# Magical Thinking and the Psychological Roots of the Hostile Media Effect: Evidence from the 2016 Presidential Election

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In the final weeks of the 2016 presidential campaign, Republican nominee Donald Trump made several unverifiable claims that he believed that the election would be rigged to favor Hillary Clinton and that the only way he would accept the results of the election would be if he won. He claimed that the mainstream media were in on the conspiracy – a claim that was readily scarfed up by his supporters. *Washington Post* reporter Jenna Johnson wrote that, "Trump supporters were insistent that such fraud is rampant and that major media outlets are conspiring to hide the issue." A few months after the election the *Post*'s Aaron Blake wrote that Hillary Clinton supporters were skeptical of the news media's treatment of their candidate as well, writing, "long-simmering complaints about the media's coverage of the Clintons have boiled over nearly six months after the 2016 campaign, a testament to how hard feelings remain. Clinton backers clearly feel the former first family is unfairly scrutinized on a near-constant basis." Many supporters of the two major party candidates for the highest office in the country felt as though the news media were conspiring against their preferred candidate. Scholars of political communication are likely to read news coverage of this kind and begin knowingly nodding their heads.

This is because the hostile media effect – when strong partisans find a balanced news story hostile to their own point of view – is a robust, well-known phenomenon in the study of political communication. Typically, hostile media effect researchers show participants content that is balanced, only to find that the participants believe the story is unfair, biased, and slanted away from their side. The relative hostile media effect relaxes this assumption in order to study news coverage that is slanted in a particular direction (Gunther et al. 2001). Relative hostile media effect studies tend to slant a story in one direction, which pushes against traditional norms of objectivity in American journalism (Gans 1979).

Beyond our interest in differences in the institutional practice of journalism in hostile media studies, the psychological roots of why some people tend to see the media as a set of organizations covering the news in a way that is somehow inherently biased is understudied by scholars. In this paper, we seek to cast a revealing light upon why some individuals perceive a hostile media when reading stories that the journalists who wrote them would have a very difficult time understanding the charges of bias. New work in political science has speculated that a particular type of thinking might be responsible for beliefs such as those expressed by the Trump and Clinton supporters in the pages of the *Washington Post*. Dubbed "magical thinking,"

In a survey experiment fielded just before the 2016 presidential election, we varied whether Hillary Clinton, Donald Trump, or neither candidate was winning a statewide election poll in a 2016 Electoral College "swing state." While supporters of each candidate exhibited a relative hostile media effect, paranormal, conspiratorial and religious fundamentalists' beliefs associated with magical thinking predicted perceptions of bias in articles against Donald Trump but only did so in the case of religious fundamentalism for perceptions of bias against Hillary Clinton.

**The Relative Hostile Media Effect and Magical Thinking**

Gunther et al. (2001) argued that the relative hostile media effect occurs when competing partisans perceive media coverage as biased in the same direction but each group believes the coverage is significantly more unfavorable to their own side relative to the opposing party. The extent, rather than the direction, of the bias is the relevant concept to understand.

Scholars usually explain strong partisans' hostile media perceptions via one of three psychological mechanisms (Giner-Sorolla and Chaiken 1994; Schmitt, Gunther, and Liebhart 2004). Selective recall assumes that unfavorable content is more salient to partisans and therefore

disproportionately remembered. In a presidential campaign, evidence that a candidate is behind in an important state could be information that is considered to be more salient than other information in the story.

The second mechanism, selective categorization, is when opposing partisans focus on, process, and recall the same content but interpret the valence of that content as hostile to their own view. Giner-Sorolla and Chaiken (1994) note that this explanation has roots in social judgment theory (Sherif and Hovland 1961), which notes that highly involved partisans are more likely than weaker partisans to believe that media statements tend to be biased. This mechanism also makes sense for highly involved partisans clicking refresh every half hour on *FiveThirtyEight*'s Electoral College prediction map as they might accurately process a recall a poll result in a swing state, but have differential beliefs about whether that information is biased against their standard bearer.

Scholars have also considered whether partisans might be vulnerable to an evaluative bias, rather than the perceptual biases of selective recall and selective categorization. The different standards mechanism proposes that opposing partisans agree on the content and valence of a news story but have different criteria for what constitutes a fair story (Vallone et al. 1985). That is, evenhanded treatments of information in a news story would constitute bias. For example, we could imagine Trump supporters reading a story about how Trump trailed in a swing state poll and believe that the story is biased because it should have mentioned a prior,

more positive poll, or information about states in which he was doing well. While early studies found evidence for different standards (Giner-Sorolla and Chaiken 1994; Vallone et al. 1985), in more recent work using a more stringent test, selective categorization emerged as the best explanation (Gunther and Liebhart 2006; Schmitt et al. 2004).

We argue that another explanation, one more deeply-rooted than how people selectively process or evaluation information, might help explain which individuals are most likely to determine news coverage is biased against their views. This explanation, conspiracism, is relatively new in political science (Oliver and Wood 2014). Rather than being driven by misinformation or political mistrust, conspiracism is motivated attributing attitude objects to supernatural and paranormal beliefs. Additionally, conspiracism tends to highlight the primacy of unseen, purposive and evil forces. They also tend to interpret political results in terms of good vs. evil (Oliver and Wood 2014).

