

# You're Making Us Look Bad: Can Partisan Embarrassment Dampen Partisanship and Polarization?\*

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**Abstract.** Partisan elites and members of the public often have attitudes or engage in behavior that could embarrass co-partisans. We examine this occurrence—what we call partisan embarrassment—by investigating how much partisans report feeling this embarrassment, what types of scenarios embarrass partisans, what types of partisans feel this embarrassment, and what political ramifications of partisan embarrassment could be. We expect that when a co-partisan engages in embarrassing behavior, co-partisans will want to distance themselves from their party to preserve their own status. We find that about 53.90% of American partisans experience partisan embarrassment, but it is highly variable across individuals and scenarios and has limited influence on partisanship, polarization, private or public in-party support, or views about party competence. Consistent with work highlighting the importance and stability of partisan attachments, our findings suggest that partisans are unlikely to punish their party, even when it embarrasses them.

**Key Words:** polarization; partisanship; embarrassment; null results

**Word Count:** 6,464

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## Introduction

On June 27, 2024, President Joe Biden and former President Donald Trump met for the first debate of the 2024 campaign. Biden, who appeared tired and unprepared, delivered a performance that was described as confusing and full of “puzzling non sequiturs” (Kim and Riccardi 2024). Pundits quickly lampooned Biden’s “painful” performance, which had “left Democrats reeling” (Stanage 2024). Biden’s attempts at damage control “fell flat” (Grayer, Fox, and Lee 2024), with his rhetorical struggles producing an atmosphere where one could “sense the embarrassment” in the room (Crace 2024). Biden was “embarrassing himself,” according to *The New York Times* Editorial Board, and dragging down his party’s reputation. So great was Democrats’ embarrassment with Biden’s public appearances that he ultimately stepped down and was replaced by Vice President Kamala Harris as the party’s nominee.

While scholars have long known that parties attempt to avoid voting on issues that might harm their reputation (Cox and McCubbins 1993, 2005), less work has been devoted to understanding the sources and consequences of Americans’ *embarrassment* by their own party—what we call “partisan embarrassment.” Drawing on work in social psychology, we note that embarrassment, as an emotion, has distinct effects on social behavior that could have unique political implications when it is partisan. In particular, partisans’ association with their party might lead them to feel embarrassed by party missteps and thus publicly distance themselves from the group, decreasing their partisan loyalty. Partisan embarrassment could thus be one manifestation of *intraparty* affective polarization—divisions *within* the parties—that could affect our understanding of partisanship.

We examine partisan embarrassment in American politics using three original datasets<sup>1</sup> to accomplish four goals. First, we document the existence of partisan embarrassment, highlighting that 53.90% of American partisans report having felt embarrassed by their party, a quantity that could be underestimated by excluding Independents who may have defected from party. Second, we use closed- and open-ended responses to explore *what* embarrasses partisans, examining potential differences between scenarios as well as peer and elite behavior. Third, we examine individual-level correlates of partisan embarrassment.

Fourth, we examine the political ramifications of partisan embarrassment. We conduct an experiment to test whether Americans’ embarrassment with their party affects attitudes associated with partisanship and polarization, such as partisan identity strength, affective party ratings, public and private party support, and perceived party competence. Although our experiment was able to successfully prime partisan embarrassment, this did not cause partisans to distance themselves from their party.

Together, our studies show that while the majority of partisans experience partisan embarrassment, this embarrassment is highly variable by individual and scenario and may not affect partisan loyalties. We conclude by discussing implications, noting our findings suggest a daunting outlook for American politics, whereby politicians can conduct embarrassing behavior with limited risk of weakening their base’s support.

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<sup>1</sup> Studies 1 and 3 have experimental components and were pre-registered: [https://aspredicted.org/3HB\\_K7M](https://aspredicted.org/3HB_K7M) and [https://aspredicted.org/GLV\\_1W3](https://aspredicted.org/GLV_1W3).

## ***Interparty Conflict, Intraparty Conflict, and Partisan Embarrassment***

***Interparty Conflict.*** Decades of research have highlighted the importance of partisanship in shaping political beliefs and behaviors (Campbell et al. 1960), and the importance of partisanship has only grown over time. First, with secular increases in partisan ideological (Levendusky 2009) and demographic (Mason 2016, 2018) sorting, the Democratic and Republican parties have become increasingly internally homogeneous and externally distinct. As this process has clarified choices for partisans, so, too, has it facilitated growth of affective polarization—whereby partisans like the in-party and dislike the out-party (Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes 2012; Iyengar et al. 2019; Rogowski and Sutherland 2016; Webster and Abramowitz 2017)—and negative partisanship—whereby voters are motivated by voting *against* parties and candidates they dislike (Abramowitz and Webster 2016, 2018).

With these developments, political scientists have noted that partisanship has become more than a partisan lens, but also a social identity (Tajfel and Turner 1979; Green, Palmquist and Schickler 2002) that may further exacerbate affective polarization (Dias and Lelkes 2022; but see West and Iyengar 2022; Orr and Huber 2020). That is, partisans have become so tied to their parties that they have incorporated this into how they feel about themselves generally.

This era of partisanship and polarization is concerning for both social and political reasons. Socially, partisanship can shape how we interact with others, affecting: interpersonal trust (Lee 2022); economic behavior (Engelhardt and Utych 2020); residential preferences generally (Bishop 2008); willingness to be neighbors with (Mason 2018), date (Huber and Malhortra 2017; Easton and Holbein 2021), marry (Iyengar, Konitzer, and Tedin 2018) out-partisans; and willingness to help out-partisan neighbors with household tasks (Webster, Connors, and Sinclair 2022). Politically, polarization can influence beliefs (e.g., Druckman et al. 2021), participation (Iyengar and Krupenkin 2018), and trust (Hetherington and Rudolph 2015). Strong affective polarization can even lead to anti-democratic attitudes (Kingzette et al. 2021) and out-party dehumanization (Cassese 2021; Martherus et al. 2021).

Despite extensive evidence of affective polarization, recent work has also demonstrated that partisans may exaggerate this animosity for social reasons (Connors 2023) and may not dramatically change their social relationships for political reasons (Connors et al. 2024). Moreover, some work suggests limited effects of affective polarization on some political outcomes, such as support for political violence or antidemocratic values (e.g., Broockman, Kalla, and Westwood 2022; Voelkel et al. 2023). Yet even with these limits, scholars generally agree that strong partisan divisions have important consequences.

***Intraparty Conflict.*** Focusing on interparty conflicts can overlook potential fractures within one's own party. Recent research has begun to examine these *intraparty* conflicts, noting nuances within parties that could potentially influence partisanship at the individual level and the future of American partisanship at the macro level (Groenendyk, Sances, and Zhirkov 2020).

Uscinski et al. (2021), for example, note an important divide between people with “anti-establishment” beliefs and their counterparts within both parties. Relatedly, Krupnikov and Ryan (2022) find a divide between the deeply interested, engaged, ideologically extreme, and politically active partisans (the deeply involved) and people who are less invested in politics—again, within both parties. Klar, Krupnikov, and Ryan (2018) demonstrate that these types of intraparty divides can muddy some polarization measures, because people have a stronger distaste for the politically talkative and interested than they do for out-partisans generally. Indeed, some people are so turned

off by partisanship and the deeply politically involved that they are unwilling to identify with a party at all (Klar and Krupnikov 2016). These findings suggest that intraparty schisms and partisan behavior can shape others' willingness to identify with a party.

Despite recent efforts to investigate these divisions, there is currently little exploration of the affective consequences of them. Previous work has shown that affective polarization is primarily driven by out-party hostility, rather than unwavering in-party support, but little work investigates the negative feelings partisans sometimes have towards their in-group, particularly when decoupled from a distaste for politics generally—and what the consequences might be. Filling this gap is important because it can illuminate the potential limits of a social identity theory explanation for affective polarization, elaborate potential mechanisms for political (dis)engagement, and highlight implications for within-party contests, such as primary elections.

***Partisan Embarrassment.*** We investigate one affective manifestation of intraparty divisions: embarrassment with one's own party. We choose to focus on embarrassment for two primary reasons. First, embarrassment is often an emotion that is experienced when a member of one's own group engages in an act that harms the group's broader image. Because we are interested in the relationship between emotions and an individual's attitudes towards her own group, embarrassment is the ideal emotion to study. Second, we focus on embarrassment because it is overlooked in the existing body of scholarship, which often focuses on anxiety (Albertson and Gadarian 2015) or anger (Phoenix 2019; Webster 2020). Studying embarrassment more fully reveals how emotions shape group relations in politics.

Partisan embarrassment could occur for a variety of reasons, including the aforementioned intraparty divides over policy or political interest, as well as higher profile behaviors, such as scandals and gaffes.<sup>2</sup> It remains an open question how partisans react to these potentially embarrassing moments. On the one hand, partisans could hold so steadfastly to their ingroups that they do not experience embarrassment, perhaps even rallying around their party, anticipating pushback from their outgroup. On the other hand, partisans could experience embarrassment and weaken their positive in-party affect. Because people are motivated to look good to others (see, e.g., Goffman 1955, 1967), feeling embarrassed by their in-group may lead them to distance themselves from it in order to preserve their own image.

Embarrassment is defined as the “feeling of inadequacy that is precipitated by the belief that one's presented self appears deficient to others” (Modigliani 1971, pg. 15)—or the “acute state of flustered, awkward, abashed chagrin that follows events that increase the threat of unwanted evaluations from real or imagined audiences” (Miller 1996, pg. 129). Experiencing embarrassment is uniquely social: embarrassment occurs when someone's “flaws” are revealed before others, making the presence of an audience essential to understanding embarrassment: the more people witness a behavior, the more embarrassed one becomes (Eller, Koschate, and Gilson 2011). People are more likely to feel embarrassed when the situation is witnessed by the out-group (Rodriguez, Uskul, and Cross 2011), strangers or acquaintances (Eller et al. 2011), and larger groups of people (Eller et al. 2011).

Because embarrassment is an emotion experienced as a consequence of real or imagined social dynamics, it aligns with social identity theory. As people strive to maintain a positive in-group image, behavior that challenges that can cause embarrassment—and since people are motivated to avoid feeling embarrassed, this can help reinforce social norms (Lewis 1993; Goffman 1955). Embarrassment thus serves a crucial function in preserving group norms, identity,

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<sup>2</sup> We incorporate these into our studies and also discuss research on scandals in the *Discussion & Conclusion* section.

and images. When in-group members engage in behavior that violates in-group norms or reinforces negative stereotypes about the group, that behavior “threatens the in-group’s social image and the positive social identity of its members” (Rodriguez, Uskul, and Cross 2011, pg. 406). Anticipating embarrassment in this type of scenario can dissuade in-group members from engaging in deviant behaviors in the first place. Ultimately, when people are motivated to preserve a positive in-group image, they are likely to experience embarrassment when in-group members challenge that image.

The dynamics that tend to spark embarrassment are easily applicable to political contexts. Many of politicians’ behaviors have large audiences because politicians operate on an international stage and are, by definition, *public* figures. Thus, what they do or say in public spaces or on the Internet is often witnessed by a wide audience. Further, the media is likely to cover behavior that will draw attention, and this sensational content likely includes the types of norm-violating behavior that could cause in-party embarrassment.

Beyond elites, members of the public could also engage in behaviors that embarrass co-partisans. Partisans in the public vote, take surveys, talk to the media, and engage with people on a day-to-day basis. In each of these contexts, they are representing their group. If, for example, these partisans say they believe conspiracy theories, are demeaning to certain groups, or say factually incorrect things, these actions could be perceived as embarrassing to their co-partisans. Indeed, research finds that how group members act can give others a perception of the group as a whole, especially if it is covered by the news or social media (Krupnikov and Ryan 2022). Thus, how partisan elites and peers act could lead co-partisans to feel embarrassed by their party—and this embarrassment could have externalities.

***Our Study.*** We explore partisan embarrassment as an outcome of intraparty division that could potentially dampen partisanship. We propose that when partisans conduct behavior that embarrasses co-partisans, they will attempt to distance themselves from their party by altering their partisan identity strength, partisan affect, willingness to privately or publicly support their party, and views about each party’s competence. This distancing could occur because in judging that others will perceive their party negatively, co-partisans will want to distance themselves from it so as to not *also* be judged negatively. If this were the case, partisan embarrassment could mitigate partisan divides.<sup>3</sup>

It is important to note that although some attitudes and behaviors could be embarrassing for both partisan groups, other attitudes and behaviors may be more or less embarrassing depending on one’s partisanship. Because norms can differ by partisan group (Connors 2020), and because embarrassment is a reaction to breaking with those norms (Lewis 1993), what embarrasses each partisan group could differ. Thus, there are likely situations that are uniquely embarrassing to Republicans, but not to Democrats (and vice versa).

