The Effect of Counter-Stereotypical Partisan Exemplars on Partisan Stereotypes and Affective Polarization

C. Daniel Myers
University of Minnesota
cdmyers@umn.edu

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Abstract:

Partisans hold negative and inaccurate stereotypes of members of the out-party. Yet, little research has explored where these stereotypes come from. Drawing on theories of stereotype construction from psychology, we argue that stereotypes of the out-party are constructed from the stream of partisan exemplars that an individual encounters, either in person or, more commonly, through the media. Drawing on an established experimental paradigm for studying racial stereotypes, we test this theory using an experiment that presents with either ideologically stereotypical or ideologically counter-stereotypical exemplars of the party they do not identify with. We evaluate the effect of these exemplars on stereotypes of and affect towards out-partisans. The results suggest that counter-stereotypical exemplars can moderate stereotypes of partisan ideology and improve affect towards the out-party. These results have important implications for understanding how the media shape partisan stereotypes, and also suggest methods for reducing inter-partisan animosity.

Recent explanations for the rise of affective polarization have focused on biased mental representations of the out-party. These "pictures in our heads" (Lippman 1922) – the stereotypes we hold about the out-party – cast the out-party as more likely to possess negative personal traits (Rothschild 2019), more demographically "other" (Ahler and Sood 2018, Mason and Wronski 2018, Valentino and Zhirkov 2019), and more ideologically extreme (Rothschild 2019, Myers 2020) than they really are. These negative, and often incorrect, pictures are associated with negative affect towards the out-party, increased perceived polarization, and greater party loyalty (Ahler and Sood 2018). Yet, this work fails to explain what causes these biased stereotypes. How did we arrive at these distorted images of the out-partisans in the first place?

This theory is rooted in exemplification theory, which holds that stereotypes are not fixed mental objects, but are shaped by the set of individual group members stored in memory. These exemplars may come from in-person contact, or, particularly for socially-distant out-groups, from the (often inaccurate) exemplars presented in the media (Entman and Rojecki 2000). For example, stereotypes associating blacks with criminality and government dependence are produced and maintained by media coverage that almost exclusively presents Black exemplars who are welfare recipients or violent criminals (Gilens 1999, Entman and Rojecki 2000). However, the fact that stereotypes depend on the store on exemplary individuals means that they are malleable; exposure to counter-stereotypical exemplars of a group (Dasgupta and Greenwald 2001, Mastro and Tukachinsky 2011) or changes in the stream of exemplars of a group presented in the media (Goldman and Mutz 2014), can change stereotypes by changing the exemplars individuals use to construct their stereotypes.

We extend this exemplar-based theory of stereotypes to explain stereotypes of partisan groups by testing whether exposure to counter-stereotypical out-party exemplars changes

stereotypes of and affect towards the out-party. We focus, in particular, on ideologically stereotypical and counter-stereotypical exemplars. Existing work shows that partisans perceive more ideological polarization than actually exists (Levendusky and Malhotra 2016a), and that these misperceptions drive affective polarization (Levendusky and Malhotra 2016b, Ahler and Sood 2018). Levendusky and Malhotra (2016b) find that articles about high levels of ideological polarization increase perceived polarization and offer suggestive evidence that this is driven by ideologically extreme quotes from individual Democrats and Republicans. Finally, recent work suggests that ideology and issue-positions, rather than group identities, form the core part of partisan stereotypes (Rothschild et al. 2019, Myers 2019). If exposure to out-group exemplars drive stereotypes of the out-group, we expect that exposure to ideologically moderate exemplars of the out-party should reduce ideological stereotyping, relative to exposure to ideologically extreme exemplars. We further expect this to improve affect towards the out-party.

We test these hypotheses using an experiment where respondents are exposed to descriptions of four sitting members of Congress from the out-party. We manipulate whether participants are exposed to four ideologically stereotypical out-party members or to one ideologically stereotypical and three ideologically moderate out-party members. After exposure, we measure out-party affect, perceptions of out-party extremity, and implicit affect towards the out-party. We find general support for this theory, finding that experimental participants exposed to moderate exemplars have more moderate perceptions of out-group ideology and more positive affect towards the out-party than participants exposed to ideologically typical exemplars.

Exemplification Theory and Counter-Stereotypical Exemplars

Stereotypes play an important role in social and political judgement, guiding attitudes and behavior towards out-group members. Exemplification theory holds that these stereotypes are constructed from the stream of exemplary individuals from that group encountered either in person or via the media (Smith and Zárate 1992, Brosius 2003, Garcia-Marques et al. 2006). According to this theory, stereotypes are not fixed mental objects, but instead are constructed as needed by retrieving from memory a set of exemplary individual members of the group (Kahneman and Miller 1986, Garcia-Marques et al. 2017). For many out-groups mediated contact is far more common than actual in-person contact, so the stored set of exemplary individuals come to mirror the (often inaccurate) exemplars that dominate media coverage of a group (Entman and Rojecki 2000). Thus, for example, stereotypes associating blacks with criminality and government dependence are produced and reproduced by media coverage that rarely includes example of blacks as anything other than welfare recipients and violent criminals (Gilens 1997, Entman and Rojecki 2000). These stereotypes, in turn, drive affect and attitudes towards the out-group.

Exemplification theory's focus on the store of group exemplars as the determinant of group stereotypes suggests that providing counter-stereotypical exemplars can change the content of an out-group stereotype, and with it out-group affect and attitudes. Indeed, a range of studies in psychology demonstrate that this is the case. Dasgupta and Greenwald (2001) introduce this paradigm in an experiment that exposes subjects to liked black exemplars (e.g. Martin Luther King) and disliked white exemplars (e.g. Jeffrey Dahmer), or disliked black exemplars (e.g. Mike Tyson) and liked white exemplars (e.g. Tom Hanks) and found a large positive effect of the liked-black/disliked-white condition on implicit, though not explicit, racial attitudes. This effect was replicated with implicit attitudes towards the elderly (Dasgupta and

Greenwald 2001, Study 2), women leaders (Dasgupta and Asgari 2004), and gays and lesbians (Dasgupta and Rivera 2008). In high-powered replication studies, Joy-Gaba and Nosek (2010) and Pinkston (2015) replicate the positive effect on out-group implicit attitudes, though they find much small effect sizes that reported in the original Dasgupta and Greenwald study.[1] Finally, a series of laboratory experiments suggest that exposure to Barack Obama has a positive effect on white implicit attitudes and stereotypes (see Columb and Plant 2016 for a review, cf. Schmidt and Nosek 2010, Schmidt and Axt 2016).

Research in communication extends this finding to stereotypes and explicit attitudes. Mastro and Tukachinsky (2011) find that exposure to a well-liked Latino exemplar (the actor Jimmy Smits) improved stereotypes of Latinos, at least among those with positive attitudes towards intergroup racial conduct. Further studies find that exposure to other well-liked minority celebrities reduced negative stereotypes of blacks (Ramasubramanian 2011, 2015), and improved affect towards Latinos and Asians (Mares Forthcoming). Other work finds that counter-stereotypical news portrayals of racial minorities improved implicit stereotypes (Ramasubramanian 2007), explicit affect (Ramasubramanian and Oliver 2007), and led to more external attributions of responsibility (Power et al. 1996).

Relatively little work has examined the effect of exemplar exposure outside of the laboratory, though Tukachinsky et al. (2015) document a correlation between racial attitudes and portrayals of racial minorities in primetime television, and Dixon (2008) connects the content of local news to stereotypes of blacks as criminals (see also Valentino 1999). One important exception to this is work by Goldman and co-authors on the so-called "Obama effect" (Goldman

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[1] Dasgupta and Greenwald (2001) report standardized effect sizes in the range of .82 and .89 standard deviations in experiments with 48 and 21 subjects, respectively. Joy-Gaba and Nosek (2010) report effect sizes of .17, .14, .03, .16, and .11 standard deviations with samples of 796, 1,191, 1,081, 95, and 77, respectively.

2012, Goldman and Mutz 2014, Goldman and Hopkins 2019). Goldman argues that Obama's prominent depiction in the media as a counter-stereotypical black exemplar caused an abrupt change in the stream of black exemplars encountered by whites during the 2008 and 2012 presidential campaigns. They find that this change reduced white racial prejudice during these campaigns. However, this change appears to have only lasted for the duration of the campaign (Goldman and Mutz 2014, Pasek et al. 2014), after which white racial attitudes return to their pre-campaign state; Goldman argues that this is because the stream of black exemplars returned to its normal state.[2] Kerevel and Atkenson (2015) report a similar pattern of findings when examining the effect of female mayors in Mexico on stereotypes about gender and leadership.

