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How candidates evoke identity and issues on TikTok
An absence of issues

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Social media platforms are increasingly becoming a key aspect of campaign communications strategy. We explore the final six months before the 2024 US Presidential Election to understand what the major campaigns were producing and distributing on this distinct platform. In particular, we describe the content of these videos in relation to two theories of political behavior. The first, is the **expressive (identities)** model of politics. Under this model, voters are motivated by the interests and standing of the groups they belong to and candidates should appeal to the social identities that are important to voters. Alternatively, candidates may follow an **instrumental (issues)** model, which states that voters align with politicians who advocate for the issues which are important to them and candidates should discuss issues. In contrast, much of the research on campaign advertising has described the rise and prevalence of attack ads, where campaigns disparage each other. Our work integrates negativity as an orthogonal dimension to identities and issues, that is, a candidate may attack the other while still discussing identities or issues. We find that neither presidential candidate followed

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the expressive or instrumental models in the 2024 Election: the majority of the content they released contained neither identities nor issues (counter to popular media narratives around the 2024 election). Both candidates spend a significant (but not overwhelming) amount of time disparaging the other, 49% of all Harris content and 54% of all Trump content are disparaging. A key distinction is that the majority of Harris' negative campaigning was tied up in issues and identity, while a majority of Trump's did not touch on either identity or issues (i.e., they were mainly attacks on Harris as a person). We augment these findings with survey responses from a representative sample of the American public and find that in contrast, an instrumental model better predicts their party identification. This suggests that the candidates could benefit in their fundraising or get-out-the-vote campaigns (aimed at co-partisans) from increased attention given to issues that are both important and defining for a given party. In particular, Harris rarely mentioned environmental issues on TikTok, which are important to Democratic respondents across surveys.

Keywords: political identity, social groups, policy issues, partisanship, TikTok, campaign messaging, prediction

Introduction

Adults, especially young adults, are increasingly encountering political information on social media. In traditional media environments, news is very siloed, where consumers actively choose to go to a news website, turn on a news channel, or to abstain from news consumption entirely. In contrast, on social media, news content can reach people who both choose to consume but also to allow the news to find them (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2017; Enli, 2017). Social media is thus a critical site for exposure to political information (potentially even for the disinterested) and an important source of information in elections (Eshbaugh-Soha, 2015; Rossini et al., 2017; Bode et al., 2020; Groshek and Al-Rawi, 2013; Metzgar and Maruggi, 2009; Enli, 2017; Buccoliero et al., 2020; Fulgoni et al., 2016). For example, Pew's recent TikTok study noted that 95% of users are on the social media platform for entertainment, but 45% see at least some political

content (MClain et al., 2024). This content can reach more marginal voters in terms of both persuasion and likeliness to vote. TikTok, consistently one of the top mobile apps in the US, is thus a platform where users encounter political campaigns with implications for political behavior (Hindarto, 2022).

One important question about political activity on this platform is how candidates appeal to voters. We argue that candidate behavior on this platform can be inspected through two political theories: the expressive (identities) and instrumental (issues) models. Each model seeks to explain political behavior. However, to the best of our knowledge, there is no existing work on understanding which model candidates employ, and to what extent, on social media. This question has critical implications for political science, as these models provide fundamentally different ideas of politics, with the first arguing that voters choose the candidate that they most identify with as a person or which best expresses their social/political identity (Huddy and Bankert, 2017), and the second arguing that voters choose candidates systematically according to agreement on issues (Fiorina, 1976; Lenz Gabriel, 2012; Highton and Kam, 2011)[1].

If people primarily prefer candidates because they represent the social groups they belong to, that implies that reasonable candidates should spend their time appealing to these identities by mentioning particular social groups. It also implies that popular policies will be those which reward and punish different groups. If, on the other hand, issues play a greater role in political judgment, politicians should speak about issues that matter to people, and focus their political energy on policies which act on the issues important to their constituents. Yet, there has been no systematic review of how *candidates* position themselves according to identities and issues on social media. This work thus speaks to an open question of what partisan identity really is (Ruckelshaus, 2022), through understanding elite behavior on social media and how that aligns with the attitudes of potential voters.

We also describe the ways that candidates attack each other on social media. Negative content has been extensively studied in the literature (Fridkin and Kenney, 2004; Lau et al.,

[1]Note, that the presence of these two theories does not prevent the existence of complementary theories which combine elements from each, nor does our analysis. We investigate each for the sake of understanding, while allowing that both potential voters and elites consider both identities and issues in their behavior.

1999; Fine and Hunt, 2023; Auter and Fine, 2016; de Boer et al., 2012; Yu et al., 2024), with some finding that negative messaging is effective at influencing behavior on social media (Fine and Hunt, 2023). However, while others have described the extent to which candidates attack the other relative to mentioning issues, no one has related the presence of attacks to the mentions of identities and issues. This is a striking gap, given the considerable attention paid to the rise of identity politics (Fukuyama, 2018). Our research addresses this and other gaps by responding to the following questions:

- RQ 1: Did the presidential candidates in the United States 2024 election speak to identities or issues in their TikTok posts?
- RQ 2: Which identities and issues did candidates discuss?
- RQ 3: How does negativity interact with identities and issues?
- RQ 4: How do the identities and issues discussed by candidates align with the attitudes of likely potential voters within their political party?

To answer these questions, we combine a study of TikTok posts in the lead up to the 2024 election with responses to a two-wave survey completed in 2022. The first wave of the survey concentrated on political identities and the second on political issues. Combining these datasets allows us to understand not only what candidates did, but also how these actions correspond to the opinions and preferences of a representative sample of the American public (likely potential voters). We also augment the survey responses with responses to the American National Election Study (ANES).

In summary, we find that Harris and Trump bring up identities at similar rates on TikTok, and Trump talks about issues a little more than Harris. Both candidates mention issues in a superficial manner, often in relation to the other candidates, if they mention them at all. They rarely go into policy detail. 49% of Harris content is disparaging her opponent, with 54% of Trump's content disparaging his opponent. Interestingly the majority of Harris' negative content is in the context of issues or identity, while the majority of Trump's negative is unrelated to either issues or identity (i.e., Trump's negative content is mainly aimed at Harris). This is all particularly striking when we consider data on potential voters' attitudes. Using multiple data sources, we find that there is much more discriminative power in issues than in identities, that is, it is easier to predict a potential voter's party ID knowing their attitudes

towards issues than information about their identity. Thus, we see that issues have relevance to voters yet are overshadowed by identities and disparaging content on social media. We leave to future work the question of what might happen if they were to reorient their attention towards issues.

Relevant Work

Political communication can be earned (i.e., organic) or paid (i.e., advertisement) and it could be categorized as aiming for one of three key goals (stylistically): persuasion (aimed at people who are likely to vote, but not sure who they are going to vote for), get-out-the-vote (aimed at people likely to support the candidate, but not sure if they are going to vote), and fundraising (aimed at strong supporters who are already likely to vote for the candidate). Research done in conjunction with Facebook for the 2020 election showed the vast majority of advertising content by the major campaigns was aimed towards fundraising (Allcott et al., 2025). Others have found that different calls to action occur on different platforms (Larsson et al., 2024; Wurst et al., 2023) and at different times of the election cycle, with later stages focusing on getting out the vote and fundraising (Stromer-Galley et al., 2021). And, organic content on social media is also aimed at co-partisans who represent the vast majority of followers of partisan accounts (Yu et al., 2024). Thus, whether fundraising or get-out-the-vote, it is likely that the vast majority of the content late in the cycle (the time we study here) from candidate accounts is aimed towards co-partisans. How this content evokes identities and issues, and how such content interacts with candidate attacks, is an open question.

Outside of social media, related work has proposed critiques of candidates' use of identity politics (Fukuyama, 2018; Hobsbawm, 1996) and inspected aspects of how identity interacts with ideology (Grossmann and Hopkins, 2015; Kidder, 2016). Still more work has studied political advertising in particular, exploring how ads lean into identities or issues (Kaplan et al., 2006; Latimer, 1984). For example, there is strong evidence that issues influence voters' decision in senate elections (Wright Jr and Berkman, 1986). Other work has studied the linguistic styles (Jordan et al., 2018; Savoy, 2018; Bronstein, 2013) or personality traits of candidates (Glasgow and Alvarez, 2000), but not related these to messaging around identities or issues. Candidates likely utilize their own models of voters in their campaign content (Lucas et al., 2025). Recent work has found that elites tend to view voters as more focused on identities than

issues (Lucas et al., 2025). This begs the question of whether their social media posts similarly reflect an expressive, over an instrumental, model.

There have been limited studies of identities, issues, and attacks on social media. One study of Clinton and Trump on Twitter in 2016 found that Trump attacked Clinton and Democrats in 44% of his tweets and mentioned issues in only 2.3%, while Clinton made attacks and mentioned issues roughly equally (28% and 27% respectively) (Buccoliero et al., 2020). Yet, this study did not consider identities. Stromer-Galley et al. (2021) found that Biden and Trump focused on issues more than character in 2020, but did not discuss social group identities. Others have found that ads on Facebook are less issue-focused and more partisan than those on TV (Fowler et al., 2021).

When investigating elites positioning on social media, we would be remiss not to analyze the negativity of their posts, given the significant prior attention given to negative campaign advertising (Brader, 2005; Lau et al., 1999). We are not the first to study negative ads on social media (Fine and Hunt, 2023; Auter and Fine, 2016; de Boer et al., 2012). For example, the use of negative ads were found to differ across Facebook and Twitter, and across the 2016 and 2020 elections, with the 2016 election being remarkably negative (Stromer-Galley et al., 2021). However, while negative ads have been found to be prevalent on social media, we do not know how they interact with identities and issues. That is, do candidates attack each other in terms of their abilities to support certain groups, or pass policies around a given issue, or do they simply attack each other's personal traits? Answering these questions, and tracking these interactions over time, can provide insight into campaign strategy. Yet, to the best of our knowledge, no one has systematically studied the relative use of identities and issues on social media, or related them to partisan attacks, as we do here.

Methods

Our study aims to understand if and how candidates speak to political identities and issues on the relatively recently launched social media platform TikTok. To understand the implications of candidates' posting strategies, we inspect how they align with the opinions of the American public. That is, do candidates speak to the identities/issues that are important to members of their party? Answering our questions requires both utilizing social media and the collection

of novel survey data. To ensure that we are understanding how candidates are informed by public opinion and not the other way around, we design and implement our survey far before the 2024 presidential election, in the winter of 2022.

Social media design and data

Our goal is to create a dataset of campaign posts that users on TikTok would likely see during the 2024 US presidential election. Each campaign creates a large number of videos, and many of these may be viewed by a relatively small number of users. To focus our attention on the posts which are likely to be most viewed, and to thus have the most influence, we create synthetic accounts with different types of browsing behavior. We refer to these as sock puppet accounts. This sock puppet data was gathered in two waves. The first wave began in July 2024, when 700 sock puppet accounts were launched. In October, we began a more intensive design with a new set of 201 (quadrant-based) accounts (for more information about the quadrants see Appendix Section A). The first wave was designed to simulate exploratory behavior where users showed no to some interest in news and politics and browsed randomly, whereas in the second wave the accounts followed specific types of behavior in order to understand how this behavior influenced the content they saw (this is not the research question of this paper but is discussed in (Ge et al., 2026)). Here, we pool all videos seen by all accounts in order to understand the content posted by the campaigns, which was most likely to be viewed by users on TikTok.

All accounts in both waves log onto TikTok twice per day for a thirty-minute period - between 7:00-9:00 am and 7:00-9:00 pm. All accounts were logged on through the AWS Ohio region. We choose this region as it is a region in the Midwest of the United States where both candidates are likely to post on TikTok. In both waves, we record all of the posts seen by the puppets via simulated browser-based interaction with the For You Page (Sandvig et al., 2014). This provides a view of the types of content the For You Page algorithm (Klug et al., 2021) is likely to show to typical users who fall into one of these five behavioral profiles (random engagement and the four quadrant behavior profiles).

The main dataset is all of the posts that are from campaign or campaign-adjacent accounts (kamalaharris, kamalahq, timwalz, realdonaldtrump, teamtrump, and jd) which were shown to any of the accounts. As shown in Table 1, during July 28th, 2024 - November 22nd,

Table 1: Data are shown in the format "posts in/not in analysis". The TikTok posts were made July 28th, 2024 to November 22nd, 2024. Our analysis contains posts viewed by any of the 700 sock puppet accounts, which we compare to posts not viewed by the accounts. Posts not in the analysis are simply posts on the page of each associated account which we inspected manually. For example, we manually inspected the Harris page to determine how many posts were made during the time period when the sock puppets were active. We can see that those posts in the analysis are more popular (i.e. they have more views, likes, and comments) compared to the posts by the same accounts which are not viewed by the sock puppets.

	Team/Account	#Unique posts	Median views (in thousands)	Median likes (in thousands)	Median comments (in thousands)
Campaign team	Harris	285/791	2400/1000	269/103	3/1
	Trump	213/309	6000/1200	578/106	13/3
Harris team breakdown	kamalaharris	82/137	3400/1600	470/132	9/4
	kamalahq	185/570	1900/960	198/98	2/1
	timwalz	18/84	1750/538	265/76	4/2
Trump team breakdown	realdonaldtrump	55/6	11600/10950	10450/602	22/22
	teamtrump	142/281	4900/1200	472/93	11/3
	jd	16/22	1800/632	224/84	6/2

2024, we saw 498 posts posted by the Harris (285 posts) and Trump (213 posts) campaigns. The campaigns posted more content closer to the election and only 96 of the videos were posted before October.

