

The Political Impact of Affective Polarization: How Partisan Animus Shapes COVID-19 Attitudes

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ABSTRACT

Affective polarization is a defining feature of 21st century American politics—partisans harbor considerable dislike and distrust of those from the other party. Does this animus have consequences for citizens' opinions? Such effects would highlight not only the consequences of polarization, but also shed new light onto how citizens form preferences more generally. Normally, this question is intractable, but the outbreak of the novel coronavirus allows the researchers to answer it. They find that affective polarization powerfully shapes citizens' attitudes about the pandemic, as well as the actions they have taken in response to it. However, these effects are conditional on the local severity of the outbreak, as the effects decline in areas with high caseloads—threat vitiates partisan reasoning. The authors' results clarify that closing the divide on important issues requires not just policy discourse but also attempts to reduce inter-partisan hostility.

The rise of affective polarization—the tendency for partisans to dislike and distrust those from the other party (Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes 2012)—is one of the most striking developments of 21st century American politics (Pew Research Center 2019). Affective polarization has wide-ranging effects on our social and economic lives: for example, it shapes how much time we spend with our families, where we want to work and shop, and who we want to date (Iyengar et al. 2019). But to what extent does affective polarization shape our politics? The answer is surprisingly unclear: “little has been written on this topic [i.e., the political effects], as most studies have focused on the more surprising apolitical ramifications” (Iyengar et al. 2019, 139).¹ Here, we take up a crucial aspect of that question: does affective polarization shape policy beliefs?

We argue that it does. As animus towards the other party increases, partisans become more motivated to distinguish themselves from the other party. They do so by taking positions on new issues that match those of their own party—and differ from the other party. This implies that those who are the most affectively polarized should be the most likely to adopt their party’s positions on the issues.

While this argument is straightforward, testing it is difficult given the inherent endogeneity between policy beliefs, affective polarization, and elite issue positions. If we find that those who are more affectively polarized also hold more extreme beliefs, is that due to affective polarization driving beliefs (as we argue above), to policy beliefs driving animus (i.e., part of why someone dislikes the other side is their positions, see Fiorina 2017), or due to elite polarization simultaneously driving both affective polarization (Rogowski and Sutherland 2016)

¹ Exceptions include work showing how affective polarization affects trust in government (Hetherington and Rudolph 2015), the nationalization of vote choice (Webster and Abramowitz 2017), and political tolerance (Westwood et al. 2019).

and policy beliefs (Levendusky 2009)? Ordinarily, it is not possible to disentangle these possibilities from one another.

But the emergence of the novel COVID-19 pandemic in the winter of 2020 presents us with the conditions to separate these possibilities. We collected data on respondents' levels of affective polarization in 2019, prior to the emergence of the coronavirus, meaning we have a measure of affective polarization that is exogenous to the pandemic. We can thus examine how pre-existing levels of animus shape responses to COVID-19. Because we measure affective polarization prior to the start of the pandemic, our design rules out the aforementioned alternative explanations.

We find strong evidence that affective polarization drives responses to the crisis. In particular, we examine how worried individuals say they are about contracting the virus, the actions they are taking in response to it (i.e., washing their hands, wearing a mask, etc.), and the policies they support to address it (i.e., extending stay-at-home orders). Among partisans who are not affectively polarized, we find little partisan divide in any of these areas. As affective polarization increases, however, partisan gaps grow with Republicans reporting less concern and greater opposition to policies, and Democrats engaging in more protective behaviors. That said, these relationships become muted among partisans who live in areas with large numbers of cases, as in these contexts even those with high levels of partisan animus have good reason to be concerned about the virus (i.e., it is personally salient to them).

Our results have a number of implications not only for addressing COVID-19, but also for theories of opinion formation more generally. Affective polarization has *political* ramifications and thus closing issue divides requires not just policy discourse but also efforts to reduce inter-partisan hostility.

Affective Polarization and Policy Beliefs

Affective polarization is one of the most consequential developments for contemporary political behavior (see Iyengar et al. 2019). When we identify with a political party, or any other social group, we tend to divide the world into a liked in-group (our own party) and a disliked out-group (the other party; see Tajfel and Turner 1979). As a result, we favor our own party, derogate the other, and hence affective polarization emerges.

Affective polarization can shape issue positions through party cue-taking. While cue-taking affects issue positions more broadly (i.e., Lenz 2012), affective polarization adds a twist. Not only are affectively polarized voters attracted to their own party's positions, but they are also repelled by the other party's positions—those positions function as a sort of “anti-cue,” telling them what *not* to do (Nicholson 2012). So as affective polarization increases, individuals increasingly seek out their party's positions, and reject those from the other side. Doing so allows them to differentiate themselves from the other party (Tajfel and Wilkes 1963), thereby protecting their own self-conception (Fein and Spencer 1997). In this way, partisan animus itself shapes the process of party cue-taking in the contemporary political environment.

Demonstrating that affective polarization affects policy beliefs, however, is surprisingly complicated. There is an empirical relationship between issue positions and partisan animus but, as Bougher (2017) explains, interpreting the original source of this relationship is complicated. Indeed, the relationship between issue beliefs and affective polarization could stem from three possible scenarios: (1) animus drives cue-taking on issues (as just explained), (2) individuals with more extreme policy positions hold more animus because the other party is distant from their political views, or (3) elite issue polarization is leading separately to both public issue divides (Levendusky 2009) and affective polarization among the public (Webster and

Abramowitz 2017, Rogowski and Sutherland 2016). As a result, it is difficult to determine if partisan animus affects political views—i.e., whether policy positions are undergirded by affective dislike beyond substantive considerations.

To circumvent this problem, we need a measure of affective polarization taken *prior to the emergence of an issue*. By using an ex ante measure, we ensure that affective polarization (at time 1) occurs earlier than the issue positions (at time 2) and can rule out the possibility that existing elite polarization on the issue lead to both partisan animus and issue positions, or that existing issue attitudes are the cause of affective polarization. Yet, the persistence of existing issues on the policy agenda and the unpredictability of new issues emerging onto the agenda make it extremely difficult to use an ex ante measure (and, to our knowledge, has not been done). The novel COVID-19 pandemic, however, allows us to consider an issue as it emerges.

But to accurately test the animus-issue linkage, we need measures of affective polarization that were recorded before COVID-19 began to spread. If we instead used a measure of affective polarization taken *after* COVID-19 began to spread around the country, the issue itself—and politicians' reactions to it—could shape levels of affective polarization. For example, Democrats' levels of affective polarization might not only reflect underlying animus toward President Trump, but also how he specifically responded to COVID-19 (i.e., downplaying its severity, refusing to acknowledge its existence in the U.S. for several weeks, etc.). If we see that this measure of affective polarization is related to attitudes about the pandemic, then it could be simply reflecting politicians' reactions to the crisis. We thus must use pre-pandemic measures of affective polarization—paired with attitudes toward the pandemic measured once it emerged — to determine whether partisan animus shapes issue positions.

The partisan difference in elite responses to the pandemic suggests why affective polarization might play a key role in driving issue positions here. From the beginning of the outbreak, Democratic politicians, much more so than Republican ones, expressed greater concern about the virus, implored the public to take more precautions, and supported more restrictive policies (Lipsitz and Pop-Eleches 2020). President Trump—with his dismissal of the virus, demands to reopen the economy, and refusal to wear a mask—may be the apotheosis of this tendency, but he is hardly an exception; nearly all Democratic governors took swifter and more public actions to combat the virus than Republican ones did (Fowler, Kettler, and Witt 2020).

In line with the aforementioned logic that increasing levels of out-group animus increase identity motivations to follow party cues, we expect the following pattern: as affective polarization increases, Democrats will express more concern about the virus, be more willing to take actions to prevent its spread (e.g., wash their hands more, avoid large crowds, cancel travel, etc.), and be more supportive of policies to stop the virus (e.g., stay-at-home orders) (*hypothesis 1a*). Conversely, among Republicans we expect that as affective polarization increases, worries about COVID-19 will decrease, there will be a lower likelihood of taking actions to prevent its spread, and less support of policies to stop the spread of the virus (*hypothesis 1b*). Our argument is not simply that partisan gaps have emerged; that point has been thoroughly documented elsewhere (e.g., Allcott et al. 2020, Gadarian et al. 2020). Instead, our argument is that affective polarization, at least partially, drives these gaps, since those with more animus toward the other party will seek out the most distinct positions from that party.

Our argument implicitly invokes partisan motivated reasoning since we posit partisans have a directional motivation in forming opinions to cohere with their partisan group and confirm their identities (e.g., Leeper and Slothuus 2014). While this type of reasoning

predominates highly political situations (Groenendyk and Krupnikov Forthcoming) salience can mitigate it (Mullinix 2016). High-salience issues can prompt an accuracy motivation, whereby individuals aim to process information based on the “best” available (empirical) evidence rather than to affirm an identity (Druckman 2012, Bayes et al. 2020). In the case of COVID-19, this will occur as the direct threat of the virus increases (i.e., as the number of cases in one’s area grows). An increase in cases can alter personal experiences (e.g., increasing the likelihood that you or people you know have been infected) which, in turn, vitiates partisan reasoning (e.g., Lerman and McCabe 2017). We thus predict that as the number of COVID-19 cases in one’s area increases, the impact of affective polarization will decrease (*hypothesis 2*).² In short, partisan animus matters, but so too does the geography of the COVID-19 outbreak in the U.S.³ Broadly, our study suggests the possibility that partisan motivated reasoning is conditional, and may be shaped by context.⁴

Data and Measures

Measuring Affective Polarization

As mentioned, our data include measures of affective polarization taken prior to the emergence of COVID-19 in the U.S., which occurred in early 2020. These measures are from a nationally representative survey conducted (for an unrelated study) in the summer of 2019. We

² Following a similar logic, we also might expect the affective polarization effect to decline among those who have had or are vulnerable to COVID-19, but at the time of our data collection, the number of such individuals in our sample was too small to test that possibility.

³ We pre-registered our hypotheses at <https://aspredicted.org/blind.php?x=76az8b>.

⁴ We recognize that there are two alternative, albeit related, theories. First, with regards to cue-taking, it could be that affectively polarized partisans are more (less) likely to cohere with the elites in their (the other) party because they view them as more (less) trustworthy sources. It would thus not be motivated reasoning at work but rather informational cue taking (see Kam 2007). Second, motivated responding suggests that survey respondents express opinions that mimic party leaders in a symbolic fashion, which may not reflect their actual beliefs (e.g., Bullock and Lenz 2019). We do not have the data to decisively rule out either of these alternative theories. However, neither undercuts a larger point about the impact of affective polarization on policy attitudes (or at least survey responses to which politicians and other members of the public attend). That being said, if the partisan differences are purely a function of the motivated responding theory, it is not immediately clear why increasing cases in an area would decrease the general goal to respond in a partisan fashion.

provide details about the survey in Supplementary Information (SI) 1 and 2. The key variables for our purposes are a large battery of items designed to tap affective polarization: feeling thermometer ratings of the parties (i.e., on a scale of 0 to 100 how cold or warm do you feel toward the Republicans/Democrats), a trait battery (i.e., how well do terms like honest, intelligent, selfish etc. describe the parties), trust in the parties, and a set of social distance items that measure how comfortable respondents are interacting with those from each party in various social settings (Druckman and Levendusky 2019). A total of 3,345 respondents completed these questions, which provide our pre-COVID-19 measure of affective polarization. We combine these four measures of affective polarization into an index ($\alpha=.88$), rescaled to lie between 0 and 1, with higher values indicating more affectively polarized responses (the distribution of the variable by party is in SI 3). Following previous research, we focus on the *out-party animus* components of affective polarization (Druckman and Levendusky 2019).⁵

COVID-19-Related Variables

Once the coronavirus began to spread throughout the country, and states responded by shutting down their economies, we re-interviewed respondents between April 4th and April 16th, 2020. A total of 2,484 respondents who answered our 2019 survey completed our re-interview, for a re-contact rate of 74%. We provide more details on our sample, including comparisons to census benchmarks, in SI 1.⁶

⁵ As in earlier work on similar topics (e.g., Druckman and Levendusky 2019), we exclude pure Independents from our study, but retain independents who lean toward a party.

