

Polarization and Support for Undemocratic Behavior: The Case of Russia*

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Abstract

When do autocrats pay an electoral cost for subverting democracy? Research in democracies—and some authoritarian contexts—suggests that partisan attachments can lead voters to look past the undemocratic behavior of their copartisan leaders in polarized societies. Although ideological and partisan attachments are quite weak in contemporary electoral autocracies, supporters of such regimes often have a strong emotional aversion toward the opposition, who the regime portrays as traitors or fifth columns. We hypothesize that regime supporters who hold such attitudes will be less likely to punish regime candidates who engage in undemocratic behavior. We examine this claim using a vignette experiment on a face-to-face survey in Russia conducted just before the 2021 State Duma elections. Results suggest that regime supporters who express antipathy toward the regime’s staunchest opposition—Alexei Navalny and his supporters—are more likely to condone specific anti-democratic actions that sideline Navalny’s movement. Regime supporters were not, however, more likely to excuse other types of undemocratic behavior by regime candidates that were less clearly targeted at Navalny and his organization. Negative affect toward the opposition may thus help explain how autocrats survive the periodic rise of challengers that occurs in all electoral authoritarian systems—and why they sometimes face backlash for their undemocratic actions.

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1 Introduction

Electoral authoritarian regimes subvert democratic norms in order to shield themselves from competition. And yet studies show that many citizens support key features of democracy even in electoral autocracies ([Pietsch, Miller, and Karp, 2015](#); [Claassen, 2020](#); [Reuter and Szakonyi, 2021](#); [Hale, 2011](#)). This contradiction poses a potential danger for autocratic regimes as many of the undemocratic actions that they take are potentially unpopular. When do authoritarian regimes risk being punished by citizens for undermining democracy? The question is especially salient because most modern dictatorships rely on some degree of (genuine) popular support in order to maintain themselves in power (e.g. [Guriev and Treisman, 2022](#)).

A number of scholars have suggested that incumbents who violate democratic norms may escape electoral backlash if their supporters have strong partisan attachments that lead them to excuse or downplay the undemocratic behavior of their copartisan leaders ([Krishnarajan, 2022](#)). In short, voters sometimes appear to place partisanship over democratic principles ([Svolik, 2019](#); [Graham and Svolik, 2020](#)). This problem may be particularly acute in polarized societies where fear of the other party taking power is pronounced, such that voters are willing to tolerate undemocratic actions in order to make sure their opponents are defeated.

Using original survey data from Russia, this paper examines whether polarized attitudes, and especially antipathy toward political opponents, lead supporters of autocratic regimes to look past the undemocratic behaviors that their leaders use to tilt the electoral playing field ([Levitsky and Way, 2010](#); [Schedler, 2013](#)). Following [Druckman et al. \(2021\)](#), we define affective polarization as "the tendency for partisans to dislike and distrust those from the other party" (28). Since most contemporary autocracies like Russia deemphasize ideology, promote catch-all policies, and instead seek legitimacy on the basis of performance (e.g. [Guriev and Treisman, 2022](#)), ideological attachments to these regimes tend to be weak. Therefore, to study how polarized attitudes condition the willingness of Russian voters to punish incumbents for democratic subversion, we focus on antipathy toward out-partisans—that is, emotional aversion to the opposition—rather

than policy disagreement, more narrowly (e.g. [Svolik, 2020](#)).¹ We expect that affectively polarized regime supporters will be less likely than other regime supporters to punish regime candidates who engage in undemocratic behavior.

Moreover, while affective polarization may include elements of both in-party attachment and out-party animosity, we draw attention specifically to negative attitudes toward out-partisans since, in addition to being non-ideological, many modern autocracies eschew grassroots party-building. As a result, party identity tends to be quite weak. Support for the regime is often wide, but shallow. Thus, to the extent affective attitudes play a role, we expect it will be those that are focused on negative emotions toward the opposition.

We examine these arguments in the setting of contemporary Russia, an archetypal electoral autocracy. We draw on survey data from an original, face-to-face pre-election survey of over 2,700 voters carried out in September 2021. As we show, most Russians do not hold strong ideological positions and their ideological views do not cohere on opposite ends of a political spectrum (or spectrums). Partisan attachments are also quite shallow, with very few regime supporters reporting strong attachments to the ruling party. At the same time, however, we find relatively high levels of antipathy among regime supporters toward the most staunch segments of the opposition: Alexei Navalny and his supporters.

To test our claims, we conducted a vignette framing experiment that primed survey respondents to evaluate a United Russia (UR) politician who was known to engage in different types of democratic subversion (or no subversion in the control group). After considering the vignette, respondents were asked the likelihood that they would vote for the candidate. The results suggest that voters, including many regime supporters, do generally punish UR candidates for engaging in democratic subversion. Indeed for most of the subversion treatments—ballot box fraud, attempting to ban YouTube, banning protests—we find voters with polarized attitudes² are no less likely than others to punish

¹Though, of course, policy disagreement and ideological difference may serve as a basis for affective polarization, they are not required ([Mason, 2018a](#)).

²Whether defined in ideological terms, as positive partisanship/in-party attachment, or out-partisan antipathy.

the ruling party for undemocratic behavior. Affective polarization does not seem to affect the propensity of voters to punish regime candidates for illiberal actions that are not framed explicitly as targeting the object of voters' antipathy.

We do, however, uncover evidence that regime supporters who express antipathy toward the regime's staunchest opposition—Alexei Navalny and his supporters—are more likely to condone specific anti-democratic actions that sideline Navalny's movement. Affective polarization makes voters more likely to overlook undemocratic behaviors that undermine Navalny's electoral prospects, by banning his supporters from running for office. Thus, to the extent we find evidence of affectively polarized attitudes conditioning voters' responses to undemocratic behavior by incumbents, it is only outpartisan antipathy toward Navalny that has an effect. By contrast, in-party attachment (what some may term "positive partisanship"), appears to offer regime candidates in Russia little protection for undemocratic actions.

While Russia is in many ways different than the democratic countries that have been widely studied in the polarization literature,³ there are nonetheless some similarities. As in the U.S., out-group animosity in Russia has been increasing in recent years as the regime has turned to a more pro-active strategy of demonizing Navalny and his supporters on state media (alongside growing state media dominance). At the same time, in-group favoritism has declined with falling support for and trust in the United Russia party. Just as changes in elite behavior and in the media environment have contributed to rising out-party antipathy in many democratic settings, so too have they contributed to greater polarization of attitudes in Russia, as well.

Russia of course also differs in important ways from many other countries studied in the polarization literature. It has lower than average levels of societal polarization—i.e. fewer individuals hold deeply polarized attitudes—and it lacks two (or more) relatively well-matched political blocs. Yet even in the absence of deep social bifurcation and in a context with many politically disengaged citizens, we find familiar markers of affectively polarized attitudes; moreover, we find that these attitudes shape citizens' acceptance of undemocratic strategies (that they otherwise profess not to support)—though only

³See e.g. [Druckman et al. \(2021\)](#) on these trends in the U.S.

under certain conditions. When undemocratic actions clearly target the object of their antipathy regime partisans are more likely to look the other way. Our findings thus demonstrate that while affectively polarized attitudes do not give autocrats carte blanche to undermine democratic norms, fomenting out-group antipathy may enable regimes to specifically marginalize their opponents without suffering significant popular backlash. We thus shift the agenda on affective polarization from the study of how democracy is subverted to how autocrats survive the periodic rise of challengers that occurs in all electoral authoritarian systems.

2 Affective Polarization and Support for

Undemocratic Leaders

In recent years, polarization has emerged as a prominent explanation of democratic backsliding in both academic and popular accounts. Indeed, several episodes of democratic erosion, including in Venezuela, Turkey, Hungary, Poland, and the US, appear to conform to this pattern (McCoy, Rahman, and Somer, 2018; Haggard and Kaufman, 2021; Chiopris, Nalepa, and Vanberg, 2021; Luo and Przeworski, 2019; Nalepa and Cinar, 2021). While polarization may undermine democracy in a myriad of ways, we are most concerned in this paper with the notion that voters in polarized societies look past or excuse the undemocratic behavior of co-partisan politicians because their political loyalties "trump" their (possibly real) commitment to democratic principles. This leads them to continue voting for candidates who undermine democratic norms (e.g. Svoboda 2019).

The literature on this topic suggests that democracy may be imperiled by two types of polarization: *ideological* (i.e., a profound disagreement over policies) or *affective* (i.e., visceral dislike of opposing parties and their supporters). Although each type of polarization describes a divided society, they may reflect different types of division.

Building on work in social psychology that studies the power of social identities to shape behavior and emotion (Mackie, Devos, and Smith, 2000; Brewer and Pierce, 2005; Smith, Seger, and Mackie, 2007; Tajfel and Turner, 1979), and work in political science that portrays party identification as social identity (Mason, 2015; Malka and Lelkes, 2010;

[Green, Palmquist, and Schickler, 2004](#); [Campbell et al., 1960](#)), some scholars assert that once political identification becomes salient, it can drive political animosity and politicized emotions (i.e., fear, anger). Other scholars suggest that strong attachments to one's party are not necessary for strong feelings of out-partisan enmity to emerge (e.g. [Abramowitz and Webster, 2018](#)). Either way, disdain for one's political opponents has the potential to shape political behavior.

Affective and ideological polarization may go together, but there is no theoretical reason to assume that they must. Empirically, because they are endogenous, affective polarization and policy differences are often inseparable. A number of studies suggest that there are voters (and societies) who are affectively polarized, but not ideologically polarized (see [Iyengar and Krupenkin, 2018](#); [Mason, 2015](#); [Iyengar et al., 2019](#)). A body of recent research in American politics has aimed to cleanly identify the effect of one aspect of polarization or the other (e.g. [Dias and Lelkes, 2021](#); [Orr and Huber, 2020](#); [Druckman et al., 2021](#)). In comparative research, [Orhan \(2022b\)](#) finds that affective polarization is positively correlated with the likelihood of democratic backsliding in a cross-sectional sample of 53 countries, while ideological polarization has no demonstrable connection. Similarly, using a conjoint experiment in Turkey [Orhan \(2022a\)](#) finds that affective polarization has a marginally greater effect on support for democratic backsliding than does ideological polarization. Our task here is not to identify the causal effect of out-party antipathy as distinct from policy difference or ideological polarization, but rather to show that affective polarization (however it comes about) affects voters' tolerance for undemocratic behavior by their political leaders.

Scholars have argued that ideological polarization can undermine democracy because intense policy disagreements among political elites push citizens to prioritize their ideological interests over democratic norms ([Svolik, 2019](#)). Ideologically polarized partisans, the argument goes, understand that punishing an in-party politician who is violating democratic norms would make it more likely that the policies they oppose will be enacted. ([Graham and Svolik, 2020](#); [Carey et al., 2020](#)). Thus, strong ideologues might continue supporting undemocratic candidates.

By contrast, the argument linking affective polarization to democratic erosion focuses

on how strong emotional affect might lead voters to look past the undemocratic behavior of their co-partisans. Strong emotional attachment to one's party, strong emotional aversion to the out party, or both make it psychologically costly to punish one's own party to the benefit of the out party (Gidengil, Stolle, and Bergeron-Boutin, 2021; Kingzette et al., 2021; Orhan, 2022b; Şaşmaz, Yağcı, and Ziblatt, 2022).

In many contemporary authoritarian regimes like Russia, incumbents prefer to deemphasize ideology and instead pursue a catch-all or populist platform (e.g. Guriev and Treisman, 2022). Such regimes often depoliticize the public sphere and ideological attachments are typically weak. To the extent that polarization leads regime voters to look past the undemocratic behavior of incumbents, we believe that it will be the affective sort that matters. Thus, we argue that affectively polarized regime supporters will be less likely than other regime supporters to punish regime candidates who engage in undemocratic behavior.

Most contemporary dictatorships also avoid the type of grassroots party building that characterized mass mobilizational regimes in the 20th century (Guriev and Treisman, 2022). Typified by communist regimes, mass-mobilizational dictatorships used state-administered mass organizations to inculcate society in the official ideology. By contrast, most contemporary regimes do not ask their subjects to be ardent supporters, just that they acquiesce. Given the lack of strong partisan ties in autocracies like Russia, we expect that out-partisan animosity—emotional aversion to the opposition—should be more relevant than in-partisan attachment when it comes to excusing undemocratic behavior by regime candidates.

