

What shapes support for secession?

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Abstract

We report results from a survey experiment with a 1299-person nationally representative sample of Red-state Republicans and Blue-state Democrats. The experiment tests the effect of various arguments for and against a secessionist “national divorce” between Red and Blue states. We prompted randomly selected sub-samples with one of ten treatments: eight different arguments for or against secession and prompts to reflect on unspecified reasons, either pro or con, for secession. The most effective pro-secession treatments highlighted imposition of objected-to policies at the federal level. The prompt to reflect on unspecified benefits of secession caused greater support among Red-state Republicans. Red-state Republicans were also influenced by concerns about the possible economic costs of the split. A treatment about differences in values of between Red and Blue states did not increase support for secession. Stressing common American values, identity and history did not reduce support for secession. Concerns about left-behind co-partisans (Republican voters in Blue states and vice versa) and the possibility of political violence did not dampen support for secession. Correlation between affective polarization and support for secession was statistically significant but very small.

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1 Introduction

By most accounts America is a very divided country. Americans increasingly dislike and distrust members of the opposing party, a phenomenon known as affective polarization. Iyengar, Sood and Lelkes (2012); Iyengar et al. (2019); Abramowitz and Webster (2018); Phillips (2022). Mason (2018) argues that Americans have separated themselves into two teams of bitter rivals. Divisions have reached the point where eight in ten Americans say that Republicans and Democrats cannot even agree on basic facts (Shearer, 2025). For some Americans this disunity has become so intolerable that they favor breaking up the United States into at least two different countries.

In February of 2023 Marjorie Taylor Greene tweeted

We need a national divorce. We need to separate by red states and Blue states and shrink the federal government. Everyone I talk to says this. From the sick and disgusting woke culture issues shoved down our throats to the Democrats’ traitorous America Last policies, we are done.

In Oregon and Washington, Cascadia Democratic Action (<https://cascadiademocratic.org>) is working to place a referendum on ballots in those two states to secede from the United States and create a separate country, possibly joined by British Columbia. California hosts a similarly robust secessionist moment. (Kenton, 2025).¹ A secessionist movement in Texas is smaller but still quite active (Miller, 2018). Over the last several years, secession is supported by about one-fifth to one-fourth of respondents in national surveys with Red-state Trump voters rising to one-third in some polls in 2022 (Oates and Wolak, 2025; Saad, 2025; Romano, 2022).

We commissioned YouGov to conduct a pre-registered survey experiment of 1299 adults who voted in the 2024 election—643 Trump voters in Red states and 656 Harris voters in Blue states—to test the kinds of arguments increase in secessionist sentiment.² For the purposes

¹See also <https://cascadiabioregion.org/the-cascadia-movement>

²We surveyed a total of 1500 respondents, 750 Red-State Republicans and 750 Blue-state Democrats, but

of this research Red states are states where a majority voted for Trump in all three elections: 2016, 2020 and 2024. Blue states are states where a majority voted against Trump in those three elections. States that returned a mix of those outcomes over the three elections were not included in this research. We chose this sampling design to focus on voters whom we thought would be more susceptible to secessionist arguments since they would remain in the majority after secession.

In the next section we discuss our hypotheses for the types of argument that will cause an increase in secessionist sentiment. In section 3 we explain the specific treatments we used to test those hypotheses. Section 4 describes the data. In section 5 we present the quantitative results from the survey examples and show that highly divisive policy issues causes the most movement in secessionist sentiment. Section 7 concludes.

2 Hypotheses

In answer to the question of which argument increase or decrease secessionist sentiment, we test two general possible motivators of pro-secessionist sentiment: 1) differences in *values*—“preferences ... about collective goals and general principles of conduct” (Lavender Forsyth, Chaudhuri and Atkinson, 2023)—and 2) *policy imposition*—policies, which by their nature must be set at the federal level, but with which regional majorities strongly disagree. We also test whether devotion to Donald Trump could serve as a possible motivator for secessionist sentiment. We prompt some respondents with the possibility that he could serve as president of a breakaway republic. The literature has also identified several factors that may reduce support for secession. These include 1) worries about the economic effects of a split, 2) the fate of co-partisans who would be left behind, 3) concerns about possible political violence as a result of the break up and 4) a belief that there is still more that unites Americans than divides them. We discuss each of these pro and con viewpoints below.

YouGov removed some respondents to insure a nationally representative sample.

Pro-secession hypotheses

We hypothesize that each of the following arguments will significantly increase support for secession.

Values: Recent research has indicated that America is increasingly split into two rival “teams,” one rural, Republican, conservative, less educated evangelical Christian and white, the other urban, Democratic, liberal, college educated secular and multi-ethnic (Mason, 2018). This claim is supported by Egan (2020) who shows that people change non-political identities to conform to their political and ideological ones. There is an ethnic component to these teams, of course, but much of the disagreement is over *values*: secular and pluralist versus religiously heteronomous (mainly Christian). This divide underlies the contentious debates on abortion, LGBT rights, school prayer and displays of religious symbols in public places (Rotolo and Smith, 2026). To test these value differences we prompt respondents on the role of Christianity and Christian value in public policy.

Policy Imposition: To test this hypothesis, we require issues that are divisive among the two groups and that must be set at the national level. There are a host of such issues. We chose immigration, gun control and fiscal policy for the following reasons. The civil unrest in cities that have been subject to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids recently indicate just how divisive the Trump Administration’s immigration policy is. Immigration was a major issue in his re-election campaign. He and his supporters called for “mass deportation.” Majorities in Red States favor stricter restrictions on immigration while majorities in Blue states dislike such policies (Immigrant Legal Resource Center, 2024). The issue can be addressed only obliquely by states since immigration enforcement and deportation are under federal purview. The second policy issue we prompt is gun control. Winkler (2013) argues that gun rights are a greater source of division in the United States than even abortion. In the past, states and localities have been allowed latitude on this issue but recently through the *Heller*, *McDonald* and *Bruen* decisions the Supreme Court

has interpreted the Second Amendment in ways that have forced Blue states to amend their stricter gun laws.

