When Politics Trumps Truth: Political Concordance Versus Veracity as a Determinant of Believing, Sharing, and Recalling the News

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Resistance to truth and susceptibility to falsehood threaten democracies around the globe. The present research assesses the magnitude, manifestations, and predictors of these phenomena, while addressing methodological concerns in past research. We conducted a preregistered study with a split-sample design (discovery sample $N = 630$, validation sample $N = 1,100$) of U.S. Census-matched online adults. Proponents and opponents of 2020 U.S. presidential candidate Donald Trump were presented with fake and real political headlines ahead of the election. The political concordance of the headlines determined participants' belief in and intention to share news more than the truth of the headlines. This "concordance-over-truth" bias persisted across education levels, analytic reasoning ability, and partisan groups, with some evidence of a stronger effect among Trump supporters. Resistance to true news was stronger than susceptibility to fake news. The most robust predictors of the bias were participants' belief in the relative objectivity of their political side, extreme views about Trump, and the extent of their one-sided media consumption. Interestingly, participants stronger in analytic reasoning, measured with the Cognitive Reflection Task, were more accurate in discerning real from fake headlines when accurate conclusions aligned with their ideology. Finally, participants remembered fake headlines more than real ones regardless of the political concordance of the news story. Discussion explores why the concordance-over-truth bias observed in our study is more pronounced than previous research suggests, and examines its causes, consequences, and potential remedies.

Public Significance Statement
The present work highlights a disconcerting phenomenon: The political alignment of news can overshadow its truth in influencing public belief and information sharing. In contrast to previous studies, the present research found that proponents and opponents of 2020 U.S. presidential candidate Donald Trump were more influenced by the alignment of news with their political views than by its factual accuracy. This effect was driven more by resistance to true news than susceptibility to fake news—a finding that holds special relevance amid prevalent mistrust of science and electoral processes. The "illusion of objectivity" emerged as a key predictor, indicating that partisans who believed their political side was relatively unbiased and objective were, ironically, the most biased and least objective. The findings underscore the need for interventions that teach people to think critically not only about the news but also about the workings of their own minds.

Keywords: fake news, partisan bias, confirmation bias, objectivity illusion, cognitive reflection

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Healthy democracies require informed citizens, agreement on facts, and trust in elections—a foundation increasingly eroded by susceptibility to misinformation and resistance to the truth (Ecker et al., 2024; Kuklinski et al., 2000; Van Bavel et al., 2021; Van der Linden, 2023). The proliferation of fake news, along with growing distrust in science, also exacerbates public health crises (Roozenbeek et al., 2020; Suarez-Lledo & Alvarez-Galvez, 2021). Compounding the problem, people tend to share (Vosoughi et al., 2018) and remember (Heath et al., 2001; Hendersen & Clark, 2007) fake news more than real news, increasing its prevalence and impact (though see Altay et al., 2023). With more close elections and global challenges on the horizon, the importance of reliable information and a public's ability to assess it objectively are paramount. However, addressing this problem requires a clear understanding of its gravity, which remains unclear in controlled scientific research (Pennycook & Rand, 2021a).

To fill this gap, the present research builds upon the valuable contributions of previous studies in this field, addresses methodological concerns in past research, and explores new dimensions of the misinformation problem. Our objectives are threefold: (1) to deepen our understanding of the scope and severity of nonnormative judgments of news (i.e., those that are inaccurate and politically biased) in the context of the 2020 U.S. presidential election campaign; (2) to illuminate subtleties of the problem, such as the relative importance of susceptibility to fake news versus resistance to true news; and (3) to identify factors that predict the degree to which people's beliefs and sharing of news are influenced more by its political concordance than its factual accuracy.

Classic research in social and cognitive psychology suggests one set of conditions under which people will be susceptible to political fake news: when it confirms their political beliefs and desires (Bastardi et al., 2011; Kunda, 1990; Lord et al., 1979; Nickerson, 1998; Nisbett & Ross, 1980). Additionally, people may resist true news when it disconfirms their political beliefs and desires (Ditto & Lopez, 1992; Edwards & Smith, 1996; Taber & Lodge, 2006). The combination of these two tendencies comprises what some researchers have called *partisan bias*, or the degree to which people believe, share, and remember news concordant with their political beliefs more than news discordant with their political beliefs, regardless of the news' truthfulness (Batailler et al., 2022).

Other researchers refer to this phenomenon as the "effect of political concordance," contending that accepting new information consistent with prior beliefs and ideologies—or resisting new information inconsistent with prior beliefs and ideologies—is not necessarily an error or a motivated bias in judgment (Druckman & McGrath, 2019; Pennycook & Rand, 2021a, p. 725). For instance, people may be more inclined to believe politically concordant news due to the increased processing fluency that results from repeated exposure to ideologically familiar information (Pennycook et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2016). In our view, bias does not equate to a "mistake." Rather, it signifies an evaluative tendency, without any prejudgment as to whether that tendency is accurate or inaccurate. We thus use the terms "partisan bias" and "the effect of political concordance" interchangeably.

Although researchers do not dispute the existence of the effect of political concordance, they debate its importance and size relative to the effect of headline truth (Altay et al., 2023; Gawronski, 2021; Pennycook & Rand, 2021b). This debate has implications for both theory and intervention. One camp argues that partisan bias is a

major concern (e.g., Gawronski, 2021). This view is supported by studies that have found an effect of political concordance on the perceived veracity (Gawronski et al., 2023; Kim et al., 2019; Pennycook & Rand, 2021b; Van Bavel & Pereira, 2018), sharing (Ceylan et al., 2023; Marie et al., 2020; Osmundsen et al., 2021), and memory (Calvillo et al., 2023; Greene et al., 2021; Meffert et al., 2006) of news.

In contrast, another camp of researchers claims, "politics does not trump truth" (Pennycook & Rand, 2021a, p. 390). Across many studies, they find the effect of the veracity of the news to be over four times greater than the effect of political concordance on participants' belief in news (Pennycook & Rand, 2021a). However, these past studies tend to share methodological limitations that the present research remedies. First, these past studies heighten participants' attention to truth by alerting them to the study's focus on accuracy. For example, before viewing news headlines, participants are informed that the researchers "are interested in how accurate you think the headline is" (exact wording varies by study; e.g., Bago et al., 2020; Martel et al., 2020; Pennycook et al., 2021). Such accuracy prompts and the lack of a cover story may lead participants to concentrate more on the veracity of news headlines than they would in everyday life. This approach may also introduce experimenter demand (Aronson et al., 1990). Indeed, past research has shown that prompting people to think about accuracy increases their tendency to share true news over fake news by increasing the importance of accuracy in their deliberation process (Arechar et al., 2023; Lin et al., 2023; Pennycook & Rand, 2022).

A second limitation of these past studies is their inclusion of political headlines that are sometimes ambiguous in partisan valence, potentially attenuating the effect of political concordance. For example, in one study, the headlines "Trump to Ban All TV Shows that Promote Gay Activity" and "Sarah Palin Calls to Boycott Mall of America Because 'Santa Was Always White in the Bible'" were categorized as concordant with Democratic ideology, reflecting Democrats' unfavorable perceptions of the positions of these political figures (Pennycook & Rand, 2019b). However, these headlines could also resonate with Republicans' ideology, as they align with their favorable perceptions of the positions of the same political figures. This ambiguity may dilute the manipulation of headline political concordance, weakening partisan bias.

A third limitation arises from the fact that many past studies specify the actual online source of the presented news stories (e.g., CNN.COM). This practice could bolster accuracy effects, as credible sources are more likely to disseminate truthful news, and participants may recognize the credibility of the source and factor it into their judgments of news veracity (see Hovland & Weiss, 1951).

To address these limitations, the present research implements a cover storys—to shift attention away from accuracy motives—in which the study is framed as focused on memory, alongside accompanying foil questions about each headline. We use political headlines that clearly align with only one of the ideological leanings of the two main partisan groups featured in our research—supporters and opponents of presidential candidate Donald Trump. No source information was provided in our news stimuli, allowing us to isolate participants' judgments of news content independent of their trust in various media outlets.

To definitively compare the effects of headline truth and political concordance, researchers would ideally randomly select news stories from the entire universe to obtain representative samples of

true versus fake, and politically concordant versus discordant, news stories. Without this approach, the impact of manipulating headline truth and political concordance would be subject to various idiosyncratic stimulus properties, such as the extremity of claims and the salience of political cues. However, this approach poses formidable practical challenges, and even then, methodological issues would arise. Using past headlines would introduce confounding factors related to prior exposure to the news (e.g., repeated exposure, refuted news), which could obscure effect size estimates of headline truth and political concordance.

We took a different tack to probe the relative effect sizes of truth and political concordance. We conducted a study in the "demonstration tradition" of psychology (L. Ross & Nisbett, 2011), which, though not without limitations (Debrouwere & Rosseel, 2022), can illuminate the strength of a previously underappreciated variable. The objective is to compare the impact of one manipulated independent variable with the impact of another whose intuitive significance is readily appreciated. Our study introduces newly crafted fake news stories, some of which are exceptionally outlandish. The key question is how the effect of headline political concordance compares to the effect of a "large" manipulation of headline veracity. In other words, which factor holds more sway on participants' judgments of news veracity and their intentions to share this news: whether the headline was outlandishly false or not, or whether it aligned with their political views? Studies can provide insights into the relative power of independent variables when the effect of one manipulation is demonstrated to be substantial compared to another "intuitively large" variable (L. Ross & Nisbett, 2011; see also Cohen, 2003).

Beyond debating the magnitude of effects of headline truth relative to political concordance, researchers also contest the importance of partisan bias in the study of belief in misinformation, regardless of its effect size. For instance, some researchers suggest that focusing on partisan bias is less important than understanding people's general ability to "discern truth from falsehood," regardless of its political concordance (Pennycook & Rand, 2021a, p. 725). We assess whether the effect of political concordance is a key variable to focus on in addition to this ability. Imagine a scenario involving a social issue and news stimuli, in which the effect of political concordance is found to equal or surpass that of headline truth. In this case, people will tend to believe in fake news that aligns with their political beliefs over true news that is discordant with their political views—even when the effects of headline truth are positive and strong. This propensity would erode consensus on facts and intensify polarization.

Given the gravity of the problem, it is important to assess the magnitude of the various influences on nonnormative judgments of news veracity. This research investigates the effects of headline truth and political concordance both separately and comparatively, featuring a unified *concordance-over-truth bias* measure. We calculate this measure by subtracting the effect of truth (i.e., accuracy) from the effect of political concordance (i.e., partisan bias). This measure gauges the extent to which the political alignment of news overrides its veracity in influencing people's belief and likelihood of sharing news. Our research also disentangles two distinct yet important phenomena: the susceptibility to misinformation and the denial of truth (see Kahn-Harris, 2018; Philipp-Muller et al., 2022). Little scholarly attention has been given to comparing these components of partisan bias—that is, the acceptance of politically convenient falsehoods versus the denial

of politically inconvenient truths. To address this issue, we isolate the effects of political concordance for both fake news and real news.

Another aim of our research is to identify predictors of nonnormative beliefs in and intentions to share political news. On the one hand, some researchers and commentators argue that the problem originates in particular political ideologies (Sullivan, 2010). For example, political conservatism is associated with a higher susceptibility to misinformation (Calvillo et al., 2020; Roozenbeek et al., 2022) and increased self-exposure to fake online news and willingness to share it (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; A. Guess, Nagler, & Tucker, 2019; Pereira et al., 2023; Rao et al., 2022), particularly among conservatives low in trait conscientiousness (Lawson & Kakkar, 2022). Conservatism is also associated with greater distrust in mainstream media (Van der Linden et al., 2020) and poorer discernment of real from fake news (Garrett & Bond, 2021; Pennycook & Rand, 2019b), including apolitical news (Pereira et al., 2023). Furthermore, political conservatism correlates with individual difference variables that may increase nonnormative veracity judgments of news, including less tolerance of ambiguity and uncertainty, less integrative complexity, and a stronger motive to justify the status quo (Jost et al., 2003). On the other hand, some research finds that liberals and conservatives exhibit similar levels of confirmation bias (Ditto et al., 2019), dismissiveness in response to ideologically uncongenial scientific research (Nisbet et al., 2015), and derogation of political outgroups and favoritism toward political ingroups (Brandt et al., 2014; Schwalbe et al., 2020). Researchers and commentators also suggest that it is not just ideology that matters but the extremity of one's ideology (A. Guess, Nagler, & Tucker, 2019; Imhoff et al., 2022; Pomerantz et al., 1995; Pretus et al., 2023; Schwalbe et al., 2020).

A lack of formal education may also predict susceptibility to misinformation (Delmastro & Paciello, 2022; Scherer et al., 2021). Relatedly, a tendency to engage in shallow cognitive processing—as measured by the Cognitive Reflection Test—has been shown to correlate with a reduced ability to discern true from fake news (Ahmed & Tan, 2022; Erlich et al., 2023; Maertens et al., 2024; Pennycook & Rand, 2021b). However, some studies suggest that cognitive reflection does not consistently predict a lower likelihood of sharing fake news (Osmundsen et al., 2021), only weakly correlates with resisting political misinformation (Roozenbeek et al., 2022), and, under certain conditions, may predict greater confirmation bias in the evaluation of political information (Kahan, 2013).

To try to reconcile these contradictory findings, we assess the predictive power of political ideology, political extremism, educational attainment, and cognitive reflection. We also assessed additional variables that research suggested might predict partisan bias. One variable emerged as predictive in an initial discovery sample and motivated our preregistration: the *objectivity illusion*, measured here as the extent to which people believe in the objectivity of their own political side relative to the other side (Gilovich & Ross, 2015; Pronin & Hazel, 2023; Schwalbe et al., 2020). Previous research hints at, but does not confirm, the role of the objectivity illusion in nonnormative veracity judgments of the news. For example, two related constructs—intellectual humility and the ability to consider the views of one's adversaries (i.e., actively open-minded thinking)—have each been found to correlate with less belief in fake news (Bowes & Tasimi, 2022; Maertens et al., 2024; Marie & Petersen, 2022; Roozenbeek et al., 2022).

Additionally, participants overconfident in their ability to distinguish real and fake news expressed a greater likelihood to share fake politically concordant news on social media (Lyons et al., 2021). Finally, the same measure of objectivity illusion used here was found to predict confirmation bias in the 2016 presidential election (Schwalbe et al., 2020). We summarize the other predictors assessed on an exploratory basis in the Method section.

In the current research, on a confirmatory basis, we thus had several focused predictions: (1) participants will exhibit partisan bias in their judgments of the perceived truth or veracity of news and their desire to share it, and (2) the objectivity illusion will predict the tendency for political concordance to influence veracity judgments more than headline truth (i.e., the concordance-over-truth bias). Additionally, based on analyses of our discovery sample and suggestive but not definitive past research (Heath et al., 2001; Hendersen & Clark, 2007), we predicted (3) that participants will recall more fake than real political news headlines. In light of theory, and societal concerns about the polarizing effect of fake news, our research also assessed (4) whether exposure to fake political news—as opposed to exposure exclusively to real political news—intensifies polarization between the two partisan groups in their views of Trump (A. M. Guess et al., 2023). Although this hypothesis did not receive consistent support in our study, it was based on the possibility that partisans, interpreting extreme fake news in alignment with their perceptions of Trump, might strengthen in their views of Trump—a phenomenon of attitude polarization found in past research (Lord et al., 1979; cf. A. M. Guess & Coppock, 2020).

