Partisan Cues, Emotion, and the Efficacy of Corrections to Misinformation About Democratic Norms

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PARTISAN CUES, EMOTION, AND THE EFFICACY OF CORRECTIONS TO MISINFORMATION ABOUT DEMOCRATIC NORMS

By

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A thesis submitted to the faculty of The University of Mississippi in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College.

Oxford, MS
April 2021

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Reader: Dr. Miles Armaly
DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my mother, Claire, and my sister, Kathryn. We are doing this hard thing.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Without the kindness, guidance, and support from a great number of individuals, this thesis would not have been possible.

First, thank you to Dr. Brown. From leading the special topics class that ignited my passion for this issue to holding my hand when life made college really tough (and every Zoom call since), you have been a constant source of intellectual stimulation and emotional support. In every moment that I doubted myself during this process, you were there to coach me through it and to remind me of my abilities. Thank you for helping me see this project to the finish line and for being my friend.

To Travis Endicott, your close attention to detail and thorough knowledge of the subject matter significantly smoothed the process of a policy girl deciding to become a political scientist for a year. Thank you so much for your time and support.

Next, thank you to the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College. This program (and the physical building) have been my home away from home these four years, but the walls of the Hoco would not have been as bright without the rich friendships forged in the kitchen and the supporting mentors I have found in the staff. DSG, Ms. Penny, Dr. Ibrahim, Ms. Ashleen, Ms. Jen, and William have supported me in innumerable ways during my time here and I am deeply grateful to have been your student worker.

To every friend who listened to me talk about this project (and gave me a hug in moments of uncertainty), thank you.
ABSTRACT

JULIA RUTH JAMES: Partisan Cues, Emotion, and the Efficacy of Corrections to Misinformation About Democratic Norms (Under the direction of Dr. Robert Brown)

Political misinformation and threats to democratic norms are major problems for American democracy. This thesis examines belief in misinformation about democratic norms and the efficacy of corrective information (fact-checking) in multiple circumstances, specifically analyzing the effects of emotions, partisan cues, and conspiracy thinking on the efficacy of the corrective information. To measure these effects, a survey of 45 questions was fielded through Lucid. Approximately 2000 respondents answered questions about their demographics, political beliefs/participation, and media habits. These respondents were subsequently randomly sorted into 1 of 8 experimental groups and received an emotional priming activity and a simulated news article containing misinformation about democratic norms. The political attribution and presence of fact checking varied based on the experimental group. The results of this survey found that corrective information is effective at reducing belief in misinformation across a variety of circumstances; the effectiveness was not significantly affected by the experimental treatments. The results also showed that conspiracy thinking is positively correlated with increased belief in misinformation, which is particularly impactful as approximately 70% of the respondents displayed a tendency towards conspiracy thinking.
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INTRODUCTION

Fake News, a term initially meant to refer to intentionally false information presented online or in the news\(^1\), has become an accusation, a justification, and a catch-all term to encompass every problem currently facing the political and media landscapes. The ad model seen online, monetization of clicks, and the ease of publication makes it particularly easy and profitable to publish intentionally false and reactionary stories in large quantities. In the lead-up to the 2016 United States Presidential election, we saw this phenomenon in its first fully-fledged form, but it was not until after the election results shocked the country that media analysts, politicians, and journalists took a step back and began to consider the possible scale and influence of these fake news stories. Interestingly, Alexios Mantzarlis, director of the Poynter Institute’s International Fact-Checking Network, has said that this flurry of media interest in Fake News post-November 2016 may have actually contributed to the state of the problem today (Wendling 2018). By popularizing the term and making it synonymous with a wide variety of issues in the modern landscape (from spin to media bias to any form of false information), fake news became a punch line and a favorite accusation of the newly-elected President Trump. The explosion of ideas encompassed in Fake News made it easy for individuals to cling to sources that affirmed their own biases, asserting that anything else was just “fake news.”

Fake news information does not exist in a vacuum, and research indicates that the likelihood of accepting misinformation as correct, as well as the likelihood of responding to misinformation correction, are influenced by other aspects of the political environment (Garrett et al. 2016; Kosloff et al. 2010; Ecker & Ang 2019). As noted by Weeks (2015), politics is not devoid of emotion and there is evidence that emotion can influence how accurately citizens

\(^1\) Not all news sources present Fake News. Most major new outlets are highly reputable sources (“Media Bias Chart 7.0” 2021), but biased or extremist coverage of news events often includes Fake News.
perceive political reality, as well as whether citizens consider misinformation and corrections in a partisan or open-minded fashion. As ideological polarization and affective partisanship intensify, appeals to emotion become increasingly effective (Iyengar and Westwood, 2015), as does the political strategy of pitting groups against each other. Research indicates that these appeals to emotion and group dynamics can be effective tools as citizens are inclined to reject factual information that does not align with their views (Taber and Lodge 2006; Lodge and Taber 2013). Political polarization and political misinformation have increased in tandem in recent years, with a seemingly causal link arising between the two since research has shown that misinformation does have the power to influence citizen’s policy beliefs (DiJulio et al. 2016; Nyhan 2010; McCright & Dunlap 2011). Citizens may make different voting decisions based on the absence or presence of political information that they receive, making it reasonable to conclude that political misinformation is actively affecting the voting patterns of citizens and ultimately the state of our democracy (Fowler & Margolis 2014).

In an effort to reduce the negative effects of misinformation on society, many journalists, citizens, and non-partisan organizations have begun “fact-checking” viral misinformation. These efforts often have mixed success, as the cognitive processes (i.e. motivated reasoning) that make individuals more likely to believe misinformation also often make them less likely to accept information provided by fact-checking. To begin the process of addressing these issues and building a more resilient and respected media system, we must understand the strengths and weaknesses of certain tactics for information dissemination and correction. My thesis research seeks to understand what makes an individual more (or less) likely to believe misinformation (fake news) and corrective information (fact-checking). Specifically, my approach is to examine the impact of partisan cues and emotion on a person’s belief in misinformation and the likelihood
that people will respond to corrections of misinformed beliefs. I draw from Weeks’s experimental model, making two key adjustments to expand and refine the conclusions from Weeks’s 2015 study. Whereas Weeks focused on negative emotions (anxiety, anger), I expand the range of emotions being tested to include a positive emotion, hopefulness. In addition, I change the political issues examined in the experimental design to broadly held democratic norms. I hypothesize that hopefulness will make respondents more likely to believe fact checking, as they are approaching the experiment with a more positive disposition and are more likely to have trust in official sources. I also chose to study democratic norms to attempt to determine if the same mechanisms that influence the efficacy of misinformation correction work consistently on issues where people may not be as readily predisposed to think of misinformation as reinforcing their partisan orientations. I found that corrections were effective at reducing belief in misinformation across all the test scenarios; partisan cues and emotion did not have a significant impact on this effectiveness. Despite this, there was a clear correlation between conspiracy thinking tendencies and increased belief in misinformation, a result that is particularly impactful given that approximately 70% of the respondents displayed a belief in conspiracy theories. The relationship between conspiracy thinking and misinformation/fact checking is an area ripe for further research.
LITERATURE REVIEW

When conceptualizing the political information problems facing our society, it can be difficult for scholars to holistically articulate the scope of the problem and the factors at play. Tucker et al. (2018) created the chart shown below (Figure 1) to demonstrate how each factor influences and exacerbates the others; the Truth, Trust, and Technology (T3) Commission of the London School of Economics consolidated the information crisis into five themes, which they call the five giant evils. The first evil, confusion, is a result of the sheer number of sources individuals have available to them at any moment. It can leave individuals feeling disoriented, a sense of confusion that is often exacerbated by the “pollution” of global information, or the frequent presence of untrustworthy and intentionally false information that is somewhat

Figure 1: Interactions in the Political and Media Landscape
indistinguishable from other reliable sources. This disorientation leads to the second evil, cynicism. When citizens feel they do not know how to navigate their media network, they become skeptical of the majority of the information in it, even the information from trustworthy sources. The third evil, fragmentation, refers to the fact that there is diminishing agreement regarding common facts. Citizens are receiving different sets of information (on social media and through self-selected outlet adherence) upon which to make decisions and engage with society, fragmenting the nation into multiple subsets largely based on political identity. The fourth evil, irresponsibility, refers to the power that social media and technology corporations have in shaping common understandings and the lack of established norms for how they are expected to wield that power. These corporations’ central purpose is to make money, not to inform the public, therefore making them irresponsible actors with the power they wield because their goals do not prioritize the public good. Finally, the fifth evil, apathy, refers to the loss of faith in democratic institutions that results from these first four evils. This framework is useful for establishing a broader understanding of the political and media environments that misinformation exists in, allowing me to more comprehensively consider the other factors that may be affecting belief in misinformation and the subsequent efficacy of corrective information.

These dynamics explained by T3 Commission are also visible in the United States, as America is more ideologically separated than it was 30 years ago — but perhaps more importantly, political animus between parties is also higher than in previous decades (Pew Research Center 2017; Pew Research Center 2019). This animus is referred to as affective political polarization (Tucker et al. 2018). Affective polarization has a number of driving causes that political scientists are still discussing and identifying, but it is clear that the changes in the media over the last few decades have contributed to it (Barber & McCarty 2015). American
citizens are increasingly divided on their sources of information, and the quality of the information those sources provide. For example, in a recent survey, 93% of Americans who identified Fox News as their primary source of political news were Republicans; 95% who said MSNBC were Democrats (Grieco 2020). CNN, NPR, and The New York Times all had similarly slanted audiences. (Notably, ABC and CBS News both had more bipartisan audiences.) This partisan divide in sourcing is not merely citizens selecting a preferred outlet; they are often selecting against others. Republicans actively distrust most news sources trusted by Democrats, and vice versa (Jurkowitz et al. 2020). The presence of this active distrust makes it more difficult for citizens to have productive political conversations and increases the animus between parties.

