Online Appendix for: Affective polarization did not increase during the COVID-19 pandemic

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Potential Mechanisms

Heterogeneity in affective polarization within existing survey data and our own experiment provides suggestive evidence of possible mechanisms through which COVID-19 events might have decreased affective polarization.[1]

Scholars have demonstrated a close connection between an individual's identity and her level of affective polarization. American identity can mitigate affective polarization by detracting from partisan identities (e.g., Levendusky 2018; Levendusky 2020), and the alignment of multiple social identities (religious, racial, gender, and partisan) is one hypothesis for growing affective polarization in the United States (e.g., Mason 2016). While Online Appendix Table 2 shows that an index measuring strength of identity is positively correlated (β = 17.17; state clustered se = 2.64) with affective polarization cross-sectionally across respondents in the Nationscape data, we find no evidence that strength of identity changed significantly with the onset of the pandemic (Online Appendix Figure 4 and Online Appendix Table 1). In Online Appendix Figure 4 and Online Appendix Table 1, we also show that neither American identity nor partisan identity exhibit significant individual changes with the onset of the pandemic, and, if anything, American identity weakens over time. This is consistent with West and Iyengar's (2020) finding that affective polarization may be distinct from the salience of partisan identity.

On the other hand, Americans could be united by a common bond or experience (i.e., an external threat) without shifting the value they place across labeled identities. Consistent with a shared experience mentality reducing affective polarization, Online Appendix Table 2 shows that affective polarization is negatively correlated with a respondent's concern about the pandemic in the Nationscape data (β = -9.41; state clustered se = 1.41). See also Online Appendix Table 4.

Similarly, personal experiences may counter one's partisan perspective (e.g., Lerman and McCabe 2017; Druckman et al. 2021). Online Appendix Table 2 shows that respondents in the Nationscape data who had greater exposure to the virus (determined by whether they or members of their network got sick) typically exhibit significantly lower levels of affective polarization (β = -14.90; state clustered se = 1.20).

State-level policy, partisanship, and COVID-19 prevalence may also mediate the observed decline in affective polarization. Online Appendix Table 3 shows no significant correlation of state-level COVID-19 prevalence with partisan affective polarization in the Nationscape data on average across respondents (see also Online Appendix Figure 5). There is, however, some evidence of a correlation between state-

[1]Other data sources used in this section include state name data downloaded from https://raw.githubusercontent.com/jasonong/List-of-US-States/master/states.csv on May 10, 2021; state adult population data downloaded from https://www.census.gov/data/datasets/time-series/demo/popest/2010s-state-detail.html#par_textimage on May 11, 2021; state-level stay-at-home orders taken from https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/us/coronavirus-stay-at-home-order.html on May 10, 2021; and state-level COVID-19 case and death data from *The New York Times* (2021).

level COVID-19 prevalence and the extent to which Republican respondents have depolarized relative to Democratic respondents. With regards to stay-at-home orders, Online Appendix Figure 6 reports estimates of an event-study specification of state-level stay-at-home orders on affective polarization using the Nationscape data and finds little evidence that stay-at-home policies had a significant effect on polarization. Lastly, Online Appendix Figure 7 shows no clear differences in trends between Republican-leaning states and Democratic-leaning states.

Another potential mechanism is through shifts in news consumption. Increased exposure to cross-cutting news sources as well as local news sources has been shown to decrease polarization (e.g., Garrett et al. 2014; Darr et al. 2018; Levy 2020). In Online Appendix Figure 4, we use the Nationscape data to show that the number of news outlets used by respondents—a proxy for news diversity—increased significantly upon the report of the first COVID-19-related death. After spiking with the first COVID-19-related death, the number of news outlets slowly declined to be insignificantly different from pre-pandemic levels by the time of George Floyd's death (see Online Appendix Figure 4 and Online Appendix Table 1). Online Appendix Table 2 shows that the number of news outlets used is negatively correlated (β = -10.88; state clustered se = 1.30) with affective polarization cross-sectionally across respondents.

All of these results are correlational based on rough proxies for mechanisms. They do, however, provide a baseline for future work to explore how people process crises in ways that impact polarization.

Additional References

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Supporting Tables and Figures

Online Appendix Table 1: P-values for Changes in Time Series

	(1) Change After COVID-19 Onset		(2) Change After George Floyd's Murder	
Partisans (Nationscape)	-3.199	[0.006]	2.640	[0.017]
Congressmembers (Nationscape)	-2.143	[0.097]		
Parties (Druckman et al. 2020)	0.297	[0.763]		
Trump Feelings (Nationscape)	-4.453	[0.005]	1.688	[0.265]
Trump Approval (Nationscape)	-5.082	[0.001]	3.341	[0.028]
Trump Feelings (ANES)	-12.814	[0.000]	10.410	[0.000]
Partisans (Nationscape), Own Party	-1.955	[0.007]	0.336	[0.630]
Partisans (Nationscape), Other Party	1.416	[0.083]	-2.482	[0.001]
Partisans (Nationscape), Rep. Resp.	-4.719	[0.005]	3.145	[0.054]
Partisans (Nationscape), Dem. Resp.	-1.930	[0.220]	2.267	[0.130]
Partisans (Nationscape), Own Party & Rep. Resp.	-3.392	[0.001]	1.157	[0.262]
Partisans (Nationscape), Own Party & Dem. Resp.	-0.772	[0.440]	-0.304	[0.748]
Partisans (Nationscape), Other Party & Rep. Resp.	1.449	[0.219]	-2.160	[0.057]
Partisans (Nationscape), Other Party & Dem. Resp.	1.390	[0.218]	-2.766	[0.010]
News Index (Nationscape)	0.006	[0.266]	-0.005	[0.361]
Identity Index (Nationscape)	-0.011	[0.124]	0.010	[0.098]
Partisan Identity (Nationscape)	-0.005	[0.625]	0.011	[0.285]
American Identity (Nationscape)	-0.013	[0.170]	-0.007	[0.401]

Note: Table shows the estimated change and associated p-value for our measures of affective polarization and some potential mechanisms with the onset of the coronavirus pandemic and the aftermath of George Floyd's murder. The change after COVID-19 onset is between the last observed period prior to the first reported COVID-19 death in the US (February 29, 2020) and the last observed period prior to George Floyd's murder (May 25, 2020) for each series respectively. When it is well-defined, the change after George Floyd is between the last observed period prior to George Floyd's murder (May 25, 2020) and the last observed period for each series respectively. The p-values (in brackets) are implemented by testing for a difference in the respective coefficients from a weighted OLS regression of the respective variables on indicators for each period (without a constant term) using robust standard errors.

Online Appendix Table 2: Mechanisms – Nationscape Data

	Dependent Variable: Partisan Affective Polarization									
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
News Index	-14.40	-10.88								
	(1.73)	(1.30)								
Identity Index			19.30	17.17						
			(2.78)	(2.64)						
COVID-19 Concern					-3.01	-9.41				
					(1.61)	(1.41)				
Sick Index							-21.31	-14.90		
							(1.19)	(1.20)		
Sick (Self)									-25.13	-21.13
									(1.27)	(1.14)
Sick (Family)									-2.40	-2.32
									(1.41)	(1.43)
Sick (Work)									-5.10	-2.66
									(0.99)	(1.05)
Sick (Other)									1.06	1.64
									(0.57)	(0.54)
Clusters	51	51	51	51	51	51	51	51	51	51
Observations	242849	242849	23167	23167	70052	70052	70596	70596	70596	70596
Controls		Y		Y		Y		Y		Y

Note: Table shows estimates from weighted OLS regressions of various variables on the measure of partisan affective polarization (Panel A of Figure 3) in the Nationscape data. All listed independent variables range from 0 to 1. 'News Index' is the number of news outlet categories reportedly used by the respondent divided by twelve (the number of potential categories). 'Identity Index' is the sum of reported identity strength across six identities rescaled to range between 0 and 1. 'COVID-19 Concern' is a four-point measure of degree of concern about the COVID-19 pandemic rescaled to range between 0 and 1. 'Sick (X)' are indicators for whether oneself, a family member, a colleague at work, or some other member of one's personal network got sick from the coronavirus. 'Sick Index' is the sum across the four sick indicators divided by four. All regressions include state fixed effects and date fixed effects. Controls include party indicators, education category indicators, racial category indicators, Hispanic category indicators, gender indicators, and age. Sample is restricted to partisans with valid affect scores. Standard errors clustered by state are reported in parentheses.

Online Appendix Table 3: Mechanisms – Nationscape Data and State COVID-19 Cases

	Dependent Variable: Partisan Affective Polarization								
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)		(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
Log Cases	-0.00	0.15	0.04	0.18	Log Deaths	0.05	0.18	0.13	0.24
	(0.26)	(0.24)	(0.25)	(0.24)		(0.24)	(0.22)	(0.23)	(0.21)
Log Cases ×			-0.17	-0.12	Log Deaths ×			-0.29	-0.22
Republican			(0.09)	(0.08)	Republican			(0.11)	(0.11)
Republican			-0.38	-2.07	Republican			-0.33	-2.01
			(0.85)	(0.84)				(0.88)	(0.87)
Clusters	51	51	51	51		51	51	51	51
Observations	242849	242849	242849	242849		242849	242849	242849	242849
Controls		Y		Y			Y		Y

Note: Table shows estimates from weighted OLS regressions of various variables on the measure of partisan affective polarization (Panel A of Figure 3) in the Nationscape data. 'Log Cases' ('Log Deaths') is the log of one plus the cumulative number of coronavirus cases (deaths) reported in the respondent's state on the date of the interview according to *The New York Times* (2021). All regressions include state fixed effects and date fixed effects. Controls include party indicators, education category indicators, racial category indicators, Hispanic category indicators, gender indicators, and age. Sample is restricted to partisans with valid affect scores. Standard errors clustered by state are reported in parentheses.