Oliver and Wood (2014) find that half of the American population endorsed at least one conspiracy belief from a fairly short list of conspiracy theories. Importantly, "conspiracism does not seem to be an expression of political ignorance," nor is it the province of either conservatism or liberalism (Oliver and Wood, p. 964). Oliver has come to call the kind of thinking that leads people to claim unseen forces are having a major effect in the battle between good and evil as magical thinking. More specifically, they define the term as "a tendency to make causal attributions to unobservable forces. For a belief to be magical, it must point to some invisible power, whether it is luck, God, or the Illuminati, that makes things happen. Of course, simply believing in unobservable forces doesn't make a belief magical—there are plenty of scientific theories that refer to things we can't observe, like Dark Matter in physics. Rather, for a belief to

be magical it must also contradict an alternative explanation that is based on observable phenomena. Magical thinkers not only assume that hidden, invisible powers are behind much of what happens in the world, but that this explanation is more correct than an empirical one." (Oliver and Wood, forthcoming: p. 15-16)

Magical thinking applies readily to investigations of attitudes about the mass media. For years, politicians and members of ideological media have attacked the mainstream media as a biased cabal of elites seeking to tear down its opponents (Ladd 2011). Conspiracy theories about an ideologically-motivated media controlled by a few unseen, powerful forces persist in American culture and communication. While certainly not equivalent to one another, conspiratorial beliefs, paranormal thinking, and religious fundamentalism have triangulated as indices of magical beliefs (Lobato et al., 2014; Darwin et al., 2011; Lindeman & Aarnio, 2007; Drinkwater et al., 2012)

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Journalism that reports the results of public opinion polls simultaneously seeks to cover the news objectively, while usually reporting a result that is good for one side and bad for the other. It is in this way that stories about polling are good cases to test the relative hostile media effect. On the one hand, journalists are not intentionally slanting the information in polls (but see Groeling 2008) even though that information usually favors on side. On the other hand, polling is a ubiquitous part of presidential (and other) campaigns and it would not be surprising for

individuals to react to a story containing a bad poll for their preferred candidate by wondering why other, more positive information about their candidate did not make it into the story.

The relative hostile media effect literature leads us to predict that the worse an article depicts the poll performance of their party's candidate, the more bias those voters will perceive in the article. With respect to why they see this kind of bias, we hypothesize that magical thinking will predict levels of perceived bias against the both candidates in the articles.

**Research Design**

In order to empirically test these hypotheses, we conducted a cross-sectional survey experiment of likely voters ($n$ = 1,093) from Nov. 2-6, 2016 using a representative national sample recruited by Survey Sample International (SSI), using their quota sampling procedure set to meet U.S. Census targets. Table 1 shows the demographic breakdown of the sample compared to exit poll data from the 2016 presidential election. Our sample had higher concentrations of older, Democratic white women with lower SES. Our sample also had fewer racial and ethnic minorities, males, and those making more than $100,000 a year than the 2016 electorate, according to exit poll data.

We created three versions of a Reuters news article, based on real media reports, detailing the results of a new battleground state poll. The poll results either indicated that Trump was slightly ahead ($n$ = 334), that Clinton was slightly ahead ($n$ = 341), or that the race was tied ($n$ = 340). The articles were short–around 250 words– and were mocked up to look like they were screenshotted from Reuters' website (Figure 1). The differences between the articles were the headline ("Clinton and Trump tied," "Clinton trails Trump" or "Trump trails Clinton"), the poll results (tied, Clinton ahead by 2%, Trump ahead by 2%), the interchanging the partisanship of

the quoted sources depending on how the race was depicted, and the battleground state (North Carolina, Ohio, and Iowa).

Each participant was randomly placed into one of these three conditions. One group read an article citing a Reuters/Ipsos poll collected in mid-October showing that Hillary Clinton was ahead in a key battleground state (Ohio), within the margin of error. Another group read an article citing the same poll showing Donald Trump with that same lead in a comparable battleground state (North Carolina). The control group read a similar article that showed the two presidential candidates tied in another battleground state (Iowa). Different battleground states were chosen to increase face validity of the poll result being shown to respondents. We selected states whose polling between the stimuli poll date (October 20th, 2016) and during the actual study period (November 2-6, 2016) generally reflected the narrative in each of our conditions.

While keeping constant the state that the poll was conducted in would have strengthened internal validity, we opted to highlight external validity by using polls that more accurately reflected the state of the race at the time our sample was contacted by SSI. We have no theoretical reason to believe that the state polling reported upon in our conditions would influence attitudes about the news media, but we cannot completely rule that explanation out with our design. The only differences in the articles were the state names and the poll results.

**Measures**

Broadly, survey items were scaled such that higher values represent either (a) higher levels of the given variable (higher income/education, strong agreement, high perceived bias, partisan strength, etc), or, (b) for items related to candidates or political leanings, lower values

represent a stronger Democrat (Clinton) response and higher values represented stronger Republican (Trump) response.