Political party affiliations and strongly held partisan sentiments can predispose us to believe misinformation in certain circumstances, due to the natural psychological patterns of our minds. This phenomenon, known as motivated reasoning, is defined as “a state of mind in which we find ourselves willing (perhaps at an unconscious level) to shade our beliefs in light of our opinions” (McIntyre 2018, p.45). This psychic defense mechanism seeks to remedy the mental discomfort of having to reconcile information that is inconsistent with our current worldview, or possibly even alter one’s worldview. Frequently when scholars discuss partisans on either side of the aisle reacting differently to the same information, those partisans are engaging in motivated reasoning. As motivated reasoning is often an unconscious process (Mooney 2011), it can be more difficult for individuals to recognize they are engaging in it and address it in the way they have been approaching political discourse. However, examples have become so extreme that it has become easier to identify, but perhaps still equally difficult to remedy. One of the most recently influential and far-reaching examples of motivated reasoning arose when former President Donald Trump repeatedly claimed that he had won the 2020 presidential election and
that votes had been stolen from him (Segers 2020). Supporters of President Trump were then forced to choose between accepting his statements (despite the lack of credible evidence for his claim), or changing their beliefs to accept that he had lost. In this scenario, many of his supporters engaged in motivated reasoning to justify their continued support of President Trump (Jurkowitz 2021). Simple fact-checking can be less effective in these circumstances, as motivated reasoning is one process by which political misinformation is believed over corrective information. Other scholars have also observed a form of motivated reasoning in people’s reactions to fake news on Twitter, as highly partisan individuals are more likely to accuse “fake news” of the information they disagree with (Ribeiro et al. 2017). Engaging in motivated reasoning can require someone to defend the possibly illogical position they have taken, often resulting in individuals (especially political elites) forming strong emotional attachments to their beliefs (Christensen and Moynihan 2020).

Appeals to emotion are at the core of most political messaging, attempting to associate a feeling with certain candidates or policies (Brader 2005; Jones et al. 2013; Wirz 2018). While this phenomenon is not new, our understanding of emotion in the political sphere has broadened to include emotions as a central part of political participation, public opinion, political discussion, political tolerance, policy attitudes, and the processing of information (Searles and Ridout 2017). The rise in political animus in recent decades has increased the importance of emotions in the political sphere, making it more important to understand their role in the problem of misinformation.

*Prevalence of Misinformation*

It can be difficult to concretely measure the mass of political misinformation in the media environment, in part because there are multiple standards of measurement. Should researchers
count how many “fake” articles were posted in a given time period, how many times it got shared, or how many people are estimated to have seen it? None of these metrics are particularly easy to calculate, but some researchers have attempted to measure how often citizens interact with misinformation in their media diet. Allen et al (2020) found that only 0.15% of the entire American media diet is composed of fake news, but this study also included non-news media in its definition of the American media diet and only defined “fake news” as visits to websites previously identified as perpetrating disinformation. This definition of fake news fails to consider the original posts on social media websites that can contain misinformation, which is common when political elites or bots are posting misinformation (Tucker et al. 2018).

The sheer prevalence of misinformation remains difficult to understand, but more research has been conducted regarding who shares misinformation online. Tucker et al. (2018) identify trolls, bots, fake news websites, conspiracy theorists, hyperpartisan media, foreign governments, and politicians themselves as the major spreaders of misinformation and disinformation online.² Initial concern focused on the presence of bots and foreign governments in producing disinformation, operations that social media companies have made serious efforts to combat (with some success) since the 2016 election (Goldstein & Grossman 2021). Research has shown that conspiracy theorists often gain traction from mainstream media covering their theories, which in turn provides the general public with greater exposure to these ideas (Marwick & Lewis 2017). Politicians can play a similar amplification role - while they are not the largest sharer of misinformation, the misinformation they do share is sometimes more influential (Lazer et al. 2017).

² Misinformation refers to false information; disinformation refers to intentionally false information.
The American media environment is also asymmetrically polarized; the far right is largely isolated from traditional media, while the far left remains integrated into the larger discourse (Jurkowitz et al. 2020). Misinformation is not usually reported on traditional news programming, but “news analysis” programming such as cable news and talk radio can be very influential in how people interact with and are affected by misinformation (Polletta and Callahan 2017). These news analysis programs offer their viewers a framework through which to view other political events and political information, making it more likely that they will engage in motivated reasoning when encountering other information that does not fit within this framework. Nyhan (2010) also demonstrates the connection between misinformation shared through some of these “news analysis” programs and shifts in the beliefs of the American public.

Misinformation has the power to influence the citizen’s beliefs, an effect researchers have documented on such topics as federal foreign aid and welfare spending, elements of the Affordable Care Act, and information about climate change (DiJulio et al. 2016; Nyhan 2010; McCright & Dunlap 2011). However, the causal link between misinformation driven belief changes and political behavior has not yet been firmly established (Tucker et al. 2018). The inconclusive literature also suggests that not all political beliefs are informed by facts, and that understanding how facts operate in this framework should be a crucial research priority (Nyhan 2020). Nyhan (2020) emphasizes the difficulties in studying how policy outcomes are affected by misinformation, since this research would require the presence of a control group who had never been exposed to the misinformation in question. When studying voting patterns and policy outcomes, researchers often analyze the news certain groups were exposed to and then how they behaved afterwards (in real life, not as an element of experimental design). To establish a true causal link between the misinformation and the policy outcome, researchers would have to be
able to compare those results to a hypothetical control group that was not exposed to the misinformation, which does not naturally exist in the modern media landscape and can be difficult to artificially replicate. Despite this, some research has shown that presence or absence of political information does influence public opinion, and by extension, political behavior (Fowler & Margolis 2014).

Patterns in Attempts to Correct Misinformation

In response to the realization that misinformation is such a prevalent and powerful force in political dialogue, journalists and researchers began to focus efforts on how to stymie its influence, primarily seeking to provide corrective information (“fact-checking”). The effectiveness of corrective information has been highly inconclusive when studied by researchers, as they have discovered that circumstantial factors play a large role in the effectiveness of the corrective information and are still striving to fully understand the relationship between these factors and their policy implications (Berinsky 2017; Ecker and Ang 2019; Jerit and Zhao 2020; McIntyre 2018; Weeks 2015).

Early research showed that it was important to frame the correction as an affirmative true statement rather than just contradicting the false statement - i.e. “Mustard is made from seeds” instead of “Mustard is not a jelly” (Lewandowsky et al. 2012). By providing an alternative factual statement, it will fill the gap left by the retraction of the misinformation, making it more likely that the correction will be accepted. Several researchers have shown success with providing corrective information, while others have found that individual facts can be corrected but that the misinformation still lingers in attitudes. Still others have not observed any effect or found a “backfire effect” - when an individual reports a stronger belief in the misinformation
after being exposed to corrective information (Nyhan and Reifler 2010). When others attempted to replicate the backfire effect, it did not appear (Haglin 2017; Ecker et al. 2014; Jerit and Zhao 2020).

The type of misinformation being corrected has an impact on whether the correction is effective, including whether the information is general or specific. For example, partisanship won out over correction in situations where the misinformation is a general statement rather than a specific fact, but Ecker and Ang (2019) had success correcting misinformation when the correction was highly targeted and did not require the participant to substantively shift their world view. Ecker and Ang also discovered that conservative participants were less likely to be affected by corrective information, and therefore more likely to maintain inaccurate beliefs. McIntyre (2018) corroborates this assertion, as well as stating that the backfire effect is more prevalent among conservatives. While the backfire effect is still a matter of debate, multiple studies have shown that conservatives are more likely to fall victim to misinformation.

Psychological aspects of the thought patterns of conservative individuals have been found to make them more susceptible to this misinformation, including a bias towards believing negative information and elements of brain structure (Fessler et al. 2017; Kanai et al. 2011). However, other studies have seen equal levels of misinformation belief across parties (Weir 2017). This area remains ripe for further research.

Another factor that impacts the effectiveness of the corrective message is the source of that message. Multiple reviews of the literature have shown that traditional expertise based fact-checking can falter when confronted with the power of motivated reasoning; the situations in which it can be effective are still being defined and explored (Tucker et al. 2018; Jerit and Zhao 2020). Berinsky (2017) found that correction by unlikely sources made the corrective
information more trustworthy. Unlikely sources usually constituted partisans providing corrective information that appears to counter their own political interests, making the information to be perceived as more reliable since the source had nothing to gain from providing it. While this finding is interesting, it provides limited assistance when thinking about how to systematically correct misinformation, as unlikely sources are somewhat rare and could not be institutionally organized while maintaining the quality of “unlikeliness” that makes them credible. Another uniquely effective source of corrective information draws out the difference between nonpartisan and apolitical sources. Vraga and Bode (2017) tested providing corrective information through the “related stories” feature on Facebook and found that using an algorithm as a message source increased the likelihood of the corrective information being accepted. The perceived apolitical nature of the algorithm made the correction more successful, leaning away from partisanship in correcting misinformation, unlike the findings of Berinsky (2017).

Partisanship also interacts with the emotional state of the media consumer to affect the likelihood that they believe misinformation and corrective information (Weeks 2015). Weeks’ data showed that anger increased the likelihood that participants would process the information in a partisan manner, resulting in beliefs that align with party affiliation. Anxiety reduces the influence of the participant’s partisanship by creating a sense of doubt about the quality of previously held beliefs, making participants more likely to believe the new information in the message, regardless of the veracity of the information. The data also showed that corrections to misinformation were effective, regardless of emotions or partisan affiliations.

In this thesis I seek to expand on the literature examining the potential impacts of emotion and partisan cues on the likelihood of individuals believing misinformation and responding to corrective information. My general approach is to follow a study by Weeks (2015)
who looked at how feelings of anger and anxiety interacted with misinformation and corrections to misinformation. While I follow Weeks’s general approach (detailed below) I modify his work in two ways. Weeks crafted his analysis to specifically isolate partisan effects by using two different political issues in his experiment and assigned a political party to each issue. I chose to assess partisan cues in a different way, by attributing misinformation about the same issue to both Republicans and Democrats. Specifically, I chose to study democratic norms, which allows me to examine misinformation and correction in an area that is generally conceptualized as less overtly partisan. This allows my research to examine if factors that usually affect the efficacy of corrective information stayed the same when considering an issue that respondents would be less likely to directly associate with partisanship.

Second, my study expands the range of emotions being tested, as Weeks’s experiment only focuses on negative emotions. Thus in addition to examining anxiety, I also test whether feelings of hopefulness have an impact on the likelihood of people being corrected. I chose hopefulness as the second test emotion since there is very little research on the effect of positive emotions when perceiving political facts. Following Weeks (2015), I hypothesized that priming anxiety would make respondents more likely to believe new information regardless of its veracity. In addition, I hypothesize that the hopefulness prime would make participants more likely to believe the corrective information as they are approaching the experiment with a more positive disposition and are more likely to have trust in official sources. These manipulations will help us understand under what circumstances Weeks’s findings are not applicable and continue to test the relationship between emotions, partisan cues, and misinformation.
RESEARCH DESIGN

In order to examine the impact of emotions and partisan cues on the likelihood of responding to corrective measures, I conducted a survey through Lucid in February 2021 (X=2200). For this study I obtained informed consent, basic demographics (e.g.: gender, race, income, education), and political characteristics (e.g.: partisanship, 2020 presidential vote) prior to implementing my treatment conditions. My sample consisted of a fairly representative racial composition including 72% white, 11% Black, 7% Hispanic, 5% Asian, and 5% other. The partisan make-up of my sample includes about 49% Democrats, 34% Republicans, and 17% Independent.

