

# **You're Making Us Look Bad: Can Partisan Embarrassment Dampen Partisanship and Polarization? Apparently Not.**

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***Abstract.*** Partisan elites and members of the public often have attitudes or engage in behavior that could embarrass members of their in-party. 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, most importantly, what the political ramifications of partisan embarrassment are. We expect that when a group member engages in embarrassing behavior, in-group members want to distance themselves from their group to preserve their own status. We find that partisan embarrassment exists but it has no meaningful influence on partisanship, polarization, private or public in-party support, or views about the in- and out-party's competence. Our findings are potentially worrisome for representative democracy, as they suggest that political elites can engage in behavior that might not be approved of by their in-party, but will not be punished by them.

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

**Word Count:** 6,476

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On January 7, 2023, Kevin McCarthy was elected Speaker of the House. Despite his position as the top congressional Republican, this outcome was not always obvious. McCarthy’s election took an astonishing 15 ballots, making his ascension to Speakership the most drawn out process since the mid-1800s. Across the political spectrum, politicians and journalists expressed dismay over the pace of his election. Pundits lampooned the dysfunction (Goodykoontz 2023), President Joe Biden called the process “a little embarrassing” (Pierce 2023), and congressional Democrats mockingly ate popcorn to taunt the GOP over their mounting public relations problem (Saksa 2023). Republicans themselves were aware of how the vote was perceived, noting that Democrats were gleeful over the GOP’s divisions (Mueller 2023).

The whole debacle was (at least framed to be) embarrassing for Republicans. Similar occurrences have happened for Democrats, including recent gaffes by President Joe Biden (Sink 2024). While scholars have long known that parties attempt to avoid taking votes 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.” 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—or divisions within the parties—that could have an important influence on 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 55.5% of American partisans report having felt embarrassed by their party at least once. Second, we explore *what* embarrasses partisans, examining potential differences between peer and elite behavior as well as scenarios that could embarrass partisans. We do this by examining open-ended descriptions from randomly assigned prompts about embarrassment from co-partisan elites or peers. Third, we examine what types of partisans experience partisan embarrassment.

Fourth, and most importantly, we examine the political ramifications of partisan embarrassment. To do this, we conduct an experiment to test whether Americans’ embarrassment with their own party affects numerous attitudes associated with partisanship and polarization, such as partisan identity strength, affective party ratings, public and private party support, and perceived party competence. Overall, we find that while partisans exhibit partisan embarrassment—something theory suggests would lead them to distance themselves from the group—this has no meaningful effect on partisan attachment or polarization. We conclude by discussing implications, noting our null findings suggest a daunting outlook for American politics, whereby elected officials can conduct embarrassing behavior with limited risk of weakening their support among their base.

## ***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 in various ways. First, with secular increases in partisan ideological (Levendusky 2009) and demographic (Mason 2016, 2018) sorting, the Democratic and Republican

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

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 one another, affecting: interpersonal trust (Lee 2022); economic behavior (Engelhardt and Utych 2020); willingness to converse with others (Mutz 2002; Barbera 2014); comfort with one’s children socializing with (Mason 2018) and marrying (Iyengar and Westwood 2015) out-partisans; willingness to be neighbors with out-partisans (Mason 2018); residential preferences generally (Bishop 2008); willingness to date (Huber and Malhotra 2017; Easton and Holbein 2021) and marry (Iyengar, Konitzer, and Tedin 2018) out-partisans; and willingness to assist one’s neighbors with household tasks (Webster, Connors, and Sinclair 2022). Politically, polarization can influence political 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 these levels for social reasons (Connors 2023) and may not dramatically change their social relationships for purely political reasons (Connors, Klar, and Krupnikov 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 there are strong divisions between Republicans and Democrats that have important consequences.

***Intraparty Conflict.*** In focusing on in-party versus out-party conflicts, the social identity framework often overlooks potential fractures within one’s *own* party. Recent research has begun to examine these intraparty conflicts, noting nuances within the party 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 political 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 divisions in American politics beyond Republicans and Democrats, there is currently little exploration of the affective consequences of intraparty divisions. 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 own group—and what the consequences might be. Filling this gap is centrally 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. 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. It remains an open question how partisans react to these potentially embarrassing moments for their party. 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, however, partisans could experience embarrassment and weaken their positive in-party affect. Because people have a motivation 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 can be 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 (Eller, Koschate, and Gilson 2011). The more people witness a behavior, the more embarrassed one becomes (Eller et al. 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, 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 the 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 positive 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 typically 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 may embarrass in-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 in conspiracy theories, are demeaning to certain groups, or say factually incorrect things, these actions could be perceived as embarrassing to their co-partisan peers. 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 amplified on social media (Krupnikov and Ryan 2022). Thus, how partisan elites and peers act could lead in-partisans to feel embarrassed by their party—and this partisan embarrassment could have beneficial externalities.

***Our Study.*** We thus explore partisan embarrassment as an outcome of intraparty divides that could potentially dampen partisanship and polarization. We propose that when partisans conduct behavior that embarrasses in-partisans, they will attempt to distance themselves from their party by altering their partisan identity strength, affect towards the in- and out-party, 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, in-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 the concerning partisan divides and potentially lead to more compromise.<sup>2</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 some 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 conducted three studies with partisans.<sup>3</sup> 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 did this to determine the rate, type, and correlates of partisan embarrassment and to allow partisans to explain the types of scenarios that lead to partisan embarrassment. We further examined this in Study 2 with a nationally-representative sample from YouGov (N=1200). We used findings from Studies 1 and 2 to inform our experimental design in Study 3.

In Study 3, we examined the political ramifications of partisan embarrassment with a convenience sample from Prolific (N=1,479). Our goal was to experimentally induce partisan embarrassment and measure our dependent variables. However, given the heterogeneity—

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<sup>2</sup> Of course, 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.

<sup>3</sup> Our studies did not include pure independents.

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 assigned respondents to a control condition or a treatment condition that asked respondents to discuss a time they felt embarrassed by their party. We then asked all respondents a series of questions to gauge various aspects of their partisanship and polarization.

Our findings from these three studies demonstrate that partisans do feel partisan embarrassment—however, they also demonstrate that partisan embarrassment does not lead partisans to meaningfully change how they identify with and feel towards the in- and out-party. This suggests that in today’s climate, political elites can engage in behavior that might not be approved of by their in-party, but will not be punished by them.

