

Looking good vs. seeking good:

Group-based reputational incentives can reduce (or even eliminate) aversion to societal harm

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#### **Author Note**

Both authors contributed to all aspects of the research and approved the final version of the manuscript. All data, code, materials, and pre-registrations are publicly available [here](#). This work has not been presented at a conference. The authors declare no competing interests or conflicts.

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## Abstract

Prior research shows people's concern with maintaining their own reputation powerfully drives judgment and decision making. But humans also identify strongly with groups. Indeed, from the longstanding animosity between Israelis and Palestinians to the growing hostility between Democrats and Republicans, group-based conflicts can exact a dramatic toll on society. How far will individuals go to protect their group's reputation? Can group-based reputational concerns counteract even other core considerations like aversion to societal harm? Examining both emotional responses and financially-incentivized behavior of partisans in the United States, five pre-registered experiments (N=6647) reveal that incentives for reputational standing can weaken—and sometimes even eliminate or reverse—people's emotional aversion to negative material outcomes for society. This occurs even when harm is substantial—including economic devastation and national security threats—and when it adversely affects *ingroup* members. Individuals were even less likely to act on opportunities to avert societal suffering if avoiding harm stood to burnish the outgroup's reputation. Our work illuminates the central role of group-based reputational standing in contributing to cycles of socially destructive intergroup animus. By shifting attention from averting material suffering to making the other side look bad, partisans may play into the other side's cynical narratives about their disregard for the sanctity of human life, damaging potential bridges to cooperation and increasing the outgroup's conviction in the righteousness of its conflict. When two sides are more focused on looking good than seeking good, prospects for peace diminish.

*Keywords:* Conflict, groups, reputation, judgment and decision making, harm

Across continents and centuries—from the dusty planes of Mesopotamia to the trendiest coffee shop in Brooklyn—humans remain exquisitely attuned to their reputation. Some researchers even liken people to “intuitive politicians,” navigating the world by managing the impressions they make on the audiences they most seek to curry favor with (Tetlock, 2002).

Most prior research on reputation focuses on individual reputation (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Berman & Silver, 2022; Lerner & Tetlock, 1999; Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995; Schlenker & Weigold, 1992). But humans are social animals who belong to, identify with, and derive value from groups; just as we care about our own reputations, so too do we care about the image of the groups with which we are closely identified (Cialdini et al., 1976; Snyder, Lassegard, & Ford, 1986). Although understudied, we know that a concern with the reputation of one’s group can be a force for good, for example leading us to avoid engaging in immoral behavior that reflects poorly on our group (e.g., Doosje, Branscombe, Spears, & Manstead, 1998). But might our sensitivity to group-based reputational incentives sometimes lead us down more sinister pathways?

### **The present research**

Here, we consider a darker ramification of attention to group-based reputational standing. Can bolstering group reputation counteract other core considerations like the avoidance of harm to others (c.f., Bandura, 1990; Schein & Gray, 2015, 2018)? Examining both emotional responses and behavior of partisans in the United States, we test whether reputation can blunt individuals’ aversion to outcomes that involve widespread harm, leading us to feel better when people suffer but it makes our group look good, or feel worse when people are spared of suffering but it makes our group look bad. Prior work on *schadenfreude* suggests we might expect people to feel pleasure when the *outgroup* (alone) suffers (minor) pain (e.g., Leach,

Spears, Branscombe, & Doosje, 2003). Here, we examine whether reputation blunts emotional responses to dramatic pain—such as economic devastation and national security threats—affecting society as a whole, including the *ingroup*.

On the one hand, given the fundamental aversion to hurting others (Schein & Gray, 2015, 2018), group-based reputational incentives could lack the motivational force necessary to blunt partisans' differentiation between material harm and benefit to society, perhaps especially when these harms and benefits are large-scale. Tolerating widespread harm—especially when those bearing the brunt of the harm include the *ingroup*—might be a bridge too far, no matter the implications for the *ingroup*'s reputational standing. Relatedly, individuals might (consciously or subconsciously) consider it gauche to factor in the implications for the *ingroup*'s reputation when they are faced with news that implies a significant setback or upside to society. For example, it would likely have felt “un-American” for a Republican to let any happiness at the increased approval rating for Republican President George W. Bush dilute the sadness after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. Indeed, research suggests that individuals treat certain domains as morally sacred and impervious to instrumental considerations (Tetlock et al., 2000). Consistent with this idea, in a pilot experiment, 89% of participants thought an individual who attended solely to material suffering was more moral than an individual who also attended to group-based reputational incentives (see *Supplementary Information* (SI) for details).

On the other hand, there are good reasons to posit that group-based reputational incentives *will* influence how partisans feel, even when that means impacting their tolerance for harm to society as a whole. For one, people are sensitive to the prestige they personally derive from their group membership: they seek to advertise their affiliation with successful groups (Marques, Yzerbyt, & Leyens, 1988) and exclude targets who besmirch the image of groups with

which they are associated (Stelzl, Janes, & Seligman, 2008). But beyond the status we derive from our groups' image, a positive reputation can also serve as an important strategic advantage to a group (and its members) in competitive contexts, helping to deliver valued resources like power and legitimacy. Consider the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians, in which the two groups compete for third-party support over the legitimacy of their respective territorial claims (Shamir, 2007; Noor, Shnabel, Halabi, & Nadler, 2012). Actions that substantially tarnish Israel's reputation—like, for example, withholding scarce COVID-19 vaccines from Palestinians in favor of Israelis (Kingsley, 2021; Rasgon, 2021)—could have important and rewarding strategic benefits for Palestinians, like bolstering the perceived legitimacy of Palestinians' grievances, despite material costs they impose. Of relevance, one study of United States undergraduates revealed that participants reported greater negative affect when reading an article detailing a presidential candidate of their party (vs. the other party) failing to stop a housing and economic crisis, presumably because it would hurt their favored candidate in the upcoming presidential election (Combs, Powell, Schurtz, & Smith, 2009).

Our experiments were designed primarily to examine—as a proof-of-principle—whether or not reputation can blunt partisans' affective differentiation between material harm and benefit, rather than to make general claims about the precise relative importance of these two considerations broadly writ. Still, across experiments, we investigate whether group-based reputational incentives *have no effect on* affective differentiation, *weaken* affective differentiation, *eliminate* affective differentiation, or *reverse* affective differentiation, stress-testing our hypothesizing across a broad range of scenarios, including scenarios that vary in the starkness of the material stakes.

While we focus primarily on affective reactions, our framework poses an additional provocative possibility. Beyond making people *feel* better about material harm, sensitivity to group-based reputational incentives could even make partisans *complicit* in helping to bring about material suffering, or in failing to put a stop to it. For example, partisans may be less likely to take actions that reduce widespread social suffering when these actions would also help boost the outgroup's reputation. We test this possibility as part of our investigation.

Taken together, the present work highlights the negative consequences of attention to group-based reputational standing. From the longstanding animosity between Israelis and Palestinians or Indians and Pakistanis to the growing hostility between Democrats and Republicans in the United States, group-based conflicts exact a dramatic toll on society, destroying value and increasing human suffering. By easing the brakes on aversion to harm, attention to group-based reputation may contribute to cycles of conflict by playing into cynical narratives about the other side, in turn damaging bridges to cooperation.

### **Experiment 1**

Experiment 1 begins to test whether group-based reputational incentives can reduce affective differentiation between material outcomes that are good vs. bad for the world. To do so, we investigate whether people feel better about catastrophic outcomes for the world when it makes their group look good, and vice versa (i.e., feel worse about good outcomes that make one's group look bad).

### **Method**

**Open science statements.** We report how we determined our sample size, all data exclusions, all manipulations, and all measures in all experiments (Simmons, Nelson, & Simonsohn, 2012). For all experiments, we first conducted pilot studies to generate estimated

effect sizes. We then conducted a-prior power analyses for each experiment and chose sample sizes that ensured at least 90% statistical power to detect effect sizes obtained in the relevant pilot. Full details for every experiment are available in the *SI*. In doing so, we recruited a diverse sample of adults in the United States and included at least 200 participants per experimental condition in all experiments. All experiments were conducted on Amazon Mechanical Turk and were preregistered on [aspredicted.org](https://aspredicted.org). All data, materials, pre-registrations, and analysis code can be found on Researchbox.com [here](#). This research was approved by the host university's Institutional Review Board (IRB Number: STU00213032).