In addition to questions about demographics and political attitudes, I developed an experiment to assess the impact of corrections on misinformation regarding democratic norms, and to see if these impacts were influenced by emotion (anxiety and hopefulness) and partisan cues (different attribution of the misinformation by party and vote choice in the 2020 presidential election). Following the model of the Weeks (2015) study, I utilized two priming writing tasks and four treatment scenarios, both of which participants were randomly assigned to, to create a total of eight experimental groups with approximately 250 participants per experimental group. Participants were asked to read an article that discusses claims about democratic norms, with variation on the party these claims are attributed to. The presence of corrective information was based on the experimental group that the participant was randomly assigned to.

Weeks (2015) used two separate issues to ensure that there was a logical association between the claims being made about the issue and the political party they were assigned to. I wanted both Republican and Democratic participants to receive the same issue and reasonably

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3 The responses were collected from February 3-6, 2021. IRB Protocol: #21x-185
4 The question wording can be found in the Appendix.
believe that members of their own party or the opposition party had made these claims. Second, the issue of democratic norms is uniquely universal at this moment in history, with both Republican and Democratic citizens concerned about, and regularly exposed to politically motivated information displaying a deviation from healthy government norms (Albertson and Guiler 2020; Clayton et al. 2020; Greenblatt 2017). The prevalence and pertinence of democratic norms in current political dialogue makes it an extremely timely issue on which to study the effects of misinformation.

In order to induce emotion, and therefore prime respondents so that they would read the claims through the lens of the emotion to which they were primed, participants were randomly assigned to a writing task to list 3-5 things that make them either currently anxious or hopeful about the future, using the following prompts:

**Hopefulness**

Hopefulness often arises when you believe that your goals will be met and things will work out in a positive way. Examples of situations that evoke hopefulness include: graduating and getting a job, getting married and starting a family, you or a loved one recovering from an illness, resolving a conflict with a friend, etc. What are 3-5 things that make you most hopeful for the future? Please briefly list them in the box below.

**Anxiety**

Anxiety often arises when you experience worry, unease, or nervousness about an imminent event or something with an uncertain outcome. Examples of situations that evoke anxiety include: work stress or job change, family or relationship problems, emotional shock, or the death of the loved one. What are the 3–5 things that make you most anxious about the future? Please briefly list them in the box below.

Anxiety was included again since Weeks' finding for this emotion was unique and there is not a consistent consensus among researchers about how anxiety functions in regard to political misinformation. Hopefulness is the new variable introduced by my research. Weeks’s writing task asked respondents to specifically write about things that made them anxious or angry about the issue they would be reading an article on -- since my research uses the same issues for everyone (as opposed to party-specific issues), the writing task was modified using the
work of Winterich and Haws (2011) to make the task more general and to provide an introductory description to the task. I also did not include a standard control group like Weeks did, primarily to ensure that there was a sufficient N in each experimental group. As such, all examinations of hopefulness are in relation to anxiety, and vice versa.

Immediately following the writing task, respondents completed a short battery of questions asking them about their current emotional state. Respondents rated the extent to which they were feeling a range of emotions in order to check the effectiveness of the writing task in inducing the desired emotion. Table 1 lists summary information for the responses to these questions about current emotional state.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Received Hopeful Induction</th>
<th>Received Anxiety Induction</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-Report Hopeful</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republicans</td>
<td>0.547</td>
<td>0.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democrats</td>
<td>0.497</td>
<td>0.463</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trump Voters</td>
<td><strong>0.469</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.416</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biden Voters</td>
<td>0.606</td>
<td>0.575</td>
</tr>
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| **Self-Report Anxious** | | |
|Republicans            | **0.406**                  | **0.457**                  |
|Democrats              | **0.383**                  | **0.45**                   |
|Trump Voters           | **0.408**                  | **0.474**                  |
|Biden Voters           | **0.367**                  | **0.433**                  |

Entries in bold indicate significant differences among those receiving the hopeful v. anxiety emotional induction (difference of means tests)
Generally speaking, those that received the hopeful induction tended to self-report as more hopeful than anxious, though this difference was only significant for Trump voters. In contrast, those who received the anxiety induction were significantly more likely to say they felt anxious (rather than hopeful) across all group comparisons.

After completing the writing task, participants then read a news article attributed to the Associated Press that discussed claims circulating about democratic norms in the public dialogue (see Appendix). The article structure (dateline, introductory paragraph, numbered claims and facts) matches the structure used in Weeks (2015) and is designed to convey a reliable corrective source. The articles contained three incorrect statements about democratic norms in the United States and were manipulated to contain either: A) attribution of these claims to either Democratic elected officials or Republican elected officials and B) the presence or absence of corrective information that directly shows why the above statements are false.

The factual statements used as corrective information were created using federal laws and studies conducted by nonpartisan government watchdog organizations. This corrective information was attributed to a fictional independent fact checking organization, again using the same structure of the Weeks (2015) study. To craft the claims used in the articles, three statements from the Bright Line Watch list of democratic principles were inverted to state the opposite of the true democratic principle. Listed below are the claims, along with their corrective information.

- Claim 1: Higher ranking government officials can fire and demote other government officials for political reasons, or appoint family members to federal or cabinet level positions.
  
  • **Facts:** The Pendleton Civil Service Reform Act of 1883 was created to establish federal employment based on merit rather than political party affiliation. In addition, federal law, at 5 U.S.C. § 3110, generally prohibits a federal official, including a Member of Congress, from appointing, promoting, or recommending
for appointment or promotion any “relative” of the official to any agency or department over which the official exercises authority or control.

• Claim 2: Federal law enforcement investigations of public officials or their associates are influenced by political motives.

  **Facts:** Federal law enforcement organizations do not conduct investigations for politically motivated reasons. They do investigate political leaders in order to end political corruption, including violations of the Hobbs Act. Independent government watchdog organizations have found no evidence of politically motivated action in recent FBI investigations.

• Claim 3: Government statistics are not reliable and are regularly influenced by partisan considerations.

  • **Facts:** The bureaucrats who oversee the creation of these statistics are legally required to be non-partisan and make their statistics publicly available. There are numerous federal agencies that oversee this process, including the Government Accountability Office, the Office of Management and Budget, and the Federal Committee on Statistics Methodology.

  Each claim was specifically selected so that Republican or Democratic participants could reasonably believe that the leaders of either party made this claim. The claims needed to be believable for respondents in every treatment in order to isolate the effect of the partisan cue included in the article, thereby ensuring that partisan differences in responses were exclusively the result of this partisan signaling and not the factual information in the claims themselves.

  In total, this created eight experimental groups to which respondents could be randomly assigned. Respondents for each experimental group were then asked to assess the degree to which they thought the statement was accurate based on a four-point scale: not at all accurate, not very accurate, somewhat accurate, very accurate. These measures on perceived accuracy for each statement constitute the dependent variables in the study. My primary variable of interest is a dichotomous variable categorizing those who received the correction and those who did not.
ANALYSIS

Before examining the experimental treatments, I offer some summary observations on overall support for democratic norms, beyond those examined in the experiment. To assess baseline support for democratic norms, participants were asked to rate on a seven-point scale (scaled 0 – 1) the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with four statements from Bright Line Watch’s list of democratic principles.\(^5\) Since democratic norms are the test issue for the experimental design, I felt it was important to examine some summary information on participants' general support for democratic norms. Table 2 shows the means of support for each norm, broken down by party identification and vote choice\(^6\).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Voted for Trump</th>
<th>Voted for Biden</th>
<th>Republican</th>
<th>Democrat</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elections should be conducted without fraud and manipulation</td>
<td>0.942</td>
<td>0.923</td>
<td>0.913</td>
<td>0.899</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governments should protect the right to peaceful protest</td>
<td>0.831</td>
<td>0.881</td>
<td>0.821</td>
<td>0.857</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Important to accept election losses peacefully</td>
<td>0.759</td>
<td>0.917</td>
<td>0.798</td>
<td>0.875</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political leaders should share a common understanding of the facts</td>
<td>0.849</td>
<td>0.893</td>
<td>0.838</td>
<td>0.869</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Entries in bold indicate significant differences between party identification or vote choice (difference of means tests)

---


\(^6\) A variable indexing these statements was originally included in the subsequent OLS regression plots, but was not included in the final versions as it did not approach statistical significance in any of the models.
The importance of accepting election losses peacefully was the norm statement with the greatest difference in support by both party identification and vote choice, most likely attributable to former President Trump’s unwillingness to admit defeat in the 2020 election and influencing respondents’ perception of the claim. “Governments protecting the right to peaceful protest” and “political leaders sharing an understanding of the facts” were also both significantly different, with Democrats having a higher belief in both norms. Republicans/Trump voters likely had less support for protests after the large number of Black Lives Matter protests that took place in the summer of 2020; despite this, overall support for this norm was still high, with over 80% of respondents expressing support for it. There is a possibility that Republicans/Trump Voters had less support for “political leaders sharing an understanding of the facts” as Republican politicians sometimes conceptualize politics as a win/lose game rather than a process of compromise, but this is primarily speculation.

Experiment

Moving into the experimental analysis of emotion and the efficacy of corrective information, I analyze each claim by the emotion respondents were primed to and the source of the misinformation they were given, giving me eight experimental groups to compare. I also separate respondents by the presidential candidate they voted for in the 2020 election to look for potential differences across the two groups in how emotions affect the impact of the corrections, and if this changes when the misinformation is attributed to a Democrat or Republican. I chose to use presidential vote choice instead of party identity due to this survey’s proximity to the 2020 election. I expect the primary source of difference to be between the hopeful and anxious primes,
also examining how this effect varies by the partisan cue associated with the misinformation. In each figure, the larger the negative coefficient, the more effective the correction was.

Claim 1: Higher ranking government officials can fire and demote other government officials for political reasons, or appoint family members to federal or cabinet level positions.

