The Effect of Partisan Cues and Message Content

on the Perceived Believability of Politicians

Madison Webb

University of Colorado at Boulder

Department of Psychology and Neuroscience Honors Thesis

Defense: April 8th, 2019

Advisor: Leaf Van Boven

Committee members:

Leaf Van Boven, Psychology and Neuroscience

Tiffany Ito, Psychology and Neuroscience

Jennifer Wolak, Political Science

Lewis O. Harvey Jr., Psychology and Neuroscience, Honors Council

Abstract

Previous research has demonstrated a "party over policy" effect, in which politicians will support a piece of legislation from their own party regardless of the policy content, even if that content runs contrary to their ideological or explicit goals. This study evaluates a similar effect: the perceived believability. In this study 179 undergraduates at the University of Colorado at Boulder were asked to rate how believable statements were from members of different political parties, varying the specificity of the content of the statement. Participants rated statements from their political outgroup as being less believable than statements from their political ingroup, particularly when the content of the statement is ambiguous, and therefore open to interpretation guided by group membership cues.

The Effect of Partisan Cues and Message Content on the Perceived Believability of Politicians

Despite the wariness of what party politics might hold, a wariness which the United States has always held, we have proved powerless to do anything about it. While defending the new government to the people of the United States, James Madison speaks of parties, or factions, as "…an attachment to different leaders ambitiously contending for pre-eminence and power… [that have] divided mankind into parties, inflamed them with mutual animosity, and rendered them much more disposed to vex and oppress each other than to cooperate for their common good," (*The Federalist*, No. X, Madison). While the whole of the Federalist essays were written in order to justify their proposed solutions to the nature of man within a government, Madison and the other founders identified the unavoidable struggle between different groups of people, especially when it pertains to government and governmental control. The danger is not whether or not ambitious politicians will leave people behind, it is whether the people will behave towards government in a way that harms both the other side and themselves.

Contemporary research hints at this being the case: the two major parties are growing further apart, and with that shift comes growing animosity towards the other side. According to the Pew Research Center, partisan priorities now diverge on average by 19 points, up from just 14 points in 1999 (Pew Research Center, 2019). More startlingly, the largest gap between each party's priorities has nearly doubled in the last two decades, from 24 points in 1999 to 46 points in 2019, with only signs of this rate of separation continuing to increase (Pew Research Center, 2019). This divide signals that Americans fundamentally disagree with each other and their visions for the country which goes so far as to harbor moral disengagement, lack of empathy (schadenfreude), and threats of physical harm towards the other side (Kalmoe & Mason, 2019). Dubbed "lethal partisanship", these factors predispose citizens to disengage from what might

happen to the other side, "…thereby protecting one's self-image even as one harms other people," (Kalmoe & Mason, 2019, pg. 7). These feelings about the other group change people's behavior, like decreasing pro-social behavior, meaning that a dislike for your political opponents can make you act towards them in a less ideal way (Kalmoe & Mason, 2019; Bandura et al. 1996). These feelings are particularly concerning because Kalmoe and Mason (2019) find that citizens report that they feel that violence towards the opposing party is justified if that party were to take the office of the presidency in the next election (Edsall, 2019; Kalmoe & Mason, 2019). These findings do not have to do with the content of policy decisions held by the other side, but rather with the people themselves, meaning that a politician's political identity is more relevant to voters than is the content of their statements.

Given that someone's political affiliation appears to affect how people feel towards that person, could it also be true that the messages someone receives from a partisan are also affected by their political affiliation? Research on the the effects of group membership on persuasion says it can be. McGarty and colleagues (1994) argue that statements made by a party member will be more persuasive to their supporters than it will be persuasive to members of the other party (McGarty et al. 1994). They base this argument in Turner's (1987) self-categorization theory (SCT) that describes how people come to see themselves and others as members of a group, and what those consequences might be. Under this theory, members of an in group should be interchangeable because of their group membership (Turner, 1987; McGarty et al. 1994). Members of that group should find their message just as persuasive as a message from a different person within the group, because their shared group membership gives them both confidence in the message and context for what to expect. On the other hand, being a member of the outgroup

means that the speakers themselves may be rejected before they are able to try to persuade their

opponents simply because of their group membership (Turner, 1987; McGarty et al. 1994).

