American Voters Do Punish Overt Undemocratic Behavior at the Polls: Natural Experimental Evidence from the 2021 Insurrection of the U.S. Capitol

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First version: September 10, 2021
This version: November 26, 2021

Abstract

Existing research suggests that overt undemocratic behavior by elected officials is insufficiently punished by American voters to electorally discourage democratic backsliding. Evidence for this proposition comes primarily from hypothetical survey experiments with relatively weak treatments. I test this hypothesis using a natural experiment with a powerful treatment: Donald Trump's incitement of the insurrection of the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021. The insurrection was unexpected to the general public, did not coincide with other events that could plausibly affect public opinion, and occurred while Gallup was conducting a nationally representative survey using random digit dialing. Comparing vote choice intention among respondents that were interviewed just before, and just after, the insurrection occurred suggests that the insurrection caused a 10.8% decline in support for the Republican Party, and an 8.4% increase in support for the Democratic Party. Politicians interested in winning elections have strong incentives to avoid insurrection-like events from occurring.

Keywords: Democratic Backsliding, Accountability, Voter Behavior
Words: 3,994 (excl. online appendix and abstract)

1 Introduction

Politicians that cannot win through free and fair elections self-evidently have an incentive to rig the electoral system for political gain. While democratic norms among politicians could in principle self-constrain politicians from doing so, this mechanism, even if such norms exist, becomes more and more brittle ones the stakes of elections increases. For democracy to be truly self-enforcing it is therefore necessary that politicians anticipate that, were they to behave undemocratically, their own supporters would punish them by voting for a competitor in sufficiently large numbers to bring about their defeat (Graham and Svolik, 2020; Svolik, 2020).

It is extremely disconcerting therefore that a number of recent studies find that the American electorate may no longer provide this shield of protection again democratic backsliding.[1] Graham and Svolik (2020) find that in regular state legislative elections between a Democrat and a Republican, and where the candidates differ substantively on economic and social policy (i.e., virtually every election in the United States), a mere 3.5% of the electorate is willing to punish clear undemocratic behavior by politicians if this means that they are forced to vote for a politician that is further away from their own policy preferences.[2] McCoy, Simonovits and Littvay (2020) and Albertus and Grossman (2021) meanwhile find that Americans are remarkably hypocritical when it comes to democratic backsliding, supporting the same anti-democratic state executive behavior when their own party is in power, while condemning it if the opposing party is in power.

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[1]This concern is of course hardly limited to the United States alone. Indeed, a rapidly growing literature exists on the issue of democratic backsliding in general (e.g., Bermeo (2016), Cleary and Öztürk (2020), Haggard and Kaufman (2021), Lührmann (2021), and Waldner and Lust (2018)), and on the role of voters in tolerating democratic backsliding in particular (e.g., Cho and Hwang (2021), Magaloni (2006), and Svolik (2019, 2020)).

[2]Carey et al. (2020) do find that American voters sufficiently punish undemocratic behavior when they are not forced to give up any of their own policy preferences.

This important existing evidence not withstanding significant uncertainty remains as to whether American voters do indeed not punish undemocratic behavior by elected officials sufficiently strongly to reasonably influence elections. First, all existing evidence is survey experimental in nature. It remains unclear therefore whether voters would not sufficiently react to *real-life* democratic transgressions that would directly affect their own life.[3] Second, all existing studies employ important but nevertheless not truly fundamental and decisive forms of democratic backsliding (e.g., whether a candidate supported a proposal to reduce the number of polling places in areas that largely support the opposing party). It is unclear therefore whether American voters will not be an effective electoral check to more extreme forms of democratic backsliding that would truly change the rules of the game (e.g., a president refusing to leave office after losing an election).

To address these issues I analyze the results of a novel natural experiment that occurred because Donald Trump's incitement of the insurrection of the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021, unexpectedly occurred while Gallup was conducting a nationally representative public opinion survey among 1,023 adult Americans. Given that Gallup samples respondents using random digit dialing the probability of any particular individual to be interviewed before or after the insurrection is plausibly exogenous to any pre-treatment characteristics that may otherwise affect vote choice. Furthermore, given that there were no other events surrounding January 6, 2021 that could plausibly explain major changes in political party alliance I can recover the average treatment effect of inciting the insurrection by simply comparing support for the Republican Party among respondents that happened to be interviewed just before, and just after, the insurrection occurred.

Using this natural experiment I find that Americans do in fact punish behavior as extreme

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[3]Graham and Svolik (2020) are an exception to this. They also analyze the electoral effect of Republican Greg Gianforte hitting a journalist in the face. This paper differs from Graham and Svolik (2020) by focusing on a more extreme form of undemocratic behavior that had a more structural effect on American democracy.

as inciting an insurrection strongly enough to decisively influence presidential elections. More specifically, I find that electoral support for the Republican Party went down 10.8% as a result of Donald Trump's incitement of the insurrection. Crucially, the majority of voters switched to supporting the Democratic Party, rather than becoming independents, causing the expected vote share of the Democratic Party to simultaneously increase by 8.4%. Voters in swing states imposed similar levels of electoral punishment as voters in non-swing states, suggesting that this event had the capacity to strongly shift U.S. presidential election results (see online appendix H). While it is impossible to establish what Republican support would have been today if Trump had not incited the insurrection, correlational analysis does suggest that the negative effect was most probably long-lasting.

These results suggest that voters may be a more viable constrain on democratic backsliding than the existing literature presumes. This is a crucial observation because while coup d'états were the primary channel of autocratization in the past, in recent years democratic backsliding typically occurs by elected state executives that slowly undermine democratic institutions while reasonably free and fair elections remain at least initially in place. This implies that voters could in principle stop the process of democratic backsliding if they would chose to vote antidemocratic incumbents out of office. The strength of the electoral check is, however, crucially moderated by the electoral system. Indeed, in more than two-thirds of all cases where democratic backsliding occurred incumbents were able to exploit the electoral system in such a way to rule as a (super)majority even while winning only a *minority* of the popular vote (Haggard and Kaufman, 2021).[4] The fight against democratic backsliding is therefore perhaps as much about letting the voice of the majority be heard, as it is about getting the majority to value democracy more.

The paper also contributes to the ongoing study of the consequences of the January 6 insurrection, which is likely to prove one of the major watershed moments in 21th century

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[4]This of course includes the United States, where Donald Trump was elected with 2.9 million votes less than Hillary Clinton in the 2016 presidential election.

American political history. My results contrast relatively sharply with existing reports, which have tended to emphasize how radically different self-identifying Republicans and Democrats have perceived the events of January 6, 2021. A post-January 6 YouGov poll, for example, found that approximately 45% of self-identifying Republicans actually supported the storming of the Capitol, that 52% of Republicans blamed Joe Biden rather than Donald Trump for inciting the unrest, and that only 27% of self-identified Republicans saw the insurrection as a threat to democracy. My results do not dispute these reports. Instead, my results show that there was a major shift in the *number* of people self-identifying as Republican and Democrat as a result of the insurrection. Within the now much smaller remaining group of Republican-leaning voters it could well be true that many trivialized or straight-out denied the nature and gravity of the January 6 insurrection.

