

Argument Congruency Bias or Expressive Responding ¹

What is the puzzle

Motivated reasoning is an established topic in political science, however, some scholars Khanna and Sood (2018) have shown evidence that this is merely a result of expressive responding. Expressive responding is when an individual states an answer that they know to be wrong to signal support for a particular fact or outcome.

Are people truly biased in their reasoning or do they just report the wrong answers?

What is the dependent variable?

The difference in rating of congenial and uncongenial arguments.

Why do you think this is an important question?

This type of question will help explore whether the motivated reasoning and argument congruency bias are real phenomenon. If the mechanism which we assume (bias in reasoning) is not at play, then this subtopic of political science should receive less scholarly attention. Further, it should abate our concerns about society to some extent: individuals are not making logical leaps, they are just lying. Lying is concerning, no doubt, but at least we know that individuals are still capable of proper rationality.

Potential Designs

Research have used incentives to determine whether individuals are motivated reasoners or expressive responders.² I propose a design that provides a similar incentive structure.

¹All ideas in this proposal rely on experimental designs. I have already received confirmation for support for at least one more experiment from Jacob.

²Khanna and Sood (2018) found that individuals expressively responding in a work in which they asked respondents to draw conclusions based on a set of data. They provided a set of responses a small monetary

Alternatively, I have considered a design which does not rely on a monetary incentive. Under this design the treatment group would be told that they are evaluating arguments constructed by a small class of graduate students. In this design, the fact that the participants are grading an assignment should provide incentive to report the correct conclusion.

What is your initial explanation?

I believe a subset of individuals are expressive responders. Most notably, individuals who are highly partisan are have high levels of affective polarization are likely to report answers which are not necessarily what they believe to be true, however they answer to uphold their partisan positions.

Race and Argument Congruency Bias

What is the puzzle

Does race effect the level of bias when evaluating arguments?

- Will white liberals rate strong conservative arguments higher if it comes from a black person?
- Will white conservatives rate strong and weak liberal arguments lower when they are presented by a black person?
- Will white conservatives rate strong and weak conservative arguments higher when they are presented by a black person?

incentive if they answered the question correctly. The authors found that individuals were more likely to report the correct deductive conclusion when offered a .10 cent incentive which suggests that those without incentive were responding incorrectly **on purpose**.

What is the dependent variable?

The difference in rating of congenial and uncongenial arguments. As a natural extension of my previous work, I want to explore the level of argument congruency bias present when rating an argument. So if an individual sees a strong argument they like and a strong argument they dislike any (positive) difference in the rating of these arguments represents bias in favor of congenial arguments (a negative value would indicate the rated the arguments they disagree with higher)?

Why do you think this is an important question?

Race and politics is always at the forefront of American politics. Understanding how ideology interacts with race and bias has yet to be explored thoroughly. The case of whether the race of an arguer impacts the rating of the audience is very compelling and has implications for politicians and activists.

Potential Designs

In this idea, the design would involve a control that involves either a traditionally white name (Jake/Molly) or a picture of a white individual and a treatment that involves a either a traditionally black name (DeShawn/Shanice) or a picture of a black individual News (2006). The arguments being evaluated will be preceded by a statement which claims: Jake/DeShawn) made the following argument:

What is your initial explanation?

White Liberals

If white liberals are more accepting of arguments that come from black arguers then I expect that this is a product of white guilt. White liberals tend to be more sensitive to

the systematic oppression of black people in the United States than white conservatives. Given this sensitivity, I suspect that white liberals will be more considerate of a strong conservative argument when it is presented by a black person. In an attempt to validate the opinion of a black arguer, I expect that a white liberal will rate a strong conservative argument presented by a black person as higher in rating than the same argument presented by a white person. For instance, if a white person says affirmative action is bad, then the white liberal may dismiss this argument as racist. However, if a black person says affirmative action is bad, a white liberal may be hesitant to come to the same conclusions.

Given that the argument is strong, a white liberal may withhold some of their biases out of respect to the underrepresented (black) arguer. However, I do not expect white liberals to rate weak arguments any higher when the arguer is black. This is because I understand argument congruency bias to be largely concentrated in two scenarios: 1) a liberal rates a strong conservative argument as weaker than a strong liberal argument; 2) a liberal rates a weak conservative argument as weaker than a weak liberal argument. I believe ACB is largely a product of biased assessments of **uncongenial strong** arguments and **congenial weak** arguments. Therefore, I do not expect the rating of weak conservative arguments (uncongenial weak) to change in the case of liberals because bias is not concentrate in this area and the role of the black arguer in the case of the white liberal is reducing bias.

White Conservatives

I do not expect for conservative whites to rate liberal arguments higher when they are presented by black arguers. White conservatives are less likely to believe that systematic oppression impacts blacks currently, therefore, they are not known to be sensitive to blacks' experience and subsequently, they will not overvalue liberal arguments presented by blacks like the white liberal does. In fact, personal experience suggests that white conservatives

believe liberal arguments to be less valid when coming from blacks (blacks are victims; blacks are inherently hyper-liberal). Thus, it may be the case, that white conservative rate strong and weak liberal arguments lower when they are presented by a black person due to racial animus or a lack of credibility.

Therefore, However, I believe there may be differential effects when a black arguer presents a conservative arguments. Conservatives are often accused of having racial animus, so when black people present conservative arguments, conservatives are eager to promote such an individual publicly, to legitimize their political opinions as diverse or inclusive. Given this eagerness to legitimize their political beliefs in a system that values diversity, I believe conservative whites will rate strong and weak arguments as higher when they are presented by a black arguer. Using the same example of affirmative action, a white conservative may see that there is a higher value to a black person saying affirmative action is bad than when a white person says affirmative action is bad. If the white conservative allows this consideration to bias their opinion, we may see white conservatives rating conservative arguments by blacks as higher because it has more value towards their cause.

I expect this relationship to hold across strong and weak arguments for conservatives as their higher rating for conservative arguments presented by blacks is not a reduction in bias, but rather an increase in the value of the argument.

Alternative Interventions to Reduce Argument Congruency Bias

What is the puzzle

What is the dependent variable?

Why do you think this is an important question?

What is your initial explanation?

References

Kabir Khanna and Gaurav Sood. Motivated responding in studies of factual learning.

Political Behavior, 40(1):79–101, 2018.

ABC News. Top 20 “whitest” and “blackest” names. *ABC News*, 2006.