Public Opinion Quarterly (2025) **Vol 00 No 0,** 1–18

Did Trump's Indictments Rally His Base? Evidence from the Counterfactual Format

Soubhik Barari[1], Alexander Coppock[2], Matthew H. Graham[3,*], Zoe Padgett[4]

[1]Research Methodologist, NORC, University of Chicago, Chicago, IL, US
[2]Associate Professor (on Term), Department of Political Science, Yale University, New Haven, CT, US
[3]Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Temple University, Philadelphia, PA, US
[4]Senior Research Scientist, SurveyMonkey, San Mateo, CA, US

Abstract In the task of assessing how sudden, significant events causally affect public opinion, political pollsters often ask respondents how the event affected their attitudes and beliefs. We study the case of former President Donald Trump's federal indictment for allegedly mishandling classified documents using two methods of retrospective causal inference. The commonly used *change format* asks respondents to state directly how the event affected their attitudes: Republicans say the event increased their support of Trump, while Democrats say the opposite. Like previous work, we argue that the change format exhibits a form of bias known as response substitution. The alternative *counterfactual format* is plausibly free of this source of error and asks respondents to imagine what their attitudes and beliefs would have been if the event had not happened. Using this method, Republican primary voters report that the indictment increased their belief that Trump mishandled documents (+2.5 pp) and decreased their intention to vote for him in the primaries (−1.6 pp). We argue that the counterfactual format is particularly valuable for studying the effects of highly salient news events like the Trump indictment on public opinion.

Public opinion journalism often reports polls that ask voters to self-assess the causal effect of big news events on their attitudes. For example, after former US president Donald Trump was indicted in June 2023 for allegedly mishandling classified documents, a CBS poll asked likely Republican primary voters "how might the indictment charges change their view of Trump"; 14 percent said "for the better," and 7 percent "for the worse,"

*Corresponding author: Matthew H. Graham, Department of Political Science, Temple University, 1801 N Broad St, Philadelphia, PA 19122, US; email: mattgraham@temple.edu.

https://doi.org/10.1093/poq/nfae061

implying a net increase in electoral support (CBS News 2023). A Reuters/IPSOS poll asked, "How does the latest criminal case against Donald Trump impact your likelihood of voting for him in the 2024 presidential election, if at all," with 31 percent of Republicans saying much more or somewhat more and 23 percent saying much less or somewhat less, again suggesting a net increase (Ipsos 2023).

As demonstrated in Graham and Coppock (2021), change format questions like these produce biased inferences about the effects of events on attitudes. They tend to overstate change in the congenial direction: supporters report becoming more supportive and opponents report becoming more opposed (Coppock 2022, ch. 2). One explanation for this bias is "response substitution," wherein subjects answer the question they want to respond to rather than the one they were asked (Gal and Rucker 2011; Yair and Huber 2020). Through this lens, respondents who say that indictments make them *more* supportive of Trump are trying to say that they support him *despite* the indictments.

In this paper, we study the case of Trump's indictments with the counterfactual format, a method of measuring self-reported attitude change that aims to improve upon the change format (Graham and Coppock 2021). Respondents assigned to use the counterfactual format were first asked to express their current attitude in light of the indictment, then asked what their attitude would have been if they had not heard the news. The difference is a measure of each subject's belief about the indictment's effect on their attitudes. Respondents could of course be wrong about this causal inference, but the approach ameliorates the response substitution problem:rather than having to lay aside their baseline preferences and beliefs about Trump and the indictment, respondents are able to express these as part of their expression of belief about the indictment's causal effect.

In collaboration with SurveyMonkey, we conducted an opinion poll weighted to national demographic targets that randomly assigned half the respondents to the change format and half to the counterfactual format. Respondents reported their self-assessments (using their randomly assigned question format) of the indictment's effect on (i) the belief that Trump committed the crimes in question, (ii) primary election support for Trump among Republican primary voters, and (iii) general election support for Trump among other respondents.

The change format exhibits its typical pattern of suggesting large effects in the congenial direction. Among Republican primary voters, 43 percent said the indictment made them "more likely" to support Trump in the primary and 16 percent said "less likely." By contrast, in the counterfactual format, the average Republican primary voter gives themselves a 64.1 percent chance of supporting Trump. When asked how they would have responded if they didn't know about the indictment, the average response was 65.7

percent, for an estimated effect of -1.6 percentage points. Whereas the change format implies the indictment is a net positive for Trump among Republican primary voters, the counterfactual format indicates the opposite.