*Control variables*

Prior to answering other questions, participants were asked for demographic variables summarized in Table 1, including their age ($M$ = 50.1, $SD$ = 13.9), gender (61% self-identified female) and race (15.2% non-white). Education ($M$ = 3.3, $SD$ = 1.54) was measured on a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 ("Less than high school") to 6 ("Postgraduate degree") and income ($M$ = 4.14, $SD$ = 2.10) was measured on 8-point ordinal scale ranging from 1 ("Less than $15,000 per year") to 8 ("$150,001 or more per year").

We also controlled for psychological predispositions using the full Big Five Inventory (Goldberg, 1993; John & Srivastava, 1999) and the full need for cognition scale (Cacioppo & Petty, 1982). The agreeableness (α = .79, $M$ = 3.90, $SD$ = 0.67), conscientiousness (α = .82, $M$ = 3.98, $SD$ = 0.64), extraversion (α = .79, $M$ = 3.17, $SD$ = 0.76), neuroticism (α = .88, $M$ = 2.7, $SD$ = 0.87), and openness to experience (α = .85, $M$ = 3.70, $SD$ = 0.72) subscales of the Big Five Inventory, and the need for cognition scale (α = .83, $M$ = 3.11, $SD$ = 0.65) were reliable.

*Political demographics*

Participants were asked about their level of election interest ($M$ = 3.56, $SD$ = 0.78) using a 4-point scale ranging from 1 ("Not at all interested") to 4 ("Very Interested"). Attention to election news ($M$ = 4.08, $SD$ = 1.02) was measured on 5-point scale ranging from 1 ("None at all") to 5 ("A great deal"). Party identification ($M$ = 2.35, $SD$ = 1.50) was measured on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 ("Strong Democrat") to 6 ("Strong Republican"). Those who identified themselves as Independents were asked to specify whether they leaned toward one party or the

other. The party identification scale was folded to create a 3-point scale measuring partisan strength ($M$ = 1.80, $SD$ = 0.81) from 1 ("Weak partisan") to 3 ("Strong partisan").

*Perceived bias in media/journalism.* We also collected measures of media skepticism by asking participants whether they think the media "are fair", "tell the whole story", "are accurate", and "can be trusted," on a 5-point scale where a higher score indicated a higher level of skepticism (Tsfati, 2003), which resulted in a very reliable 4-item scale (α = .93, $M$ = 3.30, $SD$ = 1.11). In order to account for their general perceptions of journalists, participants were also asked how much they agreed or disagreed with seven statements related to bias in reporting. These survey items included statements such as "Journalists twist stories to make candidates look bad", "Journalists only pretend to be objective", "Journalists' top priority is ratings/clicks", and "Journalists give the most attention to stories that support their personal views". The resulting perceived journalist bias scale (α = .83, $M$ = 4.76, $SD$ = 1.11) and ranged from 1 ("Strongly disagree") to 7 ("Strongly Agree").

*Magical thinking*

For this study, we used three scales tapping into magical thinking: paranormal beliefs, religious fundamentalism, and conspiratorial beliefs. Paranormal beliefs were measured using a 3-point "No", "Not sure", "Yes" scale consisting of four questions (α = .76, $M$ = 1.89, $SD$ = 0.61) asking respondents whether they believe in ESP, ghosts, the predictive power of horoscopes, and whether humans have past lives.

Religious fundamentalism was measured using a 5-point scale (α = .88, $M$ = 3.12, $SD$ = 1.23) from 1 ("Strongly disagree") to 5 ("Strongly Agree") with four questions used in previous studies. The scale asked respondents level of agreement with the following statements: to what extent do you believe that we are living in 'End Times' as foretold by Biblical prophecy, to what

extent you agree that the Bible is the literal word of God, whether many of the world's problems can be solved by prayer, and whether participants agree that the Bible has hidden secrets about the future if one knows where to look.

Conspiratorial beliefs were measured by the same 5-point scale used for the religious fundamentalism scale, and also uses a four question scale ($\alpha = .82$, $M = 3.36$, $SD = 0.95$). The statement asked the extent to which respondents agreed or disagreed that much of our lives are being controlled by plots hatched in secret places, that even though we live in a democracy, only a few people will always run things anyway, that the people who really 'run the country, are not known to the voters, and whether they agree that big events like wars, recessions, and the outcomes of elections are controlled by small groups of people who are working in secret against the rest of us.

*Outcome variables*

We are interested in the extent to which participants felt that the Reuters poll report they read was biased against Clinton or Trump. Using a 5-point scale from 1 ("Not at all biased") to 5 ("Very biased"), we ask participants to rate bias against both Clinton ($M = 1.87$, $SD = 1.25$) and Trump ($M = 1.98$, $SD = 1.27$), randomizing the order of the candidate they evaluated first. Our third outcome variable keyed in on the participant's perception of the journalist writing the story using a question that asked, "Would you say the journalist who wrote the article was strictly neutral, or did they favor one candidate over the other?" The scale ranged from 1 ("Strongly favored Clinton") to 6 ("Strongly favored Trump").

## Results

[Figures 1 and 2 about here]

H1 predicted that likely voters would perceive more bias against their party's candidate in conditions where the Reuters poll report depicted them as losing. In other words, a Republican voter reading the poll report indicating Trump was losing to Clinton in Ohio would result in higher levels of perceived bias against Trump, and vice-versa for a Clinton supporter reading a poll report about their candidate losing to Trump in North Carolina.