Looking at figure 2 there is no observable effect of emotion on the efficacy of the corrective information regarding claim 1. When the misinformation is attributed to a Democrat, regardless of emotional prompt, being exposed to the correction reduces belief in misinformation, with this being consistent across Biden and Trump voters. Thus we see no real effect for emotion in influencing the efficacy of correction. When the misinformation is attributed to a Republican, there is a significant gap in the effectiveness of the correction by presidential vote choice, but there is no observable difference between the anxiety and hopefulness treatments. When a Republican elected official was being corrected, Trump voters were less likely to accept the correction for claim 1. Thus rather than emotions, my sense is that this is partisan motivated reasoning at work, and I will explore this in greater depth later in the analysis. While I was initially unsure why the emotions were not producing a stronger effect on the belief in misinformation and efficacy of correction, further research elucidated some of the unexpected similarities between anxiety and hopefulness as emotional prompts, which are discussed further in the Discussion section.
Claim 2: Federal law enforcement investigations of public officials or their associates are influenced by political motives.

Examining claim 2, we again see little effect of emotion in influencing the efficacy of corrections. Looking at figure 3, the corrections are successful at reducing belief in misinformation, but there is still no statistically significant difference between the emotional primes in that success. In the anxiety treatment, Trump voters were less likely to accept correction of the misinformation attributed to Democrats and Biden voters were less likely to accept the correction of misinformation attributed to Republicans; this would lead me to conclude that out-party misinformation is less likely to be successfully corrected in an anxious state, however this difference does not meet the standard of statistical significance. It is possible that partisan cues had a stronger effect for this claim as it directly alludes to an antagonistic
relationship between parties, rather than simply implying deviation from democratic norms, making correction less effective.

Claim 3: Government statistics are not reliable and are regularly influenced by partisan considerations.

Figure 4, demonstrating the efficacy of corrections to claim 3, closely matches the result found for claim 1. For Biden voters, corrections had a significant impact, regardless of emotional prompt. The correction was less effective for Trump voters when a Republican was being corrected, but the emotional treatment had no impact on this effect. There was also no observable difference between the emotional prompts when a Democrat was being corrected. In this experiment, while there was strong evidence of corrections working to reduce belief in
misinformation, there was no measurable difference in the impact of emotions on the efficacy of corrective information.

Summary: Experiment

In general, then, we see two patterns emerge from the experimental analysis. First, corrections to misinformation work: for the most part (19 of 24 instances), those exposed to the correction were significantly less likely to believe the misinformation compared to those who did not receive the correction. Second, we see little evidence that the test emotions are either enhancing or diminishing the effectiveness of the corrections to misinformation. The primary deviations from this pattern are likely the result of motivated reasoning among Trump voters.
(regardless of emotional prompt) resulting in a decreased effectiveness of the correction when misinformation is attributed to a Republican Party official. This evidence of partisan motivated reasoning leads me to focus the next step of my analysis on the way partisan cues impact the efficacy of correction and to examine which other non-experimental factors may be affecting that efficacy.

**Partisan Cues, Vote Choice, and the Efficacy of Correction**

Moving away from the experimental analysis of emotion, I attempt to offer some insight into the impact of corrective information more generally. While the efficacy of corrections may not be strongly influenced by emotion, the results discussed above clearly indicate that corrections exert an impact on how respondents assess the accuracy of misinformation: in almost all cases, respondents receiving the corrective treatment were less likely to view the misinformation as accurate. In addition to emotion, I am interested to see if this impact is influenced by political considerations, namely vote choice. While the results from the experimental treatment showed general consistency in the impact of corrections for Biden and Trump voters, I am interested in exploring further the potential impact of motivated reasoning among these two groups when statements are attributed to Democratic versus Republican officials.

I assess this by running a series of OLS regressions using belief in each claim about democratic norms as my dependent variable. My variables of primary interest are whether the respondent received the correction or not (0 = only misinformation, 1 = misinformation and correction), as well as a variable for vote choice (0 = Trump, 1 = Biden). In addition, I include several control variables designed to account for other aspects of the political and information environment. Specifically, I control for:
• Political Interest: (0=not at all interested, .33=not very interested, .66=somewhat interested, 1=very interested)
  o “How interested would you say you are in politics?”
• Belief in conspiracy theories. These statements are a modified version of a conspiracy belief index taken from Enders (2019) assessing the degree to which respondents agree or disagree with the following and scored (0=strongly disagree, .25=disagree, .5=neither agree or disagree, .75=agree, 1=strongly agree)
  o “Unseen patterns and secret activities can be found everywhere in politics”
  o “Much of our lives are being controlled by plots hatched in secret places”
  o “The people who really run the country are not known to the voters”
• Trust in government (0=never, .25=some of the time, .5=about half of the time, .75=most of the time, 1=always)
  o “How often can you trust the federal government to do what is right?”
• FoxNews – whether the respondent gets their primary news from Fox News (0=no, 1=yes)
• Trust in fact checking: (0=none at all, .25=a little, .5=a moderate amount, .75=a lot, 1.0=a great deal)
  o “It has become more common for fact checking organizations to provide fact checking on the comments of candidates and elected officials. How much do you trust independent fact checking organizations?”
• Confidence in the 2020 election outcome (0=not at all confident, .33=not too confident, .66=somewhat confident, 1=very confident)
“Now we’re going to ask you about the 2020 general election. How confident are you that votes nationwide were counted as voters intended?”

- Education (recoded and scaled 0 – 1)
- Race (1 = Black, 0 = other)
- Gender (1 = female, 0 = male)
- Age

I anticipated political interest to be associated with a decreased likelihood of believing the misinformation, as people who are more interested in the political landscape are more likely to be aware of what democratic norms are and when they are being violated. I anticipate the belief in conspiracy theories variable will result in a higher belief in misinformation, as individuals who have a high belief in conspiracy theories have less trust in institutions and are therefore more likely to believe claims that the institution functions in an unfair or undemocratic way.

In contrast, individuals with a high trust in government are anticipated to be less likely to believe these claims, as they are predisposed to believe the government functions with their best interests in mind. Since Fox News often has a partisan slant to their news coverage (“Media Bias Chart 7.0” 2021), it is expected that viewers who watch more Fox News will have higher belief in the statements made by Republicans and less belief in the statements made by Democrats. The trust in fact checking variable was included in these regressions since trust in fact checking can vary strongly by party affiliation and the presence of partisan cues in our claims was likely to animate this. I wanted to see if trust in fact checking also affected whether individuals were more or less likely to believe misinformation. I anticipate that the confidence in the 2020 election variable will result in respondents being less likely to believe these claims, as they are more
likely to think that the government functions appropriately and maintains democratic standards.

Finally, education, race, gender, and age were included as basic demographic controls.

Claim 1: Higher ranking government officials can fire and demote other government officials for political reasons, or appoint family members to federal or cabinet level positions.

Claim 1, Claim Attributed to Democrat

My independent variables of primary interest are vote choice and whether the respondent received only the statements containing misinformation, or misinformation and correction.

Figure 5 shows the coefficient plot of this regression.7

The negative coefficient for “correction” indicates that corrective measures reduce the likelihood of thinking the misinformation attributed to the Democratic official is accurate, confirming the effectiveness of being exposed to corrective information. In addition, we see that Biden voters are significantly more likely than Trump voters to view the misinformation as accurate, perhaps owing to the fact that it is attributed to a Democratic elected official.

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7 Tables for all analyses can be found in the Appendix. Table A1 shows the results corresponding with the analysis of claim 1: figure 5 - figure 8
With regard to the other variables in the model, belief in conspiracy theories and trust in government both exert a strong positive effect, indicating that they are associated with a greater likelihood of believing the misinformation attributed to the Democratic official. The trust in government variable worked opposite of how it was anticipated to, but this is perhaps because this variable is functioning as more of a blanket trust in government officials, rather than showing trust in/support for democratic government institutions, as I had originally anticipated. The belief in conspiracies variable functioned in the direction that I expected it to (toward higher belief in the misinformation), but with a much larger effect than anticipated. In addition, those with higher confidence in the 2020 election are significantly less likely to view the misstatements attributed to the Democratic official as accurate, meaning this variable functioned as anticipated.

The other political controls do not reach significance, though the dummy variable for watching Fox News is close (significant at p < .10), suggesting a modest effect. The negative coefficient here may be attributable to the fact that the claim is being made by a Democratic
official. Of the demographic controls, Black and female respondents are significantly less likely to believe the misinformation in the claim about nepotism and hiring is accurate. Age and education had no effect.

Given the highly polarized nature of the political environment and the fact that the claims about democratic norms were set up to include a partisan component, I am also interested if vote choice may impact the likelihood of the correction working, examining if Biden and Trump voters are more or less likely to be successfully corrected based on the partisan source of the claim. I assess this by adding an interaction term (Correction*Vote) to see if vote choice influences the efficacy of the correction on respondents’ assessment of the accuracy of misinformation. Figure 6 shows the plots of the effects resulting from this analysis.

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**Figure 6. Conditional Effects of Vote Choice on Correction**

Claim 1 Attributed to Democrats

![Figure 6](image_url)
As the left side of the plot indicates, while both sets of voters tend to believe the misinformation, Biden voters are significantly more likely to evaluate the misinformation attributed to the Democratic official as accurate, minus any correction. For those who did receive the correction in addition to the misinformation (right side of figure), both sets of voters are significantly less likely to view the claim as accurate. Again, we see evidence that corrections work, at least to some degree. With regard to the idea of an impact of vote choice on this relationship, there is little evidence that vote choice moderates the impact of the correction on assessing misinformation. The slopes of the lines are extremely similar (-.125 Trump voters; -.143 Biden voters), thereby accounting for the almost completely parallel lines. Thus, while receiving the correction results in respondents being less likely to view the misstatement attributed to a Democrat as accurate, we do not see any evidence of a different impact across the two groups of voters.

