Deception Detection in Politics:
Partisan Processing through the Lens of Truth-Default Theory

DISSERTATION

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Abstract

Political scientists, psychologists, sociologists, and communication researchers have long wondered about the biased processing of political messages by partisan voters. One effect on democracy is the presumption that one’s ingroup politician is believable while the outgroup is deceptive. Truth-default theory (Levine, 2014b) holds that salient ingroups are most susceptible to inaccurate detection of deception. I test this. Using stimuli of a news interview in which a politician either gives all on-topic answers or goes flagrantly off-topic, I manipulate the politician’s party affiliation as Democratic or Republican. Registered voters who identify as either Democrats or Republicans (n = 618) are randomly assigned to experimental conditions. I test aspects of TDT and social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) relating to partisan favoritism toward the ingroup politician’s trustworthiness and derogation of the outgroup politician in their perception and detection of dodging. Discussion concerns the ramifications—for deception detection and political democracy—when partisan ingroups and outgroups engage in biased processing.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Politicians are considered some of the most deceptive people in the United States (Gallup, 2016; Serota, Levine, & Boster, 2010). The public thinks politicians do not answer questions (Bull & Mayer, 1993; Harris, 1991). George Orwell (1946/2001) said, “Politics itself is a mass of lies, evasions, folly, hatred, and schizophrenia.” This dissertation will explore the role of partisan bias in people’s perceptions of politicians dodging questions. I investigate the extent to which people accurately detect dodges depending on their ingroup vs. outgroup identification—whether or not a politician actually dodges.

My theoretical rationale draws on truth-default theory (TDT: Levine, 2014b), Grice’s (1989) theory of conversational implicature, information manipulation theory 2 (IMT2: McCormack, Morrison, Paik, Wisner, & Zhu 2014), and social identity theory (SIT: Tajfel & Turner, 1979). TDT holds that salient ingroups are most susceptible to inaccurate perceptions of deception. Salient ingroups presume their members comply with Gricean maxims of conversational implicature and the cooperative principle. A violation of the Gricean maxim of relevance would therefore theoretically go undetected among members of a salient ingroup. For example, when Republicans and Democrats are both exposed to the same political interview in which a politician gives all on-topic answers or goes flagrantly off-topic, if the politician is a Republican then Democratic
viewers should perceive significantly more dodging than Republican viewers, and vice versa if the politician were a Democrat.

Using stimuli of a news interview, I created four conditions with two variables. I manipulate a politician’s party affiliation as either Democratic or Republican. And the politician either gives all on-topic responses to the questions or dodges a question with an off-topic response. The results from this experiment could have severe ramifications—for deception detection and political democracy—as partisan ingroups and outgroups engage in biased processing.
Chapter 2: Fundamentals of Conversation

Speech Acts

In a question-response interaction, speakers are performing speech acts. Speech acts compose the fundamental essence of conversation. In this chapter I discuss definitions and understandings of this phenomenon, place it in the context of this dissertation’s political interview experiment, and summarize some key components of speech acts.

A speech act may be defined as a produced utterance, symbol, or marker that carries intended meaning to a message recipient (Searle, 1965). It may also be called an illocutionary act (Austin, 1962). For example, speech acts include asking questions, answering questions, making commands, promises, greetings, and assertions. A speech act is more than asserting or proposing information disclosed as the utterance’s syntactical content. The illocutionary part of a communicative situation is distinct from other parts such as the linguistic text of the message, voice inflection, and topical referents mentioned in a statement. A speech act does something to the hearer. It produces an effect on an audience. It carries what Searle (1965) calls illocutionary force. It produces illocutionary effects. Words, phrases, sentences, intonation, punctuation, and volume may be the devices, but the illocutionary force of the utterance transforms the signal to serve a function.
I offer an example of a question as a speech act in everyday question-answer routines. Imagine your lover uttering the following: “Does it feel cold in here to you?” I use the term “uttering” instead of “asking” or “saying” because the verb can implicate meaning and might betray the type of speech act implied by the question—if the stated question about the temperature is even really a question. I cast doubt on whether it is a question or rather a statement because the meaning largely depends on your understanding of the context. You might discern that your lover is criticizing your regulation of the thermostat. Is it a request for you to turn on the heat? Is it a warning that you should put on more clothing? Is it hinting a desire to snuggle? The utterance “Does it feel cold in here to you?” as transcribed on paper is a question soliciting a literal yes or no representation of something. But your lover probably does not request accurate yes or no information. Or at least the retrieval of a yes or no is probably not the sole intention. Language choices are being employed in an attempt to affect your actions. If you know him or her well, you can probably interpret the interactional meaning from “Does it feel cold in here to you?”

In our language usage we use words to either (1) say things or (2) do things, according to Austin’s (1962) theory of speech acts. When we say things we make statements that can be judged true or false. When we do things with words then things change. For example, consider a minister saying, “I now pronounce you husband and wife,” or a judge saying, “I find you guilty and sentence you to prison.” The minister and judge are not merely saying things, reporting observations, making statements, or uttering
assertions. Their words perform actions. A person’s life and world have been changed by the realization of the sentences as ceremonial or institutional procedures.

Austin calls the first type—saying things with words—constatives. The second type, doing things with words, he calls performatives. For our purposes of judging messages that are deceptive or are not deceptive, the present study would seem confined to the constative category. After all, deception detection experiments nearly exclusively pit lies against truths. And in this dissertation I am comparing observations of a politician embedding a deceptive dodge relative to answering all the questions on-topic. So in a sense we are appraising constative—not performative—messages that are statements saying things that either align with the question topic and are thus “true” or diverge from the question topic and are thus “false.”

However, a subjective impressionistic feature enters into the equation with politics and partisan bias. Constatives can be true or false; performatives cannot. But performatives can go “right” or “wrong.” For example, returning to the examples a couple paragraphs above, the U.S. Supreme Court may have ruled contrary to a lower district court judge’s prior ruling so the guilty sentence will be thrown out on appeal. Or a ceremonial decree might have been issued by a person who turned out to have an expired license so the utterance is null and void. How do we discern whether performatives go right or wrong? Austin (1962) referred to the conditions in which performatives succeed, or go right, as felicity conditions. Felicity conditions are used to make inferences about the speaker’s intentions. They are situational beliefs employed to get things done. There are three categories of felicity conditions, as summarized by Levinson (1983). (A) The
circumstances and people in the conventional procedure must be appropriate. (B) The procedure must be handled correctly and completely. (C) The people must have the requisite intentions as proscribed by the procedure and their conduct must follow as instructed.

In this dissertation’s focus on a news interview we can see the relevance of felicity conditions. One way of looking at a journalist questioning a politician can be akin to truth vs. lie constatives. Information is solicited by the question, and the answer is either true or false. The response can be judged factual or not. However, the news interview raises additional considerations. Another way of looking at the conventional procedure of a journalist questioning a politician involves performatives with felicity conditions. As the (A) category in the above paragraph requires, the politician must provide an answer as brought forth by the journalist’s question. A constative would mean the politician’s answer is either true or false. But a performative felicity condition allows “grey area.” Observers appraise the subjective nature of whether the politician’s response was appropriate as required by the conventional procedure of a news interview.

Similarly, the (B) category above requires that the procedure was executed correctly. In the context of a political interview a partisan observer who shares party affiliation with the politician might question the journalist’s appropriateness in asking questions properly. Conversely, as the (B) category also stipulates that the procedure was executed completely, a partisan observer of the politician’s opposing party might question whether the politician fully complied with answering the journalist’s inquiry. An observer of the outgroup is not necessarily disputing the true/false (constative) nature of
the politician’s answer but rather judging the response as a “dodge” because it fails to fully and adequately comply with the conventional procedure of the news interview. Furthermore, as the (C) felicity condition requires that interactants have the requisite intentions and comport with required conduct, a Democratic voter watching a Republican politician, for example, might enter the viewing experience presuming the politician’s answers will fail to comply with the journalist’s requests. That is, an opposing partisan might not watch the interview judging each answer as either true or false: instead the outgroup voter might consider the politician’s answers as failing the (C) felicity condition. No matter the content of the politician’s statement, to a biased opposing partisan viewer, the politician’s words will presumably fail to be backed up by actions.

In my study the journalist interviews the politician and asks him to report factual things. Undeniably this study involves constatives. Like a typical deception detection experiment in which observers judge whether statements are true or false, the participants in my experiment judge whether the politician’s statements are on- or off-topic. However, the context of the interview is a conventional procedure. A news interview is not a routine conversation setting. The context may trigger expectations of a performative nature. Audience members could include partisan voters with biased perceptions of the extent to which the politician and journalist act appropriately, execute their actions fully, and back up their words with intended actions. My study might involve felicity conditions that influence how the experiment’s participants judge the action. Audience members might detect violations in the procedure which go beyond the politician saying
something true or false. Audience members might detect the politician doing something infelicitous.

The context may not even be confined to a constative/performative dichotomy but rather illocutionary acts. Austin developed three categories of performative acts. *Illocutionary* acts have conventional force associated with the statement. This is the essence of a speech act. The second category of performative act is a *locutionary* act. A sentence is uttered that makes a determinate reference. And the third category of performative act is a *perlocutionary* act. These types of utterances bear consequences on the audience. For example, a judge saying “I direct the bailiff to cuff the defendant to his chair” has a direct effect on the actions of the people the judge addresses.

Searle (1979) later systematized Austin’s work. Searle created a typology of five categories of speech acts. If the above example about your lover feeling cold was indeed an attempt to influence, direct, or order you to do something, that would be a *directive* in Searle’s categorization. Searle’s second type of speech act is a *representative*. If your lover tells you “It is cold outside,” and the statement is indeed describing, reporting, or informing you of something factual which can indeed be either true or false, that is a representative speech act. The third type is a *commissive*. These speak of something happening in the future. For example, offering to drive someone to the airport or promising to take someone out to dinner are commissives. Fourth, *expressives* reveal feelings. Emotionally crying “I am sorry” or screaming “I love you!” are expressives. Fifth, *declaratives* make transformative decrees. For instance when a judge says “I find you guilty” the utterance transforms the defendant’s legal situation.
In our news interview setting, the journalist’s questions of the politician are all directive speech acts. The journalist is attempting to get his respondent to divulge information. He has the right to direct the politician’s actions as consented by the situation. The journalist’s directive may vary in its directness. People might interpret his question as stating exactly what information he desires receiving. That would be a *direct* directive. Or observers might be left trying to figure out exactly what the journalist wants from his question. That would be an *indirect* directive. The type of speech act being employed by the politician in his responses to the journalist may also be open to interpretation by observers. Observers might consider the politician’s speech act a directive, trying to get the journalist to do something, such as desiring that the journalist commend the politician’s stance on an issue, or move on to a different topic of inquiry. Observers might also consider the politician’s response a representative speech act, reporting facts. Or observers could interpret the politician’s responses as being commissives, expressives, or declaratives.

Searle further specified types of felicity conditions. Of particular note for this dissertation is Searle’s (1976) sincerity condition. Hypothesizing about the sincerity condition extended Austin’s directive that felicitous performatives must be executed appropriately and the actors must have the requisite intentions to carry out the procedure. A politician’s answer to a question rises above merely being either true or false in reporting information. The politician’s answer may be a speech act appraised by message recipients for its felicitous or infelicitous sincerity condition. Take for instance the journalist asking the politician to talk about his plan for the environment. Let us say the
politician answers, “I want your viewers and readers to know that yes I am telling you that I have a plan for the environment. It is a great plan. I consider it the best plan.” Such an answer goes beyond judging true or false. In a true or false locutionary sense (a) the politician answers the question and does not dodge the question as asked, and (b) provides the journalist with the information sought. What is more, the syntactical content of the sentence (e.g., “I am telling you that I have a plan for the environment”) makes it tautologically (i) true in a constative sense and also (ii) carried out successfully in a performative speech act sense. Such a statement would be appraised truthful and acted out successfully—but may be akin to saying “I state that snow is green” (Levinson, 1983, p. 253). The extent to which the statement is felicitous is another matter.

