

Can Elites Persuade Elites?: The Effect of Partisan Elite Cues on Attitudes Towards Black
Lives Matter and Environmental Policy Among State-level Democratic Committee Members

by
Kimberly Duff

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ABSTRACT

Research shows that elite cues influence citizen attitudes toward issues and policies, but it is relatively unknown if elite cues influence elites. Through an experimental survey of 102 Democratic Central Committee members in Maryland, I find that elites can be influenced by ideological cues with limited effects. A progressive Democrat cue elicits a more moderate response whereas a moderate Democrat cue elicits a more progressive response. Through the lens of social identity, I infer that there are intraparty in-group and out-group categorizations within the Democratic Party that exist between moderates and progressives, and I test the theory through an experimental survey with ideological cue attributions. I find high support for the Black Lives Matter movement and relatively low support for policy efforts to defund the police. I further find that there is a gender gap on the experimental effects of cue taking across racial and environmental issues. Finally, my findings suggest the Democratic Party should use moderate frames, voices, or attributions when attempting to advance a progressive agenda.

INTRODUCTION

After the extrajudicial killing of George Floyd in May of last year at the hands of Derek Chauvin, a white police officer, the Black Lives Matter movement once again organized and took to the streets to protest police brutality against Black and brown people. With the increase of polarization in the United States, it was no surprise to observe the stark divide of support and opposition to the contemporary civil rights movement. While that divide is mostly observed between Democrats and Republicans, a divide exists within the Democratic Party itself concerning the Black Lives Matter movement. For example, Maryland's Washington County Democratic Central Committee experienced two separate waves of resignations over both the Black Lives Matter movement and racial issues in under a year, with the first wave of resignees in opposition to the Black Lives Matter movement and the second wave in support. These exoduses served as the impetus for this study. Was this an isolated incident, or was it generalizable to Democratic Central Committee members in Maryland? What do Maryland Democratic Central Committee members think about the contemporary civil rights movement? Is support for the Black Lives Matter movement and policy based on the movement malleable and is that support dependent upon ideological cues among the Democratic Party in Maryland?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Identity Theory

Research in multiple fields demonstrates that people derive worth from their sense of belonging and connection with others, and this has implications for ideological cues. Social identity theory is applicable in all aspects of life and is not unique to the realm of politics. Founded in the 1970s, social psychologists define it as "that part of an individual's self concept

which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to membership" (Tajfel 1974, 69). Essentially, social identity theory explains the creation of in-groups and out-groups, where in-group members are perceived in a positive manner and out-group members are viewed negatively and differently from the in-group, whether those differences are real or perceived. The formation of in and out-groups can revolve around any scenario of human interaction, even based on trivial determinants of membership like a coin toss where the probability of membership is 50/50 (Nicholson 2012, p. 54).

Given these parameters, it is unsurprising that social identity theory applies to politics, especially with the high levels of polarization in the current American political climate. The majority of research concerning politics and social identity is measured between distinct partisan camps (Abrams 1994; Abrams and Elmer 1992; Greene 1999; Kelly 1998, 1989, 1990a, 1990b; Duck et al. 1995). For example, in Kelly's (1998) research of British political parties, she found a significant and positive correlation in perceived in-group and out-group differentiations, specifically that strong partisans' self-esteem had a positive correlation with their partisan identity. Through an experimental study, Kelly (1989) found that partisans are more likely to perceive their in-groups as diverse and out-groups as extreme and homogeneous.

Additionally, Kelly (1990b) found that social identity theory applies to intra party factions, at least in the British political context. Even so, "although it is common wisdom that loyalty to European political parties is stronger than American party loyalties," Kelly's research still "clearly demonstrates the utility of social identity theory for understanding partisanship in all party contexts" (Greene 1999, p. 395). In the American context, the obvious divide of partisanship is between the Democratic and Republican parties. However, there is an absence of

research that focuses on intra party factions within the parties themselves. Considering my sample of strong Democratic partisans, I wanted to know if ideological factions created in-groups and out-groups between moderates and progressives. Given the level of social identification is more significant for strong partisans than it is for weak partisans (Greene 1999, p. 398-399), my sample can be blanketly classified as strong partisans given their elite status. In order to understand the ideological divide within the Democratic Party between moderates and progressives, I experimentally tested the effect of source cues.

Source Cues

Cues are small pieces of information that provide cognitive shortcuts when interpreting hard or complex information. Cue-taking is a commonly tested phenomenon in all social science fields. Political science has a rich literature experimentally assessing multiple types of political cue-taking (Arceneaux 2008; Bisgaard and Slothuus 2018; Boudreau and MacKenzie 2014; Bullock 2011; Darmofal 2005; Druckman et al. 2013; Goren et al. 2009; Johnston and Wronski 2015; Nelson et al. 2007; Nicholson 2012; Robinson 2010; Tourangeau et al. 2014). However, the bulk of political science research in the context of cue-taking has been the analysis of comparison between Democrat and Republican cues on citizens (Arceneaux 2008; Bisgaard and Slothuus 2018; Boudreau and MacKenzie 2014; Bullock 2011; Darmofal 2005; Druckman et al. 2013; Goren et al. 2009; Johnston and Wronski 2015; Nelson et al. 2007; Nicholson 2011; Nicholson 2012; Tourangeau et al. 2014) leaving room for additional research and analysis of ideological cues within the narrowed population of a particular party as well as if the experimental effects of political cue-taking is unique to a sample of citizens, or if it is generalizable to political elites themselves.

As mentioned, previous research focused on party cues. I expand that research by exploring ideological cues within the Maryland Democratic party. However, cues can also be executed through framing. Framing "is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation" (Entman 1993, p. 52). For example, in a web-based swing state survey, researchers framed policies surrounding policing and the environment. More specifically, the research tested Democratic, Republican, and independent responses to frames surrounding police reform and the Green New Deal. The results indicated that "Democrats' most effective strategy would be to frame a progressive agenda in more moderate terms" (Li et al. 2020). However, this research still had a primary focus on both Democratic and Republican citizens and contrasted results accordingly compared to my narrowed sample in terms of geography, party, and partisan elite status.

Another example of framing effects that is popular in political science research is measuring the effects of cue-taking followed by a (usually fabricated) news article with attribution to party or a partisan figure (Arceneaux 2008; Bullock 2011; Nelson et al. 2007). Because my research involves race and the Black Lives Matter movement, the work of Nelson et al. (2007) is of primary interest, whose research question was how ordinary people come to view events as racist. The experiment revolved around a fabricated news article of a white police officer shooting an 18-year-old Black male in Baltimore. The control condition involved participants receiving the article without any manipulation. The other experimental conditions received articles that were manipulated where a fabricated city council candidate was given quote attribution. Depending on the condition, the fake candidate was Black or white as well as Democrat or Republican. My research is similar to this in two primary ways outside of the

relative theme of police brutality: 1) the utilization of quote attribution, and 2) the division of testing conditions through a control group and experimental condition groups. However, my utilization of ideological cues as well as omitting race attributions allowed for more interpretive data with having two specific independent variables.

The literature is mixed in regards to the effects of cue-taking on highly politically salient and partisan individuals. Some findings insist that strong partisans need to turn to party cues for guidance where other results indicate that strong partisans are not easily manipulated when it comes to cue-taking effects on attitudes and opinions. Studies that found that strong partisans turn to party cues conducted survey experiments where the independent variables of the conditioned groups were Democrat and Republican cue attributions (Bisgaard and Slothuus 2018; Druckman et al. 2013). There are some mixed results as well. For example, Bullock (2011) found that partisans were more responsive to policy when they received their respective party's cue. Further, Tourangeau et al. (2014) was curious about response bias and measurement errors and recorded response rates based on partisan sponsorship, and found that participants of all partisan affiliations were most likely to respond when there was a neutral sponsor as opposed to the Democrat or Republican sponsorship. Nicholson (2012) however, found that partisan leaders did not persuade in-partisans, but "instead significantly polarized the opinion of out-partisans" (53). The major difference in methodology with Nicholson's research relative to others is that cues were specific party leaders, being Barack Obama and John McCain. He then compared his results without the specific party leader cues and repeated his experiment with only party cues, and he found that party cues are not nearly as polarizing as partisan leader cues. However, these findings included additional independent variables, and Nicholson neglected to analyze results through an intersectional lens of race and partisanship. Therefore, it is unknown if the racial

differentiation between Obama and McCain impacted the findings more (or less) when compared to purely party cues. This assessment of multiple variables was the main reason I chose ideological attribution instead of specific politician attribution of a progressive like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and a moderate like Joe Biden¹. Further, Bouadreau and MacKenzie (2014) found that strong partisans exhibit the most objective responses to policy information despite party cues. While my research will not completely satisfy the mixed results of the studies described, it does contribute through the analysis of cue-taking among strong partisan elites.

