

The Role of Personal Experiences and Media Narratives on Preferences and Beliefs: Evidence from a Longitudinal Survey

Do large events bring us together or drive us apart? Does media consumption affect this process? What role does factual information play?

Data

Survey data (panel):

- 7 waves between April and October 2020
- 1,440 U.S. citizens from the AmeriSpeak panel (same as the GSS one)
- Questions on:
 - Political preferences and voting intentions
 - News consumption: preferred news sources and quantity
 - Institutional trust (in line with the GSS questions, on a 5-point likert scale)¹
 - Policy preferences (in line with GSS questions, on a 4-point likert scale)²
 - Covid-19 related temporary policy preferences (on a 5-point likert scale)³
 - Effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on employment status, income and health (own, family and friends)
- Data on Covid-19 cases and deaths at the county level (NY times)
- Weekly percentage variations in consumer expenditures with respect to the first week of January 2020, adjusted seasonally (Opportunity Insights)
- Media slant for news sources (Allsides.com)

Outcomes

- Increase support policy = $\frac{Policy_{i,oct} - Policy_{i,apr}}{Policy_{i,apr}} < 0$
- Decrease confidence = $\frac{Confidence_{i,oct} - Confidence_{i,apr}}{Confidence_{i,apr}} < 0$

Shocks

- Economic (individual level): Income drop_c = $\frac{Income_{i,oct} - Income_{i,apr}}{Income_{i,apr}} > 0.20$
- Economic (county level): Δ consumer expenditures_c = $\frac{Consumer\ expenditures_{c,oct} - Consumer\ expenditures_{c,apr}}{Consumer\ expenditures_{c,apr}} > 0.20$
- Health (individual level): Has family, friends or acquaintances hospitalized with Covid-19 between April and October
- Health (county level): Increase Covid-19 cases_c = $\frac{Cases_{c,oct} - Cases_{c,apr}}{Population\ 2019_{c,apr}}$

Media slant indicator

$$Media\ slant_i = \frac{1}{N} \sum_s Slant\ score_{i,s}$$

- Dem. Leaning news = media slant_i > 3rd quartile
- Rep. Leaning news = media slant_i < 1st quartile