⁶ One concern might be that we measured affective polarization too far in advance of pandemic given the 9-month gap. This would work against us finding a relationship; moreover, in existing work, affective polarization appears to be stable across multi-month time spans, even within the context of an election (Beam et al. 2018). Nonetheless, to be sure, we also included an item, in our COVID-19 survey, asking respondents to rate the other party on the feeling thermometer (the most common measure of affective polarization). The correlation in affective polarization between the waves is 0.76, suggesting a high degree of over-time stability (see also Alwin 1997).

In the re-interview survey, we asked respondents about their reactions toward the COVID-19 outbreak, focusing on three relevant dimensions: (1) how *worried* they are about the virus, both for themselves and for the nation as a whole, measured by a range of items put into an index ($\alpha = 0.89$); (2) which *behaviors* (from a list of 14) they are taking to avoid becoming infected with COVID-19 (i.e., washing their hands more, cancelling travel, etc.); and (3) their support for various *policies* to limit the spread of COVID-19 (i.e., stay-at-home orders, business closures, etc.) again analyzed as an index ($\alpha = 0.73$). The worry and policies variables are recoded to a 0 to 1 scale; the behavior variable is treated as a count. Full wording for all items is provided in SI 2.

[Insert Figure 1 About Here]

Figure 1 shows Kernel density plots (separately for Democrats and Republicans) for each of the three dependent variables. The plots show the average Democrat is more worried, is more likely to change behaviors, and is more supportive of policies to stop the spread of infections, consistent with other analyses showing partisan gaps in these areas (e.g., Allcott et al. 2020, Gadarian et al. 2020). There is, however, significant overlap in the attitudes of Republicans and Democrats, which suggests the possibility that something moderates the relationship between partisanship and COVID-19 attitudes.

To capture threat from the disease, we use counts of cases in each respondent's county, as reported by the *New York Times* (specifically, the three-day moving average of cases).⁷ Because cases and deaths are correlated at 0.99, substituting deaths yields substantively identical results. Figure 2 contains scatter plots for each of the dependent variables (on the y-axes) along with the

⁷ The data are available at: <https://github.com/nytimes/covid-19-data>. Also, because the case counts are measured at the county level, in the models including this variable, we cluster standard errors at the county level to account for this dependence in our data.

number of cases in the respondent's county (on the x-axes), as well as a loess smoother to show the non-parametric, bivariate relationship between the two. Because the relationship is non-linear (especially for low levels of cases), as well the long right-tail of cases (i.e., a small number of areas, such as New York City and Seattle, with extremely high rates of infection), we use the natural log of cases in all of our models.

[Insert Figure 2 About Here]

Models of COVID-19 Attitudes

We test our hypotheses by regressing our dependent variables—worry, behavior, and policy support—on our three main explanatory variables: (1) a dummy variable for partisanship (coded 1 if the respondent is a Republican and 0 if the respondent is a Democrat); (2) the respondent's level of affective polarization⁸; (3) the logged cases in the respondent's county. We also interact all three variables since our hypothesis is that partisan gap should be strongest among affectively polarized respondents living in counties with few cases. We further control for the population of the respondent's county (i.e., a per-capita adjustment).

The first wave of our original survey also included an exhaustive set other demographic variables that could affect COVID-19 attitudes such as age, gender, race and ethnic identity, news habits, ideology, and cultural and economic issue attitudes. The re-interview wave included measures of pre-existing health conditions. We include these measures as control variables in our models; the full list of control items appears in the SI 2.

For each of the dependent variables, we run four models, adding additional control variables with each model. Our first model is the simple model with just our key independent

⁸ The affective polarization questions were embedded in a question wording experiment. We therefore control for this treatment in each of the models as well, though we note that this does not affect our ultimate substantive conclusions (see SI 2 for a discussion).

variables. Our second model includes demographic controls, the respondent's COVID-19-related health risks, and a dummy variable if the respondent lives in a state with a Republican governor (to control for differences in policy across states). Our third model includes controls for the respondent's partisan identity, political interests, issue positions, as well as a measure of county partisanship (measured here by Trump 2016 vote share)—each interacted with the Republican dummy variable. The fourth model includes measures related to the respondent's news sources and social media use in addition to the previous set of controls. Our goal is to show that the results are robust to numerous different model specifications. Indeed, our results are extremely consistent across these different models.

We also run different estimation approaches for the behavior and policy variables. Although the behavior variable is normally distributed, we estimate models using both OLS and a negative binomial approach since the measure is technically a count of behaviors. The figures in the main text present results from the OLS model while the negative binomial results are in SI 5. For the policy dependent variable, we present the results of the OLS model. However, the majority of the values of the dependent variable—for *both* Democrats and Republicans—are clustered at the most supportive values. For this reason, in the supplemental information, we show that the results are robust to a Tobit model (SI 6).

Results

We display the full set of coefficients from all the models (including alternative estimation approaches) in SI 4-6. In the main text, we focus on graphical depictions generated from those analyses that test our core hypotheses. These appear in Figures 3-5.⁹ Each graph shows the marginal effect of the Republican dummy variable at different levels of affective

⁹ The figures are based on the models with the full set of control variables. Also, in SI 7-9, we present figures for each of the questions that make up the dependent variable scales individually.

polarization—that is, the difference in the expected value of the dependent variable for Republicans minus the expected value of the dependent variable for Democrats.¹⁰ For each dependent variable, we include separate plots for a low number of cases (the 25th percentile) and a high number of cases (the 75th percentile). If our argument is correct, then we should find that as affective polarization increases, the gap between the parties increases as well (i.e., the marginal effect of partisanship increases; this is the test of hypothesis 1). But we should also find that this relationship is muted in areas with large numbers of cases, as all citizens are more concerned about the virus. Simply put, we should see a steeper slope (larger marginal effect) in areas with low cases relative to high cases; this is the test of hypothesis 2.

In Figure 3, we present the marginal effect of being a Republican (as opposed to a Democrat) on worry, as affective polarization increases. In the first panel, which presents the relationship between partisanship and affective polarization in areas with few cases, we see that affective polarization drives the partisan gap: when affective polarization is low, partisans are indistinguishable from one another, but when affective polarization is high, partisans significantly diverge. In contrast, the second panel, depicting the pattern in areas with high levels of cases, there is no significant impact of affective polarization (i.e., the confidence interval overlaps zero).¹¹

[Insert Figure 3-5 about here]

Figure 4 presents the same analysis for the behavior dependent variable. Importantly, affective polarization again clearly shapes political outcomes, generating the partisan divides on

¹⁰ The marginal effects plots are based on the models with the full set of control variables, but we find similar results with the other models.

¹¹ When there is a high number of cases, we do see small partisan differences for moderate levels of affective polarization (likely because the majority of our respondents have moderate levels of affective polarization), but these gaps are distinctly smaller than the partisan gaps among those who live in areas with few cases.

COVID-19 behaviors. The difference, however, is that the number of cases does not moderate the relationship between partisanship and the number of behaviors the respondent engages in to avoid infection. Higher numbers of cases do lead to more preventative behaviors overall, but affective polarization increases partisan gaps in behavior regardless of the number of cases. In other words, affectively polarized Republicans in counties with more cases engage in more preventative behaviors than similarly polarized Republicans in counties with fewer cases, but they always engage in significantly fewer behaviors than Democrats. That cases do not have a significant moderating effect on behaviors may reflect the highly politicized nature of this outcome, particularly with the members of the Trump administration—and many Republican elected officials—choosing not to model behaviors such as wearing face-masks (e.g., Green et al. 2020).

Turning next to Figure 5, we see that when it comes to policy support, affective polarization once again shapes opinions. Here, however, much like with worry the number of cases moderates the relationship. Although there is a significant partisan difference among the affectively polarized when the number of infections is low, there is no statistically significant difference between Republicans and Democrats in the counties with high numbers of cases. We note that support for policies aimed at preventing the spread of infections had majority support among Republicans at the time of the re-interview. As a result, it is no surprise that in areas with a significant number of COVID-19 infections, partisan gaps disappear.

[Insert Figure 6 About Here]

In Figure 6, we use the same models to present a different perspective on the results, now focusing on the marginal effect of affective polarization for Democrats and Republicans in low- and high-case counties. The goal here is to see which party is causing the partisan gaps at higher

levels of affective polarization by considering how a unit increase in affective polarization affects the likelihood of worrying, changing behavior, and supporting policy.

For worry about COVID-19 and support for COVID-19 policies, the marginal effect of affective polarization is significant and negative for Republicans in counties with few cases; the confidence intervals for the other marginal effects overlap with 0. Increases in affective polarization only have an effect on Republicans in counties with low cases, suggesting that for these two dependent variables the partisan gaps are driven largely by affectively polarized Republicans.

When it comes to behaviors, however, the only statistically significant marginal effect for affective polarization is among *Democrats* in counties with few cases—these individuals are engaging in preventative behaviors (even though they likely do not need to do so). At the same time, in counties with large outbreaks, the absolute size of the marginal effects for both Democrats and Republicans are still equivalent to a full behavior in both cases—even if the confidence intervals overlap with zero. That might explain why the partisan gap remains in those counties: the difference *within* parties between the affectively polarized is smaller, but since the parties move in opposite directions the partisan gap remains the same.

Overall, the results make clear that the partisan gaps observed in the data are a function of affective polarization, suggesting that it is cue-taking, driven by a desire to differentiate oneself from the other party, that divides the parties on this issue. This type of partisan reasoning, however, is blunted when real-world threats become salient: in areas with substantial numbers of infections, the effects of animus are more muted, as all citizens respond to the outbreak. Put slightly differently, when there is little personal risk, affective polarization drives

responses but as the risk of infection triggers respondents' accuracy motivation, the effects of affective polarization wane.

With regards to two of our dependent variables, worry and policy support, we see that the effect of affective polarization is most pronounced among Republicans. This pattern makes sense: even Democrats in low severity locations take the disease seriously (likely taking the cue from Democratic politicians), so as the local severity increases, their attitudes do not change as they have effectively encountered a ceiling effect. In contrast, because Republicans start out with much less concern, as disease severity increases their behavior begins to look more like Democrats'. This also suggests that when the virus spreads to previously low-infection areas—many of which have more Republican voters—these individuals may change their behavior as a result.

Conclusion

While scholars, pundits, and citizens often invoke affective polarization as driving citizens' reactions on issues, there has, to date, been no direct evidence that it does. We leveraged unique data to offer the first evidence that affective polarization shapes policy attitudes. As polarization increases, partisans are motivated to distinguish themselves from the other party. They can do so by following the positions endorsed by their party's elites and rejecting those endorsed by the other party's elites. Real-world threat—in our case, a high level of infections in one's county— tempers that relationship since it moves individuals away from partisan motivations towards a desire to rely on evidence.

These findings have important implications for understanding how to best combat COVID-19. Since affective polarization underlies partisan gaps, policymakers will need to devise different strategies to bring the parties together on these issues. Simply highlighting areas

of commonality, scientific edicts, or economic forecasts is not enough, instead they will need to ameliorate partisan animus to shrink the gaps. This would require, for example, correcting misperceptions about the parties (Ahler and Sood 2018), priming superordinate identities (Levendusky 2018), and/or fostering inter-party contact/dialogues (Wojcieszak and Warner 2020). The results also offer novel insights for theories of partisan reasoning insofar as they show how such thinking can drive opinions but also how real-world threats can alter motivations.

