Malleability of Political Attitudes Regarding the 2016 Presidential Election

by

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Certificate of Approval

This is to certify that the accompanying thesis by Holly Smith has been accepted in

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Abstract

Previous studies have indicated that there are foundational and cognitive differences between conservatives and liberals. Past research has also indicated that shifts in political attitudes can occur as the result of certain cognitive stimuli, such as mortality salience. We sought to explore the malleable nature of individuals' political affiliation and attitudes by observing the effects of political messages (Anti-Trump and Anti-Clinton advertisements) on their political attitudes. We looked at shifts in political attitudes in the context of American politics and the 2016 presidential election, with our study spanning pre- and post-election. In order to clearly analyze and observe shifts in political attitudes, we worked within the construct of two party political system (conservatives and liberals) and used a three-phase approach. Participants ($n =54$) were given implicit and explicit measures three different times to monitor their potential shifts in political attitudes. Participants were also shown negative valence political ads to potentially create a shift in their political attitudes. Self-reported political affiliation was used to distribute participants into one of three video presentation groups (Anti-Trump, Anti-Clinton, or Control). Results of this study indicated that neither mortality salience nor political advertisements create a shift in political attitudes, whether measured implicitly or explicitly. Findings do, however, suggest that advertisements and mortality salience may shift participants' favorability for candidates--only after the election outcome is known. Future researchers should look into cognitive processes involved in the divided two-party system of American politics.

Keywords: *Liberal, Conservative, political attitudes, mortality salience, negative stimuli, 2016 election*

Malleability of Political Attitudes Regarding the 2016 Presidential Election

The tensions surrounding research on political attitudes reflect the "culture war" taking place in American politics (Haidt & Graham, 2007). This dispute is embodied in interactions such as that between Rick Santorum and John Stewart on *The Daily Show*. After arguing at length over gay marriage, Stewart commented "It is so funny; you know what's so interesting about this is ultimately you end up getting to this point, this crazy stopping point where literally we can't get any further. I don't think you're a bad dude, I don't think I'm a bad dude, but I literally can't convince you" (Haidt & Graham, 2007). Another similar interaction took place during the 2016 presidential campaign with candidate Donald Trump heavily targeting conservative groups by appealing to their need for safety and control, whereas candidate Hillary Clinton focused on the inclusion of all marginalized populations by proposing fair policies to help them. The diverse approaches that each candidate took as well as the inability to come to an agreement on gay marriage highlight the huge political differences within the United States. These differences are in no way new to this generation. Starkly different political opinions have existed since the beginning of our country, as seen through the historical examples of abolitionists and those in favor of slavery, pro and anti-Vietnam War, and civil rights advocates and those supporting segregation. A similar dichotomy exists today in the context of liberals and conservatives.

Interactions and debates such as these illustrate the foundational nature of political attitudes, and also suggest that they have deep psychological roots. It is important to understand why individuals are unwavering in their political attitudes and how those attitudes influence or result from psychological and cognitive processes.

Political attitudes have a long reaching grasp which can influence many aspects of society. All of the social policies are crafted targeting certain political attitudes to assure the approval from those demographics. Knowing where psychological differences lie, and how they arise, is a vital area of research for psychologists. Equally as important is knowing whether or not political attitudes can be shifted and what is able to influence such a foundational aspect of a person's ideology. In order to examine the malleability of political attitudes, we will be working within the context of liberals and conservatives.

Moral and Motivational Foundations

Numerous studies have attempted to answer *why* individuals differ in their political attitudes. Differences between conservatives and liberals stem much deeper than a social label or category. According to Conover and Feldmen (1981), the difference between liberals and conservatives is the acceptance or rejection of symbolic forms of economic, racial, and social issues. The acceptance of capitalism, status quo, and other social control symbols define conservative views. On the other hand, the rejection of capitalism, more humanistic economic policies and more radical views which include marginalized communities are associated with liberal views. Most people differ within their acceptance or rejection of certain symbolic representations, which means that conservatives and liberals are not polar opposites and there can be overlap in their acceptance. Furthermore, a liberal individual can be conservative on certain issues, and vice versa. Overall, the biggest difference between liberals and conservatives revolves around the symbolic representation between "change vs. traditional values" (Conover & Feldmen, 1981). Research has examined an array of other potential differences: personality traits (Caprara, Schwartz, Capanna, Vecchione, & Barbaranelli, 2006), core

values (Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003), motivation and morals (Janoff-Bulman, 2009), physio-cognition (Dodd et al., 2012), neural pathways (Davidson, Ekman, Saron, Senulis, & Friesen, 1990) and even genetics (Settle, Dawes, Christakis, & Fowler, 2010). For the purpose of our study, we will focus on differences associated with motivation and morals.

In the research on motivational foundations, liberals are categorized by an approach motivation, in which they are invested in their group members' welfare and the furtherment of positive societal outcomes (Janoff-Bulman, 2009). Tied into this approach motivation is the Behavioral Activation System (BAS; Gray, 1990), which posits the idea that approach actions and movement towards a goal create a positive outcome. Liberals illustrate this in their openness to change and their focus on social justice. Liberals are more likely to vote on policies that benefit marginalized populations and give fair opportunities to all (Mills et al., 2016). Conservatives, on the other hand, are categorized by an avoidance motivation, in which they seek to protect their group members from harm and prevent negative societal outcomes (Janoff-Bulman, 2009). Conservatives are more likely to vote on policies that punish marginalized communities who are seen as morally lacking (Mills et at., 2016). Unlike liberals, their motivation is associated with the Behavioral Inhibition System (BIS; Gray, 1990). Conservatives' inhibition is associated with aversive actions, through which negative outcomes are avoided. According to Gray (1990), it is through these different motivations and their associated cognitive structure (BAS or BIS) that individuals choose their political candidates and party affiliation.

In addition to motivational differences, there is also strong evidence for moral

differences between conservative and liberal individuals. To analyze these differences

most effectively, researchers have used psychological approaches such as Moral

Foundations Theory (Graham, Haidt & Nosek, 2009; Haidt & Graham, 2007). The Moral

Foundations Theory presents five pairs of psychological foundations derived through

anthropological and evolutionary perspectives. The first two, harm/care and

fairness/reciprocity, are categorized as *individualizing* foundations, suggesting their

importance for the welfare and rights of individuals (Haidt & Graham, 2007). The

foundation of harm/care is illustrated in instances where one responds to human suffering

with compassion, which is embodied in many liberals' rejection of torture.

Fairness/reciprocity is illustrated in situations where reciprocal interactions and one's role

in society have led to individualization and egalitarianism. This foundation emerges in

liberals' insistence of equal pay and employment opportunities for men and women.

The second set of foundations are present in conservatives and contain the *binding*

foundations, which are ingroup/loyalty, authority/respect, and purity/sanctity (Haidt &

Graham, 2007). These binding foundations are important for self-control, duty, and group

integrity. The foundation of ingroup/loyalty is especially salient in times of conflict, and

emphasizes the importance of defense and sacrifice in the name of one's ingroup. This

foundation explains conservatives' unrelenting support of the military and government

spending on national security. The foundation of authority/respect is illustrated in

conservatives' acceptance of hierarchical systems and their trust in authority's ability to

do the right thing. Lastly, the foundation of purity/sanctity refers to one's disgust (as a

social emotion) in response to others' violation of established virtues, exemplified

through conservatives' rejection of homosexuality**.** Using the Moral Foundations Theory,

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Graham and colleagues (2009) examined how moral decisions varied across political parties through the Moral Foundation Questionnaire. The Moral Foundation Questionnaire focuses on the use of scenarios and objective statements to obtain political attitudes (Graham et al., 2009). These researchers found that liberals were most likely to uphold and apply the foundations of harm/care and fairness/reciprocity while conservatives, on the other hand, upheld and applied all five foundations equally.