## Study 1

**Study Design.** First, we examined 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; sample details and survey wording in Appendix A). Our goal was 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 partisan embarrassment simply 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 partisan 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 assigned respondents to answer questions about their in-party elites or peers. In the elite condition they were asked, “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?” In the peer condition, they were asked instead about “a [Republican / Democratic] peer (i.e., *not* a [Republican / Democratic] elite but a [Republican / Democrat] in the public).” Response options were: “no, never,” “once or twice,” “sometimes,” “quite often,” and “basically every week.” For those who answered “no, never” they were asked to, “Please talk about why you think you have not been embarrassed.” For every other response, participants were asked to, “Please talk about what has embarrassed you and why.”

**Results.** Overall, we find that 55.50% of American partisans reported having felt partisan embarrassment at least once. In particular, 23.64% of American partisans reported feeling partisan embarrassment “once or twice,” 23.64% “sometimes,” 6.19% “quite often,” and 2.02% “basically every week.” Further, we find that rates of embarrassment did not differ by whether participants were asked about peers or elites ( $p=.328$ ).<sup>4</sup>

Next, we examine individual variables’ relationships with general embarrassment, merging peer and elite conditions. As shown in Table 1, we find that partisan embarrassment was strongly associated with race, education, political interest, and partisan strength: White respondents ( $p<.001$ ) and the more educated ( $p=.001$ ) and politically interested ( $p=.020$ ) reported more partisan embarrassment, but stronger partisans reported *less* embarrassment ( $p=.001$ ).

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<sup>4</sup> P-value of *elite* versus *peer* coefficient in OLS regression predicting embarrassment by condition.

Splitting this up by condition, we find that when predicting embarrassment by one's partisan peers, only education and partisan strength mattered. The more educated reported *more* embarrassment ( $p=.003$ ) and stronger partisans reported *less* embarrassment ( $p=.034$ ). When predicting embarrassment by one's partisan *elites*, age, race, political interest, and partisan strength mattered most. Younger ( $p=.045$ ), White ( $p<.001$ ), and politically interested ( $p=.004$ ) respondents were more likely to report being embarrassed by their partisan elites, while strong partisans ( $p=.010$ ) were less likely to report so. Here, education was only marginally significant ( $p=.083$ ).

It is possible these findings reflect the fact that political sophisticates (educated and politically interested) are more likely to encounter political information and therefore more likely to encounter situations that embarrass them. Yet the correlational negative relationship between partisan strength and embarrassment conflicts with the idea that stronger partisans could feel more embarrassment as their identity is more tied to their partisanship. As Tajfel (1982) explains, people want to “preserve or achieve ‘positive group distinctiveness’...to protect, enhance, preserve, or achieve a positive social identity for members of the group” (pg. 24). Instead, it is possible this correlation reflects strong partisans' decreased likelihood of *encountering* partisan embarrassment because of selective exposure to partisan media, *feeling* partisan embarrassment because of motivated reasoning, or *reporting* partisan embarrassment because of partisan cheerleading. It is also possible this correlation reflects an effect of partisan embarrassment on partisan strength—that embarrassment *causes* partisans to weaken their party attachment. We examine this in Study 3.

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

	<i>Dependent Variable:</i>		
	Embarrassment	Peer Embarrassment	Elite Embarrassment
<b>Age</b>	-0.00 (.00)	-0.00 (.00)	-0.01** (.00)
<b>Woman</b>	0.02 (.08)	-0.07 (.11)	0.12 (.11)
<b>White</b>	0.33*** (.08)	0.17 (.11)	0.52*** (.11)
<b>Education</b>	0.09*** (.03)	0.11*** (.04)	0.07* (.04)
<b>Interest</b>	0.11** (.05)	0.04 (.07)	0.18*** (.06)
<b>Partisan Strength</b>	-0.15*** (.05)	-0.14** (.07)	-0.18*** (.07)
<b>Democrat</b>	-0.02 (.12)	-0.15 (.17)	0.11 (.17)
<b>Ideology</b>	-0.07 (.05)	-0.09 (.07)	-0.05 (.06)
<b>Knowledge</b>	-0.07 (.05)	-0.04 (.07)	-0.10 (.07)
<b>Constant</b>	2.03*** (.25)	2.26*** (.37)	1.88*** (.33)
<b>Observations</b>	728	366	362

Table shows coefficients predicting reported embarrassment (from 1 [“no, never”] to 5 [“basically every week”]) from OLS regressions with robust standard errors in parentheses. Model 1 (left) predicts embarrassment, grouping elite and peer embarrassment together. Model 2 (middle) predicts peer embarrassment. Model 3 (right) predicts elite embarrassment. *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 (“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). \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01.

Finally, in examining open-ended responses, we observe both similarities and differences in *what* embarrasses partisans (see Figure 1). Both Republicans and Democrats describe scenarios about specific policies, from general extremism and unwillingness to compromise *as well as* moderation and *too much* compromising. For example, a strong Democrat reported being embarrassed that the party was too moderate, writing, “I just feel like the Democratic party has become too moderate and that they don’t look out for the working class.” Similarly, some partisans were embarrassed by their party compromising too much, like this strong Republican who wrote, “Backtracking from firm stances because of political pressure. The GOP caves too often to the Left under the false believe they will ever garner their support.” A strong Democrat echoed a similar point: “Politician[s] giving credence to stupid Republican positions and working for compromise without the Republican giving an inch.” Yet, another strong Democrat expressed embarrassment at the





respondents, particularly strong partisans, pointed to specific policy divisions. For example, Republicans often noted embarrassment when in-partisans would speak out against vaccines, while Democrats expressed embarrassment over how in-partisans responded to policies targeting homelessness.

Among people who reported never feeling embarrassed by their party, we observe two types of explanations. Some point to their overall lack of political interest, such as this strong Democrat: “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 group 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!”

## Study 2

**Study Design.** To better understand the types of scenarios people find embarrassing and how embarrassment might correlate with partisan loyalties and behaviors, we included original questions on the American Media Exposure Survey (AMES) (Kim and Carlson n.d.), which was 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 (n=1,564). Sample details and survey wording are in Appendix B.

