No Pressure: A Method to Reduce Overreporting of Political Engagement

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Abstract. Researchers frequently employ measures of political engagement. Yet, concerns about the validity of such measures—and overreporting in particular—have gone largely unresolved. Building upon existing literature, we employ two preregistered survey experiments to test treatments that can potentially decrease overreporting of political engagement (specifically, news consumption, political discussions, political interest, and voting). First, we test six treatments in a large study of US adults. Based upon these results, we employ our strongest treatment—*Dampen Politics*, which aims to "un-prime" respondents to think about politics—in a more rigorous test with a nationally representative sample. We find that self-reports of political discussions, political interest, and voting all decreased as a result of this treatment. Our findings help quell a decades-long debate as well as offer a simple solution to more accurately measure political engagement.

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Introduction

The health of any democracy depends much upon the degree to which its citizens are engaged in the political process. As such, researchers frequently employ measures of political engagement, including measures of news consumption, discussing politics with others, political interest, and voting. Yet there are lingering concerns that many of these measures are tainted by social desirability bias. That is, that people overreport the degree to which they consume political news, discuss politics with others, are interested in political affairs, and—most especially—turn out to vote, because they believe it makes them look better to others to do so (Blais et al. 2004; Brockington and Karp 2002; Corbett 1991; Holbrook, Green, and Krosnick 2003; Holbrook and Krosnick 2010; Lyons and Scheb 1999; Price and Zaller 1993; Style and Jerit 2020). Indeed, the presence of such concerns helps to explain why citizens are more likely to turn out to vote if they are told their peers will know whether or not they voted (Gerber, Green, and Larimer 2008).

This potential mismeasurement is concerning given the centrality of political engagement as a variable in political behavior research. First, this mismeasurement leads, of course, to overestimates of political engagement (Clausen 1968; Traugott and Katosh 1979). Second, and more problematic, this mismeasurement is unlikely to be equally distributed across the population. People differ in their desire to impress others and, as such, will vary in how much their self-reports of political attitudes and behavior are exaggerated (see e.g., Connors 2020, 2023). Because of this, statistical models that feature a measure of political engagement—e.g., as an independent variable, dependent variable, or as a moderator—may suffer from bias. That is, to the extent that social desirability pressure drives overreports of political engagement, and this pressure *also* has a nonzero correlation with another variable in the model, effect estimates involving the engagement variable will likely be biased (see also Bernstein, Chadha, and Montjoy 2001; Karp and Brockington 2005; Silver, Anderson, and Abramson 1986). In addition to overestimation and bias, a third worry is that this mismeasurement would influence precision: differential pressure to overreport likely creates a noisier measure, thus increasing standard error estimates.

Social desirability pressures are, of course, not the only factor that can influence selfreported political engagement. Prior (2009), in particular, notes that when respondents are asked more specific questions about their media consumption, overreporting decreases. He argues that this approach is effective because it helps respondents recall better—i.e., that failed recall, rather than social desirability bias, creates mismeasurement of this type of political engagement. On reports of political interest, Prior notes that people do not feel "compelled" to inflate their level of interest, and that these levels are quite stable rather than shaped by context (2010). Similarly, other researchers note that mismeasurement of turnout can be partly attributed to failed recall (Belli, Traugott, and Rosenstone 1994; Belli et al. 1999), question ordering (Presser 1990), and nonresponse (Jackman 1999).

Thus, while the influence social desirability may vary depending upon the particular form of political engagement a respondent is being asked about, the potential threat that it poses for measurement cannot easily be dismissed. As such, and given the importance of these measures of political engagement, researchers remain concerned about their validity. It is possible, for example, that while failed recall causes mismeasurement among *some* citizens (supporting Prior's work), among *other* citizens mismeasurement is rooted in more social concerns (see also Belli, Traugott, and Beckmann 2001).

To the extent this is the case, researchers would benefit from methods to reduce social desirability bias among the respondents who are influenced by social pressures. Thus, in this paper

we aim to both speak to the social desirability and political engagement debate and, most importantly, find a simple method that obtains more valid measures of political engagement.

To do so, we run two large preregistered survey experiments. First, engaging existing literature, we explore a variety of potentially effective interventions to reduce self-reported engagement (news consumption, discussing politics, political interest, and voting) using a sample of 1,732 US adults from Lucid from May 16th to May 24th, 2022. Based upon the results of our first study, we use our most effective intervention from the Lucid study on a nationally-representative sample of US 819 US adults from the Cooperative Election Study (CES) from September 29th to November 8th, 2022. Here, we can test the robustness of our treatment effect on a different sample at a different point in time.