Another way that researchers measure differences in political ideology between conservatives and liberals is through the Wilson-Patterson Inventory (WPI; Wilson & Patterson, 1968). The WPI is used to measure political ideology by asking policy based questions consisting of controversial topics such as abortion and immigration (Mills et al., 2016; Tritt, Peterson, Page-Gould, & Inzlicht, 2016). Instead of focusing on the moral imperatives between conservatives and liberals, the WPI focuses on policies which target motivational variables. Conservative people score higher on the WPI than liberal people do. The higher conservative scores refer to the higher outrage and indignity felt by the respondents towards the controversial topics. Policies and punishment for crimes are also influenced by political ideologies, with conservatives leaning towards harsher punishments due to a violation of their dignity (Okimoto & Gromet, 2015). Outrage and indignity felt by conservative leaning individuals stem from the combined negative affective response and motivated reaction felt towards the outgroup (Okimoto & Gromet, 2015). Affective responses refer to the positive or negative feelings elicited by the outgroup while motivated reaction refers to the behavioral response elicited by the outgroup (Okimoto & Gromet, 2015).

Many researchers and social scientists have taken these findings and made

assumptions about the moral standing of conservatives and liberals-- specifically that conservatives are more accepting of inequality and resist positive change (Jost et al., 2003). These conclusions must be monitored because not only do they lead to self-righteousness and contempt in some liberals, they also distract researchers from productive and objective scientific research. With the large body of research on political attitudes, it is important to establish that one political party is not better than the other, and researchers are not attempting to prove anything of the sort. In fact, each political group bases itself upon moral motivations devoted to the needs and interests of their entire group (Janoff-Bulman, 2009). Research surrounding physio-cognitive differences between liberals and conservatives suggests that these individuals may merely experience and understand the world differently (Dodd et al., 2012).

Negative Stimuli

Variations in responses to valenced stimuli (negative, neutral, and positive) are also related to political ideology (Mills et al., 2016). Stronger responses to negative stimuli, as opposed to positive, have been found in people with more conservative ideologies (Mills et al., 2016). Memory, which is linked to attention, can in turn be affected by the enhanced focus on negative stimuli. Mills et al. (2016) found this link when participants had a significantly higher correct recall response to negative valence and highly arousing pictures. The bias towards negative valence pictures or stimuli increased with participants' level of conservatism as measured by the attendance in memory (Mills et al., 2016). In terms of the content of the negative stimuli, Mills et al. (2016) showed four different subtypes of negative stimuli, which were prelabeled with varying levels of arousal: spiders, snakes, animals and human. The spider and snake

subgroups consisted of spiders and snakes, respectively. The animal stimuli consisted of pictures depicting animal abuse, while the human stimuli consisted of human rights violations. There were, however, no significant differences between negative subtype and political ideology. Higher memory recall for negative stimuli, regardless of subtype content, was still linked to conservatism. Mills et al. (2016) posited a possible conclusion regarding the effect of arousal on cognitive ability and conservatism. His conclusion states that higher arousal interferes with cognitive processes by favoring low effort thinking, akin to trusting your gut. This is similar to Eidelman, Crandall, Goodman, and Blanchar's (2012) conclusion that low effort thinking promotes conservatism.

Negative stimuli are linked to conservatism (Mills et al., 2016), and any deviance from the norm, which is negative, would also be linked to conservatism. In order to remove the emotions, which can influence how a stimulus is viewed within a political context, Okimoto & Gromet (2015) used non descriptive stimuli (shapes) to measure how sensitivity to deviance is related to political ideology. By using shapes, which hold no political content, sensitivity to deviance can be measured with no confounding variables affecting how the stimulus is viewed. The removal of social constraints which influence perception revealed the cognitive differences between conservative and liberal individuals by implicitly obtaining their political ideology.

Conservatives' sensitivity to deviance is high in regards to the outgroup (Okimoto & Gromet, 2015). However, deviancy in ambiguous shapes or ambiguous moral conundrums reveal the real differences between conservative and liberal ideologies (Okimoto & Gromet, 2015). Conservative people tend to view deviation from the norm more negatively, while liberals are more forgiving towards differences. Intolerance or

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tolerance only holds true in morally ambiguous situations where there is no clear answer between right and wrong. Sensitivity to deviance is especially noticeable when choosing social policies, as more conservative people tend to vote on harsher policies that punish marginalized communities such as immigrants or low income people (Okimoto & Gromet, 2015). There is no distinction in tolerance, however, when it comes to clearly deviant groups such as criminals. Both parties view the clearly deviant individual as worthy of punishment.

Shifts in Political Attitudes

Because conservatives are particularly sensitive to these aspects of deviancy, negative political advertisements emphasizing deviancy may be one especially effective form of shifting conservatives' political attitudes. The use of negative political advertisements, or "attack ads", is perhaps the most well-known and explicit form of creating a shift in political attitudes. Negative political advertisements provide concrete and vivid candidate information (such as performance, appearance, and stance on policy), and are more effective than other forms of advertising that are less explicit in nature (Garramone, Atkin, Pinkleton, & Cole, 1990). Researchers examining the effectiveness of political advertisements (both negative and positive) found that participants recall of information from negative ads was more accurate than that from positive ads (Basil, Schooler, Reeves, & Biocca, 1991; Kahn & Kenney, 2000). Lau (1985) credited these ads' effectiveness to the negativity effect, which posits that individuals lend greater importance to negative information than equally possible positive information. Additionally, individuals tend to view forms of negative information as more credible than forms of positive information (Hamilton & Zanna, 1972).

One aspect of these negative political ads is gender, which played an important role in the 2016 presidential election. Researchers found that gender factors into participants' level of attentiveness and the value they place on information garnered from negative political ads (Dinzes, Cozzens, Manross, 1994). The 2016 presidential election was the first election to have two candidates of the opposite gender vying for the presidency. The gender of the candidates is important in political ads (especially negative political ads) since there is a rejection of gender roles and expectations, specifically when it comes to female candidates (Dinzes, Cozzens, & Manross, 1994). Women, who are seen as docile and noncompetitive, break gender expectations in negative ads when they "attack" male candidates. This rejection of gender expectations is not seen in same sex negative political ads since women who attack each other (or men who attack each other) are seen as normal, thus there is no rejection of gender expectations to attend to. People who watched negative political ads with same gender candidates were less attentive seeing as gender expectations were not broken (Dinzes, Cozzens, & Manross, 1994). In negative political ads with opposite gender candidates, however, participants were more attentive and placed higher value on the information viewed (Dinzes, Cozzens, & Manross, 1994). Building upon the strong influence of negative content, the presentation of negative advertisements with candidates of opposite genders may be especially persuasive for those watching.

Whereas negative political advertisements are explicit influencers of political attitudes, many researchers have chosen to focus on shifting political attitudes implicitly through underlying cognitive processes. A study by Eidelman and colleagues (2012) explored the malleable nature of political attitudes through four unique studies.

Interestingly, Eidelman et al. (2012) examined the influence of cognitive interruption on political attitudes. For example, their first study centered around intoxication as a mechanism for cognitive interference, in which they found that as participants' blood alcohol level increased so did their levels of political conservatism. The researchers measured conservatism through participants' agreement with statements containing conservative policies. Similar results were found for the remaining three studies. These studies incorporated cognitive load through the completion of a simultaneous cognitive task, time constraint as a cognitive stressor while endorsing political statements, and the endorsement of political terms in either a cursory or thoughtful manner. The collective results from Eidelman et al.'s (2012) four studies suggest that low effort thought promotes conservatism. Studies such as these imply that when a depletion of cognitive resources takes place, individuals are forced to rely on easier, or automatic thinking. This psychological response and its link to conservatism is supported by the binding moral foundations discussed earlier. For example, a conservative who values the authority/respect foundation will not question or critically examine their authority's decisions, but instead will accept them at face value and spend cognitive resources elsewhere. It is therefore inaccurate to conclude that conservatives rely on low effort thought, more so, they choose to disengage from effortful thinking on political topics.