2   Context

On November 3, 2020 Joe Biden (Democrat) won the U.S. presidential election of sitting U.S. president Donald Trump (Republican) with a little more than 7 million popular votes (and 74 Electoral College votes) difference. Despite this enormous difference in the number of votes, and the absence of any evidence of widespread voting fraud, Donald Trump claimed that the election was fraudulent and that he was the true winner of the election.

After several months of constant misinformation regarding the election, and a wide range of highly publicized court cases (which were all essentially dismissed for a lack of evidence), Donald Trump held a speech at the "Stop the Steal" rally on January 6, 2021. In the speech Trump said, among other things, that the election was stolen, that he and his supporter will never concede, that they will fight like hell, and that they are going to walk down to the Capitol because you'll never take your country back with weakness.[5]

Right after this speech a large mob of Trump supporters stormed the U.S. Capitol build-

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[5]See online appendix A for direct quotes from the speech.

ing, leading to the death of 5 people, the injury of at least 138 police officers, physical property damages in excess of 30 million dollars, the abrupt halt of an ongoing congressional debate, and the immediate evacuation of all members of Congress.

In the weeks following the insurrection a trial was held in the U.S. Congress to impeach president Trump. In this trial only 10 of the 207 Republican House of Representatives members and 7 of 50 Republican Senate members voted to impeach president Trump, leading to his acquittal (all Democrats in both houses voted for impeachment).[6]

I regard this event as a clear case of democratic backsliding that should be recognized and electorally sanctioned as such *if* the U.S. electorate is indeed to function as an effective check against overt undemocratic behavior by elected officials.

3   Identification strategy

To study whether the American electorate punishes overt undemocratic behavior by elected officials I exploit that the insurrection unexpectedly occurred while Gallup was conducting a nationally representative public opinion survey among 1,023 adult Americans using random digit dialing.[7]

Causal identification relies on two assumptions. First, *temporal ignorability*, meaning that whether any particular individual is interviewed before or after January 6 should be

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[6]I regard the acquittal of President Trump by other Republican members of Congress as a part of the treatment – i.e., a clear and overt undemocratic act by the Republican Party at large. I therefore examine effects on the Republican Party as a whole, not only support for president Donald Trump himself. Results are, if anything, slightly stronger on Donald Trump's presidential approval rating (see online appendix G).

[7]The survey was conducted from January 4 until January 15, with 177 people having been interviewed before January 6, and 715 people having been interviewed after January 6 (see online appendix B). Online appendix F shows that the sample is largely representative of the American electorate (based on data from the American National Election Study 2020).

orthogonal to any other individual-level characteristic that also affects vote preferences. Second, *excludability*, meaning that the timing of interview should affect vote preferences only through the insurrection event, not through any other channel (Muñoz, Falcó-Gimeno and Hernández, 2020).

3.1 Temporal ignorability

Temporal ignorability is likely to hold for four reasons.

First, Gallup interviews over the phone and samples respondents using random digit dialing. This ensures that any individual, regardless of where he/she lives, and regardless of his/her own background characteristics, has an equal probability to be contacted for an interview on any particular day. In line with this I find that the control and treatment groups are balanced on common pre-treatment determinants of Republican Party support (see figure 1).[8]

Second, there is no evidence of endogenous reachability differences (i.e., a priori Democrats being more difficult to reach for an interview and therefore being disproportionally included in the treatment group). First, the number of tries before an interview was successfully completed is uncorrelated with supporting the Republican Party (OLS coefficient: -0.022; P-value: 0.199). Second, all results hold when dropping all respondents that were not successfully interviewed on the first try (OLS coefficient: -0.141; P-value: 0.006).

Third, there is no indication of endogenous social desirability bias. If it were true that Republicans were disproportionally more likely to be interested in concealing their vote preference as a result of January 6, 2021 one would reasonably expect that: (1) non-responses on the vote preference question went up after January 6; and (2) support for Independents, rather than Democrats, went up after January 6 (i.e., assuming that selecting Independents

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[8]As is standard I drop the treatment day itself from the sample in all estimations. All results hold when assigning all respondents that were interviewed on January 6 to either control or treatment.

Figure 1: Balance on observables.
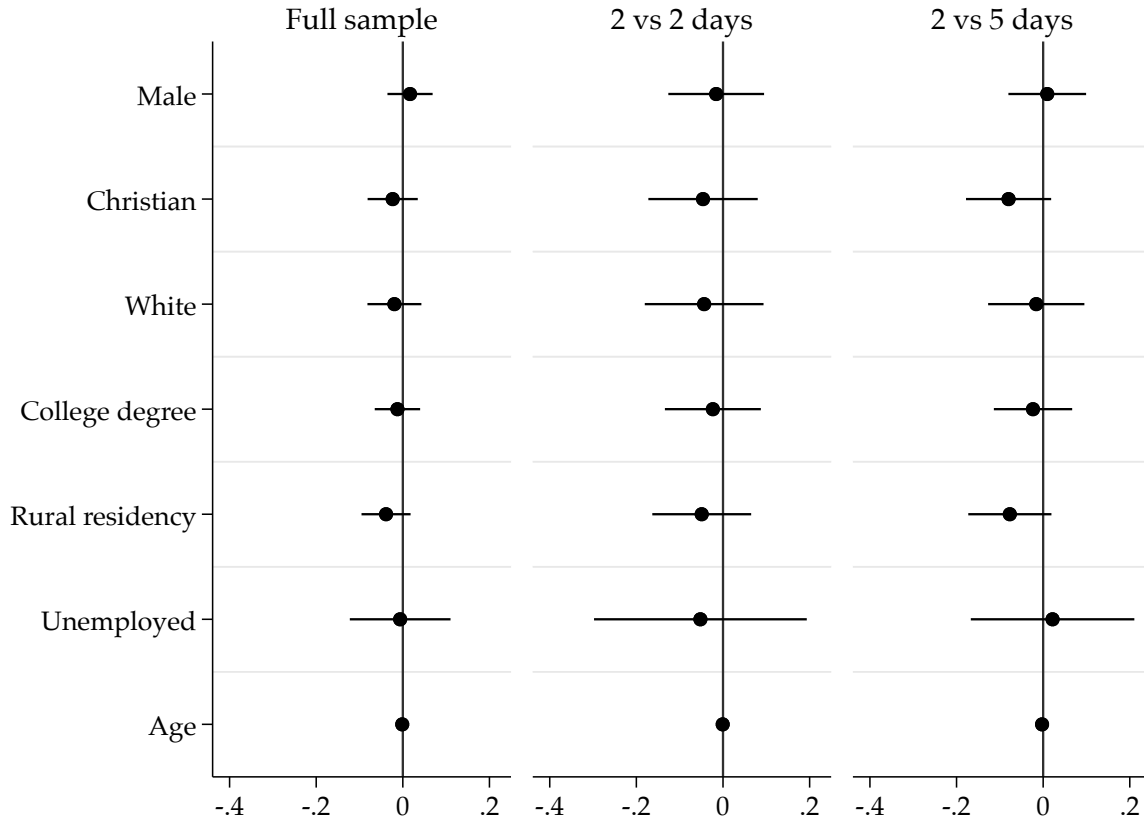
Note: Each dot represents an individual OLS regression. Dependent variable is treatment status. Point estimates and 95% confidence intervals are reported.