More broadly, our findings highlight that partisan animus and issue positions are endogenous to one another. Prior work argues that issue positions can affect partisan animus (e.g., Orr and Huber Forthcoming), but our work shows that the reverse is also true: partisan animus shapes the positions individuals take on particular issues. So, through cue-taking, animus drives the issue positions that individuals adopt. Policy differences between the parties are not simply a function of different information (Gerber and Green 1999, Fowler 2020), or different values (Goren 2005), but rather of partisan animus as well. This is a substantial finding insofar as a large literature reveals the *social* consequences of affective polarization (e.g., on friendships, romantic relationships, business transactions, etc. [Iyengar et al. 2019]), but scant work has been able to isolate *political* consequences, due to the data difficulties we explicated. We show clear political consequences on policy perspectives.

Our results also provide insight into why, despite a dramatic rise in affective polarization in the U.S., there has not been a concomitant rise in policy polarization among the public (e.g., Fiorina and Abrams 2008). Specifically, COVID-19 is completely novel, and the elite parties divided very clearly and cleanly on this issue. But this is not the case for most issues. Many issues—taxes, abortion, health care, etc.—predate the contemporary rise in affective polarization, and so the parties were already sorted on these issues before partisan animus

became a key consideration. So on most issues, the effects of partisan animus on positions will be modest, as cue-taking had already occurred for other reasons (Lenz 2012, Levendusky 2009).¹² Much of this effect of partisan animus occurs on these new and emerging issues (or when positions change rapidly), suggesting the importance of studying these issues to observe these phenomena as they occur. As the political agenda changes in the future, we might expect affective polarization to play a notable role in driving responses. This would be a concerning trend insofar as it suggests a non-substantive, affect-laden basis for opinions. This highlights the importance of future work to track the impact of affective polarization and to work towards ameliorating it.

¹² Further, cue-taking (the mechanism here) is restricted to those with higher levels of political knowledge (Bakker et al. 2020), and these individuals are also more likely to adopt their party's positions *ex ante*.

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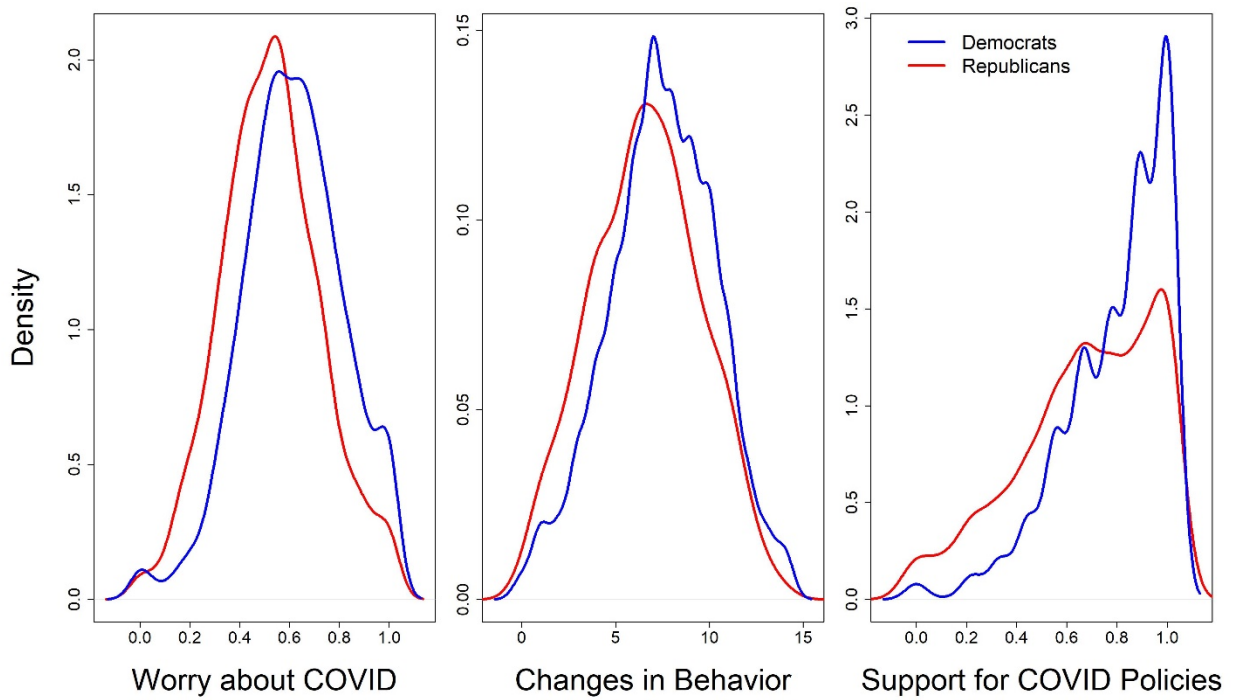
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Figure 1. COVID-19 attitudes and behaviors by party.



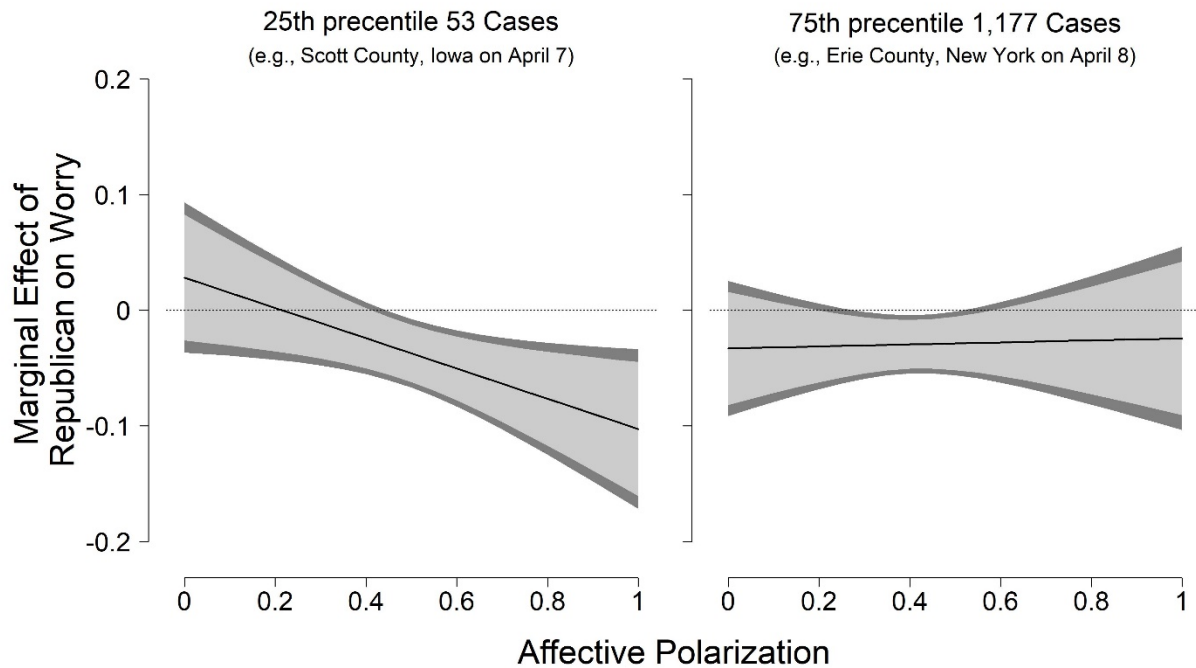
Kernel density plots.

Figure 2. COVID-19 attitudes and behaviors by number of cases in a county.



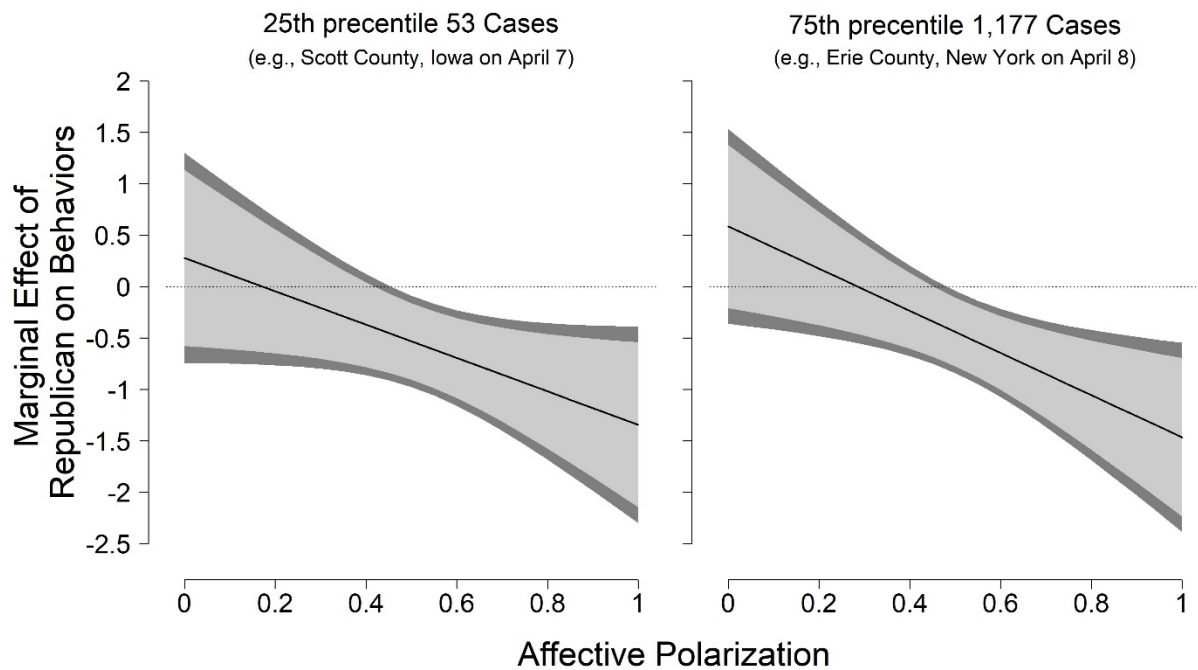
Dots represent respondents with jitter added to make cases at same coordinates visible. Black line represents a Lowess smoother with a smoother span of 0.5.

Figure 3. Affectively polarized Republicans are less worried about COVID-19 if there are few cases in the county.



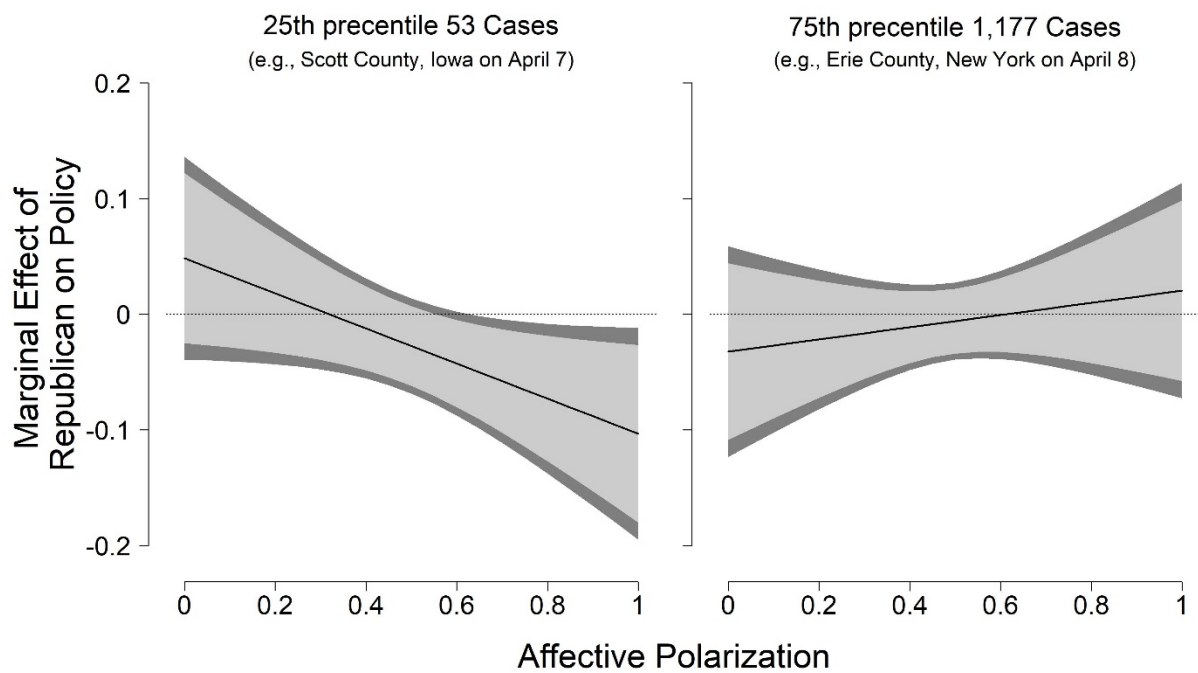
Results from OLS model 4 in SI 4. Light grey shaded areas represent 90% confidence intervals with darker grey areas indicating 95% confidence intervals.