## Empirical Approach

To examine the nature of partisan embarrassment and its ramifications, we conduct three survey-based studies (Appendices A, B, and C evaluate data quality). We intentionally focus on partisan embarrassment among *current* partisans, excluding pure Independents from our studies. Some of our findings could underestimate the prevalence of embarrassment because some former partisans

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<sup>3</sup> Partisan embarrassment could instead lead people to double-down on their partisan identity to protect their group’s status, interpreting the embarrassment as a threat and reacting by reporting *stronger* party attachment and *greater* out-party dislike. We examine this in Study 3.

could have *become* Independents due to embarrassment with the party. However, given the ‘stickiness’ of partisan attachments (Campbell et al. 1960), we suspect this is not common.

In Study 1, we use a Cooperative Election Studies (CES; N=791) module to collect both closed- and open-ended responses to questions about partisan embarrassment (YouGov). We do this to determine the rate, type, and correlates of partisan embarrassment and allow partisans to explain the types of scenarios that lead to partisan embarrassment. We further examine this in Study 2 with a nationally-representative sample from YouGov (N=1,314).<sup>4</sup> We use findings from Studies 1 and 2 to inform Study 3.

In Study 3, we examine the political ramifications of partisan embarrassment with a Prolific convenience sample (N=1,476). Our goal is to experimentally induce partisan embarrassment and measure our dependent variables. However, given the heterogeneity—especially across parties—in what embarrasses partisans (Studies 1 and 2), choosing one embarrassing scenario as a treatment could create SUTVA violations by making the treatment more effective for certain types of participants. Thus, instead, we randomly assign respondents to a control condition or a treatment condition that asks respondents to discuss a time they felt embarrassed by their party. We then ask all respondents a series of questions to gauge various aspects of their partisanship and polarization.

## Study 1

**Study Design.** First, we examine the rate, type, and correlates of partisan embarrassment with both closed- and open-ended questions in a CES module from November 3<sup>rd</sup> to December 7<sup>th</sup>, 2021 (N=791; survey weights used for non-experimental analyses; sample details and survey wording in Supplementary Material A). Our goal is to understand how common partisan embarrassment is, the differences in embarrassment caused by partisan elites and peers, and the scenarios that elicit partisan embarrassment. It is possible that elites cause more embarrassment because their behavior is more public, but it is also possible that *peers* cause more embarrassment because they are held to a higher standard (see, e.g., Druckman and Levendusky (2019), who show people dislike partisan elites more than peers). Beyond the object of embarrassment, this study could also suggest the behaviors that embarrass partisans and what variables correlate with partisan embarrassment.

We thus randomly assign respondents to answer questions about their in-party elites or peers. In the elite condition they are asked, “Have you ever felt embarrassed to be a [in-party] because of something a [in-party] elite (i.e., a politician or media elite) said or did?” In the peer condition, they are asked instead about “a [in-party] peer (i.e., *not* a [in-party] elite but a [in-party] in the public).” Response options are: “no, never,” “once or twice,” “sometimes,” “quite often,” and “basically every week.” For those who answer “no, never” they are asked to, “Please talk about why you think you have not been embarrassed.” For every other response, participants are asked to, “Please talk about what has embarrassed you and why.”

**Results.** Overall, we find that 53.90% of American partisans (weighted) report having felt partisan embarrassment at least once. In particular, 23.80% report feeling partisan embarrassment “once or twice,” 22.84% “sometimes,” 5.03% “quite often,” and 2.23% “basically every week.” Further, we find that rates of embarrassment do not differ by whether participants are asked about peers or elites ( $p=.467$ ).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Although Studies 1 and 2 do not use probability samples, our samples do not differ meaningfully from Census demographics (see Supplementary Material A and B).

<sup>5</sup> P-value of treatment coefficient in ordered logit regression predicting embarrassment (unweighted).

Next, we examine the relationship between individual characteristics and embarrassment. Given the exploratory nature of this analysis and to allow for ease of interpretation, we begin with bivariate ordered logits regressing partisan embarrassment on demographic and political characteristics. However, because many of these characteristics are correlated with one another, we present these results in a multivariate regression framework in Supplementary Material A.

As shown in Table 1, we find that partisan embarrassment (conditions merged) is strongly associated with race, ideology, education, and political interest: White ( $\beta=0.559$ ,  $SE=0.187$ ,  $p=.003$ ) and liberal ( $\beta=-0.188$ ,  $SE=0.062$ ,  $p=.003$ ) respondents, as well as the more educated ( $\beta=0.176$ ,  $SE=0.054$ ,  $p=.001$ ) and politically interested ( $\beta=0.380$ ,  $SE=0.091$ ,  $p<.001$ ) report more partisan embarrassment.<sup>6</sup> Splitting this up by condition, we find that the more educated ( $\beta=0.164$ ,  $SE=0.079$ ,  $p=.038$ ), report more *peer* embarrassment.<sup>7</sup> White ( $\beta=0.769$ ,  $SE=0.260$ ,  $p=.003$ ) and liberal ( $\beta=-0.206$ ,  $SE=0.087$ ,  $p=.018$ ) respondents as well as the more educated ( $\beta=0.186$ ,  $SE=0.073$ ,  $p=.011$ ) and politically interested ( $\beta=0.505$ ,  $SE=0.122$ ,  $p<.001$ ) report more *elite* embarrassment.<sup>8</sup>

Overall, these findings demonstrate the types of people that are more embarrassed by their party—White, liberal, and more educated and politically interested respondents report more embarrassment. It is likely that the last two of these correlations reflect the fact that those more educated and interested are more likely to encounter political information and therefore more likely to encounter situations that embarrass them.

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<sup>6</sup> In multivariate regression, ideology and education are not statistically significant, but race and political interest remain similar.

<sup>7</sup> In multivariate regression, education is no longer significant.

<sup>8</sup> In multivariate regression, younger respondents are more embarrassed, while ideology and education are not statistically significant and race and interest remain similar.

**Table 1.** Embarrassment by Demographic and Political Variables

	<i>Dependent Variable:</i>		
	Embarrassment	Peer Embarrassment	Elite Embarrassment
<b>Age</b>	-0.003 (.004)	0.002 (.007)	-0.006 (.006)
<b>Man</b>	-0.147 (.165)	-0.026 (.240)	-0.247 (.228)
<b>Other, Non-Binary</b>	0.568 (1.152)	2.532 (.745)	0.058 (1.203)
<b>White</b>	0.559 (.187)	0.384 (.263)	0.769 (.260)
<b>Education</b>	0.176 (.054)	0.164 (.080)	0.186 (.073)
<b>Interest</b>	0.380 (.091)	0.232 (.133)	0.505 (.122)
<b>Partisan Strength</b>	-0.098 (.104)	-0.142 (.144)	-0.073 (.145)
<b>Democrat</b>	0.272 (.164)	0.169 (.233)	0.359 (.229)
<b>Ideology</b>	-0.188 (.062)	-0.172 (.089)	-0.206 (.087)
<b>Knowledge</b>	0.204 (.105)	0.246 (.146)	0.162 (.150)
<b>Max Observations</b>	791	395	396

Table shows coefficients (and standard errors in parentheses) predicting reported embarrassment (from 1 [“no, never”] to 5 [“basically every week”]) from ordered logit bivariate regressions using survey weights. The left column predicts embarrassment, grouping elite and peer embarrassment together. The middle column predicts peer embarrassment and the right column predicts elite embarrassment. *Age* is continuous, ranging from 18 to 91 years old. *Woman* is 2=other or non-binary, 1=woman, and 0=man. *White* is 1=White and 0=non-White. *Education* is from 0 (“did not graduate high school”) to 5 (“post-graduate degree (MA, MBA, MD, JD, PhD, etc.)”). *Interest* is from 0 (“hardly at all”) to 3 (“most of the time”). *Democrat* is 1=Democrat and 0=Republican, including leaners. *Partisan Strength* is from 1 (“independent leaner”) to 3 (“strong partisan”), as pure independents (0) are removed from this analysis. *Ideology* ranges from 0 (“very liberal”) to 4 (“very conservative”). *Knowledge* is from 0 (both knowledge questions incorrect) to 2 (both knowledge questions correct). 23 participants responded “don’t know” to the political interest question (bivariate regressions: N=768, N=383, N=385) and 40 responded “not sure” to the ideology question (bivariate regressions: N=751, N=377, N=374) and were dropped from their respective regressions.

Finally, in examining open-ended responses, we observe both similarities and differences in *what* embarrasses partisans (see Figure 1). To look at this, a research assistant hand-coded each response (N=312)<sup>9</sup> for references to different types of potentially embarrassing scenarios, including co-partisans being: involved in sex scandals, too extreme, too moderate, misinformed, or uninformed—embarrassing scenarios that we then use in Study 2. The categories were not mutually exclusive because participants could describe more than one thing that embarrassed them. Regardless of whether elites (12.7%) or peers (14.5%) caused the embarrassment, co-partisans

<sup>9</sup> Participants were asked this question if they reported experiencing partisan embarrassment (N=439). We further removed responses that were blank, seemingly insincere, or irrelevant.



acting too extreme was the most common source of embarrassment. Co-partisans believing or spreading misinformation was more likely to foster embarrassment when thinking about co-partisan peers (13.1%) than elites (6.1%), while sex scandals were more commonly mentioned when considering elites (12.1%) than peers (5.5%). Although these categories were common, we observed extensive variation in the scenarios partisans considered embarrassing, with 59.6% of descriptions referencing something *other* than or in addition to what we coded for. Many respondents pointed to very distinct moments or behaviors they found embarrassing, such as kneeling for Black Lives Matter or withdrawal from Afghanistan, which appeared infrequently in our data. Somewhat more common within the “other” category is references to specific politicians (e.g., Biden’s mental state or Donald Trump). The wide diversity of descriptions of embarrassing scenarios suggests that embarrassment is quite personal.

Although we did not analyze these responses formally, participants who reported never being embarrassed by their party were asked why they thought that was the case. Generally, we observe two types of explanations. Some point to their overall lack of political interest, such as this strong partisan: “I don’t believe I pay enough attention to politics to get embarrassed.” Others lean heavily on their partisan identity, indicating they are too proud a member to feel embarrassed. For example, one strong Democrat wrote: “I have nothing to be embarrassed about. I’m proud to be a Democrat.” Several Republicans were similarly proud, with one strong Republican writing: “I am proud of what our people stand for and believe in. We need to rise up and make America great again!”

**Figure 1.** Open-Ended Responses Coded for Most Common Sources of Partisan Embarrassment

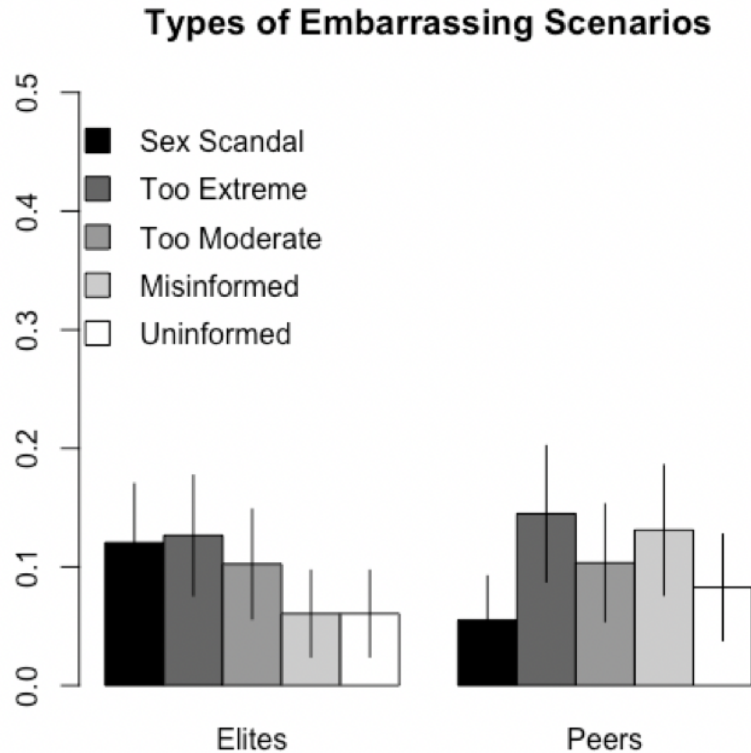


Figure shows most commonly discussed sources of partisan embarrassment in open-ended responses (N=312) coded by research assistant. Vertical lines indicate 95% confidence intervals.

## Study 2

**Study Design.** To build on these findings, we include original questions on the American Media Exposure Survey (AMES) (Kim and Carlson n.d.), fielded by YouGov between April 22 and May 2, 2022 to a nationally-representative sample of Americans, as well as an oversample of 200 self-reported regular Fox News viewers (final sample after excluding pure Independents: N=1,314). Sample details are in Supplementary Material B.

First, we build upon open-ended responses from Study 1 to obtain more concrete estimates of the degree of partisan embarrassment across different scenarios. We focused on broad scenarios that were frequently mentioned, rather than the more distinct scenarios described to evaluate the broader themes in embarrassing scenarios rather than specific events or people. We present partisan participants with the following prompt: “People feel embarrassed for many reasons. We’d like to better understand if you have ever felt embarrassed to be a [Republican/Democrat]. Please indicate how embarrassed you either have felt or would feel in the following scenarios.” We ask about five scenarios based on Study 1 responses: (1) a [in-party] politician is in a sex scandal, (2) [co-partisans] are too ideologically extreme, (3) [co-partisans] are too ideologically *moderate*, (4)

[co-partisans] believe and spread misinformation, and (5) [co-partisans] are uninformed about news or politics. Response options are: “not at all embarrassing,” “a little embarrassing,” “moderately embarrassing,” and “very embarrassing.”

