


ORIGINAL ARTICLE

The Political Consequences of State Pride

Jennifer Wolak 

Department of Political Science, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan, USA
Email: wolakjen@msu.edu

(Received 07 June 2024; revised 01 November 2024; accepted 12 November 2024)

Abstract

Separate from their feelings of national pride, Americans may also feel proud of the state where they live. I explore the political consequences of these feelings of state pride. I propose that when people feel proud of the state they reside in, they are more willing to empower their state governments to take action to address state challenges. Using survey responses from a module of the 2020 Cooperative Election Study, I find that people who express greater pride in their state are more likely to advocate for state spending on social programs. Feelings of state pride are also associated with support for policy devolution and the belief that state governments should have more influence over policymaking within the federal system. State governments have incentives to try to cultivate feelings of state pride, as those who feel proud of their state are more willing to empower their state government to effect change.

Keywords: state pride; pride; state identity; public opinion; support for policy devolution

Feelings of state pride

Texans who love their state can buy a waffle iron to make Texas-shaped waffles. Michiganders can express their state pride with an oven mitt imprinted with a map of the Lower Peninsula. Stores in shopping malls offer up state-themed gifts, from local foods to state-themed Christmas ornaments to state-shaped casserole dishes. People's interest in owning state-themed items suggests that many people feel more than just a connection to the place where they live – they also feel proud of their state. When people place state-shaped stickers on their cars, choose to get a state tribute tattoo, or opt to hang a state flag from their porch, they display their feelings of state pride for others to see. Evidence from surveys confirms that people see their state as a point of pride. Most people describe their state as one of the very best states to live in (McCarthy 2014). A majority of Americans prefer staying in their state to moving to any other state (Saad 2014). When asked to choose the best state in a series of head-to-head state matchups, people picked the state where they live over any other state four out of five times (White and Sanders 2021).

Are these feelings of state pride consequential for state governments? I propose that when people feel proud of the state where they live, they are more likely to want to empower their state government to take leadership on policy initiatives. Using survey responses to a module of the 2020 Cooperative Election Study, I explore the political consequences of feelings of state pride. I find that when people feel proud of their state, they are more likely to think that policymaking authority should be devolved from the national government and entrusted to state officeholders. Those with greater state pride are also more likely to support increased state government spending on social programs in the state. I also show that these effects are distinctive to state pride, and not merely a product of general satisfaction with the job performance of state officeholders or the strength of identification as a state resident.

Most people feel at least some pride in the state they live in – and these feelings affect how they see their state government. State elections have been argued to be increasingly nationalized, where people's electoral choices reflect what is going on in Washington, D.C., rather than what is happening in their state (Abramowitz and Webster 2016; Hopkins 2018; Rogers 2016; Sievert and Banda 2024; Zingher and Richman 2019). If public expectations of state government reflect only partisan politics at the national level, then we might worry about the responsiveness of state governments to local circumstances. I find that people's demands of state government are informed by more than just partisan battles at the national level. When people love their state and take pride in the place where they live, they are more willing to empower state governments to address local challenges.

This research builds on recent studies that highlight the importance of state identities. People's attachments to the place where they live inform evaluations of gubernatorial job performance, trust in state government, and the kinds of candidates they prefer (Munis 2021; Pears and Sydnor 2022; Winburn et al. 2024). But while these studies focus on the strength of people's self-identification as residents of their states, I show that the feelings of pride people feel about the place where they live are politically important as well. Feeling proud of one's state has distinctive effects from those associated with self-identifying as a Texan or as a Michigander.

Scholars of federalism have argued that people's loyalties to their states are a force that can serve as a check against the centralization of power with the national government (Levy 2007; Riker 1964). But many have doubted that Americans really hold politically meaningful attachments to their state (Bulman-Pozen 2014; Feeley and Rubin 2008; Levy 2007). I show that many feel proud of their state, and these loyalties inform their preferences about the balance of power in a federal system. Calls for devolution are not merely a reflection of people's partisan and ideological goals – they also reflect people's esteem for the state where they live.

These findings help explain why state governments engage in symbolic efforts to boost state morale. State officials act to promote their state in multiple ways. In their state of the state addresses, governors highlight the features and accomplishments that they think make their state great (Crew and Lewis 2011; Winburn et al. 2024). State legislatures select unifying symbols in the form of mottos, flags, and state birds to represent the state. All 50 states mandate state history as part of students' social studies curriculum. When elected officials invest in boosting state pride, it can cultivate goodwill among state constituents in ways that can ultimately serve the interests of state governments.

Pride in one's nation has been argued to be a positive force in politics, at least so long as it does not cross over into nationalistic hatreds toward others. To Almond and Verba (1965), pride in one's country is part of civic culture. When people feel pride in

their community, they are more likely to participate in politics (Richey 2023). Feelings of national pride can bring people together to pursue common interests (Putnam 2000). These findings show that feelings of state pride also have political rewards for state governments. When people think of their state and feel proud of its people, culture, or history, they are more likely to say their state government should be empowered to act on behalf of state residents.

National pride and state pride

National pride reflects the warm feelings people hold about the country where they live (Smith and Jarkko 1998). When people express pride, it is seen as an expression of their love for their country. National pride can serve as a unifying force, one that inspires people to take action to help their country (Huddy 2023). Feelings of pride find their roots in the emotional rewards people experience in response to the shared symbols, collective experiences, and past accomplishments of the nation (Sullivan, Fried, and Dietz 1992). Pride is different from social identification with a place in its symbolic and affective nature (Schildkraut 2014). A national or state identity reflects specific membership in a group and how people have internalized that membership into how they see themselves. Pride is less about whether people see their state as central to their personal identities, but instead reflects people's affect toward the place and what it represents (Theiss-Morse 2009; Wolak and Dawkins 2017). While national identity often emphasizes the boundaries that separate people, national pride reflects those things that bring people together (Schildkraut 2014; Theiss-Morse 2009).