We built upon open-ended responses from Study 1 to obtain more concrete estimates of the degree of partisan embarrassment across different scenarios. In a grid structure, we presented Republican and Democrat 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 then showed participants five scenarios, which we adapted from open-ended responses in Study 1: (1) a [in-party] politician is in a sex scandal, (2) [in-partisans] are too ideologically extreme, (3) [in-partisans] are too ideologically *moderate*, (4) [in-partisans] believe and spread misinformation, and (5) [in-partisans] are uninformed about the news or politics. Response options in each scenario were: “not at all embarrassing,” “a little embarrassing,” “moderately embarrassing,” and “very embarrassing.”

Empirically, Study 2 was largely exploratory, focusing on uncovering embarrassment rates across scenarios among American partisans in general, but also among Republicans and Democrats separately. To achieve this, we simply estimate the weighted proportions of each response option for the full sample (representative of the U.S. adult population) and each party. Our secondary goal in Study 2 was to extend findings from Study 1 to see if race, education, political interest, and partisan strength were again related to embarrassment. To accomplish this, we estimate ordered logit models for each embarrassing scenario, where the dependent variable is the level of embarrassment and explanatory variables include similar variables to Study 1 (see Table 2).

Finally, we investigate whether experiencing embarrassment is correlated with expressions of partisanship. Previous research suggests that it 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 and Connors 2023). In other words, 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 expected

people who feel partisan embarrassment might be willing to express their support privately, but not publicly.

To measure this, we asked respondents how likely they would be to: (1) try to persuade someone to vote for [in-party] 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 reported their responses on a five-point scale ranging from “very unlikely” to “very likely.” We analyze the relationship between partisan embarrassment and these measures by first calculating the average level of partisan embarrassment across scenarios and using this as the primary explanatory variable in an ordered logit model where the dependent variable is the likelihood of engaging in each political activity. We control for the same demographic and political characteristics as Study 1: age, gender, race/ethnicity, education, political interest, strength of partisanship, party identification, and ideology.

**Results.** Again, our first goal was to investigate the rates of partisan embarrassment across embarrassing scenarios. We find that of the scenarios we asked about, American partisans were 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 reported that it was very embarrassing when their co-partisans believed or spread misinformation, 28.6% reported the same when their co-partisans were involved in a sex scandal, and 25.4% when their co-partisans were generally uninformed about politics. Ideological views did not seem particularly embarrassing to American partisans, with only 7.3% reporting that it was very embarrassing when their co-partisans were too moderate, and 49.4% of Americans reporting that this was not at all embarrassing. While viewed as less embarrassing than the information-oriented scenarios, 17.0% of American partisans still reported that it was very embarrassing when their co-partisans were too ideologically extreme.

As Study 1 suggested 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 was not at all embarrassing when their partisans were ideologically extreme, compared to 27.5% of Democrats. More striking is the partisan embarrassment gap regarding the spread of misinformation. Although spreading misinformation was still viewed as the most embarrassing scenario among both Republicans and Democrats, only 29.9% of Republicans viewed this as very embarrassing, compared to nearly half (48.8%) of Democrats. Democrats were 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. For instance, 16.1% of Democrats considered it to be not at all embarrassing when their fellow Democrats were uninformed, but 29.0% of Republicans felt this way when their co-partisans were uninformed.