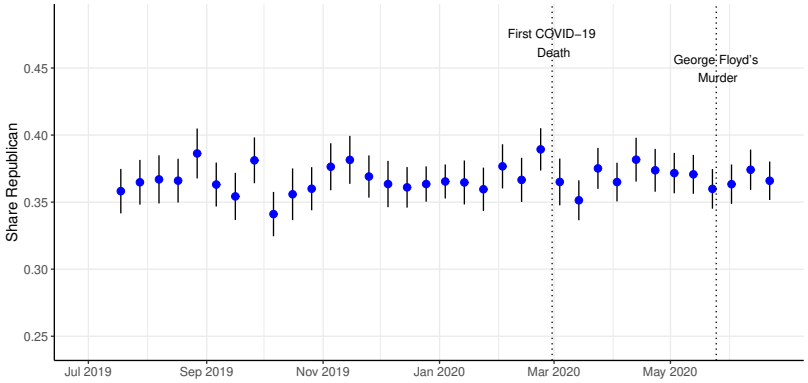
Online Appendix Table 4: Mechanisms – Druckman et al. (2020) and Experiment

	Dependent Variable: Partisan Affective Polarization Index							
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Degree of Faith	-8.43	-5.97	-7.86	-4.98	-7.13	-4.30		
	(3.03)	(3.71)	(3.08)	(3.74)	(3.00)	(3.72)		
Express Confidence							-6.65	-4.31
							(3.79)	(2.14)
Express Prepared in Past							-5.27	-0.78
							(3.91)	(2.43)
Express Prepared for Future							5.97	5.27
							(4.61)	(2.60)
Observations	422	419	422	419	422	419	1072	1070
Controls		Y		Y		Y		Y

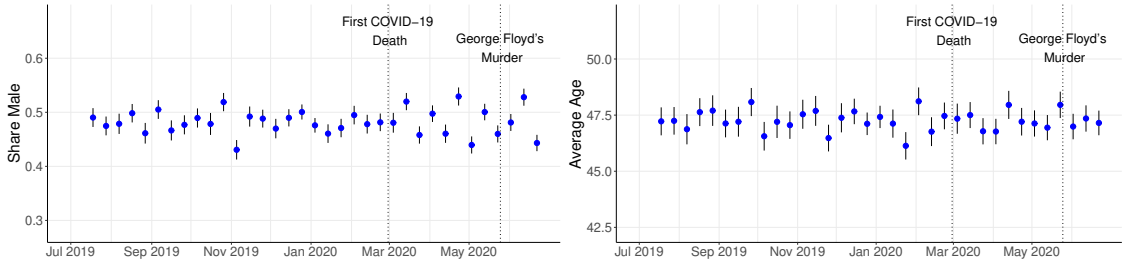
Note: Table shows estimates from OLS regressions of partisan affective polarization on views of the United States' COVID-19 response. Columns (1)-(6) use the index of affective polarization from our survey experiment and are restricted to observations in the COVID-19 treatment group. Columns (7) and (8) use the index of affective polarization from Druckman et al. (2020). The Druckman et al. (2020) data used in Columns (7) and (8) came from an experiment where one group was asked about confidence in the Trump administration and the other group was asked about confidence in the United States; our regressions only use the latter group. All listed independent variables range from 0 to 1. 'Degree of Faith' is a manual coding of the open-ended responses from our survey experiment, in which respondents were asked about their faith in the country's ability to address COVID-19 at the time of the initial outbreak. Responses expressing positive faith are recorded as 1, responses indicating a lack of faith are recorded as 0, and all other responses (including those that change from positive to negative faith) are recorded as 1/2. Columns (3) and (4) use codings from coder 1, who also coded faith in god as expressions of faith. Columns (5) and (6) use codings from coder 2, who did not code faith in god as expressions of faith. Columns (1) and (2) are from the combined codings where disagreements between coders 1 and 2 were settled by a third coder who did not code faith in god as an expression of faith. 'Express Confidence' is a four-point measure of the degree of confidence that the United States can limit the impact of COVID-19 in the next month. 'Express Prepared in Past' is a four-point measure of the degree of disagreement with the statement that the United States should have done more to prepare for the current COVID-19 outbreak; more positive values indicate greater disagreement with the need to have done more. 'Express Prepared for Future' is a similar four-point measure of disagreement with the statement that the United States should currently be doing more to prepare for the possibility of a new outbreak of COVID-19 in the fall. Controls include party indicators, education category indicators, racial category indicators, income category indicators, gender indicators, and age group indicators for all columns with controls. Columns (2), (4), and (6) also include state indicators as controls. Column (8) also includes the baseline measure of the index from July 2019 as a control for each participant. Sample is restricted to partisans with valid affect scores. Robust standard errors are reported in parentheses.

Online Appendix Figure 1: Examining Sample Composition, Trends in Respondent Demographics,

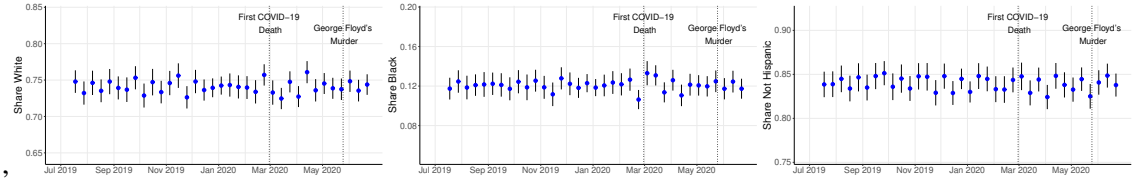
Panel A: Share Republican



Panel B: Gender and Age



Panel C: Race and Ethnicity



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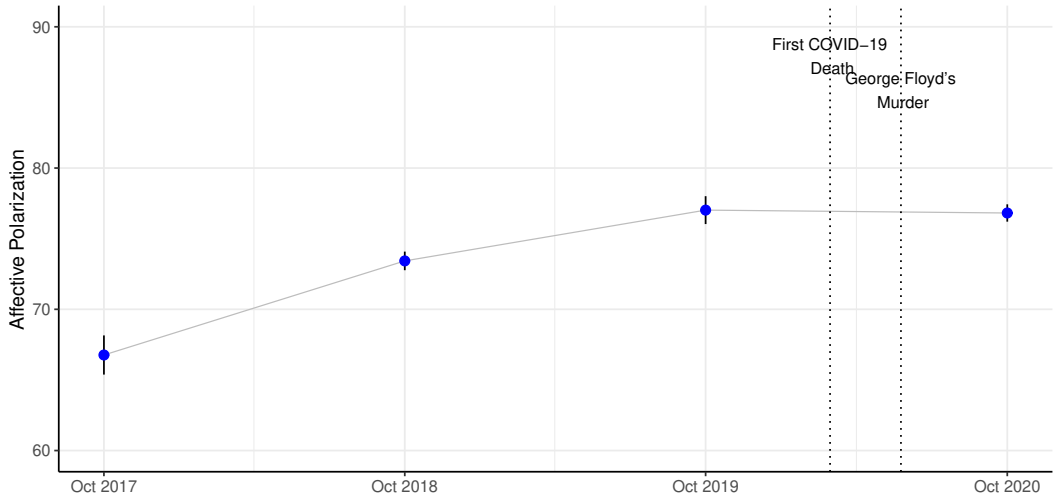
Note: Figure shows trends in various variables in the Nationscape data, including non-partisans. Panel A reports trends in the share of respondents identifying with the Republican Party for each ten-day period in the Nationscape data. Panel B reports trends in the share of respondents identifying as male (left) and the average age of respondents (right) for each ten-day period in the Nationscape data. Panel C reports trends in the share of respondents identifying as white (left), black (center), and non-hispanic (right) for each ten-day period in the Nationscape data. The first dashed vertical line indicates the date of the first COVID-19-related death reported in the U.S. The second dashed vertical line indicates the date on which George Floyd's murder occurred. The weighted means and their 95 percent confidence intervals come from a weighted OLS regression of the respective variables on indicators for each period (without a constant term) using robust standard errors.

