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Reputational Costs of Receptiveness: When and Why Being Receptive to Opposing Political Views Backfires

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A fast-growing body of research finds that receptiveness to opposing political views carries reputational benefits. A different body of research finds that opposing political views and the people who hold them are seen as repugnant. How could it be that people receptive to opposing political ideas are viewed positively when the political opponents they are receptive to are seen negatively? In seven main ($N = 5,286$) and nine supplemental studies ($N = 3,983$ participants in online studies; $N = 124,493$ observations in field data), we reconcile this tension by arguing that the identity of the person one is receptive to determines whether receptiveness carries reputational benefits or costs. When the information source belongs to the opposing party, receptiveness to opposing political views often carries reputational costs. We find these reputational costs across both strong and weak signals of receptiveness, eight different political and social issues, and multiple types of prototypical out-party sources. We argue that these costs arise because members of the opposing party are frequently stereotyped as immoral, and thus receptiveness to their ideas is seen negatively. As a boundary condition, we find that the costs of receptiveness are pronounced for sources who are prototypical of the out-party and attenuate (or even reverse) for sources who are nonprototypical. These findings resolve a seeming contradiction between two distinct literatures in psychology, contribute to a rapidly expanding literature on the interpersonal consequences of receptiveness, and lay the groundwork for understanding novel barriers to, and ultimately solutions for, the lack of cross-party openness and political polarization.

Public Significance Statement

A well-functioning democracy demands from its citizens a willingness to engage with ideas and people they disagree with—but such engagement can come at a personal cost. We find that being open-minded to political ideas coming from members of the opposing political party can hurt one's reputation. Instead of coming across in a positive light (e.g., as more thoughtful or collaborative), the open-minded person comes across negatively. This is because polarization is at an all-time high and people see members of the opposing political party negatively, and so they dislike those who are open-minded to ideas coming from the opposing political party. These findings imply that an important reason people avoid engaging with the opposing party is because they are aware of and wish to avoid the reputational costs of doing so. In other words, these findings suggest that political polarization is partly driven by reputational concerns.

Keywords: receptiveness, partisan identity, political polarization, prototypicality, morality

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A fast-growing body of research proposes that people admire those who are receptive to opposing political views (Heltzel & Laurin, 2021; Hussein & Tormala, 2021, 2024; Yeomans et al., 2020). Their receptiveness is seen as indicating that they are intelligent, trustworthy, and collaborative (Heltzel & Laurin, 2021; Yeomans et al., 2020). Yet these findings seem surprising given the divisiveness of politics today. In the United States, political polarization is at an all-time high (Finkel et al., 2020). Democrats and Republicans distrust and dislike members of the opposing party more than ever before (Iyengar et al., 2019). They see political opponents as "unintelligent" and "immoral," and believe their opponents' ideas to be rooted in misinformation, propaganda, and bias

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(Pew Research Center, 2019; Schwalbe et al., 2020). How can we reconcile these two literatures: the literature showing that people receptive to opposing political ideas are viewed positively, and the literature showing that opposing political ideas and the people who hold them are viewed negatively?

In the current research, we propose that the general tendency to positively evaluate receptive others is reversed when receptiveness is directed at people who belong to the opposing political party. We predict that, because many view members of the opposing party as immoral, people receptive to sources from the opposing party will suffer reputational costs. These predicted costs are crucial to document because, in politics, it is commonplace for opposing views to come from sources who belong to the opposing party. Under such conditions, we show that receptiveness to opposing political views carries interpersonal costs, not benefits.

If obtained, these results would nuance our perspective on the interpersonal consequences of signaling receptiveness. Moreover, these results would suggest a novel barrier to cross-party engagement: a reputational barrier. People might avoid exposing themselves to opposing political ideas because they are aware of and wish to avoid the reputational costs of receptiveness. This would suggest that reputational mechanisms partly drive political polarization and would point to new countermeasures to reduce political polarization.

Past Research on Receptiveness to Opposing Views

Receptiveness to opposing views is a construct central to interpersonal relations and has been the subject of considerable recent research. It refers to the willingness to seek out, attend to, and engage with ideas and people one disagrees with (Minson & Chen, 2022). Receptiveness describes both an individual-level difference (Minson et al., 2020) and a situational state (Itzchakov & DeMarree, 2022; Itzchakov & Reis, 2021; Teeny & Petty, 2022; Wallace et al., 2023). Individuals perceived to be receptive reap myriad interpersonal benefits. They are seen as more intelligent, trustworthy, and collaborative (Heltzel & Laurin, 2021; Hussein & Tormala, 2021); are more persuasive (Xu & Petty, 2022, 2024); are less likely to get censored (Hussein & Tormala, 2024); and elicit greater collaboration intentions and openness in others (Yeomans et al., 2020). Indeed, to our knowledge, no prior research has documented any interpersonal costs associated with signaling one's receptiveness.

Importantly, though, research in this area has tended to provide little to no information regarding to whom people are receptive. Instead, the focus has been on unpacking to what people are receptive. For example, Heltzel and Laurin (2021) investigated the reputational consequences of receptiveness (vs. unreceptiveness) to opposing political views. These authors found that receptive targets (those who sought out opposing views on political issues) are evaluated more positively than unreceptive ones (those who avoided opposing views on political issues). Importantly, whereas the information content was specified (i.e., what people were receptive to), the information source (i.e., whom people were receptive to) was not.

In political contexts, people frequently observe the political party of the information source, and we argue that the political party of the information source can fundamentally change how receptiveness is evaluated. We posit that receptiveness to out-party members carries reputational costs. Because views of political out-party members are more negative than ever before, we hypothesized that receptiveness to such out-party members would be viewed negatively. Such a finding would not call into question prior research but would provide a more complete picture of the full array of the reputational consequences of receptiveness.

Why Would Receptiveness to Out-Party Members Carry Reputational Costs?

Negative Stereotypes About Out-Party Members

Over the last few decades, Democrats and Republicans have come to dislike and distrust out-party members more than ever before (Iyengar et al., 2019). Views of out-party members as rated on feeling thermometers (where 0 = *cold*, 50 = *neutral*, and 100 = *warm*) have plummeted from a lukewarm 48° in the 1970s to a chilly 20° in 2020, even though ratings toward one's own party remained constant over the same time period (Finkel et al., 2020). This animosity is directed toward both out-party politicians and everyday members of the out-party (Druckman & Levendusky, 2019) and manifests itself in a wide array of interactions. Americans have been shown to avoid dating (Huber & Malhotra, 2017), marrying (Iyengar et al., 2018), working for (McConnell et al., 2018), and hiring (Iyengar et al., 2019) out-party members. Recently, this dislike has crossed over into dehumanization, treating political opponents as less than fully human (Cassese, 2021). Thus, both citizens and party elites are disliked by out-partisans.

Out-party members are viewed as lacking warmth, competence, and morality (Schwalbe et al., 2020; Tappin & McKay, 2019), the three primary dimensions of social perception (Brambilla et al., 2021; Cuddy et al., 2008). Moreover, according to the Pew Research Center (2022), the share of partisans describing members of the other party in negative terms has risen dramatically. As one example, 35% of Democrats described Republicans as "immoral" in 2016. This percentage reached 63% in 2022. Similarly, 47% of Republicans described Democrats as "immoral" in 2016. This percentage skyrocketed to 72% in 2022.

Given such negative perceptions of the out-party, we predicted that being receptive to out-party members—people viewed as unfriendly, unintelligent, and/or immoral—would lead to negative evaluations. That is, in contrast to prior research, we predicted that targets receptive (vs. unreceptive) to political out-party sources would be viewed negatively.

> *Hypothesis 1 (H1):* People who are receptive, compared to unreceptive, to opposing views coming from an out-party source will be evaluated negatively.

In this article, we examine the effects of all three dimensions of person perception (warmth, competence, and morality), but we focus our investigation primarily on morality for two reasons. First, some research suggests that perceptions of morality most strongly differentiate views of the in-party and out-party (Tappin & McKay, 2019). Second, past research on person perception provides evidence for the "primacy of morality." Put simply, when forming impressions of others, people weigh morality more heavily than competence and warmth (Brambilla et al., 2021; Goodwin, 2015; Goodwin et al., 2014), even in competence-oriented domains (e.g., hiring; Luttrell et al., 2022). Hence,

> *Hypothesis 2 (H2):* Negative views of targets receptive to out-party sources will be driven by perceptions of the out-party as immoral.

Why would targets who are receptive to immoral sources be viewed negatively? Receptiveness to immoral sources might trigger feelings of outrage and indignation in others. Receptiveness could be misconstrued as validating immoral sources or lending them legitimacy, which may empower such sources to spread their views more broadly. In doing so, receptive targets risk signaling undesirable traits about themselves. They may come across as lacking good judgment or, worse, as tolerant of immorality. Similar dynamics have been observed on college campuses in recent years. Invitations to engage with controversial speakers on college campuses have elicited feelings of indignation and resulted in the condemnation of receptive individuals (Powell, 2021; Stanger, 2017).

It is important to note that there are other possible explanations for why receptiveness could be perceived negatively. For instance, receptiveness could lead people to believe that the target is disloyal to one's party, that the target is going to change their attitudes on important social issues, that the target holds dissimilar attitudes, or that the target is going to get exposed to a litany of problematic ideas. We investigated these alternative accounts and presented data that helped rule them out in the General Discussion section.

Moderation by Group Membership

H1 and H2 suggest that those receptive to out-party members will be viewed negatively because out-party members are seen as immoral. Unidentified or in-party sources are not likely to be viewed as immoral, however, and so we predicted that those receptive to such sources would be viewed positively. People tend to think favorably of others about whom they have no valenced information (Cacioppo et al., 1997), and they see members of their own party in a positive light (Schwalbe et al., 2020; Tappin & McKay, 2019). Hence, we expect targets who are receptive to opposing views coming from a source whose partisan identity is unknown or from a source who belongs to one's own party to be evaluated positively.

> *Hypothesis 3A (H3A):* Consistent with prior research, people who are receptive (vs. unreceptive) to opposing views from a source with an unknown partisan identity will be evaluated positively.

> *Hypothesis 3B (H3B):* People who are receptive (vs. unreceptive) to opposing views from an in-party source will be evaluated positively.

Boundary Condition: Prototypicality

Our hypotheses regarding receptiveness to out-party sources are based on the idea that people stereotype out-party sources as immoral. Naturally, not all people who happen to belong to the out-party will be stereotyped as immoral. Indeed, factors that past research has found to reduce the reliance on stereotypes in general would likely diminish the reliance on the immorality stereotype in a political context and hence should attenuate or even reverse the proposed costs of receptiveness. Below, we discuss one such factor: prototypicality.

One key determinant of the views of outgroup members is the member's prototypicality (Brewer, 1988; Hogg, 1993; Mervis & Rosch, 1981; Rosch, 1978). Prototypicality refers to the extent to which a group member reflects their group's physical appearance, attitudes, and behaviors. In the context of politics, prototypical group members are ones who hold opinions typical of their political party, whose lifestyle choices are representative of their political party, and whose hobbies and interests align with other members of their political party. For instance, a Democrat who is pro-immigration is more prototypical than a Democrat who is anti-immigration; a Democrat who enjoys eating vegetarian food is more prototypical than a Democrat who eats wild game they hunted themselves; and a Democrat who listens to R&B music (e.g., Beyoncé) is more prototypical than one who listens to country music. Prototypicality can also be signaled through one's rank in the group—specifically, leaders of political parties tend to be seen as prototypical of their party (Huddy, 2013; Mughan, 2000). Political leaders are typically chosen or elected to represent the interests, values, and goals of members of their political party. They serve as the face and voice of their party and are expected to embody the party's core beliefs and aspirations. Given their roles as representatives, political leaders are often seen as prototypic group members. In sum, in politics, prototypicality can be signaled through various means including one's attitudes, behaviors, and role in the group.

Outside of politics, prototypical group members have been found to be more readily stereotyped compared to their nonprototypical counterparts (Blair et al., 2004; Eberhardt et al., 2006; Goh et al., 2022; Kaiser & Wilkins, 2010; Maddox, 2004; Wilkins et al., 2011). For example, men who look prototypically Black were found to be more likely to receive the death sentence than Black men who are less prototypical (Eberhardt et al., 2006). The study authors argued that prototypicality led jurors to apply negative stereotypes to the defendant, leading them to recommend more severe sentences. Applying these findings to the current research, we predict that prototypical (vs. nonprototypical) out-party members will be more readily stereotyped as immoral, and hence, targets who are receptive (vs. unreceptive) to such sources will be evaluated more negatively.

> *Hypothesis 4 (H4):* When the source is a prototypical (vs. nonprototypical) out-party member, receptive (vs. unreceptive) targets will be evaluated more negatively. This is because prototypical (vs. nonprototypical) out-party members will be especially likely to be stereotyped as immoral.

Overview of Studies

Seven main and nine supplemental studies test our predictions. Across our studies, we consistently found that receptiveness to opposing views from out-party sources leads to reputational costs. We found costs of receptiveness across both weak (Studies 1A–1B; Studies 4 and 5) and strong forms of receptiveness (Studies 2 and 3). Moreover, we found costs of receptiveness across various different types of out-party sources, including when the source was a stereotypic everyday member of the out-party (SS1 in the online supplemental materials), an everyday member of the out-party judged by their own party to be prototypical (Study 1A), a politician merely labeled as belonging to the out-party (SS2 in the online supplemental materials), and a well-known member of the out-party's political elite (Studies 2 and 3). The costs of receptiveness were also robust to eight different political and social issues, including abortion, immigration, gun control, climate change, combating terrorism, military spending, boycotting the Winter Olympics in China, and regulating social media.