Figure 4. Affectively polarized Republicans change fewer behaviors in response to COVID-19.



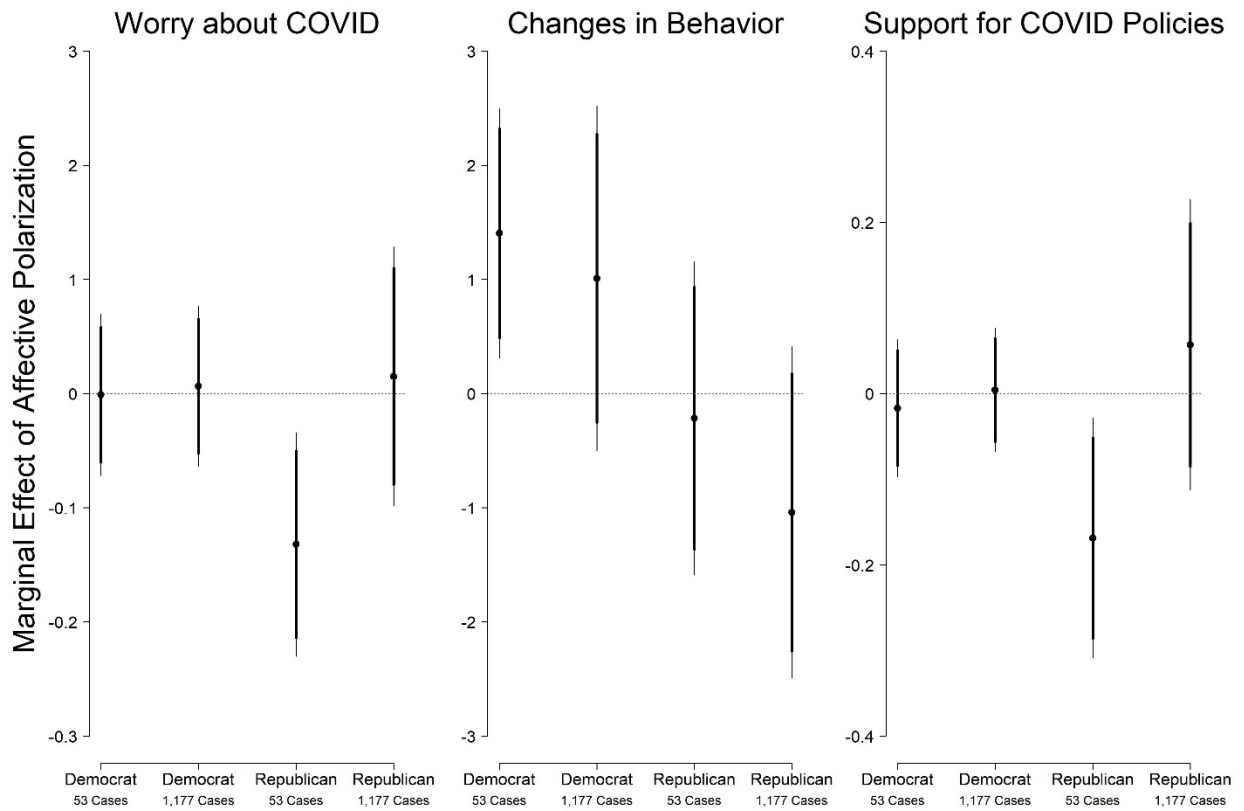
Results from OLS model 4 in SI 5. Light grey shaded areas represent 90% confidence intervals with darker grey areas indicating 95% confidence intervals.

Figure 5. Affectively polarized Republicans are less supportive of policies combatting COVID-19 if there are few cases in the county.



Results from OLS model 4 in SI 6. Light grey shaded areas represent 90% confidence intervals with darker grey areas indicating 95% confidence intervals.

Figure 6. Marginal effect of affective polarization by party and number of cases.



For Worry about COVID-19, results from OLS model 4 in SI 4. For Changes in Behavior, results from OLS model 4 in SI 5. For Support for COVID-19 Policies, results from OLS model 4 in SI 6. Thicker lines represent 90% confidence intervals with thinner lines indicating 95% confidence intervals.

Supplementary Information 1: Sample

The survey was conducted using Bovitz Inc. (<http://bovitzinc.com/index.php>). They provide an online panel of approximately one million respondents recruited through random digit dialing and empanelment of those with internet access. As with most internet survey samples, respondents participate in multiple surveys over time and receive compensation for their participation. Bovitz Inc. has been used extensively in other political science research (e.g., Howat 2019, Druckman and Levendusky 2019) including pilot data collection for the American National Election Studies.

The pre-COVID-19 survey was implemented over 3 waves in July and early August, 2019. The second wave included our main affective polarization measures to which 3,345 responded.¹³ The re-contact occurred in April, 2020, for the COVID-19 items. Of the 3,345 who had answered all of the affective polarization questions, a total of 2,484 responded in the re-contact, for a re-contact rate of 74% (in terms of those analyzed in our main models).¹⁴ While response to the COVID-19 wave is correlated with various respondent characteristics (e.g., higher income, older age, political interest), the composition of our final sample used here matches benchmarks well. This is shown in the below tables that presents the demographics of our COVID-19 sample to 2018 benchmarks from the U.S. Census Bureau, via the American Community Survey.

Age

Age Category	Our Sample (%)	Census Benchmark
18-24	9.42%	12.08
25-34	19.61%	17.87
35-50	35.04%	24.54
51-65	24.96%	24.88
Over 65	10.97%	20.65

Gender Identity

Gender Identity	Our Sample (%)	Census Benchmark
Female	50.82%	50.8
Male	48.19%	49.2
Transgender/None	0.99%	-- ¹⁵

Education Level

Educational Attainment	Our Sample (%)	Census Benchmark (%)
Did not complete high school	2.12%	12

¹³ This three distinct waves were for reasons unrelated to this project. Also, the affective polarization measures in the survey varied the target such that some answered the conventional items asking about the Democratic and Republican parties, while others were asked about partisans who varied in terms of the amount they discussed politics (rarely, occasionally, frequently) and/or their ideology (liberal, moderate, conservative). These variations do not affect the results we present here (see S2). That is, when we include variables for the experimental conditions they do not change our findings.

¹⁴ Of these, 360 are pure Independents and thus excluded from our main analyses.

¹⁵ The U.S. Census Bureau does not currently ask about transgender identity, so there is no government-provided benchmark for that quantity. Flores et al. (2016) estimate that less than 1 percent of Americans identify as transgender, consistent with our estimates here.

High school graduate	20.84%	27.1
Associates Degree/Some College	41.98%	28.9
Bachelor's Degree	25.80%	19.7
Advanced Degree	9.27%	12.3

Annual Family Income before Taxes

Income Category	Our Sample (%)	Census Benchmark (%) ¹⁶
\$30,000 or less	27.28%	29.4
\$30,000 - \$69,999	38.14%	30.3
\$70,000 - \$99,999	16.86%	12.5
\$100,000 - \$200,000	15.51%	20.9
Above \$200,000	2.22%	6.9

Primary Racial Group

Primary Race	Our Sample (%)	Census Benchmark
Caucasian (White)	69.66%	72.2
African-American	14.47%	12.7
Hispanic or Latino	9.36%	18.3
Asian-American	4.13%	5.6
Native American	0.87%	< 1
Other	1.52%	5

Across categories, our sample matches the Census benchmarks fairly well. Our biggest discrepancies are that (1) we under-estimate senior citizens, (2) we under-estimate the least well-educated (and over-estimate those with some college or a bachelor's degree), and (3) under-estimate the top quarter of the income distribute. These are well-known limitations of any survey sampling procedure, not just our own—problems #1 and #2 are linked in that those populations are not online, and those with high incomes are also typically under-represented across all survey modes. The other significant gap is that we under-estimate the fraction of the population that is Hispanic or Latino, but this is in part a methodological difference. The Census asks about ethnicity (Hispanic/Latino) separately from race, whereas we combine them into one question. As a result, our estimates for Hispanic/Latino citizens are measuring a different construct from the Census benchmark. Overall, however, our sample does fairly well in matching the Census benchmarks across these different categories.

¹⁶ The Census categories for income are slightly different than the ones we use. They record income as: \$34,999 or below, \$35,000 - \$74,999, \$75,000 - \$99,999, \$100,000 - \$199,999, and \$200,000 or greater.

Supplementary Information 2: Full question wordings and coding for measures

Dependent Variables

- **Worry about COVID-19**

The variable is built using 2 different grids with six items each. Each has the same four response options.

For each of the following areas, how worried are you about the long-term impact of the coronavirus on the country in general?

Public Health
National Economy
Education
Social Relations
Entertainment/Sports
The 2020 Election

For each of the following areas, how worried are you about the long-term impact of the coronavirus on you and your family personally?

Physical Health
Mental Health
Finances
Education
Friendships
Personal interests/hobbies

<0> Not at all worried; <.3333> Not too worried; <.6667> Somewhat worried;
<1> Very worried.

The final variable is the mean response to the twelve items.

- **Changed Behaviors**

The variable is built as a count of the number of items checked based on the following question.

We're interested in how people are responding to the coronavirus. In the past few days, which of the following, if any, have you done to protect yourself from getting the coronavirus, also known as COVID-19? Please check all that apply.

Washed your hands more frequently
Worked from home
Used hand sanitizer
Cancelled planned travel
Avoided gatherings of more than 10 people
Tried to stay at least 6 feet away from other people
Worn a face mask
Worn gloves
Did not go to a grocery store to avoid contact with others

Ordered grocery delivery to avoid going to the grocery store
 Cooked at home to avoid ordering food handled by others
 Went outside less frequently to avoid contact with others
 Stayed at home entirely
 Bought extra food

- Policies to Fight COVID-19
 Many states have required non-essential businesses to close to help prevent the spread of the coronavirus. Do you disagree or agree that this is a necessary policy to combat the spread of the coronavirus?

<0> Strongly disagree; <.3333> Somewhat disagree; <.6667> Somewhat agree;
 <1> Strongly agree

Many states and localities have issued rules requiring that residents stay at home to help prevent the spread of the coronavirus. Some say that such stay-at-home orders should be kept in effect until it is certain that the coronavirus will no longer pose a significant public health threat. Others think that the stay at home orders should end as soon as possible to help the economy recover. What do you think?

<0> Strongly support lifting the stay-at-home orders as soon as possible to help the economy; <.3333> Somewhat support lifting the stay-at-home orders as soon as possible to help the economy; <.6667> Somewhat support stay-at-home orders remaining in place until the coronavirus will no longer pose a significant health threat; <1> Strongly support stay-at-home orders remaining in place until the coronavirus will no longer pose a significant health threat

To what extent do you oppose or support local governments fining individuals for violating social distancing rules?

<0> Strongly oppose; <.3333> Somewhat oppose; <.6667> Somewhat support;
 <1> Strongly support

The final variable is the mean response to the three items.

Main Independent Variables

- Republican (Pre-Covid-19 Wave)
 Generally speaking do you consider yourself a...
 <0> Strong Democrat; <0> Weak democrat <0> Independent leans Democrat
 <1> Independent leans Republican; <1> Weak Republican; <1> Strong Republican
 Pure independents are excluded from the analysis.
- Affective Polarization (Pre-Covid-19 Wave)
 Participants read the following introduction prior to answering the affective polarization questions. “We are next going to ask you a set of questions about ordinary people (e.g.,

voters) who are *[Republicans and Democrats / Democrats and Republicans]*. Please take your time, and do your best to answer the questions about these people.”

