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BUILDING THE PICTURES IN OUR HEADS: THE SELF-FULFILLING PROPHECY OF PARTISAN CONFLICT

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Animosity between American partisans has been rising for decades, producing governmental dysfunction, uncertainty, and even political violence. Theory and research on social identity processes imply that as antagonism rises, it may erode a shared sense of what it means to be American. I argue that to minimize the resulting psychological uncertainty, partisans will be drawn to outrage-driven media that castigates political opponents. Specifically, partisans will find vitriolic messages about members of the other political party reassuring, provoking the opposing party to respond with similar messages. That same search for psychological certainty will undermine support for political opponents' legal rights and encourage partisans to punish their own relatively moderate in-group members that are not sufficiently hostile to the opposition. To test these predictions, I use crowd-sourced survey experiments in fictitious social media environments that expose participants to high or low levels of partisan conflict. Outgroup aggression consistently fails to provoke retaliatory responses, but predictions about how social identity processes themselves would produce extreme responses were supported.

BUILDING THE PICTURES IN OUR HEADS: THE SELF-FULFILLING PROPHECY OF PARTISAN CONFLICT

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

People act, not on what is true, but on what they believe is true. This maxim of social science comes in many forms. Lippmann (1922) notes that everyone, from the top foreign affairs expert to the uninformed citizen, makes decisions based on a distorted story of the world around them—a world represented as stereotypes, or what he memorably called "the pictures in our heads." The Thomas Theorem reminds us that "If men define their situations as real, then they are real in their consequences." And Merton (1948) extended this observation one step further with his conception of the *self-fulfilling prophecy*: A belief, even if distorted or false at first, can lead to actions that make it true.

These processes describe current partisan relations in the United States. Recent decades have seen rising animosity between Republicans and Democrats (Iyengar et al. 2019), but the perception that the two parties don't get along has outpaced the growth of actual antipathy (Moore-Berg et al. 2020). And holding these exaggerated perceptions, mainly by the most active political participants, is predictive of endorsing anti-democratic and even violent actions against one's political opponents (Moore-Berg et al. 2020). This can—and has—led to an escalating series of partisan reprisals and counter-reprisals to rebalance the playing field in the biased eyes of partisans. This cycle is one form of what the political scientist Lee Drutman (2020) described as a "doom loop" for American democracy. When each side views its opposition as a fundamental threat, each can feel justified in taking actions that only escalate tensions, undermining a fair democratic process, with each side becoming the very threats to American democracy they see in their opponents.

This dissertation seeks to better understand the social psychological underpinnings of this 'doom loop.' Chapter 2 outlines the theoretical argument. As partisan conflict intensifies, we should expect this will raise questions in Americans' minds about what it means to be American. Less constrained by bipartisan decorum, Americans come to adopt more strident partisan postures and identify more closely with their party.

I then turn to how partisans treat their aggressive in-group members. Do partisans reward those who retaliate against the other side's aggression with equal or greater aggression? If so, is this driven by the weakening conception of what it means to be American? Alternatively, individuals may exclude political opponents from their vision of what it means to be American, justifying aggression in their minds. As a strong superordinate identity can powerfully unite a divided people (Gaertner et al. 1994; Kam and Ramos 2008), either possibility is especially troubling as it threatens a key source of solidarity in the United States. Finally, a third possibility is that partisans may see their opponents as a threat, making retaliation look like a rational way to defend the interests represented by one's faction.

The final issue I consider is tolerance for different points of view, first within one's own party and then within the country more generally. As tensions rise, we should expect partisans to continually penalize in-group members who try to remain civil and conciliatory with their political opponents. Such patterns in peer punishment should also be driven by a weak overarching American identity that enables a desire to maintain certainty about the partisan identity. Finally, partisans are expected to be less supportive of the rights of their political opponents following periods of conflict. If opposing partisans are understood in a sufficiently negative light, support for opponents' rights should measurably weaken, which Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018) link to subsequent decline in fair democratic politics.

A set of two survey experiments, described in Chapter 3, test these arguments. Chapter 4 reviews the results of each study. These analyses test an argument describing a cycle of how partisan aggression escalates through a self-fulfilling prophecy based on social identity mechanisms. This research highlights threats to a superordinate identity and to important democratic norms that allow the United States to weather the conflicts that are otherwise a normal part of the political process. Finally, the present research suggests specific ways that the existing structure of the media ecosystem may be contributing to escalating partisan conflict.

CHAPTER 2

THEORY

Here I develop a theory to explain escalating intergroup conflict between Republicans and Democrats in the United States. Previous work, especially in political science, lays the groundwork for explaining how Republicans and Democrats have become consistently divided along demographic boundaries. I use the social psychological literature on self-categorization and self-uncertainty to extend the implications of these divisions for partisan aggression. I argue these forms of aggression risk retaliation from political opponents through rewards to co-partisan extremists, punishments to co-partisan moderates, and declining support for the legal rights of political opponents. In what follows, I review the research from which my claims are derived and then present a conceptual model that summarizes the claims and guides the proposed empirical tests.

Partisan Animosity

Republicans and Democrats increasingly struggle to get along. Growing shares of Americans say they simply dislike the other party, and even oppose the idea of their child marrying a member of the other party (Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes 2012). Families also spent less time together over the 2016 Thanksgiving holiday due to partisan hostility (Chen and Rohla 2018). But the nature of animus extends well beyond mild discomfort and social distance. Partisans say they increasingly view members of the other party as threats to the United States (Pew Research Center 2014). Most striking is the fact that 57% of Republicans and 41% of Democrats say they view members of the opposing party as ‘enemies’ rather than political opponents (Salvanto et al. 2021). Clearly, this is not a sustainable trend.

However, some may find solace in noting that Americans increasingly identify as politically independent. Is high-profile political discord alienating Americans from the two major political parties? It is doubtful. When asked if they lean closer to one party or another, 81% of those who initially identified as independent chose one of the two American political parties (Pew Research Center 2019a). In total, 93% of Americans, when pressed, will choose a political party. Even if they were larger in number, true independents would likely be fairly uninfluential, as they have long exhibited low political participation rates and possess little knowledge of public affairs, a pattern which dates back decades (Converse 2006; Stimson 2004).

So why has partisan animosity[1] escalated? The dominant explanation derives from the growing consistency of partisans' social identities. The Republican Party is increasingly white, Christian, rural, and conservative. The Democratic Party is increasingly racially diverse, secular, urban, and liberal (Bishop 2008; Chen and Rodden 2013; Mason and Wronski 2018). Identities aligned along a consistent cleavage like political party lack cross-pressures that diversify a person's self-concept (Roccas and Brewer 2002). This makes losses for one's identity group, like lost elections, *feel* more significant (Mason 2018), likely explaining why large majorities of Americans in October 2020 identified that year's general election as a major stressor (American Psychological Association 2020).

Such growing alignment of racial, religious, geographic, and even lifestyle identities (DellaPosta, Shi, and Macy 2015) creates an ever clearer distinction between Republicans and Democrats, which decades of research suggests makes them more likely to become focal points

[1] What I discuss as "animosity" based on partisan group identity has been widely termed *affective polarization*, but authors have unfortunately used 'polarization' to describe a wide array of phenomena (Bramson et al. 2016), so to minimize confusion, *partisan animosity*, is used throughout this paper instead.

of discrimination and conflict (Coser 1956; Tajfel 1974; Turner et al. 1987). The most striking finding on the alignment of identities is that civil wars are over ten times more likely to occur when ethnic, religious, geographic, and socioeconomic differences all fall along a single social cleavage in a nation (Gubler and Selway 2012). In other words, tense political situations become more combustible the more that socioeconomic status, ethnicity, religion, and geographic residence form one consistent dividing line.

The media ecosystem in which conflicts occur and are portrayed can intensify such sharp dividing lines. Traditional and social media alike are dominated by intense partisan conflict (Bail 2021; Berry and Sobieraj 2014; Brady et al. 2017). On social media in particular, the most angry, vitriolic content spreads the fastest (Brady et al. 2017), taking up a disproportionate share of the attention online. As this content takes up so much attention, that means it is highly visible. Partisans have ample opportunity to witness their opponents behaving aggressively. Exactly this kind of negative intergroup contact is a major driver of prejudice, according to past research (Aberson 2015; Barlow et al. 2012). We should therefore expect that seeing one's partisan opponents instigate conflict will make partisans more hostile in-turn.

Claim 1. Viewing out-group instigated aggression is positively related to animosity against the out-group.

Social Identity, Self-Categorization, and Uncertainty

When individuals view themselves as members of a social category, that category is called a social identity. Social identities can include residents in a defined neighborhood, people of the same race, adherents to a political party, and so on. These identities contribute to self-understanding by nesting a person's self-concept in a complex social web: "Each of these memberships is represented in the individual member's mind as a social identity that both

describes and prescribes one's attributes as a member of that group—that is, what one should think, and how one should behave" (Hogg, Terry, and White 1995:259–60). For example, once a person knows they identify with the Democratic Party, the identity calls forth particular attitudes on social issues, opinions of different politicians and commentators, and so on. Because social identities delineate these expectations, the process of categorizing people into contrasting groups exaggerates perceived homogeneity within groups as well as perceived differences between them (Tajfel 1981). This is partly why differences between Republicans and Democrats are *perceived* as larger than they actually are in terms of ideology and demographics (Ahler and Sood 2018; Westfall et al. 2015). By implication then, anything that highlights the difference between Republicans and Democrats, like partisan sorting or intergroup conflict, should sharpen the distinction between parties.

Groups contribute to self-definition by providing a *prototype*, a clear image of what it means to be a member of a group. Those who are unsure of themselves can find greater reassurance from belonging to groups they see as more clearly distinct, according to uncertainty-identity theory (Hogg 2000; Hogg et al. 2007). For instance, college students away from home for the first time find reassurance from fraternities and sororities (Goldman and Hogg 2016). In general, the more distinctive a group, the clearer its prototype will be, and therefore the more useful it will be for reducing an individual's subjective sense of uncertainty. So, the theory proposes that the more a person feels uncertain, the more appealing it will be to identify with a distinctly defined group (Hogg 2000; Hogg et al. 2007). When experiencing self-relevant uncertainty, research has found individuals tend to identify more strongly with their social groups, and are even willing to engage in more aggressive actions *against an out-group* to

achieve *acceptance within their group* (Goldman and Hogg 2016). This suggests experiencing uncertainty can inspire individuals to take aggressive actions against political opponents.

One interesting prediction from uncertainty-identity theory is based on the way groups are nested within one another (Jung, Hogg, and Choi 2016; Jung, Hogg, and Lewis 2018). By way of example, Democrat and Republican are *subgroup* identities nested within the *superordinate* American identity. Jung and colleagues (2016, 2018) have predicted a compensatory process wherein identity certainty at one level negatively predicts identification at another level. So, the more certain a person feels about American identity, the less we should expect they need the validation their party may offer, and vice versa. One identity provides the clarity necessary to reassure a person's self-concept, so there is less need to identify with the other identity.

However, non-experimental surveys find only superordinate identification rises as subgroup identity certainty falls, but certainty about the superordinate identity is not significantly related to subgroup identification (Jung et al. 2016, 2018). In other words, the limited evidence so far shows that superordinate identities compensate for weakly defined subgroup identities, but subgroup identities do not compensate for weakly defined superordinate identities. However, experimentally manipulating aggression between partisan subgroups—which previous studies did not do—would inherently mean Americans' behavior is diverging, directing aggression at one another. The prototype of the superordinate American identity should therefore become more ambiguous and thus, less reassuring, because it becomes less obvious how Americans relate to one another. More formally,

Claim 2. Viewing outgroup aggression will be associated with less American identity certainty.

We should expect that witnessing outgroup aggression will make partisans more certain of their partisan identity. Each subgroup identity becomes more clearly defined because of conflict. More formally,

Claim 3. Viewing outgroup aggression will be associated with more partisan identity certainty.

Next, by the compensatory mechanism of uncertainty-identity theory, we should expect with declining American identity certainty, partisans will identify more with their party in search of a clear self-concept. More formally,

Claim 4. American identity certainty will negatively predict the strength of partisan identification.

The second part of the compensatory mechanism means that as partisan identity certainty grows, then partisan identification should strengthen to make up for the 'vacuum' left by a weakening American identity. Formally,

Claim 5. Partisan identity certainty will be positively associated with the strength of partisan identification.

Claims 2 through 5 suggest a mediation process. Certainty in American and partisan identities should mediate the effect of intergroup conflict on the strength of partisan identification. More formally,

Claim 6. Identity certainty will mediate the positive effect of outgroup aggression on party identity strength. Such aggression will a) positively predict partisan identity certainty, which b) positively predicts partisan identification. That same aggression will also c) negatively predict American identity certainty, which d) negatively predicts partisan identification.

Steps “a” through “d” of Claim 6 will be summarized going forward as the “uncertainty-identity process.” As this process intensifies, the goodwill and generosity of a shared American identity should fade with its growing ambiguity, producing more support for peers who retaliate against partisan opponents with vitriol and aggression in-kind.

Between-Group Escalation

If ongoing partisan aggression reduces the clarity of American identity, then by the logic of uncertainty-identity theory, partisans should seek out validation of their partisan identities and work to differentiate themselves from their partisan opponents. Particular forms of media have arisen that exploit that very impulse. Berry and Sobieraj (2014) content-analyzed the prevalence of “outrage tactics” in the news media over time, noting their growth since the mid-20th century in newspaper columns, talk radio, and television. As a genre of media, outrage attempts to activate moral indignation, fear, or anger in its audience. Outrage activates these emotions through various tactics like name-calling, sensationalism, and overgeneralization (Berry and Sobieraj 2014). It works. The moral-emotional language outrage media employs is tied to stiffer opposition to political compromise (Ryan 2017), more intense negative feelings toward political opponents (Ryan 2014), attraction to moral absolutism, and disdain for cost-benefit analysis (Ryan 2019). These characteristics of outrage media allow it to draw a simplified dividing line that distinguishes its consumers from their supposedly backward, misguided, or even dangerous political opponents. Its attraction makes sense in the way that it helps partisans manage psychological uncertainty. In their interviews with followers of outrage programming—including those hosted by the late Ed Schultz of MSNBC, Glenn Beck formerly of Fox News, and others—Berry and Sobieraj (2014:127) conclude,

> …outrage-based political opinion programs create safe political spaces for fans. In these contexts, fans experience none of the discomfort we associate with face-to-face political conversation. Instead, they feel included in a like-minded community, have their lifestyles and viewpoints validated, and walk away armed with ammunition for any who might challenge them.

Another troubling factor is that by denigrating out-groups so frequently and exaggerating their most radical fringes, outrage media may create an image in news consumers' minds of the typical member of the opposition as radically hateful of one's own group. As Lippmann (1922) long ago noted on the perceived reality of stereotypes, "we can best understand the furies of war and politics by remembering that almost the whole of each party believes absolutely in its picture of the opposition, that it takes as fact, not what is, but what it supposes to be the fact" (Lippmann 1922:7). So it should be especially worrying that, as Moore-Berg and colleagues (2020) found in a national survey, partisans drastically overestimate how much their political opponents dehumanize them. More specifically, partisans report in surveys that they think their opponents see them as closer to a quadrupedal ape than a modern human. Expected dehumanization then predicts support for anti-democratic tactics against the opposing party (e.g., "[Democrats/Republicans] should redraw districts to maximize their potential to win more seats in federal elections, even if it may be technically illegal"). There's a troublingly specious logic at play: if you believe your opposition sees you as subhuman, what will they do when they win political power? Should you not bend the rules to keep power away from a group that sees you this way?

