Check for updates

DOI: 10.1111/pops.70018

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Political Psychology

Reaching across the aisle: Committed and optimistic citizens support a non-preferred presidency and cooperate with electoral winners

Ismaharif Ismail [1] | **Lile Jia** [2]

[1]Department of Communication, University of California, Santa Barbara, California, USA

[2]Department of Psychology, National University of Singapore, Singapore, Singapore

Correspondence
Lile Jia, Department of Psychology, National University of Singapore, Block AS4, Level 2, 9 Arts Link, Singapore 117570.
Email: psyjl@nus.edu.sg

Funding information
National University of Singapore, Grant/Award Number: R-581-000-165-133

Abstract

Increasing voters' cooperative tendencies following an election loss is paramount for modern democracies, especially those becoming increasingly polarized. In the context of the 2020 United States presidential election, we investigated the effect of national attachment on Americans' cooperative tendencies following an electoral loss. In a preregistered study, Americans' national attachment along three dimensions (*commitment*, *deference*, *superiority*) and their cognitive identification with the country (importance) were measured. Americans who were more committed to contributing to the country showed greater pre-election readiness to accept a non-preferred presidency and stronger post-election intentions to cooperate with the non-preferred president and his supporters. In contrast, importance, deference, and superiority showed sporadic predictability and generally failed to contribute to cooperative intentions. Optimism toward the country mediated the effects of commitment, deference, and superiority on all attitudinal and intention measures, suggesting that it may serve as a 'hub' through which various dimensions of national attachment jointly facilitate cooperative tendencies. We discuss the implications of our findings for the graceful acceptance of election results among electoral losers, smooth leadership transitions, and understanding the motivational bases underlying political and societal issues.

The two authors contributed equally to the paper.

This is an open access article under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs License, which permits use and distribution in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, the use is non-commercial and no modifications or adaptations are made.
© 2025 The Author(s). *Political Psychology* published by Wiley Periodicals LLC on behalf of International Society of Political Psychology.

KEYWORDS
commitment, goal pursuit, National Identification, optimism, US election

Highlights

- Commitment is a crucial dimension of national attachment to initiate cooperation among voters following an election loss.
- Optimism toward the country serves as a psychological hub through which commitment, deference, and superiority sentiments facilitate cooperative tendencies.
- Findings underscore the goal-striving dynamic whereby optimism would give the motivational edge to promote goal-directed action.
- Future research is needed to study smooth leadership transitions and bringing electoral losers back to the national union.

Capitol riots: Pro-Trump protesters storm the US legislature

-BBC Jan 7, 2021

Presidential elections produce winners and losers among citizens. While voters who support the winning candidate revel in their collective triumph, supporters of the losing candidate face the defeat of their preferred politician and the prospect that the new administration's policies are unlikely to represent their interests. This is hardly an enviable situation, and electoral losers tend to blame the political system for it. Compared to winners, they exhibit low political trust, are dissatisfied with democracy, and doubt the fairness of the electoral process (e.g., Blais & Gelineau, 2007; Sinclair et al., 2018). Consequently, they are likely to retreat to their own party and are disinclined to lend legitimacy to or support the new leaders (Ginsberg & Weissberg, 1978; Nadeau & Blais, 1993). Unwinding this post-election entrenchment of partisanship, especially in countries where political opinions are increasingly polarized, is paramount. After all, losers' willingness to rally behind the new president and cooperate with winners not only aligns with democratic ideals but also underlies a country's ability to tackle domestic and international challenges (Ehret et al., 2018; Sweetser & Tedesco, 2014).

What predicts losers' cooperative tendencies? This question has rarely been answered from a psychological perspective. One exception is the work on rationalization of the status quo. According to this perspective, people derive a sense of familiarity, security, and solidarity from the social and political systems they live in, and they are hence motivated to view the status quo in an overly positive light (Jost et al., 2004; Kay et al., 2009). In the context of an election, as the outcome becomes part of the sociopolitical reality, citizens should be motivated to defend and justify why the new leader is a reasonable choice. Indeed, both winners and losers reported a more positive attitude toward the winning candidates right after than before the election (Beasley & Joslyn, 2001; Laurin, 2018). Thus, rationalization can help voters accept the election outcome better and, consequently, increase losers' cooperative tendencies.

However, the electorate may also be divided as partisans seek to defend the specific status quo they hold dear. For example, Azevedo et al. (2017) found in the 2016 U.S. presidential elections that voters defending the general status quo supported Hillary Clinton as the establishment candidate. In contrast, voters supporting the status quo in gender- and economic-specific domains preferred anti-establishment Donald Trump. Similarly, the U.S. Capitol insurrection on January 6, 2021, occurred when Trump supporters rejected

14679221, 2025, 6, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/pops.70018 by University Of California, Wiley Online Library on [26/10/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

the election outcome to defend the status quo of the Trump presidency, which they deemed legitimate (e.g., Haslam et al., 2023; Liaquat et al., 2023). In other words, system justification and rationalization can promote not only electoral unity but also schism, depending on the context.

Before they are voters, they are citizens

We take a different perspective and consider the role of national identification here. People's identity as election winners or losers is meant to be temporary; their identity as citizens is enduring. National identity serves as a superordinate category that is shared among citizens of different identities and reduces the social distance between members of different political groups (Riek et al., 2010). From a social categorization perspective (Gaertner et al., 1993), citizens' superordinate identification with the country or the national group, when made salient, can inhibit their social identities specific to political or racial groups. Indeed, in a megastudy with 25 competing interventions, emphasizing a common national identity was found to reduce partisan animosity among American citizens (Voelkel et al., 2024).

CIDS model

National identity, however, is a complex multidimensional construct with little agreement on how its dimensions should be defined. Early conceptualizations of national identity measured patriotism and nationalism as a form of "ingroup love" and a way citizens conceive their country in an international context (Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989). Others have argued for internationalism (preference for international cooperation) as another form of national sentiment that should be measured alongside patriotism and nationalism (Karasawa, 2002; Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989). More recent conceptualizations of national identity have advanced citizens' collective narcissism as a unique attachment that is distinct from traditional nationalism (Cichocka & Cislak, 2020). The diverse perspectives outlined thus underscore the need for a comprehensive approach to measuring national identification to meaningfully study this construct.

We adopt the CIDS model of group identification (Roccas et al., 2008), which integrates insights from past social identity models in national identity (e.g., Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989), organizational identity (e.g., Riketta, 2005), psychological collectivism (e.g., Triandis & Gelfand, 1998), and social identity theory (e.g., Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992). Roccas et al. (2008) proposed that identification can be measured as commitment ("how much I am affiliated and want to benefit the group"), alongside importance ("how much I view the group as a part of who I am"), deference ("how much I honor, revere, and submit to the group's norms, symbols, and leaders"), and superiority ("how much I view my group as superior to other groups"). Importance captures people's cognitive identification with the country. Commitment, deference, and superiority capture three dimensions of national attachment, the modes of national identification that are infused with specific emotional and motivational elements. Commitment entails a positive affect toward the country that manifests as a desire to contribute to the country's welfare, and is key to most definitions of patriotism (e.g., Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989; Roccas et al., 2008). Deference captures people's submission to the group norms and leadership, which are closely associated with authoritarianism and "blind" support for national leaders (Duckitt et al., 2002; Schatz et al., 1999). Superiority is related to nationalism and nurtures support for leaders to dominate over threatening outgroups (Doob, 1964; Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989). The CIDS model, thus, allows us to demonstrate that attachment to the country extends beyond a

14679221, 2025, 6, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/pops.70018 by University Of California, Wiley Online Library on [26/10/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

purely cognitive appraisal of membership (importance) to encompass affectively and motivationally charged attachments (commitment, deference, and superiority), which are highly pertinent within political contexts.

