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ORIGINAL PAPER

In-Group Love Versus Out-Group Hate: Which Is More Important to Partisans and When?

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Abstract

Recent evidence indicates that partisans discriminate against those from the opposing party. However, it is still unclear whether partisan out-group prejudice reveals a desire for out-group harm or in-group help. We investigate the conditions under which these tendencies arise. Using one observational survey and three survey experiments, we show that when given the chance to either harm the out-group or help the in-group, people tend to choose the latter. Yet while the tendency to help the in-group appears to be primary, we also show that under situations of symbolic threat to partisan identity, respondents shift gears and opt for harming the out-group as a strategy to defend the status of their political group identity. These results add to our understanding of how partisan identity and polarization works in non-elites.

Keywords Partisanship · Affective polarization · Symbolic threat · Moral threat · Survey experiment · Intergroup hostility

Of all the issues facing contemporary American politics, one feature of the system tends to stand out as particularly problematic: polarization. Polarization gets expressed in two distinct arenas: first, at the elite Congressional level, as elected leaders become increasingly ideologically extreme along party lines (Layman 1999; Stonecash et al. 2003; Layman et al. 2006; McCarty et al. 2006); second, at the level of the mass public. In the latter, polarization has been detected regarding issue positions (Abramowitz and Saunders 2008), but has also emerged in the form of an

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increasing level of hostility towards the other party (Iyengar et al. 2012), developing into a form of outgroup prejudice that rivals other well-established forms of prejudicial bias, such as racial bias (Iyengar and Westwood 2015).

Previous research, however, makes it difficult to understand some of the behavioral effects of this out-group prejudice. In particular, there is still some uncertainty as to whether the prejudice is driven by a desire to harm the opposing party or help one's own party. In this paper, we explore this issue, providing evidence that when given the chance to do one or the other, people tend to act in ways that benefit the in-group, rather than denigrate the out-group. While this is good news, we also show that this more benign form of prejudice can shift focus under situations of symbolic threat—activating out-group animosity. These reactions are important signposts in a political environment with increasingly hostile rhetoric that sometimes includes language that attacks partisan "sides".

Evidence of Polarization

Some argue that the American public is not particularly politically informed or involved, and thus not polarized[1] (Fiorina et al. 2005, 2008). Yet Abramowitz and Saunders (2008) have analyzed ANES data and national exit polls, finding that since the 1970's there has been a noticeable increase in polarization in the voting public. This divide has been reflected in growing differences in political views and attitudes between voters in blue states and red states, between religious and secular voters, and between Democrats and Republicans. Moreover, an increase in affective polarization, the growing antipathy that has been generated towards partisan outgroups (Iyengar et al. 2012), is not disputed (at least not at the time of writing) and is of special relevance.

Using cumulative ANES data from the last 30 years, Iyengar and Krupenkin (2018) showed that Republicans and Democrats report increasingly negative opinions of one another when measured with standard feeling thermometers, as well as other measurements of trait-attribution and affect. They also demonstrated that these negative opinions have become increasingly stable and consistent, applying to all representatives and members of the party over time.

In-Group Versus Out-Group Bias

The consequences of these increased negative opinions have been documented in a number of studies examining partisan discrimination. Iyengar and Westwood (2015) used a survey experiment to show that partisans exhibited prejudice towards one another in non-political environments. For example, partisans were more likely to reject a college application if it included an out-party cue in the resume. This

[1] This group of scholars explain polarization at this level as an artifact of extreme political activists that is erroneously discussed by the media as a problem in the electorate.

prejudice was not confined to outward expression. Newly developed IAT tests, which measure the strength of implicit favorable or unfavorable feelings for opposing parties, showed results that are comparable or exceed the negative scores generated on racial IAT measures (Iyengar and Westwood 2015). These findings indicate that partisan prejudice has both a controlled and an automatic component.

However, when it comes to exhibiting biased behavior towards out-partisan members, it is largely unclear whether this is being driven by a desire to benefit one's own party or harm the other party. As long as the behaviors being measured—such as whether people admit a college student with a shared party affiliation over one with an out-party affiliation—both benefit one's group and harm the out-group simultaneously, it is hard to tease the effects apart.

Fortunately, a series of recent studies have found that although partisans do engage in discriminatory behavior, they do not necessarily go out of their way to harm each other, as we might be inclined to think. Lelkes and Westwood (2017) examined whether inter-party animosity met different levels of prejudice, as outlined by Allport (1954). More specifically, they examined the promotion of negative speech, the avoidance of out-group members, and actual discriminatory behavior designed to intentionally harm another group. This allowed them to show which behavior (in-group protection or out-group hostility) was more closely associated with affective polarization. It also allowed them to examine the severity (and, therefore, the seriousness) of people's out-group animosity.

In one experiment designed to determine whether partisans would promote negative speech about one another, subjects were randomly assigned to read a news article that either reflected poorly on Republicans or on Democrats in Congress. They were then asked whether or not they would recommend the article for online publication. Unsurprisingly, subjects were more likely (65%) to recommend publication of the article denigrating the out-party than they were the article that denigrated their own party (25%). Interestingly, their level of affective polarization, as measured by differencing feelings thermometers that subjects rate the parties on, was substantially more impactful on their choice to protect their in-group (by not publishing the article) than on their choice to harm the opposing party.

Similar results arose when different respondents were exposed to one of two stories: police officers using tear gas against peaceful Democratic protesters or against peaceful Republican protesters. Respondents had to decide whether the police action was warranted and how much money the city should fine the protesters. Very few respondents believed the tear gas was warranted at all—an indication that partisans do not wish unreasonable harm on their opponents. And although respondents did suggest a slightly higher fine for out-party members, an asymmetry emerged once again; individual-level polarization impacted in-party favoritism but not out-party punishment.