But partisans inevitably see their own counter-reactions as far less menacing than their opponents do. As Claassen and Ensley (2016) find, partisans are motivated to downplay their

own group's election interference. Mutz (2007) reaches a similar finding wherein partisans dismiss the severity of their own side's demagoguery, but see menace in the same rhetoric when it comes from the opposition. So as partisans have become concerned about their opponents' demagoguery and mischief, driven to identify more closely with their party, we should expect they will look on extremists within their own camp more favorably.

Claim 7. As party identification rises, rewards to extreme co-partisans will rise.

Moreover, this effect should be mediated by the uncertainty-identity process. Therefore,

Claim 8. The uncertainty-identity process will mediate the effect of the outgroup's aggression on support for extreme co-partisans.

Exposure to such aggressive content can highlight the conflict between Republicans and Democrats, which may do real damage to a perceived American identity. Although they make American identity salient, such messages use American identity as a tool to distinguish in-group partisans from and castigate their opponents. While partisans themselves report enjoying the validation (Berry and Sobieraj 2014) and micro-celebrity status (Bail 2021) that spreading this content in their social circles can bring, uncertainty-identity theory would predict this aggression undermines the shared sense of what it means to be American. But part of what makes outrageous content so contagious is that it drives user engagement. Messages that make frequent use of outrage are more likely to go viral (Brady et al. 2017, 2019). This suggests that an exchange process may emerge where users share vitriolic content, and in turn their network confers approval in the form of likes and shares, encouraging more vitriol. The confluence of identity-based tribalism on the one hand, with powerful motivating rewards for vitriolic speech on the other, makes social media a powerful vector for the spread of outrage-based content.

Within-Group Purification

Although the rise in partisan animosity is often conceived as developing more extreme disdain for one's opposition, polarization can also take another form, whereby members of each group punish those in their own faction who have more mixed or conciliatory feelings toward political opponents. When experiencing internal or external strife, groups tend to become more internally authoritarian, characterized by more rigid norm-enforcement and support for dictatorial leaders (Benard 2012; Erikson 1966; Hogg and Adelman 2013).

As a group then, when members of a political party are experiencing uncertainty, parties can provide easy templates to understand oneself and most of one's social circle as united against wayward opposing partisans. So, those who deviate from the in-group prototype—that is, those who try to speak well of the opposing party or work with the opposing party—would be penalized for undermining the certainty and steadfastness of the group's resilience against their opponents. For example, partisans may find themselves even more opposed to compromise and consequentialist decision-making, as discussed in the previous section, because it may help one's political opponents.

Indeed group members report disliking their well-meaning peers – positive deviants – who take unusually prosocial actions because the non-deviant members anticipate negative moral judgment (O'Connor and Monin 2016). A desire to maintain the categorical boundary between Democrats and Republicans may explain why, when Levendusky (2018) asked survey respondents to write positive comments about the opposing party, only 38% actually complied, with many instead writing vitriolic or dismissive comments to the researcher. So even when compelled to say something positive about the out-group, many partisans may refuse to do so.

Relatedly, extensive research in the social identity literature has identified the *black sheep effect* where people denigrate their own group members who deviate from a group norm—

so much so that they like this person less than out-group members (Marques and Paez 1994; Marques and Yzerbyt 1988; Pinto et al. 2010). This may explain one stressor often voiced by politically moderate Americans. Bail (2021) interviewed American social media users, with self-identified moderate users regularly noting that they avoided discussing politics on social media at all for fear of angering close friends or family members. Many reported making what they saw as mild criticism of their own side, but facing memorably extreme negative feedback from a strong partisan. They reported subsequently avoiding political commentary on social media.

From the enforcement side, experiments have found norm enforcement occurs more routinely when prospective enforcers expect to receive rewards from their group for punishing deviants (Horne 2001, 2004). Moreover, ingroup favoritism biases group members even more in favor of their group when they expect rewards from ingroup members (Balliet, Wu, and De Dreu 2014; Yamagishi and Kiyonari 2000). So, in a space dominated by vigilant group members, we should expect two outcomes. The first is the key prediction of the "spiral of silence" theory of public opinion: if people perceive their opinion to be in the minority, they will avoid voicing that opinion, which leads others who share the same opinion to self-censor in turn (Glynn, Hayes, and Shanahan 1997; Noelle-Neumann 1974). Second, as rewards to strict enforcement rise and group members seek to distinguish themselves as genuine believers, we should expect a rise in the "false enforcement of unpopular norms" (Willer, Kuwabara, and Macy 2009). Because of the incredible pressures to conform (through rewards and punishments), even those who personally oppose a norm will still penalize those who deviate from it. These processes work in concert to distort and exaggerate the apparent opinions of members in any group.

In the context of uncertainty-identity theory, we should expect increased pressure toward uniformity as one's political opponents undermine certainty in American identity. This will

appear in the form of punishments for those who appear overly conciliatory with the out-group partisans. More formally,

Claim 9. As party identification rises, punishments to moderate co-partisans will rise.

The effect of witnessing the initial act of outgroup aggression should also be mediated by the uncertainty-identity process. Therefore,

Claim 10. The uncertainty-identity process will mediate the effect of witnessing outgroup aggression on support for extreme co-partisans.

By enabling easy within-group norm enforcement, social media environments—particularly Twitter—are especially prone to exaggerating the prevalence of extreme views. Of those who Tweeted about politics in a one-month period in 2018, 97% of the Tweets written were composed by the 10% most active Twitter users (Pew Research Center 2019b). Moreover, of all the Tweets that discussed national politics in that same period, 97% were written by Twitter users who strongly disapproved or strongly approved of President Trump. Politics is also especially fraught on social media; around 40% of Americans told Pew they had experienced online harassment (Vogels 2021). Most say this occurred on social media, and of those harassed online, about half say it was due to their political positions. An earlier version of a similar survey (Duggan 2017) even found moderates were more likely to report harassment because of their politics than those who identified more strongly with 'liberal' and 'conservative' labels.

Despite the mismatch between the typical Twitter user and the typical American, journalists nonetheless have increasingly used Twitter as a stand-in for public opinion in their reporting (McGregor 2019). This can propagate the skewed image of American partisans that emerges on Twitter in ways that shape the image of the electorate. Twitter's outsized influence in portrayals of political debate may partially explain why voters who are the most politically

engaged and who read the most news also exaggerate stereotypes about Republicans and Democrats the most (Ahler 2014; Ahler and Sood 2018; Levendusky and Malhotra 2016a, 2016b).

In summary, social media environments distort Americans' picture of the electorate by offering significant rewards for strident condemnation of one's political opponents and punishments for moderates within one's own camp who are understood as ineffectual or suspiciously disloyal. We should expect that peer punishment for perceived disloyalty to the party and ever more strident condemnation of one's political opponents to do two things: (1) contribute to stereotypes about the extremity of each faction, and (2) constrain actual partisans' behavior as time passes in an ongoing self-reinforcing cycle. Certainly, as commentators are quick to caution, social media is not real life. But social media can be real in its consequences for real life.

Threats to Democracy

In addition to threatening American identity, as animosity escalates between the two parties and pressures within parties toward conformity grow, this may also threaten the once-upon-a-time bipartisan commitment to classical liberal norms that undergird democratic government.[2] The most apparently threatened norm in the present era is the norm of mutual toleration, wherein members of political parties recognize rivals' rights to compete for elected office and govern as legitimate authorities. When this norm is threatened, officials are more prone to weaponizing the levers of government to maximize their party's electoral advantage

[2] However, Americans struggled to live up to democratic ideals even before the polarized present. Most Americans anxiously avoid discussions around controversial social issues (Eliasoph 1998), they generally dislike compromise (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2002), and they struggle to reason coherently about major policy issues (Converse 2006).

over opponents, for instance via partisan gerrymandering and restrictions on voting that disproportionately target the opposition's key voters (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018). This undermines both fair elections and the *perception* of fair elections, thus eroding the legitimacy of elected officials because their actual popular support becomes suspect.

Ironically, the very tactics that elevate voter turnout and small donations—apparent indicators of a healthy democracy—thrive on disdain for political opponents. Termed *negative partisanship*, voters tend to dislike the opposing party more than they like their own party (Abramowitz and McCoy 2019; Mason 2015). Moreover, disdain for social groups aligned with the opposing party mobilizes voters. Longitudinal surveys by Mason, Wronski, and Kane (2021) found that previous years' hostility to black, Hispanic, Muslim, and gay Americans positively predicted support for Donald Trump – a political figure who took a uniquely pugilistic stance against Democrats in general, but especially Hispanic and Muslim Americans. Notably, feelings toward these social groups were not associated with Republican Party support in general, and animosity toward traditionally Republican groups like white and Christian Americans was not predictive of support for any single Democratic politician tested (Nancy Pelosi, Chuck Schumer, Bernie Sanders, Hillary Clinton). However, Bartels' (2020) analyses of surveys of Republican voters find that ethnic antagonism—even after controlling for partisan animosity, support for Donald Trump, ideological conservatism, and political cynicism—was the strongest predictor of support for illiberal positions. Disdain for political opponents appears to have escalated to such an extent that voters prioritize it over commitments to liberal democracy.

While research finds some backlash against illiberal politicians, too few voters show the commitment to classically liberal principles necessary to constrain illiberal members of their own party. One nationally representative vignette experiment found only 10 – 15% of respondents

would vote for the opposing candidate if their party's candidate supported an illiberal platform (Graham and Svolik 2020). More concretely, when then U.S. House candidate Greg Gianforte (R-Montana) physically assaulted a journalist working for *The Guardian*, Gianforte only lost an estimated 3.6% of voters on the day of the election, still defeating his Democratic opponent 50.2% to 44.1% (5.7% voted for a Libertarian candidate) (Graham and Svolik 2020). While some voters, particularly moderates, were willing to change their vote in reaction against illiberal behavior, such voters are apparently too rare to consistently penalize this behavior. This may be an alarming sign of weakening normative constraints once provided by a coherent American identity, with mere partisan loyalty filling the void.

As American identity certainty wanes, but partisan identity certainty (and with it, partisan identification) rises, then norms and ideals that unite Americans should be expected to lose support, particularly if they prescribe tolerance for political opponents. More formally,

Claim 11. As party identification rises, support for mutual toleration will fall.

The influence of outgroup aggression on mutual toleration should also be mediated by the identity-uncertainty process. Therefore,

Claim 12. The uncertainty-identity process will mediate the effect of outgroup aggression on support for mutual toleration.

Summary of the Theory

All 12 claims are summarized in Figure 1. Claim 1 is illustrated by the positive effect of seeing outgroup aggression on animus against the outgroup. Claims 2 and 3 are represented by two simultaneous effects of out-group aggression: a negative effect on American identity certainty and a positive effect on partisan identity certainty. American identity certainty then negatively predicts the strength (i.e., closeness) of party identification (Claim 4), as partisan

identity certainty increases party identification (Claim 5). Claim 6, which represents the uncertainty-identity process, is illustrated by the indirect effect of witnessing outgroup aggression on party identification through American and partisan identity certainty. As partisan identification rises, then so too should rewards to extreme co-partisans (Claim 7), which should be explained by the uncertainty-identity process (Claim 8). Moreover, with greater party identification should also come greater rewards to aggressive co-partisans (Claim 9), which is also explained by the uncertainty-identity process (Claim 10). Finally, party identification will negatively predict support for mutual toleration (Claim 11), also owing to the uncertainty-identity process (Claim 12).

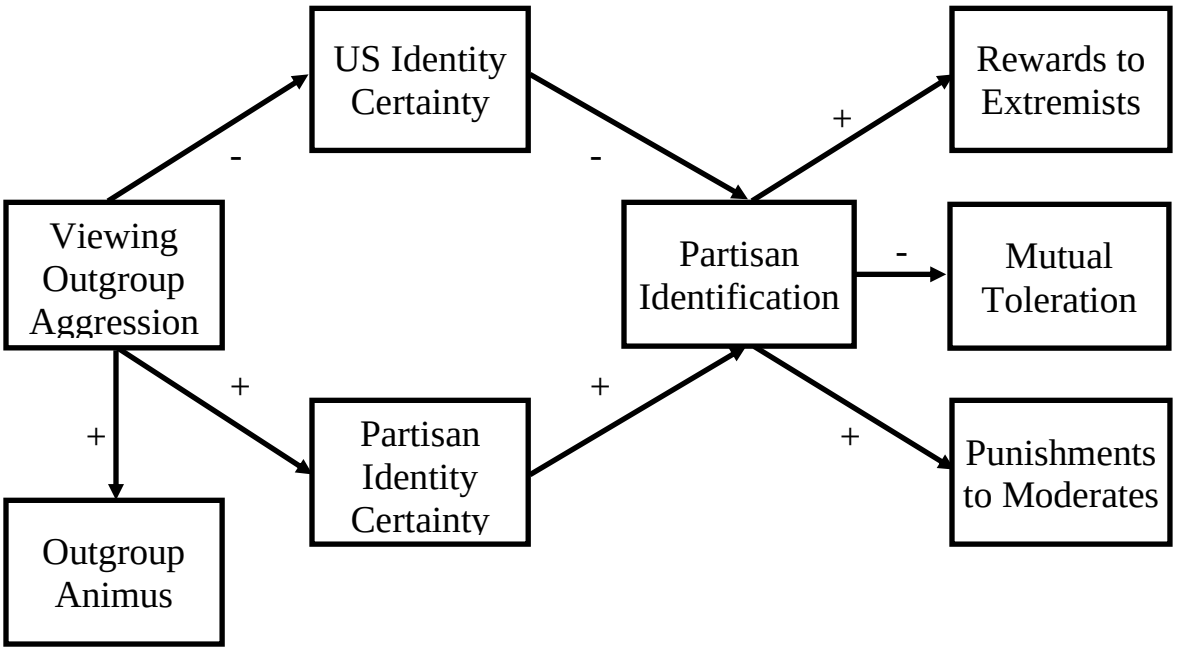

Figure 1: Hypothesized model explaining the effect of seeing aggressive out-group behavior on outgroup animus, peer sanctioning, and mutual toleration.

In summary then, long-running fear of one's opposition risks creating a series of negative encounters. Such encounters are expected to initiate a chain reaction whereby partisans' fear of opponents leads them to lash out, which will appear menacing to their opponents, who will retaliate in-turn. Under such conditions, moderation and reconciliation come to look weak; they come to look like bad strategy. The existential stakes feel real because a self-fulfilling prophecy has made them real. Partisans' fears of the opposition lead them to behave with the kind of illiberal aggression that validates their opponents' worst suspicions. Neither mutual toleration nor forbearance can hope to survive that kind of environment for long.