Commitment and cooperative tendencies

We focus on national commitment as a relevant dimension for understanding how citizens would respond to an electoral loss. Just like how citizens' committed participation during the election decides the fate of their country, their future support or opposition in the months (or days) to come post-election determines if the country can thrive under its new leadership. Citizens' motivation to contribute to their country can yield strong opposition against the newly elected leader if they believe that their leadership is detrimental to the country. Yet, the same commitment could imply an inclination to cooperate with the non-preferred leadership for the sake of the country's future.

We propose two competing hypotheses for the effect of commitment on cooperative tendencies. On the one hand, we argue for a *graceful acceptance hypothesis*. Citizens committed to the country should be prepared to reach across the aisle in case of an electoral loss. Specifically, commitment can engender cooperative tendencies toward a non-preferred candidate and the candidate's supporters. Committed citizens will likely prioritize the country's goals over their personal preferences. When individuals are affectively attached to a group, their motivational system is realigned to consider the costs and benefits of an outcome at the group, not the personal, level (De Cremer & van Dijk, 2002; De Cremer & van Vugt, 1999). Indeed, support for democracy was positively related to secure national identification (Marchlewska et al., 2022). Moreover, stronger civic national identity was associated with higher support for democracy and lower support for authoritarian regimes in 24 European countries (Erhardt et al., 2021). Hence, while low-commitment citizens may be fixated on their political preferences, high-commitment citizens are more likely to have the country's interests in mind and follow democratic ideals. Committed citizens may not like the non-preferred candidates. However, they would recognize that supporting the new administration and cooperating with winners are essential for the country's unity following their electoral loss.

On the other hand, we recognize a competing, *defensive dissent hypothesis*: committed citizens cooperate less with the political outgroup precisely because they hold the country's interests in mind. Committed citizens from different political factions have distinct ideals of what is best for their country's welfare and oppose policies from other factions (e.g., Van Bavel & Pereira, 2018). Given that they share a salient superordinate identity when highly committed to their country, citizens from opposing political parties may view each other as ingroup deviants. Past studies have shown that deviants of the ingroup tend to be evaluated and punished more harshly than outgroup members (e.g., Black Sheep-Effect; Otten & Gordijn, 2014). The opposing political faction is perceived as a threat to the country's welfare, and committed citizens may reject political opponents to defend the well-being of the country (e.g., Finkel et al., 2020). Hence, high-commitment citizens may be more defensive of their political preferences and oppose the non-preferred president.

The presidential election in the U.S. provides a suitable context to test the *graceful acceptance* hypothesis against the alternative *defensive dissent* hypothesis. In the last two decades, the country has witnessed a significant increase in polarization between the Republican and Democratic parties and aggressive discrimination against each other (Finkel et al., 2020; Iyengar et al., 2019). The deepened political polarization offers a conducive environment for the process outlined in the *defensive dissent* hypothesis. If solid support for the *graceful acceptance* hypothesis is still observed, we can be more confident of its robustness and generalizability to other deeply polarized democracies (e.g., South Korea; Lee et al., 2018).

14679221, 2025, 6, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/pops.70018 by University Of California, Wiley Online Library on [26/10/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

Optimism toward the Country as a Mediator

Citizens' attachment to their country shapes their expectations for its future trajectory. We predict that committed citizens would feel optimistic toward their country, boasting a positive expectancy for its future (e.g., Armor & Taylor, 2003). This optimism would, in turn, translate to increased cooperation. Our conjecture is inspired by research on positive illusion during personal goal pursuit. When individuals are committed to a course of action, they exhibit an optimistic bias toward their striving: they report higher performance expectancies (Armor & Taylor, 2003), greater confidence in goal success (Puca, 2004), and greater perceived control (Gollwitzer & Kinney, 1989) than the environment objectively affords. These mild positive distortions suppress negative thoughts about uncertainties or failure in pursuit, give people a motivational edge, and promote action (Armor & Taylor, 2003; Taylor et al., 1992).

The same goal-striving dynamic should apply to the citizen-state relationship. As citizens contemplate whether to contribute to the country, they may have concerns over personal costs, imperceptible impact, and uncertain success. High-commitment citizens' devotion to the country's strivings engenders optimism toward the country's future, which would buffer the dispiriting effects of their various concerns and allow them to contribute harder and longer. The rose-tinted lens would also prepare citizens for the uncertainty of a non-preferred presidency. Optimism would translate to a positive attitude toward the newly elected, giving the upcoming administration the benefit of the doubt in guiding the country forward. Furthermore, like in personal goal pursuit, citizens' optimism would promote actions of collective strivings such as supporting the new administration's policies and cooperating with supporters of the non-preferred candidate.

Alternative paths to cooperation tendencies

Though not the current paper's focus, whether deference and superiority precipitate cooperation with a non-preferred presidency is worth contemplating. Given that high-, as opposed to low-, deference citizens submit to the group's norms and institutions (Roccas et al., 2008), deference should precipitate democratic ideals and consequently citizens' acceptance for electoral loss. However, for Trump voters, high-deference could mean a stronger rejection of Biden's win to defend the status quo of Trump's leadership post-election (e.g., Haslam et al., 2023; Liaquat et al., 2023). Voters wishfully expect their candidate to win and, after a loss, question the legitimacy of the new leader (Krizan et al., 2010; Sinclair et al., 2018). High-deference Trump supporters' allegiance to the incumbent president pre-election may thus undermine their support for Biden. Similarly, superiority engenders support for leaders with hawkish policies (Gruffydd-Jones, 2017) and may reduce citizens' support for a dovish president. Among both Trump and Biden supporters, superiority may strengthen support for Trump's aggressive policies and weaken support for Biden's policies. In other words, high-superiority Biden supporters could be more receptive toward Trump, whereas high-superiority Trump supporters are less receptive toward Biden. Hence, deference and superiority may not engender the kind of broad support commitment offers during a leadership transition. As a result, we expected that whereas commitment could positively predict cooperative tendencies during an election, deference and superiority might only have sporadic predictability.

Interestingly, deference and superiority may also predict losers' cooperative tendencies via optimism. Deference and superiority reflect people's dependence on their country to stave off two primal fears about an unkind world. Deferring to authority grants citizens a sense of security in a dangerous world, while believing in the superiority of their country comforts citizens in a competitive, dog-eat-dog world (Duckitt et al., 2002; Roccas et al., 2008). Hence, both forms of national attachment can motivate a positive expectancy of the country, which, as

14679221, 2025, 6, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/pops.70018 by University Of California, Wiley Online Library on [26/10/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

argued earlier, would translate to a more cooperative tendency. This implies that while the motivational basis differs, optimism can serve as a common positive mediator for commitment, deference, and superiority to predict voters' attitudes. Akin to a central 'hub,' optimism acts as a common mechanism for voters with different styles of national attachment to cooperate with a new national leader. Subscribing to an optimistic view toward the country could unify the diverse effects of national attachments to produce more cooperative inclinations among citizens. In other words, for Trump supporters, optimism would buffer the aversive effects of deference and superiority against accepting an electoral loss. Although past studies have alluded to the positive expectancy ingroup members have toward their own group in collective striving (e.g., social movements; van Zomeren et al., 2008), to the best of our knowledge, no studies have directly examined optimism toward the national group or investigated how different dimensions of national attachment are related to such optimism.

Overview of research

We tested our predictions in the context of the 2020 U.S. presidential election. The responses of Trump and Biden supporters were tracked at three time points: before the election (pre-election), shortly after the election (post-election), and shortly after the inauguration (post-inauguration). This setup allows us to study citizens' pre-election readiness for and post-election intentions to cooperate with a non-preferred presidency. Furthermore, the impact of national attachment can be investigated together with the process of rationalization (e.g., Laurin, 2018), potentially investigating the interplay between the two psychological processes.

