

Affective polarization did not increase during the COVID-19 pandemic

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Abstract

We document trends in affective polarization during the COVID-19 pandemic. In our main measure, affective polarization is relatively flat between July 2019 and February 2020, then falls significantly around the onset of the pandemic. Three of five other data sources display a similar downward trend, with two of five data sources showing no significant change. A survey experiment shows that priming respondents to think about the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic significantly reduces affective polarization.

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Political divisions in the U.S. compounded the scientific, economic, and social challenges of responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. Studies using survey and behavioral data from the early days of the pandemic reveal that partisan divisions were among the most significant drivers of health behaviors, concern about the virus, support for specific policies, attributions of responsibility, and even beliefs about basic facts (e.g., Allcott et al. 2020b; Druckman et al. 2020; Gadarian et al. 2020; Gollwitzer et al. 2020; Romer and Jaimeson 2020). This echoes similar divisions among politicians and the media (e.g., Carothers 2020; Hart et al. 2020; Simonov et al. 2020). Against this backdrop, many have concluded that the crisis likely deepened political polarization (Carothers 2020; Feldmann 2020; Harris 2020; Tierney 2020; Victor 2020; Walsh 2020).

In this paper, we use multiple data sources to document trends in political polarization during the COVID-19 pandemic. We focus on affective polarization—the extent to which partisans feel more negatively toward the opposing political party than toward their own (Iyengar et al. 2019). Affective polarization in the U.S. has been steadily increasing in recent decades, and this has generated widespread concern about its consequences including undermining democratic institutions and generating legislative gridlock (e.g., Finkel et al. 2020).

We find no evidence that affective polarization rose during the crisis. Four of six data sources suggest that affective polarization in fact declined with the onset of COVID-19, with the other two suggesting neither a decline nor an increase. A survey experiment adds further evidence, showing that priming respondents to think about the onset of the pandemic significantly reduces affective polarization.

One possible interpretation is that COVID-19 actually brought partisans together in the face of a common threat (Brooks 2020; Quarcoo and Kleinfeld 2020), consistent with evidence from previous national threats (Carlin and Love 2018; Levendusky 2020). Placed in the context of the partisan response to the pandemic (e.g., Allcott et al 2020b; Gadarian et al. 2020), our findings highlight how a major crisis can at once lessen (or not impact) the *extent* of a political division while simultaneously priming the *consequences* of those divides for society.

COVID-19 and Affective Polarization

A new coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2; COVID-19) emerged in December, 2019, in Wuhan, China. The first confirmed case in the U.S. was on January 21, 2020. This was followed by the declaration of a public health emergency on February 3rd and the first reported U.S. death on February 29th.

On March 11th, the National Basketball Association suspended its season and the World Health Organization declared a global pandemic. Counties in California issued the first stay-at-home order on March 16th. Panel A of Figure 1 plots these and other key dates in the pandemic.

The timing of COVID-19 coincided with a turbulent political period in the United States. Presidential election primary voting began in January, and President Trump was acquitted from his first impeachment on February 5th, 2020. These and other key political events are plotted in Panel B of Figure 1.

While multiple important events occurred during the first half of 2020, the pandemic dominated the public's interest. Figure 2 reports Google search trends for various topics (as defined by Google), including Coronavirus, Election, George Floyd, Black Lives Matter, and Impeachment. Searches related to the COVID-19 pandemic vastly exceeded interest in other topics for most periods.

These events took place on the heels of a quarter-century trend of increasing affective polarization in the United States. Affective polarization refers to the extent to which partisans feel more negatively toward the opposing political party than toward their own (Iyengar et al. 2019). The most widely used measure is a feeling thermometer that asks respondents to rate the parties on a 0 (very cold) to 100 (very warm) scale. The trend stems from increasingly lower ratings of the out-party over time (e.g., Democrats ratings of Republicans and vice versa); in 2000, the average out-party rating sat at 41.604 but was 21.940 in 2020.¹ Other measures—such as trust in the parties, trait ratings of the parties, or ratings of partisan elites—show similar trends (e.g., Lelkes et al. 2017; Levendusky 2018; Druckman and Levendusky 2019; Iyengar 2019). A sizeable literature suggests that affective polarization influences non-political interactions such as choosing roommates, spouses, and employees (e.g., Iyengar et al. 2019). Other work suggests political impacts on political participation, trust in government, and support for democratic institutions (e.g., Hetherington and Rudolph 2015; Iyengar and Krupenkin 2018; Kingzette et al. 2021).

The onset of COVID-19 led scholars to conjecture two possible outcomes on affective polarization.

On one hand, the pandemic may have attenuated group divisions. Social psychology work on intergroup relations suggests that hostility between (political) groups may shrink when there is competition at a higher level, specifically, at the national level. The idea is that the emergence of a threatening common out-group reduces the salience of subordinate partisan identities. As

¹These statistics are based on data from the American National Election Studies.

Carlin and Love (2016: 128) state, “a dramatic national security event should shrink partisan trust gaps.” The authors show this to be the case with regard to the killing of Osama bin Laden (also see Levendusky 2020 on the impact of 9/11). While COVID-19 is not a “common out-group” per se, it did constitute an overarching threat that could similarly promote “a sense of shared fate [that would] reduce political division around the issue” (van Bavel 2020: 464; also see Quarcoo and Kleinfeld 2020). Survey evidence finds support for a strengthened sense of unity, with the share of Americans indicating “we’re all in it together” increasing from 63 percent to 90 percent between January 2018 and March 2020 (More in Common 2020).

On the other hand, it is possible that the pandemic exacerbated group divisions. As Tierney (2020) writes, “In recent decades, the glue binding America has come undone, as political polarization has reached record levels... Could the fight against the coronavirus forge America, once more, into a unified nation, or will the terrifying global trauma become just another front in the partisan war? The latter seems far more likely.” Research suggests that elite and media divisions exacerbate affective polarization—as partisans view gaps between their leaders, they become more polarized (e.g., Rogowski and Sutherland 2016, Webster and Abramowitz 2017). That elite partisan divisions became immediately evident (e.g., Carothers 2020; Fowler et al. 2020; Hart et al. 2020; Lipsitz and Pop Eleches 2020; Simonov et al. 2020) suggests the possibility of increased affective polarization.

As noted above, a large number of papers reveal sharp partisan division in citizens’ COVID-19 policy attitudes, factual beliefs, and behaviors (e.g., Allcott et al. 2020b; Druckman et al. 2020, n.d.; Gadarian et al. 2020; Gollwitzer et al. 2020; Ritter 2020; Romer and Jaimeson 2020). Clinton et al. (2021:1) explain that “partisanship is more important than public health concerns for explaining individuals’ willingness to stay at home and reduce social mobility...”. Druckman et al. (2021) show that variation in individuals’ affective polarization scores—and specifically out-party hostility—explains partisan gaps in the public’s COVID-19 attitudes and behaviors. These differences in COVID-19 responses are plausibly a consequence of affective polarization. They do not directly address whether polarization itself increased or decreased during the pandemic.

Trends in Affective Polarization

We combine data from four distinct surveys on political attitudes. Our primary data comes from the Democracy Fund Voter Study Group’s Nationscape study (Tausanovitch and Vavreck 2020).

The Nationscape data we use covers more than 300,000 interviews between July 2019 and July 2020. The granular time resolution of the Nationscape data is uniquely valuable for isolating trends around important events.² We supplement the Nationscape data with data from the American National Election Study (ANES) and Druckman et al. (2020). The ANES data we use includes their 2020 Time Series study as well as pilot and exploratory studies in 2018, 2019, and 2020. The Druckman et al. (2020) data consists of a balanced panel of respondents who participated in two previous survey experiments. The use of a balanced panel in the Druckman et al. (2020) data addresses concerns regarding the use of repeated cross-sections. Lastly, in the Online Appendix, we use data from the Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES) (Kuriwaki 2021).³

Measures of affective polarization vary in the type of elicitation (e.g., feelings, trust, or behaviors) and the subject of those elicitations (e.g., voters, parties, or candidates). To avoid relying on a single measure or data source, we report trends across six different measures and data source combinations in the main text. Across datasets, we define affective polarization to be the weighted average of individuals' feelings towards one's own party minus feelings towards the other party. We include independents who report leaning towards one party, but exclude pure independents (see Druckman and Levendusky 2019). We use survey weights when available consistently across a given data series.⁴ We apply an affine transformation to all measures of affect so they range between 0 and 100. See Druckman and Levendusky (2019) and Iyengar et al. (2019) for further discussion of the different measures and their relation to one another.

Figure 3 reports trends in affective polarization towards partisans or parties. Panel A of Figure 3 shows our measure of affective polarization towards partisans using Nationscape data. This is our preferred measure due to the size, frequency, and consistent methodology of the Nationscape data. Panel A shows that, prior to the rise of COVID-19 in the U.S., affective polarization was relatively flat and this flat trend extends back to July 2019. However, after the first publicized COVID-19-related death in the U.S. (on February 29th, 2020), affective polarization exhibits a significant decline through May (p-value = 0.006) prior to the death of George Floyd.⁵ The 0.075

²Some have expressed concern with a decline in data quality in the Nationscape data over time (e.g., Aronow et al. 2020). See also Online Appendix Figure 1, where we examine trends in respondent demographics over time.

³Replication code and data from Druckman et al. (2020) and our own survey experiments are available at <https://osf.io/dra7s/>. Nationscape, ANES, and CCES data are available respectively at <https://www.voterstudygroup.org/publication/nationscape-data-set>, <https://electionstudies.org/data-center/>, and <https://cces.gov.harvard.edu/>. The survey instruments are available in the Online Appendix. See replication code for exact details on sample construction and analysis.

⁴Survey weights are used in all analyses of data from Nationscape and from the Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES), but were not available consistently for data from the ANES or from Druckman et al. (2020).

⁵All p-values for changes over time are computed by comparing, without covariate adjustment, the last observed

standard deviation decline during the onset of the pandemic in Panel A can be compared to the 0.18 standard deviation increase in party affective polarization between 1996 and 2016 as measured in the American National Election Study (ANES), a 0.06 standard deviation decline from quitting Facebook for four weeks, or a 0.06 standard deviation treatment-on-treated decline on an affective polarization index from subscribing to counter-attitudinal news on Facebook (Allcott et al. 2020c; Levy 2020).⁶

Panel B of Figure 3 shows a marginally insignificant decrease during the onset of the pandemic when measuring affective polarization using questions in the Nationscape data about feelings towards partisan members of Congress (p-value = 0.097). Panel C of Figure 3 reports our measure of affective polarization towards political parties using a panel of respondents from Druckman et al. (2020). The estimates indicate little change in affective polarization between July 2019 and April 2020 (p-value = 0.763).

Figure 4 shows that the decline in our main measure of affective polarization (Panel A of Figure 3) during the pandemic is larger for Republican respondents, but this difference is not statistically significant (p-value = 0.228). Figure 5 shows that the decline in polarization encompasses both improved feelings towards the other party (p-value = 0.083) and worsening feelings towards one's own party (p-value = 0.007). We also examine partisan differences in changes in feelings towards own- and other-party in Online Appendix Figure 3. We find evidence that Republicans experienced larger declines in feelings towards their own party than Democrats (p-value = 0.071); we find no statistically significant difference between partisans for changes in feelings towards the other party (p-value = 0.971).

