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DOI: 10.1111/psq.12882

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Partisanship and public support for presidential norms

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Abstract

A prominent scholarship contends that presidential norms are particularly vital to a well-functioning democracy. However, scant empirical research exists on the topic. I investigate public attitudes toward a novel battery of what many scholars and journalists consider presidential norms and examine the extent to which partisan and policy concerns affect attitudes toward them. Original survey data show that Americans strongly support presidential norms. I argue that there are two salient dimensions of presidential norms—what I call structural norms and presentation norms. Structural norms promote and support constitutional government. Presentation norms concern expectations about when and how presidents should present themselves before the public. Partisans evaluate the two types of presidential norms differentially, with Republicans notably expressing lower support for structural norms. I then present experimental evidence that the public's support for presidential norms is malleable to partisan framing. These results suggest that the public supports presidential norms in the abstract, but compelling rhetoric can facilitate presidential norm violations.

KEYWORDS

polarization, presidential norms, public opinion

INTRODUCTION

Scholars argue that norms are vital to a well-functioning democracy (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018; Renan, 2017). Such norms resolve ambiguities and gaps in formal institutions or work alongside them to structure governance. In the context of the United States, presidential norms are particularly important (Azari & Smith, 2012). A complex of presidential norms emerged to define and structure the office due to the ambiguities and vagueness of Article II of the Constitution (Renan, 2017). However, the degree to which a president must conform to presidential norms is not written in stone. Presidents can choose if and how much they will conform to them because immediate sanctions for breaches of presidential

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norms are not self-executing, and costs for infractions are indeterminate. Existing literature emphasizes the central role the public plays in maintaining political norms (Azari & Smith, 2012; Renan, 2017; Weingast, 1997). Weingast theorizes that the public must achieve consensus to serve as a reliable check on sovereign transgressions. Without public consensus and the consequent sanction for transgressions, the concept of presidential norms would lose all meaning. In other words, for a presidential norm to be considered as such, public backing is vital. However, little is known regarding what the public actually thinks about presidential norms.

Throughout his presidential campaigns and single term as president, Donald Trump shattered an unprecedented amount of presidential and political norms (Gittleson, 2021; Lieberman et al., 2019; Martin, 2020; Montgomery, 2020; Nyhan, 2017; Pfiffner, 2021; Renan, 2020). Trump has achieved considerable political success despite his prodigious norm violations. Furthermore, Trump isn't the first or only president to break presidential norms, though he is likely the most prolific norm violator. These details beg the question: Do presidential norms matter to the public? If the answer is no, we might fundamentally question the notion of some presidential norms. Prior research assumes their existence. In fact, to date, scant empirical research on presidential norms exists to address these questions adequately. Taking a step back, this article assesses whether the public endorses what scholars, journalists, and politicians assert are presidential norms to measure the potential for "presidential norms" to be considered as such.

Building on previous research that identifies and explores the importance of presidential norms (Renan, 2017), this article develops methods to gauge public recognition and respect for what political scientists and journalists call presidential norms. In doing so, we can gain some leverage for understanding Trump's fervent Republican support despite his presidential norm violations (Pfiffner, 2021). Drawing on research on presidential norms and political polarization, I formulate and test several hypotheses about public attitudes and presidential norms in the contemporary United States.

Much of the existing research on presidential norms is vague regarding the public's role in sanctioning norm violations, even though widespread (i.e., public) agreement is likely necessary for many of the presidential norms to be a politically meaningful assignation. This is problematic since one prominent conception of norms, "expected behavioral patterns," must be expected by a group powerful and large enough to generate reasons for compliance (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018; Renan, 2017). Much of the literature theorizes that norm violations only yield public sanction (costs) if the public is considered (Azari & Smith, 2012; Pfiffner, 2021; Renan, 2020). This perspective does not theorize conditions when violations might yield public approbation from some groups, as well as costs from others. Lastly, if mentioned, the public is described as a monolithic, undifferentiated mass.

My findings reveal that presidential norms are not merely academic constructs but are widely supported features of the modern presidency. However, the makeup of public support for presidential norms varies, depending on the norm and several politically relevant characteristics. The public is not a monolith but a collection of various overlapping and discrete publics with sometimes convergent and divergent expectations, policy preferences, and sentiments. The results of my survey reveal two analytically distinct categories of presidential norms—what I call structural norms (e.g., releasing personal tax returns) and presentation norms (e.g., taking the oath of office on a Bible). The subtypes of presidential norms are constructed categorically in terms of function. The presidential norms that make up the two subtypes relate politically regarding who supports them. I find that different politically relevant constituencies value the two types of presidential norms differentially. In short, politics matters. In addition to these analyses, I test factors that shape how the public evaluates presidential norms through a set of survey experiments. Specifically, I explore how partisan cues and policy preferences shape evaluations of presidential norms. The results from these experiments suggest that although public support for presidential norms is formidable in the abstract, this support is neither reflexive nor guaranteed. In fact, the results indicate that support for presidential norms can be meaningfully diminished using compelling rhetoric.

NORMS IN POLITICAL SCIENCE AND THE PRESIDENCY

Social scientists have used the concept of norms (i.e., informal institutions)[1] to evaluate a wide range of phenomena. Though much of social and political life is shaped by norms, given such varied scholarly uses, the meaning of the term elicits considerable debate and confusion. Typically, definitions focus on expectations, values, or behavior, though most definitions include the threat of punishment for violation as a criterion (Axelrod, 1986). John Finley Scott defines norms as "a name for a pattern of sanctions" that operate to produce a certain behavior (Scott, 1971, p. 72).

A political norm is a type of norm. Seeking to conceptualize norms for empirical analysis, Helmke and Levitsky (2004, p. 727) define political norms as "socially shared rules, usually unwritten, that are created, communicated, and enforced outside of officially sanctioned channels." Azari and Smith (2012) contend that there are two "broad perspectives" in social science research on informal institutions. The first approach is the norms understood as *equilibria* perspective, which emphasizes the outcome of the regularity and the interest of actors. The threat of sanction is but one of many factors that might influence compliance. The second approach is the norms understood as *rules* perspective, which emphasizes communication and the sanction for noncompliance. In this framework, behavior is regulated by the threat or fact of punishment, and if a norm is broken repeatedly without sanction, the presumed norm would fail to satisfy the standard of an informal institution.

Presidential norms

If we are to make sense of the presidency, it is critically important to understand presidential norms. As Daphna Renan argues, "The nature of the presidency cannot be understood without reference to norms" (2017, p. 2188). Despite their importance, presidential norms are something we know very little about. Part of this is due to their nature. Political norms are widely recognized as essential to a well-functioning democracy (Carey et al., 2019; Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018), but what counts as a norm is often unclear. Given the dearth of empirical evidence regarding presidential norms, this study will use the norms as rules paradigm proffered by Helmke and Levitsky (2004) to test whether a range of behaviors often described by scholars and journalists as presidential norms warrant the epithet. I define presidential norms as *informal institutions, routinized practices, and customs that structure the presidency.* Critically, as with political norms, violating presidential norms should come with a threat of sanction. In this regard, the public plays a crucial role in fortifying and sustaining many presidential norms. Although some presidential norms may persist through the efforts of those within the Washington community, others ultimately require public backing to perpetuate. If presidents repeatedly violate a presidential norm with impunity and the public consistently fails to punish the transgression or demonstrates widespread discordance toward the violation, one could reasonably infer that no such norm exists.

