

Nonpartisan Pork: Partisan Issues and the Effectiveness of Credit Claiming

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Abstract

Traditional accounts of Congressional politics suggest that distributive (or “pork barrel”) spending can help members of Congress (MCs) increase electoral support by cultivating a personal vote. However, the potential to realize these nonpartisan benefits is uncertain in contexts of high partisan polarization. Drawing on recent literature that shows people are sensitive to implicit party cues, we test a theory of partisan issue ownership in the context of Congressional credit-claiming. Using a survey experiment where respondents are presented with fabricated press releases from their actual member of Congress, we consider whether implicit party associations shape the electoral benefits to be gained from credit-claiming. We find that constituents are more likely to increase their approval for their representative when claiming credit for increased spending on a “nonpartisan” issue. While partisanship colors much of Congressional politics, our findings suggest that distributive politics offer MCs an opportunity to simultaneously strengthen support and ease opposition.

This is a working paper.

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Can credit-claiming for distributive (or “pork barrel”) spending still a result in non-partisan benefits? Credit-claiming has been traditionally framed as a ubiquitous tool of incumbency used to expand electoral support beyond a partisan base (Mayhew 1974; Cain, Ferejohn and Fiorina 1987; Stein and Bickers 1994). However, the landscape of distributive politics in Congress has become integrated into a polarized partisan battlefield (Lazarus and Reilly 2010; Sidman 2019). We explore the effectiveness of congressional credit-claiming in building support for members of Congress. Do constituents reward credit-claiming representatives because constituents prefer federal spending in their local districts as opposed to that spending going elsewhere? Or, are constituents selectively supportive of their representatives, only approving when the increased federal spending is related to an inparty issue?

Nonpartisan Pork: The Traditional Approach

Credit claiming for particularistic (or “pork barrel”) spending helps members of Congress (MCs) to establish a traceable link between their legislative influence and the broad benefits that local distributive projects afford the district (Arnold 1990). While partisanship and polarization are important forces in electoral decisions, credit-claiming traditionally has been considered to be a *nonpartisan* approach to gaining support (Mayhew 1974; Grimmer, Westwood and Messing 2015) because constituents should rationally prefer federal spending in their own district as opposed to federal spending elsewhere. Further, by providing special funding projects to their districts, representatives demonstrate their willingness and ability to achieve tangible results that can be widely enjoyed by their constituencies. As a result, MCs are able to cultivate a personal vote (Cain, Ferejohn and Fiorina 1987) that is independent of shifting party structures in the electorate (Carson, Engstrom and Roberts 2007; Finocchiaro and MacKenzie 2018).

MCs can also realize nonpartisan electoral benefits beyond public opinion. Credit claimers

enjoy a lower likelihood of facing a quality challenger in both primary and general elections (Bickers and Stein 1996; Carson, Engstrom and Roberts 2007). When quality challengers do arise, MCs can leverage their appropriating role through campaign fundraising efforts. Klingensmith (2019a) shows that federal spending projects can increase a member’s fundraising potential if the spending is targeted at attentive publics (also see Stein and Bickers 1994; Rocca and Gordon 2013). While these federal spending projects may not have a direct impact on electoral returns *per se*, the resulting increases in fundraising can increase the likelihood of re-election by 0.10% (Klingensmith 2019b). Especially for members who face difficult primary or general elections, even marginal safety enhancement may be enough justification for pursuing credit-worthy awards.

Polarized Pork? A Partisan Signaling Approach

Nevertheless, partisan and ideological factors can alter the effectiveness of pork barrel spending. In-group partisanship, ideological proximity (Crespin and Finocchiaro 2013), and general policy preferences (Lazarus and Reilly 2010) all affect how constituents view federal spending and their representatives. Bickers and Stein (2000) characterize this relationship as ideological and political compatibility (1084; also see Grimmer, Westwood and Messing 2015, 97-105). In this view, constituents’ motivating rationale is not “spend here instead of spending elsewhere.” Instead, constituent approval is contingent on preferences for the underlying action and the instigating actor; in other words, voters care about the “right” kind of spending and the representative claiming credit for it. This party-informed attention only exacerbates ongoing polarizing trends in congressional politics (Sidman 2019).

More recent studies in congressional communications also suggests that MCs’ attempts at nonpartisan messaging still carry partisan implications. Because the public associates certain policy issues with one party or another (Egan 2013; Petrocik 1996; Walgrave, Leffever and Tresch 2012), voters are likely to interpret implicit partisan cues when MCs communicate

on one issue rather than another. Because constituents have deeply embedded expectations about the types of issues that party members engage (Rahn 1993), these implicit cues can be potent forces. Banda (2016) has shown that even when not making a position-taking statement, representatives can give the impression of ideological position by mentioning an issue that is either owned by their own party or by the opposing party. As a result, “copartisans prefer candidates who focus on issues owned by their parties while opposing partisans prefer candidates who trespass” (Banda 2021, 552).

Distributive politics is often theorized as a nonpartisan re-election strategy, but federal spending ultimately goes towards specific projects. We argue that credit claiming for such spending sends partisan signals to constituents based on the type of project being funded. Constituents associate certain spending targets with the two parties, leading partisan politics to infiltrate congressional credit claiming. We predict that constituents’ reception of credit claiming messages is influenced by the partisan association of the targeted spending.

Hypothesis 1: *Respondents will increase approval for MCs who claim credit for spending related to in-party issues more than they will do so toward those who claim credit for spending related to neutral or out-party issues.*

Hypothesis 2: *Respondents will increase approval for MCs who claim credit for spending related to neutral issues more than they will do so toward those who claim credit for spending related to out-party issues.*

Experimental Design

We test the above hypotheses using data from an online survey experiment fielded through Lucid Theorem from August 26, 2022, to September 17, 2022. Our hypotheses and analysis plan were pre-registered through AsPredicted.org.¹

¹An anonymized version of the pre-registration is available online at **link removed for peer review**.

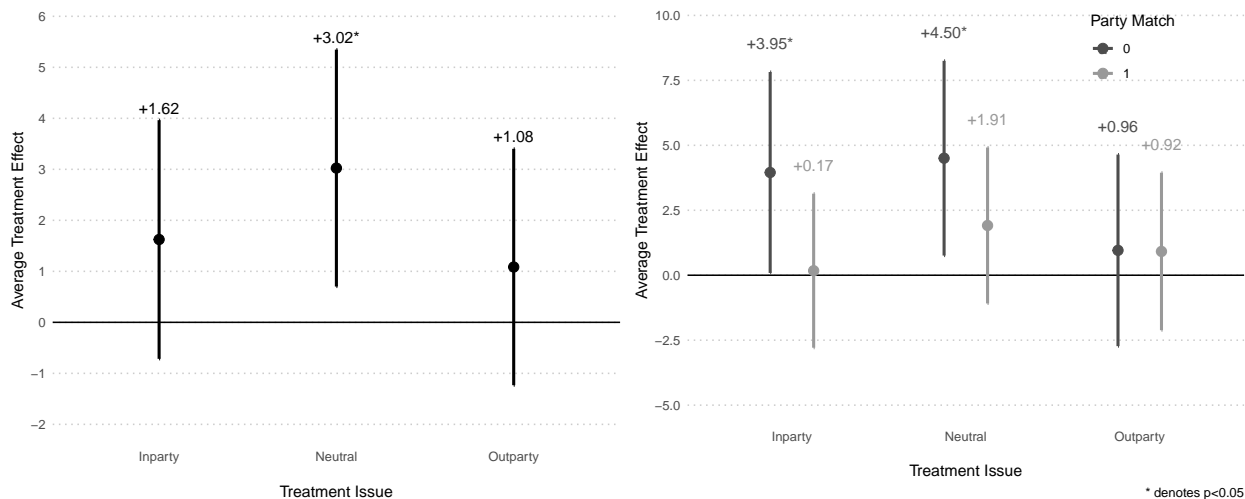
We use a pre-post test design that aims to measure respondents' change in favorability toward their members of Congress when exposed to credit-claiming messages. Respondents are first asked to evaluate their member of Congress – along with a variety of public figures, political and nonpolitical – on a feeling thermometer (0-100). After a short intervening questionnaire, respondents are then randomly assigned into one of 4 conditions: control, Democratic issue treatment, Republican issue treatment, or neutral issue treatment. In each treatment condition, respondents are presented with a fabricated press release from their actual member of Congress that claims credit for some newly announced Community Project Funding. The target of that spending varies across treatment conditions to include some stably-owned issue (Egan, 2013): environment (Democratic-owned), law enforcement (Republican-owned), and transportation (neutral). Because we hypothesize ingroup/outgroup effects by issue ownership, we classify the treatment conditions as being inparty, outparty, or neutral, depending on the respondent's partisanship. Finally, respondents are prompted with a post-test feeling thermometer for their member of Congress.²

