

# The reputational benefits of selective exposure to partisan information

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See the working  
paper here!

## Abstract

Individuals should seek diverse information to improve their judgment and decision making. Yet, they frequently engage in selective exposure by preferentially seeking out information that aligns with their prior beliefs. Here, we explore whether selective exposure confers social benefits by signaling strength of group membership.

In five pre-registered, incentivized experiments, we test whether observation moderates selective exposure (Experiments 1 & 3) and, subsequently, whether observers reward decision makers for this behavior (Experiments 2,4 & 5).

## Experiment 1: Causes of Selective Exposure

### Experiment 1 Methods

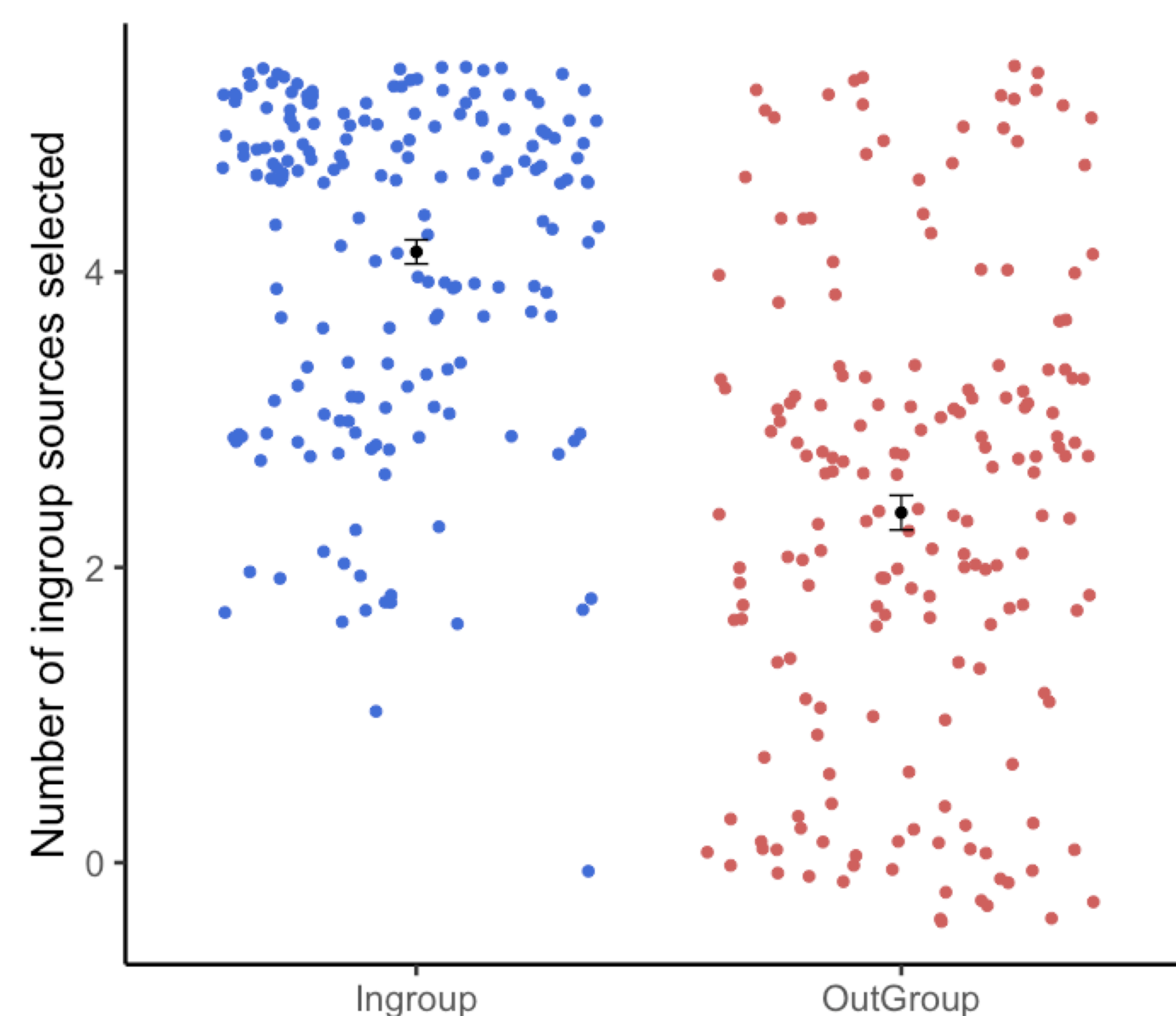
Experiment 1 (N = 364) tested whether observation drives selective exposure.

Decision makers chose which information to view out of a balanced menu of ten options either when:

- Political *ingroup* members would see their choices
- Political *outgroup* members would see their choices

### Experiment 1 Results

Decision makers who were observed by an ingroup member chose to view 75% more ingroup information than those in the outgroup condition, on average ( $p < .001$ ).



