All of the People, All of the Time: An Analysis of Public Reaction to the Use of Deception by Political Elites

Dissertation

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Abstract

Despite the public’s uniformly dismal assessment of politicians’ honesty, they *react* by punishing some offences and seemingly ignoring others. I use data from multiple survey experiments as well as an examination of electoral polling data to show that public reaction to accusations of deception against politicians is guided by the principle of expectancy violations. I find that when deception is expected, it does not draw cognitive focus from members of the public, thereby causing the public to punish only lies they find unusual. In this way, a reputation as a liar may produce a sort of inoculation effect: that is, the fact that a politician is often accused of lying may contribute to public tolerance of them continuing to do so.
Dedication

To my family, for their unfailing love and support. Bless you.
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Vita

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Chapter 1: Introduction

You can fool all the people some of the time and some of the people all the time, but you cannot fool all the people all the time.

Attributed to Abraham Lincoln.

Motivation

Donald Trump’s recent presidential campaign has featured what amounts to an all-out assault on the truth. As of this writing, over 70% of his campaign statements were found to be false by the popular fact-checking website Politifact (34% received the colorful rating “Pants on Fire”). His campaign rhetoric was selected, in its totality, as their 2015 “Lie of the Year”. Other fact-checking organizations such as the Washington Post Fact Checker and Factcheck.org also gave Trump dismal marks. This trend continued even into his term in office — one of the first major interactions the Trump White House had with the press involved an argument about the relative sizes of the crowds present for President Trump and former President Obama’s inaugurations. This argument resulted in the Trump administration coining the phrase ‘alternative facts’. As the Sydney Morning Herald put it, Trump’s rhetoric features a ‘firehose of falsehoods’.

Lying is nothing new in politics, of course — most past presidents have a few dishonest marks on their records. What is unusual about Trump, however, is that despite the diligent work done by the media in calling him to account, none of these condemnations seem to impact his standing with his supporters. Indeed, during his race for the nomination, the “teflon” metaphor formerly used for Ronald Reagan was briefly revived for “Teflon Don”.

Trump’s rise to the nomination was fascinating, and has kicked off a minor boom in political scholarship: (For examples, see: Abramowitz, 2016; Campbell, 2016; Dowdle et al., 2016; Erikson and Wlezien, 2016; Graefe et al., 2016; Holbrook, 2016; Jerôme and Jerôme-Speziari, 2016; Lewis-Beck and Tien, 2016; Lockerbie, 2016; MacWilliams, 2016; Norpoth, 2016; Stewart, Eubanks and Miller, 2016). As interesting as he is, however, Trump is merely an example of a larger research problem that political scientists seem currently ill-equipped to solve. Why is it that some allegations of deceit seem to spark public outrage and destroy political careers, while others seem to roll off the public’s back without attracting any attention whatsoever? In the broadest possible terms, what factors determine when and how members of the public update their evaluations of a politician that has been accused of lying?

Lying has long been a subject of study in political science, and much excellent research has been done on topics as diverse as the effectiveness of treatments at discouraging its use among politicians to specific surveys of its prevalence in political advertising (For examples, see: Callander and Wilkie, 2007; Cliffe, Ramsay and Bartlett, 2000; Corazzini et al., 2014; Davis and Ferrantino, 1996; Mearsheimer, 2011; Cobb, Nyhan and Reifler, 2013; Winneg et al., 2014). Deception has been characterized in the literature as everything from a cancer that will eventually destroy democracy to a vital component of its continued survival. Yet study of how the public responds when informed of political deception has not proceeded apace. Problems of endogeneity have hampered the ability of political scholars to address this question, forcing an
over-reliance on received wisdom. When it comes, for example, to forecasting the elec-
toral impact of an allegation of falsehood (so prevalent in the 2016 election), political
scientists often seem only marginally more able to make a data-based prediction than
political pundits.

A History Of Political Lying

Famously, George Washington could not tell a lie. Except, of course, that the entire
story about Washington, the cherry tree, and the axe is itself a lie — concocted by
Parson Weems, whose fictional stories about Washington form the basis of so many
of America’s myths about the man.\(^2\)

That story is widely known, and its falsehood is almost as well known. It is
tempting to take this as a confirmation that nothing has changed: the same politicians
that brought slanderous accusations against each other in Rome were doing so in the
early United States and continue to do so today. It is easy to be cynical — to assume
lying in politics is an invariable constant.

That assumption misses some important insights, however. Yes, lying has been a
feature of American politics since the beginning: No one, aside from those incredibly
devoted to Weems-style heroic myths, could argue otherwise. The very first polit-

\(^2\)It would, of course, be ironic were a book on lies resort to them in order to make its point. The
above example is, for the purposes of an example in this book, much like the story about the first
President Bush being amazed by a supermarket scanner: regardless of the actual facts, the story is
simply too good not to be true. In actual fact, the truth of the Washington cherry-tree myth is in
dispute. Parson Weems paid no attention to the truth of his stories: the man was far more interested
in feeding on the nation’s hero-worship of Washington by getting his collection published shortly
after Washington’s death than in doing anything time-consuming like checking his facts. Woodrow
Wilson is often credited with being the first historian to dispute the story of the cherry tree, causing
the story to be removed from textbooks (or merely followed with a quick debunking note) and
lowering the popularity of cherry pie being served on Presidents’ day. However, just because Weems
had no particular love for the truth does not mean that he necessarily invented his tale, and recent
historians have suggested that the story might actually be true. The interesting thing to note here,
however, is the pattern of the public’s beliefs. Early on, the story was accepted without any question
as to its veracity. Yet, as American culture changed, the falsehood of the original story became a
popular fable of its own — and one that was accepted equally without question. This pattern will
be returned to later on.
ical campaigns, between America’s first set of political parties, brought about false advertisements equal to anything produced today.

However, while the lies being told might be the same, the public’s reaction has not remained constant. Wise (1973) for example, describes citizens in the past as being “aghast” at the idea that the President would lie to them. McDermott (2001) describes the reaction of the American public to Khrushchev’s revelation of evidence that President Eisenhower had lied about conducting aerial surveillance of the Soviet Union as “outrage”, and cites scathing editorials that accuse Eisenhower of “bad administration and bad decisionmaking” and “betraying the principles of Washington.” In the modern day, however, major party candidates for the Presidency lie routinely and relatively openly, as most major fact-checking organizations will attest. Indeed, Donald Trump was notable throughout the 2016 campaign for the fact that his approval ratings seemed to rise without the slightest regard for the fact that, as Greenberg (N.d.) puts it, “the brazenness and frequency of the falsehoods, and their evident expedience, [...] set Trump apart.”

This raises multiples questions: why has the public’s opinion of their politicians has changed so markedly over time? Why are so many Americans ready to swear that politicians are intrinsically dishonest? Why do today’s Americans trust Congress less than they do used car salesmen (Honesty/Ethics in Professions, 2014), while their counterparts from further ago would likely find such an accusation slanderous or unpatriotic?

Most important to explain, however, is the variation in public reaction to political deception. If Americans today seem so certain that their politicians cannot be trusted, then why on earth is it the case that modern Americans seem so apathetic, on the whole, when their leaders lie to them? What explains when a deceitful politician should expect to fear an outraged public, and when they can relax in anticipation of public apathy?
Historical Context

America has had its fair share of political lies over the years, and the lies American politicians tell often seem to be simple repetitions. Jefferson, for example, was one of the first American politicians to hire a “hatchet man” to win an election. The hatchet man spread the rumor that Jefferson’s opponent, Adams wanted war with France — a claim that was entirely untrue and thoroughly effective, as the public gave the election to Jefferson. \(^3\) Things were different then, however: Jefferson’s hatchet man was forced to serve jail time for slander. The parallels continue: Obama was accused of being a secret Muslim — Jefferson was accused of being a secret atheist, Jackson a secret cannibal, and Adams of being a “spiritual hermaphrodite”.

Nor are the similarities limited to the lies that tend to crop up when election season rolls around. Lies told by sitting public officials also tend to follow patterns of repetition. The Bush administration is widely held to have misled everyone on the presence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq (Fisher, 2013). Jumping back in history, the Gulf of Tonkin incident was fabricated almost out of whole cloth so that Johnson could have a suitable excuse for war with Vietnam (Cherwitz, 1978). President James K. Polk, in 1846, would have found nothing new in either of those stories: he was busy telling Congress about a Mexican invasion of the United States. There was none — the conflict had occurred in disputed territory — but he got his war declaration anyway (Haynes, 2006).

In other words, the lies that politicians tell — at least in American politics — seem to be timeless. No strict and reliable quantitative comparison between early and modern American politics is possible, of course. This research will cover the difficulties inherent in the study of deception in more detail, but some points can made here. There are, for example, no databases of political lies to which one can

\(^3\)In a manner reminiscent of the famous Daisy ad, in which Johnson accused his opponent Goldwater of precipitating nuclear war.
turn. In addition, of course, there are the difficulties inherent in getting accurate records from early American history: there do not exist complete records of political speech that researchers so take for granted today. However, as was shown above, the *types* of lies that are told do not seem to have changed. Politicians still attack one another during campaign season, mislead the public as to what is in their best interest, and manipulate events to suit their own purposes. Nor does it seem to be the case that the prevalence of lying has increased — at least insofar as limited data lets us estimate. Instead, crucially, fears over an increased rate of lying in politics may be being driven by the increased visibility of political lies, as technological revolutions in media distribution and the founding of watchdog groups make learning when a politician has lied far more likely (Graves and Glaisyer, 2012).

It might seem entirely correct, therefore, to dismiss the current concern over the supposed recent rise of lying in politics. Lying is, truly, an old problem.

Dismissing the problem in this manner, however, misses out on the essential point. The style and amount of political lying may not have changed significantly over the years, but the *visibility* of lying, and the public’s *reaction* to it, certainly has.

**Modern Day**

The modern American citizen, as has been mentioned before, has on average dismal beliefs about the honesty of their elected officials. Dishonesty is taken to be a part of the stereotype of ‘politician’ (Clark and Fiske, 2014; Sanbonmatsu, 2003). Not only that, but Members of Congress rank not only below used car salesmen, but also below other stereotypically dishonest professions (such as lawyers, advertisers, telemarketers and CEO’s) (Gallup, Dec. 7, 2016).

The increased notability and visibility of political deception brought about by the modern media environment presents the public with a seemingly limitless supply
of liars awaiting their judgement. In the past few years, for example, citizens have been presented with lies from every level of government from the President (Politifact judged President Obama’s ‘keep your plan’ statement their 2013 Lie of the Year) down to local mayors (such as Milwaukee mayor Barret’s feud with Scott Walker)\(^4\). Both political parties have engaged in lies, though Republican politicians and politicians from primarily red states seem to be more likely to engage in such behavior (Bucciol and Zarri, 2013).\(^5\) Accusations of lying have been presented to the public on almost every subject imaginable, from major domestic policies such as healthcare reform to whether or not Donald Trump sold steaks.

The question, then, is how the public chooses to react to this onslaught of opportunities for judgement. In some cases, the entire American public reacts negatively to a single lie. In other cases, the reaction is group-limited — only Democrats or only Republicans, or some other subset of the public, react. And in some cases, seemingly the most common, the public does not react at all.

### Purpose and Scope

This, then is the purpose of my research: What explains the variation in the way that American citizens update their evaluations of politicians when information about said politicians’ dishonesty is revealed?

Sometimes, the public seems to view deception as hardly consequential at all. For an example of this, see Clinton’s cover-up of his extramarital affair, which hardly affected his popularity in the polls. On the other hand, some politicians have had their career ruined by dishonesty in office (Nixon, for example). Nor is public reaction

\(^4\)The 2012 Wisconsin recall election prompted a ‘Wisconsin Air War’, as it was dubbed. Issues as small scale as municipal regulations on deer rifles became the subject of controversy and claims of deception from both sides.

\(^5\)It should be noted that is not intended as an authoritative statement. Bucciol and Zarri (2013), by the nature of their data, are unable to make use of random sampling, and therefore firm statistical conclusions as to the relative honesty of the two parties are unavailable.
simple enough that it can be broken down into a simple binary: deception reactions will often differ based on independent variables: the public will regularly split along partisan lines in reaction to some deception, for example. Reactions also vary in severity: some lies seem to blow over in a week while others haunt their teller forever afterward.

In other words, there seems to be variation both between periods of history (in that the average negative response seems to have been much harsher in the past than in the modern day), and variation within the modern context (as some lies still clearly harm their tellers, while most others do not). The field of political science, then, needs some mechanism that can explain both differences in modern reactions and account for the over-time shift as well.

Almost all members of the American public will say, when asked, that they think politicians are dishonest. They will also almost always say that dishonesty in politics is a negative, and one that they are concerned about. They will claim that they would harshly judge a dishonest candidate. Given that this is not the manner in which the public actually behaves (in the same way that the public does not vote at nearly the rate at which it claims that it does), under what circumstances should researchers expect the public to actually punish a lying politician?

The Role of Expectations

There are, of course, a huge number of potential explanations and variables for the varying patterns of public reactions detailed above. Factors such as partisanship, severity, issue salience, audience sophistication, and the like would all seem to potentially play a role in determining whether or not a lie meets with condemnation. These are often pointed to when conventional wisdom is (necessarily) drawn upon to provide an explanation for a particular deception event.
I draw upon what has been called the “cognitive revolution” in political psychology — as Lodge and Taber (2013) put it, a “revolution in thinking about thinking” — to offer an explanation. Previous explanations of how individuals react to notifications of political lying have overlooked the assumption of uniform updating. That is, most models of how people react to accusations of deception model the intake of new information as a definite occurrence. Once an accusation is lodged it is assumed that those who view it will pay attention to its content and decide to update their in-memory evaluations of the politician accordingly. In literature that assumes that a deception accusation will lead to punishment, the assumption is that this will produce negative updating. Literature that assumes that voters value things other than honesty assume that voters intake this new information and add it to their evaluations of the politician in question, but simply place no actual weight upon it. If a single-issue voter only cares about gun policy, for example, then the news that their senator has been accused of dishonesty is unlikely to produce a reaction. The assumption, however, is still that the voter in this case took in and processed the information in question. Thus, when an accusation does not produce an effect on its viewers, it is assumed that they made the decision not to update their views for some reason.

Relaxing this assumption, however, allows me to offer an explanation that matches observed patterns of events and to have been largely overlooked when explanations for this variation are sought. Following (Marcus, Neuman and MacKuen, 2000), I argue that voters do not process new information about the honesty of their leaders uniformly, but do so using different modes of cognitive processing based on a monitoring system. When new information deviates from previously formed expectations, attention and cognitive resources are shifted to that information, interrupting normal low-effort, low-attention processing. I refer to incidences of subjects being presented with information that is in-congruent with their expectations as ‘expectancy violations’.
In short, I argue that people’s reaction to accusations of political deception is guided by their previous expectations of the deceiver. If stories about accused being a deceiver were expected, due to reputation, previous actions, belief in conspiracy, or any other reason, then the lie will not cause subjects to update their evaluations. If the accusation was unexpected, however, such as a politician believed to be scrupulously honest telling a lie, then subjects will be far more likely to react, to pay attention to the message, and to factor that accusation into their evaluations of the subject.

A Model Of The Deception Reaction Process

The first step towards a new theory of deception reactions is to outline how deception is conceptualized in this research. Consider the general sequence of events that occurs when a member of the public reacts to political deception.

First, a politician makes some sort of political statement. While it is most common to think of this as the stereotypical campaign speech or national address, this need not necessarily be the case. The only requirement that the statement has for inclusion into this research is that it be made in a forum that is media-accessible, so that it can be transmitted to the public.

Next, individuals get judgments of that statement’s veracity through the media. These media reports can be thought of as conveying two main pieces of information (presented visually in Figure 1): first, they assert that there is some true point \( P \), representing an accurate statement of the facts. What this true point is assumed to be may vary greatly by the media outlet in question and the subjectivity of the facts in the case at hand. In some cases, as in most fact-checking stories, this case may be made explicitly. In other cases, the fact that the audience knows and agrees with the location of point \( P \) is simply assumed: for example, during the 2016 election, the issue of climate change was raised due to claims from Trump that global warming was a China-backed hoax. Many sources that reported this as a deception
by Trump did not bother to explicitly make the case that global warming was real.

Second, the media reports make the case that the politician has reported some alternate version of the facts $P'$ that diverges from reality. In the above-given example of Trump and climate change, the true point $P$ assumed by the media report would be a statement along the lines of “Climate change is an observable fact.”. The alternate account of reality reported by the accused politician, or $P'$, would in this case be “Climate change is a hoax by the Chinese government.”.

Whether or not the politician is accused of deception, then, is based on the gap between $P$ and $P'$. If $P'$ is identical or very close to $P$, the politician is referred to as “honest”. If $P'$ is within some narrow range of $P$ then the politician is generally referred to as making “half-true” or “misleading” statements or being an “exaggerator”. If $P$ and $P'$ wildly diverge, the politician is labeled as a “liar”. What descriptions are properly matched with which gap sizes is a matter of some variability and debate between different media outlets.
**Mediated Reality**

You may notice that nowhere is the *actual* truth or falsehood of a statement a factor in the above model. Instead, this model — and this research — relies entirely on media accusations of deception, rather than attempting to determine whether the politician was truly deceptive or not. This may seem problematic. While there is plenty of research optimistic about the impartiality of the media in general (For example, see: D’Alessio and Allen, 2000) and of fact-checking initiatives in particular (See: Graves, 2016), it is still the case that the media is by no means perfect (Uscinski and Butler, 2013). It could easily be the case that a deceitful statement is ignored or an accusation of deception lodged where none is warranted. Partisan or ideological news outlets may fail to locate both $P$ and/or $P'$ at locations that correspond to their real-world values, either due to intentional distortion, cognitive biases, or some combination of the two. Given a potential gap between reality and media reports of the same, then, it is important to focus theoretically on the media’s accusations.

As Walter Lippmann wrote,

“The only feeling that anyone can have about an event he does not experience is the feeling aroused by his mental image of that event. That is why, until we know what others think they know, we cannot truly understand their acts. [...] For it is clear enough that under certain conditions men respond as powerfully to fictions as they do to realities, and that in many cases they help to create the very fictions to which they respond. [...] [This] is the insertion between man and his environment of a pseudo-environment. To that pseudo-environment his behavior is a response. But because it is behavior, the consequences, if they are acts, operate not in the pseudo-environment where the behavior is stimulated, but in the real environment where action eventuates.”
Lippmann referred to this divide between reality and the perception thereof as the pseudo-environment, or a man-made representation of reality — the reality observed by the public, as opposed to the reality “on the ground”. He gives the example of coverage of the great French military commander General Joffre. When reporters wanted to photograph the general’s command office, they were disturbed by the office’s appearance — specifically, the lack of maps. In order to make the office look more impressive for public consumption, maps were brought in and spread around. The general was photographed in the now more appealing room, and then his desk was returned to its actual working condition once the reporters left.

The point of this story is that despite the fact that Joffre’s command post featured no maps, the version of the the his office in the mental images of millions of French citizens — that is, the pseudo-real version of his office — did. If a scientific researcher were to be, for some obscure reason, interested in the study of public reactions to military command posts, they would have to design their research to be based upon a version of Joffre’s quarters that included maps, as that was the stimulus presented to the public. The fact that his actual office was map-less would have had no effect on the public’s perception of it.

In the same manner, when engaged in the study of the public’s reaction to deception, the actual truth or falsehood of a statement is, perhaps somewhat counter-intuitively, of little interest. Lippmann summarized the difficulties inherent in citizens attempting to follow politics by saying “The world that we have to deal with politically is out of reach, out of sight, out of mind.” As Nimmo and Combs put it, “Few people learn about politics through direct experience; for most persons political realities are mediated through mass and group communication.” (Nimmo, 1990).

In the case of deception, the typical citizen seldom directly ascertains the truth or falsehood of a politician’s statement personally. Take the example of Jon Kyl and Planned Parenthood funding, for example. On April 8, 2011, Senator Jon Kyl of Ari-
zona stated on the floor of the Senate that abortions accounted for 90% of Planned Parenthood’s activities. This statement sparked some controversy when it was later revealed that the actual figure was closer to 3%. An aide for Kyl explained that the senator’s words had “not been meant as a factual statement”, inspiring mockery in political media.\textsuperscript{6} When Kyl stated that well over 90% of Planned Parenthood’s activities were abortions, citizens were not able to check the details of that story on their own. Very few people were in any sort of position to check on the finances of Planned Parenthood directly, instead relying on media reports on their finances. These media reports were, in turn, themselves based on a report prepared by Planned Parenthood. Nor were citizens themselves able to directly observe Kyl’s statement. Even though video of the statement was recorded and accompanied most of the stories about the Kyl event, subjects still weren’t generally able to view the rest of Kyl’s statements for context and the like. Thus, even when direct video is available, therefore, subjects have to trust that the narrow slice that has been selected and presented to them is properly representative of the true state of affairs.

Thus, since actual dishonesty is (for the most part) unobservable, and since scholarly interest is (necessarily) centered upon the public reactions, only reported dishonesty is of substantive interest to this project.\textsuperscript{7}

\section*{Expectancy Violations}

The idea of expectancy violations is not a new concept. The fact that humans are novelty-seeking and react differently to unexpected information has been discovered many times in multiple related fields, such as communications, psychology, and neu-

\textsuperscript{6}Kyl’s approval ratings suffered only a slight, temporary decline after the inaccuracy of his words was made public.

\textsuperscript{7}In most cases, assuming that the media does a reasonable job of providing a faithful representation of reality, this distinction will be of little importance. However, it is essential to keep in mind, especially when considering the later chapters of this work, that the operative variable is accusations of deception and not actual deception events. The latter would require a host of assumptions, such judgements of the truth or falsehood of each case considered, that I do not make here.
roscience (In fact, I borrow the term *expectancy violation* from the communications literature, where it was originally used to study how interpersonal norms affected message receptivity). Indeed, as McDaniel and Geraci point out, the concept has been in practical use for over 3000 years (Hunt and Worthen, 2006).

The basic idea behind most expectancy violation research focuses on the strength of psychological arousal subjects exhibit in response to various stimuli as a function of the distinctiveness of the stimuli — the degree to which it was surprising, novel, or bizarre. In other words, people react more strongly to events that violate their normative expectations as to what ‘should’ have occurred.

As an example, consider a route that you take on a regular basis — say, your daily walk to work. Try to describe the last time that you took that walk. Assuming that nothing odd or unexpected happened, it is more than likely that you do not remember that walk in any real sense. You may think that you do, but most of what you “recall” is actually just a composite from past memories — in other words, what you *expect* a walk to work to be like, given your past experience. During the actual walk, you pay very little attention to your surroundings, often with most of your mental energy occupied with other tasks. The actual mundane and routine events that you witnessed never truly passed the necessary threshold of activation to be given your attention, as the brain filters these stimuli out of our awareness. If you have ever gotten used to a bad smell or a loud noise, only to watch a newcomer react, you have experienced this filtering of the mundane in action.

However, if you saw a car accident on your walk to work, this (hopefully) unusual event would demand your attention and doubtless be the only event that you would call to mind if a colleague asked you about your morning commute. As much as routine stimuli fail to produce enough psychological arousal to draw our mental resources, novel and unusual stimuli demand our attention. The car accident, as something you were not expecting, would also prompt a learning response — that is, it is far more
likely to prompt you to reconsider your walk to work than is, for example, the slow erosion of the sidewalk.

This tendency of human cognition — to focus on the novel over the familiar — has been replicated multiple times in multiple different fields and contexts. Information that is usual or commonplace is remembered at much lower rates than unusual information (Hunt and Lamb, 2001; Schmidt, N.d.). Indeed, the Ad Herennium advocated the creation of “ridiculous, unusual, rare” mental images as a mnemonic technique (Wollen and Margres, 1987). In sociology, Kim (2012) found that when the unspoken yet expected ‘rules’ of bus passengers were violated (such as sitting next to a person rather than taking an unoccupied seat), arguments and fights were far more likely to occur than when the ‘rules’ were observed. Bond et al. (1992) find that humans instinctively use unexpected behavior when looking for deception. In behavioral economics, the reaction consumers had to various waiting times was found by Carmon and Kahneman (N.D.) to largely be based upon the ratio between how long the wait actually was compared to how long consumers expected it to be. Research from social psychology demonstrates that group members that do not fit the stereotype of their group evince stronger reactions: female sports writers and male fashion writers were rated more favorably than their opposite-gender counterparts (Bettencourt et al., 1997). And for examples from political science, Redlawsk, Civettini and Emmerson (2010) find that increasing the amount of incongruous information a voter intakes about their preferred candidate causes citizens to abandon motivated reasoning and update their political evaluations. ‘Outsider’ candidates who do not fit the stereotype of a politician are notorious for attracting surges of public support (Sides, 2013). Newspapers that switch from the usual party they endorse find that their candidate endorsements carry more weight (Ladd and Lenz, 2009).

What causes humans to have this devoted focus on outliers and pattern-breakers? There are numerous potential explanations. Below, I explicate three interrelated
Dual Process Models

The idea of a “dual-process” model of human cognition perhaps originated with the American psychologist William James, who proposed that humans have two main methods of thinking, which he termed associative thought and true reasoning. From this beginning, dual process models have had a long history in psychological research. One recent and notable entry in the field of dual-process models was Kahneman’s *Thinking Fast and Slow* (Kahneman, 2011), although there is a great deal of preceding work. Kahneman proposed two main modes of thought that people switch between when making decisions: System 1, which is fast, instinctive, subconscious, and reliant upon heuristics in order to make judgements, and System 2, which is slower, conscious, effortful, and logical.\textsuperscript{8} For an example of this, consider an experiment by Alter et al. (2007): when asked a difficult question\textsuperscript{9}, most people answered incorrectly. However, when given the same question in a less legible format (such as a smaller, denser font) requiring slower, careful thought as opposed to quick instinctive reactions, subjects markedly improved in their ability to answer the question correctly. For further examples along these lines, see Achen and Bartels (2006).

This same model offers an framework for how expectancy violations might function. System 1 processing is used for routine tasks — such as, for most individuals, processing news stories in whatever form they are routinely exposed to them. So long as individuals have time-saving heuristics that are applicable, such as “Ignore news that I’ve heard before”, System 1 can deal with this informational load for them. However, when no heuristics are applicable, and the situation requires in-depth reasoning — such as an unprecedented event being reported — people will shift modes

\textsuperscript{8}Kahneman also refers to them as ‘intuition’ and ‘reasoning’.

\textsuperscript{9}Example: If a bat and a ball together cost $1.10, and the bat costs $1 more than the ball, how much does the ball cost?
to System 2, thereby paying greater attention to the pattern-breaking events.\textsuperscript{10}

Affect Primacy Models

Following Zajonc (1984) on the priority of affect over rationality in cognition, Marcus, Neuman and MacKuen (2000) argue for the primacy of affect over reasoning. That is, rather than conceptualizing an individual coming into contact with new information as first thinking about the information and then making an emotional judgement, the opposite is true: affective reactions occur before cognitive awareness. Crucially, this means that affective systems determine how the brain responds to novelty. They posit the existence of a surveillance system located in the limbic region, which constantly scans the environment and provokes an emotional (and therefore attentional) reaction when presented with novelty. In their words:

This system cycles continually to compare sensory information about the world with expectations obtained from the behavioral system. So long as the comparison shows no discrepancy [...] , the system generates calm and remains unobstrusive. When the system detects unexpected or threatening stimuli, however, it evokes increasing anxiety, interrupts ongoing activity, and shifts attention away from the previous focus and toward the intrusive stimuli.

What is interesting about this emotional system is that the onset of increased anxiety stops ongoing activity and orients attention to the appearance so that learning can take place. This turns out to be a particularly important dynamic process for understanding political judgement.

Therefore, given Redlawsk, Civettini and Emmerson (2010) and Lodge and Taber (2013)’s work on the effect of anxiety on updating previously held beliefs and evalu-\textsuperscript{10}This suggests that politicians may suffer for a reputation for lying, while at the same time being excused for many specific lies.
ations of political figures, this would indicate that only stimuli that deviate enough from expectation are likely to produce the emotional ‘kick’ necessary to get citizens to pay attention, engage in learning, and reconsider their previously-held beliefs.