We estimate and report average treatment effects as the increased change in feeling thermometer scores that occurs due to the treatment. We include all pre-registered analyses, balance tests, and robustness checks in the Supplemental Information.

Results

In the pre-test, we find similar MC evaluations by Democratic and Republican respondents. Thermometer scores for copartisan MCs were high – 69.9 and 66.4 (out of 100) among Democratic and Republican respondents, respectively – while scores for opposing partisan MCs were low – 40.6 and 39.0, respectively. Nearly 17% of respondents gave a pre-test value at an absolute floor or ceiling value with another 24% reporting a value greater than 85 or less than 15. The remaining 59% of respondents answered somewhere in the middle.

²More information about the experiment—including vignette language—is included in the Supplemental Information.



(a) Average Treatment Effects

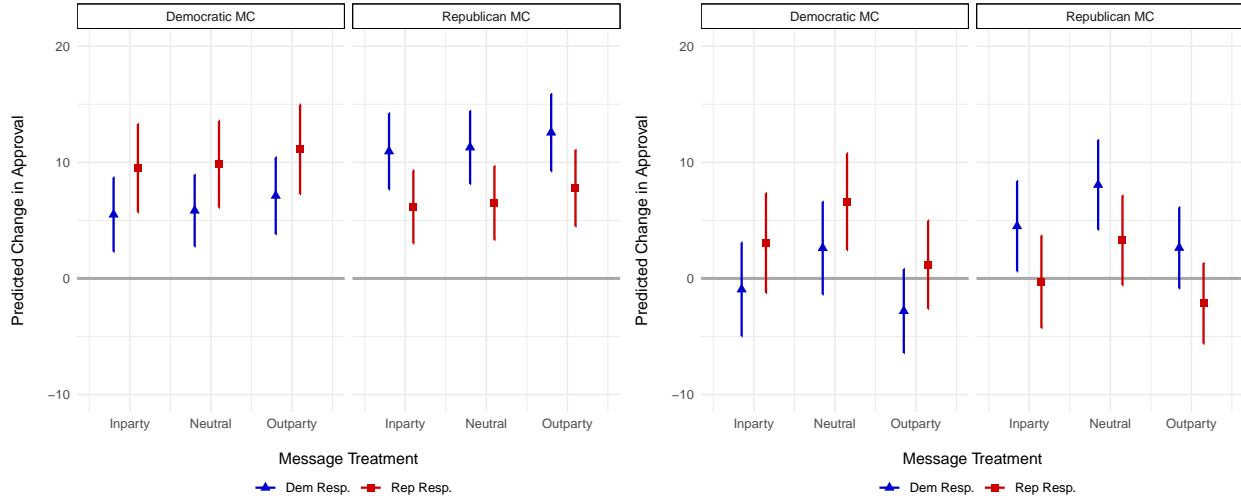
(b) Treatment Effects by Party Match

Figure 1: Treatment Effects by Condition

Our hypotheses state that partisans should reward their members of Congress for partisan-congruent spending and prefer neutral spending to partisan-incongruent spending. We report average treatment effects in Figure 1a. In the control condition, we find an average increase in thermometer score of 4.07 [2.66, 5.47]. Contrary to our expectations, we do not find a significant positive treatment effect when respondents are presented a press release claiming credit for increased federal spending on an inparty issue in the district. Additionally, we do not find that claiming credit for an outparty issue results in a negative effect; instead, the effect is statistically indistinguishable from claiming credit on an inparty issue. The only positive effect we uncover is for credit-claiming on a neutral issue that neither party owns (3.02, $p < 0.05$).

In Figure 1b, we control for whether or not a respondent and their MC are copartisans (“party match”). We find that co-partisans are unlikely to either positively or negatively change their assessment of their representative. Instead, partisans do update their approval for their opposing-party MCs when presented with a credit-claiming press release for inparty³ issue or neutral issue spending (3.95 and 4.50, respectively; both $p < 0.05$).

³“Inparty” and “outparty” are used in reference to the respondent.



(a) High Importance

(b) Low Importance

Figure 2: Predicted Change in Approval for Profile Respondent

Implicit in our original hypotheses is the idea that partisans would associate a higher value on party-owned issues than on issues owned by the opposing party. In light of results from our pre-registered analysis, we consider how individuals' issue importance more broadly affects feelings towards members of Congress. After each post-test thermometer question, we also ask respondents whether they agree that the Community Project Funding in the treatment vignette will meaningfully help their community. We fit an OLS model including treatment condition, issue importance, and relevant partisan, ideological, and demographic variables. We report the predicted change in thermometer scores⁴ for a modal profile⁵ in Figure 2.

When respondents identify an issue as important to their community (Figure 2a), we find that benefits abound. Importantly, we observe that larger treatment effects are estimated for respondents who are represented by an opposing partisan. Democratic MCs are rewarded by opposing partisans when claiming credit on projects that are important to Republicans and Republican MCs are rewarded by opposing partisans when claiming credit on projects

⁴We cannot estimate treatment effects in this analysis because respondents in the control condition were not presented with the importance prompt.

⁵The modal profile in our data is a conservative-leaning middle-aged middle class white male without a college degree

that are important to Democrats. Constituents feel better about members of Congress who secure federal funding for projects that are important to their community.

When respondents do not perceive the Community Funding Project to be especially meaningful for the district (Figure 2b), we do not observe updated feelings for claiming credit on inparty or outparty issues (with the exception of Democratic respondents rewarding Republican MCs who credit-claim for environmental projects, $p < 0.05$). Noticeably, we find significantly positive effects among opposing partisans on the neutral issue: 11.28 [8.14, 14.42] for Democratic respondents and 9.83 [6.10, 13.57] for Republican respondents. Compared to the control group estimate (4.07 [2.66, 5.47]), these predicted changes in thermometer scores is a substantial improvement that MCs can realize.

These findings challenge two expectations. First, as we have previously discussed, there is reason to believe that credit-claiming may not yield nonpartisan benefits during periods of high polarization. However, we do not find evidence of partisan cue-taking in response to credit-claiming messages. On average, respondents are not more likely to increase favor for party-congruent spending or decrease favor for party-incongruent spending. Instead, partisans routinely increase favor towards their MC when credit-claiming on a neutral spending issue.

Second, the benefits (and costs) of credit-claiming were expected to be spread across respondents and MCs. Instead, we find that the benefits to be gained by credit-claiming are almost exclusively present among an MC's opposing partisans. This finding corroborates the traditional approach to credit-claiming – MCs can use credit-claiming to cultivate a personal vote across party lines. When the spending project is considered important, MCs can expect to yield benefits across their constituency widely. When the spending project is not especially important, MCs can still improve their standing among opposing partisans for neutral issue spending. In both cases, we find that credit-claiming for pork barrel spending is still a viable, nonpartisan strategy during this time of high partisan polarization.

