Article

Gender and Racial Gaps in Support for Policing and Correctional Reforms: Are the Gaps a Consequence of Political Partisanship?

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Abstract

Divisive criminal justice issues are typically framed through gender and racial lenses, with little empirical work considering the increasing role of political partisanship. Using the 2016 Cooperative Congressional Election Study ($N = 55,000$), we estimate multivariate models of support for four policing and correctional reforms. The models initially point to gender gaps and racial gaps. However, as with many public policy issues, support for criminal justice reforms are largely a product of political partisanship—the gender and racial gaps are largely a consequence of gender and racial gaps in partisanship and appear to be driven by white Republican men. As legislative bodies continue to be overrepresented with individuals with the same demographic profile, criminal justice reform prospects are limited.

Keywords

gender and race, partisanship, sentencing, policing, criminal justice reform

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Policies on police legitimacy and mass incarceration are of high political relevance as they have become socially and economically burdensome, coming to a high cost to males and communities of color (Elderbroom et al., 2018; Uggen et al., 2020; Yates & Fording, 2005). Existing correctional policies are being revisited as evidenced by a declining prison population (Carson, 2020), reversing racially discriminatory sentencing policies (Malone, 2018), with recommended reforms to aggressive policing styles (Eckhouse, 2019; Wang et al., 2019). However, reforms within the criminal justice system are threatened if political bodies continue to be incongruent to the public opinion of an emerging ethnoracial America.

A body of work has documented public attitudes toward criminal justice policies and reforms vary by gender and race/ethnicity. Research of gender differences or gaps in attitudes toward criminal justice issues are mixed (Anderson et al., 2017; Applegate et al., 2002; Carr et al., 2007; Chiricos et al., 2004; Clark, 2017; Costelloe et al., 2009; Haghighi & Lopez, 1998; Johnson, 2007; Johnson & Kuhns, 2009; Peffley & Hurwitz, 2007; Silver & Pickett, 2015; Wang et al., 2019). Similar research is less substantial in garnering such attitudes among underrepresented groups (Carr et al., 2007; Costelloe et al., 2009; Haider-Markel & Joslyn, 2017; Nelson et al., 2007; Peffley & Hurwitz, 2007; Wang et al., 2019). A remarkable trend as minority groups disproportionately represents deadly encounters with police and the imprisonment population (Carson, 2020; Mapping Police Violence, 2020). Many of these studies also trail in relevancy, focusing on correctional policies, emphasizing punitiveness (e.g., death penalty) rather than reform (e.g., eliminating mandatory minimums) (Anderson et al., 2017; Chiricos et al., 2004; Clark, 2017; Costelloe et al., 2009; Haghighi & Lopez, 1998; Johnson, 2007; Peffley & Hurwitz, 2007;). As public interest in the death penalty continues to decline since 2004, these analyses fail to capture the American public's growing interest in policing violence and criminal justice reform (Google Trends, 2020).

Since policymaking is a political action (Lewis et al., 2013), research should continue to investigate how criminal justice reform by partisanship varies by gender and race/ethnicity (Eckhouse, 2019; Haider-Markel & Joslyn, 2017; Nelson et al., 2007; Peffley & Hurwitz, 2007). The gender and race/ethnicity of political leaders affect whites and African Americans' attitudes and experiences in fundamentally different ways (Lewis et al., 2013; Malone, 2018; Nelson et al., 2007; Peffley & Hurwitz, 2007; Yates & Fording, 2005). If the Republican Party continues to primarily compose white voters and Democrats being a coalition of multiple ethnoracial groups (Eckhouse, 2019; Nelson et al., 2007), it is logical to conclude what interests will resonate with their constituents. Already females and persons of color who hold

prominent positions in political institutions continue to be underrepresented compared to their share of the American population (Leatherby & Oppel, 2020; Lu et al., 2020; United States Senate, 2020). In that case, the average white Republican man is experiencing more political representation for their interests than all other demographic groups.

Does partisanship outperform gender and race as a predictor for support for policing and correctional reform? Given the current hyperpartisan era (Anderson et al., 2017), it is ever more pressing to investigate the role of partisanship, particularly across gender and race/ethnicity, to understand support for criminal justice reforms. Our analysis of a national sample of respondents surveyed in the 2016 Cooperative Congressional Election Studies (CCES) reveals differences in support of reform by gender, race/ethnicity, and partisanship, after controlling for variables research shows may be correlated with attitudes on policing and correctional reforms. Specifically, we analyzed two policing reforms: The extent to which sample members support (1) body-worn cameras for police and (2) increased police presence. We also assessed two correctional reforms: The extent to which sample members support (1) eliminating mandatory minimum sentences for nonviolent offenders and (2) increasing prison sentences for violent offenders. Our analysis demonstrates gender and racial/ethnic diversity in support of these reforms. However, gender and racial gaps are primarily a result of partisanship gaps.

Literature Review

Endorsement of criminal justice strategies varies by gender (Anderson et al., 2017; Applegate et al., 2002; Chiricos et al., 2004; Costelloe et al., 2009; Haghighi & Lopez, 1998; Johnson & Kuhns, 2009; Peffley & Hurwitz, 2007; Silver & Pickett, 2015; Wang et al., 2019). Of the little work that has been done exploring gender gaps in opinion on policing strategies, no gender differences in attitudes toward police behaviors and practices have been identified (Carr et al., 2007; Johnson, 2007). By comparison, gendered responses in punitive attitudes toward criminals, often referred to as punitiveness, have received significantly more attention from scholars. Men support stiffer responses and penalties to crime than women (Anderson et al., 2017; Applegate et al., 2002) and are less concerned with policies that assist the socially disadvantaged, like the poor, the elderly, and African Americans (Applegate et al., 2002). Other research shows no gender differences or suggests that gender is less relevant in ascertaining opinions on criminal justice issues compared to other demographic factors like race/ethnicity (Carr et al., 2007; Clark, 2017; Haghighi & Lopez, 1998; Johnson, 2007; Peffley & Hurwitz, 2007; Wang et al., 2019).