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

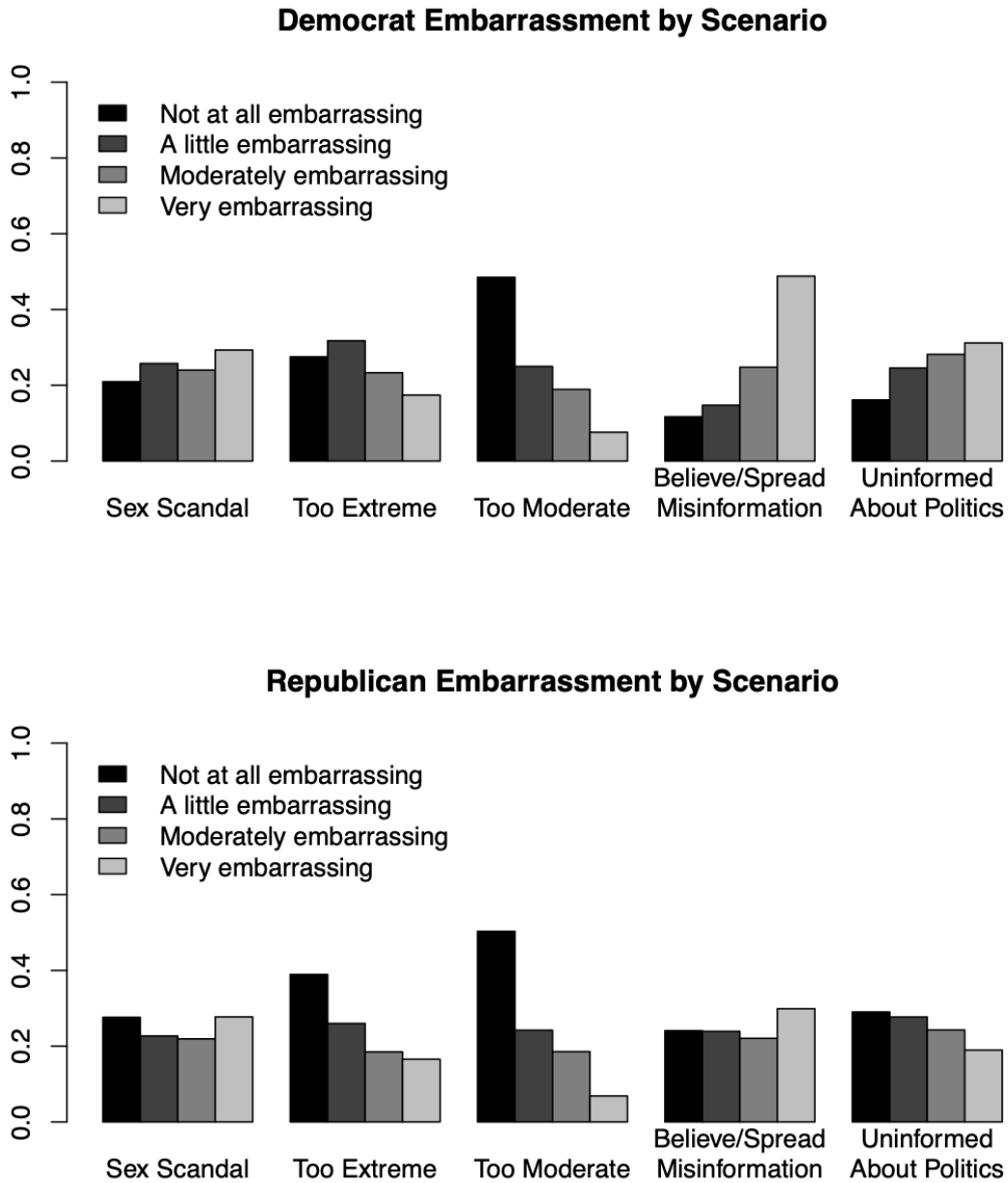


Figure shows the proportion of Democrats (top) and Republicans (bottom) reporting each level of embarrassment for each scenario. Proportions estimated using survey weights and the survey package in R (Lumley 2023).

Next, we investigate the correlates of partisan embarrassment across scenarios. Table 2 reports results from ordered logit regressions in which the dependent variable in each model is the embarrassing scenario.

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

	<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>	0.012** (0.005)	0.001 (0.005)	-0.004 (0.005)	0.008** (0.004)	-0.001 (0.005)
<b>Woman</b>	0.016 (0.146)	0.035 (0.148)	-0.062 (0.151)	-0.006 (0.151)	0.017 (0.144)
<b>White</b>	0.011 (0.179)	-0.194 (0.187)	0.034 (0.175)	0.113 (0.178)	0.135 (0.177)
<b>Education</b>	0.030 (0.053)	-0.046 (0.051)	0.004 (0.051)	0.071 (0.048)	0.003 (0.051)
<b>Interest</b>	-0.077 (0.107)	0.032 (0.105)	-0.083 (0.105)	0.122 (0.096)	0.277*** (0.102)
<b>Partisan Strength</b>	0.029 (0.083)	-0.150* (0.088)	0.138 (0.093)	-0.059 (0.085)	-0.114 (0.088)
<b>Democrat</b>	0.420* (0.226)	0.375 (0.246)	-0.027 (0.247)	0.582* (0.242)	0.447* (0.245)
<b>Ideology</b>	0.103 (0.086)	0.032 (0.083)	-0.037 (0.096)	-0.192* (0.094)	-0.162* (0.086)
<b>0 1</b>	-0.272 (0.524)	-0.867* (0.512)	-0.266 (0.568)	-0.804 (0.515)	-0.676 (0.519)
<b>1 2</b>	0.837 (0.527)	0.342 (0.515)	0.803 (0.569)	0.254 (0.521)	0.560 (0.520)
<b>2 3</b>	1.821*** (0.529)	1.444*** (0.524)	2.310*** (0.554)	1.286** (0.524)	1.767*** (0.528)
<b>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 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”). \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01.

The results suggest that different characteristics matter for different types of embarrassing scenarios. Older people are more embarrassed than younger people by sex scandals and co-partisans spreading or believing misinformation. Although Study 1 revealed that political interest was strongly related to experiencing partisan embarrassment overall, when it comes to specific

*types* of embarrassing scenarios, we only find that it is associated with co-partisans being generally uninformed about politics. That is, people who are more interested in politics are more embarrassed when their co-partisans are generally uninformed, compared to people who are less interested in politics. Similarly, strength of partisanship was strongly associated with feeling general partisan embarrassment in Study 1, but here we find that this is only the case for situations in which co-partisans are too extreme. Importantly, strong partisans are *less* embarrassed by their co-partisans being too extreme, compared to weaker partisans or leaners.

As illustrated in Figure 2, there are notable partisan differences between Democrats and Republicans. First, Democrats are more embarrassed by co-partisans spreading misinformation or co-partisans being uninformed, compared to Republicans. Second, conservatives are less embarrassed by co-partisans spreading misinformation or being uninformed, compared to liberals.

Finally, we set out to examine whether partisan embarrassment was correlated with different forms of partisan expressions. We explore this relationship with ordered logit models where the dependent variable is likelihood the respondent reported they would participate in each form of engagement. The independent variable of interest is an overall embarrassment score, reflecting the average embarrassment level across the five types explored in Table 2.<sup>5</sup> We control for the same demographic characteristics included in Table 2: age, gender, race/ethnicity, education, political interest, strength of partisanship, party identification, and ideology.

These models, which include survey weights, reveal no statistically significant association between partisan embarrassment and partisan engagement, regardless of whether that engagement was public or private. When survey weights are omitted, there is a positive association between partisan embarrassment and engaging in behaviors that express support for their party *privately*, but no relationship for public expressions of support or trying to persuade others to support one's preferred party. In essence, the relationship between partisan embarrassment and the forms of political engagement examined here is model-dependent. Thus, we transparently present the conflicting results from multiple models and conclude this relationship is tenuous. Moreover, these results are observational and thus unable to speak to questions of causality. To give us more insight, we turned to an experiment 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 conducted a survey experiment on November 21-27, 2023 with a sample from Prolific (N=1,479, sample details in Appendix C). The goal here was 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 needed 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 designed to elicit embarrassment. Specifically, our treatment condition prompted individuals to, “write about a time that you were embarrassed to be a

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<sup>5</sup> The Cronbach's Alpha across these five items was .79.

[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.” Those who were randomized into the control group were 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 into conditions occurred separately for self-identifying Democrats and Republicans.

We then presented respondents with a series of questions designed to measure expressions of partisanship and polarization (survey wording in Appendix C). First, respondents were asked to rate how they thought *others* (in-partisans, out-partisans, and political independents) felt about their party. Then, respondents were asked to rate their *own* feelings towards the two major political parties on a 0-100 “feeling thermometer” scale. To capture partisan affiliation and the strength of that attachment, we asked respondents whether they consider themselves, “right now,” to be either a Democrat or a Republican. Those who selected “Democrat” or “Republican” were then asked whether they considered themselves to be a “strong” or “not very strong” partisan, and those who selected “Independent” or “something else” were asked if they lean more towards one party. To capture the intensity of one’s partisanship in a different manner, we also asked respondents to assess the importance of their party identification to their overall identity. Responses ranged from “not at all important” to “very important.”

