“Liberate!” – Republicans Are More Willing to Get Back to Social Life Because They Are Less Scared of COVID-19

Running title: REPUBLICANS AND COVID-19 JUDGMENTS

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The Present Paper is Under Review and May Undergo New Other Changes

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Abstract

Grounded in the COVID-19 pandemic context in the United States, the study aimed at examining whether political ideology and **governor** political belongingness could influence perceived **threat of SARS-CoV-2 virus** and perceived gathering acceptability, and whether perceived **threat of SARS-CoV-2 virus** could serve as a covariate. Native Americans, being either Republican or Democrat, living in a state governed by either a Republican or a Democrat, read a scenario about a banned social gathering. Results revealed that: (a) perceived **threat of SARS-CoV-2 virus** was lower in Republicans than in Democrats, while perceived gathering acceptability was higher in Republicans than in Democrats; and (b) perceived **threat of SARS-CoV-2 virus** mostly accounted for the impact of Republican ideology on perceived gathering acceptability. This research provides evidence that, relative to Democrats, Republicans are more willing to get back to the normal social life because they are less scared of being contaminated by the **SARS-CoV-2** virus.

Key words: COVID-19, United States, Republicans, Democrats, anti-stay-at-home

1 Introduction

In the United States, the **COVID-19** outbreak gave rise to several social protests in mid-April 2020, defying the social distancing states' policy and asking for the relaxing of stay-at-home orders. In addition to supporting protesters' action, President Donald Trump urged all governors to open up the country's economy. This echoed the eager of many Republican governors regarding the reopening of the businesses with the argument of the importance of recovering the economy. By contrast, most Democrat governors showed more reluctance with regard to the relaxing of social distancing and stay-at-home orders, claiming the necessity to pursue sanitary policies against the **spread** of the **SARS-CoV-2** virus **responsible for the COVID-19**. As for the American partisans, on April 22 2020, 55% of Republicans against 88% of Democrats supported the stay-at-homes orders (see Martina et al., 2020). The debate on the priority given to either the public health or the economy is not new in American politics. Indeed, Republicans are reputed to emphasize the importance of applying policies related to economic growth, while Democrats are more often associated with the **emphasis** on the importance of pursuing health care policies (e.g., Cornwell et al., 2015).

1.1 Impact of Political Ideology on Social Reasoning

Political ideology, defined as a “set of beliefs about the proper order of society and how it can be achieved” (Erikson & Tedin, 2003, p. 64) or as “the shared framework of mental models that groups of individuals possess that provide both an interpretation of the environment and a prescription as to how that environment should be structured” (Denzau & North, 1994/2000, p. 24), is thought to guide people's social reasoning according to specific philosophies of life (e.g., Jost et al., 2009). Ideology, which is usually categorized in terms of left-right (or liberalism-conservatism) orientations, gathers knowledge patterns of interconnected beliefs, representations and values (e.g., Erikson & Tedin, 2003) and patterns of interconnected epistemic, relational and existential needs (e.g., Jost et al., 2003, 2009). People cannot think and behave in a total consistency with the ideological views belonging to their ideology, since the ideological corpus as well as people's interests may change over time, situations and contexts (e.g., Jost et al., 2009). However, people often reason in line with “a subset of core values or principles that, for all intents and purposes, may be considered ideological in the sense of being broad postures that explain and justify different states of social and political affairs” (Jost et al., 2009, p. 311). For instance, a meta-analysis conducted on 88 studies (Jost et al., 2003) revealed that political ideology was consistently associated with threat/**openness** management **variables**. More specifically, **the meta-analysis** showed that threat-related variables (e.g., death anxiety, fear of threat) were positively related to conservatism, while openness-related variables (e.g., open-mindedness, threat tolerance) were positively related to liberalism. It was also found that death anxiety and perceived dangerousness were positively associated with conservatism (Jost et al., 2003), and that conservatives scored higher on dispositional death anxiety than did liberals (Jost et al., 2007).