METHOD

Participants

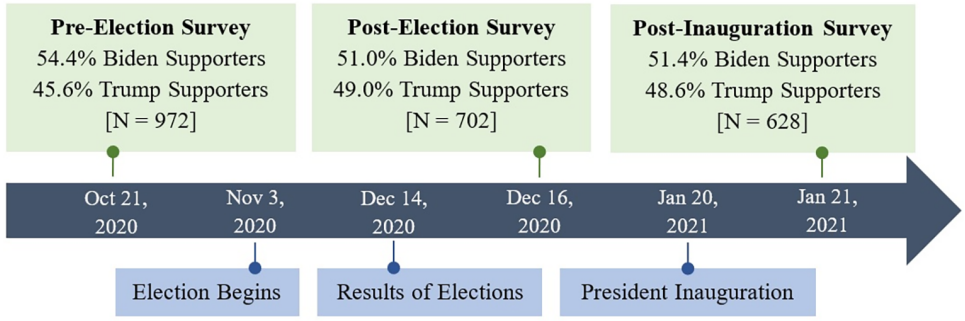
Based on a conservative power analysis (see Supporting Information SI-1 for details), we recruited 1000 American citizens ($M_{age} = 40.48$, $SD_{age} = 10.50$; 50.1% Females, 48.6% Males, 0.4% Others) from Amazon Mechanical Turk. Half of the participants self-identified as Republicans ($N = 499$), whereas the remaining participants self-identified as Democrats ($N = 501$). All participants did not vote in the early ballots of the elections.

Participants were categorized as either Trump or Biden supporters with the binary choice question, "Overall, do you prefer Trump or Biden?". Twenty-eight participants failed the attention check, and all participants' survey completion times were within 3 *SD* of the mean. Hence, the final sample was 972 during the pre-election phase, of which 702 and 628 participants completed the post-election and post-inauguration surveys, respectively (Figure 1). The smallest sample still had 80% power to detect mediation pathways with small effects (Fritz & MacKinnon, 2007).

Procedure and measures

This study is preregistered at https://aspredicted.org/pqdb-bxcx.pdf (minor deviations from preregistration are detailed in SI-6). Participants were surveyed in three phases: within 2 months before they voted at the election (pre-election), within a month after the election results were released (post-election), and within 2 weeks after President Biden's inauguration (post-inauguration). In the pre-election phase, we measured the predictors (CIDS, optimism), the covariates (issue involvement, political ideology), and participants' readiness to accept a

14679221, 2025, 6, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/pops.70018 by University Of California, Wiley Online Library on [26/10/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License



		Pre-Election	Post-Election	Post-Inauguration
Predictors	CIDS	✓		
	Optimism	✓		
Covariates	Issue Involvement	✓		
	Political Ideology	✓		
Pre-election Readiness	General Acceptance	✓		
	Acceptance of NPC	✓		
Post-Election Cooperation	Cooperate with NPC-S		✓	✓
	Support Biden Policies		✓	✓
Attitudes	Attitude toward NPC	✓	✓	✓
	Attitude toward NPC-S	✓	✓	✓

FIGURE 1 Timeline and distribution of measures across three phases. NPC, non-preferred candidate; NPC-S, non-preferred candidate supporters. Appendices A and B present specific questions of all variables.

non-preferred presidency. After the election (post-election, post-inauguration), we measured participants' intentions to cooperate. Across all three phases, we also tracked citizens' attitudes toward the non-preferred candidate and their supporters. Figure 1 summarizes the distribution of the measures.

CIDS and optimism

Participants' national attachment was assessed on four dimensions (Roccas et al., 2008): *commitment* (e.g., "I am highly committed to America"; $\alpha = .93$); *importance* ("It is important to me that I view myself as an American"; $\alpha = .91$); *deference* (e.g., "All Americans should respect the customs, the institutions, and the leaders of the U.S."; $\alpha = .86$); and *superiority* (e.g., "America is better than other nations in all respects"; $\alpha = .90$). Following that, participants' optimism toward the country was measured ("I am optimistic about the future of the U.S"; $\alpha = .93$). Each dimension was measured with four items on a 7-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*).

Pre-election readiness to accept a non-preferred presidency

Participants' readiness to accept a non-preferred presidency was measured in two ways. First, participants' general acceptance of whoever is elected was measured with a single item ("I will

14679221, 2025, 6, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/pops.70018 by University Of California, Wiley Online Library on [26/10/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

support the next president regardless of who is eventually elected"). Second, participants' acceptance of the specific non-preferred candidate being elected was assessed with five items (e.g., "Even though I prefer Trump/Biden, I am confident that Trump/Biden would do a good job if he were elected"; $\alpha = .85$). Participants responded to all items on a 7-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*).

Post-election intentions to cooperate

Trump supporters' willingness to support Biden's policies was measured with three items (e.g., "In the future, how likely are you to support the policies of the Biden administration?"; αs = .83–.84) on a 7-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). All participants' willingness to cooperate with supporters of the non-preferred candidate was measured with six items (e.g., "In general, how willing are you to work together with Trump/Biden supporters?"; αs = .92–.93) on 7-point scales (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*; 1 = *not at all*, 7 = *willing*).

Attitude toward the non-preferred president and his supporters

Participants' attitude toward their non-preferred candidate was measured with four items (e.g., "I would feel pretty good about the presidency of Trump/Biden"; $\alpha s = .89–.94$). As per the preregistration and the election outcome, we were primarily interested in Trump supporters' attitude toward Biden who eventually won the election. Biden supporters' attitude toward Trump was reported in supplementary analyses (SI-5). Participants' attitude toward supporters of the non-preferred candidate was measured using six semantic differential items (e.g., "Bad/Good," "Unpleasant/Pleasant," "Un-American/American"; αs = .94–.94) on 7-point scales.

Covariates

Participants' issue involvement with the election was measured by asking them to evaluate the political events in their country via three semantic differential items (e.g., "Unimportant/Important") and rating 2 items on how concerned they are about the presidential elections (e.g., "How much do you think your life would be affected by who the next president is?"), $\alpha = .93$, on a 7-point scale (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *willing*). Lastly, participants' political ideology was assessed by on a 9-point scale (1 = *liberal*, 9 = *conservative*).

RESULTS

Analytical approach

Because the various DVs were measured at one, two, or three time points, appropriate Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) techniques were employed to handle the different data structures. Path analysis was used to analyze the two DVs of pre-election readiness for a non-preferred presidency. Multiple Indicator-Multiple Cause (MIMIC) modeling analyzed the two DVs of post-election intentions to cooperate. Since they were measured at both the post-election and post-inauguration phases, and the scores at the two phases were highly correlated, rs = .76–.79, ps < .001, the two scores of the respective DV were loaded into a single latent factor for analysis. Latent Growth Modeling (LGM) was employed to analyze the two attitude DVs collected across all three phases. This allowed us to better model changes in Americans' attitudes over

14679221, 2025, 6, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/pops.70018 by University Of California, Wiley Online Library on [26/10/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

time and explore potential interactions between the effect of CIDS and the rationalization process.

Despite variations in analytical methods, the same conceptual model was tested (Figure 2). Although our primary focus was on the effects of commitment on the six DVs, the effects of importance, deference, and superiority were simultaneously explored. For each of the CIDS dimensions, this model would allow us to examine its overall effect before dissecting it into the mediation effect of optimism, i.e., the indirect effect and the remaining direct effect of the dimension. Issue involvement with the election and political ideology were analyzed as covariates.

Bootstrapping ($N = 5000$) was conducted to test for the indirect mediation pathways. Descriptive statistics, zero-order correlations, model specifications, and data handling details (e.g., mean-centering, missing data) can be found in SI-2.

Consistent with our preregistration and the theoretical focus on electoral losers, only Trump supporters' responses were included when analyzing Americans' attitudes toward Biden and their willingness to support Biden's policies. For the other DVs, the responses of both Trump and Biden supporters were analyzed together to maximize statistical power. Some may argue that conservatives, mostly Trump supporters, and liberals, mostly Biden supporters, might have fundamentally different responses to political issues (Heltzel & Laurin, 2020). We address this concern in two ways. First, we conducted multi-group analyses and utilized invariance testing to ascertain that the effects of CIDS did not reliably differ between Trump and Biden supporters (see SI-3 for detailed results). Based on this finding, we constrained the effects of CIDS to be the same for the two groups of participants in our primary analyses. Second, we allowed the effects of issue involvement and ideology, the two covariates, to differ between Trump and Biden supporters to account for any systematic group differences.