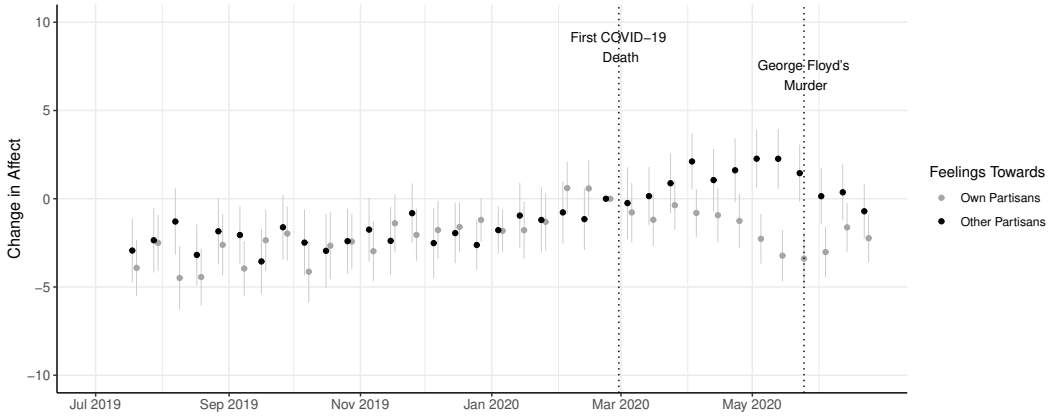
Online Appendix Figure 2: Trends in Partisan Approval Toward Trump, CCES



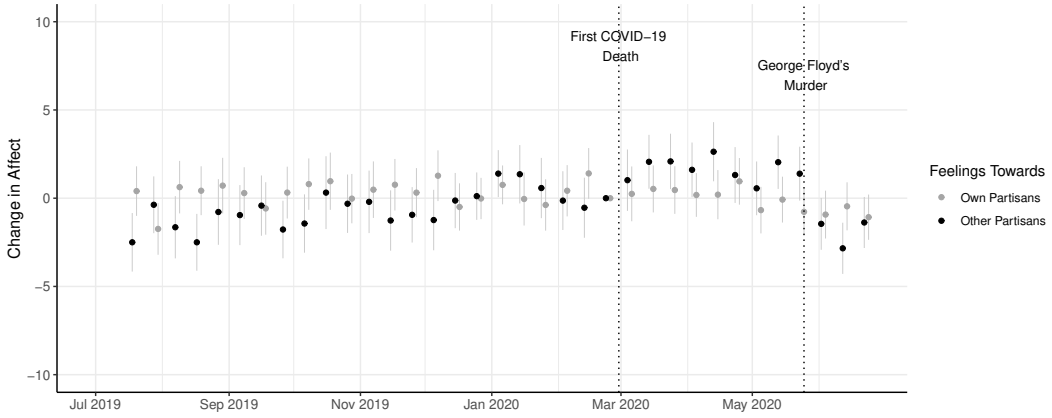
Note: Figure shows the trends in the difference (Republicans minus Democrats) in average presidential approval ratings for Donald Trump in data from the Cooperative Congressional Election Study. Surveys each year are conducted primarily in the fall, but are assigned to October of the year for plotting. The first dashed vertical line indicates the date of the first COVID-19-related death reported in the U.S. The second dashed vertical line indicates the date on which George Floyd's murder occurred. The weighted means and their 95 percent confidence intervals come from a weighted OLS regression of the respective variables on indicators for each period (without a constant term) using robust standard errors.

Online Appendix Figure 3: Trends in Affect Towards Own and Other Partisans, by Party

Panel A: Republican Respondents



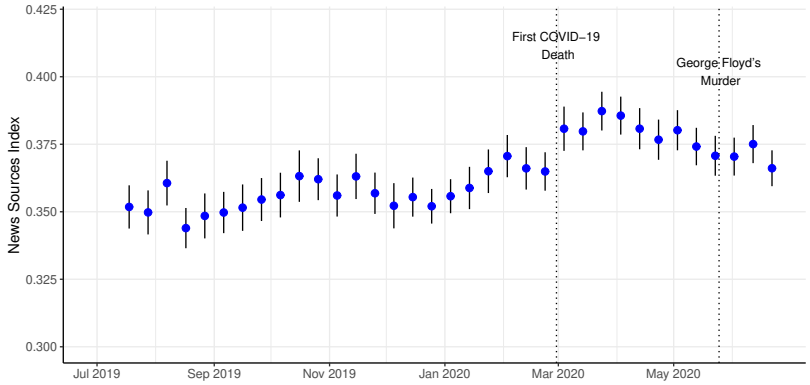
Panel B: Democratic Respondents



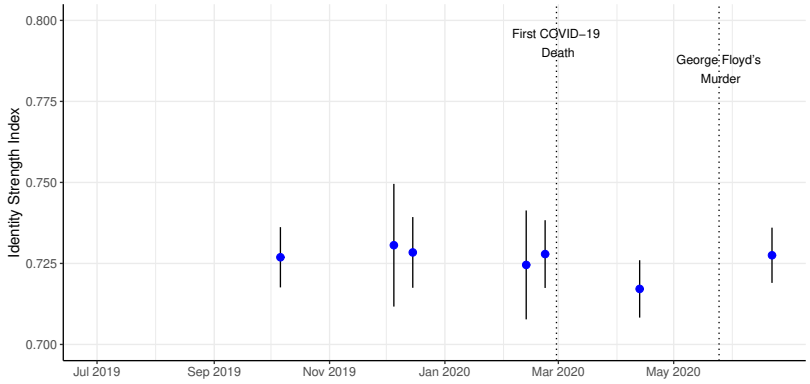
Note: Figure shows trends in affect towards other (black dots) and own (grey dots) partisans for each ten-day period in the Nationscape data as in Figure 5. The own party series is shifted forward by two days for visualization purposes. Both own and other party affect series are normalized to be zero for the period immediately prior to the first COVID-19 death reported in the U.S. (Feb 23, 2020). Panel A restricts attention to Republican respondents. Panel B restricts attention to Democratic respondents. The first dashed vertical line indicates the date of the first COVID-19-related death reported in the U.S. The second dashed vertical line indicates the date on which George Floyd's murder occurred. The weighted means and their 95 percent confidence intervals come from a weighted OLS regression of the respective variables on indicators for each period (without a constant term) using robust standard errors.

Online Appendix Figure 4: Trends in News Consumption and Identity

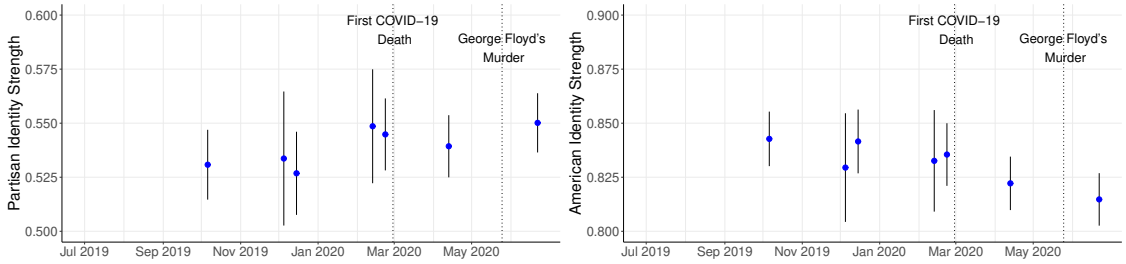
Panel A: News Index



Panel B: Identity Index

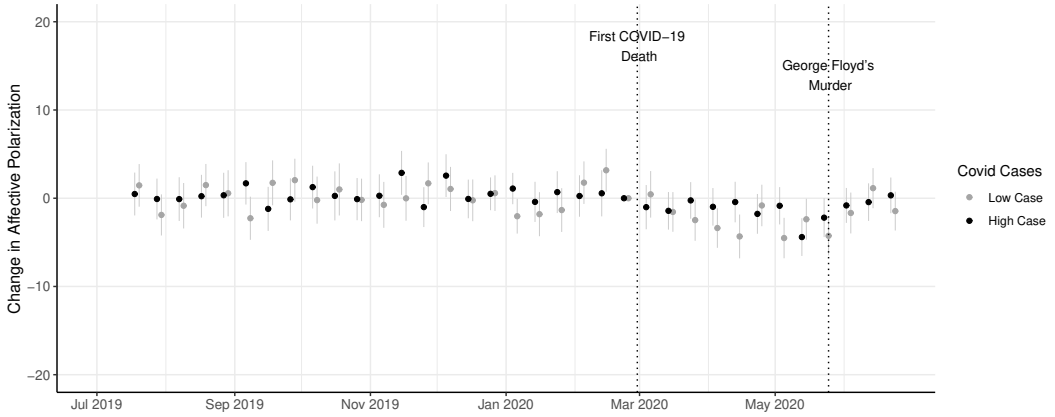


Panel C: Partisan and American Identities



Note: Figure shows trends in various variables in the Nationscape data. Panel A reports trends in a news consumption index for each ten-day period in the Nationscape data. The news consumption index is the number of news outlet categories reportedly used by the respondent divided by twelve (the number of potential categories). Panel B reports trends in an identity strength index for each ten-day period in the Nationscape data. The identity strength index is the sum of reported identity strength across six identities rescaled to range between 0 and 1. Panel C reports trends in partisan identity (left) and American identity (right) for each ten-day period in the Nationscape data. For the identity measures, a small number of observations (less than 100 each) from the October 16, 2019 and April 23, 2020 time periods are grouped with the October 6, 2019 and April 13, 2020 time periods respectively. The first dashed vertical line indicates the date of the first COVID-19-related death reported in the U.S. The second dashed vertical line indicates the date on which George Floyd's murder occurred. The weighted means and their 95 percent confidence intervals come from a weighted OLS regression of the respective variables on indicators for each period (without a constant term) using robust standard errors.

