



e-ISSN: 2319-8753 | p-ISSN: 2347-6710

IJRSET

International Journal of Innovative Research in
SCIENCE | ENGINEERING | TECHNOLOGY

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF INNOVATIVE RESEARCH

IN SCIENCE | ENGINEERING | TECHNOLOGY

Volume 13, Issue 7, July 2024

ISSN INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA

Impact Factor: 8.423

 9940 572 462

 6381 907 438

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 www.ijrset.com

Political Emotions and Identity Formation

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ABSTRACT: The collapse of postwar political arrangements in Eastern, and to some extent Western, Europe, the former Soviet Union, Africa, and Asia in the past decade has re-mapped geopolitical space and challenged social science to find new ways to conceptualize cultural and social transformation. The fall of long-established regimes coupled with vast shifts in migration flows have catapulted political identity, with its concomitant issues of nationalism, ethnicity, and citizenship, to the forefront of social scientific research. Macrosociological interest in political identity tends to focus principally upon the legal institution of citizenship, the problem of immigration, and juridical issues of membership and group rights. This chapter recasts citizenship as a cultural as well as legal mode of political incorporation and underscores the symbolic and emotional practices that nation-states marshal to mobilize affection for the polity. Wedding emotion and citizenship expands the concept of membership to include the felt experience of national belonging.

KEYWORDS: political, emotions, identity, formation, cultural, social, national

I. INTRODUCTION

Political identities tie us to families, friends, generations, and educational groups. In this chapter we will discuss the powerful emotions that arise when strongly held political identities come into conflict. In America, many recent Thanksgiving dinners dissolve into chaos when Trump supporters and Trump opponents insist on airing their views—often loudly. How can such family feuds be avoided? We end the chapter by discussing techniques for avoiding the contagion of anger in these and other explosive settings.

Radical right support and affective polarization are on the rise in Western democracies. Radical right parties combine populist, authoritarian, and nativist elements. Affective polarization describes the phenomenon among individuals in Western democracies to increasingly like parties and voters who share their view and dislike those who disagree. While disagreement on political issues is normal in democracies, affective contempt between groups of voters may undermine democratic norms and social cohesion.

Luca Versteegen, a doctoral student in political science, is interested in the role of group identities and emotions in these two radical political behaviors; radical right support and affective polarization. His core argument is that people's identities and emotions shape the way they perceive societal developments – diversification, economic crises, war, pandemics – and then motivate engagement in radical political behavior.

A feeling of not being seen and respected

In one of his papers, he interviewed 30 supporters of the German radical right party AfD to show how individuals' identities shape their views. Specifically, he theorized that for individuals to feel included in society, they need to belong to the larger society and feel recognized with their group backgrounds (e.g., ethnicity, gender). He found that even though the interviewees felt firmly belonged to German society, they tended to subjectively feel disrespected, not seen, or disadvantaged as white people or men, for example.[1,2]

"They subjectively feel that they don't receive enough political, economic or cultural attention or respect. If this subjective experience motivates radical right support, votes for these parties may decrease if we remind these individuals of the privileges and attention that white people or men objectively enjoy in current society," says Luca Versteegen.

As this paper is limited to a few qualitative interviews, he used representative data from the US to show the scope of this experience: substantial shares of white people, men, and Christians experience the combination of a firm belonging

to the larger society (i.e., the US) but subjectively disrespected with their respective backgrounds. This experience correlates with support for the radical right politician Donald Trump.

Consequently, Luca Versteegen (co-authored with Stylianos Syropoulos, Postdoctoral Fellow at Boston College) tested a prominent theory to mitigate radical right support in the US: reminding white Americans of what they share with racial minorities. A series of experiments supported the argument that identities drive radical right support and opposition to the inclusion of minorities. However, they found no evidence that reminding white people of a shared identity would reduce polarization and minority-targeted animosity.

Nostalgia for the time that has passed

In another paper, he turned to the role of emotions. Using representative panel data from the Netherlands, he examined what radical right voters are specifically nostalgic about. While he found no differences between the radical right and other voters regarding personal nostalgia contents (e.g., my childhood, vacation), radical right voters tended to be more group-based nostalgic (e.g., about how people were and society was). This group-based nostalgia predicted less satisfaction with the government and, in turn, more support for the radical right. Personal nostalgia, in contrast, tended to reduce radical right support, possibly because it provided individuals with positive feelings.