Fiscal policy may be another source of friction over policy imposition. Republicans, of course, typically favor lower taxation than Democrats. Meanwhile, Blue-state populations typically pay more into the federal budget than they receive, which may motivate some Blue-State Democrat respondents to favor a split. Thus federal fiscal policy may be unpopular to both Red and Blue constituencies albeit for different reasons. Given these differences between fiscal policy and the policies mentioned above, we included a separate treatment to test if federal fiscal policy imposition animates secessionism.

Trump’s frequent references to running for a third term piqued our interest in whether strong Trump supporters might find the possibility of third Trump term a possible reason to support secession. Although probably not as important as the previous two motivators we were interested in the extent to which strong supporters of Donald Trump fostered secessionist feeling especially if it would allow him to lead a new breakaway republic. Polls in late 2025 (Data for Progress, 2026) revealed that 59 percent of Democrats feared Trump might try to seek a third term and 53 percent of Republicans would have liked him to do so despite Constitutional restrictions. Might there be, among that sizable number of Republicans, enough support for extending Trump’s government that they would consider secession to make it happen?

Anti-secession hypotheses

Respondents may be apprehensive about the fate of *left-behind co-partisans*. Griffiths (2025) argues that “The fundamental problem with red-state/blue-state divorce is the interspersed population.” (p. 97). While there has been geographical partisan sorting over the last several decades, over 40 percent of voters voted for the candidate that lost their state in 2024. Are Blue-state respondents worried about what would become of Red-state Democrats and Red-state respondents worried about the fate of Blue-state Republicans after a split?

Second, an attempt to split the United States might lead to *violence*. The last time a group of states sought to secede Americas fought a bloody civil war to decide the issue. A possible Second American Civil War has crept back into the national conversation. Marche (2022) vividly describes four possible scenarios. French (2020) describes some similar chains of events as does Griffiths (2025). Walter (2023) is concerned that the the US may already be on the path to civil war. Griffiths (2025) describes a perilous problem of “unmixing” Red- and Blue-state populations, which he is convinced would become violent, stating “Despite what advocates say, the splitting of America into two countries—a Red America and a Blue America—would be a bloody affair.” We are interested in whether that possibility of violence reduces Americans support for secession.

Third, the economies of the American states are intertwined. Uncertainty surrounding the economic effects of a political split might affect respondents’ views on secession negatively. *Economic considerations* have been shown to be important in other developed-country examples of secessionism. Hierro and Queralt (2021) show that Catalonians’ views on secession from Spain were affected by their economic position. Those in industries that would be hurt by secession were more strongly against it than those in industries that could rely on international markets. Among the long-term unemployed excluded from public insurance strengthened support for secession. Munoz and Tornos’s 2015 survey experiment shows that economic considerations (in addition to identity and partisanship) affected Catalonians support for secession.

Finally there is still a great deal that Americans share—a common history, (possible) national identity and, for many, a commitment to make the American experiment in democracy work. Civics groups like *The Better Angels Society* (<https://www.thebetterangelsociety.org>) argue that there is still more that unites Americans than divides them and seeks to accentuate those common values. Reminding Americans of these commonalities may cause respondents to prefer to stick together despite the country’s current divisions.

In addition to those seven hypotheses, we test three more. We ask a subset of subjects to

reflect on, alternatively, reasons for or against a national divorce to see if merely reflecting on the subject of secession causes an effect. Finally, in addition to those described above, we hypothesize that rising affective polarization—“the extent to which partisans view each other as a disliked outgroup” (Iyengar, Sood and Lelkes, 2012)—is driving the desire for a national divorce. We measured negative affect with a net party feeling thermometer (own party minus opposition party) and we expect a positive coefficient on that variable. We did not introduce a randomly assigned treatment for this hypothesis. We cannot make causal statements. We are just testing for the expected correlation.

3 Treatments

In the introductory portion of the survey, prior to any treatments, we asked questions about demographics and strength of party identification. We also asked about baseline support for secession with the following question.

To what extent do you agree with the following statement? The situation in America has reached the point where I would be in favor of the more conservative “red” states seceding from the union to form their own separate country.

We asked respondents to answer on a four point scale: strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree. We use this variable as baseline support for secession. This is the variable used for the parameters listed as “Support secession (base)” in the results below. Prior to treatment we also asked respondents feeling-thermometer questions about their own party and the opposition party. The feeling thermometer varies from 0 to 100. Net feeling thermometer is the value for own party minus that of the opposition party. Descriptive statistics for these variables and strength of party identification are provided in Table 1.

We then prompted respondents, both treated and control, to think about the following hypothetical case of secession.

Suppose we split the United States up into three groups of states:

Table 1: Descriptive statistics for key variables

	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Support secession, base	2.76	1.39	1.00	5.00
Net feeling	63.70	25.68	-80.00	100.00
Strong party identifier	0.61	0.49	0.00	1.00
Observations	1299			

- A group of states where the majority voted for Donald Trump in all three elections: 2016, 2020, and 2024. They are the states colored red in the map below.
- A group of states where the majority voted against Donald Trump in all three of those elections. They are colored blue in the map.
- A group of states where a majority voted for Donald Trump in some of those elections but not in others. They are colored purple in the map.

Imagine there is a proposal for [Red/Blue] states to secede from the United States and become an independent nation. Supporters of the proposal want to secede legally, so they are advocating for a constitutional amendment that permits secession. There is an active debate in the country between supporters and critics of secession.

Now imagine that you are voting in primary elections to determine who the [Republican/Democratic] senate candidate will be for your state. You are choosing between two candidates. One is strongly in favor of secession. The other is strongly against secession. Otherwise, their platforms are very similar.

