

Political Narratives

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PhD Course on **Subjective Beliefs, Attention and Economic Behavior**, March 2023

Political narratives

- **Narratives:** causal account/story for why an event occurred.
 - “The stories people tell to explain the world”
- Provide a lens through which individuals can interpret data and forecast future developments.
- Extensively featured in the political debate.
 - Politicians typically do not cite statistics to make a point, they rather tell stories.

Examples of narratives used in political debates

- Ronald Reagan used a (fake and misleading) narrative about “welfare queens” in his 1976 and 1980 presidential campaigns to justify his agenda of cutting social programs.
- Donald Trump famously used an equally misleading “immigrant threat” narrative in his 2016 and 2020 presidential campaigns to blame immigrants for various economic and social problems in the US.
- Republicans in Congress typically use a “debt narrative” to constrain government spending when Democrats are in power.
- The current Biden administration has several times used a “corporate greed” narrative to avoid responsibility for high inflation.

Why are narratives effective?

- First channel (the “standard” explanation): Persuasion
 - “Immigrant crime” narrative convinces you that immigration is bad, and you express public opposition to immigrants.
- Second channel: Social norms
 - You already oppose immigration and the “immigrant crime” narrative convinces you that *other people* are also likely to oppose immigration, making you comfortable expressing these views in public.
- Third channel: Social cover
 - The “immigrant crime” narrative persuades some moderates, lowering the social cost of expressing opposition to immigration in public because the action is now less informative about your underlying type.

Labor market concerns and support for immigration

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March 2023

Motivation

- Anti-immigrant narratives are very often used in the political debate.
- Trump famously won the 2016 Presidential Election on strong anti-immigrant rhetoric.
- Are these narratives just racial slurs to increase support among xenophobic voters, or do they actually appeal to people who genuinely worry about losing their job?
- We study this question in the context of a *counter-narrative* to the (misleading) “immigrant take jobs away” story.

Experimental design

1. Pre-treatment beliefs questions about the labor market impact of immigration.
 - Both unemployment impact and wage impact of both low-skilled and high-skilled immigration.
2. **Randomization**
 - Control group: No information.
 - Treatment group: Information: No negative labor market impacts of immigration.
3. Post-treatment outcomes in main study
 - Beliefs about the labor market impact of immigration and other post-treatment beliefs.
 - Support for both low-skilled and high-skilled immigration.
 - Petition signatures.
4. One week after the main experiment: Obfuscated follow-up study.
 - Beliefs about the labor market impact of immigration.
 - Support for low-skilled and high-skilled immigration.

“Narrative frame”: The Mariel boatlift

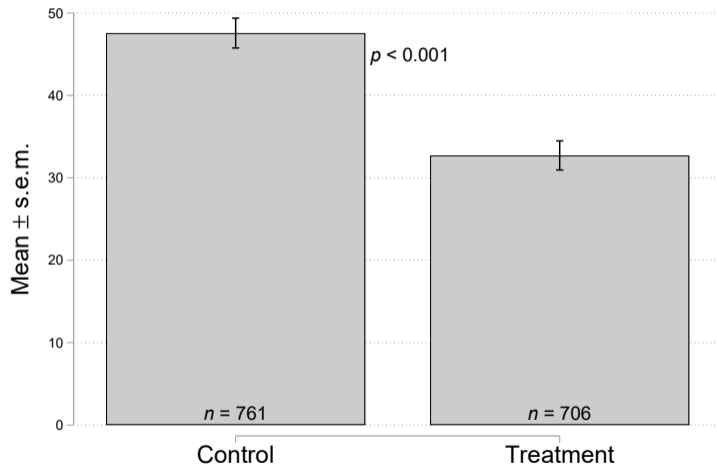
- **Unexpected** mass immigration of Cubans to the US.
- Most of the Cuban immigrants came to Miami, Florida.
- Increased the **low-skilled workforce** in Miami by 20 percent.
- Used by researchers to study the labor market impact of immigration.

Information treatment: Counter-narrative to the “immigrants take jobs away” story

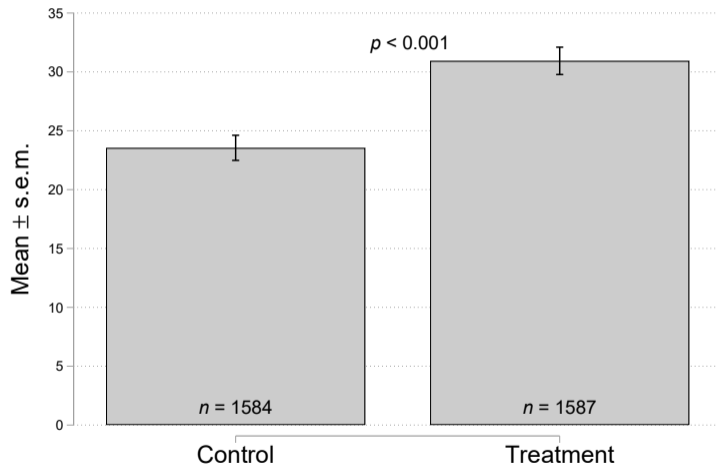
*The researchers who analyzed the short- and long-term effects of the mass immigration of Cubans to Miami concluded that, for both high-skilled and low-skilled workers, the mass immigration had **virtually no effect on wages and virtually no effect on unemployment.***

According to the researchers, the mass immigration had virtually no effect on wages and unemployment because the new Cuban immigrants increased the overall demand for goods and services, which created more jobs.

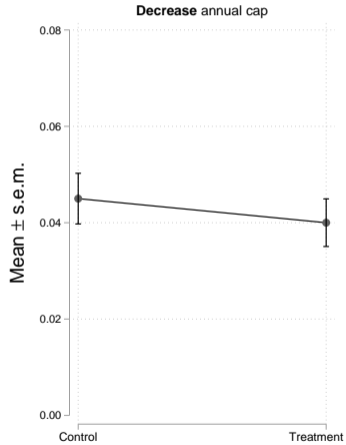
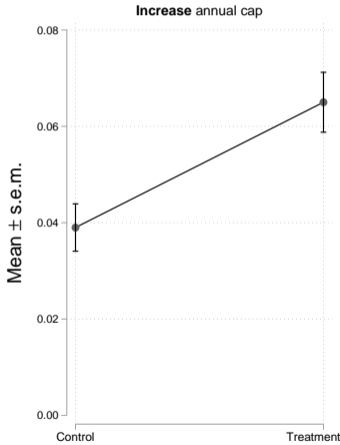
First stage on beliefs: Immigrants suppress wages