African Americans hold more critical views of police than whites (Carr et al., 2007; Haider-Markel & Joslyn, 2017; Nelson et al., 2007; Wang et al., 2019). A 2015 national survey of citizen contacts with the police indicated that African Americans and Hispanics were more likely than whites to perceive traffic stops as illegitimate and police behaving improperly (Davis et al., 2018). Of those who had face-to-face contact with police officers in 2015, African Americans were more likely than Hispanics or whites to be the recipients of force. Most African Americans regarded their most recent police-initiated contact to be excessive. Whites' attitudes differ from African Americans regarding what constitutes reasonable or excessive force during police-citizen interactions (Johnson & Kuhns, 2009; Silver & Pickett, 2015). A racial divide in attitudes that continues by gender as white and African American women were less approving of police use of reasonable force against white and African American juvenile offenders than their male counterparts (Johnson & Kuhns, 2009). Despite gender and racial attitudinal differences in police experiences and behaviors, whites and African Americans shared feelings in augmenting law enforcement to fight crime, which complements their support for harsher penalties to address crime (Carr et al., 2007).

Correctional practices also primarily afflict communities of color, especially African American communities. African Americans and Hispanics are 5.6 times and 2.7 times more likely to be incarcerated than whites in 2018 (Carson, 2020), with the racial disparity of imprisonment steadily widening (Yates & Fording, 2005). Research suggests no racial differences in support of pro-criminal justice-based solutions via correctional policies (Carr et al., 2007; Johnson, 2007). But, when African Americans are presented with a racially disparate criminal justice system, reductions for punitiveness occur (Anderson et al., 2017; Costelloe et al., 2009; Johnson, 2007; Peffley & Hurwitz, 2007), suggesting distinct racial beliefs on corrections can exist. The research is mixed on differential attitudes by gender within race toward correctional policies. White women may be more or less punitive than white men (Chiricos et al., 2004; Haghighi & Lopez, 1998; Peffley & Hurwitz, 2007). Likewise, non-white/African American women were no different in punitiveness from their non-white/African American men (Costelloe et al., 2009; Haghighi & Lopez, 1998). By contrast, African American men were more supportive of the death penalty than their counterparts; but, when the system was framed as racist, African American men were less supportive (Peffley & Hurwitz, 2007). Overall, the research suggests gender and racial/ethnic differences in attitudes toward police-citizen interactions and punishment and reform.

Gender, Race, and Partisanship

As with gender and race, perspectives toward crime and justice vary by party identification. Democrats attribute crime to societal issues, and Republicans associate the causes of crime to individual actions (Eckhouse, 2019; Haider-Markel & Joslyn, 2017; Malone, 2018; Peffley & Hurwitz, 2007). These distinct perspectives on criminality help explain why Republicans frame policing problems as a product of bad apples, and Democrats argue a rotten barrel (Haider-Markel & Joslyn, 2017). Racial identity trumps political affiliation when determining police behavior (Haider-Markel & Joslyn, 2017; Nelson et al., 2007). For instance, African American Republicans, like their Democrat counterparts, indicate that the killings of unarmed African American men by police are still considered problematic (Haider-Markel & Joslyn, 2017). Likewise, on attitudes toward correctional issues, partisan divides by gender and race (Eckhouse, 2019; Peffley & Hurwitz, 2007). An inspection of partisanship, particularly attitudes toward criminal justice reform by gender and race/ethnicity, has important implications as white males overrepresent political offices (Lu et al., 2020; United States Senate, 2020). As their civil voice dominates, white Republican males' beliefs will continue to drive a sizable portion of policy output.

Few studies have investigated how partisanship operates on attitudes toward police brutality and violence (Eckhouse, 2019; Haider-Markel & Joslyn, 2017; Nelson et al., 2007). Studies have shown partisanship has become a more important predictor of many political attitudes than have sociodemographic variables such as gender (Dolan & Hansen, 2018; Hansen & Dolan, 2020; Hansen et al., 2021). On policing reforms, African American Democrats and white copartisans shared optimism that recruiting more qualified officers of color can reduce tensions between communities and law enforcement (Eckhouse, 2019). The optimism of the effectiveness of racial bias training, community policing programs, and incentivizing law enforcement to reside in the community to improve police-citizen interactions varied by race and political affiliation. White Democrats were the most optimistic of these policing reforms than African American Democrats and white Republicans. These racial differences by party identification likely persisted because pronouncements on police brutality by politicians of differing races differentially affect whites and African Americans (Nelson et al., 2007). What remains to be explored are partisan divides by gender and race.

The get-tough on crime political rhetoric is unique to the Republican Party. Republicans continue to be unchanged in their support of the death penalty, with non-Republicans (Democrats and Independents) driving its declining support (Anderson et al., 2017). Drawing on the General Social

Survey, Eckhouse (2019) identified how support for capital punishment from 1980 to 2000 among white Democrats have progressively converged with African American Democrats to the point of appearing almost identical, suggesting white Democrats realize the racial inequality in the criminal justice system. Moreover, white Democrats have rated socio-economic reasons as the key factor to mass incarceration, African American Democrats and white Republicans identified racial biases and personal responsibility, respectively, as the primary contributor to the racial disparities in sentencing.

Hypotheses

We test five hypotheses that deal with three overarching themes. First, we explore the gender gap in criminal justice reforms on policing and correctional issues. Second, we explore the gender gaps between race on criminal justice reforms on policing and correctional issues. Third, we test whether gender and racial gaps occur within each party.

H_{1a}: Women are more likely to support police body cam use, increasing the number of police, and increasing prison sentences for repeat offenders, and less likely to support eliminating mandatory minimum sentences.

H_{1b}: African Americans are more likely to support eliminating mandatory minimum sentences and requiring police body cam use, and less likely to support increasing the number of police and increasing prison sentences for repeat offenders when compared to whites.

H_{1c}: Democrats are more likely to support eliminating mandatory minimum sentences and requiring police body cam use, and less likely to support increasing the number of police and increasing prison sentences for repeat offenders than Republicans.

H_{2a}: Gender and racial gaps in support for policing and correctional reforms are small or nonexistent when exploring within partisan groupings.

H_{2b}: Gender and racial gaps in support for policing and correctional reforms are less frequent and sizable among strong partisans, which are small when exploring weak partisans (not strong and leans).

Data

We utilize survey data from the 2016 CCES to test the hypotheses (Ansolabehere & Schaffner, 2017). The CCES is a nationally stratified survey that occurs during federal election years & includes over 50,000 respondents. The survey is administered by YouGov. In each year, the survey

consists of a 20-minute pre-election wave and a 10-minute post-election wave. We conduct our analysis using post-stratification survey weights for the estimation of multivariate models.