Conclusion

In a departure from existing survey experiments, we find these effects in an ecologically valid experimental setting where respondents read credit-claiming press releases presented as coming from their own member of Congress. In this conservative setting where respondents are expected to have stronger prior beliefs about their MC than about a fictional vignette character, we find compelling evidence that members of Congress can still enjoy widespread nonpartisan benefits from credit-claiming. While partisanship colors much of congressional politics, our experimental findings suggest that distributive politics offer members of Congress an opportunity to simultaneously strengthen support and ease opposition.

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Supplemental Information

Nonpartisan Pork:

Partisan Issues and the Effectiveness of Credit Claiming

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1 Pre-Registration

Authors pre-registered the analysis with AsPredicted.org on August 26, 2022, prior to collecting data. The report can be found online at **link removed for peer review**. We have also included the report beginning on the next page.

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Partisan Pork (#105574)

Created: 08/26/2022 11:31 AM (PT)

This is an anonymized copy (without author names) of the pre-registration. It was created by the author(s) to use during peer-review. A non-anonymized version (containing author names) should be made available by the authors when the work it supports is made public.

1) Have any data been collected for this study already?

It's complicated. We have already collected some data but explain in Question 8 why readers may consider this a valid pre-registration nevertheless.

2) What's the main question being asked or hypothesis being tested in this study?

Research Question: Are constituents responsive to party ownership cues in credit-claiming messages?

Hypothesis 1: Respondents will increase favorability toward MCs who claim credit for spending on in-party issue recipients more than they will do so toward those who claim credit for spending on neutral or out-party issue recipients.

Hypothesis 2: Respondents will increase favorability toward MCs who claim credit for spending on neutral issue recipients more than they will do so toward those who claim credit for spending on out-party issue recipients.

Hypothesis 3: Independents will increase favorability toward MCs who trespass in credit-claiming statements more than partisans will do so.

3) Describe the key dependent variable(s) specifying how they will be measured.

1. Post-test: 0-100 Thermometer
2. Dichotomous job approval
3. 0-100 Effectiveness rating
4. The within-respondent pre/post difference in thermometer score

4) How many and which conditions will participants be assigned to?

Each respondent will be randomly assigned into 1 of 4 conditions:

- (1) Control Condition (no vignette)
- (2) Announcement for police funding
- (3) Announcement for climate funding
- (4) Announcement for transportation funding

5) Specify exactly which analyses you will conduct to examine the main question/hypothesis.

The primary analysis will use the within-respondent pre/post difference in thermometer score as the DV in our OLS models that control for treatment group, respondent party, and MC party. (We perform robustness checks with additional respondent- and MC-level demographic controls.)

For H1 and H2, we will provide a visual mean comparison with visually optimal confidence intervals. We will also specify an OLS model as mentioned above.

The first model will omit MC party, a second model will include MC party. We suspect a 3-way interaction between treatment, respondent party, and MC party; thus, we will perform additive, partial interaction (treatment x respondent party), and full interaction models (treatment x respondent party x MC party). For this analysis, independents will be collapsed by whichever party to which they self-identify as most similar. Finally we intend to report the analysis based on in-group status in the three-way interaction.

For H3, we take those initially identifying as independents and compare "trespassing" effects on independents with "trespassing" effects on partisans with in-party MCs. Non-trespassing and out-party MC conditions will be omitted from this analysis. We will conduct visual mean comparisons, t-tests, and estimate OLS regression with "trespassing" treatment status (1/0), respondent party (Republican, Democrat, Independent). (We will also conduct robustness checks with other demographic controls).

We also intend to perform these analyses with dichotomous job approval and effectiveness ratings. Their purpose is primarily for robustness checks.

However, especially with the effectiveness rating, we suspect that there might be intermediate benefits to be found here that don't appear in the thermometer rating. We may include analyses that replicate those outlined above but with effectiveness rating as the DV.

6) Describe exactly how outliers will be defined and handled, and your precise rule(s) for excluding observations.

We will exclude participants who fail either of the two attention checks.

We will conduct analyses with and without respondents who fail the manipulation check.

7) How many observations will be collected or what will determine sample size? No need to justify decision, but be precise about exactly how the number will be determined.

2250 observations.

8) Anything else you would like to pre-register? (e.g., secondary analyses, variables collected for exploratory purposes, unusual analyses planned?)

An initial "soft launch" to test the instrument/reporting mechanism inadvertently began prior to official submission. At time of submission, only 4

consenting responses were collected.

We will perform exploratory mediation analyses using the effectiveness rating measure and/or a measure of perceived positive local benefit of the funding (5-point scale). These are only measured post-test, so we expect them to be inefficient estimators of any actual mediation effect (if any).

2 Treatment Vignettes

The experimental vignettes used in this study are included in the following sections. Respondents were randomly assigned to either a control condition (no statement) or one of the treatment conditions below. In each case, the name of the respondent's own member of Congress is included in the text. For illustrative purposes, Trent Kelly (MS-1)'s name is used here. Finally, the change in treatment language is included in **red text** for comparison.

2.1 Democratic-owned Issue

Rep. Trent Kelly (MS-1) announces \$750,000 in Federal Funding for Improvements to Local **Climate-Friendly Initiatives**

Rep Trent Kelly (MS-1) has announced the House passage of \$750,000 in Community Project Funding that will be used to support **climate-friendliness** locally within the district.

The representative said, "I am committed to meeting the needs of our communities. That is why I am excited to announce that I have successfully secured \$750,000 in funding for local **climate-friendly** initiatives. Our district deserves the best."

The funding comes from a federal spending bill that provides Community Project Funding for local projects.

2.2 Republican-owned Issue

Rep. Trent Kelly (MS-1) announces \$750,000 in Federal Funding for Improvements to Local **Police Initiatives**

Rep Trent Kelly (MS-1) has announced the House passage of \$750,000 in Community Project Funding that will be used to support **police** locally within the district.

The representative said, "I am committed to meeting the needs of our communities. That is why I am excited to announce that I have successfully secured \$750,000 in funding for local **police** initiatives. Our district deserves the best."

The funding comes from a federal spending bill that provides Community Project Funding for local projects.

2.3 Neutral Issue

Rep. Trent Kelly (MS-1) announces \$750,000 in Federal Funding for Improvements to Local **Transportation Initiatives**

Rep Trent Kelly (MS-1) has announced the House passage of \$750,000 in Community Project Funding that will be used to support **transportation** locally within the district.

The representative said, “I am committed to meeting the needs of our communities. That is why I am excited to announce that I have successfully secured \$750,000 in funding for local **transportation** initiatives. Our district deserves the best.”

The funding comes from a federal spending bill that provides Community Project Funding for local projects.

3 Data Description

3.1 Sample Description

Table A1: Survey Sample Descriptive Statistics

	Democrats					Republicans				
	Mean	SD	Min	Median	Max	Mean	SD	Min	Median	Max
Male	0.46	0.50	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.49	0.50	0.00	0.00	1.00
Age	44.85	16.56	18.00	42.00	87.00	50.95	16.93	18.00	54.00	91.00
Race: White	0.67	0.47	0.00	1.00	1.00	0.84	0.37	0.00	1.00	1.00
Education Level	0.51	0.50	0.00	1.00	1.00	0.42	0.49	0.00	0.00	1.00
Income	10.18	7.64	1.00	8.00	24.00	9.35	7.13	1.00	7.00	24.00
Ideology (7 = Conservative)	2.96	1.66	1.00	3.00	7.00	5.12	1.46	1.00	5.00	7.00
Democratic MC	607					270				
Republican MC	454					491				
n	1081					773				

∞

3.2 Member Identification

At the beginning of the survey, respondents are prompted to select their member of Congress from a drop-down list of all current MCs (at time of survey deployment) with instruction to select “NA.” Respondents are provided a hyperlink to the official U.S. House of Representatives “Find Your Representative” tool.¹ The survey screen is shown in Figure A1.