"People who feel that their place in society is threatened by diversity long for a time when their group was more prominent. Nostalgia that leads people to conclude that society was better in the past can motivate people to vote for the radical right to try to restore what they perceive as lost."

Different emotions lead to different political behaviors

Finally, Luca Versteegen illustrated how emotions drive affective polarization. Again drawing on his qualitative interviews from Germany, he identified various strategies individuals could use to assert the superiority of their own partisan group compared to the opposing group. These strategies included portraying the own group as innocently loving, proud, and nostalgic, while portraying the opposing group as fearful, ridiculous, apathetic, indifferent, and hateful.

"It's interesting that the party supporters in the study didn't always express their own emotions but emotions that signaled the superiority of their own group, and these emotions can be reinforced by how people talk about them. In the future, it's therefore important to identify and understand the specific emotions that characterize affective polarization, as different emotions can predict different political behaviors."

Together, this dissertation adds to previous evidence showing that identities and emotions matter in political behavior by showing why they matter.

"Our identities and emotions shape how we perceive our position in society relative to others – excluded, inferior, too close – and thus motivates radical right support and affective polarization to gain or maintain inclusion, superiority, and distance. And while identities and emotions clearly drive these radical right behaviors, I also find some promising results that identities and emotions may reduce them, Luca Versteegen says.

How emotion is involved in the formation of both personal and collective identity. After considering the essential role of emotion in the political and social construction of collective entities it takes a historical look at the role emotion has played in the formation and governance of nation-states and how it is implicated in the problems confronting our current nation-state system. It then examines the conflicting needs that are involved when persons identify with collective entities. After considering these needs, I will consider the concept of personal identity and argue that the current way of distinguishing social from individual identity is misleading and prevents us from understanding the human condition. After proposing a different way of conceptualizing personal identity and its emotional dynamics I will use the new conceptualization to consider what sort of society might be able to meet human emotional needs and how it may be possible[3,4] to form the social identity needed to unify a global society

In this study, we investigate the role of emotions in identity-protection cognition to understand how people draw inferences from politicized (mis-)information. In doing so, we combine the identity-protection cognition theory with insights about the effects of emotions on information processing. Central to our study, we assume that the relationship between an individual's political identity and inference-conclusions of politicized information is mediated by the

experienced emotions anger, anxiety, and enthusiasm. In an online study, 463 German adults were asked to interpret numerical information in two politically polarizing contexts (refugee intake and driving ban for Diesel cars) and one nonpolarizing context (treatment of skin rash). Results showed that, although emotions were mostly unrelated to political identity, they predicted performance more consistently than political identity and cognitive sophistication.

Paul Hoggett argues that human feelings and identities are constitutive of both personal and political life. Engaging with major debates in political theory, sociology, and psychoanalysis, he brings fresh insights to a range of issues: dynamics of political protest, intractable conflicts, fundamentalism and populism, the new political charismatics, the nature of forgiveness, and the relationship between anxiety and governance. The book is conceptually innovative and accessible, carefully introducing different theories of collective emotion and group identity and making extensive use of case studies from the U.S., England, and across the globe.

II. DISCUSSION

In recent years politics has become a contestation between different forms of identity rather than interests. Identity has an almost ideological connotation. It is easy to become lost in emotions and hyperbole without any awareness of its actual role in political theory. Indeed, the earliest political philosophers did not mention identity at all. Even liberals who celebrated individualism did not consider the implications of personal identity, because it involves not simply a sense of the self, but also the group. Identity implies both a sense of personal reflection, but also belonging. It is a recognition of the self, but also a distinction from others.

Identity is a social construct. It has no meaning without an awareness of interpersonal relationships. Identity emerges from the world, but transforms the inner self. It presupposes a relationship with others. The identity of a parent presupposes a child. The identity of the leader depends on followers. Other identities depend on an activity. The runner exists because others choose not to run. Nobody identifies as a sleeper because everyone sleeps. However, some might identify as an insomniac or as a deep sleeper. But again, it recognizes a distinction from others.

