

Veneration vs. Respect: Reevaluating Public Aversion to Amending the U.S. Constitution

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ABSTRACT

While still hailed today as the “supreme law of the land,” the U.S. Constitution stands as an extraordinarily aged document compared to the constitutions of democratic nations around the world. One well-documented contributor to the Constitution’s longevity is the reverence Americans harbor for it—what scholars term their constitutional veneration. Drawing on a nationwide survey of 1,792 U.S. residents, this study examines Americans’ attitudes toward the Constitution and its amendment. The findings challenge prevailing measures of constitutional veneration as overly broad, instead proposing that constitutional respect is a multidimensional construct comprising both symbolic respect for founding ideals and perceptions of the Constitution’s modern relevance to governance. By identifying contrasting relationships between these dimensions and other constitutional attitudes—such as support for amendments and preferences for a less rigid amendment process—this study contends that the American public’s enduring respect for the Constitution does not preclude a legitimate belief in the need for its reform.

I. INTRODUCTION

The year 2025 marks 238 years since the U.S. Constitution was originally written by the Founding Fathers at the Philadelphia Convention. While still hailed today as the “supreme law of the land,” the document finds itself in extraordinarily ancient standing compared to the average 42-year lifespan of the constitutions of democratic nations around the rest of the world (Albert 2021). One of the most well-documented contributors to the Constitution’s unique longevity is the respect Americans harbor for it—their constitutional veneration, or loyalty-begetting reverence for the U.S. Constitution. Historical polls indicate intense support from the American

public for the Constitution (Stephanopoulos and Versteeg 2016), and political leaders from both sides of the aisle invoke appeals to the fundamental constitutionalism in all Americans (Levinson 2021). Amidst this assumed enthusiasm for our governmental framework, public discontent and distrust toward the federal government only heighten. Given the question of rewriting the Constitution to address Americans' grievances appears unthinkable in our constitutionally entrenched political culture, the amendment process is the last feasible means of constitutional change.

In the Constitution's 238 years of primacy, over 11,000 amendments to the Constitution have been proposed. Yet, only 27 have successfully received the support to be ratified, a paltry 0.002 percent success rate ("Amendments to the U.S. Constitution" n.d.). Looking at the last 50 years, that figure drops to only one successful amendment. Today's political climate is only increasingly characterized by partisan polarization, begging the question of whether the Constitution can ever be amended again. In this paper, I explore Americans' attitudes toward amending the Constitution—specifically, identifying the causes of purported amendment aversion and support for liberalizing a presently rigid amendment process.

First, I review the existing literature on constitutional veneration, its causes, and its established relationship with resistance to constitutional change. Next, I propose that current measures of constitutional veneration falsely equivocate it with the concept of constitutional respect and fail to identify the multidimensionality of constitutional respect. I argue that respect separately comprises symbolic respect for the Constitution's founding significance (a measure of veneration), and perceptions of the document's modern relevance. In doing so, I predict contrasting relationships between the proposed dimensions of respect and various other constitutional attitudes, namely an individual's general support for constitutional amendment and

desire to lower the current rigidity of the constitutional amendment process. Then, I outline my procedure for obtaining survey data regarding Americans' attitudes toward the Constitution and its amendment. I then present my findings from the survey, testing relationships between constitutional respect, general amendment support, preferred amendment rigidity, political trust, and constitutional knowledge. Finally, I apply these findings to evaluate my hypotheses and discuss how they support a distinction between symbolic constitutional veneration and belief in constitutional relevance, challenging the notion that a veneration American public is irreparably resistant to constitutional change.

This paper ultimately seeks to introduce a multidimensional lens to reevaluate predictors of public support for amending the U.S. Constitution and making amendment more attainable. While the document remains one of the oldest constitutions in the world, my findings highlight that the American public's enduring respect for the Constitution does not discount their belief in the need for amendment.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Constitutional Respect and Veneration

When it was first written in 1787, James Madison, often deemed the Father of the Constitution, advocated for a culture of constitutional veneration to curtail frequent amendment and stabilize a budding union. At the same time, Thomas Jefferson critiqued the very same concept of constitutional veneration for establishing a dogmatic resistance to change, even with the new experiences of passing generations (Albert 2021).

In October 2014, Stephanopoulos and Versteeg (2016) set out to explain the causes of general constitutional veneration by conducting a nationally representative online survey asking

Americans about their approval of federal and state constitutions, as well as different factors that may predict said approval. Their results found higher approval for the U.S. Constitution relative to state constitutions. For both, constitutional approval was predicted by how proud they were to live in the relevant jurisdiction (the U.S. for the federal constitution, and their home state for their state constitution), as well as their self-reported familiarity with each constitution. Conversely, policy congruence, which was measured by comparing provisions respondents desired in their state constitutions and policies actually in them, was found to have no relation to constitutional approval. Further, while Republicans were somewhat more likely to approve of their constitutions, demographic differences were otherwise not statistically significant (Stephanopoulos and Versteeg 2016).

It's worth noting that this study used self-reported metrics for both constitutional approval and knowledge, potentially creating respondent bias. Still, beyond introducing several individual-level factors that help explain constitutional attitudes, the study asserts state constitutional approval does not necessarily indicate substantive support for its contents.

In his foundational work on veneration, *Constitutional Faith*, Sanford Levinson (1988) proposes two divisions in constitutional thinking. The first regards *how* the Constitution should be interpreted—based on its explicit text alone, or including unwritten tradition set by judicial precedent. The second debate involves *who* has the authority to interpret the Constitution—every individual, or the Supreme Court alone. In total, this generates four schools of constitutional ideology, and likewise four different ways to view and respect the Constitution: as an unchanging and objective text, a transforming and interpretable text, a static but widely interpretable text, and a dynamic but objectively read text (Levinson 1988).

Despite this variation, the current state of survey research only loosely defines constitutional veneration as a reverence for or loyalty to the U.S. Constitution. Past attempts to measure veneration range from questions asking whether the Constitution should be amended (Ballard 2022; Lepore 2022), how credible the Founders were, how strictly judges should interpret the Constitution (Brown and Pope 2018; Dawes and Zink 2021), whether the Constitution is enduring (Associated Press 2012), and the extent to which the Constitution is sound today (Levinson and Blake 2016). There is scarce literature that explicitly distinguishes different ways to respect the Constitution than veneration, though some contain questions that address the different facets. Most notably, Brown and Pope (2018) utilize a seven-question battery for constitutional respect to find that learning about a state constitution's age and amendment rate enhances the respect people have for it, especially when it is young and amended frequently. The study's respect battery ranges from considering perceptions of the Founding Fathers to the modern relevance of the Constitution (Brown and Pope 2018).

2. Amendment Support and Aversion

Dawes and Zink (2016; 2021) perform their own surveys to link constitutional veneration (equated in their study to constitutional respect) to amendment resistance. In the first of two online survey experiments replicating their surveys from 2016, they measure constitutional respect by asking respondents a single question about the extent to which the U.S. Constitution works well or needs change. In their second survey, Dawes and Zink employ Brown and Pope's (2018) more robust constitutional respect battery. In both surveys, Dawes and Zink find significantly lower levels of support for hypothetical policies framed as constitutional amendments than when framed as federal law, and constitutional respect is a significant predictor

of the treatment effect. In other words, the greater one's reverence for the Constitution, the stronger their opposition to constitutional change.

While the employment of surveys in a research setting to explain constitutional attitudes is a relatively young phenomenon, Americans have been polled about their support for constitutional change for decades. A Gallup/Newsweek poll in 1987 saw 53 percent of respondents stating the Constitution is basically sound in meeting the needs of the country, while the other 47 percent saw a need for basic changes or amendments (Levinson and Blake 2016). Jumping ahead to the 21st century, a 2012 telephone survey of U.S. residents found 69 percent of Americans believing the U.S. Constitution is “an enduring document that remains relevant today,” while only 28 percent believed it was “an outdated document that needs to be modernized” (Associated Press 2012). The most recent polls, however, suggest a more consistent trend toward openness to constitutional change. A YouGov poll in 2022 concluded 39 percent of Americans think the Constitution should ever be changed in any way, while another 39 percent argue it should not. The poll also found Democrats were significantly more supportive of constitutional change (62 percent) than Republicans (17 percent) (Ballard 2022). Another poll in 2022 saw 41 percent of respondents claim the Constitution should be more frequently reviewed and amended. Again, 72 percent of Democrats backed this claim, while 22 percent of Republicans think the Constitution is basically fine as it is (Lepore 2022). Overall, modern Americans appear split about making changes to the U.S. Constitution, largely on party lines.

3. Amendment Rigidity

Article V, itself found in the Constitution, outlines the procedure for amending the Constitution. An amendment must first be proposed and approved by a two-thirds supermajority

of both the U.S. House of Representatives and the Senate, or by a national convention called by two-thirds of state legislatures, although a constitutional convention has never been called. The amendment is then passed to the states and becomes law only once ratified by three-fourths of state legislatures, or three-fourths of conventions called by the states. To date, state ratifying conventions have only ever been exercised to ratify one amendment (George and Richards n.d.).

There is no shortage of scholarship indicting the U.S. Constitution as one of the hardest constitutions, if not the hardest, to amend in the world. In an analysis of 39 national constitutions, Astrid Lorenz (2005) ranks the U.S. Constitution as the second hardest to amend, behind only the Belgian Constitution. Likewise, Arend Lijphart (2012) places the U.S. Constitution in a seven-way tie for first in amendment difficulty. In his own comparison, Donald Lutz (2009) ranks the U.S. Constitution as the hardest to amend among 32 constitutions. Lutz derives congruent findings when compared even to American state constitutions on an amendment difficulty index, concluding the federal amendment process is significantly more difficult than any state's (Levinson 2012). These studies focus primarily on the institutional process—Article V is distinct for its bicameral supermajority approval thresholds and reliance on approval by both national and state governments. By contrast, most U.S. states require between a mere simple majority to two-thirds vote in the legislature to submit an amendment to a statewide referendum, then a simple majority of voters to ratify an amendment (Dinan 2023). As of 2022, 11,788 state constitutional amendments have been proposed to voters (an average of 235.76 per state), of which 7,813 were approved (about 156.26 per state) (Dinan 2023). These state amendment rates stagger above the 27 successful U.S. constitutional amendments, suggesting lower vote thresholds for approval define constitutions enjoying regular amendment.

