Cheerleaders or Genuinely Biased? Revisiting Partisans as Cheerleaders



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I wanna thank me for just being me at all times."

Glauco, you a bad one.

Abstract

This dissertation delves into the theme of information processing, a relevant topic that to this day divides scholars of political psychology. By reframing the debate on the issue, I develop a theoretical framework that encompasses three approaches that are considered competing and mutually exclusive: rational voting, motivated reasoning, and partisan cheerleading. In particular, I propose a different understanding of partisan cheerleading, looking at it as a form of instrumental responding, which allows to avoid the issues that the expressive responding approach creates.

To test this theory, I designed an online survey-experiment with novel treatments that I administer to a sample of MTurk respondents. The results of the experiment show clear evidence of motivated reasoning but very little support for unbiased thinking and partisan cheerleading. In other words, my results support the theory that partisans are genuinely biased in their survey answers and do not lie to show support for their parties. As this study is only a pilot to my future research, I propose that future studies should be conducted, implementing specific improvements on my design to better understand the issue at hand.

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Introduction 1

"*And what these people don't realize is,*
despite believing completely different things,
they're actually the same person.

'Cause they don't really care about learning
and exploring and discussing.

They just wanna chime in with their little programmed reactions.
They already know what they think about everything!"

Aziz Ansari, *RIGHT NOW* (2019)

While performing his stand-up special in New York, comedian Aziz Ansari told his audience a story. In the days preceding the show, a scandalous news story had broken out in the US; a customer of a famous American franchise of pizza restaurants had been served a pizza where the pepperoni slices were arranged in the shape of a swastika. After denouncing the incident on social media, the story had gathered momentum in the news, splitting Americans in two factions: those arguing that the pepperoni slices did, in fact, resemble a swastika, and those saying that the pizza, after all, looked just like a regular pizza and the pepperoni was randomly arranged. The comedian then asked the members of his audience that believed in the first version to clap. A large group of people clapped. He then asked those who did not believe that the pepperoni slices resembled a swastika to clap. An equally large group of people clapped in response. Then, Ansari revealed the truth: none of this had ever happened. The news story was not real. There never was a pizza scandal. There never even was a pepperoni-swastika on a pizza. Nevertheless, people clapped and "*chime*[d] *in with their programmed reactions*".

Even though it may not have had the methodological rigidity that is expected in the social sciences, this excerpt from "*RIGHT NOW*" lends itself perfectly to introduce this dissertation. When we talk about politics – even about those topics that are not policy related – strong reactions often arise, because many topics are inherently political, especially if framed as the pepperoni-swastika scandal. These reactions, however, are predetermined: influenced by our existing attitudes, framed by our convictions, filtered by our views. Looking at Aziz Ansari's audience we can safely assume that those that believed that the pepperoni was arranged in a swastika were democrats, wary and fearful of a rise

of far-right politics in the US. Those who believed that it was just a normal pizza, on the other hand, were likely Republicans, tired of the rise of *woke* culture and political correctness. The minority that did not clap for either position, simply had not followed enough news to confidently answer the question. Regardless of the comedic aspect of this "informal" social experiment, Ansari raises a very interesting point for students of political psychology: why do we tend to form our opinions in accordance with our pre-existing attitudes?

In fact, observations on this type of phenomenon are not only confined to comedy shows. Research on the nature of partisan bias – in particular in the field of motivated reasoning – has shown that voters of different parties perceive reality in different ways, in many areas of their life. Partisan bias affects any issue that is even remotely related to politics, from the economy (Bartels, 2002; Bisgaard, 2015; Achen & Bartles, 2016; Bartles, 2016; Sorace & Hobolt, 2020) to gun violence (Kahan, Jenkins-Smith, & Braman, Cultural cognition of scientific consensus, 2011), from conspiracies surrounding election fraud (Edelson, Alduncin, Krewson, Sieja, & Uscinski, 2017) to those surrounding the religious affiliation of President Obama (Hartmanm & Newmark, 2012). This divide also influences how partisans judge the actions of their opponents compared to their allies, both on highly relevant issues like corruption (Blais, Gidengil, & Kilibarda, 2017) and on smaller things like the theft of political campaigns' yard-signs (Claassen & Ensley, 2016). Partisanship has even been found to have an effect on how people interpret scientific evidence, both when it comes to studies on climate change (Kahan, Jenkins-Smith, & Braman, 2011; Hart & Nisbet, 2012) and when it comes to health-related reports (Gollust, Lantz, & Ubel, 2009; Kahan, Braman, Cohen, Gastil, & Slovic, 2010). In sum, our political attitudes seem to be the prism that filters how we perceive life. What is worse is that, while finding out about the accuracy of our opinion leads us to entrench ourselves in our views (Bisgaard, 2019), we do not respond openly to evidence that points out our mistakes (Nyhan & Reifler, 2010). What is, then, the nature of partisan perception?

With the goal of better understanding the issue of partisan bias, this dissertation I contribute to the large literature of political psychology that analyzes this topic. Specifically, with this study I aim at answering two separate but interconnected research questions that contribute to the existing debate. (1) Are partisan disagreements reported in surveys the result of genuine differences of opinion between partisans or are they the consequence of insincere cheerleading? (2) And can unbiased attitudes be incentivized, reducing the differences between the reported opinions of partisans?

Both these questions have been tackled in previous research – at least tangentially – but have rarely been considered together. In fact, three main schools of thought can be identified in the literature, which are often seen as mutually exclusive. The first is rational thinking, according to which voters

are bayesian thinkers who elaborate information unbiasedly to reach the most optimal conclusion. On the other hand, motivated reasoning argues that people are always biased and driven by their prior attitudes. Finally, scholars of partisan cheerleading argue that citizens are unbiased in how they form their opinions but are biased in how they report them. In other words, they lie so that their opinions appear support their party, even when they know these reported opinions to be inaccurate. However, the academic debate among supporters of these theories often ends up overlooking one very simple fact: these theories are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

With this in mind I put forward a theoretical framework that allows for these three approaches to coexist. Voters, I argue, are by default motivated reasoners. However, when incentivized or exposed to the appropriate stimuli and contextual factors, they can take on a more unbiased form of information processing. Additionally, reframing partisan cheerleading as instrumental – instead of expressive – responding, I add the possibility that partisans may consciously decide to lie in survey answers to support their parties and shed a worse light on their opponents.

To test this theory, I put forward a revised version of an experimental design used by previous studies that employs different treatment conditions to elicit each of these three types of behavior. Traditionally, these experiments offer respondents a small financial accuracy incentive to elicit unbiased responding. To this design, I a novel treatment designed to trigger instrumental partisan cheerleading by priming respondents with information that reminds them of how they can influence independents and swing voters, and one that combines both the accuracy incentive and the reminder about influencing public opinion. This online survey experiment was run on the MTurk platform on American respondents. The reason why I decided to run this study in the American context is because the two-party system, combined with relative higher levels of partisanship and polarization – compared to other western countries, allows for clearer data and a better understanding of the and effects at play. Additionally, virtually all of the research on this topic has to this day been conducted in the United States, making my results more easily comparable to previously published findings.

In opposition to the studies in support of expressive responding (Prior, 2007; Bullock, Gerber, Hill, & Huber, 2015; Prior, Sood, & Khanna, 2015), my experiment finds no evidence for partisan cheerleading. It also finds no effects of the accuracy incentives, indicating that respondents in the experiment where mostly driven by motivated reasoning. My findings, hence, align with those of Berinski (2017) and Peterson and Iyengar (2021), who argue that motivated reasoning is the main processing style used when thinking about political issues. These results may be due to two main factors. The first is that, given to budgetary restrictions and the new nature of these treatments, the treated subjects did not respond to the conditions they were exposed to. A second reason may simply

be that respondents are motivated reasoners, meaning that unbiased information processing is hard to achieve, and that partisan cheerleading is not as common as is believed by its theorists. These results, I argue, should be seen as a first step towards a revision of existing theories into a larger framework that can encompass a variety of approaches. In fact, this is only the first pilot of a series of experiment I intend to run to study the issue. Its main contribution to the field is the development of the concept instrumental partisan cheerleading – according to which some partisans may consciously decide to lie in their survey responses to strategically support their parties – and of the experimental treatment to isolate it and measure it. The next steps of this research will be dedicated to refining the experimental design I developed and to testing if the possibility of influencing public opinion actually changes how respondents process information or if motivated reasoning remains the main setting of people's minds.

Research projects such as this one shed a new light on the nature of political information processing, allowing us to understand how voters develop their attitudes and respond to survey questions. The implications of this research can be multiple. First, from a methodological standpoint, understanding whether partisan cheerleading is a valid theory is necessary to determine whether survey-based research is as sound as the literature believes; if respondents lie in survey answers to support their parties, many of the existing studies and theories would need to be reviewed. Secondly, if voters turn out to be always influenced by their partisanship – always maintaining stable attitudes, opinions, and vote choice – regardless of politicians' performance and political events, how can democracy function? If citizens are unable to send feedback to the political elites as they are expected to do, how can there be accountability in the democratic process? Certainly, further research will be necessary to determine how these different processing models interact with each other and affect research methods and real-life politics, starting from my own DPhil.

This dissertation's chapters are organized as follows. Chapter 2 will present a literature review of the main theories on information processing and attitude formation, with a particular focus on how partisan identification plays a role in determining prior attitudes. Chapter 3 will then introduce the theoretical framework I anticipated above, which puts together different theories that to this day were seen as competing and mutually exclusive. Chapter 4 will outline the research design at the basis of this study and Chapter 5 will provide an analysis of the data collected through the survey experiment. Conclusions will then close the dissertation.

Literature Review 2

This first chapter is dedicated to reviewing the existing literature that tackles the issues and concepts useful for this dissertation. First, it will survey the existing seminal works on these concepts to identify how such scholarship addresses/approaches the issue at hand. Secondly, it will look at an array of theories from public opinion studies and political psychology to underline how these theories share two main features: first, that they all agree that political reasoning can be biased (oftentimes by party ID), and second, those theories on information processing concur that reasoning can take one of two routes: either one that is more prone to bias, or one that is more focused and considerate. Next, it will present the literature that critiques such theories – namely the measurement error tradition and expressive responding – which argue that survey studies are not the correct way to measure public opinion because they fall short of capturing real attitudes. The final section will present a series of experimental studies that respond to such critiques, anticipating, in part, the theoretical framework that this study is based on. Conclusions will close the chapter.

Party Identification and Partisanship

The Relevance of Party Identification

Since the development of the concept of partisanship in early American political science during the 20th century, it has widely been accepted as one of the most – if not *the* most – significant predictor of party preference and vote choice. This started with the seminal work of the Michigan School, "*The American Voter"* (Campbell, Converse, Miller, & Stokes, 1960), based on Campbell's concept of party ID first presented in "*The voter decides"* (1954). The predictive significance of partisanship at the individual level has yet to be disputed in political science literature; however, the debate surrounding the definition and conceptualization of the concept itself has brought two main perspectives. These two approaches are presented below.

Partisanship an Identity Trait: The Michigan School

Campbell *et al.* (1960) develop a theory of partisanship which stipulates that individuals develop their

partisan attachments at a very early age, mainly in the family context. They argue "*that an orientation toward political affairs typically begins before the individual attains voting age and that this orientation strongly reflects his immediate social milieu, in particular his family*" (1960, p. 146). This partisan attachment, then, is not only a political preference but is quite literally an identity trait. Voters in the US identify as Democrats, Independents, or Republicans because their families passed their party ID on to them. People identify with a party because they believe that "people like them" also identify with it. In other words, "*democrats are people who think of themselves as democrats*" (Green, Palmquist, & Schickler, 2002, p. 26). Being an identity trait, party ID is long-lasting and hard to change, and it influences voting choice throughout a voter's lifetime. However, the authors of "The American Voter" accept that "*party identification cannot account for all the observed variation of political attitude*" (1960, p. 131). Partisanship is the primary and most significant predictor of voting behavior, but "*nothing in the definition of partisan identification precludes Democrats from voting for Republican candidates"* (Green, Palmquist, & Schickler, 2002, p. 30).

According to the Michigan School, Party identification influences attitudes toward any political object because it acts as an "*antecedent factor that colors these attitudes as they are formed*" (1960, p. 137). In fact, they argue that partisanship acts as a "*perceptual screen*" (p. 133) for voters, affecting how they perceive political information. The stronger the partisan attachment of an individual, the more this *screen* will distort their perception. (See also: Jacoby, 2010; Dinas, 2017; Green & Baltes, 2017).

Partisanship as a running tally of retrospective evaluations: Morris Fiorina's approach

In 1981, Morris Fiorina published "*Retrospective Voting in American National Elections*", an extremely influential book inspired by retrospective voting theories, which put forward a new perspective on the concept of partisanship. According to Fiorina, party ID is a "running tally" of past experiences, a "*function of socialization* [and] *a function of the past political experiences of the socializing agents*" (1981, p. 76). According to this approach, voters evaluate government performances and reach their political conclusions. As they experience more elections (and administrations), their partisanship forms as a running tally of past evaluations, mainly economic ones (Dinas, 2017, p. 267). Fiorina argues that voters do not need to be experts in political matters. They only need to know "*what life has been during the incumbent's administration*" and, to do this, "*citizens need only calculate the changes in their own welfare*" (Fiorina, 1981, p. 5).

This retrospective view of party ID proved to be very influential, but since then, it has been criticized for being based on a naïve understanding of voters' perceptions. Work by scholars such as Bartels and Achen has evidenced that citizens are often not as informed and rational as Fiorina paints them to be, not even when it comes to their own personal welfare. Bartels (2016), in fact, finds that voting behavior, if based on economic performance evaluations, is subject to three biases. First, voters at election time seem only to consider the economic performance of the previous year, not the whole incumbent's term; second, on an aggregate level, election-year income growth of wealthier families is more influential than the income growth of middle and lower-class families; third, campaign spending sways people's electoral choice (2016, p. 75). Overall, Bartels argues that these biases might explain why Republicans have won more elections than Democrats, even if Democratic administrations have shown to increase individuals' economic welfare more than their Republican counterparts. Additionally, Achen and Bartels find that "*partisan loyalties strongly color citizens' views about candidates, issues, and even "objective" facts*" (2016, p. 269). According to their book "Democracy for Realists", voters cannot evaluate government economic performances, not even if they only need to look at their individual welfare. As argued by Bartels (2002) "*party identification is a pervasive dynamic force shaping citizens' perceptions of, and reactions to, the political world*" (p. 117).

However, the validity of the retrospective model of voting may not be lost after all. By focusing their analysis on the macro level rather than the individual one, Erikson, Mackuen, and Stimson (2002) build a model according to which performance evaluations determine election results. In their view, given the fixed nature of partisan identification, the group of voters that actually determines election results is the one that, at election time, is more influenced by factors other than party ID, mainly economic ones. In other words, if partisans are fixed in their position, the election will be won by the candidate who gains the support of "swing" voters. According to the authors, these voters are more informed at election time, and the composition of this group changes from election to election. In this approach, retrospective voting and Fiorina's running tally have great value as a parsimonious theory of party ID and its effects on aggregate voting behavior, without necessarily affecting the individual level.

In any case, regardless of which view of partisanship is adopted, political science literature is united in the view that partisan identification remains the most important and influential factor in vote choice. To this end, a recent working paper by Dias and Lelkes (Forthcoming) studying the causes of affective polarization – i.e., the difference between in-party and out-party affect – has shown promising results that people's dislike for voters of their opposing party is mainly due to a

psychological attachment to the party rather than a difference in policy preferences or a running-tally of previous performances. This goes to show how partisanship is a fundamental factor in how individuals view the political world, and it has important consequences on how people understand and evaluate political information.

Biased Voters Make Biased Responders

As previously mentioned, the Michigan School's view of party ID already theorized some sort of "biased reasoning", arguing that partisanship acts as a "perceptual screen". On the other hand, Morris Fiorina's view of party identification, based on a retrospective approach to opinion formation, tells us that voters may be Bayesian thinkers after all. A similar point to that of Fiorina was made by Gerber and Green (1999), who found little proof for biased processing.

However, as normatively appealing as the Bayesian view may be, there is a great abundance of scholarly sources that contend that these models do not really explain how our political brains work. This view was not only taken by Bartels and Achen, who argue that even retrospective voting itself may be biased. In fact, many scholars of political psychology argue that bias almost always plays a part in opinion formation. Some argue this may be due to a tendency to avoid inconsistent issue positions, other because voters may be unable to develop consistent ideologies. As will be shown below, some posit that this depends on the level of information people have on a given issue, others that it depends on their affective engagement with the issue. Regardless of the differences that can be found among these theories there is one thing that they all agree on: biases play a fundamental role in information processing and attitude formation. On top of this, these theories all share some common features that offer a deeper understanding of how people's thought processing works. In fact, the theoretical framework that I will present in the next chapter is based on the theories that I present on this one. From these theories on biased reasoning, I extract key insights which will be used to inform my theoretical framework. Particularly, I draw upon the concept of dual processing introduced by some of these theoretical approaches. It is to this literature that I will now turn.

After outlining Festinger's (1957) work on cognitive dissonance, I will present these studies below first looking at theories which explain why and how biases affect public opinion, then looking at models of information which outline the existence of two systems of reasoning, one effortful and voluntary, and one effortless and automatic.

A theory of cognitive dissonance - Festinger 1957

In his seminal book "A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance" Leon Festinger set out the fundamental principle that is behind most studies of attitude formation. He theorized that individuals hold a mix of beliefs and attitudes, which result in their behaviors. These beliefs and attitudes regard any object of life, and they may be positive or negative depending on the opinion that the individual has of the object in question. For simplicity's sake, Festinger theorizes that we only hold one opinion for each object (either positive or negative).

Cognitive dissonance occurs when our opinion of an object A is inconsistent with our opinion of a related object B. For instance, let us take the example of a voter that likes the President but dislikes one of the President's policies, a simple instance of cognitive dissonance: the voter's opinion of the President and of the policy proposal are inconsistent with each other.

Festinger stipulates that, in such a situation where a person's beliefs, attitudes, and behavior are unaligned with one another, she will find herself in a situation of discomfort. This is when that person will do all she can to alleviate that discomfort or get out of that instance of cognitive dissonance. Festinger identified three possible moves an individual could make to do this. First, she might "change" her cognition. In our example, the voter might decide to change her opinion on the policy proposal so as to make it consistent with her support for the President. Second, she might "add" more cognitions to one side of the debate. Simply, this would mean that our citizen, would find new arguments to support her liking the President so as to outweigh the dislike of the policy. The third move identified by Festinger is that of altering the importance of the issue. In other words, to alleviate discomfort, our voter would try to think as little as possible about the issue at hand, about the President, and his policy proposal.

In his work, Festinger did not delve specifically into how party ID may play a role in cognitive dissonance. However, seeing how much research supports the relevance and centrality of partisanship in cognitive processes about political objects, it would not be too far-fetched to say that people will adjust many of their opinions on political issues according to their partisan affiliation. Several of the following theories, particularly Lodge and Taber's JQP Model (2013), support this claim with considerable evidence. Festinger's cognitive dissonance theory, in fact, is not only the initial step of my theoretical framework (particularly because of how it explains party-congenial information processing), but it is also at the basis of most – if not all – of the more recent theories I present below.

Bias in Public Opinion Studies

The Nature of Mass Beliefs - Converse 1964

One of the most important contributions to political psychology and public opinion studies is "The

Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics" (1964) by one of the main authors of the Michigan School, Philip E. Converse. In it, the author paints a grim picture of democratic citizens. Working with survey data, he finds that respondents are not able to hold consistent opinions, to answer questions coherently or to hold long-lasting attitudes. In other words, Converse's voters fall extremely short of having what we would traditionally call "ideologies".

As Alvarez & Brehm (2002) put it, Converse claims that voters can only hold "*non-attitudes*", meaning that respondents come up with their answers once they are asked the question. His whole analysis revolves around the key point that the average voter lacks information, knowledge and understanding of most political issues. People are unable to form coherent opinions because they simply do not know what they are talking about.

If – and only if – a voter is asked his opinion on an issue that has a clear link to her partisan ID will that voter be able to give a partisanship-coherent answer. Even on not-so-obscure issues, voters are not able to develop informed attitudes and maintain a consistent opinion over time. The only case when that may happen, according to Converse, is if a respondent already holds a higher-than-average knowledge level on the topic. Converse's work, even if not dedicated specifically to bias, was the first theory that did not consider partisans as rational and informed as traditionally assumed. His work was the first to pave the way for a flourishing literature of political psychology that looks at democratic citizens with a more critical eye without assuming their unbiasedness and coherence.

Primacy of Affect - Zajonc 1980

American psychologist Robert Zajonc published in 1980 a paper which analyzed the role of emotion and affect in cognitive processes. The paper came as a response to the rise of psychological theories that attributed great value to cognition and a less relevant role to affect. According to these scholars, people are unbiased when making decisions; they consider all the available alternative conclusions before developing or making an evaluation. In this process, there is little room for emotion.

In "Feeling and Thinking: Preferences Need No Inferences" (1980), Zajonc refutes these theories of cognitive processes and puts forward a concept called "primacy of affect" (see also: Zajonc, 1984). He concludes that emotions always matter and that affect always comes before cognition. In Zajonc's view "*there are probably very few perceptions and cognitions in everyday life that do not have a*

significant affective component" (Zajonc, 1980, p. 153). Hence, all aspects of thinking, from what information we seek to how we process it to develop attitudes, is driven by affect. This does not mean that cognition is not part of the process, but it simply comes after affect has biased our view of the topic at hand. In Zajonc's words, "*the early affective reaction is gross and vague. Nevertheless, it is capable of influencing the ensuing cognitive process to a significant degree*" (Zajonc, 1980, p. 154).

As a psychologist, Zajonc did not examine what this means for political attitudes. However, knowing the relevance of party identification and how it functions as a form of psychological attachment, we can credibly conclude that party ID may elicit strong affective reactions. Applying this theory to the study of partisan bias is, in fact, not far-fetched. Considering partisanship as an affective attachment, we see how it might easily influence people to perceive the world in party-congenial ways, going far beyond mere cognitive processing.

RAS Model - Zaller 1992

Another central work in public opinion studies is Zaller's (1992) Receive-Accept-Sample (RAS) model (see also: Zaller & Feldman, 1992). The core argument of the RAS model is that people develop momentary opinions based on whatever information is readily available "at the top of their mind". In Zaller's view this explains why the same person might answer the same question differently at different times or even give inconsistent answers at the same time. The key to response stability is, simply put, information.

When people are highly engaged with politics, their opinions are more stable. This is because, if incentivized, especially knowledgeable people dedicate more effort to forming their opinions. On the other hand, less engaged respondents will be fickle in their answers because they will make their evaluations based on whatever little information is readily available to them from the outside world.

Party ID plays a fundamental role in the RAS model, as it determines what information a respondent is exposed to (through the media and his personal networks), and it acts as a filter to exclude incongruent information. As Zaller states "*people tend to accept what is congenial to their partisan values and to reject what is not*" (1992, p. 241). In fact, the RAS model lends itself perfectly as an approach to analyzing partisan bias. Paying more attention to party-congenial information, it is not hard to see why voters often end up holding party-congenial views.

Combining Values to the RAS Model - Alvarez & Brehm 2002

Alvarez and Brehm (2002) developed a theory of attitude formation that combined Zaller's RAS model and other public opinion models centered around core values. The key tenet of the framework

presented in their "*Hard Choices, Easy Answers*" is that when people form opinions, their values and predispositions interact with each other and with the information they have available "at the top of the mind".

For each given issue, voters have different values which lead them to a specific opinion. However, the contrast between different values and predispositions may lead to different conclusion at different times. This is where information comes into play; the available information is what makes some values more relevant – and other less so – when thinking about an issue. In other words, the information that we are exposed to at a given time frames the way we think about issues, and different information may bring up different values. This theory, hence, easily explains instability in survey answers.

Alvarez and Brehm then identify three possible states of opinion formation. Which state an individual finds herself in depends on what values are activated and what information is provided. The first is called "ambivalence". This is a state in which a voter finds herself with two or more contrasting values activated at the same time. In this case, the stronger or more relevant value is the one that will determine the opinion she will develop. The second possible state is "equivocation", which happens when a person holds two or more mutually reinforcing values. In a state of equivocation, the opinion on the issue is fixed, even though the reasoning behind the conclusion may change with the relevance of the values. The final state is called "uncertainty". In this case, only one value is at play, and opinion stability is determined by how knowledgeable a voter is on the issue. Highly informed voters will hold the same opinion for a longer time, while less informed ones may change their mind more often.