Viewers of a political interview will probably appraise the answer in an illocutionary sense, wondering whether the speech act comported with the sincerity condition. A partisan viewer who shares the party affiliation of the politician may likely consider the answer satisfactorily sincere while a viewer from the opposing party of the politician may likely consider the politician’s response in violation of the requisite intentions of sincerity conditions. Whether the answer is an appropriate action as called forth by the journalist’s question is subjective in this partisan context. The essence of my dissertation is the theoretical prediction that partisans will disagree on the felicity conditions of a politician’s illocutionary speech act in the context of a conventional news interview procedure because partisans apply different sincerity conditions on the basis of the speaker’s party identification (PID). If a politician’s answer about his plan for the environment were to include a line such as “I am telling you that I have a plan for the
environment,” that would not be an equivocation in the strict sense of Bavelas, Black, Chovil, and Mullett’s (1990) framework and not a lie under Levine’s (2014b) deception detection framework, because the communication content as stated displays circular logic. Yet partisan message recipients may exhibit polarized viewpoints of whether such an utterance would be an answer or a dodge because it is a speech act with felicity conditions.

An utterance may serve as an indirect speech act when the speaker intends hearers to derive meanings in addition to the literal message conveyed (Searle, 1975). The message carries double illocutionary force. The speaker presumes hearers have necessary background information and knowledge to recognize that there is something more to his statement. Indirect speech acts are conventionally used to perform directives politely. For example, the statement “I wonder if you could leave the room” is gentler than rudely saying “Leave.” The decoder should understand the meaning the request. A competent interactant would not interpret the statement as the speaker expressing befuddled wonderment asking the hearer whether he has the ability to exit. Nor would a yes or no response, followed by remaining in the room, be logical, despite the phrasing soliciting a yes or no response.

For a speech act to be successful, or felicitous, in performing an additional, or indirect, speech act, it must achieve a felicity condition. In addition to the other typologies discussed earlier, Searle (1975) labels four felicity conditions: preparatory, sincerity, propositional content, and essential. As previously mentioned, felicity conditions are rules and principles of conversation, according to Searle (1975). A
political interview is not a conversation, per se. It is institutional discourse (Clayman, 2004) different from ordinary, mundane conversation (Schegloff, 1991). Felicity conditions engender politeness between interactants who avoid threats to face. In a political interview the interactants place less concern for politeness and may not shy away from threats to face (Harris, 2001). In social situations such as political interviews, where the interactants are aggressive and willing to launch face threats, normative rules of relational politeness do not apply (Locher & Watts, 2005). Nonetheless, felicity conditions may still play out in a political interview. Audience members may derive extra meanings from the politician’s message beyond the syntactical content of his answers. For example, the essential condition of felicity conditions involves the speaker attempting to get the hearer to do something. Similarly, in the sincerity condition the speaker wants the hearer to do something.

Assertives are a type of illocutionary act in which “we tell people how things are” (Searle, 1979, p. viii). Speakers and hearers can ascribe an assertive nature to utterances, but also may consider them Directives, Declarations, or other categories of using language. Viewers of the news interview might interpret the politician’s answers as assertives because the responses describe the way he plans to fix the economy, the environment, etc. But Searle (1979) notes that assertives can also apply in an institutional nature. If viewers oppose the politician’s PID they might think he lacks the authority to declare solutions for the economy and environment, thus his responses would appear dodgy.
Under the auspices of assertive felicity conditions, we can imagine partisan audience members who share the PID of the politician deriving meanings in addition to the politician’s answer. They might interpret his message performing indirect speech acts wanting or attempting to get viewers to do something (Searle, 1975). Conversely, partisan audience members of the opposite PID might view his answers as infelicitous assertives of indirection. Perhaps, for example, the politician’s answer is viewed as an attempt at the propositional content condition in which the speaker predicates a future act of the journalist and voters complying with his assertives. The politician is indirectly offering to provide additional services for voters through his answers which an opposing partisan may process as dodging the question and deflecting for the direct speech act solicited by the journalist’s question.

This dissertation’s context might be considered a speech act and also a speech event. A speech event is a “social activity in which language plays a specific, and often rather specialized, role” (Levinson, 1983, p. 279). For example, a routine conversational exchange of a Democratic supporter privately asking a Democratic politician about his plan for the environment is a different cultural event with different constraints of language and inferences than the same question asked by a reporter at a TV studio with cameras rolling.

To summarize this part on speech act theory as it relates to my experiment, the interactants in the news interview stimuli are performing speech acts. The politician presumably uses his utterances to try to get the audience to do things based on their understanding of what he means. Differences in audience members’ interpretations of
what he means may depend on which type of speech act they think he is performing. The
journalist asks the politician to report information and the politician provides information
in response to each question. Some viewers may interpret the politician performing a
locutionary act. But the politician also needs people to like him because his profession
relies on public support. Some viewers might interpret the politician on the campaign trail
asking for support and thus performing an illocutionary act. The politician is trying to get
elected and trying to get people to vote for him (among other presumed desires of
politicians, such as raising donations and soliciting grassroots volunteers). So some might
interpret his utterances not so much as answers to questions but perlocutionary acts,
trying to get people to do something. His perlocutionary act might be interpreted as
directed toward the journalist—not as concerned with providing information to the voters
or asking for votes but trying to get the journalist to move on to other topics or shift to
talking points instead of letting the reporter ask “gotcha” questions or control the
politician’s agenda. There are numerous possibilities of speech act performances which
audience members might interpret the politician engaged in during the interview.

This brings us to the role of questioning in initiating the action in this political
interview situation, speech event, and language game.

Questions

All of my measures in this dissertation’s experiment (as well as most experiments
that comprise deception detection research) assess participants’ observations of the
person answering—not asking—questions. However we must acknowledge that the
interview setting is a joint activity (Clark, 1996). It is not performed by one autonomous speaker. It is part of a social act. Each person derives meaning from the other’s language usage. In this section I discuss questioning and different forms that questions may take. This section helps supplement the previous section on speech acts and draws upon several of the same concepts.

Speakers use different modalities to attempt illocutionary acts (Clark, 1996). One type of sentence modality is a wh-interrogative. Wh-interrogatives include who, what, when, where, and why questions. For example, “What is your plan for the environment?” is a wh-interrogative. The only other type of modality that is a question is a yes/no interrogative. In my study’s stimulus all the prompts by the journalist are wh-interrogatives. Other modalities include a declarative (e.g., “I have a plan for the environment”), imperative (e.g., “Please move on to another topic and ask a different question”), and exclamatory (e.g., “I hate your newspaper!”). In my stimulus the politician’s answers can all be categorized as declarative assertions under Clark’s (1996) modality categories.

According to Searle (1969) there are two types of questions: closed (e.g., yes or no) and open (e.g., how and why). A question demands and commands a response (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973). A relevant answer is expected to follow a question. In this experiment’s stimulus all the questions are open.

To summarize this section on questions, there are different types of questions. Questions are speech acts. Questions rely on felicity conditions for their interpretation. And questions are embedded in a context that drives their interpretations. Having
discussed speech acts as the general phenomenon and questioning as the impetus, this
brings us to turn taking as it relates to pairing the question and answer in the situational
event.

Turn Taking and Adjacency Pairing

The activity of questioning and responding is a structured interaction. It has a
turn-taking system. Some settings have formal rules governing who can talk, when, and
the topic. Some settings involve negotiating the moment. Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson
(1974) specified two “facts” of conversation. (1) Only one speaks at a time. (2) The two
take turns speaking. In ordinary everyday conversations there are not other specified rules
of turn taking. People’s rights are not limited beyond the two facts above. But other
situations have pre-allocated turn structure. For example, in a courtroom there are
restrictions on when people can talk and about what. Some institutional settings offer
hybrids of the unlimited loose structure and the restricted format of a courtroom. For
example, in a standard news interview the journalist poses questions, begins and ends the
encounter, and establishes topical agendas. However there is also a conversational
element in a news interview whereby the respondent can introduce other topics and veer
the discussion various directions, which journalists tend to permit (Lieberman, 2004).

The order and system to turn taking can be analyzed through adjacency pairs.
Conversations have an order in which pairs of acts are found together. A primary
example of an adjacency pair is a question and answer. An adjacency pair features a first
pair part and a second pair part. According to Schegloff and Sacks (1973), the first pair
part of an adjacency pair initiates and expects the second pair part of the adjacency pair to follow. If the normatively-expected second pair part does not proceed after being called forth by the first pair part then powerful inferences may be derived (Sidnell, 2010). For example, imagine one person saying “Hi” and the other staring back silently. The absence of a verbal response sends a message. Such a conversational practice of refraining from uttering a speech act could even “say” more than audibly verbalizing “I am angry at you.” A verbal response is preferred to bookend the adjacency pair in a conversation.

Adjacency pairs have sequential rules, according to Jacobs and Jackson (1983). As far as the conversation in general, conversations have relevant turns. Specific to the pairs, the first pair part demands that the second pair part response is conditionally relevant (Schegloff, 1972). Otherwise people notice its absence (Jacobs & Jackson, 1983). As far as the second pair part, the reply should be coherent.

Jacobs and Jackson (1983) propose a model that addresses coherence in adjacency pairs and turn taking. Their rational model of conversational coherence posits several assumptions. One assumption is that speech acts are performed to achieve goals. Another assumption is that discourse and conversation must be orderly. Another assumption is that a conversation is a language game. It has rules. The players make moves. Each player may have expectations of the other player’s moves and strategies. But the unfolding sequences of play can emerge toward unplanned end states.

Jacobs and Jackson’s theorizing about coherence is particularly relevant to the present dissertation with a turn of conversation being perceived as complete or incomplete. Contextual situations matter in a conversation, as observers derive meaning
from the sequential responses in an interaction (Chevalier, 2008). A dodge to one perceiver could be a fitting answer to another because conversation is locally occasioned. One observer might perceive an unfinished response that inadequately addressed the question while others might perceive adequate completion of turns despite lexical deficiencies in the correspondence of the question and response. In the news interview there are preallocated turns. The journalist opens and closes the interview, asks questions, and awaits answers. The politician’s replies are supposed to supply the solicited information in the formal ordering as called forth by the journalist’s questions. Audience members may perceive the politician based on holistic impressions of the flow of the interview as one event rather than stopping and judging each sequential remark devoid of context. Differences in perception may theoretically be based on Jacobs and Jackson’s theorizing about impressions of coherence.

The rational model of conversational coherence (Jacobs & Jackson, 1983) likens turn taking in conversation to a chess game. Each player aims to achieve a goal by making moves within the parameters of rules. The players seek their vying goals while cooperating. Each assumes the other is cooperative within the structured rules—yet each knows the other has competing interests. Just as each relies on the other to cooperate, each also relies on the other to operate rationally. For the game to function each player assumes the other has a purpose in trying to win. Each move must have a point. In a conversation every utterance should have coherence just as each chess piece should advance the player’s goal. Every utterance must coherently contribute.
The rational model of conversational coherence has two rules. The first rule is called the validity rule. According to the validity rule, the speaker must sincerely intend to achieve the goal expressed. In the case of a politician describing his plan for the environment, for example, the illocutionary act is invalid in the eyes of observers if the politician appears unbelievable in his intentions.

The second rule of Jacobs and Jackson’s (1983) rational model of conversational coherence is called the reason rule. According to the reason rule, the speaker should be interested in aligning his or her beliefs and desires with those of others. From the audience’s standpoint watching a news interview, the politician’s utterances are believable if they are presumed to share interests with the journalist and viewers. However if viewers think, for instance, that the politician might say the “right” answer but does not really have the best interests at heart toward his audience, then he is presumably violating the reason rule.