Yet, Ginsburg and Melton propose that low amendment rates are not explained as much by procedural difficulty as they are by amendment culture—defined as normative social pressure for or against constitutional change (Ginsburg and Melton 2014). Their comparative analysis finds that institutional variables such as amendment vote thresholds are never statistically significant predictors of constitutional amendment rates, while amendment culture is the only consistent and substantively large predictor. This study utilizes a self-described imperfect operationalization of amendment culture—the rate of amendment of a country’s previous constitution—however more recent literature has rectified this with survey data. In 1937, Zachary Elkins asked Americans, “Should the Constitution be easier to amend?”, to which 28 percent said yes, and 60 percent said no. A similar survey in 1987—50 years later—found a similar result: 20 percent of respondents believed the Constitution was too hard to amend, and 60 percent thought it was as hard as it should be (Lepore 2022).

Madison seems to have won the founding debate on constitutional veneration, though this hasn’t stopped scholars from echoing Jefferson’s concerns today: Albert warns constitutional unamendability inhibits the democratic ideal of self-government, chaining today’s Americans to the will of their ancestors (Albert 2022). Lutz argues that an amendment process that makes constitutional change too difficult interferes with necessary rectification of historical mistakes. At the same time, an excessively flexible amendment process fails to distinguish the importance of constitutional law over ordinary federal legislation—amendment processes must find a balance in difficulty (Levinson 1995).

4. Political Trust

The American public's political trust, or their confidence that political institutions will act in their interests, has fallen precipitously over the past half-century. The Pew Research Center's (2024) aggregation of political trust surveys finds that in 1958, the first year the National Election Study began asking about governmental trust, 73 percent of Americans trusted the government to do what is right about always or most of the time. By 1980, the same question recorded only 27 percent of Americans with the same level of trust, and the moving average remained at 22 percent in 2024.

Despite alarmingly low rates of confidence in modern government, the Founders intended for the Constitution to tolerate and even ground itself in a healthy level of political distrust (Addison 2020a). They were themselves paranoid of a government encroaching on individual freedoms or tyranny by an uninformed majority, so the Founders incorporated principles enabling collaboration in governance in spite of low trust. These include representatives accountable to public elections, checks and balances between branches of government, a Bill of Rights guaranteeing fundamental protections for the People, and a federal system distributing powers between national and state governments—including that of constitutional amendment.

Even so, the constitutional amendment process suffers when political trust is low. Tarabar and Young (2021) concur with the literature that amendment culture predicts amendment rates. Defined by Hofstede cultural indices of societal characteristics, countries with individualistic rather than collectivist cultures exhibit greater support by individuals for amendments that serve their particular interests. By contrast, cultures prone to uncertainty avoidance, or discomfort with deviation from a familiar structure, report lower rates of amendment to their constitutions (Tarabar and Young 2021). Closely related to political trust, these societies are averse to the risk

that constitutional change will fail to serve their interests. An adjacent study by Blake et al. (2023) concludes that countries with a higher political trust index, among other institutional social capital measures, have higher constitutional amendment rates. Motivated by past findings that political trust enhances support for ballot referenda in Switzerland, their analysis determines that the positive effect of political trust can even offset the negative effect of procedural rigidity on amendment frequency.

More granularly, high political trust appears to increase individuals' perception that constitutional amendments are legitimate. A working paper by Cozza (2022) emphasizes that political trust not only improves the procedural legitimacy of state constitutional change almost uniformly across different processes of initiation and ratification, but also positively mediates the legitimacy of a legislature-only (rather than publicly participatory) amendment process—the same manner by which the federal constitution is amended.

5. Constitutional Knowledge

Contrary to Stephanopoulos and Versteeg's (2016) conclusion that constitutional knowledge is a significant predictor of constitutional approval, Dawes and Zink (2021) found no treatment effect of constitutional knowledge based on a brief knowledge battery. Similarly, Brown and Pope (2018) find that additional information about constitutional age and amendment rates inclines respondents to both respect and be more open to reforming state constitutions, but has no effect on reverence toward the U.S. Constitution. Another report by the National Constitution Center suggests that most Americans lack detailed knowledge about the Constitution but still endorse its core values (Wilson et al. 2002). Finally, Brown and Pope (2018) assert that information about constitutional amendment rates and age increased

individuals' respect for their state constitution but not the U.S. Constitution. Thus, the majority of the literature appears to find that constitutional familiarity is unrelated to federal constitutional respect.

Whether desired or not, there is little debate that the Constitution is infrequently amended. Key, then, to overcoming dangerous inhibitors of constitutional amendment is a reevaluation of our rigid amendment process and the predictors of public resistance to federal constitutional amendment.

III. THEORY

1. Two Dimensions of Constitutional Respect

Given Levinson's (1988) presentation of four distinct conceptions of the Constitution, it is easy to imagine someone who believes both that the Constitution was an admirable charter of democracy *and* that it would benefit from further amendment to maintain its relevance. Simultaneously, another person could see the original text as imperfect but insist that the Constitution derives legitimacy from its enduring interpretability and should not be wantonly changed. The current literature does not distinguish constitutional veneration from constitutional respect, but I contend that they are distinct concepts. The difference can be understood by decomposing measures of constitutional respect into two dimensions. The first, which I dub "symbolic respect," is an individual's level of respect for the Constitution as a symbol of Americanism, both in its historical founding significance and democratic ideals. Separately, constitutional respect comprises a perception of "modern relevance," or one's belief that the Constitution is suitable in its current state for modern governance. Of the two, I argue that

symbolic respect is a truer measure of veneration. These two dimensions of constitutional respect, symbolic respect and perceived modern relevance, are the primary independent variables of this study. Given the combined measurement of these supposed dimensions in past work (Brown and Pope 2018; Dawes and Zink 2021) and Madison's theory that symbolic respect would beget amendment aversion (Albert 2021), I anticipate that symbolic constitutional respect is associated with a stronger belief in modern constitutional relevance.

The distinction of veneration as symbolic respect rather than belief in modern relevance may explain some of the phenomena in the existing literature. Brown and Pope (2018) utilize a battery that factors in both measures of symbolic respect (e.g., wisdom of the writers of a constitution) and perceived modern relevance (e.g., need for constitutional amendment to address modern concerns). As a result, it follows that learning about a state constitution's frequent amendment rates and relative youth improves observed respect via perceptions of greater modern relevance. On the other hand, information about the U.S. Constitution's old age and low amendment rate did not significantly change respondents' respect for it, potentially explained by the high symbolic respect it maintains despite potential perceptions of modern irrelevance.

2. Dimensions of Constitutional Respect vs. Amendment Support

Dawes and Zink's (2021) study associates constitutional respect with lower support for constitutional policy change. However, they employ the same constitutional respect battery as Brown and Pope, measuring both symbolic respect and belief in constitutional relevance (Brown and Pope 2018), so a finding that those who believe the Constitution should not be amended are more resistant to constitutional change should come as no surprise. It is worth reevaluating whether amendment aversion is truly a product of symbolic respect/constitutional veneration or

merely of disbelief in modern relevance. Brown and Pope (2018) find that individuals express greater desire for government reform upon learning about the disparity in amendment rates of the U.S. and state constitutions despite not exhibiting a significant change in federal constitutional respect. I thus presume their desire for reform stems from discontent with constitutional relevance, not symbolic respect, and that support for or resistance to constitutional amendment is also predicted by perceived modern relevance rather than symbolic respect.

3. Dimensions of Constitutional Respect vs. Preferred Amendment Rigidity

A multitude of scholars points to the United States' onerous amendment process as its primary obstacle to the passage of constitutional amendments. Although recent survey research has shifted away from scrutinizing the amendment process itself, my study will revisit whether the low support for decreasing amendment rigidity reported in the 20th century still holds after a drought in constitutional change. My work will also expand upon Dawes and Zink's (2021) work linking constitutional respect to amendment resistance; under the assumption that those who are more resistant to amendment will prefer the amendment process to be more rigid—or difficult to use to approve amendments—I anticipate that the predictors of amendment support will also strengthen preferences for more rigid amendment processes.

4. Political Trust vs. Dimensions of Constitutional Respect

The literature has yet to directly test the relationship between political trust and respect for the Constitution (as opposed to tolerance for constitutional amendment), but scholarly unanimity that political trust increases support for both constitutional and statutory policy change indicates that politically trusting individuals are more satisfied with government-generated laws,

including the Constitution. In particular, when one trusts today's political institutions to represent their interests, they are more likely to believe that the Constitution presiding over said institutions adequately reflects modern interests. Addison (2020b) asserts that political trust falters when people believe the state of American politics strays from the Founders' vision for liberal republican democracy, further backing the claim that sound political trust predicts stronger perceptions of the Constitution's modern relevance.

To a weaker extent, I expect political trust to positively predict an individual's symbolic respect for the Constitution. Political trust meaningfully and expectedly shifts based on one's partisan agreement with the President, where members of the controlling party consistently have more trust (Pew Research Center 2024). Yet, political trust in the U.S. government from both Republicans and Democrats have nevertheless tracked relatively closely to each other since the 1960s, signaling some intrinsic dimension of faith in American government beyond mere ideological congruence. As such, while modern political trust is an imperfect instrument for trust in the Founders from centuries ago, I posit that individuals who report greater political trust will, all else held equal, also harbor higher symbolic respect for the Constitution and its founding principles.

