

Believing the Worst: Out-Party Negativity and Belief in Conspiracy Theories

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Abstract

Recently, affective polarization—the increase in mutual antipathy between ordinary Democrats and Republicans—has received a great deal of attention both inside and outside the academy. In spite of this, researchers know little about how increasingly negative out-party feelings may influence the way partisans evaluate information or reason about politics. In this paper, I examine the role that out-party negativity plays in partisans’ willingness to believe a particularly pernicious type of misinformation: political conspiracy theories. Across three studies, I find that negative out-party affect plays a primary role in conspiracy belief, independent of other dispositional and political factors. Moreover, the influence of out-party negativity cannot simply be attributed to symbolic ideology, a dislike for opposing ideologues, generalized affect, or a propensity to engage in expressive responding. These results have important implications for our understanding of contemporary bias: partisans traffic in misinformation—no matter how egregious—simply because they believe the worst of their opponents.

Keywords: affective polarization, conspiracy theories, negative partisanship, fake news

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One of the hottest debates in political science over the past few decades surrounds the existence and nature of partisan divisions in American politics. While there is a consensus that congressional polarization is on the rise (Lewis et al. 2018; Layman, Carsey and Horowitz 2006; McCarty, Poole and Rosenthal 2006; Theriault 2006), many question whether ordinary Democrats and Republicans are similarly divided on matters of public policy. Some, pointing to growing levels of constraint between issue positions among mass partisans, argue that divisions in the public are beginning to approach those observed in Congress (Abramowitz and Saunders 2008; Abramowitz 2010); others, highlighting Americans' moderation on even the most controversial issues, suggest that these perceived divisions are more a product of polarizing choices than truly polarized opinions (DiMaggio, Evans and Bryson 1996; Fiorina, Abrams and Pope 2005).

Regardless of the existence of ideological divisions in the mass public, scholars agree that ordinary Americans are deeply divided when it comes to their feelings about the Democratic and Republican parties. Partisans have come to increasingly dislike—and perhaps even despise—their political opponents, even as evaluations of their own side have remained fairly warm (Haidt and Hetherington 2012; Iyengar, Sood and Lelkes 2012). This phenomenon, known as “affective polarization,” seems to provide an explanation for much of the dysfunction that permeates American politics. Partisans increasingly see their opponents “close-minded,” “hypocritical,” and “mean” (Iyengar, Sood and Lelkes 2012); pluralities of both Democrats and Republicans also report being “afraid” of the other side and believe the policies of the out-party “threaten the nation’s well being” (Pew Research Center 2016). Democrats and Republicans also appear to discount their opponents when it comes to friendships, dating, and marriage (Huber and Malhotra 2017; Iyengar, Sood and Lelkes 2012). Perhaps most disturbingly, partisans discriminate against their opponents in scholarship and hiring decisions, sometimes to a degree that surpasses that of racial discrimination (Gift and Gift 2015; Iyengar and Westwood 2015).

While a growing body of research focuses on the extrapolitical consequences of affective polarization, few studies focus on how increasing out-party antipathy may shape the way ordinary people relate to politics (Iyengar et al. 2018; Iyengar and Krupenkin 2018b). What little has been done suggests that out-party negativity has important ramifications for the American political system. Hetherington and Rudolph (2015), for example, demonstrate that increased dislike for the out-party plays a central role in partisans' distrust of government when the other side is in power, a dynamic that quite often results in political gridlock. Iyengar and Krupenkin (2018b) find that out-party negativity is a large determinant of political participation, a change from just a few decades ago, when Americans' engagement was more motivated by in-party feelings. Whether this increase in out-party hostility bears consequences for how Americans *reason* about politics, however, is an open question.

In this paper, I examine whether and how the increasingly hostile out-party feelings that partisans harbor toward their political opponents influence the way they evaluate political information. Specifically, I investigate the role that out-party animosity plays in partisans' willingness to believe a particularly pernicious type of *misinformation*—political conspiracy theories. Using data from three studies, I demonstrate that negative out-party affect plays a significant role in partisans' belief in attitudinally-congruent conspiracy theories, above and beyond the effects of party identification, ideology, and positive feelings toward one's own party. Interestingly, hostility toward the other side—not warmth toward one's own side—also helps partisans resist believing conspiracy theories that attribute nefarious motives to their own side, providing further evidence that out-party negativity serves as a basis for political reasoning. These results persist even after controlling for factors that predispose individuals to believe in conspiracy theories, like trust and a propensity to engage in conspiratorial thinking. I also demonstrate that the influence of negative out-party affect cannot simply be attributed to symbolic ideology, a

dislike for opposing ideologues, generalized negative affect, or a propensity to engage in expressive responding. These results have important implications for our understanding of the nature of contemporary partisan bias: partisans who strongly dislike their opponents traffic in misinformation—no matter how egregious—simply because they believe the worst of their opponents.

Belief in Conspiracy Theories

Before examining the relationship between negative out-party feelings and conspiracy belief, it is useful to take a broader look at who believes in conspiracy theories and why. Conspiracy theories—and those who believe them—have been a part of American history since the birth of the nation. These “explanations for important events that involve secret plots by powerful and malevolent groups” (Douglas, Sutton and Cichocka 2017, 238) have been weaponized as a political tool since the Revolution, when rumors circulated that King George III intended to enslave American colonists (Uscinski and Parent 2014, 1-2). Today, conspiracy theories remain a fixture in American politics, and belief in conspiracy theories is neither rare nor relegated to those at the fringes of society. Evidence suggests that most Americans believe at least one conspiracy theory; many believe more than one (Miller, Saunders and Farhart 2015; Oliver and Wood 2014; Uscinski and Parent 2014). In addition, conspiracy belief cuts across racial, gender, political, and occupational lines (Berinsky 2012; Uscinski and Parent 2014).

Research suggests that people believe in conspiracy theories primarily because they fulfill important psychological needs (DiFonzo and Bordia 2007; Uscinski and Parent 2014). Conspiracy belief is thought to be a product of a motivated process wherein people who feel powerless or insecure seek out explanations for unseen events (Douglas, Sutton and Cichocka 2017). In general, this motivated process can take one of two forms. First, individuals can exhibit a general tendency toward believing in conspiracies, a psycho-

logical propensity known as a “conspiratorial disposition.” The conspiratorially-minded are socialized to believe the world is dangerous, uncertain, and filled with ill-intentioned people (Oliver and Wood 2014; Uscinski and Parent 2014; Uscinski, Klofstad and Atkinson 2016; Wood, Douglas and Sutton 2012). This uncertainty and anxiousness causes psychological discomfort, which motivates people to filter in congenial information and filter out uncongenial information in an effort to bolster and reinforce their worldview (Festinger 1957; Kahneman 2011). For those who view the world as fearful and unpredictable, accepting narratives that portray reality as something intentionally constructed by all-powerful actors helps assuage mental distress. This general tendency also explains how some people believe rumors that logically contradict one another, such as believing both that Osama bin Laden was already dead before Navy Seals raided his compound in Pakistan and that Osama bin Laden is still alive (Wood, Douglas and Sutton 2012).

That being said, those who believe conspiracy theories irrespective of content tend to be the exception rather than the rule. The majority of the population does not score high on conspiratorial disposition measures, and yet large numbers of Americans believe conspiracy theories (Uscinski and Parent 2014). The key to understanding belief in a particular *type* of conspiracy theory, therefore, is to better understand the worldview motivating (mis)information acceptance or rejection. Whereas the conspiracy-minded rely on a worldview that paints society as treacherous, those who believe in political conspiracy theories are motivated by their preexisting political beliefs (Berinsky 2012; Miller, Saunders and Farhart 2015; Pasek et al. 2015; Uscinski and Parent 2014). In particular, people are predisposed to believe conspiracy theories that paint disliked political groups or actors negatively, as doing so further confirms one’s own political beliefs by impugning others’ (Kahan et al. 2007; Uscinski and Parent 2014). This is not to say people who believe in political conspiracies are not responsive to uncertainty and threat; for these individuals, however, anxiety arises following changes in political power. When one’s preferred party

does not hold the White House, for example, partisans are liable to experience feelings of anxiety or loss of control, which may predispose them to be more susceptible to believing in conspiracy theories (Weeks 2015; Uscinski and Parent 2014). This helps explain the existence of a partisan cycle in the dissemination of conspiracy theories: those that impugn Democrats and their allies are more prevalent when a Democrat holds the White House and vice versa (Uscinski and Parent 2014).

In summary, belief in conspiracy theories—political and otherwise—is ultimately a product of motivated reasoning. People believe in conspiracy theories for the same reason they engage in confirmation bias in other contexts: the human brain is wired to accept explanations that fit what it already believes (Festinger 1957; Kahneman 2011). If belief in political rumors is largely driven by a desire to accept information that comports with one’s political worldview, the natural question that follows is what constitutes a political “worldview” for most Americans. It is to this question we now turn.

Out-Party Hostility as a Basis for Motivated Reasoning

To date, scholars have argued that the worldview motivating belief in political conspiracies is liberal-conservative ideology (Miller, Saunders and Farhart 2015; Pasek et al. 2015; Uscinski and Parent 2014; Uscinski, Klotstad and Atkinson 2016). Ideology not only guides one’s political thinking, but also serves as a motivational device that allows people to justify or rationalize the way the world works (Jost, Federico and Napier 2013; Miller, Saunders and Farhart 2015). Liberals, in theory, believe conspiracies that vilify conservatives because they dislike conservatism; conservatives believe the worst of liberals because they dislike liberalism.

Several pieces of evidence suggest, however, that ideology is not the primary organizing device for most people when it comes to politics. Since the earliest days of public opinion research, scholars have noted that most Americans are “innocent of ideology”

(McClosky 1964). They do not think about politics in ideological terms nor do they understand the meaning of ideological language (Converse 1964; Luttbeg and Gant 1985; Jacoby 1986). When most people call themselves “liberal” or “conservative,” they do so for reasons that are largely emblematic and have little to do with their actual preferences on public policy issues, which are often disorganized, inconsistent, or contradictory (Conover and Feldman 1981; Malka and Lelkes 2010; Ellis and Stimson 2012). The idea that individuals endorse political conspiracy theories primarily on an ideological basis seems unlikely given that so few actually think in ideological terms. The fact that so many contemporary conspiracy theories are bereft of policy or ideological content (Bal-latore 2015) — e.g. Hillary Clinton’s kill list; Donald Trump’s sexual proclivities — also makes it less likely that philosophical beliefs are at the heart of conspiracy endorsement.

