The Association Between Trump Policy Agreement and Climate Change Belief/Concern

Nathan Aszkenazy, Quantitative Analysis Center, Wesleyan University

Introduction

- Ever since the emergence of former President Donald Trump in 2016, the United States political sphere has been very polarized due to the views and actions taken by the Trump Administration.

- As a result of this, traditional parties such as Democrat and Republican became more partisan with members beginning to move toward more extreme ends of the political spectrum.

- These stigmas and beliefs portrayed through social media resulted in an alienation of moderates and created sentiment that if one belongs to one party it means they disagree with most viewpoints of the other party.

- One issue in particular, climate change policy, seemed to especially divide the country.

- The Trump Administration took step after step to slow climate action and reverse many of the regulations put in place during the Obama Administration as their primary focus was on economic growth and not environmental protection. (Borunda, 2020)

Methods

Sample

- Data were drawn from the Fall 2018 National Survey on Energy and the Environment, representing a sample of 800 adults ages 18 or older living in the United States, conducted by Muhlenberg College. Respondents were called up to 5 times on their cell and landlines. The sample data has been weighted by gender, race, age, income, and educational attainment to reflect those population characteristics of the United States as reported by the United States Census Bureau.

Measures

- Political Party was coded as 1- Democrat, 2-Republican, 3-Other Party, and 4-Indpendent

- Respondents were then asked if they believed temperatures have been increasing over the past 4 decades (i.e. do you believe in climate change) which was coded into a categorical value of 0 and 1. 0, believing in climate change, and 1, not believing.

- Climate change concern and Trump climate policy approval were both measured on a 4-point categorical scale. 1-not a serious problem/strongly disapprove, 2-not too serious/somewhat disapprove, 3-somewhat serious/somewhat approve, 4-very serious/strongly approve

Research Questions

- Is there an association between political party affiliation and belief?
- Disregarding political party, is there a connection between approval level of Trump Climate Policy and climate change concern?
- Is Trump climate policy approval the confounding variable that determines climate change belief?

Results

Univariate

- 17% of respondents said there has been no evidence of warming in the past 4 decades

- Another 11% answered that they were not sure and the other 72% said they did believe there has been evidence of warming.

- 31% of respondents were Democrats, 28% Republican, 34% Independent, and 7% made up of other parties.

- 65% believed climate change to be a serious problem, 22% somewhat serious, 7% not too serious, and 3% not serious at all.

- 21% of respondedts strongly approve of Trump Climate Policy, 13% somewhat approve, 14% somewhat disapprove, and 41% strongly disapprove

Bivariate

- A Chi-Squared test of significance determined that there is a significant relationship between both political party and climate change concern as well as a climate change concern and Trump climate policy approval. (p<.0001)

- Figures 1 and 2 illustrate these relationships in graph form

Multivariate

- A logistic regression shows that although climate change concern is significantly affected by political party affiliation, Trump climate policy approval is the confounding variable.

- Regression analysis showed that in comparison to those who strongly disagree with Trump climate policy, those who only somewhat are 2x more likely to not believe in climate change, those who somewhat agree 15x more likely, and those who completely agree 34x more likely.

