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Editor's Preface to the Spring Edition

Here at Elon University, we are extremely grateful to host The *Pi Sigma Alpha Undergraduate Journal of Politics* for the sixth semester. We are proud to present the Spring 2023 issue and congratulate all authors published in this issue for their high achievement.

This publication seeks to highlight the intellectual curiosity that leads to innovative scholarship in all subfields of political science, scholarship that addresses timely questions, is carefully crafted, and utilizes diverse methodologies. We are committed to intellectual integrity, a fair and objective review process, and a high standard of scholarship as we showcase the work of undergraduate scholars, most of whom pursue questions that have been traditionally ignored in scholarship but that drive our discipline forward.

Following the lead of the *American Political Science Review* (APSR) Editorial Board, we are excited to publish research in the areas of "American politics, comparative politics, international relations, political theory, public law and policy, racial and ethnic politics, the politics of gender and sexuality and qualitative and quantitative research methods." This publication also values the relationships formed through student-faculty collaboration and aims to build a culture of scholarship that expands beyond the college campus. We hope to encourage and empower students to seek out knowledge and pursue their potential, contributing to scholarship in a variety of disciplines.

This year, we thank our advisors Dr. Baris Kesgin and Dr. Aaron Sparks for their support, without which the issue would not have been possible. We would also like to thank the entirety of the Political Science and Policy Studies Department at Elon University; our Faculty Advisory Board; and all the students who shared their exceptional work with us this semester.

We are excited to present the Spring 2023 edition of the *Journal*. Thank you for your continued support and readership of our publication; we hope you enjoy the edition.

Sincerely,

The Editorial Board at Elon University

Submission of Manuscripts

The *Journal* accepts manuscripts from undergraduates of any class and major. Members of Pi Sigma Alpha are especially encouraged to submit their work. We strive to publish papers of the highest quality in all areas of political science.

Generally, selected manuscripts have been well-written works with a fully developed thesis and strong argumentation stemming from original analysis. Authors may be asked to revise their work before being accepted for publication.

Submission deadlines are September 15th for the Fall edition and February 15th for the Spring edition. Manuscripts are accepted on a rolling basis; therefore, early submissions are strongly encouraged.

Students may submit their work through Elon University's submission portal, found here: https://www.elon.edu/u/academics/arts-and-sciences/political-science/psa-journal/

Alternatively, students may email psajournalelon@gmail.com with an attached Word document of the manuscript. In the body of the email, students are asked to include their name and university, the title of the manuscript, and the closest subfield of political science to which their manuscript pertains (American politics, comparative politics, international relations, political theory, or policy studies). Due to the time committed to the manuscript review process, we ask students to submit only one manuscript per submission cycle.

Submitted manuscripts must include a short abstract (approximately 150 words) and citations/references that follow the *APSA Style Manual for Political Science*. Please do not exceed the maximum page length of 35 double-spaced pages, which includes references, tables, figures, and appendices.

The *Journal* is a student-run enterprise with editors and an Editorial Board that are undergraduate students and Pi Sigma Alpha members at Elon University. The Editorial Board relies heavily on the help of our Faculty Advisory Board, which consists of political science faculty from across the nation, including members of the Pi Sigma Alpha Executive Council.

Please direct any questions about submissions or the Journal's upcoming editions to the editors at Elon University: psajournalelon@gmail.com.

Contents

"Stop the Steal" and Other Lies: Partisan Cheerleading and Misinformation

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Allegations of widespread electoral fraud called into question the validity of the 2020 US presidential election. Then-President Donald Trump even claimed that the election was rigged against him. This skepticism regarding the security of U.S. elections fueled several demonstrations across the country, culminating in the January 6, 2021, attack on the US Capitol. Despite the severity of these events, the consensus remains that widespread election fraud did not occur. What motivates one to spread allegations of electoral fraud? Do these claims represent sincere concerns for the safety and security of democratic institutions, or are they primarily partisan weapons used to subvert the opposition? To answer these questions, I conducted a survey of Republicans to assess if their belief in electoral fraud is genuine and caused by motivated reasoning, or, if their belief is disingenuous and informed by partisan cheerleading. The results indicate that Republicans are broadly aware that widespread electoral fraud did not take place, yet they may still be inclined to spread misinformation suggesting otherwise, presenting worrisome implications for the future of American democracy.