Methods for coding identities and issues

We developed a codebook for identities and issues as a team. Then three coders coded each post. The inter-annotator agreement on whether a post is disparaging towards the other candidate was 0.68 (Fleiss' Kappa), which is reasonable for this task. It is less straightforward to report the agreement on the other categories which are multi-select categories. When we

consider each identity as a category the average Fleiss' Kappa is .56, and when we consider each issue as a category the average is 0.57. The agreement varies depending on the particular identity or issue. For example, there is strong agreement on the dominant issues (Family planning and Immigration both have Fleiss's Kappa of 0.92). Coders also highly agree about when gender is mentioned (Kappa of 0.82). However, the identity of Americans is more subtle and there is higher disagreement, (Kappa of 0.45). This is to be expected as American is an ambiguous and contested identity[2]. One can see Section B for the identity codebook, Table 8, and the issues codebook Table 9. The final labels were constructed from the majority vote. When it was possible for a coder to select multiple categories we include any category with at least two votes.

Here, we consider four categories for disparaging content: Policy Attack, Group Association Attack, Personal Attack, and Not Disparaging. Policy Attack describes posts that attack Trump or Harris for a policy action, proposal, or an association with some kind of policy. Group Association Attack describes posts that attack Trump or Harris for either failing to support a certain group (e.g. an attack claiming that Trump is prejudiced against Latinos) or supporting a group (e.g. an attack claiming that Harris only cares about transgender rights). Personal Attack describes posts that attack Trump or Harris solely based on their unsuitability or incompetence. If a post (1) does not attack the other candidate personally, and (2) either doesn't state the policy or identity preference of the other candidate or states the facts of their campaign portfolio matter-of-factly, the post is labeled as "Not Disparaging". All posts have a label in this system.

Survey design and construction of relevant models and variables

We deployed two surveys using the firm Prodege and the software platform Qualtrics. The first was launched in Winter 2022 and the respondents who successfully completed the survey were recontacted one month later. The first survey contained a battery of questions around social group identity, whereas the second focused on issue positions. These two surveys are included in the appendix (see Appendix Section C). We received 1,997 responses to the first survey

[2]This is plausibly an issue for all majority demographics (e.g. white) within a category. These can be obliquely referenced as implicit defaults where minority demographics (e.g. Hispanic) may be mentioned explicitly. These implicit references make the coding more ambiguous.

and 1,027 of these successfully completed the second round. The population was contacted following a quota to match the adult population[3] of the US on gender, age, education, race, and partisanship[5]. We obtain a population reasonably similar to the general US adult population (approximately 70% of our sample is white, 40% has some college education but no 4-year degree, 40% is 65 years old or older, and 60% is female, compared to 60%, 30%, 15%, and 50% in the general US population (ACS 2021))[6].

To understand how identities and issues predict party ID we form three models using the survey responses. The first, INDENTITY+, models partisanship as a function of one's identities. As identity is a difficult-to-measure construct with competing definitions, we take a holistic approach and collect measures of five key variables: Group Membership, Group Association, Group Fate, Group Standing, and Group Support. Additional details around the construction of these variables are included in Section C (Additional methods background and details). ISSUES, models partisanship as a function of issue position and importance (Fournier et al., 2003), while IND+ISSUES, models partisanship as a function of both identities and issues, as identities and issue positions likely both influence one's partisanship. We model partisanship with a seven-point scale and our final outcome variable is grouped into three buckets: Democrat (Strong Democrat, Weak Democrat, Leans Democrat), Republican (Strong Republican, Weak Republican, Leans Republican), or Independent (Neither). To mitigate potential bias, this is the final question that respondents see in the section on demographics in the first survey. We wait one month before asking respondents to take the survey on policy issues so that their responses to the identity questions do not bias their responses to the issue questions.

Analysis

Here we address our three research questions, investigating the extent to which presidential candidates spoke about identities and issues, which of these they discussed, and their negative affect. Then, to understand how the identities and issues discussed by candidates aligned with

[3]Quotas were: gender (max 1,200 for either gender), age (max 600 for three age groups, but 800 for 45-64), race (max 1,440 for white, max 400 for Black, and max 600 for Hispanic [4]), education (max 800 for high school or less, max 600 for some college, max 800 for college or more), and party max 750 for either party or other (on a 7-point scale).

[5]This research was deemed exempt by the authors' IRB.

[6]We show the demographics of our respondents in Appendix Section D.

the attitudes of potential voters within their political party, we consider a set of sub-questions. First, to mirror RQ1, we ask if identities or issues best correlate with the party ID of likely potential voters. This allows us to compare how the expressive and instrument models describe candidate campaign content. vs. likely potential voters. Then, to mirror RQ2, we ask which identities or issues are most important to likely potential voters. This allows us to analyze whether the identities and issues mentioned by the candidates are those which are important to likely potential voters. We include robustness checks and other additional analyses in the Appendix Section D.

RQ1: Did the presidential candidates in the United States 2024 election speak to identities or issues in their TikTok posts?

We begin by inspecting how often each candidate discusses identities and issues. In Figure 1, we see that both candidates mention identities more than issues. Harris mentions identities in 32% of her posts and issues in 23%, whereas Trump mentions identities in 31% and issues in 30% Trump is more likely to mention issues than Harris. However, contrary to popular sentiment, Harris is not more significantly more likely to mention identities (Peoples, 2026). What is most striking about Figure 1 is that both candidates are most likely to discuss neither identities nor issues. We repeat Figure 1 in Section E, where we only inspect videos seen by accounts in wave one, and do not see any qualitative differences.

RQ2: Which identities and issues did they discuss?

As both candidates speak about identities to some extent, both in ∼30% of their content, we next inspect the particular identities they discuss in Figure 2. We see that Harris most frequently discusses gender groups, followed by racial groups, age groups, and immigration groups. In total Harris mentions 11 subgroups (e.g. female), whereas Trump mentions 7. In Figure 2, we also see that Trump mentions "Americans" the most. During coding, some coders initially interpreted references to American identity in Trump's posts as signaling White identity. After further review, we instructed coders to prioritize the most explicit identity cue when multiple interpretations were plausible. As a result, content that may have implicitly evoked White identity was coded as American identity when the latter was explicitly referenced. The patterns shown in Figure 2 therefore reflect a consistent preference for explicit over implicit identity appeals. This coding rule is particularly consequential for majority-group identities,

which can often be activated indirectly, whereas appeals to non-majority identities are more frequently explicit. Consequently, Trump's content may contain implicit racial signaling that is not captured in Figure 2.

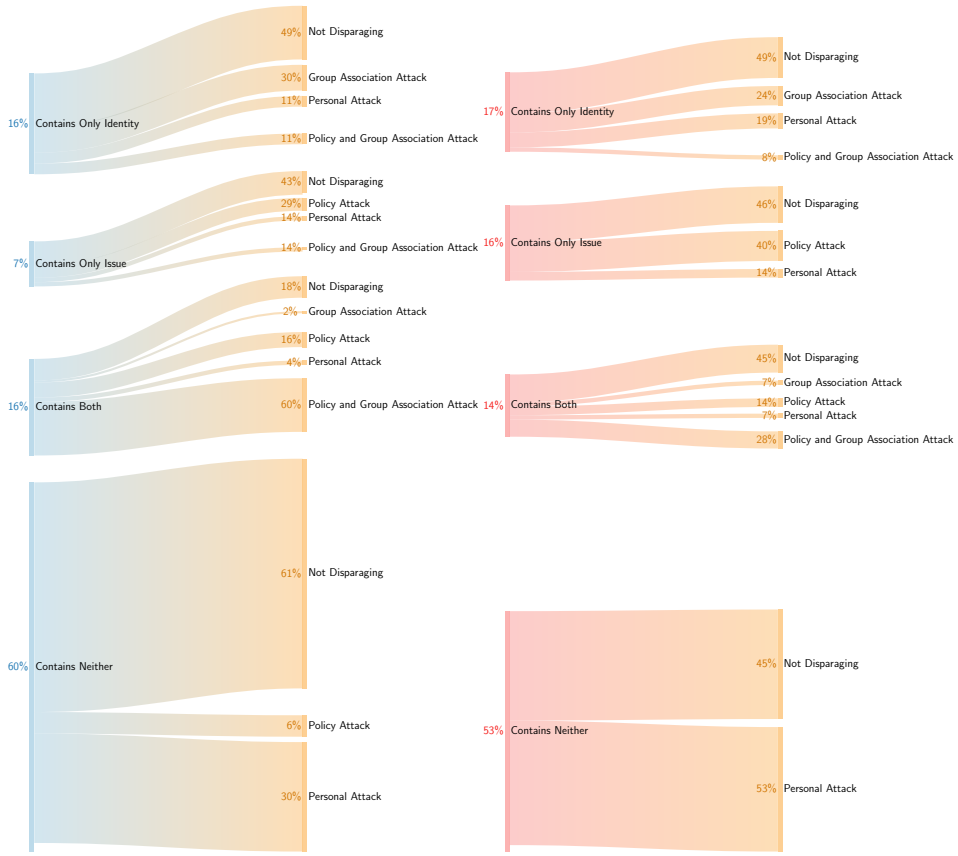


Figure 1: Harris (left) and Trump (right) TikTok posts in terms of containing identity, issue, and disparaging content. We see 23% of Harris post and 30% of Trump posts address issues (either alone or with identity), while both candidates address identity in ∼30% of posts. 49% of Harris posts and 54% of Trump posts contain disparaging content. Among all Harris posts, 21% contain Policy attacks, 19% contain Group Association attacks, and 21% are Personal attacks. Among all Trump posts, 14% contain Policy attacks, 12% contain Group Association attacks, and 34% contain Personal attacks. The width of nodes represents the number of posts. Note, we do not display categories which occur in less than 2% of posts.

We see that both candidates mention females more than males. However, they do this in different ways, especially in the absence of issues. Harris is most likely to mention females through a frame of rights. For example, she often says she does not want women today to have fewer rights than women of previous generations. Trump tends to portray females through a male lens, as needing protection. However, they both bring up females in connection to issues; Harris in connection to reproductive rights, and Trump in connection to: punitive actions against women pursuing abortion, transgender athletes, and protection from immigrants.

We also investigate the particular issues that the candidates discuss. We see that Harris discusses issues in 23% of posts and Trump in 30% of posts. In Figure 3 we see that Harris most frequently discusses family planning (such as birth control) and generic economics, while Trump mentions generic economics and immigration more than half of the time. Trump mentions roughly 7 issue categories and Harris mentions 11. Harris discusses climate change and Trump does not, and Trump discusses ceasefire plans and Harris does not.

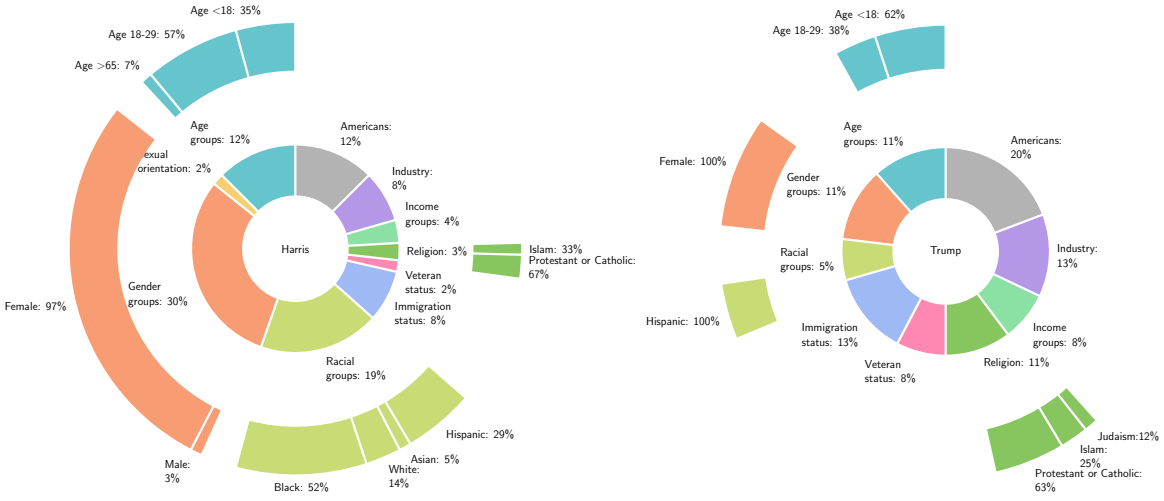


Figure 2: The social identities mentioned by Harris and Trump within TikTok posts. Here, we tagged explicit mentions and did not tag a group if it was referred to implicitly (e.g. by the camera panning over members of that group).

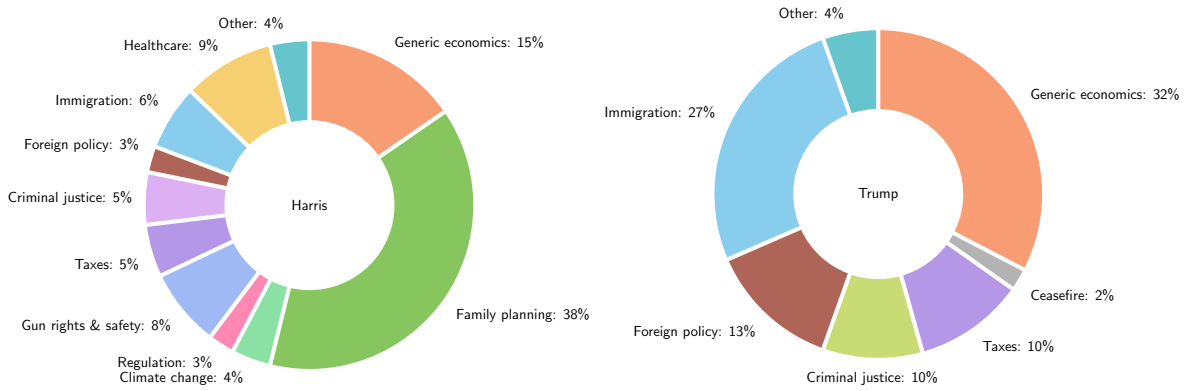


Figure 3: The policy issues mentioned by Harris and Trump within TikTok posts. Unlike social identities, here we do not break the issue categories into more granular issues as the candidates do not often discuss these issues in sufficient detail to do so.