Self and the Other

We can imagine some solitary figure alone on an island like Robinson Crusoe. However, unlike Crusoe this person has no knowledge of others and no memory of anyone else. They make music, but they are not a musician. They hunt, but they are not a hunter. Everything they do is simply natural. It is just what they do. Identity depends on the introduction of somebody else. The simple awareness of others necessitates the introduction of institutions to give their relationship meaning.

Every introduction to a stranger fits into some institutional framework in our minds. The stranger is a friend, an enemy, a business associate, a political authority, a priest, and on and on. Modern society has developed multiple, overlapping institutions so a person may have multiple identities. But the stranger forms an identity we impose onto them. Of course, this does not mean the stranger accepts this identity. Identity depends on a careful negotiation between its participants. It is not always a conscious negotiation nor is it fair. People do not choose their identity. It depends on the recognition of others. We can fantasize a new sense of ourselves, but it will ultimately depend on the validation of others.

Identity and Institutions

My notion of identity depends on a more expansive sense of institutions than most. Some institutions form clear identities. The family introduces mothers, fathers, sons, and daughters. Congress introduces Representatives and Senators. The Presidency introduces a President. Friendship is another institution. It offers its own context for the formulation of identities and norms. People create institutions to make sense of our relationship to others. Friendship, war, and trade all depend on the construction of institutions to make sense of others and ourselves.

The construction of institutions involves a careful negotiation between those involved. Any person may introduce an institutional framework, but the responses of others will change their perspective. Indeed, the overlap of institutions makes the introduction of distinct institutions into others a common phenomenon. It brings about confusion over social roles and norms.[5,6] In a classroom, teachers often demand attention from students focused on each other. The conflict involves a negotiation between the school or the classroom alongside others like friendship or courtship. The appropriate norms in these institutions differ significantly so it causes confusion among the participants to determine

the proper behavior. The teacher imposes the norms of the classroom, but the students feel social pressure to adopt a competing contextual framework with different norms and identities.

A Careful Negotiation

Political theory suggests a thought experiment commonly referred to as the state of nature. Imagine two strangers meet for the first time outside the bounds of the state or the law. How do they react? Hobbes assumes they attack one another. Rousseau imagines they befriend each other. Locke denies my premise and insists a natural law remains beyond the realm of any state. All three assume the construction of an institution for the interaction between the strangers. Hobbes assumes war is the default position in the state of nature, while Rousseau makes believes friendship is where they begin. Again, Locke believes their behavior is no different than in a political society where law defines fundamental norms and behaviors. But the theorists assume an implicit agreement of institutions, norms, and identities in the state of nature. Reality is quite different.

I have already said the construction of institutions depends on a careful negotiation between its participants. One stranger may assume the other is a friend, while the other expects a physical confrontation. The behavior of the other will affect the specific social context, norms, and identities involved. Eventually both parties will agree on the nature of their relationship and its context. They will impose an identity on others, while they accept one for themselves. But our own identity is a negotiation. It is not a choice. We look for validation from others in the identities we adopt. Yet at the same time we influence the interpretation of our identity. Let us remember that every negotiation depends upon leverage. Both sides have different demands and expectations, but over time the parties often come to an agreement.

Liberalism and Conservatism

Liberal societies confer substantial leverage to the individual. In contrast, more conservative societies confer more leverage to the community. Consequently, liberal societies embrace not simply pluralism, but allow the individual more freedom to determine their own identity. Conservative communities remain more reluctant to recognize divergent notions of identity formed by the individual. Nonetheless, the difference is not an ether/or proposition. Liberal societies do not allow individuals absolute control over their own identity. They still rely on some form of social recognition. In contrast, conservative communities allow for some individual autonomy even though it faces greater constraints. But identity remains meaningless without the recognition of others. Personal identity shapes more than just the individual. It shapes the relationships towards the individual. Identity has meaning through the interaction with others.

Reinterpreting Institutions

So, the emergence of identity politics does not reflect the construction of new institutions, but rather the reinterpretation of existing ones. Indeed, many of these reinterpretations represent a reconfiguration of toxic institutions into something more palatable for the oppressed, exploited, or merely uncomfortable under previous paradigms. Again, this explanation demands a broader meaning of “institution” to include race and sexuality. An institution creates a template or context for norms and identities to form. Typically an institution implies an organization like a school or Congress. But some institutions have a more nebulous construction where they remain in the background. They are present and shape our social interactions, but do not dominate them.