Key results are reported below. Standardized effect sizes are summarized in Table 1 (see SI-4 for full results).

Confirmatory testing

Total effects

We first examined the total effects of commitment while controlling for other dimensions of national identification (importance, deference, superiority) to pit the *graceful acceptance* against the *defensive dissent* hypotheses.

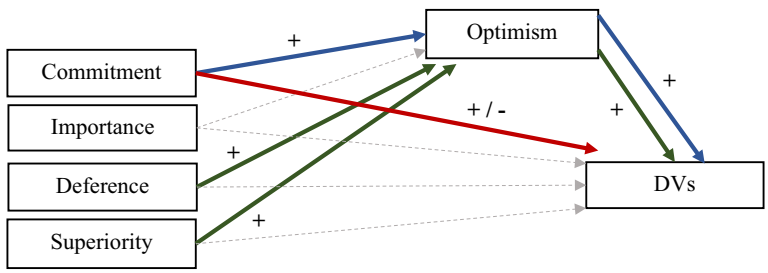


FIGURE 2 Conceptual model tested in main analyses. The bolded arrow in blue indicates a predicted positive, indirect relationship for "commitment → optimism → cooperative tendencies". Moreover, the bolded arrow in red indicates the contrasting predictions of either a positive (graceful acceptance hypothesis) or negative (defensive dissent hypothesis) relationship for "commitment → cooperative tendencies". Lastly, the bolded arrows in green indicate exploratory tests of positive indirect relationships for "deference → optimism → cooperative tendencies" and "superiority → optimism → cooperative tendencies". Issue involvement and political ideology are included in the analyses as covariates.

14679221, 2025, 6, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/pops.70018 by University Of California, Wiley Online Library on [26/10/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

TABLE 1 Summary of total effects of CIDS on attitude and cooperation tendencies.

	Pre-election readiness		Post-election cooperation		Attitudes	
	General acceptance ($N = 972$)	Acceptance of specific NPC ($N = 972$)	Support Biden policies ($N = 443$)	Cooperate with NPC supporters ($N = 972$)	Attitude toward NPC supporters ($N = 972$)	Attitude toward Biden ($N = 443$)
Commitment	.17***	.19***	.26*	.30***	.15***	.03
Importance	.01	−.02	.00	−.10*	−.04	.01
Deference	.18***	.07**	.05	−.04	.01	.09*
Superiority	−.01	.04	−.29***	−.04	.00	−.11

Note: All coefficients reported are standardized. All indirect effects for commitment, deference, and superiority were significant (bootstrap $N = 5000$). Only Trump supporters were surveyed on their attitudes toward Biden and Biden's policies.

Abbreviation: NPC, non-preferred candidate.

*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$.

14679221, 2025, 6, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/pops.70018 by University Of California, Wiley Online Library on [26/10/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

Pre-election readiness

Before the elections, commitment predicted greater cooperative tendencies and acceptance of the democratic process for American citizens ($N = 972$). High-, as opposed to low-, commitment Americans were more prepared to accept any future president ("regardless of who is eventually elected"), $b = 0.31$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.16, 0.46], as well as the specific non-preferred candidate (e.g., Trump for Biden supporters), $b = 0.27$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.16, 0.38].[1]

Post-election cooperation

Among all Americans ($N = 972$), commitment positively predicted willingness to cooperate with supporters of their non-preferred candidate, $b = 0.45$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.32, 0.59]; among Trump supporters ($N = 443$), high-commitment predicted greater willingness to support Biden's policies, $b = 0.35$, $p = .016$, 95% CI [0.07, 0.64]. Commitment positively predicting pre-election readiness and post-election cooperation was consistent with the *graceful acceptance* hypothesis.

Attitudes

Was the cooperative tendency of high-commitment Americans accompanied by a more positive attitude toward the non-preferred candidate? Across the three time points, we tracked attitudes toward Biden for Trump supporters and attitudes toward supporters of the non-preferred candidate for both Trump supporters and Biden supporters (see Figure 1). Our LGMs tested the effect of national attachment on the average and the trajectory of attitudes across the three phases.

Average attitudes across the three phases. In terms of Trump supporters' ($N = 443$) average attitudes toward Biden, commitment was not a significant predictor, $b = 0.03$, $p = .700$, 95% CI [−0.14, 0.20]. By contrast, commitment predicted Americans' ($N = 972$) average attitudes toward supporters of non-preferred candidates, $b = 0.21$, $p = .004$, 95% CI [0.07, 0.35].

Trajectory of attitudes. Trump supporters' attitude toward Biden improved from pre-election ($M = 1.82$, $SD = 1.08$), to post-election ($M = 1.99$, $SD = 1.21$), to post-inauguration ($M = 2.21$, $SD = 1.37$), $b = 0.25$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.20, 0.31]. This pattern aligned with the notion that citizens rationalized the election outcome (Beasley & Joslyn, 2001; Laurin, 2018). More important, the rationalization process was distinctively tied to the elected president. The same pattern of increasing attitude was not observed in Biden supporters' attitude toward Trump, $b = -0.02$, $p = .176$, 95% CI [−0.05, 0.01] (Figure 3; see SI-5 for detailed results). Furthermore, Americans' attitudes toward supporters of the non-preferred candidate also declined over time, $b = -0.15$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [−0.24, −0.07]. Replicating and extending the established pattern of rationalization (Laurin, 2018) suggests that our results are unlikely due to any unique features of the 2020 US election (e.g., the US Capitol insurrection) and generalizable to other election contexts. Commitment, however, was unrelated to the trajectory of attitudes toward Biden or supporters of the non-preferred candidate, $ps > .70$.

[1]An alternative interpretation is that the measurement of pre-election readiness to accept the specific non-preferred candidate could instead be assessing Trump supporters' baseline attitude toward Biden rather than their preparedness to accept an unfavorable election outcome. We argue that this was not the case as confirmatory factor analysis supported that all measured constructs in the study were distinct, χ^2 (1051) = 2870.48, $p < .001$, CFI = .90, RMSEA = .06, SRMR = .07 (see SI-2 for details). Moreover, when baseline attitude toward the non-preferred candidate was controlled for, commitment effects on pre-election readiness to accept the non-preferred candidate (Biden) remained robust for Trump supporters, $b = .42$, $p < .001$. Lastly, greater pre-election readiness positively predicted the *trajectory* of attitudes toward Biden when included in the LGM analysis, $b = .08$, $p < .001$. That is, being predisposed to accept the electoral loss *before* the elections bolstered the rationalization of the electoral outcome among Trump supporters, thus, further supporting the conceptual distinctiveness between measuring pre-election readiness and attitude toward Biden. Detailed analyses are reported in SI-7.

14679221, 2025, 6, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/pops.70018 by University Of California, Wiley Online Library on [26/10/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

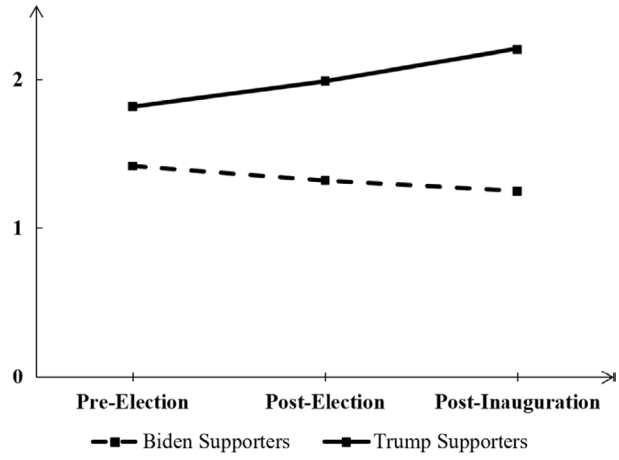


FIGURE 3 Attitude toward non-preferred candidate as a function of time points.