Motivation

The string of indictments issued against Trump in 2023 were highly salient news events, prompting speculation about their effects on the voting public's beliefs and attitudes. Ideally, researchers could randomize exposure to news of an indictment, then compare average opinions across treatment and control as in a standard survey experiment. That design is not feasible in our setting, due to what Druckman and Leeper (2012) and others (Linos and Twist 2018) call the "pretreatment problem." If most people have already heard about the event, it is no longer possible to observe the "untreated" attitude they would have expressed if the event had not occurred. Our pretreatment problem is likely severe, as contemporary estimates of exposure to news of the indictments are very high: 93 percent, according to a YouGov poll (CBS News 2023), and 92 percent, according to a Reuters/IPSOS poll (Ipsos 2023).

The pretreatment problem leaves two options for estimating the effects of highly salient news events: time-series data and retrospective self-assessments. Interrupted time-series designs exploit repeated measurements of opinions before and after news events to estimate effects. FiveThirtyEight's average of pre- and postindictment polls, for instance, suggest that Trump's primary support fell modestly from 53.8 percent on the day before the documents indictment to 53.5 percent in the week after (FiveThirtyEight 2023b). However, the assumptions required to extract reliable causal inferences from such data are quite demanding (Muñoz, Falcó-Gimeno, and Hernández 2020). In particular, analysts must assume that no contemporaneous events also affect the relevant attitude and, further, that response rates do not change differently across types of voters after the event. Both assumptions are difficult to justify in the indictment setting, given the contemporaneous struggles of Trump's leading primary opponent, Ron DeSantis (acknowledged in FiveThirtyEight 2023b), and differential partisan nonresponse after political news events (Gelman et al. 2016).

Because of the pretreatment problem and the challenges associated with interrupted time series, researchers often resort to asking survey respondents for retrospective assessments of the causal effects of events on their attitudes. In this paper, we compare two approaches to retrospective self-assessments, the change format and the counterfactual format (Graham and Coppock 2021). While the counterfactual format does not guarantee unbiased inferences, we view it as the best option when widespread pretreatment is likely and time-series designs are not available or are difficult to defend.

Research Design

We surveyed 5,011 Americans between June 22 and 27, 2023, using SurveyMonkey's "river sample," wherein a random sample of the platform's over two million daily respondents to customer-generated surveys are invited to take an additional, voluntary survey. Because it is a nonprobability sample, it is not possible to calculate the overall response rate for this survey. Of the 6,877 respondents that began the survey, 5,011 completed it (73 percent).

We collected demographic information for use in weighting. None of the weighting variables exhibited missingness, as they were required for the response to be coded as complete. We used multistage raking to weight respondents by age, gender, race, education level, region, Census division, and state, using the 2019 American Community Survey. The weighted demographic distributions are close to the distributions from the 2021 American Community Survey (table A1). As an additional demonstration that our weighting procedure works as expected, we calculated a weighted estimate of approval of President Joe Biden (40.4 percent) from our survey and compared it with the June 26 average approval ratings calculated by FiveThirtyEight (40.3 percent; FiveThirtyEight 2023a). All estimates reported in this paper are weighted.

We randomly assigned respondents to one of two methods for retrospectively assessing causal effects, the change format or the counterfactual format. Because we assumed that the large majority of respondents were pretreated, our questions provided less detail than the implementations in Graham and Coppock (2021), who mostly sought to avoid questions that were likely to be affected by pretreatment. These two conditions are shown in table 1. Respondents assigned to the change format (first row) were asked about their belief in Trump's crime as well as their electoral support using the standard approach to retrospective self-assessments of causal effects. By contrast, the counterfactual format uses a sequence of two questions for each of these opinions. The first measures the level of opinion given the event occurred and the second measures the level supposing (counterfactually) the respondent did not know about the event.

Results

The two formats imply very different conclusions about how the indictment affected beliefs and attitudes toward Trump and his handling of the documents, as shown in table 2. Following the structure of the survey, our main analysis splits the results based on the primary in which the respondent plans to vote. The Appendix reproduces all tables and figures using party identification instead of primary vote intention.

Table 1. Randomized question format conditions in survey.

