

Is That Source Credible?

A Model of Source Credibility in Politics

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A dissertation submitted to the department of Political Science
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in Political Science

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May 2020

Dedication

To Beka, the ever-supportive love of my life.

To my parents, for their unyielding love and support.

To Beth, a patient mentor, my personal role model, and a valued friend.

To myself, for never falling out of love with what I do.

Abstract

Using low information rationality, citizens can address their own lack of political knowledge by turning to elite experts with more detailed policy knowledge to help interpret and economize information. However, citizens must navigate a political media environment that is oversaturated with unqualified sources and competing heuristic cues. This has led some scholars to question whether individuals are willing or able to utilize low-information rationality effectively. Much prior work focuses on partisan motivated reasoning, asserting that the influence of partisanship overwhelms that of other relevant informational cues. This is refuted by a relatively smaller subset of works, finding that the influence of partisanship is often diminished by contextual cues. I address this debate with two experimental designs that place source cues in a competing context by simultaneously manipulating expertise-related source credibility cues and partisan cues. Findings suggest that the influence of partisan cues does not overwhelm competing source credibility cues. Instead, individuals do take source expertise and credibility into account, even when confronted with competing partisan source cues.

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Introduction:

Checking Our Sources

“I think that everyone is kind of confused about the information they get from the media, and rightly so. I’m confused about the information I get from the media.” - Bob Woodward, political journalist and author.

On November 13, 2019, Bill Taylor, the United States Ambassador to Ukraine, testified during the first day of impeachment hearings conducted by the House Intelligence committee. On live television, he alleged that President Donald Trump and other high-ranking White House officials attempted to bribe and coerce the Ukrainian government into launching a damaging public investigation into a political rival, former Vice President Joe Biden. Ambassador Taylor’s testimony was broadcast live via the three major cable news networks of the time (Fox News, CNN, and MSNBC), as well as live streamed on social media websites like YouTube and Twitter.

Yet, while all citizens could *hear* the same testimony from the Ambassador irrespective of the medium to which they chose to tune in, not all citizens *saw* the same testimony. Coverage of the hearings varied greatly from network to network, each with its own cast of political pundits and newsroom graphics teams to help viewers interpret the historic moment. Thus, while the content of the testimony itself was identical across all networks, the frames utilized to characterize the hearings, as well as the qualifications and motivations of Ambassador Taylor himself, were left to the subjective judgement of each news team.

Figures 1 and 2 provide a brief snapshot of live coverage from both Fox News and MSNBC. Both networks chose to leverage simple cues to inform the audience of the Ambassador’s credibility. However, the cues the networks utilized could not be any more dissimilar.

Coverage on Fox News used contextual cues and information that highlighted what they felt were negative aspects of Ambassador Taylor's character. These cues noted the general dismissal of Taylor's testimony by President Trump, the White House, and the party establishment more broadly. These cues undoubtedly send a strong ideological signal to the viewer, notifying them as to where most Republicans stand on impeachment. Moreover, they portray the Ambassador as having a personal vendetta against the president, bringing his motivations into question. In stark contrast, coverage on MSNBC chose to present cues that highlight the Ambassador's qualifications, noting his tenure in the position, as well as his breadth of knowledge and familiarity with foreign policy towards Ukraine.

Figure I.1 Ambassador to Ukraine, Bill Taylor, giving testimony to congress as seen on Fox News (November 13, 2019)

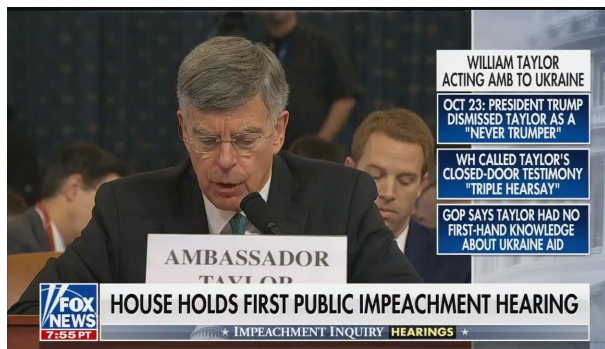
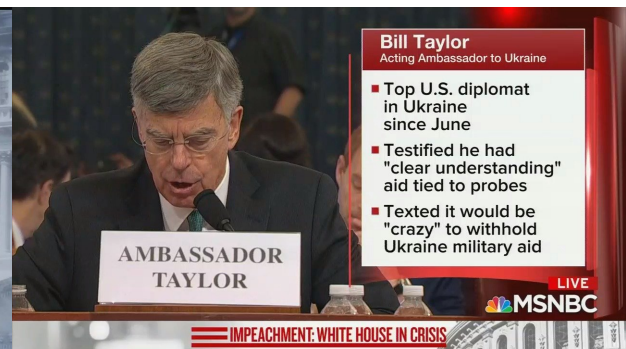


Figure I.2 Ambassador to Ukraine, Bill Taylor, giving testimony to congress on MSNBC (November 13, 2019)



These polarized differences in the framing of a source credibility serves to highlight key aspects of the challenge presented to citizens as they navigate their political information environment. First and foremost, citizens are presented with a great deal of choice in information sources. As noted, Ambassador Taylor's testimony was broadcast over both a variety of networks, as well as a variety of mediums. Consumers have more options than ever regarding both from whom and through which medium they consume media (Arceneaux and Johnson 2013; Prior 2007). These sources are not always ideologically neutral, providing fertile soil for the growth of partisan selective exposure and further political polarization (Stroud 2011; Iyengar and Westwood 2014; Iyengar and Hahn 2009; Knobloch-Westerwick

2012; Knobloch-Westerwick and Meng 2009). It is safe to say that most American citizens were likely unfamiliar with Ambassador Taylor prior to his testimony, so such highly partisan cues may have a drastic effect on how they assess Taylor's credibility, and the effectiveness of his testimony in communicating valuable information to the public.

These issues are only exacerbated by a media environment that is oversaturated with competing messages, sources, and cues. While the Ambassador is just one individual, he was also questioned by 15 members of the intelligence committee and two prosecutors, with a plethora of pundits from each network discussing the testimony during short recesses. Each of these pundits presumably has their own unique qualifications and potential ulterior motives, giving the viewer a lot of names and faces they need to keep track of. The scope of this problem goes well beyond the impeachment hearings. A *Washington Post* analysis conducted in 2016 found that 601 political pundits made an appearance on the three main cable news networks (CNN, Fox, and MSNBC) over an eight day period, with as many as 11 pundits on screen at once (Farhi 2016). While it seems counterintuitive, media outlets hold debates on highly technical issues featuring perspectives from highly unqualified, non-expert sources with disturbing regularity. Although there may be a minimum level of assumed source expertise when a pundit appears in the news, the question remains as to whether citizens can distinguish the experts from the non-experts when there are many competing voices. Citizens may think "that pundit must be credible if they made it on the news." but this does not address if, and when, citizens choose among the many voices on the news that all presumably receive this same benefit of the doubt.

Perhaps the most famous (and most-parodied) example is entertainer Bill Nye's¹ repeated debates over the existence of climate change on both CNN and Fox News with other non-expert media pundits (e.g. Tucker Carlson of Fox News, Nick Loris of The Heritage Foundation). CNN alone has featured a plethora of opinions on childhood vaccination laws

¹Nye has no scientific experience or training to speak of, outside of a bachelor's degree.

from qualified and unqualified sources, including medical doctors,² journalists,³ and celebrity actors.⁴ The quality of information from these sources also varies widely, due to sources' conflicts of interests or ulterior motives which may mislead the audience. On the issue of climate change, for example, CNN aired segments featuring climate change skeptics Rick Santorum,⁵ Tom DeLay,⁶ and Scott Jennings,⁷ whom all received money from the fossil fuels industry. This problem has become increasingly persistent and relevant in the internet age, as pundits, and even elected officials, with no formal expert training or experience receive regular airtime and column inches, spreading highly partisan-influenced perspectives (e.g. President Donald Trump and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's repeated discussions of the Obama Birther and Clinton Benghazi conspiracy theories).

This creates a confusing atmosphere in which citizens may struggle to weigh multiple competing cues from expert and non-expert sources alike. While citizens can make semi-informed decisions through heuristic cues and low information rationality (Lupia 2015; Downs 1957; Popkin 1994), competing cues from two (or more) sources often disrupt this process, leading to worse decision-making (Boudreau 2013). With many competing cues, how do individuals distinguish expert opinions from lower quality perspectives?

Works on partisan motivated reasoning question whether such cues help citizens make better informed decisions. Instead, these works assert that partisan biases would lead citizens to see copartisan sources as experts and opposing partisan sources as non-experts, preventing effective low information reasoning and political communication (Cohen 2003; Iyengar et al 2012; Bolsen et al. 2014; Kioussis 2001; Achens and Bartels 2016; Campbell et al 1960).

This results in selective exposure to information sources and subsequent political polarization (Stroud 2011; Iyengar and Hahn 2009). These deeply-imbedded partisan attitudes may prevent expert perspectives from effectively correcting misinformed beliefs and rumors

²Sanjay Gupta (2017); Ford Vox (2017).

³Susan Scutti (2018); Ben Brumfield (2015).

⁴Jenny McCarthy and Jim Carrey (2008).

⁵Former Pennsylvania senator.

⁶Former Congressman, Texas 22nd.

⁷Public relations consultant for fossil fuel companies.

(Flynn et al. 2017; Berinsky 2017).

Yet, this research is refuted by a relatively smaller subset of works which questions the extent to which partisan cues overwhelm competing source cues (Boudreau and MacKenzie 2014; 2018; Bullock 2011) These works suggest that while partisan cues do exhibit great influence over political assessments and behavior, citizens will use competing cues when made readily available (Messing and Westwood 2012; Nicholson 2012; Leeper and Slothuus 2014; Metzger et al. 2015; Feldman et al. 2013; 2018; Mummulo 2016; Darmofal 2015). This suggests a somewhat more sanguine depiction of the average voter: still prone to affective partisan bias, but also willing and able to seek out and make use of other competing source cues.

In this dissertation, I build off studies of source credibility cues conducted on political source credibility as well as the substantial psychology and communications-based literature on apolitical source credibility. While past works on political credibility indicate that source credibility can heavily influence political opinions, these works often fail to provide a concrete conceptual definition of source credibility itself. Thus, I contribute to the literature on source credibility by providing an in-depth analysis that fully defines source credibility in a political context, while demonstrating its affect on political assessments and behavior in a partisan polarized political environment. I put forward a multidimensional theoretical model of political source credibility which features two distinct dimensions along which individuals assess the credibility of a source of political information: 1) expertise, a perception of the source's competence and experience, and 2) character, a perception of the source's trustworthiness, honesty, and conflicts of interest.

The subsequent experimental studies both test the internal validity of this model and the substantive impact of source credibility cues in a polarized political environment. This research should have larger implications for scholarly understanding of when and why political information, heuristic cues, and persuasive communications are successful. This dissertation is structured as follows:

In Chapter 1, I lay out the theoretical foundations of my multidimensional models of source credibility. Here, I more thoroughly conceptualize both the expertise and character dimensions of credibility, while addressing oversights in past literature on political source credibility. I also explain the role that source credibility plays in political assessments, decision-making, and behavior in a polarized political environment. I offer the results from a modest observational survey analysis, which show that assessments of source credibility load well onto two latent dimension that align with this multidimensional model.

In Chapter 2, I present the design and results of two unique survey experiments, which test the predictive validity of the expertise dimension. Moreover, these studies test whether individuals are willing and able to identify expert sources and use those sources' perspectives to inform their own opinions and decision-making. Results indicate that while individuals evince strong tendencies towards partisan motivated reasoning, they nonetheless consider the perspective of expert sources irrespective of partisanship. Though opposing partisan expert sources may be at a disadvantage relative to copartisan experts, they can still effectively communicate with the audience effectively, resulting in stronger arguments and less biased news consumption habits.

In Chapter 3, I present a similar survey experiment, which tests the predictive validity of the character dimension of source credibility. Ultimately, I find that individuals again exhibit consistent and logical behavior, updating their assessments and behavior according to the credibility of the source. This holds true irrespective of the partisanship of that source, with opposing partisan sources gaining a greater degree of consideration from respondents. This serves to decrease the overall gap in partisan selection bias to a noteworthy degree.

In Chapter 4, I present a final unique experiment, which simultaneously manipulates expertise cues, character cues, and partisan cues. This expands upon the previous analyses by assessing the relative impact of the expertise and character dimensions. In doing so, I hope to determine which of the two dimensions has a stronger effect on political assessments and behavior, while analyzing how individuals rectify conflicting credibility cues in a polarized

political sphere. I find evidence that aligns well with a multidimensional model of credibility, corroborating findings from the two preceding chapters. While source credibility cues fail to wholly eliminate partisan biases, they do mitigate selection bias to a substantial degree, while providing interesting revelations regarding the role of source credibility and partisan allegiances.

Finally, I conclude with an in depth assessment of the potential implications for this research. I review how these findings may be interpreted within the broader scholarly framework on partisan motivated reasoning, and suggest future considerations for designing experiments on the subject. I also discuss the more normative implications, such as how journalist can leverage simple, yet carefully chosen source credibility cues to increase the effectiveness of communication, and perhaps persuasion over time and repeated messaging. I note how the results both demonstrate the great utility of source credibility cues, while highlighting the weighty responsibility that journalists should consider when selecting sources of information. I consider future avenues for this research, including how measures of source credibility can be utilized in future endeavors. In addition, I note how specific source cues, like gender and race, ought to warrant further scholarly exploration through the lens of source credibility. I seek to add to the broader understanding of how individuals use source cues indicating source credibility while addressing this discrepancy in the literature regarding partisan source cues. I argue that individuals take source credibility cues into account despite their own partisan biases. In a series of unique experimental designs, I find that the influence of partisanship, while quite strong, does not completely overwhelm the competing source credibility cues. Instead, individuals do acknowledge and even seek out arguments that come from credible sources, even after accounting for the partisanship of that source. The implications suggest that small credibility cues found in simple newspaper bylines and television chyrons can promote healthier democratic news consumption habits to a small but notable degree. Even in situations where the benefits of additional source cues are marginal, the cost of using such cues is virtually zero, meaning that such cues will have a positive

utility for the communicator in almost every circumstance.

Chapter 1:

What Makes A Source Credible?

“If you believe that the greatest challenge you’ve got is credibility, then the way you get that is you earn it, right? That’s not something that any set of policy makers can bestow.” - Representative Joe Kennedy III (MA-3)

Heuristic cues play a vital role in the political decisions of most American citizens. In general, citizens lack a detailed knowledge of politics (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996). Yet, when faced with uncertainty, individuals can turn to experts with a more detailed understanding of politics (e.g. political officials, the media, local opinion leaders) to help interpret political events and economize information processing, drastically cutting down on the cost of acquiring new political information (Downs 1957; Popkin 1994). Thus, individuals can still arrive at quasi-informed decisions by utilizing low-information rationality. So long as individuals can utilize relevant source cues to determine whether the speaker is credible and worthy of being believed, individuals can still make rational political decisions based on the speaker’s advice even if they do not maintain an encyclopedic knowledge of the issue at hand (Lupia and McCubbins 1998; Lupia 2002; Lupia 2016). In theory, this paints a relatively optimistic depiction of citizen’s general democratic competence by establishing a relatively low threshold for the individual to meet. Put simply, an individual only needs to identify a credible and reliable source of political information, accept the information this source provides, and use it to update their opinions and assessments of the political world. However, prior scholarship on the subject of source

credibility in a political context has thus far failed to arrive at an intuitive, agreed-upon understanding of what makes a source of information credible in the mind of an individual. One may intuitively understand that Secretary of State Colin Powell is more persuasive than Jerry Springer (Druckman 2001a), but it is not readily apparent why one speaker is more credible than another when comparing more equitable political sources. Thus, in a media environment that is often oversaturated with an overwhelming number of sources and pundits, it is unclear as to what criteria individuals use to determine whether or not a source of information is credible.

Even without a unified definition of source credibility in politics, it remains unclear within the broader political science literature as to whether individuals are willing or able to utilize low information rationality in an increasingly polarized political environment. Much of the prior work in this area focuses on the strong effects of partisanship and motivated reasoning. This school of thought asserts that partisan allegiances completely overwhelm useful contextual information and cues, painting a rather glum depiction of the average citizen's democratic competence (Campbell et al 1960; Cohen 2003; Druckman 2001b; Iyengar et al 2012). In addition, scholars have raised concerns regarding selective exposure, as individuals tend to read, watch, or listen to sources that share their partisan identities (Iyengar & Hahn 2009) and preexisting attitudes (Knobloch-Westerwick & Meng 2009), potentially leading to higher levels of political polarization (Stroud 2011; Bakshy et al. 2015; Knobloch-Westerwick 2012). These works, however, are contested by a relatively smaller subset of works (Bullock 2011; Nicholson 2012; Leeper & Slothuus 2014), which find that the influence of partisanship may be moderated by contextual cues and personal motivations, offering a far more sanguine perspective.

This dissertation will build off of utility-based models of political source credibility as well as the substantial psychology and communications-based literatures on apolitical source credibility in an effort to answer two essential research questions: 1) How do individuals assess the credibility of an information source? 2) Are individuals capable of making

effective use of source credibility cues to arrive at more informed and less biased opinions despite of their partisanship?

In this chapter, I seek to outline a theoretical model of source credibility. I begin by reviewing prior literature in political science. In doing so, I address the ongoing debate as to whether individuals can be reasonably expected to utilize low-information rationality in a political information environment that has become increasingly polarized along partisan lines. Next, I discuss how individuals determine the credibility of a source in a political context. I put forward a multidimensional theoretical model of political source credibility which features two distinct dimensions along which individuals assess the credibility of a source of political information: 1) Expertise, a perception of the source's competence and experience, and 2) Character, a perception of the source's sincerity and honesty. Finally, I detail a basic observational survey used to statistically validate this model of political source credibility in a non-partisan context. This experiment serves as a precursor to experiments in subsequent chapters, which will serve to demonstrate the predictive validity of the model in a partisan polarized context.

Are we too polarized to trust credible sources?

What individuals expect to gain from the available information is highly contextual, as they attempt to satiate competing cognitive motives. Kunda (1990) notes that individuals are torn between two competing motivations: an accuracy motive and a directional motive.⁸ The accuracy motivation drives individuals to use more cognitive effort and deeper information searches to arrive at factually correct conclusions. This drives individuals to gather information that will help them make decisions that serve their own interests while simultaneously allowing them to provide justification for their decisions and beliefs that will appear rational and unbiased to their peers. The directional motive drives individuals to utilize selective (and potentially biased) information searches and interpretations that are in line with their own previously held beliefs and identities. In doing so, individuals seek to

⁸Also see Chaiken et al. 1996.

avoid cognitive dissonance from information that causes them to question their own identity and preconceptions, while also allowing them to appear consistent to their peers.

These dueling motivations create an incentive structure for cognitive reasoning that is heavily based on the information context. On one hand, partisan source cues may trigger informational reasoning by communicating contextual information about the speaker's political ideology (Downs 1957; Aldrich 2011). For example, by simply learning that a political candidate is a Republican, a voter may infer that the candidate likely supports conservative fiscal policies. This is an invaluable heuristic shortcut, allowing voters to make relatively informed assessments and decisions with very little cognitive effort. On the other hand, partisan cues can also send strong identity-based directional signals to the individual, indicating that the source will not challenge the individual's group status or previously held beliefs. This leads to strong affective partisan biases, in which respondents favor copartisans and hold disdain for opposing partisans on matters both political and apolitical in nature (Iyengar and Westwood 2014).

The lion's share of research on political reasoning has focused heavily on the exclusive directional influence of partisan cues. This literature stems from *The American Voter*, in which Campbell et al. (1960) suggest that identity-driven attachment to one's own political party drives much of political behavior. As a result, citizens often utilize partisanship as an affective, group-based cue that can overwhelm other, more relevant and helpful informational cues. Cohen (2003) finds that partisan individuals will overwhelmingly support (reject) the exact same policy proposal based on whether or not their own political party supports (opposes) the bill. Similarly, Turner (2007) finds that respondents perceive drastically different levels of ideological bias when the same news story is attributed to Fox News or CNN. Many other works reveal the same phenomenon, with partisan cues overwhelming other competing cues such as policy content (Achens & Bartels 2016), issue positions (Iyengar et al. 2012), and candidate characteristics (Bartels 2002; Goren 2002). This effect is often considered so ubiquitous and overwhelming that some works have even gone so far as

to use the partisan affiliation of the information source as a proxy for credibility itself (Druckman 2001b; Kioussis 2001). This is particularly concerning in a scientific context, as the influence of partisan polarization often leads individuals to simply reject scientific, fact-based arguments when made by opposing partisans (Kraft et al. 2015). Similarly, partisans tend to lean heavily towards their own predispositions when scientific and fact-based issues, like climate change, become politicized (Hart & Nisbet 2011; Bolsen et al. 2014).

Additional studies in partisan motivated reasoning also question whether individuals are willing to seek out an alternative perspective at all due to individuals tendencies towards partisan selective exposure. When tasked with finding important political information, citizens show a strong propensity to seek out news sources that they perceive to share their own partisan affiliation and previously held beliefs (Iyengar and Hahn 2009; Knobloch-Westerwick 2012). This can have profound affects on individual political assessments and behavior, potentially resulting in increased levels of political polarization (Stroud 2011). This problem has been exacerbated by the rise of online news sources and social media. Individuals can now choose which websites and sources they prefer to have appear on their own Facebook timeline, Twitter feed, and YouTube recommendations. As a result, both individual preferences and the social media websites' own algorithms often lead to higher exposure to partisan congruent and pro-attitudinal news sources (Bakshy et al. 2015; Newman et al. 2017). In sum, this literature presents a rather grim depiction of fact-based communication, in which facts and evidence are simply overwhelmed by the polarized political environment.

Yet despite this heavy focus on partisan directional group-based reasoning, determining which of these dueling motivations that partisan cues serve is often difficult and highly contextual. It is true that individuals are often predisposed to partisan motivated reasoning, as directional reasoning is familiar and accessible to the individual. However, individuals are also constrained by their own ability to justify those conclusions, lest they make a costly

decision or appear biased and irrational to those around them. Kunda (1990) refers to this as the “Illusion of Objectivity,” under which individuals struggle to justify their own logic and remain accountable to those around them. As a result, individuals ought to prioritize accuracy over directional cognition when the benefits of the accuracy motives - or costs of utilizing the directional motive - increase. Recently, scholars have shown the ability incentivize motives through the use of economic games which demonstrate how small changes in contextual incentives can decrease levels of partisan motivated reasoning, increase the motivation for accuracy in information searches, and increase acceptance of the limits of one’s own political knowledge (Bullock et al. 2015; Prior et al. 2015), a more sanguine conclusion.

A more recent collection of works on the subject elaborate on this point, showing that individuals are still capable of utilizing more accuracy-based reasoning outside of laboratory or economic game setting, so long as relevant information and cues are not costly to obtain and are easy to interpret. As a result, the influence of partisan directional cues decreases when alternative, competing cues are readily available. This line of research finds that individuals make use of relevant contextual policy information when available, even when confronted with clear partisan cues (Bullock 2011), and that individuals weight candidate-based policy endorsements far more heavily than traditional party-based cues (Nicholson 2012; Barber and Pope 2019). Further evidence suggests that by leveraging competing cues, a political messenger may be able to counter individual partisan biases, particularly on complex and technical policy issues. For example, simple changes in the wording of scientific and fact-based communication (e.g. using “climate change” in lieu of “global warming”) can significantly reduce partisan-based rejection of facts (Schuldt and Roh 2014; Jang and Hart 2015). Similar frames and cues can be utilized to reduce biases born from misperceptions of policy consequences or expert agreement, which can be corrected under favorable circumstances (Golfarb and Kriner 2017; Ding et al. 2011). These works are further bolstered by similar findings, which suggest that the addition of carefully placed source cues (i.e. cues which provide context to the audience about the source

of the information) can serve as useful tools in decreasing partisan rejection of facts and fact-based evidence (Bolsen and Druckman 2015; Lupia 2013; Druckman and Lupia 2016). While citizens do hold copartisan sources in higher esteem than opposing partisan sources, citizens show a consistent preference for both ideologically neutral sources (Jacobsen 2017) and popularly-endorsed sources (Messing and Westwood 2012; Metzger et al. 2015).⁹ While partisan source cues often hold strong influence over individual opinion, these cues are only useful to the individual insofar as they help determine whether that information source is credible or trustworthy (Lupia and McCubbins 1998).

