Sounding the Alarm: Transgressing Democratic Norms and the Effects of Political Pushback

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Abstract

In competitive democracies political norm violations rarely occur in a vacuum; nor do citizens experience them as such. Rather, transgressions are constantly being mediated for the public by political elites across the political spectrum.To date, however, there has been little systematic analysis of the role that political pushback by elites plays in shaping citizens' reactions to leaders who flout democratic norms. Our research seeks to fill this gap. We draw on literatures in political behavior, social psychology, and game theory to distill a series of plausible testable implications about the varying effects of elite political pushback. We develop a survey experiment to evaluate and to adjudicate among these alternative hypotheses.

1 Introduction

In competitive democracies political norm violations rarely occur in a vacuum; nor do citizens experience them as such. Rather, transgressions are constantly being mediated for the public by political elites across the political spectrum. Political elites matter in this context precisely because what constitutes a political norm violation is not always clear: they require additional, specialized

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knowledge to interpret compared with other political actions about which the general public might have more information (Clayton, et al 2020). Given this, there are strong a priori reasons to believe that elite cues can heavily influence citizens' assessment of which actions taken by leaders constitute a political norm violation and how such assessments are likely to affect voters' perceptions of leaders and parties alike. To date, however, there has been little systematic analysis of the role that political elites play in mediating citizens' reactions to leaders who flout democratic norms. Our research seeks to fill this gap.

Whereas much of the current literature on the problem of democratic backsliding focuses directly on citizens' values and their willingness to defend democracy against would-be autocratic leaders (Foa and Mounk 2016; Carey, et al. 2019; Svolik and Graham 2019; Svolik 2020; Nalepa, et al. 2019), our work shifts the focus to encompass the political opposition's role in shaping citizens' perceptions and reactions to such norm violations. Specifically, we concentrate on exploring three sets of related, but distinct, questions:

- When is pushback against a leader's bid to erode democratic norms most effective?
- Does partisan pushback succeed in altering the public's perceptions about an aggrandizing president, or does it tend to backfire and redound to the leader's benefit and hurt the party that sounded the alarm?
- Is bipartisan political pushback necessarily a more effective strategy for sanctioning leaders who violates democratic norms?

This survey experiment is rooted in a broader theoretical project that aims to elucidate the strategic calculus behind political pushback to executive aggrandizement (also see Gamboa 2018; Przeworski and Luo 2018). In particular, our findings helps to ground key assumptions about the relative costs to party elites across the political spectrum for challenging a leaders' attempts to transgress key democratic norms. This is a vital step in developing a theory of how checks

and balances operates under polarization, and thus understanding the extent to which pushback succeeds or fails in halting democratic erosion.

Below, we draw on a diverse set of literatures in political behavior, social psychology, and game theory to distill a series of plausible testable implications about the varying effects of elite pushback and use a survey experiment to evaluate and to adjudicate among these alternative hypotheses.

1.1 Framing, Backlash, and Reputation

There is substantial evidence that the effectiveness of elite cues generally depends on polarization and partisanship. The framing literature in American politics consistently finds that individuals are generally more responsive to narratives offered by their preferred party in forming their issue positions, especially in low-information environments and when parties are polarized on an issue (Bullock 2011, Druckman 2015). Previous studies suggest that source credibility matters even for factual beliefs (Nyhan et al 2017, Druckman et al 2019), as individuals are more likely to disregard information coming from an untrusted source and more likely to trust their preferred party. Party cues affect subjective judgments about a range of other outcomes, from the state of the economy (Bisgaard et al 2018) to evaluations of candidate quality and performance while in office (Mummolo et al 2018 Donovan et al 2019). However, the influence of co-partisan elites is not unlimited: research has also found that individuals rely on the party elite's opinion less when the policy distance between the voter and the party elites grows (Peterson 2019).

Applied to the problem of democratic backsliding, the upshot of the framing literature is that partisan pushback against a leader who violates democratic norms will be effective, but that such effects will likely be largely confined to citizens who are already favorably disposed to the source of the opposition. In other words, in the polarized context of contemporary American politics a charge made by a Democratic congresswoman that President Trump has violated a political norm will disproportionately help to convince citizens who are already

identified as Democrats that the President has committed a transgression.

As well, findings from social psychology on third-party reactions to justice and mistreatment, indicate that out-group elite expressions of incivility or threats to legally sanction a politician on the basis that they violated certain norms can evoke feelings of status threat among the supporters of the politician (Terman 2019).

Applying these lessons to a polarized democracy, this literature suggests that partisan opposition pushback may thus not only fail to convince a leader's supporters that she should be sanctioned, but actually serve to produce a backlash of increased support for the leader who violates norms. If this is operative in current American politics, we would expect that pushback from Democrats would backfire among Republican supporters, such that they would be less inclined to see Trump's actions in a negative light precisely because pushback is coming from the opposition party.

There are also good reasons to a suspect that the effects of partisan pushback may extend beyond citizens' perception of the president's behavior and to perceptions about the parties themselves. In a recent discussion of political norms, Azari (2020) argues co-partisan pushback is essentially now a form of norm-breaking in itself and, hence, implies that any pushback against Trump is especially risky for Republican elites.