Mediation effects of optimism toward the country

The indirect effects of commitment on the various DVs, mediated by optimism, were highly consistent. The indirect effects of commitment were found for all DVs while accounting for the other national attachments. Higher commitment, $b = 0.41–0.47$, $ps < .001$, predicted greater optimism, which in turn predicted pre-election readiness for acceptance, $b = 0.11–0.16$, $ps < .01$, willingness for post-election cooperation, $b = 0.16$, $ps < .008$, and positive intergroup attitudes, $b = 0.12–0.21$, $ps < .001$. We summarize the tests of indirect effects in Table 2. Indeed, although the indirect mediation pathways ($bs = 0.05–0.07$, $\beta s = .03–.05$) were much smaller in effect sizes than the total effect of commitment, they were all significant.

Direct effects

After accounting for optimism and other national attachments in the models, we examined the direct effects of commitment and found that they mostly mirrored the total effects, albeit with smaller effect sizes. Again, high commitment was consistent in predicting pre-election readiness, $b = 0.20–0.26$, $ps < .001$, and post-election cooperation, $b = 0.28–0.39$, $ps < .06$, but had limited predictive power for intergroup attitudes, $b = -0.02–0.12$, $ps > .09$. Even after accounting for optimism, the direct effects maintained robust support for the *graceful acceptance* hypothesis over the *defensive dissent* hypothesis.

Exploratory testing

Total effects of other National Attachments

Pre-election readiness

Similar to commitment, high- as compared to low- deference, Americans were more prepared to accept any future president, $b = 0.34$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.24, 0.44], and a specific non-preferred candidate, $b = 0.10$, $p = .006$, 95% CI [0.03, 0.18]. Importance and superiority were unrelated to pre-election cooperative tendencies, $ps > .19$.

Post-election cooperation

Deference, however, did not predict any post-election cooperative intentions, $ps > .18$. Superiority predicted opposition to Biden's policies, $b = -0.39$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [−0.57, −0.21], which might be because Biden was perceived to be dovish (Peele et al., 2022). Moreover,

14679221, 2025, 6, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/pops.70018 by University Of California, Wiley Online Library on [26/10/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

TABLE 2 Summary of key pathways.

	Indirect effect					
Outcome variable	***B***	***SE***	**95% CI**	***β***	β_{total}	β_{direct}
Commitment → Optimism → DV						
General Acceptance	0.05	0.02	[0.01, 0.09]	.03	.17***	.14***
Acceptance of NPC	0.07	0.02	[0.04, 0.10]	.05	.19***	.14***
Support for Biden Policies	0.07	0.04	[0.02, 0.16]	.05	.26*	.20
Cooperate with NPC Supporters	0.06	0.02	[0.03, 0.11]	.04	.30***	.25***
Attitude toward Biden	0.06	0.02	[0.02, 0.11]	.06	.03	−.03
Attitude toward NPC Supporters	0.09	0.02	[0.05, 0.13]	.06	.15***	.09
Deference → Optimism → DV						
General Acceptance	0.02	0.01	[0.002, 0.03]	.01	.18***	.22***
Acceptance of NPC	0.02	0.01	[0.01, 0.04]	.02	.07**	.07*
Support for Biden Policies	0.03	0.02	[0.004, 0.06]	.03	.05	.04
Cooperate with NPC Supporters	0.04	0.01	[0.01, 0.06]	.03	−.04	−.07
Attitude toward Biden	0.02	0.01	[0.01, 0.06]	.03	.09*	−.01
Attitude toward NPC Supporters	0.03	0.01	[0.01, 0.05]	.03	.01	.09
Superiority → Optimism → DV						
General Acceptance	0.03	0.02	[0.01, 0.06]	.02	−.01	.02
Acceptance of NPC	0.05	0.01	[0.02, 0.07]	.04	.04	.01
Support for Biden Policies	0.04	0.02	[0.01, 0.09]	.03	−.29***	−.34***
Cooperate with NPC Supporters	0.04	0.02	[0.01, 0.08]	.03	−.04	−.07
Attitude toward Biden	0.03	0.01	[0.01, 0.06]	.03	−.11	−.04
Attitude toward NPC Supporters	0.06	0.02	[0.03, 0.09]	.05	.00	−.15*

Note: For attitude toward Biden and supporters of the non-preferred candidate, only pathways predicting the growth model intercepts were reported. Optimism was unrelated to the slopes of the growth model. Importance was unrelated to optimism.

Abbreviation: NPC, non-preferred candidate.

*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$.

importance unexpectedly predicted reluctance to cooperate with supporters of their non-preferred candidate, $b = -0.16$, $p = .012$, 95% CI [−0.28, −0.04]. Among CIDS, only commitment positively predicted participants' post-election cooperation with the non-preferred president and the political outgroup, supporting the *graceful acceptance* hypothesis.

Attitudes

Only deference predicted more positive average attitudes toward Biden across the three phases, $b = 0.09$, $p = .027$, 95% CI [0.01, 0.17]. Importance, deference, and superiority were unrelated to average attitudes toward supporters of non-preferred candidates, $ps > .36$, and the trajectory of these attitudes, $ps > .12$.

Direct and indirect effects of other National Attachments

Indirect effects of deference and superiority on all DVs were also observed. Despite differing patterns of total effects on the various DVs, deference, $b = 0.13$, $p = .001$, 95% CI [0.06, 0.21], and superiority, $b = 0.28$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.19, 0.38], positively predicted optimism, which in

14679221, 2025, 6, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/pops.70018 by University Of California, Wiley Online Library on [26/10/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

turn predisposed support for the non-preferred candidate. We summarize the tests of indirect effects in Table 2.

After controlling for optimism, high deference directly predicted readiness for pre-election acceptance in general, $b = 0.32$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.22, 0.43], and the specific non-preferred candidate, $b = 0.08$, $p = .029$, 95% CI [0.01, 0.16], but not for post-election cooperation, $ps > .08$. Among Trump supporters, high superiority directly predicted disliking Biden, $b = -0.14$, $p = .021$, 95% CI [−0.25, −0.02], and less support for Biden's policies, $b = -0.43$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [−0.61, −0.25].

Issue involvement and political ideology

Americans' issue involvement with the election negatively predicted their pre-election readiness and attitudes, $ps < .003$. This likely reflected their engagement with the anticipated electoral outcome; once it was over, issue involvement no longer predicted their post-election cooperative intentions, $ps > .10$. Americans were also more willing to accept a non-preferred presidency when the candidate was aligned with their political ideology. The more liberal Trump supporters and the more conservative Biden supporters showed greater cooperative tendencies on all DVs, $ps < .001$. Detailed results are reported in SI-4. Since issue involvement and political ideology were controlled in all main analyses, the effects of commitment and optimism were observed on top of these two potent covariates.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Democratic ideals expect electoral losers to overcome the bitterness of defeat and support their non-preferred leaders. For such an important process, however, there is a surprising dearth of research on its psychological underpinning, with the work on the rationalization of the status quo being a rare exception. In this paper, we expand the literature and demonstrate the role of national attachment. We tested two competing hypotheses on the cooperative tendency of committed Americans after experiencing an electoral defeat. Findings overwhelmingly supported the *graceful acceptance* hypothesis, with high-commitment Americans more (not less) willing than low-commitment Americans to reach across the aisle after losing an election. They were readier to accept the possibility of a non-preferred presidency before the start of the election and showed stronger intentions to cooperate after the electoral defeat. Although high-committed citizens had a more positive attitude toward the supporters of the non-preferred candidate's supporters, which might facilitate cooperative efforts, high-commitment Trump supporters did not like Biden more than their low-commitment counterparts. This is consistent with the notion of graceful acceptance; their intention to cooperate is driven by having their country's welfare in mind despite personal preference (cf. Finkel et al., 2020).

