

In this study, reading level of articles and candidates featured in the articles were treated as within-subject variables, and the source of the story between-subjects.

Each participant reads eight stories, two each of high and low reading level per candidate. However, to examine effects of media brands and reader bias, we manipulate the source attributed to the story, building off Baum’s research in media brands and television reporting [8].

All eight stories in this study were in fact written by the Associated Press, however, readers are divided into four groups receiving different labels. In group A, readers were shown the headline and text of the story with no other context. In group B, readers were additionally shown that the story was from the Associated Press (true label). In groups C and D, readers were shown that the story was from CNN and Fox News, respectively.

CNN and Fox News were chosen as they are the two outlets most popularly referenced for news about government and politics, yet show disparity in the political leanings of their audience. News consumers who were surveyed as having “consistently conservative” political values named Fox News as their number one source of political information; on the other hand, CNN ranks as the number one outlet for those left of the political spectrum [27].

This setup was created to eliminate some of the confounding effects from using stories from different sources (writing style, focus of content, slant, etc.), while directly observing the effect of revealing a specific source to the reader. The Associated Press was chosen as the source of the stories as it is the highest circulation newswire service in the United States, and has 14,000 members that use its content [31]. Notably, both CNN and Fox News publish content in full or part from the Associated Press, although the specific stories chosen had not been published in full by either to avoid bias.

After each article, we ask the reader to rank the trustworthiness of the story on a