To measure public and private support for respondents’ party (similar to Study 2), we asked 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 asked respondents their intention to engage in these behaviors both when the action was observable (public) and when it was 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 asked respondents their perception of elected Republicans’ and Democrats’ competence and then four questions to measure social polarization. Drawn from prior work (Webster, Connors, and Sinclair.2022), we asked respondents to imagine how they would—or would not—engage with an in-party neighbor. We asked respondents the frequency with which they would do favors for that neighbor, watch over that neighbor’s property when they are not home, ask that neighbor personal things, and talk to that neighbor about politics. Response options for each were: “never,” “sometimes,” “about half the time,” “most of the time,” and “always.” We then asked 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 asked two exploratory questions, inquiring about embarrassment by audience and whether the written experience was about a real or imagined scenario.

Because we blocked 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 Democratic respondents. 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 0-3, 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. 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.

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

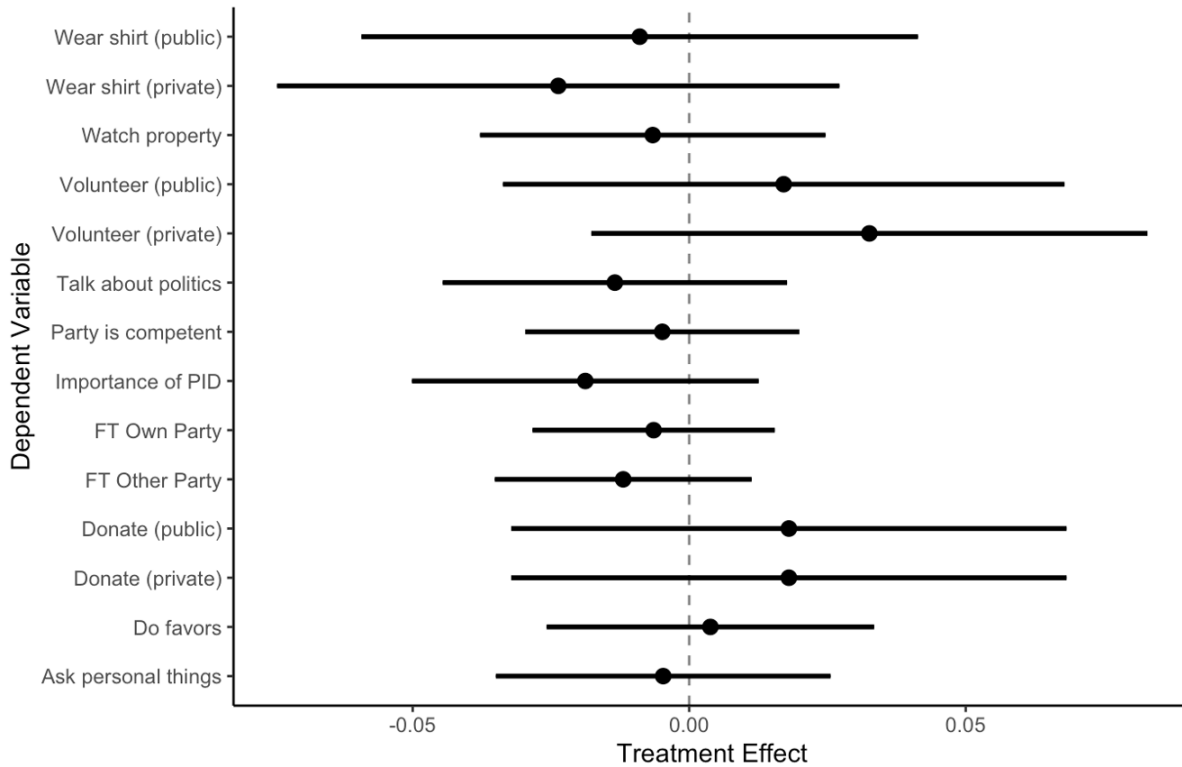
	<b>Embarrassment</b>
<b>Treated</b>	0.184*** (0.035)
<b>Democrat</b>	0.056 (0.035)
<b>Constant</b>	0.253*** (0.030)
<b>Observations</b>	1,464

Table shows the 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. \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01.

The coefficient estimates of our treatment on various measures of partisan loyalty and expressions are shown in Figure 3. The results suggest that embarrassment had no effect on partisanship, polarization, private *and* public in-party support, or views about in- and out-party competence: the treatment effects that we estimate are consistently indistinguishable from zero. This is the case across types of political participation (e.g., wearing a shirt, donating to a political party, or volunteering for a campaign). Additionally, we do not find evidence that the visibility of a participatory act matters. On the contrary, experiencing embarrassment does not affect partisans’ willingness to engage in various forms of political behavior in public or private settings.



**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.

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’ political attitudes. Experiencing embarrassment, for instance, does not cause shifts in individuals’ feeling thermometer ratings of the in- or out-party. In a related fashion, embarrassment does not 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>6</sup> In fact, we find that embarrassment does not even influence respondents’ beliefs about how in-partisans, out-partisans, and Independents feel about their party (see Appendix 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 did 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 hypothesis noted above and in the pre-registration (see also Appendix C).

<sup>6</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 Appendix C for these results.

## Discussion & Conclusion

Political elites and members of the public often engage in behavior or have attitudes by which in-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 in-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 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—something noted by Filindra and Harbridge-Yong (2022).

While our results fit into a broader trend in findings that partisans do not 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 in-partisans has no meaningful effect on how partisans feel about their party and how committed they are to it. And, 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, however, 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). 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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## Appendix 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 are then compensated by points (determined by CES) after each survey they take. Respondents can then exchange points for giftcards and other prizes (see <https://cces.gov.harvard.edu/frequently-asked-questions>).

Of the full sample (N=1,000), 51.40% were Democrats, 30.57% were Republicans, and 18.03% were pure independents (note that pure independents did not take our experiment). The sample had a mean ideology of 2.96 and standard deviation of 1.20 from extremely liberal (1) to extremely conservative (7). It was 58.46% women, 41.54% men; had a mean age of 48.73 with a standard deviation of 17.61; and was 64% white and 36% 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.