Structural presidential norms

Some presidential norms are what Renan (2017) defines as structural norms. These are "expected behavior patterns" that function to "(i) insulate decisions from certain types of actors, (ii) limit self-dealing or corruption of government power, (iii) structure decision-making to make it less arbitrary, (iv) allocate authority among different branches or institutions of government, and (v) structure the role of politics in governance" (2017, p. 2195). Norms of fair play, such as avoiding using government agencies to attack political opponents, which help sustain democracy, are similar (Carey et al., 2019). Following Renan, I call all these types of presidential norms structural norms. They promote and support

[1] *Norms* and *informal institutions* will be used interchangeably throughout this article.

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constitutional governance. Structural norms "stabilize expectations, neutralize incipient conflicts, or settle points not resolved by the written rules," edifying the workings of the American government and structuring presidential behavior when there are tensions or gaps in the formal rules (Azari & Smith, 2012, p. 43). Norms regarding the use of unilateral action limit the scope of what even popular presidents might attempt using their formal powers (Reeves & Rogowski, 2015, 2018). Structural norms largely constrain presidential behavior and affect how the president operates within an institutional context, frequently with respect to other elite political actors.

Presentation presidential norms

The other type of presidential norm I introduce is what I call presentation norms, which concern expectations that presidents often eagerly abide by and even encourage. As head of state and head of government, presidents play a singular and prominent symbolic role in American cultural life. Beginning in the twentieth century, presidents have presented themselves and are expected to be presented before the public via regular public addresses and press conferences (Neustadt, 1991; Smith, 1990; Tulis, 1987, p. 7). This development has fundamentally altered the nature of the office and its role in American governance (Kernell, 1993). Among school-aged children, the ubiquity of the president's name and image inculcate veneration for the office and political authority writ large (Greenstein, 1960). I define presentation norms as *symbolic and public presentation practices that structure the way in which the president engages with the public.* While the formal institutions of the presidency have received careful and copious scholarly attention, the symbolic presidency is relatively understudied, especially given the resources that presidents pour into maintaining and developing the symbolic potency of the office (Druckman & Jacobs, 2015; Miroff, 2016). The symbolic presidency is "a set of expectations about the office that are held by the public, described by journalists and teachers, and encouraged by presidents themselves" (Hinckley, 1990, p. 130). Spectacles, or "symbolic events," are the manner in which leadership is enacted in the modern presidency (Miroff, 2016). Empirical research on presidential spectacle demonstrates how the symbolic context can yield dividends politically (Howell et al., 2020). Events like the State of the Union provide presidents with an annual opportunity to prime the citizenry in service of their policy and political agenda (Druckman & Holmes, 2004). Relatedly, more than most people, politicians manipulate their presentation of self, depending on the context and audience, adjusting their persona and performance as needed in pursuit of political advantage (Fenno, 1977; Goffman, 1959; Lowndes, 2013; Skowronek, 1997, 2005).

Presidents not only utilize spectacle and performance instrumentally, but they also use preestablished spectacles (i.e., presidential rituals) and rich imagery to pursue advantage. The games presidents play and the vacations they take are carefully curated for political advantage and generate substantial interest from the press and the public (Ayoub, 2006). For example, golf is associated with presidential recreation (Van Natta, 2004). Often, certain symbols or symbolic practices are employed so regularly by successive presidencies that the public comes to associate certain symbolism and symbolic practices with the presidency itself and expects their presence or usage under some predetermined circumstances. In this way, norms are routinized into existence by successors following a norm innovator. These norms are categorically different from structural norms since they are generally prescriptive instead of proscriptive. Presentation norms are less immediately and evidently consequential for maintaining the constitutional order. Still, they are nevertheless essential since they aesthetically connect the president and the institution of the presidency to the people.

THE PUBLIC AND PRESIDENTIAL NORMS

Existing literature persuasively demonstrates the importance of presidential norms for the American political system. Recent high-profile transgressions have trained scholarly and journalistic attention on the subject. However, for much of the research in this domain, the public is conceived as a passive but

reliable check on presidential norm violations (Azari & Smith, 2012). When considering the public, these accounts treat it as a homogeneous mass (Pfiffner, 2021; Renan, 2017). Does the public support presidential norms? What characteristics distinguish supporters from non-supporters? Will the public stand together to reliably sanction presidential norm violations? Answering these questions requires a more sophisticated understanding of the public—one that recognizes that the public is less a homogeneous mass and more a collection of overlapping publics with sometimes convergent, oftentimes divergent preferences and expectations. Whether or not the public punishes presidential norm violations is significantly influenced by the degree of cohesion in its ranks.

Voters take cues from political elites and use them to make sense of political information (Berinsky, 2009; Endres et al., 2021; Lenz, 2012; Levendusky, 2009; Zaller, 1992). Over the past few decades, political elites have become strikingly polarized ideologically (Druckman et al., 2013; McCarty et al., 2008; Poole & Rosenthal, 2001). The mass public is following suit, becoming increasingly divided spatially, socially, and politically along partisan lines (Abramowitz & Saunders, 2008; Iyengar et al., 2019; Levendusky, 2009; Mason, 2018). Such division undermines reciprocity and mitigates support for democratic principles (Graham & Svolik, 2020; Svolik, 2019).

In recent years, the Republican Party, led by Donald Trump, has demonstrated a willingness to violate political norms. Senate Republicans' rationale for refusing to vote on Merrick Garland's nomination to the Supreme Court, their about-face regarding Amy Coney Barrett's confirmation, Trump's election fraud lies, and the 147 Republicans who voted to overturn the 2020 presidential election results highlight the party's growing tolerance for far-reaching norm violations. Among Trump supporters, exposure to elite rhetoric claiming the election was rigged can undermine support for democratic norms (Clayton et al., 2021). In 2021, 68% of Republicans believed that the 2020 election was stolen from Trump (PRRI, 2021). According to the same survey, Republicans were much more likely than Democrats and Independents to believe that "true American patriots may have to resort to violence in order to save our country." However, Republicans are generally more respectful of traditional symbols, order, and structure and disdain those who refuse to embrace these symbols (Jost, 2021). For example, 88% of Republicans believe it is inappropriate for players to kneel during the national anthem compared to 23% of Democrats (Dann, 2018).