Media and Affective Polarization

Despite growing scholarly interest in and concern about affective polarization (Iyengar et al. 2019) almost no work examines the effect of partisan exemplars on partisan stereotypes and affect. Instead, most work examining the role of the media in affective polarization focuses on the partisan slant of outlets. Conventional wisdom[3] and some studies argue that access to and consumption of partisan media drives polarization by providing biased information and promoting norms of hostility towards the out-party (Levendusky 2013, Berry and Sobieraj 2014, Lelkes et al. 2017). However, this claim is highly contested. Other work argues that partisan media is mostly consumed by those who are already polarized (Arceneaux and Johnson 2013), that audiences for partisan media are small (Prior 2013), and finally that, in practice, most

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[2] Goldman and Mutz (2014) argue that this is because media coverage and public attention to Obama fell after the campaign period.

[3] Consider Barack Obamas (in)famous quote "if you watch Fox News, you are living on a different planet than you are if you ... listen to NPR." (; for different coverage that demonstrates Obama's point, see Flood 2018)

Americans consumer a politically diverse news diet if they consume news at all (Gentzkow and Shapiro 2011, Prior 2013).

The extensive literature on racial exemplars suggests an alternative way that media might influence affective polarization. Since most contact with members of the other party, particularly elite members of the other party, is mediated, stereotypes of the two parties will be created by the stream of partisan exemplars presented in the media. If exemplification theory is correct, changes in these streams of exemplars will change stereotypes, at least as long as the change in exemplars endures. Durable changes in the stream of partisan exemplars, might cause durable changes in how Americans view the two parties. This might be caused, for example by caused, for example, by increased elite polarization (Mutz 2007, pgs. 238-240), or by increased consumption of national news, which, in contrast to local news tends to give more coverage to extreme members of both parties (Schaffner and Sellers 2003, Padgett et al. 2019). These changes do not depend, necessarily, on increased consumption of partisan media or on the existence of "echo chambers," though these could also be the source of more extreme partisan exemplars.

One existing study touches on the effect of partisan exemplars on affective polarization. First, as part of a larger study examining the effect of media coverage of polarization, Levendusky and Malhotra (2016a) find that reading an article that depicts Americans as polarized and divided increases affective polarization relative to an article that depicts Americans as moderate and centrist. Both articles include quotes from average voters from both parties as exemplars to illustrate polarization or moderation. This effect cannot necessarily be attributed to the exemplars, as two articles differ in a number of ways beyond the presence of these quotes, but the authors report participants had more negative reactions to the polarized exemplars and

viewed them as more representative of their party and suggest that these reactions could be a mechanism by which coverage of polarization drives increase polarization.

Hypotheses

To test whether partisan exemplars can shape ideological stereotypes of and affect towards the out-party, we conduct a preregistered experiment where we present individuals with four out-party exemplars, operationalized here as members of Congress. These exemplars are either ideologically stereotypical (i.e. conservative Republicans and liberal Democrats) or counter-stereotypical (i.e. moderate Republicans and Democrats). We then measure out-party affect, perceptions of out-party ideology, and implicit attitudes towards the out-party. This design and hypotheses were pre-registered prior to conducting the experiment (https://osf.io/p2g6s).

In this paper we test three sets of hypotheses. Our primary hypothesis is that participants presented with counter-stereotypical exemplars will have more moderate perceptions of out-party ideology, relative to participants presented with stereotypical exemplars. Further, we expect that this effect will be primarily driven by participants in the counter-stereotypical exemplar condition moderating their perceptions, rather than participants in the stereotypical exemplar condition developing more extreme perceptions, because the stereotypical exemplars will be similar to the stream of exemplars commonly encountered in the media.

H1a: Democratic Perceptions of Republican Ideology:

1. *Democrats in the Moderate Republican condition will report more moderate perceptions of Republican ideology than Democrats in the Conservative Republican condition.*

2. *This effect will be the result of Democrats in the Moderate Republican Exemplar condition having more moderate perceptions than Democrats in the control condition, not Democrats in the Conservative Republican condition having more extreme perceptions than Democrats in the control condition.*

H1b: Republican Perceptions of Democratic Ideology:

1. *Republicans in the Moderate Democrat condition will report more moderate perceptions of Democratic ideology than Republicans in the Liberal Democrat condition.*

2. *This effect will be the result of Republicans in the Moderate Democrat Exemplar condition having more moderate perceptions than Republicans in the control condition, not Republicans in the Liberal Democrat condition having more extreme perceptions than Republicans in the control condition.*

As a secondary effect of changes in perceived ideological extremity, we expect that being presented with counter-stereotypical exemplars of the out-party will reduce negative affect towards the out-party. Further, we expect that this effect will be driven by counter-stereotypical exemplars improving out-party affect relative to the control condition, not by stereotypical exemplars reducing affect towards the out-party.

H2a: Democratic Affect towards Republicans

1. *Democrats in the Moderate Republican Exemplar condition will display more positive affect towards Republicans than will Democrats in the Conservative Republican Exemplar condition.*

2. *This effect will be the result of Democrats in the Moderate Republican Exemplar condition displaying more positive affect towards Republicans than Democrats in the control condition, not of Democrats in the Conservative Republican condition displaying more negative affect than Democrats in the control condition.*

H2b: Republican Affect towards Democrats

1. *Republicans in the Moderate Democrat Exemplar condition will display more positive affect towards Democrats than will Republicans in the Liberal Democrat Exemplar condition.*

2. *This effect will be the result of Republicans in the Moderate Democrats Exemplar condition displaying more positive affect towards Democrats than Republicans in the control condition, not of Republicans in the Liberal Democrat condition displaying more negative affect than Republicans in the control condition.*

Finally, we expect that exposure to moderate exemplars will improve implicit attitudes towards the partisan outgroup.

H3a: Democratic Implicit Attitudes towards Republicans

1. *Democrats in the Moderate Republican Exemplar condition will show more positive implicit attitudes towards Republicans than will Democrats in the Conservative Republican Exemplar condition.*

2. *This effect will be the result of Democrats in the Moderate Republican Exemplar condition showing more positive implicit attitudes towards Republicans than Democrats in the control condition, not of Democrats in the Conservative Republican condition showing more negative implicit attitudes than Democrats in the control condition.*

H3b: Republican Affect towards Democrats

1. *Republicans in the Moderate Democrat Exemplar condition will show more positive implicit attitudes towards Democrats than will Republicans in the Liberal Democrat Exemplar condition.*

2. *This effect will be the result of Republicans in the Moderate Democrats Exemplar condition showing more positive implicit attitudes towards Democrats than Republicans in the control condition, not of Republicans in the Liberal Democrat condition showing more positive implicit attitudes than Republicans in the control condition.*

Method

To test these hypotheses, we conduct a survey experiment in which respondents are assigned to read about stereotypical or counter-stereotypical members of their out-party, or to a control. Notably, while the theory described above describes stereotypes as changing in response

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to changes in the stream of group exemplars, this experiment tests the effects of a single-shot treatment on stereotypes. This provides a hard test for our theory, since exposure to a handful of exemplars may not weigh much against the store of exemplars stored from years of encountering out-partisans through the mass media.

Pre-Test of Exemplars

We employ sitting members of Congress as partisan exemplars in our treatments. Members of Congress are useful as exemplars because they are clearly group members and frequently appear in media accounts as exemplars of their parties. Their official position reduces the chance that they will be seen as artificial or unrealistic by subjects, as might be the case with hypothetical or fake candidates. Further, they have concrete records that can be used to characterize them as either stereotypical or counter-stereotypical, yet are, for the most part, not sufficiently well-known for people to have concrete negative or positive attitudes towards them. Finally, recent work suggesting that measures of partisan affect primarily capture affect towards party elites supports using such elites as exemplars instead of exemplars drawn from the mass public.

To ensure that the presented exemplars are perceived as ideologically moderate or extreme, we conducted a pre-test using respondents from Lucid's Theorem platform.[4] We drafted profiles of ten moderate Democrats, ten liberal Democrats, ten moderate Republicans, and ten Conservative Republicans. We selected these potential exemplars based on a number of factors, including their DW-Nominate scores (Lewis et al. 2019), positions on high-profile

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[4] Lucid is an online aggregator of survey respondents that offers demographically representative samples via quota sampling. Coppock and McClellan (2019) show that respondents from Lucid largely match ANES demographic and behavioral benchmarks; they also replicate several prominent experimental findings from probability samples using Lucid subjects

issues, membership in ideological caucuses like the Blue Dog Democrats or the House Freedom Caucus, as well as our general perception of their positions and media images.