5. Constitutional Knowledge vs. Dimensions of Constitutional Respect

The literature signals that there is no relationship between constitutional knowledge (familiarity with the Constitution's textual provisions) and respect. However, this finding may change when analyzed through the two separate dimensions of respect. Taking into account that most Americans resonate with the Constitution's general values despite being unaware of its specific provisions (Wilson et al. 2002), I hold that constitutional knowledge does not impact

symbolic respect. Likewise, given the conclusion that education about low amendment rates and old constitutional age—a fact that should damage perceptions of modern relevance—does not affect federal constitutional respect (Brown and Pope 2018), I hold that constitutional knowledge has no effect on perceived modern relevance either. While Stephanopoulos and Versteeg report constitutional familiarity increases constitutional support (Stephanopoulos and Versteeg 2021), I am skeptical that self-reported knowledge (as opposed to factual assessment) confidently acts as more than a measure of familiarity with basic democratic principles or affectively biased self-perception.

In sum, my hypotheses are as follows:

H₁: Constitutional respect has two distinct dimensions of symbolic constitutional respect and perceived modern constitutional relevance.

H₂: Stronger symbolic constitutional respect strengthens perceived modern constitutional relevance.

H_{3A}: Symbolic constitutional support is unrelated to general amendment support.

H_{3B}: Weaker perceptions of modern constitutional relevance increases general amendment support.

H_{4A}: Symbolic constitutional respect is unrelated to preferred amendment process rigidity.

H_{4B}: Stronger perceptions of modern constitutional relevance increases preferred amendment process rigidity.

H_{5A}: Stronger political trust increases symbolic constitutional respect.

H_{5B}: Stronger political trust increases perceived modern constitutional relevance.

H_{6A}: Greater constitutional knowledge is unrelated to symbolic constitutional respect.

H_{6B}: Greater constitutional knowledge is unrelated to perceived modern constitutional relevance.

While absent from my primary hypotheses, I also intend to determine whether constitutional respect (and either of its theoretical dimensions) and/or general amendment support are related to one's personal identity, particularly their partisan affiliation. Past work has found that Americans concede that not all of their peers may be taking equal advantage of the rights provided in the Constitution (Wilson et al. 2002), suggesting typically marginalized groups will exhibit lower constitutional respect as a whole.

IV. METHODS

1. Dimensions of Constitutional Respect

The respect section of my survey begins with basic information about the U.S. Constitution, including its adoption year, amendment rate, and supremacy over all other laws. In order to measure my two proposed dimensions of constitutional respect, I repurpose the respect battery used by Brown and Pope (2018) and Dawes and Zink (2021). After making several revisions to enhance precision and concision, the battery included four questions that I anticipate address the concept of symbolic respect, and four that measure perceived modern relevance. The symbolic respect items target the Constitution's founding ideals and its writers' vision, while the modern relevance items probe respondents' beliefs about the Constitution's applicability to contemporary governance—these groupings are distinguished in Appendix A1.

Responses to each question were standardized on a scale of zero (lowest respect) to one (highest respect). The average scores for each of the two subsets constitute my measures of symbolic respect and perceived modern relevance. A multivariate linear regression analysis of

perceived modern relevance on symbolic respect can test whether the latter predicts the former (H_2).

If constitutional respect is indeed a multidimensional concept (H_1), parallel factor analysis of the battery should yield eigenvalues above eigenvalues generated from randomly generated and/or reshuffled data for at least two factors, with significant factor loadings on the questions targeting each respect dimension. Both previous administrations of this battery only identified one significant factor (Dawes and Zink 2021; Brown and Pope 2018), although one found evidence for a two-factor model and chalked up the second to a residual dimension due to low explanation of variance (Brown and Pope 2019). I argue that the updated battery with questions more closely tailored to measuring each theoretical dimension may distill clearer support for the multidimensionality of constitutional respect.

2. Amendment Rigidity

While the literature on amendment rigidity varies in its operationalization of what makes an amendment process difficult (e.g., bicameral vs. unicameral legislature, number of actors/stages involved), it tends to focus on majority vote requirements (Lorenz 2005). As such, I will operationalize preferred amendment rigidity as respondents' preference for higher, lower, or maintained amendment approval thresholds at each stage of the U.S. amendment process. To gauge preferences for amendment process rigidity, respondents are first shown a brief description of the primarily employed amendment process: a two-thirds vote in both the Senate and House of Representatives to approve the amendment, then ratification by three-fourths of state legislatures. The first question is an attention check to determine whether the respondent retained the information about the vote thresholds required for amendment approval in the Senate and House

of Representatives. The next two questions are rotated between asking whether the 67 percent amendment vote requirement in both houses of Congress is too high, too low, or just right, and the same for the 75 percent requirement for state legislatures. Relationships between results from the respect and rigidity sections will be tested via multivariate regression analysis to evaluate H_{4A} and H_{4B} .

3. Amendment Support

Dawes and Zink (2021) present their survey takers with hypothetical constitutional amendments to measure general resistance to constitutional amendment. In order to calculate general amendment support, I apply a similar strategy and present respondents with a series of six hypothetical constitutional amendments, then ask them to rate their level of support or opposition. To minimize the influence of the content of the amendment itself, the amendments were intentionally selected to fall on a balanced range of political ideology (verifiable if factor analysis identifies ideological factors weighing heavily on conservative- vs. liberal-tending policies) (see Appendix A3). Support for each amendment will be standardized on a scale from zero (strongest opposition) to one (strongest support), then averaged to derive a “general amendment support” score that reflects an individual’s propensity to support constitutional amendment, regardless of content.

Four of the six amendments were selected based on Pew Research Center’s list of the most common subjects of proposed constitutional amendments from 1999 to 2018: congressional term limits, flag desecration, direct presidential election, and equal gender rights (DeSilver 2018). Amendments that were more difficult to explain to respondents were excluded, such as balanced budget and campaign finance reform. An abortion ban amendment was included in

light of the 2022 Supreme Court decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson* to discount a constitutional right to abortion, bringing abortion law to the forefront of modern public discourse. Lastly, a gun control amendment was added as an ideological balance to the abortion ban, inspired by California governor Gavin Newsom's proposal earlier in the year of a 28th Amendment that would constitutionally enshrine various gun safety measures ("Governor Newsom Proposes Historic 28th Amendment" 2023).

As with rigidity, I will evaluate H_{3A} and H_{3B} via multivariate regression analysis between the two proposed dimensions of constitutional respect and general amendment support. Beyond typical demographic covariates, in the likely case that ideological partiality influences support for each amendment, it is especially pertinent that I control for partisan affiliation, acquired in the demographics section of the survey.

4. Political Trust

I utilize the battery administered by Cozza (2022) to measure respondents' political trust in four political institutions: federal government, political parties, courts, and the respondent's state government, with slight revisions to provide balanced answer choices (see Appendix A4). I standardize the respondent's trust in each institution on a scale from zero (lowest trust) to one (highest trust), then average them to obtain a general political trust score, across levels and branches of government. Finally, I use this political trust score to evaluate H_{5A} and H_{5B} through multivariate regression analysis predicting the constitutional respect dimensions.

5. Constitutional Knowledge

To measure respondents' level of knowledge of the content of the Constitution, I adapted three questions of varying difficulty from the 2022 Annenberg Constitution Day Civics Survey: identifying the branches of government, House Representative term length, and First Amendment rights (Annenberg Public Policy Center 2022). The average score of the three questions (each scored as outlined in Appendix A5) will act as the “constitutional knowledge” score for each respondent, which, like for political trust, will act as a covariate to evaluate H_{6A} and H_{6B} through multivariate regression with the constitutional respect dimensions as the outcome.

6. Demographics

The final section of the survey obtains demographic information from each respondent, including race, gender, birth year, household income, citizenship status, education level, and partisan affiliation. I ascertain raw relationships between demographic characteristics and constitutional respect through a multivariate regression predicting each dimension of respect, without any attitudinal covariates.

The full survey instrument can be found in Appendix A.

I conducted my survey in March 2025, administered online with Qualtrics software. The final sample contained 1,792 respondents, balanced on age, gender, race/ethnicity, and region. All respondents were members of a respondent pool with the Centiment survey research firm and originally recruited from Facebook, LinkedIn, and Centiment's partner network. My survey

filtered out respondents who failed the attention check in the rigidity section—the final 1,792 respondent count reflects only those who passed.

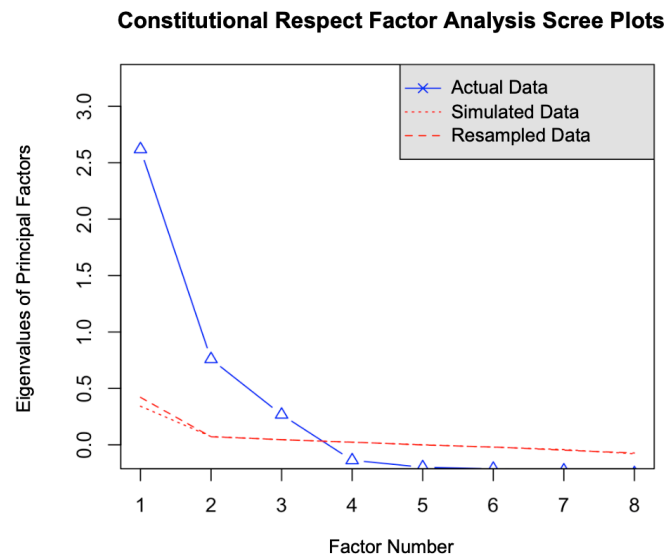
The average respondent was about 50 years old, and their median household income was between \$30,000 and \$39,999. Of all respondents, 47.27 percent of respondents identified as male, and 51.79 percent as female. The largest represented race/ethnicity group was White, capturing 78.96 percent of respondents, followed by Black or African-American at 14.62 percent of respondents, then Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino at 10.21 percent (not mutually exclusive). 43.35 percent of respondents reported having completed a four-year Bachelor's degree in college or higher. Nearly all respondents, 98.38 percent, were U.S. citizens. Lastly, partisan affiliation was relatively evenly balanced, with 40.90 percent of respondents identifying as or leaning to Democratic, while 44.03 percent identifying as or leaning Republican. The remaining 15.07 percent did not identify with either political party.

