

No Pressure: A Method to Reduce Overreporting of Political Engagement

Elizabeth C. Connors University of South Carolina

John V. Kane New York University

Abstract. Survey researchers frequently employ measures of political engagement, yet social desirability pressures can lead to overreporting. Building upon existing literature, we adopt an iterative approach to determine how such overreporting can be reduced. Four preregistered survey experiments were conducted (total N=7,122). We first confirm that social desirability considerations can underlie some types of self-reported political engagement. Second, having tested a variety of interventions that were designed to reduce overreporting, we find that our most effective treatment (*Dampen Politics*) was one that aimed to decrease the salience of politics. This treatment significantly reduced (1) the degree to which respondents perceived the survey as political, and (2) some types of self-reported political engagement, particularly political interest and voting. We tested alternative implementations of the *Dampen Politics* treatment, each time assessing its robustness and validity. Our findings suggest a simple adjustment in survey wording and organization can meaningfully decrease overreporting of political engagement.

Key Words: political engagement; measurement; surveys; social desirability

Word Count: 8,740

Acknowledgements: For their valuable feedback on previous drafts, we thank participants and discussants at SPSA 2024 and MPSA 2024 and various anonymous reviewers.

Competing Interests: The authors declare none.

Other Statements and Declarations: Research was conducted under the approval of the University of South Carolina's or New York University's Institutional Review Board, consent forms were given in all studies, and deception was not used. Studies were preregistered and internally funded. A portion of this research was funded internally by New York University's "Dean's Research Grant" (Spring/Summer 2024) within the School of Professional Studies (SPS). These sponsors did not play any role whatsoever in the design, execution, analysis, or interpretation of the data, nor did they play a role in the writing of the study.

Introduction

The health of any democracy depends much upon the degree to which its citizens are engaged in the political process. Researchers therefore frequently employ measures of political engagement, such as news consumption, discussing politics with others, political interest, and voting. Yet there are lingering concerns that many of these measures are tainted by social desirability bias because they often rely on self-reports (Holtgraves 2004). That is, that people overreport the degree to which they consume political news, discuss politics with others, are interested in political affairs, and—most especially—turn out to vote, because they believe it makes them look better to do so (Alvarez and Li 2023; Corbett 1991; Holbrook, Green, and Krosnick 2003; Holbrook and Krosnick 2010a; Karp and Brockington 2005; Style and Jerit 2020). Indeed, concerns about social desirability help to explain why citizens are more likely to vote if told their peers will find out (Gerber, Green, and Larimer 2008).

This potential mismeasurement is concerning given the centrality of political engagement as a variable in political science research. First, this mismeasurement leads, of course, to overestimates of political engagement (Clausen 1968; Traugott and Katosh 1979). Second, and more problematic, this mismeasurement is unlikely to be equally distributed across the population. People differ in their desire to impress others and, as such, will vary in how much their self-reports of political attitudes and behavior are exaggerated (see, e.g., Connors 2020, 2023). Because of this, statistical models that feature a measure of political engagement—e.g., as an independent variable, dependent variable, or moderator—may suffer from bias. That is, to the extent that social desirability pressure drives overreports of political engagement, and this pressure *also* has a non-zero correlation with another variable in the model, effect estimates involving the engagement variable will likely be biased (see also Bernstein, Chadha, and Montjoy 2001; Karp and Brockington 2005; Silver, Anderson, and Abramson 1986). In addition to overestimation and bias, a third worry is that this mismeasurement would influence precision: differential pressure to overreport likely creates a noisier measure and a higher risk of a Type II error.

Survey researchers would thus benefit from a simple method to reduce social desirability bias and obtain more valid measures of political engagement. To identify such a method, we fielded four large, preregistered survey experiments that tested a variety of interventions using U.S. samples as a test case. The first study informed the latter ones, enabling us to test the robustness of our most effective intervention with different samples and in different contexts while incrementally improving it as a means of measuring self-reported political engagement (see Druckman 2022 who argues for this iterative and varied approach in experimental research). Specifically, we first drew upon existing literature and explored a variety of potentially effective interventions to reduce self-reported engagement using a sample of U.S. adults. Based upon these results, we employed our most effective intervention—*Dampen Politics*, which aims to decrease the salience of politics among respondents—on a Cooperative Election Study (CES) sample to examine if the effect replicated. A third and fourth experiment further tested the robustness of the *Dampen Politics* intervention, with the latter survey using a diverse national sample and an alternative implementation. Our findings suggest a simple adjustment in survey wording and organization can meaningfully decrease overreporting of political engagement.

Social Desirability Bias in Political Engagement Measures

Political engagement is an umbrella term for various beliefs and behaviors that demonstrate an engagement with the political process. This can include how often one consumes political news, how often one discusses politics with their friends and family, one's interest in politics broadly, and how often one votes in elections. While this is by no means an exhaustive list, these four measures of political engagement are regularly employed by political scientists and thus are the measures we focus on.

Researchers have been concerned for decades that social desirability bias influences our measures of political engagement, particularly measures of voting. Based on both data and theory, the overwhelming belief is that in order to seem like a good citizen (or at least avoid seeming like a bad citizen), some respondents may indicate they voted when they did not, or overreport their levels of political interest and other forms of political engagement. Indeed, recent research finds that a heightened sense of duty to society predicts greater self-reported political engagement (Waldfoegel, Dittmann, and Birnbaum 2024). This is consistent with the notion that feeling pressure to be politically engaged is an important factor that influences how respondents answer political engagement questions.

Extant literature and survey practices suggest that social desirability bias influences these measures to varying extents. First, measures of news consumption and political discussion aim to capture an objective truth (i.e. whether or not respondents consumed political news or engaged in political discussions). Changes in question specificity, therefore, can increase the measures' validity and precision (Prior 2009). Thus, the American National Election Studies (ANES) asks respondents how many days a week they consume news or discuss politics. Yet, while there is an *objective* truth to how often people engage in these behaviors, people may still want to obscure that truth behind more socially desirable answers—answers that will increase their perceived level of engagement. These measures are thus potentially tainted by social desirability bias, although possibly less so than the political interest and voting variables, to which we turn next.

Measures of political interest are more abstract, asking about internal beliefs rather than objective behavior. They are thus vulnerable to subjective evaluations of one's interest relative to others'. Inherently, this makes political interest difficult to measure, although Prior (2010) argues that it is safe from social desirability concerns. Despite Prior's (2010) affirmations, the preambles to both of ANES' measures of political interest suggest concerns about social desirability bias. The first question begins with, "Some people don't pay much attention to political campaigns," and the second question begins with, "Some people seem to follow [in 1964, "think about"] what's going on in government and public affairs most of the time, whether there's an election going on or not. Others aren't that interested." Both approaches appear aimed at obtaining a more valid measure of interest by explicitly assuring respondents that some citizens are not politically interested. This communicates to respondents that there is no need to report high interest in order to fit in—i.e., there is no need to *overreport* political engagement.

Finally, whether or not one voted in an election—though an objective behavior—is one that people are likely motivated to exaggerate, especially given that voting in elections is a recognized hallmark of a functioning democracy. Political scientists aiming to measure voter turnout have long been concerned about how to validly measure such behavior given the social context surrounding it (see Karp and Brockington 2005). Research confirms what we instinctively know: there is a strong civic norm to vote, both in the US (Blais and Achen 2019; Campbell et al. 1960; de Tocqueville 1835; Doherty et al. 2017; Riker and Ordeshook 1968;) and elsewhere (Blais 2000;

Galais and Blais 2016)—although the pressure to vote is likely stronger in countries with higher participation (Karp and Brockington 2005).¹ Indeed, get-out-the-vote (GOTV) campaigns in the US rely on this perceived sense of civic duty to increase turnout (Gerber et al. 2008, 2010; Haenschel 2016; Panagopoulos 2013).

Political science research and decades of various ANES voting measures in the US demonstrate an attempt to depress this social pressure to obtain valid turnout data. As far back as 1948, ANES asked, “In the election, about half the people voted and about half of them didn’t. Did you vote?” This is a similar approach to the political interest measure, reminding participants that some do not vote and so one need not report having voted in order to fit in. Yet it is important to note that while this approach highlights the lack of a descriptive norm (i.e. that not everyone votes or is interested), there is likely still a strong injunctive norm that biases self-reports (i.e. that it is socially desirable to vote and be interested).² Over time, this wording evolved slightly (see SA G)—presently, ANES asks: “In talking to people about the election we often find that a lot of people were not able to vote because they weren’t registered, they were sick, or they just didn’t have time. Which of the following statements best describes you?” This preamble’s wording presumably allows respondents an excuse to have not voted—i.e., it communicates that not voting does not necessarily mean one is not a good citizen, but perhaps just busy.

All of these wording changes likely reduce overreports. Yet, they are focused on reducing abstractness (like the media consumption and political discussion measures) and changing descriptive norms (like the political interest and voting measures). If *injunctive* norms are still contributing to overreports—i.e., if respondents are still inflating their political engagement to seem like a good citizen—then these changes do not necessarily address that particular issue. In other words, while these changes have improved measurement of political engagement, there is still more to be done.

Indeed, research finds that in the 1990s, self-reported turnout in the ANES was over 20 percentage points higher than actual US turnout (Karp and Brockington 2005)—something likely driven by multiple drivers of misestimation, including but not limited to social desirability bias. And in 2010, research by Holbrook and Krosnick used the “item count technique” (allowing for private reporting of turnout) to reduce overreports of turnout in telephone surveys, a survey mode especially prone to social desirability bias (Holbrook et al. 2003). Their technique was able to mitigate issues found in telephone surveys, but it was unsuccessful with online surveys. The authors note this might be the case because online surveys are less susceptible to social desirability bias, yet other research clearly demonstrates that social desirability bias exists in online surveys as well (see, e.g., Connors, Krupnikov, and Ryan 2019; Style and Jerit 2020). Further, follow-up work questioned the “item count” method’s validity entirely (Holbrook and Krosnick 2010b). Thus, in papers where voter turnout is integral to the inferences made, researchers often must obtain more expensive and time-consuming “validated” voter data (e.g. Alvarez and Li 2023), although these also have drawbacks (e.g. Lyons and Scheb 1999), including time, cost, and potential Type II error (Berent, Krosnick, and Lupia 2016).

¹ Research also finds that this civic norm is stronger among the more educated (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980), inflating the relationship between education and voter turnout as well as the relationship between education and *overreporting* of voter turnout (Hansen and Tyner 2021).

² See Cialdini, Reno, and Kallgren (1990) and Connors (2023) for discussions of the distinction between these norms. We investigate the importance of injunctive norms in our first empirical section below (“Social Desirability & Overreporting Political Engagement”).

Because research suggests that the measurement of these four pieces of political engagement could be influenced by social pressures to varying degrees, our approach aimed to first confirm that people view reporting political engagement as socially desirable and then address this bias using simple interventions.

Data & Measures

To identify a method that reduces overreports of political engagement, we fielded four large preregistered survey experiments.³ Study 1 (*Lucid 2022*) features a sample of 1,732 US adults from Lucid from May 16th to May 24th, 2022 and tests various interventions, implementing the most effective intervention (*Dampen Politics*) in Studies 2, 3, and 4. Study 2 (*CES 2022*) features a diverse national sample of 819 US adults from the Cooperative Election Study (CES) from September 29th to November 8th, 2022. Study 3 (*Lucid 2024*) features a sample of 3,345 US adults from Lucid from March 9th to March 12th, 2024.⁴ Lastly, Study 4 (*Prolific 2024*) features a sample (nationally representative on sex, age, and ethnicity⁵) of 1,226 US adults from Prolific from June 12th to 27th, 2024. We next detail how each political engagement variable was measured (see also Table 1 below).

The news consumption variable (*Consume*) aims to measure how often one consumes political news. In the ANES, this is measured by asking respondents how often they consume news (not including sports) during a typical week. We measured this with self-reported consumption of news “not including sports” during a “typical week” (with response options ranging from “none” to “seven days per week”). In the first study, this question was asked separately for internet-, television-, newspaper- and radio-based news. The four items attained pairwise correlations ranging from .20 to .46 (all $p < .001$; $\alpha = .65$) and, as such, were combined into a single additive scale and then asked as one question in subsequent studies.

The discuss politics variable (*Discuss*) aims to measure how often one discusses politics with others. Similar to the news consumption variable, in the ANES this is measured by asking respondents how often they talked about politics with their family or friends in the past week. We measured *Discuss* by asking respondents to indicate how often (“during a typical week”) they “discuss politics with your family or friends,” with response options again ranging from “none” to “seven days per week.”

The political interest variable (*Interest*) aims to measure how interested one is in politics, political events, and the political process. In the ANES, political interest is measured by asking respondents about their interest in “elections” and their interest in “government and public affairs.” We measured *Interest* by asking respondents to indicate how interested they were in “information about what’s going on in government and politics,” with response options ranging from “not at all interested” (1) to “extremely interested” (5).

Finally, the voting variable (*Vote*) aims to measure whether one voted in an election. We measured *Vote* in a variety of ways throughout our four studies, asking about both typical years

³ Link for *Lucid 2022* and *CES 2022* (see 2022 and 2023 files, respectively): https://osf.io/z4ncp/?view_only=1a4e083cd73248a5957d1e18c204909c. Link for *Lucid 2024*: https://aspredicted.org/G69_HY1. Link for *Prolific 2024*: https://aspredicted.org/CF1_JMS.

⁴ Both Lucid studies featured quotas to ensure that the sample would be nationally representative with respect to age, race/ethnicity, gender, and geographic region.

⁵ Our sample was 3 respondents short of being nationally representative on age, however.

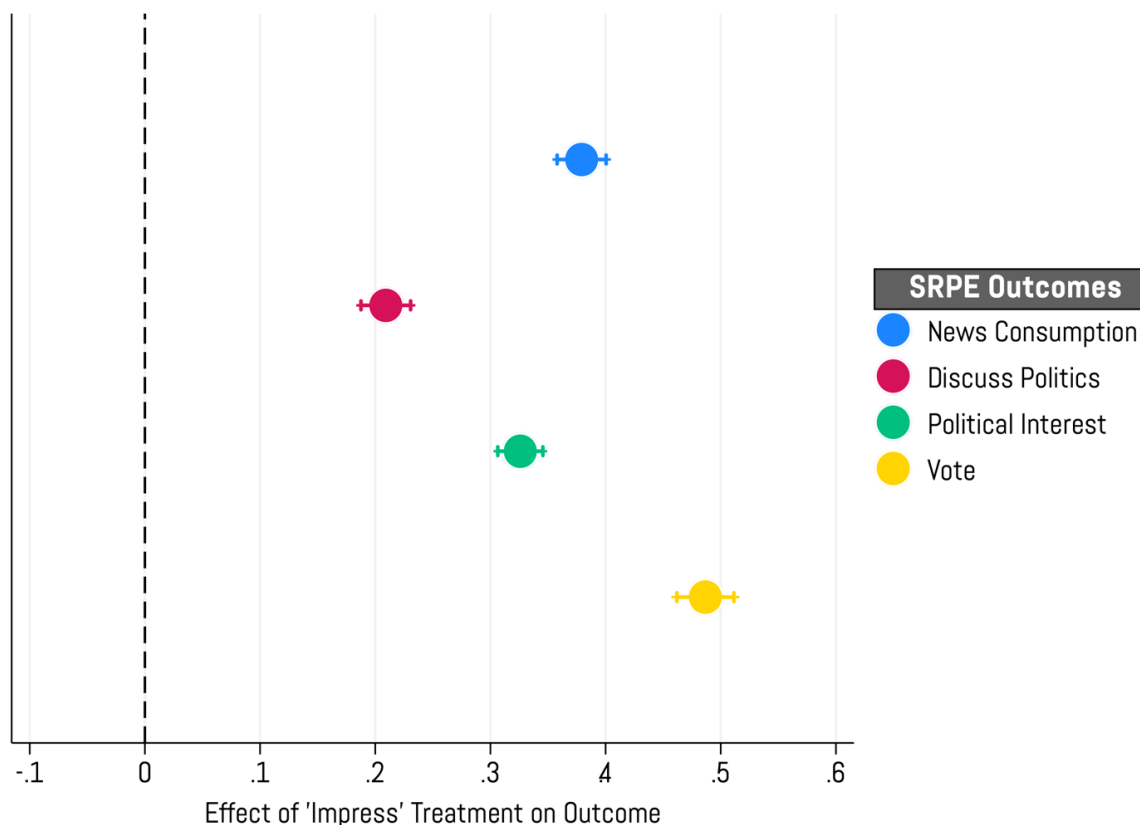
and the past election. We coded these responses to construct a binary variable that simply indicates whether the respondent reported voting or otherwise (full details in the SA).

Social Desirability & Overreporting Political Engagement

Before exploring interventions to reduce self-reported political engagement (SRPE), we first present evidence that social considerations are likely relevant for how people answer survey questions about their engagement in political matters—i.e. we show that reporting political engagement is viewed as socially desirable. The data come from our *Lucid 2024* study (discussed below).

We employ a design similar to Claassen and Ryan (2016), in which the authors asked respondents to indicate which Democratic presidential primary candidate they would support if they “want to make the best impression or who they would support if they want to make the worst impression.” In our case, we gave respondents the following prompt, “Please answer the following questions in a way that you think someone would in order to **[impress/disappoint] others** (even if this is not your actual behavior or opinion),” randomizing whether the instruction was to “impress” or to “disappoint” (bolded text in original). We gave this prompt on the same screen as each of the four political engagement measures described above. A subjective manipulation check (Kane & Barabas 2019) confirms that respondents were attentive to this prompt, significantly changing the way they responded depending upon which condition they were assigned to (see SA for details).

FIGURE 1. Effect of ‘Impress’ Treatment (compared to “Disappoint”) on SRPE



Notes: Estimates reflect the difference in self-reported political engagement (SRPE)—all measured on a 0 to 1 scale—going from the “disappoint” to “impress” conditions. The first three estimates are OLS, while “Vote” is logistic. CIs are 90% (spikes) and 95% (thinner lines) N=3,345. Lucid (2024) data.

Figure 1 presents the results of this experiment. Each estimate reflects the percentage-point change in SRPE (measured on a 0-1 scale) going from the “disappoint” prompt to the “impress” prompt. In all four cases, we see large, statistically significant increases in SRPE. The *Vote* outcome, for example, exhibits nearly a 50 percentage-point increase, suggesting that respondents feel it is far more socially desirable to report that one has voted compared to reporting that one did not vote. This test confirms that social concerns likely influence the measurement of political engagement variables. That is, to the extent respondents believe that reporting higher political engagement will create a better impression to others, it follows that engagement is likely being overreported when researchers measure it in surveys. Indeed, recent studies find this to be the case (Alvarez and Li 2022; Style and Jerit 2020).

Experimental Interventions to Reduce Overreporting

Motivated by previous research, we tested six different treatments’ effects on reports of political engagement in our first study and then employed our most effective treatment—*Dampen Politics*—in the subsequent three studies. In our first study, prior to asking about their levels of political engagement, respondents were randomly assigned to one of seven experimental conditions, including a *Control Condition* that simply informed respondents that, “The following

questions will ask you about your interest and engagement in political matters.” Each treatment condition then added content to the *Control Condition* text, except for the *Dampen Politics* treatment (explained below). Detailed wording of each condition is featured in Table 2.