Motivation I: Shocks vs Media- Policy preferences and institutional trust

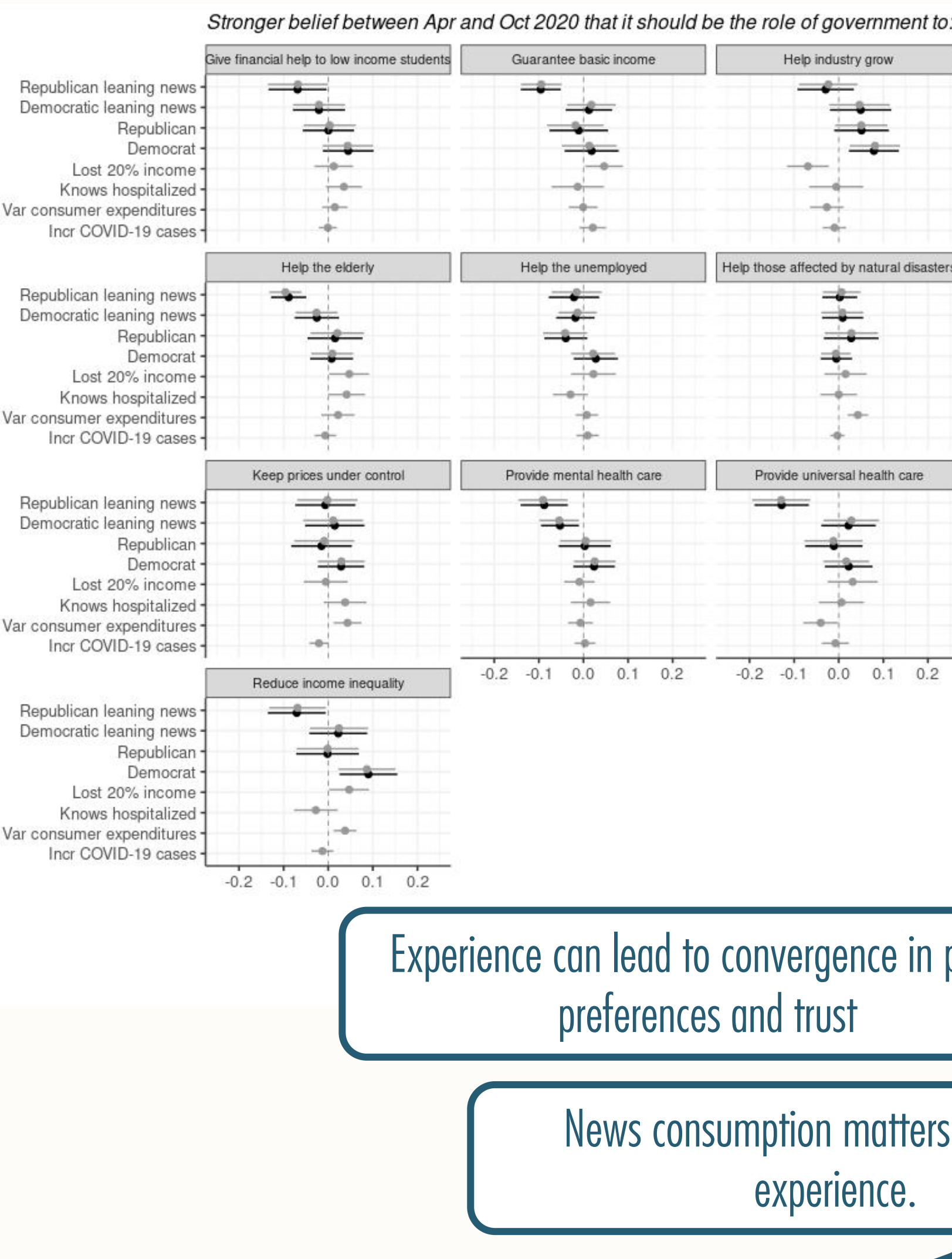
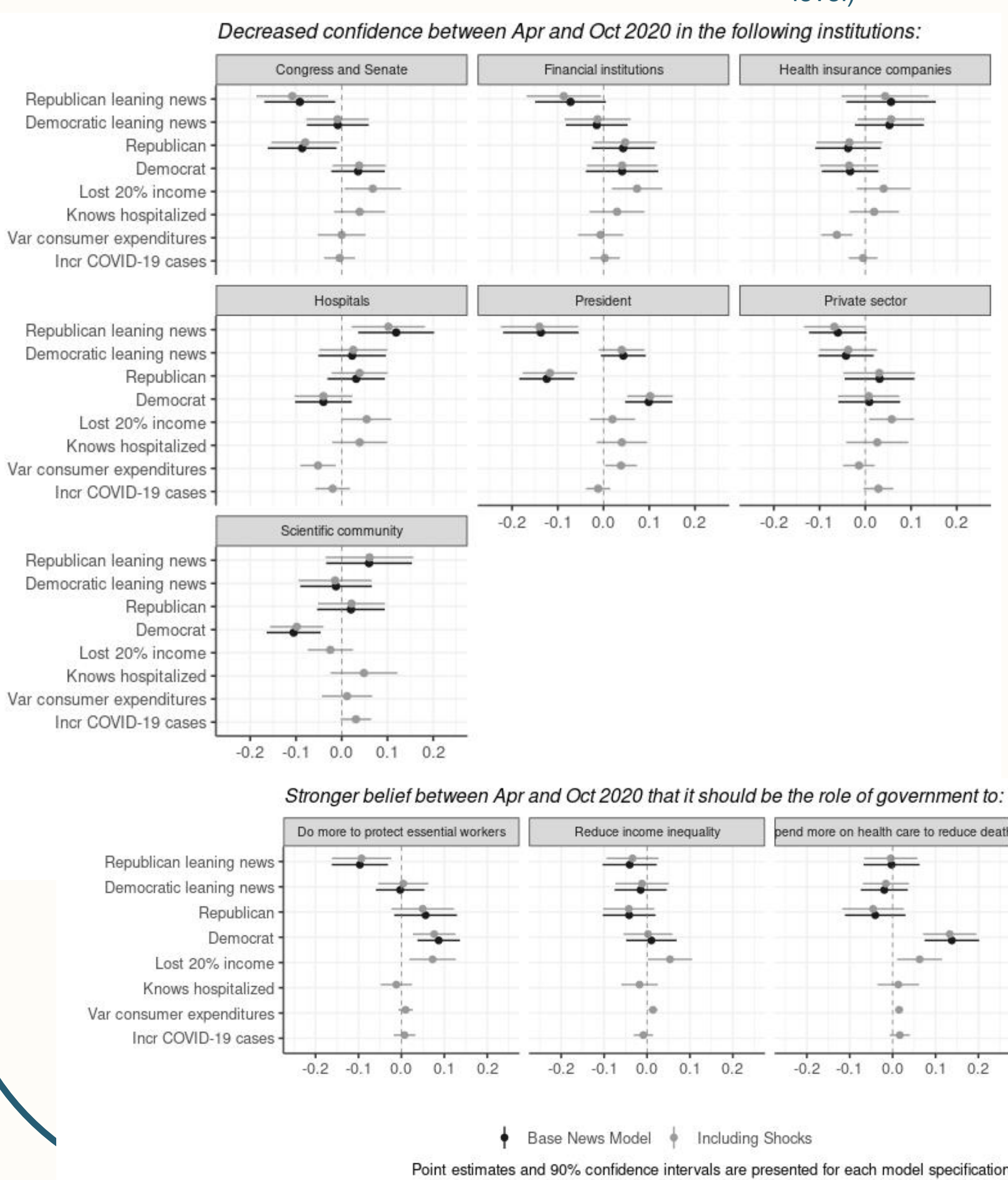
$$Y_{ic} = \alpha + N_i\theta + X_i\beta + S_i\theta_1 + Z_c\theta_2 + Yb_i\gamma + \epsilon_{ic}$$