Study 2 is exploratory, focusing on uncovering embarrassment rates across scenarios by estimating the weighted proportions of each response option for the full sample and each party. Our secondary goal in Study 2 is to extend Study 1 findings to examine individual-level correlates of embarrassment across scenarios. To accomplish this, we examine simple bivariate relationships between individual characteristics and the level of self-reported embarrassment in each scenario. Although this analysis allows for the cleanest interpretation of the relationships, many of these characteristics are correlated with one another, so we again present these results in a multivariate regression framework in Supplementary Material B (Tables B1-B2).

Finally, we investigate whether experiencing embarrassment is correlated with expressions of partisanship. Previous research suggests embarrassment could have distinct effects on how people express their group identities publicly and privately, as people who want to impress others will act differently in public in order to make a good impression (see Connors, Krupnikov, and Ryan 2019; Connors 2023). If partisans do not feel good about how their party looks to others, they may be less likely to express association with that party publicly. Thus, we expect people who feel partisan embarrassment might be willing to express their support privately, but not publicly.

To measure public and private partisanship expression, we ask respondents how likely they would be to: (1) try to persuade someone to vote for [co-partisans] in 2022, (2) publicly display a bumper sticker, yard sign, hat, or T-shirt supporting a [in-party] candidate, and (3) privately express support for a [in-party] candidate. Participants report their responses on a five-point scale ranging from “very unlikely” to “very likely.” We examine whether partisan embarrassment is associated with partisanship expression by using an ordered logit model where the dependent variable is the likelihood of engaging in each partisanship expression activity and the explanatory variable of interest is the average level of partisan embarrassment across the five scenarios (Cronbach’s Alpha = .79). In an effort to isolate the relationship between embarrassment and partisanship expression, we control for age, gender, race/ethnicity, education, political interest, partisan strength, party identification, and ideology.

**Results.** Our first goal is to investigate the rates of embarrassment across scenarios. We find that of the scenarios asked about, American partisans are most embarrassed by their co-partisans believing and spreading misinformation, followed by their co-partisans being involved in a sex scandal, and their co-partisans being generally uninformed about politics. Indeed, 39.9% of American partisans report that it is very embarrassing when their co-partisans believe or spread misinformation, 28.6% report the same when their co-partisans are involved in a sex scandal, and 25.4% when their co-partisans are generally uninformed about politics. Ideological views do not seem particularly embarrassing to American partisans, with only 7.3% reporting that it is very embarrassing when their co-partisans are too moderate, and 49.4% reporting that this is not at all embarrassing. However, 17.0% of American partisans still say that it is very embarrassing when their co-partisans are too ideologically extreme.

As Study 1 suggests and Figure 2 highlights, Republicans and Democrats are embarrassed by different behaviors. Republicans, for instance, are less embarrassed by their co-partisans being too extreme compared to Democrats, with 38.9% of Republicans reporting that it is not at all embarrassing when their co-partisans are ideologically extreme, compared to 27.5% of Democrats. More striking is the partisan embarrassment gap regarding the spread of misinformation. Although

spreading misinformation is still viewed as the most embarrassing scenario among both Republicans and Democrats, only 29.9% of Republicans view this as very embarrassing, compared to nearly half (48.8%) of Democrats. Democrats are also more embarrassed by their co-partisans being uninformed, compared to Republicans. We observe nearly opposite linear trends in the level of embarrassment experienced by Republicans and Democrats when their co-partisans are generally uninformed about politics: 16.1% of Democrats consider it to be not at all embarrassing, but 29.0% of Republicans feel this way.

**Figure 2. Rates of Partisan Embarrassment by Scenario and Partisanship**

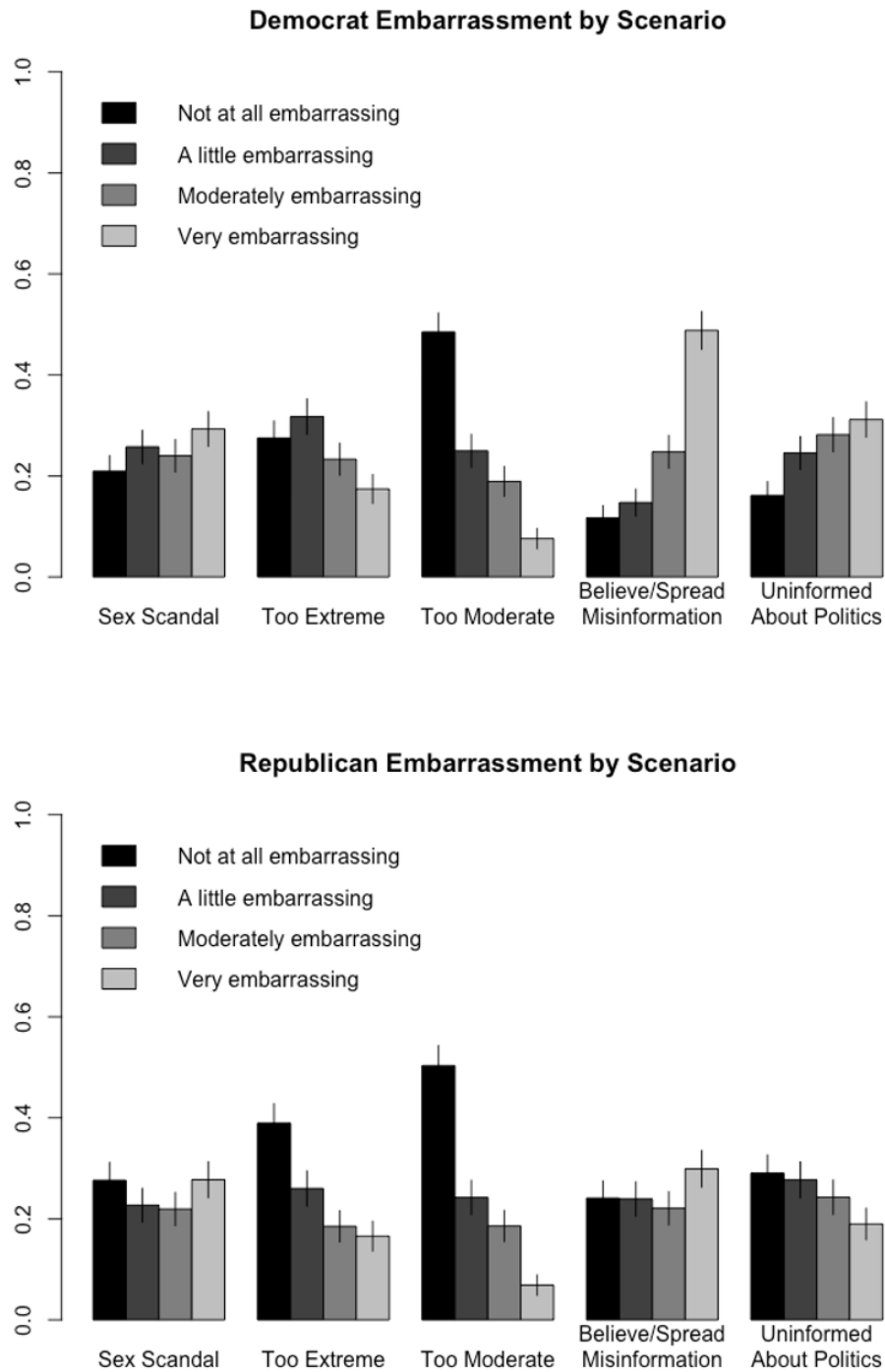


Figure shows the proportion of Democrats (top, N=717) and Republicans (bottom; N=597) reporting each level of embarrassment for each scenario. Proportions estimated using survey weights and the survey package in R (Lumley 2023). Vertical lines indicate 95% confidence intervals.

**Table 2.** Individual-Level Correlates of Partisan Embarrassment by Scenario

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>					
	Sex	Scandal	Too Extreme	Too Moderate	Misinformation	Uninformed
<b>Age</b>	0.009 (0.004)	0.001 (0.004)	-0.001 (0.004)	0.003 (0.003)	-0.002 (0.004)	
<b>Woman</b>	0.067 (0.129)	0.096 (0.133)	-0.042 (0.134)	0.121 (0.127)	-0.029 (0.128)	
<b>White</b>	0.001 (0.152)	-0.211 (0.155)	0.088 (0.154)	-0.050 (0.144)	0.014 (0.144)	
<b>Education</b>	-0.015 (0.045)	-0.011 (0.044)	0.007 (0.044)	0.083 (0.040)	0.075 (0.042)	
<b>Interest</b>	0.074 (0.089)	0.063 (0.086)	0.087 (0.083)	0.197 (0.073)	0.357 (0.079)	
<b>Partisan Strength</b>	0.062 (0.065)	-0.054 (0.062)	0.159 (0.061)	0.009 (0.057)	0.041 (0.057)	
<b>Democrat</b>	0.185 (0.137)	0.334 (0.143)	0.070 (0.144)	0.864 (0.139)	0.681 (0.141)	
<b>Ideology</b>	0.038 (0.052)	-0.031 (0.048)	-0.020 (0.056)	-0.308 (0.053)	-0.230 (0.050)	
<b>Max Observations</b>	1,291	1,291	1,291	1,291	1,291	

Table shows coefficients predicting reported embarrassment for each scenario (from 0 [“not at all embarrassing”] to 3 [“very embarrassing”]) from bivariate ordered logit models with survey weights and standard errors are parentheses. *Age* is continuous, ranging from 18 to 91 years old. *Woman* is 1=woman and 0=man. *White* is 1=White and 0=non-White. *Education* is from 0 (“did not graduate high school”) to 5 (“post-graduate degree (MA, MBA, MD, JD, PhD, etc.)”). *Interest* is from 0 (“never”) to 4 (“most of the time”), however no respondents reported “never,” so in practice the variable ranges from 1 (“hardly at all”) to 4 (“most of the time”). *Democrat* is 1=Democrat and 0=Republican, including leaners. *Partisan Strength* is from 1 (“independent leaner”) to 3 (“strong partisan”), as pure independents (0) are removed from this analysis. *Ideology* ranges from 0 (“very liberal”) to 4 (“very conservative”). 23 respondents were dropped through listwise deletion in these models for responding “not sure” to the ideology question.

Table 2 shows the bivariate relationships between individual-level characteristics and partisan embarrassment across five scenarios. We observe that political characteristics are more likely to be associated with partisan embarrassment than sociodemographic characteristics. We find no relationship between gender or race and embarrassment, and age is only associated with embarrassment from a sex scandal ( $\beta=0.009$ ,  $SE=0.004$ ,  $p=.021$ ), with older Americans feeling more partisan embarrassment from a co-partisan sex scandal than younger Americans. Those with higher levels of education experience more embarrassment when partisans spread misinformation ( $\beta=0.083$ ,  $SE=0.040$ ,  $p=.040$ ). Democrats and those who are more interested in politics experience more embarrassment due to co-partisans being misinformed (Democrats:  $\beta=0.864$ ,  $SE=0.139$ ,  $p<.001$ ; Interested:  $\beta=0.197$ ,  $SE=0.073$ ,  $p=.007$ ) and uninformed (Democrats:  $\beta=0.681$ ,  $SE=0.141$ ,

$p < .001$ ; Interested:  $\beta = 0.357$ ,  $SE = 0.079$ ,  $p < .001$ ) about politics. The stronger one's partisanship is, the more likely they are to be embarrassed by their co-partisans being too moderate ( $\beta = 0.159$ ,  $SE = 0.061$ ,  $p = .010$ ). Ideology yields interesting patterns where the more conservative one is, the more likely one is to be embarrassed by co-partisans believing misinformation ( $\beta = -0.308$ ,  $SE = 0.053$ ,  $p < .001$ ), but the more liberal one is the more likely one is to be embarrassed by co-partisans being uninformed ( $\beta = -0.230$ ,  $SE = 0.050$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

Finally, we examine whether partisan embarrassment is correlated with different forms of partisan expression. Ordered logit models with survey weights reveal no statistically significant association between partisan embarrassment and expression (see Supplementary Material Table B3-B4).<sup>10</sup> Consistent with Study 1 robustness checks, we replicated this analysis without survey weights, and find the same results after correcting for multiple comparisons.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, these results are observational and thus unable to speak to questions of causality, which we interrogate in Study 3.

### Study 3

**Study Design.** To assess whether embarrassment has a causal effect on partisans' party loyalty, partisan expressions, and attitudes towards in- and out-party targets, we conduct a survey experiment on November 21<sup>st</sup>-27<sup>th</sup>, 2023 with a sample of partisans from Prolific ( $N = 1,476$ , sample details are in Supplementary Material C). The goal here is to exogenously induce partisan embarrassment among a random subset of respondents to evaluate how that feeling affects subsequent political attitudes and behavior. Because experiencing partisan embarrassment is correlated with characteristics like political interest and partisan strength—which are also related to political attitudes and engagement—we need to randomly assign some respondents to feel partisan embarrassment and others to not.