V. RESULTS

1. Descriptive Statistics

Parallel analysis on the eight-question constitutional respect battery identified three significant factors with eigenvalues above those of simulated random data or resampled data shuffled from the actual responses (see Figure 1). From subsequent factor analysis, the first factor yields an eigenvalue of 3.24 and the second has an eigenvalue of 1.44. The third factor has a lower eigenvalue of just over 1.00—the common cutoff for significance outlined by Kaiser's rule—but did not load across questions on a clear and consistent theoretical basis. Thus, I omit the third factor from analysis.

Figure 1. Parallel analysis finds three significant factors to constitutional respect.



After transforming response data for each question such that they range from 0 (lowest respect) to 1 (highest respect), the questions load onto each of the two factors by approximately the groupings hypothesized. Three of the questions I hypothesized pertain to symbolic constitutional respect load heavily onto the first factor with loadings above 0.7: whether the Constitution deserves Americans' respect, if the writers of the Constitution were wise and visionary, and if the Constitution set admirable principles of government.

Using a factor loading cutoff value of 0.3, the second factor comprises questions on whether the Constitution is outdated, whether it must be amended to address modern concerns, if the courts should interpret it strictly or liberally, and whether it has been amended too few, too many, or the right number of times. I define this second factor as a measure of the Constitution's perceived modern relevance. Notably, the question on whether the writers of the Constitutions were only looking out for themselves also loads heavily onto this factor with a value of 0.51, suggesting perceptions of the Founders' selfishness may more closely reflect respondents' beliefs that the Constitution is no longer relevant rather than symbolically unimportant.

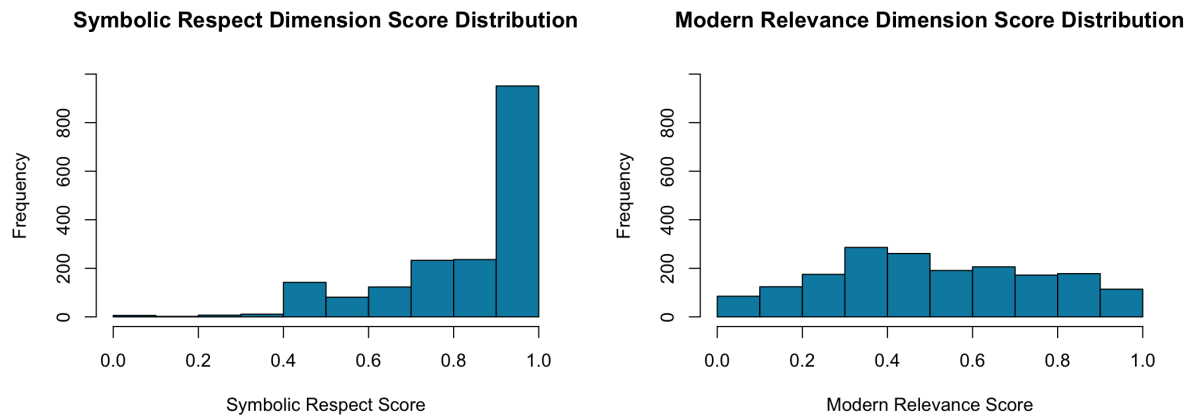
This factor analysis supports H_1 —constitutional respect contains two distinct dimensions. For the purpose of evaluating their relationships with other constitutional attitude variables, I create two new independent variables: one for symbolic respect, averaging the scores of the questions that load onto it, and another for modern relevance with the same procedure. The complete factor loadings are reported in Table 1.

Table 1: Constitutional Respect Factor Loadings

	Factor 1	Factor 2
Respect Constitution	0.7242	0.0208
Founders Selfish	0.2357	0.5117
Constitution Outdated	0.1405	0.7321
Founders Wise	0.7519	0.0498
Address Modern Concerns	-0.1278	0.8177
Admirable Principles	0.7961	-0.0387
Judge Interpretation	0.0136	0.4104
Amendment Rate	-0.0217	0.3867

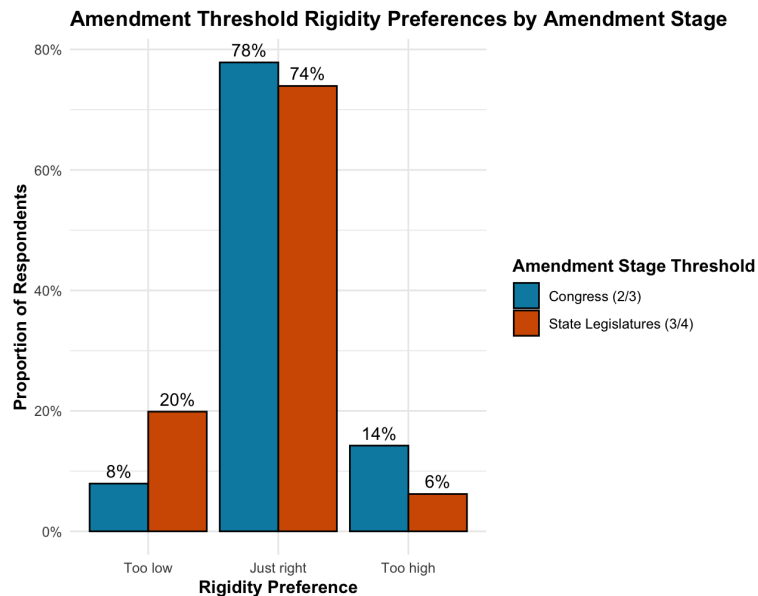
Both observed symbolic respect and modern relevance scores span the full range of 0.00 to 1.00. However, symbolic respect reports a substantially high mean of 0.84 compared to a mean modern relevance score of 0.53; respondents on average expressed stronger disagreement with questions about the Constitution's relevance than its respectability. The distribution of symbolic respect scores exhibits a strong left skew, while modern relevance scores are largely evenly distributed across the range (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Respondents report, on average, substantially stronger symbolic respect for the Constitutions than perceptions of its modern relevance.



In the amendment rigidity section, respondents’ rigidity preference scores, averaged between their attitudes toward the Congress approval threshold and state legislature approval threshold on a scale of 0 (belief rigidity is too low) to 1 (belief rigidity is too high) generated a mean of 0.48. Respondents were generally satisfied with the current amendment process’ approval thresholds: 77.85 percent of respondents believe the two-thirds threshold for Congress is “just right,” and 73.94 believe the same for the three-fourths threshold for state legislatures. A substantially higher portion of respondents believed the three-fourths threshold for state legislatures is too high (14.23) compared to the two-thirds threshold for Congress (only 6.19 percent) (see Figure 3). Altogether, these findings generally support public belief that constitutional amendments should not be made flippantly but only for significant policy changes with national consensus.

Figure 3. Most respondents think constitutional amendment rigidity is “just right,” but more think the threshold for states should be lower than for Congress.



Looking at the six hypothetical amendments proposed to respondents, support was lowest for a 15-week abortion ban, yielding a mean support score of 0.59 (63 percent of respondents in support). On the other hand, an amendment enshrining congressional term limits enjoyed the highest mean support score of 0.81 (88 percent of respondents in support). Mean support scores for each amendment (overall and broken down by party) can be found in Figure 4. General amendment support, a score averaging support across the six amendments has a relatively high mean of 0.70 (see Figure 5). Contrary to respondents’ apparent resistance to making constitutional amendments easier to pass, all amendments proposed, whether typically conservative or liberal, had the support of enough respondents to pass if put up to a vote.

Figure 4. Most amendments proposed to respondents, whose content spanned the ideological spectrum, received bipartisan support.

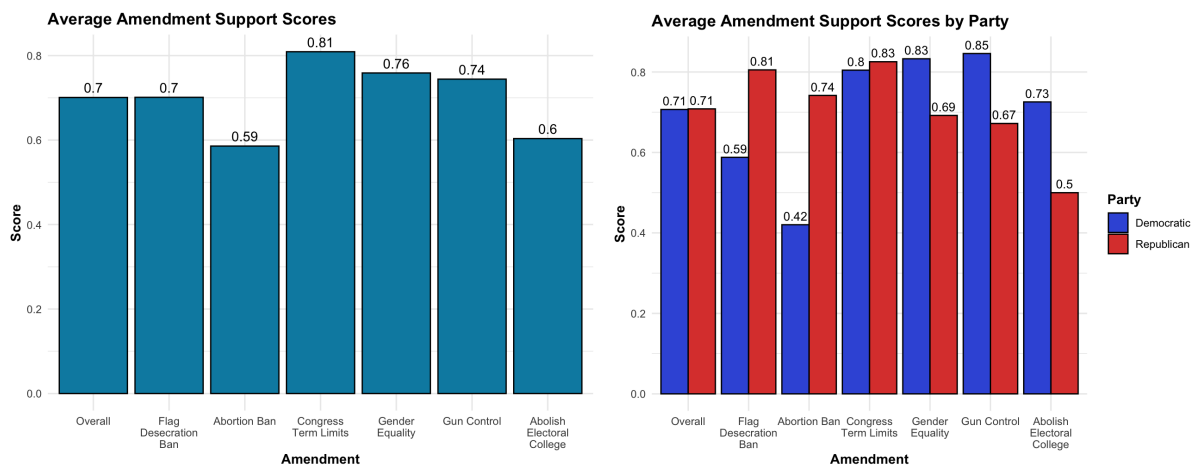
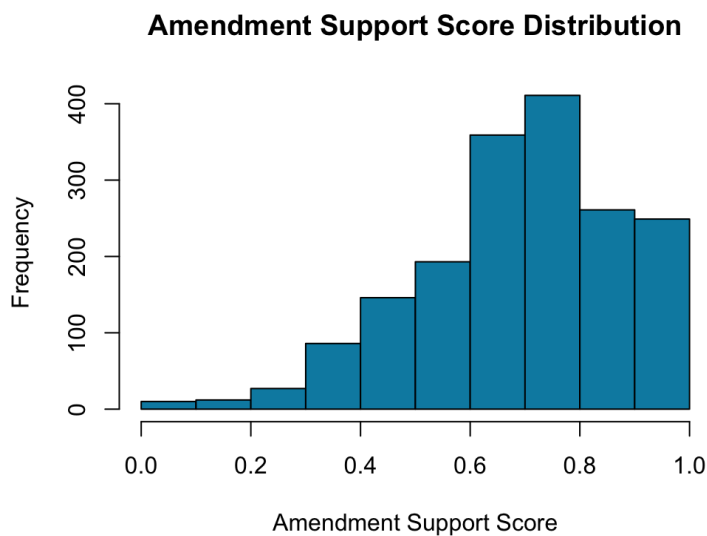


Figure 5. Respondents, on average, expressed moderately strong support for the six amendments proposed.