The first treatment (*Integrity*) informed respondents that the validity of our research requires accurate answers. We reasoned that this messaging should be persuasive insofar as respondents do not actively desire to undermine the study. The second treatment (*Self-Interest*) warned respondents that questions asked later in the survey will be based upon answers to the present questions. This messaging was designed to induce respondents to want to answer accurately as a means of avoiding being asked unfamiliar, irrelevant, and/or more difficult questions later on. The third treatment (*Save Face*) echoed research by Krupnikov, Piston, and Bauer (2016), assuring respondents that they would be given an opportunity to explain their answers *post hoc*. The underlying logic in “saving face” is that respondents will feel more comfortable responding in a socially *undesirable* fashion if they know they will be able to explain their responses later on (see also Stout, Baker, and Baker 2021).

The fourth and fifth treatments (*Reduce Shame* and *Augment Shame*) attempted to directly manipulate the amount of perceived shame associated with low political engagement. The former condition stated that there is “absolutely no shame” in being politically disengaged and that “many Americans” are disengaged—this is similar to the aforementioned approach taken by the ANES, but is focused on *both* injunctive (“no shame”) and descriptive (“many Americans”) norms. Conversely, the latter condition stated that many Americans are “unfortunately” disengaged and that this is “absolutely shameful” (the opposite of the previous approach). By directly manipulating the degree of social desirability associated with political engagement, these treatments should affect SRPE.

Our final manipulation (*Dampen Politics*) was designed to reduce the salience of politics in the survey—i.e. reduce the degree to which respondents viewed the survey to be primarily interested in political attitudes and behaviors. This manipulation echoes research by Groenendyk and Krupnikov (2021), who find that respondents change their goals, and thus their survey behavior, depending on whether they view the survey to be political or apolitical. We reasoned that because respondents’ perception of a survey’s political nature can change their goals within the survey, respondents who view a survey as *apolitical* should be less motivated to present as a politically-engaged citizen. That is, when respondents view a survey as *political* in nature, they likely believe they will be judged along a *political* dimension (i.e. as a good or bad citizen) and thus inflate their levels of political engagement. In contrast, when politics is *less* salient within a survey, respondents may be more likely to accurately report their engagement levels insofar as the goal of appearing as a politically-engaged citizen becomes less important in an apolitical context.

The *Dampen Politics* manipulation thus involved asking respondents the same outcome questions as the other conditions but *alongside apolitical questions*, and with a prompt designed to “un-prime” politics. For example, when asked in one study about their interest in government and politics, respondents in the *Dampen Politics* condition were also asked about their interest in cooking, movies and shows, the arts, exercising, etc. The “un-prime” prompt varied slightly from study to study, but in the first study respondents were told, “The following questions will ask you about how you spend your time and energy – between work, relationships, and other activities.” In the *Control Condition*, this prompt instead read, “The following questions will ask you about your interest and engagement in political matters.” Again, this condition was designed to reduce respondents’ perception that the study was primarily interested in politics and, therefore, the respondents’ likelihood of inflating their SRPE.

Study 1: Lucid, May 2022

To examine interventions that could affect self-reported political engagement, we first fielded a preregistered study via Lucid. The survey featured a total of 1,732 U.S. adult respondents, with quotas included to ensure that the sample matched US Census data on race/ethnicity, age, gender, and geographic region. Tables 1 and 2 outline the outcome measures and treatments discussed above.

TABLE 1. OUTCOME MEASURES (LUCID STUDY)

Outcome	Survey Question	Response Options
News Consumption	During a typical week, how many days do you watch, read, or listen to news, not including sports, on the following medium: TV, Internet, Radio	
	<i>[Dampen Politics Intervention]</i> How often do you do the following during a typical week: talk to friends or family / work at your job / exercise / watch TV / practice hobbies / cook / watch, read, or listen to news on the Internet, not including sports / watch news on TV, not including sports / read news in a printed newspaper, not including sports / listen to news on the radio, not including sports	None / one day / two days / three days / four days / five days / six days / seven days
Discuss Politics	During a typical week, how many days do you discuss politics with your family or friends?	None / one day / two days / three days / four days / five days / six days / seven days
	<i>[Dampen Politics Intervention]</i> (Included in previous question) discuss politics with your family or friends	
Interest	How interested are you in information about what’s going on in government and politics?	
	<i>[Dampen Politics Intervention]</i> How interested are you in the following: [columns: cooking / movies and shows / the arts / exercising / social activities / travel / what’s going on in government and politics	Extremely interested / very interested / moderately interested / slightly interested / not at all interested
Vote	Which of the following best describes what you did in the elections that were held in November?	Definitely did not vote in the elections / definitely voted in person at a polling place on election day / definitely voted in person at a polling place before election day / definitely voted by mailing a ballot to elections officials before the election / definitely voted in some other way / not completely sure whether you voted or not
	<i>[Dampen Politics Intervention]</i> Which of the following do you do in a typical year (click all that apply): [go on a trip / get sick / try to change your job / pick up a new hobby / make a new friend / vote in an election]	

Notes: Table features text for each of the four measures of political engagement. The *Dampen Politics* intervention included political items alongside apolitical items and, as such, involves slightly different wording. The outcome questions of interest for this condition appear in bold text. The CES outcome measures were largely similar to the *Dampen Politics* items here and are discussed in the text.

TABLE 2. INTERVENTION PROMPTS (LUCID STUDY)

Intervention	Text Included in Prompt
<i>Control</i>	<i>The following questions will ask you about your interest and engagement in political matters.</i>
<i>Integrity</i>	<i>[Control content] Please answer these questions <u>accurately</u>: the statistical validity of this study depends on having accurate answers about political matters from respondents like yourself.</i>
<i>Self-Interest</i>	<i>[Control content] Please answer these questions <u>accurately</u>: the political questions you receive later in the survey may be based on how you answer the following questions.</i>
<i>Save Face</i>	<i>[Control content] Please answer these questions <u>accurately</u>. After answering these questions, you will be given a chance to explain your answers, if you like, but you certainly do not have to offer any reason for your answers.</i>
<i>Reduce Shame</i>	<i>[Control content] Please answer these questions <u>accurately</u>. There is absolutely no shame in not being interested in politics. In fact, many Americans, for a variety reasons, pay barely any attention to politics, and don't engage in political matters at all.</i>
<i>Augment Shame</i>	<i>[Control content] Please answer these questions <u>accurately</u>. Unfortunately, some Americans, for a variety reasons, pay barely any attention to politics, and don't engage in political matters at all. This is absolutely shameful.</i>
<i>Dampen Politics (also in CES Study)</i>	<i>The following questions will ask you about how you spend your time and energy – between work, relationships, and other activities. Please answer these questions <u>accurately</u>.</i>

Notes: Table features the verbatim text shown to respondents before asking political engagement items. The *Dampen Politics* intervention was also featured in the CES study.

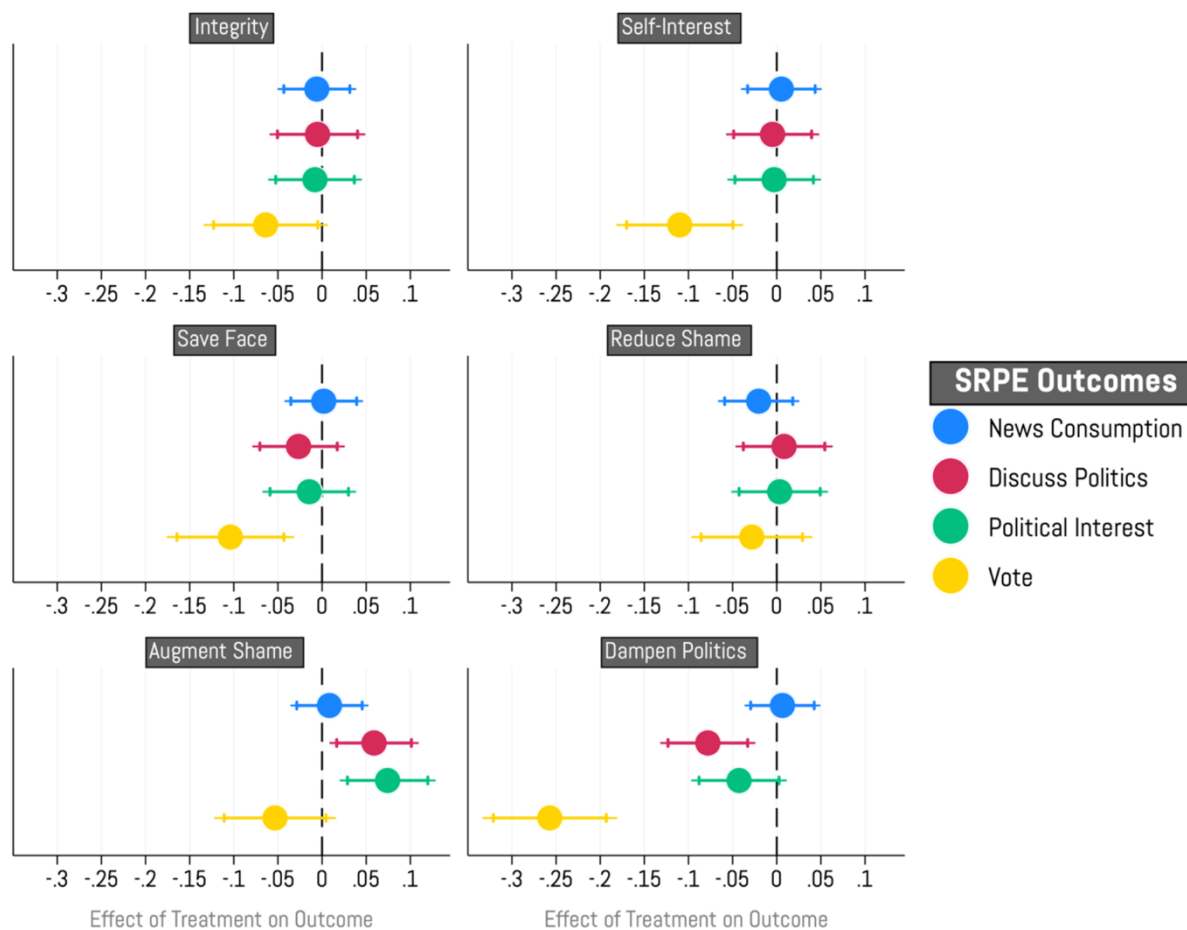
Findings. Before examining the effects of each manipulation on SRPE, we first analyze the results of a variety of post-outcome subjective manipulation checks (SMCs; Kane and Barabas 2019). Each SMC was tailored to each of the aforementioned conditions, and was only featured in the *Control* and that particular condition. For example, in the *Dampen Politics* condition, we asked, “To what extent do you think this survey is primarily focused on your political interest and involvement?” Response options ranged from “Not at all” (1) to “A great deal” (5) (see SA for full list of SMCs and their respective response options).

We find that every manipulation except *Self-Interest* exerts a correctly-signed and statistically significant ($p < .05$) effect upon its respective SMC (the *Self-Interest* manipulation was significant but incorrectly signed). However, effect sizes varied considerably: *Cohen's D* values for the *Integrity*, *Shame Reduction* and *Shame Augmentation* conditions are approximately .20, while values for the *Save Face* and *Dampen Politics* conditions were .35 and .46, respectively (see SA A for full set of results). Given our operationalization of each manipulation and the SMCs, these

initial results suggest that the *Save Face* and *Dampen Politics* treatments may be most conducive to manipulation within a survey experiment.

How does each manipulation affect SRPE? Figure 2 displays intention-to-treat (ITT) effects (all estimated via OLS regression except the binary *Vote* outcome, which used logistic regression) on each of the four measures of SRPE (all recoded to range from 0 to 1), with separate panels for each of the experimental interventions. Setting aside the *Augment Shame* condition (which was designed to *increase* SRPE), the overall pattern is that manipulations tend to *decrease* SRPE, as intended and as evidenced by the bars appearing to the left of the vertical line at the 0 point on the *x*-axis. Second, the *News Consumption* outcome is never affected to a significant degree, perhaps suggesting that it is not an item that is as susceptible to overreporting (see also Prior 2009). Third, the largest effects tend to be for self-reported voting which, consistent with existing literature, suggests that respondents feel the greatest amount of pressure to overreport voting,

FIGURE 2. Effects of Interventions on Self-Reported Political Engagement (Lucid Study)



Notes: Lucid Data. Legends indicate each outcome, all of which were rescaled to range from 0 to 1. The *x*-axes therefore display the percentage-point effect of a given intervention on each outcome. Each panel displays results for one intervention type. The first three estimates are OLS, while “Vote” is logistic. 90% (spikes) and 95% (thinner lines) confidence intervals shown. Total N = 1,764.

However, Figure 2 also demonstrates that effects vary a great deal—both in magnitude and statistical significance—depending upon both the intervention and the specific outcome measure. For example, the *Reduce Shame* intervention does not exhibit a single effect that attains significance at the conventional level, while the *Integrity* intervention has only one significant effect: a 7 percentage-point decrease in self-reported voting ($p=.04$). Viewed together, the *Reduce Shame* and *Augment Shame* conditions demonstrate that manipulating the amount of shame associated with political disengagement can matter for SRPE (e.g., the *Augment Shame* condition increases, by several percentage points, self-reported discussion of politics with family members (*Discuss*) and interest in government and politics (*Interest*) [$p<.05$ in both cases]), but individually, these two interventions show little consistency in affecting SRPE.

Echoing the SMC results reported above, the *Save Face* and *Dampen Politics* conditions show, overall, greater consistency and larger treatment effects on SRPE. Beginning with the *Save Face* intervention, treatment effects are consistently negative and generally at least one percentage-point in magnitude, yet only for self-reported voting is the effect—a large .104 (10.4 percentage-point decrease)—statistically distinguishable from zero at the .05 level.

In contrast, the *Dampen Politics* conditions yield the overall strongest results. With the exception of the news consumption outcome, three of the effects attain statistical significance at the .06 level or better, with (again) the largest observed effect for *Vote*: decreasing the salience of politics in the survey reduces self-reported voting by a sizable 26 percentage points (i.e., .26), which is the single largest effect observed in the experiment. Note that it is possible that part of the large effect on *Vote* here may be due to a slight difference in question wording between the two conditions⁶—we thus adjust this aspect in subsequent studies. *Interest* also decreases on the order of 8 percentage points ($p<.01$) while *Discuss* decreases by 4 percentage points, though this latter effect attained only marginal statistical significance ($p=.06$).

As an additional means of comparing the interventions, multivariate regression models were conducted that tested whether a particular manipulation reduced all four SRPE outcomes *jointly*.⁷ The results of these analyses indicate that the *Dampen Politics* intervention is able to jointly reduce SRPE at a far higher level of significance ($F = 11.33$; $p<.001$) than the two other conditions that attained (at least marginally) significant test-statistic values: *Save Face* ($F = 2.28$; $p=.06$) and *Self-Interest* ($F = 2.46$; $p=.04$) interventions (see SA for reporting of full results).

Overall, then, the results of *Lucid 2022* suggest that researchers may be able to reduce the amount of respondent overreporting of political engagement in their surveys.⁸ However, across the four measures of SRPE employed in our study, the *Dampen Politics* intervention stood out as having the largest and most consistent treatment effects, even taking into account slight differences between conditions for the *Vote* measure. We therefore sought to test this intervention again, and in a more rigorous fashion, with a diverse national sample. The expectation underlying each of the following studies is that lowering the perceived salience of politics on a survey will significantly reduce SRPE.

⁶ The *Control* asked about the recent November election whereas the *Dampen* asked about typical November elections.

⁷ This approach is useful when multiple outcome measures are all relevant for a broader phenomenon, yet one still wishes to fit separate models for each outcome. In such cases, a multivariate regression approach uses information from each model to determine the overall significance of the intervention on the outcomes combined.

⁸ Note that, inconsistent with our preregistration, we do not find consistent evidence that self-monitoring moderates the effect of any intervention-type—something we also find in the other three studies (see SA F for details).

Study 2: Cooperative Election Study (CES), September-November 2022

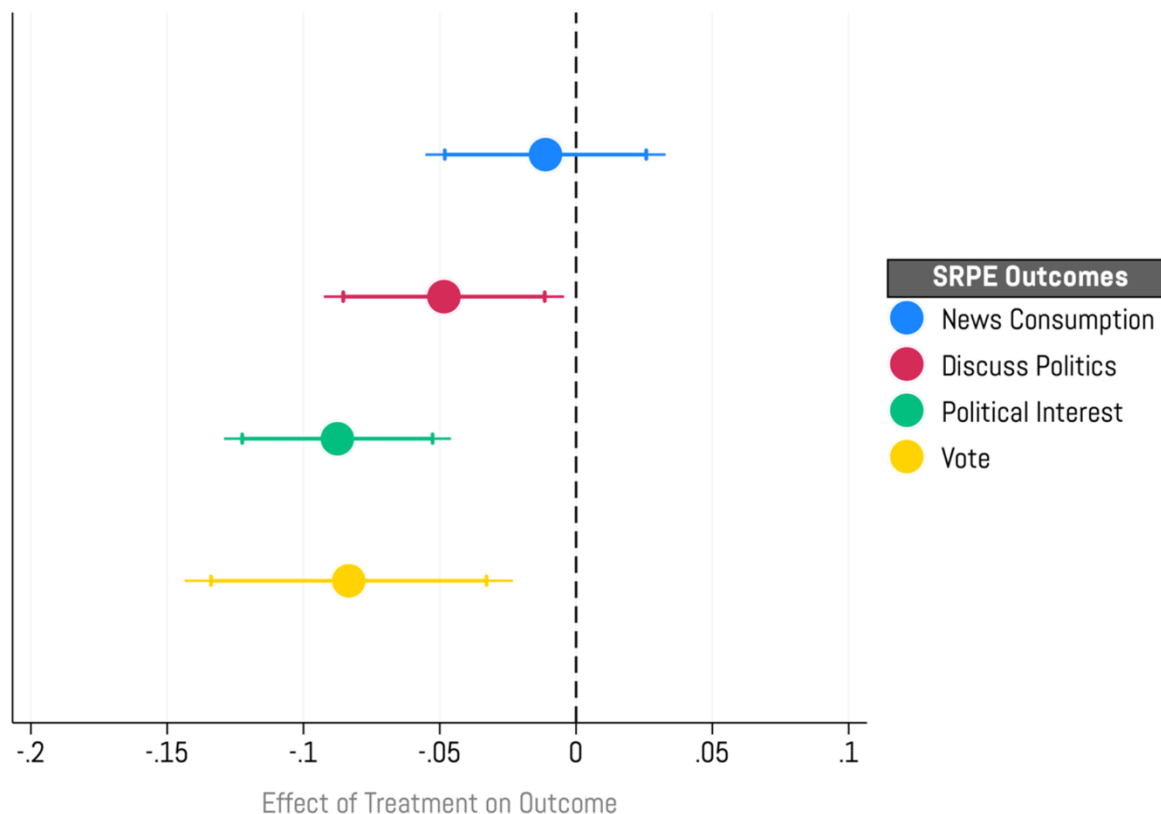
We next fielded a preregistered study with a Cooperative Election Study (CES) sample ($n=819$). This study was similar in terms of design to the previous study, but several changes are important to highlight. First, the experiment featured only two conditions: a *Control Condition* and a *Dampen Politics* condition (the most effective treatment from the previous study). Second, to further test the robustness of the *Dampen Politics* intervention, both conditions explicitly asked respondents to answer accurately. Third, we increased the similarity of the voting outcome measure in both conditions, asking in both conditions if the respondent voted in the past election—in the *Control Condition*, options were a simple “Yes” (1) or “No” (0) and in the *Dampen Politics* condition the respondent could either click the “vote” option (1) or not (0). Finally, as space on the CES module was limited, the *News Consumption* measure was condensed into a single item (see SA).