Along with cognitive load, conservatism has been established as a response to certain threatening stimuli. Mortality salience, or the idea that one's death is inevitable, has been found to increase differences between conservatives and liberals by tapping into the moral foundations of each group (Bassett, Van Tongeren, Green, Sonntag, & Kilpatrick, 2015). Mortality salience is closely linked to Terror Management Theory

(Greenberg, Pyszczynski, & Solomon, 1986), which posits that individuals are motivated to defend their cultural belief system when confronted with the inevitability of their own death. In these situations, conservatives consistently exhibit higher levels of death anxiety (Bassett et al., 2015). Taking into account conservatives' moral and motivational foundations, such as avoidance, intolerance of uncertainty and fear of threat, these findings are not surprising. Mortality salience also has the powerful effect of shifting political attitudes, specifically towards conservatism (Bassett et al., 2015).

This psychological phenomenon has been documented in American politics when danger was especially salient (Janoff-Bulman, 2009). For example, when thoughts of death or threats to national security (such as 9/11) were experimentally presented, participants, regardless of their identification as liberal or conservative, were more likely to show support for a conservative candidate (Landau et al., 2004). Other studies have supported these findings in the context of specific elections, such as the presidential election between George W. Bush and Senator John Kerry (Cohen, Ogilvie, Solomon, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski, 2005). After asking participants' voting intentions for the 2004 election, Cohen and colleagues (2005) found that the control group was in overwhelming support of Kerry, whereas the group who was reminded of their mortality was significantly in support of Bush. Researchers have also examined this shift in the context of a cognitive coping mechanism (Bonanno & Jost, 2006). Bonanno and Jost (2006) followed proximal survivors of 9/11 for 18 months and found that their shifts towards conservatism were in many ways disadvantageous. They found that a shift towards conservatism failed to promote healthy long-term adaption or gratification and actually promoted feelings of vengeance and militaristic solutions. This research

regarding circumstances of fear and threat indicate the importance of evaluating the differences and even possible benefits of certain political attitudes.

Current Study

With the current "culture war" raging in American politics, it is important to study the psychological foundations of these political attitudes. In the current study, we examined shifts in political attitudes in the context of American politics and the 2016 presidential election. In order to clearly analyze and observe shifts in political attitudes, we worked within the construct of a two party political system (that of conservatives and liberals). Based on previous research that conservative individuals are more attentive to negative stimuli (Mills et al., 2016), the current study used the presentation of negative political ads as a classic method of shifting political attitudes (Lau, Sigelman, Heldman, & Babbitt, 1999). Participants in this study completed three phases over the span of a month, during which we recorded their political attitudes (explicit and implicit), exposed them to negative valence political ads, and increased their mortality salience.

We predict that these ads will have differential effects. According to research on negative stimuli and its link to conservatism, we hypothesize that the negative advertisements will produce a greater shift in political attitudes amongst conservatives (more so than liberals) in the direction that the advertisement intended. Additionally, due to extensive research on the effectiveness of negative political advertisements (Basil et al., 1991; Garramone et al., 1990; Kahn & Kenney, 2000; Lau et al., 1999), we hypothesize that each video presentation will convince participants in the way that it was intended; the Anti-Trump videos will make participants more liberal while Anti-Clinton videos will make participants more conservative. Additionally, we hypothesized that

mortality salience will create a shift towards conservatism for all participants, regardless of their political attitudes. Finally, since we will be measuring these attitudes pre- and post-election, we hypothesize that overall favorability of the president elect will rise once the outcome of the election is known. We examined these effects in the context of a major presidential election, specifically one which focused heavily on negative content (such as immigration, national security, and bigotry).

Although we are building upon a broad collection of past research, the current study adds to an emerging body of literature that focuses on individuals' political attitudes before and after a presidential election. Our study is unique in that political attitudes, candidate favorability, and mortality salience were measured before *and* after an election outcome was known. This research is important because the results may help determine whether people will stubbornly defend their political affiliation despite the outcome or whether an election's outcome can provoke change in a person's favorability for the new president. In the context of this controversial election, these issues are more salient than ever.

Method

Participants

Eighty-eight participants from a small liberal arts college in the Pacific Northwest were recruited through the use of email listservs, word of mouth, and by advertising in Intro to Psychology classes as well as other psychology classes. Participants were within the 18-25 age range, with a mean age of 19. Both male ($n= 28$), female ($n= 58$), and gender nonconforming ($n=1$) participants were included, as well as members of any ethnic group (Caucasian: 67.6%; Latino: 10.3%; Asian American: 10.3 %; Multiethnic:

7.4%; Native American, Alaska Native: 2.9%; Middle Eastern American: 1.5%) who

self-selected to participate. Participation in this study was completely optional, and

participants self-selected by clicking on the provided link to access the study if they were

interested. Out of the total eighty-seven (87) initial participants who completed the first

phase, fifty-four (54) completed the second phase and sixty-six (66) completed the third

phase. The numbers of women in the three phases were n= 58, 39, and 48 respectively;

for gender nonconforming the numbers were n= 1, 1, and 1 respectively; and for men the

numbers were n= 28, 15, and 19. Participants received some modest compensation and

they were entered in a raffle for a $25 gift card for the restaurant of their choice. The

more stages completed by the participants, three stages in total, the more raffle tickets

they earned. Some participants also obtained extra credit in certain psychology classes as

decided by their professor.

Design

   In order to test our hypotheses, we created a three-phase design. The first phase

was an online survey created through Qualtrics and included questions from multiple

questionnaires. The second phase included an in-person presentation, as well as a

physical packet of questionnaires. The in-person presentation consisted of exposure to

one of three different videos (Anti-Clinton, Anti-Trump, or a Control of car ads).

Participants were assigned to the video groups in Phase II based on their self-reported

political affiliation in Phase I, so that the distribution of affiliations was similar across the

video groups, as was the overall number of participants in each group. The third and final

phase was similar to the first phase, with an online survey including questions from

multiple questionnaires. A short debrief was given out after the first two phases with a

full debrief at the end of the final phase.

Measures

Throughout the three phases, a number of measures were employed. Some of these were included in all of the phases, while others were only used in the second and third phase. The individual measures are described in the paragraphs below. Complete versions of each measure can be found in Appendices A-H. *Figure 1* outlines which measures were used in each phase and the order in which they were presented.

Phase I	Phase II	Phase III
1. Political Attitudes Scale 2. Shape Stimuli Scale 3. Political Demographics Questions	1. Fear of Death Scale 2. Content Questions 3. Political Attitudes Scale 4. Shape Stimuli Scale 5. Political Demographics Questions	1. Fear of Death Scale 2. Political Attitudes Scale 3. Shape Stimuli Scale 4. Political Demographics Questions

Figure 1. Content and order of Scales used for the three phases.

Political Attitudes Scale (PAS). We developed our explicit measure, the Political Attitudes Scale (PAS) from the Moral Foundation Questionnaire by Graham et al. (MFQ; 2009) and the Wilson-Patterson Inventory (WPI, 1968). The PAS consisted of 20 statements with 10 items taken from the MFQ and 10 items taken from the WPI. Questions from the MFQ were geared towards moral foundations while the WPI focused on social policy issues. Questions were derived from both conservative and liberal moral foundations and policies. Responses to the questions were indicated through a 5-point Likert scale with *1= Strongly Disagree* and *5= Strongly Agree*. Questions from this measure included questions such as "*When the government makes laws, the number one principle should be ensuring that everyone is treated fairly*" and "*The government should*

increase military spending" (see Appendix A). We found an average (across the three phases) Cronbach's alpha of .81, displaying good reliability.