Figure 6 reports trends in partisan feelings towards Donald Trump. Feelings towards presidential candidates have been previously used as measures of affective polarization (e.g., Lelkes et al. 2017; Levendusky 2018; Iyengar 2019); moreover, presidential approval ratings are often interpreted through a partisan lens—as one recent paper puts it “citizens are increasingly substituting in partisanship for approval” (Donovan et al. 2019: 1213; also see Small and Eisinger 2020).⁷ Panel A reports trends in the difference in feelings between Republicans and Democrats towards

period prior to the first publicized COVID-19 death in the U.S. (February 29, 2020) to the last observed period prior to George Floyd's death (May 25, 2020) for each series respectively. See Online Appendix Table 1 for additional detail on the size and statistical significance of affective polarization changes.

⁶The estimated decline in Online Appendix Table 1 is -3.20 and the standard deviation across respondents is 42.66. The question wording and scaling in the ANES, Allcott et al. (2020c), and Levy (2020) data differ from the Nationscape data.

⁷We restrict attention to Donald Trump because the Democratic primary was still in progress during our time period of interest.

Donald Trump. Although there is a slight upward trend prior to the onset of the pandemic, there is a significant decline upon the onset of the pandemic (p-value = 0.005). Panel B reports a similar decline in partisan differences in presidential approval ratings from the Nationscape data with the onset of the pandemic (p-value = 0.001). Panel C reports estimates of affect towards Donald Trump as measured in the ANES data in December 2018, December 2019, April 2020, and August–November 2020. While the difference in affect towards Trump between Republicans and Democrats is relatively constant across the 2018 and 2019 waves, the gap between the parties is significantly lower in April 2020 relative to the 2019 wave (p-value < 0.001).

We also observe a subsequent sharp increase in affective polarization during early June in each of the three affective polarization measures that cover this period.⁸ In our preferred affective polarization series (Figure 3A), this increase is statistically significant (p-value = 0.017) with affective polarization nearly returning to pre-pandemic levels. In a subsequent section, we provide suggestive evidence that this increase is likely to have been caused by events related to George Floyd’s death rather than by COVID-19-related events based on the precise timing, the racialized nature of this polarization increase, and a priming experiment.

An important question is whether a short-run decline in affective polarization during the onset of the pandemic faded to a long-run increase as the pandemic persisted and continued to be politicized. While, at the time of writing, our data are limited to examine trends beyond the 2020 election, we do have two series that extend up to the election. Panel C of Figure 6 shows that polarization towards Donald Trump immediately prior to the 2020 election was still below the corresponding value in 2019. Similarly, Online Appendix Figure 2 uses CCES data on presidential approval ratings and likewise finds no evidence of an increase in polarization between the fall of 2019 and the fall of 2020. Combined, these two series suggest no evidence that affective polarization exceeded 2019 levels through the first eight months of the pandemic.

While we cannot rule out that confounding factors unrelated to COVID-19 influenced the changes we see at the onset of the pandemic, we note that many of the most important political events in 2020 occurred several weeks before or several weeks after the onset of the pandemic.⁹ Furthermore, Figure 2 shows that the public’s interest during this time period was dominated by the pandemic. In contrast, interest in Donald Trump’s impeachment—one of the main political stories

⁸Our three affective polarization series measures which extend into June are all from Nationscape, and include feelings towards partisans (Figure 3A), feelings towards Trump (Figure 6A), and Trump approval (Figure 6B). Each of these three series show a statistically significant decrease in affective polarization between the first COVID-19-related death and late May (see Online Appendix Table 1 for detail).

⁹See Figure 1 for key dates in 2020 associated with the pandemic and other political events.

during the same period—was greater in December 2019 when Donald Trump was impeached by the House than in January and February 2020 during the Senate’s trial.

Survey Experiment

We implemented a pre-registered survey experiment to examine how priming the COVID-19 pandemic impacts affective polarization (<https://aspredicted.org/blind.php?x=xc28e9>). We recruited 1503 respondents on Bovitz Inc.’s Forthright panel between September 29, 2020 and October 4, 2020 (we exclude 89 respondents who failed an attention check).¹⁰ At this point in the pandemic, most state-wide lockdowns had been lifted but in-person schooling remained in flux and it was well in advance of the December 11th U.S. Food and Drug Administration approval of the first vaccine. Further, the timing during the midst of the presidential campaign potentially created a challenging test for any treatment to de-polarize.

We randomly assigned participants to one of three conditions: a control, a placebo, or a COVID-19 treatment. In the COVID-19 treatment, we asked respondents to read two news article excerpts that cover the initial phases of the pandemic and to reflect on their own experiences and faith in the United States’ ability to address the pandemic at its onset.¹¹ Our approach follows

¹⁰The protocol was approved as exempt by Northwestern University’s IRB (STU00212339), and informed consent was obtained at the beginning of the survey. The survey analysis was pre-registered at aspredicted.org (#48474).

¹¹**COVID-19 Information Treatment in Survey Instrument:**

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.

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.

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.

Levendusky's (2018) study where he had respondents read an article about the strengths of Americans and then reflect on what they like best about America. However, we focus on the common *experience* of the pandemic as a national threat (per the earlier discussion of the identity impact of an overarching threat). To ensure that any effect does not stem from reflection alone, we also include a placebo treatment where respondents are asked to perform the analogous exercise but for Prince Harry and Meghan Markle's financial separation from the UK royal family (which occurred just before the onset of the pandemic).¹² In the pure control group, respondents are not asked to perform any exercise.

We then asked the four-measure affective polarization battery recommended by Druckman and Levendusky (2019) which includes: party thermometers, trait measures (8 items), trust measures, and social distance measures (3 items). We also asked respondents whether they believed COVID-19 caused the public to become more or less politically divided / polarized. We again exclude pure independents. For each category of affect questions (feelings thermometer, trust, perceived traits, and social distance), we first rescaled responses to range between 0 and 100 before taking the average across responses within a given category for each individual. We then take the average across categories to construct the index for each respondent. Complete survey instruments, including the placebo information treatment, can be found in the Online Appendix.

Panel A of Figure 7 reports the estimated treatment effects using affective polarization as the outcome. Relative to the pure control group, the COVID-19 prime reduces the aggregate index of affective polarization by 3.8 units (p-value = 0.042) on a 0 to 100 scale. The COVID-19 treatment effect is larger in magnitude than the placebo's, though this difference falls short of statistical significance (p-value = 0.290).

Panel B of Figure 7 reports the estimated treatment effects on out-party feelings (i.e., negative partisanship). Out-party hostility has been the driver of changes in affective polarization over time (Groenendyk 2018). It also is what seems to have shaped reactions including the COVID-19 attitudes and behaviors (Druckman et al. 2021). In our experiment, the COVID-19 prime

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.

¹²A reviewer pointed out that the placebo prime could exacerbate affective polarization due to the racial dynamics of the royal family split; indeed, race is highly intertwined with partisan affective polarization (Westwood and Peterson 2020). That said, the salience of race in the royal split was likely heightened during their March 2021 interview (well after our survey experiment) in which Meghan Markle accused a member of the royal family of being concerned about the color of the baby (Imray 2021). As we present below, we also find no evidence that the placebo increased affective polarization relative to the control.

improves an index of feelings towards the other party by 3.5 units (p-value = 0.005), and this effect is significantly larger than the placebo's (p-value = 0.046). Many of the individual components of the index exhibit similar results. In contrast, the difference in reported affect between the pure control and the UK royal placebo is not significant.

Online Appendix Figures 11 and 12 examine heterogeneous treatment effects by party. Though the point estimate on the affective polarization index is larger for Republican respondents, this difference is not significant with either the pure control group (p-value = 0.334) or the placebo group (p-value = 0.727) as the baseline. For the index of feelings towards the other party, the treatment effects are larger for Republican respondents when using the pure control as the baseline (p-value = 0.061), but these differences are not significant when using the placebo group as the baseline (p-value = 0.271). The heterogeneous experimental treatment effects are consistent with the heterogeneity observed in the Nationscape data (see Figure 4).

Overall, our results suggest that thinking of the onset of the pandemic either did not change or significantly decreased affective polarization, particularly out-party hostility. While we are unable to cleanly test for mechanisms, the observed effects may be driven by prioritizing a shared identity in the face of a threat, by emphasizing the common experience of the pandemic across America, or by priming alternative experiences from the early pandemic period that shaped affective polarization.

Interestingly, despite these results, more than two-thirds of our respondents indicated that they believed COVID-19 has made the public more politically divided, consistent with the aforementioned presumption that partisan behaviors indicated larger polarization gaps.

Rising Polarization following the Murder of George Floyd

In Figures 3 and 6, several of the time series show a clear uptick in affective polarization following the murder of George Floyd on May 25, 2020. While we cannot say conclusively whether that uptick was a response to Floyd's killing, several pieces of evidence support the view that it was.

Figure 8 shows trends in Google searches related to COVID-19, George Floyd, and partisanship. The left inset of Panel A shows that interest in COVID-19 coincides with the initial decrease in affective polarization. It also shows that COVID-19 search interest was waning prior to George Floyd's death. In contrast, the middle and right insets of Panel A show that interest related to George Floyd (e.g., "Black Lives Matter") and partisanship (e.g., "far left", "far right") both spiked

simultaneously with the death of George Floyd. In terms of timing, the increase in partisan affective polarization in Nationscape more closely aligns with the rise in George Floyd search activity than with changes in COVID-19-related searches.¹³

We also examine trends in the partisanship of racial affect (see figure notes for definition). Panel B of Figure 8 shows that the partisanship of racial affect was flat during the onset of the pandemic, but spikes after George Floyd’s death. The increase in the partisanship of racial affect aligns with the increase in (political) affective polarization in Figure 3. Furthermore, in Online Appendix Figure 10, we show that our measure of partisan racial affect exhibits a significant and positive relationship with our measure of (political) affective polarization ($\beta = 0.285$; robust se = 0.005). This link is consistent with prior work connecting race and affective polarization in the United States (e.g., Mason and Wronski 2018; Valentino and Zhirkov 2018; Westwood and Peterson 2020).

Lastly, Online Appendix Figure 13 reports results from our pilot experimental study that included a COVID-19 prime, a George Floyd prime, and a pure control.¹⁴ We first note that, as in the results of our main experiment described in the preceding section, the COVID-19 prime has a negative and significant effect on our affective polarization index relative to a pure control sample (p-value = 0.033). Consistent with the pandemic and George Floyd’s death having opposing effects, the estimated effect of the George Floyd prime on our index of affective polarization is positive with p-value = 0.085 and is similar in magnitude to the negative estimated effect of the COVID-19 prime. Moreover, the COVID-19 and George Floyd treatment effects are statistically different from one another for all but one outcome measure.

These results are consistent with a causal decrease in affective polarization at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic following the first publicized U.S. death, coupled with a subsequent increase in affective polarization induced by events related to George Floyd’s murder.

¹³Online Appendix Figure 8 reports trends for each individual term or topic, and Online Appendix Figure 9 reports the timing of state reopening decisions from Allcott et al. (2020a).

¹⁴In the main experiment, we dropped the George Floyd prime in favor of the placebo prime to address concerns that the reflective exercise may have treatment effects irregardless of the topic. For the pilot, we recruited 582 MTurk respondents on September 23, 2020, and we exclude 30 respondents who failed an attention check. Our pilot experiment uses the same affect outcomes and the same IRB protocol as our main survey experiment, and informed consent was obtained at the beginning of the pilot survey.

Discussion

Research has shown that early politicization of the virus in the United States led to stark partisan divides in behaviors and policy support (e.g., Allcott et al. 2020b; Gadarian et al. 2020; Gollwitzer et al. 2020; Romer and Jaimeson 2020), driven in part by levels of affective polarization (Druckman et al. 2021). Media coverage also showed armed partisans at anti-lockdown protests in Michigan and other states. For some it may follow that affective polarization, which has steadily increased over the past several decades (Iyengar et al. 2019; Finkel et al. 2020), itself increased with the onset of the virus—a sentiment relayed by many commentators and our own survey respondents. Yet, we find evidence that, if anything, affective polarization decreased during this period.¹⁵

Our study has several important caveats. First, while the timing aligns well and our experimental results provide corroborating evidence, we cannot cleanly identify a causal effect of the pandemic given the time series nature of our data. Second, we measure average beliefs and feelings across Americans and the pandemic may have exacerbated tensions among some sub-populations. Lastly, our main measures focus on a particular form of affective polarization (i.e., feelings) and other measures may be of particular interest (e.g., behaviors) (see also Druckman and Levendusky 2019).