A more plausible explanation for conspiracy belief is partisanship. Party identification has long been understood to be a primary source of motivated reasoning in American politics (e.g., Campbell et al. 1960; Bartels 2002; Gaines et al. 2007; Hochschild and Einstein 2015; Taber and Lodge 2006; Zaller 1992). Because party identification occurs causally prior to most other political outcomes—including ideology (Barber and Pope 2018)—it is perhaps “the most obvious factor leading to rumor acceptance or rejection” (Berinsky 2012, 12). Indeed, even those who have championed ideology as the primary source of conspiracy attitudes note that partisanship also plays a large role in determining these beliefs (Miller, Saunders and Farhart 2015).

While it is perhaps more theoretically appropriate to attribute conspiracy belief to partisanship instead of ideology, some aspects of partisanship should play a more important role in conspiracy belief compared to others. Specifically, I argue that negative out-party feelings are central to the way contemporary partisans view politics, making them the likely basis for partisans’ political “worldview.” Several pieces of evidence suggest that this is the case.

As mentioned previously, motivated reasoning is central to conspiracy belief. Evidence from neuroscience demonstrates that motivated reasoning is an automatic, emotion-based process experienced below the level of individual consciousness (Westen et al. 2006), suggesting that sources of political motivated reasoning should also be implicit in nature. Recent research establishes that negative out-party feelings are deeply ingrained in voters' minds and are automatically employed in both political and extrapolitical evaluations (Iyengar and Westwood 2015). The automaticity with which these feelings are used in evaluations in other contexts suggests that they might be central to conspiracy belief as well.

Moreover, the negativity that partisans already feel toward their opponents should predispose them to believe conspiracy theories that attribute nefarious motives to the opposition. Large percentages of partisans characterize their opponents as "immoral" and "dishonest;" pluralities of Democrats and Republicans say that the other party makes them feel "afraid" (Pew Research Center 2016). These preconceived notions make it more likely that partisans would engage in confirmation bias by believing conspiracy theories that cement their view of the opposition as having less-than-pure intentions.

There is also good reason to believe that partisans' hostile feelings toward the opposition have become more central to the way partisans view politics more generally. Rising levels of out-party hostility, for example, have tracked alongside increased levels of straight-ticket voting over time (Abramowitz and Webster 2016). Negative feelings toward the other side have also become a primary basis of partisan activism (Iyengar and Krupenkin 2018b). Increasing out-party hostility also helps to explain declining levels of trust in government (Hetherington and Rudolph 2015). A recent study by Iyengar and Krupenkin (2018b) demonstrates that partisans' feeling thermometer scores, as well as trait evaluations and feelings toward presidential candidates, have grown more consistent over the past three decades, laying the groundwork for party affect to become a

“constrained belief system” (207). As out-party feelings play a more dominant role in other important political outcomes, it seems reasonable that they might also anchor contemporary partisan thinking.

Perhaps most importantly, considering out-party feelings as a source of conspiracy belief helps integrate a third strand of literature that has been largely overlooked in studies of political conspiracy theories: the role of group identities (Uscinski and Parent 2014). Like other social domains, politics is dominated by the human tendency to understand the world in terms of groups (Achen and Bartels 2016; Ahler and Sood 2018; Bentley 1908; Brewer and Kramer 1985; Huddy 2001; Kinder and Kam 2009). Social identity theory posits that people naturally sort themselves into in- and out-groups, are motivated to view their in-group positively, and will denigrate the out-group as a way to bolster the status of their in-group (Huddy 2001; Tajfel 1981; Tajfel and Turner 1979). In politics, party identification functions as perhaps the most important social identity, in part because individual partisanship is remarkably stable over time and also because partisans exhibit favoritism toward their own party and negativity toward the other party (Campbell et al. 1960; Green, Palmquist and Schickler 2002). One way that partisans can boost their in-group (in-party) while denigrating the out-group (out-party) is by endorsing conspiracy theories that highlight the bad intentions of the other side. We should expect the motivation to denigrate the out-group to be particularly strong in contemporary politics. Salience plays a large role in the degree to which individuals are willing to either bolster their in-group or denigrate their out-group (Brewer 1999; Reynolds, Turner and Haslam 2000; Stets and Burke 2000). In an era in which 71% of Republicans and 63% of Democrats cite the harm of the other party’s policies as a major reason for identifying as they do (Pew Research Center 2018), negative out-party feelings seem particularly salient. Therefore, we might expect them to play an outsized role in political reasoning.

Finally, out-party negativity may provide a more satisfying explanation for the

variance we observe in conspiracy belief. While knowing an individual's party or ideological affiliation can help us predict what *types* of political conspiracy theories s/he is more likely to believe (i.e. attitudinally-congruent or -incongruent), scholars know much less about which factors may influence the *certainty* with which people believe conspiracy theories. To date, research has treated partisans and ideologues as monolithic groups without considering potentially important intragroup differences that might drive attitude variation (Berinsky 2012; Miller, Saunders and Farhart 2015; Pasek et al. 2015; Us-cinski and Parent 2014). A closer look at out-party negativity's role in conspiracy belief could help explain why some partisans are more likely to endorse such rumors compared to others.

Study I: 2012 American National Elections Study

As a first test of whether out-party hostility influences conspiracy belief, I use a series of items tapping "non-mainstream beliefs" appearing on the online administration of the 2012 American National Elections Study (American National Election Studies 2012). Following the approach of Miller, Saunders and Farhart (2015), I construct two indices, one that averages together responses to two items designed to tap belief in *congenial* conspiracy theories (for Democrats, left-leaning items that impugn Republicans, and for Republicans, right-leaning items that impugn Democrats) and *uncongenial* conspiracy theories (for Democrats, right-leaning items that impugn Democrats, and for Republicans, left-leaning items that impugn Republicans). The congenial (uncongenial) items for Democrats (Republicans) concern (1) whether federal officials knew about 9/11 in advance and (2) whether the government intentionally directed flooding to poor neighborhoods during Hurricane Katrina; the uncongenial (congenial) items for Republicans (Democrats) concern (1) whether Barack Obama was born in another country and (2) whether the Affordable Care Act (ACA) authorizes death panels. Question wordings for

these items can be found in [OA 1](#).¹

The independent variables of interest are two pertaining to party affect, operationalized using the 101-point party feeling thermometers. *In-Party Positivity* refers to feelings toward the Democratic Party among Democrats and feelings toward the Republican Party among Republicans; *Out-Party Negativity* refers to feelings toward the Democratic Party among Republicans and feelings toward the Republican Party among Democrats. I also include a number of other independent variables. To estimate the independent effects of party affect, I include a measure of individuals' self-reported strength of partisanship. Because ideology is the prevailing explanation for political rumor endorsement, I also include two dummy variables, one if a respondent identifies as *Liberal* and another if she identifies as *Conservative*. This mimics the approach of [Miller, Saunders and Farhart \(2015\)](#), who group together individuals who identified as "extremely liberal," "liberal," or "somewhat liberal" as liberal and individuals who identified as "extremely conservative," "conservative" or "somewhat conservative" as conservative.

I also include a measure of "generalized" trust, which averages together individuals' responses to the traditional trust in government and interpersonal trust items ([Miller, Saunders and Farhart 2015](#)). I include it primarily to guard against the possibility that individuals' willingness to endorse these political conspiracy theories is simply a function of their overall inclination to endorse *all* conspiracy theories. Although a better measure would more directly capture a conspiratorial disposition, past research suggests that highly trustful individuals are less willing to endorse conspiracy theories ([Miller, Saunders and Farhart 2015](#); [Swami, Charmorro-Premuzic and Furnham 2010](#)). In the absence of a better alternative, I use generalized trust as a proxy for the tendency to believe in conspiracy theories regardless of political content.

¹The Online Appendix can be found [here](#).

In addition, I include a measure of political knowledge.² Scholars are divided as to whether political knowledge lessens or enhances rumor endorsement. On one hand, those with a greater understanding of politics might be better able to recognize conspiracy theories as unsubstantiated, and therefore be less willing to endorse them (Berinsky 2012). On the other hand, high-knowledge partisans may be invested in maintaining their worldview (Achen and Bartels 2016; Lau and Redlawsk 2001; Taber and Lodge 2006), of which conspiracy theories can be an important component (Miller, Saunders and Farhart 2015). Including a measure of political knowledge in my analysis will allow me to better adjudicate which is the stronger explanation.

Finally, I include a series of demographic controls for age, income, education, and ethnicity. I include these both as standard controls for public opinion data, but also because evidence suggests that conspiracy endorsement varies somewhat across these groups (Goertzel 1994).

I estimate a series of four OLS models, one for each conspiracy theory index among both groups of partisans.³ I separate Democrats from Republicans as previous research

²Here, I elect to use the knowledge battery included on the online administration of the 2012 ANES, as (1) the conspiracy items were administered solely as part of the online survey and (2) using these items allows me to compare the influence of knowledge in this study to that in the next study, which used these same questions. Question wordings for the knowledge items can be found in OA 1. Substituting the traditional office recognition questions as a measure of political knowledge does not meaningfully change the results.

³Following convention, I classify Independent leaners as partisans, as previous research has documented their tendency to think and behave like other partisans (Keith et al. 1992). Here, I depart somewhat from Miller, Saunders and Farhart's (2015) study, which excludes moderates and (in the replication) Independents from the analysis. By including leaners and moderates, my results speak to the correlates of conspiracy belief

demonstrates an asymmetry in motivated reasoning across groups of partisans: Republicans display more implicit partisan identity and partisan-motivated reasoning than Democrats (Theodoridis 2017), and tend to screen out more negative content than their opponents (Henderson and Theodoridis 2018). Therefore, we might expect negative out-party affect to differentially impact Democrats' and Republicans' beliefs in conspiracy theories.

The *Congenial Conspiracy Theories* index consists of those items that confirm partisan beliefs by painting the opposition in a bad light, and the *Uncongenial Conspiracy Theories* index is constructed of items that work against partisans' preconceived notions by suggesting the worst about their own side. All variables are scaled 0-1, with positive coefficients indicating a greater tendency to endorse that particular set of conspiracy theories. Table 1 presents the results.

among a larger (and potentially more representative) population.