In this framework, the role of partisanship is twofold. First, party ID acts as a summary of a respondent's core values. Secondly, it determines what information the individual receives through her personal networks and mass media. Much like Zaller's RAS model, Alvarez' and Brehm's theory easily explains why members of different parties perceive political information in different ways. In fact, in this model partisanship first acts as a filter for available information, than acts as an aggregation of relevant political values that voters consider when developing attitudes.

Dual Processing Models

This next subsection presents a series of theories that, on top of studying why and how information processing is biased, also present information processing as a dual model. All these theories argue that, on the one side, we have a more elaborate and effortful type of processing and, on the other, we find a more effortless but imprecise type. These theories differ among themselves in how they

conceptualize and define concepts, but they all offer dual processing as the explanation of how voters may be biased at times, and more impartial at others. Most importantly, they all hold that the effortless and inaccurate route is the one that is more often used when processing information. It is exactly this type of dual-processing approach that I will build on with my theoretical framework.

Heuristics – Kahneman and Tversky 1981; Kahneman 2012

Another theory that led the way for new research on non-rational thinking was Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky's work on heuristics (1981). First presented in their 1981 paper, heuristics are cognitive shortcuts that we use to reach effortless conclusions that may or may not be accurate.

In their view, as humans, we hardly resort to effortful thinking as it requires great amounts of energy and time. We more than often resort to heuristic-based processing which is quicker and easier. This process is optimal in terms of effort required but may not be optimal when it comes to the conclusion we reach. With heuristic-based processing we trade off the quality of our conclusion for smaller "costs".

In his book "Thinking, Fast and Slow" (2012), Kahneman theorizes that we possess two potential systems of reasoning. System 1 is the heuristics-based system, it is fast and automatically operates below conscious awareness. Its role is to assess situations quickly and rapidly provide solutions to problems. System 2, on the other hand, is deliberate and conscious, driven by controlled processes and rational thinking. We use system 2 to seek new or missing information and make contemplated decisions.

Since both Kahneman and Tversky are scholars of behavioral psychology, they mainly applied heuristics theories to general processes of decision making without ever applying it specifically to political choices. However, in political science and psychology we can find an abundance of literature that argues that party identification functions as a heuristic for voters (Sniderman, A., & Tetlock, 1991, pp. 14-30; Kuklinski & Quirk, 2000). As Sniderman and Tetlock put it, "*What else, after all, is party identification but a judgmental heuristic?*" (1991, p. 19). Once someone knows that a given person is their party's candidate, heuristic processing will lead them to trust that specific candidate without the need to collect additional information, because the candidate represents the party they identify with. The same goes for issue positions; when one party has a position on an issue on which a voter has no stance, he will automatically take the same position as the party without requiring additional information on the topic. From the point of view of this approach, hence, bias is simply a consequence of our System 1 relying on partisan identification to process and understand more complicated issues.

Elaboration Likelihood Model – Petty and Cacioppo 1986

Richard Petty and John Cacioppo developed another influential model of information processing. Their "Elaboration Likelihood Model" (ELM) (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) posits that there are two alternative routes that our information processing can take. If processing happens on the central route, before forming an attitude, people consider different sources, compare and contrast information with previous cognitions, and evaluate new information accordingly. Obviously, this process requires a lot of effort and energy– similarly to Kahneman's System 2 – which Petty and Cacioppo define as high elaboration.

The second path that can be taken in information processing is a peripheral one. This route is characterized by a low level of elaboration, and, instead of considering and comparing different sources and pieces of information, it brings people to focus on simple but compelling cues such as the perceived credibility of the source, the congruence of the new information with previous cognitions, and the affective reaction that the new information triggers. The peripheral route is used more often than the central route because, according to the authors, high elaboration is only attainable when the subject has appropriate motives and abilities.

The ELM is easily applicable to the effects of partisanship on the formation of political attitudes. Put simply, if the peripheral route is the more commonly used, party ID will often act as one of those peripheral indicators used to form opinions without employing high elaboration. Hence, the peripheral route, similarly to the aforementioned System 1, is more prone to bias because it utilizes party ID as an effortless instrument to develop attitudes based on complicated information.

Motivated Reasoning – Kunda 1987; 1980

The first scholar to develop a motivated reasoning theory was Ziva Kunda, a researcher of social psychology. Kunda's work (1987; 1990) argues that a person's thought process can be driven by different motivations, defined as "*any wish, desire, or preference that concerns the outcome of a given reasoning task*" (1990, p. 480). These motivations fall under two main categories. First, we have *accuracy motivations,* which push people to reach an accurate conclusion, regardless of its (in)congruence with the individual's prior attitudes. Secondly, Kunda identifies *directional motivations,* which lead people to arrive at a specific conclusion regardless of its accuracy. It is worth pointing out that, while Kunda argues that both accuracy and directional motivations may drive people's thinking, she also notes that both thought processes may seem rational in retrospect. This is

because both the accuracy- driven individual and the directionally- driven one construct quasi-rational arguments supporting their attitudes and conclusions (Kunda, 1990).

This framework is easily applicable to information seeking on political issues. In fact, given the relevance of party ID as a form of psychological attachment to a party, it is not hard to see how partisanship can be a driver of directional motives. Rather than being accurate, partisans are likely to choose to hold party-consistent opinions. As the founder of motivated reasoning, Kunda's work is fundamental for the understanding of this study. In fact, as I will explain in more detail in the theory chapter, I argue that effortful information processing is driven by accuracy motivations, while the more effortless path is driven by directional ones – which in turn produces biased perceptions and attitudes. What determines the type of motivations that drive voters, I argue, is a mix of external stimuli, incentives and contextual factors.

Impression Driven On-Line Processing – Lodge, McGraw, Stroh 1982

Another theoretical framework that consists of two separate processing paths was developed by Lodge, McGraw, and Stroh in 1982. The first is memory-based processing, according to which, once you receive new information, you retrieve past information on the same topic from long term memory and re-evaluate the issue to construct an updated attitude.

The second is the impression-driven on-line processing model. According to this model, when we receive new information, we do not compare it to all the previous information we collected. Rather, we just pull up a running tally of our opinion on the issue and update it according to the new information. On-line processing, being less costly in terms of effort, is used more often and being hastier and subject to affect, may not lead to optimal conclusions.

Lodge, McGraw and Stroh claim that we virtually always use on-line processing. A person would only use memory-based processing if "*one's goal is to remember as much information as possible* […] *or, perhaps more likely, if one were exposed to information with no specific objective in mind and only later asked to render an evaluation of the target*" (Lodge, McGraw, & Stroh, 1982, pp. 401-402). In other words, unless we receive the appropriate stimuli, we will generally resort to the impression-driven on-line processing path.

How can we fit this framework in the political information processing with particular regards for partisanship? Again, given that on-line processing is used more often than memory-based processing, and that it is greatly influenced by first impressions, party ID can play a huge role in attitude formation. In fact, the running tally that a voter will "pull up" regarding a political object will very likely be tied to a party stance, influencing her opinion accordingly.

Similarly to the previous theories of biased processing I introduced, Lodge, McGraw and Stroh's argument easily explains how and why partisan bias occurs. In fact, if the on-line processing is the one we use more often – and is also coincidentally the one more susceptible to emotional reactions – our attitudes will, more often than not, be influenced by our pre-existing attitudes.

JQP Model – Taber & Lodge 2013

The final model I present in this subsection is Taber and Lodge's JQP Model. This model is of particular relevance to my study as it encompasses most of the principles contained in the previous theories. Taking Zajonc's primacy of affect, Kunda's distinction between directional and accuracy goals, the concept of dual processing – shared by the heuristics approach, by ELM and by the on-line processing model – and starting from the founding idea that voters are often biased, uninformed and incoherent, these authors build a detailed yet specific model of information processing.

First introduced in a paper in 2000, their work culminated in their seminal 2013 book "*The Rationalizing Voter*", which presents their model in detail. Being so influential, after their work was published, many other scholars of political psychology framed their work either in comparison or in contrast to Lodge and Taber's model.

This theory claims that all political objects – whether they be issues, parties, candidates, or institutions - are affectively charged (Lodge & Taber, 2000; Mutz, 2007; Lodge & Taber, 2013; Cotter, Lodge, & Vidigal, 2020a). This reiteration of Zajonc's "primacy of affect" approach, applied to political psychology, stipulates that "*immediately and without intentional control, a* [political object] *is classified as either good or bad*" (Lodge & Taber, 2013, p. 44) and that the role of the positive or negative affect tag attached to an object does not stop at the simple categorization of the object itself. In fact, "*the feelings aroused in the initial stages of processing color all phases of political thinking* […]. *The considerations that enter into consciousness will be influenced by the valence of initial affect"* (2013, pp. 147-148). In a way, when thinking about politics, it is fair to say that voters "think with their guts", as clearly put by Cotter, Lodge, and Vidigal (2020a). According to these authors, voters unconsciously think: "*When the gut response feels right, why challenge it? Why even make the effort to tally up the pros and cons when the gut response that came spontaneously to mind feels right?*" (2020a, p. 54).

Lodge and Taber's theory is composed of five processes that contribute to this centrality of affect in political thinking. First, they argue that our thinking is subject to "hot cognition", meaning that all objects we have thought about in the past are affectively tagged either positively or negatively. Secondly, according to Lodge and Taber, all information processes happen outside of conscious

awareness, a phenomenon they call "automaticity". "Affect transfer" is the third process they identify. According to this view, the affective state experience by a person can transfer feelings – and subconscious primes – to the object that person is thinking about. Additionally, the affective state and subconscious primes experienced while evaluating an object also influence which considerations an individual will retrieve from memory, a phenomenon called "affect contagion". The fifth phenomenon on which the JQP model rests is motivated reasoning itself, meaning that prior affect will bias how we pay attention to and how we process information so that we will favor accepting attitudinally congruent information while rejecting incongruent news.

The JQP model is also held on four fundamental pillars, all of which represent biases that affect information seeking and attitude formation processes. The first is the "prior attitude effect", which stipulates that people who feel strongly about an issue will evaluate arguments that support their attitude as more substantial and compelling than disconfirming ones, even when invited and incentivized to leave their preferences aside. Evidence of prior attitude effect was found in many experimental studies run by Lodge and Taber (2000; 2013) and Redlawsk (2002). The second bias to affect how voters come to their conclusions on political issues is "disconfirmation bias". Because of this bias, voters subconsciously – yet actively – devalue and counterargue any piece of incongruent information they face, so as to support their own pre-existing positions (Taber & Lodge, 2006; Mutz, 2007). Because of this active subconscious counterarguing, "*incongruent information requires significantly greater processing time*" (Redlawsk, 2002, p. 1040; see also: Taber and Lodge, 2006). Moreover, in their process of information selection, voters fall victim to the "confirmation bias". Research shows that, not only do voters ignore disconfirming news, they also consciously seek and are unconsciously drawn towards attitude-confirming information (Redlawsk, 2002; Mutz, 2007; Taber & Lodge, 2006). The summation of these three biases leads to a well- identified consequence, "attitude polarization". As citizens are exposed to additional attitude-incongruent information, they tend to get more and more entrenched in their original position (Redlawsk, 2002; Taber & Lodge, 2006; Lodge & Taber, 2013). In fact, it is quite hard to change voters' minds by simply presenting incongruent facts and reports, because the "affective tipping point" where voters' affective attitudes are reversed is very hard to reach (Redlawsk, Civettini, & Emmerson, 2010). However, the JQP model also allows for a slim possibility that respondents may give optimal and unbiased answers. Unfortunately, this will only happen if they are in the right context and exposed to the right stimuli, a situation that, the authors argue, is highly unlikely outside of experimental settings.

Overall, Lodge and Taber's JQP model is a very detailed yet comprehensive theory of information processing and attitude formation. In this framework, Party ID fits perfectly. As a strong form of

psychological attachment, partisanship will condition all four pillars outlined above, leading a voter to hold and reinforce her existing positions even when faced with contrasting factual information.

What Do These Theories Have in Common?

As mentioned, the theories presented above all have differences in how they approach and explain information processing and attitude formation. Other than the different lexicon used to describe similar concepts, they mainly differ in the specific factors that influence processing, and in the relative importance they assign to cognition compared to affect. However, as interesting as the details of these theories are, they might take us away from understanding the issue at hand and comprehending information processing as a general phenomenon. Rather than focusing on the differences, I propose a deeper focus on their points of contact.

First, all of these theories agree on the fact that reasoning is not as linear and unbiased as Bayesian approaches make it to be. Rather, when it comes to politics, bias and affect play a huge role in determining one's opinion. Especially in cases with high polarization and strong partisanship, party ID serves as a great predictor of attitudes and opinions. Some theories would claim that partisanship serves as a heuristic, while others claim that it is used as an indicator of one's party stance, and others would simply claim that it functions as an affective and psychological identity trait. Regardless of which of these phenomena are at play – as it is also likely that all of these are happening at the same time, one thing is clear: party ID is fundamental in attitude formation and information processing.

The second common feature of these theories (or, at least, common to those that look at individual details of information processing) is that there are two different thought processes that might be employed by people. One is more in-depth, effortful, cognition- and memory- based, the other is more effortless, superficial and affect-based. These theories differ mainly on what causes people to use one or the other system and on what term is more appropriate to describe this phenomenon. Whether we call them systems, motives, or elaboration models has little relevance for the purpose of this study. The key aspect of these theories is that they all share the idea that people may use a different type of processing on different issues at different times, depending on what context they find themselves in and what stimuli they receive.

If we build our understanding of information processing and attitude formation on these two tenets, without getting stuck on the details, we might be able to develop a more parsimonious theoretical framework of attitude formation.

Critiques to Theories of Biased Processing

All the theories presented above, however, have been criticized in other branches of public opinion studies. The critiques that have been put forward over the years equally affect all of these approaches as they are not only based on theoretical limitations but are mostly focused in pointing out issues of measurement in public opinion studies. In fact, these critiques are, first of all, critiques of survey studies and survey experiments.

Achen and the Measurement Error Tradition

The first to make this point was Achen in 1975. His critique revolved around a very simple point; respondents give different answers at different times because surveys are not appropriate tools to measure opinions. The wording, phrasing, and order of questions, and the general structure of the survey may lead people to give inconsistent answers at different times.

The key aspect of Achen's (1975) theory is that opinions about an issue should be seen as a distribution of opinions, rather than a single fixed point. If a respondent is asked the same question at different times, he will likely give a different answer each time, especially if asked vague questions. His critique was mostly directed to the main study of political psychology of that time, Converse's (1964) work, but it is easy to see how this critique may still hold its ground against newer approaches to opinion formation. Put simply, Achen tells us that since surveys are not capable of measuring public opinion, it is not possible to build valid theories based on survey evidence.

Since that time Achen's critique has partly been resolved with the advent of experimental research, but it remains a considerable perspective to keep in mind when studying public opinion.

Partisan Cheerleading as a Form of Expressive Responding

The second critique that has been put forward is one that stems out of expressive responding theory. According to this approach, voters are rational partisans who, even if they identify with a party, do not let their partisan affiliation affect their understanding of the political world and remain aware of political facts and events. However, these partisans derive expressive benefits from supporting their party and attacking the opposition at any chance they get. In this view, voters root for their party much as sports fans do, and even though they are conscious that their actions will scarcely have effects on political outcomes, they do all they can to show their support for their own "team" (Green, Palmquist, & Schickler, 2002, p. 220). In other words, voters have a "*conscious desire to offer a partisanship-consistent message*" (Bullock, Gerber, Hill, & Huber, 2015, p. 559). According to theorists of partisan cheerleading, in order to spread this type of message, voters lie in surveys, and

they do it because they receive some form of psychological expressive benefit from supporting their party. This does not only happen on questions regarding attitudes and opinions, but also on factual knowledge questions where respondents are asked to give the correct answer regarding issues that have a clear factual truth (Prior, 2007; Prior & Lupia, 2008; Bullock, Gerber, Hill, & Huber, 2015; Prior, Sood, & Khanna, 2015; Schaffner & Luks, 2018; Khanna & Sood, 2018). Research on expressive responding has, in fact, showed that "*survey responses are not entirely sincere. Instead, they may reflect the expressive value of making statements that portray one's party in a favorable light*" (Bullock, Gerber, Hill, & Huber, 2015, p. 521). From this perspective, the partisan divide in factual responses that we find in surveys is not due to the fact that voters hold different beliefs about the truth. Rather, it is a consequence of respondents deriving satisfaction from partisan cheerleading in the form of lying to survey questions. Even though respondents may believe one answer, they may give the interviewer a different one to manifest their party support (Bullock & Lenz, 2019).

Even though partisan cheerleading is a relatively new theory, several studies have been conducted in the past years supporting this approach. These studies were based on different experimental designs that allowed them to find different forms of evidence for partisan cheerleading. The most common design used to prove that expressive responding skews survey results consists of offering randomly selected respondents a monetary accuracy incentive to answer questions correctly (Prior, 2007; Prior & Lupia, 2008; Bullock, Gerber, Hill, & Huber, 2015; Prior, Sood, & Khanna, 2015; Khanna & Sood, 2018; Robbett & Matthews, 2018). The fact that subjects who receive the incentive answer more questions correctly – or simply give party- uncongenial answers – is then interpreted as evidence of partisan cheerleading. In other words, the utility of the monetary incentive outweighs the expressive benefits derived by lying in surveys, which results in a higher number of factually correct answers and a smaller partisan divide. On top of monetary incentives, some studies such as Prior *et al*. (2015) also invite respondents in treatment conditions to consider the available information and to formulate their responses "impartially". Although weaker, these accuracy appeals also have negative effects on the share of incorrect questions. A newer issue-specific study by Schaffner and Luks (2018) also finds evidence of expressive responding by looking at how respondents from different parties held different views regarding the crowd size controversy surrounding President Trump's inauguration speech. Other experimental treatments have also been used to unmask expressive responding. Robbett and Matthews (2018) find evidence that, in addition to monetary incentives, higher costs of information on a given issue also cause people to resort to partisan cheerleading. Moreover, they find that when respondents are told that they will receive the incentive only if the majority of the group they are part of will answer correctly, they will be more likely to give attitude-confirming answers.

Critiquing the Critique: No Matter How You Measure It, Processing is Always Biased.

In response to these critiques, many scholars of information processing – especially ones subscribing to theories related to motivated reasoning – developed experimental studies that were able to test for the soundness of their claims. In fact, it is possible to spot several fallacies when looking at partisan cheerleading, both from a theoretical and an empirical point of view. Firstly, the studies mentioned above have not conclusively demonstrated that expressive responding is really the cause for respondents giving factually incorrect but attitude-confirming answers to survey questions.

As pointed out by Schaffner and Luks, "*the incentive condition simply changes what types of considerations respondents sample; it does not prove that respondents are intentionally answering correctly*" (2018, p. 136). Other scholars of expressive responding also recognize this fallacy of this research: "*these studies may reduce partisan differences in responses to survey questions, but they cannot tell us whether the partisan gap has narrowed because the studies reduced insincere responding among partisans or because they caused partisans to think differently*" (Bullock & Lenz, 2019).

This issue, however, is not only common to survey experiments based on accuracy incentives. All the studies supporting partisan cheerleading share this fallacy, as none of them provides evidence that the decision to answer incorrectly actually happens at a conscious level. Besides, other research has proved that the incidence of expressive responding is minimal. For instance, Berinsky (2017) designed two experiments to reduce expressive responding to questions regarding political conspiracies. However, he finds null results; incentives did not reduce expressive responding, pointing to an absence of partisan cheerleading. Another study by Peterson and Iyengar reproducing the design used by Bullock *et al.* (2015) and Prior *et al*. (2015), finds that "*approximately two-thirds of the initial partisan divide in the unincentivized conditions persisted when we offered respondents the opportunity to earn rewards for correct responses*" (Peterson & Iyengar, 2021, p. 144).

In and of themselves, these concerns are enough to question the standing of theories of partisan cheerleading and expressive responding. Moreover, motivated reasoning – the approach that these theories find fault with – provides an alternative explanation for the effects found in the studies mentioned above. Simply, voters are mostly driven by directional goals, but given the right circumstances and incentives, they adopt more accuracy-driven attitude formation processes. This

does not mean that respondents lie when they give attitude-confirming but incorrect answers in knowledge surveys; it merely means that they reach different conclusions because they undertake different reasoning processes. To put it in the words of Lodge and Taber: "*openmindedness is possible, but it is not our natural inclination*" (2013, p. 229).

Conclusion

This chapter was dedicated to reviewing the fundamental literature on the topics relevant to this study. The first section laid out the main theories of partisanship that were developed over the decades in political science, mainly focusing on the socio-psychological account of party ID developed by the Michigan School and comparing it to Morris Fiorina's view of party identification as a running tally of past performance evaluations. The second section presented an array of theories of information processing and public opinion, with particular attention brought to their common aspects: the nature of bias and the existence of two separate processing routes. The third section looked at the critiques of these approaches, namely: the measurement error tradition and the partisan cheerleading theory. While both make similar claims, the former focuses on how surveys are not the appropriate tool to measure public opinion in and of themselves, while the latter argues that respondents lie in survey answers to support their own party, deriving expressive benefits from it. I finally presented additional literature that arose in response to these critiques (with particular attention to the partisan cheerleading), arguing that, both empirically and theoretically, motivated reasoning still remains a sound framework to analyze opinion formation.

The next chapter will be dedicated to developing a deeper theoretical framework for this study, first presenting a new understanding of partisan cheerleading, then expanding on how this understanding can be coupled with the dual-processing frameworks mentioned above.

Theory 3

This chapter will be dedicated to laying out the theoretical framework on which this study is built. In particular, its objective is to first reframe partisan cheerleading as a theory of instrumental responding, as opposed to one of expressive responding, and second to include this new understanding in a framework that could potentially allow for partisan cheerleading, traditional unbiased thinking, and motivated reasoning to separately coexist.

In the first section I will present the proposed instrumental approach to partisan cheerleading. Then, I will examine Lodge and Taber's JQP model more closely, with focus on how it relates to what is traditionally seen as unbiased processing. I will then present a more detailed account of my theoretical framework and detail the ideal types of each of the aforementioned routes of processing. Finally, I will make the first step towards the development of testable hypotheses for the model which allow to determine which of these models comes in play in the experimental design that will be presented in the Chapter 4. Conclusions will close this chapter.

Revisiting Partisan Cheerleading

As pointed out in the previous chapter, supporters of partisan cheerleading have yet to find definitive empirical support to sustain their theory. Research has shown that partisans give different answers to factual questions in surveys – favoring their party – unless incentivized to do otherwise. However, to this day it has not been proven that the reason for such partisan behavior is rooted in expressive responding. In fact, an alternative argument could be made that once incentivized, partisans become less biased because they think about political issues differently. Scholars of partisan cheerleading have shown is that some phenomenon that might be explained by expressive responding is occurring. It becomes however apparent that they have not yet demonstrated that this theory is the sole explanation for this phenomenon. Given that partisan cheerleading posits that voters know the truth about factual questions but consciously decide to lie, one is brought to think that, according to this theory, voters have undergone some sort of impartial information-seeking and attitude-formation process. Unfortunately, none of this is laid out in the partisan cheerleading literature. Without this

perspective on processes of attitude formation, expressive responding only provides, at best, a shallow understanding of information processing.

This shortcoming of partisan cheerleading research is mostly due to the ill-defined concept of "expressive benefits" which respondents are supposed to derive from lying in survey answers to support their party. As such, this view of partisan cheerleading fits roughly in the ego defensive responding tradition, according to which "*people can deploy attitudes to protect themselves from unflattering truths about themselves and 'harsh realities' in* [their] *external world*" (Glynn, Herbst, Lindeman, O'Keefe, & Shapiro, 2015). In the scholarly work on partisan cheerleading, expressive responding is mainly presented as a given, without actually explaining how voters reach their decision to lie. Additionally, on top of being hard to define and explain, expressive responding is impossible to measure. So far, no study of partisan cheerleading has managed to capture expressive responding in and of itself. All they have done is register that people, when incentivized, may give factually correct answers even when these are incongruent with their party ID. Experimental research design structured around the idea that offering incentives to respondents makes them act less as cheerleaders will always face this kind of shortcoming. Not being measurable, expressive responding is only one of the possible interpretations that can be given of the results of these studies. New types of experimental treatments must be designed, with the clear objective of isolating the effects of cheerleading without risking that these effects get mixed up with other phenomena happening at the same time. To do this, I propose to reframe the concept of partisan cheerleading as an instrumental behavior employed by respondents, a reconceptualization that isolates the concept more easily both theoretically and, most importantly, empirically.