The bar plots in Figures 1 and 2 visually bear this hypothesis out in our data. While the vast majority of the respondents in the overall samples perceived the articles to contain no bias against either candidate, Republican voters perceived a noticeably larger percentage of bias against Trump in the Clinton winning condition and Democrats noticed more bias against Clinton in the Trump winning condition.

To more formally validate these observations, we conducted between-subjects ANOVAs predicting perceived bias against the candidates in each of the articles. HMP would be indicated by a main effect between both party identification and condition on perceived bias. We found a main effect for perceived bias against Clinton for both the condition, $F(1, 1036) = 17.5$, $p < .0001$, and party identification, $F(1, 1002) = 61.5$, $p < .0001$, and we found a main effect for perceived by against Trump for both the condition, $F(1, 1028) = 64.1$, $p < .0001$, and party identification, $F(1, 995) = 16.0$, $p < .0001$. Across conditions, group means were nearly identical for both perceived bias against Clinton by Democrats ($M = 2.24$, $SD = 1.42$) and perceived bias against Trump by Republicans ($M = 2.25$, $SD = 1.37$), but Democrats perceived more bias against Trump ($M = 1.9$, $SD = 1.23$) than Republicans perceived against Clinton ($M = 1.58$, $SD = 1.03$). Thus, H1 was supported; partisan voters perceived more bias against their party's candidate when they read a neutral poll report that indicated that their candidate was behind.

However, Republicans had a greater net-differential in perceived bias against Trump compared to Clinton.

H2 reaches beyond verifying the existence of a hostile media perception, and attempts to understand how psychological attitude and belief structures influence the likelihood that a participant was more or less likely to perceive bias against a candidate. We predicted that higher levels of magical thinking, measured in our study with scales about paranormal beliefs, religious fundamentalism, and conspiratorial beliefs, would increase the likelihood that participants perceived bias against both Trump and Clinton.

[Tables 2 and 3 about here]

Due to the ordinal nature of our outcome variables and nonlinear nature of the data, we used an ordered logistic regression model to evaluate how the various magical thinking items in our scales predicted the likelihood of perceived bias given after controlling for our other. After controlling for demographics, the Big Five personality inventory, need for cognition, electoral interest and news attention, media distrust, party identification and strength, and the condition in which participants were placed, several magical thinking items emerged as notably predictive of perceived bias, but differed between the candidates.

While age, income, party identification, and the experimental condition significantly predicted perceived bias against both candidates, the only shared magical thinking predictor between the two outcome items was religious fundamentalism. In the case of perceived bias against Clinton, religious fundamentalism ($\beta$ = .53, SE = .11, $z$ = 4.88, $p < .001$) had the largest standardized effect size of any variable in the model. For every one-point increase in religious fundamentalism, our model predicts a 40.8 percent decrease in the likelihood that respondents perceive no bias at all against Clinton. Oddly, the only other item within the conceptual orbit of

magical thinking that reaches statistical significance is prayer frequency ($\beta$ = -.20, SE = .10, $z$ = -1.98, $p$ = .05), but its effect goes in the opposite direction. That is, the more frequently one prays, the less likely they are to perceive bias against Clinton, whereas if their beliefs are more fundamentalist, they were more likely to perceive bias.

On the other hand, perceived bias against Trump is predicted by each of the magical thinking scales. In addition to religious fundamentalism ($\beta$ = .37, SE = .10, $z$ = 3.60, $p$ < .001), paranormal thinking ($\beta$ = .32, SE = .08, $z$ = 4.17, $p$ < .001) and conspiratorial thinking ($\beta$ = .18, SE = .09, $z$ = 2.02, $p$ < .05) also predicted perceived bias against Trump. For every one-point increase on the paranormal belief and conspiratorial belief scales, our regression model predicts that respondents are 27.7 percent and 15.2 percent less likely to perceive no bias at all against Trump, respectively, after for controlling for all other variables. Every one-point increase in religious fundamentalism decreased those odds by 31 percent, ever so slightly edging out the odds of party identification, which predicts a 30.7 percent decreased likelihood of perceiving no bias for as they identify more strongly with the Republican party. Partisan strength, on the other hand, approached statistical significance for perceived bias against Clinton ($\beta$ = -.15, SE = .08, $z$ = -1.86, $p$ = .06), whereas it did not for Trump ($\beta$ =-.06, SE = .08, $z$ = -0.74, $p$ = .46).

In terms of psychological predictors of perceived bias, neuroticism, extraversion, and need for cognition has no significant predictive power for either Clinton or Trump. However, conscientiousness ($\beta$ = -.32, SE = .10, $z$ = -3.31, $p$ < .001) negatively predicted perceived bias against Clinton, and, for Trump, agreeableness ($\beta$ = -.19, SE = .10, $z$ = -1.95, $p$ = .05) negatively predicted perceived bias, and openness to experience ($\beta$ = .18, SE = .10, $z$ = 1.83, $p$ = .07) approached statistical significance. Unsurprisingly, the general perception that journalists are biased was a significant predictor for perceived bias against Trump ($\beta$ = .27, SE = .11, $z$ = 2.57, $p$

= .01), but not for perceived bias against Clinton ($\beta$ = .00, SE = .10, $z$ = 0.03, $p$ = 0.98), reflecting the Trump campaign's rhetoric railing against the "fake news" media. All else being equal, those who perceive spiritual, shadowy, or unseen forces as having an outsized causal influence on national and/or world events systematically interpret largely neutral poll reports as biased against candidates. While party identification and the content of the article explained larger chunks of variation in the model, the fact that agreement with these magical belief systems still demonstrates significant predictive power is notable.