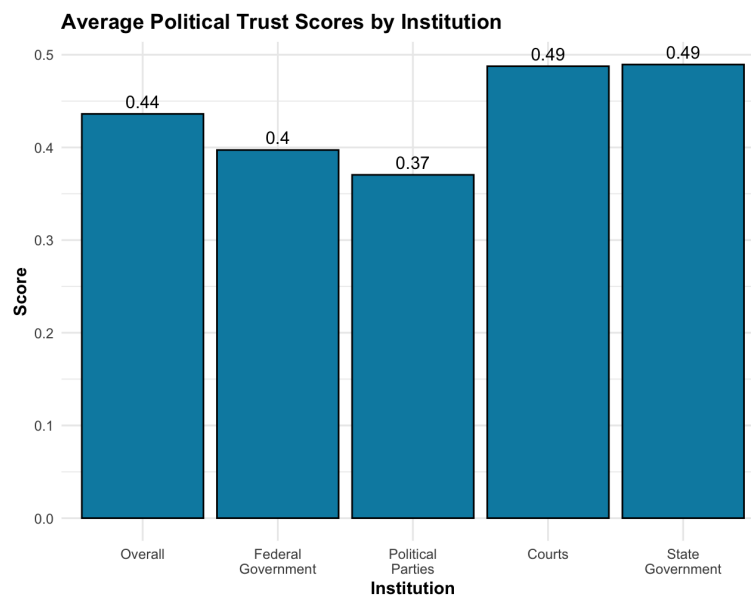
I conducted a second factor analysis on the amendment support questions to confirm whether the amendments fall across an ideological political range. A calculation of factor eigenvalues identified two significant factors with eigenvalues of 1.80 and 1.52, respectively. As anticipated, amendments that tend to align with a liberal platform, such as gender equality, stricter gun control, and abolishing the electoral college weight strongly on the first factor. By contrast, conservative amendments like the abortion ban and prohibiting flag desecration report strong weights on the second factor. Term limits, while initially included as a conservative-tending amendment due to its historical proposal by Republicans in Congress, loads weakly on both the liberal factor (0.30) and conservative factor (.26), suggesting it does not lean strongly in either ideological direction. Further, reflecting unexpectedly strong bipartisan support for all amendments proposed, some amendments load positively on their ideologically opposing factor, such as flag desecration on the liberal factor (.05) and gun control on the conservative factor (.13). Nevertheless, it appears that my selection of proposed constitutional amendments does span across an ideological spectrum, as intended. Factor weights for each amendment can be found in Table 2.

Table 2: Amendment Support Factor Loadings

	Factor 1	Factor 2
Flag Desecration	0.0475	0.7608
Abortion Ban	-0.1525	0.5561
Term Limits	0.2953	0.2547
Gender Equality	0.5941	-0.0361
Gun Control	0.5469	0.1282
Electoral College	0.5898	-0.0867

Most respondents had low to medium political trust according to the battery measuring trust in institutions from the federal to state levels. The mean trust score of 0.44 puts the average respondent between “somewhat confident” and “not very confident” in political institutions. As expected, respondents report higher political trust in courts (.49) and state government (.49) than they do in federal government (.40) and political parties (.37) (see Figure 6), corroborating the assumption that individuals are more likely to trust institutions that are impartial or otherwise more likely to act in the best interests of their constituents, as more local levels of government tend to (Addison 2020b).

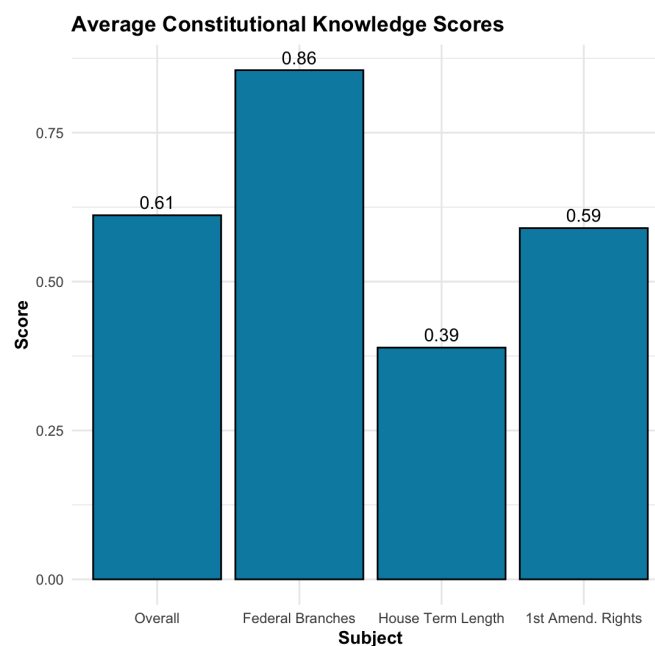
Figure 6. Public political trust is generally moderately low, but courts and state governments enjoy marginally higher trust.



Finally, respondents’ constitutional knowledge scores, derived from correct answers to the three questions about constitutional content, produced a mean of 0.61 (see Figure 7). In line with the literature, most respondents appear to have a sound understanding of the more basic

tenets of the Constitution such as the three branches of government it establishes (.86), although they are not as familiar with finer details such as term lengths (.39) or the precise rights outlined in the First Amendment (.59).

Figure 7. Respondents were generally knowledgeable about basic constitutional facts but less familiar with more granular details.

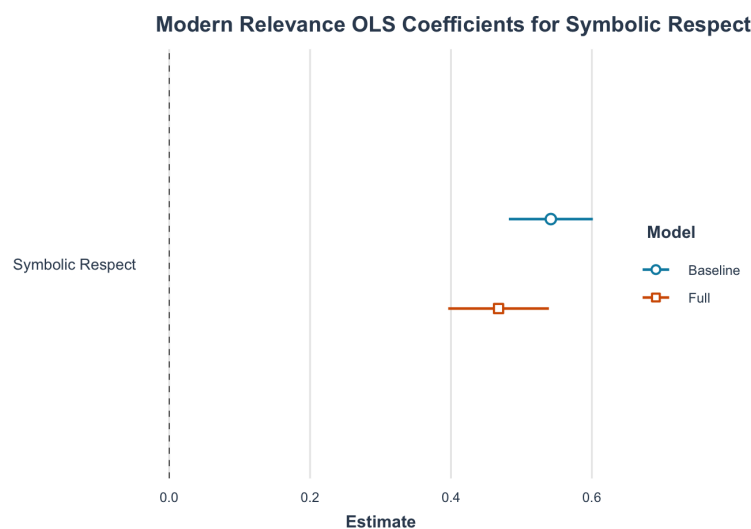


2. Regression Analysis

With the establishment of two distinct dimensions of constitutional respect, they can be independently tested for relationships with other constitutional attitudes. Both a simple bivariate linear regression of modern relevance on symbolic respect and a multivariate regression with controls yield significant, positive coefficients for symbolic respect at the $\alpha = 0.05$ level ($p < 0.001$ and $p < 0.05$, respectively) (see Table 1 in Appendix B). The model with controls includes covariates for political trust and constitutional knowledge, as well as demographics including

race/ethnicity (White, Black, Asian, American Indian and Alaska Native, and Spanish/Hispanic/Latino), gender, age, income, citizenship status, four-year college graduation status, and partisan lean. In this full model, symbolic respect has a relatively large coefficient of 0.468, indicating that, holding all else constant, someone with the strongest possible symbolic constitutional respect score (1.00) is expected to have a modern constitutional relevance score 0.468 points higher than someone with the weakest possible symbolic constitutional respect score of 0.00. This finding supports H_2 , that stronger symbolic respect strengthens one's belief that the Constitution is relevant enough for modern governance. The coefficients of the two models are plotted in Figure 8.

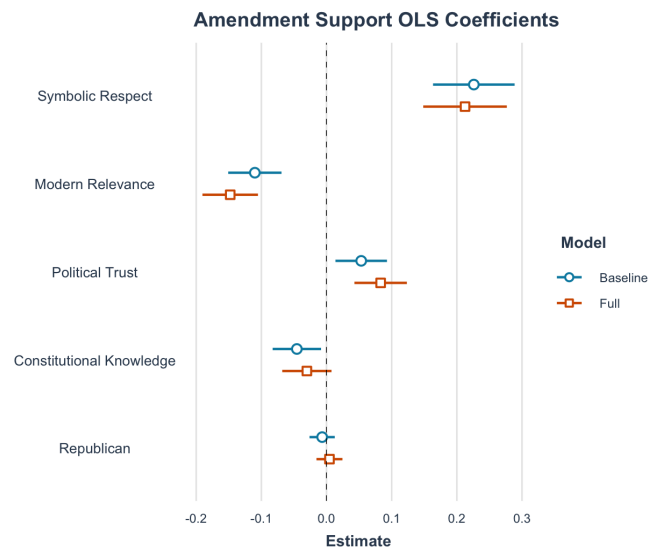
Figure 8. Symbolic respect is a highly significant, positive predictor of modern relevance score.



