

Partisan bias in perception of accuracy of factual claims

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Abstract

There is currently no consensus among scholars on the stage at which partisan bias occurs: during the perception of information, during its processing or at presentation. Nevertheless, in most cases the result is the same: respondents' answers to factual questions are affected by their partisanship. The aim of this paper is to investigate how and to what extent partisan bias affects the perceived accuracy of factual claims made by politicians (leaders of major political parties in Slovakia). In our research, respondents (N=122) were asked to create their own ranking of the credibility of politicians (how much trust a respondent has in a certain political leader). The respondents were later asked to estimate the average factual accuracy of the most trusted, moderately trusted and the least trusted politician. Data from the fact-checker Demagog.SK was used as the baseline data for testing the actual accuracy of politicians. This paper is a survey experiment that also tests the effect of anchoring. The results suggest no positive partisan bias. However, the results also show that negative partisan bias is much more prevalent when respondents portrayed the least trusted politicians in a significantly worse light than more trusted politicians. The paper shows that people on average believe that politicians use false claims more often than they really do (stigmatization), especially when it is a politician they do not like.

Key words: partisan bias, fact-checking, partisanship, anchoring, trust

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