Dependent Variables and Methods

The 2016 CCES is unique in that four questions added to the survey of that year asked about support for criminal justice reforms. These four questions about reform in policing and the correctional system are the dependent variables in this study. The respondent was provided with a specific criminal justice reform, and then they would indicate whether they support or oppose said reform. Respondents who oppose the reform are coded 0, with supporters coded 1. The four survey questions include:

1. Require police officers to wear body cameras that record all of their activities while on duty?
2. Increase the number of police on the street by 10%, even if it means fewer funds for other public services?
3. Increase prison sentences for felons who have already committed two or more serious or violent crimes?
4. Eliminate mandatory minimum sentences for nonviolent drug offenders?

Since the dependent variables are coded as binary choices, we estimate survey weighted logistic regression models to predict support for the four reforms. Then the analysis occurs in two stages. In the first stage, four logistic regression models are estimated to predict support per reform. Since there are a large number of respondents in the overall sample, we must acknowledge that statistical significance does not necessarily indicate substantive importance. Therefore, we estimate predicted probabilities for the independent variables of interest and plot the study's variables' substantive effect on support per reform.

In the second stage, the survey sample is split by partisanship to test whether gender and racial gaps exist among partisan groupings. We are also interested in whether the strength of partisanship has an impact on gender and racial gaps in support of police and correctional reforms. Thus, we estimate a model per reform for respondents who identify as strong Democrats, not very strong and lean Democrats, not very strong and lean Republicans, and Strong Republicans.[1] Since the number of models in this stage is quite large at 16, the full model results are presented in Appendix C. Instead, we estimate predicted probabilities for the independent variables of interest and plot the substantive effect of the variables on support for the four reforms by partisan grouping.

Independent Variables

The analysis includes socio-demographic and attitudinal variables common in studies predicting attitudes toward criminal justice policies. The socio-demographics of key interest are the respondent's gender and race. The gender variable is coded 0 for men and 1 for women. For race, the categories include white, African American, and Hispanic. Due to fewer observations, the "other" category captures the remaining racial/ethnic minorities. Similarly, due to a low number of Hispanic respondents, when the models are split by partisanship, we err on the side of caution and do not plot the predicted probabilities for Hispanics. Socio-demographic controls include the respondent's age, education level, and income level.

There are three attitudinal variables included in the empirical modeling. First, we include respondent partisanship. For the first stage of the analysis, a partisanship variable is included from a seven-point party identification measure that was collapsed into the groups Democrats, Independents, and Republicans ("leaners," such as leaning Democrat, are coded as partisan groupings). In the second stage of the analysis, we use the variation in the seven-point measure to explore whether there are gender and racial gaps among partisans and whether partisanship strength plays a role. Second, a measure of political interest is included in the analysis to account for the fact that some respondents might have differing levels of attention to policy debates. Finally, a continuous measure of political ideology is included since liberals and conservatives attitudinally differ on policing and correctional reforms. Coding for all variables used in this study is provided in Appendix A.

Results

In Table 1, we present descriptive and bivariate results for gender, race, and partisanship on support for the four policing and correctional reforms. In terms of the overall sample, the majority supports all four reforms. Over 80% of respondents support requiring police use of body cams while on duty and increasing prison sentences for repeat violent felons. Two-thirds of respondents (66.6%) support eliminating mandatory minimum sentences for nonviolent drug offenses. The most controversial reform was increasing police street presence by 10%, with just over a majority of respondents (54.7%) in support.

When looking at gender differences, women are statistically more likely to support requiring body cams, increased police street presence by 10%, and increased prison sentences for repeat violent offenders. In comparison, women are less likely to support eliminating mandatory minimum sentences for nonviolent drug offenders. The gender gaps are fairly consistent between

Table 1. Support for Policing and Correctional Reforms—Percent Support.

Question	Full sample (%)	Women (%)	Men (%)
Require body cams while on duty	87.5	89.5	85*
Increase police on streets by 10%	54.7	55.4	53.9*
Increase prison sentences for repeat offenders	84	85.7	81.9*
Eliminate mandatory minimum sentences	66.6	64.7	68.9*

Question	White (%)	African American (%)	Hispanic (%)	Other race (%)
Require body cams while on duty	86.2	94.1*	89.5*	86.9
Increase police on streets by 10%	56.4	47.6*	55.1	49.9*
Increase prison sentences for repeat offenders	85.2	76.6*	85.3	82.6*
Eliminate mandatory minimum sentences	65.6	76.3*	62.6*	64.9

Question	Dem (%)	Ind (%)	Rep (%)
Require body cams while on duty	93	86.8*	79.6*
Increase police on streets by 10%	46.5	51.4*	69*
Increase prison sentences for repeat offenders	77.3	84.8*	93.4*
Eliminate mandatory minimum sentences	78.5	63.4*	50.9*

*Indicates statistically significant bivariate relationship; survey weights utilized.

2% and 4%. The descriptive statistics provide some support for H_{1a} that gender gaps in support for criminal justice reform occur among the sample.

The results also provide some evidence that racial/ethnic gaps occur in support of the examined criminal justice reforms. African Americans are 8% more likely to support requiring body cams for police while on duty. Hispanics are less likely than African Americans to support requiring body cams, but 3% more likely than white respondents. Since African Americans are also more likely to encounter police brutality/violence (Davis et al., 2018; Mapping Police Violence, 2020), we expect African Americans to largely favor this policing reform (94%). Similarly, when asked about support for eliminating mandatory minimum sentences for nonviolent drug offenders, African American respondents are around 11% more likely to support the correctional reform than white respondents. Interestingly, Hispanic respondents are less likely than white and African American respondents to support this correctional reform. Respondents racially/ethnically classified as "other" were similar to White respondents. The racial gap is expected since African Americans are the dominant minority group historically subjected to racially biased criminal penalties (Malone, 2018).