While the existing literature puts all presidential norms on par, suggesting uniform public acquiescence, it is worth investigating whether all presidential norms hang together so easily. Because of the powerful political cleavages that organize contemporary American politics, I predict that public support for the two subtypes of presidential norms (structural and presentation) will vary according to partisanship. I expect partisans to differentially support both structural and presentation presidential norms. Prominent political scientific research contends that in an effort to win mass support and achieve a conservative policy agenda, the modern Republican Party threatens democracy and the norms that edify it (Hacker & Pierson, 2020; Lieberman et al., 2019; Mettler & Lieberman, 2020). In the contemporary context, I expect support for structural norms to be strongest among Democrats. As such, I expect support for structural norms to be weakest among Republicans. Conversely, I expect Republican voters (relative to Democrats) to embrace presentation norms. These concerns call into question the public's ability to reliably and forcefully sanction presidential norm violations and recommend an investigation with these considerations in mind. It is important to emphasize that these hypotheses are rooted in the contemporary moment, which is marked by intense partisan polarization (Abramowitz & Saunders, 2008; Druckman et al., 2021; Iyengar et al., 2019; Levendusky, 2009; Mason, 2018).

Although there is scant existing research directly assessing characteristics predicting public support for presidential norms, related studies evaluate the determinants of public support for the political system and political participation, concepts closely related to presidential norms. Dennis Chong and his coauthors find that attitudes toward norms of equality and free expression are increasingly related to age, race, education, and gender (Chong et al., 2024). Age is an enduring and significant predictor of a host of political behavior. Older Americans tend to possess more resources, vote at higher rates, support Republicans, and believe in American exceptionalism (Hartig, 2021; Peterson et al., 2020). Race and

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racial attitudes have likewise long divided Americans (Cohen, 1999; Dawson, 1995; Kinder & Sanders, 1996; Tesler, 2016). Bartels finds that ethnic antagonism toward blacks, immigrants, and Latinos predicts lower levels of support for democratic norms among Republican voters (Bartels, 2020). Educational differences, too, are increasingly reshaping the American political landscape. Politically sophisticated and culturally liberal college graduates are moving toward the Democratic Party (Cohn, 2021; Sosnik, 2023). Across various contexts, education correlates positively with civic engagement and democracy (Glaeser et al., 2007; Verba et al., 1995). Finally, researchers have identified a political gender gap, which describes differences in political behavior between men and women (Box-Steffensmeier et al., 2004; Kaufmann & Petrocik, 1999). Based on these considerations, if Americans are divided regarding their attitudes toward presidential norms, partisanship is likely not the only predictor of support for presidential norms.

The politicization of presidential norms can have profound consequences. If presidential norms are ultimately underpinned by a widespread public willingness to sanction deviant presidents, then the politicization of presidential norms is fundamentally corrosive to the constraints that facilitate democratic governance. Presidents can use rhetoric to undermine norms, denigrating their capacity to constrain presidential behavior, and politicizing the norm such as to call into question the norm's present appropriateness and future relevance (Clayton et al., 2021). When presidents strategically violate norms, we should expect the violation to come alongside vigorous rhetorical justifications for the violation. How do such justifications shape public attitudes toward presidential norms? I expect policy and partisan arguments on behalf of norm violations to influence attitudes toward presidential norms. Thus, I study public attitudes toward presidential norms using several methods. First, I use a nationally representative sample to measure public attitudes toward a novel battery of presidential norms. I analyze the properties of that support using statistical inference. Afterward, I use a series of survey experiments to test how malleable public attitudes toward presidential norms are in the context of partisan framing.

THE SURVEY TEST

Data and methods

Do Americans support presidential norms? Do they prefer presentation presidential norms or structural presidential norms? To evaluate public attitudes toward presidential norms, I fielded a nationally representative Lucid survey sample of 788 American adults eligible to vote during the week of January 17, 2022.[2] I partnered with Lucid to recruit the research participants. I obtained voluntary and informed consent from respondents prior to their participation in the research study. The study included no deception, and risks to participation were minimal, associated with basic computer tasks. Additional information regarding how human subjects were engaged in the research process can be found in the appendix. Table A1 derives the demographic data of the study. To investigate the public's support for presidential norms, I asked respondents whether they agreed or disagreed with a battery of 16 phenomena considered by scholars, journalists, and politicians to be presidential norms. Some of the presidential norms were items of my own construction, whereas others are adapted from previous studies by other scholars (Azari & Smith, 2012; Carey et al., 2019; Pfiffner, 2021; Renan, 2017).[3]

[2]The survey (and the associated survey discussed later in this article) adheres to the 2020 APSA Council-approved Principles and Guidance for Human Subjects Research.

[3]I included phenomena in this battery that major news organizations or scholars described as "presidential norms" and received substantial media coverage being described as such. Although many such behaviors fit within this paradigm, I winnowed down the list by selecting items for which I could find multiple and credible sources that claim the behavior to be a presidential norm and by political import.

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Support for presidential norms

In this survey, I analyze 16 questions regarding evaluations of presidential norms, which ask respondents how presidents ought to conduct themselves while in office. Respondents were presented with a statement and asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement. The response values allow respondents to answer using a five-level Likert item, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The scale is constructed from these statements by coding the five potential responses from each assertion from −2 to 2 in intervals of 1, with −2 being the least supportive response and 2 being the most supportive. Nine of the questions concern what I call structural presidential norms. I refer to these instruments in shorthand as structural norms because they promote and support constitutional governance. The other seven questions ask respondents when and how presidents should present themselves before the public while in office. I describe these instruments as presentation norms because they are practices that structure the way in which the president engages the public.

Included in the survey are measurements for various control variables, including party identification (−3 = Strong Democrat, −2 = Not very strong Democrat, −1 = Leans Democrat, 0 = Independent, 1 = Leans Republican, 2 = Not very strong Republican, 3 = Strong Republican), gender (0 = female, 1 = male), age, education (measured at eight levels as some high school or less, high school, post–high school vocational training, some college, associate degree, college graduate, master's/professional degree, doctorate), and race (0 = nonwhite, 1 = white).

Survey results

Americans strongly support presidential norms, both the presentation and structural varieties. All presidential norms included in the survey received majority support, and most received agreement far exceeding 50%. Most structural norms received at least 71% agreement. Support for structural norms (i.e., agreement with the norm or disagreement with the norm violation) ranged from 87% to 69%. The presidential norm that "presidents should not use public office for private gain" received the most support. Figure 1 provides a full summary of the results. As with structural norms, Americans generally support presentation norms. Each norm elicited at least majority support; most, in fact, most obtained support exceeding 70%. The range of support for these presidential norms was between 52% and 86%. Figure 2 provides a full summary of the results.

Nine questions in the battery concern structural norms, and seven concern presentation norms (I provide the sources I derived the questions from in Tables A7 and A8). Table A6 presents the loadings for a two-factor solution that detects two different patterns in the responses, largely corroborating the subsetting of presidential norms into structural and presentation norms. The first dimension captures all of the structural norms, and the second dimension taps into the presentation elements of presidential norms. In other words, my theoretically motivated subsetting of presidential norms does not differ much from a more data-driven approach. The procedures used to obtain the optimal number of factors can be found in the appendix (see Figures A7–A9).

We can ascertain from these findings that the public writ large supports many prominent informal constraints on and expectations of the presidency. Further, the presidential norms under examination engender minimal opposition. The degree to which there is any counterweight to the broad consensus on presidential norms comes in the form of neutrality or ambivalence rather than outright opposition. Nevertheless, despite widespread public agreement regarding presidential norms, there is discernible variation in support.