Measures of Political Engagement

Political engagement is an umbrella term for various beliefs and behaviors that demonstrate an engagement with the political process. This can include how often one consumes political news, how often one discusses politics with their friends and family, one's interest in politics broadly, and how often one votes in elections.¹

The news consumption variable (*news*) aims to measure how often one consumes political news. In the American National Election Studies (ANES), this is measured by asking respondents how often they consume news (not including sports) during a typical week (with eight options, from none to every day). The discussing politics variable (*discuss*) aims to measure how often one discusses politics with others. Similar to the news consumption variable, in the ANES this is measured by asking respondents how often they talked about politics with their family or friends in the past week (with eight options, from none to every day). Both of these measures are straightforward, as they aim to measure objective behavior rather than (the more difficult) internally-held beliefs. They also align with Prior's (2009) recommendation of specificity in measurement, likely increasing their validity and precision. Yet there are still concerns that while there is an *objective* truth to how often people engage in these behaviors, people may want to hide that truth behind more socially desirable answers that enhance how politically engaged they look. These measures are thus potentially tainted by social desirability bias, although possibly less so than the political interest and voting variables to which we turn next.

The political interest variable (*interest*) aims to measure how interested one is in politics, political events, and the political process. This is a more abstract variable that asks about internal beliefs rather than objective behavior, and it is thus vulnerable to subjective evaluations of one's interest relative to others'. Inherently, this makes political interest difficult to measure, although Prior (2010) argues that it is safe from social desirability concerns—something that we can examine here. In the ANES, political interest is measured in two ways. First, they ask respondents about their interest in "elections," giving them options of "not much interested," "somewhat interested," "very much interested," and "don't know." Second, they ask respondents about their interest in "government and public affairs," asking how closely they follow politics (with options of "hardly at all," "only now and then," "some of the time," "most of the time," and "don't know").

In the lead-in to both questions we can see ANES' concerns about social desirability bias, despite Prior's (2010) affirmations. The first question begins with, "Some people don't pay much attention to political campaigns" and the second question begins with, "Some people seem to

¹ While this is by no means an exhaustive list, these four measures of political engagement are regularly employed by political scientists.

follow (1964: think about) 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." Both of these approaches—especially the first—likely aim to mitigate respondents' inclination to overreport political interest in order to fit in or look good to others and thus obtain a more valid measure.

Finally, the voting variable (*vote*) aims to measure whether one voted in an election—focusing on objective behavior, but (again) objective behavior that people may be motivated to exaggerate, as voting in elections is a recognized hallmark of a functioning democracy. Political scientists aiming to measure voter turnout have long been concerned about how to validly measure such behavior given the social context surrounding it (see Karp and Brockington 2005). Research confirms what we instinctively know: that there is a strong civic norm to vote, both in the US (Blais and Achen 2019; Campbell et al. 1960; de Tocqueville 1835; Doherty et al. 2017; Riker and Ordeshook 1968;) and elsewhere (Blais 2000; Galais and Blais 2016)—although the pressure to vote is likely stronger in countries with higher participation (Karp and Brockington 2005).² Indeed, get-out-the-vote (GOTV) campaigns even rely on this civic duty to increase turnout (Gerber et al. 2008, 2010; Panagopoulos 2013), something that has even been used on social media (Haenschen 2016).

Indeed, decades of various ANES voting measures demonstrate an attempt to depress this social pressure and obtain valid turnout data. First, in 1948, ANES asked, "In the election, about half the people voted and about half of them didn't. Did you vote?" In 1962, they asked, "One of the things we need to know is whether or not people really did get to vote this fall. In talking to people about the election we find that a lot of people weren't able to vote because they weren't registered or they were sick or something else came up at the last minute. Do you remember for sure whether or not you voted in the November election?" From 1952 to 1960, 1964 to 1998, and in 2002 and 2004, they asked, "In talking to people about the election we (1972 and later: often) find that a lot of people weren't able to vote because they weren't registered or they were sick or they just didn't have time. (1956-1960: How about you, did you vote this time?) (1964-1970: How about you, did you vote this time, or did something keep you from voting) (1972-1976: How about you, did you vote in the elections this fall?) (1978 and later: How about you, did you vote in the elections this November?)" This, with some small alterations, is how we still measure voting, acknowledging that this wording likely *helps* but certainly does not *eliminate* overreports. In fact, research finds that in the 1990s, self-reported turnout in the ANES was over 20 percentage points higher than actual turnout (Karp and Brockington 2005). Thus, in papers where voter turnout is integral to the inferences the paper makes, researchers often have to get more expensive and timeconsuming "validated" voter data in order for their work to be taken seriously.

Thus, we have four meaningful pieces of political engagement—*news*, *discuss*, *interest*, and *vote*—that measure either beliefs or behaviors related to engagement (see Table 1). In our two studies, we measured these variables as follows. First, we measured *news* with self-reported consumption of news "not including sports" during a "typical week." This question was asked separately for internet-, television-, newspaper- and radio-based news, with response options ranging from "none" (1) to "seven days per week" (8). This largely mimics the ANES measurement. The four items attained pairwise correlations ranging from .20 to .46 (all p<.001; (α =.65)) and, as such, were combined into a single additive scale to allow for various forms of news consumption.

² Research also finds that this civic norm is stronger among the more educated (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980), inflating the relationship between education and voter turnout as well as the relationship between education and *overreporting* of voter turnout (Hansen and Tyner 2021).