There are two criminal justice reforms that African Americans are statistically less likely to support than white respondents, but no statistical differences occur between white and Hispanic respondents. Nearly all African American respondents oppose increasing police street presence by 10%, with a racial gap of 9% points. Respondents racially/ethnically classified as "other" were similar to African Americans. Likewise, African American respondents are about 9% less likely than white respondents to support increasing prison sentences for repeat violent offenders. Respondents in the "other" racial/ethnic category are 3% less likely than white respondents to support the correctional reform. Overall, results demonstrate that African Americans are more likely to support those that increase police oversight and reduce punishment for nonviolent offenses and less likely to support criminal justice reforms that are focused on punishment or increasing police street presence and, which provides some support for H_{1b}.[2]

The largest gaps in support for criminal justice reform in Table 1 exist when comparing partisan groupings. The reform with the greatest partisan gap exists when asking about support for eliminating mandatory minimum sentences for nonviolent drug offenders. Democrats (78.5%) are 27.6% more likely than Republicans (51%–49%) to support the correctional reform, splitting on support for eliminating mandatory minimums for nonviolent offenders. A similarly large gap exists when inquired about increasing police street presence. The gap between Democrats and Republicans is 22.5 percentage points. The majority of Democrats oppose increasing police street presence

(46.5%), with over two-thirds of Republicans (69%) in support. The next sizable partisan gap occurs on increasing prison sentences for repeat violent offenders, with Republicans 16 percentage points more likely to support the correctional reform than Democrats (77%–93%). Finally, Democrats are 13 percentage points more likely to support requiring body cams. The results provide some support for H_{1c}. When exploring partisanship, support for the four reforms mirrors white and African American respondents' racial comparisons. In particular, African American respondents support these reforms at almost identical rates as Democratic respondents.

In Table 2, we provide the multivariate results predicting support for the four criminal justice reforms. Significant gender gaps occur between women and men per reform, net of all factors. Women are more likely to support requiring body cams, increasing police street presence, and increasing prison sentences for repeat offenders. By contrast, women are less likely to support eliminating mandatory minimum sentences. In Figure 1, we plot predicted probabilities for the gender, race, and partisanship variables. The gender gaps are readily observable. On average, women are fivepercentage points more likely to support requiring police body cam use, increasing police street presence, and increasing prison sentences for repeat offenders, and seven percentage points less likely to support eliminating mandatory minimum sentences. These results are similar to the descriptive statistics and provide support for H_{1a}.

The racial differences in criminal justice reforms reported in the descriptive statistics greatly diminish when including other relevant independent variables in the analysis (Table 2 and Figure 1). The nine percentage point racial difference in the descriptive statistics in support of increased police street presence wanes after controlling other factors, as Table 2 shows no racial gap. Table 2 shows a statistically significant difference between white and African American respondents on the remaining three reforms. However, these racial gaps are substantially reduced when observing the plotted predicted probabilities (Figure 1). No racial gap occurs in predicting support for eliminating mandatory minimum sentences. Racial gaps are reduced to two and five percentage points when predicting support for requiring body cams and increasing prison sentences for repeat offenders, respectively. The results provide some indication that factors, such as partisanship, impact the existence of racial gaps in support for criminal justice reforms.

Partisanship has a strong predictive impact on support for criminal justice reforms, net of all factors (Table 2). Figure 1 demonstrates that the partisan gap is relatively large.[3] On policing reforms, Democrats are seven points more likely to support police body cam use but 10 points less likely to support increasing police street presence than Republicans. On correctional reforms, Democrats are eight points less likely to support increasing prison

Table 2. Models Predicting Support for Policing and Correctional Reforms.

	Require body cams	Increase street police 10%	Increase repeat felon prison sentences	Eliminate mandatory minimum sentences
(Intercept)	2.25* (0.12)	−0.86* (0.07)	1.16* (0.11)	1.07* (0.08)
Age	0.01* (0.00)	0.03* (0.00)	0.02* (0.00)	−0.01* (0.00)
Woman	0.33* (0.04)	0.17* (0.03)	0.33* (0.04)	−0.28* (0.03)
African American	0.43* (0.11)	−0.07 (0.05)	−0.35* (0.06)	0.16* (0.06)
Hispanic	0.19 (0.11)	0.27* (0.06)	0.26* (0.10)	−0.42* (0.07)
Race—Other	0.04 (0.08)	0.06 (0.06)	0.10 (0.07)	−0.25* (0.06)
Education	−0.09* (0.02)	−0.11* (0.01)	−0.15* (0.02)	0.04* (0.01)
Income	−0.05* (0.01)	0.01 (0.00)	0.02* (0.01)	−0.01 (0.01)
Political interest	0.03 (0.03)	−0.04 (0.02)	−0.21* (0.03)	0.26* (0.02)
Party ID—independent	−0.45* (0.08)	−0.08 (0.05)	0.19* (0.06)	−0.28* (0.05)
Party ID—Republican	−0.73* (0.06)	0.39* (0.04)	0.77* (0.07)	−0.66* (0.04)
Political ideology	−0.19* (0.02)	0.19* (0.01)	0.19* (0.02)	−0.27* (0.01)
N	53,694	53,685	53,692	53,697
AIC	37,023.32	66,303.27	39,788.94	61,090.23
BIC	37,450.10	66,730.03	40,215.70	61,517.00
Log Likelihood	−18,463.66	−33,103.63	−19,846.47	−30,497.12

*Indicates statistical significance at $p < .05$; standard errors in parentheses; Models estimated using survey weights.
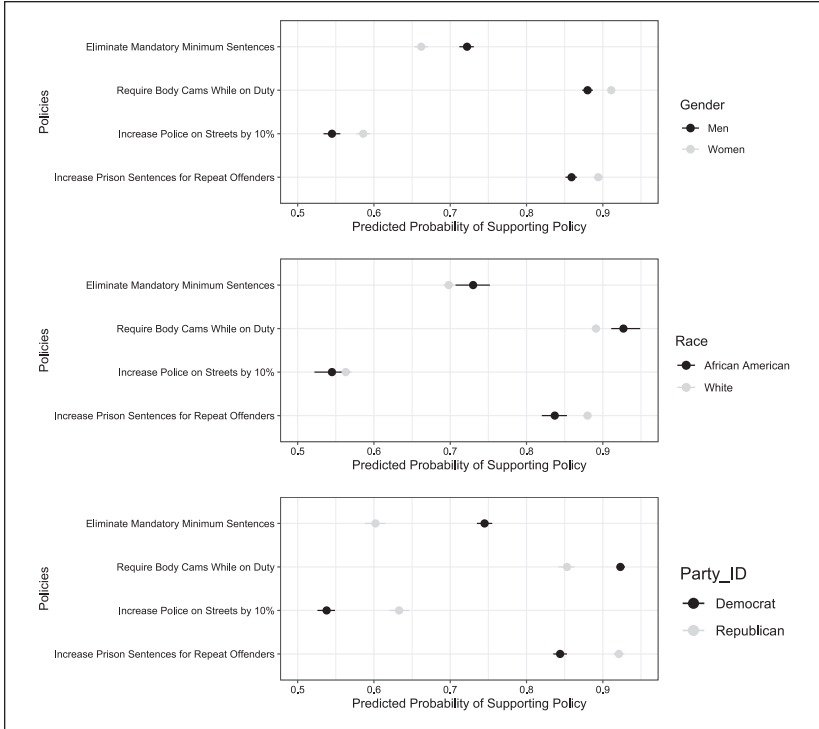
Figure 1. Predicted probabilities of gender, race, and party ID on support for reforms.