The participants were then asked the following questions. Where the word “[CONDITION]” currently is placed, the participants saw one of the following options depending on which randomly assigned (experimental) treatment group they were placed in (as noted below these variations do not affect our results here):

1. [Republicans/Democrats]
2. [Republicans/Democrats] who rarely talk about politics.
3. [Republicans/Democrats] who occasionally talk about politics.
4. [Republicans/Democrats] who frequently talk about politics.
5. Moderate [Republicans/Democrats]
6. Moderate [Republicans/Democrats] who rarely talk about politics.
7. Moderate [Republicans/Democrats] who occasionally talk about politics.
8. Moderate [Republicans/Democrats] who occasionally talk about politics.
9. [Conservative Republicans/Liberal Democrats]
10. [Conservative Republicans/Liberal Democrats] who rarely talk about politics.
11. [Conservative Republicans/Liberal Democrats] who occasionally talk about politics.
12. [Conservative Republicans/Liberal Democrats] who frequently talk about politics.

Respondents were then asked our questions to measure affective polarization (as follows).

*Feeling Thermometer*¹⁷

We’d like you to rate how you feel towards [CONDITION] on a scale of 0 to 100, which we call a “feeling thermometer.” On this feeling thermometer scale, ratings between 0 and 49 degrees mean that you feel unfavorable and cold (with 0 being the most unfavorable/coldest). Ratings between 51 and 100 degrees mean that you feel favorable and warm (with 100 being the most favorable/warmest). A rating of 50 means you have no feelings one way or the other. How would you rate your feeling toward these groups? Remember we are asking you to rate ordinary people (e.g., voters) and *not* elected officials or candidates.

It was recoded to a 0 to 1 scale.

Trait Questions

We’d like to know more about what you think about [CONDITION]. Below, we’ve given a list of words that some people might use to describe them. For each item, please indicate how well you think it applies to [CONDITION]: not at all well; not too well; somewhat well; very well; or extremely well.

Terms: Patriotic, Intelligent, Honest, Open-minded, Generous, Hypocritical, Selfish, Mean

Responses: <0> Not at all well, <.25> Not too well, <.50> Somewhat well, <.75> Very well, <1> Extremely well

¹⁷ As mentioned in the text, we also asked the feeling thermometer item again in the COVID-19 wave.

Trust

How much of the time do you think you can trust [CONDITION] to do what is right for the country?

Responses: <0> Almost never, <.25> Once in a while, <.50> About half the time, <.75> Most of the time, <1> Almost always

Social Distance

How comfortable are you having close personal friends who are [CONDITION]?

Responses: <0> Not at all comfortable, <.3333> not too comfortable, <.6667> somewhat comfortable, <1> extremely comfortable.

How comfortable are you having neighbors on your street who are [CONDITION]?

Responses: <0> Not at all comfortable, <.3333> not too comfortable, <.6667> somewhat comfortable, <1> extremely comfortable.

Suppose a son or daughter of yours was getting married. How would you feel if he or she married someone who is a [CONDITION]?

Responses: <0> Not all all upset, <.3333> Not too upset, <.6667> Somewhat upset, <1> Extremely upset

The final variable is the mean response to all the items asked about the respondent's out-party.

The models control for all 12 conditions through dummy variables indicating the frequency of discussion condition and the ideology condition and the interactions for those conditions. *These experimental variations in the measure of affective polarization do not affect the results.*

COVID-19 and Demographic Control Variables

- Household COVID-19 Infection (COVID-19 Wave)

The variable is constructed using the following questions.

Have you personally contracted the coronavirus, as known as COVID-19?

No

I am not sure

Yes, but I have not been tested

Yes, and I have tested positive

I had all the symptoms, but tested negative

(If I am not sure) How unlikely or likely do you think it is that you have caught the coronavirus?

Very unlikely

Somewhat unlikely

Somewhat likely

Very likely

Has someone in your household (i.e., someone that you live with) contracted the coronavirus?

I live alone

No

I am not sure

Yes, but they have not been tested

Yes, and they have been tested positive

They had all the symptoms, but tested negative

(If I am not sure) How unlikely or likely do you think it is that someone in your household has caught the coronavirus?

Very unlikely

Somewhat unlikely

Somewhat likely

Very likely

Variable is coded 1 if the respondent answered they or someone in their house contracted the coronavirus (regardless of the test outcome) or if they said they were not sure, but it was likely that they or someone in their house had the coronavirus. It is coded 0 if they said neither they nor anyone in their house had the coronavirus or said it was unlikely anyone had it.

- Risk of Illness (COVID-19 Wave)

Variable is coded 0 if respondent answered “no” to the following three questions and coded 1 if the respondent answered “yes” to any of the questions.

Do you have children under 4 years old living with you?

Are you or your spouse currently pregnant?

Do you currently have any health conditions that would make the coronavirus especially risk for you, such as asthma, emphysema, or difficulty breathing?

- Work Out of the House (COVID-19 Wave)

Does any of your work currently require you to leave home?

<0> No

<1> Yes, for a little of my work.

<1> Yes, for some of work.

<1> Yes, for all my work.

- Future Income (COVID-19 Wave)

In the coming year, do you think your household income will decrease, stay the same, or increase due to the coronavirus?

<0> Significantly decrease

<.25> Somewhat decrease

<.5> Stay the same

<.75> Somewhat increase
<1> Significantly increase

- **Difficulty Having No Contact (COVID-19 Wave)**
Has it been enjoyable or difficult for you to have less, or even no, in-person contact with people outside of your household? Please use the following scale from 0 to 100, where 0 indicates you enjoy reduced in-person contact, 50 indicates you are indifferent, and 100 indicates that is extremely difficult to have less in-person contact.
Variable recoded to a 0 to 1 scales.
- **Age (Pre-COVID-19 Wave)**
A series of dummy variables with 18-24 as the reference category.
Categories: 25-34; 35-50; 51-65; Older than 65
- **White (Pre-COVID-19 Wave)**
<1> Respondent's primary race is white; <0> Respondent's primary race is African American, Asian American, Hispanic or Latino, or something else.
- **African American (Pre-COVID-19 Wave)**
<1> Respondent's primary race is African American; <0> Respondent's primary race is White, Asian American, Hispanic or Latino, or something else.
- **Asian American (Pre-COVID-19 Wave)**
<1> Respondent's primary race is Asian American; <0> Respondent's primary race is White, African American, Hispanic or Latino, or something else.
- **Hispanic/Latino (Pre-COVID-19 Wave)**
<1> Respondent's primary race is Hispanic or Latino; <0> Respondent's primary race is White, African American, Asian American, or something else.
- **Education (Pre-COVID-19 Wave)**
<0> Less than High school; <.25> High school graduate; <.50> Some college; <.50> Associates degree/2-year degree; <.75> 4 year college degree; <1> Advanced degree
- **Income (Pre-COVID-19 Wave)**
<0> <\$30,000; <.25> \$30,000 - \$69,999; <.50> \$70,000 - \$99,999; <.75> \$100,000 - \$200,000; <1> >\$200,000

Partisan and Ideological Control Variables

- **Partisan Identity (Pre-COVID-19 Wave)**
Respondent is asked the following four questions about their own political parties.

Importance of being a [PARTY] to the survey participant

Responses <0> Not at all important; <.25> Not very important; <.5> Somewhat important; <.75> Very important; <1> Extremely important

How well the term [PARTY] describes the survey participant

Responses: <0> Not at all well; <.25> Not very well; <.5> Somewhat well; <.75> Very well; <1> Extremely well

Frequency with which survey participant uses “we” instead of “they”, when referring to [PARTY]

Responses: <0> Never; <.25> Rarely; <.5> Some of the time; <.75> Most of the time; <1> All of the time

The extent to which the survey participant believes themselves to be a [PARTY]

Responses: <0> Not at all; <.25> Not too much; <.5> Somewhat; <.75> A good deal; <1> A great deal

Final variable is the mean of these items.

- Ideology (Pre-COVID-19 Wave)

Respondent’s reported political ideology

<0> Very liberal; <.1667> Mostly liberal; <.3333> Somewhat liberal; <.5> Moderate; <.6667> Somewhat conservative; <.8333> Mostly conservative; <1> Very conservative

- Issue Positions (Pre-COVID-19 Wave))

The respondent is asked the following eight questions.

Belief on if federal spending on Social Security should be changed or kept the same

Responses: <0> Decreased; <.5> Kept about the same; <1> Increased

Belief on whether there should be public government healthcare plans, private healthcare plans, or some combination

Responses: <0> Only private insurance; <.1667> Mostly private insurance; <.3333> Slightly more private insurance; <.5> Half private insurance and half public insurance; <.6667> Slightly public insurance; <.8333> Mostly public insurance; <1> Only public insurance

Belief on whether the government should provide fewer services to cut spending, or increase spending to provide more services

Responses: <0> Definitely reduce spending/cut services; <.16667> Probably reduce spending/cut services; <.3333> Maybe reduce spending/cut services; <.5> Keep services and spending the same; <.6667> Maybe increase services/raise spending; <.8333> Probably increase services/raise spending; <1> Definitely increase services/raise spending

Belief on whether or not the government has a responsibility to ensure job/standing of living for each person

Responses: <0> Government should definitely leave it to each person; <.1667> Government should probably leave it to each person; <.3333> Government should maybe leave it to each person; <.5> Unsure; <.6667> Government should maybe ensure standard of living; <.8333> Government should probably ensure standard of living; <1> Government should definitely ensure standard of living

Views on abortion

Responses: <0> By law, abortion should never be permitted.; <.25> The law should permit abortion only in case of rape, incest, or when the woman's life is in danger.; <.5> The law should permit abortion for reasons other than rape, incest, or danger to the woman's life, but only after the need for the abortion has been clearly established.; <.75> By law, a woman should always be able to obtain an abortion as a matter of personal choice, but only until a certain point in her pregnancy; <1> By law, a woman should always be able to obtain an abortion as a matter of personal choice.

Whether homosexuals should be legally protected against discrimination

Responses: <0> Definitely should not be protected; <.25> Maybe should not be protected; <.5> Unsure; <.75> Maybe should be protected; <1> Definitely should be protected;

Belief of whether rate of immigration into the US should change, or be kept the same

Responses: <0> Definitely decrease; <.1667> Probably decrease; <.3333> Maybe decrease; <.5> Keep at present level; <.6667> Maybe increase; <.8333> Probably increase; <1> Definitely increase

Whether transgender individuals should be legally protected against discrimination

Responses: <0> Definitely should not be protected; <.25> Maybe should not be protected; <.5>— Unsure; <.75> Maybe should be protected; <1> Definitely should be protected

- Political Interest (Pre-COVID-19 Wave)
<0> Not at all interested; <.25> Not too interested; <.5> Somewhat interested; <.75> Very interested; <1> Extremely interested
- Political Knowledge (Pre-COVID-19 Wave)

The respondent was asked the following five questions.