The purpose of this text was to fix in respondents' mind exactly what secession meant in the context of this survey. We did this to reduce variability that might arise because respondents were thinking of different situations when they considering their support for secession. The map referred to in the question is reproduced in Figure 1

Vote for Trump 2016-24

- Voted for Trump in all three elections
- Voted against Trump all three elections
- Voted for Trump in some but not all three elections

3.1 Pro treatments

Policy imposition

“Supporters argue that [Red/Blue] states should secede so that they can control the policies in their states. They make the following points:”

Then Red-state Republicans received the following prompt:

- “Many Red states want to limit immigration, but Democratic federal governments allow high levels of both legal and illegal immigration into red states.
- Many Red states want to loosen restrictions on gun ownership. However, blue-state politicians often pursue legislation to limit gun rights throughout the entire country. ”

Blue-state Democrats instead received this prompt:

- “Many Blue states want to allow more immigration and treat immigrants more humanely. However, Republican federal governments impose harsh immigration policies in Blue states.
- The Supreme Court often blocks attempts by Blue states to pass stricter gun laws.”

Fiscal policy

All respondents who received the fiscal policy treatment read the following words.

“Supporters of the amendment argue that [Red/Blue] states should secede to reduce the financial burden of taxes on their citizens. They make the following points:”

Red-state Republicans who received this treatment then read:

- “Democrats in the federal government impose high taxes, including on citizens in red states.
- If red states were to secede, they could lower tax rates for citizens.”

Blue-state Democrats who received this treatment instead received this prompt:

- “Recent analyses show that Blue states tend to pay more in taxes than they receive in federal benefits, which means Blue states are subsidizing red states. Therefore, if Blue states were to secede, they could lower tax rates for citizens without cutting benefits.”

Values

Both subsamples who received this treatment read the following words with red or blue used in the first sentence as appropriate.

“Supporters argue that [Red/Blue] states should secede because people in Red and Blue states have fundamentally different views of what it means to be American. They make the following points:

- Many people in red states believe that the United States was formed as a Christian nation and that its laws and public policies should reflect its Christian values.
- Many people in Blue states believe that the United States was formed as a multicultural democracy and that its laws and public policies should not be based on any particular set of religious beliefs.”

Third term

The following treatment was only given to some randomly-selected Red-state Republicans.

Supporters argue that red states should secede so that Donald Trump can be president for a third term. They make the following points:

- Many red states would like to elect President Trump for a third term, but they cannot do so under the current US Constitution.
- If they secede, red states would be able to create a constitution that allows for President Trump (or other presidents) to be elected for more than 2 terms.

Reflection on benefits of secession

We asked respondents to reflect on any positive arguments they could think of for secession and write them in the space provided. Specifically, we asked, “Do you think any benefits

could come from the group of [blue/red] states seceding?” If yes, they were given an open-ended prompt: “What benefits could come from the group of [blue/red] states seceding?”

3.2 Con treatments

In this subsection we describe the five prompts against of secession. The following are treatments that we expected to reduce respondent support for secession.

Left-behind co-partisans

To Red-state Republicans:

“Critics argue that red states should not secede because they would be leaving behind Republicans in Blue states. They make the following points: In the last presidential election, 42% of voters in Blue states voted for Donald Trump.

- Republicans in Blue states will be subject to increasingly extreme liberal policies if red states secede.”

To Blue-state Democrats:

Critics argue that Blue states should not secede because they would be leaving behind Democrats in red states. They make the following points:

- “In the last presidential election, 43% of voters in red states voted for Kamala Harris. Democrats in red states will be subject to increasingly extreme conservative policies if Blue states secede.”

Violence

All respondents who received this treatment read the following text, inserting the correct state color as needed.

Critics argue that [red/blue] states should not secede because it might lead to violence or even war. They make the following points:

- Republicans in rural areas of Blue states might fight for their regions to join the new country of red states.
- Disputes over control of military bases, infrastructure, or strategic resources could spark conflict between the new nations.”

Economic difficulties

All respondents who received this treatment read the following text, inserting the correct state color as necessary.

Critics argue that red states should not secede because it would have disastrous economic consequences. They make the following points:

- Secession could disrupt interstate trade and labor mobility, which would slow economic growth and hurt businesses that rely on integrated national markets. The new country would likely face fiscal instability due to costly efforts to rebuild government institutions and uncertainty over debt obligations.

Common identity

All respondents who received this treatment read the following text, inserting the correct state color as necessary.

Critics argue that [red/blue] states should not secede because it would undermine democratic values and American identity. They make the following points:

- A core principle of democracy is that different beliefs can coexist within one republic.
- Secession would imply a failure of American democracy. Americans are bound together by a single national identity and history.

- Secession would mean that partisan differences outweigh hundreds of years of shared nationhood.

Reflection on harm from secession

We also we asked a subset of respondents to reflect on any negative arguments they could think of for secession and write them in the space provided. Specifically, we asked, “Do you think any harm could come from the group of [blue/red] states seceding?” If yes, they were given an open-ended prompt: “What harm could come from the group of [blue/red] states seceding?”

Finally, all respondents, both treated and control, were asked whether they would vote for the pro-secession candidate. Possible responses included (1) Definitely not, (2) Probably not, (3) Probably, and (4) Definitely.

4 Data

YouGov collected the data from their nationally-representative respondent pool in March 2026. Prior to contracting with YouGov, we conducted the survey experiment with a similarly sized sample through the online service Prolific. The representativeness of that sample worried us. In particular the percentage of the sample that was college educated was double the national average and the employment-population ratio was also quite high. We were concerned the better educated and people might respond to our treatments differently than people with out a tertiary degree. Therefore we chose to use YouGov See the appendix for a fuller discussion. We also report descriptive statistics for both the YouGov and Prolific samples there. In the rest of section we will provide a fuller description of the data, including descriptive statistics and open-ended statements from members of the control-group gave for their positions on secession

Descriptive Statistics

Figure 2 illustrates mean support for secession at baseline in the full sample and various subgroups. Those who answered “strongly agree” or “agree” with the secessionist statement are counted in this figure. Overall about 35 of the respondents, both Red-State Republicans and Blue-State Democrats supported secession. This figure is about 15 points higher than the results in the YouGov survey mentioned above, which is expected since our sample excludes “purple” states and political minorities in states we did survey. For the most part, there are no significant differences among subgroups in support for secession between Red-State Republicans and Blue-State Democrats. There are a few exceptions. Religious Democrats are less likely than religious Democrats to support secession, and the opposite is true for less religious respondents. Democrats in the West support secession more than Republicans in the West (who are all Alaskans).