Game theory provides a somewhat different perspective on the potential costs of pushback to both parties. Cheap talk models, in particular, teach us that because parties have opposing electoral incentives to fabricate (in the case of the opposition) or suppress (in the case of co-partisans) information about a leader, then voters should update negatively about both parties' reputations whenever they act according to their partisan interests. For example, in their signaling model of the production of political scandals, Dzuida and Howell (2020) deduce that both parties will suffer reputation costs from partisan scandals (scandals in which only the opposition alleges wrong-doing), whereas the president's reputation suffers only when allegations against her are made by both parties.

Taken together, the literature thus identify six potential sets of relationships between the type of elite pushback (partisan or bi-partisan) and different citizens' perceptions of the President, the President's party, and the opposition party.

Partisan Reinforcement: Opposition partisan pushback increases citizens' negative perceptions of the President among citizens who support the opposition party.

Partisan Backlash Opposition partisan pushback increases citizens' positive perceptions of the President among citizens who support the opposition party.

Partisan Reputation: Partisan pushback increases citizens' negative perceptions of both parties

Bipartisan Backlash: Bipartisan pushback increases citizens' negative perceptions of the President's party among citizens who support the President.

Bipartisan Reinforcement: Bipartisan pushback increases citizens' negative perceptions of the President.

Bipartisan Reputation: Bipartisan pushback increases citizens' positive perceptions of the President's party.

2 Experiment Design

Below, we discuss the design of the survey experiment to evaluate the effect elite pushback against democratic norm violations. We randomly exposed respondents to either a partisan pushback treatment (Treatment 1) or a bipartisan pushback treatment (Treatment 2) to compare perceptions of the President and the parties among different partisan groups of respondents.

Our survey experiment is rooted in real world political events drawn from the news headlines. We use a between-subjects design in which no elite pushback constitutes the control group and the two treatments randomly assign the elite condemnation cue, with partisan pushback (i.e. the Democratic Party members only) as the first treatment, and bipartisan pushback as the second treatment.

Individual were randomly assigned to one of the two treatment and one control groups and asked each subject to evaluate only one norm violation to avoid potential spillover effects across multiple norm violations and partisan cues (separate, but related research by Clayton et. al focuses on how successive norm violation affect an individual's perceptions about the politician and threat norms pose to democracy). Note that our design thus allows us to isolate the specific effects we are interested in exploring but may also decrease the external validity of the experiment, as subjects in the real world are likely observing multiple norm violations and multiple forms of political pushback. Respondents were also asked the same battery of post-treatment questions about demographics, political opinions, and political knowledge (see Appendix).

The norm violation was presented as a shortened version of an actual news article about a norm violation by President Trump. The elite condemnation treatments were reported reactions by congress members, which are edited and anonymized versions of actual statements/tweets from elected representatives from the Democratic Party and the Republican Party. Given the nature of our study, partisan opposition and bipartisan opposition treatment refer to political elites voicing concerns about how presidential behavior impacts democracy. For the sake of realism, the partisan opposition treatment only includes reference to democratic concerns but uses an alarming tone as is typical of the real statements.

We sought to balance two selection criteria in choosing a specific norm violation. On the one hand, we needed to choose an action taken by President Trump that has received both partisan and bipartisan pushback as a meaningful norm violation. At the same time, we also wanted to avoid using a norm violation event that is so highly publicized and polarized that respondents have already fully made up their minds, and thus any effects of elite pushback risk being be too small to detect with the current set-up.

Given these concerns, we chose the firing of Inspector General Michael Atkinson by President Trump early April 2020 as the norm violation event. In addition to its relevance to broader issues about executive aggrandizement and the

president's on-going attempts to erode checks and balances, it drew opposition from both sides of the aisle; yet it was not as widely publicized as other norm violation events by Trump, especially since it coincided with the initial days of the coronovirus epidemic.

Post-treatment, we measured all subjects' evaluations of the norm violation, perceived importance of the event, and individuals' evaluation as to president's commitment to democracy as well as two sets of measures of trust towards political parties.

We used two measures of trust towards political parties: general levels of trust toward party members in Congress and trust in the accuracy of the information provided by the party members. All of these outcome variables were measured on a standard Likert 4-point scale.

Finally, we also measured the emotional reactions to the norm violation event. We asked participants to rate how much they felt each of the following emotions on a 5-point Likert scale: anger, outrage, fear, worry, anxiety, enthusiasm, pride, and hope.