**Participants.** We conducted an experiment with a sample of 991 Republicans (Experiment 1a:  $Mage = 42.07$ ,  $SD = 12.96$ , 51% female) and 1023 Democrats (Experiment 1b:  $Mage = 38.10$ ,  $SD = 12.00$ , 53% female). As pre-registered, we included only the 915 Republicans (92.3%) and 973 Democrats (95.1%) who passed an attention check and did not ask to have their data removed. Of note, Experiment 1 was conducted in August 2020 at the time of the first spending bill aimed at addressing widespread unemployment at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic ([Cochrane, 2020](#)).

**Procedure.** In all experiments, participants always first gave informed consent, answered an attention check (for full text, see *SI*), and completed a set of demographics (age, gender, and political party identification). To measure party identification, we followed the procedure used by Pew Research Center (2015). Specifically, we first asked participants whether they considered themselves more of a Democrat or a Republican. If the participant indicated Independent, we then asked the following question: “As of today, do you lean more Democrat or Republican?” After the party identification question, participants completed a variety of exploratory individual

difference measures, including ingroup glorification and ingroup attachment (Roccas, Klar, & Liviatan, 2006; for full text, see online materials).

After completing this opening set of questions, participants learned that they would read an ostensibly real news story and answer questions about it on the following pages. Full text for all news stories is available in the *SI*. Participants were randomly assigned to one of four between-subjects experimental conditions in a 2 (good material outcome vs. bad material outcome) x 2 (low reputation salience vs. high reputation salience) design.

All participants read a news story in which a public figure made a pessimistic prediction, suggesting that there would be major economic harm if a policy they were advocating for was not implemented (i.e., speedy reopening by states of coronavirus-shuttered businesses for Republicans; new government stimulus package for Democrats). In the low reputation salience condition, the public figure was a group of leading economists whose party affiliation was not mentioned. In the high reputation salience condition, the public figure was either (then) Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (for Republicans) or House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (for Democrats).

Participants read that the public figure warned that, if the policy they were advocating for was not implemented, homelessness rates would rise by 30% in the next month and jobless claims would remain above one million per week. In the low reputation salience condition, there were no reputational consequences for the ingroup if the (economist's) prediction was right or wrong; in contrast, in the high reputational salience condition, the partisan leader being right or wrong about the policy would reflect well or poorly on the ingroup. To amplify the reputational stakes in the high reputation salience condition, we included language from the outgroup implying that the ingroup figure's prediction would be wrong. In particular (depending on

condition), McConnell and Pelosi's concerns were dismissed by an outgroup Senator (Democrat Kristin Gillibrand or Republican Lindsey Graham, respectively) as merely "alarmist politics."

In the negative material outcome condition, the negative forecast came to pass. Specifically, participants read that a new report on the U.S. economy commissioned by the Federal Reserve confirmed that homelessness rates had increased by 30% and that the report cited data from the Labor Department indicating that jobless claims had persisted above one million per week. The article thus concluded that the public figure's forecasts were spot on. In the positive material outcome condition, participants learned that the forecasts were off base. Specifically, participants learned about the same report from the Federal Reserve (and data from the Labor Department), but read that homelessness rates had remained stable and that jobless claims had fallen below one million per week. Of note, we took a conservative approach, not directly mentioning reputational consequences for the predictor (based on our theorizing about individuals' sensitivity to group-based reputational standing, we reasoned that perceivers would nevertheless pick up on reputational consequences).

One additional point regarding the material harm merits note. In this and all experiments, participants responded to material gains (vs. losses) that we expected people across the political spectrum to agree were worthwhile. While in many cases competing groups want different outcomes (e.g., legalized status of abortion), here we purposefully selected outcomes about which there is bipartisan consensus about the end (minimizing economic suffering) even when there might be differences in opinion about the optimal means.

Participants then answered questions regarding their affective reactions to the news story. These answers constituted the primary dependent variable in this experiment. We measured affect using a composite of ten specific emotion items. All items were measured on a 7-point

Likert scale anchored at “Not at all” and “Very much.” We measured positive affect as the average of five items (happy, relieved, enthusiastic, glad, excited). We also measured negative affect as the average of five items (upset, sad, distressed, concerned, uneasy). We created a combined index by subtracting the average of the negative affect scores from the average of the positive affect scores. Thus, zero indicated equal levels of positive and negative affect, positive scores indicated more positive experiences, and negative scores indicated more negative experiences. The index achieved a high level of reliability (alphas = .90 for both experiments after reverse-scoring negative items).

## **Results**

Across Experiments 1-3, we maintained the same 2 (reputation salience: high vs. low) x 2 (material outcome: good vs. bad) design. We report the full set of results for the interaction and all main effects in the SI. We also report results for positive and negative affect separately in the SI. For clarity, we report only the subset of analyses most central to our hypotheses in the main text. Raw data for all conditions is depicted in Figures 1-4 for Experiments 1-3.

We had two overarching hypotheses. First, we expected people to show a robust pattern of responding more positively to good (vs. bad) material outcomes for society. We expected this to manifest in a clear simple effect of material outcome (good vs. bad) when the predictor was an economist, and thus no reputation was at stake (i.e., the low reputation salience condition).

Second, and of more central interest, was whether individuals would be sensitive to reputation in a context with dramatic material consequences for society as a whole (including ingroup members). We predicted that they would, and that this would manifest in an interaction in which for partisan (vs. non-partisan) predictors, the affective differentiation between good vs. bad material outcomes would be blunted because the good vs. bad material outcomes were in

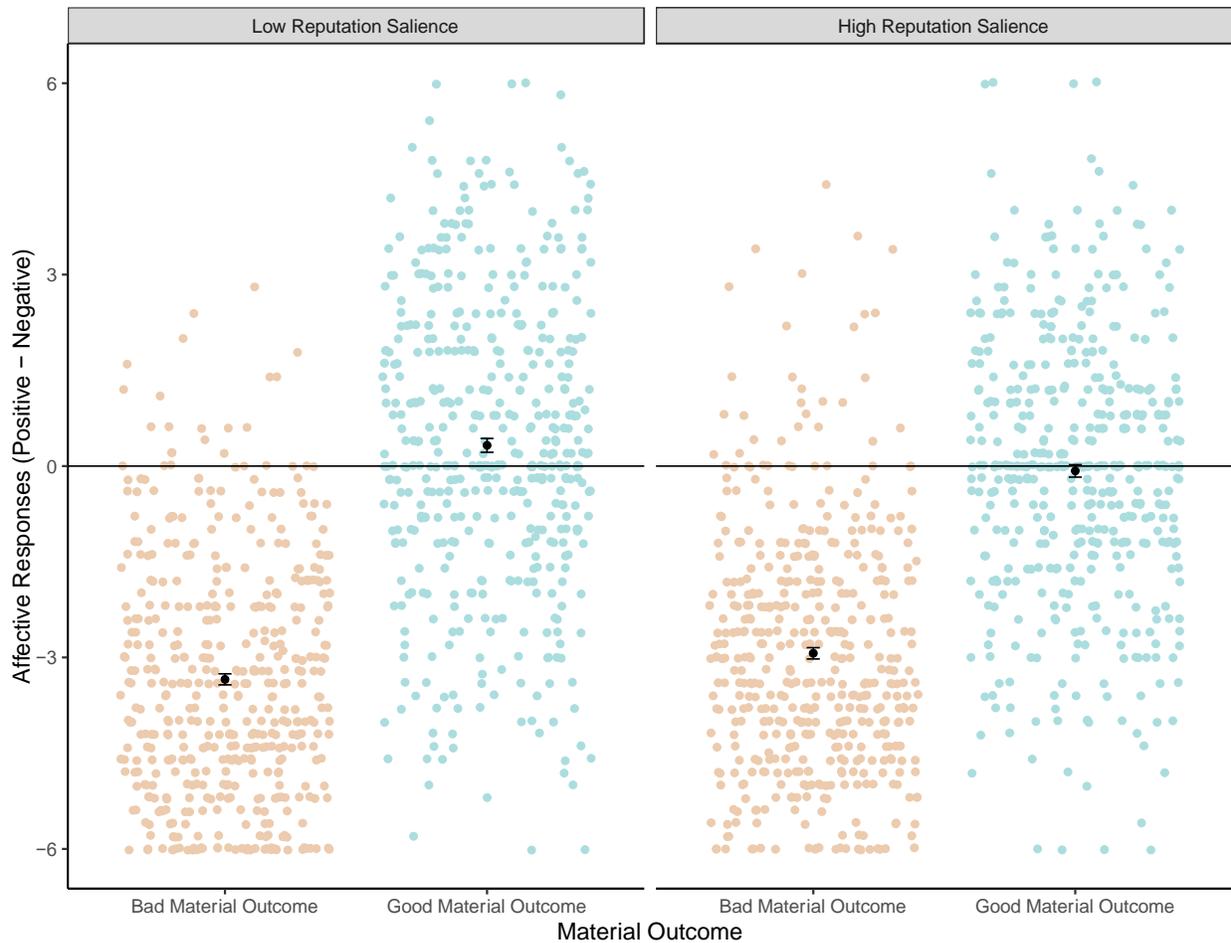
opposition to bad vs. good reputational outcomes for an ingroup leader. As such, in addition to the interaction (the primary hypothesis test), we also report the simple effect of material outcome when reputation is at stake (i.e., the high reputation salience condition). Given the identical designs and hypotheses for Experiments 1a-b, we report them together below, as well as including details about individual sub-experiments where relevant.