In closing this part on the rational model of conversational coherence, I emphasize that a conversation’s adjacency pairing and turn taking are analogous to a chess game with the validity rule and reason rule. The rules of the model help bridge the phenomenon of speech acts with Grice’s cooperative principle. “If one can make it look like he or she is trying to cooperate,” according to Jacobs and Jackson (1983, p. 54), “the institutional demands are satisfied.” The model makes a chief assumption that each conversational move is pushing the speaker’s beliefs and wants in an attempt to affect the other’s beliefs and wants. A second-pair-part turn deviates from the constraints of the conversation if it appears uncooperative.
The model emphasizes that conversational partners advance each other’s beliefs and wants. This primary tenet of the model will bring us to the next part on political transactions as a special context of question-response interactions. A conversation is a sequence of adjacency pairs. But even more importantly—as discussed here and the preceding parts on questioning and speech acts—a conversation is an event where each transactant contributes sequential efforts to transform the other in his or her moves toward a goal. By studying a political interview as a speech event instead of isolated adjacency pairs and by recognizing that the interview features the advancement of the goals of the politician and journalist, we recognize the diversity of perspectives which viewers might draw. For example, imagine a partisan Republican voter watching a Republican politician give an interview in which the journalist asks the politician about his stances on the environment, gun control, or any number of common yet potentially divisive issues. A voter might not observe the interview like a discourse analyst attending to each question-answer unit sequentially. Instead, a partisan voter might interpret the interview as an event in which the protagonist politician aims to express his wholesome message against the antagonist journalist. Whether the politician answers or dodges questions, he is coherently advancing his goal—as perceived by an ingroup partisan voter, according to Jacobs and Jackson’s (1983) model—and abides by the validity rule and reason rule. On the other hand, an outgroup voter of the opposing party would interpret the interview exchanges in the opposite fashion regardless of whether adjacency pairs were on- or off-topic. This brings us from the conceptual to delineations between political transactions and routine “everyday” transactions in an applied setting.
Chapter 3: The Question-Response Interaction

In this chapter I discuss question-response interactions. My discussion is admittedly brief because my concerns are confined to the concept of dodging questions, specifically a politician dodging with an off-topic response. Those interested in lengthier treatments of the dynamics of question-response sequences may enjoy Goffman’s (1976) theoretical essay, and Turner, Edgley, and Olmstead’s (1975) empirical study of people controlling information in conversational replies to questions.

I start with discussing a standard conversational interaction. Then I describe a different type of interaction: a high-profile, public setting when a professional journalist poses questions to a politician. The two interactive settings (routine conversational transactions, and high-profile interviews) offer different theoretical and practical considerations.

I limit my discussion to the conscious production of messages. I also limit my discussion to interactants whose communication is task- or goal-oriented.

Routine Transactions

In an everyday, routine, conversational interaction, a question has the intention of soliciting information (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973). The response is expected to provide the
requested information (Goffman, 1967). The information offered by the respondent is expected to be truthful, not a lie (McCornack, 1992). The solicited information is also expected to be of a quantity suitably fitted to the question (Grice, 1989). For example, the answer to the question “Do you know what time it is?” should not be a mere “yes”—even though that would be a literal yes-or-no response as the question was worded—nor should it take a lengthy amount of words to answer. As defined by Grice (1989), an answer should contribute information to the question-asker “as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged” (p. 26). The interactants appraise the extent to which an answer adequately aligns with the question by drawing inferences or deriving implications. Grice calls these implicatures. For example, the question “Do you know what time it is?” can be met with a nonverbal shrug and a proffering of a bare wrist sans a watch. This would suffice as a suitable response because the interactants can infer what information was requested and the response fitting the question.

Grice’s (1989) theory of conversational implicature goes into further detail on the expected components of a response. He refers to these as four maxims of quantity, quality, relevance, and manner. The maxim most pertinent to this dissertation and other studies of politicians dodging questions (e.g., Rogers & Norton, 2011) is relevance. Relevance (which Grice originally called his relation maxim) pertains to whether the response aligns with or diverges from the topic of the question (McCornack, 1992; McCornack et al., 2014).
Barring sociopathology, people tend to exchange questions and answers in accordance with Gricean implicatures. In the rare instances of “opting out” of providing the solicited information (Grice, 1975, p. 49)—such as responding “I am not at liberty to say” or “No comment”—a respondent announces violating the cooperative principle. This is a form of evading a question overtly. In another rare occurrence a respondent announces an overt violation by changing the subject, saying, for example, “Let’s talk about something else. How about that game last night?” Grice’s theorizing does not veer in to the deceptive side of violating his maxims covertly (McCornack, 1992). He actually wrote that it vexed him to contemplate ways in which people successfully evade questions with off-topic responses (Grice, 1989, p. 27).

Moving from Grice’s theorizing to its empirical support, I now discuss routine transactions specific to dodging questions. Turner et al. (1975) ran a “real world” study of how people disclose information to each other. The researchers had undergrad participants record important encounters (i.e., not casual “Hi, how are you?” interactions) with important acquaintances (e.g., relatives and close friends, not strangers). While Turner et al. did not mention Grice’s cooperative principle (probably because it had not been published yet) their findings clearly supported the premise of people cooperating in their exchanges. And unlike Grice, Turner et al. veered in to the ways people manage disclosures by going off-topic. Results indicated the modal type of deception people employed—in terms of dodging questions—was “changing the subject” (Turner et al., 1975, p. 77). People may (rarely) tell lies or stay silent when important information is solicited. But the preferred method of manipulating information is to deflect to a different
topic. (By “manipulating information” I merely mean a disclosure that is less than “the whole truth and nothing but the truth.”)

For practical purposes, as evidenced in Turner et al., the off-topic diversion seems most “efficacious” in its employment (p. 77). It tends to successfully get the question-asker to move on to another topic. It complies with conversational norms of providing a response. And it technically speaks a truth—albeit through perhaps deceptive means—instead of outright lying. Turner et al. provide an example of a “young lady” who did not want to “be alone with a fellow who is an occasional date” (p. 77). He asked her if she wanted to leave the ballgame and go to his dorm room. She reported to the researchers that instead of answering his question honestly and disclosing that she was afraid of what he had in mind, she changed the subject by talking about how lovely the Colorado weather was.

There were two main takeaways from Turner et al.’s (1975) findings. First, when people reply to questions in conversations, people rarely—if ever—unfurl “the whole truth and nothing but the truth.” People do not completely disclose facts but instead restrict or even distort the information they give when responding to serious questions. Second, when responding to questions of a serious nature, in which the complete truth is not an option, the most common tactic is to change the subject. People naturally tend to offer diversionary responses that veil their true feelings.

Later theorizing has expanded upon Turner et al.’s observations. Recent research has delved into deceptive violations of Grice’s theory of conversational implicature. The most notable theories are Levine’s (2014b) truth-default theory and McCornack et al.’s
As its name implies, truth-default theory (TDT) emphasizes that human interactants exhibit a truth bias. Barring particularly suspicious contexts or a speaker having an obvious motive to lie, people’s default mental setting is a presumption of veracity. The truth bias may be defined as “the tendency to actively believe or passively presume that another person’s communication is honest independent of actual honesty” (Levine, 2014b, p. 380). This tendency helps explain the ease with which Turner et al.’s participants appeared to skirt full disclosures with relative impunity, and also helps explain deceptive people’s ability to avoid detection by appearing to comport with Grice’s cooperative principle. People expect honesty from each other.

Perhaps the first descriptions of the truth bias appeared in footnotes from Zuckerman, DeFrank, Hall, Larrance, and Rosenthal (1979). They spotted “existence of a receiver’s predisposition or bias which…refers to the tendency to consistently decode others as honest” (p. 390). Originally the phenomenon of “receivers’ collective bias to decode others as honest” was used to explain the pervasive tendency of judges in experiments to interpret people’s expressions as honest—regardless of the expressions of particular people in experimental stimuli (p. 393). Zuckerman et al. (1979) proposed that trying to predict accuracy in deception detection would need to account for participants’ truth bias. Otherwise, according to Zuckerman et al., accuracy would remain around 50/50 chance. And much deception detection accuracy indeed remained indistinguishable from a coin flip for the next several decades (Levine, 2014a). A chief contribution of TDT was to point out that people’s presumption of truth is not necessarily a bad belief.
state because most message senders are truthful most of the time. And as “real world” content analyses in the domain of politics have revealed (in U.S. presidential debates and press conferences), politicians nearly always give on-topic responses to questions and rarely go off-topic (Clementson & Eveland, 2016). Zuckerman, DePaulo, and Rosenthal (1981) reported that accumulating deception detection experiments indicated that people were “more likely to call messages truthful than deceptive” (p. 24). They offered two possible explanations for people’s apparent “truthfulness bias”: some message senders exude honest demeanor and some message recipients tend to perceive truth. Levine’s (2014b) TDT would later develop a theory around the truth bias as it relates to facilitating accuracy in deception detection. (Later in a section on deception detection I will return to the truth bias as it relates to the Park-Levine Probability Model.)

IMT2 maintains that people in “normal,” routine, everyday conversational transactions rarely violate Grice’s maxims from the standpoints of both the message encoder and the message decoder. On one extreme is telling a “bald-faced lie” (McCornack et al., 2014). But (again, barring sociopathology) people only lie when they have a strong reason or incentive to lie (Levine, Kim, & Hamel, 2010). For example, in a high-stakes situation in which their job is on the line “normal” people might resort to lying (Walczyk, Harris, Duck, & Mulay, 2014). Another extreme involves opting out by announcing that the answer will not be provided. For example, a person might state that he cannot or will not provide the requested information. This violation of Grice’s cooperative principle is also extremely rare in everyday discourse, as gleaned from “real world” observational and survey studies from Turner et al. (1975) and Hayes (2007).
routine conversational transactions, means of dealing with tough questions tend to involve simply manipulating the disclosure by leaving out some details (e.g., “lies by omission”) or embedding misleading information in otherwise honest discourse (McCornack et al., 2014). The most common maneuver to deal with tricky questions clearly seems to be trying to change the subject in varying degrees or otherwise shifting a direct question into more equivocal, nonspecific terrain (Hayes, 2007; Turner et al., 1975).

Equivocation theory (Bavelas, 1998) directs our attention to the role that communication situations play in necessitating equivocation during daily transactions. Equivocation is defined as a nonstraightforward, ambiguous, or indirect message (Bavelas, Black, Bryson, and Mullett, 1988). People equivocate when a response to a question is expected yet any direct answer would result in negative consequences for the respondent in his or her relationship with the question-asker and/or audience members. Avoidance-avoidance conflicts, as Bavelas and colleagues (1990) call them (harking back to Lewin’s [1935] field theory), are no-win rhetorical situations that inspire equivocation. Such conflicts arise when a person asks a question in which there is no good way for the respondent to answer the question without offending the question-asker or observers. For example, in a radio interview professional U.S. football quarterback Tom Brady dodged a question about the U.S. presidential election, and the interviewer told Brady, “I get why you stay out of Trump and Hillary. I totally understand that. That’s a no-win situation” (WEEI, 2016). The prescription for treating a question that induces an avoidance-avoidance conflict is to equivocate. In this dissertation’s
experimental stimulus, the politician would qualify as being in an avoidance-avoidance conflict situation. He is not necessarily communicating to an ingroup of likeminded, trusting supporters, such as at a political rally or a donor event. Nor is he addressing hostile, distrusting opponents, such as at a debate or facing antagonistic media. He is being interviewed by a journalist at a TV station, presumably communicating to Republicans, Democrats, and Independents—anyone who might be impacted by his message upon which he would potentially require enough support to be elected. The audience is not purely matching nor opposing him, per se. The audience includes a mixture of constituents, for which he would presumably need a majority of support to stay in office.