Nearly all studies of pride and patriotism have focused on people's feelings about the country where they live. But we have reasons to believe that people may feel proud of not just their country, but also their region or community (Flavin and Shufeldt 2024; Jiménez et al. 2021; Richey 2023; Schildkraut 2024). Work in political science has increasingly recognized how important place can be to how people see themselves (Cramer 2016; Jacobs and Munis 2019, 2020; Wong 2010). People may identify as rural residents or city dwellers, and they may also describe the states where they live as part of their social identities (Pears and Sydnor 2022; Schildkraut 2024). States are meaningful political geographies in a federal system like the United States. The matters that fall under state mandates are often issues that have the most direct influences on people's day-to-day lives. People have an affinity for their own state (Jacobs and Munis 2020) and many report psychological attachments to the state where they live (Hopkins 2018; Pears and Sydnor 2022; Schildkraut 2024; Wong 2010). These state identities are distinctive from national identity (Pears and Sydnor 2022). While past studies highlight the importance of states to how people see themselves, I extend this work to consider the distinctive consequences of people's pride in the state where they live. I focus on state pride as an expression of the love, affection, and positive feelings people hold about their state, apart from the degree to which they self-identify as a resident of that state.

The development of state pride

Do the states inspire feelings of pride and loyalty in their residents? Writing about the political cultures of the states, Patterson (1968, p. 198) asserts, "We can assume that

Americans feel identified with, and proud of, their nation and their states. In a federal structure, the states are likely to constitute important focuses for identification, loyalty, and pride.” But others have raised doubts that Americans feel pride about the states where they live. Relative to the national government, states are often seen as less important. State governments may be geographically closer to citizens, but national politics is more likely to draw their interest and attention (Jennings and Zeigler 1970). Dahl (1967, p. 968) argued, “It cannot even be said that the states, on the whole, can tap any strong sentiments of loyalty or like-mindedness among their citizens.”

Loyalty to one’s state is sometimes viewed as a relic of history. At the founding of the nation, people’s primary loyalties were to the states where they lived. These commitments were part of the motivation for the development of a federal design of government (Levy 2007). But as time passed, people were less likely to place the same importance on state attachments. With the centralization of power with the national government, people’s loyalties to their nation prevailed. Writing in the 1960s, Riker (1964, p. 105) saw a country where, “there seems to be little state nationalism left.” Most Americans identify with their nation first and their state second (Hopkins 2018; Wong 2010). While regional attachments are strong and meaningful in many other federal systems, they remain less salient in the context of the United States by comparison (Feeley and Rubin 2008).

Yet recent studies show that many in the public hold meaningful attachments to their states. While state identities tend to be less strongly held than national identity, Americans say that their identification with their state is more important than other group attachments like party identification (Hopkins 2018). These state attachments are politically important. Those who strongly identify with their state offer warmer evaluations of their governor and express higher trust in their state government (Pears and Sydner 2022; Winburn et al. 2024). Identification with one’s state is tied to participation in state politics (Schildkraut 2024).

State pride is also something that elected officials in the states seem eager to cultivate. Throughout history, state governments have invested in efforts to boost their state’s image. In the early history of the states, the focus was on advertising the virtues of the state to attract more workers and more residents. Over time, state promotion offices expanded to encourage tourism and business investments in the state. But these efforts were also thought to have local rewards: making residents feel proud of where they live, encouraging a connection to the state, and discouraging them from moving elsewhere (Ehrenhalt 2019; Haar 2023). Governors invoke enthusiasm and pride in their state in their annual State of the State addresses (Crew and Lewis 2011; Drake and Marsicano 2018). Cultivating state pride can be an explicit goal for governors, such as New Jersey governor Thomas Kean’s active campaigns to boost state pride in his speeches and in television ads (Felzenberg 2006).

Feelings of state pride are promoted through shared symbols and state culture. Just as national pride is attached to symbols like the American flag, the Fourth of July, and the Founding Fathers, states also have their own symbols. States all have distinctive state flags and state nicknames.¹ State legislatures recognize state flowers, state birds, and state trees, but also may name state microbes, state firearms, state rock songs, and state dinosaurs. Each state has its own license plate designs, and many feature symbols

¹In Texas, students pledge allegiance to the state flag as well as the US flag at the start of class.

of state pride, from the palmetto tree in South Carolina to oranges in Florida to mountains in Colorado.² State governments look to choose symbols that represent their state well. Several states – including Utah, Minnesota, Mississippi, Illinois, and Michigan – have recently engaged in efforts to redesign their state flags. Some revisions aim to create more inclusive images, but state officials are also interested in a marketing angle, crafting easily-recognizable symbols that state residents might want to display elsewhere in their lives (Smith and Almkhatar 2023). When state legislatures vote to adopt new state symbols or redesign the state flag, they signal how much importance they place on how people see their state.

Just as national pride finds its roots in symbols and socialization, the same kinds of influences could contribute to the development of state pride. Americans' high levels of national pride find their earliest origins in schools, where schoolchildren recite the Pledge of Allegiance and learn patriotic songs (Easton and Hess 1962; Hess and Torney 1967). In social studies curricula, children learn about the history of the country, often in ways that emphasize the country's strengths and best qualities (Easton and Hess 1962). Alongside these lessons, they also learn about the distinctiveness of their state and its history of accomplishments. State governments have long imposed requirements for state history to be included as part of the curricula for schoolchildren. By 1930, lessons in state history were offered in a majority of the states (Roberts 2019). Today, all 50 states require state history lessons in social studies curricula (McCall and Ristow 2003).

Schoolchildren take field trips to their state capital and visit state history museums. They learn about the development of their state and its place within the federal system. These curricula are often designed with the goal of helping students develop a love for their state (Bertin 1934; Brown 1955; Newman 1999; Stevens 1974). When requiring schools to teach state history, state legislatures were motivated by more than just a desire to teach young people about the place where they live – these requirements were also explicitly promoted as a way to encourage young people to take pride in the state and its past accomplishments (Bertin 1934; Brown 1955). In the words of Tyron (1936, pp. 140–141), “To foster pride in one’s local community and state is a very worthy end of instruction in state history, for one who is proud of his community is likely to be active in making it a better place to live.”

Is state pride politically important?