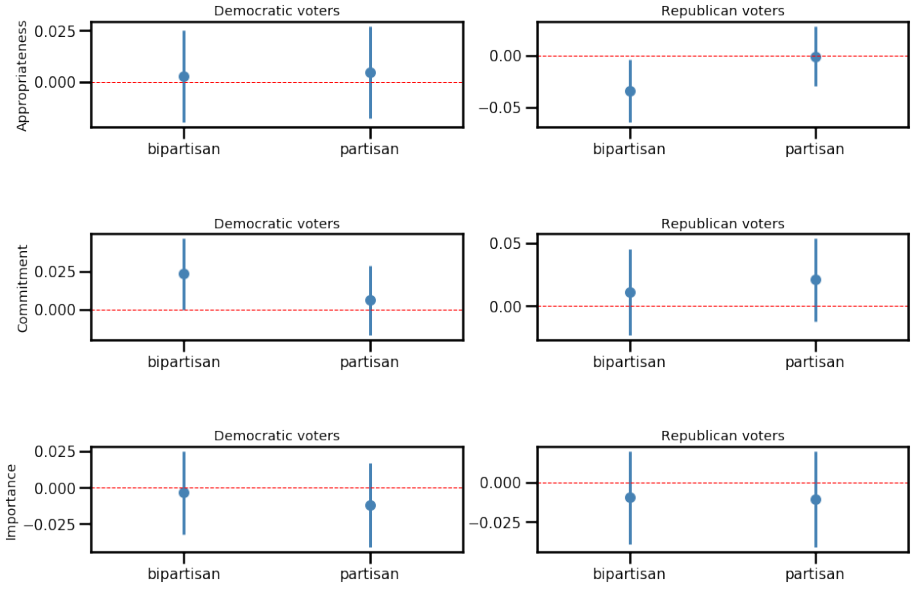
We conducted the experiment with 4,638 participants recruited via Amazon's Mechanical Turk. The survey was fielded online from September 14 to September 25, 2020. Since we were only interested in effects by partisanship, we recruited subjects with partisan affiliation as Democrats (and Democratic leaners) and Republicans (and Republican leaners). Because Mechanical Turk respondents tend to skew liberal, we used a screening question about partisan affiliation to achieve a quota of responses for each party. We ended up with 2,512 Democrats and 2,124 Republicans. In order to block users that use VPS/VPN and individuals with IP addresses outside of the United States from participating in the survey and suspicious IP addresses, we used Cloud Research platform (Kennedy et al 2019).

3 Preliminary Results

We evaluate the effect of pushback on evaluation of presidential norm violation. In line with **Bipartisan Reinforcement**, we find that only bipartisan pushback has significant effect on perceived appropriateness of norm violating behavior and this effect is only present for Republicans.

We do not find any support for **Partisan Reinforcement** or **Partisan Backlash** hypotheses as partisan opposition has no significant effect on perceived importance, or appropriateness among Republican or Democratic voters. This may be due to the fact that Democratic opposition to norm violations by President Trump is a common occurrence and thus is no longer informative for either Democratic party or Republican party voters.

Figure 1: Evaluation of Norm Violation



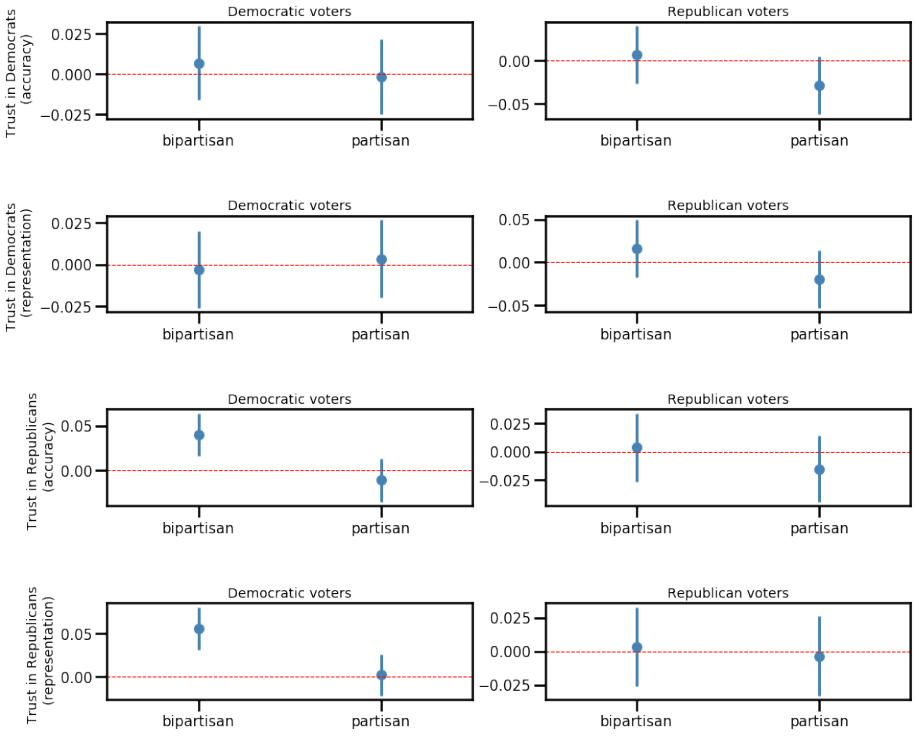
When we evaluate the effect of pushback on trust, we find partial support for the **Bipartisan Reputation** hypothesis. Bipartisan pushback increases trust for the president's party among Democratic voters but it has no effect on Republican voters. This may suggest that two effects that we discussed

in the introduction- representation and informational channels cancel out for Republican voters or it may be that any effects on trust are too small to detect with our sample size. To put more precise bounds on our null finding, we use the TOST (two one-sided t-tests) procedure to determine if we can reject the presence of a smallest effect size of interest. We find that we reject the composite null that the difference in trust towards Republican party between control group and bipartisan opposition group is not less than 4 percentage points.[1]

In any case, the null effects are suggests that expressing opposition to presidential norm violations by president's party may not be as costly to the party as the prevailing wisdom suggests at least in terms of credibility of Republican congress members.