sentences for repeat offenders but 15 points more likely to support eliminating mandatory minimum sentences. Again, the results provide support for H_{1c} .

Partisan Gaps as an Explanation for Gender and Racial Gaps?

Table 3 presents the breakdown of partisan groupings for men and women and white and African American respondents. When looking at a potential gender gap, a larger percentage of women identify as a strong Democrat and not very strong or leans Democrat. In comparison, a larger percentage of men identify as a strong Republican and not very strong or leans Republican. The descriptive statistics should give us pause to ask whether Republican men are driving gender gaps in attitudes toward criminal justice reform and whether a gender gap ceases when predicting support within partisan categories?

Table 3. Partisanship by Gender and Race.

Party identification	Full sample (%)	Women (%)	Men (%)
Strong Democrat	25.2	27.3	22.6
Not very strong Democrat or leans Democrat	23.1	23.8	22.2
Independent	19.5	19.3	19.6
Not very strong republican or leans republican	19.2	17.1	21.6
Strong republican	13.1	12.4	14

Party identification	White (%)	African American (%)
Strong Democrat	20.8	53.1
Not very strong Democrat or leans Democrat	20.9	27.9
Independent	19.3	13.6
Not very strong Republican or leans Republican	22.8	3.5
Strong Republican	16.2	1.9

A similar trend exists when looking at the partisanship of white and African American respondents. African American respondents (53%) more often identify as a strong Democrat than white respondents (21%). Similarly, African Americans are seven percentage points more likely to identify as not very strong or leans Democrat than white respondents. By contrast, less than 6% of African Americans indicate any Republican identity, while 37% of white respondents indicate a form of Republican identity. Similar to the findings with gender, the results indicate that racial gaps in support for criminal justice reform could be a consequence of partisanship gaps.

To ascertain the link between gender, race, and partisanship, we estimate multiple regression models predicting support for the examined criminal justice reforms with the samples split by partisanship and strength of partisanship (see Appendix C). In Figure 2, we plot predicted probabilities for women and men by partisanship. Models predicting support for requiring body cams illustrate a tiny gender gap of one to two percentage points among strong partisans, with no gender difference among not strong or lean partisans. There is no gender gap among strong Democrat or Republican partisans and not strong or lean Democrats when predicting support for increasing police street presence. A slight gender gap (3%) occurs in predicting support for increasing police among respondents who indicate identity as not strong or leaning Republican. Predictive models of support for increasing prison
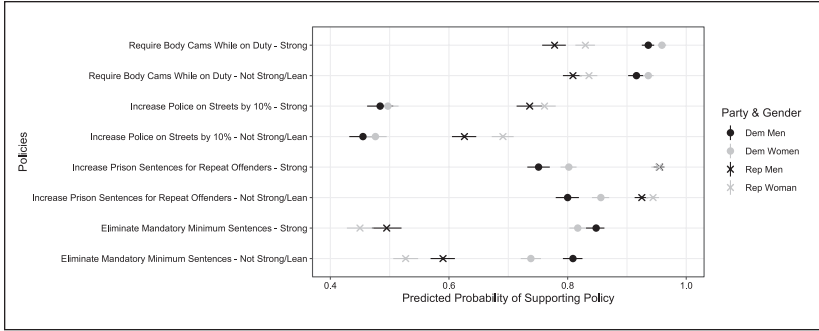
Figure 2. Predicted probabilities by gender—samples split by partisanship and strength of party ID.
Note. Predicted probabilities calculated holding all other variables at survey weighted means; 95% confidence bounds displayed.

sentences among violent repeat offenders show no gender gap among Republicans. By comparison, there is a five to six percentage point gender gap among Democrats. No gender difference occurs among strong Democrats or strong Republicans when predicting support for eliminating mandatory minimum sentences. However, a slight gender gap of four to six percentage points is evident among not strong or lean partisans in support of eliminating mandatory minimum sentences. Overall, the results indicate gender differences in support for reforms are very small when exploring within partisan groupings, which aligns with H_{2a}. Further, there are fewer gender differences in support for reform among strong partisans than weak partisans. These results provide support for H_{2b}.

Figure 3 presents the predicted probabilities for criminal justice reform support among white and African American respondents by partisanship. Since the number of African American respondents who identify as Republican is small, the confidence bounds for African American Republicans are large. The top graph illustrates Democrats, with the lower graph depicting Republicans. No racial gaps occur between respondents who identify as strong Democrats on support for any of the four reforms. By comparison, racial gaps occur among African American and white respondents who identify as not strong or leans Democrat. However, these racial gaps are relatively small, at less than three percentage points. Only one racial gap in support for any of the examined reforms exists between the examined Republican identities. Specifically, African American respondents who identify as not strong or lean Republican are about two percentage points more likely to support eliminating mandatory minimum sentences. Overall, we see that among partisan
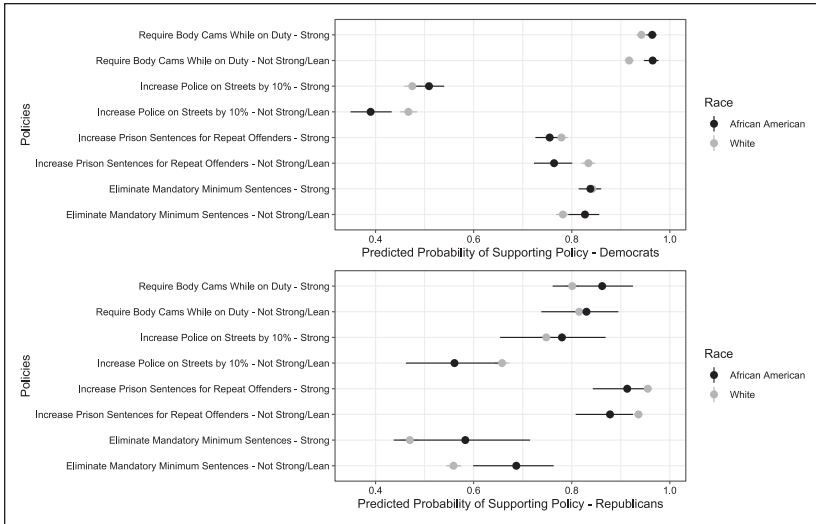
Figure 3. Predicted probabilities by race—samples split by partisanship and strength of party ID.
Note. Predicted probabilities calculated holding all other variables at survey weighted means; 95% confidence bounds displayed.