In addition to providing evidence for the robustness of these costs, our studies also tested our proposed immorality account. Across multiple studies, we measured perceptions of immorality and found that it

played an important role in predicting whether receptiveness led to reputational benefits or costs, even after controlling for perceptions of competence and warmth. Consistent with this account, we found that when members of the out-party were nonprototypical, the costs-of-receptiveness effect was attenuated or reversed. Furthermore, we collected data to address several alternative explanations and possible extensions of our hypotheses, which are summarized in Table 1 and detailed in full in the online supplemental materials.

Table 1
Summary of the Differences Between Receptive and Unreceptive Targets in Each Study

Study	*p*	*d*	Main takeaway(s)
Study 1A	.009	0.33	- Being receptive to an out-party source who is seen as representative of the out-party by out-party members led to reputational costs
			- Perceptions of immorality determined whether receptiveness led to costs or benefits
SS1 in the online supplemental materials	<.001	0.79	- Effect is robust when the source is a stereotypic out-party member
Study 1B	.001	0.39	- Effect holds when the opinions expressed by the source are crowd-sourced from online participants (rather than gathered from social media)
			- Effect holds when the source expresses an opinion on a single topic (rather than multiple topics at once) - Immorality results hold even after accounting for competence and warmth
SS2 in the online supplemental materials	<.001	0.45	- Effect holds when the source is an unnamed out-party politician
			- Effect holds when receptiveness is signaled by attending an in-person event - Effect holds across multiple political issues (abortion, gun laws, and immigration)
Study 2	<.001	0.4	- Effect holds across multiple well-known politicians (e.g., Obama, Pelosi, Trump, and Rubio)
			- Effect holds across multiple political issues (immigration, climate change, combating terrorism, and military spending)
Study 3	<.001	0.59	- Partisan identity reconciles past findings with current findings
			- Effect holds when receptiveness is described (instead of self-disclosed)
Study 4	<.001	0.9	- Partisan identity of the source moderates the effect
			- Effect is not driven by disagreement with the information provided by the source
SS3 in the online supplemental materials	<.001	0.52	- Partisan identity moderation replicates with a different topic (boycotting the Winter Olympics in China)
Study 5	.021	0.23	- Source prototypicality moderates the effect
Study 6	<.001	0.55	- Manipulating source prototypicality through lifestyle choices (holding political opinions constant) also moderates the effect
SS4 in the online supplemental materials	<.001	0.37	- Effect holds when receptiveness is signaled through reading a single article
SS5 in the online supplemental materials	<.001	0.48	- Effect is driven by costs of receptiveness, not benefits of unreceptiveness
			- Receptive targets are also perceived to be less competent and less warm
SS6 in the online supplemental materials	<.001	0.63	- Effect holds when the language "engage with" is not used
SS7 in the online supplemental materials	<.001	0.48	- Effect is not driven by perceived disloyalty
			- Effect is not driven by perceived attitude change
SS8 in the online supplemental materials	<.001	0.11	- Effect is observed in Reddit data
SS9 in the online supplemental materials	<.001	0.56	- Providing humanizing information about the source moderates the effect

Note. *p* Values and effect sizes represent differences in attitudes toward targets that were receptive (vs. unreceptive) to out-party sources; For Study 3, Study 4, and SS3 in the online supplemental materials, these values present the difference in attitude toward targets who were receptive (vs. unreceptive) to identified out-party sources; For Study 5, Study 6, and Supplemental Study 9 in the online supplemental materials, these values represent the difference in attitudes toward targets that were receptive (vs. unreceptive) to prototypical out-party sources; For SS8 in the online supplemental materials, these values represent the simple slope of the effect of receptiveness detected in online comments and the number of likes those comments received; Perceived disloyalty and perceived attitude change were assessed in Supplemental Studies 3, 4, and 7 in the online supplemental materials. Across these studies, these variables failed to consistently mediate the observed effects (see General Discussion section for details).

Transparency and Openness

Our materials, data, code, and preregistration reports can be found on Open Science Framework (OSF; https://osf.io/ab2tn/). Study 1A was not preregistered. Studies 1B, 2–6, as well as Studies 3–5, and 7 in the online supplemental materials,were preregistered. All sample sizes were determined before data collection. We aimed to collect at least 125 participants per condition in all studies, which provided 80% power to detect an effect size of Cohen's $d = 0.29$ (G*Power; Faul et al., 2007).

Study 1A: Receptiveness to an Out-Party Source With Prototypical Opinions

Study 1A tested the prediction that receptiveness to opposing views will yield reputational costs. To test this, we had participants imagine interacting with a target who belonged to their own party. The target shared that they were recently receptive to or unreceptive to an information source who belonged to the out-party. Our core prediction was that receptive targets would be evaluated more negatively than unreceptive ones (H1). Moreover, Study 1A tested whether perceptions of source immorality played a role in driving the predicted costs-of-receptiveness effect (H2).

Method

We requested a nationally representative sample of 275 participants from Lucid. Lucid is an online survey platform that uses quota sampling to recruit participants that resemble the gender, racial, geographic, and age distribution of the U.S. adult population. Two hundred and fifty participants passed our attention checks and were included in the analysis (54.17% female, 45.08% male, 0.76% other; $M_{age} = 46$, $SD_{age} = 17$; Democrats; 27.60% Republicans; 33.60% Independents; 2.00% Others).

Participants first reported their demographics, including their partisan identity. Next, participants read about a fictitious target, John, who was described as belonging to the same political party as that of the participant. If the participant was a Democrat (Republican), the target was described as identifying as a Democrat (Republican). Participants were then asked to imagine that while talking to John, the topic of politics and social media came up. John mentioned that a social media platform (Twitter) recently recommended a new account for him to follow and that the recommended account belonged to an out-party member.

Account

Participants then viewed the social media account John mentioned. The account belonged to a member of the out-party (see Figure 1). It displayed multiple opinions prototypical of the out-party gathered from online social media accounts. Importantly, this out-party account was pretested to ensure that it was seen as prototypical of the out-party by members of the out-party (see AAS1A in the online supplemental materials for pretest details). That is, a pretest indicated that members of the out-party perceived the owner of this account as representative of their own party. This approach marks a conservative test of our hypothesis because it ensures that members of the out-party agree that the owner of this account and the views he expressed are representative of their group. That is, having participants evaluate the representativeness of tweets from their own group eliminates the possibility that the representativeness ratings simply reflect exaggerated out-party stereotypes.

Target Receptiveness

Next, the target in the vignette shared that he either followed this account because he wanted to listen to the perspective it offered and engage with it (receptive) or blocked this account because he did not want to listen to this perspective nor engage with it (unreceptive). More specifically, the receptive target said: "I started following him. I wanted to listen to and engage with this perspective," whereas the unreceptive target shared: "I blocked him. I did not want to listen to or engage with this perspective." This manipulation explicitly indicates the three defining aspects of receptiveness: the willingness to seek out, attend to, and engage with opposing views (Minson & Chen, 2022).

Attitudes Toward Target

After reading the vignette, participants indicated their attitudes toward the target (John) using two 7-point semantic differential scales: "Judging from what he said, what's your overall impression of John?" Unfavorable/favorable, very negative/very positive. These two items were averaged into an attitudes index, $r(249) = .97$, $p < .001$.

Source Perceptions

Participants reported their perceptions of the immorality of the source and his ideas by indicating the extent to which they found the ideas John would be exposed to if he were to follow this Twitter account to be morally wrong using a 7-point semantic differential scale with four items (e.g., morally wrong/morally right, unacceptable/acceptable). Because these four items loaded on one factor, we combined them into a perceptions of immorality composite capturing the extent to which participants found the source and his ideas to be morally wrong and reprehensible ($\alpha = .94$).

Results

Attitudes Toward Target

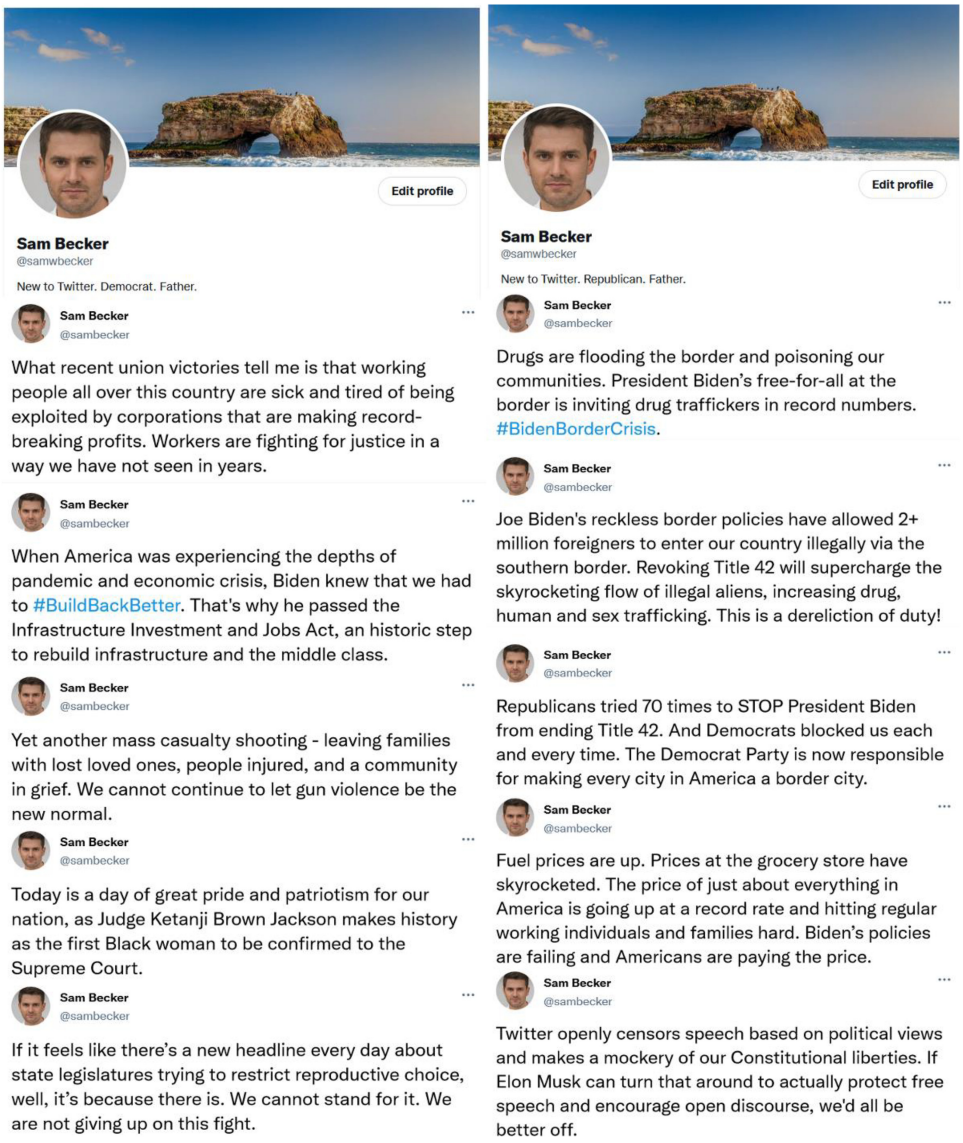
We regressed attitudes toward the target on the receptiveness condition and found a main effect of receptiveness. Consistent with our core hypothesis (H1), receptive targets were evaluated more negatively than unreceptive ones, $\beta = -.63$, $t(248) = -2.64$, $p = .009$, $d = 0.33$; Figure 2.

Immorality Perceptions

Next, we assessed the role perceptions of immorality played in driving these results. On average, participants perceived the source to be immoral ($M = 4.53$, $SD = 1.72$); t test against scale midpoint, $t(247) = 4.81$, $p < .001$. Our theorizing suggests that people tend to see prototypical members of the other party as immoral and thus evaluate those who are receptive to them negatively. If true, then for a given source, the costs-of-receptiveness effect should emerge among people who perceive the source to be immoral, but not among people who do not perceive the source to be immoral.

To test this prediction, we regressed attitudes toward the target on receptiveness, perceptions of immorality, and their interaction.

Figure 1
Stimuli Used in Study 1A



Note. The picture is an AI-generated image. From *Generated Photos* (https://generated.photos). See the online article for the color version of this figure.