To the extent to which state pride has been studied, most have considered its origins rather than its consequences. Scholars disagree about the origins of state attachment and state pride. Hopkins (2018) argues that feelings of state pride seem to be detached from politics. When people are asked what makes them feel proud of their state, they often name apolitical factors like the state’s food, people, culture, and geography (Hopkins 2018; Schildkraut 2024). If people’s connections to their state are determined by apolitical factors like state culture or geography, then feelings of state pride may never be connected back to state governments (Hopkins 2018; Patterson 1968). Yet others find greater evidence that people’s feelings of pride are connected to political conditions. While the quality of democracy in one’s state has limited effects

²State pride can also be rooted in any of the factors that make states distinct, whether that is local foods, state landmarks, or major sports teams.

on feelings of state pride (Flavin and Shufeldt 2024), state pride is higher among those who live in states where their own political party is better represented in the electorate and in state government (Flavin and Shufeldt 2024; Schildkraut 2024). When people fail to feel pride in their state, they often cite political frustrations among their reasons why they feel that way (Schildkraut 2024).³

While others have explored the origins of state attachments, I extend this work by considering the political consequences of feelings of state pride. I believe that when people feel proud of the state where they live, they will be more likely to support empowering their state government. I focus on state pride as an expression of people's love for their state and the satisfaction they draw from their state's strengths and accomplishments (Huddy 2023; Schildkraut 2014; Theiss-Morse 2009). While place identities reflect the degree to which people see the place where they live as part of their own personal identity, feelings of pride instead reflect the esteem people have for the place where they live. Pride is a positive emotion that affirms past commitments (Marcus, Neuman, and MacKuen 2000). Because pride is tied to commitments to group norms, pride can inspire loyalty as well as prosocial behaviors. Within organizations, feelings of pride are associated with higher levels of cooperation and greater commitment to the organization (Tyler 1999). Within politics, positive moods can contribute to greater trust in other people (Rahn 2000) and greater confidence in government (Gross, Brewer, and Aday 2009; Wolak and Palus 2010).

I expect that when people are proud of their state, they will be more willing to empower their state government to address challenges in the state. The first outcome I consider is support for state government spending. I expect that state pride will be associated with greater support for state policy activism through state government spending. Pride has been argued to be associated with feelings of belonging and feelings of solidarity, which can contribute to cooperation and investment in collective goals (Huddy 2023). When people feel proud of the country they live in, it can contribute to diffuse support for the political system and willingness to cooperate with the mandates of the state (Almond and Verba 1965; Gangl, Torgler, and Kirchler 2016). If feelings of state pride contribute to civic and cooperative behaviors, then people's loyalties to their state may contribute to support for state government activism. People who feel proud of their state may feel concern for their fellow state residents, supporting state government action to solve problems faced by people who live there. When people feel more pride in the state where they live, I believe they will endorse greater state spending as a way of improving collective outcomes for state residents.

As a second outcome, I consider people's desires to devolve policy authority from the national government to state governments. When people feel proud of their state, I believe they will be more willing to grant it power within the federal system. People's loyalties to their states have long been thought to be important to the balance of power in a federal system of government. In the early days of the country, some feared that power would become concentrated with the national government. People's loyalties to their state were seen as a force that would help fortify the states against the threat of an overreaching national government. In Federalist No. 46, James

³In the appendix, I model the correlates of state pride in this data. Like Hopkins (2018), I find few consistent predictors of state attachments. I also confirm past work in finding limited evidence of demographic differences in feelings of state pride (Flavin and Shufeldt 2024; Schildkraut 2024). State pride is higher among those who live in places where their own party controls state government, echoing results found by Flavin and Shufeldt (2024).

Madison argued that since the states are closer to the people and play a greater role in the matters that affect people's day-to-day lives, "the first and most natural attachment of the people will be to the government of their respective states." Similar sentiments have been echoed in federalism scholarship in the years since. Riker (1964, p.136) noted, "Federalism is maintained by the existence of dual citizen loyalties to the two levels of government." Levy (2007, p. 466) proposed that, "If the states are entirely unable to hold the loyalty of their people, then the major freedom-protecting mechanisms of the federal system will be lost."

Yet many scholars of federalism are skeptical that people truly hold meaningful allegiance to their states (Bulman-Pozen 2014; Feeley and Rubin 2008; Levy 2007; Young 2015). Even if people pledged their primary loyalties to their states in the first decades of the nation, people's loyalties are now thought to be to their nation rather than to their state (Feeley and Rubin 2008). Riker (1964) argued that people's weak loyalties to their states have contributed to the concentration of federal power with the national government. He proposed that when people feel greater loyalties to their nation than their state, they will prefer a centralized model of governing over one where states reserve greater policy authority. In Riker's (1964, p. 104) words, "If citizens, when asked their citizen-identification, reply 'I am an American' to the exclusion of 'I am a Hoosier' or 'I am a Texan,' the scene is set for centralization. But if they reply first and foremost 'I am a Virginian' or 'I am a Buckeye,' then it is difficult to imagine much centralization occurring."

While state loyalties have been argued to shape the balance of federal power, the possibility that state pride contributes to public demand for devolving power from the national government has gone untested. I propose that when people feel proud of their state, they will be more likely to say that state elected officials should be assigned greater responsibility to tackle policy challenges and less likely to say that the national government should take the lead. To the extent to which people's feelings of state pride are associated with demands for greater investment in state programs, then they should also boost support for empowering state governments to take action in support of these state investments.

Both support for state spending and support for policy devolution are connected to empowering states to actively address issues important to state residents. But they differ in their ideological content. Liberals are traditionally more likely to support government spending to solve social problems than conservatives. Policy devolution, however, traditionally draws more support from conservatives than from liberals (Glaser, Berry, and Schildkraut 2023; Wolak 2016). I expect that state pride will be associated with greater support for both state spending and devolving policy authority to state government. If I fail to find effects, it will suggest that people's pride in their state is not important for politics. It may be that people do not necessarily feel much pride in the state where they live, or that state pride matters little in a time when political debates seem increasingly nationalized (Hopkins 2018). To the degree to which state pride is rooted in nonpolitical factors like state culture, climate, or geography (Hopkins 2018), it may have few consequences for citizens' demands of state government.

