Tracking the Trump Effect: 
a long-term study of how political campaigns change the unsayable

Amalia Álvarez-Benjumea, Fabian Winter, Nan Zhang
Max-Planck-Institute for Research on Collective Goods
Motivation

• **Social norms** inhibit the expression of racist, sexist, xenophobic sentiments

• Donald Trump’s rhetoric directly challenges such longstanding taboos

Q. How has Trump reshaped the normative landscape in America?

“When Mexico sends its people, they’re not sending their best. They’re not sending you. They’re not sending you. They’re sending people that have lots of problems, and they’re bringing those problems with us. They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists. And some, I assume, are good people.”
Trump Effects 1.0

- Trump’s norm violations go unpunished, or are even embraced
- Licenses or empowers others to also violate speech norms

Bursztyn et al. “From Extreme to Mainstream”
Schaffner “Follow the Racist?”
Placing Trump’s Rhetoric in Context

- D and R not only divided on policy…
- …but also increasing inhabit different social worlds

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Democrats</th>
<th>Republicans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>Diverse</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>Non-religious</td>
<td>Evangelical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports</td>
<td>Soccer</td>
<td>Nascar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cars</td>
<td>VW</td>
<td>Ford Pick-up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol</td>
<td>Wine</td>
<td>(Domestic) Beer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td>Rap</td>
<td>Country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norms?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Affective Polarization

• Partisanship has increasingly become a “tribal” identity

• Reactions to Trump are filtered through a (biased) partisan lens
Affective Polarization

• Partisanship has increasingly become a “tribal” identity

• Reactions to Trump are filtered through a (biased) partisan lens

R: defend / downplay violations, weakening norms

D: strongly condemn violations, maintain or strengthen norms
Partisan “Sorting”

- Racial attitudes have increasingly sorted along party lines

Abramowitz and Webster (2018) *Advances Polit Psych*
Partisan “Sorting”

- Racial attitudes have increasingly sorted along party lines
- Partisan divisions over issues of race have only hardened under Trump
Partisan “Sorting”

• Racial attitudes have increasingly sorted along party lines

• Partisan divisions over issues of race have only hardened under Trump

• Trump not only licenses racist expression (among Republicans)…

… but also *drives* those open to racist ideas into the Republican party
Trump Effects 2.0

To the extent that Trump’s rhetoric increases sorting and triggers partisan reactions,

Trump has not so much changed what’s unsayable across America…

… but rather contributed to normative polarization along partisan lines.
Outline

1. Pilot data documenting (already existing) normative polarization
   - **individual** differences w.r.t. what is personally offensive
   - **geographic** differences w.r.t. beliefs about what is offensive to others

2. **Theory** and **Research Design** for long-term study of how the 2020 election campaign may further increase normative polarization
Normative Polarization:
What can(not) be said in the Age of Trump
Pilot Study

- Test reactions to potentially offensive statements

- Recruited mTurkers to collect online statements about African Americans, Asians, (Latino) immigrants, and Muslims.

- Final “basket” of 111 statements at varying levels of offensiveness:
  - “Wow, he’s really smart for a black guy”
  - “I really want to meet Obama one day just so I can call him a n—r”
Pilot Study

• Test reactions to potentially offensive statements

• Recruited mTurkers to collect online statements about African Americans, Asians, (Latino) immigrants, and Muslims.

• Final “basket” of 111 statements at varying levels of offensiveness:
  - “Wow, he’s really smart for a black guy”
  - “I really want to meet Obama one day just so I can call him a n—r”

• Different sample of 500 mTurkers rate 20 random statements:
  (s1-s10): is the statement *personally* offensive / inappropriate?
  (s11-s20): how would *other people* in R’s area react to the statement?
Distribution of Ratings

- African Americans
- Asians
- Latinos
- Muslims

Socially Inappropriate vs. Personally Offensive
Partisanship and Ratings

2016 Trump Vote Share
Partisanship and Ratings

2016 Trump Vote Share

- Personally Offensive
- Socially Inappropriate

- Blue: Democrats
- Red: Republicans
Placebo Test: Elderly and Disabled
Placebo Test: Elderly and Disabled

2016 Trump Vote Share
Placebo Test: Elderly and Disabled

Persons Offensively

Persons Socially Inappropriate

2016 Trump Vote Share
Preliminary Takeaways

1. **D** and **R** differ in what they personally judge to be offensive w.r.t. immigrants, racial and ethnic minorities
   ➡ but not w.r.t. “placebo” groups

2. Geographic distribution of Trump voters predicts the local social norm
   ➡ on which **D** and **R** agree !!
Preliminary Takeaways

1. **D** and **R** differ in what they personally judge to be offensive w.r.t. immigrants, racial and ethnic minorities
   ➡ but not w.r.t. “placebo” groups

2. Geographic distribution of Trump voters predicts the local social norm
   ➡ on which **D** and **R** agree !!

- Suggestive “snapshot” of normative polarization

- **Next steps:** track changes in polarization during the 2020 campaign with a “national representative” sample
A Long-Term Tracking Study:

Normative Polarization during the 2020 Campaign
A Simple Model

- Trump Campaign
- Sorting
- Biased Reactions
- Normative Polarization
A Simple Model

- Trump Campaign
- Sorting
- Biased Reactions
- Normative Polarization
Origins of Sorting

Racially conservative whites begin to move out the Democratic Party after the Civil Rights Movement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>All White Voters</th>
<th>College Grads</th>
<th>Not College Grads</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>.205</td>
<td>.308</td>
<td>.175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>.275</td>
<td>.510</td>
<td>.157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>.247</td>
<td>.398</td>
<td>.154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>.398</td>
<td>.628</td>
<td>.261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>.485</td>
<td>.611</td>
<td>.416</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>.636</td>
<td>.699</td>
<td>.549</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Abramowitz and McCoy (2019) *Annals*
## Elections and Sorting


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>All White Voters</th>
<th>College Grads</th>
<th>Not College Grads</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>.205</td>
<td>.308</td>
<td>.175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>.275</td>
<td>.510</td>
<td>.157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>.247</td>
<td>.398</td>
<td>.154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>.398</td>
<td>.628</td>
<td>.261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>.485</td>
<td>.611</td>
<td>.416</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>.636</td>
<td>.699</td>
<td>.549</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2020

 Abramowitz and McCoy (2019) *Annals*
A Simple Model

- Trump Campaign
- Biased Reactions
- Sorting
- Normative Polarization
Partisan Identity During Campaigns

• Partisan reactions derive from “tribal” behavior
• Campaigns intensify partisan competition, leading to more “tribal” responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictors</th>
<th>In-party minus out-party favorability ratings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Battleground</td>
<td>−.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wave</td>
<td>.02*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wave × Battleground</td>
<td>.02*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>.06*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong identifier</td>
<td>.36*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race: white</td>
<td>−.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education: high school</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education: some college</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education: college or higher</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Log likelihood: 6,669
N: 1,401

Iyengar, Sood and Lelkes (2012) POQ
Research Design

American Community Survey
Research Design

American Community Survey

Random Sample
Research Design

American Community Survey

Matched Online Panel

Random Sample
Research Design

- 15 cross sections, every 2 weeks, from **March - October 2020**
- N = 4000 in total
- Tracking measures of norms, party affiliation, racially conservative attitudes, and strength of partisan identity
Questions?
Comments?