would still be socially "acceptable" while preferable over Democrats for "Republicans in disguise"). This is not what the data suggests. Instead, there is no economically or statistically significant difference in non-response on the vote question before and after January 6 (OLS coefficient: 0.004; P-value: 0.661), and support tends to predominantly shift to the Democratic Party, rather than Independent, after January 6 (see table 1 below).[9]

Last, there is no evidence that Republicans were altogether less likely to participate in the Gallup survey because of the January 6 insurrection. First, notice that passing the balance

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[9]Note that the fact that Gallup interviews anonymously over the phone also reduces the likelihood of social desirability bias.

on observables test in figure 1 in the presence of endogenous survey non-response would require Republicans that disproportionally choose to opt out of the survey after January 6 to be similar to the voter profile of Democrats on average. Second, a placebo test using a dummy that takes the value 1 if a respondent is in favor of further restrictions on abortion, and 0 otherwise, suggests that the treatment group is, if anything, over representing a priori Republicans (OLS coefficient: 0.068; P-value: 0.190).

3.2   Excludability

Excludability is likely to hold for three reasons.

First, a content analysis of the New York Times and the USA Today suggests that there were no other events that occurred on or around January 6, 2021 that could plausibly explain a major shift in electoral support from the Republican Party towards the Democratic Party (see online appendix C).

Second, while it is true that the storming of the U.S. Capitol also exposed a major policy failure of the Government of the District of Columbia to secure the Capitol building, which could have an independent effect on vote preferences, this collateral event weights against finding that January 6 led to a major electoral shift from the Republican Party *towards* the Democratic Party. This is because the mayor of Washington D.C. was a Democrat at the time of the insurrection.

Last, while I naturally cannot exclude the possibility that the insurrection of the U.S. Capitol did not trigger some other, perhaps currently unknown, voter reaction that could have affected Republican support besides democratic backsliding concerns, the data does suggest that this is unlikely to be of major concern. This is because respondents in the treatment group are not more likely to express dissatisfaction regarding other issues that could in theory be linked to the insurrection, such as crime and violence (OLS coefficient: 0.000; P-value: 0.994), moral and ethical climate (OLS coefficient: 0.014; P-value: 0.683), respect for others (OLS coefficient: -0.003; P-value: 0.876), and race relations (OLS coefficient:

0.021; P-value: 0.686).[10][11]

4 Results

4.1 Baseline Estimates

In table 1 I use OLS to regress dummies that take the value 1 if a respondent supports or leans towards supporting Republican, Independent, or Democrat, and 0 otherwise, on a dummy that takes the value 1 if a respondent was surveyed after January 6, 2021, and 0 if he/she was surveyed before this date.[12][13][14]

The estimate in panel A column (1) suggests that Donald Trump's incitement of the insurrection led to a 10.8% decline in electoral support for the Republican Party. This effect is statistically significant on the 99% confidence level. Panel A columns (3) and (5) suggest that 8.4% of this loss for the Republican Party shifted directly to the Democratic Party, while the remaining 2.4% came to reclassify themselves as Independents.

These results suggest that the Republican Party received a "double" electoral penalty as a result of Donald Trump's incitement of the insurrection: not only did the Republican Party heavily lost many of its own supporters, but most of its own supporters moved directly

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[10]Note that if any collateral events nonetheless did take place my identification strategy would still identify the causal effect of the events of January 6, but this would represent a bundled treatment of democratic backsliding *plus* other closely related treatments.

[11]Regrettably, Gallup did not ask respondents about their satisfaction regarding the state of democracy.

[12]I choose to use linear probability models for ease of interpretation. All results hold with logit/probit (see online appendix E).

[13]See online appendix D for descriptive (nonparametric) results.

[14]Note that I cannot observe effects on actual voting behavior because there was no ongoing election around January 6, 2021. Evidence from other settings nonetheless suggests that intended vote choices reported in surveys tend to closely correspond to real-world vote choices (Hainmueller, Hangartner and Yamamoto, 2015).

Table 1: Effect January 6 insurrection on vote preference.

	Republican		Independent		Democrat	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Panel A: sample average treatment effect (SATE)						
6 January 2021	-0.108***	-0.095**	0.024	0.020	0.084**	0.075*
	(0.042)	(0.039)	(0.023)	(0.022)	(0.042)	(0.039)
Controls	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Observations	892	849	892	849	892	849
Panel B: population average treatment effect (PATE)						
6 January 2021	-0.130**	-0.125**	0.056*	0.050	0.074	0.076
	(0.057)	(0.054)	(0.033)	(0.034)	(0.059)	(0.056)
Controls	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Observations	849	849	849	849	849	849

Notes: Each column within panel A and B is a separate OLS regression. Huber–White heteroscedasticity-consistent standard errors in parentheses.
$***$ p<0.01, $**$ p<0.05, $*$ p<0.10.

to the only other party that can reasonably win contemporary U.S. presidential elections. This also suggests that the effect is not driven by extremist Republican voters turning their back on the Republican Party because they felt that some other Republican leaders (e.g., Mitch McConnell) were not sufficiently supportive of Donald Trump after he incited the insurrection (i.e., assuming that such voters would not reclassify themselves as Democrats, rather than Independents, to give expression to this belief). Rather, the effect appears mostly driven by moderate Republicans willing to move across party lines as a response to the overt undemocratic behavior of a Republican president.[15]

4.2 Robustness

In panel B of table 1 I examine whether these results hold when using American National Election Study data and probability weights to make the Gallup sample more closely resemble the American electorate in terms of age, gender, race, Christianity, education, rurality, and employment status (see online appendix F for more details). As can be seen using these

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[15]See online appendix H for heterogenous treatment effects.

probability weights, if anything, strengthens the results.[16]

Columns (2), (4), and (6) show that both the weighted and unweighted results remain essentially unchanged when controlling for the covariates from figure 1. All results also hold with geographical fixed effects for state, zipcode, or census region, and when controlling for: income, marital status, Muslim, Jewish, Atheist/Agnostic, 4-category Christian classification, self-identified intensity of religiosity, regularity of church attendance, 8-category education classification, Black, Hispanic, and Asian ethnicity/race.

