Article

Truth Bias and Partisan Bias in Political Deception Detection

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David E. Clementson[1]

Abstract

This study tests the effects of political partisanship on voters' perception and detection of deception. Based on social identity theory, in-group members should consider their politician's message truthful while the opposing out-group would consider the message deceptive. Truth-default theory predicts that a salient in-group would be susceptible to deception from their in-group politician. In an experiment, partisan voters in the United States ($N = 618$) watched a news interview in which a politician was labeled Democratic or Republican. The politician either answered all the questions or deceptively evaded a question. Results indicated that the truth bias largely prevailed. Voters were more likely to be accurate in their detection when the politician answered and did not dodge. Truth-default theory appears robust in a political setting, as truth bias holds (as opposed to deception bias). Accuracy in detection also depends on group affiliation. In-groups are accurate when their politician answers, and inaccurate when he dodges. Out-groups are more accurate than in-groups when a politician dodges, but still exhibit truth bias.

Keywords

deception detection, truth-default theory, social identity theory, political news interview

Political scientists, psychologists, sociologists, and communication researchers have long wondered about the biased processing of political messages by partisan voters. One effect on democracy is the presumption that one's in-group politician is believable, while the out-group is deceptive. The present study is inspired by two theories relevant to partisan processing: truth-default theory (TDT; Levine, 2014) and social

[1]California State University, Sacramento, CA, USA

Corresponding Author:
David E. Clementson, Department of Communication Studies, California State University, 5024 Mendocino Hall, 6000 J Street, Sacramento, CA 95819-6016, USA.
Email: davidclementson@gmail.com

identity theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). TDT emphasizes the cognitive default of believing other people's messages, which results in truth bias toward processing messages as honest versus deceptive. SIT emphasizes a psychological attachment to believing in-group members and disbelieving out-groups. TDT further holds that salient in-groups are susceptible to inaccurate perceptions of deception from their own members. Political interactions present a suspicious context in which the truth bias could falter and give way to partisan bias in people's judgments of political messages (Harwood, 2014; Verschuere & Shalvi, 2014). After all, the current state of politics in the United States seems at historic levels of partisans considering their opposing party members immoral and untrustworthy (Pew Research Center, 2016).

This article tests whether partisan voters indeed manifest the predicted effects of TDT and SIT in their processing of a politician's message. SIT holds that group members should consider a politician of their own in-group to be more trustworthy than a politician from their out-group. TDT holds that an in-group's presumed trust of their own should extend to the realm of deception detection and affect message recipients' susceptibility to inaccurate appraisals of their in-group's veracity. In a political realm, SIT and TDT are linked together as SIT emphasizes partisan bias but TDT emphasizes truth bias. That is, SIT's intergroup dynamics should translate to partisans considering the out-group deceptive and the in-group honest—regardless of a politician's actual message content (Dunbar, in press), while TDT's focus on the truth bias similarly suggests a presumption of honesty from partisan group members. However, TDT's extension of in-group truth bias leading to inaccurate appraisals of one's own politician, and SIT's emphasis on downplaying indiscretions from one's own in-group while exaggerating malfeasance from the out-group (Dunbar et al., 2016) may also manifest as voters inaccurately detecting deception from their out-group politician. TDT posits that people will believe their in-group, and thus in the present political experiment partisan voters may be susceptible to deceit from their in-group politician. TDT also implies—in line with SIT—that people believe their in-group more than they believe their out-group. From the logic of TDT, and emboldened by recent work regarding intergroup deception (Dunbar, in press; Dunbar et al., 2016), we would expect people to exhibit disbelief toward their out-group. TDT does not predict deception bias or lie bias, harping on the power of truth bias. The present study will examine if partisan voters remain in a state of truth bias whether their in-group politician deceives, and will examine if partisan voters manifest deception bias whether their opposing politician deserves credulity.

We also test the robustness of TDT by examining whether the truth bias holds when people process a politician's message. After all, the public seems to overwhelmingly express the view that politicians "always" dodge and "never" answer questions (Bull, 2008; Harris, 1991). This article explores contrasting perspectives regarding truth bias versus deception bias in a political setting. Popular media depictions of politicians, as well as scholarly commentary, indicate that politicians deceive at extraordinary rates and would lead us to think that audiences expect deception from politicians practically whenever politicians' lips are moving (Braun, Van Swol, & Vang, 2015; Romaniuk, 2013). Meanwhile, TDT emphasizes truth bias and the veracity effect, so our

experiment explores whether people exhibit deception bias—as pervasive (yet naïve) characterizations of political communication may have us believe—contrary to the truth-bias tenets of TDT.

A Brief Note on Key Terms

Before reviewing the literature, we first offer a brief note on terminology related to deception and evasion. (Definitions of deception may be found in Masip, Garrido, & Herrero, 2004; Levine, 2014; and Buller & Burgoon, 1996.) Whether a message is a lie (of commission or omission), equivocation, or evasion, deceptive messages all have the same intended result of misleading the recipient into a false belief (Buller, Burgoon, Buslig, & Roiger, 1994). For example, a falsehood may be outright dissembling, whereas an evasion may provide seemingly truthful information, but an evasion diverges from the relevant information solicited by the message decoder, thus creating a false belief akin to lying. (More on deceptive tactics can be found in Buller, Burgoon, White, & Ebesu, 1994, and Buller & Burgoon, 1994. More on deceiving through covertly violating maxims of conversational cooperativeness can be found in McCornack, 1992.) According to Bradac, Friedman, and Giles (1986), an evasion may be generally defined as an uttered response to a question that is irrelevant to the topic of the question. Unlike lies or telling the truth, which are intended as relevant to the question asked, evasions are formulated by the speaker as intentionally irrelevant to the topical query (Bradac et al., 1986).

The type of deception in this study's political news interview is the act of dodging a question. A dodge is also known as an evasion (Bull & Mayer, 1993). The term *evasion* "connotes moral impropriety" (Clayman & Heritage, 2002, p. 242). Conversely, an "answer" generally addresses the topic of the question to a reasonable degree as asked by the interviewer (Clayman & Heritage, 2002). A dodge (or evasion) avoids the topic of the question. Some forms of evasion are not necessarily deceptive, such as an announced refusal to answer (Ekström, 2009) or overt topic avoidance (Afifi, Afifi, Morse, & Hamrick, 2008). The form of evasion in this study is deceptive. It is an unannounced off-topic response. In the parlance of Grice's (1989) theory of conversational implicature, surreptitiously shifting the agenda is an exploitative violation of the relevance maxim. Its covert employment intends to mislead and deceive (McCornack, 1992; McCornack, Morrison, Paik, Wisner, & Zhu, 2014). To covertly dodge a question is a subversive maneuver to evade in hopes that the interviewer and audience do not notice (Rogers & Norton, 2011). For example, a person may dodge a question by providing a response irrelevant to the topical query, yet escape detection because the answer otherwise supplies a proper amount of information, and seems clear and not a "bald-faced lie" (McCornack, 1992; McCornack et al., 2014).