The political consequences of state pride

To consider the consequences of feelings of state pride, I use survey responses to a module of the 2020 Cooperative Election Study. To measure state pride, respondents

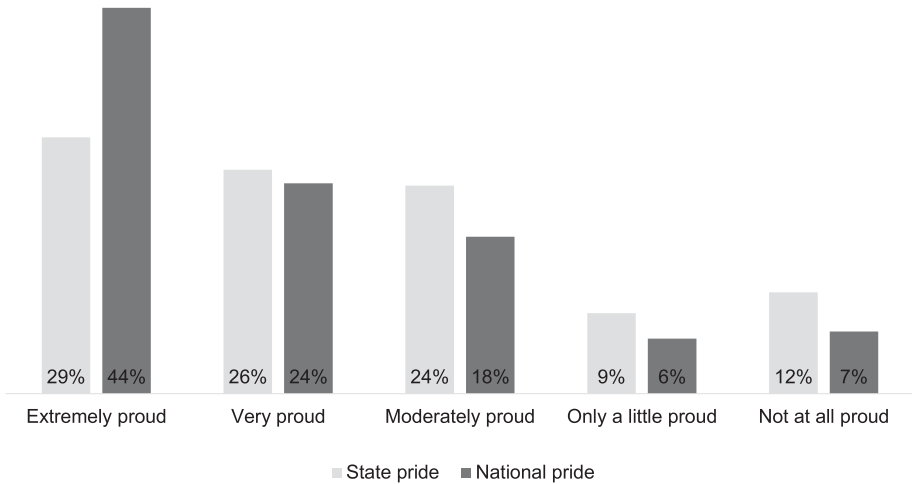


Figure 1. Levels of State Pride and National Pride, 2020 CES.

were asked, “How proud are you to be a resident of the state of [name of state]?” Five response options were given: “extremely proud,” “very proud,” “moderately proud,” “only a little proud,” and “not at all proud.” I find that most people express some pride associated with the state where they live. Twenty-nine percent said they were extremely proud, 26% answered very proud, and 24% said they felt very proud. An absence of state pride was uncommon: only 9% said they feel only a little proud and 12% answered not proud at all. As shown in [Figure 1](#), people expressed lower levels of state pride than national pride. While 29% of people said they were extremely proud of being a resident of their state, 44% said they were extremely proud of being American.

I consider two outcomes: support for increased state spending and demand for state influence within the federal system. To measure demand for greater state spending, I rely on a set of items that asked people about whether they prefer increases or decreases in state spending in five different policy domains: welfare, health care, education, transportation and infrastructure, and law enforcement.⁴ I average these answers to create a scale that ranges from 0 to 1, where higher scores indicate a stronger desire to increase state government spending. Support for policy devolution is measured with an item that asked whether states should have more responsibility over programs currently handled by the national government.

As control variables, I include items reflecting the partisan and ideological preferences of respondents. Both support for state spending and views of policy devolution have been thought to have expressly political origins, tied to people’s partisan and ideological goals. Liberals are more likely to support government spending on programs than conservatives. In the case of policy devolution, conservatives tend to favor shifting power away from the national government and toward subnational authorities (Glaser, Berry, and Schildkraut 2023; Rendleman and Rogowski 2024; Wolak 2016). To control for this, I include measures of party

⁴Question wordings are included in the appendix.

identification as well as demand for limited government. I expect that Republicans and those who favor limited government will be more likely to support policy devolution and less likely to support increases in state spending.

Past research suggests that people also think of state government power in instrumental ways, where people prefer to empower the level of government that is most likely to deliver desired partisan outcomes (Dinan and Heckelman 2020; Wolak 2016). To account for this, I include an indicator of whether state government is controlled by the same party that the respondent identifies with. Since some argue that state pride can reflect partisan considerations (Flavin and Shufeldt 2024; Schildkraut 2024), this control allows me to consider the effects of state pride apart from any portion of the feelings of pride that might be rooted in state partisan conditions. I also include controls for demographic differences, including political interest, education, age, gender, race, and ethnicity.

In Table 1, I present regression results.⁵ I find that state pride is associated with greater support for state spending on a range of state programs. Someone with the lowest level of state pride scores just above the midpoint of the scale of support for state spending (0.62), while a person who feels extremely proud of their state scores 0.06 points higher (0.68) on the 0 to 1 scale. This represents just over a third of a standard deviation increase in support for state government spending.⁶ When people feel proud of the state where they live, they are more likely to say that their state government should increase spending on social programs. Echoing past work that has described pride as encouraging cooperation and prosocial behavior, I find that those who feel greater state pride are more supportive of investments into programs that would benefit fellow state residents.

I also find that state pride is associated with greater support for devolving policy leadership to state government. Moving from the lowest level of state pride to the highest level is associated with a 0.11 increase in support for devolving greater power to the states, which is an effect size of just under half of a standard deviation. People who feel proud of the state where they live are more likely to think that their state government should be given more responsibility over matters currently handled by the national government. Past research on the origins of support for policy devolution has focused on partisan and ideological preferences about the balance of federal power (Dinan and Heckelman 2020; Glaser, Berry, and Schildkraut 2023; Rendleman and Rogowski 2024; Wolak 2016). But these findings show that feelings of pride in one's state also drive demand for policy devolution. These findings provide evidence in support of longstanding arguments in the federalism literature about how state loyalties can potentially serve as a check against the centralization of power with the national government (Bulman-Pozen 2014; Feeley and Rubin 2008; Levy 2007; Riker 1964). When people feel state pride, they would prefer to see their state government take a greater role in policymaking rather than the national government.

When considering the control variables, I fail to find effects associated with partisan control of state government. In the case of partisanship, self-identified

⁵I apply survey weights and report standard errors clustered by state. Results are robust to a multilevel modeling approach.

⁶We would expect increasing state spending on welfare, health, and education to be more popular among liberals, and greater spending on law enforcement to be more popular among conservatives. But when considering the effects of state pride on increased spending on law enforcement alone, state pride remains a significant predictor.

Table 1. State pride and empowering state government

	Support for increased state spending	Support for policy devolution
State pride	0.062* (0.015)	0.106* (0.034)
Own-party control of state govt.	-0.007 (0.013)	0.002 (0.019)
Partisanship	-0.011* (0.004)	0.006 (0.005)
Limited government	-0.188* (0.028)	0.213* (0.042)
Political interest	0.013 (0.026)	-0.034 (0.036)
Education	-0.072* (0.017)	-0.033 (0.038)
Black	0.045 (0.025)	0.055* (0.024)
Latino	0.018 (0.017)	0.050 (0.031)
Female	0.008 (0.010)	0.017 (0.020)
Age	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)
Constant	0.757* (0.027)	0.450* (0.037)
R ²	0.265	0.120
N	847	847

Data from 2020 Cooperative Election Study. Regression with state-clustered standard errors. Standard errors in parentheses.

