

Does President Trump's Outrageous Behavior Work?: Results from Two Randomized-Controlled Trials

CHANDLER JAMES 

Politicians are increasingly relying on outrage to engage the public. President Donald Trump used outrage to fuel his unlikely 2016 presidential victory and 2020 reelection effort. Was Trump's outrageous behavior a boon to his political fortunes or political malpractice? I draw on research in political psychology, populism, and presidential appeals to examine President Trump's outrageous behavior and its effect on the public. Using a series of original experiments, I find support for my expectation that Trump's outrageous behavior is a politically advantageous public relations strategy. My results show that Trump's outrageous behavior increases his support among self-identified Independents. However, contrary to popular conception, the results do not support claims that racial resentment or affinity for populism makes individuals more amenable to Trump's outrageous behavior.

Introduction

American politics is suffused with outrage (Baker 2017; Berry and Sobieraj 2016; Herbst 2010; Williamson, Skocpol, and Coggin 2011). A simple fact can attest to this point: Donald Trump, the reality TV star turned political provocateur, was elected President of the United States. Trump's impolitic, withering approach to politics upended the political world and made him the subject of intense animosity from critics and fervent adulation from supporters. Rather than sink his political career, Trump's penchant for controversy has coexisted with his unlikely ascension to the nation's highest office. Trump isn't the only contemporary political

Chandler James is a graduate student in political science at the University of Chicago. He is currently writing a dissertation on presidential norms. **AUTHOR'S NOTE:** Thanks to William Howell, Eric Oliver, Adam Zelizer, Susan Stokes, and Lisa Wedeen for comments and advice.

figure to find traction with outrageous performances. Supporters such as Lindsay Graham and Rudy Giuliani and rivals such as Bernie Sanders have garnered national attention for their outrageous behavior, too. By outrageous behavior, I mean norm-violating behavior or discourse intended to arouse an intense emotional response, particularly anger, fear, or moral indignation. The prevalence of outrageous behavior in American politics provokes several questions. Does outrageous behavior benefit or disadvantage Donald Trump? If so, what are the mechanisms that convert outrageous behavior into mass support? Finally, who are the people that respond favorably to Trump's outrageous antics?

In a democracy, we might expect politicians to behave in such a way as to minimize the risk of alienating prospective voters. Myriad research suggests that positive evaluation of candidate characteristics play an important role in voting behavior and performance (Abramson et al. 2007; Barber 2008; Holian and Prysby 2014). National politicians regularly proffer anodyne, poll-tested behavior, rhetoric, and policies to minimize the possibility of controversy and maximize popularity within the mass public. In the case of presidents and aspirants to the office of the presidency, we might expect them to act “presidential.” To act presidential is to behave in accordance with “a particular set of expectations about the office that are held by the public, described by journalists and teachers, and encouraged by the presidents themselves” (Hinckley 1990, 130). However, not all politicians pursue this precautionary, well-worn political strategy. Many politicians, past and present, including the 45th President of the United States, traffic in outrageous, polarizing, sometimes offensive behavior. All else equal, we might expect there to be at least some political costs for outrageous behavior. Assuming that politicians are seeking to win office and achieve power, the prevalence of outrageous behavior in American politics reveals a compelling puzzle.

Previous research has examined the role of outrage in the American political scene but does not directly address these questions. Prior work has examined outrage within the media (Arceneaux and Johnson 2013; Berry and Sobieraj 2016) or focused particularly on anger and outrage within the electorate (Banks 2014; Mason 2018). This study contributes to the study of public appeals, emotions, and outrage in American politics in at least three ways: (1) by examining how popularly available public appeals from sitting officeholders affects public attitudes, (2) by presenting an original experimental design to assess how outrageous behavior influences public opinion, and (3) by testing mechanisms for how outrageous behavior translates into political support by inspiring anger in susceptible populations in the electorate. The results from this study indicate that Donald Trump is not hampered by his outrageous behavior. In fact, there is limited evidence to suggest that Trump benefits from the deployment of outrageous behavior. Interestingly, these findings do not support claims that racial resentment or affinity for populism makes individuals more amenable to Trump's outrageous behavior.

Outrageous Behavior as a Political Strategy

One of the central challenges of studying outrage is formulating a tractable definition for empirical assessment.¹ The textbook definition of outrageous is “exceeding the limits of conventional behavior; sensational, somewhat shocking; daring, provocative, shameless.”² What's so shocking about the behavior of the aforementioned politicians is their routine flouting of established conventions of politics. Instances of norm-violation prevalent in contemporary politics include: Manichean rhetoric, institution-disdaining behavior, and spontaneity; in fact, according to Jamieson and Taussig (2017), such behavior is part and parcel of Donald Trump's “rhetorical signature.” In this article, I define outrageous behavior as norm-violating behavior intended to provoke indignation, shock, or anger.

Cultural norms structure everyday life. Strict adherence to norms, however, is not ironclad—under certain conditions, scholars have found that norms can backfire, effectuating the opposite of their intended aim (Conway et al. 2009; Conway and Schaller 2005). This area of research presents two different, but not mutually exclusive theories for why norms can backfire: (1) emotional reactance (Brehm 1966; Fuegen and Brehm 2004) and (2) informational contamination (Conway, Repke, and Houck 2017; Conway and Schaller 2005). Emotional reactance occurs when one values freedom of choice and that freedom is thought to be limited by the hegemony of a norm, while informational contamination is the consequence of a norm being enforced so vigorously that observers feel that norm-induced consensus is a product of coercion, which consequently sows doubt and mistrust in the information environment.