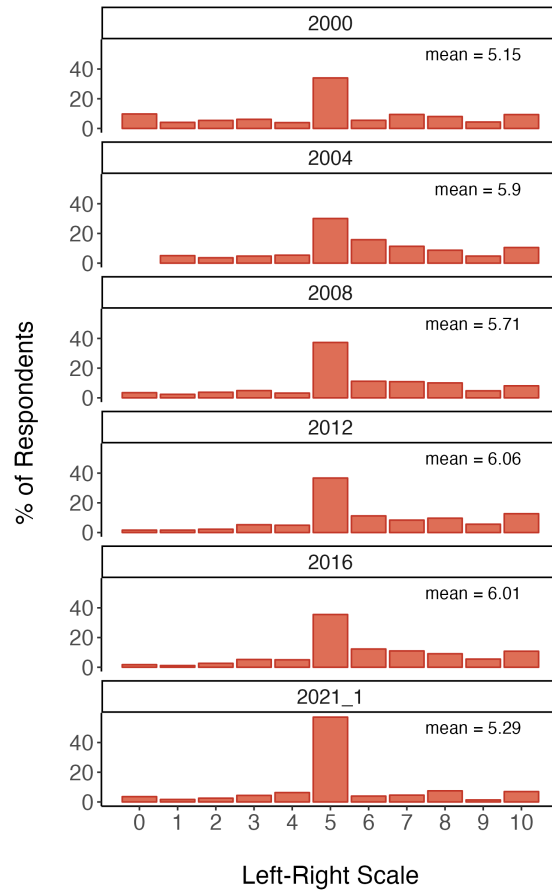
3 Polarization in Russia

3.1 Ideological and Issue-based Polarization

Since its emergence in the late 1990s, Russia's ruling party, United Russia, has sought to dominate the country's party system by pursuing vaguely centrist, or right-of-center, policies under a catch-all platform. A brief glance, in Figure 1, at two decades of survey data on left-right self-placement in Russia shows clearly that there is no trend toward

growing ideological polarization. This is consistent with the Putin regime's nonideological character until at least the start of his third term and suggests that his subsequent "conservatism" (Evans, 2015) has had little effect on left-right position. If anything, centrist self-placements have become even more dominant over the period of UR's rule.

Figure 1: Russian Political Ideology on Left-Right Scale since 2000

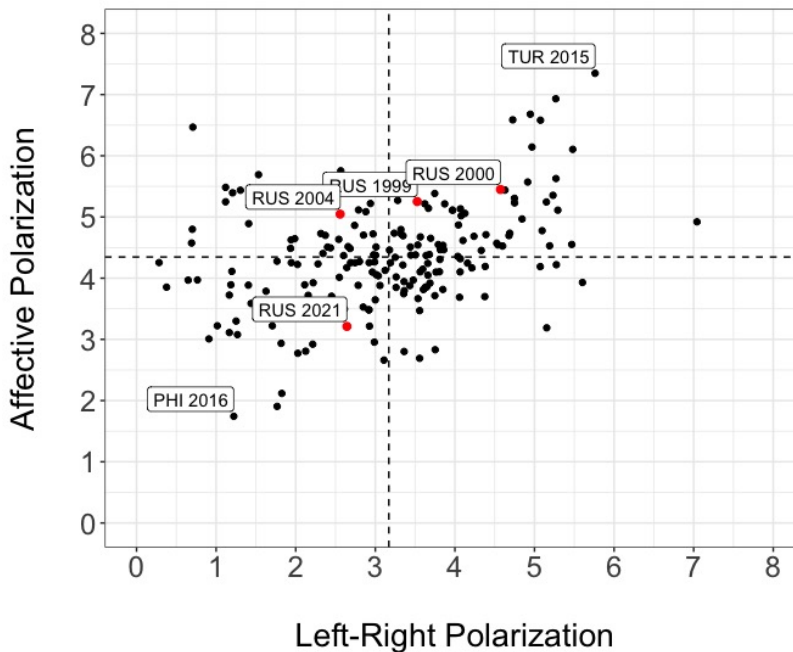


Source: Russian Election Studies, 2000-2021.

Further confirming the impression that ideological polarization in Russia is low, Russians express broad agreement on a variety of policy issues, as shown in Appendix Figure A1. With the partial exception of mandatory vaccination against COVID-19, Russians overwhelmingly take a similar position on issues from the importance of traditional values, to raising taxes to addressing inequality, price controls, pension reform, increasing redistribution, and mitigating climate change. It is also notable that policy preferences

dominant among the public do not all align with the policies Putin has pursued: large majorities support price controls, which Putin and United Russia have rejected, and oppose the government’s 2018 proposal to raise the retirement age. Together, this evidence suggests that both policy preferences and issue-based polarization play a less central role in Russian politics than they do in contexts where parties are more programmatic and their platforms more clearly ideological.

Figure 2: How Polarized Is Russia in Comparative Perspective?



Note: Dotted lines indicate the sample arithmetic means of affective (y-axis) and left-right polarization (x-axis). Replicating and extending Reiljan’s (2019) country-level polarization measures, we calculate the affective and left-right polarization scores for each individual in a country (N=54) for a given election (N=170). Individual scores of each political party were then summed and mean values were computed. Finally, all mean values of party scores were weighted with the vote shares of the other parties and all scores were summed.

Figure 2 affirms some of these points in a comparative context. Using data from the CSES and our own survey, it places Russia’s level of ideological polarization amongst similar data from 54 other countries. The data should be interpreted with caution due to measurement inconsistencies across time, but the figure indicates that ideological polarization in Russia was relatively high at the end of the 1990s, just before Putin took office and when economic reform still dominated the agenda. Since then it has receded

and Russia is now less ideologically polarized than most countries in the CSES.⁴

Further, when it comes to the acceptability of various electoral tactics, Russians appear largely united against undemocratic actions. Figure 3 displays attitudes toward a range of electoral tactics among three groups: respondents who say they would vote for Russia's most prominent opposition figure—Alexey Navalny—if he stood in a hypothetical presidential election alongside Putin and other challengers from Russia's parliamentary opposition (5% overall), respondents who say they would vote for Putin (42% overall), and a broader group of respondents who express approval of President Putin (60% overall).

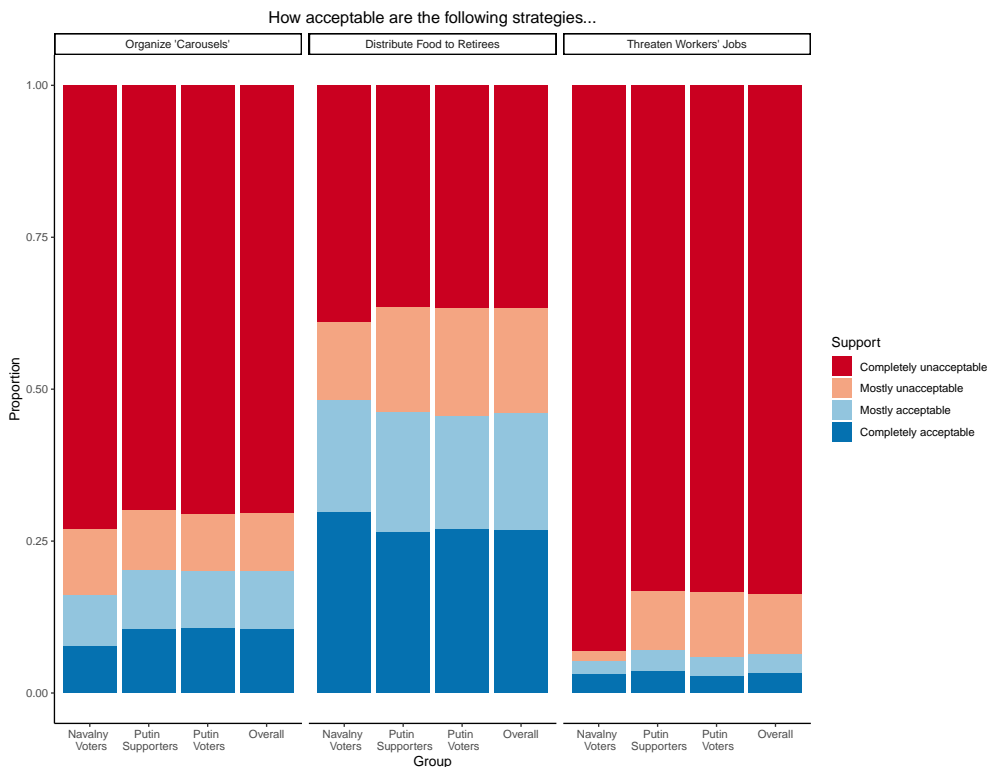
The red bars show that overwhelming majorities of all groups reject anti-democratic vote-getting tactics such as organizing 'carousels' to facilitate multiple voting and threatening the jobs of workers who vote the 'wrong' way. Majorities even reject strategies that are less clearly problematic for democracy like distributing food to retirees. In short, both Putin and Navalny voters reject anti-democratic vote-getting strategies when queried directly, and do so in similar numbers. Consistent with this, experimental evidence suggests that when electoral fraud becomes known, it erodes support among the regime's political base (Reuter and Szakonyi, 2021)—though voters appear to blame the regime and its candidates rather than Putin (Aarslew, 2023).

Still there are some clear differences between Putin and Navalny supporters on the issue of democracy. Figure 4 shows expressed support for a democratic political system in Russia overall. As shown in the left panel, a large majority of roughly 75 percent across all groups endorse democracy as the most suitable political system for Russia today, though Navalny voters are significantly more likely than Putin voters to agree unequivocally with that proposition (33% vs. 19%, $p < .01$). The right plot, meanwhile, shows that while a large majority of Navalny voters reject a strong leader who is unconstrained by parliament or elections, a similar share of Putin voters considers such a leader acceptable.⁵

⁴This is not to say that issue-based preferences play no role in Russian politics or that voters have no ideological commitments. Indeed, attitudes toward the ruling United Russia party may have become more polarized in recent years (Appendix Figure A2). Increasing authoritarianism and heavy-handed tactics by the regime may be driving more voters into sharply opposed camps.

⁵There are further differences in how Navalny and Putin supporters perceive democratic performance

Figure 3: Views on the Acceptability of Various Vote-getting Strategies



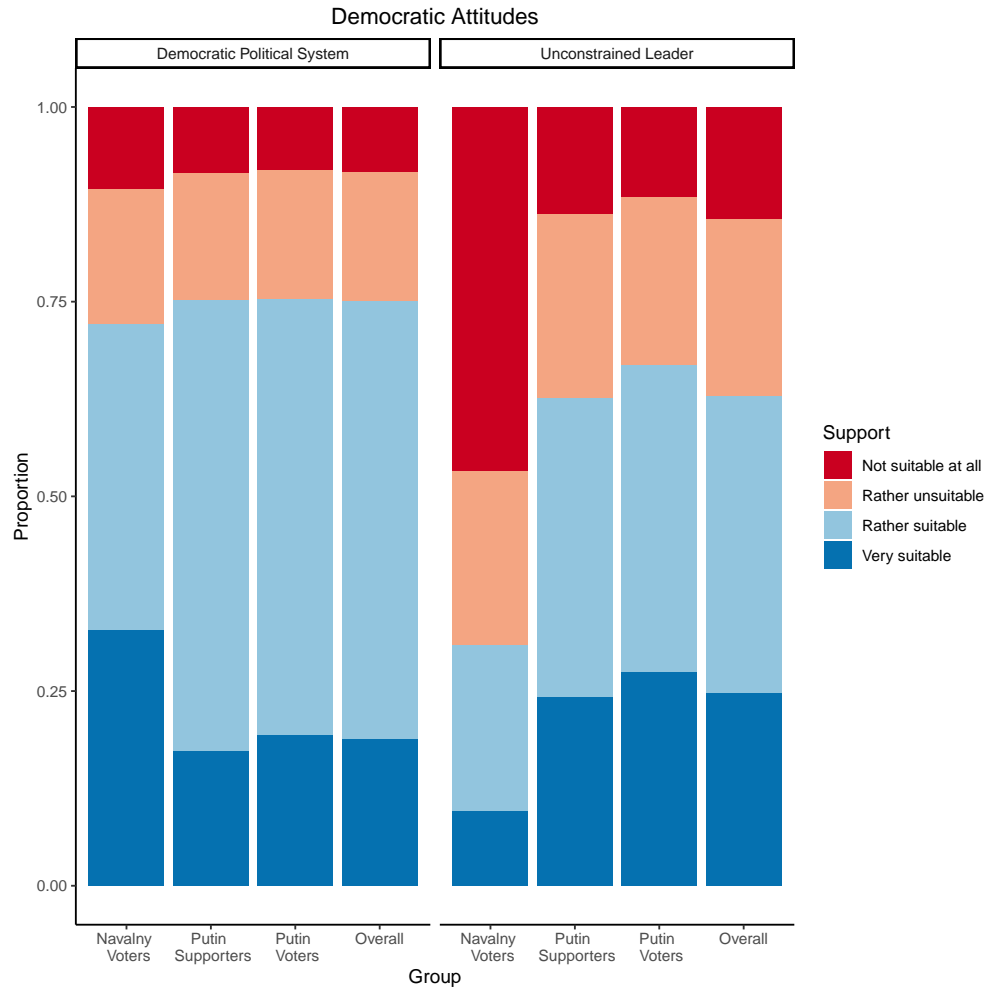
Source: Russian Election Study, September 2021

The pattern of responses across both items further suggests that while Navalny voters hold a more conventional view of democracy, Putin voters largely see democracy as compatible with a strong and unconstrained leader yet still reject blatantly anti-democratic election tactics. This contradiction raises the interesting question of when and under what circumstances one view prevails over the other. If autocratic incumbents come to believe the public values their strength and disregard the public's reticence about anti-democratic cheating, it suggests they could face backlash.

