

Identity vs. Affiliation: Does Partisanship Overpower Demographic Drivers of Issue Ownership?



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Introduction

Personal identity vs political affiliation: which pull is stronger? This research aims to address this question using high profile issues within the context of an increasingly polarized electorate.

The U.S. is experiencing record highs in animosity between parties [4], and a growing ideological divide. With this project, I seek to map instances of partisan override in pivotal issues and empirically illustrate the state of our nation's impasse through quantitative visuals.

Hypothesis

In a comparison of cross-pressured voters, partisan alignment acts as the primary driver of political trust, marginalizing the impact of demographic traits on issue ownership across key policy domains.

Variables

Independent Variable: Party ID

Control Variables: Gender, Age, Race, Education level

❖ Gender recoded as: Man, Woman

❖ Age recoded as: 18-35, 36-55, 56+

Dependent Variables:

“Which party would do a better job handling immigration?”

❖ Recoded into binary: Democrats= 1

“Which party would do a better job handling abortion?”

❖ Recoded into binary: Democrats= 1

References

- [1] American National Election Studies, ANES 2024 Time Series Study [dataset and documentation], August 8, 2025 version (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, Center for Political Studies, 2025), www.electionstudies.org.
- [2] Tiffany D. Barnes and Erin C. Cassese, “American Party Women: A Look at the Gender Gap within Parties,” *Political Research Quarterly* 70, no. 1 (2017): 131.
- [3] Daniel Q. Gillion, Jonathan M. Ladd, and Marc Meredith, “Party Polarization, Ideological Sorting and the Emergence of the US Partisan Gender Gap,” *British Journal of Political Science* 50, no. 4 (October 2020): 1218, doi.org/10.1017/pnas.2113843118.
- [4] Norman, Julie M., and Beniamino Green. “Why can’t we be friends? Untangling conjoined polarization in America.” *Political Psychology* (February 4, 2025). <https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.13084>.
- [5] Jenna Bednar, “Polarization, Diversity, and Democratic Robustness,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 118, no. 50 (December 2021): e2113843118, <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2113843118>.
- [6] Donald Green, Bradley Palmquist, and Eric Schickler, *Partisan Hearts and Minds: Political Parties and the Social Identities of Voters* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 50.

Data Analysis and Visualization

To compare the relative impact of demographics and partisanship on respondents’ party trust in key issues, I conducted a hierarchical analysis. This multilayered approach allowed me to simultaneously test the control variables to observe the strength of party ID as a predictor of partisan trust. The issues were chosen intentionally to represent areas where demographics are historically expected to challenge partisan affiliation. Data: ANES, 2024 [1]

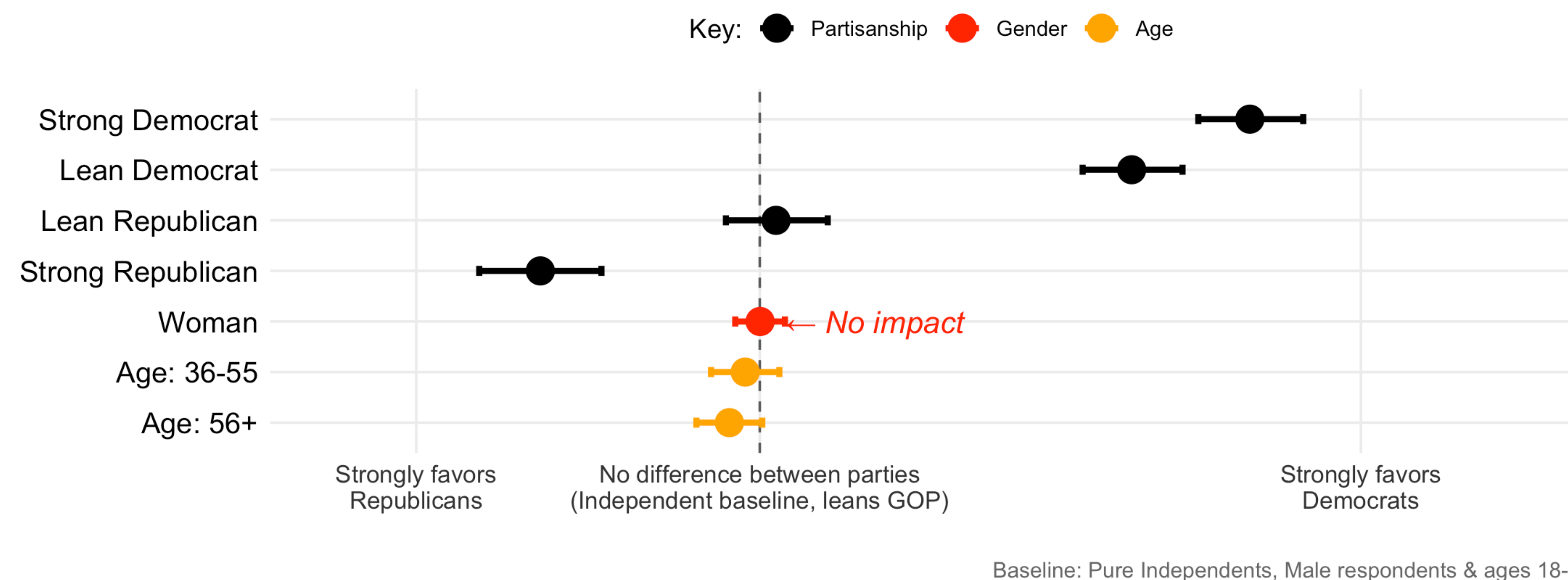
Binomial where *Democrats=1, Other=0*

1. A Linear Probability Model (Abortion) 2. A Logistic Regression (Immigration).

“Which party would do a better job handling abortion”