Political scientists are also beginning to take notice of the important role emotions play in contemporary politics (Christenson and Weisberg 2019; Iyengar et al. 2019; Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes 2012; Mason 2018). American politics is riven with anger, fanned by social polarization and partisan antipathy (Mason 2018). One promising avenue for outrageous behavior to benefit practitioners is by inducing anger among their supporters. Anger is a response to a perceived social transgression (Averill 1983). In other words, anger is a righteous response to injustice. Valentino and his co-authors (2011) claim that anger motivates people toward political participation. In fact, they find that anger catalyzes action even more than enthusiasm or anxiety.

Outrage-based political content sells (Berry and Sobieraj 2016). Not only does outrage media, intended to elicit an emotional response, garner attention, and pecuniary reward, it also has important political consequences. Matthew Levendusky (2013) finds that exposure to extreme, partisan media, such as programs on Fox News (e.g., Hannity

1. (1) Outrage is inherently subjective. What is outrageous to some may be benign to others. What inspires outrage in a few may inspire excitement in many. (2) Outrage is both a noun and a verb. For example, people can be both outrageous and outraged simultaneously. Or a person can be outraged, but not outrageous, or vice versa. This study is particularly concerned with politicians being outrageous (i.e., employing outrageous behavior) and the effect of outrageous behavior on mass attitudes, particularly support for candidates and their expressed policy preferences. In this case, an outcome of outrageous behavior might be outrage from a constituent. Less of a concern for this study is whether the politician is genuinely outraged, or the public is outrageous.

2. “outrageous, adj. and adv.” OED Online. December 2019. Oxford University Press. <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/133862?redirectedFrom=outrageous> (accessed February 16, 2020).

and The O'Reilly Factor), makes partisans more intensely partisan, while a bevy of research finds a public largely impervious to persuasion (Jacobson 2015; Kalla and Brookman 2018). People are resistant to persuasion. This occurs, in part, because human beings are often motivated reasoners (Levendusky 2013). Rallying the like-minded is a surer political strategy than persuading out-partisans (Panagopoulos 2020). Outrageous behavior from politicians may mimic the effects of partisan media, validating, buttressing, and strengthening supporters' beliefs.

Research finds that inspiring anger can produce valuable political outcomes. Inducing anger can help politicians encourage voters to engage in costly political behaviors (Groenendyk and Banks 2014). Anger can be used to successfully to garner status and esteem, because angry people are seen as more competent and elicit more support (Tiedens 2001). Inducing anger makes people more optimistic (Lerner and Keltner 2000). In conflictual environments, anger engenders people to turn to dominant, excessive leadership (Laustsen and Petersen 2020). Banks (2014) offers experimental evidence to show how politicians can affect racial conservative policy preferences by inducing anger in individuals who score high in racial resentment. The consequences of racial resentment can have profound political import (Kinder and Sanders 1996; Kinder and Sears 1981). For example, Banks describes how the George H.W. Bush 1988 presidential campaign used the Willie Horton ad to activate racial animosity among white voters, upending the once-promising Michael Dukakis campaign.

Outrageous behavior can be used to garner attention, a platform that politicians can use instrumentally. During the 2016 Republican primaries, Trump earned billions of dollars in free media for his frequently outrageous antics (Confessore and Yourish 2016). Though the public appeals literature largely focuses on the political strategies of presidents, we should also expect generating attention to be beneficial for other types of office-seekers as well (Mayhew 1974). Samuel Kernell (1993) argues that presidents "go public" to mobilize support for themselves and their policies among the public, aggrandizing presidential power. Cohen (1995) finds that when a president spotlights an issue during a State of the Union address, the issue is likely to become salient to the public. As Cohen notes, "any presidential mention of a policy will increase public concern and awareness of it" (1995, 105). What's more, neither the president's personal popularity, nor their substantive position on the issue affects whether the public becomes concerned with the issue.

Getting attention for outrageous behavior can translate into legislative success. Canes-Wrone et al. (2001) finds that promotion of issues, under certain conditions, can lead to increased legislative influence. Her study suggests that presidents can use plebiscitary appeals strategically, particularly when their stance on an issue is popular among the public, to improve passage in Congress. Druckman and Jacobs (2015) find that presidential administrations have successfully used their platform to spotlight popular initiatives and positions and minimize unpopular positions and events. According to the duo, under certain conditions, strategically emphasizing or understating issues and positions provides the opportunity to manipulate public opinion in the service of a president's political agenda.

Presidents need not rely on political appointments or even explicit directive to set the tone of the policies to be carried out by bureaucrats within the executive branch (Whitford and Yates 2003). Outrageous behavior can indirectly affect bureaucratic behavior. The notion that “policy is enunciated in rhetoric; it is realized in action” (Kaufman and Resources for the Future 1967), aptly reflects the central role rhetoric plays in the formation and implementation of policy. As research from the public appeals literature makes clear, politicians are strategic and use public appeals to generate attention instrumentally to advance their policy, political, and electoral ambitions.