Overall, combined with existing evidence on the polarized response to the pandemic, our results show that a crisis may at once decrease the *extent* of group attitudinal divides (e.g., affective polarization) while simultaneously exacerbating the *consequences* of the divides (e.g., partisan divisions in behavioral responses to the pandemic). Group attitudinal changes and related behavioral changes need not align (also see Voelkel et al. 2021). Scholars and practitioners who examine interventions to mitigate polarization—a burgeoning industry (e.g., Ahler and Sood 2018; Levendusky 2018; Huddy and Yair 2020; Levendusky 2020; Moore-Berg et al. 2020; Wojcieszak and Warner 2020)—may need to separately distinguish the size of attitudinal divisions from their consequences.

¹⁵In the Online Appendix, we explore various potential mechanisms for the decline in affective polarization, including those related to identity strength (e.g., American identity), shared experience mentalities (e.g., faith in the country), personal COVID-19 experiences (e.g., disease exposure), state-level variations (in policy, partisanship, COVID-19 prevalence), and news consumption patterns. Of these, the evidence is strongest for the mentality of shared experiences, personal COVID-19 experiences, and exposure to diverse news networks.

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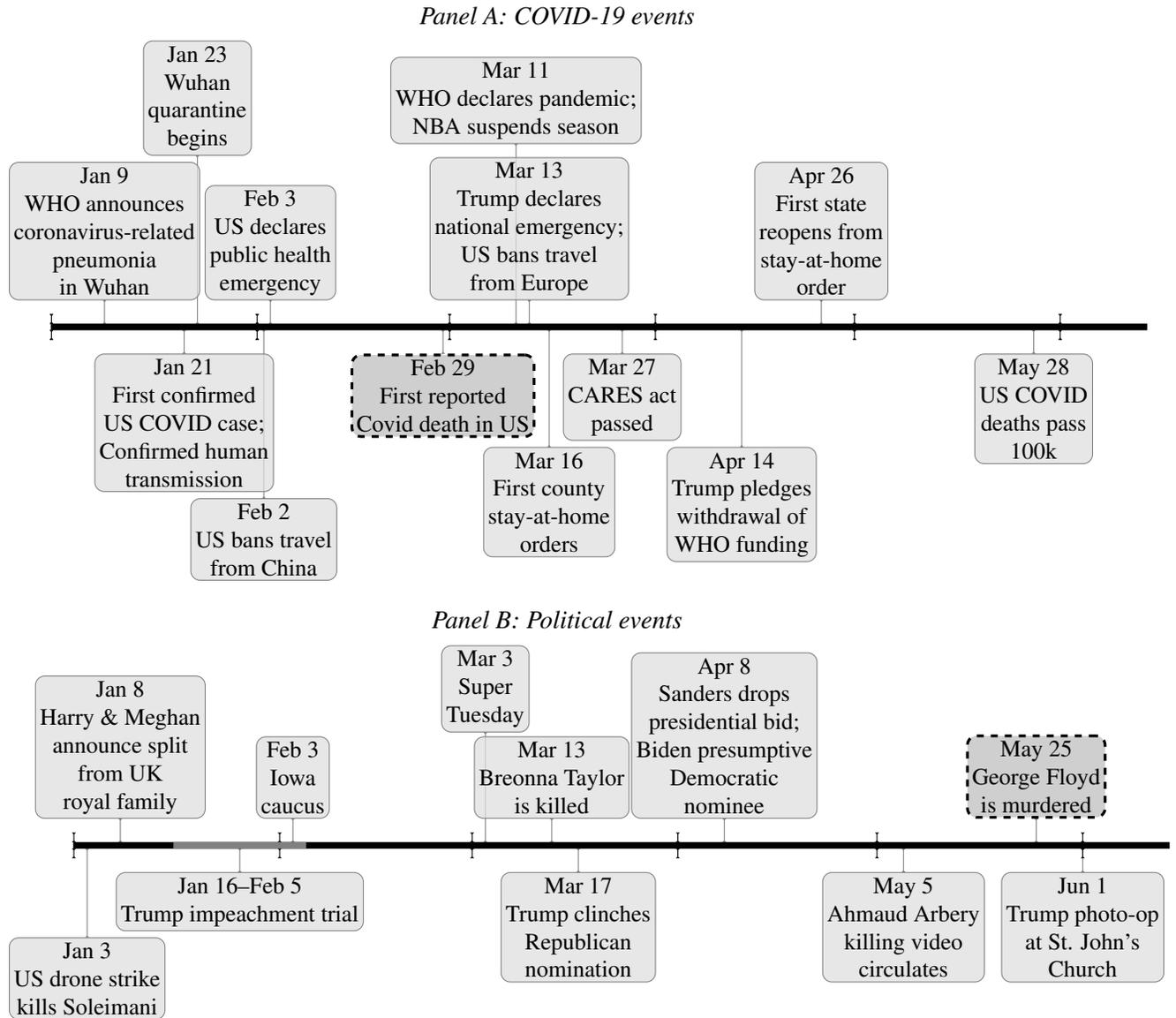
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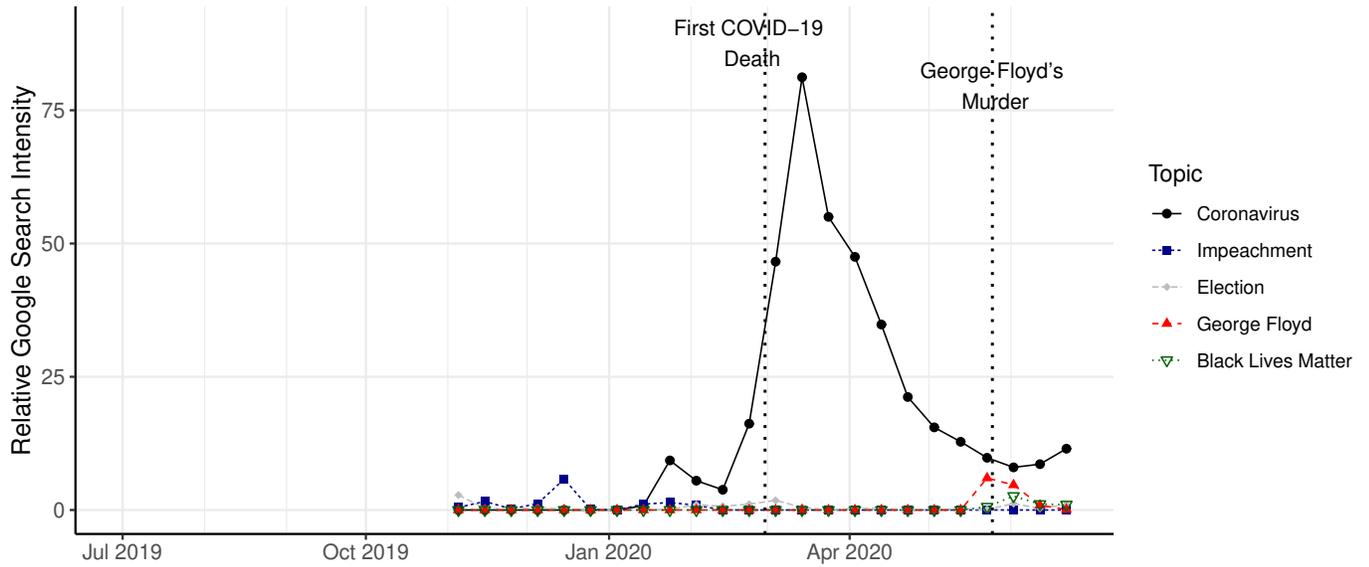
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Figure 1: Timeline of events in 2020, January-June



Note: Figure shows a timeline of key events which occurred during the first half of 2020. Panels A and B show COVID-19 and other political events respectively. Dashed borders are used to highlight the first COVID-19 death reported in the U.S. in Panel A and the murder of George Floyd in Panel B. These two events are indicated by dashed vertical lines in subsequent figures.

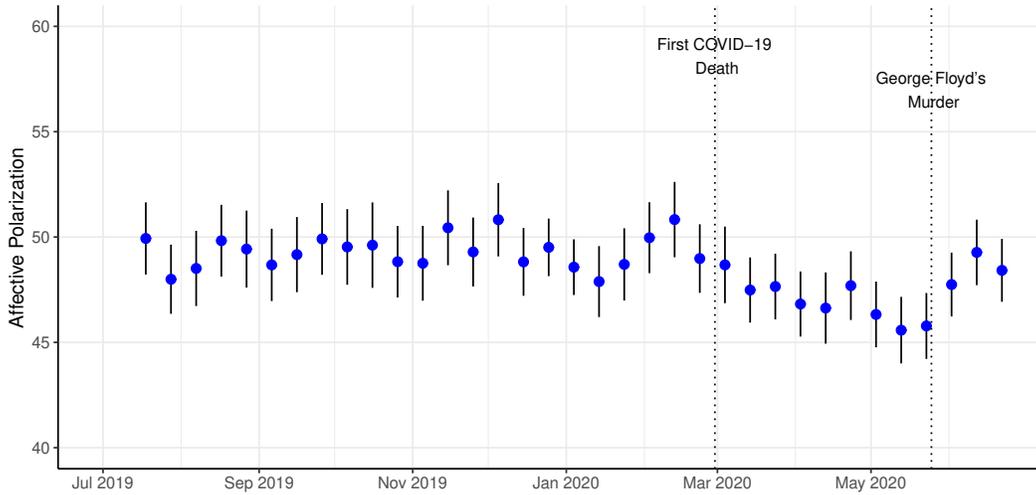
Figure 2: Google search trends of topics



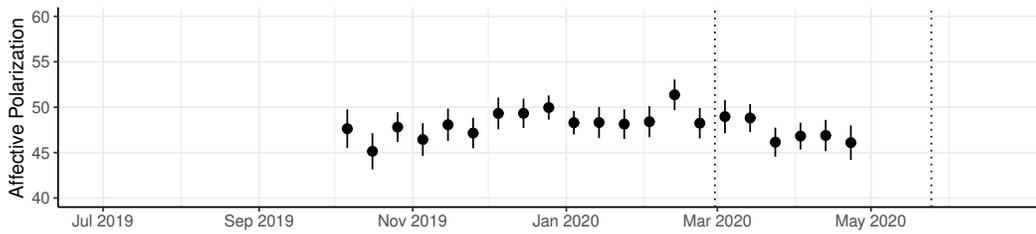
Note: Figure reports Google search trends for various topics (as defined by Google) in the United States, including Coronavirus, Election, George Floyd, Black Lives Matter, and Impeachment. Each term's search volume is indexed relative to the highest volume day for Coronavirus between November 1, 2019 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.