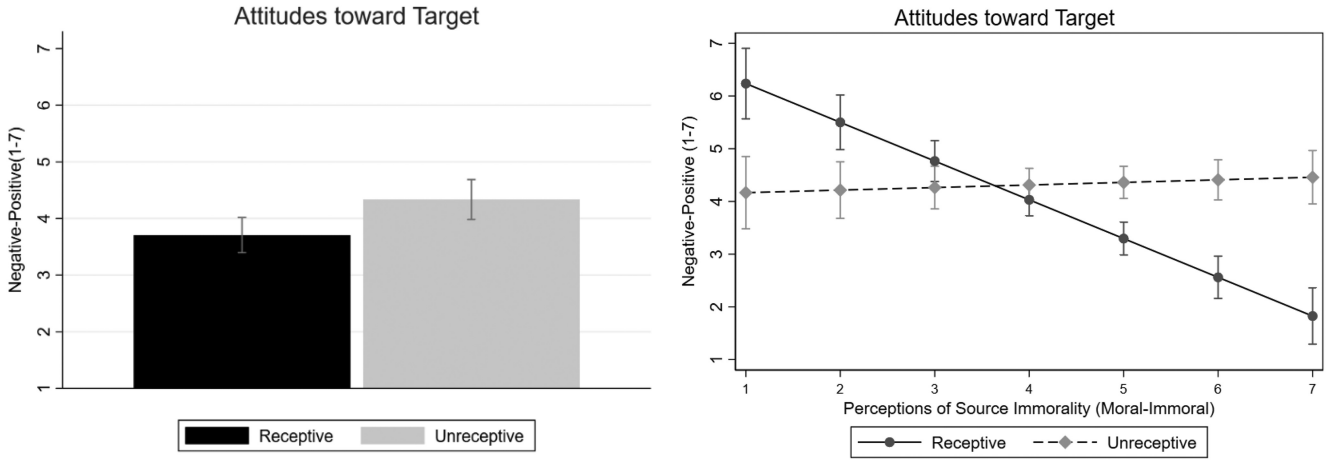
Consistent with H2, this interaction was significant, $\beta = -.78$, $t(244) = -6.32$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .14$; see Figure 2. Next, we conducted Johnson–Neyman tests to determine the regions of significance. When the source scored 4.2 or higher on immorality (60% of the sample), receptive targets were evaluated more negatively than unreceptive ones ($ps < .044$). When the source scored between 2.8 and 4.1 on immorality (23% of the sample), there were no significant differences between receptive and unreceptive targets. Finally, when the source scored 2.7 or lower on immorality (17% of the sample), receptive targets were evaluated more positively than unreceptive ones ($ps < .049$). Examining the simple slopes revealed a negative and significant slope in the receptiveness condition, $\beta = -.74$, $t(130) = -8.30$, $p < .001$, and a nonsignificant slope in the unreceptiveness condition, $\beta = .049$, $t(131) = .56$, $p = .58$.

Discussion

Study 1A reveals that receptiveness to an out-party source leads to reputational costs (H1). This result is striking as it diverges from past research, which has found that receptiveness leads to interpersonal benefits. Here, we found that members of one's own party who were open to listening to and engaging with out-party sources were evaluated more negatively than those who refused to engage with such sources. Additionally, perceptions of immorality predicted whether receptiveness led to reputational benefits or costs (H2). Most participants in this sample viewed the source as immoral and evaluated a target receptive to the source negatively.

One potential limitation of Study 1A is that the stimuli used were gathered from posts on social media. Posts on social media can be

Figure 2
Results for Study 1A



Note. Left: attitudes toward target as a function of target receptiveness. Right: attitudes toward target as a function of target receptiveness and perceptions of source immorality. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

inflammatory and thus could be unrepresentative of how everyday partisans discuss their opinions on political issues. To address this, Study 1B used stimuli that were crowd-sourced from online participants.

Study 1B: Receptiveness to an Out-Party Source With Crowd-Sourced Opinions

Study 1B tested whether the costs-of-receptiveness effect would replicate if the stimuli used were the written opinions of online participants, rather than posts from social media. We recruited two waves of participants. Participants in the first wave provided their opinions on abortion. These opinions were used as stimuli and presented to a new group of participants in the second wave. Our prediction was that the costs-of-receptiveness effect would emerge even when using stimuli that were crowd-sourced from online participants. In addition, Study 1B tested whether the immorality results would hold even after accounting for the two other dimensions of person perceptions: warmth and competence.

Method

Wave 1

One hundred twenty-five Democrats and Republicans who held party-consistent views on abortion were recruited from Prolific Academic using the filters available on the platform. We recruited participants with party-consistent views to avoid having the source seem nonprototypical. Participants first reported their demographics, including their views on abortion (prolife, prochoice, neutral [neither prolife nor prochoice]). Next, participants were asked to write a few sentences indicating their thoughts on abortion. We excluded participants who identified as Independents, reported a neutral view on abortion, or did not leave a meaningful written response (e.g., "its good," "none"). This left us with 108 participants, 53 prochoice Democrats and 55 prolife Republicans.

Wave 2

Three hundred Democrats and Republicans who held party-consistent views on abortion were recruited from Prolific Academic (55.67% female, 43% male, 1.33% other; $M_{age} = 37$, $SD_{age} = 14$). The study followed a similar procedure to Study 1A. Participants read about an in-party member who was either receptive to or unreceptive to an out-party social media account. Rather than show an account with multiple political posts (as was the case in Study 1A), we only showed participants one post, which consisted of one randomly selected opinion from the out-party participants recruited in Wave 1. Target receptiveness was manipulated using the same language used in Study 1A.

In addition to reporting their attitudes toward the target, participants reported their perceptions of the source's immorality, competence, and warmth. The order of these three measures was counterbalanced. To measure immorality, we had participants indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with two statements describing the source as immoral and virtuous (reverse coded). Responses were recorded on 7-point scales ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. These two items were averaged into an immorality index, $r(299) = .51$, $p < .001$. Competence (competent, intelligent) and warmth (warm, friendly) were measured using similar scales.

Results

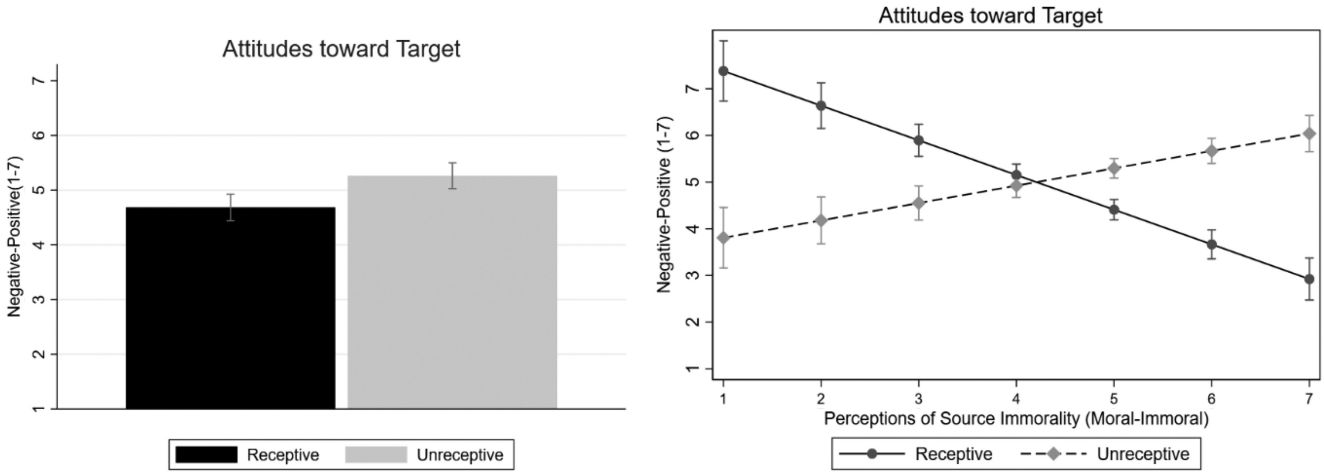
Attitudes Toward Target

We regressed attitudes toward the target on the receptiveness condition and found a main effect of receptiveness. Receptive targets were evaluated more negatively than unreceptive ones, $\beta = -.58$, $t(298) = -3.37$, $p = .001$, $d = 0.39$; Figure 3.

Immorality Perceptions

On average, participants perceived the source to be immoral ($M = 4.77$, $SD = 1.29$); t test against scale midpoint, $t(299) = 10.33$, $p < .001$. To investigate the role perceptions of immorality played in

Figure 3
Results for Study 1B



Note. Left: attitudes toward target as a function of target receptiveness. Right: attitudes toward target as a function of target receptiveness and perceptions of source immorality. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

driving the cost-of-receptiveness effect, we employed the same analytic strategy used in Study 1A. Replicating our results, we found a significant interaction, $\beta = -.96$, $t(296) = -9.12$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .22$; see Figure 3. Next, we used Johnson–Neyman tests to determine the regions of significance. When the source scored 4.5 or higher on immorality (55% of the sample), receptive targets were evaluated more negatively than unreceptive ones ($ps < .038$). When the source scored between 3.9 and 4.4 on immorality (25% of the sample), there were no significant differences between receptive and unreceptive targets. Finally, when the source scored 3.8 or lower on immorality (20% of the sample), receptive targets were evaluated more positively than unreceptive ones ($ps < .017$). Examining the simple slopes revealed a negative slope in the receptiveness condition, $\beta = -.74$, $t(150) = -8.69$, $p < .001$, and a positive one in the unreceptiveness condition, $\beta = .37$, $t(150) = 4.67$, $p < .001$.

Do these results hold even after accounting for competence and warmth? To answer this question, we estimated a similar regression, adding four additional covariates: perceptions of competence, perceptions of warmth, and their interactions with receptiveness. Replicating our earlier results, the interaction between receptiveness and immorality remained significant even after accounting for perceptions of competence and warmth, $\beta = -.79$, $t(292) = -4.29$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .059$. These results provide evidence that perceptions of immorality play a role in driving the costs-of-receptiveness effect, controlling for other source perceptions.

Discussion

Results from Study 1B provide a replication of the costs-of-receptiveness effect (H1). Even when the source's opinions were crowd-sourced from online participants rather than selected from social media, receptive targets were evaluated more negatively than unreceptive ones. In addition, results from Study 1B provide evidence in support of the role that immorality perceptions play in driving the costs of receptiveness: Perceptions of source immorality predicted whether receptiveness led to costs or benefits (H2). Most participants viewed the source as immoral and evaluated a target who was receptive to the source negatively. These results held even after accounting for source competence and warmth.

One potential limitation of Studies 1A and 1B is that the source of the information was an everyday citizen. Would the costs-of-receptiveness effect replicate if the source was a member of the political elite? Understanding how people respond to receptiveness to political elites is important for two reasons. First, decades of research in political science highlight the outsized influence political elites have on members of their political party; elites set the agenda for their party and shape the opinions of rank-and-file party members (Abramowitz, 1978; Clayton & Willer, 2023; Lenz, 2013; Pink et al., 2021; Zaller, 1992). Second, the opinions of elites are highly salient. Opinions of elites are widely covered by journalists and the media (Blumler & Gurevitch, 1981; Gans, 1979). Because of their salience and ability to shape the opinions of others, it seems imperative to examine whether the costs-of-receptiveness effect would emerge when the source is a member of the political elite rather than an everyday citizen.

A second potential limitation of these studies is that they involved receptiveness to people based on their social media posts. It is possible that perceptions of those receptive to arguments made on social media differ from those receptive to other forms of communication. Study 2 addressed both of these limitations.

Study 2: Stimulus Sampling

Study 2 tested whether the costs-of-receptiveness effect would generalize to sources who belong to out-party political elites. In addition, we wanted to ensure that our results are robust to other features of the vignettes (e.g., the event format). To efficiently test the generalizability of our results, we used a design inspired by a rating-based conjoint task. Conjoint is a study design popular in marketing and political science used to determine how people value different features (e.g., price, memory size, battery life) that make up a product (e.g., an iPhone; Bansak et al., 2021; Hainmueller et al., 2014;

Moore, 2004). Participants in a conjoint study are shown a series of trials, each showcasing a different version of the target product. By varying different features of the product (e.g., a battery life of 8 hr vs. 7.5 hr) between trials and measuring how consumers respond to different combinations of these features, managers can quantify how much a given feature (e.g., battery life) affects overall attitudes.

Applying this approach, we had participants read multiple vignettes, each describing a target who was either receptive to or unreceptive to opposing views. Across vignettes, we varied multiple aspects of the scenario to ensure that the results we document are robust to a variety of stimuli. This approach allowed us to assess how the "feature" of receptiveness (compared to unreceptiveness) influences overall attitudes toward the target, on average, across many different combinations of stimuli. Our preregistered hypothesis was that, on average, receptiveness would lead to more negative attitudes toward the target than unreceptiveness. Due to the complexity of this setup, we did not include mechanism measures.

Method

We requested a nationally representative sample of 900 participants from Lucid. Eight hundred twenty-three participants (51.91% female, 48.09% male; $M_{age} = 46$; 40.3% Democrats; 30.25% Republicans; 25.69% Independents; 3.76% Others) were included in the final analysis, after exclusions specified in our preregistration. Each participant was asked to complete six trials (i.e., read six vignettes) and rate six targets. In total, there were 4,922 observations from a nationally representative sample of Americans.

Participants first reported their attitudes toward four individual issues (e.g., immigration). Next, participants were asked to imagine they met a target who shared their attitudes on a social issue. The target always held the same attitude as the participant. The target was described as mentioning an event at which opposing views were espoused and shared whether he attended this event to listen to and engage with this opposing perspective (receptive) or refused to do so (unreceptive). We experimentally varied four aspects of each vignette:

- Target receptiveness (receptive vs. unreceptive; manipulated in the same way as Study 2).
- Event format (a lecture or a rally).
- Source identity (Barack Obama, Marco Rubio, Nancy Pelosi, Donald Trump, or an unnamed speaker, "The speaker").
- Issue (climate change, immigration, terrorism, and military spending).

Thus, each vignette varied in target receptiveness, event format, source identity, and issue, and there were ($2 \times 2 \times 5 \times 4 =$) 80 possible combinations of stimuli. Each participant saw six of these 80 combinations. Below, we expand on source identity and the views expressed by these sources. All exact materials can be found on OSF.