Each profile was 100-150 words long and included the member's official portrait. While the content of each profile was tailored to the member, each followed the same general form. The first sentence introduced the member and where they represented. The second provided a brief biographical history, including when they were elected and notable previously held offices or other careers highlights. The next several sentences described notable positions (e.g. "a supporter of abortion rights"), bill authorship or sponsorship (e.g. "is the author of the College for All Act, which would eliminate tuition and fees at public colleges across the United States"), votes (e.g. "was the only House Democrat from Illinois to vote against the Affordable Care Act"), or other signals of ideological stances (e.g. "is a member of the Main Street Caucus, a group of moderate Republicans in Congress," or "is seen as one of Donald Trump's biggest supporters in Congress"). A final sentence sometimes noted personal characteristics that might signal ideology or representativeness of the exemplar (e.g. "is one of only 14 naturalized citizens serving in Congress.") All these descriptors were selected to portray the member as describe generally stereotypical or counter-stereotypical ideologically in as natural a way as possible.

We pre-tested these 40 profiles using a sample of 162 respondents drawn from Lucid Theorem's online platform. Respondents were asked to read each profile and then rate the ideology of the profiled member of Congress, guess their position on four issues (taxes, immigration, abortion, and government intervention into healthcare markets), rate how representative they were of their party as a whole, and rate how positively or negatively they viewed the member. Each respondent rated the potential exemplars from one party only. The

results of the pre-test are listed in the appendix,[5] with the selected exemplars listed at the top of each category. As counter-stereotypical exemplars, we selected the three exemplars that were rated as (relatively) moderate, as well as being rated as at least moderately representative of their party as a whole. As stereotypical exemplars, we chose the exemplars that were rated as moderately conservative for Republicans and fairly liberal for Democrats, relative to the other exemplars, and as moderately representative of their party as a whole, again relative to the other exemplars. Importantly, we rely on the pre-test measures of perceived ideology and representativeness to choose exemplars that are the most stereotypical or counter-stereotypical. This does not allow us to determine which aspects of the profile (e.g. policy stances, caucus membership, demographic characteristics such as race or gender communicated in the member's official portrait), caused respondents to view them as stereotypical or counter-stereotypical.

Experimental Procedure

We recruited 3,167 respondents over the Lucid Theorem platform to participate in an academic research study of people's opinions.[6] Democrats and Republicans were assigned to different branches of the experiment, and true independents were divided equally between these branches. Each participant was randomly assigned to one of three conditions: a control condition, a Moderate Out-Partisan Exemplar condition or a Conservative/Liberal Out-Partisan Exemplar

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[5] Available at http://users.cla.umn.edu/~cdmyers/PartisanExemplarsDGReplicationSPSAAppendix12312019.docx.
[6] This sample size represents a deviation from our Pre-Analysis Plan, which called for recruiting 1,733 respondents. This sample size was determined by the number of respondents necessary to achieve .8 power to detect a difference of means of Cohen's *d* = .35 on the partisan BIAT. Since the BIAT can only be completed by respondents using devices with keyboards, we expected 866 of the 1,733 responses to complete the BIAT, of whom 760 would provide useable responses. However, the percentage of respondents who completed the BIAT was, in fact, closer to 25%, partially because a higher percentage of respondents than expected used mobile devices and partially because a significant percentage of those with keyboards had difficulty with the BIAT. To achieve the pre-specified power for the BIAT, we recruited an additional 1,212 respondents. We also include data from 220 respondents who completed the treatment and provided responses to at least one independent variable, but who did not complete the survey and thus were not counted as completes by Lucid.

condition. To reduce variance and facilitate the calculation of heterogeneous treatment effects, participants were assigned to experimental conditions using block randomization, blocking on strength of partisanship and a binary indicator of political interest split at the expected median.

Participants first answered two pre-treatment questions measuring interest in politics. After these, participants in non-control conditions were introduced to the treatment with the following instruction: "Thank you for taking part in this study of people's opinions about individual members of Congress. There are 435 members of Congress and we find that most people don't know much about members other than their own representatives. In this part of the study we will present you with four brief profiles of ordinary members of Congress. Please read each profile carefully. You've been selected to view randomly-selected, ordinary members the <Republican/Democratic> Party. After each profile, we will ask you two questions to get your thoughts about the member of Congress."

Participants were then presented sequentially with four profiles. All Democrats (Republicans) read the same profile first, that of a conservative Republican (liberal Democrat). Those in the Moderate conditions then read profiles of three moderate Republicans/Democrats while those in the Liberal Democrat or Conservative Republican condition read profiles of three conservative Republicans or liberal Democrats. At the bottom of each profile two questions asked subjects how familiar they were with the member of Congress and how positive or negative they felt towards the member of Congress. These questions were intended to encourage participants to actively think about the exemplar in a way that would not encourage or discourage sub-typing by, for example, asking how liberal or conservative or how representative they perceived the exemplar to be.

Following these four profiles, participants completed measures of out-party affect and perceptions of the two parties' ideologies, the order of which was counter-balanced. Respondents who were not using mobile devices then completed the partisan brief implicit attitude test. The complete survey can be seen at https://osf.io/ax52t/.

Measures

We use the measure of partisanship in Lucid's demographic data, which uses a standard 7-point ANES format.[7] We measure political interest using two items,[8] which we used to create an additive index (Cronbach's α = .87). After treatment, we measure perceptions of out-party ideology using two measures. First, we ask respondents to place the average Republican and average Democrat on a standard seven-point ideological scale. Second, following Levendusky and Malhotra (2016), we ask respondents to place the average Republican and the average Democrat on three issue position scales: capital gains taxes, deportation of immigrants who arrived as children, and abortion. We expected these three measures to produce an additive index, but because of low scale reliability (Cronbach's α = .52 for Democrats' issue positions, .53 for Republicans' issue positions) we analyze these items separately.

We use three different measures of out-party affect, drawn from Druckman and Levendusky (2019). First, the out-party feeling thermometer, corrected for individual neutral

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[7] We know of no work that evaluates the reliability of Lucid-supplied demographics. In the pretest (*n* = 147) we asked the traditional ANES 7-point question and compared this to the Lucid-supplied party ID. For 83.7% of respondents, response to this question matched the Lucid-supplied party ID question exactly; for an additional 10.9% of respondents the party matched, but strength of partisanship was different. Based on this, we are fairly comfortable relying on the Lucid-supplied measurement, particularly as this provides us with a pre-treatment measure (Montgomery et al. 2018) that does not run the risk of priming partisanship (Klar et al. 2019).

[8] These questions are "Generally speaking, how interested are you in politics?" with response options Extremely interested (1), Very interested (2), Somewhat interested (3), Slightly interested (4), Not at all interested (5) and "How much of the time would you say you follow what's going on in government and public affairs?" with response options Most of the time (1), Some of the time (2), Only now and then (3), and Hardly at all (4).

point by subtracting the mean score of four other feeling thermometers (labor union, big business, feminists, Christian fundamentalists) as suggested by Winter and Berinsky (1999). Second, an index of two items measuring trust in each party (α = .90 for trust in Democrats, .89 for trust in Republicans).[9] Third, an index of three social distance measures (α = .88 for social distance from Democrats, .89 for social distance from Republicans). [10] We measure implicit attitudes using a version of the Partisan Brief Implicit Attitudes Test described in Iyengar and Westwood (2015) to measure implicit attitudes towards the out-party, implemented in Qualtrics using Carpenter et al. (2019)'s *R* package, and scored using the procedure recommended by Nosek et al. (2014).

Analysis

We analyze Republicans and Democrats separately. For both sub-samples, we evaluate hypotheses using difference in means tests, accounting for the experiment's blocking scheme. We generate confidence intervals and *p*-values (one-sided, in the hypothesized direction) using randomization inference. For analyses comparing moderate to liberal/conservative conditions we drop inattentive respondents, defined as respondents who spend less than eight seconds on the initial profile. Since this profile was the same for moderate and conservative conditions, this provides a pre-treatment measure of respondent attentiveness. For hypotheses comparing a

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[9] These items asked "How much of the time do you think you can trust <Republicans/Democrats> to do what is right for the country?" with response options "Almost always" (5), "Most of the time" (4), "About half the time" (3), "Once in a while" (2), "Almost never" (1) and "Do you trust Republicans to work for the interests of average Americans?" with response options "Definitely yes" (4), "Probably yes" (3), "Probably not" (2), and "Definitely not" (1).