Recall Models

The human memory process does not treat all information equally. When information is to be remembered or learned, it must be moved from short-term to long-term memory. This function is performed by the hippocampus, which physically creates new synapses in order to store the new information. The hippocampus, which is selective, prioritizes information based on a number of criteria. Routine information — events similar to many existing memories — is given a low priority, while information linked to strong emotional or physical responses is given a higher priority. Thus, an unexpected event is far more likely to be encoded (and thus remembered) (Bjork, 1996).

Research has also suggested that in addition to encoding, memory may also function differently with regards to novelty when it comes to the retrieval process. That is, when a human being engages in memory search, those memories that involve novel or unexpected events are more likely to be successfully retrieved. There are varying explanations for this: researchers have variously hypothesized that unexpected memories are more easily discriminated from other memories (Hunt and McDaniel, 1993), that distinctive memories have smaller numbers of mnemonic cues and thus suffer less from cue-overload (Bruce and Gaines, 1976), or that distinctive memories have structural features in their encoding that leads to their easier retrieval (Knoedler, Hellwig and Neath, 1999).

Which process — encoding or retrieval — underlies the human tendency towards a memory bias in this regard does not appear to be a settled issue (McDaniel and Geraci, 2006). However, the fact that more distinctive events are more likely to be
recalled (whether that is due to the memories being more likely to be encoded and thus influencing the sampling pool, or to being more likely to be retrieved, or some combination of the two) is sufficient to lead most citizens to overweight the importance of events that violate their expectations. The accessibility bias, or heuristic, has long been understood in political science: it operates on the notion that if something can be recalled, it must be important, or at least more important than alternative solutions which are not as readily recalled.\textsuperscript{11} This effect was notably demonstrated by Shanto Iyengar when discussing media effects (Iyengar, 1990). Since events that violate expectations are more likely to be remembered, they are also therefore more likely to be thought of as highly relevant and important.

Of course, there are also alternative explanations for the human bias towards events that violate previous expectations, rather than solely memory-based effects. Neuropsychologists have found that humans are hardwired to seek out and react more heavily to novelty. Although previously it was thought that novelty was a cognitive reward in and of itself, research shows that instead novelty leads to the activation of dopamine pathways in the brain. Since dopamine functions as a reward or motivation chemical, this serves as a survival instinct that inspires humans to seek out and focus on novel experiences and situations (Bunzeck and Düzel, 2006). Research by Somerville, Heatherton and Kelley (2006) points to the role of the anterior cingulate cortex. Economists point to the human tendency to attempt to reduce ‘decisional costs’ (Thaler, 1994).

For the purpose of this research, I do not need to enter into the debate concerning the mechanisms behind expectancy violations. Regardless of which explanation (or, as seems most likely, some combination of the above ideas) turns out to be correct, most scientific fields seem to be in widespread agreement that there exists a tendency of people to react most heavily to things that violate their preconceived expectations,

\textsuperscript{11}The saying “I guess I would have remembered it if it had been important” is a common example of this bias in everyday thought.
while being more likely to “write off”, ignore, or fail to remember events that they consider routine or unsurprising. The fact that updating beliefs is far more likely to occur given a novel stimuli is all that I require. How this relates to political deception is discussed below.

**Expectation Effects and Deception**

What this means in terms of deception reactions is that public reactions to a revelation of political deception should vary — at least in part — based on how honest or dishonest they *expected* the politician in question to be. This offers an explanation for varying public responses. Consider our opening example of Donald Trump. His seeming immunity to being held to account for his falsehoods may be based, in part, on the fact that his celebrity career and bombastic social media presence, coupled with extremely prevalent dishonesty accusations in the press, led the public to already have an expectation that stories about Trump lying were ‘normal’, or non-novel. If that is the case, then the public would be far less likely to cognitively react\(^{12}\) when presented with the stimulus of yet another news story explaining Trump’s latest assault on the truth. In effect, Trump’s own dishonest reputation may give him free rein to ignore facts, where a more honest politician would suffer for doing so.

In other words, under expectancy violations, citizens do not react based upon the divergence between \(P\) and \(P'\), but on the difference between \(P'\) and their *expected position* of \(P'\). If there is no gap between those last two values, then an accusation might well produce no change.

To return to Donald Trump, imagine a typical American citizen viewing a news report stating that Trump has said something dishonest. The fact that the 2016 campaign coverage was saturated with stories of Trump’s dishonesty (and perhaps that Trump was a media personality in his own right prior to his presidential run)\(^{12}\)That is, pay attention.
means that a news report of Trump saying something outrageous is likely to viewed as non-novel, fail to produce enough cognitive arousal to be actively processed, and thus be viewed and passed over without ever having an effect on the citizen’s beliefs. Our citizen dismisses the story with a “Look what he said now!” — or, for those that thought Trump was being unfairly targeted by reporters, “Look what they said now!” — and a shake of the head, and it passes from mind without any lasting impact.\textsuperscript{13} The expectancy effect occurs whenever the accusations are expected, regardless of whether they are explained via candidate honesty, media bias, or other explanations. See Figure 2 for an graphical depiction.

In contrast, take a counter-factual world in which stories about political dishonesty are few and far between, such that citizens have a broad expectation that their leaders are honest. The unexpected nature of a single report of Trump’s dishonesty

\textsuperscript{13}To elaborate: I am referring here to the idea that due to negative media reports being common in the Trump election, both opponents and proponents of Trump had reason to process them as non-novel. Another potential mechanism would be intentional discounting of media reports by Trump supporters, a practice the campaign explicitly encouraged.
would cause our hypothetical viewer to take notice. That story would promote active processing, and would therefore lead our citizen to update their beliefs to incorporate the new information. In essence, the barrage of negative stories about Trump’s honesty serve as a sort of ‘smokescreen’, forming a negative expectation in voter’s minds that hides him from further (active) thought.

The historical pattern fits into the framework of expectancy violations as well. When deception events were relatively rare and uncommon in the public mind, they had a much larger impact when they did occur due to the majority of the public having an expectation of political honesty from its leaders. The aforementioned reaction to the U-2 scandal is an example of this. As trust began to wane, however, deception events started to carry a much smaller psychological weight as the announcements of political deception grew more common and more expected. An example of this effect might be shown by the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal: according to Zaller, Clinton did not suffer much long-term approbation from the Lewinsky scandal (Zaller, 1998). Under normal logic, this may seem odd, especially considering the fact that over 50% of Americans labeled Clinton as dishonest even prior to the Lewinsky events (October 1996 CNN News/Gallup Poll). Within the framework of expectancy violations, however, this makes perfect sense. Perhaps counter-intuitively, however, because more Americans anticipated dishonesty from Clinton, the news of the scandal and his denial of it fit public expectations, and thus did not produce the widespread or long-lasting public reaction predicted by some classical theories of public response (Zaller, 1998).14

Conceptualizing Reaction

When I refer to public reaction, I am referring to the portion of the change in evaluations of a lying politician(s) that can be causally attributed to a revelation of deception. Of course, there are many types of evaluations possible — trait labelling,

14A scandal can be viewed (System 1) without undergoing cognitive processing (System 2).
for instance. A politician that lies to the public in order to achieve a popular goal might well be thought to be more “competent”, while at the same time also being regarded as “immoral” or “dishonest”.

While differing measures of reaction are thus of interest, for the purposes of this research, I require one measure that can be both easily compared to previous research in the field and that can be tracked against available historical data. For this purpose, I will be characterizing public reaction primarily as changes in approval/feeling thermometer ratings. I refer for ease of use to a significant drop in these evaluations as “punishment”.

To clarify, I focus only on the reaction that occurs after the revelation of deception has already taken place. Although the question of how likely citizens are to learn about a politician’s lies is interesting given modern media promotes both easy access to information and therefore selective exposure, that question is beyond the scope of this research. Factors that influence detection, although important, will not be taken into account. This study is only concerned with the effect of revelations of deception once they reach the subject.

Summary

Citizens pay attention to those accusations of deception that most surprise them, and dismiss without attention those stories that they saw as expected. This leads to any number of fascinating political science questions: Are partisans tougher on co-partisan liars than on their opponents when they lie? Has public reaction to political scandal declined due to the greater ease of detection brought about by fact-checking and the new media? Have media market changes negatively affected the ability of journalists to hold politicians accountable? Is a reputation for dishonesty a positive in an election, and if so, what is worth electorally? While I will be answering these
questions as I proceed, this dissertation is focused on three main points: First, why has the political science discipline conceptualized deception reactions as it has in the past? Second, how should we think of deception reactions instead? And finally, does this new way of thinking provide useful, real-world empirical results?

This dissertation has three main sections. The next chapter presents a review of the history of deception research in political science. I review this literature in order to explain why deception research has proceeded to its current point largely without engaging the idea of differential attention and public cognition, and argue for the necessity of a new approach.

In the second chapter, I make use of original experimental data in order to examine the reaction of the public to deception at an individual level. I find that expectancy violations explain the unique patterns of response found.

Finally, in the third chapter, I construct an original dataset in order to examine whether or not the results found in the lab provide useful insights for interpreting the results of a real-world political event. I find that expectancy violations offer a unique viewpoint into the 2016 election. Throughout the dissertation, I highlight ways that this work could be developed in future research.
Chapter 2: A History of the Study of Political Deception

...we can best understand the furies of war and politics by remembering that almost the whole of each party believes absolutely in its picture of the opposition, that it takes as fact, not what is, but what it supposes to be the fact.

\[\text{Walter Lippmann, Public Opinion}\]

Introduction

In this chapter, I first open by defining deception as it used in this research. I then describe the current state of research on political deception. I also argue that the discipline has neglected the study of public reactions to deception, and that one of the reasons this branch of research is under-served may be dependent upon the origins of the field. Finally, I conclude by arguing that we need a more sophisticated model of political deception response than the general models currently used in political science research.
Origins of the Field

Lying is, perhaps, an endemic part of human nature, and universal to all cultures (Lewis and Saarni, 1993). A great deal of research shows that humans are perfectly willing to engage in deceptive behavior when it suits their purposes to do so (For examples, see: DePaulo et al. (1996); Gneezy (2005); Fischbacher and Föllmi-Heusi (2013); Gibson, Tanner and Wagner (2013)). As the previous chapter showed, deceptive behavior is no less common in the field of politics. This prevalence has led to a long and rich tradition of scholarship on the matter of political deception: Early political philosophers such as Plato, Kant, Machiavelli, and Tocqueville, among others, wrestled with the issue of why lying was such a common political problem, how much deception a political system could bear, and what, if anything, can or should be done about lying in the first place (Dombrowski, 1997; Martin, 2009; Dietz, 1986; Danoff, 2010).

The discipline of political science, specifically, has also focused scholarly attention on political lies. Interest in and study of government lying surged during and after World War II, due to the seemingly stunning effectiveness of wartime propaganda in the new mass media. Political scholars, faced with this seemingly incontrovertible evidence of the effectiveness of governmental lies, issued dire predictions for the future of democracies. Writers such as Lippman, Bernays, and Lasswell studied propaganda and how it operated. Although their conclusions varied from pessimistic to positive — Bernays, for example, was derided as a “young Machiavelli” for his beliefs that propaganda would become a necessary part of the operations of democracy — they were all convinced of its effectiveness. Lasswell, for example, famously referred to democracy as the “dictatorship of palaver”, demonstrating how fundamental he believed it to be (Ball and Bellamy, 2003).

One term for this pattern of belief — that the public is nearly completely suscepti-
ble to media influence — is the War of the Worlds model, after the famous broadcast that reportedly convinced many Americans that they were under attack by Martians. Although the story of that scare is somewhat apocryphal — many historians, such as Campbell (2010), conclude that the “panic” was largely apocryphal, and that many of those supposedly fooled may well have simply been joining in on a good joke — the image of the public as willing to believe whatever an official voice on the radio told them to was, along with other such research as the Milgram experiments, enough to establish the public for a time in the scholarly mind as little more than easily bid-dable sheep. Although this “hypodermic needle” model\textsuperscript{15} of political influence was soon disproved, most notably by the Lazarsfeld et al. election studies (Lazarsfeld, 1968), its effects on the foundation of modern political science research in this area remained. In other words, the study of political lying is, I argue, path dependent. The initial decision and motivations that established the beginning of the field had a disproportionately large, and, for the most part, largely unrecognized impact on how later scholars would approach and conceptualize political lying, what research questions they would pose, and even what methods they would turn to to answer those questions. Research into political lying has been unable to completely escape its origins. We can see this reflected in both the types of research that have predominated in the field, and the importance with which the subject has been treated.

\textbf{Types of Research}

Since these beginnings, modern scholarship on political lying has flourished — perhaps due to the wealth of material that politicians so readily provide. Broadly, we can refer to several strains or categories into which most research in this area can be placed. The first is broad, high-level work done on accurately defining the concept of political lying, and its place in modern governmental systems. Edelman (2001),

\textsuperscript{15}The name suggests the idea that opinions can be directly ‘injected’ into a viewer’s mind.
for example, argues that deception may be an intrinsic and inescapable foundation of modern political systems, while Ramsay contends that the use of deception is the most pressing pathology of most modern democratic systems, and likely to lead to their collapse, as do others (Cliffe, Ramsay and Bartlett, 2000; Hochschild and Einstein, 2015). This style of research descends directly from early political philosophy, as mentioned above, and also from attempts to deal with the moral quandaries raised by the popularization of propaganda post-WWII.

The field of political deception research was born out of the chaos of the World Wars. This trend of world events affecting the discipline’s evolution has continued: There have been bursts of scholarship surrounding particularly notable political lying events, and dissecting those lies in depth. The Pentagon Papers are one example. When Daniel Ellsburg, a military strategist, released classified documents they revealed that the Johnson administration had, in the words of the New York Times, “systematically lied, not only to the public but also to Congress”. This provoked an outburst of scholarship attempting to explain how such an event could possibly have happened (Arendt, 1972; Kahin, 1975). The Watergate scandal, Clinton’s denial of his extramarital affair, and Bush’s repeated claim that the United States did not engage in torture have all also inspired similar surges in scholarship (Morgan, 1996; Cohen, 2004; Jervis, 2008).

In addition to particular events, scholars have focused on the deception patterns of specific political administrations or actors as well. This generally occurs when there is something notable about the approach that the administration or actor takes with regard to political lying. Nyhan et al., for example, offer a dissection of the Bush administration’s strategy for the use of deception, and McNair offers a similar critique of deception in English politics, among other regimes (McNair, 2011; Fritz, 2004). Pfiffner (1999) offers a review of modern presidential lies.

Finally, and somewhat more recently in the development of this area of literature,
scholars have also examined the usage of lying in general as a political strategy. This
trend has only grown in popularity as the earlier assumption of the field that lying
would prove universally effective has failed. For example, Callander and Wilkie (2007) conclude that politicians that make use of deception have an advantage over those who do not, and argue that a political actor’s willingness and ability to make use of deception should be accounted for in future research. Davis and Ferrantino (1996) argue that the lack of transferable property rights to political offices gives politicians more incentives to engage in deceptive behavior than actors in other contexts. Corazzini et al. (2014) study how electoral campaigns discourage lying by elected officials through creating psychological costs. Nyhan and Reifler (2015b) find that state legislators reduce their usage of deception as a tactic when faced with the threat of fact-checking. Winneg et al. (2014) examine deception in political advertising, and find that organizations not required to publicly disclose their donors are more likely to make use of deception.

In short, the extreme prevalence of political lying has been met with an equal amount of careful time and effort from scholars.

The Importance of Lying

We can also see the effects of the field’s origins in the way that the field has conceived of deception.

Perhaps the topic of deception has received so much study, not only because of the never-ending stock of anecdotes that politicians seem so ready to supply, but also because of the extreme seriousness with which past scholarship has been inclined to treat the subject. The modern tradition of political deception research was born in the horrors of Nazi Germany, and sustained by events such as the U-2 crash, the My Lai massacre, the Watergate scandal, and governmental authorization of torture. With

\[16\] It is also a reflection of the field’s focus on elites: see below.
such origins, political scientists have treated the subject with the utmost urgency — and, for the most part, a decidedly negative approach.

Political deception has been called the destroyer of democracies. David Wise, for example, concludes in his study of political lying that “If [the American people] are misled, if the truth is concealed from them by the same government that demands their sons, their loyalty, and their treasure, then the American experiment is doomed to end in repression and failure.” Wise (1973). The public seems to agree with these dour predictions, with well over 90% of the population agreeing that honesty is an essential quality for any future political leader (Pew Research Center, 2008). Relatively few scholars, by comparison, have argued for the necessity or even the acceptability of deception. Most scholars that do take positions other than complete condemnation of dishonesty do so in a highly nuanced way: Dovi (2014) argues that taking action against political lying could exacerbate political polarization, Hatier (2012) contends that the public unfairly demonises its political leaders compared to other public actors, and Arendt suggest that we should perhaps tolerate lies as substitutes for “more violent means” of political persuasion (Arendt and Baehr, 2003).

The attitude of scholars also changed, over time: During the War, deception was framed as a terrible weapon that the government had unearthed or discovered. When the Watergate era dawned, deception became a self-indulgent vice of the Nixons of the world. Certainly, it was a destructive vice, dangerous to the fabric of the society, but not as terrible as it once was. Finally, in the modern era, as deceptions became more common (or, more accurately, more well-known), lying has come to be simply assumed as an unfortunate flaw of the political system — annoying, perhaps, but never regarded with the same deadly seriousness that it was in the beginning. Contrarian views — that deception was necessary or unavoidable or even a good in a political system — followed a similar trend of declining intensity, with Bernays

\[^{17}\text{But see Elster (1998).}\]
arguing in deadly earnest for the total government management of information in the 1940’s (Bernays, 1947), while in more recent times most defences of political deception come only in the form of pointing out relatively high honesty rates among politicians, such as kept campaign promises\textsuperscript{18}, or the like.

Whether lying is to sound the death knell of democracy, therefore, or to be its only possible savior from the challenges of modern governance, it seems clear that the origins of the field are at least in agreement on the central importance of political deception as a topic of study. Importantly, however, this idea of importance may have limited deception researchers somewhat. Under this serious conception, deception is always a traumatic and negative event. We will discuss assumptions made as to public reactions to deception in the literature later on. However, most of the time, the public is assumed to react negatively to a lie if they successfully hear of and process it. When they do not react negatively, it is often assumed that they failed to process the lie correctly, or that they did react negatively to the lie but that this reaction was outweighed by other concerns. The idea of lies as ‘background noise’, as an expectancy violation approach conceives of them, does not fit within this framework as it has been conceived for most of the field’s history.

\textbf{Effects of Field Origins}

In this section, I detail three effects that the origins of the field (along with practical concerns) have had upon the evolution as a discipline as a whole. The first is that there has been a focus of research primarily upon political elites, such as politicians and journalists, without a corresponding focus upon the public. The second is that when the public is dealt with in political deception research, the goals of the research are primarily oriented towards either the detection of deception, or the correction thereof, but not the reaction of the public. Finally, when the reaction of the public

\textsuperscript{18}For an example and literature review, see: Imbeau (2009).
to news that a politician has deceived them is of interest in political science research, it is primarily dealt with using one of several assumptions.

**Elite Dominance**

In the introduction to their study of the prevalence of political lying in the United States political culture, Bucciol and Zarri (2013) make a pair of statements that are very odd when taken together. When discussing the current state of political deception literature, they state that “scholarly work on the subject has flourished [...] due to the fact that, as ample anecdotal evidence confirms, history has witnessed a multitude of relevant lies by prominent politicians.” Yet, only a few short paragraphs later, they remark that “despite its undeniable relevance, the theme has received scant attention from the empirical literature thus far.”

How can it simultaneously be the case that an area of study is both flourishing and has received scant attention? The answer lies in the history of political deception in the United States and in the manner in which it is studied. Most past research on political lying has tended to focus on the politicians that tell the lies, and not on the public that receives them. Much has been written on whether or not deception can work for politicians, how likely they are to get away with it, its prevalence in different types of regimes, and more. This bias is not merely a simple binary for all politicians, either. The more highly visible a politician is, the more research has been done on their deceptions. For example, there is vastly more material available for presidential lies (or lies by other national leaders, when discussing other countries) than there is for, say, Members of Congress. Lower levels than that in the governmental system — bureaucrats, state politicians, and so on — receive correspondingly less attention still. The reasons for this focus on the elite, when it comes to the study of deception in the American context, are both historical and practical.
Historical

Historically, the field of deception research, as mentioned above, can trace its origins back to the dark days of World War II. It was the deception of famous, charismatic individuals — Hitler and Goebbels and Stalin — that captured the imagination of the field’s foundational scholars. They were faced with death camps that survived because they were hidden, hatred spread by falsehoods from the top, and a war that was arguably started or at least was certainly prolonged by the strategic use of deception. Is it any wonder that the majority of scholarship descended from this time is so terribly concerned with the power of the propaganda machine? By contrast, what did the public do in the “magic bullet” model that was so popular at the time? Little more than sit back and passively accept whatever was told to them. The German population and the American voting public seemed equally willing and eager to accept even the politician’s most outlandish political claims.

All the interest, from an academic standpoint, was with the new propaganda ministries being set up by the various governments, and not with their supposedly defenceless target. The government, it seemed, by virtue of new mass communication technologies, was certain to control all public political thought, and all that remained was to try and ensure that at the very least they did so responsibly.

Of course, this idea was more than a little overblown. As any student of political communication will immediately be aware, the government’s hypothesized power to control the minds of men did not pan out in the dire way that the experiences of World War II might have predicted. Far from being held up as all-powerful, by the 1940’s the field had moved on to the minimal effects model, questioning whether or not the public could be expected to substantively respond to any form of political communication at all. But while models of political communication and media influence went on to greater sophistication, the study of political deception never truly escaped its origins
of viewing the elites as the important and substantively interesting actors, and the public as mere targets for their effects.

The major events that kept inspiring interest in this area of research were also all brought about by elites. The history of scholarship in American political deception can be tracked largely to the revelation of major presidential lies such as U-2 and Watergate. For evidence of this, look at Figure 3, and note how there are clear spikes in research following such events as Watergate or the Lewinsky scandal. Prior to these events, the response of the public was not interesting because it was largely assumed to be simple quiescence. After the set of scandals that marked the massive surge in political cynicism in the 1960’s and 70’s, the public’s reaction to lying was also not interesting to scholars because almost every piece of practical experience and experimental research suggested that it should largely be disgust and condemnation. In neither case was there assumed to be interesting and academically significant variation.

Figure 3: Scholarly work on political deception over time.

Note the spikes following such events such as Watergate and the Lewinsky scandal. Data was taken from the Web of Science database. Articles in the political science field that mentioned ‘deception’, ‘lies’, ‘lying’ or related keywords in their title or abstract were included in the dataset.

We can see this decline in trust over time visually. Looking at Figure 4, one can
observe a sharp decline in public trust during Johnson and Nixon’s time in office — presumably due to the effects of the Gulf of Tonkin event, Watergate, the Pentagon Papers, and the war. This decline has never truly reversed: aside from a spike surrounding the events of the 9/11 attacks, the public’s trust in its leaders never approaches anything close to the heights that it once took during Eisenhower and Kennedy. See Keele (2007) for an analysis of the determinants of public trust, and see Levi and Stoker (2000) for a partial analysis of the role of these major scandals in decreasing public political trust.

Figure 4: Percentage of survey respondents that say they trust government ‘always’ or ‘most of the time’.


Practical

The second reason that political research on deception has remained limited to focusing on the elites is because of the exigencies of the data that has been available to support research in this area. Bucciol and Zari describe the problem as, “[a] lack of
reliable data of a non-partisan nature.” If anything, they drastically understate the case: there is little data available, and what data there is suffers from problems of reliability and endogeneity.

First, it was only relatively recently, with the development of more modern communications, that a politician’s words were preserved in any organized fashion. Even when reliable transcripts of most political speeches became both common-place and publicly available, there still remained the challenge of actually sorting through the massive amount of material produced: a challenge that still has not been totally solved. Fact-checking organizations, for example, can only check a small percentage of the total number of political statements made in the time they have available — and so they have to focus on those claims that are receiving public attention or that lend themselves to judgement. This unavailability of information was, of course, most pronounced for politicians that did not receive much public attention. Therefore, most deception research tends to focus on elites because those are the only figures for which data on lies (or more accurately, accusations thereof) could readily be obtained. Data on the public’s reactions to political lying was also not collected for a great deal of time, until the advent of modern polling.

Second, there has been no way to judge the absolute truth of many political claims for long periods of the literature’s history. Accusations of lying are easily available to any researcher, and are thick on the ground around any election season. However, these are almost invariably met with justifications and counter-accusations of self-serving motives or partisan bias, which render it well-nigh impossible to determine the actual truth or falsehood of a statement without detailed investigatory work. Thus, until recently, merely classifying statements as true or untrue was difficult enough, let alone proceeding any further with research.

Historians did do this work in many cases, providing a great service to academic research. They, however, also have a bias towards the most note-worthy or influential
events as a natural consequence of academic interests, and seldom performed any sort of systematic survey. This, again, has led research to focus almost entirely on political elites. This trend is being mitigated, somewhat, by the recent growth of the afore-mentioned fact-checking organizations (Graves and Glaisyer, 2012). However, even with this new data source, work in this area has been slow: the only attempt to systematically determine the incidence rate of lying in politics of which I am aware was published only three years ago as of this writing (Bucciol and Zarri, 2013). Also, fact-checking organizations themselves suffer from a number of methodological concerns, which are of especial concern to any researcher attempting to make use of them as a dataset (For details, see: Uscinski and Butler, 2013). Finally, despite research showing that the threat of fact-checking can inspire politicians to honesty (Nyhan and Reifler, 2015b), it is not always effective. Michelle Bachmann once claimed that PolitiFact had rated every statements she had made as being true. They added this to the list of her ‘Pants on Fire’ ratings (Bachmann, 2011).

Thus, prior work has focused on those telling the lies, and not so heavily on the public that receives them, due both to a sort of path-dependence effect of the early origins of this field of research, as well as the limitations of the data that has been available. Despite these obstacles, however, there has been a great deal of sterling research done on the topic of deception in politics.

**Detection and Correction in Public-Focused Research**

Of the works that do focus on the public and deception, most tend to take one of two approaches. The public is either examined on its ability to *detect* deception when it is presented to them, or on their ability to *correct* their mistaken beliefs after failing to detect the lie in the first place.

19 Even they suffer from some severe data access issues, hindering their ability to draw generalizable conclusions from their findings.
There are many reasons why the literature has gone down these two paths when it comes to deception research. First of all, they seem to descend directly from the origins of the discipline once again. Academic interest in political deception, as I argue, has tended to move in tandem with large-scale political deception scandals. Therefore, for researchers interested in the public good, investigating the relative practicabilities of either creating a more skeptical and therefore less easily led populace vs creating a “cure” that can be applied to fix a deception that has taken root would seem to be an issue of the utmost practical importance. If one holds with Wise that the future of the United States as a democracy rests upon the successful solution of this problem, then indeed, those two possibilities would seem the natural candidates for research (Wise, 1973).

Moreover, as well as naturally fitting with most of the motivations that have driven the research of political deception, and as well as possessing self-evident practical application, detection and correction also lend themselves well to practical examination. Since, as earlier mentioned, organized reliable data on this topic is difficult to come by, the fact that these two areas of research lend themselves well to laboratory experimentation is yet another reason why they have been heavily focused on in political science research.

Detection

The first area that political science research on deception and the general public has focused on is detection. By detection, I mean all work whose central question focuses on whether or not the public, when presented with a mistruth, is capable of recognizing it as such. Thus, for example, Kull (2003), a research project into public misperceptions about the Iraq War, would be classified as detection research under my definition, as it was focused on whether or not citizens would evince suspicion when presented with potentially deceptive messages about weapons of mass destruction.
Other examples of detection research include Ekman (1996) and McGraw (1998).