groupings, racial gaps are nonexistent or are substantively small, which supports H_{2a}. We also find no racial gaps in support for reform among respondents who identify as strong partisans. The results provide convincing support for H_{2b}.

The majority of the public are supportive of policing and correctional reform within the criminal justice system. Gender and race/ethnicity initially appear to help understand public opinion on criminal justice reform. However, the gender and racial gaps of the examined measures of reform are largely a product of partisanship differences (Eckhouse, 2019). An increase in a diverse political leadership among Democrats can address the historical blind spots that have long been unresponsive to the needs of women and African American and Hispanic communities.

Limitations

While the study made steps toward identifying public attitudes on topical criminal justice reforms, it is not without limitations. First, our models did not incorporate criminal victimization experiences, which have been shown to vary attitudes on policing and correctional policies by race and ethnicity (Costelloe et al., 2009; Johnson & Kuhns, 2009).[4] It is also unknown whether

participants have had vicarious exposure to incarceration, which reduces support for harsh penalties among African Americans (Johnson, 2007). Second, while political interest was considered a measurement of the respondents' awareness of government policy issues, various media outlets' consumption may have influenced the examined reforms' value. For instance, Republicans who consumed more news stories on recent police killings of African American citizens usually adopted the already held perspective of liberals and Democrats—the treatment of African Americans by police is a widespread problem (Haider-Markel & Joslyn, 2017; Nelson et al., 2007).

Research implications. Our results contribute to several methodological considerations for future work. First, research should continue investigating demographic groups by partisanship when exploring public opinion on criminal justice reform. Second, the current research fills a significant empirical hole by supplying attitudinal research on salient issues within policing, especially among persons of color. This research's urgency is based on the overrepresentation of people of color in deadly police-citizen interactions and public interest (Google Trends, 2020; Mapping Police Violence, 2020). Third, subsequent work should discontinue an amalgamation of all minorities representing minority thought is at odds with evidentiary support for a racial-ethnic hierarchy in public attitudes toward reforms.

Prevention, clinical, and policy implications. For criminal justice reform to garner political traction, there needs to be greater congruence between overall partisanship in the population and the partisanship of elected officials. In particular, legislative bodies are underrepresented when it comes to Democratic party representation. While institutions such as the United States Senate were designed to overrepresent smaller, more rural states, other legislative bodies have witnessed unequal representation due to factors beyond initial design. Gerrymandering has made the effort for equal representation difficult as politicians facilitate their success by geographically carving out constituents by partisanship, resulting in predetermined election winners. While both parties have used gerrymandering, Republicans are demographically homogeneous, whereas politicians who identify as women and/or African Americans tend to be Democrats (Lu et al., 2020; United States Senate, 2020). Specifically, political representation by women in the United States Congress has grown from one in five to one in four from 2016 to 2021, with about two-thirds identifying as white (Center for American Women and Politics, 2021). While the political representation within Congress continues to broaden in gender, racial, and ethnic diversity, often among Democrats, these figures are still disproportionately males and non-Hispanic whites and considerably larger than their 50% and 60% share of the overall United States

population, respectively (Census, 2021). The likelihood of collective reform is less possible with Republican overrepresentation since they view criminality as a consequence of individual responsibility (Eckhouse, 2019; Haider-Markel & Joslyn, 2017; Malone, 2018; Peffley & Hurwitz, 2007). Moreover, white males and persons adhering to conservatism view police killings of unarmed African Americans and tend to be more punitive than their counterparts (Costelloe et al., 2009). By contrast, Democratic leaders are more likely to be attracted to reform as they view criminality resulting from broader social issues (Eckhouse, 2019; Haider-Markel & Joslyn, 2017; Malone, 2018; Peffley & Hurwitz, 2007). The gender and racial diversity within the Democrat Party allows for more voices that can resonate with the public at large. Campaigns that seek to achieve fair electoral maps could ultimately result in policing and correctional reforms in the long run if successful.

If Democrats are contenders, women and African Americans should be identified as the leaders. As women continue to increase their representation within political institutions, gendered politics can alter an existing male-dominated institution's political agenda. Though attitudinal research of female politicians on policing styles is needed, Johnson and Kuhns (2009) research provides evidentiary support that female politicians will be less approving of police use of force than their male counterparts. Female political representation is fruitful to correctional reform. Transitioning to a female governorship from a former male governor was associated with increased spending on social programs and reductions in the racially biased crack cocaine laws (Malone, 2018). Likewise, female legislators' presence brought decreased imprisonment of African Americans, and unlike African American elected officials, decreased racial disparities in imprisonment (Yates & Fording, 2005). While these findings speak to women in general, the study's data suggests that Republican female leaders will share their male counterparts' perspectives on criminality. Finally, female politicians may also recognize the challenges of incarceration. For instance, in addition to one-fifth of women being civilly disfranchised, women are more likely than men to be familiar with a family member who has been incarcerated (Elderbroom et al., 2018; Uggen et al., 2020).