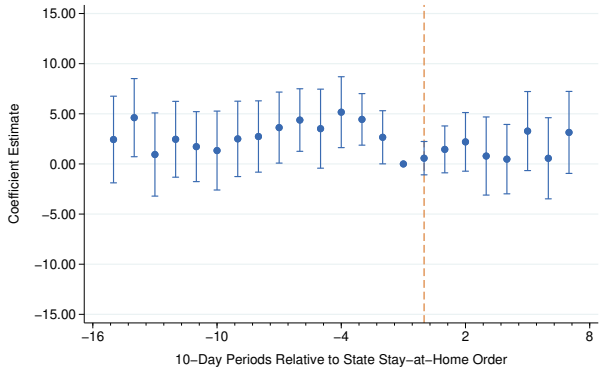
Online Appendix Figure 5: Trends in Affective Polarization by High- and Low-Case States



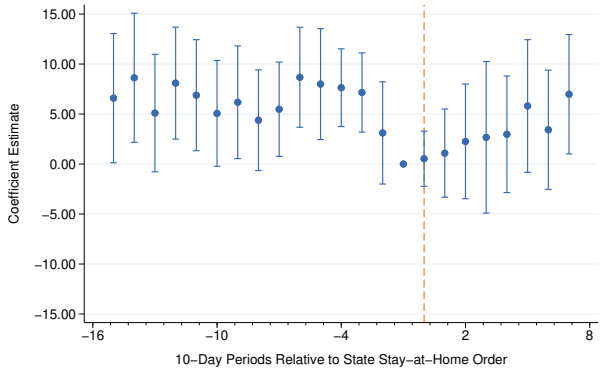
Note: Figure shows trends in affective polarization towards partisans for each ten-day period in the Nationscape data as in Panel A of Figure 3. These series are shown separately for states in which the number of COVID-19 cases per adult resident population as of March 31, 2020 is above (black dots) or below (grey dots) the adult resident population-weighted median across states. The low case series is shifted forward by two days for visualization purposes. Both polarization series are normalized to be zero for the period immediately prior to the first COVID-19 death reported in the U.S. (Feb 23, 2020). The first dashed vertical line indicates the date of the first COVID-19-related death reported in the U.S. The second dashed vertical line indicates the date on which George Floyd's murder occurred. The weighted means and their 95 percent confidence intervals come from a weighted OLS regression of the respective variables on indicators for each period (without a constant term) using robust standard errors.

Online Appendix Figure 6: Event Study Estimates of State Stay-at-Home Orders on Affective Polarization

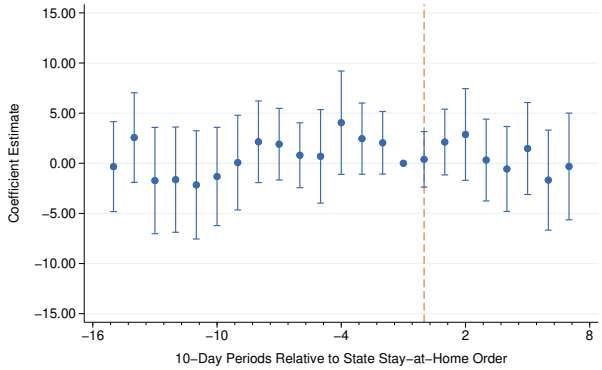
Panel A: All Respondents



Panel B: Republican Respondents



Panel C: Democratic Respondents



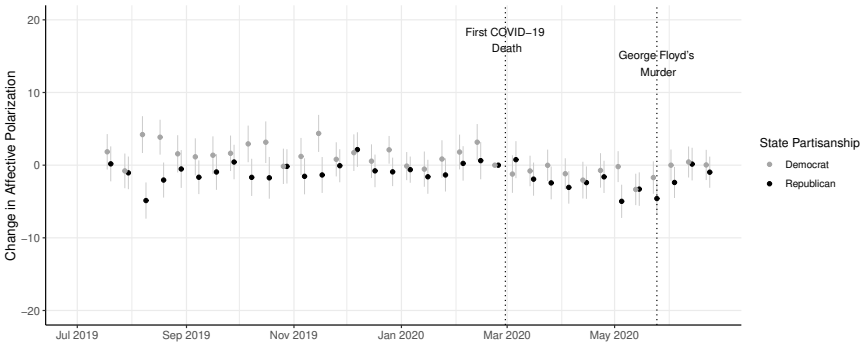
Note: Figure reports estimated coefficients $\hat{\omega}_k$ from the regression

$$\pi_{it} = \mu_i + \delta_t + \sum_{k=-16, k\neq 1}^{k=8} \omega_k \mathbf{1}_{\{t-T_i=k\}} + \varepsilon_{it}$$

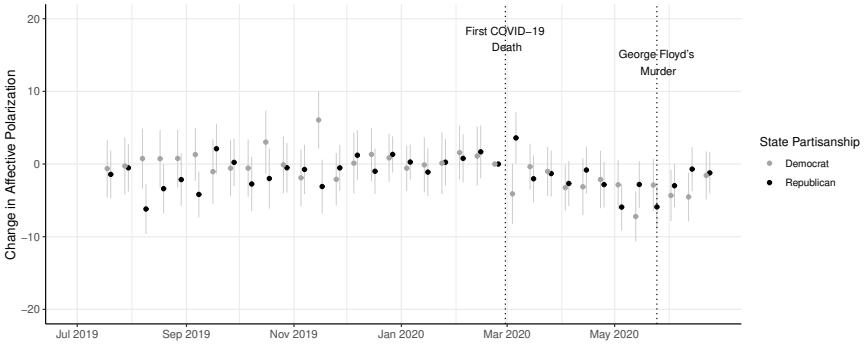
where π_{it} is the weighted average of the Nationscape measure of affective polarization in state s during the ten day period t (as in Panel A of Figure 3), μ_i is state fixed effect, δ_t is a calendar time fixed effect, and $\mathbf{1}_{\{t-T_i=k\}}$ is an indicator for periods relative to the state stay-at-home order T_i. States without a state-wide stay-at-home order are included as controls. States are weighted by their adult resident population. Periods before $k=-16$ and after $k=8$ are grouped with $k=-16$ and $k=8$ respectively and excluded from the plots. Panel A includes all partisan respondents. Panel B restricts attention to Republican respondents. Panel C restricts attention to Democratic respondents. 95 percent confidence intervals are displayed and standard errors are clustered at the state level.

Online Appendix Figure 7: Trends in Affect By Party and State Partisanship

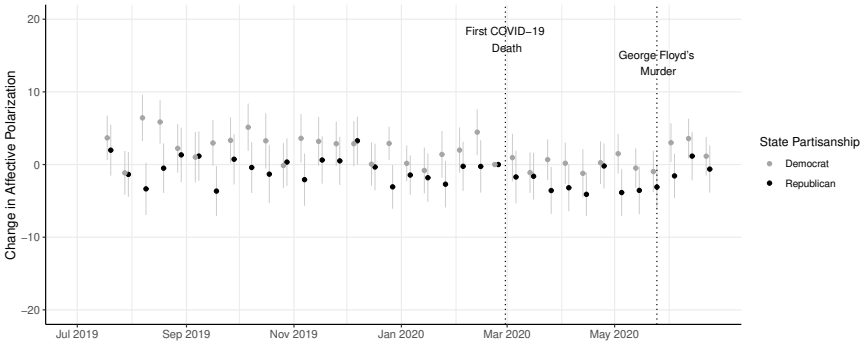
Panel A: All Respondents



Panel B: Republican Respondents



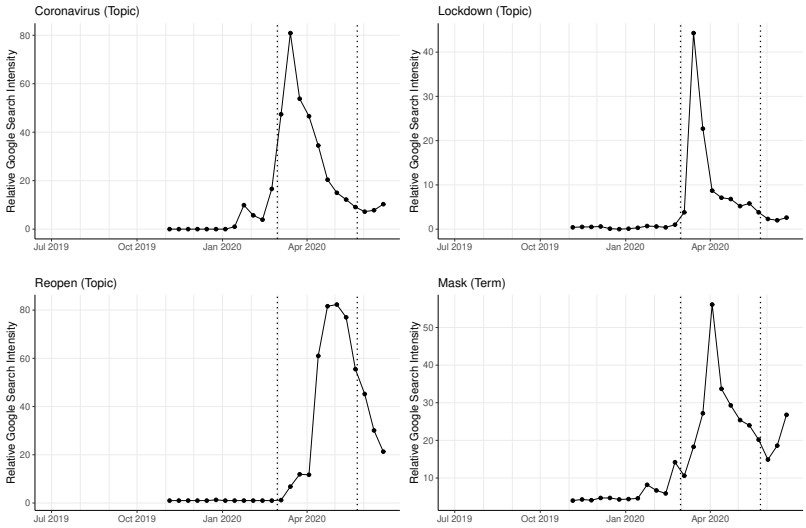
Panel C: Democratic Respondents



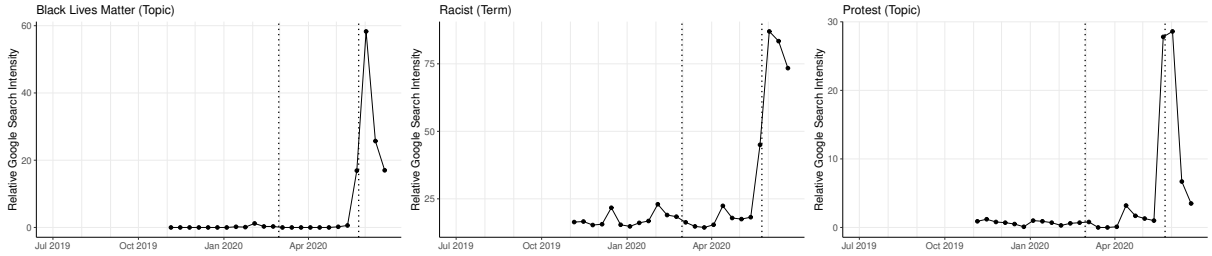
Note: Figure shows trends in affective polarization towards partisans for each ten-day period in the Nationscape data separately for Republican-leaning states (black dots) and Democratic-leaning states (grey dots) as in Panel A of Figure 3. The Republican-leaning state series is shifted forward by two days for visualization purposes. Both Republican-leaning and Democratic-leaning states series are normalized to be zero for the period immediately prior to the first COVID-19 death reported in the U.S. (Feb 23, 2020). Republican-leaning states are defined to be the states with above-median Republican presidential vote shares in the 2016 election using data from the MIT Election Data and Science Lab (2017) and weighted by Nationscape respondent weights. Panel A includes all partisan respondents. Panel B restricts attention to Republican respondents. Panel C restricts attention to Democratic respondents. The first dashed vertical line indicates the date of the first COVID-19-related death reported in the U.S. The second dashed vertical line indicates the date on which George Floyd's murder occurred. The weighted means and their 95 percent confidence intervals come from a weighted OLS regression of the respective variables on indicators for each period (without a constant term) using robust standard errors.