Cue-taking can be so powerful that it can cause disagreement with expert opinion (Darmofal 2005). The issues in Darmofal's research can be described as hard issues, which are further described in the next section. When examining the four diverse issues of the Strategic Defense Initiative, nuclear energy safety, Japanese investment in the United States, and AIDS quarantines, Darmofal (2005) found that when citizens disagreed with expert opinion on these hard issues it was due to the political climate, more specifically due to partisan elite cues. Further, Darmofal (2005) concludes that partisan elite opinion is the main cause of citizen disagreement with expert opinion. This was most recently reflected concerning the COVID-19 pandemic where wearing a mask and social distancing became partisan issues based on cues.²

Hard and Easy Issues

People use cognitive shortcuts in their everyday lives, and this heuristic model of processing information is not unique to politics. In fact, heuristics is often the thought process that is commonly associated with cue-taking because it takes less mental effort to come to conclusions (Rahn 1993), especially in the presence of one's own self-identifying in-group.

¹ The original draft of this experimental survey gave attributions to Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Joe Biden for progressive and moderate cues, but was later changed due to consideration of intersectional analysis of racial and gender differences.

² Science and health experts repeatedly encouraged the use of face masks and social distancing, whereas former president Donald Trump continued to hold in-person rallies where masks were not mandated while simultaneously claiming that the virus was a hoax.

Regarding political cue-taking, "partisan elites seem capable of helping citizens figure out how they should interpret a complex [political] reality," (Bisgaard and Slothuus 2018, p. 467) complex translating into what are referred to as "hard" issues. Hard issues are often classified as issues having to do with economics (Bisgaard and Slothuus 2018; Johnston and Wronski 2015) whereas easy issues are often classified as social or cultural issues and stereotypes (Arceneaux 2008; Bullock 2011; Lindaman and Haider-Markel 2002; Rahn 1993). Further, easy issues are often described as issues that cause immediate or gut reactions. Because of this reaction concerning easy issues, cues are not needed to reach conclusions as they are not perceived as complex. Given that the Black Lives Matter protests are in response to both social and cultural issues, I classify the protests as an easy issue, but the policies that surround the protests and the movement itself as hard issues. For example, an almost immediate reaction to Black Lives Matter was the counter-protest phrase of "All Lives Matter," a gut reactive response that neglects the true grievances of the contemporary civil rights movement.³ In the case of environmental policy, Lindaman and Haider-Markel (2002) determined that influence is top-down, meaning elite cue influence occurs on citizens. Therefore, I classify issues concerning the environment as hard issues. Further, Lindaman and Haider-Markel (2002) concluded that "elites often seem to be marching to their own tune, perhaps taking cues from, or responding to, other political actors, such as party activists and interest groups" (p. 105). However, I test this claim to determine if ideological cues influence elites.

Gender and Race

Framing and cue-taking do not necessarily have the same effect across all dependent variables, like gender. Generally speaking, women are more progressive in their baseline

³ Counter protest phrases also included "Blue Lives Matter," equating a police uniform to the immutable characteristic of race.

attitudes concerning race and racial issues (Hutchings et al. 2010; Johnson and Marini 1998; Schuman 1998). For example, in an experimental survey that utilized racial framing that sampled adults in Georgia about the controversy surrounding the Georgia state flag which had confederate symbols, the results found a differentiation between men and women (Hutchings et al. 2010). More specifically, the results indicated that "racial cues represent a powerful trigger for the gender gap in contemporary American politics" (Hutchings et al. 2010, p. 1186) and that southern white men are significantly more racist in their attitudes when compared to women. My study contributes to this research when examining racial attitudes along gendered lines.

Black Lives Matter - Background

From Fannie Lou Hamer's speech at the Democratic National Convention and Lyndon B. Johnson's signing of the Civil Rights Act in 1964, to Barack Obama's historic election in 2008, race has been and continues to be a highly salient issue within the Democratic Party. The protests that erupted in the United States in response to the murder of George Floyd by a white police officer proved to be a highly salient issue as well, where the most obvious divide was between Democrats and Republicans, though I theorize that there is also a divide between moderate and progressive Democrats. Given that the Black Lives Matter movement is a recent phenomenon being only 8-years-old as well as the saliency of racial issues throughout history concerning the Democratic Party, I wanted to know if the attitudes of my sample were fixed or malleable.

The Black Lives Matter movement is a contemporary civil rights movement that calls for equity in systems such as housing, education, policing, health care, and income. The movement began in response to the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the summer of 2013 for the killing of 17-year-old Trayvon Martin. Black Americans are 3.23 times more likely to be killed by police officers than white Americans, a clear grievance of the Black Lives Matter movement (Schwartz

and Jahn 2020). However, in the spring of 2020 following the murder of George Floyd, an "American Arab Spring"⁴ erupted. Protests emerged in full force through the tool of social media and nearly every person having a camera in their pocket through cell phone technology. In fact, the #JusticeForGeorgeFloyd hashtag was trending on Twitter the day after Floyd was murdered by a white police officer, and "within a week, protests on this issue had begun to spread throughout the country and the world" (Heaney 2020, 201).

Last year was the perfect storm for protest in the United States. The poor preparation and handling of the COVID-19 pandemic dramatically caused trust in the government to decline, specifically among Democrats (Deane et al. 2021). COVID-19 was and is not a partisan occurrence, though it most definitely elicited a partisan response. In fact, no country in the world was more politically divided under the handling of government response to COVID-19 compared to the United States (Dimock and Wike 2020). With high unemployment rates and shutdowns in response to the pandemic came high levels of restlessness, all of which contributed to the massive wave of Black Lives Matter protests across the country and the world (Heaney 2020, 202). Knowledge of the Black Lives Matter protests last year was unavoidable for all Americans.

The Democratic Party

At the time of this study, Democrats control both congressional chambers as well as the White House, therefore elites' attitudes toward Black Lives Matter is important in the context of policy and legislation. In general, it is important to know how elites react to policy and legislation when it is presented to see if there is enough support to translate into votes. The participants in my sample are all elected representatives of the Democratic Party in their respective counties in Maryland, therefore I classify them as elites. There are limitations in

⁴ The Arab Spring began in Tunisia in December 2010 when Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire in protest on government property. The protests following Bouazizi's death in January 2011 in Tunisia spread through social media and led to protests across the Arab world.

existing literature that sample Democratic elites, specifically. In a sample similar to mine, political scientists in the 1960s sampled both Democratic and Republican county party leaders in Ohio (Flinn and Wirt 1965). The all-male county party leaders were sent an opinion questionnaire through the mail focusing on national issues, civil liberty issues, and state issues. As expected, Republicans and Democrats differed in their responses, with Democrats more comfortable with government involvement and Republicans favoring less regulations, despite the sample demographics being almost identical with the exception of religion. However, the finding that "in the area of civil liberties the Republicans are united, but the Democrats show signs of intra party conflict" (Flinn and Wirt 1965, p. 81) is consistent with my question explaining the moderate-progressive divide in a cue-taking context. Another 1960s questionnaire study that focused on differing levels of leadership within the California Democratic Party found intra party conflict in that "the superstructure of party leadership tends to be more moderate and centrist than the substructure" (Costantini 1963, p. 971).

Support for the Black Lives Matter movement has been consistently high among Democrats. In an analysis of opinions derived from polling both before and after the murder of George Floyd, it was determined that white and Black Democrats feel differently on issues involving race and racial equity, with Black Democrats more progressive in their preferences than White Democrats (Conroy and Bacon 2020). My study will address this research when considering all dependent variables. In the experimental web-based swing state survey that examined policy framing, the researchers found that the average Democratic support for the Black Lives Matter movement was 3.43, on a 1-5 strongly opposed to strong support scale (Li et al. 2020).

METHODOLOGY

Survey Experiment

In order to test the effect of elite cues on elites, I used a sample of members belonging to Democratic Central Committees in Maryland⁵. I emailed all Democratic Central Committee Chairpersons in the state and requested that they take the survey themselves and distribute the survey to the rest of the full voting members on their respective committees. One week later I sent a follow-up email to the Chairpersons to serve as a reminder to take and distribute the survey. During both correspondence it was explicitly stated that participation was voluntary. Data collection for the survey took place the last two weeks of February 2021, and survey access to participants closed on March 1, 2021. The survey was conducted online through the software Qualtrics, accessed through the Political Science department at Hood College⁶.