Increase in support for policy/
Decrease in trust

Slanted news dummies

Shocks (individual level)

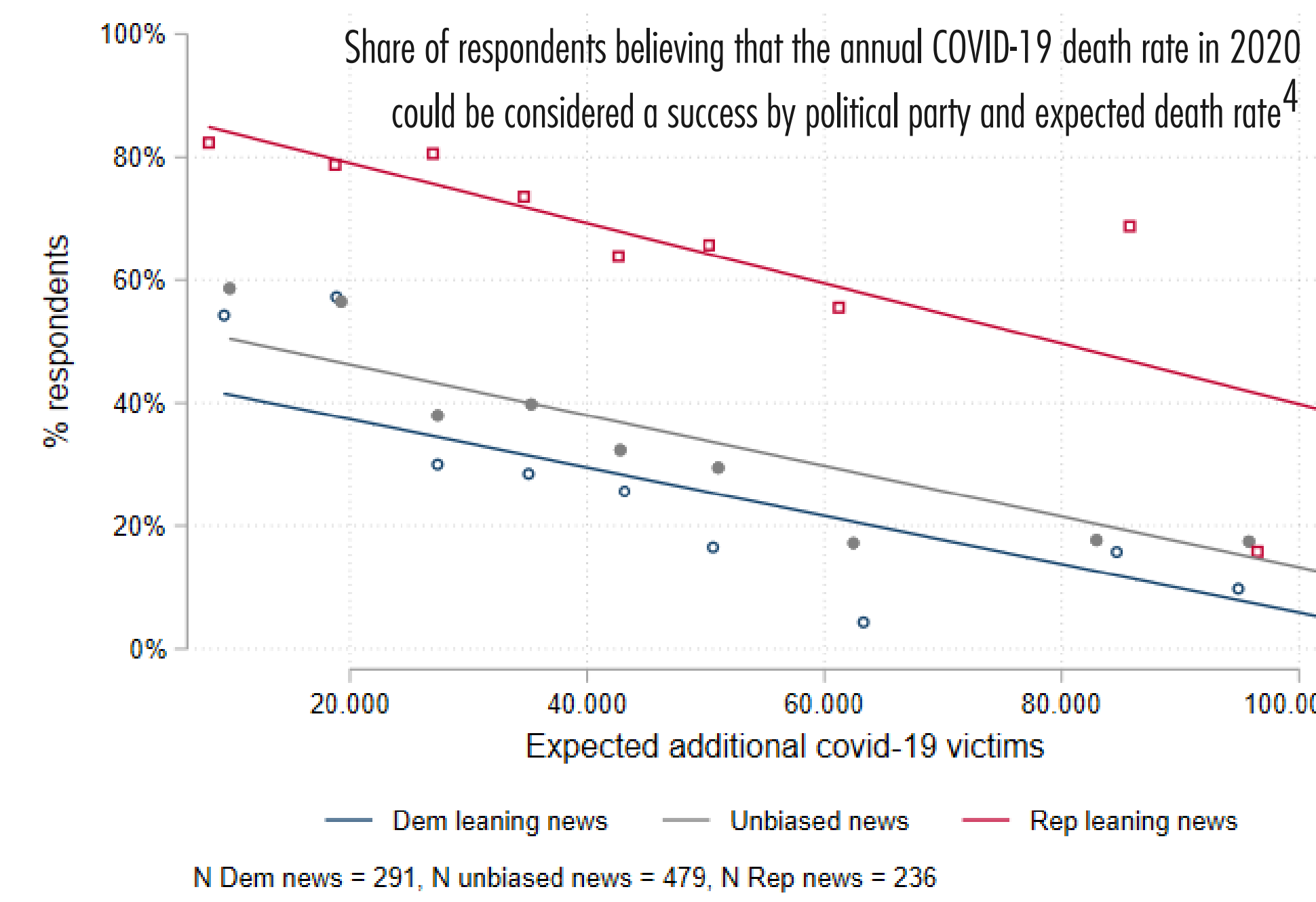
Shocks (county level)



Experience can lead to convergence in policy preferences and trust

News consumption matters more than experience.