Shape Stimuli Scale (SSS). The implicit measure, Shape Stimuli Scale (SSS) was derived from Okimoto and Gromet (2015), who measured sensitivity to deviance through the use of perfect and ambiguously imperfect shapes. Each question presented a perfect or imperfect shape and asked participants to indicate whether it was a member of a particular shape category. Shapes used included squares, circles, triangles, ovals, and distortions of these. The scale consisted of 15 questions using a 5-point Likert scale with *5= Definitely Not* and *1= Definitely Yes*. Sensitivity to deviancy was used to measure implicit political attitudes as Okimoto and Gromet (2015) found a strong link between sensitivity to deviancy and conservatism (see Appendix B). We found an average Cronbach's alpha of .81, demonstrating good reliability.

Fear of Death Scale (FOD). The Fear of Death scale (FOD) measured death anxiety by making mortality salient in a series of statements (Collett-Lester, 1969). There are 3 subsections within the scale: Your Own Death, Your Own Dying, Death of Others. Each subsection consists of 5 statements that participants responded to using a 5-point Likert scale with *5= Extremely Anxious* and *1= Not At All Anxious*. For example, participants were asked "How anxious does each statement make you?" where statements included, "*The shortness of life*" and "*Dying young*" (see Appendix C). We found an average Cronbach's alpha of .91, displaying good reliability.

Political Demographic Questions. The Political Demographic Questions consisted of several questions explicitly asking about the participants' political attitudes. These questions were "*Who are you planning on voting for?*" (Trump, Clinton, Stein, or

Johnson) and "*How would you categorize your political affiliation?*" (Conservative,

Moderate Leaning Conservative, Moderate, Moderate Leaning Liberal, or Liberal).

Participants were also asked to indicate "*Candidate favorability*" for both Hillary Clinton

and Donald Trump using a sliding scale for each with *1= least favorable* and *10= most*

favorable (see Appendix D & E).

Video Materials

Two negative valence political advertisement presentations and one neutral

advertisement presentation were shown in Phase II, each to a different group of

participants. The advertisements used were Anti-Trump, Anti-Clinton, or car

commercials either shown on TV or accessible through the internet. The video

presentations consisted of negative valence content where one presidential candidate

showed how the other candidate was unfit for the presidency. In the Anti-Trump

presentation, Clinton highlighted the ways Trump was demeaning towards different

demographics including veterans, women, and disabled people. Similarly, in the Anti-

Clinton presentation, Trump highlighted the ways in which Clinton was unfit for the

presidency, focusing especially on instances of her dishonesty. The car ads were the

neutral control group and thus did not contain any political content. Each video

presentation was approximately 2 minutes in total with a combination of three different

commercial ads spliced together. Links to the videos used are provided in Appendix F.

Video content questions. After each video was presented, three questions were

asked to determine whether participants were paying attention to the video. The questions

were about the subject of the video as well as its content. Sample questions included

"*Who was the subject of the videos?*", "*What arguments were made?*" and "*What was the*

most persuasive pitch?". The questions were assessed as pass or fail. If the participants failed all three questions, then their data for Phase II was eliminated (see Appendix G & H).

Procedure

Individuals choosing to participate in response to recruitment emails accessed the initial survey through a provided Qualtrics link. After reading through the consent form and answering demographics, participants completed the measures for Phase I (refer to *Figure 1.*). Subjects then read a debrief and exited the study. This phase lasted around 15 minutes. Phase I took place during the last two weeks of October, prior to the 2016 election day.

For the second phase of our study, participants who had completed Phase I were assigned to one of three groups according to which video material they were to be shown: Anti-Trump, Anti-Clinton, and a Control group (car ads). Their group assignment was randomly assigned within their self-reported political affiliation on the initial online survey. Participants were assigned categorically in such a way that political affiliation was dispersed evenly amongst the three video groups. Participants were emailed confidentially as to their group assignment for the second phase and given a choice of different times to come to an academic building classroom for Phase II.

Participants arrived at the classroom and were asked to sit where they could see the screen clearly. They were then shown one of the three video presentations, and immediately after were given the packet of measures for Phase II (refer to *Figure 1*). Participants wrote their name on a cover sheet so that their responses could be linked to their Phase I data. The cover sheet was subsequently shredded once the participant's data

was entered. After participants finished and turned in their packet, they were thanked and given a short debrief. This phase lasted around 30 minutes. Phase II took place over a week at the beginning of November, putting it a week after Phase I, but still prior to the 2016 election day.

For Phase III of our study, participants who had completed either Phase I only or both Phases I and II received an online follow up email that led them to our final survey on Qualtrics. This follow up email was sent about a week after the 2016 election day, when the presidential election results were known. Upon completion of the measures for Phase III (refer to *Figure 1*), they were thanked for completing the study and given a complete debrief. This phase lasted around 15 minutes.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Describing the initial state of our participants is important because it lays out the foundation to better understand the results found. Although we had many participants in Phase I, only fifty-four participants completed all three phases of our study. It is therefore important to highlight that the data used and further analyses include only those participants who completed all three phases (n= 54).

The participants in Phase I were fairly liberal with twenty-four participants self-identifying as Liberal, 19 self-identifying as Moderate Leaning Liberal, 4 self-identifying as Moderate, 4 self-identifying as Moderate Leaning Conservative, and 3 self-identifying as Conservative. We conducted a paired sample t-test for Phase I, on participant's favorability of Clinton (M=6.55, SD= 2.61) vs. Trump (M= 2.42, SD=2.31). Favorability was much greater for Clinton than Trump, $t(32)$=5.25, $p<.0001$.

In order to analyze any potential shift in political attitudes, as well as the effect of the negative advertisements, we first had to establish that the groups were equivalent (Anti-Clinton, Anti-Trump, and Control). A one-way ANOVA was used to determine any significant differences between the groups in terms of self-reported political affiliation. We found there were no significant differences in groups for Phase II, $F(2, 52)= .50$, $p =.61$. As with self-reported political affiliation, we ran a one-way ANOVA to determine if there were differences of gender between our groups. We found that there were no significant differences in gender between the three groups, $F(2, 54)=.03$, $p=.97$. Although there were many more women in our study than men, the proportion of the two genders was similar amongst the groups.

Principle Analyses

In order to analyze potential change in participants' political attitudes due to the videos they saw and/or the time vis-a-vis the election, we first computed final summary scores for the PAS and the SSS for each participant and each phase. An average score was calculated for answers to the PAS, in which lower scores represented more conservative attitudes. Answers to the SSS were computed by finding each participant's average for answers on perfect shape questions and then subtracting that average from their average answers to imperfect shape questions (imperfect average-perfect average). The resulting scores represented participants' sensitivity to deviance, where higher scores suggested higher sensitivity. For scores on the FOD, answers were summed together in which high scores suggested high levels of fear of death.

Political Attitude. A mixed effect 3 (Phase: I, II, III) X 3 (group: Control, Anti-Trump, Anti-Clinton) ANOVA was conducted on PAS scores to assess whether the

political ads and time in relation to the election altered the participants' political attitudes. There was no significant main effect of phase, $F(2, 102) = .79$, $p = .46$, nor a significant main effect of group, $F(2, 51) = 1.07$, $p = .35$. There was no group by phase interaction $F(4, 102) = .48$, $p = .75$, such that participants' political attitudes did not change depending on group nor on phase. Means and standard deviations are shown in Table 1.