The SCT then would predict increased support for persuasive messages from one's

ingroup over messages from the outgroup when affiliation with a group is made salient. In a

political context this could have implications from being persuaded to vote for the best candidate

to persuasion on a specific policy issue once that candidate is in office. This, logically, would

seem to be the case: if someone already agrees with a candidate on many issues (which is

supposedly why they are members of the same party), then it should be easier for the candidate

to persuade that person to agree with them. This is because one's self-categorization is meant to

reflect reality, so if an in group message is inconsistent with one's views that person is more

likely to adjust their reality based on the message from their ingroup. An outgroup message will

not adjust the listeners view of reality, because their reality was already different from the

listener's (Turner, 1987; McGarty et al. 1994). McGarty et al. (1994) find that it is not that

messages from one's ingroup are more persuasive than messages from one's outgroup, it's that

messages from one's outgroup are less persuasive. This distinction is important because it

suggests that outgroup messages are punished, while ingroup messages are not enhanced just

because they come from the ingroup. If the outgroup is punished, or is under a higher scrutiny

than the ingroup, then it should be expected that weaker messages from the outgroup will be

punished more, especially in comparison to how a listener receives a weak ingroup message.

However, it is important to note that these findings do not claim that any group

membership has influence. In order for group membership to matter it has to be seen as relevant

to someone's opinion on the issue (McGarty et al. 1994). Obviously, affiliation with a political

party is a relevant group membership when the message is political. Party affiliation is probably

even more relevant now than it would have been three decades ago because the issue priorities for each party are pulling further and further apart, so a speaker's political affiliation is much more informative as to what their actual viewpoint is. Punishment of the outgroup message is also consistent with citizens' expressed negative attitudes towards the other party as seen in recent years (Kalmoe & Mason, 2019). Personal identity and group membership are clearly very important to how a listener receives a message, but the content of the message must also be relevant to how the message is received. Is it the case that even a quality message from an outgroup will be rejected simply because it comes from the outgroup? Or are there messages that are able to overcome punishment from the listener?

The false consensus effect, as described by Gilovich (1990), states that people will project onto a statement their own beliefs and attitudes, which biases how common people see their beliefs and attitudes as being. Gilovich (1990) proposes that the underlying mechanism that causes this effect is the resolution of ambiguities, called construal. Using an example about which movies someone prefers, Gilovich explains that that person must first decide what it means for a movie to be Italian or French, which will then influence both their preference and what they believe the preferences of others are, the former of which is the argument that pertains to this research. Manipulating his example, when a citizen engages a statement made by a politician they may go through a similar process as choosing a movie they would prefer. In this example, though, the listener must decide not what it means for the speaker to be Italian or French, but what it means for the statement to come from a Democrat or a Republican. Using Gilovich's definition of construal, the features of a person or statement that are brought to mind when their category (political affiliation) is made salient should influence what the listener sees as objective information that they are to consider (Gilovich, 1990).

Gilovich also finds that people construe more when statements are general rather than specific (Gilovich, 1990). For instance, in a political context, "We need to improve our tax system," is general rather than specific, so the type of solution may be interpreted by the listener based on whether they were told that the speaker is a Democrat or a Republican. On the contrary, if the same speaker were to say instead, "We need to improve our tax plan by reducing the income tax for people who make less than $100,000 per year," there is less room for interpretation because it is concrete (specific) rather than ambiguous (general). This can easily be integrated with the work by McGarty et al. (1987). The political affiliation of a speaker can be seen as the category that the speaker falls under. The persuasiveness of the message that the speaker gives is a function of both their membership to a political group and the type of message that they give (either concrete/specific or general/ambiguous). Outgroup members are likely to be punished by the listener if their views do not align with those of the listener. This should be made worse if the statement by the speaker is ambiguous because the party affiliation of the speaker, whether it be the same or different from the listener's, will indicate how the ambiguity should be filled in. So, a listener may be somewhat indifferent to an ambiguous or concrete statement from their ingroup because they will make up for the lack of information from the ambiguous speaker with their own preferences and opinions. However, by the same process the listener will fill in the ambiguity of a statement from the outgroup with the knowledge that the speaker's perception of reality is different from their own, and they may punish the outgroup speaker not only because they are a member of the outgroup, but also because the speaker was ambiguous in their statement.

Another relevant area of research that warrants a discussion is that of polarization. Cohen (2003) finds that people define the 'social meaning' of an object, and then make inferences based

on the meaning that they've arrived upon (Cohen, 2003). But, this can flow in the opposite direction as well. Either someone will decide on a social meaning and then evaluate the quality of the object, or they will use the qualities of the object (or, the context of the argument) to help them construct the social meaning of the object. What direction this process happens in is determined by the context of the decision to be made. In his research Cohen (2003) finds support for a "party over policy" effect, where a participant will support a policy regardless of the content of the policy if it is proposed by members of their own political party. So, in the absence of political factors, the listener uses the qualities of the message to make evaluations about its social meaning, but when political information is present the listener will take that into account before they attach social meanings to it (Cohen, 2003). In other words, if an ingroup party member proposes a piece of legislation that the listener may not have thought was relevant to their party's preferences, they will support it because they assume that the values of the political actor are in line with their own.