Source Identity

Participants read that the opposing views came from one of five sources. Four sources were well-known members of the political elite: Nancy Pelosi and Barack Obama for the Democratic party, and Donald Trump and Marco Rubio for the Republican party. We chose these politicians for two reasons: first, they were widely recognized by the public, and second, members of the opposing party had similar attitudes toward them (see section AAS3 in the online supplemental materials for pretest data). A fifth level was included in which the name of the speaker was never mentioned ("The speaker").

Views of the Source

To ensure generalizability, we tested four polarizing policy issues (immigration, climate change, military spending, and terrorism). These four policy issues were chosen because they were rated as important (Pew Research Center, 2021). Within each of these policy areas, we chose a specific policy that was proposed by recent administrations (e.g., increasing the number of refugees admitted to the United States to 120,000 per year and ending a ban on Syrian refugees). To bolster the credibility of the stimuli, we only allowed combinations of sources and views that occur in the real world. Specifically, no source who belongs to the Democratic party (Obama, Pelosi) was described as holding traditionally Republican views (e.g., endorsing increased military spending or opposing electric vehicles). Similarly, no source who belonged to the Republican party (Trump, Rubio) was described as holding traditionally Democratic views. Focusing on combinations of sources and views that occur in the real world allowed us to bolster the external validity of our stimuli.

Results

As preregistered, we estimated the average marginal component effect (AMCE) of receptiveness on attitudes toward the target with standard errors clustered on the respondent level (see Hainmueller et al., 2014 for a discussion of AMCE and related concepts). More specifically, we estimated the following regression model:

$$\widehat{\text{Impressions}}_{i,t} = \alpha + \beta_1\ \text{receptiveness}_{i,t} + \beta_2\ \text{event}_{i,t} + \vec{\beta_3}\ \text{issue}_{i,t} + \vec{\beta_4}\ \text{speaker}_{i,t}. \quad (1)$$

The AMCE of receptiveness is captured by the coefficient β_1. If this coefficient were found to be negative and significant, it would suggest that receptiveness to opposing views made attitudes toward the target more negative, on average, across the various event formats, political issues, and sources tested. Indeed, we found that receptiveness to opposing views had a significant and negative AMCE (AMCE $= -0.14$, $SE = 0.067$, $p = .042$). This result means that receptive targets were rated more negatively than unreceptive targets across the different combinations of events, issues, and speakers. Correcting for potential imbalances across strata yielded consistent results (AMCE $= -0.18$, $SE = 0.070$, $p = .011$; see AAS3 in the online supplemental materials).

Moderation by Source Group Membership

As described already, all participants in this study were assigned to read about opposing views. For instance, a pro-immigration Democrat participant would read about anti-immigration views. Additionally, we only allowed combinations of views and sources that would occur in the real world. Hence, a pro-immigration Democrat would get assigned to read about anti-immigration views coming from Rubio, Trump, or a source whose partisan identity is unknown (but not from Pelosi or Obama). Because most participants hold party-consistent attitudes, views opposite to their own

were expressed by out-party sources. However, some participants were assigned to a source whose partisan identity was unknown or to a source who belonged to their own party. For instance, an anti-immigration Democrat would read about pro-immigration views, and those views would come from Pelosi, Obama, or an unknown source (but not Rubio or Trump). Thus, all participants read about opposing views. For most, those views came from out-party sources, but for some, those views came from an in-party or no-party source. This set-up allowed us to test our prediction that the costs of receptiveness are specific to out-party sources. When the source's partisan identity was unknown (H3A) or when the source belonged to one's own party (H3B), we expected the costs of receptiveness to reverse.

To test for this moderation, we first coded each trial based on whether participants saw a vignette in which the source was a member of the opposing party, their own party, or no party (when the party of the source was withheld altogether). Next, we estimated a regression model with receptiveness, speaker party (opposing, own, or no party), issue (immigration, climate change, military spending, or terrorism), and their interactions predicting target evaluations. To account for the fact that participants saw multiple trials and thus rated multiple targets, we used standard errors clustered on the participant level. Participants who identified as Pure Independents (i.e., leaned toward neither party) were excluded from this analysis because classifying whether the source belonged to their party or an opposing party is meaningless. Note that this analysis was not preregistered.

We found significant two-way interactions between receptiveness and the speaker's party ($ps < .001$), but the three-way interactions with issues were nonsignificant ($ps > .36$; see ST6 in the online supplemental materials), so we collapsed across issues (for results by issue, see ST7 in the online supplemental materials). Replicating our core result, participants evaluated receptive targets more negatively than unreceptive targets when the source belonged to the opposing party, $\beta = -.72$, $t(621) = -6.97$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.40$. However, when the source belonged to participants' own party, this finding reversed, $\beta = .67$, $t(397) = 5.33$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.41$. Participants evaluated targets receptive to opposing views from an in-party source more positively than unreceptive targets, even though participants disagreed with the views expressed by the source. Figure 4 shows the robustness of this effect across speakers, political issues, and event formats. This underscores the importance of whom participants are receptive to (out-party source vs. in-party source), above and beyond what they are receptive to, in driving attitudes toward receptive individuals.

Finally, when the party identity of the source was withheld, participants evaluated the unreceptive and receptive targets equally, $\beta = -.060$, $t(660) = -.56$, $p = .57$, $d = 0.034$. We were surprised by this last result given that prior work has documented a robust preference for receptive targets over unreceptive targets when no partisan identity indicators were present (and we replicate this benefit of receptiveness to unidentified sources in Studies 3 and 4). To further explore this null result, we decomposed the results by an issue in ST7 in the online supplemental materials. Of note, receptive targets were rated (marginally) more positively than unreceptive ones when the issue was military spending or immigration, but significantly more negatively when the issue was terrorism. There was no significant effect on the issue of climate change (see AAS3 in the online supplemental materials for details). These results suggest that, while the costs of receptiveness were robust to all four issues, the benefits of receptiveness when the partisan identity of the source is unknown might be more sensitive to the exact issue under consideration.

Discussion

Replicating the results from Studies 1A–B, we found support for the robustness of the reputational costs of receptiveness. The costs-of-receptiveness effect emerged across different combinations of sources, issues, and event formats. Of note, this effect replicated even when the source was a member of the political elite. This is important given that members of the political elite not only get media attention but also widely shape the views of their rank-and-file party members. In addition, Study 2 provides correlational evidence in support of our predicted moderation by group membership of the source (H3A, H3B). In the next study, we shed light on why current and past research obtained divergent results, before proceeding to provide causal evidence for our predicted moderation by group membership of the source.

Study 3: Reconciling Past and Current Research

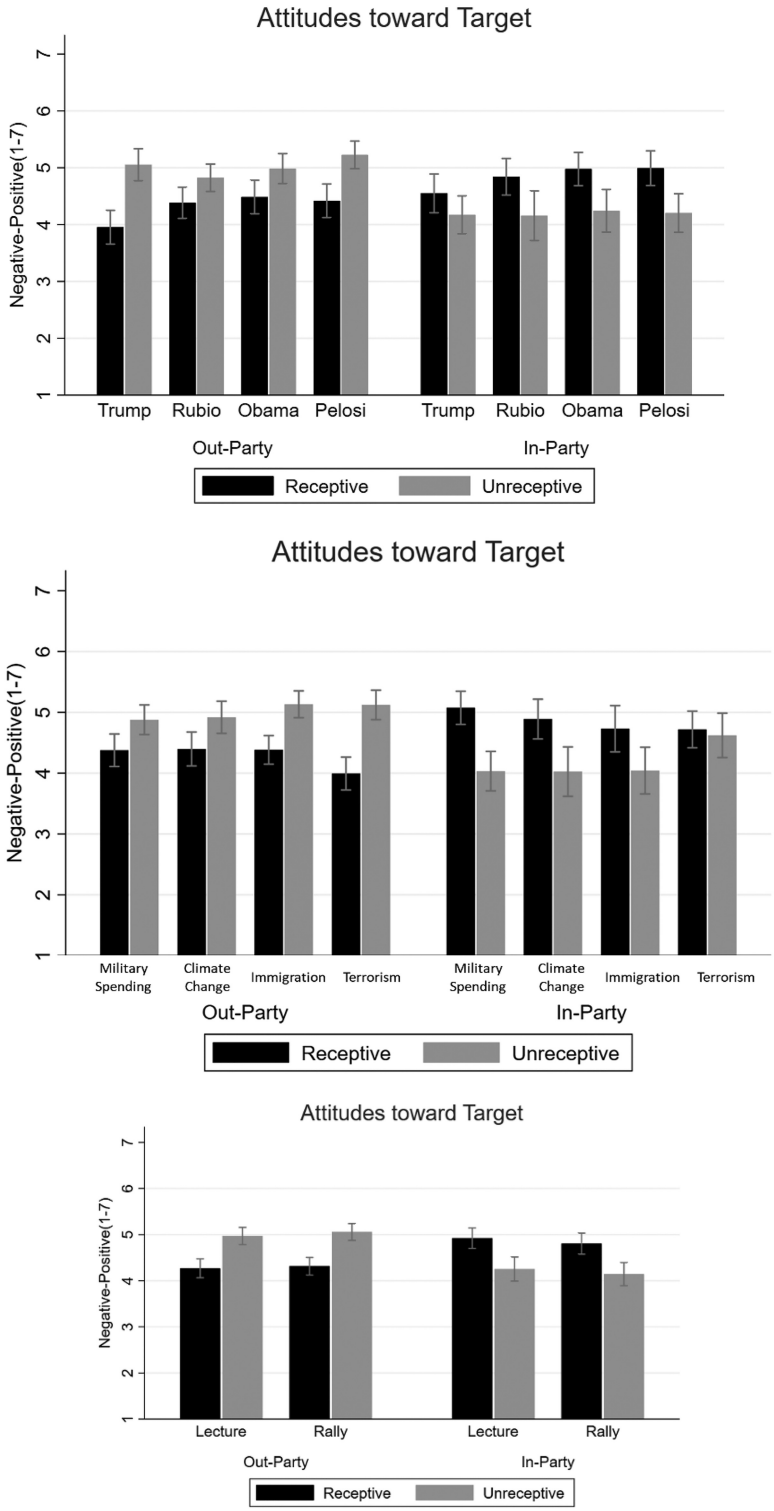
So far, our evidence suggests that revealing the partisan identity of the source can reverse the benefits of receptiveness and turn them into costs. One important question remains: why might the current results be different from past research? One important reason is that prior research did not reveal the information source. If the absence of a source explains the difference in past and current results, then simply specifying the source using the same experimental paradigm employed in past research should be sufficient to turn the benefits of receptiveness into costs. To test this possibility, the current study carried out an exact replication of Study 1a from Heltzel and Laurin (2021) with an added condition in which the identity of the source was specified. We also included questions intended to shed light on the extent to which participants in prior research (absent any information about the source) relied on source cues when evaluating the targets. In doing so, we hoped to further reconcile the past and current results.

Method

One thousand six participants recruited from Lucid took part in our survey (51.99% female, 47.51% male, 0.50% other; $M_{age} = 41$, $SD_{age} = 16$; 77.24% White, 12.53% African American, 3.84% Asian, 6.39% other; 38.62% Democrats; 30.95% Republicans; 28.90% Independents; 1.53% Others). This study followed a 2 (within: receptive vs. unreceptive) × 2 (between: no identity vs. identity) mixed design.

Participants were asked about their views on immigration. Next, participants were introduced to two targets (Individual A and Individual B). Both targets were described as having the same opinion on immigration as the one reported by the participant. Both targets were also described as reading articles that supported their views. Importantly, Individual A was described as also seeking out opposing views, while Individual B was described as avoiding them. The identity of the sources Individual A sought and Individual B avoided depended on the condition. In the no identity condition, no source was specified (as was the case in past research). In the identity condition, the source was well-known member of the political elite. For participants who supported tougher immigration

Figure 4
Results for Study 2



Note. Robustness across speakers (upper panel), issue (middle panel), and event format (lower panel). Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals with standard errors clustered on the participant level.

policies, the sources were Rachel Maddow, Nancy Pelosi, and Barack Obama. For participants who opposed tougher immigration policies, the sources were Tucker Carlson, Ted Cruz, and Mitch McConnell (see Materials in the online supplemental materials). After reading this vignette, each participant reported their attitudes toward both the receptive and the unreceptive target (same items used in Studies 1A and 2).

At the end of the study, we asked a series of questions about the source mentioned in the vignette. Our goal in asking these questions was to gain greater insight into the extent to which participants in prior research relied on source cues when evaluating the targets. Specifically, we asked participants in the no identity condition whether a specific source came to mind as they were reading the vignette. Participants who indicated that they thought about a specific source were then asked to describe up to three sources that came to mind.

Results

Attitudes Toward Target

As preregistered, we regressed attitudes toward the target on the receptiveness condition, identity manipulation, and their interactions. Standard errors were clustered on the participant level. We found a significant interaction, $\beta = -1.14$, $t(1{,}002) = -8.34$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .034$. When partisan identity was unknown, the receptive target was evaluated more favorably than the unreceptive target, $\beta = .67$, $t(505) = 7.33$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.45$, replicating prior research. However, when partisan identity was introduced, the opposite pattern emerged: the receptive target was evaluated more negatively than the unreceptive one, $\beta = -.47$, $t(497) = -4.61$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.30$; see Figure 5.