* $p < 0.05$.

Democrats are more likely to support increased state government spending than Republicans. The magnitude of this effect is comparable to that of state pride, where the difference in support for state spending between a strong Democrat and a strong Republican is 0.07 points. I also considered whether the effects of state pride are conditional on partisanship. In models shown in the [Supplementary Materials](#), I find that the effects of state pride on the desire to empower state governments do not depend on partisan preferences. Feelings of state pride have the same effect on demand for policy devolution among Democrats as among Republicans. Likewise, state pride contributes to greater support for state spending similarly across party lines.⁷

I find that those who prefer a model of limited government are less likely to support state spending than those who prefer an activist government. Moving from the minimum to the maximum level of support for limited government is associated with a 0.19 point drop in support for state spending on the 0 to 1 scale, about a standard deviation change. Consistent with prior literature, those who favor limited government are about 0.21 points more likely to express a desire to devolve greater

⁷I fail to find significant interaction effects when state pride is interacted with the seven-point party identification measure. I also considered whether the effects of state pride differ when people live in a state where their own party controls state government, but fail to find a significant interaction effect. I also find no evidence that the effects of state pride are conditional on whether a person lives in a state that favored their party's presidential candidate in the 2020 Electoral College vote.

policy influence to the states compared to those who most strongly reject limited government, which approaches a standard deviation effect size. Yet even after accounting for people's ideological preferences for activist versus limited government, state pride remains a significant predictor of both outcomes. The effects of state pride are modest in magnitude compared to the influence of core values, but nonetheless show that people think about state spending in more than just partisan and ideological terms. When people feel proud of the state where they live, they are more supportive of increasing the reach and influence of their state government.

Robustness checks

I have argued that feelings of state pride are distinctive from people's self-identification as state residents. State identities reflect people's feelings of closeness to their state and the people who live there (Jiménez et al. 2021; Pears and Sydner 2022; Schildkraut 2024). While place identities reflect how much people define themselves personally by the places where they live, pride reflects the emotional rewards people draw from the shared culture and distinctive features of the place where they live. Feelings of pride tend to be correlated with place identities, but they do not have identical origins or consequences (Huddy 2023; Jiménez et al. 2021; Schildkraut 2024). A person might identify as a resident of a state but not feel much enthusiasm or warmth toward the state. I believe that the consequences of state pride are distinctive from those associated with state identification. Pride has civic consequences that go behind the social effects of place identity. While place identities are tied to feelings of closeness to other group members, feelings of pride and patriotism are particularly likely to inform views of government and support for the political system (Huddy 2023).

As a robustness check, I consider whether the effects of state pride are distinctive from those associated with state identification. To measure state identity, I use an item asking respondents how important the state where they live is to their personal identity. Consistent with past scholarship on national pride and national identity (Huddy and Khatib 2007; Miller and Ali 2014; Theiss-Morse 2009), I find that place identity and state pride are correlated, but nonetheless distinctive. The correlation between state identity and state pride is relatively strong ($r = 0.50$), though weaker than the correlation between strength of national identity and a comparable measure of national pride ($r = 0.69$).

In Table 2, I find that state pride has effects that are distinctive from those of state identity. State pride remains associated with greater support for state spending and policy devolution to the states even after accounting for the effects of feeling attached to the state where one lives. Just as national pride has effects distinctive from those of national identity (Huddy and Khatib 2007; Schildkraut 2014), the effects of state pride are distinctive from those of just feeling a psychological attachment to the state where one lives. I find that those who strongly identify as residents of their state are more likely to support state government spending on social programs. This is consistent with past studies of social identity, which show that when people identify as a member of a group, they are more likely to be invested in the success of the group and concerned about other group members (Theiss-Morse 2009). However, I find that those with strong state identities are no more likely to favor devolving power to

Table 2. The effects of state pride controlling for state identity and approval

	Controlling for state identity		Controlling for approval of state government	
	Support for increased state spending	Support for policy devolution	Support for increased state spending	Support for policy devolution
State pride	0.041* (0.018)	0.090* (0.036)	0.065* (0.016)	0.081* (0.040)
State identity centrality	0.050* (0.020)	0.036 (0.035)	–	–
Approval of state government	–	–	–0.002 (0.005)	0.020* (0.010)
Own-party control of state govt.	–0.008 (0.012)	0.001 (0.019)	–0.005 (0.013)	–0.018 (0.020)
Partisanship	–0.011* (0.004)	0.005 (0.005)	–0.011* (0.005)	0.006 (0.005)
Limited government	–0.185* (0.028)	0.215* (0.042)	–0.189* (0.028)	0.222* (0.043)
Political interest	0.010 (0.026)	–0.036 (0.036)	0.013 (0.026)	–0.031 (0.037)
Education	–0.065* (0.017)	–0.028 (0.038)	–0.072* (0.017)	–0.036 (0.037)
Black	0.043 (0.024)	0.054* (0.025)	0.045 (0.025)	0.055* (0.024)
Latino	0.016 (0.017)	0.048 (0.032)	0.018 (0.017)	0.046 (0.032)
Female	0.006 (0.010)	0.015 (0.020)	0.008 (0.010)	0.018 (0.019)
Age	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)
Constant	0.745* (0.025)	0.441* (0.038)	0.760* (0.026)	0.424* (0.039)
R ²	0.271	0.122	0.265	0.127
N	847	847	846	846

2020 Cooperative Election Study. Regression with state-clustered standard errors. Standard errors in parentheses.
* $p < 0.05$.

state governments.⁸ Feelings of pride in one's state are associated with greater demand for devolution, but the importance of identifying as a state resident is not.

