5th Political Science & Political economy Conference Titles and Abstracts

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Biased Partisan Processing of Factual Information: Testing the Role of Monetary and Social Incentives" (with Ben Lyons and Jason Reifler)

Abstract: Why do people often process factual political information in a biased fashion? An increasingly popular explanation is that of partisan motivated reasoning, whereby people's partisan political identities motivate them to process novel information in a manner consistent with prior political views. We explore the scope conditions of this dynamic through two survey experiments in the US. First, we test the limits of motivated learning, by asking respondents to evaluate the effectiveness of a hypothetical policy change – banning concealed handguns – while varying the incentives for a correct answer (a monetary reward or not), and varying the complexity, or difficulty of understanding, the data given (frequencies or percentages). Second, we estimate the extend of partisan cheerleading that occurs when evaluating social reality, by informing respondents that their performance on a series of factual questions might be compared, or they might need to justify their answers, to either co-partisans or non-partisans. We then determine the relative effectiveness of monetary and social incentives on shaping partisan factual bias when processing and reporting political information, which has broader implications for our understanding of the social context underlying political polarization and partisan conflict.

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