Annenberg Institute
BROWN UNIVERSITY

EdWorkingPaper No. 26-1431

Americans' Attitudes about Political Neutrality in Public Schools

Eric Torres
Heterodox Academy

This paper presents the results of a study of Americans' attitudes about political neutrality in public schools. Using data from a nationally representative survey conducted in March of 2025, I find that Americans across the political spectrum largely oppose schools attempting to promote either liberal or conservative viewpoints. However, a survey experiment reveals that partisans are significantly more likely to approve of teachers' political disclosures to students when those disclosures align with their own political preferences, suggesting that Americans may inconsistently apply standards for educational neutrality in forming judgements about individual cases in the classroom. These findings offer insight into how partisanship can affect public oversight of American schooling and suggest a mechanism by which the political education of students in liberal and conservative contexts might systematically drift apart even in the face of ostensibly shared commitments to political impartiality in teaching.

VERSION: March 2026

Suggested citation: Torres, Eric. (2026). Americans' Attitudes about Political Neutrality in Public Schools. (EdWorkingPaper: 26-1431). Retrieved from Annenberg Institute at Brown University: https://doi.org/10.26300/dx04-c570

Americans' Attitudes about Political Neutrality in Public Schools

Eric W. Torres

Abstract

This paper presents the results of a study of Americans' attitudes about political neutrality in public schools. Using data from a nationally representative survey conducted in March of 2025, I find that Americans across the political spectrum largely oppose schools attempting to promote either liberal or conservative viewpoints. However, a survey experiment reveals that partisans are significantly more likely to approve of teachers' political disclosures to students when those disclosures align with their own political preferences, suggesting that Americans may inconsistently apply standards for educational neutrality in forming judgements about individual cases in the classroom. These findings offer insight into how partisanship can affect public oversight of American schooling and suggest a mechanism by which the political education of students in liberal and conservative contexts might systematically drift apart even in the face of ostensibly shared commitments to political impartiality in teaching.

Introduction

Public schools in the United States are widely regarded as sites of political socialization, or "the process by which citizens crystalize political identities, values and behavior that remain relatively persistent throughout later life" (Neundorf & Smets, 2015). But although the basic premise that schools have a role to play in students' political development has been endorsed by a variety of influential educational theorists (e.g. Mann, 1855; Dewey, 1899; Bennett, 1993; Guttmann, 1999; Hess & McAvoy, 2014b) and is frequently invoked in public discussions of education (see Beadie, et al., 2021), the details of how schools ought to be involved in students' political development have been perennially controversial (Levine, 2023; Levinson, 1997; Hess & McAvoy 2014a; Zembylas, 2022).

In recent years, disagreements about the teaching of politically divisive topics have become increasingly central features of the American politics of education (e.g. Mazzei, Harris, & Alter, 2023; Mills, 2024). As unrest related to the killing of George Floyd swept the country in 2020, many schools and districts issued public statements and modified their programming to focus on anti-racist education and the promotion of social justice (Enoch-Stevens et al., 2023). But while these developments were heralded by progressives as a valuable campaign to redress historical inequalities, many conservatives came to worry that schools were promoting a narrow left-wing ideology about race and social identity under the pretense of basic fairness. Opposition to purportedly indoctrinatory teaching became a central feature of Glenn Younkin's successful campaign for governor of Virginia (Barrakat & Rankin, 2022) and between 2021 and 2023, conservative legislatures in 18 states passed laws designed to regulate what and how schools teach students about issues related to race, gender, and U.S. history (Woo, et al., 2024) Shortly after retaking office in 2025, the Trump administration issued an executive order indicating that federal funding would be withheld from any schools found to be engaged in "illegal and discriminatory treatment and indoctrination…, including based on gender ideology and discriminatory equity ideology" (Exec. Order No. 14,190, 2025).

Attempting to understand how the public sees these educational controversies, recent research has focused on assessing partisan differences in attitudes about teaching specific controversial subjects, like race and gender (Safarpour, et al., 2021; Collins, 2024; Lin, Horowitz, Hurst, & Braga, 2024), and sought to differentiate the educational values and priorities of liberals and conservatives (Saavedra, et al., 2024; Houston, Peterson, & West 2022; Houston, 2024). But one question that distills the conflicts over schools' political influence into a form that reflects fundamental anxieties in our polarized nation has so far avoided

direct scrutiny: namely, whether Americans believe that public schools are (or should be) encouraging young people to adopt broadly liberal or conservative political viewpoints.

This article aims to deepen understanding of the American public's attitudes about the political influence of public schools in two main ways. First, data from a nationally representative survey provides descriptive information on Americans' beliefs about whether public schools are and should be engaged in the promotion of liberal or conservative ideological viewpoints. Second, results of a survey experiment embedded in the same questionnaire provide insights into the consistency with which normative judgements are applied to teaching that favors partisan allies and opponents.

Three main findings emerge from this study: First, results indicate that a majority of Americans favor ideological impartiality in schools, at least in principle. Second, while a plurality of Americans feel that they lack information about whether their local schools are, as a matter of fact, engaging in the promotion of liberal or conservative views, a majority of those who feel that they have sufficient information to form a judgement believe that their local schools *are* attempting to nudge students' towards either liberal or conservative worldviews. Finally, the results of the survey experiment demonstrate that American partisans are approximately one and a half times more likely to oppose teachers' disclosures of their political beliefs when those beliefs indicate support for political opponents. Interpreted as a biased application of standards for teachers' impartiality, this finding raises the possibility of asymmetrical public oversight of educational practices with a variety of potentially important implications for educational policy and practice.

Taken together, these findings suggest an American public favorably disposed towards principles of neutrality in public education, but skeptical about whether those principles are being realized. Furthermore, inconsistencies in judgements about the acceptability of discrete acts of political signaling in the classroom suggests a vulnerability to the realization of the educational neutrality that Americans claim to esteem: namely, partisans' willingness to look the other way when schools steer students towards partisans' preferred outlooks.

Methods

Study Design

This study aimed to address the following research questions:

1. Do Americans support public schools' political impartiality?
2. Do Americans believe that their local public schools are politically impartial?
3. Do Americans apply norms of political impartiality evenhandedly to teaching that favors in-group and outgroup political groups?

Data for this study were collected on March 11th and 12th, 2025 as part of the Harvard CAPS-Harris Poll, a nationally representative survey of American adults jointly administered by the Harvard Center for American Political Studies, the Harris Poll and Harris X. The items analyzed in this study were presented to a random subsample of 537 of the 1,080 respondents who completed the full survey. Results were weighted by race/ethnicity, education, reported income, employment status, sex, region of residence, marital status, and household size for representativeness. See Table S1 in the supplementary materials for sample demographics.

Item wordings and response categories for key items are presented in the supplementary materials and in Tables 1-3, above. To assess the first research question regarding explicit support for the deliberate cultivation of ideological attitudes, participants were posed two questions about the appropriateness of schools attempting to instill liberal or conservative orientations in students. The first question asked participants to indicate their views about whether public schools should promote particular ideological views. Respondents had the option to indicate that schools should attempt to promote liberal values, conservative values, or no particular political values. Alternatively, participants could indicate that they did not care about whether schools promoted particular political values. The second question offered a series of statements about participants' local public schools which allowed them to indicate their judgements about the promotion of ideological views in their local public schools. The options for this

second question were a matrix of descriptive and normative stances reflecting what participants thought schools in the area were actually doing and whether or not they approved of that activity. The options available to participants were not exhaustive: notably, there was no option to indicate approval or disapproval of local schools perceived *not* to be promoting particular ideological viewpoints.

To assess the consistency with which partisans apply their judgements about the appropriateness of political influence in schools, participants were randomly presented with one of three versions of a vignette recounting an instance of a teacher sharing his political preferences with his students. In the first version of the vignette, the teacher indicates that he supported Donald Trump for president in the 2024 election. In the second version of the vignette, the teacher indicates that he supported Kamala Harris. In the third version of the vignette, readers are only told that the teacher disclosed who he voted for but are not provided with specific information about which candidate that was. Participants were then asked to indicate whether the teacher's disclosure was acceptable, unacceptable, or that they lacked the information to decide the acceptability of the teacher's disclosure.

Statistical Analysis

To assess partisan bias in judgements of the teacher's disclosure, a categorical variable for alignment between the candidate endorsed in the vignette and participants' partisan affiliation was generated such that self-identified Democrats exposed to the version of the vignette in which the teacher endorsed Harris were treated as aligned, self-identified Democrats exposed to the version of the vignette in which the teacher endorsed Trump were treated as misaligned, and Democrats exposed to version of the vignette in which no information was given about who the teacher endorsed were treated as a control. The same logic was applied for Republican participants, such that exposure to a Trump endorsement was coded as alignment and exposure to a Harris endorsement was coded as misalignment. A polytomous logistic regression model was fitted using unweighted data according to the following general specification:

$$\ln\left(\frac{Pr(Y_i = j)}{Pr(Y_i = K)}\right) = \alpha_j + \beta_j x_i + e_{ij}$$

where Y is the judgment by individual i of the appropriateness of the teacher's political disclosure to students with options j (approve, disapprove, and unsure) relative reference category K (such that $j \neq K$), α is an intercept, x is an indicator variable for alignment as described above, and e is an error term.

Pairwise comparisons of estimated marginal likelihoods of approval, disapproval, and uncertainty about the teacher's action across conditions were calculated post-estimation for differences not directly estimated by the initial model output.

Two alternative alignment variables using ideology and favorability perceptions of Donald Trump were also used in place of partisan affiliation as robustness checks. Results from the model assessing effects of ideology-condition alignment were similar to those observed using party-condition alignment. Using favorability ratings of Donald Trump in place of party found no effect of condition-favorability alignment. See Tables S31 and S32 in the supplementary materials for model details and output. Those who identified as independents (n=121), who indicated a moderate ideology (i.e. neither leaning liberal or leaning conservative, n=220), and those for who had ambivalent feelings about Donald Trump (n=26) were excluded from their respective models such that analysis for the survey experiment was restricted to those with a partisan or ideological leaning.

Statistical analyses were conducted using Stata v19.5. Analyses and expectations for this study were not preregistered. Data and code for reproduction are available at https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataverse/schoolneutrality

Results

Judgements about the Appropriateness of Political Partiality in Public Schools

Responses to the item asking whether schools should attempt to promote liberal or conservative views are presented in Table 1, below.