Second, we measured *discuss* by asking respondents to indicate how often ("during a typical week") they "discuss politics with your family or friends," with response options again ranging from "none" to "seven days per week," again largely mimicking ANES measurement Third, we measured *interest* by asking respondents to indicate how interested they were in "information about what's going on in government and politics," with response options ranging from "not at all interested" (1) to "extremely interested" (5), aligning with one of ANES' measurement of political interest. Each of these three measures were recoded to range from 0 to 1. Finally, we measured *vote* by showing respondents a variety of options and asking, "which best describes what you did in the elections that were held in November?" We coded these responses to construct a binary variable that simply indicates whether the respondent reported voting (1) or otherwise (0) (full details on response options are included in the Supplementary Appendices A and B).

Because research suggests that the measurement of each of these four pieces of political engagement could be influenced by social pressures to varying degrees (with *vote* likely being the most influenced by these pressures), our treatments aimed to examine this (potential) mismeasurement by including short (i.e. easy to implement in surveys) interventions that could increase the validity and precision of these variables' measurement. We turn to these next.

Our Treatments

Motivated by previous research, we tested six different treatments' effect on reports of political engagement: *Integrity, Self-Interest, Save Face, Reduce Shame, Augment Shame*, and *Dampen Politics*. We tested all six of these treatments in our first survey on Lucid and then used our most effective treatment—*Dampen Politics*—in our second survey within a CES module. Before getting to the study details and results, we explain the theoretical reasoning behind (and wordings of) of each treatment.

Prior to asking about their levels of political engagement, respondents were randomly assigned to one of seven experimental conditions, including a control condition that simply informed respondents that, "The following questions will ask you about your interest and engagement in political matters." Each treatment condition then added content to the control condition text, except for the *Dampen Politics* treatment (explained below). Detailed wording of each condition is featured in Table 2).

The first treatment (*Integrity*) informed respondents that the validity of our research requires accurate answers. We reasoned that this messaging should be persuasive insofar as respondents do not actively desire to undermine the study. The second treatment (*Self-Interest*) warned respondents that questions asked later in the survey will be based upon answers to the present questions. This messaging was designed to induce respondents to want to answer accurately as a means of avoiding being asked unfamiliar, irrelevant, and/or more difficult questions later on. The third treatment (*Save Face*) echoed research by Krupnikov, Piston, and Bauer (2016), telling respondents that they would be given an opportunity to explain their answers *post hoc*. The underlying logic in "saving face" is that respondents will feel more comfortable responding in a socially *un*desirable fashion if they know they will be able to explain their responses later on (see also Stout, Baker, and Baker 2021).

The fourth and fifth treatments (*Reduce Shame* and *Augment Shame*) attempted to directly manipulate the amount of perceived shame associated with low political engagement. The former condition stated that there is "absolutely no shame" in being politically disengaged and that "many

Americans" are disengaged—this is similar to the ANES approach in asking about political interest and voting. In contrast, the latter condition stated that many Americans are "unfortunately" disengaged and that this is "absolutely shameful"—the opposite of the ANES approach. By directly manipulating the degree of social desirability associated with political engagement, these treatments should affect self-reports of political engagement.

Our final manipulation (*Dampen Politics*) was designed to reduce the salience of politics in the survey—i.e. reduce the degree to which respondents viewed the survey to be primarily interested in political attitudes and behaviors. This manipulation therefore echoes research by Groenendyk and Krupnikov (2021), who find that when respondents change their survey behavior depending on if they view the survey as being political or apolitical. Their findings suggest that when respondents perceive a study to be about apolitical (rather than political) topics, they may feel less compelled to inflate political engagement because they do not believe they are being judged on this dimension (i.e. as a good or bad citizen).

The *Dampen Politics* manipulation thus involved asking respondents the same outcome questions as in the other conditions but—in contrast to the other conditions—asking the outcome questions *alongside* apolitical questions. For example, when asked about their interest in government and politics, respondents in the *Dampen Politics* condition were also asked (on the same screen) about their interest in cooking, movies and shows, the arts, exercising, etc. Notably, for the voting outcome, respondents were asked about activities they typically do in a year and were able to select whether or not they "vote in an election." This allowed for the construction of a binary measure of whether or not a respondent reports having voted (allowing for comparisons with the binary measure described above). Verbatim text of the apolitical items can be found in SAs A and B. Lastly, in comparison to the control condition, this condition began by telling respondents, "The following questions will ask you about how you spend your time and energy – between work, relationships, and other activities" (rather than "your interest and engagement in political matters"). Again, by asking about a variety of topics *unrelated* to politics, this condition was designed to reduce respondents' perception that the study was primarily interested in politics and, therefore, the respondents' likelihood of inflating their political engagement.