1.2 COVID-19 Fingerprint in the Political Ideology-Social Reasoning Link

Beyond the structural contents of political ideology, the acquisition of political reasoning would necessitate the absorption of ideological thinking conveyed by political elites. **People** who perceive themselves as conservative (or liberal) would be likely to adopt social reasoning that are

conventionally considered as right-of-center (or left-of-center) (e.g., Federico & Schneider 2007; Jost et al., 2009; Lavine & Gschwend 2006). For instance, studies revealed that people identifying themselves as conservative, relative to those identifying themselves as liberal, displayed more positive attitudes toward social gatherings (e.g., Carney et al., 2006; Jost et al., 2008). This echoes the greater tendency of **American** conservatives to protest against the physical social distancing and stay-at-home orders **at the COVID-19 time**.

Interestingly, even though conservatives would be more likely to experience the existential need to avoid threat, **it seems** that the need to avoid the economic crash would have overshadowed the need to avoid **death from** COVID-19 in **American** conservatives. We then presume that the controversial political position **displayed** by **American** conservatives **may** result from the endorsement of moral disengagement views aiming at legitimating injurious conduct by palliative language (Bandura et al., 2001). Republican elites have recently used several communication strategies that could have made personally or socially acceptable anti-stay-at-home arguments. For instance, President Donald Trump minimized the stay-at-home violation by highlighting the defensive nature of the protesters' misconduct ("They're suffering... they want to get back", see Burnett & Slodysko, 2020); Bandura et al. (2001) called "minimization of the harm" such a communication strategy. President Donald Trump also contrasted the misconduct with more important inhumanities ("More people are going to die [...] Our country has to get back to work, otherwise it's going to be very hard to start it up again", see Delaney, 2020); a strategy that Bandura et al. (2001) called "advantageous exonerative comparison". Lastly, President Donald Trump ignored or distorted the harmful consequences of the anti-stay-at-home policy ("I'm sure that we have doctors that would say, 'let's keep it closed for two years, let's close it up for two years'", see Delaney, 2020); a strategy called "misrepresenting the harm" (Bandura et al., 2001). In the same way as system-justifying beliefs (e.g., Napier & Jost, 2008; Tyler, 2006), palliative language intends to activate the deference of citizens and, thus, to generate more (or less) positive (or negative) feelings (e.g., Bandura et al., 2001; Napier & Jost, 2008).

Therefore, we assume that, relative to Democrats, Republicans would be more (or less) likely to experience positive (or negative) feelings with regard to the **SARS-CoV-2** virus since they would have developed the view that the virus would be less threatening for the human life. Such a view would have the function to encourage the desire of reopening the businesses through disengaging views.

1.3 Research Objectives

The present study aimed at testing the influence of political ideology on perceived biological **threat of SARS-CoV-2 virus**, perceived societal **threat of SARS-CoV-2 virus**, and perceived acceptability **of** social gathering. This study also aimed at examining whether the political belongingness **of the governor of one's state** may affect the variables under study, and this directly and through the interaction with people's political ideology. In addition, the study aimed at testing the covariate (mediating) effect of perceived biological **threat of SARS-CoV-2 virus** in the links of political ideology with perceived societal **threat of SARS-CoV-2 virus** and perceived acceptability **of** social gathering. Our hypotheses are the following:

Hypothesis 1: Political ideology may differentiate the way people view the SARS-CoV-2 virus, in the sense that Republicans should be less scared by the virus than would Democrats, during the COVID-19 period.

Hypothesis 2: We expected Republicans, relative to Democrats, to perceive social gathering as more acceptable and less risky for the society during the COVID-19 period.

Hypothesis 3: We expected that Republicans staying in a state governed a Republican would be the least scared people during the COVID-19 period, given their stronger exposure to Republicans' language palliative. In addition, Democrats staying in a state governed by a Republican should be the most scared people during the COVID-19 period, *expecting* that the governor would prematurely end the social distancing and stay-at-home orders.