1. Does Political Identity Overpower Gender in Abortion Policy?

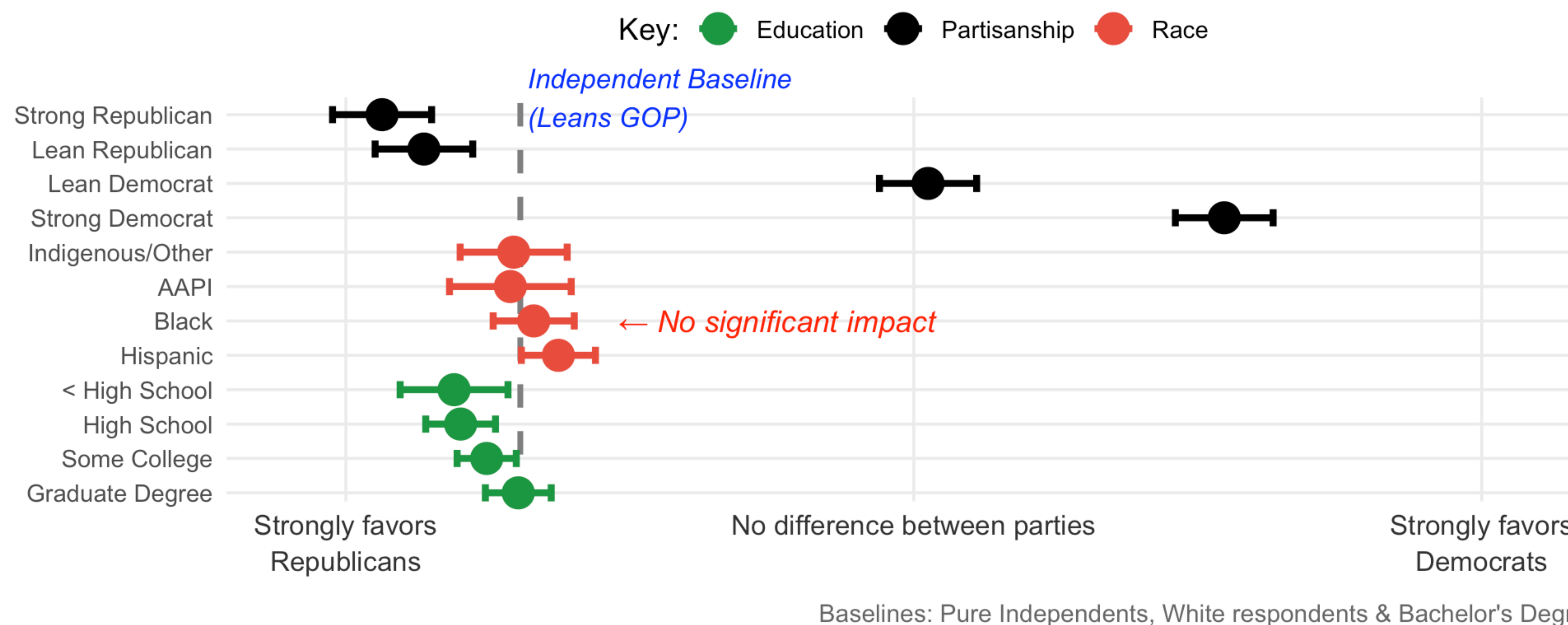
Regardless of gender or age, party identity determines partisan trust.



“Which party would do a better job handling immigration”

2. Does Political Identity Overpower Race and Education in Immigration Policy?

Regardless of race & education, party identity determines partisan trust.



Findings

- ❖ Strong Republican voters are only 8% likely to trust the Democrats on abortion policy, regardless of age or gender
- ❖ A man (baseline) and a woman voter of the same party ID are equally as likely to trust the Democrats on abortion policy
- ❖ A Hispanic voter is only 3.3% more likely to favor the Democrats on immigration policy than a white (baseline) voter of the same party ID and education level
- ❖ Voters with a high school education or less are 5.3%-5.8% less likely to trust the Democrats on immigration policy than a Bachelor's degree holder (baseline) of the same party ID

Conclusion

This analysis supports the original hypothesis by demonstrating that partisan identity eclipses demographics in the context of high-profile issue ownership. In political practice, partisanship acts as a “pseudo-social identity”, pulling voters into political camps. While voter opinion may be more nuanced, once party bias is measured the diversity is marginalized. Effective legislation benefits from representation of demographic contexts.

Literature Review

Despite the *expectation* of demographic splits on key issues, these gaps exist primarily *between* parties and not within them [2]. The intra-party gender gap, for example, is highly issue-dependent, but shows no statistical significance in higher profile issues like abortion. Over 50% of women align with the Democratic party [2], but both Republican men and women align with the GOP on abortion. Similarly, party ID has been found to override racial identity on the issue of immigration. Literature indicates party ID acts as a social identity, subject to affective discourse [6]. Extreme partisan polarization, reflected from party elites onto the electorate, is a likely contributor to the erosion of legislative functioning seen in US democracy today [5].