Following extensive research in psychology and political science, we chose to use an emotional recall task (see, e.g., Lerner and Keltner 2001; Webster 2020; Webster, Connors, and Sinclair 2022), which we design to elicit embarrassment. Specifically, our treatment condition prompts individuals to, “write about a time that you were embarrassed to be a [in-party] because of something either a [in-party] elite (i.e., a politician or media elite) *or* a [in-party] peer (i.e., in the public) said or did. Be as specific as possible in talking about what happened and how it made you feel. If you have not been in this situation, imagine a scenario where you might feel embarrassed to be a [in-party] and write about that.” Those who are randomized into the control group are asked to write about what they ate for breakfast. Because we are interested in embarrassment specifically as it pertains to an individual's own political party, randomization occurs separately for self-identifying Democrats and Republicans.

We then present respondents with a series of questions designed to measure expressions of partisanship and polarization (see Supplementary Material C). First, respondents are asked to rate how they thought *others* (co-partisans, out-partisans, and Independents) feel about their party. Then, respondents are asked to rate their *own* feelings towards the two major political parties on a

<sup>10</sup> Coefficient on embarrassment for likelihood of persuading others with Bonferroni adjusted p-values for three tests:  $\beta = 0.030$ ,  $SE = 0.095$ ,  $p = 1$ , likelihood of publicly displaying support:  $\beta = -0.045$ ,  $SE = 0.089$ ,  $p = 1$ , and likelihood of privately displaying support:  $\beta = 0.106$ ,  $SE = 0.097$ ,  $p = 1$ .

<sup>11</sup> Coefficient on embarrassment for likelihood of persuading others with Bonferroni adjusted p-values for three tests without survey weights:  $\beta = 0.035$ ,  $SE = 0.067$ ,  $p = 1$ , likelihood of publicly displaying support:  $\beta = -0.065$ ,  $SE = 0.066$ ,  $p = 1$ , and likelihood of privately displaying support:  $\beta = 0.151$ ,  $SE = 0.071$ ,  $p = .416$ .

0-100 “feeling thermometer” scale. To capture partisan affiliation and the strength of that attachment, we ask respondents whether they consider themselves “right now” to be a Democrat, Republican, or other. Those who select “Democrat” or “Republican” are then asked whether they consider themselves to be a “strong” or “not very strong” partisan, and those who select “Independent” or “something else” are asked if they lean more towards one party. To capture the intensity of one’s partisanship in a different manner, we also ask respondents to assess the importance of their party identification to their overall identity. Response options range from “not at all important” to “very important.”

To measure public and private support for respondents’ party (similar to Study 2), we ask respondents whether they would be willing to wear a T-shirt in support of their party, donate to their party, and volunteer for one of their party’s campaigns. Importantly, we ask respondents their intention to engage in these behaviors both when the action is observable (public) and when it is private (e.g. donating to one’s party when donors’ names are published versus not published). Varying the observability of these acts allows us to determine whether embarrassment has differing effects on behavior depending on its observability, which previous research suggests should be important.

Next, we ask respondents their perception of elected Republicans’ and Democrats’ competence and then four questions to measure social polarization. Drawn from prior work (Webster et al. 2022), we ask respondents to imagine how they would—or would not—engage with an in-party neighbor (i.e., the frequency with which they would do favors for that neighbor, watch over their property when they are not home, ask them personal things, and talk to them about politics). Response options for each are: “never,” “sometimes,” “about half the time,” “most of the time,” and “always.” We then ask a question to assess if respondents were properly treated (i.e. embarrassed), asking respondents: “right now, how embarrassed do you feel to be a [in-party]” with options of “not at all embarrassed,” “a little embarrassed,” “moderately embarrassed,” and “very embarrassed.” Lastly, we ask two exploratory questions, inquiring about embarrassment by audience and whether the written experience was about a real or imagined scenario.

Because we block on respondents’ partisanship before the randomization process, we obtain the average treatment effects of embarrassment by regressing our dependent variables on an indicator variable for treatment status and a dummy variable for partisanship. However, we begin by checking whether our treatment had its intended effect in eliciting embarrassment among treated respondents. To do this, we regress our manipulation check variable (scaled to range from 0 to 3, higher values indicating greater embarrassment) on our treatment indicator and partisanship dummy variable.

**Results.** The results of our manipulation check (see Table 3) suggest our treatment was successful at eliciting embarrassment, although we note that the substantive effect of our experimental manipulation on individual-level embarrassment is small. Thus, we proceed by estimating our intent-to-treat effects of partisan embarrassment by regressing each of our dependent variables on our treatment indicator and, to derive average treatment effects via standardization, a dummy variable for Democratic identifiers.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Of course, these models do not let us rule out the possibility that some other emotion that is related to embarrassment—rather than embarrassment itself—is behind potential treatment effects. To investigate this, we re-estimate our models via an instrumental variables analysis where our treatment assignment serves as an instrument for the amount of embarrassment that survey respondents report feeling. This is analogous to estimating a complier-



**Table 3.** Individual-Level Correlates of Partisan Embarrassment by Scenario

	<b>Embarrassment</b>
<b>Treated</b>	0.184 (0.035)
<b>Democrat</b>	0.056 (0.035)
<b>Constant</b>	0.253 (0.028)
<b>Observations</b>	1,464

Results of the manipulation check: the coefficient on our treatment variable is positive and statistically distinguishable from zero—suggesting we were successful at manipulating partisan embarrassment among those randomized into our treatment condition. 15 respondents did not answer the manipulation check question.

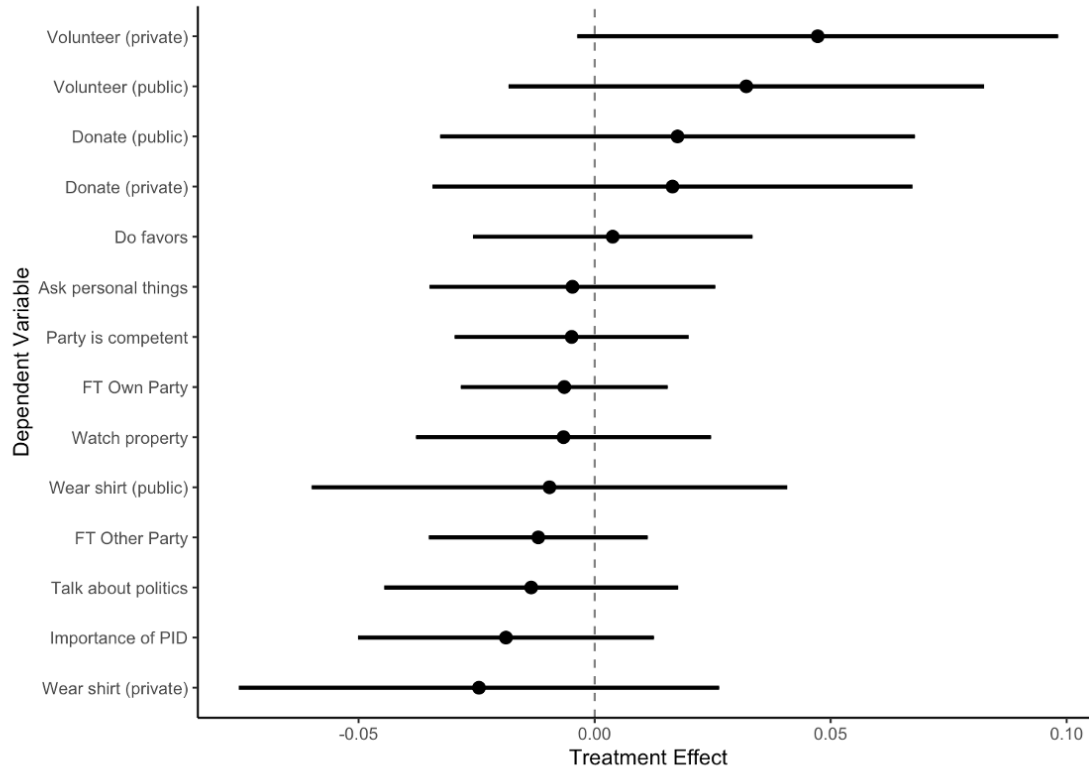
The coefficient estimates of our treatment on various measures of partisan loyalty and expressions are shown in Figure 3. In contrast to our pre-registered hypotheses, the results suggest that embarrassment has no effect on partisanship, polarization, private *or* public in-party support, or views about in- and out-party competence: the treatment effects that we estimate are consistently indistinguishable from zero.<sup>13</sup> This is the case across types of political participation as well as different levels of visibility: experiencing embarrassment does not affect partisans’ willingness to engage in various forms of political behavior in public or private settings.

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weighted local average treatment effect, where “compliance” indicates a self-induction of embarrassment. When this pre-registered model specification is used, our results remain unchanged (see Supplementary Material C).

<sup>13</sup> Our effect sizes are so substantively small that a post-hoc power analysis indicates one would need a sample of *at least* 127,140 participants to detect these effects.

**Figure 3.** The Effect of Partisan Embarrassment on Partisanship and Polarization



This figure shows the treatment effect of partisan embarrassment on our dependent variable measures. All dependent variables have been scaled to range from 0-1. Some dependent variable questions were not answered by some respondents (do favors=15, ask personal things=16, party is competent=6, FT own party=10, watch property=17, FT other party=9, talk about politics=16, importance of PID=15). Horizontal lines indicate 95% confidence intervals.

We also find that embarrassment does not cause individuals to be less likely to associate with their co-partisans—across our four measures of social polarization, we find no treatment effect. Finally, we find that embarrassment does not change individuals’ partisan loyalties: experiencing embarrassment does not shift individuals’ feeling thermometer ratings of the in- or out-party or alter individuals’ perceptions about their own party’s competence. Perhaps most importantly, we find no effect of embarrassment on individuals’ sense of how important their partisanship is to their overall identity.<sup>14</sup> In fact, we find that embarrassment does not even influence respondents’ beliefs about how co-partisans, out-partisans, and Independents feel about their party (see Supplementary Material C), suggesting they do not believe embarrassing behaviors change *anyone’s* views about their party.

Lastly, because there is no treatment effect, this also means that embarrassment does not cause partisans to double-down on their partisan identity, ignoring the embarrassing behavior and using that to motivate more in-group attachment to protect group status. Thus, the data also do not support the alternative pre-registered hypothesis noted above (see also Supplementary Material C).

<sup>14</sup> Embarrassment *does* cause people to identify with their party less strongly. However, given this is the only significant effect we find, we are hesitant to make much of this finding. See Supplementary Material C.

## Discussion & Conclusion

Political elites and members of the public often engage in behavior or have attitudes by which co-partisans can feel embarrassed. We investigate this partisan embarrassment—examining how often and who feels partisan embarrassment, what types of behaviors and what types of partisans embarrass the public, and, most importantly, what the ramifications of partisan embarrassment are. We anticipated that, driven by concerns about how one’s political group is perceived by others, partisan embarrassment would dampen partisanship and polarization. We indeed find that partisans feel embarrassed by actions of co-partisans and that what embarrasses partisans varies by individual in interesting ways. However, we find that this embarrassment has no meaningful effect on their partisan loyalties: it does not significantly influence partisan identity, affective party ratings, private or public party support, or perceived party competence.

Our findings align with work by Funck and McCabe (2022) as well as Lee et al. (2022), who find limited effects of scandals on voting decisions because of voters’ other considerations, such as partisanship and election competitiveness. Similarly, Filindra and Harbridge-Yong (2022) find that partisans are hesitant to punish leaders for their behavior except in certain contexts: when that behavior is a “major threat” *and* when a high-ranking party member speaks out against this behavior. Many embarrassing scenarios, therefore, may not represent a “major threat,” even if the other party or journalists try to portray them that way. It is possible that embarrassing scenarios only become major threats when they reach the point of party leadership challenging the behavior directly. One particular scenario could be the January 6<sup>th</sup> insurrection, an event that led many Republicans to speak out against their co-partisans’ behavior. However, Republicans who engaged in this criticism were, themselves, then criticized, discouraging others from doing so (Filindra and Harbridge-Yong 2022).

While our results fit into a broader trend in findings that partisans do not meaningfully punish their in-party for their actions, they are nevertheless still surprising. Representative democracy relies on some level of reactivity from the public, but we find that embarrassing behavior by co-partisans has no meaningful effect on how partisans feel about their party. Although previous findings found limited effects of scandals on *voting*, our designs examined more nuanced outcomes of partisan loyalty, allowing for slight shifts in perceptions and behaviors, and still found no effect of partisan embarrassment on these outcomes.

It is possible, of course, that partisan embarrassment has effects outside of those we examine—perhaps in more interpersonal contexts where people feel more social pressure to react to in-party mistakes (Connors 2023) or when politics is not salient (Groenendyk and Krupnikov 2021). It is also possible that repeated exposure to partisan-based forms of embarrassment is necessary in order to shift attitudes and behaviors. Indeed, the accumulation of embarrassing moments derived from one’s own party is qualitatively different than a one-time manipulation of partisan embarrassment. As our experimental design uses a single induction of partisan embarrassment, we are unable to say how *repeatedly* being embarrassed by one’s own party could change individual-level behavior.