In-group Versus Out-group Competition

Groups, such as political parties, compete against other groups for survival. In her theory of the evolution of social groups, Brewer (1999) suggests groups survive

through cooperation and trust. According to Brewer (1999), a group's "cooperative system requires that trust dominate over distrust" (p. 433). This leads to the notion of an in-group. An in-group relies on mutual trust of its members. In an in-group, the members expect cooperation from each other.

At a fundamental level, an in-group is characterized by its members being able to trust each other (Brewer, 1999). According to optimal distinctiveness theory (Brewer, 1991), the benefits of group membership are best achieved through strong attachment—a salient in-group where the members cooperate and trust each other. The in-group discriminates against its out-group. The in-group and out-group compete for resources.

SIT (Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) takes group survival to a further psychological level. SIT is interested in how competition manifests in group members' minds. Individuals are psychologically motivated to retain identification with fellow members and differentiate themselves from the out-group.

SIT offers an explanatory framework for people's group affiliations becoming salient. A salient in-group arises as the members strongly perceive favoritism toward their own members and derogation of an out-group. The attachment toward the in-group is a cognitive process of accentuated belonging relative to exaggerated detachment from the out-group (Leonardelli, Pickett, & Brewer, 2010). Meta-analysis has affirmed a basic tenet of SIT that the more salient a group is, the more bias people will develop in favor of their in-group (Mullen, Brown, & Smith, 1992).

Political Partisan Bias

Social identity and group membership help people deal with politics (Brewer, 2001). Politics can present people with much anxiety and uncertainty (Lau & Redlawsk, 2001). According to the American Psychological Association (2016), the 2016 U.S. presidential election may have been the most stressful in recent history. People can assuage tension and expediently make decisions about politics by using political party cues as informational shortcuts (Groenendyk & Banks, 2014).

People tend to make the most immediate and impactful assumptions in their political decision making based on a politician's party label. Seminal voting studies (e.g., Berelson, Lazarsfeld, & McPhee, 1954; Campbell, Converse, Miller, & Stokes, 1960; Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1944) harp on the influence of partisanship in people's assumptions about politicians. Party identification is one of the most stable identifications over time (Sears & Funk, 1999). Currently in the United States, the two major rival parties are the Democrats and Republicans. While there have been shifts in U.S. Americans calling themselves Independents rather than Democrats or Republicans, in longitudinal studies people tend to report the same party identification with more stability than most other social category labels (Huddy, 2001).

People assume a politician who shares their party affiliation is more similar to themselves than a politician of the opposing party affiliation (Pew Research Center, 2016; Rahn, 1993). People rate others from their own political party as more honest and ethical than they rate a politician of the opposing party (Ehrlich & Gramzow, 2015).

Carlin and Love (2013) ran an experiment with college students who identified as either Democrats or Republicans. Participants played a trust game over the Internet. The only experimental manipulation by the researchers was telling participants that the other player was a Democrat or a Republican. The partisan participants gave more lottery tickets to an in-group member than an out-group member. Trust between the undergrads was solely based on party identification. Munro, Lasane, and Leary (2010) also gave college students a task irrelevant to politics and found that partisan bias drove the participants' judgments. Participants played the role of college admissions officials. When an applicant held the opposing party affiliation of a participant then participants tended to reject the applicant.

An in-group's trust among themselves and distrust for the out-group may be most distinct when the groups are political (Brewer, 1999). In-group loyalties are tied to out-group opponents being distrusted. The partisanship of American voters has been discussed as synonymous with in-group/out-group social identity (Green, Palmquist, & Schickler, 2002). A burgeoning corpus of studies have empirically examined voters' partisan behavior under a framework of SIT (Gerber, Huber, & Washington, 2010; Greene, 2004). For example, political psychologists have applied SIT's in-group/out-group differentiation to studies of Australian college students (Duck, Hogg, & Terry, 1995), British teenagers (D. Abrams & Emler, 1992), students and artists in London (Kelly, 1988), and U.S. students (Greene, 1999). This brings us to our first proposition regarding in-group/out-group perceptions of a politician.

Hypothesis 1: Whether a politician evades or answers questions, people who share the politician's party affiliation will perceive the politician as significantly more trustworthy than those of the opposing party affiliation.

The next hypothesis builds slightly from the first. People should perceive more deception from an out-group politician than from their in-group politician. Politicians are generally considered dishonest and deceptive (Gallup, 2016; Serota, Levine, & Boster, 2010). The pervasive perception is that politicians "never give a straight answer to a straight question" (Bull, 2008, p. 337). Politicians practically "come out of the womb equivocating" (Bavelas, Black, Chovil, & Mullett, 1990, p. 235). In essence, people express an expectation that politicians will dodge questions. Yet SIT's tenets of party favoritism and opposing party derogation should transfer to perceptions of deception. Accordingly, we posit the following in the context of a political news interview.

Hypothesis 2: People who are exposed to a politician from their partisan in-group will be less likely to report that the politician dodged a question than people who are exposed to a politician from their partisan out-group.

The first two hypotheses concerned partisan bias affecting people's perceptions of a politician being trustworthy or deceptive. We now build from SIT to other lines of research which take theoretical positions regarding people's innate judgments of

veracity versus deception and salient in-group members' observations. The next prediction will concern whether people have a deception bias toward a politician's message. The following few sections will then bridge theorizing concerning partisan in-group/out-group bias and deception detection by salient in-groups.

Truth Bias

Despite the popularity and prevalence of deception detection in various discussions of conversational and institutional discourse, people typically receive messages as being true (Gilbert, Tafarodi, & Malone, 1993). As its name implies, TDT (Levine, 2014) emphasizes that human interactants exhibit truth bias. Truth bias may be defined as "the tendency to actively believe or passively presume that another person's communication is honest independent of actual honesty" (Levine, 2014, p. 380). Barring particularly suspicious contexts or a speaker having an obvious motive to lie, people's default mental setting is a presumption of veracity. People expect honesty from each other. TDT's mechanism whereby a deceptive message would slip by undetected is based on Spinoza's (1677/1982) belief theory. To "unbelieve" something—thus shifting from a predisposed, automatic truth bias—requires conscious effort (Gilbert, 1993).

