

Partisan Vision? Do Partisans See Differently?

Gaurav Sood*

Alex Theodoridis†

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Abstract

In the current era of partisan polarization, there is concern that partisanship that strongly colors partisans' worldview. But does it cause us to *see* things differently (Chabris and Simons 2010)? We test the hypotheses in three different experiments and consistently find that the effect is at worst small.

*Gaurav can be reached at, gsood07@gmail.com

†Alex can be reached at alexandertheodoridis@gmail.com

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 . We test this with some simple evaluative tasks—finding errors—with subtle cues about party.

1 Data and Research Design

([Chabris and Simons 2010](#))

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 survey, 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.

On a survey on M-Turk, 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 the point about partisan bias, the main point is about the smallness of the differences.

Table 1: Average Number of 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

Table 2: Average Number of 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: Average Number of 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

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

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

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

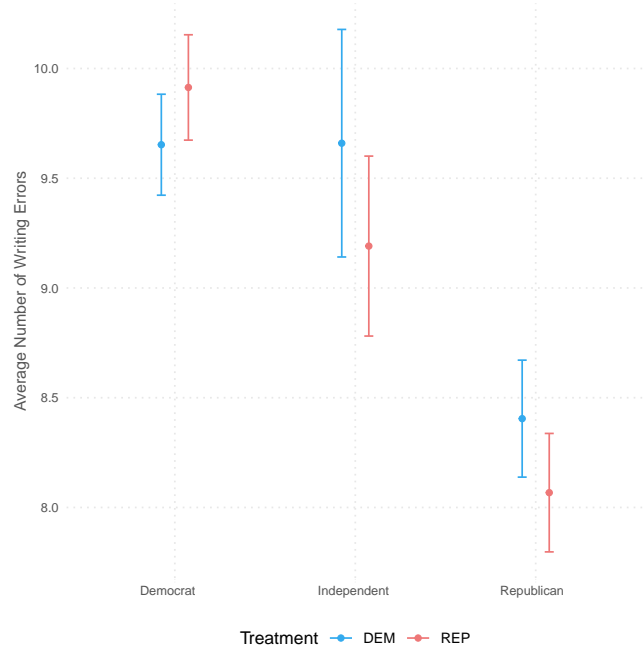


Figure SI 2.2: Poorly Parked Cars