On an exploratory basis, we (1) compare the effect of headline political concordance with the effect of headline truth, each of which is independently manipulated on a within-subjects' basis; (2) compare the degree to which participants believe politically convenient fake news versus resist politically inconvenient true news; (3) test additional predictors of nonnormative news judgments (e.g., one-sided news consumption); and (4) assess the correlation between cognitive reflection and the tendency to discern real from fake news under two key conditions—one where accuracy leads to ideologically concordant conclusions and another in which it leads to ideologically discordant conclusions.

Method

Transparency and Openness

We report how we determined our sample size, all data exclusions, all manipulations, and all measures in the study (Simmons et al., 2012). All research materials, data files, and R scripts can be found on the Open Science Framework (OSF) at https://osf.io/4kwmf. The study's hypotheses and analyses were preregistered after data collection and prior to analysis of the data. Our discovery sample preregistration can be found on OSF at https://osf.io/n4wfm. Our validation sample preregistration can be found on OSF at https://osf.io/4euyf. Data were analyzed using R, Version 4.1.0 (R Core Team, 2021). For within-subjects analyses, Cohen's d_z effect sizes, signified as d, were calculated using the effectsize package (Ben-Shachar et al., 2020). Mixed effects models were analyzed using functions in the lme4 package (Bates et al., 2015) and the lmerTest package (Kuznetsova et al., 2017).

Participants

We recruited 2,180 participants on Lucid between January 31 and February 17, 2020, about 9 months before the 2020 U.S. presidential election. Lucid, an online aggregator of survey respondents from multiple sources (Coppock & McClellan, 2019), used quota sampling across gender, age, race, ethnicity, income, education, and geographic region to recruit a U.S. Census-matched sample of participants. A priori, we excluded 371 participants for failing attention checks ($n = 331$) and completing the survey on a mobile phone ($n = 40$) consistent with our preregistration.[1] The sample was still matched to the U.S. Census after exclusions. This left a final sample of 1,808 participants ($M_{age} = 48.19$ years, $SD = 16.71$; 54.3% female, 45.7% male; *race:* 1.8% American Indian or Alaska Native, 7.0% Asian, 12.6% Black or African American, 0.6% Pacific Islander, 72.0% White, 5.9% other race; *ethnicity:* 87.2% not Hispanic, 12.8% Hispanic; 70.4% no bachelor's degree, 29.6% bachelor's degree; 37.6% support Trump, 52.3% oppose Trump, 10.1% neither support nor oppose Trump).

Participants were randomized in a 4:1 ratio (evenly presented) such that 1,445 were allocated to a fake + real news condition, and 363 were allocated to a real news-only control condition (discussed below). Exposure to the fake + real news condition versus the real news-only control condition did not significantly impact attention check performance, $OR = 1.03$, 95% CI [0.77, 1.35], $z = 0.18$, $p = .858$. Sample characteristics were balanced across conditions (see Supplemental Table S1). The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at Stanford University.

Split-Sample Approach

After data collection, but before any data analysis, we preregistered a split-sample procedure (Anderson & Magruder, 2017; Fafchamps & Labonne, 2016) and divided the final sample of 1,808 participants into a discovery sample (35%, $N = 632$) and a hold-out validation sample (65%, $N = 1,176$) using stratified randomization by condition and demographic factors with an R script we created ahead of time from simulated data (https://osf.io/8axcz). We chose this 35%/65% split to optimize statistical power and minimize false discoveries (Anderson & Magruder, 2017). This approach allowed us, first, to explore the discovery sample to identify novel hypotheses and, second, to run confirmatory tests of these hypotheses using a preregistered analysis plan on the hold-out validation sample. We conducted additional nonregistered analyses in our validation sample to explore the robustness and nuance of these effects, which we specify as exploratory.

A comparison of the demographic characteristics of these two samples after exclusions with the U.S. Census is displayed in Table 1. Both samples were generally consistent with the demographics of the U.S. Census, with no characteristic differing by more than five percentage points. A breakdown of the party affiliation by stance on Trump for each sample is also included in Supplemental Table S2. The final validation sample provided 80% power to detect a within-subjects standardized effect size (Cohen's d) of $d = 0.08$ and a

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[1] We asked Lucid to screen out participants completing the study on their mobile phone because the news headline visuals were difficult to read on mobile phone devices. Our final sample of 1,808 was higher than our target of 1,544 because Lucid needed to recruit more participants than expected to fill our predesignated U.S. census representativeness criteria.

Table 1
Demographic Characteristics Compared to the U.S. Census

Variable	U.S. Census	Discovery sample	Validation sample
Sample (*N*)		632	1,176
Gender			
Female	51.5%	54.4%	54.3%
Male	48.5%	45.6%	45.7%
Age (years)			
18–24	12.8%	9.2%	8.6%
25–34	17.9%	16.0%	16.9%
35–44	17.6%	18.8%	17.7%
45–54	19.4%	18.5%	18.2%
55–64	15.4%	16.1%	17.4%
Over 65	16.8%	21.4%	21.1%
Race			
Black	12.3%	12.7%	12.6%
Other	15.3%	15.9%	15.1%
White	72.4%	71.4%	72.4%
Ethnicity			
Hispanic	13.9%	13.2%	12.6%
Not Hispanic	86.1%	86.8%	87.4%
Income			
Less than 25k	25.0%	22.9%	24.8%
25k–50k	25.2%	29.4%	26.8%
50k–75k	18.1%	20.0%	22.4%
75k–100k	11.5%	11.6%	10.7%
100k+	20.2%	16.2%	15.3%
Education			
Bachelor's	27.3%	29.6%	29.6%
No bachelor's	72.7%	70.4%	70.4%
Region			
Midwest	21.7%	22.5%	22.3%
Northeast	18.0%	19.0%	18.7%
South	36.9%	35.4%	36.0%
West	23.4%	23.0%	23.0%
Partisanship			
Support Trump		37.3%	37.7%
Oppose Trump		50.3%	53.4%
Neither		12.3%	8.9%

Note. 2010 U.S. Census targets sourced from "Age and Sex Composition in the United States: 2010," by U.S. Census Bureau, 2010, U.S. Department of Commerce (https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2010/demo/age-and-sex/2010-age-sex-composition.html), and "The White Population: 2010 [2010 Census Briefs]," by L. Hixson, B. B. Hepler, and M. O. Kim, 2011, U.S. Census Bureau (https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2011/dec/c2010br-05.pdf). In the public domain.

between-subjects effect size of $d = 0.20$, with an α of .05 (two-tailed). These minimum detectable effect sizes were consistent with our within-subjects target of $d = 0.11$ and between-subjects target of $d = 0.20$ that we had used to determine our sample size.

Materials, Design, and Procedure

The survey was designed using Qualtrics online survey software (https://www.qualtrics.com; median duration = 21.32 min). A flowchart of the study procedures is presented in Figure 1. Participants were invited to participate in a study on "memory and everyday communications." They were informed that the study would involve reading news headlines and answering related questions, followed by questions regarding their recall of these headlines. The purpose of this cover story—specifically its deliberate omission of any mention of the participants' accuracy—was to conceal our primary hypotheses. This was done to minimize an artificial emphasis on accuracy and to reduce experimental demand. It also aimed to diminish self-presentation and social desirability biases that might otherwise obscure the phenomenon under investigation (Aronson et al., 1990). After providing informed consent, participants were told it was very important that they read the headlines and accompanying sentences in their entirety. To increase participants' engagement during the study, they were asked if they could commit to doing this and to refrain from the use of memory aids. All participants made the commitment and were allowed to participate in the study.

The survey presented participants with 16 news headlines sequentially in random order, including eight political headlines related to Donald Trump and eight nonpolitical filler headlines. Half the political headlines were positive for Trump (e.g., "Donald Trump 'Serious Contender' for Nobel Prize in Economics"), and half were negative for Trump (e.g., "Trump's Former Accountant: Trump is Not a Billionaire"). In order to test whether the exposure to fake news might deepen partisan divisions, we included two between-subjects conditions, one that included fake and real news ("fake + real news" condition) and another that included only real news ("real news-only control" condition). In the fake + real news condition (80% of participants), half of the political headlines were fake, and half were real. In the real news-only control condition (20% of participants), all eight political headlines were real. The experiment thus featured a 2 (headline veracity: fake vs. real) × 2 (headline favorability: positive for Trump vs. negative for Trump) × 2 (condition: fake + real news vs. real news-only control) mixed design. Headline veracity and headline favorability were manipulated within-subjects, while condition was manipulated between-subjects. All within-subjects analyses were conducted in the fake + real news condition.

The headlines were displayed in a large font and were accompanied by captions ranging from 32 to 71 words in length (collectively referred to as "headlines"). The headline and caption stimuli can be found in Supplemental Table S3. They varied in font size and style to create the impression that they were drawn from varied news outlets. The real partisan headlines were actual articles pulled from reputable news sources (e.g., Washington Post, Reuters, CNN) that were common in the news at the time related to popular factual topics (e.g., stock market returns, job numbers, poll numbers, policy announcements) and were fact-checked to confirm their veracity. Half of these real headlines (Level 1) were selected to be clearly true. The other half of the real headlines (Level 2) were selected to be true, but less obviously so. The fake headlines were created by the authors to ensure respondents had not seen them before. Half of these fake headlines (Level 3) were created to be clearly fake, but not outrageously so (e.g., "Free Stay for Veterans at Trump Hotel in Washington, DC," "Trump Said I 'Don't Like Poor People' During Private Meeting with Business Moguls"). The other half of the fake headlines (Level 4) were designed to be outlandishly fake (e.g., "Trump Beats Grandmaster Chess Champion Magnus Carlsen," "Donald Trump Killed Pedestrian While Driving in 1973"). The eight nonpolitical filler headlines were all real headlines that went viral in 2016 and 2017.

In the fake + real news condition, each of the eight presented political headlines corresponded to one of eight categories (i.e., the four levels each of the pro-Trump and anti-Trump headlines). For each of these eight categories, one headline was randomly drawn among three possibilities. Thus, we had a total stimuli bank for this

Figure 1
Flowchart of Study Procedures
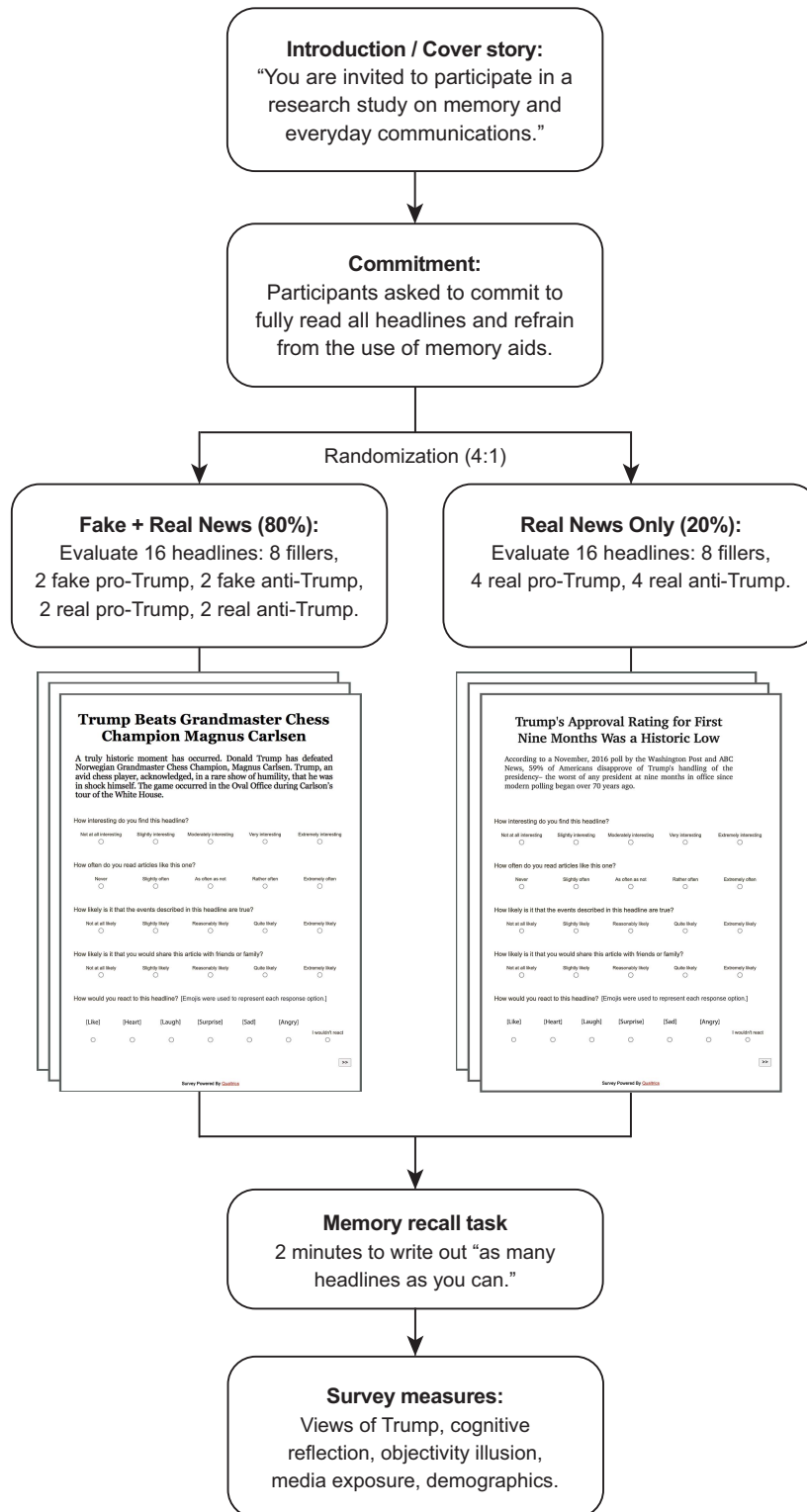
Note. See the online article for the color version of this figure.

condition of 24 political headlines (three headlines within each of the eight categories). In the real news-only control condition, each of the eight political headlines was randomly drawn from the same larger bank, but only real headlines were selected. Mixed in with these political headlines were the eight neutral headlines, which were identical for all participants.

The 16 news headlines were individually presented alongside five questions about the participants' impressions of the respective headline, in part to uphold the cover story that their impressions of the article might affect their subsequent memory. After rating the last headline, participants completed a memory recall task and then completed a series of survey items measuring various constructs that might either be predictive of participants' responses or be affected by the between-subjects manipulation, as well as demographic information including age, gender, race, ethnicity, income, and education (see survey materials on OSF at https://osf.io/4kwmf for the presentation order of all items). For counterbalancing survey items that were partisan in nature (i.e., items that referred to Trump, his supporters and opponents, political parties, or partisan media), the political side mentioned first varied on a random basis.

Measures

Stance on Trump

To determine our two partisan groups, as per the preregistration, participants' stance on Donald Trump was measured near the end of the survey with the question, "How much do you oppose or support Donald Trump?" (1 = oppose a great deal, 4 = neither oppose nor support, 7 = support a great deal). Responses were not significantly affected by condition in either sample (discovery: $d = 0.12$, 95% CI [−0.07, 0.32]; validation: $d = -0.09$, 95% CI [−0.23, 0.06]). We categorized participants as "Trump supporters" if they rated themselves above 4, as "Trump opposers" if they rated themselves as below 4, and as "Neutral" if they rated themselves at 4. This item

served as our measure of partisan stance and was directly relevant to the Trump-focused content of the news headlines.