As another robustness check, I consider whether feelings of state pride have effects that are distinctive from those of general satisfaction with state government performance. Hopkins (2018) argues that state pride has largely apolitical origins, reflecting attributes like shared culture and history. But others argue that feelings of state pride are also informed by political and economic conditions. People may feel more pride in their state when the state government is performing well or when the economy is strong (Flavin and Shufeldt 2024). In light of this, I also estimated models where I add approval of state government as a strong control.⁹ This allows me to see if state pride is still associated with support for empowering state government even after accounting

⁸This is consistent with past studies of social identity, which show that when people identify as a member of a group, they are more likely to be invested in the success of the group and concerned about other group members (Theiss-Morse 2009).

⁹I average approval ratings for the governor and state legislature to create a measure of state government approval.

for any portion of state pride that rests on state government performance. In models shown in Table 2, I find that even after accounting for people's evaluations of the performance of their state government, their feelings of pride for their state still predict greater demand for state spending and state policy influence. The pride people feel in their state is not merely capturing general affect toward state government. People's feelings of pride about the state where they live have political consequences that are distinctive from mere satisfaction with government performance.

I also considered whether the effects of state pride are distinctive from those associated with feelings of national pride, given that feelings of pride in one's state and one's country are somewhat correlated ($r = 0.34$). In results reported in the *Supplementary Materials*, I find that the effects of state pride are robust to a control for national pride. Even though some have argued that Americans' loyalty to their country should diminish demand for devolving power to the states (Feeley and Rubin 2008; Riker 1964), I find that feelings of national pride are not associated with support for policy devolution or demand for state spending.¹⁰ These robustness checks provide additional evidence in support of my argument that feelings of state pride contribute to people's desire to empower their state governments to take action. That said, with this observational survey evidence, I am only able to explore correlations and not make causal statements. It would be useful to explore in future work whether appeals to state pride can directly change people's attitudes toward their state governments.

Conclusions

In 2018, the staff of the website for the magazine *Conde Nast Traveler* interviewed a small sample of Americans representing every state in the United States about what makes them proud of their state, and what makes their state better than other states.¹¹ Some lauded their state's weather or natural beauty. Many mentioned the people – such as their diversity, their friendliness, their work ethic, or their open-mindedness. Others pointed to the culture of the state, as reflected in the food, the music, or the number of things there are to do. Consistent with arguments made by Hopkins (2018), people mostly named factors divorced from politics. But in a second video from the magazine, people were asked to name the worst thing about their state.¹² While some mentioned nonpolitical factors such as the weather as their state's biggest flaw, many gave answers tied to politics and government – consistent with arguments made by Schildkraut (2024). Some mentioned attributes of the state's political culture, such as how people vote, corrupt politicians, and a history of racism and segregation. Others talked about policy problems, whether it be drugs, jobs, taxes, poverty, or the roads.

I find that people's views about how to solve these state problems are informed by whether or not people feel pride in the state where they live. Those who feel greater state pride are more likely to say that state governments should spend on social programs for education, infrastructure, and health care. They are also more likely to believe that control over these policy issues should be devolved away from the national

¹⁰State pride also remains a significant predictor of both outcomes when controlling for approval of Congress and the President.

¹¹www.cntraveler.com/video/watch/many-people-many-places-50-people-tell-us-why-theyre-proud-of-their-state.

¹²www.cntraveler.com/video/watch/many-people-many-places-50-people-tell-us-the-worst-thing-about-their-state.

government and instead handled by the states. When people feel proud of the state where they live, they are more invested in having their state government take an active role in policy-making and invest resources into state-supported services.

While others have raised doubts about whether feelings of state pride are politically salient (Dahl 1967; Hopkins 2018), I show that feelings of state pride are related to people's views about empowering state governments. State politics has become increasingly nationalized, where policy agendas and elections reflect national political debates rather than matters distinctive to the states. Partisan debates at the national level increasingly inform the choices people make in state-level elections (Abramowitz and Webster 2016; Hopkins 2018; Rogers 2016; Sievert and Banda 2024). Outside of politics, we also see that the states have become more similar to each other in other ways as well. A suburban life of shopping at big-box stores, eating at chain restaurants, and returning to a tract home can look pretty similar regardless of whether a person is living in Ohio, Oregon, or Oklahoma. If state politics is nationalized, then we might worry about whether state officeholders are motivated to attend to the needs and desires of state constituents. The states may merely serve simply as another battleground to fight the partisan battles being waged in Washington, D.C. (Bulman-Pozen 2014).

Yet even as these forces contribute to a homogenization of state experiences, people nonetheless seem to recognize those things that make their state unique and different from the rest. People's feelings of pride, love, and affection for their state are not just something expressed in t-shirt slogans or coffee mugs, but also in people's views about the role of their state government. Feelings of state pride may lead people to feel more invested in their state's success and concerned about the collective welfare of other people in the state. These results show that how people feel about their state informs the demands people make of their state government. Within a federal system, people's state loyalties have been thought to serve as an important check in the balance of power between the national government and the state government (Levy 2007). Yet many have been skeptical that these kinds of state attachments still exist (Bulman-Pozen 2014; Feeley and Rubin 2008; Riker 1964). These results affirm that many feel significant state pride – and that these feelings of pride affect public support for devolving power to state governments.

State governments often engage in efforts to promote the state: advertising the features of the state, celebrating state symbols, and educating young people about the state's history. This approach has been criticized for putting symbols ahead of substance (Moore 1969). But trying to cultivate state pride can nonetheless be useful to state governments. Feelings of state pride affect how people see their state government and its place within the federal system. When people feel proud of the state they live in, they are more likely to believe that the state government should have greater policy influence and are more willing to support state government spending. The effects of state pride are distinctive from people's approval of state government as well as their attachment to their state.

Feelings of pride can be a civic good. Pride is tied to civic cooperation and investment in collective goals (Almond and Verba 1965; Gangl, Torgler, and Kirchler 2016; Putnam 2000). When people feel pride in their states and communities, they are more likely to participate in politics (Richey 2023; Schildkraut 2024). We have reasons to believe that feelings of state pride might also serve as a countervailing force against the partisan battles that increasingly define American politics. Partisanship is increasingly important to how people think about politics in their states (Hopkins 2018).

Federalism is increasingly defined in partisan terms as well, as those unhappy with partisan outcomes nationally are turning to the states to pursue their ideological goals (Bulman-Pozen 2014).