## Experiment 2: Consequences of Selective Exposure

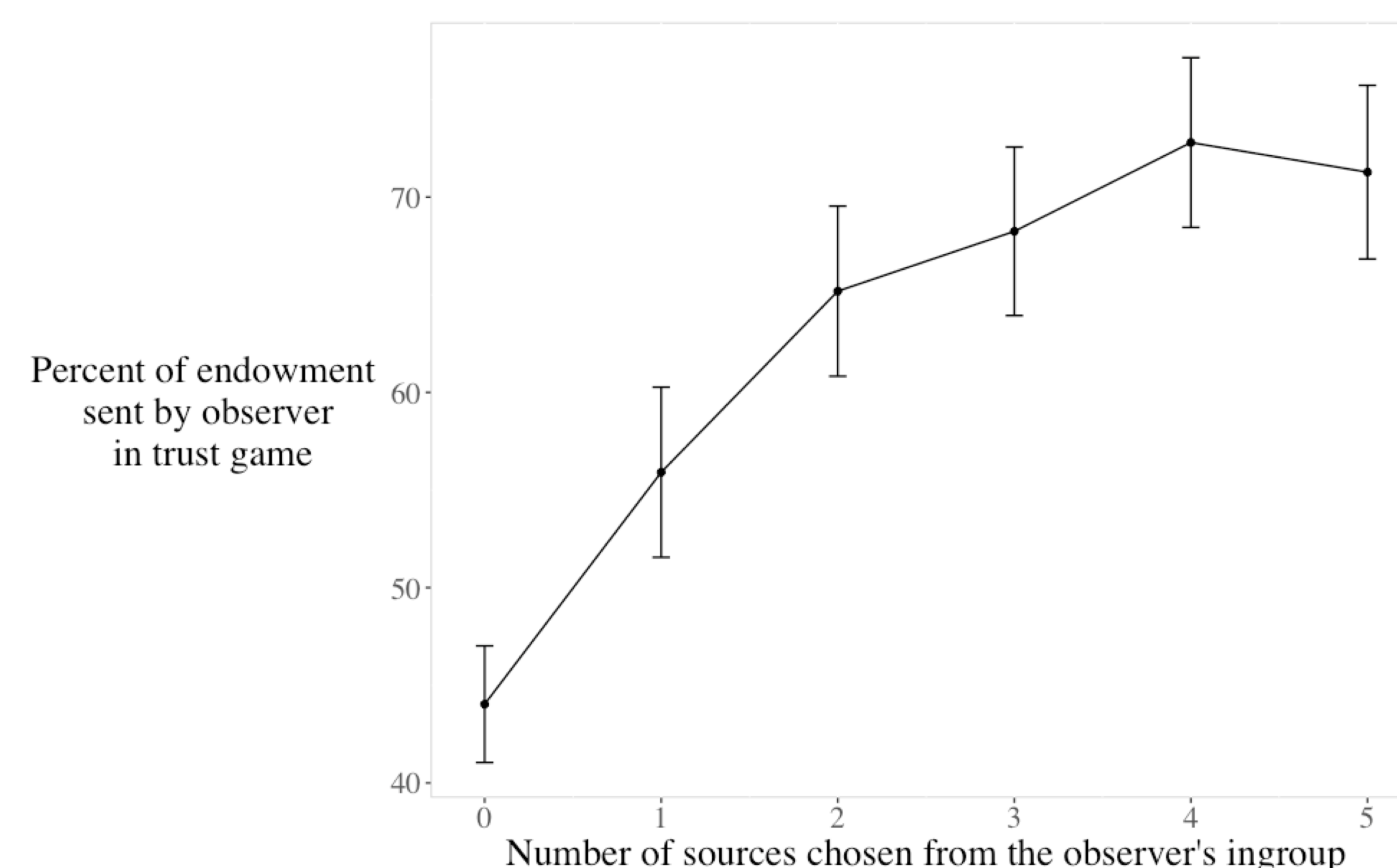
### Experiment 2 Methods

Experiment 2 (N = 671) tested whether engaging in selective exposure actually confers reputational benefits.

Observers saw the decision maker's information choices from Experiment 1 and decided how much to send to them in a trust game.

### Experiment 2 Results

For each additional information source from observer's ingroup that the decision maker selected, observers sent 17.8% more of their endowment, on average ( $p < .001$ ).



## Robustness

- Incentivized tradeoff between reputational and accuracy motives
- Types of information source:
  - News sources
  - US Senator press pages
  - Advisor opinions on political topic
- Comparison to private control condition

## Key moderators

1. **Decision context.** Observers reward decision makers who select more of the observer's ingroup sources more when expecting to collaborate on a future task reliant on trust rather than judgment skill. Importantly, actors do not intuit this sensitivity.
2. **Congruence of group membership.** Selecting advice from the observer's ingroup is rewarded more for outgroup members.
3. **Magnitude of selective exposure.** Observers prefer decision makers who select more information from the observer's ingroup, but also show a preference for diversification – punishing those decision makers who select *all* information from the observer's ingroup.

## Conclusion

The hypothesis that selective exposure is driven by the desire for ingroup favor is nuanced. Ingroup observation increases selective exposure and is generally rewarded, but observers also appreciate the benefits of consuming diverse information and select cooperation partners who appear willing to step out of the echo chamber. The plot below (Experiment 5) shows how selecting a diverse set of information sources can yield reputational benefits across conditions.

Decision Maker's InGroup Sources Chosen

