Live and Let Tie: The Visual Aesthetics of Partisan Identity

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Although policy and ideology play a central role in a candidate's platform, the way a politician presents themselves—through dress, demeanor, and image—alters their reputation in subtle ways. This research examines the intersection between party affiliation and physical appearance, testing whether male Republicans in the House of Representatives are more likely to wear red ties compared to their Democratic counterparts—drawing on the idea that the color red is associated with the Republican Party, and in recent years, Donald Trump. Three hypotheses focus on the 118th Congress, testing political ideology and visual presentation: (H_1) political party affiliation predicts tie color; (H_2) stronger district-level support for Trump in the 2024 election increases the likelihood of Republican House members wearing a red tie; and (H_3) Republican House members with a longer tenure are less likely to wear a red tie. The fourth hypothesis examines tie colors over time, comparing the 112th Congress in 2011 to the 118th Congress in 2024 to test the prevalence of red-tie-wearing Republicans before and after the emergence of Trump in the political sphere in 2015. The larger implications from the study focus largely on the shifting nature of president-party relationships, aesthetic mimicry, and political polarization.

INTRODUCTION

On September 26, 1960, a young, handsome Democrat stood on one side of the television screen. On the other side of the screen stood a sweaty, shifting, incumbent vice president. Millions of Americans tuned in to watch the U.S. presidential debate between John F. Kennedy, a Massachusetts senator, and Richard Nixon, the current vice president under Dwight D. Eisenhower. For those watching on television, the debate was a major failure on Nixon's part—Kennedy's youthful and spry appearance clashed with Nixon's physical discomfort and balmy makeup, marking a key turning point in the presidential race in JFK's favor (History.com Editors 2010).

However, this is not what all Americans perceived—some Americans were only listening via radio waves. The listeners on the radio believed the debate was a draw, and some even thought Nixon won by listening only to the audio. The difference lay not in the candidates' words, but in their visual presentation. This debate and public reactions from 1960 show how important physical aesthetics can be in altering and shaping political public opinion (Druckman 2003).

"In politics, perception is reality," Lee Atwater, a Republican political strategist for Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush, once said (Victoria Times-Colonist Staff 2017). This quote captures a fundamental truth about politics and campaigns: A candidate's public appearance is an important aspect of political communication. Most of the previous literature in this research lens has taken this starting point, hinging on public appearance, and examined voters' reactions; this underlying premise remains the same in this research as well.

As American voters increasingly rely on digital media, such as social media and advertisements on television, and less on non-visual media, such as newspapers and radio, outward appearances in politics have become an integral part of political communication and strategy. Although ideology and policy remain central, politics operates within an inherently visual culture where outward appearances—such as dress and demeanor—subconsciously shift our beliefs.

This research explores the intersection between partisanship and visual appearances, focusing on tie colors worn by male members of the U.S. House of Representatives. The research asks the question of whether Republicans are more likely to wear a red tie in their portrait compared to their Democratic counterparts. In short, is your tie color in your Congressional portrait linked to your political beliefs?

There are distinct colors that partisans adopt; the Republican Party has coined the color red, while the Democratic Party has coined the color blue (Holland 2024). These hues are seen everywhere—from posters to pins to "Make America Great Again" hats. These colors are stereotypes that candidates build on, but how strong are these visual cues? Existing research suggests that outward symbols can help representatives identify themselves as members of political factions and thus help attract attention and resources (Clark 2020). This research seeks to find whether self-presentation follows this sub-brand logic, including whether it reflects a

deeper ideological party affiliation, and how other variables, such as years served and characteristics of the district, play into this equation.

In addition, this research also examines whether this phenomenon has changed with the emergence of Donald Trump as a political figure. Is aesthetic mimicry, the act of dressing in similar patterns to someone in a higher position of power than you and who aligns with your beliefs, more common in the Trump era? Hypothetically, a young freshman Republican male in the House is still finding his footing. Mimicking Trump's aesthetic choices may be appealing to him. The representative can visually align himself with the leader of his political party and of the country and follow suit. However plausible, these claims are as yet untested.

In order to test this, the data compares the 112th Congress to the 118th Congress – from pre-Trump times to current Trump times—to see if today, more Republicans are wearing red. Has red been the Republican political uniform over time, or has Trump and the coined "Trump red" made an increase in the share of Republicans wearing red?

Theoretical Perspectives on Fashion, Aesthetic Choices, and Partisanship

This project builds on a number of approaches in the existing literature that explore the relationship between partisanship and aesthetic choices, especially colors and partisan affiliations. Despite negative associations with superficiality, it is important to note that fashion and appearances matter—even down to the designer someone wears. Fashion has been, and will continue to be, used for political statements and support—whether a small nod of support for Palestine or a detailed journey of J.D. Vance's suit transformation to the White House (Nead-Work 2023).

Researchers and political journalists have studied visual appearances and color association in previous academic studies. This research differs from past research in several important ways. First, it introduces a new, hand-coded database. Although there is a Congressional Picture Directory online, no prior research has systematically examined tie colors among the male representatives within the House of Representatives. Several scholars have commented on the individual style trends of politicians, such as JD Vance, Trump, and even Hillary Clinton; however, a large-scale, comparative analysis of tie colors across Congress has not been conducted before. This research fills in the gaps by shifting from a smaller case study of physical appearance to a qualitative measure of visual symbolism within Congress.

The visual presentation of political figures, specifically their clothing, has received attention within the journalistic sphere. Derek Guy (2024) discussed the Trump effect with JD Vance for Politico. Guy analyzed Vance's transformation from a Silicon Valley uniform to a Trump uniform. In 2016, Vance's style resembled that of a Silicon Valley man: an open-collared flannel shirt paired with a grey, sometimes navy sport coat. This uniform was often paired with jeans and boots to give a more casual, relaxed vibe—akin to a technology CEO on the West Coast. In 2021, his style became more "Trumpian." Vance increasingly wore items associated with Trump, such as a red tie and a dark, tailored suit. Guy noted that this transformation is not unique to Vance:

> "Vance's style transformation is not unique to him; many in the Republican Party have adopted Trump's signature, bright red, shiny tie. At last year's Republican primary debate, all the candidates on stage except Nikki Haley wore red ties—all solid-colored and glossy with the exception of Asa Hutchinson and Chris Christie, the two remaining Trump critics, who wore patterned neckties in softer shades of red. (Republican primary debates before the Trump era show much more diversity in neckwear, such as in 2007, 2011 and 2015)" (Guy 2024).