We found support for both hypotheses. First, when the predictor was an economist (i.e., the low reputation salience condition), we found a simple effect of material outcome: participants reported a more positive overall response for positive (vs. negative) material outcomes, and this effect was quite substantial in size, both when collapsing across both the Republican and Democrat sub-experiments ( $M_{\text{bad}} = -3.34$  vs.  $M_{\text{good}} = 0.32$ ,  $t(893) = 26.45$ ,  $p < .001$ , Cohen's  $d = 1.72$ ) and when considering each of the Republican (Experiment 1a:  $M_{\text{bad}} = -2.87$  vs.  $M_{\text{good}} = 0.84$ ,  $t(435) = 18.62$ ,  $p < .001$ , Cohen's  $d = 1.75$ ) and Democrat (Experiment 1b:  $M_{\text{bad}} = -3.37$  vs.  $M_{\text{good}} = -0.15$ ,  $t(451) = 19.75$ ,  $p < .001$ , Cohen's  $d = 1.76$ ) sub-experiments individually. Thus, participants showed a clear aversion to societal harm when reputation was not at stake.

Second, and supporting our key theoretical prediction, we found that this aversion to societal harm was significantly attenuated when the predictor was a partisan (i.e., in the high reputation salience condition). Results are depicted in Figure 1. Collapsing across the two sub-experiments yielded robust evidence for a significant interaction between material outcome and reputational salience (interaction:  $b = 0.81$ ,  $se = 0.19$ ,  $t = 4.24$ ,  $p < .001$ ). In Experiment 1a (i.e., among Republicans), we found significant evidence to support this hypothesis (interaction:  $b = 1.18$ ,  $se = 0.26$ ,  $t = 4.49$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and in Experiment 1b (i.e., among Democrats) we found marginally significant evidence (interaction:  $b = 0.44$ ,  $se = 0.26$ ,  $t = 1.71$ ,  $p = .088$ ).

Thus, reputational considerations blunted individuals' preferences for good over bad material outcomes for the world. That is, partisans let reputational considerations influence their (degree of) preference for good over bad material outcomes. Rather than simply focusing on whether or not the policy had wrought economic destruction on society as a whole, their affective responses factored in how these respective material outcomes made their group look.

Of note, although we predicted a significant interaction effect, we also theorized that the effect size of the interaction would be relatively small in this specific experimental context. After all, the difference between material outcomes here was grave, representing the presence or absence of economic devastation amid a global pandemic. Although we thought it would be impressive if, even within this context, individuals' affective responses were shaped by reputation, we expected that we would still observe a more substantial effect of material outcome, with individuals overall preferring good over bad material outcomes in both the partisan and economist conditions. As depicted in Figure 1, this was in fact the case: although affective differentiation was smaller when reputation was on the line (vs. when it was not), individuals felt more positive about good versus bad material outcomes in both conditions (simple effect in the high reputation salience condition:  $M_{\text{bad}} = -2.93$  vs.  $M_{\text{good}} = -0.08$ ,  $t(932) = 21.69$ ,  $p < .001$ , Cohen's  $d = 1.41$ ). Collapsing across Experiments 1a and 1b, the effect of material outcome was reduced by approximately 20% in high reputation salience condition relative to the low reputation salience condition (i.e., from  $d = 1.72$  to  $d = 1.41$ ), suggesting that despite a substantial effect of reputational considerations, the relative size of the effect of material outcomes was larger in this context.



**Figure 1.** In the context of domestic economic policy, Republicans’ and Democrats’ preferences for good vs. bad material outcomes were significantly blunted when the good vs. bad material outcomes were yoked, respectively, to bad vs. good reputational outcomes for an ingroup leader (Experiment 1). Error bars represent 1 SE and colored dots represent raw data.

## Discussion

Experiment 1 provided initial evidence that reputational incentives can blunt partisans’ affective differentiation between positive vs. negative material outcomes for the world. At least in Experiment 1’s specific context, partisans’ affective reactions were driven more strongly by material outcomes than by reputational considerations; we diversify contexts, and continue examining the relative effect sizes of material and reputational considerations in Experiments 2-3.

## Experiment 2

Experiment 2 tests whether reputational incentives can blunt partisans' aversion to societal harm in a new domain. Experiment 2a explores this possibility among Republicans in the context of national security. Experiment 2b is a parallel experiment with Democrats, reported separately because of a few noteworthy design differences (described below).

### **Experiment 2a Method**

**Participants.** We conducted an experiment with a sample of 600 Republicans ( $M_{age} = 43.95$ ,  $SD = 13.12$ , 49% female). As pre-registered, we included only the 581 Republicans (96.8%) who passed an attention check and did not ask to have their data removed. Experiment 2a was conducted in April 2021.

**Procedure.** Republicans were randomly assigned to one of four between-subjects experimental conditions. In all conditions, participants read an ostensibly real news story in which they learned that a leading public figure had predicted that Iran's cyber capabilities were stagnating (i.e., a predicted positive material outcome for Americans, given the intergroup animosity between the United States and Iran). Specifically, they learned that, despite some internal differences in perspective among foreign policy analysts, a public figure had staked much of his foreign policy credibility on his view that Iran's cyber capabilities were stagnating.

As in Experiment 1, we manipulated both the salience of reputational outcomes (high vs. low) and the valence of the material outcome (negative vs. positive news about Iran's actual cyber capabilities). To manipulate reputation salience, we mimicked the design of Experiment 1 by manipulating the partisan identity of the predictor—in this case, either Democratic President Biden (high reputation salience) or CIA Director Burns (low reputation salience; Burns' partisan group membership was not mentioned, and he was confirmed unanimously by the United States Senate). To manipulate material outcome, participants learned that a new, independent report

either confirmed (good material outcome) or contradicted (bad material outcome) the prediction regarding Iran's stagnating capabilities. Specifically, participants learned that a report relying on a systematic assessment by U.S. intelligence sources and American operatives had found either that Iran's cyber capabilities were either less sophisticated (good material outcome) or more sophisticated (bad material outcome) than previously believed. Thus, relative reputational gain for Republicans (i.e., Biden looking bad) co-occurred with material harm for the country (i.e., Iran's cyber capabilities growing more sophisticated than anticipated) and vice-versa.

The primary outcome variable was participants' affective reactions to reading the news story, which we measured in two ways. First, we measured it using a single item of overall positivity vs. negativity on a 100-point sliding scale anchored at "Extremely negative" and "Extremely positive." Second, we used the same combined index of ten specific emotion items from Experiment 1, including five positive items and five negative items. The index again achieved a high level of reliability ( $\alpha = .91$  after reverse-scoring negative items).

While now in the context of national security rather than domestic economic policy, the design parallels Experiment 1 in which participants read a news story in which a public figure makes a public prediction with reputational consequences. One other design feature merits note: We sought to provide a stringent test of our theorizing about the role of reputation by further raising the countervailing material stakes. In particular, we intentionally amplified participants' perceptions of Biden's (or CIA Director Burns') involvement in national security. That is, when participants learned that the prediction was inaccurate, they further learned that this raised question marks about general foreign policy competence, increasing the national security risk to the United States. Consequently, the more desirable reputational outcome for Republicans (i.e., Biden looking bad) involved even greater material downsides: not only were Iran's cyber

capabilities more sophisticated, but the U.S. faced the additional material cost of reduced competence in handling related threats from China and Russia. The reverse was also true (i.e., when the prediction was accurate, it reflected well on general competence and ability to handle related threats). With these heightened material stakes, any effects of reputation would be still more impressive.