In an age where populism is ascendant around the globe (Kendall-Taylor and Frantz 2016), fueled in part by anti-establishment sentiment, distinguishing oneself from mainstream politicians can pay dividends. Populist politicians often rail against existing institutions, consider political adversaries as illegitimate, and paint a dire, Manichean worldview that pits “real people” against the corrupt elite (Müller 2016). Defining populism has been an bedeviling enterprise that has perplexed most and satisfied few (Canovan 1981; Laclau 2005). However, many prominent conceptions of populism (Galston 2018; Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018; Mudde 2004; Müller 2016) align with Oliver and Rahn's (2016) view that “at its core, populism is a type of political rhetoric that pits a virtuous “people” against nefarious, parasitic elites who seek to undermine the rightful sovereignty of the common folk” (190). Thus, Trump's outrageous behavior can provide a strong signal that he's no ordinary politician, and therefore not beholden to the establishment. Ernesto Laclau (2005) posits that politicians can use populist rhetoric to stitch together wide-ranging coalitions with broad interests to upend longstanding regimes.

Outrageous behavior has been found to appeal to people antagonistic to strong political correctness (PC) norms. PC norms aim to reduce or remove negative group relevant language from respectable discourse (Conway et al. 2009). When norms become too overbearing, however, even when they're enforced in good faith, they can backfire (Conway et al. 2009). Politicians can leverage backlash against strong norms to establish legitimacy and favor among the disaffected. Indeed, some people support Trump not in spite of, but because of his norm-violating behavior (Guo 2015). Conway and his co-authors (2017) point to emotional reactance and informational contamination as powerful explanations for support of public displays of deviance. They find evidence from several randomized-controlled trials that over-exposure to strong PC norms increased support for Donald Trump among respondents scoring high in reactance to strong PC norms and respondents concerned about informational contamination.

My hypothesis is derived chiefly from the public appeals literature. As mentioned above, politicians behave instrumentally and make appeals to garner support, frequently to their benefit. Thus, I expect *outrageous behavior to increase overall support for Trump and his policies*. The rationale undergirding this contention is straight-forward—politicians wouldn't knowingly make appeals, particularly risky or controversial ones, if there was no potential upside. Thus, we should expect politicians to use outrageous behavior strategically to increase support for themselves and their agenda.

Experimental Overview

I conducted two original survey experiments to test this hypothesis. Both surveys follow the same basic design. I recruited respondents with an advertisement on Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk). MTurk is a crowdsourcing marketplace that provides a platform for businesses (requesters) to hire individuals (workers) to complete jobs that computers are unable to do (e.g., take surveys). MTurk convenience samples are among the most reliable convenience samples commonly utilized by researchers (Berinsky, Huber, and Lenz 2012). Indeed, survey experiments conducted on samples obtained from MTurk produce estimates similar to ones obtained from population samples (Mullinix et al. 2015). Between August 20 and September 25, 2019, I recruited 1,267 respondents between the studies. The subjects were recruited in two separate waves. I paid all respondents who completed the task. Tables in the appendix show the demographic data collected in the two studies.

Both studies contained the same basic structure. Subjects were first asked a few basic voting pre-treatment political attitudinal questions to obtain baseline partisanship. Subjects were then asked several questions to obtain a measure of their affinity for populism (Oliver and Rahn 2016) and several questions to estimate their level of racial resentment (Kinder and Sanders 1996). Then subjects were randomly assigned to experimental conditions that varied between the two studies. After exposing subjects to varying treatment conditions, all subjects were asked the same attitudinal and policy questions, which serve as the outcome variables of interest. Finally, both surveys concluded with several common demographic questions.

In Study 1, subjects were exposed to one experimental condition. In this study, subjects were exposed to either a 35-second clip from then-candidate Trump's presidential campaign announcement, a 40-second clip from President Trump's 2019 State of the Union Address, or a 20-second clip of then candidate Trump dancing to a parody of the song "Hotline Bling" on a Saturday Night Live skit from 2015. During Trump's campaign announcement, he said:

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.

This quote was captured in the video clip shown to roughly one-third of the subjects in this study. This treatment condition is coded as the outrageous behavior treatment. The clip from Trump's 2019 State of the Union Address is coded as the conventional political rhetoric treatment because of its more anodyne, but partisan character. In this clip, Trump says:

The lawless state of our Southern border is a threat to the safety and security and financial well-being of all America. We have a moral duty to create an immigration system that protects the lives and jobs of our citizens. This includes our obligation to the millions of

immigrants living here today who follow the rules and respected our laws. Legal immigrants enrich our nation and strengthen our society in countless ways.

The placebo is a video of Trump dancing to a parody of the 2016 hit song, *Hotline Bling*. After subjects watch one of the three randomly assigned video clips, they completed a post-treatment attitudinal test. Specifically, attitudes on building a wall on the Southern border with Mexico and Trump's job approval are queried.

It's worth going into some detail about the two treatments, since they both possess policy and politicized content, delivered in a manner where the intended aim is to persuade. The outrageous behavior treatment is content obtained from the context of a heated campaign, prior to Trump assuming the presidency. The conventional political rhetoric treatment was obtained from a video of President Trump delivering a State of the Union Address. A difference between the two settings is discernible. Though the American flags, velvet curtains in the background, and the microphone offer some weight to Trump's pugnacious Announcement speech, the forum pales in comparison, in terms of pomp and circumstance, to the majesty of a State of the Union Address before Congress. In this clip, behind the president sit not only a sizable American flag but also Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi and Vice President Mike Pence. The camera in the outrageous behavior treatment stays fixed on Trump, while the camera in the conventional political rhetoric treatment pans occasionally to distinguished political figures and concludes with applause from the audience. The august trappings of State of the Union and the presidential performances delivered during them increase public confidence in the president (i.e., make Trump seem more "presidential") (Howell, Porter, and Wood 2020). *Ceteris paribus*, the setting of the State of the Union offers a more amenable forum to appeal to the public, given the gravitas of the circumstance, than the comparably unadorned context of the outrageous behavior treatment video clip.

