Fact-Checking Political Knowledge and Motivations for Objectivity Versus Subjectivity in Decision-Making

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Introduction

Human decision-making is influenced by two primary reasoning motivations – directional goals to achieve desired conclusions and accuracy goals to achieve correct or objective conclusions (Kunda, 1990).

Some individuals are dispositionally motivated to overcome biased processing and make objective decisions, and this is sometimes related to reductions in biased judgment and behavior (Hawkins & Nosek, in prep).

How might individuals who are motivated to make objective decisions actually make more objective decisions? We investigated fact-checking in a political context as one potential mechanism through which individuals might debias political judgments.

Method

Political knowledge quiz and fact-checking procedure. Six questions were adapted from 2012 quizzes on Factcheck.org. Below is an example of the procedure for just one of the six questions administered.

Example Political Knowledge Question (1 of 6)
Planned Parenthood clinics performed more than 11 million medical services in 2010. Which of the following statements is true of their services?

a) Abortion services make up about 27% of their services (Republican bias)
b) Abortion services make up about 15% of their services (Republican bias)
c) Abortion services make up about 3% of their services (Correct response)
d) Abortion services make up less than 1% of their services (Democratic bias)

CHECK Stage
Would you like to see the correct answer to this question?

EXPLANATION Stage
Would you like to see an explanation for why this is the correct answer to this question?

REVISE Stage
Testing and treatment of sexually transmitted diseases is the largest category of services (38%), then breast and cervical cancer screening and prevention (14.5%). Would you like to revise your response?

Participant proceeds to next political knowledge question

Participant views original question and responds, then proceeds to the next political knowledge question

Composite score computation. Percentage of correct scores, Democratic-biased responses, and Republican-biased responses were computed across the six political knowledge questions. Fact-checking measures included the percentage of items that participants checked the response to, viewed the explanation of, and revised.

Results and Discussion

Means for Political Knowledge, Bias Scores, and Fact-Checking Composite Scores

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<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Dem</th>
<th>Ind</th>
<th>Rep</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Political Knowledge</td>
<td>35.7%</td>
<td>36.2%</td>
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<td>Democratic Bias</td>
<td>34.9%</td>
<td>37.3%</td>
<td>27.9%</td>
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<td>Republican Bias</td>
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<td>26.5%</td>
<td>37.2%</td>
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<td>Fact-Checking</td>
<td>86.5%</td>
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<th>V-E</th>
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<tr>
<td>Fact-Checking</td>
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<tr>
<td>View Explanation</td>
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<td>.07</td>
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<td>--</td>
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<tr>
<td>Revise Response</td>
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<td>.22*</td>
<td>.31*</td>
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Fact-checking was frequent, suggesting that the fact-checking procedure developed here might be improved by introducing a cost to view the correct response, such as a small portion of the study reward (e.g., $.05 of the $.50 reward).

MOSS was unrelated to fact-checking, suggesting that the debiasing properties associated with motivations for objectivity may occur earlier in the decision-making process, such as selective information exposure.