A real world example of the consequences of Cohen's work comes from Ehret, Van Boven, and Sherman (2018) who demonstrated the party over policy effect in the context of climate change legislation. In their research they evaluate partisan's opinions on climate change policy leading up to a real election in the state of Washington. Their main goal was to evaluate whether manipulation of the political affiliation of the politician who proposes climate legislation will impact voters' support for that legislation. Their results are consistent with that of Cohen in that the party of the person who proposes the legislation serves as a better predictor of support than does the content of the legislation and the views towards climate change held by the voter. Their results are also consistent with Gilovich (1990) and McGarty et al. (1994) in that legislation proposed by the ingroup does not see increased support from voters in the ingroup.

Rather, people "reactively devalue" the policy of their outgroup, regardless of other factors that may better serve their own interests and preferences (Van Boven et al., 2018; Gilovich, 1990).

The final relevant theoretical construction of this study comes from construal level theory (CLT) (Trope & Liberman, 2003; Trope & Liberman, 2010; Luguri & Napier, 2013). CLT posits that psychologically distant events or people, which includes those who are socially distant from a subject, will use high-level construals, more abstract mental models, to represent the target (Trope & Liberman, 2003). Because the mental model of a distant target is abstract, changing a piece of the model can drastically change the meaning of the model. In a political context, this means that a Democrat who has an abstract mental model of a Republican, because they are socially distant from each other, may see huge changes in their model of the Republican. On the other hand, a Democrat who is asked to evaluate another Democrat, because they have a low-level construal of their socially close peer (a concrete mental model), will not have that model changed much by new information they are presented with about their peer (Trope & Liberman, 2003). Luguri and Napier (2013) elaborate on the importance of this issue. They find that attitudes towards a particular group issue are stronger for high-level construal (abstract thinking), but only when identity is made salient (Luguri & Napier, 2013). As they argue, this is important in a political context because it affects how policy is heard. They use an example about policy discussion in Congress: any debate in Congress is composed of people with highly salient political identities, which may encourage lawmakers to stick to their political ideologies rather than try to reach bipartisan compromise (Luguri & Napier, 2013).

This study follows previous lines of research in both the impact of the persuasion of social identities, and how these social identities may be the result of polarized politics. Specifically, we investigate the perceived believability of politicians. The study evaluates belief

ratings of politicians with regard to the type of statement (ambiguous or concrete), the politician's affiliation (Democrat, "Affiliation Unknown", and Republican), and the participant's affiliation (Democrat, Independent, Republican). In line with the suggestions of previous research, we predict that group membership will be persuasive, specifically when it comes to ambiguous statements. We predict that for ambiguous statements, participants will rate statements from their political outgroup as being less believable (devalue those statements) than statements from their political ingroup. Independents and "Affiliation unknown" politicians serve to investigate whether one party is consistently more believable than the other party (i.e. independents rate Republicans as consistently more believable than Democrats) and whether or not political affiliation harms the politician's believability (i.e. all participants rating the "Affiliation unknown" politician as more believable than either the Democratic or Republican politician). We predict that "Affiliation unknown" politicians may be less believable than their partisan counter parts because of the role that partisan affiliation plays in decision-making.

Method

Study Overview and Design

Participants indicated their level of belief towards 48 different statements made by politicians. Before beginning, subjects were told that they were going to be asked a few demographic questions, "*Then you'll read 48 different statements that members of Congress have made within the past year and respond with your level of belief or disbelief towards the content of the statement. We're not asking whether you believe that they said the statement or not, but whether you believe if the content of statement itself is true.*" Of the 48 statements, 24 are considered ambiguous statements and 24 are considered concrete statements. A list of the different statements can be found in the appendix. Concrete statements are designed to have

more detail to them (references to specific years, statistics, figures), while ambiguous statements

do not make reference to any particulars beyond their general idea. The statements were assigned

randomly to a combination of gender (in proportion with the actual ratio of men to women in

Congress before the 2018 elections), name, and political affiliation ('Democrat', 'Republican', or

'Affiliation Unknown'). We expect that participants will punish (believe less) statements made

by members of the opposite party than members of their own party, especially when their

statements are ambiguous. The result is a 2 (message type) x 2 (participant affiliation) x 3 (target

affiliation) within subjects study design.