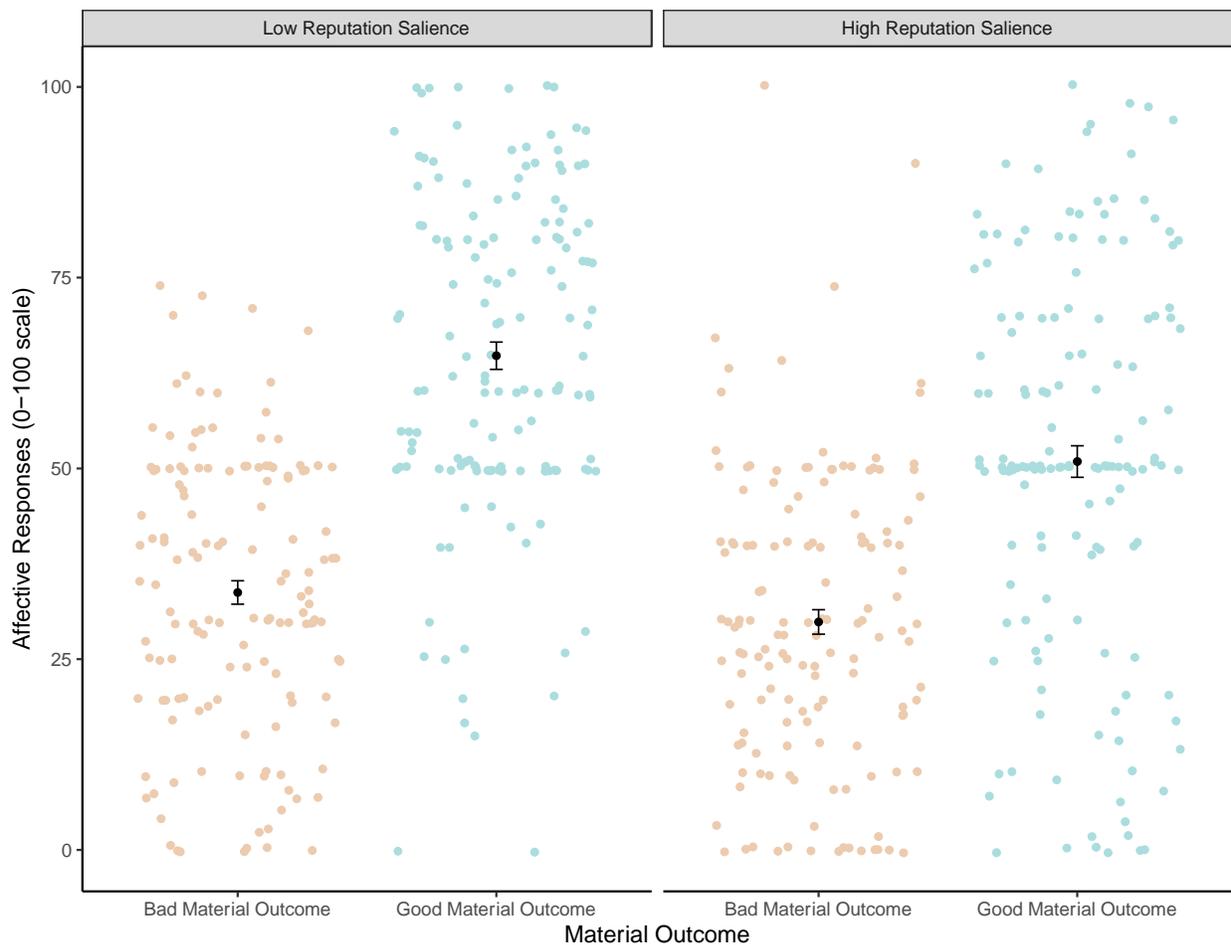
## **Experiment 2a Results**

As in Experiment 1, we first examined the simple effect of material outcomes in the low reputation conditions. As predicted, when the predictor was CIA Director Burns (i.e., the low reputation salience condition), we found a clear and sizeable effect of material outcome: participants responded much more positively to good vs. bad material outcomes, for both the single general affect item ( $M_{\text{bad material}} = 33.74$  vs.  $M_{\text{good material}} = 64.77$ ,  $t(280) = 13.17$ ,  $p < .001$ , Cohen's  $d = 1.55$ ) and the 10-item composite ( $M_{\text{bad material}} = -2.15$  vs.  $M_{\text{good material}} = 1.79$ ,  $t(284) = 16.55$ ,  $p < .001$ , Cohen's  $d = 1.95$ ).

As in Experiment 1, we theorized that this preference for the positive over negative material outcomes would be significantly attenuated when the positive outcome helped an outparty partisan leader's (in this case, President Biden's) reputation. As depicted in Figure 2, this interaction prediction was confirmed: we found significant evidence that reputational gains blunted affective responses to bad material outcomes for both the single general affect item (interaction:  $b = 10.01$ ,  $se = 3.55$ ,  $t = 2.82$ ,  $p = .0049$ ) and for the combined index (interaction:  $b = 0.97$ ,  $se = 0.34$ ,  $t = 2.86$ ,  $p = .0044$ ). Of note, individuals continued to feel more positively about good (vs. bad) material outcomes in the high reputation salience condition (Single-item slider:  $M_{\text{bad material}} = 29.88$  vs.  $M_{\text{good material}} = 50.91$ ,  $t(277) = 8.03$ ,  $p < .001$ , Cohen's  $d = 0.93$ ; 10-item composite:  $M_{\text{bad material}} = -2.33$  vs.  $M_{\text{good material}} = 0.63$ ,  $t(272) = 12.35$ ,  $p < .001$ , Cohen's  $d =$

1.43). Critically, however, this represented an approximately 30-40% reduction in the gap in affective responses between low vs. high threat to the United States from Iran (Single item:  $d_{low}$  reputation salience = 1.55 vs.  $d_{high}$  reputation salience = 0.93; Composite:  $d_{low}$  reputation salience = 1.95 vs.  $d_{high}$  reputation salience = 1.43). Thus, building on Experiment 1, the results provided converging evidence that reputational considerations can blunt aversion to societal harm.

Of note, in this study, the interaction appeared primarily driven by individuals feeling less good about positive material outcomes when there were reputational downsides than it was by individuals feeling happier about negative material outcomes when there were reputational upsides. We make note of this distinction where relevant across studies and return to discuss it further in the General Discussion.



**Figure 2.** In the context of national security, Republicans' preferences for good vs. bad material outcomes were blunted when the good vs. bad material outcomes were yoked, respectively, to bad vs. good reputational outcomes for an outgroup leader (i.e., President Biden) (Experiment 2a). Error bars represent 1 SE and colored dots represent raw data.

### **Experiment 2b Method**

**Participants.** We conducted an experiment with a sample of 903 Democrats ( $M_{age} = 40.05$ ,  $SD = 12.60$ , 50% female). As pre-registered, we included on the 869 Democrats (96.2%) who passed an attention check and did not ask to have their data removed. Experiment 2b was also conducted in April 2021.

**Procedure.** Experiment 2b was a parallel experiment with Democrats. Democrats also read an ostensibly real news story in which a public figure made a prediction regarding Iran's cyber capabilities. Participants were randomly assigned to one of six between-subjects experimental conditions: four primary conditions that closely followed the conditions from Experiment 2a and two supplemental conditions (described later).

In the four primary conditions, Democrats were randomly assigned in a 2 (reputation salience: high vs. low) x 2 (material outcome: positive vs. negative) fully between-subjects design. The predictors were again either President Biden (here, an ingroup member) or CIA Director Burns and the prediction regarding Iran's cyber capabilities was either contradicted or confirmed. In contrast to Experiment 2a, in Experiment 2b the public figure predicted that Iran's cyber capabilities were *growing more sophisticated* (rather than stagnating). Thus, reputational gains for Democrats in the high reputation salience condition (i.e., Biden looking good) again co-occurred with material harm (i.e., Iran's growing cyber capabilities) and vice versa. The primary outcome variable was again participants' affective reactions to reading the news story, which we measured in the same two ways as in Experiment 2a: with a single global evaluation and with a

combined index of ten specific emotion items (five positive and five negative;  $\alpha = .84$  after reverse-scoring negative items).