These results suggest that while partisanship does indeed play a role in people's party-related decision making, polarization (at least in its affective form) seems to incline people more towards favoring their in-group, not hurting the out-group. Thus, research showing that people favor a co-partisan over a member of the opposing party is likely to be more the result of in-group favoritism than out-group denigration.

Group Identity and Symbolic Threat

While we might find it reassuring that people more frequently express their political bias in ways that benefit their in-group rather than harm the out-group, one explanation for this behavior is that favoring one's in-group is simply a more straightforward way of reaffirming an important social group identity—one that, according to Green et al. (2004) is likely to form early in life and remain stable over time. Since people's self-concepts are tied, in part, to their memberships to certain groups (Tajfel and Turner 1979; Tajfel 1981; Greene 1999; Greene 2002), being affiliated with a political party is likely to be an important part of how they identify themselves. As such, party affiliation becomes connected to feelings of individual worth and self-esteem, which in turn motivate a need to maintain and defend a positive impression of their party (Brewer 2007). This is something that is much more straightforwardly accomplished by expressing in-group favoritism than by expressing out-group animosity. That is, denigrating the out-group, by itself, does nothing to reinforce and reaffirm one's groups' (and thereby, one's own) importance and worth.

This would suggest that under some conditions in-group favoritism will not be enough to protect one's standing, image, and self-esteem. For example, what happens if someone attacks your party? Depending on the nature and severity of the attack, expressing in-group favoritism by itself may not be enough to recover from the damage. It may become necessary to strike back, to undermine the credibility of the opposition, and to "hit them where it hurts".

Of particular relevance here would be the danger of "symbolic" threats (e.g., threats to values, beliefs, and identity) against one's group—in contrast with more "realistic" threats, such as to physical well-being, safety, and security (see Riek et al. 2006 for a review). If what is at issue is the sense of self and worth that we gain via our identification with a group, then an attack against that group's beliefs or values would be especially dangerous and worthy of retaliation.

Recently, research has found that central to our sense of self is our moral identity. For one, we strongly prioritize moral characteristics (such as being honest, courageous, compassionate, etc.) over other attributes (such as being tall, blue-eyed, funny, etc.) in our self-concept, such that the loss of them is much more likely to mean that we are no longer the same person (Leach et al. 2007; Strohminger and Nichols 2014; Conway 2018). Moreover, when formulating social judgments and impressions of others, morality outweighs perceptions of competency and sociability (Wojciszke 2005; Brambilla et al. 2011, 2012). In short, morality is a core component of social identity and social interaction (Graham et al. 2009; Haidt 2012).

Although there are a variety of symbolic threats in the political context, morality has shown to be a potent one. Indeed, recent findings indicate that people lash out at others who look comparatively moral when they encounter a threat to their *own* morality (Tetlock et al. 2000; Tetlock 2003). Examining this at the group level, Täuber and Zomeren (2013) found that moral threats (as opposed to non-moral threats) to their in-group status caused subjects to protect their group identity and, by extension, their own personal identity (Tajfel and Turner 1979), by expressing more outrage towards the out-group. These findings inform our hypotheses below.

Overview of Current Studies

The objective of the studies we report here was two-fold. First, our goal was to further clarify the nature of the bias typically shown towards out-group members—i.e., is it motivated more by the desire to favor the in-group or denigrate the out-group? Second, our goal was to examine what happens to this bias when one's party is under attack—does the underlying motivation shift?

With respect to our first objective, the first study (Study 1) we report here was designed further disentangle in-group favoritism versus out-group denigration, which we accomplished by giving people the chance to do one without thereby doing the other (in contrast to the many zero-sum structures employed thus far). In other words, we gave people the choice between favoring the in-group without thereby harming the out-group, or harming the out-group without thereby favoring the in-group. We hypothesized that when forced to make such a choice people would generally chose the former—a finding that, if anything, would only be enhanced under conditions of high affective polarization.

H1 When forced to make a choice, partisans will prioritize in-group help over out-group harm.

With respect to our second objective, we designed three studies (Study 2–4) to examine the degree to which symbolic moral threats leveled against the in-group would prompt a behavioral change. That is, when given the choice between favoring the in-group (without thereby harming the out-group) and harming the out-group (without thereby favoring the in-group), would people shift towards out-group denigration? We hypothesized that they would.

H2 Moral threats directed towards a partisan group will cause partisans to reprioritize out-group harm over in-group help.

To test this hypothesis, Study 2 mirrored Study 1, but with the introduction of a moral attack against the in-group. We anticipated that this would significantly shift participants towards out-group denigration. To test the strength of this motivational shift, in Study 3 we introduced a third option—and "opt out" where they could do neither—to see if they would still choose to denigrate the out-group. And then finally, in Study 4, we examined whether shifting the target of the threat, from party elites to regular individuals such as themselves, would further enhance their motivation to denigrate the out-group.

The literature on polarization has not yet fully explored the extent to which moral threats affect out-party denigration. What is more, while there is evidence that in-party favoritism is a primary feature of affective polarization, to our knowledge there is no research testing to which extent this force is affected by moral threats. Given this empirical lacuna, we cannot state with certainty the direction of the effect of moral threats on party prejudice. We do hypothesize (H2) that moral threats will shift the expression of this prejudice in the direction of out-party denigration. Yet

in the absence of empirical evidence this hypothesis remains in the realm of conjectures. In view of the relevance of better understanding the contours of politically polarized behavior, filling out this empirical gap is of utmost relevance.

Study 1: Set Up

To test our first hypothesis—that partisans will choose to favor their own group rather than denigrate the opposing group when given a forced choice between favoring the in-group (without thereby harming the out-group) and harming the out-group (without thereby favoring the in-group)—we ran a survey in the Winter of 2016 with Mechanical Turk users. The task we employed for our respondents was adopted from Lelkes and Westwood (2017) and altered accordingly.