Figure 3: Trends in affective polarization

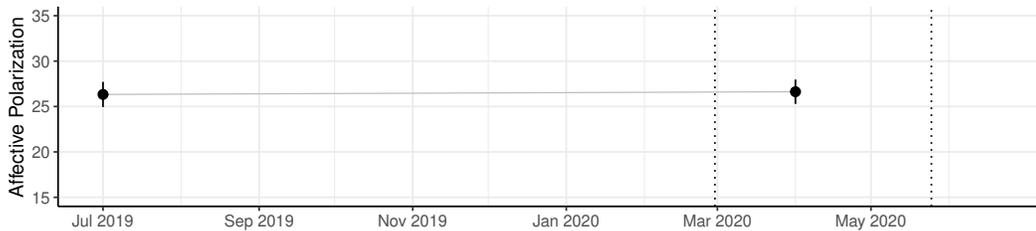
Panel A: Nationscape (partisans)



Panel B: Nationscape (members of Congress)

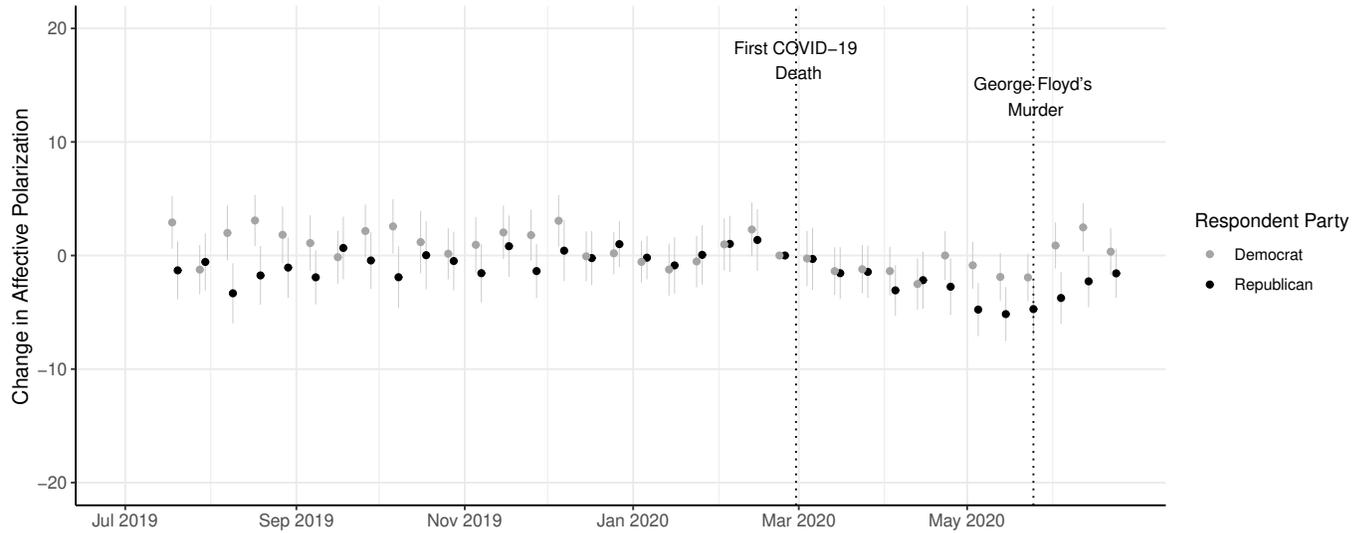


Panel C: Druckman et al. 2020 (parties)



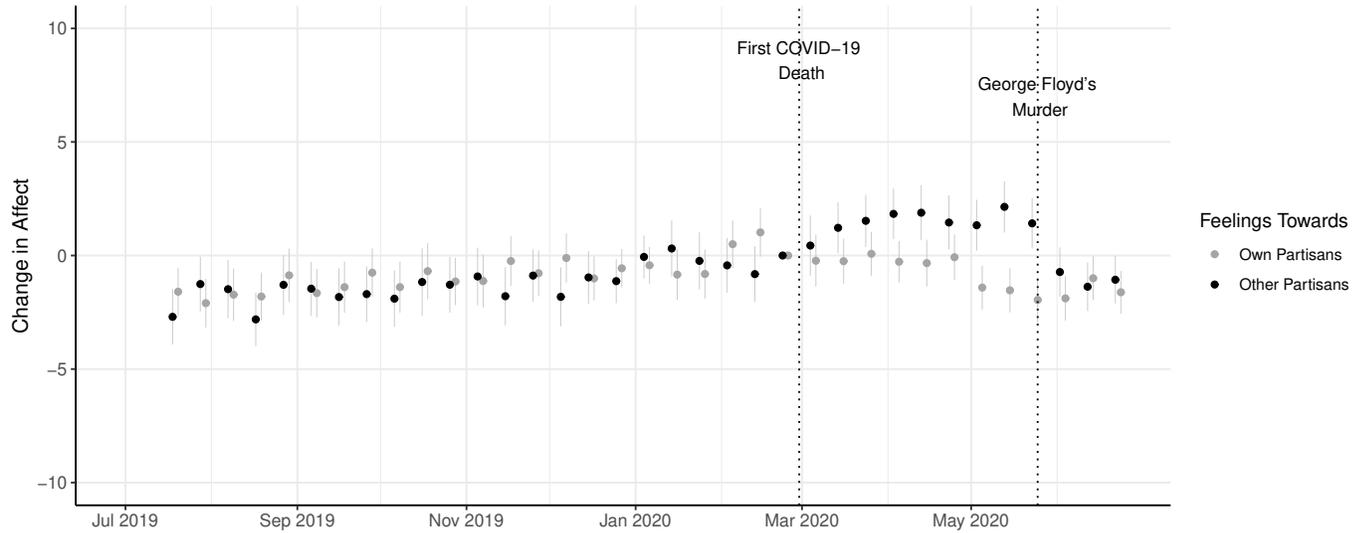
Note: Figure shows trends in affective polarization using three distinct data sources. Panel A reports affective polarization towards partisans for each ten-day period in the Nationscape data. Panel B reports affective polarization towards members of Congress for each ten-day period in the Nationscape data. Panel C reports affective polarization using a panel of respondents from Druckman et al. (2020) who completed surveys in July 2019 and April 2020. The Druckman et al. (2020) data report lower levels of affective polarization likely due, in part, to an embedded experiment that varied the target evaluated (e.g., “Democrats,” “moderate Democrats”) (see Druckman et al. n.d.). 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. No weights are used for the Druckman et al. (2020) data.

Figure 4: Trends in affective polarization by party



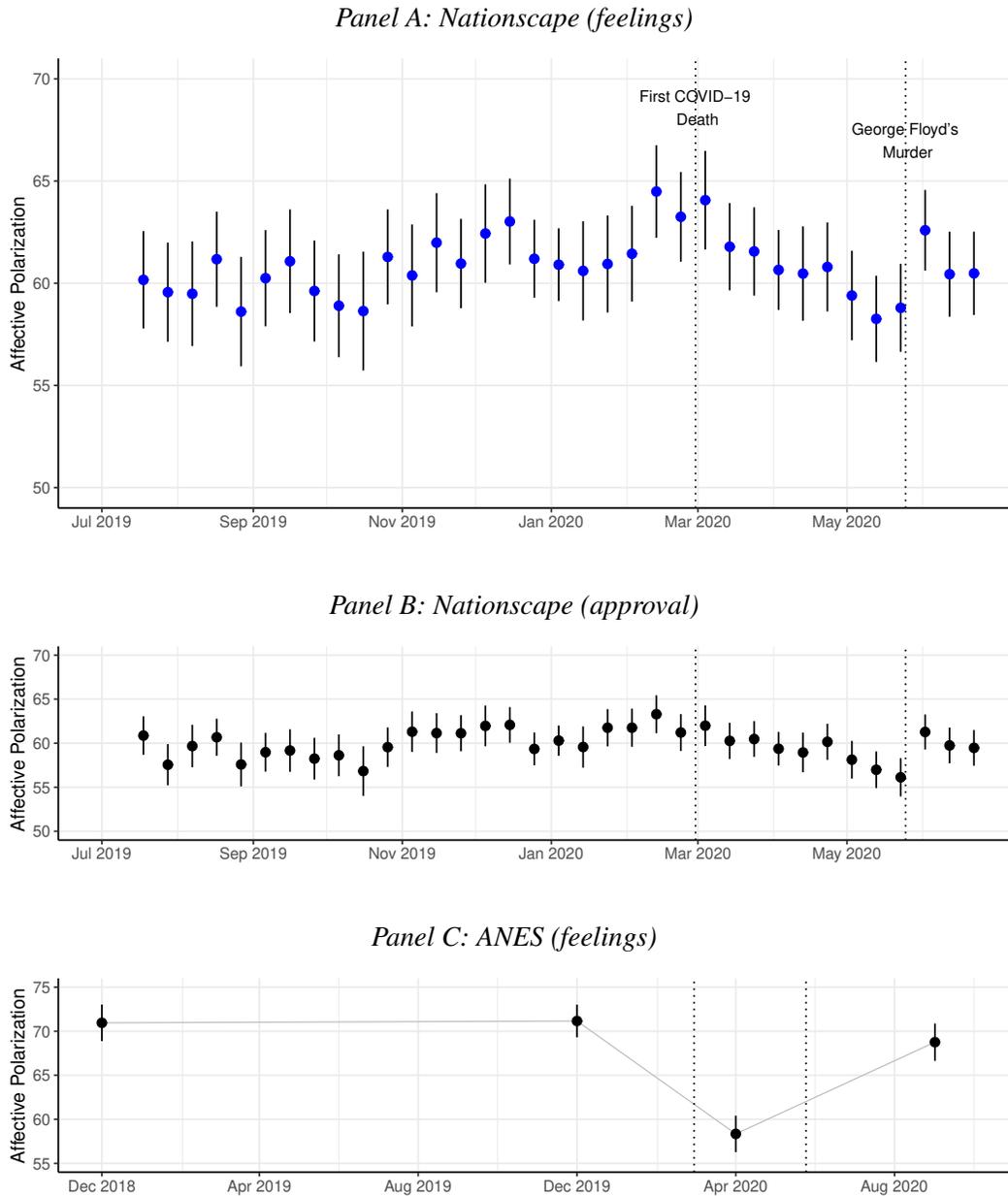
Note: Figure shows trends in affective polarization among Republicans (black dots) and among Democrats (grey dots) for each ten-day period in the Nationscape data as in Panel A of Figure 3. The Republican series is shifted forward by two days for visualization purposes. Both affective polarization series are normalized to be zero for the period immediately prior to the first COVID-19 death (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.

Figure 5: Trends in affect towards own and other partisans



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 Panel A of Figure 3. 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 (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. See Online Appendix Figure 3 for analyses of affect towards own and other partisans among Republicans and among Democrats separately.