Study 1: Lucid, May 2022

To examine interventions that could affect self-reported political engagement (SRPE), we first fielded a preregistered study via Lucid in May of 2022. The survey featured a total of 1,732 U.S. adult respondents, with quotas included to ensure that the sample matched US Census data on race/ethnicity, age, gender, and geographic region. Tables 1 and 2 outline the outcome measures and treatments discussed above.

Outcome	Survey Question	Response Options	
Consume News	During a typical week, how many days do you watch, read, or listen to news, not including sports, on the following medium: TV, Internet, Radio		
	[Dampen Politics Intervention] How often do you do the following during a typical week: talk to friends or family / work at your job / exercise / watch TV / practice hobbies / cook / watch, read, or listen to news on the Internet, not including sports / watch news on TV, not including sports / read news in a printed newspaper, not including sports / listen to news on the radio, not including sports	None / one day / two days / three days / four days / five days / six days / seven days	
Discuss Politics	During a typical week, how many days do you discuss politics with your family or friends?	None / one day / two days / three days / four days / five days / six days / seven days	
	[Dampen Politics Intervention] (Included in previous question) discuss politics with your family or friends		
Interest	How interested are you in information about what's going on in government and politics?	Extremely interested / very interested / moderately interested / slightly interested / not at all interested	
	[Dampen Politics Intervention] How interested are you in the following: [columns: cooking / movies and shows / the arts / exercising / social activities / travel / what's going on in government and politics		
Vote	Which of the following best describes what you did in the elections that were held in November?	Definitely did not vote in the elections / definitely voted in person at a polling place on	
	[Dampen Politics Intervention] Which of the following do you do in a typical year (click all that apply): [go on a trip / get sick / try to change your job / pick up a new hobby / make a new friend / vote in an election]	election day / definitely voted in person at a polling place before election day / definitely voted by mailing a ballot to elections officials before the election / definitely voted in some other way / not completely sure whether you voted or not	

TABLE 1. OUTCOME MEASURES (LUCID STUDY)

Notes: Table features text for each of the four measures of political engagement. The *Dampen Politics* intervention included political items alongside apolitical items and, as such, involves slightly different wording. The outcome questions of interest for this condition appear in bold text. The CES outcome measures were largely similar to the *Dampen Politics* items here and are discussed in the text.

Control	The following questions will ask you about your interest and engagement in political matters.
Integrity	[Control content] Please answer these questions <u>accurately</u> : the statistical validity of this study depends on having accurate answers about political matters from respondents like yourself.
Self-Interest	[Control content] Please answer these questions <u>accurately</u> : the political questions you receive later in the survey may be based on how you answer the following questions.
Save Face	[Control content] Please answer these questions <u>accurately</u> . After answering these questions, you will be given a chance to explain your answers, if you like, but you certainly do not have to offer any reason for your answers.
Reduce Shame	[Control content] Please answer these questions <u>accurately</u> . There is absolutely no shame in not being interested in politics. In fact, many Americans, for a variety reasons, pay barely any attention to politics, and don't engage in political matters at all.
Augment Shame	[Control content] Please answer these questions <u>accurately</u> . Unfortunately,

Text Included in Prompt

TABLE 2. INTERVENTION PROMPTS (LUCID STUDY)

Intervention

some Americans, for a variety reasons, pay barely any attention to politics, and don't engage in political matters at all. This is absolutely shameful. The following questions will ask you about how you spend your time and **Dampen** Politics energy – between work, relationships, and other activities. Please answer (also in CES Study)

Notes: Table features the verbatim text shown to respondents before asking political engagement items. The Dampen Politics intervention was also featured in the CES study.

these questions accurately.

Findings. Before examining the effects of each manipulation on SRPE, we first analyze the results of a variety of post-outcome subjective manipulation checks (SMCs; Kane and Barabas 2019). Each SMC was tailored to each of the aforementioned conditions, and was only featured in the control and that particular condition. For example, in the Dampen Politics condition, we asked, "To what extent do you think this survey is primarily focused on your political interest and involvement?" Response options ranged from "Not at all" (1) to "A great deal" (5) (see SA for full list of SMCs and their respective response options).

We find that every manipulation except Self-Interest exerted a correctly-signed and statistically significant (p<.05) effect upon its respective SMC (the *Self-Interest* manipulation was significant but incorrectly signed). However, effect sizes varied considerably: Cohen's D values



FIGURE 1. Effects of Interventions on Self-Reported Political Engagement (Lucid Study)

Notes: Lucid Data. Each panel displays results for one intervention type. The *x*-axes display the treatment effect on each outcome. Each outcome is recoded to range from 0 to 1 for interpretive ease. Models are OLS, with 90% (wider lines) and 95% (thinner lines) confidence intervals shown. Total N = 1,764.

for the *Integrity*, *Shame Reduction* and *Shame Augmentation* conditions were approximately .20, while values for the *Save Face* and *Dampen Politics* conditions were .35 and .46, respectively (see SA A for full set of results). Given our operationalization of each manipulation and the SMCs, these initial results suggest that the *Save Face* and *Dampen Politics* treatments may be most conducive to manipulation within a survey experiment.