Moreover, institution evolve over time. The norms will change and new identities will form. Conservatives fear new norms and identities undermine institutions, but this is false. Institutions have tremendous resilience. Norms and identities do not define institutions. Rather an institution is a canvas for norms and identities to form. So, institutions can allow for a wide diversity of norms and identities especially in different cultures and time periods. Marriage has undergone a radical transformation from a patriarchal institution into something more egalitarian. Nevertheless, I hesitate to say it has become truly egalitarian. At the same time, it likely will continue to evolve over subsequent generations.

Racial Identities

Race offers a true challenge for the explanation of institutions, because it introduces aspects of Western culture many prefer to ignore or deny. Racism was never simply a worldview or a behavior. It was an institution. It was more obvious in some places than others and established different norms in different regions. The Jim Crow era laws and customs of the American South was the clearest example of racism in the United States. But racism existed in different forms in nearly all places. The problem was it did not simply refer to an idea or a behavior. It established a context

where the presence of race formed identities and norms. Behaviors can become corrected. Ideas can change. But institutions evolve. They do not easily disappear.

The tension today over racism involves a debate over not just definitions, but classifications. Conservatives argue racism is behavioral. A racist becomes an identity based on behaviors and decisions. They believe the eradication of racism depends on the eradication of behaviors based on race. Moreover, they believe behavioral change depends on an agnostic ignorance of race. Despite their efforts, they participate in the institution of race through their refusal to recognize race openly. Their ignorance becomes a shield from the label[6,7] “racist.” Yet at the same time, their ignorance leaves them vulnerable to the perpetuation of racism. They refuse to recognize its existence so they become complicit and sometimes even active participants. They cannot engage in antiracism because they deny any knowledge of it. Nonetheless, this brings up an unsettling precondition for the antiracist. Antiracism demands conscious participation in the institution of race in order to recognize racism.

Race as an Institution

Antiracism makes sense when racism is seen as part of an institution rather than a behavior. Ibram X. Kendi among others do not imagine they can eradicate race from the human imagination. Rather they challenge our culture to reimagine the institution once again. They hope to transform the diversity of race into something celebrated rather than feared. Their intention is to redefine not just the norms that underpin conceptions of race, but to reshape racial identity. This is not a radical shift in philosophy or perspective. African American scholarship has a long tradition from Frederick Douglass to W.E.B. DuBois to James Baldwin who sought to reimagine black identity. Few believed racism would disappear so they wanted to change the nature of the relationship from something hierarchical into an egalitarian one.

Conservatives, on the other hand, believe they can eradicate racism. They believe the eradication of racism depends on the abolition of race. But they fail to understand the enormity of the task at hand. It does not simply involve the elimination of race from all law. It does not simply involve the education of its citizenry. Indeed, it involves the wholesale examination of all institutions to understand how race has become entangled into different norms and identities throughout the entire culture. Systemic racism implies the incorporation of racial hierarchies into different institutions throughout society. Indeed, it is not limited to police misconduct, but involves attitudes, behaviors, and norms in political, economic, and social institutions. Some of its elements may remain unrecognized for generations.

Final Thoughts

Likewise many social conservatives view sexuality as a behavior. The rise of different sexual identities alongside the reinterpretation of masculinity and femininity resemble threats because social conservatives fail to understand sexuality as an institution. The emergence of new sexual identities from homosexuality to transgenderism involve an evolution or reinterpretation of sexuality as an institution. It continues to involve a negotiation between the individual and the culture regarding identity, but allows for increased leverage for the individual to decide. Nonetheless, some sexual identities remain taboo. For example, pedophilia is off limits. In many ways, the #MeToo movement has demanded less sexual promiscuity in the workplace especially where a power imbalance exists. Sexual identity remains a negotiation even in a liberal, pluralistic society.

Identity has an important role for political science and theory. Nonetheless, its existence is largely accepted as fact. My aim here is to explain their significance within a wider theory of institutions. Identities do not exist without the recognition of the other. People rely on others to understand themselves. They seek identity in opposition to others, but also through familiarity with them. But it is the recognition of social identity from others that gives it meaning. It is not enough to make music. We want others to recognize us as somebody who makes music. Sometimes identity serves as a tool of oppression. But it also has the capacity for liberation.