Alternatives to the Uncertainty-Identity Process

Although the predictions of uncertainty-identity theory fit closely with how partisans seek out validation and behave online, other processes may actually explain how intergroup conflict affects peer sanctioning and support for mutual toleration. First, perhaps instead of becoming less certain about what it means to be American, partisans will just see their opponents as less American. By this account, partisans think their in-group is American. They do not doubt American identity or what it means. They just don't see their opponents as fitting into what it means to be American. By this account, intergroup conflict may have all the same effects on peer sanctioning and support for mutual toleration, but conflict operates through undermining the superordinate American identity that otherwise helps unite members of competing groups (Gaertner et al. 1994; Kam and Ramos 2008). With reference to Figure 1, this alternate model would show a mediating process whereby viewing outgroup aggression negatively predicts the perception of a common ingroup that includes all Americans. Such a perception would negatively predict 1) punishments to same-party moderates and 2) rewards to same-party extremists, while positively predicting support for mutual toleration.

The second alternative is that witnessing conflict instigated by opposing partisans simply looks threatening. Existing research suggests that anticipated threat is a powerful driver of prejudice (Stephan and Stephan 2000), so out of a sense of threat, partisans may become more tolerant of extreme counter-measures from their in-group members and less tolerant for the rights of who they perceive as dangerous opponents. By this account, threat can take a realistic form (i.e., the outgroup threatens my group's material interests) or a symbolic form (the outgroup threatens my group's values) (Stephan and Stephan 2000). This alternate model, with reference to Figure 1, would predict viewing outgroup aggression positively predicts realistic and symbolic threat. Both types of threat should increase penalties to in-group moderates and rewards to in-group extremists, while reducing support for mutual toleration.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

Overview of Studies

The predictions developed above and illustrated in Figure 1 are tested with two survey experiments using the crowdsourcing tool, Cloud Research. All surveys include self-identified Republicans and Democrats as well as independents who lean toward one party or the other. Such 'leaners' are grouped with their party for the proposed analyses.[3] Cloud Research runs on the Amazon Mechanical Turk (mTurk) platform. Three major concerns with mTurk include participant inattention, misrepresentation of one's identity, and familiarity with typical deception protocols used in research (Kennedy et al. 2020; Summerville and Chartier 2013). To combat these, I opted to use CloudResearch features that 1) exclude participants who have a record of giving inattentive and deceptive responses, and 2) minimize the presence of non-naïve participants who may recognize ordinary research deception tactics. As discussed below, I also include attention checks in the surveys.

In both studies, participants are shown a bogus political news story where members of the opposing party denigrate the participant's political party (See Appendix A). The researcher is said to be interested in how Americans make sense of the news online together. Participants then answer a series of questions about the political parties dealing with prejudice, identity,

[3] This is a standard practice (see e.g., Bartels 2020; Vogels 2021) because independents who lean toward one party or the other do not tend to behave differently than those who explicitly align themselves with a party (Pew Research Center 2019a).

anticipated threats, and democratic rights. Then participants see responses to the news stories from four supposed co-partisans that vary in how vitriolically they respond to the news story (see the text of co-partisan responses in Appendix B).

Study 1 establishes scales for Study 2 and conducts manipulation checks (using news stories about memes that vary in their level of partisan vitriol). In so doing, Study 1 also tests the first six claims (dealing with partisan animosity and the uncertainty-identity process). Study 2 expands Study 1's focus on stories about memes to include news reports of face-to-face partisan aggression to examine the effects of more tangible conflicts. Study 2 also expands the full theoretical model. This means it will also offer a chance to replicate findings on the uncertainty-identity process tested in Study 1. Study 2 will also test the peer punishment predictions by offering participants the chance to reward and/or punish co-partisans for acts of reciprocal out-group aggression and attempted reconciliation.

Study 1

Study 1 tests A) whether reading about a vitriolic opponent increases partisan animosity (Claim 1), and B) if seeing a vitriolic opponent initiates the uncertainty-identity process (i.e., American identity certainty falls, while partisan identity certainty rises, producing the combined effect of raising partisan identification) (Claims 2 – 6). Study 1 also ensures the manipulations work as intended and is used to calculate reliability scores for a novel measure of mutual toleration and more parsimonious perceived threat measures (described below).

Participants

One hundred participants were assigned to each of the two experimental conditions, in equal proportions from the Democratic and Republican Parties, for a total sample size of 200. Partisans were identified with the question: "Do you consider yourself a Democrat, a

Republican, an independent or none of these?" If they selected one of the two major parties, they were asked "Do you consider yourself a strong or moderate [Democrat/Republican]?" Those who answered "independent" or "none" were asked "Do you lean more toward the Democrats or the Republicans?" where the options were "Lean Democrat", "Don't Lean", or "Lean Republican." Those who said they did not lean were thanked for their interest and informed that they were ineligible. The distribution of leaners, partisan moderates, and strong partisans within the two parties is displayed in Figure 2 below.

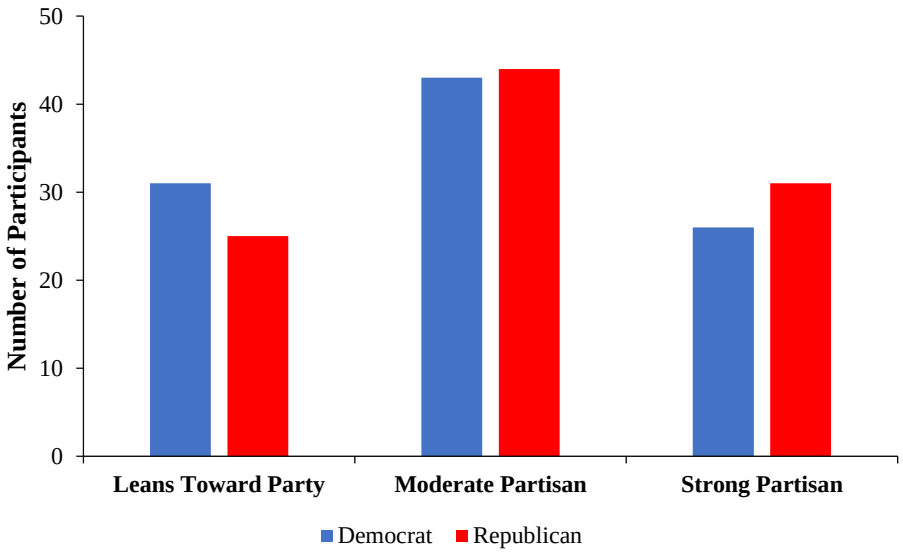

Figure 2. Partisans in Study 1 by self-reported strength of affiliation (N = 200).

Of all participants, 78% were non-Hispanic whites, 6.5% black, 6% Asian, and 4.5% chose another racial category. In terms of ethnicity, 9.5% were Hispanic or Latino. The gender breakdown was 55.5% women, 43.5% men, and 1% identifying with neither men nor women. The average participant was 38.6 years old (*SD* = 11.6). The median income was between

$40,000 and $49,999 with 56% holding a bachelor's degree or higher. This distribution of demographics is typical for a sample collected using mTurk (Litman and Robinson 2021).

Design and Procedure

Study 1 manipulated the level of vitriol in the story participants read about (high or low) based on the intensity of moral-emotional language the opposing party uses (based on Brady et al. 2017, 2019). See Appendix A for the text of the news stories. Participants then answered questionnaire items for the dependent variables: identity certainty, partisan identification, animosity toward the other party, support for mutual toleration, the perception of a common American ingroup, and anticipated outgroup threat. As a manipulation checks, participants then rated 1) how 'aggressive' they considered the meme to be and 2) the aggressiveness of each co-partisan's response to the meme. The survey took about 12 minutes to complete, and participants received $1.50 for their time.

Manipulation Checks. In response to the news story, respondents in Study 1 were first asked, "In the news story you read, how aggressive do [Democrats/Republicans] seem to you?" on a 0 – 100-point slider scale where 0 = "not aggressive at all" and 100 = "extremely aggressive." A t-test shows participants saw the "civil" meme as far less aggressive (M = 59.77, SD = 25.53) than the "vitriolic" meme, $t(198) = 7.56$, M = 82.86, SD = 16.74, $p < .001$.

Second, respondents used the same response scale to rate the four bogus comments on the news story from co-partisans: "How aggressive does this comment sound to you?" A series of paired-samples t-tests (i.e., for non-independent samples) show that co-partisan comments were perceived as aggressively as intended: the most vitriolic comment was seen as more aggressive (M = 71.92, SD = 23.22) than the second most vitriolic comment, $t(199) = 6.58$, M = 48.16, SD = 26.60, $p < .001$, and the second most vitriolic comment was perceived as more aggressive than

the third most vitriolic comment, $t(199) = 6.58$, $M = 36.89$, $SD = 26.38$, $p < .001$. Finally, the third most vitriolic comment was perceived as more aggressive than the least vitriolic comment, $t(199) = 10.45$, $M = 16.36$, $SD = 21.57$, $p < .001$.

Measures

The following are measures used in Study 1. Question wording for scales is reported in Appendix C. The quality of alpha reliability coefficients is described using rules of thumb in George and Mallery (2003).

Identity Certainty. After they read the news story's associated meme, respondents are asked how certain they are in 1) their identity as "Americans," and 2) their political party identity as "Democrats" or "Republicans." Identity certainty is measured using reverse-coded items adapted from prior research (Jung et al. 2018), seen in appendix C. Good alpha reliabilities emerged for both American ($\alpha = .86$) and partisan identity certainty ($\alpha = .88$).

Common Ingroup. The four-item measure of superordinate group inclusion was adapted from Gaertner and colleagues (1994), reported in Appendix C. As the initial alpha reliability was questionable ($\alpha = .63$), the question "In the United States, it usually feels as though we are individuals and not members of a particular group" was found to have very low correlations with all other items in the measure, rs < .12, and was consequently dropped. The reliability of the refined three-item measure is good ($\alpha = .83$).

Perceived Outgroup Threat. As a scale measure of perceived outgroup threat, I use measures of perceived outgroup threat from Stephan, Ybarra, and Bachman (1999). Full question wording for the 24 item-scale is reported in Appendix C, with 12 items measuring symbolic threat, and 12 measuring realistic threat. Past research that used this scale did not transparently state the full subset of items that were used in a given analysis or explain why certain items were

used. So to refine the measure for the current analyses, I used principal components analysis. Entering all items into the analysis shows that the first factor explains about 41% of the variance in these items, with the second factor explaining about 9%. When all items for realistic threat and symbolic threat are included in corresponding summary scores, they are highly correlated, r = .74. To avoid analytic problems with collinearity, and to ensure the measures are tapping into different constructs, items dealing with one type of threat that exhibited high correlations with the *other* type of threat were sequentially removed from consideration. Decisions were driven by whether items asked about substantively similar matters, the effects of dropping an item on reliability, and the unique variance contained in an item. The refined model retained four items from symbolic threat and four from realistic threat (used items are marked in Appendix C). The refined model improves such that the first factor explains 52% of the variance and the second factor explains 18% of the variance in the items. The refined measure of symbolic threat exhibits good reliability (α = .81), with excellent reliability for realistic threat (α = .90). The refined summary scores are also far less correlated (r = .47) than the unrefined scores.

Partisan Group Identification. Drawing on past social identity research, I use the Huddy and colleagues (2015) measure of closeness of identification with one's political party, measured using a series of Likert-typed response options. These tap into the group dimension of partisanship more than the simple partisan affiliation measure discussed above, and are reported in Appendix C. The question asking respondents how often they use "we" instead of "they" to talk about their political party used a five-point Likert scale, while other items used a four-point scale, as was the case in the original Huddy and colleagues (2015) measure. After converting this item to a four-point scale, the overall measure exhibits good reliability (α = .87).

Partisan Animus. This study uses two measures of partisan animosity: the conventional feeling thermometer from the American National Election Survey[4], and a series of trait attributions used by Druckman and Levendusky (2019). For the feeling thermometer, participants rated "The Democratic Party" and "The Republican Party."

The second measure of partisan animosity asks participants to indicate how well they think a series of traits describe members of the other political party, seen in Appendix C. These items were found to exhibit good reliability, and so merged into a single scale (α = .86). Positive items were reverse-coded so that the summary score measures denigrating attributions.

Mutual Toleration. Finally, the norm of mutual toleration, although a subject of much discussion (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018; Mettler and Lieberman 2020; Mutz 2007), lacks an existing quantitative attitudinal scale. Items based on existing questions in the General Social Survey are combined with novel items. Items are meant to reflect respect for the rights of the other party to engage in normal political activity, such as campaigning and governance. Respondents answer a series of slider bar questions where 0 = "Strongly Disagree" and 100 = "Strongly Agree." The statements appear in Appendix C. The unrefined scale exhibits good alpha reliability (α = .82). A principal components analysis shows that one factor accounts for 53% of the variance in these items. However, items dealing with respect for the opposing party's political leaders and that party's voters exhibit somewhat high unique variance (.58 and .54 respectively). The refined scale drops these two items, leaving a factor that explains 64% of the variance. The new alpha reliability remains about the same (α = .81).

Racial Resentment. Some effects of outgroup aggression may overlap with feelings about different social groups. As reviewed in the previous chapter, one social identity uniquely

[4] See Appendix C for the full question wording of the standard feeling thermometer.

stands out in its relationship to political party: Race. Black Americans are heavily concentrated in the Democratic Party, and White Americans are increasingly concentrated in the Republican Party (Mason and Wronski 2018). Moreover, animus against particular racial groups is predictive of feeling thermometer ratings of political leaders (Abramowitz and McCoy 2019; Mason et al. 2021). This implies animus against Black Americans then may be a powerful driver of inter-party conflict. I therefore include the "racial resentment" scale as an important control variable in all analyses. Racial resentment is one measure of symbolic racism, the dominant form of racism against black Americans in the contemporary United States (Bobo 1983; Kinder and Sanders 1996). Symbolic racism consists of negative moral stereotypes specifically about Black Americans: that they don't share other Americans' commitment to hard work and individual responsibility (Kinder and Sanders 1996). The racial resentment items (see Appendix C) developed by Kinder and Sanders (1996) exhibit excellent reliability (α = .93). Importantly, racial resentment items were asked *before* the false news story was introduced to participants, so the story could not influence responses to the racial resentment scale.

Additional Control Variables. In addition, respondents are asked about their political ideology (i.e., liberal / conservative), race, ethnicity, gender, income, age, religious affiliation, and educational attainment. Question wording is reported in Appendix C.

Data Quality Checks

When shown the news story, participants were asked to summarize it in a text box on the same page. Responses were coded as valid or invalid based on responses. Following previous protocols (Chmielewski and Kucker 2019), if for this question, respondents wrote completely off-topic responses like "VERY GOOD STUDY" or copy-pasted irrelevant text as a response,

their case was discarded as invalid and replaced (N = 20). Importantly, responses were not coded as invalid if the respondent was confused or the response was poorly written.

In Study 1, participants spent an average of 2 minutes and 10 seconds on the page. Then, at the end of the study, participants were asked a multiple-choice question about the news story's content. In the middle of the survey, they were also prompted to select a particular Likert-typed response option. No one in Study 1 failed both attention checks. When participants read their co-partisans' reactions to the news story, they were asked to offer their own comment on the events. As a suspicion probe, participants were asked if they noticed anything odd in the study. One participant voiced suspicion about the study design. While participant suspicion is a threat to internal validity, research by Blackhart and colleagues (2012) finds suspicion probes are generally ineffective in separating naive participants from participants who do not believe study manipulations and cover stories. For this reason, I check for self-reported suspicion, but do not exclude participants based on it.