In figure 2 I find that the estimated effect is highly stable when narrowing the sample to only include respondents that were surveyed directly before/after January 6, 2021. The point estimate in all cases hoovers around a 10% reduction in vote share for the Republican Party (note that the estimate is not statistically significant in the first two days because of a lack of statistical power, *not* because the treatment effect is substantively smaller).

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[16]I generate the weights using ten distinct covariates. The weighting exercise therefore somewhat increases the standard errors. The main effect nonetheless remains statistically significant on the 95% level.

Figure 2: SATE and PATE estimates with less days after January 6 included in the sample.
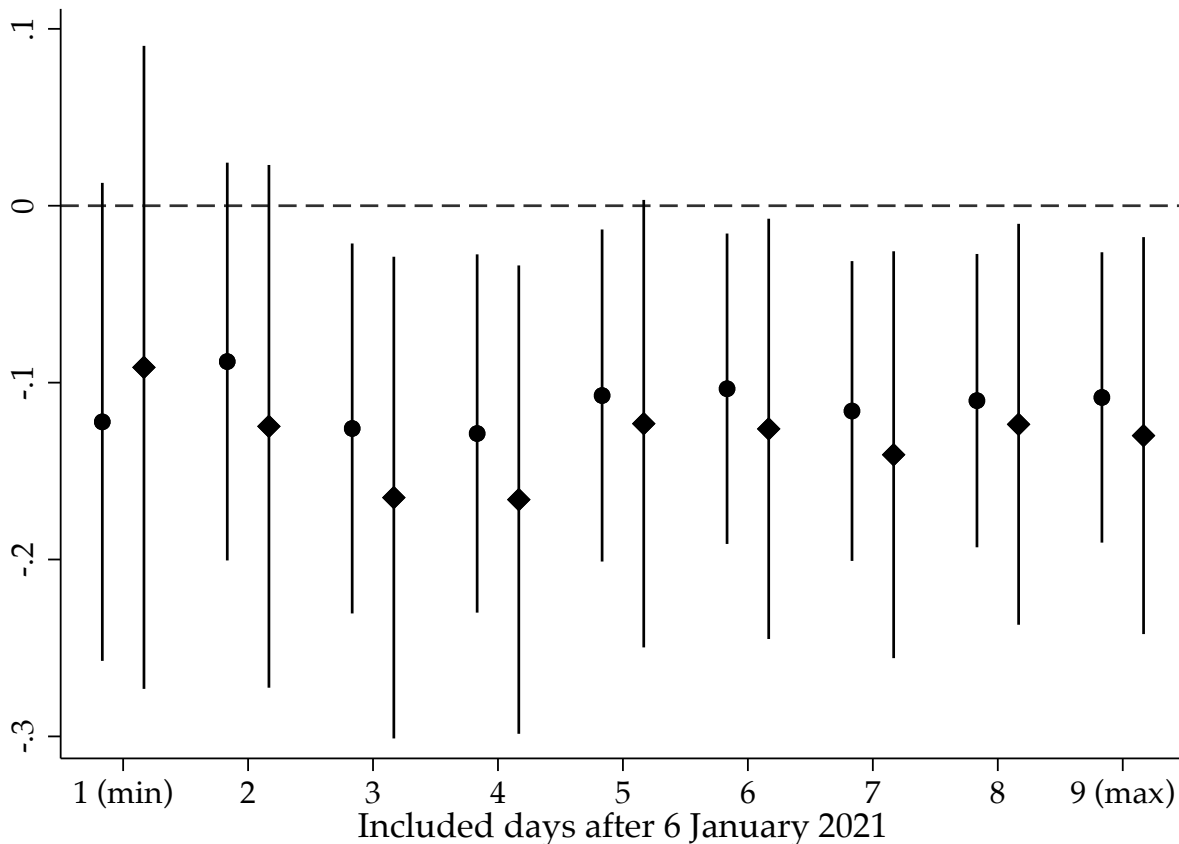
Note: Point estimates and 95% confidence intervals of OLS regressions of supporting the Republican party on treatment status. The horizontal axis plots how many days after January 6, 2021 are included in the treatment group. The control group always consists of all respondents that were interviewed on January 4 and 5. Circles indicate SATE estimates. Diamonds indicate PATE estimates.

4.3   Treatment Durability

In terms of how long the effect lasted there is no sign that the treatment effect diminished within the sample itself. Limiting the sample to the post-January 6 period I find that the number of days a respondent is interviewed after January 6 is uncorrelated with support for the Republican Party (OLS coefficient: 0.002; P-value: 0.803).

Assessing how long the effect lasted outside of the sample is more challenging as there is no way to credibly establish how high support for the Republican Party would have been today if the insurrection had not occurred.

Table 2: Party support relative to voter distribution on January 4 and 5, 2021.

	3-18 February	1-15 March	1-21 April	3-18 May
Republican	-3.74%	-5.27%	-3.73%	-4.05%
Independent	-0.49%	+1.27%	-1.51%	-0.75%
Democrat	+4.24%	+2.52%	+3.27%	+3.33%

Notes: Dates in column heading refer to fieldwork periods of Gallup "Mood of the Nation" surveys.

Correlational evidence from table 2 nonetheless suggests that in May 2021, 4 months after the insurrection, average support for the Republican Party was still 4% below, and Democratic Party support was still 3% above, what it was in the days before January 6. It is also noteworthy in this regard that in the few elections that have taken place since January 6, 2021 it have been Republicans that have kept significant distance from Trump that have done well (Glenn Youngkin, Jack Ciattarelli), while Republicans that have closely aligned themselves with Trump have arguably spurred comfortable wins for Democrats (Larry Elder).

5   Conclusion

This paper has shown that the American electorate *does* act as an effective electoral check on democratic backsliding, at least when the undemocratic behavior by a politician is as extreme as inciting an insurrection to overturn the result of a free and fair election.

While this is a hopeful message it is also very clear that the American electorate is very far from a *perfect* check on undemocratic behavior by elected officials. Indeed, if the American electorate was a perfect check on undemocratic behavior by politicians we would presumably see much less of the many instances of smaller, but nonetheless very serious, forms of undemocratic behavior (e.g., gerrymandering).

Further research is therefore necessary with regard to the important question of how extreme undemocratic behavior has to become before American voters react in sufficient severity. Future research is also necessary with regard to the important question of why the Republican Party has not generally reacted to Donald Trump's incitement of the January 6 insurrection by distancing itself from Donald Trump and the insurrectionists. Bias in

perceptions of public opinion among Republican elites may play an important role here (Broockman and Skovron, 2018).

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— Online Appendix —
American Voters Do Punish Overt Undemocratic Behavior at the Polls

By: Sam van Noort

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Contents

A   Quotes from Trump's speech on January 6, 2021

My identification strategy relies on the claim that Donald Trump's speech on the January 6 "Stop the Steal" rally incited the insurrection of the U.S. Capitol, and should therefore be interpreted by the American electorate as a clear case of democratic backsliding.