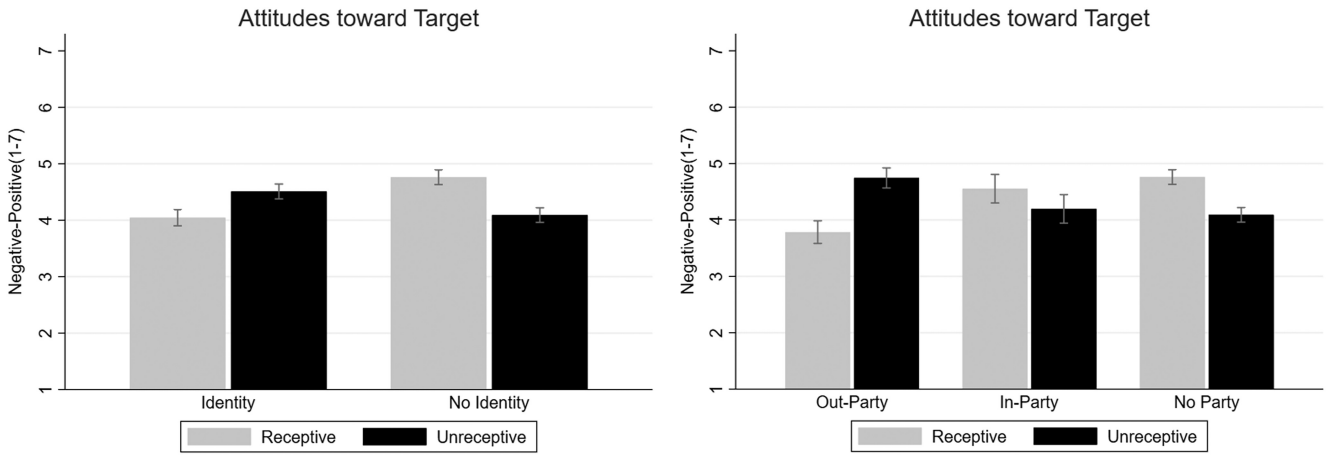
Moderation by Source Group Membership

Similar to Study 2, the assignment in the current study was conditional on participants' beliefs. This means that most participants in the identity condition were matched to an out-party source, but some were matched to a source who belonged to their own party. Our theorizing specifies that the costs-of-receptiveness effect should be present when the source is an out-party member, but not an in-party member. To test this, we first coded whether participants saw a vignette in which the source was an out-party or in-party source. Next, we regressed receptiveness, source party (opposing party, own party, and no identity), and their interactions to predict attitudes. This analysis revealed significant interactions ($ps < .001$). Participants rated the receptive target more favorably than the unreceptive ones when the partisan identity of the source was unknown, $\beta = .67$, $t(505) = 7.33$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.45$, or when the source belonged to participants' own party, $\beta = .36$, $t(137) = 2.07$, $p = .040$, $d = 0.24$. However, when the source belonged to the out-party, participants evaluated targets who were receptive to opposing views more negatively compared to unreceptive targets, $\beta = -.96$, $t(279) = -6.80$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.59$; Figure 5.

Additional Source Information

One of the goals of this study was to further reconcile the current and past findings. Hence, we asked participants in the no identity condition to share with us whether they thought of a specific source when reading the vignette and, if so, to describe the sources that came to mind. Of the 507 participants in the no identity condition, only 260 (51.28%) indicated that they thought about a source. Those participants were then asked to describe up to three sources that came to mind. We then coded these open responses into four categories: (a) sources whose party was unknown (e.g., "Reporter/Anchor getting information to the public," "newscaster"; 49.62%); (b) no sources (e.g., "I don't know," "I m not sure," 24.23%); (c) in-party sources (e.g., "Fox News," "Biden," Nancy"; 9.23%); and (d) out-party sources ("MSNBC," "Don Lemon," "Trump"; 16.15%). Most relevant to the question at hand, of the people who thought about a source, 16.15% named an out-party source. Put differently, only 8.28% of participants ($N = 42$ of 507) in the no identity condition named an out-party source. Note that the percentage

Figure 5
Results From Study 3



Note. Left: Attitudes toward the target as a function of target receptiveness and manipulated source identity. Right: Attitudes toward the target as a function of target receptiveness and source group membership. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals clustered on the participant level.

of participants who considered an out-party source (~8%) is probably an overestimate because participants may not have considered the source until our questions prompted them to do so. These results help explain why prior research did not find a costs-of-receptiveness effect: only a minority of participants (~8%) conjured out-party sources. This could be for a variety of reasons, including that the paradigm used in past research inadvertently directs attention toward comparing the two targets and not so much the information source.

Discussion

Study 3 has three important implications: First, these results demonstrate the robustness of the costs of receptiveness to using material from prior research. Using the same paradigm employed in prior research (Heltzel & Laurin, 2021; Study 1a), we found costs to receptiveness when the partisan identity of the source was made explicit, and the source belonged to the out-party. These results also show that the costs-of-receptiveness effect is robust to additional procedural variations. For instance, in our earlier studies, receptiveness was self-disclosed (i.e., the target shares that they were receptive or unreceptive). Here, receptiveness was not self-disclosed, but rather described, yet the costs of receptiveness persisted.

Second, these results shed some light on why prior research found no costs to receptiveness. Based on the open-response data, it appears likely that the majority of participants did not consider the source, and among those who did, the majority thought of in-party sources or sources whose partisan identity was unknown, rather than out-party sources. We return to this point in the General Discussion section. Third, these results replicate the correlational patterns related to moderation by source group membership (H3A, H3B). In the next study, we provide a casual test of this moderation and include measures of our proposed mechanism: perceptions of immorality.

Study 4: Moderation by Source Group Membership

Study 4 builds on the results from Studies 2 and 3 in three important ways. First, it tests whether the moderation pattern observed in Studies 2 and 3 would replicate with random assignment. We randomly assigned participants to read about a target who was receptive to or unreceptive to opposing views coming from a source who was a member of the out-party, in-party, or whose partisan identity was unknown. Second, Study 4 measured perceptions of immorality as the mediating mechanism driving these predicted moderation patterns.

Third, this study addresses an alternative account: costs of receptiveness could be driven by mere disagreement with the information. If true, then regardless of the identity of the source, receptiveness to opposing views should yield reputational costs. If, holding the information they provide constant, the identity of the source affects whether receptiveness has costs or benefits, then this would be evidence against a mere disagreement account. Our preregistered prediction was that the consequences of receptiveness would depend on the identity of the source: Receptiveness to an out-party source would result in reputational costs, but receptiveness to unknown or in-party sources would confer reputational benefits.

Method

Twelve hundred twenty-five participants from Amazon Mechanical Turk took part in our study. Twelve-hundred and seven participants passed two attention checks and were included in the analysis (44.11% female, 55.14% male, .75% other; $M_{age} = 40$, $SD_{age} = 12$; 53.52% Democrats; 23.12% Republicans; 22.04% Independents; 1.33% Other). Participants were assigned to one of six conditions in this 2 (receptive vs. unreceptive target) × 3 (opposing party vs. unknown party source vs. own party) between-participants design.

The study followed a similar procedure to Study 2. First, participants reported their demographics (including their partisan identity) and indicated their views on a current political issue: whether the United States should impose more regulations on social media companies. Next, participants read one vignette about a fictitious target, John, who shared their views on regulating social media companies but was considering attending an event at which opposing views were espoused. Receptiveness was manipulated using the same language used in Study 2. Attitudes toward the target were measured using the same items used in previous studies. To measure perceptions of immorality, we used the same items used in Study 1B (immoral, virtuous [reverse coded]). We also included the items used to measure perceived competence and warmth. The order of perceptions of immorality, competence, and warmth was counterbalanced.

Source Identity

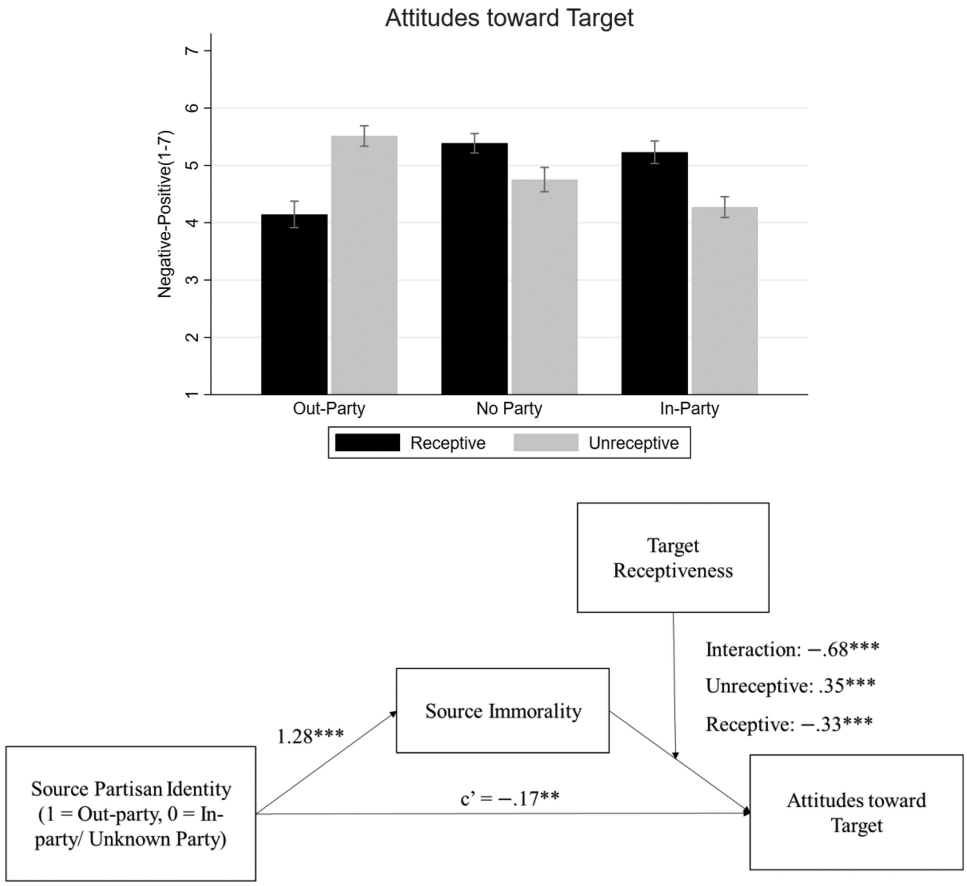
The source mentioned in the vignette depended on participants' assigned condition. For participants in the no-party condition, the source was an unknown speaker ("The speaker demanded …"). For participants in the out-party condition, the source was a leader of the out-party. Republicans (and Independents who leaned Republican) were assigned to read about Nancy Pelosi, whereas Democrats (and Independents who leaned Democrat) were assigned to read about Donald Trump. For participants in the in-party condition, the source was a leader of their own party: Republicans (and Independents who leaned Republican) were assigned to read about Donald Trump, whereas Democrats (and Independents who leaned Democrat) were assigned to read about Nancy Pelosi. Independents who did not lean toward either party were randomly assigned to read about one of the two leaders.

Results

Attitudes Toward Target

We regressed attitudes toward the target on the receptiveness condition, partisan identity condition, and their interactions. We found two significant interactions: Receptiveness × In-Party = 2.33, $t(1,201) = 11.54$, $p < .001$; Receptiveness × Unknown Party = 2.00, $t(1,201) = 9.98$, $p < .001$; $\eta_p^2 = .12$. When partisan identity was not evoked or when the source was an in-party member, receptive targets were evaluated more favorably than unreceptive ones, $\beta_{unknown} = .63$, $t(397) = 4.58$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.47$; $\beta_{In\text{-}party} = .96$, $t(401) = 7.02$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.70$. However, when the source belonged to the opposing party, the opposite pattern emerged: Receptive targets were evaluated more negatively than unreceptive ones, $\beta = -1.37$, $t(403) = -9.23$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.90$; Figure 6.

Figure 6
Results From Study 4



Note. Upper panel: attitudes toward the target as a function of whether partisan identity of the source was included and target receptiveness. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Lower panel: moderated mediation model. The notation c' indicates the direct effect after controlling for the mediators. Coefficients are standardized linear regression coefficients.
** $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

Mediation Analysis

Next, we assessed the role perceptions of immorality played in driving these results. To do this, we conducted a bootstrapped moderated mediation analysis with 10,000 iterations with source identity as the independent variable, perceptions of immorality as the mediator, target receptiveness as the moderator, and attitudes toward the target as the outcome (Figure 6). Because source identity was a multicategorical variable, we used dummy coding (Hayes & Preacher, 2014). This analysis was run in SPSS using Model 14. Note that this analysis was not preregistered. Our theorizing would predict that sources who belonged to the out-party, compared to sources who belonged to the in-party or whose partisan identity was unknown, would be seen as more immoral. As a result, targets who are receptive to those sources would be seen negatively, whereas those who are unreceptive would not.

Consistent with this theorizing, partisan identity of the source (1 = *out-party*, 0 = *in-party/unknown party*) led to greater perceptions of source immorality ($\beta = 1.28$, $SE = 0.040$, $p < .001$). Moreover, there was a significant interaction between source immorality and target receptiveness ($\beta = -.68$, $SE = 0.054$, $p < .001$). There was a negative relationship between source's immorality and target attitudes when the target was receptive ($\beta = -.33$, $SE = 0.043$, $p < .001$). However, that relationship was positive when the target was unreceptive ($\beta = .35$, $SE = 0.043$, $p < .001$).