Study 2

Study 2 followed the procedures described in Study 1, except where indicated below. Study 2 is a four-condition experiment that manipulates the intensity of intergroup conflict. The experiment uses the same stories as Study 1, but also adds new ones that escalate the intensity of conflict to include face-to-face forms of conflict. The novel outcome measures are again tested and deployed from Study 1. To avoid making participants too suspicious about the true nature of the study, Study 2 did not ask participants how aggressive they see the story and their co-partisans are.

Study 2 also adds a peer sanctioning measure to the present research. After seeing their co-partisans' reactions to the news story, participants decide which co-partisan (if any) should

receive a gift of 50 cents (reward measure) and which (if any) should lose 50 cents from their pool of gifts from other survey-takers (punishment measure). Participants then wrote their own message to be evaluated by future survey takers who could then add or take money from the participant's supposed "bonus pool." In reality, participants' responses were not shared, and they were not eligible for bonuses. Creating this environment ensures participants feel pressure to conform to what they believe is the group standard. Participants took about 12 minutes and received $1.50 for their time.

Participants

Each condition had 200 participants, half identifying with the Republican Party and half with the Democratic Party. The total sample size was 800. Partisans were identified in the same way as in Study 1, with leaners, moderate partisans, and strong partisans. The distribution of each is visualized in Figure 3 below.

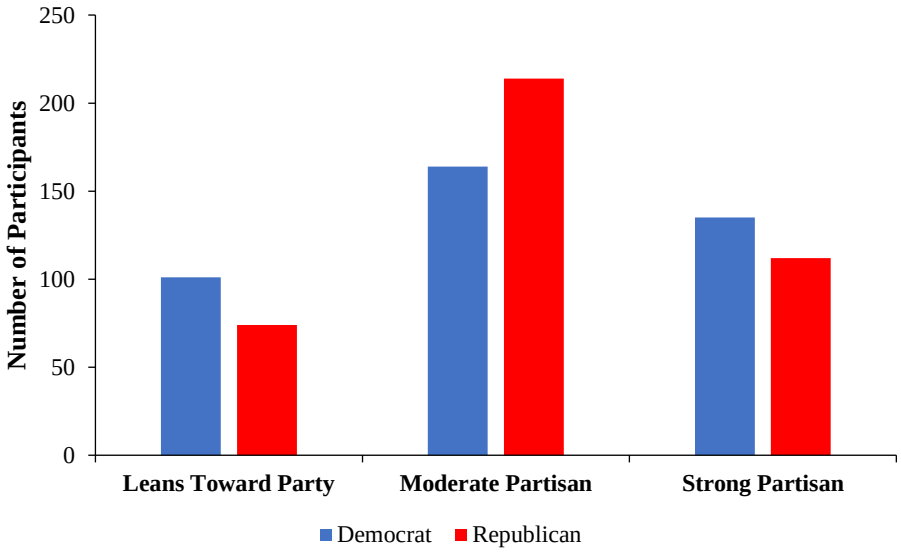

Figure 3. Strength of Partisan Affiliation by Political Party among Study 2 Participants. (N = 800)

Non-Hispanic whites made up 75.1% of the sample, followed by Black Americans at 9.5%, Asians at 5.5% and 5.1% coming from another racial group. Men were 39.9% of participants, with women at 59.4%, and people identifying with neither at 0.7%. The average age was 39 years (*SD* = 12.5). The median income fell between $40,000 and $49,999, with 54.4% claiming at least a bachelor's degree.

Design

Outgroup aggression was manipulated by showing participants the low vitriol meme from Study 1 (condition 1), the high-vitriol meme from Study 1 (condition 2), the high-vitriol meme in the context of a story about out-group partisans stealing campaign yard signs (condition 3), and the high vitriol meme in the context of a story about out-group partisans starting a street clash during the in-group party's local rally (condition 4). Appendix A reports the wording of each story.

Measures

The same summary score measures are used here as in Study 1, mostly meeting "good" to "excellent" thresholds of reliability: American identity certainty (α = .87), partisan identity certainty (α = .87), partisan identity strength (α = .88), negative trait attributions about partisan opponents (α = .86), the perception of a shared ingroup identity (α = .78), and racial resentment (α = .92). Items from the novel measures that were identified as promising from the Study 1 principal components analysis are reassessed here using confirmatory factor analysis.

Perceived Threat. Confirmatory factor analysis is used on the items in Study 2, based on the principal components analysis used to select items in Study 1. The results are shown in Table

1 below. The standardized coefficients show the items load well on their respective factors, and the fit is good.

Table 1. Confirmatory Factor Analysis of Realistic and Symbolic Threat, Standardized Coefficients (N = 800).

Variable	Realistic Threat	Symbolic Threat
Rthreat1	.90***	
	(.01)	
Rthreat2	.79***	
	(.02)	
Rthreat5	.80***	
	(.01)	
Rthreat10	.89***	
	(.01)	
Sthreat1		.54***
		(.03)
Sthreat4		.78***
		(.02)
Sthreat6		.49***
		(.03)
Sthreat10		.80***
		(.02)
Error Covariance (Sthreat1, Sthreat6)	.33***	
	(.03)	
Error Covariance (Realistic, Symbolic)	.66***	
	(.03)	

NOTES: Standard errors appear in parentheses. See Appendix C for question wording.
χ^2 (18) = 22.22, p = .222; RMSEA = .017; R^2 = .976, CFI = .999, TLI = .998, SRMR = .020.

Mutual Toleration. Also based on the principal components analysis in Study 1, a confirmatory model on mutual toleration is shown in Table 2. The standardized coefficients show the items load well on the factor, with an acceptable fit.

Table 2. Confirmatory Factor Analysis of Mutual Tolerance, Standardized Coefficients (N = 800).

Opp1	.53***
	(.03)
Opp2	.61***
	(.03)
Opp5	.90***
	(.02)
Opp6	.71***
	(.03)
Error Covariance (Sthreat1, Sthreat6)	.54***
	(.03)

NOTES: Standard errors appear in parentheses. See Appendix C for question wording.
χ^2 (1) = .52, p = .472; RMSEA < .001; R^2 = .859, CFI = 1.000, TLI = 1.002, SRMR = .003.

Sanctioning Behavior. Sanctioning behavior is dummy-coded for the Chapter 4 analyses. For reward, 1 = "rewarded the most vitriolic co-partisan" and 0 = "chose another option." For punishment, 1 = "penalized the most conciliatory co-partisan" and 0 = "chose another option." This binary coding has the advantage of retaining respondents in the analysis who chose not to reward anyone and those who chose not to punish anyone (as opposed to treating them as missing data were the ordinal structure preserved).

Data Quality Checks

As in Study 1, responses were coded as "invalid" and removed from the dataset if they contained nonsensical written responses (N = 28). One additional respondent was also coded as invalid after this respondent indicated that they leaned toward neither Democrats nor Republicans, and then came back, answered a different way so that they could pass the eligibility

criteria, and then completed the survey. Fortunately, there is no record of any other participant in Studies 1 or 2 attempting this.

In Study 2, participants spent an average of 2 minutes and 18 seconds on the page containing the manipulation. In the middle of the survey, participants were prompted to pick a certain option on a Likert-typed question, and at the end of the study, they answered a multiple-choice question about the subject of the news story they read. One person in Study 2 failed both attention checks and was excluded for inattention. Six participants expressed suspicion about the study design.

Hypotheses

The numbered hypotheses below are based on expected relationships between the study manipulations and measures of the core concepts from the claims laid out in the theory section. Hypotheses are numbered to correspond to their respective theoretical claim.

Hypothesis 1a. The level of out-group aggression is positively related to ingroup bias.

Hypothesis 1b. The level of out-group aggression is positively related to endorsing negative stereotypes about partisan opponents.

Hypothesis 2. The level of out-group aggression is negatively associated American identity certainty.

Hypothesis 3. The level of out-group aggression is positively associated with partisan identity certainty.

Hypothesis 4. American identity certainty is negatively related to the strength of partisan identification.

Hypothesis 5. Partisan identity certainty is positively related to the strength of partisan identification.

Hypothesis 6. Identity certainty mediates the positive effect of outgroup aggression on party identity strength. Such aggression will a) positively predict partisan identity certainty, which b) positively predicts partisan identification. That same aggression will also c) negatively predict American identity certainty, which d) negatively predicts partisan identification.

Hypothesis 7. Party identification is positively related to rewarding the most extreme co-partisan.

Hypothesis 8. The uncertainty-identity process mediates the effect of the outgroup's aggression on rewarding the most extreme co-partisan.

Hypothesis 9. Party identification is positively related to punishing the most conciliatory co-partisan.

Hypothesis 10. The uncertainty-identity process mediates the effect of the outgroup's aggression on punishing the most conciliatory co-partisan.

Hypothesis 11. Party identification is negatively related to support for mutual toleration.

Hypothesis 12. The uncertainty-identity process mediates the effect of outgroup aggression on support for mutual toleration.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

This chapter proceeds by presenting results from each study. Study 1's analyses are limited to the effect of witnessing outgroup aggression on identity processes (Claims 1 – 6). Analyses of Study 2 repeat tests of these claims and add effects on sanctioning behavior (Claims 7 - 10). The analyses also examine effects on support for mutual toleration (Claims 11 and 12). Models were inspected for assumption violations—including influential outliers, multicollinearity, heteroskedasticity, and non-normal residuals. Outliers did not significantly change results whether they were retained or removed from analyses. Corrections for assumption violations are discussed below. Alternate model specifications also checked for interaction effects between political party and witnessing outgroup aggression, but what few significant interactions emerged failed to replicate across studies.

Study 1

Descriptive Statistics

Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics for items used in the analyses for Study 1. As is convention (Iyengar et al. 2019), the feeling thermometer scores are analyzed by subtracting scores for the outgroup from the scores for the ingroup. High values indicate a higher bias in favor of one's group. The average respondent ranked their party about 45 points higher than the opposing party, approximately on par with estimates from the ANES (Iyengar et al. 2019). All other results can be understood with reference to the description of Measures in Chapter 3 and the full question wording in Appendix C.

Table 3. Study 1 Descriptive Statistics (N = 200).

Variable	Mean / Proportion	Standard Deviation	Range
Experimental Condition (Vitriolic Meme = 1)	.50	-	0 – 1
Political Party (Republican = 1)	.50	-	0 – 1
Racial Resentment	2.56	1.15	1 – 5
Ingroup Bias (Feeling Thermometer Scores)	44.76	31.31	-75 – 100
Negative Trait Attributions	67.11	17.84	9.33 – 100
American Identity Certainty	56.95	21.99	0 – 100
Partisan Identity Certainty	61.40	21.50	0 – 100
Strength of Partisan Identity	2.48	.72	1 – 4

Hypothesis 1a: The level of out-group aggression is positively related to ingroup bias. The first hypothesis states that we should expect disdain against outgroup members to increase following a negative encounter with the outgroup. This should produce more dislike of the outgroup relative to one's own group and more negative trait attributions about the out-group.

An OLS regression model in Table 4 uses the vitriol condition and political party to predict the feeling thermometer scores. Model A shows no main effect of either experimental condition (b = 1.62, SE = 4.45, p = .716) or an effect of political party, b = -.92, SE = 4.45, p = .836. Net of the experimental conditions and party, racial resentment positively predicts ingroup bias in Model B (b = 5.32, SE = 2.47, p = .032). As reported in the previous chapter, the manipulation check worked. Participants saw events in the Civil Meme condition as less

aggressive than the Vitriolic Meme condition. However, feeling thermometer scores did not change in response to the experimental manipulation.

Table 4. OLS Coefficients Predicting Ingroup Bias (N = 200).

	Model A	**Model B**
Civil Meme (Reference)		
Vitriolic Meme	1.62	1.57
	(4.45)	(4.41)
Democrat (Reference)		
Republican	-.92	-8.49
	(4.45)	(5.64)
Racial Resentment		5.32*
		(2.47)
Intercept	45.33***	43.11***
	(7.38)	(7.38)
Adj. R^2	.00	.01

NOTES: Standard errors appear in parentheses. $^{\dagger}p < .10$, *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.
Ingroup bias was computed from feeling thermometer scores as described in the previous chapter under Study 1 Measures.

Hypothesis 1b. The level of out-group aggression is positively related to endorsing negative stereotypes about partisan opponents. When predicting negative outgroup attributions, Model A in Table 5 shows Republicans make less negative attributions than Democrats, b = -5.33, SE = 2.50, p = .034. Model B in Table 5 shows racial resentment positively predicts derogatory attributions, b = 5.39, SE = 1.33, $p < .001$, and the difference between Democrats and Republicans actually grows, b = -13.01, SE = 3.08, $p < .001$.

Table 5. OLS Coefficients Predicting Negative Attributions (N = 200).

	Model A	Model B
Civil Meme (Reference)		
Vitriolic Meme	3.00	2.95
	(2.50)	(2.41)
Democrat (Reference)		
Republican	-5.33*	-13.01***
	(2.50)	(3.87)
Racial Resentment		5.39***
		(1.35)
Intercept	73.61***	71.36***
	(4.14)	(4.03)
Adj. R^2	.02	.09

NOTES: Standard errors appear in parentheses. $^{\dagger}p < .10$, $*p < .05$, $**p < .01$, $***p < .001$.

Overall, these results largely fail to support Hypothesis 1: neither feeling thermometer scores, nor negative attributions change in response to witnessing outgroup aggression. Notably, racial resentment is a consistent predictor of greater out-party animus, which makes sense considering the sizable overlap between race and political party in the United States. This result suggests racial resentment exerts its own strong effect on bias against political rivals, consistent with previous findings (Abramowitz and McCoy 2019; Mason et al. 2021).

Hypothesis 2: The level of out-group aggression is negatively associated American identity certainty. In line with uncertainty-identity theory, we should expect outgroup aggression to shake confidence in identities shared with the outgroup, especially American identity. However, exposure to outgroup aggression does not reduce American identity certainty (Table 6, Model A: $b = 3.44$, $SE = 3.09$, $p = .267$). Racial resentment, however, positively predicts American identity certainty ($b = 5.24$, $SE = 1.69$, $p = .002$). This means racially

resentful respondents were more certain about what it means to be American. Hypothesis 2 is not supported.

Table 6. OLS Coefficients Predicting American Identity Certainty (N = 200).

	Model A	Model B
Civil Meme (Reference)		
Vitriolic Meme	3.44	3.39
	(3.09)	(3.03)
Democrat (Reference)		
Republican	5.27†	-2.20
	(3.09)	(3.87)
Racial Resentment		5.24**
		(1.69)
Intercept	47.32***	45.14***
	(5.13)	(5.07)
Adj. R^2	.01	.05

NOTES: Standard errors appear in parentheses. †p < .10, *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.

Hypothesis 3: The level of out-group aggression is positively associated with partisan identity certainty. Uncertainty-identity theory would also lead us to expect more partisan identity certainty after witnessing outgroup aggression. Model A in Table 7 reveals a positive effect of outgroup aggression on partisan identity certainty, $b = 6.51$, $SE = 3.01$, $p = .032$. This effect held net of racial resentment, as seen in Model B, $b = 6.46$, $SE = 2.96$, $p = .030$. Notably, the higher a respondent's racial resentment, the more certain they feel about what it means to belong to their political party ($b = 4.80$, $SE = 1.66$, $p = .004$). Overall, conflict clarified the boundaries between groups, supporting Hypothesis 3.