After filling out basic demographic questions we asked subjects for their partisan identification using the branching questions employed by the American National Election Studies. Those who identified as Republicans followed one survey path while those who identified as Democrats followed another path. We included partisan "leaners" as partisans since there is evidence that these identifiers have similar attitudes and behaviors as regular partisans (Petrocik 2009). True Independents (N = 26) were randomly assigned to one of the two paths, but we did not analyze the data they generated. All partisans, regardless of what path they were on, were given the following cover story:

> The researchers hosting this survey are conducting it for the founders of an online news website that launched about 3 months ago. In this short time period, their website has seen far more traffic than originally expected. Since their company is new to the online marketplace, they are conducting research on the topics and stories that consumers think are the most important. While most of the content appearing on their website homepage is selected by the editors, they have reserved certain slots for posts that the public can vote on. We would like your input regarding which of the following two articles should appear on next week's homepage

Those on the Republican path saw two articles that were both noted as "Under consideration for publication". One praised Republicans for making strides to fix congressional gridlock and the other blamed Democrats for a disproportionate amount of financial scandals coming out of Washington. Those on the Democrat survey path saw the opposite: an article praising Democrats for trying to fix gridlock and an article blaming Republicans for the financial scandals. Thus, each partisan group saw an article that praised their own group and one that criticized the opposing group. The articles were side by side. (See Appendix Fig. 6 for full articles) We chose gridlock and financial scandals as our article topics because both are viewed negatively by the public at large. A recent Gallup (2013) indicated that both Republicans and Democrats cite gridlock as their primary reason for congressional disapproval. Attempts to alleviate this problem should be perceived as positive by both partisan groups. Similarly, financial scandals should be perceived negatively from any partisan standpoint.

In order to make sure the issues in the articles were comparable, we ran a pre-test where self-identified Republican and Democratic college students rated the issues on a scale where 1 = Not important at all and 7 = Extremely Important. We found no differences at $t(48) = .65$, $p = .52$ and .41, $p = .68$. The articles were approximately equal length (168 words for the gridlock story and 156 words for the scandal story). After reading both, respondents were forced to select which article should be published on the website's homepage. Among other control variable questions, respondents also filled out 100-point feeling thermometers for both parties, which were randomly determined to appear either before or after the news stories in order to prevent systematic attitude priming.

Subjects (N = 165) were paid survey takers on Amazon's Mechanical Turk. The survey took about 10 min to complete. To be considered for the analysis, respondents had to be at least 18 years old, have a 95% survey acceptance rate on the Mechanical Turk platform, be located in the United States, pass an attention check question and pass an English comprehension question. We used these restrictions for all studies going forward. However, the results hold even when the restrictions are not used. Sample demographics (for all studies) can be seen in the Appendix.[2]

Study 1: Results[3]

Overall, 67% of partisans chose the article that favored their in-group rather than the article that criticized the other party. This was the case for both groups of partisans, not strictly the Democratic identifiers who dominated the sample. A two-sample difference in proportions test indicates no significant difference in the way Democrats ($M = .31$, $SE = .04$) and Republicans ($M = .33$, $SE = .06$) decided which article to select at $z(110, 53) = .27$, $p = .78$. These preliminary findings lend credence to our first hypothesis that helping the in-group seems to be primary to harming the out-group (but see Footnote 2).

To examine whether one's level of affective polarization influences this selection, we created a polarization variable by differencing the party feeling thermometers from one another leaving us with a measure from −100 to +100. This variable is then folded, such that those with the highest score (100) have extremely positive feelings about one party and extremely negative feelings about the other party; they are maximally polarized. Those with the lowest possible score (0) placed the parties on the same scale number, indicating that they are minimally polarized. As Lelkes and Westwood (2017) note, this differencing method is most frequently used to measure an individual's level of affective polarization.

We regressed this measure onto the dependent variable, article choice, coded as 0 for those who chose to help the in-party and 1 for those who chose to harm the

[2] We note here that since Study 1 is observational, the results from this online convenience sample must be taken with a grain of salt, as the individual survey takes are non-representative of the American population.

[3] Data and coding for all four studies can be found in the Harvard Dataverse at the following address: https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataset.xhtml?persistentId=doi:10.7910/DVN/J33F9O

Table 1 Study 1 effect of covariates on article selection

	Chose out party harm
PID strength	− .199 (.266)
White	− .550 (.428)
South	.148 (.378)
Pol. participation	.004 (.223)
Attention to politics	− .115 (.273)
Age	.030 (.015)*
College	.487 (.368)
Affective polarization	.004 (.007)
Constant	− 1.28 (1.17)
Pseudo R^2	.05
N	162

Model is a logistic regression. The dependent variable is selection of the article that denigrates the out-party = 1 and selection of the article that praises the in-party = 0

Significance codes: * < .05; ** < .01; *** < .001

out-party. In addition to the polarization measure, we included controls for party ID strength, measured by folding the seven-point party ID scale that had been created with the branching questions, a dichotomous race measure where 0 = Non-white and 1 = White, a four-point political participation measure, four-point measure for how much attention the subject pays to everyday politics, a dummy variable for whether the subject had attained a college degree or equivalent, and an age variable. The results of this regression are presented in Table 1.

The coefficients of logistic regressions are not easily interpretable in their natural form, but the sign and the significance can still be discerned from the initial output. It is clear from Table 1 that none of the variables, including the subject's personal level of affective polarization, show any relationship to article selection. Only the age variable reaches statistical significance. While Lelkes and Westwood (2017) find that someone's level of affective polarization positively affects their willingness to protect the in-party given a voluntary choice to do so or not, we did not find this relationship in the forced choice context. This null finding does not necessarily undermine Lelkes and Westwood's work, however. One reason for the difference may be that in the original study, respondents chose to either publish or not publish an article that was either unflattering towards their party or unflattering towards the opposing party. The people who might normally choose to not to publish an article at all are now being forced into a choice and are likely to gravitate towards the lauding of their own party, a context that could wash out the effect of personal polarization level.