There were three conditions of the experimental survey: a control condition that attributed quotes to "an elected official," a moderate condition with quote attribution from an "elected official who is a moderate Democrat," and a progressive condition with quote attribution from an "elected official who is a progressive Democrat." The control condition consisted of 32.4 percent of the sample with the moderate and progressive conditions consisting of 30.4 percent and 29.4 percent respectively. The quotes involved race and the environment along with a 1-5 metric scale of agreeability. After the quotes, questions were asked without any attribution regarding either race or environmental issues and/or policies.

⁵ The author is the former Treasurer and Chairwoman of the Washington County Democratic Central Committee from 2018 - March 2021. She did not participate in the survey despite belonging to the sample to reduce response bias and bias in general.

⁶ The survey is provided in the Appendix of this paper.

Participants

The sample for this experiment was a small, homogenous population in terms of party identification and elite status as Democratic Central Committee members in Maryland. All of Maryland's counties and Baltimore City have a Democratic Central Committee, consisting of individuals who were elected or appointed to a four-year term. This sample is highly partisan, of which evidence can be found even through the electoral process of the seats. Every gubernatorial election year, Central Committee candidates can be found on the primary ballot for their respective party. While there are also Republican Central Committees in Maryland, I focus only on Democratic Central Committees for two reasons: first, I was not interested in comparing Republican versus Democratic responses in terms of the Black Lives Matter movement or environmentalism because they tend to be highly partisan issues where results would reveal two distinct camps as is the nature of the two-party polarization in the current political climate. Instead, a primary focus on the Democratic Party allows to narrow the focus of similarities and differences between the obviously more liberal and progressive party, and these specific issues are much more salient for Democrats as they remain at the forefront of the party especially between the moderate and progressive wings. Second, I chose this sample because of its uniqueness and my personal access to the sample population. With the narrow sample of all Democrats, I was able to test the effects of moderate and progressive ideological cues.

There are a total of 360 Democratic central committee seats in the state, though not all of the positions are full. For example, Washington County is an 8-seat committee, but they currently have 3 vacancies.⁷ The only members of this sample are full voting members, not student or associate members. The total sampled out of the population was 102 participants, roughly a 35

⁷ This central committee had 7 full seats at the time of the survey, 3 resignations followed soon after the close of the survey on the grounds of disagreement on racial issues. This is included to inform that membership is not static through turnover rates as well as the occasional inability to fill all seats.

percent response rate, establishing a statistically representative sample of the larger population of Democratic Central Committee members in Maryland, but not Democrats in general.

Democratic Central Committees are the official arms of the Democratic National Committee on the local county level. The primary purpose of these committees are to recruit and run candidates in elections, suggest appointment nominees to the governor in the event of an open Democratic seat in the committee's respective county, as well as have voting rights at the state level regarding party decisions. While four committees were not gender balanced at the ballot in 2018, the remaining 20 committees were gender balanced at the ballot at the time of the survey.

Using the classic 7-point ideological metric scale ranging from "extremely liberal" to "extremely conservative," participants self-identified their ideologies, displayed in Figure 1.⁸ There were no participants who self identified as "conservative" or "extremely conservative." There were more female than male participants, with 56.7 percent of the sample identifying as female and 43.3 percent identifying as male. The racial makeup of the participants is displayed in Figure 2, with the majority of respondents identifying as white. The ages of the participants were determined by asking for their birth year. The range of birth years for the sample is 1943-1995, spanning over five generational categories as displayed Table 1. The majority of the sample came from Boomers I, followed by millennials, Generation X, Boomers II, and the Post War generation. One thing that was somewhat surprising was the education among the Maryland Democratic central committee members; 55.2 percent of the sample possessed at least one graduate degree, as displayed Figure 3. Therefore this sample is overwhelmingly educated with 85.1 percent of participants receiving a college degree or higher. In terms of annual household

⁸ See Tables and Figures and the end of this paper.

income, the sample varied greatly, though the majority of participants were in the \$100,000 - \$149,000 income range as displayed in Figure 4.

Generalizability

Joe Biden won 25 states in the 2020 presidential election, and he won Maryland by the third most vote percentage. Only behind Vermont and Massachusetts which had a 66.4 and 65.9 percent voting bloc for Biden respectively, Maryland had the highest Democratic vote share with 65.8 percent of votes (see Figure 5). This form of comparison relays that Maryland is a blue stronghold, even stronger than the stereotypical labeled liberal state of California by this measure. Further, this measure relays that this sample is not representative of Democratic interest across the country. Figure 6 is a comparison of the Democratic vote count in Maryland and the top five Democratic share of the vote in Trump winning states. This metric is included to show that the Democratic Party in Maryland is not necessarily generalizable to the Democratic Parties in other states like North Carolina or Florida, as examples.

Hypotheses

My research seeks to test three hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: *When presented with the moderate cue, respondents will be more conservative in their response/position.*

Hypothesis 2: *When presented with the progressive cue, respondents will be more liberal in their response/position.*

Hypothesis 3: *Subjects' ideological predispositions will moderate the effects noted in Hypotheses 1 and 2; more conservative subjects will express more agreement with the moderate cue and more liberal subjects will express more agreements with the progressive cue.*

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Data

Elite attitudes were shaped by ideological cues, but not in the direction that was expected. Following the stimulus, the survey experiment asked subjects to rate their attitudes on a 1-5 metric scale, where 1 is low support and 5 is high support. Concerning the Black Lives Matter movement, overall support was relatively high across all conditions along with the "white supremacy" quote (see Table 2 for label coding and Figure 7 and Table 3 for differences in means). Previous research found that the average Democratic support for the Black Lives Matter movement was 3.43 on a 1-5 strongly opposed to strongly support scale (Li et al. 2020). Using this metric, the average support for the Black Lives Matter movement among my sample across all conditions was 4.61, considerably higher than average. The main finding is that the moderate Democrat cue elicited the most progressive response across all variables on quote attributions and the subsequent policy questions, whereas the progressive Democrat cue elicited the most moderate responses across all measures about Black Lives Matter and revolving policy. The "Injustice" quote in the mouth of a progressive elicited a less progressive response than "policy efforts to defund the police" within the same condition despite both having the same ends. While there was statistical significance when comparing the moderate and progressive cue conditions on the "Injustice" quote (see Table 4 for p values), the overall trend of moderate cues eliciting progressive responses and vice versa still holds relevance based on the trends alone.

The trend of moderate cues eliciting progressive responses was not limited to Black Lives Matter and relevant policy. Similar patterns were observed concerning the environment. While the control condition moderated more progressive responses on Black Lives Matter and race across all questions, the same was not true for the environment, in fact this is only the case with

the "Climate Change" quote. However, the moderate Democrat cue elicited the most progressive response on both quotes and the "Global Warming" question. The "Environment and Economy" was the only question where the progressive Democrat cue elicited a more progressive response than the moderate Democrat cue,⁹ however the difference between means of the progressive and moderate cue is only .01 (see Table 5). Moderate cues moderating progressive responses remains the main trend concerning the environmental portion of the research.

The effects of the cue-taking experiment were not moderated by race or Black Lives Matter protest attendance, rather it affected everyone similarly across all demographics except one: gender.¹⁰ For women, the moderate Democrat cue moderated a progressive response concerning race and Black Lives Matter (see Figure 9 and Table 7 for differences in means among women participants). This trend is true across all measures for women. Interestingly, women in the progressive Democratic cue group supported policy efforts to defund the police more than the "Injustice" quote despite both having the same ends of defunding police. When comparing the differences in means among women respondents on "Injustice," the control to progressive difference is 1.1 while the moderate to progressive difference is 1.13. However, when comparing the means on "Defund," the difference in means between the control and progressive condition is only .71 and the moderate to progressive difference is .64. Statistical significance was reached when comparing the progressive Democrat condition with both the control and moderate cue conditions for women on "Injustice" as well as between the moderate and progressive conditions in Black Lives Matter Support (See Table 8).

⁹ Possible explanations for this finding is explored in the discussion section of this paper.

¹⁰ While the traditional meaning of a gender gap in political science is usually the difference in vote shares, either as citizen voters or as candidates, the gender gap in this context is referencing the difference in means between men and women in the data of this research.

For men in the sample, there was no statistical significance on Black Lives Matter and race. However, the progressive Democrat cue moderated a more progressive response on "Defund" whereas the moderate cue elicited the most moderate response, satisfying hypotheses 1 and 2. However, women were more supportive of policy efforts to defund the police in general. In fact, comparing the baseline attitudes between men and women in the control groups, women proved to be more liberal in their baseline attitudes toward Black Lives Matter and race across all issues measured, but the progressive cue made men more liberal and women more moderate.