An Instrumental Approach to Partisan Cheerleading

Hence, I propose a new understanding of partisan cheerleading which is measurable and easier to identify. Put simply, partisan cheerleading, instead of being the result of expressive responding, becomes the result of an instrumental responding strategy. Respondents might lie in surveys, but they do it because they believe that they can influence public opinion and help their party gain support. In particular, they believe their aggregated responses can influence median and independent voters. The process that respondents undertake in this reviewed form of partisan cheerleading remains the same as in the original. They seek information from both sides of the aisle, analyze it without bias, and develop their attitudes accordingly, yet, when it comes to survey answers, they will lie to support their party. Instrumental partisan cheerleaders act the exact same way as expressive responders. What changes is their motivation to lie.

This revised version of partisan cheerleading is an improvement because it can be incorporated in a framework that allows for the coexistence of unbiased processing, biased behavior, and partisan cheerleading. Most importantly, it can be isolated from the dual system processing, assisting its operationalization.

Unbiased Reasoning in the JQP Model

Lodge and Taber's John Q. Public model, a model of information processing and attitude formation, is grounded on a simple tenet: all thinking is affectively charged. If we take a thought, at any point of its "life", it will always be suffused by an affective attitude we hold about the object of said thought. Hence, Lodge and Taber's model is based on a straightforward premise. Everything about how we think, seek new information, process this information, and construct our evaluations is based on non-rational behavior. Subconsciously, we would rather have been correct in the past in attaching negative or positive affective tags to different objects than changing our mind today, admitting that those affective tags were representative of a biased and inaccurate evaluation.

However, making accurate evaluations, even going against our prior affect, is possible. Unlikely, but possible. Processes of affect transfer and affect contagion might allow external cues and current affective states to influence our information-seeking and evaluation-building processes. With the right external stimuli, we might make correct evaluations even when these go against our previous attitudes. However, it remains complicated to have the right combination of contextual factors, incentives, and subconscious stimuli to lead us to make accurate – eventually attitude-disconfirming – evaluations. As unlikely as Lodge and Taber believe it is, this possibility opens the prospect for a further development of the JQP model.

A Revised Theoretical Framework of Information Processing

As mentioned in the previous section of this chapter and in the literature review, motivated reasoning theory – especially the JQP model – allows for some type of unbiased behavior in information seeking and attitude formation processes. This is especially true if an individual finds him or herself surrounded by the right context, being subjected to the right stimuli, or receiving the right incentives. This section will expand on the theoretical implications of this possibility and will develop hypotheses accordingly.

A Typology of Information Seeking and Processing Behavior

As we said, motivated reasoners are unbiased in approaching new information and forming their attitudes. Consequently, they make attitude-confirming choices, regardless of accuracy and rationality. Ideal motivated reasoners will only look at sources they already know will confirm their attitude, will give more credibility to attitude-confirming sources, and will take a longer time to process attitude-incongruent information. When faced with a factual question, they will give the answer they genuinely believe to be true, even if that is not accurate. Let's make the example of Mark the motivated reasoner. Mark is a Republican and, because of this, he tends to gather his information about politics from his party's politicians and from his Republican friends. When he does watch the news, he prefers to get his information from right-leaning sources, like Fox and Breitbart News. His personal networks are mostly made of other Republicans as he feels that it is easier to be friends with people who share the same values. When the day of his survey interview comes, Mark will do his best to answer factual questions correctly but, given his source of information, he will only give pro-Republican answers.

On the other hand, unbiased voters will be impartial throughout the whole process. I expect the ideal type of unbiased voter to decide which information to seek based on how that affects their personal interests, rather than whether or not it is congruent with their personal predispositions. In other words, from their information selection, through their attitude formation, and, finally, to their final choice, they will make accurate and unbiased choices regardless of party-congeniality. Ideally, they would consider sources impartially, look at as much available information as possible (regardless of whether it confirms or rejects their prior attitude), and develop an accurate and optimal view according to the information they viewed. When it comes to survey answers, unbiased thinkers will give accurate answers. Take the example of Robert the unbiased "rational" thinker. Robert is very open-minded and loves to get his information from as many sources as possible; he wants to know all the sides to the story before making a decision. He might have some partisan affiliation, but that does not change how he looks at politics. He will always give credit where credit is due. On the day of his survey interview, when asked factual questions, he will do his best to offer correct and accurate answers and, given his wide range of sources, he will do so no matter what the partisan valence of the correct answer is.

Thirdly, according to partisan cheerleading, respondents in surveys consciously lie to support their party even though they know their answer to be factually wrong. In a way, this is almost a "fabricated" partisan divide. Partisan cheerleaders are supposedly unbiased in their information seeking and processing. However, once it comes to answering questions and voting, they will make party-

congenial choices regardless of such choices' accuracy. Hence, an ideal type of partisan cheerleader will act precisely like an unbiased voter in selecting and processing information. Partisan cheerleaders, however, will deviate from unbiased thinkers when facing a factual question. At that point, partisan cheerleaders will abandon their unbiased behavior and give party-congenial answers, even when they are conscious that their answers will be incorrect, because they aim to support their party. Now think of Paula. Paula is a true loyal Democrat, always has been and always will be. However, she also likes to think of herself as an informed voter and tries to get her information from several sources, both left-wing and right-wing ones. Her social surroundings are variegated as she likes to get in touch with people with different views to understand the issues from all sides. However, at the end of the day, she knows that the Democratic party is always going to do a better job at governing the country. That is why, when she is interviewed, she will answer all questions in a way that favors her party, even when she knows perfectly well that some of her responses are factually incorrect. Her specific objective is to influence public opinion, that is why she answers survey questions *instrumentally*, to shine a positive light on her party and hopefully sway swing voters to her side.

A third information processing style we can identify is highly informed motivated reasoning. This style of processing is based on a highly engaged research of information, which, however, focuses only on the side of one's partisanship without paying attention to the arguments coming from the other side of the aisle. In fact, when it comes to going to the ballots or answering survey questions, highly informed motivated reasoners will end up making party-congenial choices, because – also given their high level of information – they are able to easily construct arguments that support their existing political attitudes. Take the example of Catherine, a college professor who identifies as a Democrat and makes a point of being well-informed about political events. However, as much as Catherine reads news articles, her go-to choice is the Huffington Post, and as much as she watches the news, she always and up picking MSNBC. In fact, at the end of the day, Catherine will construct an opinion that will be in support of her party, because almost all of the information she accessed was party-congenial. On the day she is interviewed about her survey, these positions will be reflected in her responses: regardless of their accuracy, she will always provide party-congenial answers she sincerely believes in. The main difference between Catherine and Mark – other than their party ID – is their level of information. In fact, both of them will mostly hold party-congenial attitudes, regardless of their accuracy.

Even though each one of the examples presented above is identified with a specific partisanship, it is important to note that it was done for purely illustrative purposes. In fact, any of their partisanships

could be easily switched with their opponents' and the models would work exactly the same. What matters, in these examples, is their explanatory value.

From the distinctions between these ideal types of information processing behavior, we can develop a typology. On the x-axis, we find the type of information seeking and processing behavior, which can either be unbiased and impartial or biased and partial. On the y axis, we find the type of answer given to a factual question, which can be either driven by accuracy goals or by directional goals.

The four ideal types presented above are entered in the typology accordingly:

		Type of information seeking and attitude formation behavior	
		Biased and partial	Unbiased and impartial
Type of answer	Driven by accuracy goals	Highly Informed Motivated Reasoner (Catherine)	Unbiased Thinker (Robert)
	Driven by directional goals	Motivated Reasoner (Mark)	Instrumental Partisan Cheerleader (Paula)

Figure 1 Typology of Information Processing Styles

One important thing to note is that voters might give correct or incorrect answers regardless of the type of motivation that drives them in attitude formation processes. This is because there obviously are instances where accurate answers correspond to attitude-congenial ones. Therefore, each factual question will ideally be answered correctly by unbiased thinkers and by that section of respondents whose prior attitude corresponds to the one supported by the accurate answer.

Thus, my theoretical framework is based on the idea that all thinking is affect-laden but that it is still possible to reach some sort of unbiased reasoning. Building on the JQP model and revisiting partisan cheerleading, I propose a theory whereby voters can take one of three paths in information seeking and attitude formation. Obviously, this framework is not based on strict, perfectly distinguishable categories. Rather, it should be seen as a two-dimensional continuum filled with grey areas in between the ideal types that compose it. Each person may fall under a different category at an given time,

depending on the stimuli she receives, the context that surrounds her, or the specific object of her thought. The first of these categories is the unbiased and impartial one – corresponding to the "unbiased thinker" in the typology, which will lead respondents to accurate answers regardless of party congeniality. The second path that respondents can take is the biased and partial one – corresponding to the "motivated reasoner", which will lead them to attitude-confirming answers regardless of accuracy. Another style of processing is that of the "highly informed motivated reasoner", which also leads to attitude-confirming answers. The difference with the "standard" motivated reasoner is simply the level of engagement and interest that they show towards politics. Highly informed motivated reasoners will collect as much information as possible from both sides of the aisle, but will always end up supporting their party because, after all, they are unable to escape their partisan bias. The last option is the one where respondents will follow an unbiased and impartial path but will give a party-congenial answer to support their party – our "instrumental partisan cheerleader". Which path each respondent takes, depends solely on how they approach political issues, on the context that surrounds them, and on the stimuli they receive.

A First Step towards Testable Hypotheses

This framework's fundamental argument is that all three of these types of processing may or may not coexist in the same individual at any given time, depending on the context and the issue at hand. This study's objective is to disentangle the three processing types, identify the effects of each of them, and measure them. To do this, there need to be testable hypotheses that will determine how the experimental design will be structured and how data will be analyzed.

First, we can isolate what we called motivated reasoners in order to identify when respondents act like Mark. As mentioned before and underlined in the theories presented in the literature review, people's default setting is one of biased processing. When facing new information and developing attitudes, people tend to look for confirming pieces of news that do not elicit negative affective reactions. Hence, we can hypothesize that people, if left to their own devices and without receiving any stimuli, will be biased in their information processing.

Second, we need to isolate what we called unbiased thinkers, who will look at all information available without being influenced by bias and will come to the most accurate conclusions they can. In other words, we need to understand what makes people act like Robert. To do this, following in the steps of previous research, we hypothesize that respondents, when incentivized to be accurate, will be driven by accuracy motivations as they answer survey questions.

Finally, we need to isolate the situations in which people act like Paula, our instrumental partisan cheerleader. If this behavior can actually be observed, it will be because people intentionally give survey answers that support their own party, regardless of their accuracy. Hence, we hypothesize that when people are given the chance to influence public opinion – especially independent voters and median voters – they will give survey answers that paint their party in a better light, while smearing the opposition.

With an experimental design to test these three general hypotheses, we will also be able to understand how big the effects of each type of processing are – if there are any at all. Obviously, finding evidence – or lack of it – for any of these hypotheses (or combinations of them) will present different implications for the study of information processing, either solving the debate between theories of biased reasoning and partisan cheerleading by discovering which theory is actually based in reality, or by finding a synthesis of the two.

Conclusion

This chapter presented the theoretical framework on which this research project is founded. I first revisited partisan cheerleading theory, arguing that it is better suited and more easily measurable if it is conceived as a theory of instrumental responding. After having presented the details of Lodge and Taber's JQP model, I put together a framework which allows partisan cheerleading, motivated reasoning, and unbiased thinking to potentially coexist, depending on which contextual factors a respondent is faced with. I then presented the hypotheses that underlie this theory and will drive the development of the experimental design. These hypotheses help us better understand and isolate these three types of processing and survey responses.

In the next chapter, this theory will be used as the foundation of the experimental design that I will use to test for the existence and relevance of each type of information processing.

Data and Research Design

4

Introduction

This chapter is dedicated to presenting the experimental design on which this study is constructed. The experiment outlined below was designed on Qualtrics and administered through Amazon's Mechanical Turk platform on May 11th 2021. MTurk was chosen because, on top of being used in previous studies tackling the same debate (Bullock, Gerber, Hill, & Huber, 2015; Peterson & Iyengar, 2021), there is ample evidence in methodological literature that MTurk produces acceptable samples for research in social science (Berinski, Huber, & Lenz, 2012; Casler, Bickel, & Hackett, 2013; Huff & Tingley, 2015; Mullinix, Leeper, Druckman, & Freese, 2015; Hauser & Schwarz, 2016; Levay, Freese, & Druckman, 2016). Respondents were told that they would have taken part in a survey on political opinion that would have taken around 4 minutes to complete and, in exchange for answering the questions, they were offered $0.50. A total of 1038 respondents accepted to take part – with the only requirements being that they had to be at least 18 years of age and located in the United States of America. The reason why I decided to study this issue in the context of the USA is twofold. First of all, the two-party political system allows for a clearer analysis, both because it reduces the number of parties a voter can identify with, and because of the relatively higher levels of Party ID that are registered in the US compared to European countries. Secondly, this will make the results of the study comparable to other works in this field, most of which were conducted in the US. Besides, with 2020 having been an election year, this context also offers the possibility of running this experiment at a time when partisan emotional attachment is particularly high.

While being mostly representative in terms of demographic variables (except for the age of the respondents who were younger than average), the distribution of the respondents' partisan identification and education level was skewed. In fact, 721 respondents had achieved some level of college education (553 had undergraduate degrees, 177 had postgraduate degrees, 11 had PhDs) and a majority of respondents identified themselves as either strong democrats, democrats, or "leaning" democrats (580 said they identified with one of these degrees of "democrat", 295 with the corresponding degrees of "republican", 158 as independent, and 5 preferred not to reveal their party

ID). Although representative on these covariates, the composition of such a large sample should not affect the results of the study (Mullinix, Leeper, Druckman, & Freese, 2015), as the respondents were randomly assigned to one of the four treatment conditions (262 were assigned to the control group, 261 were assigned to the first treatment group, 259 to the second and 256 to the third).

The basic premise of the design is that respondents who are divided into the different treatment conditions are asked the same battery of factual question on political issues and events. When mentioning factual questions, for the purpose of this research, I will refer to the definition provided by Bullock and Lenz: "*a factual question is a question about a statement or set of statements whose truth can be learned*" (2019, p. 326). This experiment was developed with the principal objective of testing which type of processing – between unbiased thinking, motivated reasoning, and instrumental partisan cheerleading – can be observed in how voters process political information and develop their attitudes. To attain this goal, it was necessary, first of all, to design a novel treatment condition that could better isolate and capture the different dynamics of survey responding compared to previous studies. As will be outlined below in further detail, I designed a new treatment to instigate a response pattern that corresponds to the one described in the previous chapter as "instrumental partisan cheerleading". Here, the distinction between "instrumental" and "expressive" responding is pivotal. In fact, while previous research has been unable to prove the existence of expressive responding with definitive evidence, the theoretical framework at the basis of this study has put forward the concept of instrumental partisan cheerleading. Contrarily to expressive respondents – who receive expressive benefits from giving survey responses that support their party – instrumental cheerleaders give party-congruent answers with the specific objective of influencing public opinion. Both "instrumental" and "expressive" responding result in party-congenial survey responses which are the fruit of a conscious effort to support one's party, what changes is the utility calculation that motivates these responses. If evidence of instrumental responding is found, the whole theoretical framework of partisan cheerleading will need to be reviewed through this new prism.

The addition of this new experimental treatment does more than simply providing a clearer understanding of what partisan cheerleading is. In fact, by isolating the "noise" created by respondents who consciously give incorrect survey answers, it will be possible to better understand the effects of motivated reasoning and unbiased processing. In other words, if we know who the liars are – and, for that matter, if there are any – we can better understand how "sincere" respondents process information, specifically, whether they do it unbiasedly or not.

The remainder of this chapter is structured as follows. First, I will present the experimental design in detail, focusing particularly on the treatments and on the questions the respondents were asked. I will

then focus on the measurable hypotheses that can be tested thanks to this experiment, starting from which variables of interest can be subsumed from the design. Conclusions will then close the chapter.

Experimental Design

Pre-Treatment Questions

Once respondents accepted to take this survey as it was shown to them on the MTurk platform they were first presented with a brief and general overview of the objectives of the study and of the measures taken to protect their privacy. Once they had accepted these terms and confirmed that they were at least 18 years of age, respondents were asked a brief battery of pre-treatment questions. First, they were asked about demographic variables (age, gender, educational attainment, and ethnicity) and then about political variables (interest in politics, level of political information, party identification, and voting record over the past two elections). The data collected through these questions serves as relevant covariates that will allow for a deeper understanding of the processes at play.

Experimental Treatments

After answering the pre-treatment questions, subjects were informed that they would have to answer a battery of factual questions on political issues and events. Then, they were randomly assigned to one of the four treatment conditions, one of which was a control group.

Respondents in the first treatment condition were given an accuracy incentive, a common treatment used to elicit more elaborated processing and responses. They were informed that the top 100 subjects with the highest number of correct answers to the factual questions would have entered a raffle in which 20 subjects would have been randomly picked to win an additional prize of $0.50 – hence doubling their reward. Clearly, this incentive is smaller than those provided in some of the previous studies. However, there is reason to believe that it would still have the necessary effects. In fact, as Study 2 in Bullock et al. (2015) shows, even smaller monetary incentives are enough to outweigh biased processing in survey answers. Additionally, further research into the effects of “uncertain” monetary incentives has shown how, even when respondents have no guarantee of receiving a bonus reward if they respond accurately, they will pay more attention and give more accurate answers (Jamieson & Weller, 2020). The objective of this treatment is obviously to incentivize subjects to offer factually accurate responses, by making accuracy motivations more relevant. If this treatment really does make people more accurate, the behavior of respondents in this condition should be close to that of Robert, the “unbiased thinker” presented in the previous chapter.

In the second treatment group, subjects were administered the novel treatment, designed to push them to consciously give answers that would support their party. This was done in two ways: first, by underlining how the results of the survey would be published and presented to a broad audience (through publication on social media and in a peer-reviewed journal) and, second, by underlining how the perception of incumbent performances influence the vote choice of independents and swing voters. Particularly, it was specified how economic performance is of special relevance for these voters. The text that respondents were presented with read:

> "*Keep in mind that the results of this survey will be first published on social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) and then published in a peer-reviewed scientific journal.*
>
> *Before you start, I wanted to give you one last piece of information on US public opinion.*
>
> *Did you know that* ***economic performance is the most influential issue for swing voters and independents?*** *This means that the outcome of State and Federal elections will likely depend on politicians' success on economic issues (i.e. employment rates, GDP, trade)."*

This treatment is designed to stimulate partisan cheerleading, pushing relevant issues to the forefront of respondents' minds and inducing conscious party-congenial responses, even in spite of accuracy. In other words, respondents in this condition are prompted to behave like the Paula I described in the theory chapter.

The third treatment is the combination of the previous two. Respondents in this group were first informed of the raffle that the top 100 respondents would enter, then they were presented with the same text as the respondents in the public-opinion-influence condition. Including this treatment allows to better understand the magnitudes of the previous two, especially when respondents are in a situation where conflicting motives – both accuracy and directional ones – drive their decision-making.

Finally, subjects in the control condition were simply presented with the battery of factual questions, without any previous stimuli. Obviously, the control group serves as a benchmark against which to test the effects of the treatments. However, in our case, it also serves to observe how respondents act in their "default setting" which, as mentioned in the previous chapters, is motivated reasoning. Hence, I expect respondents in the control condition to act as Mark, the ideal type of motivated reasoner that was previously outlined.

Factual Questions

Respondents in all conditions were asked to answer 9 factual "True or False" question on different political issues (presented in Table 1). In order to prevent cheating by looking up the answers online, respondents were given a maximum of 20 seconds to answer each question before they were taken to the following. This same time limit was used to prevent cheating in previous studies such as Bullock et al (2015).

Table 1 Factual Questions and Details

Statement	Question Frame	Correct Answer	Answer Valence
The unemployment rate was lower during Trump's presidency (**before** the pandemic), than during Obama's presidency.	Republican	True	Republican
The national debt was lower during Obama's Presidency than during Trump's presidential term.	Democrat	True	Democratic
The outcome of the 2020 Presidential elections was determined by illegal votes.	Republican	False	Democratic
More school shootings occurred during the Trump Presidency than during Obama's second presidential term.	Democrat	False	Republican
More than 20% of those living in the US was born outside of the United States.	Republican	False	Democratic
President Trump spent a lower percentage of the federal budget on defense than President Obama.	Counterintuitive	True	Counterintuitive
Illegal immigrants commit violent crimes at a significantly higher rate than legal American citizens.	Republican	False	Democratic
China surpassed the US in exports, becoming the first in the world, during the Trump administration.	Democrat	False	Republican
More than half the newly elected Republican members of Congress are women or minorities.	Republican	True	Republican

The questions were balanced, both in terms of how the statements were framed and in terms of the valence of the correct answer, to avoid biasing respondents' answers.

Hypotheses

This experimental design allows to test a series of hypotheses on two related – yet different – dependent variables, each of which can be measured in four different ways. The first variable is the correctness of the answers provided by respondents; this can be measured as a total score (i.e., counting how many of the nine questions were answered correctly), as the likelihood of providing a correct answer to each individual question, as the score obtained by subjects on economic questions, or as the score obtained on non-economic questions. Both of these two last measurements of "correctness" are subsets of the total score, but they are of particular interest because the difference between the two is a good indicator of how strong the effects of the second part of the second treatment is. With this in mind, four hypotheses can be developed regarding the effects of the treatments on correctness:

Hypothesis 1: Treatment 1 (i.e., the incentive) increases the number of correct answers and the likelihood that respondents answer each individual question correctly.

Hypothesis 2: Treatment 2 (i.e., the public-opinion-influence condition) decreases the number of correct answers and the likelihood that respondents answer each individual question correctly.

Hypothesis 3: Treatment 3 (i.e., the combination of Treatments 1 and 2) increases the number of correct answers and the likelihood that respondents answer each individual question correctly, but to a lesser extent than treatment 1.

Hypothesis 4: Treatment 2 decreases the number of correct answers on economic issues more than on non-economic issues.

The second dependent variable that can be analyzed is the party-uncongeniality of the answers given to the factual questions. This variable is going to be especially useful to track the behavior of partisans when they face questions that they are unsure how to answer. This is of particular value because it lets us understand whether people who receive an incentive to answer correctly become more open to giving uncongenial answers than others – especially when it comes to questions they do not know the answer to. In other words, it helps us answer the question: do we become more open to the

possibility that "the other side" is right when we are not sure of the truth and are offered an incentive? The measurements previously used for correctness can be readapted to party-uncongeniality, hence, in my analysis I will be looking at the effects of the treatments on the uncongeniality score of respondents (i.e. the number of uncongenial answers given), on the likelihood of providing a correct answer to each individual question, on the uncongeniality score on economic questions, and on the uncongeniality score obtained by partisans on non-economic questions. As similar as these measurements may be, there is another important difference between the two variables. In fact, for party-uncongenial answers to exist, there first needs to be partisan identification. That is why, while correctness could be measured for all respondents, uncongeniality can only be measured for those respondents who identified as either strong democrats, democrats, democrat leaners or as their republican counterparts. For this reason, independents and respondents who did not disclose their party ID will be excluded from the analyses on uncongeniality. With this caveat regarding the analysis of party-uncongeniality, the following hypotheses can be tested:

Hypothesis 5: Treatment 1 (i.e. the incentive) increases the number of uncongenial answers and the likelihood that partisans answer each individual question uncongenially.

Hypothesis 6: Treatment 2 (i.e. the public-opinion-influence condition) decreases the number of correct answers and the likelihood that partisans answer each individual question uncongenially.

Hypothesis 7: Treatment 3 (i.e. the combination of Treatments 1 and 2) increases the number of correct answers and the likelihood that partisans each individual question uncongenially, but to a lesser extent than treatment 1.

Hypothesis 8: Treatment 2 decreases the number of uncongenial answers on economic issues more than on non-economic issues.