Online Appendix Figure 8: Google Trends for COVID-19, George Floyd, and Partisan Related Terms

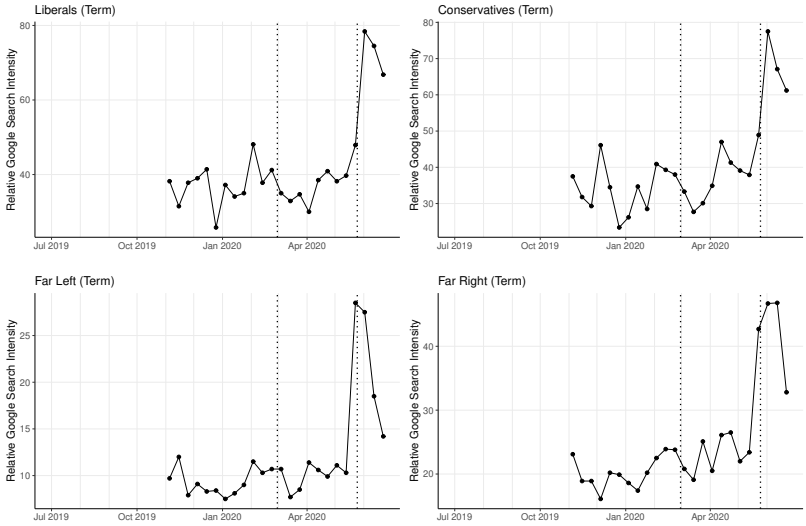
Panel A: COVID-19-Related Searches



Panel B: George Floyd-Related Searches

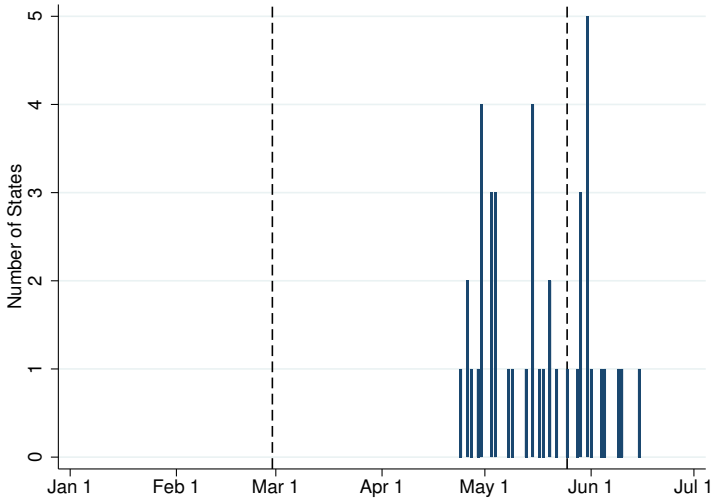


Panel C: Partisan-Related Searches



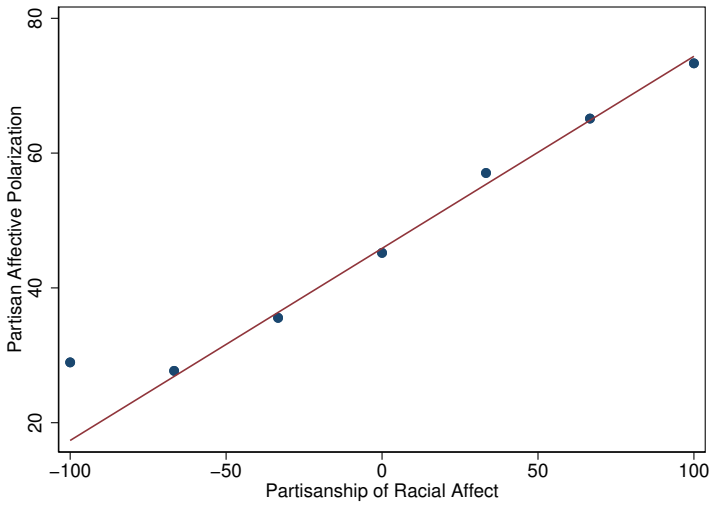
Note: Figure reports Google search trends for terms and topics related to COVID-19, George Floyd, and partisanship. Each term's search volume is indexed relative to the highest volume day between November 1, 2019 and July 1, 2020. The daily volume is then averaged over each ten day period. The first dashed vertical line indicates the date of the first COVID-19-related death reported in the U.S. The second dashed vertical line indicates the date on which George Floyd's murder occurred.

Online Appendix Figure 9: Timing of State Reopening Decisions



Note: Figure uses data from Allcott et al. (2020a) to show the distribution of reopening dates for states. The first dashed vertical line indicates the date of the first COVID-19-related death reported in the U.S. The second dashed vertical line indicates the date on which George Floyd's murder occurred.

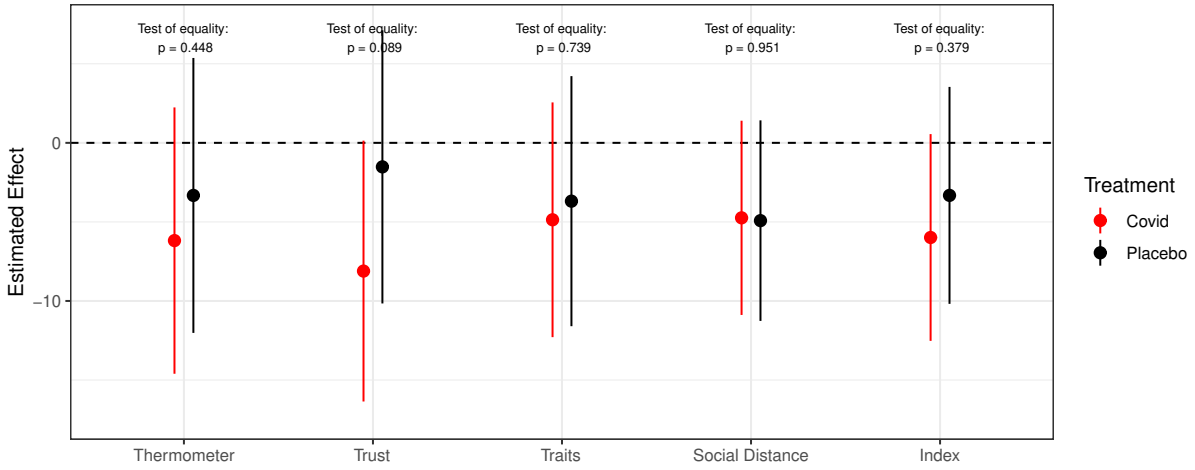
Online Appendix Figure 10: Racial Affect and Partisan Affect



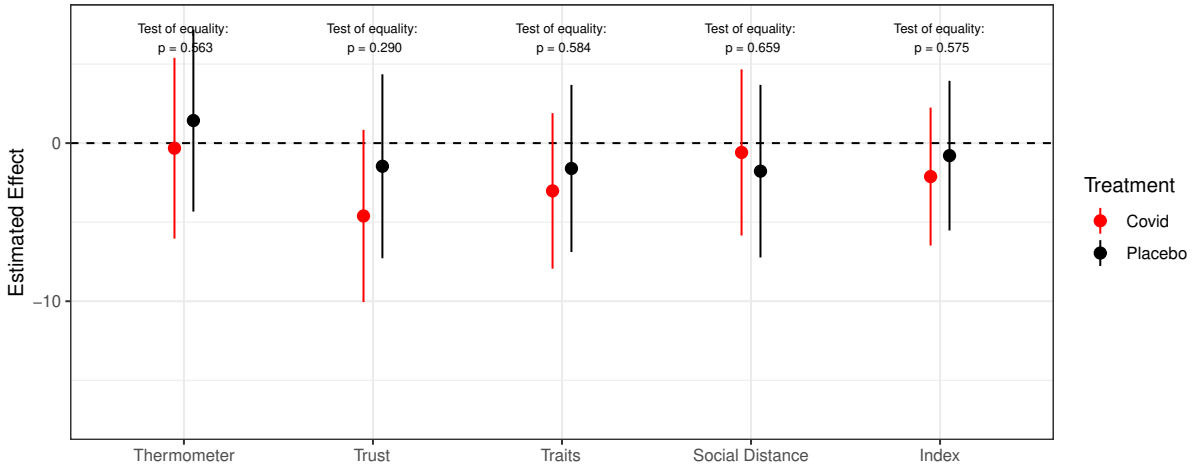
Note: Figure plots a weighted binscatter of the partisanship of racial affect and partisan affective polarization (as defined in Panel A of Figure 3 in the main text) across all respondents with valid responses to both. The partisanship of racial affect is defined as follows. First, for all Democrats, we compute affect towards Blacks minus affect towards Whites. Second, for all Republicans, we compute affect towards Whites minus affect towards Blacks.