INTRODUCTION

In the wake of the 2020 United States general election, allegations of widespread electoral fraud from some news organizations and elected officials called into question the validity of the election results. A December 2020 poll even found that 77% of Republicans believed that widespread fraud did occur (Malloy and Schwartz 2020). These claims permeated all the way to the Office of the President of the United States. In a speech held at the White House on December 2, 2020, President Donald Trump decried, "This election is about great voter fraud, fraud that has never been seen like this before. It's about poll watchers who were not allowed to watch. So illegal…This election was rigged. Everybody knows it" (Trump 2020).

This skepticism regarding the safety and security of U.S. electoral systems fueled a number of demonstrations across the country, culminating in the January 6, 2021 attack on the US Capitol building, wherein supporters of President Donald Trump stormed the United States Capitol after attending a rally protesting alleged acts of voter fraud. Despite the severity of these events, the consensus remains that widespread election fraud did not take place (Bastian et al 2021; Department of Justice and Department of Homeland Security 2021). This dissonance between allegations of electoral fraud and the lack of evidence supporting these claims warrants further investigation into the nature of misinformation and how it contributes to potentially disastrous outcomes for democratic institutions. What motivates one to spread allegations of electoral fraud? Do these claims represent genuine concerns for the safety and security of democratic institutions, or do they exist primarily as partisan weapons used to subvert the opposition?

To assess these questions, I turn to the existing literature on political misinformation, and in doing so, I suggest two divergent hypotheses as possible explanations. To evaluate these hypotheses, I take an experimental approach aimed at gauging the extent to which individuals believe partisan-aligned misinformation. The findings suggest that partisan misinformation is often expressed insincerely, which may have troubling implications for democratic institutions.

NAVIGATING THE LITERATURE: COMPETING THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

The ways in which partisans consume information and then act with that new knowledge are often considered through the competing lenses of "motivated reasoning" and "partisan cheerleading." Motivated reasoning, or the act of uncritically accepting information that is favorable to one's political affiliation, breeds ground for misinformation to thrive (Kunda 1990; Taber and Lodge 2006). Partisan cheerleading, on the other hand, describes the act of willfully upholding misinformation *despite being well informed*, in order to bolster support for one's party, ostensibly "cheerleading" for their side (Peterson and Iyengar 2021; Schaffner and Luks 2018). This is an important distinction to make, as much of the relevant literature on this subject explores the spread of misinformation through these two lenses. However, these mechanisms tend to contradict each other in terms of assessing the root causes of individuals engaging in misinformation. Because of this, there are two distinct camps in the literature that suggest conflicting hypotheses when it comes to the issue of election fraud claims.

One thread of the existing literature suggests that claims of electoral fraud are genuine, presenting a solid

case for the existence of motivated reasoning. Scholars have found that prominent figures within a given political party maintain substantial influence over their rank-and-file party members' beliefs (Bullock 2011). Political positions that are not ideologically consistent with voters' views are often still supported if said voters' preferred party speaks in support of them, suggesting that "party loyalists" are more common than "ideological puritans" (Barber and Pope 2019). One study has revealed that voters will often adopt the policy positions of legislators, even if only presented with weak evidence supporting them (Broockman and Butler 2017). Studies have also shown that partisan elites can influence their constituents' beliefs on issues as wide-ranging as national economic performance, immigration policy, and climate change (Druckman et al. 2013; Bisgaard and Slothuus 2018). Some scholars have even shown the extent to which party elites' rhetoric can influence supporters, with some voters going so far as to forgive violations of democratic norms committed by candidates (Clayton et al. 2021; Carey et al. 2020). Similarly, on issues of electoral fraud, partisan elites have been shown to have a direct influence on their constituents' perceptions of election validity and direct allegations of voter fraud by party elites have been shown to decrease voters' confidence in elections (Beaulieu 2014; Berlinski et al. 2021). This suggests that claims of electoral fraud from political elites could directly affect voters' genuine beliefs about the existence and extent of fraud during the 2020 presidential election.

These dynamics are reinforced by news organizations and their ability to influence those who consume their news (Nelson et al. 1997; Flynn and Krupnikov 2019). With the increasing prevalence of "fake news" in recent years, many researchers have explored the effect of political misinformation in influencing voters (Pennycook and Rand 2019a; Clayton et al. 2019), as well as the role of exposure to misinformation over time (Pennycook and Rand 2019b; Pennycook et al. 2018). The proliferation of political polarization in recent decades has also had a profound impact on how voters consume news (Iyengar et al. 2019; Stroud 2010). Studies have shown that partisans tend to have an unfavorable view of news sources which they perceive as uncongenial with their party, whether or not the source actually has a divergent partisan stance (Peterson and Kagalwala 2021). This phenomenon appears to become more prevalent around election time, as partisans are less likely to consume "out-of-party" news, resulting in less critical views of their party's candidate (Peterson et al. 2019). Even in more authoritarian settings, political actors have been shown to seek out and internalize information in-line with their particular political preferences (Robertson 2017).