Electing Democratic African American leaders is also valuable to criminal justice reform. As our data shows, most African Americans are Democrats (Eckhouse, 2019; Nelson et al., 2007). Thus, racial and partisan gerrymandering has diluted the political power of communities of color. The results have been policing issues not being readily visible to politicians, as whites are less likely to report improper policing behaviors and unjustified police contact points than African Americans and Hispanics (Davis et al., 2018). The social unrest on police brutality and violence will unlikely be abated if the racial diversity of rank-in-file police officers are not commensurate with

the communities they police and if police leadership continues to be predominantly white (Leatherby & Oppel, 2020). Gerrymandering has also occurred via prisons, whereby prisoners are counted where incarcerated, not where their residence was before incarceration. Political leaders of these communities with prisons will continue to exploit prisoners because they have a strong incentive to oppose correctional reform that would decrease incarceration rates. Such political abuses against minority groups, especially African Americans, can be lessened as states with greater electoral strength held by African American leaders were strongly associated with decreases in African Americans' imprisonment (Yates & Fording, 2005). The uneven impact of incarceration, which has disproportionately burdened families and communities of color, primarily African Americans, has diminished their civil voice for their interests to be actualized because of civil disfranchisement (Uggen et al., 2020). Like gender, the voices of politicians of color may resonate with communities of color, with gender and race/ethnicity as a vehicle to mobilize significant momentum in reform as they understand their lived experiences.

Appendix A: Variable Coding

Independent Variables

- *Age*—respondent's age at the time of the survey.
- *Gender*—0 = man; 1 = woman;
- *Income*—net annual income, 16 categories from 1 = less than $10,000 to 16 = $500,000 or more.
- *Race*—nominal level, white; African American; Hispanic; "other" race
- *Education*—highest level of education, 1 = no high school; 2 = high school graduate; 3 = some college; 4 = 2-year college; 5 = 4-year college; 6 = post grad
- *Party ID*—7-point party ID; Strong Democrat to Strong Republican
- *Political Ideology*—continuous measure, −3 = very liberal to 3 = very conservative.
- *Political Interest*—How much attention paid to politics? 0 = hardly at all; 1 = only now and then; 2 = some of the time; 3 = most of the time.

Dependent Variables (0 = oppose; 1 = support)

1. Eliminate mandatory minimum sentences for non-violent drug offenders?
2. Require police officers to wear body cameras that record all of their activities while on duty?

3. Increase the number of police on the street by 10%, even if it means fewer funds for other public services?
4. Increase prison sentences for felons who have already committed two or more serious or violent crimes?

Appendix B: Descriptive Statistics

Table B1. Descriptive Statistics—Socio-Demographics.

Variable	Min	Median	Mean	Max	SD
Age	18	49	47.9	99	16.8
Income	1	6	6.3	16	3.3
Education	1	3	3.7	6	1.5

Variable	White	African American	Hispanic	Other	
Race	71.7%	12.3%	8.1%	8%	
Variable	0	1			
Gender	45.7%	54.3%			

Table B2. Descriptive Statistics—Political Attitudes.

Variable	Min	Median	Mean	Max	SD
Political ideology	−3	0	0.1	3	1.8
Political interest	0	2	2.2	3	0.9

Variable	Democrat	Independent	Republican
Party ID	48.2%	19.5%	32.3%

Table B3. Descriptive Statistics—Partisanship among Hispanics and Other Races.

Party identification	Hispanic (%)	Other—race (%)
Strong Democrat	28.6	19.2
Not very strong Democrat or leans Democrat	30.5	27.7
Independent	20.6	28.7
Not very strong Republican or leans Republican	13.1	16.3
Strong Republican	8.2	8.1

Appendix C: Models Predicting Support for Policies—Samples Split by Partisanship

Table C1. Predicting Support for Policies—Strong Democrat Sample.

	Eliminate mandatory minimum sentences	Require body cams	Increase street police 10%	Increase repeat felon prison sentences
(Intercept)	0.28 (0.18)	1.08* (0.30)	−0.34* (0.15)	1.56* (0.18)
Age	−0.00 (0.00)	0.03* (0.00)	0.02* (0.00)	0.02* (0.00)
Woman	−0.22* (0.08)	0.47* (0.12)	0.05 (0.06)	0.29* (0.06)
African American	−0.03 (0.10)	0.50* (0.18)	0.13 (0.07)	−0.14 (0.08)
Hispanic	−0.71* (0.14)	0.31 (0.23)	0.23 (0.13)	0.53* (0.14)
Race—Other	−0.24 (0.16)	0.18 (0.22)	0.22* (0.11)	0.02 (0.12)
Education	0.15* (0.03)	−0.08 (0.04)	−0.13* (0.02)	−0.18* (0.02)
Income	−0.01 (0.01)	−0.03 (0.02)	0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)
Political interest	0.44* (0.05)	0.17* (0.08)	−0.06 (0.04)	−0.24* (0.05)
Political ideology	−0.22* (0.02)	−0.18* (0.04)	0.22* (0.02)	0.15* (0.02)
N	14,210	14212	14204	14205
AIC	11,176.25	5,319.24	16,359.09	13,069.72
BIC	11,478.72	5,621.71	16,661.54	13,372.17
Log Likelihood	−55,48.13	−2,619.62	−8,139.54	−6,494.86

Table C2. Predicting Support for Policies—Not Strong/Lean Democrat Sample.

	Eliminate mandatory minimum sentences	Require body cams	Increase street police 10%	Increase repeat felon prison sentences
(Intercept)	0.69* (0.16)	1.78* (0.27)	−0.70* (0.15)	1.48* (0.21)
Age	−0.01* (0.00)	0.01* (0.00)	0.03* (0.00)	0.02* (0.00)
Woman	−0.41* (0.07)	0.30* (0.11)	0.09 (0.06)	0.39* (0.08)
African American	0.29* (0.12)	0.91* (0.23)	−0.32* (0.10)	−0.44* (0.12)
Hispanic	−0.50* (0.12)	0.12 (0.22)	0.32* (0.11)	0.31 (0.18)
Race—Other	−0.49* (0.11)	0.08 (0.17)	0.08 (0.11)	0.22 (0.12)
Education	0.02 (0.03)	−0.04 (0.05)	−0.10* (0.02)	−0.16* (0.03)
Income	0.01 (0.01)	−0.06* (0.02)	0.01 (0.01)	0.02 (0.01)
Political interest	0.35* (0.04)	0.18* (0.06)	−0.17* (0.04)	−0.26* (0.06)
Political ideology	−0.34* (0.03)	−0.15* (0.05)	0.29* (0.03)	0.24* (0.04)
N	12,783	12,781	12,780	12,780
AIC	12,078.44	6,332.56	14,904.87	10,687.72
BIC	12,376.67	6,630.79	15,203.10	10,985.94
Log Likelihood	−5,999.22	−3,126.28	−7,412.44	−5,303.86

* Indicates statistical significance at $p < .05$; standard errors in parentheses; Models estimated using survey weights.