Motivation II: Expectations, judgement and media



News sources strong determinant of judgement

Convergence in expectations lead to a convergence in judgement

Can exposure to the same information overcome political divergence?

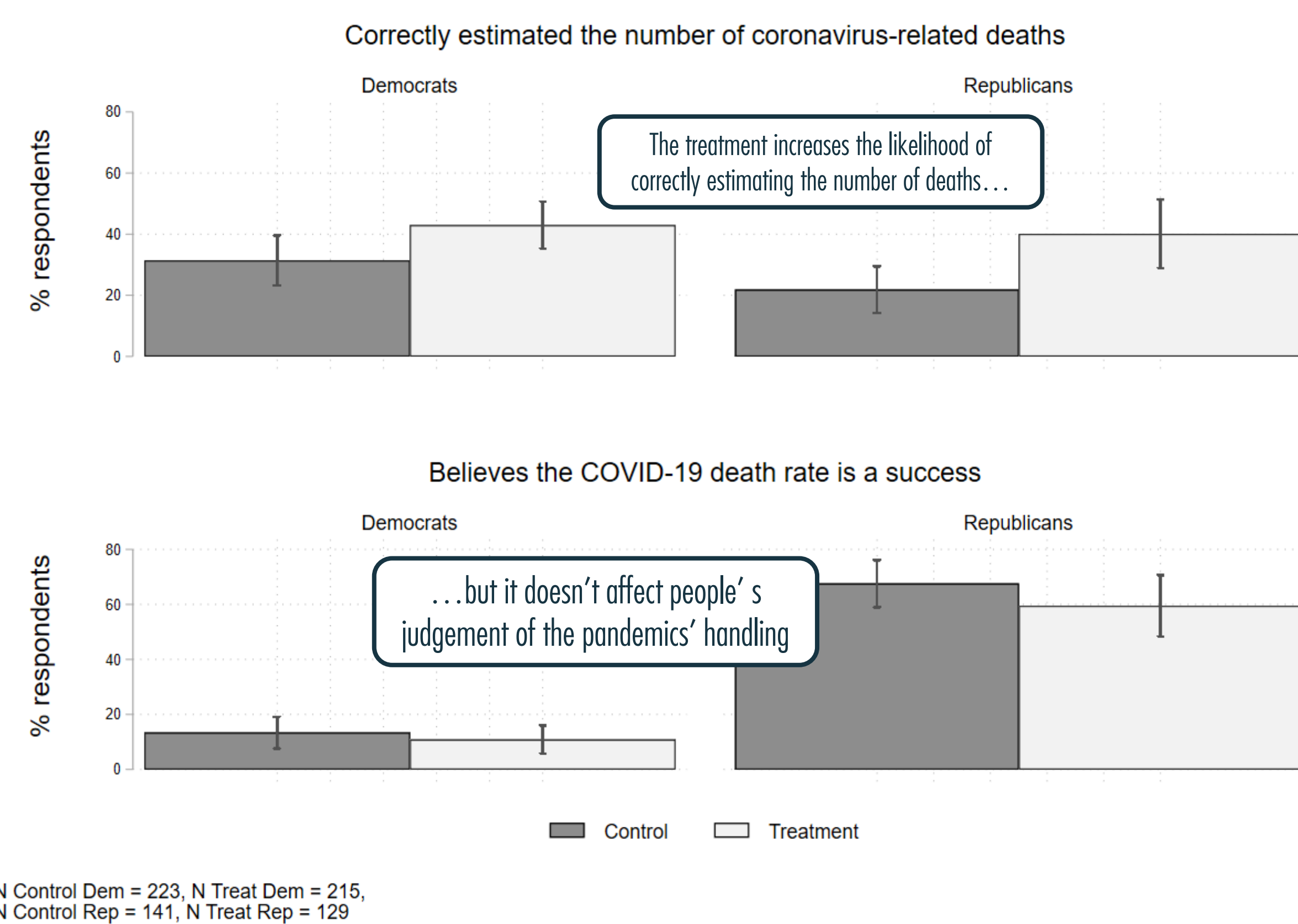
Experiment

- Estimate of the number of COVID-19-related deaths in the State of residence and in the U.S.⁵
 - No treatment
 - Link to the CDC website with Covid-19 cases and deaths
- Considering how public authorities in the country have been managing the pandemic, do you believe that the current death rate can be considered a success?⁶