**Discussion**

This study sought to explore hostile media perceptions in the 2016 election and attempt to identify potential predictors using magical thinking measures that are emerging in contemporary studies of populism, conspiratorial beliefs about politics, and supernatural/superstitious beliefs systems (Oliver & Wood, 2012; 2014; Oliver & Rahn, 2016). This study provides empirical support for both established and forward-looking perspectives on contemporary political communication studies. First, we provide concrete evidence of hostile media perceptions after participants read a short article detailing the results of polling data from a neutral and generally trusted news source in the days prior to the 2016 presidential election. Second, to wit, these data provide the first empirical application of magical thinking measures to the hostile media effect literature, providing evidentiary support for the notion that magical thinkers are more likely to perceive bias in otherwise neutral poll reports, even after controlling for demographics, psychological predispositions, party identification, partisan strength, and the content of the stories themselves.

This also adds to work done by scholars like Uscinski and Parent (2014) who find that conspiratorial thinking is not only ubiquitous, but also widespread across the political spectrum

in a way that suggests we should treat it as a separate, and important, plane of analysis in political science. The differential results we find certainly suggest that conspiratorial and paranormal beliefs were more strongly associated with perceptions of bias against Trump rather than Clinton, but the outsized influence of religious fundamentalism on both sides is notable.

Although it is somewhat comforting to think that the vast majority of respondents perceived these articles as largely neutral and containing no bias, the fact that such a high percentage of committed partisans saw bias in balanced stories reporting the results of a reputable poll is troubling. These findings help confirm that political partisanship and party identification alone do not sufficiently account for the influence of conspiratorial beliefs (Uscinski & Parent, 2014) religious fundamentalism, and paranormal beliefs (Oliver & Wood, 2014) on political beliefs.

Given the role that magical thinking played in predicting perceptions of bias, our analyses suggest that persuading people that stories providing bad news about their candidate are fair and reasonable stories is a very difficult task. As political communication and media effects scholars increasingly focus on both the antecedents and horizons of populist strains of political thought and influence, it will become increasingly necessary to test these emerging measures in a variety of contexts and on a variety of samples.

Our work is not without limitations that should give scholars pause. Future studies would do well to more systematically flesh out the concept of magical thinking in a more granular and nuanced fashion. Although this work attempts to replicate and build on work from Oliver and Wood, our measures are admittedly crude given the scope and complexity of magical thinking conceptually.

The experimental conditions we presented to our participants reflected a particular political time. Research from Joanne Miller, Kyle Saunders and Christina Farhat suggest that beliefs in conspiracy theories can vary by political context. They have found that the party in power can affect who is most likely to believe in conspiracies. In an analysis Prof. Miller explained at the 2017 University of Wisconsin-Madison Center for Media Ethics Conference, liberals became more likely to endorse conspiracism after Barack Obama turned over the keys to the White House to Donald Trump.

If we think of magical thinking and magical beliefs as being situated in a civil sphere permeated with performative, ritualistic, and ultimately symbolic communicative practices (Alexander, 2006) that mold (and potentially distort) one's perceptions of intentions, motivations, causation, and even reality itself, then more qualitative and ethnographic methods of analysis should supplement quantitative findings and sharpen these kinds of statistical measures.

Table 1

Sample Demographics Compared to Election 2016 National Exit Poll Data

| Variable | Sample (%) | Exit Polls (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Gender | | |
| Women | 61 | 53 |
| Men | 39 | 47 |
| Age | | |
| 18-29 | 14 | 19 |
| 30-49 | 32 | 36 |
| 50-64 | 30 | 30 |
| 65+ | 24 | 16 |
| Race | | |
| White | 84 | 71 |
| Hispanic/Latino | 3 | 11 |
| Black/African American | 5 | 12 |
| Education | | |
| College grad | 40 | 50 |
| Some college | 18 | 32 |
| HS or less | 42 | 18 |
| Income | | |
| Under $30k | 29 | 17 |
| $30,001 - $100k | 54 | 49 |
| $100,001+ | 17 | 34 |

*Note*. Electorate demographics are from exit polls conducted by Edison Research. Sample data consists of 863 U.S. adults collected Nov. 2-6, 2016.