By contrast, the overall effects of deference and superiority were limited. While deference seemed promising at first by positively predicting pre-election readiness, it had no effect at the most critical juncture of the election; that is, after an electoral loss. Specifically, deference predicted neither support for Biden's policies among Trump supporters nor cooperation with supporters of the non-preferred candidate. Superiority showed opposition to Biden and his policies. This finding aligns with past work showing that the kind of national attachment that emphasizes one's submission to authority (e.g., Schatz et al., 1999) or the superiority of the ingroup (e.g., Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989; Marchlewska et al., 2022) offers rigid support to state authority, which may not be suitable during leadership transitions. Hence, citizens whose national attachment is characterized by a strong commitment to the country are uniquely disposed to cooperate with a non-preferred president following an intensely polarized election.

14679221, 2025, 6, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/pops.70018 by University Of California, Wiley Online Library on [26/10/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

Identifying the group of citizens who would gracefully accept an election loss may be a promising start in bringing electoral losers to the national union.

Our findings also underscore the importance of motivational processes in understanding people's political opinions. Just like research on rationalization unveils one's motivated reasoning in dealing with a new reality (Jost, 2019), we consider the motivational process when citizens are committed to the country's prosperity. Drawing from research on personal striving, we hypothesized and found that commitment could indirectly predict cooperative tendencies via optimism. Our findings align with the proposed goal-striving dynamic: citizens who were dedicated to collective striving would view the prospect of the country particularly positively to gain a motivational edge and promote action. Importantly, we replicated the pattern of rationalization (Laurin, 2018) and demonstrated that the psychological mechanism related to the goal-striving dynamic operates in parallel with motivated reasoning implicated in rationalization, highlighting distinct motivational bases.

In addition to identifying this novel pathway, our endeavor also identifies optimism as a hub, metaphorically speaking, for mediating the effects of commitment, deference, and superiority. Despite the sporadic total effects of deference and superiority, they share consistent indirect effects with commitment in predicting cooperation and positive intergroup attitudes. This suggests that deference and superiority, though engender rigid or 'blind' support for national leadership (Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989; Schatz et al., 1999), may translate to adaptive support through a sense of optimism—an understudied psychological mechanism for motivation scientists and political science scholars to explore.

Notably, the effect sizes of these indirect pathways via optimism were relatively small as compared to the direct and total effects of national attachment. This is consistent with past work that underscored the stronger influence of national attachment in reducing partisan animosity among American citizens, as compared to reframing perceptions about the nation (Voelkel et al., 2024). Moreover, this suggests the presence of alternative mediators, particularly when the indirect effect is in the opposite direction from the total effect, such as in the case of superiority. Further research could explore alternative mediators such as zero-sum reasoning (e.g., Webster et al., 2024), institutional trust (e.g., Freitag & Ackermann, 2016), and political deliberation (e.g., Mercier & Landemore, 2012) that could undermine or promote losers' willingness to rally behind a non-preferred presidency.

Our findings imply that inculcating national attachment among citizens could pave the way for a smooth leadership transition during elections. But the correct form of national attachment must be promoted. Among the three dimensions of national attachment, only commitment positively contributed to losers' cooperative tendencies. Political socialization through school, peers, and the digital space offers an avenue to cultivate the commitment of individual citizens (e.g., Lee et al., 2013) and foster norms of prioritizing the country's welfare (e.g., Shah et al., 2017). Moreover, how the winners frame victory is critical in reigniting commitment from the losers and bringing them back to the union (e.g., Ritter & Howell, 2001). Indeed, John F. Kennedy's famous inauguration speech, "Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country," which garnered him unprecedented approval, provided anecdotal evidence for the potency of evoking commitment. Future work should empirically test whether arousing citizens' commitment rather than their sense of deference or superiority effectively rallies national support following an election.

Our research has some limitations. First, as the study was conducted in a WEIRD (*W*estern, *E*ducated, *I*ndustrialized, *R*ich, and *D*emocratic; Henrich et al., 2010) country with heightened political polarization, this raises concerns about how the observed effects could generalize to other democracies. While more research is undoubtedly needed, recent evidence shows that national identification is positively related to support for democracy and leaders' policies across different sociopolitical contexts and non-Western regions (e.g., Erhardt et al., 2021; Marchlewska et al., 2022; Van Bavel et al., 2022). This suggests the potential generalizability

14679221, 2025, 6, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/pops.70018 by University Of California, Wiley Online Library on [26/10/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

of the current investigation to other politically polarized democracies apart from the United States, such as Japan (Lee et al., 2022), South Korea (Lee et al., 2018), Norway (Berntzen et al., 2024) and Sweden (Fladmoe, 2012).

Second, optimism was measured only *before* the election. Thus, it was unclear if optimism toward the future of the country was stable or could have varied amid the emerging electoral outcomes during the study. This narrowed the scope of our findings to only *pre-election* optimism being directly related to citizens' readiness to accept an electoral loss. Future research could explore if there was an interaction between the electoral outcomes and optimism through a longitudinal design to examine the effects of post-election optimism and test the presence of a bidirectional relationship between optimism and election-related attitudes.

Finally, we did not find support for the defensive dissent hypothesis, but the pertinent psychological mechanism may still exist among a non-trivial fraction of high-commitment Trump supporters. Their commitment to contributing to the United States might have predisposed them to increase their opposition to Biden because they believed his presidency would hurt the country (Finkel et al., 2020; Iyengar et al., 2019; Van Bavel & Pereira, 2018). That is, meaningful heterogeneity may exist underneath the overall effect. Indeed, while some Trump supporters withdrew their support for Trump at the end of the 2020 elections (e.g., Armaly & Enders, 2022; Rothbart & Stebbins, 2023), others participated in the historic capitol riot. These sub-factions suggest that there may be differential effects of national attachment across the different "profiles" of voters. It remains to be explored how high-deference, or high-commitment, supporters would reconcile supporting and opposing Trump when he repeatedly criticizes important American institutions.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Our research was approved by the university Institutional Review Board and adhered to the legal requirements of the study country.

FUNDING INFORMATION

The research was partly supported by the National University of Singapore (R-581-000-165-133), awarded to the first author.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

All data and materials are publicly available via Open Science Framework and accessible at https://osf.io/wu6eh/?view_only=7d8fee07386e40f48469c85418070445. The design and analysis plan for the study were preregistered with AsPredicted at https://aspredicted.org/pqdb-bxcx.pdf.

ORCID

Ismaharif Ismail https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9834-3711

REFERENCES

Armaly, M. T., & Enders, A. M. (2022). Who supports political violence? *Perspectives on Politics, 22*(2), 1–18. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592722001086

Armor, D. A., & Taylor, S. E. (2003). The effects of mindset on behavior: Self-regulation in deliberative and implemental frames of mind. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 29*(1), 86–95. https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167202238374

Azevedo, F., Jost, J. T., & Rothmund, T. (2017). "Making America great again": System justification in the US presidential election of 2016. *Translational Issues in Psychological Science, 3*(3), 231. https://doi.org/10.1037/tps0000122

BBC. (2021). *Capitol riots: Pro-Trump protesters storm the US legislature – in pictures*. BBC News. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-55568131

14679221, 2025, 6, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/pops.70018 by University Of California, Wiley Online Library on [26/10/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

Beasley, R. K., & Joslyn, M. R. (2001). Cognitive dissonance and post-decision attitude change in six presidential elections. *Political Psychology, 22,* 521–540. https://doi.org/10.1111/0162-895X.00252

Berntzen, L. E., Kelsall, H., & Harteveld, E. (2024). Consequences of affective polarization: Avoidance, intolerance and support for violence in the United Kingdom and Norway. *European Journal of Political Research, 63*(3), 927–949. https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12623

Blais, A., & Gelineau, F. (2007). Winning, losing and satisfaction with democracy. *Political Studies, 55,* 425–441. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.2007.00659.x

Cichocka, A., & Cislak, A. (2020). Nationalism as collective narcissism. *Current Opinion in Behavioral Sciences, 34,* 69–74. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cobeha.2019.12.013

De Cremer, D., & van Dijk, E. (2002). Reactions to group success and failure as a function of identification level: A test of the goal transformation hypothesis in social dilemmas. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 38*(5), 435–442. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0022-1031(02)00009-4

De Cremer, D., & van Vugt, M. (1999). Social identification effects in social dilemmas: A transformation of motives. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 29*(7), 871–893. https://doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1099-0992(199911)29:7<871::AID-EJSP962>3.0.CO;2-I

Doob, L. W. (1964). *Patriotism and nationalism: Their psychological foundations*. Yale University Press.