I employ a series of multivariate linear regressions to test for relationships between the constitutional respect dimensions and general amendment support. A baseline regression using only symbolic respect, modern relevance, and the non-demographic controls used in the first

multivariate regression, as well as a full model adding demographic controls, yield highly significant, positive coefficients for symbolic respect of 0.226 and 0.213, respectively ($p < 0.001$) (see Table 2 in Appendix B). This rejects H_{3A} —symbolic constitutional respect unexpectedly increases one’s propensity to support constitutional amendment in general. Conversely, the baseline model generates a significant, negative coefficient of -0.110 for modern relevance ($p < 0.001$), which not only holds but is magnified to -0.148 in the model with full demographic controls ($p < 0.001$). This signifies a respondent with the maximum possible modern relevance score is expected to report an amendment support score 0.148 points lower than someone with the minimum possible modern relevance score, holding all else constant (see Table 2 in Appendix B). Thus, H_{3B} is supported; weaker perceptions of modern constitutional relevance predict higher support levels for constitutional amendment. Figure 9 illustrates the contrasting effects of symbolic respect and modern relevance on general amendment support. Strikingly, both dimensions of constitutional respect were more strongly associated with amendment support than political trust, constitutional knowledge, or partisan identity.

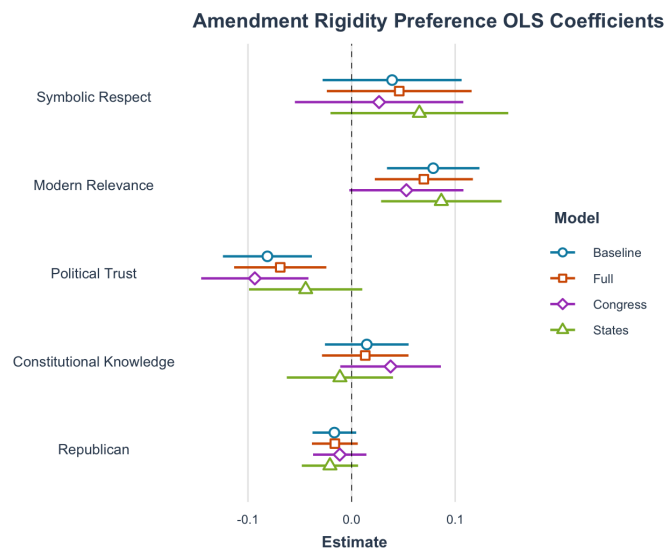
Figure 9. Higher symbolic respect is associated with greater general constitutional amendment support, while modern relevance perception is associated with weaker support, however both are stronger predictors than political trust, constitutional knowledge, and partisan identity.



With the same procedure as general amendment support, I examine the effect of the constitutional respect dimensions on preferred amendment rigidity in Congress and state legislatures (measured by attitude toward current amendment approval vote thresholds). In a regression of overall preferred amendment approval rigidity on both symbolic respect and modern relevance (with controls), symbolic respect does not have a significant effect on rigidity preference ($p > 0.05$), but a respondent's modern relevance score has a significant, positive coefficient of 0.070 ($p < 0.01$). Breaking this regression down into preferred amendment rigidity for either Congress or for state legislatures produces the same findings, although modern relevance becomes a marginally significant predictor at the $\alpha = 0.05$ level when isolated to the congressional amendment process ($p = 0.060$) (see Table 3 in Appendix B).

If either, changing the more rigid three-fourths state legislative approval threshold (modern relevance coefficient of 0.087) appeared slightly more contingent on constitutional respect than the congressional threshold (modern relevance coefficient of 0.053). Nonetheless, no modern relevance coefficient in any model exceeded 0.09, reflecting a respondent pool slightly amenable to but largely satisfied with the rigidity of the current amendment process. The insignificance of symbolic respect in predicting amendment rigidity preference supports H_{4A} , while the positive effect of a stronger belief in modern constitutional relevance provides support for H_{4B} . The coefficients for each respect dimension for both amendment stages are plotted below in Figure 10.

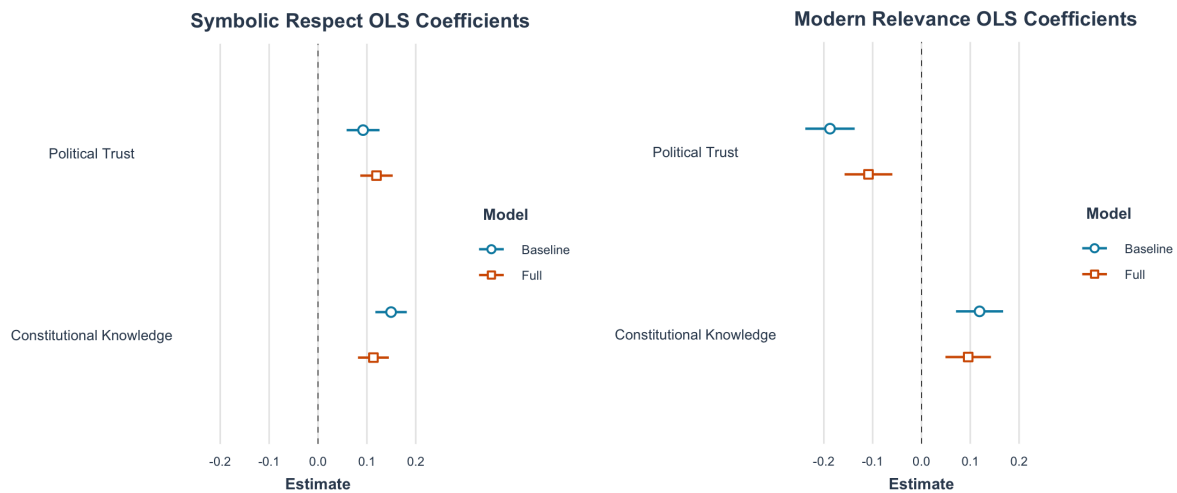
Figure 10. Symbolic respect not significantly related to amendment rigidity preference, although stronger perception of modern constitutional relevance predicts preferences for higher approval thresholds.



My next set of regressions addresses my final hypotheses: whether political trust and constitutional knowledge are significant predictors of either dimension of constitutional respect. The first regression of symbolic respect on both trust and knowledge, controlling for modern relevance score and demographic factors, yields a significant coefficient of 0.120 for political trust ($p < 0.001$) and a significant coefficient of 0.113 for constitutional knowledge ($p < 0.001$) (see Table 4 in Appendix B). On the other hand, a regression of modern relevance on these variables reveals that while constitutional knowledge has a similar, significantly positive effect with a coefficient of 0.096 ($p < 0.001$), political trust has an opposite, negative effect on modern relevance, generating a coefficient of -0.109 (see Table 5 in Appendix B).

Consequently, I find support for H_{5A} , as political trust is positively associated with symbolic constitutional respect. However, I reject H_{5B} ; political trust has an inverse relationship with perceived modern relevance. Likewise, I reject my original hypotheses that constitutional knowledge is unrelated to either dimension of constitutional respect; knowledge in fact significantly enhances both the dimensions of symbolic respect and modern relevance. Figure 11 displays the effects of political trust and constitutional knowledge on both respect dimensions.

Figure 11. Both political trust and constitutional knowledge enhance symbolic respect, but only knowledge improves perceptions of modern relevance, while political trust damages it.



My final regression analyses are exploratory and identify which demographic variables predict each dimension of constitutional respect. I first regress symbolic respect on exclusively demographic variables and find significant negative coefficients of -0.054 for Asians ($p < 0.05$) and -0.021 for identifying as female ($p < 0.05$). Republican lean was a significant positive predictor of symbolic respect with coefficient of 0.052 ($p < 0.001$), as well as age—for every ten years older a respondent is, their expected symbolic respect increase by 0.03 points ($p < 0.001$) (see Table 4 in Appendix B).

The same test on modern relevance highlights the same relationship for age with a positive coefficient of 0.005 ($p < 0.001$) and Republican lean with a relatively large coefficient of (0.107). At the same time, college graduates have significantly lower perceptions of modern constitutional relevance with a coefficient of -0.046 ($p < 0.05$), as are Hispanic Americans at a marginally significant level ($p = 0.081$) with a coefficient of -0.036 (see Table 5 in Appendix B).

In sum, older, conservative Americans have greater constitutional respect across all dimensions, while non-white Americans follow the opposite trend. Female respondents display significantly lower levels of symbolic constitutional respect, and college graduates are more likely to feel that the Constitution requires updating.

VI. DISCUSSION

This study confirmed that existing measures of constitutional respect are inadvertently tapping into two related but distinct concepts—symbolic respect and perceived modern relevance—where veneration is primarily captured by symbolic respect. Instead, it lends optimism to the idea that Americans may view the Constitution’s symbolic significance not as a barrier to change, but as a reason to pursue it—seeing amendment as a way to honor its adaptable founding ideals for today’s governmental needs.