Additionally, José Criales-Unzueta, on the night of the mayoral election, wrote a piece titled "Newly-Elected New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani and His Wife Rama Duwaji Enter the Spotlight—What Will They Wear?" for Vogue. In his piece, Criales-Unzueta breaks down the mayoral election from a unique perspective: What Zohran Mamdani was wearing throughout his campaign. Criales-Unzueta noted his style of slim-cut, single-breasted suits, preference for brands like Uniqlo, and New York-specific tailors and bootleg street vendors.

> "Why are we talking about what they're wearing?… Following the 2024 presidential election, the argument about whether what politicians wear matters feels mostly settled. It does matter, because our clothing and our personal style are indicative of our values, priorities, and yes, our politics. Former first lady Michelle Obama has just written a book on the subject, titled The Look" (José Criales-Unzueta 2025).

In fact, Mamdani's wife, Rama Duwaji, on the night of her husband's acceptance speech, wore a top from Palestinian-Jordanian designer Zeid Hijazi—a designer famous for drawing inspiration "from Palestinian folklore, rebellion." Criales-Unzueta explains the importance of this specific designer for this specific moment in politics. Her husband has been widely criticized for his support of Palestine, and "By wearing a Palestinian designer on election night, Duwaji affirmed her politics are aligned with her husband's—and invited the same criticism" (José Criales-Unzueta 2025).

As explained above, fashion and appearances matter, even in the political sphere. However, this research focuses specifically on color associations, which will be explained more below. A few prior studies have emphasized the partisan association with specific colors.

In 2014, Schloss and Palmer tested the color preferences of Republicans and Democrats across different periods in time—during non-election days, the 2012 interim election, and the 2012 presidential election. The findings revealed

that on non-election days, both Republicans and Democrats preferred the Republican red equally. Interestingly, during these non-election periods, Republicans even preferred Democratic blue more than Democrats did. However, on election day, respondents' color preferences shifted to align more closely with their own party's colors: "Republicans liked Republican red more than Democrats did, and no longer preferred Democratic blue more than Democrats did" (Schloss and Palmer 2014). In summary, election day differentially affected the color preference of voters based on partisan affiliation, suggesting that the color preferences of voters are linked to waves of increased political support for a political party.

A 2024 study by Losada Maestre and Sánchez Medero researched the influence of color on the perception of political messages within the context of Spanish culture. The study found clear color associations: Participants identified red as progressive, blue as conservative, and gray as neutral. The study demonstrated that colors can shape the perception of political messaging and activate affiliations with partisan biases. However, the research also noted that although these color affiliations activate a partisan bias, these color affiliations do not have the same strength as issue ownership—the idea that a political party is associated with specific policy concerns, such as Republicans with the economy (Losada Maestre and Sánchez Medero 2022).

Andrew J. Clarke's research titled "Party Sub-Brands and American Party Factions" explores ideological factions within the House, which he refers to as "party sub-brands." Although there is a heavy party divide between Democrats and Republicans, there are also factions within party lines, which allow for a niche identity and a specialized voter market (Clarke 2020). These factions sometimes differ from the broader party platform and unified party messaging; however, these sub-brands do not act as a replacement, as they often serve as a complement to the candidate's identity. These factions allow members to operate and differentiate themselves from the national party brand. Though Clark does not focus on color specifically, the association between President Trump and his signature red suggests that the broader adoption of this color amongst male legislators may fit into this party sub-brand framework emphasizing branding.

The potential benefits of adopting these party sub-brands may be growing, since the last few decades have seen a major reduction in the frequency of new House candidates being favored for prior elected experience. A study by Rachel Porter and Sarah A. Treul, titled "Evaluating (in) experience in congressional elections," focuses on the recent shift in candidate experience before entering the House of Representatives. In earlier decades, especially between the 1980s and the early 2000s, the majority of newly elected members in the House had some sort of elected experience, especially on a local or state level. However, between the years of 2016 and 2020, only about half of the elected freshmen had some sort of prior elected experience, thus emphasizing the shifting pattern in elected candidates and the rise of "amateurs" to the national stage (Porter and Treul 2023). Both this study and the one mentioned above use large-scale examination of House members over time to see how individual candidates and larger trends have changed over time. However, these trends are measured differently through different lenses—one with a focus on tie color and larger party affiliation visual trends, and one that focuses on tenure and experience alone.

In summary, this collection of established literature emphasizes the impact of colors and other clothing choices to convey a political message or method in both national and international contexts. However, this subject is generally significantly underexplored.

This research hopes to fill in the gaps of this underexplored topic by providing a new, systematic approach to quantifying partisan politics and outward appearances. This research fits within the broader discussion of political messaging and party affiliation, as it touches on physical partisan identity, recent shifts in the president-party relationship, and how Donald Trump has transformed the Republican Party within the last ten years. This study extends the frameworks mentioned above by demonstrating that signals received by voters are not accidental—these visual signals are produced by political leaders. The prevalence of red ties, particularly among Republicans in the House, suggests a growing reliance on visual branding and signaling at the elite political level.

Additionally, this work is compelling because it created a systematic, large-scale approach to outward physical appearances. This research collected data from both the 112th Congress, with 358 male representatives, and the 118th Congress, with 302 male representatives—thus, totaling 660 representatives in the sample. Different hypotheses examine different data angles, such as tenure and district-level political leanings, which allows for a more comprehensive review and analysis of how both individual and contextual factors may play into tie color. Lastly, this research provides a replicable framework for studying visual partisan identity, which can be easily replicated across different Congresses of both past and future.

HYPOTHESES

H_1 – In the 118th Congress, male Republicans in the House of Representatives are more likely to wear a red tie compared to male Democrats in the House of Representatives.

H_1 tests male representatives in the House of Representatives' tie colors in their official House of Representatives staff portrait. H_1 compares Republican and Democratic party affiliation to see if there is a correlation

between political party and tie color. Does political affiliation affect a representative's tie color in their staff portrait? It is hypothesized that male Republicans in the House of Representatives are more likely to wear a red tie due to the affiliation with red as the defining color of the Republican Party.