With the hypotheses set out before analyzing the results, one question remains: what does it mean if these treatments do not have an effect? Two types of answers can be given to this question. The first is that if one of the treatments does not work it is because it was not designed or presented efficiently to the respondent. The only possible response I can give to this potential critique is that further research – first and foremost my own DPhil – will need to make the effort of designing and wording more effective treatments for experiments of this kind. After all, we all must learn from experience. However, there can be another reason that explains why each treatment may have no effect. By this I mean that the phenomena that the treatments are designed to capture, simply do not exist. This is especially true of Treatments 1 and 2, given that a null effect of Treatment 3 might also indicate that

the effects of the incentive and of the public-opinion-influence condition cancel each other out. Specifically, finding no effects for Treatment 2 would indicate that there is no evidence of partisan cheerleading, and no effects for Treatment 1 would indicate that respondents cannot be pushed to answer questions correctly even if incentivized, showing that unbiased thinking is not easy to achieve when it comes to political issues. All these hypotheses are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2 Summary of Hypothesized Treatment Effects

	Effects on Correctness	**Effects on Uncongeniality**
Treatment 1 (Incentive)	- Positive	- Positive
Treatment 2 (Public Opinion Influence)	- Negative - Stronger effect on economic questions	- Negative - Stronger effect on economic questions
Treatment 3 (Combined)	- Positive, but weaker effect compared to Treatment 1	- Positive, but weaker effect compared to Treatment 1

These results, even if null, would not however signal a lack of interesting scientific findings. In fact, they would provide additional support for motivated reasoning, adding to the research already presented in the literature review chapter. Put simply, it would show that respondents are sincere in how they answer questions, regardless of the accuracy of their answers.

Conclusion

This chapter presented the research design at the basis of this research which consists in an online survey experiment that adds a new treatment to previous survey experiments used in the field. This new treatment condition is designed to push respondents to consciously give partisan answers to factual questions, regardless of their accuracy, for instrumental reasons. In fact, in the theory chapter I put forward the theory that partisan cheerleading should be reframed as an instrumental behavior, consciously undertaken by respondents to support their party, instead of being based on expressive responding. After presenting the specific factual questions that respondents had to answer I outlined the hypothesis that can be tested in this study.

The design I proposed consisted of three different treatment conditions and a control group, each one designed to isolate and comprehend different aspects of information processing. The first treatment

offered respondents an accuracy incentive designed to make them less biased in their responses. The second treatment instigated partisan cheerleading patterns of responding by suggesting that the results of the survey would have been accessible to a large audience and that economic performance of incumbents could influence public opinion and the vote choices of independents and swing voters. The third treatment condition combined both previous treatments, to allow a better analysis of the interactions of accuracy and directional motivations in survey responding. It is important to note that the control group in this design does not only serve as a benchmark for comparison of other treatment groups. In fact, it also provides us with a chance of understanding how people construct their opinions in their "default" condition, motivated reasoning.

This design hence allows us to understand which type of information processing is more prominent in voters' minds. The next chapter will present the necessary statistical models to test for the hypotheses presented above. Looking at the effects of each treatment effect on both the correctness and uncongeniality of answers will provide us with a deeper understanding of how respondents approach survey responding.

Results and Discussion

5

This chapter is dedicated to presenting the results of the online survey experiment I outlined in the previous chapter and ran on MTurk. Through a series of regressions, I aim at testing the hypotheses presented in the previous chapter and underlining what these new empirical findings mean for the theoretical framework presented in the third chapter. Having designed an experiment that isolates the effects of each type of previously outlined information processing style – motivated reasoning, partisan cheerleading, unbiased thinking – this chapter allows us to see the effects of each one of these styles.

As a point of reference, the treatment designed to isolate unbiased thinking is referred to as either "treatment 1" or as "incentive treatment". The one designed to identify the effects of partisan cheerleading will be called "public opinion influence treatment" or "treatment 2". The terms "treatment 3" and "combined treatment" will, instead, refer to the combination of the two previous treatments, designed to ascertain how respondents react when treated to behave in two contrasting ways. The experiment is designed so that we can observe the respondents in their default condition of information processing, motivated reasoning, and compare their behavior to that of treated subjects.

To this end, this chapter is structured as follows. I will first present some descriptive statistics regarding how respondents answered the factual questions in the survey, first looking at how many of them were correct in each response and then looking at the partisan divide – the difference in the share of democrats and republicans that answered the questions correctly. I will then proceed to analyze the results of a variety of statistical models. I will start by looking at the models that use the "correctness" of answers as a dependent variable, in the form of a total score, of subsets of that score, or of the likelihood of answering each question correctly. I will then focus on those models that predict the "party uncongeniality" of the answers provided, formulated in similar manners as the "correctness" variable. I will then discuss what these result mean for the hypotheses and for the theoretical framework. Conclusions will then close the chapter.

Descriptive statistics

The first step to be taken to analyze these results is to look at how many respondents answered each factual question correctly. As Table 3 shows, not all questions were as easy to answer in the eyes of the respondents. For instance, the question that received the highest number of correct answers was the one on employment – with 786 correct respondents out of 1038 – while the question on Chinese export was the one which most people answered incorrectly. The reason why respondents answered the latter – and other questions – incorrectly probably goes beyond the simple nature of each respondent's information processing style. In fact, it is not unlikely that some of these questions were simply too difficult or obscure for at least a considerable portion of the respondents.

Table 3 Correct Answers by Question

Topic	Correct	Incorrect
Employment	786	252
Debt	688	350
Voter Fraud	711	327
School Shootings	452	586
Foreign-Born Population	406	632
Defense Spending	489	594
Illegal Immigrants Crime	677	361
China Export	286	752
New Rep. Congresspeople	440	598

Note: Number of people in the entire sample that answered correctly and incorrectly.

Especially when questions are more obscure, respondents may end up relying on other information that is in their possession, or other types of contextual cues, such as partisan identification. The data presented above, however, does not give us any indication of how respondents with different partisan affiliations answered the questions. To do this, we turn to Table 4, which presents data on the difference in the share of correct answers among partisans. In the third column of the table, negative values indicate that a higher percentage of Republicans answered the question correctly than Democrats, while the opposite is true of positive values. Here we see that the partisan divide is fairly constant across questions, with an average of 17.48 (in absolute value). Five of the nine questions in fact have a difference in correctness of partisan answers that ranges from 13.24 to 18.68. Three other questions – on voter fraud, on school shootings, and on the violent crimes of illegal immigrants –

have larger partisan divides. However, the most interesting datum on partisan divide is the one relative to the question of the percentage of foreign born residents in the US. Here the partisan divide is less than a percentage point, 0.83. Considering that this question was answered incorrectly by a large majority of respondents (632 in the total sample), we can safely say that both democrats and republicans overestimate the number of people born outside the United States that live in the country. To better understand the relations between the questions and the behavior of respondents in answering them, I will now turn to the analysis of the regression models.

Table 4 Partisan Divide by Question

Statement	**% of correct Democrats**	**% of correct Republicans**	**Partisan divide (%dem-%rep)**
Employment	70.52 (409)	86.77 (256)	-16.26
Debt	72.58 (421)	53.89 (159)	18.68
Voter Fraud	76.90 (446)	47.11 (159)	29.79
School Shootings	33.79 (196)	60.67 (179)	-26.88
Foreign-Born Population	39.48 (229)	38.64 (114)	0.83
Defense Spending	44.31 (257)	59.66 (176)	-15.35
Illegal Immigrants Crime	72.59 (421)	49.83 (147)	22.75
China Export	22.76 (132)	36.27 (107)	-13.51
New Rep. Congresspeople	38.62 (224)	51.86 (153)	-13.24
		Avg: (in absolute value)	17.48

Note: Measured by subtracting the share of correct Republicans from the share of correct Democrats

Correct Answers

In this section I will present the regression models developed to test the hypothesis on "correctness". I will first look at the models built on the correctness score, then will focus on the differences between the score on economic issues and the one on non-economic issues. Finally, I will look at the regression models for each individual answer; this will help in understanding if the topic and frame of each question influenced the answers of respondents.

Total Correctness Score

To look at the effects of the treatments on the correctness score I ran 4 models. The first two are OLS models but, given that the score can be considered a count variable, the main analytical focus is centered around models 3 and 4, the Poisson regressions. The decision to run the Poisson regression was due to the fact that the data was *not* overdispersed, hence, there was no necessity of running models to fix the overdispersion, such as a negative binomial regression. Other than the variables related to the individual treatment groups and partisan identification, Table 5 presents the interaction term between party identification and the treatment groups. It is important to note that the models that include party ID as a covariate – and all the following models on correctness – hold independent voters as the intercept and exclude the five respondents that refused to disclose their partisanship from the analysis. Another relevant variable is included as a covariate; "time spent" refers to the total time that respondents spent answering the 9 factual questions and, for the models on the total score, its unit of measurement is minutes. The remaining covariates that were measured in the pretreatment stage of the experiment are not included in the models as they never showed significant effects.

Looking at Table 5 we can now turn to the results of the regression analysis on the total correctness score. All models in this table indicate that there were no discernible significant effects of any of the covariates. In fact, all coefficients for the covariates have confidence intervals that easily include the possibility of those coefficients being null. Neither of the three treatments of the experiment change the correctness score of respondents and the same can be said of partisanship and the time they dedicated to answering the questions. These coefficients, even though they show null effects, provide us with interesting insight. First of all, we can see that partisanship of the respondents did not influence their score, indicating that the questions were well balanced in how they were framed and did not facilitate respondents of one party over the other. Secondly, we can see that the treatments had no effect on the quality of responses, meaning one of two things: either the respondents in the sample were largely motivated reasoners or the treatments were not efficient in stimulating correct

Table 5 Models on Total Correctness Score

	Dependent variable:			
	Total Correctness Score			
	OLS		*Poisson*	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
(Intercept)	4.718***	4.781***	1.551***	1.565***
	(0.084)	(0.232)	(0.028)	(0.078)
Incentive Treat	0.083	-0.047	0.017	-0.010
	(0.118)	(0.295)	(0.040)	(0.099)
Public Opinion Treat	0.008	-0.185	0.002	-0.039
	(0.119)	(0.309)	(0.040)	(0.105)
Combined Treat	0.056	-0.100	0.012	-0.021
	(0.119)	(0.303)	(0.040)	(0.102)
Democrat		-0.191		-0.040
		(0.237)		(0.080)
Republican		0.046		0.010
		(0.261)		(0.087)
Time Spent		0.037		0.008
		(0.117)		(0.039)
Incentive*Dem		0.220		0.046
		(0.336)		(0.113)
Public Op*Dem		0.263		0.056
		(0.347)		(0.118)
Combined*Dem		0.239		0.051
		(0.343)		(0.116)
Incentive*Rep		0.042		0.009
		(0.370)		(0.124)
Public Op*Rep		0.198		0.042
		(0.383)		(0.129)
Combined*Rep		0.062		0.013
		(0.375)		(0.126)
Observations	1,038	1,033	1,038	1,033
R^2	0.001	0.004		
Adjusted R^2	-0.002	-0.008		
Log Likelihood			-1,962.840	-1,953.243
Akaike Inf. Crit.			3,933.681	3,932.486
Residual St. Error	1.353(df=034)	1.358(df=1020)		
F Statistic	0.222(df=3;1034)	0.317(df=12;1020)		

Note: Intercept corresponds to Independents and control group. *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

answers. To better understand this, I now turn to the analysis of the subsets of economic and non-economic issues.

Economic vs. Non-Economic Issues

The variables in the models of "Economic Issues" and "Non-Economic Issues" questions are the same as the ones used in the models predicting the total correctness score. There is, however, one major difference in how the "Time Spent" variable is measured. Given that respondents had a total of 20 seconds to answer each question and that the "Economic Issues" subset only contains three of the nine questions – the ones on employment, debt and Chinese exports – the "Time Spent" variable is here measured in increments of 20 seconds. In other words, a one unit increase in the "Time Spent" variable means that the respondent spent 20 more second on the subset of issues at hand. Again, given that the independent variable considered here is a score, the regression models that I will be focusing on are the Poisson models (3 and 4 on both regressions).

Turning our attention to table 6 and 7 we, once again, find no significant effects for any of the predictors included in the models. The conclusions we can draw from the analysis of the economic and non-economic issues scores are similar to the ones previously drawn from the total score. First, we can say that both subsets of questions were fairly balanced in the aggregate in terms of question framing, as partisanship does not seem to play a role in the score of respondents. Second, we can see that the treatments also play no role in the respondents' score. It is particularly interesting that there is no difference in the effects of Treatment 2 between the economic issues and the non-economic ones. This seems to indicate that bringing respondents' attention on specific issues does not make them more or less likely to answer those questions correctly. Moving on to the question-specific models we may be able to distinguish the specific effects of the covariates on the individual responses.

Individual Questions

In my analysis of the correctness of individual responses I used logistic regressions, as the dependent variable is a binary one – since all questions were True or False, respondents could either answer correctly or incorrectly. The same variables used in the previous three models are used in these regressions, with the only difference that in this case "Time Spent" is measured in seconds and it refers to the time respondents spent answering the specific question at hand. This section only presents three of the question-specific regression models in Table 8, and six of them in the graphs in Figure 2. The remaining tables can be found in Appendix B and the graphs in Appendix C.

Table 6 Models on Correctness Score on Economic Issues

	Dependent variable:			
	Correctness Score on Economic Issues			
	OLS		*Poisson*	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
(Intercept)	1.698***	1.802***	0.530***	0.591***
	(0.044)	(0.120)	(0.047)	(0.129)
Incentive Treat	0.041	-0.042	0.024	-0.025
	(0.062)	(0.155)	(0.067)	(0.166)
Public Opinion Treat	0.031	-0.095	-0.018	-0.057
	(0.063)	(0.162)	(0.068)	(0.176)
Combined Treat	-0.023	-0.017	-0.013	-0.010
	(0.063)	(0.159)	(0.068)	(0.170)
Democrat		-0.136		-0.082
		(0.124)		(0.134)
Republican		0.141		0.078
		(0.137)		(0.144)
Time Spent		0.082		-0.049
		(0.052)		(0.056)
Incentive*Dem		0.204		0.122
		(0.176)		(0.190)
Public Op*Dem		0.150		0.091
		(0.182)		(0.198)
Combined*Dem		0.047		0.029
		(0.180)		(0.194)
Incentive*Rep		-0.115		-0.062
		(0.194)		(0.207)
Public Op*Rep		-0.044		-0.20
		(0.201)		(0.216)
Combined*Rep		0.109		-0.060
		(0.197)		(0.209)
Observations	1,038	1,033	1,038	1,033
R^2	0.002	0.014		
Adjusted R^2	-0.001	0.002		
Log Likelihood			-1,403.415	-1,394.631
Akaike Inf. Crit.			2,814.830	2,815.263
Residual St. Error	0.714(df=1034)	0.712(df=1020)		
F Statistic	0.525(df=3;1034)	0.185(df=12 ;1020)		

Note: Intercept corresponds to Independents and control group. *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 7 Models on Correctness Score on Non-Economic Issues

	Dependent variable:			
	Correctness Score on Non-Economic Issues			
	OLS		*Poisson*	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
(Intercept)	3.019***	2.979***	1.105***	1.092***
	(0.068)	(0.188)	(0.036)	(0.096)
Incentive Treat	0.042	-0.005	0.014	-0.002
	(0.097)	(0.241)	(0.050)	(0.124)
Public Opinion Treat	0.039	-0.093	0.013	-0.030
	(0.097)	(0.253)	(0.050)	(0.131)
Combined Treat	-0.079	-0.082	0.026	-0.027
	(0.097)	(0.247)	(0.050)	(0.099)
Democrat		-0.053		-0.032
		(0.193)		(0.110)
Republican		-0.096		0.043
		(0.213)		(0.049)
Time Spent		0.133		0.004
		(0.096)		(0.141)
Incentive*Dem		0.014		0.037
		(0.274)		(0.147)
Public Op*Dem		0.114		0.061
		(0.284)		(0.145)
Combined*Dem		0.188		0.051
		(0.280)		(0.155)
Incentive*Rep		0.155		0.058
		(0.302)		(0.158)
Public Op*Rep		0.245		-0.20
		(0.313)		(0.216)
Combined*Rep		0.175		-0.060
		(0.306)		(0.209)
Observations	1,038	1,033	1,038	1,033
R^2	0.001	0.004		
Adjusted R^2	-0.002	-0.008		
Log Likelihood			-1,744.284	-1,735.074
Akaike Inf. Crit.			3,496.568	3,496.147
Residual St. Error	1.108(df=1034)	1.1120(df=1020)		
F Statistic	0.218(df=3;1034)	0.349(df=12 ;1020)		

Note: Intercept corresponds to Independents and control group. *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

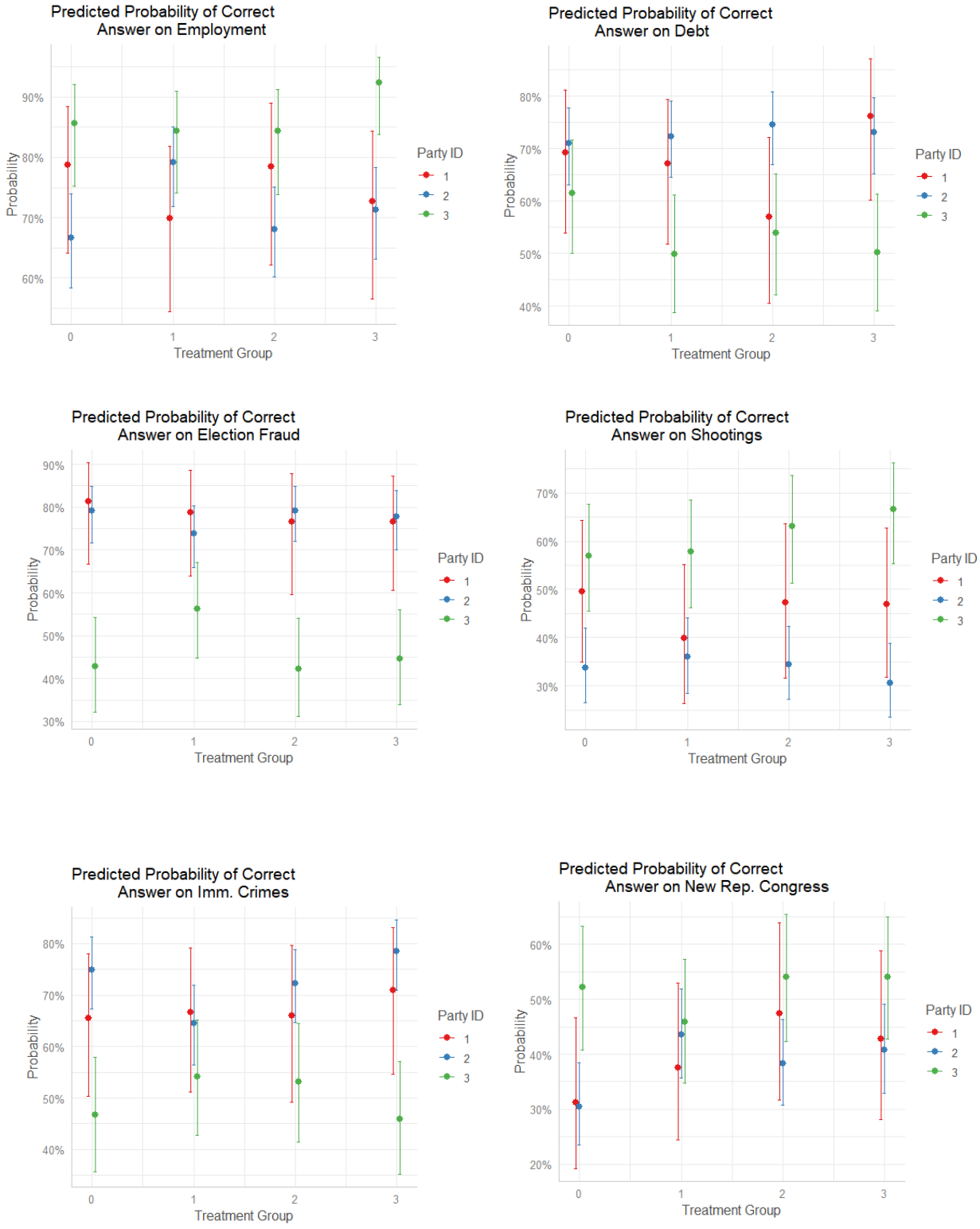
Data becomes more revealing when we look at the correctness of responses to the individual questions. First of all, we see that the time spent by respondents is significant on every question except for the ones on the foreign-born population of the United States and China's exports. In fact, on this question none of the predictors has an effect, indicating again that the questions were answered similarly by affiliates of both parties and across treatment groups. However, looking at the individual results of all other questions, we see that partisanship has an effect on most of them – with the notable exceptions of the question on debt where it has no effect, and the questions on school shootings and defense spending where the effect is only significant at the 90% confidence level. The effects of party ID depend on the framing of the question and the valence of the answer, indicating that people vote along party lines. Additionally, it is interesting to see how the question on employment shows an effect for the interaction of the Incentive Treatment and being Democrat, even if it is only significant at the 90% level. This would seem to indicate that only on this question, being assigned to Treatment 1 actually made Democrats more likely to answer correctly – considering that the question was phrased as pro-Republican and the answer underlined the good performance of President Trump on the issue.

When we turn to the graphs of Figure 2, we find confirmation of what is described above. In fact the effects of the treatments are barely ever significant. However, when we look at the effects that the treatments have on the subsets with different party ID (independents in red, Democrats in blue, and Republicans in green), we see that the treatments show some effects on the respondents. This is particularly the case of Treatment 1 (the incentive) which gets mixed results, sometimes making the group that has a higher share of incorrect answers in the control, more likely to answer correctly in the treatment groups (as is the case of the questions on employment and shootings). In other cases, Treatment 1 seems to lower the probability of respondents of one party to answer correctly (i.e. the Republicans on debt and on the Congresspeople questions, or the Democrats on the questions on immigrant crime and election fraud). Treatment 2 has barely any effect across questions for both parties, except for two cases where it makes Democrats less likely to answer correctly – on immigrant crimes and on the new Republican Congress. Finally, treatment 3 also appears to have no effects, except for two cases in which it slightly affects the responses of Republicans, making them more likely to be correct on the shootings questions and more likely to be incorrect on debt. Overall, the only group that displays more consistent treatment effects across questions is the one that received the accuracy incentive. However, it is necessary to keep in mind that the coefficients of these effects were statistically insignificant in most cases.

The question that remains, hence, is: what could explain the fact we observe effects on some questions and not others? Taking, as examples, the foreign-born population and the Chinese export questions we can come to some preliminary conclusions. The foreign-born population is in fact often perceived as bigger than it really is by citizens of a country (Sides & Citrin, 2007; Citrin & Sides, 2008; Blinder,

Figure 2 Predicted Probability of Answering Correctly by Question

Note: In the variable "PID3", 1 corresponds to Independent, 2 to Democrat, 3 to Republican.



2013) and the Chinese export question is not immediately easy to answer. In other words, they are both hard questions to answer correctly.