The indirect effects tracked these results. There was a negative indirect effect through perceptions of source immorality when the target was receptive (indirect effect = −0.42, $SE = 0.069$, 95% CI [−0.56, −0.29]). However, there was a positive indirect effect through perceptions of source immorality when the target was unreceptive (indirect effect = 0.45, $SE = 0.063$, 95% CI [0.33, 0.58]). The moderated mediation was significant (index of moderated mediation = −0.87, $SE = 0.085$, 95% CI [−1.04, −0.71]). These results persisted, even after including perceptions of warmth and competence as additional mediators (see AAS5 in the online supplemental materials).

Discussion

Study 4 provides support for our theorizing. First, we found that although participants evaluated receptive targets more negatively

than unreceptive ones when the source belonged to the out-party, they evaluated receptive targets more positively than unreceptive ones when the partisan identity of the source was unknown (H3A). Indeed, we were able to replicate this exact moderation pattern using another issue—whether the United States should compete in the Olympics—in SS3 in the online supplemental materials, further bolstering the evidence for this moderation.

Second, we found that receptiveness to in-party sources led to reputational benefits (H3B). This provides a causal replication of the correlational results from Studies 2 and 3. Further, these results indicate that it is not the identification of the partisan source per se (i.e., knowing their name) that causes the costs-of-receptiveness effect, but rather that the partisan source belongs to the out-party. These results also rule out that our results are driven by disagreeing with the information provided by the source. In this study, the information provided by the source was held constant, yet costs of receptiveness were still observed. This rules out that the costs of receptiveness are driven by mere disagreement with the source.

Third, echoing results from Studies 1A–B, perceptions of immorality mediated the costs-of-receptiveness effect (H2). Out-party sources were seen as more immoral than in-party or unidentified sources. These immorality perceptions led receptive targets to be evaluated more negatively than unreceptive targets. Importantly, those results held even after controlling for perceptions of warmth and competence. In the next two studies, we provide boundary conditions for the costs-of-receptiveness effect by varying the source's prototypicality (H4).

Study 5: Moderation by Prototypicality

Not all out-party members are stereotyped to lack morality. Research suggests that stereotypes are most readily applied to prototypical group members (Eberhardt et al., 2006). Thus, prototypical members of the out-party are more likely than nonprototypical members to be stereotyped as immoral. Based on this theorizing, we predicted that the perceived prototypicality of the source would act as an important boundary condition. Our preregistered prediction was that receptiveness would lead to reputational costs when the source was a prototypical member of the out-party, but not when the source was a nonprototypical member of the out-party.

Method

Eight hundred five participants from a nationally representative sample recruited through Lucid took part in our study (53.40% female, 46.37% male, 0.23% other; $M_{age} = 46$, $SD_{age} = 17$; 34.89% Democrats; 31.36% Republicans; 33.75% Independents) and were randomly assigned to one of four conditions in this 2 (receptive vs. unreceptive) × 2 (low prototypicality vs. high prototypicality) between-participants design.

Procedure

This study followed the same procedure as Study 1A, except that we included a low prototypicality condition and updated the stimuli accordingly (see Figure 7 for sample stimuli; all stimuli from the pretest are reported in a table uploaded to OSF). All other aspects of the study were identical to Study 1A. Participants read about a target who mentions that a social media platform (Twitter) recommended an out-party source to them. The target then either followed the social media account recommended by the platform (receptive) or blocked it (unreceptive). The account either belonged to a prototypical or nonprototypical member of the out-party. To verify that the prototypicality manipulation was successful, we included manipulation checks measuring prototypicality (same items as Study 1A). The results confirmed that the source in the high prototypicality conditions was seen as more prototypical than the source in the low prototypicality conditions (among Democrats: $M_{Low} = 4.26$, $SD_{Low} = 1.55$, $M_{High} = 5.34$, $SD_{High} = 1.38$, $t(271) = 6.12$, $p < .001$; among Republicans: $M_{Low} = 4.08$, $SD_{Low} = 1.67$, $M_{High} = 5.20$, $SD_{High} = 1.66$, $t(248) = 5.29$, $p < .001$).

Results

Attitudes Toward Target

As preregistered, we regressed attitudes toward the target on the receptiveness condition, prototypicality condition, and their interactions. We found only a significant interaction between receptiveness and prototypicality, $\beta = -.77$, $t(800) = -3.17$, $p = .002$, $\eta_p^2 = .012$. When source prototypicality was high, receptive targets were evaluated more negatively compared to unreceptive ones, $\beta = -.41$, $t(399) = -2.32$, $p = .021$, $d = 0.23$. However, when source prototypicality was low, receptive targets were evaluated more positively than unreceptive ones, $\beta = .35$, $t(401) = 2.17$, $p = .031$, $d = 0.22$; Figure 8.

Mediation Analysis

Next, we assessed the role perceptions of immorality played in driving these results. To do this, we used the same analytic strategy from Study 4. We predicted that high (vs. low) prototypical sources would be perceived as more immoral and that receptiveness would moderate the relationship between immorality and attitudes (see Figure 8).

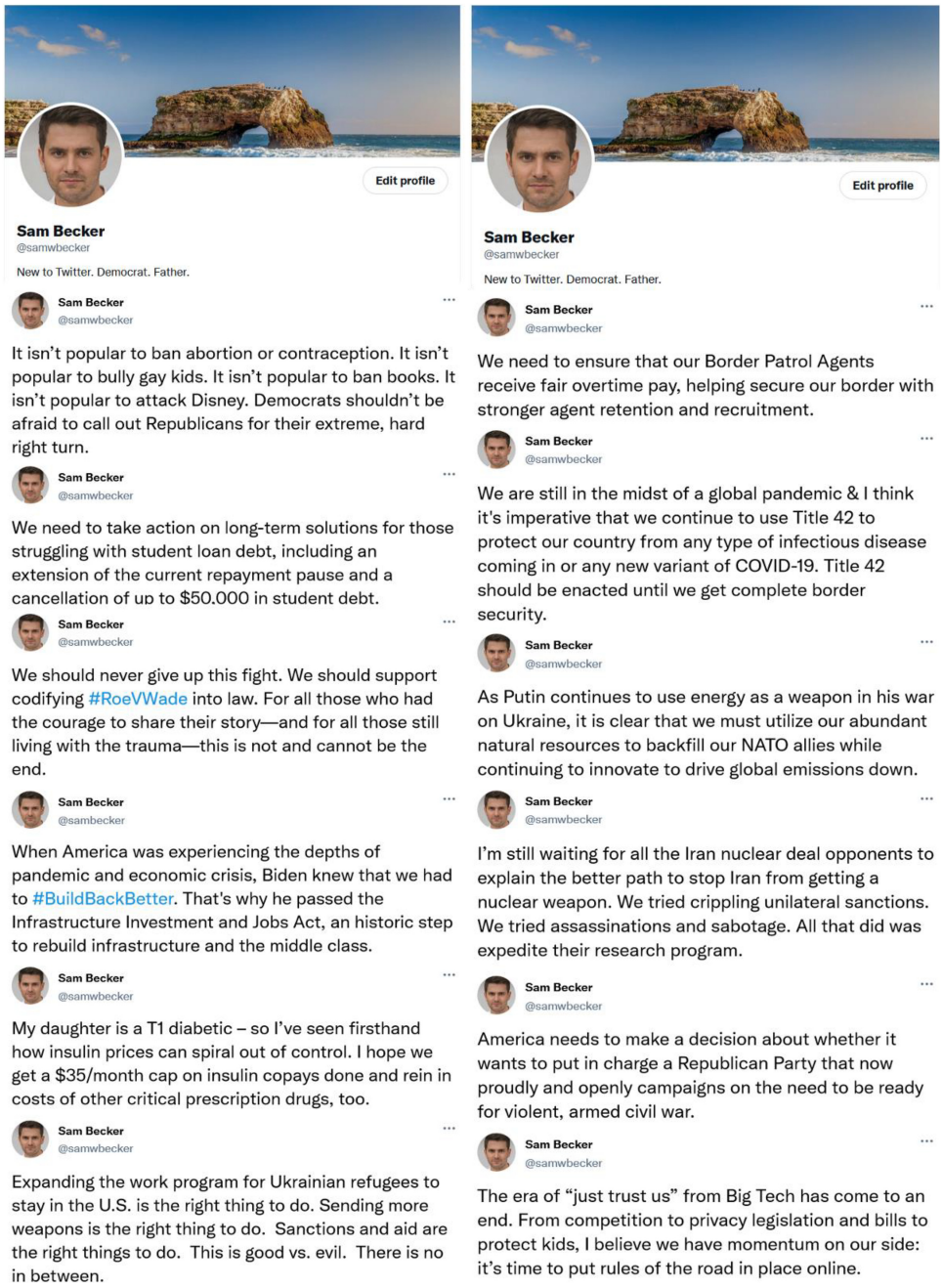
Consistent with these predictions, prototypicality of the source (1 = *high*, 0 = *low*) led to greater perceptions of source immorality ($\beta = .33$, $SE = 0.070$, $p < .001$). Moreover, there was a significant interaction between perceptions of source immorality and target receptiveness ($\beta = -.59$, $SE = 0.063$, $p < .001$). There was a negative relationship between perceptions of source's immorality and attitudes toward the target when the target was receptive ($\beta = -.69$, $SE = 0.046$, $p < .001$). This relationship was much weaker when the target was unreceptive ($\beta = -.10$, $SE = 0.043$, $p = .017$). There was a negative indirect effect through perceptions of source immorality when the target was receptive (indirect effect = −0.23, $SE = 0.05$, 95% CI [−0.33, −0.13]). However, there was no significant indirect effect when the target was unreceptive (indirect effect = −0.034, $SE = 0.023$, 95% CI [−0.08, 0.01]). The moderated mediation was significant (index of moderated mediation = −0.19, $SE = 0.051$, 95% CI [−0.30, −0.10]).

Discussion

Study 5 revealed that the costs of receptiveness were present when the source was highly prototypical (i.e., representative of the out-party), but not when the source was nonprototypical (H4). Apart from highlighting this important boundary condition, these results also provide additional replication of the immorality results. Prototypical sources were perceived as more immoral

Figure 7

Example Twitter Profiles Manipulating Prototypicality



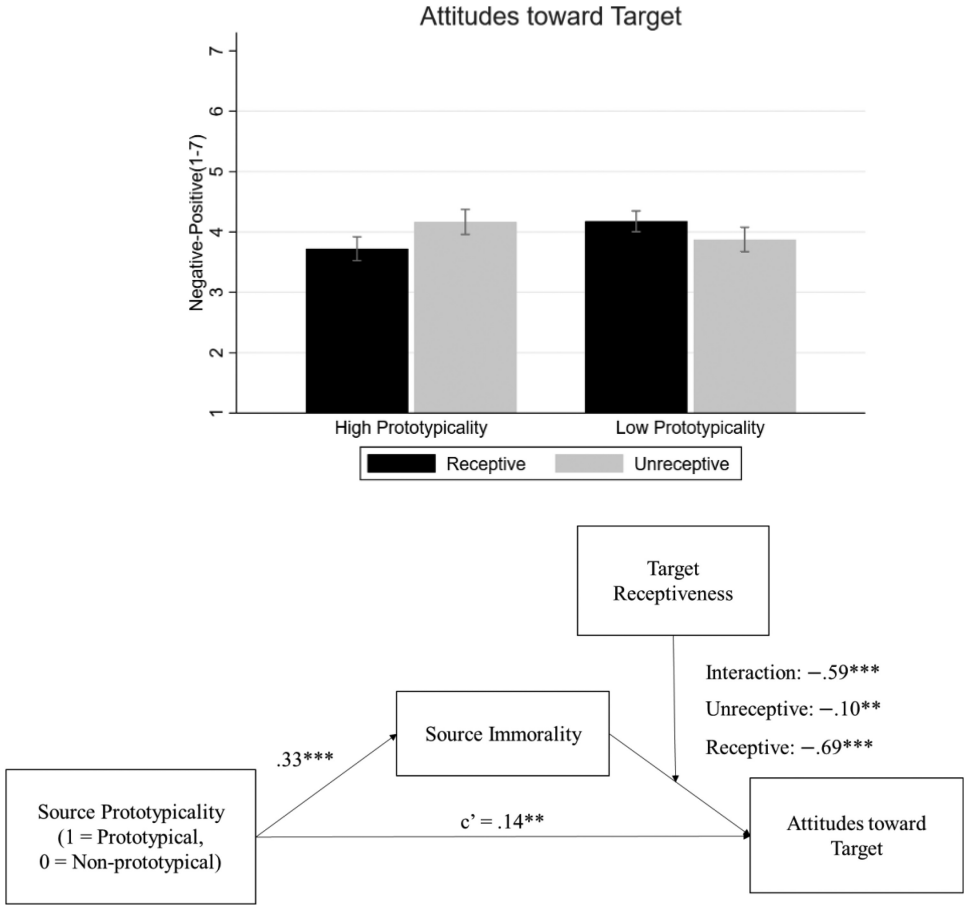
Note. Left: high prototypicality Democrat profile. Right: low prototypicality Democrat profile. The picture is an AI-generated image. From *Generated Photos* (https://generated.photos). See the online article for the color version of this figure.

than nonprototypical ones and that the relationship between source immorality and attitudes toward the target depended on target receptiveness. In this study, prototypicality was manipulated by varying people's opinions on political issues (e.g., their opinions on immigration). In the next study, we held people's political opinions constant and manipulated prototypicality by varying their lifestyle choices.