Table 2 - *Ordered logit regression results predicting perceived bias against Clinton (all conditions)*

| Predictor | **Std β** | ***SE*** | ***Z*** | **p-value** | **Odds Ratio** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Age | -0.21 | 0.09 | -2.35 | 0.02** | 1.24 |
| Sex | -0.12 | 0.08 | -1.47 | 0.14 | 1.13 |
| Income | 0.33 | 0.09 | 3.66 | 0.00*** | 1.05 |
| Race(nonwhite) | -0.05 | 0.07 | -0.68 | 0.50 | 0.72 |
| Education | 0.03 | 0.09 | 0.35 | 0.73 | 0.97 |
| Big Five - Agreeableness | -0.02 | 0.10 | -0.24 | 0.81 | 1.03 |
| Big Five - Conscientiousness | -0.32 | 0.10 | -3.31 | 0.00*** | 1.37 |
| Big Five - Extraversion | 0.03 | 0.10 | 0.30 | 0.77 | 1.02 |
| Big Five - Neuroticism | -0.02 | 0.09 | -0.26 | 0.79 | 0.97 |
| Big Five – Openness | 0.13 | 0.10 | 1.22 | 0.22 | 0.88 |
| Need for Cognition | -0.10 | 0.10 | -1.04 | 0.30 | 1.10 |
| Paranormal Thinking | 0.10 | 0.08 | 1.24 | 0.22 | 0.91 |
| Conspiratorial Thinking | 0.10 | 0.09 | 1.11 | 0.27 | 0.90 |
| Religious Fundamentalism | 0.53 | 0.11 | 4.88 | 0.00*** | 0.59 |
| Pessimism | 0.01 | 0.08 | 0.17 | 0.86 | 0.99 |
| Prayer | -0.20 | 0.10 | -1.98 | 0.05** | 1.22 |
| Election Interest | 0.03 | 0.10 | 0.28 | 0.78 | 0.97 |
| Election News Attention | -0.07 | 0.10 | -0.70 | 0.48 | 1.07 |
| Perceived Journalist Bias | 0.00 | 0.11 | 0.03 | 0.98 | 1.00 |
| Media Distrust | -0.17 | 0.11 | -1.50 | 0.13 | 1.18 |
| Partisan Strength | -0.15 | 0.08 | -1.86 | 0.06* | 1.17 |
| Party ID | -0.42 | 0.09 | -4.63 | 0.00*** | 1.52 |
| Condition | 0.39 | 0.08 | 5.17 | 0.00*** | 0.68 |
| Not at all biased against Clinton\|Slightly biased against Clinton | 0.54 | 0.08 | 6.67 | 0.00*** | |
| Slightly biased against Clinton\|Somewhat biased against Clinton | 1.23 | 0.09 | 13.53 | 0.00*** | |
| Somewhat biased against Clinton\|Mostly biased against Clinton | 2.35 | 0.12 | 18.92 | 0.00*** | |

Table 3 - *Ordered logit regression results predicting perceived bias against Trump (all conditions)*

| Predictor | **Std β** | ***SE*** | ***Z*** | **p-value** | **Odds Ratio** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Age | -0.20 | 0.09 | -2.32 | 0.02** | 1.22 |
| Sex | -0.07 | 0.08 | -0.84 | 0.40 | 1.07 |
| Income | 0.43 | 0.09 | 4.75 | 0.00*** | 0.91 |
| Race (nonwhite) | 0.09 | 0.08 | 1.26 | 0.21 | 0.65 |
| Education | -0.08 | 0.09 | -0.90 | 0.37 | 1.08 |
| Big Five - Agreeableness | -0.19 | 0.10 | -1.95 | 0.05** | 1.21 |
| Big Five - Conscientiousness | -0.07 | 0.09 | -0.75 | 0.45 | 1.07 |
| Big Five - Extraversion | 0.04 | 0.10 | 0.39 | 0.69 | 1.00 |
| Big Five - Neuroticism | 0.00 | 0.09 | 0.00 | 1.00 | 0.96 |
| Big Five – Openness | 0.18 | 0.10 | 1.83 | 0.07* | 0.83 |
| Need for Cognition | -0.14 | 0.09 | -1.50 | 0.13 | 1.15 |
| Paranormal Thinking | 0.32 | 0.08 | 4.17 | 0.00*** | 0.72 |
| Conspiratorial Thinking | 0.18 | 0.09 | 2.02 | 0.04** | 0.84 |
| Religious Fundamentalism | 0.37 | 0.10 | 3.60 | 0.00*** | 0.69 |
| Pessimism | -0.01 | 0.08 | -0.16 | 0.87 | 1.01 |
| Prayer | 0.00 | 0.10 | 0.01 | 0.99 | 1.00 |
| Election Interest | 0.03 | 0.10 | 0.34 | 0.74 | 0.97 |
| Election News Attention | 0.02 | 0.10 | 0.19 | 0.85 | 0.98 |
| Perceived Journalist Bias | 0.27 | 0.11 | 2.57 | 0.01*** | 0.76 |
| Media Distrust | -0.06 | 0.11 | -0.52 | 0.60 | 1.06 |
| Partisan Strength | -0.06 | 0.08 | -0.74 | 0.46 | 1.06 |
| Party ID | 0.37 | 0.09 | 4.20 | 0.00*** | 0.69 |
| Condition | -0.61 | 0.08 | -8.03 | 0.00*** | 1.83 |
| Not at all biased against Trump \| Slightly biased against Clinton | 0.30 | 0.08 | 3.76 | 0.00*** | |
| Slightly biased against Trump \| Somewhat biased against Trump | 1.14 | 0.09 | 12.74 | 0.00*** | |
| Somewhat biased against Trump \| Mostly biased against Trump | 2.29 | 0.12 | 19.20 | 0.00*** | |
| Mostly biased against Trump \| Very biased against Trump | 3.22 | 0.17 | 19.49 | 0.00*** | |