Table 1: Correlates of Conspiracy Theory Belief, 2012

	<i>Congenial Conspiracy Theories</i>		<i>Uncongenial Conspiracy Theories</i>	
	Republicans	Democrats	Republicans	Democrats
Out-Party Negativity	0.404*** (0.034)	0.054** (0.027)	-0.008 (0.033)	-0.193*** (0.025)
In-Party Positivity	0.218*** (0.036)	-0.007 (0.029)	-0.058 (0.036)	-0.068** (0.027)
Liberal	-0.002 (0.031)	-0.033** (0.013)	0.084*** (0.031)	-0.040*** (0.012)
Conservative	0.033** (0.016)	-0.048*** (0.016)	-0.084*** (0.016)	0.015 (0.015)
Strength PID	-0.024 (0.018)	-0.003 (0.015)	0.036** (0.017)	0.017 (0.014)
Generalized Trust	-0.232*** (0.040)	-0.178*** (0.033)	-0.167*** (0.039)	-0.121*** (0.030)
Pol. Knowledge	-0.082*** (0.025)	-0.137*** (0.020)	-0.113*** (0.024)	-0.160*** (0.018)
Constant	0.203*** (0.038)	0.547*** (0.033)	0.586*** (0.038)	0.642*** (0.030)
Observations	1,261	1,658	1,270	1,650
R-squared	0.237	0.152	0.159	0.235

Standard errors in parentheses. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$, two-tailed.

Models also include controls for gender, race, age, income, and education.

Source: ANES 2012 Time Series Study.

The coefficients of greatest interest are those relating to in- and out-party affect. A positive coefficient on *In-Party Positivity* indicates that greater fondness for one's own party is associated with a higher tendency to believe in that set of conspiracy theories. A positive coefficient on *Out-Party Negativity* indicates that the more partisans dislike their opponents, the more likely they are to believe that set of conspiracy theories. When it comes to beliefs in congenial conspiracy theories, therefore, we should expect positive coefficients on both *In-Party Positivity* and *Out-Party*

Negativity, indicating that greater affinity for one's own party or greater animus toward the opposition are associated with increased belief in congenial conspiracy theories. Conversely, we should expect negative effects for In-Party Positivity and Out-Party Negativity when it comes to uncongenial conspiracy theories if party affect plays a protective role in helping partisans dismiss uncongenial conspiracy theories.

As expected, Out-Party Negativity is strongly associated with Republicans' belief in congenial conspiracy theories (column 1). The effect of Out-Party Negativity ($\hat{\beta} = 0.404$) suggests that Republicans who feel highly negative toward the Democratic Party (1 on a 0-1 scale) are about 20 percentage points more likely to believe in congenial conspiracy theories compared to those who feel neutrally toward Democratic Party (0.5 on a 0-1 scale). As the dependent variable, the Congenial Conspiracy Theories index, has four response categories, a difference of 20 percentage points is only slightly less than the magnitude of difference between thinking a conspiracy theory "probably did not happen" to "probably did happen," or from "probably did happen" to "definitely happened." By contrast, as feelings toward their *own* party move from neutral to highly positive, Republicans are only about 11 percentage points more likely to believe such conspiracy theories ($\hat{\beta} = 0.218$). The effect of negative out-party affect dwarfs that of ideology; the coefficients on Liberal and Conservative are substantively insignificant in this model. Generalized Trust—as is the case for all four models—is a strong negative predictor of belief in conspiracy theories; its influence on Republicans' endorsement of congenial conspiracy theories is about half as large as the effect of negative feelings toward the Democratic Party. The negative coefficient for Pol. Knowledge indicates that those Republicans who demonstrate a greater factual understanding of politics are less likely to believe rumors that confirm their preconceived notions, though the effect is substantively insignificant. In short, these results demonstrate that negative out-party affect plays a significant role in Republicans' endorsement of rumors that dispar-

age Democrats, over and above those related to strength of party identification, ideology, positive affect toward one's own party, as well as other political variables like generalized trust and political knowledge.

In contrast, out-party affect does not appear to play a substantively significant role in Democrats' belief in congenial conspiracy theories (column 2). In fact, the effects of both `Out-Party Negativity` and `In-Party Positivity` on Democrats' beliefs in rumors that make Republicans look bad are negligible. While the coefficients on `Liberal` and `Conservative` are statistically significant, they are again not very substantively important. Neither in- or out-party affect appears to influence Republicans' belief in uncongenial conspiracy theories, either (column 3). Interestingly, ideology does have a strong influence on these beliefs: taken together, the coefficients for `Liberal` and `Conservative` suggest that ideology (moving from conservative to liberal) increases belief in uncongenial conspiracy theories by about 17 percentage points. In this case at least, ideology continues to exert an independent effect on conspiracy belief (Miller, Saunders and Farhart 2015).

Interestingly, out-party negativity helps Democrats in resisting conspiracy theories that impugn their own side (column 4). Compared to Democrats who feel neutrally toward Republicans, those Democrats who are particularly negative toward the GOP are nearly ten percentage points less likely to believe in uncongenial conspiracy theories. This effect is similar in magnitude to those of both `Pol. Knowledge` and `Generalized Trust`. The influence of Democrats' positive feelings toward the Democratic Party on belief in these conspiracy theories is also in the expected direction, but substantively insignificant. The effects of identifying as either a conservative or liberal ideologue are also negligible. The fact that Democrats apply negative out-party feelings — *not* feelings toward their own group — when asked to evaluate information that directly implicates *their own group* suggests that out-party antipathy in particular is likely a unique source of

partisan motivated reasoning.

The fact that neither *Out-Party Negativity* nor *In-Party Positivity* appear to be meaningful predictors in columns 2 and 3 may have more to do with the nature of the dependent variable than with the (apparent) non-relationship between party affect and conspiracy belief. Both of the models in which party affect appears to play little role make use of the same index, which contain “left-leaning” conspiracy theories that are congenial for Democrats and uncongenial for Republicans. Using this set of rumors, however, may not be an entirely appropriate test of the theory. First, it may be that partisans did not rely upon party affect in their endorsement of these conspiracy theories because the survey was administered during a time when a Democrat occupied the White House. The balance of left- and right-leaning conspiracy theories is subject to a partisan cycle, with right-leaning conspiracy theories becoming more prevalent during Democratic administrations and left-leaning conspiracy theories flourishing under Republican presidents ([Uscinski and Parent 2014](#)).

Second, conspiracy belief may be conditioned by the salience of the rumors themselves. The conspiracy theories included in this index—that the government knew about 9/11 in advance and that the government directed flooding to poor areas during Katrina—were, by the time of this survey in 2012, quite dated. It may simply be that partisan affect did not appear to exert an influence on left-leaning conspiracy beliefs because the partisan (or ideological) relevance of these items is unclear or has waned over time. A closer look at the proportions of partisans believing these rumors suggests this may be the case. Democrats and Republicans do not differ substantially from one another in their *levels* of belief in these left-leaning conspiracy theories. For example, the differences between the proportions of Democrats and Republicans believing that the government had advance knowledge of 9/11 and that flooding during Katrina was directed to poor areas

both amount to only about eight percentage points.⁴ On the other hand, the differences between the proportions of partisans who expressed belief in right-leaning conspiracy items are much larger: a difference of 32 percentage points when it comes to belief that Obama was born in another country, and a difference of 26 percentage points when it comes to belief that the ACA authorizes death panels.⁵ From these initial results, however, it is impossible to whether conspiracy theory salience or partisan relevance explains the varied influence of party affect on conspiracy belief.

Study II: 2016 NBC News | SurveyMonkey Survey

To investigate this possibility, I replicated and extended the analysis in Study I using an original survey administered by NBC News and SurveyMonkey from June 21-July 5, 2016. The sample was drawn from SurveyMonkey’s Audience Panel, a pool of approximately 3 million users who answer SurveyMonkey’s consumer and political surveys on a regular basis.⁶

To test whether conspiracy theory salience accounted for the asymmetry in the 2012 data, I included a battery of items to measure beliefs in more recent conspiracy theories, though I also repeated two items from the 2012 ANES survey (regarding Obama’s birthplace and whether the government knew about 9/11 in advance) to maintain some consistency. I also added two additional congenial items for Republicans—(1) whether stricter gun laws will lead to confiscation and (2) whether an emphasis on social issues is an attempt to curtail the influence of religion and family—and two additional congenial

⁴The partisan gap on the 9/11 conspiracy is even smaller in Study II: Democrats and Republicans differed in their beliefs by only three percentage points.

⁵See [SI 1.1](#) for more information.

⁶For more information about the sample and weighting procedures, see [OA 2](#).

items for Democrats—(1) whether voter ID laws attempt to restrict minority participation in elections⁷ and (2) whether cheaper, renewable energy options are being suppressed by the government for profit. Full question wordings can be found in [OA 1](#).

Also included in this survey is a measure tapping an individual’s “conspiratorial disposition” ([Uscinski, Klofstad and Atkinson 2016](#); [Uscinski and Parent 2014](#)). I introduced this question in order to capture individuals’ tendency to believe in rumors regardless of their political content. Recall that in Study I, I used generalized trust as a stand-in for such a predisposition, which was the best available but imperfect measure of the concept. Instead, this survey included a question asking respondents how much they agree with the statement that “Big events like wars, recessions, and outcomes of elections are controlled by small groups of people who are working in secret against the rest of us.”⁸ Introducing this question as a control provides a more difficult test of my theory about the central importance of out-party affect in conspiracy belief.

Table 2 again presents a series of four OLS models. The dependent variables are averages of respondents’ beliefs in congenial and uncongenial conspiracy theories. The independent variables of interest—with the exception of the conspiratorial disposition

⁷At the time of this survey, the conjecture that voter identification laws were designed to restrict voting rights was not verified to be true. Later, some Republicans acknowledged that this was indeed the purpose of such laws ([Wines 2016](#)). Though conspiracy theories occasionally turn out to be true—e.g. Watergate—this does not mean that they did not once qualify as such. All that is needed to classify something as a conspiracy theory is that a significant segment of the population believes it to be true in the absence of concrete, factual information ([Sunstein and Vermeule 2009](#); [Pigden 2006](#); [2007](#)).

⁸This is just one measure of conspiratorial thinking; [Uscinski and Parent \(2014\)](#) actually identify four. Due to space constraints, however, I was only able to include one question on the survey.

measure—remain the same as those in the 2012 study.⁹ As before, variables are scaled 0-1; positive coefficients indicate increased conspiracy belief.