- Regression analysis also showed that in comparison, to Democrats, Republicans are .358328x more likely to not believe in climate change, Indpendents .1346992x more likely, and other parties .1441799x more likely.
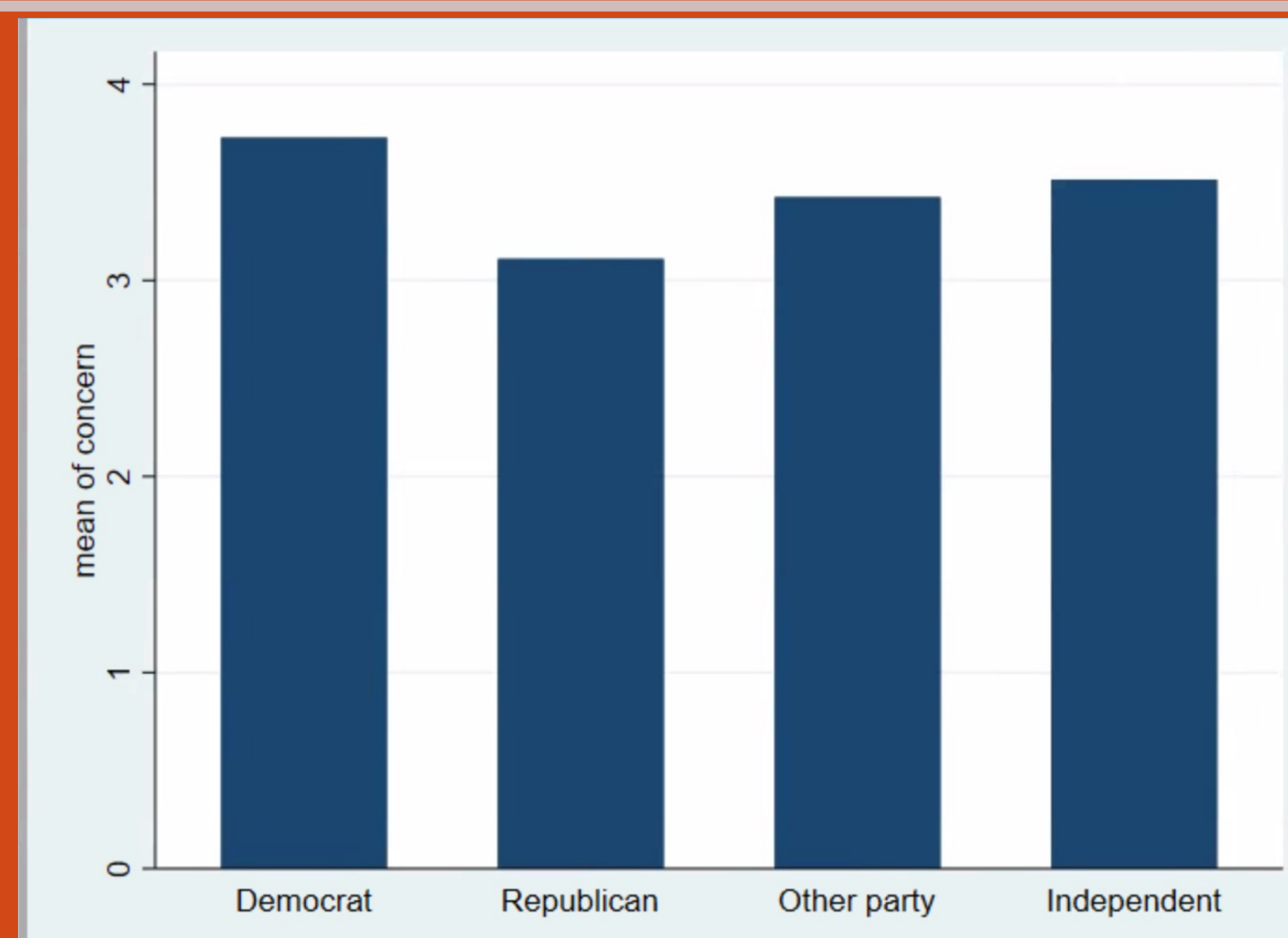