3.2 Affective Polarization

In recent years as the strength of his opposition movement has grown, the Kremlin has used increasingly charged rhetoric to attack Navalny and his supporters. While the Putin regime has long deemphasized ideology, it has increasingly played on voters' affect by in Russia, as shown in Appendix figure A4.

Figure 4: Democratic Attitudes



Source: Russian Election Study, September 2021.

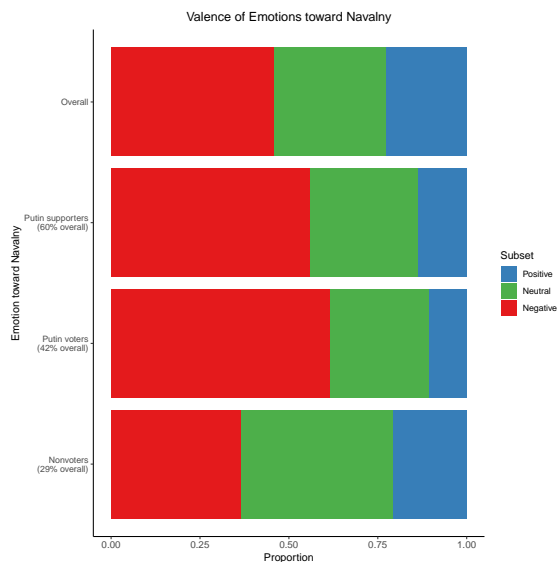
demonizing its nonparliamentary opposition.⁶

Now labeled a traitor and his supporters branded as a fifth column, Navalny was viewed negatively by slightly less than half of all Russians just before parliamentary elections in September 2021. We asked respondents which words they would use to describe their attitude toward Navalny, from admiration to antipathy (the full question wording is in the Appendix), and summarize the results in Figure 5. Among Putin supporters (60% overall) and Putin voters (42% overall) a majority express a negative

⁶It is important to note that the Kremlin deals very differently with its parliamentary opposition. Consequently, negative views of the parliamentary opposition among Putin voters and supporters are less pervasive. See below.

view of Navalny and very few express a positive view.⁷ By contrast, among nonvoters, representing roughly 1-in-3 Russians, neutral views of Navalny actually predominate.

Figure 5: Attitudes toward Navalny



Notes: Negative attitudes toward Navalny predominate among Putin voters.

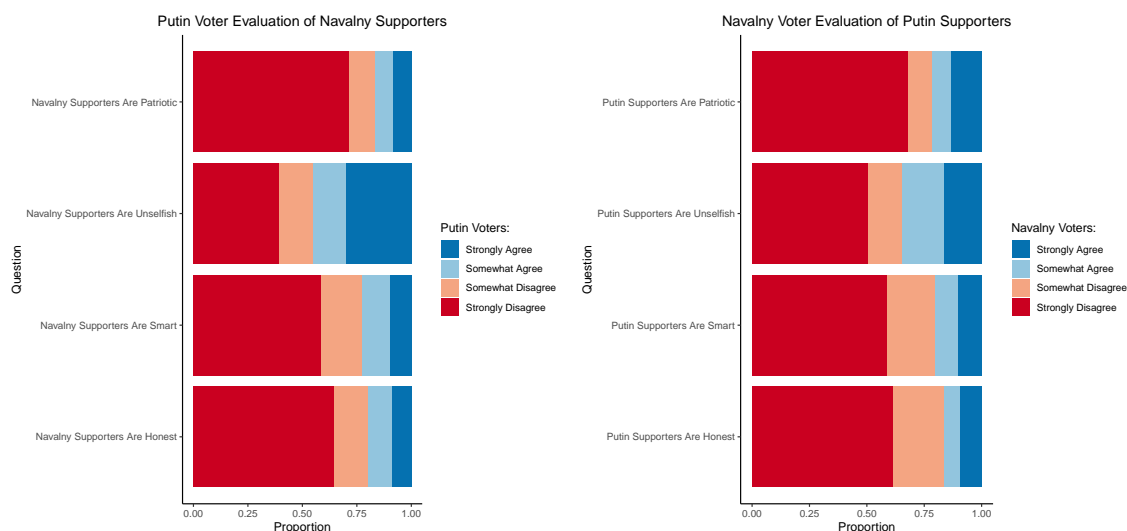
Although affective responses to Navalny and his supporters as traitors could well run deep, they do so only among a fairly narrow group. Only about 11 percent of the sample expressed very strong negative emotions like disgust or antipathy toward Navalny. Many Russians are not paying attention or exercised enough about politics (or weren't in late 2021) to get exercised about the opposition. Until recently, the Putin regime simply ignored Navalny and his movement. Officials refused to even mention his name in public statements and limited his visibility on state television. Many Russians do not seem to know enough to feel strongly about Navalny.

Still, among those who expect to cast a vote in the next presidential election, we do see quite polarized views and strong out-party antipathy directed at out-party supporters.⁸

⁷The breakdown of negative views among Putin voters is the following: 17% expressed disgust, 17% expressed antipathy, 21% said they didn't have anything good to say about him; and 7% said they were wary/unsure about him. Thus, fully 34% expressed extreme dislike of Navalny.

⁸While we did not ask an equivalent set of questions about the character of supporters of the parliamentary opposition, a different question which simply asked respondents to rate supporters of "opposition parties" (which would include both Navalny and the systemic opposition) on a scale from 0-10 shows

Figure 6: Animus toward Out-party Supporters



Source: Russian Election Study, September 2021

Figure 6 displays responses to a series of items in which we asked respondents to agree or disagree with several statements about out-party (i.e. Putin or Navalny) supporters. So in the left panel, we asked those who expect to vote for Putin (again, 42% overall) about their views of Navalny supporters and, in the right panel, we asked those who would vote for Navalny if he were to be included on the ballot (again, 5% overall) about their views of Putin supporters. The results are striking: large majorities of 75% or more in both groups say that out-party supporters are not patriotic, that they are stupid, and that they are dishonest. Fewer, though still a majority in both groups, say that out-party supporters are selfish.

In sum, then, even before Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, out-party antipathy was quite widespread—though only with respect to Alexey Navalny and his movement (not the opposition as a whole), and among Navalny supporters with respect to Putin. These affectively polarized attitudes were accompanied by differences in issue that negative views of the generalized opposition are less pervasive. For example, while 27 percent rate their attitude toward Navalny supporters as “very bad” (a 0 on the scale) only 13 percent rated their attitude toward the opposition similarly. Since respondents may have been thinking of either Navalny or the systemic opposition when answering this question it stands to reason that attitudes toward the systemic opposition are milder still. This inference is supported by Figure 2 which shows that levels of affective polarization toward parliamentary parties (i.e. United Russia and the systemic opposition) is low in comparative context.

positions, particularly on democracy.

Last, alongside this evidence on what might be termed "negative partisanship," it is important to also describe briefly the nature a "positive partisanship" in the Russian context. Though United Russia has dominated Russian politics for roughly two decades, partisan attachments to the regime remain relatively shallow (and have been declining over time). While large numbers of voters express support for United Russia (54% answered above the median on a 10 point scale), only 10 percent of voters mentioned UR when asked in an open-ended question to name the party that they would characterize as "my party."⁹ In fact, even among UR supporters, only 18 percent named the party in response to this question. Most instead said there was no party that they would call "my party," clear evidence of weak positive partisanship among Russian regime supporters.

4 Framing Experiment

We test our hypotheses about the effect of polarization on tolerance of anti-democratic attitudes using a framing experiment placed on the August-September 2021 wave of the Russian Elections Survey. This wave was conducted just prior to the national Duma elections held from September 17-19, 2021 and included 2,750 face-to-face interviews with Russian adults.

The experiment prompted respondents to imagine a future (hypothetical) election for the Duma deputy seat representing their district. In that election, the ruling party United Russia puts forward a 50-year-old male candidate who advocates increasing funding for local schools and building new roads, while also touting his support for a free computer training program for people with disabilities.

After that introductory description, we randomly assign each respondent to one of the five groups (one control and four treatment) shown in Table 1; the proportion of the sample allocated to each group is given on the right. Each of the four treatment groups received additional information about the pre-election activities of the candidate, while the control group received none. Each treatment group emphasizes a different class of anti-democratic activity perpetuated by the candidate and collectively reference

⁹This measure is due to Colton (2000).

violations of different core elements of representative democracy, including free and fair elections, freedom of assembly, access to independent media, and the right to run for public office.

The first treatment group is informed that the candidate has a history of organizing *karusels* at polling stations. The term *karusels* refers to organizing illegal multiple voting¹⁰ and is well-known by the general public as a common scheme used by officials to manipulate elections (Bader, 2013). The second treatment group informs respondents that the candidate supports a bill in the State Duma banning any protests in the three months following elections. This legislative action would violate freedom of assembly as enshrined in the Russian constitution, while presumably protecting the incumbent regime from public displays of anger about election manipulations (and their effect on outcomes).

Next, in the third treatment, the candidate is described as supporting legislation to ban YouTube in the country. Long before Russia's invasion of Ukraine, YouTube has been a key medium for Russians to access both entertainment as well as independent information about current events from both domestic and foreign media (Litvinenko, 2021). In the fall of 2021, YouTube was the third most popular web resource (after Google and Yandex) attracting roughly 25 million users per day.¹¹ For years, politicians have threatened to block the service entirely, oftentimes on grounds that it refuses to take down content unflattering to the regime.¹²

Our final treatment has the candidate supporting legislation to block employees of Alexey Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation (FBK) from participating in elections. As Navalny's prominence and political ambitions have grown, so have those of this inner circle, who have increasingly stepped up in his absence (Navalny was first poisoned and then, after returning to Russia following treatment in Germany, imprisoned by the regime).¹³ In the summer of 2021, a new federal law was passed, which deemed the FBK an extremist organization, and thereby prevented any of its members from running

¹⁰Voters figuratively ride a carousel in and out of the polling booth to vote multiple times.

¹¹'Will Russia ban YouTube?' *The Bell*, October 4, 2021.

¹²'YouTube and Instagram face Russian bans', *BBC*, February 14, 2018.

¹³In 2019, FBK's lawyer Lyobov Sobol ran for the Moscow City Duma and preparations were underway for affiliated employees to participate in the 2021 Duma elections.

for office.¹⁴ The framing experiment explicitly references this violation of the rights of opposition politicians.

After the presentation of the vignette, we ask respondents from all groups about the likelihood that they would vote for the hypothetical UR candidate on a scale from 1 to 4, with 4 indicating Very Likely (see Table 1).¹⁵ Our outcome thus gauges whether respondents are more or less likely to support a politician who takes any of these four anti-democratic actions. This psuedo-behavioral measure enables us to better capture any trade-off respondents face in accepting undemocratic behavior by a candidate affiliated with the regime.

Finally, given our theoretical interest in affective polarization as a moderator of our treatment, we control for a wide range of factors that might be correlated with out-party animus and voting behavior. In the analysis, we draw on questions about respondent characteristics (including age, gender, education, income, ideology, and exposure to state media), as well as detailed measures of political preferences, opinions about politicians, perceptions of election integrity, and respect for other democratic principles to better understand how polarization affects voters’ reactions to politicians who engage in undemocratic behavior.

Table 1: Experiment Wording and Treatment Assignment

Preamble: Imagine that during the next State Duma elections, a man is nominated by United Russia in your voting district. He is 50 years old and his program focuses on increasing support for local schools and building new roads in the district. He becomes well-known thanks to his support for a government program which provides free computer training for people with disabilities in your district.

		N	%
Control	<i>No additional information given.</i>	466	18.9
Treatments:			
#1) Karusels	The candidate organizes karusels at polling stations.	509	20.7
#2) Protests	He supports a bill in the State Duma banning any protests in the three months following elections.	495	20.1

¹⁴Ullah, Zahra and Anna Chernova. ‘Russian court declares Navalny groups ‘extremist’ ahead of elections’. *CNN*, June 9, 2021.

¹⁵One potential concern with this experimental design is that, unlike the typical conjoint candidate experiment, it does not present respondents with artificial differences between candidates that would allow respondents to conceal a politically sensitive choice.