Once again, higher levels of out-party negativity are associated with increased belief in congenial conspiracy theories among Republicans. Those Republicans who feel highly negatively toward the Democratic Party are about 15 percentage points more likely to believe congenial conspiracy theories compared to those Republicans who feel neutrally toward their opponents. This effect is substantively greater in magnitude than even that of *Conspiratorial Disp.*, a stable personality trait. It is, however, roughly on par with the effect of ideology, as $(\hat{\beta}_{\text{Conservative}}) = 0.128$ indicates that conservative Republicans are about 13 percentage points more likely than moderate Republicans to believe in these conspiracy theories. These results show that, once again, negative out-party affect is strongly related to belief in congenial conspiracy theories, independent of the influence of other political identities or personality traits.

⁹The feeling thermometer items included in this study asked respondents to rate their feelings toward the parties on a scale from 0-10 (instead of the standard 0-100) due to limitations in SurveyMonkey's instrument.

Table 2: Correlates of Conspiracy Theory Belief, 2016

	<i>Congenial Conspiracy Theories</i>		<i>Uncongenial Conspiracy Theories</i>	
	Republicans	Democrats	Republicans	Democrats
Out-Party Negativity	0.285*** (0.043)	0.104*** (0.032)	-0.162*** (0.037)	-0.153*** (0.031)
In-Party Postivity	0.042 (0.036)	0.032 (0.030)	0.074** (0.031)	-0.014 (0.029)
Liberal	-0.017 (0.043)	0.020 (0.014)	0.032 (0.036)	-0.067*** (0.014)
Conservative	0.128*** (0.019)	0.028 (0.021)	-0.036** (0.016)	0.120*** (0.021)
Strength PID	0.054 (0.040)	0.080*** (0.031)	0.001 (0.035)	-0.078*** (0.029)
Conspiratorial Disp.	0.216*** (0.028)	0.241*** (0.021)	0.271*** (0.024)	0.114*** (0.021)
Pol. Knowledge	0.002 (0.034)	0.011 (0.023)	-0.039 (0.030)	-0.084*** (0.022)
Constant	0.137** (0.055)	0.276*** (0.042)	0.464*** (0.048)	0.470*** (0.041)
Observations	660	913	660	911
R-squared	0.319	0.195	0.336	0.397

Standard errors in parentheses. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$, two-tailed.

Source: Source: NBC News | Survey Monkey Audience Panel Survey, June-July 2016.

Results from columns 2 and 3 begin to help solve the puzzle found in the 2012 results. *Out-Party Negativity* plays an important role for both groups of partisans when it comes to the endorsement of more recent left-leaning conspiracy theories. Democrats who feel strongly negatively toward the Republican Party are about five percentage points more likely to believe in congenial conspiracy theories than their co-partisans with neutral feelings. The influence of *Out-Party Negativity* on Republicans' belief in attitudinally-inconsistent conspiracy theories is slightly larger. Again, these effects are substantially larger than the effects of ideology for both sets of partisans. These results

suggest that beliefs in more contemporary left-leaning conspiracy theories—even under a Democratic administration, in which they are less plentiful—are driven, in part, by how negatively partisans feel toward their opponents.

Finally, column 4 demonstrates that among Democrats, moving from neutral to highly negative in evaluations of the Republican Party reduces belief in uncongenial conspiracy theories by about seven percentage points. This again suggests that out-party feelings provide some protection against partisans' belief in conspiracy theories that disparage their *own* side. This effect, however, is smaller than that of ideology; adding together the absolute value of the coefficients for `Liberal` and `Conservative` leaves us with an effect of $\hat{\beta} = 0.187$. Among Democrats, beliefs in worldview inconsistent rumors in 2016 appeared to be a product of both out-party feelings *and* ideology in roughly equal measure. Though the results here are not as clear as those for Republicans, they do suggest that out-party affect plays an important role even for partisans when it comes to rejecting rumors that suggest the worst of their own side.

Disentangling Out-Party Negativity and Ideology

The results presented thus far suggest that out-party hostility is strongly associated with conspiracy belief. In many cases, the influence of out-party negativity outpaces the effect of ideology, the prevailing political explanation for belief in political conspiracy theories (Miller, Saunders and Farhart 2015; Uscinski and Parent 2014). But what if out-party negativity simply another manifestation of ideology? If this is indeed the case, my argument that out-party negativity as the primary correlate of conspiracy belief is much weaker.

Recent research provides reasons to doubt that party affect and at least one kind of ideology—operational ideology (Ellis and Stimson 2012)—are equivalent. Operational ideology, which is “grounded more explicitly in concrete decisions, what citizens think the government should or should not be doing with respect to important matters of pub-

lic policy” (Ellis and Stimson 2012, 11), is what many classic studies of ideology assess: that is, how “constrained” people’s attitudes are across a variety of policy preferences and issues (Converse 1964). Evidence suggests that there is at best a weak relationship between party affect and operational ideology.

Lelkes (2018), for example, finds the rate of affective polarization over time does not differ between partisans who exhibit high issue constraint and those who are less constrained in their preferences. Furthermore, over-time changes in ideological consistency appear to be only weakly related to changes in individuals’ feelings toward the parties. If affective polarization occurs even in the absence of consistent issue preferences, we can be more sure that party affect and operational ideology are not the same latent construct. In addition, if party affect were rooted in policy preferences, we would observe roughly similar thermometer ratings for those Democrats and Republicans who hold similar issue positions. Sood (2011) finds that not only do the social and cultural issue preferences of Democrats and Republicans substantially overlap one another, but conditional on the same preferences, a large gulf remains in the feeling thermometer scores that partisans ascribe to each party. This further suggests that operational ideology and party affect are conceptually and empirically distinct.

Perhaps, however, out-party negativity is a manifestation of another type of ideology: symbolic ideology (Ellis and Stimson 2012). By this account, ideology functions more as a social identity than a constellation of constrained policy preferences (Conover and Feldman 1981; Ellis and Stimson 2012; Kinder and Kalmoe 2017; Malka and Lelkes 2010). Conceptualizing ideology in this way helps to explain how ideology might constitute a worldview that motivates conspiracy belief (Miller, Saunders and Farhart 2015; Uscinski and Parent 2014). Much like partisans, conservatives and liberals may believe conspiracy theories because of what these rumors imply about themselves or their allies rather than on the basis of principled policy disagreement. The question, therefore,

becomes whether *symbolic* ideology and out-party negativity are interchangeable.

I provide three pieces of evidence to suggest that out-party negativity and symbolic ideology are distinct. First, I demonstrate that though party affect and ideology are statistically related, the relationship is not strong enough to suggest that one can act as a stand-in for another. Second, I demonstrate that “sorted” partisans—that is, those partisans whose ideological and partisan identities match (Levendusky 2009)—are not substantially more negative toward their opponents than their unsorted counterparts, again suggesting that symbolic ideology and party affect are distinct concepts. Finally, I show that partisans’ negative out-party feelings still bear a strong association to conspiracy belief, even after accounting for individuals’ feelings toward liberals and conservatives, the relevant in- and out-groups for ideological identities. Taken together, these results reinforce the notion that out-party negativity plays a primary and unique role in conspiracy belief.

As a first test, I assessed the strength of the bivariate relationships between interrelated concepts like out-party negativity, in-party positivity, strength of partisanship, and ideological self-identification in both the 2012 and 2016 data. To do so, I calculated a series of pairwise correlation coefficients between these measures; the results can be found in SI 2. As to be expected, there is at least a moderate statistical association between most of these variables. In the 2012 data, the strongest correlations among both Democrats and Republicans are those between in-party positivity and strength of partisanship, with magnitudes hovering around approximately $r=0.4$. In the 2016 data, the highest correlation is again between in-party positivity and strength of partisanship among Democrats. Among Republicans, however, the highest correlation emerges between out-party negativity and ideology ($r=0.370$). That being said, the strength of this correlation is not what we might consider “high” (that is, $r>0.5$) for survey research. While it is clear that out-party negativity and ideology are related (and more strongly so among Republicans), the

relationship is not strong enough to suggest that ideology and party affect are conceptually and empirically indistinct.

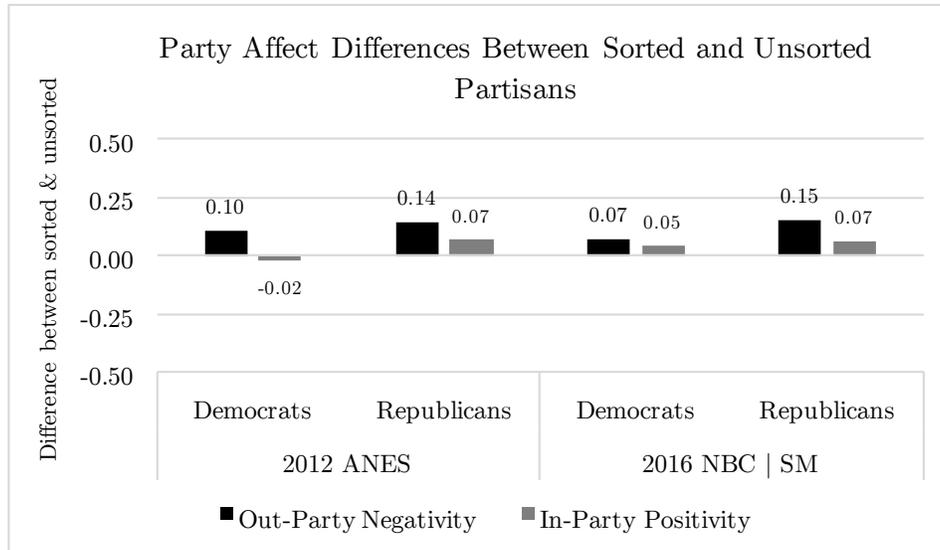
Another way to tease out the difference between symbolic ideology and party affect is to consider how party affect may differ between “sorted” and “unsorted” partisans. Ideological sorting—or the process by which ideological identities come to align with partisan identities (Levendusky 2009)—is thought to facilitate affective polarization because aligned identities reinforce the bases for motivated reasoning. Those with aligned sociopolitical identities tend to be more biased and negative toward out-groups because they are motivated to protect multiple, overlapping identities while denigrating an out-group also comprised of individuals with multiple, overlapping identities (Mason 2015; 2018). If symbolic ideology—that is, ideological self-identification (Mason 2018)—and party affect are tapping the same latent construct, we should expect there to be large differences in the party feeling thermometer scores between sorted partisans (Democrats who identify as liberal and Republicans who identify as conservative) and unsorted partisans (Democrats who identify as moderate or conservative, and Republicans who identify as moderate or liberal).¹⁰

To test this possibility, I calculated the average levels of in-party positivity and out-party negativity among sorted and unsorted Democrats and Republicans in both the 2012 and 2016 data. From here, I subtracted the average in- and out-party feeling thermometer scores among unsorted partisans from the average in- and out-party feeling thermometer scores among sorted partisans (that is, sorted Democrats-unsorted Democrats and sorted Republicans-unsorted Republicans). Figure 1 displays the magnitude of these differences. Positive values indicate that sorted partisans—that is, those individuals for whom party identity matches ideological identity—are either more negative toward their out-party

¹⁰Of important note, I have already controlled for sorted identities by introducing the `Liberal` and `Conservative` dummies in the regression analyses above.

or more positive toward their in-party than unsorted partisans. In theory, the difference in feeling thermometer scores between sorted and unsorted partisans could reach 100 percentage points if there is a perfect correspondence between symbolic ideology (i.e. ideological self-identification) and party affect.

