Measuring Continued Influence of Corrected Political Misinformation

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Introduction

- Misinformation shown to have **continued influence** on judgments even after a correction (Johnson & Seifert, 1994)
- Thorson (2016) found a similar continued influence of misinformation with false **political** accusations

Key questions:

- How does misinformation affect judgments about politicians?
- To what degree do "fact checks" designed to correct such misinformation reverse these effects?

New Stimulus Set

- Many trials per condition needed for fMRI study
- Created **36 distinct** candidates, **4 stimuli** per candidate
- **12 types** of allegations (e.g., financial fraud, racism, murder)
- 4 political offices (Senate, Congress, governor, 'state leg')
- Mixed gender (2/3 M, 1/3 F), race (3/4 white, 1/4 minority)

Pilot studies to design stimuli

1) Judgments of **generated faces** (n = 100 MTurk, n = 44 Penn)
   - Novel faces with different race, gender, and age were tested
2) Judgments of **names** (n = 150 MTurk, n = 36 Penn)
   - Generated names from different cultures, gender, and ages were tested
3) Judgments of **another set of faces** (n = 100 MTurk, n = 34 Penn)
   - Second set of faces were tested as an alternative set
4) Judgments **of Face + Name + Bio** (n = 100 MTurk x 2 rounds)
   - Completed bios of all created candidates were piloted to confirm quality
5) Judgments of **Face + Name + Bio** (n = 180 CloudResearch MTurk)
   - Piloted candidates in a ''choice task'' followed by a memory test of the candidates' bios to ensure memorability of faces, names, and platforms

Study 6 Method

Participants: Recruited from CloudResearch MTurk

- Adults (N = 151) age 22 – 70 years

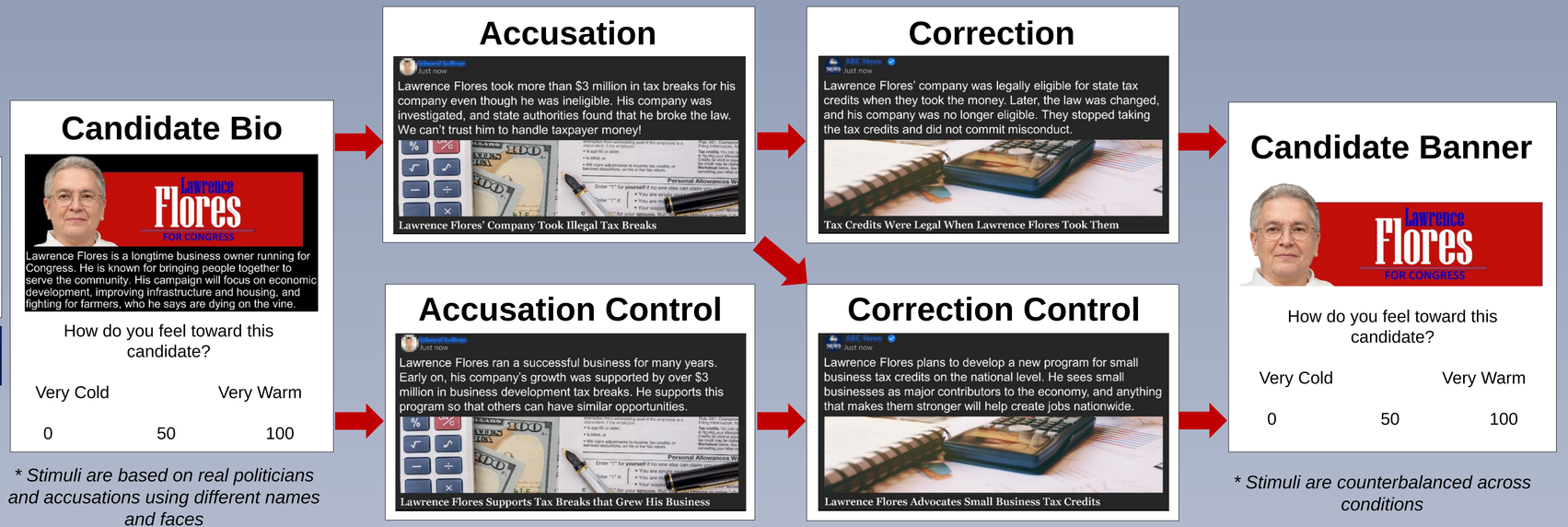
Procedure

I. Present candidate bios, with feeling thermometer rating.

II. Present accusation, correction, and/or control narratives for each candidate, followed by feeling thermometer rating
   I. Corrected Accusation – [Accusation] + [Correction]
   II. Uncorrected Accusation – [Accusation] + [Correction Control]
   III. Control – [Accusation Control] + [Correction Control]

III. Choices between all pairs of candidates for each office

Step 1: Candidate and Misinformation Stimuli



** Stimuli are based on real politicians and accusations using different names and faces*

** Stimuli are counterbalanced across conditions*

Step 2: Choice Task

Choice task is presented **after** misinformation stimuli

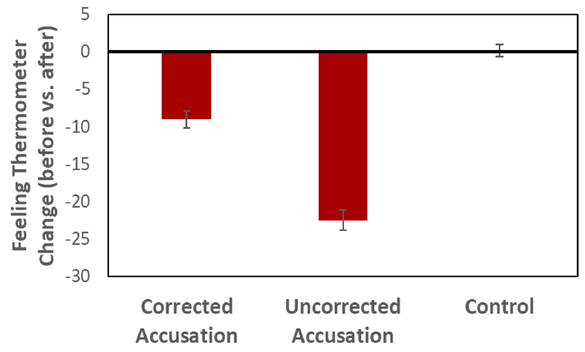
Candidate Banners

Based on what you have read, which candidate would you prefer for Congress?

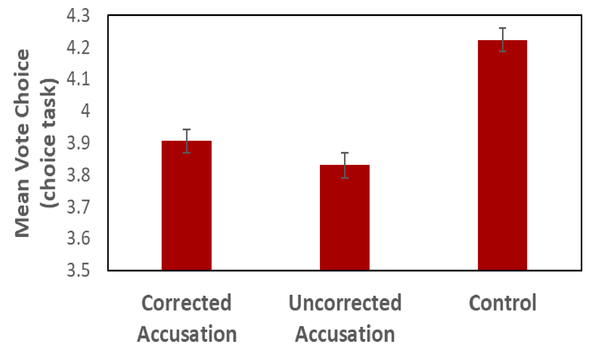
** Candidates are shown next to one another in real experiment and the order is randomized*

Study 6 Results

Corrections did not fully mitigate effects of accusations



After a brief 15-20 minute delay, accusations had a lasting effect on candidate preferences, but corrections did not



Conclusions

- Continued influence effect replicates with a large set of political candidate stimuli. Misinformation had **lasting effects** on candidate evaluations, **even** when corrected.
- Continued influence of misinformation is also present on the choice task at a short delay. Corrections became even **less effective** for choices vs. candidate ratings.
- A key next step is to repeat this experiment in the **fMRI** scanner to measure brain activity during implicit candidate evaluations, because reward system activity is predicted to track changes in evaluations and predict choices. Brain activity might ultimately predict the continued influence of misinformation on subsequent choices better than initial ratings do.

References & Contact

Johnson, H. M., & Seifert, C. M. (1994). Sources of the continued influence effect: When misinformation in memory affects later inferences. Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory, and Cognition, 20, 1420–1436.
Thorson, E. (2016). Belief echoes: The persistent effects of corrected misinformation. Political Communication, 33, 460-480.

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