The relationships in Figure 2 are bivariate and the categories are correlated so we also estimated multivariate relationships with ordinary least squares, shown in Table 2 on a four-point scale with zero being “strongly disagree” and three being “strongly agree” with the pre-treatment secessionist statement. *Ceteris paribus*, strong party identifiers, those very interested in politics, women and Hispanics were significantly more likely to support the secessionist candidate. College-educated people were significantly less likely to do so.

Figure 3 illustrates support for the secessionist statement (both “agree” and “strongly agree”) at baseline by state. The largest support among Blue-state Democrats is unsurprisingly in Hawaii, which has hosted a Hawaiian sovereignty movement (nationofhawaii.org) for some time, Washington and Oregon which are part of the Cascadia movement (cascadia-bioregion.org) and California with its *Calexit* movement (calexitnow.org). Over 60 percent of respondents from Hawaii and Washington support secession, while about 50 percent of respondents in California and Oregon do. The figure from Washington is significantly different ($p < 0.05$) than the bottom 13 states in the list. Among Red-state Republicans, we found support for secession in South Dakota, where over 80 percent of respondents favored

Figure 2: Mean support for secession by subgroup

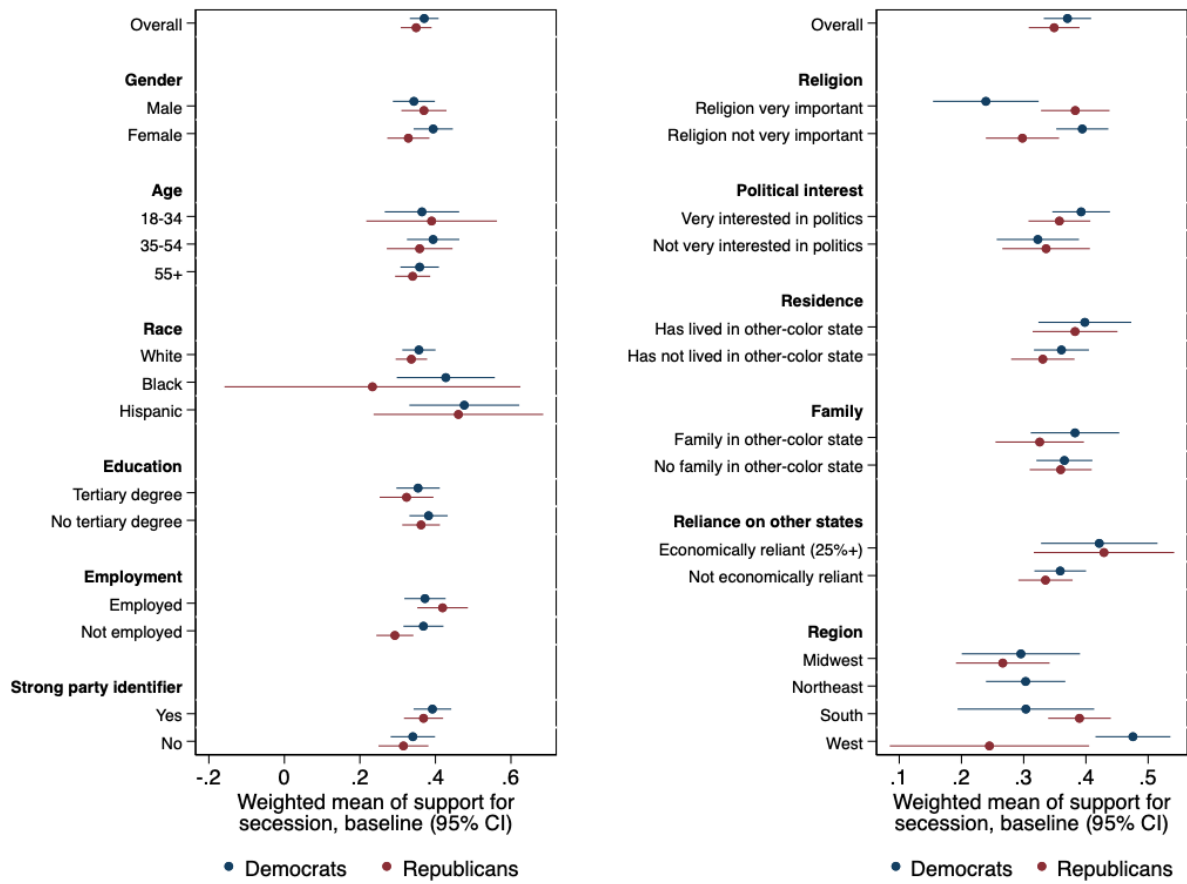
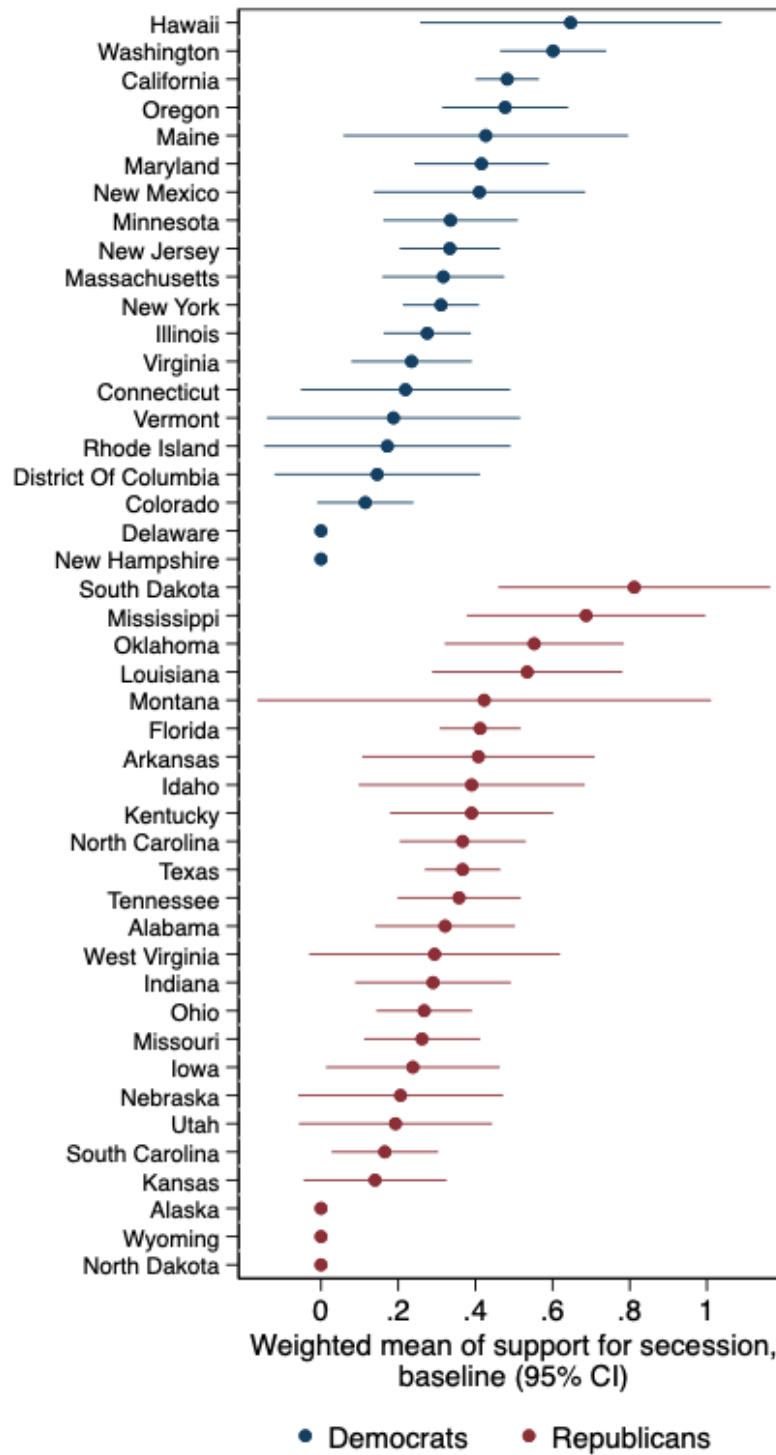