Table 7. OLS Coefficients Predicting Partisan Identity Certainty (N = 200).

	Model A	Model B
Civil Meme (Reference)		
Vitriolic Meme	6.51*	6.46*
	(3.01)	(2.96)
Democrat (Reference)		
Republican	2.76	-4.08
	(3.01)	(3.78)
Racial Resentment		4.80**
		(1.66)
Intercept	54.00***	52.00***
	(5.00)	(4.96)
Adj. R^2	.02	.05

NOTES: Standard errors appear in parentheses. $^{\dagger}p < .10$, *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.

Hypothesis 4: American identity certainty is negatively related to the strength of partisan identification. Another key prediction from uncertainty-identity theory is that self-relevant uncertainty should induce greater identification with clearly defined groups. Hypothesis 4 predicted this would mean American identity certainty is negatively related to party identification (because party identity compensates for an ambiguous American identity). Model B in Table 8 shows just this. American identity certainty reduces the strength of partisan identification (*b* = -.01, *SE* = .002, p = .006). The result holds net of racial resentment (Model C, Table 8), with resentment itself only exerting a marginal effect (*b* = .10, *SE* = .05, *p* = .071). Standardized beta coefficients are included in Table 8 to convey the magnitude of the effects of identity certainty (a 100-point scale) on party identification (a four-point scale). Hypothesis 4 is supported.

Table 8. Unstandardized and Standardized OLS Coefficients Predicting Strength of Partisan Identification (N = 200).

	Model A		Model B		Model C	
	b	β	b	β	b	β
Civil Meme (Reference)						
Vitriolic Meme	.08	.05	-.01	-.01	-.01	-.01
	(.10)		(.09)		(.09)	
Democrat (Reference)						
Republican	.11	.08	.10	.07	-.03	-.02
	(.10)		(.09)		(.12)	
American Identity Certainty			-.01**	-.20	-.01**	-.22
			(.00)		(.00)	
Partisan Identity Certainty			.02***	.51	.02***	.49
			(.00)		(.00)	
Racial Resentment					.10†	.15
					(.05)	
Intercept	2.27***		1.66***		1.68***	
	(.17)		(.20)		(.20)	
Adj. R^2	.00		.20		.21	

NOTES: Standard errors appear in parentheses. †p < .10, *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.
b refers to unstandardized coefficients, and *β* to standardized coefficients.

Hypothesis 5: Party Identity Certainty Increases the Strength of Party Identification. Hypothesis 5 says clearly defined identities will prompt greater identification, thereby meaning we should expect party identity certainty to strengthen identification with one's political party. Party identity certainty increases the strength of party identification as seen in Model B of Table 8, $b = .02$, $SE = .002$, $p < .001$. Hypothesis 5 is supported.

Hypothesis 6: The Uncertainty-Identity Process Mediates the Effect of Outgroup Aggression on the Strength of Party Identification. Because outgroup aggression does not predict party identification, as seen in Model A of Table 8, there is not an effect suitable for a mediation analysis to explain. Hypothesis 6 is consequently unsupported.

Study 1 Discussion. Overall, the results of Study 1 do not suggest witnessing outgroup provocation initiated a counter-response, despite respondents explicitly recognizing the vitriolic meme as more aggressive than the civil meme (See Chapter 3). Both in-group bias (measured using feeling thermometer scores) and endorsement of negative stereotypes remained unchanged after witnessing outgroup aggression (Hypotheses 1a and 1b). Moreover, outgroup aggression did not change American identity certainty (Hypothesis 2), but it did increase partisan identity certainty (Hypothesis 3). As predicted, American identity certainty negatively predicted identifying closely with one's political party (Hypothesis 4) and party identity certainty positively predicted stronger partisan identification (Hypothesis 5). Effects of identity certainty on the strength of identification uniquely support the predictions of uncertainty-identity theory, where previous tests have fallen short (Jung et al. 2016, 2018). However, the uncertainty-identity process does not explain the effect of conflict on identification because party identification is not even related to seeing outgroup aggression (Hypothesis 6).

Except for party identification, racial resentment emerges as a consistent predictor of outcome variables. As previous work has found (Abramowitz and McCoy 2019), racial resentment is positively related to animus against political opponents. But racial resentment also positively predicts partisan identity certainty *and* American identity certainty. Racial resentment instigates many of the important social identity variables of interest in the causal chain, and is doing so more strongly than witnessing outgroup aggression.

Study 2

The descriptive statistics for Study 2 appear below in Table 9. They're largely the same as in Study 1, but one surprising outcome is the distribution of reward and punishment behavior in Study 2. While the hypotheses for this study are focused on the probability of rewarding

extreme members in one's own faction and penalizing those advocating reconciliation, at a purely descriptive level, it is intriguing that respondents were several times more likely to actually penalize the most outrageous commenter, and reward the most conciliatory one, *regardless of group membership*. That is, neither party differed in its sanctioning behavior of co-partisans. Compared to Republicans, Democrats were not significantly different in terms of rewards, $\chi^2(4) = 6.50$, $p = .165$, or punishments, $\chi^2(4) = 6.80$, $p = .147$. I return to the distribution of sanctioning behavior in the concluding Discussion chapter.

Table 9. Study 2 Descriptive Statistics (N = 800)

Variable	Mean / Proportion	Standard Deviation	Range
Condition			
Civil Meme	.25	-	0 – 1
Vitriolic Meme	.25	-	0 – 1
Signs	.25	-	0 – 1
Clash	.25	-	0 – 1
Political Party (Republican = 1)	.50	-	0 – 1
Racial Resentment	2.74	1.18	1 – 5
Ingroup Bias (Feeling Thermometer Scores)	44.22	31.13	-51 – 100
Negative Outgroup Attributions	66.37	18.39	.44 – 100
American Identity Certainty	58.32	22.93	0 – 100
Partisan Identity Certainty	59.55	21.59	5.6 – 100
Strength of Partisan Identity	2.55	.72	1 – 4
Support for Mutual Toleration	76.12	21.29	0 – 100
Realistic Threat	68.76	22.28	0 – 100
Symbolic Threat	74.61	17.93	7 – 100
Shared Identity	27.56	20.37	0 – 100
Reward			
Outrageous Condemnation	.14	-	0 – 1
Mild Condemnation	.10	-	0 – 1
Slight Condemnation	.09	-	0 – 1

Conciliatory Response	.62	-	0 – 1
No One	.04	-	0 – 1
Punishment			
Outrageous Condemnation	.40	-	0 – 1
Mild Condemnation	.04	-	0 – 1
Slight Condemnation	.03	-	0 – 1
Conciliatory Response	.11	-	0 – 1
No One	.42	-	0 – 1

Hypothesis 1a. The level of out-group aggression is positively related to ingroup bias. As in Study 1, with Study 2, there is no main effect of outgroup aggression on bias favoring one's ingroup (see coefficients for different conditions in Model A of Table 10). Notably in Model B, racial resentment is positively associated with ingroup bias, as in Study 1, $b = 4.12$, $SE = 3.27$, $p = .001$. Without an effect of outgroup aggression, Hypothesis 1a is unsupported.

Table 10. OLS Coefficients Predicting Ingroup Bias (N = 800).

	Model A	Model B
Civil Meme (Reference)		
Vitriolic Meme	-2.85	-2.60
	(3.12)	(3.10)
Signs Story	-2.81	-2.48
	(3.12)	(3.10)
Clash Story	.17	.75
	(3.12)	(3.10)
Democrat (Reference)		
Republican	-.18	-6.75*
	(2.20)	(2.97)
Racial Resentment		4.12***
		(1.26)
Intercept	45.68***	37.39***
	(2.46)	(3.52)
Adj. R^2	.00	.01

NOTES: Standard errors appear in parentheses. $^{\dagger}p < .10$, *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.

Hypothesis 1b. The level of out-group aggression is positively related to endorsing negative stereotypes about partisan opponents. There is also no main effect of outgroup aggression on negative attributions about the outgroup. As seen in Modell A of Table 11, there is a small negative effect of political party, such that Republicans are slightly less likely than Democrats to make negative attributions against their political opponents (b = -2.78, SE = 1.30, p = .033). As in Study 1, Model B of Table 11 shows racial resentment positively predicts higher negative stereotype endorsement, b = 2.19, SE = .74, p = .003. Hypothesis 1b is unsupported. Overall, there is no support in Study 2 for the hypothesis that witnessing outgroup aggression produces more animus against political opponents.

Table 11. OLS Coefficients Predicting Negative Attributions (N = 800).

	Model A	Model B
Civil Meme (Reference)		
Vitriolic Meme	-1.24	-1.11
	(1.84)	(1.83)
Signs Story	0.01	.18
	(1.84)	(1.83)
Clash Story	-1.03	-.72
	(1.84)	(1.83)
Democrat (Reference)		
Republican	-2.78*	-6.26***
	(1.30)	(1.75)
Racial Resentment		2.19**
		(.74)
Intercept	68.32***	63.93***
	(1.45)	(2.08)
Adj. R^2	.00	.01

NOTES: Standard errors appear in parentheses. $^{\dagger}p < .10$, *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.

Hypothesis 2: The level of out-group aggression is negatively associated with American identity certainty. Unlike in Study 1, outgroup aggression has a significant negative effect on American identity certainty. Respondents who read about a partisan clash report less certainty in American identity than those who read about the civil meme circulating on social media, as seen in Model A of Table 12, b = -4.55, SE = 2.20, p = .040. Of note, adding racial resentment (see model B) reduces the effect of the street clash coefficient to non-significance, b = -3.94, SE = 2.18, p = .071. Compared to Model A, accounting for racial resentment in Model C (b = 4.33, SE = .88, p < .001) also reduces the effect of being a Republican on American identity certainty. Because there was an initial effect of aggression on identity certainty, Hypothesis 2 is supported. However, it seems racial resentment is accounting partly for the effect of both

political party and partisan aggression. I return to this issue in the Discussion.

Table 12. OLS Coefficients Predicting American Identity Certainty (N = 800).

	Model A	Model B
Civil Meme (Reference)		
Vitriolic Meme	-2.12	-1.86
	(2.20)	(2.17)
Signs Story	1.35	1.69
	(2.20)	(2.17)
Clash Story	-4.55*	-3.94†
	(2.20)	(2.18)
Democrat (Reference)		
Republican	12.16***	5.26*
	(1.56)	(2.08)
Racial Resentment		4.33***
		(.88)
Intercept	53.57***	44.87***
	(1.74)	(2.47)
Adj. R^2	.08	.10

NOTES: Standard errors appear in parentheses. $^{\dagger}p < .10$, *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.

Hypothesis 3: The level of out-group aggression is positively associated with partisan identity certainty. In Study 2, there is no main effect of witnessing outgroup aggression on party identity certainty (Models A and B, Table 13). Of note, racial resentment positively predicts partisan identity certainty, $b = 3.26$, $SE = .86$, $p < .001$. Hypothesis 3 is not supported. While Study 1 found a positive effect of seeing outgroup aggression on partisan identity certainty, that did not replicate in Study 2.

Table 13. OLS Coefficients Predicting Partisan Identity Certainty (N = 800).

	Model A	Model B
Civil Meme (Reference)		
Vitriolic Meme	-.59	-.39
	(2.15)	(2.13)
Signs Story	-1.98	-1.71
	(2.15)	(2.13)
Clash Story	-.81	-.35
	(2.15)	(2.13)
Democrat (Reference)		
Republican	5.47***	.27
	(1.52)	(2.04)
Racial Resentment		3.26***
		(.86)
Intercept	57.66***	51.10***
	(1.70)	(2.42)
Adj. R^2	.01	.03

NOTES: Standard errors appear in parentheses. $^{\dagger}p < .10$, *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.

Hypothesis 4: American identity certainty is negatively related to the strength of partisan identification. As in Study 1, American identity certainty reduces party identity strength, consistent with expectations, $b = -.01$, $SE = .001$, $p < .001$ (See Models B and C, Table 14). Racial resentment is not a significant predictor of the strength of partisan identification, $b = .01$, $SE = .03$, $p = .676$. Hypothesis 4 is supported.

Table 14. Unstandardized and Standardized OLS Coefficients Predicting Strength of Partisan Identification (N = 800).

	Model A		Model B		Model C	
	b	β	b	β	b	β
Civil Meme (Reference)						
Vitriolic Meme	-.08	-.05	-.08	-.05	-.08	-.05
	(.07)		(.07)		(.07)	
Signs Story	-.08	-.05	-.05	-.03	-.04	-.03
	(.07)		(.07)		(.07)	
Clash Story	-.05	-.03	-.06	-.04	-.06	-.04
	(.07)		(.07)		(.07)	
Democrat (Reference)						
Republican	.12*	.08	.09†	.06	.08	.05
	(.06)		(.05)		(.06)	
American Identity Certainty			-.01***	-.17	-.01***	-.17
			(.00)		(.00)	
Partisan Identity Certainty			.02***	.48	.02***	.48
			(.00)		(.00)	
Racial Resentment					.01	.02
					(.03)	
Intercept	2.54***		1.90***		1.88***	
	(.06)		(.09)		(.10)	
Adj. R^2	.00		.17		.17	

NOTES: Standard errors appear in parentheses. †p < .10, *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.
b refers to unstandardized coefficients, and *β* to standardized coefficients.

Hypothesis 5: Partisan identity certainty is positively related to the strength of partisan identification. As in Study 1, party identity certainty increases party identity strength, $b = .02$, $SE = .001$, $p < .001$, net of other factors (Models B and C, Table 14). Hypothesis 5 is supported.

Hypothesis 6: Identity certainty mediates the positive effect of outgroup aggression on party identity strength . As in Study 1, there is no effect of partisan aggression on the

strength of party identity (Model A, Table 14), and therefore no effect suitable to be explained by a mediation analysis. Hypothesis 6 is not supported.

Hypothesis 7: Party identification is positively related to rewarding the most extreme co-partisan. The question asking respondents to reward a co-partisan for their comment on the news story included a list of four people and a fifth choice to reward no one at all (See Appendix C for exact question wording). Recall that this question is transformed into a binary variable where 1 = "rewarded the most extreme co-partisan" and 0 = "rewarded someone else or no one at all." As seen in Model B of Table 15, a one-point increase in partisan identification (a four-point scale) increases the odds of rewarding the most outrageous co-partisan by 85%.[5] Racial resentment is also a significant predictor of rewards in Model C, *OR* = 1.34, *SE* = .16, *p* = .012. Racial resentment appears to operate alongside partisan identification, but is not displacing it. Hypothesis 7 is supported.

[5] Ordered logistic regression models that retained the ordinal structure of the question reached similar results. However, those models are not ideal as they remove respondents who rewarded no one from the analysis.

Table 15. Odds Ratios Predicting Rewards to Extreme Co-Partisans from Logistic Regression Models (N = 800).