Findings. As in *Lucid 2022*, we first used an SMC to test whether the *Dampen Politics* intervention was able to significantly reduce the degree to which the study was perceived to be about politics. Despite the intrinsically political nature of the CES survey, we again find a statistically significant decrease ($-.44$, $p<.001$) in the degree to which respondents viewed the study to be political (see SA for details). This provides further evidence for the validity of the *Dampen Politics* intervention as a means of lowering the salience of politics in one’s survey.

Figure 3 displays the main results of *CES 2022*. The intention-to-treat (ITT) effect is again shown for each of the four outcomes, and in all four instances we indeed observe negatively-signed effects, as predicted. As in *Lucid 2022*, the estimated effect on *News Consumption* is small (a 1 percentage-point decrease) and non-significant ($p=.28$). However, we observe significant decreases for all three other measures of SRPE: going from the *Control Condition* to the *Dampen Politics* conditions yields a .05 (5 percentage-point) decrease in *Discuss* ($p<.05$), a 9 percentage-point decrease in *Interest* ($p<.001$), and an 8.5 percentage-point decrease in *Vote* ($p<.01$). Further, the multivariate regression analysis confirms that the *Dampen Politics* intervention decreased the SRPE outcomes jointly to a statistically significant degree ($F=5.31$; $p<.001$).

We were also able to examine our results in comparison to the validated vote that the CES provides. These data indicate that 74.6% of our sample indeed voted, which—consistent with literature above—is noticeably lower than the percentage of respondents in the *Control Condition* who *reported* voting (77.6%). We find here that the *Dampen Politics* intervention significantly lowered self-reported turnout, though the decrease (8.3 percentage points) yields a turnout rate that is lower than the validated percentage. Our results suggest that while this implementation of the treatment lowers self-reported voting, it may lower reporting *beyond* true levels of engagement. This over-correction may have been due to the question formatting. Specifically, a matrix-style question may lead inattentive respondents who *did* vote to skip the question or not realize that voting was asked about. To the extent this is the case, Study 2 suggests that this particular implementation of the *Dampen Politics* treatment may not perform well among inattentive respondents. We investigate these concerns more directly in Studies 3 and 4.

FIGURE 3. Dampen Politics Intervention & Self-Reported Political Engagement (CES Data)



Notes: CES Data. Legend indicates each outcome, all of which were rescaled to range from 0 to 1. The x-axis therefore displays the percentage-point change in each outcome (on a 0 to 1 scale) given a change from the Control to Dampen conditions. The first three estimates are OLS, while “Vote” is logistic. 90% (spikes) and 95% (thinner lines) confidence intervals shown. Total N = 819.

Study 3: Lucid, February 2024

While the previous analyses present compelling evidence that the *Dampen Politics* intervention is able to sizably reduce SRPE—particularly for *Interest* and *Vote*—one important consideration is that our treatment is to some degree “bundled.” Specifically, while the manipulation checks confirm that it reduces the salience of politics (as intended), it is also the case that the SRPE questions take a different format in the *Dampen Politics* condition. In the *Control Condition*, all questions are single items with single responses, whereas in the *Dampen Politics* intervention, the first three outcomes take the form of a question matrix, while the fourth outcome (*Vote*) is a multi-response item (i.e., respondents are asked to select each response that applies to them).⁹

We therefore endeavored to investigate the degree to which our *Dampen Politics* intervention is able to reduce SRPE apart from whatever differences might be due to a change in question

⁹ A related concern is that the treatment simply includes more questions relative to the control group, which could plausibly increase respondents’ fatigue. However, Bansak et al. (2021) do not find that the addition of extra survey items leads to meaningfully large changes in response quality.

formatting. To accomplish this, we included one placebo outcome to analyze alongside each of the SRPE outcomes. For example, in the question matrix that measures political interest, we included a question asking respondents about their interest in traveling. We therefore included a single-item version of this travel question in the *Control Condition* as well. Similarly, in the multi-response question used to measure voting in the *Dampen Politics* condition, respondents could also indicate whether or not they went on a trip within “the past year and a half.” We therefore also included a single-response question about going on a trip within the *Control Condition*.

This design enables us to test whether assignment to the *Dampen Politics* condition (relative to the *Control Condition*) affects both (1) SRPE outcomes, and (2) the corresponding placebo outcomes. Given the design, therefore, the strongest evidence for the *Dampen Politics* intervention would be to find sizable negative effects on the SRPE items, but correspondingly small, non-significant effects on the placebo outcomes.

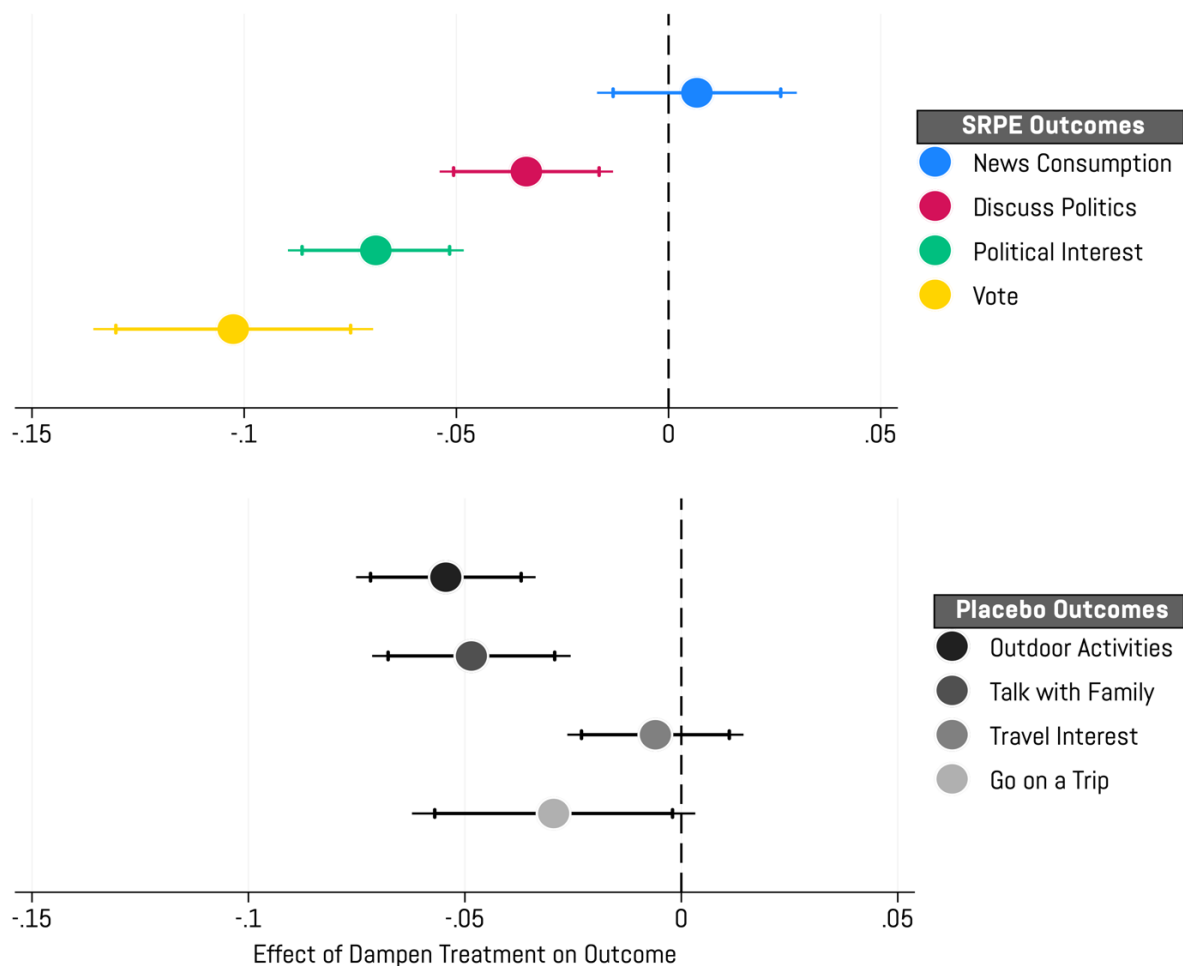
Figure 4 presents the results of these analyses. As shown in the top panel, we again find large decreases in SRPE as we go from the *Control* to *Dampen Politics* conditions, particularly for *Vote* and *Interest*. The effect on self-reported voting in the 2022 midterm elections, for example, is an estimated .103 (10.3 percentage-point) decrease in turnout ($p < .001$), while the effect on self-reported political interest nearly a 7 percentage-point decrease ($p < .001$).

The bottom panel of Figure 4 displays the effects of the *Dampen Politics* condition on the four placebo outcomes. Again, each placebo outcome corresponds to the SRPE item in the top panel by virtue of having the same response options and, thus, being featured in the same matrix/multi-item question within the *Dampen Politics* condition. This allows for a direct comparison between the effect of the *Dampen Politics* condition on the n^{th} SRPE item vis-à-vis the n^{th} placebo item. Given this, we first observe significant negative effects for the “outdoor activities” and “talk with family” placebo outcomes. This suggests the possibility that the effects of *Dampen Politics* on *News Consumption* and *Discuss*, respectively, may be due, at least in part, to the change in question formatting rather than the lowered salience of politics.

In contrast, however, the bottom panel of Figure 4 shows the effects of *Dampen Politics* on “travel interest” and “go on a trip” to be substantively small (0.1 and 2.9 percentage points, respectively) and statistically non-significant at conventional levels ($p = .56$ and $.08$, respectively). This serves as substantial evidence that, at least for the *Interest* and *Vote* outcomes, the *Dampen Politics* treatment is not lowering SRPE merely because of a change in question formatting.

On this point, several additional results are important to emphasize. First, we again find that *Dampen Politics* significantly decreased the degree to which respondents thought the survey was primarily about politics ($p = .03$), though it is worth noting that this perception was relatively low in the *Control Condition* (.46 on a 0 to 1 scale). Further, because we featured *mock vignette checks* (see Kane, Velez and Barabas 2023) prior to the experiment, we were able to gauge pre-treatment attentiveness. Using these measures, we find that the manipulation had stronger effects (on perceptions that the survey was primarily about politics) on more attentive respondents, and null effects on inattentive respondents. Thus, this analysis provides further confidence that our manipulation is accomplishing what it needs to in order to have an effect on SRPE (see Kane 2025).

FIGURE 4. Effects on SRPE and Placebo Outcomes (Study 3)



Notes: Legends indicate each outcome, all of which were rescaled to range from 0 to 1. Estimates therefore reflect the percentage-point change in each outcome going from the Control to Dampen Politics conditions. The n th outcome shown in the top panel corresponds to the n th outcome shown in the bottom panel by virtue of being featured in the same matrix-style item (or multi-response item, in the case of “Vote”/ “Go on a Trip”). The first three estimates within each panel are OLS, while “Vote” is logistic. CIs are 90% (spikes) and 95% (thinner lines). $N=3,345$. Lucid (2024) data.

Second, using these same measures of attentiveness, we also find that among the most attentive, there is still no significant effect on either the “travel interest” or “go on a trip” placebo outcomes. This is important insofar as the less attentive may be those who are most likely to give a different response if the question format changes (e.g., because they are speeding through the question, not reading carefully, not effortfully responding, etc.). Thus, to find that among the most attentive, we still observe significant effects on *Interest* and *Vote*, but *not* on the corresponding placebo items, serves as further evidence that the effects we observe are not merely due to a change in question formatting.

Third, in the case of *News Consumption*, we never find that *Dampen Politics* has a significantly negative effect. This is important because if the effects of the treatment were primarily driven by changes in question formatting, then we should see the same effects for *News Consumption* that we observe for the *Discuss* and *Interest* items, all of which use the same matrix-style formatting in the *Dampen Politics* condition. These differential effects are consistent with the patterns in our previous studies as well as previous research.

Lastly, across all studies thus far, it is indeed the case that we typically do not know the “true” levels of respondents’ political engagement. As such, one may reasonably wonder whether our *Dampen Politics* treatment is lowering SRPE below its true value. However, it is worth stressing that, even in our *Dampen Politics* condition, self-reported turnout in the 2022 midterm election is at 55.28%, which is considerably higher than the national turnout rate of 46% reported by Pew Research Center (Pew Research Center 2023).

Study 4: Prolific, June 2024

In our final study, we adopted an alternative strategy for reducing the salience of politics. Our reasoning for doing so was twofold. First, an alternative strategy would enable us to circumvent some of the methodological limitations noted above (e.g. requiring matrix-style questions in the *Dampen Politics* condition). Second, and more broadly, we wanted to explore the degree to which our approach can generalize to other forms of implementation. That is, we wanted to ensure that lowering the salience of politics is an effective strategy for reducing SRPE, even if researchers choose to implement it in different ways.

We recruited a sample of 1,226 U.S. adults via Prolific.¹⁰ In contrast to the previous studies, all respondents answered survey items that, (1) asked a single question (i.e., no matrix-style items), and (2) required a single response (i.e., no multi-response items). In the *Dampen Politics* condition, respondents were provided with the following instructions prior to each survey item: “*The following questions will ask you about how you spend your time and energy. We are particularly interested in what you do for fun. Please answer these questions accurately.*” Consistent with these instructions, respondents were asked two apolitical survey questions prior to each political item. For example, respondents were asked about their interest in “movies and shows,” and then about their interest in “social activities,” before being asked about their interest in “what’s going on in government and politics.” The outcome measures were otherwise worded and coded identically to the previous studies.

In the *Control Condition*, respondents were not given the aforementioned instructions, nor did two apolitical questions appear before each political engagement item. Rather, respondents in this condition first answered the political engagement questions, followed by four of the apolitical questions. As in *Lucid 2024*, having all respondents answer the same apolitical items permits testing for effects of the *Dampen Politics* treatment on placebo outcomes. This enables us to assess the degree to which additional mechanisms are responsible for any observed treatment effect.

Following the political engagement items, we again asked respondents to indicate the extent to which they perceived the study to be “primarily focused on your political interest and involvement.” Measured on a five-point scale (and then recoded to range from 0 to 1), we find that the *Control Condition*’s mean equals .64 while the mean for the *Dampen Politics* group equals

¹⁰ Using information from the previous study, an *a priori* power analysis found this sample size to be sufficient with power equal to .80. Details can be found in the SA.

.42—a sizable difference of nearly 22 percentage points ($p < .001$). This manipulation check confirms that our treatment lowered the salience of politics.

The main results are shown in the top panel of Figure 5. Despite the implementation of our treatment being substantially different from the implementation used in the three previous studies, the overall pattern of results is markedly similar. We again observe only a modest (1.9 percentage-point), non-significant decrease in self-reported news consumption ($p = .16$). This consistency with the previous studies is important to highlight as it confirms that the intervention can perform similarly despite being implemented in an alternative fashion. More importantly, effects on *Discuss*, *Interest* and *Vote* are all negative, sizable (> 5 percentage points), and statistically significant ($p < .05$ in all cases). Our intervention, though implemented differently, thus reduces SRPE for the same three items for which we found significant reductions in the previous studies.

The bottom panel of Figure 4 displays the effects on placebo outcomes. In notable contrast to the results shown in Figure 3 above, the effects on the placebo outcomes are directionally inconsistent (two negative estimates and two positive estimates). Importantly, this inconsistency in helps to alleviate concerns regarding alternative mechanisms (i.e., such a mechanism would need to increase some apolitical activities but decrease others). Moreover, though two of the effects observed in the bottom panel of Figure 4 are statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level, the magnitude of the effects is smaller than the significant effects observed in the top panel.

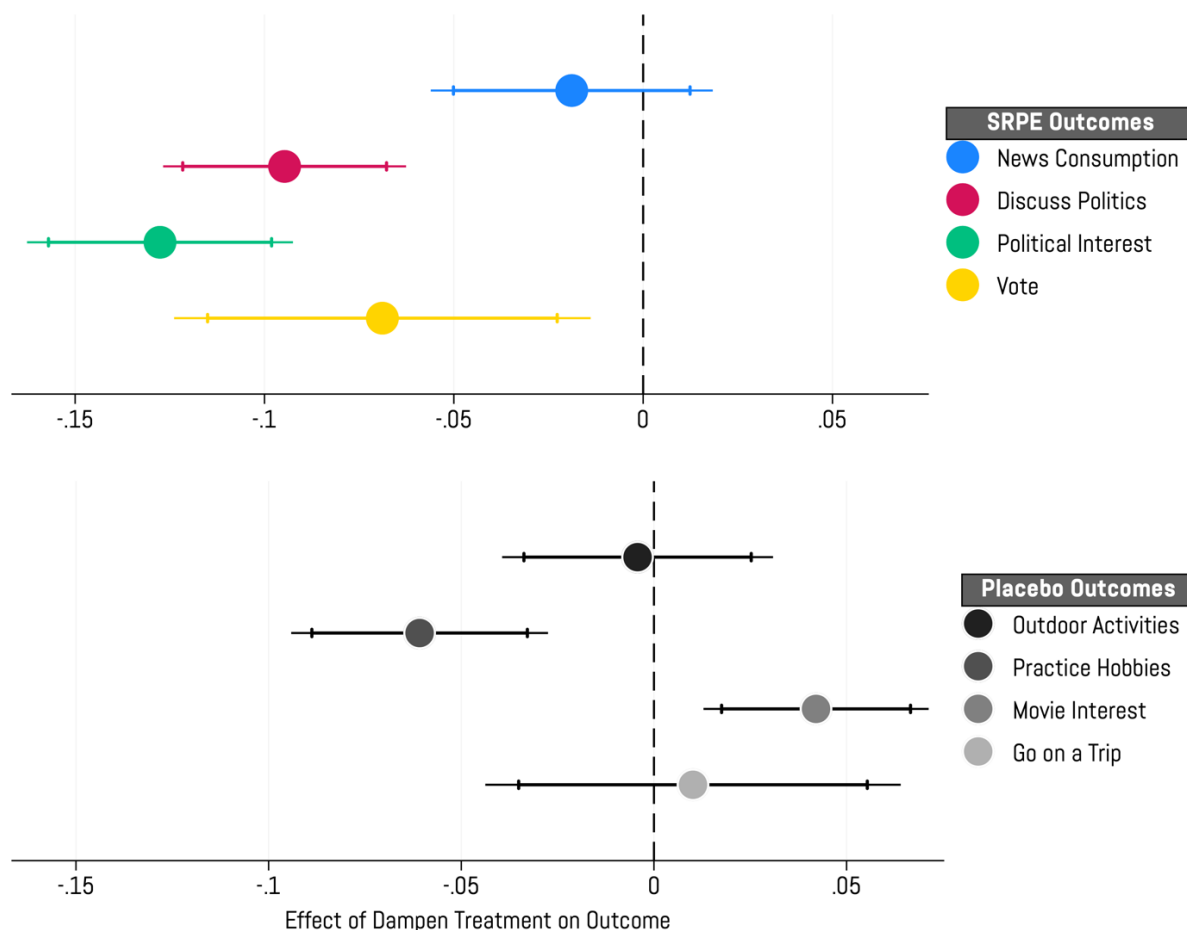
It is also worth stressing that the placebo outcome that corresponds to the binary *Vote* item (the binary “Go on a trip” outcome) is not significantly affected by the *Dampen Politics* intervention. An important implication, therefore, is that the *Dampen Politics* intervention is reducing self-reporting of a key measure of political engagement—voting—because of lowered political salience rather than an alternative mechanism.