Only perceived modern constitutional relevance, not respect for the Constitution as a symbol of American democracy, significantly predicted lower general likelihood of supporting constitutional amendments. This finding challenges past research arguing that constitutional veneration uniformly causes resistance to amending the Constitution (Dawes and Zink 2021). That symbolic respect strengthens perceived modern relevance complicates prior assumptions that reverence alone begets constitutional complacency. Instead, it suggests that some Americans view the Constitution’s strength not as a barrier to change, but as a reason to pursue it—seeing amendment as a means of honoring its founding ideals. After distillation, symbolic respect in fact increased support for amendments, revealing a form of reverence rooted in the belief that even a historically sound document must evolve. My analysis additionally concluded that perceived modern relevance is a significant, positive predictor of Americans’ preferred amendment process

rigidity, particularly at the state legislative stage of ratification. As an individual's belief grows that the Constitution should address modern concerns, so too does their preference for lowering the barriers to amendment, albeit modestly.

Contrary to researchers' established belief that political trust increases the legitimacy of laws generated by the government, I found that high levels of political trust are associated with weaker beliefs in the Constitution's modern relevance. This indicates that Americans' faith in today's political institutions and leaders is despite the Constitution's outdatedness, not because of modern government's alignment with it. In fact, the negative coefficient for political trust may suggest that this confidence in political institutions as responsive entities only underscores the static nature of the Constitution. The adjoining finding that political trust strengthens symbolic constitutional respect reinforces that politically trusting Americans still respect the Constitution's founding significance. Rather, they may believe it is the document's stagnant clauses that have strayed from those ideals, while the government has evolved to meet them.

Researchers have generally determined that individuals' respect for the Constitution is undiscerning of its particular provisions or history (Brown and Pope 2018; Dawes and Zink 2021; Wilson et al. 2002), but my analysis contradicts these findings by identifying a significant positive effect of constitutional knowledge on both dimensions of respect. This follows the adjacent literature on political trust asserting that familiarity breeds legitimacy. Intuitively, Americans that are well-versed in the tenets of the Constitution appear to be more appreciative of the Constitution's historical significance and symbolic value to democracy. Likewise, these individuals may be more familiar with the judicial tradition of interpreting the Constitution as needed to meet the moment, thus limiting perceptions of constitutional inadequacy for modern times.

Finally, my tests of how demographic characteristics impact the constitutional respect dimensions supported the theory that marginalized groups in America tend to express lower respect for the Constitution. Women reported lower symbolic respect, potentially reflecting detachment from the all-male composition of the Constitution's original writers. Non-white respondents were significantly more likely to feel both that the Constitution deserves less symbolic respect, and that it is not sufficiently relevant to modern governance, pointing to racial and ethnic minorities' impression that the document does not—and has never—equitably served all of its constituents in a nation significantly more diverse than it was over 200 years ago. One of the strongest demographic effects derived from Republican and Republican-leaning respondents, who on average had much higher symbolic respect for the Constitution and perceptions that it functions well for modern governance. As the more ideologically conservative party in America's two-party system, this final regression finding does not come as a surprise, but spells out likely partisan polarization on future attempts at constitutional change.

This study is only a preliminary exploration of the multidimensionality of constitutional respect. Symbolic respect and modern relevance delineate important differences between respect in the abstract and respect in application, and future research should investigate the specific causes of each dimension, as well as how amenable they are. While my findings demonstrate robust associations, the cross-sectional nature of the survey limits the ability to make strong causal inferences between constitutional attitudes and amendment preferences. Even so, the patterns observed hint that many of these relationships may stem from deeper, more nuanced explanations. For instance, symbolic respect's positive relationship with amendment support may indicate that some view the Constitution's amenability as a more central founding ideal than others. Similarly, the opposite relationships of political trust with each respect dimension may

reflect a spectrum of belief on how practically consequential constitutional relevance is, regardless of the respect it deserves. Researchers should tailor future constitutional respect batteries to measure layered ways of respecting the Constitution that can explain these findings.

Despite relatively weak support for loosening the rigid requirements for amendment approval and ratification, this study descriptively found very high levels of support for an array of constitutional amendments. In a modern landscape of dwindling frequency of constitutional amendment, this finding calls attention to constitutional amendment as a mechanism of policy change that may often fail in Congress but displays bipartisan nationwide support. My analysis focused on just one method of constitutional amendment—approval by Congress and state legislatures. Future research should further distill the extent to which Americans are open to constitutional change by examining how dimensions of constitutional respect predict support for alternative paths to amendment, including a national constitutional convention or common state practices like citizen initiative and electoral referendum.

The underlying practical purpose of this study was to understand whether constitutional amendment has gone extinct. Traditional theory has long held that Americans venerate the Constitution on such faithful grounds that it borders on religion (Levinson 1988), fostering a culture of amendment aversion. However, the distinction of symbolic respect from perceived modern relevance provides a more promising outlook on the future of constitutional change than past studies have suggested. While constitutional veneration in the form of symbolic respect may be less tractable in today's strong constitutional culture, effectively directing dialogue toward America's evolving policy realities—and framing constitutional change as an act of fidelity to, not betrayal of, the Founders' democratic spirit—can nevertheless mobilize authentic momentum for constitutional change anew. By disentangling symbolic admiration from resistance to reform,

this paper offers a new way to understand how reverence itself may sustain—rather than preclude—democratic renewal.

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APPENDIX A. SURVEY INSTRUMENT

A1. Constitutional Respect Section

Respondents were first presented the following text with basic information about the U.S.

Constitution:

Since the U.S. Constitution was written and adopted in 1788, more than 11,000 amendments—additions or changes—to the Constitution have been proposed. However, only 27 have received the necessary approval to become amendments to the Constitution. As you may know, the Constitution takes priority over all federal, state, and local laws.

The following questions ask for your opinions about the U.S. Constitution.

Please indicate whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, neither agree nor disagree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree with each statement below.

Respondents were then presented with the constitutional respect battery employed by Dawes and Zink (2021) and Brown and Pope (2018), with the following revisions:

- First, I shorten “The U.S. Constitution is an enduring document that deserves our respect.” to “The U.S. Constitution deserves our respect.” so as not to ask for both perceived endurance and respect.
- I change “The U.S. Constitution is an outdated document that needs to be modernized.” to “The U.S. Constitution is an outdated document.” to avoid asking for both perceived outdatedness and need for modernization.
- I replace “We should amend the U.S. Constitution more frequently so that it addresses modern concerns.” with “We need to amend the U.S. Constitution to better address modern concerns.” such that the question does not presume the Constitution doesn’t

already address modern concerns, and because of its similarity to the last question of the battery on whether the Constitution has been amended the right number of times.

- I add “The U.S. Constitution set admirable principles of government.” to probe at respondents’ perception of the document’s overarching content upon its writing as a supplement to questions that test attitudes toward the writers of the Constitution.

Ultimately, respondents were asked to rate their agreement with six statements on a five-point Likert scale ranging from “Strongly agree”, “Somewhat agree”, “Neither agree nor disagree”, “Somewhat disagree,” and “Strongly disagree”. The statements were as follows, presented in random order:

- *The U.S. Constitution deserves Americans' respect.*
- *The people who wrote the U.S. Constitution were only looking out for themselves.*
- *The U.S. Constitution is an outdated document.*
- *The people who wrote the U.S. Constitution were wise and visionary.*
- *We need to amend the U.S. Constitution to better address modern concerns.*
- *The U.S. Constitution set admirable principles of government.*

Of these six statements, the first, second, fourth, and sixth were intended to measure symbolic respect, while the third and fifth measured perceived modern relevance. The following two questions, also in the original constitutional respect battery, were included to measure perceived modern relevance and concluded the respect section:

Which of the following statements comes closest to your view of how the U.S. Constitution should be interpreted by the courts?

- *Judges should base their rulings on what they believe the U.S. Constitution means in today's world*
- *Judges should base their rulings on what they believe U.S. Constitution meant when it was originally written*

Would you say the U.S. Constitution has been amended too many, too few, or about the right number of times?

- *Too high*
- *About the right number of times*
- *Too few*
- *Don't know*

A2. Amendment Rigidity Section

The rigidity section began by explaining one way the U.S. Constitution can be amended:

Please read the following carefully:

An amendment to the U.S. Constitution is approved when:

- *Two-thirds (67%) of the members of the Senate and two-thirds (67%) of the members of the House of Representatives vote to approve the amendment, AND*
- *Three-fourths (75%) of state legislatures vote to approve the amendment.*

The next questions ask you about this process for amending the U.S. Constitution.

On the page immediately after reading what the vote percentage requirements are for amendment approval in Congress and from state legislatures, respondents receive the following attention check (correct answer highlighted in bold):

How many votes are required in the Senate and the House of Representatives to approve an amendment to the U.S. Constitution?

- *One-half (50%) plus one vote*
- *Three-fifths (60%)*
- ***Two-thirds (67%)***
- *Three-fourths (75%)*

The next two questions (one for both houses of Congress and one for state legislatures) remind respondents of the vote percentage threshold for approval in each stage of amendment, then asks whether they believe the requirement is “Too high”, “Just right”, or “Too low”. I rotate the order of these two questions, shown below:

- *The current number of votes required in the Senate and the House of Representatives to approve an amendment to the U.S. Constitution is 67%. Is this too high, too low, or just right?*
- *The current number of state legislatures required to approve an amendment to the U.S. Constitution is 75%. Is this too high, too low, or just right?*

A3. Amendment Support Section

This section prefaces the questions with the following introduction:

You will now read a series of proposed amendments to the U.S. Constitution. For each, please tell me whether you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose the proposed amendment. If you have no preference, please indicate so.

Each of the next six questions, presented in a random order, displays the content of a hypothetical constitutional amendment, then asks the following:

Do you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose this amendment to the U.S. Constitution?