How does each manipulation affect SRPE? Figure 1 displays intention-to-treat (ITT) effects (all estimated via OLS regression) on each of the four measures of political engagement (all recoded to range from 0 to 1), with separate panels for each of the experimental interventions. Setting aside the *Augment Shame* condition (which was designed to *increase* SRPE), the overall pattern is that manipulations tended to *decrease* SRPE, as intended and as evidenced by the bars appearing to the left of the vertical line at the 0 point on the *x*-axis. Second, the news

interest outcome is never affected to a significant degree, perhaps suggesting that it is not an item that is as susceptible to overreporting (see also Prior 2009). Third, the largest effects tended to be for self-reported voting, suggesting that respondents feel the greatest amount of pressure to overreport voting, which is consistent with the existing literature noted above.

However, Figure 1 also demonstrates that effects varied a great deal—both in magnitude and statistical significance—depending upon both the intervention and the specific outcome measure. For example, the *Reduce Shame* intervention does not have a single effect that attains significance at the conventional level, while the *Integrity* intervention has only one significant effect: a 7 percentage-point decrease in self-reported voting (p=.04). Viewed together, the *Reduce Shame* and *Augment Shame* conditions demonstrate that manipulating the amount of shame associated with political disengagement can matter for SRPE (e.g., the *Augment Shame* condition increased, by several percentage points, self-reported discussion of politics with family members and interest in government and politics [p<.05 in both cases]), but individually, these two interventions showed little consistency in affecting SRPE.

Echoing the SMC results reported above, the *Save Face* and *Dampen Politics* conditions show, overall, greater consistency and larger treatment effects on SRPE. Beginning with the *Save Face* intervention, treatment effects were consistently negative and generally at least one percentage-point in magnitude, yet only for self-reported voting was the effect—a large 10.4 percentage-point decrease—statistically distinguishable from zero at the .05 level. In contrast, the *Dampen Politics* conditions yielded the overall strongest results. With the exception of the news consumption outcome, three of the effects attain statistical significance at the .06 level or better, with (again) the largest observed effect for the voting outcome: decreasing the salience of politics in the survey reduced self-reported voting by a sizable 26 percentage points, which is the single largest effect observed in the experiment. Self-reported interest in government also decreased on the order of 8 percentage points (p<.01) while self-reported discussion of politics with family members decreased by 4 percentage points, though this latter effect attained only marginal statistical significance (p=.06).

As an additional means of comparing the interventions, multivariate regression models were conducted, which allow for a test of whether a particular manipulation *jointly* reduced the four relevant outcomes to a statistically significant degree. The results of these analyses indicate that the *Dampen Politics* intervention was able to jointly reduce SRPE at a far higher level of significance (F = 11.33; p < .001) than the two other conditions that attained (at least marginally) significant test-statistic values: *Save Face* (F = 2.28; p = .06) and *Self-Interest* (F = 2.46; p = .04) interventions (see SA A for reporting of full results).

Overall, then, the results of the Lucid study suggest that researchers may be able to reduce the amount of respondent overreporting of political engagement in their surveys. However, across the four measures of political engagement employed in our study, the *Dampen Politics* intervention stood out as having the largest and most consistent treatment effects. We therefore sought to test this intervention again, and in a more rigorous fashion, with a nationally representative sample.

Study 2: Cooperative Election Study (CES), September-November 2022

Next we ran a preregistered study with a nationally-representative CES sample (n=819). This study was similar in terms of design to the previous study, but several changes are important to highlight. First, the experiment featured only two conditions: a control condition and a *Dampen Politics* condition (the most effective treatment from the previous study). Second, to further test

the robustness of the *Dampen Politics* intervention, both conditions explicitly asked respondents to answer accurately. Third, and perhaps most importantly, the voting outcome measure was worded identically across the two conditions: respondents were asked to indicate if they "vote[d] in November's elections," with the response options in both conditions being a simple "Yes" (1) or "No" (0). Finally, as space on the CES module was limited, the news consumption measure was condensed into a single item (see SA B).

Findings. As in the Lucid study, we first used an SMC to test whether the *Dampen Politics* intervention was able to significantly reduce the degree to which the study was perceived to be about politics. Despite the intrinsically political nature of the CES survey, we again find a statistically significant decrease (-.44, p<.001) in the degree to which respondents viewed the study to be political (see SA B for question wording). This provides further evidence for the validity of the *Dampen Politics* intervention as a means of lowering the salience of politics in one's survey.

FIGURE 2. Dampen Politics Intervention & Self-Reported Political Engagement (CES Data)



Notes: CES Data. The *x*-axis displays the treatment effect on each outcome. Each outcome is recoded to range from 0 to 1 for interpretive ease. Models are OLS, with 90% (wider lines) and 95% (thinner lines) confidence intervals shown. Total N = 829.

