

Experiment Summary

Stage 1 – Partisan Story Sharing

All respondents were asked to read a two-paragraph story that contained a mix of factual information about COVID-19 and politicized information sourced to a partisan outlet. Self-identified partisans read a story sourced to the co-partisan outlet while independents were randomly assigned to read either the Democratic or Republican version of the story.

All respondents read the following introductory paragraph:

More than 150,000 people have contracted the coronavirus (COVID-19) in the U.S., and at least 2,800 people have died across the country, according to Johns Hopkins University. The World Health Organization on Monday said the pandemic is accelerating: It took 67 days from the first case to reach 100,000 cases, 11 days for the second 100,000 cases and four days for the next 100,000 cases.

Democratic respondents then read the following:

Democrats have been vocal about their criticism of President Trump's behavior. As NYT columnist Michelle Goldberg put it: "Trump has been giving daily televised briefings in which he overpromises and spreads misinformation. That makes frankness about his catastrophic ineptitude imperative. People are suffering and dying needlessly because the president can't do his job. There will be an election, and the public will be asked to render a verdict on Trump's leadership."

Republican respondents then read the following:

Democrats have been vocal about their criticism of President Trump's handling of the crisis. In defending his father against criticism from the media, Donald Trump Jr went so far as to say on Fox News that Democrats "seemingly hope that it comes here and kills millions of people so they can end Donald Trump's streak of winning."

Similarly, Peter Hegseth, a co-host of Fox & Friends Weekends, admonished Democrats' criticism, saying: "They're rooting for the coronavirus to spread. They're rooting for it to grow. They're rooting for the problem to get worse."

Respondents were then asked whether or not they would share the message on social media. 55% of respondents (n = 1,161) reported that they would share the message while 45% (n=959) reported that they would not. There were differences in willingness to share by message type, with 50% of respondents exposed to the Democratic message reporting that they were willing to share compared to only 39% exposed to the Republican message (difference = 11%, $p < 0.001$).¹

¹ Excluding independents does not change these differences.

Stage 2 – Partisan Story Sharing

The 45% of respondents who reported that they would share the message were then exposed to an information experiment designed to motivate them to “stop and think” about sharing the message. The experiment consisted of a control condition and 4 treatments.

Control: *Are you sure you would like to share this message?*

National Unity Appeal: *Before you post, ask yourself: Is this the type of post that most Americans would find helpful in these challenging times? Does this post reflect the unity and civility of the American people? Are you sure you would like to share this message?*

Co-Partisan Appeal: *Before you post, ask yourself: Is this the type of post that most \$respondent_party would find helpful in these challenging times? Does this post reflect the unity and civility of the \$respondent_party? Are you sure you would like to share this message?*

Elite Consensus Appeal: *Before you post, ask yourself: Is this the type of post that our leaders in Washington would find helpful in these challenging times? Does this post reflect the unity and civility that members of both parties have displayed? Are you sure you would like to share this message?*

Scientific Consensus Appeal: *Before you post, ask yourself: Is this the type of post that scientists would consider helpful in these challenging times? Does this post reflect the unity that members of the science community have displayed? Are you sure you would like to share this message?*

After reading one of these messages, respondents indicated if they would or would not share the message. Figure 1 shows the proportion of respondents who would still share the message. Appeals to national unity (.12 lower than control, $p = 0.005$), elite consensus (.09 lower than control, $p = 0.005$), and scientific consensus (.18 lower than control, $p < 0.001$) reduced willingness to share the message.

Figure 2 plots the treatment effects separately for Democrats and Republicans. There are no significant differences between Democrats and Republicans within any of the conditions. Further, the differences between the control condition and scientific consensus conditions remain strong for both parties ($p = 0.002$ for both partisan groups). The differences also largely remain for the American identity appeal, although the effects are stronger for Republicans (0.17 lower than control, $p = 0.03$) than Democrats (0.10 lower than control, $p = 0.06$). Republicans (0.19 lower than control, $p = 0.01$) but not Democrats (0.06 lower than control, $p = 0.3$) respond to the elite consensus appeal.