### 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 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]



## Appendix B: Study 2 (American Media Exposure Survey [AMES]), April 22<sup>nd</sup> – May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 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.

Of the full 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 (unweighted). The 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.

### 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.

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 A1 shows the results from Table 2 in the manuscript without survey weights. Table A2 shows the results from Table 2 in the manuscript as an OLS model instead of ordered logit. Table A3 shows the results described on manuscript page X where the independent variable of interest is the average level of embarrassment across the five types and the dependent variables are forms of political engagement. Tables A4-A8 show the relationship between the level of embarrassment from each specific type of embarrassing scenario and political engagement, rather than using the average level of embarrassment across the five types—all models reflect the same model specification presented in the manuscript (ordinal logit models with survey weights). \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01.

**Table A1. 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>
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
<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>	-0.1665 (0.4025)	-0.529 (0.398)	-0.661 (0.414)	-1.024** (0.416)	-0.463 (0.402)
<b>1 2</b>	1.0063** (0.4035)	0.719* (0.399)	0.491 (0.414)	0.138 (0.414)	0.902** (0.401)
<b>2 3</b>	1.9789*** (0.4059)	1.920*** (0.403)	1.915*** (0.421)	1.110** (0.415)	2.124*** (0.405)
<b>Observations</b>	1,291	1,291	1,291	1,291	1,291

**Table A2.** Individual-Level Correlates of Partisan Embarrassment by Scenario (OLS)

	<i>Dependent Variable:</i>				
	<b>Sex Scandal</b>	<b>Too Extreme</b>	<b>Too Moderate</b>	<b>Misinformation</b>	<b>Uninformed</b>
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
<b>Age</b>	0.006*** (0.002)	0.001 (0.002)	-0.003* (0.002)	0.004** (0.002)	-0.001 (0.002)
<b>Woman</b>	0.067 (0.065)	0.045 (0.061)	-0.020 (0.056)	-0.016 (0.061)	-0.058 (0.060)
<b>White</b>	0.038 (0.075)	0.022 (0.071)	-0.019 (0.065)	0.107 (0.071)	0.102 (0.070)
<b>Education</b>	0.001 (0.022)	-0.006 (0.021)	0.008 (0.019)	0.044** (0.021)	0.023 (0.021)
<b>Interest</b>	0.036 (0.047)	0.048 (0.044)	0.014 (0.040)	0.071 (0.044)	0.185*** (0.043)
<b>Partisan Strength</b>	0.077* (0.039)	-0.092** (0.037)	0.049 (0.034)	0.005 (0.037)	0.008 (0.036)
<b>Democrat</b>	0.090 (0.103)	0.112 (0.097)	-0.193** (0.089)	0.230** (0.097)	0.179* (0.095)
<b>Ideology</b>	-0.004 (0.038)	0.011 (0.036)	-0.082** (0.033)	-0.172*** (0.036)	-0.099*** (0.035)
<b>Constant</b>	0.891*** (0.249)	1.095*** (0.234)	1.123*** (0.215)	1.473*** (0.234)	0.970*** (0.231)
<b>Observations</b>	1,291	1,291	1,291	1,291	1,291
<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>	0.014	0.007	0.010	0.093	0.059
<b>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup></b>	0.008	0.001	0.004	0.087	0.053
<b>Residual Std. Error (df = 1282)</b>	1.124	1.057	0.969	1.058	1.042
<b>F Statistic (df = 8; 1282)</b>	2.249**	1.112	1.656	16.400***	9.969***

**Table A3. Relationship Between Embarrassment and Political Engagement**

	<i>Dependent Variable:</i>		
	<b>Persuade</b>	<b>Public Support</b>	<b>Private Support</b>
	(1)	(2)	(3)
<b>Embarrassment</b>	0.030 (0.095)	-0.045 (0.089)	0.106 (0.097)
<b>Age</b>	-0.001 (0.005)	0.003 (0.005)	0.010 (0.005)
<b>Woman</b>	-0.367** (0.142)	-0.182 (0.135)	-0.357** (0.156)
<b>White</b>	0.212 (0.161)	-0.091 (0.159)	0.423** (0.186)
<b>Education</b>	0.139** (0.054)	0.007 (0.047)	0.181*** (0.054)
<b>Interest</b>	0.622*** (0.113)	0.432*** (0.098)	0.469*** (0.110)
<b>Partisan Strength</b>	0.520*** (0.091)	0.471*** (0.087)	0.512*** (0.096)
<b>Democrat</b>	-0.169 (0.239)	-0.320 (0.220)	-0.213 (0.276)
<b>Ideology</b>	-0.092 (0.093)	-0.026 (0.096)	-0.139 (0.105)
<b>0 1</b>	1.587** (0.593)	1.100** (0.529)	0.919 (0.641)
<b>1 2</b>	2.275*** (0.591)	1.858*** (0.532)	1.508** (0.643)
<b>2 3</b>	3.614*** (0.600)	2.855*** (0.533)	2.779*** (0.643)
<b>3 4</b>	4.680*** (0.611)	3.891*** (0.552)	3.807*** (0.651)
<b>Observations</b>	1,291	1,291	1,291

**Table A4.** Embarrassment from In-Party Sex Scandals and Political Engagement

	<i>Dependent Variable:</i>		
	<b>Persuade</b>	<b>Public Support</b>	<b>Private Support</b>
	(1)	(2)	(3)
<b>Embarrassment (Scandal)</b>	0.004 (0.063)	0.023 (0.061)	0.074 (0.066)
<b>Age</b>	-0.001 (0.005)	0.003 (0.005)	0.009* (0.005)
<b>Woman</b>	-0.368*** (0.141)	-0.182 (0.135)	-0.356** (0.156)
<b>White</b>	0.214 (0.214)	-0.093 (0.159)	0.426** (0.185)
<b>Education</b>	0.139** (0.054)	0.007 (0.047)	0.182*** (0.053)
<b>Interest</b>	0.624*** (0.112)	0.433*** (0.097)	0.476*** (0.110)
<b>Partisan Strength</b>	0.519*** (0.091)	0.472*** (0.087)	0.509*** (0.096)
<b>Democrat</b>	-0.164 (0.239)	-0.331 (0.220)	-0.213 (0.275)
<b>Ideology</b>	-0.093 (0.092)	-0.025 (0.095)	-0.147 (0.104)
<b>0 1</b>	1.554*** (0.589)	1.182** (0.515)	0.869 (0.630)
<b>1 2</b>	2.243*** (0.587)	1.940*** (0.518)	1.459** (0.633)
<b>2 3</b>	3.581*** (3.581)	2.937*** (0.517)	2.730*** (0.633)
<b>3 4</b>	4.647*** (0.606)	3.974*** (0.536)	3.758*** (0.642)
<b>Observations</b>	1,291	1,291	1,291