Online Appendix Figure 11: Experimental Treatment Effects of Priming the Pandemic by Party, Affective Polarization

Panel A: Republican Respondents



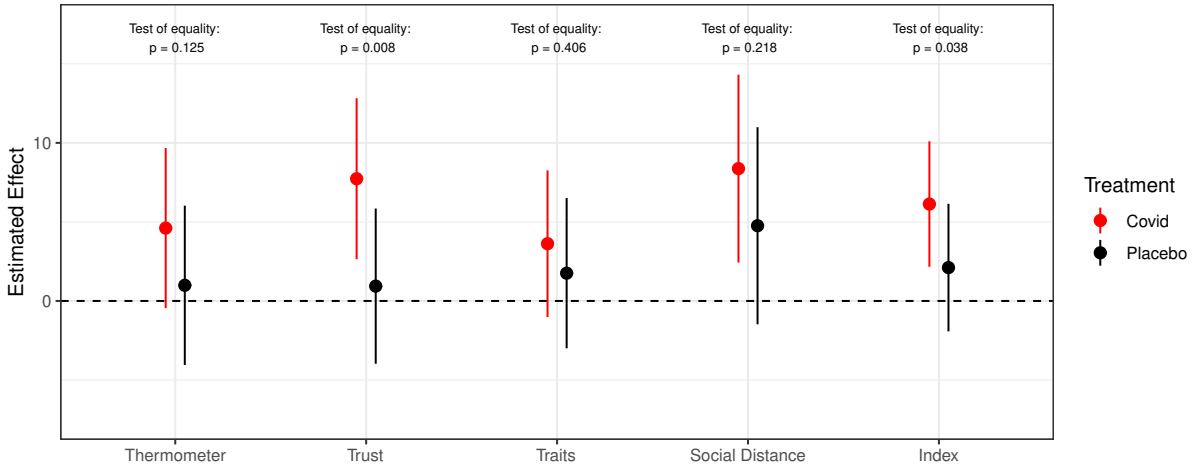
Panel B: Democratic Respondents



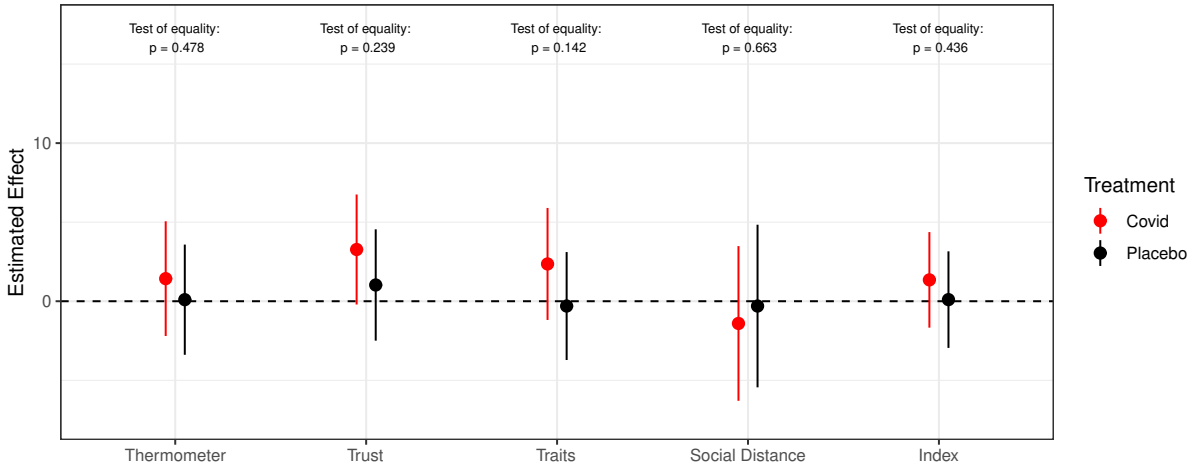
Note: Figure reports estimated treatment effects of the COVID-19 and placebo primes relative to the pure control group. Panel A reports estimates on measures of affective polarization (own party minus other party) after restricting to Republican respondents. Panel B is the same as Panel A, but restricts the sample to Democratic respondents. Both panels report estimates separately for each of four question categories (feelings thermometer; trust; perceived traits; and social distance) and for an index averaging across categories. The 95 percent confidence intervals are constructed using heteroskedastic robust standard errors. Above the bars, we report the p-value from a two-sided test of equality between the COVID-19 and placebo treatment effects using robust standard errors.

Online Appendix Figure 12: Experimental Treatment Effects of Priming the Pandemic by Party, Affect Towards Other Party

Panel A: Republican Respondents



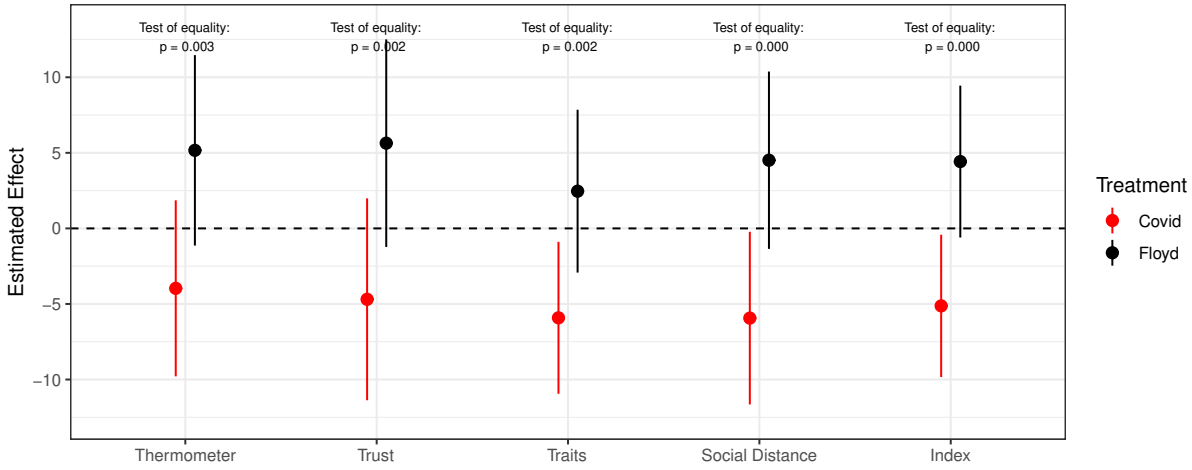
Panel B: Democratic Respondents



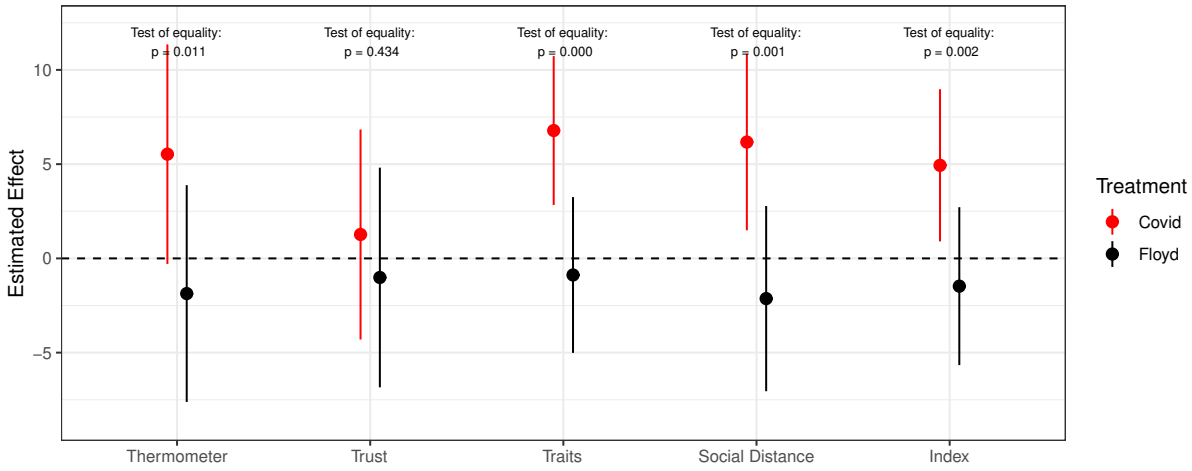
Note: Figure reports estimated treatment effects of the COVID-19 and placebo primes relative to the pure control group. Panel A reports estimates on measures of other party affect after restricting to Republican respondents. Panel B is the same as Panel A, but restricts the sample to Democratic respondents. Both panels report estimates separately for each of four question categories (feelings thermometer; trust; perceived traits; and social distance) and for an index averaging across categories. The 95 percent confidence intervals are constructed using heteroskedastic robust standard errors. Above the bars, we report the p-value from a two-sided test of equality between the COVID-19 and placebo treatment effects using robust standard errors.

Online Appendix Figure 13: Experimental Treatment Effects of Priming the Pandemic versus Priming George Floyd, Pilot Data

Panel A: Affective Polarization



Panel B: Affect Towards Other Party



Note: Figure reports estimated treatment effects of the coronavirus and George Floyd primes relative to the pure control group using our MTurk pilot data. Panel A reports estimates on measures of affective polarization (own party minus other party). Panel B reports estimates on measures of affect towards the other party. Both panels report estimates separately for each of four question categories (feelings thermometer; trust; perceived traits; and social distance) and for an index averaging across categories. The 95 percent confidence intervals are constructed using heteroskedastic robust standard errors. Above the bars, we report the p-value from a two-sided test of equality between the coronavirus and George Floyd treatment effects using robust standard errors.

Survey Experiment Instrument

This section provides the full text of our survey instrument.