#3) YouTube	He supports a bill in the State Duma banning YouTube in Russia.	479	19.5
#4) Navalny	He supports a bill in the State Duma banning employees of Alexey Navalny's foundation from participating in elections.	514	20.9
Total			2,463

Outcome : How likely is it that you would vote for this candidate?
Scale: 1 - Very unlikely; 2 - Somewhat unlikely; 3 - Somewhat likely; 4 - Very likely

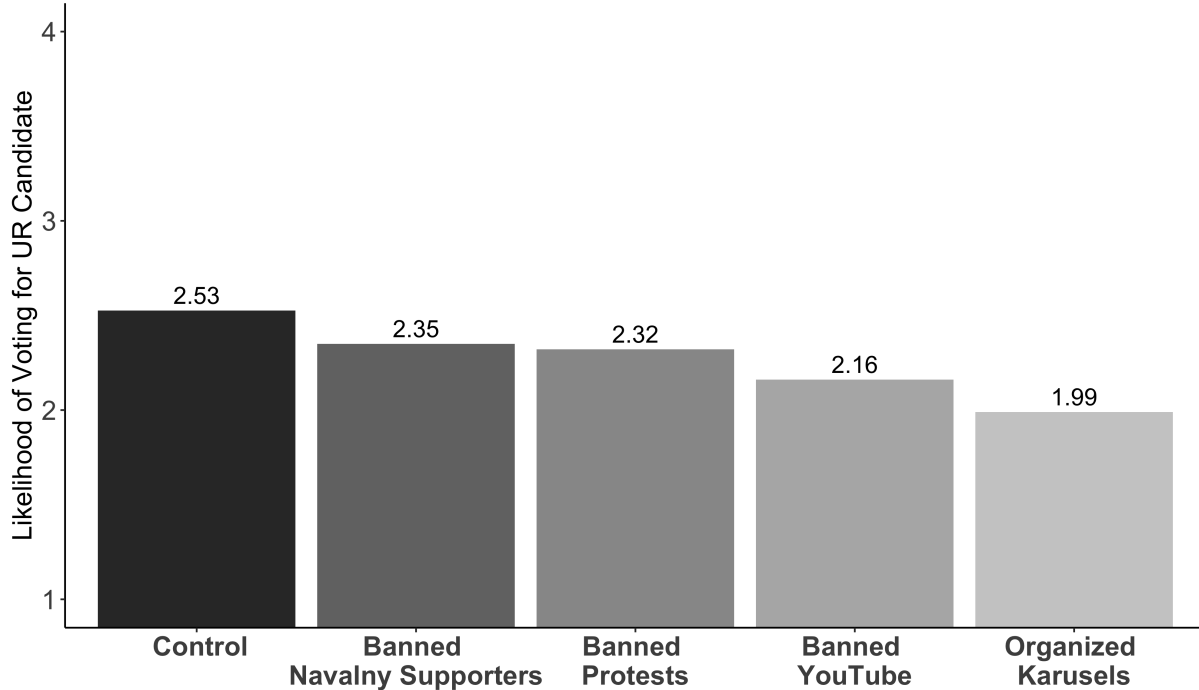
5 Experimental Results

We plot the main results from the experiment in Figure 7. On average, respondents in the control group (who received no additional information about pre-election activities) were moderately supportive of the UR candidate, scoring a 2.53 on the 1-4 scale. All four of the treatments significantly decrease respondent support for the candidate, with the *karusels* treatment producing the largest negative effect and cutting support by roughly 20%.

We estimate these treatment effects more precisely in Table 2 using multivariate regression and including a set of standard demographic controls: gender, age (logged), education, town size, and economic situation. Column 1 presents results from a specification with separate indicator variables for each of the four treatment conditions. The point estimates represent the average treatment effect for each treatment relative to the control condition and confirm the main finding in Figure 7: that respondents react unfavorably to learning about any type of anti-democratic actions committed by the UR candidate.¹⁶ Each point estimate is large and statistically significant, with the treatments referencing organizing *karusels* and banning protests producing more of a backlash than the banning of Youtube or efforts to disqualify Navalny supporters from running for office. In Column 2, we present all four treatments jointly, comparing any anti-democratic

¹⁶Though note that we cannot benchmark the size of this effect against (nor differentiate it from) the effect of receiving other types of negative information about the candidate, given the design of our experiment. A useful next step for future research would be to benchmark the size of the punishment effect for undemocratic behavior against that of other negative information that might come to light during a campaign using a conjoint experiment.

Figure 7: Main Experimental Results



Notes: This figure plots the average responses per treatment and control group of the survey experiment.

activity versus the control. Here, the point estimate represents the difference in the mean value of the dependent variable between those assigned to treatments 1, 2, 3, or 4, on the one hand, and those assigned to the control condition. Together our treatments reduce respondents' willingness to vote for the United Russia candidate by 0.3 units on the 4 point scale—an eight percent decrease.

In short, then, Russian voters punish regime candidates that engage in any of these activities violating democratic norms and/or rights. Still 40 percent of respondents in our experiment did not punish the anti-democratic incumbent—that is, they indicated that they were somewhat or very likely to vote for him anyway. One obvious possibility is that support for democratic principles is weak in this context, and people who failed to punish the incumbent in fact care little about democracy. Interestingly, we find no evidence that even strong agreement with the statement "democracy is the most suitable

form of government for Russia" predicts willingness to punish electoral manipulation.¹⁷ And though support for a leader who is unconstrained by parliament and elections does correlate with candidate support, roughly a third of respondents *vote for* the candidate who tramples on democracy even among those who *disagree* that strongman rule is best for Russia.

Table 2: Experimental Results

	Likelihood of Voting for UR Candidate (1-4)					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Constant	2.22*** (0.281)	2.24*** (0.276)	2.17*** (0.265)	2.16*** (0.267)	1.89*** (0.251)	2.01*** (0.288)
Organized Karusels Treatment	-0.409*** (0.071)		-0.055 (0.147)			
Banned Protests Treatment	-0.127* (0.069)		-0.120 (0.177)			
Banned Youtube Treatment	-0.290*** (0.087)		-0.219 (0.152)			
Banned Navalny Supporters Treatment	-0.114 (0.076)		-0.254* (0.141)			
Joint Treatment		-0.235*** (0.063)		-0.152 (0.112)	-0.177 (0.117)	-0.184 (0.188)
Out-group Antipathy (0-1)			0.502** (0.194)	0.501** (0.194)	0.225 (0.200)	0.507** (0.198)
Organized Karusels Treatment × Out-group Antipathy (0-1)			-0.572** (0.230)			
Banned Protests Treatment × Out-group Antipathy (0-1)			-0.008 (0.291)			
Banned Youtube Treatment × Out-group Antipathy (0-1)			-0.127 (0.276)			
Banned Navalny Supporters Treatment × Out-group Antipathy (0-1)			0.215 (0.254)			
Joint Treatment × Out-group Antipathy (0-1)				-0.137 (0.198)	0.088 (0.200)	-0.139 (0.201)
UR Scale (0-1)					1.12*** (0.173)	
Joint Treatment × UR Scale (0-1)					-0.269 (0.175)	
Left-Right Scale (0-1)						0.303 (0.229)
Joint Treatment × Left-Right Scale (0-1)						0.075 (0.282)
R ²	0.153	0.140	0.169	0.151	0.205	0.156
Observations	1,737	1,737	1,737	1,737	1,737	1,737
Demographic Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1 This table estimates the treatment effects for the survey experiment on the outcome of whether the respondent would vote for the hypothetical candidate (1-4 scale). All models include standard demographic controls: gender, age (logged), education, town size, and economic situation. Standard errors are clustered on the region level.

5.1 Affective Polarization and Anti-democratic Actions

As a next step, then, we explore how polarized attitudes mediate respondents' tolerance of nondemocratic actions. Our primary measure of affective polarization is an index

¹⁷This finding is similar to that of [Svolik \(2020\)](#).

of out-group antipathy (capturing negativity towards Navalny and his supporters, $\alpha = 0.73$).

Columns 3 and 4 test whether Russians who harbor intense negativity towards the opposition are more likely to overlook anti-democratic actions by their political leaders. Specifically, in column 3, we interact affective polarization with indicators for each of the four treatment conditions, while in column 4 we investigate how affective polarization mediates the effect of the joint treatment (again collapsing all four treatment arms).

None of the interactions except one approach conventional levels of statistical significance; and that one carries a negative sign (contrary to to expectations). We do not find evidence that more affectively polarized regime supporters are less likely to punish UR candidates who engage in undemocratic behavior.¹⁸

Next, we estimated a model in which we also interacted in-group partisanship (indicated by support for the ruling party) with the treatment. This tests the possibility that in-party feeling—not out-party animus—is the aspect of affective polarization that best predicts reactions to a candidate’s undemocratic behavior. As we have argued above, out-group antipathy may be visceral and charged, leading some respondents to support curbing democracy to deny opportunities to a hated opposition candidate, but without any special preference for the current regime. Column 5 presents little support for the mediating effect of either out-group antipathy or in-group partisanship on the joint treatment. In this specification, respondents who display negative emotions towards Navalny are not more likely to look past undemocratic behavior by UR candidates, and neither are people who feel closer to United Russia. While previous work has argued that strong partisan attachments lead voters to condone anti-democratic actions that help ensure that their group stays in power (Svolik 2019), in Russia, we do not find in-partisan attachments lead voters to forgive the undemocratic actions of their co-partisans.¹⁹

Column 6 similarly investigates whether ideological—and not affective—polarization

¹⁸We show further evidence of this null effect using the specification plot in Appendix Figure A10.

¹⁹In fact, though it is statistically insignificant in this specification, the coefficient on the interaction is negative, suggesting that the treatment has, if anything, a larger effect on UR partisans. In specifications that exclude outgroup antipathy toward Navalny (which is highly correlated with UR support) the coefficient on the interaction is negative and statistically significant). One reason for this is that non-regime supporters are probably already aware of fraud and expect it. So new information about fraud does not move them.

is a more significant mediating factor in Russians' responses to undemocratic behavior. Here we estimated a model which adds an interaction between ideological polarization (measured on a left-right scale, normalized 0-1) and the treatment. As anticipated, we find that the inclusion of ideological polarization does not change our results for out-group antipathy; neither the ideological polarization variable nor its interaction with the treatment reaches conventional levels of statistical significance.

As noted above, most of the out-partisan antipathy reported by regime supporters in Russia is directed specifically at Navalny and not representatives of the systemic opposition. Since Navalny and his supporters do not participate in elections, it makes little sense that antipathy toward Navalny would color regime supporters' views of electoral fraud in an election where Navalny's organization cannot participate. Likewise, both banning protest and banning YouTube are actions that would disadvantage a broad set of opposition groups, the attitudes toward which are not highly polarized; indeed, banning YouTube would negatively impact not only the regime's political opponents, but ordinary citizens much more broadly.

To zero in on how antipathy toward Navalny might affect undemocratic actions that target Navalny specifically, we restrict our analysis to the treatment that references banning Navalny supporters from public office. Table 3 reports these results. Column 1 shows that voters with strong out-party animus are more likely to forgive undemocratic behavior and vote for the hypothetical candidate. The coefficient on the interaction term is positive, suggesting that they actually reward him. Columns 2-6 disaggregate our index of affective polarization into its component parts, with each column displaying a different measure. The results are quite consistent across measures. Though the sample size in Columns 3-6 is greatly diminished, the pattern of results is similar, with the positive coefficients on the interaction terms in two of the models just missing conventional levels of statistical significance. Finally, to test directly whether people behave contrary to their democratic principles, we limit the sample in column 7 to respondents who say they reject a strongman leader and in column 8 to respondents who say that democracy is the best political system for Russia. Consistent with other findings in the literature, even democratically-minded voters support undemocratic behavior when it targets the

object of their antipathy.

Table 3: Affective Polarization and Forgiveness for Undemocratic Behavior: The Case of Navalny

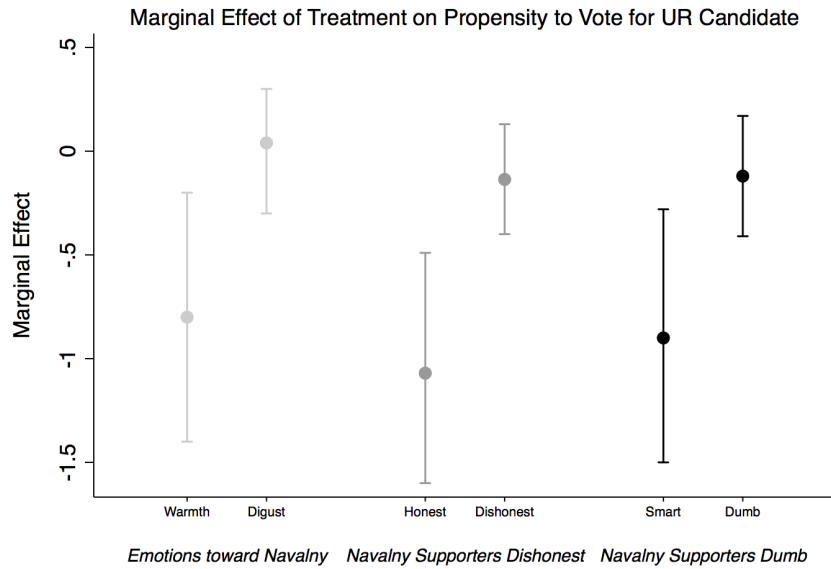
	Likelihood of Voting for UR Candidate (1-4)							
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
(Intercept)	2.19*** (0.242)	2.25*** (0.267)	2.35*** (0.313)	2.35*** (0.317)	2.22*** (0.284)	2.47*** (0.293)	2.06*** (0.333)	1.65*** (0.284)
Banned Navalny Supporters Treatment	-0.244* (0.133)	-0.339** (0.156)	-0.238 (0.220)	-0.265 (0.222)	0.042 (0.147)	-0.285 (0.198)	-0.349** (0.154)	-0.237* (0.140)
Out-group Antipathy (0-1)	0.280** (0.112)						0.518*** (0.137)	0.408*** (0.146)
Banned Navalny Supporters Treatment × Out-group Antipathy (0-1)	0.542** (0.206)						0.492* (0.262)	0.376* (0.210)
Navalny Negativity Scale		0.031* (0.017)						
Banned Navalny Supporters Treatment × Navalny Negativity Scale		0.085*** (0.031)						
Navalny Supporters Dishonest			0.024 (0.034)					
Banned Navalny Supporters Treatment × Navalny Supporters Dishonest			0.098 (0.067)					
Navalny Supporters Notsmart				0.011 (0.034)				
Banned Navalny Supporters Treatment × Navalny Supporters Notsmart				0.110 (0.068)				
Navalny Supporters Selfish					0.072*** (0.026)			
Banned Navalny Supporters Treatment × Navalny Supporters Selfish					0.018 (0.053)			
Navalny Supporters Unpatriotic						0.005 (0.035)		
Banned Navalny Supporters Treatment × Navalny Supporters Unpatriotic						0.112* (0.060)		
R ²	0.147	0.144	0.102	0.100	0.108	0.099	0.178	0.166
Observations	2,038	1,927	1,375	1,369	1,324	1,403	910	1,277
Demographic Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1 This table estimates the effect of the Navalny treatment – that is, support for barring members of Navalny’s organization from running for office – on voting for the hypothetical candidate (1-4 scale). Here we focus on how affective polarization moderates the effect of the treatment. The sample in column 7 is limited to respondents who say they reject a strongman leader and in column 8 to respondents who say that democracy is the best political system for Russia. All models include standard demographic controls: gender, age (logged), education, town size, and economic situation as well as Putin approval and exposure to state media. Standard errors are clustered on the region level.