	Change format condition	Counterfactual format condition
Belief	**Q:** "As you may know, former President Donald Trump was recently indicted for removing classified information from the White House, including sensitive nuclear secrets. Does the indictment make you think it is more likely or less likely that Trump mishandled nuclear secrets?" [`More likely/ No change/Less Likely`]	**Q1:** "As you may know, former president Donald Trump was recently indicted for removing classified information from the White House, including sensitive nuclear secrets. In your opinion, how likely is it that Trump mishandled nuclear secrets?" [`0-100 scale`] **Q2:** "Suppose you did not know about the indictment. How would you have answered the following question: In your opinion, how likely is it that Trump mishandled nuclear secrets?" [`0-100 scale`]
Support	**Q:** *(for Republican primary voters)* "Does the indictment make you more or less likely to vote for Trump in the primary?" *(for all others)* "Imagine that the 2024 presidential election is between Joe Biden and Donald Trump. Does the indictment make you more or less likely to vote for Trump?" [`More likely/No change/Less Likely`]	**Q1:** *(for Republican primary voters)* "How likely are you to vote for Donald Trump in the 2024 Republican primary?" *(for all others)* "Imagine that the 2024 presidential election is between Joe Biden and Donald Trump. How likely are you to vote for Donald Trump?" [`0-100 scale`] **Q2:** "Suppose you did not know about the indictment. How would you have answered the following question: How likely are you to vote for Donald Trump?" [`0-100 scale`]

Among Republican primary voters, the change format suggests that the indictment strengthened Trump's position, making them less convinced that Trump mishandled documents and more supportive of Trump in the primary. When asked directly, just 16 percent of Republican primary voters said that the indictments increased their belief that Trump had mishandled documents.

Table 2. Average self-reported effect by primary and question format.

		Counterfactual format			Change format		
Topic	Primary turnout intention	Actual (average)	Predicted if not for indictment (average)	Diff.	More likely (%)	Less likely (%)	Diff. (pp)
Believe Trump mishandled docs	Republican	27.1	24.6	2.5	16.2	39.6	−23.4
				(0.6)			(2.8)
				$p < 0.001$			$p < 0.001$
	Democratic	85.3	79.5	5.8	76.0	5.0	71.0
				(0.6)			(2.3)
				$p < 0.001$			$p < 0.001$
	Neither	55.7	54.2	1.5	37.4	15.7	21.6
				(0.9)			(3.9)
				$p = 0.124$			$p < 0.001$
Vote for Trump (general election)	Democratic	11.1	10.1	0.9	8.0	60.2	−52.1
				(0.8)			(2.7)
				$p = 0.217$			$p < 0.001$
	Neither	42.2	41.9	0.3	20.3	30.8	−10.5
				(0.9)			(4.0)
				$p = 0.752$			$p = 0.009$
Vote for Trump (primary election)	Republican	64.1	65.7	−1.6	43.0	16.3	26.7
				(0.6)			(2.9)
				$p = 0.007$			$p < 0.001$

Note: The counterfactual format was measured on a 101-point percentage scale. Cell entries are means and differences-in-means. The change format was measured on a three-point scale: more likely, no difference, less likely. Cell entries are percentages and differences-in-percentages. Robust standard errors are in parentheses. All p-values are based on two-tailed tests of the null hypothesis of no difference.

Many more, 40 percent, said that the indictments made them less likely to believe he had mishandled documents. Similarly, 43 percent said the indictment made them more likely to support Trump, against just 16 percent saying "less likely."

By contrast, the counterfactual format suggests that the indictment put a small dent in Trump's still-strong position among Republican primary voters. After the indictment, the average Republican primary voter said that there is a 27.1 percent chance that Trump mishandled classified documents. They estimated that if they had not known about the indictment, they would have said 24.6 percent on average, a difference of 2.5 percentage points (s.e. = 0.6, $p < 0.01$). Republican primary voters also thought that the indictment made them less likely to vote for Trump in the primary: on average, they reported a 64.1 percent chance of doing so, compared with 65.7 percent if the indictment had not been issued (difference = 1.6 pp, s.e. = 0.6, $p = 0.02$).

Among Democratic primary voters, the two formats also paint different pictures. Using the change format, 76 percent said the indictment made them more likely to believe that Trump mishandled documents, with 60 percent saying it made them less likely to vote for Trump. The opposite sentiments stood in the single digits. The counterfactual format suggests that the indictment modestly increased their belief that Trump mishandled documents, with no effect on their general election preferences. The average Democratic primary voter said that there was an 85.3 percent chance that Trump mishandled documents and guessed that if the indictment had not been issued, they would have said 79.5 percent (difference = 5.8 pp, s.e. = 0.6, $p < 0.01$). Either way, they said there was only a 10 to 11 percent chance they would vote for Trump (difference = 0.9 pp, s.e. = 0.8, $p = 0.22$).