[10] These are "How comfortable are you having close personal friends who are <Republicans/Democrats>?" and "How comfortable are you having neighbors on your street who are <Republicans/Democrats>?", both with response options "Extremely comfortable" (4), "Somewhat comfortable" (3), "Not too comfortable" (2), and "Not at all comfortable" (1), and "Suppose a son or daughter of yours was getting married. How would you feel if he or she married a <Republican/Democrat>?" with response options "Not at all upset" (4), "Not too upset" (3), "Somewhat upset" (2), and "Extremely upset" (1).

treatment condition to the control condition we cannot perform a similar calculation, since the

control condition did not see any profiles. Instead, we calculate the Intent-to-Treat effect (ITT)

using all subjects, and the Complier Average Causal Effect (CACE), treating respondents in the

treatment condition who spent eight second or more on the first profile as compliers (Harden et

al. 2019).

Results

For all results, we report the one-sided *p*-value in the hypothesized direction, as well as

the standardized effect size (Cohen's *d*), which is the difference in means divided by the pooled

standard deviation. To provide a sense of the substantive scale of the effects, we also show the

standardized difference on the outcome variable between all Democrats/Republicans (including

leaners) in the sample and all true independents in the sample.

Exemplars and Perceptions of Out-Party Ideology

Figure 1 shows the first test of H1, the hypothesis that moderate exemplars will moderate

stereotypes of out-party ideology by pushing perceptions of Democratic ideology in a

conservative direction and perceptions of Republican ideology in a liberal direction. The top

panel shows the effect of moderate Democratic exemplars on Republicans' perceptions, as

compared to liberal Democratic exemplars. We find statistically significant effects in the

expected direction for perceived general ideology ($p = .004$, $d = .18$, $d_{Reps/Inds} = .51$), position on

immigration ($p = .002$, $d = .19$, $d_{Rep/Inds} = .53$), and position on abortion ($p = < .001$, $d = .26$, d

$_{Reps/Inds} = .47$); the effect on perceived position on taxes is in the expected direction but not

statistically significant ($p = .219$, $d = .05$, $d_{Reps/Inds} = .34$). The size of these effects re

substantively meaningful equivalent to roughly one-third the size of the difference between true

independents and Republicans in the full sample.

Effect of Moderate Exemplars on Rep Perceptions of Dem Ideology (vs. Extreme)

Effect of Moderate Exemplars on Dem Perceptions of Rep Ideology (vs. Extreme)
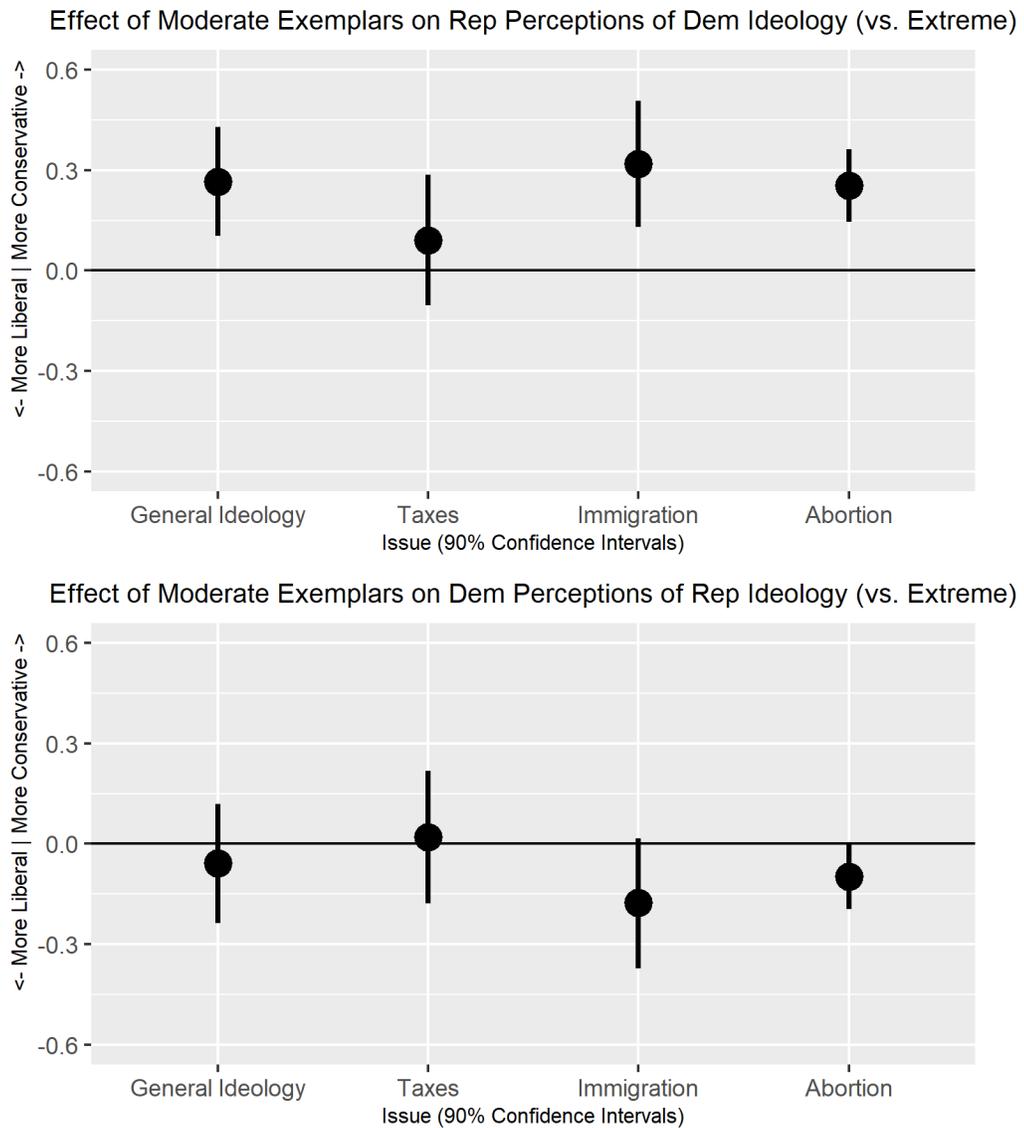
Figure 1: Effect of Moderate vs. Extreme Exemplars on Perceptions of Out-Party Ideology

The effect of moderate Republican exemplars on Democrats is less consistent (Figure

1b), though still primarily in the expected direction. The effect on perceived position on abortion

statistically significant ($p = .049$, $d = .10$, $d_{\text{Dems/Inds}} = .20$), and the effect on perceived position on

immigration marginally so ($p = .067$, $d = .10$, $d_{\text{Dems/Inds}} = .27$), but the effect on perceived general

ideology not significant ($p = .297$, $d = .03$, $d_{\text{Dems/Inds}} = .26$) and the effect on perceived position on taxes in the wrong direction, though essentially zero ($p = .559$, $d = .01$, $d_{\text{Dems/Inds}} = .13$). While the size of the effects of moderate Republican exemplars on Democrats is smaller than the effect of moderate Democratic exemplars on Republicans, they are of a similar magnitude relative to the difference between true independents and Democrats in the full sample.