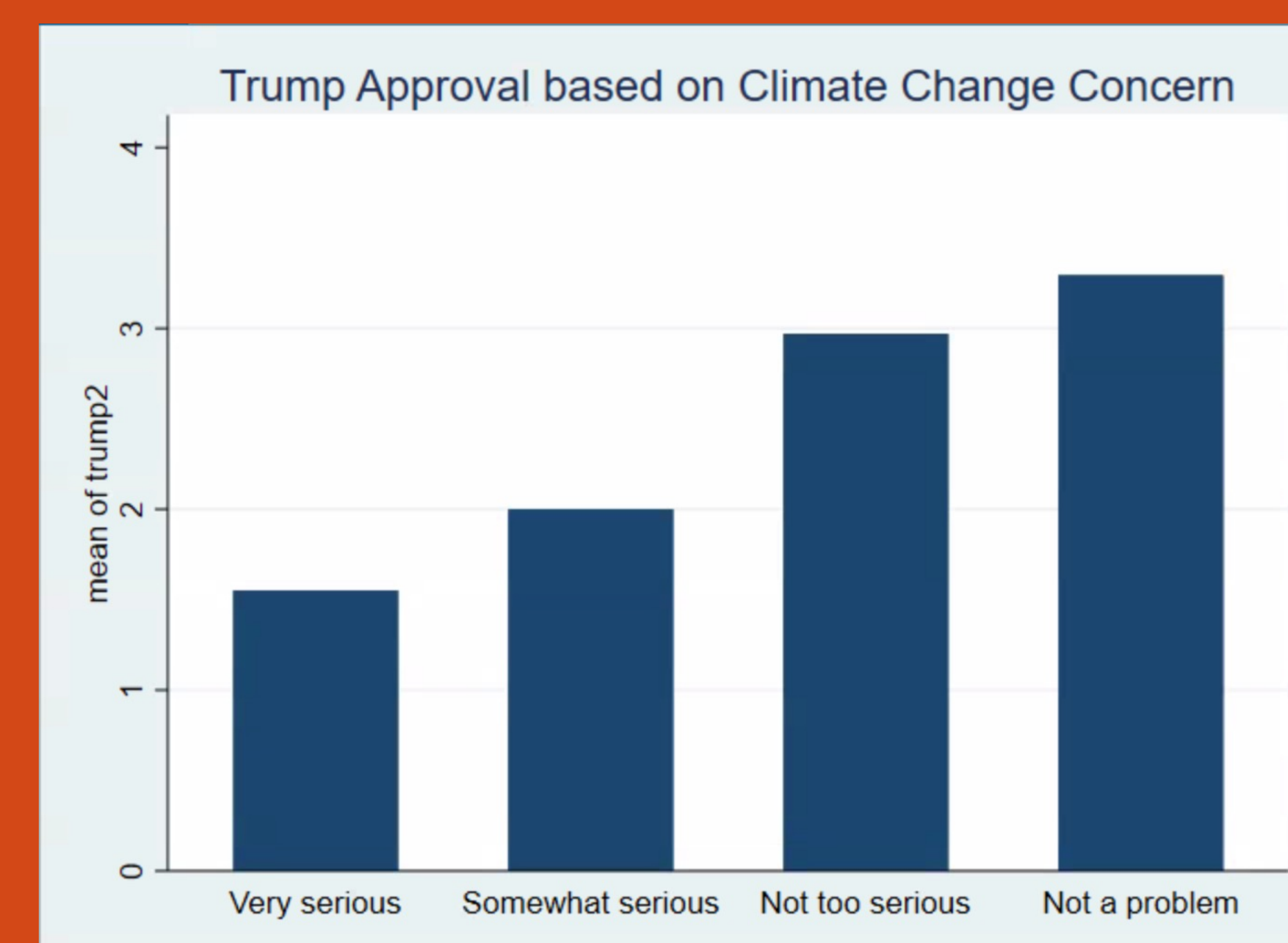Figure 1. Climate Change Concern by Political Party Affiliation