Additionally, for H_1, a red tie is now the signature aesthetic of Trump. Aesthetic mimicry can be a reason for this—male Republicans in the House of Representatives view Trump as the strongest, most prominent leader in the Republican Party. Subconsciously, or even consciously, this is a decision made in order to appear similar to the president.

> *H_2 – In the 118th Congress, male Republicans in the House of Representatives from districts with a larger vote for Trump are more likely to wear a red tie compared to male Republicans in the House of Representatives from districts where Trump won by a smaller margin. Conversely, male Republicans in the House of Representatives from a district with a weaker margin of Trump support are less likely to wear a red tie.*

H_2 only looks at male Republicans in the House of Representatives, not male Democrats in the House of Representatives—meaning that only Republican males in the House of Representatives are considered for H_2. The second hypothesis will look at polling data from the 2024 presidential election to see how many in a specific district supported Trump in the election. What kind of male Republicans in the House of Representatives are more likely to wear a red tie?

It is hypothesized that a representative from a heavily supportive Trump district is more likely to wear a red tie. In a district where Trump won by a larger margin, there is more widespread support for the Republican Party and Donald Trump, meaning the representative is more likely to lean into the Republican Party and its affiliations. Additionally, the representative does not need to appear more bipartisan to secure support from the left or middle, unlike those from a swing district in need of bipartisan support.

For example, a male Republican in the House of Representatives from a district in Alabama with 90% of the voters choosing Trump is more likely to wear a red tie compared to a male Republican in the House of Representatives from California, where Trump won the district by only 52%. These two fictional representatives, although both male Republicans in the House of Representatives, come from very different geographic locations with very different political landscapes and district support for Trump. These differences should be accounted for, and in theory, their outward appearances will align with how prominently a district leans Republican, thus showing in their tie color.

> *H_3 – In the 118th Congress, male Republicans in the House of Representatives who have served longer are less likely to wear a red tie.*

H_3 draws from only the 118th Congressional database. It is hypothesized that the more well-established and politically experienced a male Republican in the House of Representatives is, the more likely he is to have a stronger sense of self, which can be displayed through his personal style. A young, freshman male Republican in the House of Representatives is still finding his power and beliefs, so he is more likely to wear a red tie, since that is what his peers in his party are doing. Conversely, male Republicans in the House of Representatives who are more experienced and have served multiple terms are more politically established. They have an established personality and are more likely to wear whatever tie they feel like wearing.

> *H_4 – Male Republicans in the House of Representatives from 2024 are more likely to wear a red tie compared to male Republicans in the House of Representatives from 2012.*

H_4 only tests male Republicans in the House of Representatives, not male Democrats in the House of Representatives—meaning that only Republican males in the House of Representatives are considered for H_4. H_4 tests male Republicans in the House of Representatives across time, drawing from both 2024 (118th Congress) and the 112th Congress (in session from January 3, 2011, to January 3, 2013).

H_4 tests whether the share of male Republicans in the House of Representatives wearing a red tie in 2024 is different from that of male Republicans in the House of Representatives in 2012. The 112th Congressional database draws from the pre-Trump era. Today, Trump and Trump red have become more iconic in both pop culture and the political sphere. A red tie has become synonymous with Trump as the two presidencies have played out. Before Trump entered the political arena in the 2016 presidential election, was a red tie as popular, or did Trump have an impact? H_4 hypothesizes that male Republicans in the House of Representatives in 2024 will wear more red ties compared to male Republicans in the House of Representatives in 2012, from the pre-Trump era in politics.

H_4 marks a slight change in the unit of analysis from the previous three hypotheses above. The earlier hypotheses measure House Representatives at an individual level by looking at district data and experience. H_4 shifts the focus from an individual level of analysis, being an individual representative, to a larger unit of analysis: all of the male Republicans in the House of Representatives in 2012 and 2024. Of all the male Republicans in the House of Representatives in 2012, how many of them wore a red tie? In 2024, what share of male Republicans in the House of Representatives wore a red tie? H_4 is a question of the proportion of male Republicans in the House of Representatives from two different Congress sessions, not an individual focus compared to the earlier hypotheses.

METHODOLOGY

This research draws from only male House of Representatives members in the U.S. Congress and does not include members of the Senate. By using members in the House, it is easier to draw connections between district data and Congressmen, such as local support for Trump within a district. Senators draw from state-wide support, meaning it's more difficult to test constituent support from a specific district. Additionally, the House and the Senate, although both within the same branch of the government, have different levels of power, different schedules, and are in very different political spheres. By drawing from only one branch of the bicameral Congress, it's easier to find trends and make precise conclusions about district data.

Additionally, aesthetic mimicry is likely to be more common in the House. Freshman members are less established; they are in a much larger pool of legislators and tend to have less outward identification compared to a Senator.

This data draws from the official ***Congressional Pictorial Directory***. The directory contains a compilation of color photographs of all the members of Congress. Although there are several headshots of each representative, this directory creates a clear and consistent database. This research draws from the directory of two different time periods: the 112th Congress and the 118th Congress. The 112th Congress was in session from January 3, 2011, to January 3, 2013. The 118th Congress convened on January 3, 2023, and ended on January 3, 2025. As of the time of this research, there is no current directory of the 119th Congress, which began in January of 2025; therefore, the research used the most recent directory.

Women are not included in this study, since women do not typically wear ties professionally. As of January 2025, 125 women are serving in the U.S. House of Representatives, of the 435 seats. Although this representation should be accounted for, there is no clear systematic way to specifically code clothing items that are not ties in headshots.

CODING

Not all red ties are made equal—some are more red than others. For the sake of accounting for the difference in shades, saturation, and pattern, the coding has split the red tie coding into two related components, "redtie" and "redspec." Redtie is a binary coding of whether the member is wearing a red tie or not. On the other hand, redspec is a specific measure of the red tie, accounting for patterns and hues.

