

Memory and Perceived Political Polarization - Twitter

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This pre-registration describes online experiments, one on Twitter and one on Prolific, that study the relationship between memory of extreme political opinions and the formation of beliefs about others' political views. This is an extension of a previously preregistered RCT, in which a similar experiment was run solely on Prolific.

Elicited information:

- 1) Estimates of typical political view within a sample drawn from each political party

Experimental setup

Subjects will be recruited into the survey on Prolific. They will then read political opinions related to a particular policy domain (e.g. COVID policies), either on Twitter or on Prolific. The statements will come from five different Twitter accounts, and the statements on Prolific will be screenshots from these five accounts.

Some of these accounts will post statements on one side of the spectrum (e.g. in favor of loosening COVID policies), while the remaining accounts will post statements on the other side of the spectrum (e.g. in favor of tightening COVID policies).

After viewing the opinions, subjects will be asked to estimate the share of the opinions that were on one side of the spectrum (e.g. in favor of lifting COVID restrictions).

Treatments

1) *Memory treatment*

In the memory treatment, subjects will view the opinions on Twitter over the course of multiple days. After the treatment period, I will elicit incentivized estimates of the share of opinions viewed that were on a given side.

2) *Control group*

In the memory treatment, subjects will view the opinions on Prolific on a single screen. They will estimate the share of opinions viewed that were on a given side immediately after viewing the opinions.

3) *Treatment **extreme***

The extreme and moderate treatments will be cross-randomized with the memory and control treatments in a 2x2 design. Subjects in the extreme treatment group will be exposed to a set of views on either side that includes both "moderate" and "extreme" opinions on one side of the spectrum. The opinions are rated "moderate" or "extreme" based on the results of a Prolific survey in which individuals were asked to provide a numerical rating of how extreme a given opinion was.

4) Treatment *moderate*

Subjects in the moderate treatment group will be exposed to a set of views that includes only “moderate” opinions on both sides. The share of opinions on each side will remain the same across the moderate and extreme treatments.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses apply to the political domain.

1. In the memory treatment group, subject in the *extreme* treatment group will report estimates of the share of opinions on one side -- the side for which extreme opinions appear -- to be higher than those in the *moderate* treatment. In the control group, I expect those in the *extreme* and *moderate* treatments to report estimates that are closer in magnitude to each other.

Exclusion Criteria

- 1) The analyses will be performed both with all data points, and also excluding those who report estimates of the percentage on either side less than 10 or greater than 90.
- 2) In the initial recruitment survey for the Twitter arm of the experiment, participants will be excluded based on Twitter usage -- they must indicate in the survey that they use Twitter daily.

Randomization and Sample Size

Treatments {*Moderate, Extreme*} and {*Control, Memory*} will be cross-randomized within each session.

The sample size will be approximately 1000 in total (250 in each of the 4 treatments).