RQ3: How does negativity interact with identities and issues?

Harris' team disparages Trump in 49% of their posts, while Trump's team disparages Harris in 54% of their posts. The fact that we see so many disparaging posts speaks to a general trend of negative campaign ads (Geer, 2012) and communication trends of U.S. Representatives and Senators (Westwood and Lelkes, 2024).

Among Team Harris posts, 21% contain Personal Attacks, 18% contain Group Association Attacks, and 18% contain Policy Attacks. Among Team Trump posts, 33% contain Personal Attacks, 9% contain Group Association Attacks, and 13% contain Policy Attacks. For examples of these attacks, see Table 10. Overall, both candidates issue more Personal Attacks than any other category. Yet, the majority of Harris' negative content is connected with issues or identity, while the majority of Trump's negative content contains neither. Harris is less likely to issue Personal Attacks in posts that mention neither identities nor issues: in these posts, she introduces herself as a candidate with positive messages.

RQ4: How do the identities and issues discussed by candidates align with the attitudes of potential voters within their political party?

We inspect alignment in several different ways. First, we ask whether identities or issues are more predictive of party ID (RQ 4a). This question mirrors RQ 1, where we ask whether the candidates discuss identities or issues more. Whereas RQ 1 provides insight into whether candidates may follow an expressive or instrumental view of politics, RQ 4a asks the same question of voters. Next, in RQ 4b, we look at the particular identities and issues that are important to potential voters. This is a direct mirror of RQ 2, where we inspect the identities and issues discussed by the candidates. Together, these two questions allow us to inspect whether candidates were speaking to the *same* identities and issues which are important to voters.

RQ4a: Are identities or issues more predictive of party ID?

We see that on TikTok neither the expressive or instrumental models describes the candidates well, although the expressive model may be a slightly better fit than the instrumental. Next, we ask whether the expressive (identities) or instrumental (issues) best describes party ID.

To address this question, we employ a series of models where each model utilizes a set of features. The first utilizes survey responses around identity, the second around issues, and the third around both. Each model is trained to predict party ID coded as Democrat, Republican, or Independent and is implemented using Logistic Regression. We consider three models, as described above. Recall, the first, INDENTITY+ includes responses to questions about identity, the second ISSUES includes responses to questions about issue stance and importance, and the third, IND+ISSUES is the full combination of INDENTITY+ and ISSUES. These models are described in more detail in Section D.

In Table 2, we see significant F1 score gains with ISSUES relative to INDENTITY+, and these gains occur both in the precision and recall for both parties. In IND+ISSUES, we see that identity information can slightly assist with performance when issue positions are already known. This is true regardless of dataset. Issues are always more predictive of party ID than

identities, whether we consider our survey data or the ANES.

Table 2: Here we train logistic regression models on the task of predicting party ID. We see significant performance gains when we include issue positions and importance in the predictive models relative to models which only contain identity variables. We bold the statistics from the best performing model in each column.

	Democrats			Republicans			Overall		
	Precision	Recall	F1 Score	Precision	Recall	F1 Score	Precision	Recall	F1 Score
Indentity+	0.573	0.793	0.665	0.700	0.634	0.661	0.631	0.712	0.663
Issues	0.741	0.860	0.797	0.779	0.864	0.819	0.760	0.862	0.808
Ind+Issues	**0.743**	**0.868**	**0.800**	**0.784**	**0.864**	**0.822**	**0.763**	**0.866**	**0.812**
ANES 2020 Indentity+	0.546	0.772	0.639	0.530	0.760	0.625	0.538	0.766	0.632
ANES 2020 Issues	0.589	0.813	0.683	0.622	0.788	0.695	0.605	0.800	0.689
ANES 2020 Ind+Issues	**0.645**	**0.829**	**0.725**	**0.686**	**0.813**	**0.744**	**0.665**	**0.821**	**0.734**
ANES 2024 Indentity+	0.567	0.758	0.649	0.527	0.738	0.615	0.547	0.748	0.632
ANES 2024 Issues	0.595	0.838	0.696	0.587	0.798	0.676	0.591	0.818	0.686
ANES 2024 Ind+Issues	**0.635**	**0.808**	**0.711**	**0.620**	**0.776**	**0.689**	**0.628**	**0.792**	**0.700**

RQ4b: which identities and issues are most important to potential voters in each party?

The purpose of RQ4a is to allow us to understand if the issues and identities which are discussed by the candidates on TikTok align with the issues and identities that are most important to potential voters. Here, we use self-reported importance to describe the potential voters in each party. We can measure importance both in our dataset and in the ANES. The questions are framed differently in each survey, however they all offer insights into the identities and issues that potential voters view as important.

Identities To measure how respondents value different identities we ask them the following question: *The government has allocated funds to target groups of students to send to college and you've been asked to decide who should receive those funds among the following groups. Select the three groups you would target to send to college.* They are shown a list of groups that they belong to. That is, for each identity category they are shown

the particular group they belong to. For example, a white woman would be shown: White people and females, rather than race and gender. The identity categories are: race and ethnicity, gender, age, education, income, sexual orientation, army affiliation, occupation, living place / urbanicity, religion, birth nation, and union status. By limiting each respondent to only three groups we ask them to compare amongst various potentially compenting identities.

Issues We repeat this design to elicit issue importance. Here we ask: *Imagine you have 20 $100K tokens to allocate to lobby on behalf of your position in the following public policy categories, how would you allocate those 20 tokens among these public policy categories? You must allocate all 20 tokens, but the max you can allocate for any given category is 10.* Respondents are provided with the following issue categories: income inequality, criminal justice, infrastructure, environmental protection and extraction, voting rights and integrity, abortion and maternity care, taxes, healthcare, gun rights and safety, foreign relations, immigrants, social services for the poor, regulations, and trade.

We are interested in ANES questions that ask respondents to consider the relative importance of different identities and issues. There is no such question that we could find when it comes to identities. Instead, we utilized a question that asks respondents about whether particular identities are important to them.

ANES Identities While not directly comparable to the format we use in our survey, in order to inspect the ANES data we utilize responses to questions of the following form: *How IMPORTANT is being X to your identity?* Here we consider the responses which ask about similar identities to those included in our survey (unfortunately there are not many of these identities)[7].

ANES Issues We use the question: *What do you think are the most important problems facing this country? If you think there are more than one, please briefly tell me one problem now.* For each issue which had an analog in our survey (e.g. immigration) we then coded the percentage of respondents who included this issue as being one of the most important

[7]These questions begin with V2022 in ANES 2020 and V2425 in the ANES 2024.

facing the country. [8]

In Figure 4 we see that gender is a defining characteristic for Democrats determining where government funds should be allocated, whereas being born in the US is the defining characteristic for Republicans. Respondents were only shown groups that they themselves reported belonging to. Hence, 99% of Republicans and 96% of Democrats who would send spending to youth born in the same country as them were born in the US. In contrast, close to 50% of Democrats would give to youth of the same gender as them, while only 30% of Republicans would. This giving is largely driven by women, where 87% of Democrats and 80% of Republicans who would give to youth of their own gender are women. The ANES data mirrors these findings, even with a different question design. As we can see in Figure 4b and Figure 4c, Democrats assigned a high score to "Feminist" as an identity category, whereas Republicans assigned a high score to the identity of "American". This result holds when we consider only those respondents who report using TikTok on the ANES (see Figure 5).

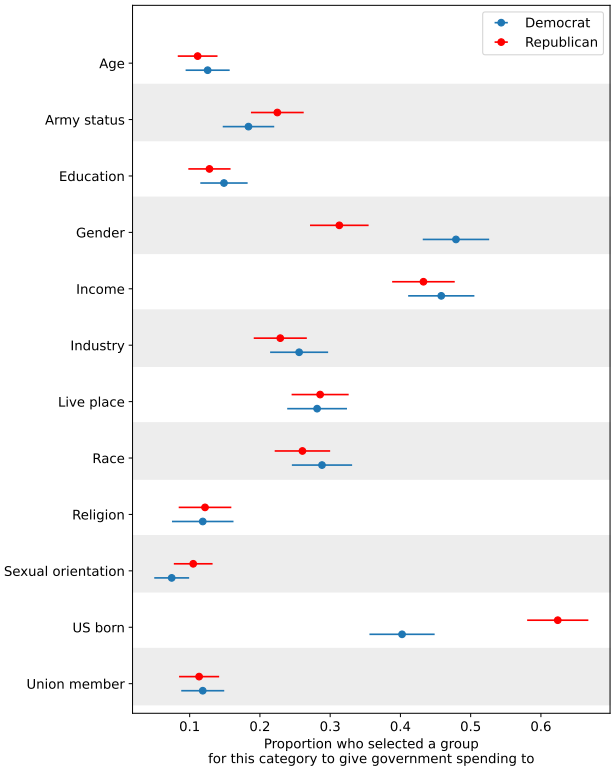
In Figure 6, we see that Democrats and Republicans largely place different values on different issue categories (when asked which policy categories they would want to lobby over)[9]. The issues with the greatest separation between the parties are Environmental Protection and Extraction (which is highly important to Democrats), Taxes (which is highly important to Republicans), and Abortion and Maternity Care (which is highly important to Democrats).

Here, we only have access to the responses to this question from ANES 2020, as the responses to this question are still being coded for 2024. In 2020, we can see that Environmental Protection and Extraction is also very important to Democrat respondents to the ANES. Immigrants, Criminal Justice, and Voting Rights and Integrity are important to Republican respondents in general, where Immigrants as an issue is less important to TikTok users[10] .

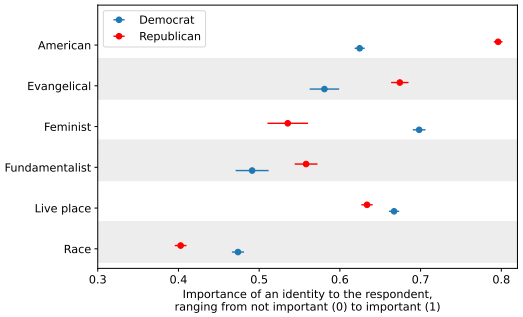
[8] This is coded as V202205.

[9] However, Healthcare is a clear exception and is the issue with the greatest importance for potential voters of both parties. We do not display it here as it makes it difficult to read the other points on the plot.

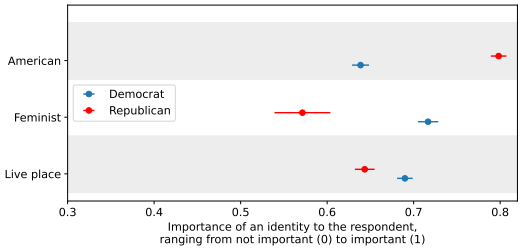
[10] Healthcare is also the most important issue to ANES respondents, we remove it from this plot as it was so important that it was difficult to read the plot for the other issues. That is 30% of both Democrats and Republicans overall, and 60% of Democrat TikTok users and 30% of Republican TikTok users consider this issue to be important.



(a) Importance as captured by our survey

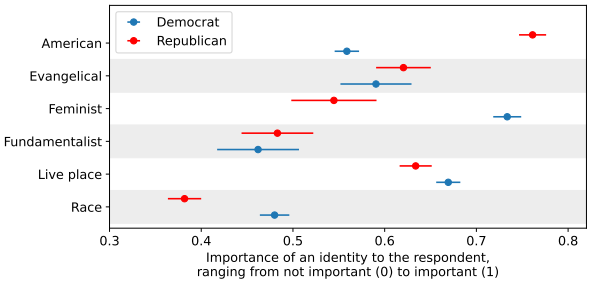


(b) Importance as captured by ANES 2020

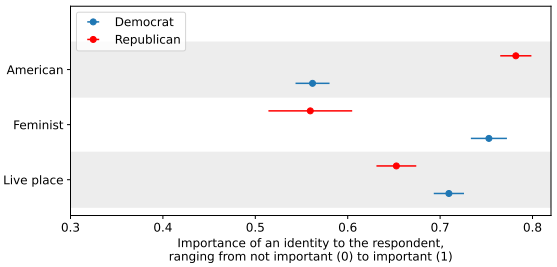


(c) Importance as captured by ANES 2024

Figure 4: Self-reported importance of identities of adults in the United States.