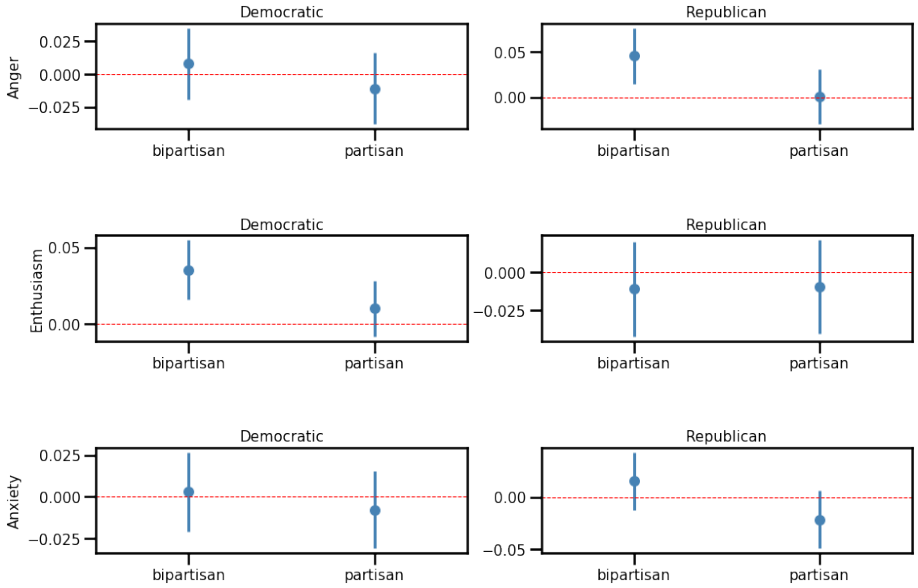
[1]The TOST procedure was conducted using statsmodels package in Python, with a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$. The threshold of 4 percentage points was chosen based on the smallest effect size that could have been significant based on our initial power calculation in the pre-analysis plan.

Figure 2: Trust towards congress members



To measure the effect of elite opposition on emotional responses of voters towards the norm violation, we combine responses to anger/outrage categories into an anger measure (Cronbach's alpha 0.77), fear/nervousness/worry into an anxiety measure (Cronbach's alpha 0.70) and pride/hope/enthusiasm into an enthusiasm measure (Cronbach's alpha 0.84).

Figure 3: Emotional Reactions



Consistent with the results for trust and the evaluation of norm violations, partisan opposition does not seem to have a significant effect on emotional responses of the voters to norm violation. Bipartisan opposition on the other hand, has a significant effect on the emotional responses of Democratic voters and Republican voters albeit in different ways.

In line with H11b in our pre-analysis plan, we find that bipartisan opposition increases anger among Republican voters but not Democratic voters. Democratic voters, on the other hand, report higher levels of enthusiasm in the bipartisan opposition treatment than in the control condition.

Regression tables are in the appendix. We also replicate this analysis by looking at the effects of opposition among Trump-approvers and disapprovers.

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4 Appendix

4.1 Regression Results

Table 1: Evaluation of the Norm Violation(Democratic Voters)

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Bipartisan Opposition	0.003	-0.003	0.023*
	(0.012)	(0.015)	(0.012)
Partisan Opposition	0.005	-0.012	0.006
	(0.012)	(0.015)	(0.012)
Intercept	0.145***	0.749***	0.116***
	(0.008)	(0.010)	(0.008)
Observations	2,513	2,513	2,513
R^2	0.000	0.000	0.002
Adjusted R^2	-0.001	-0.001	0.001
Residual Std. Error	0.239(df = 2510)	0.306(df = 2510)	0.246(df = 2510)
F Statistic	0.078 (df = 2.0; 2510.0)	0.344 (df = 2.0; 2510.0)	2.057 (df = 2.0; 2510.0)

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 2: Evaluation of the Norm Violation(Republican Voters)

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Bipartisan Opposition	-0.035**	-0.010	0.011
	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.017)
Partisan Opposition	-0.001	-0.011	0.021
	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.017)
Intercept	0.609***	0.608***	0.625***
	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.012)
Observations	2,125	2,125	2,125
R^2	0.003	0.000	0.001
Adjusted R^2	0.002	-0.001	-0.000
Residual Std. Error	0.290(df = 2122)	0.281(df = 2122)	0.324(df = 2122)
F Statistic	3.326** (df = 2.0; 2122.0)	0.314 (df = 2.0; 2122.0)	0.726 (df = 2.0; 2122.0)

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 3: Trust (Democratic Voters)