Shapes Stimuli. A mixed effect 3 (Phase: I, II, III) X 3 (group: Control, Anti-Trump, Anti-Clinton) ANOVA was conducted on SSS scores to assess whether the political ads and time in relation to the election altered the participants' sensitivity to deviance. There was no significant main effect of phase, $F(2, 102) = 2.298$, $p = .11$, nor a significant main effect of group, $F(2, 51) = .502$, $p = .61$. There was no group by phase interaction $F(4, 102) = 1.310$, $p = .27$ such that participants' sensitivity to deviance did not change depending on group nor on phase. Means and standard deviations are shown in Table 2.

Fear of Death. A mixed effect 2 (Phase: II, III) X 3 (group: Control, Anti-Trump, Anti-Clinton) ANOVA was conducted on FOD scores to assess whether the political ads and time in relation to the election altered the participants' anxiety towards the inevitability of their death. There was no significant main effect of phase, $F(1, 51) = .009$, $p = .93$, nor a significant main effect of group, $F(2, 51) = .424$, $p = .66$. There was no group by phase interaction, $F(2, 51) = .159$, $p = .85$ such that participants' anxiety towards the inevitability of their death did not change depending on group nor on phase. Means and standard deviations are given in Table 3.

Favorability of Clinton. A mixed effect 3 (Phase: I, II, III) X 3 (group: Control, Anti-Trump, Anti-Clinton) ANOVA was conducted on favorability of Clinton to see if

political ads and time in relation to the election changed the participants' favorability

rating for Hillary Clinton. There was not a significant main effect of group, $F(2, 50) =$

.687, $p= .51$. There was, however, a significant main effect of phase, $F(2, 100) = 3.22$,

$p<.05$. Pairwise comparisons revealed that Phase III showed significantly greater

favorability of Clinton ($p =.012$) than Phase II. This main effect of phase is qualified by a

significant group by phase interaction, $F(4, 100) = 2.851$, $p< .05$, such that for the

Control and Anti-Trump group, but not the Anti-Clinton group, favorability of Clinton

rose on Phase III (see Figure 2 below). Post hoc comparisons using 95% confidence

intervals showed that within the Control group, favorability of Clinton was significantly

greater in Phase III than in Phase II at the .05 level. These comparisons also revealed that

within Phase III, favorability of Clinton was significantly higher in the Control group

than in the Anti-Clinton group at the .05 level. Means and standard deviations are shown

in Table 4.
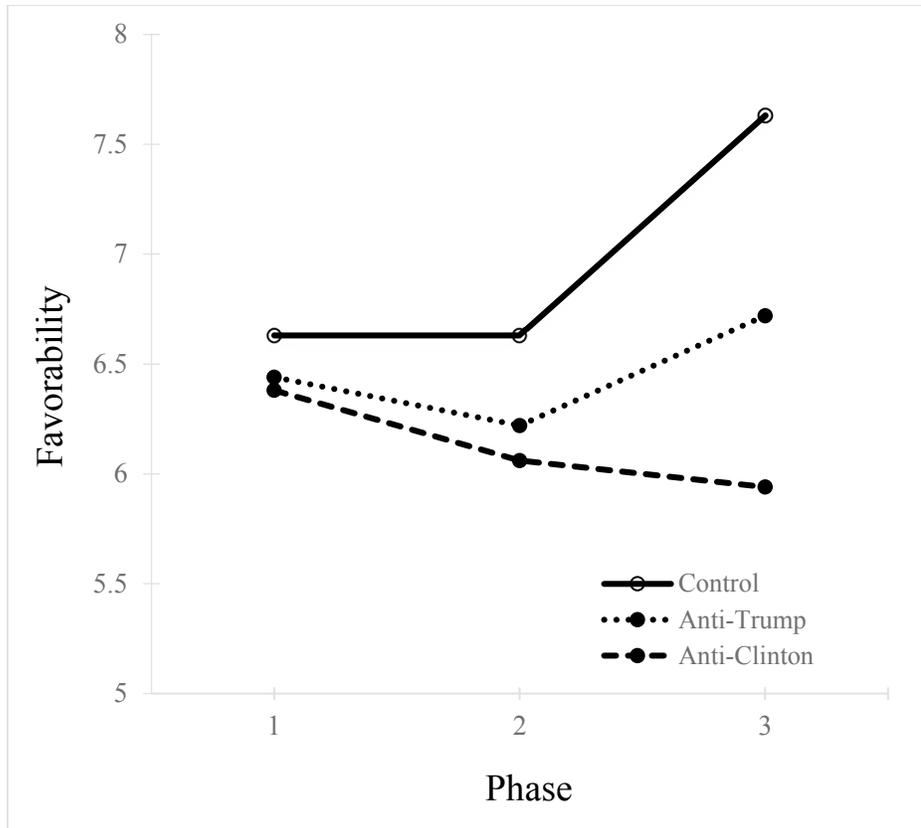
Figure 2. Favorability of Clinton Across All Phases and Groups. Favorability ranged from 1-10.

Favorability of Trump. A mixed effect 3 (Phase: I, II, III) X 3 (group: Control, Anti-Trump, Anti-Clinton) ANOVA was conducted on favorability of Trump to see if political ads and time in relation to the election altered the participants' favorability rating for Trump. There was no significant main effect of phase, $F(2, 52) = .116$, $p= .89$, nor a significant main effect of group, $F(2, 26) = .448$, $p= .64$. There was no group by phase interaction, $F(4, 52) = .276$, $p= .89$ such that favorability of Trump did not change depending on either group or phase. This finding was compromised by the limited sample size for Trump ratings (see Discussion below). Means and standard deviations are shown in Table 5.

In addition to examining the interactions between phases and groups, we sought

to examine the potential correlations between implicit and explicit measures of political affiliation. Looking across phases, scores on the FOD were significantly correlated across phases ($r = .78$, $p = .01$), as were scores on the SSS (Phase I to II: $r = .78$, $p = .01$; Phase II to III: $r = .67$, $p = .01$; Phase I to III: $r = .84$, $p = .01$) and on the PAS (Phase I to II: $r = .91$, $p = .01$; Phase II to III: $r = .93$, $p = .01$; Phase I to III: $r = .91$, $p = .01$).

As expected, we also found a strong relationship between scores on the PAS and answers to the self-reported political affiliation in the Political Demographics Questions. For Phase I, PAS scores and self-reported political affiliation had a significant negative correlation ($r = -.80$, $p = .01$) as well as in Phase II ($r = -.78$, $p = .01$) and Phase III ($r = -.79$, $p = .01$), suggesting that when self-reported political affiliation is high, PAS scores are low (both of which signify high conservatism). Contrary to our expectations and prior research, responses to the SSS were not significantly correlated with self-reported political affiliation in Phase I ($r = -.10$, $p = .23$), Phase II ($r = -.09$, $p = .26$), or Phase III ($r = -.05$, $p = .36$). Interestingly, responses to the SSS were significantly correlated to responses on the PAS in Phase II ($r = .25$, $p = .03$), but in the opposite direction from our prediction. Further analysis with two tailed consideration revealed that this correlation was not, in fact, significant.

Discussion

Little psychological research has been done regarding political attitudes during a major election in the United States. The current study is the first, to our knowledge, to analyze political attitudes before and after election day. The purpose of our study was to influence participants' political attitudes through exposure to multiple forms of stimuli and observe any resulting shift from this exposure. Results did not support our hypothesis

that political advertisements would influence participants' political attitudes, as there were no group differences in political attitudes in Phase II or Phase III. Results also did not support our hypothesis that mortality salience would shift all participants' political attitudes towards conservatism, seen through a lack of conservative shift in the phases where the Fear of Death Scale was presented. Lastly, our results did not support our hypothesis that the outcome of the election would shift political attitudes. We did, however, find a shift in how participants viewed candidates, as seen in an increase in favorability of Clinton in Phase III for both the Anti-Trump and Control groups. Favorability in the Anti-Clinton group, however, remained the same, suggesting that the advertisements did have an effect in conjunction with the election results.