Formative research from Zuckerman, DePaulo, and Rosenthal (1981) reports that people are "more likely to call messages truthful than deceptive" (p. 24). TDT holds that the truth bias can facilitate accuracy in deception detection. TDT also points out that people's presumption of truth is not necessarily a bad belief state, because most people are truthful most of the time. As content analyses in the domain of politics have revealed, politicians nearly always give on-topic responses to questions (Clementson & Eveland, 2016).

Ordinary detection tends to result in more accurate truth detection (relative to lie detection) because of the "Spinoza effect" (Gilbert, 1993; Levine, 2014) leading to the veracity effect (Levine, Kim, & Blair, 2010; Levine, Park, & McCornack, 1999). Spinoza (1677/1982) philosophized that the human mind initially receives information as being truthful because understanding requires acceptance in order to process. Only after automatic credulity, according to Spinoza, can the veracity of information then be appraised (Bennett, 1984). The mind can disbelieve false information (i.e., detect deception) but not without first representing it as true (Gilbert, Krull, & Malone, 1990). The Spinoza "effect" occurs when people continue to believe (false) information without activating the appraisal stage, because the information retains its inertia from initial acceptance. To "unbelieve" something requires cognitive effort, so errors are made in allowing deception to go undetected (Gilbert et al., 1993). The Spinoza effect helps explain truth bias in deception detection research (Levine, 2014).

The veracity effect regards people's propensity to be more accurate at judging truths than lies (Levine et al., 1999). People expect honest communication, so in study settings prompting people to discern between truths and lies, the more truths there are to detect, the more accurate the participants will appear (Levine, Kim, Park, & Hughes, 2006). When accuracy rates are scored separately for truths and lies, the veracity of the messages that are judged can predict resultant accuracy. Consistent with the truth bias and veracity effect, there tends to be a positive, linear correlation between the amount of truths in a given deception detection study and observed accuracy (Park & Levine, 2001).

Politics Triggering Deception Perception and Detection

Contrary to the truth bias, in political contexts, a deception bias might surface. Instead of expecting truth, people may be more likely to expect deception from a politician. Unlike the truth bias whereby people presume honesty from each other—and thus the veracity effect in which increasing truthful message exposure increases the appearance of accuracy in detection—a deception bias may arise in processing a politician's message. Thus, the more a politician deceives instead of speaking truths, the more message decoders may appear to correctly detect deception rather than detect veracity.

Public perceptions give the impression that politicians deceive at extraordinary rates. There is the old joke: "How can you tell when a politician is lying? His lips are moving" (Braun et al., 2015). An article in *The New York Times* by the editor of PolitiFact had the headline "All politicians lie" (Holan, 2015). Ekman (2009) discusses politicians as exemplifying deception. According to Braun et al. (2015), deception is ubiquitous in politics. Kahneman (2011) speculates that people (himself included) think politicians are the most deceptive people because, unlike otherprofessions, politicians' verbal indiscretions are covered prominently in the media. According to Romaniuk (2013), "There is a widely held belief . . . that politicians often produce evasive responses under questioning from members of the news media" (p. 145). People believe "politicians are notorious for not answering questions." For example, a U.S. presidential debate opened with a questioner challenging the politicians to "do something revolutionary and . . . actually answer the questions" (Romaniuk, 2013, p. 145).

People's truth bias causes their judgments to appear more accurate in detecting truths in standard deception detection experiments. However, based on mass-mediated depictions and expressions of the presumed pervasiveness of deception in politics, we will offer a prediction counter to TDT. TDT emphasizes the truth bias, but we posit that people are so inclined to expect deception from politicians that instead of the veracity effect manifesting, when people observe a political question–answer setting a deception bias may manifest. Given the popular media and scholarly assertions about rampant deception from politicians, people might expect a politician to dodge questions. After all, presumably the public thinks that politicians "always" dodge and "never" answer questions (Bull, 2008; Harris, 1991). Audience members may presume deception and appear to be more accurate in their detection when a politician dodges than when a politician does not dodge. If people think politicians deceive at extraordinary rates, then a reversal of the veracity effect may arise, whereby an increase in deception by a politician would translate to increased accuracy in people's detection of said deception. Thus—counter to TDT and truth bias and the veracity effect, and instead in line with assertions from mass media and academic literature suggesting a deception bias—we propose:

> **Hypothesis 3:** People who are exposed to a politician dodging will be more accurate in their dodge detection than those who are exposed to a politician not dodging.

The Interaction of Group Dynamics and Deception on Accuracy

Moving from people's bias toward truth or deception in processing political messages, we next turn to accurate detection being influenced by partisan bias. Our first two predictions concerned the basic tenets of SIT's presumptions of trustworthiness from an in-group and deception from an out-group. Our third prediction concerned TDT's assertions about the truth bias and whether politics might present an exception with a deception bias affecting accurate perceptions. The next and final prediction will bring together the theorizing to explore an interaction between in-group/out-group dynamics and deception on accuracy. We may gain a sense of understanding the phenomenon of deception detection in politics and predict the causal effects of a politician dodging or not dodging on accuracy as moderated by whether a politician represents people's in-group or out-group.

In its elaboration of the truth bias affecting the perception and detection of deception, TDT asserts that people's processing of messages as being honest or deceptive may be influenced by group dynamics. TDT suggests that—in presumably rare instances of an in-group member deceiving a fellow member—salient in-group members would be susceptible to deception from their own members. As discussed earlier, in-group members presume honesty. They have a truth-default—perhaps to a fault. Their group's existence and survival requires implicitly trusting each other. In the occurrence of a member potentially deceiving another member, the deception would likely escape detection.