Ratings of Headlines

Headlines were categorized as "concordant" if they were consistent with participants' stance on Trump (e.g., headlines that were positive for Trump if the participant was pro-Trump) and "discordant" if they conflicted with participants' stance on Trump (e.g., headlines that were negative for Trump if the participant was pro-Trump). Participants rated each headline on five attributes. Of primary interest to the present research, participants rated both how likely it was "that the events described in this headline are true" and how likely they were to "share the article with friends or family" (both items: 1 = not at all likely, 5 = extremely likely). We created multiple within-subjects outcome measures based on these two items, summarized in Table 2.

Effect of Political Concordance (i.e., Partisan Bias). We calculated the effect of political concordance, or participants' degree of partisan bias, by subtracting each participant's mean veracity rating of ideologically discordant headlines from their mean veracity rating of ideologically concordant headlines. In signal detection theory, this measure is conceptually similar to having a lower response bias criterion (c)—that is, a lower threshold and, consequently, a greater likelihood to indicate that a headline is true—for politically concordant headlines (Stanislaw & Todorov, 1999).

Effect of Truth (i.e., Accuracy). We calculated the effect of truth, or a measure of accurate truth discernment, by subtracting each participant's mean veracity rating of fake headlines from their mean veracity ratings of real headlines. This measure is conceptually similar to discrimination sensitivity (d') in signal detection theory (Stanislaw & Todorov, 1999).

Concordance-Over-Truth Bias. We created a composite measure of participants' degree of concordance-over-truth bias by subtracting, for each participant, the effect of headline truth

Table 2
Summary of Measures Computed From Ratings of Headlines

Index	Computation	Possible range	Direction
Effect of political concordance (i.e., partisan bias)	Concordant minus discordant headlines: (CF, CR) − (DF, DR)	−4 to 4	Higher = tendency to rate ideologically concordant headlines as more likely to be true than ideologically discordant headlines.
Effect of truth (i.e., accuracy)	Real minus fake headlines: (CR, DR) − (CF, DF)	−4 to 4	Higher = tendency to rate real headlines as more likely to be true than fake headlines (i.e., to accurately discern real news from fake news).
Concordance-over-truth bias	Effect of political concordance minus effect of truth: [(CF, CR) − (DF, DR)] − [(CR, DR) − (CF, DF)] = When cancel out terms equivalent to: CF − DR	−4 to 4	Higher = tendency to be influenced more by political concordance than truth; to exhibit more partisan bias and less accuracy (i.e., to rate concordant fake headlines as more likely to be true than discordant real headlines).
Susceptibility to fake partisan news	Concordant fake minus discordant fake headlines: CF − DF	−4 to 4	Higher = tendency to rate concordant fake news as more likely to be true than discordant fake news.
Resistance to true partisan news	Concordant real minus discordant real headlines: CR − DR	−4 to 4	Higher scores = tendency to rate discordant real news as less likely to be true than concordant real news.

Note. Measures of ratings of headline veracity (1 = not at all likely, 5 = extremely likely) were analyzed within-subjects in the fake + real news condition. CF = concordant fake headlines; CR = concordant real headlines; DF = discordant fake headlines; DR = discordant real headlines.

(i.e., accuracy) from the effect of headline political concordance (i.e., partisan bias). Our measure of concordance-over-truth bias assesses the extent to which participants are more influenced by the partisan alignment of the news than by its factual accuracy. This measure of concordance-over-truth bias is mathematically equivalent to subtracting each participant's mean veracity rating of real discordant headlines from their mean veracity rating of fake concordant headlines.

Susceptibility to Fake News. To explore the key components of partisan bias, we calculated two subbiases often entangled in most other research studies. The first is susceptibility to fake partisan news, or the tendency to accept fake political news supportive of one's beliefs relative to fake news that is not. This measure reflects the degree to which people accept false evidence more when it confirms rather than disconfirms their beliefs—a form of gullibility. We measured susceptibility to fake partisan news by subtracting veracity ratings of fake, ideologically discordant headlines from veracity ratings of fake, ideologically concordant headlines. Higher scores on this measure represent a greater tendency to accept convenient falsehoods, rating concordant fake news as more likely to be true than discordant fake news. Hereinafter, we refer to this as *susceptibility to fake news*.

Resistance to True News. The second subcomponent of partisan bias is resistance to true partisan news, or the tendency to be skeptical of true political news that contradicts one's beliefs relative to true news that does not. This measure reflects the degree to which people resist true news more if it disconfirms rather than confirms their beliefs—a form of closed-mindedness. We measure resistance to true partisan news by subtracting veracity ratings of real, ideologically discordant headlines from veracity ratings of real, ideologically concordant headlines. Higher scores on this measure represent a greater tendency to deny inconvenient truths, rating discordant real news as less likely to be true than concordant real news. Hereinafter, we refer to this as *resistance to true news*.

Sharing. For participants' ratings of how likely they would be to share the article, we created parallel outcome measures using the same calculations.

Filler Items to Mitigate Suspicions. Three additional questions for each headline were included to help mitigate suspicions and also provide controls in one exploratory analysis. Participants rated how interesting they found each headline (1 = *not at all interesting*, 5 = *extremely interesting*), how often they read articles similar to the presented headline (1 = *never*, 5 = *extremely often*), and how they would react online to the headline, with six emoji options.

Recall of Headlines

After viewing and rating all 16 headlines, participants were given 2 min to complete a memory task to both reinforce the study's cover story and provide data to test whether some types of headlines were recalled better than others. For the task, participants were instructed to "Please now write as many headlines as you can. If you can't remember the exact wording, please try your best to recall the facts stated in the headlines as accurately as possible." Participants' responses were coded with a natural language processing (NLP) algorithm we created (available at https://osf.io/2874q) to determine whether each headline was recalled or not. We developed this NLP algorithm based on iterative training for accuracy detection, correlating a subset (N = 348) of our discovery sample with

manual coding conducted by a research assistant who was blind to experimental hypotheses. The percent agreement between the NLP script and the manually coded recall responses was 97.55%, and the Cohen's κ was 0.94.

Potential Predictors

Objectivity Illusion and Bias Blindspot. To test whether participants' perceptions of their relative objectivity and bias predicted their actual biases in judgments of veracity and sharing of news, we included an *objectivity illusion* measure (adapted from Schwalbe et al., 2020) and *bias blindspot* measure (Pronin et al., 2002) after the headlines and memory task. Our objectivity illusion scale had participants rate the extent to which they believed both Trump supporters and Trump opposers were each influenced (1 = *not at all influenced*, 7 = *extremely influenced*) by two normative or ideal considerations (e.g., knowledge of facts and history) and two nonnormative factors or biases (e.g., misinformation) and subtracting, for each participant, the mean of the two nonnormative influences (all $\alpha s > .83$) from the mean of the two normative influences (all $\alpha s > .76$) for political allies minus adversaries. Our measure of bias blindspot had participants indicate the extent to which they believed their own position on Donald Trump had been influenced (1 = *not at all influenced*, 7 = *extremely influenced*) by both a normative consideration (knowledge of facts and history) and nonnormative bias (propaganda). We then subtracted, for each participant, ratings of the nonnormative influence from the normative one.

Media Consumption. We included measures of one-sided radio consumption, television and online news consumption, and trust in media, as well as a measure of social media consumption to explore their associations with nonnormative news judgments. Composite measures were computed in accordance with our preregistration.

One-Sided Radio Consumption. Participants were asked to rate how many days in a typical week they listened to (a) relatively conservative radio shows or podcasts (e.g., Rush Limbaugh, Sean Hannity, Glenn Beck, Alex Jones) and (b) relatively liberal radio shows or podcasts (e.g., NPR, Pod Save America, This American Life, The Daily). We subtracted ratings of liberal from conservative radio consumption for Trump supporters, and subtracted ratings of conservative from liberal radio consumption for Trump opposers, such that our composite measured the degree to which participants engaged in one-sided radio consumption aligned with their ideological beliefs.

One-Sided Television and Online News Consumption. Participants were asked to rate how many hours per day they spent watching or browsing Fox News, CNN, MSNBC, and other news sources. Our goal was to assess the degree to which participants consumed news from sources concordant with their partisan views compared to sources discordant with their partisan views or from more neutral sources such as Yahoo. Admittedly, what constitutes "neutral" is a judgment call; however, researchers have been able to categorize some news sources as more liberal, others as more conservative, with still others falling midway between (e.g., Tyler et al., 2022). To quantify partisan bias in news consumption, as specified in our preregistration, we first calculated two quantities: the total number of hours spent consuming news from ideologically aligned sources (e.g., Fox News for a Trump supporter) and the total

number of hours spent consuming news from ideologically opposing sources (e.g., MSNBC for a Trump supporter). Both quantities were doubled to give greater weight to these partisan sources in the composite compared to neutral news sources. We chose to double the hours spent on partisan media—as opposed to other multipliers, such as 1.5× or 3×—because doubling seemed to be the most intuitive and straightforward approach. The measure of consumption of opposing news sources was then subtracted from the sum of two variables: consumption of aligned news sources and consumption of neutral news sources. As prespecified, all three quantities were first Winsorized before conducting these computations. Observations above the 95th percentile threshold were set to the 95th percentile value, and observations below the fifth percentile threshold were set to the fifth percentile value.

One-Sided Media Trust. Participants were asked to imagine that a natural disaster occurred in the United States and to indicate how much they would trust coverage and advice from two news sources—Fox News and MSNBC (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *a great deal*). We included this measure of media trust about a nonpartisan event to reduce confounding associated with participants' preference for politically congenial news. A one-sided media trust composite was calculated by subtracting trust in MSNBC from trust in Fox News for Trump supporters, and vice versa for Trump opposers.

Social Media Consumption. Participants were asked to rate how many hours per day they spent on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Reddit, and other platforms. A social media consumption composite was created for each participant by summing the total number of hours they spent across all social media platforms. We then Winsorized the total such that observations greater than the 95th percentile were set to the value at the 95th percentile, and observations less than the fifth percentile were set to the value at the fifth percentile.

Cognitive Reflection. We included the validated four-item nonnumeric Cognitive Reflection Test (CRT; Thomson & Oppenheimer, 2016) to explore whether scores on this test predicted accuracy and partisan bias in judgments of news veracity, building on the work of Pennycook and Rand (2019b). Cognitive reflection assesses the tendency to override an incorrect heuristic response with a more deliberate correct answer. For example, although the quick intuitive answer to "A farmer had 15 sheep and all but 8 died. How many are left?" is 7, further reflection could lead one to the correct answer of 8. We scored the CRT by dividing the number of correct responses by the total CRT items such that higher scores represented greater cognitive reflection (*validation*: α = .58; *discovery*: α = .54). The low Cronbach's α might be attributed to the limited number of items. Other researchers, such as Pennycook, and Rand (2019b), typically include three additional reworded items to create a seven-item CRT scale. Nevertheless, our measure of cognitive reflection exhibited acceptable predictive validity; it significantly predicted the accurate discernment of truth between real and fake political headlines (*validation: r* = .07, 95% CI [.00, .13], *p* = .044; *discovery: r* = .12, 95% CI [.04, .21], *p* = .006), in line with past research (see Pennycook & Rand, 2020).

Partisan Strength. Beyond our primary measure of partisan stance, additional items were included to assess the strength of this support, namely how favorable participants' opinion was of Donald Trump (1 = *extremely unfavorable*, 7 = *extremely favorable*) and how likely they were to support Trump if he ran again in 2020 (1 = *extremely unlikely*, 7 = *extremely likely*). To explore the role of partisan strength in predicting nonnormative news judgments, we created a composite measure by taking the mean of these two items and the partisan stance measure, reverse-coded for Trump opposers (*validation*: α = .93; *discovery*: α = .92), such that higher scores represented greater partisan strength, whether participants supported or opposed Trump.

Lethal Partisanship. To explore if authoritarian partisan tendencies predicted nonnormative news judgments, we included a measure of *lethal partisanship* (adapted from Kalmoe & Mason, 2019) in which participants indicated the extent to which they thought Americans who support (or oppose) Trump should be treated like animals if they behaved badly (1 = *strongly agree*, 5 = *strongly disagree*). We computed the measure by subtracting the item assessing dehumanization of political allies from the item assessing dehumanization of political adversaries. Higher scores thus reflected a greater degree of lethal partisanship, regardless of whether participants supported or opposed Trump.

Additional Measures

Extreme Partisan Views About Trump. To test whether exposure to the fake + real news condition heightened polarization relative to the real news-only control condition (a between-subjects analysis), participants were asked to rate Donald Trump on 11 extreme attributes and potential behaviors. These items included the extent to which they thought Trump was evil, terrible, a moron, a genius, a hero, a saint (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *an enormous amount*) and likely to launch a nuclear attack, have someone killed who might testify against him, have an illicit affair with a White House intern, solve the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, and eliminate the U.S. debt (1 = *not at all likely*, 5 = *extremely likely*). Through exploratory analyses in our discovery sample, we dropped four items (moron, genius, hero, have an illicit affair). The negative Trump items were reverse-coded for Trump supporters, and the positive Trump items were reverse-coded for Trump opposers. We then *z* scored the remaining seven items because of their different number of response categories and averaged them (αs = .84). Higher scores on this composite measure thus reflected more *extreme partisan views about Trump*, whether participants supported or opposed him. This measure also served as a predictor of nonnormative news judgments.

Demographics. Participants were asked by Lucid in their standard prescreen about their race, ethnicity, gender, age, education, region, and income. For race, participants were asked what their race was, and were given 16 options to choose from, including White; Black or African American; American Indian or Alaska Native; Asian— Asian, Indian, Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, or other; Pacific Islander—Native Hawaiian, Guamanian, Samoan, or other Pacific Islander; some other race; and prefer not to answer. For ethnicity, participants were asked if they were of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin, and were provided with 16 options to choose from, including No, not of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin; Yes, Mexican, Mexican American, Chicano; Cuban; Puerto Rican; another Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin—Argentina, Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvadore, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, Spain, Venezuela, or other country; and prefer not to answer. For gender, participants were asked what their gender was, and were given two options to choose from, including male and female. For education, participants were asked what the highest level of education was that they had completed, and were provided with

12 options to choose from, ranging from third grade or less to doctorate degree. For income, participants were asked what their total household income was and were provided with 10 options to choose from, ranging from "less than $10,000" to "over $150,000." Participants were additionally asked in our Qualtrics survey about their employment status, religion, and voter registration status, all shown in the survey materials at https://osf.io/4kwmf (Schwalbe et al., 2023).

Attention Checks. Three attention checks were used throughout the survey. These included two closed-ended questions in which participants were told to select a response as part of an otherwise normal-appearing survey question (e.g., "To what extent, to check if you are paying attention, please select 'A lot' below") and the open-ended recall response question used to exclude participants who provided a nonsensical or gibberish response a priori before the data was analyzed, consistent with our preregistration.

Results

After analyzing our discovery sample, we submitted a second preregistration on OSF (https://osf.io/4euyf) for our hold-out validation sample after data collection but before any analyses were conducted on the sample. All reported results are preregistered confirmatory tests from our validation sample, unless otherwise noted, including nonsignificant effects. We include effects from the discovery sample in figures for comparison purposes (see Supplemental Material for a full account of the discovery sample analyses). In a few instances where new exploratory results were conducted in the validation sample, we specify these as such and report findings from the discovery sample retrospectively. All reported tests are two-tailed. Within-subjects analyses were conducted exclusively on participants in the fake + real news condition.