Participants

Participants for this study were recruited from the CU Boulder Sona subject pool, which

pulls from the students enrolled in general psychology in exchange for class credit. There were

179 participants, 108 of whom identified as Democrats, 44 as Republicans, and 27 who did not

identify with either party. Each party affiliation includes three different levels: those who

identified with a party when first questioned were further asked whether they identified as a

Strong [Democrat/Republican] or a *Not very strong [Democrat/Republican]*. Those who

identified as *Independent* or *Other* were asked which party they thought of themselves as closer

to, the *Republican Party*, the *Democratic Party*, or *Neither*. The three levels of strength of

identification are collapsed in the analyses into affiliations of either "Democrats",

"Republicans", or those who do not identify with either party.

This third category, those who can be considered 'independents' was originally included

in the analyses as a method of comparison to their partisan counterparts. However, because those

with no party affiliation consistently rated all targets and statements as less believable, they did

not help to understand the effect of partisan identification on belief ratings, and so were later

excluded from the analyses to make the interaction effects easier to interpret. After this the total number of subjects is 152.

Procedure

The study was conducted in the shared psychology research lab at the University of Colorado at Boulder. First, participants were asked a series of demographic questions which included their age, gender, race, religion, and political affiliation. Their political affiliation came from the methodology the American National Election Survey (ANES), which sorts people into 7 categories (1=*Strong Democrat*; 7=*Strong Republican*). This rating was later collapsed and centered on zero and the independents were dropped, leaving the two categories relevant to our analyses (-1=*Democrats*; 1=*Republicans*). Before beginning the main task, participants were asked "Why do you support [the Democratic/the Republican/your party]? Why don't you support [the Republican/the Democratic/the Republican or Democratic parties]? What personal values led you to this decision?" This was included in order to make the participants' own political affiliations salient, as it was important for them to be aware of whether the politician was part or their own party or a different party.

For the main task, participants were told that the purpose of the study was to evaluate how people make political decisions when they don't have all the information they would like. During the practice trials they were told that they would receive varying amounts of information about each politician. This information was chosen to reflect the qualities of the politicians themselves, and included gender, age, race, and political affiliation. Although we wanted political affiliation to be salient, we did not want participants to only respond according to their party and not read the statements themselves. During the main task, participants were only presented with a neutral image of the politician (a grey bust of either a man or a woman) with a

name attached; their political affiliation, written below their name and a border around their image that was either blue (for Democrats), red (for Republicans), or black (for 'Affiliation Unknown'); and a statement. The statements were either concrete ("Aggravated assault in our state has decreased by more than 8% last year.") or ambiguous statements ("This proposed legislation would significantly impact the health of our elderly."). Statements were chosen specifically to not be 'hot-button' issues, so that participants would respond to the statement with the given partisan cues, rather than their existing knowledge and biases about the statement topic. An example of this is provided below in *Figure 1*.

Participants rated all statements using a 1-7 Likert scale (1=*Do Not Believe*, 4=*Unsure*, 7=*Believe*). All participants rated all 48 statements (24 concrete, 24 ambiguous). Statements, gender, and political affiliation were randomly assigned. After completing the task subjects were given a debriefing survey in Qualtrics and received class credit.
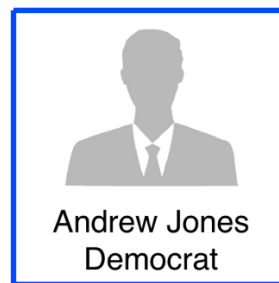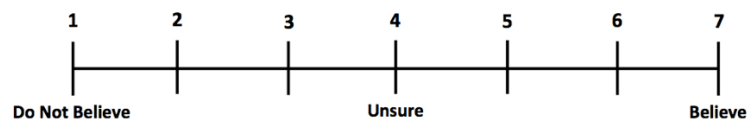
Figure 1. An example of what subjects saw during the main task. Pictured is a Democrat associated with a concrete statement, and the scale that the subjects used to indicate their belief.

Results

Belief responses were examined using 2 (message type) x 2 (participant affiliation) x 3 (target affiliation) mixed effects analysis of variance (ANOVA). As predicted, the three-way interaction was highly significant, $F(2, 300) = 8.99$, $p < 0.001$. Republican politicians ($M = 4.31$) were consistently rated as less believable than Democratic politicians ($M = 4.76$), $t(107) = 6.89$, $p < .001$, and ambiguous statements ($M = 4.37$) were consistently rated as less believable than concrete statements ($M = 4.65$), $t(151) = -6.65$, $p < .001$.