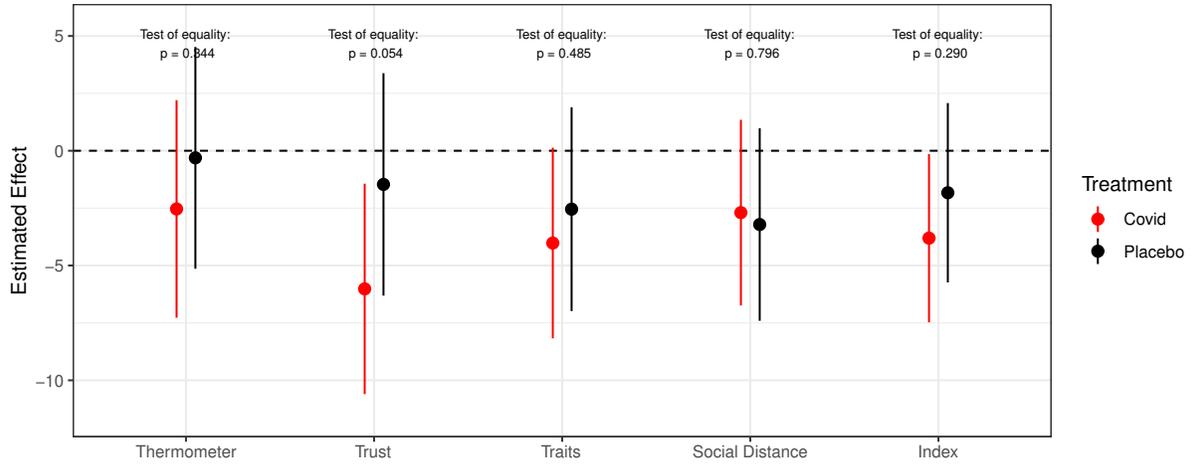
Figure 6: Trends in partisan feelings toward Trump



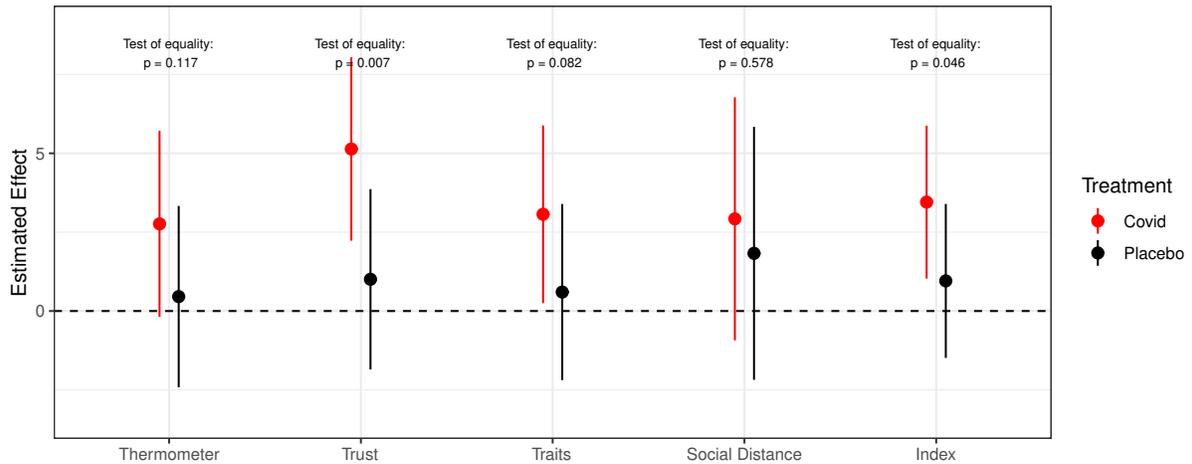
Note: Figure shows trends in the difference (Republicans minus Democrats) in average feelings towards Donald Trump. Panel A reports this measure for each ten-day period in the Nationscape data. Panel B reports trends in the difference (Republicans minus Democrats) in average presidential approval ratings for Donald Trump for each ten-day period in the Nationscape data. Panel C reports the difference (Republicans minus Democrats) in average feelings towards Donald Trump from the 2018 ANES Pilot (December 2018), the 2019 ANES Pilot (December 2019), the 2020 ANES Exploratory Testing Survey (April 2020), and the 2020 Pre-Election Time Series Study (August–November 2020, but assigned to September 2020 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. No weights are used for the ANES data.

Figure 7: Experimental treatment effects of priming the pandemic

Panel A: Affective polarization



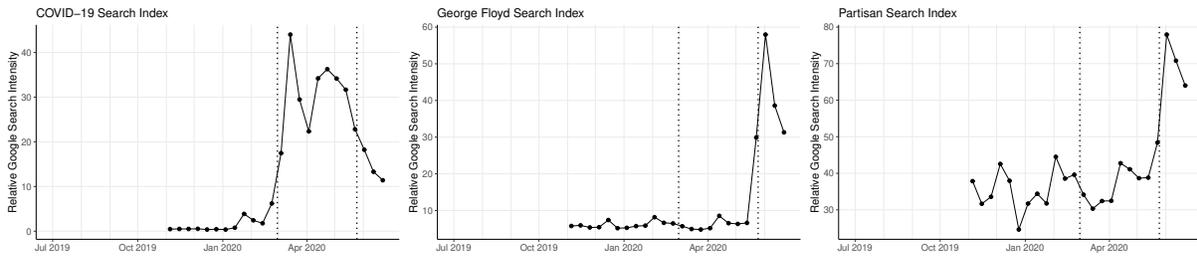
Panel B: Affect towards other party



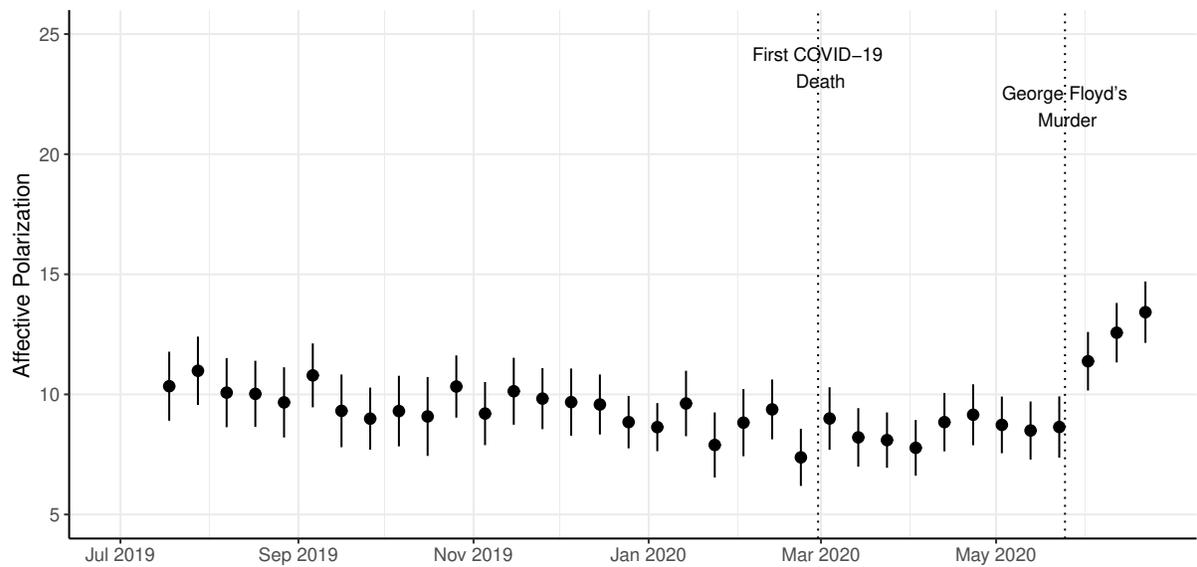
Note: Figure reports estimated treatment effects of the COVID-19 and placebo primes relative to the pure control group. Panel A reports estimates on measures of affective polarization (own party minus other party). Panel B reports estimates on measures of affect towards the other party. Both panels report 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 COVID-19 and placebo treatment effects using robust standard errors.

Figure 8: Separating the COVID-19 pandemic and George Floyd’s murder

Panel A: Google search trends



Panel B: Trends in partisanship of racial affect



Note: Panel A 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 index is constructed by taking the average across each term or topic in the category. The COVID-19 category includes “coronavirus” (topic), “lockdown” (topic), “reopen” (topic), and “mask” (term). The George Floyd category includes “black lives matter” (topic), “racist” (topic), and “protest” (topic). The partisan category includes “conservatives” (term), “liberals” (term), “far right” (term), and “far left” (term). Panel B reports trends in the partisanship of racial affect 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. We then take the weighted average across respondents in each 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. 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 for: Affective polarization did not increase during the COVID-19 pandemic

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August 2021

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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 ($\beta = 17.17$; 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 ($\beta = -9.41$; 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 ($\beta = -14.90$; 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-

¹Other 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 ($\beta = -10.88$; 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.

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Supporting Tables and Figures

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

	(1)		(2)	
	Change After COVID-19 Onset		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 (1.73)	-10.88 (1.30)								
Identity Index			19.30 (2.78)	17.17 (2.64)						
COVID-19 Concern					-3.01 (1.61)	-9.41 (1.41)				
Sick Index							-21.31 (1.19)	-14.90 (1.20)		
Sick (Self)									-25.13 (1.27)	-21.13 (1.14)
Sick (Family)									-2.40 (1.41)	-2.32 (1.43)
Sick (Work)									-5.10 (0.99)	-2.66 (1.05)
Sick (Other)									1.06 (0.57)	1.64 (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 × Republican			-0.17	-0.12	Log Deaths × Republican			-0.29	-0.22
			(0.09)	(0.08)				(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.

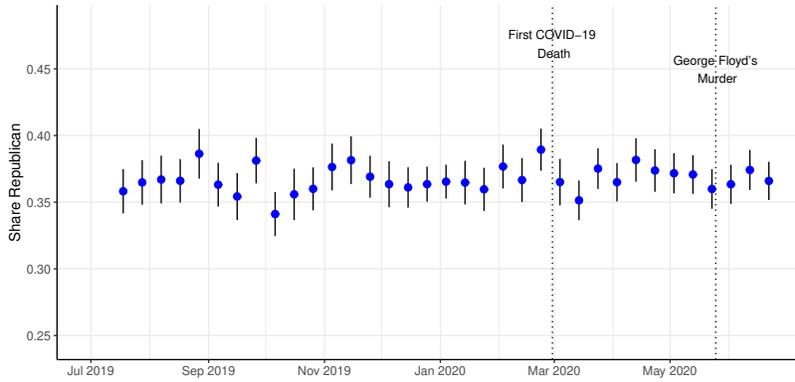
Online Appendix Table 4: Mechanisms – Druckman et al. (2020) and Experiment

	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

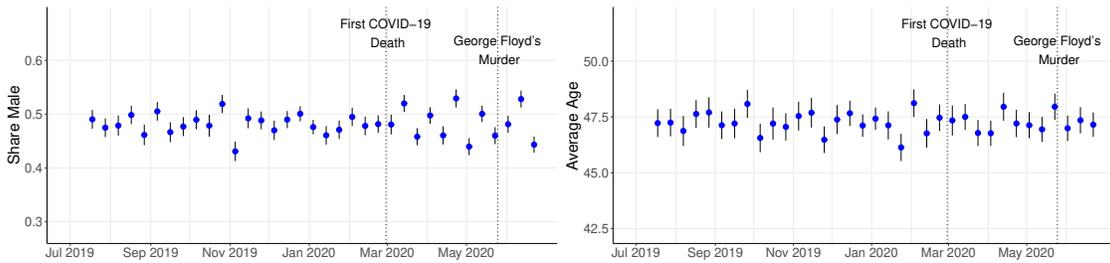
Note: Table shows estimates from OLS regressions of partisan affective polarization on views of the United States' COVID-19 response. Columns (1)-(6) use the index of affective polarization from our survey experiment and are restricted to observations in the COVID-19 treatment group. Columns (7) and (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,