Just as groups tend to exhibit an inflated truth bias among themselves, they might err on the side of too much suspension of the truth-default toward out-groups. Extending TDT with SIT, this positive bias toward one's in-group and negative bias toward the out-group should translate to people's observations of deception. People judge deception from their out-group harsher than deception from members of their own in-group (Dunbar et al., 2016). Deception among an in-group can be excused as ethical and altruistic, benefitting other members (e.g., sparing them from brutal honesty). However, deceiving an out-group has negative connotations. For instance, the same piece of misleading information that would be considered benign teasing or exaggeration among in-group members could be considered ill-intentioned lying to an out-group (Dunbar et al., 2016). If people enhance their self-worth through favoritism of their in-group and derogation of their out-group à la SIT, their distinctiveness could motivate them to treat deception from their in-group members positively (i.e., ignoring the implications of deceit) compared with noticing out-group deception's averseness. Research in political and nonpolitical contexts indicates that people consider members of their own group trustworthy and honest, and consider the out-group untrustworthy and dishonest, but no study has tested whether such an effect occurs when a group member is deceptive and thus makes fellow in-group members susceptible to deception (Dunbar, in press). Members of different political groups could be exposed to the same messaging and yet draw different perceptions of deceptiveness based on whether the speaker shares their party affiliation (Dunbar, in press).

Although studies from Rogers and Norton (2011) and Clementson (2017) measured effects of politicians dodging questions, they did not explicitly account for partisan group affiliation. And party identification is probably the biggest influence on people's perceptions of a politician (Rahn, 1993). Clementson (2017) exposed participants to a news interview in which the politician had no party label. Yet there was an effect in which participants of stronger partisanship spotted less dodging across conditions. Clementson speculated whether partisans were more susceptible to political deception. He wondered if TDT's prediction about salient in-groups' propensity toward the truth bias was surfacing. But the study did not ask participants point-blank if they observed any dodging, nor did the study tap in-group/out-group dynamics.

TDT builds from SIT when in-group tensions arise in deception detection. Salient in-groups presume honesty from their members—and by extension should presume dishonesty from the out-group. A group's competition for resources forces a salient in-group to presume truth of their own members and distrust oppositional groups (J. R. Abrams, Eveland, & Giles, 2003). Because salient in-groups would presumably expect dishonesty from an out-group, when a politician of the opposing party does not dodge a question it is likely that observers will have inaccurately presumed deception. Also, as mentioned previously, TDT notes that in trigger events—of which politics is an exemplar (Harwood, 2014; Verschuere & Shalvi, 2014)—people are more suspicious and the truth bias falters. Combining the detection effects of the truth bias encountering salient in-group partisanship à la TDT and in-group trust versus out-group distrust à la SIT, we expect group members to more correctly observe their in-group politician not dodging and the opposing politician dodging. Accordingly we propose:

Hypothesis 4: The relationship between whether a politician dodges or does not dodge and perceptual accuracy depends on whether the politician represents a person's in-group or out-group. When a politician does not dodge, in-group voters will be more accurate in their detection than out-group voters. When a politician dodges, out-group voters will be more accurate than in-group voters.

Method

Participants

Participants ($N = 618$) were registered voters in the state where this study ran.[1] They were recruited for a Qualtrics Panel. They were 48.4% male and 51.6% female. Age ranged from 18 to 90 years ($M = 53.85$, $SD = 27.84$). Participants reported their race as 86.6% White, 8.3% Black or African American, 1.5% Asian, 1.5% Hispanic or Latino, 0.6% American Indian or Alaska Native, and 1.1% Other.

Participants were recruited for a nondescript study; their political partisan identification and ideology were not primed other than as an opening demographic item. Using the standard wording of the American National Election Studies, at the beginning of the study (after obtaining informed consent) respondents were asked, "Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an

independent, or something else?" Respondents who selected Democrat or Republican (i.e., "pure" partisans) were retained. They were 50.2% Democratic and 49.8% Republican. Those who selected Independent or "something else" were filtered out by Qualtrics and went unmentioned in data analysis. Nonpartisans were purged because this study compares partisan groups operationalized in U.S. politics as Democrats and Republicans.[2]

Experimental Design

Participants watched a news interview embedded in an online survey. In the 4-minute clip, a journalist interviews a congressional candidate from the U.S. state of this study and asks four questions about national and state issues. The stimulus was constructed to be as realistic and relevant for participants as possible. We strove for ecological validity and subject salience. The politician's answers were also scripted to include bipartisan/nonpartisan rhetoric, so the manipulation was believable for the politician to be either a Democrat or Republican. The party identification of the politician was manipulated. The screen identifies the politician as either a Democrat or a Republican.

Participants were randomly assigned to be exposed to one of four video clips. The between-subjects design had 2 (dodge or no-dodge) × 2 (Democratic or Republican politician) experimental conditions. In the no-dodge version, the politician answers all the questions on-topic. In the dodge version, the politician gives an off-topic answer to one question. It is the second question in the interview. The journalist asks the politician about his plan for the economy and jobs, and he responds with his plan for peace in the Middle East, a similar manipulation as the off-topic dodge condition in Rogers and Norton's (2011) political debate experiment.

The interview was filmed at a real TV studio. The interviewer was the real senior political reporter for the capital city newspaper where the study ran. The journalist plays himself. The politician was not a real politician and had never appeared on the news before. (The actor playing the politician was a real professional political consultant.) The script appears in the appendix.

Variables testing Hypotheses 2 to 4 were coded such that odds ratios could be attained. Exposure to a treatment in which the politician dodged was coded 1 (for "success" in the parlance of odds ratios) and 0 for no-dodge condition.

Measures

In-group/Out-group. After data collection, participants were categorized as in-group or out-group. These variables were based on two indicators from the survey: (a) a participant's self-identified party affiliation (Democratic or Republican) and (b) exposure to a stimulus in which the politician was a Democrat or Republican. Participants were then classified as being either of the same party (in-group) or the other opposing party (out-group) per their exposure.