Prior research has shown the effectiveness of negative political advertisements, especially those that address scandal or harshly point out fault in political opponents (Lau et al., 1999). The strong influence of these advertisements is due to individuals' greater attentiveness to and trust in negative information (Basil et al., 1991; Kahn & Kenney, 2001; Lau, 1985). Past research has also shown that attention to negative stimuli and one's ability to recall and identify it is significantly correlated with political affiliation (Mills et al., 2016; Okimoto & Gromet, 2015). The current study took advantage of the strikingly negative content in these political advertisements to act as both a negative stimulus and a political influencer. Contrary to past research, however, we did not find a significant effect of negative advertisements on participants' self-reported political affiliation or Political Attitude Scale scores. Additionally, we were unable to address our first hypothesis that advertisements (negative stimuli) would influence conservative participants' political attitudes more so than liberal participants in the direction the videos

intended. Very few participants self-identified as conservative and this number limited our ability to make comparisons or see change. Although Mills et al. (2016) found that accurate recollection of negative stimuli was strongly correlated to conservatism, we hoped to fill a gap in the research relating to the influence of negative stimuli on conservatives.

The current study also included the use of negative stimuli through imperfect and perfect shapes, created by Okimoto and Gromet (2015). Contrary to their findings, we did not see a significant correlation between political attitudes and levels of sensitivity across all three phases. Although conservatives' high sensitivity to deviance has been established in the field (Feldman & Stenner, 1997), our findings did not support Okimoto and Gromet's (2015) claim that the shapes task could help identify sensitivity to deviancy and thus conservatism. Contrary to their findings, however, we found a significant positive correlation between the Shape Stimuli Scale and PAS on Phase II, suggesting that as sensitivity to deviance increases, political attitude increases (and thusly becomes more liberal). Despite the lack of correlation between the SSS and other measures of our study, it did show good reliability and future research should build on Okimoto and Gromet's (2015) creation of implicit measures of political attitude.

Researchers in this field have relied on scales such as the MFQ (2009) and WPI (1968) to more accurately assess participants' political attitudes and beliefs. These scales show differences between conservatives and liberals by targeting their values and morals. As expected, there was a significant correlation between scores on the PAS and self-reported political affiliation. This suggests that the PAS is an accurate identifier of individuals' self-labelled political affiliation. A known influencer of scores on the PAS,

and even self-reported affiliation, is mortality salience (Bassett et al., 2015; Janoff-Bulman, 2009; Landau et al., 2004). Numerous researchers have utilized the FOD to both determine conservatism and increase conservatism (Landau et al., 2004; Bassett et al., 2015). Contrary to our hypothesis that mortality salience would create a shift towards conservatism in all participants, we did not find a significant effect related to presenting FOD. Additionally, there was no correlation between scores on FOD and the PAS. Despite its high reliability, the FOD did not have the desired effect on political attitudes that was expected. These findings could be explained by the abstract nature of the questions asked on the FOD. Past literature has referenced events such as the terrorist attacks on 9/11, which shifted even liberal individuals to identify as conservative (Bonanno & Jost, 2006; Cohen et al., 2005). Knowing this, participants may have experienced little to no mortality salience from a collection of death related statements that did not put them in a fearful situation. Lastly, our sample of participants were predominantly in their teens, which may have lessened the effectiveness of the FOD due to adolescents' egocentrism and unrealistic feelings of invulnerability (Elkind, 1967).

The current study was unique in many ways because it revolved around a major presidential election between prominent and controversial social and political figures. Because of the prominence of these two political candidates, and the possible effects of our study on participants' perceptions of these candidates, favorability of both Clinton and Trump was asked about in each phase. Although we cannot claim that the advertisements had a direct effect on participants' views of the political candidates, we did find a significant interaction of group across phases, in which favorability of Clinton increased on Phase III for both the Anti-Trump and Control conditions, but decreased for

the Anti-Clinton group. This finding suggests that although the generally liberal sample did increase their sympathy for Clinton post-election, for the Anti-Clinton group, this effect was countered by the Anti-Clinton ads they saw during Phase II. This means that if the ads had an effect, it was predominantly latent in nature or in combination with the results of the election. Additionally, the role of gender in negative political advertisements (Dinzes, Cozzens, & Manross, 1994) could have increased the value placed on the information in the Anti-Trump ads, which in turn increased favorability for Clinton. Lastly, the increase of favorability found in the Control can be explained by our starting sample of very liberal participants.

Limitations and Future Directions

The conclusions that have been drawn from the findings are limited by several factors in the study. The participants that were included in the study were fairly homogeneous; the participants were recruited from a small liberal arts college in the Pacific Northwest which serves a very specific group of students. Only 11 out of the 54 participants self-identified as conservative, and this label included moderate and moderate, leaning conservative participants. Due to the relatively low number of conservative participants, the generalizability of the study is questionable. In future studies, a wider pool of participants with a more diverse population that adequately reflected the general population would be ideal. This would not only include self-reported political affiliation but also age, gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic diversity. Additionally, studies looking at shifts in political attitudes would benefit the most by using moderate or undecided participants, who are more susceptible to change in political attitude. Because of the liberal atmosphere at the college where we recruited participants,

most participants had a fixed liberal political attitude that was not susceptible to change.

There were several limitations to the design of the study. When the favorability rating questions for Clinton and Trump were administered online on Qualtrics, there was a drastic decrease in responses for Trump favorability ratings in the first and third phase regardless of group placement. We believe that this discrepancy was due to the favorability rating scale being a sliding scale initially set to 1, the lowest possible rating, which participants did not move when choosing a favorability rating for Trump. It is possible that due to most of the participants being liberal or liberal leaning, they may not have moved the scale since it was already on the lowest possible rating. This limitation would be addressed in future studies to correct the decrease in responses for Trump's favorability ratings.

Another limitation to the design of the study was the briefness of the political ads shown with each video presentation, which lasted around 2 minutes. At the time of design, a shorter presentation was chosen in order to keep Phase II around 30 minutes. While still effective, a longer exposure time should be discussed in order to fully capture the effects of the negative stimuli in the political ads. In connection with the length of the videos, the production and overall appearance of the videos should also be examined. The Anti-Trump video was a professionally made video by the Clinton campaign which effectively conveyed their point. The only Anti-Clinton videos found, however, were collections of news media clips with shoddy voice overs. In future studies, more similar videos should be used to limit dismissal of content due to their amateur appearance.

Despite the previously mentioned limitations, we found that the biggest limitation of all was the political atmosphere and exposure that the participants had prior to the

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study. Due to the controversial nature of this election and the overwhelming coverage on each candidate, it is hard to separate the influence of our advertisements from what participants experienced prior to or during our study. Extreme dislike of both Trump and Clinton, the contentious nature of this specific election, and the extreme polarization of the public all influenced how the candidates were viewed as well as how political affiliation was expressed. It would be interesting to see how our results would compare to results of future elections that were not as scandalous nor as polarized as the 2016 presidential election.

Other future directions that we would like to see for this topic include further research on gender (in regards to Clinton's campaign) and authoritarianism. Additionally, it would be interesting to examine Trump's actual presidential term to measure any shifts in political affiliation and favorability. Gender played such a huge role in the 2016 presidential election with Hillary Clinton being the first woman nominated to either of the prominent political parties. Hillary Clinton had a 12-point margin on Trump when it came to women who voted for her (Tyson & Maniam, 2016). We had a very limited pool of participants consisting mostly of females, which does not represent the larger population in terms of gender differences. Adding an authoritarianism component to future studies would also be beneficial due to the strong correlation between conservatism and authoritarianism (Duckitt, Bizumic, Krauss, & Heled, 2010). Manipulating authoritarianism could potentially lead to a shift in political attitude. Furthermore, exploring the political attitudes of our participants two years into Trump's presidency and comparing it to their political affiliation before and after the election could prove a potential shift. Additionally, measuring people's self-reported political

affiliation, favorability, and implicit and explicit political attitudes both currently and two years into Trump's presidency would add more information to an already complex and ever evolving political era.