**Table A5.** Embarrassment from In-Party Members being too Extreme and Political Engagement

	<i>Dependent Variable:</i>		
	<b>Persuade</b>	<b>Public Support</b>	<b>Private Support</b>
	(1)	(2)	(3)
<b>Embarrassment (Extreme)</b>	-0.127*	-0.161***	-0.002
	(0.065)	(0.061)	(0.075)
<b>Age</b>	-0.001	0.004	0.010*
	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)
<b>Woman</b>	-0.375***	-0.184	-0.353**
	(0.142)	(0.135)	(0.156)
<b>White</b>	0.202	-0.116	0.430**
	(0.160)	(0.159)	(0.184)
<b>Education</b>	0.134**	0.0005	0.182**
	(0.053)	(0.047)	(0.053)
<b>Interest</b>	0.631***	0.434***	0.471***
	(0.113)	(0.098)	(0.110)
<b>Partisan Strength</b>	0.509***	0.462***	0.509***
	(0.238)	(0.087)	(0.096)
<b>Democrat</b>	-0.146	-0.306	-0.195
	(0.238)	(0.223)	(0.277)
<b>Ideology</b>	-0.090	-0.022	-0.142
	(0.093)	(0.096)	(0.105)
<b>0 1</b>	1.377**	0.935*	0.782
	(0.578)	(0.523)	(0.621)
<b>1 2</b>	2.066***	1.696**	1.371**
	(0.578)	(0.523)	(0.625)
<b>2 3</b>	3.407***	2.698***	2.640***
	(0.586)	(0.523)	(0.626)
<b>3 4</b>	4.478***	3.742***	3.666***
	(0.596)	(0.539)	(0.633)
<b>Observations</b>	1,291	1,291	1,291

**Table A6.** Embarrassment from In-Party Members being too Moderate and Political Engagement

	<i>Dependent Variable:</i>		
	<b>Persuade</b>	<b>Public Support</b>	<b>Private Support</b>
	(1)	(2)	(3)
<b>Embarrassment (Moderate)</b>	0.124*	0.091	0.025
	(0.073)	(0.076)	(0.078)
<b>Age</b>	-0.0003	0.003	0.010*
	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)
<b>Woman</b>	-0.364**	-0.179	-0.353**
	(0.142)	(0.135)	(0.156)
<b>White</b>	0.205	-0.096	0.428**
	(0.162)	(0.160)	(0.185)
<b>Education</b>	0.142***	0.009	0.182**
	(0.054)	(0.047)	(0.053)
<b>Interest</b>	0.628***	0.439***	0.472***
	(0.111)	(0.098)	(0.110)
<b>Partisan Strength</b>	0.515***	0.465***	0.508***
	(0.091)	(0.087)	(0.096)
<b>Democrat</b>	-0.163	-0.320	-0.193
	(0.243)	(0.223)	(0.278)
<b>Ideology</b>	-0.091	-0.019	-0.141
	(0.094)	(0.096)	(0.105)
<b>0 1</b>	1.685***	1.268**	0.812
	(0.597)	(0.540)	(0.639)
<b>1 2</b>	2.376***	2.028***	1.402**
	(0.596)	(0.544)	(0.643)
<b>2 3</b>	3.719***	3.028***	2.671***
	(0.606)	(0.546)	(0.642)
<b>3 4</b>	4.788***	4.067***	3.697***
	(0.618)	(0.566)	(0.648)
<b>Observations</b>	1,291	1,291	1,291

**Table A7.** Embarrassment from In-Party Members Believing and Spreading Misinformation and Political Engagement

	<i>Dependent Variable:</i>		
	<b>Persuade</b>	<b>Public Support</b>	<b>Private Support</b>
	(1)	(2)	(3)
<b>Embarrassment (Misinformation)</b>	0.067 (0.066)	-0.034 (0.063)	0.101 (0.066)
<b>Age</b>	-0.001 (0.005)	0.003 (0.005)	0.009* (0.005)
<b>Woman</b>	-0.365** (0.142)	-0.182 (0.135)	-0.357** (0.156)
<b>White</b>	0.206 (0.161)	-0.089 (0.159)	0.419** (0.186)
<b>Education</b>	0.136** (0.054)	0.009 (0.047)	0.177*** (0.054)
<b>Interest</b>	0.620*** (0.113)	0.433*** (0.098)	0.466*** (0.111)
<b>Partisan Strength</b>	0.521*** (0.091)	0.471*** (0.087)	0.514*** (0.096)
<b>Democrat</b>	-0.183 (0.241)	-0.317 (0.220)	-0.225 (0.278)
<b>Ideology</b>	-0.085 (0.094)	-0.028 (0.097)	-0.132 (0.106)
<b>0 1</b>	1.646*** (0.587)	1.108** (0.522)	0.931 (0.629)
<b>1 2</b>	2.334*** (0.584)	1.866*** (0.525)	1.520** (0.631)
<b>2 3</b>	3.675*** (0.594)	2.862*** (0.525)	2.791*** (0.631)
<b>3 4</b>	4.743*** (0.606)	3.899*** (0.544)	3.821*** (0.639)
<b>Observations</b>	1,291	1,291	1,291