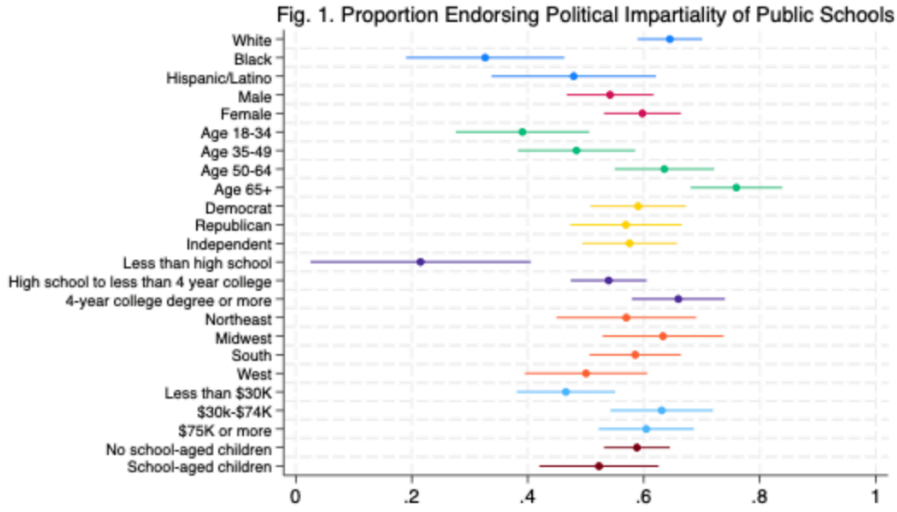
A majority of respondents, 57%, indicated that public schools should not aim to promote specific ideological views. Slightly more respondents' favored the promotion of conservative views in schools than the promotion of liberal views: 16% indicated that public schools should promote conservative views, while 9% indicated that they should promote liberal views. The difference was statistically significant ($t(527)=2.57$, $p<.05$). Finally, 18% reported indifference to whether schools promote particular political views.

Table 1: Support for Politically Partial Teaching (N=528)

Response	Percent Selecting (se)
Public schools should promote liberal views	9.0% (1.4)
Public schools should promote conservative views	15.6 % (1.8)
Public schools should not promote specific political views	57.3% (2.5)
I don't care if public schools promote specific political views	18.2% (2.0)

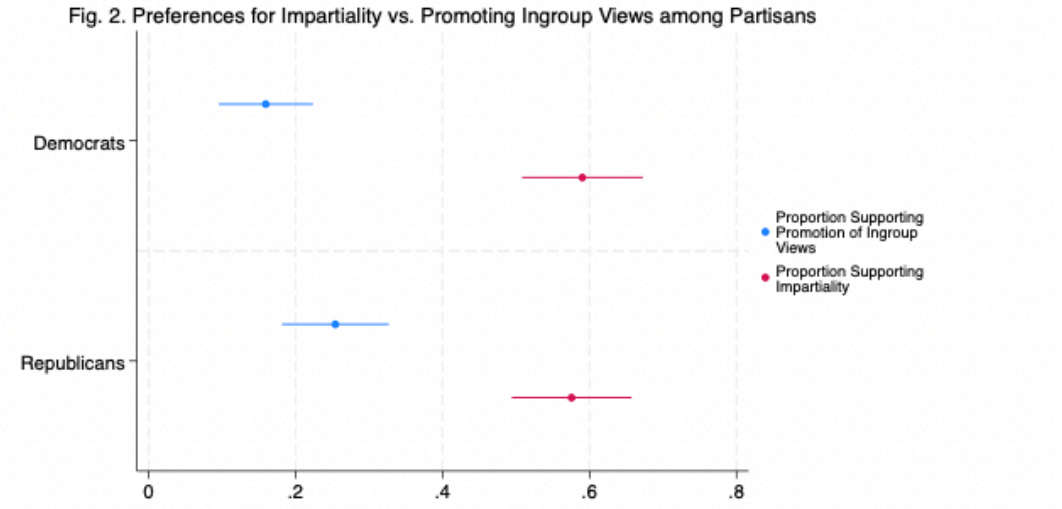
Note: Participants were asked to indicate which of the above statements they most agreed with. Cells indicate weighted percent selecting each option. Standard errors are in parentheses.

Figure 1 presents rates of support for politically impartial teaching (i.e. the proportion selecting "Public schools should not promote specific political views") by sociodemographic categories. Rates of support for schools' political neutrality were largely consistent across groups, with a few notable exceptions. White respondents were more likely to endorse political neutrality than Black respondents, older people were more supportive of political neutrality than younger people, and those with less than a high school education were less supportive than those with higher levels of education. Results of a multivariate logistic regression confirmed that each of these differences in the likelihood of endorsing neutrality in schools persisted when controlling for demographic covariates. See Table S9 in supplementary materials for regression results and Tables S2-S8, also in supplementary materials, for full response patterns to this item by age, race, sex, income, partisan affiliation, geographic region, and parental status.



Note: Dots are estimated group means, whiskers are 95% confidence intervals. Results are proportions of respondents selecting "Public Schools should not promote specific political views" relative to all other options (See Table 1, above, for other response options). Estimates for groups with low counts (e.g. those who selected "Asian" as their race, n=16) were omitted from this figure. See Tables S1-S6 in supplementary materials for full response patterns by participant sociodemographic categories.

To further investigate these patterns among partisans, Figure 2 presents levels of support for schools teaching *ingroup* views among Democrats and Republicans (i.e. the proportion of Democrats who endorsed schools promoting liberal views and Republicans who endorsed schools' promoting conservative views) alongside the proportions endorsing impartiality. While Republicans were observed to be somewhat more likely to support schools promoting conservative values than Democrats were to support schools promoting liberal values, these differences were not statistically significant ($t(392)=1.88$, p=.061) and support for impartiality was at least twice as common as support for promotion of ingroup views among both groups.



Note: Dots are estimated group means, whiskers are 95% confidence intervals. Results are proportions of partisan respondents (i.e. those who identified as either Democrats or Republicans, N=393) selecting "Public schools should promote [ingroup views]" and "Public schools should not promote particular political views," where ingroup views are defined as conservative views for self-identified Republicans and liberal views for self-identified Democrats.

Overall, responses to this item suggest that outright support for public schools promoting either liberal or conservative values is substantially less common than support for schools' ideological neutrality. While nearly one fifth of Americans are indifferent to whether public schools promote liberal or conservative viewpoints, among those who report having a view one way or the other, support for neutrality prevails.

Judgements About the Existence and Appropriateness of Political Steering in Local Public Schools

Participants were next asked a question about their own local public schools. The item was constructed so as to simultaneously assess participants' descriptive and normative attitudes about the political socialization practices of their local public schools. Response options presented an array of choices eliciting whether participants believed their local schools were, in fact, engaged in the promotion of liberal or conservative viewpoints alongside whether or not they approved of the activity that they perceived. Table 2 presents response patterns to this item.

Here, uncertainty about schools' activity was the most common response. A plurality of respondents, 47%, indicated that they did not know whether the schools in their area promoted particular political views. Among those who indicated knowledge of the educational practices in their local public schools, the majority believed that schools were actively promoting either liberal or conservative views: 69% said that their local public schools were promoting either liberal or conservative views, while 31% believed that schools were not promoting liberal or conservative views. Although a greater proportion of the sample believed that their local schools were promoting liberal views (21%) than conservative views (15%), the difference was not statistically significant ($t(527)=1.91$, $p=.056$).

Consistent with responses to the prior item about the appropriateness of schools in general driving students towards liberal or conservative views, a majority, 58%, of those who believed that their local schools were engaged in promoting either liberal or conservative views objected to the practice.

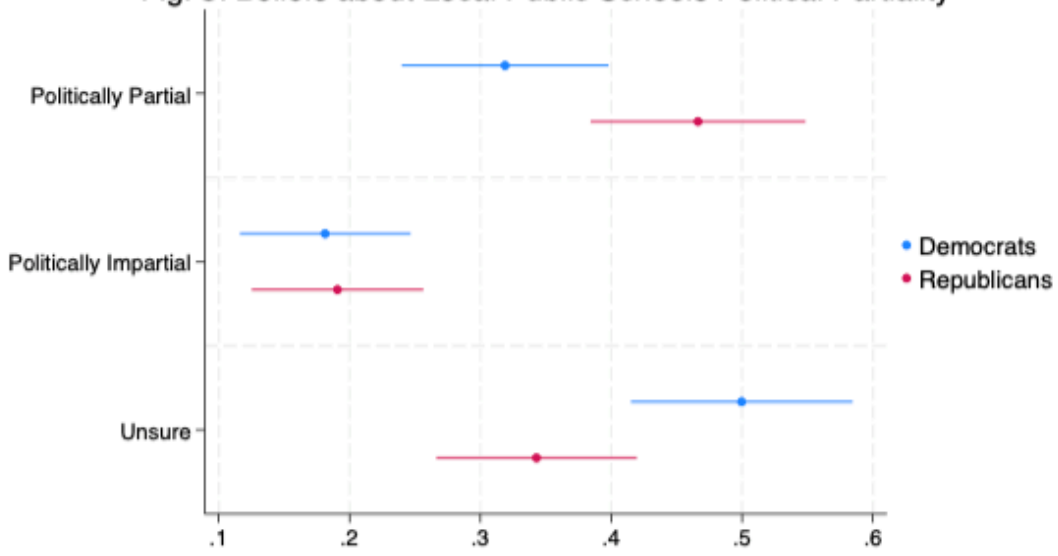
Table 2: Attitudes about Politically Partial Teaching in Local Schools (N=528)

Response	Percent Selecting (se)
Public schools in my area promote liberal views, and it is wrong	14.4% (1.9)
Public schools in my area promote liberal views, as they should	7.0% (1.2)
Public schools in my area promote conservative views, and it is wrong	6.7% (1.3)
Public schools in my area promote conservative views, as they should	8.5% (1.5)
Public schools in my area do not promote specific political views	16.7% (1.9)
I'm not sure if public schools in my area promote specific political views	46.7% (2.6)

Note: Participants were asked to indicate which of the above statements they most agreed with. Cells indicate weighted percent selecting each option. Standard errors are in parentheses. See Tables S9-S16 in the supplementary materials for full response patterns by subgroup.