Figure 8 complements these results by showing the marginal effects of the Navalny treatment across several key measures of affective polarization. When regime supporters have positive views of Navalny, the effect of the treatment is quite large—sometimes as large as a full point on the 4 point scale. However, when regime supporters express strong emotional aversion to Navalny and his movement, the effect of treatment is indistinguishable from zero, suggesting that such voters are not willing to punish UR candidates for cracking down on Navalny’s organization.

In sum, we find little evidence that in-partisan attachments make voters more likely to look past electoral manipulation, but there is some evidence that out-party animus does so. In this way, affectively polarized attitudes abet the efforts of Russia’s non-

Figure 8: Marginal Effects for Selected Subgroups: Navalny Treatment



democratic regime to sideline challengers by leading a narrow, but politically charged group—strong regime supporters who hold highly negative views of a leading regime opponent (Navalny)—to excuse actions that exclude him from the political process. This result makes sense considering the demonization of Navalny and his movement on Russian state media, which regime supporters are much more likely to consume.

At the same time, it is important to note that this same group of highly affectively polarized respondents does not unequivocally condone other types of backsliding related to fair elections, free media, or the right to protest. Positive partisans are, in fact, more likely to punish candidates that violate democratic norms. When it comes to actions that undermine other key democratic institutions, even the affectively polarized may be unwilling to accept undemocratic actions for the sake of the ruling party. Their tolerance of authoritarian measures only extends to those that specifically target the object of their disgust.

6 Conclusion

Does polarization make it easier for autocrats to get away with subverting democracy? In this paper, we presented evidence on this question from a large-scale survey experiment

in Russia on the eve of parliamentary elections. Of course, polarization in Russia and other nondemocratic settings is different than in many classic cases. Notably, Russia lacks two (or more) evenly matched political blocks, and the relative lack of competition in Russia sets the case apart from many classically polarized countries that are studied in the literature (e.g. the United States, Brazil, Turkey, Venezuela). Vladimir Putin enjoys broad support, and, for regime supporters, the opposition winning office may not seem like a plausible scenario that should warrant the subversion of democratic norms broadly—only the sidelining of the main opposition figure and his supporters, as we have shown here. Alexei Navalny, the regime’s primary opponent, sits behind bars, and his supporters have been repressed by the state.

At the same time, many Russian citizens are apathetic about politics, and partisan attachments to United Russia are relatively weak. Political allegiance is rarely an important part of social identity in Russia, as it is for many in the United States ([Mason, 2018b](#)).

And yet, there is significant negative partisanship among the Putin electorate, and this negative partisanship leads some to justify certain types of undemocratic actions by the regime. Our experiment shows that regime supporters who are affectively polarized toward the regime’s staunchest opposition (Alexei Navalny) are more likely to condone specific anti-democratic actions that sideline Navalny’s organization. Regime supporters were not, however, more likely to excuse other types of undemocratic behavior by regime candidates that were less clearly targeted at Navalny and his organization. Indeed regime supporters showed less willingness to condone blatantly authoritarian tactics—like banning protests, outlawing popular media, or cheating on election day—when Navalny was not specifically mentioned. This is particularly interesting given how Navalny’s movement is distinct from most of the Russian opposition. Navalny and his supporters take very different policy positions, particularly on issues of democratic rights and freedoms.²⁰ And whereas regime supporters feel little antipathy toward supporters of opposition parties in general, they are much more antagonistic toward sup-

²⁰See e.g., Figure 4, and Figures A3 and A4 in the Appendix.

porters of Navalny's movement.²¹

In depoliticized autocracies with weak partisan ties, negative affect may be a crucial driver of political behavior. This suggests the need for more research on negative partisanship in electoral authoritarian regimes. Indeed, surveys suggest that the invasion of Ukraine has produced widespread affective polarization between supporters and opponents of the war. Like supporters of Navalny, the Kremlin has portrayed the war's opponents as traitors to Russia and a fifth column seeking to advance Western interests. This heightened polarization may lead regime supporters to justify the egregious acts of domestic repression that the regime has since perpetrated. Our findings offer a pre-war glimpse at the dark potential of such dynamics, even in a context where traditional partisanship is limited.

²¹Putin supporters' mean score on a 10-pt feeling thermometer is 4.0 for supporters of opposition parties versus 2.7 for supporters of Navalny's movement.

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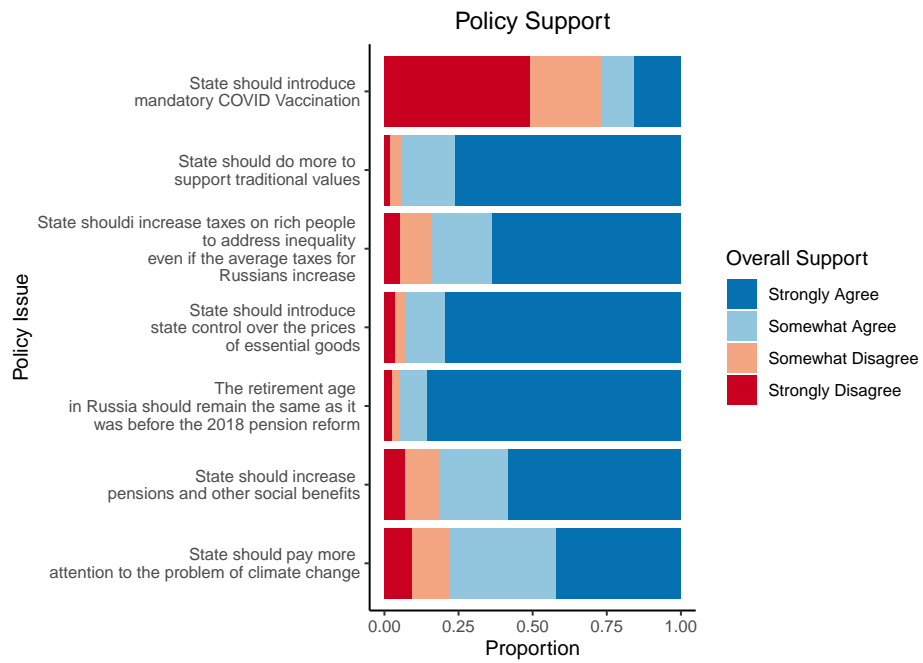
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Appendix

A1 Additional Descriptive Statistics on Polarization

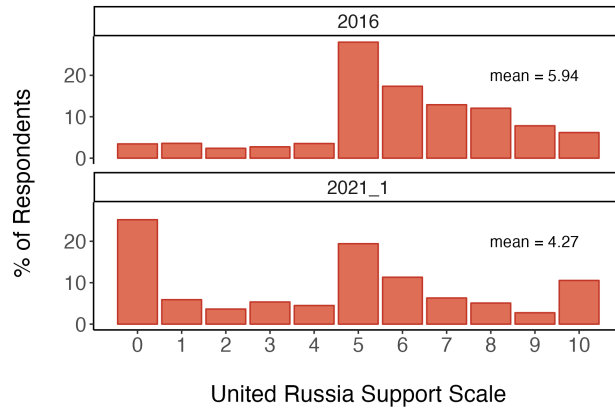
A1 Ideological Polarization

Figure A1: Little Evidence of Polarization on Several Prominent Policies



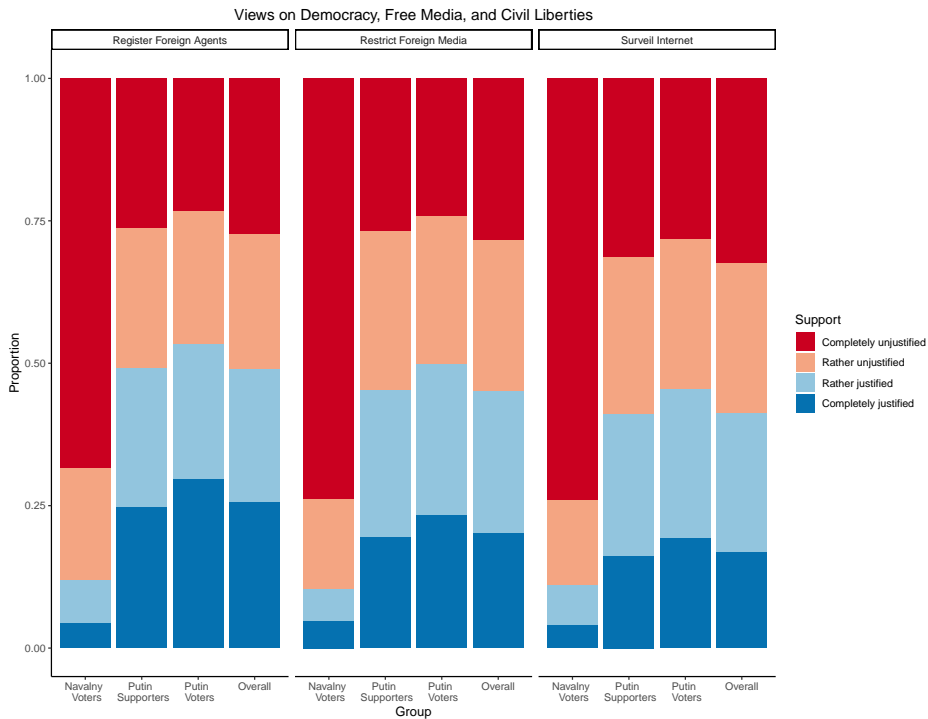
Source: Russian Election Study, September 2021.

Figure A2: Support for United Russia on 10-point Scale



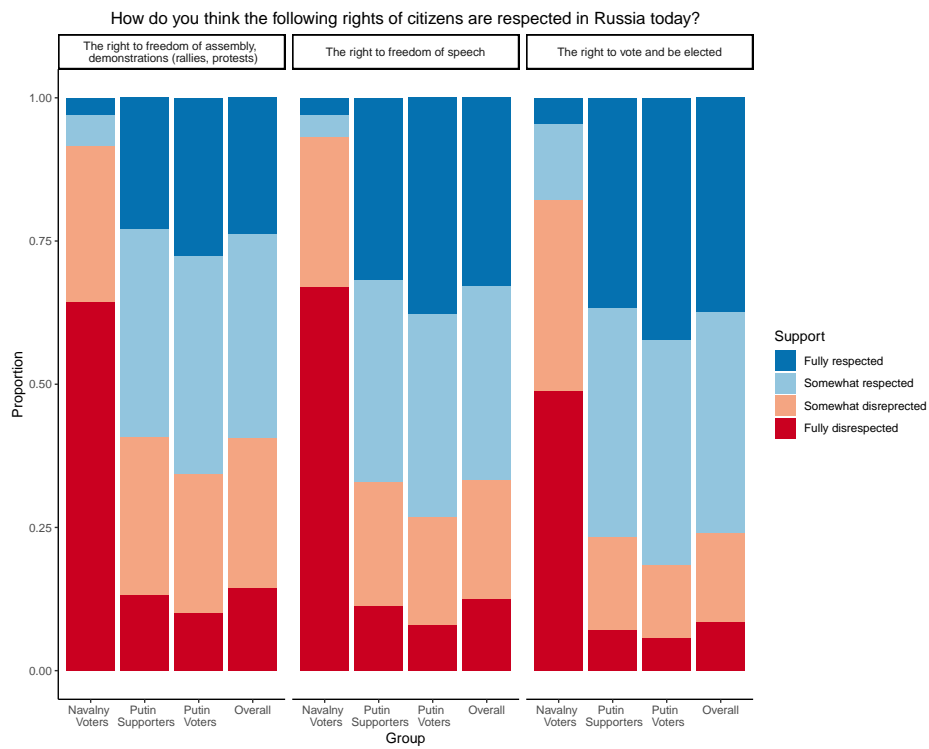
Source: Russian Election Studies, 2016 and September 2021.