The within-subjects results from paired t tests were validated in linear mixed effects models (see Supplemental Table S4). These models incorporated the maximal random effects structures that converged and improved model fit as evidenced by log-likelihood comparison tests (Barr et al., 2013). This approach included random intercepts for subjects and headlines and, when appropriate, random slopes for participants (see Supplemental Material).

Manipulation Checks: The Effect of Headline Truth

Paired t tests revealed that participants rated real headlines ($M = 2.95$, $SD = 0.85$) as significantly more likely to be true than fake headlines ($M = 2.43$, $SD = 0.88$), $M_{\text{diff}} = 0.51$, 95% CI [0.46, 0.56], $t(935) = 20.68$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.68$. Within the fake headlines, participants rated our less outlandish fake Level 3 headlines as more likely to be true ($M = 2.77$, $SD = 0.97$) than the relatively far-fetched fake Level 4 headlines ($M = 2.10$, $SD = 1.04$), $M_{\text{diff}} = 0.67$, 95% CI [0.61, 0.74], $t(935) = 20.94$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.68$. Within the real headlines, participants did not rate our Level 1 headlines ($M = 2.93$, $SD = 0.97$)—that we had selected to be more obviously true—as more likely to be true than the Level 2 real headlines ($M = 2.96$, $SD = 0.93$), $M_{\text{diff}} = -0.04$, 95% CI [−0.09, 0.02], $t(939) = -1.36$, $p = .173$. $d = -0.04$. Thus, the effect of truth (i.e., accuracy) was greater when comparing ratings of our real headlines to our more far-fetched fake Level 4 headlines ($M_{\text{diff}} = 0.85$, $SD = 0.99$) than to our less outlandish fake Level 3 headlines ($M_{\text{diff}} = 0.17$, $SD = 0.81$), $d = 0.68$, 95% CI [0.61, 0.76], $t(936) = 26.27$, $p < .001$.

Suggesting that our manipulation of headline valence (pro- vs. anti-Trump) was not confounded with headline veracity, neutral participants across both samples (total $n = 141$ from an n of 1,445 in the fake + real news condition) did not rate positive headlines for Trump ($M = 2.55$, $SD = 0.82$) to be significantly more or less likely to be true than negative headlines for Trump ($M = 2.63$, $SD = 0.94$). This was determined using a linear mixed effects model that accounted for the sample as a random effect with random intercepts for subjects and headlines, $b = -0.087$, 95% CI [−0.35, 0.19], $t = -0.62$, $p = .539$, $d = -0.09$. All manipulation check results in our validation sample replicated in the discovery sample (see Supplemental Materials).

Veracity Judgments

One of our primary research questions pertained to the magnitude of the effect of political concordance (i.e., partisan bias) in judgments of news headline veracity. As predicted, paired t tests revealed that participants rated politically concordant headlines ($M = 3.28$, $SD = 1.00$) as more likely to be true than politically discordant headlines ($M = 2.11$, $SD = 0.98$), $M_{\text{diff}} = 1.17$, 95% CI [1.09, 1.25], $t(858) = 28.57$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.97$. In exploring the relative size of partisan bias, we found the effect of political concordance ($M_{\text{diff}} = 1.17$, $SD = 1.20$) was larger than the effect of actual headline truth ($M_{\text{diff}} = 0.51$, $SD = 0.76$)—an indication of a "concordance-over-truth" bias, $d = 0.46$, 95% CI [0.39, 0.53], $t(858) = 13.51$, $p < .001$. Put another way, the standardized effect of political concordance was 1.4 times greater than that of headline truth. Furthermore, the ratio of the unstandardized coefficients for the effect of political concordance relative to headline truth was even more pronounced—2.2 times greater—within our integrated linear mixed effects model (see Supplemental Table S5). As seen in Figure 2A, this comparison indicates that participants rated fake, politically concordant headlines as significantly more likely to be true than real, politically discordant headlines.

The index of concordance-over-truth bias in our data was robust: Effect sizes were in the small to medium range ($d = 0.31$–0.57) for participants both low and high in cognitive reflection, and for participants without a bachelor's degree, with a bachelor's degree, and even for those with an advanced degree, as well as across gender, age, race, and income (see the left panel of Supplemental Table S7). The effect of political concordance was greater for the less outlandish fake Level 3 headlines ($M_{\text{diff}} = 1.25$, $SD = 1.72$) than the more far-fetched fake Level 4 headlines ($M_{\text{diff}} = 0.92$, $SD = 1.54$), $d = 0.17$, 95% CI [0.10, 0.23], $t(858) = 4.84$, $p < .001$. But, attesting to the robustness of the finding (as shown in Figure 2B), participants still rated the most far-fetched fake Level 4, politically concordant headlines as more likely to be true ($M = 2.56$, $SD = 1.46$) than the real, politically discordant headlines ($M = 2.33$, $SD = 1.12$), $M_{\text{diff}} = 0.23$, 95% CI [0.12, 0.34], $t(860) = 4.16$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.14$.

On an exploratory basis, we sought to unpack the effect of political concordance by comparing participants' susceptibility to fake news ($M_{\text{diff}} = 1.09$, $SD = 1.31$) with their resistance to true news ($M_{\text{diff}} = 1.25$, $SD = 1.44$). Resistance to true news was stronger than susceptibility to fake news, $d = 0.13$, 95% CI [0.06, 0.19], $t(858) = 3.72$, $p < .001$. Or, said another way, the effect of political concordance was stronger for real headlines than it was for fake headlines. We explored this effect first in our validation
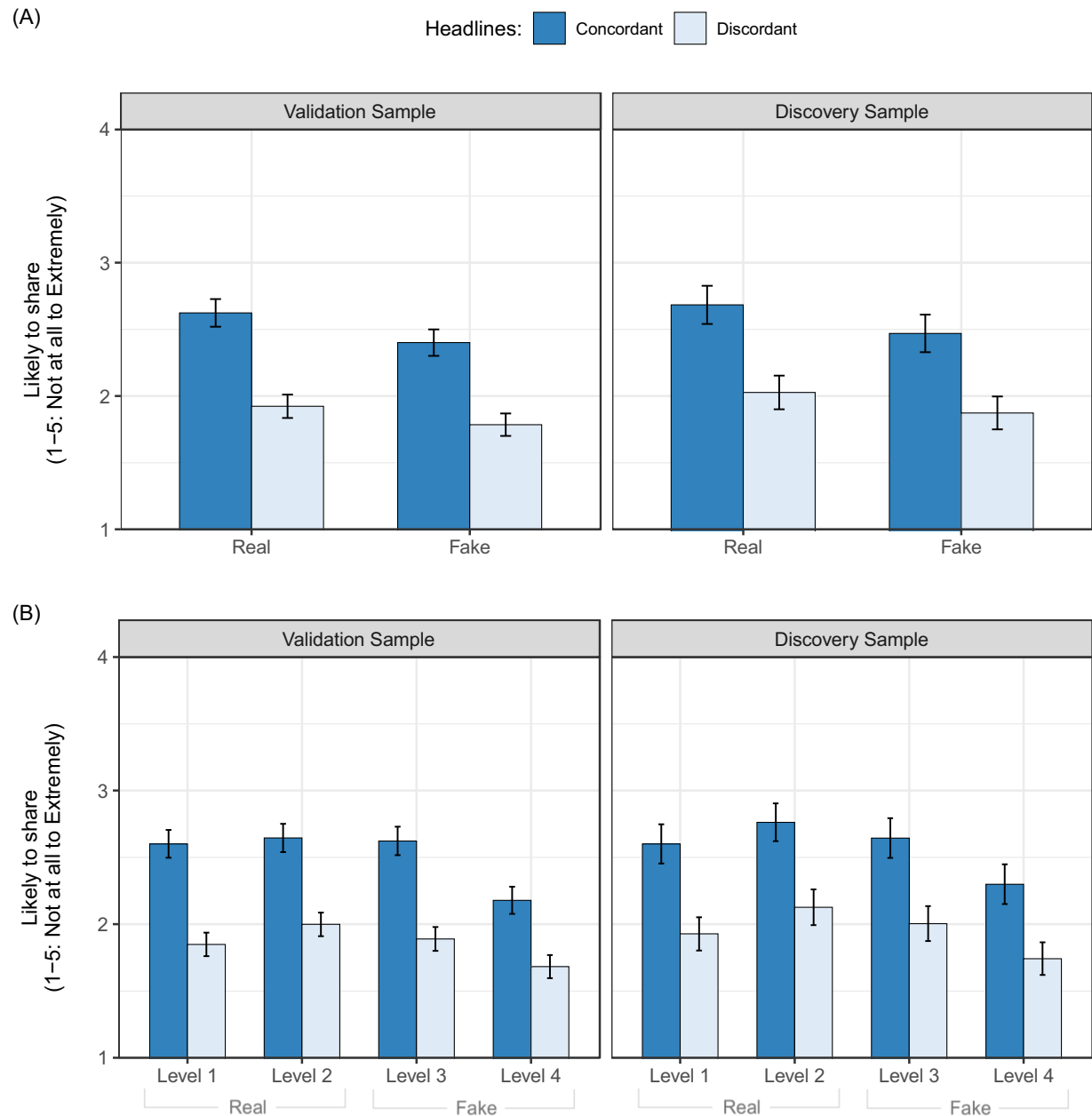
Figure 2

Ratings of Headline Veracity
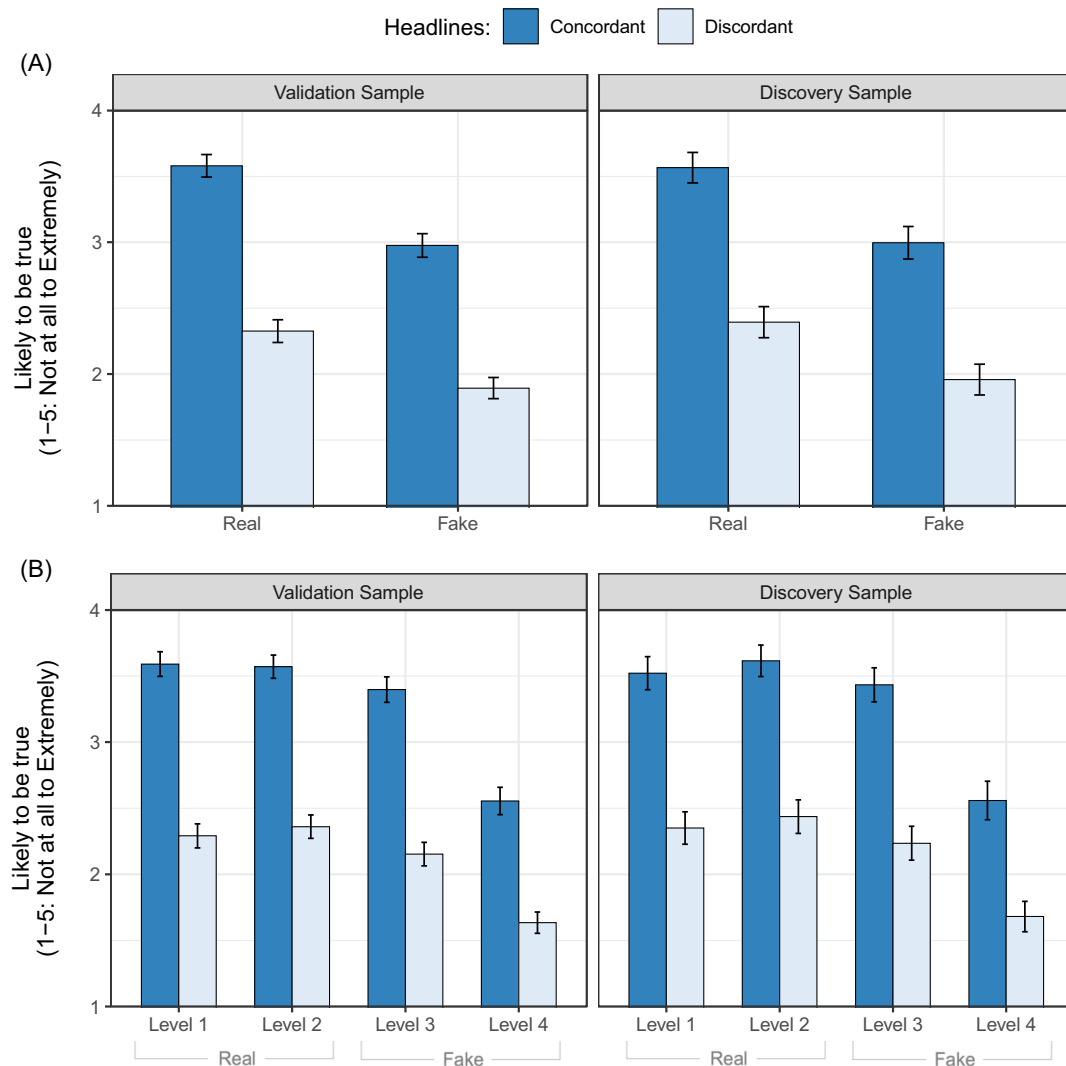
Note. Panel (A): Ratings of perceived headline veracity by political concordance (concordant vs. discordant) and headline truth (real vs. fake) across validation and discovery samples. Panel (B): The same figure but with headline truth split by four levels. Real headlines are Levels 1 and 2, with Level 2 headlines designed to be true, but less obviously so. Fake headlines are Levels 3 and 4, with Level 4 headlines crafted to appear more outlandishly fake. Sample sizes: validation $N = 860–862$; discovery $N = 441–442$, variation due to missing values. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. See the online article for the color version of this figure.

sample and retrospectively found it to be present also in our discovery sample, $d = 0.10$, 95% CI [0.01, 0.20], $t(440) = 2.15$, $p = .032$.

Sharing Headlines

The same pattern of results was also evident in paired t tests of participants' ratings for how likely they were to share the news articles with friends or family. In line with our prediction, participants reported being more likely to share concordant headlines ($M = 2.51$, $SD = 1.23$) than discordant headlines ($M = 1.85$, $SD = 1.04$), $M_{diff} = 0.66$, 95% CI [0.60, 0.72], $t(858) = 20.48$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.70$. In exploratory

analyses of the magnitude of this partisan bias on intentions to share (Figure 3A), we again found that the effect of political concordance ($M_{diff} = 0.66$, $SD = 0.95$) was stronger than the effect of actual truth ($M_{diff} = 0.18$, $SD = 0.66$)—a concordance-over-truth bias, $d = 0.44$, 95% CI [0.37, 0.51], $t(858) = 12.81$, $p < .001$. Put another way, the standardized effect of political concordance was 2.6 times greater than that of headline truth on sharing intentions. Again, the ratio of the unstandardized coefficients for the effect of political concordance relative to headline truth was more pronounced—3.7 times greater—within our integrated linear mixed effects model (see Supplemental Table S6). This effect was similarly robust ($ds = 0.30–0.56$) across cognitive reflection, education level,

Figure 3

Ratings of Likelihood to Share

(A)

(B)

Note. Panel (A): Ratings of likelihood to share the news headline articles with friends or family by political concordance (concordant vs. discordant) and headline truth (real vs. fake) across validation and discovery samples. Panel (B): The same figure but with headline truth split by four levels. Real headlines are Levels 1 and 2, with Level 2 headlines designed to be true, but less obviously so. Fake headlines are Levels 3 and 4, with Level 4 headlines crafted to appear more outlandishly fake. Sample sizes: validation $N = 861–862$; discovery $N = 441–442$, variation due to missing values. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. See the online article for the color version of this figure.

gender, age, race, and income (see right panel of Supplemental Table S7). Additionally, as shown in Figure 3B, participants indicated they would be more likely to share the most outlandish fake Level 4, politically concordant headlines ($M = 2.18$, $SD = 1.42$) than real, politically discordant headlines ($M = 1.92$, $SD = 1.13$), $M_{\text{diff}} = 0.25$, 95% CI [0.17, 0.34], $t(860) = 5.87$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.20$ (Figure 2b).