*Claim 1, Claim Attributed to Republican*

Figure 7 shows the results of the initial analysis, this time with the misinformation being attributed to a Republican elected official. In this analysis, we again see the strong impact of the correction in reducing respondents’ perception of the accuracy of the statement. Thus even in the context of a highly partisan post-election environment, corrections had an impact, regardless of whether the statement was made by a Democrat or Republican.
In contrast to the analysis where the incorrect statement was attributed to a Democrat, 2020 presidential vote is not significant here: Biden voters were neither more or less likely to view the claim as accurate when it was attributed to a Republican official. I am unsure why this variable loses significance, as motivated reasoning might suggest positive relationship when the claim is attributed to a Democrat (as shown in figure 5) and a negative effect when attributed to a Republican. In addition, conspiracy thinking and trust in government behave similar to the model for misinformation attributed to the Democratic official, with both having a strong impact on the likelihood of believing the misinformation. The other control variables behave similarly with a few exceptions. Fox News as a primary news source is no longer even marginally significant in the treatment attributing misstatement to a Republican. And while the variable is not significant, trust in fact checking switches signs. Finally, race and gender drop out, with Black and female respondents no longer being less likely to view that misstatement as accurate when it is attributed to a republican official.
With regard to the possibility of vote creating a moderating effect on the correction, Figure 8 shows very different results from what we saw when the same misinformation was attributed to the Democratic official. Here again, Biden voters who did not receive a correction are more likely to assess the misinformation as accurate (.672 v. 603). Yet the effect of the correction is clearly stronger among Biden voters, accounting for the steeper slope that even crosses that for the Trump condition (Biden: .672-.539=.133; Trump .603-.572=.031).\footnote{The coefficient for the interaction term does not quite reach significance at .05 (p<.057).} When the misstatement is attributed to a Republican official, Biden voters are significantly more likely than Trump supporters to respond to the correction. In comparison to when claim 1 was attributed to a Democrat, the likelihood of Biden voters responding to the correction did not notably change, but rather the likelihood that the correction was effective for Trump voters drops
substantially. This possibly suggests that Trump voters are less likely to respond to correction when the misinformation comes from in-party sources.

Claim 2: Federal law enforcement investigations of public officials or their associates are influenced by political motives.

Claim 2, Claim Attributed to Democrat

For the second claim, we see that “correction” again has a statistically significant negative coefficient, meaning that corrective information is effective at reducing belief in misinformation (Figure 9). The effect of the control variables is also largely the same as when

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9 Analyses for this section (corresponding to figure 9 - figure 12) are in Table A2 of the Appendix
claim 1 was attributed to a Democrat: large significance for conspiracy, significance for trust in government, confidence in the 2020 election, and gender. Presidential vote choice and race were not significant in this model, unlike when claim 1 was attributed to a Democrat.

When specifically looking at the interaction of presidential vote and exposure to correction, we see that Biden voters were more likely to believe the claim attributed to a Democratic elected official, but that there is no significant difference between the effectiveness of correction for Trump voters and Biden voters (Figure 10). The correction was slightly more effective for Biden voters (slope = -.146 for Biden; -.116 for Trump), but it is not a statistically significant difference.

![Figure 10. Conditional Effects of Vote Choice on Correction](image-url)
Claim 2, Claim Attributed to Republican

Similar to what I saw in claim 1, the correction is effective, with the correction variable having a statistically significant negative coefficient (Figure 11). Also, when the misinformation is attributed to a Republican, the confidence in the 2020 election and gender again drop out as statistically significant variables. The significance of belief in conspiracy theories and trust in government remains high.

Matching when the misinformation was attributed to a Democrat above, the interaction of presidential vote and exposure to correction does not have any significant difference by vote choice in the efficacy of correction (Figure 12). The slopes are almost identical (-.098 Trump voters; -.094 Biden voters). In this instance, we also see no significant differences in the
probability of either set of voters believing the misinformation, either before or after the correction.

Claim 3: Government statistics are not reliable and are regularly influenced by partisan considerations.

**Claim 3, Misinformation Attributed to Democrat**

Consistent with all of the other models, the correction variable remains effective at reducing the likelihood of belief in misinformation. Mimicking what I saw in claim 2, belief in conspiracy theories, confidence in the 2020 election, and gender remain significant variables in the regression analysis (Figure 13)\textsuperscript{10}. Interestingly, trust in government drops out as a statically

\textsuperscript{10} Analyses for this section (corresponding to figure 13 - figure 16) are in Table A3 of the Appendix.
significant variable, possibly because this claim focused on statistics produced by government agencies rather than the actions of specific individuals in the government.

When examining the interaction of vote choice with corrective information, we see both Biden and Trump respondents were equally likely to assess the misinformation as accurate without the correction (Figure 14). The correction did work slightly stronger for Trump voters, but this difference was only marginal and not statistically significant (slope = -.165 Trump voters; -.124 Biden voters). It is possible Trump voters were slightly more likely to accept the correction as it was a Democratic elected official who was being corrected.
Claim 3, Misinformation Attributed to Republican

When looking at claim 3 attributed to a Republican elected official, belief in conspiracy theories continues to be the most statistically significant variable in terms of if an individual believed the misinformation (Figure 15). Political interest rises to meet the standard of significance for the first time; this is possibly due to the fact that individuals who are more up-to-date on the political environment and are therefore more familiar with the current level of gridlock and dysfunction that is often created by politicians, and could find claims that politicians disregard democratic norms more believable. However, this result is unlikely to have any meaningful implications as this variable did not have any observable pattern across the regressions. Trust in government remains less significant than it was for the other claims, but does rise again to meet the minimum standard of significance. Gender also remains significant.
When examining the interaction between vote choice and efficacy of correction, we again see no significant differences in the probability that Biden and Trump supporters will perceive the misinformation as accurate, either without or with the correction. The correction appears to have a higher likelihood of being effective for Biden voters (as evidenced by the non-parallel lines; slope = Biden -.11; Trump -.07), but this difference does not end up being statistically significant.
Summary: Partisan Cues, Vote Choice, and the Efficacy of Correction

In review, corrective information is generally effective at reducing belief in misinformation, at least to some extent. General belief in misinformation, without corrective information, was approximately 70% among all respondents; for those individuals who were exposed to corrective information, average belief in the misinformation was around 50%. These numbers stayed consistent regardless of the partisan identity of the source of the misinformation, with the only significant exception being when claim 1 (hiring and nepotism) was attributed to a Republican elected official. The lack of a corrective effect for Trump voters in this case is possibly attributable to the Trump administration’s frequent violation of this democratic norm during his presidency, shifting conceptions about what is normal or accurate based on partisan
identity (since when claim 1 was attributed to a Republican, the correction has a significant impact for Biden voters but almost no impact for Trump voters).

Also worthy of note is that, in claim 2 (political motives to investigations) and claim 3 (reliability of government statistics), the group that is more likely to believe the claim matches with the party giving the misinformation, but not in claim 1. For the first claim, Biden voters were more likely to believe the statement (uncorrected) regardless of who was giving the misinformation. While partisan differences in the form of vote choice did not end up having a significant effect on the efficacy of the correction (except in the case of misinformation about nepotism and hiring attributed to Republicans), it is still interesting to note that corrections were largely effective. The regression analyses also showed that belief in conspiracy theories had a significant effect on whether or not a respondent evaluated the claims as true, leading me to further investigate the relationship between belief in conspiracy theories and the efficacy of corrective information.

Belief in Conspiracy Theories and the Efficacy of Correction

In examining the analyses for each claim, and regardless of whether misinformation is attributed to a Republican or Democrat, we see a consistent effect for the belief in conspiracy theories. In each instance, conspiracy belief is strongly associated with a greater likelihood of believing misinformation. This suggests that belief in conspiracy theories could also possibly have an impact on the efficacy of corrective information, a possibility that I investigate by using a different interaction variable (Correction*Conspiracy). My expectation is that higher levels of conspiratorial thinking are likely to reduce the effect of fact checking on how respondents perceive the accuracy of each claim. While my survey was not necessarily designed to examine
conspiratorial beliefs, the respondents have such an unexpectedly strong belief in these conspiracy theories that it seemed worthwhile to examine the possibility that belief in conspiracies may influence the effectiveness of fact-checking.

Recall from the earlier discussion of control variables that I used a portion of Enders (2019)’s conspiracy belief index to measure the degree to which respondents agreed with the following statements:

- Unseen patterns and secret activities can be found everywhere in politics.
- Much of our lives are being controlled by plots hatched in secret places.
- The people who really "run" the country are not known to the voters.

Conspiracy belief agreement was then scored on a scale of 0-1 as follows: (0 = strongly disagree; .25 = disagree; .5 = neither agree or disagree; .75 = agree; 1.0 = strongly agree). Broken down by party and presidential vote choice, the conspiracy theory index produced the following summary results (Table 3):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Overall</th>
<th>Rep</th>
<th>Ind</th>
<th>Dem</th>
<th>Vote Trump</th>
<th>Vote Biden</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conspiracy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>2.64</td>
<td>2.76</td>
<td>3.61</td>
<td>1.92</td>
<td>4.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>4.55</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td>7.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither</td>
<td>19.04</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>24.59</td>
<td>19.64</td>
<td>10.36</td>
<td>22.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>35.08</td>
<td>38.42</td>
<td>34.81</td>
<td>32.92</td>
<td>41.07</td>
<td>31.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>38.63</td>
<td>40.36</td>
<td>33.15</td>
<td>39.28</td>
<td>45.68</td>
<td>33.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>.755</td>
<td>.777</td>
<td>.727</td>
<td>.749</td>
<td><strong>.819</strong></td>
<td><strong>.702</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This table indicates that belief in conspiracy theories is universally high, with at least 65% of survey respondents across all categories stating that they “agree” or “strongly agree” with the statements in the conspiracy theories index. This belief is also strong regardless of party identity, with the mean belief being 77% for Republicans, 75% for Democrats, and 73% for independents. While conspiracy belief is high across all comparisons, we do see rather large mean differences when comparing Trump and Biden voters.\textsuperscript{11}

Claim 1, Misinformation Attributed to Democrat

Figure 17 shows the results of the first interaction between conspiracy belief and receiving the correction.\textsuperscript{12} When looking at the left side of the plot, belief in conspiracy theories increases the likelihood that an individual will believe in the misinformation (as previously discussed). For those at the highest two levels of conspiracy belief the probability of believing misinformation prior to correction is an average of .679. This drops to .485 for the lower two levels of conspiracy belief. Moving up levels of conspiratorial belief (from the conspire=0 line to the conspire=1 line), we see that the slopes become progressively less steep: [slopes: conspire(0) = -.251; conspire(.25) = -.212; conspire(.75) = -.135 conspire(1.0) = -.096], indicating that the correction becomes progressively less effective as belief in conspiracy theories increases. The correction still has some effect at all levels, but the effect is decreased by belief in conspiracies.\textsuperscript{13} This matches my original hypothesis on the effect of conspiracy theories, as individuals who are predisposed to institutions and would be more willing to accept the claims that the government functions in an undemocratic way.