**Table A8.** Embarrassment from In-Party Members Being Uninformed about Politics and Political Engagement

	<i>Dependent Variable:</i>		
	<b>Persuade</b>	<b>Public Support</b>	<b>Private Support</b>
	(1)	(2)	(3)
<b>Embarrassment (Uninformed)</b>	0.039 (0.073)	-0.024 (0.066)	0.094 (0.077)
<b>Age</b>	-0.001 (0.005)	0.003 (0.005)	0.010* (0.005)
<b>Woman</b>	-0.367** (0.142)	-0.181 (0.135)	-0.360** (0.157)
<b>White</b>	0.209 (0.162)	-0.089 (0.160)	0.418** (0.187)
<b>Education</b>	0.139** (0.139)	0.007 (0.047)	0.181*** (0.054)
<b>Interest</b>	0.616*** (0.115)	0.436*** (0.099)	0.457*** (0.111)
<b>Partisan Strength</b>	0.523*** (0.091)	0.470*** (0.087)	0.516*** (0.096)
<b>Democrat</b>	-0.175 (0.243)	-0.322 (0.221)	-0.213 (0.279)
<b>Ideology</b>	-0.091 (0.092)	-0.027 (0.096)	-0.133 (0.105)
<b>0 1</b>	1.592*** (0.579)	1.127** (0.522)	0.905 (0.632)
<b>1 2</b>	2.280*** (0.577)	1.885*** (0.526)	1.494** (0.634)
<b>2 3</b>	3.619*** (0.586)	2.882*** (0.526)	2.763*** (0.633)
<b>3 4</b>	4.686*** (0.597)	3.918*** (0.544)	3.792*** (0.641)
<b>Observations</b>	1,291	1,291	1,291

## Appendix 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. After filtering out those who failed our attention checks, 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 sample has roughly the same amount of education as the general public (38.5% reported having a Bachelor’s degree or higher), and 25.8% of the sample identifies as non-White. The sample has a mean ideology of 3.92 and standard deviation of 2.11 from extremely liberal (1) to extremely conservative (7).

### 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. [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]
10. [race] What racial or ethnic group best describes you? [White / Black / Hispanic / Asian / Native American / Middle Eastern / Mixed / Other]

11. [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]
  12. [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]
  13. [self-monitoring 3] How good or poor of an actor would you be? [Excellent / Good / Fair / Poor / Very poor]
- [treatment]
14. [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]
15. [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]
  16. [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]
    - a. How would you rate Republicans? [0 to 100 degrees]
    - b. How would you rate Democrats? [0 to 100 degrees]
  17. [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]
    - a. [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]]

- b. [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]
18. [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]
19. [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]
20. [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
21. [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
22. [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]
23. [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)]
24. [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]
25. [open] If you would like, please leave any comments you have about the study: [open-ended]

**Supplementary Analyses:**

**Table A9.** 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>Observations</b>	1,430

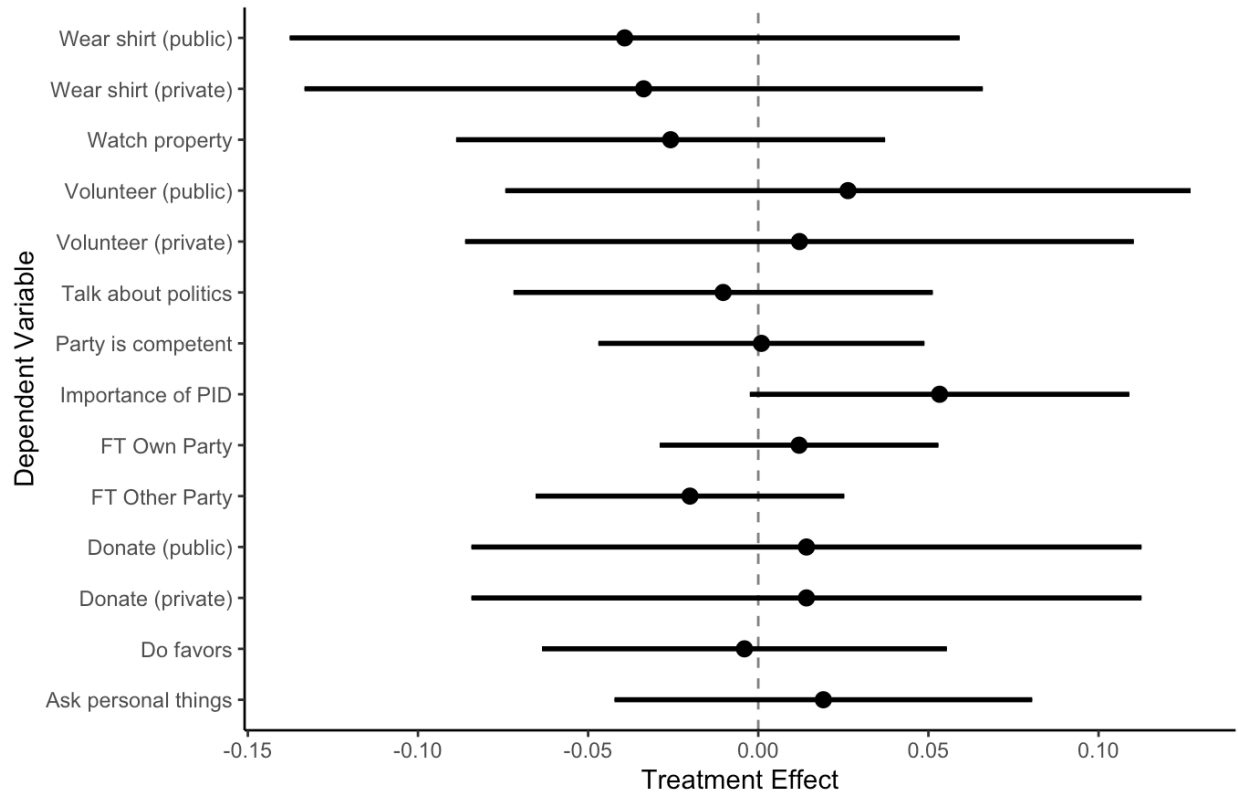
This table shows the results of a regression predicting whether a respondent identifies as a “strong partisan” according to their treatment status. \* p<0.1; \*\* p<0.05; \*\*\* p<0.01.

**Table A10.** 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>
	(1)	(2)	(3)
<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* (0.883)
<b>Constant</b>	80.034*** (0.841)	21.670*** (0.882)	50.464*** (0.765)
<b>Observations</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. \* p<0.1; \*\* p<0.05; \*\*\* p<0.01.

**Figure A1.** 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.