While the individual propensity towards partisan selective exposure is highly concerning, prior evidence also suggests that the extent of selective exposure may also be overstated in past literature. When presented with copartisan, opposing partisan, and neutral hard news sources, Iyengar and Hahn (2009) find that only 30% of Democrats and 50% of Republicans choose the copartisan source. Knobloch-Westerwick and Meng (2009) find that 43% of respondents willingly expose themselves to counter-attitudinal sources. Likewise, Feldman et al. (2013) find that only 54.3% of respondents choose a proattitudinal news source over a counter-attitudinal or neutral story. This bias towards copartisan and proattitudinal sources is often further undermined by the inclusion of non-news related options (i.e. entertainment and apolitical subjects; Arceneaux and Johnson 2013; Feldman et al. 2013). Additional research indicates that news selectivity is often influenced by many contextual factors, including the salience of an issue, policy-specific knowledge, and general political knowledge (Feldman et al. 2018; Mummulo 2016; Darmofal 2015). Thus, while individuals do tend to prefer copartisan sources to opposing partisan sources, this does not mean that individuals will automatically choose the copartisan or pro-attitudinal source in all circumstances. In fact, the previously noted selection experiments indicate that willing self-exposure to counter-attitudinal sources and opposing partisan sources is not uncommon, despite general preferences for pro-attitudinal and copartisan sources. In sum, the partisanship of an

⁹Also see Metzger et al. 2010; Hass and Unkel 2017; Edwards et al. 2013 for apolitical examples.

information source is just one cue among many that helps the individual determine source credibility, and must be considered within the context of competing source cues.

As such, I acknowledge the powerful role partisanship plays in political communication, but argue for the necessary consideration of context. Studies of motivated reasoning provide clear evidence for strong partisan biases. Yet, by manipulating partisanship and no other source cue or relevant information, many prior studies are measuring the effect of partisanship in a contextless vacuum. Thus, it should seem only natural that survey respondents lean heavily on partisan identification, as it is the only information that the researcher has made available to the respondent. It is an explicit goal of this research to contribute to the scholarly debate over low-information rationality by examining the role of heuristic cues indicating source credibility in conjunction with partisan cues. In doing so, I hope to provide a more realistic context in which to examine the persuasive influence of both partisanship and source credibility in political communication. However, prior to addressing the role of source credibility and cues which inform the individual as to the credibility of the source, I seek to establish a theoretical model which explains how individuals determine source credibility within a political context. To do so, I draw from a plethora of literature in political science, communications, psychology, and sociology to create a model of political source credibility.

Source credibility in political communications

Most modern conceptualizations of political source credibility borrow heavily from the Aristotelian concept of *Ethos*, an appeal to the speaker's character.¹⁰ Along with the accompanying concepts of *Logos* (rational, logical reasoning) and *Pathos* (emotional sympathy and shared values), Aristotle believed that the persuasiveness of arguments were bolstered when made by an individual of credible authority and reliable intent:

“We believe good men more fully and more readily than others: this is true generally whatever the question is, and absolutely true where exact certainty is im-

¹⁰see Mayer (1988) for a notable exception.

possible and opinions are divided... It is not true, as some writers assume in their treatises on rhetoric, that the personal goodness revealed by the speaker contributes nothing to his power of persuasion; on the contrary, his character may almost be called the most effective means of persuasion he possesses” (Aristotle 2004, *trans. Roberts*).

The speaker’s reputation bolsters his or her persuasive abilities by sending signals to the audience regarding the speaker’s positive characteristics, qualifications, intentions, etc. These subtle signals of reputability imply to the listener that the speaker’s argument is based upon accurate and useful information. Individuals can thus quickly and easily infer a rough judgement of whether the speaker’s argument is worth listening to even before considering its content, particularly when the subject matter is complex or contentious.

While most modern models of source credibility build heavily upon Aristotelian Ethos, limitations in previous studies have resulted in widespread debate across scholarly apolitical disciplines as to what dimensions of credibility individuals find useful. Early models of source credibility tended to view credibility solely as a function of perceived trustworthiness and competence (Hovland and Weiss 1951; Hovland et al. 1953; Lupia and McCubbins 1998). While the names of these two latent dimensions differ across the literature, latent representations of source expertise and character remain consistent in nearly every model of source credibility.

Later scholars have attempted to build upon this framework by adding additional dimensions that may account for idiosyncratic characteristics, traits, and qualities of the speaker that are relevant in apolitical contexts. This gave rise to a plethora of conceptualizations of credibility across disciplines with a great number of varying dimensions (Whitehead 1968; Sternthal et al. 1978; Meyer 1988; Teven and McCroskey 1997; Pornpitakpan 2004; Tormala et al. 2006).¹¹ For example, Whitehead (1968) finds that credibility can be defined in four factors: Trustworthiness, Competence, Dynamism, and Objectivity. However, these additional dimensions often lack theoretical justification, and risk confounding dimensions of source

¹¹To list all of the theoretical permutations of source credibility would be a lengthy exercise. Ohanian (1990) provides a brief overview of some of the more well-utilized approaches to source credibility.

credibility with unrelated concepts, like charisma (McCroskey and Young 1981). Moreover, efforts to divide the traditional character dimension into separate dimensions - character and objectiveness - have failed to provide consistent evidence across contexts. For example, Teven and McCroskey (1997) argue for the addition of a dimension representing shared concerns and perceived caring in high school teaching practices, referred to as Good Will. Yet, the characteristics that make a good teacher may not be equivalent to the characteristics that make a good politician or political pundit.

Perhaps more concerning, very few of these studies sought to directly test the internal and predictive validity of the dimensions in their theoretical models, either through direct experimental manipulation of each dimension or via some other method. That is, the vast majority of prior studies across disciplines opt either for observational surveys (often conducted on small convenience samples) or narrow experiments focused on demonstrating that source credibility affects persuasion as a whole, rather than demonstrating the causal impact of the dimensions in the theoretical model. This has created a problem for scholars of source credibility, as the subject has become oversaturated with different, partially-validated theoretical constructs, each tailored to a specific context, with none particularly well-suited to address source credibility in politics (McCroskey and Young 1981).¹²

In contrast to the variety of atheoretical and apolitical approaches to multidimensional source credibility, I offer a more simplistic approach to source credibility which utilizes the more traditional two dimensional approach, featuring an expertise and a character domain. This research in political science literature aligns well with this approach. Prior evidence indicates that individuals make better decisions when provided with expert perspectives (Boudreau and McCubbins 2010). In addition, citizens have consistently shown the ability to infer levels of trustworthiness to determine which sources to (dis)trust (Boudreau and McCubbins 2010; Lupia and McCubbins 1998; Boudreau 2009a; Boudreau 2009b). Further, game-theoretic and experimental evidence suggesting that individuals make better decisions when presented

¹²For example, while the concept of “attractiveness”, measured with phrases such as “sexy”, applies well to celebrities (Ohanian 1990), it may not apply as well to politicians, candidates, or political pundits.

with information provided by an individual with high levels of knowledge and/or motives that align with the those of the respondents (Lupia and McCubbins 1998).

This two-dimensional approach to source credibility is also consistent with the handful of prior conceptualizations of credibility in a political context. Lupia and McCubbins (1998) also make heavy use of Aristotelian ethos, while simultaneously describing individuals as goal-oriented reasoners. This means that citizens only use political information insofar as it allows them to make decisions based on their own internal motivations. Information that is not directly relevant to this purpose is unnecessary and is ignored. The implication is that not all potential source cues have the same level of relevance across contexts, and certain cues (i.e. partisanship, race, gender, occupation) ought to vary in their influence based on the current context. While partisanship is a particularly powerful cue in most American political contexts, it is just one cue among many, and should vary in influence based on its contextual relevance. Thus, partisanship and other source cues allow citizens to compensate for their lack of detailed knowledge, and let them act as cognitive misers attempting to seek out the most detailed information possible while spending the least amount of resources and cognitive effort (Simon 2000; Lau and Redlawsk 2001).

Yet, while prior scholarship in political source credibility offers intuitive understanding (i.e. credible sources are more persuasive than non-credible sources) there is not a thorough explanation as to how individuals judge a source's credibility. In a particularly noteworthy experiment, Jamie Druckman (2001a) demonstrates that individuals find former Secretary of State Colin Powell's perspective of humanitarian aid and foreign policy to be more persuasive than the perspective of disgraced former Cincinnati Mayor and day time talk show host Jerry Springer. While this clearly demonstrates that individuals trust highly credible sources over non-credible sources, it is not readily apparent *why* one speaker is more perceived to be more credible than another when comparing more equitable political sources. Thus, it is unclear how individuals determine source credibility when making a comparison between somewhat more equitable and less outlandish pundits.

Put another way, when a political news program regularly fields nearly half a dozen pundits at a time, why and when is one pundit seen as more or less credible than another? In one famous example, Danielle Pletka of the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) readily proclaimed to lack any scientific expertise before arguing against the existence of climate change on NBC's political talk show *Meet the Press*.¹³ From one perspective, one could imagine that citizens acknowledge her self-proclaimed lack of expertise on the subject and discount her opinion, relative to her more expert peers. From another, it is also not unreasonable to suspect that by sharing the same platform with other more credible pundits, viewers are lead to attribute the same level of credibility to Pletka as well. From yet another perspective, one could also justifiably predict that credibility would simply be overshadowed by partisan motivated reasoning: viewers would find her to be credible (not credible) because they either share (do not share) her view on climate change, or approve (disapprove) of AEI's reputation as a conservative think tank, rendering the remainder of the context a moot point. Thus, to understand the role of source credibility in political opinion formation and behavior, it is necessary to address the expectations as to when and why individuals may find source credibility cues to be useful.

I put forward a simple *Credibility Hypothesis*, which predicts that source cues related to speaker's credibility should incentivize the individual's accuracy motive, and lead the individual to perceive that speaker's argument to be more persuasive. I expect evidence of the Credibility Hypothesis to potentially evince as a main effect of source credibility, indicating that individuals consider the source's credibility even when accounting for the partisanship of that source. I further divide the Credibility Hypothesis into an *Expertise Hypothesis* and *Character Hypothesis*. These hypotheses are effectively the same as the credibility hypothesis, only focusing on each individual dimension.

¹³November 25, 2018

Theoretical framework

This multidimensional model of political source credibility seeks to build off of prior efforts in the political science discipline, and thus requires the same set of basic assumptions. First, this model assumes that individuals act like cognitive misers, attempting to gain the most detailed, accurate knowledge available while simultaneously expending as little effort as possible. Similarly, this model assumes that individuals are goal-oriented reasoners. As a result, individuals will only consider information and contextual cues that are directly relevant to their goals, while ignoring non-relevant information.

Expertise

Expertise is an assessment of the speakers's qualifications, intelligence, and competence. Expertise is multifaceted in that it includes both the quantity of one's knowledge on a subject as well as the quality of that knowledge (Griffin 1967). In this context, Expertise is *relative*, meaning that individuals ought to value information from sources that fully understand the consequences of potential decisions and can thus guide the listener towards the most sensible option (Lupia 2016; Boudreau and McCubbins 2010). This dimension of credibility is referred to by many names in prior apolitical works, such as Authoritativeness, Competence, or Qualification (Ohanian 1990). Expertise is a shorthand heuristic which embodies how the individual perceives a speaker's level of judgement. Candidates that are perceived as experienced, competent, and qualified will be viewed as more prepared and capable of conducting good research for their opinions, meaning that their opinions are likely well-informed.

While information sources with a high level of Expertise may be uniquely qualified to provide accurate information, this does not necessarily dictate that the source will be forthcoming with that information or that the source would not intentionally mislead the listener. As an example, consider two pundits on a typical television news program arguing over whether the U.S. should decrease its use of fossil fuels. The first pundit is named

Deanna, a molecular chemist with a Ph.D. in chemistry that is employed by oil company Exxon Mobil. She is arguing in favor of increased oil production. The second is a journalist named Jean-Luc, who has no formal scientific training or experience. He is arguing in favor of reduced oil production. Viewers should immediately see that Deanne has far more expertise on the issue than Jean-Luc. However, viewers may also perceive her to be biased and dishonest due to conflicts of interest with her employment at Exxon Mobil, potentially undermining her advantage in expertise. Thus, individuals must also consider the character of the speaker, as well as their expertise.

Character

Character is an assessment of the subject's trustworthiness and authenticity. Speakers that are high in Character are perceived to be honest, sincerely believing in their own rhetoric and message. This definition borrows heavily from conceptualizations of trustworthiness in prior literature, broadly defined as the perceived level of trust that the individual places in the speaker (Hovland and Weiss 1951; Hovland et al. 1953; Whitehead 1968; Ohanian 1990; Flanagin and Metzger 2017). When searching for information, individuals ought to value sources that they believe will not outright lie or mislead the listener with false claims.

Perceptions of Character may be inferred in the moment from present cues, or be a historical function of consistency and dependability in past interactions (McCroskey and Young 1981). Credibility in Character ought to be harmed either when the listener believes that the speaker has outright lied (e.g. denied involvement in a political scandal despite clear evidence to the contrary) or is pandering to the audience in a way that seems patently inauthentic and dishonest.¹⁴

Sources that are perceived to have good Character may lack the knowledge to provide accurate information. Let us return to our example debate between Deanna and Jean-Luc.

Viewers may perceive Jean-Luc to have a greater deal of Character credibility than Deanna

¹⁴McGraw et al 2002 features good analysis of pandering on assessments of politicians and their espoused policies.

because he does not have a conflict of interest. However, given that he has no formal scientific or energy-sector experience or training, he may lack the facts and information necessary to give the viewers an informed, useful perspective on the subject, thus undermining his character advantage.

Nonetheless, the Character dimension indicates that the delegate will not intentionally deceive the listener, and will at least make an honest effort to provide good information that is reliable and helpful.

Creating Validated Measures of Political Source Credibility

As a preliminary test of this theory, I attempted to construct basic measures of political source credibility based on this multidimensional model. When analyzing the credibility of a political information source, pundit, or official, I expect individuals to judge the credibility of the delegate based on both their perceived Character and Expertise. Thus, if an individual were asked to assess the credibility of that delegate, their answers should consistently fall along one of these two latent dimensions.

In an effort to test this expectation, I constructed an online survey, which was distributed to a convenience sample of 600 individuals gathered through Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) in the fall of 2016. While survey samples gathered from MTurk are not representative of the United States population, political and psychological difference between MTurk respondents and more traditional survey subjects are minimal (Clifford et al. 2015). Results garnered using MTurk (and other online samples, such as Lucid) also reliably replicate on nationally representative samples, allaying concerns regarding heterogeneous effects (Coppock and Green 2015; Coppock 2018). Thus, while not nationally representative, MTurk serves as an adequate sample for this preliminary analysis.

Respondents were asked read a short biographical statement about Aaron Weber, a fictitious candidate for the position of Lieutenant Governor who is attempting to persuade individuals

Figure 1.1 Aaron Weber, Candidate for Texas Lt. Governor



Aaron Weber

Aaron holds both a bachelors and law degree from the University of Texas at Austin. Born and raised in Austin, Texas, he strove to protect and represent the interests of all residents of the state he loves. In 2006, he began successful career in business law, where he spent his time fighting for small business and families alike. Aaron knows he has the leadership, the vision, and the passion for justice to be your next Attorney General.

to support him in an upcoming election. The biography, which was accompanied by a photograph of Aaron, featured a short paragraph detailing Aaron's past experiences and qualifications for the position.

After reading this information about Aaron Weber, respondents were asked to use a five-point unipolar Likert scales (1 = "Not well at all" to 5 = "Very well") to rate how well a series of variables describe the candidate. Analysis initially began with 33 adjectives and descriptive phrases. Most of these phrases were borrowed from previous works on apolitical source credibility, with the addition of a select few variables that deal more directly with politics (e.g. bipartisan). A Promax Factor analysis revealed two distinct latent dimensions¹⁵. Yet, while substantively interesting, a four-part, 30-odd question measure of credibility is unwieldy and not very pragmatic for conducting survey research. Thus, following Meyer (1988), items were removed based on a combination of their alpha scores and inordinately high correlations with other variables. Table 1 displays the end result of this process. Using these measures, one can create reliable indices for each dimension of credibility using varying combinations of these adjectives. Table 2 displays one potential example, which will

¹⁵Eigen values greater than 1

Table 1.1 Factor Analysis Loadings

Adjective	Character	Expertise
Trustworthy	.853	-
Fair	.847	-
Honest	.819	-
Sincere	.763	-
Unbiased	.775	-
Concerned for the Public Interest	.756	-
Impartial	.749	-
Objective	.785	-
Qualified	-	.813
Knowledgeable	-	.920
Experienced	-	.798
Intelligent	-	.763
Competent	-	.728
Proportional Variance	.368	.286
Cumulative Variance	.368	.654

Note: Values below .7 omitted

Table 1.2 Political Credibility Indices

Character	Expertise
Fair	Knowledgeable
Honest	Qualified
Unbiased	Experienced
Sincere	Competent
$\alpha = .885$	$\alpha = .894$

be used often in the proceeding chapters of this dissertation. The Chronbach's alphas for each factor are reported beneath each index. Each score is well above the accepted threshold (.7) for a stable measure, indicating that each of the scales is a statistically valid and reliable measure. These specific adjectives were chosen to preserve face validity and statistical validity while minimizing redundancy. However, other permutations or combinations of the adjectives found in Table 1 are equally acceptable to use based on the researcher's particularly needs and available survey space.

Separate additive scales are the most appropriate operationalization of both latent

dimensions, as they are easy to calculate and lend themselves to a simple interpretation in statistical analysis. Further, statistically valid and reliable scales can be easily employed in future survey research, making them rather useful and pragmatic. The correlation between both indices in Table 2 is somewhat high ($r = .56, p < .05$). However, this is somewhat expected, given that both dimensions are measuring different positive aspects of the same overarching latent concept of source credibility.

The Next Step

In this chapter, I outlined the challenges presented to citizens as they attempt to acquire accurate political information from competing sources with varying levels of credibility. Afterwards, I laid out a theoretical framework, which seeks to explain how individuals interpret source cues in their immediate political environment so as to make a quick judgement of the source's credibility. I put forward a multidimensional theoretical model of political source credibility which features two distinct dimensions along which individuals assess the political source credibility: Expertise, a perception of the source's competence and experience, and Character, a perception of the source's authenticity and honesty. I then utilized a simple survey design to create two indices through which to measure both dimensions of credibility and statistically validate this theoretical model.

This preliminary analysis provides a useful lens through which to conceptualize and measure political source credibility in survey research. However, it lacks both the predictive validity and evidence of substantive impact on individual level opinion and behavior. I intend to build upon this model of source credibility in the proceeding chapters through the use of careful experimental survey designs. By leveraging these experiments, I seek to address three important questions:

First, can a researcher manipulate each dimension of credibility independently from the other using specific source cues? This would demonstrate both the predictive validity of this theoretical framework while underscoring the necessity of taking a nuanced

multidimensional approach. Second, do these latent dimensions of source credibility have a substantive impact on individual opinions and behavior? This would demonstrate that individuals are *able* to identify credible sources of information and incorporate that information into their own political assessments and decisions. Third, do individuals utilize source credibility cues in a political environment that is highly polarized along partisan lines? This would demonstrate whether or not individuals are *willing* to seek out credible sources and accept that information when in direct competition with strong partisan cues.

Chapter 2:

Expertise and Source Credibility

“[Sen. Kennedy] is totally brilliant. I don’t know if you know what this means: Oxford. He went to Oxford. I’m very much into the world of schools. Oxford. You have to be very, very smart to go to Oxford.” - President Donald Trump, 2018

In this chapter, I seek to simultaneously demonstrate the predictive validity of the expertise dimension of credibility while also testing the Expertise Hypothesis. I hypothesize that when individuals are presented with clear source cues indicating a high degree of context-relevant expertise, those individuals will find that source’s argument to be more credible and persuasive, even when simultaneously confronted with clear competing partisan cues. I leverage two unique survey experiments which directly pitted relevant source credibility cues against partisan cues to examine their influence in regards to political persuasion and information searches. In both, I find that while source credibility cues do not negate partisan biases, the influence of partisanship does not completely overwhelm the competing source credibility cues. In fact, individuals do acknowledge and even seek out arguments that come from expert sources, even after accounting for the partisanship of that source. These results offer reason for cautious optimism regarding citizens’ basic democratic competence, as the resulting implication suggests that the source cues often found in newspaper bylines and television news chyrons can substantially affect the success (or failure) of persuasive political communications in a partisan context.

Study 1

Study 1 utilizes a convenience sample of 949 students from the University of Houston in the spring of 2018. Though both women and Democrats were over-represented relative to the national population, the sample was more racially diverse than the typical student sample. While students samples are not demographically representative of the United States population, concerns of selection bias from student samples are mitigated when the researcher is able to appropriately model relevant heterogeneous treatment effects based on respondent demographics (Druckman and Kam 2011; Coppock and Green 2015). It is not unreasonable to expect students to be more receptive to framing effects and expertise cues due to higher levels of political sophistication brought about by their education. However, there is little past precedent that would suggest this is the case. Recent replication studies have found high rates of treatment effect homogeneity between student and nationally representative samples across a variety of political contexts and cue-based framing experiments, with findings from student samples replicating on nationally representative samples in the vast majority of instances (Coppock et al. 2018; Krupnikov and Levine 2014). This helps to somewhat allay concerns that student respondents may value cues or expertise more than respondents from a nationally representative sample.¹⁶ Thus, while student samples are not ideal, they are adequate for testing simple framing effects.

Manipulations

This study utilizes treatments that are similar to the *New York Times* “Room for Debate” opinion column: a near-daily column in which two pundits or experts are invited to write opposing opinion pieces on a salient political topic. Like the *New York Times* column, the columns I created include a short introduction featuring relevant source cue information

¹⁶As an extra precaution, I measured political sophistication in order to test whether sophisticates were more receptive to expertise cues (see Appendix). There was little evidence that would suggest the politically sophisticated were more receptive to expertise cues than less politically sophisticated respondents, as sophisticates seemingly formed their own assessments irrespective of author expertise.

Figure 2.1 Example of NYT Room for Debate Author Introduction^a



^aBorrowed from the Nov 21, 2016 column "Should the President Be Able to Block You on Twitter?" (<https://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2016/11/21/should-the-president-be-able-to-block-you-on-twitter>)

about each author. Figure 1 depicts an example from a 2016 Room for Debate column. This is not dissimilar to the typical byline or chyron featured in much of print, television, and online media. The columns discuss two political issues: labelling laws for foods containing Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) and automatic voter registration. Full text can be found in the appendix, but to summarize: Each column includes arguments by two different authors, with one author arguing in favor of the given policy and the other arguing against the policy. Each article included a short introductory byline with relevant background information about the authors. While this design is meant to directly simulate a real world print news media column, this format, in which two (or more) pundits are introduced and then proceed to argue for competing points of view, is not far removed from commonplace news segments one may see on cable television news. Respondents were asked to read both articles.¹⁷ After each article, respondents were given a short questionnaire with questions related to their perceptions of both the authors and their arguments.