Study 2: Set Up

The second study replicates the findings from Study 1 but introduces a condition- a type of symbolic threat- under which partisans were expected to choose to harm

Table 2 Study 2 article selection by condition

	Control	Threat	Total
Help in-party	71 (67%)	55 (50%)	126
Attack out-party	35 (33%)	54 (50%)	89
Total	106	109	215

outgroup members rather than help their own group. We use the same context of online article choice to accomplish this.

Using a new sample of Mechanical Turk users (N = 215), we again branched Republican identifiers onto a distinct path from Democratic identifiers. Once on their respective paths, respondents were randomly assigned into a Control condition or a Threat condition. In the Control condition, partisans were forced to engage in the same task as Study 1: read an article that praises their own party and one that disparages the out-party and then make a forced choice about which should be published. In the Threat condition, respondents were first asked to read "The most popular article featured on the website from the previous week". This article blames the respondent's own party (Republican or Democrat) for the influx of special interest money in Washington DC and is unambiguously negative. It also explicitly uses the word "immoral" in order to cue this symbolic threat in the text (See Appendix Fig. 7). After reading this, they are presented with the same task as the Control group: choose to publish the article that either praises their own party or the article that disparages the opposing party.

The article in the Threat condition uses the issue of money in politics because it too represents a feature of democracy that is almost universally off-putting to Americans regardless of party affiliation (Pew 2015; New York Times 2015) and $t(48) = .41$, $p = .68$ for our student sample. We measure the same control variables as in Study 1, adding a seven-point ideological identification scale that is folded into an Ideological Strength measure with lower numbers indicating "Moderate" and higher numbers indicating greater ideological strength in either a liberal or conservative direction.[4] Sample demographics can be seen in Appendix Table 8.

Study 2: Results

The results for article selection by condition in Study 2 are presented in Table 2. They reproduce the basic results from Study 1: 67% of partisans in the normal circumstances of the Control condition chose the article that favored their own party instead of the article that denigrated the out-party. This provides more evidence that helping the in-party is psychologically primary.[5]

[4] Control variables can still reduce noise in experimental contexts (Gerber and Green 2012) and serve as robustness checks.

[5] We note here at that in the normal circumstances of the Control condition, Democrats ($M = .39$, $SE = .05$) were more likely to select the out-party harm article than Republicans ($M = .181$, $SE = .06$) at $z(33,73) = -2.18$, $p = .02$.

Table 3 Study 2 effects of threat on forced choice article selection

	Chose out party harm
Threat condition	.760 (.297)*
PID strength	− .367 (.237)
Ideology strength	.310 (.190)
White	− .072 (.279)
South	− .378 (.341)
Pol. participation	.137 (.182)
Age	.018 (.012)
Religiosity	.071 (.172)
College	− .085 (.296)
Affective polarization	.009 (.006)
Constant	− 1.97 (1.11)
Pseudo R^2	.055
N	215

Model is a logistic regression. The dependent variable is selection of the article that denigrates the out-party = 1 and selection of the article that praises the in-party = 0

Significance codes: * < .05; ** < .01; *** < .001

Table 3 explains what happens when the threat is tested. The dependent variable is coded as 1 if the subject selected the article denigrating the opposing party and 0 if the subject selected the article lauding their own party. Our main independent variable, Threat condition, is a dummy coded as 1 if the subject was exposed to the threat to their own party before selecting which article to publish and 0 if they were in the Control condition and did not view a threat to their own party before making the choice. We see that the Threat treatment is significant at the .01 level and robust against other controls.

To better understand the magnitude of this effect, Fig. 1 graphs the predicted probabilities of selecting the article that attacks the out-party depending on one's experimental condition. Respondents in the Control condition (0) have about a .32 chance of publishing the article that harms the out-party. This probability goes up to .50 when exposed to a moral threat to one's own party (1). These findings provide support for our second hypothesis.

Our findings from Study 2 indicate that partisan identity priorities are easily shifted. Exposure to this in-group symbolic threat is enough to cause partisans to put their own group's reputation on the back-burner and focus their behavioral efforts on harming the opposition.

Study 3: Set Up

Though the findings from Study 2 are noteworthy, the decision-making context presented to the respondents is unrealistic. In democratic societies, the majority of political decisions are not mandatory forced choices; people usually engage in political

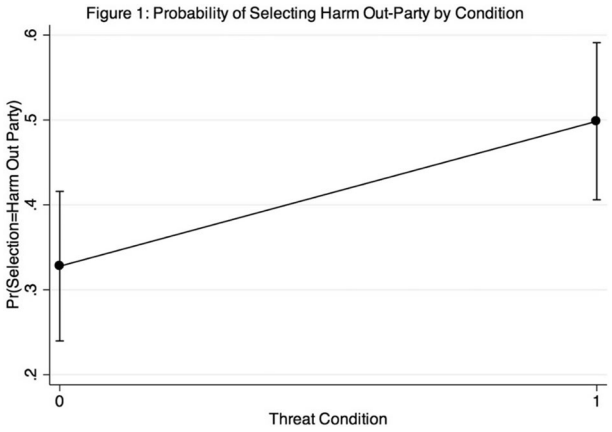

Fig. 1 Study 2 probability of selecting harm out-party article by condition

Table 4 Study 3 voluntary article selection by condition

	Control	Threat	Total
Help in-party	43 (46%)	31 (37%)	74
Attack out-party	32 (35%)	36 (43%)	68
Neither	18 (19%)	17 (20%)	35
Total	93	84	177

behaviors voluntarily. Therefore, we reproduce Study 2 with a new Mechanical Turk sample and make one minor change. This time, respondents are given a "Neither" option, allowing them to opt out of choosing an article for publication. This maintained the non-zero-sum structure of Studies 1 and 2, where they could choose to help their own party without harming the opposing party or vice versa, but introduced the important opportunity to also choose to do neither. Sample characteristics of our respondents (N = 177) are in the Appendix.