Table 2: Relationship between baseline support for secession and covariates

	(1)
	Support secession (base)
Democrat	0.0735 (0.0682)
Strong party identifier	0.155** (0.0613)
Female	0.107* (0.0600)
Age	-0.00119 (0.00210)
White	-0.0556 (0.0863)
Hispanic	0.245** (0.120)
Tertiary degree	-0.146** (0.0602)
Employed	0.0950 (0.0734)
Religion is very important	-0.0325 (0.0673)
Very interested in politics	0.106* (0.0628)
Has lived in other-color state	0.0430 (0.0675)
Family lives in other-color state	-0.0848 (0.0663)
Economically reliant on other states	0.0247 (0.0920)
Constant	-0.0947 (0.177)
Observations	1299

Support secession (base) is standardized with respect to the control group. All covariates are binary except age. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Figure 3: Mean support for the secessionist candidate by state



it, surprising. The next highest was Mississippi where support was over ten points lower. Support in the lowest 20 states is significantly lower ($p < 0.1$) than South Dakota's. Also, somewhat surprisingly, Texas, with its *Texit* movement, registered only average levels of support among red-state Republicans.

Control-group Open-ended Responses

Readers may be curious about the justifications that respondents gave, in their own words, for their existing positions on secession (if any). With only 181 of the 400 control group members providing open-ended responses, this is obviously self-selected data, but the responses themselves are still quite interesting. We asked all subjects for open-ended verbal justifications for their level of support (if any) for the secessionist candidate at endline. Tables 3 and 4 summarize the answer from the control group only. Table 3 presents justifications from secession supporters (including weak and strong supporters) and Table 4 presents justifications from secession opponents (including weak and strong opponents). These responses provide untreated respondents' reasons of support of or opposition to secession and as such indicate what some of these rationales are in the general population. We developed these categories based on our reading of these open-ended responses. If respondents indicated more than one justification we included all of them in their appropriate categories.

Tables 3 and 4, respectively, report percentages of pro- and anti-secession justifications that fell into each of the categories we identified. The means columns do not sum to one because we omit justifications that we could not clearly categorize or that were given only a very small number of times. There were no significant differences between the Democrats and Republicans in the types of justifications they gave, although in some cases this was due to large standard errors masking what appear to be large substantive differences.

The first two categories of statements in Table 3 concerned a form of *policy imposition*, either fiscal policies or non-fiscal policies (commonly LGBT rights). About 11 percent of Blue-state Democrats' statements mentioned fiscal policy, namely that Red states are net

Table 3: Justification proportions among secession proponents, by party

	Democrats		Republicans	
	Mean	SE	Mean	SE
Fiscal policy	0.112	0.041	0.038	0.028
Control of non-fiscal policies	0.112	0.039	0.155	0.073
Differences in values or beliefs	0.191	0.058	0.206	0.066
Threats to democracy	0.104	0.038	0.038	0.038
Failures of governance	0.013	0.013	0.037	0.027
Hopelessly divided	0.126	0.043	0.059	0.034
Derogation of the outgroup	0.153	0.052	0.329	0.085
Observations	61		40	

Note: Each row shows proportions for a distinct justification. Proportions are weighted to show estimated population proportions. The sample is restricted to control group respondents who expressed support for secession. The standard errors do not incorporate weight-estimation uncertainty.