III. RESULTS

Research suggests political identity has strong influence over individuals’ attitudes and beliefs, which in turn can affect their behavior. Likewise, firsthand experience with an issue can also affect attitudes and beliefs. A large (N = 6,383) survey (Pew Research and Ipsos W64) of Americans was analyzed to investigate the effects of both political identity (i.e., Democrat or Republican) and personal impact (i.e., whether they suffered job or income loss) on individuals’ reactions to the COVID-19 pandemic. Results show that political identity and personal impact influenced the American

public's attitudes about and response to COVID-19. Consistent with prior research, political identity exerted a strong influence on self-reports of emotional distress, threat perception, discomfort with exposure, support for restrictions, and perception of under/overreaction by individuals and institutions. The difference between Democrats and Republican responses were consistent with their normative value differences and with the contemporary partisan messaging. Personal impact exerted a comparatively weaker influence on reported emotional distress and threat perception. Both factors had a weak influence on appraisal of individual and government responses. The dominating influence of political identity carried over into the bivariate relations among these self-reported attitudes and responses. In particular, the appraisal of government response divided along party lines, tied to opposing views of whether there has been over- or under-reaction to the pandemic. The dominance of political identity has important implications for crisis management and reflects the influence of normative value differences between the parties, partisan messaging on the pandemic, and polarization in American politics.[6,7]

Amidst a polarized political climate (Jacobson, 2013; Doherty, 2014; Hare and Poole, 2014; Dunlap et al., 2016; Garimella and Weber, 2017), the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has swept across the United States (US). As of the 24th of August 2020, the US reported over 5.5 million cases and 175,000 deaths due to COVID-19 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020). The impact of the pandemic is widespread, felt not only in terms of lives lost but also in terms of psychological harm (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020; Cullen et al., 2020; Serafini et al., 2020) and economic loss (Baker et al., 2020; Fernandes, 2020; Soucheray, 2020), with 20.6 million lost jobs in the US through the early months of the pandemic. The widespread impact of the pandemic has placed it in direct competition with partisan messaging and political identity in shaping the public's attitudes toward COVID-19 and appropriate response measures.

The COVID-19 pandemic poses unique and difficult management challenges. The disease, caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2; Coronaviridae Study Group of the International Committee on Taxonomy of Viruses, 2020), produces several flu-like symptoms, such as coughing (often with sputum), shortness of breath, muscle aches, and fevers (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020). Typically, the most acute and deadly symptoms are the associated respiratory illnesses (World Health Organization [WHO], 2020), especially prevalent in older populations and those with compromised immune systems. Like other flu viruses, these respiratory symptoms are also its primary means of transmission, spreading primarily through droplets expelled by coughing and sneezing. The combination of factors makes the virus both highly contagious and potentially deadly. Further complicating matters is the possibility of asymptomatic spread (Anguelov et al., 2020; del Rio and Malani, 2020) and the possibility of limited immunity and vulnerability to reinfection (Batisse et al., 2020; Roy, 2020). The combination of factors necessitated a swift response from institutions and organizations under conditions of great uncertainty and accountability pressures.

Political Identity and Attitudes About COVID-19

Whereas mixed political messaging marked the initial stage of the pandemic, clearer lines were quickly drawn, and polarization of party elites and the masses followed (Hong and Kim, 2016; Jiang et al., 2020). Much of the divide concerns the perceived threat of COVID-19 and the purported costs and benefits of its management. Specifically, there is a divide over the implementation and extent of response measures such as mask wearing, social distancing, and lockdown procedures. The Democratic Party emphasized the threat of the virus (Pickup et al., 2020) and the potential benefits of broad restrictions—namely, lower cases, transmission, and deaths (Best and Boice, 2020; de Bruin et al., 2020; Hsiang et al., 2020)—as exceeding the economic costs (Green et al., 2020). By comparison, the Republican Party de-emphasized the threat of the virus (Pickup et al., 2020) and highlighted the potential cost of broad restrictions—such as job loss, psychological harm, and delayed treatment of non-COVID related illnesses (Baldwin and Weder, 2020; McKee and Stuckler, 2020)—as outweighing the benefits of broad restrictions (Atlas et al., 2020).