Research into the formation of political misconceptions and their consequences has revealed the prevalence of partisan elites, as well as partisan media, in promoting unsubstantiated claims (Flynn et al. 2017; Druckman and McGrath 2019). As prior exposure to misinformation has shown to increase that misinformation's perceived accuracy, it is reasonable to assume that claims of election fraud maintain the same durability (Pennycook et al. 2018). This suggests the following hypothesis:

> H1: *Claims of election fraud represent sincere beliefs and genuine concern for American democracy*

In stark contrast, another strand of the literature suggests quite different motivations for spreading claims of electoral fraud, largely rooted in partisan cheerleading. When assessing individuals' perceptions of voter fraud, the need for understanding ulterior partisan motives is crucial, especially when they contain substantial material implications, as was made clear following the January 6th Capitol Riots. The 2020 election saw unprecedented levels of growth in terms of individual voters' party loyalty, averaging out at 95.4% (Jacobson 2021). Prior research has suggested that loyalty is a prime factor in determining the strength of one's partisanship, with more loyal voters exhibiting stronger partisan attachment (Clifford 2017). Subsequently, when threatened with electoral loss, strongly identified partisans feel angrier than weakly identified partisans. These emotional responses to expected political outcomes have been shown to spur electoral engagement, with strongly identified partisans becoming more inclined to engage in political action (e.g. volunteering, donating) than others (Huddy et al. 2015). What remains unclear is the extent to which this partisan-calcified political action wanes after the election has been called. However, given the increasingly polarized nature of American politics, emotionally motivated political action may very well continue beyond election day.

One such way that partisan political action manifests itself outside of the election season is through survey-based research. Previous literature has suggested that partisan responses to survey questions can often represent insincere beliefs (Bullock and Lenz 2019). Prior survey research has indeed uncovered evidence of partisan cheerleading among both Democratic and Republican voters and has gone further to implement methods that measurably reduce such acts (Bullock et al. 2015; Khanna and Sood 2018). These actions reveal that *partisan voters' fact-based political knowledge is often correct, despite upholding opposite claims* (Prior et al. 2015).

As partisan actors absorb claims of electoral fraud from ideologically congenial or uncongenial sources, they externally present these claims in a manner that is representative of their political association in order to express party solidarities (Taber and Lodge 2006). In other words, claims of electoral fraud could represent insincere acts of partisan cheerleading, used simply as a means of expressing partisan sympathy over empirical analysis (Schaffner and Luks 2018). This is equally as prevalent in the case of well-informed partisan actors, who knowingly represent a version of the truth that is inconsistent with the observed consensus, instead opting to uphold the party line (Prior et al. 2015). Contrasting with Hypothesis 1, this strand of the literature would suggest

that claims of electoral fraud are not sincere expressions of concern, but instead embody a form of political posturing used to undermine the democratic process. For this reason, the literature points to a divergent hypothesis:

> H2: *Claims of election fraud are insincere and are expressive of individuals' political leanings, as opposed to their factual knowledge*

Considering the harmful repercussions that beliefs in electoral fraud can have on our political atmosphere (as exemplified by the January 6th Capitol Riots), it is crucial that social scientists develop a comprehensive understanding of what claims of electoral fraud truly represent. These competing hypotheses provide the potential for developing a deeper understanding of how partisan actors consume political news and act given that new knowledge, which is vital for ensuring the longevity of democratic institutions.

METHODOLOGY

Given the difficulty of assessing and directly observing the motivations behind the spread of misinformation, I instead assess the effect of misinformation on those who espouse it. In particular, I seek to measure the extent to which misinformation peddlers believe their own misinformation. To do so, I take an experimental approach to my research. I model this approach after Bullock et al (2015) in which the authors develop a method for measuring partisan cheerleading. The authors conducted a survey in which respondents in the treatment condition were monetarily compensated for providing correct and "I don't know" answers to factual questions, while those in the control condition were not. This measurably reduced partisan cheerleading relative to the control group, resulting in decreased partisan divergence in reporting factual knowledge. As such, the authors provide a useful template that can be modified to better assess belief in electoral fraud in particular.