	Trust in Republicans - A	Trust in Republicans - R	Trust in Democrats - A	Trust in Democrats - R
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Bipartisan Opposition	0.056***	0.040***	-0.003	0.007
	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)
Partisan Opposition	0.002	-0.011	0.003	-0.002
	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)
Intercept	0.190***	0.208***	0.612***	0.608***
	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.008)	(0.008)
Observations	2,513	2,513	2,513	2,513
R^2	0.010	0.007	0.000	0.000
Adjusted R^2	0.009	0.007	-0.001	-0.001
Residual Std. Error	0.254(df = 2510)	0.250(df = 2510)	0.243(df = 2510)	0.245(df = 2510)
F Statistic	12.917*** (df = 2.0; 2510.0)	9.478*** (df = 2.0; 2510.0)	0.140 (df = 2.0; 2510.0)	0.287 (df = 2.0; 2510.0)

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 4: Trust (Republican Voters)

	Trust in Republicans - A	Trust in Republicans - R	Trust in Democrats - A	Trust in Democrats - R
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Bipartisan Opposition	0.003	0.004	0.016	0.006
	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.017)	(0.017)
Partisan Opposition	-0.003	-0.015	-0.019	-0.029*
	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.017)	(0.017)
Intercept	0.597***	0.587***	0.322***	0.315***
	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.012)	(0.012)
Observations	2,125	2,125	2,125	2,125
R^2	0.000	0.001	0.002	0.002
Adjusted R^2	-0.001	-0.000	0.001	0.001
Residual Std. Error	0.281(df = 2122)	0.282(df = 2122)	0.321(df = 2122)	0.317(df = 2122)
F Statistic	0.107 (df = 2.0; 2122.0)	0.902 (df = 2.0; 2122.0)	2.224 (df = 2.0; 2122.0)	2.506* (df = 2.0; 2122.0)

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 5: Evaluation of the Norm Violation(Democratic Voters)

	Appropriateness	Importance	Commitment	Trust Rep - A	Trust Rep - R	Trust Dem - A	Trust Dem - R
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Bipartisan	0.003	-0.006	0.023**	0.057***	0.041***	-0.004	0.005
	(0.011)	(0.015)	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)
Partisan	0.003	-0.015	0.004	0.002	-0.011	0.002	-0.004
	(0.011)	(0.015)	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)
Male	0.016*	-0.000	0.028***	-0.008	-0.009	-0.016	-0.012
	(0.010)	(0.012)	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.010)
College	0.042***	0.029**	0.049***	0.035***	0.041***	0.025**	0.031***
	(0.010)	(0.013)	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.010)
White	-0.011	0.038***	-0.009	-0.029**	-0.014	-0.039***	-0.020*
	(0.011)	(0.014)	(0.011)	(0.012)	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)
Hispanic	0.119***	-0.034*	0.122***	0.104***	0.118***	0.013	0.027*
	(0.015)	(0.019)	(0.015)	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.015)	(0.016)
Age	-0.001***	0.003***	-0.001*	-0.001	-0.000	0.002***	0.003***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Observations	2,512	2,512	2,512	2,512	2,512	2,512	2,512
R^2	0.042	0.023	0.045	0.039	0.040	0.023	0.023
Adjusted R^2	0.039	0.021	0.042	0.036	0.037	0.020	0.021
Residual Std. Error	0.234(df = 2504)	0.303(df = 2504)	0.240(df = 2504)	0.250(df = 2504)	0.246(df = 2504)	0.241(df = 2504)	0.242(df = 2504)
F Statistic	15.649*** (df = 7.0; 2504.0)	8.540*** (df = 7.0; 2504.0)	16.837*** (df = 7.0; 2504.0)	14.328*** (df = 7.0; 2504.0)	14.800*** (df = 7.0; 2504.0)	8.504*** (df = 7.0; 2504.0)	8.564*** (df = 7.0; 2504.0)

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 6: Evaluation of the Norm Violation(Republican Voters)

	Appropriateness	Importance	Commitment	Trust Rep - A	Trust Rep - R	Trust Dem - A	Trust Dem - R
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Bipartisan	-0.037**	-0.008	0.006	0.004	0.005	0.014	0.004
	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.017)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)
Partisan	-0.002	-0.008	0.018	0.001	-0.011	-0.013	-0.023
	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.017)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)
Male	-0.005	-0.064***	0.006	-0.046***	-0.024**	0.009	0.022*
	(0.013)	(0.012)	(0.014)	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.013)	(0.013)
College	-0.016	-0.008	0.030**	0.034***	0.019	0.125***	0.120***
	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.015)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)
White	-0.009	-0.059***	-0.023	-0.051***	-0.065***	-0.123***	-0.120***
	(0.017)	(0.016)	(0.019)	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.017)	(0.017)
Hispanic	0.105***	0.054***	0.108***	0.128***	0.111***	0.222***	0.239***
	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.020)	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.018)
Age	0.002***	0.001	0.003***	-0.001	-0.001	-0.003***	-0.003***
	(0.001)	(0.000)	(0.001)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.001)	(0.000)
Observations	2,124	2,124	2,124	2,124	2,124	2,124	2,124
R^2	0.028	0.024	0.029	0.050	0.043	0.197	0.213
Adjusted R^2	0.025	0.021	0.026	0.047	0.040	0.194	0.210
Residual Std. Error	0.287(df = 2116)	0.278(df = 2116)	0.319(df = 2116)	0.274(df = 2116)	0.276(df = 2116)	0.289(df = 2116)	0.282(df = 2116)
F Statistic	8.676*** (df = 7.0; 2116.0)	7.551*** (df = 7.0; 2116.0)	9.106*** (df = 7.0; 2116.0)	15.925*** (df = 7.0; 2116.0)	13.606*** (df = 7.0; 2116.0)	74.232*** (df = 7.0; 2116.0)	81.695*** (df = 7.0; 2116.0)