If the respondent followed the provided link, they were directed to an initial screen that prompted them to enter their zip code (Figure A2a). Upon entering their zip code, the respondent was then directed to one of two screens. In the first scenario, the zip code was uniquely matched to a single Congressional district and the website returned their member (e.g., Figure A2b). In the second scenario, the zip code was matched to multiple Congressional districts and the respondent was prompted to enter a street address (e.g., Figure ??); afterwards, the website was directed to their member.

Table A2 shows the relationship between respondents who identified a member of Congress (1) and those who selected “NA” (0). Out of 2163 respondents who consented and passed both early attention checks, about 86% were able to select a representative. On average, we find that respondents who selected “NA” were more likely to be younger, non-white, not college educated, low-income, and ideologically moderate than those respondents who selected their member of Congress.

¹The link is <https://www.house.gov/representatives/find-your-representative>.

Figure A1: Member Identification Tool



The UNIVERSITY of OKLAHOMA

To begin, we would like you know who represents your local district in the U.S. House of Representatives. You may look up your member of Congress using the following online tool: <https://www.house.gov/representatives/find-your-representative>.

Be sure to find (1) the number of your Congressional district, and (2) your representative's name.

Please select your member of Congress from the list below.

The list is organized by State and Congressional District.

For example, if you live in Tennessee's 5th Congressional District, you would scroll midway through the list to find "Jim Cooper (TN-5)." If you live in Virginia's 11th Congressional District, you would scroll down near the bottom of the list to find "Gerry Connolly (VA-11)."

Please note that you can double-check you selection by confirming the congressional district (this will be printed as **(state abbreviation - congressional district number)**) and your representative's name.

If you cannot find them, please select "NA."



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SEARCH

UNITED STATES HOUSE of REPRESENTATIVES

FIND YOUR REPRESENTATIVE
Enter your zip code: **LOOK UP**

118th Congress, 2nd Session The House is not in session.

REPRESENTATIVES LEADERSHIP COMMITTEES LEGISLATIVE ACTIVITY THE HOUSE EXPLAINED

Resources

- Directory of Representatives
- Leadership
- Committees
- Site Map

Technical Difficulties?

Send comments about the Find Your Representative service to the webmaster. Please note that **messages for a specific representative** sent to the webmaster **will not be forwarded** to the representative.

Find Your Representative

Not sure of your congressional district or who your member is? This service will assist you by matching your ZIP code to your congressional district, with links to your member's website and contact page.

Please review the frequently asked questions if you have problems using this service.

Enter your ZIP code:

FIND YOUR REP BY ZIP

- Where can I find a list of public e-mail addresses for members of Congress?
- What should I do when I enter my ZIP code information and I get the wrong elected Representative?
- Can I forward my message through the Contact Webmaster mailbox?
- Are there alternative ways to reach my elected representative?
- What is the proper form of address when I write my elected representative?
- Is it okay for my company / organization to link to the Find Your Representative service?

(a) Initial Prompt for Zip Code

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SEARCH

UNITED STATES HOUSE of REPRESENTATIVES

FIND YOUR REPRESENTATIVE
Enter your zip code: **LOOK UP**

REPRESENTATIVES LEADERSHIP COMMITTEES LEGISLATIVE ACTIVITY THE HOUSE EXPLAINED

Find Your Representative

Information provided:
Zip code 39329 is located in the 3rd Congressional district of Mississippi.

The representative for this district is

Michael Guest
Republican

Sources: Esri, U.S. Census Bureau, Clerk of the U.S. House of Representatives

(b) Result for Single Match on Zip Code

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SEARCH

UNITED STATES HOUSE of REPRESENTATIVES

FIND YOUR REPRESENTATIVE
Enter your zip code: **LOOK UP**

REPRESENTATIVES LEADERSHIP COMMITTEES LEGISLATIVE ACTIVITY THE HOUSE EXPLAINED

Your Possible Representatives

Bennie G. Thompson
Democrat
Mississippi District 2

Michael Guest
Republican
Mississippi District 3

Provide Additional Information

The information you provided (Zip code: 39000) overlaps multiple congressional districts. Providing additional information will allow an exact match.

Enter Street Address

Street Address:

City: Select a State:

I'm not a robot

FIND YOUR REP BY ADDRESS

(c) Address Prompt for Multiple Match on Zip Code

Figure A2: House.gov Find Your Member Tool

Table A2: Member Identification Task Completion Description

Variable	0, N = 309 ¹	1, N = 1,854 ¹	p-value ²
Sex: Male			>0.9
male	147 (48%)	880 (47%)	
non-male	162 (52%)	974 (53%)	
Age	37 (26, 52)	46 (33, 62)	<0.001
Race: White	180 (58%)	1,378 (74%)	<0.001
Education Attainment			<0.001
NBach	222 (72%)	977 (53%)	
YBach	86 (28%)	871 (47%)	
Income	4 (1, 10)	8 (3, 17)	<0.001
Ideology			<0.001
1	39 (13%)	284 (15%)	
2	31 (10%)	254 (14%)	
3	21 (6.8%)	156 (8.4%)	
4	141 (46%)	568 (31%)	
5	15 (4.9%)	147 (7.9%)	
6	36 (12%)	223 (12%)	
7	26 (8.4%)	222 (12%)	
Party Identification			0.4
dem	188 (61%)	1,081 (58%)	
rep	121 (39%)	773 (42%)	

¹n (%); Median (IQR)

²Pearson's Chi-squared test; Wilcoxon rank sum test

3.3 Balance Tests

Table A3: Treatment Balance by Demographic Variables

Variable	control N = 463 ¹	inparty N = 454 ¹	neutral N = 460 ¹	outparty N = 477 ¹	p-value ²
Sex: Male					0.4
male	228 (49%)	200 (44%)	224 (49%)	228 (48%)	
non-male	235 (51%)	254 (56%)	236 (51%)	249 (52%)	
Age	47 (34, 61)	48 (34, 63)	45 (33, 63)	46 (32, 61)	0.8
Race: White	334 (72%)	334 (74%)	343 (75%)	367 (77%)	0.4
Education Attainment					>0.9
NBach	249 (54%)	236 (52%)	239 (52%)	253 (53%)	
YBach	213 (46%)	215 (48%)	221 (48%)	222 (47%)	
Income	8 (4, 18)	8 (3, 17)	8 (4, 17)	7 (3, 17)	0.5

¹n (%); Median (IQR)

²Pearson's Chi-squared test; Kruskal-Wallis rank sum test

Table A4: Treatment Balance by Partisan and Ideological Variables

Variable	control N = 463 ¹	inparty N = 454 ¹	neutral N = 460 ¹	outparty N = 477 ¹	p-value ²
Respondent Party					0.5
dem	271 (59%)	257 (57%)	281 (61%)	272 (57%)	
rep	192 (41%)	197 (43%)	179 (39%)	205 (43%)	
MC Party					0.2
Dem	236 (52%)	203 (45%)	221 (49%)	217 (47%)	
Rep	220 (48%)	246 (55%)	231 (51%)	248 (53%)	
Ideology					0.2
1	75 (16%)	60 (13%)	61 (13%)	88 (18%)	
2	67 (14%)	50 (11%)	77 (17%)	60 (13%)	
3	45 (9.7%)	35 (7.7%)	37 (8.0%)	39 (8.2%)	
4	135 (29%)	152 (33%)	134 (29%)	147 (31%)	
5	37 (8.0%)	37 (8.1%)	43 (9.3%)	30 (6.3%)	
6	52 (11%)	54 (12%)	56 (12%)	61 (13%)	
7	52 (11%)	66 (15%)	52 (11%)	52 (11%)	

¹n (%)

²Pearson's Chi-squared test

4 Treatment Description

4.1 Pre-Test Responses

Figure A3 shows the distribution of pre-test scores with 25%, 50%, and 75% percentiles shown. We find that nearly 2/3 of all respondents fall between 15 and 85 on the 0-100 feeling thermometer. This means that while some respondents will experience ceiling or floor effects, the majority of respondents are able to adjust their approval. These potential ceiling and floor effects are important because they produce an ecologically-valid conservative estimate of our treatment effect.