While the general patterns of beliefs about local schools are similar among Democrats and Republicans, Republicans were significantly more likely than Democrats to believe that schools were engaged in ideologically motivated education than Democrats, with 47% of Republicans and 32% of Democrats reporting that their local schools were engaged in promoting either liberal or conservative views ($t(393)=2.55$, $p<.05$). Figure 3 presents perceptions of local schools' political influence by respondent partisan affiliation. See tables S9-S16 in the supplementary materials for response patterns by demographic subgroups and parental status.

Fig. 3: Beliefs about Local Public Schools Political Partiality

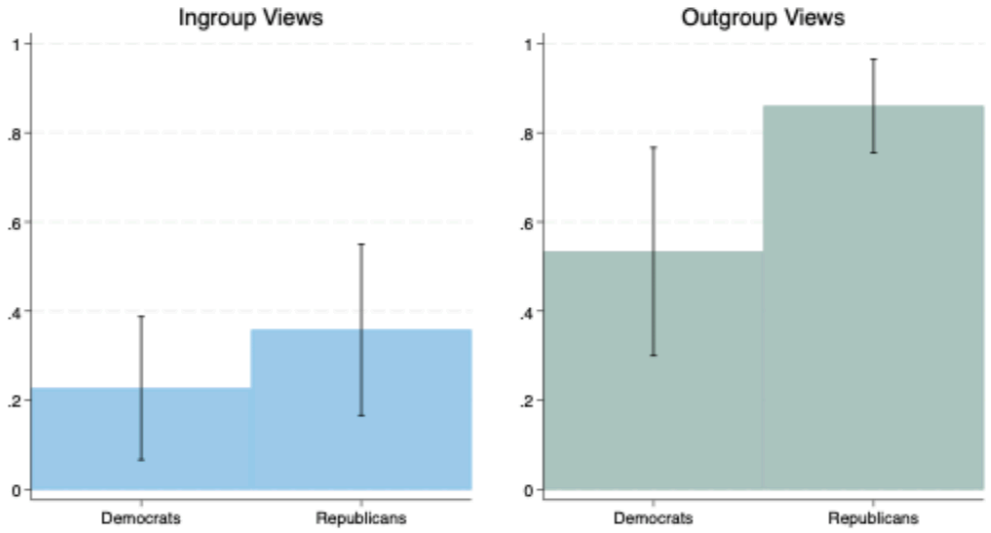


Note: Dots are estimated group means, whiskers are 95% confidence intervals. Results are proportions of partisan respondents (i.e. those who identified as either Democrats or Republicans, N=393) indicating that local schools are politically partial (i.e. that they promote either liberal or conservative views, indicated by selecting any of options 1-4 on the item described in Table 2), politically impartial (indicated by selecting option 5 on the item described in Table 2), or that they are unsure about the political partiality of local schools (indicated by selection option 6 on the item described in Table 2).

Among those who believed that their local schools were engaged in the promotion of either liberal or conservative values, there was no evidence that Democrats and Republicans differed in the likelihood of objecting to schools promoting the views of their ideological ingroup ($t(66)=1.04$, $p = .30$). However, Republicans were significantly more likely to object when they perceived schools promoting liberal views than Democrats were to object when they perceived schools promoting conservative views ($t(83)=2.62$, $p<.05$). Figure 4 presents rates of disapproval among the subset of partisan respondents who perceived schools to be engaged in politically partial teaching. Notably, among the small number of partisan respondents who reported that their local schools were engaged in promoting views aligned with those of their political ingroup (N=66), 71% rated this state of affairs favorably. By contrast, among those who perceived their local schools to be promoting views aligned with their political opposition (N=83), the pattern of judgements was inverted, with 75% reporting their objection.

These differences suggest that, despite the majority view that schools' promoting particular ideological viewpoints is objectionable in principle, partisans' application of this standard to their own local context may depend on whether they believe schools to be promoting views that align with their own. The next section more pointedly interrogates these asymmetries.

Fig. 4: Proportion Objecting to Politically Partial Teaching in Local Schools



Note: Bars are estimated group means, whiskers are 95% confidence intervals. Results are proportions of Democrats and Republicans who both perceive schools to be engaged in politically partial teaching and who object to the practice (N=187). The Ingroup Views panel represents those who perceived their local schools to be promoting views aligned with their partisan affiliation (i.e. liberal views for Democrats and conservative views for Republicans), while the Outgroup Views panel presents those who perceived their local schools to be promoting views aligned with their political outgroup (i.e. conservative views for Democrats and liberal views for Republicans).

Effects of Partisan Alignment on Judgements about Teacher Disclosures

To estimate an effect of ideological affinity on judgements about schools' promotion of liberal and conservative viewpoints, participants were randomly exposed to one of three versions of a scenario in which a 10th grade teacher reveals his political preferences to students in his government class. The versions of the scenario differed by whether the teacher expressed support for Donald Trump, Kamala Harris, or an unnamed political candidate. Respondents were asked to indicate whether the disclosure in question was acceptable, unacceptable, or whether they felt that they lacked the necessary information to make a judgement about the appropriateness of the disclosure. Using information about respondents' partisan affiliation, an indicator variable for alignment between the content of the teacher's disclosure and participants' partisan leanings was generated such that self-identified Democrats exposed to the version of the vignette in which the teacher endorsed Harris were treated as aligned, self-identified Democrats exposed to the version of the vignette in which the teacher endorsed Trump were treated as misaligned, and Democrats exposed to version of the vignette in which no information about which candidate the teacher endorsed were treated as an ambiguous control. The same logic was applied for Republican participants, such that exposure to a Trump endorsement was coded as alignment and exposure to a Harris endorsement was coded as misalignment. Item text is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Item Text for Experimental Vignette

A public-school teacher told students in his 10th grade government class [that he supports Donald Trump for president | that he supports Kamala Harris for president | which candidate he supports for president].

Which of the following statements about this situation do you agree with most?

- ☐ It was wrong for the teacher to tell the students which candidate he supports
- ☐ It was fine for the teacher to tell the students which candidate he supports
- ☐ I don't have enough information to decide whether it was right or wrong to tell students which candidate he supports

Note: Participants were randomly assigned to see one of the three versions of the scenario indicated by the bracketed sections of text.

Balance checks indicate that random assignment was successful and that participants exposed to each version of the vignette did not differ significantly by demographics or attitudes about the appropriateness of political impartiality (see tables S18-S25 in the supplementary materials).

Across all conditions, attitudes about the appropriateness of the teacher's disclosure were largely uniform, with similar levels of support, opposition, and ambivalence about the action. Table 4 presents weighted approval rates by condition. Furthermore, the version of the vignette that participants were randomly exposed to did not, by itself, have an effect on participants' judgments about whether the teacher's disclosure in the scenario was acceptable (*chi-square(4)=2.05, p=.73)*

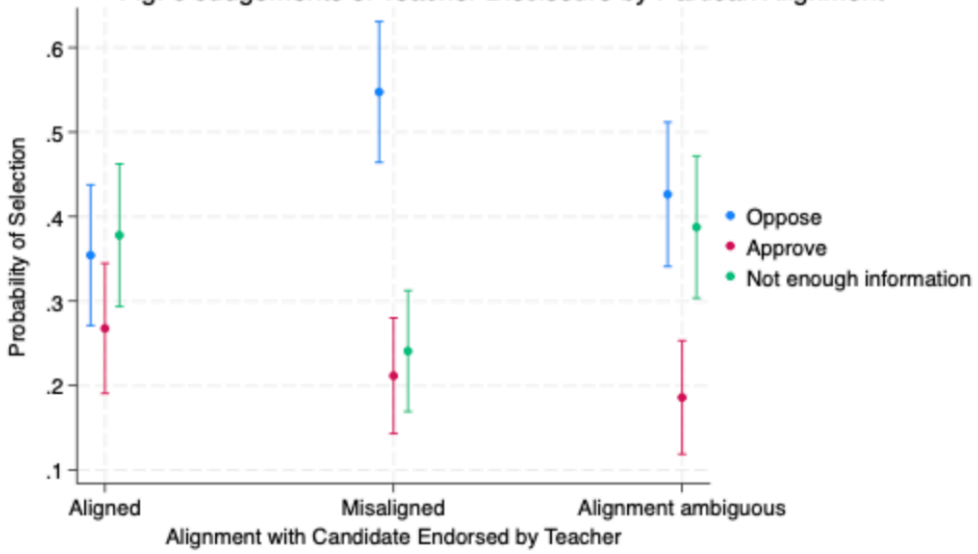
Table 4: Judgements of Teacher's Political Disclosures by Condition

Scenario Version	**Percent Selecting (Se)**		
	Oppose	**Accept**	**Unsure**
Teacher supports Trump	31.3 (3.6)	40.5 (5.4)	36.9 (4.1)
Teacher supports Harris	33.5 (3.8)	33.9 (5.1)	31.7 (3.9)
Teacher supports unnamed Candidate	35.2 (3.8)	25.6 (4.5)	31.4 (3.9)

Note: Cell values are weighted proportions selecting "It was wrong for the teacher to tell the students which candidate he supports" (Oppose), "It was fine for the teacher to tell the students which candidate he supports" (Accept), or "I don't have enough information to decide whether it was right or wrong to tell students which candidate he supports" (Unsure). Standard errors are in parentheses. The vignette version to which participants were randomly exposed is indicated by the leftmost column. All values rounded to tenths of a percent. See Table 3 for full item text.

However, using information about participants' political affiliation reveals a heterogeneous treatment effect on party-condition alignment. Specifically, partisan respondents were more likely to judge a teacher's disclosure as being inappropriate if they were exposed to a version of the scenario in which the teacher endorsed the candidate from the opposing party as opposed to their own party. Figure 5 displays judgements of appropriateness by alignment with the candidate endorsed by the teacher.