In addition, we tested the 2 (participant affiliation) x 3 (target affiliation) interactions for only ambiguous statements, $F(2, 300) = 20.84$, $p < .001$, and only concrete statements, $F(2, 300) = 2.64$, $p = .77$. These interactions are depicted in *Figure* 2 and *Figure* 3. For concrete statements only the target's political affiliation was significant, $F(2, 300) = 10.33$, $p < .001$. Also for concrete statements, Democrats rated other Democrats as more believable ($M = 4.82$) than they did Republicans ($M = 4.58$), $t(107) = 3.12$, $p < .01$, however the difference between how Republicans responded Democrats ($M = 4.81$) and how Republicans responded to other Republicans ($M = 4.88$) was not significant, $t(43) = -0.50$, $p = .62$. For ambiguous statements only, Democrats still rated other Democrats as more believable ($M = 4.70$) than they did Republicans ($M = 4.05$), $t(107) = 6.88$, $p < .001$, but Republicans rated Democrats as significantly less believable ($M = 4.22$) than they did other Republicans ($M = 4.71$), $t(43) = -3.66$, $p < .001$.

Oerall participants rated their ingroup as more believable on average than members of the outgroup. However, breaking these responses into concrete statements and ambiguous statements, the ambiguous statements show a strong interaction effect such that members of one's political outgroup are rated as less believable than members of one's political ingroup. For concrete statements, on the other hand, there was no significant interaction effect. This explains the significance of the three-way interaction and supports our hypotheses. Who and what a participant is responding to matter: overall Democrats will rate other Democrats as more believable than they will Republicans, and likewise Republicans will rate other Republicans as more believable than they will Democrats. However, this pattern breaks when the target uses concrete language, but is made stronger when the target uses ambiguous language.
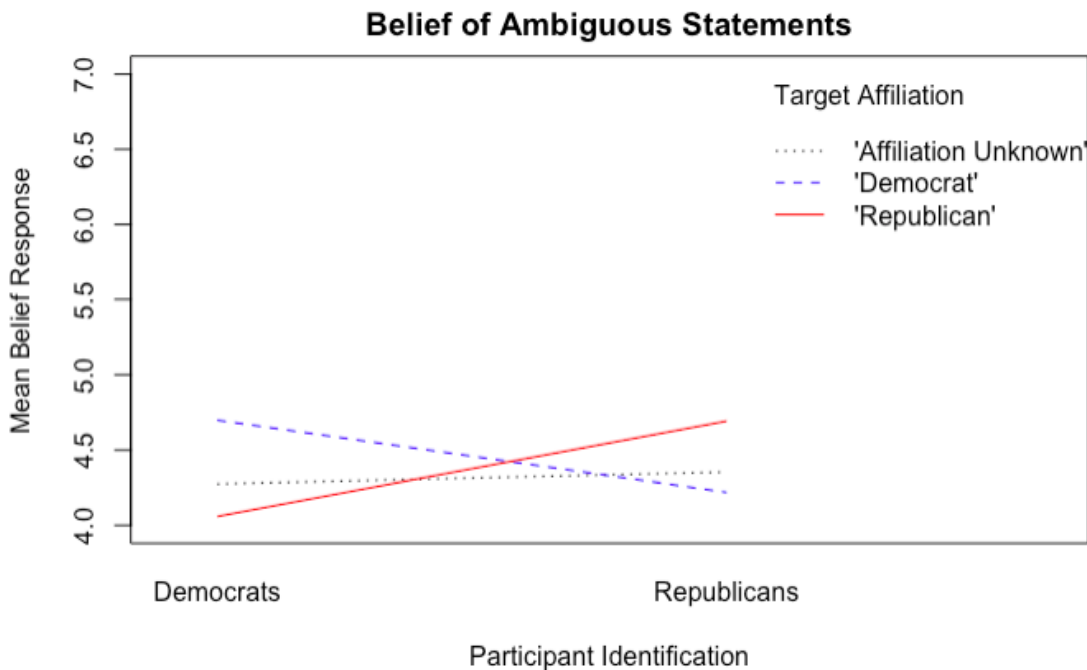

Figure 2. Interaction of participant affiliation and target affiliation for only ambiguous statements. As predicted, the interaction is highly significant because ambiguous statements are open to be interpreted using other available information; in this case, partisan cues. Responses to