Study 6: Manipulating Prototypicality Through Lifestyle Choices

Study 6 tested whether results from Study 5 would replicate using a different manipulation of prototypicality (H4). Rather than manipulate prototypicality by varying the source's opinions on political issues, we held the source's opinions constant and

Figure 8
Results From Study 5



Note. Upper panel: attitudes toward the target as a function of source prototypicality and target receptiveness. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Lower panel: moderated mediation model. The notation c' indicates the direct effect after controlling for the mediators. Coefficients are standardized linear regression coefficients.
** $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

manipulated their lifestyle choices (e.g., where they lived, the music they listened to). Our preregistered prediction was that receptiveness to prototypical sources would result in costs to receptiveness, but that this effect would be attenuated or reversed when the source was nonprototypical.

Design

We opened the survey for 800 Democrats and Republicans on Prolific Academic. In total, 790 participants (49.50% female, 49.11% male, 1.39% other; $M_{age} = 44$, $SD_{age} = 15$) completed the survey. This study followed a similar design to Study 5. Thus, this study followed a 2 (receptive vs. unreceptive) × 2 (high vs. moderate prototypicality) between-participants design. Across conditions, the source shared three political posts and three lifestyle posts. The political posts were held constant across conditions, but the lifestyle ones were varied depending on condition. For instance, the high prototypicality Democrat profile noted that the person lived in California and enjoyed R&B music. In contrast, the low prototypicality condition noted that the person lived in Texas and enjoyed country music. Consistent with our intentions, participants rated the source in the high prototypicality conditions as more prototypical than the source in the moderate prototypicality condition: among Democrats, $M_{Moderate} = 4.88$, $SD_{Moderate} = 1.47$, $M_{High} = 6.10$, $SD_{High} = 0.93$, $t(568) = 11.82$, $p < .001$; among Republicans, $M_{Moderate} = 5.02$, $SD_{Moderate} = 1.64$, $M_{High} = 5.91$, $SD_{High} = 1.19$, $t(215) = 4.56$, $p < .001$. After viewing the source, participants reported their attitudes toward the target, as well as their perception of the source's immorality, competence, and warmth.

Results

Attitudes Toward Target

As preregistered, we regressed attitude toward the target on the receptiveness condition, prototypicality condition, and their interactions. We found a significant interaction between receptiveness and prototypicality, $\beta = .77$, $t(786) = 3.40$, $p = .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .014$. When source prototypicality was high, receptive targets were evaluated more negatively compared to unreceptive ones, $\beta = -.89$, $t(393) =$

−5.51, $p < .001$, $d = 0.55$. However, when source prototypicality was moderate, there were no significant differences in attitudes toward receptive and unreceptive targets, $\beta = -.12$, $t(393) = -.73$, $p = .47$, $d = 0.07$; Figure 9.

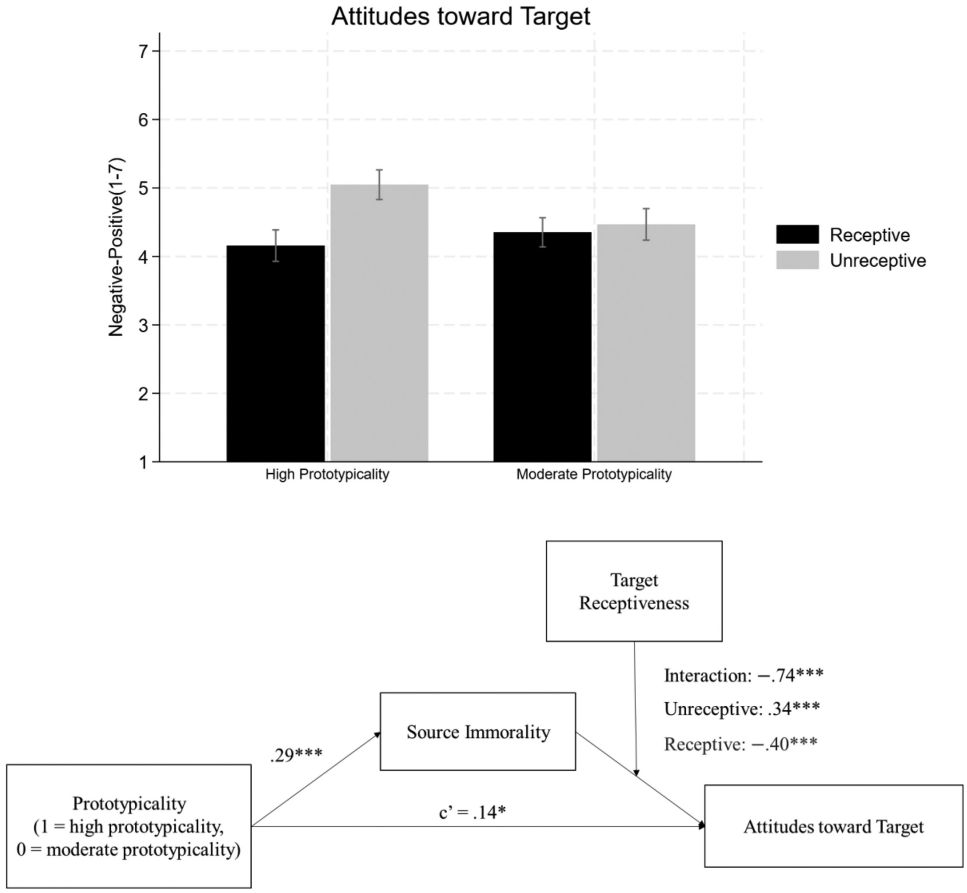
Mediation Analysis

Next, we assessed the role immorality played in driving these results using the same analytic strategy from Study 5. Replicating results from Study 5, prototypicality of the source (1 = *high*, 0 = *moderate*) led to greater perceptions of source immorality ($\beta = .29$, $SE = 0.071$, $p < .001$). Moreover, there was a significant interaction between perceptions of source immorality and target receptiveness ($\beta = -.74$, $SE = 0.065$, $p < .001$). There was a negative relationship between perceptions of the source's immorality and attitudes toward the target when the target was receptive ($\beta = -.40$, $SE = 0.047$, $p < .001$). This relationship was positive when the target was unreceptive ($\beta = .34$, $SE = 0.046$, $p < .001$). There was a negative indirect effect through perceptions of source immorality when the target was receptive (indirect effect = −0.11, $SE = 0.033$, 95% CI [−0.18, −0.054]). There was a positive significant indirect effect when the target was unreceptive (indirect effect = 0.098, $SE = 0.029$, 95% CI [0.045, 0.16]). The moderated mediation was significant (index of moderated mediation = −0.21, $SE = 0.058$, 95% CI [−0.33, −0.10]). These results did not change when accounting for competence and warmth.

Discussion

Study 6 presents additional evidence for the moderating role of source prototypicality (H4). Even when holding the political attitudes of the source constant and manipulating prototypicality through the source's lifestyle choices (e.g., where they lived or what music they listened to), prototypicality moderated the costs-of-receptiveness effect. Moreover, these results provide additional replication of the immorality results from Study 6. Highly prototypical sources were perceived as more immoral than moderately prototypical ones, and the relationship between source immorality and attitudes toward the target depended on target receptiveness.

Figure 9
Results From Study 6



Note. Upper panel: attitudes toward the target as a function of source prototypicality and target receptiveness. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Lower panel: moderated mediation model. The notation c' indicates the direct effect after controlling for the mediators. Coefficients are standardized linear regression coefficients.
* $p < .10$. *** $p < .001$.

General Discussion

A fast-growing body of research finds that receptiveness to opposing political views leads to reputational benefits. Receptive people are seen as trustworthy and intelligent. However, these results appear inconsistent with the literature on partisan animosity, showing that political opponents are seen in a negative light. In the current research, we reconcile this seeming contradiction by arguing that the identity of the person one is receptive to determines whether receptiveness carries reputational benefits or costs. We found that receptiveness to out-party sources led receptive (vs. unreceptive) others to be evaluated negatively.

This costs-of-receptiveness effect was robust to many procedural variations. First, it emerged across different types of sources, including members of the out-party judged by their own party to be prototypical (Studies 1A, 5, and 6), stereotypic everyday members of the out-party (SS1 in the online supplemental materials), politicians merely labeled as belonging to the out-party (SS2 in the online supplemental materials), and well-known out-party elites (Studies 2 and 3). Second, the costs of receptiveness were robust to both strong and weak signals of receptiveness. The costs of receptiveness emerged when the targets underwent costly, time-consuming, and effortful forms of receptiveness, such as going to an in-person rally (Studies 2 and 3) or attending a lecture (Study 2). They also emerged when targets engaged in relatively effortless forms of receptiveness, such as following a social media account online (Studies 1A–1B, 5, and 6) or reading a single online article (SS4 in the online supplemental materials). Regardless of the form of receptiveness, being receptive to prototypical out-party members conferred reputational costs.

Third, the costs of receptiveness emerged across eight different social issues, including abortion, climate change, regulating social media companies, and boycotting the Winter Olympics in China. It was present both when the source shared their views on multiple social issues at once (Studies 1A, 5, and 6) or discussed their views on a single issue (Studies 1B, 2–4).

In addition to testing the robustness of this effect, we provided evidence for the mechanism underlying it. We found evidence that people viewed out-party members in a negative light—particularly as immoral, which led the receptive person to incur reputational costs (Studies 1A, 1B, 5, and 6). Perceptions of immorality continued to account for the costs-of-receptiveness effect even after controlling for competence and warmth (Studies 1B and 6). Moreover, we tested an important boundary condition—prototypicality. We found that portraying the source as nonprototypical can reduce the reliance on the immorality stereotype, thereby attenuating or even reversing the costs-of-receptiveness effect. This result held regardless of whether source prototypicality was manipulated by varying the political opinions of the source (Study 5) or by holding those constant and varying their lifestyle choices (Study 6).

Theoretical Implications

The current research makes several theoretical contributions. First, it helps resolve a seeming contradiction between two distinct literatures in psychology: the literature on receptiveness and the literature on partisan animosity. Second, research on receptiveness has made important headway in understanding the reputational benefits of receptiveness, but what about its costs? To our knowledge, the current research is the first to empirically document interpersonal costs to receptiveness (see Hussein & Tormala, 2021 for a theoretical exception). Because people frequently know the partisan identity of information sources in the real world, we see this costs-of-receptiveness effect as providing a critical addition to the literature on receptiveness. Apart from providing a more complete picture of the interpersonal consequences of receptiveness, we also provided clarity on the conditions needed for this effect to emerge. Perceiving the source as immoral determined whether receptiveness led to costs or benefits. Consistent with reports from the Pew Research Center (2019), in our studies, we found that a majority of partisan participants perceived out-party members to be immoral, which suggests that the costs of receptiveness documented in the current research are likely to be widespread.

Third, our results suggest a novel barrier to receptiveness to opposing views. People might avoid exposing themselves to ideas and people they disagree with because they are aware of the social costs of receptiveness. If true, this would suggest novel countermeasures to polarization. First, countering people's fears about the social costs of receptiveness could provide a novel intervention to bridge divides and increase receptiveness to opposing views. For example, Study 5 shows that being receptive to a nonprototypical out-party member led to no interpersonal costs (in fact, it conferred some benefits). Providing people with information about the lack of social costs of receptiveness could encourage them to expose themselves to ideas and people they disagree with. Second, given that the reputational costs of receptiveness are rooted in viewing the out-party as immoral, correcting this misperception could be a catalyst for change. Helping people view the other side as moral would lead them to no longer punish others who are receptive to opposing views, which in turn could encourage more receptiveness to opposing views, creating a chain reaction. By uncovering costs to receptiveness, our research lays the groundwork to addressing the nefarious problem of rising levels of divisiveness and polarization.

Fourth, our findings have the potential to contribute to the literature on elite cues. A substantial literature notes that partisans adopt policy views advanced by their party's political elites (e.g., Clayton & Willer, 2023; Pink et al., 2021). Yet precisely how political elites influence members of their party remains unclear. Our results suggest a novel mechanism: peer pressure. In Studies 2–4, we found that when the source was a political leader of one's own party, people perceived receptive (vs. unreceptive) others more positively. This suggests that elite cues are followed, in part, because party members reward those who are receptive to views expressed by in-party elites and socially sanction those who are not. Examining what role, if any, this interpersonal dynamic plays in propagating the opinions of elites among rank-and-file party members would be an exciting new direction.

Fifth, our results speak to debates around the differential effects of political ideology (what) and partisan identity (who; see Orr et al., 2023; Turner-Zwinkels & Brandt, 2023). Whereas some prior research has shown that partisans are more concerned with policy views than identity per se, we found that whom a target is receptive to, above and beyond what they were receptive to, influenced reactions to receptiveness. Research examining under what conditions partisan identity (who) versus ideology (what) is more influential would be worthwhile.

Alternative Accounts

Our studies provide consistent evidence for the costs-of-receptiveness effect across numerous settings and using varied procedures. Here, we

highlight alternative accounts and introduce evidence that helps rule them out.

Concerns About Ingroup Loyalty

Our proposed process has focused on outgroup animosity as a driving force behind the reputational costs of receptiveness. Could the observed effects be driven by ingroup loyalty instead? Receptiveness might signal a willingness to abandon opinions espoused by the ingroup and thus could be a sign of disloyalty. If true, then the observed costs of receptiveness could stem from a motivation to punish ingroup disloyalty.

To assess this account, we measured the perceived disloyalty of the target in three studies (SS3, SS4, and SS7 in the online supplemental materials). Specifically, participants indicated the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with two statements averaged into a disloyalty index ("John is loyal to his political party" (reverse coded); "John might leave his political party and switch sides"). Next, we ran a mediation analysis with receptiveness as the independent variable, perceived disloyalty as the mediator, and attitudes as the dependent variable. The group disloyalty account would predict a negative indirect effect. Receptive targets would be perceived as more disloyal, and disloyalty would be negatively correlated with attitudes toward the target.