Effect of narrative on attitudes: Support low-skilled immigration



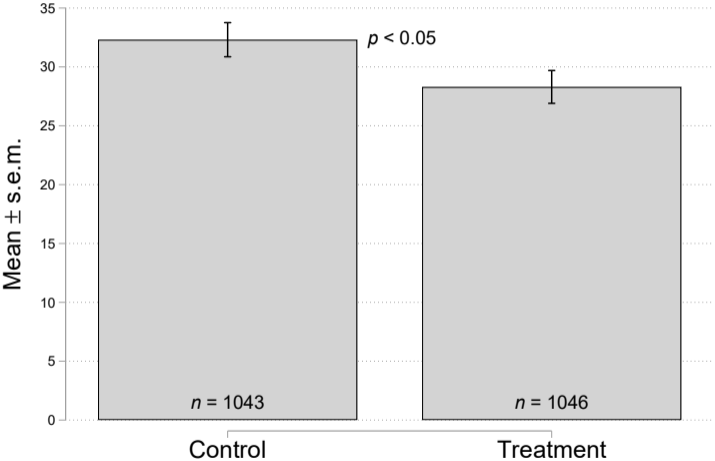
Behavioral measure: Petition signatures in favor of increasing/decreasing the annual cap on low-skilled guest workers



Obfuscated follow-up study

- Respondents receive generic invitation emails.
- We use different consent forms and layouts of surveys.
- We obfuscate the purpose of the follow-up study by first asking questions about other topics (e.g., redistribution, taxation).
- We ask questions about immigration attitudes at the end of the follow-up (different wording compared to the main study).

Obfuscated follow-up: Oppose low-skilled immigration



Conclusion

- Significant effect of a job narrative about immigration on policy views.
- Shows that narratives not only “pander to the base” but actually persuade people.
 - Important to provide counter-narratives to wrong and misleading narratives that play on people’s fears.
- The impact of narratives persists over time.

From Extreme to Mainstream: The Erosion of Social Norms

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March 2023

Motivation

- Social norms are important in any society: some behaviors and opinions are socially desirable while others are stigmatized.
- Large literature on the persistence of cultural traits and norms (Fernandez, 2007; Voigtlaender and Voth, 2012; Giuliano, 2007; Alesina et al., 2013).
- However, little is known about what factors might lead long-standing social norms to change, or even more so, to *change quickly*.

Social norms can change quickly

- Aggregators of private opinions (e.g., elections) might lead to updates in individuals' perceptions of what people around them think, and thus induce fast changes in the social acceptability of holding certain opinions and expressing them publicly.
- **Intuition:** if most individuals assume that a specific opinion is stigmatized, the stigma might be sustained in equilibrium: no learning. But aggregators of opinion can lead to fast change.
- Narratives can also be used to mislead people about the popularity of some opinions, often in the form of “everybody knows” statements ...
 - Anti-climate narrative: “everybody knows that natural cycles are responsible for climate variability”
 - Used to cast doubt on the evidence behind global warming and make climate change skepticism seem like a widespread opinion.

Conceptual motivation

- “Pluralistic ignorance” (Katz and Allport, 1931): privately, most people reject a norm, but they incorrectly believe that most other people accept it, and therefore end up following the norm as well.
 - When individuals believe a behavior or attitude is stigmatized, they might be reluctant to reveal their private views to others for fear of social sanction.
 - If most individuals act this way, they might all end up believing their private views are only shared by, at most, a small minority.
 - Soviet regime (Kuran, 1991): many individuals opposed the regime but believed others supported it.
 - O’Gorman (1975): in 1968, most white Americans substantially over-estimated the support among other whites for racial segregation.
- Related concept: “preference falsification” (Kuran, 1995).

Experimental design

- Goal is to manipulate respondents' beliefs about the share of the population holding xenophobic convictions (supporting Trump).
- In 2018, a sample of 1,600 participants from Pittsburgh was recruited with Qualtrics Research Services.
- To manipulate beliefs: Exploit differences in the 2016 election outcome between Pittsburgh's county and Pittsburgh's metropolitan statistical area.
 - In the 2016 US Presidential Election, **Hillary Clinton won Pittsburgh's county.**
 - In the 2016 US Presidential Election, **Donald Trump won Pittsburgh's metropolitan area.**

Donation to an Anti-Immigrant Organization

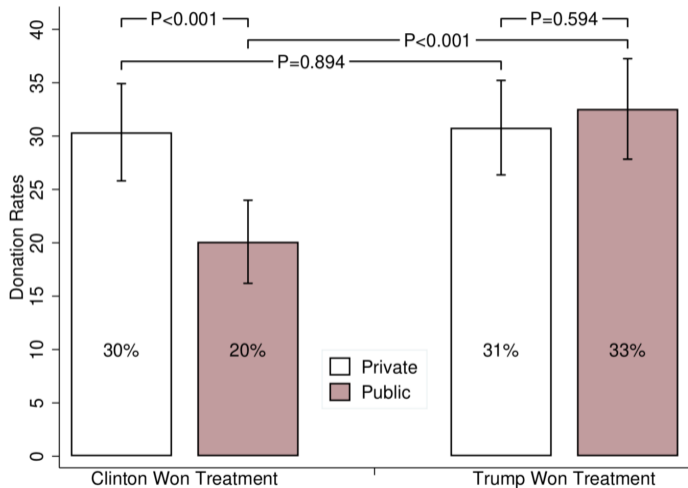
- Participants were then given the possibility to make a donation to a randomly drawn organization.
 - An anti-immigrant of interest or a pro-immigrant organization of no interest.
 - The purpose of the pro-immigrant organization is to reduce experimenter demand effects.
- To maximize power and avoid direct deception, randomization such that most would get assigned the anti-immigration organization:

*The Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR) is an **immigration-reduction organization** of concerned individuals who believe that immigration laws must be reformed, and seeks to reduce overall immigration (both legal and illegal) into the United States. The founder of FAIR is John Tanton, author of *The Immigration Invasion*, who wrote "I've come to the point of view that for European-American society and culture to persist requires a European-American majority, and a clear one at that."*

Cross-randomization: Private vs. Public Donation

- To generate a private vs. public condition: exploit the fact that Qualtrics has access to participants' names and contact information (even though the authors did not).
 - **Public:** "The results from this survey, **including your individual donation decision** and the donation decisions of all of the other Pittsburgh respondents to this survey, will be posted on our website in October 2018. **There is no need to provide your name, email, etc. here; the survey company we work with has this information already.**"
 - **Private:** "**The anonymized results from this survey** will be posted on our website in October 2018. **Results will be reported as percentages only, so your individual response to the survey will remain anonymous.**"

Main results: Willingness to donate by treatment status



Main takeaways

- A positive update in people's beliefs about Trump's popularity increases their willingness to publicly express xenophobic views.
- Election information changed perceptions of the social norm and beliefs about social judgments.
- In everyday life, narratives are likely to affect social norms too.
 - In particular, "everybody knows" narratives often invoked by politicians ...