Detection research has found, on the whole, that people seem to be largely incompetent at sorting truth from falsehood. This is in accordance with psychological research on the lie-detecting abilities of human subjects, which generally report our dismal performance (Gilbert, 1991; Friedman and Tucker, 1990; Ekman, 1996). Research has shown that on average, people detect lying at rates slightly over that of chance (Sun Park and Levine, 2001) — roughly 56%, according to Bond and DePaulo (2006). In addition, research has highlighted several unique aspects of the political context that generally lead to poor lie-detection rates: Motivated reasoning, the lack of interpersonal interaction, low public attention rates to political matters, and so on. This is borne out by research showing that lying seems to be, at least in some cases, quite effective (see Vinson and Moore (2007), which suggests that misinformation may have played a crucial role in the Bush-McCain race in the South Carolina primary.)

Of course, this finding would seem at first glance to bring one massive objection against the entire point of this research. If the public is so bad at knowing when they have been lied to, why should we bother to examine their reaction when it seems certain to be a rare event that they will even be aware that a lie has occurred? This is one of the primary reasons why the use of mediated accusations of deception, rather than actual deception events, as the central point of interest in this research is of such paramount importance. While people are largely incompetent at detecting deception on their own, the media is anything but lax in its efforts to present the public with evidence of political misconduct.

The media also devotes a significant (and, overtime, increasing) amount of its time and resources to publicizing political lies. This is in part due to the media’s well-documented obsession with political scandals (Groeling and Kernell, 1998; Nyhan, 2015) as well as to the growing commercialization of the news industry as discussed
by Cohen (2004). Political scandals draw in viewers, and any accusation of political lying is a potential political scandal to be focused on. In addition, accusations and counter-accusations of lying fit perfectly with the horse-race style of journalism that the news media adopts in order to compete for viewers with entertainment media (Hahn, Iyengar and Norpoth, 2002; Linn, Moody and Asper, 2009).

In addition, dedicated non-partisan fact-checking organizations that act as watchdogs for political speech are a relatively recent innovation, made possible by recent advancements in communications technology. Nyhan and Reifler (2015) find that fact-checking can be effective at affecting the behavior of political elites. Fridkin, Kenney and Wintersieck (2015) find that fact-checks can have a substantial impact upon citizen opinions, and Bardwell (2011) find that fact-checking can foster political engagement. Amazeen (2014) find that fact-checking organizations are highly consistent with one another when passing judgement, suggesting some degree of reliability.20 Fact-checking organizations, therefore, drastically lower the amount of effort it takes for an average person to detect a political deception. Indeed, with such organizations available the public hardly needs to perform any detection work of their own, as they have a staff of experts to do it for them.

This use of the mass media to augment the capabilities of the public against political deception has resulted in several unique beliefs that the public holds about political deception. First of all, people are certain that they are being lied to, even if they are not always able to pinpoint exactly when it is taking place. All research indicates that the modern American citizen is certain that most politicians are liars. In fact, most of the American public believes that they are being lied to regularly by their elected leaders.21 Only 8% of the public are willing to describe members of Congress as ‘honest’.22 Thus, it is not the case that citizens are “asleep at their

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20See Graves and Glaisyer (2012) for information on the current state of fact-checking organizations in American political media.


22Gallup Poll, December 5-8, 2013.
post”, as it were. They are *looking* for political lies (sometimes over-zealously: see Corbett (2015) for more details).

While this means that the bulk of this research will therefore not have to interact with the questions raised by the detection literature, one central point of the detection research is essential to this project. The inability of people to directly detect deception, and their corresponding reliance on mass media accusations to perform this function for them, is essential to the creation of expectations that we will later observe.

**Correction**

The second area that research has tended to focus on is corrections. By corrections research, I mean all research that examines how easily a subject that has accepted a deceitful political claim can be persuaded to reject that claim. In general, research in this area has proceeded by examining the effectiveness of providing accurate information in order to counteract false claims. Most importantly for our purposes, corrections research defines its objective in terms of the factual beliefs of the subject, and not by their evaluations of the politician that sent the deceitful messages. A standard corrections study, for example, would judge the success or failure of some method of providing the facts about some government policy by whether or not citizens could (or would) now provide the correct figures, and would not take into account how trustworthy they felt the message provider to now be.

In other words, the corrections research has largely focused upon the factual subjects at the core of accusations of deception. To return to the example of Kyl from earlier, a corrections approach to investigating his case would focus on whether or not subjects still recited Kyl’s 90% figure, instead of the correct amount. However, the effects that this event would have on the personalities involved in the case would not be a concern of such research. Questions such as whether Kyl was still trusted
by his constituents, or if the public would support him at the next election — that
is, how the public’s evaluations of Kyl changes — would not be of interest.

Yet these questions are crucial. Often, especially in the increasingly competitive
media environment, the actual factual issues at the heart of political deceptions can
range from important to trivial. The 2016 presidential election campaign, for ex-
ample, featured length media debates over issues such as the size of the crowds on
Inauguration Day, whether or not Trump sold steaks, the contents of blank manila
folders, and many, many, many more. These issues are not substantive — whether
or not the public believes that Trump has a successful steak brand or not is hardly
a matter of grave political concern. However, whether or not the public uses the
fact that Trump was accused of lying about his steak brand, as well as all of the
other myriad charges against him, to inform their future interactions with him most
certainly is.

The conclusions from the corrections literature are mixed. Some have had (lim-
ited) success with providing accurate information: see Nyhan and Reifler (2010);
Berinsky (2015); Nyhan and Reifler (2015a); Kuklinski et al. (2000). However, the
corrections process has not proven to be nearly so easy as simply letting the facts
speak for themselves. The studies mentioned above all find that attempts to correct
false political beliefs can, under certain circumstances, backfire or have unforeseen
consequences. Thus, these findings further reinforce the importance of deception as
an area of research, since once deception has occurred its effects may be quite difficult
to correct.

Summary

In other words, we (as political scientists) have spent a great deal of time studying
how effective a member of the political elite is likely to be at placing a false belief in
the minds of the public, and the best ways to counteract those beliefs once they are
implanted. How the public *reacts* to deception (leaving factual implantation aside), however, is a topic that to the best of my knowledge has seldom been directly examined. Very little research has been done on how the public updates their evaluations of the politician in question. Indeed, to my knowledge, this is the first experiment specifically designed to address that question, although work has been done on related topics, such as how justifications can affect the public’s response to being deceived (McGraw, 1998; Nyhan and Reifler, 2015a) or how fact-checking can influence the effectiveness of political advertising (Fridkin, Kenney and Wintersieck, 2015).

Research that focuses on detection deals with deception *before* it has been revealed to the public, by its very nature; as research that focuses on the correction of false beliefs must deal with it *after* the fact. The examination of what effect the actual revelation of deception has on evaluations of the politicians involved in and of itself is all too often left unquestioned, therefore. The news that a politician is lying becomes either the end goal or a mere preliminary step in the research design.

Yet research has shown or suggested that lying should have certain effects on the public beyond the simple acceptance or rejection of the information in question - decreasing political efficacy and engagement, increasing political uncertainty, and so on. For this project, I focus specifically on the public reaction to accusations of deception in terms of how they impact that politician’s ongoing ratings.

**The Study of Reaction**

We have seen why the political research literature has tended to focus on the problems of correction or deception when it focuses on the public. However, in addition to the reasons that those two strains have been prevalent, there are also several reasons that the study of public reactions to deception accusations have received relatively little attention. In addition to the historical reasons that this research question has
received little attention in comparison to the study of elites and the prevention and
correction of the dissemination of counter-factual statements, there are also reasons
inherent to the study of deception reactions that make research in this area difficult.
In part, this is due to inherent problems of endogeneity as well as the prevalence of
received wisdom.

**Endogeneity**

Any study of deception faces numerous potential major sources of endogeneity. In-
erence from observation therefore becomes significantly more difficult. For example,
consider the case of strategic politicians. When deciding on what level of honesty
they will employ (which, ideally, should correlate strongly with their representation
in the media), politicians no doubt take into account the likely level of backlash that
they expect to face from the public, and become more honest as the stakes get higher.
Similarly, they should be more tempted to make use of deception when the odds of
any sort of public punishment are lowest. This would cause the effect of deception
accusations to appear artificially low, and causing research that uses observational
data to underestimate the cost of deception.

Americans also have a significant and growing number of choices in the expanding
media market. Given this, more and more members of the public have the ability
to view news sources that cater to their particular partisan or ideological tastes.
Liberals often prefer to watch CNN or MSNBC, for example, while conservatives
are more likely to enjoy Fox News. If partisan media outlets are more likely to
report deception accusations against out-group politicians, then the accusations that
individuals observe will be highly correlated with their own partisanship such that
they observe frequent stories of deception from opposing partisans and few from co-
partisans. This would have a significant effect upon any attempt to draw causal
conclusions from observational data. If viewers already have highly negative opinions
of opposing partisans, such that new information can achieve little in depressing evaluations further, then this could lead to underestimation of the cost of accusations of deception. Alternatively, under motivated skepticism, individuals should prove most responsive to attacks against political opponents and less to those against their allies. In such a scenario, observation would lead researchers to overestimate the effectiveness of deception accusations.

In summary, any attempt to determine how the public reacts to deception from observational data faces significant methodological issues. Each real-world instance of deception accusation being launched features a complex, interlocking web of potential political motivations, where every actor’s actions are anticipated and potentially influential upon the actions of every other actor. While it may be quite possible to simply pick an event narrow enough in scope and well-known and well-documented enough that these tangles of causality can be ameliorated, experimental data seems essential to the development of a testable theory.

Assumptions

Research on how the public reacts to political deception has also been hampered by the idea that the problem has been solved. Simple life experience is enough to suggest that people find being deceived unpleasant. Research in psychology and economics commonly supports this instinct with findings that subjects are not only motivated to punish deception, but are willing to make significant personal sacrifices in order to do so (Baumeister et al., 2001; Brandts and Charness, 2003; Fehr and Gächter, 2000; Rycyna, Champion and Kelly, 2009; Wang, Galinsky and Murnighan, 2009; Wang and Leung, 2010). Given this, it is natural that some political researchers would assume that the public would react badly to being deceived. Davis and Ferrantino (1996), for example, directly state the fact that they are making this assumption. It is also present, whether explicit or implicit, in such studies as Callander and Wilkie (2007);
Glazer (1990); Huang (2010); and Kartik and McAfee (2007) among other examples. Much political research in the area of deception makes reference to the idea that lying, if attributed to a politician, will be harmful to that politician’s evaluations. Politicians themselves, too, seem to make this assumption, or at least their behavior indicates they do. When informed that their speeches were being observed, state senators became far less likely to make statements judged untrue by fact-checking agencies (Nyhan and Reifler, 2015b).

However, this assumption does not always seem to be borne out universally in actual practice. There are many notable examples of the public staying quiescent when faced with a story of political deception. Cohen (2004), for example, shows that far from falling, President Clinton’s poll numbers actually rose during the Lewinsky scandal. There is also plenty of research supporting the idea that the public may simply not be capable of reacting to accusations of political deception: see Delli Carpini (2005); Jerit and Barabas (2006); and Nyhan and Reifler (2010) for examples of studies that cast doubt on the public’s political acumen. Alternatively, the public may simply have other goals for its politicians rather than honesty — research that points to the primacy of economic concerns or party loyalty supports this idea. Thus, although less common, there is also a counter-vailing tendency to assume that citizens do not update their evaluations of politicians when those politicians are accused of deception. See Persson and Tabellini (2002) for a partial review of research in which political deception is presumed to be costless.

Different strains of research therefore offer varying and occasionally contradicting predictions for public behavior. In reality, we observe a wide variety of public reactions, and need an explanatory framework that can account for this variation.

\(^{23}\)An example that we will turn to in more detail in a later chapter.
The Need for a New Approach

The fact the public’s reaction(s) to messages about political deceptions have never been the focus of indepth political science research and theorizing mean that we, as political scientists, lack the ability to forecast or explain the American public’s performance in many significant cases, and are also unable to deal with several important normative questions about the operations of democracy. The question of how the public reacts to deception is not a mere niche issue, or one of interest only to political psychologists. Instead, it has wide and far-ranging impacts upon the capabilities of the discipline as a whole.

Real-World Applicability

First, the issue of how the public will respond to accusations of deception has surged in terms of real-world relevance and applicability as these messages and the need to accurately predict and understand their effects has grown in recent years. Fact-checking, as discussed earlier on in this chapter, has boomed in popularity and relevance in the past few United States elections. This increase in politicians being held to account for their statements, as well as the tendency of other media outlets to rebroadcast their judgements, have resulted in the public being exposed to far more accusations against their political leaders than ever before. While much work lauds these new fact-checking initiatives for serving as a check upon elite power and as a new evolution of the democratic ideal of a watchdog press, it behooves us as political scientists to (a) judge whether these organizations are truly having the effect upon public evaluations of their leaders that both fact-checking agencies and political elites assume that they do (Nyhan and Reifler, 2015b), and (b) understand what other effects upon public cognition the introduction of such a revolutionary new style of media judgements will have.
Also as mentioned earlier, the current news media faces a drastically more competitive market, both externally (as entertainment options for the average American constantly proliferate in their abundance) and internally (as the lowering barriers to entry brought about by technology result in the disintegration of a formerly oligopolistic market that pursued large segments of the population into an environment where news agencies are incentives to strive for capture of narrower sub-populations (Cohen, 2004)). This focus on narrower audiences coupled with a perceived need to pursue stories involving scandal and controversy in order to compete with entertainment options means that the media’s appetite for stories about political deception has dramatically increased in recent years. Stories about lying politicians always feature the suggestion of wrongdoing by the powerful, and the potential for their humbling. They are almost guaranteed to feature some amount of conflict between two actors, unless the politician in question makes no effort to defend themselves, which means that they can be presented as an ongoing feud between two parties. Controversy and “game focus” is always appealing to news agencies in order to draw viewers (For more, see: Cappella and Jamieson, 1996). For new outlets focused on catering to one particular group, they offer a way to attack politicians in opposing groups, serving as pleasant confirmations of their audiences’ pre-existing beliefs. Thus, not only does an increasing focus on calling out deception fit the democratic ideals of the journalism industry, it can also often serve their economic needs as well. Given that the breakup of the media landscape shows no signs of decelerating (Linn, Moody and Asper, 2009; Hahn, Iyengar and Norpoth, 2002) and the growth of individually personalized media streams (the “filter bubble” effect) is only increasing these trends (Pariser, 2011), political deceptions will likely only become a larger part of the political news landscape.

Finally, in tandem with the increasing growth of controversy as a focus in the media and no doubt interrelated with it, the use of negative messaging by campaigns has grown sharply over time. In part, this is because the media will often “rebroad-
cast” negative political advertisements in the course of reporting about them, giving the campaign greater exposure for their campaign messaging at no cost (Fowler and Ridout, 2009; Geer, 2012). Indeed, some advertisements are produced solely for the purpose of having them ‘picked up’ by journalists. Johnson-Cartee and Copeland (2013) detail the other factors that have led to the growing usage over time of negative messaging by campaigns. Although negative campaign messaging runs the gamut of possibilities in regards to the accusations that are made against opponents, a substantial portion of these accusations focus upon candidate dishonesty (Brooks and Geer, 2007), with campaigns attempting to mimic the style of fact-checking agencies in branding their opponents as liars and their statements false.

For all these reasons, then, the political environment of the United States seems certain to bring forth more and more political accusations of lying as time goes on. If we as a discipline seek to engage with the changing political landscape, the question of how the public processes accusations of deception will be essential.

**Academic Research**

The question of how the public responds to deception plays a vital role in political science research. Naturally, the concept plays a major role in political studies of deception directly. In studies of elites and the strategies they make use of when engaging in deception, the projected reaction of the public is essential to understanding elite reasoning and motivations. Nor can researchers effectively predict the success or failure of any given attempt at deception without some model of how the public will react to deceptions from that messenger, and how this affect their interactions with the public in the future. Theorists interested in discovering newer and more effective systems to restrain elite deception should also focus upon this question. If potential systems that seek to prevent elites from being deceptive focus upon the wrath of the public in order to provide their source of censure, then the question of whether or not
the public has “teeth”, as it were, is of vital importance. The primacy of proposals to increase public honesty should also be dependent upon the answer to this question — if the public serves as a natural punisher of deception, then less time and academic effort need be devoted to finding a way to curb it.

In addition, this question is of essential interest to other, broader disciplines as well. The study of political communication, for example: a politician’s choice to communicate in a certain way may result from the fact that they were constrained by a punishing public into only honest options. Even areas of research that do not generally explicitly reference deception may well be affected by the outcome of this project, since the decision to not include deception as an aspect of the research is often motivated by the assumption that the public does not react to deception.

The growing prevalence of lying accusations, as described above, also makes the issue one of rapidly growing relevance to those researchers interested in forecasting or describing electoral behavior. As candidates become more and more likely to attempt to mark each other with the title of “liar”, the question of how we can understand how such accusations will succeed or fail, and how they will change the electoral calculus, will only become more germane. The 2016 election serves as an excellent example of two actors attempting, in part, to use accusations of dishonesty to sway a presidential election.

**Normative Concerns**

Finally, the question of the public’s reaction to accusations of political deception is also of essential importance to normative questions about the proper operation of a functioning democracy.

For example, many groups have an interest in combating deception in politics. Some are watchdog groups, such as Politifact or Factcheck.org, that have calling out deceit as their main purpose. Other interest groups have no direct motivation...
to combat deception, but do so as needed, in the interest of whatever cause for which they advocate. Those groups that supported President Obama’s healthcare initiative, for example, had a dedicated interest in opposing lies that were spread about the program’s implications (Berinsky, 2015). Finally, political campaigners have an interest in drawing attention to political deceit as well: at least insofar as it is spread by their opponents.

Currently, these groups have no organized way to hunt for political deception. They, instead, tend to rely upon checking those claims that gain some degree of public attention, whether that’s because the truthfulness of those claims is currently being debated in the media (such as in the Jon Kyl example), or because they have garnered attention for some other reason (such as being part of the State of the Union address, or an election debate).

Greater comprehension would allow all of these organizations to be better equipped to go hunting for mistruths. Since understanding this issue would make it easy to identify those areas in which the public is least likely to respond (that is, in which politicians bear the least risk of a public backlash from lying), problem areas can easily be targeted. In addition, knowledge of the circumstances under which the public will punish deception could, alternatively, allow such groups to better pick their battles, allowing for a more efficient use of time and resources by only targeting deceptions to which the public is likely to react. Finally, such groups could attempt to manipulate circumstances to promote public involvement — if partisan identification overrides accuracy concerns, for example, then perhaps fact-checking announcements should avoid mentioning the subject’s political party.

In addition, it raises the question of whether or not the media can fulfill its democratic obligations. The media’s power to restrain political actors from deceiving the public is based upon the “sunshine effect”\(^\text{24}\), which, in turn, relies upon sanctions

\[^24\text{Following a quote from Justice Brandeis: “Publicity is justly commended as a remedy for social and industrial diseases. Sunlight is said to be the best of disinfectants...”}\]
from the public. The questions of how and why the public respond to charges brought by the media is of essential importance to understanding the place of the news media in the modern world.

More broadly, if we assume that to some degree the operation and success of a democracy is dependent upon the ability of its citizens to sanction their leaders for misbehavior, then the question of the honesty of those leaders becomes of paramount importance. If politicians are free to deceive their constituents without being held to account in some manner, then this strikes at the very nature of democracy.

**Practical Benefits**

This research should also be of general interest to the public, given the vast mass attraction to stories of political lies and scandals (Thompson, 2013). Merely answering this question may even lead to more honest politicians: Nyhan and Reifler (2015b) found that politicians, when threatened with increased levels of fact-checking, in fact reduced their levels of political deception. Thus, the answer to this question may provide the means to render the entire political system more honest. This could even increase political efficacy in the public: in fact, as efficacy is described as feeling that politics is manageable or comprehensible, the simple increase in politicians being taken to task for their deceptions or even simply being able to understand why politicians do or not get called to account for their statements may be enough to promote efficacy among members of the public (Brooks and Geer, 2007; Lau and Rovner, 2009).

Of course, these results will only come about as the result of a long campaign of effort by researchers and other parties. This dissertation provides only a first step towards greater understanding of this topic.
Summary

For all these reasons, then, the question of how the public reacts to news of deception is one that should be of primary interest to researchers, reformers, and the politically active of all stripes. However, as matters stand, the discipline currently lacks the empirical data necessary to forecast or explain the American public’s reaction to being deceived. Instead, anyone intending to do so is forced to make one of several unattractive choices. First, to oversimplify, you may choose from the two most commonly used strains of received wisdom earlier mentioned: that the public will always or never become angry about being deceived. This is, of course, obviously problematic: the public sometimes condemns those that deceive it and sometimes does not, so simply assuming either response to be universal makes little sense.

The fact that these two most commonly observed strains of received wisdom directly oppose one another leads us, moreover, to the troubling implication that we need, at the very least, some theory as to when which model of response should be expected to apply. Since neither simple assumption provides a good fit for observed patterns of public reaction, it would seem to be the case that neither punishment nor nonresponse is universally true in all cases. Research to this point, as mentioned earlier, shows a near-total lack of conditional models. The public is, generally speaking, immediately assumed to provide either punishment or apathy upon the revelation of deception, with no mention of moderating or mediating factors.

If this strategy of relying upon overly universal assumptions does not appeal, then the only option left is to attempt to offer an explanation for why the public responded as they did. However, no systematic attempt to create a universal model or find a common explanation for these cases has yet been proposed. Well established formulae exist to predict turnout in a given election, or a candidate’s odds of winning election, or how likely it is a bill will make it through Congress. When it comes to
the aftermath of a political lie, however, we are instead forced to rely upon hunting for (ostensibly) similar cases from the past, upon some non-scientific observations of past trends, or upon intuition.

Conclusion

The origins of the study of political deception have their start in the propaganda of the second World War. From there, past conceptualizations and data availability, as well as the sheer inertia of concepts of in academic work, have led to the field’s origins continuing to color and inform later work on the same topic.

I identify three main impacts that this has had upon the field. First, academic attention has been primarily focused upon elite political actors, and seldom upon those to whom said elites are communicating. Second, that work which has focused on the public has tended to investigate ways of either improving the public’s ability to detect deception, or to correct false beliefs caused thereby. Finally, due both to these two factors as well as inescapable difficulties involved with the prospect, the study of how the public reacts to deception accusations has been largely left untapped.

This lack of definitive research has been masked by simple, attractive, and intuitively correct assumptions as to how the public should respond. However, these assumptions cannot be universally correct — the public’s responses to deception are many and varied, as shown by some of the historical examples offered throughout this chapter. Some sort of model that can predict when and how the public should respond is required. Considering the importance of this question, whether to answering academic curiosity, investigating democratic principles, or achieving greater real-world relevance, this seems essential.

In the next chapters, I draw upon the idea of expectancy violations, introduced earlier, to offer a first cut at the cognitive processes underlying public responses, and
to test the applicability of these responses to the modern American context.
Chapter 3: The Role of Expectations in Political Deception

Blessed is he who expects nothing,
for he shall never be disappointed.

_____________________
Alexander Pope

Introduction

Expectancy violations play an essential role in determining whether or not the public will react to accusations of deception. As described in Chapter 1, expectancy violations serve as a mental device for saving cognitive effort — those stimuli that are expected and therefore routine can safely be given less mental effort, while unusual stimuli, presenting the far greater possibility of opportunity or danger, are given a great deal of time or attention.

In the previous chapter, I made the case that we as political scientists are in need of a explanation for when the public will and will not prove responsive to news of deceitful politicians, in order to fit the varying patterns of response that are actually observed. If we do not assume that all stories about deception will be effective, and look for a guideline as to which will engender a reaction and which will not, the shift between the two main modes of cognitive processing that humans use to respond to new information seems like a natural starting point. While surely not the only factor determining how the public responds to
deception, the role of the ‘surveillance system’ in determining the public’s level of attention would explain, if confirmed, both the decreasing public response to, and the ‘normalization’ of, political deception over time. It would also address why punishment of deception is so commonly found in psychological experiments focused on everyday interactions, and less definitively in political contexts, since subjects tend to hold differing expectations of those two groups. Therefore, in this chapter, I examine how prior expectations condition the responses of individuals to deception on an individual basis.

I argue that when a story about a politician being dishonest is presented to an individual, they respond (as in Chapter 1) by first making an assessment of the novelty (or non-conformity to prior information) of the story. Importantly, as Marcus, Neuman and MacKuen (2000) show, this check for breaks from routine happens prior to actual cognition of the story itself. Those stories judged to be novel are given concerted cognitive attention, and are more likely to be impressed upon the memory of the viewer. Those stories judged to be non-novel are not given cognitive focus: they are the scrolled-past headlines, forgotten television segments, or dismissed articles that fail to have a lasting impact.

Importantly, when responsive to a story, voters should respond in whatever way they normally would. That is, expectancy violations do not let me predict how the public will respond to being lied to, only whether or not they will respond. If the public for some reason enjoyed being lied to, for example, then those subjects surprised by news that a politician has lied would be expected to increase their positive evaluations of that politician. Following research that shows a near universal distaste for being deceived (Fehr and Gächter, 2000; Baumeister et al., 2001; Brandts and Charness, 2003; Wang, Galinsky and Murnighan, 2009; Wang and Leung, 2010) I assume that individuals will, when responsive to deception, adjust their evaluations of politicians downward.
In order to combat the problems of data access and endogeneity that have hampered research into this question up until this point, I make use of an experimental design. Experimental procedures ensure clean data, a lack of strategic behavior, and the ability to bypass source selection and other factors. I construct situations in which experimental participants evaluate hypothetical politicians that have lied, and by manipulating characteristics of those politicians, cause participants to evaluate them using varying expectations. I demonstrate that those participants with the greatest reason to expect honesty from a hypothetical politician are also the most likely to respond to news of that politician’s deceit, and vice versa.

In the following section, I lay out the logic behind this experimental approach. I then lay out the broad-scale characteristics of the politicians that will be varied in the experiments and the reasons those variables were selected. Next, I state the hypotheses to be tested in this chapter before describing the methods used to test those hypotheses in detail. Finally, I present the experimental results, and conclude on a discussion of the work’s implications and the need for further research.

**Experimental Design Logic**

**Direct Manipulation of Subject Expectations**

The rationale behind the experimental manipulation used in this chapter is born out of the fact that the purpose of this research is to examine the effects of expectations upon public reactions to deception. The direct approach might seem to be to simply manipulate the expectancies of subjects and observe the variations in their reactions to instances of deception — that is, to label a politician as a ‘liar’ or ‘non-liar’, and then present them both as telling a lie and measure subjects’ reactions. However, several features of expectancies render them insusceptible to convenient experimental manipulation, and this approach to experimentation problematic.
The first is that expectations for political figures are normally set by information from a wide variety of figures over long periods of time. Consider the case of an American citizen regarding former President Obama, for example. A citizen’s expectation of receiving the truth would be set by a wide variety of sources. Their expectations of Democratic politicians in general, for example, would play a significant role on their opinion of any Democratic politician in particular (Bartels, 2002). In addition, citizens have expectations that are unique to the office of president in particular, as opposed to any other level of government (Waterman, Jenkins-Smith and Silva, 1999). Finally, on top of these broad, baseline expectations, we have the individual’s mix of considerations (following Zaller and Feldman (1992)) formed by the news they have taken in about President Obama specifically, from whatever news sources they regularly encounter.

Given this, manipulating expectations, especially in an experimental setting, presents numerous challenges. A subject’s baseline attachment to and attitude about such fundamental parts of a politician’s political identity as their partisan affiliation, for example, are formed by socialization processes that typically occur early on in life and lead to little flexibility later on. While the strength of partisan attachment can be temporarily experimentally manipulated, it lies beyond the strength of experimental treatments that are available to change an individual’s expectations of a party that have been formed by a lifetime of experiences in the course of a short laboratory interaction. A similar logic applies when attempting to change the expectations that accrue to a particular political office.