In exploratory analyses, mirroring our veracity findings, participants' resistance to sharing true news ($M_{\text{diff}} = 0.70$, $SD = 1.11$) was slightly stronger than their susceptibility to sharing fake news ($M_{\text{diff}} = 0.62$, $SD = 1.08$), $d = 0.08$, 95% CI [0.01, 0.14], $t(858) = 2.26$, $p = .024$, though we did not retrospectively find this effect in our discovery sample, $d = 0.04$, 95% CI [−0.05, 0.14], $t(439) = 0.89$, $p = .373$.

Predictors of Nonnormative News Judgments

As predicted, using linear regression within the fake + real news condition, participants' degree of objectivity illusion positively predicted their concordance-over-truth bias in veracity ratings, $\beta = 0.42$, 95% CI [0.36, 0.48], $t(859) = 13.62$, $p < .001$.

On an exploratory basis, we tested both raw bivariate correlations and also used multiple linear regression to zero in on the unique contributions of all the survey composites as well as gender, education years, age, and income to assess which constructs most strongly predicted our measures of concordance-over-truth bias, which captures higher partisan bias and lower accuracy. As shown in Figure 4 (veracity ratings) and Figure 5 (likelihood of sharing), the objectivity illusion and extreme partisan views about Trump were the top two predictors of concordance-over-truth bias both for judgments of veracity and for intentions to share the news. One-sided media consumption or trust also consistently came out as a top third or fourth predictor of concordance-over-truth bias, although the specific item (e.g., one-sided radio consumption) that achieved this predictive power varied somewhat.[2] Refer to Supplemental Figures S1–S4 to examine the individual predictors of the effect of concordance (i.e., partisan bias) and truth discernment (i.e., accuracy) split out separately.

In exploring whether these phenomena were stronger for Trump supporters or Trump opposers in raw values, we did not find one side to exhibit greater partisan bias (i.e., effects of political concordance) nor concordance-over-truth bias in their ratings of headline veracity. However, Trump supporters did show greater partisan bias (i.e., effects of political concordance) and concordance-over-truth bias in their intention to share headlines, consistent with past research (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Figure 6, left panels).

In line with recent trends in asymmetric partisan nonresponse bias (e.g., Kennedy et al., 2021), our sample included a greater proportion of Trump opposers (53.4%) than Trump supporters (37.7%). Our Trump opposers were also stronger in their opposition of Trump ($M = 6.63$, $SD = 0.65$) than Trump supporters were in their support ($M = 6.09$, $SD = 0.83$), $M_{diff} = 0.55$, 95% CI [0.44, 0.65], $t(628) = 10.32$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.75$, and this same pattern of differences was found in our discovery sample (see Supplemental Material). To address this potential confound, we conducted a spotlight analysis (Spiller et al., 2013) to compare Trump supporters and Trump opposers at the same level of moderate partisan strength (see Supplemental Material for methodology and Supplemental Figure S5 for analyses at each level of strength). In this analysis, a different picture emerged: Trump supporters displayed stronger partisan bias (i.e., effects of political concordance), concordance-over-truth bias, objectivity illusion, and one-sided media consumption than did Trump opposers (Figure 6, right panels).

Cognitive Reflection and Selective Reasoning

Because cognitive ability has been associated with accurate truth discernment (Pennycook & Rand, 2021b), as well as confirmation bias (Kahan, 2013), we sought to understand its complex role in the present results. In exploratory analyses, we found a set of seemingly paradoxical relationships related to cognitive reflection: It was positively correlated with accuracy (i.e., the effect of truth) in headline veracity ratings, $r = .07$, 95% CI [.00, .13], $p = .043$,

consistent with Pennycook, and Rand (2019b), and yet it was also positively correlated with partisan bias (i.e., the effect of political concordance) in headline veracity ratings, $r = .11$, 95% CI [.05, .18], $p < .001$, consistent with Kahan (2013). The following analyses suggest a resolution to this paradox. People high in cognitive reflection were accurate when being accurate would lead them to ideologically congenial conclusions, and they were less accurate when being accurate would lead them ideologically noncongenial conclusions—a phenomenon we call "selective reasoning."

We analyzed selective reasoning by first assessing the relationship of cognitive reflection to two forms of accurate discernment between real and fake news. The first was *convenient accuracy*, or the degree to which people were accurate when it would yield ideologically congenial (i.e., convenient) conclusions. We computed this by subtracting ratings of discordant fake headlines from ratings of concordant real headlines. The second was *inconvenient accuracy*, or the degree to which people were accurate when it would yield ideologically noncongenial (i.e., inconvenient) conclusions. We computed this by subtracting ratings of concordant fake headlines from ratings of discordant real headlines. We then compared the strength of cognitive reflection with each of these two relationships.

Cognitive reflection was positively correlated with convenient accuracy, $r = .13$, 95% CI [.07, .20], $p < .001$, and, if anything, was marginally negatively correlated with inconvenient accuracy, $r = -.06$, 95% CI [−.13 .01], $p = .074$. To test whether the strength of these relationships was significantly different, we conducted a comparison of overlapping correlations based on dependent groups with the cocor package in R (Diedenhofen & Musch, 2015). The two correlations were significantly different, $r_{diff} = .20$, 95% CI [.09, .31], $z = 3.53$, $p < .001$, suggesting the presence of selective reasoning: Greater cognitive reflection increased accuracy primarily when accuracy led to ideologically congenial conclusions, but not when it led to uncongenial conclusion. We explored this effect first in the validation sample and retrospectively found the effect to be marginal in the discovery sample, $r_{diff} = .13$, 95% CI [−.01, .28], $z = 1.81$, $p = .071$.

Recall

Of the 16 headlines viewed within the real + fake news condition, participants recalled a greater number of the eight political headlines ($M = 1.44$, $SD = 1.33$) than the eight filler nonpolitical headlines ($M = 1.18$, $SD = 1.11$), $M_{diff} = 0.26$, 95% CI [0.18, 0.35], $t(939) = 6.17$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.20$. As predicted, using a paired t test, we found that partisans recalled significantly more fake political headlines ($M = 0.96$, $SD = 0.92$) than real ones ($M = 0.50$, $SD = 0.75$), $M_{diff} = 0.46$, 95% CI [0.39, 0.53], $t(861) = 13.48$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.46$.

Exploring the robustness of this effect, participants' greater recall of fake headlines persisted even when controlling for the following variables in a logistic mixed effects model: their reported interest in

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[2] A hypothesized three-way interaction between objectivity illusion, one-sided radio consumption, and cognitive reflection that we encountered in our discovery sample was not significant, $\beta = 0.00$, 95% CI [−0.06, 0.06], $t(853) = 0.01$, $p = .991$.

Figure 4

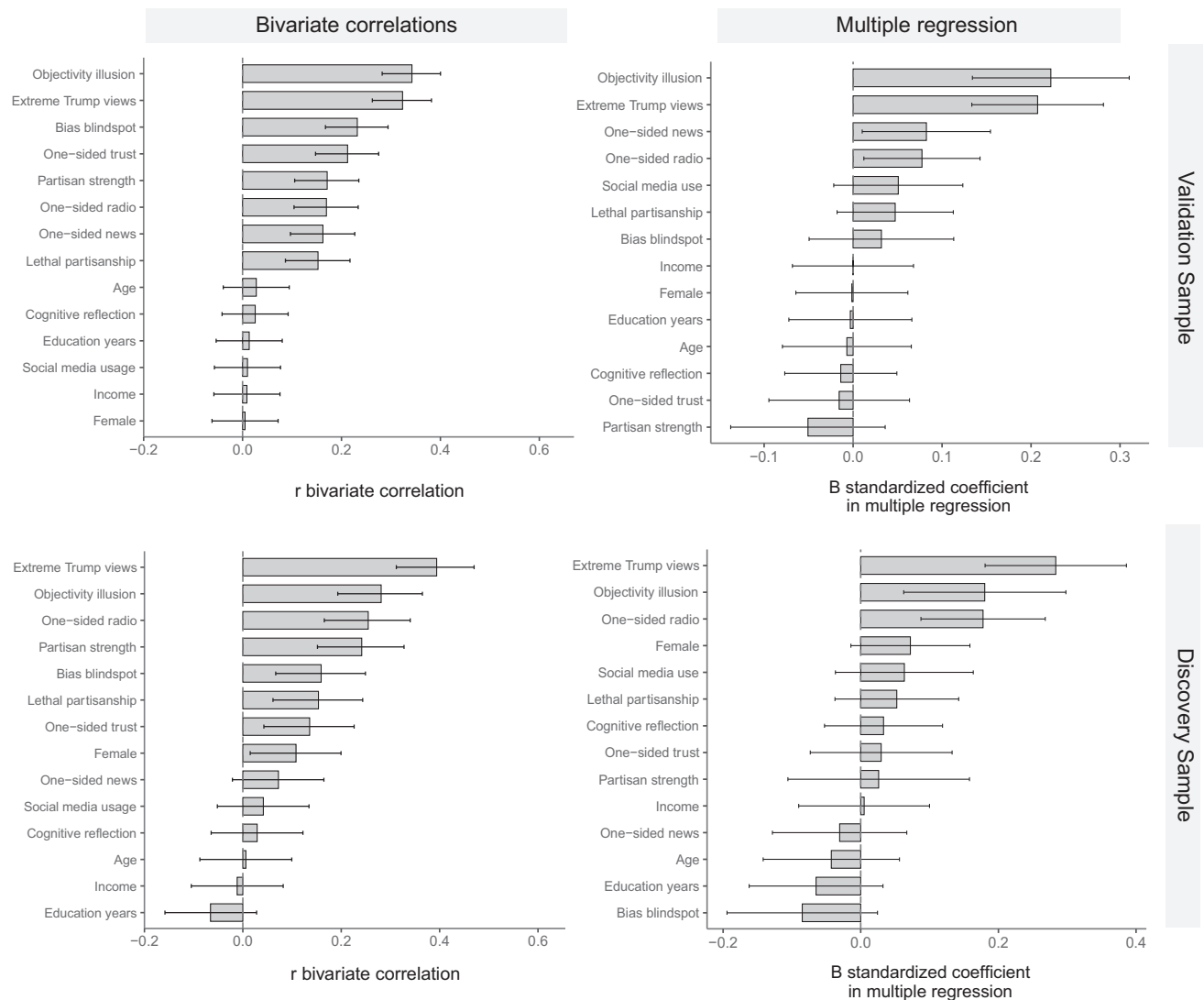*Predictors of Concordance-Over-Truth Bias in Ratings of Headline Veracity*
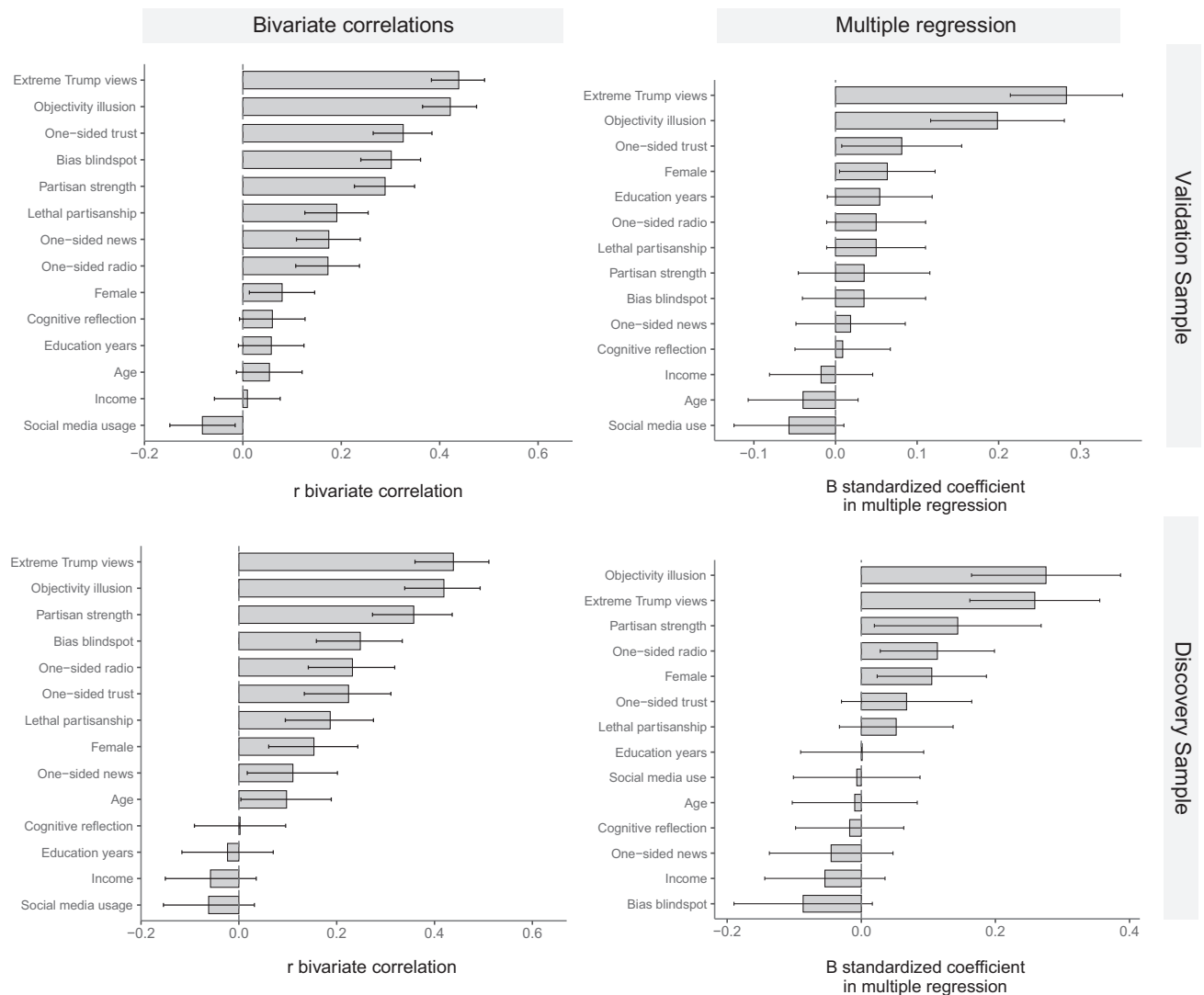
Note. Predictors of concordance-over-truth bias for ratings of perceived headline veracity in the validation and discovery samples, represented with bivariate correlations and standardized β coefficients in multiple regression. Extreme Trump views = shorthand for our extreme partisan views about Trump measure that included participants' ratings of Donald Trump on 11 extreme attributes and possible behaviors; One-sided trust = one-sided media trust; One-sided news = one-sided television and online news consumption; One-sided radio = one-sided radio consumption. All variance inflation factors in multiple regression <2.07. Sample sizes: validation $N = 861$; discovery $N = 440$. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

the headlines, their reported frequency of reading similar headlines, and whether they indicated they would react to the headlines online with a surprise or laughter emoji or not; $OR = 2.74$, 95% CI [1.78, 4.20], $z = 4.52$, $p < .001$. In this model, binary recall of headlines was predicted by the fixed effect of headline veracity (categorized as real or fake) along with the aforementioned covariates. Random intercepts for subjects and headlines comprised the maximal random effects structure that converged and provided a superior fit over simpler models, as determined by log-likelihood tests. The effect of fake news on recall was evident when comparing the more

far-fetched fake Level 4 headlines to real headlines, $OR = 4.01$, 95% CI [2.62, 5.96], $z = 6.21$, $p < .001$, as well as the less outlandish fake Level 3 headlines to real headlines, $OR = 1.79$, 95% CI [1.18, 2.74], $z = 2.58$, $p = .010$. These results were obtained from logistic mixed effects models employing the same maximal random effects structure as previously mentioned.