Among those who do not plan to vote in either party's primary, the change format suggests that the indictment modestly hurt Trump. Pluralities of about 45 to 50 percent said that the indictment had no effect on their views or vote intentions. Those who reported an effect were more likely to say the indictment increased their belief that Trump mishandled documents (difference = 21.6 pp, s.e. = 3.9, $p < 0.01$) and made them less likely to vote for Trump in the general election (difference = -10.5 pp, s.e. = 4.0, $p < 0.01$). By contrast, the counterfactual format suggests indifference: these respondents report that the indictment slightly revised their beliefs in favor of the idea that Trump mishandled documents (+1.8 pp, s.e. = 0.9, $p = 0.05$), with no substantial effect on vote choice (+0.1 pp, s.e. = 0.9, $p = 0.89$).

Why Do the Answers Differ?

The top-line results of the change and counterfactual forms differ in both direction and magnitude. We consider two possible explanations for this discrepancy, which previous research was unable to disentangle. The first is the response substitution explanation: partisans use the change question to report the level of their attitudes rather than the change in their attitudes. A second possibility is that the coarsened outcome scales of earlier iterations of the counterfactual format were under-sensitive to small changes, making for an unfair comparison to the change format. Relative to previous implementations of the counterfactual format that used binary, five-, or seven-point scales (Graham and Coppock 2021), our use of a quasi-continuous 101-point scale allows for finer comparisons with the change format.

Figure 1 provides suggestive evidence in support of the response substitution explanation and against the under-sensitivity explanation. In each panel of the figure, we compare the fraction of subjects reporting positive, negative, or no change in their attitudes using the two formats. For the counterfactual format, we have to choose a threshold of difference between the first and second responses that amounts to "change." For example, at the 10 position on the horizontal axis, we count differences smaller than 10 points as "no change." At the 0 position, any difference is counted as change.[1]

If the "under-sensitivity" theory fully explains why the formats yield different answers, the fractions in each of the three categories using the change format would equal the fractions when using the smallest possible threshold for change in the counterfactual format (at the 0 point on the x-axis). In fact, this pattern is approximately what we observe in figure 1a among those who do not intend to vote in either party primary. At the point where the change and counterfactual formats meet, the proportions in each category are similar.

However, we do not observe the same alignment among partisans. In figure 1b, huge fractions of Republican primary voters report that the indictment made them think it was "less likely" Trump mishandled documents and make them "more likely" to support him in the primary. Even at the smallest possible threshold for change, the percentages reporting changes in the congenial direction are substantially reduced by the counterfactual format. We see this same basic pattern (reversed) among Democratic primary voters in figure 1c. Even when very small differences are classified as attitude change, there are many fewer self-reports of change in the congenial direction.