Figure 2: Trump climate policy approval based on climate change concern
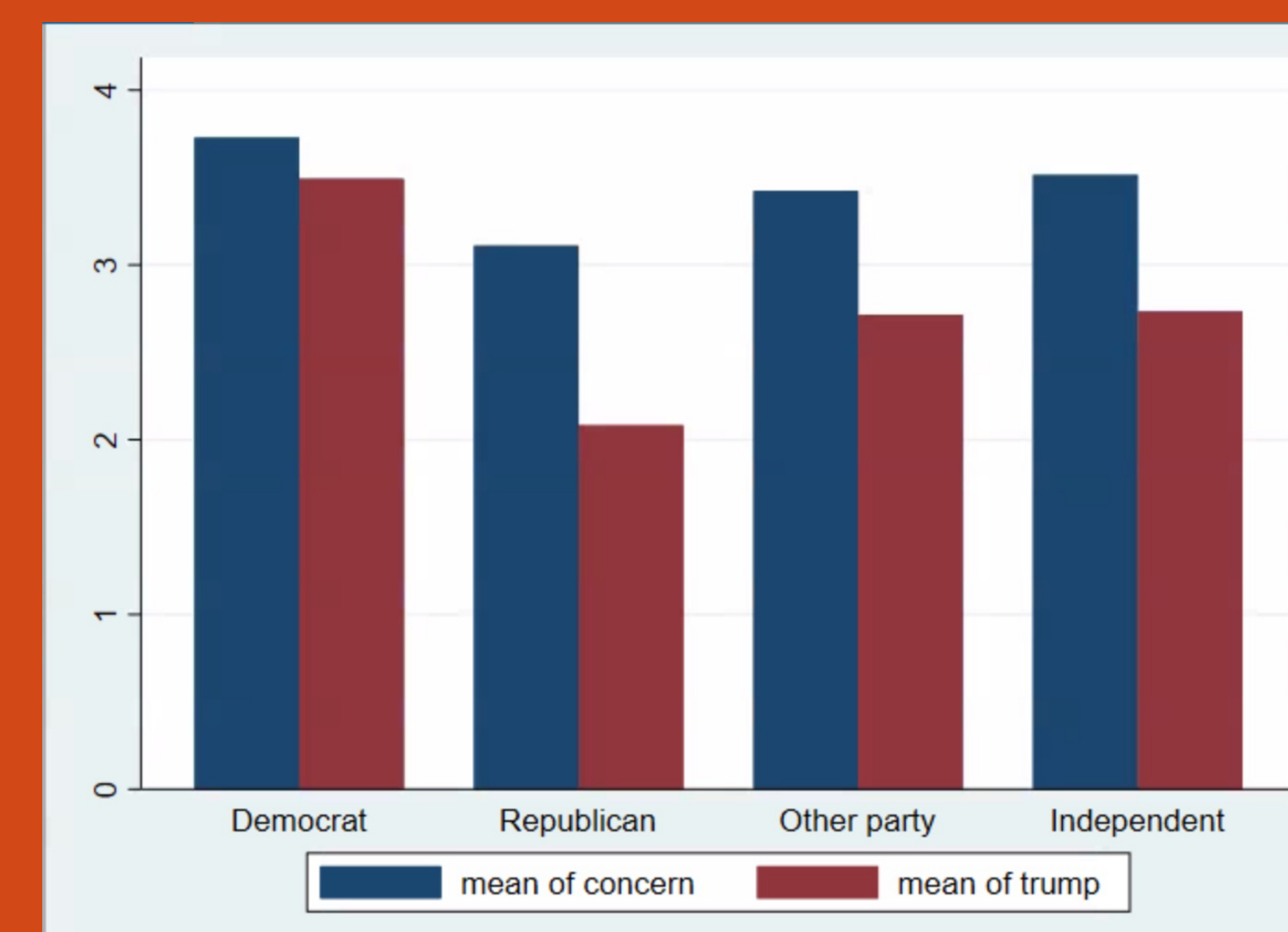

Figure 3: Mean of climate change concern and Trump climate policy approval within parties

Discussion

- This study confirms what has already been established about the partisan divide on climate change belief and concern.

- However, this study goes deeper to explore if this divide in climate change sentiment is based solely on party affiliation, or if there is another variable affecting results.

- As can be inferred from the data shown, there was a significant association found between Trump climate policy and climate change concern.

- This shows how in 2018, there was not necessarily a divide between political parties, but a divide between those who support Trump and those who do not.

- When political party is taken out of the equation and climate change concern is solely gauged on level of Trump climate policy approval, the graph skews left showing how people who are less concerned about climate change tend to support Trump more.

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