Below, I provide a number of direct quotes from Donald Trump's speech to substantiate this assertion:

> "All of us here today do not want to see our election victory stolen by emboldened radical-left Democrats, which is what they're doing. And stolen by the fake news media. That's what they've done and what they're doing. We will never give up, we will never concede. It doesn't happen. You don't concede when there's theft involved."

> "Our country has had enough. We will not take it anymore and that's what this is all about. And to use a favorite term that all of you people really came up with: We will Stop the Steal."

> "Because if Mike Pence does the right thing, we win the election. [...] All Vice President Pence has to do is send it back to the states to recertify and we become president and you are the happiest people."

> "[...] we're going to walk down to the Capitol, and we're going to cheer on our brave senators and congressmen and women, and we're probably not going to be cheering so much for some of them."

> "Because you'll never take back our country with weakness. You have to show strength and you have to be strong. "

> "We fight like hell. And if you don't fight like hell, you're not going to have a country anymore."

> "So let's walk down Pennsylvania Avenue."

Not only I but also virtually all other reasonable and independent observers of American politics characterized the words of Trump as inciting the insurrection. The New York Times, for example, opened on January 7, 2021 with "Trump Incited Mob", the Washington Post opened with "President incites crowd to acts of insurrection", and the USA Today opened with "Trump incited crowd to march to Capitol Hill."

B Distribution of survey responses across days

Figure A1 shows the number of respondents that were interviewed by Gallup before, on, and after January 6, 2021. As can be seen the survey was conducted from January 4 until January 15, with 177 people having been interviewed before January 6, and 715 people having been interviewed after January 6.[1]

Figure A1: Histogram of dates of interviews relative to treatment.
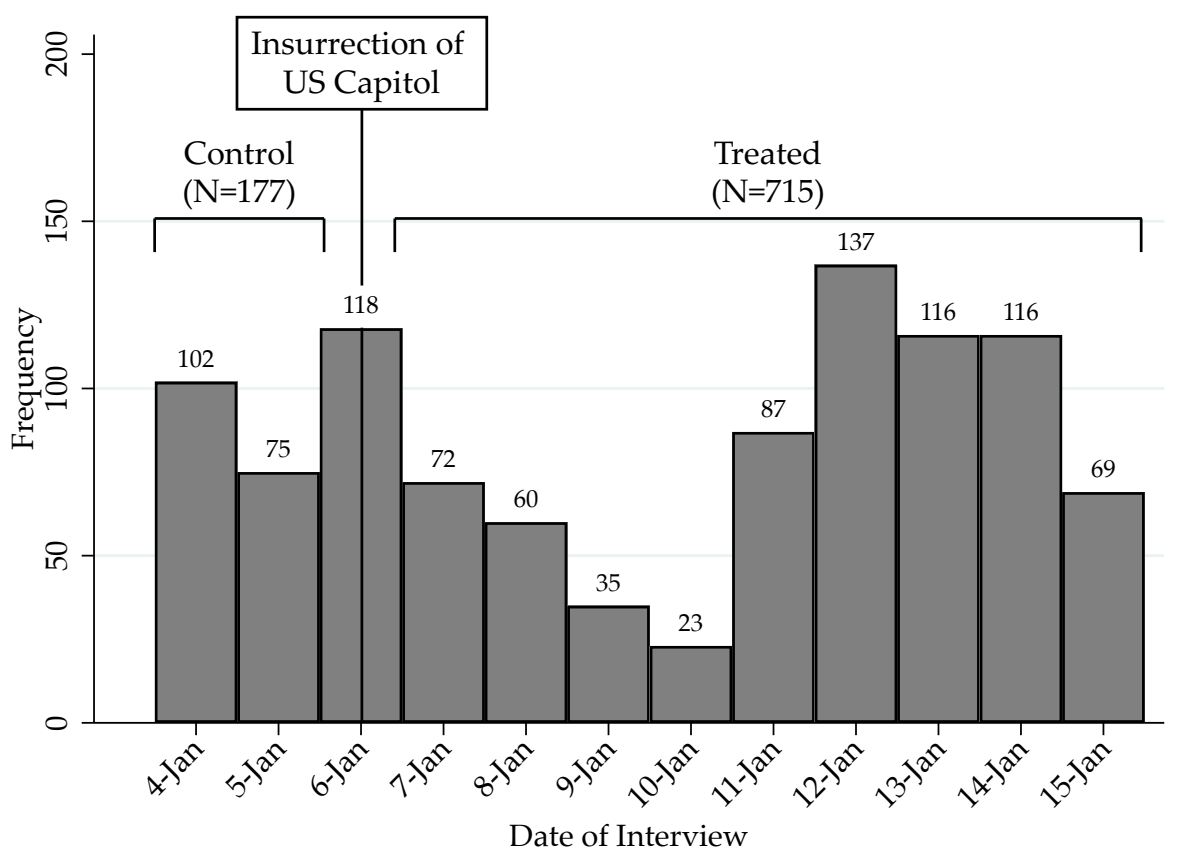
Note: Data refers to the year 2021. Data comes from Gallup's January "Mood of the Nation" survey.

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[1]Note that there was no increase in non-response on January 7 to January 10. Instead, response was somewhat higher than expected on January 6, relative to January 5, 7, and 8. January 9 and 10 were weekend days and Gallup interviews less on the weekend. This was conveyed to me by Kris Hodgins (Senior Consultant at Gallup).

C Content analysis of potential simultaneous events

My identification strategy relies on the assumption that there were no other events on January 6, or in the days surrounding January 6, that could also have induced a major shift in electoral support from the Republican Party to the Democratic Party.

To test whether this assumption is likely to hold I read the New York Times and the USA Today cover to cover on all days from January 4 to January 15, 2021. Below I discuss the twelve most salient political events that occurred during this time period, and explain why these events are unlikely to explain away my results.

- **4 January, 2021: Trump-Raffensperger phone call.** On January 4 an audio recording of a phone call between President Trump and Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger was leaked. In the phone call Trump pressures Raffensperger to "find" enough votes to reverse his loss to Joe Biden in the state of Georgia during the 2020 Presidential election. Because this event is, if anything, likely to negatively affect Republican support, and because it occurred on January 4, it weights against finding that respondents became *less* likely to support the Republican Party *after* January 6 (as compared to Republican support on January 4 and 5).

