

A grayscale photograph of a man in a white dress shirt and a patterned tie, speaking into a microphone. His right arm is raised high in the air. Behind him is a large, dark sign with the letters 'WE' in a bold, sans-serif font. The background is slightly blurred, suggesting an indoor setting like a conference or a stage.

# Motivated Reasoning and Self-Interest in a Pandemic: The 2020 WE Scandal

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# What is the WE Scandal?

- Trudeau government developed a plan to support post-secondary student who were unable to find summer jobs
- Canada Student Service Grant
  - Paid volunteer program
  - 23 June – WE Charity would administer
  - 35,000 applications
- Information about ties between Trudeau family, finance minister and Charity emerged in June
- Program dismantled

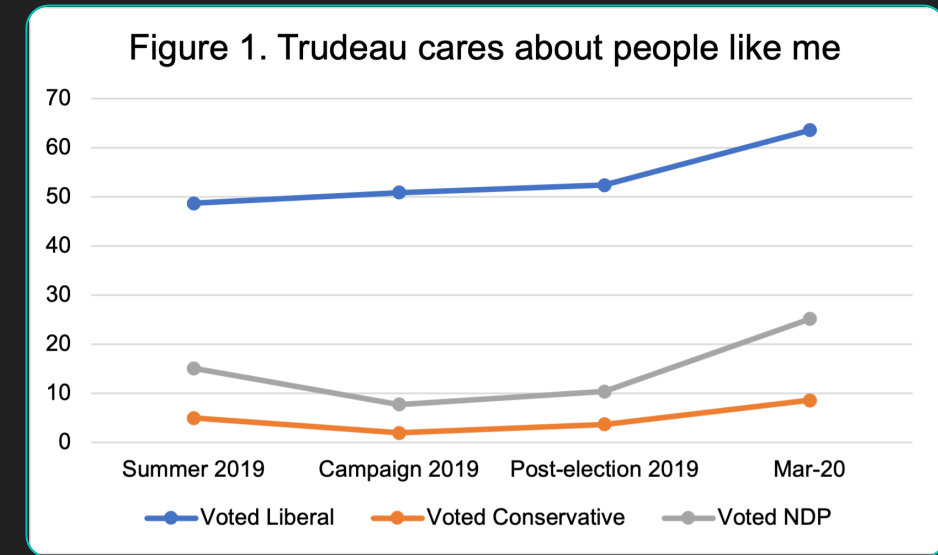
# Reactions to the WE Scandal

- Partisan motivated reasoning (PMR) suggests party supporters will react to information based upon partisan implications
  - Co-partisans will downplay or ignore
  - Out-partisans will react more severely
- Two potential complications
  - A) Pandemic context
  - B) Self-interest in program

# Two Potential Moderators

## A) Pandemic Context

- Government enjoyed a “COVID bump” among all voters, even out-partisans
- Urgency of pandemic led to reliance on government



## B) Self-Interest

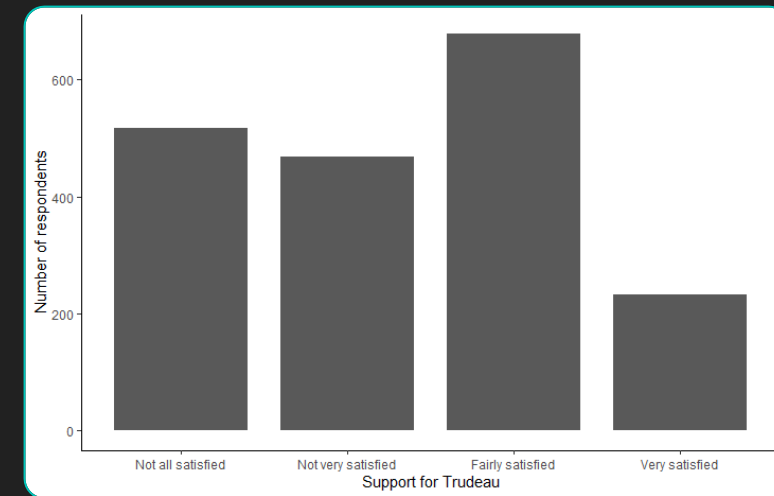
- From \$1,000 to \$5,000
- Incoming, current or outgoing post-secondary students
- \*jobs were scarce\*

# Hypotheses

- H1: Respondents punish the Trudeau government when primed to think about the WE scandal
- H1a: Co-partisans (here Liberals) will be less inclined to punish the Trudeau government for the scandal, as compared to opposing partisans
- H2: Respondents are less willing to punish the Trudeau government when primed to think both about the WE scandal and the objectives of the program given the urgency of the pandemic
- H3: Self-interest in benefits of CSSB will moderate impact of WE scandal on support for Trudeau government
  
- Exploratory 1: Does the urgency of the pandemic moderate partisan motivations?
- Exploratory 2: Does self-interest moderate partisan motivations?