*N* = 818, * p ≤ .1, * p ≤ .05, *** p ≤ .01

Figure 1

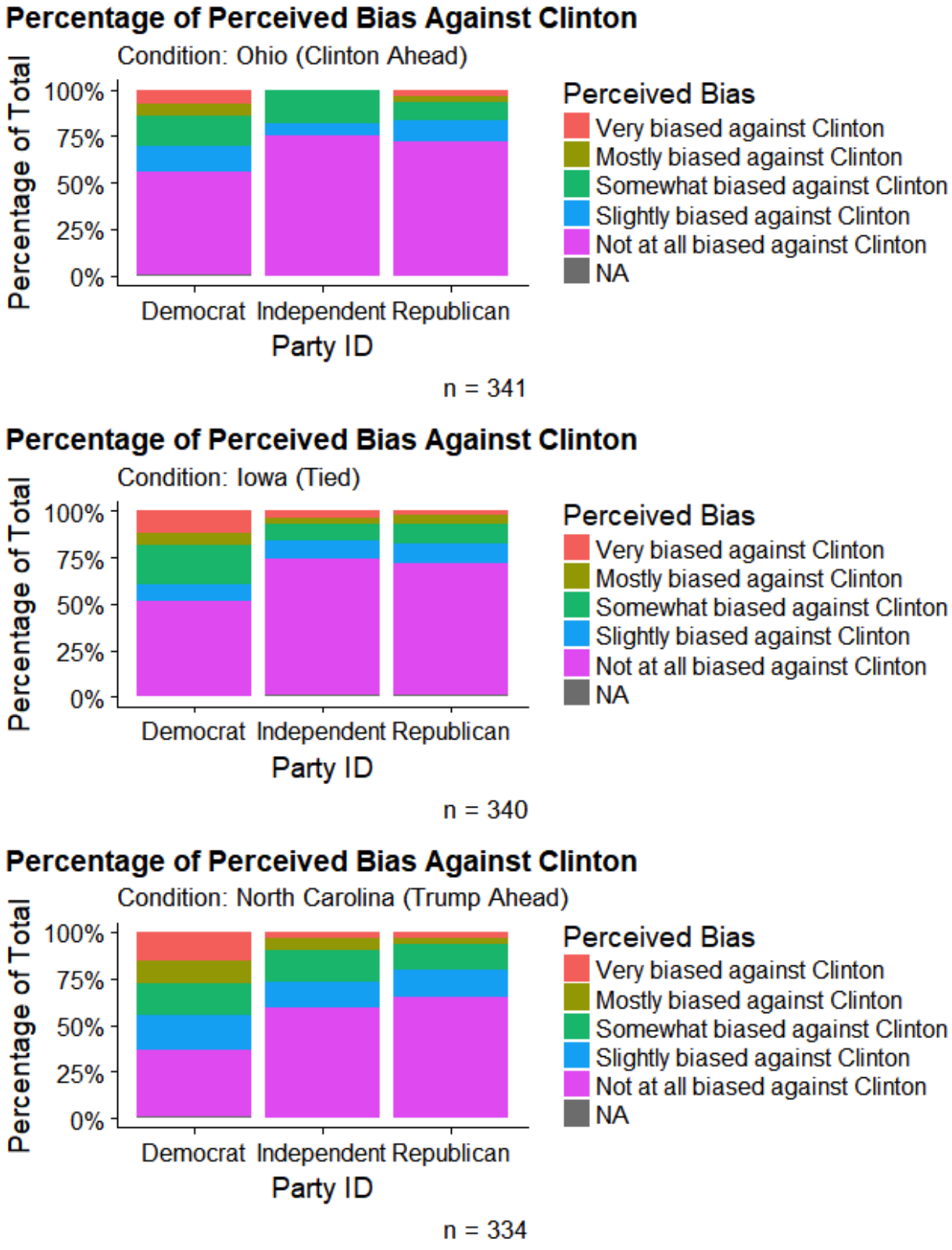
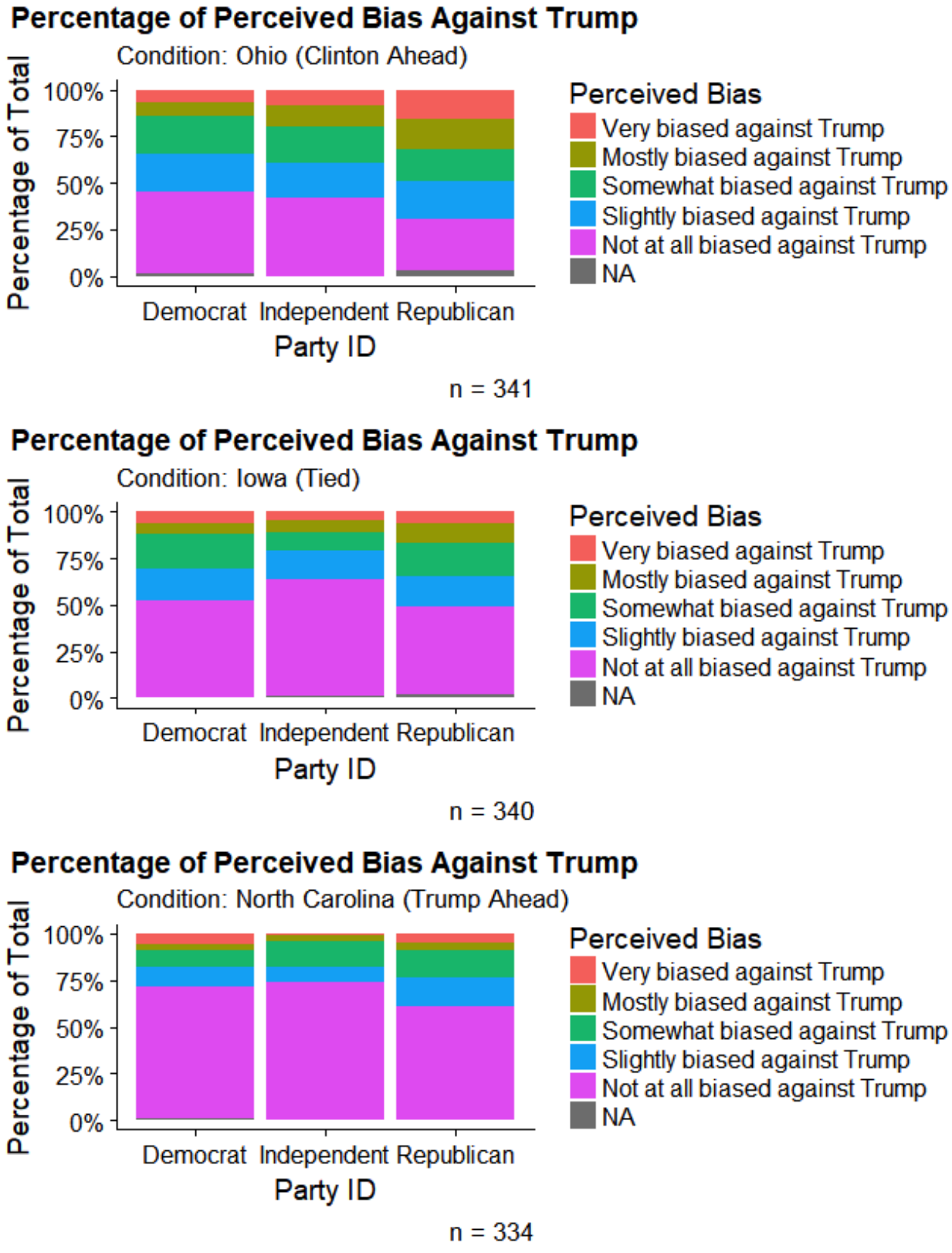