- **5 January, 2021: Georgia runoff elections for the U.S. Senate.** On January 5 runoff elections were held for Georgia's two U.S. Senate seats. After the general 2020 elections the Republican Party held 50 Senate seats, and the Democratic Party held 48 seats. As a result, the two runoff races in Georgia would determine which Party would control the Senate under the incoming Biden administration. In the early hours of January 6 both elections were called for the Democratic Party, giving the Democratic Party an effective majority in the Senate with Democratic Vice President Kamala Harris having the right to cast a tie-breaking vote. The extraordinary high political stakes of this election caused the race to attract significant nationwide attention. I am not aware of research that suggests that the mere existence of salient elections or

Republican Party defeats in crucial elections causes major shifts in electoral support from the Republican to the Democratic Party (which is necessary for this event to confound my results). To test this null hypothesis more rigorously I run a placebo test analyzing the effect of the occurrence and results of the 2006 United States elections on Republican Party support. The 2006 elections were in two important respects comparable to the Republican Party' defeat in the 2021 Georgia runoff elections. First, the Republican Party suffered a historic defeat in 2006, loosing control of both houses of Congress in one election cycle (which was the first time either party did so since the 1994 elections). Second, like the 2021 Georgia runoff elections, the bad performance of the Republican Party in 2006 was largely blamed on an unpopular Republican president (George W. Bush in the 2006 case). The 2006 elections occurred on November 7. To the best of my knowledge no public opinion survey was going on before and after November 7, 2006. Importantly, however, CBS News and the New York Times conducted a call-back poll, in which they surveyed 715 respondents on October 27–31 and then again on November 11–14. This allows me to estimate the effect of the election (result) by regressing a dummy capturing whether a respondent would vote for the Republican Party if there was an election today on a pre/post-election dummy, while controlling for individual-level fixed effects. Given that potential confounders are unlikely to have changed over such a short period of time this credibly identifies the causal effect of the election event. In support of the null hypothesis I find that the 2006 electoral defeat of the Republican Party had no effect on Republican support in the CBS/NYT call-back poll (OLS coefficient: 0.000; P-value: 0.869).

- **7– January, 2021: Non-Republican backlash against Trump.** From January 7 onwards a large number of individuals and cooperations spoke out against Trump's actions on January 6. This included many social media companies banning Trump from their platforms (e.g., Twitter, Facebook), and many news pundits and Democratic politicians heavily criticizing Trump's actions. I see this as part of the treatment in

the sense that any violent attempt to subvert the results of a free and fair election is likely to generate such reactions. I don't see these reactions as independent events as they are caused by Trump's incitement of the insurrection, and thus at most mediate the effect of Donald Trump's incitement of the insurrection on voter preferences.

- **7–13 January, 2021: Republican backlash against Trump.** Several members of the Republican Party establishment also spoke out against President Trump. On January 7 several cabinet members (e.g., Elaine Chao, Betsy DeVos) resigned, citing Trump's behavior on January 6 as their main motivation. Arnold Schwarzenegger (ex-Republican governor of California) posted a video denouncing Trump on January 11. Liz Cheney said on January 12 that she will vote to impeach Trump. Mitch McConnell said on January 13 that he will support impeachment proceedings, but did not commit to voting in favor of conviction. In general I see these events as part of the treatment, for the same reasons as discussed above. In addition, the results of figure 2 (main text) suggest that at least the denouncements of Schwarzenegger, Cheney, and McConnell had little effect on Republican support as I find very similar effects before and after they were voiced.

- **8 January, 2021: Trump allegedly mentions the option of pardoning himself.** On January 8 it is made public that according to anonymous sources Trump has mentioned to aides that he wants to pardon himself. Trump in the end does not attempt to pardon himself and it never becomes clear whether he actually ever seriously considered it. This event cannot explain my results because the effect is equally present on January 7, which is after the insurrection occurred but before this rumor became public (see figure 2 in main text).

- **10 January, 2021: Public opinion poll shows that majority of Americans want President Trump removed from office.** On January 10 ABC News/Ipsos published the results of a poll that found that 56% of those surveyed believe that

President Trump should be removed from office before his term ends on January 20, and that 67% blame Trump for the riots in Washington. These poll results cannot explain my results because the effect is equally present before January 10 (see figure 2 in main text).

- **11 January, 2021: COVID-19 vaccine distribution is going slowly.** There were no major COVID-19 news stories that broke during the period of Gallup's January 2021 survey (besides basic updates on infections, causalities, and vaccinations that were continuously reported for months before January 2021, and which were relatively similar in tone before and after January 6). Arguably the most notable COVID-19 news story broke on January 11 when it was reported that at that point less than a third of available vaccine doses had been send to the states for administering. This cannot explain my results because the effect is equally present before January 11 (see figure 2 in main text).

- **12 January, 2021: Leaders of the U.S. army send letter in support of Joe Biden to all army personnel.** On January 12 the military's Joint Chiefs of Staff send a letter to the entire American forces reminding them that their job is to support and defend the Constitution, and that Biden will soon be their next commander in chief. The publication of this letter cannot explain my results because the effect is equally present before January 12 (see figure 2 in the main text).

- **12 January, 2021: Republican members of Congress block a resolution to urge Vice President Pence and Trump's cabinet members to invoke the 25th Amendment.** On January 12 Republican members of Congress vote against a resolution aimed at the removal of President Trump through the 25th Amendment. This triggers Democratic members of Congress to start impeachment proceedings. The Republican Party blocking the 25th Amendment resolution cannot explain my results because the effect is equally present before January 12 (see figure 2 in the main text).

6

- **14 January, 2021: The House passes Articles of Impeachment.** On January 14 the House of Representatives passes Articles of Impeachment charging Trump with "incitement of insurrection." Impeachment later fails on February 13, 2021 because of Republican opposition in the Senate. The House passing the impeachment articles cannot explain my results because the effect is equally present before January 14 (see figure 2 in the main text).

- **14 January, 2021: Capitol building and surrounding gated and packed with heavily armed National Guards.** From January 14 until after Joe Biden's inauguration on January 20 the entire Capitol building and surrounding was packed with tens of thousands of heavily armed National Guards that were forced to spend the night on the stone floor within the Capitol building. The militarization of the Capitol building from January 14 onwards cannot explain my results because the effect is equally present before January 14 (see figure 2 in the main text).

- **15 January, 2021: Democrats claim that some Republican lawmakers may have conspired with the January 6 insurrectionists.** On January 15 several Democratic members of Congress claimed that some of their Republican colleagues — none of whom they named specifically — may have conspired with the insurrectionists in an attempt to overturn the election. Serious evidence is never provided for these claims. These allegations cannot explain my results because the effect is equally present before January 15 (see figure 2 in the main text).

D   Non-parametric results

In table A1 I present the number and percentage of respondents that indicated that, as of today, they support or lean towards supporting the Republican Party, the Democratic Party, or none of the above, before and after January 6, 2021. The first two columns present the unweighted results, and the last two columns use the probability weights devised in appendix F.

Table A1: Party support before and after the January 6 insurrection of the U.S. Capitol.

	Unweighted		Weighted	
	January 4–5	January 7–15	January 4–5	January 7–15
Republican	31.64%	24.62%	25.49%	18.45%
Leaning Republican	18.08%	14.27%	18.87%	12.92%
Independent	7.34%	9.79%	6.88%	12.46%
Leaning Democrat	17.51%	21.12%	30.08%	24.30%
Democrat	25.42%	30.21%	18.68%	31.88%
N	177	715	169	680

Notes: Data comes from Gallup's January "Mood of the Nation" survey. Weights are generated using American National Election Study data on the percentage of male, Christian, White, college educated, rural, unemployed, and 18–29, 30–49, 50–64, and 65+ year old individuals that existed in the U.S. electorate in November 2020. See appendix F for more information.