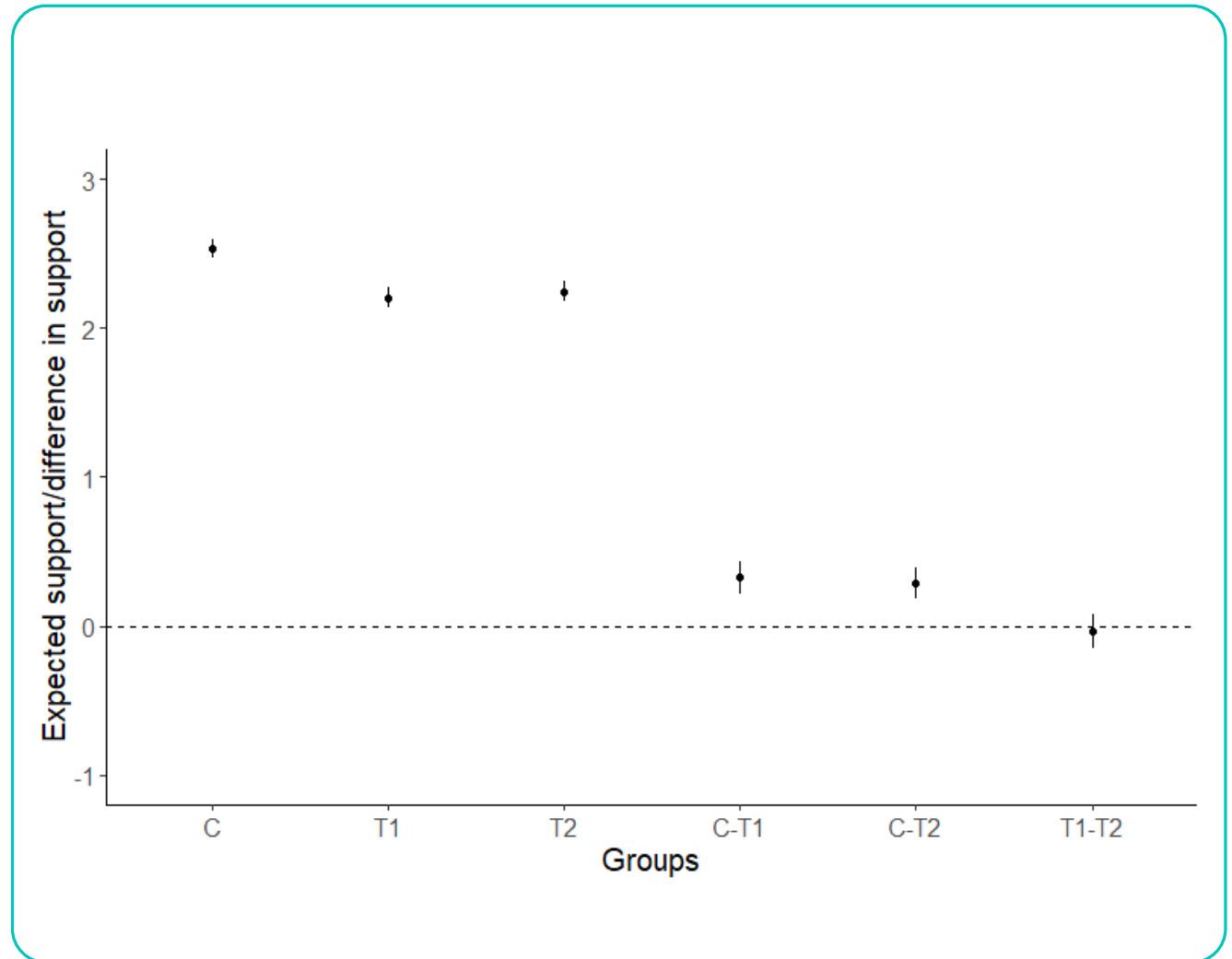
# Survey Experiment

- CONTROL (n = 669): How satisfied are you with the performance of the federal government under Justin Trudeau?  
Very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied, not at all satisfied  
Don't know/prefer not to answer
- T1 (n = 625): **In light of the recent WE Charity scandal**, how satisfied are you with the performance of the federal government under Justin Trudeau?
- T2 (n = 602): **In light of the recent WE Charity scandal surrounding the Canada Student Service Grant program aimed at compensating post-secondary students and recent graduates for volunteer work during the pandemic**, how satisfied are you with the performance of the federal government under Justin Trudeau?