The two political issues debated in these columns, GMO labeling laws and automatic voter registration, were chosen because they offer an insightful contrast in levels of partisan polarization. Most Americans share an unfavorable view of GMOs irrespective of partisan identification (Funk and Kennedy 2016), meaning that the issue is not highly polarized along partisan lines. In contrast, Democrats and Republicans tend to be far more divided in their support for automatic voter registration laws (McCarthy 2016). As such, one should reasonably expect partisanship to hold a larger influence over the opinions of respondents in

¹⁷The order in which the articles appeared randomly assigned.

regards to automatic voter registration.

In each article, I manipulated the author's biography to include relevant information about the author's partisan identification and level of expertise. Photos of each author were excluded to prevent potential attractiveness or race-related confounds. Each article pitted an argument in favor of the policy (pro argument) against an argument opposed to the policy (con argument), like the *New York Times* "Room for Debate" column. First, I randomized the expertise levels of the authors. In every manipulation, one author's biography contained a cue indicating high levels of expertise while the other author's biography contained a cue indicating low expertise. Second, I randomized the partisanship of the authors. In each manipulation, one author was a Republican and the other a Democrat. The final result was a 2 x 2 experiment with four total combinations.

Table 2.1 Manipulation Combinations (Study 1)

	Pro Author	Con Author
1	High expertise Democrat	Low expertise Republican
2	Low expertise Democrat	High expertise Republican
3	High expertise Republican	Low expertise Democrat
4	Low expertise Republican	High expertise Democrat

The expertise-specific manipulations varied for each issue (Table 2). One distinct advantage of this dichotomous design is that it offers a more conservative test of the Expertise Hypothesis. Such a design is meant to eliminate confounding variables that have been shown to undermine the influence of partisanship, such as the inclusion of a third non-partisan option (Feldman et al. 2013) or an apolitical entertainment option (Arceneaux and Johnson 2013). Thus, when testing the relative influence of partisanship and expertise, this design creates contextual circumstances where one would be most likely to expect the influence of partisanship to dominate the influence of other competing cues, disproving the Expertise Hypothesis.

Table 2.2 Manipulations by Issue (Study 1)^a

Issue	High expertise	Low expertise
GMO labels	Biology Ph.D.	Political science M.A.
Automatic voter registration	20 years legal experience	Recent law school graduate

^aSee Appendix for full manipulations.

Figure 2.2 Example manipulation

GMO Labels Make Food More Expensive, Not Any Safer

About the Author:

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Foods made with Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) are safe to eat, and GMO labels promote misinformation, not safety. Thorough laboratory testing across many studies has revealed a strong scientific consensus that foods produced with GMOs are safe to eat. Not only are GMO foods safe, but they more cost-effective to produce, and often more tasty and nutritious than traditional crops. Instead of providing people with useful information, mandatory GMO labels would only intensify the misconception that so-called “Frankenfoods” endanger people’s health. GMO labels only serve to scare consumers instead of informing them, while driving up the costs of production and the price we pay at the grocery store.

GMO Labels Increase Consumer Safety, Not Food Costs

About the Author:

James Bolger is a professor of genetics and biology at University of Texas. He received his Ph.D. in genetics from Yale University. He is a registered Democrat and a regular contributor to this column.

Foods produced with Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) should be clearly labeled to promote consumer safety. Scientific evidence regarding the safety of GMOs is mixed: While some studies may indicate minimal risk, others raise human safety concerns that may arise from genetic engineering due to the introduction of new allergens. This includes an increased level of naturally occurring allergens, plant toxins, or changes in nutrition. The lack of scientific consensus is bad news for the consumer. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) does not currently require safety testing on genetically modified crops, nor do they require any companies to do safety testing of their genetically engineered crops. Consumers deserve to know what is in their food for their own safety.

Manipulation Checks

A separate analysis (n = 300 university students) demonstrated that these manipulations were not confounded by perceptions of author ideology or the character dimension. In doing so, I

seek to ensure that the relevant expertise cues are isolating and manipulating the Expertise dimension. As a result, any subsequent results from the full study could therefore be attributed to the increase or decrease in Expertise, rather than a relevant confounding dimension.

Perceptions of author ideology represent a relevant threat to the manipulation, due to partisan biases. For example, if the expertise cue leads the respondent to feel the high expertise author was more liberal than the low expertise author, it would be difficult to determine whether any potential persuasive were due to the change in the level of the author's expertise or if the respondent simply felt that author shared a political predisposition. Perceptions of author Character also represent a confounding threat that would harm internal and predictive validity. The proposed multidimensional approach to source credibility is predicated on the idea that the Expertise and Character dimensions are separate, and can therefore be manipulated independently to observe their unique isolated effects. Thus, it is vital to ensure that the source cues utilized in this experiment manipulated only the Expertise dimension and not the Character dimension.

To measure perceptions of the author's ideology, respondents were asked simply to place the author on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from "Very liberal" to "Very conservative". Answers were coded from 1 to 7, with higher scores indicating that the author was perceived to be more conservative. The perceived ideology of the con author was then subtracted from that of the pro author to achieve a differenced measure in perceptions of author ideology. To measure perceptions of the author's Character, respondents were asked how well the following terms described the author using five-point Likert scales: "honest", "fair", "authentic", and "sincere". Answers to these questions were averaged, creating a reliable index of author character ($\alpha = .846$). These adjectives were borrowed from the study conducted in Chapter 1. The perceived Character of the con author was then subtracted from that of the pro author to achieve a differenced measure in perceptions of author Character.

Beginning with perceptions of ideology (Table 3)¹⁸, the expertise manipulation (expert pro author) revealed a null relationship with perceptions of ideology. This would indicate that the expertise manipulation did not lead respondents to believe that the author was either more liberal or more conservative than his low expertise counterpart. Instead, perceptions of ideology were primarily dominated by the binary indicator of the author's partisanship, with Democratic authors being viewed as more liberal (relative to Republican authors). Analysis included an interaction between the author's partisanship and the respondent's own partisan identification to account for potential heterogenous effects among Democratic and Republican respondents. However, there was little evidence supporting such a heterogenous relationship.

Table 2.3 Perceived Ideology (Pro Author - Con Author)

	<i>Dependent variable: Perceived Ideology</i>	
	GMO Labels	Automotive Voter Registration
Expert pro author	-0.328 (0.315)	0.098 (0.340)
Democrat pro author	-1.562** (0.572)	-2.365** (0.620)
Partisan identification	0.047 (0.116)	0.049 (0.134)
Democrat author * Party id	0.182 (0.170)	-0.114 (0.181)
Constant	0.467 (0.432)	0.364 (0.486)
Observations	244	234
Adjusted R ²	0.052	0.206
<i>Note:</i>		*p<0.05; **p<0.01

Moving to perceptions of author Character (Table 4), the expertise manipulation exhibited a small, null relationship with perceptions of Character, alleviating concerns regarding a

¹⁸Please note that, unlike subsequent regression analyses, the coefficients in the manipulation check have not been standardized.

potential confound. In fact, none of the relevant variables or experimental conditions exhibited a substantively or statistically significant relationship with perceptions of author Character.

Table 2.4 Perceived Character (Pro Author - Con Author)

	<i>Dependent variable: Perceived Character</i>	
	GMO Labels	Automotive Voter Registration
Expert pro author	0.148 (0.127)	0.089 (0.127)
Democrat pro author	0.270 (0.151)	0.079 (0.152)
Copartisan pro author	-0.035 (0.076)	-0.043 (0.076)
Partisan identification	0.063 (0.034)	0.058 (0.034)
Constant	-0.169 (0.158)	-0.028 (0.152)
Observations	294	294
Adjusted R ²	0.013	-0.001
<i>Note:</i>		*p<0.05; **p<0.01

Overall, results indicated that the manipulations do not exhibit much evidence of relevant experimental confounds that could potentially bias results from the full study. With this in mind, I turn now to analysis of the full study.

Measures

Analyses features two primary independent variables of interest: author expertise and the respondent's partisan congruence (i.e. copartisanship) with the author. The author expertise manipulation was measured with a simple binary variable, with 1 indicating that the author arguing in favor of the policy (pro author) was randomly assigned to the high expertise manipulation and 0 indicating that the pro author was randomly assigned to the low expertise manipulation. To measure partisan congruence, respondents were given a brief questionnaire prior to treatment that featured demographic questions borrowed from the 2016 American National Elections Study. This included a branching measure of self-reported partisan identification used to create a seven-point measure ranging from "Strong Democrat" to

“Strong Republican”. I utilized this measure to create a new measure of partisan congruency with the speaker (i.e. whether the respondent shares the author’s partisan identification). This scale was coded as a binary, with 1 indicating that the speaker and respondent shared partisan identities, 0 indicating the author and respondent held opposing partisan identities.¹⁹ The small number of “pure independents,” who did not lean towards one party, were removed from analysis. In addition, analyses include an interaction between both author expertise and partisan congruence. This is included so as to test whether a copartisan author received a greater benefit from the expertise cue than an opposing partisan author.²⁰

After reading each article, subjects were asked a series of questions used to construct two dependent variables. The first is a differenced measure of perceptions of source expertise. Respondents were asked to rate how well specific adjectives described each of the authors: knowledgeable, qualified, experienced, and competent. Each of these adjectives was measured on a five-point Likert scale (1 = “Not well at all” to 5 = “Very well”; Cronbach’s α = .903). These adjectives were taken directly from the study utilized in chapter 1. These measures were averaged to get a single five-point measure of perceived expertise for each author. The perceived expertise of the author arguing against the policy (con author) was subtracted from the perceived expertise of the pro author to create a measure of the difference in perceived expertise between the two, ranging from -4 to 4. Positive scores indicate that the pro author was perceived to have relatively more expertise than the con author; vice-versa for negative scores.

The second measure assessed the self-reported difference in perceptions of argument strength between the two authors. While assessing the respondent’s stated position (i.e. “Do you support or oppose automatic voter registration?”) on a given issue may be a more direct measurement of opinion, it is not directly linked to the expertise aspect of the treatment and may therefore lack the sensitivity necessary to measure substantively important persuasive

¹⁹Partisan leaners, who indicated that they were independent but leaned more towards one party, were treated as partisans.

²⁰Analyses with additional control variables, as well as analyses that assess Republicans and Democrats separately, can be found in the Appendix.

effects. Instead, respondents were asked to rate how persuasive (ranging from 1 = “very unpersuasive” to 7 = “very persuasive”) and how effective (ranging from 1 = “very ineffective” to 7 = “very effective”) each author’s argument was. These two items were measured on two separate seven-point Likert scales, which were later averaged into one measure of argument strength for each author (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .873$).²¹ Finally, the perceived argument strength of the con author was subtracted from the perceived argument strength of the pro author, resulting in a measure of the difference in perceived argument strength between the two, ranging from -6 to 6. Positive scores indicate that the pro author argument was perceived to be relatively stronger than the con author’s argument; vice-versa for negative scores. This measure is advantageous in that it is directly linked to the expertise aspect of the treatment, allowing one to more directly assess potential treatment effects.

Should the evidence support the Expertise Hypothesis, one would expect to see a positive main effect for the expertise variable. This would indicate that the expertise cue has influenced both perceptions of the author’s expertise and the author’s persuasiveness even after accounting for partisan congruence. This would directly imply that the expertise cue is influencing respondents, leading them to update their perceptions and beliefs in the expected manner, even when in the direct presence of competing partisan cues. Should the Expertise Hypothesis not hold, one would expect to see a substantively small and statistically null main effect for the expertise variable. Irrespective of these results, one should still expect partisanship to have a strong influence on respondent assessments (exemplified by a positive main effect for the copartisan variable). In addition, one may expect that copartisans benefit more from expertise cues than opposing partisans (exemplified by a positive interaction effect between the expertise and copartisan variables). Nonetheless, one would expect to see a positive main effect of expertise, even accounting for such an interaction.

²¹See Oeefe 2002; Chong and Druckman 2007; Arceneaux 2012.

Data and Analysis

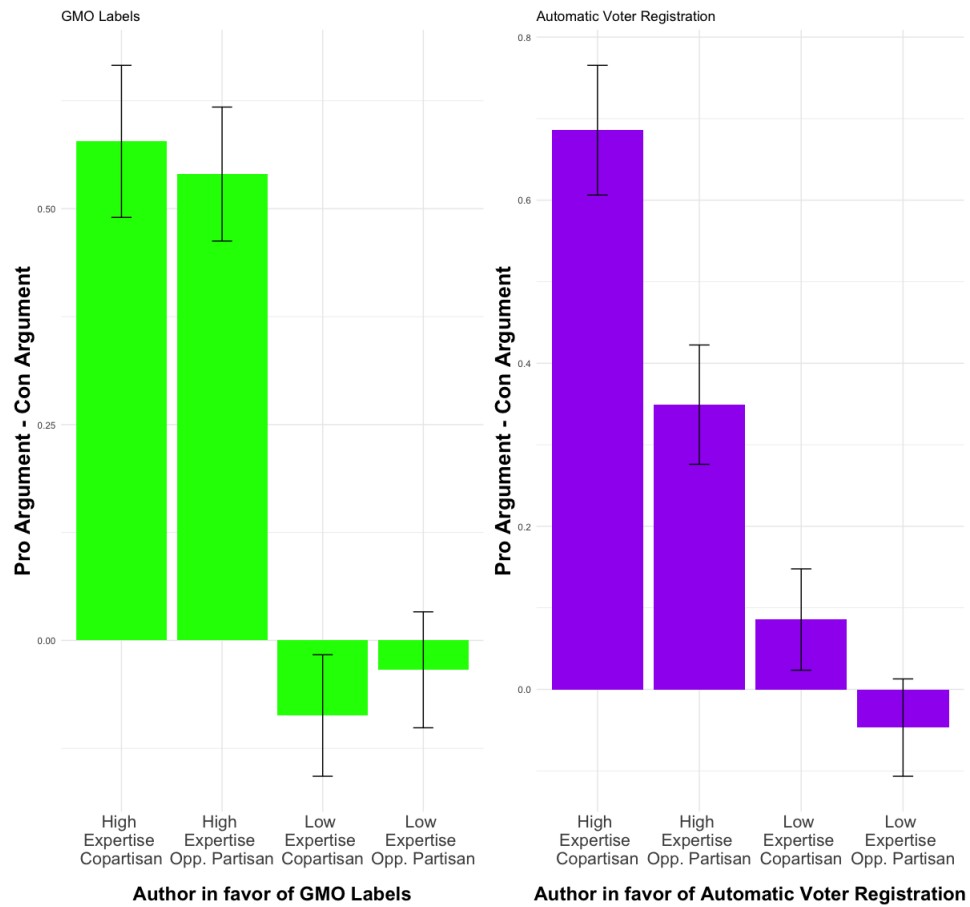
I begin by presenting Figure 3, which illustrates the mean level of perceived source expertise based on the experimental condition. The plot on the left illustrates the mean level of perceived source expertise on the GMO labels issue, while the plot on the right illustrates the same for the automatic voter registration issue. In both instances, the manipulation was a success, as respondents perceived the high expertise author to have a higher level of expertise than the low expertise author. Yet, in regards to automatic voter registration, respondents demonstrated a notable partisan bias, finding high expertise copartisans to have a higher level of expertise than high expertise opposing partisans. Nonetheless, these results support the Expertise Hypothesis and are normatively encouraging. Respondents do not universally assume that copartisans are experts regardless of other competing cues, nor do they assume opposing partisans are not experts despite what evidence is presented to them. Instead, respondents exhibit a clear ability to successfully identify sources with high levels of expertise and distinguish them from low expertise sources irrespective of partisanship. Table 5 presents an OLS regression that analyzes the effect of the expertise manipulation on perceptions of argument strength for both issue frames.²² In these models, coefficients have been standardized, allowing one to better compare the effect sizes of different variables within the model.²³ Once again, the dependent variable in this analysis was measured by subtracting the perceived argument strength of the con author from that of the pro author. The positive constant term across all models indicates that respondents found the arguments in favor of GMO labels and automatic voter registration to be more persuasive. This is perhaps unsurprising, as public opinion polling indicates that the majority of Americans support both these policies (Funk and Kennedy 2016; McCarthy 2016).

Beginning with the GMO labels issue frame (Model G1 and G2), results indicate a positive

²²The Appendix includes analysis with additional interaction effects between the expertise manipulation and relevant control variables.

²³Analysis with non-standardized coefficients (including standard errors) can be found in the Appendix, along with models featuring additional control variables.

Figure 2.3 Mean level of Expertise by Experimental Condition



main effect from the expertise manipulation, as respondents found a high expertise source's argument to be stronger than that of a low expertise source. Moreover, the effect of the expertise variable was notably larger than that of the copartisan variable, which displayed a rather small and statistically null result ($p < .75$). The interaction effect in Model G2 suggests that copartisan sources benefited more from the influence of expertise than opposing partisan sources, though this finding was also statistically null ($p < .16$). Thus, when considering GMO labels, a non-polarizing political issue, respondents appeared to value expertise more than shared partisanship with the author. In fact, the expertise dimension appeared to dominate partisanship in this context, rather than partisanship overwhelming the influence of expertise. This lends strong support to the Expertise Hypothesis, as individuals clearly found high expertise sources to be more persuasive than low expertise sources.

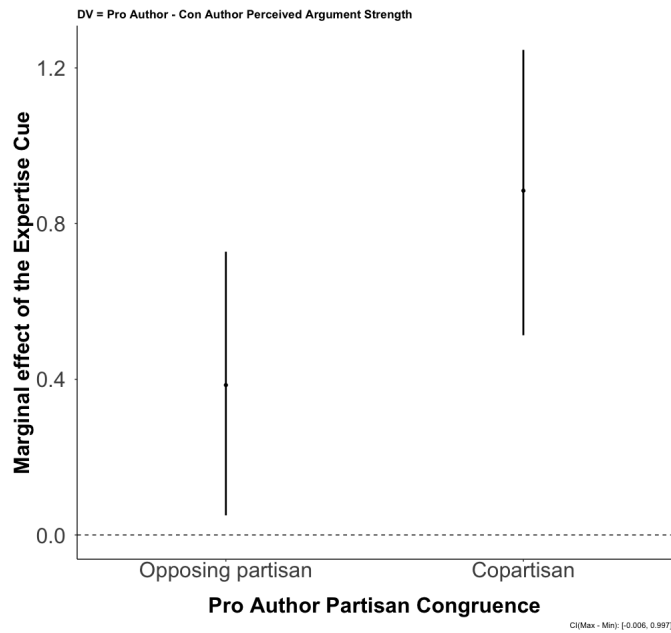
Table 2.5 The Effect of Expertise on Perceived Argument Strength

	<i>Difference in Perceived Argument Strength (Pro Author - Con Author)</i>			
	GMO Labels (G)		Automatic Voter Reg. (A)	
	(G1)	(G2)	(A1)	(A2)
High expertise pro author	0.156**	0.210**	0.063	0.132**
Copartisan pro author	0.011	0.060	0.167**	0.105*
Expert * Copartisan		0.087		0.113*
Constant	0.339** (0.117)	0.237 (0.137)	1.054** (0.108)	0.935** (0.124)
Observations	834	834	840	840
Adjusted R ²	0.022	0.023	0.030	0.033

Note: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; Coefficients standardized.

Moving to the automatic voter registration issue frame (Model A1 and A2), results yielded a less consistent main effect of expertise. The expertise variable did exhibit a small, positive (albeit null; $p < .07$) effect in Model A1. Nonetheless, the results suggest that partisanship appears to be relatively dominant, as the influence of copartisanship doubled that of expertise. However, Model A2 tells a different story after accounting for a potential

Figure 2.4 Marginal Effect of Partisan Congruence and Pro Author Expertise in the Automatic Voter Registration Frame



heterogeneous relationship between expertise and copartisanship. These results show expertise to have a positive main effect that is comparable (even somewhat larger) in size to that of partisanship. Results also reveal that copartisans received a greater benefit from the high expertise cue than opposing partisans. Figure 4 plots the marginal effect of the interaction found in Model A2. Figure 4 indicates that this interaction effect is indeed driven primarily by a positive bias towards copartisans rather than a punishment of opposing partisans. Thus the persuasive advantage of high expertise is further increased when the expert is also a copartisan. Interestingly, further analysis shows that this interaction effect is exclusively among Republican respondents (See Appendix for further analyses). In other words, while both sets of respondents found high expertise authors to be more persuasive than low expertise authors, Republicans found high expertise Republican authors to be extra persuasive. Such an effect was not evident among Democratic respondents when exposed to high expertise Democratic authors.

While these results are somewhat mixed, they offer modest support for the Expertise

Hypothesis. Even in an issue context that is highly polarized along partisan lines, individuals appear to be taking the source's level of expertise into account. In fact, once accounting for heterogeneity between individual partisan identification, it would appear that the expertise cues have a degree of influence that rivals that of partisan cues. When considered along side evidence from the GMO labels issue frame, evidence offers modest support for the Expertise Hypothesis, as respondents are able to identify expertise cues when made readily available, and those cues hold a degree of influence that has a notable substantive impact on political assessments in spite of competing partisan considerations.

Discussion

Analyses from Study 1 lend support to the Expertise Hypothesis. Respondents show an ability to acknowledge an expert source's credentials, irrespective of that source's partisan identification. In addition, respondents appear to find arguments made by high expertise sources to be stronger than those made by low expertise sources, although the size of this effect is somewhat dependent on context. When the issue is not highly divisive along partisan lines, respondents appear to show a clear preference for expert sources. When the issue is more politically polarizing, respondents display a much stronger partisan bias. This bias, however, did not completely overwhelm the influence of expertise, as theories of motivated reasoning may suggest. Instead, analysis yields a modest positive main effect for the expertise condition in most circumstances, indicating that source expertise still played a role in the individual's perception of argument strength.

While these are encouraging results, the design in Study 1 utilizes forced exposure. Thus, while the results of this study indicate that individuals are *able* to take expert opinions into account in a politically polarized environment, it remains unclear whether individuals are *willing* to seek out those expert opinions. Study 2 utilizes a similar selection experiment design which seeks to directly test whether individuals will actively seek out high expertise perspectives when confronted with alternative choices in a partisan political context.

Study 2

I seek to build off of Study 1 by leveraging a unique selection experiment design, manipulating both partisanship and expertise cues in a similar manner to the previous study. Selection experiments typically present the respondent with 2 or more stimuli, such as news article headlines or political candidates. Respondents are typically then asked which of these choices they would most prefer. A selection experiment is ideal in this context, as they have been utilized extensively in political science and communications to study selective exposure and partisan biases (Stroud 2011; Iyengar and Hahn 2009; Feldman et al. 2018; Mummulo 2016; Darmofal 2015; Arceneaux and Johnson 2013; Feldman et al. 2013). This specific design is meant to mimic how many Americans would receive their news on online platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, with the article headlines being akin to what one may see on their social media newsfeed or trending due to the website's computer algorithms. In doing this, I seek to demonstrate the behavioral influence of expertise source cues, even when in direct competition with partisan cues that may trigger selection biases.

Study 2 utilizes a convenience sample of 894 students from University of Houston in the fall of 2018. Respondents were shown two competing headlines on a given political issue, one arguing in favor of a given policy, one arguing against that policy. This design is very similar to Study 1, with author bylines manipulated to include both partisan and expertise-related source cues (expertise source cues for each issue can be found in Table 7). Yet, Study 2 differs slightly from Study 1, as respondents were shown only the headline and author bylines, not the content of the articles themselves. Study 2 also makes two notable improvements upon the design of Study 1. First, Study 2 includes two additional issues: Tariffs on U.S. trade partners and U.S. policy on military drone strikes. Both of these issues were chosen because they are salient in current events and divisive along partisan lines, as Republicans are more supportive of President Trump's trade tariff policy and the use of military drone strikes on foreign combatants (Laloggia 2018; Pew Research Center 2015).