Table 8 Models on Question-Specific Correctness Score

	Dependent variable:					
	Correct on Employment		Correct on Election Fraud		Correct on Immigrant Crimes	
	(1)	(2)	(1)	(2)	(1)	(2)
(Intercept)	1.029***	1.943***	0.786***	1.065**	0.631***	0.719 **
	(0.140)	(0.397)	(0.133)	(0.414)	(0.130)	(0.340)
Incentive Treat	0.246	-0.467	0.030	-0.153	-0.155	0.048
	(0.205)	(0.500)	(0.189)	(0.564)	(0.182)	(0.459)
Public Opinion Treat	-0.016	-0.011	0.001	-0.287	0.034	0.024
	(0.199)	(0.548)	(0.189)	(0.564)	(0.185)	(0.479)
Combined Treat	0.222	-0.329	-0.070	-0.289	0.122	0.247
	(0.206)	(0.517)	(0.188)	(0.549)	(0.186)	(0.481)
Democrat		-0.616		-0.137		0.454
		(0.409)		(0.443)		(0.374)
Republican		0.473		1.755***		-0.777**
		(0.503)		(0.458)		(0.396)
Time Spent		-0.090***		0.097***		-0.017 ***
		(0.017)		(0.032)		(0.020)
Incentive*Dem		1.115*		-0.146		-0.543
		(0.569)		(0.612)		(0.527)
Public Op*Dem		0.079		0.291		-0.160
		(0.603)		(0.631)		(0.547)
Combined*Dem		0.549		0.207		-0.046
		(0.579)		(0.619)		(0.558)
Incentive*Rep		0.369		0.693		0.255
		(0.686)		(0.639)		(0.565)
Public Op*Rep		-0.081		0.258		0.237
		(0.727)		(0.657)		(0.584)
Combined*Rep		1.040		0.361		-0.275
		(0.755)		(0.640)		(0.581)
Observations	1,038	1,033	1,038	1,033	1,038	1,033
Log Likelihood	-573.918	-539.679	-646.591	-591.995	-669.437	-640.198
Akaike Inf. Crit.	1,155.835	1,105.358	1,301.181	1,209.990	1,346.875	1,306.397

Note: Intercept corresponds to Independents and control group. *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Uncongenial Answers

This section presents the second part of my series of regression analyses, where the dependent variable is the "party uncongeniality" of the answers compared to each respondent's party identification. To reiterate, the answer to a question is considered uncongenial when the valence of the answer is incongruent with the partisanship. Hence, Democrats give uncongenial answers when they give pro-Republican or anti-Democrat answers, and Republicans give uncongenial answers when they do the opposite. In a similar fashion to the previous section, I will first look at the models developed around the total "uncongeniality score". Then, I will proceed to analyze the differences between the models on uncongeniality on economic and non-economic issues. Finally, I will look at the regression models on the uncongeniality of the answers provided to each individual question.

While there are some similarities with the previous section, there are also several fundamental differences. The first one is obviously due to the difference in the dependent variable. Analyzing uncongeniality, in fact, helps us understand whether or not voters are ever willing to question their partisan predisposition. This is especially interesting for those questions that are harder to answer correctly. Do voters become more open to the other party being right when they are unsure of the answer to a question? A second important difference between the following models and the previous ones is that the question on defense spending was excluded from the analysis. This is because this question, on top of having a counterintuitive answer (with President Obama spending more than President Trump on defense programs), is also much more open to debate as to what policy better represents each party; not all republicans may want their government to spend more money on defense and not all democrats would want it to spend less. The final difference with the previous models is that party-uncongeniality can only be measured for respondents that actually identify with a party. For this reason, only partisans were used for the following models, excluding from the analysis the 158 independents and the 5 respondents who preferred not to declare their party ID. Consequently, these models will present the variable "Democrat", a binomial variable that equals 1 if the respondent identifies as either a "strong democrat", a "democrat", or as "leaning democrat". The respective identifications for republicans correspond to a 0 in the variable, hence, they are used as the benchmark for comparison.

Total Uncongeniality Score

Table 9 presents the results of 4 models on the total "Uncongeniality Score", measured as a sum of the number of uncongenial answers given by a respondent. Again, with this score being a count variable I will be focusing on the results of the Poisson models presented below.

As we can see from the coefficients of Model 4, two variables are significant. The first is "Democrat", while the second is "Time Spent", which is measured in minutes. Both of these coefficients are significant at the 99% level and are negative, which tells us two things. Being a Democrat – with all other things being equal – decreases the average expected number of uncongenial answers by 20.8%. The second is that the more time respondents dedicated to answering the factual questions, the lower their uncongeniality score was. A possible explanation for this is that some questions were too difficult for respondents to answer with certainty, hence, the more people spent time thinking about them the more they became biased. On the other hand, people who simply guessed as soon as – or potentially even before – they read the answer had a 50-50 chance of giving correct and/or congenial answers.

Figure 3 displays the treatment effects on the total uncongeniality score – the total number of party-uncongenial answers given by respondents. The plot shows that the Democrats in the sample are more likely to respond to both the monetary incentive and the public opinion influence incentive, than their Republican counterparts. Although the effects of Treatment 2 are only marginally significant, the effects of Treatment 1 seem to be clear when compared to democratic respondents in the control group. The pattern is similar for Republicans but given the low number of Republican partisans the sample does not lend enough power to make valuable inferences. These results show that Democrats, when offered a financial incentive, are less likely to give party-congenial answers. However, the party-congeniality of Democrat's answers does not seem to be affected by the public opinion treatment or the combined treatment.

Figure 3 Treatment Effects on Uncongeniality Score by Party ID

NOTE: In the "Democrat" variable, 0 corresponds to Republican and 1 to

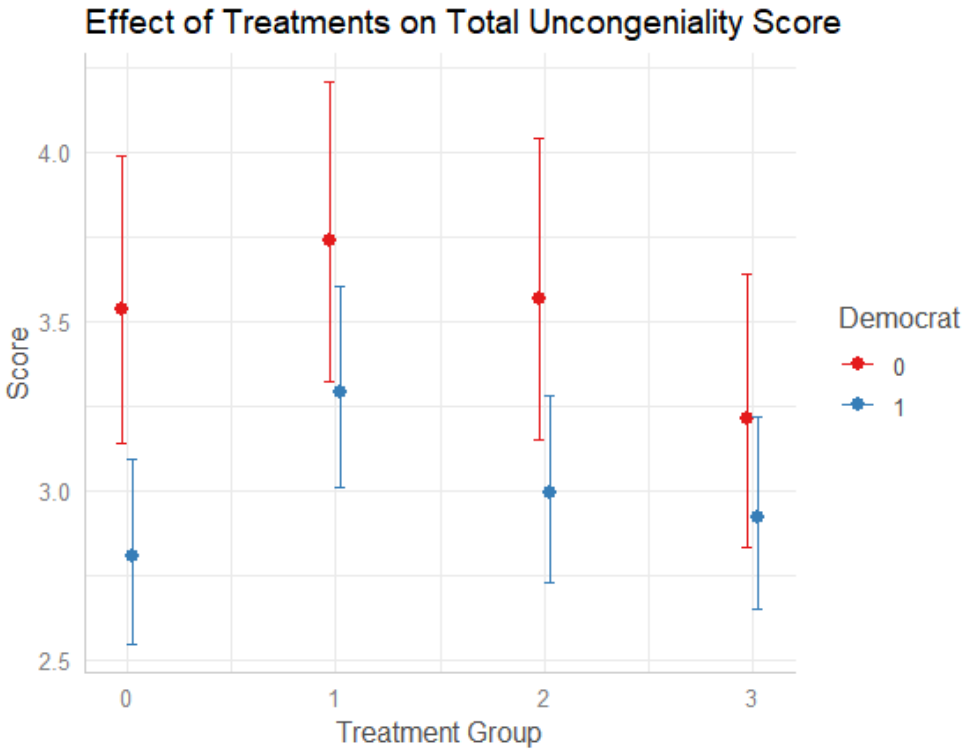


Table 9 Models on Total Party-Uncongeniality Score

	Dependent variable:			
	Total Party-Uncongeniality Score			
	OLS		*Poisson*	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
(Intercept)	3.073***	3.905***	1.123***	1.379***
	(0.114)	(0.221)	(0.039)	(0.071)
Incentive Treat	0.363**	0.196	0.112**	0.055
	(0.161)	(0.272)	(0.053)	(0.099)
Public Opinion Treat	0.089	0.020	0.029	0.008
	(0.160)	(0.276)	(0.054)	(0.088)
Combined Treat	-0.036	-0.331	-0.012	-0.097
	(0.161)	(0.270)	(0.055)	(0.088)
Democrat		-0.740***		-0.233***
		(0.236)		(0.079)
Time Spent		-0.415***		-0.134***
		(0.137)		(0.048)
Incentive*Dem		0.293		0.105
		(0.335)		(0.109)
Public Op*Dem		0.171		0.057
		(0.337)		(0.112)
Combined*Dem		0.452		0.138
		(0.334)		(0.113)
Observations	875	875	875	875
R^2	0.009	0.041		
Adjusted R^2	0.005	0.033		
Log Likelihood			-1,680.803	-1,667.964
Akaike Inf. Crit.			3,369.606	3,353.928
Residual St. Error	1.682(df=871)	1.659(df=866)		
F Statistic	2503* (df=3;871)	4.683*** (df=7;866)		

Note: Intercept corresponds to Republican and control group. *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Economic vs. Non-Economic Issues

Looking at the uncongeniality of answers on the subsets of economic and non-economic questions an important note is that, the "Time Spent" variable is measured in increments of 20 seconds. Comparing tables 10 and 11 we can take note of a few different things. The first is that there are no significant effects in the model on economic issues. None of the predictors affects the uncongeniality score obtained by respondents on economic questions. However, there is one effect that is significant at the

99% level on the uncongeniality of answers to non-economic questions. Democratic respondents, in fact, are predicted to have less uncongenial answers, which is in line with the findings on the total of Table 9. Democrats seem to be less likely to provide uncongenial answers than Republicans. Looking at the "Time Spent" variable, there is a small effect that is significant at the 90% confidence level on non-economic issues, an effect that is not found on economic issues.

Table 10 Models on Party-Uncongeniality Score on Economic Issues

	Dependent variable:			
	Party-Uncongeniality Score on Economic Issues			
	OLS		*Poisson*	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
(Intercept)	1.228***	1.438***	0.206***	0.373***
	(0.055)	(0.221)	(0.061)	(0.114)
Incentive Treat	0.065	-0.053	0.052	-0.040
	(0.078)	(0.272)	(0.085)	(0.143)
Public Opinion Treat	-0.030	-0.014	-0.025	-0.010
	(0.078)	(0.136)	(0.086)	(0.145)
Combined Treat	-0.034	-0.092	-0.028	-0.070
	(0.078)	(0.133)	(0.087)	(0.143)
Democrat		-0.172		-0.137
		(0.116)		(0.126)
Time Spent		-0.117*		-0.098
		(0.064)		(0.072)
Incentive*Dem		0.189		0.150
		(0.335165		(0.178)
Public Op*Dem		-0.006		-0.008
		(0.166)		(0.180)
Combined*Dem		-0.088		0.067
		(0.164)		(0.180)
Observations	875	875	875	875
R^2	0.001	0.012		
Adjusted R^2	-0.001	0.003		
Log Likelihood			-1,126.020	-1,123.731
Akaike Inf. Crit.			3,260.039	3,265.462
Residual St. Error	0.817(df=871)	1.659(df=866)		
F Statistic	0.689* (df=3;871)	1.312(df=8;866)		

Note: Intercept corresponds to Republican and control group. *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 11 Models on Party Uncongeniality Score on Non-Economic Issues

	Dependent variable:			
	Party-Uncongeniality Score on Non-Economic Issues			
	OLS		*Poisson*	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
(Intercept)	1.845***	2.372***	0.612***	0.876***
	(0.088)	(0.169)	(0.050)	(0.114090
Incentive Treat	0.297**	0.238	0.149	-0.103
	(0.124)	(0.211)	(0.068)	(0.107)
Public Opinion Treat	0.119	0.017	0.063	0.009
	(0.124)	(0.214)	(0.069)	(0.112)
Combined Treat	-0.002	-0.240	-0.001	-0.114
	(0.125)	(0.209)	(0.071)	(0.112)
Democrat		-0.576***		-0.300***
		(0.183)		(0.101)
Time Spent		-0.217*		-0.113*
		(0.120)		(0.069)
Incentive*Dem		0.111		0.089
		(0.259)		(0.139)
Public Op*Dem		0.193		0.110
		(0.261)		(0.142)
Combined*Dem		0.361		0.184
		(0.259)		(0.144)
Observations	875	875	875	875
R^2	0.009	0.037		
Adjusted R^2	0.005	0.028		
Log Likelihood			-1,438.921	-1,428.538
Akaike Inf. Crit.			2,885.841	2,875.076
Residual St. Error	1.299(df=871)	1.284(df=866)		
F Statistic	2.571* (df=3;871)	4.107*** (df=8;866)		

Note: Intercept corresponds to Republican and control group. *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Individual Questions

The models presented below are all logistic regressions, used to evaluate the likelihood of respondents giving uncongenial answers to each single question. Given that the dependent variable of each model is related to an individual question the "Time Spent" covariate is here measured in seconds. These models provide us with additional insight into how open to give uncongenial answers the respondents were when answering the factual questions. In this section, I only show the results of the questions

on debt, on the foreign-born population of the US and on Chinese exports, all the other tables can be found in Appendix B.

The most important covariates in these models, once again, are "Democrat" and "Time Spent". The only exceptions are the question on school shootings – which has no effects – and the one on foreign-born residents in the US – where the effect of being a Democrat is only significant at the 90% confidence level. Looking specifically at the party ID dummy variable, we see that Democrats tend to be more congenial across the board, except for the question on the national debt, where they are more open to giving uncongenial answers than their Republican counterparts. Moreover, across all questions we can see how spending more time on each question made respondents less likely to be uncongenial. This opens an interesting possibility for interpretation. Given that spending more time on a question makes respondents more congenial, it seems that shorter response times may actually be masking the effects of partisanship. If respondents answer very quickly, ignoring the question, their answers may be the result of a random choice. Had they spent more time on the question, we might have seen even stronger effects of party identification.

An interesting thing to be noted relates to the question on the foreign-born population of the US. In fact, other than "Democrat", there are two other significant predictors. The first is Treatment 3 – at a 90% significance level – and the second is the interaction term between the party ID dummy and the combined treatment variable. The former is at the 95% level and is the only case throughout the experiment where the effect of the treatment is captured. With a coefficient of 0.846, "Combined*Dem" tells us that democratic respondents who received the combination of Treatments 1 and 2 are 2.33 times more likely to be uncongenial in their answer to this question.

When turning to Figure 4 we can look at the treatment effects on the probability of respondents providing party-uncongenial answers to each question. In these plots, the red lines – referring to those respondents with a value of 0 on the variable "Democrat" – refer to those respondents who identify with the Republican party, while the blue lines – with a value of 1 on the variable "Democrat" – are the respondents who identify with the Democratic party. Treatment 1 is again the condition that elicits the strongest effects, even though, it is mostly not significant. When treated with the accuracy incentives, Democrats become more uncongenial on the question of employment, while Republicans do the same on the question on election fraud. Both groups, when incentivized to answer correctly, become more likely to be uncongenial when asked questions about immigrant violence and the newly elected Republican congresspeople. If we focus on the effects of the public opinion influence treatment, we see once again that it has no effects on either group, which is especially clear on the questions on Chinese exports, immigrant crimes and the employment rates. Treatment 3 – the

combination of the two previous treatments – again seems to have no effects on the partisans when it comes to most questions, except for making Democrats more likely to be uncongenial when asked about the foreign-born population of the US or the newly elected members of Congress from the Republican party. One case of particular interest is the question on the national debt. In fact, while Democrats maintain the same low level of uncongeniality across all treatment groups, a fairly strong (but still only marginally significant) effect is observed in the uncongeniality of Republican responses across all conditions.

Table 12 Models on Question-Specific Party-Uncongeniality

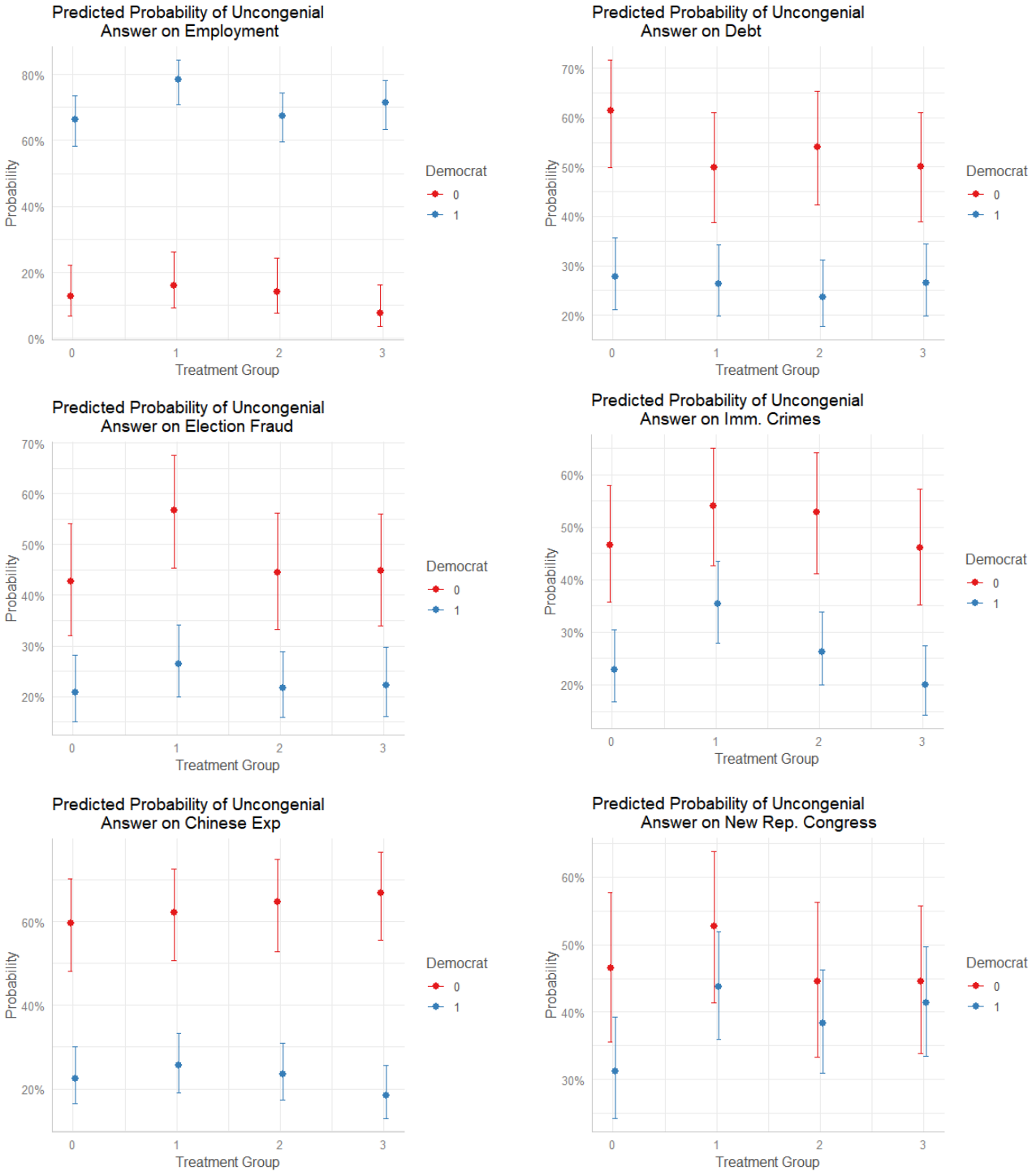
	Dependent variable:					
	Uncongenial on Debt		Uncongenial of Foreign-Born Population		Uncongenial on Chinese Exports	
	(1)	(2)	(1)	(2)	(1)	(2)
(Intercept)	-0.436***	0.359	0.064	-0.224	-0.592***	0.651**
	(0.138)	(0.260)	(0.135)	(0.255)	(0.141)	(0.262)
Incentive Treat	-0.209	-0.465	-0.027	-0.134	0.106	0.107
	(0.199)	(0.332)	(0.191)	(0.334)	(0.198)	(0.338)
Public Opinion Treat	-0.257	-0.300	0.245	0.083	0.018	0.311
	(0.199)	(0.338)	(0.192)	(0.336)	(0.199)	(0.340)
Combined Treat	-0.195	-0.459	-0.045	-0.603*	0.001	0.603
	(0.199)	(0.330)	(0.192)	(0.344)	(0.200)	(0.344)
Democrat		-1.418***		0.555*		-1.629***
		(0.302)		(0.288)		(0.309)
Time Spent		0.020		-0.015		-0.053**
		(0.021)		(0.022)		(0.024)
Incentive*Dem		0.395		0.168		0.059
		(0.425)		(0.410)		(0.436)
Public Op*Dem		0.087		0.237		-0.154
		(0.430)		(0.412)		(0.442)
Combined*Dem		0.394		0.846**		-0.566
		(0.425)		(0.421)		(0.450)
Observations	875	875	875	875	875	875
Log Likelihood	-567.817	-534.067	-603.732	-583.720	-573.252	-501.366
Akaike Inf. Crit.	1,143.635	1,086.134	1,215.464	1,185.441	1,154.505	1,020.773

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Overall, these findings again show us that respondents were not really affected by the treatments they were subjected to. In fact, while some effects can be observed they mostly present insignificant coefficients. Given how few significant effects can be observed, these findings can – at best – be considered mixed.

Figure 4 Predicted Probability of Answering Uncongenially by Question

NOTE: In the "Democrat" variable, 0 corresponds to Republican and 1 to Democrat



Discussion

What do these results tell us about the hypotheses presented in the previous chapter and about the theoretical framework at large? First of all, the models presented above show one basic finding, the treatments of this experiment have no effects on neither the correctness nor the uncongeniality of the answers given by respondents. Given these results, I can only conclude that there is no support for *Hypotheses 1* through *8*, as we cannot reject their null hypotheses regardless of how the correctness and uncongeniality of responses are measured.

Specifically, the incentive treatment condition – Treatment 1 – did not make respondents more correct in their answers, as we would expect if we held that unbiased processing can be induced through incentives. For this reason, we cannot confirm *Hypothesis 1*. We also find no support for *Hypothesis 2*, because there no treatment effects were observed for Treatment 2 – the so-called public opinion influence condition. The same goes for *Hypothesis 3*, which stipulated that Treatment 3 would have had a positive effect on correctness. *Hypothesis 4*, the last hypothesis regarding the correctness of answers cannot be confirmed either. In fact, there were no discernible differences between the effects of Treatment 2 between economic and non-economic issue-questions.

The hypotheses on the effects of the treatments on uncongeniality – *Hypotheses 5* through *8*, which mirrored the ones on correctness – are unsupported as well. In fact, there are no effects of Treatments 1, 2, and 3 on how party-uncongenial the respondents were in their answers. There is only one notable exception, the interaction effect of Treatment 3 and the "Democrat" variable on the likelihood of giving an uncongenial answer to the question on the foreign-born population of the US. This indicates that Democrats were more likely to give pro-Republican answers when it came to this question, especially those treated with the combination of the incentive and the public opinion influence conditions. This is in line with the findings on the correct answers to the same question. Table 10 shows, in fact, that there were no effects of partisanship on the likelihood of answering the question correctly, which, given that a large majority of respondents gave an incorrect answer, indicates that all respondents overestimate the number of foreign-born residents in the US, regardless of their party ID.

Even though the treatments have no effects on the responses given to the factual questions, the results of this experiment provide us with great insight into the issue of information processing. In fact, when looking at the 1038 respondents in the sample – or the subsample of 875 partisans – one thing is clear: when it comes to answering factual questions, people act similarly to Mark, the ideal type of motivated reasoner presented in the theory chapter. In the data there is little evidence of unbiased

thinkers like Robert, let alone partisan cheerleaders like Paula. Had there been any unbiased thinkers responding to the survey, we would have observed a positive effect of Treatment 1 on correctness and uncongeniality. On the other hand, if respondents had actually been insincere – as stipulated by partisan cheerleading - we would have found negative effects of the Public Opinion Influence condition on the dependent variables. Simply put, respondents in the survey experiment were sincere in their views, even though those views often were incorrect and inaccurate. Offering an incentive did not bring out unbiased responses and encouraging instrumental partisan behavior did not make the responses more biased. Put simply, respondents gave the answered they *believed* to be true, which, more often than not, was congruent with their partisan identification.

In other words, the findings of this study can be added to the list of evidence for motivated reasoning presented in the literature review. Like Peterson and Iyengar (2021) and Berinski (2017), I can only conclude that respondents are primarily motivated reasoners and that partisan cheerleading theory, no matter how you measure and conceptualize it – as expressive or instrumental, lacks empirical support.

Conclusion

This chapter presented the results of the experiment I designed with the objective of isolating the three types of information processing and survey responding that I outlined in the theoretical framework: motivated reasoning, partisan cheerleading, and unbiased thinking.

As discussed above, the results of the analysis on the correctness and party-uncongeniality of the answers show no evidence of instrumental partisan cheerleading, which should have been triggered by Treatment 2, or unbiased thinking, which was incentivized by Treatment 1. This leaves only motivated reasoning as an explanation of how respondents approach survey responding and factual questions. In fact, while there were no treatment effects, the two variables that had consistently significant effects were the partisanship of respondents and the time they dedicated to answering the questions. The relevance of partisanship easily fits in the motivated reasoning framework, however, the fact that the time spent by respondents on each question is often significant indicates that the experimental subjects not always paid attention to the issue-statements before answering. This is definitely a limitation of this study, which I will address in further detail in the conclusive chapter.