Study 3: Results

Study 3 partially replicates the initial finding from Study 1. Table 4 reports the results for article selection by condition. In the normal context of the Control condition, helping the in-party (chosen by 46% of subjects) still appears to be psychologically primary, although the numbers are not quite as high since the forced choice context is removed by adding the third option: do nothing.

Table 5 shows the effect of the Threat condition on the article selection options. Given that the dependent variable now has three levels that are not meaningfully ordered, we ran a multinomial logit which breaks the model down into a series of logistic regressions. The base category is listed second in top row of each model.

Table 5 Study 3 multinomial logit results: effect of threat on voluntary article selection

	Harm out party versus help in party	Neither versus help in party	Neither versus harm out party
Threat	.863 (.395)*	1.06 (.493)*	.197 (.480)
PID str.	− .833 (.294)	− .470 (.367)	.363 (.347)
Ideology str.	.078 (.260)	− .093 (.308)	− .171 (.288)
White	.208 (.469)	− .411 (.549)	− .619 (.562)
South	.966 (.413)	.881 (.499)	− .085 (.470)
Pol. particip.	− .324 (.203)	− .370 (.249)	− .046 (.232)
Age	.012 (.017)	.048 (.021)*	.035 (.021)$^{+}$
Religiosity	.298 (.212)	.332 (.254)	.033 (.258)
College	.630 (.382)	.88 (.481)$^{+}$	.257 (.480)
Affective pol.	.033 (.007)	− .018 (.009)$^{+}$	− .021 (.009)*
Constant	− .540 (1.41)	− .540 (1.41)	− 1.25 (1.69)
Pseudo R^2	.093	.093	.093
N	176	176	176

Model is a multinomial logistic regression broken up into separate logits by STATA. The option selected by the respondent is listed first for each model and the referent group is listed second

Significance codes: * < .05, $^{+}$ < .1; ** < .01; *** < .001

For example, in the first column the header is *Harm Out-Party* versus *Help In-Party*, which means *Helping the In-Party* is the baseline category.

Even in the face of control variables, the Threat condition has an effect, but it is not straightforward. As previously seen in Study 2, exposure to a threat to one's group identity will cause respondents to choose out-party harm over in-party help. This result is indicated by the significant coefficient of .863 for the Threat condition variable in the first model where the DV is coded as 0 for helping one's own party and 1 for harming the opposing party.

Exposure to the threat also causes people to opt out and choose "Neither" rather than helping their own party, as indicated by the significant coefficient of 1.06 in the second column. However, when subjects are choosing between harming the opposing party and "Neither", being in the Threat condition has no effect on selection, as indicated by the non-significant coefficient of .197 in the third column.

Interestingly, what did seem to make a difference in this final scenario was someone's level of affective polarization. Those who were highly polarized chose to harm the out-party rather than opting out and selecting "Neither". This suggests that the effect of affective polarization has shifted from wanting to enhance one's in-group membership to wanting to defend against an attack.

Since multinomial logit coefficients are also not easily interpretable, Figs. 2–4 show the effects of the Threat condition on the probability of article selection in graphical form. Figure 2 indicates that when all other variables are held at their mean or modal values, moving from the Control condition into the Threat condition reduces the probability of helping one's own party from .527 to .306 (a difference of − .221). Figure 3 indicates that moving from the Control condition to the Threat

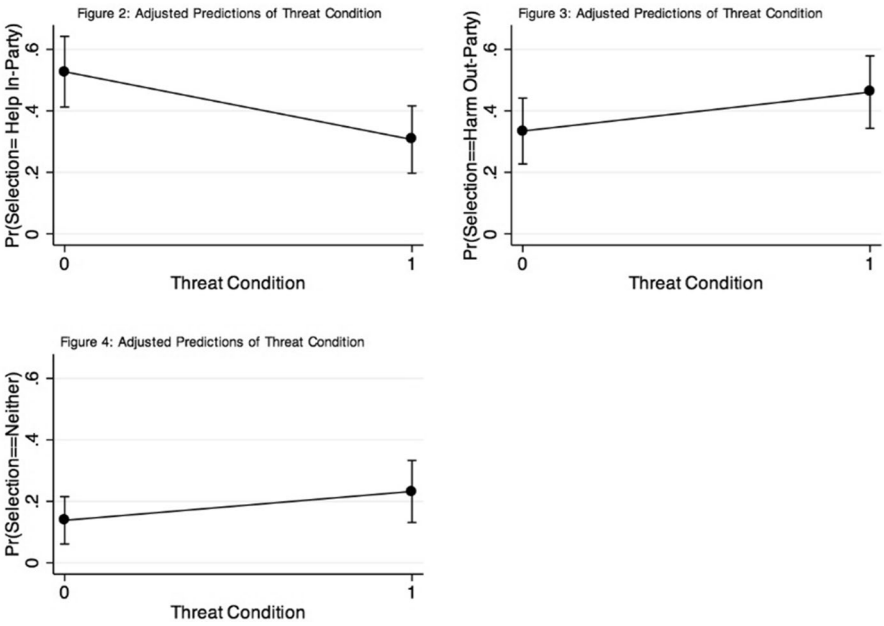

Fig. 2–4 Study 3 effect of threat condition on voluntary article selection (help in-party, harm out-party or neither)

condition increases the probability of harming the out-party from .334 to .461 (a difference of .127). Figure 4 indicates that going from the Control to the Threat condition increases the chances of selecting "Neither" from .138 to .232 (a difference of .094).