Correlates of support for presidential norms

To further assess presidential norms, I construct a set of regression models to examine the relationship between support for structural and presentation norms and various politically relevant characteristics.

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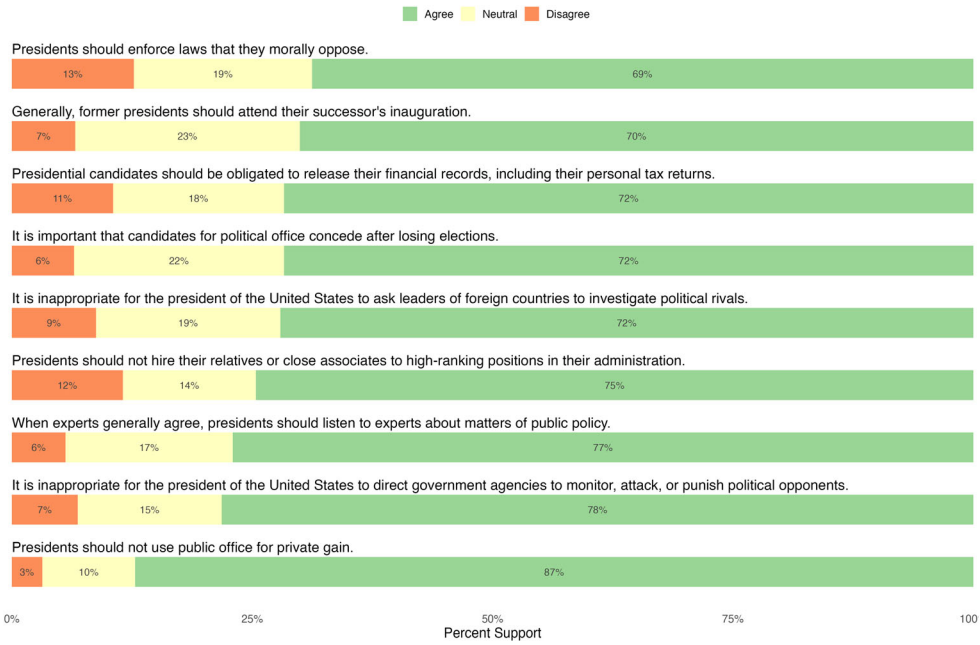

FIGURE 1 Public support for structural presidential norms.

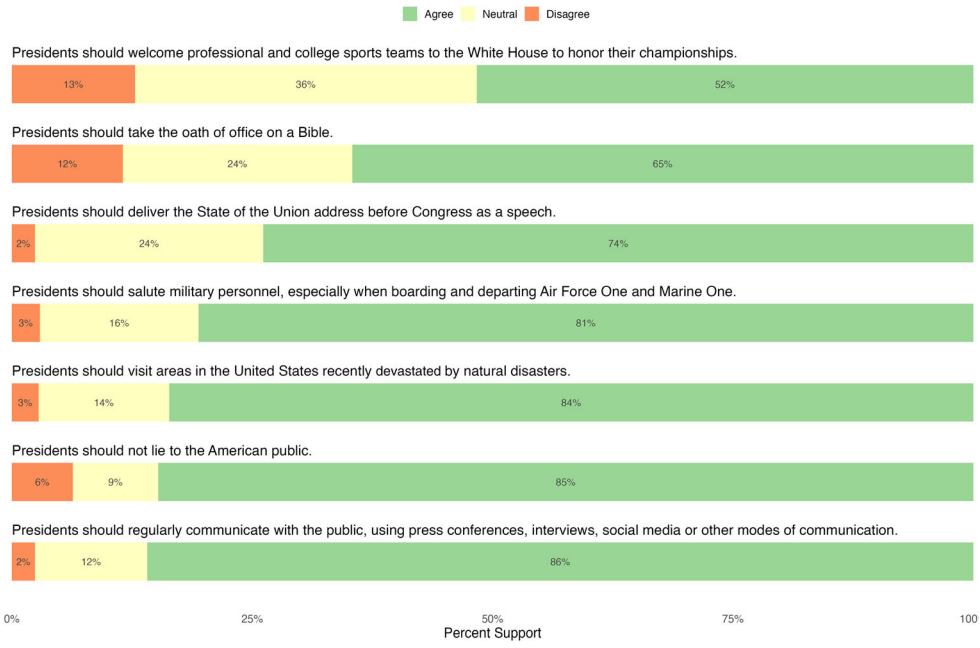

FIGURE 2 Public support for presentation presidential norms.

Table 1 details support for structural presidential norms among the respondents. The specification of the model is contingent upon how the dependent variable is coded. I focus separately on each structural presidential norm in this analysis. The model includes demographic variables, including education, race, gender, and age, that might also predict support for structural norms. The dependent variable in each

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TABLE 1 (OLS) Predictors of support for structural presidential norms.

Dependent variable									
	Enforce laws (1)	**Attend inauguration (2)**	**Release taxes (3)**	**Concede loss (4)**	**Foreign leaders (5)**	**Nepotism (6)**	**Listen to experts (7)**	**Punish rivals (8)**	**Private gain (9)**
Republican	−0.132	−0.327***	−0.663***	−0.345***	−0.416***	−0.093	−0.374***	−0.158	−0.125
	(0.112)	(0.099)	(0.109)	(0.097)	(0.107)	(0.122)	(0.091)	(0.103)	(0.083)
Democratic	0.076	0.255***	0.347***	0.534***	0.066	0.167	0.220***	0.064	−0.079
	(0.103)	(0.092)	(0.100)	(0.090)	(0.099)	(0.113)	(0.084)	(0.095)	(0.077)
Education	0.064***	0.044**	0.034*	0.002	0.062***	0.051**	0.027	0.047**	0.031**
	(0.020)	(0.018)	(0.020)	(0.018)	(0.020)	(0.022)	(0.017)	(0.019)	(0.015)
White	0.070	0.168**	0.045	0.021	0.058	0.096	0.211***	0.057	0.054
	(0.092)	(0.082)	(0.089)	(0.080)	(0.088)	(0.101)	(0.075)	(0.085)	(0.069)
Male	0.168**	−0.090	−0.069	0.016	−0.026	−0.114	0.006	−0.023	0.086
	(0.079)	(0.070)	(0.077)	(0.068)	(0.076)	(0.086)	(0.064)	(0.072)	(0.059)
Age	0.009***	0.004*	0.007***	0.010***	0.007***	−0.004	0.005**	0.014***	0.013***
	(0.003)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Constant	0.097	0.578***	0.670***	0.481***	0.589***	0.993***	0.643***	0.411***	0.804***
	(0.155)	(0.138)	(0.151)	(0.135)	(0.149)	(0.170)	(0.126)	(0.143)	(0.116)
Observations	788	788	788	788	788	788	788	788	788
R^2	0.046	0.073	0.146	0.143	0.059	0.022	0.081	0.066	0.084
Adjusted R^2	0.039	0.066	0.139	0.136	0.052	0.014	0.074	0.059	0.077

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TABLE 1 (Continued)

Dependent variable									
	Enforce laws (1)	**Attend inauguration** (2)	**Release taxes** (3)	**Concede loss** (4)	**Foreign leaders** (5)	**Nepotism** (6)	**Listen to experts** (7)	**Punish rivals** (8)	**Private gain** (9)
Residual std. error ($df = 781$)	1.094	0.975	1.066	0.953	1.053	1.200	0.893	1.009	0.818
F statistic ($df = 6; 781$)	6.266***	10.281***	22.229***	21.688***	8.154***	2.878***	11.530***	9.180***	11.907***

Note: Linear regressions with standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variables are listed at the top of each column. Respondents are described as Republican if they identify as "Leans Republican," "Not very strong Republican," or "Strong Republican." Respondents are described as Democratic if they identify as "Leans Democrat," "Not very strong Democrat," or "Strong Democrat." *Education* is coded from 1 (some high school or less) to 8 (doctorate). *White* is coded as 1 if the respondent identifies as white and 0 otherwise. *Male* is coded 1 if the respondent identifies as a male and 0 otherwise.