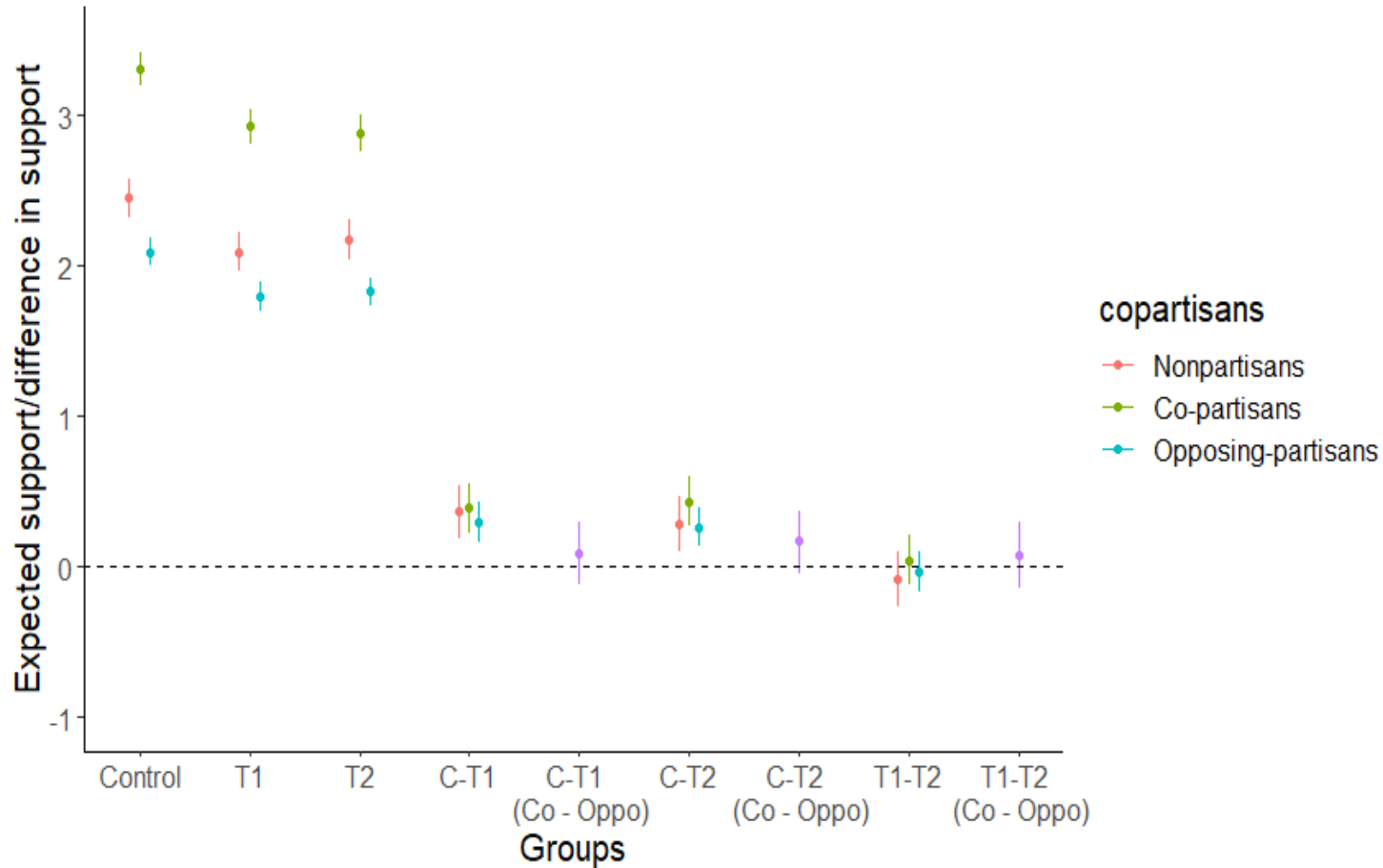


# Full Sample Results

- Expectation (H1): Respondents punish the Trudeau government when primed to think about the WE scandal ✓
- Expectation (H2): Respondents are less willing to punish the Trudeau government when primed to think both about the WE scandal and the objectives of the program given the urgency of the pandemic (T2 vs. T1) ✗