Lastly, we acknowledge that our results exclusively describe *partisans*, rather than Independents who might have already abandoned their party—future research could examine if embarrassment was a factor behind this decision, although our results, along with research on the stability of partisanship, suggest this is unlikely. As we conceptualize partisan loyalties and

expressions here, however, being embarrassed by one's own party appears to dampen neither partisanship nor polarization.

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# **Supplementary Material for *You're Making Us Look Bad: Can Partisan Embarrassment Dampen Partisanship and Polarization?***

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## **Supplementary Material A: Study 1 (Cooperative Election Study [CES]), November 3<sup>rd</sup> – December 7<sup>th</sup>, 2021**

### **Sample Information:**

The Cooperative Election Study (CES) was formerly the Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES) and uses a national stratified sample from YouGov (for more information, see <https://cces.gov.harvard.edu>), a well-respected, representative sample. CES recruits participants through advertisements and referrals and participants are then compensated by points (determined by CES) after each survey they take. Respondents can then exchange points for giftcards and other prizes. Details about this process can be found at <https://cces.gov.harvard.edu/frequently-asked-questions>. Our analyses use survey weights using CES' provided weights. Stata's survey weight function accounts for design effects.

Of the full (unweighted) sample (N=1,000), 49.60% were Democrats, 29.50% were Republicans, 17.40% were pure independents, and 3.50% were not sure. Although N=1,000 took the full CES module, those who did not respond to the partisanship question (N=35) and pure independents (N=174) did not take our survey, which depended on some level of partisan attachment. Thus, our sample was N=791. This (unweighted) sample of 791 had a mean ideology of 1.93 and standard deviation of 1.24 from very liberal (0) to very conservative (4), dropping "not sure" respondents. It was 59.04% women, 39.82% men, and 1.14% non-binary; had a mean age of 49.41 with a standard deviation of 17.64; and was 65.74% white and 34.26% either mixed or full minority. As a comparison, American National Election Studies (ANES) 2020 data has the following breakdown. The sample was 46.53% Democrats, 41.73% Republicans, and 11.74% pure independents; with a mean of 4.09 and standard deviation of 1.67 on a scale from 1 (extremely liberal) to 7 (extremely conservative). It was 53.74% female, 45.45% male, and 0.81% NA; had a mean age of 51.59 with standard deviation of 17.21; and was 72.92% white and 27.08% either mixed or full minority.

### **Data Quality**

Survey research has become increasingly accessible with the advent and widespread use of online sampling and surveys. Despite their widespread use and some survey firms having strong reputations for data quality and sampling procedures (e.g., NORC, IPSOS, YouGov), there are still a number of limitations with using survey data related to respondent attention and fatigue. It is now standard practice for researchers to embed attention checks into their surveys, particularly when using more self-service online panels, such as MTurk, Prolific, and Lucid.

Other survey firms, such as YouGov and NORC, include several data quality checks before delivering data to respondents (and discourage individual researchers from adding their own attention checks, as they do this in house). That means we do not have the data with which to evaluate how quickly respondents completed the survey (speed test) or answered attention check "trap questions," as these are available to YouGov. Instead, YouGov flags and removes inattentive cases to the best of their ability. However, this does not mean that they catch everything. Although these insincere respondents might simply introduce noise to estimates, they can be consequential, especially if the goal is to describe smaller populations or rare events. For example, some work

has demonstrated that lazy or insincere survey respondents might lead us to over-estimate rare populations (e.g., Cimpian and Timmer 2019).<sup>1</sup>

In Study 1, we use questions included on a CES module, which was administered by YouGov. The CES describes itself as the “largest academic survey of the American public and a core resource for academic researchers and the public for understanding public opinion and American election”—more information can be found here: <https://cces.gov.harvard.edu/frequently-asked-questions>. The CES is widely respected in the field for data quality, but it is not necessarily immune to these challenges that reflect survey research more broadly. And although we did not a priori expect partisan embarrassment to be rare, it turned out that just over half of the sample reported experiencing partisan embarrassment. We do not view this as rare—and not rare in the same context as what Cimpian and Timmer (2019) found in their study of LGBTQ survey respondents. However, to be cautious in interpreting our results, we want to reflect on the data quality in our sample.

To evaluate this, we look at the distribution of responses to political knowledge questions. The CES asked respondents “Which party has a majority of seats in...” and asked about both the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate. Response options were: Republicans, Democrats, Neither, Not Sure, or skipped. We used responses to these two questions to create a variable that was equal to 2 if the respondent got both questions correct, equal to 1 if the respondent got 1 out of the 2 questions correct, and equal to 0 if they got neither question correct. We find that a substantial portion of our sample got *both* questions correct (41.59%) and another good portion got one of the two correct (34.01%). 24.40% of the respondents got neither question correct. These responses indicate a higher level of knowledge among our sample as compared to the population, indicating that our sample is more politically sophisticated than the population *and* that respondents were on average engaged in the survey (enough to correctly answer knowledge questions).

This certainly does not tell us there were *no* bogus respondents in our data. What all of this suggests to us is that with YouGov’s independent analysis of data quality and our findings about average political knowledge in our sample, we are confident that we largely have a high quality sample with which to draw inferences from.

## Survey:

[common content]

1. [age] In what year were you born?
2. [gender] What is your gender? [man / woman / non-binary / other]
3. [race] What racial or ethnic group best describes you? [White / Black or African-American / Hispanic or Latino / Asian or Asian-American / Native American / Middle Eastern / Two or more races / Other (open)]
4. [education] What is the highest level of education you have completed? [did not graduate from high school / high school graduate / some college, but no degree (yet) / 2-year college degree / 4-year college degree / postgraduate degree (MA, MBA, MD, JD, PhD, etc.)]
5. [political interest] Some people seem to follow what’s going on in government and public affairs most of the time, whether there’s an election going on or not. Others are not that

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<sup>1</sup> Cimpian, Joseph R., and Jennifer D. Timmer. 2019. “Large-Scale Estimates of LGBTQ-heterosexual Disparities in the Presence of Potentially Mischievous Responders: A Preregistered Replication and Comparison of Methods.” *AERA Open* 5.4: 2332858419888892.

- interested. Would you say you follow what's going on in government and public affairs...  
[most of the time / some of the time / only now and then / hardly at all / don't know]
6. [PID1] Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a...? [Democrat / Republican / Independent / other (open) / not sure]
  7. [PID2] IF PID1=="Republican" or "Democrat": Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a...? [strong Democrat / not very strong Democrat / strong Republican / not very strong Republican]
  8. [PID3] IF PID1=="Independent", "other", or "not sure": [the Democratic Party / the Republican Party / neither / not sure]
  9. [ideology] In general, how would you describe your own political viewpoint? [very liberal / liberal / moderate / conservative / very conservative / not sure]
  10. [knowledge] Which party has a majority of seats in... [rows: U.S. House of Representatives / U.S. Senate; columns: Republicans / Democrats / neither / not sure]
- [our module]
11. [Participants were randomly assigned to one of the following and answered questions about their in-party. Pure independents were not asked these questions.]
    - a. [elite] Have you ever felt embarrassed to be a [Republican / Democrat] because of something a [Republican / Democratic] elite (i.e., a politician or media elite) said or did? [no, never / once or twice / sometimes / quite often / basically every week]
    - b. [peer] Have you ever felt embarrassed to be a [Republican / Democrat] because of something a [Republican / Democratic] peer (i.e., *not* a [Republican / Democratic] elite but a [Republican / Democrat] in the public) said or did? [no, never / once or twice / sometimes / quite often / basically every week]
  12. [open] Please talk about [what has embarrassed you and why (for "once or twice," "sometimes," "quite often," "basically every week") / why you think you have not been embarrassed (for "no, never")]: [long open-ended]

**Table A1.** Embarrassment by Demographic and Political Variables (full regression, weighted)

	<i>Dependent Variable:</i>		
	Embarrassment	Peer Embarrassment	Elite Embarrassment
<b>Age</b>	-0.009 (0.006)	-0.002 (0.008)	-0.014 (0.007)
<b>Man</b>	-0.145 (0.174)	0.113 (0.255)	-0.351 (0.244)
<b>Other, Non-Binary</b>	-0.108 (0.996)	2.409 (0.769)	-0.824 (0.888)
<b>White</b>	0.536 (0.204)	0.271 (0.274)	0.833 (0.278)
<b>Education</b>	0.093 (0.064)	0.142 (0.091)	0.035 (0.085)
<b>Interest</b>	0.346 (0.121)	0.094 (0.161)	0.604 (0.169)
<b>Partisan Strength</b>	-0.178 (0.104)	-0.257 (0.156)	-0.186 (0.147)
<b>Democrat</b>	0.087 (0.265)	-0.075 (0.380)	0.215 (0.381)
<b>Ideology</b>	-0.116 (0.010)	-0.169 (0.150)	-0.092 (0.147)
<b>Knowledge</b>	-0.024	0.118	-0.177

	(0.119)	(0.166)	(0.169)
0 1	-0.009 (0.523)	-0.464 (0.792)	0.231 (0.676)
1 2	1.064 (0.525)	0.676 (0.801)	1.279 (0.670)
2 3	2.847 (0.527)	2.498 (0.807)	3.081 (0.670)
3 4	4.107 (0.556)	3.657 (0.883)	4.455 (0.671)
N	736	369	367

Table shows coefficients (and standard errors in parentheses) predicting reported embarrassment (from 1 [“no, never”] to 5 [“basically every week”]) from ordered logit bivariate regressions using survey weights. The left column predicts embarrassment, grouping elite and peer embarrassment together. The middle column predicts peer embarrassment and the right column predicts elite embarrassment. *Age* is continuous, ranging from 18 to 91 years old. *Woman* is 2=other or non-binary, 1=woman, and 0=man. *White* is 1=White and 0=non-White. *Education* is from 0 (“did not graduate high school”) to 5 (“post-graduate degree (MA, MBA, MD, JD, PhD, etc.)”). *Interest* is from 0 (“hardly at all”) to 3 (“most of the time”). *Democrat* is 1=Democrat and 0=Republican, including leaners. *Partisan Strength* is from 1 (“independent leaner”) to 3 (“strong partisan”), as pure independents (0) are removed from this analysis. *Ideology* ranges from 0 (“very liberal”) to 4 (“very conservative”). *Knowledge* is from 0 (both knowledge questions incorrect) to 2 (both knowledge questions correct). 55 respondents were dropped through listwise deletion in these models: 23 participants responded “don't know” to the political interest question and 40 responded “not sure” to the ideology question (some respondents responded both “don't know” to the political interest question and “not sure” to the ideology question).

**Table A2. Embarrassment by Demographic and Political Variables (full regression, unweighted)**

	<i>Dependent Variable:</i>		
	Embarrassment	Peer Embarrassment	Elite Embarrassment
Age	-0.008 (0.004)	-0.004 (0.006)	-0.013 (0.006)
Man	-0.053 (0.146)	0.096 (0.207)	-0.220 (0.208)
Other, Non-Binary	1.048 (0.672)	1.761 (0.961)	0.149 (0.908)
White	0.596 (0.154)	0.371 (0.211)	0.888 (0.232)
Education	0.179 (0.049)	0.225 (0.070)	0.131 (0.069)
Interest	0.235 (0.091)	0.104 (0.125)	0.384 (0.135)
Partisan Strength	-0.272 (0.086)	-0.264 (0.122)	-0.318 (0.123)
Democrat	-0.047 (0.207)	-0.169 (0.302)	0.099 (0.291)
Ideology	-0.133 (0.081)	-0.127 (0.115)	-0.146 (0.117)
Knowledge	-0.181 (0.098)	-0.128 (0.134)	-0.265 (0.146)
0 1	-0.409 (0.425)	-0.474 (0.639)	-0.482 (0.582)
1 2	0.679 (0.426)	0.643 (0.641)	0.595 (0.582)
2 3	2.418 (0.439)	2.475 (0.660)	2.285 (0.598)

3 4	3.941 (0.493)	4.062 (0.750)	3.774 (0.663)
N	736	369	367

Table shows coefficients (and standard errors in parentheses) predicting reported embarrassment (from 1 [“no, never”] to 5 [“basically every week”]) from ordered logit bivariate regressions *without* using survey weights. The left column predicts embarrassment, grouping elite and peer embarrassment together. The middle column predicts peer embarrassment and the right column predicts elite embarrassment. *Age* is continuous, ranging from 18 to 91 years old. *Woman* is 2=other or non-binary, 1=woman, and 0=man. *White* is 1=White and 0=non-White. *Education* is from 0 (“did not graduate high school”) to 5 (“post-graduate degree (MA, MBA, MD, JD, PhD, etc.)”). *Interest* is from 0 (“hardly at all”) to 3 (“most of the time”). *Democrat* is 1=Democrat and 0=Republican, including leaners. *Partisan Strength* is from 1 (“independent leaner”) to 3 (“strong partisan”), as pure independents (0) are removed from this analysis. *Ideology* ranges from 0 (“very liberal”) to 4 (“very conservative”). *Knowledge* is from 0 (both knowledge questions incorrect) to 2 (both knowledge questions correct). 55 respondents were dropped through listwise deletion in these models: 23 participants responded “don't know” to the political interest question and 40 responded “not sure” to the ideology question (some respondents responded both “don't know” to the political interest question and “not sure” to the ideology question).