Table 4: Justification proportions among secession opponents, by party

	Democrats		Republicans	
	Mean	SE	Mean	SE
Value unity	0.199	0.040	0.396	0.061
Economics	0.078	0.028	0.070	0.031
National security	0.043	0.022	0.041	0.023
Civil conflict	0.060	0.024	0.022	0.016
Co-partisans left behind	0.033	0.017	0.024	0.023
Unfeasible due to geography	0.036	0.022	0.014	0.014
Principles of democracy / the Constitution	0.007	0.007	0.033	0.020
Hope for future cooperation	0.025	0.015	0.020	0.014
Other consequences	0.131	0.035	0.074	0.033
Observations	107		73	

Note: Each row shows proportions for a distinct justification. Proportions are weighted to show estimated population proportions. The sample is restricted to control group respondents who expressed opposition to secession.

recipients of federal funds while Blue states pay more in federal taxes than they receive. For example one respondent said “I really hate the policies being forced on the country, particularly targeting Blue states. We also send far more money to the federal government, so we might as well keep our money and go out on our own.” Red-state Republicans’ statements mentioned fiscal policy only about four percent of the time. Interestingly many of these statements on fiscal issues expressed, incorrectly, that their federal taxes were being used to bail out Blue states whose liberal policies had placed Blue states financial distress. A typical example is “I’m personally tired of dealing with Blue-state’s politics, problems and liberal viewpoints as well as supporting their financial problems brought on by their own stupidity and liberal viewpoints.”

About 16 percent of Red-state Republicans’ statements mentioned non-fiscal policy differences. One respondent put it simply: “Immigration reform. Build business. Stop assisting minorities. Reform welfare.” About 11 percent Blue-state Democratic statements mentioned the imposition of non-fiscal policies. “Our rights are being taken away. I don’t want to live in a county where we don’t have rights or free Healthcare.” Another Blue-state Democrat said

The entire GOP are governed by Project 2025. They are racists. They are anti LGBTQ, anti abortion anti books and teaching correct history. They do not represent true American values. I prefer to live in a free state that follows the constitution ALL MEN (AND WOMEN) ARE CREATED EQUAL.

The previous respondent mentions *values*, by which they seem to have meant “equal protection of the laws” and perhaps tolerance. Clashes of values or beliefs were mentioned in about one in five of both Republicans’ and Democrats’ statements as a reason for supporting secession. One Red-state Republican stated “I am tired of hard core liberals in Blue states ruining America and want to go back to conservative values.” Another stated “I believe in personal freedom, and that only exists mainly in the red states.”

We also noticed three other categories of justifications. These were threats to democracy,

failures of governance and the belief that Americans were hopelessly divided. Ten and four percent of Democratic and Republican statements, respectively, mentioned threats to democracy. Statements like “The red states are dragging this country into fascism, and I want nothing to do with that.” are emblematic. A small number statements mentioned failures of governance, but these were mostly Republicans frustration with Democrats obstruction of President Trump’s policy initiatives rather than a general concern about gridlock. Almost 13 percent of Democrats’ and six percent of Republicans’ statements argued that the country is too divided to ever be united again. As one stated: “This country is irredeemable.”

Finally we can also observe the possible role of negative affect in support for secession among the control group. Coding affect from responses in black and white is often tricky, so we simple coded statements where respondents made derogatory comments about the other party. These are shown in the seventh row of Table 3. Examples include “I cannot stand Democrats. PERIOD.”, “Democrats are idiots” and “Blue states are crazy, high tax, pro gay, pro baby killers.” Those sorts of responses were made quite frequently by Red-state Republicans—about one-third of the statements. Those sorts of statements were made rather less frequently by Blue-state Democrats (about 15 percent of the time), but there were some, *viz*: “I have no issue, and perhaps even prefer, to be apart from the idiots who voted this absolute Anti-Christ into office TWICE...”

Table 4 presents the frequency of the various arguments control group members expressed for opposing secession. The most common open-ended response, mentioned in 20 percent of Democrats statements and almost 40 percent of Republicans statements was that Americans still share important values that make union worthwhile. For example “[I]’m an American before I’m a democrat. I believe in American ideals and I hope the American dream isn’t dead.” Many of these responses implied that the respondent valued the union for its own sake—that it possessed intrinsic value that should not be abandoned, *viz* “Because we are UNITED states.” This category was more common among Red-state Republicans about 40 percent of whom mentioned it compared to only about 20 percent of Blue-state Democrats.

That difference is borderline significant at 95 percent.

Other categories were much less common. The next largest category, shown in the second row, mentioned expressed concerns about the economic consequence of a breakup. One respondent simply stated “Secession would be a bad economic policy.” One respondents who expressed negative affect was against secession for economic reasons:

1. I believe in one America. 2. Although I absolutely HATE New York and California these two states pay more into the Federal government than they receive in appropriations. Red states benefit by that.

The remaining anti-secession statements were all mentioned less five percent of the time. These were were , concerns about national security, fear of civil war, fear of the consequences for left-behind co-partisans and hope that the country can still overcome its current divisions.

We cannot infer much from these data since less than half of our control-group members wrote anything, but it is interesting that the modal category in both the pro- and anti-secession responses concerned values—deep differences in values in pro-secession responses and the belief that we still share certain values in the anti-secessionist ones.