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 7: Emotional Reactions to the Norm Violation(Democratic Voters)

	Anger	Enthusiasm	Anxiety
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Bipartisan Opposition	0.008	0.035***	0.003
	(0.014)	(0.010)	(0.012)
Partisan Opposition	-0.011	0.010	-0.008
	(0.014)	(0.009)	(0.012)
Intercept	0.534***	0.077***	0.421***
	(0.010)	(0.006)	(0.008)
Observations	2,512	2,512	2,512
R^2	0.001	0.005	0.000
Adjusted R^2	-0.000	0.005	-0.000
Residual Std. Error	0.283(df = 2509)	0.201(df = 2509)	0.247(df = 2509)
F Statistic	0.949 (df = 2.0; 2509.0)	6.503*** (df = 2.0; 2509.0)	0.409 (df = 2.0; 2509.0)

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 8: Emotional Reactions to the Norm Violation(Republican Voters)

	Anger	Enthusiasm	Anxiety
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Bipartisan Opposition	0.046***	-0.011	0.016
	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.014)
Partisan Opposition	0.001	-0.009	-0.022
	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.014)
Intercept	0.290***	0.282***	0.275***
	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.010)
Observations	2,124	2,124	2,124
R^2	0.005	0.000	0.003
Adjusted R^2	0.004	-0.001	0.002
Residual Std. Error	0.292(df = 2121)	0.292(df = 2121)	0.263(df = 2121)
F Statistic	5.690*** (df = 2.0; 2121.0)	0.292 (df = 2.0; 2121.0)	3.675** (df = 2.0; 2121.0)

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 9: Emotional reactions to the Norm Violation(Democratic Voters)

	Anger	Enthusiasm	Anxiety
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Bipartisan Opposition	0.008	0.034***	0.003
	(0.014)	(0.010)	(0.012)
Partisan Opposition	-0.012	0.007	-0.008
	(0.014)	(0.009)	(0.012)
Male	-0.012	0.043***	-0.023**
	(0.011)	(0.008)	(0.010)
College	-0.002	0.044***	0.020*
	(0.012)	(0.007)	(0.010)
White	0.021	-0.011	0.030***
	(0.014)	(0.009)	(0.012)
Hispanic	-0.011	0.086***	0.026
	(0.018)	(0.015)	(0.017)
Age	0.002***	-0.001**	-0.000
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Observations	2,512	2,512	2,512
R^2	0.008	0.054	0.007
Adjusted R^2	0.006	0.051	0.004
Residual Std. Error	0.282(df = 2504)	0.196(df = 2504)	0.247(df = 2504)
F Statistic	3.089*** (df = 7.0; 2504.0)	18.761*** (df = 7.0; 2504.0)	2.476** (df = 7.0; 2504.0)

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 10: Evaluation of the Norm Violation(Republican Voters)

	Anger	Enthusiasm	Anxiety
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Bipartisan Opposition	0.043***	-0.015	0.015
	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.013)
Partisan Opposition	0.002	-0.009	-0.017
	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.013)
Male	0.018	0.033***	-0.015
	(0.013)	(0.012)	(0.011)
College	0.057***	0.063***	0.082***
	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.011)
White	-0.061***	-0.063***	-0.069***
	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.015)
Hispanic	0.128***	0.187***	0.151***
	(0.017)	(0.018)	(0.016)
Age	-0.001	-0.000	-0.002***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Observations	2,124	2,124	2,124
R^2	0.069	0.107	0.124
Adjusted R^2	0.066	0.104	0.122
Residual Std. Error	0.283(df = 2116)	0.277(df = 2116)	0.247(df = 2116)
F Statistic	23.994*** (df = 7.0; 2116.0)	41.970*** (df = 7.0; 2116.0)	44.928*** (df = 7.0; 2116.0)

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

4.2 Covariate Balance

Table 11: Sample Demographics (Percentages)

	Party Affiliation	Democratic			Republican		
	Treatment	bipartisan	control	partisan	bipartisan	control	partisan
Age category	18 - 24	0.102	0.125	0.110	0.064	0.070	0.056
	25 - 34	0.404	0.394	0.368	0.320	0.352	0.307
	35 - 44	0.238	0.247	0.289	0.267	0.277	0.284
	45 - 54	0.148	0.110	0.103	0.196	0.172	0.225
	55 - 64	0.075	0.087	0.091	0.110	0.083	0.092
	65+	0.033	0.037	0.039	0.042	0.047	0.036
College category	Bachelor's degree	0.410	0.446	0.449	0.448	0.428	0.423
	Graduate degree	0.233	0.167	0.202	0.206	0.199	0.200
	High school degree or less	0.080	0.087	0.077	0.086	0.095	0.090
	Some college/associate	0.277	0.300	0.272	0.259	0.278	0.287
Race	Non-white	0.265	0.272	0.255	0.194	0.201	0.181
	White	0.735	0.728	0.745	0.806	0.799	0.819
Gender	Female	0.557	0.593	0.552	0.506	0.536	0.498
	Male	0.434	0.399	0.443	0.494	0.464	0.502
	Other	0.010	0.008	0.005	0.000	0.000	0.000
Presidential Approval	Approver	0.122	0.080	0.102	0.791	0.811	0.844
	Disapprover	0.878	0.920	0.898	0.209	0.189	0.156

White respondents are coded as white and respondents indicating another race or multiple races are coded as non-white.