Hypothesis 4: We expected political ideology to affect perceived *acceptability* of social gathering and perceived societal *threat of SARS-CoV-2 virus* through perceived biological *threat of SARS-CoV-2 virus* during the COVID-19 period.

In order to test these hypotheses, the research was designed to differentiate people's political ideology in terms of either Republican or Democrat. Despite the large political landscape of American politics, ranging from far-left wing to far-right wing parties, we focused our attention on the Democrat-Republican dichotomy because most governors belong to either the Democratic Party or the Republican Party. Participants read a fictive, though realistic, scenario in which a dozen of people were *illegally* gathering *at* the COVID-19 time.

2 Method

2.1 Participants

2.1.1 Initial sample

The study employed a sample of 592 Native¹ American volunteers from 49 states² of the United States. They were recruited from a crowdsourcing online platform (Clickworker) (308 females, 281 males, 3 others; $M_{\text{age}} = 35.03$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 12.17$, age range of 18 to 77 years old; political ideology; political ideology, $M = 4.64$, $SD = 1.80$, see Measures section), within three days (from April 28 to May 01, 2020) during the COVID-19 period. Participants reported various ethnicities³.

¹ Only Native Americans could access to the survey.

² Participants reported to live in the states of Alabama ($n = 7$), Alaska ($n = 3$), Arizona ($n = 15$), Arkansas ($n = 5$), California ($n = 61$), Colorado ($n = 12$), Connecticut ($n = 4$), Delaware ($n = 4$), Florida ($n = 49$), Georgia ($n = 25$), Hawaii ($n = 3$), Idaho ($n = 2$), Illinois ($n = 18$), Indiana ($n = 7$), Iowa ($n = 5$), Kansas ($n = 4$), Kentucky ($n = 4$), Louisiana ($n = 4$), Maine ($n = 5$), Maryland ($n = 11$), Massachusetts ($n = 15$), Michigan ($n = 16$), Minnesota ($n = 12$), Mississippi ($n = 2$), Missouri ($n = 8$), Montana ($n = 1$), Nebraska ($n = 3$), Nevada ($n = 4$), New Hampshire ($n = 2$), New Jersey ($n = 21$), New Mexico ($n = 3$), New York ($n = 37$), North Carolina ($n = 21$), North Dakota ($n = 2$), Ohio ($n = 25$), Oklahoma ($n = 8$), Oregon ($n = 4$), Pennsylvania ($n = 32$), Rhode Island ($n = 2$), South Carolina ($n = 7$), South Dakota ($n = 1$), Tennessee ($n = 5$), Texas ($n = 43$), Utah ($n = 4$), Vermont ($n = 1$), Virginia ($n = 22$), Washington ($n = 24$), West Virginia ($n = 4$), Wisconsin ($n = 15$), and Wyoming ($n = 0$).

³ Participants reported to be African American ($n = 44$), Asian American ($n = 49$), Caucasian American ($n = 419$), Hispanic American ($n = 43$), and other ($n = 37$).

2.1.2 Final sample

The analyses were conducted on a sample composed of participants who reported to: (a) live in a state that banned the gathering of a dozen of people at the study time; (b) be either a democrat or a republican; and (c) know the political belongingness (Democratic Party vs. Republican party) of the governor of their state at the study time. This final sample comprised 303 participants (155 females, 147 males, 1 other; $M_{age} = 35.85$, $SD_{age} = 12.34$, age range of 18 to 77 years old; political ideology, $M = 4.70$, $SD = 2.07$, see Measures section) staying in 45 states⁴ of the United States. This sample included various ethnicities⁵.