Duckitt, J., Wagner, C., du Plessis, I., & Birum, I. (2002). The psychological bases of ideology and prejudice: Testing a dual-process mode. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 83*(1), 75–93. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.83.1.75

Ehret, P. J., Van Boven, L., & Sherman, D. K. (2018). Partisan barriers to bipartisanship: Understanding climate policy polarization. *Social Psychological and Personality Science, 9*(3), 308–318. https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550618758709

Erhardt, J., Wamsler, S., & Freitag, M. (2021). National identity between democracy and autocracy: A comparative analysis of 24 countries. *European Political Science Review, 13*(1), 59–76. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755773920000351

Finkel, E. J., Bail, C. A., Cikara, M., Ditto, P. H., Iyengar, S., Klar, S., Mason, L., McGrath, M. C., Nyhan, B., Rand, D. G., Skitka, L. J., Tucker, J. A., Van Bavel, J. J., Wang, C. S., & Druckman, J. N. (2020). Political sectarianism in America. *Science, 370*(6516), 533–536. https://doi.org/10.1126/science.abe1715

Fladmoe, A. (2012). Mass political polarization and attitudes towards education as part of the welfare state in Norway, Sweden and Finland. *Journal of European Social Policy, 22*(1), 45–62. https://doi.org/10.1177/0958928711425268

Freitag, M., & Ackermann, K. (2016). Direct democracy and institutional trust: Relationships and differences across personality traits. *Political Psychology, 37*(5), 707–723. https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12293

Fritz, M. S., & MacKinnon, D. P. (2007). Required sample size to detect the mediated effect. *Psychological Science, 18*(3), 233–239. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9280.2007.01882.x

Gaertner, S. L., Dovidio, J. F., Anastasio, P. A., Bachman, B. A., & Rust, M. C. (1993). The common ingroup identity model: Recategorization and the reduction of intergroup bias. *European Review of Social Psychology, 4*(1), 1–26. https://doi.org/10.1080/14792779343000004

Ginsberg, B., & Weissberg, R. (1978). Elections and the mobilization of popular support. *American Journal of Political Science, 22,* 31–55. https://doi.org/10.2307/2110668

Gollwitzer, P. M., & Kinney, R. F. (1989). Effects of deliberative and implemental mindsets on illusion of control. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 56*(4), 531–542. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.56.4.531

Gruffydd-Jones, J. (2017). Dangerous days: The impact of nationalism on interstate conflict. *Security Studies, 26,* 698–728. https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2017.1336393

Haslam, S. A., Reicher, S. D., Selvanathan, H. P., Gaffney, A. M., Steffens, N. K., Packer, D., Van Bavel, J. J., Ntontis, E., Neville, F., Vestergren, S., Jurstakova, K., & Platow, M. J. (2023). Examining the role of Donald Trump and his supporters in the 2021 assault on the US capitol: A dual-agency model of identity leadership and engaged followership. *The Leadership Quarterly, 34*(2), 101622. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2022.101622

Heltzel, G., & Laurin, K. (2020). Polarization in America: Two possible futures. *Current Opinion in Behavioral Sciences, 34,* 179–184. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cobeha.2020.03.008

Henrich, J., Heine, S. J., & Norenzayan, A. (2010). The weirdest people in the world? *Behavioral and Brain Sciences, 33*(2-3), 61–83. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0140525X0999152X

Iyengar, S., Lelkes, Y., Levendusky, M., Malhotra, N., & Westwood, S. J. (2019). The origins and consequences of affective polarization in the United States. *Annual Review of Political Science, 22,* 129–146. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-051117-073034

Jost, J. T. (2019). A quarter century of system justification theory: Questions, answers, criticisms, and societal applications. *British Journal of Social Psychology, 58,* 263–314. https://doi.org/10.1111/bjso.12297

Jost, J. T., Banaji, M. R., & Nosek, B. A. (2004). A decade of system justification theory: Accumulated evidence of conscious and unconscious bolstering of the status quo. *Political Psychology, 25,* 881–920. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9221.2004.00402.x

14679221, 2025, 6, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/pops.70018 by University Of California, Wiley Online Library on [26/10/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

Karasawa, M. (2002). Patriotism, nationalism, and internationalism among Japanese citizens: An etic–emic approach. *Political Psychology, 23*(4), 645–666. https://doi.org/10.1111/0162-895X.00302

Kay, A. C., Gaucher, D., Peach, J. M., Friesen, J., Laurin, K., Zanna, M. P., & Spencer, S. J. (2009). Inequality, discrimination, and the power of the status quo: Direct evidence for a motivation to view what is as what should be. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 97,* 421–434. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0015997

Kosterman, R., & Feshbach, S. (1989). Toward a measure of patriotic and nationalistic attitudes. *Political Psychology, 10*(2), 257–274. https://doi.org/10.2307/3791647

Krizan, Z., Miller, J. C., & Johar, O. (2010). Wishful thinking in the 2008 U.S. presidential election. *Psychological Science, 21,* 140–146. https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797609356421

Laurin, K. (2018). Inaugurating rationalization: Three field studies find increased rationalization when anticipated realities become current. *Psychological Science, 29,* 483–495. https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797617738814

Lee, C., Shin, J., & Hong, A. (2018). Does social media use really make people politically polarized? Direct and indirect effects of social media use on political polarization in South Korea. *Telematics and Informatics, 35*(1), 245–254. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tele.2017.11.005

Lee, N. J., Shah, D. V., & McLeod, J. M. (2013). Processes of political socialization: A communication mediation approach to youth civic engagement. *Communication Research, 40*(5), 669–697. https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650212436712

Lee, S., Rojas, H., & Yamamoto, M. (2022). Social media, messaging apps, and affective polarization in the United States and Japan. *Mass Communication and Society, 25*(5), 673–697. https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2021.1953534

Liaquat, U., Jost, J. T., & Balcetis, E. (2023). System justification motivation as a source of backlash against equality-promoting policies—And what to do about it. *Social Issues and Policy Review, 17*(1), 131–154. https://doi.org/10.1111/sipr.12093

Luhtanen, R., & Crocker, J. (1992). A collective self-esteem scale: Self-evaluation of one's social identity. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 18*(3), 302–318. https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167292183006

Marchlewska, M., Cichocka, A., Furman, A., & Cislak, A. (2022). Who respects the will of the people? Support for democracy is linked to high secure national identity but low national narcissism. *British Journal of Social Psychology, 61*(2), 599–621. https://doi.org/10.1111/bjso.12499

Mercier, H., & Landemore, H. (2012). Reasoning is for arguing: Understanding the successes and failures of deliberation. *Political Psychology, 33*(2), 243–258. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9221.2012.00873.x

Nadeau, R., & Blais, A. (1993). Accepting the election outcome: The effect of participation on losers' consent. *British Journal of Political Science, 23,* 553–563. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123400006736

Otten, S., & Gordijn, E. H. (2014). Was it one of us? How people cope with misconduct by fellow ingroup members. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass, 8*(4), 165–177. https://doi.org/10.1111/spc3.12098

Peele, G., Cain, B. E., Herbert, J., & Wroe, A. (2022). *Developments in American politics 9*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Puca, R. (2004). Action phases and goal setting: Being optimistic after decision making without getting into trouble. *Motivation and Emotion, 28*(2), 121–145. https://doi.org/10.1023/B:MOEM.0000032311.13014.fa

Riek, B. M., Mania, E. W., Gaertner, S. L., McDonald, S. A., & Lamoreaux, M. J. (2010). Does a common ingroup identity reduce intergroup threat? *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations, 13*(4), 403–423. https://doi.org/10.1177/1368430209346701