"Affiliation Unknown" politicians are consistent, meaning that the interaction can be attributed
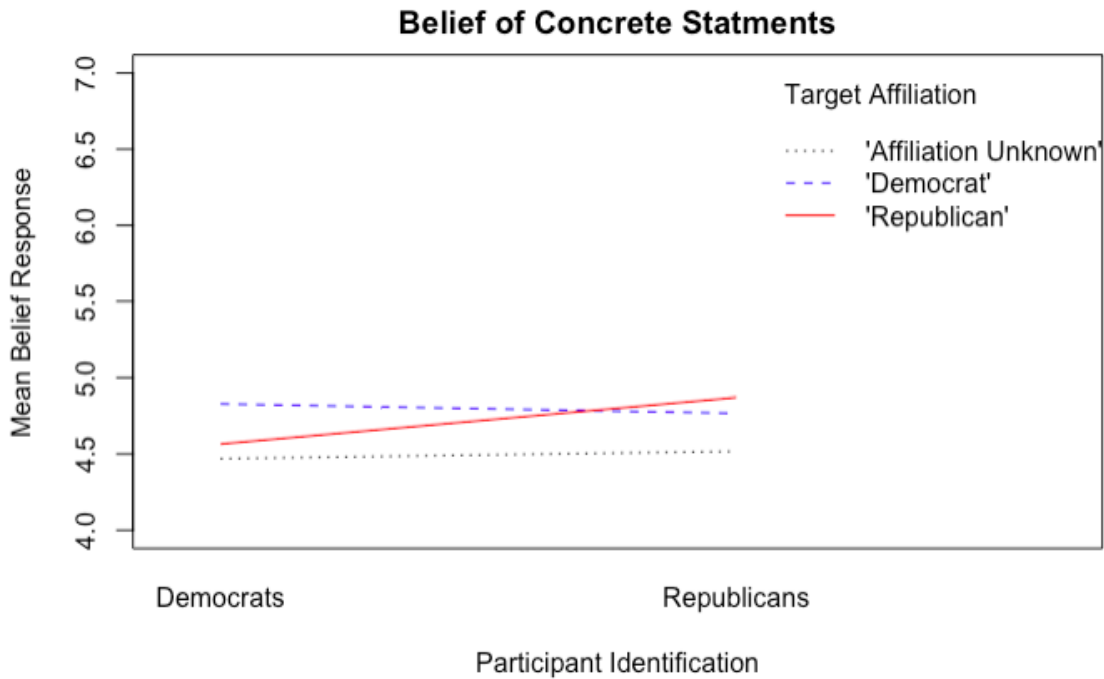
to partisan information.

Figure 3: Interaction of participant affiliation and target affiliation for only concrete statements

(theoretically, more believable). The interaction is slightly significant, and crosses over on the

Republican side. These results suggest that concrete statements are generally more believable,

even in the presence of party cues. Responses to "Affiliation Unknown" politicians are

consistent, meaning that the interaction can be attributed to partisan information.

Another way to conceptualize this pattern of results is depicted in *Table 1*. Rather than

look at how Democrats respond to other Democrats and Republics for either set of statements,

looking at how Democrats respond to other Democrats for each type of statement will help show

whether statement type significantly affects responses. For both Democrats and Republicans

there is not difference in how they respond to members of their own party across both statement types. However, for both Democrats and Republicans there is a significant difference in how they respond to the other party given the type of message that they are given. Since the means for each outgroup for ambiguous statements is lower, this supports our expectation that ambiguous statements will be less believable, but only when the message comes from the opposite party.

Table 1
Belief of statements

| | Statement Type | | | | |
| | Concrete | Ambiguous | | | |
Participant Identification	*M*	*M*	*df*	*t*	*p*
Democrats					
In-group	4.82	4.70	107	1.56	0.12
Out-group	4.58	4.05	107	7.37	< .001***
Republicans					
In-group	4.88	4.71	43	1.60	0.12
Out-group	4.81	4.22	43	4.98	< .001***

Discussion

The results of our study support our hypothesis that (1) group membership is persuasive and (2) the ambiguity of a statement allows the participant room to interpret its meaning, so they devalue (rate as less believable) statements from their out-group party. When participants respond to concrete statements they rate members of their own political party and other political

parties similarly. However, when the statement is ambiguous they rate members of the other party as less believable than statements from members of their own party.

This work helps adds to other research that seeks to explain political polarization and what factors contribute to it. As the ideological gap between the parties grows, so does the psychological social distance between the members of the Democratic and Republican parties. Construal predicts that when statements are ambiguous the listener will construe more, or fill in the gaps, for the missing information in the statement (Trope & Liberman, 2003; Trope & Liberman, 2010; Luguri & Napier, 2013). How that message is construed depends on whether there is other information to help the listener interpret the statement, in this case the political affiliation of the speaker (McGarty et al., 1994). That is, ambiguity invites interpretation from the listener, which will either be filled in positively or negatively depending on whether or not the speaker's political affiliation matches that of the listener's. However, as Luguri & Napier (2013) note, saliency of identity is a factor that increases polarization, where in the absence of a salient political identity ambiguity can actually decrease polarization (Luguri & Napier, 2013; Luguri et al., 2012). This study focused on the effect of different statement types when identity was salient meaning that it may be most applicable to situations within government where political identity is always salient. As far as the general electorate it may be the case that as polarization increases it becomes impossible to avoid discovering the other person's political affiliation, which in certain contexts may result in more polarization following a political discussion.