Implications

In a political time where the two main political parties (Democrats and Republicans) are polarized and heavily criticized, being aware of the psychological processes that go into the formation of political attitudes is imperative. Previous literature, as well as our findings, show a link between psychological processes and political affiliation (Caprara et al., 2006; Dodd et al., 2012; Janoff-Bulman, 2009; Jost et al., 2003). Although these political attitudes may develop over an entire lifetime of social and cultural influences, both psychological research and events in history have shown that political attitudes are, in fact, malleable. Awareness of these psychological processes may prove beneficial when addressing the divide between liberals and conservatives. Although we did not find significant results for Fear of Death, it is important to address Donald Trump's overwhelming use of negative content to induce and encourage fear in an already fearful country. By highlighting the potential risk factors of immigrants and refugees and of our supposedly insecure borders, we believe Trump psychologically primed the American public towards a more conservative political affiliation. Studies like ours and other similar research allows the public to reflect on the state of our country and how political figures can influence our political attitudes implicitly.

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Table 1

Political Attitude Scale Descriptive Statistics

Group	Phase 1 M (SD)	Phase 2 M (SD)	Phase 3 M (SD)
Control	3.80 (.42)	3.75 (.56)	3.83 (.57)
Trump	3.73 (.31)	3.73 (.36)	3.73 (.44)
Clinton	3.52 (.56)	3.55 (.68)	3.58 (.72)

Note. The Political Attitude Scale ranged from 1-5, with higher scores being more sensitive to deviance.

Table 2

Shape Stimuli Scale Descriptive Statistics

	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
Group	*M* (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)
Control	2.38 (.93)	2.52 (.95)	2.48 (1.08)
Trump	2.48 (.77)	2.93 (.83)	2.74 (.98)
Clinton	2.52 (.92)	2.49 (.81)	2.48 (.94)

Note. The Shape Stimuli Scale ranged from 1-5, with higher scores being more sensitive to deviance.

Table 3

Fear of Death Scale Descriptive Statistics

	Phase 2	Phase 3
Group	*M* (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)
Control	50.26 (11.38)	50.63 (12.99)
Trump	51.33 (8.55)	50.61 (10.15)
Clinton	47.53 (11.33)	48.18 (13.15)

Note. The Fear of Death Scale ranged from 1-75, with higher scores having higher anxiety towards death.

Table 4

Favorability of Clinton Descriptive Statistics

Group	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
	M (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)
Control	6.63 (2.06)	6.63 (2.22)	7.63 (1.74)
Trump	6.44 (2.41)	6.22 (1.59)	6.72 (2.08)
Clinton	6.38 (2.83)	6.06 (2.59)	5.94 (2.82)

Note. Favorability ratings ranged from 1-10, with 10 being most favorable.

Table 5

Favorability of Trump Descriptive Statistics

Group	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
	M (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)
Control	2.08 (1.85)	2.15 (1.77)	2.23 (1.74)
Trump	3.20 (3.35)	2.80 (2.17)	2.80 (1.92)
Clinton	2.91 (2.66)	2.91 (2.51)	3.00 (2.97)

Note. Favorability ratings ranged from 1-10, with 10 being most favorable.

Appendix A

Directions: Please read the following statements and indicate (circle your answer) the extent to which you personally agree, on a scale of 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Understand that you may skip any of the following questions, or end the survey at any point.

1. **There are some cases in which it is necessary to kill another human being.**

1=*Strongly disagree*　　2=*Disagree*　　3=*Neither Agree Nor Disagree*　　4=*Agree*
5=*Strongly agree*

2. **Gun rights should be protected in this country.**

1=*Strongly disagree*　　2=*Disagree*　　3=*Neither Agree Nor Disagree*　　4=*Agree*
5=*Strongly agree*

3. **When the government makes laws, the number one principle should be ensuring that everyone is treated fairly.**

1=*Strongly disagree*　　2=*Disagree*　　3=*Neither Agree Nor Disagree*　　4=*Agree*
5=*Strongly agree*

4. **Torture is necessary in regards to terrorists and suspects of terrorism.**

1=*Strongly disagree*　　2=*Disagree*　　3=*Neither Agree Nor Disagree*　　4=*Agree*
5=*Strongly agree*

5. **A woman should have a right to have an abortion.**

1=*Strongly disagree*　　2=*Disagree*　　3=*Neither Agree Nor Disagree*　　4=*Agree*
5=*Strongly agree*

6. **Abstinence-only sex education should be banned.**

1=*Strongly disagree*　　2=*Disagree*　　3=*Neither Agree Nor Disagree*　　4=*Agree*
5=*Strongly agree*

7. **The government should decrease welfare funding.**

1=*Strongly disagree*　　2=*Disagree*　　3=*Neither Agree Nor Disagree*　　4=*Agree*
5=*Strongly agree*

8. **Justice is not always the most important requirement for a society.**

1=*Strongly disagree*   2=*Disagree*   3=*Neither Agree Nor Disagree*   4=*Agree*
5=*Strongly agree*

9. **The government should help other countries by providing foreign aid.**

1=*Strongly disagree*   2=*Disagree*   3=*Neither Agree Nor Disagree*   4=*Agree*
5=*Strongly agree*

10. **I am proud of my country's history.**

1=*Strongly disagree*   2=*Disagree*   3=*Neither Agree Nor Disagree*   4=*Agree*
5=*Strongly agree*

11. **If I were a soldier and disagreed with my commanding officer's orders, I would obey anyway because that is my duty.**

1=*Strongly disagree*   2=*Disagree*   3=*Neither Agree Nor Disagree*   4=*Agree*
5=*Strongly agree*

12. **I think there's nothing wrong with the fact that some individuals inherit a lot of money while others do not.**

1=*Strongly disagree*   2=*Disagree*   3=*Neither Agree Nor Disagree*   4=*Agree*
5=*Strongly agree*

13. **The death penalty is an acceptable form of punishment for criminals.**

1=*Strongly disagree*   2=*Disagree*   3=*Neither Agree Nor Disagree*   4=*Agree*
5=*Strongly agree*

14. **The government should increase military spending.**

1=*Strongly disagree*   2=*Disagree*   3=*Neither Agree Nor Disagree*   4=*Agree*
5=*Strongly agree*

15. **Gay marriage shouldn't be legal.**

1=*Strongly disagree*   2=*Disagree*   3=*Neither Agree Nor Disagree*   4=*Agree*
5=*Strongly agree*

16. Everyone has a right to higher education.

1=*Strongly disagree*   2=*Disagree*   3=*Neither Agree Nor Disagree*   4=*Agree*
5=*Strongly agree*

17. Respect for authority is something all people need to learn.

1=*Strongly disagree*   2=*Disagree*   3=*Neither Agree Nor Disagree*   4=*Agree*
5=*Strongly agree*

18. Even if an act is unnatural, it doesn't mean it's wrong.

1=*Strongly disagree*   2=*Disagree*   3=*Neither Agree Nor Disagree*   4=*Agree*
5=*Strongly agree*

19. Men and women each have different roles to play in society.

1=*Strongly disagree*   2=*Disagree*   3=*Neither Agree Nor Disagree*   4=*Agree*
5=*Strongly agree*

20. Illegal immigrants shouldn't be punished.

1=*Strongly disagree*   2=*Disagree*   3=*Neither Agree Nor Disagree*   4=*Agree*
5=*Strongly agree*

Appendix B

Please use the following scale to indicate (circle answer) what shape is being shown. You may skip any of the following questions, or end the survey at any point.