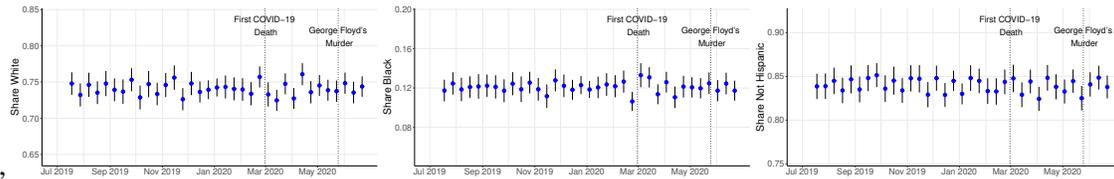
Panel A: Share Republican



Panel B: Gender and Age

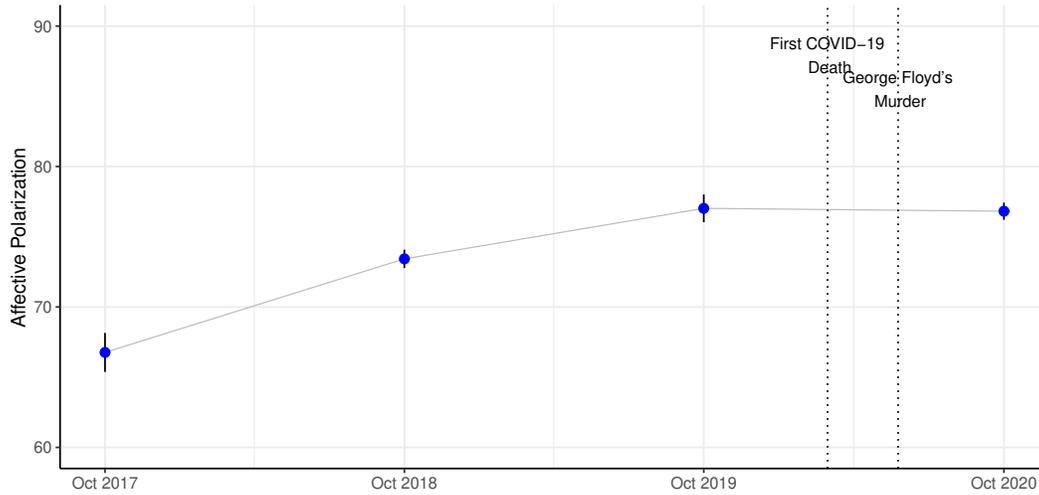


Panel C: Race and Ethnicity



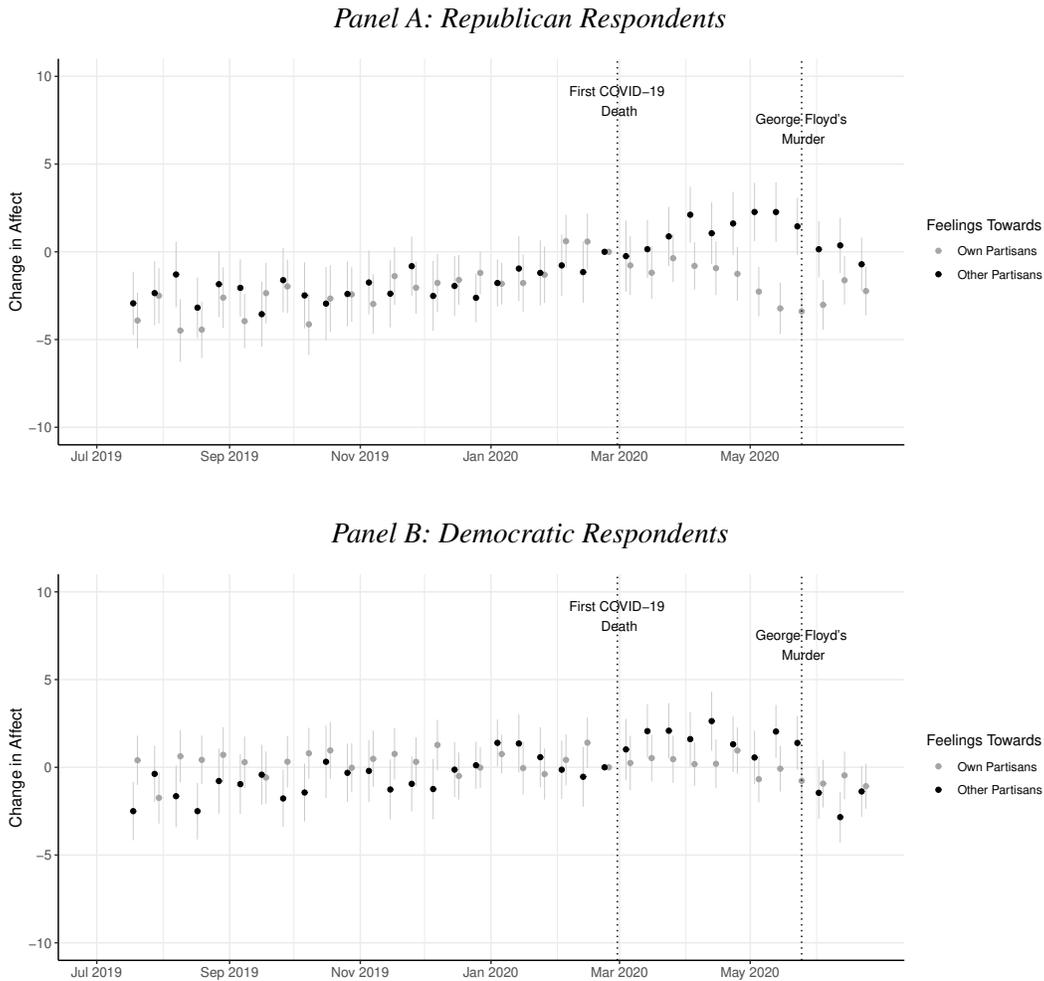
Note: Figure shows trends in various variables in the Nationscape data, including non-partisans. Panel A reports trends in the share of respondents identifying with the Republican Party for each ten-day period in the Nationscape data. Panel B reports trends in the share of respondents identifying as 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.

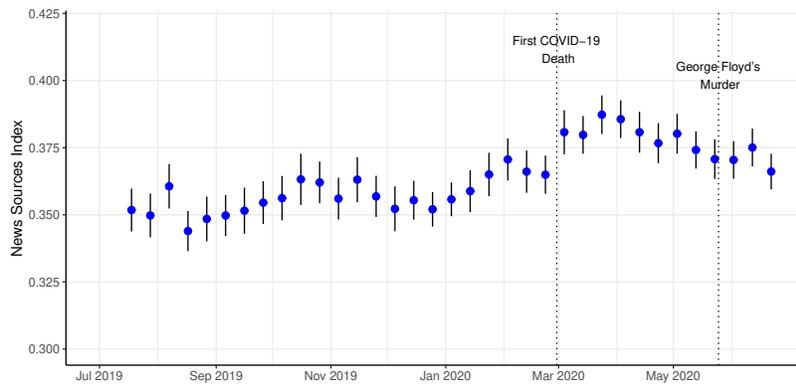
Online Appendix Figure 3: Trends in Affect Towards Own and Other Partisans, by Party



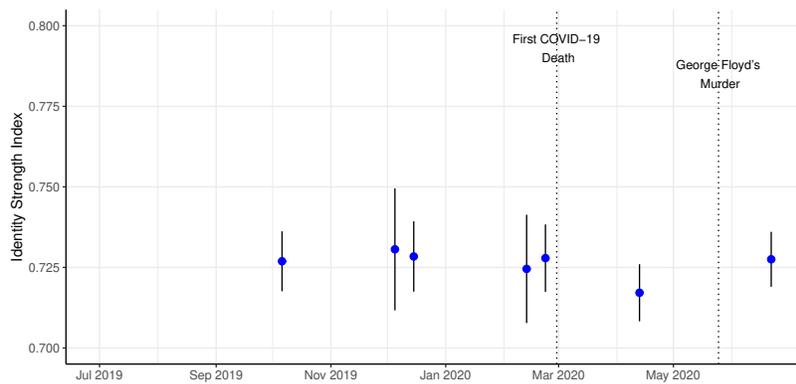
Note: Figure shows trends in affect towards other (black dots) and own (grey dots) partisans for each ten-day period in the Nationscape data as in Figure 5. The own party series is shifted forward by two days for visualization purposes. Both own and other party affect series are normalized to be zero 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

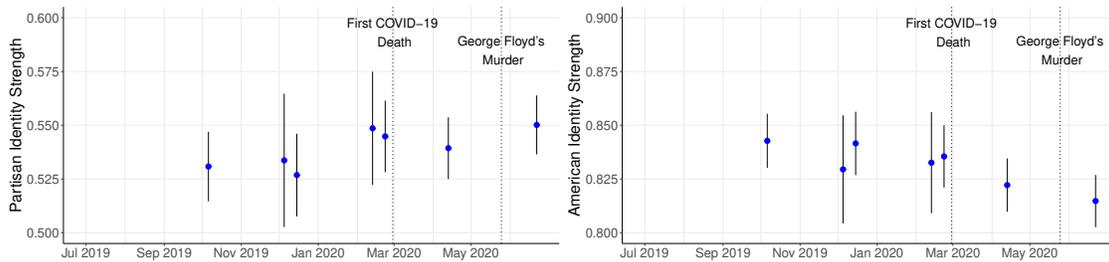
Panel A: News Index



Panel B: Identity Index

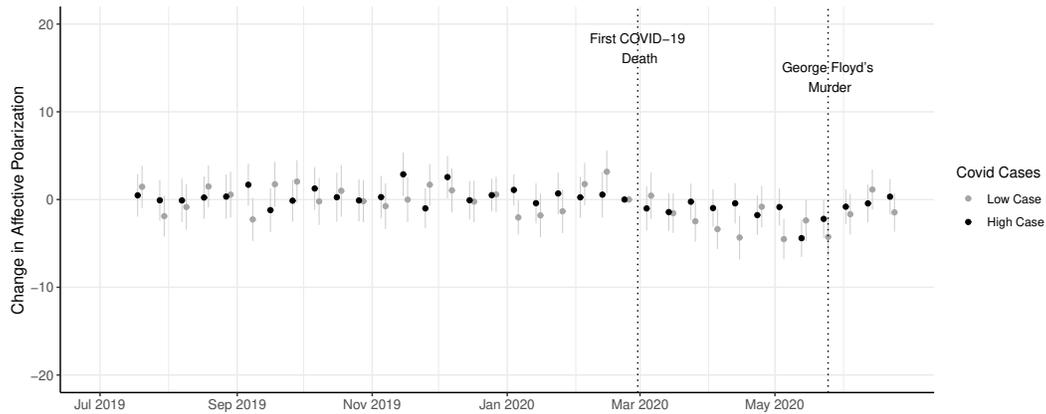


Panel C: Partisan and American Identities



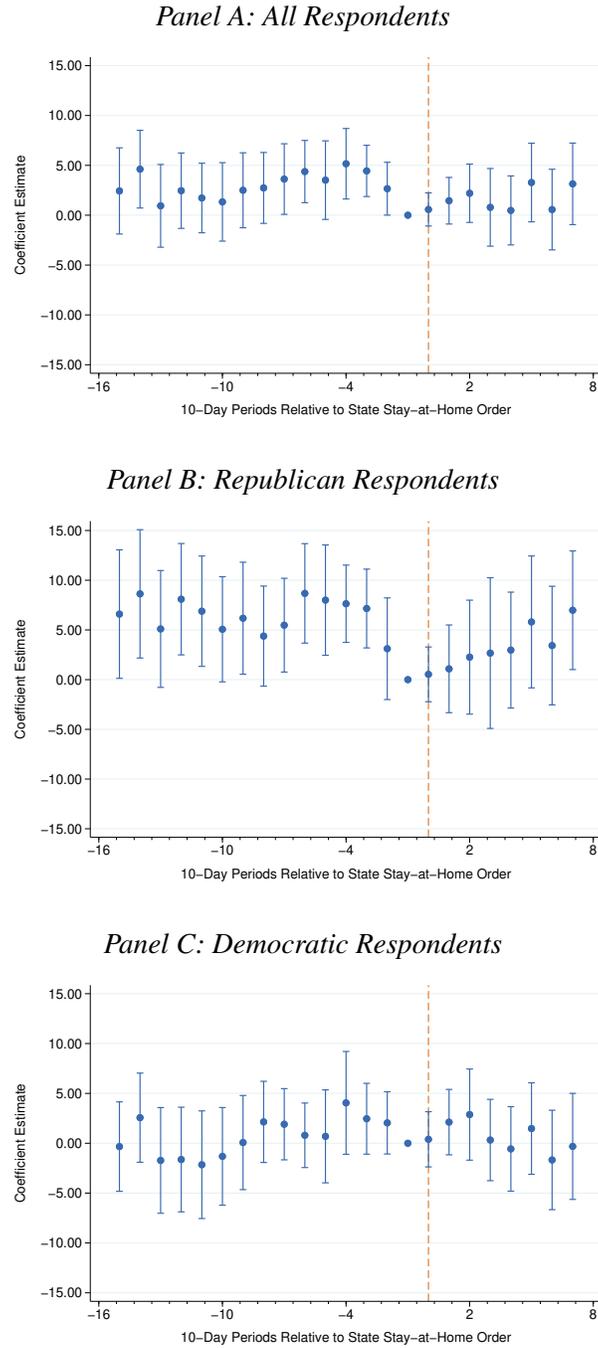
Note: Figure shows trends in various variables in the Nationscape data. Panel A reports trends in a news consumption index for each ten-day period in the Nationscape data. The news consumption index is the number of news outlet categories reportedly used by the respondent divided by twelve (the number 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