<Demographic and Background Questions>

We are going to start by asking you some questions about your general attitudes and opinions.
Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Democrat, a Republican, an Independent, or what? *[Democrat; Republican; Independent; Some other party]*

<Page seen if Democrat or Republican>
Would you call yourself a strong <Democrat / Republican> or a not very strong <Democrat / Republican>? *[Strong; Not very strong]*

<Page seen if Independent>
If you had to choose, do you think of yourself as closer to the Democratic Party or the Republican Party? *[Closer to Democratic Party; Closer to Republican Party; Neither]*

Which point on this scale best describes your political views? *[Very liberal; Mostly liberal; Somewhat liberal; Moderate; Somewhat conservative; Mostly conservative; Very conservative]*

In general, how interested are you in politics? *[Not at all interested; Not too interested; Somewhat interested; Very interested; Extremely interested]*

What is the highest level of education you have completed? *[Less than high school; High school graduate; Some college; 4 year college degree; Advanced degree]*

What is your estimate of your family's annual household income (before taxes)? *[< $30,000; $30,000-$69,999; $70,000-$99,999; $100,000-$200,000; >$200,000]*

Which of the following do you consider to be your primary racial or ethnic group? Check all that apply. *[White; African; American; Asian; American; Hispanic or Latino; Native American; Other]*
<Question seen if Other> How would you describe your primary racial or ethnic group? *[Text free entry]*

Which of the following best describes your gender identity? *[Male; Female; Transgender; None of the categories offered]*

What is your age? *[Under 18; 18-24; 25-34; 35-50; 51-65; Over 65]*

In what state do you currently live? *[Drop-down list of 50 states and Washington D.C.]*

Last spring, on average, how many days a week did you read/listen/watch news about COVID-19? *[Never; 1 day/week; 2 days/week; 3 days/week; 4 days/week; 5 days/week; 6 days/week; Every day]*

Last winter, on average, how many days a week did you read/listen/watch news about Prince Harry and Meghan Markle's separation from the royal family? *[Never; 1 day/week; 2 days/week; 3 days/week; 4 days/week; 5 days/week; 6 days/week; Every day]*

This is a question to just make sure you are paying attention. Please choose option C below, regardless of the actual answer. *[A. I am enjoying this survey.; B. I do a lot of surveys.; C. I have not done many surveys.; D. None of the above.]*

*<**Randomized Priming and Reflection Tasks**>*

<Each respondent is randomly assigned to one of three conditions>

<Pages seen if randomly assigned to condition 1 (Covid Prime)>

We are going to ask how you felt about COVID-19 last spring. We also will ask you to read news articles from last spring.

<Page Break>

COVID-19 swept across the United States last March and April, leading states to issue stay-at-home orders. To remind you of ongoing events during this time we are next re-printing segments of two newspaper articles from March and April, 2020. We will then ask you to reflect about your experiences at that time, when the United States faced this uncertain threat.

<Page Break>

Business Insider, March 11, 2020

The WHO officially declared the coronavirus outbreak a pandemic on March 11 after spreading to more than 100 countries around the world. "WHO has been assessing this outbreak around the clock, and we're deeply concerned both by the alarming levels of spread and severity and by the alarming levels of inaction," WHO director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told reporters.

USA TODAY, April 2, 2020

The world soared past the 1 million mark in confirmed coronavirus cases, jobless numbers skyrocketed, Democrats delayed their national convention and the nation's preeminent infectious disease expert required a security detail on Thursday. More bad news landed early Friday: The U.S. death toll topped 6,000 President Donald Trump and federal health officials predicted a "very painful" period in the country's fight against the public health emergency.

<Page Break>

What were your experiences with COVID-19 last spring, as our country faced this uncertain threat? Did you have faith in the country's ability to address COVID-19 at that time (i.e., at the initial outbreak)?

Please take your time and do not rush. *[Text free entry]*

<Pages seen if randomly assigned to condition 2 (Placebo Prime)>

We are going to ask how you felt about Prince Harry and Meghan Markle stepping away from their royal duties in early 2020. We also will ask you to read news articles from last January.

<Page Break>

Prince Harry and Meghan Markle, after much speculation, officially stepped away from their royal duties. To remind you of ongoing events at this time we are next re-printing segments of two newspaper articles from January, 2020. We will then ask you to reflect about your experiences at that time, when they made this decision.

<Page Break>

Business Insider, January 8, 2020

After months of speculation, Prince Harry and Meghan Markle put the rumors to rest and officially announced they were stepping down from their duties as senior royals. The Duke and Duchess of Sussex said they planned on being financially independent and split their time between North America and the United Kingdom

USA TODAY, January 9, 2020

About an hour after their announcement, another palace announcement, sent in an email from the office of the private secretary and the spokesperson for Queen Elizabeth II, landed in media inboxes. "Discussions with The Duke and Duchess of Sussex are at an early stage," the statement said carefully. "We understand

their desire to take a different approach, but these are complicated issues that will take time to work through."

<Page Break>

To the extent you followed it, what were your experiences with the royal split last winter, as the royals faced an uncertain future? Did you have faith in the UK's ability to address the royal split?

Please take your time and do not rush. *[Text free entry]*

<If randomly assigned to condition 3, no articles or reflection questions are seen>

<Polarization Questions>

<All respondents see the following questions. In these questions, "<Outparty>" appears as "Republican" for Democratic and Independent respondents, and as "Democratic" for Republican respondents. "<Inparty>" appears as "Democratic" for Democratic and Independent respondents, and as "Republican" for Republican respondents.>

<Polarization Measure: Thermometer>

We are now going to ask you a set of questions about the Republican and Democratic parties.

<Page Break>

We'd like you to rate how you feel towards the Democratic and Republican parties on a scale of 0 to 100, which we call a "feeling thermometer." On this feeling thermometer scale, ratings between 0 and 49 degrees mean that you feel unfavorable and cold (with 0 being the most unfavorable/coldest). Ratings between 51 and 100 degrees mean that you feel favorable and warm (with 100 being the most favorable/warmest). A rating of 50 means you have no feelings one way or the other. How would you rate your feeling toward the Democratic and Republican parties?
the <Outparty> Party *[0-100 Slider]*
the <Inparty> Party *[0-100 Slider]*

<Polarization Measure: Traits>

Now we'd like to know more about what you think about the <Outparty> Party. Below, we've given a list of words that some people might use to describe them.

For each item, please indicate how well you think it applies to the <Outparty> Party:

	Not at all well	Not too well	Somewhat well	Very well	Extremely well
Patriotic					
Intelligent					
Honest					
Open-minded					
Generous					
Hypocritical					
Selfish					
Mean					

Now we'd like to know more about what you think about the <Inparty> Party. Below, we've given a list of words that some people might use to describe them.

For each item, please indicate how well you think it applies to the <Inparty> Party: *<Repeat above matrix of trait questions>*

<Polarization Measure: Trust>

How much of the time do you think you can trust the <Outparty> Party to do what is right for the country? *[Almost never; Once in a while; About half the time; Most of the time; Almost always]*

How much of the time do you think you can trust the <Inparty> Party to do what is right for the country? *[Almost never; Once in a while; About half the time; Most of the time; Almost always]*

<Polarization Measure: Social Distance>

How comfortable are you having close personal friends who are <Outparty>s? *[Not at all comfortable; Not too comfortable; Somewhat comfortable; Extremely comfortable]*

How comfortable are you having neighbors on your street who are <Outparty>s? *[Not at all comfortable; Not too comfortable; Somewhat comfortable; Extremely comfortable]*

Suppose a son or daughter of yours was getting married. How would you feel if he or she married a supporter of the <Outparty>? *[Not at all upset; Not too upset; Somewhat upset; Extremely upset]*

How comfortable are you having close personal friends who are <Inparty>s? *[Not at all comfortable; Not too comfortable; Somewhat comfortable; Extremely comfortable]*

How comfortable are you having neighbors on your street who are <Inparty>s? *[Not at all comfortable;*

Not too comfortable; Somewhat comfortable; Extremely comfortable]

Suppose a son or daughter of yours was getting married. How would you feel if he or she married a supporter of the <Inparty>? *[Not at all upset; Not too upset; Somewhat upset; Extremely upset]*

<Perceived Polarization>

Some people say that COVID-19 caused the public to become more politically divided or polarized. Others say that it unified the public, making them less polarized. And yet others say it had no effect. What do you think? *[Definitely polarized the public; Possibly polarized the public; No effect; Possibly made the public less polarized; Definitely made the public less polarized]*

Pilot Survey Experiment Instrument

This section provides the full text of the survey instrument used in our pilot experiment.

<Demographic and Background Questions>

We are going to start by asking you some questions about your general attitudes and opinions.
Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Democrat, a Republican, an Independent, or what? *[Democrat; Republican; Independent; Some other party]*

<Page seen if Democrat or Republican>
Would you call yourself a strong <Democrat / Republican> or a not very strong <Democrat / Republican>? *[Strong; Not very strong]*

<Page seen if Independent>
If you had to choose, do you think of yourself as closer to the Democratic Party or the Republican Party? *[Closer to Democratic Party; Closer to Republican Party; Neither]*

Which point on this scale best describes your political views? *[Very liberal; Mostly liberal; Somewhat liberal; Moderate; Somewhat conservative; Mostly conservative; Very conservative]*

In general, how interested are you in politics? *[Not at all interested; Not too interested; Somewhat interested; Very interested; Extremely interested]*

What is the highest level of education you have completed? *[Less than high school; High school graduate; Some college; 4 year college degree; Advanced degree]*

What is your estimate of your family's annual household income (before taxes)? *[< $30,000; $30,000-$69,999; $70,000-$99,999; $100,000-$200,000; >$200,000]*

Which of the following do you consider to be your primary racial or ethnic group? Check all that apply. *[White; African; American; Asian; American; Hispanic or Latino; Native American; Other]*
<Question seen if Other> How would you describe your primary racial or ethnic group? *[Text free entry]*

Which of the following best describes your gender identity? *[Male; Female; Transgender; None of the categories offered]*

What is your age? *[Under 18; 18-24; 25-34; 35-50; 51-65; Over 65]*

In what state do you currently live? *[Drop-down list of 50 states and Washington D.C.]*

Many people don't know the answers to these questions, so if there are any you don't know, just check "don't know."