Overall, we can safely conclude that this experiment provides support for motivated reasoning theory. These findings have serious implications for the study of political psychology and electoral behavior

from a methodological standpoint, but also imply consequences for the functioning of democratic politics. These implications will be presented in more detail in the conclusion of this dissertation.

Conclusion

6

With this dissertation I attempted to shed new light on how voters process information and respond to surveys by reframing existing theories of political psychology and proposing a new prism through which we can look at this topic. Given the composite nature of my theoretical approach, the question I address with my research is twofold. The first aspect of my research question regarded the nature of partisan disagreements that are often observed in surveys responses. Are they the result of genuine differences of opinions between opposing sides, or are they the consequence of respondents lying in surveys to support their parties? Secondly, I asked whether unbiased attitudes that go beyond partisan frames can be incentivized. Is there a way to encourage voters to consider political issues and events impartially?

Looking at the existing literature that attempts to answer these questions – and others similar to them – one can hardly make up his mind. Theorists and scholars of rational behavior and rational voting tell us that voters are unbiased from the start; that they undertake impartial thought processes in everything they do. Rationality and unbiasedness, according to them, need not be incentivized because they are the default setting of individuals' thinking. Reading the literature on motivated reasoning we get the opposite idea. In this view, voters are biased, driven by emotions and influenced by prior attitudes in every step of information processing. According to motivated reasoning, people believe what they say even when what they believe is factually incorrect, and their survey responses reflect that. However, scholars of partisan cheerleading do not agree. They argue that, in most cases, voters know very well what the truth is, but they decide to support their party no matter what. A partisan cheerleader, when faced with a survey question, will decide to lie, rather than smear her party's image.

Given this fragmented academic context, when building the theoretical framework at the foundation of this study I took a step back from the heated scholarly debate on the topic to look at the "bigger picture". Having done that, one thing seemed clear to me. These theories are not necessarily mutually exclusive. With this in mind, I developed a theory that reframes the debate and focuses on which conditions must be met to elicit each one of these three processing modes. I argue that the default setting of our minds is motivated reasoning and that only when we receive the correct stimuli we switch to a different style of information processing. Different levels of interest on a topic or external

primes can lead us to approach political issues more unbiasedly, and the possibility of influencing other people's views may lead us to become cheerleaders. In other words, the context we find ourselves surrounded by is the key determinant of how we approach political information.

To put this theory to the test I modified an experimental design that has been used on previous research on the topic. The novelty of my design, in particular, was the addition of a treatment condition with the specific goal of eliciting partisan cheerleading. This treatment – or anything like it – had never been used, and its absence in the literature made it impossible to actually determine the effects of partisan cheerleaders in surveys and experiments. I then ran this survey experiment on the online platform MTurk, with a sample of more than 1000 respondents.

The empirical results from this study should be treated with some caution. As I have explained throughout the thesis, this is the first take – the pilot – for future studies to be pursued in the context of a PhD. Four notes are of particular relevance when considering this study. 1) Whereas instrumental partisan cheerleading did not show any considerable treatment effects, it is not clear that I was able to successfully manipulate instrumental considerations. A series of alternative - stronger – treatments to capture instrumental motivated reasoning accompanied with manipulation checks would allow me to successfully measure the underlying concept. 2) It is also clear that online surveys attract respondents that don not fully consider the questions. In a study such as this one that revolves around factual questions, this might be an additional concern. Though the treatment effects do not vary considerably by the time they took to answer the questions, it is clear that if a small proportion answers randomly, the power of the experiment drops significantly. Attention checks (see Berinski, Huber, & Lenz, 2012) would increase the quality of the sample and improve the explanatory power of the experiment. 3) The sample size should also be increased; with the latest developments in experimental analysis, when the target estimand is the heterogeneous treatment effect, the sample size should increase considerably. 4) The final point to be made regarding the limitations of the study relates to context. After 4 years of Trump, the Biden administration has only served for 150 days and motivated reasoning is less potent. This along with the fact that we are dealing with a pandemic makes it hard for voters to make any valid comparisons between the parties. At the same time, the Republicans seem to be split between two camps. This is also not helpful in terms of the aims of the study. It is thus likely that a replication of this study closer to the midterm election would produce different results.

Overall, the contribution that this dissertation makes to the field is twofold. The first, is the addition of the new conception of partisan cheerleading. Instrumental partisan cheerleading is not only a concept that I am adding to the many theoretical approaches that deal with information processing. It

is, first and foremost, the reformulation of a concept that was hardly measurable and testable, expressive responding. With instrumental partisan cheerleading new avenue I identified a new potential style of information processing and survey responding, which has not yet been accounted for in the literature. As this project was but a pilot for my own future research, this dissertation provides a starting point to understanding how – and if – the possibility of influencing public opinion affects how people process information.

Implications of this study

On top of the contribution to the field of political psychology the findings of this research have several real-world implications. Firstly, political ones. As my results showed a strong prevalence of motivated reasoning, they provide a better understanding of current-day processes of socio-political development. These results are especially interesting in today's polarized context. In fact, assuming that politicians make decisions based on feedback they receive from the electorate, we would expect public opinion to be fluid and to reflect processes based on rewarding success and punishing failure. This fluid and responsive public opinion, would serve as an indicator for political elites of what their electorate thinks, driving them towards more popular policies. However, if the electorate is split into immovable opposing factions that overlook the failures of their party and the successes of their opponents', elites will lose the incentive to enact policies that benefit the electorate. Put in simple terms, what would incentivize politicians to do a good job if they do not run the risk of being voted out of office? Understanding how and why voters may fossilize on their partisan view is, hence, a fundamental step to understanding current-days politics.

Additionally, this research sheds more light on the value of factual truth in democratic regimes. If voters are to decide who should govern their country, they should be well-informed and unbiased in their decision-making processes. Understanding the degree to which they are, in fact, unbiased and well-informed may bring up new perspectives on democracy itself and may underline the need for more readily available and accessible information on political issues that cuts across party lines.

Finally, this research has important methodological implications for the study of social sciences. Finding no support for the effects of partisan cheerleading in survey answers, my findings show that people are actually sincere in their responses. Hence, there seems to be no need to reconsider the interpretation of survey-based studies or to re-evaluate the future of quantitative research designs to account for insincere responding patterns. Scholars can rest easy at night, knowing that surveys remain a valid method of studying public opinion.

Limitations of the Study and Openings for Further Research

As any experimental research design, this study faces limitations in terms of generalizability. In deciding to run an experiment to study this topic, I sacrificed the generalizability of my results in favor of a more in-depth and clearer understanding of the phenomenon at hand. Experimental settings and treatments, in fact, rarely represent real-life conditions, but they do give us the possibility of better seeing how processes unfold, especially in a topic as complex as information processing. Further research employing different methods is certainly necessary, but I am convinced that the first step in studying my research question had to be an experiment, which was more adaptable to my specific research needs and provided a more clear-cut answer.

In addition to these more general impediments of experimental research, my study suffered from other, more specific, issues. Limited financial resources compelled me to run the experiment online, which, in turn, produced a misrepresentative sample of respondents specifically when it came to the low number of Republican respondents. Moreover, having to run this experiment with digital workers I could not ensure that the subjects of the experiment paid the necessary attention to the survey as they were answering it. This is also reflected in my results, which show that the time respondents dedicated to the questions was often a very significant predictor of the quality of their answers. Future experiments of this kind should include screener questions, to "weed out" inattentive respondents. Another issue, that factual-questions-based experiments face is the nature of factual questions themselves. Choosing, phrasing and presenting the right set questions is a delicate endeavor and, even when done correctly, some of the questions asked may simply be too complicated for respondents to understand and answer. I aim at fixing these issues in my own future research, starting from my own doctoral research.

These limitations, in fact, also present fascinating avenues for further research. Improving and modifying the research design will provide a clearer outlook on information processes and on the interactions between the different processing styles at the basis of my theory. First, further studies of this kind, should aim at testing new types of accuracy incentives and determine which ones are more effective and which ones are a better representation of the "natural" conditions in which voters find themselves in their daily life. Additionally, it would be interesting to provide respondents with the information *before* they answer the factual questions, to see how this affects their responses and to track their information selection behavior. Would they become more accurate and open-minded as found by Bullock et al (2015), or would they ignore party-uncongenial information as theorized in motivated reasoning and found by Berinski (2017) and Peterson and Iyengar (2021)? Changing the context of the experiment would also provide interesting new outlooks on the topic. For example it

would be fascinating to see how respondents behave in nations that have lower levels of party identification, maybe because of a multi-party system or maybe because of a less polarized political environment. The former would be particularly interesting, especially in light of the preliminary finding by Jim Woo Kim (Forthcoming), who argues that motivated reasoning is exacerbated in contexts of high polarization and partisan affect. Even smaller changes to the design could provide new insight into the issue, such as changing the topics of the questions or the type of questions provided – instead of True/ False statements one might ask opinions about speeches, images or videos of political events. Overall, this field of political psychology is flourishing, and many possible methods and approaches can be used to study it. Future research should commit to expanding the variety of studies employed, even going beyond experiments.

Concluding Thoughts

In a political context where the noise of a polarized debate drowns out all the faint calls for compromise, we often find ourselves thinking "*how can the other side be so blind to the facts that support my position?*". What we do not think is that, at least on some issues, *we* are the blind ones while our opponents are actually correct. And with the rise of concepts like post-truth – picked as the Oxford Dictionaries' word of the year in 2016 – it has become apparent that this seemingly irreconcilable divide does not only concern differences in policy preferences but also in how we view and interpret facts. It seems that, as voters, not only do we want different things, but we also perceive different realities. In asking myself how the animal species that prides itself as being the most evolved on the planet could fall victim to what seemed like such a simple issue, I decided to dedicate my research this topic. As it turns out, the issue is not that simple, and we are far from solving it.

All that is left to do now, is to keep looking for an answer.

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Appendix A: Survey-Experiment Layout

1. Pre-Treatment Questions

What is your age?

What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Non-binary / third gender
- Prefer not to say

What is the highest level of education that you have achieved?

- No high school diploma
- High school diploma (or equivalent)
- Some college
- 2-year college degree
- 4-year college graduate
- post-graduate (e.g. masters)
- PhD

What is your ethnicity?

- White
- Black or African American
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- Hispanic or Latinx
- Other

Generally speaking, how interested are you in politics?

- Extremely interested
- Very interested
- Moderately interested
- Slightly interested
- Not interested at all

How many hours per day, on average, do you spend viewing, listening to, or reading news or other political material?

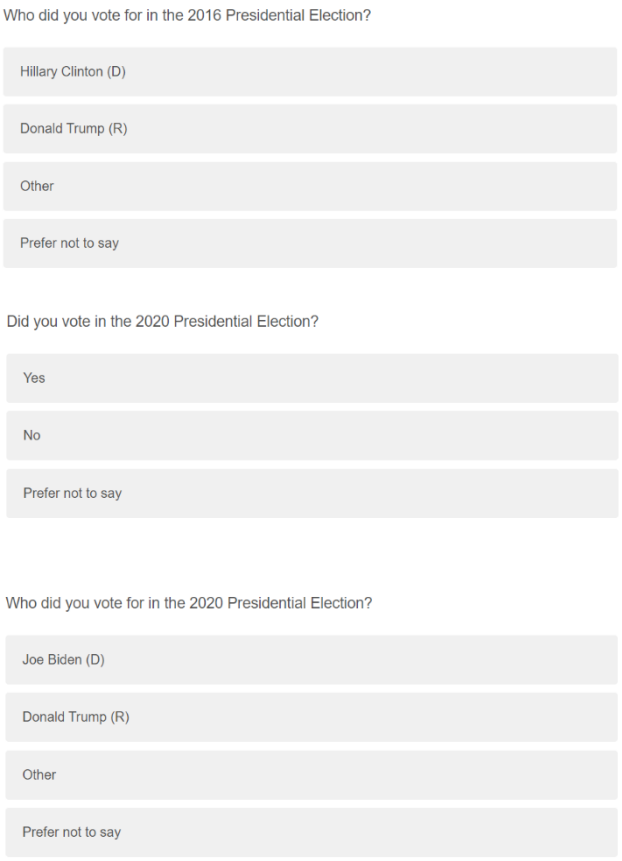
- Less than 15 minutes
- 15 to 30 minutes
- 30 to 60 minutes
- 1 to 2 hours
- 2 to 3 hours
- More than 3 hours
- Don't know

Generally speaking, do you consider yourself as being a Republican, a Democrat or an Independent?

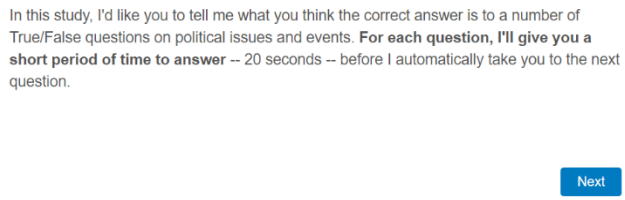
- Strong Democrat
- Democrat
- Leaning Democrat
- Independent
- Leaning Republican
- Republican
- Strong Republican
- Prefer not to say

Did you vote in the 2016 Presidential Election?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

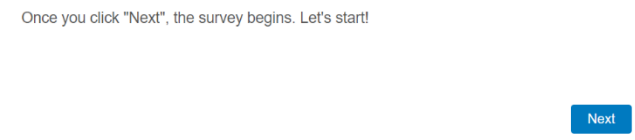


2. Explanation of survey structure:

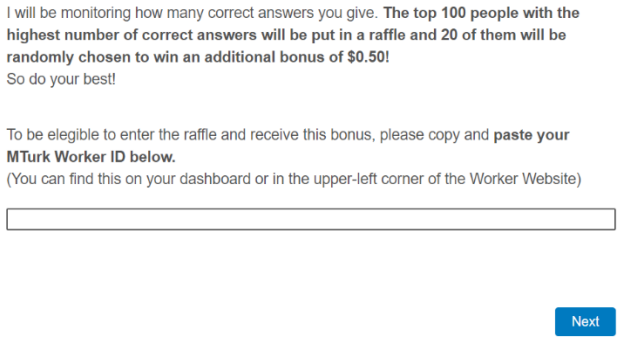


3. Treatments:

Control group:



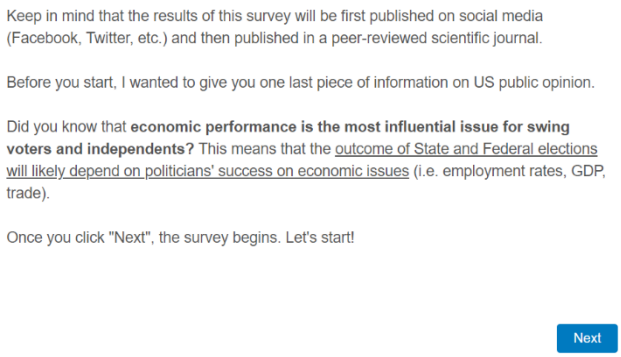
Treatment 1:


I will be monitoring how many correct answers you give. **The top 100 people with the highest number of correct answers will be put in a raffle and 20 of them will be randomly chosen to win an additional bonus of $0.50!**
So do your best!

To be elegible to enter the raffle and receive this bonus, please copy and **paste your MTurk Worker ID below.**
(You can find this on your dashboard or in the upper-left corner of the Worker Website)

Next

Treatment 2:


Keep in mind that the results of this survey will be first published on social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) and then published in a peer-reviewed scientific journal.

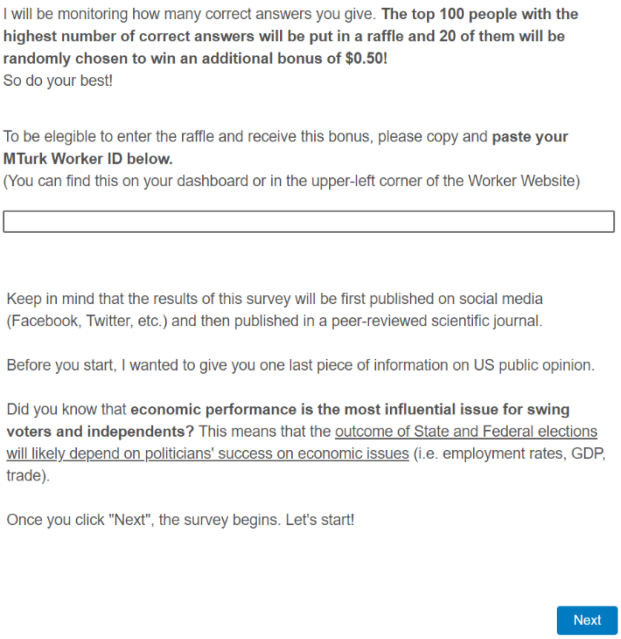
Before you start, I wanted to give you one last piece of information on US public opinion.

Did you know that **economic performance is the most influential issue for swing voters and independents?** This means that the outcome of State and Federal elections will likely depend on politicians' success on economic issues (i.e. employment rates, GDP, trade).

Once you click "Next", the survey begins. Let's start!

Next

Treatment 3:


I will be monitoring how many correct answers you give. **The top 100 people with the highest number of correct answers will be put in a raffle and 20 of them will be randomly chosen to win an additional bonus of $0.50!**
So do your best!

To be elegible to enter the raffle and receive this bonus, please copy and **paste your MTurk Worker ID below.**
(You can find this on your dashboard or in the upper-left corner of the Worker Website)

Keep in mind that the results of this survey will be first published on social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) and then published in a peer-reviewed scientific journal.

Before you start, I wanted to give you one last piece of information on US public opinion.

Did you know that **economic performance is the most influential issue for swing voters and independents?** This means that the outcome of State and Federal elections will likely depend on politicians' success on economic issues (i.e. employment rates, GDP, trade).

Once you click "Next", the survey begins. Let's start!

Next

4. Factual Questions:

The unemployment rate was lower during Trump's presidency (**before** the pandemic), than during Obama's presidency.

True

False



The national debt was lower during Obama's Presidency than during Trump's presidential term.

True

False



The outcome of the 2020 Presidential election was determined by illegal votes.

True

False



More school shootings occurred during the Trump Presidency than during Obama's second presidential term.

True

False



More than 20% of those living in the US were born outside of the United States.

True

False



President Trump spent a lower percentage of the federal budget on defense than President Obama.

True

False



Illegal immigrants commit violent crimes at a significantly higher rate than legal American citizens.

True

False

18

China surpassed the US in exports, becoming the largest exporter in the world, during the Trump administration.

True

False

17

More than half the newly-elected Republican members of Congress are women or minorities.

True

False

19

5. Debriefing:

Thank you for taking part in this survey! Below you can find some details about this study and you'll be able to see the score you got answering the previous questions.

This survey was designed to understand how people react to different stimuli when answering questions about political events and issues. Specifically, people responding to this survey were split up in 4 groups after answering the initial questions:

- One group was asked the "factual" questions without any further information.
- One group was told that the top 100 respondents of the survey would enter a raffle, and 20 of them would be randomly picked to receive a reward of $0.50.
- One group was reminded of the fact that independents and swing voters decide who to vote for based on the performance of the President on economic issues.
- One group was both reminded about the relevance of economic issues for independents and told about the raffle that the top 100 respondents would enter.

Comparing how many people answered the questions correctly in each group will allow me to understand how each of these four stimuli influence how people process information and develop their opinions.

In particular, I will be looking at how people responded to these "factual" questions based on their partisan affiliation and will try to determine how voters may be biased in how they see the world and answer questions about politics.

If you have any questions or complaints regarding the study, feel free to contact me at: glauco.grestini@politics.ox.ac.uk

Appendix B: Additional Regression Models

	Dependent variable:	
	Correct on Debt	
	(1)	(2)
(Intercept)	0.751***	0.590*
	(0.132)	(0.354)
Incentive Treat	-0.126	-0.099
	(0.185)	(0.468)
Public Opinion Treat	-0.087	-0.529
	(0.186)	(0.477)
Combined Treat	-0.087	0.353
	(0.187)	(0.507)
Democrat		0.084
		(0.381)
Republican		-0.346
		(0.409)
Time Spent		0.043**
		(0.021)
Incentive*Dem		0.166
		(0.536)
Public Op*Dem		0.710
		(0.544)
Combined*Dem		-0.250
		(0.572)
Incentive*Rep		-0.372
		(0.574)
Public Op*Rep		0.218
		(0.585)
Combined*Rep		-0.811
		(0.605)
Observations	1,038	1,033
Log Likelihood	-663.193	-638.339
Akaike Inf. Crit.	1,334.386	1,302.677
Note:		*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

	Dependent variable:	
	Correct on Shootings	
	(1)	(2)
(Intercept)	0.292***	-0.369
	(0.125)	(0.331)
Incentive Treat	0.022	-0.392
	(0.177)	(0.440)
Public Opinion Treat	0.052	-0.091
	(0.177)	(0.458)
Combined Treat	0.057	-0.105
	(0.177)	(0.448)
Democrat		-0.657*
		(0.355)
Republican		0.297
		(0.387)
Time Spent		0.067***
		(0.020)
Incentive*Dem		0.487
		(0.506)
Public Op*Dem		0.120
		(0.520)
Combined*Dem		-0.041
		(0.516)
Incentive*Rep		0.423
		(0.552)
Public Op*Rep		0.349
		(0.571)
Combined*Rep		0.514
		(0.561)
Observations	1,038	1,033
Log Likelihood	-710.746	-670.205
Akaike Inf. Crit.	1,429.492	1,366.410
Note:		*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

	Dependent variable:	
	Correct on Foreign-Born Population	
	(1)	(2)
(Intercept)	-0.292***	-0.103
	(0.125)	(0.332)
Incentive Treat	-0.040	-0.075
	(0.177)	(0.438)
Public Opinion Treat	-0.0221	-0.301
	(0.179)	(0.466)
Combined Treat	-0.354*	-0.552
	(0.181)	(0.465)
Democrat		-0.096
		(0.351)
Republican		-0.094
		(0.387)
Time Spent		-0.021
		(0.020)
Incentive*Dem		0.111
		(0.499)
Public Op*Dem		-0.013
		(0.524)
Combined*Dem		0.363
		(0.525)
Incentive*Rep		-0.055
		(0.552)
Public Op*Rep		0.389
		(0.575)
Combined*Rep		-0.051
		(0.579)
Observations	1,038	1,033
Log Likelihood	-692.207	-676.664
Akaike Inf. Crit.	1,392.414	1,399.327
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01	

	Dependent variable:	
	Correct on Defense Spending	
	(1)	(2)
(Intercept)	-0.199	0.022
	(0.124)	(0.339)
Incentive Treat	0.069	0.069
	(0.176)	(0.450)
Public Opinion Treat	0.052	-0.512
	(0.176)	(0.503)
Combined Treat	0.215	-0.242
	(0.176)	(0.475)
Democrat		0.128
		(0.362)
Republican		0.671*
		(0.396)
Time Spent		-0.095***
		(0.021)
Incentive*Dem		-0.026
		(0.511)
Public Op*Dem		0.699
		(0.566)
Combined*Dem		0.481
		(0.533)
Incentive*Rep		0.126
		(0.561)
Public Op*Rep		0.639
		(0.607)
Combined*Rep		0.642
		(0.583)
Observations	1,038	1,033
Log Likelihood	-716.935	-684.899
Akaike Inf. Crit.	1,441.870	1,395.797
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01	

	Dependent variable:	
	Correct on Rep. Congresspeople	
	(1)	(2)
(Intercept)	0.515***	-0.363 **
	(0.128)	(0.355)
Incentive Treat	-0.245	0.281
	(0.179)	(0.478)
Public Opinion Treat	0.243	0.686
	(0.179)	(0.478)
Combined Treat	0.343*	0.497
	(0.179)	(0.470)
Democrat		-0.035
		(0.380)
Republican		0.874**
		(0.396)
Time Spent		-0.086 ***
		(0.022)
Incentive*Dem		-0.283
		(0.525)
Public Op*Dem		-0.342
		(0.538)
Combined*Dem		-0.048
		(0.532)
Incentive*Rep		-0.533
		(0.569)
Public Op*Rep		-0.609
		(0.585)
Combined*Rep		-0.419
		(0.573)
Observations	1,038	1,033
Log Likelihood	-705.411	-684.003
Akaike Inf. Crit.	1,418.822	1,394.005
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05 ***p<0.01	