As expected, controlling for respondent-level covariates does not change the estimates for average treatment effect for each group but improves precision.

We use several strategies to check for covariate balance:

First, we test if any of the covariates significantly predict assignment to one of the three treatment groups. To do this we use multinomial logistic regression to test if any of the covariate combinations predict one of two treatment or control groups.

4.3 Survey instrument

Informed Consent Form

Survey on American Democracy

You are invited to participate in a web-based online survey on political preferences and attitudes about political leaders. This study is being conducted by Gretchen Helmke who is a professor at the University of Rochester and Seda Ozturk who is a PhD Candidate at the University of Rochester. We thank you for your attention and your responses. If you decide to take part in this study, you will be first asked to complete a few questions to determine your eligibility that will take about 1 minute to complete. If you are eligible for participating in the second part of the survey, you will continue to the second part, which will take about 5-8 minutes to complete. The first part of the survey will ask you questions about your party preferences. The second part of the survey will ask questions about your political knowledge, and demographics and you will be asked to read a short newspaper article and share your opinion. Please read the article carefully. Later in the survey, we will check to make sure that people have read the article. You will be paid 10 cents for the first part of the survey and 75 cents for the second part as a bonus per HIT via the Mechanical Turk interface. No direct payments will be sent from the University of Rochester research team. If researchers make a decision to manually reject your responses, you will not receive the payment. You can not take this survey more than once. Your participation is voluntary and you may decline the survey or withdraw at any time. You will receive payment for participating through MTurk. To receive payment you will have to enter your MTurk ID at the beginning of the survey. No information that identifies you will be collected or retained by the researchers, and all of the information we collect will be stored securely. However, any online interaction carries some risk of being accessed. Please contact the Research Subjects Review Board at the University of Rochester with any questions or concerns (by phone at (585) 273-4127 or by email at kathleen$_b$*uckwell@urmc.rochester.edu*).

Do you consent to participate in the survey?

o Yes, I consent

o No, I don't consent

Did you vote in the 2016 Presidential Election?

o Yes

o No

Who did you vote for in the 2016 Presidential Election?

o Donald Trump

o Hillary Clinton

o Gary Johnson

o Jill Stein

o Other

o Rather not say

Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Democrat, a Republican, an Independent, or something else?

o Republican

o Democrat

o Independent

o Other

o No preference

Would you call yourself a strong Republican or a not very strong Republican?

o Strong

o Not very strong

Would you call yourself a strong Democrat or a not very strong Democrat?

o Strong

o Not very strong

Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican or Democratic party?

o Republican

o Democratic

o Neither

Do you approve or disapprove of the way Donald Trump is handling his job as President?

o Strongly approve

o Somewhat approve

o Somewhat disapprove

o Strongly disapprove

When it comes to politics, would you describe yourself as liberal, conservative, or neither liberal nor conservative?

o Very conservative

o Somewhat conservative

o Slightly conservative

o Moderate; middle of the road

o Slightly liberal

o Somewhat liberal

o Very liberal

Generally, how interested are you in politics?

o Not at all interested

o Not very interested

o Somewhat interested

o Very interested

Please read the news article on the following screen very carefully. You'll be asked to answer several short questions about the event described in the article.

Trump Fires Michael Atkinson, Intelligence IG Who Told Congress About Ukraine Phone Call

WASHINGTON –President Trump has fired Michael Atkinson, the inspector general for the U.S. intelligence community who alerted Congress to concerns about a Trump phone call with the president of Ukraine–a matter that led to the president's impeachment last year. Trump formally notified the intelligence committees of both the Senate and House in a letter that he "no longer" has the fullest confidence in Atkinson and would nominate a replacement "at a later time". Trump has the authority to fire presidential appointees. However, past

presidents have never fired an inspector general who had been investigating the president's own conduct.

Trump Fires Michael Atkinson, Intelligence IG Who Told Congress About Ukraine Phone Call

WASHINGTON –President Trump has fired Michael Atkinson, the inspector general for the U.S. intelligence community who alerted Congress to concerns about a Trump phone call with the president of Ukraine–a matter that led to the president's impeachment last year. Trump formally notified the intelligence committees of both the Senate and House in a letter that he "no longer" has the fullest confidence in Atkinson and would nominate a replacement "at a later time". Trump has the authority to fire presidential appointees. However, past presidents have never fired an inspector general who had been investigating the president's own conduct. Democrats criticized the president's decision. One Democratic member of Congress stated "Inspectors general should only be removed for reasons related to their performance to help preserve their independence. A general lack of confidence simply is not sufficient detail to satisfy Congress". Another Democratic member of Congress stated that the decision was "a blatant attempt by the president to gut the independence of the intelligence community and retaliate against those who dare to expose presidential wrongdoing. It would have chilling effect against all willing to speak truth to power."