An additional difficulty is encountered when attempting to influence the mix of considerations an individual holds about a particular politician. While opinions about individual political figures might be comparatively recently formed compared to most individuals’ partisan affiliations, these opinions are still formed over a significant period of time. Information about a politician also comes to a citizen in the modern
media environment from a potentially wide variety of sources, from which users largely self-select. The addition of a single new piece of information from a single source — a single new consideration — cannot replicate these sustained, long-term effects, even if a fictional politician (a “blank slate”) is used. While it would be of supreme interest to create a long-term study in which subjects’ information environment in manipulated over long periods of time to create expectations that replicate those formed ‘organically’, such a study is beyond the scope of this project.

Secondly, any attempt to manipulate expectations in a direct manner is more than likely to overlap and conflict with the topic under investigation. That is, since the purpose of the experiment is to study how the public reacts when a politician is accused of deception, and since the direct method of setting expectations would in effect also be an accusation lodged against the subject politician, this method would essentially amount to little more than making two accusations in relatively rapid succession. While the effect of repeated accusations could also be of potential scholarly interest, this too is beyond the scope of this research.

Thirdly, and finally, manipulating expectations in this way would bypass the essential cognitive features of interest that are at the center of this theory. The central argument of this research is that news of deception is met with different cognitive processes depending upon the recipient’s pre-existing judgements of the likelihood of this news. Either thoughtful, ‘active’ processing is used, or less effortful ‘automatic’ processing. Attempting to forcibly create expectations in this style among subjects would almost certainly stand out in their minds as unusual, and thereby artificially increase the amount of active processing present.

**Generalized Inheritance**

Given all of these concerns, the direct manipulation of expectancies is an unsuitable research design. However, while the expectations subjects hold must be, for the pur-
poses of this research, taken to be fixed, there remains a path forward. Rather than change the expectations that the subject holds for the politician in the experimental treatment, it is possible to change aspects of the politician in order to evoke different yet previously-existing expectations from the subject, and thereby to access variation of expectations. By tapping into deeply held political stereotypes such as partisanship, I can reliably alter whether or not a politician is regarded as honest or dishonest by subjects, and thereby still directly examine the effects of expectations on reactions to deception accusations. This follows findings and research designs such as Fryer and Jackson (2003); Galinsky and Moskowitz (2000); McDermott (2007); McGarty, Yzerbyt and Spears (2002); Le Pelley et al. (2010), among many others, that rely upon a hypothetical subject or group inheriting its perceived properties among experimental subjects from a general category. Changing the general categories of which a fictional subject or group is a member is a commonly used practice for examining the operation of those stereotypes. For the research below, two characteristics commonly used by the public to inform their level of political trust (Hetherington, 1998) present themselves as both highly impactful and amenable to experimental manipulation. I make use of two important categories that individuals in the United States use in order to form political judgements — partisanship, and personal attachment.

Partisanship is an enduring and broadly applied categorical stereotype that is widely used to form political judgments (Green, Palmquist and Schickler, 2002). From the partisan stereotype literature, we know that partisanship should have two main effects on political expectations of honesty. First, an in-group bias should result in co-partisans being viewed as significantly more honest and trustworthy than out-group politicians (Bolsen, Druckman and Cook, 2014). Secondly, the two parties, due to ideological and other differences, should not be identical in their expectations of political honesty, but should rather demonstrate variations in their relative levels of generalized political trust based on the current political climate (Bartels, 2002).
go into detail on both of these expectations below.

Secondly, in addition to partisanship, an important source for political categorical judgments is personal attachment. An individual’s judgments of politicians are known to be heavily affected by a home-district bias — for example, American voters famously dislike Congress, but approve of their own Member of Congress (and so on for other politicians as well) (Hetherington, 2005; Mendes, 2013). The presence of an in-group bias is a well-documented finding in the field of social psychology. Subjects reliably favor and have higher opinions of members of groups of which they are a part as opposed to other groups. This finding also applies to estimates of honesty — that is, subjects assume that members of their in-groups are more likely to tell them the truth. Therefore, I expect subjects to have more positive (truthful) expectations for politicians that come from their own states than for those politicians that do not.

**Hypotheses**

Using the framework of expectancy violations, and relying upon the determinants of expectations of trust listed above, it is possible to make a number of predictions.

The first and most important prediction is the most basic one made by following an expectancy violation approach. As described earlier, only those messages that break with the pattern of expected messages by a subject should produce a change in a subject’s evaluations. Those messages that are expected should largely remain unprocessed, and therefore ineffective at shifting opinion. Therefore:

**Hypothesis 1:** Accusations of political lying should produce a downward shift in a politician’s reputation only with those subjects that possessed an expectation of honesty from said politician.

This, however, is only the most basic hypothesis that I can form. In order to further examine and test for the effects of expectancy violations, I utilize the broad-scale
determinants of political trust identified above in order to identify several effects that
should be observed under the theory of expectancy violations. As these are merely
specific implications of the broader Hypothesis 1, I label them as sub-hypotheses (a)
through (c) below.

First, partisan attachment, as mentioned above, is a major determinant of political
attitudes. Research shows individuals are far more likely to trust politicians that are
from their same political party, and also more likely to distrust members of the
opposing party (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, 2001). This means that, perhaps counter-
intuitively, individuals should be more likely to punish friendly politicians accused of
lying while effectively showing leniency counter-partisan politicians. Formally:

**Hypothesis 1a:** Accusations of political lying against co-partisan politicians
should be more likely to produce downward shifts in evaluations.

Secondly, the effect of partisanship should not be limited merely to differing ex-
pectations of trust for co-partisans. Party membership can also inform one’s general-
ized level of trust in politicians and political systems. That is, it is possible that
all Democrats are more trusting of politicians in general while Republican are more
likely to expect deceit, or vice versa. Research into this very question demonstrates
that the effect of partisanship on political trust is largely dependent upon which party
is in control of major political institutions, primarily the Presidency (Keele, 2005).
Individuals demonstrate a much larger degree of generalized trust in politicians whenever their party holds the Executive Branch — for more examples of this effect, see Uscinski, Parent and Torres (2011). See also Figure 5, which presents the earlier image of declining trust over time and breaks it down by party, showing how partisan trust changes with the presidential administrations.

Since this experiment was conducted under the tenure of a Democratic President,
and since Democrats are generally held to be more trusting than Republicans, I expect
to find a greater expectation of trust among Democratic subjects. Polls taken near
Figure 5: Percentage of survey respondents that say they trust government ‘always’ or ‘most of the time’, broken down by party.


the time of this research bear this expectation out, as they show a roughly 15 point gap in political trust of Democrats over Republicans.\textsuperscript{25} Therefore:

**Hypothesis 1b:** Accusations of political lying should be more likely to produce downward shifts in evaluations among Democrats than Republicans.

Finally, a major influence upon individual expectations of political honesty is the subject’s relation to the politician in question. Americans generally have a far more optimistic view of their personal representatives than they do of politicians in general. Congress, for example, generally holds a low level of public trust and approval — but most Americans give their own Member of Congress a significantly higher rating (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, 1995). Therefore, a home-state cue should create trust and an expectation of honesty.

In practice, and since this overlaps with the partisan expectations outlined above, I expect to observe different patterns of behavior in the presence of a home-state cue. Given that expectations of trust are non-additive (That is, the effects outlined above

\textsuperscript{25}Taken from a Pew Research Center poll conducted November 2015: “Beyond Distrust: How Americans View Their Government”.
depend upon the presence or absence of a trust expectation, and do not change based upon how many reasons for trust any given individual possesses\textsuperscript{26}, I expect to see the attenuation of the above partisan effects. That is, the presence of an additional reason for trust should cause counter-partisans to become responsive where they formerly were not, and cause Republicans to become responsive where formerly only Democrats were. Therefore:

**Hypothesis 1c:** In the presence of a home-state cue, populations that were formerly non-responsive under Hypothesis 1a and 1b should show patterns of greater response.

**Methods**

**Sample Source**

In order to examine these hypotheses and overcome the obstacles to inference mentioned above, I conducted a pair of experimental studies. I report findings from these two survey experiments, both of which were run through Mechanical Turk (“MTurk”), a recruitment service run by Amazon. The Mechanical Turk program allows for individuals who need the participation of humans to complete small online tasks, such as completing surveys, sorting images, proofreading text, and participating in research to offer small financial rewards, mediated through Amazon, in order to recruit subjects. In the parlance of the site, those are offering opportunities to participate in a project are referred to as “requesters”, while those participating are referred to as “Turkers”.

Most research has shown that for the purposes of experimental research, Mechanical

\textsuperscript{26}This should not be taken as a definitive statement that overlapping expectations have only binary outcomes. Both intuition and the results presented below suggest that they do. However, in the absence of a theory of expectancy interactions, I fall back on the simplest formulation possible for this research. Future work should investigate how overlapping expectancies from different sources interact to produce single judgments.
ical Turk is an excellent addition to the toolkit of the social science researcher. The underlying rationale, after all, of offering small rewards to a population of convenience is exactly the same as research that makes use of college students as research samples. Research into the topic of the use of online markets as a tool for experimental recruitment has found that not only do online markets offer the equivalent of student subject groups for research in a much more convenient format, but that research subjects obtained from online markets are in fact often superior. When proper research methodology is followed, in fact, online markets offer groups of subjects that are more diverse and representative of the United States population than standard samples of convenience of American college students, although it is important to note that they are still samples of convenience and do not constitute a statistically valid nationally representative sample. Online market-based subject groups also offer higher data quality and reliability than standard student samples, as well. For more details on the use of this subject pool for political science research, see Berinsky et al. (2012); Buhrmester, Kwang and Gosling (2011); Hauser and Schwarz (2016); and Paolacci and Chandler (2014).

Of course, the use of Mechanical Turk is not without issue. One major concern when using online markets is the generalizability of the experimental results to the population at large due to systematic differences between the population from which we are drawing experimental subjects and the population to which we hope to draw inferences. While thanks to the greater diversity of online market samples this is less of a problem than for research based on student samples or most other samples of convenience, some legitimate concerns still remain. For example, some scholars have suggested that participants in online market may be substantively different from those in the general population. Online market participants tend to have higher levels of technological competency than the general population, for example, and are somewhat more likely to present testing effects when subjected to standard battery
items such as the Cognitive Reflection Test. Also at issue is the possibility that the experimental context will exacerbate partisan effects, due to the fact that subjects will not have access to other information about politicians as they would in a natural environment. To alleviate these concerns, I conduct research using real-world data drawn from nationally representative survey samples in the next chapter.

**Sample Details**

As mentioned above, subjects were recruited through Amazon’s Mechanical Turk program. Subjects were offered $1 for their participation, based on the rates that Berinsky et al. (2012) calculate to be optimum for both data quality, subject motivation, and ethical/fairness concerns. Subjects were told in the recruitment materials that they were participating in a social science research experiment, but were not given details as to the nature of the experiment in order to avoid contamination effects. Using Mechanical Turk’s recruitment controls, only subjects that had a proven record of being genuine, good faith participants were allowed to sign up for the experiment. In addition, subjects were limited to adult American citizens 18 years of age or older. Subjects were also blocked on political ideology in Study 2, with independents classified based on which way they “lean”, in order to ensure a roughly even partisan split. All subjects were required to be from the United States, confirmed using MTurk subject qualifications and IP address monitoring. Subjects were also required to have a 95% or higher rating on Mechanical Turk. Descriptive statistics of the sample are present in Table 1.

After manual screening of responses and attention checks removed roughly a hundred subjects, 918 subjects were present in Study 1 and 1871 in Study 2, respectively. Power calculations suggested these high numbers of subjects given the high number of sub-group comparisons to be made.
Table 1: Summary Statistics of Experimental Samples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Median or Percentage</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Study 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (1 = 18-29, 6 = 70 or over)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female (1 = Yes)</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race (1 = Non-white)</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>0.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partisanship (1 = Str Dem, 5 = Str Rep)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Knowledge Battery (5 = all correct, 0 = none)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Study 2** | | |
| Median or Percentage | SD |
| Age (1 = 18-29, 6 = 70 or over) | 2 | 1.30 |
| Female (1 = Yes) | 47% | 0.49 |
| Race (1 = Non-white) | 15% | 0.36 |
| Partisanship (1 = Str Dem, 5 = Str Rep) | 3 | 1.50 |
| Political Knowledge Battery (5 = all correct, 0 = none) | 4 | 1.15 |

Data and Collection

Upon agreeing to participate, subjects were redirected to a standard online survey platform, powered by Qualtrics. Subjects in the experiment participated in what appeared to be an ordinary survey of political attitudes, of the sort that are commonly run by political campaigns and committees. Indeed, many subjects indicated in their attention, manipulation, and comprehension checks that they believed they were participating in exactly such a project.27

Embedded within the survey they completed were a number of measures of relevant key variables (detailed below), as well as the experimental treatment. Subjects were presented with what appeared to them to be brief news articles on political matters, of the sort commonly found online. Each article contained a statement from a fictional politician, and each experimental subject was exposed to one and only one such statement during the course of the experiment. The honesty of the statement was manipulated as the primary treatment variable. One group of subjects had their politician knowingly offer highly inaccurate information that supported their statement, while senators in the other group offered accurate facts instead. Aside from the honesty of the senator being quoted, the other details of the story were precisely the same. Subjects appeared to regard these stories and the politicians featured within

27As checks, participants were asked to recall a numerical detail from the article they were shown as the treatment, to provide a brief summary of the survey they had just taken, and to identify the fictional politician used in the treatment. Additional checks are described below.
them as genuine. In fact, during and despite post-questionnaire debriefings, many indicated that they believed the fictive senator they encountered during the experiment was in fact their own senator.

Honest senators made reference to a numerical figure during the course of their remarks. Their numbers were pulled directly from an authoritative source on the subject, and confirmation from an expert group was also displayed (for the rationale behind this and some other aspects of the treatment, please see the section in Chapter 1 on the pseudo-environment and mediated reality). Subjects in the deception condition, however, saw a politician that presented figures that diverged hyperbolically from the true figure, twisting the facts to suit their own point of view or argument. These were also accompanied with a rating and commentary from a fact-finding group, similar to those produced by popular organizations such as Politifact or the Washington Post Fact Checker. These ratings were placed so as to resemble a normal part of the article. This statement clearly delineated the article as a lie or a truth to the subject, and presented the accurate facts to either confirm or deny the senator’s statement. The goal of this approach was to simulate the way in which a standard member of the public would be informed of a politician’s deception.

All subjects were, at a later point in their survey, measured on the outcome variable. This took the form of a standard feeling thermometer rating exercise, similar in style to those used by the American National Election Survey. These ratings were also measured unobtrusively as part of the political attitudes survey, embedded alongside similar ratings exercises for currently prominent politicians. Demographic data and other variables of interest were collected prior to the treatment. Subjects were asked whether or not they thought politicians, as a general whole, were trustworthy or not (collected as a a binary yes/no statement agreement). In Study 2, subjects were also asked to estimate the percentage of the time they thought politicians, as a general class, told the truth. Generalized trust was collected, rather than trust in the
fictive politician presented to subjects, as (a) subjects would have no prior beliefs or information about the fictive politician, resulting in the information they gave simply defaulting to the generalized trust measure as mentioned earlier, and (b) the act of asking questions specifically about the fictive politician would draw attention to that politician, and thereby promote active processing on the part of subjects. These trust measures were administered prior to subjects reading the news article or giving their feeling thermometer evaluations, in order to prevent contamination from those stimuli. Finally, subjects were given post-experimental questionnaires and debriefed.\textsuperscript{28}

Subjects in the experiment were, consonant with the historical trends of growing distrust driven by high-profile public deception events such as Watergate, unlikely to consider politicians in general trustworthy.\textsuperscript{29} The majority of the sample, when asked if they agreed with the statement “You can generally trust politicians to tell the truth” did not agree. In fact, 83\% of the sample indicated that they did not feel politicians to be generally trustworthy (mean .827, se .013). In addition, subjects were also asked to report the percentage of the time that they felt they could trust statements from politicians. Overall, the sample indicated that they expected to be lied to frequently. The average percentage estimated by the sample was 36\% (mean 36.5, se .736). That is, subjects assumed that politicians spend 74\% of their time lying — an estimate that is oddly in line with Bucciol and Zarri (2013).

In order to support the idea that these findings indicate genuinely divergent expectations about what can be expected in terms of honesty, the following is the average percentage of political statements assumed to be truthful for each group in the general trust question. Subjects that indicated they believed politicians were generally trustworthy said that political statements were trustworthy 68\% of the time (mean 68.3, se 1.13). In contrast, subjects that said that politicians were not honest indicated

\textsuperscript{28}The debriefing and revelation of the survey were conducted after all data collection, to avoid Hawthorn effects.

\textsuperscript{29}Democrats were, however, more trusting than Republicans on average.
cated they believed that political statements were trustworthy only 30% of the time (mean 30.1, se .63). As a matter of interest, while “Politicians tell the truth 0% of the time” was a moderately popular answer for subjects that indicated they thought politicians in general were dishonest\(^{30}\), not a single subject that indicated a general belief in political honesty estimated a 0% honesty rate, further supporting the validity of this measure. This indicates: 1) That there is a significant difference of opinion between the two groups that colors their practical on-the-ground expectations of various actors, as opposed to slightly different levels of optimism, and 2) Questions that measure self-reported general political trust do in fact tap deeply important political attitudes (Hetherington, 1998).

For further validation, subjects were given an external political efficacy battery. Subjects were relatively split on the issue of whether or not they could expect the government to be responsive to their concerns, as fifty-five percent of the sample received the lowest possible score on the combined efficacy battery. In addition, political efficacy and trust in government honesty were also related. A subject that indicated a general belief in political honesty gave a 1-point higher rating of external political efficacy on a three-point scale ($\beta .92$, $p < .001$). The two variables were strongly related, with a Spearman’s rho of .36 ($p < .001$). Finally, trust in government and moral beliefs were also related. Subjects that indicated they found government to be generally untrustworthy had significantly different views on morality than their counterparts, being far more likely to indicate that lying and other immoral activity is always wrong ($p < .001$).

In summary, these findings mean that our sample is in line with the historical patterns presented in Chapter 2. Subjects were, overall, distrustful of their elected

\(^{30}\)This level of estimation can perhaps be excused by either the anchoring effect of the survey scale, or by the fact that this research was conducted during a particularly contentious political campaign during which deceit was a major issue (see Chapter 4 for more details): it is hard, after all, to imagine any politician telling the truth 0% of the time. At a minimum, they would sometimes have to say their own name.
officials. Rather than a simple generalized level of public distrust, however, there were significant variations, as some groups seem generally trustful of political honesty while others are not. A simple self-report of expectation of political honesty seems to be supported as a potential measure tapping an important political attitude, as it correlates with subject estimates of actual political lies as well as with subject political efficacy.

**Treatment in Detail**

The definition of deception used in this research is given in the earlier chapter: “A lie, for the purposes of this research, is a false statement made knowingly to purposefully mislead another for some purpose.”. When used as a treatment in these experiments, I operationalize deception according to that definition: politicians in these experiments offer information that is clearly false (that is, it is a “black” lie\(^{31}\)), in every case referencing easily measured statistics. Although this is not the type of lie most common in actual politics, this is not an issue here because this research focuses on the reaction of the public to the use of deception. The decision of whether or not a politician is actually guilty of lying is a product of what Lippmann referred to as the pseudo-environment. Since the public will, most of the time, relate to the topics of political deception as unobstrusive matters (that is, they will not personally observe the operating budget of Planned Parenthood, but rather have it reported to them), then the matter of interest is what happens after a politician has been rendered a liar in the pseudo-environment, regardless of the actual truth of the statement.\(^{32}\)

Expectancy, of course, cannot easily be directly manipulated. The decision to switch between active and normal processing is based upon judgements of what is and

\(^{31}\)As opposed to a “grey” lie that relies upon equivocal language or untestable claims. Promising to make something “a priority” for example, and then failing to deliver action upon that issue would be an example of a “grey” lie.

\(^{32}\)As an example, consider the hypothetical case in which a politician tells the truth but, inexplicably, every possible outlet of information available to the public reports it as a lie. The politician would be a liar in the pseudo-environment, and as such would be a valid subject for this research.
is not routine, and manipulating the lifetime of experiences that form an individual’s concept of ‘routine’ is not easily done. Therefore, as stated previously, the logic of this experimental design focuses on evaluating the variations in the effectiveness of a treatment — an accusation of political dishonesty — upon different subgroups of experimental subjects.

As part of what appeared to be a typical political survey, subjects were asked to read what appeared to be an excerpt from an online news article. In the course of the article, a statement from a fictional senator ("Senator Adams") is shown. In Study 2, the Senator was also described as representing the subject’s home state (this variation across experiments was present to allow the examination of Hypothesis 1c using inter-study response patterns). Senator Adams, in the course of a brief article excerpt, is quoted as making a statement that involves some numerical figure. The main treatment was whether or not subjects were assigned an honest or dishonest version of Senator Adams. When honest, Adams used accurate figures in the statement. When dishonest, Adams would use wildly inaccurate figures to support their position. Since the main treatment of interest is the effect of accusations of dishonesty, the article also included a following note in the style of various fact-checking agencies, rating the statement as honest or dishonest.

In addition, the Senator was identified as either Democratic or Republican to permit the study of how partisanship conditions the effects of honesty. This identification was made to subjects both by following the senator’s name with the appropriate partisan letter code (and state code, in the case of Study 2), and by referencing the senator’s party affiliation once in the article text. This means that there were four base treatment groups in Study 1 — subjects saw one of an accused or honest Re-

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33 Numerical statements were chosen for this treatment as they are easily verifiable as true/not true, allow for simple and definite fact-checking statements, are publicly available and verifiable in case of prior knowledge, and as will be of interest, allow for straightforward manipulation of the magnitude of the dishonest statement.

34 An example of treatment materials is given in an appendix.
publican Senator, or an accused or honest Democratic Senator. Other than these variations, the text of the excerpt remained constant across all treatments in Study 1, where it was an examination of coal power policy, and the figure at stake the average annual deaths due to coal pollution. In order to ensure that subject matter of the article itself was not responsible for the results, Study 2 was a more sophisticated version of Study 1, repeated three times on three new issue areas: political lobbying (the senator in question stated the amount their office received in lobbying funds), energy security (the senator described the remaining years in the U.S. energy reserves), and the growth of ISIS (the senator gave the figures for casualties in U.S. anti-terrorism efforts). An example of the type of treatment used is given in the appendix.

To ensure the validity of the treatment, manipulation checks were included. It could be the case, for example, that subjects might view a politician using incorrect figures to support their point of view as merely incompetent rather than genuinely dishonest. The manipulation checks show that the treatment causes subjects to view the fictional Senator Adams as dishonest, while in no way affecting their judgment of the senator’s competence, knowledge, or skill. When asked about their willingness to ascribe various traits to Senator Adams using trait-labeling questions modeled after those used in the ANES, subjects were no less likely to describe Adams as “knowledgeable” or “reliable” when the Senator was accused of deception. Tests for significant differences of means returned $p=.478$ and $.182$ respectively. No substantive difference is found when tests are run on each issue area or study individually. Subjects were,

35 That is, that Democrats or Republicans are not merely uniquely responsive to environmental issues, rather than patterns being driven by expectancy violations.

36 These issues were chosen not only to diversify issue areas and test robustness, but also to deal with the idea that deception might be treated differently based on essential characteristics of the lie. That is, the public might treat a lie about a personal matter differently than a broader political issue, or a salient political matter differently from a non-salient one. Thus, the above issues include one issue that is politically salient, one issue that is political but currently (as of the time of the survey) not widely salient, and one issue that is personal to politician in question rather than the political system as whole.
however, significantly less likely to label the Senator as “trustworthy” \( (p<.001) \).

This pattern was also demonstrated in post-experimental questionnaires. When asked about Adams, almost all (>97%) subjects assigned an accused version used language such as “honest/dishonest”, “a liar” or some variation thereof. Fewer than 5% of subjects, however, mentioned competence or ability in any context.\(^{37}\) Repeating the analyses in this article minus those subjects that mentioned competence in some form, or restricting subjects solely to those that explicitly said that the article made them question Adams’ honesty, produces no substantive difference in results. Thus, I can be confident that subjects are properly interpreting the reported variation from the correct figures as a reported act of deception on Adams’ part, and not of feigned competence, genuine ignorance, or anything of the sort.

In order to ensure that results were due to variations in attention, I also tested subjects’ recall of the treatment. Subjects were asked, as part of the post-experimental interview, to recall a piece of information from the article such as the figures mentioned. By running a simple logistic regression, I found that compared to someone who places no faith in politicians (ie, someone who estimates they tell the truth 0% of the time), someone who believes that politicians are honest 100% of the time has 2.7 times greater odds of being able to accurately recall information from the article when exposed to an accusation against Adams \( (p<.001) \). This supports the argument that the following results are due to different modes of cognitive processing, and that subjects are paying differing amounts of cognitive effort to the treatment based on their expectations.\(^{38}\)

\(^{37}\) Coding of these mentions was intentionally inclusive: it included any post-interview that mentioned the Senator’s competence, or any word relating to competence.

\(^{38}\) The alternative theory being tested here is variant mechanisms for expectancy effects. Instead of being due to differing modes of cognitive processing, it is possible that individuals process all information, but that information that was expected has a lower ‘weight’ due to the drop-in-the-bucket effect. In contrast, information that goes against previously processed information has a larger effect, in a Bayesian style. Although I present this test here in the support of the cognitive processing explanation, as stated in Chapter 1, this research is agnostic to the precise mechanism behind expectancy violations, and compatible with all of them.
Results

As mentioned above, the underlying logic of this research design lies in varying the characteristics of the fictional Senator Adams in order to tap the expectations of various subgroups of the sample. Under expectancy violations, the treatment should only cause a response with those subgroups of the sample that most expect honesty from the fictive politicians presented to them, as they undergo active processing. Meanwhile, those subgroups that expect dishonesty should show no effects of the treatment on their evaluations of Adams, presenting no difference between groups exposed to accused and unaccused versions of the senator.

Study 1

First, for purposes of context, I present the base differentials in evaluations caused by accusations in Study 1. The outcome variable is the mean rating of Senator Adams on a standard 0-100 feeling thermometer scale, with 100 being most positive.

Since all hypotheses call for partial movement of some subgroups in response to lying accusations, I expect to observe some shift in evaluations of Adams in the aggregate. In Figure 6, accusations of lying did have some effect on evaluations of Adams: an accusation of dishonesty significantly lowered ratings of Adams by an average of 4.95 feeling thermometer points ($p=.003$). This is a substantial effect: for comparison, the average effect of co-partisanship with the subject was 15.1 points ($p<.001$), meaning that honesty is worth almost a third as much to the public as being a member of the correct party.

While this does demonstrate that lying can carry some reputational costs, of far greater interest for our hypotheses is which groups of subjects are driving this aggregate-level change. I begin by first breaking down the lying differential for Study 1 by respondent and Adams’ partisanship.
Figure 6: Study 1 Base Lying Differential

Note: Feeling Thermometer is a standard 0-100 rating scale. Points denote the mean. Error bars around each point give 95% confidence intervals.

Looking at Figure 7, it is clear that, as predicted, accusations of lying produced no significant results among Republican subjects in Study 1. Although the Republican Adams were rated more favorably on average than their Democratic counterparts overall (in both the honest and dishonest cases), Republican subjects did not rate dishonest senators significantly differently from those that were honest ($p=.878$), supporting Hypothesis 1b. However, Democratic subjects showed a very different pattern of results. The honesty or dishonesty of the Republican Adams still produced no effect ($p=.473$). There was, however, a marked effect when Adams was a Democrat (Figure 8). Among fellow Democrats, being accused of dishonesty lowered Adams’ feeling thermometer ratings by an average of 11.46 points ($p<.001$). Therefore, it seems that the aggregate effects for Study 1 are primarily being driven by Democratic
Note: Feeling Thermometer is a standard 0-100 rating scale. Points denote the mean. Error bars around each point give 95% confidence intervals.

subjects reacting actively to Democratic senators, with subjects in other conditions proving non-reactive as we would expect under normal processing.