\textsuperscript{11} This mean difference is significant by a t-test calculation ($t = 8.22$)
\textsuperscript{12} Analyses for this section (corresponding to figure 17 - and figure 18) are in Table A4 of the Appendix
\textsuperscript{13} The interaction term is significant at the $p<.10$ level
Claim 1, Misinformation Attributed to Republican

When claim 1 is attributed to a Republican (Figure 18), a slightly weaker version of what I found above can be observed. Looking at the left side of the figure, there is a significant difference in likelihood of believing misinformation between higher and lower levels of conspiracy belief (average of for higher two levels = .682; for lower two levels = .448). As hypothesized, belief in conspiratorial thinking is related to belief in misinformation about democratic norms. Here again we also see modest evidence of a difference in the impact of correction across levels of conspiracy belief, though these differences do not reach the level of statistical significance: [slopes: conspire(0) = -.182; conspire(.25) = -.153; conspire(.75) = -.095; conspire(1.0) = -.065]. While the correction is effective to some degree at every level, we see that even after the correction (right side of figure), those at higher levels of conspiracy belief are significantly more likely to perceive misinformation as accurate.
Claim 2, Misinformation Attributed to Democrat/Republican

Differing from what I observed in claim 1, the correction’s efficacy is not significantly different at higher levels of belief in conspiracy theories in claim 2 when the misinformation was attributed to a Democrat (Figure 19). We see this in the parallel lines across levels of conspiracy belief, as evidenced by the very similar slopes [slopes: conspire(0) = -.152; conspire(.25) = -.146; conspire(.75) = -.134; conspire(1.0) = -.128]. The slopes are also noticeably flatter, indicating that the correction was overall less effective. It is possible that this claim was less able to be corrected since its topic was about politically motivated government investigations of other politicians, and this is an area that is more likely to also be the subject of conspiracy theories. I am unsure why the correction was not more effective for the individuals.

14 Analyses for this section (figure 19 and figure 20) are in Table A5 of the Appendix
with a low belief in conspiracy theories. In spite of the lack of an interaction effect in this analysis, we do still see the pattern of significant differences in likelihood of believing in misinformation across lower and higher levels of conspiracy belief. Higher levels of conspiracy belief are associated with a greater likelihood of believing misinformation prior to correction (average of .479 at lower two levels v. average of .749 at higher levels, and this difference across levels of conspiratorial belief remains after the correction. Figure 20 shows very similar results when misinformation regarding claim 2 is attributed to Republicans.

Figure 19. Conditional Effects of Conspiracy Belief on Correction
Claim 2 Attributed to Democrat
Claim 3, Misinformation Attributed to Democrat/Republican

For claim 3, which focuses on misperceptions surrounding the reliability of government statistics, we see a continuation of the overall pattern\textsuperscript{15}. While the analysis does not show a significant effect of conspiracy belief on the efficacy of corrections (note the largely similar slopes in figure 21 and figure 22), there is little doubt that conspiratorial thinking is related to higher levels of belief in misinformation. When the misinformation about government statistics is attributed to a Democrat, those at the highest two levels of conspiracy thinking are much more likely to believe the misinformation relative to those in the lower levels of conspiracy thinking (average of .731 v. .429). This difference is even larger when the misinformation is attributed to a Republican ( .715 v. .373). Belief in conspiracy theories continues to have a positive relationship with belief in the misinformation, as observed in the previous claims. This relationship persists even after being exposed to a factual correction.

\textsuperscript{15}Analyses for this section (figure 21 and figure 22) are in Table A6 of the Appendix
Figure 21. Conditional Effects of Conspiracy Belief on Correction
Claim 3 Attributed to Democrat

Figure 22. Conditional Effects of Conspiracy Belief on Correction
Claim 3 Attributed to Republican
Summary: Belief in Conspiracy Theories and the Efficacy of Correction

As demonstrated by previous sections of the analysis, receiving corrections to misinformation is consistently associated with a reduced likelihood of believing in misinformation. While partisan cues can affect the likelihood of someone believing misinformation, my analysis found that the most consistent metric for identifying whether a respondent would believe misinformation was their belief in conspiracy theories. The stronger an individual’s conspiracy thinking, the more likely they are to believe misinformation.

In thinking about these findings, they are particularly important from a substantive viewpoint because the vast majority of our respondents exhibit high levels of conspiratorial belief. Thus to the degree that conspiratorial thinking remains prevalent, particularly in our politics, then we may expect high levels of belief in misinformation and the potential for reduced efficacy of corrections. My analysis also showed that when examining respondents at different levels of conspiratorial belief, the source attribution in the claims to either Republicans or Democrats did not have an effect on belief in the claim.
DISCUSSION

In examining the efficacy of corrections to political misinformation, I observed that they can significantly reduce belief in misinformation. However, they do not completely eliminate that belief; general belief in misinformation, without corrective information, was approximately 70% among all respondents; for those individuals who were exposed to corrective information, average belief in the misinformation was around 50%. While this does create concern regarding the large body of uncorrected political misinformation in the media landscape, it does offer some hope that current methods of combating misinformation can be effective - however, they should most likely be refined in order to make their impact more pronounced.

The lenses through which I sought to examine the efficacy of correction, emotion and partisan cues, did not end up producing a particularly significant effect on the efficacy of correction. While I initially struggled to offer an explanation for the lack of an emotional effect, further research showed that hopefulness and anxiety (despite seeming like opposites in a negative/positive capacity) actually work very similarly in a psychological capacity (Searles and Ridout 2017). Both emotions prompt individuals to enter an “information seeking” mindset. The emotional priming task Weeks used was also modified due to time constraints, meaning that the priming writing task was also possibly less effective than it was in Weeks’s experiment.

When looking at the analysis of partisan cues, these cues could have a noticeable impact on whether the misinformation was believed, but this impact was not universal across all of the test scenarios. Since the claims about democratic norms could be easily interpreted to be referencing recent events in the American political arena, I believe this variation in the impact of partisan cues on belief in misinformation is likely attributable to respondents’ interpretation of the claims. When looking at the impact of partisan cues (vote choice) on the efficacy of
correction, a significant difference could only be observed in 1 of the 6 test scenarios. While future research could be conducted in both of these areas to further tease out the effects observed here, it is perhaps a better use of resources and attention to focus on the relationship between conspiracy theories and misinformation.

In our dataset, average predisposition towards conspiracy thinking was approximately 75%. This is significantly higher than was observed in previous studies (Oliver & Wood 2014), and makes my subsequent findings regarding belief in conspiracy theories even more impactful. Conspiracy thinking has a strong positive relationship on belief in misinformation, observed both in the OLS regressions and the marginal effects plots. While I did anticipate that conspiracy thinking would likely increase belief in misinformation, I did not anticipate the effect being as pronounced as it was, or being applicable to such a large portion of the sample. It therefore makes it even more meaningful that increased belief in conspiracy theories was sometimes associated with a decreased efficacy of corrective information. While this effect was not as consistently visible in every claim, I believe the relationship between belief in conspiracy theories and the efficacy of fact-checking is both a ripe and pressing area for further research. In order to successfully combat misinformation in the media environment, it is essential to consider the effect of conspiracy theories in that effort.

Political misinformation poses a sizable threat to democracy. While scholars are still working to understand the prevalence of information in the information landscape, research has clearly established that exposure to misinformation can change the way citizens engage with government. Particularly in a time when we have seen efforts from some politicians and corporations to subvert democratic norms, the potential impacts of misinformation are even more substantial. While we must maintain vigilance against this threat, we have also seen that support

52
for democratic norms remains high and that, largely, attempts to subvert norms were not successful. These attempts have exposed weaknesses in our democracy that we need to be mindful of, but there is cause for hope in the face of these challenges. Correction to misinformation is effective in a variety of circumstances, and the scale of recent attacks on democratic norms has prompted a broader awareness of these threats, creating the potential for action.
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Appendix

1. Experimental Treatment – Misperceptions about Democratic Norms
2. Experimental Treatment – Misperceptions and Correction
3. Analysis Tables
4. Survey
Misperceptions about Democratic Norms

WASHINGTON, D.C. (AP) -- Throughout the past several years, there have been numerous national conversations about the state of democratic norms. Several of the following statements have been topics of discussion by Democratic and Republican leaders, journalists, news organizations, academics, and political think tanks. Here are three claims about democratic norms that Republican elected officials have been circulating, and facts about those claims according to Political Facts, an independent fact-checking organization.

**Claim #1:** Higher ranking government officials can fire and demote other government officials for political reasons, or appoint family members to federal or cabinet level positions.
Republican elected officials claim that they feel more supported, and therefore serve their constituents better, when they have the support of close family members and friends.

**Claim #2:** Federal law enforcement investigations of public officials or their associates are influenced by political motives.
Republican elected officials claim that federal law enforcement agencies are used to do the bidding of partisan leaders, investigating baseless claims to damage the reputation of the officials being investigated.

**Claim #3:** Government statistics are not reliable and are regularly influenced by partisan considerations.
Republican elected officials claim that government statistics can be easily manipulated to reflect progress towards the policy goals of the party in power.
Misperceptions about Democratic Norms

WASHINGTON, D.C. (AP) -- Throughout the past several years, there have been numerous national conversations about the state of democratic norms. Several of the following statements have been topics of discussion by Democratic and Republican leaders, journalists, news organizations, academics, and political think tanks. Here are three claims about democratic norms that Republican elected officials have been circulating, and facts about those claims according to Political Facts, an independent fact-checking organization.

Claim #1: Higher ranking government officials can fire and demote other government officials for political reasons, or appoint family members to federal or cabinet level positions.
Republican elected officials claim that they feel more supported, and therefore serve their constituents better, when they have the support of close family members and friends.

Facts: The Pendleton Civil Service Reform Act of 1883 was created to establish federal employment based on merit rather than political party affiliation. In addition, federal law, at 5 U.S.C. § 3110, generally prohibits a federal official, including a Member of Congress, from appointing, promoting, or recommending for appointment or promotion any “relative” of the official to any agency or department over which the official exercises authority or control.

Claim #2: Federal law enforcement investigations of public officials or their associates are influenced by political motives.
Republican elected officials claim that federal law enforcement agencies are used to do the bidding of partisan leaders, investigating baseless claims to damage the reputation of the officials being investigated.

Facts: Federal law enforcement organizations do not conduct investigations for politically motivated reasons. They do investigate political leaders in order to end political corruption, including violations of the Hobbs Act. Independent government watchdog organizations have found no evidence of politically motivated action in recent FBI investigations.