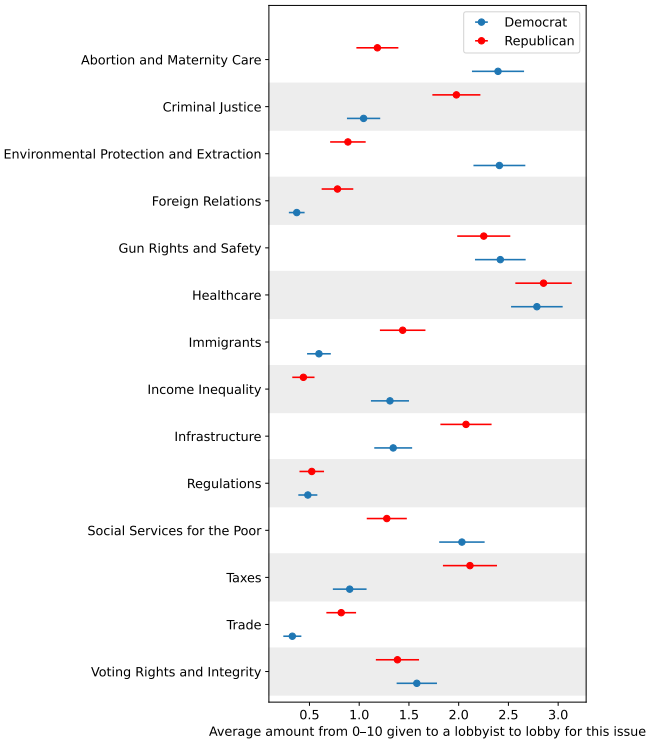


(a) Importance as captured by ANES 2020, only including TikTok users

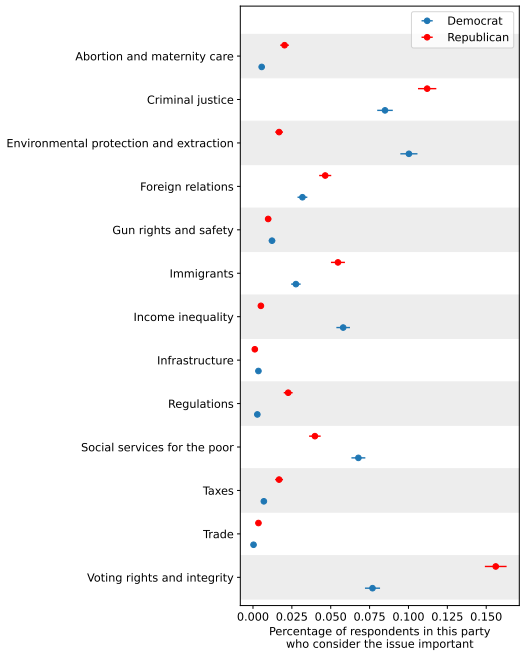


(b) Importance as captured by ANES 2024, only including TikTok users

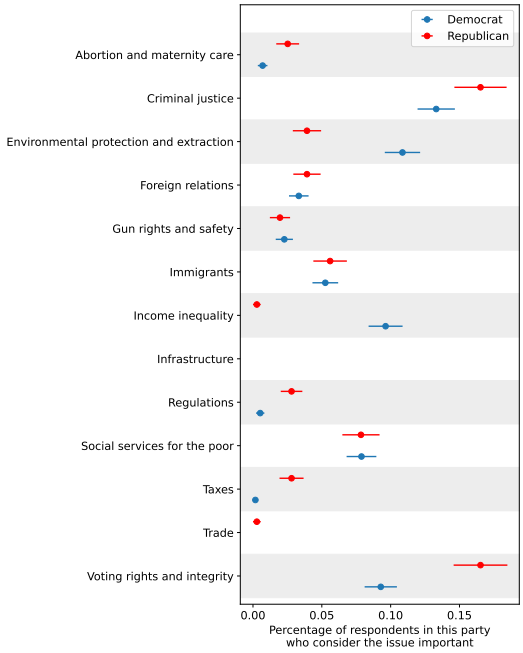
Figure 5: Self-reported importance of identities of TikTok users in the United States.



(a) Our survey



(b) ANES 2020



(c) ANES 2020 TikTok users

Figure 6: Issue importance for respondents to our survey and ANES 2020.

Synthesis

Considering the first research question, neither candidate mentions issues more than identities, and both candidates mention neither identities nor issues in a majority of their posts. Harris mentions identities in 32% of her posts, and issues in 23%, and Trump mentions identities in 30% of his posts and issues in 31%. However, we note that neither candidate mentions issues to any depth. In contrast, issues are more predictive of Party ID than identities for potential voters. This suggests that candidates may appeal to voters by discussing issues rather than identities.

When we consider what the candidates discuss we see more alignment when it comes to identities than issues. Harris signals to gender identities the most often, and Trump signals to Americans the most often. This is well aligned with the survey data, where in both datasets we see that gender identity is important to Democrats and American identity is important to Republicans.

Alignment between the TikTok posts and issue views is less clear. Trump focused on economics and immigration and Harris on family planning. Considering the responses from potential voters Harris may be neglecting other issues. Harris rarely discusses climate change, although environmental protection and extraction is important to Democrats in both surveys and is either at least as, or more important, than Abortion and Maternity care. While Trump discusses Taxes and Criminal Justice each in roughly 10% of posts, these may deserve more attention considering the survey responses.

Both campaigns disparage the other frequently. Of these, it is striking that personal attacks are the most frequent. This contributes to the overall finding that the TikTok campaign content is substantively weak, and unlikely to inform voters about either candidate's policy platform.

Discussion

Quantitative descriptive data has a way of challenging accepted beliefs. Many media and political elites claim that Harris spent too much time talking about the rights of non-binary

or transgender people[11], but the data shows us that Harris avoided talking about that identity group: it was Trump attacking Harris for ties to them, not her claiming them, that was a salient part of the 2024 election cycle. This is highlighted in Figure 2. Actually, the two candidates spent a similar amount of time on "identity" politics (Figure 1) undermining this core post-election punditry regarding 2024.

Our work provides value in several ways. We describe what candidates were posting in a politically intense period and show that neither the expressive nor instrumental models describe the majority of these posts. In addition to this description, we also propose a taxonomy which connects identities, issues, and attacks, and which can be of use in future work. While existing work has differentiated between negative ads focused on personality traits vs policy positions, with varying findings as to the relative effectiveness of each (Fridkin and Kenney, 2008), to the best of our knowledge no one has also explored how identity politics interacts with these two dimensions. Future work should investigate the relative *effectiveness* of negative messaging when it frames one candidate as unable to further the interests of a particular group, without referencing particular policies.

While we found that issues predicted party ID well, this may not straightforwardly support the idealized model of an informed voter with strong preferences. While not directly related to our core research questions, our data afforded the ability to investigate the claim that issue positions are dictated by party ID and not the other way around. This analysis is shown in Section D.1. Here, we find that even when controlling for party ID some identities are still predictive of issue position and importance - suggesting that successful models of political behavior will likely incorporate both expressive and instrumental aspects (Campbell et al., 1960), above and beyond partisanship.

Some have suggested that it may be that no candidate offers what voters want (Fazekas and Hatemi, 2024). Our survey results help provide more insight into this claim by showing what respondents care about and how they stand on a range of issues. We see that issues

[11]Bill Maher (`https://nypost.com/2024/11/16/us-news/bill-maher-says-r-d-democrats-blew-2024-election-with-woke-issues/`, James Carville (`https://www.newsweek.com/james-carville-harris-loss-woke-politics-1982035`), and Matt Yglesias (`https://www.slowboring.com/p/common-sense-manifesto-4-identity`)

are much more predictive of party ID than identities, yet candidates speak about identities at a similar rate (and more often neglect both). This suggests there may be more room for candidates to speak about the issues that matter to potential voters.

Limitations

While focusing on elites, we do not investigate the political content posted on TikTok by everyday users. However, the user-driven content of social media messages can have interesting political implications (Groshek and Al-Rawi, 2013), and as such is likely a fruitful direction for future work.

We focus on the most popular posts by either campaign. Our findings might differ if we were to consider all content. While we think it is valid to focus on the types of content typical viewers would encounter on TikTok, future work could focus on the types of content a more engaged viewer might see.

There is evidence that candidates may use different social media platforms differently (Rossini et al., 2017). Thus, other work could compare and contrast strategies on TikTok to those found on other platforms.

Our focus was primarily on how each team focused on either identities or issues. This distinction speaks to an ongoing debate between instrumental and expressive views of politics (Kalin and Sambanis, 2018; Fiorina, 1976), with recent publications lending strength to both sides (instrumental (Orr et al., 2023) and expressive (Dias and Lelkes, 2022)). However, there are many other interesting categorizations one could make with this data. For example, one other dimension to explore would be the authenticity expressed by either candidate (Enli, 2017). Finally, others have argued that partisanship is a stronger identity than others (West and Iyengar, 2022; Mason and Wronski, 2018). Our work instead engages with the question of how potential voters of each party express different identities and issue positions, without causally estimating whether party ID drives these expressions or the other way around.

In our predictive model, we treat issues as the same. That is, we do not control for the fact that there may have been differences in how participants interpreted each issue question (Alvarez and Nagler, 2004; Lachat and Wagner, 2018; Carmines and Stimson, 1980). Future

work may incorporate more complicated models of how issues interact with information about the parties themselves. Here, we refrained from potentially endogenous models.

In order to keep the predictive models interpretable, we opted for Logistic Regression. Others may find different results with more complex models. However, we did also explore different models, such as Random Forests, and found that we obtained similar and often better performance with Logistic Regression.

The sock puppet method we used to gather videos that users may have seen during the 2024 election is not without flaws. Users do not behave as robotically as our automatic accounts. Moreover, other regions across the US are relevant to the election. While we did not gather a completely realistic view of TikTok in the 2024 election period, we believe that our sample is representative enough for our purposes. That is, we see that the accounts were shown a sizeable number of generally popular videos from each campaign.

Finally, the Fleiss Kappa is low for some categories. This is true for those categories which are more contested, such as "American", which is unsurprising. However, the low Kappa is a limitation.

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A. Sock puppets setup

We create four types of accounts, each of which can be thought of as a prototype for a different type of user:

- Quadrant 1 (lifestyle-heavy): accounts follow 10 lifestyle influencers and 2 news channels. When viewing behavior is activated, accounts watch news content with a low probability (0.05) and non-news content with a high probability (0.95).
- Quadrant 2 (balanced): accounts follow 6 lifestyle influencers and 6 news channels. When viewing behavior is activated, accounts watch news content with equal probabilities (0.50).
- Quadrant 3 (unengaged): accounts follow no one. When viewing behavior is activated, accounts watch both news and non-news content with very low probability (0.05).
- Quadrant 4 (news-attentive): accounts follow 2 lifestyle influencers and 10 news channels. When viewing behavior is activated, agmccounts watch news content with a high probability (0.95) and non-news content with a low probability (0.05).

The lifestyle influencers are randomly picked from a pool of accounts listed in Table 3, while news channels are randomly picked from the accounts listed in Table 4. We hired a research assistant to find the lifestyle influencers. We wanted the topics to be generally popular and only selected influencers with a large number of followers relative to other influencers in their category[12], and accounts which had been recently active. See Table 3 for lifestyle influencers which accounts could choose. See Table 4 for news channels we chose for accounts to follow, these were selected to be central according to the Media Bias Chart (Ad Fontes Media, 2025).

[12]We did not set a general cutoff for the number of followers as these numbers varied wildly by category. For example, sports channels always tended to have more followers than sustainability channels.

Table 3: Lifestyle influencers we chose for accounts to follow. These were chosen as popular, and generally apolitical accounts as far as we could tell.

Category	author_name	author_id
Sustainability	HomesteadDonegal	mirendarosenberg
	Ken Russell	kenforflorida
	Alaina Wood	thegarbagequeen
	Steeze365Daily	steeze365daily
	thesorrygirls	thesorrygirls
	ReLauren	relauren
	Reallaurinda	reallaurinda
	Ashley Diedenhofen	sciencebyashley
	TheNotoriousKIA	thenotoriouskia
	Phil Sustainability	philsustainability
	Brennan Kai	brennan.kai
Wellness	Jessamyn | The Underbelly Yoga	mynameisjessamyn
	Mari Llewellyn	marillewellyn
	Arielle Lorre	ariellelorre
	Dr. Will Cole	drwillcole
	Micheline Maalouf Therapist	micheline.maalouf
	Staci Tanouye, MD	dr.staci.t
	Andrew Huberman	hubermanlab
	Fiona	feelgoodwith_fi
	Steph Grasso, MS, RD	stephgrassodietitian
	Daniel	mrduku
DIY / Home improvement	Molly Miller	therenegadehome
	Bong Bain	wildheartshome
	Lilly	thefurnituredoctor
	Christine Higg	_forthehome
	Joanna Gaines	joannagaines
	Lone Fox	lonefoxhome
	Kylie Katich	kyliekatich
	CASSMAKESHOME | HOME & DIY	cassmakeshome
	Renovating Our Home	renovatingourhome
	Jay Munee DIY	jaymuneediy
	kelsey	kelseydarragh
	Abby	abby_roadhome
	Contractor Ken	contractorken
	ReallyVeryCrunchy	reallyverycrunchy
	THE FLIPPED PIECE	theflippedpiece
	Jeff Thorman	homerenovisiondiy
	Bro Builds	bro_builds

Category	author_name	author_id
Tech	koharotv	koharotvreal
	Tyler Morgan	hitomidocameraroll
	Jimena con jota	soyjimenaconjota
	CHIP	chip_de
	Mark's Tech	markstech
	TheAsianJC	theasianjc
	Lucas VRTech	lucas_vrtech
	Marques Brownlee	mkbhd
	Unbox Therapy	unboxtherapyofficial
	Austin Evans	austintechtips
	iJustine	ijustine
	Kevin Stratvert	kevinstratvert
	Sara Dietschy	saradietschy
College Sports	Olivia Dunne	livvy
	Paige Beukers	paigebueckers
	Hanna & Haley Cavinder	cavindertwins
	Khoi Young	khoiyoung7
	Frederick Richards	frederickflips
	Shedeur Sanders	shedeursanders
	Angel Reese	angelreese10
	Caitlin Clark	caitlin.clark22
	Bronny James	bronny
	A.J. Henning	ajhenning
Hunting/fishing/outdoors	BlacktipH Fishing	blacktiph
	Ryan Izquierdo	ryanizfishing
	jetreef	jetreef
	RAWW Fishing	rawwfishingyt
	kickintheirbasstv	kickintheirbasstv
	Outdoors Weekly	outdoorsweekly
	Frederick Penney	frederick
	Becky Granola Girl	bonjourbecky
	Keith Paluso	thisiskeithpaluso
	Kween werK	kweenwerk

Table 4: News channels we chose for accounts to follow. Reliability scores and bias scores are extracted from the Media Bias Chart (Ad Fontes Media, 2025). Reliability scores for articles and shows are on a scale of 0-64. Scores above 40 are generally good. Bias scores for articles and shows are on a scale of -42 to +42, with higher negative scores being more left, higher positive scores being more right, and scores closer to zero being minimally biased, equally balanced, or exhibiting a centrist bias. Typically, a publication would be considered centrist if the score is between -10 and +10, left-oriented if the score is -10 or less and right-leaning if the score is +10 or more.

author_name	author_id	Reliability	Bias
New York Times	nytimes	41.04	-8.07
NBC	nbcnews	42.80	-5.64
Washington Post	washingtonpost	38.83	-6.93
PBS News	pbsnews	43.32	-4.05
ABC	abcnews	44.80	-3.00
CBS	cbsnews	42.03	-2.72
NPR	npr	43.09	-4.17
BBC News	bbcnews	44.73	-1.35
Yahoo News	yahoonews	40.94	-5.63
USA Today	usatoday	40.86	-4.06

B. Coding identities and issues on TikTok

We report the majority vote label for each category. For multi-select categories we include any label which received at least two votes, or which at least two coders labeled.