Second, Study 2 includes an additional partisan control condition, in which the two authors differed in levels of expertise, with no party cues. This control condition allows one to better evaluate whether respondents are rewarding copartisans for their identity and expertise, or punishing opposing partisans. The final result is a 2 x 3 experiment, with 6 possible manipulations.

Table 2.6 Manipulation Combinations (Study 2)

	Pro author	Con author
1	High expertise Democrat	Low expertise Republican
2	Low expertise Democrat	High expertise Republican
3	High expertise Republican	Low expertise Democrat
4	Low expertise Republican	High expertise Democrat
5	High expertise control	Low expertise control
6	Low expertise control	High expertise control

This experimental design deliberately excluded entertainment or apolitical options for respondents. In addition, partisan sources were not directly tested against non-partisan sources within the same manipulation (i.e. Democrat vs. Republican vs. neutral source). Past selection experiment studies have indicated that including these options can blunt the effect of partisan biases (Arceneaux and Johnson 2013; Feldman et al. 2013). As such, I designed this experiment to maximize the potential effect of partisan biases, providing the most conservative possible test for the Expertise Hypothesis.

Respondents were exposed to all four issue frames in a randomized order, bringing the final sample size to 3576 (894 respondents multiplied by four issues). Respondents were simply asked to indicate which of the two articles they would rather read before moving on to the next set of articles on a different issue. The end result is a 2 x 3 within-subjects selection experiment.

Table 2.7 Manipulations by Issue (Study 2)

Issue	High expertise	Low expertise
GMO labels	Biology Ph.D.	Political Science M.A.
Automatic voter registration	20 Years Legal Experience	Recent law school graduate
Trade tariffs	Former assistant for U.S. Trade Representative	Former clerk for U.S. Transportation Department
Drone strikes	Former military analyst for the CIA	Former translator for the U.S. embassy in Spain

Manipulation Checks

The addition of new manipulations also necessitates additional manipulation checks to ensure these manipulations are not confounded by either perceptions of author ideology or Character. While manipulation checks for these new manipulations (n = 325 undergraduates) utilize the same measures as in Study 1, the trade tariffs and drone strike manipulations were tested utilizing a single author format. Rather than placing two articles side-by-side from two different authors, respondents were shown only one argument from an author arguing in opposition to newly instituted trade tariffs. Thus, rather than utilizing a differenced assessment of two authors, analysis utilized a direct assessment of that one authors' perceived ideology or perceived Character.

Beginning with perceptions of ideology (Table 8),²⁴ analysis reveals little evidence that would suggest that the expertise manipulation is correlated with the dependent variable in a meaningful way. Instead, it would appear as though the author's partisanship dominated perceptions of ideology, as expected.

²⁴Please note the coefficients for these manipulation check analyses are not standardized.

Table 2.8 Perceived Ideology

	<i>Dependent variable: Perceived Ideology</i>	
	Trade tariffs	Drone strikes
Expert author	−0.037 (0.155)	0.138 (0.160)
Democratic author	−0.407 (0.290)	0.298 (0.304)
Respondent Party ID	−0.001 (0.053)	0.121** (0.058)
Democratic author * Respondent Party ID	0.010 (0.078)	−0.298** (0.081)
Constant	3.171** (0.233)	2.843** (0.228)
Observations	325	318
Adjusted R ²	0.007	0.083
<i>Note:</i>		*p<0.05; **p<0.01

Regarding perceptions of Character (Table 9), analysis again yielded little to suggest that the expertise manipulation was potentially confounded. In fact, neither the expertise manipulation nor partisan cue appeared to affect perceptions of author Character, allaying confound-related concerns.

Table 2.9 Perceived Character

	<i>Dependent variable: Perceived Character</i>	
	Trade tariffs	Drone strikes
Expert author	0.123 (0.080)	0.132 (0.090)
Democratic author	0.142* (0.084)	0.097 (0.095)
Copartisan author	−0.065 (0.042)	−0.117* (0.048)
Respondent Partisan identification	0.006 (0.020)	−0.064** (0.023)
Constant	2.081** (0.106)	2.565** (0.102)
Observations	319	314
Adjusted R ²	0.008	0.036
Residual Std. Error	0.685 (df = 314)	0.779 (df = 309)
F Statistic	1.629 (df = 4; 314)	3.926** (df = 4; 309)
<i>Note:</i>		*p<0.05; **p<0.01

These manipulation checks are encouraging, suggesting that the manipulations are not confounded in a manner that would bias the full study analysis. As such, I turn now to the analysis of the full study.

Measures

Study 2 utilizes the same independent measures as Study 1, with the addition of control variables for respondent partisanship and the parties' stereotypic positions.

The expectations of partisan support differ greatly by issue. As a result, I constructed a measure that better accounts for the effect of partisanship in each issue context by comparing the respondents' partisanship to the position that the pro author has taken on a specific issue. On the issues of drone strikes and tariffs, the pro position was considered "counter-attitudinal" if the respondent was a Democrat and "pro-attitudinal" if the respondent was a Republican; vice-versa on the issue of automatic voter registration. Both of these measures were compared to the "neutral attitudinal" baseline of the GMO labels debate. This

resulted in a nominal variable, in which respondents were coded as having “pro-attitudinal”, “counter-attitudinal”, or “neutral attitudinal” beliefs based upon both the issue and their partisan identity. This approach is identical to approaches utilized in previous selection experiments (Feldman et al. 2013; Feldman et al. 2018; Mummulo 2016).

Similarly, I constructed a measure of stereotypic positions by comparing the author’s partisanship and the position that the pro author has taken on a specific issue. Thus, a Democrat arguing in favor of automatic voter registration would be considered to be taking a stereotypic position, where as a Republican taking the pro position would be considered counter-stereotypic; vice-versa for both the the trade tariff and drone strike manipulations. The main dependent variable of interest is the article that the respondent selected. Thus article selection was measured with a simple binary in which 1 indicates that the respondent selected the pro author and 0 indicates that the respondent chose the con author.

Data and Analysis

Table 10 presents a binary logit regression, which analyzes factors influencing whether the respondents selected the article arguing for the pro-policy position. Analysis included clustered standard errors and fixed effects for both the respondent and the issue, which were excluded from the table for parsimony. Table 11 reports the relevant predicted probabilities for each model in Table 10.²⁵

Across all models, one can observe a consistent, substantively large, positive main effect of the expertise condition. Respondents were roughly 13 percent²⁶ more likely to select the pro-policy argument when the author was a high expertise source, relative to a low expertise source ($p < .01$). This effect remained remarkably consistent, even when accounting for partisan congruence, respondent partisanship relative to the issue, and counter-stereotypic policy positions. This lends strong support to the Expertise Hypothesis, as respondents regularly sought the perspective of a high expertise source over a low expertise source even

²⁵Additional analysis with interactions between the other control variables can be found in the Appendix.

²⁶This effect increased to 16 percent when non-voting eligible respondents, like non-citizens, were removed from the sample.

in a highly polarized political context designed to maximize the relative influence of partisan and pro-attitudinal biases.

Table 2.10 The Effect of Expertise and Partisanship on News Article Selection

	<i>Dependent variable: Selected the Pro Policy Argument</i>			
	(Model 1)	(Model 2)	(Model 3)	(Model 4)
High expertise pro author	0.802** (0.101)	0.799** (0.102)	0.855** (0.172)	0.848** (0.174)
Copartisan pro author	0.442** (0.118)	0.515* (0.210)	0.464** (0.170)	0.526** (0.243)
Opposing partisan pro author	-0.293* (0.120)	-0.190 (0.213)	-0.233 (0.175)	-0.131 (0.248)
Counter-attitudinal		-0.748** (0.192)		-0.749** (0.192)
Pro-attitudinal		-0.025 (0.208)		-0.025 (0.208)
Counter-stereotypic		0.032 (0.246)		0.035 (0.246)
Stereotypic		-0.200 (0.247)		-0.196 (0.247)
Expert * Copartisan			-0.043 (0.241)	-0.027 (0.242)
Expert * Opp. partisan			-0.116 (0.244)	-0.120 (0.248)
Constant	0.984 (0.964)	0.967 (0.977)	0.954 (0.970)	0.946 (0.984)
<i>Note:</i>				*p<0.05; **p<0.01

While respondents demonstrated a clear preference for high expertise sources, analysis from Table 10 and Table 11 also demonstrate that respondents maintained sizable partisan and attitudinal biases. Respondents were roughly 12 percent more likely to select the pro argument when the author was a copartisan, relative to both an opposing partisan source and

the control. ($p < .01$). Similarly, respondents were almost 4.5 percent more likely to select the pro-attitudinal argument ($p < .05$), and 7.5 percent less likely to select a counter-attitudinal argument ($p < .05$) relative to the control. Thus, while partisan biases did not prevent respondents from seeking an expert perspective, the expertise cue did not eliminate affective group and attitudinal motivated reasoning. While perhaps unsurprising, this result does speak to the great degree to which partisanship influences the information-seeking process. Finally, unlike Study 1, analysis from Table 10 yields few indications of an interaction effect between the expertise cue and partisan congruence. While Study 1 offers some evidence that copartisan sources benefit disproportionately from expertise cues relative to their opposing partisan peers, Study 2 offers little to suggest that this evidence is consistent nor robust. Additional analysis featuring three-way interactions (see Appendix) also yield neither substantively important nor statistically significant heterogeneous relationships.

Table 2.11 Predicted Probability of Selecting the Pro Policy Argument

	(Model 4)
High expertise	.538
Low expertise	.411
Opposing partisan	.444
Copartisan	.557
Control	.427
Counter-attitudinal	.425
Pro-attitudinal	.544
Neutral (GMO labels issue frame)	.498

Discussion

Results from Study 2 provide substantial support for the Expertise Hypothesis. When given the choice, individuals show a strong preference for expert sources. This selection preference holds across several issue contexts, and remains when accounting for individual partisan and

attitudinal biases. This is not to say that expertise source cues completely eliminate partisan and attitudinal biases. Individuals demonstrated both a strong negative bias counter-attitudinal arguments as well as positive biases towards copartisan sources. Nonetheless, these biases did not overwhelm the expertise source cue, as theories of motivated reasoning may suggest. Instead, respondents demonstrated a willingness to seek the perspective of an expert author when the option is available, even on highly polarizing political issues. Put another way, imagine a citizen surfing the internet or social media with many friends and sources discussing the day's political news. That citizen may be tempted to turn a blind eye and scroll past news that disagrees with their partisan worldview or has been posted by opposing partisan sources. However, results from Study 2 suggest that when the news comes from a qualified expert source, citizens may be more willing to allay their motivated suspicions and click on that post, willingly exposing themselves to new informative perspectives on politics.

Conclusion

Multiple analyses show relatively consistent support for the Expertise Hypothesis: source cues related to expertise sent a strong signal to the individuals, affecting both their perceptions of the argument itself as well as their behavior in regards to seeking information among competing arguments. This influence remained consistent despite the presence of competing partisan and attitudinal cues across a variety of partisan polarized and non-partisan polarized issue contexts. These findings provide clear evidence that individuals do consider the context-relevant expertise of an author when source cues make that information clear and available. While the presence of expert source cues did not wholly eliminate individual partisan biases, and the sizes of the effects themselves were somewhat small, they nonetheless lead respondents to update their assessments, opinions, and behaviors in the expected logical fashion.

While the questions at the core of this research are simple, the potential ramifications could

be impactful on scholarly understanding of individual political communications, political knowledge, and overall democratic competence. Many prior works tend to treat source credibility and expertise either as a given or something that is wholly irrelevant due to the overwhelming influence of partisanship. Such approaches fail to address why source credibility matters and how individuals judge source credibility. This leads to the rather pessimistic, but ultimately misleading conclusion that individuals are too blinded by their own partisanship to find useful information from sources that are truly credible. While it is true that individuals are motivated reasoners, these results paint a more sanguine depiction of the American citizen as one who is still biased, but still able to consider the context and alternative information when made both salient and readily available.

While expertise source cues may not deliver a normatively desirable knockout blow to individual partisan bias, the implications drawn from these experiments offer reason to be cautiously optimistic about both a political messenger's ability to disseminate accurate information and citizens' levels of democratic competence. The expertise manipulations utilized in this experiment are somewhat subtle: just a brief sentence or two about the author's background. While such subtle source expertise and source credibility cues may not completely override the individual's biases, they do appear to help communicate accurate information more effectively. Moreover, the results of this study should be encouraging and exciting, as these cues are virtually costless to implement. Media outlets may be able to increase the substantive power of their communications by providing the viewer, reader, or listener with carefully selected source cues that might indicate the communicator's level of qualifications and expertise on the relevant subject matter. Such graphics are already employed to some degree in newspaper columns and television news (e.g. "Representative from *x* district" or "author of *y* book"). As such, careful selection and increased ubiquity of source expertise cues may help media entities disseminate accurate information and help the average citizen identify useful information and perspectives without using additional resources or effort. To reiterate, using these cues is virtually costless. Even if using expert

source cues helps only at the margin, the utility of these cues appear to far outweigh the cost.

Chapter 3:

Character and Source Credibility

“The FAKE [mainstream media] is working so hard trying to get me not to use Social Media. They hate that I can get the honest and unfiltered message out.” - President Donald Trump, 2018

In this chapter, I seek to simultaneously demonstrate the predictive validity of the character dimension of credibility while also testing the Character Hypothesis. I hypothesize that when individuals are presented with clear source cues indicating a high degree of character, those individuals will find that source’s argument to be more credible and persuasive, even when simultaneously confronted with clear competing partisan cues. I leverage a unique survey experiment which directly pits relevant source credibility cues against partisan cues to examine their influence in regards to political persuasion and information searches. I find that while source credibility cues do not negate partisan biases, the influence of partisanship does not completely overwhelm the competing source credibility cues. In fact, individuals do acknowledge and even seek out arguments that come from high character sources and avoid low character sources, even after accounting for the partisanship of those sources. These results offer reason for cautious optimism regarding citizens’ basic democratic competence, as the resulting implication suggests that the source cues often found in newspaper bylines and television news chyrons can substantially affect the success (or failure) of persuasive political communications in a partisan context.

Study Design

Sample and Manipulations

A selection experiment was distributed to a census-matched sample of 800 respondents from Lucid, an online survey service, in the summer of 2019 (53% female, 72% white, median age 46, 46% Democrat, 37% Republican)²⁷. Using census-matching, Lucid samples have been shown to match the demographics of other nationally representative samples, with experimental findings replicating on Lucid in the vast majority of instances (Coppock and McClellan 2019).²⁸ Selection experiments have been utilized extensively in past works on partisan selective exposure (e.g. Stroud 2011; Feldman et al. 2013; 2018). This specific design is meant to closely mimic how many Americans would receive news on online social media platforms like Facebook or Twitter, with article headlines being akin to those on one's typical social media newsfeed.

Respondents were shown several sets of (fabricated) headlines on salient political topics, with one author arguing in favor of a given policy (pro author) and one author arguing against that policy (con author). This design, while meant to mimic online news media, is also similar to television news formats, in which two or more pundits discuss a political issue from differing perspectives. Each headline featured an introduction of the author, similar to a byline or a chyron featured in print, television, and online news. After viewing each set of headlines, respondents were asked to answer a short battery of questions before moving onto the next set.²⁹

²⁷Full demographics in Appendix

²⁸Also see Coppock et al., 2018; Coppock and Green 2015.

²⁹The ordering of the sets of headlines was randomized.

Figure 3.1 Example of a Manipulation

<u>Article A</u>	<u>Article B</u>
A Carbon Tax Can Be A Big Part of a Climate Change Solution	A Carbon Tax Is A Terrible Way To Fight Climate Change
-	-
<i>About the Author:</i>	<i>About the Author:</i>
<i>Toby Baker is a spokesperson for the National Weather Service (NWS). He is a regular contributor to the MSNBC opinion column.</i>	<i>Brian O'Donnell is a spokesperson for Exxon Mobile, a producer of oil and other types of energy worldwide. He is a regular contributor to the Fox News opinion column.</i>

Respondents were shown sets of headlines on four political issues: 1) labelling laws for food made with genetically modified organisms (GMO labels issue frame), 2) carbon taxes targeting climate change (climate change issue frame), 3) U.S. investment in nuclear power (nuclear energy issue frame), and 4) taxes on sugary soft drinks (soda tax issue frame). These issues were chosen for their contrast in partisan polarization. While most Americans support GMO labels irrespective of partisanship, Democrats are relatively less supportive of nuclear energy (Reinhart 2019), and more supportive of carbon taxes (Puskin & Mills 2017) and soda taxes (Bottemiller Evich 2017), than Republicans. Thus, partisanship should be more influential on the latter three issues.

For each set, I manipulate the author bylines to include relevant contextual cues about the author's partisan identification and character, represented by a potential conflicts of interests. Photos were excluded to prevent confounds from race or attractiveness. For each set of headlines, one author was randomly assigned a high character cue while the other received a low character cue. I also included a control condition with no character credibility cues. I randomized the partisan affiliation of each author, with one writing for Fox News, the other for MSNBC. The end result is a 3 x 2 experiment with six treatments (Table 1). The character manipulations are unique to each issue frame (Table 2), with each high character manipulation indicating a lack of conflicting interests with the respondent, and low character

cues representing a potential conflict of interests. Each character manipulation was tested to ensure it successfully manipulated character and was not confounded by perceptions of expertise or ideology.

Table 3.1: Manipulation Combinations

	Pro author	Con author
1	High character Democrat	Low character Republican
2	Low character Democrat	High character Republican
3	High character Republican	Low character Democrat
4	Low character Republican	High character Democrat
5	Democrat control	Republican control
6	Republican control	Democrat control

This design intentionally excludes circumstances that may undermine the influence of partisan biases, such as the inclusion of non-ideological sources (Feldman et al. 2013) and apolitical options (Arceneaux and Johnson 2013). In this scenario, partisanship should have maximum potential for influence over respondents' decisions, serving as a highly conservative test of the Character Hypothesis.

Table 3.2: Manipulations by Issue

Issue Frame	High character cue	Low character cue
GMO labels	Spokesperson for Texas Farm Bureau	Spokesperson for Monsanto Corporation
Climate Change	Spokesperson for National Weather Service	Spokesperson for Exxon Mobil
Nuclear energy	Spokesperson for solar energy farm	Spokesperson for nuclear energy plant
Soda Tax	Spokesperson for National Education Association	Spokesperson for American Beverage Association

Measures

Analyses featured two key independent variables: the character manipulation assigned to the pro author and the partisan congruence with the pro author. The character manipulations are represented with a binary measure (1 = high character pro author, 0 = low character pro

author).³⁰ Partisan congruence is measured by a binary variable (1 = copartisan pro author, 0 = opposing partisan pro author).

Analyses feature two main dependent variables: article selection and perception of credibility. Respondents were first asked to pick which of the two articles they would prefer to read (1 = pro author, 0 = con author). Respondents were then asked which of the two authors they found to be more credible (1 = pro author, 0 = con author).³¹

Data and Analyses

Manipulation Check

Perceived Ideology

I conducted pilot tests for each manipulation utilized in this study to ensure that the manipulations were affecting perceptions of the author's character as intended, rather than perceptions of the author's ideology or perceptions of the author's expertise. To measure perceptions of the author's ideology, respondents were asked simply to place the author on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from "Very liberal" to "Very conservative". Answers were recoded from 0 to 6, with higher scores indicating that the author was perceived to be more conservative.

³⁰Respondent partisanship was measured with the traditional branching format; leaners are coded as partisans and "pure independents" are omitted.

³¹ $r = .68$, $p < .01$.

Table 3.3 The Effect of the Character Manipulations on Perceptions of Author Ideology

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Perceptions of author ideology			
	GMO Labels	Climate Change	Nuclear Energy	Soda Tax
High character pro author	−0.206 (0.161)	−0.133 (0.164)	−0.135 (0.162)	0.040 (0.157)
Low character pro author	−0.093 (0.164)	−0.031 (0.172)	0.143 (0.163)	−0.034 (0.159)
Copartisan pro author	0.028 (0.135)	−0.081 (0.137)	−0.032 (0.133)	−0.028 (0.130)
Respondent party ID	−0.023 (0.028)	0.001 (0.028)	−0.001 (0.027)	−0.008 (0.027)
Constant	3.959** (0.171)	4.089** (0.179)	3.855** (0.173)	4.111** (0.171)
Observations	692	692	695	694
Adjusted R ²	0.003	−0.004	−0.001	−0.007

Note:

*p<0.05; **p<0.01

Across each issue, results provide little evidence that would suggest these cues are confounded by perceived ideology of the author. In all issue contexts, both the high character and low character cues do not appear to shift perceptions of the author's ideology to a substantively meaningful degree. These results are encouraging, as they suggest any potential treatment effect is due to the increase in character credibility, rather than an increase in perceived liberalism or conservatism that might result in partisan and ideological confounds.

Perceived Expertise

Next, I conducted a test to ensure that the character manipulations were not confounded by expertise. Similar to the previous chapter, respondents were asked to rate which author was better described by the following adjectives: knowledgeable, qualified, experienced, and competent. Each of these adjectives was measured on a five-point Likert scale (1 = "Con author, by a lot" to 5 = "Pro author, by a lot"; Cronbach's $\alpha = .903$). Answers are rescaled from 1 to -1, with higher scores indicating that the adjective better described the pro author.

Table 3.4: Manipulation Check: Effect of Character Manipulations on Perceived Expertise

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Perceptions of author expertise			
	GMO Labels	Climate Change	Nuclear Weapons	Soda Tax
High character pro author	0.086 (0.053)	0.056 (0.052)	−0.018 (0.049)	−0.018 (0.049)
Low character pro author	0.020 (0.054)	−0.068 (0.054)	−0.002 (0.050)	−0.002 (0.050)
Democratic pro author	−0.011 (0.045)	0.017 (0.046)	0.003 (0.042)	0.003 (0.042)
Copartisan pro author	0.152*** (0.045)	0.147*** (0.043)	0.167*** (0.041)	0.167*** (0.041)
Respondent Party ID	−0.026*** (0.009)	−0.032*** (0.009)	0.006 (0.008)	0.006 (0.008)
Constant	0.149*** (0.056)	0.225*** (0.056)	0.023 (0.053)	0.023 (0.053)
Observations	692	692	695	695
Adjusted R ²	0.023	0.034	0.020	0.020

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Once again, analyses yield little evidence that would suggest that either the high or low character cues are confounded by perceptions of author expertise. In each issue frame, the high and low cues yield effects close to 0, with perceptions of expertise better predicted by partisan allegiances. This assures that any treatment effects in subsequent analysis are driven by increases in perceived character, as intended, rather than unanticipated effects from the other dimension of source credibility.