The Benevolence of Everyday Dodging

One theoretical reason we rarely violate Grice’s cooperative principle in our routine interactions is because of Goffman’s (1955) notion of “face.” Face refers to the management of a person’s image in social situations. In our desire to maintain smooth societal interactions, we avoid offending each other’s public image. We protect our own reputation and that of others. In Turner et al.’s (1975) analysis of important conversations where people changed the subject or otherwise controlled information such that their replies were not fully disclosive truths, the top justification people reported for why they engaged in such (perhaps deceptive) communication boiled down to the concept of face. People manipulate information in order to save face for themselves and/or protect the other’s face. For example, one of Turner et al.’s participants reported being asked to
comment on another person’s new outfit and chose to avoid answering the question directly because “the girl is fairly large and it would have hurt her a lot if I had told her my honest feelings about her new outfit” (p. 78). In Turner et al.’s study, most (55.2%) of the reasons people gave for why they avoided answering a direct question were because they wanted to protect the face of themselves and/or someone else (p. 89). (Of course respondents did not use the term “face;” the researchers used the term reporting emergent themes from their study.) The other most commonly cited reasons were also of an altruistic nature. More than a fifth (22.2%) of people cited a desire to avoid tension and conflict. And 11.3% cited a desire to maintain the relationship in the short- or long-term. The act of dodging questions can serve benevolent purposes—at least from the perspective of the person producing the diversionary discourse.

Pertinent to this dissertation’s focus on group dynamics, two early theoreticians who wrote about face concerns—Goffman (1967) and Simmel (1961)—were both inspired by intragroup communication in formulating their theorizing on facework. Goffman (1967) wrote that group members are expected to vigilantly, purposefully, and spontaneously protect each other’s faces in the same respectful way each member treats his or her own face (p. 10). Simmel (1961) wrote that groups assume that their members do not communicate with full disclosures in the sense of voluntarily revealing all their inner thoughts to each other. Group members get along smoothly by allowing some secrets to remain unshared because the cohesive face of the group must stay intact.

In the same vein of relational and group cohesion, one reason we tend to observe Grice’s cooperative principle and we do not necessary “call out” dodging in our routine
transactions pertains to society’s survival. In formulating TDT, Levine (2014b) makes the point that we generally require social interactions in which a solicitation for information is expected to be met with accurate content in a suitable amount requested. Other more micro reasons may be offered for adherence to the cooperative maxims, but on the most macro level chief concerns include interactive facework and societal survival. Facework and social cohesion also are pertinent to question-response sequences beyond the “everyday” variety. This brings us to the dynamics of high-profile sequences such as a journalist interviewing a politician.

Political Transactions

In a routine transaction, a question solicits information and the information is expected to be provided in general accordance with Grician maxims and the cooperative principle. For example, a stranger needs to know the time and asks, “Do you know what time it is?” The question has a utilitarian purpose solely for the asker. The question is not worded a particular way to trick anyone nor to provide entertainment. Whether the respondent provides the time or a shrug and extension of an empty wrist, the response is tailored to the questioner and is not a public act for scrutiny by audiences.

Public transactions such as a celebrity interview or a sports press conference feature different dynamics. In this part—as with the dissertation as a whole—I focus on the political transaction. Specifically I look at a journalist interviewing a politician and conceptual, applied, and practical considerations.
Professional journalists practically have in their job description the role of asking questions. He or she puts planning in to the wording of questions. The wording may even be intended to solicit a response or reaction that has ramifications beyond the retrieval of particular information elicited by the literal question (Bull, 2008). For example, the journalist might ask a loaded or “gotcha” question that places the respondent in an embarrassing light simply by its wording and has no regard for the information being solicited.

The respondent (i.e., politician) responds to the question which the journalist encoded. But the politician does not formulate his or her response with only the journalist in mind. There is an “overhearing audience” (Heritage, 1985). Furthermore, there are differences in audiences of types of political interviews for print journalists, live press conferences, debate settings, et cetera. These audience members may include voters, other journalists, potential financial donors, party activists, campaign employees, volunteers, special interest groups, and issue advocacy organizations. They present a far larger audience for whom the politician is concerned than merely the specific journalist posing the question. For example, a question about supporting or opposing gun control might be appeased on the journalist’s end if the politician clearly answers the journalist’s exact question by saying yes he supports gun control or no he opposes gun control, but the voters and other constituent groups comprise an overhearing audience for whom any smart politician would be more concerned with than appeasing the journalist with such a divisive topic. When posed a direct question that forces the politician to take a stand on a contentious issue—thus potentially alienating “overhearing audience” members—a
pragmatic respondent equivocates with a nonstraightforward, ambiguous, ambivalent, or otherwise indirect reply (Bavelas et al., 1990). Bavelas et al. go so far as to suggest that any response by a politician must be equivocal in at least one sense or another. The politician must equivocate for practical purposes as well as in terms of speaking to an overhearing audience. According to Bavelas et al., no response by a politician will truly answer the question in a fully disclosive manner as asked by a journalist, without violating at least some degree of addressing the sender, receiver, content, and context (see also Bull, 2003).

A response should be supplied without offending the journalist’s face nor appearing uncooperative. That is, a politician should supply something in response and avoid last-resort options of running away or staying obstinately silent. But the response should not be a lie either. And—as Machiavelli advised a fledging politician (Koestler, 2015)—the response should retain deniability rather than committing the politician to a stance that could haunt him or her down the road (Ekström, 2009).

The safest response to a tough political question thus involves some form of dodging. On account of their profession it is incumbent upon politicians to dodge questions (McCornack et al., 2014). In closing remarks about IMT2, Professor McCornack states that if he were to switch jobs from academia to politics, “I naturally will deceive more frequently, purely as a function of my profession” (McCornack et al., 2014, p. 371). Put another way, IMT2 posits a causal relationship between politicians and dodging. Their profession causes them to dodge questions. Politicians’ professional livelihood depends on a majority of people liking them (Jucker, 1986). Diverse
constituencies who value any number of different divisive issues make it seemingly impossible for a politician to accumulate a majority of voter support without performing rhetorical balancing acts. Politicians “constantly encounter” questions that require equivocation (Bowers, Elliott, & Desmond, 1977, p. 238). Equivocation usually presents “the least face-threatening option” for the politician to handle the needs of addressing an overhearing audience when dealing with conflictual questions from the journalist (Bull, 2008, p. 339).

Although a discussion of whether politicians dodge more questions than any other class of people—as suggested by McCornack et al. (2014)—is beyond the scope of this dissertation, researchers have speculated that such an empirical question would probably be answered affirmatively. Politicians are considered some of the most deceptive people in the United States (Gallup, 2016; Serota, Levine, & Boster, 2010). The public thinks politicians do not answer questions (Bull & Mayer, 1993; Harris, 1991). The pervasive perception is that politicians “never give a straight answer to a straight question” (Bull, 2008, p. 337). Politicians practically “come out of the womb equivocating” (Bavelas et al., 1990, p. 235). They appear “addicted to equivocation and ambiguity” (Key, 1958, p. 241). Page (1976) asserted that “without doubt candidates are often ambiguous” (p. 744). In the only experiments measuring people’s reactions to politicians being asked questions, the studies’ participants perceived politicians more untrustworthy than trustworthy whether the participants were in dodge or no-dodge questions (Rogers & Norton, 2011) and participants, on average, reported perceiving dodging even when the politician gave on-topic responses to all questions (Clementson, in press).
The previous sections on dodging and the dynamics of question-response interactions may be summarized with a few points. Empirical studies have observed that people in everyday situations tend to frequently dodge questions to the extent of controlling disclosures and trying to change the subject when facing tough questions (Hayes, 2007; Turner et al., 1975). On account of their profession, politicians must frequently dodge (McCornack et al., 2014). Politicians’ responses to questions are nearly always dodges to some degree or another toward audience members (Bavelas et al., 1990). Public opinion polls reveal that politicians are distrusted (Gallup, 2016). And experimental studies (discussed in more detail later) have shown that people perceive dodging and untrustworthiness from politicians even when their responses to questions were on-topic answers and not dodges (Clementson, in press; Rogers & Norton, 2011).

In essence, politicians are expected to dodge questions. Granted, this assertion that politicians are expected to dodge questions has never been explicitly tested. For example—to the best of my knowledge—no public opinion poll has asked people whether they expect politicians to dodge questions and no experiment has measured pre- and post-test perceptions of the extent to which politicians are answering or dodging questions. But it seems reasonable to think that people expect politicians to dodge questions if accumulated research makes assertions such as the pervasive perception that politicians “never give a straight answer to a straight question” (Bull, 2008, p. 337), practically “come out of the womb equivocating” (Bavelas et al., 1990, p. 235), and appear “addicted to equivocation and ambiguity” (Key, 1958, p. 241). Furthermore, McCornack et al. (2014) assert that politicians need to deceive on account of their
professional demands. We might also derive from Rogers and Norton (2011) and Clementson (in press) that people seem to ascribe dodging to politicians to a significant degree even in no-dodge conditions. Apparently people expect politicians to dodge questions if experiments indicate participants perceive dodging regardless of its occurrence. This brings us to the next section in which I go into more detail on empirical tests of politicians dodging questions. The following section provides specifics about people’s perceptions of politicians dodging questions.

Politics as a Trigger Event

TDT mentions a few factors that cause people to presume deception instead of remaining in a mental state of expecting veracity from message senders. The most basic cue is a trigger event (Levine, 2014b). A trigger event offers a context in which observers would expect a speaker to deceive on account of the situation. In trigger events the speaker has a motive to lie. For example, a restaurant is not typically a trigger event. When sitting in a restaurant, people are not usually facing lines of questioning from each other at the table in which their future livelihood hangs in the balance based on their answers. There may be some exceptions such as a job interview or marital counseling session happening in a restaurant. Ordinarily though a restaurant would hardly trigger potential deception. But consider a setting such as a courtroom or police interrogation chamber. Those settings would qualify as trigger events. One utterance rubbing the audience the wrong way could jeopardize the speaker’s future.
Political observers assume that politicians need to equivocate to keep enough voting constituencies agreeing—or at least not disagreeing—with them (Bavelas et al., 1990). Politics is a stereotypical trigger event based on lay-person standards of the public expecting deception (e.g., Bull & Mayer, 1993; Gallup, 2016). Politics is also a stereotypical trigger event based on theoretical standards of discourse production from politics as a profession (McCornack et al., 2014) and political settings tending to trigger suspicion (Levine, 2014b). This brings us to the second cue that would trigger observations of deception in a political event: suspicion.

Suspicion emerges with a trigger event. Politics primes suspiciousness in concert with it being a trigger event because of the aforementioned motive to lie and also because people who are more suspicious tend to report spotting more deception (McCornack & Levine, 1990). TDT points out that perceiving more deception hardly equates to detecting it more accurately. Indeed, too much suspicion leads to inaccurate perceptions when people are mostly truthful (Levine, 2014b).

Political interviews are a suspicious context in which the truth-bias should hypothetically falter according to some scholars’ commentaries (Harwood, 2014; Verschuere & Shalvi, 2014). But only one study has tested such an assertion. Clementson (in press, study 2) exposed participants to a political interview in which independent variables included different types of dodges and a dependent variable included trustworthiness. Recall that trustworthiness is our default mental setting when appraising people in everyday situations, according to TDT. People’s generalized communicative suspicion (as operationalized by Levine and McCornack, 1991) was a moderator variable
in Clementson’s (in press) study. Suspicion is an antonym of trust (Levine & McCornack, 1991). Results indicated that the effect of dodges lowering trustworthiness was moderated by people’s suspicion. The interaction of an off-topic response being moderated by suspicion significantly lowered a politician’s trustworthiness. This one study testing the effects of suspicion in a political context did not measure situational state-induced suspicion. Rather the study used Levine and McCornack’s (1991) personality trait suspicion. Nonetheless the results indicating that suspiciousness and an off-topic dodge interact to deplete a politician’s trustworthiness—along with prior literature’s assertions of politics priming people’s suspicion—provides reasonable support that the suspicious context of politics leads people to spot deception.
Chapter 4: The Concept of Dodging

This chapter discusses the form of deception known as dodging questions. I explicate what it abstractly means to dodge a question. Then I offer an operational definition. I will also discuss a typology which helps classify the occurrence of dodging.