Figure A3: Support for Anti-democratic measures



Notes: Putin voters are substantially more supportive than Navalny voters of various anti-democratic measures

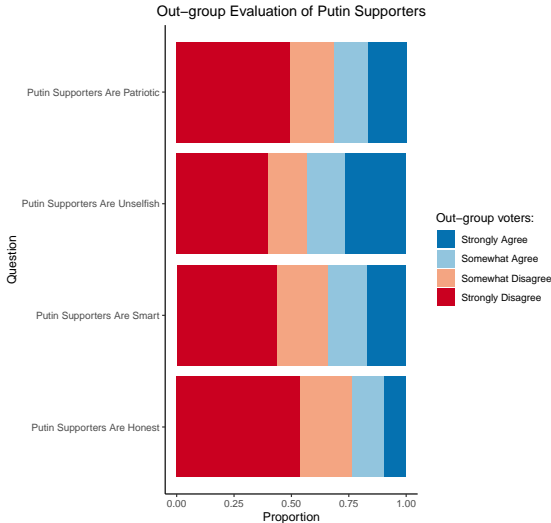
Figure A4: Perceptions About Respect for Democratic Rights in Russia Today



Notes: Regime supporters are much more likely to think that various democratic rights are respected in Russia today

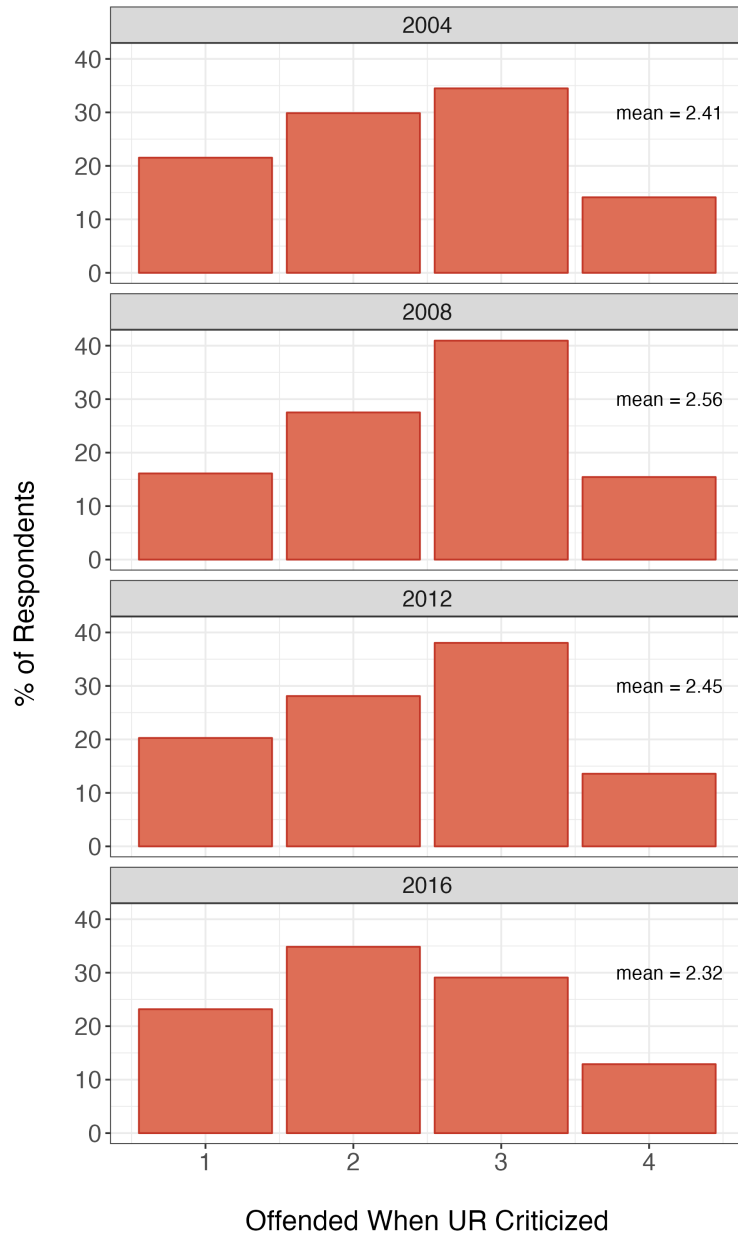
A2 Outgroup Aversion

Figure A5: Animus toward Out-party Supporters. This figure displays attitudes toward Putin supporters among opposition voters more broadly.



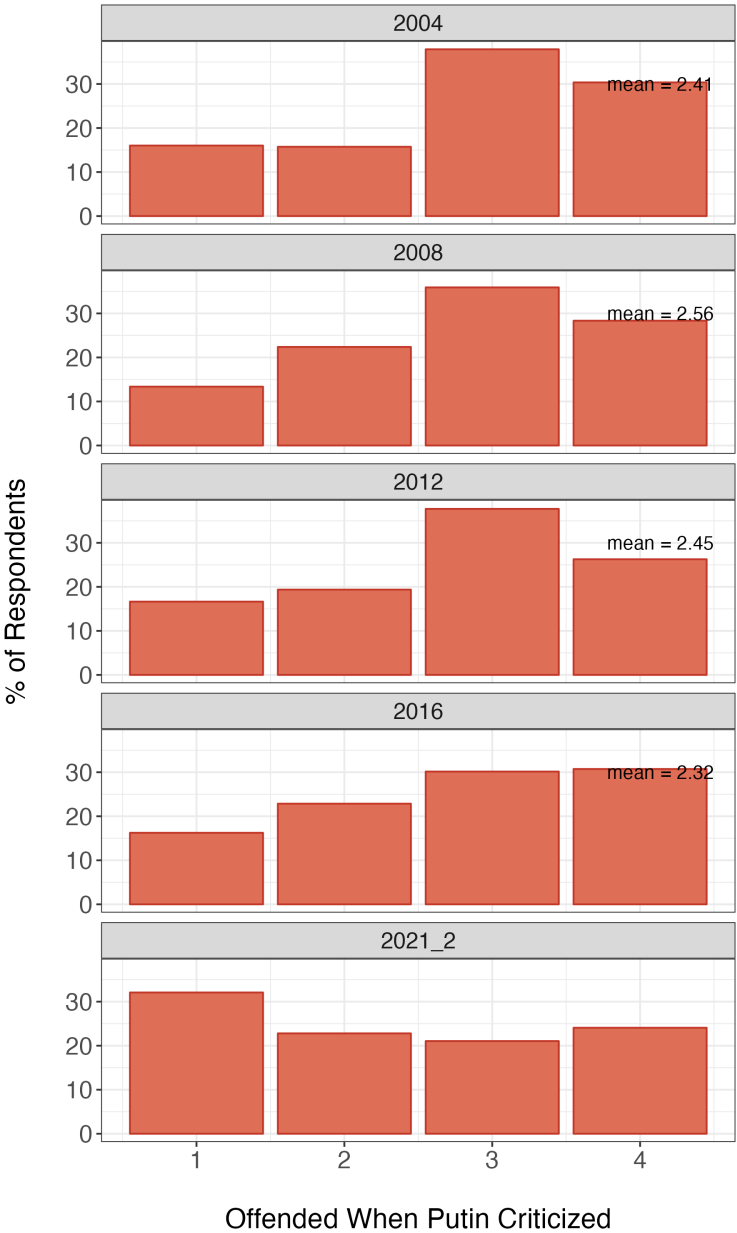
Notes: We can also show that this animus toward Putin supporters is prevalent among opposition voters more broadly, and not only Navalny supporters

Figure A6: Taking Offense to Insulting United Russia: Only UR Supporters



Notes:

Figure A7: Taking Offense to Insulting Putin: Putin Supporters

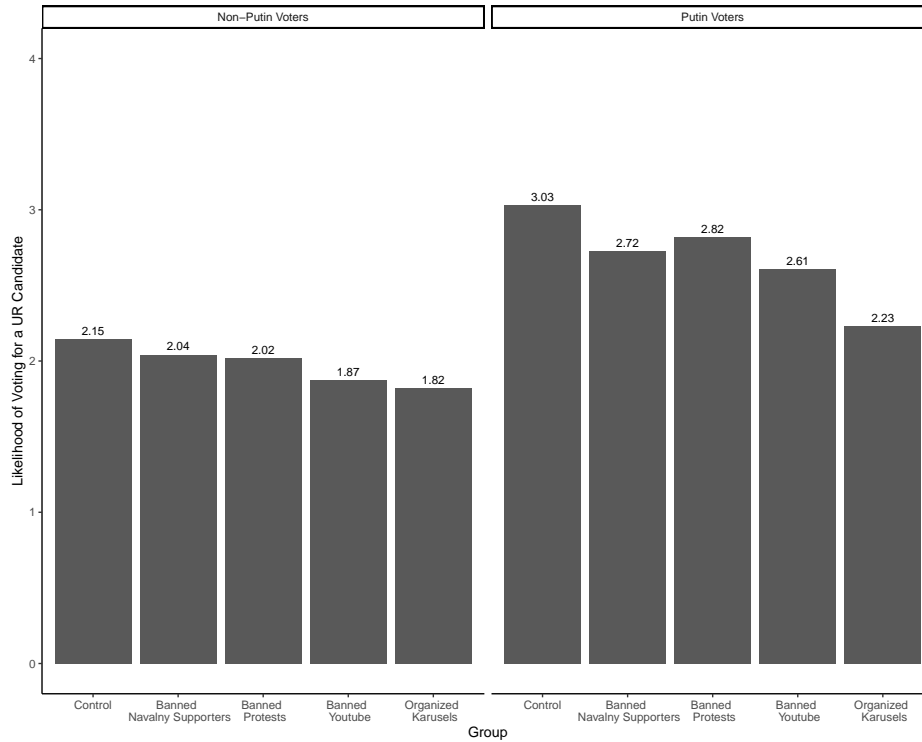


Notes:

A2 Framing Experiment Robustness Checks

A1 Heterogeneous Effects by Regime Support

Figure A8: Treatment effects: Comparing Putin Voters and Others



Notes: This figure plots the mean outcomes from the experiment broken out by Putin voters and non-Putin voters. News that the candidate engages in manipulation does not really move non-regime-supporters, because they may already expect that type of behavior. However, for regime supporters, information about regime candidates acting undemocratically tempers their enthusiasm for voting for such candidates. This effect is evident across all four treatment arms, though it is strongest when regime candidates tamper directly with electoral integrity by organizing carousels (resulting in a 26 percent drop in overall support).

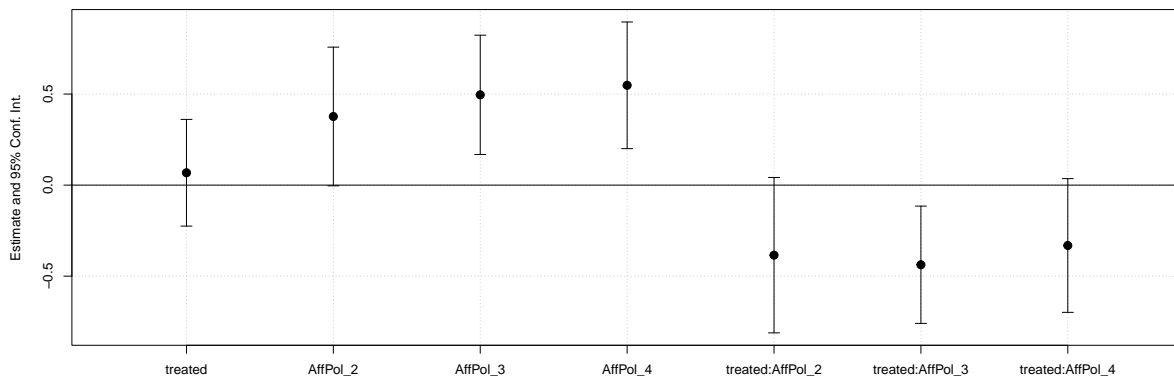
Table A1: Robustness Checks: Regime Support