The effects that moderated the women's response in Black Lives Matter and race are comparable to the effects seen on men concerning the environment. For men, the moderate Democrat cue elicited the most progressive response on environmental issues (See Figure 11 and Table 10). However, the progressive cue also showed a more progressive response in comparison to the control group. While the moderate cue elicited the most progressive response overall, aside from "Climate Change" where the control group had the most progressive attitudes, the progressive cue made men more progressive on all other measures when compared to the control. While women showed statistical significance in their attitudes concerning race and Black Lives Matter and men did not, the opposite is true for the environment where men had results of statistical significance where the women did not. Men showed statistical significance between the control group and both cue groups for "Global Warming" as well as between the control group and moderate cue for "Environment and Economy" (See Table 11).

As previously stated, there was no statistical significance for women concerning the environment. However, the moderate cue elicited more progressive responses than the progressive cue across all measures except for "Environment and Economy" where the progressive cue elicited the most progressive response (see Figure 12 and Table 12).

Discussion

I began my research wanting to know if Democratic Central Committee members in Maryland support the Black Lives Matter movement. Then, in an attempt to test that support empirically, I wanted to know if support among my sample for the Black Lives Matter movement was malleable and dependent upon ideological cue-taking. I generally found that ideological cues do have effects on elites. My findings are consistent with Li et al. (2020) in that the moderate Democratic cue elicited the most progressive response when compared to the control and progressive cue groups across all Black Lives Matter and most environmental quotes and questions. It is possible that the overall results were driven by the number of female participants given their statistical significance and cue-taking effects concerning Black Lives Matter and race, and the same for men concerning the environment. Both "Injustice" and "Defund" elicited relatively low support across conditions. One plausible reason for this finding is the fact that "defunding the police" is an unfavorable frame of the policy issue when compared to other ways of framing (Li et al. 2020). However, the results indicate high support for the Black Lives Matter movement across all conditions and relatively low support for the policy efforts surrounding the movement through defunding efforts.

While the moderate Democrat cue elicited the most progressive response across nearly all conditions concerning the environment, the "Environment and Economy" response was the exception. There are two possibilities found in previous literature that explain this phenomenon. The first is Lindaman and Haider-Markel's (2002) finding that issues involving environmental protections are top-down influence issues, meaning that people turn to elite cues when forming opinions. This leads into the second explanation of hard issues. Because economics are categorized as hard issues (Bisgaard and Slothuus 2018; Johnston and Wronski 2015) it could be

argued that receiving a cue, even the progressive cue, caused heuristic shortcuts. However, this explanation seems to be more true for men than for women concerning the environment.

Cues seemed to affect women and men differently across issues. When examining women and their responses concerning race and Black Lives Matter, I found that the moderate Democratic cue elicited more progressive responses when compared to the progressive Democrat cue, and the control responses were all more progressive when compared to the progressive cue. A possible explanation for the difference in means between "Injustice" and "Defund" among women is the fact that the "Injustice" quote was put directly into the mouth of a moderate or progressive Democrat in the experimental conditions, whereas "Defund" did not receive direct attribution, though it did follow the quotes within the flow of the survey. Therefore, it can be speculated that if given direct attribution, "Defund" would have seen more polarized effects as seen in the "Injustice" response. However, this trend was not seen among the men of the sample who seemed set in their attitudes toward race and Black Lives Matter regardless of cue condition. Though, the progressive cue made men slightly more liberal concerning policy effort to defund the police. Women were more progressive in their baseline attitudes compared to men when observing the control groups of both genders, reinforcing the findings of Hutchings et al. (2010) of the gender gap concerning racial attitudes.

There was also a difference between men and women concerning the environment where women seem to be more fixed on their opinions and men seem to turn to ideological cues. While the progressive cue elicited a more moderate response across all issues for men, the same was not true for women. Further, when comparing the control groups with the moderate cue conditions for men, there are significant shifts in attitudes while there is not a significant shift for women.

The difference in results across issues for men and women has one possible explanation: women are more fixed in their attitudes concerning the environment and men were more fixed in their attitudes concerning race and Black Lives Matter. Because of this, it seems as though race and Black Lives Matter is more of a hard issue for women and an easy issue for men, whereas the environment seems to be an easy issue for women and a hard issue for men based on the statistical significance in the various cue-taking measures.

The limitations of this research is the small and homogeneous sample, and therefore generalizability. Care should be taken when generalizing these results. While this research can be repeated with different samples of Democrats including citizens, a cross sectional analysis of Democratic Central Committee members of different states would compile more data and comparison points and thus extend generalizability. However, it is recommended that the samples of future research be Democratic partisans regardless of elite status, to test if ideological cues have an effect on Democratic partisans. A larger sample would also contribute to the generalizability of my findings concerning the effects of cue-taking between men and women.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, I tested the effect of ideological cues on partisan elites and found limited experimental effects among Democratic Central Committee members in Maryland. My findings suggest that there are intra party factions within the Democratic Party being moderates and progressives. Support for the Black Lives Matter movement seems to be somewhat malleable and dependent on ideological cues among Democratic Central Committee members in Maryland.

I found that elites can persuade elites, though the effects are limited. For all questions across all conditions, moderate Democrat cues elicited the most progressive responses and progressive Democrat cues elicited the most moderate responses. Further, I found that men and

women in my sample respond to ideological cues differently depending on the issue. Women were less fixed on their attitudes toward race and Black Lives Matter than men, where the progressive Democrat cue elicited a much less liberal response. Men were less fixed on their attitudes toward the environment than women, where the moderate cue increased progressive response.

I also found that support for the Black Lives Matter movement is high, however that support is not reflected in policy efforts to defund the police. My findings further previous research in that progressive policy was most favorable when given moderate attribution (Li et al. 2020). Therefore, my main recommendation for the Maryland Democratic Party is to consider using moderate frames as well as moderate voices/attribution when attempting to advance progressive policy agendas. For example, when attempting to pass policy efforts to defund the police, have the policy presented from a moderate Democrat like Joe Biden and avoid the policy being presented by a progressive like Bernie Sanders or Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. Further, instead of referring to the defunding of police as literally "defund," present the policy in more moderate terms such as "reforming the police." If the Democratic Party passes policies that reflect the populist voice that encompasses the current left through moderate attributions, my results indicate that the moderate delivery is more widely acceptable.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I first want to thank Dr. Carin Robinson for her dedication to both myself and my work, she is a fantastic educator, and I am continuously thankful for her agreement to be my research committee advisor. Secondly, I want to thank Dr. Paige Eager and Professor Alan Goldenbach for agreeing to serve as faculty committee members for this research as well as for their tremendous feedback. Finally, I want to thank my husband, Chris, and my daughter, Storm, for their continued patience and support throughout this research and my educational journey thus far. I love you both.

Appendix

*Note that experimental conditions will be provided within the control survey within parentheses.

I am a senior in the political science department at Hood College. For my Departmental Honors project, I am conducting research about public opinion in 2021. This survey is completely anonymous. Your answers will not be connected to your name in any way. Please answer the questions by marking the responses that come closest to your views. You may skip any questions that you are uncomfortable answering. If you have any questions about my research, I can be reached at kimberlynduff@gmail.com. Thank you for your assistance.

Please tell us how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Federal minimum wage should be \$15/hour.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The Electoral College should be abolished.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Irish, Italian, Jewish, and many other minorities overcame prejudice and their way up. Blacks should do the same without any special favors.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The government should take a bigger role in environmental regulations.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Next, you will read a series of quotes about the environment from an elected official (who is a moderate Democrat/progressive Democrat). After each statement, please tell us how strongly you agree or disagree with the statement.

Please read the following quote from an elected official (who is a moderate Democrat/progressive Democrat), then tell us how strongly you agree or disagree with the statement.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
"Climate change is the existential threat to humanity. Unchecked, it is going to actually bake this planet. This is not hyperbole. It's real. And we have a moral obligation."	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please read the following quote from an elected official (who is a moderate Democrat/progressive Democrat), then tell us how strongly you agree or disagree with the statement.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
"There's no debate as to whether we should continue producing fossil fuels. There's no debate, we should not. Every single scientific consensus points to that."	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Now we would like to ask your opinion on matters having to do with environmental policy.

Complete the sentence with the position that comes closest to your view: The seriousness of global warming is _____.

- ☐ Generally exaggerated
- ☐ Somewhat exaggerated
- ☐ Generally correct
- ☐ Somewhat underestimated
- ☐ Generally underestimated

Please tell us how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statement:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Protection of the environment should be given priority, even at the risk of curbing economic growth.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Next, you will read a series of quotes about race from an elected official (who is a moderate Democrat/progressive Democrat). After each statement, please tell us how strongly you agree or disagree with the statement.