Effect of Moderate Exemplars on Rep Perceptions of Dem Ideology (vs. Control)

<- More Liberal | More Conservative ->

Issue (90% Confidence Intervals)

Effect of Liberal Exemplars on Rep Perceptions of Dem Ideology (vs. Control)

<- More Liberal | More Conservative ->

Issue (90% Confidence Intervals)
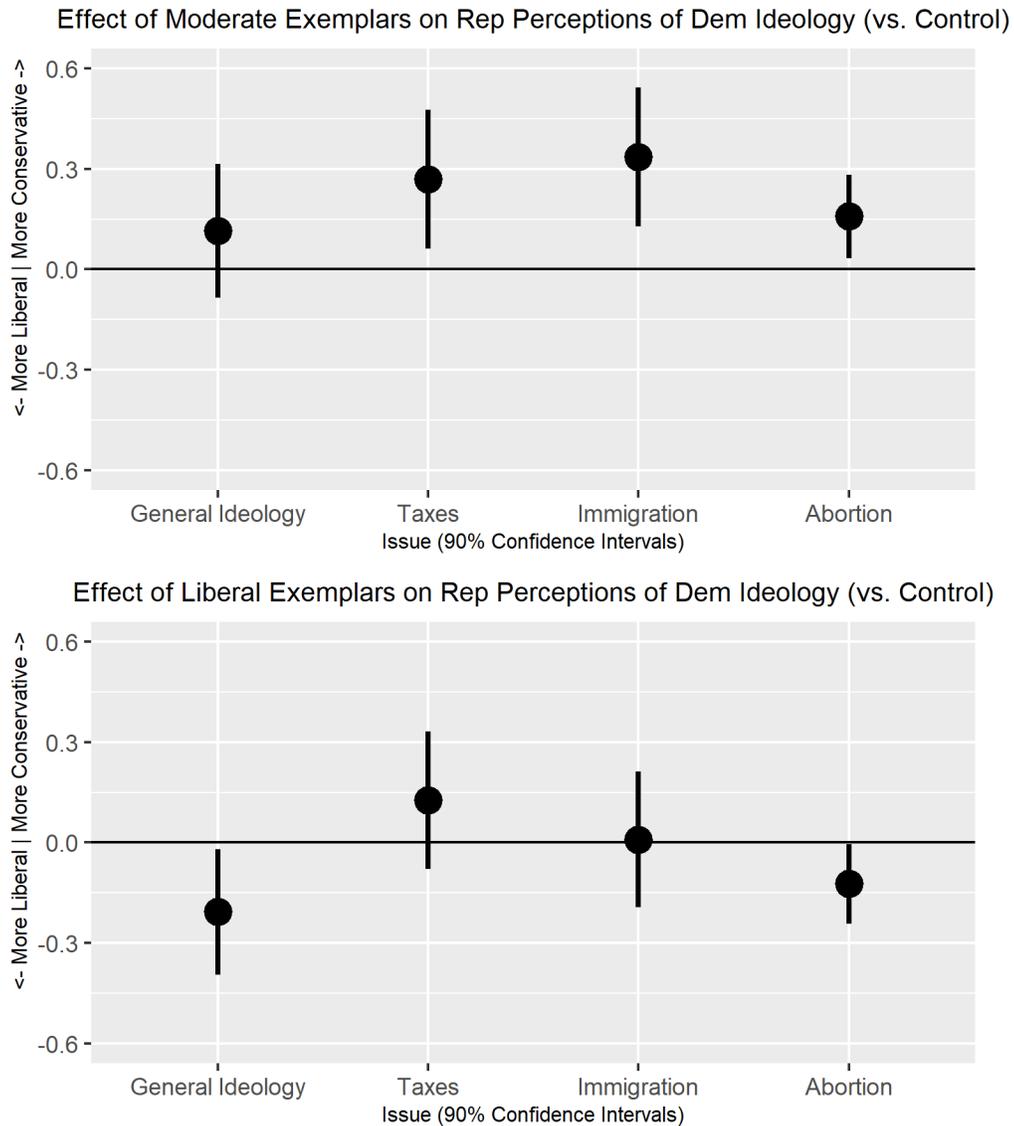
Figure 2: Effect of Dem Exemplars vs. Control on Rep Perceptions of Dem Ideology

On the whole, these results suggest that moderate exemplars can moderate perceptions of out party ideology, though the effects were larger for Republicans in our sample than for Democrats and for some issues (abortion and immigration) than others (general ideology and taxes). *H1a1* and *H1b1* posit that these effects will be the result of participants in the moderate exemplar conditions moderating their views of out-party ideology, not of participants in the conservative/liberal exemplar conditions growing to view the out-party as more extreme. To evaluate this, we compare both treatment conditions to the control condition. Figure 2 shows the CACE of moderate Democratic exemplars (Panel A) and liberal Democratic exemplars (Panel B) vs. the control condition. For Republicans the effect of moderate exemplars is in the expected direction, moving perceptions on all four measures in a conservative direction, and the effect is statistically significant for taxes ($p = .016$, $d = .16$, $d_{\text{Reps/Inds}} = .34$), immigration ($p = .004$, $d = .21$, $d_{\text{Reps/Inds}} = .54$), and abortion ($p = .018$, $d = .18$, $d_{\text{Reps/Inds}} = .48$), though not general ideology ($p = .171$, $d = .08$, $d_{\text{Reps/Inds}} = .51$). Consistent with expectations, there is evidence of an effect of liberal exemplars moving perceptions of issue positions in a liberal direction on general ideology ($p = .035$, $d = .15$, $d_{\text{Reps/Inds}} = .51$) and abortion ($p = .044$, $d = .14$, $d_{\text{Reps/Inds}} = .48$), though the effect is negligible for immigration ($p = .472$, $d = .01$, $d_{\text{Reps/Inds}} = .54$), and in the opposite direction, though not statistically significant for taxes ($p = .156$, $d = .08$, $d_{\text{Reps/Inds}} = .34$).

The effect on Democratic perceptions of Republican ideology (Figure 3), is more mixed. Relative to the control condition, moderate Republican exemplars have a negligible effect on perceptions of Republicans' general ideology ($p = .374$, $d = .02$, $d_{\text{Dems/Inds}} = .26$) and position on abortion ($p = .433$, $d = .01$, $d_{\text{Dems/Inds}} = .20$), and the opposite of the expected effect on perceived position on taxes ($p = .046$, $d = .11$, $d_{\text{Dems/Inds}} = .13$). Only for perceived position on immigration do moderate exemplars have a statistically significant effect in the expected direction($p = .018$, d

= .14, d Dems/Inds = .27). In contrast, the effect of conservative exemplars is largely in line with expectations, with negligible effects on perceptions of general ideology (p = .370, d = .02, d Dems/Inds = .26), taxes (p = .266, d = .04, d Dems/Inds = .13), and immigration (p = .067, d = .05, d Dems/Inds = .27), while only the effect on abortion approaches statistical significance (p = .087, d = .10, d Dems/Inds = .20).
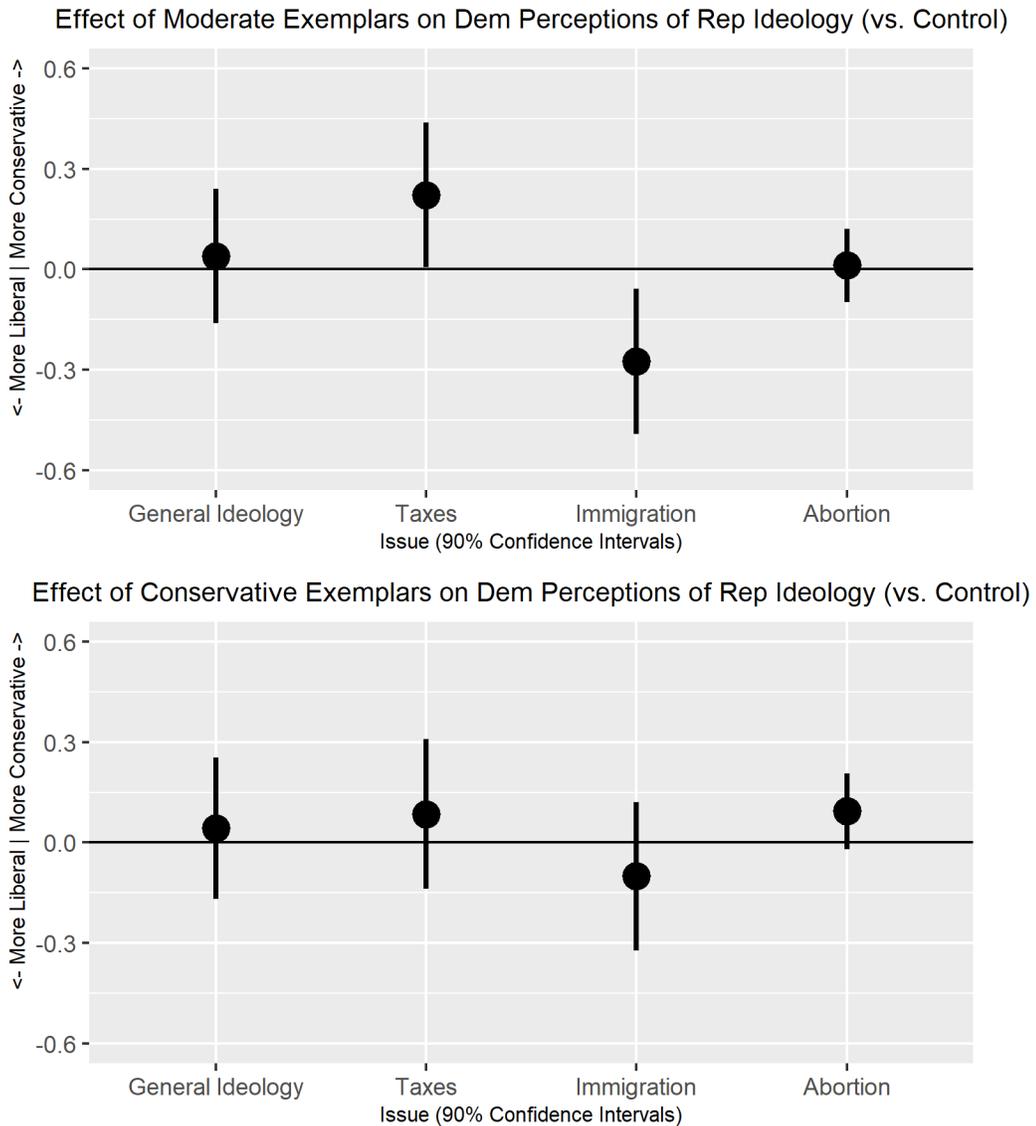