Overall, the experiment indicates that a symbolic threat moves people to harm opponents or choose do nothing.[6] Interestingly, the percentage of people who chose to do nothing was consistent between both the Control and Threat conditions, suggesting that there is a baseline of individuals who would prefer not to get involved. We were interested to see if this might change if we made the threat more personal. Therefore, instead of leveraging a moral threat focused on Democratic and Republican elites in Washington, we shifted the focus to Democratic and Republican identifiers in the mass public, making it more about *them*, in Study 4.

[6] We also ran this model as a logistic regression in which the dependent variable is coded such that 1 = Chose Harm the Out-Party and 0 = Chose Help In-Party or Neither. Results can be seen in Table 9 of the Appendix. In this model, the threat condition produces a null result. We believe this is because harming the out-party is not a unique option from the combination of the other two options; all three are conceptually distinct and should be estimated with the multinomial logistic regression.

Table 6 Study 4 voluntary subject article selection

	Control	Threat	Total
Help in-party	73 (73%)	52 (51%)	125
Attack out-party	23 (23%)	43 (43%)	66
Neither	4 (4%)	6 (6%)	10
Total	100	101	201

Study 4: Threat Condition Robustness Check

Study 4 is set up identically to Study 3, but our Threat treatment is altered, as mentioned above. The goal was to make the nature of the moral threat more personal, hitting closer to home and evoking a stronger reaction—which would dislodge the "Neither" respondents into harming the out-party. Moreover, changing the nature of the moral threat further tests the robustness of the hypothesis. Since criticisms can be directed at members of the public just as easily as they can be directed at the party elite, this test seems appropriate. Our new threat (Appendix Fig. 8) is an article expressing moral outrage at Democrats (Republicans) violating laws at the polling booths on election day, thereby trying to subvert the democratic process. Respondents were a new set of Mechanical Turk workers (N = 206). Demographics can be seen in the Appendix.

Study 4: Results

Table 6 reports the results for article selection by condition in Study 4. It is again clear that those in the normal circumstances of the Control condition are choosing to protect the in-party instead of harming the out-party by a sizable margin. Moreover, very few people are selecting the "Neither" category in either condition. Because the numbers for "Neither" are so low, they will be difficult for a multinomial regression to estimate. We address this in two ways. First, we run one model where we drop those who chose "Neither" and instead report a logistic regression (similar to Study 2) in which the DV is again 0 = Help In-Party and 1 = Harm Out-Party. This can be seen in Table 7. Second, we run another model where we lump the people who chose "Neither" in with the people who chose "In-Party Help" (See Appendix Table 9). This helps preserve statistical power, although we believe that each level of the dependent variable is unique and should, in theory, stand-alone (as previously mentioned in Footnote 6 for Study 3). See Online Appendix Table 1 and Figs. 1 and 2 for results of the multinomial regression with weak estimation.

Table 7 reports the results of the logistic regression where the respondents who selected "Neither" were dropped. Figure 5 shows the probability of selecting the Out-Party Harm article by condition.

Our results here replicate much of what we have seen in the previous studies: the dummy variable for being in the Threat condition is highly significant at $p = .001$ and positively signed, meaning that exposure to the threat caused

Table 7 Study 4 effect of more personal threat on voluntary article selection

	Chose out party harm (neither's dropped)
Threat condition	1.11 (.335)***
PID strength	− .293 (.270)
Ideology strength	.184 (.208)
White	.367 (.401)
South	− .388 (.367)
Pol. participation	− .102 (.164)
Age	.006 (.014)
Religiosity	.116 (.173)
College	− .323 (.330)
Affective polar.	.007 (.007)
Constant	− 1.59 (1.16)
Pseudo R^2	.069
N	190

Model is a logistic regression. The dependent variable is selection of the article that denigrates the out-party = 1 and selection of the article that praises the in-party = 0

Significance codes: * < .05; ** < .01; *** < .001

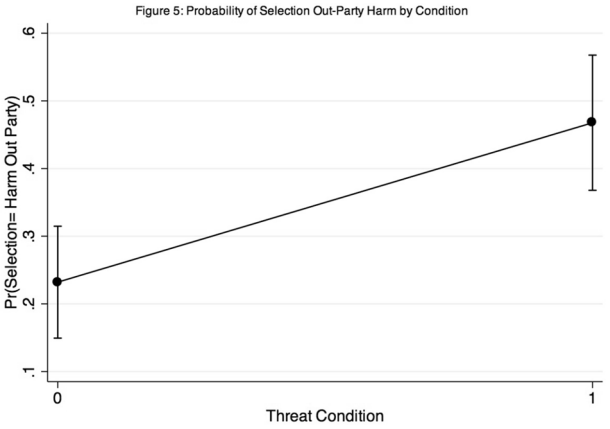

Fig. 5 Study 4 effect of more personal threat on voluntary article selection

people to select the article that harms the opposing party. This change in probability of .243 is the largest of the three experimental studies, indicating that subjects were even more inclined to lash out at the opposing group when the threat was more personalized.

Discussion

This series of studies has built off the previous work on partisan prejudice, providing several contributions to the relevant literature. Using the work by Lelkes and Westwood (2017) as inspiration, we have presented further evidence that helping and lauding one's own party is psychologically primary in contrast to the denigration of the opposing party. We accomplished this by giving partisans the choice to favor their own group rather than denigrate the opposing group in a non-zero-sum way—either favoring the in-group (without thereby harming the out-group) or harming the out-group (without thereby favoring the in-group). While it does not seem feasible to completely suppress our natural tribal tendencies to create group identities, fostering a positive attitude towards in-group members is more conducive to social cooperation than the denigration of the out-group; it serves as a straightforward way to reaffirm those group identities. To that extent, showing that protection of the partisan in-group is indeed a primary psychological trait is an encouraging result in an age in which polarization seems to be bringing out the worst in people.