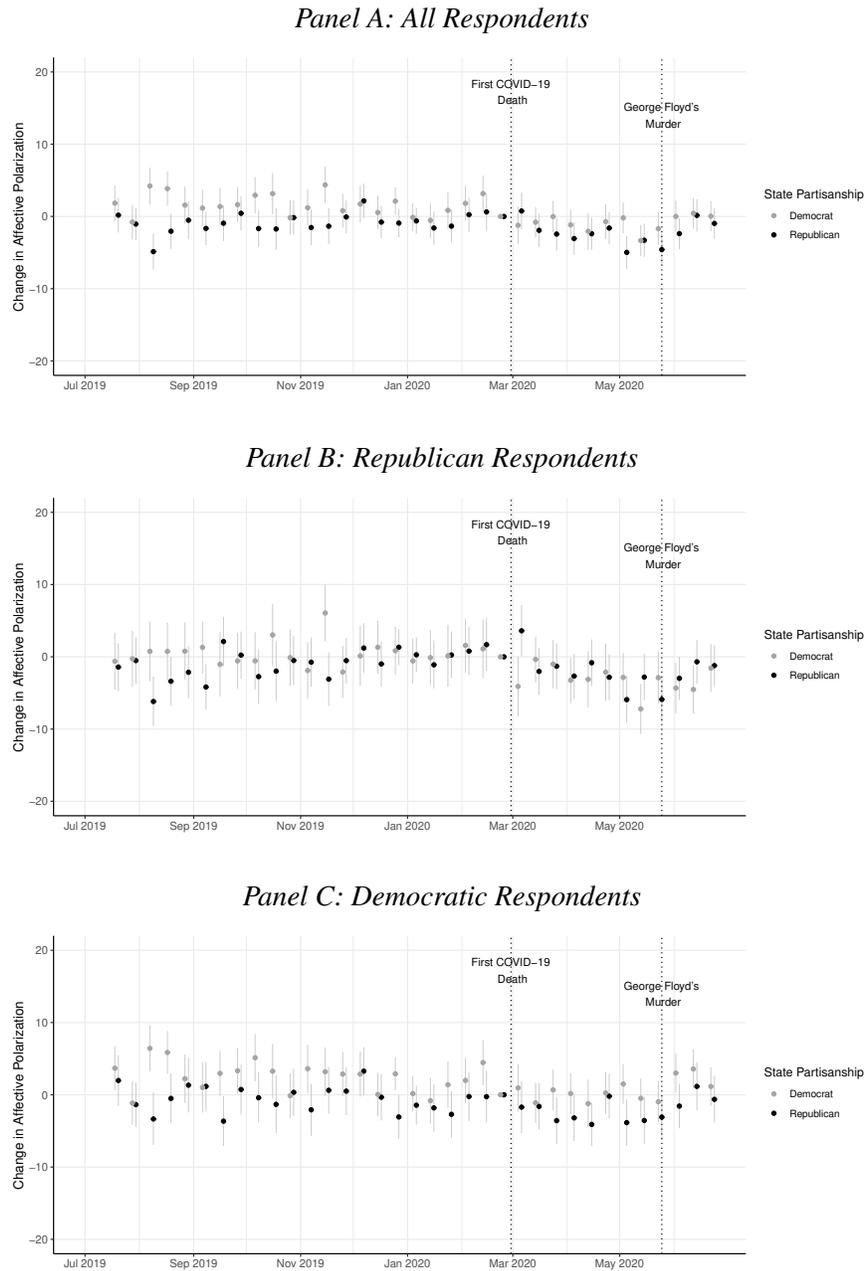


Note: Figure reports estimated coefficients $\hat{\omega}_k$ from the regression

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

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.

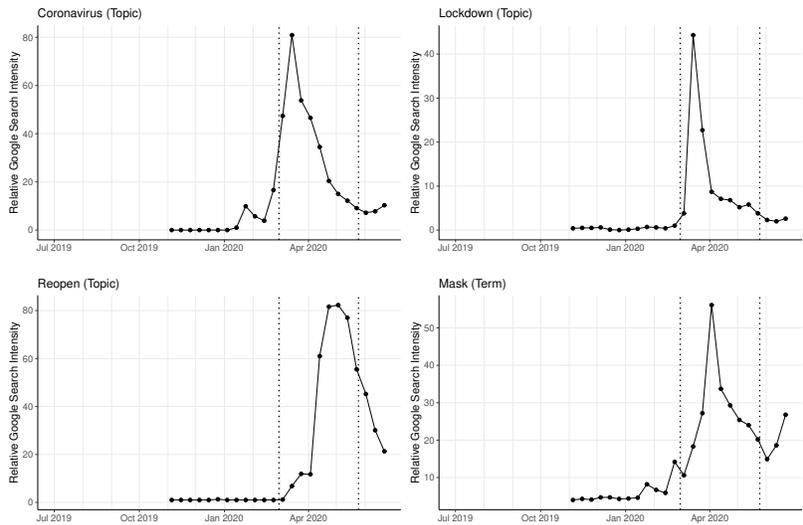
Online Appendix Figure 7: Trends in Affect By Party and State Partisanship



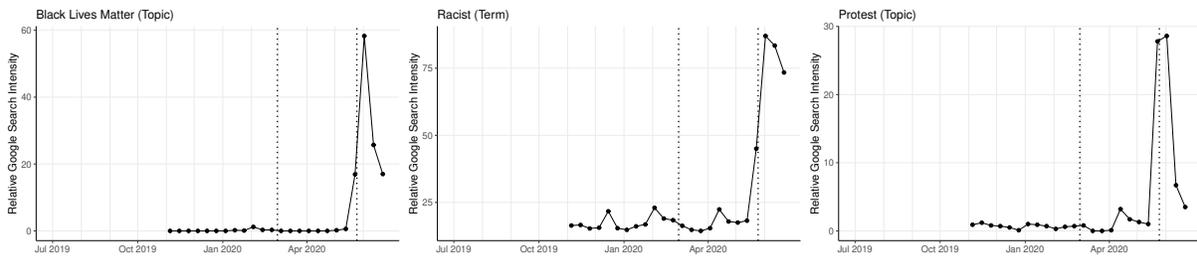
Note: Figure shows trends in affective polarization towards partisans for each ten-day period in the Nationscape data separately for Republican-leaning states (black dots) and Democratic-leaning states (grey dots) as in Panel A of Figure 3. The Republican-leaning state series is shifted forward by two 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 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

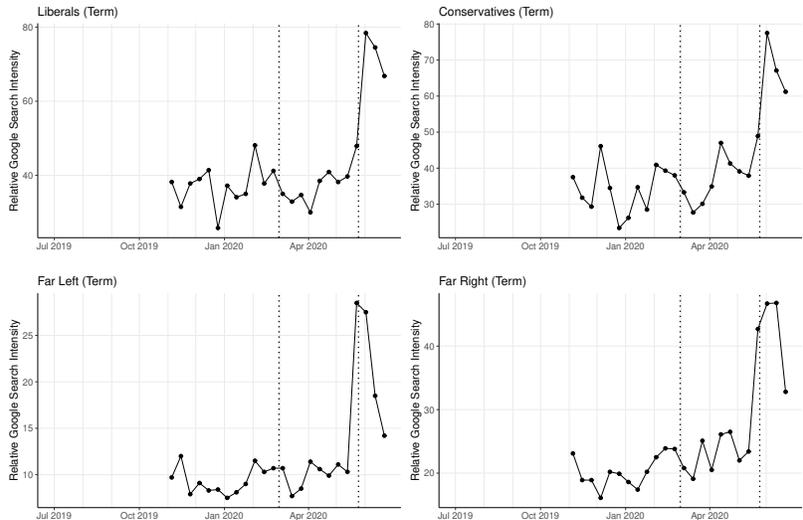
Panel A: COVID-19-Related Searches



Panel B: George Floyd-Related Searches

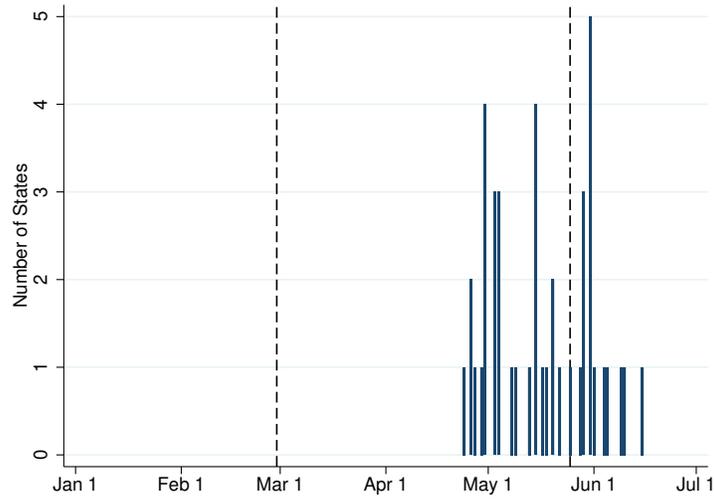


Panel C: Partisan-Related Searches



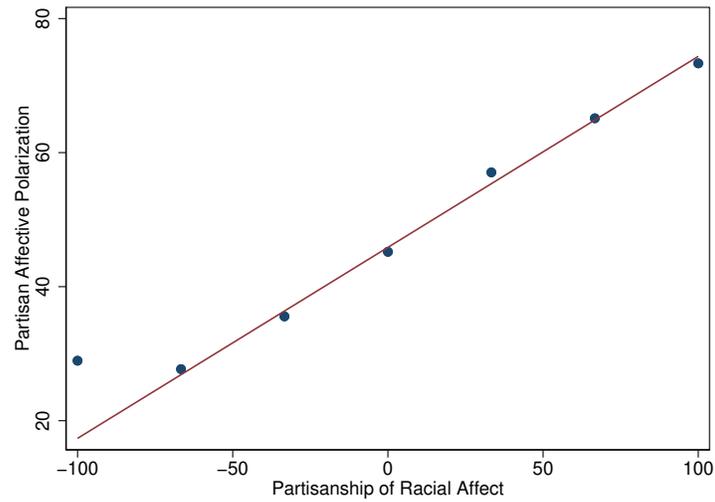
Note: Figure reports Google search trends for terms and topics related to COVID-19, George Floyd, and partisanship. Each term's search volume is indexed relative to the highest volume day between November 1, 2019 and July 1, 2020. The daily volume is then averaged over each ten day period. The first 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.