The full Fleiss Kappa scores are below. Table 5 shows the Kappa for identities and Table 6 shows it for issues. We see higher scores for more common labels, which is to be expected, and lends confidence to our primary findings. For example, we are confident that Harris often discusses Family planning and Trump often discusses Generic economics and Immigration. When it comes to identities Trump appeals to majority identities in a way that coders do not always agree about. For example, we see that when one coder codes the identity 'Americans', others code 'Immigration status' 19% of the time, and 'Income groups' 18% of the time, alluding to the fact that nationality and class can be discussed in multiple ways.

Coders were given the general instructions:

> You are determining three things for each video. You can use the visual information, the audio information, and the video description to determine these three things. As much as possible mark the categories based on explicit mentions of groups and policies.
>
> First, you should determine if the video explicitly (or highly suggests in words or images) mentions any issues. The video can mention 0 issues or multiple issues. If the video mentions multiple issues, please select each issue that is mentioned. Second, you should determine if
>
> the video explicitly (or highly suggests in words or images) mentions any identities. The video can mention 0 identities or multiple identities. If the video mentions multiple identities, please select each identity that is mentioned. Third, you should determine whether the video makes
>
> an attack or disparaging comment about a candidate. If the other candidate is not mentioned you should mark NOT DISPARAGING. The attack may attack the candidate about a policy, a group, or both. If the attack is about both a candidate's policy and their association with a group you should mark the value Policy and Group Attack.

The full codebook is shown for attacks in Table 7, identities in Table 8 and for issues in Table 9.

Table 5: Fleiss' Kappa by Group

Group	**Fleiss' Kappa**
Americans	0.4271
Judaism	0.3980
Age > 65	0.4259
Sexual Orientation	0.4411
Black	0.6952
Industry	0.2472
Age < 18	0.4253
White	0.8993
Income groups	0.6841
Veteran status	0.6309
Age 18–29	0.6487
Christian	0.4719
Islam	0.8743
Female	0.8232
Male	0.3589
Education groups	0.1787
Asian	0.1973
Immigration status	0.6635
Hispanic	0.6990

Table 6: Fleiss' Kappa by Issue

Issue	**Fleiss' Kappa**
Climate change	0.3455
Criminal justice	0.5358
Family planning	0.9118
Foreign policy	0.4732
Generic economics	0.7399
Gun rights / safety	0.6339
Healthcare	0.5317
Immigration	0.8184
Other	0.7741
Regulation	0.2673
Taxes	0.8361
Trade	0.3306
Voting rights	0.3320

C. Survey background and details

We deployed two surveys using the firm Prodege and the software platform Qualtrics. The first was launched in winter 2022 and the respondents who successfully completed the survey were recontacted one month later. The first survey contained a battery of questions around social group identity, whereas the second focused on issue positions. We received 1,997 responses to the first survey and 1,027 of these successfully completed the second round. The population was contacted following a quota to match the adult population of the US on gender, age, education, race, and partisanship.

In order to model identity fully, we incorporate a range of related work. Similarly, we ask about a comprehensive set of policy issues. We share additional details about the INDENTITY+ and ISSUES models and survey instruments here.

See the full identity survey document here.

See the full issues survey document here.

Indentity+

INDENTITY+ allows us to explore the hypothesis that party identification is driven by belonging to other social groups. Here, we utilize a rich measurement of identity, which we term IDENTITY +. This measurement utilizes several different dimensions of identity: Group Membership, Group Affiliation (i.e., which identities a person affiliates themselves), Group Fate (i.e,. which identities a person sees their fate linked to (Dawson, 1995)), Group Standing (which measures a sense of nostalgic deprivation (Gest et al., 2018)), and Group Support (which measures the extent to which a respondent would provide financial resources to different groups). These have been found to be important and non-overlapping measures of identity (McClain et al., 2009).

A common starting point in measuring identity is ***Group Membership*** (i.e., what group, or groups, a person assigns themselves to within all demographic categories). (McClain et al., 2009) added the measure of perceived membership, which we term ***Group Association***

(i.e., which groups a person associates themselves with). In explaining Black politics in the United States, Dawson (1995) originated the term *linked fate*. Linked fate describes the extent to which group members see their fate as linked to the fate of the group. He argues that even as their economic conditions change, Black voters see their fate linked to the fate of Black people in the United States. Linked fate, which we call ***Group Fate*** has remained an essential measure of racial identity in politics (Simien, 2005).

Group Association and Fate, largely developed for Black voters, have been questioned for Hispanic and Asian voters (Junn and Masuoka, 2008; Gershon et al., 2019). However, that is not to say that race does not factor into politics for these groups (Sadhwani, 2022; Cox, 2019). For Asian and Hispanic voters the groups which they choose to ignore may be just as significant as those they choose to incorporate into their identities (Basler, 2008; Junn and Masuoka, 2008). Recently, Hickel et al. found that Hispanic voters who identified as American, rather than Hispanic, were more likely to vote Republican (Hickel Jr et al., 2020).

Simultaneously, scholars have called for a new understanding of white political identity (Jardina, 2019). Unlike previous work which has focused on out-group animus, Jardina has proposed that white identity is also explained by in-group attitudes, that is, those with higher white identity value being white, and have positive attitudes towards other whites. Additionally, recent work has investigated the extent to which some whites may see their group as a dispossessed minority (Jardina, 2021), suggesting the importance of group consciousness for this group as well (Berry et al., 2019).

The rise of the narrative of oppression in political communication, along with the associated supports for populism in recent elections, bring up questions around the extent to which perceived societal standing influences political identity and behavior (Mondon and Winter, 2019; Berlet and Sunshine, 2019; Kazin, 2016). Gest et al. measured subjective social, political, and economic status to be able to predict support for the Radical Right in the United States and United Kingdom (Gest et al., 2018). They found that nostalgic deprivation, a construct tightly related to ideas of a dispossessed minority, predicts support for the Radical Right. Whereas measures of societal standing are not generally included in models of partisanship, we incorporate this in a measure we term ***Group Standing***.

Individuals are influenced by a range of potentially conflicting social group identities (Brader et al., 2014; Bergersen et al., 2018; Smith, 2007; Matos et al., 2023; Bedolla, 2007). To model the fact that identities can compete and that voters are influenced by a range of identities, where respondents care about how politicians benefit certain groups (Campbell et al., 1960), we introduce a measure of ***Group Support***. This measure captures which identities may be correlated with political action, as explained below.

Incorporating this existing scholarship, IDENTITY+ is drawn from five categories of variables: **group membership**, **group association**, **group fate**, **group standing**, and **group support**:

- **Group Membership** We start the survey by asking participants to select subgroup membership within 12 categories (and party identification): age, gender, race and ethnicity, education, income, religion, LGBTQ status, immigration status, union status, veteran status, place of residence, industry, and political party.
- **Group Association** To determine which groups the respondent most identifies with, we ask, "These descriptions matter the MOST to me" and "These descriptions matter the LEAST to me". The question is structured such that a respondent must select three of the possible subgroups that matter the most and three which matter the least. Each of the possible responses are generated given the respondent's previous answers. For example, a woman who wrote in her race as Salvadoran,[13] with a college education, who works in the health industry, is a practicing protestant, and a union member, could say that the three most or least important descriptions to her are: "I am Salvadoran", "I am a union cardholder" and "My college degree". This departs from surveys which allow respondents to select groups without identifying subgroups, for example, by selecting race/ethnicity, union status, or education as being important to them.
- **Group Fate** Here, we follow a similar approach as for group association. For each group

[13]For this and the other identity strength items, if respondents indicated belonging to multiple groups we asked them to indicate which one they prefer that we refer to for the rest of the survey. So if someone indicated that they were both 'Black' and 'Vietnamese' we would ask them to indicate which group they prefer we use for the rest of the survey to refer to their race. We view this as a modest improvement over options which either force people to select one race, or refer to race in abstract terms. However, in future work we will refine the delivery of the survey to allow people to better describe multiple memberships.

that a participant belongs to they must choose one of the following: "What happens generally to THIS GROUP in this country will have something to do with what happens in my life" and "What happens to this group will NOT impact my life; What happens to this group will impact my life A LITTLE; What happens to this group will impact my life SOMEWHAT; What happens to this group will impact my life A LOT". We also constrain responses such that for at least one group and no more than three, they must select the most extreme options (NOT and A LOT).

- **Group Standing** To determine how one sees the groups within a societal context, we ask respondents to "Place each group into categories indicating how important you think they are in American society." They are shown a diagram of concentric circles, and told that " '1' represents those that are considered the most central and important to society, whereas '4' represents those that are considered the least central and important to society." This question was adapted from the question developed by Gest et al. (2018). In the original conception, people are asked to indicate the relative importance of large demographic groups, such as "The Elderly". Here, we are using standing as another dimension of identity, and asking respondents to indicate the relative importance only of those groups which they have indicated belonging to.
- **Group Support** Finally, we ask participants to indicate how much they would favor different groups they belong to with financial support: both with a donation by a charity and spending by the government. We ask two questions: "A charity has allocated funds to target groups of students to send to college and you've been asked to decide who should receive those funds among the following groups. Select the three groups you would target to send to college" and "The government has allocated funds to target groups of students to send to college and you've been asked to decide who should receive those funds among the following groups. Select the three groups you would target to send to college:". Now, they are shown the same groups as in previous questions, with the groups rephrased to be plural, for example, if a respondent selected *Protestant* earlier, they would be shown the option to give to *People of Protestant Faith*.

Issues

Here, we include positions on 34 issues across 14 political topics, from abortion to foreign policy. For each of the 34 issues covered in the second survey we ask four types of questions. The first

asks respondents to select a position on an issue, the second asks respondents who they think gains and loses from an issue, the third asks their opinion about their perceptions of the issue positions of elites from the Democrat and Republican parties, and the fourth asks respondents to indicate how important 14 political topics are to them. Here, we analyze how respondents answer the issue position questions and the issue importance questions, questions two and three are the subject of future work. For example, an issue position question about abortion is as follows, *Access to unconditional abortion before 15 weeks: a) Should BE protected by law, b) Should NOT be protected by law, or c) Don't know.*

In the issue importance question we group the 34 issues into 14 issue areas (in order to make the choices tractable for respondents). Respondents are presented with the following question. *Imagine you have 20 $100K tokens to allocate to lobby on behalf of your position in the following public policy categories, how would you allocate those 20 tokens among these public policy categories?* ***You must allocate all 20 tokens, but the max you can allocate for any given category is 10.*** The 14 issue areas are: Trade, Immigration, Healthcare, Voting Rights and Integrity, Infrastructure, Regulations, Foreign Relations, Taxes, Criminal Justice, Abortion and Maternity Care, Income inequality, Social Services for the Poor, Gun Rights and Safety, and Environmental Protection.

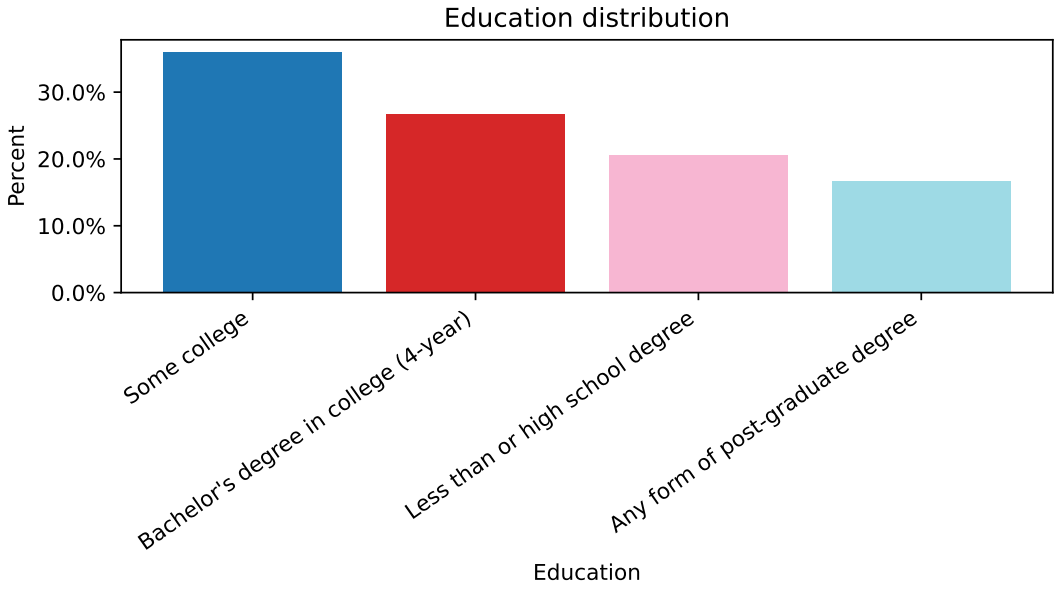


Figure 7: Survey respondents by education level.