Research Design

Following this logic, I conducted an incentive-based survey experiment. I limited my analysis to self-identified Republicans, as such partisans are the most likely to make claims of electoral fraud benefitting Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden at the expense of Republican incumbent Donald Trump during the 2020 Presidential Election.[1] In this experiment, 203 Republican participants were recruited on Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) platform during July 2022, and they were randomly assigned to the control group (N = 99), or the treatment group (N = 104).

While experimental research conducted on MTurk has shown to be more representative of US demographics than comparable convenience sampling methods, recent concerns about bots and fraudulent, non-US respondents on MTurk have brought into question the validity of data quality on the site (Berisnky et al. 2012; Chmielewski and Kucker 2020). To ensure the data quality of this study, the survey was fielded onto MTurk through CloudResearch, an online platform that utilizes API integration to connect directly with Mechanical Turk and offers researchers extra tools that aid in data collection. In particular, CloudResearch utilizes an independent pre-screening feature to vet whether or not survey takers have shown to be attentive and engaged in past surveys, compiling these respondents into a pool of CloudResearch-Approved Participants. While this limits the number of total MTurk respondents who can be reached, the quality of data has shown to be higher than standard MTurk studies (Rivera et al. 2022).

Additional parameters were also set up to ensure that, of the CloudResearch-Approved Participants, only those who have completed 50 prior MTurk tasks at a 50% or higher approval rating were eligible to participate in the study. Within the survey, a reCAPTCHA filter was also included to weed-out potential bot respondents as well. After the survey was fielded, any question responses with suspiciously short completion times (below two standard deviations from the mean completion time) were eliminated from analysis, as well as any responses that originated from a suspicious IP address. These protections have been adopted by other political scientists with some success, improving data quality relative to other MTurk studies (Utych 2021; Kennedy et al. 2020).

With regards to the content of the survey itself, participants were asked to answer 5 factual questions relating to politically contentious topics, placing particular emphasis on issues important to the Republican party.[2] The participants were informed that they had 30 seconds to answer each question. This was done to discourage them from utilizing outside sources when answering the factual questions. The respondents were then asked the following five questions:[3]

- *"Did widespread electoral fraud benefitting Joe Biden occur during the 2020 US Presidential election?"*
- *"Has Joe Biden cut military spending during his time in office?"*
- *"Have there been more than 500,000 deaths from COVID-19 in the United States?"*
- *"Did ANTIFA orchestrate the January 6th 2021 US Capitol riots?"*
- *"Generally speaking, has the US unemployment rate decreased under Joe Biden's Presidency?"*

Upon completion of the survey, participants in both conditions were then paid a $0.50 flat fee. Following the method developed by Bullock et al. (2015), members of the treatment condition were additionally informed beforehand that they will be awarded $0.20 for each correct answer and $0.10 for each "I don't know" / "unsure" answer. In short, both

control and treatment group participants earned at least $0.50 for participating, while those in the treatment group had the potential to earn up to $1.50 if they provided correct answers to each question. This payment scheme allows for potential differentiation among the motivated reasoning *(Hypothesis 1)* and partisan cheerleading *(Hypothesis 2)* explanations of misinformation. Survey results would suggest support for motivated reasoning and thus genuine belief in electoral fraud if the control and treatment groups maintain similar responses *(H1)*. On the other hand, results would provide support for partisan cheerleading and insincere political expression if belief in electoral fraud is substantially different between the control and treatment groups *(H2)*.

Data

The unit of analysis for this study is the individual respondent. The independent variable is the respondent condition (i.e. whether they are in the treatment or the control group) and the primary dependent variable of interest is their response to the question about electoral fraud. Of the 203 total respondents surveyed, 37% reported that widespread electoral fraud *did not* occur, while 22% were unsure, and 41% incorrectly reported that widespread electoral fraud *did* occur. Of those in the control group, 30% accurately reported that electoral fraud did not occur, while 26% were unsure and 43% incorrectly reported that electoral fraud did occur. The treatment group tells somewhat of a different story, with 43% of those in the treatment condition correctly reporting that widespread electoral fraud did not occur, while 18% were unsure and 38% were incorrect. This provides some preliminary support for the occurrence of partisan cheerleading. The other four questions serve as alternate dependent variables, upon which we can compare the election fraud responses. Table 1 details the responses for each of these variables.