Fig. 5 Judgements of Teacher Disclosure by Partisan Alignment



Note: Dots are estimated group means, whiskers are 95% confidence intervals. Results are proportions of partisan respondents (i.e. those who identified as either Democrats or Republicans, N=393) indicating approval, opposition, or ambivalence (due to lack of information), of a teacher's disclosure to students of his preferred candidate in the 2024 election, grouped by condition-partisan alignment. Point estimates and confidence intervals derived from unweighted polytomous logistic regression of scenario alignment on judgements of the teacher's behavior.

Where the teacher in the scenario endorsed a candidate aligned with participants' own political ingroup (i.e. Donald Trump for Republicans or Kamala Harris for Democrats, as seen in the leftmost column in Figure 5), rates of approval, disapproval, and ambivalence were similar. However, where partisans were exposed to a version of the vignette in which the teacher endorsed the candidate from the opposing party, they disapproved of the disclosure at over twice the rate that they approved or indicated that they lacked information to make a judgement, with 55% indicating that the disclosure was wrong compared to 21% indicating that it was acceptable and 24% indicating that they lacked sufficient information to make a judgment ($z(393)=4.89$, $p<.001$; and $z(393)=4.31$, $p<.001$, respectively). The estimated likelihood of expressing disapproval when faced with a teacher indicating support for the opposing party's candidate, 55%, was also 1.55 times higher than the likelihood of expressing disapproval, 35% ($z(393)=3.21$, $p<.01$), and 1.45 times higher than the likelihood of expressing ambivalence, 38% ($z(393)=2.8$, $p<.01$), estimated when partisans were asked to judge teachers who supported the candidate from their party.

Cumulatively, these results suggest that Americans' judgments about the appropriateness of one type of political influence in schools — teachers' disclosures of their own political preferences— hinge to a substantial degree on whether the disclosure in question is aligned with observers' own political preferences. More pointedly, partisans are just over one and a half times more likely to disapprove of teachers' express support for political opponents than support for their own party's candidates. While this study does not presuppose an ethical judgement about the appropriateness of teachers' disclosures of their personal political attitudes and though such disclosures are only one among many plausible mechanisms by which schools might influence students' thinking, these results suggest that the prevailing support for schools' engaging in politically impartial education observed in response to abstract questions about schools' promotion of particular ideological viewpoints may belie latent partisan bias in the application of normative standards to individual cases.

Discussion

Americans' attitudes about public schools play an important role in regulating their function. Public opinion provides direction to policy-makers (Burstein, 2003; Brooks & Manza, 2006) and can

inform how teachers (Hess & McAvoy, 2014b; Sheppard & Levy, 2019) and administrators (Koyama, 2014) go about their work.

Recent surveys of public priorities related to K-12 education suggest that partisans are divided on how schools should approach the teaching of politicized topics (Houston, Peterson, & West, 2022; Houston, 2024; Saavedra, et al., 2024), though some of this division may be a result of how policies have been branded and communicated as opposed to disagreements about their substance (Collins, 2024). While understanding these differences over the teaching of discrete issues is informative in its own right, insights from research on partisan polarization suggest the value of assessing how schools are seen as shaping children's broad ideological outlooks and affiliations.

American partisans increasingly orient themselves to politics as an antagonistic conflict of opposing ideological-partisan groups, rather than as an array of discrete disagreements about individual issues (Mason, 2018b; Finkel et al., 2020). As partisans have become increasingly sorted over the last decades—with the internal consistency of attitudes and attributes *within* groups and differences *between* groups having both grown (Mason, 2018a; Levendusky, 2009)— liberals and conservatives have become increasingly alienated from one another. Studies of partisan affect have found that liberals and conservatives hold increasingly negative feelings towards their opponents (Iyengar, Sood, & Lelkes, 2012; Iyengar, et al., 2019; Druckman & Levendusky, 2019) and frequently perceive political contests as having existential stakes (Pew Research Center, 2016) and involving clear moral binaries (Tappin & McKay, 2019; D'amore, et al. 2024).

Perhaps even more than other sites of political contestation, schools are likely to activate worries about ideological partiality and should be studied through the prism of their perceived contributions to ideological movements. Not only do schools make a claim to epistemic authority, but they are also charged with influence over the youth in ways that other organs of democratic society are not. These characteristics make schools' treatment of political issues particularly high-stakes (Gutmann, 1999; Brighouse, 1998; Hess & McAvoy, 2014b). Even partisans who lack school-aged children of their own may worry about systematic bias in the state's educational apparatus as an illegitimate means of shaping the nation's social and political future. Conversely, partisans who earnestly believe that their own worldviews are morally and empirically authoritative (or whose disdain for opposing partisans overrides their principled beliefs about the value of impartiality) may be more comfortable with schools' teaching with ideologically directive intent.

The results of this study suggest that worries about ideological partiality in schools are commonplace. While a plurality of respondents, 47%, expressed uncertainty about their local schools' political influence over students, nearly as many, 37%, believed that those local schools were promoting either liberal or conservative views. Only 17% were confident that schools were not promoting particular ideological views. Given that 57% of respondents felt that schools *should not* promote particular ideological views, these findings point to a public that doubts that their preferred vision of educational neutrality is being realized in their local schools.

This study also provides grounds to believe that judgements about discrete cases of educational influence may be affected by partisan bias. Although a majority of Americans oppose schools using their position of influence over students to drive them towards particular ideological positions in principle, partisans who perceived that their local schools were promoting views aligned with their ingroup tended to support this activity. Furthermore, when evaluating a specific case of political behavior in the classroom—namely, a teacher's disclosure of his preferred candidate to his students— partisans' judgements about its appropriateness were substantially influenced by whether the candidate in question was from their own party, deeming the disclosure as unacceptable one and a half times more frequently when the teacher indicated support for the candidate from the opposing party.

If the differences in attitudes observed in response to the scenarios in the survey experiment are reflective of differences in the actual propensity of citizens to apply stakeholder pressure to schools for teaching of political content perceived to align with or deviate from their own ideological worldviews, this study suggests a permission structure by which educational polarization might be abetted. Partisans may express support for educational neutrality either out of sincere convictions about its fairness or because

they are reluctant to reveal their preferences for ideologically partial education. In either case, to the degree that ideologically partial teaching in schools is more frequently condoned where it is consistent with observers' political preferences and more actively policed when it opposes those preferences, these findings point to a mechanism by which teaching in politically conservative and politically liberal districts might systematically drift apart, exacerbating the growing epistemic and cultural divides between Americans of different political orientations. This possibility warrants further study.

Limitations

This study has a number of limitations that should be borne in mind while interpreting its results. For one, the results of this study reflect public attitudes that emerged from a particular time and social context. Attitudes about the promotion of ideological views in schools are likely to draw upon feelings of favorability towards the parties and movements associated with those views, which can fluctuate in response to current events.

There are also limits to what can be inferred about participants' beliefs owing to the construction of the survey items. For example, since the survey did not operationalize or provide examples for what it means for schools to promote liberal or conservative views, caution should be taken in inferring what respondents had in mind when indicating their support or opposition to these abstract positions. The broadly framed questions used in this study provide valuable information about how the public feels about using schools as vessels for ideological ends in a general sense and may be particularly useful in developing accounts of public trust in education, but a deeper analysis, including attempts to interpret differences in support for neutrality across subgroups, requires more detailed assessment of the specific practices that the public believes constitute politically partial or impartial teaching and the conditions under which they approve or disapprove of those practices.

It should furthermore be noted that the behavior described in the survey experiment — a teacher's disclosure of his political attitudes to students — should not be interpreted as a stand in for politically biased teaching. Teachers might reveal their own political preferences to students in service of multiple objectives, not all of which involve persuading students to adopt those views. Philosophers and education scholars disagree about the effects and appropriateness of such disclosures (Kelly, 1986; McAvoy & Hess, 2013; Hess & McAvoy; 2014a; Geller, 2020; Conrad, Schiera, & Dym, 2024). Unmeasured variation in how respondents understand teachers' disclosures in principle is a source of measurement error in the current design: two individuals with the same normative values about what constitutes appropriate influence over students might nonetheless respond differently to the teacher's disclosure in this study if they differ in their beliefs about its likely impact on students. For example, an individual who believes that teacher disclosures implicitly signal to students that adopting similar views is a way to get good grades may report a different judgement about its appropriateness than an individual who doubts that students will notice or care who their teacher supports, even if both believe that teachers should refrain from attempting to influence students' ideological beliefs as a matter of principle. Such differences are invisible in the design of this study. Though the response options made space for participants to indicate that they lacked information based on the sparse description of the disclosure to make a judgement about its appropriateness, there is no means to verify that respondents had the same assumptions about the reasons for and impact of the disclosure in mind as they made their judgements. While the observed variation in the propensity to accept or oppose the disclosure based on whether the teachers' preferences aligned with participants' own political and ideological affiliations is consistent with an explanation that participants are more comfortable with educational activity that nudges students towards the viewpoints of their own ideological "team," additional work aimed at understanding how respondents perceive teachers' political disclosures as well as tests of inconsistency in judgements about alternative teaching behaviors and educational initiatives would strengthen the interpretation of results.

Future work should build on these findings by assessing whether observed asymmetries in judgements about the appropriateness of politically partial teaching extend to scenarios beyond teachers' political disclosures, like the formation of biased lesson plans, grading, and other potential means of steering student thinking. To better understand the impact of these attitudes, future work should furthermore investigate whether differences in beliefs about the legitimacy of various forms of schooling

and teacher conduct predict differences in behavior (e.g. contacting schools or elected officials to oppose or reinforce the practices, voting, organizing, or donating).

Conclusion

Political polarization has increased public scrutiny of schools' role in developing young people's political outlooks. This study offers insights into how the public sees schools as vectors for the propagation of political ideology. Despite majority preferences for ideologically impartial schooling, many Americans are uncertain about whether their local schools are meeting that standard. Among those who believe they know enough to offer a concrete position on the matter, belief that schools are ideologically partial is over twice as common as belief in their impartiality. Furthermore, the results of a survey experiment provide evidence that partisans inconsistently apply normative standards in forming judgements about the appropriateness of individual cases of classroom conduct. Collectively, these results suggest an American public wary of politicized education, but susceptible to biases in policing its presence.