	Likelihood of Voting for UR Candidate (1-5)			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
(Intercept)	2.42*** (0.241)	1.72*** (0.196)	1.91*** (0.311)	1.37*** (0.306)
Voted for Putin	0.934*** (0.096)			
Organized Karusels Treatment	-0.271*** (0.100)	-0.217** (0.089)	-0.411** (0.186)	-0.028 (0.194)
Banned Protests Treatment	-0.058 (0.092)	-0.084 (0.084)	-0.350** (0.162)	0.010 (0.191)
Banned Youtube Treatment	-0.138 (0.106)	-0.166** (0.080)	-0.519*** (0.180)	-0.215 (0.165)
Banned Navalny Supporters Treatment	-0.016 (0.100)	0.036 (0.089)	-0.041 (0.212)	0.047 (0.239)
Voted for Putin × Organized Karusels Treatment	-0.523*** (0.158)			
Voted for Putin × Banned Protests Treatment	-0.153 (0.103)			
Voted for Putin × Banned Youtube Treatment	-0.282* (0.155)			
Voted for Putin × Banned Navalny Supporters Treatment	-0.256** (0.126)			
UR Scale (0-10)		0.148*** (0.012)		
UR Scale (0-10) × Organized Karusels Treatment		-0.060*** (0.021)		
UR Scale (0-10) × Banned Protests Treatment		-0.019 (0.017)		
UR Scale (0-10) × Banned Youtube Treatment		-0.034* (0.017)		
UR Scale (0-10) × Banned Navalny Supporters Treatment		-0.044** (0.018)		
Left-Right Scale (0-10)			0.052** (0.022)	
Left-Right Scale (0-10) × Organized Karusels Treatment			-0.006 (0.032)	
Left-Right Scale (0-10) × Banned Protests Treatment			0.039 (0.030)	
Left-Right Scale (0-10) × Banned Youtube Treatment			0.042 (0.032)	
Left-Right Scale (0-10) × Banned Navalny Supporters Treatment			-0.011 (0.040)	
Estimate of UR Duma Control				0.011*** (0.003)
Estimate of UR Duma Control × Organized Karusels Treatment				-0.008** (0.003)
Estimate of UR Duma Control × Banned Protests Treatment				-0.004 (0.004)
Estimate of UR Duma Control × Banned Youtube Treatment				-0.002 (0.003)
Estimate of UR Duma Control × Banned Navalny Supporters Treatment				-0.004 (0.004)
R ²	0.168	0.200	0.066	0.081
Observations	1,748	2,395	2,003	2,106
Demographic Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓

A2 Heterogeneous Effects by Outgroup Aversion

Post-hoc, we investigated whether affective polarization might have a nonlinear effect on support for the undemocratic candidate, using a specification that interacted the joint treatment with a categorical measure of out-party antipathy. Appendix Figure A9 displays the marginal effects from this model at varying levels of affective polarization. What both the results of this model and the raw cross-tabs show is that voters at middling levels of affective polarization are marginally more likely to punish the candidate for undemocratic behavior. The interaction coefficient at the highest level of out-party antipathy is not positive (strong partisans do not reward the candidate), but it is indistinguishable from zero. So too is the coefficient on the interaction at the lowest level of out-party antipathy—perhaps because such voters are not surprised by the candidate’s behavior or because they are not engaged enough to care.

Figure A9: Punishment for Undemocratic Behavior Greatest at Middling Levels of Affective Polarization



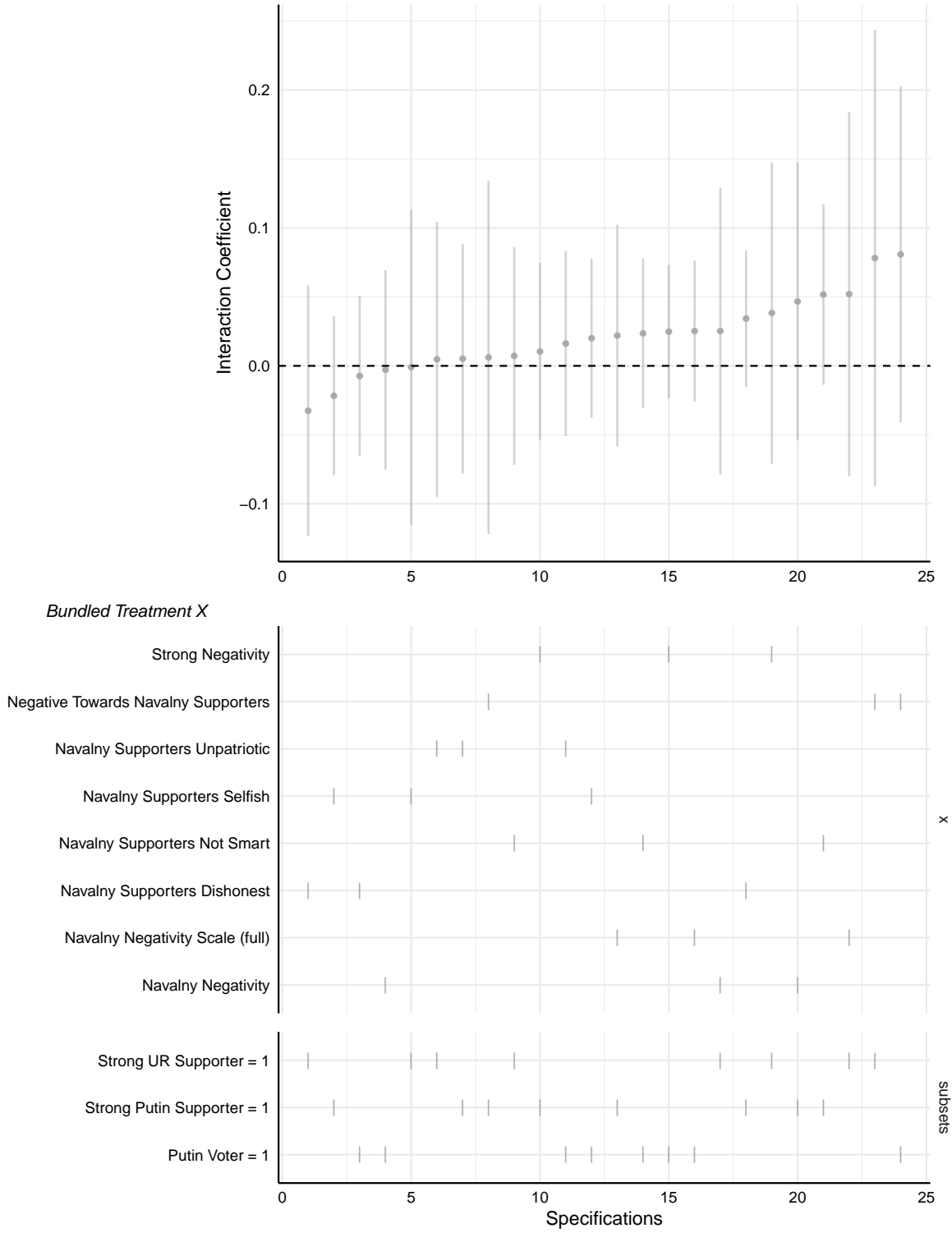
Notes: This figure plots marginal effects for the joint treatment at varying levels of affective polarization. The model included standard demographic controls: gender, age (logged), education, town size, and economic situation as well as Putin approval and exposure to state media. Standard errors are clustered on the region level.

A3 Specification Curves

In [A10](#), each dot is the point estimate on an interaction between the treatment and a different measure of out-group antipathy. For presentational purposes, we focus only on regime supporters, which is the subgroup that represents our primary theoretical interest. Here again we see no evidence that respondents demonstrating high levels of affective polarization are more likely to condone or condemn anti-democratic actions.

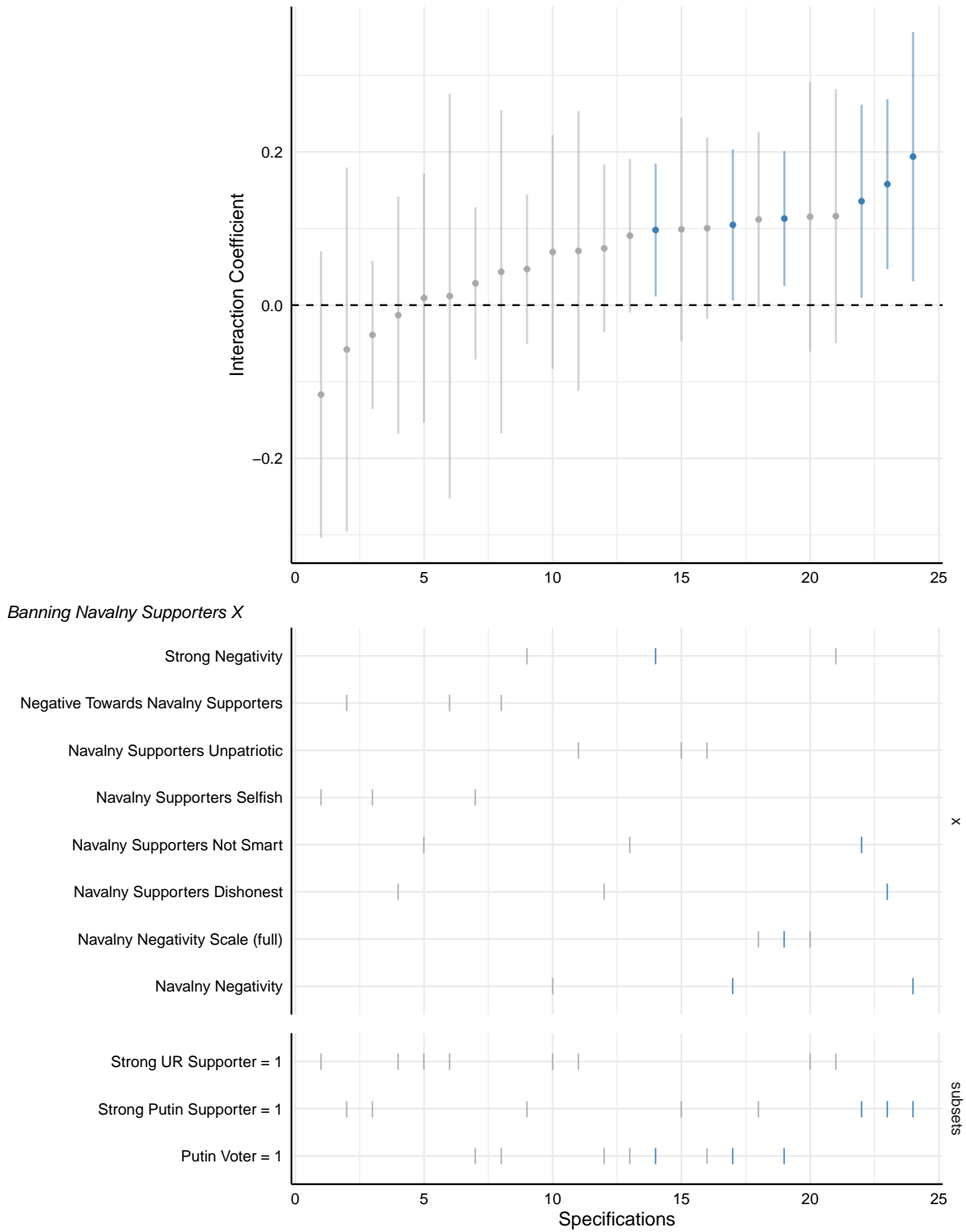
Figure [A11](#) shows another specification plot, again interacting each of our individual measures of out-group antipathy among regime supporters but this time with just the treatment referencing banning Navalny supporters. This specification plot tells a somewhat different story from Figure 10, as it appears that affective polarization does slightly modify the effect of treatment for most of our measures. The interaction terms are positive and statistically significant at the .5 level for a number of the subsets and significant at the .1 level for a number of others. Taken as a whole, they suggest that regime supporters who express significant dislike for Alexey Navalny and his supporters are less likely than other regime supporters to punish UR candidates who advocate curbing the political rights of members of his movement.

