

Can online backlash stifle free speech?*

Pre-registration 4

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*All errors are our own.

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Our third experiment conducted in March 2023 resulted in a negative effect of *priming* on *speaking up*, contrary to the positive (ie. backlash) effect observed in the first two experiments run in late 2021. Since we also added a treatment about the likelihood of speaking up in the experiment, we now investigate if the opposite effect is due to the addition of this extra treatment. If this is the case, it suggests that it triggers strategic substitutability: informing participants about others' willingness to speak up increases 'free-riding'. Alternatively, if the negative results are robust even without the inclusion of the new information, it indicates that our initial results were either due to sampling variation, or that the perception of cancel culture has shifted over time.

We follow the original protocol pre-registered on 29 March 2023 with a number of changes as described below:

1. We collect 370 observations using US participants who identify as Independents/unaligned from Prolific.
2. We only include the StrongPrime and Control conditions (dropping WeakPrime), half of the participants assigned to each.
3. In addition to the HiPub and LoPub conditions (adding a sentence about how many others were willing to speak up), we include a condition without this sentence (NoPub). Half of the participants are assigned to the NoPub treatment, and one quarter to each of the HiPub and LoPub treatments.
4. We shorten the experiment and drop the elicitation of WTP for publication and norms perception.

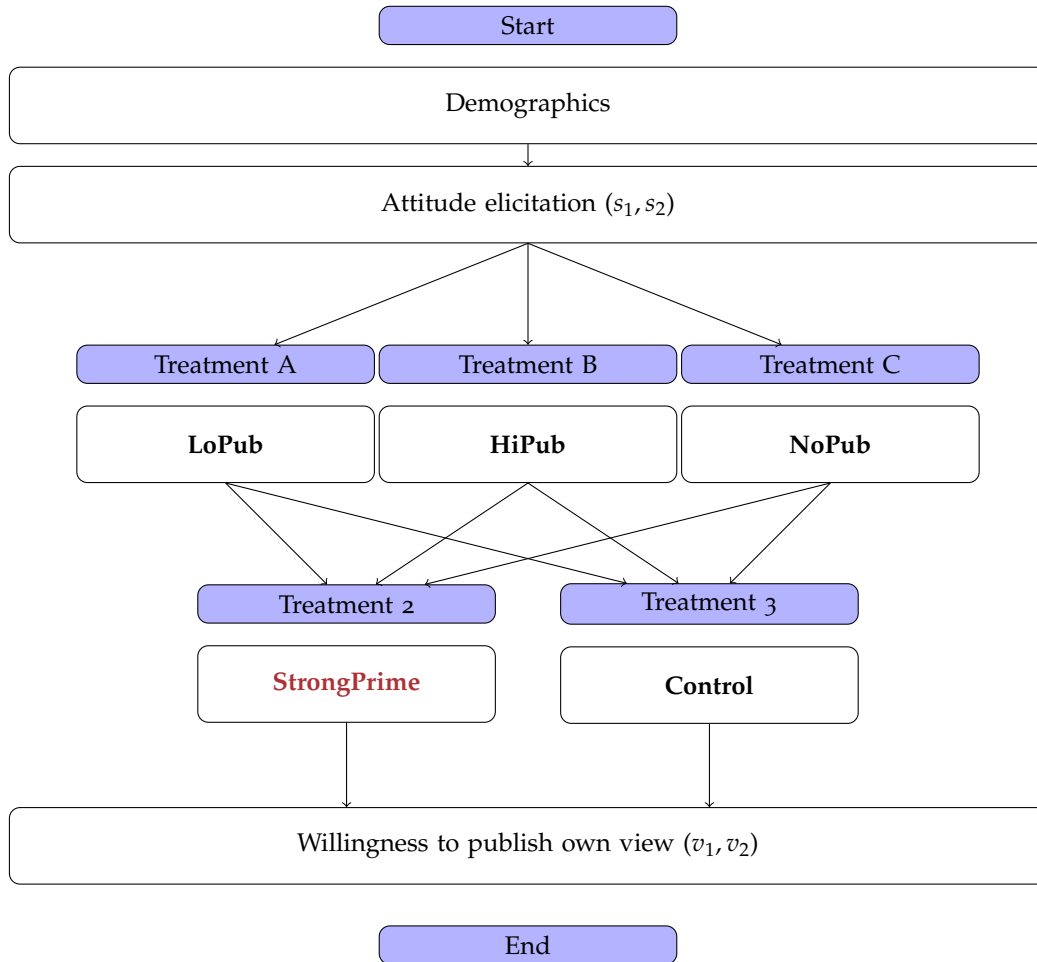


Figure 1: Experiment timeline