These results are consistent with the predictions made in Hypotheses 1a and 1b. The only significant effect of lying accusations was found among co-partisans, suggesting that the higher expectations Democratic respondents had for ‘their’ senator led them to be more likely to update their evaluations to incorporate the new information. Meanwhile, Republicans, with their lower levels of trust in government and politicians, paid little to no attention to accusations of lying whatsoever, as opposed to their Democratic counterparts. It is notable that not only did Republicans dismiss charges against co-partisans (as motivated skepticism might suggest) but also ignored charges against their political opponents, supporting the idea of normal processing.
Figure 8: Study 1 Lying Differentials, By Senator Party, Democratic Subjects Only

Note: Feeling Thermometer is a standard 0-100 rating scale. Points denote the mean. Error bars around each point give 95% confidence intervals.

This, of course, is not definitive. Rather than Republicans being non-responsive due to normal processing, perhaps Republicans are actively processing the treatment yet non-responsive for other reasons — they might have different ideals for politicians to follow, and actively dismiss the accusation against Adams as non-consequential, for example. Or perhaps the issue area is at fault — environmental policy might simply not be important enough to Republican respondents to produce a response, while being unusually salient for Democratic respondents. Study 2 examines the robustness of the above results.
Study 2

Study 2, as noted above, added additional refinements over Study 1. In addition to being run on multiple issue areas, all subjects in Study 2 saw Senator Adams identified as hailing from their home state.

Figure 9: Study 2 Base Lying Differentials, By Treatment Subject

Examine overall average results, Study 2 showed similar effects to Study 1: Adams suffered an average loss of 5.95 points ($p<.001$) when accused. Figure 9 (as well as comparison with Figure 6) also demonstrate that the specific issue area used in the treatment does not seem to impact the general pattern of results obtained.
Therefore, the rest of the results present the pooled Study 2 results. Rerunning all tests below on each issue area separately produced no substantive differences in results.

The first thing to note about the Study 2 results (presented in Figures 10 and 11) is that the shift to a home state senator produced a pattern of responses far more indicative of accusations having an effect upon evaluations. These results offer support for Hypothesis 1c.

Figure 10: Study 2 Lying Differentials, By Senator Party, Republican Subjects Only

![Study 2 Base Lying Difference](image)

Note: Feeling Thermometer is a standard 0-100 rating scale. Points denote the mean. Error bars around each point give 95% confidence intervals.

In Figure 10, Republican subjects still respond to accusations against Democratic senators with complete indifference. There is no significant difference between the
Note: Feeling Thermometer is a standard 0-100 rating scale. Points denote the mean. Error bars around each point give 95% confidence intervals.

rating that an honest Democratic senator receives from a Republican audience and a dishonest one \((p=.231)\), just as in the Study 1 results. However, when confronted with a co-partisan from their home state, Republican subjects were just as willing to punish deception as their Democratic counterparts, and to almost exactly the same degree. On average, a Republican senator in this instance lost 6.73 feeling thermometer points when accused of lying \((p=.017)\).

Democratic subjects, in turn, also grew more responsive than in Study 1. Democratic senators suffered a mean loss of 6.40 feeling thermometer points with a Democratic audience when accused of lying \((p=.003)\). The addition of the home-state expectation also led to Democratic subjects becoming responsive to accusations against Republican senators as well: an accusation here led to an average 6.39 point loss
(p=.010), whereas in the previous study, this had produced no significant change.

This suggests that politicians that were previously thought of as part of an out-group — Republican senators for Democratic respondents in Study 1, for example — were seen differently in Study 2. Democratic respondents in Study 2 punished Republican politicians accused of lying almost to exactly the same degree as they punished fellow Democrats. Republican respondents, in turn, became responsive to deception at all for the first time. The identical levels of punishment found whenever a group proved responsive to deception are consistent with the idea of subjects switching from one method of processing to another: note that multiple trust-producing conditions (such as Adams being from both a subject’s same party and state) had no additive effect on greater or lesser punishment.

Finally, our main hypothesis (Hypothesis 1) predicts that the overall effect of lying accusations on politician evaluations should be conditional on a subject’s expectation of honesty. To examine this directly, I estimate a multiplicative analysis using OLS regression on results from Study 2, controlling for factors known to affect political evaluations. I include a dummy variable indicating whether the subject and Adams were from the same political party, since as mentioned above co-partisanship should be expected to positively impact feeling thermometer ratings. In addition, since Democrats are expected to be more generally positive towards politicians in general than Republicans (1b), a dummy variable for political partisanship was also included. Controls were also included for the subject’s baseline feeling thermometer rating tendency by including their average ratings for other politicians, as well as a battery of demographic variables.

We can see that all control variables behave as predicted. Co-partisanship is worth, as in Study 1, roughly 15 points on a feeling thermometer rating. Demo-

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39 In other words, Democrats seem to trust all fellow Democrats and all local politicians, while Republicans trust only fellow Republicans who are also local. Investigating these patterns of trust is an intriguing avenue for further research.

40 Two Democrat and two Republican politicians.
cratic respondents are indeed more positive to Adams, rating the senator nearly 10 points more highly than do their partisan counterparts. Older subjects appear to be more critical of Adams than are younger subjects, with each increased age category significantly decreasing feeling thermometer ratings. Political knowledge has a significant, but substantively small effect on thermometer ratings: moving from the most to the least knowledgable subject would only produce an expected change of less than a point. Finally, the subjects’ baseline feeling thermometer rating tendency was significant, helping to control for anchoring and other such effects.

To examine whether the effect of lying accusations is conditional, I interact a dummy variable indicating whether or not a lying accusation was made with the subject’s estimate (as a percentage from 0-100) of how often politicians tell the truth.\textsuperscript{41} The dependent variable is the subject’s feeling thermometer rating of Senator Adams. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 2. The findings indicate that whether or not an accusation of lying will prompt a shift in evaluations is heavily conditioned by the subject’s expectation of honesty. The interaction term is negatively signed and statistically significant.

More specifically, these results demonstrate that as people’s expectations of political honesty increase, the effectiveness of an accusation of lying also significantly increases. For example, for individuals that have the highest expectations of honesty (that is, those subjects that indicated that they expect politicians to tell the truth 100% of the time), the coefficient measuring the effect of lying accusations on people’s views of Adams is -7.09 ($p<.001$). However, among those subjects who expected dishonesty (that is, those subjects that indicated they expect politicians to tell the truth 0% of the time) the lying accusation dummy variable has no significant effect ($p=.39$). The estimated loss of feeling thermometer points due to dishonesty for given levels of political trust is presented in Figure 12.\textsuperscript{42}

\textsuperscript{41}Used as their baseline expectation for Senator Adams.
\textsuperscript{42}For information on interpreting multiplicative interactions, see Braumoeller (2004).
Table 2: Regression results examining the multiplicative relationship between experimental condition and estimated honesty of politicians on overall feeling thermometer rating of Adams (Study 2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Coef.</th>
<th>Robust SE</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accusation</td>
<td>−1.09</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>0.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accusation * Trust</td>
<td>−0.06</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-Partisanship</td>
<td>14.81</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject Party ID</td>
<td>9.58</td>
<td>1.62</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>−1.14</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>0.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>−2.71</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial Minority</td>
<td>−0.27</td>
<td>1.66</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Knowledge</td>
<td>−0.10</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rating Tendency</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>8.54</td>
<td>5.22</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Observations 1748
R² 0.22

Coefficients are unstandardized OLS coefficients. The dependent variable is the respondent’s feeling thermometer rating of Adams from 0-100. Trust is the respondent’s 0-100 percentage estimate of how often they expected politicians to tell the truth. Co-partisanship is coded 1 for respondents whose treatment contained a senator from their own party and 0 otherwise. Subject Party ID is coded one for Democratic respondents and 0 for Republican respondents. Demographic controls: gender, age, race, political knowledge, and average feeling thermometer rating given to other politicians. Removing these controls produces substantively similar results.

In summary, support is found for all hypotheses. As in Hypothesis 1, accusations of dishonesty only had a significant effect conditional on expectations of honesty. When subjects expected lies, their evaluations of dishonest politicians did not change. When they expected honesty, however, they sharply lowered their evaluations of dishonest politicians.

Also as predicted (1a), co-partisan senators were far more likely to suffer a drop in feeling thermometer ratings when accused. In Study 1, the only group of politicians to be punished were Democratic co-partisans. In Study 2, co-partisan politicians were the only group of politicians to be punished by both parties. Supporting 1b, Republican respondents, across both studies, were less responsive to accusations of deception.
than were Democratic respondents. Democratic respondents, on the other hand, were always responsive to deception, no matter the study. Finally, the presence of a home-state cue (1c) caused subjects to be more likely to engage in active processing across the board. Democratic respondents began to treat Republican politicians in exactly the same manner as Democratic politicians, and Republicans became responsive for the first time, if only to fellow Republicans.
Conclusion

Fact-checking organizations and initiatives have increased over time to become ubiquitous parts of the modern campaign narrative (Graves and Glaisyer, 2012), and campaigns have always been ready to accuse their opponents of dishonesty. It is important, then, as these accusations make up an increasing fraction of campaign discourse, for political science to understand what role they play in shaping citizens’ beliefs about their leaders.

My research design bypassed several obstacles to inference by fielding a pair of nationwide Internet survey experiments. I drew on a substantial literature from cognitive political psychology to argue that citizens update their beliefs when psychological mechanisms triggered by the presence of information incongruent with expectations are activated. Therefore, contrary to what might seem intuitive, people should be most likely to punish lies that are committed by their own party members and personal representatives, and members of optimistic political movements should be more likely to punish lies than those with a grimmer view of politics. The patterns of my experimental findings supported these hypotheses.

Of course, this research was subject to many limitations. For example, experimental control required a fictional politician. Despite assurances in post-treatment questionnaires that Senator Adams seemed real (and buoyed by the remarkable number of subjects that assumed, despite all briefings, that he was real and was, in fact, their senator), subjects had none of the prior knowledge or heightened reactions that might be present for a real politician. Subjects in the experiment read the accusation against Adams directly after reading his statement, whereas in real politics a fact-check might follow at a significant gap in time and come from any one of a number of sources. Similarly, the experiment controlled all of the information available about Adams, whereas in a genuine media environment, there would be a profusion
of information available for voters to choose from.\footnote{For more information on how mixed information can affect cognitive processing, see Redlawsk, Civettini and Emmerson (2010).} Despite suggestive results from the attention check analysis, I am also unable to conclusively identify the mechanism driving the expectational effect (attentional, Bayesian, memory-based, etc.) — though this research is agnostic to the precise mechanism driving expectancy violations. In addition, the limitations of an experimental design mean that I am unable to judge how durable these effects might be over time. Nevertheless, although it is difficult to generalize from tightly controlled experimental settings to the comparative chaos and complexity of the modern political media environment, this experiment is an important first step towards making those broader inferences. Future work, for example, might examine how Americans’ historical decline in trust in government has affected the responsiveness of the public to accusations over time, or offer a more detailed examination of how citizens form expectations of political actors.

If voters do, in fact, judge candidates on a sliding scale — basing their reaction to an accusation of deception not on the politician’s deviation from the truth but on their deviation from their expected deviation, what are the implications for political discourse at large? Should candidates go out of their way to lower expectations of their honesty in the same way that candidates will try to downplay their speaking ability before a debate, or is the modern political environment so negative that all politicians already benefit from the smokescreen effect? More research will be needed to say for sure. Yet the troubling conclusion is that accusations against largely honest politicians hold the potential to be devastating, while citizens prove least attentive to those that most bear watching.
Chapter 4: A Picture of the Public

People never lie so much as after a hunt, during a war or before an election.

Otto van Bismarck

Introduction

In the last chapter, I examined how expectancy violations operated to guide deception reactions on an individual level. Several counter-intuitive patterns of results — such as partisans being more likely to punish co-partisans, or political pessimists proving largely non-responsive to confirmations of their political doubt — were both predicted and explained by using a expectancy-violation based framework.

However, perhaps the most important question left after the previous chapter is the question of how well the expectancy violation framework translates to a larger and more significant political context. For example, the effects found in the previous chapter were all found in studies that used a generic, fictional politician; and in scenarios in which all the information available to the subjects about a particular case could be easily manipulated. This environment is one that heavily favors an ability to find an effect, but perhaps hinders my ability to generalize to the chaotic and uncontrolled environment of actual politics.
In addition, perhaps the natural follow-on point from the previous chapter is to consider the implications. While the previous chapter’s results inspire confidence that the expectancy violation effect operates on an individual level, affecting individual behavior, its operation has not been examined in the aggregate. The question, then, is whether this individual cognitive effect has larger effects on the American political system as a whole, and if so, what they are.

The goal of this chapter, therefore, is two-fold. First, this chapter serves as a real-world test of the expectancy violation hypothesis. Do expectancy violations offer a useful framework for understanding and predicting actual political events, and do we actually observe the counter-intuitive patterns associated with this pattern of thinking in the broader American political context?

Second, this chapter serves as a way to illustrate the normative implications of the cognitive effects identified in the previous chapter. For example, if a public expectation of dishonesty serves to decrease the likelihood that the public will actually respond to further reports of dishonesty, then it may be necessary to reevaluate the modern media environment’s ability to perform its function as a watchdog. Media market fragmentation has led to increased competition by various outlets for political news, leading to greater degree of sensationalism, group-tailored content, and negativity in modern news. While these changes have been discussed in more detail elsewhere (Bennett, 2016; Cohen, 2004; Geer, 2012; Stockmann, 2011), they may have an additional, unforeseen effect. In addition, the greater total amount of news stories encountered by a result of technical change and the effects of increased competition on the suppression of lying aversion (Minozzi and Woon, 2013) should also result in increased exposure by the public to stories of deception. “Inflation” in the amount of negative political stories taken in by the typical American news consumer could feed the public’s perception of politicians as dishonest, and thereby weaken their reaction to further such stories. In a media environment in which such stories are relatively
rare — such as what Cohen (2004) refers to as the “Golden Age” of television news — a more innocent public would be shocked by stories of political dishonesty, and more likely to cognitively engage with the report.

I must also consider what sort of factors will have an impact upon the formation of political expectations. An individual's political expectations, as previously discussed, are formed by the past political environment which they have experienced. Poverty, social status, or any other effect that would cause one to have a differing experience of political honesty can (potentially) not only lead to differential access to information, but also differential processing of the same information.

This chapter will use data from the 2016 presidential election — in particular, state-level variation in polling averages — to examine the operation of expectancy violations on public reactions to deception at a mass level. First, I detail the context and logic behind this study, as well as briefly reviewing the related literature. I then move on to explicitly state the hypotheses being tested in this chapter. Following that, I explain the data sources and collection process for this research, before moving on to a brief methods note and the presentation of results. Finally, I offer a concluding summary detailing the implications of this research and a call for further research topics.

Expectations at the Mass Level

In the following research, I will be examining how expectancy violations condition deception reactions at the aggregate level of mass politics. The same basic framework, as laid out in Chapter 1, is still applicable. I assume that the difference between an expected accusation and an actual accusation is what determines whether or not the accusation receives active processing, and thus also determines whether or not the accusation has any lasting impact.
I conceptualize an expectation of dishonesty at the aggregate level as simply the average of all the positional expectations of the group — their $P'$ — being fixed at a significant distance from reality, or $P$. In the same way, a deception reaction at the mass level would simply consist of a politician’s average public feeling thermometer rating loss with the concerned group falling or dropping as a result of an accusation being made.

Of considerably more interest than merely considering what this research means when it speaks of an ‘expectation on average’ are what sort of group-level factors should be expected to produce variations in expectations. Since we know that expectations are formed by repeated access to information (Bartholow et al., 2001), we will, in this chapter, be examining group-level variation in access to information. I assume throughout this chapter that this mechanism of information being taken in and used to form expectations as to what sort of messages should be expected in the future, as well as group-level information variance, is what holds.

The specific group-level information variances to be examined in this chapter will be discussed below in more detail. However, it is worth explaining why this chapter is focused upon the antecedents of expectations, instead of simply directly dealing with measuring expectations of political honesty. The main issue is one of simple necessity and data availability. As mentioned in the previous chapter, measuring expectations directly is a difficult proposition. By their very nature, humans are, generally speaking, largely unaware of our own expectations until they are violated (for an example, see Krueger and Mueller (2002)). To track expectations, then, there are only two distinct possibilities. The first is to ask subjects to make forecasts based upon their expectations. For example, if researchers wanted to know whether or not a subject expected to see stories about shootings, they could ask them not to estimate how often they see stories about shootings (since the expectancy effect and its impact on memory would also play a role here), but about how often they think
shootings occur. This method was used in the previous chapter when subjects were asked to estimate how often they think politicians tell the truth. Using this method is somewhat limited at a national level, however. While some generalized trust measures are collected on political surveys, and will be used in the analysis below, there are few specific measures of what American citizens expect in terms of political honesty. Generalized trust encapsulates many other political beliefs and concepts besides a simple forecast of honesty, and is correlated with enough other political variables that using it alone to make predictions is fraught with potential difficulties.

The second method of tracking expectations, then, is to track what information subjects would be exposed to that would, in turn, form them. While not also without its difficulties, this method should allow me to supplement simple generalized political trust as an explanatory variable, and form more compelling hypotheses.

**Study Context**

This dissertation has previously discussed the example of Donald Trump in regards to political dishonesty in earlier chapters. The test in the previous chapter, however, did not *directly* address the question of Donald Trump, due to the unavoidable exigencies of the experimental design. Instead, it focused on generalized expectations and a fictional politician. Nevertheless, is possible for this research to examine Trump’s campaign, and that of Clinton, in the light of expectancy violations.

The 2016 election cycle offers a perfect way to examine expectancy effects in a real world environment. First, the issue of political honesty rapidly became a central focus of the campaign, even more so than most previous political campaigns. Fact-checking and accusations of lying were near-constant refrains of both political parties. This interest and prevalence provides me, first, with additional data on honesty in politics that may not have been collected in a more typical campaign, and second,
with a wide variety of accusations of political deception to use as test cases for study. Second, the election featured sharp and widely-pronounced group-level variations in how the public responded to news of Trump’s dishonesty, providing visible and salient variation on the central focus of this research. Third, the wealth of data ordinarily collected during any presidential campaign is an extremely valuable asset to this research, as tracking polls of political figures are otherwise seldom run with such frequency and regularity. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the 2016 election offers a highly instructive and motivating example of the potential implications of this theory, and the potential effects of human cognitive biases on political systems.

One implication of the expectancy violation framework is that those citizens who are most often exposed to news about political deception, and therefore have an expectation that politicians are dishonest, should have been less likely to change their opinions downward due to the news of a candidate’s dishonesty presented during the campaign. The 2016 election featured an extremely high degree of focus on political honesty and fact-checking. In fact, according to the Duke Reporters’ Laboratory Project, the 2016 election featured the most fact-checking work in history (Duke Reporter’s Lab, N.d.).

Background

The 2016 election featured a competition between two main presidential candidates: Donald J. Trump and Hillary Rodham Clinton. Also running were Gary Johnson for the Libertarian Party, and Jill Stein for the Green Party, as well as other third party candidates.

While all candidates were accused of dishonesty as one point or more during the campaign, Trump’s candidacy was marked by controversy and deviation from established campaign norms from the very beginning. In his formal announcement of his candidacy for the Republican Party nomination, Trump remarked:
When do we beat Mexico at the border? They’re laughing at us, at our stupidity. And now they are beating us economically. They are not our friend, believe me. But they’re killing us economically.

The U.S. has become a dumping ground for everybody else’s problems. (APPLAUSE)

Thank you. It’s true, and these are the best and the finest. When Mexico sends its people, they’re not sending their best. They’re not sending you. They’re not sending you. They’re sending people that have lots of problems, and they’re bringing those problems with us. They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists. And some, I assume, are good people.

But I speak to border guards and they tell us what we’re getting. And it only makes common sense. It only makes common sense. They’re sending us not the right people.

— Donald J. Trump, Remarks at Presidential Bid Announcement, June 16 2016

These statements — as well as others from Trump’s early speeches and rhetoric — led to wide criticism of Trump from most media outlets. The Trump campaign routinely engaged the media in personal feuds over these criticisms, often with the candidate himself personally arguing with individual journalists over Twitter (Gross and Johnson, 2016).

Trump’s bid for the presidency was, also, originally viewed by most media actors as non-serious, with most reporters, pundits, and election forecasters giving him negligible chances at capturing the nomination. Indeed, early on, most of the discussion centered around Trump focused on how his campaign would affect that of presumptive frontrunners such as Jeb Bush and Ted Cruz, rather than on his chances of attaining the nomination personally. The popular prediction website FiveThirtyEight, for
example, initially rated his chances of securing the nomination at just 2%. Trump invariably responded to criticism of his chances with charges that any evidence of weakness in his campaign was false. For example, following several disappointing debate performances, Trump announced that he was ‘winning in every poll’ and media reports of polls showing him losing were ‘lies’ and ‘bias’.

Finally, many stories about Trump — especially from the early days of the primary campaign — were based on entertainment value. The Trump campaign, as well as their candidate, often seemed politically inexperienced, leading to odd decisions or poor preparations for campaign events. In addition, Trump himself often seemed to intentionally invite controversy in order to attract more media attention. For example, his decision to skip one of the primary debates in order to attend a veteran’s event resulted in a great deal of media attention both before and after the event, focusing on minute by minute speculation as to whether or not he would actually attend the event, and post-event speculation as to whether or not he had affected his performance in the horse race by doing so. This was a repeated strategy for the Trump campaign to attract ‘earned media’: later in the campaign, when Trump promised to finally address his controversial championing of the idea that Barack Obama was not born in the United States, he forced all the attending reporters to cover a series of veterans promoting his candidacy and an advertisement for his hotel, before issuing a two-sentence statement denial that placed the blame on Hillary Clinton and credited himself for settling the ‘birther’ issue. CNN’s John King summed up Trump’s relationship with the media as “We got played.”

These early interactions set the tone for most of Trump’s relationship with the media, and also helped to cement the issue of honesty (particularly Trump’s, or his lack thereof) as a central issue in the 2016 campaign. Trump’s controversial statements in his candidacy announcement inspired not only condemnation, but also point-by-point fact-checked rebuttals, and this trend continued throughout his campaign (and, as
of this writing, the early days of his presidency). Trump responded by accusing the ‘mainstream media’ of dishonestly twisting his words and unfairly attacking him, and by continuing to make similar statements that incited further bouts of fact-checking. Trump’s opponents did not hesitate to make use of this aspect of his reputation, calling for fact-checks and accusing him of being dishonest about his conservative credentials. Trump responded in kind, most famously by branding rival Ted Cruz with the nickname ‘Lyin’ Ted’.

By the time of Trump’s surprising victory in the primaries, his media personality for the campaign was firmly established. Trump was entertaining, always providing unusual or offbeat news stories for the 24-hour media cycle. Trump was not a serious candidate, as almost all political forecasters confidently predicted a Clinton victory, and this was widely predicted in press. And finally, the story of ‘Trump as liar’ had become a cornerstone of the campaign news cycle. Clinton called for live fact-checking during the debates. Apps that supplemented his Twitter feed with fact-checks were published. A campaign ad depicting ‘Donald Trump’s 7 Biggest Lies’ was released. As of this writing, over 70% of his campaign statements were found to be false by the popular fact-checking website Politifact (34% received the colorful rating “Pants on Fire”). His campaign rhetoric was selected, in its totality, as their 2015 “Lie of the Year”. Other fact-checking organizations such as the Washington Post Fact Checker and Factcheck.org also gave Trump dismal marks. As the Sydney Morning Herald put it, Trump’s campaign featured a ‘firehose of falsehoods’.

Therefore, the media had incentives (Cohen, 2004) to provide Trump with constant coverage. His outrageous statements (both intentional and otherwise) required a constant flow of fact-checking stories calling out Trump’s dishonesty. His aggressive and combative response to any criticism only inspired news agencies to stand firmer in their criticism of his speech, and thereby to ensure that the concept of ‘Trump is accused of being a liar’ was well cemented in the public imagination.
By the standard logic of presidential campaigns, being so firmly associated with a negative story would be disastrous, especially for a campaign such as Trump’s that was already trailing in the polls. However, contrary to what may seem intuitively correct, according to the principles of expectancy violations Trump should have actually benefited from a negative news environment.

If one assumes, as was done in the previous chapter, that actually processing information branding a candidate as a liar would inspire an individual to negatively adjust their evaluation of that candidate, then the reason for Trump’s advantage in this sort of informational environment should be clear. Most citizens, exposed to the aforementioned coverage, should form an expectation that messages about Trump lying are normal. This means that further messages along those same lines should produce little reaction from the public, as they are filtered out as described earlier.44

One can view this as a sort of sunk cost: once Trump was viewed as a liar and took that reputational ‘hit’, he was insulated from the price of his further remarks. This may have allowed him to make statements more costly than those made earlier on in his campaign, or to take positions without regard for the facts. 45

Expectancy violations, then, predict that Trump should have varying degrees of success based upon the expectations of their audiences, and therefore upon the amount of negative political information regularly taken in by those audiences. Comparatively, Trump should have had an advantage with those audiences that expected

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44 Negative messages of an unexpected type, however, are still effective: see the reaction to Trump’s sexual remark scandal for more details.
45 Explication may be required here. As the mechanism that I propose is predicated upon attention/focus/memory being withheld from certain messages, how can those messages still have benefits if subjects do not process them? I am relying here upon the way that modern media consumers encounter headlines and news stories. A candidate who found it politically advantageous to (falsely) declare that a country was planning to attack the United States, for example, could rely upon that story being transmitted to different audiences in several different ways. To his supporters, friendly news outlets would transmit the claim directly with little-to-no fact-checking attached. The general public would see stories such as ‘Candidate: Attack Imminent!’ and, later, ‘Fact-checking Candidate’s Absurd Attack Claims’. If the public pays attention to claims made by the candidate but not the later accuracy checks of the same, then a lack of attention can actually improve a dishonest candidate’s ability to communicate with the public.
him to behave dishonestly, in that they will dismiss most reports of dishonesty. Trump’s reputation as a liar and near-constant dishonesty provide a unique opportunity as well, as I can form hypotheses about his campaign that I would be unable to for a ‘typical’ candidate.

Luckily, the 2016 election gives us a way to examine Trump’s performance over differential populations. While information as to the expectations of individual citizens is not readily available, research has shown (Venkatesh and Goyal, 2010) that they are formed via long-term and repeated media exposure. State-level data on media variation, however, is readily available. Given that that is the case, it is possible to examine differential media environments by state, and how they correspond to Trump’s performance in the 2016 presidential campaign.

**Corruption**

Political corruption offers us a way to examine a variation in the news environments encountered by different citizens across states. State governments differ in the amount of political corruption present, and therefore they also have varying (and correlated) levels of news stories about political dishonesty by state officials.

Information about state politicians is targeted: especially in the modern media era of ‘narrowcasting’ and personalized news streams. That is, I can expect a resident of a certain state, ceteris paribus, to be more likely than residents of other states to encounter news about political corruption in that state.

Research has also shown that states have varying degrees of political corruption. Alt and Lassen (2003), for example, find that institutional variables, such as ease of ballot access for incumbent challengers, causes states to have widely varying degrees of political corruption. Goel and Nelson (1998) examine the effect of state government size (which varies widely) on corruption, finding that those states with larger
governments had higher amounts of corrupt political activity. Alt and Lassen (2008) find that factors such as divided or unified government, and elected versus appointed judicial systems, produce significant variations in corruption measurements. These variations have also been found to have significant substantive effects. One vein of political corruption research, for example, focuses on the long-term negative effects of political corruption on economic growth (Mauro, 1995). This effect has also been found at the state level, where variations in corruption have been shown to significantly lower individual states’ GSP growth rates. Corruption has also been found to significantly affect state environmental programs (Woods, 2008), police force conduct (Correia, Reisig and Lovrich, 1996), and state government spending levels (Liu and Mikesell, 2014), among many others. Thus, I can be confident that the states exhibit notable differences in their levels of corruption, and that this variation produces significant and measurable effects.