In addition to the four conditions described above, we also included two additional conditions aimed at addressing a potential alternative explanation. We theorized that—despite material upsides—Democrats would be less happy when Biden (vs. a CIA director with unknown partisan membership) made a pessimistic prediction that turned out to be inaccurate because the inaccurate prediction would have negative effects on Democrats' reputation.

Alternatively, however, it could be the case that this interaction is driven less by group-based reputational considerations per se than by reducing confidence in Biden's general competence with respect to foreign policy and ability to handle related threats (e.g., from China and Russia). That is, participants might view Biden's incorrect prediction as reflecting negatively on the U.S.'s ability to handle foreign policy challenges effectively. If so, then their negative affect might be due not to reputational damage but to a calculation that, despite the good material news about Iran's weaker-than-predicted capabilities, the U.S. would be facing greater material challenges (because Biden's incorrect prediction revealed incompetence on the foreign policy change).

To address this potential alternative explanation, we needed to separate the reputational effects of Biden's prediction from the broader material consequences of his (in)accuracy. To do this, we included two additional conditions in our randomized design that were identical to the high reputation salience conditions described above, with one exception. Specifically, the article participants read included additional text indicating that while citizens often attend to and care about the president's views on foreign policy (i.e., that reputation is at stake), the underappreciated reality behind the scenes is that he is not in fact closely involved in the day-to-

day operations, which are largely handled by the CIA and military officials (i.e., that the president's inaccuracy has less impact on the U.S.'s material ability to manage foreign policy challenges than might be expected). With this design, the text including Biden's prediction would still reveal materially impactful information about Iran's capabilities, but would no longer provide a basis for drawing broader material conclusions about U.S. foreign policy competence. We theorized that if we again obtained a comparable interaction even when we replaced the two high reputation salience conditions described above with these two supplemental conditions, then it would yield greater confidence that the interaction is in fact specifically driven by reputational considerations.

### **Experiment 2b Results**

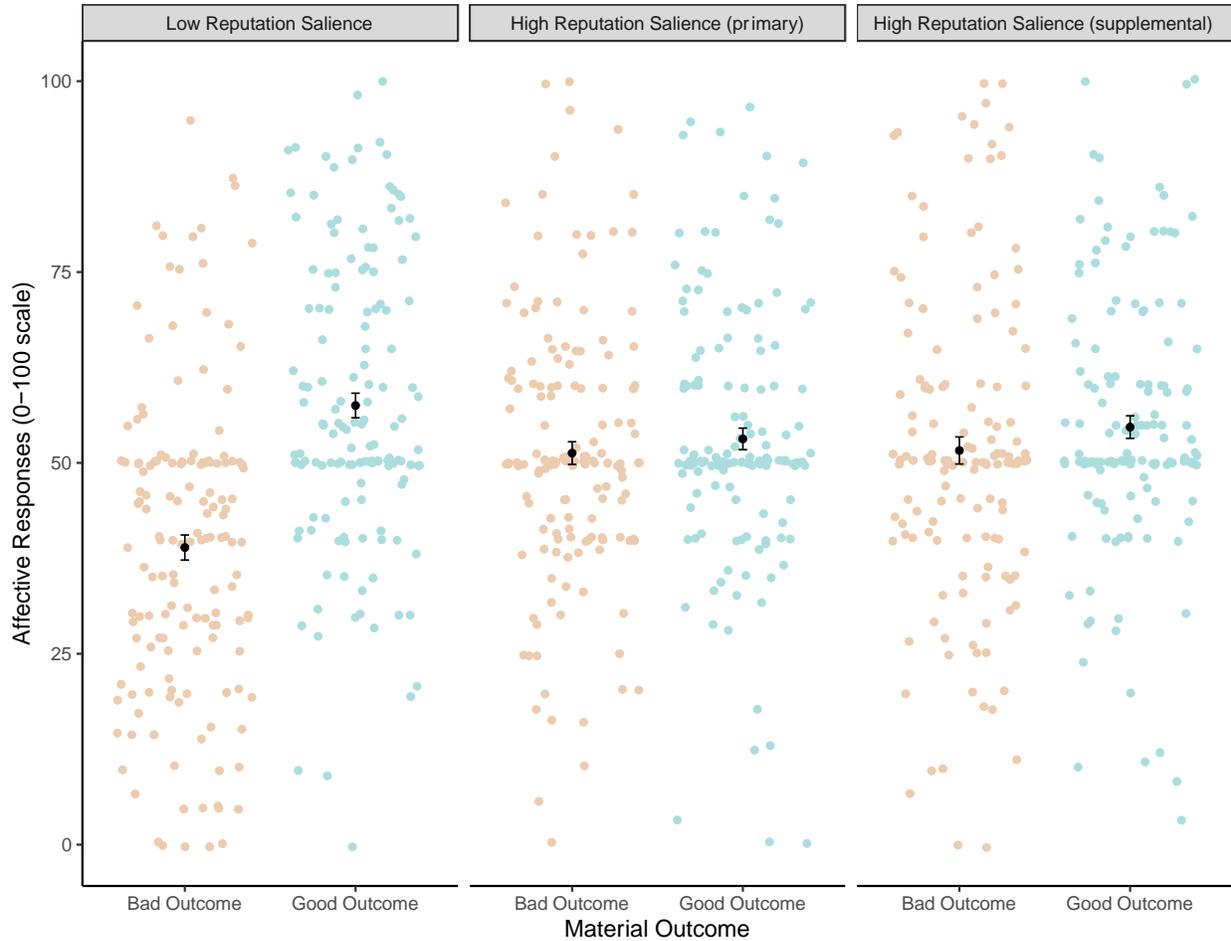
We again began by examining the simple effect of material outcomes in the low reputation conditions. As predicted, participants in the low reputation salience conditions reported a more positive affective response when the pessimistic prediction turned out to be incorrect (i.e., resulting in a good material outcome: Iran's cyber capabilities in fact *not* growing more sophisticated) compared to when the prediction was confirmed (i.e., resulting in a bad material outcome: Iran's cyber capabilities *indeed* growing more sophisticated). This was true both for responses on the single item measuring general global affect ( $M_{\text{bad material}} = 38.91$  vs.  $M_{\text{good material}} = 57.52$ ,  $t(292) = 8.07$ ,  $p < .001$ , Cohen's  $d = 0.94$ ) and on the 10-item affect composite ( $M_{\text{bad material}} = -1.79$  vs.  $M_{\text{good material}} = 0.87$ ,  $t(291) = 11.65$ ,  $p < .001$ , Cohen's  $d = 1.36$ ).

We next tested our focal interaction prediction. While we hypothesized that participants would report a more positive overall response for positive material outcomes in the low reputation salience condition, we theorized that this effect would be attenuated (and potentially

even eliminated) when the positive material outcome hurt an ingroup leader's (in this case, President Biden's) reputation. This was in fact the case: analyses yielded strong evidence for an interaction between reputation salience and material outcomes for both the single general affect item (interaction:  $b = 16.75$ ,  $se = 3.09$ ,  $t = 5.43$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and the collapsed 10-item scale (interaction:  $b = 1.52$ ,  $se = 0.31$ ,  $t = 4.85$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Of note, individuals no longer demonstrated a statistically significant aversion to material harm when affect was measured with the single-item slider ( $M_{\text{bad material}} = 51.29$  vs.  $M_{\text{good material}} = 53.14$ ,  $t(289) = 0.91$ ,  $p = .37$ , Cohen's  $d = 0.11$ ), although the aversion persisted—but was meaningfully reduced—as measured by the 10-item composite ( $M_{\text{bad material}} = -0.97$  vs.  $M_{\text{good material}} = 0.16$ ,  $t(290) = 5.28$ ,  $p < .001$ , Cohen's  $d = 0.62$ ). Critically, the blunting through reputational incentives represented an approximately 55-90% reduction in aversion to material harm in the form of threat to the United States from Iran (Single item:  $d_{\text{low reputation salience}} = 0.94$  vs.  $d_{\text{high reputation salience}} = 0.11$ ; Composite:  $d_{\text{low reputation salience}} = 1.36$  vs.  $d_{\text{high reputation salience}} = 0.62$ ).