# Partisan motivated reasoning

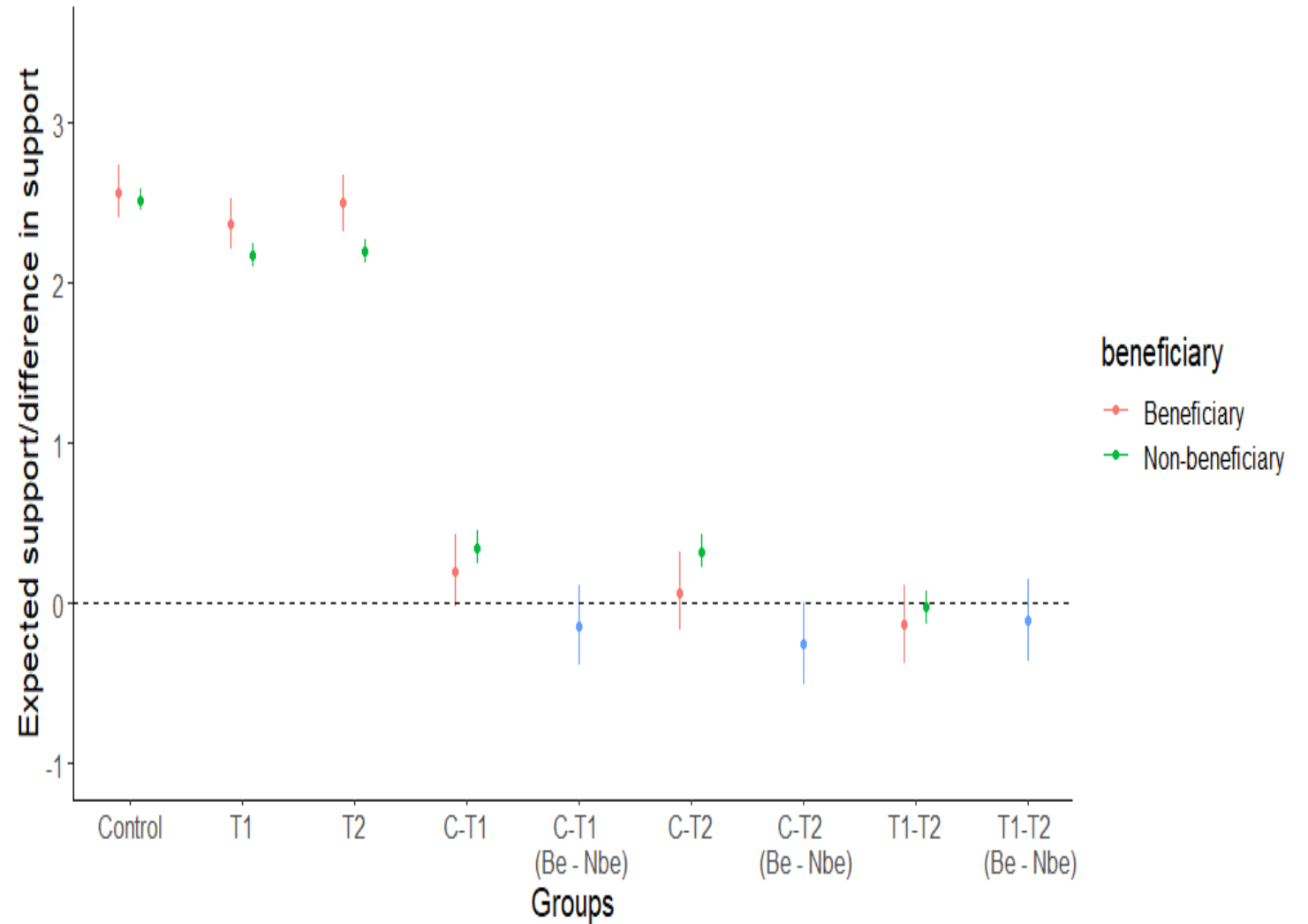


- Expectation (H1a): Liberals will be less inclined to punish Trudeau than others ✗
- Expectation (Exploratory 1): Does the urgency of the pandemic moderate partisan motivations? (T2 vs. T1) ✗