In addition, political and demographic information was collected to serve as control variables in order to understand the extent to which social factors outside of partisan allegiance influence respondents' participation (or lack thereof) in partisan cheerleading. In terms of racial identity, 174 respondents marked that they were white, 12 marked that they were Asian, 8 marked that they were Black or African American, 2 marked that they were Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, 1 marked that they were American Indian or Alaska Native, 3 marked that their race was not listed and 1 preferred not to answer. In terms of ethnicity, 186 marked that they were not of Hispanic or Latino descent, while 17 marked that they were.[4] Of the respondents' ages, the mean was 44.49, with a minimum of 20 and a maximum of 91. Participants were also asked to indicate how strong their affiliation with the Republican party is on a scale of 1 to 100, with 1 representing "very weak" and 100 representing "very strong." The mean strength of partisanship for total respondents was 70.25, with a minimum of 1 and a maximum of 100. The control and treatment groups are well-balanced with respect to these aforementioned control variables. I report the balance of these variables across both groups in Table A1, found in the appendix.

RESULTS

In order to test the hypotheses of interest, I estimate a series of regressions. The first set consists of bivariate linear probability models. I estimate one such model using each of the factual questions asked in the survey as the dependent variables, which cover the following topics: Electoral fraud, military spending, ANTIFA involvement in the January 6, 2021, US Capitol riots, COVID deaths in the United States, and unemployment rates in the United States under President Joe Biden. For this series of regressions, the dependent variables are coded as binary, with 1 representing a correct response to a particular

Table 1. Response rates to factual questions by respondent condition					
Responses by Condition	Election Fraud	Military Spending	ANTIFA	COVID Deaths	Employment
Control	30% Correct 26% Unsure 43% Incorrect	18% Correct 47% Unsure 34% Incorrect	26% Correct 46% Unsure 27% Incorrect	72% Correct 16% Unsure 11% Incorrect	29% Correct 22% Unsure 48% Incorrect
Treatment	43% Correct 18% Unsure 38% Incorrect	39% Correct 35% Unsure 26% Incorrect	52% Correct 27% Unsure 21% Incorrect	86% Correct 7% Unsure 8% Incorrect	56% Correct 13% Unsure 32% Incorrect
Total	37% Correct 22% Unsure 41% Incorrect	29% Correct 41% Unsure 30% Incorrect	39% Correct 36% Unsure 24% Incorrect	79% Correct 11% Unsure 9% Incorrect	43% Correct 17% Unsure 40% Incorrect

Percentage of correct, unsure, and incorrect responses for each factual survey question. Across all questions, respondents in the treatment condition exhibit greater percentages of correct answers relative to the control group. These results do seem to suggest surface-level support for the existence of partisan cheerleading, as respondents in the treatment condition do seem to be affected by the incentive-payment structure.

Table 2. Bivariate Linear Probability Models					
Variable	Model 1 Fraud	Model 2 Military	Model 3 ANTIFA	Model 4 COVID	Model 5 Unemployment
Intercept	0.30 (0.0483)	0.18 (0.0446)	0.26 (0.048)	0.73 (0.0404)	0.29 (0.048)
Treatment	0.13* (0.068)	0.21** (0.062)	0.26** (0.067)	0.13** (0.056)	0.26** (0.067)

In each model tested the treatment group maintains a positive coefficient, indicating that treatment respondents were more likely to answer any of the questions correctly. Results suggest divergent responses between control and treatment groups, which would support the existence of partisan cheerleading. (P-value < 0.1 = "", P-value < 0.05 = "**", std. error in parenthesis)*

question and 0 representing an incorrect or "unsure" response. The independent variable is again coded as binary, with 1 representing the treatment condition and 0 representing the control. The results are found in Table 2.

Given that the dependent variable is dichotomous, Model 1 indicates that respondents in the treatment group were 12.97% more likely to answer the question on electoral fraud correctly, relative to the control group. In other words, when given a monetary incentive for answering this question correctly, members of the treatment group were more willing to admit that widespread election fraud *did not* occur. The divergence in responses between the two groups would suggest that some level of partisan cheerleading indeed took place, as it appears that insincere political expression was curbed in the treatment group, lending support for Hypothesis 2. Substantively, this is a fairly large effect given the small sample size and the low levels of compensation for correct responses. The results of Model 1 are just shy of achieving statistical significance at the 95% confidence level, with the P-value being 0.056. Despite this, the result does maintain significance at the 90% confidence level, which is an appropriate measure to use given the relatively small sample size and small incentives offered.