Finally, we found evidence to support the notion that the interaction was driven (as theorized) by reputational concerns rather than by inferences regarding Biden's competencies. Specifically, when replacing the two primary high reputation salience conditions with the two supplemental Biden conditions (in which we specified that his incorrect prediction had little bearing on U.S. foreign policy competencies), we again find significant evidence that the reputation effect attenuates the effect of material outcomes for both the single general affect item (interaction:  $b = 15.55$ ,  $se = 3.27$ ,  $t = 4.76$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and for the combined index (interaction:  $b = 1.21$ ,  $se = 0.33$ ,  $t = 3.71$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Of note, the interaction with the primary conditions was almost equal in magnitude to the interaction with the supplemental conditions (Single item:  $b_{\text{primary}} = 16.75$  vs.  $b_{\text{supplemental}} = 15.55$ ; Composite:  $b_{\text{primary}} = 1.52$  vs.  $b_{\text{supplemental}} = 1.21$ ),

suggesting that implications for general competency in handling other foreign threats were not the primary driver of the interaction.



**Figure 3.** In the context of national security, Democrats’ preferences for good vs. bad material outcomes were effectively eliminated when the good vs. bad material outcomes were yoked, respectively, to bad vs. good reputational outcomes for an ingroup leader (i.e., President Biden). This pattern of results held in two supplemental conditions which addressed an alternative explanation based on non-reputational considerations (Experiment 2b; see main text for details). Error bars represent 1 SE and colored dots represent raw data.

## Discussion

Experiment 2 demonstrated that, in certain cases, reputational stakes can nearly eliminate affective aversion to societal harm. Of note, the fact that the relative effect of material versus reputational considerations was larger among Republicans (where material concerns regarding

Iran's threat co-occurred with the additional material risk of presidential incompetence) than among Democrats (where material concerns about Iran occurred absent concerns about presidential incompetence) suggests (albeit tentatively) that the relative size of material versus reputational considerations in shaping affect may depend on the relative balance of material versus reputational stakes.

### **Experiment 3**

In Experiment 3, we sought to address an alternative possibility that could account for some of the prior results: perhaps partisans aren't feeling happier because of reputation per se, but because they are having their expectations confirmed (e.g., Kaiser, Vick, & Major, 2004; Major, Kaiser, O'Brien, & McCoy, 2007). That is, perhaps Democrats, for example, feel better when Pelosi or Biden (vs. an economist or CIA Director) is right about a pessimistic prediction not because of their sensitivity to Democrats' reputation relative to Republicans but simply because Pelosi or Biden being right about things is more consistent with their political expectations, with expectancy-violations yielding affective costs. To more strongly disentangle the relative contributions of reputation and having one's expectations confirmed, we thus needed to examine a context in which reputational gain for the ingroup occurs as a consequence of events that disconfirm one's expectations.

### **Method**

**Participants.** We conducted an experiment with a sample of 973 Republicans ( $M_{age} = 44.31$ ,  $SD = 12.84$ , 52% female). As pre-registered, we included only the 926 Republicans (95.2%) who passed an attention check and did not ask to have their data removed. Experiment 3 was conducted in July 2021.

**Procedure.** Republicans were randomly assigned to one of four between-subjects experimental conditions. Across conditions, participants read an ostensibly real news story in which they learned that a leading public figure had made a private, pessimistic prediction about a new domestic economic policy. Specifically, participants read that the leading public figure had privately noted reservations about using targeted efforts to reduce unemployment (i.e., an approach advocated in the new policy).

As in Experiments 1-2, we manipulated both the salience of the reputational outcome (high vs. low) and the valence of the material outcome (negative vs. positive effects of the policy) in a fully between-subjects design. To manipulate reputation salience, the predictor was either Democratic President Biden (high reputation salience) or Council of Economic Advisors Chair Rouse<sup>1</sup> (low reputation salience). To manipulate the material outcome, participants learned that a new report found either that the policy had reduced unemployment and efficiently allocated resources (good material outcome for society) or had no effect on unemployment and inefficiently allocated resources (bad material outcome for society). Specifically, participants read either that over one million families had received nutritional assistance that they badly needed (good material outcome) or that there had been almost no reduction in the number of families receiving nutritional assistance that they badly needed (bad material outcome). The story made clear in all conditions that while the policy was put into effect while the public figure was in office (thus impacting their reputation), the policy was in fact developed and implemented independently of the public figures (and of their private opinions about the policy's likely

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<sup>1</sup> While Chair Cecilia Rouse is female, we gave her a male-gendered name (Charlie) to avoid introducing a confound for gender in the experiment. Of the 500 participants in the low reputation salience condition (and thus read about Rouse), none indicated familiarity with Rouse or commented on the name change in an open-ended text box at the end of the experiment.

effectiveness). The text noted that the public figure was credited or blamed with the policy's success or failure by the public (i.e., reputation was always at stake for the public figure; note though that this impinged on group-based reputational considerations for the participant only when Biden was the public figure in question).

The key conceptual change in Experiment 3 compared to Experiments 1-2 was the dissociation between confirming expectations regarding the “wrongness” of an outgroup's leader and reputational incentives. Unlike Experiments 1-2, Experiment 3 created a contrast between the correctness of the private prediction and the public perception. Specifically, in the good material outcome conditions, the leader made an incorrect private prediction (i.e., incorrectly assuming the policy would be a failure), but was nevertheless publicly credited for the success of the policy; in the bad material outcome conditions, the leader made a correct private prediction (i.e., correctly assuming the policy would be a failure), but was nevertheless publicly blamed for the policy. Republicans' expectations should be confirmed to a greater extent in the good material/bad reputational outcome condition (in which Biden made an incorrect prediction) compared to the bad material/good reputational outcome condition (in which Biden made a correct prediction). Thus, Republican participants experience reputational *gain* when their expectations are *disconfirmed* and vice versa, disentangling confirmation one's expectations from reputational gain.