1. Appendix table A.2 presents equivalent results in tabular form.

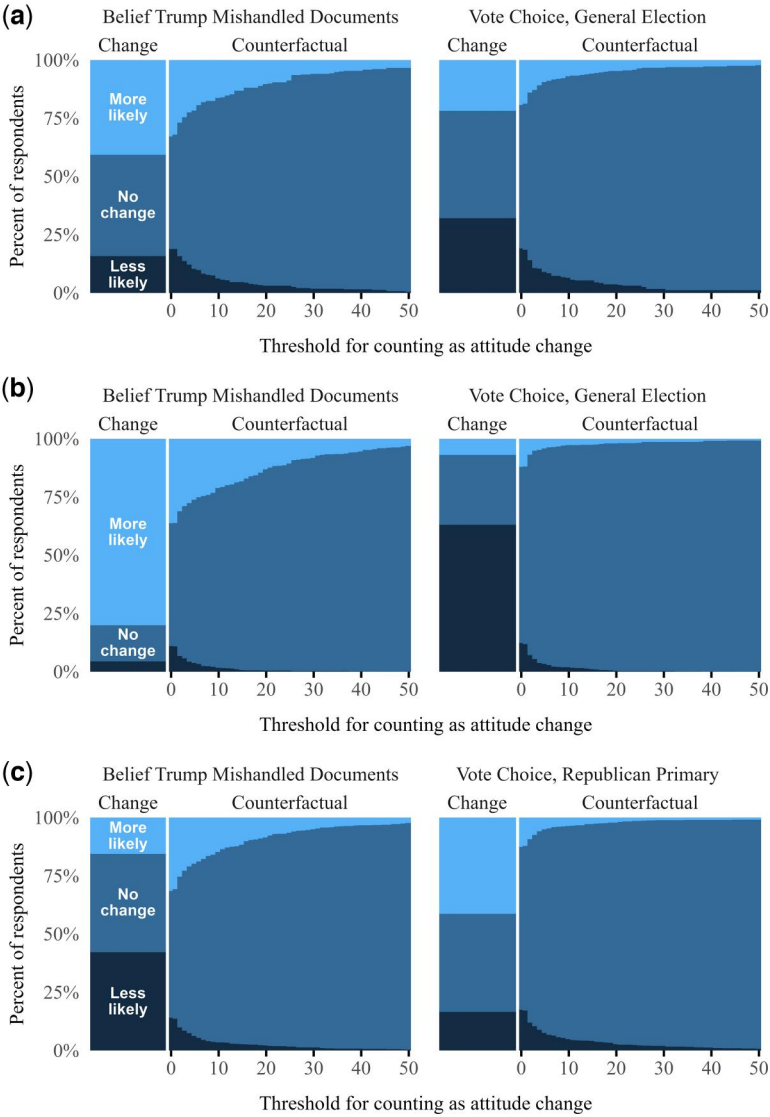

Figure 1. Distribution of self-reported effects by primary and question format. The figure compares the distribution of self-reported change in the change and counterfactual formats. In each panel, the stacked bar chart labeled "change" displays the proportion saying more likely, no change, and less likely. The area chart displays the equivalent proportions for the counterfactual format under different possible thresholds for attitude change. Figure 1a displays results for respondents who did not plan to vote in either primary (N = 754). Figure 1b and 1c displays results for those who plan to vote in the Republican primary (N = 2,026) and Democratic primary (N = 1,953).

It is the pattern of partisan congeniality in figure 1 that leads us to put more stock in the response substitution theory. Among those who do not intend to vote in either primary, the change and counterfactual formats actually give quite similar answers, which under the response substitution theory would occur quite by accident. When reporting the middling level of their attitudes, they happen to give answers that are quite close to the middling change in their attitudes. Among partisans, however, reporting very high or very low attitude levels yields very incorrect change estimates, which is precisely what we observe.

In sum, the evidence presented in figure 1 does not support the idea that differences between the change and counterfactual formats can be explained by differential sensitivity to small amounts of change. We find bias due to response substitution to be the more plausible explanation, though of course this evidence does not constitute proof of that theory.

Discussion

Using the case of Trump's indictment for allegedly mishandling classified documents, we assessed the usefulness of the counterfactual format for studying the effects of high-salience news events on public opinion. Did the indictment harm Trump's political prospects or did it strengthen his support? Using the counterfactual format, we find that the indictment put a small dent in Trump's still-strong position among Republican primary voters. We found positive effects on beliefs that Trump mishandled documents and negative or insignificant effects on candidate support. These conclusions stand in contrast to the more commonly used change format, which suggested that Democrats became ever more opposed to Trump and Republicans became ever more supportive.

The case of Trump's indictments exemplifies the two conditions under which we would recommend the counterfactual format for use assessing the effects of news events on public opinion: first, when most of the survey population has been "pretreated" by major news coverage, and second, when contemporaneous surveys are not suitable for a time-series analysis. Given the difficulties in drawing causal inferences from time-series data highlighted by Muñoz, Falcó-Gimeno, and Hernández (2020), we think the counterfactual format may be an attractive method in many news settings and certainly outperforms the change format in any of them.

Our finding that Trump's indictments likely had small, negative effects on Republican primary voters' support for Trump contradicts some popular narratives about the effects of scandal. In this case, we find that scandal is bad for candidates, consistent with much academic research on the topic (Markovits and Silverstein 1988; Darr et al. 2019; Hamel and Miller 2019; Dziuda and Howell 2021; Rottinghaus 2023).

Our design also sheds light on the differences between the counterfactual and change formats. Earlier studies of the counterfactual format used coarser outcomes scales, which may be under-sensitive to small amounts of attitude change. In the present study, we used a finer, 101-point scale. Yet even with added granularity, we find far less change—and in particular, less congenial change—than the change format implies. This design feature gives us a firmer basis from which to conclude that the change format exaggerates the proportion of people whose attitudes change by any substantively meaningful amount. Although existing research finds that more granular versions of the change format are biased (Coppock 2022), future investigations of this issue could benefit from putting granular versions of the change and counterfactual formats in the same survey.

Applying the counterfactual format also highlighted some untested potential limitations. The fact that it is composed of two consecutive, similar questions may make it prone to anchoring bias (where responses to the first question influence responses to the second question) or straightlining (where subjects give the same answer to both questions out of inattention or satisficing). In future research, anchoring could potentially be addressed by placing the questions further apart in the survey, while likely straightliners could be screened out using an adaptation of mock vignette checks (Kane, Velez, and Barabas 2023).

In sum, even as we acknowledge that the counterfactual format is only an approximation, our application to the case of Trump's indictments showcases its utility in a set of cases that are often the subject of public opinion research: studying the causal effects of widely publicized, potentially significant events. We encourage survey practitioners to retire the change format and to adopt the counterfactual approach as a standard feature of polling about breaking news events.