Specifically for this research, I am interested in whether or not varying corruption levels significantly effect citizen’s perceptions of their leaders. Evidence supports the idea that citizens are, at least to some degree, able to recognize that corruption has occurred and adjust their political beliefs accordingly, despite the common finding that the amount of attentions most citizens pay to politics is quite low. Predictably, state-level corruption has been found to significantly affect public judgements of state politicians (Kelleher and Wolak, 2007). In addition, however, corruption has also been found to have wider effects on generalized trust in addition to level-specific effects. Uslaner (2004), for example, finds that corruption at the country level and generalized trust in politicians from all levels of that country’s government are heavily related. Richey (2010) finds a similar effect when examining the United States: those states with greater amounts of political corruption convictions have lower amounts of generalized trust. Evidence from my own data also supports this idea. In the state-level dataset described below, those states with the highest levels of corruption
had populations that, on average, estimated the percentage of the time they could trust statements from politicians as nearly 18 points lower than states with the lowest levels of political corruption. When subjects from the previous chapter’s experimental research were asked what percentage of the time they thought politicians could be trusted, participants drawn from high-corruption states gave answers that were nearly 20 points lower, on average, than their counterpoint participants in low-corruption states.46

Therefore, since residents of states with corrupt governments should be more likely to expect stories about dishonest politicians:

**Hypothesis 1:** First, Trump should have had higher poll ratings in the 2016 election in those states that have histories of high levels of political corruption over those that do not, *ceteris paribus.*

However, I am not merely interested in observing Trump’s total public approval, but rather, as in the previous chapter, in the responsiveness the public shows to Trump’s dishonesty. One way to observe the responsiveness of citizens to Trump’s deceptions is to focus on the slopes of his average public opinion ratings in individual states over time. As previously documented, Trump faced accusations of dishonesty steadily throughout his campaign, starting almost simultaneously with his opening campaign announcement. Those citizens that *were* responsive to political news of deception (that is, those citizens that had an initial expectation of political honesty) should, therefore, have steadily lowered their evaluations of Trump throughout the campaign with each new story (At least until new expectations regarding Trump were potentially set by this coverage. This point is addressed further below.). Meanwhile, citizens with a low expectation of honesty should have shown no effect for said stories — demonstrating the same ‘flat’ pattern of results shown in graphs in the previous

46 This is not intended to serve as any sort of authoritative statistical test, as the experiment conducted in the previous chapter was not designed for that research purpose. It is merely an indicative correlation.
chapter.

Therefore, all else being equal, more responsive populations in the 2016 election should be more likely to show a decline in popularity for Trump as the campaign goes on. Or stated formally:

**Hypothesis 2:** Trump’s average popularity ratings over time in each state should show less responsiveness in those states that have higher degrees of political corruption, *ceteris paribus*.

Of course, this variable does not offer us information about expectations of Trump in particular, only about politicians in general. That is, a citizen’s running assessment of how common stories about dishonest politicians are should be affected by the amount of corruption present in their state, but that should not lead to a specific expectation for how likely those stories are about Trump. I assume in this research, as I have before, that there is an inheritance effect from the general case to the specific. That is, I assume that an individual that receives information about multiple different politicians also uses that information to inform their evaluation for the general category of ‘politician’, and that all future politicians they interact with have their individual expectations formed partly by the characteristics particular to that politician, and partly by their status as a politician in general. This follows research in the stereotyping literature on how individuals inherit the stereotypes of their general groups (Schneider, 2005). Specific to the ‘politician’ stereotype, for example, Clark and Fiske (2014) find that voters tend to associate individual politicians with the general stereotype they have for politicians, which is primarily negative.

While corruption should serve as an instructive test, therefore, I also want to be able to deal specifically with expectations formed about Trump, both as a more rigorous test of the theory and because of his unconventional campaign. To do so, I examine two sources of information variance that uniquely affect opinions of Trump and only Trump.
The Celebrity Apprentice

Perhaps the most unusual source of data for examining the effect of public expectations upon deception processing comes from the program that, prior to his presidential run, was Donald Trump’s greatest source of celebrity and recognition.

*The Celebrity Apprentice* (as well as its precursor, *The Apprentice*) was a reality television program focused around the central concept of contestants competing in a series of business-themed challenges for, originally, a position in Donald Trump’s business organizations, or after the show’s re-branding in 2007-8, the courtesy title of ‘Apprentice’ and a donation to charity in their name. The original version of the program, *The Apprentice* debuted in 2004 and drew from the ranks of businesspeople for its contestants. In order to sustain interest in the program, the programs shifted focus in 2007-8 to become *The Celebrity Apprentice*, featuring lesser known celebrities rather than business people. Since the show’s inception, however, and up until his recent successful bid for the presidency, it has been hosted by Donald J. Trump.

Donald Trump had been a celebrity before *The Apprentice* debuted. His name, likeness, and personality as a real-estate magnate had been featured in music, movies, several Trump-branded books, professional wrestling, a Trump-branded video game, his own talk-radio show, and even a Trump-themed board-game. However, despite all of these smaller appearances, it was his career as the reality television show host of the *Apprentice* programs that made him a regular fixture in the public eye and cemented his celebrity status (even leading to his “You’re fired!” catchphrase). *The

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47 This is, actually, yet another example of the role of deception in the 2016 presidential campaign. According to Trump, he severed his involvement with the program out of respect for NBC, its hosting company. He did this, in his account, despite NBC wanting to sign him on to an additional two year contract to continue hosting the show. By contrast, NBC stated that it was their decision to end Trump’s career as a host of the program, and that they had taken the initiative to reexamine their relationship with him following the politically-charged remarks he made in his inaugural campaign speech. The fact that such a minor business decision became the focus of not one, but two narratives accusing an actor on the political stage of deception should serve as an example of what I referred to earlier as the ‘constant’ stream of deception accusations being made during the campaign.
Apprentice was a breakout hit when it first debuted for NBC in 2004, helping the network to recover from the loss of several of its long-running ‘pillar’ programs that season.

This may seem very amusing, and on some level it is, especially in light of Trump’s later successful political career. However, I detail the nature and success of Trump’s reality television career here in order to make a very serious point: The Celebrity Apprentice might well have had a significant impact on who became the 45th president of the United States.

The idea that pre-existing celebrity status can be helpful to a politician is hardly new (Driessens, 2013; Marsh, Tindall et al., 2010; Street, 2004), and the impact of fiction on real-world political processes is also well-documented (Feldman and Sigelman, 1985; Holbert, Shah and Kwak, 2003, 2004; Mutz and Nir, 2010; Mutz, 2016). Name recognition’s effect on voting behavior is well known (Kam and Zechmeister, 2013) and an obvious advantage to anyone who has achieved widespread national recognition. However, rather than simply changing whether or not people think about a politician, celebrity status might also change how they think about them.

For an example, return to The Celebrity Apprentice. During the course of the program’s fourteen season run, viewers were informed that contestants on the program lived in a penthouse suite at Trump Towers, and the show featured its stars riding elevators to the boardroom in which most of the show’s action ensued. In reality, as was revealed later in the program’s run, the ‘boardroom’, ‘penthouse’, and ‘lobby’ were all custom built sets on the same floor.

In the same vein, contestants were advertised (during The Apprentice portion of the program) as being able to win a position as ‘executive vice president’ of various Trump-affiliated businesses. In reality, the positions were largely publicity-based, with winners appearing at promotional events based on their fame from appearing on the program. The Celebrity version features contestants winning the title of ‘apprentice’
— which everyone recognizes as largely meaningless.

There are more examples of unreality from the program, of course: ‘spontaneous’ marketing tie-ins with other companies and products, manufactured ‘crises’ and arguments staged to increase the drama of a segment, and much more. None of the above are in any way a condemnation of Trump’s performance on *The Celebrity Apprentice* — indeed, these seem largely to be the necessary actions of a good reality television host. However, they do mean that there is a substantial portion of the viewing public that is entirely used to seeing fantastic messages from Donald Trump.

Viewers see celebrities making a wide variety of untrue statements throughout their career — such is the nature and soul of show business after all. The formation of expectations, however, happens at a subconscious level. So when the public sees Schwarzenegger starring as an action hero or Reagan portraying a cowboy, they may be setting expectations for their discourse that remain when they transition to more serious political careers.

In addition, celebrities are also covered by the news with far greater regularity. Tabloid and entertainment journalism focuses heavily on stories about celebrity scandals. Thus, any celebrity should, when running for political office, enter with a history of news coverage that most other political entrants do not, and the public should be more likely to expect stories about scandals in regard to celebrity politicians than standard political actors.

Therefore, regarding *The Celebrity Apprentice*’s effect on the election results, I first expect to observe Trump possessing an overall advantage in those states where the program was most watched. Therefore:

**Hypothesis 3:** Trump should have had higher poll ratings in the 2016 election in those states that had high viewship for *The Celebrity Apprentice, ceteris paribus.*

However, this alone would not definitively demonstrate an effect for the program. While it might be convincing evidence that Trump’s celebrity status had an effect
on the election, the above test alone would not differentiate between the effect the program had on expectations of Trump and those it had via simple name recognition.

Name recognition, however, has no clear theorized effect on responsiveness. Expectations, meanwhile, do. Therefore:

**Hypothesis 4:** Trump’s average popularity ratings over time in each state should show less responsiveness in those states that had higher viewerships for *The Celebrity Apprentice, ceteris paribus.*

The advantage of using one of the major sources of Trump’s celebrity and public persona are the direct ties this has to Trump and to no other politician. However, by using data associated with one other politician, I can examine the specific ‘branding’ of Trump as a liar during the 2016 campaign.

**Clinton Advertising Dominance**

As mentioned previously, one notable and unusual feature of the 2016 presidential election was the imbalance in political advertising between the two candidates. To quote Professor Micheal Franz:

“This ad imbalance is one of the stories of this presidential election. Trump remains competitive despite being pummeled in the political ad air war. One might imagine that he would be doing even better, perhaps tipping some of the closer states to his column if his campaign were matching Clinton’s ad for ad. But that presumes ads are effective this campaign in moving opinion of either Trump or Clinton.”

According to all spending records, Clinton significantly outperformed Trump’s advertising presence throughout the whole of the campaign. Data from FEC filings shows that Clinton spent $1.19 billion to Trump’s $647 million. Trump’s spending was historically low, in fact. When adjusted for population growth, inflation, and income
growth, the Trump campaign spent less on advertising than any other Republican presidential campaign since 1960 (save the Dole campaign), and also had far less of an organizational structure in place to create and support such advertising.\footnote{It should be noted, however, that this comparison is based solely upon official campaign spending as well as explicitly affiliated single-issue candidate PACs. It does not capture spending by political parties or other independent expenditures. Thus, there is a downward bias here, as the growth of this third-party campaign spending in recent years makes up an appreciable fraction of campaign spending.} This was heavily remarked upon during the campaign by a wide variety of media outlets, such as the New York Times, Washington Post, CNN, and any number of other sources. Trump’s lack of messaging and refusal to compete with Clinton on this topic was largely held, at the time, to be indicative of either incompetence and inexperience on the part of Trump and his campaign leaders, or a sign that he lacked the resources — specifically, the campaign infrastructure and backing of outside forces and political allies — to do so.\footnote{Trump and Trump-affiliated news sources generally presented an alternative view of the advertising imbalance, either suggesting that it proved greater financial acumen on the part of Trump, or using it as a springboard to criticize Clinton’s connections to her financial donors.}

I do not dispute those conclusions. However, while I do not disagree with the fact that Trump allowed Clinton to largely dominate political advertising, or that this was likely in some part due to some level of inexperience on the part of him and his staff, I do not believe it is the case that an advertising imbalance necessarily was a purely negative situation for Trump. Far from ‘remaining competitive despite being pummeled in the air war’, Trump may, to a certain degree, have been competitive because of the imbalanced information environment.

A number of Clinton-supporting advertisements focused on Trump’s dishonesty. One example is presented in Figure 13 — this advertisement, aired before the first debate, fact-checked seven of Trump’s statements and explicitly referred to him as a liar. Insofar as a greater exposure to Clinton-supportive advertising was likely to increase the degree to which the public would hear accusations that Donald Trump was dishonest, Clinton should have helped to form an expectation in the public’s mind...
that messages about Trump’s dishonesty are a regular and non-novel occurrence, thus effectively helping to deaden the public to further messages. In essence, wherever Clinton spent the most of her advertising resources, she may also have been helping to purchase immunity to further public criticism for her rival as well — and in some of the most critical areas for her campaign.

Figure 13: An example of a Clinton-backed advertisement focused on Trump’s honesty.


Therefore, the framework of expectancy violations should lead us to re-examine the effects of negative advertising in the 2016 campaign. While the 2016 election was an incredibly expensive presidential campaign (if not record-breaking) with almost $7 billion dollars spent, this spending, as mentioned, was largely one-sided. The Clinton campaign spent significantly more than the Trump campaign on advertising in many major media markets. This means that in many major media markets in the
United States, advertisements from the Clinton campaign (and affiliated groups, such as the Democratic party and Political Action Committees) were far more commonly encountered by inhabitants of those markets than were the corresponding Trump advertisements.

The content of the Clinton campaign’s advertisements was a mix of all types of standard political advertising. A substantial portion of those advertisements, however, were negative, and directly focused on the honesty of Trump.

Therefore, I can expect those in Clinton dominated media markets to be significantly more likely to have been exposed to messages about Trump’s dishonesty than those in other markets. For that reason,

**Hypothesis 5:** Trump should have had higher poll ratings in the 2016 election in those states that had higher proportions of Clinton advertising, *ceteris paribus*.

In addition, since the advertisements should have depressed responsiveness:

**Hypothesis 6:** Trump’s average popularity ratings over time for the latter part of the campaign in each state should show less responsiveness in those states that had higher proportions of Clinton advertising, *ceteris paribus*.

Finally, unlike either the corruption data (which is neither specific to Trump nor chronologically adjacent to the campaign) nor the *Celebrity Apprentice* data (which is specific to Trump, but still not chronologically adjacent to the campaign), the fact that Clinton’s advertising was both directly related to Trump and was aired during the campaign means that it is possible to examine its effects on a specific example of the accusations previously discussed.

**Specific Reactions**

I also expect to see a change in how the public reacts to specific charges being brought against Trump, rather than simply taking advantage of his near-unique political reputation for deception to test effects at the level of the entire campaign.
In a similar manner as the scenarios run on fictional politicians in the previous chapter, when Trump is accused of being politically deceptive, I should expect to observe him lose some degree of political popularity with the public. Importantly, only some segments of the public (specifically those that had reason to expect honesty from Trump in the first place) should show this negative reaction. Others, however, should be far more likely to view a report about Trump’s dishonesty as expected. This could be due to a belief that Trump is dishonest. Alternatively, and somewhat ironically, the exact opposite belief could lead to an identical expectation: a good number of Trump supporters held the genuine belief, encouraged by the Trump campaign, that the main-stream media was unfairly biased against Trump and releasing constant, non-genuine attacks against his honesty as a tactic to prevent his victory. While this was clearly intended to persuade voters to intentionally dismiss certain major news stories, it could also lead viewers to view negative media attacks as expected, if not genuine, and therefore dismiss them. For example, early in the campaign Trump dubbed CNN the Clinton News Network, routinely accusing them of bias and falsifying stories against him. Note that despite very different rationales for expecting stories accusing Trump of dishonesty, the same effect should be present: both groups should retain their (very disparate) base evaluations about Trump.

I examine one fairly notable deception story from the Trump campaign. Trump made a point throughout his campaign of championing his opposition to immigration, and of accusing Clinton of favoring open borders. This refrain was repeated at his rallies and public speeches, in his advertisements, and at the debates. However, during the latter half of the campaign, Trump switched from a general indictment of Clinton’s immigration to making a specific accusation: namely, that she would let massive — and specific — numbers of immigrants in the country.

“She wants open borders. We could have 600 million people pour into our country. Think of it. Once you have open borders like that, you don’t
have a country anymore.”

Later that day, he repeated the same claim, albeit with an alteration to the figures involved.

“She wants to let people just pour in. You could have 650 million people pour in, and we do nothing about it. Think of it. That’s what could happen. You triple the size of our country in one week.”

This specific story has some unusual features compared to the rest of Trump’s campaign corpus that make it especially useful. First, it focuses upon a specific numerical claim, and also makes a specific claim about what Clinton has or has not supported. In that respect, it is easy to test. The numbers that Trump gives for potential immigration, in addition to disagreeing with each other, are also logistically impossible. Six hundred million or so immigrants in one week would require that over three million people made a border crossing every hour. Clinton, meanwhile, had supported multiple attempts at immigration reform, but had not voted or spoken out in favor of any plan that could have invited immigration in quantities even close to these numbers.

Secondly, the story was widely nationally reported, meaning that I can assume widespread national exposure to the story. The incredibly large figures that Trump had used provided media outlets with the opportunity to make humorous comparisons and entertaining analogies, and for Trump opponents to mock his understanding of political and geographical realities. The Washington Post, for example, dryly noted that it would require the entire populations of South America, Central America, and Canada to move into the United States in order to approach Trump’s numbers. The
story was also spread by CNN, CBS, and any number of secondary sources, and was, briefly, the pre-eminent campaign story.

Finally, this claim was a brief and time-limited event. While Trump repeated many of his claims throughout his campaign regardless of judgements about their accuracy, he made this claim at a specific time (Oct. 30th). Once the media reacted to the story, Trump rapidly abandoned those figures, returning to more general claims. This means that I can narrow down the timing of the effect.

Therefore, I will also examine whether public reaction to this event follows the patterns predicted by an expectancy violations approach to dishonesty. That is:

**Hypothesis 7:** The shift in average poll ratings taken directly before and after the “six hundred and fifty million immigrants” remark should be less pronounced in those states that have higher proportions of Clinton advertising, *ceteris paribus.*

**Data**

**Polling**

Data for this project was assembled from a variety of sources. The primary component are poll ratings for Trump taken from throughout the 2016 presidential campaign. The collection of poll ratings are not meant to be a complete collection, but rather a gathering of polls from the most trustworthy and reliable polling agencies.

The first requirement for being included in the dataset was that data from the poll was collected by a reputable polling source. Several media entities ran running collections and commentary of polls collected during the elections, such as FiveThirtyEight, RealClearPolitics, and the Princeton Election Consortium (a complete list of the sources consulted is available in Appendix B). Choosing only polls that had been presented and vetted by at least one of these sources eliminated polls that used substandard methodology (such as non-random internet polls, for example) or those
that were conducted as public relations moves rather than as genuine knowledge gathering attempts. In an attempt to judge the effects of poll quality, I made use of the "Pollster Grades" put out by FiveThirtyEight as an approximation for poll quality. FiveThirtyEight ranks political polling firms on a scale of A+ through F based on their historical performance and an assessment of their methodology. Restricting polls further from those that were used by a major poll aggregator to those that received some cutoff of quality rating had no substantive impact on results. Once the collection of this first corpus of polls was complete, filtering began.

First, polls were limited to those capable of making state-level predictions, since my primary interest is in state-level differences. National polls, or polls that did not retain or provide location information for their subjects as well as sample sufficiently in each state were eliminated. Multistate polls were retained, and broken into separate entries by their results for each state.

Once national polls were eliminated, polls were filtered for comparability. Only those polls that compared identical targets could be effectively used to track public opinion over the course of the campaign — a poll that tested people’s opinions between Trump and Clinton, for example, cannot be directly compared to a poll that tests Clinton vs Trump vs Stein. Since the vast majority of the polls in the dataset are three way polls (Clinton, Trump, Johnson), all polls that did not offer that three-way choice were eliminated.

Once this was finished, assemblage of the corpus was complete. For each poll-entry in the dataset, the following information was gathered: the state in which the poll was conducted, the start and end date for data collection, the polling firm or organization responsible for data collection, the total sample size for that state, and the raw percentage numbers for a three-way choice between Clinton, Trump, and Johnson. A dataset with 3075 poll-entries remained. For the state-level dataset, these polls were averaged to produce the candidates’ overall mean rating.
Measuring Punishment

It is essential to this research that I have some measure that can effectively track whether and how the public responds to news of deception. In line with the hypotheses presented above, three separate measures are formed from the polling data described in the previous section to track public responsiveness.

The first response variable is simply the raw three-way choice percentage for Trump between Trump, Clinton, and Johnson, taken at the poll-level. When converted to the state level analysis, the mean percentage found in all polls for that state is used as the value for that state. This variable tests whether or not the expectancy violation framework is correct in predicting a substantial advantage for Trump. If correct, the fact that negative political messages about Trump were, in general, expected and treated as non-novel stimuli by the general public should result in those messages not being actively processed, and thereby not becoming part of Donald Trump’s evaluation. Therefore, in those areas in which expect expectations of negative messages about Trump’s honesty to be most common, I should expect Donald Trump to have better performance than in areas in which the accusations against him were seen as novel. To measure this, I simply look for a statistically significant shift in Trump’s polling numbers between expecting and non-expecting areas.

The second response variable tracks state-level, overall campaign responsiveness. The logic behind this variable is that those states in which the expectancy effect occurred the most — that is, those states in which messages about Trump’s dishonesty are most likely to be dismissed — should show the lowest amount of change over the course of the campaign. For each state, I measure the slope of Trump’s poll ratings over time. I then take the absolute value of this variable, which is used an index of how much the population of a given state changed their minds about Trump during the course of the campaign. Larger values indicate that Trump’s ratings significantly
changed over the course of the campaign, while smaller values indicate that opinion of Trump remained relatively constant. When using this variable, I should expect to see those variables that indicate a greater likelihood of public expectations of negative messages about Trump’s honesty result in a lower value of this variable. That is, those states in which people responded to the stream of messages about Trump’s honesty should have greater amounts of change in people’s evaluations of Trump than states in which people were more likely to dismiss those messages, *ceteris paribus*.

The third response variable is the public response to one Trump deception story in particular from the campaign, used only in the Clinton advertising dominance tests. In order to examine how Trump’s ‘650 million immigrants’ claim and the ensuing dishonesty charges lodged against him had affected the public’s perceptions of him, I took advantage of the poll-level dataset. I cut the dataset into only those surveys that completed data collection in the three days prior to Oct. 30th, and those surveys that began data collection in the three days following Oct. 30th. I created an indicator variable to differentiate between these two periods, and to examine the effect that the story about Trump’s claim had had on the public. This reduced the dataset to 387 poll-entries (after long-form tracking polls, for the sake of responsiveness, were removed) with roughly even numbers on either side of the gap.

**Corruption**

Data on state-level political corruption was taken from Dincer and Johnston’s 2014 and 2015 “Edmond J. Safran Center Corruption in America Survey” (Dincer and Johnston, 2014). This survey was undertaken as an alternative measure of political corruption to the standard use of the Justice Department’s “Report to Congress on the Activities and Operations of the Public Integrity Section.”. The Justice Department measure of state-level political corruption is based upon convictions per state. Instead, and importantly for this research, Dincer and Johnston make use of a per-
ception-based, rather than a conviction-based, metric. Following Boylan and Long (Boylan and Long, 2003), Dincer and Johnston conducted a nationwide survey of reporters covering state politics. Roughly one thousand reporters were contacted, and over a quarter of those replied. Reporters were asked to rate the three branches of the state governments they covered on two main indices — legal and illegal corruption. A five point Likert scale was used to measure reporter’s assessments of how common political corruption was in each branch, with five representing a belief by the reporter that corruption was ‘extremely common’ and one representing ‘not at all common’. The median of each category-state entry was used as the final entry of corruption.

The fact that Dincer and Johnston’s corruption index is perception-based is crucial to this research. The point of studying political corruption, in this research, is to use it as a window into the public perceptions of politicians that we normally cannot observe. Therefore, the perception of reporters as to how common corruption in a state seems to its inhabitants is useful. It means that I can be confident that New Jersey’s high scores are reflective of its inhabitants being more likely than other states to encounter reports of political corruption.

Although Dincer and Johnston are attempting to create an disaggregated index of corruption to guide political reform efforts, the purposes of this research are different. Therefore, their 6-part indices for each state, from both years that the survey was conducted, were combined into one aggregate corruption index with one entry giving the average corruption value per state. It is possible, however, that different types of corruption could set varying expectations for state inhabitants. For example, greater levels of corruption in the executive branch might cause an expectation of executive misbehavior, while judicial corruption might remain surprising. Since the above hypotheses focus on popularity ratings of potential executive leaders, I created and tested a separate index that aggregated solely the executive corruption ratings from the Dincer and Johnston study. Analyses using only executive corrup-
tion showed no substantively different pattern of results from the results presented below, so I conclude that citizens are not differentiating between separate branches of government.

Summary data for political corruption is presented in Table 3. As can be seen states such as Arizona, Georgia and New Jersey were judged to be the most corrupt states, while Rhode Island and Wyoming were among the least corrupt. The median corruption rating was 3.75, meaning that in most states, political corruption is seen as between ‘moderately common’ and very common.

One potential concern about using state-level measurements is possible spatial correlation for levels of corruption. Many determinants of state-level corruption, such as ballot access for incumbent challengers (Alt and Lassen, 2003), state government size (Goel and Nelson, 1998), party control and judicial appointments (Alt and Lassen, 2008), and FOIA laws (Cordis and Warren, 2014), are limited to and only effect the state in which they are present. For that reason, a great deal of political corruption should be insulated and particular to each state, and have little to no effect on its neighbors. However, some factors that affect corruption levels, such as economic factors like natural resource access (Leite and Weidmann, 1999), as an example, could reasonably be geographically located and affect several states based on their proximity, causing spatial correlations. In addition, research suggests that high corruption might be contagious at the state level, due to such mechanisms as learning effects (Goel and Nelson, 2007). Therefore, in the following analyses, I conduct and present tests for spatial biases.

**State-Level Partisanship**

Controls were also included for state-level partisanship. States differ in the members of their populations, the party establishments and organization present, history and political sentiment, and political cultures (Fisher, 2016). These prevailing cultures
### Table 3: State-level Corruption Measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Corruption</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alaska</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecticut</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delaware</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawaii</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idaho</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indiana</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kentucky</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maine</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massachusetts</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michigan</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minnesota</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mississippi</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missouri</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montana</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nebraska</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nevada</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Hampshire</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Mexico</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Dakota</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oklahoma</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhode Island</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Dakota</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utah</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vermont</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Virginia</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wyoming</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
would not only have some effect on how members of the public form expectations of their leaders, but also upon how they process political information in general. A heavily Republican state such as Texas, for example, might react differently to news about potential gun control legislation than a more Democratic state. For each state, the past five presidential elections (not including the 2016 election at hand) were selected. Margins of victory for each party were compiled (with Republicans being coded as positive and the Democrats being coded as negative ends of the same scale) and then averaged. The final average margins are taken as indicative of the political culture in that state, with negative values indicating a tendency to lean to the Democratic side, and positive values the Republican.

There are, of course, difficulties inherent in the use of presidential electoral margins as an indicator of political culture. State electoral outcomes are not only dependent upon the residents of that state, but also upon purely political factors. Gerrymandering, for example, could cause a state to have a persistent bias towards one party in elections without necessarily reflecting the underlying population. To some extent presidential elections are not truly reflective of a state’s general population — both because individuals are generally more politically active and aware during a presidential election, and because citizens treat presidents differently than they do other politicians. With that being said, standard electoral margins should serve as a rough indicator of state-level political culture, as well as helping to deal with political strategy when that becomes relevant.

**Clinton Ad Dominance**

As previously discussed, I am interested in those subjects who were vastly more likely to encounter Clinton-supporting advertisements than Trump advertisements. For specifics, I turn to the Wesleyan Media Project’s Advertising Analysis, which presented an report (“Clinton Crushes Trump 3:1 in Air War”) on the compara-
tive performance of the two main opposing candidates in the 2016 election (Clinton Crushes Trump 3:1 in Air War, N.d.). While they present a great deal of analyses, of specific interest here is their breakdown of television ad dominance by media market. It is important to note that this data only accounts for broadcast political advertising. Clinton also had a significant advantage in terms of both local and national cable advertisements, and although this is significantly more difficult to track, a similar level of advantage when it came to online advertisements.