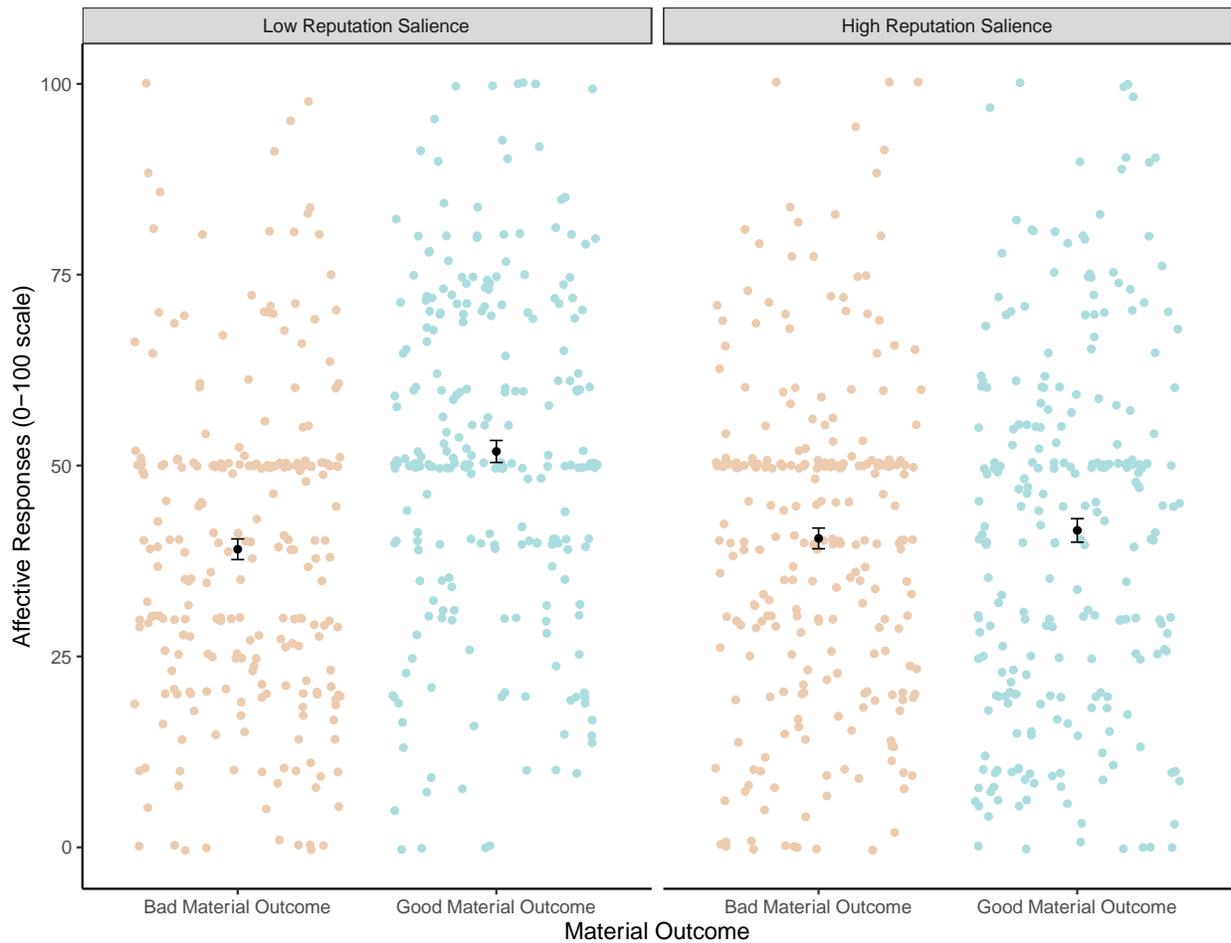
## **Results**

Our analysis plan proceeded as in Experiments 1-2, with the overarching hypothesis that a similar pattern of results would emerge despite the fact that any effect of confirming one's expectations regarding the “wrongness” of an outparty leader would oppose any effect of reputation. Despite this potential oppositional force, a near-identical pattern of results emerged.

First, we again found a simple effect of material outcome in the low reputation salience conditions: participants in the conditions involving Council of Economic Affairs Chair Rouse responded much more positively to good vs. bad material outcomes, for both the single general affect item ( $M_{\text{bad material}} = 38.69$  vs.  $M_{\text{good material}} = 51.86$ ,  $t(459) = 6.66$ ,  $p < .001$ , Cohen's  $d = 0.62$ ) and the 10-item composite ( $M_{\text{bad material}} = -1.61$  vs.  $M_{\text{good material}} = 0.50$ ,  $t(459) = 10.86$ ,  $p < .001$ , Cohen's  $d = 1.01$ ). However, and more critically, we again found evidence for an interaction: this aversion to societal harm was significantly attenuated when the positive outcome helped an outparty partisan leader's (in this case, again President Biden's) reputation, for both the single general affect item (interaction:  $b = 11.54$ ,  $se = 2.86$ ,  $t = 4.03$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and the 10-item composite (interaction:  $b = 1.25$ ,  $se = 0.28$ ,  $t = 4.53$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Mirroring the results of Experiment 2b, individuals no longer demonstrated a statistically significant aversion to material harm when affect was measured with the single-item slider ( $M_{\text{bad material}} = 39.16$  vs.  $M_{\text{good material}} = 40.78$ ,  $t(456) = 0.79$ ,  $p = .43$ , Cohen's  $d = 0.07$ ), although the aversion persisted—but was meaningfully reduced—as measured by the 10-item composite ( $M_{\text{bad material}} = -1.45$  vs.  $M_{\text{good material}} = -0.60$ ,  $t(459) = 4.34$ ,  $p < .001$ , Cohen's  $d = 0.40$ ).

Of note, and as depicted in Figure 4, the reputation effect was again quite substantial in magnitude: it represented an approximately 60-90% reduction in the gap in affective responses between low vs. high threat to the United States from Iran (Single item:  $d_{\text{low reputation salience}} = 0.62$  vs.  $d_{\text{high reputation salience}} = 0.07$ ; Composite:  $d_{\text{low reputation salience}} = 1.01$  vs.  $d_{\text{high reputation salience}} = 0.40$ ). Indeed, in the high reputation salience condition, Republicans reported nearly identical affective responses for the general affect item when the policy was a failure and materially hurt society as a whole, including the ingroup (but Biden was blamed: Mean = 39.16) and when the policy was a success and materially benefited society as a whole, including the ingroup (but Biden was

credited: Mean = 40.79).



**Figure 4.** In the context of national security, Republicans’ preferences for good vs. bad material outcomes were eliminated when the good vs. bad material outcomes were yoked, respectively, to bad vs. good reputational outcomes for an outgroup leader (i.e., President Biden). This pattern held despite the fact that any positive affective consequences of reputational gain could, in principle, have been counteracted by negative affective consequences of disconfirming prior expectations about an outgroup/ingroup leader (Experiment 3). Error bars represent 1 SE and colored dots represent raw data.

## Discussion

Experiments 1-3 provided consistent evidence that group-based reputational incentives can reduce (or even largely eliminate) affective differentiation between material outcomes that are good vs. bad for the world (including the ingroup/ingroup causes). Moreover, this pattern did

not seem to be driven by affective costs (or benefits) of disconfirming (or confirming) prior expectations about an outgroup/ingroup leader being wrong/right about the world.

### **Experiment 4**

To this point, our prior experiments have shown that reputational incentives can blunt, or even largely eliminate, affective differentiation between harm and gain to society. However, we did not observe any cases in which partisans felt *better* in contexts involving greater material harm to society relative to less. Extending our logic, however, if the relative reputational stakes were sufficiently large, partisans might in principle be happier in scenarios involving worse material outcomes (but better reputational ones) versus those involving better material outcomes (but worse reputational ones). We designed Experiment 4 as a proof-of-concept test to examine this possibility.

#### **Method**

**Participants.** We conducted an experiment with a sample of 785 Republicans ( $M_{age} = 44.49$ ,  $SD = 12.84$ , 54% female). As pre-registered, we included only the 753 Republicans (95.9%) who passed an attention check and did not ask to have their data removed. Of note, Experiment 4 was conducted in the week following President Biden's inauguration (i.e., January 21-27, 2021).

**Procedure.** Republicans were randomly assigned to one of two between-subjects experimental conditions: low material harm/low reputation salience vs. high material harm/high reputation salience. Thus, while Experiments 1-3 orthogonally manipulated both reputation salience and material harm, in Experiment 4 we manipulated them together. We did so because our primary hypothesis was that partisans might be happier about a situation with a worse material outcome (but better reputational outcome) compared to a situation with a better material

outcome (but worse reputational outcome). We thus required only these two conditions to test our primary hypothesis.

In all conditions, participants read an ostensibly real news article about an altercation at a tattoo parlor caused by an unruly Biden supporter. Republicans in the low material harm/low reputation salience condition read that an incident at a tattoo parlor owned by a Trump supporter had resulted in extensive property damage and the police had arrested a customer who was in town to celebrate Biden's inauguration. Of note, the material harm here is concentrated to an *ingroup* member. Republicans in the higher material harm/higher reputation salience condition read the identical news story, except for tweaks that amplified the material and (especially) reputational stakes. Raising the material stakes, participants learned that the incident had resulted in both property damage *and* a broken arm for the storeowner. Raising the reputational stakes, participants read that the Biden supporter was photographed in a BIDEN 2020 Hat and a Dump Trump t-shirt, and that a Republican lawmaker had said he was glad to see the media covering news that reflected poorly on Democrats. Affective responses were measured as a composite of the same ten items used in Experiments 1-3, which again achieved a high level of reliability ( $\alpha = 0.82$  after reverse-scoring negative items).

## **Results**

We conducted two sets of analyses. First, we wanted to ensure that participants did in fact perceive differences in material harm across conditions. To confirm that Republicans did indeed perceive the higher harm condition as more materially harmful, we ran a pilot experiment randomly assigning Republicans ( $N = 403$ ) to the high vs. low material harm conditions (while keeping all participants in the low reputation salience condition). After reading the news story, participants rated how much harm they thought was imposed on the storeowner. We found

strong support for the ability of participants to pick up on the differences in material harm: Republicans perceived significantly higher harm in the high harm condition compared to the low harm condition ( $M_{\text{higher}} = 5.86$  vs.  $M_{\text{lower}} = 5.40$ ,  $t(363) = 4.65$ ,  $p < .001$ , Cohen's  $d = 0.49$ ). This effect size (of approximately half a standard deviation) represented a moderate sized effect.