5 Model and Estimates

We estimate the effects of the treatments with the following specification:

$$Y_i = \alpha + \sum_{t=1}^{10} \beta_t T_{it} + \beta'_1 X_i + \epsilon_i \quad (1)$$

where Y_i is subject i ’s response about their vote choice for the hypothetical pro-secession candidate (definitely would not = 0 to definitely would = 4), T_{it} is an indicator for treatment t , for individual i , and X is a vector of covariates. We use HC1 heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors. To select the covariates, we use post double selection lasso to select from the following list of variables:³ party, strength of party affiliation, white and Hispanic indica-

³We use Stata’s `pdslasso` command with default tuning parameters.

tors, a tertiary degree indicator, sex, age, income, a Christian indicator, religiosity, political engagement, an inverse-covariance weighted index of political knowledge questions, employment, an indicator for whether someone has lived in a red (blue) state if they are a Democrat (Republican), and an indicator for whether someone has family living in a red (blue) state if they are a Democrat (Republican). We run the model separately for Democrats and Republicans due to the slight differences in the wording of some treatments. Doing so also allows us to estimate population (rather than sample) average treatment effects for Blue-state Democrats and Red-state Republicans, respectively. ϵ_i is a well-behaved error term.

Table 5 reports the sample average treatment effects and population average treatment effects from this survey experiment. The dependent variable is standardized with respect to the control group, so coefficients can be interpreted in terms of standard deviations. Most treatments did not significantly change respondents’ attitudes on secession. As expected, the strongest effect in the table is the coefficient on respondents’ baseline (pre-treatment) support for secession.

Blue-state Democrats appear to be particularly immune to arguments about secession as shown in columns two and four of Table 5. Only the *policy imposition* treatment that mentioned immigration and gun control is statistically significant. It moved their sentiment about 0.21 standard deviations in favor of secession. Two treatments affected Red-state Republicans’ secessionist sentiments. *Fiscal burden* induced more secessionist responses and concern about *economics* made them less secessionist. Red-state Republicans responded positively to arguments about separating from liberal Blue states so that they could reduce federal taxes. This treatment increased their support for secession by about 0.32 standard deviations. Prompting them with potential economic difficulties arising from secession caused them to reduce their support for secession by about 0.2 standard deviations. Raising the possibility that President Trump could serve additional terms if Red states seceded was not a convincing argument to Red-state Republicans. According to the population average treatment effect it actually *reduced* their support for the secessionist candidate but a significant

amount. The prompt about different values was not effective in raising respondents’ support for secession and the prompt about common values did not reduce respondents’ support for secession.

Finally, we present tests of the effect of affective polarization on support for secession in Table 6. The hypothesis was that support for secession is driven significantly by affective polarization. We do find, as expected, that feeling thermometers measuring support for one’s co-partisans and animosity toward the other partisans are statistically significant predictors of the probability that a respondent will support secession, but the effect is quite small substantively, only about 15/100 of one percent. A person with large negative affect who rated their own party 100 and the opposite party with a zero is only predicted to increase their support for secession by 0.15 points of a four-point scale.

6 Conclusion

We have presented results from a survey experiments on 1299 subjects split between Red-state Republicans and Blue-state Democrats. We prompted randomly selected sub-samples with one of eight different arguments for or against splitting the United States into separate Red and Blue countries, and a prompt to reflect on unspecified arguments either for or against a national divorce.

Arguments about differing values and the the role of religion in policy making did not increase support for secession, and arguments about common American values, identity and history did not reduce support for secession. Support for secession was similarly undampened by bringing up the possibility of secession causing violence and co-partisans (Republican voters in Blue states and vice versa) after a split and the possibility of political violence. Correlation between affective polarization and support for secession was statistically significant but substantively small.

The most effective pro-secession treatments highlighted imposition of policies by the op-

Table 5: Average treatment effects by party

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Support sec.	Support sec.	Support sec.	Support sec.
Pro: Policy imposition	-0.00420 (0.130)	0.213** (0.107)	0.0604 (0.141)	0.220* (0.117)
Pro: Fiscal burden	0.324*** (0.117)	0.168 (0.103)	0.366*** (0.120)	0.168 (0.109)
Pro: Values	0.115 (0.108)	0.170 (0.115)	0.0656 (0.109)	0.175 (0.117)
Pro: Third term	-0.148 (0.139)		-0.253* (0.150)	
Pro: Reflect	0.214* (0.111)	-0.105 (0.111)	0.267** (0.114)	-0.0635 (0.115)
Con: Left behind	0.0734 (0.108)	-0.120 (0.107)	0.0183 (0.119)	-0.0925 (0.120)
Con: Violence	-0.0485 (0.115)	-0.154 (0.112)	-0.0461 (0.124)	-0.135 (0.112)
Con: Economics	-0.196* (0.114)	-0.0985 (0.100)	-0.196 (0.126)	-0.119 (0.107)
Con: Values	0.105 (0.136)	-0.0229 (0.101)	0.157 (0.130)	0.0250 (0.112)
Con: Reflect	0.0743 (0.107)	-0.169 (0.122)	0.0656 (0.141)	-0.124 (0.119)
Support secession (base)	0.686*** (0.0271)	0.700*** (0.0266)	0.695*** (0.0281)	0.709*** (0.0275)
Hispanic	0.0775 (0.108)		0.126 (0.127)	
Knowledge index	0.0478* (0.0266)			
Estimand	SATE	SATE	PATE	PATE
Party	Republicans	Democrats	Republicans	Democrats
Observations	643	656	643	656

All regressions are based on equation 1. *Support sec.* = *Support secession*. The dependent variable is standardized using the control-group mean and standard deviation; all dependent variable means are 0. SATE = Sample average treatment effect. PATE = Population average treatment effect. The effects in column 3 are weighted to be representative of strong Republicans in red states. The effects in column 4 are weighted to be representative of strong Democrats in blue states. The standard errors do not incorporate weight-estimation uncertainty. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table 6: Relationship between feeling and support for secession