Figure 1 – Proportion Willing to Share Message by Treatment

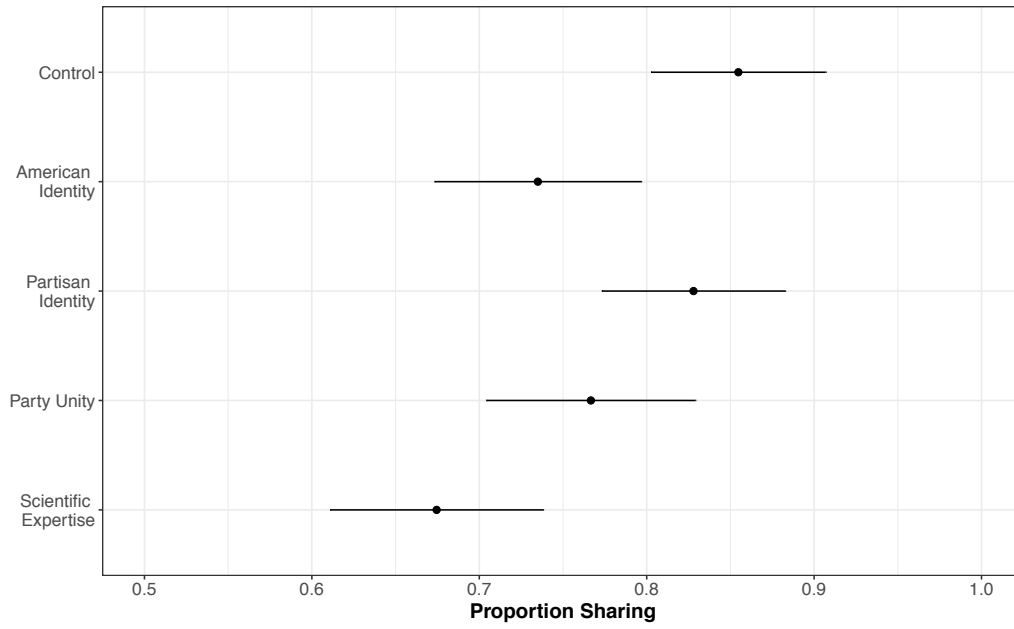
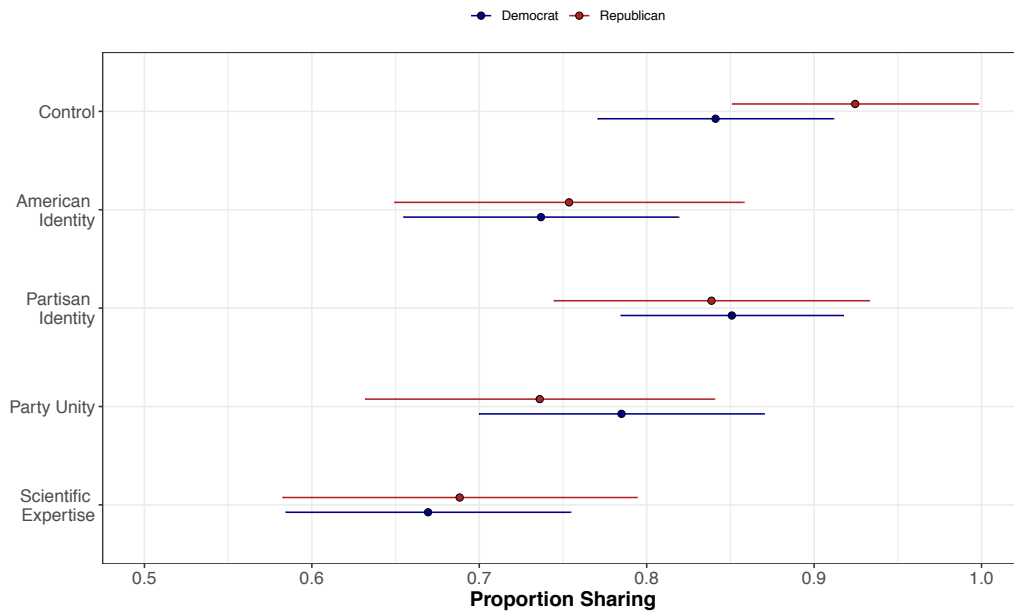