Deception and Dodging

Dodging is a purposeful strategy of conversational and institutional discourse. A person responds to a question without directly answering it as asked. One intentionally produces discourse that departs from fully disclosive truth (McCornack, 1992; Turner et al., 1975). Such tactics may be used to avoid being caught in an outright lie, thus preserving some deniability for the speaker (Bull, 2008). The term is most often used in political discourse to insult adversaries (Clementson, 2016b).

Literature discusses ways in which an answer diverges from the question to become an equivocation, evasion, strategic ambiguity, palter, or obfuscation, among other terms enveloped by the broader notion of dodging. But scholars should not use the terms interchangeably and synonymously. Figure 1 presents components of the terminology. Figure 2 presents the hierarchical structure of the concepts. Equivocation aims for sustaining relationships when responding to an awkward question (Bavelas et
Equivocation provides a nonstraightforward, ambiguous, or indirect answer to a direct question. It is a form of deception when used to mislead (Levine, 2014b), but is not always necessarily deception (Bavelas et al., 1990). Conversely, evasiveness is a more derogatory term for avoiding a question. It denotes an intentionally devious deflection with less noble aims (Bull, 1998). Strategic ambiguity purposefully allows receivers to derive multiple meanings and viewpoints (Eisenberg, 1984). Strategic ambiguity attracts voters (Krosnick, 1990; Shepsle, 1972; Tomz & Van Houweling, 2009) unless employed to the point of appearing “evasive or spineless” (Campbell, 1983, p. 278). Like equivocation, obfuscation shares some features with strategic ambiguity as they attempt to avoid discontent among audience members (Dewan & Myatt, 2008). But unlike equivocation, obfuscation’s lack of clarity does not broaden the speaker’s appeal and is aversive when noticed.

Topic avoidance is a form of dodging in interpersonal relationships. It is not always deceptive. For example, a person might announce that she wants to avoid talking about her parents’ divorce. But topic avoidance also includes “shifting the topic, evasiveness” (Afifi, Afifi, Morse, & Hamrick, 2008, p. 291). Paltering is a form of deception employed in business negotiations (Rogers, Zeckhauser, Gino, Norton, & Schweitzer, 2017). One verbally discloses truthful statements to convey a misleading impression. Like equivocation, the speaker retains deniability by not telling a lie but rather omits relevant information, violating Grice’s (1989) quantity maxim. But more like obfuscation, a palterer is less concerned if the recipient is victimized.
Figure 1. Components of Terminology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Deception Type</th>
<th>Intentional by Speaker</th>
<th>Seeks to change the subject</th>
<th>May depend on speaker's perception</th>
<th>May depend on recipient's perception</th>
<th>May be overtly employed by speaker</th>
<th>Aversive to recipients when noticed</th>
<th>Maintains relations with recipients</th>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
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<td>✓</td>
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<td>No</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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<tr>
<td>Artful dodging</td>
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<td>No</td>
<td>√</td>
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<td>No</td>
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<tr>
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<td>√</td>
<td>✓</td>
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</tr>
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Figure 2. Constructs of Deception
The type of dodging that I explore in this dissertation is a form of deception (Levine, 2014b; Rogers & Norton, 2011). Deception may be defined as “intentionally, knowingly, and/or purposely misleading another person” (Levine, 2014b, p. 379). According to Levine (2014b), “Forms of deception include omission, evasion, equivocation, and generating false conclusions with objectively true information” (p. 380). There are other forms of dodging, such as announced refusals to answer (Ekström, 2009). For example, a politician might say “No comment, I cannot answer that question.” But those forms of dodging are overt, not deceptive as far as misleading through exploiting a Grician maxim. This dissertation explores the form of dodging that is essentially covert trickery. Hence the Figures above label dodging as “Dodging Covertly” instead of just “Dodging.”

Although deception includes dodging questions—not just telling lies—the literature on deception detection almost exclusively focuses on lying. To the best of my knowledge, only two research reports on deception (Clementson, in press; Rogers & Norton, 2011) have tackled dodge detection.

Some of the earliest assertions about deception detection involve dodging questions. An ancient Hindu medical writing on papyrus dating to 900 BC instructed people on how to detect if someone poisoned you. Translated from Sanskrit it stated: “He does not answer questions, or they are evasive answers” (Wise, 1845, p. 394; see also Trovillo, 1939).
In this dissertation my position on dodging and deception diverges from Bavelas et al. (1990) in their work on equivocal communication. My position also requires some brief clarifying as it relates to positions expressed by Levine (2014b) and McCornack et al. (2014) in their theories on deception. Bavelas and her colleagues regard equivocation as different from lies. If a person is equivocating, he or she is not lying, according to Bavelas et al. They also regard equivocation as being different from deception.

Equivocation is a benevolent act instigated by the situation. Levine (2014b) however considers equivocation—and other forms of withholding or deflecting fully disclosive truth—as deception. Levine’s experiments all concern lies vs. truths, but under the general umbrella of deception research he conceptualizes lies, equivocations, evasions, etc. as all being forms of deception. McCornack et al. (2014) directly extend Grice’s (1989) theory of conversational implicature to the study of producing deceptive discourse. According to McCornack and his colleagues, anything that violates any Gricean maxims or diverges from Grice’s cooperative principle is a form of deception. Interpersonal deception theory (Burgoon, Buller, Guerrero, Afifi, & Feldman, 1996) and the original information manipulation theory (IMT: McCornack, 1992) also consider deception as anything violating a Gricean maxim. This obviously includes lies, and also includes off-topic dodges because they are violations of Grice’s Relation maxim.

I also diverge from Bavelas et al. when I place dodging as a form of deception because in the dodge treatment condition of this dissertation’s experiment the politician is not equivocating. Although I draw upon theoretical and empirical research from Bavelas and her team as well as their colleagues from the Palo Alto group, this dissertation does
not actually explore equivocation. In my experimental dodge condition the politician is
giving an off-topic response. (Appendix A presents the transcript.) The politician is not
being equivocal, nonstraightforward, or ambiguous; he is talking about something
totally different than the question prompt. (More on topics later in this section.)

Meanwhile my theoretical grounding does not diverge from Levine’s (2014b)
TDT and McCormack et al.’s (2014) IMT2 in this dissertation. The form of dodge
employed by the politician should be considered intentional deception as both theories
define deception. In line with TDT and IMT2, a dodge is a form of deception just like
lying because the speaker is withholding or diverging from disclosive truth and violating
the cooperative principle.

Having briefly explicated dodging in an abstract sense and in its relation to
deception, I now discuss its operationalization more concretely for empirical research. In
this next part I shift from dodging as a general concept to changing the topic.

Operationalizing the Concept of Dodging

Whether a response to a question is a suitable answer or an aversive dodge is
often subjective (Clayman, 2001; Harris, 1991). After running studies of salespeople
dodging consumers’ questions, Bickart, Morrin, and Ratneshwar (2015) concluded that
perceptions of dodging are “in the eye of the beholder” (p. 607). However, empirical
utility is served for researchers by assessing the topic of the question and then appraising
whether or not the response addresses the topic raised by the question. In this part I move
from discussing the general concept of dodging to more specifically addressing changing
the topic. I explain how this basic operationalization—albeit imperfect and perhaps overly simplistic to some—reasonably merits acceptance for our operationalization purposes.

In the earliest attempt to place responses into categories which would distinguish dodges, researchers proposed placing messages in three categories. The three categories were (1) evasions, (2) literal answers, or (3) responses that answered a totally different question than the question that was asked (Sluzki, Beavin, Tarnopolsky, & Verón, 1967). Obviously this categorization scheme left some to be desired. The third category leaves plenty of space for people to technically answer a totally different question while appearing to talk about the same topic solicited by the question. For example, a news reporter could ask a politician about going to war with North Korea and the response could mention atrocities committed by North Korea and praise the American military patrolling the Korean border, and thus appear a literal answer (category 1) or an evasion (category 2) or answering a totally different question (category 3). Although the three-pronged approach by seminal Palo Alto researchers did not get picked up initially because it was too subjective (see, e.g., Bavelas & Smith, 1982), the latest work operationalizing dodging embraces that seminal typology with some tweaks by adding consideration of the topic of the question and response (Clementson, in press; Clementson, 2016b; Clementson & Eveland, 2016).

Palo Alto researchers broadened their classifications from Sluzki et al. (1967) through Bavelas et al. (1990). They proposed distinguishing messages in terms of four non-mutually-exclusive dimensions: sender, receiver, content, and context (Bavelas et al.,
Of the four, though, context is the only dimension that explicitly applies to a question and answer setting (Bavelas et al., 1990, p. 35). The context code measures “To what extent is this a direct answer to the (implicit or explicit) question?” (p. 35). Again this categorization iteration leaves some to be desired as it does not distinguish considering the topic of the question and the topic of the response.

The next part goes in to deeper consideration of the importance of topics. We could infer from Bavelas et al. that a dodge does not address the topic of the question while a non-dodge would address the topic of the question. What the incarnations of typologies from Palo Alto colleagues have in common for researchers desiring to empirically appraise such subjective and purposefully vague (and deceptive) responses is emphasizing that once coders have agreed on the topic of the question and the topic of the response we can then label whether or not the response qualifies as dodging. An operational definition of a dodge may then be stated as a response in which the topic of the response does not align with the topic of the question. Admittedly readers can question this operationalization because it does not require too much imagination to picture a politician, for example, addressing the topic of the question but still not providing a satisfactory answer as the question was asked. So in the next part I discuss topics. Then I justify the merits of the above operational definition as it has demonstrated a reliable classification scheme in prior empirical work.
Topics

Below I will discuss topical coherence as it has been appraised through empirical coder reliability. But first in this part I provide a more theoretically-driven discussion of discerning on- and off-topic turns of talk. After all, as mentioned above, our ability to decide what qualifies as dodging hinges on topics—discerning the topic of the question and the topic of the answer.

Conversations have a topical organization (Crow, 1983). Topics provide a reason for interactions composed of turn-taking. In a typical conversation, a topic is announced (or otherwise made adequately clear) as the reason for an inquiry. For example, when someone calls another on the phone, after greetings or banter, the caller might say, “The reason I called was to ask…” (Levinson, 1983, p. 312). The topic is free from constraints of prior topics. That is, if the reason for calling is stated as discussing a death in the family then the response should be “fitted” to a death in the family even if the interactants’ last three phone conversations had been about different subject matter (p. 313). If the respondent has the desire for a “topic shift” (Sacks, 1971), he or she should announce it by introducing it and signaling the desire, rather than an “unlinked topic ‘jump’ ” (Levinson, 1983, p. 313). We may note that for deception purposes there would be a difference between an overt topic shift that is announced and a covert topic shift which the deceiver hopes would go unnoticed (McCornack et al., 2014). For example, Grice (1989) mentions obvious topic shifts of the non-sequitur variety, such as saying “How about that weather!” after someone makes an awkward remark.
Levinson (1983) defines an on-topic exchange as one in which two people are “talking about the same topic or sets of referents” (p. 313) or “linked concepts” (p. 314). That is, the answer to the question “What are those two people talking about?” would be the topic at that given juncture. Obviously the answer to that unspecific-worded question would be subjective. No two observers might ever exactly agree—if pressed to put into words—what two people are talking about to a fine-grained degree. Yet in pragmatics studies of “actual usage” such a vague question would “correlate with discourse topic” (Levinson, 1983, p. 89).