	(1)	(2)	(3)
	Support sec.	Support sec.	Support secession (binary)
Net thermometer (quartiles)	0.104*** (0.0293)		
Net thermometer (-100-100)		0.00433*** (0.00113)	0.00156*** (0.000514)
Democrat	-0.0482 (0.0566)	-0.0370 (0.0571)	-0.0227 (0.0261)
Constant	-0.239** (0.0991)	-0.213** (0.0843)	0.227*** (0.0381)
Observations	1299	1273	1273

Net thermometer is the difference between the feeling rating (0-100) towards one's own party and the feeling rating (0-100) toward the other party. The variable is thus on a -100 to 100 point scale. The first column uses a version that groups the outcomes by quartiles. *Support secession* is on a 4-point scale; the binary version is an indicator for whether they would probably or definitely vote for secession. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

position at the federal level. A prompt to reflect on unspecified benefits of secession also caused greater support among Red-state Republicans. The only effective anti-secession treatment raised concerns about the possible economic costs of a divorce but only for Republicans

The findings in this paper have broader implications for understanding the current acrimony in American politics. Our dependent variable is an admittedly extreme version of acrimony, but its virtue is that it is a very precise and concrete measure of how much the two sides dislike each other—to the point that they no longer wish to live in the same country with the political opposition.

The strongest pro-secession results in our experiment (other than simply have Red-state Republicans reflect on reasons for secession) concerned the imposition of policies at the federal level on constituencies that resented those policies. Republicans resented high federal taxes and Democrats resented harsh immigration policies and having their gun control laws declared unconstitutional.

One arguable interpretation of the survey experiments results and a possible avenue of future research is that *nationalization* of American politics may be a motivator of support for secession. In a nationalized American polity, the public focuses on national (federal) rather

than state and local policy and politics (Hopkins, 2018). In a nationalized polity, policies that state governments can control—even very controversial ones like the death penalty, taxes and school curricula—do not draw the same ire that policies set at the federal level like federal taxes, immigration, LGBT rights and gun control do. This interpretation was also raised by Jacobs (2024), where respondents who were more cognizant of the national Red- and Blue-state divide were also more likely to support secession.

The one-fifth to one-fourth of the American public that supports secession is not enough to make a national divorce a serious threat at this point, but it is concerning, as are the deep divisions between Red and Blue America of which these secession supporters are exemplars.

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A Online Appendix

The Prolific Sample

The Prolific sample was much better educated and much more likely to be employed than than the national averages. The sample mean for tertiary education was 73 percent of the sample compared to a national average of about 38 to 40 percent. The employment-population ratio was as about 76 percent compared to a national average of about 59 percent. Therefore we commissioned YouGov to conduct the experiment with their nationally-representative subject pool. As shown in Table 7 the YouGov sample is much more closely matched national averages, although, due to our requirement that respondents voted in 2024, the sample did skew a bit older (and therefore more likely retired) than national average.

Table 7: Means by sample

	Prolific Mean	YouGov Mean
Democrat	0.51	0.51
Strong party identifier	0.58	0.61
Female	0.60	0.54
Age	44.66	57.29
White	0.79	0.81
Hispanic	0.10	0.07
Tertiary degree	0.73	0.38
Employment-Population Ratio	0.76	0.45
Christian	0.59	0.57
Has lived in other-color state	0.25	0.32
Family lives in other-color state	0.25	0.30
Observations	1315	1299

All variables are binary.

The prompts from the Prolific sample were a bit different than those for the YouGov sample. We exchanged three prompts from the Prolific study. We thought we needed a kind of placebo for the study so we added the two prompts asking respondents to reflect on their own ideas about secession. Given Trump’s frequent statements about a third term at that

time we were designing the survey we also decided to add a prompt about that. For power purposes these three additions required removing three prompts from the Prolific survey. We removed a prompt about spending priorities, that is differences between Democrats and Republicans in their preferences for social programs, which we considered somewhat redundant to the fiscal policy prompt. *Governance* in Table 8 prompted respondents with difficulties of divided governance including frequent government shutdowns. *Image response* simply showed respondents a picture of an opposition rally—a Trump rally to Democrats and a No-Kings rally to Republicans. These latter two treatments were very weak and actually the wrong sign for Democrats so we removed them from the YouGov sample.

Table 8 presents the causal estimates of the treatments from the survey experiment. The main difference from the YouGov treatments is that the con treatments were more effective. Indeed all of them were statistically significant with small to medium effect sizes. The only pro treatment that was significant was policy imposition but it had a small effect size and was significant only among Democrats. We have no way of knowing for sure, but we suspect that these very different effects may have been due to the higher educational level of the Prolific sample.

Table 8: Average treatment effects by party, Prolific sample

	(1)	(2)
	Support secession	Support secession
Pro: Policy imposition	-0.0314 (0.102)	0.165* (0.0964)
Pro: Fiscal burden	0.183 (0.118)	-0.0661 (0.114)
Pro: Values	-0.229 (0.105)	-0.0469 (0.102)
Pro: Spending priorities	-0.0414 (0.119)	0.0590 (0.0981)
Pro: Governance	0.0632 (0.124)	-0.000788 (0.143)
Pro: Negative affect	0.0510 (0.125)	-0.00142 (0.106)
Con: Left behind	-0.236* (0.129)	-0.343*** (0.0985)
Con: Violence	-0.216** (0.108)	-0.293*** (0.100)
Con: Economics	-0.380*** (0.115)	-0.200* (0.112)
Con: Values	-0.215** (0.0984)	-0.184** (0.0902)
Support secession (base)	0.618*** (0.0313)	0.753*** (0.0237)
Hispanic	-0.171 (0.122)	
Wave FE	Yes	Yes
Party	Republicans	Democrats
Observations	645	670

All regressions are based on equation 1. All dependent variables are standardized using the control-group mean and standard deviation; all dependent variable means are 0. The Prolific sample was run over two waves; a wave fixed effect is included. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.