Figure 2 – Proportion Willing to Share Message by Treatment and Party Identification



COVID-19 Survey Question Summary

How worried are you that you or someone in your family will be exposed to the coronavirus (COVID-19)?

	Not at all worried	Not too worried	Somewhat worried	Very worried
Total	4.7	14.2	44.7	36.3
Democrats	3.2	9.2	43	44.5
Republicans	4.3	20.5	47.4	27.8
Independents	10.2	14.8	42.7	32.2

How confident are you that the federal government will be able to handle an outbreak of the coronavirus (COVID-19) in this country?

	Not confident at all	Not too confident	Somewhat confident	Very confident
Total	18.1	28.9	39.8	13.1
Democrats	29.1	37.6	26.4	6.9
Republicans	3.4	16.3	57.9	22.4
Independents	19.5	33.4	37.8	9.4

To what extent have you been practicing social distancing due to the coronavirus (COVID-19)?

	None of the time	Some of the time	Most of the time	All of the time
Total	1.2	7	37	54.8
Democrats	0.4	6.3	33.1	60
Republicans	1.3	6.9	42.6	49.3
Independents	3.4	9.0	34.7	52.9

To what extent have you been stocking up on food and other essentials due to the coronavirus (COVID-19)?

	Not at al	Somewhat (1-2 weeks' more food)	A lot (3-4 weeks' more food)	Very much (a month or more food)
Total	24.2	52.4	14.9	8.5
Democrats	20.2	53.9	15.9	10
Republicans	27.6	50.8	14.6	7
Independents	28.8	50.5	12.7	8.1

To what extent have you changed the number of times you wash your hands during the day due to the coronavirus (COVID-19)?

	Decreased	No change	Increased
Total	1.7	10.1	88.2
Democrats	1.8	7.4	90.8
Republicans	2.0	11.1	86.9
Independents	1.2	21.05	77.8

Demographic Summaries

Forthright Sample

	Full Sample N = 2,125	Democrats N = 1,006	Republicans N = 796	Independents N = 322
Age	45.4 (SD=16.1)	43.4 (SD=16.2)	48.5 (SD = 15.6)	42.5 (15.6)
% 4-year degree	35	39.9	33.3	24.17
% Female	48.6	49.9	47.2	47.8
% White	70.7	60	87.9	62
% Urban	27.3	34.7	18.6	25.8
% attend church at least 1/week	25.21	23	28.27	24.54

2019 Cooperative Congressional Election Study (Unweighted)

	Full Sample N = 18,000	Democrats N = 8,293	Republicans N = 6,474	Independents N = 3,233
Age	49.3 (SD=17.1)	47.2 (SD=17.1)	53.9 (SD = 16.7)	45.2 (15.8)
% 4-year degree	32.3	38.13	27.6	26.94
% Female	56.41	60.9	51.3	55.2
% White	69.5	61.7	83.6	61.6
% Urban				
% attend church at least 1/week	24.8	17.62	35.9	18.9

2019 Cooperative Congressional Election Study (Weighted)

	Full Sample N = 18,000	Democrats N = 8,293	Republicans N = 6,474	Independents N = 3,233
Age	48.3 (SD=17.9)	46.9 (SD=17.1)	53.3 (SD = 16.7)	42.5 (15.8)
% 4-year degree	30.5	36.4	28.3	21.7
% Female	51.54	54.5	48.9	49.9
% White	67.1	57.9	84.1	56.9
% Urban				
% attend church at least 1/week	24.8	18.1	37	17.1