We found mixed empirical support for this account. In SS3 in the online supplemental materials, perceived disloyalty had a negative indirect effect (indirect effect: −.25, 95% CI [−0.39, −0.11]). However, in SS7 in the online supplemental materials, this indirect effect was positive and nonsignificant (indirect effect: .038, 95% CI [−0.080, 0.16]). In SS4 in the online supplemental materials, the effect was negative, but nonsignificant (indirect effect: −.058, 95% CI [−0.13, 0.013]). In sum, sometimes the indirect effect was positive, and other times it was negative. Sometimes the indirect effect was significant, and other times it was nonsignificant. Thus, we were unable to find consistent support for a loyalty account. This is consistent with findings highlighting that outgroup animosity plays a larger role in American political interactions than ingroup loyalty (Abramowitz & Webster, 2018; Dimant, 2024; Rathje et al., 2021).

Concerns About Attitude Change

A similar alternative account relates to concerns about attitude change. Receptiveness could be seen as a signal that one is willing to change their mind and adopt opposing views, and this could be viewed negatively by partisans. We assessed this account in SS3, SS4, and SS7 in the online supplemental materials by capturing participants' concerns about the target adopting opposing views (e.g., "John might change his mind on the topic of [topic of vignette; e.g., immigration]"; "John's opinions on [topic of vignette] might change"). Next, we ran a mediation analysis with receptiveness as the independent variable, perceived attitude change as the mediator, and overall impressions as the dependent variable. This account predicted a negative indirect effect. Receptive targets would be perceived as more likely to change their mind and changing one's mind on a political issue would lead to negative attitudes toward the target.

We found mixed empirical support for this account as well. In SS3 in the online supplemental materials, perceived attitude change had a positive and significant indirect effect (indirect effect: .19, 95% CI [0.022, 0.36]). In SS7 in the online supplemental materials, the indirect effect was negative and significant (indirect effect: −.53, 95% CI [−0.88, −0.20]), and, in SS4 in the online supplemental materials, the effect was negative, but nonsignificant (indirect effect: −.083, 95% CI [−0.20, 0.023]). In short, we were unable to find consistent support for this account.

Concerns About Constant Exposure to Problematic Ideas

Another potential reason behind the costs of receptiveness is that receptive targets might be seen as exposing themselves to a litany of seemingly problematic views. Whereas people may be accepting of receptiveness toward opposing views on one or two issues, receptiveness to a constant stream of opposing views could be seen as unacceptable. This account suggests that receptiveness should only have costs when receptiveness involves constant exposure to seemingly problematic views (e.g., following someone on social media). However, if receptiveness is more limited in scope, then it should no longer involve reputational costs.

Evidence against this account comes from SS4 in the online supplemental materials. In SS4 in the online supplemental materials, receptiveness was operationalized as reading a single article. Reading a single article seems less likely to evoke concerns about constant exposure to seemingly problematic views. Hence, this perspective would predict that receptiveness should no longer lead to reputational costs. In contrast to this prediction, we found that even when receptiveness was operationalized as reading a single online article, it led to reputational costs. Our studies provide evidence against this account.

Reconciling Past and Current Findings

Why do the current results differ from past findings? In Study 3, we demonstrated that specifying the partisan identity of the source can reverse the benefits of receptiveness and turn them into costs. This likely provides much of the explanation for the discrepancy with past work. In addition, two other factors could play a role. First, in Study 3, we found that, when the partisan identity of the source was absent, the majority of participants did not consider the source. Even among the minority of participants who took the source into account, most reported in-party sources or sources whose partisan identity was unknown. That is, even when participants considered the source, the majority conjured up sources who belonged to their own political party or sources whose partisan identity was unknown. Thus, the lack of costs in past research could be attributed to the failure to account for the source and their partisan affiliation.

Second, in Study 4, we found a curious pattern. Recall that in Study 4, participants were randomly assigned to an in-party source, an out-party source, or a source whose partisan identity was unknown; In addition to reporting their attitudes toward the target, participants also reported their perceptions of the source. We found that when the partisan identity of the source was unknown (as was the case in past research), perceptions of the source differed as a function of the target's receptiveness. Participants found the source to be more competent, $\beta = -.45$, $t(394) = -3.75$, $p < .001$, and warmer, $\beta = -.30$, $t(397) = -2.56$, $p = .011$, when the target was receptive (vs. unreceptive). Ex ante, one would expect no differences in perceptions of the source as a function of the target's receptiveness. However, participants appeared to use the target's receptiveness as a signal about the source: Thus, another reason for differences between the current

and past research is that in past research participants might have relied on target receptiveness as a signal that the source is someone who is reasonable and worth listening to.

Open Questions and Future Directions

We now turn to addressing some remaining questions that relate to the current findings, as well as promising directions for future work.

Costs of Receptiveness or Benefits of Unreceptiveness?

Are the observed effects driven by costs associated with receptiveness, benefits associated with unreceptiveness, or both? In SS5 in the online supplemental materials, we added a pure control condition in which participants only learned that the target shared their views on a social issue. We found that receptive targets were evaluated more negatively than targets in both the unreceptive, $\beta = -.88$, $t(569) = -4.72$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.48$, and control, $\beta = -.97$, $t(569) = -5.66$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.58$, conditions. Moreover, there was no significant difference in attitudes between the control and the unreceptive conditions, $\beta = .092$, $t(569) = .55$, $p = .58$, $d = 0.057$. This suggests that the observed effects are driven by costs associated with receptiveness.

Downstream Consequences

Although not the focus of the current research, we also investigate downstream consequences of the costs of receptiveness. In SS4 in the online supplemental materials, we measured two downstream consequences: (a) interest in discussing politics with the target and (b) collaboration intentions (e.g., whether participants wanted the target to be on their team at work). We found that the negative attitudes toward the receptive target translated to these two sets of measures. Moreover, in SS6 in the online supplemental materials, we captured the consequences of receptiveness using a behavioral measure: the popularity of online comments on social media. We found that receptiveness to out-party sources decreased the popularity of online comments scraped from Reddit. Together, these results indicate that the reputational costs of receptiveness are consequential, affecting outcomes ranging from the number of likes to collaboration intentions. What other downstream consequences might these costs have? For instance, could observing receptiveness to out-party sources energize observers to advocate for their side? Future research investigating additional downstream consequences, such as attitudinal advocacy (Hussein & Tormala, 2023), would be worthwhile.

Different Person Perception Dimensions in Different Domains

Across our studies, we found evidence that immorality plays a pivotal role in determining whether receptiveness to opposing political views leads to reputational costs or benefits. Beyond immorality, when might the perceived competence or warmth of the source determine the reputational consequences of receptiveness? For instance, consider a target who was found to be receptive to a moral and warm, but incompetent medical speaker, might we observe costs of receptiveness under such conditions as well? It seems plausible that in the medical domain, competence would determine whether receptiveness leads to benefits or costs. We hope future research extends the current results to new domains outside of politics. Investigating the relative importance different source perceptions (immorality, competence, warmth) play in determining the consequences of receptiveness across domains would be worthwhile.

Different Types of Immorality

Need the source's immorality be tied to politics or could the costs of receptiveness emerge if the source was immoral for nonpolitical reasons? Our view is that if the source is seen as immoral, receptiveness to their ideas would carry reputational costs. For instance, if a colleague at work regularly lies or sabotages others, receptiveness to their ideas might carry reputational costs. Future work looking into this possibility would be worthwhile.

Symmetry Across Party Lines

Our results allow us to address whether the costs-of-receptiveness effect is symmetric. Our theoretical account predicts that it would be; after all, out-party hate is displayed equally by members of both parties (Finkel et al., 2020). Indeed, we found the costs-of-receptiveness effect among both Democrats and Republicans in 11 of our 13 experiments (see AASPL in the online supplemental materials).

Prototypicality and Ideological Extremity

We have found that the reputational costs of receptiveness are attenuated when the source is nonprototypical. In Study 5, we used tweets that varied in the extent to which ingroup members thought they reflected their group's prototypical views. The careful reader will notice that the tweets seen by the ingroup as highly prototypical were more ideologically extreme than the tweets seen as less prototypical. Perceived ideological extremity and prototypicality are correlated, and people may use one variable to infer the other even when such inferences are not merited. Even so, we suggest that the perceived ideological extremity of the source cannot alone explain all effects documented in the current research.

As described in the introduction, perceivers do not rely solely on ideological extremity to make inferences about prototypicality. In Study 6, we used lifestyle attributes (e.g., place of residence, musical preferences, dietary choices) as a manipulation of prototypicality. Even though this manipulation held the ideological extremity of the source constant, it too affected the reputational costs of receptiveness. Nevertheless, it is possible that participants in this study drew the inference that the more prototypical sources were more extreme.

However, Study 4 shows that receptiveness to the exact same ideological stance is viewed differently depending on the source's identity. In other words, holding the ideological extremity of the source constant (by holding constant their views), the identity of the source affected whether receptiveness had costs or benefits. If the effects were solely due to the ideological extremity of the source's views, removing the identity of the source should have had no effect. In other words, we should have found costs to receptiveness in the no identity condition. In contrast, we found that an outgroup source was necessary for the costs of receptiveness to emerge. Taken together, these results suggest that the reputational costs of receptiveness we document are not attributable to a dislike of those receptive to extreme views per se, but rather, of those receptive to prototypical outgroup sources.

Individuating or Humanizing Information

Another open question relates to how the current results would change if individuating information about the source were included. For instance, if the social media profile contained not only political opinions but also personal information that could humanize the source. Our view is that factors that attenuate the reliance on stereotypes would attenuate the costs-of-receptiveness effect, and humanizing information is one such factor (Rubinstein et al., 2018).

To test this possibility, we ran a 2 (receptive vs. unreceptive) × 2 (control vs. individuating information) between-participants study (see SS9 in the online supplemental materials for details). In addition to varying target receptiveness, we varied whether the source's social media profile only contained political posts or contained both political posts as well as humanizing posts (e.g., what they had for lunch, what books they recently read, how they had fun at a local parade, and how they enjoyed an evening walk). We found a marginally significant interaction, $\beta = .50$, $t(590) = 1.91$, $p = .056$. In both conditions, receptiveness led to reputational costs, but it did so to a lesser extent when humanizing posts were included, $\beta = -.87$, $t(294) = -4.78$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.56$, compared to only political ones, $\beta = -1.38$, $t(296) = -7.21$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.84$. This suggests that one way to mitigate the costs of receptiveness would be to humanize out-party sources.

Cross-Party Contact

The current results demonstrate that exposing oneself to and being open-minded to information from out-party sources is seen as socially unacceptable. This result joins a small but growing literature on the reputational consequences of interacting with out-party sources (Frimer & Skitka, 2018; Ryan, 2017). This literature begs the following questions: what forms of social interactions with out-party members are seen as acceptable? What forms are frowned upon? For instance, how do people react to fellow in-party members who marry out-partisans? What about those who have productive working relationships with out-partisans? Answering these questions could mark a substantial advance in our understanding of the state of cross-party relations.

Information Consumption and Impression Formation

Our findings speak to how people's information consumption habits impact the impressions others form of them. Historically, information consumption was inconspicuous; with the proliferation of social media, however, information consumption is increasingly easy to observe. For instance, on Facebook, people share news articles they read and, on X (formerly Twitter), people can see which accounts others follow. In the current research, we investigated how the identity of the source behind the information impacted attitudes toward the person consuming such information. Beyond source identity, examining the reputational consequences of different types of information consumption habits is an area ripe for further research. For instance, might the type of information people consume—data and statistics versus personal facts (Kubin et al., 2021)—influence the reputational consequences of information consumption?

Constraints on Generality

Our theorizing focused on studying the reputational costs of receptiveness in the context of U.S. politics. To ensure that the target population matched this theorizing, many of our studies recruited nationally representative samples. These samples were matched to the U.S. census on race, gender, age, and geographic distribution. Beyond the United States, we hope future work will examine how the current results differ across contexts. For instance, other countries have lower levels of polarization than the United States. Might the current results change in such contexts? It would be worthwhile to expand the current results to additional contexts and target populations.

Conclusion

Policymakers, pundits, and academics regularly encourage Americans to become more receptive to opposing political views. Indeed, past research highlights the social benefits of receptiveness to opposing views. Findings from past research suggest that everyday individuals stand to benefit reputationally from sharing their receptiveness efforts with others. Yet, these findings seem at odds with today's polarized world. In the current research, we reconcile this seeming contradiction by examining how the identity of the source to which one is receptive determines whether receptiveness has reputational benefits or costs.

In seven main and nine supplemental studies, we find that receptiveness to out-party sources leads to reputational costs. We provide evidence that perceptions of the out-party as immoral drive this effect, and we demonstrate its robustness across various factors including the identity of the source, the way receptiveness is expressed, and the political issue under consideration. These findings offer a new direction for receptiveness research, where the focus has been on understanding the benefits of receptiveness. A well-functioning democracy demands from its citizens a willingness to engage with people they disagree with, but our results indicate such receptiveness comes with reputational costs. These costs may, in part, explain increasing levels of polarization in modern society. Understanding these reputational costs and their role as barriers to receptiveness is a first but crucial step toward coming up with novel interventions to address the pervasive lack of cross-party openness and political polarization.

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