Justifying Dissent

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 - Narratives that police reform would increase violent crime
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- Why do these rationales enable dissent?
 - Standard account: persuasion
 - But dissent is often limited not due to a lack of support for dissenters' causes, but because people fear the consequences of expressing dissent
 - 62 percent of Americans agree: "The political climate these days prevents me from saying things I believe because others might find them offensive"

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 - 62 percent of Americans agree: "The political climate these days prevents me from saying things I believe because others might find them offensive"
- **This paper:** propose, formalize, and experimentally examine another mechanism — the "social cover" effect — by which rationales affect public behavior

Example 1: Opposition to defunding the police

- In many settings, large social sanctions from public expression: people will attribute position to lack of support for racial equality
- Now, suppose an argument popularized claiming that police defunding will increase violent crime
- More people may now publicly oppose defunding due to . . .
 - **Persuasion:** people's private opposition to defunding becomes stronger, and they are now willing to pay social cost
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 - A **social cover:** rationale opens up new explanations for their position, and reduces the informativeness of opposition to defunding for underlying prejudice

Example 2: Support for deporting illegal immigrants

- In many settings, large social sanctions from public expression of anti-minority views: people will attribute their position to xenophobia
- Now, suppose an argument popularized claiming that immigrants commit more violent crime
- More people may publicly support deportation due to...
 - **Persuasion:** people's private support for deportation becomes stronger, and they are now willing to pay social cost
 - **Anticipated persuasion:** people think some of their audience will be persuaded
 - A **social cover:** rationale opens up explanations — other than xenophobia — for their position, and thus reduces the informativeness of support for deportation for underlying prejudice

This paper

- Formalize, whether and why rationales may reduce the social cost and enable dissent
- Experiments on social media (“Willingness to Tweet”) studying power and limitations of rationales in facilitating dissent:
 - Liberals’ willingness to publicly oppose the movement to defund the police
 - Conservatives’ willingness to publicly support the immediate deportation of all illegal Mexican immigrants
- Isolate the “cover” effect of rationales from persuasion and other confounding mechanisms and demonstrate its quantitative importance
- Explore how rationales shift perceptions of dissenters’ motives and resulting social sanctions

Outline

Theoretical framework

Experiment 1: Liberals expressing politically incorrect views

Experiment 2: Interpretation of politically incorrect dissent

Experiment 3: Expression of anti-immigrant sentiment

Experiment 4: Interpretation of anti-immigrant sentiment

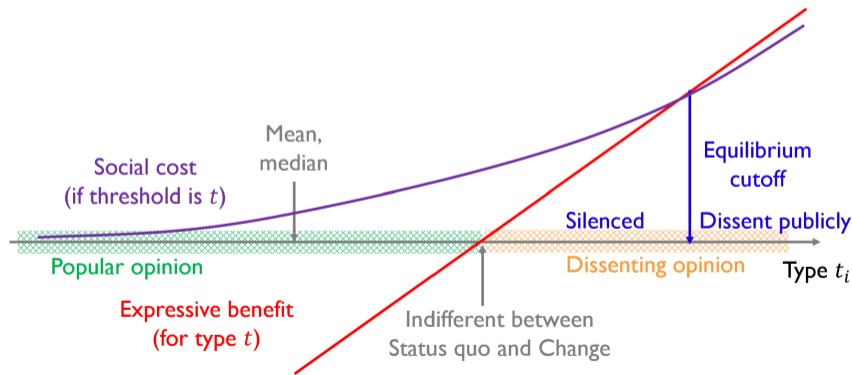
Conclusion

Model (simplified)

- Policy question: Status quo vs Change
 - Economic consequences of Change (relative to Status Quo) for individual i : w_i
 - Not known perfectly, can learn and update (wages, social welfare, reduction of crime or unemployment)
 - Idiosyncratic preferences for Change: t_i
 - Total utility from Change: $w_i + t_i$
- Individual “sender” is offered to publicly support Change ($d_i \in \{0, 1\}$)
 - Expressive benefit: proportional to $\mathbb{E}_i(w_i | *) + t_i$
 - Social cost: proportional to $\mathbb{E}(t_i | d_i = 1) - \mathbb{E}t_i$
 - Others (“receivers”) make inference about type t_i of a sender who publicly supported Change

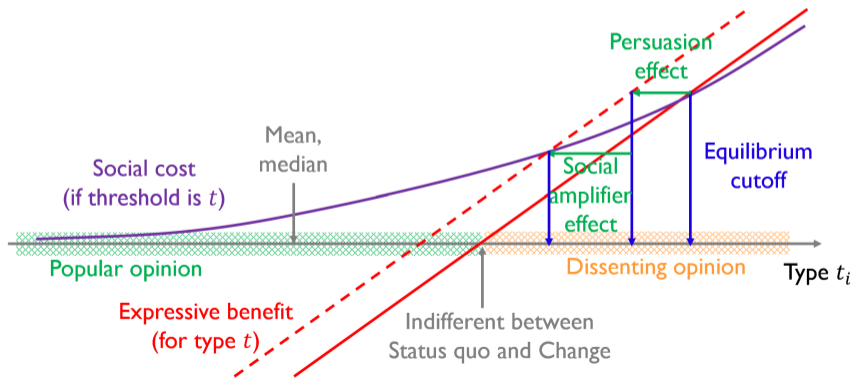
Equilibrium: illustration

- Suppose $\mathbb{E}_i(w_i) = w_0$, same for all people
- Equilibrium cutoff: intersection of two lines
- There is stigma: fewer people express dissenting opinion than hold it



Persuasive rationales

- New info: $\mathbb{E}(w_i | \text{Info}) = w_0 + \Delta$, $\Delta > 0$
- Indifferent type and Expressive benefit curve move left
- But if more people dissent, dissenting is less costly, prompting more dissent...