2.2 Study Design and Data Collection

This study was carried out not only in line with the Declaration of Helsinki, but also with the permission of the university's IRB of the principal study's investigator. Its design included two factors: Political Ideology, operationalized through the "Democrat-Republican" dichotomy, and Governor Political Belongingness, operationalized through the "Democratic Party-Republican Party" dichotomy. In other words, participants were categorized into four groups, corresponding to conditions of a two-factor between-subjects design, as follows: (1) Democratic **Ideology** - Governor Democratic Party ($n = 135$); (2) Democratic **Ideology** - Governor Republican Party ($n = 54$); (3) Republican **Ideology** - Governor Democratic Party ($n = 52$); and (4) Republican **Ideology** - Governor Republican Party ($n = 62$).

The data were collected within two waves: From April 28 to April 30, on the one hand, and from April 30 to May 01. The first data collection wave aimed at estimating the number of participants not fitting the inclusion criteria (see the Measures section for more details about the methodological precautions). The second data collection aimed at completing the needed data, which were estimated using G*Power 3.1.9.4 software, as follows: Focusing on the ANOVA and ANCOVA analyses (fixed factors, main and interactions effects) – with α error probability set to .05, desired power of .95, and partial η^2 set to 0.06 (corresponding to a medium⁶ effect size) –, the estimated sample size was $N = 206$ (with a critical F value of 3.89 for ANOVA and of 3.88 for ANCOVA), **indicating** approximately 51-52 participants per condition. Then, we attempted to attain this number of participants for every condition, **knowing that it was impossible to** avoid unequal numbers of participants across the conditions.

2.3 Procedure

⁴ Participants reported to live in the states of Alabama ($n = 4$), Alaska ($n = 2$), Arizona ($n = 6$), Arkansas ($n = 4$), California ($n = 27$), Colorado ($n = 7$), Connecticut ($n = 2$), Delaware ($n = 3$), Florida ($n = 25$), Georgia ($n = 12$), Hawaii ($n = 1$), Idaho ($n = 1$), Illinois ($n = 8$), Indiana ($n = 4$), Iowa ($n = 1$), Kansas ($n = 3$), Kentucky ($n = 1$), Louisiana ($n = 1$), Maine ($n = 1$), Maryland ($n = 7$), Massachusetts ($n = 6$), Michigan ($n = 9$), Minnesota ($n = 5$), Mississippi ($n = 1$), Missouri ($n = 2$), Montana ($n = 0$), Nebraska ($n = 2$), Nevada ($n = 2$), New Hampshire ($n = 0$), New Jersey ($n = 10$), New Mexico ($n = 1$), New York ($n = 25$), North Carolina ($n = 11$), North Dakota ($n = 2$), Ohio ($n = 16$), Oklahoma ($n = 1$), Oregon ($n = 3$), Pennsylvania ($n = 20$), Rhode Island ($n = 0$), South Carolina ($n = 4$), South Dakota ($n = 0$), Tennessee ($n = 2$), Texas ($n = 23$), Utah ($n = 1$), Vermont ($n = 1$), Virginia ($n = 13$), Washington ($n = 14$), West Virginia ($n = 2$), Wisconsin ($n = 7$), and Wyoming ($n = 0$).

⁵ Participants reported to be African American ($n = 25$), Asian American ($n = 34$), Caucasian American ($n = 223$), Hispanic American ($n = 11$), and other ($n = 10$).

⁶ In psychological research, setting a medium effect size in the calculation of sample size is appropriate (e.g., Schäfer & Schwarz, 2019).

Participants read that the study was **about** the COVID-19, that would respond to few questions, and that receive a compensation of 0.15\$⁷ in case they would accept to take part in the study. In order to incite participants to report spontaneous and honest responses, we highlighted the fact that the responses of participants would remain anonymous. Participants who accepted to participate in the study had to provide their written informed consent by mentioning not only that they understood the study's objective, but also that they agreed to carry it out. Then, before answering questions, participants could read in page 1 the following short story:

A dozen of people are gathering at a specific place of the town during the COVID-19 time. At the end of the gathering, they are taking a selfie as a souvenir photo.