Appendixes

Appendix A. Survey Information

Table A.1. Unweighted and weighted demographic distributions and Biden approval.

		SurveyMonkey poll			
Demographic	Category	Unweighted (%)	Weighted (%)	ACS 2021 (%)	FiveThirtyEight (%)
Gender	Male	48.1	47.5	49.0	–
	Female	49.9	50.2	51.0	–
Age	18-24	5.5	12.1	11.7	–
	25-34	10.3	17.5	17.4	–
	35-44	13.1	16.7	17.0	–
	45-54	17.0	16.0	15.7	–
	55-64	21.0	16.6	16.6	–
	65+	33.0	21.0	21.6	–
Race and ethnicity	White, non-Hispanic	68.2	63.9	63.6	–
	Black, non-Hispanic	11.5	12.7	11.8	–
	Hispanic	12.5	16.4	16.9	–
	Asian, non-Hispanic	2.7	5.4	6.0	–
	Other, non-Hispanic	5.0	1.6	1.7	–
Educational attainment	High school or less	17.9	38.5	38.0	–
	Some college/ associate's	31.1	30.5	29.5	–
	Bachelor's	28.5	19.5	20.2	–
	Graduate degree	22.5	11.5	12.3	–
Biden approval	Approve	43.3	40.4	–	40.3
	Disapprove	54.0	56.3	–	55.2

Note: SurveyMonkey poll data are weighted to the 2019 American Community Survey (ACS). Percentages for the 2021 ACS are based on the ACS 1-Year Estimates Public Use Microdata Sample available from https://data.census.gov/mdat. FiveThirtyEight data are average Biden approval ratings as of June 26, 2023 (FiveThirtyEight 2023a).

Appendix B. Supplementary Results

Table A2 is a numerical version of figure 1.

Table A.2. Magnitude of self-reported effect sizes by primary and question format.

(a) Beliefs

Effect	Format	Republican %	Democratic %	Neither %
Positive	Change	16.2	76.0	37.4
	Counterfactual	33.3	36.5	29.5
	1–5%	13.1	9.7	11.3
	6–10%	6.1	4.9	4.8
	11–20%	6.6	8.4	6.2
	20% or more	7.5	13.4	7.3
Negative	Change	39.6	5.0	15.7
	Counterfactual	15.0	11.9	20.5
	1–5%	7.9	6.5	9.2
	6–10%	2.6	3.1	4.8
	11–20%	1.5	1.3	2.1
	20% or more	3.0	1.0	4.3
No effect	Change	44.3	19.0	46.9
	Counterfactual	51.8	51.6	50.0

(b) Vote choice

Effect	Format	Republican %	Democratic %	Neither %
Positive	Change	43.0	8.0	20.3
	Counterfactual	13.0	13.3	22.6
	1–5%	7.8	7.4	11.1
	6–10%	1.4	1.5	2.7
	11–20%	2.2	1.0	4.1
	20% or more	1.5	3.4	4.6
Negative	Change	16.3	60.2	30.8
	Counterfactual	17.7	14.1	19.9
	1–5%	9.4	8.8	8.3
	6–10%	2.2	1.2	4.1
	11–20%	2.0	3.3	3.5
	20% or more	4.1	0.9	3.9
No effect	Change	40.7	31.8	48.8
	Counterfactual	69.3	72.5	57.5

Note: Table presents summary statics based on figure 1. Each cell entry is the percentage of respondents giving a response. The three pairs of "change" and "counterfactual" rows give the percentage of respondents who indicated that the indictment had a positive effect, a negative effect, and no effect. Nested under the counterfactual rows are the percentage of respondents indicating each amount of change.

Table A.3. Average self-reported effect by partisan identity.

		Counterfactual format			Change format		
Topic	Primary turnout intention	Actual (average)	Predicted if not for indictment (average)	Diff.	More likely (%)	Less likely (%)	Diff. (pp)
Believe Trump mishandled docs	Republican	25.0	22.5	+2.5	16.7	38.5	−21.8
				(0.6)			(2.8)
				$p < 0.001$			$p < 0.001$
	Democrat	85.4	80.3	+5.2	73.9	6.1	67.8
				(0.6)			(2.5)
				$p < 0.001$			$p < 0.001$
	Independent	59.2	56.7	+2.5	39.6	15.3	24.2
				(1.0)			(4.4)
				$p = 0.017$			$p < 0.001$
Vote for Trump (general election)	Republican	64.8	61.4	+3.4	33.8	15.3	18.5
				(3.1)			(7.4)
				$p = 0.277$			$p = 0.013$
	Democrat	8.5	7.9	+0.5	7.1	61.8	−54.7
				(0.7)			(2.6)
				$p = 0.451$			$p < 0.001$
	Independent	37.5	37.0	+0.6	19.0	32.6	−13.6
				(1.0)			(4.8)
				$p = 0.585$			$p = 0.005$

(continued)

Table A.3. Continued.