Riketta, M. (2005). Organizational identification: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 66*(2), 358–384. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2004.05.005

Ritter, K., & Howell, B. (2001). Ending the 2000 presidential election: Gore's concession speech and Bush's victory speech. *American Behavioral Scientist, 44*(12), 2314–2330. https://doi.org/10.1177/00027640121958348

Roccas, S., Sagiv, L., Schwartz, S., Halevy, N., & Eidelson, R. (2008). Toward a unifying model of identification with groups: Integrating theoretical perspectives. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 12*(3), 280–306. https://doi.org/10.1177/1088868308319225

Rothbart, D., & Stebbins, D. M. (2023). The proud boys raging righteously at the U.S. capitol on January 6, 2021: A hate group in action. *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology, 29*(4), 426–436. https://doi.org/10.1037/pac0000634

Schatz, R. T., Staub, E., & Lavine, H. (1999). On the varieties of national attachment: Blind versus constructive patriotism. *Political Psychology, 20*(1), 151–174. https://doi.org/10.1111/0162-895X.00140

Shah, D. V., Thorson, K., Wells, C., Lee, N. J., & McLeod, J. (2017). Civic norms and communication competence. In *The Oxford handbook of political communication* (pp. 467–481). Oxford University Press.

Sinclair, B., Smith, S. S., & Tucker, P. D. (2018). "It's largely a rigged system": Voter confidence and the winner effect in 2016. *Political Research Quarterly, 71,* 854–868. https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912918768006

Sweetser, K. D., & Tedesco, J. C. (2014). Effects of bipartisanship messaging and candidate exposure on the political organization–public relationship. *American Behavioral Scientist, 58*(6), 776–793. https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764213515221

Taylor, S. E., Kemeny, M. E., Aspinwall, L. G., Schneider, S. G., Rodriguez, R., & Herbert, M. (1992). Optimism, coping, psychological distress, and high-risk sexual behavior among men at risk for acquired immunodeficiency

14679221, 2025, 6, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/pops.70018 by University Of California, Wiley Online Library on [26/10/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

syndrome (AIDS). *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 63*(3), 460. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.63.3.460

Triandis, H. C., & Gelfand, M. J. (1998). Converging measurement of horizontal and vertical individualism and collectivism. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 74*(1), 118–128. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.74.1.118

Van Bavel, J. J., & Pereira, A. (2018). The partisan brain: An identity-based model of political belief. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences, 22*(3), 213–224. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tics.2018.01.004

Van Bavel, J. J., Cichocka, A., Capraro, V., Sjåstad, H., Nezlek, J. B., Pavlović, T., Alfano, M., Gefland, M. J., Azevedo, F., Birtel, M. D., Cislak, A., Lockwood, P. L., Ross, R. M., Abts, K., Agadullina, E., Aruta, J. J. B., Besharati, S. N., Bor, A., Choma, B. L., … Jørgensen, F. J. (2022). National identity predicts public health support during a global pandemic. *Nature Communications, 13*(1), 517. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-021-27668-9

van Zomeren, M., Postmes, T., & Spears, R. (2008). Toward an integrative social identity model of collective action: A quantitative research synthesis of three socio-psychological perspectives. *Psychological Bulletin, 134*(4), 504. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.134.4.504

Voelkel, J. G., Stagnaro, M. N., Chu, J. Y., Pink, S. L., Mernyk, J. S., Redekopp, C., Ghezae, I., Cashman, M., Adjodah, D., Allen, L. G., Allis, L. V., Baleria, G., Ballantyne, N., Van Bavel, J. J., Blunden, H., Braley, A., Bryan, C. J., Celniker, J. B., Cikara, M., … Willer, R. (2024). Megastudy testing 25 treatments to reduce antidemocratic attitudes and partisan animosity. *Science, 386*(6719), eadh4764. https://doi.org/10.1126/science.adh4764

Webster, S. W., Glynn, A. N., & Motta, M. P. (2024). Partisan schadenfreude and candidate cruelty. *Political Psychology, 45*(2), 259–277. https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12922

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

How to cite this article: Ismail, I., & Jia, L. (2025). Reaching across the aisle: Committed and optimistic citizens support a non-preferred presidency and cooperate with electoral winners. *Political Psychology*, *46*, 1924–1944. https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.70018

14679221, 2025, 6, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/pops.70018 by University Of California, Wiley Online Library on [26/10/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

APPENDIX A

ITEMS MEASURING NATIONAL IDENTITY AND POLITICAL MOTIVATION

Commitment

I feel strongly affiliated with the U.S.

I am glad to contribute to the U.S.

I am strongly committed to the U.S.

I like to help the U.S.

Importance

Belonging to the U.S. is an important part of my identity.

It is important to me that I view myself as an American.

It is important to me that others see me as an American.

When I talk about Americans, I usually say "we" rather than "they".

Deference

In times of trouble, the only way to know what to do is to rely on the leaders of the U.S.

All Americans should respect the customs, the institutions, and the leaders of the U.S.

It is disloyal to criticize the U.S.

There is usually a very good reason for every rule and regulation that the leaders of the U.S. propose.

Superiority

Other nations can learn a lot from the U.S.

Compared to other nations, the U.S. is particularly good.

Relative to other nations, the U.S. is a very successful nation.

The U.S. is better than other nations in all respects.

Optimism

I am optimistic about the future of the U.S.

I do not feel positive about the future of the U.S.

I expect the U.S. to improve in the future.

It is likely that the U.S. will progress in the future.

Issue Involvement

In your life, you personally find the political events in your country to be: Irrelevant/Relevant; Unimportant/Important; Insignificant/Significant

How much do you care about what happens politically in your country?

How much do you think your life would be affected by who the next president is?

Political Ideology

What is your political ideology?

14679221, 2025, 6, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/pops.70018 by University Of California, Wiley Online Library on [26/10/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

APPENDIX B

ITEMS MEASURING COOPERATIVE TENDENCIES

General Acceptance of Whoever is Elected

I will support the next president regardless of who is eventually elected.

Acceptance of Specific Non-Preferred Candidate

Even though I prefer [Trump/Biden], if [Biden/Trump] were elected president, I believe America would still prosper.

Even though I prefer [Trump/Biden], I am confident that [Biden/Trump] would do a good job if he were elected.

Even though I prefer [Trump/Biden], I am optimistic about the U.S. if [Biden/Trump] were elected president.

Even though I prefer [Trump/Biden], I would continue to contribute to the country if [Biden/Trump] were elected president.

Support for Biden Policies

In the future, how likely are you to support policies of the Biden administration?

In the future, how likely are you to praise the Biden administration if it effectively manages a national crisis?

In the future, how likely are you to give Biden the benefit of the doubt on controversial issues?

Willingness to Cooperate with Supporters of Non-Preferred Candidate

In general, how willing are you to work together with [Trump/Biden] supporters?

If cooperation was essential for national progress, how willing are you to work together with [Trump/Biden] supporters?

I would rather see our country in decline than work together with Americans who support [Trump/Biden].

If it contributes to our country, I would readily cooperate with Americans who support [Trump/Biden].

Both Trump supporters and Biden supporters should work together for the sake of our country.

Regardless of whether they support Trump or Biden, all Americans should put aside their differences and work together to benefit America.

Attitude toward Non-Preferred Candidate

How desirable or undesirable would it be for you if [Trump/Biden] were elected president?

Do you think that [Trump/Biden], if elected, will do a good job as the president?

I would feel pretty good about the presidency of [Trump/Biden].

I would have negative feelings about the presidency of [Trump/Biden].

Attitude toward Supporters of Non-Preferred Candidate

Americans who prefer [Trump/Biden] are …

Bad/Good; Unfriendly-Friendly; Disloyal to America-Loyal to America

Very Un-American-Very American; Unpatriotic-Patriotic

14679221, 2025, 6, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/pops.70018 by University Of California, Wiley Online Library on [26/10/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License