*$p < 0.1$; **$p < 0.05$; ***$p < 0.01$.

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column indicates support for one of the nine structural presidential norms. For example, column 1 presents the results from the question, "Presidents should enforce laws that they morally oppose." Contemporary Republican elites have demonstrated an increased propensity for political norm violation (Hacker & Pierson, 2020; Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018; Mettler & Lieberman, 2020). Because the partisan public takes cues from copartisan political elites, I expect Republicans to demonstrate less support for structural norms than Democrats. If this hypothesis is correct, I should find that the Republican partisanship indicator variable has a negative coefficient for each column, demonstrating that, on average, Republican and Republican-leaning respondents exhibit less support for structural norms. I estimate this using OLS regression, given by,

$$Yi = \beta 0 + \beta 1Ri + \beta 2Di + \beta 3Ei + \beta 4Wi + \beta 5Mi + \beta 6Ai + \epsilon i.$$

Here, Y_i is a measurement of support for the structural presidential norm. Instead of measuring all the presidential norms together, I assess all the structural norms separately, using the same model specification, except for the dependent variable. I do this by including all nine structural norms in Table 1. The independent variables R_i and D_i are indicator variables that describe the partisanship of the respondent. Here, the R_i variable takes on the value of 1 if the respondent identifies as "Leans Republican," "Not very strong Republican," or "Strong Republican," and 0 otherwise. Similarly, the D_i variable takes on the value of 1 if the respondent identifies as "Leans Democrat," "Not very strong Democrat," or "Strong Democrat," and 0 otherwise. The key parameters of interest are β_1 and β_2, which show the correlation between partisanship and support for presidential norms. The model includes several controls for educational attainment, race, gender, and age. ϵ_i is the residual or error term.

The survey results largely support this expectation. Table 1 presents the results. For each structural norm, the parameter β_1, which shows the effect of identifying as a Republican on support for presidential norms, is negative. For five of the structural presidential norms, the coefficient is statistically significant. Among Democrats, the relationship is generally reversed. For all but one of the structural presidential norms, the parameter β_2, which shows the effect of identifying as a Democrat on support for presidential norms, is positive. The coefficient is statistically significant for four of the nine structural presidential norms. An alternative specification (Table A3), which combines all nine structural norms into one index, further substantiates this result.

Table 2 details support for presentation presidential norms among the sample of respondents. Here, too, I focus separately on each presentation presidential norm in this analysis. The dependent variable in each column indicates support for one of the seven presentation presidential norms. For example, column 1 presents the results from the question, "Presidents should welcome professional and college sports teams to the White House to honor their championships." In general, I expect Republicans to demonstrate more support for presentation presidential norms than Democrats. If this hypothesis is correct, I should find that the Republican indicator variable has a positive coefficient, demonstrating that, on average, Republican and Republican-leaning respondents exhibit more support for presentation presidential norms. I estimate this using OLS regression. Again, instead of evaluating structural and presentation presidential norms together, I assess all the presentation presidential norms separately, using the same model specification, except for the dependent variable. I do this by including all seven presentation norms in Table 2.

Republicans and Democrats demonstrate no clear pattern in their overall attitudes toward presentation presidential norms. Table 2 presents the results. For both Republicans and Democrats, the parameters β_1 and β_2, which show the effect of identifying as a Republican and Democrat on support for each of the presentation presidential norms, are a mix of both positive and negative. Among Republicans, only one of the coefficients is statistically significant, and for Democrats, two. This result suggests partisans do not differ markedly in their evaluation of presentation presidential norms as a class, though for several presentation norms, partisan differences are palpable. For presentation norms, I also evaluate partisan attitudes in an alternative specification, where I combine all seven presentation norms into one index (Table A3). For Republicans, the relationship between partisanship and support for

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TABLE 2 (OLS) Predictors of support for presentation presidential norms.

Dependent variable							
	Sports (1)	**Bible oath (2)**	**SOTU speech (3)**	**Salute military (4)**	**Visit disasters (5)**	**Don't lie (6)**	**Go public (7)**
Republican	0.122	0.530***	−0.067	0.097	−0.131	−0.071	0.021
	(0.110)	(0.118)	(0.085)	(0.088)	(0.087)	(0.104)	(0.080)
Democratic	0.390***	−0.054	0.165**	0.099	0.074	−0.066	0.048
	(0.101)	(0.109)	(0.078)	(0.081)	(0.080)	(0.096)	(0.074)
Education	0.008	−0.032	0.033**	0.006	−0.016	0.026	0.007
	(0.020)	(0.022)	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.019)	(0.015)
White	−0.128	−0.120	0.159**	0.072	0.132*	0.119	0.156**
	(0.090)	(0.097)	(0.070)	(0.072)	(0.071)	(0.085)	(0.066)
Male	0.137*	0.073	0.061	−0.035	−0.114*	−0.054	0.002
	(0.077)	(0.083)	(0.060)	(0.062)	(0.061)	(0.073)	(0.056)
Age	−0.004	0.012***	0.013***	0.009***	0.006***	0.010***	0.010***
	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Constant	0.515***	0.416**	0.246**	0.807***	1.142***	0.899***	0.784***
	(0.152)	(0.164)	(0.118)	(0.122)	(0.120)	(0.144)	(0.111)
Observations	788	788	788	788	788	788	788
R^2	0.039	0.092	0.090	0.041	0.030	0.039	0.061
Adjusted R^2	0.031	0.085	0.083	0.034	0.022	0.031	0.054
Residual std. error ($df = 781$)	1.077	1.159	0.834	0.864	0.851	1.017	0.783
F statistic ($df = 6; 781$)	5.214***	13.191***	12.868***	5.566***	3.967***	5.255***	8.517***

Note: Linear regressions with standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variables are listed at the top of each column. Respondents are described as Republican if they identify as "Leans Republican," "Not very strong Republican," or "Strong Republican." Respondents are described as Democratic if they identify as "Leans Democrat," "Not very strong Democrat," or "Strong Democrat." *Education* is coded from 1 (some high school or less) to 8 (doctorate). *White* is coded as 1 if the respondent identifies as white and 0 otherwise. *Male* is coded 1 if the respondent identifies as a male and 0 otherwise.