Figure 3: Effect of Rep Exemplars vs. Control on Dem Perceptions of Rep Ideology

Effect of Mod Exemplars on Reps' Affect Towards Dems

Effect of Mod Exemplars on Dems' Affect Towards Reps
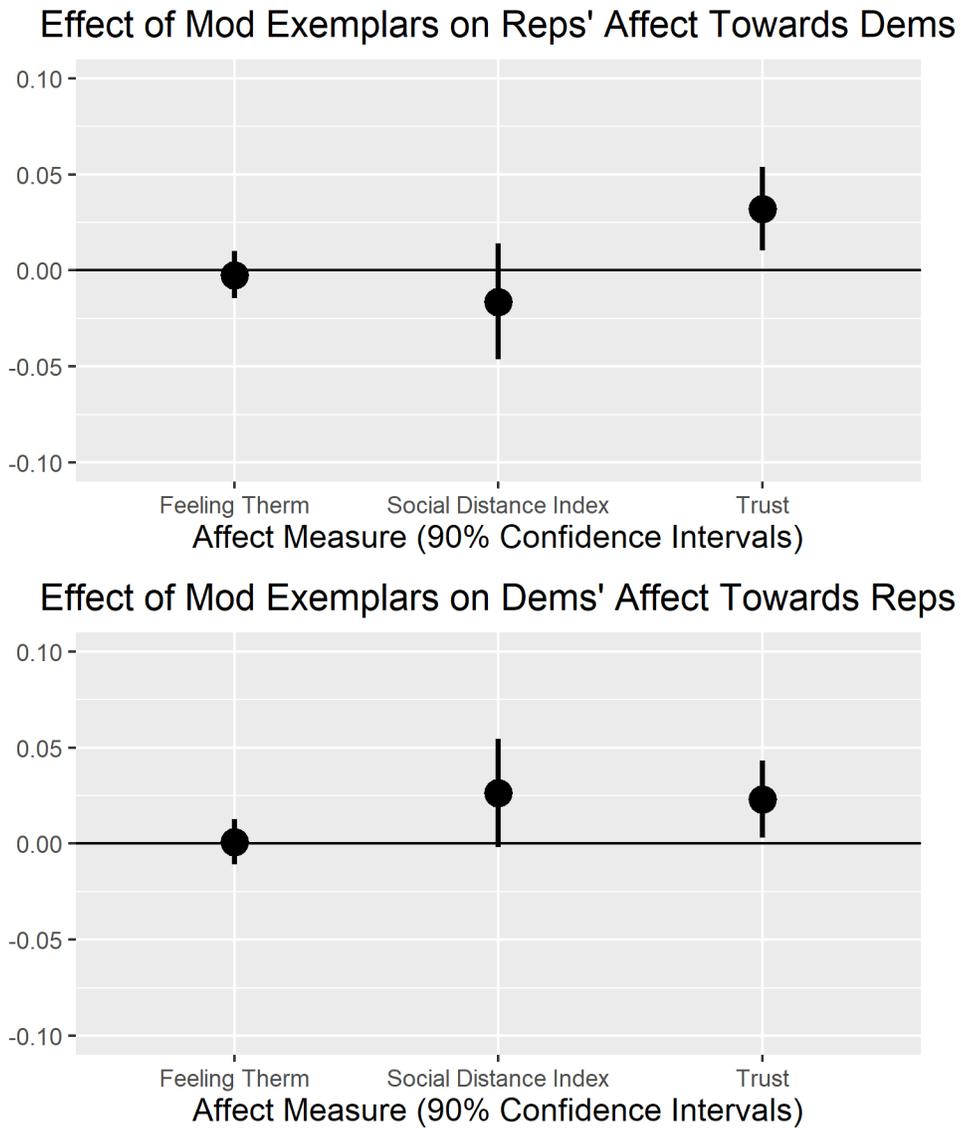
Figure 4: Effect of Moderate Exemplars vs. Extreme on Out-Party Affect

In summary, the moderate exemplars treatment moderated perceptions of out-party

ideology relative to the liberal/conservative exemplars condition, though the observed effect is

larger and more consistent for Republicans than for Democrats, and for some issues (abortion,

immigration), than others (taxes). A simple explanation of this difference across issues is that the

profiles of members of Congress tended to feature more discussion of social and cultural issues

than of economic issues.[11] There is some evidence that this effect is driven primarily by the
effect of moderate exemplars moving perceptions of out-party ideology in a moderate direction,
as opposed to ideological exemplars moving perceptions of out-party ideology in an
ideologically stereotypical direction, though this evidence is weaker.

Effect of Moderate Exemplars on Republicans' Affect Towards Democrats (vs. Control)
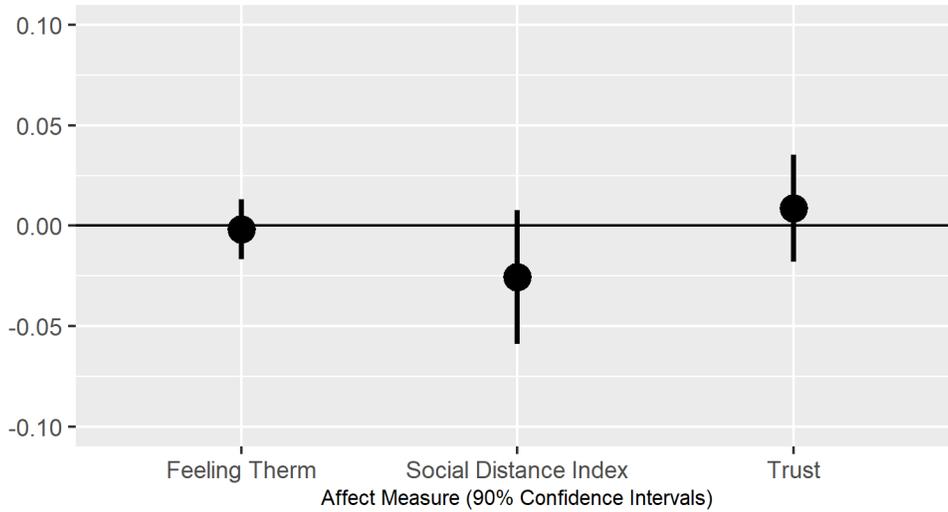
Effect of Ideoerate Exemplars on Republicans' Affect Towards Democrats (vs. Control)
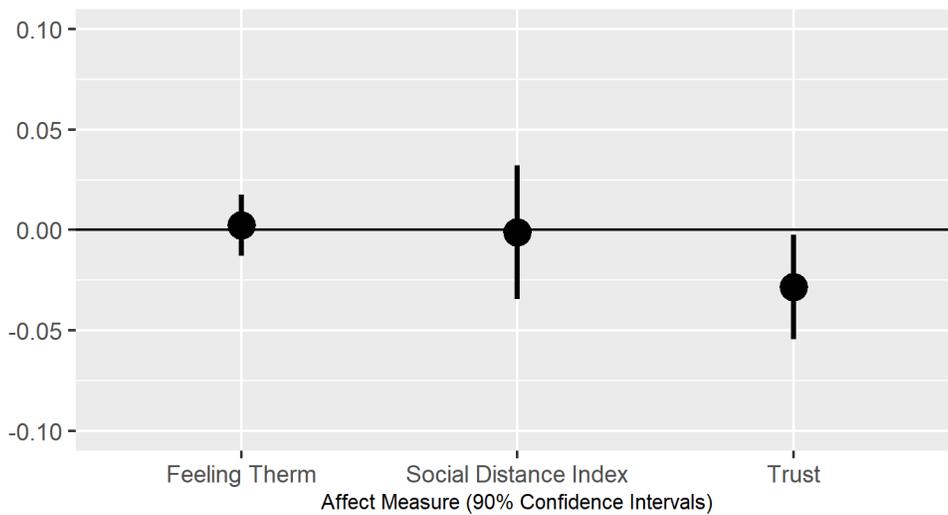
Figure 5: Effect of Dem Exemplars vs. Control on Rep Affect Towards Dems

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[11] 11 of 14 profiles explicitly mentioned abortion, and the most frequently mentioned issues besides abortion were
LGBTQ issues (nine profiles), gun control (seven profiles) and environmental issues (six profiles), especially climate
change. In contrast, only three profiles explicitly mentioned taxes, and the only other economic issue mentioned
by more than one profile were the minimum wage (three profiles), and Obamacare (three profiles).