## **Supplementary Material B: Study 2 (American Media Exposure Survey [AMES]), April 22 –May 2, 2022**

### **Sample Information:**

The American Media Exposure Survey (AMES) was fielded in April 2022 with YouGov. YouGov surveyed 1,786 respondents who were matched down to a sampling frame on gender, age, race, and education to yield a sample of 1,564 respondents to create the final dataset. The sampling frame reflects stratified sampling from the 2019 American Community Survey, using person weights on the public use file. Matched cases were weighted to the frame using propensity scores based on age, gender, race/ethnicity, years of education, and region. Weights were post-stratified on 2016 and 2020 presidential vote choice and a four-way stratification of gender, age, race, and education. R's survey weight function accounts for design effects.

Of the full (unweighted) sample (N=1,564), 45.84% were Democrats, 38.17% were Republicans, and 15.98% were pure independents or reported that they didn't know. Those who did not respond to the partisanship question (N=10) and pure independents (N=240) were dropped from our study, which depended on some level of partisan attachment. Thus, our sample was N=1,314. This (unweighted) sample had an unweighted mean ideology of 2.04 and standard deviation of 1.29 on a scale from very liberal (0) to very conservative (4), with 58 respondents reporting they were not sure. The sample was 47.38% male, and 52.62% female. The unweighted mean age was 54.35 with a standard deviation of 16.00. The sample's racial and ethnic composition was 72.70% white and 27.30% either mixed or full minority.

### **Data Quality:**

Following the motivation described in Supplementary Material A, we also critically evaluate and specifically comment on the quality of the data used in Study 2. As noted above, this survey was fielded by YouGov. Again, we do not have the data with which to evaluate how quickly respondents completed the survey (speed test) or answered attention check "trap questions," as these are available to YouGov (YouGov flags and removes inattentive cases to the best of their ability).

Although YouGov has a strong reputation for maintaining a high-quality sample, particularly at the time of our data collection in 2022, online opt-in panels must still be treated with caution. For example, recent concerns have been raised about insincere respondents over-reporting preferences and behaviors that are actually rare in the population (Mercer, Kennedy, and Keeter 2024).<sup>2</sup> Although we do not know the true population level of embarrassment, we examine whether younger (18-29 year old) respondents were more likely to report the highest levels of embarrassment. Previous work has demonstrated that 18-29 year old respondents are more likely to over-report rare traits. We therefore examine whether this group appears to be over-reporting embarrassment in our data. Again, we do not know what we should expect to observe in the population with respect to partisan embarrassment, but if the rates were dramatically different among the 18-29 year old group, there could be cause for concern. These analyses are explained in Table B1, below, and do not raise concerns for us about our sample.

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<sup>2</sup> Mercer, Andrew, Courtney Kennedy, and Scott Keeter. 2024. "Online opt-in polls can produce misleading results, especially for young people and Hispanic adults." Pew Research Center. March 5, 2024. Accessed March 3, 2025. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/03/05/online-opt-in-polls-can-produce-misleading-results-especially-for-young-people-and-hispanic-adults/>

**Table B1.** Proportion of Respondents in each Age Group Reporting Highest Level of Embarrassment

	18-29 (n=108)	30-44 (n=238)	45-64 (n=593)	65 and Over (n=375)
<b>Scandal</b>	.22	.24	.30	.36
<b>Extreme</b>	.18	.12	.14	.18
<b>Moderate</b>	.09	.09	.07	.06
<b>Misinformed</b>	.39	.42	.43	.46
<b>Uninformed</b>	.30	.25	.24	.27

Table shows the proportion of respondents in each age group reporting the highest level of embarrassment for each scenario. Overall, there is very little variation based on age and it is not the case that younger respondents are reporting the highest level of partisan embarrassment substantially more often than are individuals from other age groups. This does not mean that all of our respondents were attentive and it does not mean that all of our *young* respondents were attentive, but it does at least partially assuage the concern that younger respondents, in particular, might be over-reporting or not paying attention to the survey.

Another way to catch bogus respondents is to evaluate open-ended questions to see if they have characteristics of bots (e.g., “very good” “yes”), give product reviews, or otherwise don’t answer the question at hand (see Kennedy et al. 2020 and Ryan 2018).<sup>3</sup> The AMES included a free response question in which respondents were asked to describe what was going on in the world with respect to an issue they identified as important. Examining these responses, we do not see evidence of concern for bogus respondents contaminating our results. There is certainly variation in how thoughtful responses were, but even short, one-word responses were still generally on-topic. For example, when asked to describe what was going on in the world with respect to the War in Ukraine, some people simply wrote “War” or for the U.S. economy, some people wrote “Inflation.” Neither of these responses are wrong, but they are brief – and certainly shorter than the more detailed responses others gave, such as “Inflation 40 year high...recession imminent” or “Russia is trying to take over Ukraine,” both of which are short, but more detailed than a single word answer.

We want to reiterate that we do not assert that there are *no* bogus respondents in our data. There very well could be insincere respondents that YouGov missed and there could be respondents who have misrepresented themselves to YouGov to qualify for more surveys, which could affect our estimates. However, we feel confident that our findings are accurate given data available and are consistent with other high quality social science research relying on survey data.

### Survey:

Relevant questions from AMES included in the analysis presented in the manuscript are detailed below. Participants were asked about their in-party. Pure independents were not asked these questions.

<sup>3</sup> Kennedy, Courtney, Nick Hatley, Anrold Lau, Andrew Mercer, Scott Keeter, Joshua Ferno, and Dorene Asare-Marfo. 2020. “Assessing the risks to online polls from bogus respondents.” Pew Research Center. February 18, 2020. Accessed March 3, 2025. <https://www.pewresearch.org/methods/2020/02/18/assessing-the-risks-to-online-polls-from-bogus-respondents/>  
Ryan, Tim. 2018. Data Contamination on MTurk. <https://timryan.web.unc.edu/2018/08/12/data-contamination-on-mturk/>



1. [embarrassment] People feel embarrassed for many reasons. We'd like to better understand if you have ever felt embarrassed to be a [Democrat / Republican]. Please indicate how embarrassed you either have felt or would feel in the following scenarios. [randomize order of rows] [rows: when a [Democrat / Republican] politician is involved in a sex scandal / when [Democrats / Republicans] are too ideologically extreme / when [Democrats / Republicans] are too ideologically moderate / when [Democrats / Republicans] believe and spread misinformation / when [Democrats / Republicans] are uninformed about the news or politics in general] [columns: not at all embarrassing / a little embarrassing / moderately embarrassing / very embarrassing]
2. [party support] How likely are you to do each of the following political activities? [randomize order of rows] [rows: try to persuade someone to vote for a [Democrat / Republican] in 2022 / publicly display a bumper sticker, yard sign, hat, or T-shirt supporting a [Democrat / Republican] candidate / privately express support for a [Democrat / Republican] candidate] [columns: very likely / likely / neither likely nor unlikely / unlikely / very unlikely]

### Supplemental Analyses:

Table B1 shows the results for regressions referenced on p. 16 in the manuscript with survey weights. Table B2 shows the same regression results without survey weights. Table B3 (weighted) and B4 (unweighted) show the results described on manuscript page 21 where the independent variable of interest is the average level of embarrassment across the five scenarios and the dependent variables are forms of political expression.

**Table B2.** Individual-Level Correlates of Partisan Embarrassment by Scenario (weighted)

	<i>Dependent Variable:</i>				
	Sex Scandal	Too Extreme	Too Moderate	Misinformation	Uninformed
Age	0.012 (0.005)	0.001 (0.005)	-0.004 (0.005)	0.008 (0.004)	-0.001 (0.005)
Woman	0.016 (0.146)	0.035 (0.148)	-0.062 (0.151)	-0.006 (0.151)	0.017 (0.144)
White	0.011 (0.179)	-0.194 (0.187)	0.034 (0.175)	0.113 (0.178)	0.135 (0.177)
Education	0.030 (0.053)	-0.046 (0.051)	0.004 (0.051)	0.071 (0.048)	0.003 (0.051)
Interest	-0.077 (0.107)	0.032 (0.105)	-0.083 (0.105)	0.122 (0.096)	0.277 (0.102)
Partisan Strength	0.029 (0.083)	-0.150 (0.088)	0.138 (0.093)	-0.059 (0.085)	-0.114 (0.088)
Democrat	0.420 (0.226)	0.375 (0.246)	-0.027 (0.247)	0.582 (0.242)	0.447 (0.245)
Ideology	0.103 (0.086)	0.032 (0.083)	-0.037 (0.096)	-0.192 (0.094)	-0.162 (0.086)
0 1	-0.272 (0.524)	-0.867 (0.513)	-0.266 (0.569)	-0.804 (0.515)	-0.676 (0.519)
1 2	0.837 (0.528)	0.342 (0.515)	0.803 (0.569)	0.254 (0.521)	0.560 (0.520)
2 3	1.821 (0.529)	1.444 (0.524)	2.310 (0.554)	1.286 (0.524)	1.767 (0.528)
N	1,291	1,291	1,291	1,291	1,291

Table shows coefficients predicting reported embarrassment for each scenario (from 0 [“not at all embarrassing”] to 3 [“very embarrassing”]) from ordered logit models with survey weights. Standard errors are parentheses. *Age* is continuous, ranging from 18 to 91 years old. *Woman* is 1=woman and 0=man. *White* is 1=White and 0=non-White. *Education* is from 0 (“did not graduate high school”) to 5 (“post-graduate degree (MA, MBA, MD, JD, PhD, etc.)”). *Interest* is from 0 (“never”) to 4 (“most of the time”), however no respondents reported “never,” so in practice the variable ranges from 1 (“hardly at all”) to 4 (“most of the time”). *Democrat* is 1=Democrat and 0=Republican, including leaners. *Partisan Strength* is from 1 (“independent leaner”) to 3 (“strong partisan”), as pure independents (0) are removed from this analysis. *Ideology* ranges from 0 (“very liberal”) to 4 (“very conservative”).

**Table B3.** Individual-Level Correlates of Partisan Embarrassment by Scenario (unweighted)

	<i>Dependent Variable:</i>				
	<b>Sex Scandal</b>	<b>Too Extreme</b>	<b>Too Moderate</b>	<b>Misinformation</b>	<b>Uninformed</b>
<b>Age</b>	0.009 (0.003)	0.001 (0.003)	-0.006 (0.003)	0.008 (0.003)	-0.002 (0.003)
<b>Woman</b>	0.104 (0.104)	0.098 (0.103)	-0.037 (0.108)	-0.049 (0.108)	-0.093 (0.104)
<b>White</b>	0.040 (0.121)	0.042 (0.119)	-0.052 (0.124)	0.176 (0.125)	0.168 (0.121)
<b>Education</b>	-0.005 (0.036)	-0.007 (0.037)	0.025 (0.037)	0.059 (0.037)	0.035 (0.036)
<b>Interest</b>	0.058 (0.077)	0.073 (0.075)	-0.007 (0.078)	0.136 (0.077)	0.315 (0.075)
<b>Partisan Strength</b>	0.120 (0.063)	-0.154 (0.064)	0.122 (0.067)	0.013 (0.065)	0.012 (0.063)
<b>Democrat</b>	0.144 (0.166)	0.228 (0.166)	-0.411 (0.173)	0.393 (0.170)	0.296 (0.167)
<b>Ideology</b>	-0.003 (0.061)	0.023 (0.061)	-0.169 (0.064)	-0.304 (0.064)	-0.173 (0.062)
<b>0 1</b>	-0.167 (0.403)	-0.529 (0.398)	-0.661 (0.414)	-1.024 (0.416)	-0.463 (0.402)
<b>1 2</b>	1.006 (0.404)	0.719 (0.399)	0.491 (0.414)	0.138 (0.414)	0.902 (0.401)
<b>2 3</b>	1.979 (0.406)	1.920 (0.403)	1.915 (0.421)	1.110 (0.415)	2.124 (0.405)
<b>N</b>	1,291	1,291	1,291	1,291	1,291

Table shows coefficients predicting reported embarrassment for each scenario (from 0 [“not at all embarrassing”] to 3 [“very embarrassing”]) from ordered logit models without survey weights. Standard errors are parentheses. *Age* is continuous, ranging from 18 to 91 years old. *Woman* is 1=woman and 0=man. *White* is 1=White and 0=non-White. *Education* is from 0 (“did not graduate high school”) to 5 (“post-graduate degree (MA, MBA, MD, JD, PhD, etc.)”). *Interest* is from 0 (“never”) to 4 (“most of the time”), however no respondents reported “never,” so in practice the variable ranges from 1 (“hardly at all”) to 4 (“most of the time”). *Democrat* is 1=Democrat and 0=Republican, including leaners. *Partisan Strength* is from 1 (“independent leaner”) to 3 (“strong partisan”), as pure independents (0) are removed from this analysis. *Ideology* ranges from 0 (“very liberal”) to 4 (“very conservative”).