Normative Value Differences

The relationship between attitudes, beliefs and political identity is complex. Individual differences in values or biases, such as negativity biases (Hibbing et al., 2014; Lilienfeld and Latzman, 2014), may drive the development of political identity, or people may also be encouraged to adopt values preferred by their ingroup (Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Huddy and Bankert, 2017). Of particular note given the pathogenic salience of the COVID-19 pandemic is the relationship between the “behavioral immune system,” a postulated set of behavioral adaptations which mitigate disease severity, and political conservatism (Schaller and Park, 2011; for meta-analysis see Terrizzi et al., 2013). A strong behavioral immune system, hallmarked by disgust sensitivity and a strong ingroup preference, is positively associated with

conservatism. However, pandemic mitigation strategies place this preference in direct conflict with aforementioned Republican messaging and normative values that emphasize individual freedom, government non-intervention, and economic costs.

Another factor to consider is research suggesting conservatism is associated with subjective perceptions of threat (Jost et al., 2003, 2017), particularly as it pertains to mortality salience. Subjective perceptions of threat, real or imagined, can produce emotional distress or, if the threat is imagined or overblown, anxiety (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Likewise, a longstanding finding is that anxiety is associated with enhanced orienting to perceived threats (Posner, 1980; Bar-Haim et al., 2007; Cisler et al., 2009), further suggesting the two experiences are closely related. Importantly, the research does not imply that Republicans ought to perceive COVID-19 to be a greater threat than Democrats, nor does it predict they ought to experience greater anxiety. It does suggest, however, that to the extent they do perceive threat or experience emotional distress, they ought to be more strongly motivated to mitigate that fear than Democrats. Combined with normative emphasis on individuality and personal freedoms, Republicans support for various COVID-19 mitigation measures be strongly related to personal, subjective assessment of the threat posed by the pandemic.

The Role of Partisan Messaging

Regardless of how individuals arrive at their political identity, however, partisan messaging can strongly affect subsequent attitudes and beliefs of affiliated persons (Cohen, 2003; Ward and Tavits, 2019; Pennycook et al., 2020). Even issues that initially seem to lack partisan content often divide along partisan lines. Indeed, political identity plays an obvious and powerful role in shaping the beliefs attitudes of the public (Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Huddy, 2001; Van Bavel and Pereira, 2018; Iyengar et al., 2019; Ward and Tavits, 2019). The attitudes tied to these beliefs frequently become more entrenched over time, creating a feedback loop that increases polarization among both party elites and the public.

Unsurprisingly, research shows that public opinion about COVID-19 has likewise polarized along political party lines (Allcott et al., 2020; Calvillo et al., 2020; Jiang et al., 2020), reflected both offline and in social media analysis (Panda et al., 2020). The views of the public have aligned with worries about the virus and economy espoused by Democrats and Republicans, respectively. An ABC News/Ipsos poll conducted in early May, 2020 revealed that Republicans and Democrats have opposing views on the opening of the economy, with 35% versus 92% respectively opposing an immediate re-opening (Southeray, 2020). These results are aligned with a separate poll conducted in the same month by CNBC/Change Research in which 97% of Democrats compared to 39% of Republicans were significantly worried about the virus (Pramuk, 2020).

The alignment of individual attitudes with partisan identity posed challenges for its management. Research suggests political identity may influence willingness to engage in ostensibly risky behavior (Makridis and Rothwell, 2020; van Holm et al., 2020) as well as willingness to respect and adhere to policies surrounding management of the virus (Allcott et al., 2020; Brzezinski et al., 2020). This poses a problem for the effective disaster management (Baum, 2011; Gregory, 2016). Understanding how political identity shaped early perceptions of and reactions to COVID-19 is therefore of use to future pandemic management efforts.

