

Confirmation bias & desirability bias in the 2016 US Presidential election (#1400)

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1) What's the main question being asked or hypothesis being tested in this study?

To what extent do confirmation bias and desirability bias account for belief change in the political domain? Specifically:

1. Do they have independent effects on belief change?
2. Which bias accounts for greater belief change overall?
3. Do they combine additively and/or multiplicatively to affect belief change?

2) Describe the key dependent variable(s) specifying how they will be measured.

Magnitude of belief change. At the start of the study (T1) participants will indicate who they think will be elected in the 2016 US Presidential election on a scale from 0 (Clinton) - 100 (Trump). At the end of the study participants will again indicate who they think will be elected (T2). Belief change will be computed in two steps. In step one we will calculate the difference between T1 and T2 scores. In step two this difference will be signed as either negative (-) or positive (+), depending upon whether the participant changed their belief away from or towards the information presented during the study, respectively.

3) How many and which conditions will participants be assigned to?

4 between-subjects conditions in a 2x2 design. Condition assignment occurs in two steps. In step one, participants indicate (a) who they want to win, and (b) who they think will win. Responses for (a) will be given a nominal choice format ("Clinton", "Trump", or "neither"), (b) a continuous scale from 0 (Clinton) - 100 (Trump). We will treat scores below 50 as 'thinking' Clinton will win, scores above 50 as 'thinking' Trump will win. Participants indicating uncertainty (a score of 50), or selecting they want "neither" to win, will be screened out of the experiment. This yields 2 quasi-experimental groups—those whose want/think candidates are congruent, and those whose are incongruent. In step two, participants in both groups are randomly assigned to receive information either (a) consistent, or (b) inconsistent with who they think will win (information assignments within each candidate choice will be balanced). This yields 4 between-subjects conditions in a 2x2 design: information consistent or inconsistent with who the participant thinks will win (confirmatory/disconfirmatory), and consistent or inconsistent with who they want to win (desirable/undesirable).

4) Specify exactly which analyses you will conduct to examine the main question/hypothesis.

2x2 ANCOVA predicting belief change from confirmation and desirability factors, controlling for T1 belief scores. We will conduct the following planned contrasts. (1) We will compare mean change in the confirmatory-undesirable vs. disconfirmatory-undesirable condition, and mean change in the disconfirmatory-desirable vs. disconfirmatory-undesirable condition. (2) We will compare mean change in the confirmatory-undesirable vs. disconfirmatory-desirable condition. (3) We will examine whether there is an interaction between confirmation and desirability factors in predicting belief change.

5) Any secondary analyses?

By-candidate exploratory analyses.

6) How many observations will be collected or what will determine sample size? No need to justify decision, but be precise about exactly how the number will be determined.

900 participants (balancing assignment to 225 per condition). Sample size was determined via power analysis for the ANCOVA, recommended N=779. We added approx. 15% to this number to account for participant exclusions.

7) Anything else you would like to pre-register? (e.g., data exclusions, variables collected for exploratory purposes, unusual analyses planned?)

Participant exclusion criteria:

- 1) Failed attention check.
- 2) Within each condition, those with belief change scores >3 SD from the mean.
- 3) Answering "yes" to a question asking them if they answered dishonestly/mistakenly.

8) Have any data been collected for this study already?

No, no data have been collected for this study yet