Table C3. Predicting Support for Policies—Strong Republican Sample.

	Eliminate mandatory minimum sentences	Require body cams	Increase street police 10%	Increase repeat Felon prison sentences
(Intercept)	0.58* (0.20)	1.82* (0.23)	0.24 (0.21)	1.27* (0.37)
Age	−0.01* (0.00)	0.02* (0.00)	0.02* (0.00)	0.03* (0.01)
Woman	−0.18* (0.07)	0.33* (0.08)	0.13 (0.08)	−0.01 (0.16)
African American	0.46 (0.30)	0.44 (0.35)	0.18 (0.32)	−0.71* (0.35)
Hispanic	−0.08 (0.18)	0.24 (0.22)	0.07 (0.21)	0.20 (0.29)
Race—Other	0.16 (0.17)	0.11 (0.19)	−0.05 (0.20)	−0.39 (0.39)
Education	0.03 (0.03)	−0.14* (0.03)	−0.09* (0.03)	−0.07 (0.07)
Income	−0.02 (0.01)	−0.04* (0.01)	−0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.03)
Political interest	0.16* (0.05)	−0.15* (0.06)	−0.00 (0.06)	−0.02 (0.10)
Political ideology	−0.25* (0.03)	−0.16* (0.04)	0.07* (0.03)	0.19* (0.05)
N	7,295	7,294	7,295	7,296
AIC	11,069.96	8,051.75	9,097.32	3,277.35
BIC	11,345.76	8,327.54	9,373.12	3,553.16
Log Likelihood	−5,494.98	−3,985.87	−4,508.66	−1,598.68

*Indicates statistical significance at $p < .05$; standard errors in parentheses; Models estimated using survey weights.

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Table C4. Predicting Support for Policies—Not Strong/Lean Republican Sample.

	Eliminate mandatory minimum sentences	Require body cams	Increase street police 10%	Increase repeat Felon prison sentences
(Intercept)	0.86* (0.16)	2.00* (0.19)	−0.87* (0.16)	1.30* (0.29)
Age	−0.01* (0.00)	0.01* (0.00)	0.03* (0.00)	0.03* (0.00)
Woman	−0.25* (0.06)	0.19* (0.08)	0.29* (0.06)	0.30* (0.13)
African American	0.55* (0.20)	0.10 (0.28)	−0.41* (0.21)	−0.71* (0.28)
Hispanic	−0.01 (0.16)	0.64* (0.22)	0.25 (0.16)	0.04 (0.29)
Race—Other	−0.16 (0.12)	0.13 (0.15)	−0.10 (0.12)	−0.02 (0.20)
Education	−0.00 (0.02)	−0.08* (0.03)	−0.11* (0.02)	−0.17* (0.04)
Income	−0.02 (0.01)	−0.05* (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.06* (0.02)
Political interest	0.17* (0.04)	−0.06 (0.05)	0.03 (0.04)	−0.12 (0.07)
Political ideology	−0.22* (0.03)	−0.22* (0.04)	−0.00 (0.03)	0.09 (0.06)
N	10,639	10,637	10,637	10,638
AIC	15,047.90	10,549.23	13,665.86	5,712.19
BIC	15,338.79	10,840.11	13,956.75	6,003.08
Log Likelihood	−7,483.95	−5,234.61	−6,792.93	−2,816.09

*Indicates statistical significance at $p < .05$; standard errors in parentheses; Models estimated using survey weights.

Table C5. Predicting Support for Policies—Independent Sample.

	Eliminate mandatory minimum sentences	Require body cams	Increase street police 10%	Increase repeat Felon prison sentences
(Intercept)	1.14* (0.17)	2.13* (0.26)	−1.42* (0.17)	0.64* (0.23)
Age	−0.01* (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.03* (0.00)	0.03* (0.00)
Woman	−0.37* (0.08)	0.43* (0.11)	0.29* (0.08)	0.51* (0.11)
African American	0.01 (0.16)	−0.05 (0.26)	−0.50* (0.16)	−0.59* (0.19)
Hispanic	−0.36* (0.16)	−0.13 (0.26)	0.26 (0.15)	−0.14 (0.23)
Race—Other	−0.26* (0.12)	−0.15 (0.19)	0.04 (0.12)	0.05 (0.17)
Education	0.02 (0.03)	−0.09* (0.04)	−0.08* (0.03)	−0.08* (0.04)
Income	−0.00 (0.01)	−0.06* (0.02)	0.01 (0.01)	0.04* (0.02)
Political interest	0.16* (0.04)	0.07 (0.06)	0.04 (0.04)	−0.20* (0.05)
Political ideology	−0.20* (0.03)	−0.14* (0.05)	0.09* (0.03)	0.15* (0.05)
N	8,770	8,770	8,769	8,773
AIC	11,292.69	6,620.68	11,717.55	6,790.93
BIC	11,575.85	6,903.84	12,000.71	7,074.11
Log Likelihood	−5,606.34	−3,270.34	−5,818.78	−3,355.47

*Indicates statistical significance at $p < .05$; Standard errors in parentheses; Models estimated using survey weights.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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Notes

1. As a robustness check, models were estimated for respondents who identified as "not very strong" partisans and "leans" in a partisan direction separately. The results were substantively the same as the results presented here with the two groups combined. Additionally, models were estimated for Independents. Since there is no theoretical guidance in terms of expectations for Independents, we chose to include these results in the appendix rather than in the manuscript body.
2. Due to a low number of observations, comparisons of Hispanics and respondents who identify with another racial/ethnic group are not possible, as evidenced by the inconsistent patterns.
3. Predicted probabilities are not presented for Independents because there are no clear theoretical expectations for the groups of non-partisans.
4. The 2016 CCES contained one question relating to personal victimization. Because of a lack of variance to the query, its addition to the models added no substantive changes.

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