The first variable is binary, meaning that a 0 notes the representative is not wearing a red tie, and that a 1 means the representative is wearing a red tie, including both "Trump red" and "close red." This variable serves as a simple, surface-level coding as to whether a representative is wearing a red tie or not. The second variable "redspec" is a three-part variable. (0,0) means the representative is not wearing a red tie. A (1,1) means close red, which is defined as: The member is wearing a red tie, but it is not a true Trump red. This includes patterns such as stripes, plaid, or dots, and off-red hues such as maroon or light red. Lastly, (1,2) is a true, Trump red, which means the member is wearing a true, bold red tie, referred to as "Trump red." The coding below goes into more specifics as to the difference between a Trump red and a close red tie.

Coding Rules and Guidelines

1. Common Sense Test

a. Within coding, if one is unsure, use common sense. If one looks at the photo and has to think about whether it is a red tie, it is not coded as a red tie. If the color immediately appears to be red to the average person, it should be coded as a red tie. When all else fails, consider polling a random person on the street and asking them directly whether the person is wearing a red tie.

b. For example, Rep. Kevin Kiley or Rep. Mark E. Amodei are not wearing red ties. Although Rep. Kevin Kiley is wearing a dark maroon shade, this is not considered red per the coding (0,0). The same goes for Rep. Mark E. Amodei; he is wearing a light, pinkish tie that is not considered red (0,0).

2. A third or more of the tie

a. For simplicity and consistency of coding, a tie should have more than a third of red on it to be considered a red tie. Smaller dots and thin stripes do not count – a larger section of the tie must be red.

b. Rep. Brad Sherman and Rep. Jimmy Panetta (pictured below) are two examples of close red (1,1) – they are both wearing red ties with patterns on them.

c. Both Rep. Adrian Smith and Rep. Ryan K. Zinke (pictured below) serve as examples of a non-red tie (0,0). They are both technically wearing ties with red on them; however, red does not comprise more than a third of the tie. Instead, the red is only small dots or stripes. Again, the coding uses a dummy common sense test. Large, wide red stripes are included, and other examples where red takes up more than a third of the tie.

3. Specifics for Trump red (1,2)

a. Trump red must be a tie with no pattern and be fully red.

b. Trump red includes subtle red shine patterns, with no contrasting non-red colors.

i. Two examples would be Rep. Michael Waltz or Rep. Blaine Luetkemeyer (pictured below), where there is a subtle shine pattern on the red tie (1,2). At face value, this is considered a Trump red tie, meaning the tie is entirely red and features no non-red patterns.

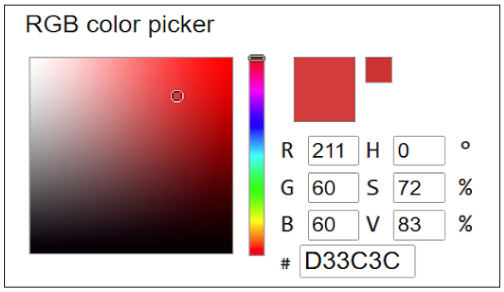
RGB Specifics for Coding

To ensure objective and fair classification of red ties, the research used an eyedropper tool to extract values from the images. The RGB (Red, Green, Blue) model was applied to categorize the ties as either Trump red, close red, or not red. RGB is a color model commonly used among graphic designers to vary the intensity of hue. The standard range of values falls between 0 and 255, with each value representing the intensity of the respective color shade. For example, a pure red is represented as (255, 0, 0), a pure green is represented as (0, 255, 0), and a pure blue is represented as (0, 0, 255).

In most instances, the tie colors were easily categorized through visual inspection at first glance. However, about a tenth of the sample required confirmation using the eyedropper tool. The following criteria were applied to ensure accuracy and replicability:

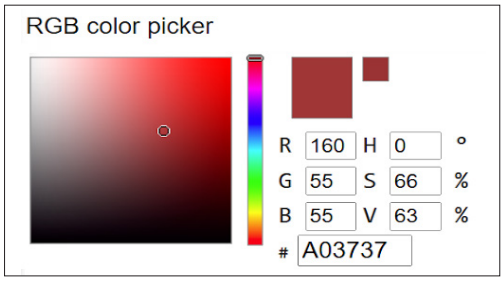
To count as Trump red (1,2):

a. R must be the highest value 1.
b. R>130, G<50, B<50; or
c. The R value must exceed the second-highest value by more than 150
d. For example, (211, 60, 60) qualifies as Trump red, because although the G and B values are over 50, the R value is more than 150 higher than the second-highest value. (211-60=151)



To count as close red (1,1):

a. R must be the highest value
b. R>80, G<50, B<50; or
c. The R value must exceed the second-highest value by more than 100
d. For example, (160,55,55) qualifies as close red, because although the G and B values are greater than 50, the R value is more than 100 points higher than the second-highest value. (160-55=105)



Examples

Rep. Gary G. Miller
of Diamond Bar (42nd District)
Republican—7th term

redtie, 0 redspec, 0

Rep. Thomas P. Tiffany
of Minocqua (7th District)
Republican—3rd term

redtie,1 redspec, 2

Rep. Brad Sherman
of Sherman Oaks (32nd District)
Democrat—14th term

redtie, 1 redspec, 1

Rep. Jimmy Panetta
of Carmel Valley (19th District)
Democrat—4th term

redtie,1 redspec, 1

Rep. Mark E. Amodei
of Carson City (2nd District)
Republican—7th term

redtie, 0 redspec, 0
(Not a red tie)
RGB (195, 141, 165)

Rep. Kevin Kiley
of Rocklin (3rd District)
Republican—1st term

redtie, 0 redspec, 0
(Not a red tie)
RGB (36,15,22)

Examples, cont'd

Rep. Adrian Smith
of Gering (3rd District)
Republican—9th term

redtie, 0 redspec, 0
(Note the patterned stripe—less than 33%)

Rep. Ryan K. Zinke
of Whitefish (1st District)
Republican—3rd term

redtie,0 redspec, 0
(Note the dots—less than 33%)

Rep. Blaine Luetkemeyer
of St. Elizabeth (3rd District)
Republican—8th term

redtie, 1 redspec, 2
(Shine counts)

Rep. Michael Waltz
of St. Augustine Beach (6th District)
Republican—3rd term

redtie, 1 redspec, 2
(Shine counts)