*$p < 0.1$; **$p < 0.05$; ***$p < 0.01$.

presentation norms is positive, but the coefficient is larger and statistically significant for Democrats, further suggesting that, on average, Democrats are more likely to support presentation norms. Appendix Figures A1–A6 detail how Republicans, Democrats, and Independents separately evaluate structural and presentation presidential norms. These figures showcase perceptible partisan differences in attitudes toward presidential norms. Table A3 also shows that education, identifying as white, and age are positively related to support for structural norms, while the age covariate is the only other statistically significant predictor of support for presentation norms.

These findings reveal significant variation in the public's respect for presidential norms. Support for structural and some presentation presidential norms varies along partisan lines. We also see that presidential norms are not all of a kind. Overall, these patterns offer strong evidence that the public

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generally supports presidential norms in the abstract, but a closer examination reveals a more nuanced description of that support. Separating presidential norms into two subcategories—structural norms and presentation norms—the results also show that Republicans and Democrats value structural norms quite differently. Identifying as a Republican is correlated with less support for structural presidential norms, whereas identifying as a Democrat is correlated with greater support for both structural and presentation presidential norms. What are the consequences of this subtle, underlying polarization? To wit, in the political realm, rarely are actions performed and received in the abstract. Rather, political action, including the violation of presidential norms, occurs in a dynamic, contested discursive environment. If presidents violate presidential norms, we might expect them to do so strategically, for example, justifying the action with a compelling argument or appealing to some higher aim. In the next section, I test the explanatory power of partisan cues and policy preferences on public attitudes toward presidential norms in a series of experiments embedded in a nationally representative survey.

JUSTIFICATION EXPERIMENT

The results from the study detailed in the preceding pages reveal that support for presidential norms is widespread among the American public. However, the results also indicate two subcategories of presidential norms supported differentially by the public in terms of partisanship. Norm violations are not carried out in isolation but in a contested, dynamic discursive environment (Chong & Druckman, 2007). Politicians strategically engage the public. Presidential rhetoric can affect how the public evaluates presidents and their actions (Druckman & Holmes, 2004). Thus, to better understand public attitudes toward presidential norms, this section explores how malleable public support for presidential norms is in the context of partisan framing.

What kinds of arguments on behalf of presidential norm violations resonate? Do such arguments resonate differentially for Democrats and Republicans? To answer these questions, I examine the extent to which partisan and policy concerns affect public attitudes toward presidential norms. I partnered with Lucid to recruit 996 participants to test this possibility through a series of experiments embedded in a nationally representative survey conducted in March 2023.[4]

The first experiment assesses the extent to which partisanship influences attitudes toward presidential norms by examining how politically purposive arguments on behalf of violating norms affect public attitudes toward presidential norms. Subjects were randomly assigned to one of six conditions, including a control condition. Those in the control group received no prompt. Subjects assigned to one of the five justification treatment conditions were provided information about presidential demands as an explanation and justification for lying to the American people. These subjects were first told either:

- **[National Security:]** Sometimes presidents lie for reasons of national security, with the intention to protect Americans from foreign threats.
- **[Pass Laws:]** Sometimes presidents lie to get laws passed, with the intention of improving the lives of American citizens.
- **[Create Jobs:]** Sometimes presidents lie to spur economic growth and create jobs.
- **[Unite America:]** Sometimes presidents lie to promote social harmony, with the intention of uniting Americans.
- **[Win Reelection:]** Sometimes presidents lie to get reelected.

Afterward, all respondents were asked whether they agree, neither agree nor disagree, or disagree with the following statement, which derives from a question asked in the first study described in the preceding pages: "Presidents shouldn't lie to the American public."

[4]For sample demographics and additional details, see Table A2.

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If the public's attitudes toward presidential norms are firm, we should observe two patterns in the data. First, support for presidential norms should not vary much across treatment conditions. Second, the justification treatment should not decrease support for presidential norms. In fact, we might even expect support for presidential norms to increase because assigning a motive to a presidential norm violation accentuates the violation. We are also interested in how partisan concerns influence attitudes toward presidential norms. If partisan concerns don't influence how Americans respond to presidential norm violations, we should see that Democrats and Republicans respond similarly within and across treatment conditions. If partisan concerns influence attitudes toward presidential norms, we should see that support for presidential norms varies along partisan affiliation within treatment conditions.

The selected treatment conditions offer an additional means to assess how partisan concerns affect attitudes toward presidential norms. Although President Joe Biden was not invoked explicitly in the prompt, his incumbent status is indexed in reference to the usage of the term *president* enunciated in the question wording. Therefore, if partisanship influences reactions to presidential norm violations, we might observe divergent treatment effects among Democrats and Republicans. Under this logic, Democrats should respond more favorably to the justifications for presidential norm violations than Republicans since the justifications would, if practiced contemporaneously, likely redound to the benefit of a Democratic president and, thus, Democratic political priorities.

A brief discussion of the various treatments will add clarity to our analysis. Lying to pass laws or to win reelection, if such action is perceived to be critical to achieving the desired end, redounds primarily to the benefit of the president and their supporters, whereas lying for national security or to unite the country offers a more diffuse benefit. Thus, in this experiment, we are primarily interested in the absolute value of the treatment effect, while the direction of the treatment effect is an important, though secondary, concern since both a positive and negative effect would demonstrate that framing presidential norm violations alters public attitudes toward presidential norms.

Results

If Americans process norm violations through a partisan filter, then the effects of the treatment should diverge along party lines. I test this hypothesis in Table 3 using an OLS model. I analyze the entire sample and examine Democrats, Republicans, and independents separately in these analyses. The independent variables of interest are the treatment dummies described above. The dependent variable is the respondent's support for a norm against lying. The first column details the results from the full sample. The treatment effect is negative for the Unity treatment and both negative and statistically significant for the National Security treatment, indicating the treatments reduced support for the norm against lying. The other three treatments had the effect of increasing support for the norm, though only the Pass Laws treatment is statistically significant. However, these results reveal only part of the story since I expect heterogeneous treatment effects by party affiliation. Therefore, I also focus separately on Republicans, Democrats, and Independents in the following three columns.

The second column focuses on self-identified Democrats only. The negative and statistically significant coefficient for the National Security treatment and the negative coefficient for the Unity treatment show that the treatments reduced Democratic support for presidential norms. The coefficients for the other treatments are positive and statistically insignificant. The emphasis in the third column is on Independents. The National Security and Create Jobs treatments reduced support for presidential norms, though none had a statistically significant effect on Independents. Among Republicans (column 4), all but one of the treatments had the effect of increasing support for presidential norms, though, again, none reached the level of statistical significance.

The analyses above compare respondents under treatment to respondents under control. Comparing partisan attitudes within treatment conditions accentuates partisan differences. Table A4 presents the difference-in-means (t) test for the Justification experiment. In the control group, 81% of respondents strongly agreed or somewhat agreed with the norm against presidents lying to the American people (84%

TABLE 3 (OLS) Effect of justification by partisanship.