In page 2, we assessed the dependent variables (i.e., perceived biological **threat of SARS-CoV-2 virus**, perceived societal **threat of SARS-CoV-2 virus**, and perceived **acceptability of** social gathering). In page 3, we measured demographics (i.e., sex, ethnicity, age, political ideology, state they live in, governor's political party of the state they live in, **awareness of** the state's stay-at-home policy).

2.4 Measures

2.4.1 Dependent variables

After reading the page 1's story, participants indicated in page 2 the extent to which they thought that: (a) the **SARS-CoV-2 virus** was biologically threatening; (b) the **SARS-CoV-2 virus** was threatening for the society; and (c) the social gathering of a dozen of people was acceptable. First, the employed items for the perceived biological **SARS-CoV-2 virus** were the following: "The COVID-19 virus seems to you... not at all (1) / strongly (9) dangerous for the human organism", "... not at all (1) / strongly (9) hazardous for the human health", and "... not at all (1) / strongly (9) threatening for the human life". Second, the items we employed for measuring the perceived societal **SARS-CoV-2 virus** were the following: "The social gathering you read in the story seems to you... not at all (1) / strongly risky for the society (9)"; "... not at all (1) / strongly dangerous for others (9)"; and "... not at all (1) / strongly hazardous for the community (9)". Third, the used items for the perceived **acceptability of** social gathering were the following: "The social gathering you read in the story seems to you... not at all (1) / strongly acceptable (9)"; "... not at all (1) / strongly tolerable (9)"; and "... not at all (1) / strongly admissible (9)". All of these nine questions appeared in a random order for every participant.

2.4.2 Demographics and invoked independent variables

Participants answered questions in page 3 on demographics that were presented in a random order for every participant. Specifically, participants informed about their sex (among three possibilities: "Female", "Male", or "Other"), age, ethnicity, and the state they currently lived in (among 50 possibilities). Additionally, they had to inform their own political ideology through two questions: While a question was considered as a demographic ("Your personal political orientation", from "far-left wing" [1] to "far-right wing" [9]), the other one aimed at

⁷ Given the low financial compensation, we clearly asked potential participants for not partaking in the study in case they perceived that this compensation amount was "too low" in their eyes.

retaining participants identifying themselves as Democrat or Republican, thus allowing to remove the other participants. Then, the question comprised three possibilities: “Democrat”, “Republican”, or “Other”⁸. Participants were also asked to report the political belongingness of the governor of the state they lived in, and this among three possibilities: “Democratic Party”, “Republican Party”, or “Other or here and now I have no idea about this”. This last possibility allowed to remove participants not identifying the **state’s** governor as either a Democrat or a Republican⁹. In addition, they had to report **how aware they were** about the stay-at-home policy applied in their state, notably regarding the gathering of a dozen of people; three response possibilities were offered: “Permitted”, “Banned”, or “Here and now I have no idea about this”. This question aimed at excluding participants who either lived in a state tolerating social gathering or did not know about the social gathering **policy** applied in their state¹⁰. This participants exclusion was necessary given the fact that: (a) the study concerned the context of stay-at-home policy violation; and (b) the degree of policy **awareness** is more impactful on social reasoning and behavior than the policy itself, which can be misunderstood or misinterpreted. Finally, all these methodological precautions led to exclude 289 participants from the analyses.

2.5 Data Analysis

Based on the remained participants, two sorts of analyses were conducted computed using SPSS IBM (v. 26): Psychometric and preliminary analyses, on the one hand, and comparison analyses, on the other hand. First, we computed a principal component analysis with the rotation method of varimax (Kaiser Normalization) in order to examine the factorial structure of the dependent variables (i.e., perceived biological **threat of SARS-CoV-2 virus**, perceived societal **threat of SARS-CoV-2 virus**, and perceived **acceptability of** social gathering) and, if needed, the study objectives and subsequent analyses were readjusted in order to fit the evidenced factorial structure. Additionally, a correlation analysis (Pearson’s r) was performed between the dependent variables. Second, and in order to test our hypotheses, (M)ANOVA and ANCOVA analyses were computed. More specifically, in order to test the hypotheses 1, 2 and 3, 2×2 (Political Ideology $\times$ Governor Political Belongingness) (M)ANOVAs were processed on the dependent variables, while a 2×2 (Political Ideology $\times$ Governor Political Belongingness) ANCOVA was performed in order to test the hypothesis 4.