How much of a majority is required for the U.S. Senate and House to override a Presidential veto? *[Cannot override; 1/3; 1/2; 2/3; 3/4; Don't Know]*

Do you happen to know which party currently has the most members in the House of Representatives in Washington, D.C.? *[Democrats; Republicans; Tie; Don't know]*

Whose responsibility is it to determine if a law is constitutional? *[President; Congress; Supreme Court; Don't know]*

Who is the current U.S. Vice President? *[Rex Tillerson; James Mattis; Mike Pence; Mitch McConnell; Don't know]*

Last spring, on average, how many days a week did you read/listen/watch news about COVID-19? *[Never; 1 day/week; 2 days/week; 3 days/week; 4 days/week; 5 days/week; 6 days/week; Every day]*

How often have you relied on each source below for information about COVID-19?

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently	Every Day
The New York Times					
The Wall Street Journal					
The Washington Post					
USA Today					
Los Angeles Times					
Your Local Newspaper					
Your local TV News					
ABC World News Tonight					
CBS Evening News					
NBC Nightly News					
MSNBC					
Fox News					
CNN					
Breitbart					
Trump Press Conferences					
State official (e.g. governor) Press Conferences					
The Centers for Disease Control (CDC)					
The World Health Organization (WHO)					
Wikipedia					
Facebook					
Twitter					
Social media other than Facebook or Twitter					
Other people I talk to/in conversation					

This is a question to just make sure you are paying attention. Please choose option C below, regardless of the actual answer. *[A. I am enjoying this survey.; B. I do a lot of surveys.; C. I have not done many surveys.; D. None of the above.]*

*<**Randomized Priming and Reflection Tasks**>*

<Each respondent is randomly assigned to one of three conditions>

<Pages seen if randomly assigned to condition 1 (Covid Prime)>

We are going to ask how you felt about COVID-19 last spring. We also will ask you to read a news article from last spring.

<Page Break>

COVID-19 swept across the United States last March and April, leading states to issue stay-at-home orders. To remind you of ongoing events during this time we are next re-printing a segment of a newspaper article from early April, 2020. We will then ask you to reflect about your experiences at that time.

<Page Break>

USA Today, April 2, 2020

The world soared past the 1 million mark in confirmed coronavirus cases, jobless numbers skyrocketed, Democrats delayed their national convention and the nation's preeminent infectious disease expert required a security detail on Thursday. More bad news landed early Friday: The U.S. death toll topped 6,000 President Donald Trump and federal health officials predicted a "very painful" period in the country's fight against the public health emergency.

More bad news landed early Friday: The U.S. death toll topped 6,000 President Donald Trump and federal health officials predicted a "very painful" period in the country's fight against the public health emergency.

Of the globe's 1 million-plus cases, nearly a quarter of them — more than 245,000 — are in the U.S. Jobless numbers released Thursday were stunning. New unemployment claims doubled to 6.6 million from last week's record-setting 3.3 million.

<Page Break>

We'd like to know what you remember about your experiences with COVID-19 during this time last spring. What did you think about the COVID-19 and what were your experiences? How did you feel at that time?

In answering this, try your best to be as thorough and convincing, as if you were explaining to people who did not have a COVID-19 experience what it was like.

Please take your time and do not rush. To help with that, the next screen arrow will not appear for a few moments to give you time to write out your answer. *[Text free entry]*

<Pages seen if randomly assigned to condition 2 (George Floyd Protest Prime)>

We are next going to ask how you felt about the George Floyd protests last spring and summer. We also will ask that you read a news article from last spring.

<Page Break>

In late May 2020, protests and civil unrest swept across the county in response to the killing of George Floyd, an African-American man who was killed during an arrest by Minneapolis police officers. To remind you of ongoing events during this time we are next re-printing a segment of a newspaper article from the late May, 2020. We will then ask you to reflect about your experiences at that time.

<Page Break>

USA TODAY, May 31, 2020

From Portland to Pensacola, violent protests flared in more than 30 cities across the U.S. this weekend in the wake of the death of George Floyd, an African American man who pleaded that he could not breathe after a white police officer kneeled on his neck for more than eight minutes during an arrest.

Why did Floyd's death spark such widespread, visceral outrage, while three other deaths of African Americans this year – Breonna Taylor in Louisville, Ahmaud Arbery in Georgia and Tony McDade, a black transgender man killed by police officers in Tallahassee – did not?

An array of combustible issues converged to form a "perfect storm" of civil unrest after Floyd's death and could lead to longer-lasting changes, experts and protest organizers said.

<Page Break>

We'd like to know what you remember about your experiences with the protests during this time last May. What did you think about the protests and what were your experiences? How did you feel at that time?

In answering this, try your best to be as thorough and convincing, as if you were explaining to people who did not experience the protests at that time what it was like.

Please take your time and do not rush. To help with that, the next screen arrow will not appear for a few moments to give you time to write out your answer. *[Text free entry]*

<If randomly assigned to condition 3, no articles or reflection questions are seen>

<Polarization Questions>

<All respondents see the following questions. In these questions, "<Outparty>" appears as "Republican" for Democratic and Independent respondents, and as "Democratic" for Republican respondents. "<Inparty>" appears as "Democratic" for Democratic and Independent respondents, and as "Republican" for

Republican respondents.>

<Polarization Measure: Thermometer>

We are now going to ask you a set of questions about the *Republican and Democratic parties*. Please take you time, and do your best to answer the questions.

<Page Break>

We'd like you to rate how you feel towards the Democratic and Republican parties on a scale of 0 to 100, which we call a "feeling thermometer." On this feeling thermometer scale, ratings between 0 and 49 degrees mean that you feel unfavorable and cold (with 0 being the most unfavorable/coldest). Ratings between 51 and 100 degrees mean that you feel favorable and warm (with 100 being the most favorable/warmest). A rating of 50 means you have no feelings one way or the other. How would you rate your feeling toward the Democratic and Republican parties?
the <Outparty> Party *[0-100 Slider]*
the <Inparty> Party *[0-100 Slider]*

<Polarization Measure: Traits>

Now we'd like to know more about what you think about the <Outparty> Party. Below, we've given a list of words that some people might use to describe them.

For each item, please indicate how well you think it applies to the <Outparty> Party:

	Not at all well	Not too well	Somewhat well	Very well	Extremely well
Patriotic					
Intelligent					
Honest					
Open-minded					
Generous					
Hypocritical					
Selfish					
Mean					

Now we'd like to know more about what you think about the <Inparty> Party. Below, we've given a list of words that some people might use to describe them.

For each item, please indicate how well you think it applies to the <Inparty> Party: *<Repeat above matrix of trait questions>*

<Polarization Measure: Trust>

How much of the time do you think you can trust the <Outparty> Party to do what is right for the country? *[Almost never; Once in a while; About half the time; Most of the time; Almost always]*

How much of the time do you think you can trust the <Inparty> Party to do what is right for the country? *[Almost never; Once in a while; About half the time; Most of the time; Almost always]*

<Polarization Measure: Social Distance>

How comfortable are you having close personal friends who are <Outparty>s? *[Not at all comfortable; Not too comfortable; Somewhat comfortable; Extremely comfortable]*

How comfortable are you having neighbors on your street who are <Outparty>s? *[Not at all comfortable; Not too comfortable; Somewhat comfortable; Extremely comfortable]*

Suppose a son or daughter of yours was getting married. How would you feel if he or she married a supporter of the <Outparty>? *[Not at all upset; Not too upset; Somewhat upset; Extremely upset]*

How comfortable are you having close personal friends who are <Inparty>s? *[Not at all comfortable; Not too comfortable; Somewhat comfortable; Extremely comfortable]*

How comfortable are you having neighbors on your street who are <Inparty>s? *[Not at all comfortable; Not too comfortable; Somewhat comfortable; Extremely comfortable]*

Suppose a son or daughter of yours was getting married. How would you feel if he or she married a supporter of the <Inparty>? *[Not at all upset; Not too upset; Somewhat upset; Extremely upset]*

<Polarization Preferences>

The <Inparty> should do everything they can to hurt the <Outparty> party, even if it is at the short-term expense of the country. *[Strongly agree; Somewhat agree; Neither agree nor disagree; Somewhat disagree; Strongly disagree]*

If the <Outparty candidate, Trump/Biden> candidate wins in 2020, the <Inparty> should do anything possible to block anyone he nominates to the Supreme Court. *[Strongly agree; Somewhat agree; Neither agree nor disagree; Somewhat disagree; Strongly disagree]*

The <Inparty>s should do everything in their power within the law to make it as difficult as possible for <Outparty>s to run the government effectively. *[Strongly agree; Somewhat agree; Neither agree nor*

disagree; Somewhat disagree; Strongly disagree]

<Outparty>s are not just worse for politics—they are downright evil. *[Strongly agree; Somewhat agree; Neither agree nor disagree; Somewhat disagree; Strongly disagree]*

<Outparty>s deserve any mistreatment they get from <Inparty>s. *[Strongly agree; Somewhat agree; Neither agree nor disagree; Somewhat disagree; Strongly disagree]*

<Perceived Polarization>

Some people say that COVID-19 caused the public to become more politically divided or polarized. Others say that it unified the public, making them less polarized. And yet others say it had no effect. What do you think? *[Definitely polarized the public.; Possibly polarized the public.; No effect.; Possibly made the public less polarized.; Definitely made the public less polarized.]*

Some people say that the racial protests following the murder of George Floyd caused the public to become more politically divided or polarized. Others say that it unified the public, making them less polarized. And yet others say it had no effect. What do you think? *[Definitely polarized the public.; Possibly polarized the public.; No effect.; Possibly made the public less polarized.; Definitely made the public less polarized.]*