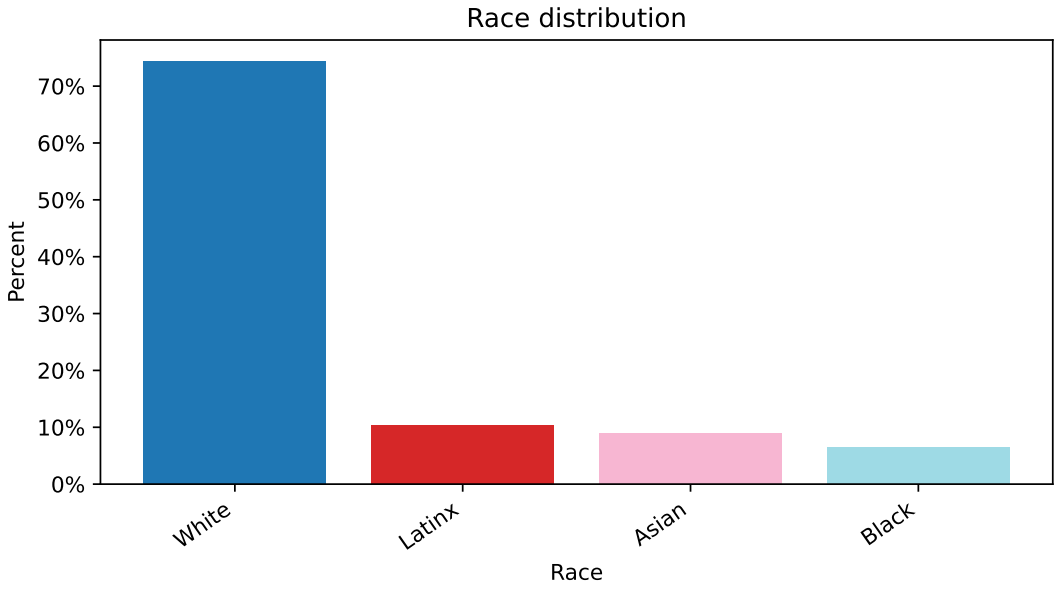


Figure 8: Survey respondents by race.

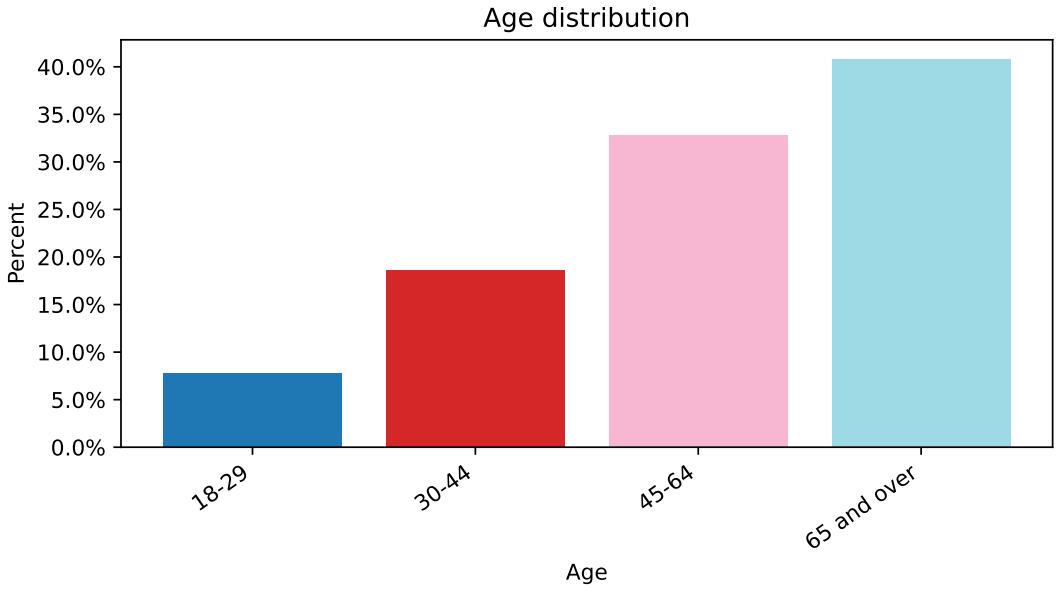


Figure 9: Survey respondents by age.

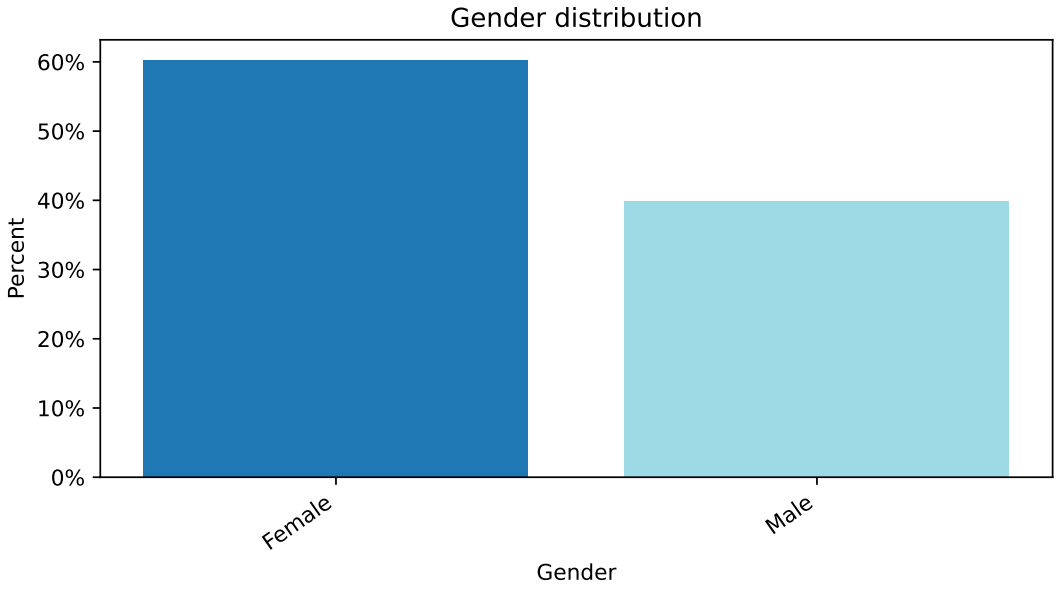


Figure 10: Survey respondents by gender.

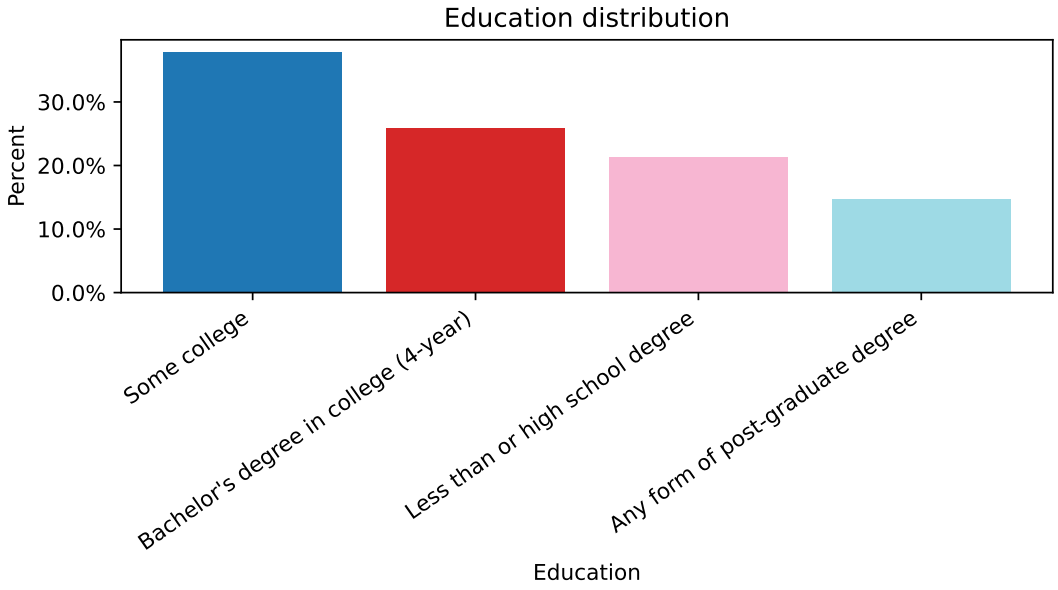


Figure 11: Survey respondents by education level - wave one.

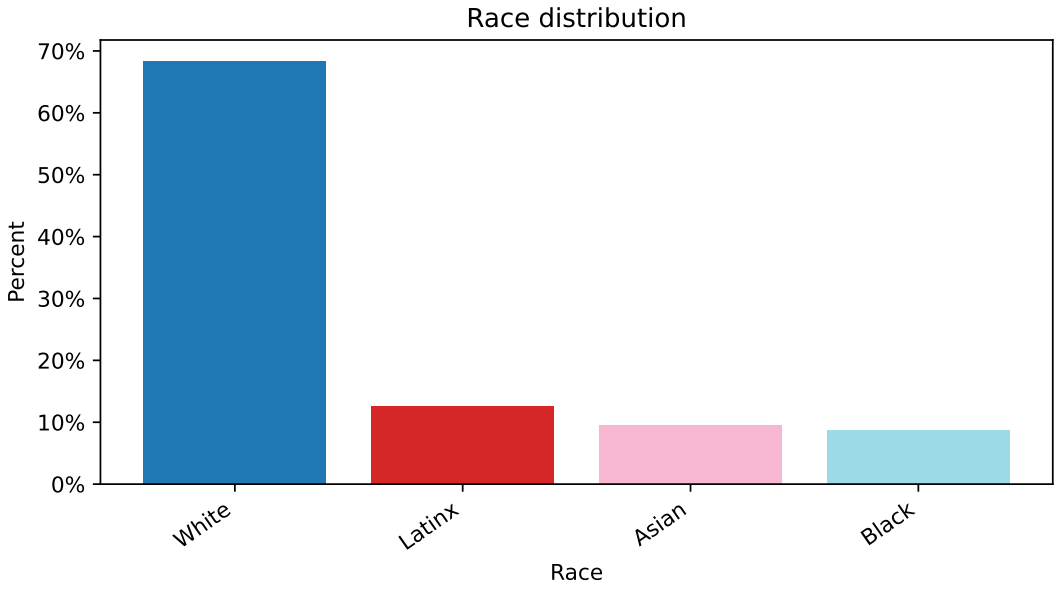


Figure 12: Survey respondents by race - wave one.

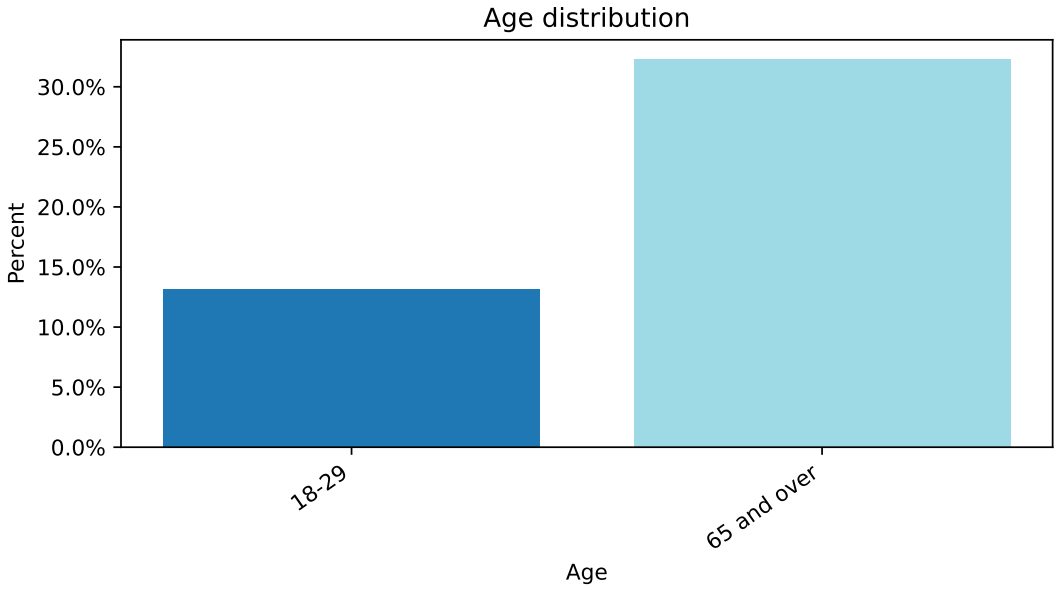


Figure 13: Survey respondents by age - wave one.