3 Results

3.1 Psychometric and Preliminary Results

A principal component analysis with the rotation method of varimax (Kaiser Normalization) yielded two latent variables¹¹ with acceptable scores (i.e., above .70): Perceived

⁸ 235 participants answered “Other” and thus were not integrated in the final sample on the basis of the given question.

⁹ 102 participants answered “Other or here and now I have no idea about this” and thus were not integrated in the final sample on the basis of the given question.

¹⁰ 49 participants answered “Permitted” and 46 other participants answered “Here and now I have no idea about this”. In sum, 95 were not integrated in the final sample on the basis of the given question.

¹¹ This crucial result led us to simplify the study objectives given the fact that the initial variables “perceived biological **threat of SARS-CoV-2 virus**” and “perceived societal **threat of SARS-CoV-2 virus**” were gathered to henceforth compose the variable “perceived **threat of SARS-CoV-2 virus**”. Thus, the subsequent analyses were based

threat of **SARS-CoV-2 virus** ($\alpha = .94$) and perceived acceptability of the social gathering ($\alpha = .90$) were composed of six and three manifest variables, respectively (see Table 1). Moreover, perceived threat of **SARS-CoV-2 virus** appeared to be negatively related to perceived **acceptability of** social gathering, $r = -.55, p < .001$.

3.2 (M)ANOVA Results

A 2×2 (Political Ideology $\times$ Governor Political Belongingness) MANOVA revealed a significant effect of Political Ideology (Wilks's Lambda = .89, $F_{(2, 298)} = 18.29, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .11$), but revealed neither a significant main effect of Governor Political Belongingness ($p = .70$), nor a significant Political Ideology $\times$ Governor Political Belongingness interaction effect ($p = .65$). Follow-up ANOVAs were then conducted separately on the dependent variables of interest.

The means and standard deviations of perceived threat of **SARS-CoV-2 virus** and perceived **acceptability of social** gathering for each condition are presented in Table 2, and a corresponding graph of the means is displayed in Figure 1. The 2×2 ANOVA (Political Ideology $\times$ Governor's Political Belongingness) that was conducted on **perceived** threat of **SARS-CoV-2 virus** and perceived acceptability of social gathering revealed a significant main effect of Political Ideology for perceived threat of **SARS-CoV-2 virus** ($F_{(1, 299)} = 35.90, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .11$) and for perceived acceptability of social gathering, ($F_{(1, 299)} = 15.23, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .05$). The means in Table 2 indicate that perceived threat of **SARS-CoV-2 virus** was lower in the Republican ideology condition ($M = 6.83, SD = 1.83$; estimates: $M = 6.83, SE = .14$, 95% confidence interval (CI) = [6.55, 7.10]) than in the Democratic ideology condition ($M = 7.90, SD = 1.22$; estimates: $M = 7.93, SE = .12$, 95% CI = [7.69, 8.17]). The means in Table 2 also indicate perceived **acceptability of social** gathering was higher in the Republican ideology condition ($M = 3.52, SD = 2.00$, estimates: $M = 3.51, SE = .18$, 95% CI = [3.16, 3.87]) than in the Democratic ideology condition ($M = 2.64, SD = 1.85$; estimates: $M = 2.59, SE = .15$, 95% CI = [2.29, 2.89]). Neither the Governor Political Belongingness main effect, nor the Political Ideology $\times$ Governor Political Belongingness interaction effect were significant ($ps > .05$).