Study 2 alters and builds on Study 1 in a few important ways. First, the placebo of the first stimulus is amended to address the potential concern that the placebo in Study 1 affects support for Trump and his policies for some remote reason. Instead of a video of Trump dancing to a parody of "Hotline Bling," subjects assigned to the placebo treatment condition are randomly shown one of five television commercials (see appendix). The expectation is that television commercials shouldn't prime subjects in any relevant and systematic ways—even though it seems unlikely this rather innocuous video of Trump dancing would do so, either. The outcome variables from Study 1 are retained.

In both studies, subjects across all treatment conditions are exposed to video content; the difference is that some were exposed to outrageous behavior, some were exposed to more conventional rhetoric or neutral, innocuous content. By manipulating the treatments in this way, I estimate the effects of exposing subjects to outrageous behavior, compared to a control baseline of conventional partisan behavior or neutral content, on political attitudes.

Data and Analyses

To assess the effect of outrageous behavior on political attitudes, each posttest is comprised of a series of questions formulated to obtain respondents' attitudes or policy preference. Subjects are queried on Donald Trump's performance as president and the level of support for the policy relevant to the content of the intervention. In each post-test, for example, respondents support Trump's policy proposal when they indicate that they "strongly favor" or "somewhat favor" building a wall on the U.S. border with Mexico. Therefore, the results from this study can only attest to how outrageous behavior affects support for Trump and issues specifically queried in the survey, as opposed to the effects of outrageous behavior more generally.

Both studies include a battery of items which are combined into an index of opinion to assess the impacts of outrageous behavior—the indices serve as dependent variables in my analysis. I re-scale the outcome variable in each model to make the interpretation of treatment effects more intuitive. The dependent variable is a measure between the interval [0,1]. The indices include support for building a wall on the southern border and job approval of Donald Trump.

I begin by testing the effects of outrageous behavior on political attitudes using data from Study 1. I estimate:

$$Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 D_{1i} + u_i$$

Where posttreatment attitude y_i for individual i is regressed on a dummy variable D_{1i} which indicates the treatment condition. In this equation, u_i is an unobserved disturbance term. The second column contains a more elaborate model embellished with demographic control variables. If Hypothesis 1 is correct, I should find that outrageous behavior exposure has a positive coefficient, demonstrating that on average, those assigned to the outrageous behavior treatment are more supportive of Donald Trump and his agenda. In Table 1, I present the results. The results show some support for Hypothesis 1. I find that the average effect of outrageous behavior in Study 1 and Study 2 is a 6.6 percentage-point and 3.0 percentage-point increase for Donald Trump and his agenda, respectively. In Study 1, the effect is statistically significant. These results suggest Donald Trump uses outrageous behavior to his overall benefit and not to his detriment.

To further investigate Trump's outrageous behavior, I constructed several more regression models to examine the relationship between the outrageous behavior treatment and partisanship. To test this relationship, these models include interactions of the outrageous behavior treatment with Democratic and Republican dummy variables. In both Study 1 and Study 2, the main effect remains positive, though neither is statistically significant. In contrast, in both studies, the Republican interaction is negative, suggesting that the outrageous behavior treatment had either no or a slightly negative effect on Republican respondents. The Democratic interaction is slightly positive in Study 1 and slightly negative in Study 2, suggesting the outrage treatment had either no or a small positive effect on Democratic respondents' appraisal of Trump

TABLE 1
The Effect of Trump's Outrageous Behavior on Support for Trump

	<i>Dependent Variable</i>			
	<i>Trump Support</i>			
	<i>Study 1</i>	<i>Study 1 w/CA</i>	<i>Study 2</i>	<i>Study 2 w/CA</i>
Outrage	0.066* (0.036)	0.059* (0.030)	0.030 (0.037)	-0.0001 (0.031)
Conventional	0.024 (0.036)	0.032 (0.030)	0.030 (0.038)	-0.008 (0.031)
Party ID		0.278*** (0.019)		0.314*** (0.019)
Male		0.071*** (0.025)		0.050* (0.026)
Education		-0.010 (0.010)		-0.021* (0.011)
Age		0.007 (0.012)		-0.016 (0.011)
White		-0.113*** (0.028)		-0.086*** (0.029)
Constant	0.422***	0.521*** 0.655*** (0.025)	0.410*** (0.064)	
Observations	664	664	603	603
R ²	0.005	0.280	0.001	0.335
Adjusted R ²	0.002	0.272	-0.002	0.328
Residual Std. Error	0.374 (df=661)	0.319 (df=656)	0.378 (df=600)	0.309 (df=595)
F Statistic	1.739 (df=2; 6613)	6.467*** (df=7; 6560)	0.423 (df=2; 6004)	2.886*** (df=7; 595)

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

and his preferred policies. Thus, the results indicate that Independents responded most favorably to Trump's outrageous behavior and partisans were ambivalent about Trump's outrageous behavior.

These results point to outrageous behavior as a viable political strategy for Donald Trump. However, the results indicate the benefits of outrageous behavior relative to an innocuous control condition. To assess the benefits of outrageous behavior relative to conventional political rhetoric, I filter out respondents assigned to the control conditions in both Study 1 and Study 2, and then regress the outcome measures on treatment condition (outrageous behavior or conventional political rhetoric). The results are listed in Table 3. In Study 1, the outrageous behavior treatment has a larger effect than the conventional political rhetoric treatment, but the difference falls short of significance. In Study 2, the difference between the two treatments is essentially 0. A covariate adjustment barely affects the estimates for either study.