Majority in Senate and House required to override President's Veto

<0> Cannot override; <0> 1/3; <0> 1/2; <1> 2/3; <0> 3/4; <0> Don't know

Party that has the most members in the House of Representatives

<1> Democrats; <0> Republicans; <0> Tie; <0> Don't know

Branch that determines if a law is constitutional

<0> President; <0> Congress; <1> Supreme Court; <0> Don't know

Current U.S. Vice President

<0> Rex Tillerson; <0> James Mattis; <1> Mike Pence; <0> Paul Ryan; <0>
Don't know

Party that is more conservative at national level

<0> The Democratic Party; <1> The Republican Party; <0> Neither; <0> Don't
know

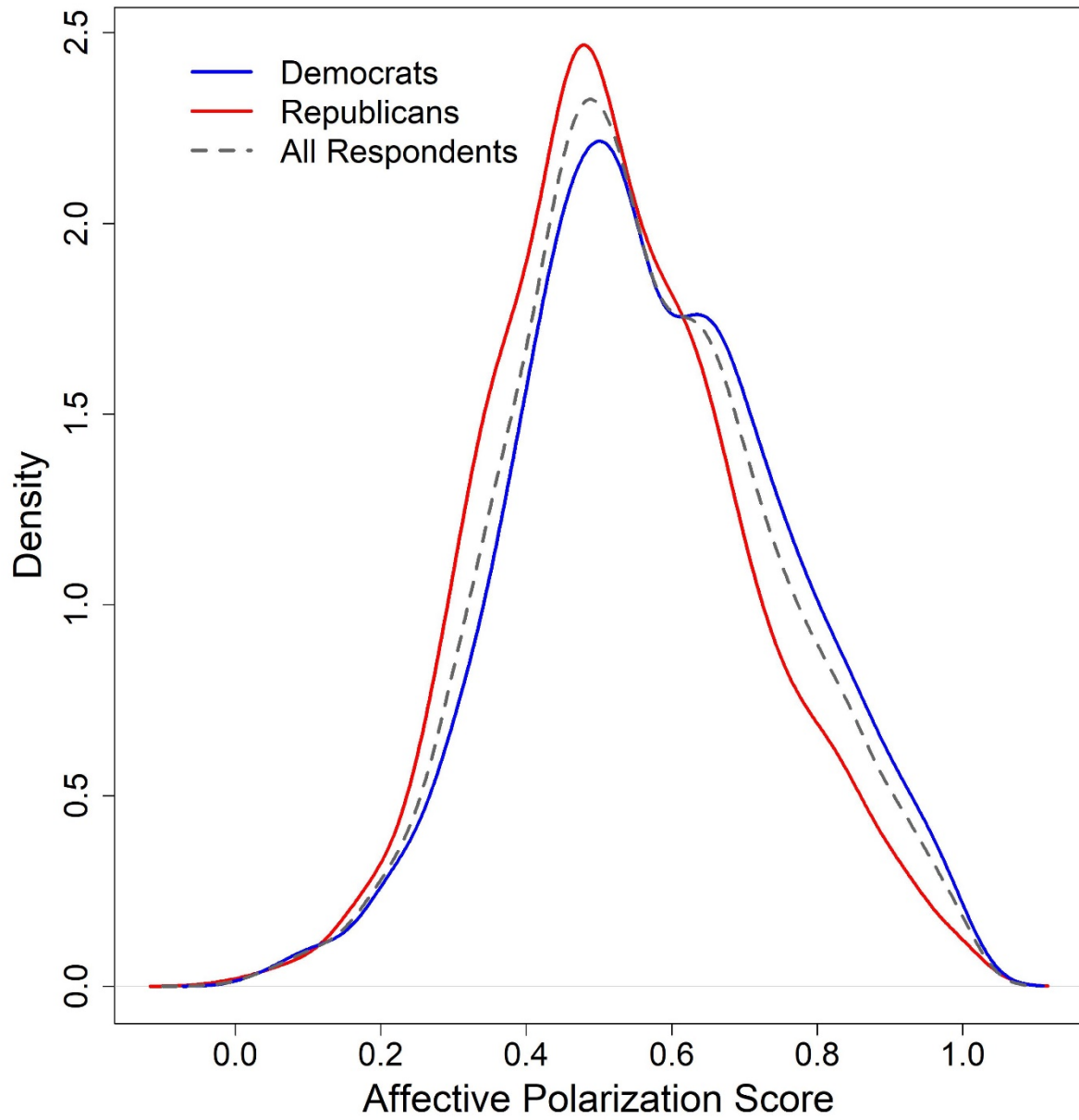
The final variable is the proportion of correct answers.

News Source Control Variables

- Media: Fox News (Pre-COVID-19 Wave)
<1> Respondent reports watching Fox News at least once a month; <0> Respondent does not watch Fox News at least once a month
- Media: CNN (Pre-COVID-19 Wave)
<1> Respondent reports watching CNN at least once a month; <0> Respondent does not watch CNN at least once a month
- Media: MSNBC (Pre-COVID-19 Wave)
<1> Respondent reports watching MSNBC at least once a month; <0> Respondent does not watch MSNBC at least once a month
- NY Times or Washington Post (Pre-COVID-19 Wave)
<1> Respondent reports reading either the *New York Times* or the *Washington Post*; <0> Respondent does not read either the *New York Times* or the *Washington Post*
- Network News (Pre-COVID-19 Wave)
<1> Respondent reports watching ABC, CBS, or NBC news at least once a month; <0> Respondent does not watch ABC, CBS, or NBC news at least once a month
- Local News (Pre-COVID-19 Wave)
<1> Respondent reports watching any local newscast at least once a month; <0> Respondent does not watch any local newscast at least once a month
- Social Media Use (Pre-COVID-19 Wave)
<0> Respondent does not use social media; <0> Respondent does not see news related social media content; <.3333> Respondent sees news related social media content once a day; <.6667> Respondent sees news related social media content 2-4 times a day; <1> Respondent sees news related social media content five or more times a day

Supplementary Information 3

Distribution of affective polarization measure by party. Higher values mean more out-party dislike.



Supplementary Information 4

OLS Models for Worry about COVID-19 DV

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	Coef	SE	Coef	SE	Coef	SE	Coef	SE
Republican	0.137	0.069	0.126	0.067	0.086	0.098	0.083	0.098
Affective Polarization	-0.002	0.066	0.006	0.067	-0.014	0.068	-0.011	0.069
Republican X Affective Polarization	-0.435	0.120	-0.399	0.116	-0.325	0.116	-0.310	0.116
Logged Cases (County)	0.001	0.006	0.000	0.007	-0.003	0.006	-0.004	0.006
Republican X Cases	-0.027	0.011	-0.025	0.010	-0.022	0.010	-0.020	0.010
Polarization X Cases	0.004	0.010	0.003	0.010	0.001	0.011	0.002	0.011
Republican X Polarization X Cases	0.054	0.019	0.050	0.019	0.048	0.019	0.045	0.019
County Population (Millions)	0.002	0.002	0.002	0.002	0.004	0.002	0.004	0.002
Household COVID-19 Infection			0.022	0.013	0.018	0.013	0.017	0.013
Risk of Illness			0.037	0.008	0.034	0.008	0.030	0.008
Out of Work			0.010	0.010	0.009	0.010	0.007	0.010
Future Income			-0.101	0.020	-0.116	0.020	-0.110	0.020
Difficulty Having No Contact			0.141	0.017	0.122	0.017	0.117	0.017
Age (25-34)			0.016	0.018	-0.002	0.018	-0.002	0.018
Age (35-50)			0.034	0.017	0.018	0.017	0.013	0.017
Age (51-65)			-0.003	0.017	-0.015	0.017	-0.015	0.017
Age (Older than 65)			-0.054	0.018	-0.064	0.017	-0.063	0.018
Female			0.011	0.008	0.003	0.008	0.004	0.008
White			-0.039	0.036	-0.036	0.035	-0.027	0.035
African American			0.006	0.036	-0.017	0.036	-0.017	0.036
Asian American			-0.030	0.038	-0.031	0.039	-0.029	0.038
Hispanic/Latino			0.003	0.038	-0.009	0.038	-0.001	0.038
Education			-0.025	0.021	-0.012	0.022	-0.006	0.022
Income			-0.015	0.017	-0.012	0.018	-0.020	0.018
Republican Governor (State)			-0.006	0.009	0.000	0.009	-0.003	0.009
Trump Vote Share (County)					-0.052	0.030	-0.056	0.031
Republican X Trump Vote					0.051	0.049	0.051	0.049
Partisan Identity					0.132	0.026	0.112	0.026
Republican X Partisan Identity					-0.018	0.042	-0.032	0.041
Ideology					0.021	0.030	0.007	0.031
Republican X Ideology					-0.107	0.051	-0.067	0.052
Issue Positions					0.027	0.039	0.027	0.041
Republican X Issue Positions					0.138	0.065	0.106	0.065
Political Interest					0.077	0.026	0.041	0.029
Republican X Political Interest					-0.031	0.041	-0.032	0.042
Political Knowledge					-0.087	0.023	-0.075	0.024
Republican X Political Knowledge					0.000	0.038	-0.007	0.038

Media: Fox News							0.018	0.010
Media: CNN							0.019	0.010
Media: MSNBC							0.017	0.012
NY Times or Washington Post							-0.012	0.010
Network News							0.010	0.012
Local News							0.014	0.014
Social Media Use							0.041	0.014
Experiment (Rarely Talk)	0.008	0.018	0.003	0.018	-0.001	0.017	-0.009	0.017
Experiment (Occasionally)	0.002	0.019	-0.002	0.018	-0.005	0.018	-0.007	0.018
Experiment (Frequently)	-0.018	0.019	-0.019	0.019	-0.019	0.018	-0.026	0.018
Experiment (Moderate)	0.003	0.020	0.006	0.018	0.006	0.018	0.003	0.018
Experiment (Sorted)	-0.016	0.019	-0.017	0.019	-0.023	0.019	-0.027	0.019
Experiment (RarelyX Moderate)	0.016	0.028	0.023	0.027	0.019	0.026	0.034	0.026
Experiment (RarelyX Sorted)	0.046	0.027	0.054	0.027	0.049	0.026	0.060	0.026
Experiment (OccasionallyX Moderate)	-0.034	0.030	-0.020	0.029	-0.021	0.028	-0.015	0.028
Experiment (OccasionallyX Sorted)	0.015	0.027	0.026	0.026	0.024	0.027	0.022	0.027
Experiment (FrequentlyX Moderate)	0.005	0.027	0.007	0.026	0.001	0.025	0.006	0.025
Experiment (FrequentlyX Sorted)	0.064	0.032	0.060	0.031	0.055	0.030	0.062	0.030
Constant	0.593	0.044	0.579	0.058	0.583	0.069	0.558	0.070
N	2062		2054		2034		2012	
Counties	723		723		716		711	
R ²	0.068		0.151		0.208		0.223	

Supplementary Information 5

OLS Models for Changes in Behavior DV

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	Coef	SE	Coef	SE	Coef	SE	Coef	SE
Republican	-0.009	1.014	-0.221	1.061	-0.374	1.416	-0.416	1.370
Affective Polarization	2.177	1.205	2.265	1.392	1.802	1.417	1.911	1.419
Republican X Affective Polarization	-1.455	1.660	-0.856	1.745	-1.227	1.726	-1.072	1.730
Logged Cases (County)	0.230	0.136	0.202	0.159	0.202	0.151	0.178	0.150
Republican X Cases	0.079	0.164	0.103	0.181	0.083	0.170	0.099	0.163
Polarization X Cases	-0.122	0.216	-0.113	0.265	-0.142	0.270	-0.127	0.271
Republican X Polarization X Cases	-0.102	0.260	-0.198	0.289	-0.099	0.279	-0.138	0.273
County Population (Millions)	-0.028	0.032	-0.008	0.027	-0.006	0.025	0.000	0.026
Household COVID-19 Infection			-0.514	0.233	-0.505	0.226	-0.564	0.228
Risk of Illness			0.493	0.116	0.480	0.117	0.462	0.114
Out of Work			-0.353	0.137	-0.302	0.138	-0.311	0.139
Future Income			-1.484	0.262	-1.494	0.269	-1.433	0.263
Difficulty Having No Contact			0.108	0.233	0.038	0.230	-0.024	0.234
Age (25-34)			0.164	0.266	0.160	0.265	0.190	0.267
Age (35-50)			0.802	0.262	0.680	0.256	0.728	0.264
Age (51-65)			0.739	0.260	0.455	0.255	0.588	0.262
Age (Older than 65)			0.950	0.272	0.628	0.270	0.834	0.274
Female			0.500	0.121	0.568	0.127	0.575	0.126
White			-0.578	0.529	-0.530	0.515	-0.341	0.517
African American			-0.558	0.537	-0.449	0.522	-0.367	0.522
Asian American			-0.191	0.596	0.016	0.574	0.059	0.553
Hispanic/Latino			0.021	0.551	0.071	0.545	0.212	0.537
Education			1.123	0.307	0.698	0.311	0.730	0.306
Income			1.077	0.254	0.934	0.252	0.722	0.253
Republican Governor (State)			0.168	0.132	0.194	0.129	0.155	0.129
Trump Vote Share (County)					-0.460	0.417	-0.498	0.424
Republican X Trump Vote					0.570	0.776	0.662	0.777
Partisan Identity					0.526	0.343	0.314	0.344
Republican X Partisan Identity					1.100	0.624	0.902	0.625
Ideology					0.362	0.434	0.248	0.445
Republican X Ideology					0.068	0.721	0.704	0.717
Issue Positions					0.921	0.602	0.852	0.624
Republican X Issue Positions					0.274	0.920	-0.201	0.929
Political Interest					0.774	0.414	0.045	0.452
Republican X Political Interest					-0.996	0.603	-0.890	0.608
Political Knowledge					0.962	0.411	1.013	0.417
Republican X Political Knowledge					-0.138	0.603	-0.239	0.601