Analyses

To gauge assessments of the source’s character and ensure the success of the manipulation, respondents were shown a series of adjectives: “honest”, “unbiased”, “trustworthy”, and “objective”. Respondents were asked to rate whether the adjective better described the pro author or the con author. Responses are measured on a five-point ordinal scale, ranging from “[pro author], by a lot” to “[con author], by a lot”. Answers are rescaled from 1 to -1, with higher scores indicating that the adjective better described the pro author. Answers to these questions are averaged to create a final, highly reliable index of perceived source character

(Cronbach's $\alpha = .898$), with all four measures loading onto the same latent factor. Should the manipulations work as expected, one should see the high character manipulation exhibit a positive main effect, and the low character manipulation exhibit a negative main effect.³²

Table 3.5: Character assessment of the pro author based on shared partisanship

	Copartisan pro author	Opposing partisan pro author	Difference (copartisan - opposing partisan)	% Δ in difference relative to the control
Control pro author	.178	-.100	.278**	-
High character pro author	.226	.060	.166**	-.122*
Low character pro author	-.039	-.062	-.023	-.211**

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Table 3.2: Predicted Probability For Character Assessments

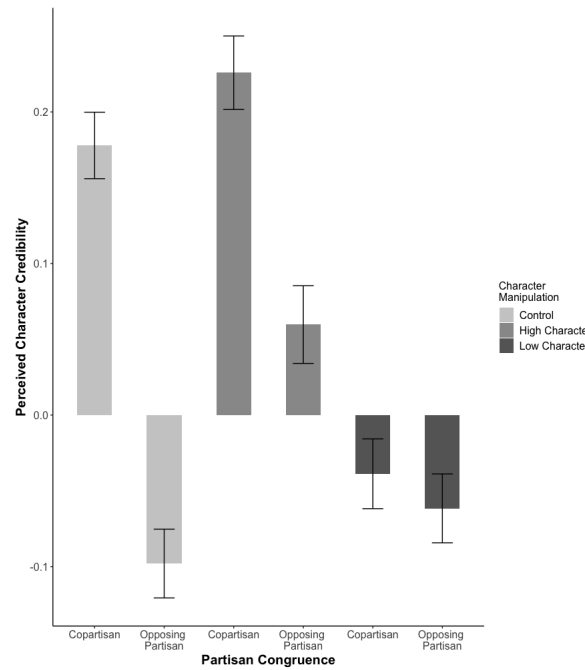


Table 5 presents the predicted probabilities for perceptions of credibility, with Figure 2 plotting these predicted probabilities for illustrative purposes. Even after accounting for partisanship, both the high character and low character manipulations evince strong main

³²Correlation between article selection and perceptions of source character: $r = .52$, $p < .01$.

effects. Respondents that received the high character manipulation gave the author a .106 higher score than those that received the control ($p < .01$). Conversely, respondents in the low character condition gave to give the pro author a .074 lower score than those in the control condition ($p < .01$). Respondents also gave copartisan sources a .226 ($p < .01$) higher score than copartisans. This difference in scores was similar in size the difference in scores between the high character and low character treatment (mean difference = .180, $p < .01$). This again speaks to the comparable level of influence that character credibility cues have relative to partisan cues.

Interaction effects evince powerful heterogenous effects based on both character cues and partisan congruence. Respondents exposed to the high character cue were likely to perceive opposing partisans (mean difference = .158, $p < .01$) to have higher levels of character relative to their respective peers in the control condition. Copartisans also appear to gain from the high character cue, but only to a small degree (mean difference = .047, $p < .01$). In the low character manipulation, respondents were likely to perceive copartisan sources to be less credible than respondents assigned to the control (mean difference = .218, $p < .01$). Respondents assigned to the low character condition appear to view opposing partisans slightly more positively relative to the control, but this effect is rather small (mean difference = .036, $p < .05$). This lends further robustness to the general pattern in all analyses, as opposing partisan sources are perceived to be roughly equally credible with or without the low character cue. On average, individuals perceive opposing partisan sources to not be trustworthy or credible by default, and only update their assessments when cues providing evidence to the contrary are clearly-signaled.

This heterogenous effects result in a rather drastic decrease in copartisan bias. In the control condition, respondents are likely to give a copartisan a .278 ($p < .01$) perceived character score relative to an opposing partisan. In the high character treatment, that gap decreases to .166 ($p < .01$). With the addition of low character cues, the difference in scores between copartisan and opposing partisan is both substantively small and not statistically significant.

In summation, these results again strongly support the Credibility Hypothesis and indicate the manipulations worked as expected. Rather than being overwhelmed by competing partisan cues, character credibility cues led respondents to update their assessments of the sources in a consistent and logical fashion. This subsequently results in a notable decrease in the level of partisan bias, mitigated partisan motivated reasoning to a degree.

Next, I analyze respondents' selection of news headlines, pooling results across all issue frames.³³ Table 6 presents predicted probabilities from Table 7, which presents a pooled logit regression, featuring clustered standard errors and fixed effects for both the issue frame and respondent.

The results provide strong support for the Character Hypothesis. After accounting for partisan congruence, the main effect for high character cues increases the likelihood of selection (5.3%, $p < .01$), and low character cues decrease the likelihood of selection (5.4%, $p < .01$), relative to the control with no character cues. This implies that individuals take competing cues into account in highly polarized contexts, subsequently altering information gathering behavior in predictable manners. While partisan bias persists, the size of the difference in probability of selection between the high and low character manipulations (10.7%, $p < .01$) rivals the same difference between copartisans and opposing partisans (7% $p < .01$).

Interactions between the character manipulations and partisan congruence reveal deeply-rooted partisan stereotypes. Respondents are equally likely to select high character copartisan sources as they are in the control condition, and equally likely to select low character opposing partisan sources as in the control. This implies that individuals' default assessments are that copartisans are credible while opposing partisan are not.

Yet, when given evidence to the contrary, individuals update their behavior. High character opposing partisan sources are 10.9% more likely to be selected than opposing partisan sources in the control condition with no character cues ($p < .01$). This decreases the gap in

³³ Analysis of each issue frame independently can be found in the Appendix.

selection between copartisan and opposing partisan sources 18.4% in the control condition to 6.9% in the high character conditions. We see the inverse effect with low character copartisans, as they are 17.4% less likely to be selected relative to the control conditions, decreasing the partisan-based gap to just 5.4% overall. Surprisingly, respondents are slightly more likely to select opposing partisan sources in the low character condition than in the control. Though this pattern, as will be seen, is not consistent across analyses. Nonetheless, results imply that character cues reduce the influence of partisan bias substantially.

Table 3.6: Selection of pro author argument based on character cues and shared partisanship

	Copartisan pro author	Opposing partisan pro author	Difference (copartisan - opposing partisan)	% Δ in difference relative to the control
Control pro author	63.2%	44.8%	18.4%**	-
High character pro author	62.6%	55.7%	6.9%*	- 11.5%**
Low character pro author	45.8%	51.1%	-5.3%**	- 23.7%**

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Table 7: The Effect of Character Credibility Cues on Political News Article Selection

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	Selected the pro author article	
	(1)	(2)
High character pro author	0.329* (0.131)	0.101** (0.031)
Low character pro author	-0.195 (0.132)	0.066* (0.033)
Copartisan pro author	0.336** (0.111)	0.159** (0.032)
High character * copartisan		-0.092* (0.045)
Low character * copartisan		-0.208** (0.047)
Climate change issue frame	0.260* (0.129)	0.044* (0.022)
Nuclear power issue frame	-0.081 (0.131)	-0.016 (0.023)
Soda tax issue frame	0.037 (0.130)	0.003 (0.023)
Constant	-19.155 (652.3)	-0.145** (0.038)
Observations	2,777	2,777

Note: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

Perceived Source Credibility

Although previous analyses show clear differences in selection, these analyses do not necessarily indicate that this effect was driven by differences in perceived source credibility.

Thus, to assess the direct influence of source credibility, respondents were asked simply to indicate which of these two sources they found to be more credible (1 = pro author, 0 = con author). Table 8 presents predicted probabilities from Table 9, which presents a binary logit regressions analyzing respondent's perceptions of which author is more credible. This analysis was conducted to better show that the differences observed are due to a difference in perceived credibility.

Results here reveal a similar pattern: after accounting for partisanship, the character manipulations reveal strong main effects, as respondents perceive the high character author to be more credible (6%, $p < .01$) and low character author to be less credible (4.7%, $p < .01$) relative to the control. The overall effect size of the difference in perceived credibility between high and low character authors (10.7%, $p < .01$) rivals the difference between copartisan and opposing partisan authors (13%, $p < .01$), indicating they had similar levels of influence over respondent perceptions.

Interaction effects also yield the same pattern as in the previous analysis. Relative to their respective controls, copartisan authors receive no statistically meaningful boost to credibility in the high character manipulation, and opposing partisans receive no statistically meaningful penalty. This indicates that copartisans are perceived as credible by default, while opposing partisans are viewed as non-trustworthy by default. High character opposing partisan sources receive a 15.1% ($p < .01$) increase to perceived credibility, substantially diminishing the gap in credibility between themselves and copartisan sources from 15.5% in the control to 7.9%. Respondents severely penalized low character copartisans with a 15.2% ($p < .01$) decrease in perceived credibility, reducing the gap between copartisans and opposing partisan to 4.3%. This implies that, rather than being overwhelmed by partisanship, the availability of character cues mitigates the influence of partisan bias on perceived credibility.

Table 3.8: Perceived source credibility of the pro author based on character cues and shared partisanship

	Copartisan pro author	Opposing partisan pro author	Difference (copartisan - opposing partisan)	% Δ in difference relative to the control
Control pro author	65.9%	40.4%	25.5%**	-
High character pro author	63.4%	55.5%	7.9%**	- 17.6%**
Low character pro author	50.7%	46.4%	4.3%*	-21.2%**

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Table 3.9: The Effect of Character Cues on Perceived Source Credibility

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	Perceived Source Credibility	
	(1)	(2)
High character pro author	0.066** (0.022)	0.161** (0.031)
Low character pro author	-0.049* (0.023)	0.058 (0.033)
Copartisan pro author	0.132** (0.020)	0.267** (0.032)
High character * copartisan		-0.192** (0.044)
Low character * copartisan		-0.218** (0.047)
Climate change issue frame	0.030 (0.022)	0.027 (0.022)
Nuclear energy issue frame	-0.035 (0.023)	-0.039 (0.023)
Soda tax issue frame	0.009 (0.023)	0.003 (0.023)
Constant	-0.096** (0.031)	-0.188** (0.038)
Observations	2,775	2,775

Note:

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

Conclusion

Results from this study strongly support the Character Hypothesis while demonstrating the value of clearly-signaled character cues in a polarized political sphere.

In a contextless scenario without competing cues, respondents demonstrate strong partisan biases, with copartisans viewed as credible and opposing partisans perceived as non-credible by default. Yet, when context was made available to respondents through the use of clear character cues, individuals responded in a logical fashion, rewarding opposing partisans for high character, and punishing copartisans for low character cues. This did not wholly eliminate the considerable role of partisanship in credibility assessments and news selection, but it did mitigate the role of partisan bias to a substantial degree.

This research holds important implications. While many American citizens view the world through red or blue-tinted glasses, this does not prevent them from clearly seeing any sign posts on their path. A citizen surfing the internet or social media may be tempted to scroll past posts and articles sources that don't share a partisan affiliation. Yet, this study suggests that those same citizens can be incentivized to put aside their partisan suspicions (to a degree) with a clearly-signaled, but relatively modest cue, potentially helping them acquire useful political information.

In addition, little effort and cost was required on the part of the source (or researcher) to effectively add contextual cues. The source cues utilized in this study were only a sentence long. Though column inches and screen space are at a premium, additional source cues are relatively costless to implement, while the benefits of more effective communication and information dissemination can be immense. Most media outlets already do this to a small degree through the use of author bylines or television chyrons. More careful selection and increased ubiquity of source cues may be beneficial to the outlet and audience, by decreasing the cognitive cost of determining a source's credibility.

Chapter 4:

Assessing the Relative Weight of Expertise and Character

“...the Democrats and their lapdogs, the Fake News Mainstream Media, are taking out the old Ronald Reagan playbook and screaming mental stability and intelligence. Actually, throughout my life, my two greatest assets have been mental stability and being, like, really smart... I think that would qualify as not smart, but genius....and a very stable genius at that!” - President Donald Trump, 2018

The previous two chapters of this dissertation addressed both the expertise and character dimensions of source credibility respectively. In each chapter, I sought to demonstrate the predictive validity of each dimension through the use of source credibility cues. In addition, I demonstrated that these cues hold substantive influence over individual political assessments and behavior in a polarized political environment across a range of political issues. I have shown that while source credibility cues do not eliminate partisan-based motivated reasoning, subtle, virtually-costless cues can help mitigate partisan-based biases to a substantively important degree.

In this chapter, I seek to expand upon the previous studies by considering both expertise and character source cues simultaneously in a polarized environment. I find this to be an important next step. Individuals often receive multiple source cues that can either work in conjunction to bolster the speaker’s credibility, or send conflicting messages that the individual must weight based on their subject-relevance and merit.

I seek to introduce multiple cues in order to test circumstances in which competing contexts both confirm and disconfirm partisan stereotypes (e.g. a copartisan source that has high expertise, but a clear ulterior motive). In some circumstances, conflicting source credibility cues may confuse the audience, resulting in more uncertainty, worse decision-making, and less participation on the issue at hand (Boudreau 2013). I build upon this with the goal of testing whether conflicting positive and negative source credibility cues overwhelm each other or simply cancel each other out. The implications of either scenario will tell us a great deal about how individuals handle conflicting information, and hold interesting questions and implications regarding individual-level decision-making. Are citizens willing to trust an expert source with a potential conflict of interests? Are they willing to look past a source's lack of expertise if their motivations seem genuine? Is it a normatively good outcome if individuals (dis)trust either of these sources? I seek to address these questions, and consider some of the potential implications of such findings.

In addition, prior evidence suggests that incongruence between initial partisan judgements and contextual policy information increases citizens' level of anxiety and subsequently undermines affective assessments of copartisan political candidates (Redlawsk et al. 2010). This phenomenon is exacerbated with each additional cue, with multiple cues stacking to create a larger effect (i.e. two cues have a stronger effect than one cue, three stronger than two, etc; Mummolo et al. 2016). Results from previous chapters indicate that we see a similar effect of contextual information regarding source credibility: low expertise and low character sources are punished for their lack of credibility, even when that source is a copartisan. Thus, in this chapter, I seek to assess whether source credibility cues stack, with two positive or negative source credibility cues have a larger substantive effect than just one. Finally, I wish to compare the findings in this experiment with those of previous chapters as a method of testing the robustness of those previous results. Should the results from previous chapters remain consistent, one would expect to see strong support for both the Expertise and Character hypotheses, leading to a substantial decrease in partisan bias. In summary, the

goals of this chapter are as follows:

1. To assess the relative weight of expertise and character cues to determine which of the two has a greater impact on political behavior.
2. To assess how individuals weigh both dimensions of source credibility when cues put them in conflict with each other, in an attempt to see if one dimension of credibility dominates the other.
3. To provide further robustness to the results from previous studies, demonstrating the influence of both dimensions of source credibility on political behavior in a polarized political environment.

In the following experiment, I find consistent evidence that individuals prioritize source expertise over source character, with the former having a much greater impact on information-seeking behavior. While copartisan (opposing partisan) sources are perceived as (not) credible by default, both expertise and character cues appear to mitigate these partisan biases in isolation. Yet, when presented with congruent expertise and character cues (i.e. both cues indicate credibility or a lack thereof) respondents provide little evidence of a “stacking effect”. Instead, individuals update their assessments logically based on the expertise cue, with the additional character cue adding little relative to the control. Finally, when expertise and character cues conflict, individuals consistently prioritize the expertise cue over the character cue. This implies that individuals trust the perspective of high expertise sources, even when that source has a clear ulterior motive. Conversely, individuals show little faith in a high character source that lacks expertise. These results suggest important normative implications that emphasize the importance of responsible journalistic practices.

Study Design

Similar to the previous two chapters, I distributed a selection experiment to a census-matched sample of 1500 respondents from Lucid, an online survey service in the fall of 2019. All

designs and measures were preregistered prior to data collection through the Open Science Foundation, and materials have been made publicly available. To ensure adequate statistical power, I supplemented this data with additional survey data acquired from a student sample ($n = 359$). This resulted in a total of 1859 respondents (56% female, 69% white, 55% Democrat, 37% Republican).³⁴

As in previous designs, respondents were given several sets of (fabricated) headlines on a variety of political topics, with one author arguing in favor of the given policy (pro author), and the other arguing against that policy (con author). Respondents read both headlines and answered a short battery of questions before moving onto the next set.³⁵

The issues discussed by each set of headlines are identical to the four used in the previous chapter: 1) labelling laws for food made with genetically modified organisms (GMO labels issue frame), 2) carbon taxes targeting climate change (climate change issue frame), 3) U.S. investment in nuclear power (nuclear energy issue frame), and 4) taxes on sugary soft drinks (soda tax issue frame). However, this study differs from the previous chapters by including cues related to both expertise and character in the bylines. For each set of headlines, one author was randomly assigned a high expertise cue while the other received a low expertise cue. I also included a control condition in which neither author received an expertise cue. I simultaneously followed a similar randomized process utilizing character cues. Finally, I randomized the partisan affiliation of each author, with one author writing for Fox News and the other writing for MSNBC. This ultimately resulted in a $3 \times 3 \times 2$ experiment: Expertise (high/low/control) \times Character (high/low/control) \times partisan congruence (copartisan \times opposing partisan). Once again, this design excludes both non-ideological sources and apolitical options that may serve to undermine the effects of partisanship (Feldman et al. 2013; Arceneaux and Johnson 2013). This ensures that this is the most conservative test of both the Character and Expertise Hypotheses.

³⁴Median age of non-student respondents is 45. Full demographics in the Appendix

³⁵The ordering of the sets of headlines was randomized.

Table 4.1 Character Manipulations by Issue

Issue Frame	High character cue	Low character cue
GMO labels	Texas Farm Bureau	Monsanto Corporation
Climate Change	National Weather Service	Exxon Mobil
Nuclear energy	Solar energy farm	Nuclear energy plant
Soda Tax	National Education Association	American Beverage Association

Table 4.2 Expertise Manipulations by Issue

Issue Frame	High expertise cue	Low expertise cue
GMO labels	Ph.D. in genetics	Bachelor's in political science
Climate Change	Ph.D. in climate science	Bachelor's in history
Nuclear energy	Ph.D. in electrical engineering	Bachelor's in communications
Soda Tax	Ph.D. in economics	Bachelor's in business

Measures

Analyses feature three main independent factors: 1) the character treatment to which the pro author was assigned (high, low, control), 2) the expertise treatment to which the pro author was assigned (high, low, control), and 3) the partisan congruence treatment to which the pro author was assigned (copartisan, opposing partisan). Analyses also considered interaction effects among these variables.

The main dependent variable was a simple binary choice that represented which article the respondent would prefer to read based on the headlines (1 = pro author, 0 = con author).

However, analyses also include dependent variables to measure relative perceived expertise and character of the sources. These were measured in an identical fashion to the experiments in the previous chapters. To gauge source expertise, respondents were shown a series of adjectives: “knowledgeable”, “experienced”, “qualified”, and “intelligent”. Respondents were asked to rate whether the adjective better described the pro author or the con author.

Responses are measured on a five-point ordinal scale, ranging from “[pro author], by a lot” to

“[con author], by a lot”. Answers are rescaled from 1 to -1, with higher scores indicating that the adjective better described the pro author. Answers to these questions are averaged to create a final, highly reliable index of perceived source expertise (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .917$). I utilized a similar process to measure source character, using the adjectives “honest”, “unbiased”, “trustworthy”, and “objective” (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .881$).

Preliminary Analyses

Figure 4.1 Relative perceived expertise

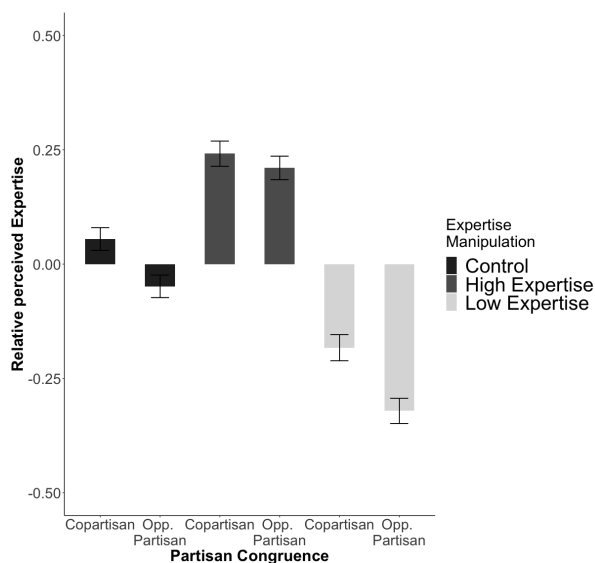


Figure 4.2 Relative perceived character

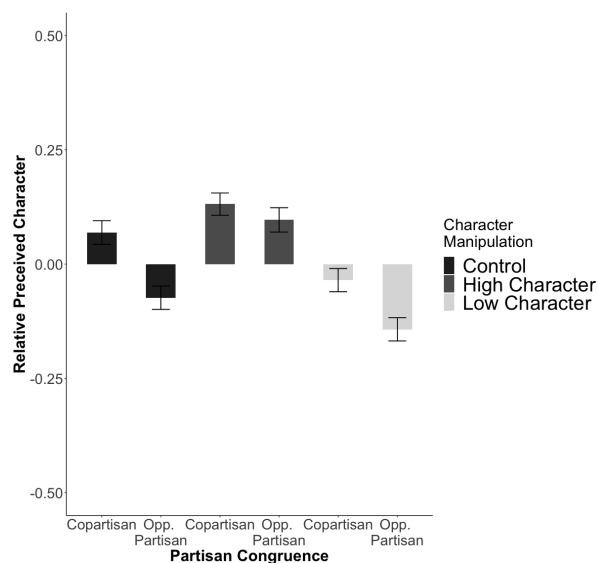


Figure 1 displays the effect of expertise cues on relative perceptions of expertise. Figure 2 displays the effect of expertise cues on relative perceptions of expertise. Both were measured with respective indices constructed from five-point ordinal measures. Positive scores indicate that the pro author was viewed to have greater expertise/character than the con author. Descriptive evidence shows that the manipulations were successful in altering perceptions of the authors, with individuals responding in a logical fashion. Pro authors assigned high expertise (character) cues are perceived to have a higher degree of expertise (character) relative to the con author. Pro authors assigned low expertise (character) cues are perceived to have a lower degree of expertise (character) relative to the con authors. While partisan

differences in perception remain prevalent, these results demonstrate that individuals do take note of competing source character cues.

Data and Analyses

I begin with analyses which address the effects of expertise and character in conjunction or in conflict with one another. In doing so, I seek to directly compare the influence of both dimensions of expertise and determine whether individuals prioritize one dimension over another. Afterwards, I move to analyses that focus upon the expertise and character dimension individually, to assess whether the results are consistent with those found in previous chapters

Which dimension of credibility has a stronger influence over political behavior?

Table 3 displays the main effects for the expertise cues and copartisanship and their respective effects on the predicted probability that the respondent chooses the pro author article. These predicted probabilities, and all subsequent predicted probabilities in this chapter, were generated from a within-subjects logit regression analysis with clustered-standard errors, featuring fixed effects for both issue frame and respondent (Table 4; for parsimony these fixed effects are not displayed).

Results highlight the large influence of partisanship in political assessments and behavior. Respondents are 9% more likely to select a copartisan source relative to an opposing partisan source ($p < .01$). However, evidence reveals a strong main effect for both the high expertise and low expertise cues. Holding all other factors constant, the high expertise cue increases article selection by 9.4% ($p < .01$), and the low expertise cue decreases selection by 11.8% ($p < .01$), relative to the control condition. These results support the Expertise Hypothesis, as respondents update their assessments and behavior in logical fashion, even after controlling for partisanship. In addition, high character cues increase pro author selection by 4.5% ($p <$

.05). Low character cues decrease selection by 4.3% ($p < .01$), supporting the character hypothesis.