Personal Experience in Attitude Formation

It seems both intuitive and uncontroversial to state that firsthand experience with an event or issue can alter one's beliefs and attitudes about that event or issue. The significant spread of COVID-19, even as early as March of 2020 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020) affected many individuals and families across the US, both in terms of health effects and job loss. One might expect that individuals personally affected by the pandemic would react differently and develop different attitudes regarding the appropriate response. For instance, we might expect that individuals who suffered personally from COVID-19 would report more negative emotions and greater COVID-19-related threat perceptions than individuals who were not personally affected. Personal experience may even be strong enough to override or neutralize the effects of political identity (Bernstein, 2005; Strauss, 2009; Bernstein and Taylor, 2013; Hersh, 2013).

Indeed, personal experience with crises can affect political identity and participation. For instance, research suggests personal experience of poverty can influence belief about the government's responsibilities (Noone et al., 2012). Victimization in violent crime can influence political participation and attitudes regarding the justice system (Bateson,

2012; Hersh, 2013). In a similar vein, experience with environmental disasters plausibly linked to climate change can influence attitudes regarding institutional responsibility for climate change (Akerlof et al., 2013; Myers et al., 2013; Unsworth and Fielding, 2014). However, much like facts, personal experience may not always be sufficient to shift deeply held ideological beliefs or political identity (Ogunbode et al., 2017).

Purpose and Hypotheses

Critically, we know of no study that has directly compared the effects of political identity and personal experience in shaping attitudes and beliefs regarding a crisis. Populations directly affected by crises are rarely large enough, diverse enough, or random enough to make such comparisons. However, increasing polarization combined with the COVID-19 pandemic has created a substantial cross-section of individuals affiliated with both major US political parties who either report having or not having been directly affected by the pandemic. These individuals are distributed over many states and a large geographical area. This unique combination of factors provides an effective means for directly comparing the effects of political identity and personal experience on psychological responses to the COVID-19 pandemic.

To examine how political identity and personal impact (i.e., job or income loss) shaped early attitudes about COVID-19, we examined the US public's early reactions as a function of both political identity and personal impact. We used publicly available data from the Pew Research Center in consultation with Ipsos. We were interested in whether and to what extent each factor influenced individuals' emotional distress, perceptions of pandemic threat, behavioral responses to the pandemic, support for restrictions, and assessments of the government responses to the pandemic. We were also interested in comparing the effect size of each factor, and whether one was markedly stronger than another. Our primary set of hypotheses held that both political identity and personal impact play a role in shaping perceptions of and reactions to the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the relationship between perceptions and reactions. However, we hypothesize the effects of political identity will be more consistent and larger than personal impact across a range of attitudes and responses. Broadly, we predicted that both Democrats and those personally impacted by the pandemic would exhibit greater emotional threat responses, discomfort, support for restrictions, and evaluate the government response more poorly. These results would reflect a rational response to personal impact, and also be consistent with both normative differences in partisan values as well as partisan messaging on the topic.

As a second aim, we also examined how the relationship between attitudes about COVID-19 differed as a function of both personal impact and political identity. We hypothesized that both political identity and personal impact would influence the relationship between emotional distress, perceptions of threat, behavioral responses to the pandemic, support for restrictions, and assessment of the government's response. However, in line with our earlier hypothesis about main effects, we predicted that political identity would have a larger effect. Specifically, we predict that Republicans' emotional distress and threat perception will be more strongly correlated with each other and with behavioral discomfort, support for restrictions, and evaluation of government response. Furthermore, because of the differing normative values between Democrats and Republicans, we predict that the relationships between our variables will be defined by perceptions of government under-reaction and over-reaction, respectively.

Grouping Variables

We created two grouping variables to contrast group-level perceptions of COVID-19. The grouping variables were based on Pew survey questions regarding their political affiliation or leaning and whether participants had been affected by the pandemic.

Political identity was measured by asking participants, "In politics today, do you consider yourself a": (a) "Republican," (b) "Democrat," (c) "Independent," and (d) "Something else." Participants who answered (c) or (d) were asked a follow-up question, "As of today do you lean more to..." the Republicans or to the Democrats. To avoid ambiguity in the interpretation of political identity, we opted to include only those respondents who answered (a) or (b) to the initial question, excluding individuals who identified as independents or merely leaning toward one party or another.