Model: Takeaways

- Rationales lower social cost of dissent and thereby make more people express a dissenting opinion
- A rationale that persuades some people enables even more people to dissent
 - A weaker, less persuasive rationale has a smaller effect
- Even if a rationale persuades as many people as it dissuades, social inference effect allows more people to dissent [▶ Figure](#)

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Experiment 1: Sample and Setting

- Pre-registered experiment conducted in October 2021 with a sample of 523 Democrats and Independents active on Twitter
 - Pre-registered replication conducted in October 2022 with 533 Democrats
- Social media is a natural setting to study dissent:
 - Natural audience
 - Natural form of public expression
 - Readily available rationales
 - Setting of direct interest

Studying public dissent through **Willingness to Tweet**

- Revealed-preference measure of **willingness to publicly dissent**: willingness to post a Tweet **expressing support for a campaign opposing defunding the police**
- **Challenge**: want this revealed-preference measure without actually contributing to starting a political campaign
- **Solution**: Rather than asking participants to post, we ask them to **schedule** a post using “Tweetability,” an app we created
- Participants told that Tweets will be posted when and if we reach survey respondents in all counties
 - Participants told that all Tweets will be deleted (if not yet posted) by a certain date. Since we recruit fewer respondents than the number of counties, no possibility that posts ever be made public

Experiment 1: Experimental design

- All respondents provided with a rationale: article written by a Princeton professor arguing that defunding the police increases violent crime
- Respondents choose whether to privately join campaign
- Those who join shown the article a second time, then choose whether or not to post a Tweet with a petition to oppose defunding the police
 - **Experimental manipulation:** vary the availability of a social cover, holding all other mechanisms constant

Identifying effect of “social cover”

- Need to fix both persuasion and anticipated persuasion across treatments
 - **Persuasion**: all our respondents read article
 - **Anticipated persuasion**: article linked in both Tweets
- **Manipulating social cover**: vary whether the Tweet communicates that respondent was exposed to the rationale **before** or **after** joining the campaign.
 - Both formulations truthful: all respondents shown the article twice (once before joining and once after)

Treatment: **Cover** vs. **No Cover**

Figure: **Cover** condition

I have joined a campaign to oppose defunding the police: [bit.ly/3DK3UEr](https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2020/06/12/defund-police-violent-crime/). Before joining, I was shown this article written by a Princeton professor on the strong scientific evidence that defunding the police would increase violent crime:

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2020/06/12/defund-police-violent-crime/>



washingtonpost.com

Perspective | Cops prevent violence. But they aren't the only ones wh...
Communities already know how to police their own. Now put them in charge of it.

Figure: **No Cover** condition

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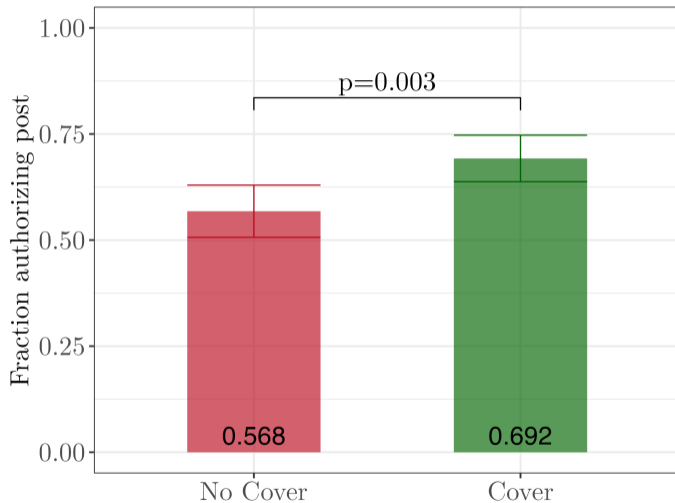
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Main results: Willingness to Tweet by group



► Replication

Interpreting results

- People more willing to schedule *Cover* Tweet due to mechanical effects of the “before” / “after” wording?
 - Direct evidence on whether Tweets are perceived as misleading.
 - Placebo experiments with identical manipulation in non-stigmatized domains
- People more willing to schedule *Cover* Tweet because they anticipate “before” wording will be more persuasive to followers?
 - Auxiliary experiment shows no differences in anticipated persuasiveness of the Tweets
- Direct evidence on “social cover” mechanism?
 - Open-ended text responses in which respondents describe considerations on their mind when choosing what to Tweet

Did people find the Tweet misleading?

- We directly measure whether people find the Tweet misleading with a yes/no question at the end of the experiment
- Very few (only four percent) of respondents perceive either Tweet to be misleading
 - There is no economically or statistically significant treatment effect on whether respondents find the Tweet misleading
 - Treatment effects are robust to dropping respondents who perceive the Tweet to be misleading.
- Respondents who say the Tweet is misleading are asked to explain why with an open-ended response
 - No one mentions the before/after wording
 - No one mentions the timing of the information

Placebo experiments

- To rule out that differences driven by mechanical effects of wording: replicate experiment and manipulation across several **non-stigmatized contexts**
- **Placebo outcome (I)**: willingness to post a Tweet with a petition to conserve the Amazon rainforest
 - **Rationale**: landmark research study suggesting many Amazonian species in danger of extinction
 - Experiment with 315 respondents from December 2021
- **Placebo outcome (II)**: willingness to post a Tweet in favor of eliminating daylight saving time
 - **Rationale**: PBS article by neurology professor on how daylight saving time is connected with serious negative health effects
 - Pre-registered experiment with 524 respondents from November 2022
- Auxiliary survey from November 2022 validates that the placebo outcomes are associated with lower social stigma [▶ Figure](#)

Placebo results: Willingness to Tweet by group

Figure: **Rainforest** placebo

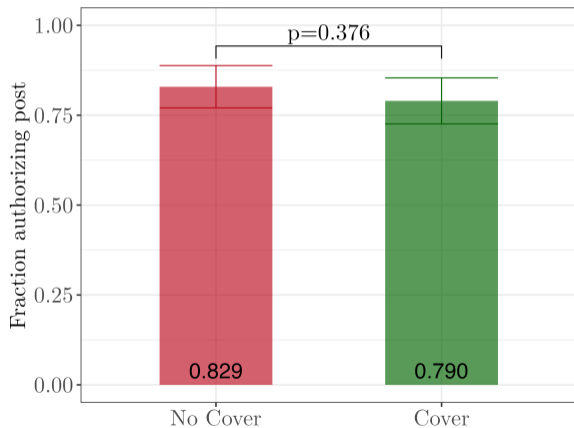
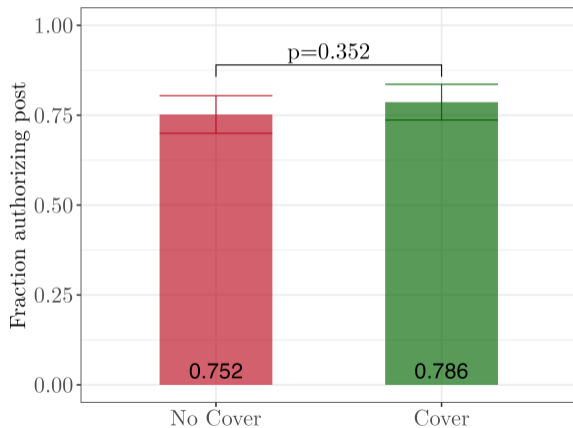
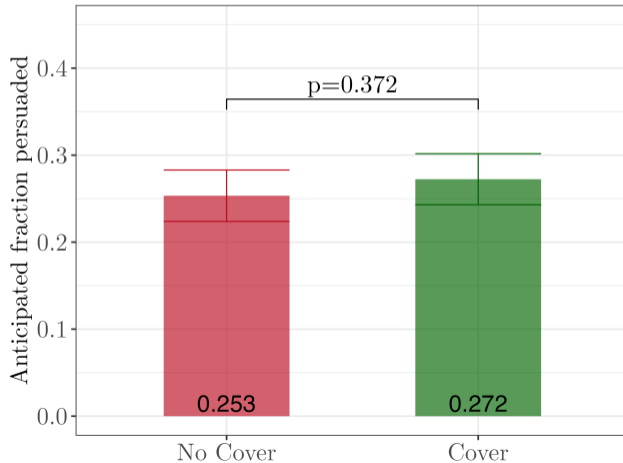