On a more worrisome note, we found that a symbolic moral threat to their party caused respondents to lash out at the opposing party. This response was expected, based on the literature claiming that one's identification with a political party resembles other types of group identities (e.g., religion, sports) that constitute a significant part of one's personal identity. This was further supported through our use of two different types of targets for the threats. That is, when the target was a distant, elite member of their party, individuals were more likely to denigrate the opposing party compared to a control group. This behavior became even more likely when the targets of the threat were ordinary party members in the mass public, which could make the threat feel more personal. Under the former condition, a significant number of subjects choose not to publish either of the articles. In contrast, under the latter condition, very few subjects opted out of choosing one of the two articles—showing a higher willingness to engage in out-group denigration.[7]

Although there is reassuring evidence that partisans do not go out of their way to harm the opposing party (Lelkes and Westwood 2017), our findings suggest that more outward, aggressive behavior could be easily triggered by threats perceived as moral. This is of especial importance in a time when articles such as "The Moral and Intellectual Bankruptcy of the Republican Party" (The Guardian 2018), "The Deeply Immoral Values of Today's Republican Leaders" (Huffington Post 2017),

[7] Interestingly, our findings are robust against partisanship strength. Greene (1999, 2002) has shown that the social component of partisanship increases for people who identify as Strong Democrats and Strong Republicans. People who fall into these categories should more profoundly internalize the threat. We report the interaction between the experimental condition and partisan strength for each of the three experimental studies in the Online Appendix Tables 2, 3 and 4. Surprisingly, we found no significant effects on the interaction term in any of the studies. This suggests that the threat's effect on weak party identifiers is just as impactful as it is on strong party identifiers—at least in our samples.

and "The GOP's Moral Rot is the Problem, not Donald Trump Jr." (Washington Post 2017) are becoming commonplace.

A reasonable critique of our research is that people tend to expose themselves to news media that is *congenial* towards their identity and worldview (Stroud 2008), thereby avoiding these types of threats, rending their consequences meaningless. However, other scholars argue there is still ample exposure to diverse information, either through media or in-person conversation (Guess et al. 2018). Moreover, it is also the case that some symbolic threats are currently coming from high level elites and being broadcast far and wide. For example, Eric Trump, speaking about Democrats, told Sean Hannity that, "To me, they're not even people….It's so, so sad, I mean morality is just gone, morals have flown out the window." While this statement is an extreme one and was made on a highly partisan program that caters to co-partisans, comments like this garner additional coverage on social media and on other networks like CNN (2017) and Time Magazine Online (2017) among others, making them difficult to avoid. It is no wonder that party loyalty is increasingly a function of negative feelings towards the out-party rather than positive feelings towards one's own party (Abramowitz and Webster 2016). This trend towards "negative partisanship" thus leads us to believe that aggression towards the out-party- rather than protection of one's own party- could become more commonplace.

Our series of studies come with a number of shortcomings. The data supporting our first hypothesis—that reflecting positively on partisan in-groups is psychologically primary—was observational and tested using MTurk samples. While our results are consistent with years of work on intergroup relations, a nationally representative sample would be helpful to fully solidify this finding. Since the data that supports our second hypothesis was experimental and tested the effect of a manipulated factor between demographically equivalent groups, the MTurk sample was not as problematic.

Despite the improved internal and external validity of survey experiments, this is still not a natural environment. Though we tried to make our scenario as realistic as possible, article selection (and "up-voting") does not normally take place in the context of Mechanical Turk; it takes place on news network websites and standard social media sites. Future studies should continue to delve into the nature of partisan identity and prejudice by testing other behavioral reactions using observational methods. Moreover, we only tested one type of behavior: the selection of an article for public consumption. While "up-voting" and other forms of online approval such as "liking" are common among media consumers and may affect information exposure, we recognize that this behavior is more benign than other forms of retaliation such as online intimidation or in-person assault and physical violence. It would be fruitful to (ethically) conduct further research that tests a variety of behaviors with varying degrees of consequences.

Finally, we do not yet know the precise mechanism behind the reprioritization of out-party harm over in-party help. It is possible that exposure to the moral threat causes anger, an emotion that is commonly cited as "approach oriented" (Carver and Harmon-Jones 2009). However, this would only explain the subjects' willingness to harm the out-party rather than to opt-out and choose "Neither" (Study 3). Future

studies should further explore the role of emotions as causal mechanisms for out-party aggression.

Extensions of this research should also explore the effects of other types of threats. In this study, we used experimental material that cued morality, an identity-related symbolic threat, through its language. However, we did not test this threat against other types of threats in a full test. Though we argue that moral threats show to be potent, other styles of symbolic and political threats should be tested and compared. Future research might explore threats to well-established social norms or threats to electoral success in which partisans are told their candidate or party is going to lose an upcoming election (see Huddy et al. 2015 for an example).

Regardless, this series of studies add to our understanding of how political polarization works in political non-elites, demonstrating that it can range from the less harmful tendency to favor one's own to a more troubling tendency to actively denigrate the outgroup when one's group is perceived as under threat.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Ethical Approval All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of College of Charleston IRB Board (Protocol Number with final addendum number: IRB-2016-06-01-085424-a-2017-09-30-121409) and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

Appendix

See Tables 8, 9 and Figs. 6, 7, 8.