Percentage of Perceived Bias Against Clinton
Condition: Ohio (Clinton Ahead)
Percentage of Total
100%
75%
50%
25%
0%
Democrat
Independent
Republican
Party ID
Perceived Bias
Very biased against Clinton
Mostly biased against Clinton
Somewhat biased against Clinton
Slightly biased against Clinton
Not at all biased against Clinton
NA
n = 341
Percentage of Perceived Bias Against Clinton
Condition: Iowa (Tied)
Percentage of Total
100%
75%
50%
25%
0%
Democrat
Independent
Republican
Party ID
Perceived Bias
Very biased against Clinton
Mostly biased against Clinton
Somewhat biased against Clinton
Slightly biased against Clinton
Not at all biased against Clinton
NA
n = 340
Percentage of Perceived Bias Against Clinton
Condition: North Carolina (Trump Ahead)
Percentage of Total
100%
75%
50%
25%
0%
Democrat
Independent
Republican
Party ID
Perceived Bias
Very biased against Clinton
Mostly biased against Clinton
Somewhat biased against Clinton
Slightly biased against Clinton
Not at all biased against Clinton
NA
n = 334

Figure 2


Percentage of Perceived Bias Against Trump
Condition: Ohio (Clinton Ahead)
Percentage of Total
100%
75%
50%
25%
0%
Democrat
Independent
Republican
Party ID
Perceived Bias
Very biased against Trump
Mostly biased against Trump
Somewhat biased against Trump
Slightly biased against Trump
Not at all biased against Trump
NA
n = 341
Percentage of Perceived Bias Against Trump
Condition: Iowa (Tied)
Percentage of Total
100%
75%
50%
25%
0%
Democrat
Independent
Republican
Party ID
Perceived Bias
Very biased against Trump
Mostly biased against Trump
Somewhat biased against Trump
Slightly biased against Trump
Not at all biased against Trump
NA
n = 340
Percentage of Perceived Bias Against Trump
Condition: North Carolina (Trump Ahead)
Percentage of Total
100%
75%
50%
25%
0%
Democrat
Independent
Republican
Party ID
Perceived Bias
Very biased against Trump
Mostly biased against Trump
Somewhat biased against Trump
Slightly biased against Trump
Not at all biased against Trump
NA
n = 334

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