Figure: **Daylight saving** placebo



Anticipated persuasion

- To rule out that differences driven by differences in the anticipated persuasiveness of the Tweet: present participants with either the *Cover* Tweet or the *No Cover* Tweet and ask them to guess what share of their followers would be persuaded to join the campaign



Direct evidence on mechanism

- Respondents asked which of two Tweets they would hypothetically prefer to post:
 - *Cover*: *Cover* Tweet vs. *Control* Tweet (“I have joined a campaign to oppose defunding the police: [LINK].”)
 - *No Cover*: *No Cover* Tweet vs. *Control* Tweet
- Comparisons with “Control” rather than direct comparison of “Cover” and “No Cover” avoids making the “Before/After” comparison salient — better captures behavior in main experiment and in real world settings
- Respondents asked to “Please explain why you chose this Tweet rather than the other Tweet”
- Key object of interest: differences in explanations across conditions

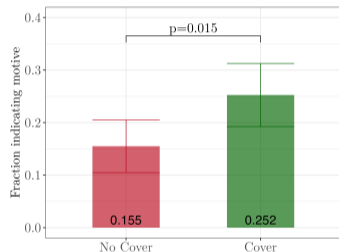
Hand-coding responses

- **Social cover:** mention that preferred Tweet indicates to followers that article affected choice to join the campaign
 - “I think the evidence provided in the article is an important catalyst in why I would have joined the campaign and without any context that first tweet could be misconstrued, or even cause me to be publicly shamed.”
- **Anticipated persuasion:** mention that article might persuade others
 - “The tweet is meant to not only inform people of your decision, but to also advertise others to do the same. Having supporting evidence for your cause will increase the chance of others to side and agree with you. Tweet B does this, Tweet A doesn't.”
- **Information:** mention that article is informative or provides an explanation for why people might join, but response does not explicitly relate information to own views or other people's views
 - “I would want others to see this article and know that I have some evidence to back my tweet”

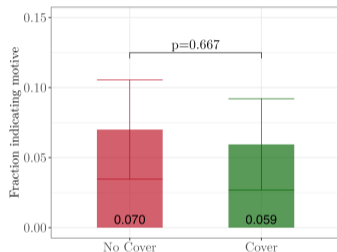
Conservative coding for “social cover” and “anticipated persuasion” \implies plausible lower bound

Results: choice of Tweet with rationale over control

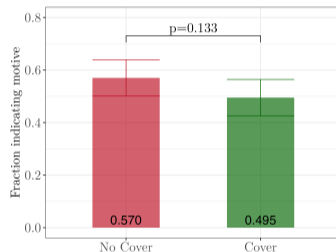
83% of respondents prefer *No Cover* Tweet over *Control* Tweet, 87% of respondents prefer *Cover* Tweet over *Control* Tweet



(a) Social Cover



(b) Anticipated persuasion



(c) Information

Substantial number of Tweets mention some form of social sanction — no support for alternative interpretations of treatment effects (real or perceived demand effects, belief that either Tweet is unnatural or misleading)

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Experiment 3: Expression of anti-immigrant sentiment

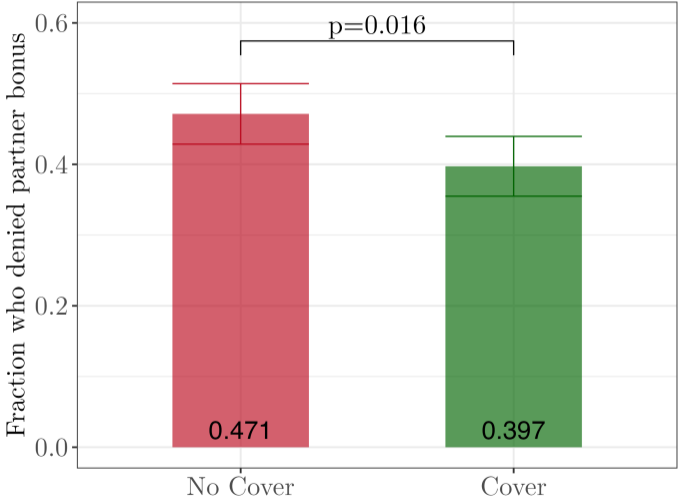
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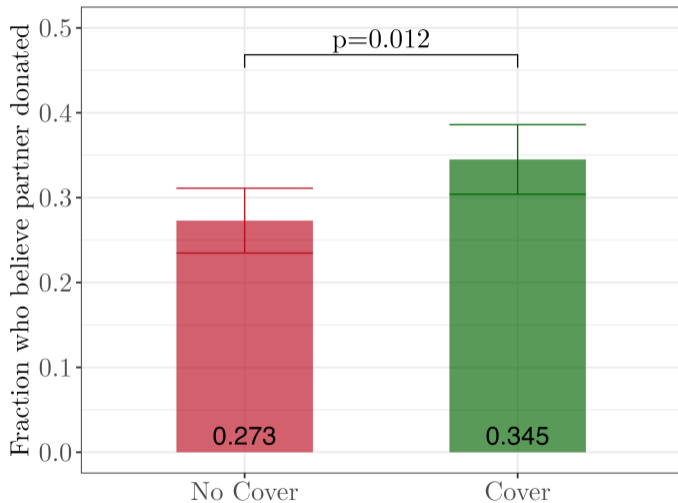
Overview of Experiment 2

- Pre-registered experiment conducted in November 2021 (1,023 Democrats)
- Each respondent matched with a previous survey participant who chose to post the Tweet opposing defunding the police
 - **Cover condition:** Shown screenshot of the “Cover” Tweet from previous experiment (“Before joining the campaign...”)
 - **No Cover condition:** Shown screenshot of the “No Cover” Tweet from previous experiment (“After joining the campaign...”)
- Outcomes
 - Social judgment: willingness to deny bonus payment to matched participant
 - Inference about motives: beliefs about whether matched participant donated to NAACP
 - Open-ended text: phrases used in response