		Counterfactual format			Change format		
Topic	Primary turnout intention	Actual (average)	Predicted if not for indictment (average)	Diff.	More likely (%)	Less likely (%)	Diff. (pp)
Vote for Trump (primary election)	Republican	67.4	69.1	−1.6	45.8	14.1	31.7
				(0.6)			(3.0)
				$p = 0.010$			$p < 0.001$
	Democrat	35.3	33.7	+1.6	21.0	39.9	−18.9
				(1.1)			(15.7)
				$p = 0.182$			$p = 0.235$
	Independent	42.5	44.9	−2.3	23.4	27.4	−4.0
				(2.6)			(12.2)
				$p = 0.373$			$p = 0.742$

Note: This table is identical to main text table 2, except that it uses party identity instead of the respondent's intended primary vote. Robust standard errors are in parentheses. All p-values are based on two-tailed tests of the null hypothesis of no difference.

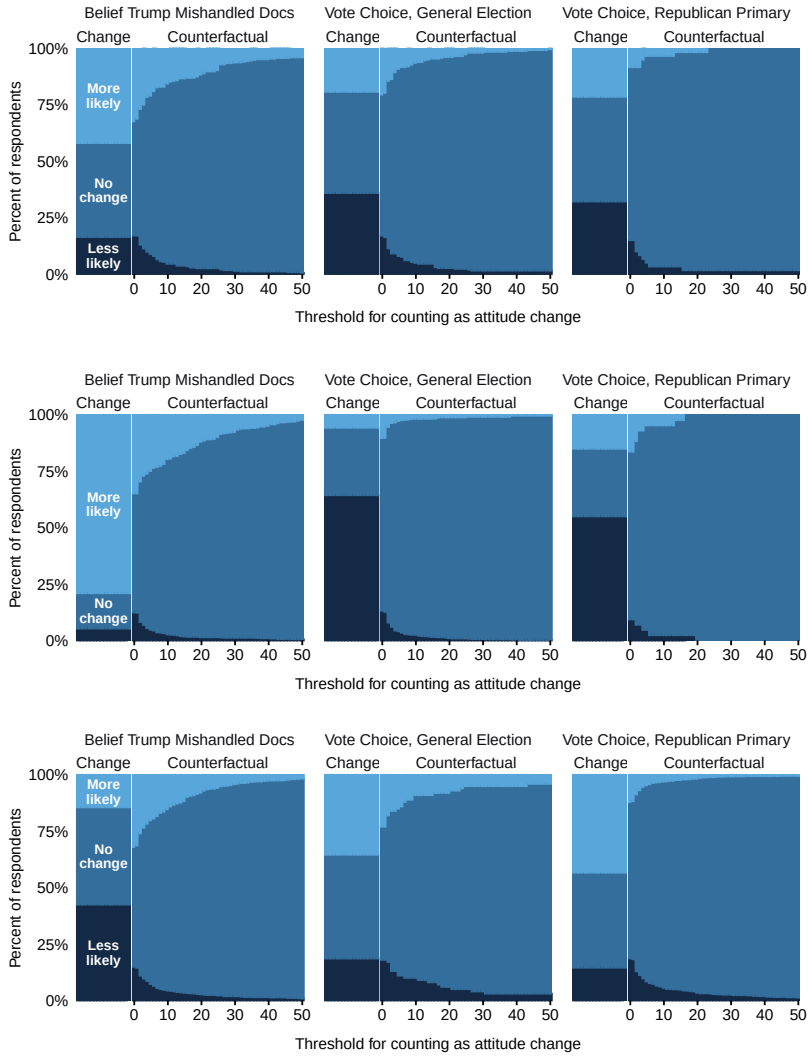

Figure A.1. Distribution of self-reported effects by partisan identity. This figure is the equivalent of figure 1, but splits voters by party identity rather than primary vote intention.