Qualtrics randomization resulted in 327 in-group participants (52.9% of the sample) and 291 out-group (47.1% of the sample). The two groups were not significantly

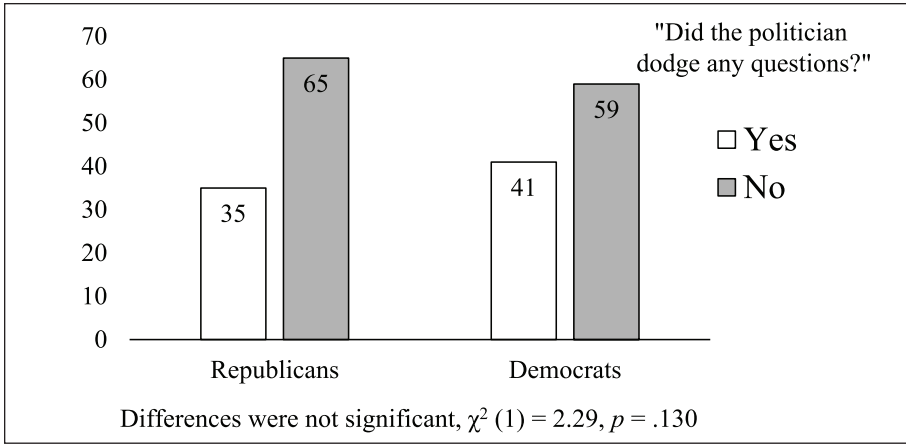

Figure 1. Percent of each party who perceived dodging.

different from 50%, based on a one sample *t* test with the test value of .5 as the groups were coded 0 and 1, $t(617) = 1.449$, $p = .148$.

Trustworthiness. McCroskey and Teven's (1999) six-item scale taps perceptions of a speaker's trustworthiness. Placed on 7-point continua, the semantic differential items are as follows: honest/dishonest, untrustworthy/trustworthy, honorable/dishonorable, moral/immoral, unethical/ethical, and phoney/genuine. Half of the items require reverse-coding. Higher scores indicate the politician was perceived as more trustworthy ($\alpha = .94$, $M = 4.53$, $SD = 1.33$).

Observation of Dodging. After exposure to the stimulus and a manipulation check, participants were asked "Did he dodge any of the questions?" There were two response options randomly presented: Yes or No. The majority of participants (62.3%) said "No" and 37.7% said "Yes." A one-sample t test with the test value of .5 indicated the differences significantly varied from a 50/50 split, $t(617) = 57.56$, $p < .001$. Although about half were exposed to a dodge, only about a third of the participants reported that the politician dodged a question.

Both Republicans and Democrats were more likely to say that the politician did not dodge any questions than that the politician did dodge questions. The difference between the parties was not significant, $\chi^2(1) = 2.29$, $p = .130$. See Figure 1.

Accuracy. After data collection, a variable was created for whether participants were accurate or inaccurate in their judgment. The dichotomous variable was coded 1 for accurate and 0 for inaccurate. This variable was based on (a) whether a participant selected "Yes" or "No" in response to the question asking if the politician dodged any questions and (b) whether the participant was in a dodge or no-dodge condition. Overall, the majority (59.5%) were accurate and 40.5% were inaccurate. A one-sample

t test with the test value of .5 confirmed that the participants had significantly greater accuracy than chance, $t(617) = 4.83$, $p < .001$.

Manipulation Checks

The Qualtrics survey forbade respondents from returning to a prior screen. There was a manipulation check immediately after exposure to the stimulus in which participants were asked to recall the politician's party identification. Options were Democrat or Republican (randomly presented), "the video clip didn't say," or "I don't remember." Participants who failed for their particular condition were then filtered out. If they selected "the video clip didn't say" or "I don't remember" they were filtered out.[3]

Before being debriefed, participants were asked how much prior media exposure they had to the politician in the video clip. On a scale of 0 (*none*) to 10 (*an extreme amount*), responses ranged from 0 to 10 ($M = 1.61$, $SD = 2.35$, $Mdn = 0$, Mode = 0). Most (64.9%) indicated that that they had zero exposure. And the median and mode were zero. However, participants indicated, on average, that the stimulus apparently held enough ecological validity for the mean to be between 1 and 2.

Randomization and Validity Checks

For random assignment to conditions of participants' own party affiliation and whether the politician dodged, the breakdown was as follows. Democratic participants exposed to No-Dodge, $n = 157$ (25.4%); Democratics exposed to Dodge, $n = 153$ (24.8%); Republican participants exposed to No-Dodge, $n = 162$ (26.2%); and Republicans exposed to Dodge, $n = 146$ (23.6%). Those were not significantly different, $\chi^2(1) = 0.236$, $p = .627$.

Slightly more participants were randomly assigned to a No-Dodge condition (51.6%) than a Dodge condition (48.4%). There was not a significant difference between the conditions, $t(617) = -0.80$, $p = .422$.

For random assignment to conditions of whether participants were exposed to their in-group or out-group politician and whether the politician dodged, the breakdown was as follows. In-group No-Dodge, $n = 165$ (26.7%); In-group Dodge, $n = 162$ (26.2%); Out-group No-Dodge, $n = 154$ (24.9%); and Out-group Dodge, $n = 137$ (22.2%). Those were not significantly different, $\chi^2(1) = 0.374$, $p = .541$.

The politician's trustworthiness was not significantly different, on average, whether participants were Democratic ($M = 4.54$, $SD = 1.30$) or Republican ($M = 4.52$, $SD = 1.37$), $t(616) = 0.149$, $p = .858$.

Results

The first hypothesis predicted that, regardless of whether a politician evades a question, people who share the politician's party affiliation will perceive him as being significantly more trustworthy than people of the opposing party will perceive him. In an independent samples *t* test, the politician's trustworthiness was significantly higher,

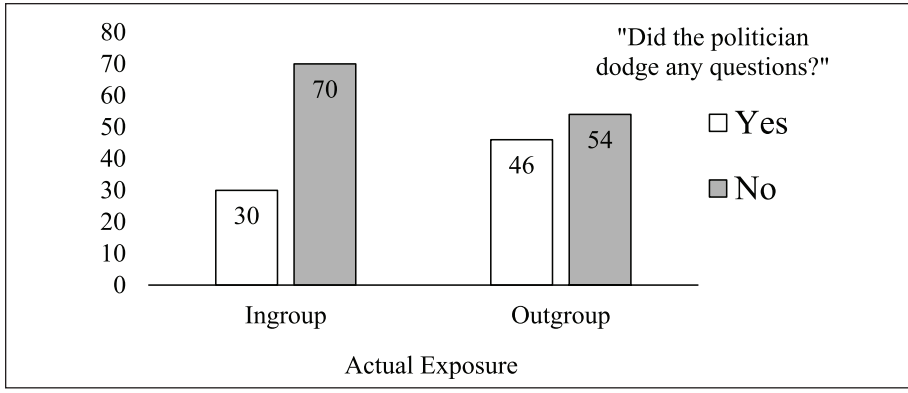

Figure 2. Percentages who perceived dodging in in-group and out-group conditions.