	Model A	Model B	Model C
Civil Meme (Reference)			
Vitriolic Meme	1.21	1.27	1.29
	(.34)	(.36)	(.37)
Signs Story	.88	.93	.95
	(.26)	(.28)	(.28)
Clash Story	1.04	1.08	1.14
	(.30)	(.31)	(.33)
Democrat (Reference)			
Republican	.90	.85	.51*
	(.18)	(.17)	(.15)
Strength of Partisan Identification		1.85***	1.82***
		(.27)	(.27)
Racial Resentment			1.34*
			(.16)
Intercept	.17***	.03***	.02***
	(.04)	(.02)	(.01)
Pseudo R^2	.00	.03	.04

NOTES: Standard errors appear in parentheses. $^{\dagger}p < .10$, $*p < .05$, $**p < .01$, $***p < .001$.

Hypothesis 8: The uncertainty-identity process mediates the effect of the outgroup's aggression on rewarding the most extreme co-partisan. The main effect of outgroup aggression (Model A) in Table 15 fails to reach statistical significance. There is consequently no effect of outgroup aggression to be explained using mediation analysis in this instance, so Hypothesis 8 is unsupported.

Hypothesis 9: Party identification is positively related to punishing the most conciliatory co-partisan. Again, when respondents were asked to penalize a co-partisan, they could choose to A) penalize any of the co-partisans whose comment they read or B) choose to

penalize no one. Punishment in this analysis is dummy-coded such that 1 = "punished the most conciliatory co-partisan" and 0 = "rewarded someone else or no one at all." Logistic regression techniques in Table 16 model the odds ratio that the most conciliatory co-partisan was punished vs. all other outcomes. Model B shows that party identity strength positively predicts punishing the conciliatory co-partisan (*OR* = 1.72, *SE* = .28, *p* = .001). Racial resentment is also significant and positive in Model C (*OR* = 1.42, *SE* = .18, *p* = .007). Hypothesis 9 is supported.

Table 16. Odds Ratios Predicting Penalties to Conciliatory Co-Partisans from Logistic Regression Models (N = 800).

	Model A	**Model B**	**Model C**
Civil Meme (Reference)			
Vitriolic Meme	.91	.95	.96
	(.28)	(.29)	(.29)
Signs Story	1.00	1.05	1.06
	(.30)	(.32)	(.32)
Clash Story	.54†	.56†	.58
	(.19)	(.19)	(.20)
Democrat (Reference)			
Republican	1.32	1.25	.69
	(.30)	(.28)	(.22)
Strength of Partisan Identification		1.72***	1.66**
		(.28)	(.27)
Racial Resentment			1.42**
			(.18)
Intercept	.13***	.03***	.02***
	(.03)	(.02)	(.01)
Pseudo R^2	.01	.03	.04

NOTES: Standard errors appear in parentheses. †p < .10, *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.

Hypothesis 10: The uncertainty-identity process mediates the effect of the outgroup's aggression on punishing the most conciliatory co-partisan. The main effect of

outgroup aggression on rewards to extreme co-partisans is not significant in Model A of Table 16. There is not an effect for a mediation analysis to explain, so Hypothesis 10 is unsupported.

Hypothesis 11: Party identification is negatively related to support for mutual toleration. When predicting mutual toleration in OLS models, error terms were found to be heteroskedastic, so robust standard errors are used. The effect of outgroup aggression on tolerance for political opponents is not significant (Model A, Table 17). The strength of partisan identity is not significant when added in Model B (b = -2.24, *Robust SE* = 1.16, p = .055). However racial resentment is associated with less support for the rights of political opponents (b = -3.61, *Robust SE* = .91, $p < .001$). Hypothesis 11 is unsupported.

Table 17. OLS Coefficients Predicting Mutual Toleration (N = 800).

	Model A	**Model B**	**Model C**
Civil Meme (Reference)			
Vitriolic Meme	-3.66†	-3.84†	-4.05†
	(2.10)	(2.11)	(2.08)
Signs Story	-1.23	-1.42	-1.71
	(2.08)	(2.08)	(2.05)
Clash Story	.21	.10	-.43
	(2.00)	(2.00)	(1.97)
Democrat (Reference)			
Republican	-1.27	-1.01	5.14**
	(1.50)	(1.49)	(1.87)
Strength of Partisan		-2.24†	-2.00†
Identification		(1.16)	(1.15)
Racial Resentment			-3.87***
			(.88)
Intercept	77.92***	83.62***	90.81***
	(1.57)	(3.30)	(3.74)
R^2	.01	.01	.04

NOTES: Robust standard errors appear in parentheses. †p < .10, *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.

Hypothesis 12: The uncertainty-identity process mediates the effect of outgroup aggression on support for mutual toleration. As outgroup aggression did not predict support for the rights of the opposing party (Models A and B in Table 17), there is not an effect for a mediation analysis to explain, so Hypothesis 12 is unsupported.

Alternative Mechanism: Intergroup Aggression and Perceived Outgroup Threat. At this point, I turn to address the alternatives to identity uncertainty as plausible mediators between outgroup aggression and sanctioning behavior as well as support for mutual toleration. The first alternative is perceiving the outgroup as a threat. This measure borrowed from research in integrated threat theory (Stephan et al. 1999) conceives of two kinds of threats: threats to values and ideals (symbolic threat) and threats to material and political interests (realistic threat).

In Table 18, I predict both symbolic threat (Models A and B) and realistic threat (Models C and D) using political party, outgroup aggression, and racial resentment. For both symbolic and realistic threat (Models A and C), there are no main effects of outgroup aggression. The only predictor of note for realistic threat is a small positive effect of racial resentment in Model C, b = 1.88, SE = .90, p = .038. When it comes to symbolic threat, Republicans perceived significantly more threat from the outgroup, as seen in Model A, b = 3.83, SE = 1.25, p = .002. In Model B, racial resentment positively predicts symbolic threat (b = 2.38, SE = .71, p = .001), and utterly wipes out the effect of political party (b = .03, SE = 1.69, p = .984). This would suggest that differences in symbolic threat the two parties perceive in one another are explained almost entirely by racial resentment. In other words, Republicans tend to be more racially resentful, in line with previous findings (Abramowitz and McCoy 2019; Kinder and Sanders 1996), and consequently, Republicans see Democrats as more threatening to their values than vice versa. Returning to the central prediction of interest regarding intergroup aggression, there is no effect

of aggression on perceived outgroup threat. That said, outgroup threat may still contribute to important outcomes of interest here.

Table 18. OLS Coefficients Predicting Perceived Outgroup Threat (N = 800).

	Symbolic Threat		*Realistic Threat*	
	Model A	**Model B**	**Model C**	**Model D**
Civil Meme (Reference)				
Vitriolic Meme	.63	.77	2.57	2.68
	(1.77)	(1.76)	(2.23)	(2.23)
Signs Story	.61	.80	1.55	1.70
	(1.77)	(1.76)	(2.23)	(2.23)
Clash Story	1.37	1.71	-.23	.04
	(1.77)	(1.76)	(2.23)	(2.23)
Democrat (Reference)				
Republican	3.83**	.03	-1.13	-4.13†
	(1.25)	(1.69)	(1.58)	(2.13)
Racial Resentment		2.38***		1.88*
		(.71)		(.90)
Intercept	69.34***	64.56***	68.36***	64.58***
	(1.40)	(2.00)	(1.76)	(2.53)
Adj. R^2	.01	.02	.00	.00

NOTES: Standard errors appear in parentheses. †p < .10, *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.

In Table 19, symbolic and realistic threat predict the reward and punishment outcomes (logistic models) as well as support for mutual toleration (OLS model). Realistic threat positively predicts rewarding the most extreme co-partisan (*OR* = 1.04, *SE* = .01, $p < .001$), but symbolic threat has no significant effect (*OR* = 1.00, *SE* = .01, $p = .725$). When predicting penalties to a co-partisan that advocates reconciliation, both realistic threat (*OR* = 1.04, *SE* = .01, $p < .001$) and symbolic threat (*OR* = 1.02, *SE* = .01, $p = .024$) increase the odds that a respondent will penalize the most conciliatory co-partisan. Perceived realistic threat clearly plays a potent role in

motivating this important form of social control, with a lesser role played by symbolic threat, which only raises the odds of penalizing moderate in-group members. Finally, mutual toleration is negatively associated with realistic threat (b = -.18, *Robust SE* = .04, $p < .001$, but is not significantly related to symbolic threat (b = .03, *Robust SE* = .05, p = .596). These results suggest symbolic threat contributes largely to maintaining within-group conformity, but realistic threat leads people to support extreme co-partisans, penalizing deviant ingroup members, and disrespecting the legal rights of political opponents. However, as with the identity-uncertainty process, witnessing outgroup aggression did not increase threat, and thus, perceived threat cannot explain the effect of conflict on subsequent escalation.

Table 19. Outcomes of Perceived Outgroup Threat (N = 800).

Outcome Variable:	Rewards to the Extreme Co-Partisan[1]	Penalties to the Conciliatory Co-Partisan[1]	Mutual Toleration[2]
Civil Meme (Reference)			
Vitriolic Meme	1.21	.90	-3.42†
	(.35)	(.29)	(2.04)
Signs Story	.87	1.02	-1.26
	(.27)	(.32)	(2.01)
Clash Story	1.15	.56	-.39
	(.34)	(.20)	(1.96)
Democrat (Reference)			
Republican	.48*	.66	4.27*
	(.16)	(.25)	(1.85)
Symbolic Threat	1.01	1.02*	.03
	(.01)	(.01)	(.05)
Realistic Threat	1.04***	1.04***	-.19***
	(.01)	(.01)	(.04)
Racial Resentment	1.34*	1.36*	-3.67***
	(.17)	(.19)	(.85)
Intercept	.00***	.00***	96.05***
	(.00)	(.00)	(3.95)
Pseudo R^2	.10	.14	
R^2			.07

NOTES: Standard errors appear in parentheses. †p < .10, *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.
[1] Logistic model output, reporting odds ratios.
[2] OLS coefficients with robust standard errors.

Intergroup Aggression and a Shared Identity. Another alternative to identity certainty as a mediator of the effect of outgroup aggression is perceiving that one's political opponents do not share an overarching identity with oneself. If this mechanism is supported, it means the image of what it means to be American remains clear, but political opponents simply exist outside that vision. In Table 20, I predict respondents' tendency to perceive a common group identity that cuts across political parties. No main effect of condition emerges in Model A,

suggesting that outgroup aggression does not change the perception of a shared identity in the United States.

Table 20. OLS Coefficients Predicting the Perception of a Shared Identity (N = 800).

Variable	Model A	Model B
Civil Meme (Reference)		
Vitriolic Meme	1.93	1.97
	(2.02)	(2.03)
Signs Story	-.48	-.42
	(2.02)	(2.03)
Clash Story	-2.16	-2.06
	(2.02)	(2.03)
Democrat (Reference)		
Republican	4.43**	3.24†
	(1.43)	(1.94)
Racial Resentment		.74
		(.82)
Intercept	25.52***	24.03***
	(1.60)	(2.30)
Adj. R^2	.01	.01

NOTES: Robust standard errors appear in parentheses. †p < .10, *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.

Next, I turn to the *outcomes* of perceiving a shared ingroup identity, with logistic models for 1) rewarding the most extreme co-partisan and 2) punishing the most conciliatory co-partisan, and an OLS model for 3) predicting mutual tolerance. As seen in Model A of Table 21, perceiving a shared identity reduces the odds of rewarding the most extreme co-partisan, *OR* = .99, *SE* = .01, *p* = .025. Model B shows a shared identity also reduces the odds of penalizing a conciliatory member in one's own party, *OR* = .98, *SE* = .01, *p* = .001. However, Model C shows that perceiving a shared identity did not change support for mutual tolerance *b* = -.04, *Robust SE*

= .04, p = .274. To the extent that a shared identity is an important buffer against intergroup conflict, it mostly seems to hold back within-group sanctioning that would elevate extremists and penalize would-be peacemakers. As with the main hypothesized model, a shared identity matters for the ultimate outcomes, but is unaffected by witnessing outgroup aggression, and thus cannot explain the full process.

Table 21. Outcomes of Perceiving a Shared Identity (N = 800).

Outcome Variable:	**Rewards to the Extreme Co-Partisan[1]**	**Penalties to the Conciliatory Co-Partisan[1]**	**Mutual Toleration[2]**
Civil Meme (Reference)			
Vitriolic Meme	1.28	.97	-3.82†
	(.36)	(.30)	(2.07)
Signs Story	.89	1.03	-1.57
	(.27)	(.31)	(2.05)
Clash Story	1.06	.53†	-.43
	(.31)	(.19)	(1.97)
Democrat (Reference)			
Republican	.56*	.76	5.17**
	(.16)	(.24)	(1.87)
Shared Identity	.99*	.98***	-.04
	(.01)	(.01)	(.04)
Racial Resentment	1.37**	1.47**	-3.92***
	(.16)	(.19)	(.89)
Intercept	.12***	.09***	86.88***
	(.04)	(.04)	(2.57)
Pseudo R^2	.02	.05	
R^2			.03

NOTES: Robust standard errors appear in parentheses. †p < .10, *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.
[1] Logistic model output, reporting odds ratios.
[2] OLS coefficients with robust standard errors.

Study 2 Discussion. As in Study 1, Study 2 generally did not produce aggressive counter-responses in reaction to outgroup provocation. Overall, the uncertainty-identity process did not result from outgroup aggression, and therefore did not explain the full escalatory chain outlined in Chapter 2. No other single explanation (common ingroup identity model or perceived threat) explained the full sequence either. However, racial resentment was a persistent—often strong—predictor of more extreme partisan attitudes and behavior, tending to operate alongside partisanship. In general, racial resentment is strongly associated with different social identity processes in ways that escalate partisan tensions, but it does not seem to override partisanship

With regard to specific hypotheses in Study 2, hypotheses 1 and 3 were not supported. Respectively, animus did not increase in response to out-group aggression, and partisan identity certainty was unaffected by outgroup aggression. Hypothesis 2 was initially supported—i.e., American identity certainty decreased in response to outgroup aggression—but the main effect was reduced to non-significance when racial resentment was added. With respect to the uncertainty-identity process, Study 2 replicates Study 1: American identity certainty weakens party identification (Hypothesis 4), and partisan identity certainty raises party identification (Hypothesis 5). Notably, previous theory has predicted, but until now been unable to empirically confirm the compensatory relationship between subgroup and superordinate identities (Jung et al. 2016, 2018). The uncertainty-identity process did not explain the overall model's effects (Hypotheses 6, 8, 10, and 12), nor did the alternate mechanisms under consideration (a common identity and perceived outgroup threat). However, a strong party identity was positively related both to rewarding extreme co-partisans (Hypothesis 7) and punishing conciliatory co-partisans (Hypothesis 9). Finally, partisan identity strength was not significantly related to mutual tolerance (Hypothesis 11).

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

In terms of the "doom loop" introduced in Chapter 1, the hypotheses about how outgroup aggression prompts aggression in-kind were largely unsupported. Partisan animosity and identity certainty did not consistently respond to outgroup aggression. Even perceived outgroup threat did not rise in response to outgroup aggression. Perceiving a unifying identity in the United States also did not result from witnessing more aggressive events. The ultimate proposed outcomes—support for mutual tolerance, rewards to extreme co-partisans, and penalties to conciliatory co-partisans—were also unrelated to having witnessed outgroup aggression. Consequently, neither the main pathway via uncertainty-identity theory, nor its alternatives explain the "doom loop."