Table 1: Table 4.3 Predicted probability of selecting the pro policy argument based on expertise and character cues

	Predicted Probability
Control	.516
High expertise pro author	.612**
Low expertise pro author	.398**
High character pro author	.551**
Low character pro author	.473**
Opposing partisan pro author	.468
Copartisan pro author	.558 ²

*Note: distinguishable from control treatment at * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$*

Note: distinguishable from opposing partisan treatment at ² $p < .05$; ² $p < .01$

Notably, the main effects for expertise cues are roughly double the size of the main effects effects for character cues. This would suggest that, all else held equal, individual perceptions of source expertise far outweigh considerations for source character. It is true that the exact sizes of these effects would likely change if one were to utilize different cues for each dimension. However, analyses from previous chapters gave no clear indication that the particular expertise cues I employed in this study would hold a degree of influence that is highly disproportionate to that of the character cues. Thus, initial evidence implies that while both the expertise and character dimensions influence information-seeking behavior, citizens care more about the expert knowledge that a source possess than the source's character motivations. In addition, these results offer encouraging results from the previous chapters, yielding similar main effects. This point is discussed further in the following section.

Table 4.4 The effect of source credibility and partisanship on pro author article selection

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	Article Selection	
	(1)	(2)
High Expertise Pro Author	0.737** (0.177)	1.050** (0.245)
Low Expertise Pro Author	-0.828** (0.180)	-0.741** (0.259)
High Character pro author	0.180 (0.176)	0.619* (0.242)
Low Character Pro Author	-0.610** (0.175)	-0.750** (0.252)
Copartisan Pro Author	0.477** (0.082)	0.924** (0.253)
High Expertise, High Character	0.745** (0.173)	1.227** (0.243)
High Expertise, Low Character	0.354* (0.172)	0.907** (0.246)
Low Expertise, High Character	-0.329 (0.181)	-0.398 (0.258)
Low Expertise, Low Character	-0.658** (0.177)	-0.487* (0.243)
High Expertise, No Character Cue * Coparty		-0.648* (0.352)
Low Expertise, No Character Cue * Coparty		-0.213 (0.361)
High Character, No Expertise Cue * Coparty		-0.924** (0.354)
Low Character, No Expertise Cue * Coparty		0.231 (0.359)
High Expertise, High Character * Coparty		-1.009** (0.350)
High Expertise, Low Character * Coparty		-1.096** (0.345)
Low Expertise, High Character * Coparty		0.130 (0.365)
Low Character, Low Character * Coparty		-0.346 (0.354)
Constant	-0.207 (1.048)	-0.251 (1.084)
Observations	4,621	4,621
<i>Note:</i>	*p<0.05; **p<0.01	

To more directly assess the relative influence of expertise and character cues, Figures 3 and 4 provide a depiction of these predicted probabilities for ease of interpretation. The predicted probability that the respondent selects the pro author when both dimensions of credibility are

working in conjunction or in conflict. Table 5 presents these same numbers in the form a table.

Figure 4.3 The marginal effect of **high expertise** and character based on partisanship

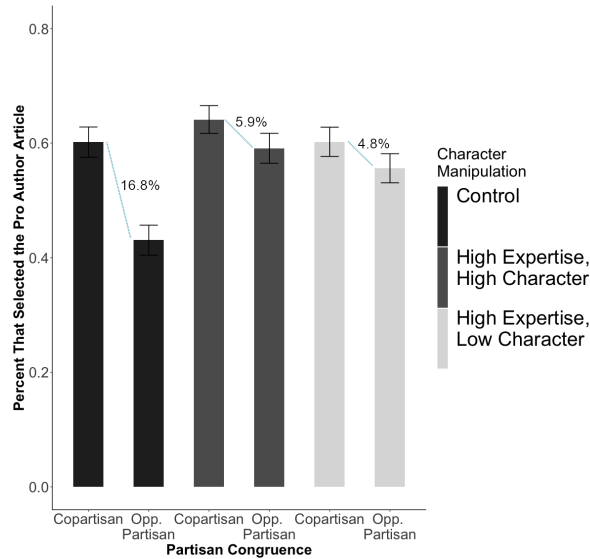


Figure 4.4 The marginal effect of **low expertise** and character based on partisanship

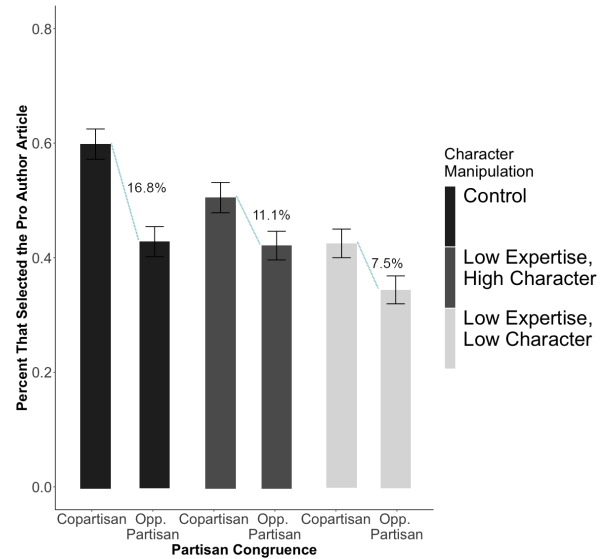


Table 4.5 The interactions of expertise, character, and partisan congruence and their effect on pro author selection

	Copartisan pro author	Opposing partisan pro author	Difference (copartisan - opposing partisan)	% decrease in bias relative to the control
Control pro author	60.1%	43.3%	16.8%**	-
High expertise, High character pro author	64.7%	58.8%	5.9%**	-10.9%*
High expertise, Low character pro author	59.6%	54.8%	4.8%*	-12.0%**
Low expertise, High character pro author	50.6%	40.5%	11.1%**	-5.7%*
Low expertise, Low character pro author	40.6%	33.1%	7.5%**	-9.3%*

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Beginning with high expertise cues, the evidence presented here evinces two noticeable patterns. First, in a context with only partisan cues (i.e. no competing credibility cues),

copartisans are viewed as credible by default. This suggests that there is a potential credibility ceiling effect for copartisans. Even with the addition of both high expertise and high character cues, a copartisan source only receives a 4.7% (statistically null, $p < .06$) increase in selection. This increase pales in comparison to similar opposing partisan sources, whom receive 15.5% ($p < .01$) increase to selection.

Second, irrespective of whether the source has high or low character credibility, respondents show a tendency to perceive high expertise copartisans as roughly equivalent to copartisan sources in the control treatment. In other words, respondents appear to trust high expertise copartisan sources irrespective of that sources degree of character credibility. Inferences drawn from these finding would suggest that the expertise dimension of credibility tends to dominate over character credibility in determining information-seeking behavior. Simply put, individuals trust high expertise copartisan sources, and the addition of high (low) character cues does little to positively (negatively) impact selection behavior.

Figure 1: Figure 4.5 Changes in the marginal effect of the *high expertise* versus control cue based on character and partisan congruence

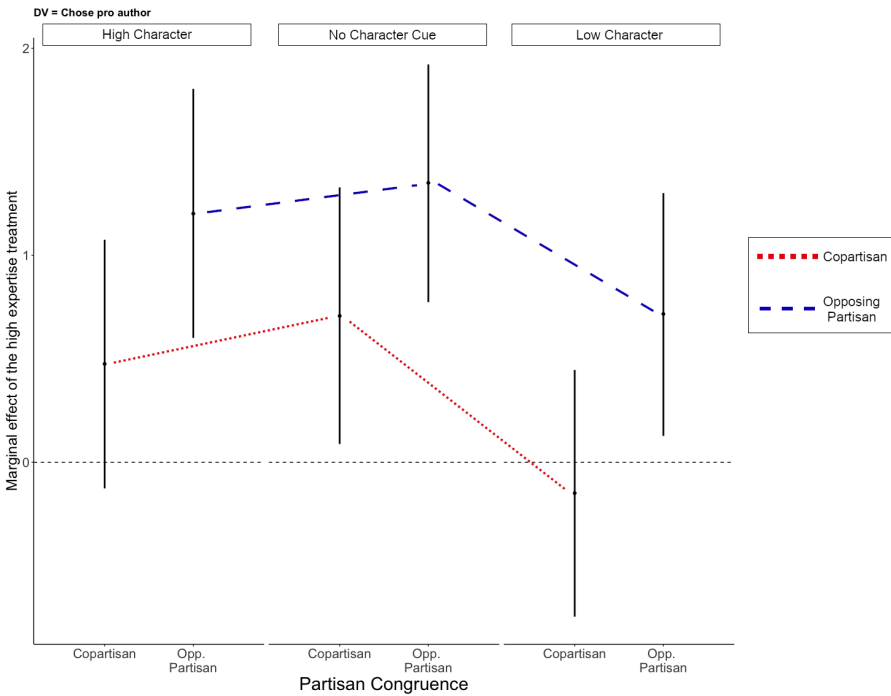
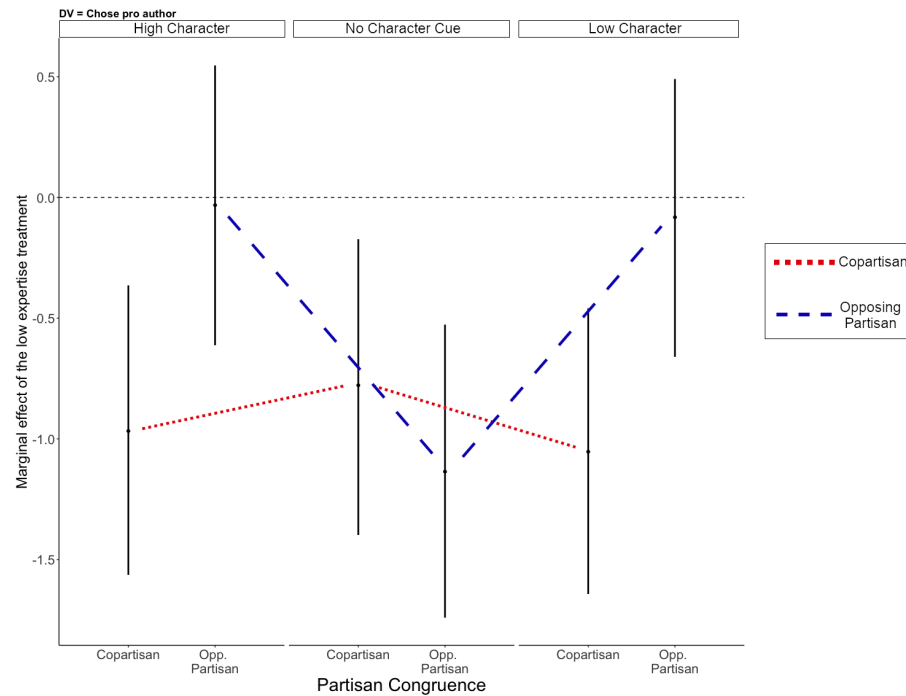


Figure 2: Figure 4.6 Changes in the marginal effect of the *low expertise* versus control cue cue based on character and partisan congruence



To better illustrate the dominance of expertise cues, Figure 5 depicts the changes in the marginal effect of the high expertise based on the addition of character cues. This allows one to better assess the marginal effect of varying levels of character while holding expertise constant. Respondents select sources in the high expertise treatment with no additional character cues at a much higher rate than in the pure control condition. This effect appears to be particularly strong for opposing partisans sources. Yet, that addition of character cues does not appear to alter the effect of expertise cues. In the high expertise, high character treatment, neither copartisan nor opposing partisan sources received an increase in selection. Perhaps more normatively interesting, high expertise sources are not generally punished for low character credibility. Opposing partisan sources receive an increase in selection from the expertise cue in spite of a lack of character credibility. While copartisan sources fail to garner the rather modest boost to selection received from the high expertise cue, expert copartisans with low character credibility are not penalized relative to the pure control. This indicates

that when character credibility and expertise credibility are in conflict, individuals prioritize expertise. This would imply that respondents are willing to trust an expert source, even when that source has a clearly-signaled conflict of interest.

Moving to low expertise cues, evidence reveals a similar inverse pattern. Low expertise, high character copartisan sources receive a 9.5% ($p < .01$) penalty in selection relative to the control. Comparatively, identical opposing partisans receive a smaller, statistically null 2.8% ($p < .05$) decrease in selection. Opposing partisans sources in the control are equally likely to be selected as low expertise, low character copartisans. This suggests that opposing partisans are viewed as non-credible, having low expertise by default. Evidence does imply the existence of potential stacking effects between low expertise and low character cues. Relative to the control, copartisan sources receive a harsh penalty of 19.5% ($p < .01$) decrease in selection. Opposing partisan sources receive a smaller, but nonetheless substantial penalty of 10.2% ($p < .01$). However, high character cues do little to alter assessments of low expertise opposing partisans. This again suggests that the influence of the high character cue is simply being overwhelmed by assessments of source expertise. Thus, a clear expertise cue provides enough of a signal to convince respondents that the source's perspective is worthy of consideration. This finding remains consistent, even when an opposing partisan source may have a conflict of interests (i.e. low character). This should serve to drastically increase the effectiveness of communications for opposing partisan sources, as they are able to better reach an audience that normally would not consider the source's perspective.

Figure 6 presents an illustration of the marginal effects of low expertise based on the character manipulation. Results from these analyses corroborate the results and implications for analyses of the high expertise cue in Figure 4. Without the addition of character cues, respondents punish both copartisan and opposing partisan sources substantial for a lack of expertise. . This provides strong evidence of a floor effect for opposing partisan sources. Since opposing partisans are already perceived to lack credibility, resulting in low rates of selection, additional low character cues affirm this stereotype rather than exacerbate an

already powerful partisan bias.

In addition, the inclusion of character cues appears to change very little in terms of selection behavior. The likelihood that a respondent selects the low expertise opposing partisan source is equivalent to the pure control in both the high character and low character treatments. High character cues do little to aid low expertise opposing partisan sources relative to the pure control condition. Thus, respondents do not appear to value the perspective of an opposing partisan with honest intentions if that source lacks relevant policy knowledge. Low expertise copartisan sources are harshly penalized for their lack of expertise in a scenario with no additional character cues. However, this harsh penalty in selection remains consistent even with the addition of character cues. A low expertise, low character copartisan is as likely to be selected as a low expertise, high character copartisan; both are equally likely to be selected relative to a low expertise copartisan with no additional character cues. Put more succinctly, the present evidence suggests that perceptions of low expertise dominate the character dimension. Individuals avoid copartisan and opposing partisan sources for a lack of expertise, and conflicting high character cues do very little to mitigate this penalty in selection. While there is some initial evidence that may suggest a stacking effect, in which low character cues exacerbate the effects of low expertise cues, more in depth analyses indicate that this penalty to selection is driven primarily by the low expertise cue, with the additional low character cue adding very little.

The biasing mitigating effect of source expertise and character individually

Finally, I turn to analysis that analyzes both dimensions of source credibility separately to gauge whether such cues mitigate partisan biases in isolation. I do so to demonstrate the robustness of prior evidence both from this experiment as well as previous chapters of this dissertation.

Expertise

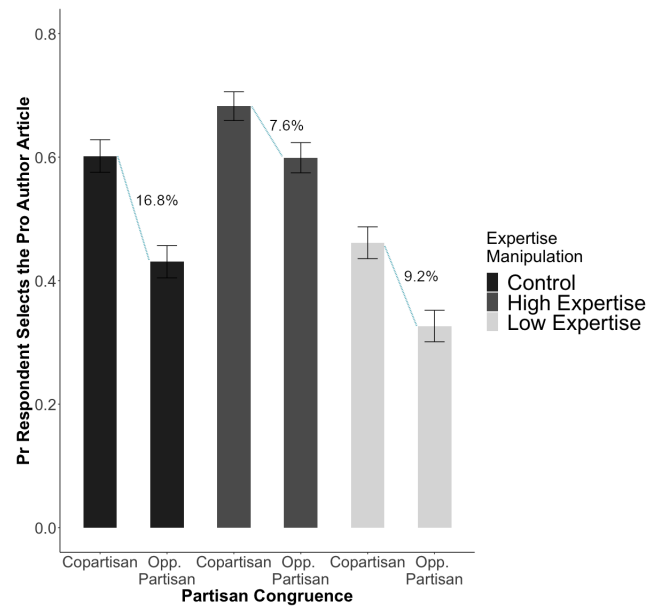
To interpret how expertise cues and partisan cues interact, Table 6 and Figure 7 display the predicted probability that the respondent chooses the pro author article based on both partisans and expertise cues with character cues held constant. In the control condition, respondents are 16.8% more likely to choose a copartisan source than an opposing partisan source. Perhaps unsurprisingly, when provided only partisan cues with no additional context, citizens largely leaned on their partisan predispositions, resulting in a sizable partisan bias.

Table 4.6 Decrease in partisan bias based on expertise cues

	Copartisan pro author	Opposing partisan pro author	Difference (copartisan - opposing partisan)	% Δ in difference relative to the control
Control pro author	60.1%	43.3%	16.8%**	-
High expertise pro author	68.9%	61.3%	7.6%*	- 9.2%**
Low expertise pro author	41.7%	32.5%	9.2%**	-7.6%*

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Figure 4.7 Predicted probability of selecting the pro policy argument based on expertise and copartisanship with no character cue



While the addition of expertise cues does not wholly eliminate this bias, they do appear to

mitigate this bias to a notable degree. High expertise cues increase the selection of copartisan sources by 8.9% ($p < .01$) and opposing partisan sources by an impressive 18.0% ($p < .01$). This decreased the bias in selection between high expertise copartisan and opposing partisan sources to 7.6 percentage points, a 9.2% decrease in bias relative to the control ($p < .01$). Low expertise cues evinced similar effects in the opposite direction, decreasing the selection of coparitsans by 18.4% ($p < .01$) and opposing partisans by 10.8% ($p < .01$). This decreased the overall gap in selection based on partisanship to 7.6% ($p < .05$) relative to the control. In each case, respondents update their assessments and behavior in a logical fashion to reflect the additional context, irrespective of partisan considerations.

Ultimately, these results closely match those in previous experiments on the expertise dimension found in chapter two. Individuals displayed a high level of partisan bias, particularly in the control condition. Yet, despite the resounding strength of partisan predispositions, respondents did attend to source expertise cues, updating their opinions logically. High expertise authors were viewed as more credible and selected at a much higher rate than the control. Low expertise cues exhibited the inverse effect. These effects were consistent, even when controlling for partisanship. While respondents view copartisan (opposing partisan) sources as credible (not credible) by default, they are nonetheless willing to update their assessments, leading to a sizable overall decrease in partisan-based selection bias.

Character

To interpret how character cues and partisan cues interact, Table 7 and Figure 8 display the predicted probability that the respondent chooses the pro author article based on both partisans and character cues with expertise cues held constant. Results reveal interesting heterogenous effects based on both partisanship and the character cue. Copartisan sources fail to benefit from a high character cue. In fact, the additional cue appears to decrease selection of copartisan sources relative to the control. This is likely due to the fact that this analysis does not take into account the interaction between expertise and character cues, which is

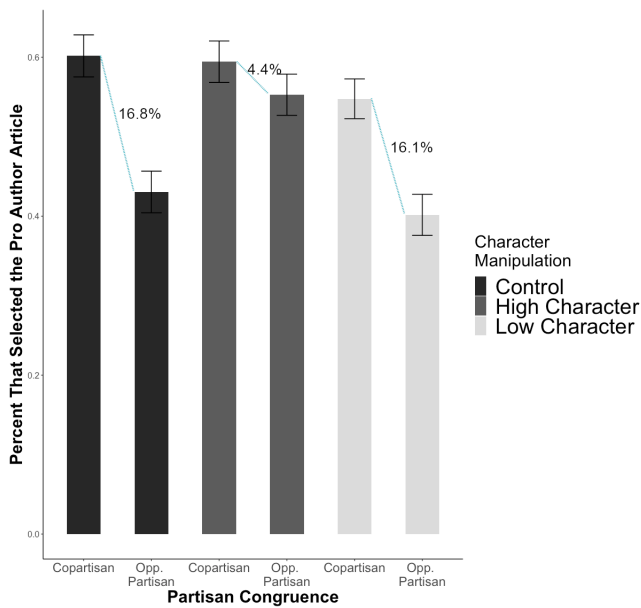
addressed in the proceeding section. Meanwhile, opposing partisan sources benefit greatly from the high character cue as selection increases by 13% ($p < .01$). Overall, the difference between high character copartisan sources is substantively negligible and statistical null, indicating that the presence of high character cues has succeeded in greatly mitigating differences in selection caused on partisan bias. This offers highly compelling support for the Character Hypothesis, as individuals update their assessments and behavior in logical fashion when sources are highly credible, even going as far to ignore their partisan allegiances.

Table 4.7 Decrease in partisan bias based on character cues

	Copartisan pro author	Opposing partisan pro author	Difference (copartisan - opposing partisan)	% Δ in difference relative to the control
Control pro author	60.1%	43.3%	16.8%**	-
High character pro author	60.7%	56.3%	4.4%	-12.4%**
Low character pro author	56.4%	40.3%	16.1%**	-0.7%

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Figure 4.8 Predicted probability of selecting the pro policy argument based on character and copartisanship with no expertise cue



Low character cues offer drastically different implications. Copartisan sources experience a

decrease of 3.7% ($p < .05$) in selection with the inclusion of low character cues, relative to the control. Low character opposing partisan sources receive a similar 3% ($p < .01$) decrease in selection. Together, the difference between low character copartisan and opposing partisan sources decreased only to a rather small degree (.07%, statistically null) relative to the control. Thus, low character cues do not appear to decrease partisan selective exposure. When considering both character cues, results hold two implications. First, individuals show a tendency to generally consider copartisans trustworthy and opposing partisans untrustworthy by default. This again underscores the great influence of partisan predispositions and stereotypes. Second, individuals appear to trust opposing partisan sources only after being presented with clear evidence that disputes their partisan-based stereotypes.

Conclusion

Results from this experiment imply that respondents are updating their assessments and behavior in a manner consistent with the Expertise Hypothesis and the Character Hypothesis. Just as respondents are more willing to hear out highly credible sources, respondents are less likely to select sources with clear cues that indicate a lack of credibility. These credibility cues by no means eliminate partisan biases, and the benefits (penalties) for high (low) credibility cues are often heterogeneous based on the partisanship of both the source and respondent. However, the heterogeneous relationship among partisanship and credibility cues can serve to mitigate partisan selection bias and selective exposure to a notable degree in some circumstances.

Interestingly, the overall body of results imply potential ceiling (floor) effects for copartisans (opposing partisans). In the control condition, respondents show a strong tendency to view copartisans as credible in both dimensions by default, while opposing partisans are viewed as non-credible. While copartisans receive slight benefits from high credibility cues, the benefits received by opposing partisans are often magnitudes larger. Since respondents already viewed copartisans as credible, additional information that reaffirms this belief yields

diminishing returns for the source. In other words, a source can only be so credible, and copartisan cues may already approach that limit. When respondents receive information that refutes their preconceptions of opposing partisans, there is simply far more room to approve upon that reputation.

Evidence yields the inverse effect for low credibility cues. Since opposing partisans were already viewed as non-credible, additional information that affirms that stereotype again yields diminishing returns. A source that was already perceived to be lacking in trustworthiness and expertise can only lose so much more credibility before they have absolutely none. Copartisans, however, have a higher starting point to fall from, yielding larger decreases in credibility. While somewhat intuitive, such patterns of behavior would be completely masked if not for the inclusion of competing cues, further highlighting the need for the consideration of context when studying and assessing partisan motivated reasoning. These results underscore a key finding: when given clear signals that refute these partisan congruence-based stereotypes, individuals update their assessments accordingly. This results in a substantial decrease in partisan selection bias. This is highly encouraging in a normative sense. Citizens may have deeply-held affective partisan dispositions, but this does not wholly prevent them from acknowledging and seeking information from expert and trustworthy sources.