Trump Fires Michael Atkinson, Intelligence IG Who Told Congress About Ukraine Phone Call

WASHINGTON –President Trump has fired Michael Atkinson, the inspector general for the U.S. intelligence community who alerted Congress to concerns about a Trump phone call with the president of Ukraine–a matter that led to the president's impeachment last year. Trump formally notified the intelligence committees of both the Senate and House in a letter that he "no longer" has the fullest confidence in Atkinson and would nominate a replacement "at a later time". Trump has the authority to fire presidential appointees. However, past presidents have never fired an inspector general who had been investigating the

president's own conduct. Both Republicans and Democrats criticized the president's decision. One Republican member of Congress stated "Inspectors general should only be removed for reasons related to their performance to help preserve their independence. A general lack of confidence simply is not sufficient detail to satisfy Congress". Meanwhile, a Democratic member of Congress stated that the decision was "a blatant attempt by the president to gut the independence of the intelligence community and retaliate against those who dare to expose presidential wrongdoing. It would have chilling effect against all willing to speak truth to power."

Do you think it was appropriate or inappropriate for the president to fire Inspector General Atkinson?

o Entirely Appropriate

o Mostly Appropriate

o Mostly Inappropriate

o Entirely Inappropriate

In your opinion, how important was the president's decision to fire Inspector General Atkinson?

o Unimportant

o Mostly Unimportant

o Mostly Important

o Important

How much confidence, if any, do you have in the Democratic members of Congress to act in the best interests of the public?

o A great deal

o A fair amount

o A little

o None at all

How much do you trust the accuracy of the information that you get about the government from the Democratic members of Congress?

o A great deal

o A fair amount

o A little

o Not at all

How much confidence, if any, do you have in the Republican members of Congress to act in the best interests of the public?

o A great deal

o A fair amount

o A little

o None at all

How much do you trust the accuracy of the information that you get about the government from the Republican members of Congress?

o A great deal

o A fair amount

o A little

o Not at all

How much respect do you think Donald Trump has for this country's democratic institutions and traditions?

o A great deal

o A fair amount

o A little

o None at all

Now, we are interested in how this news article made you feel. For each of the following emotions, please tell us whether the events described in the news article made you feel that way extremely, very, somewhat, slightly, or not at all.

Extremely Very Somewhat Slightly Not at all

Angry o o o o o

Outraged o o o o o

Disgusted o o o o o

Afraid o o o o o

Anxious o o o o o

For each of the following emotions, please tell us whether the events described in the news article made you feel that way extremely, very, somewhat, slightly,

or not at all.

Extremely Very Somewhat Slightly Not at all

Nervous o o o o o

Hopeful o o o o o

Enthusiastic o o o o o

Proud o o o o o

We are also interested in which social platforms people use most often. There are many popular social media platforms that one can choose from. To show that you have read this question, regardless of your real use, please only select the social media platform that starts with the letter 'W'. What would you say is the social media platform you use most often? Please check all that apply.

Twitter

Facebook

Whatsapp

Instagram

Snapchat

None of the above

Below you will be given a number of questions about your political knowledge. Many people don't know the answers to these questions, but it is helpful for us if you answer, even if you're not sure what the correct answer is. It is important to us that you do NOT use outside sources like the Internet to search for the correct answer.

For how many years is a United States Senator elected - that is, how many years are there in one full term of office for a U.S. Senator?

o Two years

o Four years

o Six years

o Eight years

o None of these

o Don't know

How many times can an individual be elected President of the United States under current laws?

o Once

o Twice

o Four times

o Unlimited number of terms

o Don't know

How many U.S. Senators are there from each state?

o One

o Two

o Four

o Depends on which state

o Don't know

For how many years is a member of the United States House of Representatives elected - that is, how many years are there in one full term of office for a U.S. House member?

o Two years

o Four years

o Six years

o Eight years

o For life

o Don't know

Did you look up any of the answers? It is important that you answer honestly, you will not get penalized for looking up the answers.

o Yes, I looked up the answers

o No, I did not look up the answers

Now we would like to ask some general questions about you.

How old are you?

o Under 18

o 18 - 24

o 25 - 34

o 35 - 44

o 45 - 54

o 55 - 64

o 65 - 74

o 75 - 84

o 85 or older

What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?

o Less than high school degree

o High school graduate (high school diploma or equivalent including GED)

o Some college but no degree

o Associate degree in college (2-year)

o Bachelor's degree in college (4-year)

o Master's degree

o Doctoral degree

o Professional degree (JD, MD)

Choose one or more races that you consider yourself to be:

White

Black or African American

American Indian or Alaska Native

Asian

Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

Other

Are you of Spanish or Hispanic origin or descent?

o Yes

o No

What is your gender?

o Male

o Female

o Other

Prior to this survey, had you read or heard about the event described in the article?

o Yes

o No

Prior to this survey, had you read or heard about recent firings of other inspectors general?

o Yes

o No