However, predictions about how the proposed mediators would affect the main outcome variables found relatively more support. Identity certainty predicted the strength of identification, consistent with past research in uncertainty-identity theory. And the strength of identification in-turn produced both types of sanctioning behaviors, even though it did not affect mutual toleration. Perceived outgroup threat, especially realistic threat, consistently increased both sanctioning behaviors, and reduced support for mutual toleration. Symbolic threat only played a minor role in increasing penalties to a conciliatory co-partisan. Perceiving a common ingroup identity in the United States negatively predicts within-group sanctioning behaviors, with no effect on supporting mutual toleration. Finally, racial resentment was persistently related to the more politically extreme behavior. Paralleling other researchers' findings, racial resentment was predictive of more bias against political opponents (Abramowitz and McCoy 2019), and antidemocratic attitudes (Bartels 2020).

One of the especially surprising findings in this pair of studies emerged in the descriptive statistics in Study 2. Overwhelmingly, participants did not tend to penalize the conciliatory co-partisan and they did not tend to reward their aggressive co-partisan, even after reading about very aggressive behavior from members of the opposing party. While the present analyses identified several variables that predict polarizing peer punishment, on net, most participants chose not to engage in it. It is possible that instead of "rallying the troops" outrageous political content is instead "burning out" many Americans, while the most politically extreme and most engaged are drawn deeper into the latest cycle of outrage.

To be sure, caution is warranted in interpreting descriptive statistics from a non-representative convenience sample. The pattern given the available data is nonetheless striking. It is consistent with a longstanding literature documenting Americans' dislike for discussing politics because they associate it with conflicts they would rather avoid (Cowan and Baldassarri 2018; Eliasoph 1998; Klar, Krupnikov, and Ryan 2018). The rarity of rewarding the outrageous commenter (14%) and punishing the conciliatory commenter (11%) are also consistent with Kalmoe and Mason's (2019) finding in representative surveys that very few Americans (less than 15%) are willing to support politically extreme behavior, like violence, to achieve their political goals. It is also curious to note that in their study, trait aggression was several times more predictive of endorsing partisan violence than social psychological concepts like anxiety, anger, or strength of partisan identification.

A notable limitation of the extant research on outrage media to date is that although it documents high engagement with aggressive content (Berry and Sobieraj 2014; Brady et al. 2017; Ryan 2012), it is not obvious whether outrageous content is making the typical news consumer more belligerent, or whether already belligerent people are attracted to—and thrive

on—outrageous content. In manipulating outgroup aggression, and failing to find much evidence of a counter-reaction, the null effects of at least witnessing outgroup aggression in the present study suggest the provocative effect of outrageous news content may be more limited than initially suspected.

In some ways heartening, the commenter who responded to the news story in the present research unleashed the most outrageous condemnation on political opponents, they were punished by about 40% of respondents. This descriptive result hints that partisans are willing to restrain the most extreme elements within their own factions, which scholars of democracy have argued is crucial for curtailing would-be demagogues (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018). Further research and analysis should examine what factors lead partisans to penalize such actors within their own faction.

One important motivator may be the distribution of opinions that are offered in the immediate environment. The classic Asch (1956) conformity studies (see Bond and Smith 1996 for a meta-analysis) showed participants would make an obviously false statement if everyone else in their group gave that same answer. But having one dissenter freed the participant to disagree with the rest of the group much more frequently. In the same way, the present research showed the participant a wide range of responses to the news story, and therefore, an implied range of allies. Participants may have consequently felt freed to offer more support to the commenter who most matched their own views, whether that be the most extreme individual or the most conciliatory. Future research should examine the extent to which respondents will "fall in line" with individuals on social media that express a more homogeneous set of responses.

Subsequent research should also delve more deeply into the effects of a variety of different social identities on partisan conflict. Roccas and Brewer (2002) made the influential

argument that experiencing a loss in one identity (e.g., losing an election is a loss for a partisan's identity) will feel like a loss for other overlapping identities (e.g., race). Political scientists, especially Mason (2018), have argued this elevates the stakes of conflict, provoking more stress and aggression after an election loss. As the current analyses found, racial resentment almost always drove aggressive partisan behaviors and attitudes. While only addressed in exploratory fashion here, future research should examine to what extent racial resentment underlies partisanship. A related risk is that as the parties continue to sort along consistent demographic boundaries, racial resentment may begin to align with other grievances, such as those tied to rural resentment against cities (Cramer 2016), making party conflict the center of many consistently aligned identities, which past research finds is connected to an increased risk of civil conflict (Gubler and Selway 2012).

There are also clear directions uncertainty-identity theory should pursue in this line of research. While Jung and colleagues (2016, 2018) did *not* find evidence that people identify more strongly with subgroups to compensate for identity uncertainty in a superordinate group identity, the current studies found—with the benefit of replication—a strong negative association between American identity certainty and the strength of partisan identity, precisely in line with the theory's compensatory mechanism. Where previous research examined Scottish identity (nested within the British identity) and South Korean identity (nested within the ethnic Korean identity), the current study examined political parties nested within a national identity. Further research should investigate the proper scope of the compensatory identity process.

The theory also predicts that clear prototypes are useful to the individual for resolving feelings of uncertainty (Hogg et al. 2007). Future research should explore whether heightening partisan sorting, and especially the *perception* of demographic homogeneity within parties

produces more group identification. Higher group identification, as this study found, is associated with higher rewards to extremists and harsher penalties for moderates. So, it would likely follow that the more Democrats and Republicans see their parties as homogeneous, the more rigidly they would enforce norms within their faction. This would inform how a broad macro trend—the so-called "Big Sort" (Bishop 2008)—reshapes a person's self-concept on a micro level, and thereby produce more extreme group behavior. It would also suggest that racial resentment and other forms of ethnic antagonism could become more significant sources of partisan discord if the parties continue to sort consistently along racial lines.

Future research in uncertainty-identity theory would benefit from examining the effects of partisan conflicts in different social contexts. In this study, manipulations and questions were posed with reference to national American identity and the subgroup identities of American political parties. But given the widespread disdain for political conversation, especially if it provokes conflict (Cowan and Baldassarri 2018; Klar et al. 2018), it may be that if Republican and Democratic factions emerge within specific organizational contexts where all members share a particular superordinate identity, conflict between partisan subgroups could reduce certainty about what it means to belong to the superordinate group. Those in the minority may be most at-risk of leaving and joining a different organization that more consistently aligns with their partisan identity. For instance, partisans may become less attached to a church if partisan-leaning factions emerged and routinely "butted heads" publicly, reducing certainty about the congregation's values, commitments, and priorities. This may be a micro-level process that encourages the partisan sorting other researchers have noted at a macro level (Bishop 2008; Chen and Rodden 2013; Mason 2018).

Limitations

In this paper, variation in self-understanding as a strong or weak partisan produced support for more or less aggressive group members. The puzzling outcome in this research was that witnessing outgroup aggression did not kick off the proposed "doom loop." Time and again, reading about out-group aggression failed to produce the expected effects. Future research that explores why outgroup aggression did not operate as expected will allow us to better understand the social identity processes considered in this study, whose relative merits in the results are fairly ambiguous. Such research will also be more equipped to address to what extent reactions against outgroup aggression are based in racial animus.

The reason aggression did not operate as expected may be theoretical or operational in nature. Starting with operational concerns, the manipulation check showed respondents perceived differences in aggression from the opposing party between experimental conditions. But perhaps the lack of a purely neutral control condition that had nothing to do with partisan conflict made it difficult to detect a difference in cell means. However, respondents surely grasp the world of difference between sharing a meme that bemoans the respondent's party's lack of bipartisan spirit (civil meme condition) vs. literally starting physical altercations at the respondent's party's rally (clash condition). More plausibly, partisans' minds may already be made up about their political opponents. Just one more story may not be enough to change how they see themselves and their political opponents. Perhaps a more personal manipulation where participants are themselves the direct object of aggression from partisan opponents would instigate the hypothesized effects of outgroup aggression.

As for theoretical concerns, as already discussed, media may do a poor job of provoking aggression in the way expected. The apparent relationship between aggressive partisan media and aggressive attitudes observed in past research may simply be a selection effect wherein

already aggressive partisans seek out and engage with aggressive content. Along these lines, past research finds aggression in general can fail to instigate retaliation if retaliation is especially costly (Benard, Berg, and Mize 2017). Benard and colleagues examined a situation where costs were monetary in nature. At first glance, answering questionnaire items, as in the present study, seems especially low-stakes: there is little cost to saying you see members of the other party as a serious threat. But it could be that truly engaging with the magnitude of the opposing party's aggression, and continuing to think about the issue felt psychologically taxing to participants. As reviewed above, Americans are especially averse to the bitter fighting they associate with politics. Over two-thirds of Americans identified the 2020 Presidential Election as a "significant source of stress" (American Psychological Association 2020). Faced with such a stressor, participants may have just emotionally disengaged.

As to why aggression did not consistently prompt a change in identity certainty specifically, one possibility is that vitriol in media may not implicate the self in a way that instigates self-relevant uncertainty (which would then motivate more investment in more clearly defined identities) (Hogg 2000). It may also be that for intergroup conflict to consistently produce the distinction between clashing identity groups (which clarifies prototypes and makes identification more attractive), the attacked party must respond in-turn to emphasize the contrast between groups.

As to the peer sanctioning measure used in this study, one major advantage was that there were real monetary stakes that participants had a reason to care about. One drawback was that in using tangible stakes, mTurk workers may not want to take money away from one another, which may explain why about 42% of respondents said they would rather punish no one. Future

research should see if partisans would be more willing to penalize one another in general with more lenient sanctions, and if the distributions of behavior consequently change.

Although not empirically addressed in this proposal, the institutional context of partisan conflict is also critical. To understand the social psychology that drives rank-and-file partisans to adopt extreme attitudes does not automatically explain how partisan antagonism escalates or threatens democracy. Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018:11) helpfully explain why the historically contingent actions of gatekeepers are so important:

> An essential test for democracies is not whether [demagogues] emerge but whether political leaders, and especially political parties, work to prevent them from gaining power in the first place—by keeping them off mainstream party tickets, refusing to endorse or align with them, and when necessary, making common cause with rivals in support of democratic candidates.

While it is true that elites and other institutional actors *can* stand athwart the antidemocratic impulses of an angry electorate, when they struggle to restrain—or actively abet—such impulses, the electorate's social psychology becomes immensely important to grasp, especially as enabled by new evolving forms of media. For instance, if institutional actors are too weak, then the spiral of silence (Glynn et al. 1997; Noelle-Neumann 1974) poses a real threat to otherwise moderate voices within a faction. The suppression of moderates is an under-explored aspect of the literature on partisan conflict, which is surprising considering its prominence in public affairs discussions among the lay public. More research in this area could ground public conversations in theoretically rigorous social science, rather than speculative punditry and anecdotes.

Nonetheless, we should also be cautious to uncritically suggest proponents of reconciliation or moderation are always normatively correct. One massive de-escalation of

partisan conflict was the famed Compromise of 1877, which ended military occupation of the American South, allowing the Republican Party to ease bitter tensions with the Democratic Party (Mettler and Lieberman 2020). The military had been a bulwark against terrorist activity that repeatedly targeted black voters, black elected officials, and their white allies in the Republican and Fusionist Parties. Military withdrawal marked the end of Reconstruction and the start of a series of violent intimidation campaigns against black voters, literal coups d'état that overthrew local elected officials, and the cementing of de facto single-party Democratic rule in the American South until reforms enacted through civil rights legislation of the 1960s (Foner 1988). In the Compromise of 1877, cooperation and reconciliation were disastrous for civil rights and multiracial democracy. America's troubled history of consensus-building is a useful reminder that in our search for ways to cool down escalating tensions, we must not inadvertently undermine the very tenants of democracy we intend to preserve.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

TEXT OF EXPERIMENTAL MANIPULATIONS

Below are the fictitious news stories used in Studies 1 and 2 from the point-of-view of a Democratic respondent. Republicans saw the same messages with party labels swapped.

1) Civil Text Meme

A new meme is circulating widely among Republican social media users. It appears as follows:

> Nothing gets done in Washington.
> Decades-long problems just get worse, and new ones go unsolved.
> It's clear Democrat policies aren't working, yet Democrats continue to insist on the same policies they always have.
> If only more Democrats would work with Republicans toward reasonable, bipartisan solutions.
> It's not hard to understand how people are becoming impatient.

The meme has also been shared and retweeted by a number of notable Republican Party activists and some politicians.

2) Vitriolic Text Meme

A new meme is circulating widely among Republican social media users. It appears as follows:

> Nothing gets done in Washington.
> Decades-long problems just get worse, and new ones go unsolved.
> The reason is obvious: Braindead Republicans.
> When in power, they insist on the same idiotic policies they always have.
> And when they're out of power, they act like children and throw maniacal temper tantrums to block all progress.
> Hard to blame people for being totally disgusted with Republicans.
> You can't fix stupid.

The meme has also been shared and retweeted by a number of notable Republican Party activists and some politicians.

3) Signs Story

Election officials announced today that local Republican Party members were responsible for interfering with their political opponents' campaign signs. Election officials noted that such offenses are illegal. The incident came to light after several people contacted election officials with descriptions of individuals seen removing yard signs and defacing billboards.

In the aftermath, a new meme is circulating widely among Republican social media users. It appears as follows:

> Nothing gets done in Washington.
> Decades-long problems just get worse, and new ones go unsolved.
> The reason is obvious: Braindead Republicans.
> When in power, they insist on the same idiotic policies they always have.
> And when they're out of power, they act like children and throw maniacal temper tantrums to block all progress.
> Hard to blame people for being totally disgusted with Republicans.
> You can't fix stupid.

The meme has also been shared by a number of notable party activists and some politicians.

4) Clash Story

Law enforcement officials announced today that local Republican Party members were responsible for starting a brawl during a [in party rally. Law enforcement noted that offenses committed during the clash are illegal. The incident came to light after several people contacted law enforcement to break up the fight.

In the aftermath, a new meme is circulating widely among Republican social media users. It appears as follows:

> Nothing gets done in Washington.
> Decades-long problems just get worse, and new ones go unsolved.
> The reason is obvious: Braindead Republicans.
> When in power, they insist on the same idiotic policies they always have.
> And when they're out of power, they act like children and throw maniacal temper tantrums to block all progress.
> Hard to blame people for being totally disgusted with Republicans.
> You can't fix stupid.

The meme has also been shared by a number of notable Republican Party activists and some politicians.

Appendix B

Participants only see the four bogus responses from members of their *own* political party in reaction to the story they read about.

In-group Party	Outrageous Condemnation	Mild Condemnation	Slight Condemnation	Conciliatory Response
Republicans	"Democrats will always fly into a completely unhinged rage over all kinds of imagined fantasies. They're delusional or idiots. Or both! It's just gross."	"Who do the Democrats think they're fooling? They're just trying to cause trouble over non-issues again."	"Democrats have some pretty weird ideas about what's going on, but it wouldn't be the first time."	"Hot-heads on both sides do this, but when it comes to issues that matter, we can still find common ground and work together."
Democrats	"Republicans will always fly into a completely unhinged rage over all kinds of imagined fantasies. They're delusional or idiots. Or both! It's just gross."	"Who do the Republicans think they're fooling? They're just trying to cause trouble over non-issues again."	"Republicans have some pretty weird ideas about what's going on, but it wouldn't be the first time."	"Hot-heads on both sides do this, but when it comes to issues that matter, we can still find common ground and work together."