References

Barakat, M. & Rankin, S. (2022, February 15) Youngkin looks to root out critical race theory in Virginia. *The Associated Press.* https://apnews.com/article/education-richmond-race-and-ethnicity-racial-injustice-virginia-8ad5da65b9cb05265f2b8081c41827cd?utm_source=copy&utm_medium=share

Beadie, N., Burkholder, Z., Anderson, J. D., Hartman, A., Parker, W. C., & Steineker, R. (2021). From the diffusion of knowledge to the cultivation of agency: A short history of civic education policy and practice in the United States. In Lee, C. D., White, G., & Dong, D. (Eds.). (2021). *Educating for Civic Reasoning and Discourse*. National Academy of Education. 109-155. https://doi.org/10.31094/2021/2

Bennett, W. (1993). *The Book of Virtues*, New York: Simon & Schuster.

Brighouse, H. (1998). Civic education and liberal legitimacy. *Ethics*, *108*(4), 719-745.

Brooks, C., & Manza, J. (2006). Social policy responsiveness in developed democracies. *American sociological review*, *71*(3), 474-494.

Burstein, P. (2003). The impact of public opinion on public policy: A review and an agenda. *Political research quarterly*, *56*(1), 29-40.

Collins, J. E. (2024). They only hate the term: policy branding and the politics of critical race theory. *Journal of Public Policy*, *44*(4), 826-846.

Conrad, J., Schiera, A. J., & Dym, A. (2024). Decentering teacher voice-And stance? Teacher candidates' explicit and implicit disclosure in social studies discussions. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *146*, 104637.

D'Amore, C., van Zomeren, M., & Koudenburg, N. (2024). How perceived polarization predicts attitude moralization (and vice versa): A four-wave longitudinal study during the 2020 US election. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, *126*(4), 624.

Dewey, J. (1899). *The School and Society: Being Three Lectures*. University of Chicago Press.

Druckman, J. N., & Levendusky, M. S. (2019). What do we measure when we measure affective polarization?. *Public opinion quarterly*, *83*(1), 114-122.

Enoch-Stevens, T., Daramola, E. J., Marsh, J., Mulfinger, L., Ogden, K., Bradley, D., ... & Williams, S. (2023). School System Responses to Racial Injustice. Technical Report. National Center for Research on Education Access and Choice.

Exec. Order No. 14,190, 3 C.F.R. 8853 (2025). https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/DCPD-202500198/pdf/DCPD-202500198.pdf

Finkel, E. J., Bail, C. A., Cikara, M., Ditto, P. H., Iyengar, S., Klar, S., ... & Druckman, J. N. (2020). Political sectarianism in America. *Science*, *370*(6516), 533-536.

Geller, R. C. (2020). Teacher political disclosure in contentious times: A "responsibility to speak up" or "fair and balanced"?. Theory & Research in Social Education, 48(2), 182-210.

Gutmann, A. (1999). Democratic Education: Revised Edition. Princeton University Press.

Hess, D., & McAvoy, P. (2014a). Should teachers help students develop partisan identities?. *Social Education*, *78*(6), 293-297.

Hess, D., & McAvoy, P. (2014b). *The political classroom: Evidence and ethics in democratic education*. Routledge.

Houston, D. M., Peterson, P. E., & West, M. R. (2022). Partisan rifts widen, perceptions of school quality decline: Results of the 2022 Education Next survey of public opinion. Education Next.

Houston, D. M. (2024). Polarization, partisan sorting, and the politics of education. *American Educational Research Journal*, *61*(3), 508-540.

Iyengar, S., Lelkes, Y., Levendusky, M., Malhotra, N., & Westwood, S. J. (2019). The origins and consequences of affective polarization in the United States. Annual review of political science, 22(1), 129-146.

Iyengar, S., Sood, G., & Lelkes, Y. (2012). Affect, not ideology: A social identity perspective on polarization. *Public opinion quarterly*, *76*(3), 405-431.

Kelly, T. E. (1986). Discussing controversial issues: Four perspectives on the teacher's role. *Theory & research in social education*, *14*(2), 113-138.

Koyama, J. (2014). Principals as bricoleurs: Making sense and making do in an era of accountability. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *50*(2), 279-304.

Levendusky, M. (2009). The partisan sort: How liberals became Democrats and conservatives became Republicans. University of Chicago Press.

Levine, P. (2023). Politics by other means: Civic education in a time of controversy. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, *705*(1), 24-38.

Levinson, M. (1997). Liberalism Versus Democracy? Schooling Private Citizens in the Public Square. British Journal of Political Science, 27(3), 333–360. doi:10.1017/S0007123497000173

Lin, L., Horowitz, J., Hurst, K., & Braga, D. (2024, February 22). Race and LBGTQ Issues in K-12 Schools. Pew Research Center.

Mann, H. (1855). Lectures on Education. Ide & Dutton.

Mazzei, P., Harris, E. A., & Alter, A. (2023, April 22). Florida at Center of Debate as School Book Bans Surge Nationally. *The New York Times.* https://www.nytimes.com/2023/04/22/books/book-ban-florida.html

Mason, L. (2018a). *Uncivil agreement: How politics became our identity*. University of Chicago Press.

Mason, L. (2018b). Ideologues without issues: The polarizing consequences of ideological identities. Public Opinion Quarterly, 82(S1), 866-887.

McAvoy, P., & Hess, D. (2013). Classroom deliberation in an era of political polarization. Curriculum Inquiry, 43(1), 14-47.

Mills, R. (2024, October 13). Conservative School-Board Movement Still Alive and Well — Despite Media Obituary. *National Review*. https://www.nationalreview.com/news/conservative-school-board-movement-still-alive-and-well-despite-media-obituary/

Neundorf, A., & Smets, K. (2015). Political Socialization and the Making of Citizens. In Oxford Handbook Editorial Board (eds). *Oxford Handbook Topics in Politics*. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199935307.001.0001,

Pew Research Center. (2016, June). Partisanship and Political Animosity in 2016.

Safarpour, A., Lazer, D., Lin, J., Pippert, C. H., Druckman, J., Baum, M., ... & Qu, H. (2021). The COVID States Project: A 50-State COVID-19 Survey. Report #73: American attitudes toward critical race theory. https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/crv95

Saavedra, A.R., Polikoff, M., Silver, D., Rapaport, A., Garland, M., & Scollan-Rowley, J. (2024, February).
Searching for Common Ground: Widespread Support for Public Schools but Substantial Partisan Divides About Teaching Potentially Contested Topics. University of Southern California. http://uasdata.usc.edu/education

Sheppard, M., & Levy, S. A. (2019). Emotions and teacher decision-making: An analysis of social studies teachers' perspectives. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *77*, 193-203.
Proposed Priorities— American History and Civics Education. 86 F.R. 20348. (Proposed Monday, April 19 2021) https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2021-04-19/pdf/2021-08068.pdf

Tappin, B. M., & McKay, R. T. (2019). Moral polarization and out-party hostility in the US political context. *Journal of Social and Political Psychology*, *7*(1), 213-245.

Zembylas, M. (2022). Rethinking political socialization in schools: The role of 'affective indoctrination'. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, *54*(14), 2480-2491.

Appendix

Key Item Wordings

Q1. Which of these statements do you agree with the most?

- ☐ Public schools should promote liberal views
- ☐ Public schools should promote conservative views
- ☐ Public schools should not promote specific political views
- ☐ I don't care if public schools promote specific political views

Q2. Which of these statements do you agree with the most?

- ☐ Public schools in my area promote liberal views, and it is wrong.
- ☐ Public schools in my area promote liberal views, as they should.
- ☐ Public schools in my area promote conservative views, and it is wrong.
- ☐ Public schools in my area promote conservative views, as they should.
- ☐ Public schools in my area do not promote specific political views.
- ☐ I'm not sure if public schools in my area promote specific political views.

Q3. A public-school teacher told students in his 10th grade government class [that he supports Donald Trump for president | that he supports Kamala Harris for president | which candidate he supports for president].*

Which of the following statements about this situation do you agree with most?

- ☐ It was wrong for the teacher to tell the students which candidate he supports
- ☐ It was fine for the teacher to tell the students which candidate he supports
- ☐ I don't have enough information to decide whether it was right or wrong to tell students which candidate he supports

** For item Q3, participants were randomly exposed to one of the three versions of the vignette completed by the bracketed clauses.*

Table S1. Participant Demographics (n=537)

	n (unweighted %) *weighted %*
Age	
18-34	89 (16.9%) *21.1%*
35-49	125 (23.7%) *25.3%*
50-64	157 (29.7%) *31.8%*
65+	157 (29.7%) *21.8%*
Sex	
Male	229 (43.4%) *44.9%*
Female	299 (56.6%) *55.1%*
Race	
White	386 (73.1%) *68.5%*
Black or African American	56 (10.6%) *13.3%*
Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin	58 (11.0%) *12.4%*
Asian origin	16 (3.0%) *4.7%*
Other	12 (2.3%) *1.0%*
Income	
Less than $15k	73 (13.8%) *11.9%*
$15-$30k	115 (21.8%) *15.4%*
$35-$50k	74 (14.0%) *9.9%*
$50-$75k	84 (15.9%) *16.8%*
$75-100k	61 (11.6%) *10.5%*
$100k+	112 (21.2%) *33.5%*
Decline to answer	9 (1.7%) *2.1%*
Geographical Region	
Northeast	79 (15.0%) *17.4%*
Midwest	104 (19.7%) *21.0%*
South	220 (41.7%) *38.1%*
West	125 (23.7%) *23.5%*
Partisan Affiliation	
Democrat	188 (35.6%) *32.6%*
Independent	121 (22.9%) *32.7%*
Republican	205 (38.8%) *33.3%*
No Party Selected	14 (2.7%) *1.5%*

Note: Weighted percentages reflect application of survey weights raked for national representativeness.

Table S2. Preferences for Politically Partial Education by Sex

Response	**Percent Selecting**	
	Male	**Female**
Public schools should promote liberal views	11.66 (2.4)	6.83 (1.4)
Public schools should promote conservative views	19.57 (3.0)	12.3 (1.9)
Public schools should not promote specific political views	54.20 (3.8)	59.76 (2.5)
I don't care if public schools promote specific political views	14.57 (2.7)	21.11 (2.0)
Number of Observations (unweighted)	*229*	*299*

Note: Participants were asked to indicate which of the above statements they most agreed with. Cells indicate weighted percent selecting each option by participant sex. Standard errors for each value are in parentheses.