Please read the following quote from an elected official (who is a moderate Democrat/progressive Democrat), then tell us how strongly you agree or disagree with the statement.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
"The (in)justice department says what they always say--Black lives don't matter. This system fails to protect Black communities. That's why we will keep fighting to defund the police. To honor the lives of those stolen by police and state-sanctioned violence."	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please read the following quote from an elected official (who is a moderate Democrat/progressive Democrat), then tell us whether you agree or disagree with the statement.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
"White supremacy has been etched into the foundation of our government since the beginning."	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Now we would like to ask your opinion of matters having to do with race in our society.

Do you support or oppose the following?

	Strongly Oppose	Oppose	Neutral	Support	Strongly Support
Policy efforts to defund the police.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Do you support or oppose the following?

	Strongly Oppose	Oppose	Neutral	Support	Strongly Support
Black Lives Matter movement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please tell us how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statement:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Racial discrimination is a MINOR reason why black people in our country may have a harder time getting ahead than whites.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Have you participated in a march or protest on behalf of any of the following groups or causes?
Check all that apply.

- ☐ Women's March
- ☐ Black Lives Matter or racial justice
- ☐ Poverty
- ☐ Animal rights
- ☐ Environment
- ☐ Pro-Choice
- ☐ Other
- ☐ Prefer not to say

Next, we will ask you for some background information.

What year were you born?

What is your gender?

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Non-binary / third gender
- ☐ Prefer not to say

What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- ☐ High school or less
- ☐ Some college
- ☐ College Degree
- ☐ Some Graduate school

- ☐ Graduate Degree
- ☐ Prefer not to say

What is your race/ethnicity?

- ☐ Native American
- ☐ Black
- ☐ White
- ☐ Hispanic
- ☐ Asian
- ☐ Other
- ☐ Prefer not to say

Do any of the following terms describe your religious identity? Please check all that apply.

- ☐ Fundamentalist Christian
- ☐ Liberal Christian
- ☐ Pentecostal Christian
- ☐ Progressive Catholic
- ☐ Reform Jew
- ☐ Evangelical Christian
- ☐ Charismatic Christian
- ☐ Mainline Protestant
- ☐ Orthodox Jew
- ☐ Atheist
- ☐ Agnostic
- ☐ Ethical Humanist
- ☐ Born-again Christian
- ☐ Traditional Catholic
- ☐ Conservative Jew
- ☐ Other
- ☐ None
- ☐ Prefer not to say

How would you describe your political ideology?

- ☐ Extremely liberal
- ☐ Liberal
- ☐ Somewhat liberal
- ☐ Moderate
- ☐ Somewhat conservative
- ☐ Conservative
- ☐ Extremely Conservative
- ☐ Prefer not to say

What is your annual household income?

- ☐ Less than \$50,000
- ☐ \$50,000 - \$99,000
- ☐ \$100,000 - \$149,000
- ☐ \$150,000 - \$199,000
- ☐ \$200,000 - \$249,000
- ☐ \$250,000 - \$299,000
- ☐ \$300,000 - \$349,000
- ☐ \$350,000 - \$399,000
- ☐ \$400,000 - \$500,000
- ☐ Above \$500,000
- ☐ Prefer not to say

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Tables and Figures

Figure 1. The "somewhat conservative" valid percentage was 4.5 percent while those who preferred not to answer was 3 percent.

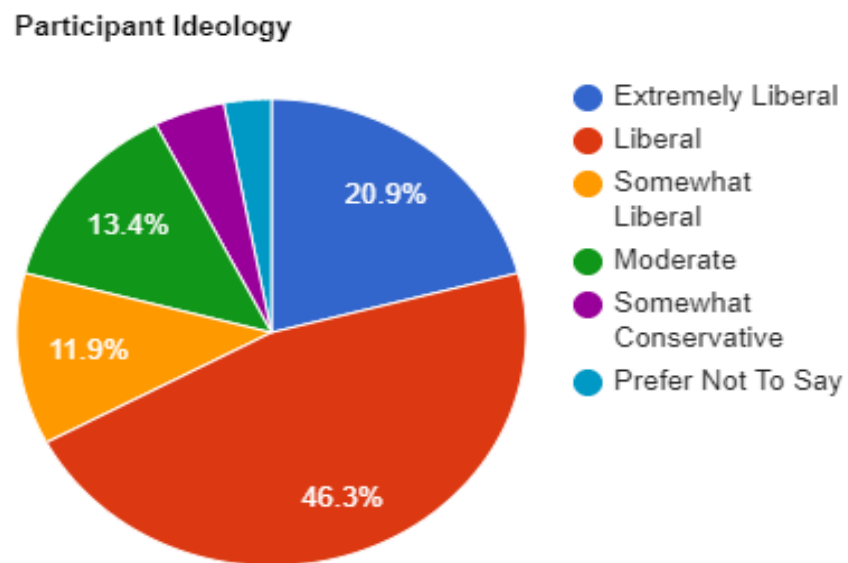


Figure 2. Hispanics made up 3 percent of the sample, and Asians and "other" made up 1.5 percent each.

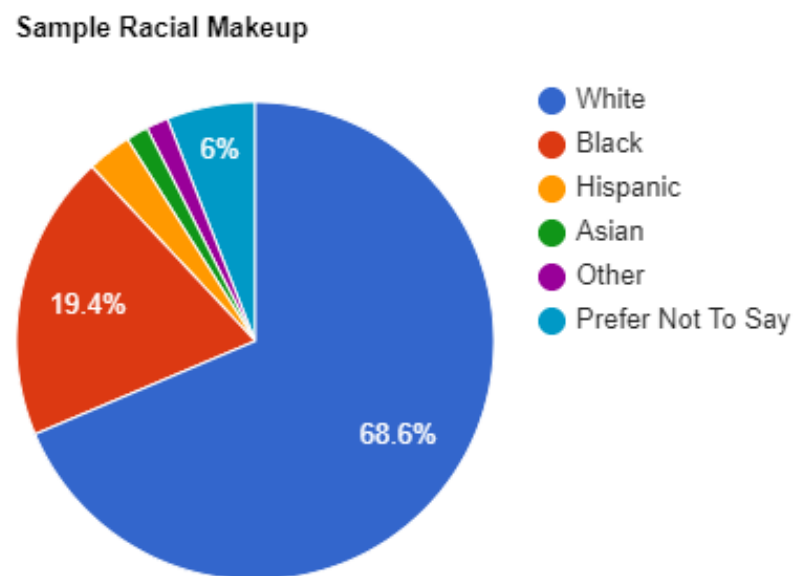


Table 1. Generational categories based on Age by Generation (2020).

Generational Category	Birth Year Ranges
Millennials	1981-1996
Generation X	1965-1980
Boomers II	1955-1964
Boomers I	1946-1954
Post War	1928-1945

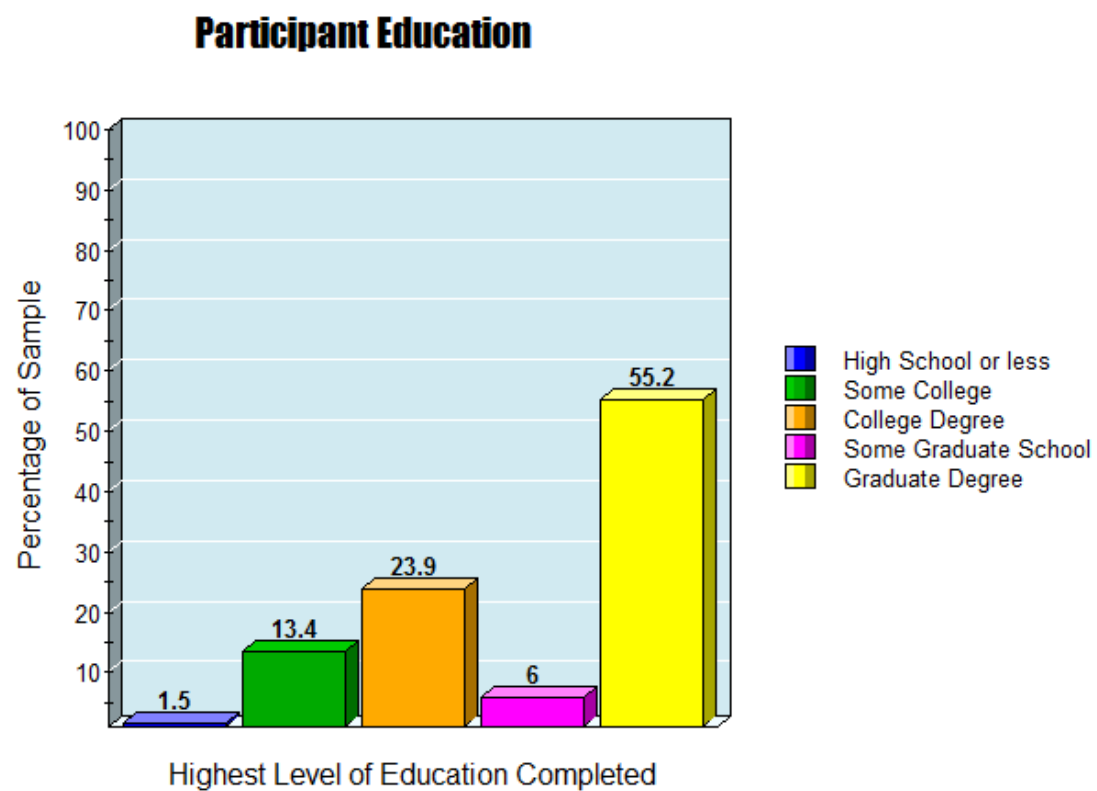
Figure 3. Participant education.