Exemplars and Out-Party Affect

We find evidence that moderate and extreme exemplars affect perceptions of out-party ideology – does this translate into changes in affect towards the out-party, as our second set of hypotheses predicts? Figure 5a shows the effect of moderate Democratic exemplars on Republican affect towards Democrats – we rescale all measures to run between -1 and 1. The effects on the normalized feeling thermometer ($p = .375$, $d = .02$, $d_{\text{Reps/Inds}} = .88$) and the index of social distance measures ($p = .190$, $d = .06$, $d_{\text{Reps/Inds}} = .24$) are in the opposite of the expected direction, though neither is statistically significant and both are substantively small, especially relative to the benchmark of the difference between all Republicans and true independents in the sample. The effect on trust is in the expected direction and statistically significant ($p = .01$, $d = .16$, $d_{\text{Reps/Inds}} = .46$) and substantively of a similar magnitude as the effects on perceived issue positions, roughly one third of the difference between all Republicans and true independents in the sample.

Figure 5b shows the effect of moderate exemplars on Democratic affect towards Republicans. Here the effect on the out-party feeling thermometer is in the expected direction, but essentially zero ($p = .46$, $d = .01$, $d_{\text{Dems/Inds}} = .93$). The effect on trust ($p = .031$, $d = .11$, $d_{\text{Dems/Inds}} = .39$) and social distance ($p = .063$, $d = .14$, $d_{\text{Dems/Inds}} = .35$) are in the expected direction and statistically significant or marginally so. The magnitude of these effects is similar to other the other effects found here, again roughly one-third the size of the difference between all Democrats and all true independents in the sample.

As with *H1*, we next evaluate whether the observed effects is the result of participants in the moderate exemplar condition increasing their affect towards the out-party or participants in the liberal/conservative exemplar conditions reducing their affect towards the out-party. For

Republicans' preferences for social distance form Democrats (Figure 5), unexpected worsening in the moderate relative to the conservative condition is the result of the moderate condition decreasing affect relative to the control ($p = .103$, $d = .14$, $d_{Reps/Inds} = .24$), as the conservative condition has a negligible effect ($p = .476$, $d = .01$, $d_{Reps/Inds} = .24$), though neither effect is statistically significant. For trust, the observed effect appears primarily to be the effect of conservative exemplars reducing trust relative to the control ($p = .037$, $d = .15$, $d_{Reps/Inds} = .46$); moderate exemplars improved trust relative the control ($p = .294$, $d = .05$, $d_{Reps/Inds} = .46$), though this effect is not significantly significant. Effects on the feeling thermometer of both moderate ($p = .422$, $d = .01$, $d_{Reps/Inds} = .88$) and conservative exemplar conditions are negligible ($p = .401$, $d = .02$, $d_{Reps/Inds} = .88$).

The positive effect of moderate exemplars relative to conservative exemplars on Democrats' affect towards Republicans appears to be the result of both moderate exemplars improving affect and conservative exemplars reducing affect, though none of the effects were statistically significant (Figure 6). Moderate exemplars had a positive but negligible effect on the social distance index ($p = .401$, $d = .02$, $d_{Dems/Inds} = .35$) while conservative exemplars had a more substantial, though still statistically insignificant, negative effect on the social distance measure ($p = .224$, $d = .06$, $d_{Dems/Inds} = .35$). The reverse was true for the measure of trust, where we find a positive but statistically insignificant effect of moderate exemplars ($p = .148$, $d = .07$, $d_{Dems/Inds} = .39$) but a negligible effect of conservative exemplars ($p = .500$, $d = {<}.001$, $d_{Dems/Inds} = .39$). Neither moderate ($p = .383$, $d = .02$, $d_{Dems/Inds} = .93$), nor negative exemplars ($p = .264$, $d = .05$, $d_{Dems/Inds} = .93$) had a meaningful effect on Democrats' feeling thermometer for Republicans.
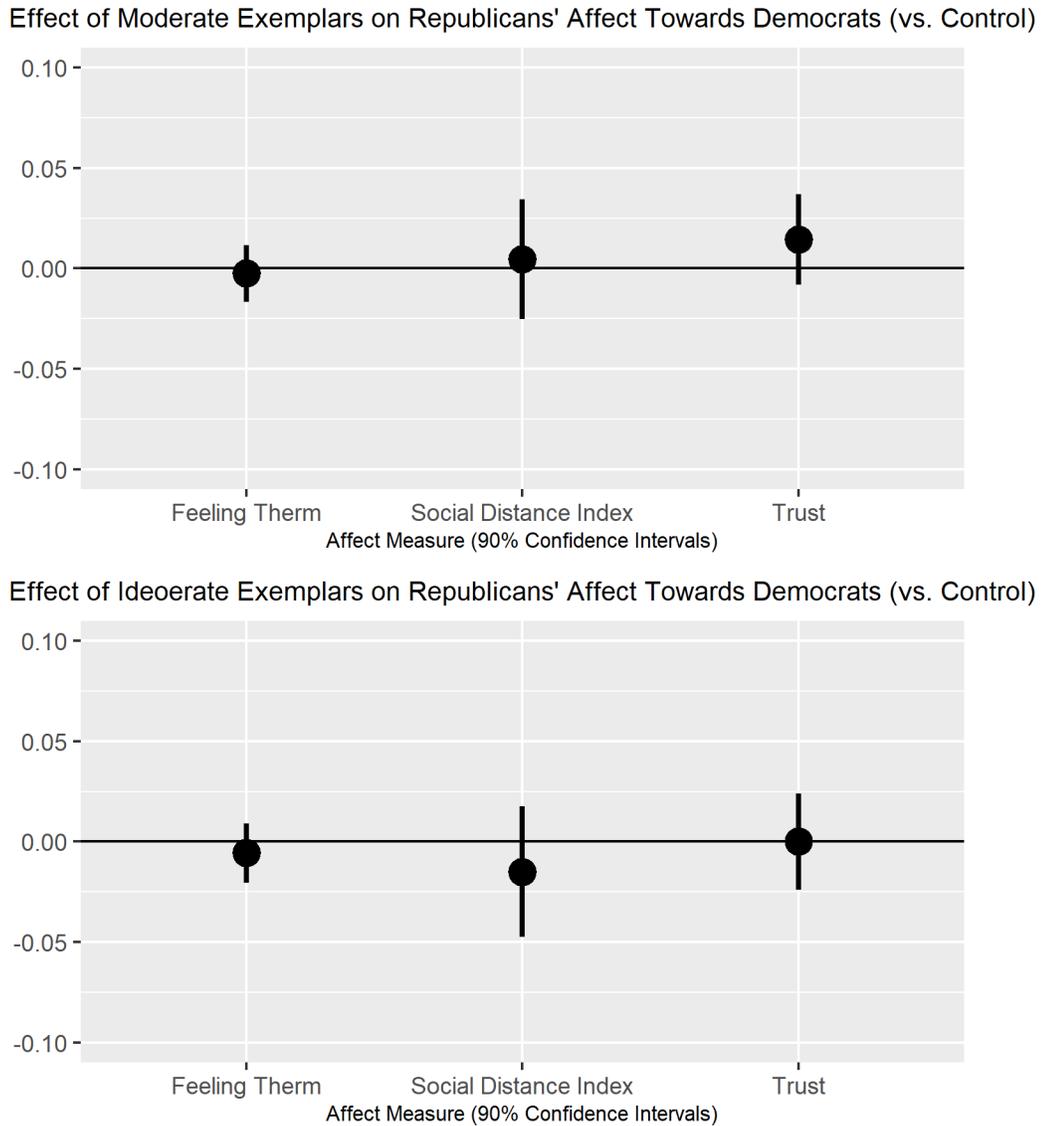
Figure 6: Effect of Rep Exemplars vs. Control on Dem Affect Towards Reps