**Table B4.** Relationship Between Embarrassment and Political Engagement (weighted)

	<i>Dependent Variable:</i>		
	<b>Persuade</b>	<b>Public Support</b>	<b>Private Support</b>
<b>Embarrassment</b>	0.030 (0.095)	-0.045 (0.089)	0.106 (0.097)
<b>Age</b>	-0.001	0.003	0.010

	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)
<b>Woman</b>	-0.367	-0.182	-0.357
	(0.142)	(0.135)	(0.156)
<b>White</b>	0.212	-0.091	0.423
	(0.161)	(0.159)	(0.186)
<b>Education</b>	0.139	0.007	0.181
	(0.054)	(0.047)	(0.054)
<b>Interest</b>	0.622	0.432	0.469
	(0.113)	(0.098)	(0.110)
<b>Partisan</b>	0.520	0.471	0.512
<b>Strength</b>	(0.091)	(0.087)	(0.096)
<b>Democrat</b>	-0.169	-0.320	-0.213
	(0.239)	(0.220)	(0.276)
<b>Ideology</b>	-0.092	-0.026	-0.139
	(0.093)	(0.096)	(0.105)
<b>0 1</b>	1.587	1.100	0.919
	(0.593)	(0.529)	(0.641)
<b>1 2</b>	2.275	1.858	1.508
	(0.591)	(0.532)	(0.643)
<b>2 3</b>	3.614	2.855	2.779
	(0.600)	(0.533)	(0.643)
<b>3 4</b>	4.680	3.891	3.807
	(0.611)	(0.552)	(0.651)
<b>N</b>	1,291	1,291	1,291

Table shows coefficients predicting forms of political expression (persuade others to vote for co-partisans, publicly display a bumper sticker, yard sign, hat, or T-shirt supporting a co-partisan candidate, and privately expressing support for a co-partisan candidate) based on the average level of embarrassment across the five scenarios (independent variable), controlling for possible confounders. Coefficients are from ordered logit models with survey weights. Standard errors are in parentheses. *Age* is continuous, ranging from 18 to 91 years old. *Woman* is 1=woman and 0=man. *White* is 1=White and 0=non-White. *Education* is from 0 (“did not graduate high school”) to 5 (“post-graduate degree (MA, MBA, MD, JD, PhD, etc.)”). *Interest* is from 0 (“never”) to 4 (“most of the time”), however no respondents reported “never,” so in practice the variable ranges from 1 (“hardly at all”) to 4 (“most of the time”). *Democrat* is 1=Democrat and 0=Republican, including leaners. *Partisan Strength* is from 1 (“independent leaner”) to 3 (“strong partisan”), as pure independents (0) are removed from this analysis. *Ideology* ranges from 0 (“very liberal”) to 4 (“very conservative”).

**Table B5.** Relationship Between Embarrassment and Political Engagement (unweighted)

	<i>Dependent Variable:</i>		
	<b>Persuade</b>	<b>Public Support</b>	<b>Private Support</b>
<b>Embarrassment</b>	0.035	-0.065	0.151
	(0.067)	(0.066)	(0.071)
<b>Age</b>	-0.001	0.008	0.005
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.004)
<b>Woman</b>	-0.361	-0.084	-0.243
	(0.104)	(0.103)	(0.110)
<b>White</b>	0.150	-0.168	0.350
	(0.119)	(0.118)	(0.126)
<b>Education</b>	0.123	0.015	0.144
	(0.036)	(0.036)	(0.038)
<b>Interest</b>	0.653	0.432	0.620
	(0.077)	(0.076)	(0.076)
<b>Partisan</b>	0.414	0.457	0.456
<b>Strength</b>	(0.064)	(0.064)	(0.066)

<b>Democrat</b>	-0.238 (0.164)	-0.284 (0.163)	-0.434 (0.173)
<b>Ideology</b>	-0.105 (0.061)	-0.028 (0.061)	-0.181 (0.066)
<b>0 1</b>	1.330 (0.409)	1.369 (0.408)	0.667 (0.433)
<b>1 2</b>	2.035 (0.410)	2.079 (0.409)	1.276 (0.428)
<b>2 3</b>	3.311 (0.417)	3.018 (0.414)	2.571 (0.430)
<b>3 4</b>	4.414 (0.424)	4.044 (0.420)	3.740 (0.438)
<b>N</b>	1,291	1,291	1,291

Table shows coefficients predicting forms of political expression (persuade others to vote for co-partisans, publicly display a bumper sticker, yard sign, hat, or T-shirt supporting a co-partisan candidate, and privately expressing support for a co-partisan candidate) based on the average level of embarrassment across the five scenarios (independent variable), controlling for possible confounders. Coefficients are from ordered logit models without survey weights. Standard errors are in parentheses. *Age* is continuous, ranging from 18 to 91 years old. *Woman* is 1=woman and 0=man. *White* is 1=White and 0=non-White. *Education* is from 0 (“did not graduate high school”) to 5 (“post-graduate degree (MA, MBA, MD, JD, PhD, etc.)”). *Interest* is from 0 (“never”) to 4 (“most of the time”), however no respondents reported “never,” so in practice the variable ranges from 1 (“hardly at all”) to 4 (“most of the time”). *Democrat* is 1=Democrat and 0=Republican, including leaners. *Partisan Strength* is from 1 (“independent leaner”) to 3 (“strong partisan”), as pure independents (0) are removed from this analysis. *Ideology* ranges from 0 (“very liberal”) to 4 (“very conservative”).

## Supplementary Material C: Study 3 (Prolific), November 21<sup>st</sup>-27<sup>th</sup>, 2023

### Sample Information:

Study 3 was fielded via Prolific from November 21<sup>st</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> in 2023. We targeted a sample of 1,500 respondents and received responses from 1,481 respondents. After filtering out those who failed *both* of our attention checks (N=2), we were left with 1,479 respondents. Of these, 725 self-identified as Democrats and 722 self-identified as Republicans. An additional 31 respondents identified as politically independent—however, 29 of these respondents reported leaning towards one of the two political parties (13 Democrats, 16 Republicans) and were accordingly classified as partisans. The two respondents who identified as a “pure independent” were dropped, as was an additional respondent who reported their partisan identification as “something else.” The final sample had a mean ideology of 3.92 and standard deviation of 2.11 from extremely liberal (1) to extremely conservative (7). Our sample was 74.2% White and 25.8% non-White; 38.6% of respondents reported having at least a bachelor’s degree.

### Data Quality:

We included two attention checks in this survey in order to make sure our respondents were providing quality responses. The first attention check listed two sports (bowling and football) and instructed respondents to select “bowling.” The second attention check listed a number of colors and told respondents to select “orange.” Only two respondents failed the attention checks.

### Survey:

[pre-treatment covariates]

1. [PID1] Generally speaking, do you consider yourself a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or something else? [Republican / Democrat / Independent / Something else]
2. [PID2] IF PID1==Republican or Democrat: Do you consider yourself to be a strong [Republican / Democrat] or not a very strong [Republican / Democrat]? [Strong [Republican / Democrat] / Not very strong [Republican / Democrat]]
3. [PID3] IF PID1==Independent or Something else: Do you lean more toward the Republican Party or the Democratic Party? [Lean toward Republican Party / Lean toward Democratic Party]
4. [ideology] In general, how would you describe your own political viewpoint? [Extremely liberal / Liberal / Slightly liberal / Moderate / Slightly conservative / Conservative / Extremely conservative / Not sure]
5. [interest] Some people seem to follow what’s going on in government and public affairs most of the time, whether there’s an election going on or not. Others aren’t that interested. Would you say you follow what’s going on in government and public affairs... [Most of the time / Some of the time / Only now and then / Hardly at all / Don’t know]
6. [deep involvement 1] It is important to share your political opinions with others. [Strongly agree / Agree / Somewhat agree / Neither agree nor disagree / Somewhat disagree / Disagree / Strongly disagree]
7. [deep involvement 2] It is important to share political news stories with other people. [Strongly agree / Agree / Somewhat agree / Neither agree nor disagree / Somewhat disagree / Disagree / Strongly disagree]

8. [deep involvement 3] It is important to encourage others to be more involved in politics. [Strongly agree / Agree / Somewhat agree / Neither agree nor disagree / Somewhat disagree / Disagree / Strongly disagree]
  9. [attention 1] This question is very simple. We will show you a list of activities and ask you which one you think is the most fun, but you must select “bowling.” This is an attention check. **Based on the text you read above, which activity have you been asked to select?** [Bowling / Basketball / Football / Hockey / Tennis]
  10. [education] What is the highest level of education you have completed? [No High School / High School graduate / Some college / 2-year college / 4-year college / Post-graduate school or advanced degree]
  11. [race] What racial or ethnic group best describes you? [White / Black / Hispanic / Asian / Native American / Middle Eastern / Mixed / Other]
  12. [self-monitoring 1] When you are with other people, how often do you put on a show to impress or entertain them? [Always / Most of the time / Some of the time / Once in a while / Never]
  13. [self-monitoring 2] When you are in a group of people, how often are you the center of attention? [Always / Most of the time / Some of the time / Once in a while / Never]
  14. [self-monitoring 3] How good or poor of an actor would you be? [Excellent / Good / Fair / Poor / Very poor]
  15. [attention 2] The task below is very simple. When asked for your favorite color, you must select “orange.” This is an attention check. **Based on the text you read above, what color have you been asked to select?** [Pink / Orange / Yellow / Green / Violet]
- [treatment]
16. [participants were randomly assigned to one of the following tasks and were kept on the page for 10 seconds before the next button was available]
    - a. [control] Please write about what you had for breakfast this morning. Be as specific as possible.
    - b. [treatment] Please write about a time that you were **embarrassed to be a [Republican / Democrat]** because of something either a [Republican / Democratic] elite (i.e., a politician or media elite) *or* a [Republican / Democratic] peer (i.e. in the public) said or did. Be as specific as possible in talking about what happened and how it made you feel. If you have not been in this situation, **imagine** a scenario where you might feel **embarrassed to be a [Republican / Democrat]** and write about that.
- [dependent variables]
17. [assuming others’ views] How warm or cold do you think **other people** from each of the following groups feel about the **[Republican / Democratic [in-party]] Party**? Ratings between 50 degrees and 100 degrees mean that they would feel favorable and warm toward the party. Ratings between 0 degrees and 50 degrees mean that they wouldn’t feel favorable toward the party and that they wouldn’t care too much for that party. You would rate the party at the 50-degree mark if they wouldn’t feel particularly warm or cold toward the party. [randomize order of a, b, and c]
    - a. How warm or cold do you think Republicans feel about the [Republican / Democratic [in-party]] Party? [0 to 100 degrees]
    - b. How warm or cold do you think Democrats feel about the [Republican / Democratic [in-party]] Party? [0 to 100 degrees]

- c. How warm or cold do you think Independents feel about the [Republican / Democratic [in-party]] Party? [0 to 100 degrees]
18. [affective polarization] Now, what are **your** feelings toward the two national parties? Ratings between 50 degrees and 100 degrees mean that you feel favorable and warm toward the party. Ratings between 0 degrees and 50 degrees mean that you don't feel favorable toward the party and that you don't care too much for that party. You would rate the party at the 50-degree mark if you don't feel particularly warm or cold toward the party. [randomize order of a and b]
- How would you rate Republicans? [0 to 100 degrees]
  - How would you rate Democrats? [0 to 100 degrees]
19. [PID1 today] Our partisan affiliations can sometimes change over time. Right now, do you consider yourself a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or something else? [Republican / Democrat / Independent / Something else]
- [PID2 today] IF PID1==Republican or Democrat: Right now, do you consider yourself to be a strong [Republican / Democrat] or not a very strong [Republican / Democrat]? [Strong [Republican / Democrat] / Not very strong [Republican / Democrat]]
  - [PID3 today] IF PID1==Independent or something else: Right now, do you lean more toward the Republican Party or the Democratic Party? [Lean toward Republican Party / Lean toward Democratic Party]
20. [identity] Today, how important is being a [Republican / Democrat [in-party]] to your identity? [Not at all important / A little important / Moderately important / Very important / Extremely important]
21. [public and private support] Would you be willing to show your support for the [Republican / Democratic [in-party]] Party by doing the following activities?: [Columns: Wear a t-shirt **in public** demonstrating your support of the [Republican / Democratic [in-party]] Party / Wear a t-shirt **in private** demonstrating your support of the [Republican / Democratic [in-party]] Party / Donate to a [Republican / Democratic [in-party]] campaign if your **name was** published / Donate to a [Republican / Democratic [in-party]] campaign if your **name was not** published / Volunteer for a [Republican / Democratic [in-party]] campaign where others **would know** you were a volunteer / Volunteer for a [Republican / Democratic [in-party]] campaign where others **would not know** you were a volunteer; Rows: Yes / No]
22. [competence] On the following scale, how competent do you think Republicans and Democrats in office are? [0=Not at all competent → 100=Completely competent]
- Republicans in office
  - Democrats in office
23. [social polarization 1] Suppose your neighbor was a [in-partisan]. How often would you do the following activities for him or her? [Never / Sometimes / About half the time / Most of the time / Always]:
- Do favours for him or her
  - Watch over his or her property while they are not home or are on vacation
  - Ask him or her personal things
  - Talk to him or her about politics
24. [embarrassment] Right now, how embarrassed do you feel to be a [Republican / Democrat [in-party]]? [Not at all embarrassed / A little embarrassed / Moderately embarrassed / Very embarrassed]
25. [audience – if in treatment condition] In the embarrassing scenario you wrote about, how embarrassed would you be if each of the following groups witnessed the embarrassing

scenario: [Columns: Republicans / Democrats / Political independents / Close family and friends / Acquaintances / Strangers; Scale: 0 (Not at all embarrassed) → 100 (Completely embarrassed)]

26. [imagined or real – if in treatment] When you wrote about the embarrassing scenario, did you write about a real or an imagined time? [A real time / An imagined time / I can't remember]  
 27. [open] If you would like, please leave any comments you have about the study: [open-ended]

### Supplementary Analyses:

**Table C1.** The Effect of Partisan Embarrassment on Identifying as a Strong Partisan

<i>Dependent Variable:</i>	
<b>PID Strength</b>	
<b>Treated</b>	-0.052 (0.026)
<b>Democrat</b>	0.131 (0.026)
<b>Constant</b>	0.499 (0.023)
<b>N</b>	1,430

This table shows the results of a regression predicting whether a respondent identifies as a “strong partisan” according to their treatment status.