As noted two paragraphs above, there are differences in a topic shift being unlinked and overtly not deceptive versus covertly deceptive. There may also be differences in linked concepts being a change in topics/references. For example, interactants can jointly engage in a topic shift which nonetheless links concepts. A sequence of topics in a conversation is constructed in collaboration between two people. If one person wants to change topics from a death in the family, for example, it would be more normative to reply with an announced transition and coherently share the shift (e.g., “I’m sorry but I would rather talk about something else”) than abruptly launch into a different topic. (Grice [1989] presents an exception of flagrantly changing the subject in a conversation through normative means via flouting his Relevance maxim. But his example is ancillary to the present point about defining a topic and topic shift.) The initiator of the inquiry has the expectation that the respondent will coherently maintain the introduced topic or at least provide a reason for closure—or shifting—of the topic.
Another way of thinking about topics is the consideration of “logical subjects” (Levinson, 1983, p. 220). In a news interview, for example, if a journalist asks a question about the environment and the politician replies by talking about pollution, recycling, and carbon footprints, then it would seem reasonable to consider the politician to be maintaining the topic. He addresses the logical subject—even if he does not use the word “environment” in his response. Conversely, let us say the question is about the environment (involving carbon footprints, ozone pollution, etc.) and the politician talks about the stock market being a good environment for trading real estate futures. He would be changing the topic because it is not a logical subject—even if he uses the same word “environment.” That was not the logical subject of the environment that the question was about.

Another way of looking at the initiation of a topic and appraising whether the next turn is on- or off-topic is through Levinson’s (1983) principle of informativeness. Similar to Grice’s (1989) cooperative principle (for which the Quantity maxim may be moderated [Levinson, 1983, p. 147]), the principle of informativeness states that conversational transactants may read more in to a statement than what was syntactically stated. We grant each other a wide scope in our inferences and understanding of whether a turn aligns with the initiated topic as we apply what we know about the world. To discern whether a response is on- or off-topic, one might ask whether it is logical to interpret the response as adding information to the solicited topic. While we are granting each other some latitude in reading more in to a statement, we do not give each other the benefit of the doubt if the logical subject lacks “aboutness” (Levinson, 1983, p. 222).
Crow (1983) defines a topic as “what a conversation is about at any given moment” (p. 137, italics original). He acknowledges that “nothing is inherent to the definition of a topic” (p. 138) because topics can range from wide to narrow. Crow espouses studying topics as distinguished by on- or off-topic, because—as also expressed by other language philosophers mentioned above—when a speaker goes off-topic the content has “no logical links” with antecedent discourse (p. 138). Reichman (1978) also seems to define a topic as an item being focused on by a conversant. A group of utterances which share a topical relationship are called a “context space” by Reichman. A conversation can switch context spaces with topical shifts. During a conversation, topics may drift but otherwise coherently transition in a logical fashion (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973). However, if the shift is illogical and non-coherent—that is, a “new topic bears no identifiable propositional relationship to any prior topic” (Crow, 1983, p. 147)—the speaker has gone off-topic. This conceptual discussion will next take us to operational methods.

Classifying Dodges in a Typology

Earlier I discussed the abstract meaning of dodging followed by an operational definition plus conceptual definitions of a topic with its relationship to discerning dodging. In this part I discuss how a basic operationalization for topics in question-response interactions has demonstrated reliability as a typology for researchers. (Later I will discuss how the typology has also demonstrated validity in Clementson’s [in press] studies testing experimental effects.) As previously mentioned, the Palo Alto group first
classified responses into one of three categories. The categories may be summarized as: overt non-answer, on-topic answer, and covert off-topic shift (without a logical linkage). I also mentioned that later work by the Palo Alto group attempted to specify that a response would be distinguished as either addressing or not addressing the topic of the question.

Recent empirical work by Clementson (in press, 2016b; Clementson & Eveland, 2016) has found this basic differentiation to be useful. Clementson and Eveland (2016) placed responses into categories as being an Overt Refusal to Answer, Same Topic Response, or Different Topic Response. (Obviously this categorization lacks the nuances of exceptions such as topic shifts that are logical links, noted in the preceding part, but operationalizing the elusive concept of dodging questions in real-world contexts requires categorization that is not as ideally fine-grained.) In one quantitative content analysis study of U.S. presidential press conferences, Clementson and Eveland (2016) reported good Krippendorff’s α reliabilities (Hayes & Krippendorff, 2007) with coders reaching intercoder agreement with reliabilities of .76 on Overt Refusal to Answer, .86 on Different Topic Response, and total agreement/no variation on Same Topic Responses.

In a second study content analyzing U.S. presidential debates, Clementson and Eveland (2016) reported Krippendorff’s α reliabilities ranging from .80 on Same Topic Responses to total agreement on Overt Refusals to Answer. Accumulating research has found the most utility in operationalizing a dodge relative to an answer in terms of whether the topic of the response aligned with the topic of the question. Furthermore, in two experiments measuring the effects of the three types of responses, Clementson (in
press) reported significant differences in how participants reacted to responses that
aligned with the topic of the question verses responses that were off-topic, on dependent
variables including trustworthiness and perceptions of dodging.
Earlier I mentioned a typology classifying types of responses as either dodges or non-dodges. In this chapter I go into further detail on how experimental research has used such classification schemes specific to political question-answer sequences and studied the effects of dodging. Empirical work has revealed the extent to which politicians—specifically U.S. presidents and presidential candidates—seem to overtly or covertly evade questions. In a quantitative content analysis of U.S. presidential press conferences, Clementson and Eveland (2016, study 1) reported that, in about 15% of presidents’ answers, they included a topic that diverged completely from the question topic. In U.S. presidential debates the politicians went off-topic in about 26% of their answers (study 2). The coding allowed for combinations of on- and off-topic responses embedded within each adjacency pair, as the politicians would nearly always (around 97% of the time) at least mention the topic of the question in their response. The coding did not analyze on-and off-topics to the degree that coders discerned whether they considered off-topics to be topic shifts qualifying as “logical links” (Crow, 1983) or “logical subjects” (Levinson, 1983).

If people expect to see politicians dodge questions, as I asserted earlier, and indeed politicians appear to dodge questions at meaningful rates (Clementson & Eveland, 52
2016) then what effect does this have on observers? Three experimental studies have reported varying degrees of perceptions and effects of politicians dodging questions with off-topic responses. The first study to compare perceptions of politicians dodging with off-topic responses was from Rogers and Norton (2011, study 2). They randomly assigned participants to listen to audio excerpts from a fake political debate. In the stimuli, treatment conditions varied whether the question and answer aligned or addressed different topics. Rogers and Norton found significant differences when the politician talked about health care in response to a question about the War on Terror, relative to when the question asked about health care and his answer discussed health care. There was a difference in perceptions of the politician as measured with a scale of four items tapping trust, likeability, honesty, and capability. When the politician dodged the question he was perceived significantly lower in the composite measure, compared to when he did not dodge.

The researchers also had respondents select from a multiple choice response option in which participants were to recall the topic that the question asked about. Participants were given four options to choose from: education, health care, illegal drugs, and the War on Terror. Results indicated participants in the same-topic response condition and different topic response condition selected the correct question topic more than they selected one of the other three (wrong) options. The authors reported this as indicating that the participants correctly remembered the question—and thus the authors stated that, by implication, participants must have accurately detected the dodge relative to the answer. But the participants were not prompted to report anything specific to the
politician’s response. That is, participants were not asked if they thought the politician dodged any questions or even if they thought the politician’s response aligned with the question topic.

The second and third experimental studies to report effects of politicians dodging questions appeared in Clementson (in press). Like Rogers and Norton, Clementson attempted to measure perceptions of the politician and dodge detection. But Clementson based his experiment on randomly-varied responses to a question instead of altering questions and then inferring whether participants reacted to the answers. He exposed participants to 4-minute video clips of a political interview in which a journalist at a TV studio interviewed a politician. Clementson’s first study used undergrad participants. The journalist was the news director at the campus TV station. And the politician was a (fake) local City Councilman. The second study used registered voters as participants. The journalist was the senior political reporter from the top newspaper in the state. And the politician was a (fake) Congressman. Results for both studies indicated that the politician was significantly less trustworthy when giving an off-topic response than an on-topic response. The measure was McCroskey and Teven’s (1999) six-item trustworthiness scale (α = .95 in both study 1 and 2). Clementson’s (in press) results also indicated participants reported significantly more dodging when the politician’s answers included one off-topic response compared to all on-topic responses. The dodging scale was a composite measure with two items tapping estimates of dodging and a third item asking about the general extent of dodging in the interview.
Summarizing the three studies that have specifically measured effects of politicians dodging questions by comparing reactions to an on-topic response versus an off-topic response (Clementson, in press, studies 1 and 2; Rogers & Norton, 2011, study 2) there are two takeaways. First, there are significant differences in perceptions of the politician depending on his response(s). Giving an on-topic response produces higher dimensions of credibility for the politician, than giving an off-topic response. Observers notice a difference as manifested in perceptions of the politician. Second—and most pertinent to this dissertation—there are significant differences in perceptions of the response. People seem to notice when a politician’s response is more detached from the topic of the question when the politician gives an off-topic response than an on-topic response. The empirical measures in Rogers and Norton (2011) and Clementson (in press) have room for improvement but they still provide empirical support for theorizing that when a politician gives an off-topic response people tend to notice. Despite pervasive perceptions that politicians “always” dodge and “never” answer questions, participants in experiments seem to be able to perceive dodging from politicians more when it occurs than when it does not occur.

Coalescing this section’s assertions, as well as a desire to replicate the formative studies mentioned above from Rogers and Norton (2011) and Clementson (in press), brings me to this dissertation’s first prediction.

**H1:** People exposed to a politician dodging a question will be more likely to report that the politician dodged a question than people who were not exposed to a politician dodging a question.
After affirming that people tend to notice a politician dodging a question, my next proposition will turn to another point of emphasis in this dissertation. I am exploring—as Aristotle (discussed in the next chapter) would probably put it philosophically—political regime affiliation biasing perceptions of truth. Or to put it more clinically from a social scientific approach: I am experimenting with perceptions of deception based on people’s party identification.

The next chapter will provide a brief overview of political scientists, psychologists, sociologists, and communication researchers studying the biased processing of political messages by partisan voters (Berelson et al., 1954; Brewer, 1999; Campbell, Converse, & Stokes, 1960). One detrimental effect on democracy is the presumption that one’s ingroup politician is believable but the outgroup opponent is deceptive. The distrust that Democrats and Republicans have for each other manifests in their voting, but also in how they interpret messages from each other’s politicians.
Chapter 6: Political Partisanship and Group Tension in a Democracy

Aristotle

Our seminal understanding of political group tension may be traced to Aristotle’s political theorizing about regimes (Muirhead, 2014). The regime is an entity who rules. Entities compete against each other to dominate. Each tries to gain power to rule the people.

Aristotle (350 BC/1984) foresaw competing regimes boiling down to oligarchs versus democrats. The oligarchs are fewer in number but have property and money. The democrats have less power in a material sense but have the power of the people. Both groups make competing claims as a ruling regime. The oligarchs and democrats would wage contests framing the other side as wrong and unjust while their own side is right and just.

From the democrats’ own perspective they embody cooperation for the common good. Democrats are larger in number than oligarchs. They represent “the people.” They represent community. They know that life and freedom are more valuable than tenuous physical possessions and territorial squabbles.

From the inside each group appears to itself as being capable of ruling. Their arguments are valid and they are both correct—but only to a point—according to
Aristotle. From a distance they are lacking the full picture. They exaggerate their own virtues. They also exaggerate the other group’s deficiencies.