Claim #3: Government statistics are not reliable and are regularly influenced by partisan considerations.
Republican elected officials claim that government statistics can be easily manipulated to reflect progress towards the policy goals of the party in power.
**Facts:** The bureaucrats who oversee the creation of these statistics are legally required to be non-partisan and make their statistics publicly available. There are numerous federal agencies that oversee this process, including the Government Accountability Office, the Office of Management and Budget, and the Federal Committee on Statistics Methodology.

**Conclusion:**
Fact-checking efforts by the independent fact-checking organization, Political Facts and the AP, indicate that each of these three claims made by Republican elected officials is false. The claims are based on inaccurate or misleading information.
Table A1. Factors Associated with Believing Misinformation (Claim #1)

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Observations   573       573       576       576
R-squared       0.251      0.251      0.205     0.211

Note: OLS regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable is a Likert variable that equates to higher scores indicating higher belief in the misinformation statement from Claim #1 (hiring and nepotism). Reported p-values are two-tailed. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.
Table A2. Factors Associated with Believing Misinformation (Claim #2)

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Observations 573 573 576 576
R-squared 0.247 0.248 0.264 0.264

Note: OLS regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable is a Likert variable that equates to higher scores indicating higher belief in the misinformation statement from Claim #2 (political motives to investigations). Reported p-values are two-tailed. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.
Table A3. Factors Associated with Believing Misinformation (Claim #3)

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<td>0.00469</td>
<td>-0.0870</td>
<td>-0.0865</td>
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<tr>
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<td>(0.0554)</td>
<td>(0.0554)</td>
<td>(0.0574)</td>
<td>(0.0574)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Confident 2020 Election (0-1)</td>
<td>-0.159***</td>
<td>-0.157***</td>
<td>-0.0722</td>
<td>-0.0733</td>
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<tr>
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<td>(0.0545)</td>
<td>(0.0542)</td>
<td>(0.0543)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Education (0-1)</td>
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<td>0.00976</td>
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<td>-0.0282</td>
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<td>(0.0468)</td>
<td>(0.0473)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Race (Black 1; Non-Black 0)</td>
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<td>0.00307</td>
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<td>(0.0449)</td>
<td>(0.0437)</td>
<td>(0.0437)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female 1; Male 0</td>
<td>-0.104***</td>
<td>-0.103***</td>
<td>-0.0603**</td>
<td>-0.0607***</td>
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<tr>
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<td>(0.0245)</td>
<td>(0.0252)</td>
<td>(0.0252)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (0-1)</td>
<td>-0.0154</td>
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<td>-0.0478</td>
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<tr>
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<td>(0.0620)</td>
<td>(0.0622)</td>
<td>(0.0652)</td>
<td>(0.0652)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.436***</td>
<td>0.445***</td>
<td>0.336***</td>
<td>0.331***</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0729)</td>
<td>(0.0736)</td>
<td>(0.0737)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>572</td>
<td>572</td>
<td>574</td>
<td>574</td>
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<tr>
<td>R-squared</td>
<td>0.288</td>
<td>0.289</td>
<td>0.295</td>
<td>0.296</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: OLS regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable is a Likert variable that equates to higher scores indicating higher belief in the misinformation statement from Claim #3 (government statistics). Reported p-values are two-tailed. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.
Table A4. Factors Associated with Believing Misinformation, Conspiracy (Claim #1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLES</th>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dem Correction x Conspiracy</td>
<td>0.155*</td>
<td>0.118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0942)</td>
<td>(0.0959)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rep Correction x Conspiracy</td>
<td>-0.251***</td>
<td>-0.183**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0740)</td>
<td>(0.0763)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correction</td>
<td>0.262***</td>
<td>0.312***</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0712)</td>
<td>(0.0705)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pres. Vote</td>
<td>0.106**</td>
<td>0.0234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0428)</td>
<td>(0.0410)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Interest (0-1)</td>
<td>0.0182</td>
<td>0.0443</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0541)</td>
<td>(0.0520)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust in Govt (0-1)</td>
<td>0.191***</td>
<td>0.229***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0546)</td>
<td>(0.0572)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FoxNews</td>
<td>0.0296</td>
<td>-0.0167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0342)</td>
<td>(0.0341)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust Fact Check (0-1)</td>
<td>0.0816</td>
<td>0.0916</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0595)</td>
<td>(0.0619)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confident 2020 Election (0-1)</td>
<td>-0.145**</td>
<td>-0.0264</td>
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<tr>
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<td>(0.0591)</td>
<td>(0.0591)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education (0-1)</td>
<td>0.0263</td>
<td>-0.0233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0501)</td>
<td>(0.0511)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black 1; Non-Black 0)</td>
<td>-0.0932*</td>
<td>0.00528</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0483)</td>
<td>(0.0469)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female 1; Male 0</td>
<td>-0.124***</td>
<td>-0.0540**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0263)</td>
<td>(0.0273)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (0-1)</td>
<td>-0.0897</td>
<td>-0.0461</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0665)</td>
<td>(0.0702)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.419***</td>
<td>0.278***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0876)</td>
<td>(0.0871)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Observations: 573 576
R-squared: 0.251 0.207

Note: OLS regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable is a Likert variable that equates to higher scores indicating higher belief in the misinformation statement from Claim #1 (hiring and nepotism). Reported p-values are two-tailed. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.
Table A5. Factors Associated with Believing Misinformation, Conspiracy (Claim #2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLES</th>
<th>(1) Claim #2 Dem</th>
<th>(2) Claim #2 Rep</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dem Correction x Conspiracy</td>
<td>0.0235 (0.0863)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rep Correction x Conspiracy</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.00814 (0.0855)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correction</td>
<td>-0.152** (0.0678)</td>
<td>-0.104 (0.0681)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conspiracy (0-1)</td>
<td>0.360*** (0.0652)</td>
<td>0.422*** (0.0624)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pres. Vote</td>
<td>0.0482 (0.0392)</td>
<td>-0.00550 (0.0364)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Interest (0-1)</td>
<td>0.0804 (0.0496)</td>
<td>0.09999** (0.0462)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust in Govt (0-1)</td>
<td>0.115** (0.0500)</td>
<td>0.176*** (0.0507)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FoxNews</td>
<td>0.0213 (0.0313)</td>
<td>0.0359 (0.0302)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust Fact Check (0-1)</td>
<td>0.0523 (0.0545)</td>
<td>-0.111** (0.0550)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confident 2020 Election (0-1)</td>
<td>-0.163*** (0.0542)</td>
<td>-0.0946* (0.0524)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education (0-1)</td>
<td>0.0792* (0.0459)</td>
<td>-0.0464 (0.0454)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black 1; Non-Black 0)</td>
<td>-0.0186 (0.0442)</td>
<td>-0.0266 (0.0417)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female 1; Male 0</td>
<td>-0.0729*** (0.0241)</td>
<td>-0.0171 (0.0242)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (0-1)</td>
<td>-0.00901 (0.0610)</td>
<td>-0.0646 (0.0625)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.366*** (0.0803)</td>
<td>0.390*** (0.0769)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Observations 573 576
R-squared 0.248 0.262

Note: OLS regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable is a Likert variable that equates to higher scores indicating higher belief in the misinformation statement from Claim #2 (political motives to investigations). Reported p-values are two-tailed. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.
Table A6. Factors Associated with Believing Misinformation, Conspiracy (Claim #3)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>VARIABLES</th>
<th>(1) Claim #3 Dem</th>
<th>(2) Claim #3 Rep</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dem Correction x Conspiracy</td>
<td>0.0921</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0877)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rep Correction x Conspiracy</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.0903</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0887)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correction</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.207***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0689)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conspiracy (0-1)</td>
<td>0.402***</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0663)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pres. Vote</td>
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<tr>
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<td>(0.0398)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Political Interest (0-1)</td>
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<td>0.119**</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0508)</td>
<td>(0.0481)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust in Govt (0-1)</td>
<td>0.0759</td>
<td>0.120**</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0509)</td>
<td>(0.0527)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FoxNews</td>
<td>0.0335</td>
<td>-0.0160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0318)</td>
<td>(0.0315)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust Fact Check (0-1)</td>
<td>-0.00488</td>
<td>-0.0895</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0553)</td>
<td>(0.0572)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confident 2020 Election (0-1)</td>
<td>-0.157***</td>
<td>-0.0827</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>(0.0551)</td>
<td>(0.0546)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0466)</td>
<td>(0.0473)</td>
</tr>
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<td>Black 1; Non-Black 0</td>
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<td>0.00422</td>
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<tr>
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<td>(0.0449)</td>
<td>(0.0437)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female 1; Male 0</td>
<td>-0.108***</td>
<td>-0.0610**</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0245)</td>
<td>(0.0252)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age (0-1)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>(0.0619)</td>
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<td>Constant</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>(0.0815)</td>
<td>(0.0798)</td>
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</table>

Observations 572 574
R-squared 0.289 0.296

Note: OLS regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable is a Likert variable that equates to higher scores indicating higher belief in the misinformation statement from Claim #3 (government statistics). Reported p-values are two-tailed. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.
Misinformation and Religious Survey

You are being asked to complete an online research survey that will take approximately 15 minutes. This survey is part of a research study conducted by the University of Mississippi. The goal of this survey is to ask you some questions about yourself and obtain your views about public affairs and current events.

Findings from this study may be reported in scholarly journals, at academic seminars, and at research association meetings. The data will be stored at a secured location and retained indefinitely. Confidentiality will be maintained to the degree permitted by the technology used. Your participation in this online survey involves risks similar to a person’s everyday use of the Internet. No identifying information about you will be made public and any views you express will be kept completely anonymous. Your participation is voluntary. Even if you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any question or to withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.

There are no known risks associated with this study beyond those associated with everyday life. Although this study will not benefit you personally, we hope that our results will add to the knowledge about how people form their opinions. Note that once you submit responses to the survey the researcher will be unable to extract your anonymous data from the database if you wish it to be withdrawn.

To participate in the study, you must be at least 18 years old and a U.S. citizen.

IRB Approval  This study has been reviewed by The University of Mississippi’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). If you have any questions, concerns, or reports regarding your rights as a participant of research, please contact the IRB at (662) 915-7482 or irb@olemiss.edu.

If you have any questions about the research, you can contact Conor Dowling at cdowling@olemiss.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or concerns about the conduct of this study, you may contact The University of Mississippi Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, 100 Barr Hall, University, MS 38677, 662-915-7482, irb@olemiss.edu.