Figure 4. Participant annual household income.

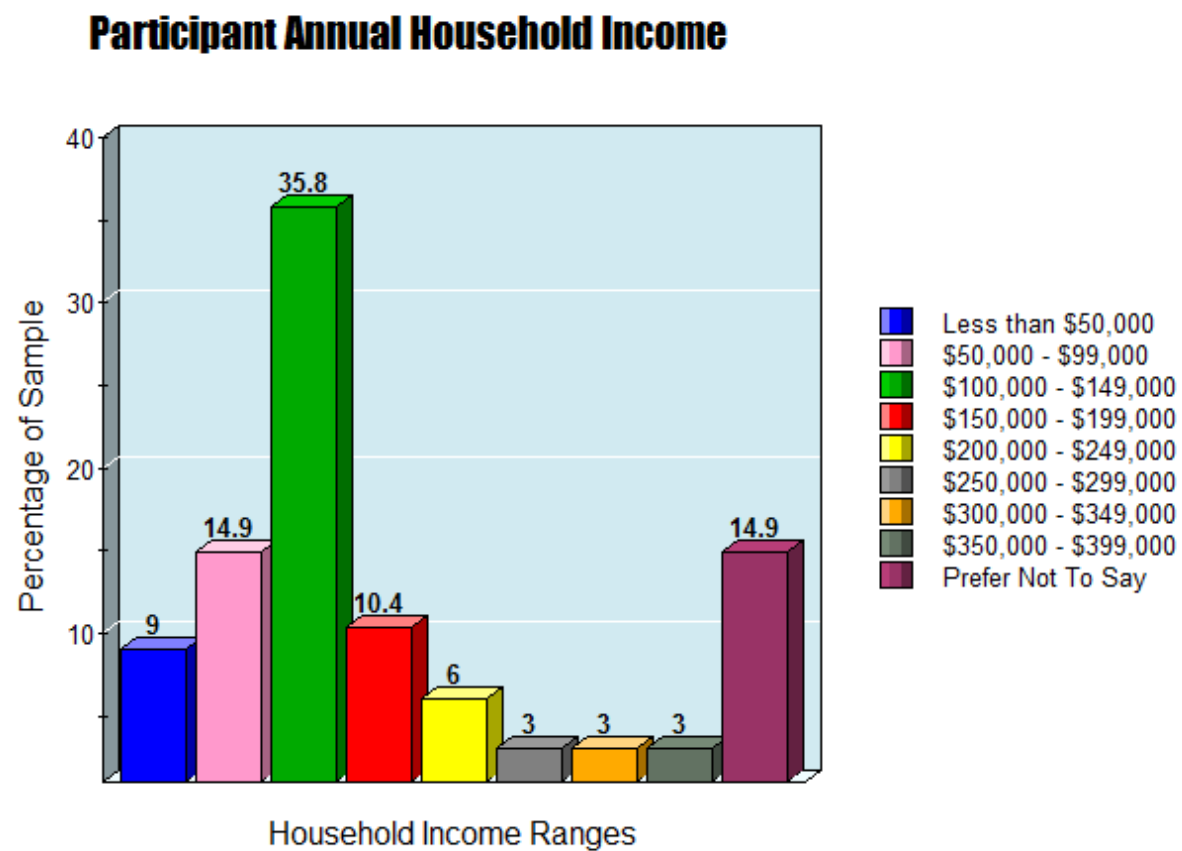


Figure 5. Top states that voted for Joe Biden in the 2020 presidential election.

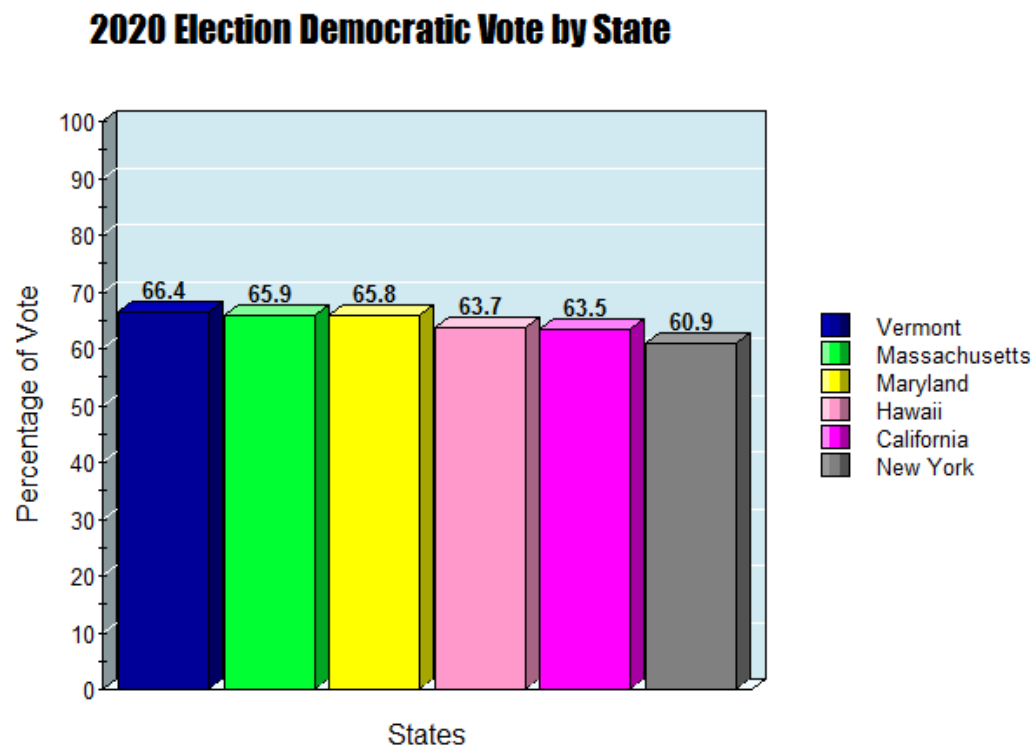


Figure 6. Donald Trump won states with the highest support for Joe Biden in the 2020 presidential election in comparison to Maryland.