Figure 2 displays the main results of the CES study. The intention-to-treat (ITT) effect is again shown for each of the four outcomes, and in all four instances we indeed observe negatively-

signed effects, as predicted. Just like in the Lucid study, the estimated effect on the news consumption outcome is small (a 1 percentage-point decrease) and non-significant (p=.28). However, we observe significant decreases for all three other measures of SRPE: going from the control condition to the *Dampen Politics* conditions yields a 5 percentage-point decrease in self-reported discussing of politics with others (p<.05), a 9 percentage-point decrease in self-reported interest in government and politics (p<.001), and an 8.5 percentage-point decrease in self-reported turnout to vote in the midterm elections (p<.01). Further, the multivariate regression analysis confirms that the *Dampen Politics* intervention jointly decreased SRPE to a statistically significant degree (F=5.31; p<.001).

Discussion

Based upon the results of our Lucid study, which suggested that the *Dampen Politics* intervention held the most promise for reducing SRPE, we further tested the robustness of this intervention with the CES sample. Ultimately, across two different samples and alternative measures of our outcome variables, we find consistent evidence that designing the survey so as to reduce the salience of politics is an effective strategy for reducing respondents' well-documented tendency to inflate SRPE.

Notably, we did not find that any intervention (whether in the Lucid or CES study) was able to reduce self-reported news consumption, aligning with findings from Prior (2009). ITT estimates were consistently near-zero and non-significant, regardless of the intervention or survey item used. One potential reason for this is that people may feel less pressure to overreport news consumption, perhaps because of the negative stigma of news media (e.g., Liedke and Gottfried 2022). We also did not find consistent evidence that self-monitoring moderates the effect of any intervention-type (see SA C for details).

Finally, we stress that these interventions are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Researchers may be able to combine, for example, the *Validity*, *Integrity*, *Save Face* and *Dampen Politics* interventions simultaneously in their surveys, potentially to greater effect.

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Supplementary Appendix A: Lucid Study

Survey.

- 1. [Lucid ID, consent, and captcha]
- 2. [gender] What is your gender? [man / woman / non-binary]
- 3. [age] What is your age? []
- 4. [race] What racial or ethnic group or groups best describes you? [white / black / Hispanic / Asian / Native American / other (please specify):___]
- 5. [education] What is the highest level of education that you have completed? [did not complete a high school degree / high school degree / some college / Associate's degree / Bachelor's degree / graduate or professional degree]
- 6. [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] [high=always]
- [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] [high=always]
- 8. [self-monitoring 3] How good or poor of an actor would you be? [excellent / good / fair / poor / very poor] [high=always]
- 9. [self-monitoring 4] I have trouble changing my behavior to suit different people and different situations. [very true / mostly true / somewhat true / not true] [high = not true]
- 10. [self-monitoring 5] Even if I am not enjoying myself, I often pretend to be having a good time. [very true / mostly true / somewhat true / not true] [high = very true]
- 11. [self-monitoring 6] When I am uncertain how to act in a social situation, I look to the behavior of others for cues. [very true / mostly true / somewhat true / not true] [high = very true]
- 12. [self-monitoring 7] At parties and social gatherings, I do not attempt to do or say things that others will like. [very true / mostly true / somewhat true / not true] [high = not true]
- 13. [self-monitoring 8] I find it hard to imitate the behavior of other people. [very true / mostly true / somewhat true / not true] [high = not true]
- 14. [attention check] Please answer the following question with "cheese" and "none of the above". What food do you like? (click all that apply) [cheese / bread / meat / vegetables / none of the above]
- [don't show questions 17-20 to those in "dampen political salience" condition below]
- 15. [PID] Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what? [Republican / Democrat / independent / something else [___]]
 - a. [if Democrat or Republican] Would you call yourself a strong [Democrat/Republican] or a not very strong [Democrat/Republican]? [strong [Democrat/Republican] / not very strong [Democrat/Republican]]
 - b. [if independent or something else] Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican Party or the Democratic Party? [closer to the Republican Party / closer to the Democratic Party / neither]
- 16. [ideology] We hear a lot of talk these days about liberals and conservatives. Here is a 7-point scale on which the political views that people might hold are arranged from extremely liberal to extremely conservative. Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this? [extremely liberal / liberal / slightly liberal / moderate / slightly conservative / conservative / extremely conservative / don't know]