Media: Fox News							0.105	0.140
Media: CNN							0.337	0.167
Media: MSNBC							-0.084	0.160
NY Times or Washington Post							0.440	0.137
Network News							0.277	0.162
Local News							0.355	0.177
Social Media Use							0.445	0.175
Experiment (Rarely Talk)	0.580	0.291	0.613	0.298	0.496	0.296	0.395	0.291
Experiment (Occasionally)	-0.007	0.279	-0.135	0.278	-0.241	0.285	-0.284	0.282
Experiment (Frequently)	0.595	0.248	0.469	0.246	0.459	0.248	0.350	0.249
Experiment (Moderate)	0.337	0.284	0.351	0.268	0.364	0.266	0.355	0.274
Experiment (Sorted)	-0.194	0.292	-0.110	0.281	-0.032	0.284	-0.094	0.284
Experiment (RarelyX Moderate)	-0.864	0.407	-0.740	0.391	-0.773	0.387	-0.636	0.391
Experiment (RarelyX Sorted)	-0.793	0.447	-0.878	0.445	-0.933	0.435	-0.762	0.424
Experiment (OccasionallyX Moderate)	-0.736	0.394	-0.542	0.380	-0.497	0.379	-0.408	0.381
Experiment (OccasionallyX Sorted)	0.136	0.427	0.312	0.409	0.293	0.424	0.299	0.417
Experiment (FrequentlyX Moderate)	-0.921	0.392	-0.835	0.363	-0.828	0.347	-0.773	0.355
Experiment (FrequentlyX Sorted)	-0.075	0.407	-0.064	0.391	-0.188	0.400	-0.095	0.398
Constant	5.231	0.740	4.359	1.015	3.148	1.083	2.587	1.061
N	2066		2057		2037		2015	
Counties	723		723		716		711	
R ²	0.052		0.124		0.148		0.168	

Negative Binomial Models for Changes in Behavior

	Model 1		Model 2	
	Coef	SE	Coef	SE
Republican	-0.011	0.151	-0.043	0.155
Affective Polarization	0.318	0.166	0.317	0.193
Republican X Affective Polarization	-0.214	0.247	-0.126	0.254
Logged Cases (County)	0.034	0.018	0.028	0.022
Republican X Cases	0.012	0.023	0.016	0.025
Polarization X Cases	-0.021	0.029	-0.017	0.036
Republican X Polarization X Cases	-0.011	0.037	-0.025	0.040
County Population (Millions)	-0.004	0.004	-0.001	0.004
Household COVID-19 Infection			-0.074	0.034
Risk of Illness			0.069	0.016
Out of Work			-0.050	0.019
Future Income			-0.207	0.037
Difficulty Having No Contact			0.013	0.032
Age (25-34)			0.023	0.039
Age (35-50)			0.112	0.038

Age (51-65)			0.106	0.038
Age (Older than 65)			0.135	0.040
Female			0.070	0.017
White			-0.081	0.068
African American			-0.076	0.069
Asian American			-0.027	0.076
Hispanic/Latino			0.000	0.070
Education			0.155	0.042
Income			0.149	0.034
Republican Governor (State)			0.024	0.018
Experiment (Rarely Talk)	0.079	0.039	0.083	0.040
Experiment (Occasionally)	-0.001	0.039	-0.021	0.038
Experiment (Frequently)	0.081	0.033	0.062	0.033
Experiment (Moderate)	0.046	0.039	0.045	0.037
Experiment (Sorted)	-0.027	0.042	-0.016	0.040
Experiment (RarelyX Moderate)	-0.118	0.055	-0.097	0.053
Experiment (RarelyX Sorted)	-0.110	0.063	-0.123	0.062
Experiment (OccasionallyX Moderate)	-0.105	0.056	-0.074	0.054
Experiment (OccasionallyX Sorted)	0.020	0.060	0.045	0.057
Experiment (FrequentlyX Moderate)	-0.126	0.053	-0.110	0.049
Experiment (FrequentlyX Sorted)	-0.009	0.056	-0.007	0.053
Constant	1.691	0.104	1.574	0.139
N	2066		2057	
Counties	723		723	
AIC	10304.7		10104.7	

Supplementary Information 6

OLS Models for Policy Support

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	Coef	SE	Coef	SE	Coef	SE	Coef	SE
Republican	0.162	0.091	0.153	0.093	0.136	0.110	0.126	0.111
Affective Polarization	0.013	0.076	0.026	0.080	-0.043	0.076	-0.044	0.078
Republican X Affective Polarization	-0.636	0.160	-0.608	0.162	-0.436	0.159	-0.414	0.160
Logged Cases (County)	-0.002	0.008	-0.001	0.008	0.000	0.008	0.000	0.008
Republican X Cases	-0.029	0.016	-0.027	0.016	-0.027	0.015	-0.026	0.016
Polarization X Cases	0.009	0.011	0.008	0.012	0.007	0.012	0.007	0.012
Republican X Polarization X Cases	0.078	0.027	0.071	0.028	0.068	0.027	0.066	0.027
County Population (Millions)	-0.001	0.004	-0.001	0.003	-0.002	0.003	-0.001	0.003
Household COVID-19 Infection			-0.022	0.016	-0.031	0.016	-0.032	0.016
Risk of Illness			0.040	0.010	0.041	0.009	0.042	0.009
Out of Work			-0.017	0.013	-0.014	0.012	-0.016	0.012
Future Income			0.012	0.022	0.022	0.022	0.023	0.022
Difficulty Having No Contact			-0.028	0.017	-0.029	0.018	-0.031	0.018
Age (25-34)			-0.007	0.020	-0.006	0.019	-0.005	0.019
Age (35-50)			0.038	0.020	0.035	0.019	0.036	0.019
Age (51-65)			0.045	0.020	0.045	0.020	0.041	0.020
Age (Older than 65)			0.035	0.022	0.041	0.022	0.040	0.022
Female			0.047	0.011	0.041	0.011	0.038	0.011
White			0.019	0.046	0.008	0.046	0.012	0.046
African American			-0.007	0.048	-0.006	0.046	-0.006	0.047
Asian American			0.070	0.048	0.076	0.047	0.080	0.049
Hispanic/Latino			0.036	0.051	0.030	0.050	0.033	0.049
Education			0.011	0.023	-0.010	0.025	-0.004	0.025
Income			0.023	0.019	0.034	0.020	0.033	0.020
Republican Governor (State)			-0.002	0.012	0.000	0.011	0.001	0.011
Trump Vote Share (County)					0.007	0.024	0.004	0.025
Republican X Trump Vote					-0.043	0.063	-0.026	0.062
Partisan Identity					0.049	0.027	0.055	0.027
Republican X Partisan Identity					0.081	0.057	0.061	0.057
Ideology					-0.070	0.033	-0.070	0.034
Republican X Ideology					-0.033	0.061	-0.021	0.063
Issue Positions					0.149	0.040	0.134	0.041
Republican X Issue Positions					0.142	0.072	0.133	0.073
Political Interest					0.005	0.023	-0.008	0.025
Republican X Political Interest					-0.111	0.046	-0.096	0.046
Political Knowledge					0.050	0.026	0.046	0.027
Republican X Political Knowledge					-0.013	0.044	-0.020	0.044
Media: Fox News							-0.030	0.013

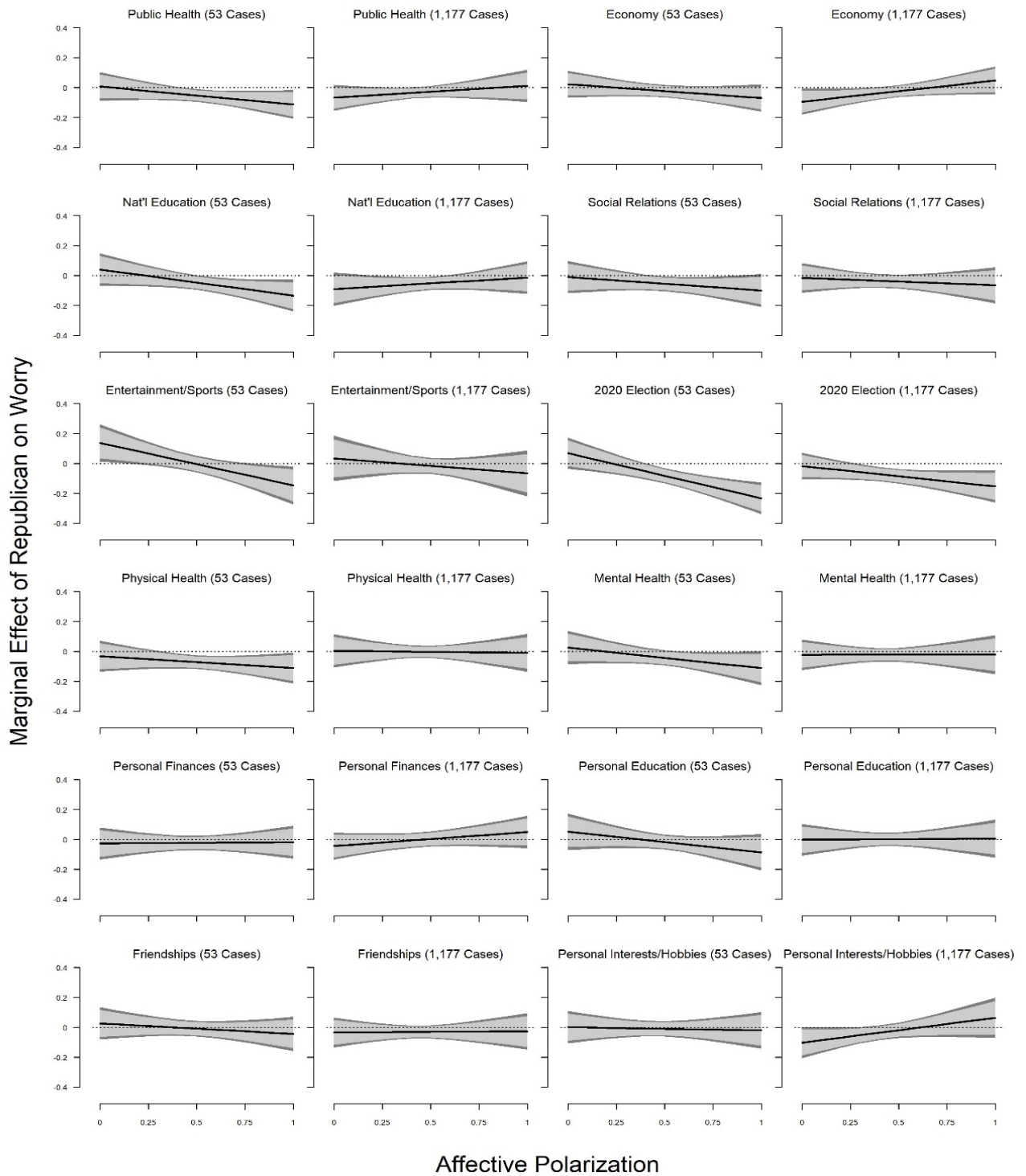
Media: CNN							-0.008	0.012
Media: MSNBC							-0.020	0.012
NY Times or Washington Post							0.014	0.011
Network News							0.030	0.014
Local News							0.022	0.015
Social Media Use							0.012	0.016
Experiment (Rarely Talk)	-0.021	0.024	-0.017	0.024	-0.021	0.023	-0.018	0.024
Experiment (Occasionally)	-0.010	0.020	-0.010	0.021	-0.023	0.020	-0.020	0.021
Experiment (Frequently)	0.013	0.019	0.008	0.019	0.005	0.019	0.000	0.019
Experiment (Moderate)	-0.016	0.021	-0.015	0.021	-0.015	0.020	-0.012	0.021
Experiment (Sorted)	-0.047	0.022	-0.043	0.023	-0.042	0.023	-0.044	0.024
Experiment (RarelyX Moderate)	0.048	0.034	0.044	0.034	0.033	0.033	0.028	0.033
Experiment (RarelyX Sorted)	0.068	0.034	0.062	0.034	0.055	0.034	0.056	0.035
Experiment (OccasionallyX Moderate)	-0.027	0.033	-0.021	0.034	-0.010	0.032	-0.017	0.033
Experiment (OccasionallyX Sorted)	0.057	0.032	0.051	0.033	0.055	0.032	0.054	0.033
Experiment (FrequentlyX Moderate)	-0.030	0.032	-0.028	0.031	-0.029	0.031	-0.027	0.031
Experiment (FrequentlyX Sorted)	0.067	0.031	0.067	0.031	0.061	0.031	0.065	0.031
Constant	0.783	0.051	0.690	0.078	0.599	0.082	0.585	0.085
N	2064		2056		2036		2014	
Counties	723		723		716		711	
R ²	0.0918		0.1235		0.1744		0.1821	