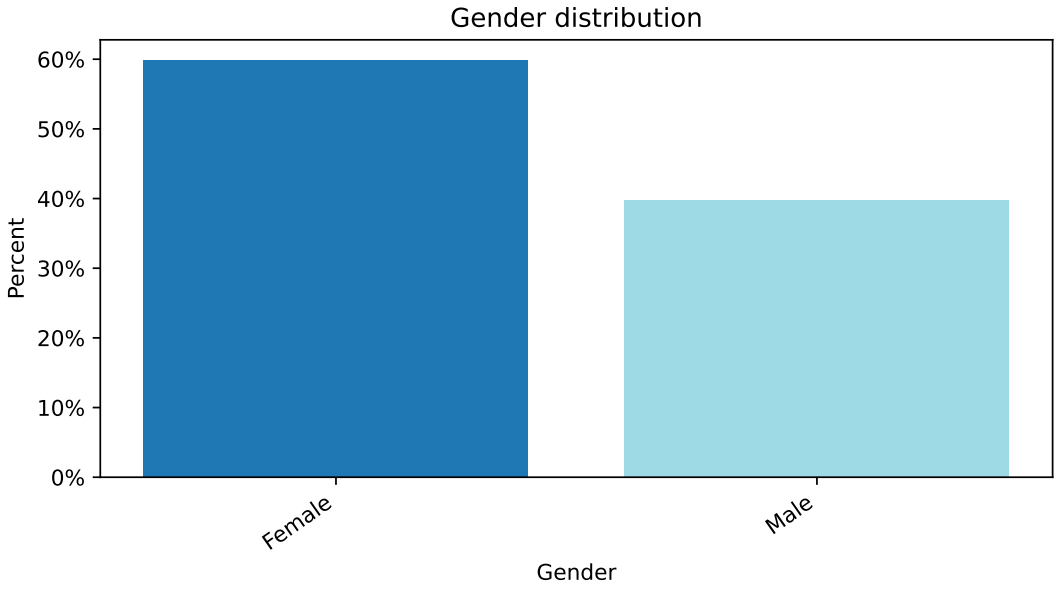


Figure 14: Survey respondents by gender - wave one.

Understanding the survey respondents

Here we describe the survey respondents in terms of their overall identities and issue positions.

Identities and issue positions of Democrats and Republicans.

We first inspect the dataset in terms of identities and issues in order to answer the questions above. In Figure 15, we see that Protestant (64.42% of this group), affiliated with armed forces (57.95%), and rural (55.49%) respondents are most likely to be Republican. In contrast, Black (77.27%), urban (58.86%), and LGBTQ (58.33%) respondents are most likely to be Democrats.

In Figure 16, where we code "Agree" as -1 and "Disagree" as 1, we see that Democrats have strong positions on government-provided healthcare for people over 65 (mean=-0.8419, high agreement), and access to at least six weeks of maternity leave (mean=-0.8395, high agreement), among other issues. Republicans have strong positions on reducing sentences for violent crimes (mean=0.8697, high disagreement), and automatically registering citizens to vote (mean=0.6723, high disagreement).

The positions of those who identify with the parties differ the most when it comes to climate change (Democrat mean=-0.6267, Republican mean=0.4086, diff=1.0354), research and production on renewable energy over oil and gas (Democrat mean=-0.8349, Republican mean=0.1954, diff=1.0303), and the positive impact of immigration the job market (Democrat mean=-0.5837, Republican mean=0.4054, diff=0.9892).

In contrast, most respondents agree about restricting donations to political campaigns (both parties agree, diff=0.0862), the US withdrawing its role in international diplomatic organizations (both parties disagree, diff=0.1314), and the government giving Medicare with no ability to supplement with private insurance (both parties disagree, diff=0.1389).

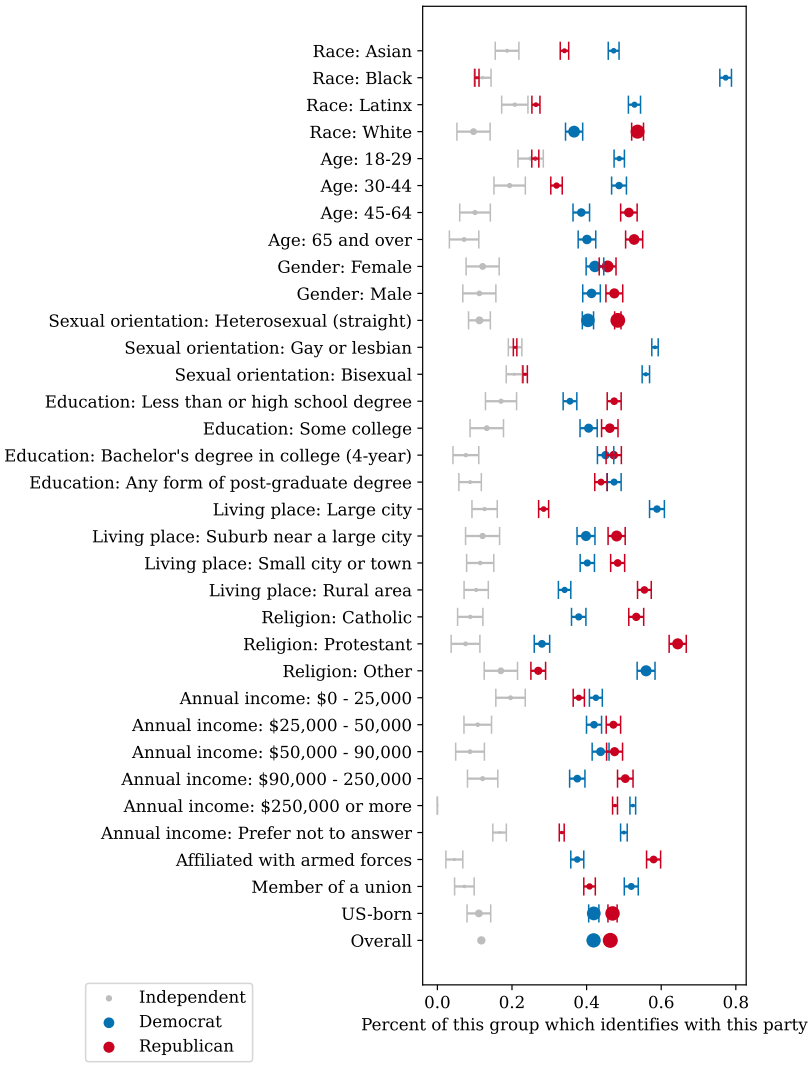


Figure 15: We show the percentage of respondents who self-described as Democrat, Republican, or Independent, which can be described with each demographic or group membership variable.

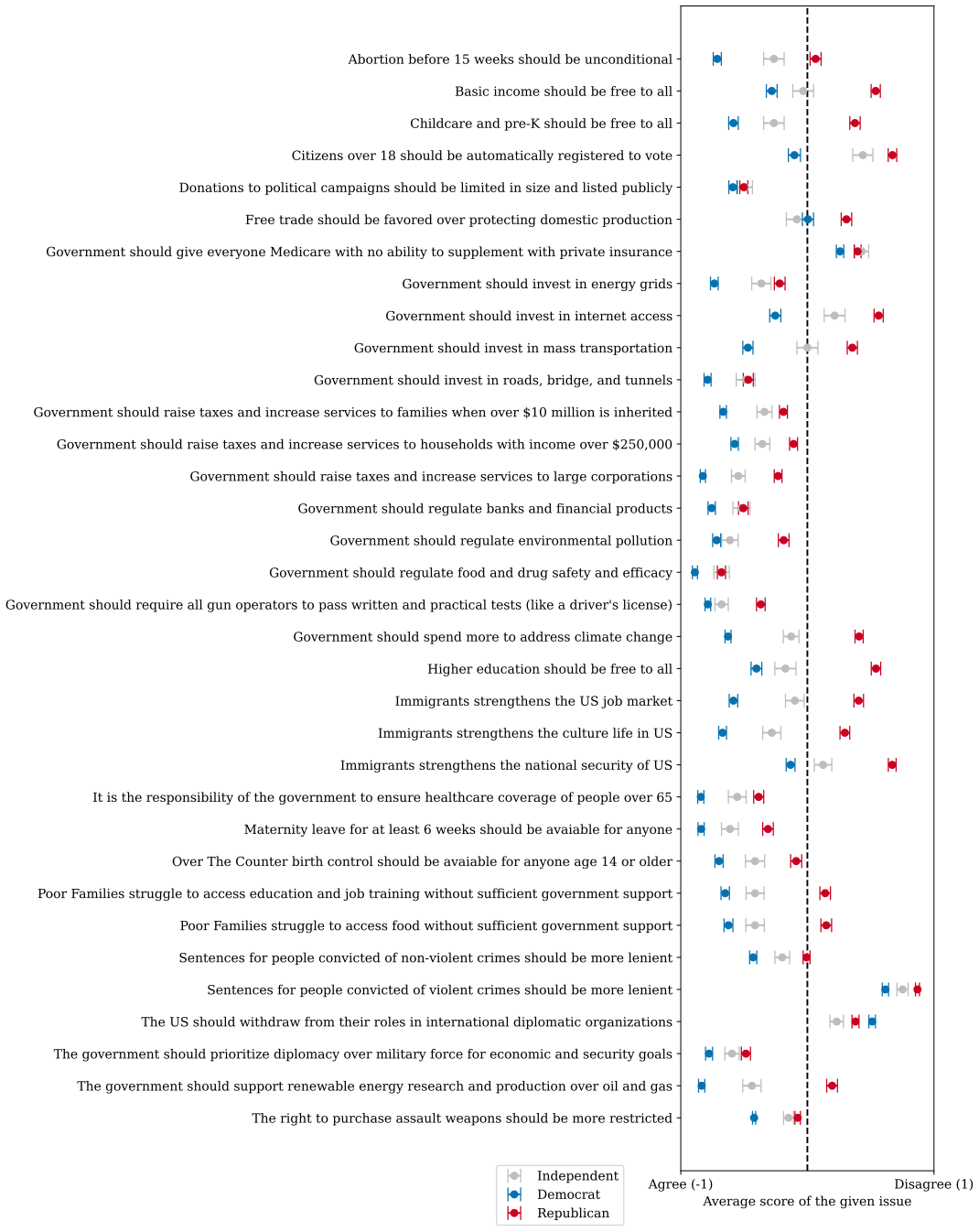


Figure 16: We show the average issue position from Agree (coded as -1) to Disagree (coded as 1) for respondents who self-described as Democrat, Republican, or Independent.

Identities and issues which are most important in each political party.

To understand which identities are most important to potential voters of each party, we ask respondents a question designed for them to rank the groups they belong to in a way which mirrors a view of politics where voters select candidates who distribute resources to specific groups (described in more detail in the section Additional methods background and details). To understand which issues are most important, we ask respondents to assign tokens to issues, a task we design such that not all issues can receive tokens, producing a ranking of issues which respondents regard as important.

D. Additional analyses

To what extent do social identities drive issue positions and importance?

While not essential to the central questions of the paper we are also interested in understanding whether social identities drive issue positions? As we see that the candidates are more likely to discuss identities than issues, it may be that they do so as identities are important in how people form opinions about issues. Thus, we investigate two hypotheses here.

Here, we are interested in understanding the relationship between social group identities and issue position and importance above and beyond partisanship. That is, we are teasing apart two hypotheses:

- **Hypothesis one:** The reason that issues are so predictive is that people take issue positions that align perfectly with the positions of the party. If this is the case there shouldn't be a correlation between being affected by an issue and one's position about that issue, or the importance they give to it. Instead, we should see that no identity covariates are significant after including party ID in our models of issue position and importance.
- **Hypothesis two:** The reason that issues are so predictive is that people take the party line on issues they don't care about and have more diverse opinions about issues which are important to them. If this is the case, we should see more deviation from the party line for issues that clearly impact one of the social groups that a respondent belongs to. We should see this even when we include party ID in our models of issue position and importance.

In Figure 17, we see that issue positions seem to be much more determined by party than by demographic. However, there are a few notable exceptions. For example, Hispanic and low-income respondents have more positive positions towards free education and basic income than the party baseline, within both parties. We see clear party separation on the issues of education, assault weapons, and immigration and less separation on the issues of maternity leave, non-violent crimes, and regulations. We see some of these results mirrored in Table 11 where we marked statistical significance of identities to predict issue positions, conditional on party identification. For example, when it comes to the issues of basic income, we see that Hispanic respondents are more positive on the issue, even when party ID is included in the model. Females are more likely to support maternity leave, when when party ID is considered. Critically, while no identity is significant for all issues, most identity categories are significant for some issues (i.e., scanning left to right one can see all categories but sexual orientation are significant for some issue), and some identity categories are significant for all issues (i.e., scanning top to bottom every issue has a least two significant identity categories).

In Figure 18, we see that there are more instances of respondents "crossing the party line". For example, we see that Black, Hispanic, and low-income Republicans are more similar to their Democratic counterparts than to the average Republican in terms of the importance they give to the issue area of social services. When it comes to abortion and maternity care Democratic men give similar importance to the issue as Republican men. We follow up on whether any of the findings in Figure 18 persist when we model issue importance as a function of one's identities *and* their party ID in Table 12. Here, we see that many of the results are mirrored. Again, females place greater importance on abortion and maternity leave, even when party ID is considered. Low income respondents place greater importance on income inequality and social services. Hispanic respondents also place greater importance on social services.

Generally, these results suggest greater support for hypothesis two. Party identification is undeniably correlated with both issue positions and importance. However, we do see some deviations from the party line, especially when it comes to how respondents value different issues. Although it is not our central question, we lend some evidence towards the claim that policy influences party rather than the other way around, by showing that how one values different policies has a relationship to the groups one belongs to and is not strictly determined by one's party.