- 17. [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]
- 18. [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]
- 19. [randomize to one of the following 7 conditions leave on page for 5 seconds and keep at top of page for DV questions]
 - a. [control] *The following questions will ask you about your interest and engagement in political matters.*
 - b. ["integrity of research" intervention] *The following questions will ask you about your interest and engagement in political matters. Please answer these questions accurately: the statistical validity of this study depends on having accurate answers about political matters from respondents like yourself.*
 - c. ["self-interest" intervention] The following questions will ask you about your interest and engagement in political matters. Please answer these questions **accurately**: the political questions you receive later in the survey may be based on how you answer the following questions.
 - d. ["face-saving" intervention] *The following questions will ask you about your interest and engagement in political matters. Please answer these questions accurately. After answering these questions, you will be given a chance to explain your answers, if you like, but you certainly do not have to offer any reason for your answers.*
 - e. ["shame reduction" intervention] The following questions will ask you about your interest and engagement in political matters. Please answer these questions accurately. There is absolutely no shame in not being interested in politics. In fact, many Americans, for a variety of reasons, pay barely any attention to politics and don't engage in political matters at all.
 - f. ["shame augmentation" intervention] *The following questions will ask you about your interest and engagement in political matters. Unfortunately, some Americans, for a variety of reasons, pay barely any attention to politics and don't engage in political matters at all. This is absolutely shameful.*
 - g. ["dampen political salience" intervention] *The following questions will ask you about how you spend your time and energy between work, relationships, and other activities. Please answer these questions accurately.*
 - i. [media & discuss] In a typical week, how often do you do the following: [columns: talk to friends or family / work at your job / exercise / watch TV / practice hobbies / cook / watch, read, or listen to news on the Internet, not including sports / watch news on TV, not including sports / read news in a printed newspaper, not including sports / listen to news on the radio, not including sports / discuss politics with your family or friends; rows: none / one day / two days / three days / four days / five days / six days / seven days]
 - ii. [vote] In a typical year, do you usually do the following (click all that apply): [go on a trip / get sick / try to change your job / pick up a new hobby / make a new friend / vote in November's elections]
 - iii. [interest] How interested are you in the following: [columns: cooking / movies and shows / exercising / social activities / travel / what's going on

in government and politics; rows: extremely interested / very interested / moderately interested / slightly interested / not at all interested]

- iv. [political knowledge 1] *Please respond <u>without</u> looking up the answer*. Do you happen to know which party has the most members in the U.S. House of Representatives in Washington? [Democrats / Republicans / don't know]
- v. [political knowledge 2] Please respond <u>without</u> looking up the answer. Do you happen to know who the U.S. Senate Majority Leader is? [Mitch McConnell / Harry Reid / Chuck Schumer / Nancy Pelosi / Jim Jordan / don't know]

[don't show questions 22-27 to those in "dampen political salience" condition]

- 20. [media] During a typical week, how many days do you watch, read, or listen to news, not including sports, on the following medium: [columns: the Internet, TV, a printed newspaper, the radio; rows: none / one day / two days / three days / four days / five days / six days / seven days]
- 21. [discuss] During a typical week, how many days do you discuss politics with your family or friends? [none / one day / two days / three days / four days / five days / six days / seven days]
- 22. [vote] Which of the following best describes what you did in the elections that were held in November? [definitely did not vote in the elections / definitely voted in person at a polling place on election day / definitely voted in person at a polling place before election day / definitely voted by mailing a ballot to elections officials before the election / definitely voted in some other way / not completely sure whether you voted or not]
- 23. [interest] How interested are you in information about what's going on in government and politics? [extremely interested / very interested / moderately interested / slightly interested / not at all interested]
- 24. [political knowledge 1] *Please respond without looking up the answer*. Do you happen to know which party has the most members in the U.S. House of Representatives in Washington? [Democrats / Republicans / don't know]
- 25. [political knowledge 2] *Please respond without looking up the answer*. Do you happen to know who the U.S. Senate Majority Leader is? [Mitch McConnell / Harry Reid / Chuck Schumer / Nancy Pelosi / Jim Jordan / don't know]
- 26. [for control and "integrity of research" intervention manipulation check] To what extent does the validity of this study depend upon having accurate answers to questions about your interest and engagement in political matters? [not at all / a small amount / a moderate amount / a moderate large amount / a great deal]
- 27. [for control and "self-interest" intervention manipulation check] To what extent were the later questions you received about your interest and engagement in political matters based on how you answered earlier questions about your interest and engagement in political matters? [not at all / a small amount / a moderate amount / a moderately large amount / a great deal]
- 28. [for control and "face-saving" intervention manipulation check] Do you believe you will have an opportunity to explain your answers regarding your interest and engagement in political matters? [no / not sure / yes]
- 29. [for control, "shame reduction," and "shame augmentation" interventions manipulation check] To what extent is it shameful that many Americans are not interested in politics and don't engage in political matters at all? [not at all / a small amount / a moderate amount / a moderately large amount / a great deal]
- 30. [for control and "dampen political salience" intervention manipulation check] To what

extent do you think this survey is primarily focused on your political interest and involvement? [not at all / a small amount / a moderate amount / a moderately large amount / a great deal]

- 31. [for "face-saving" intervention] If you like, please use this space to explain any of your answers regarding your interest and engagement in political matters. You do not need to write anything if you don't want to. [open-ended]
- [show questions 34-37 to those in "dampen political salience" condition]
- 32. [PID] Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what? [Republican / Democrat / independent / something else [___]]
 - a. [if Democrat or Republican] Would you call yourself a strong [Democrat/Republican] or a not very strong [Democrat/Republican]? [strong [Democrat/Republican] / not very strong [Democrat/Republican]]
 - b. [if independent or something else] Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican Party or the Democratic Party? [closer to the Republican Party / closer to the Democratic Party / neither]
- 33. [ideology] We hear a lot of talk these days about liberals and conservatives. Here is a 7-point scale on which the political views that people might hold are arranged from extremely liberal to extremely conservative. Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this? [extremely liberal / liberal / slightly liberal / moderate / slightly conservative / conservative / extremely conservative / don't know]
- 34. [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]
- 35. [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]
- 36. Thank you for your participation! While you took the survey did you have any ideas of what the study was about? [open-ended]
- 37. If you would like to add comments or feedback? [open-ended]