RESULTS

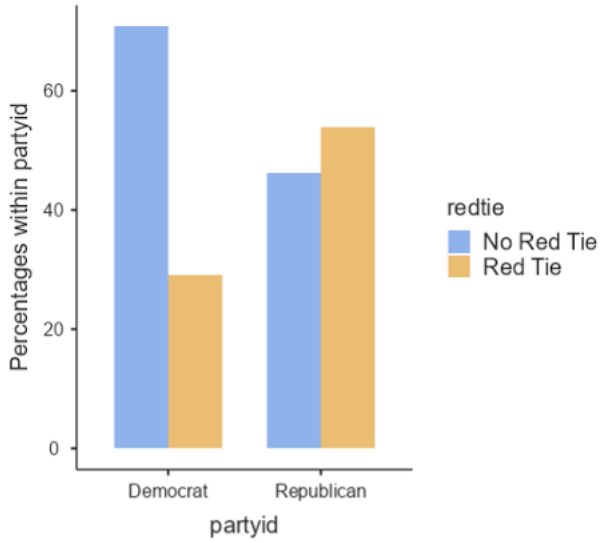
H_1

For the 118th Congress, there are 120 Democratic men and 183 Republican men included in the dataset (n=302). To test H_1, the first analysis uses redtie, a binary variable where 0 indicates that the representative is not wearing a red tie and 1 indicates that he is wearing a red tie.

Table 1.1: Binary red tie representation by party, 118th Congress

	Democrat	Republican	Total
No Red Tie	70.8%	46.2%	56.0%
Red Tie	29.2%	53.8%	44.0%
(χ^2 = 17.9, p < .001)			

Plots of Table 1.1 data



29.2% of Democrats wore a red tie, compared to 53.8% of Republicans who wore a red tie. Conversely, 70.8% of Democrats did not wear a red tie, while only 46.2% of Republicans did not wear a red tie. By examining Democrats only, a clear 41.6-point difference is notable—70.8% of Democrats are not wearing a red tie, compared to only 29.2% of Democrats wearing a red tie. Looking at this very simply at the surface level, the effect of partisanship is obvious, as demonstrated by the nearly doubling of the percentage of Republicans wearing red ties compared to Democrats.

A chi-square test confirmed this difference is statistically significant (χ^2 = 17.9, p < .001). This chi-square test confirms that the tie color and party affiliation are not independent; instead, they are associated in a statistically meaningful way.

Although the chi-square test shows that there is a significant association between party affiliation and red tie usage, the research also evaluated the possibility that other factors may contribute to this difference. The data used a linear regression model to determine whether party affiliation still matters after controlling for two additional variables—margin of victory and freshman status. The margin of victory reflects

Table 1.2: Multiple Regression Results, 118th Congress, Dependent Variable = binary Redtie

Independent Variable	Regression Coefficient	P-value
Party Identification	0.32615	<0.001
Freshman Status	0.04091	0.587
Trump Margin of Victory in 2024	0.00162	0.321
Intercept	0.24570	<0.001
R=0.252, R^2=0.062 (n=302)		

the Democratic vote share minus the Republican vote share in the 2024 presidential election. Freshman status is a binary measure of whether a congressman is a freshman or not.

Even when controlling for variables, party affiliation remained a strong predictor. Republicans were significantly more likely to wear red ties compared to Democrats—confirming that the difference observed in the earlier tests is not simply due to district-level support for Trump or freshman status. The regression coefficient for party identification (0.32615, $p < 0.001$) confirms that Republicans are more likely to wear a red tie, regardless of freshman status or district affiliation.

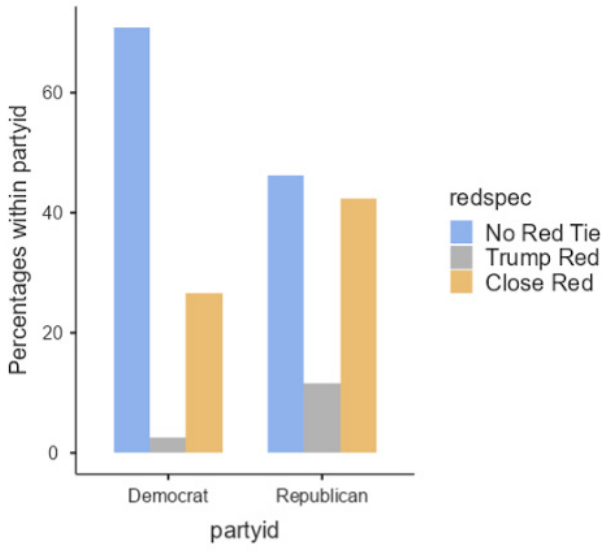
Additionally, neither of the control variables was statistically associated with red tie usage. Freshman status (p=0.587) and margin of victory (p=0.321) did not meaningfully correlate with the tie color of a congressman.

Together, these results demonstrate that even after controlling for two plausible alternative explanations, party affiliation itself remains a significant and independent predictor of red tie usage, providing strong support for H_1. In the 118th Congress, Republicans were substantially more likely to wear a red tie in their 2024 staff photo compared to Democrats.

Table 1.3: Three-category red tie representation by party, 118th Congress

	Democrat	Republican	Total
No Red Tie (0,0)	70.8%	46.2%	56.0%
Close Red (1,1)	26.7%	42.3%	36.1%
Trump Red (1,2)	2.5%	11.5%	7.9%
($\chi^2 = 20.2$, $p < .001$)			

Plots of Table 1.3 data



To extend the analysis, H_1 was tested using redspec, which distinguishes Trump red ties from close red ties. Redspec is a three-category variable that distinguishes the ties from no red tie (0,0), close red (1,1), and Trump red (1,2). This variable tests the variation in the intensity and pattern of tie color.

Among male Republicans, 46.2% did not wear a red tie, 42.4% wore a close red, and 11.5% wore a Trump red. Among male Democrats, 70.8% did not wear a red tie, 26.7% wore a close red tie, and 2.5% wore a Trump red tie.

The data suggests that there is a noticeable difference between Republicans and Democrats in red tie usage when accounting for Trump red. Democrats were more likely to wear no red tie (70.8%), compared to 46.2% of Republicans—a difference of 24.6 points. Similarly, Republicans are more than four times more likely to wear Trump red (11.5% vs. 2.5% of Democrats) by 10 points. In short, Democrats really abstain from wearing Trump red (2.5%). Given the narrow and highly specific coding of the Trump red color in RGB criteria, the findings highlight a distinct partisan visual cue in tie choices.