Basket of Deplorables Hypotheses

During a 2016 campaign fundraiser, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said half of the people who supported her Republican rival could be lumped into a “basket of deplorables.” Of them, she opined “they're racist, sexist, homophobic, xenophobic.” Republicans and Democrats, journalists, and scholars have described Trump and his core supporters as populist or racist (Edsall 2017; Hooghe and Dassonneville 2018; Inglehart and Norris 2017; Macaulay 2018; Steinhauer, Martin, and Herszenhorn 2016). We might be inclined to believe that the racially resentful and those with an affinity for populism, Trump's so-called base, are particularly amenable to his outrageous behavior. People predisposed toward populism and racial resentment are particularly angry. Populism is widely considered to be a political phenomenon fueled by animosity and indignation (Mudde 2004). Oliver and Rahn (2016) find that anger at the federal government goes hand-in-hand with support for populism and populist candidates. Other research focused on the relationship between anger and political behavior finds a tight relationship between anger and out-group prejudice (Banks 2014). Anger is the relevant emotion undergirding racial conservatism and symbolic racism (Banks and Valentino 2012). Assessing the literatures on populism and anger in political science, I formulated two additional hypotheses to further investigate the types of people galvanized by Trump's outrageous behavior.

What's so outrageous about some of Trump's behavior is that he is saying explicitly what other racial conservatives have traditionally expressed implicitly (Banks 2014). Forgoing the dog-whistle, Trump's racially charged invective is a clarion call. By making racialized appeals which breach PC norms that few contemporary politicians have been willing to cross, Trump can activate and signal commitment to racial conservatism. Therefore, Hypothesis 2 is that *subjects scoring higher in racial resentment will respond more favorably to Trump's outrageous behavior.*

Trump's breach of political norms of speech can not only show commitment to racial conservatism but also demonstrate independence from the political establishment. Drawing the ire of prominent political and media figures with the strategic use of outrageous behavior allows Trump to brandish his anti-establishment bona fides (Hess 2016). My third hypothesis is that *subjects with more populist attitudes will respond more favorably to outrageous behavior*. I expect that individuals roiled by disaffection and anger at the political establishment will interpret outrageous behavior as an expression of authenticity, making Trump's message more compelling than it would be otherwise.

If Hypothesis 2 is correct then I should find that when I interact the racial resentment index with the outrageous behavior treatment, there will be a positive and significant coefficient. The results provide neither substantive nor significant support for Hypothesis 2. In Study 1, the interaction coefficient goes in the wrong direction and is not statistically significant. While in Study 2, the interaction coefficient is negligible and not significant. My third hypothesis, which proposes that respondents who score high on the populism scale, an outrageous behavior intervention will have a positive and significant increase in their support for Trump and his agenda. Evidence from these two studies fails to support this hypothesis, as well. Interacting pre-test affinity for populism and the outrageous behavior treatment is neither substantial nor significant.

Discussion

When politicians address the public, we might expect them to behave in a sanitized way that is unobjectionable to most and offensive to few. Donald Trump takes a different tact. Trump's behavior is sometimes polarizing, strident, and outrageous. This paper attempts to make sense of why that is. The results from this paper show that Trump can increase his support and support for his agenda by trafficking in outrageous behavior. There is little evidence, however, to show that those with an affinity toward populism or racial resentment are particularly affected by Trump's outrageous behavior. Republicans weren't particularly affected by Trump's outrageous behavior, either. However, Independents responded favorably to Trump's outrageous behavior. Lacking sufficient data, this paper can only speculate for why that might be. Independents typically exhibit low levels of interest in politics—perhaps the outrageous behavior treatment transmitted novel information to this slice of the public?

More research is necessary to identify which constituencies are persuaded by Trump's outrageous behavior. Who might these people be? Alt-right memers, avid reality TV viewers, and low information voters are all plausible candidates for future research. Better understanding who is gratified by Trump's penchant for norm-violation will do much to demystify his notorious, but poorly understood “base.”

My experimental design allows me to examine how Donald Trump benefits from outrageous behavior and where he doesn't. Furthermore, my experimental design provides an example for how to assess difficult to test political phenomena, such as affect or political rhetoric, with a causally-oriented research design. Future research can build on this design—leveraging large, relatively inexpensive convenience samples,

cutting-edge online survey tools, and burgeoning technology such a deepfake software to significantly bolster excludability assumptions (i.e., the treatment and only the treatment is producing the estimated effect).

Although my experimental design is proficient in at least several ways, including resourcefulness, identification, and measurement, concerns regarding external validity are appropriate. First, examining only Donald Trump's outrageous behavior under very specific conditions raises both excludability and generalizability concerns regarding the effectiveness of the proposed treatment. Trump is a singular political figure in many ways. Perhaps there is something unique about Trump or his circumstances that allows him to use outrageous behavior for his benefit. Or only the outrageous behavior selected for these studies is beneficial, while Trump's outrageous behavior under different auspices might yield different results. Second, because my estimates are obtained using a relatively small convenience sample recruited on MTurk, my sample may not be representative of the national population. Conducting these experiments on a larger, representative sample could therefore produce different results. Third, the treatment delivered in my surveys may not fully simulate the ways in which outrageous behavior manifests in the real-world. People consume political content via news programming that contextualize political content in distinct, often-times impactful ways. This phenomenon is particularly prominent with partisan media (Jamieson and Taussig 2017). Lastly, we should be particularly concerned