Model 2 finds that respondents in the treatment group were 21.24% more likely to answer the question on military

spending correctly. This again suggests the existence of partisan cheerleading within the sample, with a larger and more significant effect relative to Model 1. Model 3 then finds respondents in the treatment group 25.66% more likely to answer the question on ANTIFA correctly, with Model 4 finding treatment group respondents 12.85% more likely to answer the question on COVID deaths correctly. Model 5 then reveals the largest effect recorded, with treatment group respondents being 26.48% more likely to answer the question on unemployment correctly. Each of these models maintains statistical significance at 95% confidence levels. These results are robust to the inclusion of control variables, of which regression results can be found in the appendix (Table A2).

In order to better assess the option for respondents to respond with "unsure" to the factual questions asked, I estimated another series of bivariate linear regressions. Here the dependent variables are coded on a three-point scale, with 0 representing an incorrect answer, 1 representing an "unsure" answer, and 2 representing a correct answer. The independent variable is again the respondent's condition coded as a dummy variable, with 1 representing the treatment group and 0 representing the control group. These results are found in Table 3.

In terms of election fraud, Model 6 suggests that respondents in the treatment group are .18 more likely

Table 3. Bivariate Regressions with Categorical Dependent Variable					
Variable	Model 6 Fraud	Model 7 Military	Model 8 ANTIFA	Model 9 COVID	Model 10 Unemployment
Intercept	0.87 (0.089)	0.84 (0.076)	0.99 (0.077)	1.62 (0.063)	0.81 (0.089)
Treatment	0.18 (0.12)	0.30** (0.11)	0.32** (0.11)	0.16* (0.089)	0.43** (0.12)

Results again suggest divergent responses between control and treatment groups, evidencing partisan cheerleading on a three-point scale (P-value < 0.1 = "", P-value < 0.05 = "**", std. error in parenthesis)*

to answer correctly on a three-point scale relative to respondents in the control group. This does suggest that, when incentivized, partisans are more willing to admit their lack of knowledge (by answering "unsure") or reveal their true knowledge (by answering correctly), even on issues as seemingly important as electoral fraud This indicates a level of insincerity among the control group. The positive effect again seems to provide evidence of partisan cheerleading, as it appears that partisans were more willing to offer up honest/correct answers given incentivization, again lending support for Hypothesis 2. While the observed effect is not very large (representing just 6% of the three-point scale), it does remain useful for contextualizing the other models. Despite this, the effect is not statistically significant at standard levels of confidence.

Model 7 points to a larger effect, with treatment group respondents increasing 0.30 on this scale, implying that misinformation about Joe Biden's Military spending budget is somewhat corrected through incentivization. Model 8 finds treatment group respondents' scores increasing by 0.32, which again points towards respondents engaging in partisan cheerleading regarding ANTIFA's role in the January 6, 2021, US Capitol riots. Model 9 suggests that treatment group respondents' scores increase by 0.16 relative to the control, with such a small effect and large baseline (1.62) indicating that partisan cheerleading did not play as substantive a role when it comes to misinformation surrounding COVID deaths. Model 10 then finds the most substantial effect measured, with treatment group respondents' scores increasing by 0.43, suggesting that, while a great deal of partisan cheerleading took place among the control group, even relatively small incentives worked to reduce this quite substantially among those in the treatment group. This may serve to indicate that the national unemployment rate is not a particularly contentious issue within the Republican Party, as these partisans are much more willing to admit to the shared consensus surrounding recent decreases in the unemployment rate. Yet when unincentivized, they remain willing to cheerlead.

Despite a general lack of statistical significance for the results found in Model 6, and while Model 9's results only maintain significance at the 90% confidence level, the results of Models 7, 8, and 10 maintain their statistical significance at the 95% confidence level. Regardless of significance, the positive effect of each model would suggest broad evidence of partisan cheerleading within the sample, providing theoretical support for hypothesis 2. These results are robust to the inclusion of control variables; such results can be found in Table A3 in the appendix.

CONCLUSION
The results of this study indicate clear support for Hypothesis 2. Partisan cheerleading does appear to play an influential role in discussions of purported electoral fraud. This is, of course, troubling given the rise in anti-democratic action and rhetoric as typified by the "Stop the Steal" campaign and the January 6, 2021, storming of the US Capitol building. With that being said, partisan cheerleading does appear to manifest itself in a number of different ways and contexts, as each of the alternative dependent variables tested indicated some level of partisan cheerleading occurring. This is consistent with prior research, as partisan cheerleading has been observed on issues as wide-ranging as economic performance and the War on Terror (Bullock and Lenz 2019).