Broadcast television advertisements are of especial interest here, however, as they provide a great deal of geographical variation. The Wesleyan Media Project data provides differences in terms of the total number of airings of Democratic presidential ads over Republican affiliated ads. Each market that had at least a fifty airing difference in Clinton’s favor was coded as Clinton-dominated. A dummy variable was then created to reconcile these measurements to the state level. It takes a value of 1 to indicate those states in which a simple majority of the state’s population was covered by a Clinton-dominated media market.

Examining those states, it is plain that the results are largely as might be expected. California is heavily Clinton-dominated — not necessarily as a result of unusually high spending by Clinton, but simply as a result of Trump not throwing money into a solidly blue state. The same is true of Vermont. Other states have large amounts of Clinton spending due partially to their proximity to other states — Alabama, for example, was the focus of Clinton advertising because of her fight for the state of Florida. Some states were pursued as the result of political strategy: Arizona, for example, was described in the press and by political commentators not as a genuine attempt to ‘flip’ the state, but rather as an attempt to force the Trump campaign to invest resources in a state that they could have otherwise simply taken as a given. Finally, some states were Clinton-dominated because of their importance to the race: Ohio, Florida, and Pennsylvania are examples of battleground states that received
heavy amounts of electoral advertising due to the combination of the number of electoral votes they were worth, and the possibility that they could be ‘tipped’. This tipping generally results from some degree of partisan balance within the state. While there are many potential reasons for a Clinton ad imbalance, therefore, I should be cautious of the possibility that these states may share common factors that could bias the results. This is especially true in the second, coefficient-based method of measuring responsivity used in this research. Tests for spatial auto-correlation are presented in the results below.

**Measuring *Celebrity Apprentice* Viewership**

In order to examine the effects of Donald Trump’s celebrity status on the formation of expectations of honesty in the 2016 campaign, I need to be able to determine how exposure to the program varies by state. If differing states watch the program to highly differing degrees, then their populations in turn should have differing exposures to Trump’s celebrity persona, and should have differing expectations that guide the amount of cognitive resources they devote to his behavior.

Viewership figures for most reality television programs are readily available. *The Celebrity Apprentice* is no exception. For example, it is known from television viewership ratings companies that the first season finale for the program drew 28.1 million viewers. However, these figures, in addition to their other methodological concerns, contain no real way to estimate any sort of geographical variation for these figures. Therefore, I cannot use standard viewership ratings numbers in this project.

As an alternative, I turn to tracking interest in the program by using national trends in search history. Google, the Internet’s leading and most-commonly-used search engine, retains and makes publicly available a great deal of data on the search requests the public makes using its service. The basic functionality of the service is simply to track how often a particular search term is entered relative to the total
number of searches made for a given time frame (in order to control for the ongoing constant increase in the total amount of internet traffic). However, Google also offers an indepth tool to breakdown and analyze this raw data. Originally intended solely for advertising use, it has since been made available for scholarly purposes as well.

The ability to break search trends down by geographic region means that I can track interest in the program at the state level. Google Trends provides data on the relative interest by subregion. That is, the subregion of the geographic area of interest with the highest total number of searches for the given term as a fraction of total searches in that subregion is given a value of one hundred as the base subregion. Following that, each other subregion in the given geographical area is given a value indicating the fraction that it rates as compared to the base subregion. For example, a subregion in which the search term was only half as popular as the first subregion (that is, it made up half as much traffic as a percentage of the subregion whole as compared to the percentage the term made of the first subregion) would be given a value of 50. A subregion in which the search term was 1% or less of the first subregion’s interest is given a value of 0.

These rankings have been used for a variety of academic purposes. Medical researchers, for example, have used Google Trends data to track influenza in the population, as queries made to Google about symptoms correlate remarkably well with actual patient behavior such as physician visits (Ginsberg et al., 2009). It has also been used to predict financial market behavior by Preis, Reith and Stanley (2010), among others. Of particular interest to this research, this data source has been found to reliably predict television viewership by geographic area in an analysis by Youn and Chou (Youn and Cho, 2016).

Given this established relationship between search patterns and aggregate behavior, I can use search trends to track interest and viewership in *The Celebrity Apprentice*. First, I tracked results for the search term ‘The Celebrity Apprentice’ (and
variations). I did not track searches for the first version of the show, *The Apprentice*. This is primarily because the two shows, although similar and closely related, do contain differences and may potentially draw different audiences. Without in depth information on the audience composition for the two programs, I am not comfortable aggregating their viewership data together. In addition to restricting data to *The Celebrity Apprentice* only, I also restrict the time range the data covers from several months before the program premiere (when marketing for the program began) to February 16, 2015, the air date of the final season of the program that featured Trump as the host.

Once I had the data restricted by time, I further restricted the data to searches originating in the United States only. I then used Google’s search trends analysis tools to break down the data by subregion as detailed above, using individual states as the subregions. The numbers were used as rankings of interest by state in the program, and thus as indicators of which states were most likely to have high viewerships for the program.

Of course, there are potential concerns about confounding variables that may drive both *Celebrity Apprentice* viewership and opinions regarding Trump. These are addressed below in the results section.

## Results

### Corruption

#### Effects on Poll Results

The first test is to see whether or not Trump had an overall electoral advantage in those states which had higher levels of governmental corruption.

I ran a regression examining the effects of governmental corruption on Trump’s
poll ratings. Corruption, could, theoretically, also be associated with state-level partisanship. If members of one political party are more likely than the other to engage in political corruption, then state populations with differing levels of corruption might have evaluated Trump differently due to partisan reasons instead. The data does not suggest that either party is significantly more likely than the other to engage in government corruption. A test for correlations between the partisan composition of the state government and political corruption shows almost no connection between the two: \(-0.04\), such that Democratic states are very slightly more likely to be considered corrupt than Republican states (This difference was not significant: \(p = 0.759\)). Even the slight Democratic trend presented here should not be taken as representative as any sort of substantive result. The Democratic results are more than likely depressed by the presence of a few outliers such as Illinois, which received very near the maximum possible corruption rating. Republicans, meanwhile, are less susceptible to this effect, as they benefit from a greater number of rural ‘red’ states, which helps to bring down their overall average via regression to the mean. In short, there does not seem to be any significant difference such that one political party in the United States is more corrupt than the other. However, in deference to the long-standing belief among partisans that their opponents are the source of all governmental corruption, and in light of scholarship such as Gordon (2009) that points to a partisan corruption divide, I control for partisan effects by controlling for the general partisanship of the state.

Corruption might also be related to Trump’s polling results by a financial avenue. As mentioned earlier, more corrupt states also tend to be those that are the least financially well-off.\(^{50}\) If Trump had an advantage with poorer populations, which evidence suggests that he did, then I would overestimate the effect of political corruption in boosting his polling performance. In order to control for this, I include each state’s 2015 Second Quarter GDP, in millions.

\(^{50}\)Due both to a trend for poorer states to become corrupt, and the effects of corruption on suppressing economic growth(Akai et al., 2005; Fisman and Gatti, 2002).
In addition, I control for unobserved effects related to corruption that should affect the polling averages of both candidates. For example, one might expect states with more political corruption to correlate well with those states that are less wealthy, less educated, or less likely to have an active citizenry than other states. If these variables are of benefit to both candidates, instead of uniquely so to Trump as my theory indicates, this would confound my results. For that reason, I also control for Clinton’s average poll ratings.

The results are presented in Table 4. State-level political partisanship, as might be expected, proved the most significant factor in determining Trump’s polling totals. Shifting from the level of the most conservative state in the dataset (Utah: 31) to the most liberal (Massachusetts: -26) creates a difference of over 18 points in Trump’s evaluations. Clinton’s polling totals also perform as expected: the better Clinton performed, the worse Trump did. The states’ economic performance had a significant, albeit substantively small, negative effect on Trump’s performance.

Of primary interest, however, is the effect of political corruption. Corruption proves to be statistically significant and in the expected direction: that is, the higher the amount of corruption in a state, the better Trump did in that state over the course of the campaign. For example, replacing the state government of Maine (which had one of the lowest corruption values in the data) with that of New Jersey (which had one of the highest) would have led to an expected gain for Trump of roughly two and a half polling points. This is a substantively significant amount: a two and half point difference in polls would have significantly changed many of the predictions made prior to the election.

A test of spatial auto-correlation bias using Geary’s $C$ shows no significant clustering in the regression residuals ($p = .275$).
Table 4: Regression results examining the effect of political corruption on Trump polling results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Coef.</th>
<th>Robust SE</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Political Corruption</td>
<td>0.561</td>
<td>0.113</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State-Level Partisanship</td>
<td>0.345</td>
<td>0.016</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinton Poll Ratings</td>
<td>-0.062</td>
<td>0.024</td>
<td>0.034</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State GDP</td>
<td>-1.580</td>
<td>0.593</td>
<td>0.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>41.210</td>
<td>1.012</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>3075</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Coefficients are unstandardized OLS coefficients. Standard errors are robust. Political Corruption is scaled from 1 to 5, with higher values indicating greater corruption. Trump Ratings gives the average poll ratings for Trump by state. State-level Partisanship gives combined victory margins for the two main parties in the last five presidential elections. Clinton Poll Ratings gives the average poll ratings for Clinton by state. State GDP gives the state’s GDP for 2nd quarter 2015 in millions, rescaled to a 0-1 percentage based on California, the highest GDP state.

Effects on Poll Responsivity

I can also examine the overall effect of state-level governmental corruption on responsiveness to the news environment over the course of the campaign. I ran a regression in which the effects of state-level governmental corruption were regressed upon the second responsiveness measure detailed earlier. In a similar vein as the previous control for corruption, I control for a potential association between between the extent of political corruption in a state and which party tends to dominate political office in that state. If a relationship was present for these variables, then one might expect people to react differently to news about Trump over the course of the campaign due to differing partisanship effects upon expectations, as demonstrated in the previous chapter. Therefore, I include the measure of partisan victory margins for the past five years as a control variable.

Trump has also come under fire for promoting governmental corruption. While there is currently little scholarly evidence for this due to the recency of these events, if
true, this would also cause state evaluations of Trump to be linked to the corruption present in a state. A higher initial ranking of Trump, for example, would be more likely to display a regression to the mean effect over time, and therefore give the appearance of responsivity where none exists. In order to control for a potential relationship between Trump and corruption, I included each state’s mean rating of Trump as a control variable.

The results are presented in Table 5. Neither mean Trump ratings, nor the overall partisan culture of a state have any significant effect on the responsivity of a given state. As predicted by Hypothesis 2, however, the results show that the higher governmental corruption in a given state is, the less likely inhabitants of that state were to significantly alter their political evaluations of Trump over the course of the campaign.

A test of spatial auto-correlation bias using Geary’s $C$ shows no significant clustering in the regression residuals ($p = .575$).

Table 5: Regression results examining the effect of political corruption at the state level on total campaign change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Coef.</th>
<th>Robust SE</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Political Corruption</td>
<td>-0.018</td>
<td>0.008</td>
<td>0.029</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trump Poll Ratings</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.352</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State-Level Partisanship</td>
<td>-0.001</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.949</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.057</td>
<td>0.047</td>
<td>0.231</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Observations: 50
R^2: 0.18

Coefficients are unstandardized OLS coefficients. Standard errors are robust. Political Corruption is scaled from 1 to 5, with higher values indicating greater corruption. Trump Ratings gives the average poll ratings for Trump by state. State-level partisanship gives combined victory margins for the two main parties in the last five presidential elections.
Celebrity Apprentice Viewership

Effect on Overall Poll Results

First, I should examine the effects of viewership of the Celebrity Apprentice program on Trump’s overall performance, to see if the program truly did give him an advantage. I ran a regression analysis in which viewership information for the Celebrity Apprentice was regressed upon Trump’s poll results.

One might expect some correlation between partisanship and likelihood of being a fan of The Celebrity Apprentice. To account for this, I controlled for the political culture of the state. This is due to the fact that different states have widely differing tastes in terms of programs. For example, a map of the popularity of the Duck Dynasty premiere on Aug. 14, 2013 fits neatly onto the classic ‘Red vs Blue’ political divide map. Advertising researchers have clearly identified the viewing habits associated with differing partisan identities. Democrats are more likely than their counterparts to enjoy sitcoms, while Republicans are more likely to enjoy watching sports and (importantly) reality television. Therefore, one might expect a correlation to exist between the popularity of the Celebrity Apprentice and the Republican popularity in the state. In order to ensure that the estimation of the effect of Celebrity Apprentice viewership will not be upwardly biased by also capturing the effect of partisanship, I control for state political culture.

Since television consumption patterns vary widely by state, I also control for the average amount of television viewership by state. West Virginia, for example, the state that watches the most television per capita, watches over an hour and half more than the least TV-consuming state, Wyoming. This control is to ensure that I am measuring solely the effect of The Celebrity Apprentice viewership, as those areas most interested in the program are doubtless more likely to watch other programs as well. Given that the theory this research is focused on uses total exposure to
information as a precursor to expectation formation, if I did not control for total television consumption, I would be unable to rule out the effects of other information that heavy television viewers are more likely to take in. For example, greater television exposure during the 2016 campaign should have led to greater exposure to negative information about Trump’s honesty, and therefore, under an expectancy violation approach, granted him an electoral advantage. As I have no indication of what proportion of television watching time was actually spent on the *Celebrity Apprentice*, and lack the capacity to measure that directly, I controlled for the average number of minutes per day spent watching television by citizens in each state. This data was taken from 2015 numbers gathered by the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

The results are presented in Table 6. It is plain that state-level partisanship had the expected effect, with the more Republican states rating Trump more highly. As predicted by an expectancy violation framework, increasing the amount of television viewing time led to an increase in Trump’s performance at the polls.

Most importantly, however, viewership interest in *The Celebrity Apprentice* improved Trump’s polling performance. For context, moving from the lowest amount of interest in the program in the data (Oregon, 54) to the greatest (Rhode Island, 100) would result in an increase of roughly two points in the polls, a significant swing for such a widely overlooked effect.

Of course, this is not a definitive indication of a expectancy-based effect. Many frameworks would assume that interest in the *Celebrity Apprentice* program could be associated with Trump’s degree of success in the polls. This data cannot rule out the possibility that there is some underlying variable, such as a simple favorability for Trump, for example, that boosts both the likelihood of viewing his television program and ranking him highly in presidential polls. In order to examine effects that should be specific to an expectancy violation approach, I turn to a more indepth analysis.
Table 6: Regression results examining the effect of *Celebrity Apprentice* Viewership on Trump polling results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Coef.</th>
<th>Robust SE</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Celebrity Apprentice</em></td>
<td>0.038</td>
<td>0.010</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State-Level Partisanship</td>
<td>0.389</td>
<td>0.010</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television Viewing Time</td>
<td>0.174</td>
<td>0.007</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>8.210</td>
<td>1.302</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>3075</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Coefficients are unstandardized OLS coefficients. Standard errors are robust. *Celebrity Apprentice* scales from 100-0, with 100 indicating the state with the most search traffic for the program and other states given lesser values according to their percentage of that key state’s search ratio. *Television Viewing Time* is the average number of minutes per day per state inhabitant. *State-level Partisanship* is combined victory margins for the two main parties in the last five presidential elections.

**Effects on Poll Responsivity**

I also examine the effects of *Celebrity Apprentice* viewership on the responsiveness of state populations over the course of the campaign. I ran a regression analysis in which state-level average interest rankings in the *Celebrity Apprentice* program were regressed upon the second responsivity measure detailed above. In addition, I controlled for the average number of minutes per day spent watching television by a citizen of each state, for reasons similar to those detailed above.

The use of average television viewing time allows me to control for the potential correlation between television popularity and political advertisement exposure. Since I assume in this research that exposure to political advertising can lead to the formation or alteration of expectations, simply using the raw interest in the *Celebrity Apprentice* program without a total viewing time control would lead to a correlation with total television viewing, thereby to advertisement exposure, and finally to expectations and responsivity. In other words, I should expect the Clinton advertising dominance variable from above to play a part here as well. Therefore, I include the Clinton advertising dominance variable as previously described.
In a similar fashion as above, one might expect that the relation between partisanship and preference choice could have effects, as detailed in the previous chapter, on how regions responded to news about Trump over the course of the campaign. To ensure that this would not produce a correlation between the responsitivity measure and *Celebrity Apprentice*, I included the presidential victory margin measure.

On a similar note, I also account for the popularity of Donald Trump. Since the *Celebrity Apprentice* program heavily featured Donald Trump and associated his persona with the program as an advertising strategy, individuals that enjoy watching Donald Trump would be more likely to become fans of the program. If the favorability these individuals feel towards Trump also affects the way that they rate Trump the presidential candidate (as seems likely), then this could bias the results. Therefore, as a method of controlling for the underlying popularity of Trump, I include state-level average poll rankings of Trump from the beginning of the campaign.

The results are presented in Table 7. As might have been predicted using an expectancy violations framework, greater amounts of television viewing (and thereby greater exposure to messages about political dishonesty) results in a flattening of coefficients. Trump’s early poll ratings also correlate with responsitivity slopes, unsurprisingly, in the expected positive direction (this finding is nearly significant at the 5% level). The state political culture and advertising prevalence controls were non-significant.

Most importantly, the effect of the *Celebrity Apprentice* rankings were clear. The more popular the *Celebrity Apprentice* the less likely inhabitants of that state were to significantly alter their political evaluations of Trump over the course of the campaign.

As an example, take the state of Nevada, which had a relatively flat campaign slope for Trump of .006, and also had a moderately high amount of interest in the *Celebrity Apprentice*. If, in a counterfactual world, residents had no more interest in the program than the national average, news about Trump’s dishonesty from the
campaign coverage would be more likely to have a mental impact. In this case, one would expect to see this relatively flat slope decline to a slope of -.099. This would not be enough to cause Trump to lose the state, most likely, but it would have made the already insecure state of Nevada require many more additional resources from the Trump campaign to regain their certainty of victory, and potentially opened up a path for Clinton to ‘tip’ some of the Red electoral votes she needed.

A test of spatial auto-correlation bias using Geary’s $C$ shows no significant clustering in the regression residuals ($p = .569$).

Table 7: Regression results examining the effect of Celebrity Apprentice popularity at the state level on total campaign change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Coef.</th>
<th>Robust SE</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Celebrity Apprentice</td>
<td>$-0.013$</td>
<td>0.006</td>
<td>0.016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television Viewing Time</td>
<td>$-0.007$</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>0.029</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State-Level Partisanship</td>
<td>$-0.001$</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.337</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Trump Ratings</td>
<td>$0.003$</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>0.066</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinton Advertising Dominance</td>
<td>$-0.019$</td>
<td>0.009</td>
<td>0.047</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>1.055</td>
<td>0.450</td>
<td>0.024</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R$^2$</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Coefficients are unstandardized OLS coefficients. Standard errors are robust. Celebrity Apprentice scales from 100-0, with 100 indicating the state with the most search traffic for the program and other states given lesser values according to their percentage of that key state’s search ratio. Television Viewing Time is the average number of minutes per day per state inhabitant. State-level Partisanship is combined victory margins for the two main parties in the last five presidential elections. Early Trump Ratings are average Trump poll ratings by state, cutoff in the first half of the campaign, scaled 0-100. Clinton Advertising Dominance is an indicator variable taking the value of 1 if a majority of a state’s population was covered by media market(s) which were primarily dominated by the Clinton campaign or affiliated parties and interests.
Clinton Advertising Dominance

Effects on Poll Results

The first test is to examine Hypothesis 5: will Trump have an electoral advantage in those areas in which he was attacked the most heavily? To answer this, I ran a regression analysis in which the effect of the dominance of Clinton-affiliated advertising in a state, indicated by a dummy variable, was regressed upon Trump’s poll ratings.

Of course, the use of Clinton advertising dominance raises some potential issues. Most notable among them is the fact that the Clinton campaign selected the states in which they intended to advertise most heavily strategically, as did their opponents in the Trump campaign. Because of the Clinton campaign’s superior resources and organization, they were largely able to dominate political advertising over the Trump campaign in states that both were targeting. No doubt the Clinton campaign systematically targeted states that they was hoping to flip to her column. ‘Battleground’ states, then, should be more likely to be Clinton-dominated than other states.

This means that if battleground states are noticeably different in terms of Trump’s performance there, as opposed to regular non-battleground states, then I should expect some form of bias in the results. Battleground states, for example, by definition have tighter races between the two leading candidates than non-battleground states, which could cause over- or under-estimation of Trump’s ratings.

In order to control for this, I created a dummy variable for battleground states. The state-level political culture variable defined earlier cannot be used here — although it does, to some extent, capture the degree to which a state has historically been competitive at the presidential level, it does not take other factors that go into the designation of ‘battleground’ states, such as electoral votes, into account. As there is no official criterion for what defines a battleground state, I relied upon expert consensus. I collected lists of battleground states from both statistical election pre-
dictors such as FiveThirtyEight, The Princeton Elections Consortium, and the New York Times forecast, as well as from recognized political pundits such as Sabato’s Crystal Ball and the Cook Political Report. All lists were collected from predictions made as close as possible to one month before the election. States identified in two or more of these sources as ‘swing states’ or ‘battleground states’ were given a value of 1, while all other states were held at 0. This produced a list of 16 overall potential swing states such as Florida and Ohio. I included this variable as a control.

In addition, I controlled for the political culture of the state. This should be one of the primary driving forces behind Trump’s poll performances, and is also likely related to the Clinton campaign and its affiliates’ decision-making process as to where their advertising resources were best spent.

Finally, I also control for Clinton’s poll ratings as well. This is due to the fact that, in addition to whatever other effect the advertisements her campaign sponsored might have had, I should expect them to have their intended effect of boosting Clinton’s ratings, and thereby depressing Trump’s score. Though I am using three-way percentage scores, considering the dominance of the two-party system in both practical terms and in mentality of the general public, it seems reasonable to assume that a benefit for one candidate is likely to be associated with a loss for the other. In order to capture and differentiate the actual intended effects of the advertisement from the expectancy-based effects, I include Clinton’s poll ratings, coded exactly as Trump’s ratings.

The results are presented in Table 8. The battleground status of a state in the 2016

51 Note: This was not the only specification tried: For example, each source’s individual list of swing states used on its own produced roughly similar patterns of results. In other words, this variables seems remarkably robust as long as several key states on which all sources agreed are included.

52 The results presented below are robust to the exclusion of this data. As might be expected, when the Clinton-positive effects of the advertisements are not filtered out from the Trump-positive effects, the total effects of the advertisements become both substantive and statistically less significant. However, the benefits to Trump from the formation of negative expectations remain. When the Clinton performance control is eliminated, being in a Clinton-dominated state boosts Trump’s total performance by .801, significant at the $p=.002$. 

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election had no significant effect on Trump’s performance at the polls. Instead, state-level partisanship and Clinton’s polling advantage were the primary drivers of his poll ratings. The political culture of a state, as might be expected, had the largest effect. Shifting from Utah to Massachusetts, as before, produces an expected difference of over 19 points. The relationship between Clinton’s poll results and Trump’s is also as expected: the better Clinton’s numbers, the worse for Trump, and vice versa. Moving from Clinton’s lowest polling result in the data to her best causes an expected loss for Trump of over 5 polling points.

Most importantly, the results support the idea that Clinton’s attacks on Trump’s honesty may have actually handed him an advantage in the 2016 campaign. Trump did, on average, just over one percentage point better on polls in Clinton-dominated states. While this effect is small, it is still potentially of substantive interest, especially in a presidential race where the final result was, decided by only .3 margins, as in Michigan, or by fewer than 2800 voters, as in New Hampshire. It is also notable that the huge amount of resources the Clinton campaign spent on attacking Trump for dishonesty may have backfired.

For details, examine Table 9. This is a version of the above regression with a reversal of the roles of the candidates (such that Clinton’s poll ratings are now the main variable of interest and Trump’s ratings are used as a control). The results show that Clinton does better in battleground states, that she does better in more Democratically-leaning states, and that she her ratings suffer as Trump’s improve. It also demonstrates that Clinton’s advertising was not, overall, ineffective. Clinton did, on average, almost two and a half points better in states where her campaign dominated advertising. Therefore, it is not the case that Clinton’s advertising was solely, or even mostly, to Trump’s benefit. However, the fact that Trump’s campaign could effectively receive a not-insubstantial portion of the sizeable resources that Clinton dedicated to advertising doubtlessly aided Trump’s campaign. In addition, although
the data does not allow for definitive statements, the theory of expectancy violations suggests that Clinton’s advertisements may have been dichotomous. Clinton seems to have been able to boost her ratings by using positive advertisements focused on her own candidacy, but her negative political ads may have served largely to only provide Trump with further armor, allowing him freedom to avoid the political costs of deception while reaping many of the potential benefits.

Table 8: Regression results examining the effect of Clinton advertising dominance on Trump polling results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Coef.</th>
<th>Robust SE</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clinton Advertising Dominance</td>
<td>1.027</td>
<td>0.262</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State-Level Partisanship</td>
<td>0.347</td>
<td>0.016</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinton Poll Ratings</td>
<td>-0.094</td>
<td>0.024</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Battleground Status</td>
<td>0.316</td>
<td>0.273</td>
<td>0.247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>43.524</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>3075</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Coefficients are unstandardized OLS coefficients. Standard errors are robust. *Clinton Advertising Dominance* is an indicator variable taking the value of 1 if a majority of a state’s population was covered by media market(s) which were primarily dominated by the Clinton campaign or affiliated parties and interests. *State-level partisanship* gives combined victory margins for the two main parties in the last five presidential elections. *Clinton Poll Ratings* gives the average poll ratings for Clinton by state. *Battleground Status* is an indicator variable taking a value of 1 if the state was coded as a battleground state.

Effects on Poll Responsivity

I also examine the effect of Clinton’s advantage in advertising in terms of overall responsivity to the news environment over the course of the campaign. I ran a regression analysis in which state-level dominance by the Clinton campaign and affiliates was regressed upon the second responsivity measure detailed above.

I also control for battleground states, as detailed above. Though I am examining
Table 9: Regression results examining the effect of Clinton advertising dominance on Clinton polling results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Coef.</th>
<th>Robust SE</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clinton Advertising Dominance</td>
<td>2.480</td>
<td>0.253</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State-Level Partisanship</td>
<td>−0.415</td>
<td>0.010</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trump Poll Ratings</td>
<td>−0.062</td>
<td>0.016</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Battleground Status</td>
<td>1.223</td>
<td>0.243</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>42.154</td>
<td>0.650</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>3075</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Coefficients are unstandardized OLS coefficients. Standard errors are robust. *Clinton Advertising Dominance* is an indicator variable taking the value of 1 if a majority of a state’s population was covered by media market(s) which were primarily dominated by the Clinton campaign or affiliated parties and interests. *State-level partisanship* gives combined victory margins for the two main parties in the last five presidential elections. *Trump Poll Ratings* gives the average poll ratings for Clinton by state. *Battleground Status* is an indicator variable taking a value of 1 if the state was coded as a battleground state.

Overall reactivity over the course of the campaign, and not simple polling results, similar concerns apply. If battleground states behave differently from those states in terms of reactivity to Trump, the results could be biased. There are a number of reasons that one might expect this to be the case. Battleground states, by definition, are those states with durably narrow gaps between polling numbers of the two candidates for a significant portion of the campaign. Therefore, one should expect less movement in battleground states simply by definition. In addition, inhabitants of battleground states are subject to noticeably higher amounts of political messaging in all forms. The greater volume of incoming messages might very well affect the responsivity of state residents — in line with expectation theory, I predict that the greater amount of political messages coming in would include more political attacks, thereby reducing responsivity in battleground states.