3.3 ANCOVA Results

The 2×2 (Political Ideology $\times$ Governor Political Belongingness) ANCOVA, with perceived threat of **SARS-CoV-2 virus** serving as covariate, conducted on perceived **acceptability of social** gathering, revealed that the covariate was significant, $F_{(1, 298)} = 112.38, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .27$, while the main effect of Political Ideology was rendered non-significant ($p = .40$). This result indicates that the effect of Political Ideology on perceived **acceptability of** social gathering was accounted for by perceived threat of **SARS-CoV-2 virus**. In addition, the comparison between means and estimates means for the Republican ideology condition ($M = 3.52, SD = 2.00$; $M = 3.06, SE = .16$, 95% CI = [2.75, 3.38]) and for the Democratic ideology condition ($M = 2.63, SD = 1.85$; $M = 2.88, SE = .13$, 95% CI = [2.62, 3.14]) revealed that the mean values changed in both conditions. This comparison also revealed a greater change in the mean scores of Republicans (with a change of .45 in Republicans against a change of .29 in Democrats). Taken together, these results indicate not only both ideologies influenced perceived **acceptability of**

on the two-evidenced latent variables, i.e. perceived **threat of SARS-CoV-2 virus** and perceived **acceptability of** social gathering.

social gathering through changes in perceived threat of **SARS-CoV-2 virus**, but also that the Republican ideology was more impactful on this relationship than was the Democratic ideology.

4 Discussion

Deeply grounded in the sanitary social, and economic context of the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States, the purpose of the present research was to examine whether and how types of political ideology (Republican and Democratic) were related to perceived **threat of SARS-CoV-2 virus** and perceived social gathering acceptability. This study also aimed at examining whether types of political belongingness (Republican Party and Democratic Party) of **governors** could influence, directly and through the interaction with political ideology, perceived **threat of SARS-CoV-2 virus** and perceived social gathering acceptability. Furthermore, this study attempted to see whether perceived **threat of SARS-CoV-2 virus** could account for the link between political ideology and perceived social gathering acceptability. To this end, the research designed aimed at exposing participants to a banned social gathering scenario and at categorizing participants according to Political Ideology and Governor Political Belongingness.

The factorial analysis revealed that perceived societal **threat of SARS-CoV-2 virus** and perceived societal **threat of SARS-CoV-2 virus** referred to the same variable at the study time. This suggests that the biological (i.e., threatening for the human organism) and societal (i.e., rapid spread of the virus **within** the society) nature of the **SARS-CoV-2 virus threat** could not be separated at the study time maybe because no vaccine was found yet. Moreover, the ANOVA analyses revealed that levels of perceived **threat of SARS-CoV-2 virus** were lower in Republicans than in Democrats (see Table 2 and Figure 1), while the levels of perceived **acceptability of** social gathering were higher in Republicans than in Democrats (see Table 2 and Figure 1) (hypotheses 1 and 2 supported). These results suggest that, relative to Democrats, Republicans would be not only less scared of the **SARS-CoV-2 virus**, but also more willing to gather themselves (despite the ban) and thus to get back to the “normal” social life. However, no Political Ideology × Governor Political Belongingness interaction effect was found, running counter the view that Republicans (or Democrats) staying in a state governed a Republican might be the least (or most) scared people (hypothesis 3 unsupported). This result suggests that the “stay-at-home” debate would essentially occur at the country level, rather than at the state level.