We find some evidence that moderate exemplars improves some measures of affect towards the out-party. Comparing ideologically counter-stereotypical to stereotypical exemplars, we find strong evidence of a positive effect on trust in the out-party, mixed evidence on preferences for social distance from the out-party, and a negligible effect on out-party feeling thermometer. It is perhaps not surprising that the strongest effects were found on the most elite-focused measure of affect; while the trust questions do not specifically mention members of

Congress, their wording suggests that they are about Democrats or Republicans who are in a position to make policy or take government actions. The social distance measures, on the other hand, likely bring to mind partisans in the mass public, making the inconsistent effects of elite exemplars less surprising.
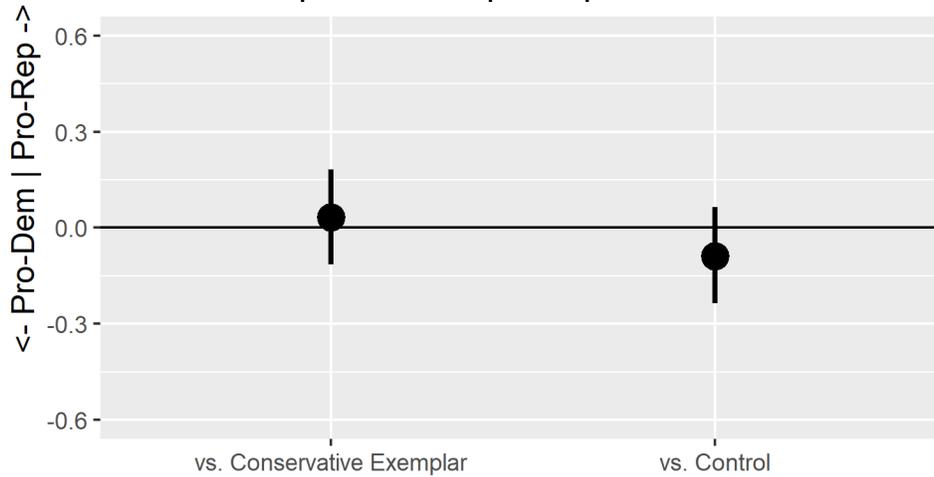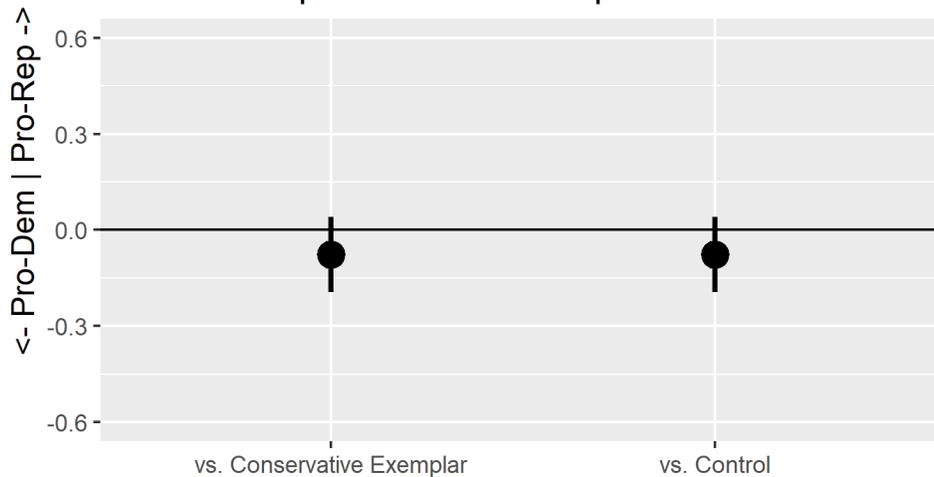

Figure 7: Effect of Moderate Exemplars on Implicit Attitudes

Exemplars and Implicit Attitudes

The third set of hypotheses predicts that exposure to moderate exemplars, relative to exposure to extreme exemplars, will improve implicit attitudes towards the out-party. Figure 7 shows the effect of moderate exemplars on the results of the BIAT relative to ideological stereotypical exemplars and relative to the control. In all cases, we find no statistically significant effect. The effect of Moderate Republican exemplars on Democrats' implicit attitude are in the opposite of the hypothesized direction (vs. conservative exemplars: $p = .273$, $d = .13$, $d_{\text{Dems/Inds}} = .59$; vs. control: $p = .294$, $d = .15$, $d_{\text{Dems/Inds}} = .59$). The effect of Moderate Democratic exemplars relative to liberal Democratic exemplars is in the hypothesized direction ($p = .725$, $d = .05$, $d_{\text{Reps/Inds}} = .87$), but the effect relative to the control condition is not ($p = .338$, $d = .14$, $d_{\text{Reps/Inds}} = .87$). Thus, we find no evidence to support *H3*.[12]

Conclusion

Why do partisans hold such negative, and distorted, pictures of the other party? This paper offers a novel theory that such negative stereotypes are driven by exposure to extreme partisan exemplars. Drawing on exemplar-based theories of stereotyping, we argue that individuals' stereotypes of the partisan other are constructed from the exemplars of partisans that they are exposed to. We test this theory using an established paradigm in the study of racial stereotypes, exposing partisans to stereotypical or counter-stereotypical exemplars of the out-party. We find general evidence that exposure to counter-stereotypical exemplars has a

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[12] This null finding comes with two important caveats. First, the sample size for these tests was quite small. As noted in fn 6, a far smaller percentage of respondents completed the BIAT than expected, so that even when we increased our sample size, only 679 respondents completed the BIAT, less than our pre-registered sample size of 780. This high degree of attrition suggests technical problems that may raised more general doubts about the quality of the BIAT data.

moderating effect on stereotypes of out-party ideology and a positive impact on trust in the out-party. These findings suggest a mechanism by which stereotypes of the out-party might become so distorted, and how they might be changed to be more accurate.

Since most exemplars of the out-party are encountered through the media, these results have important implications for how the media might drive affective polarization Existing explanations for how changes in the media environment might be connected to the increase in affective polarization tend to focus on selective exposure of individuals to partisan media outlets. Such exposure is thought to increase the salience of partisan identity and provide biased information that drives viewers to the extremes. Yet, evidence for these effects is mixed at best. Prior (2013, pg. 119) sums up the case against partisan media being the source of affective polarization: "Research to date does not offer compelling evidence that partisan media have made Americans more partisan. Most voters are centrist. Most voters avoid partisan media altogether or mix and match across ideological lines. And those who follow partisan media closely and select mostly one side are already partisan." A more recent review suggests that little has changed in this assessment, noting that "[i]t is far from clear, however, that partisan news actually causes affective polarization" (Iyengar et al. 2019, pg. 135).

The results presented here suggest a different mechanism: Changes in the people media consumers encounter as the "face" of two parties. Such a change could be the result of consumption of partisan media; certainly, someone who watches a great deal of Fox News will encounter more extreme exemplars of Democrats than someone who consumes more mainstream news sources. However, it could also be the result of trends affecting a much broader range of media outlets. For example, elite polarization could produce more coverage of extreme partisans, since there are simply more extreme and fewer moderate partisans to cover (see Mutz 2007 pg.

238-240). Alternately, the collapse of local news outlets and broad trend towards consuming

news from national sources (Hopkins 2018) could produce more exposure extreme partisans

from other parts of the country.[13] Exploring such mechanisms by which the media in general, not

just partisan media, might change individuals' images of the partisan other, is essential to

understanding how our politics arrived at its current, contentious place.

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[13] Indeed, Padgett et al. (2019) find that national media provides more coverage to ideologically extreme politicians. These is less evidence of whether this is also true of local media; Schaffner and Sellers (2003) find that local media outlets do not favor ideologically extreme politicians, though this study is both dated and may have excluded wire stories from their analysis, which account for a significant amount of coverage of national issues in local papers (Ridout et al. 2013).

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