Their preferential processing of themselves provides a bias in their comparisons to the other group. In a political philosophy sense, each group thinks of itself as a whole and perfect “truth” while the philosopher sees each presenting a partial or incomplete “truth.” A healthy combination of both is necessary. Taken alone, each is an extreme faction. Each would repress a segment of the population. Taken together they keep each other from tyrannical tendencies. They serve an educational purpose accentuating the flaws of the other side for noble civic aims.

American Enlightenment

Philosophically, a mixed regime which combines the tendencies of both oligarchs and democrats was ideal, according to Aristotle (350 BC/1984). Because such a party that tends toward mixing passions still did not exist, the authors of the U.S. Constitution envisioned a system of rival clashes that embraced Aristotle’s competing regime model resulting in a common good.

The U.S. Constitution does not mention political parties. But the framers wrote it with parties in mind, relying on parties to help the system function. The framers expected opposing parties to serve as checks and balances holding each other accountable. By pitting the sides against each other, neither extreme of entrenched aristocrats nor whimsical mobs could dominate. Equality could hypothetically be attained by permitting each party free reign to try to equalize or neutralize the other’s version of the “truth.”
The Father of the Constitution noted problems with partisanship that would necessitate keeping reins on any one party becoming too unwieldy. In Federalist number 10, Madison (1787/2003) worried about factions. He extended Aristotle’s concerns about rival democrats and oligarchs to the American society. Just as ancient regimes tried to dominate each other in class systems, Madison foresaw political parties as natural impediments to any one side—either a majority- or minority-interested side—wielding unrestrained power.

Madison took a pragmatic approach to the realities of party regimes. He departed from notions of parties in Europe during the 1500s and 1600s that were revolutionary but horrendous (Muirhead, 2014). Madison presciently saw the benefit of a country being made strong by interparty tensions rather than a nation trying to elevate one principled and great party. The Constitution hoped for parties to be able to dispute the other party’s every move—not too strong of a single Whig party or a King (Mansfield, 1965) or a Marxist ruling class of proletariats. Instead the nation would embrace a perpetual struggle between parties.

Unlike other systems that might expect religion or an intelligent few, for example, to institute rules of what is good for individuals, Madison envisioned checks and balances and bicameral legislatures elected through competing regimes or factions. Parties would run against each other with the losing party still retaining power institutionally to hold the other accountable if/when it becomes too passionately partisan. Neither party could make too many diffuse promises before the other side calls them out.
Madison wanted to use the sides against each other, exploiting ambitious faction tendencies. A messy clash of parties’ considerations would empower and implement the common good. Each side’s narrow idealism could in effect create a Madisonian ideal. Each party would accentuate its own side’s justice and the other’s corruption. In the aggregate, America could transcend party bias. Each partisan filter needs the other for the holistic betterment of all. Madison used self-interested politicians and their partisan supporters in pursuit of equitable public interest.

After the nation was founded and its constitutional founders became politicians vying for office, a two-party system emerged with the Federalists versus the Democratic Republicans (Dahl, 2003). The Federalist party was led by the first President, George Washington. But later when disagreements arose over state and federal sovereignty Madison and Jefferson founded the Democratic-Republican party.

In his farewell address President Washington (1796/2015) railed against blind partisanship. “Let me,” he said, “warn you in the most solemn manner against the baneful effects of the spirit of party” (p. 90).

On the one hand, he supported parties as healthy engines of democracy. He agreed with Madison that they serve plenty of salutary functions. They provide “useful checks upon the administration of government and serve to keep alive the spirit of liberty” (p. 91). For example, vying parties could keep the nation from reverting back to monarchy. And parties could promote patriotism in their fervor to be perceived as passionate defenders of America.
However, Washington worried about the excesses of parties. He suggested a healthy dose of caution was in order. He exhorted people to be wary of parties. They could tend toward dissension for the sake of dissension. They could be exploited by those who might harm the Constitution. They could dissolve into regional factions that would tear the union apart geographically. Left unchecked, parties could become our “worst enemy” (p. 90). Specifically he said parties would threaten the union when they misrepresent each other. Parties would talk past each other in their fervor to tear each other down. They could get to the point of inability to hear each other like they are “deaf” when an opposing party speaks (p. 89). Their suspicions of each other threatened the nation’s ability to accomplish good things. “You cannot shield yourselves too much against the jealousies and heartburnings which spring from these misrepresentations,” Washington said (p. 88). “The common and continual mischiefs of the spirit of party are sufficient to make it the interest and duty of a wise people to discourage and restrain it” (p. 90).

Recent Partisanship and Group Tension

Fast forwarding from Aristotle and the Founders of the United States democratic experiment, only essentially in the past century have researchers started empirically studying the threats of party bias. In the late 1940s, the U.S. was fraught with group hostility (Brown, 1989). The nation had recently fought in two world wars. Labor strikes pitted workers against management. Race riots abounded. Anti-Semitic attacks, Nazism,

The Social Science Research Council—a pioneer and chief benefactor of communication research (Rogers, 1997)—formed the Committee on Techniques for Reducing Group Hostility. The council was specifically interested in moving the study of politics beyond ideological ideas and philosophies and instead empirically studying people’s political behavior (Rogers, p. 210). Under the committee’s direction, Robin Williams, Jr. (1947) wrote a book about reducing intergroup tensions.

“Few things are more obvious in present day society than the great prevalence and intensity of hostility and conflict among various types of social groups,” Williams (p. 1) stated. “Hardly anywhere in the major societies of the world could one find today a person who has not been touched by the crosscurrents of intergroup antagonism and conflict. These extraordinary demonstrations of human capacities for conflict could scarcely have failed to attract the attention of social scientists.”

Around the same time, during the 1948 U.S. presidential election, Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee (1954) surveyed voters. Voters were confused by the issues and appeared to have difficulty discerning the candidates’ stances. Even on campaign issues in which Truman and Dewey had taken clear opposing positions, only 16% of people knew where the candidates stood (p. 227). Berelson et al. suspected that partisan bias clouded people’s perceptions. Whether the slippage between politicians’ messages was mediated through simple misunderstandings from political media or interpersonal discussions, biased processing of political messages through a partisan lens appeared to
be a chief culprit. People were making incorrect assumptions about politicians because of party identification. Berelson et al. observed that partisans assumed the candidate of their party shared their stands on issues to an exaggerated degree. Conversely, partisans exaggerated opposing party candidates’ stances as being more dissimilar.

Berelson et al. found that PID eases the anxiety of contentious politics. Campaigns are full of “ambiguous propaganda” (Berelson et al., 1954, p. 231). So voters make sense of politics and reduce pressure by simply fitting their opinions to their preferred party affiliation. Their primary cue is to assume agreement within party and opposition between parties. Voters generalize their perceptions based on PID.

The interparty confusion and ferocity of the last century may seem quaint compared to polls nowadays. According to Pew Research (2016a), “Partisans’ dislike of the opposing party is part and parcel of American politics, but recent years have witnessed a growing intensity in these feelings” (par. 1). Pew Research reports that partisan animosity has reached historic levels. The parties have grown in their contempt for each other.

“Intensely negative ratings of the opposing party were far less common in the past,” according to Pew (par. 3). Based on Pew’s latest figures, more than 60% of Democrats and Republicans now say they are afraid of each other. They think members of their own party are more honest and moral than other Americans. They think members of the other party are more dishonest and immoral than other Americans. Nearly 70% of party members think their own party’s policies are good and the other party’s policies are harmful.
Chapter 7: Biased Processing from Cues

Observers’ perceptions of a politician being deceptive may rely on the political PID of the observers. For example, observers of a political interview in the United States who are Republicans probably view a Republican politician differently than they would view a Democratic politician. The next several sections will lead to a proposition concerning perceptions of politicians dodging questions based on people’s partisan group affiliation. I will explain key terms and concepts such as partisanship, biased cue-based processing, and ingroups/outgroups. I begin with the nature of cues in helping people make decisions about politics.

In the first section of this chapter I discuss biased processing from cues in politics. I begin with its stubborn nature, followed by the psychological routes we use to process biased cues. Then I focus on the heuristic cues that drive people’s inferences of politicians. This discussion will lead to our consideration of PID as a meaningful cue.

The Stubbornness of Biased Processing

People’s minds are stubborn about politics. People tend to hold firm to their leanings, opinions, and evaluations toward political information even after being exposed to opposing information (Redlawsk, 2002). Based on theorizing from cognitive dissonance and motivated reasoning, people seem to discount information that is
incompatible with their views. Voters seek consistency. In experiments where participants held issue positions before a treatment, and then the treatment offered arguments contradicting the position, participants’ support for their pretreatment position strengthened (Long & Taber, 2000). Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1995) found the same type of effect with political attack advertising. When presented with negative information about their preferred political position, voters seem undeterred or even more firmly grounded.

A nice example comes from Redlawsk (2002). He created a mock presidential primary. He invented six candidates, three Democrats and three Republicans. Participants developed attitudes toward the candidates initially. Then participants were exposed to various issue positions and campaign messages (e.g., 20-second videos). The experiment lasted about 90 minutes. Some participants were “polled” amidst stimuli to glean their leanings toward the candidates. At the end everyone “voted.” Results of the simulated campaign revealed that predispositions trumped all. The voters seemed impervious to letting incongruent information dissuade them from supporting a candidate who they had liked from the start. Voters were more inclined to strengthen in their bias for or against politicians when exposed to contradictory information than to reconsider who they liked and disliked. Voters did not seem to modify and update their evaluations of politicians when exposed to new information. Once biases were formed in Redlawsk’s experiment, voters’ preconceptions appeared to stay firm.
Peripheral and Central Cues

The stubborn nature of political information can be explained by theoretical models of how our minds process the reception of messages that are intended to persuade us. The most prominent theorizing relevant to cues in political message processing may be the dual routes of persuasion. According to the elaboration likelihood model (ELM: Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), people process messages along a central route or a peripheral route. In the central route a message is given effortful contemplation for the merits of its argument. For example, if an observer of a political interview exerts effort attending to the content of the politician’s message and discerns whether the politician dodged the question relative to the journalist’s topical inquiry, the observer would be exhibiting central processing. In the peripheral route people attend to cues which are of a more superficial nature. Cues are efficient cognitive mechanisms (Mondak, 1993). They are informational shortcuts. The peripheral route pertains to our present discussion of people allowing their partisan political bias to color their perceptions of a politician’s message without processing the content of his message. When a person uses peripheral cues, he or she does not effortfully ponder the merits of a political issue or deeply consider the content of a political message. This peripheral process is also noted in the heuristic-systematic model of persuasion (HSM: Chaiken, 1987; Chaiken, Liberman, & Eagley, 1989). Partisan group affiliation is considered a heuristic cue.

Researchers in the political domain have studied an assortment of cues of a peripheral nature which people draw upon to make sense of politics. For example, the vague notion of “likability” is a heuristic which people commonly report employing
when they have to choose between political candidates (Sniderman, Brody, & Tetlock, 1991). As seminally conceptualized, the likability heuristic speaks to people being more likely to report accepting a politician’s message if they “like” the group the politician is a member of (Sniderman et al., 1991). If people feel warmly toward a politician’s group (e.g., the Democratic or Republican party) then they tend to report aligning their own issue positions with those of the politician. The “affective calculus” of the likability heuristic concerns “people’s feelings toward groups” (Sniderman et al., 1991, p. 94). People who know little-to-nothing about specific policies or politicians tend to arrive at their judgment based on which group they like and then they like the views espoused by the politician aligned with that group.