E Logit/probit estimates

In the main text I use linear probability models for ease of interpretation. Tables A2 and A3 show that the results remain essentially unchanged when using logit or probit estimation.

Table A2: Logit estimates.

	Republican		Independent		Democrat	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Panel A: sample average treatment effect (SATE)						
6 January 2021	0.643***	0.629**	1.369	1.329	1.402**	1.418*
	(0.109)	(0.118)	(0.431)	(0.459)	(0.237)	(0.256)
Controls	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Observations	892	849	892	849	892	849
Panel B: population average treatment effect (PATE)						
6 January 2021	0.573**	0.519**	1.925	1.839	1.347	1.436
	(0.136)	(0.138)	(0.895)	(0.889)	(0.319)	(0.369)
Controls	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Observations	849	849	849	849	849	849

Notes: Each column within panel A and B is a separate logit regression. Coefficients are odds ratios. Huber–White heteroscedasticity-consistent standard errors in parentheses.
$***$ p<0.01, $**$ p<0.05, $*$ p<0.10.

Table A3: Probit estimates.

	Republican		Independent		Democrat	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Panel A: sample average treatment effect (SATE)						
6 January 2021	-0.106***	-0.093**	0.026	0.020	0.084**	0.076**
	(0.040)	(0.038)	(0.026)	(0.025)	(0.042)	(0.039)
Controls	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Observations	892	849	892	849	892	849
Panel B: population average treatment effect (PATE)						
6 January 2021	-0.125**	-0.124**	0.064	0.052	0.074	0.078
	(0.053)	(0.049)	(0.044)	(0.042)	(0.058)	(0.055)
Controls	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Observations	849	849	849	849	849	849

Notes: Each column within panel A and B is a separate probit regression. Coefficients are average marginal effects. Huber–White heteroscedasticity-consistent standard errors in parentheses.
$* * *$ p<0.01, $* *$ p<0.05, $*$ p<0.10.

F Generalizability

In section 3 of the main text I have described how my empirical design is likely to recover a credible causal estimate of the average treatment effect of Donald Trump's incitement of the insurrection of the U.S. Capitol *within* the sample of respondents interviewed by Gallup between January 4 to January 15, 2021. An important, and entirely distinct, issue is whether this estimated effect also generalizes to the entire population of interest (i.e., all Americans that are eligible to vote).

Very unfortunately the total population of eligible voters is *not* the population that Gallup targets. Instead, Gallup samples by randomly selecting respondents from a list of all household telephone numbers that have been in regular use within the United States.[2] Strictly speaking, and implicitly assuming that nonresponse is orthogonal to vote preferences, the Gallup survey thus only generalizes to all adults that live in the United States and regularly use a telephone (which is not necessarily the same population as those with voting rights).

Generalization to the population of all eligible American voters requires two conditions to hold. First, the treatment effect should not vary across any characteristic that differs across the population of adult Americans that regularly use a phone and the population of eligible American voters (ensuring that any random sample out of either population produces on average the same effect). Second, the standard condition that non-response should be orthogonal to vote preferences (ensuring that any random sample is not biased by those unwilling to be interviewed being systematically different in terms of vote preferences than those that did not accept to be interviewed) (Franco et al., 2017).

Although these conditions ultimately concern counterfactual statements that cannot be directly tested using my data there is reason to believe that these conditions are likely to hold in this case.

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[2]This procedure is more reliable than using a simple phone book (where about 30% of phone numbers go unlisted).

First, the sample of Gallup's January 2021 "Mood of the Nations" poll turns out to be relatively similar in terms of known determinants of Republican Party support, as compared to the best available data on the characteristics of the American electorate as a whole. As can be seen in table A4 the Gallup sample has approximately the same share of male, rural, and unemployed individuals as the American National Election Study (ANES) indicated existed in the American electorate in November 2020.[3] Importantly, however, the Gallup sample is on average slightly more Christian, White, college educated, and of age than the U.S. electorate as a whole. To correct for this I devise probability weights (see last two columns in table A4).[4] As shown in the main text the results remain unchanged when estimating the effect in this weighted sample.[5]

Second, there is little reason to believe that in the United States non-response to telephone surveys is endogenous to vote preferences. Keeter et al. (2017) have shown that telephone survey estimates of party affiliation and political ideologically track well with estimates from high response rate surveys conducted in-person, such as the General Social Survey. Furthermore, analysis of national voter registration files suggest that voter registration with a particular party does not correlate with whether a person is willing to participate in a telephone survey.

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[3]I use the ANES to benchmark my sample averages because other surveys with larger and more rigorous samples, such as the Current Population Survey, the Census, and the American Community Survey, do not include questions regarding voting eligibility. These alternative surveys can thus only be used to study the U.S. population of voting age, which is *not* the same as all Americans with voting rights (e.g., many (ex-)felons do not have voting rights in the United States).

[4]I create these weights using Deville and Särndal's (1992) distance function. In terms of calibration I employ the principle of minimizing the distance between the smallest and largest weight. This leads to a weight range of 0.4 to 2.8 in this case.

[5]Regrettably, this weighting exercise was not included in the pre-analysis plan.

Table A4: Congruence with American National Election Survey (ANES) on observables.

	Unweighted Gallup		Weighted ANES		Weighted Gallup	
	N	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean
Male	892	0.520	7,372	0.479	849	0.479
		(0.500)		(0.009)		(0.023)
Christian	869	0.719	7,354	0.469	849	0.469
		(0.450)		(0.008)		(0.023)
White	886	0.790	7,342	0.662	849	0.663
		(0.407)		(0.009)		(0.023)
College degree	889	0.481	7,308	0.355	849	0.355
		(0.500)		(0.007)		(0.021)
Rural residency	876	0.349	7,353	0.398	849	0.398
		(0.477)		(0.010)		(0.023)
Unemployed	890	0.055	7,375	0.049	849	0.049
		(0.228)		(0.004)		(0.010)
Age	818	52.770	6,771	46.141	787	46.266
		(17.181)		(0.351)		(0.772)