While we do not consider particular MCs and instead treat them broadly as either copartisans or opposing partisans, we do consider whether some MCs are especially low (Figure A4) or especially high (Figure A5) on pre-test measures. Expectedly, we find that strict ceilings and strict floors are more likely to be met when only a few respondents from that district are in the sample. Otherwise, there is no immediately discernible relationship between extreme values and a district-level factor.

Figure A3: Distribution of Pre-Test Responses

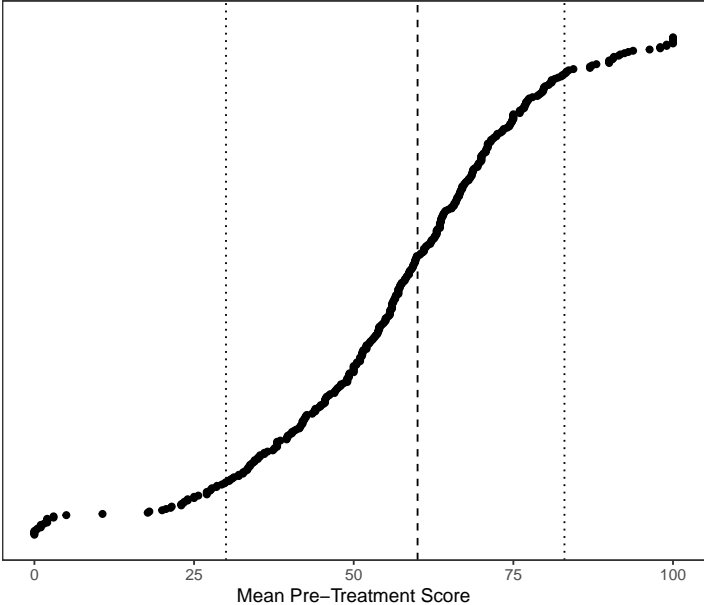


Figure A4: Pre-Test Low Scoring MCs

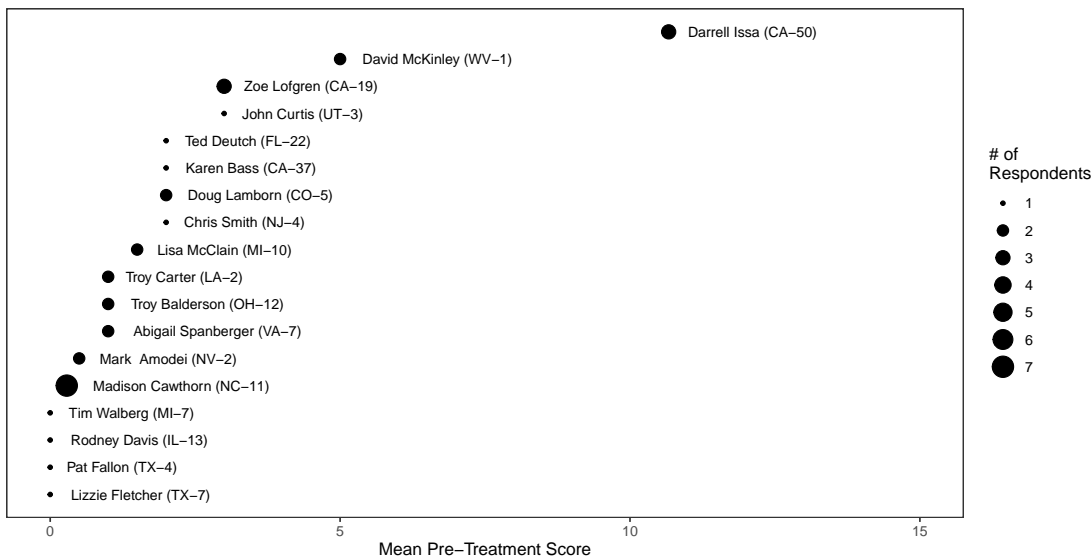
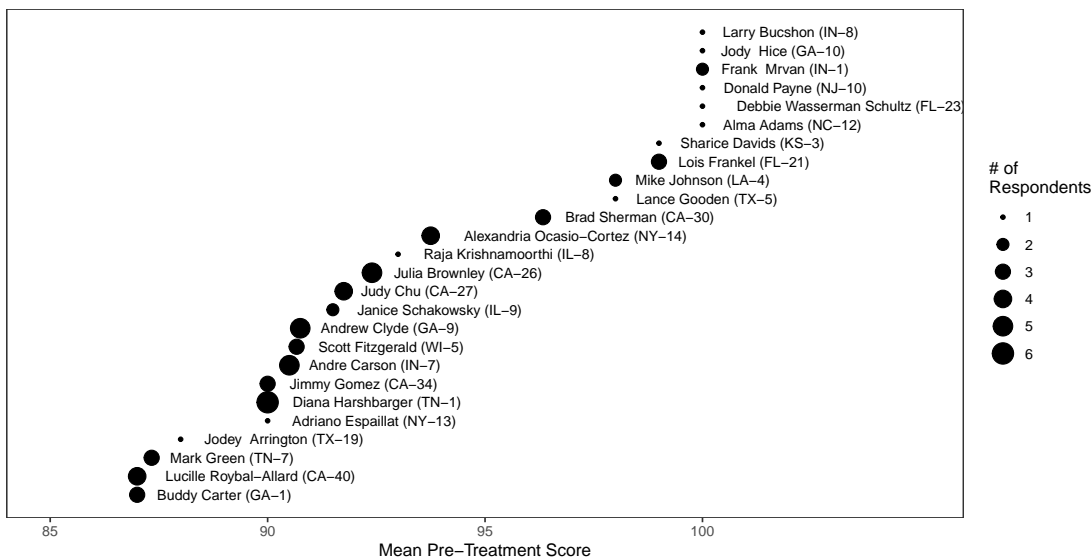


Figure A5: Pre-Test High Scoring MCs



4.2 Manipulation Check

Following each treatment condition, we ask respondents what type of spending was announced in the press release. Nearly 86% of respondents correctly identified the treatment condition, suggesting that the prime was received. Those who failed the manipulation check tended to be male, younger, more educated, higher income, more ideologically polarized (both liberal and conservative), and/or Democratic. Current best-practices suggest that respondents who fail manipulation checks should be retained in analyses; we adopt that practice in the paper. However, we also include analyses with only the respondents who pass the manipulation check in Section 6.1 and find consistent results.

Table A5: Manipulation Check Description

Variable	0, N = 198 ¹	1, N = 1,193 ¹	p-value ²
Sex: Male			<0.001
male	122 (62%)	530 (44%)	
non-male	76 (38%)	663 (56%)	
Age	35 (29, 45)	51 (34, 63)	<0.001
Race: White	144 (73%)	900 (75%)	0.4
Education Attainment			0.031
NBach	90 (45%)	638 (54%)	
YBach	108 (55%)	550 (46%)	
Income	14 (4, 21)	7 (3, 15)	<0.001
Ideology			<0.001
1	52 (26%)	157 (13%)	
2	19 (9.6%)	168 (14%)	
3	8 (4.0%)	103 (8.6%)	
4	53 (27%)	380 (32%)	
5	5 (2.5%)	105 (8.8%)	
6	20 (10%)	151 (13%)	
7	41 (21%)	129 (11%)	
Party Identification			0.015
dem	131 (66%)	679 (57%)	
rep	67 (34%)	514 (43%)	
MC Party			0.3
Dem	99 (50%)	542 (46%)	
Rep	98 (50%)	627 (54%)	

¹n (%); Median (IQR)

²Pearson's Chi-squared test; Wilcoxon rank sum test

5 Pre-registered Analyses

5.1 Testing H1-H2

5.1.1 Overview

In this section we conduct the unabridged pre-registered analyses testing H1 and H2. Our findings here corroborate those presented in the paper – but in a lengthier format.