2020 Election Democratic Vote by GOP Winning States

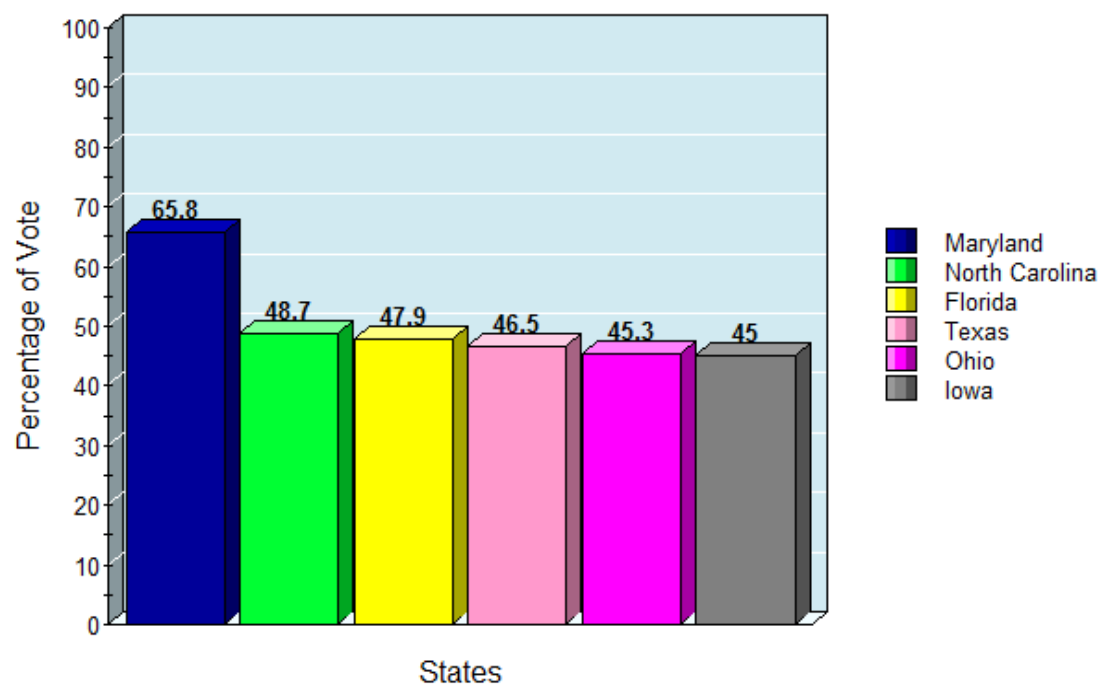


Table 2. Label coding of questions represented on x-axis in means graphs. Participants were asked if they disagreed or agreed with the quotes on a 1-5 metric scale, with increased support increasing in value. Participants were asked if they opposed or supported the policy efforts, with increased support increasing in value.

Injustice	"The (in)justice department says what they always say--Black lives don't matter. This system fails to protect Black communities. That's why we will keep fighting to defund the police. To honor the lives of those stolen by police and state-sanctioned violence."
White Supremacy	"White supremacy has been etched into the foundation of our government since the beginning."
Defund	Policy efforts to defund the police.
BLM Support	Black Lives Matter movement.
Climate Change	"Climate change is the existential threat to humanity. Unchecked, it is going to actually bake this planet. This is not hyperbole. It's real. And we have a moral obligation."
Fossil Fuels	"There's no debate as to whether we should continue producing fossil fuels. There's no debate, we should not. Every single scientific consensus points to that."
Global Warming	Complete the following sentence with the position that comes closest to your view: The seriousness of global warming is _____. (Generally exaggerated - Generally underestimated 1-5 scale)
Environment and Economy	Protection of the environment should be given priority, even at the risk of curbing economic growth.

Figure 7. Black Lives Matter and race means across all conditions.

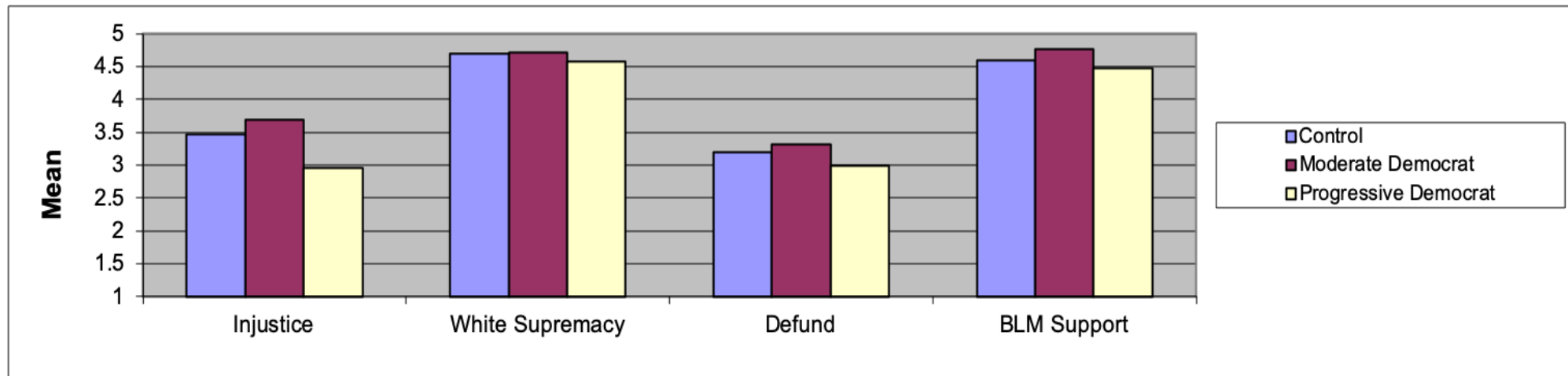


Table 3. Differences in means on race and Black Lives Matter.

	Injustice	White Supremacy	Defund	BLM Support
Control (no cue)	3.47	4.69	3.19	4.59
Moderate cue	3.69	4.71	3.31	4.76
Progressive cue	2.95	4.58	3	4.47

Table 4. Experimental effects between conditions on Black Lives Matter and race. $^{\wedge}p < .1$ (two-sided test).

	Injustice	White Supremacy	Defund	BLM Support
Control - Moderate	.615	.906	.772	.396
Control - Progressive	.188	.508	.621	.56
Moderate - Progressive	$^{\wedge}.069$.491	.381	.114

Figure 8. Environmental means across all conditions.

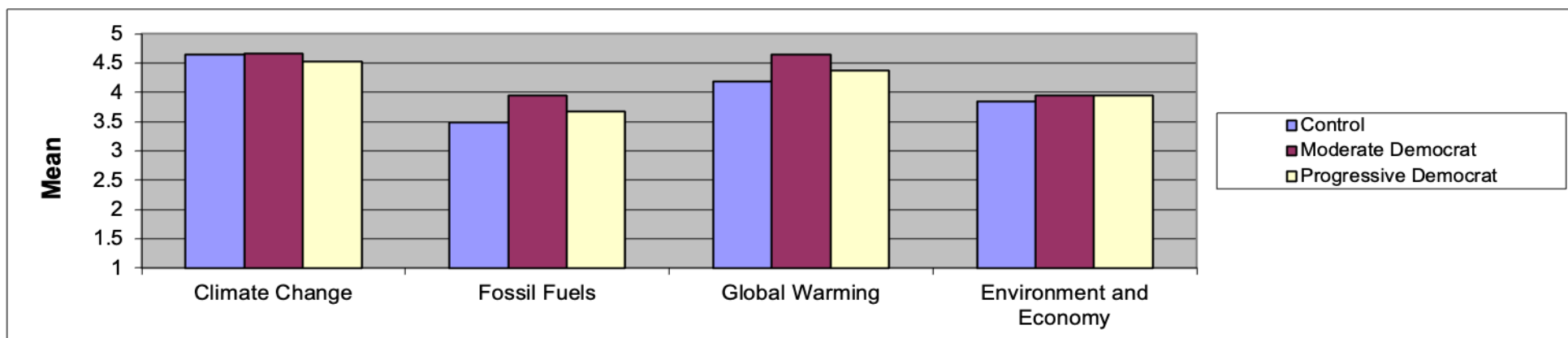


Table 5. Differences in means on the environment.

	Climate Change	Fossil Fuels	Global Warming	Environment and Economy
Control (no cue)	4.64	3.48	4.18	3.84
Moderate cue	4.67	3.94	4.65	3.94
Progressive cue	4.53	3.68	4.37	3.95

Table 6. Experimental effects between conditions on the environment. $\wedge p < .1$ (two-sided test).

	Climate Change	Fossil Fuels	Global Warming	Environment and Economy
Control - Moderate	.855	.222	$\wedge .073$.692
Control - Progressive	.479	.583	.468	.675
Moderate - Progressive	.446	.478	.288	.983

Figure 9. Black Lives Matter and race means across all conditions for women participants.

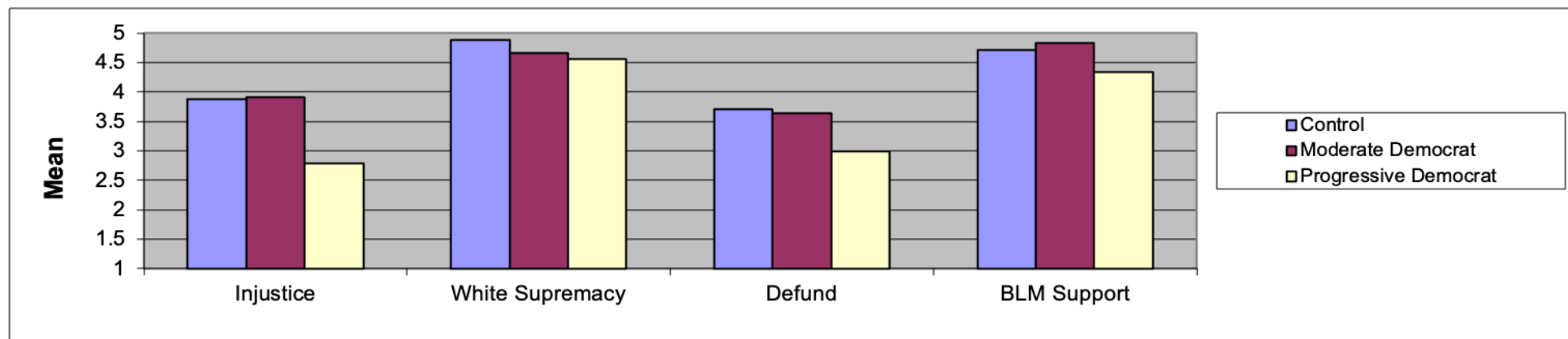


Table 7. Differences in means on Black Lives Matter and race across all conditions for women participants.