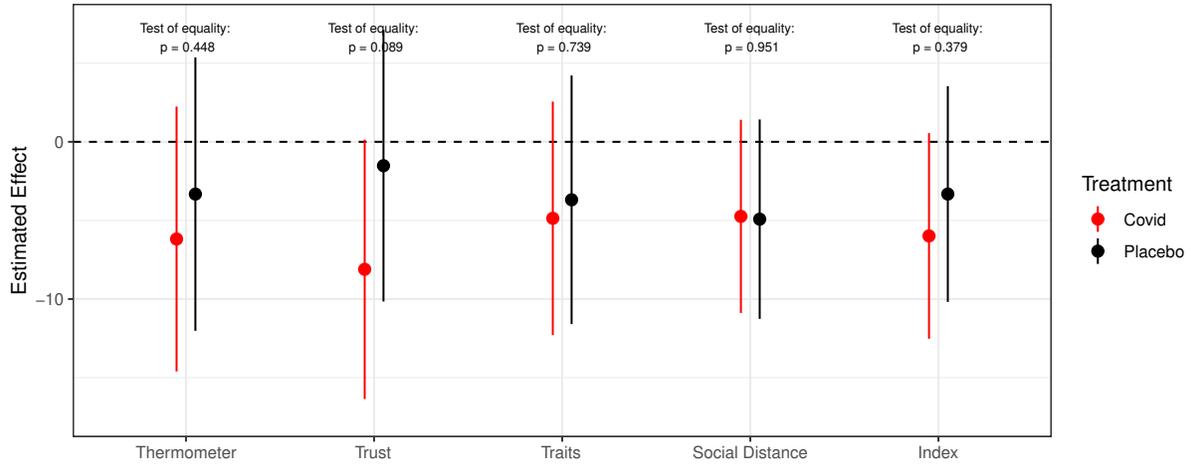
Online Appendix Figure 10: Racial Affect and Partisan Affect



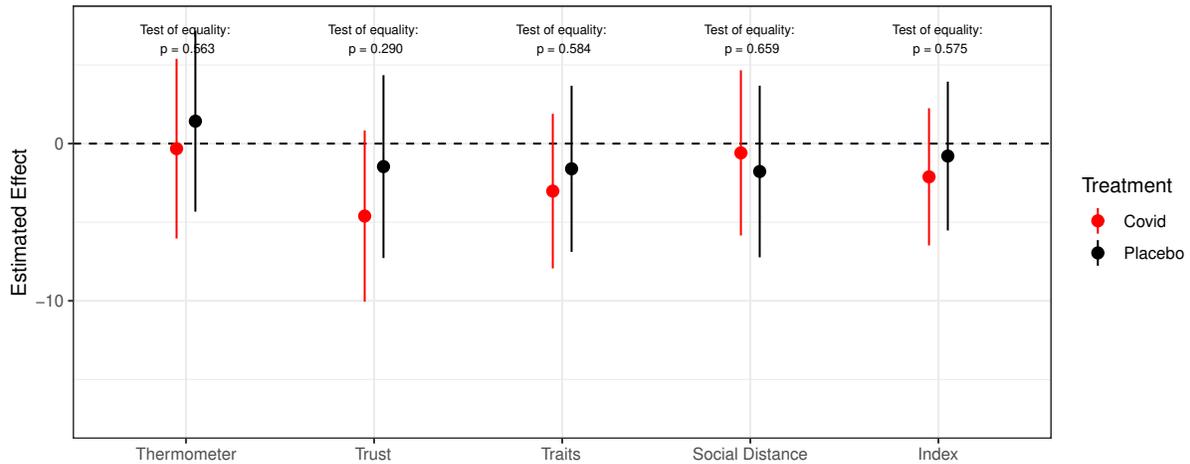
Note: Figure plots a weighted binscatter of the partisanship of racial affect and partisan affective polarization (as defined in Panel A of Figure 3 in the main text) across all respondents with valid responses to both. The partisanship of racial affect is defined as follows. First, for all Democrats,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



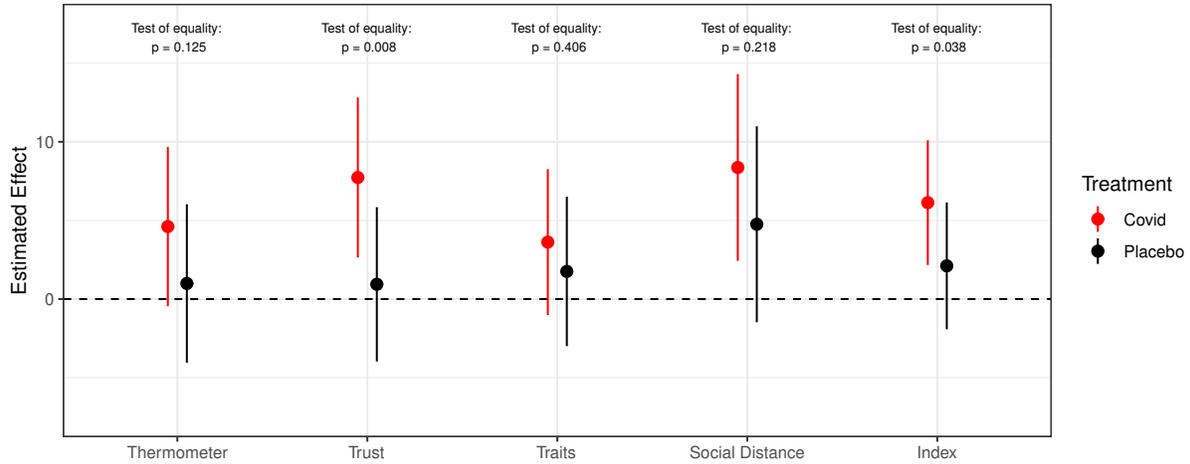
Panel B: Democratic Respondents



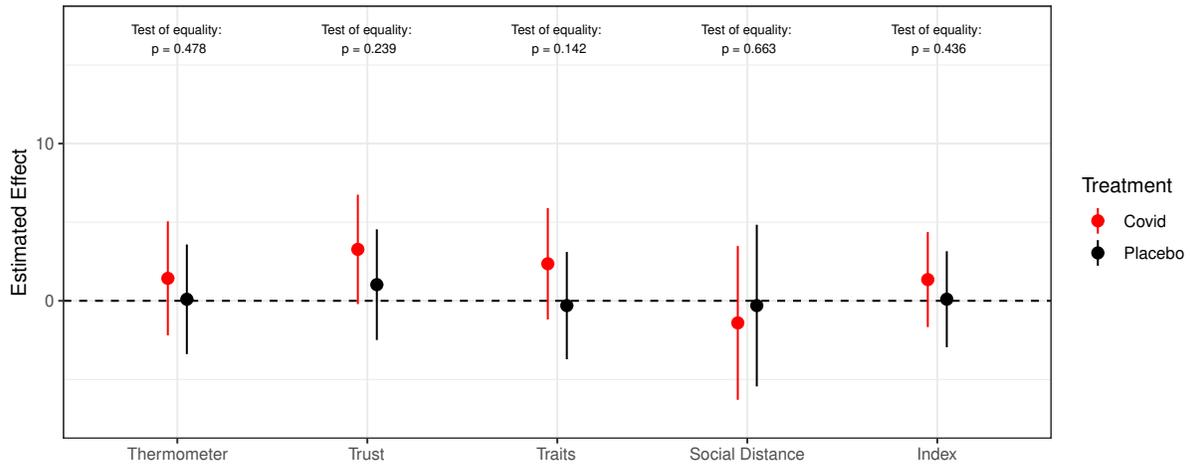
Note: Figure reports estimated treatment effects of the COVID-19 and placebo primes relative to the pure control group. Panel A reports estimates on measures of affective polarization (own party minus other party) after restricting to Republican respondents. Panel B is the same as Panel A, but restricts 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



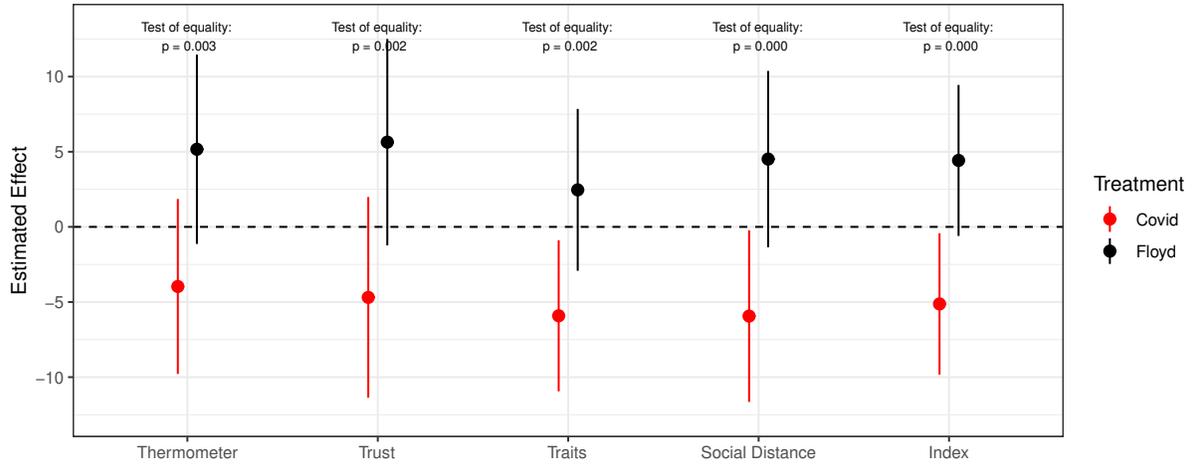
Panel B: Democratic Respondents



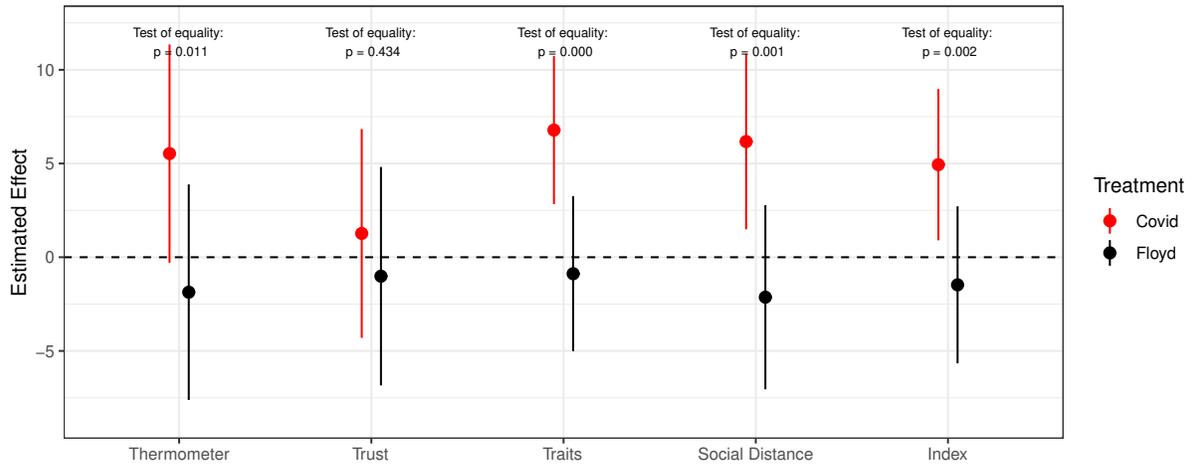
Note: Figure reports estimated treatment effects of the COVID-19 and placebo primes relative to the pure control group. Panel A reports estimates on measures of other party affect after restricting to Republican respondents. Panel B is the same as Panel A, but restricts the sample to Democratic respondents. 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]

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 country 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 knelt 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. “<In-party>” 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]*

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.]*