on average, when he was in-group ($M = 4.94$, $SD = 1.23$) than out-group ($M = 4.08$, $SD = 1.31$), $t(616) = 8.416$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = .677$. Hypothesis 1 received support.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that people who were exposed to a politician from their partisan in-group would be less likely to report that the politician dodged a question than people exposed to a politician from their out-group. Put another way, people who were exposed to a politician from their out-group were predicted to be more likely to report that the politician dodged a question than people exposed to a politician from their in-group. There was a significant association, Pearson $\chi^2(1) = 16.309$, $p < .001$; $G^2(1) = 16.348$, $p < .001$. Indeed, 30% perceived a dodge in the in-group condition and 46% perceived a dodge in the out-group condition. Meanwhile, of those who reported that the politician did not dodge any questions, more of them were in an in-group exposure condition than out-group. Figure 2 presents the results. The odds of a person perceiving dodging were about 2 times larger when a politician was from people's out-group than when the politician was from people's in-group, odds ratio: 1.966, 95% confidence interval [CI: 1.413, 2.734]. Hypothesis 2 received support. People exposed to a politician from their out-group were significantly more likely to report that the politician dodged a question than people exposed to a politician from their in-group.

Hypothesis 3 predicted that people exposed to a politician dodging would be more accurate in reporting that the politician dodged than those who are exposed to a politician not dodging would be accurate in their observation. There was a significant association between the variables—Pearson $\chi^2(1) = 36.913$, $p < .001$; $G^2(1) = 37.270$, $p < .001$—but in the opposite way predicted. Contrary to the prediction, among those in the dodge condition accuracy was 47%, compared with those in the no-dodge condition where accuracy was 71%. Meanwhile, of those who were inaccurate, more were exposed to dodging than no-dodging. Figure 3 presents the results.

The odds of a person being accurate in their dodge detection when exposed to a dodge was a little over a third of the odds of someone not exposed to a dodge being accurate, odds ratio: 0.362, 95% CI[0.259, 0.504]. The odds of someone *not* exposed

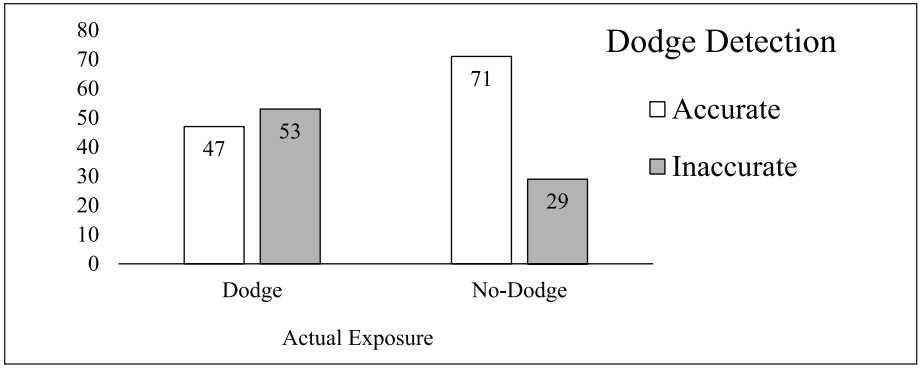

Figure 3. Percent accurate in dodge detection for dodge versus no-dodge conditions.

to dodging being accurate in their dodge detection was 2.76 times the odds for someone exposed to dodging being accurate. Hypothesis 3 was rejected. People exposed to a politician dodging appear more likely to be *inaccurate* in their detection relative to those exposed to a politician not dodging.

Hypothesis 4 predicted that the relationship between dodge/no-dodge exposure and accuracy would depend on whether the politician represents a person's in-group or out-group. We specifically proposed that voters would be more accurate when their in-group politician does not dodge than when their in-group politician dodges, and proposed that when a politician dodges then the out-group voters would be more accurate than in-group voters.

This hypothesis was tested with binary logistic regression. A two-predictor logistic model with its interaction term was fitted to the data. The result showed:

$$\text{Predicted logit of } (\text{Accuracy}) = 0.190 - 0.565(\text{In-Group}) + 0.286(\text{No-Dodge}) + 1.475(\text{Group x Dodge})$$

After affirming overall model fit, $G_M(3) = 56.25$, $p < .001$, sequential analysis was run to inspect the unique contribution of the interaction. The two independent variables were entered first. Then, the interaction term was entered as a second block. When the interaction variable was included in the model—Wald $\chi^2(1) = 18.07$, $p < .001$—there was a statistically significant decrease in the proportion reduction of error (log-likelihood), $\chi^2(1) = 18.48$, $p < .001$. The statistical significance affirmed that including the interaction term in the model decreased error. From the first block to the second block, Cox and Snell R^2 improved by .028, from .059 to .087. Nagelkerke R^2 improved by .037, from .080 to .117. About 12% of the null deviance was accounted for by the set of predictors. About 4% of the null deviance was accounted for by the interaction term.

The prediction of Hypothesis 4 that group membership would moderate the effect of dodge exposure on detection accuracy was affirmed. In-group voters were more likely to

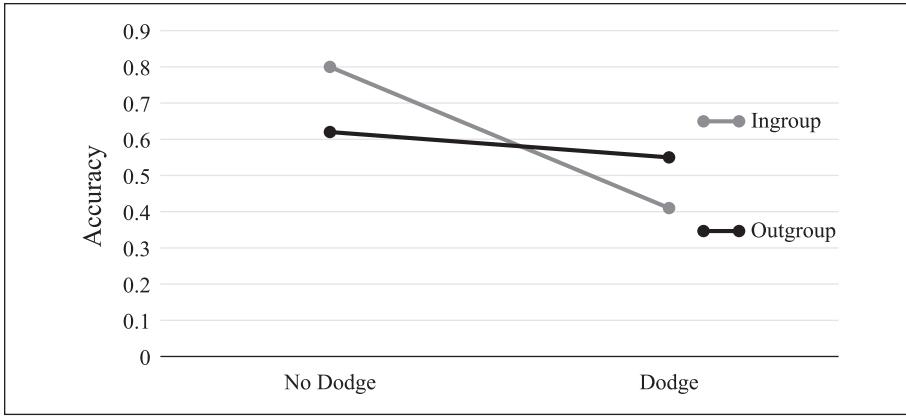

Figure 4. Accuracy (from 0 inaccurate to 1 accurate) based on dodge exposure moderated by group affiliation.

be accurate in detection when their politician did not dodge than when their politician dodged, Exp(β) = 4.37, $p < .001$, 95% CI [2.21, 8.63]. Out-group voters were more accurate than the in-group in the dodge condition. Figure 4 illustrates the moderation effect.