A chi-square test confirms that the relationship between tie color intensity and party affiliation is statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 20.2$, $p < .001$). These findings extend the previous data for redtie, confirming that not only are Republicans more likely to wear a red tie on a binary measure overall, but they are also significantly more likely to wear the specific Trump red variant (1,2) compared to their Democratic counterparts.

Together, all of the findings for H_1 illustrate that there is a strong correlation between party affiliation and tie color. Republicans are disproportionately clustered in both red categories, while Democrats overwhelmingly fall into the no red tie group. The Trump red tie, a very specific color and type of tie, is associated with a 10-point visible marker of partisan alignment for Republican members. In short, H_1 is supported by the data – Republican men in the 118th Congress are significantly more likely to wear red ties compared to their Democratic counterparts.

H_2

For H_2, the research uses the variable "marginv" as the independent variable, which reflects the Democratic vote share minus the Republican vote share in the 2024 presidential election. If the district voted more for Kamala Harris, the margin of victory would equal a positive number (Democratic vote share - Republican vote share = "marginv"). Conversely, if the district voted more for Donald Trump, the margin of victory would equal a negative number. Similarly to H_1, the research uses both redtie (binary) and redspec (ordinal) as dependent variables. Additionally, since this analysis is looking at the margin of victory for the 2024 election, it only includes the 118th Congress.

The data ran a linear regression, which redtie was the dependent variable and the margin of victory as the covariate. The regression did not control for political party because this test is only drawing from Republicans.

Table 2.1: Linear Regression Results, 118th Congress, Redtie		
Independent Variable	Regression Coefficient	P-value
Margin of Victory	0.50200	<0.001
Intercept	-0.00147	.539
$R=0.0458$, $R^2=0.00210$, (n=182)		

Although the margin of victory is statistically significant ($p<0.001$), the effect is extremely small, and the margin of victory explains less than 1% of the variance in male Republicans in the House of Representatives wearing red ties. Thus, the relationship between margin of victory and red tie usage is negligible and weak. The regression coefficient is small, despite significance. This linear regression explains that the margin of victory does not serve as a meaningful predictor of whether a male Republican in the House of Representatives will wear a red tie.

Table 2.2: Linear Regression Results, 118th Congress, Redspec		
Independent Variable	Regression Coefficient	P-value
Margin of Victory	-0.00116	0.798
Intercept	0.93286	<0.001
$R=0.0191$, $R^2=3.66e-4$, (n=182)		

Again, there is no statistically significant relationship between margin of victory and red tie usage, even when accounting for the three-part variable that measures tie intensity. The regression coefficient is essentially zero (-0.00116) and $R^2=3.66e-4$, both illustrating that the variable does not have a key impact on red tie intensity. Looking at both linear regressions for the data, the hypothesis is not supported. There's no clear impact.

One possible explanation would be that the margin-of-victory variable doesn't really measure support for Donald Trump; instead, it measures partisan voting behavior. The margin of victory only measures how strongly Trump performed in the 2024 election. A district may lean red and, therefore, consistently vote for Republicans, but that does not necessarily mean that the district is supportive of Trump. Another variable, such as a poll that directly asks constituents how they feel about Trump, might better serve this hypothesis and capture the concept that H_2 is trying to measure.

H_3

H_3 tests male Republicans in the House of Representatives in the 118th Congress to see how tenure and terms served affect red tie usage. H_3 predicts that the longer a representative serves, the less likely they are to wear a red tie. Conversely, a freshman representative would be more likely to wear a red tie. In this test, the variable "freshman" is a binary measure of whether a representative is a freshman. The data uses dependent variables redtie and redspec to see how red tie usage is affected, matched to the earlier tests.

Table 3.1: Male Republicans in the House of Representatives: Binary red tie representation by party, 118th Congress			
	Freshman	Non-Freshman	Total
No Red Tie	48.7%	33.3%	46.2%
Red Tie	51.3%	66.7%	53.8%
$\chi^2 = 2.38$, $p < 0.123$ (n=182)			

The data show the opposite of the predicted hypothesis: Non-freshmen are actually more likely to wear a red tie compared to freshmen. 51.3% of male Republicans in the House of Representatives freshmen wore a red tie, while 66.7% of non-freshmen wore a red tie. This is a 15.4-point difference between the two groups, showing that non-freshmen are more likely to wear a tie. Conversely, 48.7% of freshmen did not wear a red tie, while 33.3% of non-freshmen did not wear a red tie, meaning that freshmen are more likely not to wear a red tie compared to non-freshmen. There is no clear statistical difference between the two members ($\chi^2 = 2.38$, $p < 0.123$); however, the direction of the relationship is the opposite of the predicted hypothesis.

Table 3.2: Male Republicans in the House of Representatives: Three-category red tie representation by party, 118th Congress			
	Freshman	Non-Freshman	Total
No Red Tie (0,0)	48.7%	33.3%	46.2%
Close Red (1,1)	41.13%	46.7%	42.3%
Trump Red (1,2)	9.9%	20.0%	11.5%
$\chi^2 = 3.67$, $p < .160$ (n=182)			

Next, the same test was fun for redspec, accounting for the three-part variable, which accounts for Trump red. 48.7% of freshmen male Republicans in the House of Representatives did not wear a red tie, compared to 33.3% of non-freshmen male Republicans in the House of Representatives. 41.1% of freshmen male Republicans in the House of Representatives wore a close red, compared to 46.7% of non-freshmen male Republicans in the House of Representatives. Lastly, only 9.9%

of freshman male Republicans in the House of Representatives wore a Trump red, compared to 20.0% of non-freshman male Republicans in the House of Representatives. The Trump red category is noteworthy: Non-freshmen are more than twice as likely to wear a Trump red tie compared to freshmen.

Like above, the results are not statistically significant, yet the pattern contradicts the original hypothesis: Non-freshmen are more likely to wear a red tie.