	Dependent variable:	
	Correct on Chinese Exports	
	(1)	(2)
(Intercept)	-0.932***	-1.149***
	(0.137)	(0.373)
Incentive Treat	0.116	0.390
	(0.192)	(0.480)
Public Opinion Treat	-0.041	0151
	(0.196)	(0.512)
Combined Treat	-0.230	-0.088
	(0.201)	(0.518)
Democrat		-0.125
		(0.403)
Republican		0.683
		(0.423)
Time Spent		0.013
		(0.021)
Incentive*Dem		-0.243
		(0.553)
Public Op*Dem		-0.111
		(0.581)
Combined*Dem		-0.180
		(0.596)
Incentive*Rep		-0.485
		(0.586)
Public Op*Rep		-0.417
		(0.618)
Combined*Rep		-0.220
		(0.619)
Observations	1,038	1,033
Log Likelihood	-609.488	-595.395
Akaike Inf. Crit.	1,226.977	1,216.790
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01	

	Dependent variable:	
	Uncongenial on Employment	
	(1)	(2)
(Intercept)	-0.082	-1.655 ***
	(0.135)	(0.356)
Incentive Treat	0.359*	0.273
	(0.192)	(0.464)
Public Opinion Treat	0.100	0.115
	(0.191)	(0.482)
Combined Treat	0.045	-0.544
	(0.192)	(0.545)
Democrat		2.599***
		(0.385)
Time Spent		-0.039**
		(0.019)
Incentive*Dem		0.366
		(0.536)
Public Op*Dem		-0.058
		(0.542)
Combined*Dem		0.793
		(0.603)
Observations	875	875
Log Likelihood	-604.202	-458.626
Akaike Inf. Crit.	1,216.404	935.253
Note:		*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

	Dependent variable:	
	Uncongenial on Immigrant Crimes	
	(1)	(2)
(Intercept)	-0.798***	-0.127
	(0.146)	(0.253)
Incentive Treat	0.464**	0.297
	(0.200)	(0.329)
Public Opinion Treat	0.165	0.249
	(0.203)	(0.333)
Combined Treat	-0.090	-0.025
	(0.209)	(0.326)
Democrat		-1.080***
		(0.305)
Time Spent		-0.001
		(0.023)
Incentive*Dem		0.316
		(0.422)
Public Op*Dem		-0.066
		(0.429)
Combined*Dem		-0.148
		(0.436)
Observations	875	875
Log Likelihood	-557.471	-532.482
Akaike Inf. Crit.	1,122.943	1,082.965
Note:		*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

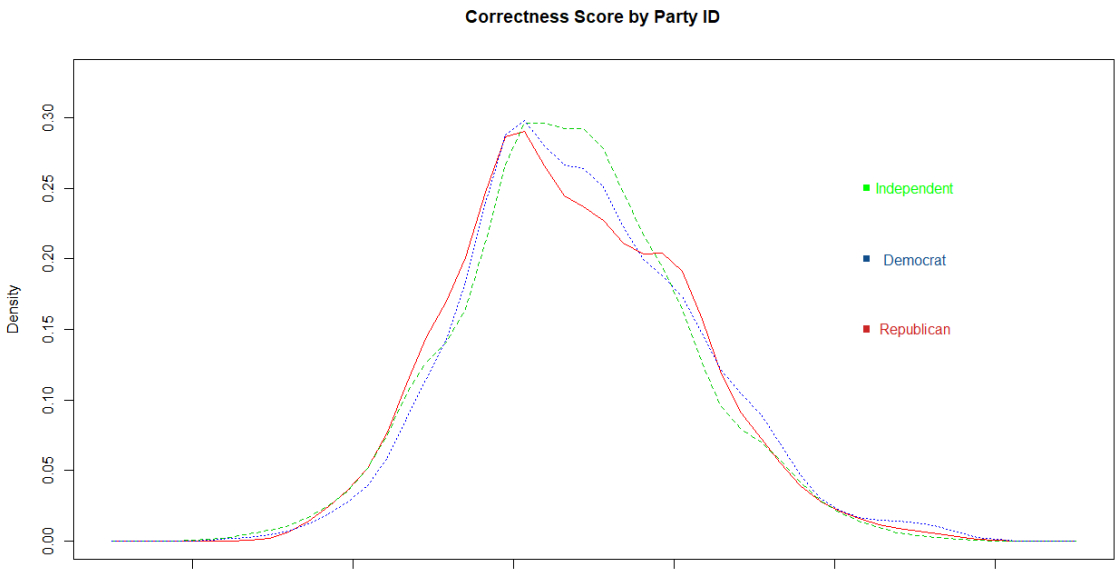
	Dependent variable:	
	Uncongenial on Election Fraud	
	(1)	(2)
(Intercept)	-0.929***	-0.265 ***
	(0.135)	(0.262)
Incentive Treat	0.384*	0.570*
	(0.206)	(0.331)
Public Opinion Treat	0.025	0.073
	(0.211)	(0.337)
Combined Treat	0.086	0.085
	(0.211)	(0.328)
Democrat		-1.040***
		(0.311)
Time Spent		-0.007
		(0.029)
Incentive*Dem		-0.259
		(0.433)
Public Op*Dem		-0.022
		(0.441)
Combined*Dem		-0.007
		(0.437)
Observations	875	875
Log Likelihood	-539.242	-512.418
Akaike Inf. Crit.	1,086.484	1,042.836
Note:		*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

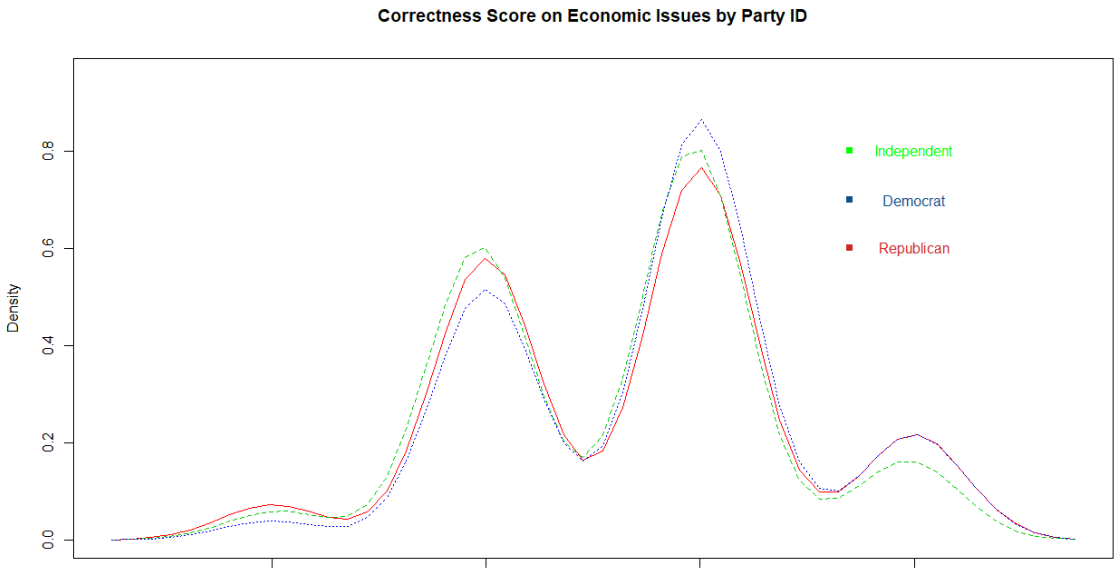
	Dependent variable:	
	Uncongenial on Shootings	
	(1)	(2)
(Intercept)	-0.533***	-0.276
	(0.140)	(0.253)
Incentive Treat	0.046	-0.093
	(0.198)	(0.332)
Public Opinion Treat	-0.080	-0.350
	(0.198)	(0.341)
Combined Treat	-0.224	-0.414
	(0.202)	(0.336)
Democrat		-0.453
		(0.292)
Time Spent		0.007
		(0.021)
Incentive*Dem		0.212
		(0.414)
Public Op*Dem		0.414
		(0.420)
Combined*Dem		0.291
		(0.421)
Observations	875	875
Log Likelihood	-568.371	-566.627
Akaike Inf. Crit.	1,144.741	1,151.253
Note:		*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

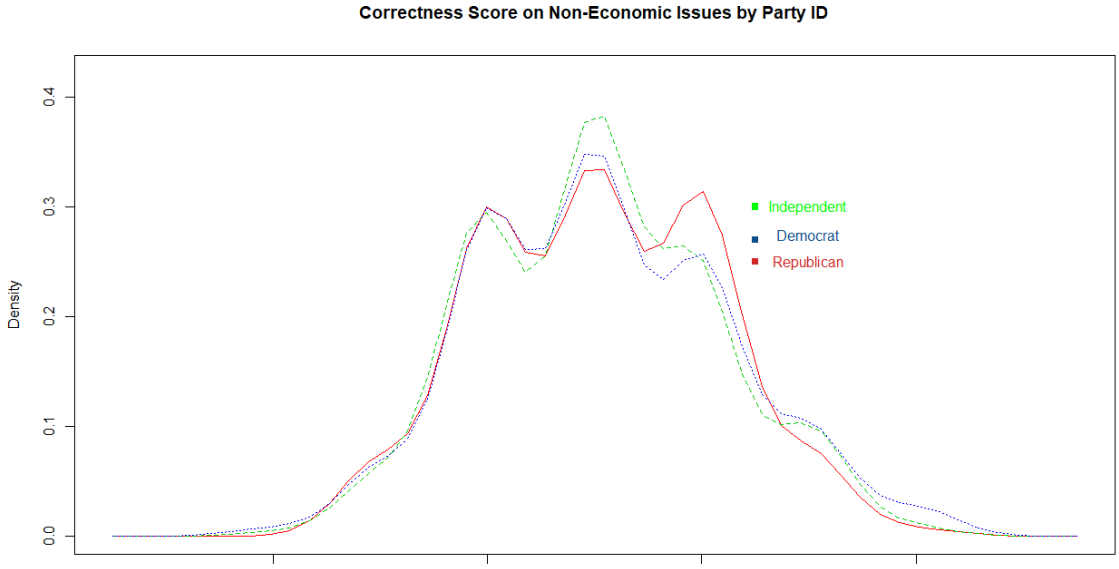
	Dependent variable:	
	Uncongenial on New Rep. Congresspeople	
	(1)	(2)
(Intercept)	-0.552***	-0.061
	(0.140)	(0.251)
Incentive Treat	0.424**	0.251
	(0.195)	(0.329)
Public Opinion Treat	0.151	-0.077
	(0.196)	(0.335)
Combined Treat	-0.254	-0.078
	(0.197)	(0.327)
Democrat		-0.650**
		(0.293)
Time Spent		-0.016
		(0.022)
Incentive*Dem		0.290
		(0.410)
Public Op*Dem		0.391
		(0.415)
Combined*Dem		0.521
		(0.411)
Observations	875	875
Log Likelihood	-591.239	-587.190
Akaike Inf. Crit.	1,190.478	1,192.380
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01	

Appendix C: Additional Graphs

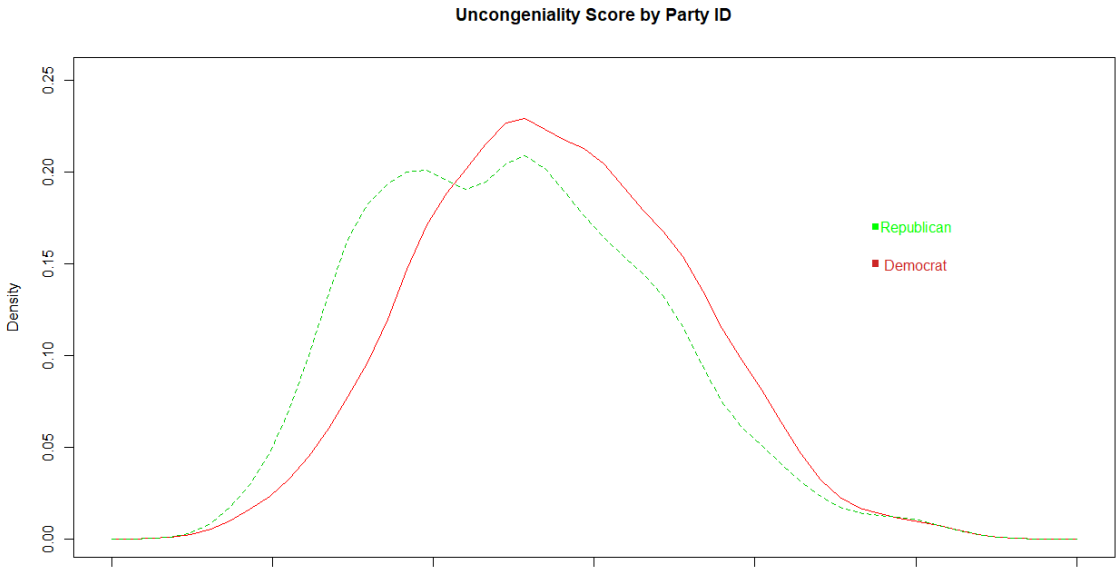
Distribution of answers by correctness across party ID:

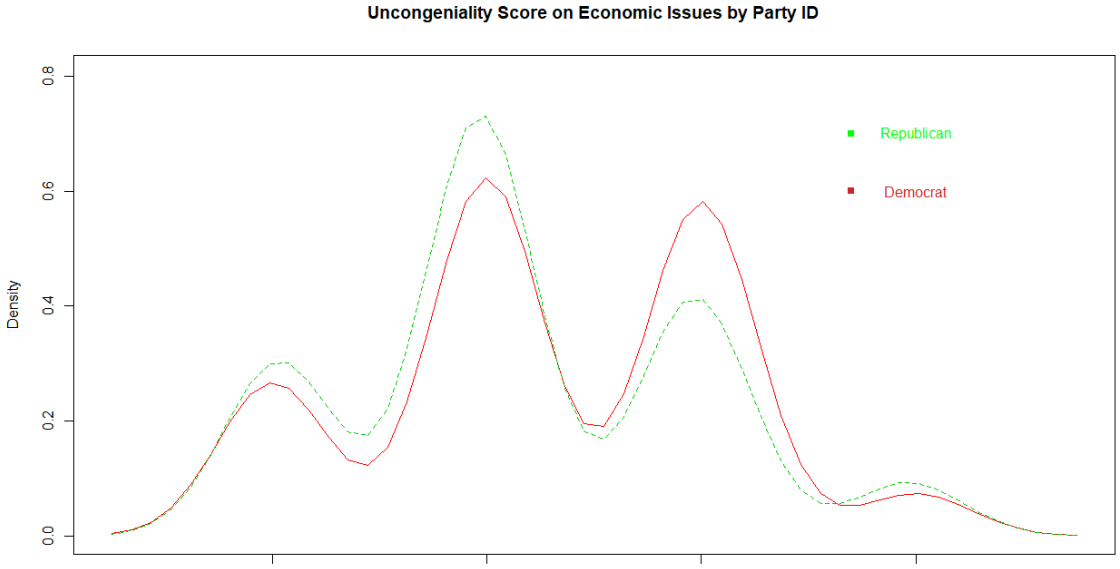


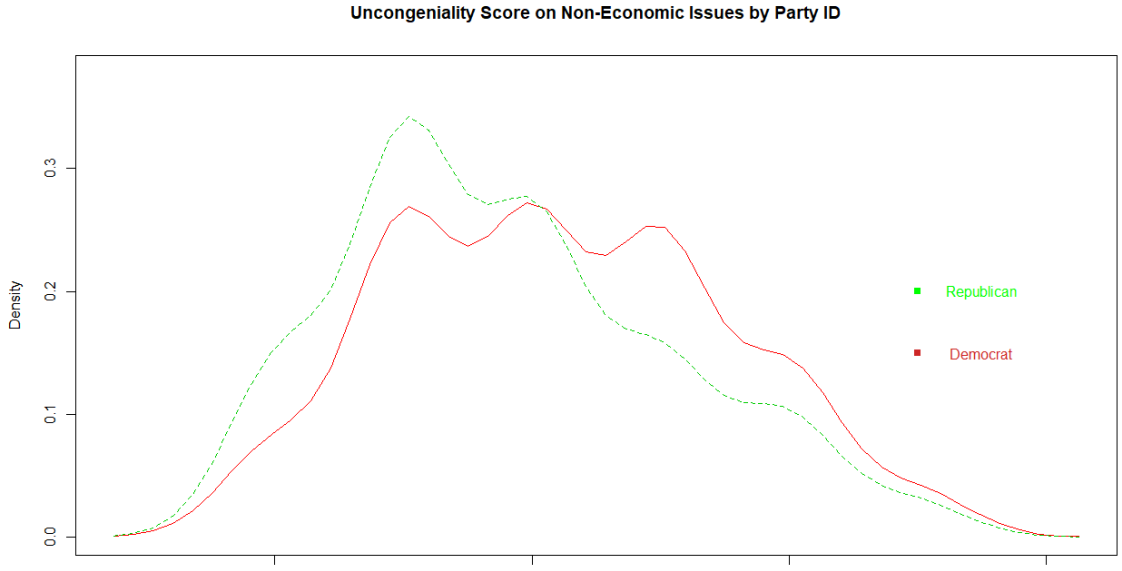




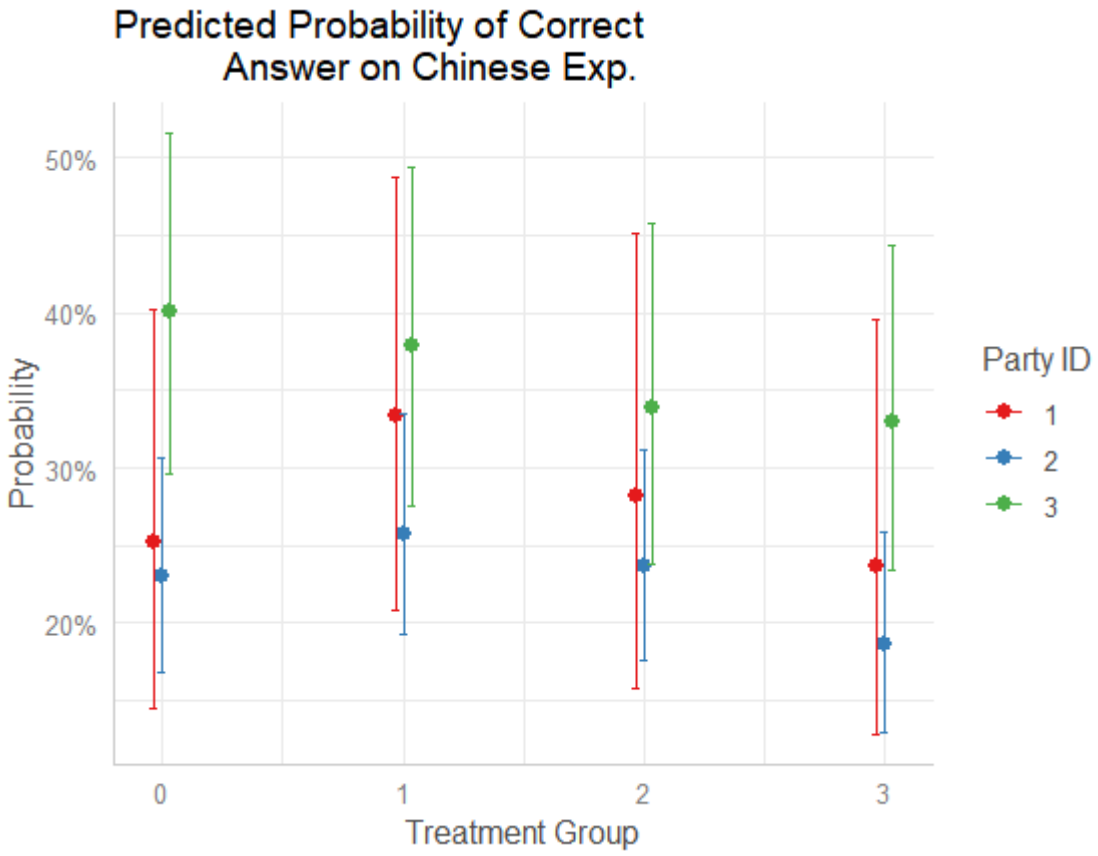
Distribution of answers by uncongeniality across party ID:

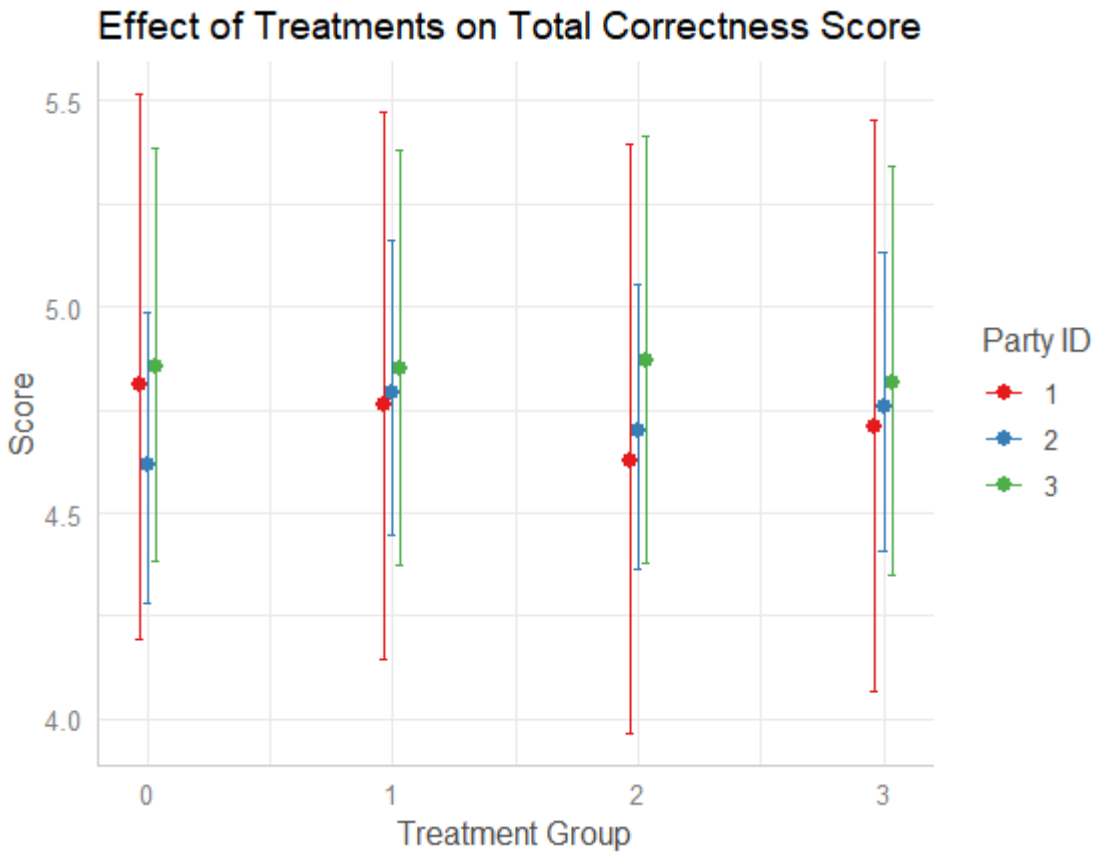


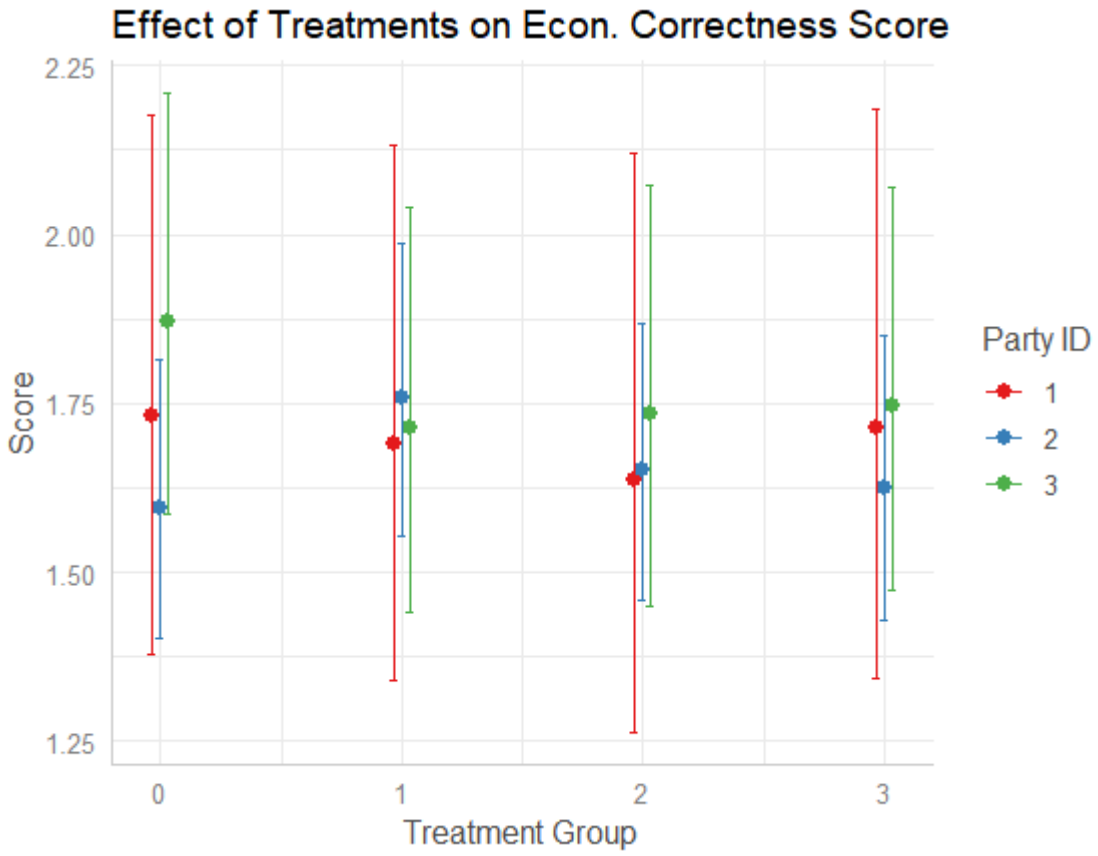


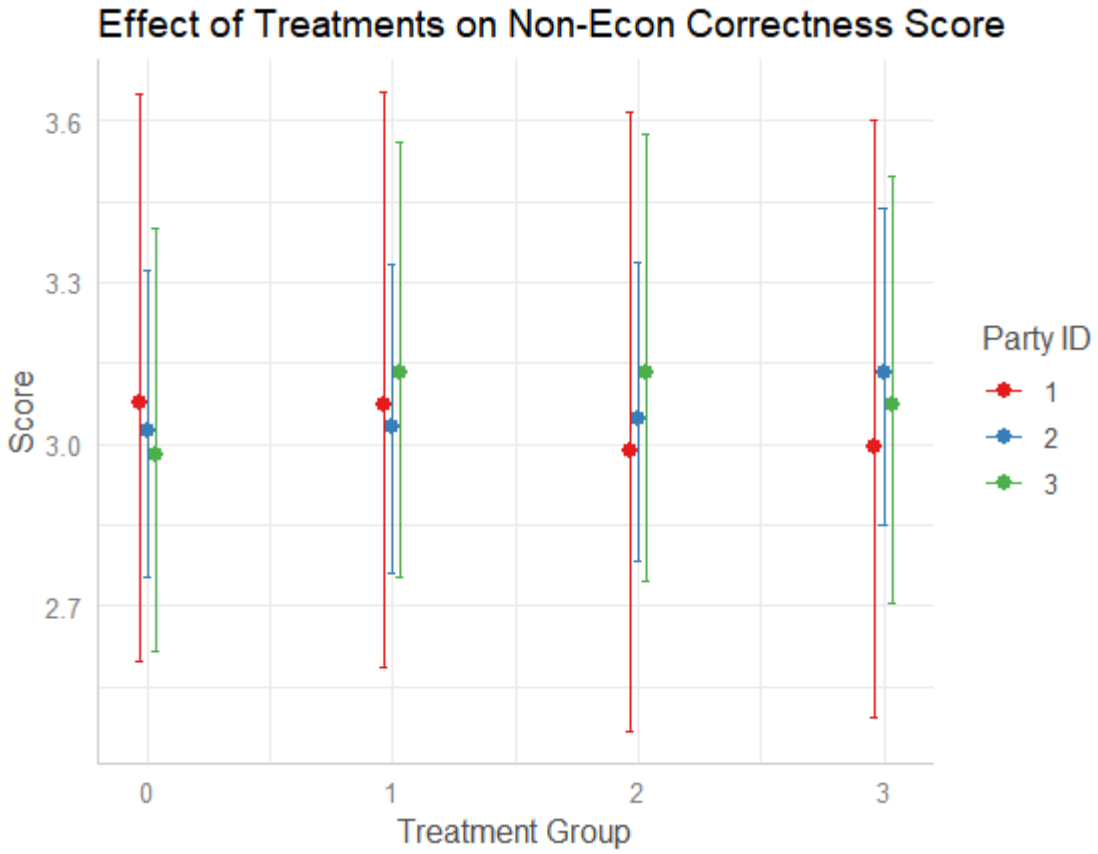


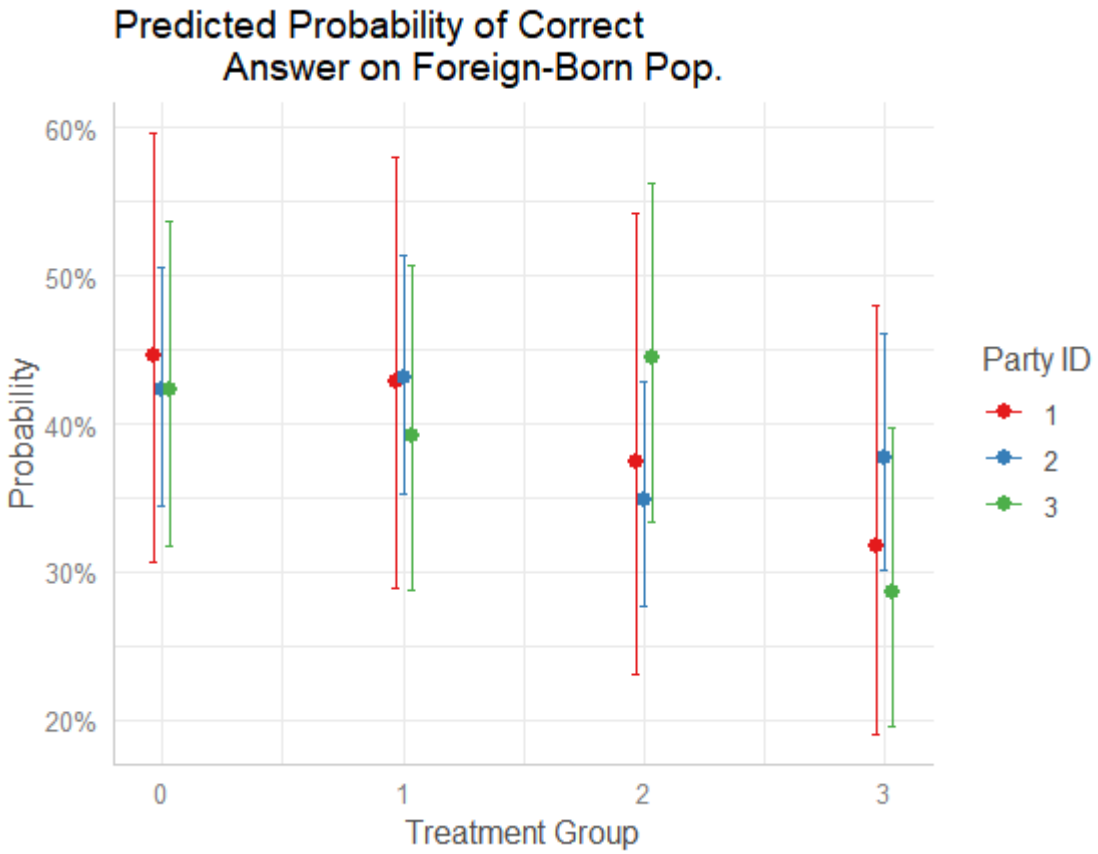
Remaining models on Correctness:

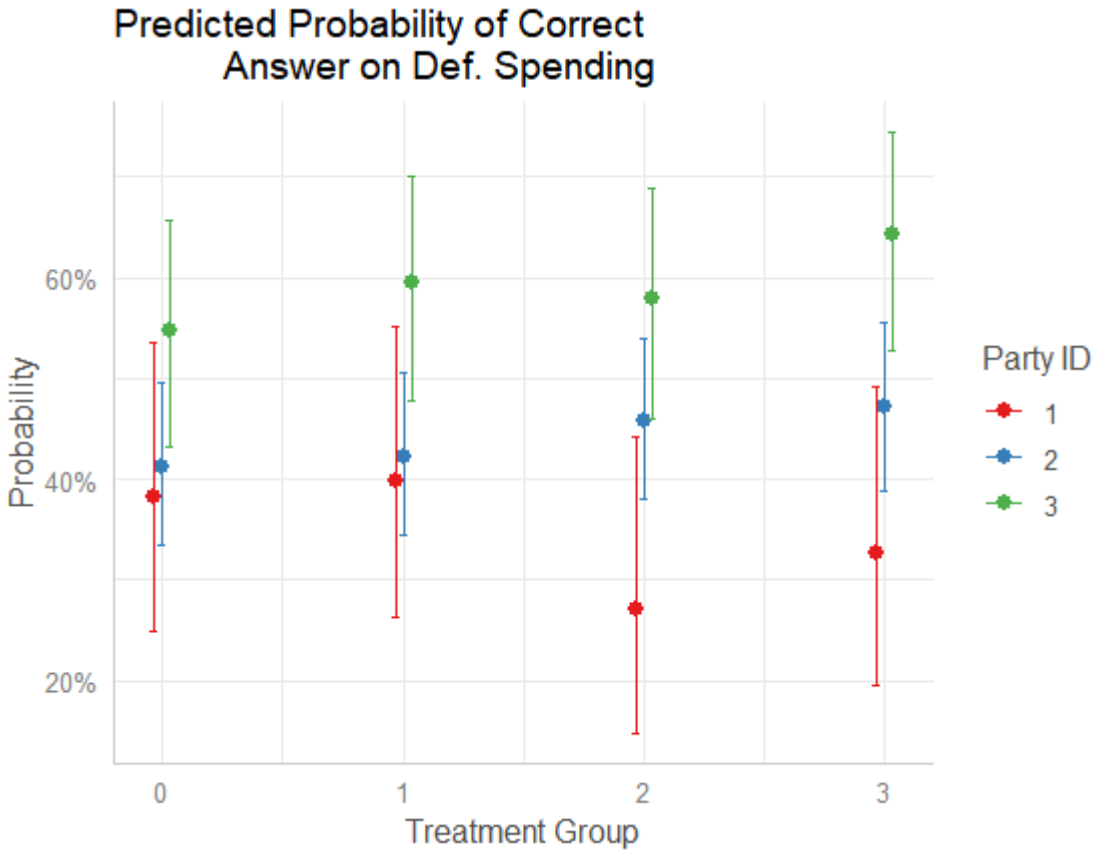

Predicted Probability of Correct Answer on Chinese Exp.
50%
40%
30%
20%
Probability
0
1
2
3
Treatment Group
Party ID
1
2
3


Effect of Treatments on Total Correctness Score
5.5
5.0
4.5
4.0
Score
0
1
2
3
Treatment Group
Party ID
1
2
3

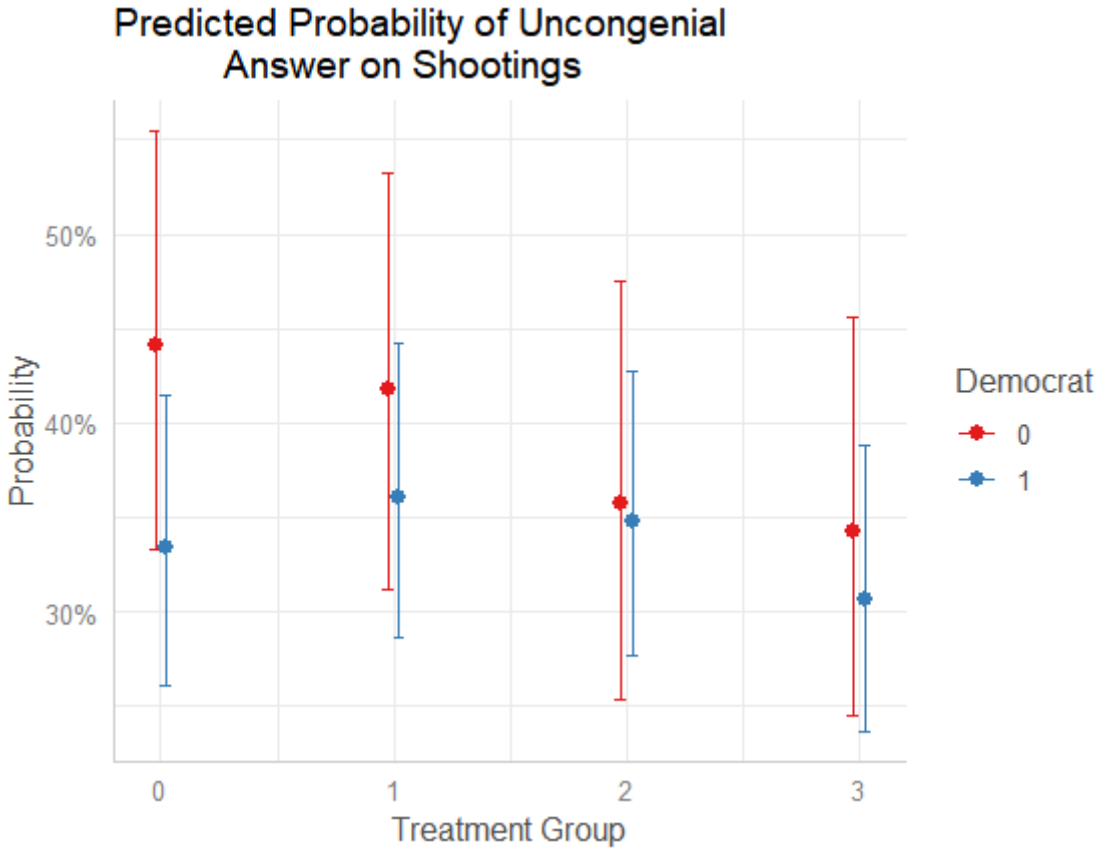

Effect of Treatments on Econ. Correctness Score
2.25
2.00
1.75
1.50
1.25
Score
0
1
2
3
Treatment Group
Party ID
1
2
3

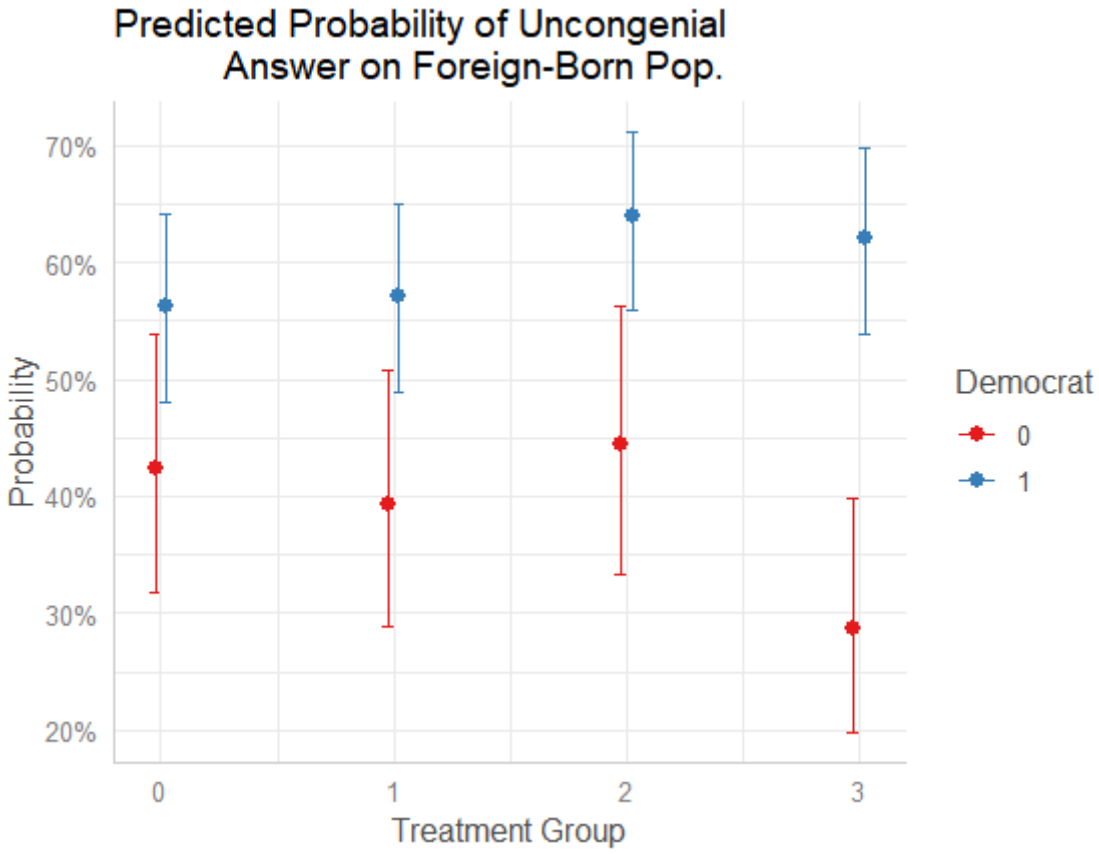

Effect of Treatments on Non-Econ Correctness Score
3.6
3.3
3.0
2.7
Score
0
1
2
3
Treatment Group
Party ID
1
2
3

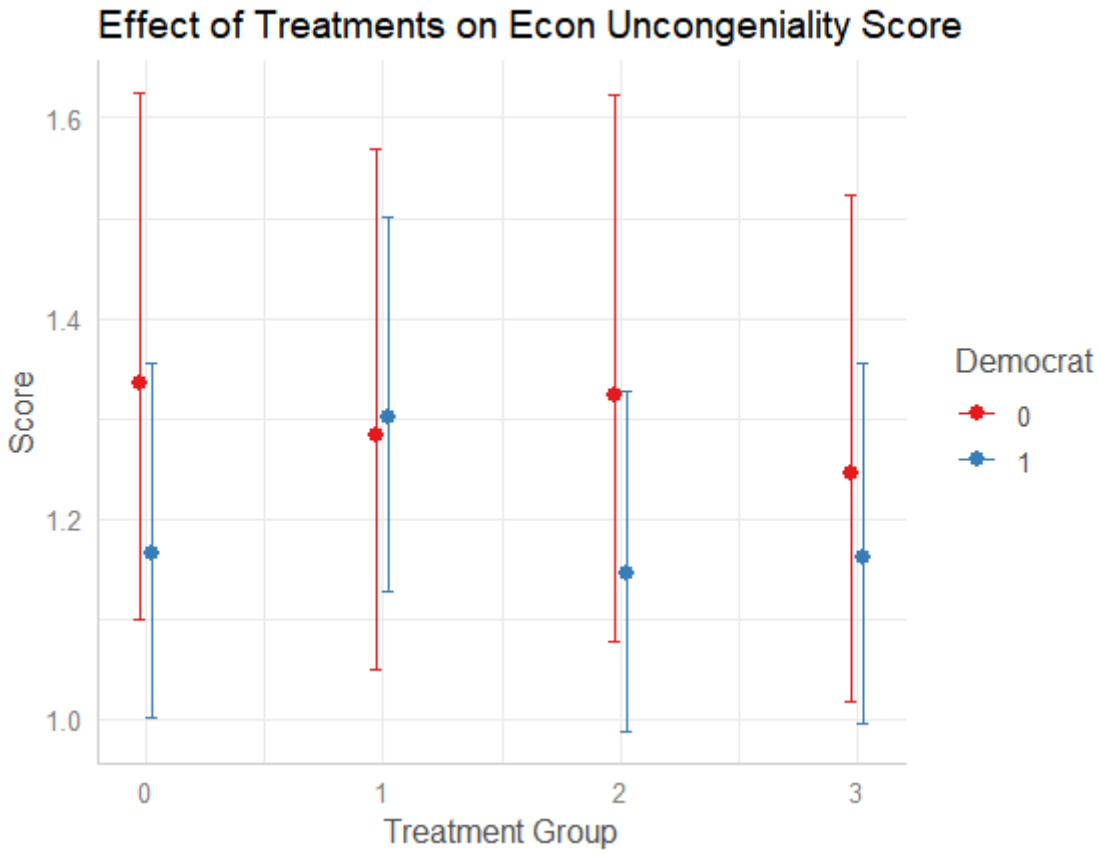

Predicted Probability of Correct Answer on Foreign-Born Pop.
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
Probability
0
1
2
3
Treatment Group
Party ID
1
2
3

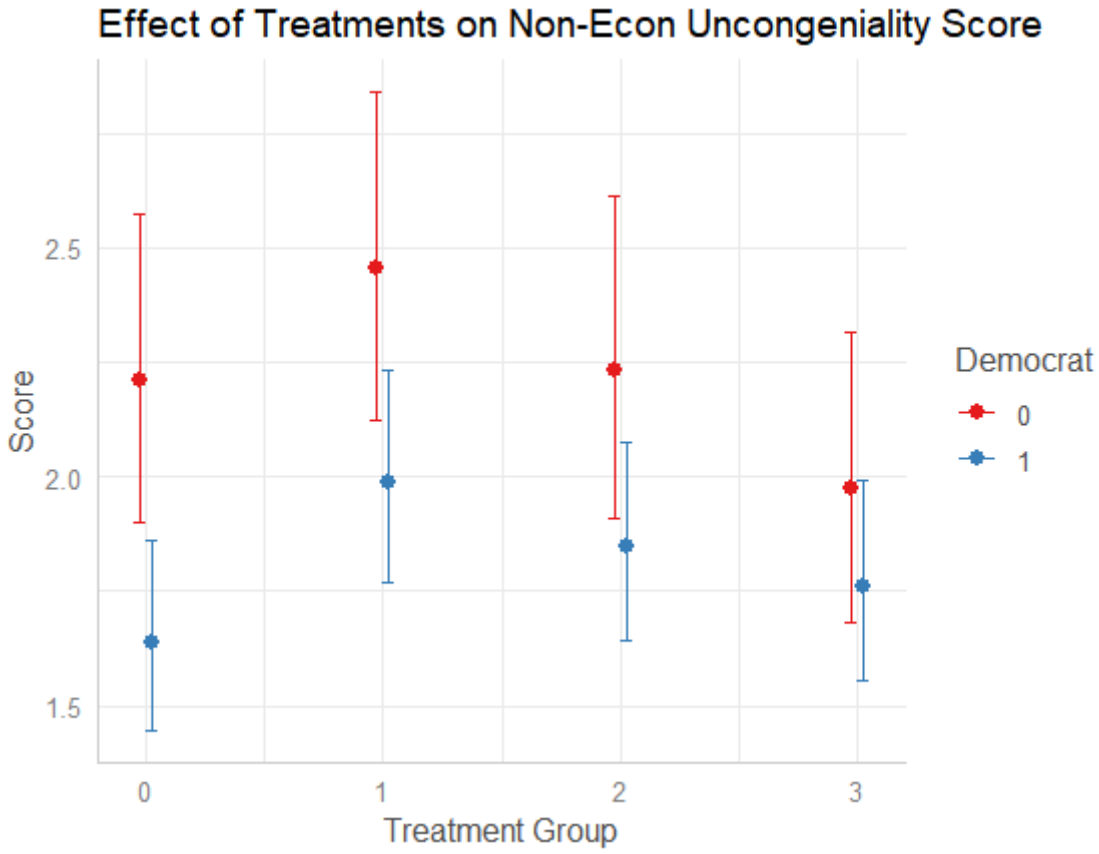

Predicted Probability of Correct Answer on Def. Spending
60%
40%
20%
Probability
0
1
2
3
Treatment Group
Party ID
1
2
3

Remaining models on Uncongeniality:






Effect of Treatments on Econ Uncongeniality Score
Score
1.6
1.4
1.2
1.0
0
1
2
3
Treatment Group
Democrat
0
1


Effect of Treatments on Non-Econ Uncongeniality Score
Score
2.5
2.0
1.5
0
1
2
3
Treatment Group
Democrat
0
1