The interaction term's odds ratio indicated that the odds of being accurate are 4.37 times greater when an in-group member is exposed to no-dodging than when an in-group member is exposed to dodging. Being in the in-group and being exposed to no-dodging increases the odds of accuracy by 337.1% compared with an in-group member being exposed to dodging. Hypothesis 4 received support.

Discussion

The first hypothesis tested the tenets of SIT in a political news interview setting. Regardless of whether the politician answered all the questions or dodged one, viewers who shared party affiliation with the politician considered him significantly more trustworthy than viewers from the politician's opposing party.

The second hypothesis concerned in-group/out-group dynamics and perceptual deception. When people were exposed to a politician sharing their party identification then 30% perceived dodging, but when they were exposed to a politician of their opposing party, then nearly half (46%) perceived dodging—a significant difference.

The third hypothesis concerned people's accuracy in appraising political deception. We expected people to be more accurate when dodging was present than when it was absent. Alas! our prediction was rejected. In this test of people's accuracy in dodge detection, people were significantly more accurate in the absence (71%) than in the presence (47%) of a dodge.

The fourth hypothesis explored people's accuracy in appraising evasion as depending on whether people are exposed to a politician from their in-group or out-group.

In-group voters were more accurate when their politician did not dodge than when he dodged. When a politician dodged, though, out-group voters were more accurate. When the politician dodged, a majority (55%) of observers were accurate in their detection when the politician represented their out-group, but less than half (41%) were accurate if the politician represented their in-group. When people were not exposed to dodging, they were especially accurate when the politician represented the in-group (80%).

Theoretical Implications

This article extends two theories relevant to politics—SIT and TDT—and explores the processing of partisan voters when exposed to deception. Most evident with biased perceptions was the interaction of in-group/out-group and dodge/no-dodge manifesting SIT. Group members processed their own politician as being favorably positive. Aligning with TDT, salient in-groups presume honesty from their fellow members and presume dishonesty from group members competing for resources (Brewer, 1999; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Their positive group identity displayed accentuated truth bias.

To the best of our knowledge, this article provides the first experiment testing TDT's assertion that the truth bias would affect the perception and detection of deception by salient in-groups. In support of TDT, salient in-group members indeed presume honesty of each other and presume deception from their out-group. This study's findings support TDT's emphasis on people having as their default mental setting a presumption of truth. Our stimulus concerned a political interview with a real journalist questioning a politician for whom half the participants held the opposing party identification. This study used a suspicion-invoking trigger event which had never been tested in such a way before. And the truth bias still prevailed. The resilience of the truth bias appears remarkable.

The prediction that people would be more accurate in their deception detection when the politician dodged, than when dodging was absent, was inspired by the folk idea that people distrust politicians to the point of having a deception bias instead of truth bias. Politics exemplifies verbal deception (McCornack et al., 2014), and the media tend to focus on politicians misbehaving (Serota et al., 2010). However, the truth bias remained largely intact, even toward politicians. Furthermore, our study permitted partisan bias to manifest, with voters exposed to a deceptive politician of their opposing party. Yet the results indicated that people's ratings of the politician's trustworthiness hovered around 5 for their own party and 4 for the other side—on a 7-point scale, with 4 as the midpoint. So, people did not find the politician especially dishonest or untrustworthy. Despite the differences, the ratings tended to be in the middle. People were still .623 truth-biased. Even in the out-group, people were still truth-biased (.70 in-group, .54 out-group). The truth bias is so robust, reliable, and "powerful" in human interactions that Levine "has never observed a lie bias in any of his data," including studies where he prompted participants to suspect deception (Burgoon & Levine, 2010, p. 210; cf. Levine, Serota, & Shulman, 2010). The deception literature can now add partisan political interviews as a presumably deceptive terrain in which the truth bias retains its robustness. In this first test of TDT in a

political context pitting truth bias versus deception bias, TDT appeared robust. We mistakenly expected people to presume that the politician would dodge and thus expected people to more accurately detect dodging than no-dodging. Yet the veracity effect remained strong. Our prediction (in Hypothesis 3) was based on the exasperated naïve perception that pervades political discourse in popular media and academic literature, expecting people to presume that the politician would be dodging. Yet truth bias retained its power and the veracity effect arose—even with out-group politicians.

Other work on intergroup deception would suggest that people consider lies told to them by out-group members to be less acceptable than they consider lies told to them by their in-group members (Dunbar, in press; Dunbar et al., 2016). The present study measured detection, not perceptions of acceptability, as we tested whether there were differences in in-group versus out-group partisans spotting a dodge. However, future research could examine whether political affiliation affects the acceptability of lying, which could directly extend the work of Dunbar et al.

Differences in perceptions of deception by the opposing groups were not as staggering as we might have expected considering rampant partisan bickering that pervades mass-mediated depictions of politics. While the predictions were affirmed as people's perceptions conveyed in-group trust and out-group distrust, the truth bias still surfaced. Even in the out-group exposure condition, a majority (54%) reported that the politician did not dodge. With in-group exposure, however, the truth bias appeared more pervasive—as predicted by TDT concerning salient in-groups. Seventy percent did not think their in-group politician dodged. Although in-group members were far more likely to say that their politician did not dodge questions, a majority of out-group observers also did not perceive dodging—even though in the dodge condition the journalist asked the politician for his plan on jobs and the economy and the politician answered by talking about peace in the Middle East. Most (71%) of the people in the no-dodge condition reported not seeing a dodge. This result is consistent with the truth bias and the veracity effect extended to political deception. Based on the veracity effect, accuracy in deception detection experiments is largely a function of the induction's base-rate of message veracity (Levine et al., 2006). The veracity effect is inspired by two key theoretical assertions of cognitive processing. First, people generally have a truth bias, because our psychological default is a presumption of honesty. Therefore, second, the more truths an observer is presented with, the more the observer will appear to spot.

