

Heretics and Hypocrites: Seeing Religious Guidance Through a Partisan Lens

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Background

Research finds individuals may experience disjunction, or discomfort and inconsistency, when a troublesome distinction is drawn between two arenas of life. Our previous qualitative study found that members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints experience disjunctions between the political and religious arenas of their lives. We build on work from Jennifer Hochschild through a survey in order to determine how partisans respond when political and religious considerations conflict.

Methods

- Study of 1,498 Latter-day Saints who responded to a survey of Utah voters.
- Respondents were randomly assigned one of two vignettes, both informing the respondent of a hypothetical petition circulating in their ward which calls on church leadership to alter their rhetoric on a particular issue.
- The specific issues (COVID-19 and LGBTQ+) were chosen because they reflect issues that are typically partisan in nature and issues that the leadership of the Church have taken a clear stand on.
- Petition Vignettes
 - Church leaders should change COVID-19 rhetoric (N= 592-R, 105-D)
 - Church leaders should change LGBTQ+ rhetoric (N=590-R, 94-D)
- Respondents are asked a series of questions regarding the vignette.

Within-Party Differences in Approaches to the Issues¹

Average response to LGBTQ+ question - average response to COVID-19 question. The larger the absolute value, the greater the within partisan inconsistency across issues.

Is circulating a petition that contradicts Church policies appropriate?
[Very appropriate, somewhat appropriate]

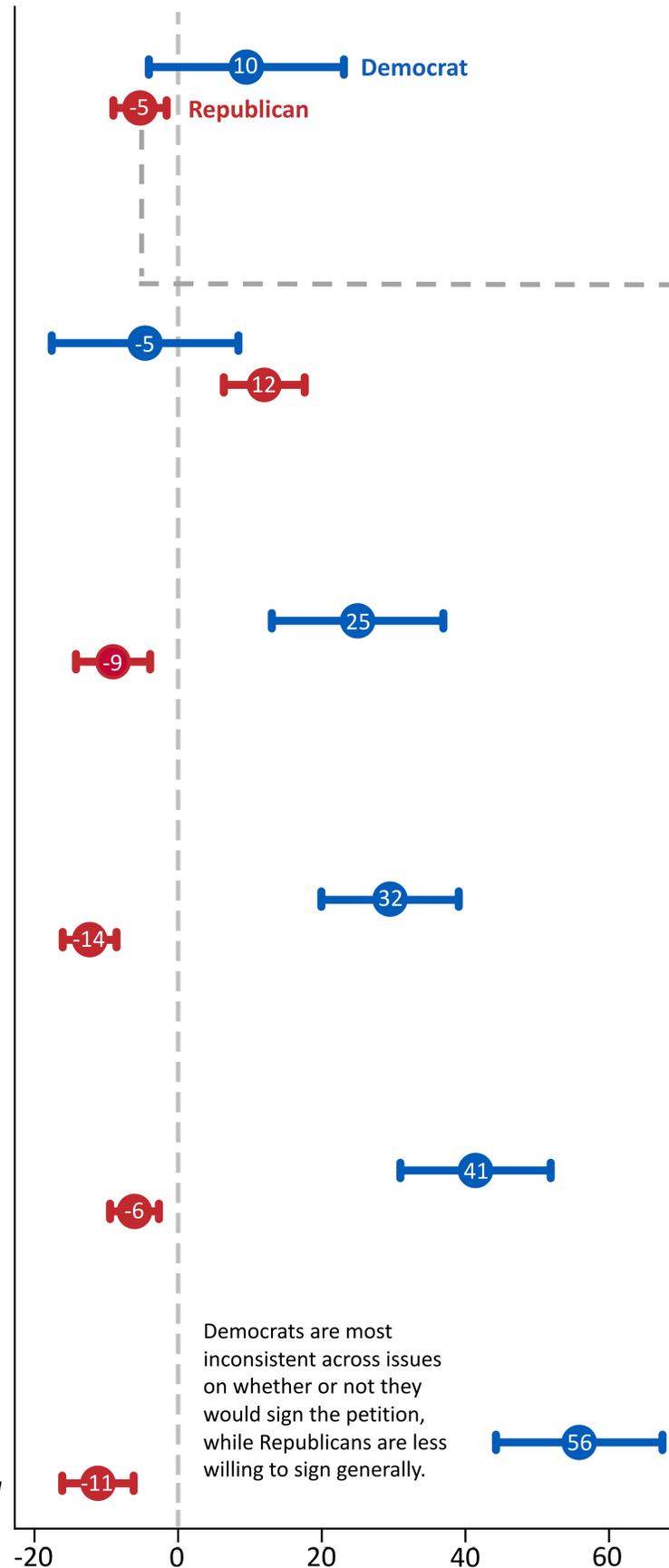
In your opinion, how fairly treated was the individual who circulated the petition?
[Very fairly, somewhat fairly]