Dependent variable				
Support for presidential norm against lying				
	All respondents (1)	**Democrats** (2)	**Independents** (3)	**Republicans** (4)
National Security	−0.067	−0.131**	−0.131	0.032
	(0.041)	(0.060)	(0.099)	(0.063)
Pass Laws	0.113***	0.080	0.172	0.103
	(0.041)	(0.056)	(0.109)	(0.066)
Create Jobs	0.034	0.092	−0.078	0.043
	(0.041)	(0.059)	(0.098)	(0.066)
Unity	−0.030	−0.054	0.009	−0.036
	(0.041)	(0.058)	(0.101)	(0.065)
Reelection	0.058	0.078	0.046	0.018
	(0.041)	(0.059)	(0.107)	(0.063)
Constant	0.808***	0.838***	0.721***	0.839***
	(0.029)	(0.042)	(0.069)	(0.046)
Observations	996	437	219	340
R^2	0.024	0.052	0.040	0.015
Adjusted R^2	0.019	0.041	0.018	−0.0002
Residual std. error	0.375 (df = 990)	0.347 (df = 431)	0.450 (df = 213)	0.343 (df = 334)
F statistic	4.922*** (df = 5; 9904).	721*** (df = 5; 4311).	784 (df = 5; 2130).	989 (df = 5; 334)

Note: Linear regressions with standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable is the respondent's support for a norm against lying. Respondents assigned to the control condition are the omitted category. Model 1 details the results for the full sample of respondents. Models 2–4 detail the results for Democrats, Independents, and Republicans, respectively.

*$p < 0.1$; **$p < 0.05$; ***$p < 0.01$.

of Democrats and 84% of Republicans). Among all respondents assigned to the National Security treatment condition, support for the norm decreased by 7.0 percentage points, with 71% of Democrats and 87% of Republicans supporting the presidential norm. In the Pass Laws treatment, support for the presidential norm increased for each partisan subgroup to 92% for Democrats and 94% for Republicans.

The varying differences in public support for presidential norms among the partisan groups observed in the justification treatments compared to the control group baseline suggest that Americans sometimes assess presidential norm violations through a partisan filter. Justification treatments had little effect on Republicans. If anything, the treatments tended to fortify Republican support for presidential norms, except for the Unity treatment, which reduced support for the presidential norms for Republicans and Democrats. However, the National Security treatment reduced Democratic and Independent support for presidential norms. Although President Biden was not named in this experiment, Republican and Democratic responses to the various treatments suggest that partisanship is an influential source of variation in subjects' responses.

These findings suggest that presidents can manipulate attitudes toward presidential norms using strategic framing of norm-violating actions. By contrast, the effect of the Pass Laws treatment was positive and statistically significant. The effects of the Create Jobs, Unity, and Reelection treatments

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varied, though the coefficients miss conventional thresholds of statistical significance. These results show that some, but not all, arguments on behalf of a presidential norm violation will achieve the desired end.

THE ENDS AND MEANS EXPERIMENT

To further explore whether and to what extent public attitudes toward presidential norms are a function of partisan predispositions, I ask whether Americans' attitudes about presidential norm violations depend on the aim for which the norm violation is employed. This experiment permits examining whether the policy or objective a president pursues affects support for presidential norm violations. As such, I conducted an experiment to examine whether the ends for which a president violates presidential norms affect public tolerance for presidential norm violations.

To answer these questions, I included an experiment in the same March 2023 survey that explores the conditions under which norm violation is permissible. Subjects were randomly assigned to one of five treatment conditions, including a control condition. Subjects assigned to the control condition were asked whether they agree, neither agree nor disagree, or disagree with the following statement: "A president should sometimes break presidential norms." Subjects assigned to one of the other treatment groups were provided with additional information and an aim to complement the statement so as to provide a purpose for which to violate presidential norms. These subjects were told either:

- **[Fake News:]** Presidents sometimes violate presidential norms to challenge the influence of mainstream media, what some people call "fake news." Presidents should sometimes violate political norms to challenge fake news.
- **[Like-minded Judges:]** Presidents sometimes violate presidential norms to install judges aligned with their judicial philosophy. A president should sometimes violate presidential norms to install like-minded judges in federal courts.
- **[Deep State:]** Presidents sometimes violate presidential norms to take on the entrenched power of what some people call the "deep state," meaning military, intelligence, and government officials who try to secretly manipulate government policy. A president should sometimes violate presidential norms to combat the deep state.
- **[Campaign Promise:]** Presidents sometimes violate presidential norms to enact promises they made during their presidential campaign. A president should sometimes violate presidential norms to fulfill their campaign promises.

The treatments utilized in this experiment offer some notable benefits. The purposes selected (i.e., treatments) to augment the statement derive from real-world political concerns. Each aim has been prominently invoked by recent presidents or their allies as a purpose worthy of violating presidential norms. While this quality facilitates external validity, the choice introduces additional complexity because some aims are associated with conservative political priorities, and others are more associated with liberal political priorities. This feature enhances rather than diminishes the study because if presidents violate presidential norms in service of some ostensibly higher aim, then they would likely only do so in a way that improves their standing among their political allies. We should expect strategic presidents to violate presidential norms in service of politically compelling objectives, which will likely be partisan if violating presidential norms is necessary to achieve them. Thus, partisan aims (as opposed to innocuous or nonpartisan ones) offer a stronger test of the public's tolerance of presidential norm violation.

Results

Does the end (e.g., policy or political objective) the president pursues affect public reaction to norm-violating means to achieve it? If Americans are willing to jettison their support for presidential norms in

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furtherance of a desired outcome or policy, then we should observe that opposition to presidential norms violations is higher among respondents assigned to the control group than those assigned to the treatment groups. We are also interested in how partisanship shapes attitudes toward presidential norms. If partisanship influences how Americans evaluate presidential norm violations, we should observe differential tolerance for norm violations among partisans within treatment conditions.

To evaluate partisanship and tolerance for presidential norm violations, I construct a set of OLS regression models. The dependent variable is measured using a 5-point Likert scale, with positive responses indicating disagreement with the statement that "a president should sometimes break presidential norms" and negative responses indicating agreement. The key independent variables are the four treatment conditions. I also examine Democrats, independents, and Republicans separately in this analysis. The results are presented in Table 4. Column 1 shows the results from the full sample of respondents. Columns 2–4 detail the results for Democrats, Independents, and Republicans, respectively.

Model 1 displays the estimated effect of the various treatments on opposition to presidential norm violations. The coefficient for the Fake News treatment is negative and statistically significant, suggesting that the treatment had the effect of increasing tolerance for presidential norm violations. Conversely, the Judges treatment had the opposite effect, increasing opposition to presidential norm violations. The coefficients for the other two treatments are positive but miss conventional thresholds of statistical

TABLE 4 (OLS) Effect of goal on opposition to presidential norm violation by partisanship.