Tobit Models for Policy Support

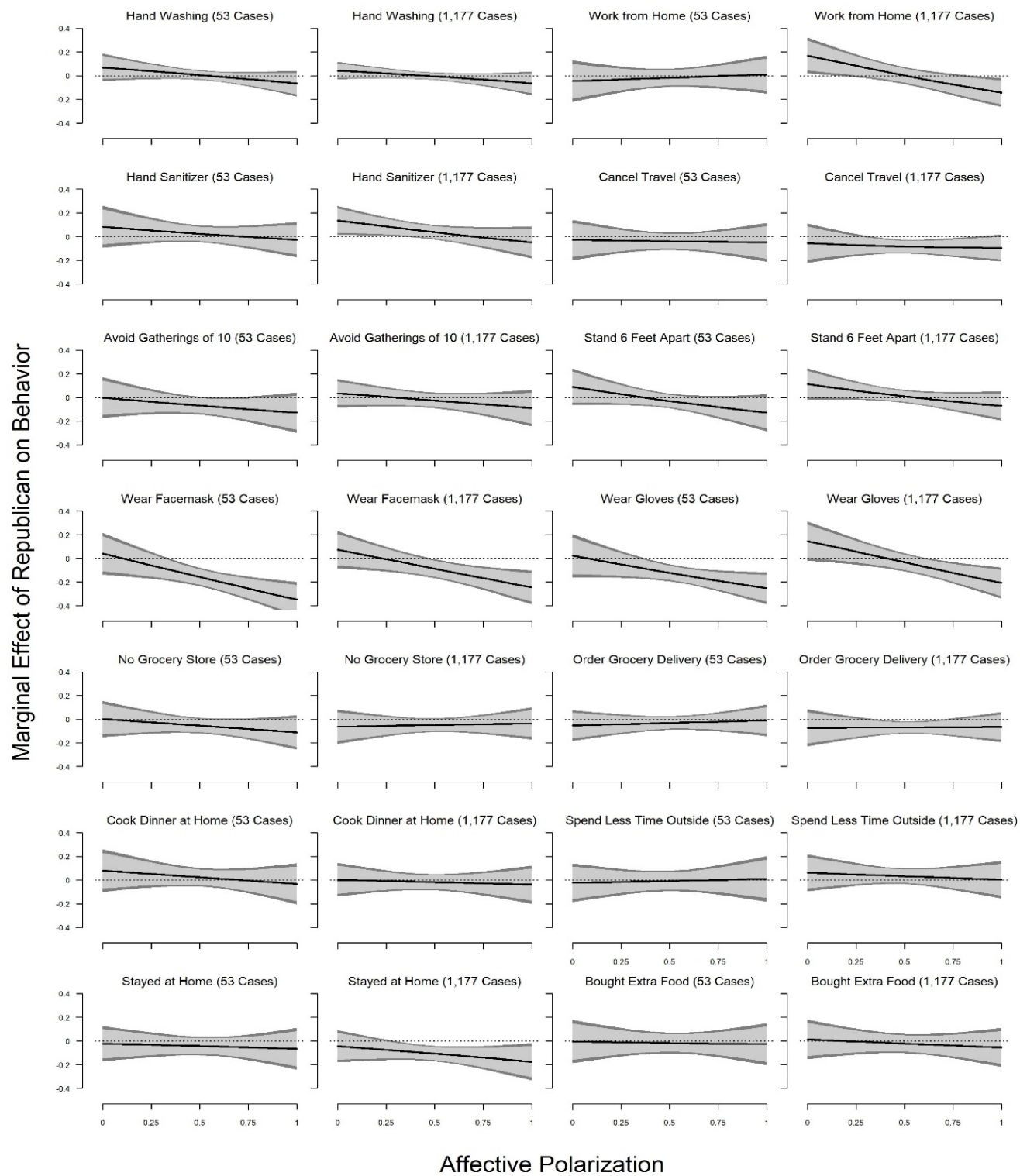
	Model 1		Model 2	
	Coef	SE	Coef	SE
Republican	0.193	0.114	0.181	0.112
Affective Polarization	0.012	0.117	0.026	0.115
Republican X Affective Polarization	-0.760	0.196	-0.720	0.192
Logged Cases (County)	-0.005	0.011	-0.004	0.011
Republican X Cases	-0.036	0.019	-0.033	0.019
Polarization X Cases	0.017	0.018	0.016	0.018
Republican X Polarization X Cases	0.095	0.033	0.086	0.033
County Population (Millions)	-0.001	0.004	-0.001	0.004
Household COVID-19 Infection			-0.028	0.023
Risk of Illness			0.057	0.014
Out of Work			-0.025	0.015
Future Income			0.015	0.030
Difficulty Having No Contact			-0.037	0.026
Age (25-34)			0.001	0.027
Age (35-50)			0.058	0.025
Age (51-65)			0.066	0.026
Age (Older than 65)			0.045	0.030

Female			0.063	0.013
White			0.002	0.049
African American			-0.029	0.051
Asian American			0.083	0.058
Hispanic/Latino			0.036	0.053
Education			0.012	0.032
Income			0.026	0.027
Republican Governor (State)			-0.008	0.014
Experiment (Rarely Talk)	-0.026	0.030	-0.020	0.029
Experiment (Occasionally)	-0.021	0.029	-0.022	0.029
Experiment (Frequently)	-0.008	0.029	-0.015	0.028
Experiment (Moderate)	-0.035	0.029	-0.034	0.029
Experiment (Sorted)	-0.058	0.029	-0.055	0.029
Experiment (RarelyX Moderate)	0.077	0.045	0.069	0.045
Experiment (RarelyX Sorted)	0.081	0.044	0.074	0.044
Experiment (OccasionallyX Moderate)	-0.019	0.045	-0.007	0.045
Experiment (OccasionallyX Sorted)	0.064	0.044	0.058	0.043
Experiment (FrequentlyX Moderate)	0.000	0.044	0.004	0.043
Experiment (FrequentlyX Sorted)	0.111	0.046	0.114	0.046
Constant	0.844	0.074	0.739	0.094
N	2064		2056	
Counties	723		723	
AIC	1638.8		1587.4	

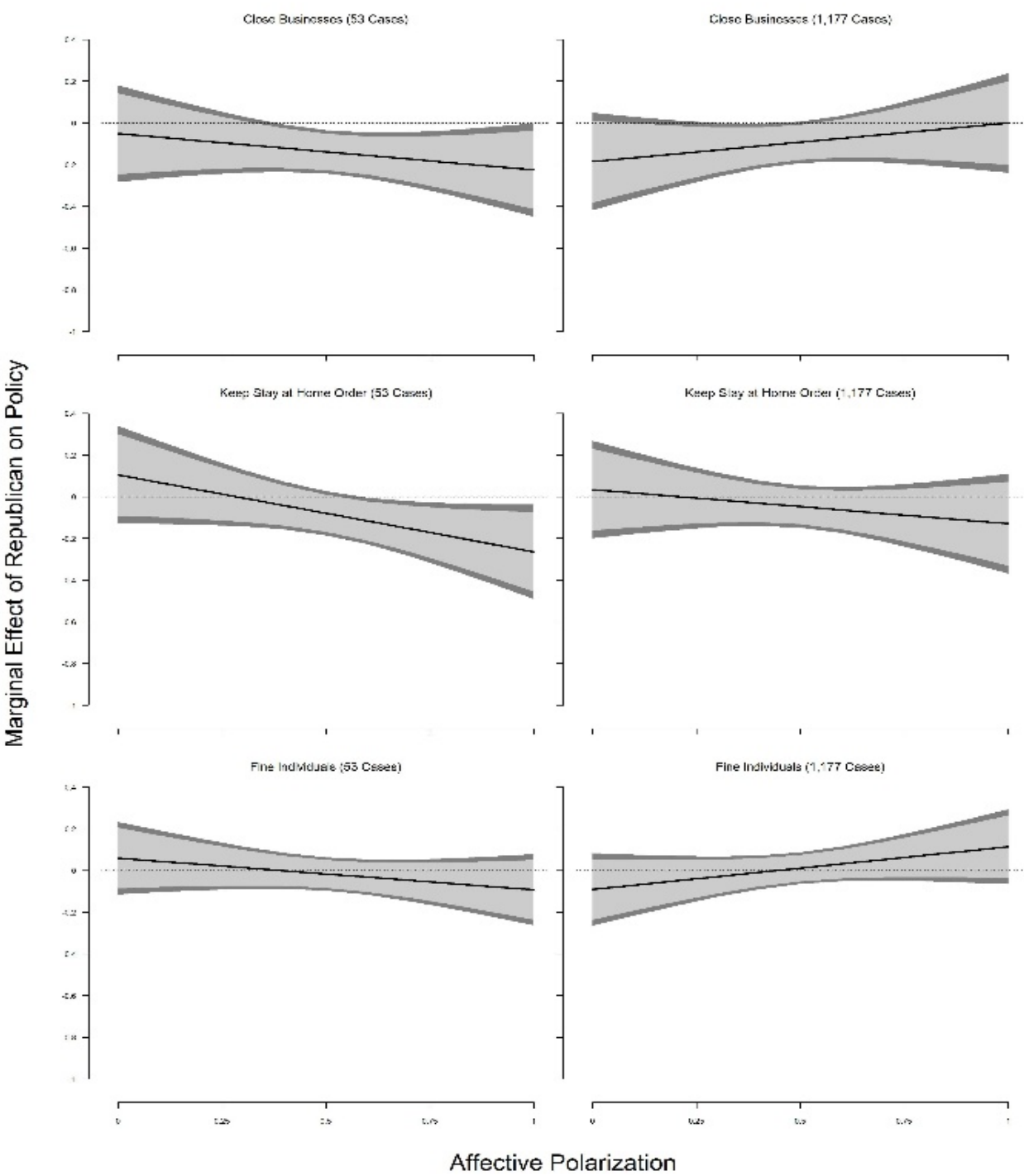
Supplementary Information 7



Supplementary Information 8



Supplementary Information 9



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