TABLE 2
The Effect of Trump's Outrageous Behavior on Support for Trump

	<i>Dependent Variable</i>	
	<i>Trump Support</i>	
	<i>Study 1</i>	<i>Study 2</i>
Outrage	0.056 (0.052)	0.023 (0.053)
Conventional	0.043 (0.031)	-0.002 (0.032)
Democrat	-0.192*** (0.036)	-0.176*** (0.037)
Republican	0.276*** (0.042)	0.366*** (0.043)
Outrage · Democrat	0.010 (0.064)	-0.016 (0.065)
Outrage · Republican	-0.022 (0.072)	-0.073 (0.073)
Constant	0.434*** (0.031)	0.419*** (0.033)
Observations	664	603
R^2	0.243	0.304
Adjusted R^2	0.236	0.297
Residual Std. Error	0.327 ($df=657$)	0.316 ($df=596$)
F Statistic	35.150*** ($df=6; 657$)	43.382*** ($df=6; 596$)

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

TABLE 3
The Effect of Trump's Outrageous Behavior on Support for Trump

	Dependent Variable			
	Trump Support			
	Study 1	Study 1 w/CA	Study 2	Study 2 w/CA
Outrage	0.041 (0.036)	0.028 (0.031)	-0.0002 (0.038)	0.005 (0.031)
Party ID		0.261*** (0.023)		0.313*** (0.023)
Male		0.068** (0.032)		0.022 (0.032)
Education		-0.019 (0.013)		0.009 (0.013)
Age		0.001 (0.015)		-0.012 (0.013)
White		-0.114*** (0.035)		-0.071* (0.037)
Constant	0.447***	0.607*** (0.027)	0.440*** (0.076)	
Observations	443	443	403	403
R^2	0.003	0.252	0.00000	0.325
Adjusted R^2	0.001	0.241	-0.002	0.314
Residual Std. Error	0.374 ($df=441$)	0.326 ($df=436$)	0.378 ($df=401$)	0.312 ($df=396$)
F Statistic	1.348 ($df=1; 4412$)	4.440*** ($df=6; 4360$)	0.00004 ($df=1; 4013$)	1.753*** ($df=6; 396$)

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

about a violation of the exclusion restriction. Although I have attempted to home in on the effects of outrageous behavior, by limiting potential confounders, perhaps unobserved factors are driving the results. Therefore, since the manipulations are real-world clips, instead of researcher-fabricated videos, there are potentially additional factors accounting for the difference between the media that could affect the results. Hopefully, however, what is lost in terms of control is gained in terms of authenticity.

Future research can turn to other methods of inquiry to examine the effects of outrageous behavior, with careful consideration for external validity. For example, case studies, elite interviews, and focus groups can test the influence of outrageous behavior on political attitudes in a more dynamic manner, including other ways in which the phenomena can impact an individual beyond attitudinal change. Elite interviews can help unpack the ways in which outrageous behavior not only affects the public, but also other politicians, institutional performance, and inter-branch relations. Furthermore, more tests of outrageous behavior on the political attitudes are in order. My study found that the average effect of outrageous political on respondents' outlook for the future was -3.34 percentage-points and the average effect on enthusiasm for the next election was -7.4 percentage-points. In an age marked by intense scholarly debate over voter suppression in the American political system (Burden 2018; Grimmer et al. 2018; Grimmer and Yoder 2021; Hajnal, Kuk, and Lajevardi 2018), examining how these effects might be incorporated into a broader political strategy of voter de-mobilization would be of interest to scholars concerned with voting and political engagement (Tables 2, 4, and 5).

TABLE 4
The Effect of Trump's Outrageous Behavior on Support for Trump

	<i>Dependent Variable</i>	
	<i>Trump Support</i>	
	<i>Study 1</i>	<i>Study 2</i>
Outrage	0.085* (0.048)	0.026 (0.041)
Conventional	0.014 (0.035)	0.022 (0.035)
Racial Resentment	0.164*** (0.035)	0.321*** (0.036)
Outrage · Racial Resentment	-0.062 (0.061)	0.006 (0.061)
Constant	0.344*** (0.030)	0.296*** (0.028)
Observations	664	603
R^2	0.043	0.172
Adjusted R^2	0.037	0.166
Residual Std. Error	0.367 ($df=659$)	0.345 ($df=598$)
F Statistic	7.398*** ($df=4; 659$)	31.003*** ($df=4; 598$)

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

TABLE 5
The Effect of Trump's Outrageous Behavior on Support for Trump

	<i>Dependent Variable</i>	
	<i>Trump Support</i>	
	<i>Study 1</i>	<i>Study 2</i>
Outrage	0.063 (0.053)	0.048 (0.046)
Conventional	0.018 (0.035)	0.037 (0.037)
Populist	0.115*** (0.037)	0.196*** (0.037)
Outrage · Populist	0.005 (0.064)	−0.002 (0.063)
Constant	0.350*** (0.034)	0.311*** (0.032)
Observations	664	603
R^2	0.027	0.068
Adjusted R^2	0.021	0.062
Residual Std. Error	0.370 ($df=659$)	0.366 ($df=598$)
F Statistic	4.620*** ($df=4; 659$)	10.891*** ($df=4; 598$)