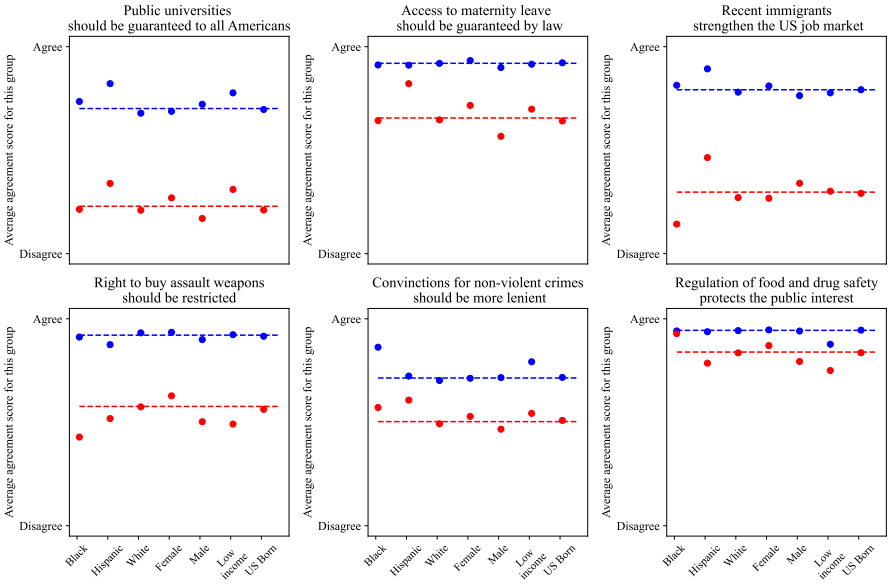


Figure 17: Here we show the average issue position amongst Democrats and Republicans with different demographics. Higher values indicate a more positive stance on this issue.

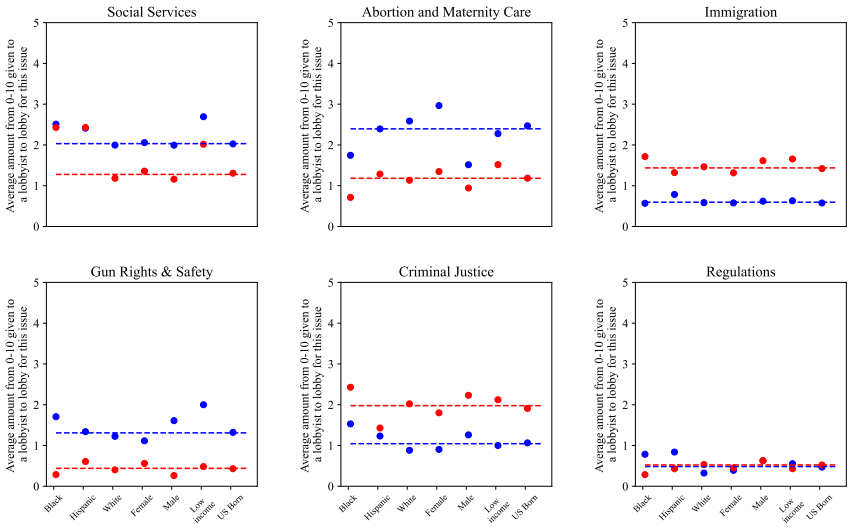


Figure 18: Here we show the average issue area importance amongst Democrats and Republicans with different demographics. Higher values indicate more importance given to a specific area.

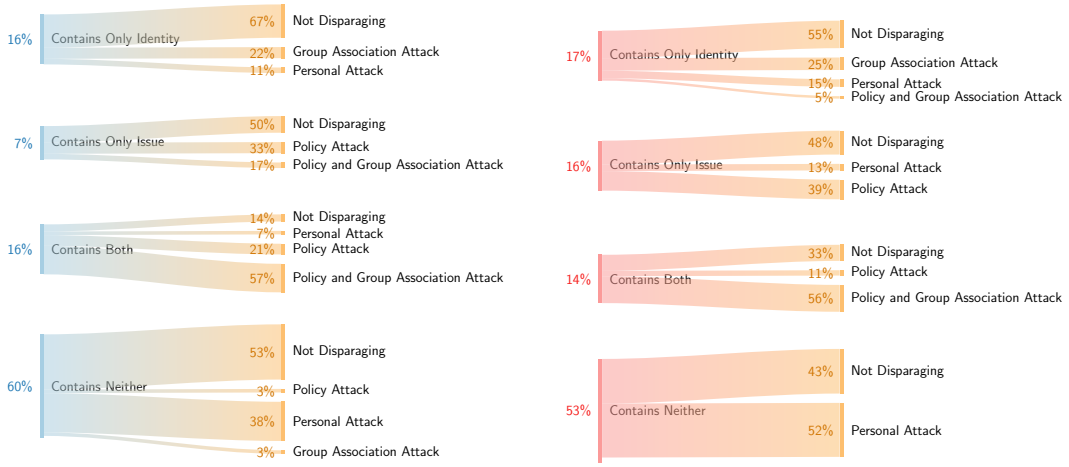


Figure 19: Harris (left) and Trump (right) TikTok posts in terms of containing identity, issue, and disparaging content.

Yet, we caution to attribute identity to the findings shown here. We found almost no correlation between identity strength and issue importance. Here, we measure identity strength as whether you respond that belonging to a certain group is important to your identity or if you see the fate of that group as linked to your fate. Across the board, identity strength did not impact policy position or importance, with a few exceptions. Only in two policy areas is identity centrality more correlated to policy area preferences than simply belonging to an affected group: reproductive rights, and immigration. We find that women who view gender as more central to their identity are more likely to prioritize the policy area of reproductive rights. Additionally, people born in the US who place being American as central to their identity are more likely to prioritize immigration as a policy area. However, these are the only statistically significant relationships that we find. Generally, we find that certain issue positions are slightly affected by group belonging, and largely unaffected by identity strength.

Robustness Wave One

In Figure 19, we repeat Figure 1 but only considering videos seen by the initial wave one accounts. We see these two figures are not substantively different. The majority of the content of both candidates discusses neither identities nor issues and the relative share of identity and issue content is similar.

Table 7: Codebook for disparaging content.

Category	Definition	Examples/Criteria
Policy Attack	Posts that attack a candidate based on a policy action, proposal, or association with a policy.	Criticizing a candidate's stance, decisions, or alignment with specific policies Example: https://www.tiktok.com/@kamalaharris/video/7413200952662035742.
Group Association Attack	Posts that attack a candidate for supporting or failing to support a particular group. These explicitly attack one of the groups in the identity column.	Claims a candidate is prejudiced against a group (e.g., Latinos) or favors a specific group (e.g., focuses only on transgender rights). Example: https://www.tiktok.com/@realdonaldtrump/video/7396435731117280543.
Policy and group attack	Posts that attack a candidate that contains both a policy attack and a group association attack	Statements portraying a candidate stance, decisions, or alignment with specific policies which may hurt a particular group or groups. Example: https://www.tiktok.com/@kamalaharris/video/7397081664846974239.
Personal Attack	Posts that attack a candidate based on their character, competence, or suitability.	Statements portraying a candidate as unfit, incompetent, or personally flawed. These are NOT policy or group association attacks but vague attacks that simply attack a candidate, such as "they are lazy." NOT, "their laziness has led to illegal immigration." Example: https://www.tiktok.com/@teamtrump/video/7429535141673831722
Not Disparaging	Posts that do not attack the opposing candidate.	(1) They do not mention the other candidate at all or (2) They do the other candidate but do not attack them in any way. For example, there is no mention of policy/group stance or only neutral, factual descriptions of a candidate's positions. Example: https://www.tiktok.com/@timwalz/video/7412039611750386986

Table 8: Codebook for Group Identity Categories. These correspond to identities which were asked about in the first wave of our survey.

Category	**Definition and Included Groups**
Age groups	References to individuals or groups defined by age, including youth (e.g., under 18, 18–29), middle-aged individuals, and older adults (e.g., 65+).
Americans	References to national identity, including "Americans," "the American people," or implicit in-group language (e.g., "people like us") where the group clearly refers to Americans.
Education groups	References to individuals defined by educational attainment, such as those without a college degree or college graduates.
Gender groups	References to gender identity, including women, men, and non-binary individuals.
Immigration status	References to immigration-related identity, including immigrants, non-citizens, or contrasts between immigrants and Americans.
Income groups	References to socioeconomic class, including working-class, middle-class, or upper-income individuals.
Industry	References to occupation or sector, including specific professions (e.g., carpenters) or broader industries.
Racial groups	References to race or ethnicity, including Black, White, Asian, Hispanic groups, or mentions of racial diversity more generally.
Religion	References to religious identity or affiliation, including specific religions (e.g., Protestant, Catholic, Islam, Judaism) or general references to religion or religious freedom.
Sexual orientation	References to sexual orientation, including LGBTQ identities (e.g., queer, gay) or heterosexual identity.
Veteran status	References to individuals with military service, including veterans or active-duty service members.

Table 9: Codebook for Political Issue Categories. These correspond to issues which were asked about in the second-wave of our survey.

Category	**Definition and Included Topics**
Gun rights / safety:	Gun policy, including access to assault weapons and gun rights, and gun safety.
Family planning	Reproductive rights and access, including birth control, abortion, and maternity leave.
Infrastructure	Massive infrastructure projects, such as Build Back Better, roads, bridges, tunnels, increased internet access, mass transportation and the energy grid.
Enhanced government subsidies	Universal basic income, pre-k / kindergarten for all, and college for all.
Safety net for the poor	Education and job training for the poor.
Regulation	Regulation around food and safety, environmental pollution or others.
Taxes	Lowering taxes, introducing new taxes, or otherwise changing tax policy.
Healthcare	Healthcare, health policy, health outcomes in the United States, access to healthcare and health insurance.
Trade	Trade policy such as tariffs, free trade agreements
Voting rights	Access to voting, restrictions of voting rights, lowering the voting age (NOTE, not about just discussing voting in this election
Immigration	Quantity, impact on jobs, culture, national security, border wall
Criminal justice	Violent crime, convictions, prisons in the United States.
Foreign policy	America First, military interventions, war in Ukraine, America abroad
Climate change	Environmental policy around mitigating the consequences of climate change, discussions of climate change.
Generic economics	Promises around wages, inflation/prices, deficit, etc., without any specific policy of subsidies, taxes, or regulation.
Ceasefire	Promises around Israel/Gaza ceasefire.

Table 10: Examples of different types of attacks found in TikTok campaign posts.

Team	Type of Attack	Quote	Account	Date
Trump	Personal	The video has a clip from CNN where the host asked a boy "What's the first word that pops up your head when you hear the name Kamala Harris?" To which the kid answered, "Liar." And the video description says "So true, kid!" https://www.tiktok.com/@teamtrump/video/7418975389944401198	teamtrump	2024-9-26
	Group Association	The video started with a clip from Harris' earlier videos where she said, "18 through 24, they are stupid". Then, Trump said, "She's not the brightest bulb in the ceiling. No, she's not smart. We're with the young people. They are smart. We love the young people, and we're gonna take them every time." https://www.tiktok.com/@realdonaldtrump/video/7396435731117280543	realdonaldtrump	2024-7-27
	Policy	"They've had three and a half years to fix the border. They've had three and a half years to create jobs. And all the things we talked about. The worst president, the worst vice president in the history of our country." https://www.tiktok.com/@realdonaldtrump/video/7414599502465600798	realdonaldtrump	2024-9-14
Harris	Personal	"Tim Walz on Trump and Vance: 'These guys are weird as hell.'" https://www.tiktok.com/@kamalahq/video/7400522330935414047	kamalahq	2024-8-7
	Group Association	The video has a clip from one of Trump's rallies, where a speaker said on the stage, "These Latinos, they love making babies." https://www.tiktok.com/@kamalahq/video/7430918268728216875	kamalahq	2024-10-28
	Policy	"Donald Trump hand-selected three members of the Supreme Court with the intention that they would undo the protections of Roe v. Wade, and they did exactly as he intended." https://www.tiktok.com/@kamalaharris/video/7413200952662035742	kamalaharris	2024-9-10

Table 11: We fit a separate linear regression for each issue using all identity features and party ID as covariates. We find that for each issue some covariates are statistically significant when when we include party ID as a coefficient. Here an X indicates that a coefficient was significant, a + indicates a positive coefficient and a - indicates a negative coefficient.

	Over the counter birth control	Free education	Raise inheritance taxes	Pro-immigrants jobs	Increase cc spending	Stricter gun laws	Regulating political donations	Non-violent crimes
Female	+X				+X		+X	
Asian								
Black								+X
Hispanic		+X		+X				+X
18-29		+X	-X				-X	
30-44		+X	-X				-X	+X
45-64		+X				-X		
HS or less								
4-year degree					+X		+X	
Post-grad				+X				
A large city								
A small town	-X							
A rural area						-X		
Protestant faith								
Catholic faith				-X				
Other faith	X	+X						
LGBTQ								
Union member								-X
Army Status			-X			-X		
US Born			-X					
Income < $25K			+X					+X
Income ∈ $25-50K			+X					+X
Income ∈ $50-90K								
Income ∈ $90-250K				+X				
Income > $250K	+X			+X				
Independent	-X	-X	-X	-X	-X			-X
Republican	-X	-X	-X	-X	-X	-X	-X	-X

Table 12: We fit a separate linear regression for the amount of fictional lobbying credits placed on each issue using all identity features and party ID as covariates. We find that for most issue importances some covariates are statistically significant when when we include party ID as a coefficient. Here an X indicates that a coefficient was significant, a + indicates a positive coefficient and a - indicates a negative coefficient.

	Abortion	Social Services	Immi-gration	Criminal Justice	Income Inequality	Voting Rights	Taxes	Environ-ment
Female	+X			-X				
Asian								
Black								-X
Hispanic		+X					-X	
18-29					+X			
30-44	+X		-X		+X	-X		
45-64					+X			
HS or less		+X		-X				
4-year degree								
Post-grad								
A large city								
A small city								
A rural area								
Protestant faith								
Catholic faith							+X	
Other faith	+X							
LGBTQ					+X			
Union member		+X						
Army Status								
US Born							+X	
Income $<$ \$25K		+X			+X			
Income $\in$ \$25-50K					+X			
Income $\in$ \$50-90K								
Income $\in$ \$90-250K								
Income $>$ \$250K								
Independent			+X	+X		-X	+X	-X
Republican	-X	-X	+X	+X	-X		+X	-X