Results from this experiment provide strong support for previous findings, offering a great deal of robustness for the predictive validity of the multidimensional approach to source credibility. Both dimensions of credibility clearly have an important substantive affect on political assessments and behavior. This effect is strongest in a scenario which features only one dimension of credibility, suggesting that these two dimensions operate independently and in the logical fashion. Thus, the validity of both dimensions remains consistent across all three chapters of this dissertation, a rather encouraging finding.

This effect is particularly interesting in that it suggests ceiling effects (floor effects) for copartisan (opposing partisan) sources may be rooted more firmly in the character dimension

than in the expertise dimension. Evidence does suggest that opposing partisans gain disproportionately from high expertise cues, but copartisans do gain some benefit (8.9%). Low expertise cues exhibit the inverse relationship, with copartisans being penalized disproportionately, but opposing partisan still receiving a sizable penalty in selection nonetheless (10.8%). The same cannot be said for character cues. Evidence indicates that copartisans gain very little from high character cues (.6%), while opposing partisans receive a rather sizable benefit. Similarly, opposing partisans are only marginally penalized by low character cues (3%). This not only highlights the strength of affective partisan biases, but suggests that that character cues may be redundant in some respects. Most individuals (dis)trust copartisans (opposing partisans) by default, so reaffirming this belief will not make them more likely to choose the copartisan source that they were already set on selecting. While partisan cues do inform perceptions of expertise to a notable degree, those partisan cues more closely align themselves along the character dimension, informing individuals about the source's degree of trustworthiness and potential biases.

While both dimensions clearly affect respondents' assessments and behavior, analysis of the relative weight of both expertise and character cues suggests that expertise plays larger role. The main effects evinced by expertise cues are twice that of character cues, rivaling even partisan congruence in the overall size of effect. When respondents were asked to consider both expertise and character credibility simultaneously, the expertise dimension clearly dominated the character dimension. Evidence provided little to suggest that high or low expertise sources were further rewarded or penalized for character credibility (or a lack thereof). Moreover, interaction effects between expertise and character show that high expertise sources are selected at high rates irrespective of partisan allegiances, even when that high expertise source lacks character. Thus, when expertise cues and character cues are in conflict, it would appear as though expertise cues are given priority.

This last finding in particular suggests fascinating normative and empirical implications that should inform how scholars, journalists, and citizens understand source credibility and

political communications. Indeed, it is normatively pleasing that respondents place a high emphasis on source expertise, mitigating partisan-based biases to a substantial degree. Perhaps in some respects, the prioritization of expertise over character credibility may be beneficial to respondents. Consider a pundit that is discussing climate change policy. This pundit has a high degree of scientific expertise on climate change, that works as a college professor. Some citizens (in this particular case, likely conservative citizens) may view college professors as snobby elitists that look down on average citizens from the ivory tower of academia. In other words, the professor lacks character credibility in the eyes of these individuals. However, the results from this study suggest that this is not a drastic concern, as the credibility gained from professors' clear expertise on the subject matter will far outweighs concerns of character-based elitism. As a result, experts should be able to communicate their ideas effectively, even if the audience has some (often unjustified) reservations about the speaker's character.

However, in many other respects, the domination of the expertise dimension over the character dimension can be highly concerning from a normative perspective. While an expert on a policy relevant subject may be informed on the matter at hand, this does not necessarily mean that they will not be motivated to intentionally mislead the listener. Consider another pundit discussing climate change policy. This pundit may also have a scientific background indicating expertise, but they have been hired by an energy corporation with a vested interest in denying climate change and a history of muddling scientific facts among the public.

Realistically, it may be beneficial to be somewhat wary of this pundit's perspective, as the facts they cite may be highly misleading due to their conflict of interests. However, these results suggest that individuals will tend to ignore this signal, instead more strongly considering that pundits expert background.

This also provides candidates with a strong incentives for pundits to misrepresent and even outright lie about their levels of expertise. Consider Former White House Deputy Assistant turned political commentator Sebastian Gorka. While Gorka does have a Ph.D. in

international relations, he earned this degree under dubious circumstances, as noted by his own dissertation chair (Griffin and Bronstein 2017). Gorka often publically demands that media outlets refer to him as ‘Dr. Gorka Ph.D.’. This violates journalistic guidelines which reserve the term “doctor” for medical professionals. The results from this experiment suggest that his demands, should they be met, might have the intended effect. Respondents may ignore Gorka’s questionable actions and conflict of interests due to his past career as a spokesperson for President Donald Trump due to his academic title, which sends a signal of expertise (be it justified or unjustified in reality). This places a great deal of emphasis on journalists’ responsibilities as gatekeepers of political information. The media dictates both what information is fit for the news and whom gets to relay the news. It is vital that journalists thoroughly vet sources before placing them in the public eye, to prevent inaccurate or omitted contextual information from confusing audiences and undermining the proliferation of important, accurate political information.

Conculsion:

What's next?

At its core, the goal of this research is rather simple: to define what source credibility means to the individual in a political context. More specifically, the underlying theory of this dissertation hinges on two key questions: 1) How do individuals assess the credibility of an information source? and 2) Are individuals capable of making effective use of source credibility cues to arrive at more informed and less biased opinions in spite of their partisanship? Though the questions at the core of this research are simple in nature, the potential ramifications of the proposed model could impactl on our understanding of individual political communications, political knowledge, and overall democratic competence. Many prior works tend to treat source credibility as a given, or a simple proxy variable for political partisanship. While suggesting that credibility does matter for individual opinion-formation and decision-making, such an approach fails to address why source credibility matters and how individuals judge source credibility. By building a better understanding of how individuals interpret cues to make source credibility judgements, one can better assess both when and why one should expect individuals to utilize a given source cue; be it the source's partisanship or another source cue.

To answer these questions, I proposed a multidimensional model of source credibility that has been founded upon prior works in both political science and apolitical fields like communications and psychology. This model asserts that individuals assess a source's credibility based on that source's expert qualifications, motivations, and character. Both

statistical and experimental tests find statistical evidence which fits well within this framework, with assessments loading neatly onto both of these latent dimensions. Further experimental evidence demonstrates the predictive validity of these findings, showing that cues which bolster (undermine) perceptions of a source's expertise or character lead respondents to update their assessments and behavior in kind.

This influence also remained consistent despite the presence of competing partisan cues across a variety of issue contexts. These findings provide clear evidence that individuals do consider the context-relevant expertise of an author when source cues make that information readily available. In a contextless scenario without competing cues, respondents demonstrate strong partisan biases, with copartisans viewed as credible and opposing partisans perceived as non-credible by default. Yet, when context was made available to respondents through the use of clear credibility cues in both dimensions, individuals respond in a logical fashion, rewarding opposing partisans for high degrees of credibility, and punishing copartisans for low degrees of credibility. This does not wholly eliminate the considerable role of partisanship in credibility assessments and news selection, but it does mitigate the role of partisan bias to a substantial degree. These results should not downplay the influence of partisanship, as party cues remain highly influential and salient to respondents despite varying levels of expertise. Effect sizes for expertise were comparable to those of partisanship and respondents update their assessments and behaviors in the expected logical fashion.

Normative and Scholarly Implications

This research holds important implications for scholarly understanding of both partisanship and competing contextual information. While many American citizens view the world through red or blue-tinted glasses, this does not prevent them from clearly seeing all sign posts on their path. A citizen surfing the internet or social media may be tempted to scroll past articles and sources that don't share a partisan affiliation. Yet, this dissertation suggests that those same citizens can be incentivized to put aside their partisan suspicions (to a degree)

with a clearly-signaled, but relatively modest cue, potentially helping them acquire useful political information.

More broadly, this research highlights the need for the consideration of political context when studying political opinions, behavior, and partisan biases. Indeed, it is impossible to create a simulated political information environment that accounts for all potential contexts and cues. Nonetheless, a complete lack of context and competing cues may risk inflating effect sizes of specific cues, like partisanship or character credibility. While the consideration of contexts and competing cues creates a greater burden for experimental framing research, it is sometimes necessary and worthwhile to ensure the validity and generalizability of one's findings.

While source credibility cues may not deliver a normatively desirable knockout blow to partisan bias, the implications here offer reason to be cautiously sanguine about a political messenger's ability to disseminate accurate information and citizens' levels of democratic competence. What I would like to emphasize here is that additional credibility cues are virtually costless. The credibility manipulations utilized in these studies are easy-to-implement: just a brief sentence about the author's background. Despite their simplicity, they do appear to help communicate information more effectively. Even in situations in which screen space or column inches are at a premium, the resource cost of adding small source credibility cues is essentially zero. Media outlets may be able to increase the effectiveness of communications by providing the audience with carefully selected source cues that indicate the communicator's credibility on relevant subject matter without the need for much additional effort. Such cues are already employed to some degree in newspaper columns and television news with great regularity (e.g. "Representative from x district" or "author of y book"). Careful selection and increased ubiquity of source expertise cues may help media entities disseminate accurate information and help the average citizen identify useful information without using additional resources or effort. Returning to the example of Bill Taylor's testimony noted in the introduction to this research, media outlets have the

ability and often the willingness to provide useful context in just a handful of words. The cost of simply leaving these cues on the screen longer would cost the networks nothing while perhaps increasing the effectiveness of these cues. To reiterate, and at the risk of redundancy, using these cues is virtually costless. Even if using source credibility cues helps only to a marginal degree, the utility of these cues far outweighs the cost.

This underscores the vital responsibility that is placed within the hands of political journalists. Journalists serve their roles as gatekeepers in this context, choosing which contributors to feature and which cues to include in their broadcast or publication. The current research presents a situation in which both general credibility and political partisanship are clearly presented to the individual. However, pundits themselves have an incentive to appear more credible, irrespective of their true qualifications and motivations. Pundits may often attempt to muddle framing and source cues intentionally in order to gain credibility and subsequent persuasiveness. Expanding on an example from the previous chapter: Former White House Deputy Assistant turned political commentator Sebastian Gorka. Gorka maintains a controversial instance on being referred to as “Dr. Gorka Ph.D.”. This in spite of questions regarding the validity of his graduate education and journalistic guidelines that reserve the term “doctor” for medical professionals (Borchers 2017). Some outlets have granted his requests (namely Fox News and reactionary alt-right tabloids such as Breitbart), while other outlets have declined. This serves to exemplify the role which source expertise cues, and the responsibility placed on media outlets to carefully choose when to display these cues appropriately so as to avoid confusing the audience.

Moreover, this research does not address situations in which two unqualified pundits debate each other, which again highlights the vital responsibilities of journalists to choose their contributors carefully. Once again harkening back to the introduction, this research may not map well onto debates on scientific subjects between entertainer Bill Nye and pundit Tucker Carlson, with neither exhibiting any true scientific background. Without healthy and careful journalistic practices, media outlets may undercut the strength of their arguments, and the

persuasiveness of expert opinions on specific subjects over time. In addition, careless use of cues and poor selection of sources may simply confuse the audience, potentially leading to a less accurately informed public that is more likely to arrive at misinformed conclusions.

Avenues for Future Research

This research offers a rich vein of extensions, which could offer further insight into the role of source credibility in modern political communications. In a certain sense, source credibility cues are very much in the eye of the beholder. While individuals assess credibility along the same two latent dimensions - expertise and character - two citizens may not interpret the cue itself in the same manner. As an illustrative example, consider a political scientist discussing politics with family members at a holiday dinner, explaining why the argument that “America is a republic, not a democracy” is misleading. This, of course, a hypothetical scenario with which no political scientist can empathize. Perhaps the political scientist’s uncle may consider that her niece has a deep understanding of politics by trade and is likely highly informed on the matter at hand. That uncle would likely regard the political scientist as a credible source and be more open to her explanation. However, the scientist’s aunt may interpret that political science cue to indicate that her niece is an elitist snob, who is out of touch with American politics due to her “ivory tower” job. This aunt would perceive the political scientist as lacking credibility, and would be less open to considering her point of view. In summary, both the aunt and uncle desire a perspective that is both well-informed and well-intentioned. Yet, they disagree over the interpretation of the same cue, and whether it means their niece is credible along those two dimensions.

In future research, it would be useful to address how different groups of individuals interpret the same cue along these lines. For example, how do liberals and conservatives interpret the same source credibility cue? Do conservatives find academics and scientific research professionals lacking in credible character due to elitism? Are liberals, who are generally less supportive of military spending, less likely to find military officials to be credible? Such

questions approach a broader overarching set of questions: to whom are specific sources credible, and when? Answering such questions not only build upon the foundation presented in this dissertation, but also represent avenues to further collective scholarly understanding in political communication.

One potential next step would be to focus more attention on whether or not individuals are willing to accept an a credible source's message. The primary dependent variable in this research was article selection, which represents whether or not individuals are willing to at least hear out that expert's argument. Future endeavors may be able to offer further insight by assessing *why* individuals are willing to attend to these arguments. Ideally, one would hope that citizens are willing to not only seek the advice of experts, but subsequently accept and follow that advice. Say, for example, an expert political scientist explains why term limits on politicians are not a good solution to government corruption. Ideally, the individual would find this argument somewhat persuasive. With multiple repetitions of the argument over time, perhaps that individual would be less supportive of term limits. However, individuals may also be seeking out those arguments simply to counterargue or confirm their suspicions about opposing partisans. For example, a Republican may tune into MSNBC and hear that same argument about term limits. They may subsequently double down on their beliefs, confirming to themselves that "the other side" is as ludicrous as they had previously thought. This may lead the individual to hear the opposing arguments from this credible source only to glean figurative ammunition for which to counterargue should the issue be brought up later. In the future, it may be helpful to analyze which of these two explanations may account for the effects found in the previous studies.

In addition to partisan cues, it would be fascinating to view how the demographic identity of the speaker affects the persuasiveness of the message. More specifically, it would be interesting to compare the perceived credibility of speakers that represent disadvantaged racial communities. In addition, it may be insightful to see whether the credibility of minority sources differs across a range of relevant race-based and non-race based issues. For

example, consider two pundits on an NPR political talk show. The first, Brandon R, is a white male with a background in politics and academics. The second, Jeronimo C, is a Latinx male with an almost identical background in politics and academics. Do listeners consider both Brandon and Jeronimo to be equally credible, or is there a racial bias against Jeronimo? If there is a bias, is this bias exacerbated by Jeronimo's ethnic and racial identity when discussing issues that stereotypically involve the Latinx community (e.g. ESL courses in schools, immigration)?

This same logic applies to gender-based cues. Let's say that Jeronimo and Brandon are joined by a female expert with almost identical qualifications. Let's call this person Beth S. Does Beth receive the same benefit in regards to perceived expertise as Brandon and Jeronimo, considering they have identical backgrounds? Or is there a gender-based bias that leads female experts to be viewed as a less credible than male counterparts? Would such a bias be exacerbated by issues that are considered to be stereotypically gendered, such as the health care birth control mandate? Or would a female expert see her perceived credibility bolstered, as her perspective is more relevant to the subject matter by virtue of being a woman? These questions, and other demographic-based questions, may help address that same overarching question of to whom specific sources are credible, and when. In addition, they may yield helpful insights into the issues facing disadvantaged communities and how individuals with such backgrounds may better communicate on important political issues. Finally, there is the question of whom media outlets consider experts, and when they choose to feature experts in broadcasts or publications. As noted, this research highlights the responsibility of journalists and media companies to feature knowledgeable and well-meaning sources, while eschewing less credible sources and pundits. Thus, a thorough understanding of when media outlets choose to feature credible sources (and when they do not) would serve as a useful barometer for the democratic health of modern political communications. In other words, what political issues and discussion do media companies feel warrant the perspective of a technical expert? What issues are those companies

comfortable with delegating to less qualified pundits? Such a task would require individuals to construct a data set of cable television news panels or newspaper opinion pieces. The researcher could then code both the occupation of the speaker, as well as the substance of the issue they are discussing. This would be no small task, given the great abundance of unique pundits featured in just a single week on the major television networks. Perhaps it is not surprising that as of the writing of this dissertation (spring of 2020), little work has been done in this regard. I will note that Kelsey Shoub and colleagues (2016) have some useful, but unpublished work on the matter. Nonetheless, very little has been done in the way of research to assess the expertise of sources the media actually chooses. Thus, such a line of research offers both ample opportunity for exploration as well as potential for highly valuable insights into the behavior of media outlets.

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Chapter 1 (Theory) Appendix

This initial study uses a convenience sample of 600 respondents from Amazon Mechanical Turk. The sample was relatively balanced in partisan make up 42.7% Democrat/lean Democrat, 16.9% pure independent, 40.4% Republican/lean Republican. The sample was composed of 53.1% women (46.9% men) and 78.3% white/European American (8/3% black/African American, 6.5% Asian).

Table A1 Expanded List of Adjectives

Adjectives
Fair
Honest
Dependable
Sincere
Unbiased
Bipartisan
Concerned for the Public Interest
Impartial
Knowledgeable
Qualified
Experienced
Competent
Charming
Attractive
Energetic
Interesting

Chapter 2 (Expertise) Appendix

Appendix A: Manipulations

Study 1

Figure 2A1 Example of an Automatic Voter Registration Manipulation^a

Automatic Voter Registration: A Confusing Mess	Automatic Voter Registration: A Common Sense Solution
-	-
<i>About the Author:</i>	<i>About the Author:</i>
<i>Brian Kubiak is an election lawyer for the Democratic Party who has practiced election law in Washington DC for almost two decades.</i>	<i>Matt Osbourne is a recent law school graduate and a newly hired election lawyer for the Republican Party in Washington DC.</i>
-	-
Automatically registering citizens using an antiquated voter information system would cause widespread confusion. The switch to electronic records would be sloppy and inefficient, costing the taxpayer money as public officials try to sort the mess out. Meanwhile, inefficiency means the system as a whole slows down on election day, leading to longer lines at the polls, and more loopholes through which criminals can commit voter fraud. Even beyond these problems, choosing not to vote is an act of free speech. Using government records to register voters without asking first violates that right. While we should encourage citizens to vote, an automatic voter registration system harms the voter more than it helps due to confusing, costly, insecure execution.	Automatic voter registration makes common sense, sorely needed changes to our electoral system. It modernizes the often antiquated, paper-based system many states use today by making the switch to electronic records. This helps streamline communication between election officials, making the voter system more efficient. This means less time waiting in line at the polls, fewer errors in the system, and less cost to the tax payer. This efficiency decreases the likelihood of voter fraud by leaving fewer loopholes in the system. Moreover, any citizen who does not want to be registered to vote can simply choose not to be registered, ensuring that the voters freedom of speech has not been encroached upon. In sum, automatic registration is cost-effective, efficient, secure, and respectful of voters' rights.

^aOrder of the articles, as well as both the expertise and partisan cues, were randomly manipulated using Qualtric survey software.

Figure 2AB Example of a GMO Label Manipulation^a

**GMO Labels Make Food
More Expensive, Not Any
Safer**

-
About the Author:

***Daniel Burke** is a professor of genetics and biology at University of Texas. He received his Ph.D. in genetics from Yale University. He is a registered Democrat and a regular contributor to this column.*

-
Foods made with Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) are safe to eat, and GMO labels promote misinformation, not safety. Thorough laboratory testing across many studies has revealed a strong scientific consensus that foods produced with GMOs are safe to eat. Not only are GMO foods safe, but they more cost-effective to produce, and often more tasty and nutritious than traditional crops. Instead of providing people with useful information, mandatory GMO labels would only intensify the misconception that so-called "Frankenfoods" endanger people's health. GMO labels only serve to scare consumers instead of informing them, while driving up the costs of production and the price we pay at the grocery store.

**GMO Labels Increase
Consumer Safety, Not Food
Costs**

-
About the Author:

***James Bolger** is a professor of political science at University of Texas. He received his B.A. in political science from Arizona State University. He is a registered Republican and a regular contributor to this column.*

-
Foods produced with Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) should be clearly labeled to promote consumer safety. Scientific evidence regarding the safety of GMOs is mixed: While some studies may indicate minimal risk, others raise human safety concerns that may arise from genetic engineering due to the introduction of new allergens. This includes an increased level of naturally occurring allergens, plant toxins, or changes in nutrition. The lack of scientific consensus is bad news for the consumer. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) does not currently require safety testing on genetically modified crops, nor do they require any companies to do safety testing of their genetically engineered crops. Consumers deserve to know what is in their food for their own safety.

^aOrder of the articles, as well as both the expertise and partisan cues, were randomly manipulated using Qualtric survey software.

Study 2

Figure 2A3 Example of an Automatic Voter Registration Manipulation^a

<u>Article A</u>	<u>Article B</u>
Automatic Voter Registration is a Confusing Mess	Automatic Voter Registration is a Common Sense Solution
<i>Brian Kubiak is election lawyer for the non-profit, non-partisan research organization Vote Smart who has practiced election law in Washington DC for two decades.</i>	<i>Aiden Green is a recent law school graduate and newly hired election lawyer for the non-profit, non-partisan research organization Vote Smart in Washington DC.</i>

^aOrder of the articles, as well as both the expertise and partisan cues, were randomly manipulated using Qualtric survey software.

Figure 2A4 Example of a GMO Labels Manipulation^a

<u>Article A</u>	<u>Article B</u>
GMO Labels Increase Food Costs, Not Consumer Safety	GMO Labels Make Food Safer, Not More Expensive
<i>Daniel Burke is an associate professor of genetics and biology at the University of Texas. He received his Ph.D. in genetics from Yale University and is a regular contributor to the MSNBC science column.</i>	<i>James Bolger is an adjunct professor of political science at the University of Texas. He received his B.A. in Political Science from Arizona State University and is a regular contributor to the Fox News science column.</i>

^aOrder of the articles, as well as both the expertise and partisan cues, were randomly manipulated using Qualtric survey software.

Figure 2A5 Example of a Trade Tariffs Manipulation^a

Article A

**Trade Tariffs Hurt Americans’
Wallets**

-

***Evan Cooke** is a former assistant trade negotiator for the United States government under the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative. He is now a Senior Financial Analyst and contributor for MSNBC.*

Article B

**Trade Tariffs Benefit American
Consumers**

-

***John Carr** is a former clerk for the United States government under the U.S. Department of Transportation. He is now a contributor for Fox News.*

^aOrder of the articles, as well as both the expertise and partisan cues, were randomly manipulated using Qualtric survey software.

Figure 2A6 Example of a Drone Strikes Manipulation^a

Article A

**Military Drone Strikes Do
More Harm Than Good**

-

***Sean West** served as a counterterrorism strategist and military analyst for the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). He now works as a policy advisor for the Democratic Party on matters related to foreign policy.*

Article B

**Military Drone Strikes Keep
America Safe**

-

***Scott Reid** served as a foreign language translator for the U.S. embassy in Spain. He now works as a policy advisor for the Republican Party on matters related to foreign policy.*

^aOrder of the articles, as well as both the expertise and partisan cues, were randomly manipulated using Qualtric survey software.

Appendix B: Sample Demographics

Study 1

Study 1 utilizes a convenience sample of 949 students from a large public university in the southwestern United States. Both women (58% women, 42% men) and Democrats (67.3% Democrat/lean Democrat, 8.5% pure independent, 24.2% Republican/lean Republican) were over-represented relative to the national population. The sample was more racially diverse than the typical student sample (22.3% White or European American, 11.6% Black or African American, 27.8% Asian, 32.6% Hispanic, 5.1% other).

Study 2

Study 2 utilizes a convenience sample of 982 student from a large public university in the southwestern United States. Once again, both women (53.1% women, 46.9% men) and Democrats (67.9% Democrat/lean Democrat, 7.2% pure independent, 39.9% Republican/lean Republican) were over-represented relative to the national population. In addition, the sample was again more racially diverse than a typical student sample (18.3% White or European American, 13.0% Black or African American, Asian 30.3%, 31.8% Hispanic, 4.7% other).