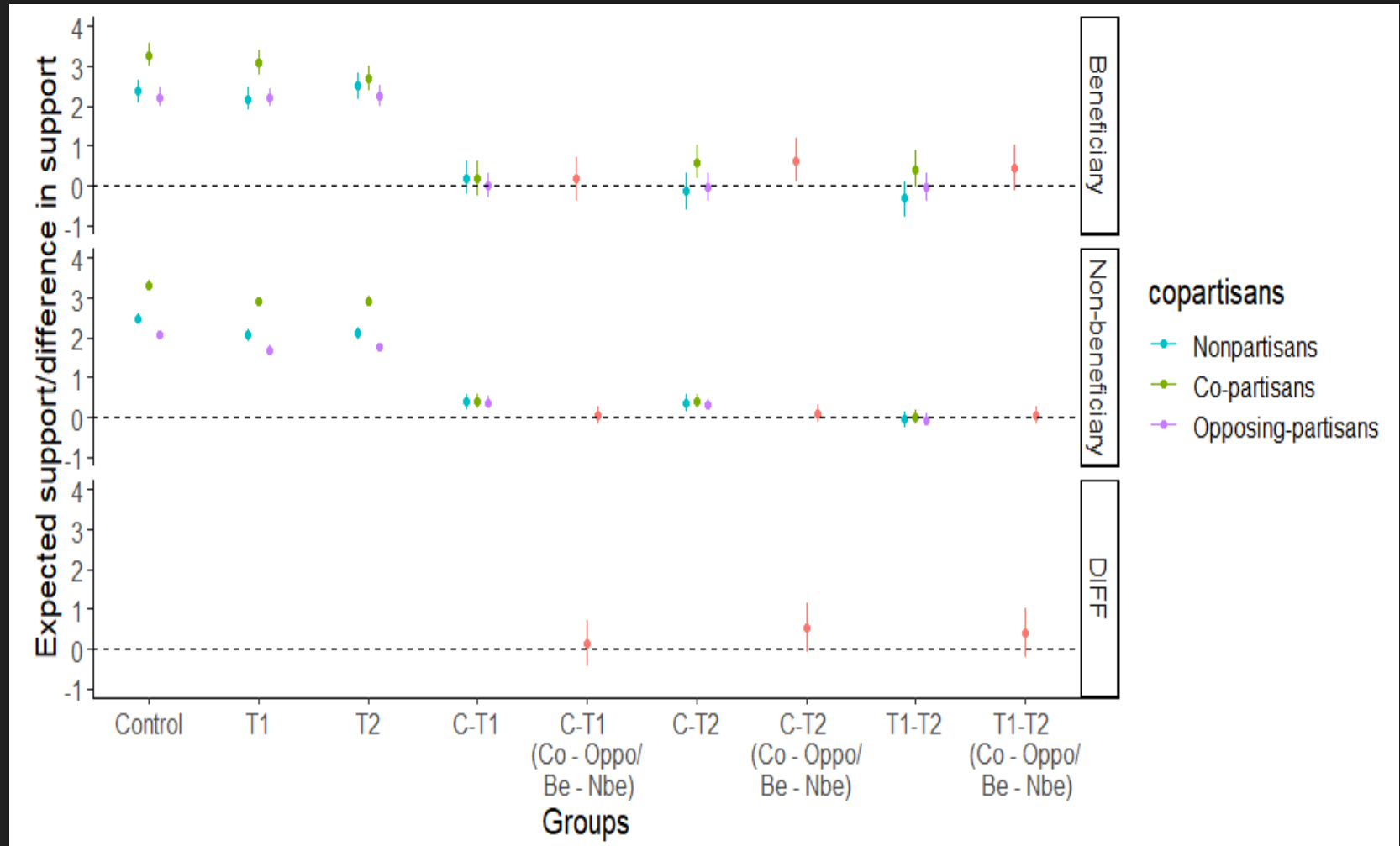
# Self-interested motivation

- Expectation (H3): Self-interested considerations (T2) will motivate reasoning for specific individuals ✓



# Does self-interest moderate partisan motivations?

- Expectation (Exploratory 2): Does self-interest moderate partisan motivations?



# Conclusions

- No evidence that partisan motivated reasoning influenced effect of scandal on evaluations of Trudeau
- Priming the urgency of the pandemic did not affect reactions to the scandal
  - But we do not have non-pandemic scandal results to see if overall reactions are muted
  - Lack of PMR could be evidence of pandemic effect
- Self-interest did influence how people evaluated the scandal
- The interaction of self-interest and PMR has unclear effects
  - Co-partisans were *less* supportive
  - Opposing and non-partisans had opposite reaction

# Next Steps

1

Investigate ambivalence

2

Compare to similar  
experiment with SNC-  
Lavalin scandal

Thank you.

All comments/criticisms/suggestions  
welcome!

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