Figure 1: Party Affect Differences Between Sorted and Unsorted Partisans



All differences are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

Sorted and unsorted partisans do not differ substantially from one another when it comes to their average levels of party affect. When it comes to in-party positivity, unsorted and sorted partisans differ by a maximum of seven percentage points—that is, sorted partisans rate their own party about seven degrees more warmly than unsorted partisans; in 2012, sorted Democrats actually rated their own party two degrees *cooler* than unsorted Democrats. When it comes to out-party negativity, the differences between sorted and unsorted partisans are larger, ranging from a minimum of five percentage points to a maximum of 15 percentage points. While it is clear that sorted partisans feel more hostile toward their opponents than unsorted partisans, the magnitude of these differences is still rather small in context; the largest difference in out-party feeling ther-

momometer scores between sorted and unsorted partisans amounts to less than a fifth of the entire feeling thermometer scale. If symbolic ideology and party affect were tapping the same underlying construct, however, we would see large gulfs between sorted and unsorted partisans when it comes to their feelings toward the parties.

Thus far, I have argued that the negativity partisans harbor toward their opponents motivates them to believe conspiracy theories that denigrate their political opponents. That being said, if symbolic ideology is the the motivating force behind conspiracy belief, perhaps it is not people's negativity toward their *partisan* opponents but rather negativity toward their *ideological* opponents that drives acceptance of misinformation. If this is the case, the apparent relationship I uncover between out-party negativity and conspiracy belief might actually be more reflective of the relationship between out-*ideologue* negativity and endorsement of conspiracy theories. All else being equal, if the relationship between ideological affect and conspiracy belief is stronger than that of party affect and conspiracy belief, we would find evidence that ideology remains the primary motivating force behind belief in this type of misinformation (Miller, Saunders and Farhart 2015).

While I cannot evaluate this claim using the NBC News | SurveyMonkey data, I can use the 2012 ANES to examine the relative influences of affect toward the parties and affect toward ideologues on belief in conspiracy theories. To do so, I replicate the analysis presented in Table 1 but added in two measures of affect toward ideological groups: Out-Ideologue Negativity (the feeling thermometer scores assigned to conservatives by Democrats and to liberals by Republicans) and In-Ideologue Positivity (the feeling thermometer scores for liberals among Democrats and for conservatives among Republicans). If affect toward the Democratic and Republican parties is actually a stand in for affect toward liberals and conservatives, the coefficients on Out-Party Negativity and In-Party Positivity should be significantly reduced in magnitude and/or lose their statistical significance.

Table 3 presents the results of this analysis. As a reminder, all variables are scaled 0-1, with positive coefficients indicating higher levels of belief in that particular set of conspiracy theories.

Table 3: Determinants of Conspiracy Theory Belief, 2012 - Including Feelings Toward Ideologues

	<i>Congenial Rumors</i>		<i>Uncongenial Rumors</i>	
	Republicans	Democrats	Republicans	Democrats
Out-Party Negativity	0.330*** (0.036)	0.043 (0.029)	0.036 (0.036)	-0.181*** (0.026)
In-Party Positivity	0.175*** (0.040)	-0.009 (0.031)	-0.050 (0.039)	-0.020 (0.028)
Out-Ideologue Negativity	0.140*** (0.036)	0.018 (0.028)	-0.092*** (0.035)	-0.044* (0.025)
In-Ideologue Positivity	0.126*** (0.041)	0.044 (0.029)	-0.033 (0.040)	-0.151*** (0.027)
Liberal	0.007 (0.031)	-0.041*** (0.014)	0.080*** (0.031)	-0.013 (0.012)
Conservative	-0.003 (0.017)	-0.041** (0.017)	-0.067*** (0.017)	0.003 (0.015)
Strength PID	-0.028 (0.018)	-0.004 (0.016)	0.038** (0.017)	0.015 (0.014)
Generalized Trust	-0.230*** (0.040)	-0.185*** (0.033)	-0.172*** (0.039)	-0.108*** (0.030)
Pol. Knowledge	-0.099*** (0.025)	-0.142*** (0.020)	-0.107*** (0.024)	-0.155*** (0.018)
Constant	0.141*** (0.039)	0.531*** (0.035)	0.620*** (0.039)	0.692*** (0.032)
Observations	1,257	1,646	1,266	1,638
R-squared	0.258	0.155	0.165	0.252

Standard errors in parentheses. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$, two-tailed.

Models also include controls for gender, race, age, income, and education.

Source: ANES 2012 Time Series Study.

Even after controlling for feelings toward ideological groups, Out-Party Negativity

continues to play a large role in conspiracy theory endorsement. The effect of *Out-Party Negativity* on Republicans' belief in congenial conspiracy theories (column 1) is more than twice the effect size of either *In-Ideologue Positivity* or *Out-Ideologue Negativity*. Similarly, *Out-Party Hostility* is also the strongest determinant of the degree to which Democrats disavow attitudinally-incongruent conspiracy theories (column 4). Once again, however, affect of any type does not appear to play a substantively important role in partisans' assessments of left-leaning conspiracy theories (congenial conspiracy theories for Democrats and uncongenial conspiracy theories for Republicans; see columns 2 and 3), with the exception of the substantively insignificant effect of *Out-Ideologue Negativity* among Republicans (column 3). The fact that neither *In-Ideologue Positivity* or *Out-Ideologue Negativity* meaningfully influence belief in these conspiracy theories again suggests that this particular set of rumors (regarding the government's role in 9/11 and Katrina) lack a strong partisan *or* ideological connotation. For those conspiracy theories that *do* produce partisan or ideological divides, however, *Out-Party Negativity* continues to play a large role in conspiracy theory acceptance among Republicans and conspiracy theory rejection among Democrats.

Taken together, these pieces of evidence demonstrate that not only are ideology and out-party negativity conceptually distinct, but partisans' negative feelings toward their opponents tend to be more predictive of belief in political conspiracy theories than feelings toward relevant ideological groups. This is not to say that ideology exerts no influence on conspiracy belief; clearly, one aspect of ideological self-identification—feelings toward in- and out-ideologues—matter to some degree for conspiracy theory acceptance and rejection. Subject to a series of alternate specifications, however, the hostile feelings partisans harbor toward their opponents appear to be the *primary* political explanation of belief in political conspiracy theories.

Out-Party Negativity, Generalized Negativity, & Expressive Responding

Perhaps the results above do not reflect a genuine association between conspiracy belief and out-party negativity but instead reflect a relationship between generalized negativity and conspiracy belief. After all, conspiracy theories feed off of negative emotions like fear and insecurity (Douglas, Sutton and Cichocka 2017), and conspiracy theories that concern positive events or outcomes are rare.¹¹ The effects that I attribute to out-party negativity or out-ideologue negativity may instead reflect some nebulous set of negative emotions rather than negativity toward specific political groups.

Two pieces of evidence suggest that this is not the case. First, as discussed previously, feelings toward in- or out-ideologues/partisans do not seem to be predictive of belief in conspiracy theories that have limited partisan or ideological relevance. Of the conspiracy theories assessed above, those with the smallest gap in levels of belief among Democrats and Republicans have the weakest relationships with partisan (or ideological) affect.¹²

To test whether out-party negativity is simply a manifestation of general negativity, I assessed how out-party negativity may influence—or fail to influence—belief in a conspiracy theory concerning vaccines. As part of the 2016 NBC News | SurveyMonkey study, I asked respondents how much they agreed with the statement “profits for big pharmaceutical companies—not science—is the real reason why the government requires childhood vaccines.” I chose this conspiracy theory in particular because belief in con-

¹¹For example, of the eight conspiracy theories in 2017 that garnered the most attention on Snopes.com, a popular fact-checking website, none carry positive connotations (Rothschild 2017).

¹²See columns 2 and 3 in Tables 1 and 3.

spiracy theories concerning the utility and consequences of vaccinations is prevalent on both sides of the aisle. Those on the right believe this kind of conspiracy theory because they view mandatory vaccines as a government attempt to restrict individual autonomy, while those on the left fear the influence of pharmaceutical companies and question the safety of vaccines (Lewandowsky, Gignac and Oberauer 2013; Mooney 2015). As such, we should not expect there to be significant partisan divisions when it comes to belief in this conspiracy theory. This is, in fact, precisely what we observe: near equal proportions of Democrats (19%) and Republicans (17%) “strongly” or “somewhat” agreed with the statement, thereby producing the smallest partisan gap in conspiracy belief among all items in the 2012 and 2016 surveys. Given the relatively apolitical nature of this conspiracy theory, we should not expect political attitudes and orientations to have a meaningful association with beliefs in the vaccine conspiracy theory. If, on the other hand, we observe a significant relationship between out-party negativity and conspiracy belief *in the absence* of effects of other meaningful political variables, we may have reason to believe that my results reflect generalized negative feelings instead of a dislike of partisan opponents.

The results presented in Table 4 demonstrate that both out-party negativity and in-party positivity do not appear to be predictive of partisans’ belief in an apolitical conspiracy theory. Not only do the estimates lack statistical significance at conventional levels, they are also substantively meaningless. All of the items tapping political attitudes or identities lack any sort of meaningful relationship to belief in the vaccine conspiracy theory, with the exception of `Strength PID`, which achieves statistical significance but is not substantively important. The fact the effects of all political variables in the model are indistinguishable from zero helps reassure us that out-party negativity is capturing negative feelings toward a relevant political group instead of generalized negative affect.