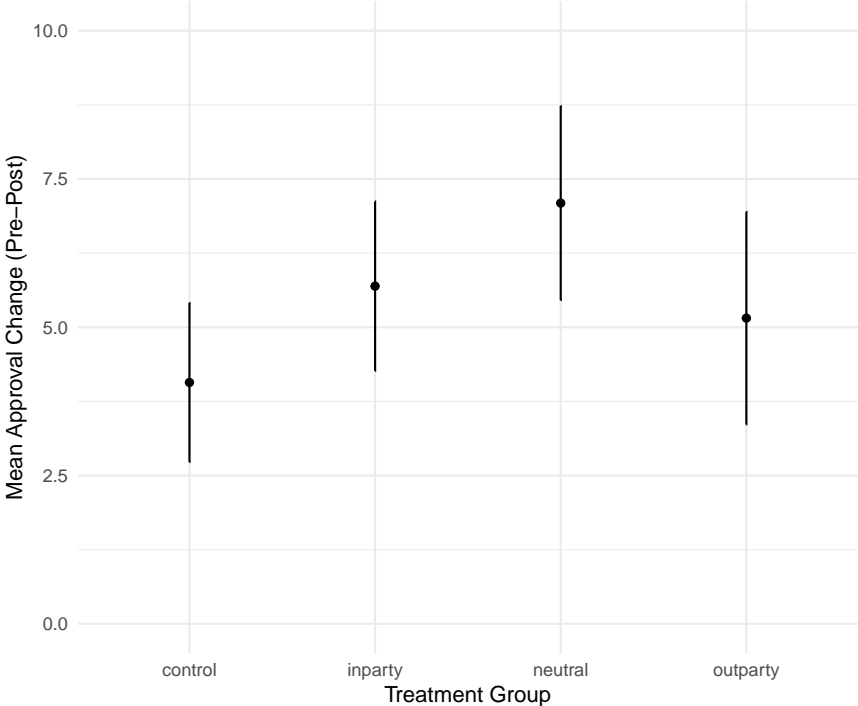
Figure A6 demonstrates the raw mean comparisons in the control group, inparty treatment group, neutral treatment group, and outparty treatment group. Consistent with Figure 1a in the paper, this demonstrates a positive treatment effect only for the neutral issue condition. Across various pre-registered modeling options, we also find consistent and stable treatment estimates in Table A6.

We also consider alternative outcome variables: dichotomous approval (0/1) and legislative effectiveness (0-10). Dichotomous approval is a far more difficult test of our hypotheses because it requires a marginal shift in approval from non-approval to approval (or vice-versa). On average, we find no significant effect across any treatment group in Figure A7. When controlling for demographic and ideological factors in Table A7, we find that there is a 5% increase in the likelihood of approving the member of Congress when presented with a credit-claiming press release on a neutral issue ($p < 0.05$). This suggests that, even under a stricter test of our hypotheses, the neutral issue condition can significantly increase marginal approval for an MC.

The legislative effectiveness measure is altogether different. Other studies suggest that MCs might experience intermediate-level benefits even when overall approval remains unchanged. We do not find any evidence of statistically significant effects on this DV in Figure A8 or Table A8.

5.1.2 Visual Mean Comparison

Figure A6: Visual Mean Comparison (H1-H2)



5.1.3 Treatment Effect Estimations

Table A6: H1-H2 OLS Regression Models for Estimating Treatment Effects

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Treatment: Inparty Issue	1.62 (1.19)	1.65 (1.19)	1.52 (1.20)	1.57 (1.20)	1.72 (1.21)	1.60 (1.20)	1.77 (1.20)
Treatment: Neutral Issue	3.02* (1.19)	2.98* (1.18)	2.94* (1.20)	2.87* (1.19)	3.08* (1.20)	2.89* (1.19)	3.11* (1.20)
Treatment: Outparty Issue	1.08 (1.18)	1.10 (1.18)	0.98 (1.20)	0.85 (1.19)	0.88 (1.20)	0.87 (1.19)	0.92 (1.20)
Party ID: GOP		-1.85* (0.85)	-2.03* (0.88)	1.15 (1.33)	0.98 (1.45)	-1.58 (0.86)	-1.63 (1.06)
MC Party: GOP			1.04 (0.87)	3.30*** (1.12)	3.45*** (1.13)		
GOP Resp. X GOP MC				-5.68*** (1.78)	-5.50*** (1.79)		
Party Match						-2.93*** (0.87)	-2.89*** (0.88)
Ideology					0.35 (0.27)		0.35 (0.27)
Male					-0.68 (0.88)		-0.67 (0.88)
Age					-0.07*** (0.03)		-0.07*** (0.03)
Race: White					-2.07 (1.07)		-1.97 (1.07)
Education: Bachelors or higher					-0.67 (0.97)		-0.71 (0.96)
Income					0.15* (0.07)		0.15* (0.07)
Constant	4.07*** (0.84)	4.83*** (0.91)	4.44*** (0.98)	3.51*** (1.01)	6.39*** (1.88)	6.59*** (1.05)	9.44*** (1.94)
Num.Obs.	1671	1671	1648	1648	1624	1648	1624
R2	0.004	0.007	0.008	0.014	0.029	0.013	0.028
R2 Adj.	0.002	0.004	0.004	0.010	0.021	0.010	0.022

5.1.4 Alternative DV: Approval (0/1)

Figure A7: Visual Mean Comparison (H1-H2), Alt. DV = Approval (0/1)