Table S3. Preferences for Politically Partial Education by Race

Response	**Percent Selecting**				
	White	**Black**	**Hispanic**	**Asian**	**Other**
Public schools should promote liberal views	5.4 (1.2)	18.8 (5.7)	13.8 (5.5)	19.4 (11.2)	9.0 (1.4)
Public schools should promote conservative views	14.4 (2.0)	25.7 (7.4)	9.7 (4.6)	20.1 (9.4)	15.6 (1.9)
Public schools should not promote specific political views	64.5 (2.8)	32.7 (6.9)	47.9 (7.2)	43.2 (13.7)	57.3 (2.5)
I don't care if public schools promote specific political views	15.7 (2.2)	22.8 (6.0)	28.6 (6.3)	17.4 (11.1)	18.2 (2.0)
Number of Observations (unweighted)	*386*	*56*	*58*	*16*	*12*

Note: Participants were asked to indicate which of the above statements they most agreed with. Cells indicate weighted percent selecting each option by participant race. Standard errors for each value are in parentheses.

Table S4. Preferences for Politically Partial Education by Age

Response	**Percent Selecting**			
	18-34	**35-49**	**50-64**	**65+**
Public schools should promote liberal views	16.5 (4.1)	11.7 (3.1)	7.6 (2.6)	1.1 (0.6)
Public schools should promote conservative views	22.1 (5.3)	20.7 (4.1)	10.9 (2.6)	10.1 (2.7)
Public schools should not promote specific political views	39.1 (5.9)	48.4 (5.1)	63.6 (4.4)	76.0 (4.0)
I don't care if public schools promote specific political views	22.7 (4.9)	19.2 (4.1)	18.0 (3.5)	12.9 (3.2)
Number of Observations (unweighted)	*89*	*125*	*157*	*157*

Note: Participants were asked to indicate which of the above statements they most agreed with. Cells indicate weighted percent selecting each option by participant age bracket in years. Standard errors for each value are in parentheses.

Table S5. Preferences for Politically Partial Education by Income

Response	**Percent Selecting**			
	<$30K	**$30-75K**	**$75K+**	**Decline to answer**
Public schools should promote liberal views	11.1 (2.6)	6.8 (2.3)	9.5 (2.5)	0
Public schools should promote conservative views	16.3 (3.1)	13.2 (3.0)	17.3 (3.3)	0
Public schools should not promote specific political views	46.6 (4.3)	63.1 (4.5)	60.4 (4.2)	55.8 (18.8)
I don't care if public schools promote specific political views	26.1 (3.8)	16.9 (3.6)	12.8 (2.9)	44.2 (18.8)
Number of Observations (unweighted)	*188*	*158*	*173*	*9*

Note: Participants were asked to indicate which of the above statements they most agreed with. Cells indicate weighted percent selecting each option by participant self-reported income bracket. Standard errors for each value are in parentheses. Standard errors for unobserved values not estimated.

Table S6. Preferences for Politically Partial Education by Geographic Region

Response	**Percent Selecting**			
	Northeast	**Midwest**	**South**	**West**
Public schools should promote liberal views	11.3 (4.1)	6.2 (2.5)	7.1 (2.0)	13.0 (3.6)
Public schools should promote conservative views	11.4 (3.4)	14.1 (3.7)	21.3 (3.5)	10.7 (3.4)
Public schools should not promote specific political views	57.0 (5.1)	63.3 (5.3)	58.6 (4.0)	50.0 (5.4)
I don't care if public schools promote specific political views	20.4 (5.0)	16.4 (4.0)	13.2 (2.6)	26.3 (4.9)
Number of Observations (unweighted)	*79*	*104*	*220*	*125*

Note: Participants were asked to indicate which of the above statements they most agreed with. Cells indicate weighted percent selecting each option by participant region. Standard errors for each value are in parentheses.

Table S7. Preferences for Politically Partial Education by Partisan Affiliation

Response	**Percent Selecting**			
	Democrat	**Republican**	**Independent**	**No Party**
Public schools should promote liberal views	15.9 (3.3)	5.9 (2.0)	4.9 (1.9)	18.7 (12.9)
Public schools should promote conservative views	8.9 (2.2)	25.4 (3.7)	12.2 (3.5)	15.6 (10.7)
Public schools should not promote specific political views	59.0 (4.2)	57.6 (4.1)	56.9 (4.9)	19.1 (11.2)
I don't care if public schools promote specific political views	16.2 (3.0)	11.2 (2.7)	26.0 (4.3)	46.6 (16.0)
Number of Observations (unweighted)	*188*	*205*	*121*	*14*

Note: Participants were asked to indicate which of the above statements they most agreed with. Cells indicate weighted percent selecting each option by reported partisan affiliation. Columns for Democrat and Republican include both "Strong Democrats/Republicans" and those who "Lean Democrat/Republican." Standard errors for each value are in parentheses.

Table S8. Preferences for Politically Partial Education by Parental Status

Response	**Percent Selecting**	
	Has children under 18	**No children under 18**
Public schools should promote liberal views	10.4 (2.9)	8.6 (1.7)
Public schools should promote conservative views	23.4 (4.4)	13.1 (2.0)
Public schools should not promote specific political views	52.3 (5.2)	58.8 (3.9)
I don't care if public schools promote specific political views	13.9 (3.7)	19.5 (2.3)
Number of Observations (unweighted)	*118*	*410*

Note: Participants were asked to indicate which of the above statements they most agreed with. Cells indicate weighted percent selecting each option by whether the participant indicates having children under age 18. Standard errors for each value are in parentheses.

Table S9. Predictors of Support for Politically Impartial Education (n=528)

Schools Should Not Promote Particular Political Views	*b(se)*	
Age	.029	**
	(.008)	
Sex [ref: Male]		
Female	.294	
	(.223)	
Race [ref: White]		
Black or Af. American	-1.025	**
	(.391)	
Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin	-.074	
	(.370)	
Asian origin	-.679	
	(.643)	
Other	.319	
	(.765)	
Political Affiliation [ref: Democrat]		
Republican	-.331	
	(.281)	
Independent	.084	
	(.296)	
No party selected	-1.195	
	(.878)	
Geographical Region [ref: Northeast]		
Midwest	.434	
	(.371)	
South	.370	
	(.322)	
West	-.162	
	(.369)	
Level of Education [ref: Less than High School]		
High School degree to less than 4-year college	1.276	*
	(.586)	
4-year college or more	1.733	**
	(.626)	
Income [ref: Less than $30K]		
$30k-$75k	.529	
	(.303)	
$75k+	.324	
	(.296)	
Decline to answer	.062	
	(.696)	
Has Children Under 18 [ref: no children under 18]	-.056	
	(.278)	
Intercept	-2.885	**
	(.800)	

*Note: Table presents results of a multiple logistic regression assessing the relative likelihood of supporting public schools' political impartiality as reflected by selecting "Public schools should not promote specific political views" as opposed to "Public schools should promote liberal views," "Public schools should promote conservative views," or "I don't care if public schools promote specific political views." ** p<.01, * p<.05 Cell values are logits.*

Table S10. Views of Local Public Schools Political Partiality by Sex

Response	**Percent Selecting**	
	Male	**Female**
Public schools in my area promote liberal views, and it is wrong	19.5 (3.1)	10.2 (2.2)
Public schools in my area promote liberal views, as they should	9.4 (2.2)	5.0 (1.4)
Public schools in my area promote conservative views, and it is wrong	6.0 (1.7)	7.3 (1.9)
Public schools in my area promote conservative views, as they should	11.0 (2.5)	6.6 (1.9)
Public schools in my area do not promote specific political views	14.6 (2.6)	18.4 (2.7)
I'm not sure if public schools in my area promote specific political views	39.6 (3.8)	52.6 (3.4)
Number of Observations (unweighted)	*229*	*299*

Note: Participants were asked to indicate which of the above statements they most agreed with. Cells indicate weighted percent selecting each option by participant sex. Standard errors for each value are in parentheses.

Table S11. Views of Local Public Schools Political Partiality by Race

Response	Percent Selecting				
	White	**Black**	**Hispanic**	**Asian**	**Other**
Public schools in my area promote liberal views, and it is wrong	15.7 (2.2)	11.8 (4.9)	4.5 (2.6)	30.5 (13.8)	9.1 (9.2)
Public schools in my area promote liberal views, as they should	4.4 (1.1)	17.7 (5.7)	5.4 (3.1)	15.6 (8.3)	15.7 (14.8)
Public schools in my area promote conservative views, and it is wrong	6.6 (1.5)	6.8 (3.9)	10.6 (4.6)	0	0
Public schools in my area promote conservative views, as they should	7.3 (1.4)	23.0 (7.5)	3.0 (2.1)	2.4 (2.5)	0
Public schools in my area do not promote specific political views	19.3 (2.4)	7.7 (3.3)	10.2 (4.4)	12.5 (8.5)	53.2 (21.7)
I'm not sure if public schools in my area promote specific political views	46.8 (3.0)	33.1 (6.7)	66.3 (6.7)	39.1 (13.3)	22.1 (13.8)
Number of Observations (unweighted)	*386*	*56*	*58*	*16*	*12*

Note: Participants were asked to indicate which of the above statements they most agreed with. Cells indicate weighted percent selecting each option by participant race. Standard errors for each value are in parentheses.

Table S12. Views of Local Public Schools Political Partiality by Age

Response	**Percent Selecting**			
	18-34	**35-49**	**50-64**	**65+**
Public schools in my area promote liberal views, and it is wrong	10.7 (3.8)	6.4 (2.4)	19.1 (3.8)	20.4 (4.2)
Public schools in my area promote liberal views, as they should	12.8 (3.9)	11.2 (3.0)	3.5 (1.4)	1.4 (0.8)
Public schools in my area promote conservative views, and it is wrong	13.6 (4.0)	6.8 (2.7)	5.4 (1.9)	1.8 (1.1)
Public schools in my area promote conservative views, as they should	9.4 (4.4)	11.9 (3.2)	8.4 (2.5)	4.0 (2.0)
Public schools in my area do not promote specific political views	12.6 (3.8)	24.7 (4.4)	15.0 (3.3)	13.8 (3.3)
I'm not sure if public schools in my area promote specific political views	40.9 (5.8)	39.0 (5.1)	48.6 (4.6)	58.7 (4.9)
Number of Observations (unweighted)	*89*	*125*	*157*	*157*

Note: Participants were asked to indicate which of the above statements they most agreed with. Cells indicate weighted percent selecting each option by participant age. Standard errors for each value are in parentheses.