In further exploratory analyses, participants did not recall more politically concordant headlines ($M = 0.73$, $SD = 0.87$) than discordant headlines ($M = 0.72$, $SD = 0.89$), $M_{diff} = 0.01$, 95% CI [−0.06, 0.09], $t(861) = 0.27$, $p = .786$, $d = 0.01$. Nor did we find

Figure 5

Predictors of Concordance-Over-Truth Bias in Ratings of Likelihood to Share

Note.   Predictors of concordance-over-truth bias for ratings of likelihood to share the news headline articles with friends or family in the validation and discovery samples, represented with bivariate correlations and standardized β coefficients in multiple regression. Extreme Trump views = shorthand for our extreme partisan views about Trump measure that included participants' ratings of Donald Trump on 11 extreme attributes and possible behaviors; One-sided trust = one-sided media trust; One-sided radio = one-sided radio consumption; One-sided news = one-sided television and online news consumption. All variance inflation factors in multiple regression <2.07. Sample sizes: validation $N = 861$; discovery $N = 439$. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

an interaction between headline political concordance and headline truth, $OR = 1.07$, 95% CI [0.83, 1.43], $z = 0.52$, $p = .604$.

Causal Effect of Fake News

Based on analyses in our discovery sample, we hypothesized that participants in the fake + real news condition would report more extreme partisan views of Trump—especially among those with high bias blindspot and also those high in one-sided radio

consumption and low in cognitive reflection—and would display lower levels of cognitive reflection compared to those in the real news-only control condition. None of these preregistered tests were significant (all ds < 0.08, ps > .539).

Signal Detection Approach

In exploratory analyses, we find the results reported above replicate when using a signal detection theory framework to

Figure 6

Asymmetries Between Trump Opposers and Trump Supporters
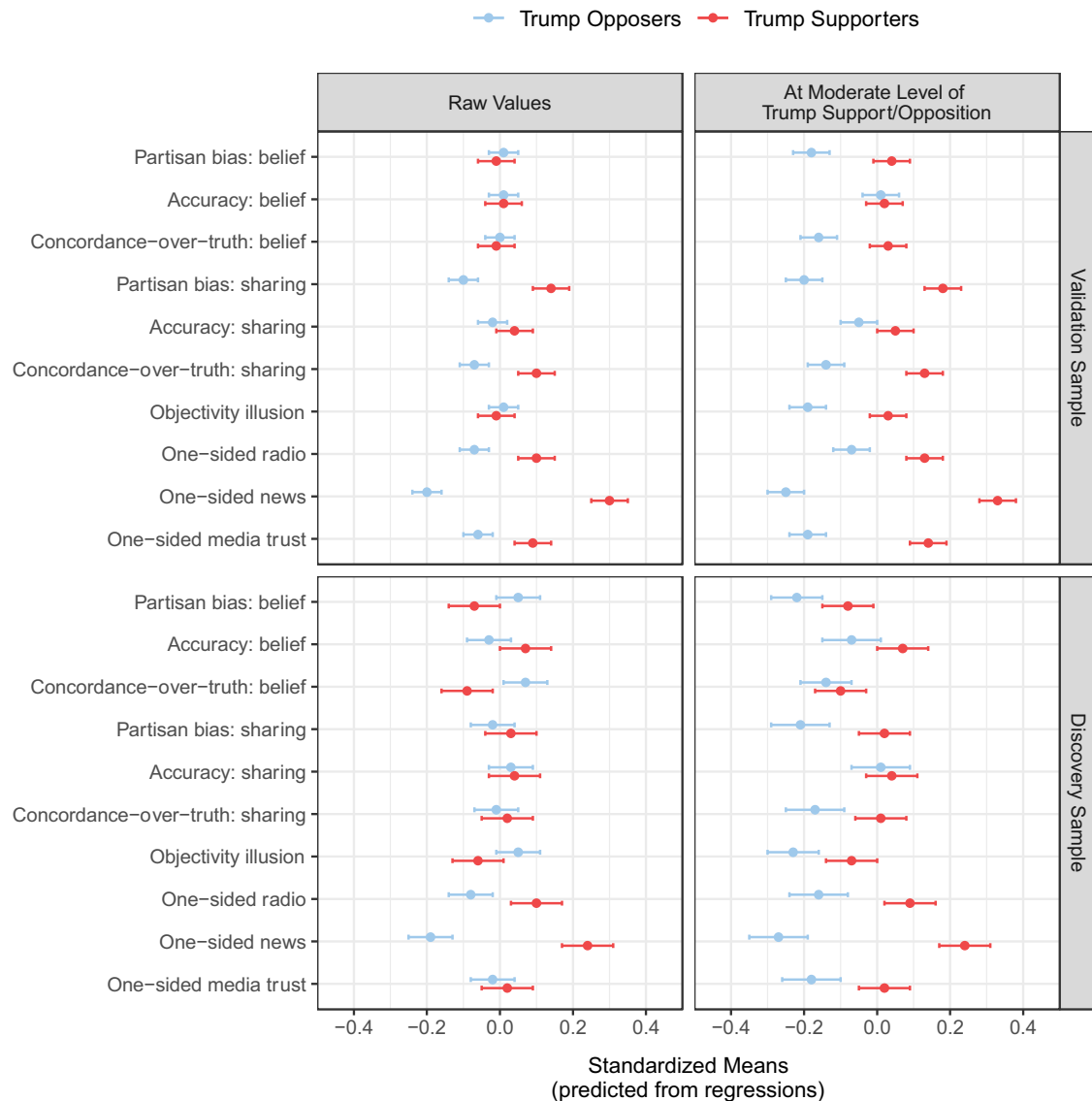
Note. Asymmetries in partisan bias (i.e., the effect of political concordance), accuracy (i.e., the effect of headline truth), concordance-over-truth bias, objectivity illusion, and one-sided media consumption and trust between Trump supporters and Trump opposers across validation and discovery samples. Left-side panels include raw differences in standardized means. Right-side panels include differences in standardized means from a spotlight analysis at the moderate amount of Trump support and opposition (where partisan stance = 2 or 6, reverse-coded) using multiple regression. Belief = ratings of headline veracity. Sharing = ratings of likelihood to share. One-sided radio = one-sided radio consumption; One-sided news = one-sided television and online news consumption. Sample sizes from regression models: validation $N = 859$–862; discovery $N = 440$–442, variation due to missing values. Error bars represent ±1 standard error of the mean. See the online article for the color version of this figure.

assess accurate truth discernment with discrimination sensitivity (d') and to assess the effect of political concordance (i.e., partisan bias) on response bias (c), respectively (see Supplemental Materials). Using this framework, in a separate analysis, we also replicate previous results (Batailler et al., 2022; Gawronski et al., 2023; see Supplemental Table S10) in finding the relationship of political concordance to response bias (c) to be stronger

than the relationship of cognitive reflection to discrimination sensitivity (d').

Discussion

What matters more in believing and sharing political news—truth or concordance with our own political views? While past research

concluded that truth tends to trump politics (Pennycook & Rand, 2021a), our study, which addresses several methodological concerns in previous studies, found a greater effect of political concordance (i.e., partisan bias) than that of headline truth (i.e., accuracy), resulting in a "concordance-over-truth" bias. Participants expressed a stronger level of belief and likelihood of sharing fake news aligned with their political views than real news that conflicted with their political views, and this effect held even with our most outlandish fake headlines. Unpacking the nuances of the effect of political concordance, we found that resistance to real ideologically uncongenial news was stronger than susceptibility to fake ideologically congenial news. This resistance to true news is particularly concerning, given its greater prevalence compared with false news (Guay et al., 2023).

The results do not imply that politics will always trump truth. Our findings are primarily constrained to the topic and context of our research—the policies and actions of the U.S. presidential incumbent Donald Trump, as perceived in the months leading up to the 2020 election. While our findings are significant, they do not establish that political concordance is always more influential than truth perception. Clearly, had our headlines been sufficiently outlandish (e.g., "Trump defies the law of gravitation and learns to fly"), the effect of truth would be expected to surpass that of political concordance. Indeed, as noted earlier, determining the relative strength of truth perception versus partisan bias as a general principle would present major practical challenges, such as randomly sampling from the entire universe of potential headlines. Our study simply serves as a demonstration or "existence proof" of the relative power of political concordance over objective truth—even when the differences between true and fake headlines are substantial by intuitive and real-world standards (L. Ross & Nisbett, 2011). While such demonstration studies cannot confirm propositions, they can disconfirm them. In this case, our study disconfirms the conclusion, drawn in previous research, that the effect of political concordance (i.e., partisan bias) is not a substantial contributor to the misinformation problem (Pennycook & Rand, 2021a).

One way our research builds on previous research, as we detail below, is that it arguably mirrors the real-world conditions of online news consumption more accurately. Most past studies, referenced in Pennycook and Rand's (2021b) review, relied on a standard set of qualitatively similar headlines drawn primarily from just two studies (Pennycook et al., 2021; Pennycook & Rand, 2019b), all of which were accompanied by instructions that increased the salience of accuracy. Our study complements this body of work by generalizing to a new set of stimuli during a pivotal election. Moreover, our methodology, incorporating a cover story and omitting explicit prompts about accuracy, reflects better how online news consumers typically engage with content—an important consideration for research aiming to generalize to everyday behavior. Furthermore, our use of headlines with a clear and singular political valence—some pro-Trump and others anti-Trump—strengthens our ability to isolate the effect of political concordance (i.e., partisan bias).

In exploring the predictors of the concordance-over-truth bias in our study, several intuitively relevant variables proved less important than expected. Formal education did not predict less concordance-over-truth bias. Even among the most educated participants in our study, including those holding advanced degrees, the bias persisted. Similarly, the tendency to engage in deeper cognitive processing was not a significant predictor. Additionally,

Trump supporters did not show a stronger concordance-over-truth bias in their judgments of news veracity than Trump opponents. However, there are caveats to this finding. Trump supporters displayed a stronger concordance-over-truth bias in their willingness to share news on social media. When Trump supporters and opponents were analyzed at the same levels of partisan strength, Trump supporters displayed a more pronounced concordance-over-truth bias in their veracity judgments as well. Trump supporters also reported greater one-sided media consumption and a stronger illusion of objectivity compared with Trump opposers. In summary, although the two political sides differ in their opinions and degree of bias, they share a tendency to be influenced more by the political concordance of news than by its truth, both in their judgments of its veracity and their decisions to share it.

Consistent with past research (Schwalbe et al., 2020), our study suggests that concordance-over-truth bias arises not so much from endorsement of a specific ideological position. Rather, it arises from the extremity of that position and the belief described by the philosopher Isaiah Berlin (2002) that one has "a magical eye which sees the truth, and that others cannot be right if they disagree" (p. 345). Indeed, a belief in the objectivity of one's side, relative to the other side, was a preregistered, strong, and consistent predictor of concordance-over-truth bias. Those who believed that their political "tribe" was the least biased and most objective were, ironically, the most biased and least objective.

Consuming or trusting one-sided media was also a consistently a strong predictor of concordance-over-truth bias. These two factors—objectivity illusion and one-sided media consumption—may constitute a particularly toxic combination: If people expose themselves primarily to one-sided media that supports their views, not only may their beliefs grow increasingly strong, but they may become increasingly convinced that their views are objective—and that those who disagree are uninformed, irrational, biased, and immoral (Pronin et al., 2004; Robinson et al., 1995). Indeed, such recursive reinforcement of both political beliefs and objectivity illusion over time has been documented in prior research (Schwalbe et al., 2020). The objectivity illusion may also blind people to the biased nature of their news sampling, leading them to believe that the one-sided sample of news they consume is a true reflection of reality.

Exploring the effect of headline truth, a stronger capacity for deep, analytical reasoning—as measured by the Cognitive Reflection Test—predicted greater accuracy in distinguishing real from fake headlines, consistent with past research (Pennycook & Rand, 2021b). However, when we unpacked this relationship, we found that cognitive reflection predicted more accuracy only when deep processing resulted in judgments aligned with participants' political ideology. Interestingly, when deep processing would result in inconvenient conclusions—that is, accepting politically uncongenial headlines or rejecting politically congenial ones—cognitive reflection no longer predicted accuracy. We refer to this phenomenon as "selective reasoning." In other words, there is an important distinction between engaging in motivated reasoning (Kunda, 1990) versus being motivated to engage in reasoning (Simion, 2024). In our study, we find that whether people are motivated to engage in reasoning appears to depend on whether reasoning leads them to the conclusion they desire. This discovery elucidates the seemingly contradictory finding in our data that higher levels of cognitive

Table 3

Difference Between Past and Present Research in Estimated Effect of Headline Truth, and Potential Contributors

Effect	Estimated Cohen's d	Effect size
Estimated effect sizes		
Original effect of truth in past research[a]	2.96	Very large
Adjusted effect of truth in past research[b]	1.63	Very large
Effect of truth in present study	0.68	Medium to large
Difference (past adjusted vs. present study)	0.95	
Factors contributing to effect size difference		
Attention to and motivation for accuracy	0.28–0.46	Small to medium
Source information effects	0.00–0.25	Null to small
Headline fakeness	0.12–0.24	Small
Total	0.40–0.95	Large
% potentially accounted for[c]	42%–71%	

[a] Standardized effect of truth (i.e., accuracy) in review of 14 studies reported in Pennycook and Rand (2021a). [b] Recalculated using the within-samples Cohen's d_z effect size using the standard deviation of the difference score (real − fake) for apples-to-apples comparison. [c] Percentage of the difference potentially accounted for using the minimal estimates and mean estimates of effect sizes.

reflection predict both accuracy and partisan bias (see also Kahan, 2013).

Rounding out our findings, based on analyses in our discovery sample, we hypothesized and found participants to recall fake news headlines more than real ones—a phenomenon that could contribute to the spread of fake news. This result may be due to the novelty of fake news and its ability to evoke emotions such as surprise (Ceylan et al., 2023; Vosoughi et al., 2018). However, even when controlling for these variables, our fake news headlines were still recalled more frequently than real headlines. In exploratory analyses, participants did not recall politically concordant news headlines more often than politically discordant ones, regardless of whether the news headlines were real or fake. Perhaps attention to negative (i.e., politically discordant) information (Pratto & John, 1991; Skowronski & Carlston, 1987) offset any partisan favoritism in the recall of politically concordant headlines. Another possibility is that, in contrast to past research showing effects of political concordance in the recall of major events such as the January 6 Capitol riot (Calvillo et al., 2023) and Brexit (Greene et al., 2021), the news headlines in our study may have been less personally or emotionally significant to participants. It is also plausible that our cover story's focus on memory may have equalized patterns of recall across partisan stimuli.