Social judgment: willingness to deny bonus payment



Inference about motives: beliefs about donation to pro-Black organization



Experiments on politically incorrect dissent: Summary

- Holding persuasion and other potential channels fixed, availability of a social cover affects **willingness to publicly dissent**
 - Find similar patterns using open-ended responses [▶ Results](#)
- Availability of a social cover changes **social judgment** and **inference**
- Most Democrats oppose defunding the police — yet vocal minorities can shape the debate
- Just how difficult is it to justify dissent in this setting?
 - Additional inference experiments slightly reducing credibility of rationale

Varying the credibility of the rationale

Figure: **Cover** condition

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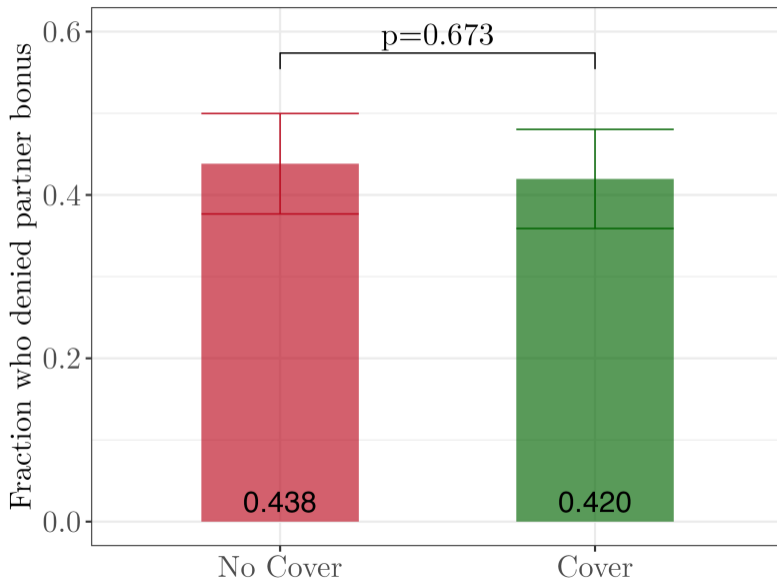
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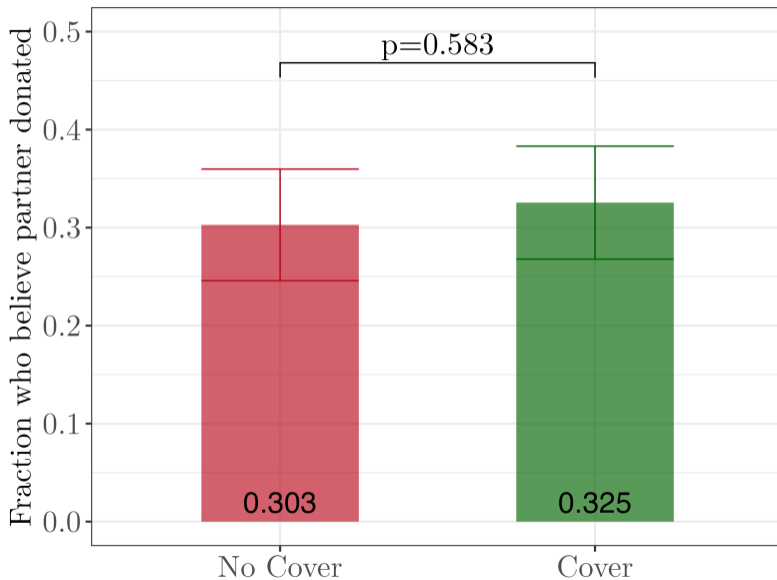
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Reduced-credibility version: willingness to deny bonus payment



Reduced-credibility: beliefs about donation to pro-Black organization



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Overview of Experiment 3

- Pre-registered experiment conducted in March 2021
- Sample of 517 Republicans and Independents with Twitter accounts
- **Outcome:** willingness to Tweet petition to immediately deport all illegal Mexican immigrants
- **Rationale:** video featuring Fox News anchor Tucker Carlson discussing the link between illegal immigration and crime
- **Experimental manipulation:** vary the availability of the social cover in the Tweet

Treatment: **Cover** vs. **No Cover**

Figure: **Cover** condition

I have joined a campaign to immediately deport all illegal Mexicans! Before I joined the campaign, I received a link to this video about how illegals commit more crime: [y2u.be/SDdkkTLCUUQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SDdkkTLCUUQ). Sign this petition to immediately deport all illegal Mexicans: [bit.ly/2OttyJ6](https://www.change.org/p/sign-this-petition-to-immediately-deport-all-illegal-mexicans)



Tucker: Why didn't we know truth about illegals and crime?
Tucker's Thoughts: For years, we were told illegal immigrants were more law-abiding than American citizens. In fact, the ...
[youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SDdkkTLCUUQ)

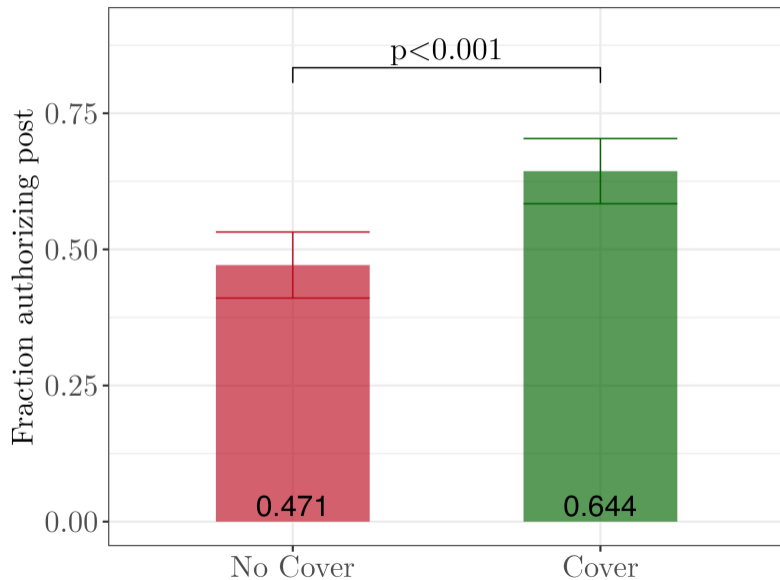
Figure: **No Cover** condition

I have joined a campaign to immediately deport all illegal Mexicans! After I joined the campaign, I received a link to this video about how illegals commit more crime: [y2u.be/SDdkkTLCUUQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SDdkkTLCUUQ). Sign this petition to immediately deport all illegal Mexicans: [bit.ly/2OttyJ6](https://www.change.org/p/sign-this-petition-to-immediately-deport-all-illegal-mexicans)



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Experiment 3: Willingness to Tweet by group