Table S13. Views of Local Public Schools Political Partiality by Income

Response	**Percent Selecting**			
	<$30K	**$30-75K**	**$75K+**	**Decline to answer**
Public schools in my area promote liberal views, and it is wrong	12.9 (3.0)	10.7 (2.9)	17.9 (3.3)	7.7 (7.6)
Public schools in my area promote liberal views, as they should	9.0 (2.6)	5.2 (1.9)	7.1 (2.0)	0
Public schools in my area promote conservative views, and it is wrong	9.4 (2.7)	3.2 (1.6)	7.5 (2.2)	0
Public schools in my area promote conservative views, as they should	4.5 (1.5)	11.3 (2.9)	9.7 (2.8)	0
Public schools in my area do not promote specific political views	10.7 (2.6)	19.2 (3.6)	19.6 (3.3)	0
I'm not sure if public schools in my area promote specific political views	53.3 (4.3)	50.4 (4.6)	38.2 (4.1)	92.4 (7.6)
Number of Observations (unweighted)	*188*	*158*	*173*	*9*

Note: Participants were asked to indicate which of the above statements they most agreed with. Cells indicate weighted percent selecting each option by participant income. Standard errors for each value are in parentheses.

Table S14. Views of Local Public Schools Political Partiality by Region

Response	**Percent Selecting**			
	Northeast	**Midwest**	**South**	**West**
Public schools in my area promote liberal views, and it is wrong	19.7 (5.3)	11.8 (4.0)	12.4 (2.6)	16.1 (4.1)
Public schools in my area promote liberal views, as they should	9.4 (3.2)	3.9 (2.2)	7.8 (2.2)	6.5 (2.3)
Public schools in my area promote conservative views, and it is wrong	4.3 (2.7)	12.0 (3.6)	7.2 (2.1)	3.0 (1.7)
Public schools in my area promote conservative views, as they should	6.9 (2.7)	5.5 (2.2)	13.0 (3.2)	5.3 (2.4)
Public schools in my area do not promote specific political views	13.7 (4.6)	18.5 (4.3)	15.2 (2.9)	19.7 (4.1)
I'm not sure if public schools in my area promote specific political views	46.0 (6.2)	48.5 (5.6)	44.5 (4.0)	49.4 (5.4)
Number of Observations (unweighted)	*79*	*104*	*220*	*125*

Note: Participants were asked to indicate which of the above statements they most agreed with. Cells indicate weighted percent selecting each option by participant geographic region. Standard errors for each value are in parentheses.

Table S15 Views of Local Public Schools Political Partiality by Political Party

Response	**Percent Selecting**			
	Democrat	**Independent**	**Republican**	**No Party**
Public schools in my area promote liberal views, and it is wrong	4.1 (1.6)	14.0 (3.7)	24.9 (3.7)	13.5 (12.3)
Public schools in my area promote liberal views, as they should	13.8 (2.9)	3.4 (1.6)	4.1 (1.6)	0
Public schools in my area promote conservative views, and it is wrong	7.5 (2.5)	6.1 (2.1)	6.3 (2.1)	11.1 (9.9)
Public schools in my area promote conservative views, as they should	6.6 (2.0)	7.9 (3.3)	11.3 (2.6)	4.1 (4.1)
Public schools in my area do not promote specific political views	18.1 (3.3)	13.5 (3.3)	19.1 (3.3)	0
I'm not sure if public schools in my area promote specific political views	50.0 (4.3)	55.1 (5.0)	34.3 (3.9)	71.4 (14.6)
Number of Observations (unweighted)	*188*	*121*	*205*	*14*

Note: Participants were asked to indicate which of the above statements they most agreed with. Cells indicate weighted percent selecting each option by participant political affiliation. Standard errors for each value are in parentheses.

Table S16. Views of Local Public Schools Political Partiality by Parental Status

Response	**Percent Selecting**	
	Children under 18	**No Children under 18**
Public schools in my area promote liberal views, and it is wrong	10.8 (3.1)	15.5 (2.2)
Public schools in my area promote liberal views, as they should	10.2 (3.0)	6.0 (1.3)
Public schools in my area promote conservative views, and it is wrong	4.1 (1.9)	7.5 (1.6)
Public schools in my area promote conservative views, as they should	13.2 (3.3)	7.1 (1.7)
Public schools in my area do not promote specific political views	24.0 (4.5)	14.4 (2.0)
I'm not sure if public schools in my area promote specific political views	37.7 (5.2)	49.6 (2.9)
Number of Observations (unweighted)	*118*	*410*

Note: Participants were asked to indicate which of the above statements they most agreed with. Cells indicate weighted percent selecting each option by whether the participant indicates having children under age 18. Standard errors for each value are in parentheses.

Table S17. Polytomous Logistic Regression of perceptions of local schools ideological partiality (n=528)

Local Schools Promote Particular Views		**Local Schools Do Not Promote Particular Views**	
Age	-0.021**	**Age**	-0.022*
	(0.008)		(0.009)
Sex [ref: Male]		**Sex** [ref: Male]	
Female	-0.880**	Female	-0.130
	(0.240)		(0.299)
Race [ref: White]		**Race** [ref: White]	
Black or Af. American	0.925*	Black or Af. American	-0.675
	(0.379)		(0.558)
Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin	-0.676	Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin	-1.123*
	(0.401)		(0.545)
Asian origin	0.360	Asian origin	-0.375
	(0.632)		(0.873)
Other	0.572	Other	2.401*
	(0.897)		(1.053)
Political Affiliation [ref: Democrat]		**Political Affiliation** [ref: Democrat]	
Independent	-0.155	Independent	-0.542
	(0.322)		(0.410)
Republican	0.967**	Republican	0.407
	(0.299)		(0.355)
No Party Selected	-0.560	No Party Selected	-12.365**
	(0.875)		(0.573)
Geographical Region [ref: Northeast]		**Geographical Region** [ref: Northeast]	
Midwest	-0.221	Midwest	0.348
	(0.406)		(0.517)
South	-0.148	South	0.125
	(0.352)		(0.478)
West	-0.295	West	0.467
	(0.392)		(0.497)
Level of Education [ref:<High school]		**Level of Education** [ref:<High school]	
High school to less than 4-year college	-0.745	High school to less than 4-year college	1.267
	(0.475)		(1.124)
4-year college or more	-0.227	4-year college or more	1.838
	(0.500)		(1.136)
Intercept	1.609*	**Intercept**	-1.348
	(0.710)		(1.382)

*p<.05; ** p<.01

Note: Results of Polytomous Logistic Regression of Perception of Local Public Schools Political Steering in Logits. Reference category for outcome: "I'm not sure if public schools in my area promote specific political views." Coefficients are logit differences in the likelihood of selecting the response option indicated by the column headings over the reference category (in this case, uncertainty about whether local schools are engaged in steering) for each independent variable, controlling for covariates.

Table S18. Random assignment balance check for survey experiment: Political Affiliation by condition

Experimental Condition	**Political Affiliation**			
	Democrat	**Independent**	**Republican**	**No Party**
Teacher supports Trump	61 (32.5%)	44 (36.4%)	66 (32.2%)	6 (42.9%)
Teacher supports Harris	61 (32.5%)	37 (30.6%)	76 (30.6%)	3 (21.4%)
Teacher supports unnamed Candidate	66 (35.1%)	40 (33.1%)	63 (33.1%)	5 (35.7%)
Pearson $\chi^2(6) = 3.19, p=.78$				

Note: Unweighted rates of assignment to experimental conditions by political affiliation. Cell values are numbers of observations and column percentage, rounded to tenth of a percent.

Table S19. Random assignment balance check for survey experiment: Sex by condition

Experimental Condition	**Sex**	
	Male	**Female**
Teacher supports Trump	88 (38.4%)	89 (29.8%)
Teacher supports Harris	70 (30.6%)	107 (35.8%)
Teacher supports unnamed Candidate	71 (31.0%)	103 (34.5%)
Pearson $\chi^2(2) = 4.42, p=.11$		

Note: Unweighted rates of assignment to experimental conditions by sex. Cell values are numbers of observations and column percentage, rounded to tenth of a percent.

Table S20. Random assignment balance check for survey experiment: Race by condition

Experimental Condition	**Race**				
	White	**Black**	**Hispanic**	**Asian**	**Other**
Teacher supports Trump	135 (35.0%)	18 (32.1%)	15 (25.9%)	5 (31.3%)	4 (33.33%)
Teacher supports Harris	125 (32.4%)	20 (35.7%)	23 (39.7%)	5 (31.3%)	4 (33.33%)
Teacher supports unnamed Candidate	126 (32.6%)	18 (32.1%)	20 (34.5%)	6 (37.5%)	4 (33.33%)
Pearson $\chi^2(8) = 2.38, p=.97$					

Note: Unweighted rates of assignment to experimental conditions by race. Cell values are numbers of observations and column percentage, rounded to tenth of a percent.

Table S21: Random assignment balance check for survey experiment: Age by condition

Experimental Condition	**Age**			
	18-34	**35-49**	**50-64**	**65+**
Teacher supports Trump	30 (33.7%)	45 (36.0%)	55 (35.0%)	47 (29.9%)
Teacher supports Harris	33 (37.1%)	29 (23.2%)	60 (38.2%)	55 (35.0%)
Teacher supports unnamed Candidate	26 (29.2%)	51 (40.8%)	42 (26.8%)	55 (35.0%)
Pearson $\chi^2(6) = 11.14, p=.08$				

Note: Unweighted rates of assignment to experimental conditions by age band. Cell values are numbers of observations and column percentage, rounded to tenth of a percent.