Thus, while the placebo outcomes suggest that the treatment may potentially alter self-reports for more than one reason, overall the risks are minimal. For example, the intervention in *Prolific 2024* also included a reminder to “respond accurately.” This could potentially have changed how people responded to questions about *apolitical* activities but, as we saw in *Lucid 2022*, this same reminder (featured in all of the interventions but not the *Control Condition*) does not, in and of itself, tend to change SRPE. This, in addition to the small magnitude of the effects, inconsistent significance levels, and inconsistent directionality, suggests that this implementation of the *Dampen Politics* intervention is an effective strategy for reducing respondents’ tendency to overreport political engagement, and with relatively little risk of worsening measurement quality.¹¹

Finally, we explored the possibility that respondents may be reporting lower political engagement merely because they are “benchmarking”—i.e., they regard political activity as relatively less enjoyable compared to the non-political activities they were asked beforehand. Specifically, we fielded a separate experiment to examine whether featuring a single apolitical item prior to a separate political interest item affected responses to the latter. If benchmarking were a concern, then inserting the apolitical item beforehand should significantly lower political interest. However, we do not find evidence for this possibility—political interest was substantively indistinguishable in both conditions (see SA H for details). This additional experimental result helps to rule out concerns about benchmarking, and implies that our treatment is effective because it lowers the salience of politics, thus relieving pressure to overreport political engagement.

¹¹ In contrast to the previous study, we did not include mock vignette checks. As such, we cannot examine how treatment effects on the placebo outcomes vary by levels of pre-treatment attentiveness.

FIGURE 5. Effects on SRPE and Placebo Outcomes (Study 4)



Notes: Legends indicate each outcome, all of which were rescaled to range from 0 to 1. Estimates therefore reflect the percentage-point change in each outcome going from the Control to Dampen Politics conditions. The n th outcome shown in the bottom panel has identical response options to the n th political outcome in the top panel. The first three estimates within each panel are OLS, while “Vote” and “Go on a Trip” are logistic. CIs are 90% (spikes) and 95% (thinner lines). $N=1,244$. Prolific (2024) data.

Summary of Key Findings, Validity Tests, & Recommendations

Our initial study employed a variety of strategies to lessen social desirability pressures. Notably, most of these interventions showed no discernible effect on most measures of self-reported political engagement (SRPE). That said, the *Dampen Politics* intervention showed the most promise for reducing overreporting of political engagement. Our goal with the *Dampen Politics* intervention was to decrease the salience of politics, reducing respondents’ belief that they were being judged by their political involvement and leading them to mitigate their overreporting of engagement. Our intervention indeed did this, but we also found some evidence that the change in question formatting might account for a portion of the effects we observe. We therefore fielded the *Lucid 2024* and *Prolific 2024* studies to further investigate this possibility.

First, *Lucid 2024* offered a more rigorous test of the *Dampen* method by comparing effects on SRPE with effects on corresponding placebo outcomes. In this case, we found less support for the

effects of *Dampen* on self-reported political discussion, but found strong evidence that the *Dampen* method is able to meaningfully reduce self-reported political interest and voting beyond what can be explained by the mere change in question formatting. Second, *Prolific 2024* then went further, changing question formatting to examine if the mere *Dampen* prompt and addition of apolitical questions were enough to reduce SRPE. We found that they indeed are. Overall, then, our findings indicate that concerns about social desirability bias with reports of political engagement can be assuaged with simple changes to the survey.

Several key findings emerged across these four studies. First, per our manipulation check item, the *Dampen Politics* intervention consistently reduced the degree to which respondents perceived the study to be primarily concerned with politics. This is an especially crucial finding insofar as this perception is likely to spur social desirability concerns and, thus, result in overreporting of political engagement (e.g. see Figure 1 above). Second, we consistently found that the *Dampen Politics* intervention significantly lowered self-reporting of: 1) discussing politics with others, 2) interest in government and politics, and 3) turning out to vote. The effect sizes varied depending upon the particular outcome and particular study, but typically ranged between 5 and 10 percentage-point reductions in SRPE.

Third, the use of placebo outcomes in *Lucid 2024* and *Prolific 2024* helped to assuage concerns that the effects are largely driven by alternative mechanisms. Though several significant effects were observed for these outcomes, the effects tended to be (relative to the effects on SRPE) smaller in magnitude, inconsistently signed (see *Prolific 2024*), and observed only among inattentive respondents (see *Lucid 2024*) who would have been unlikely to attend to the intervention anyway (e.g. Kane, Velez, and Barabas 2023). Fourth, a final experiment found no significant evidence that the *Dampen Politics* intervention’s effects were due to benchmarking (see SA F).

As additional tests of validity, we examined how specific factors moderated the relationship between the *Dampen Politics* treatment and SRPE. First, consistent with existing research that finds higher overreporting of political engagement among those with higher education (Hansen and Tyner 2021), we found the *Dampen Politics* treatment effects tended to be larger among the more educated (see SA F). These heterogeneous effects were most evident for the *Interest* and *Vote* outcomes, particularly in the *Prolific* sample and, to a lesser extent, the *CES* sample. Per existing research, finding stronger effects among the more educated is consistent with the notion that the higher-educated feel greater *pressure* to overreport political engagement, likely because of their knowledge of civic norms (see also Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980).

In a similar vein, we tested whether partisans exhibited stronger effects as compared to political independents. By openly expressing an affiliation with a party, we reason that partisans should feel greater pressure to overreport political engagement compared to independents. Thus, we should observe more negative treatment effects among partisans if our treatment is decreasing this pressure in order to get more valid measures. Indeed, we again find evidence for exactly this pattern in the *Prolific* sample and, to a lesser extent, the *CES* sample (see SA F). Thus, overall, these validity tests suggest that the *Dampen Politics* manipulation employed in the *Prolific* study is superior to the previous iteration, and that it may be most effective for the *Interest* and *Vote* outcomes. As such, for the convenience of researchers, Table 3 details how we implemented the *Dampen Politics* treatment in *Prolific 2024*.

Table 3. How to Measure Political Engagement with the *Dampen Politics* Method

<p>Guidelines: Questions should be on separate pages and prompt should be at the top of the page for each question. Do not ask political questions <i>prior</i> to this set of questions—doing so would likely make politics salient and our intervention less effective (if measuring other political questions, ask <i>after</i> this set—if this cannot be done, try to add “cleansers” to dampen political salience).</p>
<p>Prompt: <i>The following questions will ask you about how you spend your time and energy. We are particularly interested in what you do for fun. Please answer these questions accurately.</i></p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How interested are you in <u>movies and shows</u>? [extremely interested / very interested / moderately interested / slightly interested / not at all interested] 2. How interested are you in <u>social activities</u>? [extremely interested / very interested / moderately interested / slightly interested / not at all interested] 3. How interested are you in <u>what’s going on in government and politics</u>? [extremely interested / very interested / moderately interested / slightly interested / not at all interested] 4. During a typical week, how often do you <u>practice hobbies (for example: cooking, reading, learning a language)</u>? [zero days / one day / two days / three days / four days / five days / six days / seven days] 5. During a typical week, how often do you <u>listen to music</u>? [rows: zero days / one day / two days / three days / four days / five days / six days / seven days] 6. During a typical week, how often do you <u>watch, read, or listen to news on the internet, TV, newspaper, or radio, not including sports</u>? [zero days / one day / two days / three days / four days / five days / six days / seven days] 7. During a typical week, how often do you do <u>activities outside (for example: sports, picnics, walking, fishing)</u>? [zero days / one day / two days / three days / four days / five days / six days / seven days] 8. During a typical week, how often do you <u>talk to friends or family</u>? [zero days / one day / two days / three days / four days / five days / six days / seven days] 9. During a typical week, how often do you <u>discuss politics with your family or friends</u>? [zero days / one day / two days / three days / four days / five days / six days / seven days] 10. This last year, did you <u>go on a trip</u>? [yes / no] 11. This last year, did you <u>make a new friend</u>? [yes / no] 12. This last year, did you <u>vote in the midterm elections in November of 2022</u>? [yes / no]

Notes: For readers, questions in black (gray) are political engagement (apolitical) questions. Apolitical questions are flexible—feel free to vary these. If any political questions are not needed, also remove the prior two apolitical questions. If interested in measuring other political variables with same method, simply use the following guidelines, prompt, and two apolitical questions prior to the political question.

Finally, we note that the *Dampen Politics* treatment had to work within the context of a political survey in all four studies. While in some surveys, partisanship and ideology were measured post-treatment and dependent variable measures, *all* our surveys had some level of political content before the treatment worked to dampen political salience. The level of political content varied by study: *Lucid 2024* was the least political, telling respondents in the consent form that we will be asking about “contemporary matters in society”—while *CES 2022* was arguably the most political (our module came after the common content, which included many political questions) and *Lucid 2022* and *Prolific 2024* were somewhere in the middle, telling respondents in the consent form that

we are exploring “opinions about government and politics.” What this suggests is that researchers need not mislead in the consent form (which raises potential ethical concerns) in order for our treatment to work. That said, it is possible that a survey devoid of all reference to politics (prior to asking about political engagement) may be an even more ideal context for using our approach.

Discussion & Conclusion

In this manuscript, we find consistent evidence that designing a survey so as to reduce the salience of politics is an effective strategy for reducing respondents’ tendency to inflate self-reported political engagement (SRPE). First, we present evidence that social considerations likely underlie citizens’ SRPE. We then adopted an iterative approach, testing various interventions to improve the measurement of these engagement variables. Our first study employed several different interventions. Following these results, we honed in on the most effective intervention (*Dampen Politics*), examining its robustness and validity with three follow-up studies. Our results align with previous research that finds that non-political surveys can produce lower levels of overreporting of voter turnout (Achen 2019; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980). Although researchers have noted this could be the result of sampling bias (i.e. that more engaged people take political surveys—Groves, Presser, and Dipko 2004; Voogt and Saris 2003), our research suggests that this could *also* be the result of response bias (i.e. that a non-political survey context leads to lower pressure to report political engagement).

Social desirability pressures are, of course, not the only factor that can influence self-reported political engagement. Prior (2009), in particular, notes that when respondents are asked more specific questions about their media consumption, overreporting decreases. He argues that this approach is effective because it helps respondents recall better—i.e., that failed recall, rather than social desirability bias, creates mismeasurement of this type of political engagement.¹² Further, on reports of political interest, Prior notes that people do not feel “compelled” to inflate their level of interest, and that these levels are quite stable rather than shaped by context (2010). Similarly, other researchers note that mismeasurement of turnout can be partly attributed to failed recall (Belli, Traugott, and Rosenstone 1994; Belli et al. 1999), question ordering (Presser 1990), and nonresponse (Jackman 1999). Our findings suggest that while these issues may cause mismeasurement among *some* citizens, among *others* mismeasurement is rooted in more social concerns (see also Belli, Traugott, and Beckmann 2001 and Duff et al. 2007).

Aligning with some of this work (e.g. Prior 2009), though, we do not find that any intervention was able to reduce self-reported news consumption. ITT estimates for this outcome are consistently near-zero and non-significant, regardless of the intervention or survey item used. One potential reason for this is that people may feel less pressure to overreport news consumption, perhaps because of the negative stigma of news media (e.g., Liedke and Gottfried 2022).

Our findings indicate that researchers could obtain more accurate measures of political engagement by including language and/or design features that reduce respondents’ perception that the survey is primarily interested in their engagement with politics—something that aligns with findings that changing this perception can alter respondents’ goals and thus information processing (Groenendyk and Krupnikov 2021). Even if researchers do not use the exact same implementations employed here, our study provides strong evidence that the general approach—that is, reducing

¹² Price and Zaller (1993) also point to alternative measures of news consumption, attempting to eliminate those who do not truly “receive” the news and focus on those who do.

the salience of politics within a survey—can reduce overreporting of political engagement (and potentially other socially desirable political attitudes and behaviors).

That said, researchers can employ either of the strategies we featured in our studies to their advantage, though there are trade-offs to be mindful of. The design used in the first three studies (*Lucid 2022*, *CES 2022*, and *Lucid 2024*) allows survey questions to be condensed into matrices and multi-response items, while the design used in *Prolific 2024* (which featured single questions that required single responses) potentially has a lower risk of “straight-lining” from respondents (Schonlau & Toepoel 2015). In other words, using the first method involves a bundled treatment but occupies less space on a survey, while the second method more cleanly lowers the salience of politics but would require more space in terms of number of questions. If space is less of a concern and, particularly in light of our validity tests, we recommend the second method as presented in Table 3 above: using several apolitical questions (before each political engagement item) along with an explicit prompt (on the same screen as the apolitical and political engagement items) to decrease the salience of politics and, thus, lessen the pressure to overreport political engagement.

References

- Achen, Christopher H. 2019. "Understanding Voter Turnout in Canada: What Data Do We Lack?" *Canadian Parliamentary Review* 42(1):2-5.
- Alvarez, Michael R., and Yimeng Li. 2022. "Survey Attention and Self-Reported Political Behavior." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 86(4):793-811.
- Bansak, Kirk, Jens Hainmueller, Daniel J Hopkins and Teppei Yamamoto. 2021. "Beyond the breaking point? Survey satisficing in conjoint experiments." *Political Science Research and Methods* 9(1):53-71.
- Belli, Robert F., Michael W. Traugott, and Matthew N. Beckmann. 2001. "What Leads to Voting Overreports? Contrasts of Overreports to Validated Voters and Admitted Nonvoters in the American National Election Studies." *Journal of Official Statistics* 17(4):479-498.
- Belli, Robert F., Michael W. Traugott, and Steven J. Rosenstone. 1994. "Reducing Over-Reporting of Voter Turnout: An Experiment Using a Source Monitoring Framework." NES Technical Reports Number 35 (see available technical reports at <http://www.umich.edu/~nes/>).
- Belli, Robert F., Michael W. Traugott, Margaret Young, and Katherine A. McGonagle. 1999. "Reducing Vote Overreporting in Surveys: Social Desirability, Memory Failure, and Source Monitoring." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 63(1):90-108.
- Berent, Matthew K., Jon A. Krosnick and Arthur Lupia. 2016. "Measuring Voter Registration and Turnout in Surveys: Do Official Government Records Yield More Accurate Assessments?" *Public Opinion Quarterly* 80:597-621.
- Bernstein, Robert, Anita Chadha, and Robert Montjoy. 2001. "Overreporting Voting: Why it Happens and Why it Matters." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 65:22-44.
- Blais, André. 2000. *To Vote or Not to Vote? The Merits and Limits of Rational Choice Theory*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Blais, André, and Christopher H. Achen. 2019. "Civic Duty and Voter Turnout." *Political Behavior* 41(2):473-497.
- Campbell, Angus, Philip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller, and Donald E. Stokes. 1960. *The American Voter*. New York: Wiley.
- Cialdini, Robert B., Raymond R. Reno, and Carl A. Kallgren. 1990. "A Focus Theory of Normative Conduct: Recycling the Concept of Norms to Reduce Littering in Public Places." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 58:1015-1026.
- Clausen, Aage R. 1968. "Response Validity: Vote Report." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 32(4):588-606.
- Connors, Elizabeth C. 2020. "The Social Dimension of Political Values." *Political Behavior* 42(3): 961-82.
- Connors, Elizabeth C. 2023. "Social Desirability and Affective Polarization." *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 87(4):911-934.
- Connors, Elizabeth C., Yanna Krupnikov, and John Barry Ryan. 2019. "How Transparency Affects Survey Responses." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 83:185-209.
- Corbett, Michael. 1991. *American Public Opinion*. White Plains, NY: Longman.
- de Tocqueville, Alexis. 1835. *Democracy in America*. New York: Harper Perennial.
- Doherty, David, Conor M. Dowling, Alan S. Gerber, and Gregory A. Huber. 2017. "Are Voting Norms Conditional? How Electoral Context and Peer Behavior Shape the Social Returns to Voting." *The Journal of Politics* 79(3):1095-1100.
- Druckman, James N. 2022. *Experimental Thinking*. Cambridge University Press.

- Duff, Brian, Michael J. Hanmer, Won-Ho Park, and Ismail K. White. 2007. "Good Excuses: Understanding Who Votes With An Improved Turnout Question." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 71(1):67-90.
- Galais, Carol, and André Blais. 2016. "Beyond Rationalization: Voting out of Duty or Expressing Duty After Voting?" *International Political Science Review* 37(2):213-229.
- Gerber, Alan S., Donald P. Green, and Christopher W. Larimer. 2008. "Social Pressure and Voter Turnout: Evidence from a Large-Scale Field Experiment." *American Political Science Review* 102(1):33-48.
- Gerber, Alan S., Donald P. Green, and Christopher W. Larimer. 2010. "An Experiment Testing the Relative Effectiveness of Encouraging Voter Participation by Inducing Feelings of Pride or Shame." *Political Behavior* 32(3):409-422.
- Groenendyk, Eric, and Yanna Krupnikov. 2021. "What Motivates Reasoning? A Theory of Goal-Dependent Political Evaluation." *American Journal of Political Science* 65(1):180-196.
- Groves, Robert M., Stanley Presser, and Sarah Dipko. 2004. "The Role of Topic Interest in Survey Participation Decisions." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 68(1):2-31.
- Haenschen, Katherine. 2016. "Social Pressure on Social Media: Using Facebook Status Updates to Increase Voter Turnout." *Journal of Communication* 66(4):542-563.
- Hansen, Eric R., and Andrew Tyner. 2021. "Educational Attainment and Social Norms of Voting." *Political Behavior* 43:711-735.
- Holbrook, Allyson L., Melanie C. Green, and Jon A. Krosnick. 2003. "Telephone vs. Face-to-Face Interviewing of National Probability Samples with Long Questionnaires: Comparisons of Respondent Satisficing and Social Desirability Response Bias." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 67:79-125.
- Holbrook, Allyson L., and Jon A. Krosnick. 2010a. "Social Desirability Bias in Voter Turnout Reports: Tests Using the Item Count Technique." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 74(1):37-67.
- Holbrook, Allyson L., and Jon A. Krosnick. 2010b. "Measuring Voter Turnout by Using the Randomized Response Technique: Evidence Calling into Question the Method's Validity." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 74(2):328-343.
- Holtgraves, Thomas. 2004. "Social Desirability and Self Reports: Testing Models of Socially Desirable Responding." *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 30(2):161-172.
- Jackman, Simon. 1999. "Correcting Surveys for Non-Response and Measurement Error Using Auxiliary Information." *Electoral Studies* 18(1):7-27.
- Kane, John V., and Jason Barabas. 2019. "No Harm in Checking: Using Factual Manipulation Checks in Survey Experiments." *American Journal of Political Science* 63(1):234-239.
- Kane, John V., Yamil R. Velez, and Jason Barabas. 2023. "Analyze the Attentive and Bypass Bias: Mock Vignette Checks in Survey Experiments." *Political Science Research & Methods* 11(2):293-310.
- Kane, John V. 2025. "More Than Meets the ITT: A Guide for Anticipating and Investigating Nonsignificant Results in Survey Experiments." *Journal of Experimental Political Science*:10.1017/XPS.2024.1
- Karp, Jeffrey A., and David Brockington. 2005. "Social Desirability and Response Validity: A Comparative Analysis of Overreporting Voter Turnout in Five Countries." *The Journal of Politics* 67(3):825-840.
- Krupnikov, Yanna, Spencer Piston, and Nichole M. Bauer. 2016. "Saving Face: Identifying Voter Responses to Black Candidates and Female Candidates." *Political Psychology* 37(2):253-273.