Personal impact was measured by asking participants, "For each of the following, indicate whether or not it is something that happened to YOU OR SOMEONE IN YOUR HOUSEHOLD because of the coronavirus outbreak" (a) "been laid off or lost a job" and (b) "had to take a cut in pay due to reduced hours or demand for your work." Participants provided either a "yes" or "no" response to each question. We created a group-level variable by coding

participants who responded “no” to both items as 0 and those who responded “yes” to either question or both questions as 12.

Response Scales

We computed six response scales to measure participants’ perceptions of, and responses to, the COVID-19 pandemic. The scales were based on 36 items from six related, grouped sets of a questions in the Pew survey pertaining to the effect of COVID-19 on participants’: (1) emotional response, (2) threat response, (3) discomfort with various activities, (4) support for government restrictions, (5) evaluation of public response, and (6) evaluation of public under- or over-reaction. These groupings served as the bases for deriving our response scales. To improve the quality of our analyses, we used a combination of manual scale purification and confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) techniques to ensure meaningful interpretation of the results.

The creation of the response scales involved four steps. The first step was scale purification, which involved the a priori elimination of items unrelated to our concepts of interest. We re-coded and reverse coded items as needed during this step to achieve consistent ordinal coding of items. The second step was a CFA of the remaining sets of items to ascertain unidimensionality (Flake et al., 2017). We eliminated items with poor factor loading (<0.50) on their respective latent variables during this step. The third step was to assess the invariance of our baseline model across each of our two grouping variables, political identity and personal impact. The fourth step was to derive standardized scores for each of our response scales to use in further analyses.

All CFA were conducted using the lavaan package in rStudio (Rosseel, 2012). We used polychoric correlations for our ordinal variables (Olsson, 1979; Drasgow, 1986; Holgado-Tello et al., 2010), robust diagonally weighted least sum for our estimator, and the bounds constrained quasi-Newton optimization method. Our criteria for good model fit was a significant χ^2 test of fit, a comparative fit index (CFI) ≥ 0.90 , a Tucker Lewis index (TLI) ≥ 0.95 , a root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) ≤ 0.08 , and a standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) ≤ 0.08 . The reliability of the response scales was ascertained using ω_t (McDonald, 1999; Revelle and Condon, 2019).

To test for invariance across each of our two grouping variables, we followed the four-step approach recommended by Bowen and Masa (2015) for ordinal items, with the addition of a strict invariance test. We first ascertained that the configural model provided a good fit. We then compared it to a weak factorial (or metric) model where factor loadings were constrained to be equal across groups (in addition to the model configuration); next, a strong factorial (or scalar) invariance model where the factor thresholds were constrained to be equal across groups (in addition to factor loadings and the model configuration); finally, a strict (or uniqueness) invariance model where the residuals were constrained to be equal across groups (in addition to factor thresholds, loadings, and model configuration). Because the large sample makes significant χ^2 difference test results trivial, we accepted the alternative hypothesis of non-invariance if two conditions are met: a significant χ^2 difference test (Satorra and Bentler, 2010) and a significant decrement in critical model fit indices for nested, more restricted models (either $\Delta CFI < -0.010$ or $\Delta RMSEA < -0.010$; Cheung and Rensvold, 2002; Chen, 2007; Meade et al., 2008; Putnick and Bornstein, 2016).

Test results for χ^2 and fit indices for each of our CFA models are shown in 1. Factor loadings and reliability measures for our initial model are shown in Ref. 2. Factor loadings and reliability measures for the baseline model (at the end of step 2) are shown in Ref. 3.

IV. CONCLUSION

Results of the invariance tests are shown in Ref. 4. Following the elimination of items with poor factor loadings in step 2, the final baseline six response scale model provided a good and reliable fit for the data. Invariance tests revealed the configural models provided a good fit for the data. Invariance tests unambiguously supported the hypothesis of strict invariance for the personal impact grouping variable, with neither a significant χ^2 nor a significant decrement in model fit indices. For political identity increasing invariance restrictions produced significant differences in χ^2 values at each step, providing some evidence for non-invariance across the grouping variable. However, our restricted models did not significantly worsen the fit according to either our ΔCFI or $\Delta RMSEA$ criterion. The strict invariance criterion also had no effect whatsoever on the fit. Given these results, and given that we were interested in comparisons across both of our primary grouping variables, we proceeded with our unrestricted baseline model for further analysis.[7]

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