Figure A10: Affective Polarization and Democratic Backsliding: Specification Curve



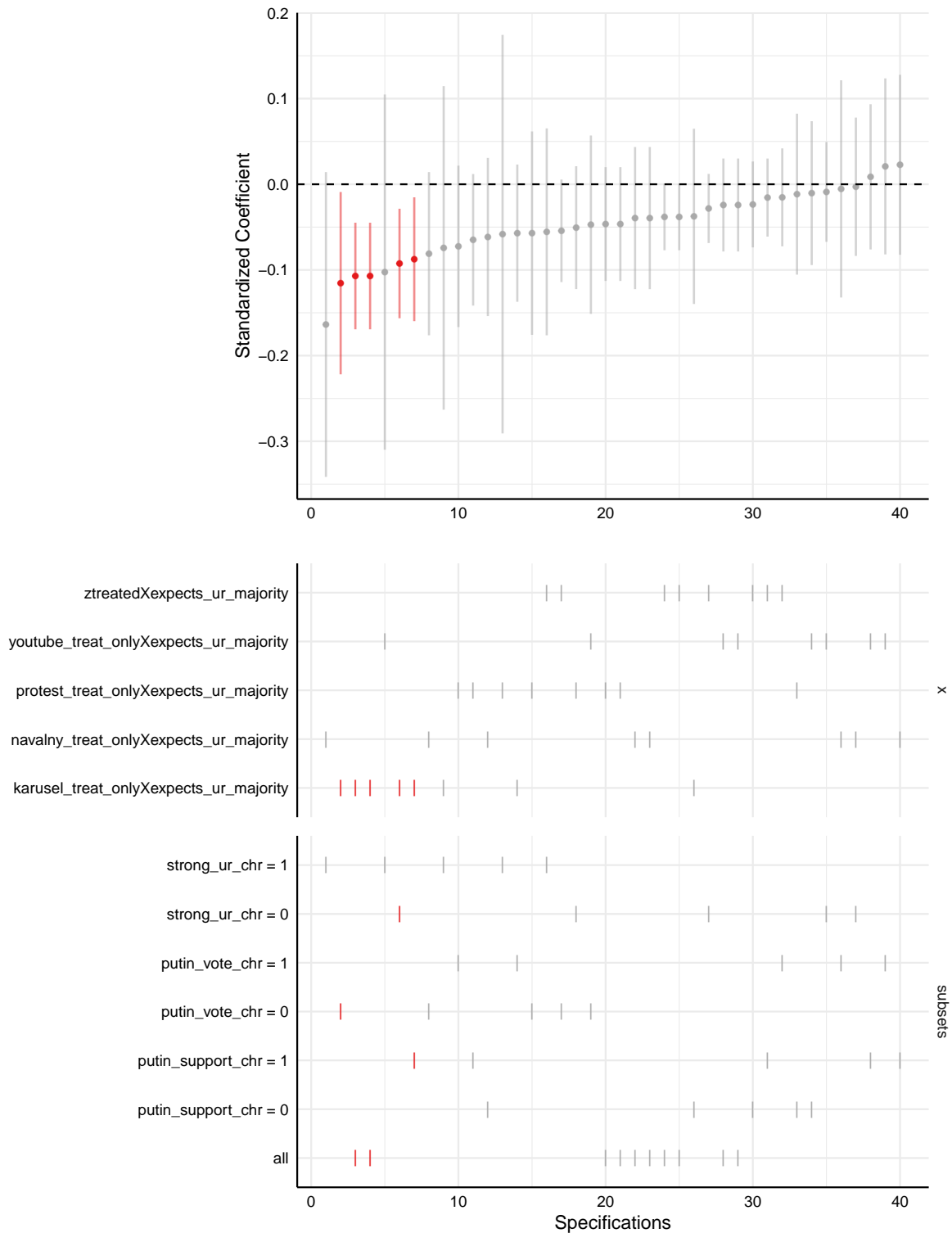
Notes: This figure plots the standardized coefficients from interacting an indicator for all four treatment arms together with different measures of affective polarization. Significant results ($p < 0.05$) are highlighted: negative = red, positive = blue, grey = nonsignificant. The lower panel indicates the subset of the data analyzed. Constituent terms and covariates (gender, age, education, town size, and economic situation) are included in all models. Standard errors are clustered on region.

Figure A11: Affective Polarization and Banning Navalny Supporters Arm: Specification Curve



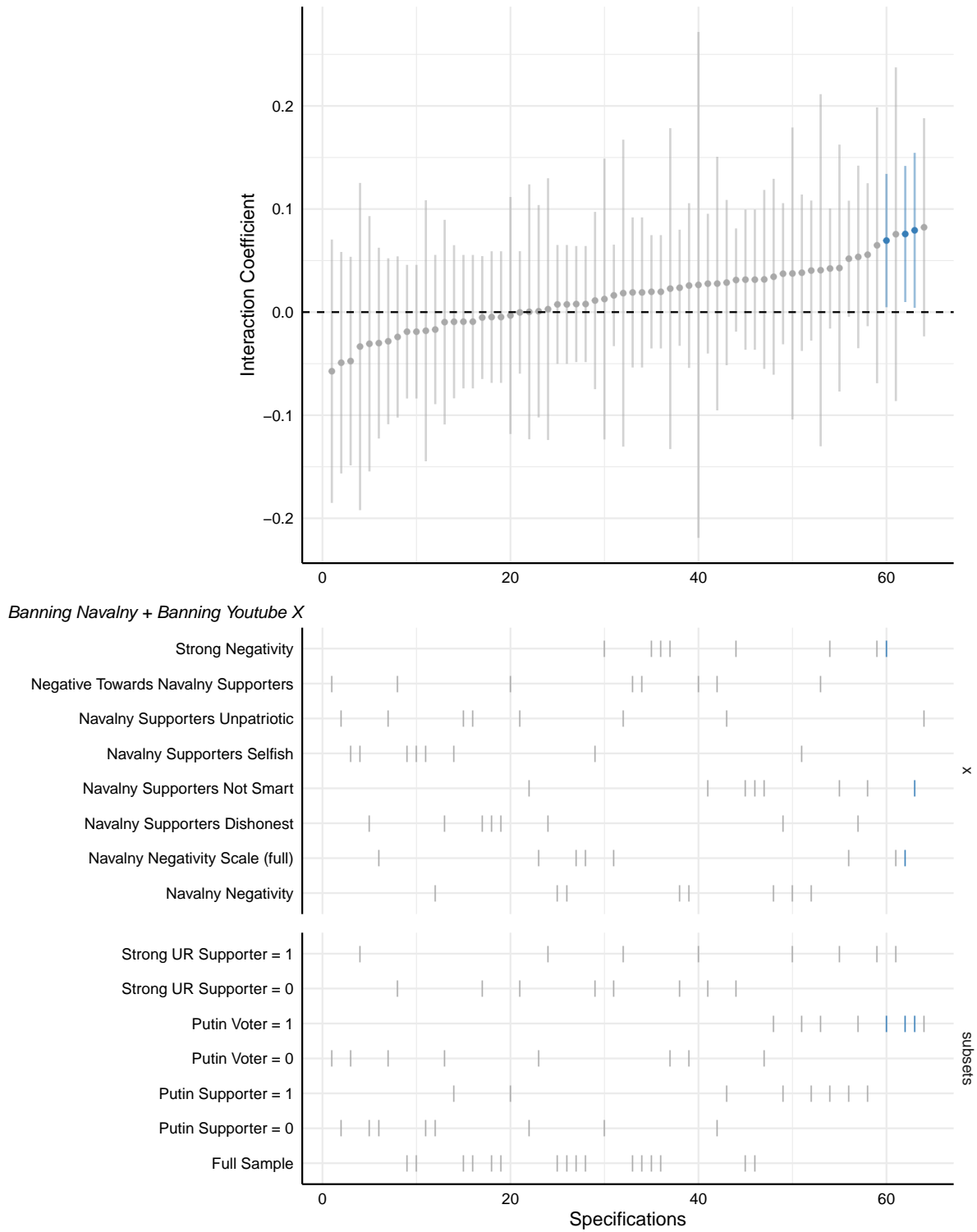
Notes: This figure plots the standardized interaction coefficients from interacting the Banning Navalny Supporters treatment with different measures of affective polarization. Significant results ($p < 0.05$) are highlighted: negative = red, positive = blue, grey = nonsignificant. The lower panel indicates the subset of the data analyzed. Constituent terms and covariates (gender, age, education, town size, and economic situation) are included in all models. Standard errors are clustered on region.

Figure A12: Competition (Duma Majority): Specification Curve



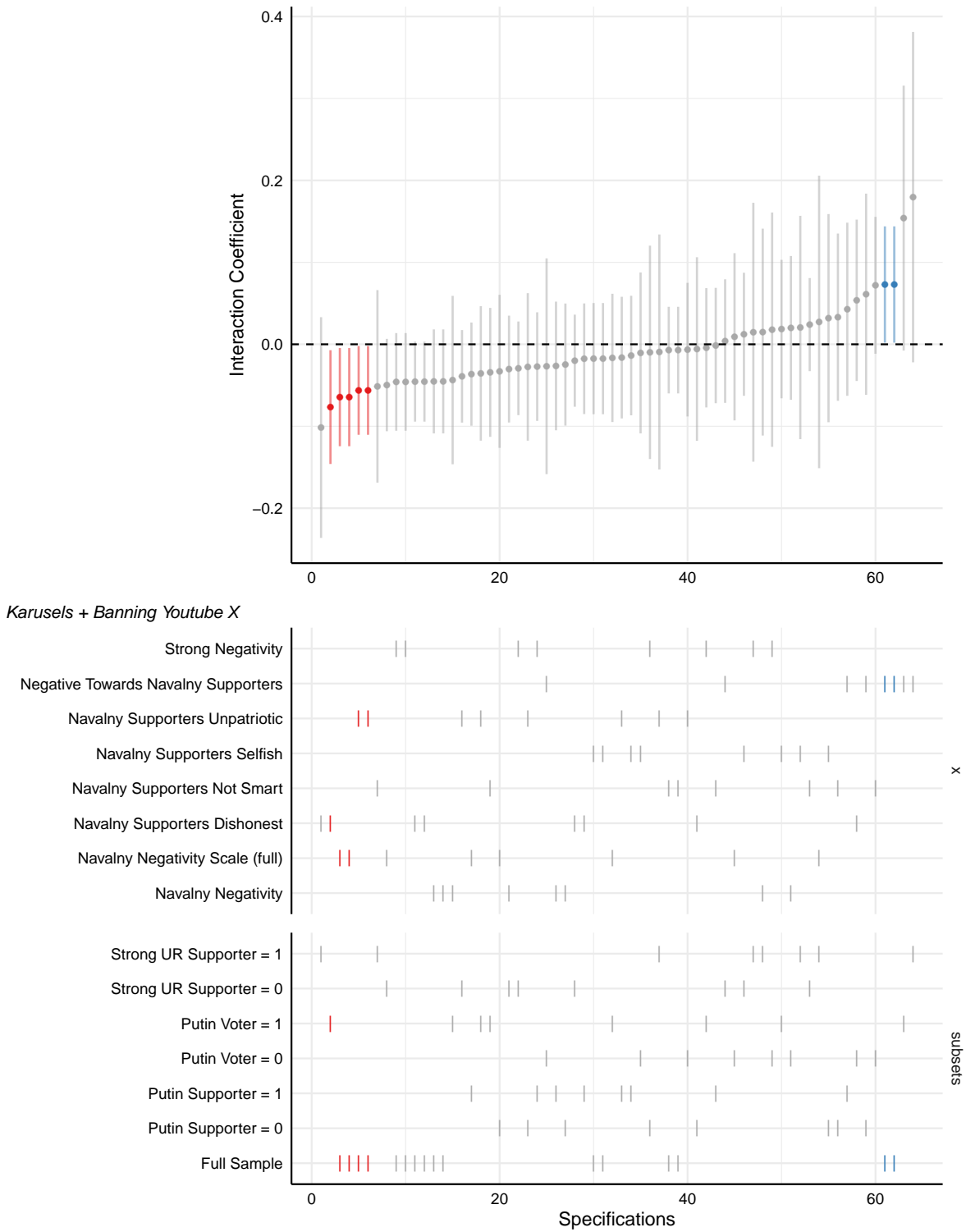
Notes: This figure plots the standardized coefficients from interacting indicators for each treatment arm with a measure of expected electoral competition (an estimate of whether UR will have a majority of seats in the Duma). Significant results ($p < 0.05$) are highlighted: negative = red, positive = blue, grey = nonsignificant. The lower panel indicates the subset of the data analyzed. Constituent terms and covariates (gender, age, education, town size, and economic situation) are included in all models. Standard errors are clustered on region.

Figure A13: Navalny and Protest Treatment Arms and Affective Polarization: Specification Curve



Notes: This figure plots the standardized coefficients from interacting a joint treatment of the Navalny-specific treatment and the protest treatment with different measures of affective polarization. Significant results ($p < 0.05$) are highlighted: negative = red, positive = blue, grey = nonsignificant. The lower panel indicates the subset of the data analyzed. Constituent terms and covariates (gender, age, education, town size, and economy) are included in all models. Standard errors are clustered on region.

Figure A14: Karusel and Youtube Treatment Arms and Affective Polarization: Specification Curve



Notes: This figure plots the standardized coefficients from interacting a joint treatment of the karusel treatment and the YouTube treatment with different measures of affective polarization. Significant results ($p < 0.05$) are highlighted: negative = red, positive = blue, grey = nonsignificant. The lower panel indicates the subset of the data analyzed. Constituent terms and covariates (gender, age, education, town size, and economic situation) are included in all models. Standard errors are clustered on region.

A3 Question Wordings

83. Which of these words would you use to characterize your attitude towards Alexei Navalny?

(show CARD 22, one answer)

1. Admiration
2. Sympathy
3. I can't say anything bad about him
4. Neutral, indifferent
5. Wary, vigilant
6. I can't say anything good about him
7. Antipathy
8. Disgust
98. (DO NOT READ OUT) Hard to say
99. (DO NOT READ OUT) Refuse to answer

40B. Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements.

Give your answer on a scale from 1 to 4 where

1 - "Completely agree" and 4 - "Completely disagree."

{KEY: 0 (Completely agree) through 4 (Completely disagree); 6 Unknown politician;

8 Hard to Say; 9 Refuse to Answer}

- (1) People who support Alexei Navalny are patriotic
- (2) People who support Alexei Navalny are honest
- (3) People who support Alexei Navalny are intelligent
- (4) People who support Alexei Navalny are selfish