- Krupnikov, Yanna, and John Barry Ryan. 2022. *The Other Divide: Polarization and Disengagement in American Politics*. Cambridge University Press.
- Liedke, Jacob, and Jeffrey Gottfried. 2022. "US Adults Under 30 Now Trust Information from Social Media Almost as much as from National News Outlets." *Pew Research Center*. Retrieved from <https://coilink.org/20.500.12592/v514dx>.
- Lyons, William, and John M. Scheb. 1999. "Early Voting and the Timing of the Vote: Unanticipated Consequences of Electoral Reform." *State and Local Government Review* 31:147-152.
- Panagopoulos, Costas. 2013. "Positive Social Pressure and Prosocial Motivation: Field Experimental Evidence of the Mobilizing Effects of Pride, Shame, and Publicizing Voting Behavior." *Political Psychology* 34(2):265-275.
- Presser, Stanley. 1990. "Can Changes in Context Reduce Vote Overreporting in Surveys?" *Public Opinion Quarterly* 54(4):586-593.
- Price, Vincent, and John Zaller. 1993. "Who Gets the News? Alternative Measures of News Reception and Their Implications for Research." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 57(2):133-164.
- Prior, Markus. 2009. "Improving Media Effects Research through Better Measurement of News Exposure." *The Journal of Politics* 71(3):893-908.
- Prior, Markus. 2010. "You've Either Got it or you Don't? The Stability of Political Interest over the Life Cycle." *The Journal of Politics* 72(3):747-766.
- Prior, Markus. 2019. *Hooked: How Politics Captures People's Interest*. Cambridge University Press.
- Riker, William H., and Peter C. Ordeshook. 1968. "A Theory of the Calculus of Voting." *American Political Science Review* 62(1):25-42.
- Schonlau, Matthias, and Vera Toepoel. 2015. "Straightlining in Web Survey Panels over Time." *Survey Research Methods* 9(2):125-137. <https://doi.org/10.18148/srm/2015.v9i2.6128>.
- Silver, Brian D., Barbara A. Anderson, and Paul R. Abramson. 1986. "Who Overreports Voting?" *American Political Science Review* 80(2):613-624.
- Stout, Christopher T., Keith Baker, and Madelyn Baker. 2021. "How Social Desirability Response Bias May Lead to an Overestimation of Obama-Trump Voters." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 85(2):694-705.
- Style, Hillary, and Jennifer Jerit. 2020. "Does it Matter if Respondents Look up Answers to Political Knowledge Questions?" *Public Opinion Quarterly* 84(3):760-775.
- Traugott, Michael W., and John P. Katosh. 1979. "Response Validity in Surveys of Voting Behavior." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 43(3):359-377.
- Voogt, Robert J. and Willem E. Saris. 2003. "To Participate or Not To Participate: The Link Between Survey Participation, Electoral Participation, and Political Interest." *Political Analysis* 11(2):164-179.
- Waldfoegel, Hannah B., Andrea G. Dittmann, and Hannah J. Birnbaum. 2024. "A Sociocultural Approach to Voting: Construing Voting as a Duty to Others Predicts Political Interest and Engagement." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 121(22): e2215051121.
- Wolfinger, Raymond E., and Steven J. Rosenstone. 1980. *Who Votes?* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

SUPPLEMENTARY APPENDIX

No Pressure: A Method to Reduce Overreporting of Political Engagement

Table of Contents

APPENDIX A. SAMPLE INFORMATION & DEMOGRAPHICS.....	1
LUCID 2022 (STUDY 1), FIELDDED MAY 2022.	1
COOPERATIVE ELECTION STUDY (CES) 2022 (STUDY 2), FIELDDED SEPTEMBER-NOVEMBER 2022	1
LUCID 2024 (STUDY 3), FIELDDED FEBRUARY 2024.....	1
PROLIFIC 2024 (STUDY 4), FIELDDED JUNE 2024.....	1
APPENDIX B: SURVEY ITEMS.....	3
LUCID 2022 (STUDY 1).....	3
COOPERATIVE ELECTION STUDY (CES) 2022 (STUDY 2).....	6
LUCID 2024 (STUDY 3).....	7
PROLIFIC 2024 (STUDY 4).....	9
APPENDIX C: MANIPULATION CHECK RESULTS	12
LUCID 2022 (STUDY 1).....	12
ALL STUDIES.....	13
APPENDIX D: REGRESSION OUTPUT FOR ALL EXPERIMENTS	14
APPENDIX E: MOCK VIGNETTE CHECK RESULTS FOR <i>LUCID 2024</i>.....	18
FIGURE E1. LUCID 2024 RESULTS AMONG MOST ATTENTIVE RESPONDENTS.....	18
APPENDIX F: EXPLORING MODERATING EFFECTS OF EDUCATION & SELF-MONITORING	19
APPENDIX G: ANES VOTER TURNOUT QUESTION WORDING.....	26
APPENDIX H: ROBUSTNESS TEST: IS “BENCHMARKING” DRIVING THE RESULTS?.....	27

APPENDIX A. Sample Information & Demographics

Lucid 2022 (Study 1), Fielded May 2022.

Lucid is a survey platform where participants sign up to get paid \$1 to take surveys that are 15 minutes or less—this compensation is decided by Lucid (for more information, see <https://luc.id/theorem> and Coppock and McClellan, 2019). The average response time for our survey was less than 15 minutes (12 and a half minutes). After recruiting participants from Lucid, participants were redirected to take the survey on Qualtrics and given a consent form. They were told that they would be taking part in a research study for \$1 where they would respond to questions about their views and that continuing with the survey would indicate their informed consent. Bot detection, relevant ID, and preventing multiple submissions options were selected on Qualtrics and participants had to pass captcha in hopes to eliminate bots. Lastly, participants were given an attention check question at the beginning of the survey (asking respondents to click two options) and 1,804 participants passed this check and continued on to take the survey.

Among those who were analyzed, 47.19% were Democrats, 31.93% were Republicans, and 20.87% were pure independents. The sample was 52.01% self-identified women, 47.99% self-identified men. The sample had a mean age of 45.96 with a standard deviation of 16.98; and, was 73.06% White, and 24.09% either mixed or full minority (2.04% declined to give an answer).

Cooperative Election Study (CES) 2022 (Study 2), Fielded September-November 2022

The Cooperative Election Study (CES) was formerly the Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES) and uses a national stratified sample from YouGov (for more information, see <https://cces.gov.harvard.edu>), a well-respected, representative sample. CES recruits participants through advertisements and referrals and are then compensated by points (determined by CES) after each survey they take. Respondents can then exchange points for giftcards and other prizes (see <https://cces.gov.harvard.edu/frequently-asked-questions>).

Of the sample (N=817), 48.47% were Democrats, 36.36% were Republicans, and 15.17% were pure independents. The sample was 56.55% self-identified women and 42.72% self-identified men (0.73% identified as non-binary or other) and had a mean age of 53.37 with a standard deviation of 16.61; and was 74.17% white and 25.83% either mixed or full minority.

Lucid 2024 (Study 3), Fielded February 2024.

The same protocols were in place for *Lucid 2024* as were in place for *Lucid 2022*, though the payment was increased to \$1.50 per respondent. Among those who were analyzed in the experiment, 43.2% were Democrats, 37.74% were Republicans, and 19.06% were pure independents. The sample was 51.96% self-identified women, 48.04% self-identified men. The sample had a mean age of 47.63 with a standard deviation of 17.27; and, was 73.69% White, and 25.47% either mixed or full minority (0.84% declined to give an answer).

Prolific 2024 (Study 4), Fielded June 2024.

Prolific is a survey platform where participants sign up to get paid to take surveys (for more information, see <https://www.prolific.co>). Respondents were paid \$1.05 for the 6-minute survey. The median time for the survey was actually 6 minutes and 53 seconds, meaning respondents were paid an average hourly rate of \$9.15 (which is above the federal minimum wage of \$7.25). After recruiting participants from Prolific, participants were redirected to take the survey on Qualtrics and given a consent form. They were told that they would be taking part in a research study for

\$1.05 where they would respond to questions about their views and that continuing with the survey would indicate their informed consent. Bot detection and preventing multiple submissions options were selected on Qualtrics and participants had to pass captcha in hopes to eliminate bots. Further, respondents were given two attention checks at the beginning of the survey—if they failed both of these, they were removed from the survey. Importantly, this was *pre*-random assignment.

The sample (N=1,222) was nationally-representative, aside from 3 respondents who were missing from the category “55-100, male, other race”—to compensate, 2 additional “25-34, male, other race” respondents and 1 additional “35-44, male, other race” respondents were recruited. Thus, 55.49% were Democrats, 26.92% were Republicans, and 17.59% were pure independents. The sample was 50.82% self-identified women, 47.87% men, and 1.31% non-binary; had a mean age of 46.13 with a standard deviation of 15.72; and was 65.38% white and 34.62% either mixed or full minority.

APPENDIX B: Survey Items

Lucid 2022 (Study 1)

1. [education] What is the highest level of education that you have completed? [did not complete a high school degree / high school degree / some college / Associate's degree / Bachelor's degree / graduate or professional degree]
 2. [self-monitoring 1] When you are with other people, how often do you put on a show to impress or entertain them? [always / most of the time / some of the time / once in a while / never]
 3. [self-monitoring 2] When you are in a group of people, how often are you the center of attention? [always / most of the time / some of the time / once in a while / never]
 4. [self-monitoring 3] How good or poor of an actor would you be? [excellent / good / fair / poor / very poor]
 5. [self-monitoring 4] I have trouble changing my behavior to suit different people and different situations. [very true / mostly true / somewhat true / not true] [high = not true]
 6. [self-monitoring 5] Even if I am not enjoying myself, I often pretend to be having a good time. [very true / mostly true / somewhat true / not true] [high = very true]
 7. [self-monitoring 6] When I am uncertain how to act in a social situation, I look to the behavior of others for cues. [very true / mostly true / somewhat true / not true] [high = very true]
 8. [self-monitoring 7] At parties and social gatherings, I do not attempt to do or say things that others will like. [very true / mostly true / somewhat true / not true] [high = not true]
 9. [self-monitoring 8] I find it hard to imitate the behavior of other people. [very true / mostly true / somewhat true / not true] [high = not true]
 10. [attention check] Please answer the following question with "cheese" and "none of the above". What food do you like? (click all that apply) [cheese / bread / meat / vegetables / none of the above]
- [don't show questions 14-17 to those in "dampen political salience" condition below]
11. [PID] Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what? [Republican / Democrat / independent / something else ____]
 - a. [if Democrat or Republican] Would you call yourself a strong [Democrat/Republican] or a not very strong [Democrat/Republican]? [strong [Democrat/Republican] / not very strong [Democrat/Republican]]
 - b. [if independent or something else] Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican Party or the Democratic Party? [closer to the Republican Party / closer to the Democratic Party / neither]
 12. [ideology] We hear a lot of talk these days about liberals and conservatives. Here is a 7-point scale on which the political views that people might hold are arranged from extremely liberal to extremely conservative. Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this? [extremely liberal / liberal / slightly liberal / moderate / slightly conservative / conservative / extremely conservative / don't know]
 13. [deep involvement 1] It is important to share your political opinions with others. [strongly agree / agree / somewhat agree / neither agree nor disagree / somewhat disagree / disagree / strongly disagree]
 14. [deep involvement 2] It is important to share political news stories with other people. [strongly agree / agree / somewhat agree / neither agree nor disagree / somewhat disagree / disagree / strongly disagree]
 15. [randomly assign to a, b, c, d, e, f, or g]

- a. [control] *The following questions will ask you about your interest and engagement in political matters.*
- b. [“integrity of research” intervention] *The following questions will ask you about your interest and engagement in political matters. Please answer these questions **accurately**: the statistical validity of this study depends on having accurate answers about political matters from respondents like yourself.*
- c. [“self-interest” intervention] *The following questions will ask you about your interest and engagement in political matters. Please answer these questions **accurately**: the political questions you receive later in the survey may be based on how you answer the following questions.*
- d. [“face-saving” intervention] *The following questions will ask you about your interest and engagement in political matters. Please answer these questions **accurately**. After answering these questions, you will be given a chance to explain your answers, if you like, but you certainly do not have to offer any reason for your answers.*
- e. [“shame reduction” intervention] *The following questions will ask you about your interest and engagement in political matters. Please answer these questions **accurately**. There is absolutely no shame in not being interested in politics. In fact, many Americans, for a variety of reasons, pay barely any attention to politics and don’t engage in political matters at all.*
- f. [“shame augmentation” intervention] *The following questions will ask you about your interest and engagement in political matters. Unfortunately, some Americans, for a variety of reasons, pay barely any attention to politics and don’t engage in political matters at all. This is absolutely shameful.*
- g. [“dampen political salience” intervention] *The following questions will ask you about how you spend your time and energy – between work, relationships, and other activities. Please answer these questions **accurately**.*
 - i. [media & discuss] In a typical week, how often do you do the following: [columns: talk to friends or family / work at your job / exercise / watch TV / practice hobbies / cook / watch, read, or listen to news on the Internet, not including sports / watch news on TV, not including sports / read news in a printed newspaper, not including sports / listen to news on the radio, not including sports / discuss politics with your family or friends; rows: none / one day / two days / three days / four days / five days / six days / seven days]
 - ii. [vote] In a typical year, do you usually do the following (click all that apply): [go on a trip / get sick / try to change your job / pick up a new hobby / make a new friend / vote in November’s elections]
 - iii. [interest] How interested are you in the following: [columns: cooking / movies and shows / exercising / social activities / travel / what’s going on in government and politics; rows: extremely interested / very interested / moderately interested / slightly interested / not at all interested]
 - iv. [political knowledge 1] *Please respond **without** looking up the answer.* Do you happen to know which party has the most members in the U.S. House of Representatives in Washington? [Democrats / Republicans / don’t know]
 - v. [political knowledge 2] *Please respond **without** looking up the answer.* Do you happen to know who the U.S. Senate Majority Leader is? [Mitch

McConnell / Harry Reid / Chuck Schumer / Nancy Pelosi / Jim Jordan /
don't know]

[don't show questions 19-24 to those in "dampen political salience" condition]

16. [media] During a typical week, how many days do you watch, read, or listen to news, not including sports, on the following medium: [columns: the Internet, TV, a printed newspaper, the radio; rows: none / one day / two days / three days / four days / five days / six days / seven days]
 17. [discuss] During a typical week, how many days do you discuss politics with your family or friends? [none / one day / two days / three days / four days / five days / six days / seven days]
 18. [vote] Which of the following best describes what you did in the elections that were held in November? [definitely did not vote in the elections / definitely voted in person at a polling place on election day / definitely voted in person at a polling place before election day / definitely voted by mailing a ballot to elections officials before the election / definitely voted in some other way / not completely sure whether you voted or not]
 19. [interest] How interested are you in information about what's going on in government and politics? [extremely interested / very interested / moderately interested / slightly interested / not at all interested]
 20. [political knowledge 1] *Please respond **without** looking up the answer.* Do you happen to know which party has the most members in the U.S. House of Representatives in Washington? [Democrats / Republicans / don't know]
 21. [political knowledge 2] *Please respond **without** looking up the answer.* Do you happen to know who the U.S. Senate Majority Leader is? [Mitch McConnell / Harry Reid / Chuck Schumer / Nancy Pelosi / Jim Jordan / don't know]
 22. [for control and "integrity of research" intervention – manipulation check] To what extent does the validity of this study depend upon having accurate answers to questions about your interest and engagement in political matters? [not at all / a small amount / a moderate amount / a moderately large amount / a great deal]
 23. [for control and "self-interest" intervention – manipulation check] To what extent were the later questions you received about your interest and engagement in political matters based on how you answered earlier questions about your interest and engagement in political matters? [not at all / a small amount / a moderate amount / a moderately large amount / a great deal]
 24. [for control and "face-saving" intervention – manipulation check] Do you believe you will have an opportunity to explain your answers regarding your interest and engagement in political matters? [no / not sure / yes]
 25. [for control, "shame reduction," and "shame augmentation" interventions – manipulation check] To what extent is it shameful that many Americans are not interested in politics and don't engage in political matters at all? [not at all / a small amount / a moderate amount / a moderately large amount / a great deal]
 26. [for control and "dampen political salience" intervention – manipulation check] To what extent do you think this survey is primarily focused on your political interest and involvement? [not at all / a small amount / a moderate amount / a moderately large amount / a great deal]
 27. [for "face-saving" intervention] If you like, please use this space to explain any of your answers regarding your interest and engagement in political matters. You do not need to write anything if you don't want to. [open-ended]
- [show questions 31-34 to those in "dampen political salience" condition]

28. [PID] Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what? [Republican / Democrat / independent / something else [____]]
- [if Democrat or Republican] Would you call yourself a strong [Democrat/Republican] or a not very strong [Democrat/Republican]? [strong [Democrat/Republican] / not very strong [Democrat/Republican]]
 - [if independent or something else] Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican Party or the Democratic Party? [closer to the Republican Party / closer to the Democratic Party / neither]
29. [ideology] We hear a lot of talk these days about liberals and conservatives. Here is a 7-point scale on which the political views that people might hold are arranged from extremely liberal to extremely conservative. Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this? [extremely liberal / liberal / slightly liberal / moderate / slightly conservative / conservative / extremely conservative / don't know]
30. [deep involvement 1] It is important to share your political opinions with others. [strongly agree / agree / somewhat agree / neither agree nor disagree / somewhat disagree / disagree / strongly disagree]
31. [deep involvement 2] It is important to share political news stories with other people. [strongly agree / agree / somewhat agree / neither agree nor disagree / somewhat disagree / disagree / strongly disagree]
32. [open 1] Thank you for your participation! While you took the survey did you have any ideas of what the study was about? [open-ended]
33. [open 2] If you would like to add comments or feedback? [open-ended]

Cooperative Election Study (CES) 2022 (Study 2)

Note: this survey was combined with other surveys in the CES module. Below are the questions that were included in the module for this particular project.