Self-categorization theory is necessary to help explain this pattern of results. Messages from an ingroup are more persuasive than messages from an outgroup, and messages from an outgroup may be rejected because of the speaker's identity even though the content of the

message is heard and understood (Turner, 1987; McGarty et al. 1994). This study does not ask

participants to recall the content of the messages they were presented with and so we cannot be

sure that the participants were considering the message content as well or in equal parts as the

presented political affiliation of the speaker. However, the difference in believability ratings

suggests that participants are taking the message content into account. It is only for ambiguous

messages that we see a difference in how participants respond to members of their own group

and members of the other group. While SCT helps to explain the occurrence of political

polarization, our pattern of results is more consistent with predictions under CLT. It is important

to note that, as predicted and consistent with prior research, it appears that people punish

members of the other party when they use ambiguous statements, rather than valuing more

highly statements from their own party.

These results are similar to those found in polarization research, particularly the "party

over policy" effect (Cohen, 2003; Van Boven, Ehret, Sherman, 2018). While this study had no

policy to evaluate, and so cannot be the same effect, the same considerations are in place. This

work diverges not only in that the participants were asked to rate statements and not policy, but

also in the specificity of the statements they were presented with. This effect is just as

concerning with regards to political polarization as is the party over policy effect since it may be

produced in everyday interactions with other people. While the party over policy effect is likely

to be produced in government (even though average voters were asked to rate policy in previous

studies, they do not vote directly on nor directly engage with policy considerations most of the

time), which can decrease the ability to pass bipartisan legislation. Average people do, however,

engage in political discussions with their peers often, and if someone's identity is present or can

be guessed at then they may become more polarized in their personal beliefs about stances from the other party.

More than just unproductive politics, the results of increased polarization have real world impacts on everyday people. Moral disengagement is both increasingly common and could be the beginning of partisan violence, as regular people respond that they think that violence against the other party would be justified if they take the presidency in the next election (Kalmoe & Mason, 2019; Bandura et al. 1996). This is likely worsened by the results demonstrated in this study. As people become less likely to believe in the other party they become less likely to try to reach bipartisan outcomes and become more distant from the other group.

Overall, this research adds to a growing body of work that seeks to understand the origins and effects of political polarization. It demonstrates that a salient political identity and the type of message interact to produce an effect that appears somewhat damning for the detrimental effects of parties that our founders warned us about from this political system's conception.

Bibliography

The American National Election Studies. (2012). The ANES guide to public opinion and

electoral behavior. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, Center for Political Studies.

Berman, R. (2016). What's the Answer to Political Polarization in the U.S.? The Atlantic.

Cohen, G. L. (2003). Party over policy: The dominating impact of group influence on political

beliefs. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 85(5), 808.

Edsall, T.B. (2019). No Hate Left Behind. The New York Times.

Ehret, P.J., Van Boven, L., & Sherman, D.K. (2018). Partisan barriers to bipartisanship:

Understanding climate policy polarization. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*,

9(3), 308-318.

Fleming, M. A., & Petty, R. E. (2000). Identity and persuasion: An elaboration likelihood

approach. In Hogg, M. A., & Terry, D. (Eds.), Attitudes, Behavior and Social

Context (pp.171-199). Philadelphia, PN: Psychology Press.

Gilbert, D. T. (1991). How mental systems believe. American Psychologist, 46(2), 107.

Gilbert, D. T., Krull, D. S., & Malone, P. S. (1990). Unbelieving the unbelievable: Some

problems in the rejection of false information. Journal of Personality and Social

Psychology, 59(4), 601.

Gilovich, T. (1990). Differential construal and the false consensus effect. Journal of Personality

and Social Psychology, 59(4), 623-634.

Goren, P., Federico, C. M., & Kittilson, M. C. (2009). Source cues, partisan identities, and

political value expression. American Journal of Political Science, 53(4), 805-820.

Hamilton, D. L., & Rose, T. L. (1980). Illusory correlation and the maintenance of

stereotypicbeliefs. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 39(5), 832-845.

Hasson, U., Simmons, J. P., & Todorov, A. (2005). Believe it or not: On the possibility of

     suspending belief. Psychological Science, 16(7), 566-571.

Kalmoe, N.P., Mason, L. (2019). Lethal Mass Partisanship: Prevalence, Correlates, & Electoral

     Contingencies.