Comparative Analysis of Effect Size Discrepancies With Past Research

A number of methodological differences likely account for why our study found a positive concordance-over-truth bias effect of $d = 0.46$, whereas previous studies reviewed by Pennycook and Rand (2021a, 2021b) found a negative concordance-over-truth bias of $d = -0.95$, using a meta-analytic approach. Unpacking this discrepancy, we observed both a smaller effect of headline truth (i.e., accuracy; $d = 0.68$ vs. $d = 1.63$) and a larger effect of headline political concordance (i.e., partisan bias; $d = 0.97$ vs. $d = 0.57$), using consistent effect size calculations.[3]

Regarding the disparity in estimated effects of *headline truth (i.e., accuracy)*, three factors—summarized in Table 3—are notable in their likely explanatory power. These effect sizes are only approximate, derived from available meta-analyses, the research literature, and our

own meta-analytic calculations of the effect of differences in stimuli across studies. Together, these factors offer a plausible explanation for the variation in truth discernment (i.e., accuracy) effect sizes observed in past research compared to our own.

The first factor is the potential difference in attention to and motivation for accuracy. In each of the 14 past studies cited by Pennycook and Rand (2021b), participants were explicitly informed at the outset that the experimenters were "interested in whether you think the headlines are accurate or not," with minor variations in wording across studies. None of these studies incorporated a cover story or foil questions to divert attention from the primary focus of assessing accuracy. The large accuracy effects observed in these previous studies likely stem, in part, from heightened accuracy salience, a factor often absent in many real-life news consumption contexts. By contrast, our study omitted instructions that heightened accuracy salience, included foil questions, and embedded the procedure in a cover story about memory and everyday communication, thus reducing an artificial emphasis on accuracy concerns. This design choice, aimed at mirroring real-life situations more accurately, likely contributes to the more modest truth discernment effect size observed in our study.

In line with this argument, extensive prior research shows that increasing participants' attention to accuracy, or their motivation to be accurate, improves truth discernment. For example, studies find that offering financial incentives for accuracy boosts partisans' tendency to differentiate between true and fake news (Rathje et al., 2023). Relatedly, making rationality salient has been found to reduce heuristic processing and motivated reasoning (Epstein, 1994; Simon et al., 1997). In addition, a meta-analysis of 20 studies found that simply prompting partisans to assess the accuracy of a single news headline at the beginning of a study increased participants'

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[3] The standardized effect sizes reported in Pennycook and Rand (2021a) were computed by dividing the average difference in ratings between real and fake headlines by the standard deviation of the overall ratings for all headlines. For consistency and to enable direct comparison, we recalculated their effect sizes by instead dividing by the standard deviation of the difference score between ratings of real versus fake news (the primary dependent variable), as we did in all the within-subjects analyses in this article.

tendency to share subsequent true political news over fake political news, $d = 0.20$, 95% CI [0.15, 0.26] (Pennycook & Rand, 2022; see also Arechar et al., 2023). Although this latter research primarily focused on news sharing rather than accuracy judgments, the reduced willingness to share fake news under conditions where accuracy is emphasized implies a skepticism about its validity. Moreover, research suggests that accuracy prompts enhance this truth discernment in sharing by amplifying the importance of accuracy in participants' deliberation process (Lin et al., 2023).

A related issue of attention to and motivation for accuracy is the potential for experimental demand. Participants may deduce a study's objective to assess their ability to distinguish real from fake news and alter their responses accordingly. By incorporating a cover story and omitting instructional accuracy prompts, our study mitigated potential demand effects. Previous research found minimal demand effects when participants were informed about experimenter intent in online surveys (Mummolo & Peterson, 2019). However, these studies focused on negative demand effects (e.g., testing participants' bias or tendency to respond in a nonimpartial way), as opposed to positive demand effects (e.g., assessing their accuracy). The distinction is critical. People are motivated to see themselves as unbiased and objective (Pronin et al., 2002), which could lessen the impact of explicit pressure to exhibit bias. Conversely, as suggested by the research on accuracy prompts, positive demand effects likely matter: Increasing subjects' belief that the purpose of the study is to assess accuracy may motivate them to be more accurate.

Moreover, a comprehensive set of studies on demand effects in online behavioral tasks (de Quidt et al., 2018) revealed large demand effects for strong manipulations, wherein participants were told "You will do us a favor" by performing certain actions ($d = 0.61$, 95% CI [0.55, 0.69]). In the same article, significant demand effects were observed even for weak manipulations that simply informed participants of investigator expectations ($d = 0.17$, 95% CI [0.13, 0.20]). The past 14 studies of headline truth effects reviewed by Pennycook and Rand (2021b) all included a strong and explicit emphasis on accuracy. This effect is likely greater than the effect of just asking participants to assess the accuracy of a single news headline at the outset of the study (Pennycook & Rand, 2022).

The omission of accuracy prompts in our study, coupled with the use of a cover story along with foil questions, likely decreased our participants' focus on and motivation for accuracy compared to past research, as well as minimized the influence of experimental demand. To approximate the effect of accuracy-related salience and motivation, we combined the 95% CI ranges from the single-item accuracy prompt studies (Pennycook & Rand, 2022) with those arising from the weak manipulation of demand effects (de Quidt et al., 2018). This yields a small to medium effect size estimate (e.g., $d = 0.28–0.46$).

A second difference between past methodology and our own is our omission of the news source's website (e.g., WSJ.COM) alongside the headline stimuli. In the 14 studies reviewed by Pennycook and Rand (2021a, 2021b), all but two specified the original online sources of the real and fake headlines. This aspect of the design introduces a confound between the news's actual veracity and the *reputation* of the news source that produced the story. In contrast, we excluded source information. This methodological difference likely matters. A specified source might be recognized as a purveyor of fake news or might arouse suspicion if it is unknown

or lacks a ".com" or ".org" suffix (e.g., NOW8NEWS.COM, MIAMIPOST.CO). Conversely, a well-established source such as CNN or the Wall Street Journal could enhance the credibility of the headlines.

Classic research in persuasion finds that source cues can strongly affect persuasibility (Hovland et al., 1953; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Recent studies find that mainstream news outlets are seen as much more trustworthy than fake news sources among nonexperts (Pennycook & Rand, 2019a). Furthermore, people have been found to rely on source cues to assess the news headline credibility: Nadarevic et al. (2020) reported large effects ($d = 0.47–0.81$) of news source authenticity on headline accuracy judgments, and Traberg and van der Linden (2022) also observed large effects ($d = 0.87–1.15$) of politically concordant versus discordant news sources in the belief of misinformation. Because most past studies retained the original source of the presented news story, the fake news stories were likely to be associated with unreputable news sources. Participants may have used this source information as a cue to assess the credibility of the headlines. This confound might have made it easier for participants to discriminate real from fake news, inflating the accuracy effect size estimate. By contrast, our design allowed us to assess participants' ability to discern real from fake news independent of the influence of the news source's reputation.

Supporting this perspective, in our review of the 14 studies analyzed by Pennycook and Rand (2021a, 2021b), we found weaker effects of headline truth discernment (i.e., accuracy) in the two studies that omitted source information ($d = 1.32$; R. M. Ross et al., 2021) than in the 12 studies that included it ($d = 1.69$). A metaregression revealed that source information was a significant moderator of effect size ($d = 0.36$, $SE = 0.17$, $z = 2.19$, $p = .028$), despite the small number of studies included in the analysis.

On the other hand, some research presents a different picture of the impact of including news source information. While two studies (Dias et al., 2020; Pennycook & Rand, 2020) reported negligible effects of source information on truth discernment ($d = 0.03$, $SE = 0.07$; $d = 0.01$, $SE = 0.10$), other research (Rathje et al., 2023) identified significant but small effects ($d = 0.20$, $SE = 0.07$). Adding to the ambiguity, some research used to argue against the source information effects did not contrast true with fake news headlines (Jakesch et al., 2018; Shen et al., 2018) or was conducted before the widespread dissemination of online news (Austin & Dong, 1994). To estimate the effect of excluding source information in our study, we exclusively considered the directly relevant studies that assessed the impact of source information on accurate truth discernment (i.e., Dias et al., 2020; Pennycook & Rand, 2020; Pennycook & Rand, 2021b; Rathje et al., 2023). Applying meta-analytic techniques to these four sets of studies yields an effect size estimate ranging from nil to small (e.g., $d = 0.00–0.25$).

A third potential explanation for the discrepancy in truth discernment between our research and past research could lie in the credibility of the fake headlines. The fake headlines used in past research might have been more obviously false than those used in our study. An informal coding of headlines supports this possibility. For example, whereas half of our fake headlines were designed to be outlandish (e.g., "Trump Attended Private Halloween Gala with Sex Orgies Dressed as the Pope" and "Donald Trump Killed Pedestrian While Driving in 1973"), we estimate that 76% of the headlines used in the studies reviewed by Pennycook and Rand

(2021b) were similarly outlandish (e.g., "UPDATE: Trump Has the Votes—Wins Nobel Peace Prize" and "CORONER'S REPORT: Woman Found on Clinton Estate Was Dead 15 Years, Suffered Torture and Malnutrition"). When focused solely on our outlandish Level 4 fake headlines, the effect size of headline truth (i.e., accuracy) was slightly higher ($d = 0.86$, $SE = 0.03$) compared to the effect size based on all fake headlines ($d = 0.68$, $SE = 0.03$). By comparing these two effects, we estimate that the potential impact of differences in the credibility of our fake headlines, compared to those in past research, is relatively small (e.g., $d = 0.12$–0.24).

The influence of one factor that remains unclear, and which we thus do not account for in this analysis, is our use of novel rather than recycled headlines. This aspect of our study allows us to replicate the real-world scenario in which individuals judge the veracity of "new" news rather than potentially familiar news. However, past research offers conflicting views on whether this factor would increase or decrease accurate truth discernment (Brashier et al., 2021; Nadarevic et al., 2020; Pennycook et al., 2018).

Overall, if we use the mean estimated effect sizes associated with these methodological differences, we can plausibly account for 71% of the difference in the estimated effect size of headline truth (i.e., accuracy) obtained in our research versus past research reviewed by Pennycook and Rand (2021a, 2021b). At a lower bound, we are able to plausibly account for 42% of this difference.

Concerning the disparity in the estimated effect of *headline political concordance (i.e., partisan bias)*, a different set of three factors—summarized in Table 4—is listed below in order of their likely explanatory power. Importantly, once again, these are only approximate ranges in effect sizes. Together, these factors offer a plausible explanation for the discrepancy in the effect size of political concordance effect sizes observed in our study versus previous research.

The first factor likely contributing to the larger effect of political concordance (i.e., partisan bias) in our study is the clearer political valence of our headline stimuli compared to past research. Our headlines were unequivocally and exclusively either pro-Trump or anti-Trump. This clarity likely facilitated participants' ability to determine whether the news stories aligned with their political views, potentially strengthening the effect of political concordance.

Our stimuli also minimized the possibility that both groups would find the same headline politically agreeable, which would have diluted the effect of political concordance. In contrast, previous research (Pennycook & Rand, 2021b) periodically used headlines that were ambiguous in their political stance or potentially appealing to opposing political groups. For instance, headlines such as "Trump to Ban All TV Shows that Promote Gay Activity," "North Carolina Republicans Push Legislation to Hobble Incoming Democratic Governor," and "Sarah Palin Calls to Boycott Mall of America Because 'Santa Was Always White in the Bible'" were classified as Democrat-Consistent, though they could also be perceived as Republican-Consistent. Similarly, "At GOP Convention Finale, Donald Trump Vows to Protect LGBTQ Community," "Donald Trump Strikes Conciliatory Tone in Meeting with Tech Executives," and "NYT David Brooks: 'Trump Needs to Decide If He Prefers to Resign, Be Impeached, or Get Assassinated'" were classified as Republican-Consistent, though they could also be perceived as Democrat-Consistent or not clearly partisan. By contrast, each of our headlines was carefully crafted to be unambiguously and exclusively either pro-Trump or anti-Trump (see Supplemental Table S3).

The effect of partisanship is likely to be weaker for headlines that are ambiguous in their appeal to one partisan group over the other. In our review of headlines used in past research (Pennycook & Rand, 2021b), we observed that one study (Martel et al., 2020, Study 2) featured headlines with a relatively clear political valence, either pro-Democrat or pro-Republican. The effect size for political concordance in this study ($d = 1.04$) was markedly larger than that found in the other 13 studies that used headlines which were more ambiguous in their political appeal ($d = 0.53$). Although speculative due to the presence of only one comparison study, applying meta-analytic techniques indicated that the clarity of the political valence of headlines moderated the effect size of political concordance across the 14 studies, $d = 0.51$, 95% CI [0.18, 0.84], $z = 2.99$, $p = .003$. To err on the side of caution, we halved the estimated effect size as well as the lower and upper limits of the 95% confidence interval. Given this analysis, we estimate the effect of the clearer political valence in our news headlines, compared to those in previous studies, to fall within the small to medium range (e.g., 0.09–0.42).

Table 4

Difference Between Past and Present Research in Estimated Effect of Headline Political Concordance, and Potential Contributors

Effect	Estimated Cohen's d	Effect size
Estimated effect sizes		
Original effect of conc. in past research[a]	0.69	Medium to large
Adjusted effect of conc. in past research[b]	0.57	Medium
Effect of concordance in present study	0.97	Large
Difference (past adjusted vs. present study)	0.40	
Factors contributing to effect size difference		
Clear political valence of headlines	0.09–0.42	Small to medium
Using pro/anti-Trump vs. political parties	0.09–0.22	Small
Timing	0.00–0.10	Null to small
Total difference	0.18–0.74	Large
% potentially accounted for[c]	45%–114%	

[a] Standardized effect of concordance (i.e., partisan bias) in review of 14 studies reported in Pennycook and Rand (2021a).   [b] Recalculated using the within-samples Cohen's d_z effect size using the standard deviation of the difference score (real − fake) for apples-to-apples comparison.   [c] Percentage of the difference potentially explained using the minimal estimates and mean estimates of effect sizes.

A second potential factor is the effect of using stance on Trump versus party identification as an indicator of participants' partisanship. The degree to which participants are classified based on a specific political issue highlighted in the headlines, rather than political party allegiance, may moderate the effect of political concordance. In our study, participants and headlines were categorized as pro-Trump or anti-Trump, resulting in clear alignment or misalignment between participants' preexisting attitudes and the presented headlines. Conversely, previous research sorted participants and headlines based on party affiliation, which has been shown to be less of a driving force for voters than their support and opposition of Trump (Pew Research Center, 2020). Consistent with this finding, the effect of political concordance in our study is somewhat attenuated, though still relatively strong, when sorting participants by their allegiance to the major political parties ($d = 0.82$, $SE = 0.03$) rather than their support of Trump ($d = 0.97$, $SE = 0.03$). We thus estimate that categorizing participants based on their stance on Trump, rather than their party affiliation, has a relatively small effect (e.g., $d = 0.09$–0.22).

A third factor concerns the timing of the research. Our study took place during a contentious presidential election, which may have intensified the effect of political concordance compared to studies conducted outside the election period. Participants might have been more emotionally invested in the news topic, potentially heightening biases in information processing (Johnson & Eagly, 1989; Martel et al., 2020). The timing of the election could have heightened participants' identification with their social group, as predicted by social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), thereby amplifying partisan bias. That said, our study was conducted in early February and was still 9 months from election day. We estimate that the effect on political concordance of running our study during an election cycle is small (e.g., $d = 0.00$–0.10).

In total, if we use the mean estimated effect sizes associated with these methodological differences, we can plausibly account for 100% of the difference in the estimated effect sizes of political concordance (i.e., partisan bias) obtained in our study versus the past research reviewed by Pennycook and Rand (2021a, 2021b). Using more conservative, lower bound estimated effect sizes, we can account for 45% of the difference.