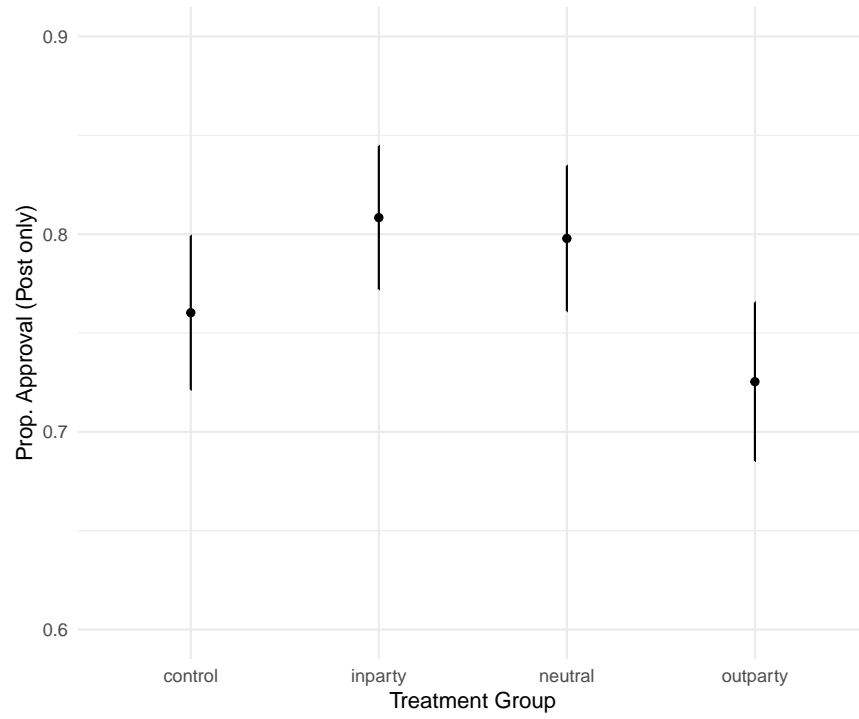


Table A7: H1-H2 OLS Regression Models for Estimating Treatment Effects, Alt. DV = Approval (0/1)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Treatment: Inparty Issue	0.04 (0.03)	0.05 (0.03)	0.04 (0.03)	0.05 (0.03)
Treatment: Neutral Issue	0.04 (0.03)	0.05* (0.03)	0.05 (0.03)	0.05* (0.03)
Treatment: Outparty Issue	-0.03 (0.03)	-0.03 (0.03)	-0.03 (0.03)	-0.03 (0.03)
Party ID: GOP	-0.33*** (0.03)	-0.32*** (0.03)	-0.04* (0.02)	-0.03 (0.02)
MC Party: GOP	-0.27*** (0.02)	-0.27*** (0.02)		
GOP Resp. X GOP MC	0.58*** (0.04)	0.57*** (0.04)		
Party Match			0.28*** (0.02)	0.28*** (0.02)
Ideology		0.00 (0.01)		0.00 (0.01)
Male		0.00 (0.02)		0.01 (0.02)
Age		0.00*** (0.00)		0.00*** (0.00)
Race: White		-0.02 (0.02)		-0.02 (0.02)
Education: Bachelors or higher		-0.06*** (0.02)		-0.06*** (0.02)
Income		0.01*** (0.00)		0.01*** (0.00)
Constant	0.88*** (0.02)	0.91*** (0.04)	0.61*** (0.02)	0.63*** (0.04)
Num.Obs.	1822	1794	1822	1794
R2	0.117	0.136	0.117	0.136
R2 Adj.	0.114	0.130	0.115	0.131

5.1.5 Alternative DV: Effectiveness (0-100)

Figure A8: Visual Mean Comparison (H1-H2), Alt. DV = Effectiveness (0-10)

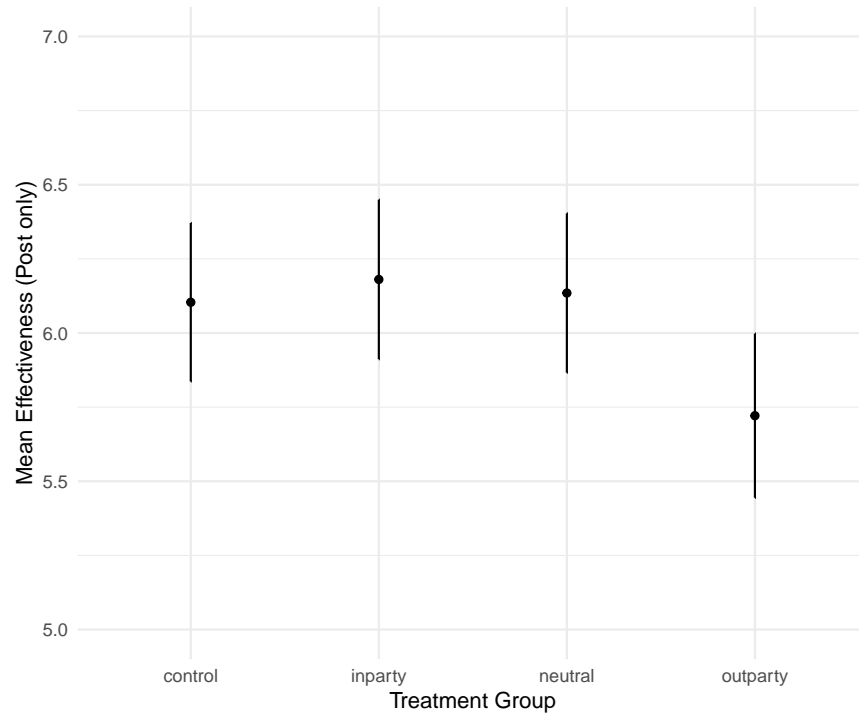


Table A8: H1-H2 OLS Regression Models for Estimating Treatment Effects, Alt. DV = Effectiveness (0-10)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Treatment: Inparty Issue	0.04 (0.19)	0.09 (0.18)	0.04 (0.19)	0.09 (0.18)
Treatment: Neutral Issue	0.11 (0.19)	0.12 (0.18)	0.11 (0.19)	0.12 (0.18)
Treatment: Outparty Issue	-0.32 (0.18)	-0.30 (0.18)	-0.31 (0.18)	-0.30 (0.18)
Party ID: GOP	-2.49*** (0.20)	-2.60*** (0.22)	-0.37*** (0.13)	-0.48*** (0.16)
MC Party: GOP	-2.04*** (0.17)	-2.10*** (0.17)		
GOP Resp. X GOP MC	4.20*** (0.27)	4.23*** (0.27)		
Party Match			2.09*** (0.13)	2.11*** (0.13)
Ideology		0.07 (0.04)		0.07 (0.04)
Male		-0.17 (0.13)		-0.17 (0.13)
Age		0.00 (0.00)		0.00 (0.00)
Race: White		0.11 (0.16)		0.11 (0.16)
Education: Bachelors or higher		-0.26 (0.15)		-0.26 (0.15)
Income		0.07*** (0.01)		0.07*** (0.01)
Constant	7.06*** (0.16)	6.47*** (0.29)	4.99*** (0.16)	4.36*** (0.29)
Num.Obs.	1822	1794	1822	1794
R2	0.123	0.156	0.123	0.156
R2 Adj.	0.120	0.151	0.121	0.151

5.2 Testing H3

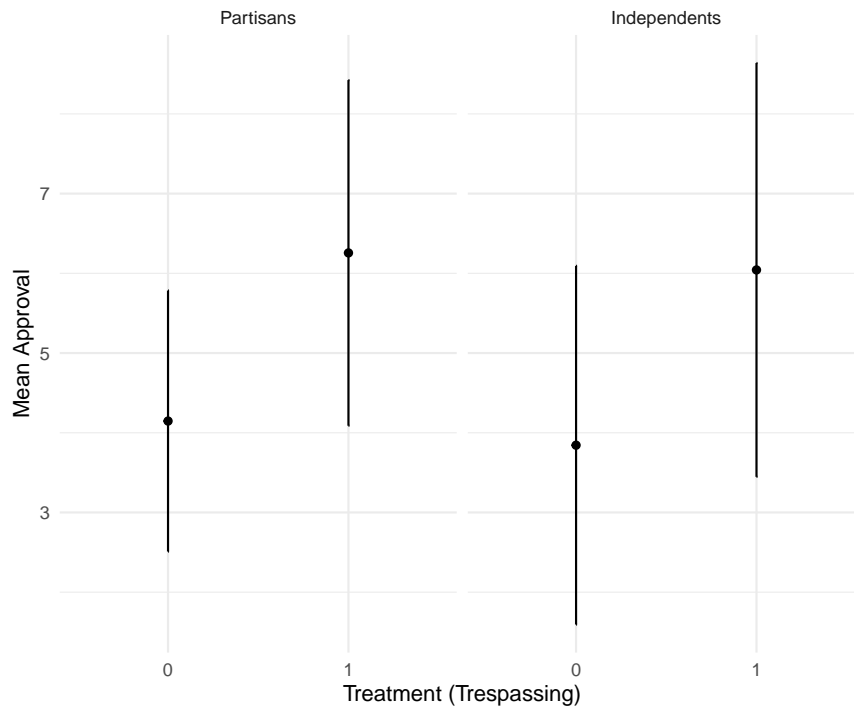
5.2.1 Overview

In this section we conduct the pre-registered analysis testing an unreported H3. We do not report H3 in the paper for three reasons. First, the theoretical argument for H3 is still made in presenting H1 and H2. In not reporting H3, there is no concealing our original expectation – we expected to find partisan issue cue-taking behavior. Second, our results for H1 and H2 mean that the expected relationship in H3 is not realistic. In testing H1 and H2, we find that neither party-congruent nor party-incongruent issue spending yields a treatment effect; thus, trespassing would logically also not demonstrate a treatment effect. Third, in making our original theory and expectation clear and not finding the antecedent relationship on which H3 relies, we omit H3 its tests in order to fit the short paper format.