Principle Investigators
Julia James  Dr. Robert Brown
Department of Political Science  Department of Political Science
136 Deupree Hall  136 Deupree Hall
The University of Mississippi  The University of Mississippi
(662) 915-7401  (662) 915-7401

Joseph Murphy  Dr. Conor Dowling
Department of Political Science  Department of Political Science
136 Deupree Hall  136 Deupree Hall
Q105 Statement of Consent
I have read and understand the above information. By completing the survey, I affirm that I am at least 18 years old and consent to participate in the study.

☐ I agree to participate. (1)

☐ I do not agree to participate. (2)

Q87 For our research, careful attention to survey questions is critical! We thank you for your care.

☐ I understand (1)

☐ I do not understand (2)

Q88 People are very busy these days and many do not have time to follow what goes on in the government. **We are testing whether people read questions carefully** (and making sure bots are not taking the survey). To show that you’ve read this much, answer both "extremely interested" and "very interested." Thank you.

☐ Extremely interested (1)

☐ Very interested (2)

☐ Moderately interested (3)

☐ Slightly interested (4)

☐ Not interested at all (5)
Q2 What is your current gender identity?

- Female (1)
- Male (2)
- Transgender Female (3)
- Transgender Male (4)
- Genderqueer (5)
- Gender-nonconforming (6)
- Not listed (please specify) (7)
- Prefer not to answer (8)

Q3 Which ONE of the following racial or ethnic groups best describes you?

- White (1)
- Black or African American (2)
- Hispanic/Latinx (3)
- Asian (4)
- Native American (5)
- Middle Eastern (6)
- Mixed Race (7)
- Other (8)
Q5 What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- Some high school or less (1)
- High school graduate (2)
- Some college, but no degree (yet) (3)
- 2-year college degree (4)
- 4-year college degree (5)
- Postgraduate degree (6)

Q133 What was your total household income before taxes during the past 12 months?

- Under $25,000 (1)
- $25,000 - $34,999 (2)
- $35,000 - $49,999 (3)
- $50,000 - $74,999 (4)
- $75,000 - $99,999 (5)
- $100,000 - $149,999 (6)
- $150,000 - $199,999 (7)
- $200,000 - $249,999 (8)
- $250,000 - $299,999 (9)
- $300,000 or more (10)
- Prefer not to say (11)
Q9 In what year were you born?
▼ 2003 (1) ... 1920 (84)

Q13 What state do you currently reside in?
▼ Alabama (1) ... Wyoming (50)

Q15 What is your present religion, if any?

- Protestant (1)
- Roman Catholic (2)
- Mormon (3)
- Eastern or Greek Orthodox (4)
- Jewish (5)
- Muslim (6)
- Buddhist (7)
- Hindu (8)
- Atheist (9)
- Agnostic (10)
- Nothing in particular (11)
- Something else (12) ________________________________________________
Q17 Aside from weddings and funerals, how often do you attend religious services?

- More than once a week (1)
- Once a week (2)
- Once or twice a month (3)
- A few times a year (4)
- Seldom (5)
- Never (6)

Q30 How important is your religion in your life?

- Very important (1)
- Somewhat important (2)
- A little bit important (3)
- Not at all important (4)

Q31 How important is it to you that your political leaders share your religious beliefs?

- Very important (1)
- Somewhat important (2)
- A little important (3)
- Not at all important (4)
Q43 How often can you trust the federal government in Washington to do what is right?

- Always (1)
- Most of the time (2)
- About half the time (3)
- Some of the time (4)
- Never (5)

Q40 How interested would you say you are in politics?

- Very interested (1)
- Somewhat interested (2)
- Not very interested (3)
- Not at all interested (4)

Q38 Where do you prefer to get the majority of your political news?

- Print news (Newspapers, magazines, etc.) (1)
- TV news broadcasts (2)
- Online News (Articles) (3)
- Online News (Videos, clips) (4)
- Social Media (5)
- I choose not to pay attention (6)
Q39 From which TV news network do you get the majority of your political news?

- Local broadcasts (1)
- CNN (2)
- Fox News Channel (3)
- MSNBC (4)
- Univision (5)
- Other (6)
- Don't watch (7)

Q105 It has become more common for fact checking organizations to provide fact checking on the comments of candidates and elected officials. How much do you trust independent fact checking organizations?

- A great deal (1)
- A lot (2)
- A moderate amount (3)
- A little (4)
- Not at all (5)
Q106 Do you believe independent fact checking organizations skew the facts to help a particular party?

- Yes, they skew a lot to help Democrats (1)
- Yes, they skew a lot to help Republicans (2)
- Yes, they skew a little to help Democrats (3)
- Yes, they skew a little to help Republicans (4)
- No, they just report the facts (5)

Q55 We would like to know if you agree or disagree with the following statements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agree strongly (1)</th>
<th>Agree (2)</th>
<th>Agree somewhat (5)</th>
<th>Disagree somewhat (6)</th>
<th>Disagree (3)</th>
<th>Disagree strongly (4)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White people in the U.S. have certain advantages because of the color of their skin. (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial problems in the U.S. are rare, isolated situations. (2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q21 Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Democrat, a Republican, an Independent, or something else?

- Democrat (1)
- Republican (2)
- Independent (3)
- Other (4)

Q23 Do you think of yourself as closer to the Democratic Party, closer to the Republican Party, or equally close to both parties?

- Closer to the Democratic Party (1)
- Closer to the Republican Party (2)
- Equally close to both parties (3)

Q25 Would you call yourself a strong Democrat or a not very strong Democrat?

- Strong Democrat (1)
- Not very strong Democrat (2)

Q27 Would you call yourself a strong Republican or a not very strong Republican?

- Strong Republican (1)
- Not very strong Republican (2)

Q29 Which party is that?

__________________________________________________________________________
Q19 Thinking about politics these days, how would you describe your own political viewpoint?

- Extremely Liberal (1)
- Liberal (2)
- Slightly Liberal (3)
- Moderate (4)
- Slightly Conservative (5)
- Conservative (6)
- Extremely Conservative (7)

Q32 Which of the following statements best describes you?

- I did not vote in the November 2020 General Election (1)
- I thought about voting this time, but didn’t (2)
- I usually vote, but didn't this time (3)
- I attempted to vote, but did not or could not (4)
- I definitely voted in the November 2020 General Election (5)

Q33 For whom did you vote for President of the United States in the November 2020 General Election?

- Donald Trump (Republican) (1)
- Joe Biden (Democrat) (2)
- Other (3)
Q34 When thinking about your vote for president, would you say your vote was more of a vote in support of Donald Trump or a vote against Joe Biden?

- A vote strongly in support of Donald Trump (1)
- A vote somewhat in support of Donald Trump (2)
- A vote somewhat against Joe Biden (3)
- A vote strongly against Joe Biden (4)

Q35 When thinking about your vote for president, would you say your vote was more of a vote in support of Joe Biden or a vote against Donald Trump?

- A vote strongly in support of Joe Biden (1)
- A vote somewhat in support of Joe Biden (2)
- A vote somewhat against Donald Trump (3)
- A vote strongly against Donald Trump (4)

Q36 When thinking about your vote for president, would you say your vote was more of a vote in support of another candidate or a vote against Donald Trump or Joe Biden?

- A vote in support of another candidate (1)
- A vote strongly against Joe Biden (2)
- A vote somewhat against Joe Biden (3)
- A vote strongly against Donald Trump (4)
- A vote somewhat against Donald Trump (5)

Q37 Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly agree (1)</th>
<th>Agree (2)</th>
<th>Somewhat agree (3)</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree (4)</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree (5)</th>
<th>Disagree (6)</th>
<th>Strongly disagree (7)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elections should be conducted, ballots counted, and winners determined without pervasive fraud or manipulation. (Q37_1)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Government should protect individual's right to engage in peaceful protest. (Q37_3)</td>
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<tr>
<td>An important part of democracy is to accept election losses peacefully. (Q37_4)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Even when there are disagreements about ideology or policy,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q41 Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Agree (1)</th>
<th>Agree (2)</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)</th>
<th>Disagree (4)</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree (5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unseen patterns and secret activities can be found everywhere in politics.</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Much of our lives are being controlled by plots hatched in secret places.</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The people who really &quot;run&quot; the country are not known to the voters.</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q51 Hopefulness often arises when you believe that your goals will be met and things will work out in a positive way. Examples of situations that evoke hopefulness include: graduating and
getting a job, getting married and starting a family, you or a loved one recovering from an illness, resolving a conflict with a friend, etc.

What are 3-5 things that make you most hopeful for the future? Please briefly list them in the box below.

________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________

Q38 Now we want to ask you about how you are feeling right now. The next several screens will have words that describe different feelings or emotions. Please read each item and then mark the appropriate answer for that word. To what extent do you feel…

Q53 Anxiety often arises when you experience worry, unease, or nervousness about an imminent event or something with an uncertain outcome. Examples of situations that evoke anxiety include: work stress or job change, family or relationship problems, emotional shock, or the death of the loved one.
What are the 3–5 things that make you most anxious about the future? Please briefly list them in the box below.

________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________

Q51 Now we want to ask you about how you are feeling right now. The next several screens will have words that describe different feelings or emotions. Please read each item and then mark the appropriate answer for that word. To what extent do you feel…
Q39 Anxious

○ Very slightly or not at all (1)
○ A little (2)
○ Moderately (3)
○ Quite a bit (4)
○ Extremely (5)

Q40 Afraid

○ Very slightly or not at all (1)
○ A little (2)
○ Moderately (3)
○ Quite a bit (4)
○ Extremely (5)

Q43 Hopeful

○ Very slightly or not at all (1)
○ A little (2)
○ Moderately (3)
○ Quite a bit (4)
○ Extremely (5)
Q44 Proud

○ Very slightly or not at all (1)
○ A little (2)
○ Moderately (3)
○ Quite a bit (4)
○ Extremely (5)

Q115 You will now read an article about democratic norms in American politics followed by questions asking you to evaluate the accuracy of the claims in the article.
Q45 AP Dem Corrected image

Q46 AP Dem Misinformation image

Q47 AP Rep Corrected image

Q48 AP Rep Misinformation image

Q49 How accurate is each of the following statements in describing how things generally work in American politics?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Claim #1: Higher ranking government officials can fire and demote other government officials for political reasons, or appoint family members to federal or cabinet level positions. (1)</th>
<th>Very accurate (1)</th>
<th>Somewhat accurate (2)</th>
<th>Not very accurate (3)</th>
<th>Not at all accurate (4)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Claim #2: Federal law enforcement investigations of public officials or their associates are influenced by political motives. (2)</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claim #3: Government statistics are not reliable and are regularly influenced by partisan considerations. (3)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>