Table 4: Determinants of Belief in Vaccine Conspiracy

	Republicans	Democrats
Out-Party Negativity	-0.027 (0.061)	-0.060 (0.048)
In-Party Positivity	-0.028 (0.052)	0.017 (0.046)
Liberal	-0.066 (0.060)	-0.029 (0.022)
Conservative	0.028 (0.027)	0.039 (0.032)
Strength PID	0.141** (0.057)	-0.093** (0.046)
Conspiratorial Disp.	0.293*** (0.041)	0.254*** (0.032)
Pol. Knowledge	-0.213*** (0.049)	-0.095*** (0.034)
Constant	0.300*** (0.079)	0.424*** (0.063)
Observations	665	916
R-squared	0.171	0.259

Standard errors in parentheses. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$, two-tailed.

Models also include controls for gender, race, age, income, and education.

Source: NBC News|Survey Monkey Audience Panel Survey, June-July 2016.

One final challenge to my results is the possibility that the relationship between out-party negativity and conspiracy belief is artificially inflated due to individual differences in opinionation. Individuals who score highly on measures of a personality trait known as “need to evaluate” have strong emotional reactions to political actors, events, and the information they encounter (Bizer et al. 2004; Jarvis and Petty 1996). People who have a strong need to evaluate also tend to express more attitudes, rely more heavily on party identification in determining their preferences, and engage more in on-line (rather than memory-based) processing than those who score lower on the need to evaluate scale

(Jarvis and Petty 1996; Tormala and Petty 2001). This suggests that those partisans who have a strong need to evaluate may hold more extreme negative and positive attitudes toward the parties, exhibit a greater tendency to offer assessments of a conspiracy theory (instead of simply expressing indifference or ignorance), and engage in more motivated reasoning compared to low-need-to-evaluate partisans. If this is the case, introducing a measure of need for affect may attenuate the relationships we observe between feelings toward the parties/ideologues and conspiracy belief.

Fortunately, the 2016 ANES ([American National Election Studies 2016](#)) allows us to evaluate this conjecture. In addition to including the variables used in previous analyses, the survey also includes a composite measure summarizing individuals' answers to a number of items on the need to evaluate scale. The survey also asked respondents how sure they were that Barack Obama is a Muslim.¹³ This particular conspiracy theory has a clear partisan divide: while only 9% of Democrats said that they were "extremely," "very," or "moderately" sure that Obama is a Muslim, 37% of Republicans said the same. To assess the influence of an individual's need to evaluate on beliefs in this conspiracy, I introduce this variable into a model containing the same independent variables used in previous analyses.

Table 5 demonstrates that *Out-Party Negativity* is still strongly associated with Republicans' belief in a congenial conspiracy theory and Democrats' skepticism toward it. *Need to Evaluate* performs as expected: increased opinionation among Republicans is associated with greater belief in the conspiracy theory, while more expressive Democrats are less likely to believe Obama is a Muslim. Even after accounting for individual variation in expressive responding, however, out-party hostility continues to play an important role in both misinformation acceptance or rejection.

¹³See [OA 1](#) for specific question wordings.

Table 5: Correlates of Belief in Obama-Muslim Conspiracy, 2016 - Including Need to Evaluate

	Republicans	Democrats
Out-Party Negativity	0.253*** (0.055)	-0.122*** (0.038)
In-Party Positivity	0.180*** (0.050)	-0.002 (0.042)
Out-Ideologue Negativity	0.135*** (0.049)	-0.074** (0.035)
In-Ideologue Positivity	0.165*** (0.055)	-0.105** (0.041)
Need to Evaluate	0.264*** (0.098)	-0.134** (0.066)
Liberal	-0.067 (0.050)	-0.015 (0.018)
Conservative	-0.019 (0.027)	0.029 (0.027)
Strength PID	0.042 (0.027)	-0.031 (0.019)
Generalized Trust	-0.064 (0.065)	-0.067* (0.040)
Pol. Knowledge	-0.166*** (0.035)	-0.139*** (0.026)
Constant	-0.060 (0.094)	0.655*** (0.061)
Observations	898	1,103
R-squared	0.234	0.170

Standard errors in parentheses. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$, two-tailed.

Models also include controls for gender, race, age, income, and education.

Source: ANES 2016 Time Series Study.

Of course, these results only account for one type of expressive responding—that which originates from a fixed personality characteristic that varies from individual to individual. Another possibility is that partisans may be engaging in another type of expressive responding known as “partisan cheerleading” (Bullock et al. 2015). According

to this account, people may endorse a conspiracy theory to send a signal to survey researchers or the public at large about their support (or lack thereof) for political figures and policies. Researchers have indeed found evidence of this kind of responding in other contexts (e.g., [Bullock et al. 2015](#); [Prior, Sood and Kahnna 2015](#)). Recent work by [Berinsky \(2018\)](#), however, suggests that the prevalence of partisan cheerleading in endorsement of conspiracy theories is rare. Using multiple experiments, [Berinsky \(2018\)](#) shows the effect of expressive responding on beliefs regarding Obama’s religion and the government’s involvement in 9/11 is limited. Moreover, [Iyengar and Krupenkin \(2018a\)](#) find that the effect of monetary incentives on moderating partisans’ negative feelings toward the opposition is trivial. Taken together, these studies suggest that the results I find above are not just an artifact of survey design or response; rather, they reflect a connection between partisans’ real dislike for their opponents and their sincere beliefs in political conspiracy theories.

Discussion and Conclusion

The results presented in this study demonstrate that negative feelings partisans harbor toward their opponents motivate belief (and disbelief) in unverified and often salacious political conspiracy theories. Conspiracy theory belief appears to be driven not simply by partisan or ideological identification, but by a particular partisan attitude—one that appears to be intensifying over time ([Iyengar, Sood and Lelkes 2012](#); [Iyengar and Krupenkin 2018b](#)). Those partisans who feel particularly negatively toward their opponents are not only the most likely to endorse attitudinally-congenial conspiracy theories, but they are also the most likely to resist believing conspiracy theories that attribute nefarious motives to their own side. These findings challenge our understanding of how partisanship, as a social identity, should work: it is negative out-party feelings, *not* positive in-party feelings, that play this inoculating role. Moreover, the relationship between

out-party hostility and conspiracy belief cannot be attributed to other alternative explanations, such as symbolic ideology, a dislike of opposing ideologues, negative affect, or the tendency to engage in expressive responding.

The fact that partisans are more willing to believe conspiracy theories primarily because they dislike their political opponents presents some troubling prospects for future political progress in America. If partisans' evaluations of political misinformation like conspiracy theories are driven more by animosity toward their opponents than by a principled philosophy or set of ideas, developing consensus on matters of public policy seems unlikely. Partisans' blind acceptance of conspiracy theories, driven primarily by out-party animosity, suggests that Americans are increasingly living in two separate worlds. Cooperation and negotiation are nearly impossible when people cannot even agree on the terms of debate; progress becomes non-existent when people's mere dislike of their opponents makes them feel entitled to not only their own opinions, but also their own facts.¹⁴ It is of little surprise that a 2018 Pew survey found that 81% of Republicans and 76% of Democrats say that they cannot agree with their opponents when it comes to basic facts (Laloggia 2018).

This is particularly troubling in light of recent developments in American politics. The ascendancy of "fake news" during and since the 2016 election has undoubtedly increased partisans' exposure to conspiracy theories. Moreover, the fact that the president of the United States frequently asserts that he is the target of a conspiracy makes it more likely that rank-and-file Republicans, who normally might be less susceptible to such claims under Republican leadership (Uscinski and Parent 2014), will also believe in and potentially assist in the proliferation of conspiracy theories. This, coupled with the proliferation of left-leaning rumors under an out-party administration, creates a perfect

¹⁴This phrase is a variation of that famously attributed to the late Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan.

maelstrom for heightened conspiracy belief on both sides of the aisle. With out-party hostility—a primary determinant of rumor endorsement—on the rise, it seems unlikely that partisans will be able to find common ground in the foreseeable future.

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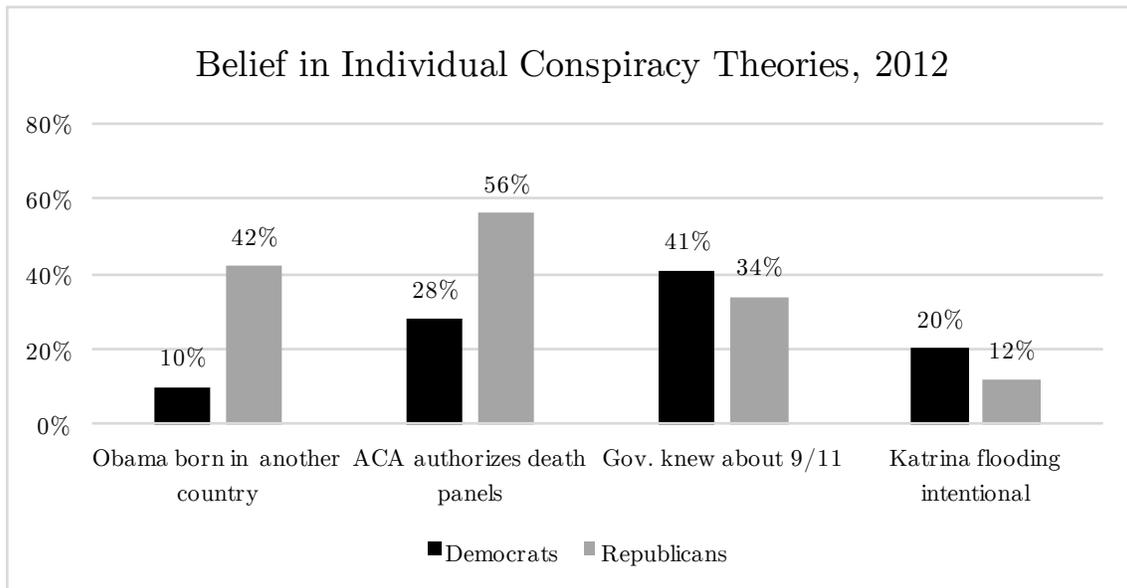
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Supporting Information