The ANCOVA analyses revealed that political ideology influenced perceived **acceptability of** social gathering through perceived **threat of SARS-CoV-2 virus**, in the way that Republicans (or Democrats) would be more (or less) inclined to partake in illegal social gatherings because they would be less (or more) scared of the **SARS-CoV-2 virus** (hypothesis 4 supported). Interestingly, the analyses also indicated that, **even though** this covariate effect concerned both Republican and Democratic ideologies, **it** appeared to rely **essentially** on the Republican ideology. In other words, the relationship between political ideology, perceived **threat of SARS-CoV-2 virus**, and perceived **acceptability of** social gathering was essentially rooted in the Republican ideology. This asymmetry (between types of ideology) may be explained by the diversity of impactful palliative language (e.g., minimization of the harm, misrepresenting the harm) that was recently communicated by Republican political elites, notably President Donald Trump (see Burnett & Slodysko, 2020; Delaney, 2020). These communication strategies may have encouraged Republican partisans to endorse moral disengagement views with regard to the importance of maintaining stay-at-home orders via moving away from the threatening conception

of the **SARS-CoV-2 virus**. This echoes, indeed, the saying of the Ohio Senate candidate, Melissa Ackison (Republican Party), that she has “no fear whatsoever” of being contaminated by the **SARS-CoV-2 virus** (see Burnett & Slodysko, 2020).

In all, grounded in the sanitary, social and economic context of the COVID-19 pandemic context in the United States, this study suggests that, relative to Democrats, Republicans would be more inclined to get back to work and normal physical social life because they would be less afraid of being contaminated by the **SARS-CoV-2 virus**, thus echoing the current political debates occurring at the national level. However, this study has limitations. Chief among them is that we did not control the diversity of moral disengagement views, which would have given a glimpse about their implications. Therefore, further studies should take into account their potential roles when investigating the links between types of ideology, perceived **threat of SARS-CoV-2 virus**, and social gathering acceptability during the COVID-19 time.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Authors' contribution

WB and LD conceived the study. WB organized the database, performed the data analysis and the interpretations of the results, and drafted the manuscript. WB and LD approved the submitted version.

Funding

In case of acceptance, the publication of this article will be funded by the Qatar National Library.

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Table 1. *Perceived Threat of SARS-CoV-2 Virus, Perceived Acceptability of Social Gathering, and Their Factor Loadings*

Items	Perceived Threat of SARS-CoV-2 Virus	Perceived Acceptability of Social Gathering
The COVID-19 virus seems to you...not at all (1) / strongly (9) dangerous for the human organism	0.91	-.18
The COVID-19 virus seems to you... not at all (1) / strongly (9) threatening for the human life	0.90	-.18
The COVID-19 virus seems to you... not at all (1) / strongly (9) threatening for the human life	0.90	-.13
The social gathering you read in the story seems to you... not at all (1) / strongly acceptable (9)	-0.35	.80
The social gathering you read in the story seems to you... not at all (1) / strongly tolerable (9)	-0.33	.82
The social gathering you read in the story seems to you... not at all (1) / strongly admissible (9)	-0.06	.83
The social gathering you read in the story seems to you... not at all (1) / strongly risky for the society (9)	0.71	-.45
The social gathering you read in the story seems to you... not at all (1) / strongly dangerous for others (9)	0.80	-.34
The social gathering you read in the story seems to you... not at all (1) / strongly hazardous for the community (9)	0.81	-.36

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of Perceived Threat of the SARS-CoV-2 Virus and Perceived Acceptability of Social Gathering According to Political Ideology and Governor's Political Party

		Democrat Governor	Republican Governor	All Parties
		M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)
Perceived Threat of SARS-CoV-2 Virus	Democrat	7.86 (1.18)	8.00 (1.33)	7.90 (1.22)
	Republican	6.76 (1.66)	6.90 (1.98)	6.83 (1.83)
	All Ideologies	7.55 (1.42)	7.41 (1.78)	7.50 (1.57)
Perceived Acceptability of Social Gathering	Democrat	2.70 (1.83)	2.48 (1.91)	2.64 (1.85)
	Republican	3.44 (2.00)	3.59 (2.01)	3.52 (2.00)
	All Ideologies	2.91 (1.90)	3.07 (2.03)	2.97 (1.95)

A

B

Figure 1. Perceived threat of SARS-CoV-2 virus (A) and perceived acceptability of social gathering (B) according to Political Ideology. Both figures involve a significant difference, $p < .001$.