Pre-Election Survey:

- [self-monitoring 1] When you are with other people, how often do you put on a show to impress or entertain them? [always / most of the time / some of the time / once in a while / never] [high=always]
- [self-monitoring 2] When you are in a group of people, how often are you the center of attention? [always / most of the time / some of the time / once in a while / never] [high=always]
- [self-monitoring 3] How good or poor of an actor would you be? [excellent / good / fair / poor / very poor] [high=always]

Post-Election Survey:

[randomly assign to 4 or 5]

- [control condition]
 - [interest] Please answer these questions **accurately**. How interested are you in what's going on in government and politics? [extremely interested / very interested / moderately interested / slightly interested / not at all interested]
 - [media and discuss] Please answer these questions **accurately**. During a typical week, how often do you do the following: [rows: watch, read, or listen to news on the internet, TV, newspaper, or radio, not including sports / discuss politics you're your family or friends][columns: none / one day / two days / three days / four days / five days / six days / seven days]

- c. [vote] Please answer these questions **accurately**. Did you vote in this past November's (2022) elections? [yes / no]
5. [dampen condition]
- a. [interest] The following questions will ask you about how you spend your time and energy. We are particularly interested in what you do for **fun**. Please answer these questions **accurately**. How interested are you in the following: [rows: cooking / movies and shows / exercising / social activities / travel / what's going on in government and politics][columns: extremely interested / very interested / moderately interested / slightly interested / not at all interested]
- b. [media] The following questions will ask you about how you spend your time and energy. We are particularly interested in what you do for **fun**. Please answer these questions **accurately**. During a typical week, how often do you do the following: [rows: practice hobbies (for example: cooking, reading, learning a language) / watch, read, or listen to news on the Internet, TV, newspaper, or radio, not including sports][columns: none / one day / two days / three days / four days / five days / six days / seven days]
- c. [discuss] The following questions will ask you about how you spend your time and energy. We are particularly interested in what you do for **fun**. Please answer these questions **accurately**. During a typical week, how often do you do the following: [rows: activities outside (for example: sports, picnics, walking, fishing) / discuss politics with your family or friends][columns: none / one day / two days / three days / four days / five days / six days / seven days]
- d. [vote] The following questions will ask you about how you spend your time and energy. We are particularly interested in what you do for **fun**. Please answer these questions **accurately**. This last year, did you do the following (click all that apply): [go on a trip / pick up a new hobby / make a new friend / vote in November's election]
6. [manipulation check] To what extent do you think this survey is primarily focused on your political interest and involvement? [not at all / a small amount / a moderate amount / a moderately large amount / a great deal]

Lucid 2024 (Study 3)

1. [mock vignette] *A Passage from a Recent Magazine Article*: More than 125 scientific societies and journal publishers are urgently warning lawmakers not to move forward with a rumored policy that would make all research supported by federal funding immediately free to the public. In three separate letters, they argue such a move would be costly, could bankrupt many scientific societies that rely on income from journal subscriptions, and would harm the scientific enterprise. Lawmakers won't comment on whether they are considering a policy that would change publishing rules, and society officials say they have learned no details. But if the rumor is accurate, the order would represent a major change from current U.S. policy, which allows publishers to withhold federally-funded research from the general public for up to 1 year.
2. [check 1] What was the topic of the magazine excerpt you just read? [literary magazines / scientific research publishing / arts funding / English education / immigration policy / funding for space exploration]
3. [check 2] Regarding the rumored change in policy that was discussed, the magazine excerpt indicated that: [lawmakers won't comment on whether they are considering it / legal scholars

stated the change in policy would be challenged in courts / journal publishers have already begun preparing for the change in policy / scientific researchers are divided in terms of their support for the policy / all of the above / none of the above]

4. [check 3] According to the magazine excerpt you just read, current policy allows federally-funded research to be withheld from the general public for up to: [1 month / 6 months / 1 year / 3 years / 5 years / none of the above]
 5. [self-monitoring 1] When you are with other people, how often do you put on a show to impress or entertain them? [always / most of the time / some of the time / once in a while / never] [high=always]
 6. [self-monitoring 2] When you are in a group of people, how often are you the center of attention? [always / most of the time / some of the time / once in a while / never] [high=always]
 7. [self-monitoring 3] How good or poor of an actor would you be? [excellent / good / fair / poor / very poor] [high=always]
- [control]
8. [interest] How interested are you in what's going on in government and politics? [extremely interested → not at all interested]
 9. [media] During a typical week, how often do you watch, read, or listen to news on the internet, TV, newspaper, or radio, not including sports? [zero days → seven days]
 10. [discuss] During a typical week, how often do you discuss politics with your family or friends? [zero days → seven days]
 11. [vote] A year and a half ago, did you vote in the November 2022 midterm elections? [yes / no]
 12. [travel] How interested are you in traveling? [extremely interested → not at all interested]
 13. [outside] During a typical week, how often do you do activities outside (for example, sports, picnics, walking, fishing)? [zero days → seven days]
 14. [phone] During a typical week, how often do you talk to friends or family on the phone? [zero days → seven days]
 15. [trip] In the past year and a half, did you go on a trip? [yes / no]
- [dampen]
1. [interest and travel] How interested are you in the following: [rows: cooking / movies and shows / exercising / traveling / what's going on in government and politics][columns: extremely interested → not at all interested]
 2. [news and phone] In a typical week, how often do you do the following: [rows: talk to friends or family on the phone / watch, read, or listen to news on the Internet, TV, newspaper, or radio, *not* including sports / exercise (indoors or outdoors) / practice hobbies (for example, cooking, learning a language) /][columns: zero days → seven days]
 3. [discuss and outside] In a typical week, how often do you do the following: [rows: activities outside (for example: sports, picnics, walking, fishing) / discuss politics with your family or friends / read a book (either physical or electronic)][columns: zero days → seven days]
 4. [vote and trip] This past year and a half, did you do any of the following (click all that apply): [went on a trip / got sick with a cold, virus, etc. / tried to change jobs / picked up a new hobby / made a new friend / voted in the November 2022 election / none of the above]
 5. [manipulation check] To what extent do you think this survey is primarily focused on your political interest and involvement? [not at all / a small amount / a moderate amount / a moderately large amount / a great deal]

Prolific 2024 (Study 4)

1. [attention 1] For the following question, please answer cheese (even if your preferences are different than this). This is an attention check.

Based on the text you read above, what are your favorite things to consume? (click all that apply) [meat / vegetables / cheese / bread / wine / beer / other (please specify):

2. [attention 2] For the following question, please answer wine (even if your preferences are different than this). This is an attention check.

Based on the text you read above, what are your favorite things to consume? (click all that apply) [meat / vegetables / cheese / bread / wine / beer / other (please specify):

3. [education] What is the highest level of education that you have completed? [did not complete a high school degree / high school degree / some college / Associate's degree / Bachelor's degree / graduate or professional degree]
4. [self-monitoring 1] When you are with other people, how often do you put on a show to impress or entertain them? [always / most of the time / some of the time / once in a while / never] [high=always]
5. [self-monitoring 2] When you are in a group of people, how often are you the center of attention? [always / most of the time / some of the time / once in a while / never] [high=always]
6. [self-monitoring 3] How good or poor of an actor would you be? [excellent / good / fair / poor / very poor] [high=always]

[random assignment to dampen politics or control]

7. [dampen politics]
 - a. [movies and shows] *The following questions will ask you about how you spend your time and energy. We are particularly interested in what you do for **fun**. Please answer these questions **accurately**.* How interested are you in movies and shows? [extremely interested / very interested / moderately interested / slightly interested / not at all interested]
 - b. [social activities] *The following questions will ask you about how you spend your time and energy. We are particularly interested in what you do for **fun**. Please answer these questions **accurately**.* How interested are you in social activities? [extremely interested / very interested / moderately interested / slightly interested / not at all interested]
 - c. [interest] *The following questions will ask you about how you spend your time and energy. We are particularly interested in what you do for **fun**. Please answer these questions **accurately**.* How interested are you in what's going on in government and politics? [extremely interested / very interested / moderately interested / slightly interested / not at all interested]
 - d. [hobbies] *The following questions will ask you about how you spend your time and energy. We are particularly interested in what you do for **fun**. Please answer these questions **accurately**.* During a typical week, how often do you practice hobbies (for example: cooking, reading, learning a language)? [zero days / one day / two days / three days / four days / five days / six days / seven days]
 - e. [cook] *The following questions will ask you about how you spend your time and energy. We are particularly interested in what you do for **fun**. Please answer these questions **accurately**.* During a typical week, how often do you listen to music? [rows: zero days / one day / two days / three days / four days / five days / six days / seven days]

- f. [media] *The following questions will ask you about how you spend your time and energy. We are particularly interested in what you do for **fun**. Please answer these questions **accurately**.* During a typical week, how often do you watch, read, or listen to news on the internet, TV, newspaper, or radio, not including sports? [zero days / one day / two days / three days / four days / five days / six days / seven days]
 - g. [outside] *The following questions will ask you about how you spend your time and energy. We are particularly interested in what you do for **fun**. Please answer these questions **accurately**.* During a typical week, how often do you do activities outside (for example: sports, picnics, walking, fishing)? [zero days / one day / two days / three days / four days / five days / six days / seven days]
 - h. [talk] *The following questions will ask you about how you spend your time and energy. We are particularly interested in what you do for **fun**. Please answer these questions **accurately**.* During a typical week, how often do you talk to friends or family? [zero days / one day / two days / three days / four days / five days / six days / seven days]
 - i. [discuss] *The following questions will ask you about how you spend your time and energy. We are particularly interested in what you do for **fun**. Please answer these questions **accurately**.* During a typical week, how often do you discuss politics with your family or friends? [zero days / one day / two days / three days / four days / five days / six days / seven days]
 - j. [trip] *The following questions will ask you about how you spend your time and energy. We are particularly interested in what you do for **fun**. Please answer these questions **accurately**.* This last year, did you go on a trip? [yes / no]
 - k. [friend] *The following questions will ask you about how you spend your time and energy. We are particularly interested in what you do for **fun**. Please answer these questions **accurately**.* This last year, did you make a new friend? [yes / no]
 - l. [vote] *The following questions will ask you about how you spend your time and energy. We are particularly interested in what you do for **fun**. Please answer these questions **accurately**.* This last year, did you vote in the midterm elections in November of 2022? [yes / no]
 - m. [manipulation check] To what extent do you think this survey is primarily focused on your political interest and involvement? [not at all / a small amount / a moderate amount / a moderately large amount / a great deal]
8. [control]
- a. [interest] How interested are you in what's going on in government and politics? [extremely interested / very interested / moderately interested / slightly interested / not at all interested]
 - b. [media] During a typical week, how often do you watch, read, or listen to news on the internet, TV, newspaper, or radio, not including sports? [zero days / one day / two days / three days / four days / five days / six days / seven days]
 - c. [discuss] During a typical week, how often do you discuss politics with your family or friends? [zero days / one day / two days / three days / four days / five days / six days / seven days]
 - d. [vote] This last year, did you vote in the midterm elections in November of 2022? [no / yes]
 - e. [manipulation check] To what extent do you think this survey is primarily focused on your political interest and involvement? [not at all / a small amount / a moderate

- amount / a moderately large amount / a great deal]
- f. [movies and shows] How interested are you in movies and shows? [extremely interested / very interested / moderately interested / slightly interested / not at all interested]
 - g. [hobbies] During a typical week, how often do you practice hobbies (for example: cooking, reading, learning a language)? [zero days / one day / two days / three days / four days / five days / six days / seven days]
 - h. [outside] During a typical week, how often do you do activities outside (for example: sports, picnics, walking, fishing)? [zero days / one day / two days / three days / four days / five days / six days / seven days]
 - i. [trip] This last year, did you go on a trip? [no / yes]
- [randomly assign order of 12 and 13]
9. [benchmark 1] How interested are you in watching live coverage of the presidential election in November? [extremely interested / very interested / moderately interested / slightly interested / not at all interested]
 10. [benchmark 2] How interested are you in watching new movies that come out this summer? [extremely interested / very interested / moderately interested / slightly interested / not at all interested]
 11. [political knowledge 1] *Please respond **without** looking up the answer.* Do you happen to know which party has the most members in the U.S. House of Representatives in Washington D.C.? [Democrats / Republicans / don't know]
 12. [political knowledge 2] *Please respond **without** looking up the answer.* Do you happen to know who the U.S. Senate Majority Leader is? [Mitch McConnell / Harry Reid / Chuck Schumer / Nancy Pelosi / Jim Jordan / don't know]
 13. [PID] Generally speaking, do you consider yourself to be a(n)? [Strong Democrat / Democrat / Independent, but Leaning Democrat / Independent / Independent, but Leaning Republican / Republican / Strong Republican]
 14. [ideology] We hear a lot of talk these days about liberals and conservatives. Here is a 7-point scale on which the political views that people might hold are arranged from extremely liberal to extremely conservative. Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this? [extremely liberal / liberal / slightly liberal / moderate / slightly conservative / conservative / extremely conservative / don't know]
 15. [open 1] (optional) Thank you for your participation! While you took the survey did you have any ideas of what the study was about? [open-ended]
 16. [open 2] (optional) If you would like to add comments or feedback: [open-ended]

APPENDIX C: Manipulation Check Results

Lucid 2022 (Study 1)

We asked a series of “subjective manipulation checks” (SMCs; Kane and Barabas 2019) that were tailored specifically to each of the interventions. The manipulation check items are as follows:

1. Control and “integrity of research” intervention: *To what extent does the validity of this study depend upon having accurate answers to questions about your interest and engagement in political matters?* [not at all / a small amount / a moderate amount / a moderately large amount / a great deal]
2. Control and “self-interest” intervention: *To what extent were the later questions you received about your interest and engagement in political matters based on how you answered earlier questions about your interest and engagement in political matters?* [not at all / a small amount / a moderate amount / a moderately large amount / a great deal]
3. Control and “face-saving” intervention: *Do you believe you will have an opportunity to explain your answers regarding your interest and engagement in political matters?* [no / not sure / yes]
4. Control, “shame reduction,” and “shame augmentation” interventions: *To what extent is it shameful that many Americans are not interested in politics and don’t engage in political matters at all?* [not at all / a small amount / a moderate amount / a moderately large amount / a great deal]
5. Control and “dampen political salience” intervention: *To what extent do you think this survey is primarily focused on your political interest and involvement?* [not at all / a small amount / a moderate amount / a moderately large amount / a great deal]

Because each of the following items were asked of both the control group and each treatment group, we are able to determine the effect of each manipulation on each SMC. These effects are shown in Table C1.

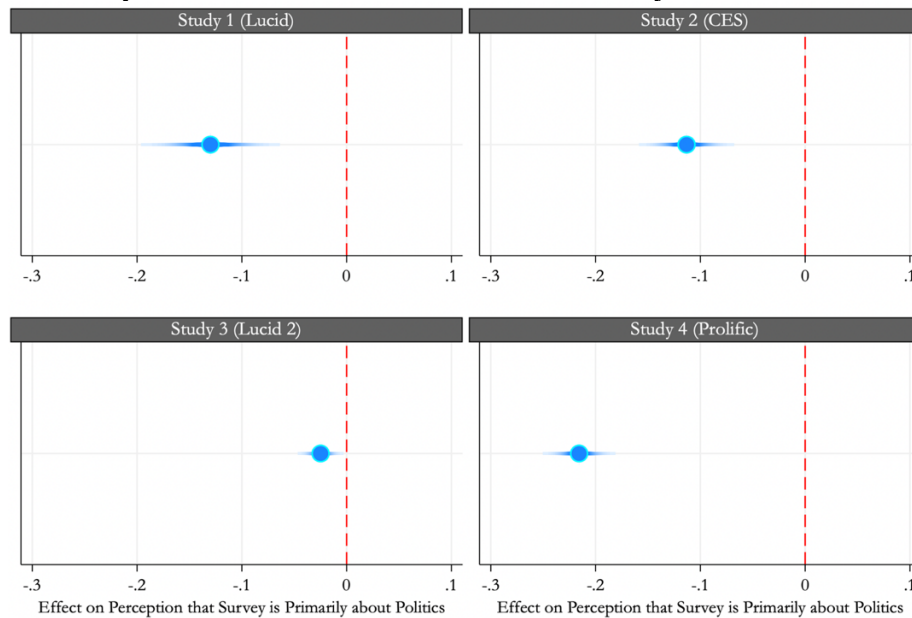
TABLE C1. Manipulation Checks Results for all Interventions in *Lucid 2022* Study

<i>Treatment Interventions</i>	Subjective Manipulation Checks				
	(1) Integrity	(2) Self-Interest	(3) Save Face	(4) Vary Shame	(5) Dampen Politics
Integrity	0.27* (0.12)				
Self-Interest		-0.37** (0.12)			
Save Face			0.23*** (0.06)		
Reduce Shame				-0.24* (0.12)	
Augment Shame				0.26* (0.12)	
Dampen Politics					-0.52*** (0.10)
Constant	3.73*** (0.08)	3.23*** (0.09)	2.19*** (0.04)	3.21*** (0.08)	3.66*** (0.07)
Observations	487	500	490	738	496
R-squared	0.01	0.02	0.03	0.02	0.05

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, ^ p<0.10 (one-tailed p-values reported).

All Studies

For all subsequent studies (all of which only used the *Dampen Politics* intervention), we asked the same SMC shown above. Figure C1 shows the results of this intervention across all 4 studies (note that the SMC has been recoded to range from 0 to 1). Here we clearly observe that the manipulation was successful in all four studies, though there is some notable heterogeneity in effect size.

FIGURE C1. “Dampen Politics” Reduces Belief that Survey is About Politics

Notes: Outcome is perception that study is mostly about politics, recoded to range from 0 to 1. Coefficients are OLS with 95% confidence intervals.

APPENDIX D: Regression Output for all Experiments

TABLE D1. *Lucid 2022*: Integrity Treatment

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Consumption	Discuss	Interest	Vote
Integrity	-0.01 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.03)	-0.01 (0.03)	-0.41 [^] (0.23)
Constant	0.44*** (0.02)	0.35*** (0.02)	0.61*** (0.02)	1.61*** (0.17)
Observations	486	489	489	489
R-squared	0.00	0.00	0.00	.01

Notes: Each column represents one outcome. First three models are OLS; fourth is logistic (with Pseduo-R² reported in bottom row). Standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, ^ p<0.10

TABLE D2. *Lucid 2022*: Self-Interest Treatment

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Consumption	Discuss	Interest	Vote
Self-Interest	0.01 (0.02)	-0.00 (0.03)	-0.00 (0.03)	-0.65** (0.22)
Constant	0.44*** (0.02)	0.35*** (0.02)	0.61*** (0.02)	1.61*** (0.17)
Observations	497	502	502	502
R-squared	0.00	0.00	0.00	.02

Notes: Each column represents one outcome. First three models are OLS; fourth is logistic (with Pseduo-R² reported in bottom row). Standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, ^ p<0.10

TABLE D3. *Lucid 2022*: Save Face Treatment

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Consumption	Discuss	Interest	Vote
Save Face	0.00 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.03)	-0.03 (0.03)	-0.62** (0.22)
Constant	0.44*** (0.02)	0.35*** (0.02)	0.61*** (0.02)	1.61*** (0.17)
Observations	488	493	493	493
R-squared	0.00	0.00	0.00	.02

Notes: Each column represents one outcome. First three models are OLS; fourth is logistic (with Pseduo-R² reported in bottom row). Standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, ^ p<0.10

TABLE D4. *Lucid 2022*: Shame Reduce Treatment

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Consumption	Discuss	Interest	Vote
Shame Reduce	-0.02 (0.02)	0.00 (0.03)	0.01 (0.03)	-0.19 (0.24)
Constant	0.44*** (0.02)	0.35*** (0.02)	0.61*** (0.02)	1.61*** (0.17)
Observations	478	483	482	483
R-squared	0.00	0.00	0.00	.00

Notes: Each column represents one outcome. First three models are OLS; fourth is logistic (with Pseduo-R² reported in bottom row). Standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, ^ p<0.10

TABLE D5. *Lucid 2022*: Shame Augment Treatment

	(1) Consumption	(2) Discuss	(3) Interest	(4) Vote
Shame Augment	0.01 (0.02)	0.07** (0.03)	0.06* (0.03)	-0.34 (0.23)
Constant	0.44*** (0.02)	0.35*** (0.02)	0.61*** (0.02)	1.61*** (0.17)
Observations	498	502	500	501
R-squared	0.00	0.01	0.01	.00

Notes: Each column represents one outcome. First three models are OLS; fourth is logistic (with Pseduo-R² reported in bottom row). Standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, ^ p<0.10

TABLE D6. *Lucid 2022*: Dampen Treatment

	(1) Consumption	(2) Discuss	(3) Interest	(4) Vote
Dampen Politics	0.01 (0.02)	-0.04 (0.03)	-0.08** (0.03)	-1.30*** (0.21)
Constant	0.44*** (0.02)	0.35*** (0.02)	0.61*** (0.02)	1.61*** (0.17)
Observations	495	499	499	501
R-squared*	0.00	0.00	0.02	.07

Notes: Each column represents one outcome. First three models are OLS; fourth is logistic (with Pseduo-R² reported in bottom row). Standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, ^ p<0.10

TABLE D7. Multivariate (Joint) Tests of Each Intervention on All Outcomes (*Lucid 2022*)

<i>Treatment Interventions</i>	<i>F (df, df)</i>	<i>p</i>
Integrity	0.99 (4, 484)	.41
Self-Interest	2.46 (4, 495)	.04
Save Face	2.28 (4, 486)	.06
Reduce Shame	0.50 (4, 475)	.74
Augment Shame	3.69 (4, 495)	<.01
Dampen Politics	11.33 (4, 493)	<.001

Notes: *Lucid study*.