SI 1 Belief in Individual Conspiracy Theories

SI 1.1 2012 ANES

Figure SI 1.1: 2012 ANES Study

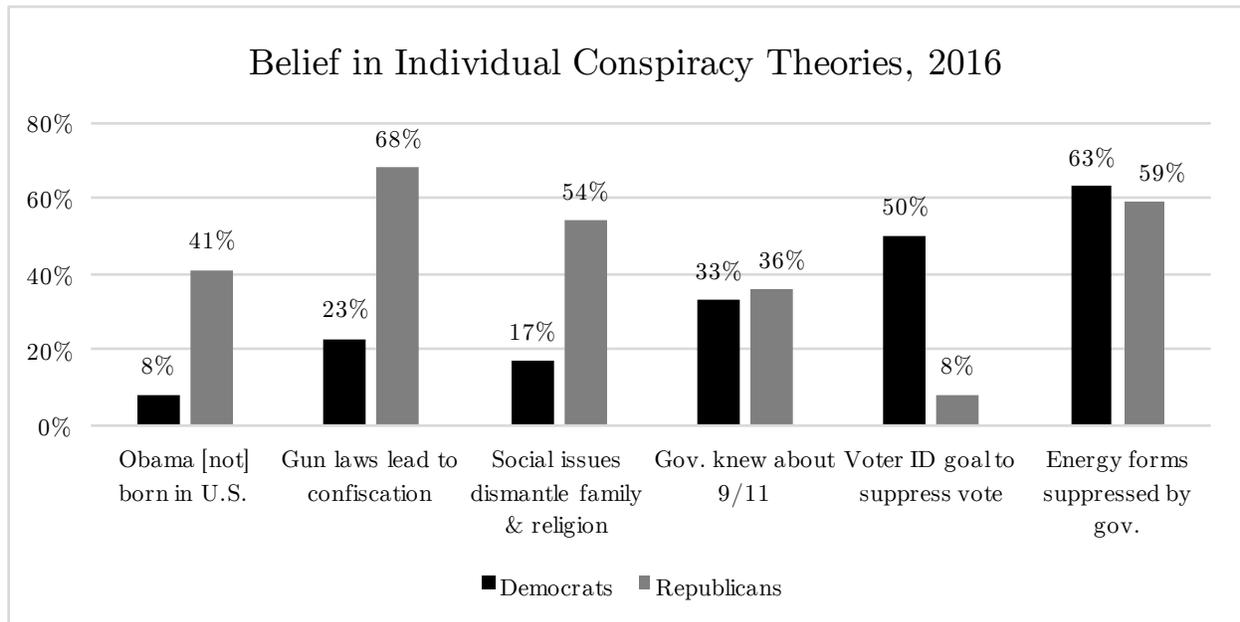


Source: 2012 ANES Time Series Study.

Percentages reflect the (weighted) proportions of Democrats/Republicans said each conspiracy theory “probably” or “definitely” happened. See [OA 1](#) for specific question wordings. All differences between partisans are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

SI 1.2 2016 NBC | SM

Figure SI 1.2: 2016 NBC | SM



Source: 2016 NBC News | Survey Monkey Survey.

Percentages reflect the (weighted) proportions of Democrats/Republicans said they either “strongly” or “somewhat agreed” with each conspiracy theory statement. One exception is for the “Obama [not] born in U.S.” item, which reflects the proportions of Democrats/Republicans who said that they either “strongly” or “somewhat” *disagreed* with the statement that Obama was born in the U.S. See [OA 1](#) for specific question wordings. All differences between partisans are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

SI 2 Correlations Between Related Concepts

SI 2.1 2012 ANES

All partisans

	Out-Party Negativity	In-Party Positivity	Strength PID
In-Party Positivity	0.203		
Strength PID	0.272	0.421	
Ideology	-0.029	-0.057	0.006

Democrats

	Out-Party Negativity	In-Party Positivity	Strength PID
In-Party Positivity	0.222		
Strength PID	0.270	0.412	
Ideology	-0.286	-0.092	-0.148

Republicans

	Out-Party Negativity	In-Party Positivity	Strength PID
In-Party Positivity	0.165		
Strength PID	0.269	0.424	
Ideology	0.416	0.216	0.305

Source: 2012 ANES Time Series Study.

Pearson's correlation coefficients. Ideology is a 7-point scale ranging from "extremely liberal" (0) to "extremely conservative" (1).

SI 2.2 2016 NBC | SM

All partisans

	Out-Party Negativity	In-Party Positivity	Strength PID
In-Party Positivity	0.111		
Strength PID	0.170	0.153	
Ideology	0.001	-0.107	-0.032

Democrats

	Out-Party Negativity	In-Party Positivity	Strength PID
In-Party Positivity	0.165		
Strength PID	0.135	0.225	
Ideology	-0.170	-0.058	-0.141

Republicans

	Out-Party Negativity	In-Party Positivity	Strength PID
In-Party Positivity	0.013		
Strength PID	0.212	0.072	
Ideology	0.370	0.173	0.136

Source: 2016 NBC | SM Survey.

Pearson's correlation coefficients. Ideology is a 7-point scale ranging from "very liberal" (0) to "very conservative" (1).

Online Appendix

OA 1 Question Wordings for Survey Instruments

OA 1.1 2012 ANES Survey

Congenial items for Republicans / uncongenial items for Democrats:

1. "Was Barack Obama definitely born in the United States, probably born in the United States, probably born in another country, or definitely born in another country?"
2. "Does the health care law passed in 2010 definitely authorize panels to make end-of-life decisions for people on Medicare, probably authorize government panels to make end-of-life decisions for people on Medicare, probably not authorize government panels to make end-of-life decisions for people on Medicare, or definitely not authorize government panels to make end-of-life decisions for people on Medicare?"

Congenial items for Democrats / uncongenial items for Republicans

1. "Did senior federal government officials definitely know about the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 before they happened, probably know about the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 before they happened, probably did not know about the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 before they happened, or definitely did not know about the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 before they happened?"
2. "Some people say that when Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast in the summer of 2005, the federal government intentionally breached flood levees in New Orleans so that poor neighborhoods would be flooded and middle-class neighborhoods would be spared. Do you think the federal government definitely did this, probably did this, probably did not do this, or definitely did not do this?"

Party affect measures:

Preamble: "I'd like to get your feelings toward some of our political leaders and other people who are in the news these days. I'll read the name of a person and I'd like you to rate that person using something we call the feeling thermometer. Ratings between 50 degrees and 100 degrees mean that you feel favorable and warm toward the person. Ratings between 0 degrees and 50 degrees mean that you don't feel favorable toward the person and that you don't care too much for that person. You would rate the person at

the 50 degree mark if you don't feel particularly warm or cold toward the person. If we come to a person whose name you don't recognize, you don't need to rate that person. Just tell me and we'll move on to the next one."

1. "How would you rate the Democratic Party?"
2. "How would you rate the Republican Party?"

[Labels on feeling thermometer scale: 0="very cold or unfavorable feeling," 15="quite cold or unfavorable feeling," 30="fairly cold or unfavorable feeling," 40="a bit more cold or unfavorable feeling," 50="no feeling at all," 60="a bit more warm or favorable than cold feeling," 70="fairly warm or favorable feeling," 85="quite warm or favorable feeling," 100="very warm or favorable feeling."]

Out-party negativity is the reverse of the Democratic Party feeling thermometer for Republicans and the reverse of the Republican Party feeling thermometer for Democrats; in-party positivity is the Democratic Party feeling thermometer for Democrats and the Republican Party feeling thermometer for Republicans.

Party identification:

"Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a [Democrat, Republican, Independent] or what?"

For self-identified Democrats and Republicans: "Would you call yourself a strong [Democrat/Republican] or a not very strong [Democrat/Republican]?"

For self-identified Independents: "Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican Party or to the Democratic Party?"

Ideology:

"We hear a lot these days about liberals and conservatives. here is a seven-point scale on which the political views that people might hold are arranged from extremely liberal to extremely conservative. Where would you place yourself on this scale?" [Extremely liberal, liberal, slightly liberal, moderate, slightly conservative, conservative, or extremely conservative]

Responses were collapsed into two dummy categories: (1) liberal (including slightly liberal, liberal, or extremely liberal), and (2) conservative (including slightly conservative, conservative, or extremely conservative).

Political knowledge:

The knowledge measure is a simple count of correct answers to the following three questions:¹⁵

1. "Is the U.S. federal budget deficit — the amount by which the government's spending exceeds the amount of money it collects — now bigger, about the same, or smaller than it was during most of the 1990s?"
2. "For how many years is a United States Senator elected — that is, how many years are there in one full term of office for a U.S. Senator?" [open-ended]
3. "On which of the following does the U.S. government currently spend the least?" [Foreign aid, Medicare, national defense, Social Security].

"Generalized trust" is an average of the following two items:

1. "How often can you trust the federal government in Washington to do what is right?" [always, most of the time, about half the time, some of the time, or never] [never, only some of the time, about half the time, most of the time, just about always]*
2. "Generally speaking, how often can you trust other people?" [always, most of the time, about half the time, some of the time, or never]

*The 2012 administration of the ANES split the sample and provided different response options (with the order reversed). The correlation between these two items is $r=-.86$. For the purposes of analysis, I collapsed responses into 5 levels: (1) never, (2) some of the time or only some of the time, (3) about half the time, (4) most of the time, (5) always or just about always.

Age:

Age was collapsed into generational categories: (1) 18-34, (2) 35-49, (3) 50-69, (4) 70-100.

Income:

Income was collapsed into 7 categories to mirror those in the 2016 NBC|SM survey: (1) under \$15k, (2) \$15k to under \$30k, (3) \$30k to under \$50k, (4) \$50k to under \$75k, (5)

¹⁵Because the rumor items were included only as part of the online survey, I use these questions (also administered in the online survey) instead of the traditional office recognition questions.

\$75k to under \$100k, (6) \$100k to under \$150k, (7) \$150k or above.

Education:

Education was collapsed into 4 categories to mirror those in the 2016 NBC|SM survey: (1) H.S. or less, (2) Associate's degree/some college, (3) College degree, (4) Graduate degree.

OA 1.2 2016 NBC News | SurveyMonkey Survey

Congenial items for Republicans / uncongenial items for Democrats:

"Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements." [Response options: strongly agree, somewhat agree, neither agree nor disagree, somewhat disagree, strongly disagree.]