In addition, I control for Trump’s raw polling numbers in the state. As mentioned above, Clinton dominated several states by virtue of her lead there being so com-
emanding that Trump did not bother to waste resources on advertising, as happened in California. In the reverse case, there are several states in which Clinton did not advertise due to Trump’s solid grasp: this is the case in Texas, for example. If there is some overall pattern of relation between which states the Clinton campaign advertised the most heavily in and Trump’s average favorability rating there, this could bias the results. In order to control for this, I include Trump’s state-level polling averages in the final regression.

I also control for the political culture of the state. Clinton’s advertising was doubtlessly also directed by the partisan predilections of state inhabitants, to some degree. To ensure that this measure is not also capturing partisan effects on responsivity, I control for state-level partisanship as previously defined.

The results are presented in Table 10. Neither Trump’s polling averages nor the balance of partisanship in a state had any effect upon responsivity. As predicted, whether or not a state was a battleground state did have an effect, as battleground states were significantly less responsive than non-battleground states. Had North Dakota been a battleground state, for example, one might have expected to see Trump’s growth slope in that state decline from .11 to only .09.

The results show that the more Clinton messages predominated over Trump messages in a given state, the less likely inhabitants of that state were to significantly alter their political beliefs about Trump over the course of the campaign. As an example, take the state of Florida, in which Clinton advertising heavily predominated over Trump advertising and the overall trend of Trump’s ratings was a slight increase of .013. Had the deadening effects of Clinton’s advertising not been present, one would have instead expected to see a slight negative slope of -.019. In other words, instead of the roughly five-point gain that Trump made over the course of the campaign in Florida, I would expect to see Trump suffer a nearly six-point loss had the citizens proved more responsive.
A test of spatial auto-correlation bias using Geary’s $C$ shows no significant clustering in the regression residuals ($p = .226$).

Table 10: Regression results examining the effect of Clinton-affiliated advertising dominance at the state level on total campaign change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Coef.</th>
<th>Robust SE</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clinton Advertising Dominance</td>
<td>−0.022</td>
<td>0.009</td>
<td>0.016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trump Ratings</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.661</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State-Level Partisanship</td>
<td>−0.001</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.687</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Battleground Status</td>
<td>−0.020</td>
<td>0.008</td>
<td>0.066</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.052</td>
<td>0.033</td>
<td>0.134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Coefficients are unstandardized OLS coefficients. Standard errors are robust. *Clinton Advertising Dominance* is an indicator variable taking the value of 1 if a majority of a state’s population was covered by media market(s) which were primarily dominated by the Clinton campaign or affiliated parties and interests. *Trump Ratings* gives the average poll ratings for Trump by state. *State-level partisanship* gives combined victory margins for the two main parties in the last five presidential elections. *Battleground Status* is an indicator variable taking a value of 1 if the state was coded as a battleground state.

**Effects on Specific Reaction**

Finally, I examine a specific, rather than overall, examination of the effects of Clinton-advertising dominance on expectations of Trump, and therefore on the public’s approach to judging him. For this case, I make use of the “Six Hundred and Fifty Million” remark previously defined. In order to determine whether or not the reaction to this particular deception from Trump was dependent upon public expectations, I interact a variable marking whether or not the remark in question had been given with the dummy variable indicating Clinton’s predominance in advertising in a given state. The dependent variable are poll-ratings of Trump, as previously defined. I also control for the effects of state-level political culture, as I expect that there will
be a relationship between the areas in which Clinton advertised, the partisan culture of that state, and how the public will react to Trump’s remark. In addition, I also control for both Clinton’s ratings in the polls, which should have an effect on where her advertisements were targeted as well as a correlation with the reaction to Trump’s remark, as well as the battleground status of the state in question.

The results are presented in Table 11. Most variables behave as expected: State-level partisanship remains a primary predictor of Trump’s success at the polls, and Clinton’s poll ratings retain their inverse relationship with Trump’s. The battleground status of a state, despite not reaching significance, trends in the direction predicted by expectancy violations in acting as an overall benefit to Trump’s polling numbers.

Most interesting for the purposes of this research, however, are the effects of Trump’s remarks on immigration. The findings indicate that whether or not Trump’s remark cost him any points with the public was conditioned by the region’s exposure to Clinton-favoring advertising. The interaction term is positively signed and negatively significant.

More specifically, these results indicate that when I focus solely on those regions in which Clinton advertising did not predominate, Trump’s remark seemed to have led to a loss of several percentage points (−2.3). This is as democratic theory would suggest and hope: Trump made a false remark, and the public’s reaction to this and to the ensuing accusations of deception made against Trump was to downgrade their opinion of him. However, those regions in which Clinton advertised heavily showed a very different pattern of results. There, there seemed to be no effective difference before Trump made his remark and after. The Trump remark dummy variable has no significant effect (p=.909). Therefore, as predicted by expectancy violation theory, only those areas with less exposure to Trump proved reactive to news of deception on his part. Those with greater reason to expect dishonesty on his part showed no

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53 For information on interpreting multiplicative interactions, see Braumoeller (2004).
reaction.

Table 11: Regression results examining the effect of Clinton-affiliated advertising dominance at the state level on reactions to specific dishonesty

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Coef.</th>
<th>Robust SE</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Six Hundred and Fifty Million</td>
<td>−2.309</td>
<td>0.855</td>
<td>0.007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinton Advertising Dominance</td>
<td>0.941</td>
<td>0.717</td>
<td>0.636</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six Hundred and Fifty Million * Clinton Advertising Dominance</td>
<td>2.239</td>
<td>1.114</td>
<td>0.636</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State-Level Partisanship</td>
<td>0.215</td>
<td>0.037</td>
<td>0.636</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinton Poll Ratings</td>
<td>−0.385</td>
<td>0.070</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Battleground Status</td>
<td>1.156</td>
<td>0.666</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>58.121</td>
<td>2.606</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>387</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Coefficients are unstandardized OLS coefficients. Standard errors are robust. *Six Hundred and Fifty Million* is an indicator variable that takes a value of 1 for polls that start in the three days following Trump’s immigration remark, and 0 for those polls with an ending date in the three days preceding the remark. *Clinton Advertising Dominance* is an indicator variable taking the value of 1 if a majority of a state’s population was covered by media market(s) which were primarily dominated by the Clinton campaign or affiliated parties and interests. *Clinton Poll Ratings* gives the average poll ratings for Clinton by state. *State-level partisanship* gives combined victory margins for the two main parties in the last five presidential elections. *Battleground Status* is an indicator variable taking a value of 1 if the state was coded as a battleground state.

Discussion

I find support for all of my hypotheses. First, there is broad support for the hypothesis that the expectancy violation effect may have offered Trump an advantage in the 2016 campaign. I found support for Hypothesis 1: In those states with greater amounts of political corruption, Trump performed better even after controlling for the effects of economic status, partisan control, and so forth.

I also found support for Hypothesis 2: The responsivity of Trump’s polls decreased as corruption increased, supporting the idea that a greater history of stories about dishonest politicians led inhabitants of those states to see stories about Trump’s
dishonesty as non-novel.

Moving on to tests of information variances that affect only Trump, I also found support for Hypothesis 3. Those states that had high degrees of interest in The Celebrity Apprentice were more likely to give Trump high polls ratings in the 2016 election. This is not definitive evidence of expectancy-based effects in any way, since multiple approaches (such as simple favorability to Trump, or name recognition) would make a similar prediction. Nonetheless, it is in accordance with the theory, and importantly, leads into the next test.

The responsitivity of Trump’s poll ratings also decreased in those states with greater interest in The Celebrity Apprentice. This is far superior evidence for expectation effects playing a role in the 2016 election. Name recognition and Trump favorability both have no clear hypothesized role in poll responsitivity, and were controlled for as well.

Moving on to perhaps the most surprising set of results, I examined how Clinton-supporting advertising benefited Trump. Following Hypothesis 5, those states where Clinton dominated ad coverage were more favorable to Trump. This was in spite of controls being put in place for the partisanship, poll ratings, and battleground status of the state — meaning that the effect being merely due to Clinton choosing to advertise heavily in the states she most needed does not seem to be the case. Importantly, when a similar test was performed on Clinton, her advertising did increase her own polling results. This both acts to confirm the test, as it produces the expected results, and leads to the comparison of Clinton-supporting advertising’s effects on the two candidates. These results estimate Trump as receiving perhaps 40% of the benefits that Clinton did from her advertising.

Hypothesis 6 was also supported. Trump’s polling results became less responsive in Clinton advertising dominated states, again after control for battleground status and state partisanship were included.
Finally, Hypothesis 7 was also borne out by the data. Trump’s “six hundred and fifty million immigrants” remark, which was both untrue and impossible, did cost him some points in the polls — precisely as several normative views of democracy would hope. However, they seemed to only cost him anything with those citizens that were not subject to heavy levels of Clinton-supporting advertising. Those subjects in states that were largely dominated by Clinton advertising showed no reaction to Trump’s remarks — even after controlling for their battleground status, their partisanship, and their opinion of Clinton.

Conclusion

The results of this analysis of the 2016 election point to the possibility that expectancy violations played a significant role in determining its final results. Three different sources of variance in information that should affect political dishonesty were tested, and all three boosted Trump’s final results while decreasing the overall responsivity his ratings showed to news over the campaign cycle. In other words, the negative expectations of Trump formed by widespread media coverage of his dishonesty served to inoculate viewers against further expressions of it.

I will move into greater detail in the following chapter as to the potential implications that should be drawn from these results, and from this research in general. However, three points stand out immediately as worthy of discussion.

The first is that political dishonesty seems to have negative effects that are poisonous to the entire political system, not merely the individual or context in which they are used. The damage that a corrupt political system does to public trust in government may allow future politicians to capitalize upon the public’s lowered expectations, and so dishonesty in politics may be self-reinforcing.

Secondly, the role of celebrity in politics may warrant further serious research.
The idea that celebrities, because of the unreality in which they naturally live or because of the greater coverage they experience, have an advantage when engaging in politics may be a disturbing one from a normative standpoint. If we would wish for elections to hinge largely on political expertise, then a system that encourages members of the entertainment industry may be problematic.

Finally, Clinton’s advertising dominance may have actually acted in Trump’s benefit. This suggests that the fact-checking initiatives of the news industry may have unanticipated side effects that need to be planned for. It also calls into question the behavior of the mass media in the 2016 election. While the 24-hour news cycle, the appeal of horse-race journalism, and the constant need to compete for viewers make a focus on controversy appealing, there seems to be a significant possibility that this is actively eroding the news media’s credibility with the public. In other words, as amusing as stories of blank folders or non-existent steaks may have been, and as justified as extensive and near-daily fact-checks of Trump’s statements might have been, a constant stream of accusations may have been far less effective at shifting public opinion than say, a condemnation of only one or two of Trump’s more notable mistruths would have been instead.

Of course, it is important to note that this chapter is by no means intended as definitive evidence that Trump’s victory was due to expectancy effects, or even to the issue of truth or falsehood at all. I do not have the statistical evidence to make that claim, and many explanations for the 2016 election are yet to be written. I merely use these results to point out the current climate of American elections — negativity, accusations, and a constant feed of controversy and outrage — may be encouraging the rise of politicians and political behavior that can thrive in such a toxic environment.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

Practical politics consists in ignoring facts.

Henry Adams

Summary

In this dissertation, I set out to examine how the public reacted when told that a politician had lied to them. Above and beyond the question of whether or not the factual content of the lie was accepted or rejected, would they change their opinion of the politician who had delivered it? Did lying carry some form of reputational cost, and if so, when and how much? Following an indepth analysis of the literature and an argument as to how this question had remained unanswered up until this point, I made use of two methodological approaches: direct survey-style experimentation, and observational database collection. The results from my experiment, the first of its kind to directly examine the effects of a standard lying accusation on political evaluations using an expectancy violations approach, uncovered some intriguing patterns of results that contradict intuitive predictions as to the behaviors of partisan actors, though they require greater external validity before we can generalize to the American population as a whole. The results of the observational study of the 2016 election helped to provide that validity, and yielded interesting and suggestive findings, though more research is needed to
quantify the precise level of importance these factors had in the 2016 results and to generalize these findings to other electoral contexts.

List of Findings

My main findings are as follows:

1. My first finding is that the public’s reaction to deception, in terms of the effects it has upon their evaluations of the politicians involved, has been significantly understudied.\footnote{It should be noted that I am not speaking of the trait attribution literature here, which has studied how voters apply labels such as ‘honest’ or ‘dishonest’ to candidates (Fridkin and Kenney, 2011; Kiousis, Bantimaroudis and Ban, 1999), but on the specific mechanisms that guide individual-level generalized responses to a single deception story.} I argue that this is in fact due to a path-dependent effect of the events that helped lead to the creation of political deception as an organized academic event in the first place, and those events that helped to drive both the direction of the field and the opinion of the public at the same time. Events such as World War II propaganda, Watergate, and the Lewinsky scandal placed most academic interest upon the political elite as the interesting actors in the field-defining events, and led to the stereotype of the public’s role in the deception process as mere passive receivers. In addition, practical concerns and simple assumptions\footnote{Especially given research from other fields does an excellent and definitive job of showing a widespread distaste for deception. Were we not to focus on the fact that the public treats politicians differently than they do other humans, these assumptions would seem entirely justified.} have led to the study of complicated cognitive responses to messages about political deception being overlooked.

2. Expectations play a significant role in determining how (and, in fact, whether) humans respond to new information. I find, in multiple tests conducted on different populations, that only those subject groups with strong theoretical reasons to have an expectation of honesty from the politician being tested responded to news that they had been lied to. Optimistic Democrats during
Obama’s tenure punished political deception, but only from their own party. Pessimistic Republicans remained inactive. In the presence of a home-state cue, Republicans became active for the first time, and Democrats expected more out of even opposing partisans. In the 2016 election, those areas with the most reason to expect news of Trump’s dishonesty — whether due to political corruption affecting their general expectations, Trump’s television career inuring the public to the idea of Trump making outrageous statements, or Clinton’s advertising setting the expectation among the public that Trump was dishonest — were more likely to have generally higher ratings of Trump, and less likely to show any response to the news surrounding the campaign over time.

3. Importantly, I find that expectations do not seem to affect the substance of the public reaction against dishonest politicians, only the likelihood of a response occurring. Republicans and Democrats responded alike once triggered to engage in active processing, and at very nearly identical rates of punishment. This speaks to a near-universal dislike for liars, with most of the variance we observe in public response corresponding to which segments of the public are triggered to respond. While I tap some of the variances in information and expectation that should guide these reactions, such as partisanship and political advertising, there is still a great deal more work to be done.

4. Finally, I find that a negative reputation for honesty can serve as an advantage to a candidate. When the public expects to receive messages about a candidate’s dishonesty, for whatever reason, they become less responsive to messages of that type. This benefits the candidate in question in multiple ways. First, by blunting the public’s reactions, all future charges are made less effective. Therefore, if a candidate were to, theoretically, experience an early blitz of less serious deception stories, the public would be non-reactive to later stories even
if those were more serious. It is not merely the case, therefore, that a candidate would experience their loss for deception only up-front, but could avoid more serious losses they would have suffered down the road. A reputation for dishonesty also serves as a significant potential source of position-taking freedom for a candidate: when there is no penalty for dishonesty, a candidate is free to take any position or make any statement that would be politically advantageous, with no regard for the reality ‘on the ground’ that would constrain the statements of a politician without a similar advantage.

The implications of these four findings deserve further discussion, which I will turn to later in this chapter. First, however, I wish to present ways in which the tests and analyses presented in this document could have been improved upon, and also directions and suggestions for future research to pursue.

As an additional way to track the effects of deception accusations on public evaluations of politicians, I could perform a time-series analysis of some group of politicians and track the frequency with which they are accused of deception. Doing so would require a significant amount of data collection, both to track news stories about the politicians involved and to track public evaluations, but would allow for the demonstration of these effects over time. This approach would also allow me to deal with the time component of the effects that I have found: the analyses that I have run do not suffice to judge how long the negative shift caused by actively processing a deception accusation lasts. The experimental data only tracks a fairly immediate reaction, the Trump remark test used in the observational data only looks at the shifts present for a few days/weeks, and the overtime reactions from the observational data do not take time into account. If future work shows that the effect of an actively processed account is short-lived, then this may help to alleviate some of the more troublesome implications that I identify in the section below. However, this would also raise grave concerns of its own, as it would show very little response from the public to deception
at all, not merely conditional response.

Additionally, a time-series analysis would allow for the investigation of other effects known to influence the public’s reaction to deception, such as the ability of the politician in question to offer justifications for their statements. This should, in theory, also be affected by expectancy violations, leading to an intriguing puzzle: are justifications expected alongside accusations? Do citizens process them similarly, or could they have different likelihoods of receiving active processing?

Future work should also address the underlying mechanism driving the expectancy effect, which this work has not definitively established. An information search task would also be an excellent model for future work in this vein. Allowing subjects the opportunity to choose from a variety of sources would better model the information environment of a real political campaign or event, and would also give the ability to better test the attention-based models of expectancy violations directly, by tracking which pieces of information participants are most interested in based upon their expectations. Additionally, testing whether the effects found in this research persists when subjects are induced to pay attention regardless of the novelty of the information would be useful both for establishing the mechanism and for attempting to counter Also, this project would allow for the testing of effects that are based upon information balance. That is, following Redlawsk, Civettini and Emmerson (2010), we know that whether subjects rely on expectancy violations, which call attention to outlier events in order to shift existing opinions; or on motivated skepticism, which decreases the impact of outlier events in order to protect existing opinions; is primarily determined by the amount of violating messages encountered. A low percentage of messages, their research suggests, can be “written off” by motivated processing, while a high percentage of violating messages demands attention. Better defining the precise cut-off point for when each process is used, and mapping that to real-world political environments, would be of value to the field.
A historical analysis would allow me to take advantage of the variance noted in Chapter 2 that has arisen as result of growing public pessimism about the honesty of their elected leaders. Since American citizens from before events such as Watergate and other presidential deceptions displayed a high expectation that government officials would be truthful, and modern American citizens display, on average, precisely the opposite belief, then it should be possible to exploit that difference in order to see how citizens reacted to historical crises as opposed to modern events. While I briefly examine this in Chapter 2, an organized test of this hypothesis would be highly instructive.

A large-scale, long-term project to create and/or alter expectations about political honesty would allow for a much more direct look at the operation of expectations. Of course, doing so would raise any number of practical challenges, as it would mean at a minimum occupying some not-insubstantial portion of a subject’s media intake. It would also raise the issue of doing so while avoiding having other, confounding effects upon the subjects. Nonetheless, it remains an intriguing avenue for research.

As a final entry on the topic of additional research approaches, a confirmatory followup experiment, following the pattern of Study 2 in Chapter 3, would be valuable after some amount of time has passed. Following Keele (2007), we should see a new pattern of political trust shortly establishing itself. Democrats will grow less trusting of government and politicians in general, while Republicans will become more so. Given this, rerunning the experiment should show more responsive Republicans and less responsive Democrats, further validating the expectancy violations approach. Taking the observational data beyond a campaign environment would allow for the examination of whether expectancy effects could persist through an entire presidency — and, in fact, whether assuming the role of president confers additional expectations upon an individual that might render the public responsive again.

\(^{56}\)See also Uscinski, Parent and Torres (2011) for more examples of these shifts in trust occurring due to won or lost elections.
Moving on to less broad approaches, there are also a number of smaller-scale refinements that would serve to more fully investigate this topic in the future. One would be to exploit life experiences as yet another handle upon expectations. For example, we might expect that those subjects who have lived through events of notable political dishonesty will react differently to further stories than groups without such experiences. On a similar note, a cross-national approach to this research might prove instructive. Different countries should vary in the expectations that their citizens have of their leaders, both due to varying amounts of political dishonesty between countries and due to differing standards of media reporting, as well as to variances in political culture. Therefore, reactions to stories about deception should differ based on the nationality of a respondent in a predictable manner, helping to transition this approach from a solely American approach to more general applicability.

Another refinement for future work would be to examine responses to deception in detail, and breakdown the precise mechanism by which public evaluations are lowered. That is, I make use of general feeling thermometer ratings in order to ‘cast a broad net’ and catch any change in evaluations of the politician. This prevents me from drawing conclusions about the fine mechanisms of public opinion. Do voters simply add the negative story to their list of considerations, a la Zaller and Feldman (1992)? Do they mark the politician in question with the ‘liar’ trait? Does the story simply decrease their affect to that politician, or does it reduce (or increase!) their odds of accepting information from that source again? All of these questions deserve further investigation.

Perhaps the most surprising findings in this research were the patterns of trust displayed by Democratic and Republican experimental participants in Chapter 3, Studies 1 and 2. Democrats appeared to trust additively, including all home-state or co-partisan politicians, while Republicans trusted jointly, including only home-state politicians who were also co-partisans. To date, not enough research has been done
on mapping the expectations of the public to say definitively how members of the
different parties attribute expectations of lies or honesty. Nor can I say for certain
whether the different numbers of trust cues needed for different partisans was the
result of the ideals of the Democratic and Republican parties, or trust effects from
the current political climate that might be reversed in current work.

More generally, political science does not have a reliable way to forecast the ex-
pectations that an individual will hold in detail, as we do for other political facts
such as their partisan identity or policy preferences. If expectations play such a vital
role in how individuals process political information, then it behooves us to be able
to reliably predict or measure them. In other words, we must be able to ascertain in
which pseudo-environments people are living, to borrow a phrase. In addition, such a
project might allow us to be able to formalize or quantify how ‘expectancy-violating’,
or surprising, a given message is, and therefore how much attention we should expect
it to be able to draw from the public.

Adding the analysis of past data would also prove highly useful to increasing the
generalizability of the election analysis presented in Chapter 4. Specifically, there
exists the possibility that Trump is somehow unusual or an outlier, and that I would
no longer observe expectancy based effects in a ‘typical’ election. In part, this is
almost certainly true. That was, in fact, part and parcel of the reason that the
2016 election was selected in the first place, as the prevalence of evidence of Trump’s
dishonesty was far beyond any previous election, Trump’s repeated assaults on the
truth provided a wealth of raw material that would not be equalled in almost any
previous election. No typical election would have provided such an opportunity to see
if expectancy effects on deception were possible on the national stage. Analysis of past
elections would prove historically instructive, however, and allow for the examination
of how often they play a decisive role in American elections. In addition, such an
analysis may prove predictively useful in future elections, assuming that the 2016
election was not the new normal.

Most broadly, the biggest avenue for future research is the application of the expectancy violation framework more broadly. Does it apply to cases of honesty as well as dishonesty, for instance? Research that points to a negativity bias on the part of human cognition might suggest that it would not, and it is hard to imagine the news story that points out a surprising case of honesty for the effect to occur. A disturbing implication of this, if true, would be that a negative reputation is valuable in politics for multiple reasons, and an honest reputation would be nothing more than a liability. This approach could also be generalized to political misbehavior and scandal in general, rather than a simple focus on deception. While I started this research project specifically to investigate how deception had been studied politically, the end product should be applicable to many broader questions.

Final Thoughts

Although more research is required to verify these findings and further investigate the causal arguments I have made, the implications of the fact that an expectation of dishonesty produces a deadening of reaction to accusations of deception has numerous potential implications. I break these down in several broad categories below.

Media

The expansion of the mass media has skyrocketed in recent years, with more and more American having access to constant streams of news. According to classical democratic thought, this might be expected to produce better-informed citizens, and to alleviate the problem of an electorate who isn’t quite sure what the three main branches of government are.

However, this pace of technological change is also drastically increasing the amount
of stories each person intakes every day. This increase of availability has also, as previously mentioned, driven up a rise in competition and in attempts to use controversy to attract more viewers.\footnote{57}{A tactic that is by no means new: it was commonplace in the battles between Hearst and Pulitzer, for example.}

Finally, the news media has drastically expanded its fact-checking efforts in recent years as well.\footnote{58}{See previous chapters for details.} This has been lauded as a return to investigative journalism and an attempt to hold politicians responsible for their words, both excellent goals.

All of this means, however, that the number of news stories any given average citizen can be expected to have seen over the course of their life about political lies and deception should have gone up markedly in the past few years, even if we assume for the moment that the actual rate of dishonesty in politics has held constant!

Thus, these changes in news industry — some of them on their face seemingly entirely positive — may actually be eroding the power of the news to have an impact upon public opinion. Oddly enough, the conclusion that these results point to is that the news media should in fact focus upon more positive stories, or adopt a more dry and restrained style of communication. Perhaps the best way to deal with untrustworthy politicians would be to first inspire greater public trust in government.

Of course, things are hardly that simple. The fracturing of the news markets has left far too many parties as players to make coordination of such a strategy possible. And the different partisan interests of various news outlets ensure that there will always be an incentive for one group or another to engage heavy messaging about their opponents’ dishonesty, while the need to compete would prevent media companies from retreating to fill less airtime. So too, reporters might morally object to focusing on more positive stories, especially when they feel the need to condemn the actions of incumbent politicians. In short, having a prospective solution for the declining power of the news media does not also provide a way to implement that
Politicians

My findings also carry significant implications for the incentives facing politicians. Rather than honesty being rewarded, it would appear that a reputation for honesty is little more than a political liability. A rational politician reading these conclusions might decide that the best course of action is to ‘blitz’ the public with so many stories of petty lies that they will prove non-responsive to any such future stories. It also means that the fact-checking environment mentioned before might provide politicians with precisely the opposite incentive that it is meant to. While politicians currently seem leery of appearing on fact-checking websites (Nyhan and Reifler, 2015b), how long before Bachmann’s approach of ignoring them is seen as the logical solution?

If our current campaign environments are set up so that we encourage dishonesty from politicians, or at least make it cheaper in a sort of subsidy, perhaps we could increase honesty in politics by slowing down the cycle of campaign news, or engaging in greater political civility between opposing parties. Again, however, there is no clear path forward to achieving this.

Democracy

Theories of how democracies should function point to the idea that the public should be able to sanction their leaders for misbehavior. However, if lying is not only generally unpunished by a significant portion of the population, but also grows less likely to be punished the more one engages in it, then this restraint upon elected officials would seem unlikely to be enforced.

This also points to a lack of trust in government and politicians as a serious matter. If the public will only prove responsive when there are high levels of trust in government, then losing too much trust may create an environment where dishonesty
runs rampant. In short, we might expect to see public pessimism about political honesty as a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The Public

My results do not point to the public being accepting of lying. Whenever the public in either the experimental or observational study had reason to actively consider the fact that they were being lied to, they punished deception promptly. Instead, the public seems to largely be inured to lying.

The question, then, is how to make lying shocking to the public again. How do we cause a desensitized public to pay active attention to reports of dishonesty and deception? There seems to be no easy answer. But if we want more from our leaders, then it seems we must expect more of them.
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Appendix A: Experimental Material

The following is an example of a news excerpt that would be presented to experimental participants. The block code would have been presented to subjects as their own home state abbreviation. This specific block was presented as part of Study 2 in the honesty condition. Other excerpts follow a similar model.

ADAMS ON ISIS GAINING NEW RECRUITS

...foreign fighters from around the globe continue to pour into Iraq and Syria to join up with the self-proclaimed Islamic State—despite ISIS’s loss of two major cities. In fact, the number of ISIS fighters recruited from Europe has increased in the last six months, one U.S. official said, meaning that ISIS’s casualties suffered aren’t slowing them down.

Despite this, many politicians are advocating that the United States stay the course in the plan against ISIS. During a speech this Monday, Senator Adams (R - $q://QID37/ChoiceGroup/SelectedChoices), a long-time proponent of military engagement with ISIS, encouraged the commitment of more soldiers to the effort:

“We cannot turn back now.” the prominent Republican politician said. “Since 2009, terrorist forces have taken tens of thousands of casualties, while the United States forces have lost only about two hundred soldiers.”
Some say, however, that without an equally aggressive push on their finances, the military engagements can only have so much of an effect...

Note: Fact-checking supports Adams’ statement: reports give the recent casualty figures as 256, exactly as the Senator claims.
Appendix B: Sources Used for Poll Variable Formation

- FiveThirtyEight
- RealClearPolitics
- New York Times Poll Tracker
- Princeton Election Consortium
- Politico Polling Center