Luguri, J. B., & Napier, J. L. (2013). Of two minds: The interactive effect of construal level and

     identity on political polarization. Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 49(6), 972-

     977.

Mackie, D. M., Worth, L. T., & Asuncion, A. G. (1990). Processing of persuasive in-group

     messages. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 58(5), 812.

McCright, A. M., & Dunlap, R. E. (2011). The politicization of climate change and

     polarization in the American public & #39's views of global warming, 2001–2010. The

     Sociological Quarterly, 52(2), 155-194.

McGarty, C., Haslam, S. A., Hutchinson, K. J., & Turner, J. C. (1994). The effects of salient

     group memberships on persuasion. Small Group Research, 25(2), 267-293.

Pew Research Center (2017). The Partisan divide on political values grows even wider.

     Retrieved from http://www.people-press.org/2017/10/05/the-partisan-divide-on-political-

     values-grows-even-wider/

Pew Research Center (2019). Republicans and Democrats have grown further apart on what the

     nation's top priorities should be. Retrieved from https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-

     tank/2019/02/05/republicans-and-democrats-have-grown-further-apart-on-what-the-

     nations-top-priorities-should-be/.

Smith, C. T., Ratliff, K. A., & Nosek, B. A. (2012). Rapid assimilation: Automatically

     integrating new information with existing beliefs. Social Cognition, 30(2), 199.

Trope, Y., & Liberman, N. (2003). Temporal construal. *Psychological review*, *110*(3), 403.

Trope, Y., & Liberman, N. (2010). Construal-level theory of psychological

distance. *Psychological review*, *117*(2), 440.

Wyer, R. S., & Albarracín, D. (2005). Belief formation, organization, and change:

Cognitive and motivational influences. The handbook of attitudes (pp. 273-322). New

York, NY: Psychology Press.

Appendix

Concrete statements:

"Opioid use has doubled here in the past decade."

"We've seen a 7% increase in auto theft over the past year."

"Last year's flood caused over $4 million in damages."

"The number of tourists visiting this state has decreased again for the third year in a row."

"Twenty-two US soldiers died in Afghanistan last year."

"Drunk driving in our district accounted for over 50% of traffic fatalities."

"The police in our district have the lowest use-of-force rate in the state."

"Median income levels have risen to an all-time high."

"Our district\'s schools are currently short by 125 teachers."

"Over 300 new people move into our state every day."

"Traffic fines accounted for one-fourth of the city\'s revenue last year."

"More than 40% of our bridges are past their intended lifespan."

"Last year\'s lottery brought in over $250,000 in tax revenue."

"We have lost a quarter of our agricultural jobs to out-of-state farms."

"Our district accounts for 25% of the state\'s soybean production."

"Unemployment rates in this state are the lowest since World War II."

"The light rail project is more than 6 months behind schedule."

"Aggravated assault in our state has decreased by more than 8% last year."

"Manufacturing jobs in our state have increased 6% last year."

"Poor road quality is the 3rd leading cause of traffic accidents in this state."

"Our district has the lowest welfare rate in the state."

"My opponent cut funding for public schools by 3% when he was in office."

"Half of our city parks do not have funding for public restrooms."

"Homelessness rates have increased by 5% last year."

Ambiguous statements:

"This proposed legislation would significantly impact the health of our elderly."

"Our nation has the most beautiful parks in the world."

"This construction project will have a drastic impact on downtown traffic."

"Civic responsibility is the bedrock of a functioning society."

"Immigrants are influencing our economy more than ever before."

"This nuclear facility is a win for the economy and for reducing carbon emissions."

"Many families in our state cannot even afford to immunize their children."

"My predecessor\'s neglect has allowed our drinking water to become contaminated."

"My innovative policies have lead to a major reduction in crime."

"The right to assemble and protest is a cornerstone of American democracy."

"Partisan stubbornness is directly hurting those at the bottom of the income ladder."

"These agricultural subsidies are necessary for the livelihood of our farmers."

"Our homeless population is severely affecting our state\'s economy."

"My policies have lead to a drastic decrease in pollution in our waterways."

"Lobbyists are dictating the future of our schools and police departments."

"My opponent's tax proposals are designed to hurt the working class."

"The direction of our healthcare system points towards inevitable failure."

"The Central Bridge Project is way ahead of schedule and will finish up under budget."

"My accuser is an extremist with many signs of mental health issues."

"Yesterday\'s rally was a nothing but a criminal gathering."

"Drug users and cheap guns are combining to drive up crime here."

"Some high schools are more dangerous than prisons these days."

"The opioid epidemic in this country is a sign of societal failure."

"A universal basic income has strong support from both Democrats and Republicans."