1. "Barack Obama was born in the United States."¹⁶
2. "The implementation of stricter gun laws will eventually lead to the confiscation of guns from Americans who legally own them."
3. "The emphasis on same-sex marriage, evolution, and LGBT rights in recent years is an attempt to dismantle the nuclear family and remove religion from daily life."

Congenial items for Democrats / uncongenial items for Republicans:

"Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements." [Response options: strongly agree, somewhat agree, neither agree nor disagree, somewhat disagree, strongly disagree.]

1. "Senior federal government officials knew about the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 before they happened."
2. "The primary goal of voter identification laws is to prevent low-income and minority voters from participating in elections."
3. "Cheaper, more efficient versions of renewable energy technologies are available but are being suppressed by oil companies and the government."

Apolitical conspiracy theory:

1. "Profits for big pharmaceutical companies—not science—is the real reason why the government requires childhood vaccines."

¹⁶The question wording here is slightly modified from that in Study I, which tapped endorsement using a question rather than a statement. Respondents' answers were reverse-coded in analysis.

Party affect measures:

Preamble: "Now, we'd like to understand how you feel about various political figures and groups using a 'feeling thermometer.' Ratings between 5 and 10 mean that you feel favorably and warm toward that person/group; ratings between 0 and 5 degrees mean that you don't feel favorably toward that person/group and that you don't care too much for him/her/them. If you don't feel particularly warm or cold toward that person/group you would rate him/her/them at 5."

[Labels on feeling thermometer scale: 0="very cold or unfavorable feeling," 5="not particularly or cold feeling," 10="very warm or favorable feeling."]

Out-party negativity is the reverse of the Democratic Party feeling thermometer for Republicans and the reverse of the Republican Party feeling thermometer for Democrats; in-party positivity is the Democratic Party feeling thermometer for Democrats and the Republican Party feeling thermometer for Republicans.

Party identification:

"In politics today, do you consider yourself a Republican, Democrat, or Independent?"

For self-identified Democrats and Republicans: "Would you consider yourself a strong [Democrat/Republican] or a weak [Democrat/Republican]?"

For self-identified Independents: "As of today, do you lean more to the Republican Party or more to the Democratic Party?"

Ideology:

"In general, how would you describe your views on most political issues? Are you:"
[very conservative, conservative, moderate, liberal, very liberal]

Responses were collapsed into two categories: (1) liberal (liberal or very liberal), and (2) conservative (conservative or very conservative).

Political knowledge:

The knowledge measure is a simple count of correct answers to the following three questions:¹⁷

1. "Is the U.S. federal budget deficit — the amount by which the government's spending exceeds the amount of money it collects — now bigger, about the same, or smaller than it was during most of the 1990s?"

¹⁷Note that these are identical to the questions in the 2012 ANES.

2. "For how many years is a United States Senator elected — that is, how many years are there in one full term of office for a U.S. Senator?" [open-ended]
3. "On which of the following does the U.S. government currently spend the least?" [Foreign aid, Medicare, national defense, Social Security].

Conspiratorial disposition:¹⁸

"Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement. 1 indicates that you strongly disagree with the statement, while 5 indicates that you strongly agree with the statement. 3 indicates that you neither agree nor disagree with the statement."

"Big events like wars, recessions, and outcomes of elections are controlled by small groups of people who are working in secret against the rest of us." [1-5]

Age:

Age was collapsed into generational categories: (1) 18-34, (2) 35-49, (3) 50-69, (4) 70-100.

Income:

Income was categorized into the following groups: (1) under \$15k, (2) \$15k to under \$30k, (3) \$30k to under \$50k, (4) \$50k to under \$75k, (5) \$75k to under \$100k, (6) \$100k to under \$150k, (7) \$150k or above.

Education:

Education was collapsed into 4 categories: (1) H.S. or less, (2) Associate's degree/some college, (3) College degree, (4) Graduate degree.

¹⁸This measure was created by [Uscinski and Parent \(2014\)](#).

OA 1.3 2016 ANES Survey

Conspiracy item:

"Is Barack Obama a Muslim?" [yes/no]

Followup: "How sure are you about that?" [extremely sure Obama is a Muslim, very sure Obama is a Muslim, moderately sure Obama is a Muslim, a little sure Obama is a Muslim, not sure at all Obama is a Muslim, not sure at all Obama is not a Muslim, a little sure Obama is not a Muslim, moderately sure Obama is not a Muslim, very sure Obama is not a Muslim, extremely sure Obama is not a Muslim]

Party affect measures:

Preamble: "I'd like to get your feelings toward some of our political leaders and other people who are in the news these days. I'll read the name of a person and I'd like you to rate that person using something we call the feeling thermometer. Ratings between 50 degrees and 100 degrees mean that you feel favorable and warm toward the person. Ratings between 0 degrees and 50 degrees mean that you don't feel favorable toward the person and that you don't care too much for that person. You would rate the person at the 50 degree mark if you don't feel particularly warm or cold toward the person. If we come to a person whose name you don't recognize, you don't need to rate that person. Just tell me and we'll move on to the next one."

1. "How would you rate the Democratic Party?"
2. "How would you rate the Republican Party?"

[Labels on feeling thermometer scale: 0="very cold or unfavorable feeling," 15="quite cold or unfavorable feeling," 30="fairly cold or unfavorable feeling," 40="a bit more cold or unfavorable feeling," 50="no feeling at all," 60="a bit more warm or favorable than cold feeling," 70="fairly warm or favorable feeling," 85="quite warm or favorable feeling," 100="very warm or favorable feeling."]

Out-party negativity is the reverse of the Democratic Party feeling thermometer for Republicans and the reverse of the Republican Party feeling thermometer for Democrats; in-party positivity is the Democratic Party feeling thermometer for Democrats and the Republican Party feeling thermometer for Republicans.

Party identification:

“Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a [Democrat, Republican, Independent] or what?”

For self-identified Democrats and Republicans: “Would you call yourself a strong [Democrat/Republican] or a not very strong [Democrat/Republican]?”

For self-identified Independents: “Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican Party or to the Democratic Party?”

Ideology:

“We hear a lot these days about liberals and conservatives. here is a seven-point scale on which the political views that people might hold are arranged from extremely liberal to extremely conservative. Where would you place yourself on this scale?” [Extremely liberal, liberal, slightly liberal, moderate, slightly conservative, conservative, or extremely conservative]

Responses were collapsed into two dummy categories: (1) liberal (including slightly liberal, liberal, or extremely liberal), and (2) conservative (including slightly conservative, conservative, or extremely conservative).

Political knowledge:

The knowledge measure is a simple count of correct answers to the following four questions:

1. “Is the U.S. federal budget deficit — the amount by which the government’s spending exceeds the amount of money it collects — now bigger, about the same, or smaller than it was during most of the 1990s?”
2. “On which of the following does the U.S. government currently spend the least?” [Foreign aid, Medicare, national defense, Social Security].
3. “Do you happen to know which party currently has the most members in the U.S. House of Representatives in Washington?” [Democrats, Republicans]
4. “Do you happen to know which party currently has the most members in the U.S. Senate?” [Democrats, Republicans]

*Note: the 2016 ANES did not repeat the question about the length of a Senator’s term. Instead, I included the other two questions (above) that were included in the knowledge battery.

“Generalized trust” is an average of the following two items:

1. "How often can you trust the federal government in Washington to do what is right?" [always, most of the time, about half the time, some of the time, or never]
2. "Generally speaking, how often can you trust other people?" [always, most of the time, about half the time, some of the time, or never]

Need to evaluate:

There are six need to evaluate questions on the post-election questionnaire, administered through an adaptive battery. Each respondent was asked four of these questions. The specific set of questions asked of each respondent was conditional on the respondent's answers to the initial question. Summary scores are provided in the variable `V162253x`, which was calculated by other researchers using the R package `catSurv`³. More information can be found in the documentation for the 2016 Time Series Study, available [here](#).

The composite items are:

(Prompt: "Thinking about yourself, please indicate whether or not the statement is characteristic of you and what you believe." [Response options: extremely uncharacteristic of me, somewhat uncharacteristic of me, uncertain, somewhat characteristic of me, extremely characteristic of me.]

1. "I like to have strong opinions even when I am not personally involved."
2. "I form opinions about everything."
3. "It is very important to me to hold strong opinions."
4. "It bothers me to remain neutral."
5. "I have many more opinions than the average person."
6. "I would rather have a strong opinion than no opinion at all."

Age:

Age was collapsed into generational categories: (1) 18-34, (2) 35-49, (3) 50-69, (4) 70-100.

Income:

Income was collapsed into 7 categories to mirror those in the 2016 NBC|SM survey: (1) under \$15k, (2) \$15k to under \$30k, (3) \$30k to under \$50k, (4) \$50k to under \$75k, (5) \$75k to under \$100k, (6) \$100k to under \$150k, (7) \$150k or above.

Education:

Education was collapsed into 4 categories to mirror those in the 2016 NBC|SM survey: (1) H.S. or less, (2) Associate's degree/some college, (3) College degree, (4) Graduate degree.

OA 2 Survey Descriptive Statistics

ANES figures are among web respondents only and are weighted accordingly.

Because respondents in the NBC News | SurveyMonkey survey were drawn from a non-probability sample, individuals' responses were weighted to match population parameters (taken from the 2010 American Community Survey) with respect to gender, age, race and ethnicity, education, and geographical region of the U.S.

Frequencies and percentages below reflect appropriate weighting. All descriptive statistics exclude pure Independents, as they were not analyzed as part of this study.

ANES age range is 18-91; NBC | SM age range is 18-100.

Table OA 2.6: Descriptive Statistics for Demographics

	2012 ANES		2016 NBC SM	
	N	% of sample	N	% of sample
Age (in years)	3,222.23	47.89 (mean)	1,632.48	47.32 (mean)
Female	1,536.97	47.65	877.59	52.61
Male	1,718.02	52.35	790.41	47.39
White non-Hispanic	2,332.66	71.24	1,145.77	68.69
Black non-Hispanic	416.663	12.73	205.21	12.30
Other race/ethnicity	524.84	16.03	317.02	19.01
H.S. degree or less	1,252.31	38.51	656.69	39.37
Associate's degree/some college	1,002.22	30.82	521.61	31.27
B.A./B.S. or higher	997.47	30.68	489.70	29.35
< \$15k	766.18	15.45	197.70	11.65
> \$150k	391.06	7.88	122.56	7.22
Liberal	1,311.26	29.60	556.88	26.67
Conservative	1,740.19	39.28	575.93	27.58