TABLE D8. *CES 2022*: Dampen Treatment

	(1) Consumption	(2) Discuss	(3) Interest	(4) Vote
Dampen Politics	-0.01 (0.02)	-0.05* (0.02)	-0.09*** (0.02)	-0.43** (0.16)
Constant	0.77*** (0.02)	0.38*** (0.02)	0.67*** (0.02)	1.24*** (0.12)
Observations	818	817	819	819
R-squared	0.00	0.01	0.02	.01

Notes: Each column represents one outcome. First three models are OLS; fourth is logistic (with Pseduo-R² reported in bottom row). Standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, ^ p<0.10

TABLE D9. *Lucid 2024*: Dampen Treatment

	(1) Consumption	(2) Discuss	(3) Interest	(4) Vote
Dampen Politics	0.01 (0.01)	-0.03** (0.01)	-0.07*** (0.01)	-0.43*** (0.07)
Constant	0.67*** (0.01)	0.33*** (0.01)	0.61*** (0.01)	0.64*** (0.05)
Observations	3,345	3,345	3,345	3,345
R-squared	0.00	0.00	0.01	.01

Notes: Each column represents one outcome. First three models are OLS; fourth is logistic (with Pseduo-R² reported in bottom row). Standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, ^ p<0.10

TABLE D10. *Lucid 2024*: Dampen Treatment Effect on Placebo Outcomes

	(1) Outdoor Activities	(2) Talk w/ Family	(3) Travel Interest	(4) Go on a Trip
Dampen Politics	-0.05*** (0.01)	-0.05*** (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.13^ (0.07)
Constant	0.46*** (0.01)	0.52*** (0.01)	0.67*** (0.01)	0.59*** (0.05)
Observations	3,345	3,345	3,345	3,345
R-squared	0.01	0.01	0.00	.00

Notes: Each column represents one outcome. First three models are OLS; fourth is logistic (with Pseduo-R² reported in bottom row). Standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, ^ p<0.10

TABLE D11. *Prolific 2024*: Dampen Treatment Effect

	(1) Consumption	(2) Discuss	(3) Interest	(4) Vote
Dampen Politics	-0.02 (0.02)	-0.10*** (0.02)	-0.13*** (0.02)	-0.29* (0.12)
Constant	0.69*** (0.01)	0.36*** (0.01)	0.59*** (0.01)	0.52*** (0.08)
Observations	1,243	1,240	1,244	1,239
R-squared	0.00	0.03	0.04	.00

Notes: Each column represents one outcome. First three models are OLS; fourth is logistic (with Pseduo-R² reported in bottom row). Standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, ^ p<0.10

TABLE D12. *Prolific 2024*: Dampen Treatment Effect on Placebo Outcomes

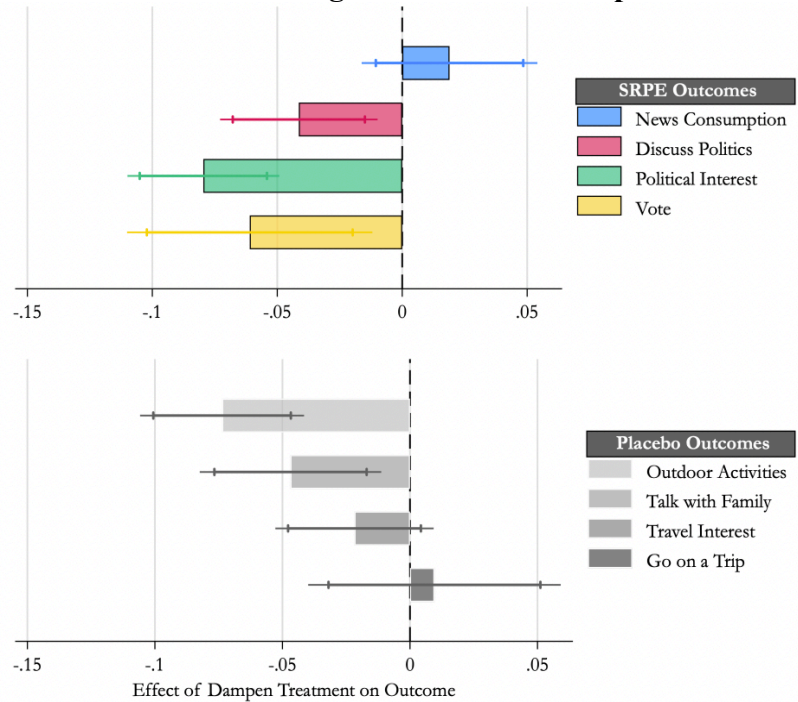
	(1) Outdoor Activities	(2) Practice Hobbies	(3) Movie Interest	(4) Go on a Trip
Dampen Politics	-0.01 (0.02)	-0.06*** (0.02)	0.04** (0.01)	0.04 (0.12)
Constant	0.47*** (0.01)	0.64*** (0.01)	0.67*** (0.01)	0.54*** (0.08)
Observations	1,241	1,242	1,245	1,239
R-squared	0.00	0.01	0.01	.00

Notes: Each column represents one outcome. First three models are OLS; fourth is logistic (with Pseudo- R^2 reported in bottom row). Standard errors in parentheses. *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, ^ $p < 0.10$

APPENDIX E: Mock Vignette Check Results for *Lucid 2024*

Figure E1 shows the effects of the Dampen Politics intervention (on each of the SRPE outcomes as well as the placebo outcomes) among those who correctly answered three “mock vignette checks” (Kane, Velez, and Barabas 2023). (The mock vignette and three mock vignette checks are detailed in Appendix B.) This was equal to 42.42% of the sample (n=1,419). These results can therefore be interpreted as the effects observed among the most attentive respondents.

FIGURE E1. Lucid 2024 Results Among Most Attentive Respondents



Notes: Within each panel, the first three models are OLS; fourth is logistic. Confidence intervals are 95% (thin) and 90% (thick).

APPENDIX F: Exploring Moderating Effects of Education, Party & Self-Monitoring

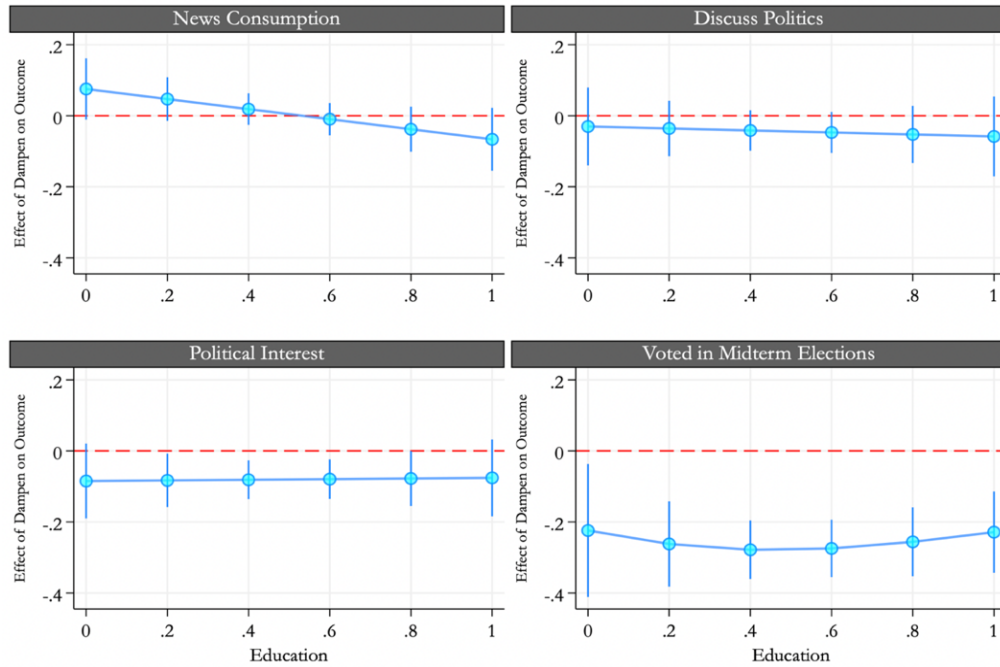
We measured respondents' educational attainment (measured on a six-point continuous scale), partisanship (measured as being either a non-leaning Independent (=0) or a partisan (=1)), and level of "self-monitoring." (The wording for each item can be found in the survey items.)

For self-monitoring, greater endorsement of each item indicates a higher level of self-monitoring. The three items were combined into a single additive scale and, for the analyses below, interacted with the "Dampen Politics" intervention.

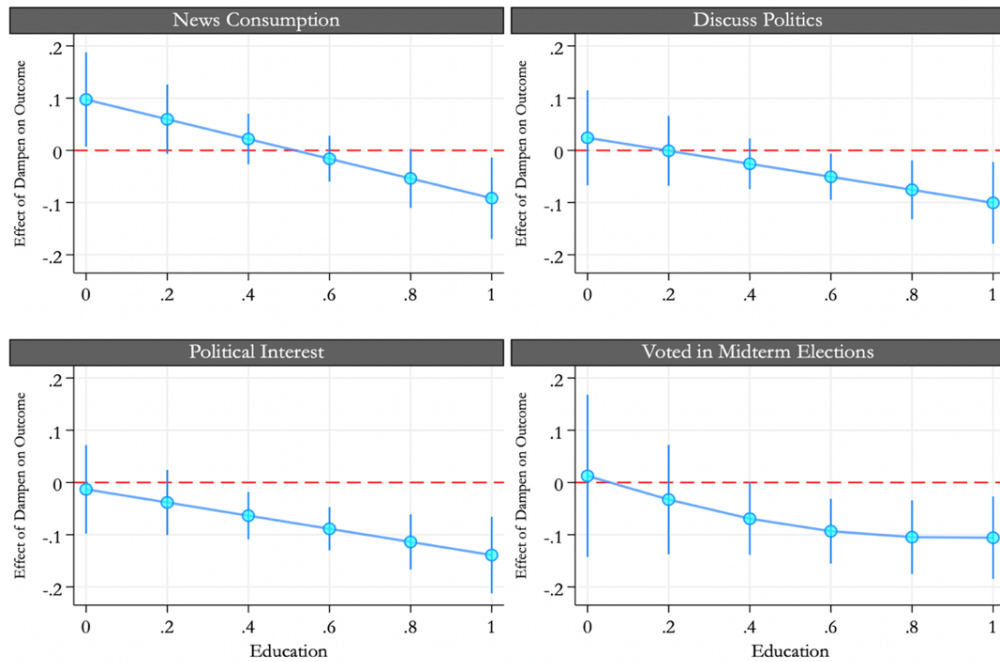
Figures 1-4 below display the results of the analyses featuring a *Dampen Politics X Education* interaction (each figure corresponds to each study, with each panel within the figure displaying the result for each of the four SRPE outcomes). Though not perfectly consistent, there is a clear tendency for education to moderate the treatment effect such that more educated respondents exhibit *larger* (i.e., more negative) treatment effects, particularly in studies 2-4. One potential reason for this pattern is that more educated respondents feel greater pressure to report being engaged with politics compared to their less educated counterparts. Thus, an intervention that seeks to relieve that pressure should be particularly effective for that group.

Figures 5-8 below display the results of the analyses that interacted the *Dampen Politics* treatment with whether or not a respondent identified as a partisan (either Democrat or Republican, or leaning toward either of those parties). The logic underlying this analysis is that, because they openly associate with a party, partisans may feel greater pressure to report being politically engaged compared to Independents. To the extent this is true, the Dampen Politics treatment should exhibit effects that are *more negative* for partisans than for Independents. Overall, this is exactly the pattern we see in the Prolific 2024 study (though not for the "News Consumption" outcome, for which Dampen Politics did not exhibit a significant effect at all). Per Figure 8, the treatment is always substantively smaller, and not distinguishable from zero, among Independents, whereas it is substantially larger and distinguishable from zero among partisans. This pattern is particularly evident for the *Political Interest* and *Vote* outcomes. For the other studies, all of which used an alternative version of the treatment (matrix-style and multi-response items), the expected pattern only emerges in the CES study—in Lucid 2022 and Lucid 2024 studies, there is not a consistently larger effect for partisans vis-à-vis Independents. Thus, overall, these analyses provide additional validity for the Dampen Politics treatment, particularly with respect to how it was implemented in the Prolific 2024 study.

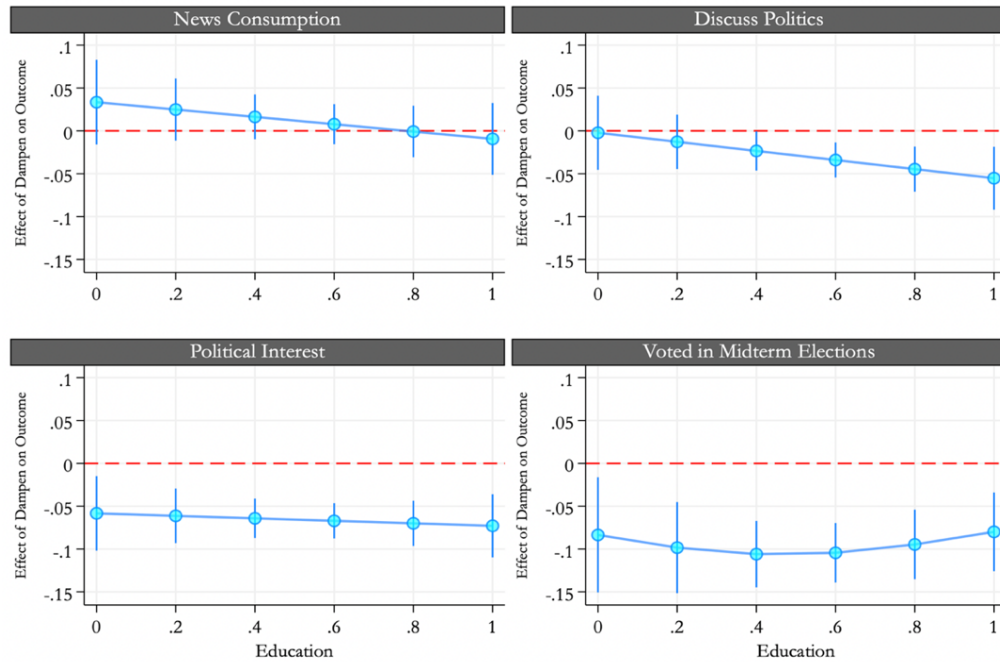
Tables F1-F4, in contrast, do not show that self-monitoring significantly moderates the effect of the *Dampen Politics* intervention (the expectation was that those high in self-monitoring should exhibit stronger treatment effects). The reason for this lack of an interaction is unclear but the results suggest that self-monitoring—at least as measured by the items above—is not a valid indicator of the pressure one feels to report high political engagement.

FIGURE F1. The Moderating Effect of Education (*Lucid 2022*)

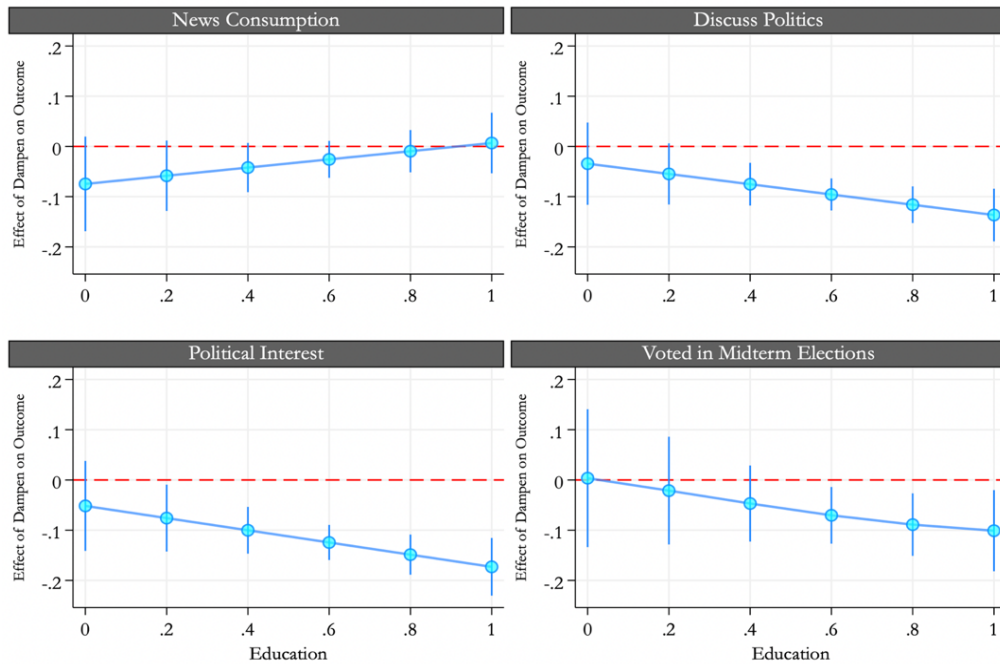
Notes: All models are OLS except bottom-right, which is logistic. Educational attainment has six possible values (ranging from less than high school to graduate-level degree) is represented on the x-axis. Dashed (red) horizontal line indicates zero effect of treatment on outcome. Confidence intervals are 95%.

FIGURE F2. The Moderating Effect of Education (*CES 2022*)

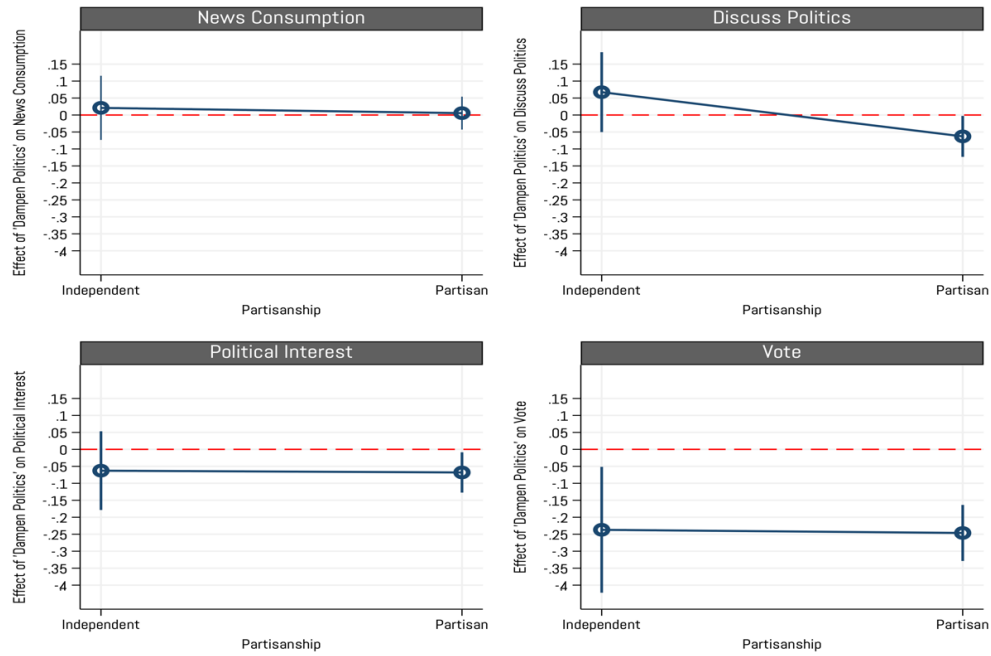
Notes: All models are OLS except bottom-right, which is logistic. Educational attainment has six possible values (ranging from less than high school to graduate-level degree) is represented on the x-axis. Dashed (red) horizontal line indicates zero effect of treatment on outcome. Confidence intervals are 95%.