This study does, however, reveal a number of surprising findings, particularly with respect to the use of "unsure" answers within the survey, as the results indicate that the rate of "unsure" answers had measurably decreased in the treatment group relative to the control group. This finding stands in stark contrast to prior research, as Bullock et al. found that when offered small incentives for "unsure" answers, respondents will select "unsure" at much greater rates than those in the control group (2015). The authors suggest that this is because "many people don't know the answers to factual questions about politics and know that they don't know the answers, but will not admit their lack of knowledge under ordinary survey conditions" (Bullock and Lenz 2019, 338). Oddly, the findings presented within this study are incongruent with this observation.

This would suggest that partisans may choose to feign ignorance over admitting a truth that would see their party in a bad light, yet when incentivized, they are much more willing to admit to such. This seemingly introduces a new angle to partisan cheerleading, one of plausible deniability: partisans invoking contestation of the facts at hand without admitted adherence to a particular narrative. In a way, this would appear as a certain level of impartiality on behalf of the respondent, yet when offered an incentive to be correct, their position changes to that of factuality. Instead of adopting a "my truth is The Party's truth" mode of cheerleading, these partisans opt for a more discrete "both sides" attitude, allowing them the opportunity to *avoid* condemning their party *without* admitting to falsities. It also offers them the ability to appear as honest or as impartial as they deem fit, while silently continuing to tow the party line. In other words, while being unincentivized offers partisans the opportunity to cheerlead, it also offers them the opportunity to be perceived as "neutral" on the issue by claiming uncertainty. Yet when payment is on the line, partisans of both dispositions admit to the truth and take the money that is offered. This may have worrisome implications for democratic institutions, as partisans may choose to cast doubt or suspicion upon electoral results while not outwardly calling for their derecognition, even if they know the results to be correct.

While prior research on partisan cheerleading has focused largely on numerical facts, cheerleading as it pertains to conspiratorial beliefs has thus far eluded incentive-based research; Bullock and Lenz (2019) have highlighted the need

for further study into this particular subject matter, stating "Incentives do reduce partisan differences in responses to questions about [numerical] facts of this sort—but these studies do not examine the hyperpartisan conspiracies and rumors now present in American politics. It will be fascinating to see whether financial incentives reduce partisan differences on questions about these matters too." My study contributes to the literature by offering a small glimpse at how cheerleading might indeed manifest itself with respect to more conspiratorial thought, and though this does appear to be a generalized phenomenon (i.e. where partisans *can* cheerlead, they *will*), the emergence of cheerleading with respect to electoral authenticity nonetheless sparks worry for the safety of democratic institutions.

The findings of this study would suggest that partisan cheerleading is indeed utilized not only as a tool for expressing party solidarity, but also as a force used to uphold antidemocratic rule. The exercise of cheerleading in this instance contradicts that of orthodox Democratic Theory, as democracy no longer appears as a desired outcome due to the loss of party influence. While prior research has suggested that partisans may forgive violations of democratic norms benefitting their party, the findings presented in this study would suggest that partisans may move a step beyond forgiveness, and actually engage in or support violations of democratic norms themselves (Clayton et al. 2021, Carey et al. 2020). This presents a worrisome trend within American politics, as partisan cheerleading on this matter remains a difficult problem to address. While certain policy interventions may serve well to help curb misinformation and dishonest media practices, the extent to which private individuals choose to engage with such content is an arduous matter to solve legislatively.

Nevertheless, certain challenges and limitations did appear throughout the study. The sample size is rather small and not nationally representative, which might serve to explain the lack of statistical significance with respect to some of the results uncovered. While the focus of this study is centered primarily on the Republican party, avenues for future research may entail analyzing partisan cheerleading as it pertains to the Democratic party, as Bullock et al (2015) show that this phenomenon is not unique to one particular political affiliation. This would allow researchers the opportunity to study the effects of cheerleading on a much wider array of issues, highlighting how the other side of the aisle may utilize cheerleading for similar or different goals as the Republican party.

While much of the literature on partisan cheerleading focuses on American politics, future research may also serve well to test the generalizability of these results, particularly in global contexts and across differing electoral systems, as recent refutation of electoral results in Peru, Colombia, and Brazil foreshadows a continued emergence of antidemocratic sentiment among right-wing parties. Analyzing the role that partisan cheerleading plays with respect to international politics will be a vital step in countering misinformation abroad, and ultimately, will serve to bolster faith in democratic systems globally. ■

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ENDNOTES

1   As this is an undergraduate research project, the research funds were also limited. This meant making difficult decisions to increase the feasibility of the project.

2   While electoral fraud was the focus of the study, participants were asked other questions in order to evaluate the consistency of the survey methodology, as well as to obfuscate the purpose of the study itself.