	Subjective Manipulation Checks				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Treatment Interventions	Integrity	Self-Interest	Save Face	Vary Shame	Dampen Politics
T	0.27*				
Integrity	0.2/*				
Salf Interact	(0.12)	0.27**			
Sell-Interest		-0.3/**			
Sava Faca		(0.12)	0 22***		
Save Face			0.23^{***}		
Dadwaa Shama			(0.00)	0.24*	
Reduce Sname				-0.24^{+}	
Augment Shome				(0.12)	
Augment Shame				(0.12)	
Domnon Politics				(0.12)	0 57***
Dampen Fondes					-0.32
Constant	2 72***	2 72***	7 10***	2 71***	(0.10)
Constant	(0.08)	(0,00)	(0.04)	(0.08)	(0.07)
	(0.08)	(0.09)	(0.04)	(0.08)	(0.07)
Observations	487	500	490	738	496
R-squared	0.01	0.02	0.03	0.02	0.05

TABLE A1. Subjective Manipulation Checks

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, ^ p<0.10 (one-tailed p-values reported).

Treatment Interventions	F (df, df)	р
Integrity	0.99 (4, 484)	.41
Self-Interest	2.46 (4, 495)	.04
Save Face	2.28 (4, 486)	.06
Reduce Shame	0.50 (4, 475)	.74
Augment Shame	3.69 (4, 495)	<.01
Dampen Politics	11.33 (4, 493)	<.001

 TABLE A2. Multivariate (Joint) Tests of Each Intervention on All Outcomes

Notes: Lucid study.

Supplementary Appendix B: CES Study

Survey.

Pre-Election Survey:

- 1. [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] [high=always]
- [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] [high=always]
- 3. [self-monitoring 3] How good or poor of an actor would you be? [excellent / good / fair / poor / very poor] [high=always]

Post-Election Survey:

- [random assignment to control or dampen condition]
- 4. [control condition]
 - a. [interest] Please answer these questions **accurately.** How interested are you in what's going on in government and politics? [extremely interested / very interested / moderately interested / slightly interested / not at all interested]
 - b. [media and discuss] Please answer these questions accurately. During a typical week, how often do you do the following: [rows: watch, read, or listen to news on the internet, TV, newspaper, or radio, not including sports / discuss politics you're your family or friends][columns: none / one day / two days / three days / four days / five days / six days / seven days]
 - c. [vote] Please answer these questions **accurately.** Did you vote in this past November's (2022) elections? [yes / no]
- 5. [dampen condition]
 - a. [interest] The following questions will ask you about how you spend your time and energy. We are particularly interested in what you do for **fun**. Please answer these questions **accurately**. How interested are you in the following: [rows: cooking / movies and shows / exercising / social activities / travel / what's going on in government and politics][columns: extremely interested / very interested / moderately interested / not at all interested]
 - b. [media] The following questions will ask you about how you spend your time and energy. We are particularly interested in what you do for **fun**. Please answer these questions **accurately**. During a typical week, how often do you do the following: [rows: practice hobbies (for example: cooking, reading, learning a language) / watch, read, or listen to news on the Internet, TV, newspaper, or radio, not including sports][columns: none / one day / two days / three days / four days / five days / six days / seven days]
 - c. [discuss] The following questions will ask you about how you spend your time and energy. We are particularly interested in what you do for **fun**. Please answer these questions **accurately**. During a typical week, how often do you do the following: [rows: activities outside (for example: sports, picnics, walking, fishing) / discuss politics with your family or friends][columns: none / one day / two days / three days / four days / five days / six days / seven days]
 - d. [vote] The following questions will ask you about how you spend your time and

energy. We are particularly interested in what you do for **fun**. Please answer these questions **accurately**. This last year, did you do the following (click all that apply): [go on a trip / pick up a new hobby / make a new friend / vote in November's election]

6. [manipulation check] To what extent do you think this survey is primarily focused on your political interest and involvement? [not at all / a small amount / a moderate amount / a moderately large amount / a great deal]

Supplementary Appendix C: Self-Monitoring Analyses



TABLE C1. No Consistent Moderating Effect of Self-Monitoring (Lucid)

Effect on Self-Report Items (percentage points

Effect on Self-Report Items (percentage points)



TABLE C2. No Consistent Moderating Effect of Self-Monitoring (CES)

Notes: Graph shows effect of "Dampen" treatment as moderated by respondents' level of selfmonitoring.