Outline

Theoretical framework

Experiment 1: Liberals expressing politically incorrect views

Experiment 2: Interpretation of politically incorrect dissent

Experiment 3: Expression of anti-immigrant sentiment

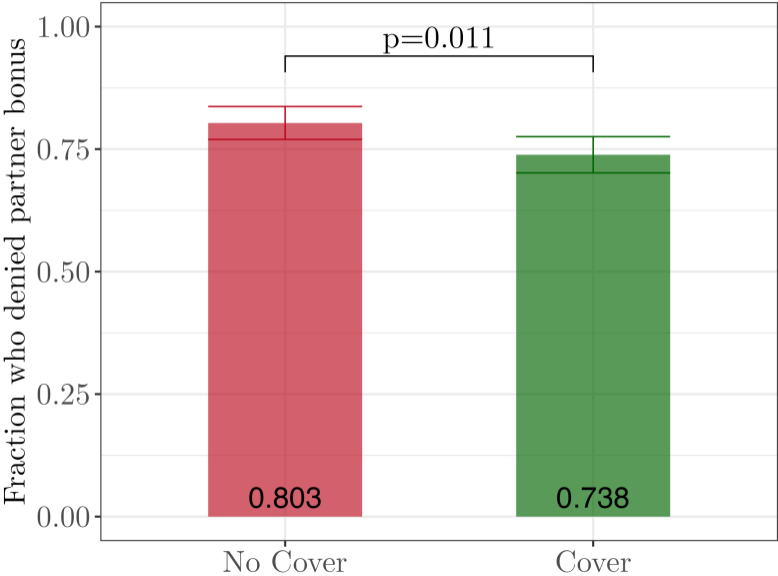
Experiment 4: Interpretation of anti-immigrant sentiment

Conclusion

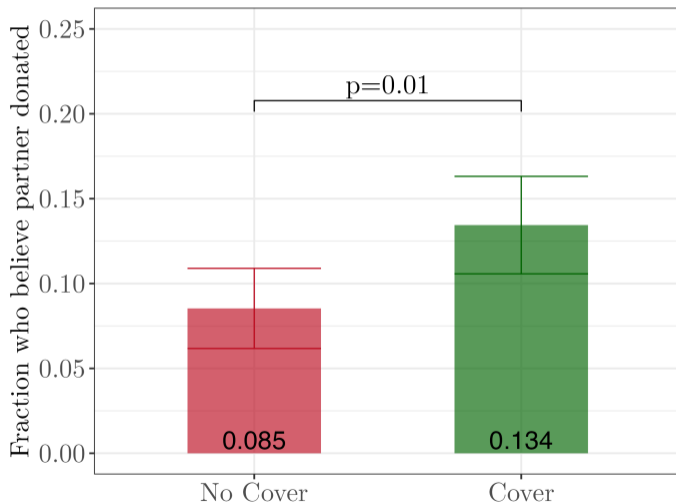
Overview of Experiment 4

- Pre-registered experiment conducted in November 2021 (1,040 Democrats, Independents)
- Each respondent matched with a previous survey participant who posted Tweet:
 - **Cover** condition: “Before joining the campaign...”
 - **No Cover** condition: “After joining the campaign...”

Social judgment: willingness to deny bonus payment



Inference about motives: beliefs about donation to pro-immigrant organization



Outline

Theoretical framework

Experiment 1: Liberals expressing politically incorrect views

Experiment 2: Interpretation of politically incorrect dissent

Experiment 3: Expression of anti-immigrant sentiment

Experiment 4: Interpretation of anti-immigrant sentiment

Conclusion

Summary

- **Rationales facilitate dissent:** Respondents on both sides of the political spectrum are more willing to express dissent when they can appeal to a rationale
- **Rationales change social inferences about the motives behind dissenting:** People impose lower social sanctions on dissenters and are less likely to ascribe their behavior to stigmatized motives when dissenters can appeal to a *credible* rationale

Fake news

- Some studies point to their limited effect at best (Allcott and Gentzkow 2017, Nyhan 2018)
- Others suggest they may influence behavior (Barrera, Guriev, Henry, Zhuravskaya 2020) and point out difficulty to distinguish between real and fake news (Angelucci and Prat 2021)
- This paper: fake news may have a large effect even if they persuade a small subset of the population, because they may be used as a rationale for public behavior
 - Interestingly, Barrera et al (2020) find that presenting incorrect statements by Marine Le Pen increases support for her, and effect stays after presenting correct factual statements

Debunking fake news

- Policy implication: to prevent a given fake news story from spreading, it might be insufficient to debunk it **privately**
- Instead, it is crucial to **generate common knowledge** that the justification is invalid
- Platforms have experimented with warning people articles are fake — debunking may be more effective if platforms generate common knowledge that all users have been debunked before posting fake news
 - Credibility of platforms with the intended audience is key
- GE effects of debunking plausibly much larger than PE effects

Political entrepreneurship and social networks

- Political entrepreneurs can be successful if they provide a rationale for expressing a stigmatized opinion
 - This proliferates the stigmatized opinion – and the rationale itself!
 - Political statements can spread particularly fast if they are useful as rationales
- Example: Nazi party successfully utilized social clubs (Satyanath, Voigtlaender, Voth, 2017), whereas competing ideologies (e.g. communists) failed to do so. Why?
 - To transmit communist ideology in social networks an individual had to be persuaded (and willing to talk!)
 - Not for Nazis! Antisemites could become ambassadors of Nazi ideology without buying it – because it provided an excuse for expressing antisemitism

Political entrepreneurship: AfD

- Cantoni, Hagemeister, Westcott (2019)
 - AfD in 2013: fiscal conservatives
 - AfD in 2017: right-wing party, vote correlated with votes for Nazi party in 1932
 - But even in 2017 the vote for AfD uncorrelated with medieval antisemitic pogroms (so much for persistence!)
- Consistent with AfD...
 - Being xenophobic and providing ample anti-immigrant rationales / narratives
 - Not providing antisemitic rationales (lack of such explicit rhetoric)

Political correctness

- Certain arguments (rationales) cannot be voiced because they may legitimize dangerous or undesirable causes \implies anyone who voices the rationale is seen as supporting the cause
- Rationales fail to shift inference and may even backfire
- Individuals/institutions seeking to suppress dissent can therefore:
 - Undermine credibility of rationales directly
 - Manipulate real or perceived correlation between knowledge of rationale and underlying type:
if I cite a rationale known only to extremists, then I must be an extremist

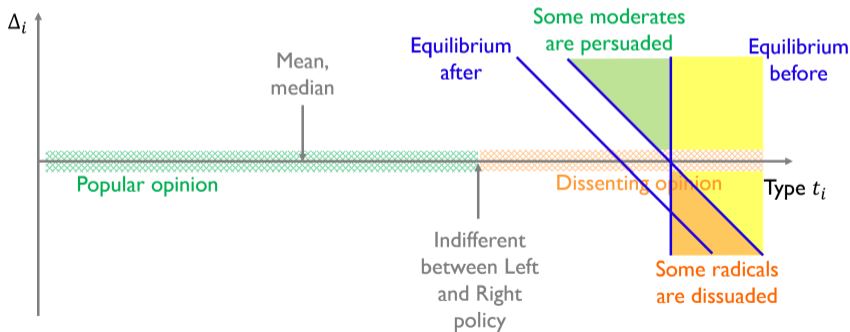
Thank you!