Table A3 and figure A1 reproduce the main results using partisan identity rather than primary vote intention. The results are similar to the main text. For the belief that Trump mishandled documents, all of the estimates in the top three rows of table A3 are within a few percentage points of the equivalent estimates in main text table 2, and the first column of figure A1 bears a

striking resemblance to the first column in main text figure 1. Vote intentions are similar for respondents whose party identity matches their primary vote intention. For example, Republicans who plan to vote in the Republican primary are a bit more supportive of Trump than Republican primary voters overall (67.4 percent versus 64.1 percent) and predict their support would also have been higher if not for the indictment (69.1 percent versus 65.7 percent), leading to identical estimates of the indictment's effect on vote choice (-1.6, s.e. = 0.6).

There are more rows than in main text table 2, and more columns than in main text figure 1, because partisan identity does not exactly line up with intention to vote in the Republican primary. More specifically, some Republican identifiers said they would not vote in the Republican primary and were thus asked about the general election, while some Democrats and Independent identifiers said they would vote in the Republican primary and were thus asked about it. Among such respondents, the standard errors in table A3 are usually too large to make any inferences about average effects on vote choice. In figure A1, the similarity of the center and right columns suggests that party identifiers had similar distributions of responses regardless of their primary vote intention.

Acknowledgements

The authors thank Laura Wronski of SurveyMonkey for advice and support, and the editors and reviewers for their helpful suggestions.

Data Availability

Replication data and documentation are available at https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/QDOBJF.

References

CBS News. 2023. "CBS News Poll: After Trump indictment, most see security risk, but Republicans see politics." https://www.cbsnews.com/news/cbs-news-poll-most-see-security-risk-after-trump indictment/.

Coppock, Alexander. 2022. *Persuasion in Parallel: How Information Changes Minds about Politics*. Chicago Studies in American Politics. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Darr, Joshua, Nathan Kalmoe, Kathleen Searles, Mingxiao Sui, Raymond Pingree, Brian Watson, Kirill Bryanov, and Martina Santia. 2019. "Collision with Collusion: Partisan Reaction to the Trump-Russia Scandal." *Perspectives on Politics* 17:772–87.

Druckman, James N., and Thomas J. Leeper. 2012. "Learning More from Political Communication Experiments: Pretreatment and Its Effects." *American Journal of Political Science* 56:875–96.

Dziuda, Wioletta, and William Howell. 2021. "Political Scandal: A Theory." *American Journal of Political Science* 65:197–209.

FiveThirtyEight. 2023a. "How Popular is Joe Biden?". https://projects.fivethirtyeight.com/biden-approval-rating/. Date accessed August 1, 2023.

———. 2023b. "What The Polls Say After Trump's Second Indictment." https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/what-the-polls-say-after-trumps-second indictment/. Date accessed June 20, 2023.

Gal, David, and Derek D. Rucker. 2011. "Answering the Unasked Question: Response Substitution in Consumer Surveys." *Journal of Marketing Research (Research)* 48: 185–95.

Gelman, Andrew, Sharad Goel, Douglas Rivers, and David Rothschild. 2016. "The Mythical Swing Voter." *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 11:103–30.

Graham, Matthew, and Alexander Coppock. 2021. "Asking About Attitude Change." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 85:28–53.

Hamel, Brian, and Michael Miller. 2019. "How Voters Punish and Donors Protect Legislators Embroiled in Scandal." *Political Research Quarterly* 72:117–31.

Ipsos. 2023. "Reuters/Ipsos Poll: Despite indictments, Trump leads primary field as DeSantis loses support (August 2-3, 2023)." https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2023-08/ReutersIpsosTrumpIndictmentWave5FederalChargesTopline080320230.pdf.

Kane, John V., Yamil R. Velez, and Jason Barabas. 2023. "Analyze the Attentive and Bypass Bias: Mock Vignette Checks in Survey Experiments." *Political Science Research and Methods* 11:293–310.

Linos, Katerina, and Kimberly Twist. 2018. "Diverse Pre-Treatment Effects in Survey Experiments." *Journal of Experimental Political Science* 5:148–58.

Markovits, Andrei S., and Mark Silverstein. 1988. *The Politics of Scandal: Power and Process in Liberal Democracies*. Holmes & Meier New York.

Muñoz, Jordi, Albert Falcó-Gimeno, and Enrique Hernández. 2020. "Unexpected Event during Survey Design: Promise and Pitfalls for Causal Inference." *Political Analysis* 28: 186–206.

Rottinghaus, Brandon. 2023. "Do Scandals Matter?" *Political Research Quarterly* 76:1932–43.

Yair, Omer, and Gregory A. Huber. 2020. "How Robust is Evidence of Perceptual Partisan Bias in Survey Responses? A New Approach for Studying Expressive Responding." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 84:469–92.

Public Opinion Quarterly, 2025, 00, 1–18
https://doi.org/10.1093/poq/nfae061
Research note