Conclusions

- Large-scale crises such as COVID-19 can induce changes in policy preferences, trust in institutions, and beliefs
- Consuming partisan media has a comparatively stronger effect than direct or indirect negative experiences with the crisis.
- Political polarization on policy preferences and institutional trust can be explained by a gap in the perception of the gravity of the crisis, driven primarily by those consuming predominantly partisan news.
- Exposing respondents to the same source of information reduced this gap but didn't alter their judgment on how public authorities handled the crisis

Results



	(1) Correctly estimated US & State deaths	(2) Correctly estimated US & State deaths	(3) US & State deaths are a success	(4) US & State deaths are a success
CDC Tx	0.118*** (0.0305)	0.149*** (0.0341)	-0.0415 (0.0313)	-0.0198 (0.0370)
CDC Tx*Rep news		-0.0370 (0.0643)		-0.0996 (0.0719)
CDC Tx*Dem news		-0.0905 (0.0624)		-0.000831 (0.0617)
Democrat	0.0615 (0.0402)	0.0596 (0.0404)	-0.130*** (0.0307)	-0.130*** (0.0306)
Republican	-0.0330 (0.0369)	-0.0331 (0.0366)	0.230*** (0.0431)	0.230*** (0.0432)
Lost 20% income	-0.0307 (0.0395)	-0.0313 (0.0398)	-0.0109 (0.0383)	-0.0108 (0.0380)
Knows hospitalized	-0.0730* (0.0422)	-0.0746* (0.0418)	-0.0135 (0.0329)	-0.0145 (0.0333)
In COVID-19 cases	-0.0178 (0.0178)	-0.0187 (0.0179)	-0.00475 (0.0191)	-0.00522 (0.0195)
Consumer exp - June	0.158 (0.124)	0.153 (0.123)	-0.204* (0.115)	-0.228** (0.114)
Dem leaning news	0.0188 (0.0369)	0.0635 (0.0478)	-0.0419 (0.0380)	-0.0420 (0.0526)
Rep leaning news	-0.0267 (0.0514)	-0.00890 (0.0565)	0.267*** (0.0420)	0.311*** (0.0508)
Expected additional death rate is a success (w5)				
Constant	0.300** (0.140)	0.297** (0.140)	0.396*** (0.139)	0.395*** (0.140)
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	1,141	1,141	1,137	1,137
R-squared	0.158	0.160	0.285	0.287
Mean dep. var.	0.330	0.330	0.335	0.335

1. Institutional trust: U.S. Congress and Senate; White House; Scientific community; Banks and financial institutions; Private sector; Hospitals and healthcare professionals; Health insurance companies.

2. GSS policies: Provide mental health care for persons with mental illnesses; Help individuals affected by natural disasters; Keep prices under control; Provide a decent standard of living for the old; Provide a decent standard of living for the unemployed; Provide everyone with a guaranteed basic income; Provide the industry with the help it needs to grow; Reduce income differences between the rich and the poor; Give financial help to university students from low-income families

3. Covid-19 policies: Transfer money directly to families and businesses for the lockdown period; Protect essential workers from contracting the virus; Spend more on public healthcare to reduce preventable deaths

4. "By May 17, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) stated that about 90,000 Americans have so far died from COVID-19 (coronavirus). In addition to this, how many more Americans do you think will die by the end of this year due to coronavirus?"

"Looking again at your estimated number of total coronavirus deaths in the U.S. by the end of the year, and considering how public authorities in the country have been managing the pandemic crisis, do you think the estimate you expect can be defined as: Great success/ Success / Failure / Great Failure"

5. How many people have died in your state because of coronavirus from the first death until today? and How many people have died in the U.S. because of coronavirus from the first death until today?

Treatment: Please answer the following questions carefully. If you wish to do so, you can look up the answer on the official CDC website at the following link: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/cases-deaths/>

6. Looking again at your estimated number of total coronavirus deaths in your state and in the US so far, and considering how public authorities in the country have been managing the pandemic crisis, do you think the current death rate can be defined as: Great success; success; failure; or great failure