FIGURE F3. The Moderating Effect of Education (*Lucid 2024*)

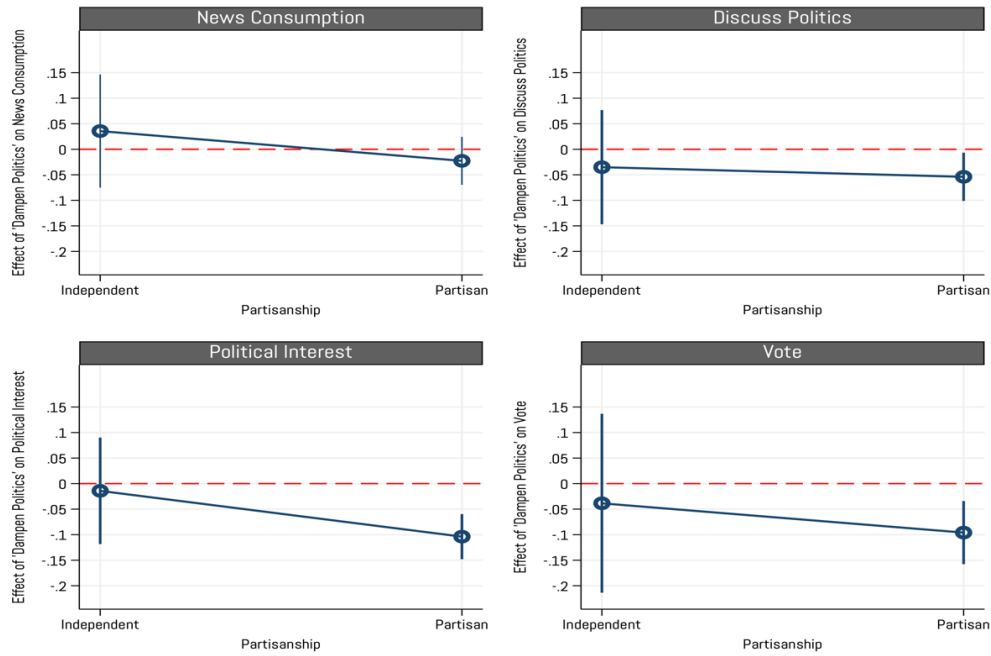
Notes: All models are OLS except bottom-right, which is logistic. Educational attainment has six possible values (ranging from less than high school to graduate-level degree) is represented on the x-axis. Dashed (red) horizontal line indicates zero effect of treatment on outcome. Confidence intervals are 95%.

FIGURE F4. The Moderating Effect of Education (*Prolific 2024*)

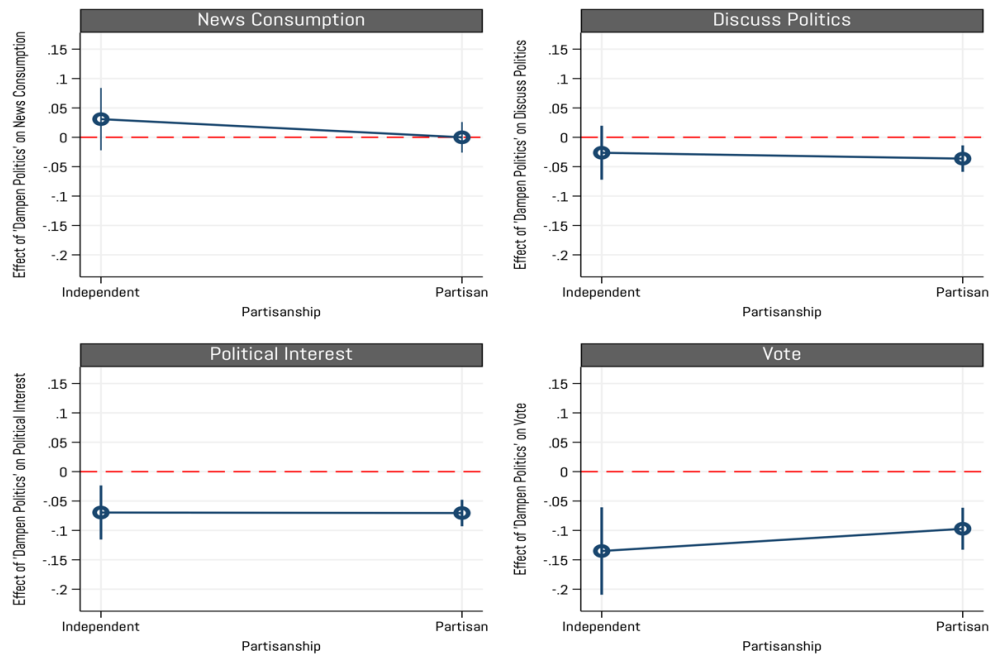
Notes: All models are OLS except bottom-right, which is logistic. Educational attainment has six possible values (ranging from less than high school to graduate-level degree) is represented on the x-axis. Dashed (red) horizontal line indicates zero effect of treatment on outcome. Confidence intervals are 95%.

FIGURE F5. The Moderating Effect of Partisanship (*Lucid 2022*)

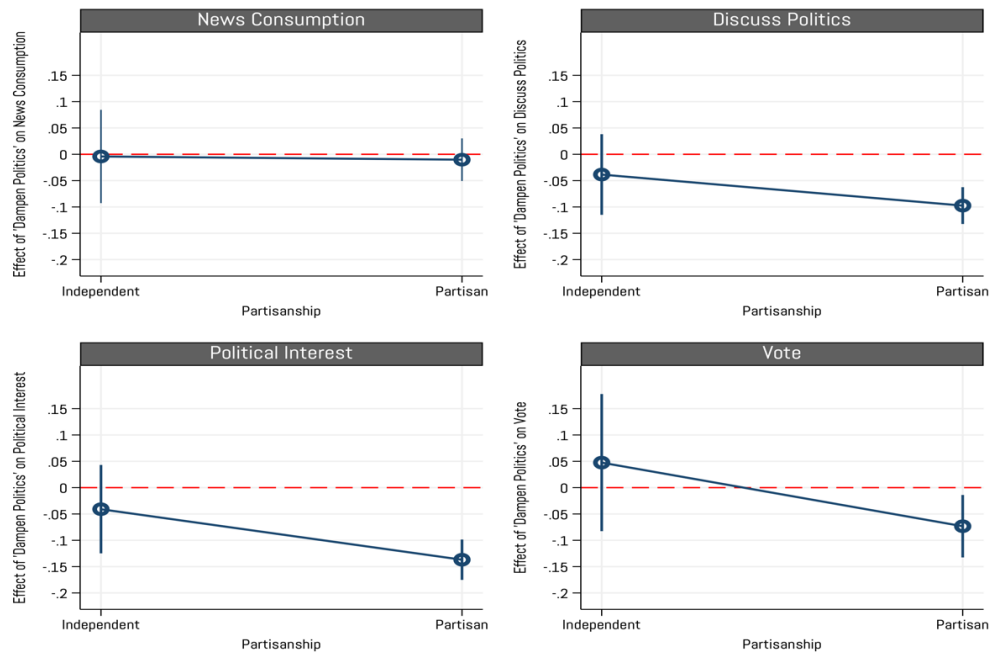
Notes: All models are OLS except bottom-right, which is logistic. Partisanship's possible values (0=Pure independent; 1=Partisan) is represented on the x-axis. Dashed (red) horizontal line indicates zero effect of treatment on outcome. Confidence intervals are 95%.

FIGURE F6. The Moderating Effect of Partisanship (*CES 2022*)

Notes: All models are OLS except bottom-right, which is logistic. Partisanship's possible values (0=Pure independent; 1=Partisan) is represented on the x-axis. Dashed (red) horizontal line indicates zero effect of treatment on outcome. Confidence intervals are 95%.

FIGURE F7. The Moderating Effect of Partisanship (*Lucid 2024*)

Notes: All models are OLS except bottom-right, which is logistic. Partisanship's possible values (0=Pure independent; 1=Partisan) is represented on the x-axis. Dashed (red) horizontal line indicates zero effect of treatment on outcome. Confidence intervals are 95%.

FIGURE F8. The Moderating Effect of Partisanship (*Prolific 2024*)

Notes: All models are OLS except bottom-right, which is logistic. Partisanship's possible values (0=Pure independent; 1=Partisan) is represented on the x-axis. Dashed (red) horizontal line indicates zero effect of treatment on outcome. Confidence intervals are 95%.

TABLE F1. No Consistent Moderating Effect of Self-Monitoring (*Lucid 2022 Study*)

	(1) Consumption	(2) Discuss	(3) Interest	(4) Vote
Dampen Politics	0.01 (0.04)	-0.05 (0.05)	-0.04 (0.05)	-0.63 (0.39)
Self-Monitoring Scale	0.24*** (0.07)	0.36*** (0.08)	0.37*** (0.08)	1.00 (0.80)
Dampen Treatment X Self-Monitoring Scale,	-0.02 (0.09)	0.01 (0.11)	-0.11 (0.11)	-1.88* (0.95)
Constant	0.35*** (0.03)	0.22*** (0.04)	0.48*** (0.04)	1.27*** (0.31)
Observations	494	498	498	500
R-squared	0.05	0.09	0.08	.07

Notes: Each column represents one outcome. First three models are OLS; fourth is logistic (with Pseduo-R² reported in bottom row). Standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, ^ p<0.10

TABLE F2. No Consistent Moderating Effect of Self-Monitoring (*CES 2022 Study*)

	(1) Consumption	(2) Discuss	(3) Interest	(4) Vote
Dampen Politics	-0.03 (0.04)	-0.09* (0.04)	-0.14*** (0.04)	-0.79* (0.33)
Self-Monitoring Scale	-0.10 (0.09)	0.24** (0.09)	-0.03 (0.08)	-2.03** (0.65)
Dampen Politics X Self Monitoring Scale	0.08 (0.13)	0.15 (0.12)	0.17 (0.12)	1.11 (0.89)
Constant	0.80*** (0.03)	0.31*** (0.03)	0.67*** (0.03)	1.87*** (0.25)
Observations	814	813	815	815
R-squared	0.00	0.04	0.02	.02

Notes: Each column represents one outcome. First three models are OLS; fourth is logistic (with Pseduo-R² reported in bottom row). Standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, ^ p<0.10

TABLE F3. No Consistent Moderating Effect of Self-Monitoring (*Lucid 2024 Study*)

	(1) Consumption	(2) Discuss	(3) Interest	(4) Vote
Dampen Politics	0.02 (0.02)	-0.04* (0.02)	-0.07*** (0.02)	-0.02 (0.13)
Self-Monitoring Scale	-0.09* (0.04)	0.29*** (0.03)	0.25*** (0.04)	0.16 (0.25)
Dampen Politics X Self-Monitoring Scale	-0.04 (0.06)	0.02 (0.05)	0.01 (0.05)	-1.28*** (0.36)
Constant	0.70*** (0.02)	0.24*** (0.01)	0.53*** (0.01)	0.59*** (0.09)
Observations	3,345	3,345	3,345	3,345
R-squared	0.00	0.04	0.04	.01

Notes: Each column represents one outcome. First three models are OLS; fourth is logistic (with Pseduo-R² reported in bottom row). Standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, ^ p<0.10

TABLE F4. No Consistent Moderating Effect of Self-Monitoring (*Prolific 2024 Study*)

	(1) Consumption	(2) Discuss	(3) Interest	(4) Vote
Dampen Politics	-0.01 (0.04)	-0.03 (0.03)	-0.02 (0.04)	-0.02 (0.24)
Self-Monitoring Scale	-0.00 (0.08)	0.34*** (0.07)	0.25*** (0.07)	0.07 (0.48)
Dampen Politics X Self-Monitoring Scale	-0.04 (0.11)	-0.22* (0.10)	-0.35** (0.11)	-0.87 (0.70)
Constant	0.68*** (0.03)	0.25*** (0.02)	0.51*** (0.03)	0.50** (0.17)
Observations	1,225	1,222	1,226	1,221
R-squared	0.00	0.05	0.05	.01

Notes: Each column represents one outcome. First three models are OLS; fourth is logistic (with Pseduo-R² reported in bottom row). Standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, ^ p<0.10

Appendix G: ANES Voter Turnout Question Wording

In the manuscript, we mention question wording changes in the ANES' measure of voter turnout. Here we detail those particulars. In 1962, ANES asked, "One of the things we need to know is whether or not people really did get to vote this fall. In talking to people about the election we find that a lot of people weren't able to vote because they weren't registered or they were sick or something else came up at the last minute. Do you remember for sure whether or not you voted in the November election?" From 1952 to 1960, 1964 to 1998, and in 2002 and 2004, they asked, "In talking to people about the election we (1972 and later: often) find that a lot of people weren't able to vote because they weren't registered or they were sick or they just didn't have time. (1956-1960: How about you, did you vote this time?) (1964-1970: How about you, did you vote this time, or did something keep you from voting) (1972-1976: How about you, did you vote in the elections this fall?) (1978 and later: How about you, did you vote in the elections this November?)."

Appendix H: Robustness Test: Is “Benchmarking” Driving the Results?

One potential concern with the *Dampen Politics* intervention is that it may be efficacious not only because it reduces the salience of politics, but also because it leads respondents to engage in benchmarking. Specifically, it is possible that by first asking respondents about engagement in fun, enjoyable activities, respondents may then subsequently regard political activities as *relatively* less enjoyable. If true, this could potentially lead to lower SRPE, precisely because those latter activities will appear *relatively* less desirable.

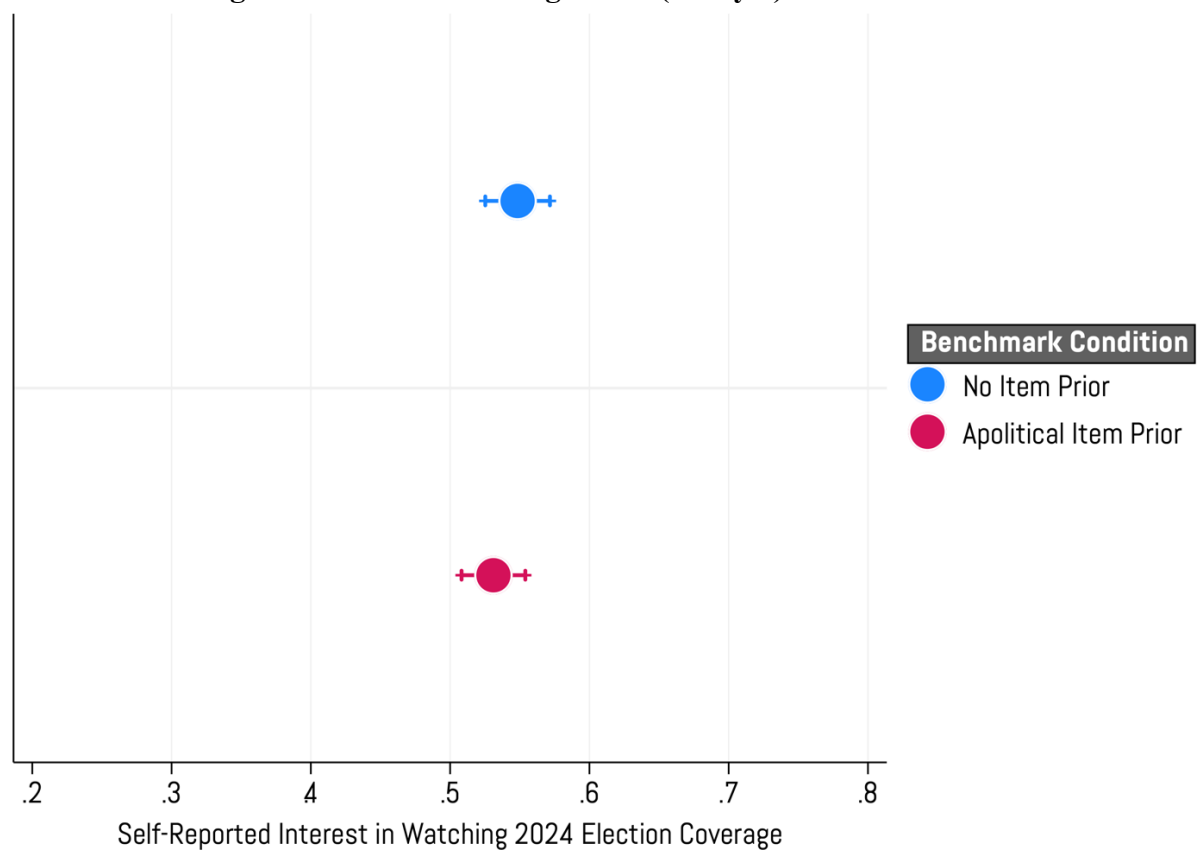
It is important to first note that we consistently find no significant effect of *Dampen Politics* on self-reported news consumption, even though this outcome should be similarly susceptible to benchmarking. Additionally, benchmarking should not explain the effects we observe on self-reported voting. In contrast to the other items, the voting question simply asks whether or not a respondent turned out to vote and, thus, should not be benchmarked against other activities.

Nevertheless, given the benchmarking concern for the other items (e.g. *Interest*), we included one additional experiment in *Prolific 2024* (also preregistered). Following the outcome measures, respondents were then re-randomized into one of two conditions. In the *Control Condition*, respondents were asked about their interest in watching live coverage of the upcoming 2024 presidential election. Responses ranged from 1 (“not at all interested”) to 5 (“extremely interested”), and were recoded to range from 0 to 1. This question therefore closely resembles our political interest measure—both in its content as well as its response options—which has been significantly reduced by the *Dampen Politics* intervention in the majority of our studies.

In the second condition, we first asked respondents an apolitical question—interest in watching “new movies that come out this summer,” with the same five response options. We then asked these respondents the question regarding interest in watching live coverage of the 2024 presidential election.

In contrast to the *Dampen Politics* intervention, we did not inform respondents that these survey questions will “ask you about how you spend your time and energy” nor that our interest is in “what you do for fun.” Thus, the primary difference between the two conditions is simply whether or not a “fun” apolitical item appeared immediately prior to the measure of respondents’ interest in coverage of the election. If benchmarking is responsible for the results we observe above, then we should similarly see that respondents who first received an apolitical item report significantly lower interest in watching coverage of the 2024 presidential election compared to those who did not receive the apolitical item first.

As shown in Figure I1, we find the average interest in watching election coverage is nearly identical across the two conditions: .55 in the *Control Condition* and .53 in the treatment condition. In addition to the small difference between the two means, the difference is also not statistically significant, even with a one-tailed test ($p=.19$). This result suggests that the *Dampen Politics* intervention is not efficacious because it leads respondents to engage in benchmarking but, rather, because it reduces respondents’ perception that the survey is primarily concerned about politics.

FIGURE I1. No Significant Benchmarking Effect (Study 4)

Notes: Points represent means on the outcome measure (see x-axis), which ranges from 0 to 1. CIs are 90% (spikes) and 95% (thinner lines). N=1,220. Prolific (2024) data.