These results show that people think about their states in more than just partisan terms. People take pride in their state for its history, features, and accomplishments – and this love for their state can contribute to a desire to invest back into the state. I find that the effects of state pride on the desire to empower state governments is independent of partisanship and partisan control of state government. In the case of American identity, people often draw boundaries around who counts as American, excluding some based on their language, their race, or where they are from (Schildkraut 2014; Theiss-Morse 2009). Strength of national identity is stronger among those who are demographically similar to that narrowed version of what it means to be American (Theiss-Morse 2009). But state identities do not seem to be very well-predicted by factors like party identification, ideology, education, age, or race (Hopkins 2018). If state identities have less politicized origins, they may be less exclusive. To the extent to which this is true, the pride people feel from being a resident of their state can prove to be a unifying force for state electorates divided by partisan battles. At the national level, reminders about what make people proud to be American can undercut partisan animosities (Levendusky 2023). Feelings of state pride may also serve as a force that brings people together over shared love of their state – even during a time of heightened partisan animosities.

Supplementary material. The supplementary material for this article can be found at <http://doi.org/10.1017/spq.2024.31>.

Data availability statement. Replication materials are available on SPPQ Dataverse at <https://doi.org/10.15139/S3/F2SKS4> (Wolak 2024).

Acknowledgements. I thank Zoe Nemerever, Cory Smidt, and participants in the 2023 State Politics and Policy Conference for their helpful advice.

Funding statement. The author received no financial support for the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

Competing interest. The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

References

- Abramowitz, Alan I., and Steven Webster. 2016. "The Rise of Negative Partisanship and the Nationalization of U.S. Elections in the 21st Century." *Electoral Studies* 41: 12–22.
- Almond, Gabriel A., and Sidney Verba. 1965. *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations*. Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company.
- Bertin, Eugene P. 1934. "Pennsylvania History in the New Social Studies Program." *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 1(2): 76–87.
- Brown, Ralph Adams. 1955. "The Importance of Local History in the School Program." *The Wisconsin Magazine of History* 38(3):145–50.
- Bulman-Pozen, Jessica. 2014. "Partisan Federalism." *Harvard Law Review* 127(4):1077–146.
- Cramer, Katherine J. 2016. *The Politics of Resentment: Rural Consciousness in Wisconsin and the Rise of Scott Walker*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Crew Jr., Robert E., and Christopher Lewis. 2011. "Verbal Style, Gubernatorial Strategies, and Legislative Success." *Political Psychology* 32(4): 623–42.

- Dahl, Robert A. 1967. "The City in the Future of Democracy." *The American Political Science Review* 61(4): 953–70.
- Dinan, John, and Jac C. Heckelman. 2020. "Stability and Contingency in Federalism Preferences." *Public Administration Review* 80(2): 234–43.
- Drake, Anna, and Christopher Marsicano. 2018. "Attack and Parry: An Examination of Gubernatorial Rhetoric and Agenda Setting for Higher Education in Texas, 2000–2015." *Texas Education Review* 7(1): 58–75.
- Easton, David, and Robert D. Hess. 1962. "The Child's Political World." *Midwest Journal of Political Science* 6(3): 229–46.
- Ehrenhalt, Alan. 2019. "The Search for Slogan Magic." *Governing* August 23, 2019. www.governing.com/archive/gov-search-state-slogan-magic.html
- Feeley, Malcolm M., and Edward Rubin. 2008. *Federalism: Political Identity and Tragic Compromise*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Felzenberg, Alvin S. 2006. *Governor Tom Kean: From the New Jersey Statehouse to the 9–11 Commission*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Flavin, Patrick J., and Gregory Shufeldt. 2024. "State Pride and the Quality of Democracy in the American States." *Publius: The Journal of Federalism* 54(2):386–406.
- Gangl, Katharina, Benno Torgler, and Erich Kirchler. 2016. "Patriotism's Impact on Cooperation with the State: An Experimental Study on Tax Compliance." *Political Psychology* 37(6): 867–81.
- Glaser, James M., Jeffrey M. Berry, and Deborah J. Schildkraut. 2023. "Ideology and Support for Federalism in Theory—And in Practice." *Publius: The Journal of Federalism* 53(4):511–35.
- Gross, Kimberley, Paul R. Brewer and Sean Aday. 2009. "Confidence in Government and Emotional Responses to Terrorism After September 11, 2001." *American Politics Research* 37(1):107–28.
- Haar, Dan. 2023. "How's Your CT pride? New State Slogan, Logo, Ad Campaign Aim to Boost Good Feelings." *CT Insider*. October 17, 2023. www.ctinsider.com/columnist/article/ct-state-slogan-ad-campaign-make-it-here-18424962.php
- Hess, Robert D., and Judith V. Torney. 1967. *The Development of Political Attitudes in Children*. Chicago: Aldine Publishing.
- Huddy, Leonie. 2023. "National Identity, Patriotism, and Nationalism." In Leonie Huddy, David O. Sears, Jack S. Levy, and Jennifer Jerit, eds. *Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology*, 3rd edition, 769–803. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Huddy, Leonie, and Nadia Khatib. 2007. "American Patriotism, National Identity, and Political Involvement." *American Journal of Political Science* 51(1): 63–77.
- Jacobs, Nicholas F., and B. Kal Munis. 2019. "Place-Based Imagery and Voter Evaluations: Experimental Evidence on the Politics of Place." *Political Research Quarterly* 72(2): 263–77.
- Jacobs, Nicholas F., and B. Kal Munis. 2020. "Staying In Place: Federalism and the Political Economy of Place Attachment." *Publius: The Journal of Federalism* 50(4): 544–65.
- Jennings, M. Kent, and Harmon Zeigler. 1970. "The Salience of American State Politics." *The American Political Science Review* 64(2): 523–35.
- Jiménez, Tomás R., Deborah J. Schildkraut, Yuen J. Huo, and John F. Dovidio. 2021. *States of Belonging: Immigration Policies, Attitudes, and Inclusion*. New York, NY: Russell Sage.
- Levendusky, Matthew. 2023. *Our Common Bonds: Using What Americans Share to Help Bridge the Partisan Divide*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Levy, Jacob T. 2007. "Federalism, Liberalism, and the Separation of loyalties." *American Political Science Review* 101(3): 459–77.
- Marcus, George E., W. Russell Neuman, and Michael B. MacKuen. 2000. *Affective Intelligence and Political Judgment*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- McCall, Ava L., and Thelma Ristow. 2003. *Teaching State History: A Guide to Developing a Multicultural Curriculum*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- McCarthy, Justin. 2014. "Montanans, Alaskans Say States Among Top Places to Live." *Gallup*. April 24, 2014. news.gallup.com/poll/168653/montanans-alaskans-say-states-among-top-places-live.aspx
- Miller, David, and Sundas Ali. 2014. "Testing the National Identity Argument." *European Political Science Review* 6(2): 237–59.
- Moore, John Robert. 1969. "State History Textbooks: Essays in Ethnocentrism." *Social Education* 3: 267–76.