A fourth potential explanation, not included in Table 4 due to the inability to apply meta-analytic techniques, relates to the wording of our headline veracity outcome measure. While previous research (Pennycook & Rand, 2021b) commonly asked participants, "To the best of your knowledge, how accurate is the claim in the above headline?" (1 = *not at all accurate*, 4 = *very accurate*), we asked, "How likely is it that the events described in this headline are true?" (1 = *not at all likely*, 5 = *extremely likely*). Future research should examine the impact of such wording differences. Though subtle, it is possible that the two types of wording could be subject to different biases in interpretation. For example, asking participants to focus on the "accuracy of the headline's *claim*" may lead them to consider the perceived credibility of the news source, while "events being true" could lead participants to focus more exclusively on whether the reported events actually occurred.

Our analyses of the impact of these methodological differences are admittedly speculative. We cannot definitively determine the influence of each factor. Nevertheless, the exercise is suggestive. Taken together, these factors shed light on the variation in effects of concordance-over-truth bias from previous studies compared to those found in our current investigation. We hope our findings and the examination of these explanatory factors will spur further research into the variables that affect susceptibility to misinformation and resistance to truth. One overarching lesson is clear: Differences in methodology can matter, and their effects can potentially accumulate into significant distortions in our understanding of real-world phenomena (Aronson et al., 1990).

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theory is advanced both by uncovering novel relationships among variables and by determining the relative importance of these relationships (L. Ross & Nisbett, 2011). Our research contributes to the ongoing debate around the comparative effect sizes of political concordance (i.e., partisan bias) and truth (i.e., accuracy; Altay et al., 2023; Gawronski, 2021; Pennycook & Rand, 2021a, 2021b). The prevailing narrative in much of the misinformation literature suggests that truth generally trumps politics and that partisan bias has little effect (Pennycook & Rand, 2021a, 2021b). Our findings challenge this narrative. With the inclusion of key methodological controls, our study reveals that the influence of political concordance on belief and intention to share news may be more significant than previously recognized. Under certain conditions, people may even demonstrate a concordance-over-truth bias, wherein they are more swayed by the political congeniality of the news than by its truth. The implications are considerable. The established research suggests that confirmation and disconfirmation biases should cause us little concern. Our findings suggest much cause for concern.

We do not assert that a concordance-over-truth bias is inevitable. Its presence is contingent on various factors, including the salience and incentivization of accuracy, potential confounds from source effects, the sensationalism of the news claims, the political slant of the news story, and people's emotional investment in the news topic. However, even a concordance-over-truth bias that approximates zero (i.e., political alignment and truth have equal effects) is important. When political concordance carries as much weight as truth, it will still be difficult to achieve the shared reality needed for rational decisions in a democracy.

Our study also bridges research on confirmation and disconfirmation bias to the literature on misinformation (Edwards & Smith, 1996; Lord et al., 1979; Nickerson, 1998). Confirmation bias, manifested in the acceptance of politically congenial falsehoods, poses a problem. But disconfirmation bias, manifested in resistance to politically uncongenial truth, is also concerning. In our study, the resistance to inconvenient truths was stronger than the acceptance of convenient falsehoods in the domain of partisan news (see also Pennycook & Rand, 2021b). The real-world problem thus goes beyond the spread of misinformation to include psychological and social resistance to truth. This phenomenon is particularly relevant in a society marked by growing mistrust in science, democratic institutions, and electoral processes (Kahn-Harris, 2018; Philipp-Muller et al., 2022). It highlights the need for interventions and policies that not only curtail susceptibility to congenial fake news but also increase receptiveness to inconvenient truths.

The present research also sheds light on the factors predicting susceptibility to fake news and resistance to true news. Surprisingly, neither education level nor the tendency to engage in analytical reasoning predicted a reduction in concordance-over-truth bias. Instead, lower levels of objectivity illusion, less consumption of

one-sided media, and less extreme views about Trump emerged as significant factors. Relatedly, our findings contribute to the literature on differences between political groups in their level of bias (A. Guess, Nagler, & Tucker, 2019; Roozenbeek et al., 2022; cf. Ditto et al., 2019). We obtained some evidence that Republicans (i.e., Trump supporters) displayed more partisan bias both in the sharing of news and, when controlling for their partisan strength, in their veracity judgments of news.

Our work also speaks the epistemological debate related to disentangling the judgmental effects of motivational preferences (Bastardi et al., 2011; Kunda, 1987) from those of prior expectations (Druckman & McGrath, 2019; Tappin et al., 2020). Both preferences (desires) and priors (beliefs) may drive the concordance-over-truth bias. On the one hand, the predictive power of the objectivity illusion and one-sided media exposure suggests that concordance-over-truth bias has cognitive origins—in people's confidence in the validity of their prior beliefs and in the perceived volume of supporting evidence. On the other hand, the predictive power of extremist views about Trump, even when controlling for people's attitudes toward Trump, suggests the possible influence of "hot" motivational states, such as partisan-based adulation and denigration. These processes may work in tandem, creating a dynamic in which cognitive processes generate beliefs that in turn protect motivational preferences from disconfirmation.

In terms of practical implications, several strategies emerge. Because general education and analytical reasoning did not reduce concordance-over-truth bias, different approaches may be necessary. For instance, warning labels from fact-checkers might have some effectiveness (Martel & Rand, 2023), and tools to help people "pre-bunk" misinformation could also be beneficial (Van der Linden, 2023). However, our research highlights that the challenge extends beyond overcoming susceptibility to misinformation; it also entails addressing resistance to truth. Other potential strategies include interventions that raise awareness about human biases and prompt individuals to critically evaluate their own thoughts (Baron, 2019; Nasie et al., 2014; Pronin & Kugler, 2007). Revisiting past media policies that required more balanced presentations of the news, such as the U.S. Fairness Doctrine (Broockman & Kalla, 2022; Pickard, 2021), might also help reduce hyperpartisan news and protect our shared "epistemic commons." Finally, enhancing transparency, accountability, and public trust in the media and government through measures such as open data initiatives, whistleblower protections, and updated laws to combat online abuses—including stronger cybersecurity and improved digital fraud legislation—should be considered. Without such trust in institutions, people may turn to alternative sources they perceive as more reliable, even if those sources have questionable motives and limited commitment to the truth.

Limitations and Future Directions

We acknowledge several limitations related to the ecological validity of our news headlines, confidence in our measures, and features of our participant sample. Concerning our news headlines, whereas past studies of fake news used actual fake news headlines in the media (e.g., Pennycook & Rand, 2019b), we created new fake headlines to ensure respondents had not seen them previously and to minimize potential confounds such as repeated exposure to news and debunked stories. This methodological feature does not appear to be an influential factor. We found even stronger effects of political concordance on responses to our authentic real news headlines than on

responses to our newly created fake news headlines, suggesting that the use of novel fake headlines did not inflate the effect of political concordance.

A related question is whether our newly created fake headlines were obviously fake enough for participants to display the same degree of accuracy in differentiating between fake and real headlines observed in prior studies (Pennycook & Rand, 2021b). We designed half of our fake headlines to be outlandish and highly implausible to explore the limits of the effect of political concordance (i.e., partisan bias). To our surprise, the concordance-over-truth effect persisted even when we zeroed in on the most outlandishly fake Level 4 concordant headlines relative to the true, discordant headlines.

A key limitation lies in our focus on news stories about Trump. The extent to which our findings generalize to other political topics warrants future research. However, given the current presidential election year and Trump's role as a contender and dominance in the news, our findings hold particular relevance and timeliness in the present political landscape. A related concern involves the content of our headlines. The majority of our fake headlines pertained to character assessments of Trump, while the real headlines centered on his presidential performance and policies. Although our data suggest limited evidence of different responses to character-based versus performance-based headlines, observed trends indicate a possible heightened effect of political concordance (i.e., partisan bias) for performance-based headlines (see Supplemental Material).

Regarding our measures, one limitation is that we did not assess participants' confidence in their beliefs about the accuracy of the headlines. Although participants rated the likelihood that "the events described in the headlines were true," we do not know the degree of genuine belief motivating these ratings, or whether participants provided their ratings based on alternative motives such as identity signaling. Although our study was conducted anonymously online, which minimized motivations for public identity signaling, it would still be valuable for future research to explore participants' confidence in their accuracy ratings. This inquiry could involve assessing whether participants would place monetary bets on the validity of news or take actions based on its content.

In addition, we relied on participants' reported likelihood of sharing news rather than their actual sharing behavior. There may be some discrepancy between the two. While one past study on actual sharing of U.S. Twitter users found that only 11% of their participants shared fake news stories (Osmundsen et al., 2021), 23% of the participants in our study claimed they would be extremely likely to share at least one of the presented articles that we had classified as fake. However, in other studies, intentions to share and actual sharing behavior have been found to be strongly correlated (Mosleh et al., 2020). A related limitation is our use of self-reported media consumption instead of actual media consumption. While these measures are typically correlated, self-reported media consumption can be influenced by participants' memory biases and motives for social desirability (Barthel et al., 2020; A. Guess, Munger, et al., 2019).

Another potential limitation concerns the positioning of our partisanship measure, covariates, and attention checks after the key experimental manipulations. Conditioning on posttreatment variables can bias treatment estimates (Montgomery et al., 2018). However, such bias generally arises in between-subjects designs. For instance, excluding participants who fail attention checks, when failure rates vary between conditions, may bias treatment estimates because the exclusion effectively undoes randomization. Moreover,

even in the absence of differential attrition, "the types of subjects who fail the manipulation check under one treatment may not be the same as those who fail under a different treatment" (Aronow et al., 2019, p. 575, as cited in Montgomery et al., 2018). Likewise, using posttreatment covariates or predictors might bias treatment estimates if these variables were differentially affected by condition. This problem applies to our between-subjects manipulation—in which one condition was exposed to fake and real headlines, and a separate control condition was exposed only to real headlines—which had no significant effects. Implicit in these analyses was the assumption that our posttreatment variables were unaffected by the between-subjects manipulation. However, these null effects were unchanged when excluding covariates and retaining participants who failed the attention checks.

The problem of posttreatment conditioning is less of a concern for our within-subjects analyses. These analyses assess the effects of both the truth and political concordance of news, along with predictors of their influence on participants. Any effect of posttreatment conditioning was, by definition, identical across the within-subjects experimental manipulations. Nevertheless, these analyses still assume that exposure to our sample of news stimuli had no influence on posttreatment survey measures, which included partisanship, predictors of concordance-over-truth bias, and attention checks. Whether this assumption is correct, or if incorrect, the degree to which it biases treatment estimates remains a topic for future research. Notably, most prior within-subjects studies on this topic similarly condition on posttreatment assessments of partisanship and other variables (see review by Pennycook & Rand, 2021b).

Regarding potential limitations related to our participant sample, we categorized partisanship based on support for or opposition to Trump, whereas previous studies split partisans and headlines by party allegiance. Despite claims that Trump supporters are more prone to believe and spread misinformation than their Republican counterparts (e.g., Pretus et al., 2023), our findings offer little support for this notion. Indeed, we observed a strong correlation between Trump support and affiliation as a Republican ($r = .72$). Although our primary analyses categorized partisans based on their support or opposition of Trump rather than their party affiliation, we found only a modestly smaller degree of partisan bias when we used party affiliation as the basis for classification ($d = 0.82$ vs. $d = 0.97$; Supplemental Table S8). The advantage of using attitudes toward Trump as the classifying variable in our study is that views of Trump emerged as the key aligning factor in the 2020 presidential season, coinciding with the time of our study (Pew Research Center, 2020). The distinction between Trump supporters and Republicans stands as an important avenue for future research.

A number of additional future directions are worth mentioning. Beyond research focused on interventions to increase accuracy (see Guay et al., 2023), future studies should also test interventions designed to reduce the effects of partisan bias (e.g., Rathje et al., 2023). For example, interventions that encourage individuals to scrutinize the validity of their introspections (Baron, 2019; Nasie et al., 2014; Pronin & Kugler, 2007) could prove beneficial. Another important area of future research is to better understand when and why people may exhibit a stronger tendency to deny inconvenient truths than to accept convenient falsehoods. Additionally, research should explore the long-term consequences of concordance-over-truth bias through longitudinal studies. It is conceivable that higher levels of concordance-over-truth bias, if left unchecked, may

exacerbate partisan divides over time through recursive processes (Cohen & Sherman, 2014). For example, accepting ideologically congenial news, and rejecting ideologically uncongenial news, may bolster people's confidence both in the validity of their beliefs and in their own objectivity, thereby amplifying partisan bias and increasing division over time (Schwalbe et al., 2020). Finally, future research should attempt to isolate the causal variables responsible for fake news' greater "stickiness" in memory (Heath et al., 2001).

Constraints on Generality

The present research shares some limitations common to other research on the same topic, particularly concerning generalizability (e.g., Pennycook & Rand, 2019b). Our study relied on an online sample of participants. However, almost half of Americans recently still preferred traditional news sources such as television, radio, or print (Shearer, 2021). Nevertheless, online samples may be suitable for studying people who primarily consume online news, a useful ambition in light of the increasing trend among Americans under 30 years of age to rely on social media platforms for their news (Liedke & Gottfried, 2022). Additionally, although we used quota sampling to match our participant demographics to that of the U.S. Census, our sample may not be generalizable to the U.S. population, as participants were recruited through an online marketplace (Lucid) without probability sampling.

Furthermore, our findings apply to a single political topic (Trump) and headlines featuring a clear partisan slant—specifically, those portraying Trump either positively or negatively at a particular time. As perceptions of Trump evolve and the news headlines become outdated, our stimuli will likewise lose relevance. We deliberately selected a topic of high partisan relevance and practical importance—how a presidential candidate is portrayed in the media during a historic election. Exploring the generality of our findings to less overtly partisan topics, such as health and economic news, marks a promising area for future research. Nonetheless, the influence of partisan cues across various issues (Cohen, 2003; Ehret et al., 2018; Van Boven et al., 2018) suggests that a "party over reality" effect may persist in a variety of contexts.

Conclusion

To a surprising degree, politics can trump truth—in the present study, with regard to a presidential incumbent during a historic election. Our demonstration is particularly noteworthy in light of past research suggesting that truth trumps politics (Pennycook & Rand, 2021a, 2021b). By addressing methodological concerns in prior studies, our research found the impact of headline political concordance (i.e., partisan bias) to be 1.4–2.2 times greater than that of headline truth (i.e., accuracy) on ratings of headline veracity. This concordance-over-truth bias comprised a strong tendency to accept politically congenial falsehoods and an even stronger tendency to resist politically threatening truths. Contrary to common assumptions, the concordance-over-truth bias was evident across the political spectrum, education levels, and analytical reasoning ability. However, it was less pronounced among individuals who consumed less one-sided media, held less extreme views about Trump—and, most tellingly and paradoxically, among those who acknowledged their own side's vulnerability to bias.

Understanding the problem of concordance-over-truth bias—its scope, severity, causes, and consequences—is essential for deciding on practical reforms and interventions. Our research suggests that the problem is significant. Confirmation bias and disconfirmation bias—in combination with one-sided news exposure and the prevalence of misinformation—seem to have given rise to a "post-truth" world. A key step is to teach people to critically examine not only the news but also their own minds (Pronin & Kugler, 2007). Otherwise, we risk Carl Sagan's feared vision of a future where people are "unable to distinguish between what feels good and what's true" (1997, p. 25).

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