1. Is this a circle?

1=*definitely not*   2=*possibly not*   3=*undecided*   4=*possibly yes*

5=*definitely yes*

2. Is this a triangle?

1=*definitely not*   2=*possibly not*   3=*undecided*   4=*possibly yes*

5=*definitely yes*

3. Is this a square?

1=*definitely not*   2=*possibly not*   3=*undecided*   4=*possibly yes*

5=*definitely yes*

4. Is this a rectangle?

1=definitely not　　　*2=possibly not*　　　*3=undecided*　　　*4=possibly yes*

5=definitely yes

5.　Is this a circle?

1=definitely not　　　*2=possibly not*　　　*3=undecided*　　　*4=possibly yes*

5=definitely yes

6.　Is this an oval?

1=definitely not　　　*2=possibly not*　　　*3=undecided*　　　*4=possibly yes*

5=definitely yes

7.　Is this a square?

1=definitely not　　　*2=possibly not*　　　*3=undecided*　　　*4=possibly yes*

5=definitely yes

8.　Is this a triangle?

1=definitely not　　　*2=possibly not*　　　*3=undecided*　　　*4=possibly yes*

5=definitely yes

9. Is this a rectangle?

1=*definitely not* 2=*possibly not* 3=*undecided* 4=*possibly yes*

5=*definitely yes*

10. Is this an oval?

1=*definitely not* 2=*possibly not* 3=*undecided* 4=*possibly yes*

5=*definitely yes*

11. Is this a square?

1=*definitely not* 2=*possibly not* 3=*undecided* 4=*possibly yes*

5=*definitely yes*

12. Is this a rectangle?

1=*definitely not* 2=*possibly not* 3=*undecided* 4=*possibly yes*

5=*definitely yes*

13. Is this an oval?

1=*definitely not*   2=*possibly not*   3=*undecided*   4=*possibly yes*

5=*definitely yes*

14. Is this a triangle?

1=*definitely not*   2=*possibly not*   3=*undecided*   4=*possibly yes*

5=*definitely yes*

15. Is this a circle?

1=*definitely not*   2=*possibly not*   3=*undecided*   4=*possibly yes*

5=*definitely yes*

Appendix C

How disturbed or made anxious are you by the following aspects of death and dying? Read each item and answer it quickly. Don't spend too much time thinking about your response. We want your first impression of how you think right now. Circle the number that best represents your feeling. You may skip any of the following statements, or end the survey at any point.

Your Own Death
   1. The total isolation of death

5=*Extremely anxious*   4=*Very anxious* 3=*Somewhat anxious* 2=*Slightly anxious*
1=*Not At All anxious*

   2. The shortness of life
5=*Extremely anxious*   4=*Very anxious* 3=*Somewhat anxious* 2=*Slightly anxious*
1=*Not At All anxious*

   3. Missing out on so much after you die
5=*Extremely anxious*   4=*Very anxious* 3=*Somewhat anxious* 2=*Slightly anxious*
1=*Not At All anxious*

   4. Dying young
5=*Extremely anxious*   4=*Very anxious* 3=*Somewhat anxious* 2=*Slightly anxious*
1=*Not At All anxious*

   5. How will it feel to be dead
5=*Extremely anxious*   4=*Very anxious* 3=*Somewhat anxious* 2=*Slightly anxious*
1=*Not At All anxious*

Your Own Dying

   1. The physical degeneration involved
5=*Extremely anxious*   4=*Very anxious* 3=*Somewhat anxious* 2=*Slightly anxious*
1=*Not At All anxious*

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2. The pain involved in dying

5=Extremely anxious   4=Very anxious   3=Somewhat anxious   2=Slightly anxious
1=Not At All anxious

3. The intellectual degeneration of old age

5=Extremely anxious   4=Very anxious   3=Somewhat anxious   2=Slightly anxious
1=Not At All anxious

4. That your abilities will be limited as you lay dying

5=Extremely anxious   4=Very anxious   3=Somewhat anxious   2=Slightly anxious
1=Not At All anxious

5. The uncertainty as to how bravely you will face the process of dying

5=Extremely anxious   4=Very anxious   3=Somewhat anxious   2=Slightly anxious
1=Not At All anxious

The Death of Others
1. Losing someone close to you

5=Extremely anxious   4=Very anxious   3=Somewhat anxious   2=Slightly anxious
1=Not At All anxious

2. Having to see the person's dead body

5=Extremely anxious   4=Very anxious   3=Somewhat anxious   2=Slightly anxious
1=Not At All anxious

3. Never being able to communicate with the person again

5=Extremely anxious   4=Very anxious   3=Somewhat anxious   2=Slightly anxious
1=Not At All anxious

4. Regret over not being nicer to the person when he/she was alive

5=*Extremely anxious*   4=*Very anxious*   3=*Somewhat anxious*   2=*Slightly anxious*
1=*Not At All anxious*

5.   Growing old alone without the person

5=*Extremely anxious*   4=*Very anxious*   3=*Somewhat anxious*   2=*Slightly anxious*
1=*Not At All anxious*

Appendix D

Please answer the following demographic questions, either by filling in the blank or by circling your answer. You can skip a question if you do not feel comfortable answering. You can end the survey at any time.

What is your age?

_____

What is your gender?

1=*Female*, 2=*Male*, 3=*Gender nonconforming*

How would you categorize your political affiliation?

1=*Liberal*,   2=*Moderate, Leaning Liberal*,   3=*Moderate*,   4= *Moderate, Leaning*

Conservative,   5=*Conservative*

Who do you plan to vote for?

1=*Hillary Clinton*,   2=*Donald Trump*,   3=*Jill Stein*,   4=*Gary Johnson*,   5=*Don't*

plan on voting/Not eligible to vote

Rate the following candidates on a scale of 1-10, with 1 being the least favorable and 10 being the most favorable.

What is your favorability rating for Donald Trump?

Least favorable 1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10 Most

favorable

What is your favorability rating for Hillary Clinton?

Least favorable 1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10 Most

favorable

Appendix E

Please answer the following demographic questions. You can skip a question if you do not feel comfortable answering a question. You can end the survey at any time.

How would you categorize your political affiliation?

1=*Liberal*,   2=*Moderate, Leaning Liberal*,   3=*Moderate*,   4= *Moderate, Leaning*

Conservative,   5=*Conservative*

Who did you vote for?

1=*Hillary Clinton*,   2=*Donald Trump*,   3=*Jill Stein*,   4=*Gary Johnson*,   5=*Don't plan*

on voting/Not eligible to vote

Rate the following candidates on a scale of 1-10, with 1 being the least favorable and 10 being the most favorable.

What is your favorability rating for Donald Trump?

Least favorable 1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10 Most

favorable

What is your favorability rating for Hillary Clinton?

Least favorable 1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10 Most

favorable

Appendix F

For access to the videos we used in our second phase, please use the following link (**https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/0B9TOml1WweAKYm5rNDNPOFBXNWc?usp=sharing**) or contact the author Holly Smith at holly.anna.smith@gmail.com.

Appendix G

Please answer the following questions in a sentence or two to the best of your ability. You can skip any question at any time or end this questionnaire.

1. Who was the subject of these videos?

2. What arguments were made?

3. What was the most convincing argument, in your opinion?

Appendix H

Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability. You can skip any question at any time or end this questionnaire.

1. What was the subject of these videos?

2. What was the most persuasive selling pitch?

3. Which one was your favorite ad?