	Injustice	White Supremacy	Defund	BLM Support
Control (no cue)	3.88	4.88	3.71	4.71
Moderate cue	3.91	4.67	3.64	4.83
Progressive cue	2.78	4.56	3	4.33

Table 8. Experimental effects between conditions on Black Lives Matter and race among women. * $p < .05$; ^ $p < .1$ (two-sided tests).

	Injustice	White Supremacy	Defund	BLM Support
Control - Moderate	.958	.169	.889	.518
Control - Progressive	*.047	.126	.205	.164
Moderate - Progressive	*.045	.68	.157	^.052

Figure 10. Black Lives Matter and race means across all conditions for men participants.

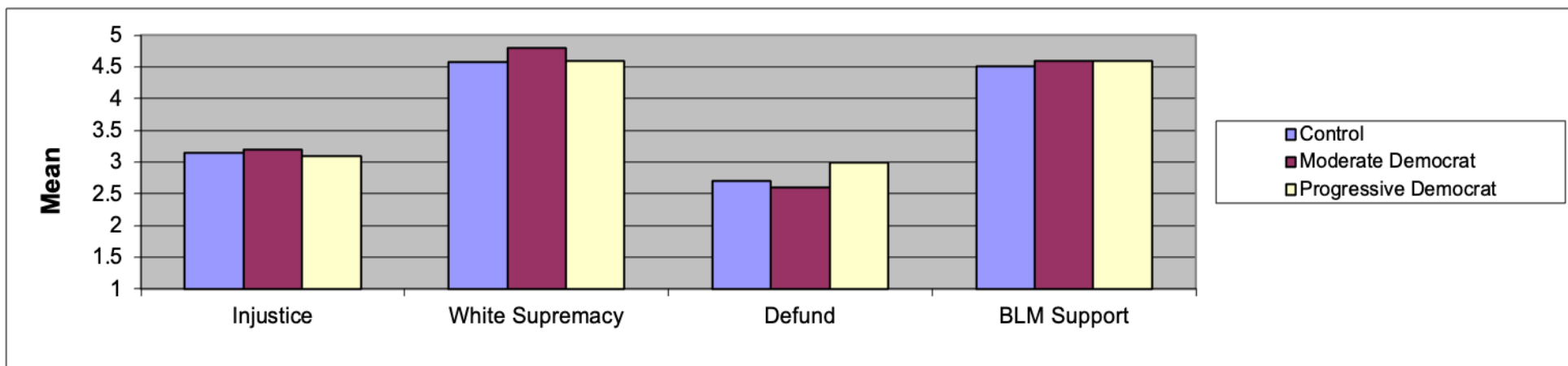


Table 9. Differences in means on Black Lives Matter and race across all conditions for men participants.

	Injustice	White Supremacy	Defund	BLM Support
Control (no cue)	3.14	4.57	2.71	4.5
Moderate cue	3.2	4.8	2.6	4.6
Progressive cue	3.1	4.6	3	4.6

Figure 11. Environmental means across all conditions for men participants.

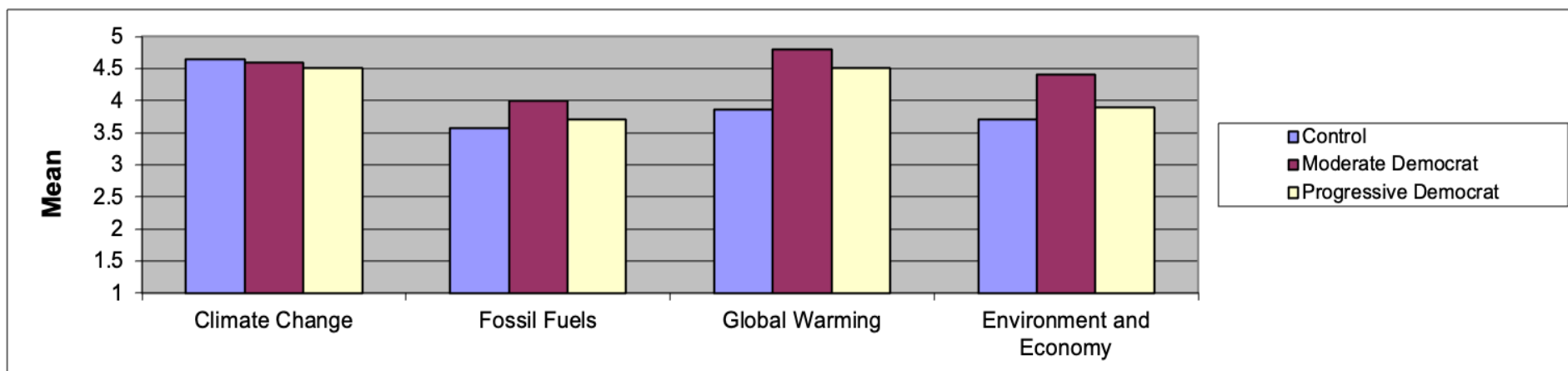


Table 10. Differences in means on the environment for men participants.

	Climate Change	Fossil Fuels	Global Warming	Environment and Economy
Control (no cue)	4.64	3.57	3.86	3.71
Moderate cue	4.6	4	4.8	4.4
Progressive cue	4.5	3.7	4.5	3.9

Table 11. Experimental effects between conditions on the environment for men participants. * $p < .05$; ^ $p < .1$ (two-sided tests).

	Global Warming	Environment and Economy
Control - Moderate	*.034	*.042
Control - Progressive	^.066	.576
Moderate - Progressive	.407	.319

Figure 12. Environmental means across all conditions for women participants.

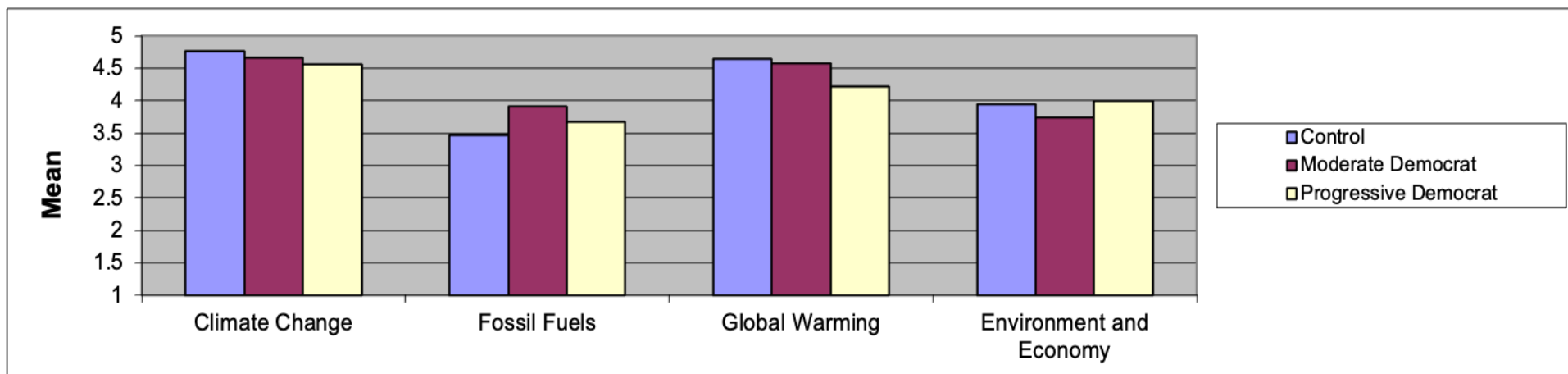


Table 12. Differences in means on the environment for women participants.

	Climate Change	Fossil Fuels	Global Warming	Environment and Economy
Control (no cue)	4.76	3.47	4.65	3.94
Moderate cue	4.67	3.92	4.58	3.75
Progressive cue	4.56	3.67	4.22	4

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Kimberly Duff