With that said, we do include the pre-registered analysis for transparency and to demonstrate the null results. Figure A9 shows that there is no significant difference between trespassing and not trespassing for either partisans or independents – much less a difference in differences between partisans and independents. Tables A9, A10, and A11 confirm this finding.

5.2.2 Visual Mean Comparison

Figure A9: Visual Mean Comparison (H3)



5.2.3 Treatment Effect Estimations

Table A9: H3 OLS Regression Models for Estimating Treatment Effects

	(1)	(2)
Treatment: Trespass	2.11 (1.36)	2.11 (1.37)
Independents	-0.30 (1.85)	0.05 (1.87)
Trespass X Independent	0.09 (2.71)	-0.03 (2.74)
Ideology		0.04 (0.31)
Male		-0.70 (1.22)
Age		-0.09* (0.04)
Race: White		0.50 (1.43)
Education: Bachelors or higher		0.03 (1.36)
Income		0.21* (0.09)
Constant	4.15*** (0.94)	5.91* (2.49)
Num.Obs.	805	794
R2	0.004	0.023
R2 Adj.	0.000	0.012

5.2.4 Alternative DV: Approval (0/1)

Table A10: H3 OLS Regression Models for Estimating Treatment Effects, Alt. DV = Approval (0/1)

	(1)	(2)
Treatment: Trespass	0.01 (0.03)	0.01 (0.03)
Independents	-0.09* (0.04)	-0.09* (0.05)
Trespass X Independent	-0.04 (0.06)	-0.04 (0.06)
Ideology		0.00 (0.01)
Male		0.02 (0.03)
Age		0.00 (0.00)
Race: White		-0.03 (0.03)
Education: Bachelors or higher		-0.04 (0.03)
Income		0.01* (0.00)
Constant	0.78*** (0.02)	0.80*** (0.06)
Num.Obs.	898	883
R2	0.014	0.024
R2 Adj.	0.011	0.013

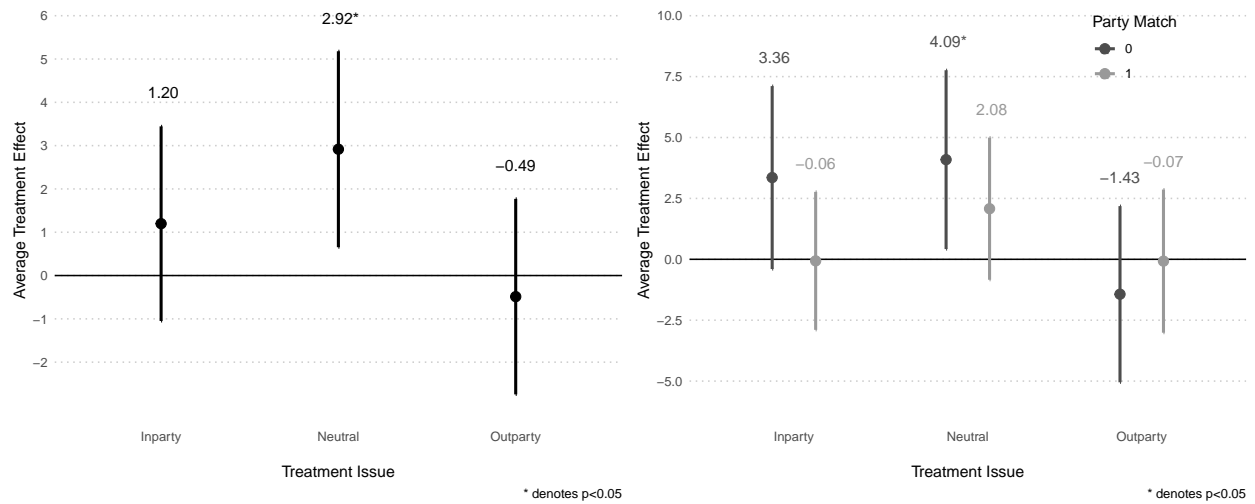
5.2.5 Alternative DV: Effectiveness (0-100)

Table A11: H3 OLS Regression Models for Estimating Treatment Effects, Alt. DV = Effectiveness (0-10)

	(1)	(2)
Treatment: Trespass	-0.10 (0.23)	-0.10 (0.23)
Independents	-1.36*** (0.31)	-1.25*** (0.31)
Trespass X Independent	-0.10 (0.44)	-0.11 (0.44)
Ideology		0.05 (0.05)
Male		-0.01 (0.20)
Age		-0.01 (0.01)
Race: White		0.12 (0.23)
Education: Bachelors or higher		-0.07 (0.22)
Income		0.07*** (0.02)
Constant	6.47*** (0.16)	5.84*** (0.41)
Num.Obs.	898	883
R2	0.045	0.076
R2 Adj.	0.042	0.067

6 Additional Analyses

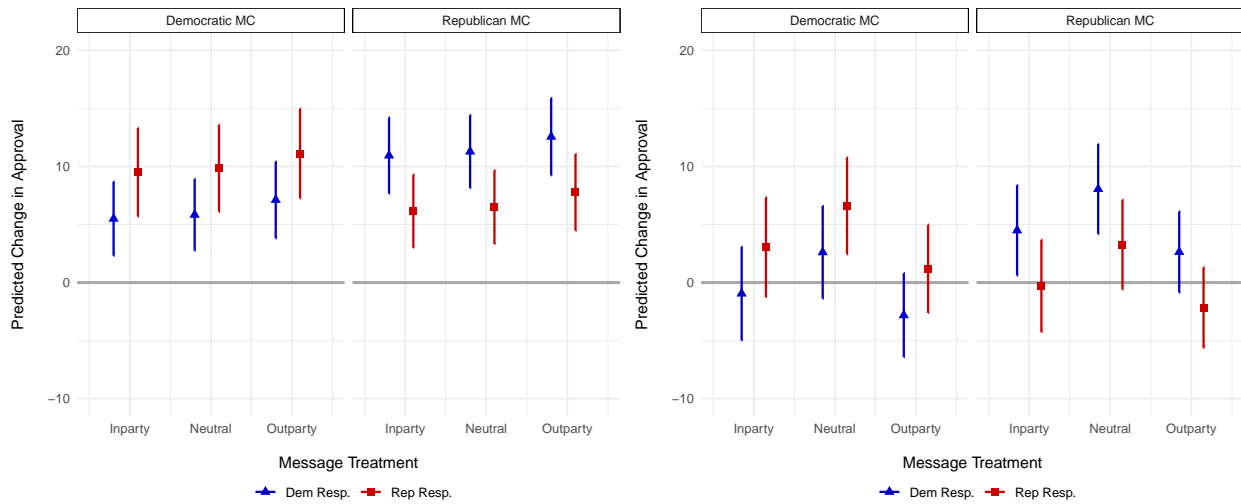
6.1 Paper Analyses with only Successful Manipulation Check Respondents



(a) Average Treatment Effects

(b) Treatment Effects by Party Match

Figure A10: Treatment Effects (Manipulation Check Passers)



(a) High Importance

(b) Low Importance

Figure A11: Predicted Change in Approval for Profile Respondent (Manipulation Check Passers)