**Table C2.** The Effect of Partisan Embarrassment on Beliefs about How One's Party is Perceived

<i>Dependent Variable:</i>			
	<b>In-Partisans</b>	<b>Out-Partisans</b>	<b>Independents</b>
<b>Treated</b>	-1.174 (0.972)	-1.899 (1.021)	-0.838 (0.885)
<b>Democrat</b>	-2.110 (0.971)	-3.200 (1.020)	1.521 (0.884)
<b>Constant</b>	80.034 (0.841)	21.670 (0.882)	50.464 (0.765)
<b>N</b>	1,472	1,472	1,459

This table shows the results of regressions predicting respondents' views of how in-partisans, out-partisans, and independents view the respondent's own party. In no case do we find that embarrassment causes shifts in respondents' beliefs about how their party is perceived.

**Table C3.** The Effect of Embarrassment on Measured Outcomes (Regression from Figure 3)

<i>Dependent Variable:</i>								
	<b>FT Own Party</b>	<b>FT Other Party</b>	<b>PID Importan ce</b>	<b>Party Competent</b>	<b>Do favors</b>	<b>Watch property</b>	<b>Ask personal things</b>	<b>Talk about politics</b>
<b>Treated</b>	-0.006 (.011)	-0.012 (.012)	-0.019 (.016)	-0.005 (.013)	0.004 (.015)	-0.007 (.016)	-0.005 (.015)	-0.013 (.016)
<b>Democrat</b>	-0.023 (.011)	-0.083 (.012)	0.015 (.016)	0.002 (.013)	0.056 (.015)	0.076 (.016)	-0.002 (.015)	0.025 (.016)
<b>Constant</b>	0.733 (0.010)	0.282 (0.011)	0.421 (0.014)	0.647 (0.011)	0.415 (0.013)	0.276 (0.014)	0.654 (0.013)	0.580 (0.014)
<b>N</b>	1469	1470	1464	1473	1464	1462	1463	1463



**Table C3 (cont'd).** The Effect of Embarrassment on Measured Outcomes (Regression from Figure 3)

	<i>Dependent Variable:</i>					
	Shirt (public)	Shirt (private)	Donate (public)	Donate (private)	Volunteer (public)	Volunteer (private)
<b>Treated</b>	-0.010 (0.026)	-0.025 (0.026)	0.018 (0.026)	0.016 (0.026)	0.032 (0.026)	0.047 (0.026)
<b>Democrat</b>	-0.047 (0.026)	-0.046 (0.026)	0.101 (0.026)	0.115 (0.026)	0.090 (0.026)	0.071 (0.026)
<b>Constant</b>	0.442 (0.022)	0.584 (0.022)	0.362 (0.022)	0.447 (0.022)	0.363 (0.022)	0.417 (0.022)
<b>N</b>	1476	1476	1476	1476	1476	1476

**Table C4.** The Effect of Embarrassment on Measured Outcomes (Complier-Weighted Local Average Treatment Effect)

	<i>Dependent Variable:</i>							
	FT Own Party	FT Other Party	PID Importance	Party Competent	Do favors	Watch property	Ask personal things	Talk about politics
<b>Embarrass</b>	-0.051 (0.058)	-0.064 (0.066)	-0.102 (0.086)	-0.040 (0.066)	0.021 (0.082)	-0.036 (0.088)	-0.026 (0.084)	-0.073 (0.088)
<b>Democrat</b>	-0.020 (0.011)	-0.077 (0.013)	0.020 (0.016)	0.005 (0.012)	0.055 (0.016)	0.078 (0.016)	-0.001 (0.016)	0.029 (0.017)
<b>Constant</b>	0.750 (0.022)	0.297 (0.025)	0.446 (0.032)	0.660 (0.025)	0.410 (0.030)	0.285 (0.032)	0.660 (0.031)	0.598 (0.032)
<b>N</b>	1457	1458	1464	1461	1464	1462	1463	1463

**Table C4 (cont'd).** The Effect of Embarrassment on Measured Outcomes (Complier-Weighted Local Average Treatment Effect)

	<i>Dependent Variable:</i>					
	Shirt (public)	Shirt (private)	Donate (public)	Donate (private)	Volunteer (public)	Volunteer (private)
<b>Embarrassed</b>	-0.070 (0.139)	-0.157 (0.140)	0.079 (0.143)	0.070 (0.144)	0.159 (0.148)	0.240 (0.155)
<b>Democrat</b>	-0.044 (0.026)	-0.039 (0.026)	0.096 (0.027)	0.110 (0.027)	0.080 (0.028)	0.057 (0.029)
<b>Constant</b>	0.466 (0.051)	0.632 (0.051)	0.348 (0.052)	0.436 (0.053)	0.328 (0.054)	0.362 (0.056)
<b>N</b>	1464	1464	1464	1464	1464	1464

**Table C5.** The Effect of Embarrassment (by PID strength) on Measured Outcomes

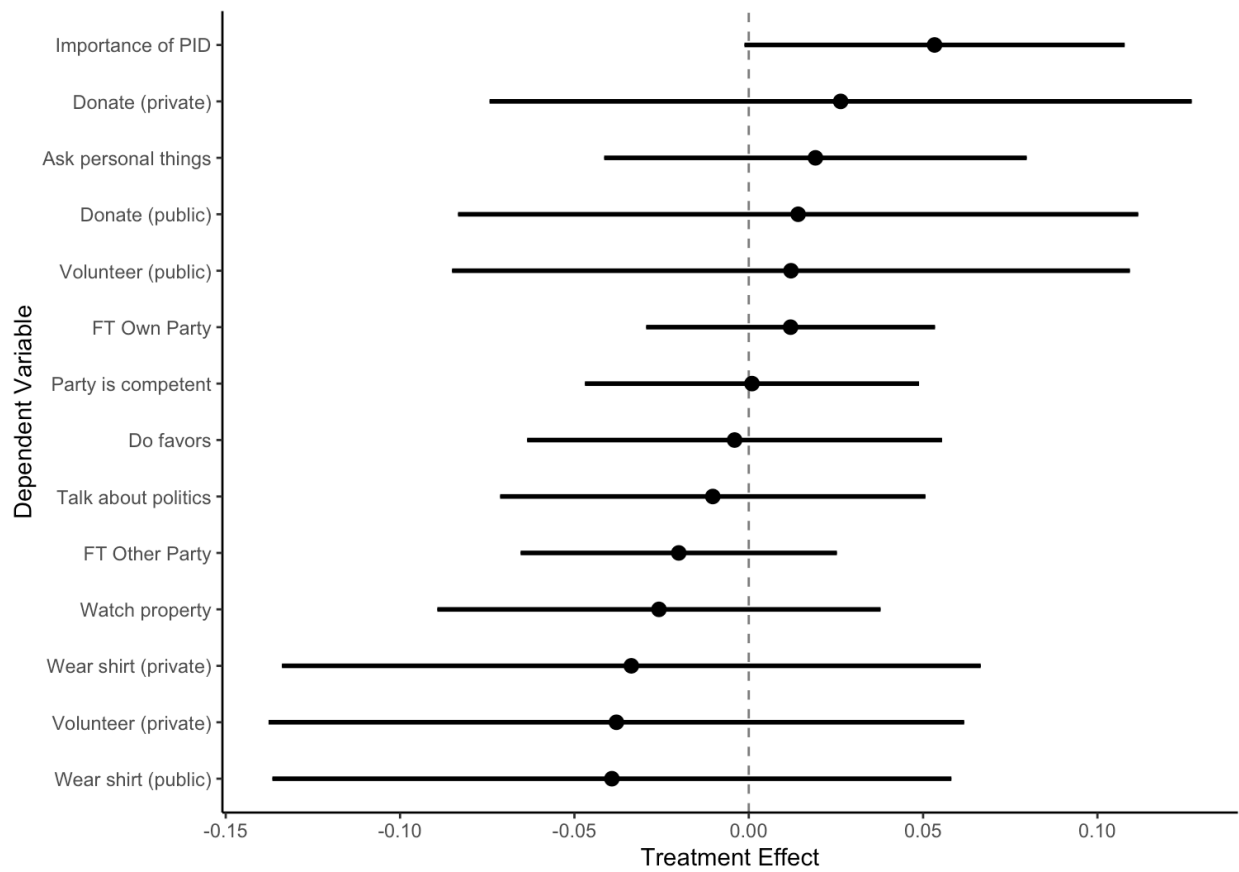
	<i>Dependent Variable:</i>							
	FT Own Party	FT Other Party	PID Importance	Party Competent	Do favors	Watch proper ty	Ask personal things	Talk about politics
<b>Treated</b>	-0.008 (0.017)	-0.002 (0.017)	-0.038 (0.018)	-0.005 (0.018)	0.006 (0.023)	0.003 (0.025)	-0.017 (0.021)	-0.009 (0.022)
<b>Democrat</b>	-0.043 (0.010)	-0.066 (0.012)	-0.024 (0.014)	-0.017 (0.012)	0.071 (0.015)	0.086 (0.016)	0.008 (0.016)	0.042 (0.016)
<b>St Partisan</b>	0.160 (0.015)	-0.108 (0.016)	0.272 (0.019)	0.145 (0.017)	-0.078 (0.021)	-0.051 (0.023)	-0.075 (0.021)	-0.136 (0.022)

<b>Treated X St</b>	0.012	-0.020	0.053	0.001	-0.004	-0.026	0.019	-0.010
<b>Partisan</b>	(0.021)	(0.023)	(0.028)	(0.024)	(0.030)	(0.032)	(0.031)	(0.031)
<b>Constant</b>	0.656	0.332	0.290	0.580	0.448	0.299	0.690	0.646
	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.015)	(0.014)	(0.017)	(0.019)	(0.017)	(0.018)
<b>N</b>	1438	1439	1433	1442	1433	1431	1433	1432

**Table C5 (cont'd).** The Effect of Embarrassment (by PID strength) on Measured Outcomes

	<i>Dependent Variable:</i>					
	<b>Shirt (public)</b>	<b>Shirt (private)</b>	<b>Donate (public)</b>	<b>Donate (private)</b>	<b>Volunteer (public)</b>	<b>Volunteer (private)</b>
<b>Treated</b>	0.020	-0.002	0.017	0.005	0.032	0.073
	(0.035)	(0.039)	(0.035)	(0.038)	(0.035)	(0.037)
<b>Democrat</b>	-0.081	-0.077	0.073	0.093	0.061	0.047
	(0.025)	(0.025)	(0.025)	(0.026)	(0.025)	(0.026)
<b>St Partisan</b>	0.297	0.279	0.259	0.205	0.271	0.269
	(0.034)	(0.035)	(0.034)	(0.036)	(0.034)	(0.035)
<b>Treated X</b>	-0.039	-0.034	0.014	0.026	0.012	-0.038
<b>Str Partisan</b>	(0.050)	(0.051)	(0.050)	(0.051)	(0.050)	(0.051)
<b>Constant</b>	0.297	0.447	0.235	0.345	0.228	0.280
	(0.027)	(0.030)	(0.027)	(0.029)	(0.026)	(0.028)
<b>N</b>	1445	1445	1445	1445	1445	1445

**Figure C1.** The Effect of Partisan Embarrassment on Partisanship and Polarization by Partisanship



This figure shows the coefficient estimates of our treatment variable (Figure 3) interacted with a dummy variable for strong partisans. Horizontal lines indicate 95% confidence intervals.