Second, we turned to our key inferential analysis. Our primary hypothesis was that participants would report greater total affect (i.e., a more positive affective response) in the context with higher material harm (and higher reputational gain) compared to the context with lower material harm (and lower reputational gain). This hypothesis was supported. Republicans reported more *positive* affective reactions in the higher harm/reputation condition compared to the lower harm/reputation condition ( $M_{\text{higher}} = -1.33$  vs.  $M_{\text{lower}} = -1.81$ ,  $t(742) = 3.15$ ,  $p = .002$ , Cohen's  $d = 0.23$ ). Of note, this effect persisted despite the counteracting force of material harm, and the fact that this harm was borne entirely by a member of the *ingroup*. Thus, whereas prior experiments demonstrated that attention to group-based reputational incentives can blunt (or eliminate) affective differentiation between greater vs. less harm, here we found evidence that they can even overpower affective differentiation, *reversing* the tendency to avoid harm to others.

## **Discussion**

Experiment 4 provided proof-of-concept evidence that sensitivity to reputational stakes can sometimes lead participants to report *more* positive affective responses in situations with greater (vs. lesser) material harm, even when that harm is focused on ingroup members.

## **Experiment 5**

Experiments 1-4 provide robust evidence that reputational stakes shape partisans' affective responses to material suffering. Whereas participants might feel better about bad

material outcomes for the world when it helps their group's reputation, will they also *act* in ways that help entrench material suffering on account of group-based reputational considerations? Experiment 5 uses an incentive-compatible design to test whether partisans are less willing to actively intervene to stop material suffering when doing so would yield reputational gains for the outgroup.

## **Method**

**Participants.** We conducted an experiment with a sample of 1192 Democrats ( $M_{age} = 40.03$ ,  $SD = 12.79$ , 54% female). As pre-registered, we included only the 1117 participants (93.7%) who passed an attention check and did not opt to have their data removed. Of note, Experiment 5 was conducted mere days after the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines received emergency use authorization in the United States in December 2020.

**Procedure.** As in prior experiments, participants learned that they would read an ostensibly real news story and answer questions about it on the following pages. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two between-subjects experimental conditions (low reputation salience vs. high reputation salience). In the low reputation salience condition, participants then read an article with the following headline: "Multiple priorities considered for COVID-19 vaccine strategy, including marketing and logistics." The article (1) described how a vaccine could provide hope to the United States after widespread harm from COVID-19; (2) noted that there were two competing priorities: marketing and ground logistics; and (3) described AmeriCares as an organization focused on helping with ground logistics. Participants in the high reputation salience condition read the identical news story, except the headline included the additional sentence "President Trump eager to take credit for logistics" and the article included a final paragraph that indicated that in a recent interview, President Trump had said that, as

President, his job was to oversee the logistics operation and ensure its success and that “people are going to look back and say Trump did something that had never ever been done before.” We wrote this additional paragraph to raise the reputational stakes (here, an outgroup President receiving acclaim) for Democrats.

On the following page, participants then learned that for participating in the survey, they were eligible to receive a \$.50 bonus. They also learned that they had the opportunity to donate the bonus (or any part of it) to Americares in order to help with COVID-19 vaccine logistics. The choice of whether to donate the bonus (and how much) served as the primary dependent variable in this experiment. Of note, participants kept any money they did not donate.

## **Results**

We hypothesized that participants would be less likely to donate their bonus in the high reputation salience condition because they would be hesitant to contribute to a cause that could eventually shed a positive light on the Republican effort to stem coronavirus. This hypothesis was supported: Democrats were significantly (albeit slightly) less likely to donate their bonus in the high reputation salience condition ( $M = 51\%$ ) compared to the low reputation salience condition ( $M = 57\%$ ),  $b = 0.24$ ,  $se = .12$ ,  $t(1116) = 2.03$ ,  $p = .043$ . This difference—obtained in the immediate aftermath of the announcement of a lifesaving vaccine, following on months of lockdowns and extreme death tolls—represents an approximately 12% relative reduction in probability of donating to a cause that could dramatically relieve material suffering on the basis of averting reputational gain to the outgroup. Thus, results revealed that reputational incentives can blunt partisans’ willingness to actively intervene to stop massive material suffering.

## **General Discussion**

From the longstanding animosity between Israelis and Palestinians to the growing hostility between Democrats and Republicans, group-based conflicts exact a dramatic toll on society. It is therefore critical to understand the psychological mechanisms that sustain such conflicts. In the context of the competitive relationship between Democrats and Republicans, five pre-registered experiments revealed that group-based reputational incentives shape partisans' responses to material outcomes, including economic devastation, national security threats, and healthcare emergencies. Strikingly, incentives for reputational standing can weaken—and sometimes even eliminate or reverse— affective differentiation between positive vs. negative material outcomes for the world. Moreover, our work suggests that individuals might sometimes forgo opportunities to avert material suffering if avoiding harm comes at the expense of burnishing the outgroup's reputation.

Moving beyond enjoyment at outgroup pain (e.g., Leach, Spears, Branscombe, & Doosje, 2003), our work sheds light on a new psychological mechanism reinforcing group-based conflict. Prior work in intergroup relations focuses on processes such as intergroup animus, dehumanization, and negative meta-perceptions as important contributors to cycles of conflict and associated material suffering (e.g., Kteily, Hodson, & Bruneau, 2016; Lees & Cikara, 2020). Previous research also suggests that individuals are sensitive to their group's reputation, for example expressing concern over maintaining the ingroup's moral standing in the eyes of others (Noor, Shnabel, Halabi, & Nadler, 2012; Rothschild, Landau, Molina, Branscombe, & Sullivan, 2013). However, whereas prior work has often focused on the ways that groups act prosocially to maintain or restore their reputation (e.g., by offering intergroup apologies; Wohl, Hornsey, & Bennett, 2012), our work illuminates new contours of the darker side of sensitivity to group-based reputation (see also Saguy & Kteily, 2011). Here, we highlight that individuals may

sometimes let the world ‘burn’ in order to gain a reputational upper-hand over the outgroup. By focusing more on making the other side look bad than on averting material suffering, partisans may play into the other side’s cynical narratives about their disregard for the sanctity of human life, damaging potential bridges to cooperation and increasing the outgroup’s conviction in the righteousness of its conflict. When two sides are more focused on looking good than seeking good, prospects for peace diminish.

We found across multiple contexts that group-based reputational incentives shaped individuals’ reactions to harm. Critically, we operationalized reputational incentives in a variety of ways: as a public declaration regarding the consequences of a policy (Experiments 1-2) or receiving public credit for an implemented policy, despite having internal reservations and being dissociated from the policy creation process (Experiment 3). Of note, in Experiment 5 reputation came about as a consequence of the participant’s action (or inaction). Yet, we also found notable variation. Reputational incentives *weakened* affective differentiation between material harm and benefit in Experiments 1 and 2a, but *eliminated* it in Experiments 2b and 3. In Experiment 4, participants even felt *better* about a context involving substantially more (vs. less) material harm on reputational grounds. Future research is needed to formally assess the magnitude of reputational and material effects on individuals’ affect and behavior at varying levels of reputational and material stakes.

While our findings were robust across a variety of methodological features (e.g., Democrats and Republicans, affective responses and financially-incentivized behavior), it is worth considering how other methodological factors may amplify vs. attenuate sensitivity to reputational considerations. One factor worth considering more systematically is the extent to which individuals factor reputational considerations similarly when faced with contexts

involving material harm versus material benefit: If a good material outcome is paired with a reputational loss and a bad material outcome is paired with an equivalently-sized reputational gain, are participants equally moved by reputation under both scenarios? In Experiments 1 and 2b reputational effects were approximately equal in the context of good and bad material outcomes. But reputational considerations appeared stronger in the context of good (vs. bad) material outcomes in Experiments 2a and 3. Future research should explore this potential asymmetry further, as well as consider whether participants differentiate between reputational gain to the ingroup and reputational loss to the outgroup (or between reputational loss to the ingroup and gain to the outgroup).

Finally, it would be useful to complement the present methodological approach with observational data collected outside of a controlled laboratory setting. For example, one such potential study could examine emotional/linguistic cues on social media during conflicts to examine whether reputationally-damaging actions by the outgroup elicit positivity, even when this comes at the expense of ingroup suffering. Future work could also go beyond the context of partisanship in the United States to examine other contexts where similar dynamics might be at play, including conflicts like those between Israel/Palestine, India/Pakistan, and Russia/Ukraine.

## **Conclusion**

Affectively-charged conflicts can impede cooperation, creating situations in which group members attend heavily to their group's relative standing. We highlight the critical role of group-based reputational incentives in reinforcing conflict by decreasing attention to material suffering, thus contributing to a vicious cycle of conflict escalation.

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