

# Partisan Vision? Impact of Partisanship on Visual Evaluative Tasks

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## Abstract

In the current era of partisan polarization, partisanship strongly colors partisans' world-view. But does it cause partisans to *see* things differently (Chabris and Simons 2010)? We test the hypothesis in two different experiments and a survey and consistently find that the effect is small.

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Partisans are increasingly polarized [Iyengar, Sood and Lelkes \(2012\)](#) with partisan cleavages outstripping some of the longer standing racial cleavages. In this paper, we explore whether polarization affects how partisans ‘see.’ We test this with some simple evaluative tasks—finding errors—with subtle cues about party.

## 1 Data and Research Design

To assess how partisans ‘see’, we surveyed a nationally representative sample of people selected by YouGov ([Rivers 2007](#)) as part of a Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES) module. We conducted two experiments. In the first experiment, we changed one single word (democratic/republican) to change who respondents thought wrote a piece of text (see [Figure SI 1.1](#) and [Republicans SI 2.2](#)). We then asked “How many errors did you count?” In the second experiment, we showed people a photo of a parking lot and asked them to estimate the number of poorly parked cars. We manipulated which party’s members were using the parking lot (see ??).

To compliment the two survey experiments with a survey. On a survey conducted on MTurk, we asked respondents to watch a short video and estimate how many people in the video were wearing masks. In particular, our directions were as follows: “Please watch the following short (10-second) video. You will be asked a question about it on the next screen. ...How many people in the video were wearing masks?”

## 2 Results

As [Table ??](#) shows, Democrats find 9.7 mistakes when they think the text is written by a Democrat compared to 9.9 mistakes when they think the text is written by a Republican. On the other hand, Republicans find 8.4 mistakes on average when they think the text is written by

a Democrat and 8.1 mistakes when they think it is written by a Republican. And while the differences are consistent with partisan bias, the differences are small.

**Table 1:** Average Number of Writing Errors

pid3lean	Error_split	avg	med	n	std_error
Democrat	DEM	9.7	10.0	334	0.2
Democrat	REP	9.9	10.0	324	0.2
Independent	DEM	9.7	10.0	94	0.5
Independent	REP	9.2	9.0	110	0.4
Republican	DEM	8.4	8.0	253	0.3
Republican	REP	8.1	8.0	252	0.3

We see the same pattern with experiment that manipulates which party members have parked the cars.

**Table 2:** Average Number of Parking Errors

pid3lean	UCMParking_split	avg	med	n	std_error
Democrat	Democratic Party	6.1	5.0	211	0.4
Democrat	Republican Party	8.7	6.0	212	0.6
Independent	Democratic Party	10.9	7.0	57	1.5
Independent	Republican Party	6.7	5.0	61	0.9
Republican	Democratic Party	8.4	6.0	181	0.6
Republican	Republican Party	8.1	5.0	163	0.7

**Table 3:** Number of People Wearing Masks

pid_dem_l	p_25	p_50	p_75	n
democrat	1.0	1.0	5.0	490
independent	1.0	1.0	5.0	879
republican	0.0	0.0	3.0	134

## References

- Chabris, Christopher F and Daniel J Simons. 2010. *The invisible gorilla: And other ways our intuitions deceive us*. Harmony.
- Iyengar, Shanto, Gaurav Sood and Yphtach Lelkes. 2012. “Affect, Not Ideology: A Social Identity Perspective on Polarization.” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 76(3):405–431.
- Rivers, Douglas. 2007. Sampling for web surveys. In *Joint Statistical Meetings*.

# SI 1 Treatment Figures

**Figure SI 1.1: Share of Black Criminals in Law & Order and the Real World**

YouGov

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We want to see how good people are at catching mistakes. Please read the following text and tell us how many errors you find.

"Together we are the democratic party. Were fighting for a better, farer, and brighter future for every Americans: rolling up our sleeves, empowering grassroots voters, and organizing everywhere to take our country back. Its more important then ever that we continue our work of electing democrats up and down the ballott. We believe in the American people and the promise of America. Their is nothing America can't do if we all works together. If you love this country, please tell your friends and family to go out and vote in this election. The future is brite! Lets go!!! We are in the final count down."

How many errors did you count?



**Figure SI 1.2: Mistakes**

YouGov

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We want to see how good people are at catching mistakes. Please read the following text and tell us how many errors you find.

"Together we are the republican party. Were fighting for a better, farer, and brighter future for every Americans: rolling up our sleeves, empowering grassroots voters, and organizing everywhere to take our country back. Its more important then ever that we continue our work of electing republicans up and down the ballott. We believe in the American people and the promise of America. Their is nothing America can't do if we all works together. If you love this country, please tell your friends and family to go out and vote in this election. The future is brite! Lets go!!! We are in the final count down."

How many errors did you count?



Figure SI 1.3: Parking Lot

YouGov

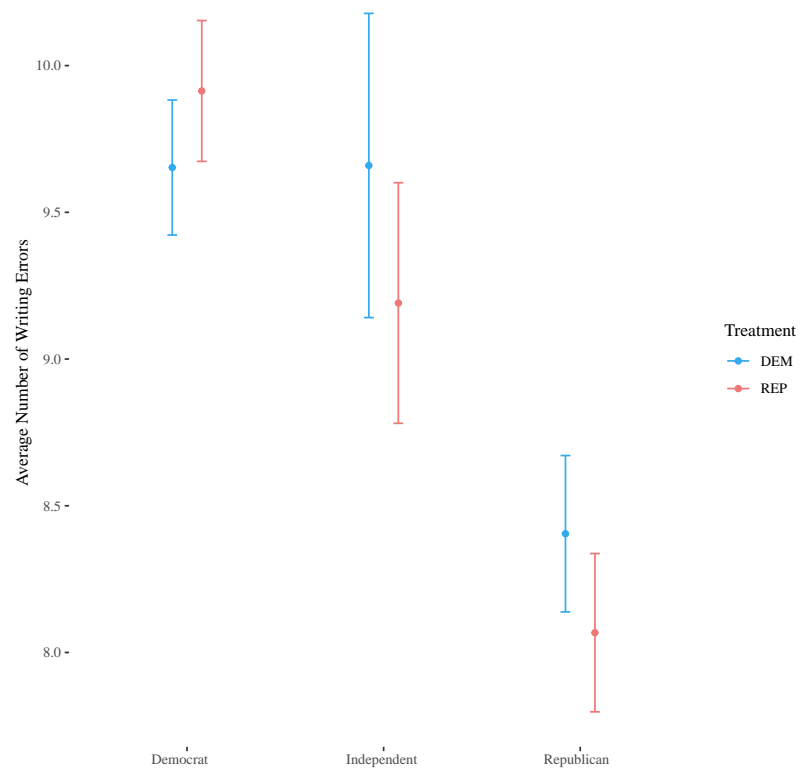


We want to see how much attention people are paying in answering questions. How many cars would you say are poorly parked in this picture of the parking lot outside a Democratic Party meeting last year?



## SI 2 Figures

Figure SI 2.1: Poorly Parked Cars



**Figure SI 2.2: Poorly Parked Cars**

