Misreporting of Ideological Placement Through Consistency Bias

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Motivation

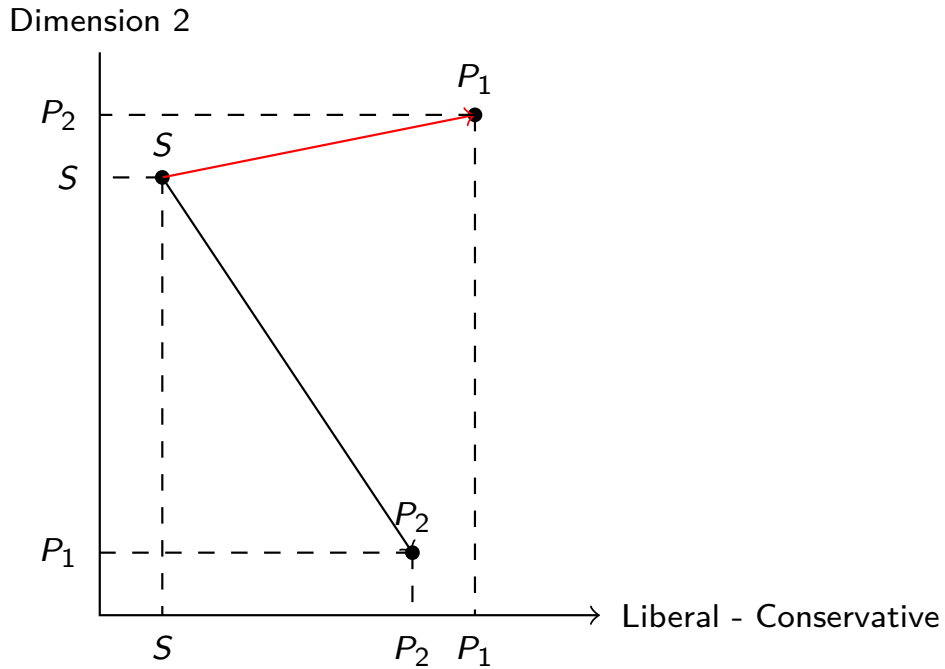
- Is there consistency bias in self reported and perceived party ideology (when measured together)
- Measurement perspective: Self reported and perceived ideology are commonly used measures
- Theoretical perspective: To what degree can we interpret biases towards preferred parties as information shortcuts

Source Cues

- Source cues are a prominent and well studied example of bias towards liked and away from disliked actors
- Subjects are provided with information about party position and change their own position
- Often interpreted as heuristics that allow good decisions in low information settings
- But how much of the bias is an **information effect** and how much is due to need for **consistency**?

Consistency Bias

- Political realm is multidimensional
- Party preference is found considering all dimensions
- There are almost always discrepancies on single dimensions

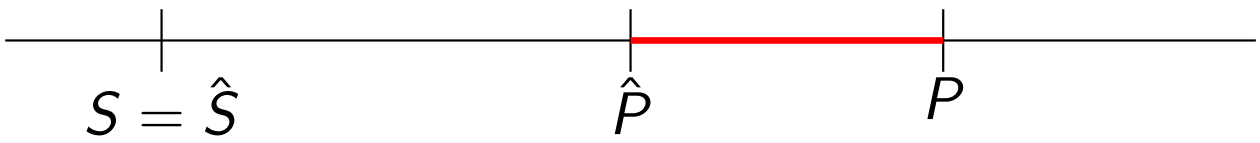


- This causes cognitive dissonance

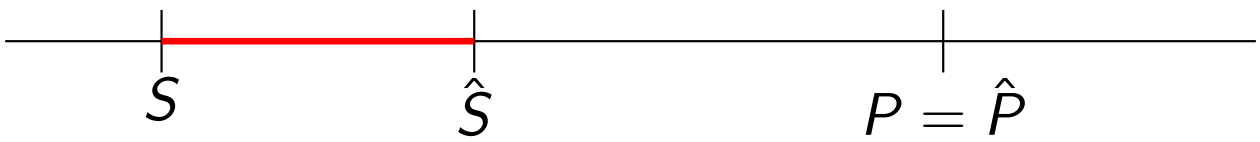
Expectations

- Hypothesis: Subjects decrease this dissonance by moving self and party position towards each other

Bias in P:



Bias in S:



Research Design

- Fix party preference and one of the placements by asking them first (Assumption: respondent does not consider the other placement at this point)
- Ask the other placement second
- Check if the second placement is biased

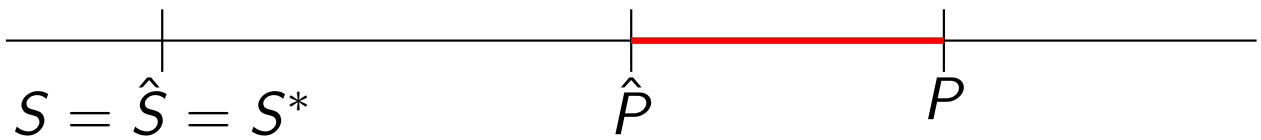
Two experiments:

1. Bias in $\hat{S}$:
   - measure party preference
   - **control**: measure S
   - **treatment**: measure P first, then S
2. Bias in $\hat{P}$:
   - measure party preference
   - **control**: measure P
   - **treatment**: measure S first, then P

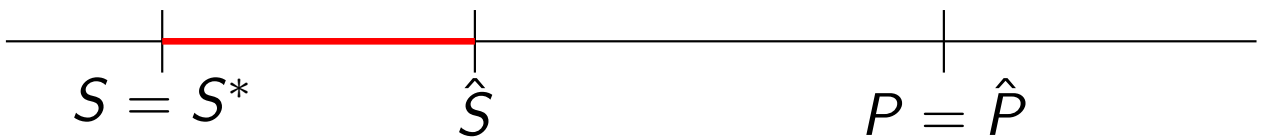
Research Design

- Ordering of positions is arbitrary, treatment effect may be lost when averaging
- Solution: Predict individual level counterfactual from issue questions (S^*)

Experiment 2: S is asked first, bias in P



Experiment 1: P is asked first, bias in S



Research Design

Outcomes of interest:

- Experiment 1, (bias in $\hat{S}$):
  - Deviations from the prediction *in direction of the preferred party*
  - $(\hat{S}_i - S_i^*)\,\text{sgn}(\hat{P}_i - S_i^*)$
- Experiment 2, (bias in $\hat{P}$):
  - Distance between party placement and self placement
  - Treatment: $(\hat{P}_i - \hat{S}_i)^2$; Control: $(\hat{P}_i - S_i^*)^2$

Data

- Pre-registered on Github (not all details)
- Data collected on Amazon's Mechanical Turk
- 500 subjects (high because of predictive model)

Statistical Analysis

- Both distributions not normal
- Bayesian framework for flexibility in modeling
- T-Distribution for Experiment 1, Gamma for Experiment 2
- Quantity of interest: Difference in means

Results I

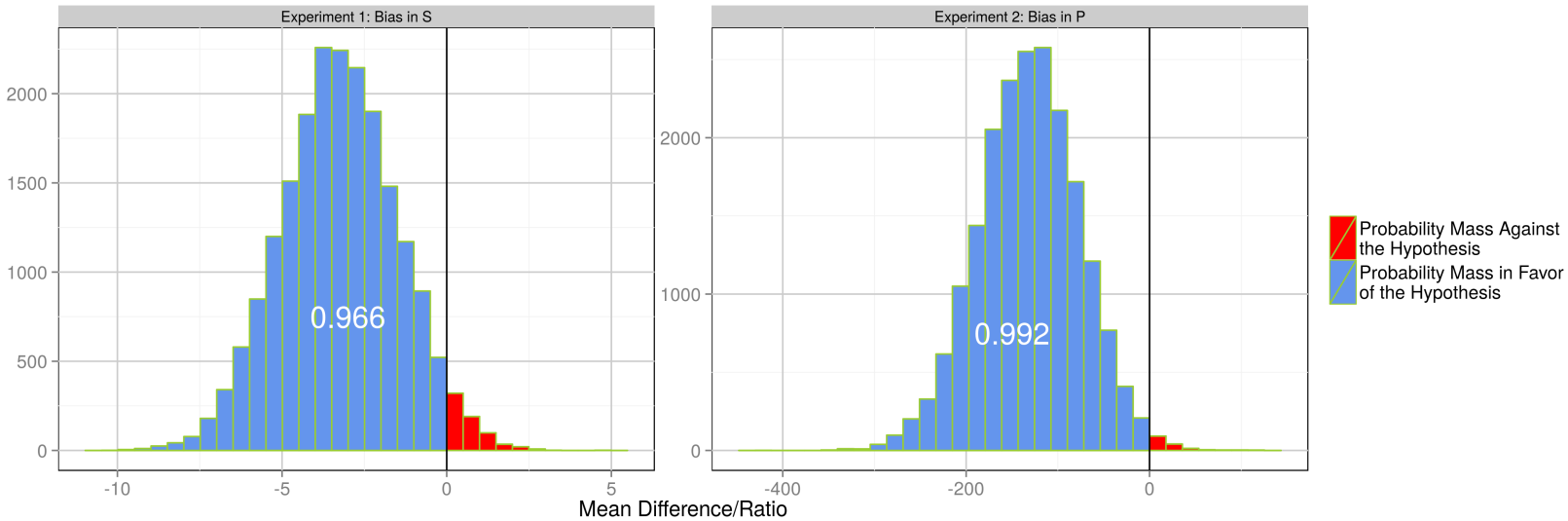


Figure 1: Posterior distribution of the difference in means for both experiments.

Results II

- There is consistency bias in self and party placement
- Effect size for self placement not very large
- Bias is induced even without any information being transmitted
- This bias could explain part of effects found in the source cue literature

Discussion

- Work in progress, future steps:
  - Polarization effect (bias away from disliked parties)
  - Include strength of affect towards party
  - Check for effect modifiers, especially political information
  - Include uncertainty of predictive model (maybe IRT instead of Random Forest)

Thank You!

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