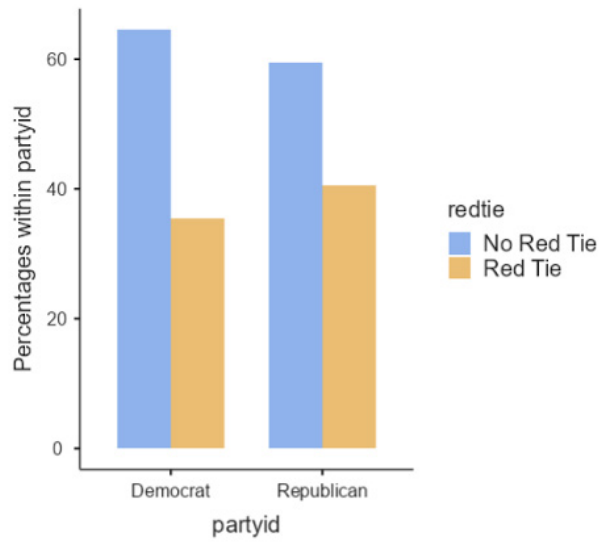
H_4

Firstly, to establish a baseline, the first analysis ran a mirrored approach to H_1, comparing partisan affiliation to red tie usage, including data only from the 112th Congress. For the 112th Congress, there are 141 Democratic male representatives and 217 Republican male representatives (n=358). To test H_4, the first analysis uses redtie, a binary variable where 0 indicates that the representative is not wearing a red tie and 1 indicates that he is wearing a red tie.

Table 4.1: Binary red tie representation by party, 112th Congress

	Democrat	Republican	Total
No Red Tie	64.5%	59.4%	61.5%
Red Tie	33.5%	40.6%	38.5%
(χ^2 = .935, p = 0.333)			

Plots of Table 4.1 data



In 2012, 33.5% of Democrats wore a red tie, compared to 40.6% of Republicans who wore a red tie. Conversely, 64.5% of Democrats did not wear a red tie, while 59.4% of Republicans did not wear a red tie. The difference between Republicans and Democrats wearing a red tie is 7.1 points, and the difference for not wearing a red tie is 5.1 points. For both political parties, representatives were more likely to wear a red tie than not. Compared to the 2024 data, the results from 2012 indicate a weaker association between party affiliation and red tie usage at that time.

A chi-square test confirmed this difference is not statistically significant (χ^2 = .935, p = 0.333). This chi-square test indicates that the tie color and party affiliation were largely independent in the 112th Congress.

To extend the analysis, H_4 was tested using redspec, which distinguishes Trump red ties from close red ties. Redspec is a three-category variable that distinguishes the ties from no red tie (0,0), close red (1,1), and Trump red (1,2). This variable tests the variation in the intensity and pattern of tie color

Table 4.2: Three-category representation by party, 112th Congress

	Democrat	Republican	Total
No Red Tie (0,0)	64.3%	59.4%	61.3%
Close Red (1,1)	32.1%	36.4%	34.7%
Trump Red (1,2)	3.6%	4.1%	3.9%
χ^2 = 0.842, p < 0.656			

Among male Republicans, 59.4% did not wear a red tie, 36.4% wore a close red, and 4.1% wore a Trump red. Among male Democrats, 64.3% did not wear a red tie, 32.1% wore a close red tie, and 3.6% wore a Trump red tie.

This data shows a subtle difference in 2012 between Democrats and Republicans: Republicans are slightly more likely to wear red ties, including the Trump red variant, but the difference is modest. A chi-square test confirms that the relationship between tie color intensity and party affiliation is not statistically significant (χ^2 = 0.842, p < 0.656).

Together, the findings for H_4 show that there is a weak correlation between party affiliation and tie color. Republicans are slightly more likely than Democrats to wear red ties, but neither the binary nor the redspec measure shows a statistically significant difference between political affiliation. Compared to 2024, the association is notably weaker, suggesting that the Republican trend of wearing red ties has strengthened over time.

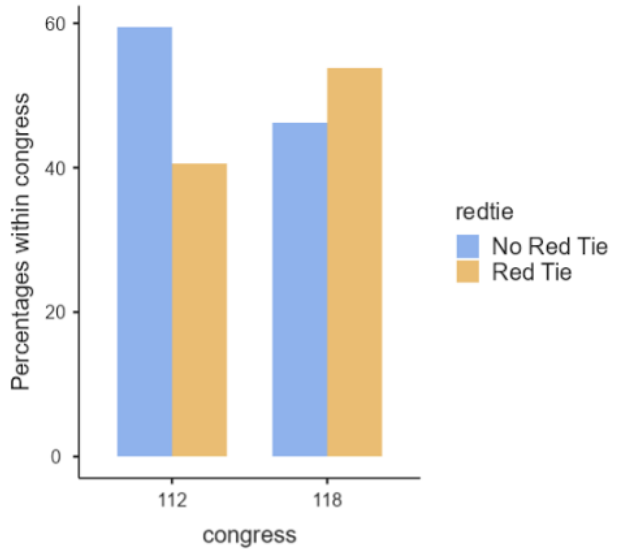
2012 v. 2024 Comparisons for male Republicans in the House of Representatives

Now, the analysis will compare red tie usage among only Male Republicans (male Republicans in the House of Representatives) between the 112th Congress (2012) and the 118th Congress (2024).

Table 4.3: Binary red tie representation of male Republicans in the House of Representatives, 112th v. 118th Congress

	112th Congress	118th Congress	Total
No Red Tie	59.4%	46.2%	53.4%
Red Tie	40.6%	53.8%	46.6%
$\chi^2 = 7.03$, $p < 0.008$			

Plots of Table 4.3 data



In the 112th Congress, 59.4% of male Republicans in the House of Representatives did not wear a red tie, compared to in the 118th Congress 46.2% of male Republicans in the House of Representatives did not wear a red tie. In the 112th Congress, a representative was more likely not to wear a red tie compared to a representative in the 118th Congress. Conversely, in the 112th Congress, 40.6% of male Republicans in the House of Representatives wore a red tie compared to 53.6% of male Republicans in the House of Representatives in the 118th Congress, proving that a male Republican in the House of Representatives in the 118th Congress is more likely to wear a red tie than a male Republican in the House of Representatives in the 112th Congress.