Dependent variable				
Oppose presidential norm violation				
	All respondents (1)	**Democrats** (2)	**Independents** (3)	**Republicans** (4)
Like-minded Judges	0.085*	0.113	0.107	0.057
	(0.048)	(0.074)	(0.101)	(0.080)
Campaign Promise	0.063	0.025	−0.007	0.164**
	(0.048)	(0.073)	(0.101)	(0.081)
Deep State	0.010	−0.029	−0.064	0.119
	(0.048)	(0.073)	(0.100)	(0.081)
Fake News	−0.095**	−0.053	−0.103	−0.149*
	(0.048)	(0.072)	(0.100)	(0.083)
Constant	0.352***	0.394***	0.325***	0.308***
	(0.034)	(0.051)	(0.073)	(0.058)
Observations	996	437	219	340
R^2	0.017	0.013	0.024	0.050
Adjusted R^2	0.013	0.004	0.006	0.039
Residual std. error	0.478 ($df = 991$)	0.490 ($df = 432$)	0.462 ($df = 214$)	0.468 ($df = 335$)
F statistic	4.289*** ($df = 4$; 9911).	426 ($df = 4$; 4321).	312 ($df = 4$; 2144).	408*** ($df = 4$; 335)

Note: Linear regressions with standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable is the respondent's opposition to presidential norm violations, measured using a five-level Likert scale, with positive responses indicating disagreement with the statement that "a president should sometimes break presidential norms." Respondents assigned to the control condition are the omitted category. Model 1 details the results for the full sample of respondents. Models 2–4 detail the results for Democrats, Independents, and Republicans, respectively.

*$p < 0.1$; **$p < 0.05$; ***$p < 0.01$.

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significance. Model 4, which shows the results among Republicans, provides greater insight into the nature of the effect of the Fake News treatment. While the coefficient for the Fake News treatment is negative and statistically significant among Republicans, there was no significant difference across treatments for only Democrats (Model 2) and Independents (Model 3).

Comparing respondents under treatment to respondents under control indicates that the Fake News treatment had the effect of reducing Republican support for presidential norms, while the other treatments yielded more mixed results. However, comparing partisan attitudes within treatment conditions provides additional insight into partisan responses to the treatments. Table A5 presents the difference-in-means (t) test for the Ends and Means experiment. Among respondents assigned to the control condition, 65% strongly agreed or somewhat agreed with the statement that "A president should sometimes break presidential norms." The mean difference between respondents assigned to the control condition and the Fake News treatment is 9.0 percentage points. Among subjects assigned to the Fake News treatment condition, 84% of Republicans compared to 78% of Independents and 66% of Democrats agreed with the statement that "Presidents should sometimes violate presidential norms to challenge fake news." Further, 74% of Independents agreed that presidents should sometimes violate presidential norms "to combat the deep state," while only 64% of Democrats and 57% of Republicans agreed with the statement.

These results suggest that the public's tolerance for presidential norm violations is, at times, conditioned on the aim the president seeks to achieve by violating the norm. Although only two of the justifications exceeded conventional thresholds of statistical significance, with the Like-minded Judges treatment reducing tolerance for norm violations, readers should interpret these results carefully. This experiment identified a justification sufficiently compelling to increase Republican tolerance for presidential norm violations substantially. Presidents and presidential candidates, with their sizable staffs, campaign infrastructures, and public standing, are endowed with tremendous resources to discover, test, and implement effective frames to justify presidential norm violations. These results indicate that the expression of this tolerance can manifest in partisan terms. A polarizing and partisan aim can alter public appetites for norm violations along predictably partisan lines. Such results provide evidence for the claim that partisanship and policy preferences shape assessments of presidential norm violations.

DISCUSSION

The United States is increasingly politically divided on a wide range of issues. As intense contestation spreads to more of the political terrain, many worry that foundational political norms are up next on the chopping block. My findings offer a modicum of relief for those concerned about the denigration of common ground in the political sphere. A nationally representative sample of nearly 800 Americans qualified to vote shows that supermajorities of the public support presidential norms.

However, presidential norms are supported differentially by the public, depending on various politically relevant characteristics. When presidential norms and other values are at cross purposes or in apparent conflict, my results show that presidents can use compelling partisan framing or justifications to affect support for presidential norms. Not every justification reduces support for presidential norms. In fact, some rationalizations had the effect of increasing support for presidential norms. This finding suggests that if presidents seek to reduce public support for presidential norms through their rhetoric, they must do so strategically, providing compelling arguments to sway their intended audiences. Presidents have tremendous resources at their disposal to do just this. With a sprawling public relations apparatus working tirelessly to advance the president's agenda, presidents can track public opinion, craft and test their messaging, and respond prominently and in real time to influence the public (Druckman & Jacobs, 2015). Presidents doubtless have the resources to discover the frames that serve their purposes.

Are Americans willing to punish a president who flagrantly trespasses presidential norms and threatens to break through the constraints of the norms-based presidency? Widespread public support of presidential norms in the abstract indicates that the public is available to sanction presidential norm

violations. However, results from my survey experiments suggest Americans evaluate presidential norms through partisan cues and policy preferences. Furthermore, even when considering presidential norms in the abstract, a palpable partisan bent for support of a subclass of presidential norms suggests the possibility of a polarized, and thus less emphatic, public backlash to presidential norm violations. These findings suggest a weaker and more conditional public constraint on presidential action.

Although I included numerous significant and wide-ranging presidential norms in the battery, many more were excluded for parsimony. Future research should aspire to identify, to the greatest degree possible, the universe of politically consequential presidential norms. Doing so will catalyze empirical research and offer tremendous insight into the norms-based presidency. Among the most prominent norm-violating behaviors in contemporary American politics is the prevalence of outrageous, profane rhetoric and name-calling among political elites (James, 2022). Future research should investigate how such behavior affects attitudes toward politicians and evaluations of political institutions and their products.

These concerns relate to the concept of "presidential," what's expected or considered befitting of a president: how they should talk, dress, vacation, and govern, among other expectations. Future research should assess how public conceptions of the presidency and what's considered presidential affect not only occupants while they're in office but also who is perceived as eligible to hold the office. Given that, with one exception, all of America's presidents have been ostensibly straight white men, future research might explore how public attitudes about race and gender influence conceptions of what's considered presidential and how these conceptions delimit access to political power. For example, why was it controversial for Obama to wear a tan suit but innocuous for Reagan and Biden to do so? Presidential norms shape every facet of the presidency, yet we know very little about them. By developing this line of research, scholars can gain insight into how norms facilitate democratic governance, diffuse support, and promote continuity or don't so as to engender resistance, alienation, and change.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

An earlier version of this article was presented at the Midwest Political Science Association Annual Meeting on April 13, 2023, and the American Political Science Association Annual Meeting on September 1, 2023. Thanks to William Howell, Eric Oliver, Adam Zelizer, Jon Rogowski, Susan Stokes, James Druckman, William Roberts, Neil O'Brian, and Eric Schickler, as well as workshop participants at the University of Oregon, University of Chicago, Carleton College, Hunter College, and University of Wisconsin-Madison, and the anonymous reviewers for helpful comments and suggestions.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The author has no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

For reasonable requests about the research findings that support this study, please contact Chandler James.

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How to cite this article: James, Chandler. 2024. "Partisanship and Public Support for Presidential Norms." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 54: 310–31. https://doi.org/10.1111/psq.12882

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