Appendix C: Analysis with Additional Controls

Analysis featured two additional control variables. First, I controlled for the respondents' political partisanship, which was measured using the aforementioned branching measure borrowed from the 2016 ANES. I included this measure to account for the fact that Democrats generally have a much more positive disposition towards automatic voter registration than Republicans. While this measure is an imperfect measure of the respondent's previously held beliefs on polarizing political issues, studies utilizing partisanship, political ideology, or other demographic factors have found this approach to be far more parsimonious and less susceptible to framing effects, while producing few, if any statistical differences from typical issue position measures (Feldman et al. 2013; Feldman et al. 2018; Mummulo 2016). As previously noted, public opinion polling indicates few differences in opinions among Democrats and Republicans in regards to GMO labels.

Second, I controlled for the partisanship of the author to account for counter-stereotypic arguments. Both theory and prior evidence suggests that an audience may find an argument to be stronger and more persuasive when a partisan or potentially biased source makes an argument that goes against stereotypical expectations (Clavert 1985). Based on aforementioned stereotypes, respondents may expect a Democratic (Republican) author to make an argument for (against) automatic voter registration. Thus, when an author flouts that expectation (e.g. a Democrat argues against automatic voter registration), respondents may perceive this to be a strong signal that bolsters the persuasiveness of the argument. To account for this, analysis included a simple binary measure, indicating whether or not the pro author was a Democrat. If respondents find the counter-stereotypic arguments to be more persuasive, analysis should yield a strong, negative effect. While I do not expect the partisanship of the author to effect perceptions in the GMO labels issue frame, I nonetheless include this measures for the sake of comparison.

Please note that Model G1, G2, A1, and A2 are identical to those utilized in the text. In addition, the

Table 2C1 The Effect of Expertise on Perceived Argument Strength

	<i>Dependent variable: Difference in Perceived Argument Strength (Pro Author - Con Author)</i>							
	GMO Labels (G)				Automatic Voter Registration (A)			
	(G1)	(G2)	(G3)	(G4)	(A1)	(A2)	(A3)	(A4)
Expert pro author	0.592** (0.130)	0.795** (0.193)	0.594** (0.130)	0.792** (0.193)	0.235 (0.126)	0.491** (0.181)	0.232 (0.125)	0.479** (0.180)
Copartisan pro author	-0.043 (0.130)	-0.227 (0.184)	-0.038 (0.131)	-0.218 (0.184)	0.616** (0.126)	0.390* (0.170)	0.628** (0.125)	0.409* (0.169)
Expert * Copartisan		0.370 (0.260)		0.361 (0.261)		0.495* (0.252)		0.479 (0.250)
Respondent party ID			-0.052 (0.095)	-0.054 (0.095)			-0.195* (0.092)	-0.187* (0.092)
Democratic author			-0.052 (0.427)	-0.361 (0.261)			-0.345 (0.410)	-0.312 (0.410)
Constant	0.339** (0.117)	0.237 (0.137)	0.575 (0.608)	0.495 (0.610)	1.054** (0.108)	0.935** (0.124)	1.906** (0.581)	1.743** (0.586)
Observations	834	834	834	834	840	840	840	840
Adjusted R ²	0.022	0.023	0.021	0.022	0.030	0.033	0.045	0.048

Note: *p<0.05; **p<0.01; Key results have been bolded for easier reading.

Appendix D: Analysis Including Political Sophistication

Political sophistication was measured using four close-ended questions: 1) “How long is one term for a U.S. Senator?” (6 years), 2) “What proportion of votes are required for the U.S. Senate to overturn a presidential veto?” (two-thirds), 3) Who is the current Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court? (John Roberts), 4) Which political party currently holds a majority in the U.S. House of Representatives? (the Republican Party, as of spring 2018). Correct answers were added together, creating a scale of political sophistication ranging from 1 to 4.

Results indicate that the addition of political sophistication does not seem to drastically affect the main effect of the expertise variable. Political sophistication seems to have a positive effect on perceived argument strength

Table 2D1 The Effect of Expertise on Perceived Argument Strength

	<i>Dependent variable: Difference in Perceived Argument Strength (Pro Author - Con Author)</i>			
	GMO Labels		Automatic Voter Registration	
	(G1)	(G2)	(A1)	(A2)
High expertise pro author	0.586** (0.130)	0.794** (0.193)	0.247 (0.126)	0.504** (0.180)
Copartisan pro author	-0.042 (0.130)	-0.230 (0.184)	0.595** (0.126)	0.367* (0.170)
Political sophistication	0.206 (0.251)	0.223 (0.251)	0.668** (0.242)	0.673** (0.242)
Expert * Copartisan		-0.379 (0.261)		0.499* (0.251)
Constant	0.184 (0.222)	0.066 (0.236)	0.522* (0.221)	0.399 (0.229)
Observations	833	833	839	839
Adjusted R ²	0.022	0.023	0.037	0.041

Note:

*p<0.05; **p<0.01

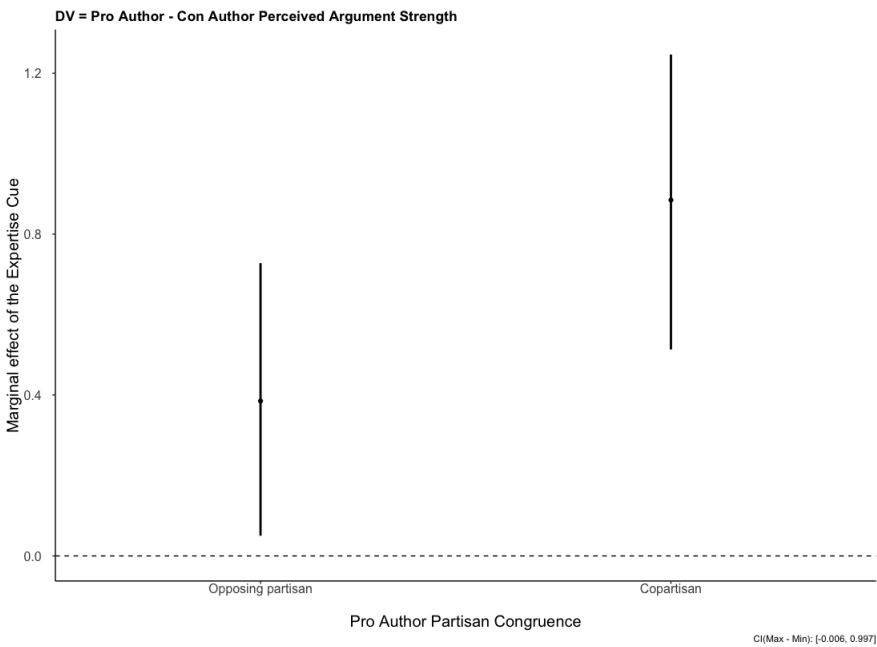
Appendix E: Analysis By Party

Appendix F features analysis that is nearly identical to that utilized in the main body of the text.

However, the sample has been divided based on partisanship in order to determine if the reported

effects are the same for both Democrats and Republicans. Please note that the coefficients used in these models are not standardized.

Figure 2E1 Marginal Effect of Partisan Congruence and Pro Author Expertise in the Automatic Voter Registration Frame (Study 1)



To begin, I present a marginal effects plot representing perceived argument strength based on an interaction of expertise and partisanship. This was alluded to on pages 13 and 14, but was moved to the Appendix due to space constraints. Results indicate that the interaction effect found in Table 2 of the manuscript was driven primarily by copartisan biases. However, upon further examination (see below), evidence suggests that this effect was unique to Republican respondents.

Republicans

Study 1

Analysis begins with Study 1, including only Republican respondents. The respondent partisanship variable has been replaced with a similar measure of partisan extremity ranging from “lean Republican” to “Strong Republican”.

Due to the lack of Republican respondents in this non-representative sample, analysis is relatively underpowered. Nonetheless, analysis reveals few differences between Republicans and the full

sample. In the GMO Labels manipulation, respondents arguments made by experts to be far stronger than those made by novices, even when controlling for all other factors. Interestingly, Republican respondents exhibited an interaction effect in the GMO labels frame that was not present for Democratic respondents, with copartisan authors gaining more from the Expertise cue than opposing partisans. Turning to the automatic voter registration frame, analysis again displays few differences from the full sample. After accounting for an interaction between expertise and opposing partisanship, results display a sizable main effect of the expertise variable. In fact, this effect was larger than the similar effect for their Democratic peers. While this effect was not statistically significant at the desired threshold, it is reasonable to suspect that this may be due to a lack of necessary statistical power.

Table 2E1 The Effect of Expertise on Perceived Argument Strength (Republican respondents)

	<i>Dependent variable: Difference in Perceived Argument Strength (Pro Author - Con Author)</i>							
	GMO Labels (G)				Automatic Voter Registration (A)			
	(G1)	(G2)	(G3)	(G4)	(A1)	(A2)	(A3)	(8)
Expert pro author	0.726** (0.269)	1.266** (0.381)	0.727** (0.267)	1.269** (0.378)	0.089 (0.253)	0.682 (0.352)	0.090 (0.254)	0.665 (0.355)
Copartisan pro author	-0.104 (0.268)	-0.661 (0.387)	-0.115 (0.267)	-0.674 (0.385)	-0.691** (0.252)	0.155 (0.335)	0.718** (0.254)	0.186 (0.342)
Expert * Copartisan		1.060* (0.533)		1.065* (0.530)		1.199* (0.501)		1.165* (0.507)
Partisan extremity			-0.359 (0.194)	-0.361 (0.192)			-0.149 (0.186)	-0.089 (0.186)
Constant	0.151 (0.231)	-0.109 (0.264)	2.347 (1.206)	2.098 (1.204)	0.809** (0.213)	0.534* (0.240)	1.738 (1.175)	1.096 (1.197)
Observations	218	218	218	218	219	219	219	219
Adjusted R ²	0.026	0.039	0.037	0.050	0.026	0.046	0.024	0.043

Note:

*p<0.05; **p<0.01

Study 2

Moving now to the Republican respondents in Study 2, analysis again fails to reveal many meaningful differences between Republican and Democratic respondents. The expertise manipulation displayed a substantively large, statistically significant main effect of the expertise cue, with all other potentially

influential factors held constant. This indicates that Republican respondents showed a strong tendency to select articles authored by experts over those authored by novices.

Table 2E2 The Effect of Expertise and Partisanship on News Article Selection (Republican Respondents)

	<i>Dependent variable: Selected the Pro Policy Argument</i>			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Expert pro author	0.800** (0.191)	0.788** (0.192)	0.721* (0.333)	0.715* (0.332)
Copartisan pro author	0.072 (0.233)	0.176 (0.403)	0.055 (0.319)	0.167 (0.461)
Opposing partisan pro author	−0.363 (0.235)	−0.343 (0.412)	−0.465 (0.330)	−0.436 (0.470)
Counter-attitudinal		−0.096 (0.373)		−0.098 (0.372)
Pro-attitudinal		−0.551 (0.368)		−0.552 (0.367)
Counter-sterotypic		0.097 (0.469)		0.090 (0.469)
Stereotypic		−0.253 (0.464)		−0.258 (0.464)
Expert * Copartisan			0.033 (0.462)	0.027 (0.462)
Expert * Opp. partisan			0.204 (0.469)	0.194 (0.468)
Constant	−0.230 (1.054)	−0.223 (1.069)	−0.181 (1.066)	−0.180 (1.081)
Observations	908	908	908	908

Note:

*p<0.05; **p<0.01

Democrats

Study 1

In Study 1, Democratic respondents evince the same basic pattern as their Republican colleagues.

Analysis reveals a strong main effect of the expertise manipulation, indicating that Democratic respondents found expert sources to be more persuasive than novice sources across both issues. The interaction between the expertise and partisan cue reveals appears to be null in both circumstances.

This may potentially suggest that Republicans held stronger copartisan biases, rewarding copartisan experts over a opposing partisan experts to a greater degree than their Democratic counterparts.

However, I believe that such a claim would require far more analysis and is tangential to the goals of this study.

Table 2E3 The Effect of Expertise on Perceived Argument Strength (Democratic Respondents)

	<i>Dependent variable: Difference in Perceived Argument Strength (Pro Author - Con Author)</i>							
	GMO Labels (G)				Automatic Voter Registration (A)			
	(G1)	(G2)	(G3)	(G4)	(A1)	(A2)	(A3)	(A4)
Expert pro author	0.546** (0.148)	0.604** (0.224)	0.547** (0.149)	0.604** (0.224)	0.280 (0.144)	0.418* (0.196)	0.281 (0.144)	0.416* (0.196)
Copartisan author	-0.008 (0.150)	-0.059 (0.210)	-0.009 (0.150)	-0.059 (0.210)	0.603** (0.144)	0.483* (0.196)	0.593** (0.144)	0.474* (0.196)
Expert * Copartisan		0.104 (0.299)		0.101 (0.300)		0.262 (0.289)		0.258 (0.288)
Partisan extremity			0.057 (0.109)	0.056 (0.110)			-0.215* (0.106)	-0.214* (0.106)
Constant	0.412** (0.136)	0.382* (0.161)	0.300 (0.254)	0.272 (0.267)	1.150** (0.124)	1.086** (0.143)	1.558** (0.236)	1.494** (0.247)
Observations	616	616	616	616	621	621	621	621
Adjusted R ²	0.018	0.017	0.017	0.016	0.031	0.030	0.036	0.035

Note:

*p<0.05; **p<0.01

Study 2

In Study 2, Democratic respondents again show the same basic pattern as their Republican colleagues.

Analysis yields a strong, statistically significant main effect of the expertise cue when accounting for

all other relevant variables. This indicates that respondents were far more likely to select articles written by experts than those written by non-experts, all else held equal.

Table 2E4 The Effect of Expertise and Partisanship on News Article Selection (Democratic Respondents)

	<i>Dependent variable: Selected the Pro Policy Argument</i>			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Expert pro author	0.827** (0.118)	0.831** (0.119)	0.973** (0.204)	0.961** (0.205)
Copartisan pro author	0.622** (0.146)	0.686** (0.251)	0.666** (0.209)	0.718* (0.292)
Opposing partisan pro author	−0.259 (0.144)	−0.174 (0.252)	−0.071 (0.210)	−0.015 (0.291)
Counter-attitudinal		−0.579* (0.228)		−0.582* (0.229)
Pro-attitudinal		0.368 (0.230)		0.367 (0.230)
Counter-sterotypic		−0.024 (0.295)		−0.016 (0.296)
Stereotypic		−0.121 (0.296)		−0.107 (0.296)
Expert * Copartisan			−0.078 (0.289)	−0.069 (0.291)
Expert * Opp. partisan			−0.360 (0.291)	−0.320 (0.293)
Constant	0.672 (1.294)	0.960 (1.304)	0.601 (1.308)	0.903 (1.318)
Observations	2,668	2,668	2,668	2,668

Note:

*p<0.05; **p<0.01

Chapter 3 (Character) Appendix

Appendix A: Examples of Manipulations

Figure 3A1 Example: GMO Labels Manipulation

Article A

GMO Labels Promote Consumer Safety

-

About the Author:

Brady Wells is spokesperson for the Texas Farm Bureau, an organization that represents the interests of farmers across Texas. He is a regular contributor to the Fox News science column.

Article B

GMO Labels Increase Food Prices, Not Consumer Safety

-

About the Author:

Matt Osbourne is a spokesperson for the Monsanto corporation, one of America's largest distributors of genetically modified seeds and pesticides. He is a regular contributor to the MSNBC science column.

Figure 3A2 Example: Climate Change Manipulation

Article A

A Carbon Tax Can Be A Big Part of a Climate Change Solution

-

About the Author:

Toby Baker is a spokesperson for the National Weather Service (NWS). He is a regular contributor to the Fox News opinion column.

Article B

A Carbon Tax Is A Terrible Way To Fight Climate Change

-

About the Author:

Brian O'Donnell is a spokesperson for Exxon Mobile, a producer of oil and other types of energy worldwide. He is a regular contributor to the MSNBC opinion column.

Figure 3A3 Example: Nuclear Energy Manipulation

<u>Article A</u>	<u>Article B</u>
America Needs to Invest in Nuclear Power Today	New Nuclear Power Plants Would Be a Waste of Money
-	-
<i>About the Author:</i>	<i>About the Author:</i>
<i>Stanley Ball is a spokesperson for the Copper Mountain Solar Facility in Boulder City, Nevada, one of the largest solar energy plants in the United States. He is also a frequent contributor to the Fox News opinion column.</i>	<i>Ethan Howard is a spokesperson for the Palo Verde Nuclear Power Station in Tonopah, Arizona, one of the largest nuclear power plants in the United States. He is also a frequent contributor to the MSNBC opinion column.</i>

Figure 3A4 Example: Soda Tax Manipulation

<u>Article A</u>	<u>Article B</u>
Soda Taxes Are Good For Our Waistlines and Schools	Soda Taxes Hurt Consumers and Students
-	-
<i>About the Author:</i>	<i>About the Author:</i>
<i>Connor Dean is a spokesperson for the National Education Association, which serves as an advocacy group for public education. He is also a frequent contributor to the Fox News business column.</i>	<i>Max Harper is a spokesperson and lobbyist for the American Beverage Association, which represents most of the major American soda and soft drink brands. He is also a frequent contributor to the MSNBC business column.</i>

Appendix C: Additional Analysis With Controls

Analysis featured two additional control variables. First, I controlled for the respondents' political partisanship, which was measured using the aforementioned branching measure borrowed from the 2016 ANES. I included this measure to account for the fact that Democrats generally have a much more positive disposition towards automatic voter registration than Republicans. I refer to these as pro-attitudinal (e.g. respondent is a Democrat and the pro author is arguing in favor of climate change reform, a stereotypically liberal position) and counter-attitudinal (e.g. respondent is a Republican and the pro author is arguing in favor of climate change reform, a stereotypically liberal position). While this measure is an imperfect measure of the respondent's previously held beliefs on polarizing

political issues, studies utilizing partisanship, political ideology, or other demographic factors have found this approach to be far more parsimonious and less susceptible to framing effects, while producing few, if any statistical differences from typical issue position measures (Feldman et al. 2013; Feldman et al. 2018; Mummulo 2016). As previously noted, public opinion polling indicates few differences in opinions among Democrats and Republicans in regards to GMO labels. Thus, the GMO labels issues frame was utilized as a neutral attitudinal baseline.

Second, I controlled for the partisanship of the author to account for counter-stereotypic arguments. Both theory and prior evidence suggests that an audience may find an argument to be stronger and more persuasive when a partisan or potentially biased source makes an argument that goes against stereotypical expectations (Clavert 1985). Based on aforementioned stereotypes, respondents may expect a Democratic (Republican) author to make an argument for (against) automatic voter registration. Thus, when an author flouts that expectation (e.g. a Democrat argues against climate change reform), respondents may perceive this to be a strong signal that bolsters the persuasiveness of the argument. To account for this, analysis included a simple binary measure, indicating whether or not the pro author was a Democrat. If respondents find the counter-stereotypic arguments to be more persuasive, analysis should yield a strong, negative effect. While I do not expect the partisanship of the author to effect perceptions in the GMO labels issue frame, I nonetheless include this measures for the sake of comparison.

The addition of controls does not affect the substantive conclusions drawn from the main analysis. Pro-attitudinal positions result in a slight increase to selection and perceived credibility, while counter-attitudinal arguments fail to move respondent behavior or assessments to a significant degree. Non-stereotypic arguments appear to slightly decrease perceived character, running counter to Calvertian explanation.

Table 3C1 Additional Analysis with Controls

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>					
	Selection	Selection	Credibility	Credibility	Character	Character
High character pro author	0.055* (0.022)	0.100** (0.031)	0.065** (0.022)	0.160** (0.031)	0.107** (0.023)	0.149** (0.032)
Low character pro author	-0.028 (0.023)	0.071* (0.033)	-0.040 (0.023)	0.064 (0.033)	-0.069** (0.024)	0.040 (0.034)
Copartisan	0.058** (0.019)	0.155** (0.032)	0.129** (0.020)	0.262** (0.032)	0.152** (0.020)	0.253** (0.033)
High character * Copartisan		-0.092* (0.044)		-0.192** (0.044)		-0.088 (0.046)
Low character * Copartisan		-0.202** (0.047)		-0.212** (0.047)		-0.220** (0.049)
Pro-attitudinal argument	0.072* (0.029)	0.065* (0.029)	0.073* (0.029)	0.066* (0.029)	0.033 (0.029)	0.026 (0.029)
Counter-attitudinal argument	-0.032 (0.029)	-0.036 (0.029)	-0.020 (0.029)	-0.026 (0.029)	-0.026 (0.029)	-0.031 (0.029)
Non-stereotypic argument	-0.032 (0.027)	-0.030 (0.027)	-0.041 (0.027)	-0.040 (0.027)	-0.067* (0.028)	-0.064* (0.028)
Climate change	0.039 (0.022)	0.041 (0.022)	0.021 (0.022)	0.024 (0.022)	0.045 (0.023)	0.048* (0.023)
Nuclear energy	0.005 (0.026)	0.006 (0.025)	-0.016 (0.026)	-0.014 (0.025)	0.040 (0.027)	0.041 (0.027)
Constant	-0.133** (0.035)	-0.176** (0.040)	-0.118** (0.035)	-0.211** (0.041)	-0.118** (0.035)	-0.159** (0.042)

Note: *p<0.05; **p<0.01

Appendix C: Sample Demographics

This sample was composed of 800 respondents from Lucid. Demographics closely represented those of a traditional nationally representative sample: 46.3% Democrat/lean Democrat, 16.4% pure independent, 37.3% Republican/lean Republican, 53.3% women (46.7% men), 72% white/European American, 11.1% black/African American, 15.9%, 13.4% Hispanic.

Chapter 4 (Relative Weight) Appendix

Appendix A: Analysis by Issue Frame

Appendix B: Sample Demographics

This sample was composed of 1500 respondents from Lucid and 358 students from the University of Houston. Demographics were slightly skewed due to the unrepresentative nature of the student body, but for the most part, were close to national averages: 38.6% Democrat/lean Democrat, 13.5% pure independent, 30.0% Republican/lean Republican, 52.5% women, 47.5% men, 63.2% White/European American, 13.3% Black/African American, 15.0% Asian, 15.3% Hispanic.

Table 4A1 Analysis by issue frame

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	prochoice			
	(GMO)	(Climate)	(Nuclear)	(Soda)
High expertise, high character	0.050 (0.052)	0.113** (0.056)	0.113** (0.056)	0.050 (0.052)
High expertise, low character	−0.007 (0.051)	0.137** (0.057)	0.137** (0.057)	−0.007 (0.051)
High expertise, no character cue	0.092* (0.051)	0.169*** (0.053)	0.169*** (0.053)	0.092* (0.051)
Low expertise, high character	−0.080 (0.052)	−0.080 (0.054)	−0.080 (0.054)	−0.080 (0.052)
Low expertise, low character	−0.100* (0.051)	−0.129** (0.054)	−0.129** (0.054)	−0.100* (0.051)
Low expertise, no character cue	−0.038 (0.053)	−0.120** (0.059)	−0.120** (0.059)	−0.038 (0.053)
No expertise cue, high character	0.107** (0.051)	−0.005 (0.056)	−0.005 (0.056)	0.107** (0.051)
No expertise cue, low character	−0.025 (0.049)	−0.030 (0.055)	−0.030 (0.055)	−0.025 (0.049)
Pro author Republican	−0.024 (0.024)	−0.038 (0.024)	−0.038 (0.024)	−0.024 (0.024)
Constant	0.506*** (0.038)	0.518*** (0.045)	0.518*** (0.045)	0.506*** (0.038)
Observations	1,699	1,645	1,645	1,699

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01