Table 8 Sample characteristics for studies 1–4

	Study 1	Study 2	Study 3	Study 4
Age (average)	36.3	34.7	36.9	36.1
College degree (%)	61	58	59	61
White (%)	79	79	77	77
Democrat (%)	68	71	62	63
Republican (%)	32	29	38	37
South (%)	31	27	33	33
N	165	215	177	206

Totals are calculated once Independents, people who did not pass the attention check or did now pass the English comprehension questions are removed

Table 9 Study 3 and 4 results When DV is dichotomized

	Study 3: chose harm out party	Study 4: chose harm out party
Threat	.508 (.350)	1.04 (.328)***
PID str.	− .668 (.258)*	− .272 (.265)
Ideology str.	.110 (.225)	.176 (.202)
White	.320 (.428)	.226 (.398)
South	.643 (.359)	− .445 (.363)
Pol. particip.	− .192 (.175)	− .074 (.162)
Age	− .003 (.015)	.004 (.014)
Religiosity	.192 (.194)	.100 (.169)
College	.353 (.346)	− .369 (.325)
Affective pol.	.009 (.007)	.008 (.007)
Constant	− .728 (1.27)	− .1.54 (1.13)
Pseudo R^2	.063	.077
N	176	200

Model is a logistic regression. The dependent variable is coded as 1 = Chose Out-Party Harm and 0 = Chose In-Party Help or Neither for both models. While the threat condition is showing significance for Study 4, we do not see this in Study 3. We believe this is because Study 4 only lumps 10 subjects who chose 'Neither" in with the subjects who choice In-Party Help while Study 3 lumps 35 Neither subjects with the In-Party Help subjects

ARTICLE UNDER CONSIDERATION

Democrats Making Strides to Fix Congressional Gridlock

It is clear to Americans that the parties in Congress have become increasingly divided. As a result, we have seen partisan bickering and legislative gridlock. Work does not get done, Senate appointments are blocked and important legislation that could improve our country takes longer to pass through Congress, if it gets voted on at all.

Though this has been a problem for years, the Democratic Party recently decided to tackle this issue head on. Over the last few months House and Senate Democrats have been reaching out to form partnerships and friendships with their political opponents. They have also tried to pass legislation to change Congressional rules that apply to both parties in order to create a less hostile environment. Should we begin to see less gridlock and a healthier governing process, it will be because Democrats initiated these changes. This type of Democratic-initiated leadership is critical at this point in time and the party should be applauded for their efforts.

ARTICLE UNDER CONSIDERATION

Republican Offices Account for a Disproportionate Number of Financial Scandals

Political scandals in Congress have been on the rise for the last few decades. It seems that on any given week, another politician is caught lying, cheating the system or engaging in corrupt acts. In particular, financial scandals have been on the rise. These acts have lowered public trust in our elected officials and government on the whole.

The majority of the finance-related scandals have been coming from Republican offices around Washington D.C, according to a recent analysis. Republicans are responsible for a large portion of the scandals involving campaign contributions, use of public money for personal benefit and questionable book keeping practices. For example, one high-ranking Republican was convicted on federal corruption charges of extortion and insurance fraud in the beginning of January while another was charged with money laundering just two weeks after. Republican politicians must learn that they are not above the law.

Fig. 6 Articles for respondent selection in all studies. Note that Republican identifiers see the opposite: an article praising Republicans for fixing gridlock and an article criticizing Democrats for a disproportionate number of financial scandals

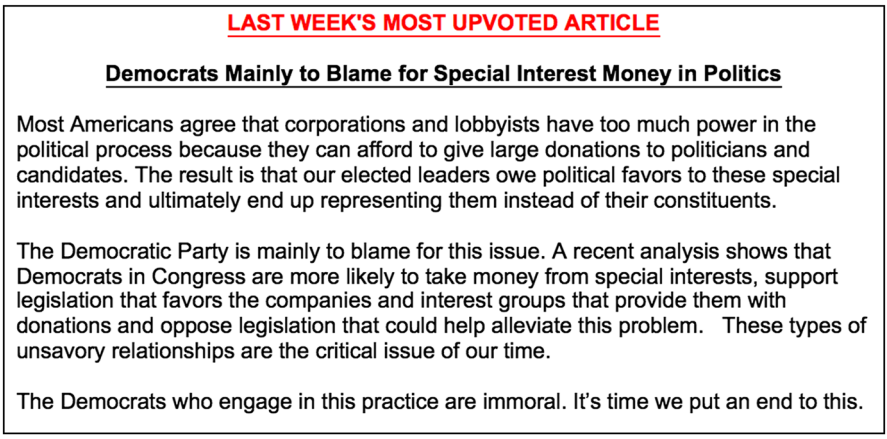

Fig. 7 Study 2 and study 3 moral threat news clipping. Note that the word "Democrat" is replaced with "Republican" for the Republican survey path

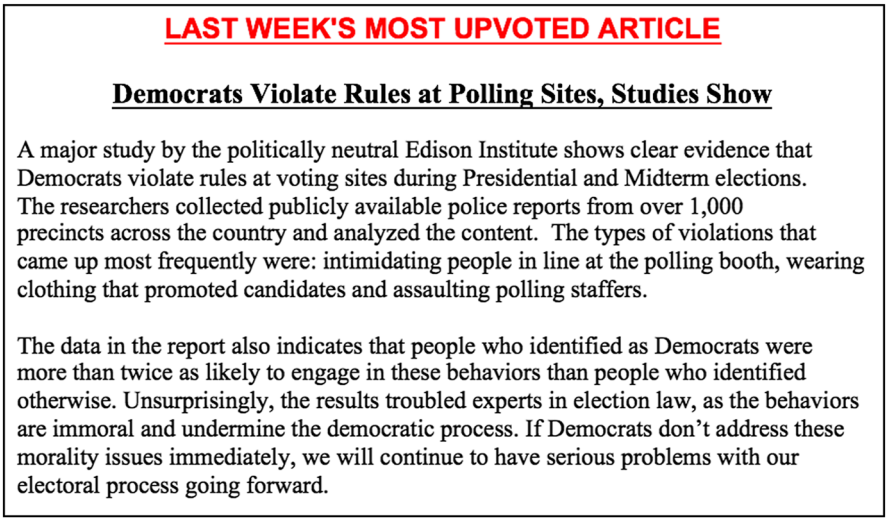

Fig. 8 Study 4 personalized moral threat news clipping. Note that the word "Democrat" is replaced with the word "Republican" for the Republican survey path

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