3   Correct answers in sequential order: *No, No Yes, No Yes.*

4   For the purpose of analysis, each of the categorical demographic variables previously mentioned, those being race and ethnicity, are coded as binary variables with 1 representing the largest category in each variable and 0 indicating otherwise.

APPENDIX

Table A1: Sample Demographic Information			
Gender	Total	Control	Treatment
Male	91	36	55
Female	110	63	47
Non-Binary / third gender	1	0	1
Prefer not to say	1	0	1
Ethnicity (Latinx)	Total	Control	Treatment
Yes	17	7	10
No	186	92	94
Race	Total	Control	Treatment
White	174	90	84
Black or African American	8	2	6
Asian	12	4	8
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	2	0	2
Am. Indian or Alaska Native	1	1	0
Other	3	1	2
Prefer not to say	1	0	1
Age	Total	Control	Treatment
Minimum	20	20	23
Maximum	91	91	74
Mean	44.49	44.70	44.29
Median	42	42	41.5
Partisanship	Total	Control	Treatment
Minimum	1	10	1
Maximum	100	100	100
Mean	70.25	70.49	70.02
Median	75	75	75

Table A1 displays the survey sample demographic balances between groups. All controls measured maintain equal variances between conditions, with the exception of respondent gender. Because there is no theoretical foundation upon which respondent gender would influence survey results, this control was omitted from further analysis.

APPENDIX, Cont'd

Table A2. Multiple Regression: Linear Probability – w/ Controls

Variable	Model 1 Fraud	Model 2 Military	Model 3 ANTIFA	Model 4 COVID	Model 5 Unemployment
Intercept	0.585145 (0.193491)	0.3951111 (0.1809995)	4.305e-01 (1.962e-01)	0.801138 (0.165366)	0.3576217 (0.1957151)
Treatment	0.128187 (0.066852)	0.2075301* (0.0625364)	2.542e-01* (6.780e-02)	0.118103* (0.057135)	0.2822006* (0.0676208)
Age	0.000118 (0.002508)	0.0014961 (0.0023464)	-1.041e-03 (2.544e-03)	0.001761 (0.002144)	-0.0008426 (0.0025372)
Partisanship	-0.004959* (0.001447)	-0.0034865* (0.0013533)	-9.526e-04 (1.467e-03)	-0.001336 (0.001236)	-0.0013869 (0.0014634)
White	-0.011974 (0.097636)	-0.0382698 (0.0913328)	-7.522e-05 (9.902e-02)	-0.116217 (0.083444)	0.2155540* (0.0987584)
Non-Latinx	0.078595 (0.122399)	0.0004006 (0.1144970)	-5.828e-02 (1.241e-01)	0.050823 (0.104608)	-0.1347638 (0.1238058)

Results indicate broad statistical significance for treatment respondents, as well as some significance with regards to partisanship and respondent race. Divergent correct response rates for treatment group members indicates support for partisan cheerleading (P-value < 0.05 = "", std. error in parenthesis)*

Table A3. Multiple Regression: Linear Probability – Categorical Dependent Variable w/ Controls

Variable	Model 6 Fraud	Model 7 Military	Model 8 ANTIFA	Model 9 COVID	Model 10 Unemployment
Intercept	1.457750 (0.348692)	1.167124 (0.307862)	0.993532 (0.318604)	1.741113 (0.257276)	1.097468 (0.362606)
Treatment	0.181398 (0.120475)	0.296322* (0.106368)	0.324267* (0.110080)	0.144827 (0.088890)	0.455648* (0.125283)
Age	-0.001911 (0.004520)	0.002143 (0.003991)	0.002222 (0.004130)	0.004041 (0.003335)	-0.001211 (0.004701)
Partisanship	-0.010815* (0.002607)	-0.006699* (0.002302)	-0.001909 (0.002382)	0.002792 (0.001924)	-0.003286 (0.002711)
White	0.009701 (0.175951)	0.013443 (0.155348)	0.073063 (0.160769)	-0.199066 (0.129822)	0.332905 (0.182972)
Non-Latinx	0.268798 (0.220577)	0.038167 (0.194748)	-0.037492 (0.201543)	0.077685 (0.162748)	-0.329620 (0.229378)

Utilizing the three-point scale coding method, we find broad statistical significance for treatment respondents, with some slight statistical significance for partisanship. Divergent correct response rates for treatment group members again signals the existence of partisan cheerleading (P-value < 0.05 = "", std. error in parenthesis)*