How comfortable would you feel if you were assigned to be ministering companions with this individual?
[Very comfortable, somewhat comfortable]

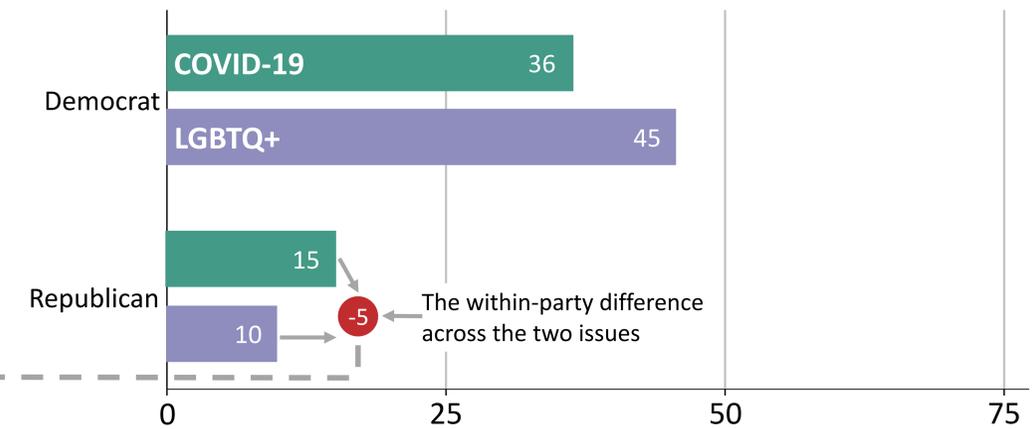
How comfortable would you feel with the individual who circulated the petition teaching the youth in your ward?
[Very comfortable, somewhat comfortable]

Regardless of whether or not you would sign, how much do you agree or disagree with the ideas expressed in this petition?
[Strongly agree, somewhat agree]

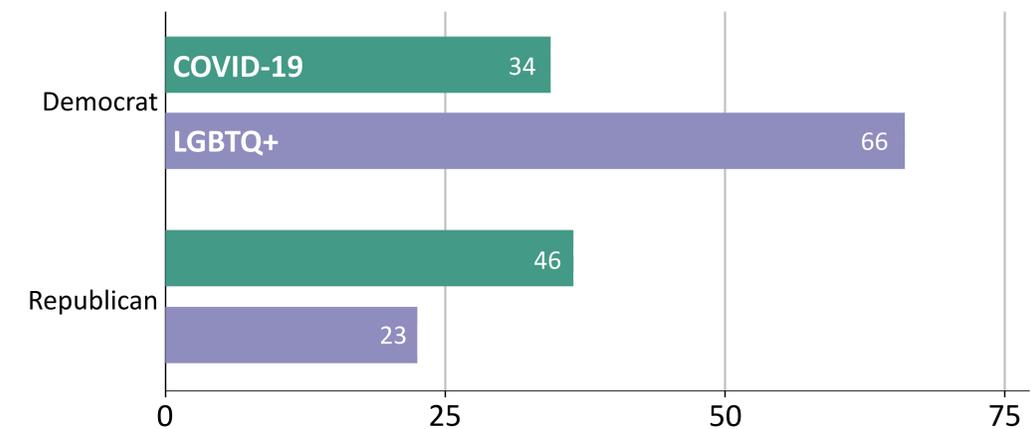
Would you sign this petition?
[Definitely yes, probably yes]



% Think Circulating a Petition to the Church is Appropriate



% Comfortable with Petitioner Teaching Youth in Ward



Implications

- Republican and Democratic members of the Church vary in their attitudes on COVID-19 and LGBTQ+ issues.
- When the Church takes a stand that conflicts with issues connected to partisan leanings, members interpret the Church's rhetoric and the behavior of individuals in light of their partisan commitments.
- While members of both parties are more likely to support a petition that aligns with their political beliefs, Democrats are more supportive than Republicans of petitioning church leadership generally.
- As the stakes of the questions increase (move from stating an opinion to having the petitioner teach the youth) partisans display greater inconsistency across the issues.

1. Within-Party Difference graph points control for age, gender, education, and church activity.