- Munis, B. Kal. 2021. "Place, Candidate Roots, and Voter Preferences in an Age of Partisan Polarization: Observational and Experimental Evidence." *Political Geography* 85:1–12.
- Newman, Maria. 1999. "Making History; What Grade Schoolers Learn About Their State's Past Can Shape Its Future." *The New York Times*. May 2, 1999.
- Patterson, Samuel C. 1968. "The Political Cultures of the American States." *The Journal of Politics* 30(1): 187–209.
- Pears, Emily, and Emily Sydnor. 2022. "The Correlates and Characteristics of American State Identity." *Publius: The Journal of Federalism* 52(2): 173–200.
- Putnam, Robert D. 2000. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.
- Rahn, Wendy. 2000. "Affect as Information: The Role of Public Mood in Political Reasoning." In Arthur Lupia, Mathew D. McCubbins, and Samuel L. Popkin, *Elements of Reason*, 130–51. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Rendleman, Hunter, and Jon C. Rogowski. 2024. "Americans' Attitudes Toward Federalism." *Political Behavior* 46(1): 111–34.
- Richey, Sean. 2023. "The Influence of Local Patriotism on Participation in Local Politics, Civic Participation, Trust in Local Government and Collective Action." *American Politics Research* 51(3): 357–72.
- Riker, William H. 1964. *Federalism: Origin, Operation, Significance*. Boston: Little Brown.
- Roberts, Scott. 2019. "Suggestions and Ideas for Effectively Teaching State History." *Michigan Council for the Social Studies Journal* 7(1): 9–13.
- Rogers, Steven. 2016. "National Forces in State Legislative Elections." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 667(1): 207–25.
- Saad, Lydia. 2014. "Half in Illinois and Connecticut Want to Move Elsewhere." *Gallup*. April 30, 2014. news.gallup.com/poll/168770/half-illinois-connecticut-move-elsewhere.aspx
- Schildkraut, Deborah J. 2014. "Boundaries of American Identity: Evolving Understandings of 'Us.'" *Annual Review of Political Science* 17:441–60.
- Schildkraut, Deborah J. 2024. "How State Identities Shape Political Engagement in the United States." Presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association.
- Schildkraut, Deborah J. 2024. "How Politics Shapes State Identities in the US." *State Politics and Policy Quarterly* 24(3):250–269.
- Sievert, Joel, and Kevin K. Banda. 2024. "All Politics are National: Partisan Defection in National and Subnational Elections." *Social Science Quarterly* 105(2): 180–92.
- Smith, Mitch, and Sarah Almkhtar. 2023. "How States are Threading the Needle on Flag Design." *The New York Times*. August 17, 2023. www.nytimes.com/interactive/2023/08/17/us/us-state-flag-design.html
- Smith, Tom W., and Lars Jarkko. 1998. *National Pride: A Cross-National Analysis*. Chicago, IL: National Opinion Research Center.
- Stevens, Arthur R. 1974. "State Boundaries and Political Cultures: An Exploration in the Tri-State Area of Michigan, Indiana and Ohio." *Publius* 4(1):111–25.
- Sullivan, John L., Amy Fried, and Mary G. Dietz. 1992. "Patriotism, Politics, and the Presidential Election of 1888." *American Journal of Political Science* 36(1): 200–34.
- Theiss-Morse, Elizabeth. 2009. *Who Counts as an America? The Boundaries of National Identity*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Tyler, Tom R. 1999. "Why People Cooperate with Organizations: An Identity-Based Perspective." *Research in Organizational Behavior* 21: 201–46.
- Tyron, Rolla M. 1936. "The Teaching of Local and State History." *Elements of the Social Studies Program* 6: 132–43.
- White, Mark, and Linley Sanders. 2021. "All US states ranked from best to worst, according to Americans." *YouGov*. April 12, 2021. today.yougov.com/topics/travel/articles-reports/2021/04/13/us-states-ranked-best-worst-according-americans
- Winburn, Jonathan, Daniel J. Fudge, Joseph Murphy III, and Bailey Griffin. 2024. "State Attachment and Gubernatorial Approval." *Social Science Quarterly* 105(4): 1061–75.
- Wolak, Jennifer. 2016. "Core Values and Partisan Thinking about Devolution." *Publius* 46(4): 463–85.
- Wolak, Jennifer. 2024. "Replication Data for: The Political Consequences of State Pride." <https://doi.org/10.15139/S3/F2SKS4>, UNC Dataverse, V1, UNF:6:YQjVeBXap4P6rkOxNwc3Kw== [fileUNF]

- Wolak, Jennifer, and Ryan Dawkins. 2017. "The Roots of Patriotism Across Political Contexts." *Political Psychology* 38(3): 391–408.
- Wolak, Jennifer, and Christine Kelleher Palus. 2010. "The Dynamics of Public Confidence in U.S. State and Local Government." *State Politics and Policy Quarterly* 10(4):421–45.
- Wong, Cara. 2010. *Boundaries of Obligation in American Politics: Geographic, National, and Racial Communities*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Young, Ernest A. 2015. "The Volk of New Jersey? State Identity, Distinctiveness, and Political Culture in the American Federal System." *Duke Law School Public Law & Legal Theory Series*. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2552866>.
- Zingher, Joshua N., and Jesse Richman. 2019. "Polarization and the Nationalization of State Legislative Elections." *American Politics Research* 47(5): 1036–54.

Author biography. Jennifer Wolak is a Professor of Political Science at Michigan State University.