Appendix C

Racial Resentment

resent1 Irish, Italians, Jewish, and many other minorities overcame prejudice and worked their way up. Blacks should do the same without any special favors.

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neither Agree nor Disagree
4. Agree
5. Strongly Agree

resent2 Over the past few years blacks have gotten less than they deserve.

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neither Agree nor Disagree
4. Agree
5. Strongly Agree

resent3 It's really a matter of some people not trying hard enough; if blacks would only try harder they could be just as well off as whites.

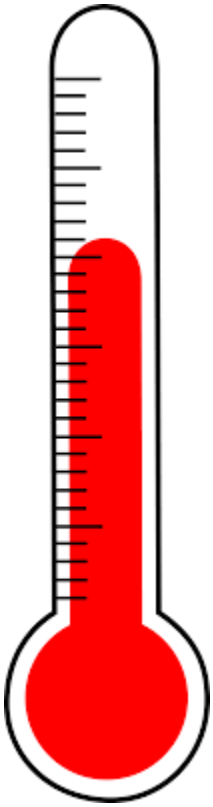
1. Strongly Disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neither Agree nor Disagree
4. Agree
5. Strongly Agree

resent4 Generations of slavery and discrimination have created conditions that make it difficult for blacks to work their way out of the lower class.

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neither Agree nor Disagree
4. Agree
5. Strongly Agree

Feeling Thermometer

We'd like you to rate how you feel towards members of the Republican and Democratic Parties 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.

Consider how you feel toward different groups and individuals on the following pages.

therm_demp The Democratic Party
- 100-point slider: 0 = Very cold or unfavorable feeling, 50 = No feeling at all, 100 = Very warm of favorable feeling

therm_repp The Republican Party
- 100-point slider: 0 = Very cold or unfavorable feeling, 50 = No feeling at all, 100 = Very warm of favorable feeling

Negative Attributions

When you think about members of the [outgroup: Democratic/Republican Party], how well do each of the below terms describe them?

att_am American
- 100-point slider: 0 = Not at all, 100 = Completely

att_pat Patriotic
- 100-point slider: 0 = Not at all, 100 = Completely

att_intel Intelligent
- 100-point slider: 0 = Not at all, 100 = Completely

att_hon Honest
- 100-point slider: 0 = Not at all, 100 = Completely

att_open Open-Minded
- 100-point slider: 0 = Not at all, 100 = Completely

att_gen Generous
- 100-point slider: 0 = Not at all, 100 = Completely

att_hypo Hypocritical
- 100-point slider: 0 = Not at all, 100 = Completely

att_self Selfish
- 100-point slider: 0 = Not at all, 100 = Completely

att_mean Mean
- 100-point slider: 0 = Not at all, 100 = Completely

American Identity Certainty

usidc1 When I think about who we Americans are, I am unsure that the American identity I know is correct.
- 100-point slider: 0 = Strongly Disagree, 100 = Strongly Agree

usidc2 I am uncertain about who we Americans are.
- 100-point slider: 0 = Strongly Disagree, 100 = Strongly Agree

usidc3 When I think about who Americans were in the past, I don't know what Americans were really like.
- 100-point slider: 0 = Strongly Disagree, 100 = Strongly Agree

usidc4 When I think about who Americans are, the image of Americans in my mind is unclear.
- 100-point slider: 0 = Strongly Disagree, 100 = Strongly Agree

usidc5 If I were asked to describe who Americans are, my description might end up being ambiguous.

Partisan Identity Certainty

pidc1 When I think about who we [ingroup: Democrats/Republicans] are, I am unsure that the [ingroup: Democratic/Republican] identity I know is correct.
- 100-point slider: 0 = Strongly Disagree, 100 = Strongly Agree

pidc2 I am uncertain about who we [ingroup: Democrats/Republicans] are.
- 100-point slider: 0 = Strongly Disagree, 100 = Strongly Agree

pidc3 When I think about who [ingroup: Democrats/Republicans] were in the past, I don't know what [ingroup: Democrats/Republicans] were really like.
- 100-point slider: 0 = Strongly Disagree, 100 = Strongly Agree

pidc4 When I think about who [ingroup: Democrats/Republicans] are, the image of [ingroup: Democrats/Republicans] in my mind is unclear.
- 100-point slider: 0 = Strongly Disagree, 100 = Strongly Agree

pidc5 If I were asked to describe who [ingroup: Democrats/Republicans] are, my description might end up being ambiguous.
- 100-point slider: 0 = Strongly Disagree, 100 = Strongly Agree

Strength of Party Identification

pidstr1 How important is being a [Democrat / Republican] to you?
1. Extremely important
2. Very important
3. Not very important
4. Not important at all

pidstr2 How well does the term [Democrat / Republican] describe you?
1. Extremely well
2. Very well
3. Not very well
4. Not at all

pidstr3 When talking about [Democrats / Republicans], how often do you use the word "we" instead of "they"?
1. Never
2. Rarely
3. Some of the time
4. Most of the time
5. All the time

pidstr4 To what extent do you think of yourself as a [Democrat / Republican]?
1. Not at all
2. Very little
3. Somewhat
4. A great deal

Shared Identity

Items marked with an *asterisk* were retained in the summary score measures used in the analyses.

***comm1** Despite different political parties in the country, there is frequently the sense that we are all just one group.
- 100-point slider: 0 = Strongly Disagree, 100 = Strongly Agree

***comm2** In the United States, it usually feels as though we belong to different groups.
- 100-point slider: 0 = Strongly Disagree, 100 = Strongly Agree

comm3 In the United States, it usually feels as though we are individuals and not members of a particular group.
- 100-point slider: 0 = Strongly Disagree, 100 = Strongly Agree

***comm4** Although there are different groups of Americans, it feels as though we are all playing on the same team.
- 100-point slider: 0 = Strongly Disagree, 100 = Strongly Agree

Perceived Outgroup Threat

Items marked with an *asterisk* were retained in the summary score measures used in the analyses.

***r_threat1** [Out-group: Democrats/Republicans] hold too many positions of power and responsibility in this country.
- 100-point slider: 0 = Strongly Disagree, 100 = Strongly Agree

***r_threat2** [Out-group: Democrats/Republicans] dominate American politics more than they should.
- 100-point slider: 0 = Strongly Disagree, 100 = Strongly Agree

r_threat3 When [Out-group: Democrats/Republicans] are in positions of authority, they discriminate against [In-group: Democrats/Republicans] when making hiring decisions.
- 100-point slider: 0 = Strongly Disagree, 100 = Strongly Agree

r_threat4 Too much money is spent on educational programs that benefit [Out-group: Democrats/Republicans].
- 100-point slider: 0 = Strongly Disagree, 100 = Strongly Agree

***r_threat5** [Out-group: Democrats/Republicans] have more economic power than they deserve in this country.
- 100-point slider: 0 = Strongly Disagree, 100 = Strongly Agree

r_threat6 [Out-group: Democrats/Republicans] receive too much of the money spent on healthcare and childcare.
- 100-point slider: 0 = Strongly Disagree, 100 = Strongly Agree

r_threat7 Too much money per student is spent on education for [Out-group: Democrats/Republicans].
- 100-point slider: 0 = Strongly Disagree, 100 = Strongly Agree

r_threat8 The tax system favors [Out-group: Democrats/Republicans].
- 100-point slider: 0 = Strongly Disagree, 100 = Strongly Agree

r_threat9 Many companies hire less qualified [Out-group: Democrats/Republicans] over more qualified [In-group: Democrats/Republicans].
- 100-point slider: 0 = Strongly Disagree, 100 = Strongly Agree

***r_threat10** [Out-Party members] have more political power than they deserve in this country.
- 100-point slider: 0 = Strongly Disagree, 100 = Strongly Agree

r_threat11 Public service agencies favor [Out-group: Democrats/Republicans] over [In-group: Democrats/Republicans].

- 100-point slider: 0 = Strongly Disagree, 100 = Strongly Agree

r_threat12 The legal system is more lenient on [Out-group: Democrats/Republicans] than on [In-group: Democrats/Republicans].
- 100-point slider: 0 = Strongly Disagree, 100 = Strongly Agree

***s_threat1** [In-Party members] and [Out-Party members] have very different values.
- 100-point slider: 0 = Strongly Disagree, 100 = Strongly Agree

s_threat2 [Out-group: Democrats/Republicans] have no right to think they have better values than [In-group: Democrats/Republicans].
- 100-point slider: 0 = Strongly Disagree, 100 = Strongly Agree

s_threat3 [Out-group: Democrats/Republicans] want their rights to be put ahead of the rights of [In-group: Democrats/Republicans].
- 100-point slider: 0 = Strongly Disagree, 100 = Strongly Agree

***s_threat4** [Out-group: Democrats/Republicans] don't understand the way [In-group: Democrats/Republicans] view the world.
- 100-point slider: 0 = Strongly Disagree, 100 = Strongly Agree

s_threat5 [Out-group: Democrats/Republicans] do not value the rights granted by the Constitution (life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness) as much as [In-group: Democrats/Republicans] do.
- 100-point slider: 0 = Strongly Disagree, 100 = Strongly Agree

***s_threat6** [Out-group: Democrats/Republicans] and [In-group: Democrats/Republicans] have different family values.
- 100-point slider: 0 = Strongly Disagree, 100 = Strongly Agree

s_threat7 [Out-group: Democrats/Republicans] don't value the traditions of their group as much as [In-group: Democrats/Republicans] do.
- 100-point slider: 0 = Strongly Disagree, 100 = Strongly Agree

s_threat8 [Out-group: Democrats/Republicans] regard themselves as morally superior to [In-group: Democrats/Republicans].
- 100-point slider: 0 = Strongly Disagree, 100 = Strongly Agree

s_threat9 The values of [Out-group: Democrats/Republicans] regarding work are different from those of [In-group: Democrats/Republicans].
- 100-point slider: 0 = Strongly Disagree, 100 = Strongly Agree

***s_threat10** Most [Out-group: Democrats/Republicans] will never understand what [In-group: Democrats/Republicans] are like.
- 100-point slider: 0 = Strongly Disagree, 100 = Strongly Agree

s_threat11 [Out-group: Democrats/Republicans] should not try to impose their values on [In-group: Democrats/Republicans].

- 100-point slider: 0 = Strongly Disagree, 100 = Strongly Agree

s_threat12 [In-group: Democrats/Republicans] do not get as much respect from [Out-group: Democrats/Republicans] as they deserve.

- 100-point slider: 0 = Strongly Disagree, 100 = Strongly Agree

Mutual Tolerance

Items marked with an *asterisk* were retained in the summary score measures used in the analyses.

***opp1** If a [Out-group: Democratic/Republican] worker wanted to go door-to-door in my community to fundraise for the [Out-group: Democratic Party/Republican Party], they should be allowed to do so.

- 100-point slider: 0 = Strongly Disagree, 100 = Strongly Agree

***opp2** If the [Out-group: Democratic Party/Republican Party] wanted to organize a rally in my community, they should be allowed to do so.

- 100-point slider: 0 = Strongly Disagree, 100 = Strongly Agree

opp3 I owe respect to elected officials who belong to the [Out-group: Democratic Party/Republican Party].

- 100-point slider: 0 = Strongly Disagree, 100 = Strongly Agree

opp4 I owe respect to voters who belong to the [Out-group: Democratic Party/Republican Party].

- 100-point slider: 0 = Strongly Disagree, 100 = Strongly Agree

***opp5** I must respect the outcome of elections that the [Out-group: Democratic Party/Republican Party] wins.

- 100-point slider: 0 = Strongly Disagree, 100 = Strongly Agree

***opp6** I must follow the laws enacted by elected [Out-group: Democratic Party/Republican Party] officials.

- 100-point slider: 0 = Strongly Disagree, 100 = Strongly Agree

Peer Sanctioning

[Programming note: comments shown in random order.]

award Whose bonus pool should GAIN 50 cents?

1. **1095:** [outgroup]s will always fly into a completely unhinged rage over all kinds of imagined fantasies. They're delusional or idiots. Or both! It's just gross

2. **4153:** Who do the [outgroups]s think they're fooling? They're just trying to cause trouble over non-issues again
3. **4886:** [Outgroup]s have some pretty weird ideas about what's going on, but it wouldn't be the first time.
4. **1865:** Hot-heads on both sides do this, but when it comes to issues that matter, we can still find common ground and work together.
5. No one

penalty Whose bonus pool should LOSE 50 cents?

1. **1095:** [outgroup]s will always fly into a completely unhinged rage over all kinds of imagined fantasies. They're delusional or idiots. Or both! It's just gross
2. **4153:** Who do the [outgroups]s think they're fooling? They're just trying to cause trouble over non-issues again
3. **4886:** [Outgroup]s have some pretty weird ideas about what's going on, but it wouldn't be the first time.
4. **1865:** Hot-heads on both sides do this, but when it comes to issues that matter, we can still find common ground and work together.
5. No one

Demographic Measures

polviews How would you describe your political views?

1. Very conservative
2. Conservative
3. Moderate
4. Liberal
5. Very Liberal

race What race do you identify with?

1. White or European American
2. Black or African American
3. Asian or Asian American
4. American Indian or Native American
5. More than one race
6. Other (please specify)

hispanic Do you consider yourself Hispanic or Latino?

1. Yes
2. No

gender What is your gender?

1. Man
2. Woman
3. Neither, I identify as… (please specify)

age What is your age?

- Open response

religion What is your present religion, if any? Are you…

1. Protestant
2. Roman Catholic
3. Orthodox Christian (such as Greek or Russian Orthodox)
4. Latter-Day Saints (LDS)
5. Jewish
6. Muslim
7. Buddhist
8. Hindu
9. Atheist
10. Agnostic
11. Something else: (please specify)
12. Nothing in particular

god Which one statement comes closest to your personal beliefs about God?

1. I have no doubts that God exists.
2. I believe in God, but with some doubts.
3. I sometimes believe in God.
4. I believe in a higher power or cosmic force.
5. I don't believe in anything beyond the physical world.

-1. Don't know
-2. Prefer not to answer

bible Which one statement comes closest to your personal beliefs about the Bible?

1. It means exactly what is says and should be taken literally.
2. It is entirely true, but should not be taken literally.
3. The Bible contains some human error.
4. The Bible is an ancient book of history and legends.
5. I have no opinion

-1. Don't know
-2. Prefer not to answer

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

1. Less than high school
2. High school diploma or GED
3. Associate's or technical degree
4. Bachelor's degree
5. Advanced degree (master's, JD, PhD, MD, etc.)

hhinc What is your total household income?

1. Less than $10,000
2. $10,000 - $19,999
3. $20,000 - $29,999
4. $30,000 - $39,999
5. $40,000 - $49,999
6. $50,000 - $59,999
7. $60,000 - $69,999
8. $70,000 - $79,999
9. $80,000 - $89,999
10. $90,000 - $99,999
11. $100,000 - $124,999
12. $125,000 - $149,999
13. $150,000+

-2. Prefer not to answer