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

References

- Abramson, Paul R., John H. Aldrich, Jill Rickershauser, and David W. Rohde. 2007. "Fear in the Voting Booth: The 2004 Presidential Election." *Political Behavior* 29 (2): 197–220.
- Arceneaux, Kevin, and Martin Johnson. 2013. *Changing Minds or Changing Channels?: Partisan News in an Age of Choice*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Averill, James R. 1983. "Studies on Anger and Aggression: Implications for Theories of Emotion." *American Psychologist* 38 (11): 1145–60.
- Baker, Peter. 2017. "Trump White House Tests a Nation's Capacity for Outrage." *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/24/us/politics/attorney-general-bush-trump.html> (January 15, 2020).
- Banks, Antoine J. 2014. *Anger and Racial Politics: The Emotional Foundation of Racial Attitudes in America*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Banks, Antoine J., and Nicholas A. Valentino. 2012. "Emotional Substrates of White Racial Attitudes." *American Journal of Political Science* 56 (2): 286–97.
- Barber, James D. 2008. *The Presidential Character: Predicting Performance in the White House* (4th ed.). New York: Pearson.
- Berinsky, Adam J., Gregory A. Huber, and Gabriel S. Lenz. 2012. "Evaluating Online Labor Markets for Experimental Research: Amazon.Com's Mechanical Turk." *Political Analysis* 20 (3): 351–68.
- Berry, Jeffrey M., and Sarah Sobieraj. 2016. *The Outrage Industry: Political Opinion Media and the New Incivility*. Reprint edition. Oxford University Press.
- Brehm, Jack W. 1966. *A Theory of Psychological Reactance*. Oxford, England: Academic Press.
- Burden, Barry C. 2018. "Disagreement over ID Requirements and Minority Voter Turnout." *The Journal of Politics* 80 (3): 1060–3.

- Canes-Wrone, Brandice, Michael C. Herron, and Kenneth W. Shotts. 2001. "Leadership and Pandering: A Theory of Executive Policymaking." *American Journal of Political Science* 45 (3): 532–50.
- Canovan, Margaret. 1981. *Populism*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Christenson, Dino P., and Herbert F. Weisberg. 2019. "Bad Characters or Just More Polarization? The Rise of Extremely Negative Feelings for Presidential Candidates." *Electoral Studies* 61: 102032.
- Cohen, Jeffrey E. 1995. "Presidential Rhetoric and the Public Agenda." *American Journal of Political Science* 39 (1): 87.
- Confessore, Nicholas, and Karen Yourish. 2016. "2 Billion Worth of Free Media for Donald Trump." *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/16/upshot/measuring-donald-trumps-mammoth-advantage-in-free-media.html> (January 15, 2020).
- Conway, L.G., A. Salcido, L.J. Gornick, K.A. Bongard, M.A. Moran, and C. Burfiend. 2009. "When Self-Censorship Norms Backfire: The Manufacturing of Positive Communication and Its Ironic Consequences for the Perceptions of Groups." *Basic and Applied Social Psychology* 31 (4): 335–47.
- Conway, Lucian Gideon, Meredith A. Repke, and Shannon C. Houck. 2017. "Donald Trump as a Cultural Revolt Against Perceived Communication Restriction: Priming Political Correctness Norms Causes More Trump Support." *Journal of Social and Political Psychology* 5 (1): 244–59.
- Conway, Lucian Gideon, and Mark Schaller. 2005. "When Authorities' Commands Backfire: Attributions about Consensus and Effects on Deviant Decision Making." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 89 (3): 311–26.
- Druckman, James N., and Lawrence R. Jacobs. 2015. *Who Governs?: Presidents, Public Opinion, and Manipulation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Edsall, Thomas B. 2017. "Opinion | The Peculiar Populism of Donald Trump." *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/02/opinion/the-peculiar-populism-of-donald-trump.html> (February 15, 2020).
- Fuegen, Kathleen, and Jack W. Brehm. 2004. "The Intensity of Affect and Resistance to Social Influence." In *Resistance and Persuasion*, edited by Eric S. Knowles and Jay A. Linn, 39–63. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.
- Galston, William A. 2018. *Anti-Pluralism: The Populist Threat to Liberal Democracy*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Grimmer, J., E. Hersh, M. Meredith, J. Mummolo, and C. Nall. 2018. "Obstacles to Estimating Voter ID Laws' Effect on Turnout." *The Journal of Politics* 80 (3): 1045–51.
- Grimmer, Justin, and Jesse Yoder. 2021. "The Durable Differential Deterrent Effects of Strict Photo Identification Laws." *Political Science Research and Methods* 1–17. doi:10.1017/psrm.2020.57.
- Groenendyk, Eric W., and Antoine J. Banks. 2014. "Emotional Rescue: How Affect Helps Partisans Overcome Collective Action Problems." *Political Psychology* 35 (3): 359–78.
- Guo, J. 2015. "The Real Reasons Donald Trump's so Popular—for People Totally Confused by It." *The Washington Post: Wonkblog*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2015/12/12/the-four-basic-reasons-that-explain-why-donald-trump-actually-is-so-popular/>.
- Hajnal, Zoltan, John Kuk, and Nazita Lajevardi. 2018. "We All Agree: Strict Voter ID Laws Disproportionately Burden Minorities." *The Journal of Politics* 80 (3): 1052–59.
- Herbst, Susan. 2010. *Rude Democracy: Civility and Incivility in American Politics*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Hess, Amanda. 2016. "How 'Political Correctness' Went From Punch Line to Panic." *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/24/magazine/how-political-correctness-went-from-punch-line-to-panic.html> (January 14, 2020).
- Hinckley, Barbara. 1990. *The Symbolic Presidency: How Presidents Portray Themselves*. New York: Routledge.
- Holian, David B., and Charles Prysby. 2014. "Candidate Character Traits in the 2012 Presidential Election." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 44 (3): 484–505.