A chi-square test confirms that the difference in red tie usage between 2012 and 2024 is statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 7.03$, $p < 0.008$). This suggests that male Republicans in the House of Representatives were more likely to wear red ties in 2024 compared to 2012.

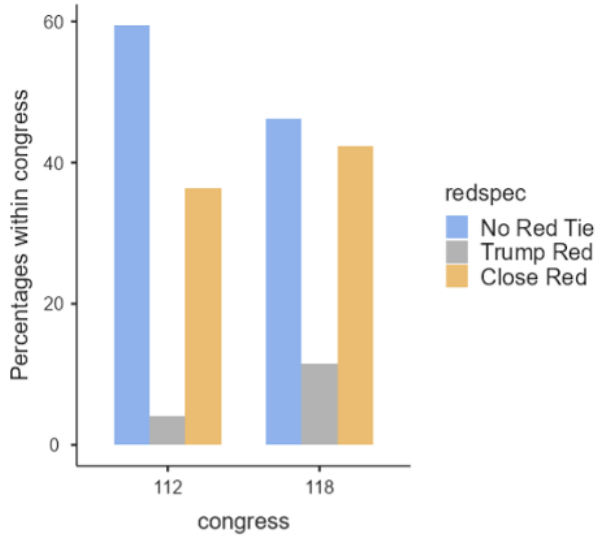
Lastly, the same test was run using the three-part variable, accounting for Trump red. 59.4% of male Republicans in the House of Representatives in the 112th Congress did not wear a red tie, compared to 46.2% in the 118th Congress who did not. The next two rows of the data confirm that even when accounting for shade variance, male Republicans in the House of Representatives were more likely to wear a red tie in the 118th Congress compared to the 112th Congress. 36.4% of male Republicans in the House of Representatives wore a close red tie in the 112th Congress, compared to 42.3% of male Republicans in the House of Representatives who wore a close red tie in the 118th Congress. Additionally, only 4.1% of male Republicans in the House of Representatives in the 112th Congress wore a Trump red tie, compared to 11.5% of male Republicans in the House of Representatives who wore a Trump red tie in the 118th Congress.

A chi-square test confirms that the difference in red tie usage between 2012 and 2024 is statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 11.3$, $p = 0.003$). This suggests that male Republicans in the House of Representatives were more likely to wear red ties in 2024 compared to 2012. Notably, for Trump red (1,2), the percentage of male Republicans in the House of Representatives wearing the Trump red shade nearly tripled from 4.1% in 2012 to 11.5% in 2024.

Table 4.4: Three-category red tie representation of male Republicans in the House of Representatives, 112th v. 118th Congress

	112th Congress	118th Congress	Total
No Red Tie (0,0)	59.4%	46.2%	53.4%
Close Red (1,1)	36.4%	42.3%	39.1%
Trump Red (1,2)	4.1%	11.5%	7.5%
$\chi^2 = 11.3$, $p = 0.003$			

Plots of Table 4.4 data



CONCLUSION

Although this research project hinges on a simple yet important question about tie colors, the results ultimately reveal a deeper understanding of the transformation in contemporary American politics. The results illustrate that increased red tie usage among male Republicans in the House of Representatives has become more closely aligned with the Republican Party over time ($\chi^2 = 7.03$, $p < 0.008$). Although differences in tie colors between Democrats and Republicans in 2012 were relatively weak and insignificant, the evidence from the 2024 House of Representatives directory indicates a stronger and more consistent pattern among male Republicans in the House of Representatives in recent years, especially for those wearing Trump red.

This shift over time demonstrates that visual presentation and aesthetic mimicry have become more strongly tied to party identification between the years of 2012 and 2024. One key finding focuses on Trump red—a vivid, specific shade of saturated red, popularized by Donald Trump. In the 112th Congress, 4.1% of male Republicans in the House of Representatives wore Trump red, compared to 11.5% of male Republicans in the House of Representatives in the 118th Congress, which is more than double within 12 years. The growing prevalence of Trump red as a specific visual clue suggests that Trump has a strong presidential brand and image that shapes decision-making and public presentation of his legislative co-partisans.

On another note, one important implication from the study is its focus on the shifting nature of president-party relationships and political polarization. The shift in outward appearance is another reflection of increasing polarization, including not just a greater distance between parties, but more homogeneity within parties. The growing uniformity suggests that political polarization also operates on a visual level, not only through ideology, voting behavior, and policy preferences.

Furthermore, another related implication also concerns recent trends highlighted in scholarship in which presidents assert more power over legislatures, and legislators are less willing to cross their party leaders, especially the president. In recent decades, presidents have asserted more power over legislatures, including over their co-partisans. In modern American politics, presidents play a central role in shaping party agendas and public policy, despite the role being traditionally reserved for the legislative sector. This data is consistent with a broader institutional trend of presidential overreach and amplified executive power.

Additionally, these findings also connect with broader debates and discussions in the study of American politics about the nationalization of political competition—the general idea that even local races are now subsumed under national-level debates and issues. While district-level support for Trump in the 2024 election provided weak results ($R=0.0191$, $R^2=3.66e\text{-}4$), the relationship between red tie usage and party affiliation was strong in H_1. This research suggests that macro-level forces, such as presidential influence and national-level issues, are more powerful drivers of behavior compared to local electoral conditions.

In a broad sense, this research contributes to the growing literature on symbolic behavior in politics. Political communication is not limited to television advertisements or speeches—there are signals that are image-driven and play a role in shaping public opinion and perception as well.

At first glance, the fact that more Republicans wear red ties in Congress may seem trivial or insignificant. However, this study demonstrates that the data are both statistically significant and in line with predicted behaviors affiliated with partisan identity. Small stylistic choices, such as what color tie a Congressman chooses to wear for the workday, can reveal a larger theme of political transformation—signaling a shift in polarization and presidential leadership in modern American politics. ■

DATA LINKS

Coding Sheet

Data Sheet

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Mallory Waligora graduated from Oakland University in May 2026, where she served as Vice President of Pi Sigma Alpha while completing a triple major in International Relations, Public Relations and Strategic Communications, and French Literature and Language. After spending six years working in retail throughout high school and university, she became interested in how presentation, style, and visual cues shape perception—an interest that ultimately inspired her research on political symbolism in Congress. Her academic work focuses on American politics and political communication.

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