Notes: ANES includes both the pre- and post-election data. ANES is weighted using the probability weights provided in the data itself. Inverse probability weights for the Gallup survey are generated using the "sreweight" Stata package. For the age variable the sample is limited to people below 80 years of age because ANES does not measure age on the interval level above 79, while Gallup does. Gallup weights are generated using four age categories that can be distinguished in both datasets: 18–29, 30–49, 50–64, and 65+.
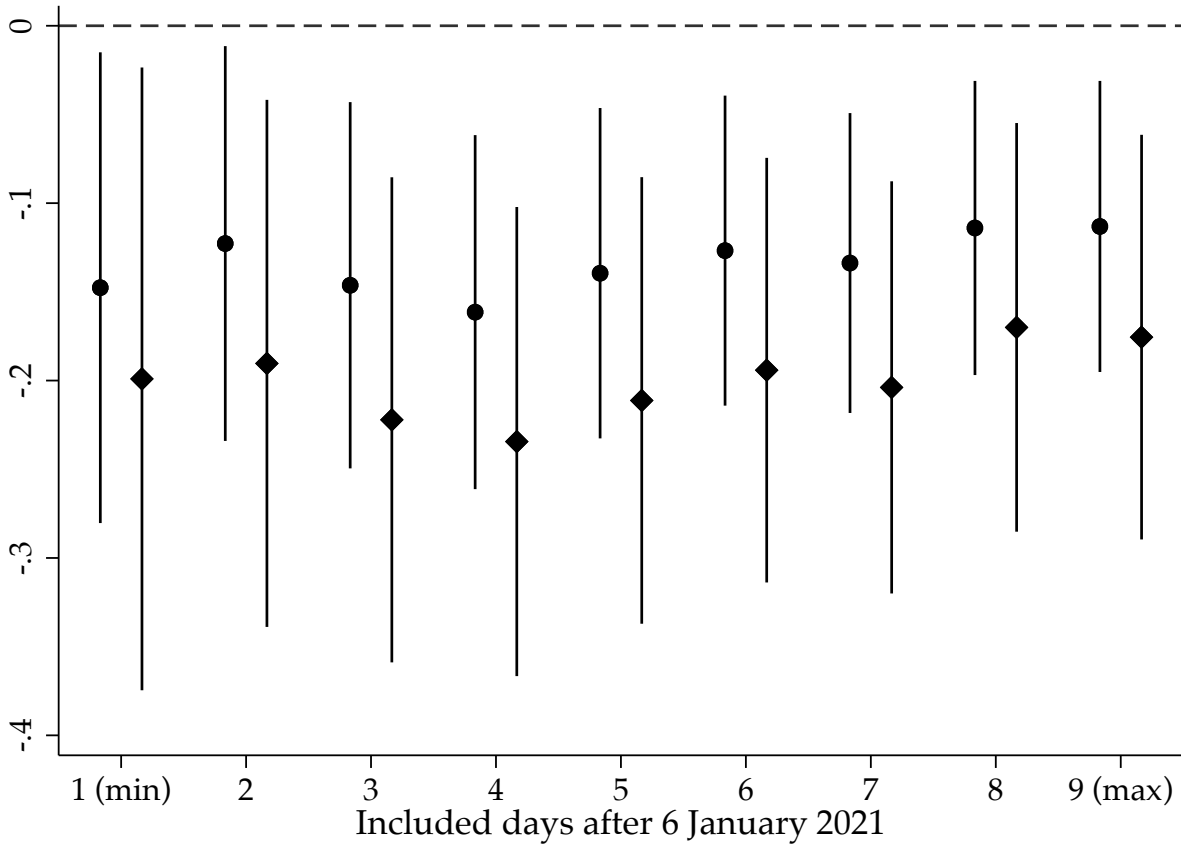
G Effect on presidential approval rating

The analysis in the main text has focused on the effect of Donald Trump's incitement of the January 6 insurrection on party-level voting preferences. This makes sense given that I conceptualize the incitement of the insurrection and the subsequent acquittal and trivialization of president Trump's behavior by Republican members of Congress as one treatment, and, more importantly, because the U.S. political space can best be understood as a competition between two major political parties, as opposed to a competition between individual politicians. It is nonetheless also of interest how the incitement of the insurrection affected support for Donald Trump himself. Particularly because a significant part of Trump supporters are relatively non-traditional Republicans (Tucker et al., 2019).

To assess the effect of inciting the insurrection on support for Donald Trump as president I regress a dummy that takes the value 1 if a respondent indicates that he/she approves of Donald Trump's job as president, and 0 if he/she disapproves, on a treatment dummy coding whether the respondent was interviewed before or after January 6, 2021.

Figure A2 reports the results. As can be seen the incitement of the insurrection also caused an approximately 10% decrease in Trump's presidential approval rating. This result holds when including the controls of figure 1 (main text), when including geographical fixed effects, when using the probability weights devised in appendix F, and when using binary logit/probit rather than OLS.

Figure A2: SATE and PATE estimates on Donald Trump's presidential approval rating.

Note: Point estimates and 95% confidence intervals of OLS regressions of presidential approval rating on treatment status. Dependent variable takes the value 1 if the respondent approves of the job that president Trump is doing, and 0 if the respondent disapproves of the job that president Trump is doing. The horizontal axis plots how many days after January 6, 2021 are included in the treatment group. The control group always consists of all respondents that were interviewed on January 4 and 5. Circles indicate SATE estimates. Diamonds indicate PATE estimates. Weights for the PATE estimates are generated using American National Election Study data on the percentage of male, Christian, White, college educated, rural, unemployed, and 18–29, 30–49, 50–64, and 65+ year old individuals that existed in the U.S. electorate in November 2020.

H Treatment heterogeneity

I do not find that the treatment effect varies with age (OLS interaction term: 0.002; P-value: 0.433). The treatment does vary with gender, religion, race, education, rurality, and employment status. As expected, the effect is stronger among urban (-0.110) relative to rural respondents (-0.071), stronger among non-Christian (-0.120) relative to Christian respondents (-0.086), and stronger among employed (-0.111) relative to unemployed respondents (-0.069).[6] Perhaps counterintuitively, the effect is stronger among males (-0.136) relative to females (-0.084), stronger among whites (-0.132) relative to non-whites (-0.021), and stronger among non-college (-0.122) relative to college graduates (-0.096). These latter effects are driven by significantly lower support for the Republican Party pre-treatment. Even after the treatment women, non-whites, and college graduates are much less likely to support the Republican Party, as compared to males, whites, and non-college graduates.

In terms of geographical treatment heterogeneity I find the effect to be -0.102 versus -0.108 in states that did and did not vote Republican in the 2020 presidential election, and -0.092 versus -0.116 in the swing versus non-swings states of the 2020 presidential election.[7] Given that American presidential elections tend to be decided in the swing states, with voter margins of much less than 9.2%, this latter result suggest that the electoral penalty imposed because of Donald Trump's incitement of the January 6 insurrection is more than sufficient to decisively influence U.S. presidential elections.

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[6]All the results in this section are based on the baseline specification as can be found in table 1 panel A column (1) in the main text.

[7]I code the following states as swing states: Arizona, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Iowa, Maine, Michigan, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Texas, and Wisconsin.

I   Access to Gallup data

To get access to the Gallup data I have signed an agreement to not share the data with anyone else. This is because this data is for sale. The data is, however, freely available for scholars associated with any of these universities. The data can otherwise be bought here.

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