This study suggested support for the "Spinoza effect" (Gilbert, 1993; Levine, 2014) leading to the veracity effect (Levine et al., 1999) in politics. Just as decades of deception detection studies with dozens of experiments have revealed people are more likely to be accurate in truth–lie stimuli when the speaker tells the truth (Park & Levine, 2001), this first deception detection experiment to test accuracy in a political context also found support for the influence of the truth bias. The odds of being accurate in dodge detection were 2.76 times greater when the politician did not dodge than when he dodged. Despite popularized depictions to the contrary, when people are exposed to a politician dodging, it seems unlikely that they will accurately detect it. Conversely, people are likely to be inaccurate in their judgment when the politician dodges. At

least 70% of participants in the no-dodge condition and 70% of participants in the in-group condition reported observing no-dodge. The vast majority of participants in the no-dodge condition were accurate in their observations.

Whether the politician shared their party identification, the majority in a given condition reported no-dodge. Nonetheless, we can glean that partisan perceptions manifested as cooperation and trust for the in-group, based on Brewer's (1999) theory of the evolution of social groups. People were significantly more likely to report that their in-group politician did not dodge any questions and appeared to distrust the out-group politician. TDT, as well as Brewer's (1991) optimal distinctiveness theory, would assert that people were far more inclined to report that their in-group politician did not dodge—even when he did—because members need to trust each other and believe they are more honest than the out-group. Partisans are strongly attached to each other psychologically and presume cooperation to survive as a political group.

Conclusion

This article contributes to our understanding of partisan bias and deception in politics. In line with SIT, out-group members perceive more dodging than in-group members—even if both contingents tend toward the truth bias. We combined SIT and TDT, finding support for their linkage. People's accuracy in detecting dodges and nondodges was moderated by whether the politician was from their in-group or out-group. A dodge was more likely to be detected by out-group members, while no-dodging was more likely to be detected by in-group members.

In support of TDT, salient in-group members are susceptible to deception, and the truth bias counteracts partisan bias as out-group members seemed to believe the politician more than suspect him of deception. Fortunately, though, most people tell the truth most of the time (Levine, 2014). This includes politicians giving far more on-topic answers than deceptive evasions, based on content analyses of U.S. presidential debates and press conferences (Clementson & Eveland, 2016). Humanity's truth bias overriding partisan bias in politics may be a healthy mental default.

Appendix

Script From Stimuli

Reporter: Hello, and welcome. I'm [name blinded], senior political reporter for the [*name of newspaper* blinded]. We are honored to be joined today by [name blinded], a candidate for the U.S. House of Representatives. We thank him for joining us, to answer some questions about issues important in this campaign for the House. Welcome.

Politician: Thank you for having me.

Reporter: I'd like to ask you about the environment. What is your stance on such key issues as our dependence on oil, renewable energy, and the continued use and depletion of our coal resources?

Politician: Sure, well I have a plan for cleaning up the environment and protecting our natural resources. Our nation has increased oil production to the highest levels in 16 years. Natural gas production is the highest it's been in decades. We have seen increases in coal production and coal employment. But we can't just produce traditional sources of energy. We've also got to look to the future. That's why we need to double fuel efficiency standards on cars. We ought to double energy production from sources like wind and solar, and as well as biofuels.

Reporter: I would like next to inquire about jobs. Our economy has strengthened across certain sectors, but employment is not near where it needs to be. For example, the manufacturing industry continues to sustain deep cuts and layoffs. What is your plan to bolster the workforce and create jobs?

Politician:

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ON-TOPIC VERSION

I was just at a manufacturing facility, where some twelve hundred people lost their jobs. Yes, I agree that we need to bring back manufacturing to America. This is about bringing back good jobs for the middle class Americans. And [first name of reporter blinded], I want you to know, and your newspaper to know, that's what I'm going to do. I will work to create incentives to start growing jobs again in this country.

OFF-TOPIC VERSION

I've got a strategy for the Middle East. And let me say that our nation now needs to speak with one voice during this time, to diffuse tensions. Look, we're going to face some serious new challenges, and as your Congressman I have a plan to deal with the Middle East.

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Reporter: Let me ask you about taxes. As you run for the U.S. House, what is your tax plan? And what would you specifically do to benefit middle-income Americans?

Politician: My view is that we ought to provide tax relief to people in the middle class. As you know, [first name of reporter blinded], and as has been reported in your paper, the people who are having a hard time right now are indeed middle-income Americans. Folks in our state have seen their income go down by forty-three hundred dollars a year. I believe that the economy works best when middle-class families are getting tax breaks so that they've got some money in their pockets.

Reporter: Where do you stand on gun control? Do you favor new restrictions or do you believe our current climate we handle gun ownership responsibly?

Politician: I believe law-abiding citizens ought to be able to own a gun. I believe in background checks to make sure that guns don't get in the hands of people that shouldn't have them. The best way to protect our citizens from guns is to prosecute those who commit crimes with guns. And I am a strong supporter of the Second Amendment.

Reporter: That concludes our interview. We thank [name blinded], candidate for the U.S. House of Representatives, for being here and taking our questions.

Politician: Thank you [first name blinded], I appreciate you having me.

Reporter: From the [*name of newspaper* blinded], I am [full name blinded]. Thank you for joining us.

Authors' Note

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Notes

1. There were a total of 618 participants included in this study after filtering out those who failed attention checks, the manipulation check, and other survey filters. The survey filters are described later in this section. Qualtrics could not provide researchers with the total number of recruited participants who were filtered, per their protocol—with the exception of the number of people who failed the manipulation check, mentioned in a later footnote. Hence, we describe the filtering mechanisms but only quantifiably report inclusion of 618 in the experiment.
2. Leaners and/or "weak" partisans were excluded because when polls include leaners and weak partisans, partisan effects tend to dissolve (Fiorina, Abrams, & Pope, 2011), suggesting that polarized opinions of partisans are isolated to those who identify as such. Those who identify weakly with a party or are Independents but lean toward a party may not demonstrate in-group/out-group effects that provide as valid a test of TDT's assertions of salient group perceptions.
3. Each of the four conditions sustained failure rates of about 6% in their respective manipulation check. Here is the breakdown of those filtered out who failed that manipulation check, based on their treatment condition: 6.39% of the participants randomly assigned to the Democratic politician Dodge condition failed, 6.95% randomly assigned to the Democratic politician No-Dodge condition failed, 6.39% in the Republican politician Dodge condition failed, and 5.46% in the Republican politician No-Dodge failed.

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Author Biography

David E. Clementson (PhD, The Ohio State University) is an assistant professor in the Department of Communication Studies at California State University, Sacramento. His research examines public figures dodging questions. Formerly a professional journalist, political campaign manager, and public relations director, he has run successful campaigns for Democrats and Republicans.