Outline

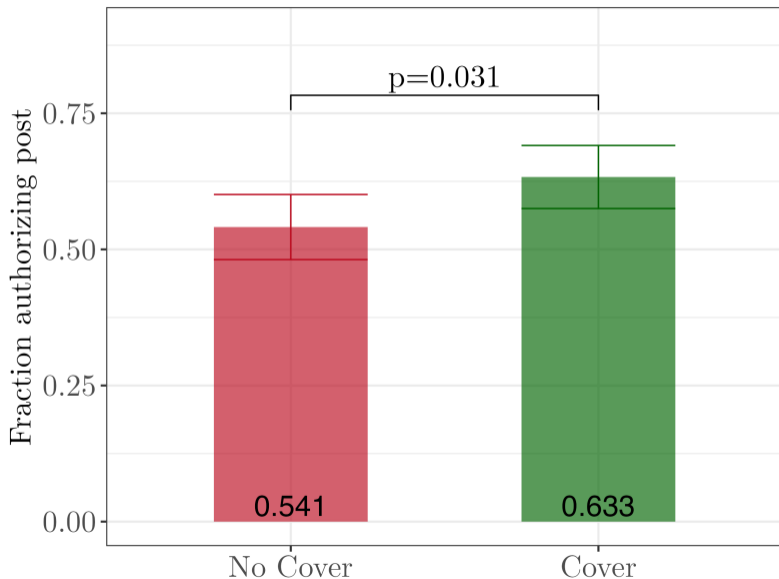
Appendix

Polarizing rationales

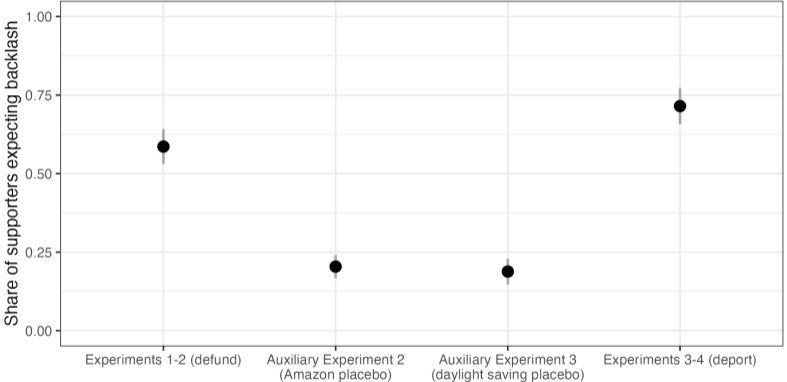
- New info may affect individuals differently: suppose $E(w_i | \text{Info}) = w_0 + \Delta_i$, $\mathbb{E}\Delta_i = 0$
- No net persuasion, but dissenters are less extreme on average
- Then social inference effect encourages more dissent



Replication of defunding experiment: Willingness to Tweet by group



Anticipated social sanctions



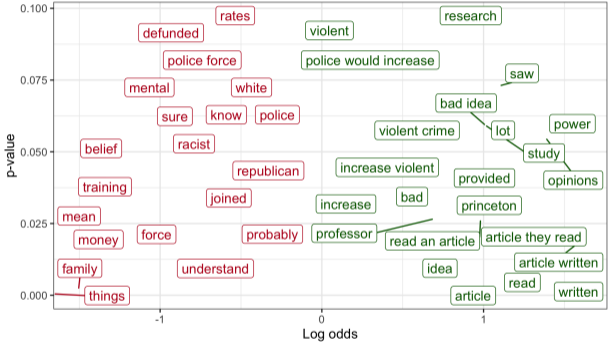
Analysis of open-ended text

- Follow Gentzkow and Shapiro (2010) to calculate Pearson's χ^2 statistic for each phrase p :

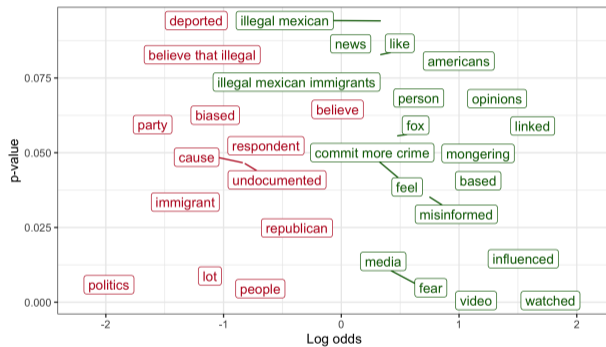
$$\chi_p^2 = \frac{(n_p^R n_{\sim p}^{NR} - n_p^{NR} n_{\sim p}^R)^2}{(n_p^R + n_p^{NR})(n_p^R + n_{\sim p}^R)(n_p^{NR} + n_{\sim p}^{NR})(n_{\sim p}^R + n_{\sim p}^{NR})}$$

- n_p^R , n_p^{NR} : number of times p appears across all responses in the *Cover* condition and *No Cover* condition, respectively
- $n_{\sim p}^i$: total number of times a phrase that is *not* p appears in condition i
- Higher when use of p is more asymmetric, lower for phrases used rarely across both conditions (prevents overfitting)
- Normalize such that positive = more characteristic of *Cover*, negative = more characteristic of *No Cover*

Anti-defunding inference: Open-ended responses



Pro-deportation inference: Open-ended responses



Intuition (1)

- Sender and receiver
- Both are first exposed to an anti-immigrant rationale
- Sender then chooses whether to take visible anti-immigration action (e.g., donation)
- Receiver observes sender's decision and makes inference about sender's motives
- Agents differ on two (privately-known) dimensions: tolerance/intolerance and whether they are persuaded by the rationale
- Sender's utility: expressive term consistent with their type + social image (receiver inferring that the sender shares their tolerance type)

Intuition (2)

- Consider situation in which rationale for donating to the anti-immigrant organization is privately known to both the sender and the receiver, but it is not common knowledge
 - Since the receiver is not aware that the sender has been exposed to the rationale, the receiver will infer that the sender is intolerant if he decides to donate, and the sender may thus choose not to donate
- If the rationale is common knowledge:
 - The receiver understands that donation could have been driven by intolerance or by persuasion
 - If being persuadable is less stigmatized than being intolerant, the common knowledge of the justification reduces the social cost of donating and increases donation rates by allowing intolerant senders to pool with agents with a “good reason to donate”