Table S22: Random assignment balance check for survey experiment: Income by condition

Experimental Condition	**Income**			
	<$30K	**$30-75K**	**$75K+**	**Decline to ans.**
Teacher supports Trump	59 (31.4%)	43 (27.2%)	72 (41.6%)	3 (33.3%)
Teacher supports Harris	58 (30.9%)	63 (39.9%)	53 (30.6%)	3 (33.3%)
Teacher supports unnamed Candidate	71 (34.8%)	52 (32.9%)	48 (27.8%)	3 (33.3%)
Pearson $\chi^2(6) = 10.99, p=.09$				

Note: Unweighted rates of assignment to experimental conditions by income band. Cell values are numbers of observations and column percentage, rounded to tenth of a percent.

Table S23: Random assignment balance check for survey experiment: Region by condition

Experimental Condition	**Region**			
	Northeast	**Midwest**	**South**	**West**
Teacher supports Trump	27 (34.2%)	25 (24.0%)	80 (36.4%)	45 (36.0%)
Teacher supports Harris	22 (27.9%)	39 (37.5%)	78 (35.5%)	38 (30.4%)
Teacher supports unnamed Candidate	30 (38.0%)	40 (38.5%)	62 (28.2%)	42 (33.6%)
Pearson $\chi^2(6) = 8.52$, $p=.20$				

Note: Unweighted rates of assignment to experimental conditions by geographical region. Cell values are numbers of observations and column percentage, rounded to tenth of a percent.

Table S24: Random assignment balance check for survey experiment: Parental Status by condition

Experimental Condition	**Parental Status**	
	No children under 18	**Has children under 18**
Teacher supports Trump	136 (33.2%)	41 (34.8%)
Teacher supports Harris	145 (35.4%)	32 (27.1%)
Teacher supports unnamed Candidate	129 (31.5%)	45 (38.1%)
Pearson $\chi^2(2) = 3.16, p=.21$		

Note: Table presents unweighted rates of assignment to experimental conditions by parental status. Cell values are numbers of observations and column percentage, rounded to tenth of a percent.

Table S25: Random assignment balance check for survey experiment: Attitudes about Impartiality by condition

Experimental Condition	**Attitudes about Educational Impartiality**			
	Favors promotion of liberal views	**Favors promotion of conservative views**	**Opposes promotion of specific views**	**Indifferent**
Teacher supports Trump	20 (42.6%)	30 (35.3%)	95 (31.4%)	32 (34.4%)
Teacher supports Harris	12 (25.5%)	25 (29.4%)	116 (38.3%)	24 (25.8%)
Teacher supports unnamed Candidate	15 (31.9%)	30 (35.3%)	92 (30.4%)	37 (39.8%)
Pearson $\chi^2(6) = 8.79, p=.19$				

Note: Table presents unweighted rates of assignment to experimental conditions by normative attitudes about the promotion of political views in public schools. Cell values are numbers of observations and column percentage, rounded to tenth of a percent.

Table S26: Subsample balance checks: political affiliation

Subsample	**Political Affiliation**			
	Democrat	**Independent**	**Republican**	**No Party**
Assigned Study Items	192 (51.5%)	123 (52.1%)	211 (49.0%)	14 (35.0%)
Not Assigned Study Items	181 (48.5%)	113 (47.%9)	220 (51.0%)	26 (65.0%)
Pearson $\chi^2(3) = 4.53, p=.21$				

Note: Unweighted rates of assignment to subsample by political affiliation. Cell values are numbers of observations and column percentage, rounded to tenth of a percent.

Table S27: Subsample balance checks: Sex

Experimental Condition	**Sex**	
	Male	**Female**
Assigned Study Items	235 (47.4%)	305 (52.2%)
Not Assigned Study Items	261 (52.6%)	279 (47.8%)
Pearson $\chi^2(1) = 2.52, p=.11$		

Note: Unweighted rates of assignment to subsample by sex. Cell values are numbers of observations and column percentage, rounded to tenth of a percent.

Table S28. Subsample balance checks: Race

Experimental Condition	**Race**				
	White	**Black**	**Hispanic**	**Asian**	**Other**
Assigned Study Items	359 (50.2%)	57 (50.9%)	60 (50.4%)	16 (42.1%)	12 (50.0%)
Not Assigned Study Items	392 (49.8%)	55 (49.1%)	59 (49.6%)	22 (57.9%)	12 (50.0%)
Pearson $\chi^2(4) = 1.00, p=.91$					

Note: Unweighted rates of assignment to subsample by race. Cell values are numbers of observations and column percentage, rounded to tenth of a percent.

Table S29. Subsample balance checks: Age

Experimental Condition	**Age**			
	18-34	**35-49**	**50-64**	**65+**
Assigned Study Items	90 (47.1%)	130 (49.8%)	159 (51.8%)	161 (50.2%)
Not Assigned Study Items	101 (52.9%)	131 (50.2%)	148(48.2%)	160 (49.8%)

Pearson $\chi^2(3) = 1.03$, $p = .79$

Note: Unweighted rates of assignment to subsample by age band. Cell values are numbers of observations and column percentage, rounded to tenth of a percent.

Table S30. Subsample balance checks: Income

Experimental Condition	**Income**			
	<$30K	**$30-75K**	**$75K+**	**Decline to ans.**
Teacher supports Trump	59 (31.4%)	43 (27.2%)	72 (41.6%)	3 (33.3%)
Teacher supports Harris	58 (30.9%)	63 (39.9%)	53 (30.6%)	3 (33.3%)
Teacher supports unnamed Candidate	71 (34.8%)	52 (32.9%)	48 (27.8%)	3 (33.3%)
Pearson $\chi^2(6) = 10.99, p=.09$				

Note: Unweighted rates of assignment to experimental conditions by income band. Cell values are numbers of observations and column percentage, rounded to tenth of a percent.

Table S31. Effects of Partisan Alignment on Evaluations of Teachers' Political Disclosures (n=393)

Disclosure was appropriate		**Not enough information**	
Partisan Alignment [ref: aligned]		**Partisan Alignment** [ref: aligned]	
Misaligned	-.670*	Misaligned	-.886**
	(.315)		(.294)
Alignment Ambiguous	-.549	Alignment Ambiguous	-.160
	(.334)		(.285)
Intercept	-.280	**Intercept**	.065
	(.227)		(.207)

*p<.05; ** p<.01

Note: Results of polytomous logistic regression assessing the effects of partisan alignment on the likelihood of indicating approval, disapproval, or uncertainty due to a lack of information about a teacher's disclosure of his vote choice in the 2024 election to his high-school civics class by experimental condition. Reference category for outcome: "It was wrong for the teacher to tell the students who he voted for." Coefficients are logit differences in the likelihood of selecting the response option indicated by the column headings relative to the reference category (i.e. that the teacher's disclosure was inappropriate) by alignment between experimental condition and partisan affiliation. Alignment is defined such that Democrats and Republicans randomly exposed to versions of the vignette in which the teacher professed his support for the candidate from their party (Kamala Harris or Donald Trump) were coded as "aligned," those exposed to a teacher endorsing the opposing party's candidate were coded as "misaligned," and those exposed to a version of the vignette in which the identity of the candidate the teacher expressed his support for was ambiguous are coded as "ambiguously aligned." Standard errors in parentheses. Respondents who did not identify as either a Democrat or a Republican (n=135) were excluded from analysis.

Table S32: Effects of Ideological Alignment on Evaluations of Teachers' Political Disclosures (n=308)

Disclosure was appropriate		**Not enough information**	
Partisan Alignment [ref: aligned]		**Partisan Alignment** [ref: aligned]	
Misaligned	-.1.02**	Misaligned	-.826*
	(.359)		(.323)
Alignment Ambiguous	-1.132**	Alignment Ambiguous	-.654
	(.386)		(.328)
Intercept	-.031	**Intercept**	.217
	(.248)		(.234)

*p<.05; ** p<.01

Note: Results of polytomous logistic regression assessing the effects of ideological alignment on the likelihood of indicating approval, disapproval, or uncertainty due to a lack of information about a teacher's disclosure of his vote choice in the 2024 election to his high-school civics class by experimental condition. Reference category for outcome: "It was wrong for the teacher to tell the students who he voted for." Coefficients are logit differences in the likelihood of selecting the response option indicated by the column headings relative to the reference category (i.e. that the teacher's disclosure was inappropriate) by alignment between experimental condition and ideological self categorization. Alignment is defined such that liberals and conservatives randomly exposed to versions of the vignette in which the teacher professed his support for the candidate from the party associated with their ideological leanings (Kamala Harris for liberals or Donald Trump for conservatives) were coded as "aligned," those exposed to a teacher endorsing the opposing party's candidate were coded as "misaligned," and those exposed to a version of the vignette in which the identity of the candidate the teacher expressed his support for was ambiguous are coded as "ambiguously aligned." Standard errors in parentheses. Respondents who did not identify as either a liberal or a conservative (n=220) were excluded from analysis.

Table S33. Effects of Alignment between views about Trump and Teachers' candidate selection on Evaluations of Teachers' Political Disclosures (n=308)

Disclosure was appropriate		**Not enough information**	
Partisan Alignment [ref: aligned]		**Partisan Alignment** [ref: aligned]	
Misaligned	-.1.02**	Misaligned	-.826*
	(.359)		(.323)
Alignment Ambiguous	-1.132**	Alignment Ambiguous	-.654
	(.386)		(.328)
Intercept	-.031	**Intercept**	.217
	(.248)		(.234)

*p<.05; ** p<.01

Note: Results of polytomous logistic regression assessing the effects of alignment between approval of Donald Trump and experimental condition on the likelihood of indicating approval, disapproval, or uncertainty due to a lack of information about a teacher's disclosure of his vote choice in the 2024 election to his high-school civics class. Reference category for outcome: "It was wrong for the teacher to tell the students who he voted for." Coefficients are logit differences in the likelihood of selecting the response option indicated by the column headings relative to the reference category (i.e. that the teacher's disclosure was inappropriate) by alignment between experimental condition and ideological self categorization. Alignment is defined such that those who approve or disapprove of Donald Trump's performance exposed to versions of the vignette in which the teacher professed his support for the candidate from the party associated with their judgement (Kamala Harris for those who disapprove or Donald Trump for those who approve) were coded as "aligned," those exposed to a teacher endorsing the alternative candidate were coded as "misaligned," and those exposed to a version of the vignette in which the identity of the candidate the teacher expressed his support for was ambiguous are coded as "ambiguously aligned." Standard errors in parentheses. Respondents who expressed ambivalence about Donald Trump were excluded from analysis.