- Hooghe, Marc, and Ruth Dassonneville. 2018. "Explaining the Trump Vote: The Effect of Racist Resentment and Anti-Immigrant Sentiments." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 51 (3): 528–34.
- Howell, William G., Ethan Porter, and Thomas J. Wood. 2020. "Rethinking Public Appeals: Experimental Evidence on Presidential Performances." *Journal of Political Institutions and Political Economy* 1 (1): 137–58.
- Inglehart, Ronald, and Pippa Norris. 2017. "Trump and the Populist Authoritarian Parties: The Silent Revolution in Reverse." *Perspectives on Politics* 15 (2): 443–54.
- Iyengar, S., Y. Lelkes, M. Levendusky, N. Malhotra, and S.J. Westwood. 2019. "The Origins and Consequences of Affective Polarization in the United States." *Annual Review of Political Science* 22 (1): 129–46.
- Iyengar, Shanto, Gaurav Sood, and Yphtach Lelkes. 2012. "Affect, Not Ideology: A Social Identity Perspective on Polarization." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 76 (3): 405–31.
- Jacobson, Gary C. 2015. "How Do Campaigns Matter?" *Annual Review of Political Science* 18 (1): 31–47.
- Jamieson, Kathleen Hall, and Doron Taussig. 2017. "Disruption, Demonization, Deliverance, and Norm Destruction: The Rhetorical Signature of Donald J. Trump." *Political Science Quarterly* 132 (4): 619–50.
- Kalla, Joshua L., and David E. Broockman. 2018. "The Minimal Persuasive Effects of Campaign Contact in General Elections: Evidence from 49 Field Experiments." *American Political Science Review* 112 (1): 148–66.
- Kaufman, Herbert. 1967. *The Forest Ranger: A Study in Administrative Behavior*. Baltimore: Resources for the Future by Johns Hopkins Press.
- Kendall-Taylor, Andrea, and Erica Frantz. 2016. How Democracies Fall Apart: Why Populism Is a Pathway to Autocracy. *Foreign Affairs*.
- Kernell, Samuel. 1993. *Going Public: New Strategies of Presidential Leadership* (2nd ed.). Washington, DC: CQ Press.
- Kinder, Donald, and Lynn Sanders. 1996. *Divided by Color: Racial Politics and Democratic Ideals*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Kinder, Donald, and David Sears. 1981. "Prejudice and Politics: Symbolic Racism Versus Threats to the Good Life." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 40 (3): 414–31.
- Laclau, Ernesto. 2005. *On Populist Reasoning*. New York: Verso.
- Laustsen, Lasse, and Michael Bang Petersen. 2020. "Online Tallies and the Context of Politics: How Online Tallies Make Dominant Candidates Appear Competent in Contexts of Conflict." *American Journal of Political Science* 64 (2): 240–55.
- Lerner, Jennifer S., and Dacher Keltner. 2000. "Beyond Valence: Toward a Model of Emotion-Specific Influences on Judgement and Choice." *Cognition and Emotion* 14 (4): 473–93.
- Levendusky, Matthew S. 2013. "Why Do Partisan Media Polarize Viewers?" *American Journal of Political Science* 57 (3): 611–23.
- Levitsky, Steven, and Daniel Ziblatt. 2018. *How Democracies Die* (1st ed.). New York: Crown.
- Macaulay, Marcia. 2018. "Bernie and the Donald: A Comparison of Left- and Right-Wing Populist Discourses." In *Populist Discourse: International Perspectives*, edited by Macaulay Marcia, 220. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Mason, Lilliana. 2018. *Uncivil Agreement: How Politics Became Our Identity*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Mayhew, David R. 1974. "Congressional Elections: The Case of the Vanishing Marginals." *Polity* 6 (3): 295–317.
- Mudde, Cas. 2004. "The Populist Zeitgeist." *Government and Opposition* 39 (4): 541–63.
- Müller, Jan-Werner. 2016. *What Is Populism?* Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Mullinix, Kevin J., J. Leeper Thomas, James N. Druckman, and Jeremy Freese. 2015. "The Generalizability of Survey Experiments*." *Journal of Experimental Political Science* 2 (2): 109–38.
- Oliver, Eric, and Wendy Rahn. 2016. "Rise of the Trumpenvolk: Populism in the 2016 Election." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 667 (1): 189–206.

- Panagopoulos, Costas. 2020. *Bases Loaded: How US Presidential Campaigns Are Changing and Why It Matters*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Steinhauer, Jennifer, Jonathan Martin, and David M. Herszenhorn. 2016. "Paul Ryan Calls Donald Trump's Attack on Judge 'Racist,' but Still Backs Him." *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/08/us/politics/paul-ryan-donald-trump-gonzalo-curiel.html> (February 15, 2020).
- Tiedens, Larissa Z. 2001. "Anger and Advancement versus Sadness and Subjugation: The Effect of Negative Emotion Expressions on Social Status Conferment." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 80 (1): 86–94.
- Valentino, N.A., T. Brader, E.W. Groenendyk, K. Gregorowicz, and V.L. Hutchings. 2011. "Election Night's Alright for Fighting: The Role of Emotions in Political Participation." *The Journal of Politics* 73 (1): 156–70.
- Whitford, Andrew B., and Jeff Yates. 2003. "Policy Signals and Executive Governance: Presidential Rhetoric in the War on Drugs." *The Journal of Politics* 65 (4): 995–1012.
- Williamson, Vanessa, Theda Skocpol, and John Coggin. 2011. "The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism." *Perspectives on Politics* 9 (1): 25–43.