- *Strongly support*
- *Somewhat support*
- *Somewhat oppose*
- *Strongly oppose*
- *No preference*

The six amendments proposed are as follows:

- *Authorize Congress to prohibit the physical violation of the U.S. flag.*
- *Prohibit doctors from performing abortions after 15 weeks of pregnancy, except in cases of rape, incest, or risks to the life and physical health of the mother.*
- *Limit the number of terms U.S. House Representatives and U.S. Senators can hold office.*
- *Guarantee equality of rights under the law on the basis of gender.*
- *Raise the minimum age to buy a firearm from 18 to 21 years of age.*
- *Replace the Electoral College with the direct popular election of the U.S. President.*

The amendments on flag desecration, abortion, and congressional term limits were selected as conservative-tending. The amendments on equal gender rights, gun control, and the Electoral College were selected as liberal-tending.

A4. Political Trust Section

Respondents received a political trust battery repurposed from a study by Cozza (2022) on constitutional amendment legitimacy, beginning with the following instructions:

The next few questions will list a number of organizations.

For each one, please indicate whether you are extremely confident, quite confident, somewhat confident, not very confident, or not confident at all in them.

Respondents then rated their trust for a series of political institutions on a five-point Likert scale ranging from “Extremely confident,” “Quite confident,” “Somewhat confident,” “Not very confident,” and “Not at all confident”—this scale was reworked from Cozza’s original four-point scale in a new attempt to standardize the distance between each answer choice. The following institutions were presented in a randomized order:

- *The government in Washington, D.C.*
- *Political parties*
- *The courts*
- *Your state government*

A5. Constitutional Knowledge Section

The section on knowledge begins with the following instructions:

The following questions will ask about your current knowledge of the U.S. Constitution.

There are many parts of the Constitution that Americans are not familiar with, so you are not expected to know the answer to all of the questions.

Please answer them to the best of your ability.

Three questions were then posed to respondents, and answer options were randomized for the first and third questions. For greater ease for respondents and data analysis, the branches of government and First Amendment questions were changed from open to closed response, with three correct answers of six potential choices. Each question is scored out of one point (with a minimum score of zero); for the branches of government and First Amendment rights questions, each correctly selected correct answer choice earns one-sixth of a point, and each correctly unselected incorrect answer choice also earns one-sixth of a point. The questions are as follows, with correct answers highlighted in bold:

Which of the following are branches of the U.S. federal government listed in the U.S.

Constitution? Check all that apply.

- ***Executive***
- ***Legislative***
- ***Judicial***
- *Bureaucratic*
- *Defense*
- *Treasury*

How many years are there in one full term of office for a member of the U.S. House of Representatives?

- 2
- 4
- 6
- 8
- Not sure

Which of the following are specific rights guaranteed by the First Amendment of the Constitution? Check all that apply.

- ***Freedom of speech***
- ***Freedom of religion***
- ***Right of assembly***
- *Right to bear arms*
- *Right to vote*
- *Right to jury trial*

APPENDIX B. REGRESSION TABLES

Note: While all income brackets were included in each regression with demographic controls, only income covariates found to be statistically significant are displayed on any table below for the sake of brevity.

Table 1. OLS regression results for effect of modern relevance score on symbolic respect score

Table 1: Modern Relevance OLS Results for Symbolic Respect

	Baseline	Full
	(1)	(2)
Symbolic Respect	0.542*** (0.030)	0.468*** (0.036)
Political Trust		-0.165*** (0.024)
Con. Knowledge		0.043* (0.023)
White		-0.020 (0.028)
Black		-0.024 (0.030)
Asian		-0.024 (0.037)
AIAN		-0.020 (0.033)
Span/Hispanic/Latino		-0.028 (0.019)
Female		0.003 (0.012)
Age		0.004*** (0.0003)
Income \$50-59k		-0.077** (0.030)
Income \$70-79k		-0.077** (0.031)
Income \$90-99k		-0.134*** (0.032)
Income \$100-149k		-0.066** (0.028)
Income \$150k+		-0.071** (0.031)
Citizen		0.016 (0.050)
College Grad		-0.042*** (0.012)
Republican		0.101*** (0.012)
Constant	0.076*** (0.026)	0.037 (0.065)
Observations	1,792	1,503
R ²	0.151	0.325

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 2. OLS regression results for effects of constitutional respect dimensions on general amendment support

Table 2: Amendment Support OLS Results		
	Baseline (1)	Full (2)
Symbolic Respect	0.226*** (0.032)	0.213*** (0.033)
Modern Relevance	-0.110*** (0.021)	-0.148*** (0.022)
Political Trust	0.053*** (0.020)	0.083*** (0.021)
Con. Knowledge	-0.046** (0.019)	-0.030 (0.019)
White		-0.013 (0.023)
Black		0.003 (0.025)
Asian		-0.010 (0.032)
AIAN		0.027 (0.027)
Span/Hispanic/Latino		-0.007 (0.016)
Female		0.040*** (0.010)
Age		0.001*** (0.0003)
Citizen		0.089** (0.043)
College Grad		-0.046*** (0.010)
Republican	-0.007 (0.010)	0.005 (0.010)
Constant	0.581*** (0.026)	0.434*** (0.056)
Observations	1,500	1,482
R ²	0.054	0.105
<i>Note:</i> *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01		

Table 3. OLS regression results for effects of constitutional respect dimensions on preferred amendment process rigidity

Table 3: Amendment Rigidity Preference OLS Results				
	Baseline (1)	Full (2)	Congress (3)	States (4)
Symbolic Respect	0.039 (0.034)	0.046 (0.036)	0.027 (0.041)	0.065 (0.044)
Modern Relevance	0.079*** (0.023)	0.070*** (0.024)	0.053* (0.028)	0.087*** (0.030)
Political Trust	-0.081*** (0.022)	-0.069*** (0.023)	-0.093*** (0.026)	-0.044 (0.028)
Con. Knowledge	0.015 (0.021)	0.013 (0.021)	0.038 (0.025)	-0.011 (0.026)
White		-0.005 (0.026)	-0.016 (0.030)	0.006 (0.032)
Black		-0.019 (0.028)	-0.028 (0.032)	-0.010 (0.034)
Asian		0.014 (0.035)	-0.023 (0.040)	0.051 (0.042)
AIAN		0.009 (0.030)	-0.017 (0.035)	0.035 (0.037)
Span/Hispanic/Latino		-0.001 (0.018)	0.005 (0.021)	-0.008 (0.022)
Female		0.030*** (0.011)	0.033*** (0.013)	0.028** (0.014)
Age		0.0004 (0.0003)	-0.0002 (0.0004)	0.001** (0.0004)
Income \$40-49k		-0.033 (0.028)	-0.001 (0.033)	-0.065* (0.035)
Income \$150k		-0.037 (0.029)	0.005 (0.034)	-0.079** (0.036)
Citizen		0.067 (0.047)	0.023 (0.054)	0.111* (0.057)
College Grad		0.015 (0.011)	0.010 (0.013)	0.019 (0.014)
Republican	-0.017 (0.011)	-0.016 (0.011)	-0.011 (0.013)	-0.021 (0.014)
Constant	0.442*** (0.028)	0.340*** (0.060)	0.472*** (0.070)	0.207*** (0.074)
Observations	1,522	1,503	1,503	1,503
R ²	0.028	0.043	0.031	0.046

Note:

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

Table 4. OLS regression results for effects of political trust, constitutional knowledge, and demographic characteristics on symbolic constitutional respect

Table 4: Symbolic Respect OLS Results			
	Baseline (1)	Full (2)	Demographic (3)
Political Trust	0.092*** (0.017)	0.120*** (0.017)	
Con. Knowledge	0.150*** (0.016)	0.113*** (0.016)	
White		0.005 (0.020)	0.005 (0.020)
Black		−0.034 (0.021)	−0.029 (0.022)
Asian		−0.050* (0.027)	−0.054** (0.027)
AIAN		0.018 (0.023)	0.013 (0.024)
Span/Hispanic/Latino		0.002 (0.014)	0.012 (0.014)
Female		−0.013 (0.008)	−0.021** (0.009)
Age		0.003*** (0.0002)	0.003*** (0.0002)
Income \$20-29k		0.030 (0.020)	0.041** (0.020)
Income \$90-99k		0.034 (0.023)	0.052** (0.023)
Income \$150k+		0.044** (0.022)	0.066*** (0.023)
Citizen		−0.039 (0.036)	−0.038 (0.037)
College Grad		−0.004 (0.009)	0.006 (0.009)
Republican	0.061*** (0.008)	0.044*** (0.008)	0.052*** (0.008)
Constant	0.687*** (0.014)	0.596*** (0.044)	0.697*** (0.043)
Observations	1,522	1,503	1,503
R ²	0.100	0.212	0.164

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 5. OLS regression results for effects of political trust, constitutional knowledge, and demographic characteristics on perceived modern constitutional relevance

Table 5: Modern Relevance OLS Results			
	Baseline (1)	Full (2)	Demographic (3)
Political Trust	−0.187*** (0.026)	−0.109*** (0.025)	
Con. Knowledge	0.119*** (0.025)	0.096*** (0.024)	
White		−0.018 (0.029)	−0.015 (0.030)
Black		−0.040 (0.031)	−0.049 (0.032)
Asian		−0.048 (0.039)	−0.038 (0.040)
AIAN		−0.012 (0.034)	−0.012 (0.035)
Span/Hispanic/Latino		−0.027 (0.020)	−0.036* (0.021)
Female		−0.003 (0.013)	−0.003 (0.013)
Age		0.005*** (0.0003)	0.005*** (0.0003)
Income \$50-59k		−0.088*** (0.032)	−0.079** (0.032)
Income \$70-79k		−0.076** (0.032)	−0.070** (0.033)
Income \$90-99k		−0.118*** (0.033)	−0.116*** (0.034)
Citizen		−0.002 (0.053)	0.010 (0.054)
College Grad		−0.043*** (0.013)	−0.046*** (0.013)
Republican	0.136*** (0.013)	0.121*** (0.012)	0.107*** (0.012)
Constant	0.476*** (0.021)	0.315*** (0.064)	0.296*** (0.063)
Observations	1,522	1,503	1,503
R ²	0.101	0.250	0.230

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01