Decisions, Decisions

Cues help people make otherwise difficult decisions when presented with an array of complex information. When people seek to make decisions regarding politicians they process political information (Gilens & Murakawa, 2002). People draw upon cues because they need to come to some sort of decision when presented with information. Decisions may include which candidate to vote for and which policies to support. A dizzying array of considerations can go in to political decisions. Two competing politicians on the campaign trail may seem to have an infinite number of qualities to ponder for or against them. Any given political issue could have seemingly endless considerations.
People tend to be cognitive misers (Fiske & Taylor, 1991) who use cognitive heuristics as shortcuts to make such an array of mind-boggling decisions (Nisbett & Ross, 1980). People use mental shortcuts to process political information just like they use mental shortcuts in processing information across their daily lives (Downs, 1957). As William James (1920/1879) said, “our political campaigns [are] meant for our nerves rather than for our reason” (p. 143).

The political environment presents people with much anxiety and uncertainty (Lau & Redlawsk, 2001). According to the American Psychological Association (2016), the 2016 U.S. election cycle may have been the most stressful in recent history. People are flooded by an onslaught of confusing and conflicting information about politics. People can expediently make decisions about political information as cognitive misers with relative effortlessness through cues and heuristics.

Most people—not just “low-information voters”—make sense of the often-confusing world of politics by using heuristics (Sniderman et al., 1991). No one has the necessary time or cognitive resources to fully contemplate political decisions exhaustively. We cannot process everything. Cognitive heuristics help people tame the swelling tide of political information (Graber, 1984). They allow people to avoid having to process enormous political knowledge.

Cue Choosing

People use cues across most facets of their life. People act upon the cues. For example, if a voter has an automatic liking for a politician based on the politician’s party
affiliation, the voter will probably be favorably inclined toward that politician (Lau & Redlawsk, 2001).

One version of heuristic shortcuts involves “cue choosing” from elite sources (Gilens & Murakawa, 2002). People choose to favorably receive messages from politicians whom they agree with or find likeable. The cue giver in this case is the politician. The message decoder is the voter or at least a member of the public. Voters often take their cues from what their favored politician or preferred party leaders tell them (Nicholson, 2012). An effective cue giver who shares party affiliation with the voter would be perceived as more persuasive in leading message recipients to find agreement with his or her message.

People tend to apply effortless shortcut appraisals to politicians and political parties (Miller, Wattenberg, & Malanchuk, 1986). Zaller (1992) posits a model of elite cuing whereby people decide to reject or accept a message from a political source based on whether the source seems likeminded. For example, Republicans and Democrats demonstrate “partisan resistance” when exposed to messages from a politician of the opposing party (p. 267). Lupia (1995) ran an experiment demonstrating the effect. He randomly assigned participants to messages favoring or opposing no-fault auto insurance. The messages were attributed to either a Republican, Pat Buchanan, or a Democrat, Jesse Jackson. (In reality, the former presidential candidates Buchanan and Jackson had not taken positions on the issue expressed in the experimental survey. Plus the issue was non-partisan and non-ideological.) Respondents expressed their own support or opposition to the insurance policies in line with the position ascribed to the respective politician à la
their party. For example, Republicans expressed opposition to the policy if they were told Jackson supported it but shared support for it when told Buchanan supported it.

Similarly, Mondak (1994) found that Republicans supported a military defense policy when it was cued as being from Reagan but Republicans opposed the same policy when it was cued as being from “the federal government”—and vice versa for Democratic participants (p. 177). It may be of interest to note that in Mondak’s experiment the effects were stronger in the opposing conditions. That is, participants were more in disagreement with a policy espoused by the opposing entity than participants were in agreement with a policy espoused by their own. Put another way, participants seemed moved more in opposition to an outgroup than moved toward the position of their ingroup. Such an effect seems similar to public opinion polls revealing more distrust and cold feelings toward partisans’ opposing party members than trust and warm feelings toward partisans’ own party (Pew Research Center, 2016a). Nicholson (2011) ran an experiment testing how partisans would react to group source cues. He chose issues in which both candidates during the 2008 U.S. presidential election agreed. Nicholson randomly inserted either Democrat Obama or Republican McCain as supporting the issue. Results indicated that there were not significant differences based on people’s own group affiliation. That is, Republican participants were not more likely or less likely to support McCain’s position, and Democrats were not more likely or less likely to support Obama’s position. But there was a significant difference toward the opposing group. Participants were more likely to oppose an issue when told that the other party’s politician supported it. Nicholson concluded that in partisan politics ingroup
attachment is stronger in its derogation of outgroup politicians than in its favoritism toward ingroup politicians. This brings us to a discussion more specific to groups as the basis for people deriving their cues.
In this chapter I discuss the concepts of ingroups and outgroups. Then I explain their related application in biased processing of politics. I begin with theorizing that concerns fundamental group dynamics of survival.

Group Survival
A group may be defined as “a collection of individuals who perceive themselves to be members of the same social category, share some emotional involvement in this common definition of themselves, and achieve some degree of social consensus about the evaluation of their group and of their membership of it” (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, p. 40). A group may be conceptualized as a collective of at least three people (i.e., more than a couple or a dyad) who identify as belonging together for a shared reason. As I mentioned earlier in the section on Recent Partisanship and Group Tension, and as I will discuss throughout the current section, the type of groups I am talking about are referred to as social groups or category groups (Brewer, 1991), particularly in social psychology literature in which people self-categorize themselves in groups based on a salient identity (Turner, Oakes, Haslam, & McGarty, 1994). The groups spoken of in this dissertation are not primary groups or therapy groups, which appear in medical and clinical psychology
literatures. Nor am I speaking of collectives which are networks of associates placed together systematically but not necessarily of the individuals’ behavioral volition, appearing most prominently in sociology, economics, and ecology.

Sumner’s (1906) formative conceptualization of group relations posited that the key impetus for groups’ existence—and motivator for their continuation—may be summed up in the notion of survival. Groups originate because people cannot survive individually without banding together with others to some degree (Brewer, 1991). After groups have formed they compete against other groups for survival. Their survival depends on giving each other preferential treatment. This also means discriminating against the outgroup. (The next section goes in to more detail on ingroup/outgroup bias.)

Sherif’s (1966) work on group relations emphasized survival. According to his functional theory of intergroup behavior, groups form because people join together to pursue common goals in concert. And their pursuits are contrary to another group competing for resources.

In her theory of the evolution of social groups, Brewer (1999) emphasizes group survival. She states, “Group living represents the fundamental survival strategy that characterizes the human species” (p. 433). She also suggests groups survive through cooperation and trust. We survive in our physical environments and operate socially through cooperating. Mutual cooperation is required. People rely on each other, trusting that each person in a group is willing to cooperate honestly. A group’s “cooperative system requires that trust dominate over distrust” (p. 433). The system falls apart if members cannot trust each other. This leads to the notion of an ingroup. An ingroup is a
step above a mere group, according to Brewer’s theory of the evolution of social groups. Ingroups are “bounded communities of mutual trust and obligation” (p. 433). In an ingroup the members particularly expect cooperation from each other.

The ingroup discriminates against its outgroup. If there were not at least some discrimination then their distinctions as groups would fade. Discrimination may manifest in feelings, verbal messages, and physical behavior. It may be expressed as a collective or by individual members of the group. At the very least the members hold negative attitudes toward another group. This may also be described as prejudice. The other group shares values contrary to the ingroup. Their values conflict.

The ingroup and outgroup compete for resources. The resources could be geographic territories or monetary. The resources could include influence in government or business. Or resources could involve competing ideas or philosophies. The resources for which they compete are scarce. That is, the ingroup and outgroup cannot both be fully content without infringing upon the other. Through their competition for resources against an outgroup, the ingroup bands together in a unified fashion. Again, ingroup members must be cooperative amongst themselves. Accordingly, in a united fashion they consider opponents inferior or even contemptible.

At a fundamental level an ingroup is characterized by its members being able to trust each other (Brewer, 1999). A group’s members would think “we” are more honest than “they” are. According to optimal distinctiveness theory (Brewer, 1991), the benefits of group membership are best achieved through strong attachment—a salient ingroup where the members cooperate and trust each other.
Another incarnation of group relations studies is social identity theory (SIT: Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). SIT takes the aforementioned drive for group survival to a psychological level. SIT is interested in how the competition for resources manifests in group members’ minds. Survival extends to considering one’s own group as similar (or positive) and considering the other group dissimilar (or negative).

Survival translates to attachment within, and distance between. The security of resources within an ingroup means the members must preserve benefits of membership for each other. They protect themselves from the outgroup. Individuals are psychologically motivated to retain identification with fellow members and differentiate themselves from the outgroup. They seek comparisons that put their ingroup in a more favorable light than the outgroup (Turner, 1975).

A seminal conceptualization of ingroups and outgroups is ascribed to Sumner (1906). His original discussion of acceptance among ingroup members and their rejection of an outgroup was termed ethnocentrism. He drew stark contrasts between ingroups and outgroups. A group’s existence hinges on members’ preference for their own plus their aversion to an outgroup. He wrote that the degree of “comradeship and peace” in an ingroup will tend to correlate with its degree of “hostility and war” toward the outgroup (p. 12). A group could not have peace among themselves if they were not battling against the others, according to Sumner. As members become more loyal to each other within, they contemptuously wage war against outsiders.

Ingroup/outgroup bias is the tendency of group members to favor fellow ingroup members’ behavior and evaluate outgroup members’ behavior negatively (Tajfel &
Another term for ingroup/outgroup bias is intergroup discrimination. While much of the debate over group bias compares stronger emotions toward outgroups relative to ingroups (e.g., hate vs. love), the chief differences are basically manifested as members having positive preferences for their group over a contrast group (Brewer, 1999).

Group Survival through Ingroup Cooperation and Outgroup Competition

We know that people tend to classify themselves and others into groups. Group designations vary across the social spectrum. From race and ethnicity to less observable categories such as hobby enthusiasts, there are infinite possibilities for group membership (Abrams, Eveland, & Giles, 2003). According to SIT, membership in a group signifies a cognitive attachment. Values are attached to the categorization. Members hold values that are emblematic of their attachment to each other.

A group joins individuals in a likeminded endeavor. The group would have initially formed because people saw it to be in their interest to join together for a purpose. The purpose of a group serving the interests of its members denotes the need to help or protect themselves amidst scarce resources.

In politics, groups compete for numerous resources. They compete to hold office. They compete to advance their principles in society through government and electoral activism. They compete in elections in which there are winners and losers. A gain by one party signals less resources for another. Political groups sustain reciprocal advancement
or loss proportional to their opposing group’s loss or advancement. The group’s interest clashes with another group.

An ingroup’s drive for survival is particularly emphasized by Hewstone, Rubin, and Willis (2002). Hewstone and colleagues suggest that ingroup members depend on each other for their very livelihood. Drawing on terror management theory (Solomon, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski, 1991), Hewstone et al. (2002) point out that human societies’ group affiliations boil down to choosing between who helps you stay alive and who threatens your life. Although their point is logical enough, terror management theory involves people’s general anxiety about their mortality regardless of group affiliation. SIT (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) better explains the antecedent of intergroup bias deriving from a person’s identity protected by the ingroup. I note this application of terror management theory simply to point out that the literature emphasizes the need for group members to survive against threats from the outgroup.

Intergroup competition conjoins cooperation among members within the group. Members have a shared goal of protecting and advancing their group. They cooperate with each other in pursuit of their shared goals. Cooperation involves cohesiveness and intragroup morale. The cooperation is not merely for intragroup betterment but also in concert with the group’s intergroup advancement relative to competitors for resources. The group has the likeminded aim of protecting and advancing their resources in a competition. Another group competes for their resources. With the intragroup promoting cohesiveness and unity among themselves they also cooperate with an eye toward
competing against an opposing group. Their cooperation among members translates to a joint effort by members of the group to prevail in conflict against a competitor.

The resultant attachment within the group as members join in conflict against an outside group brings us back to SIT (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). A group’s members will rise or fall as another opposing group vies in opposition. As the name “social identity theory” implies, an individual has an identity as part of the group. A person’s strong attachment as a part of the group is the crux of the theory.

Other theories of intergroup relations and intergroup conflict (e.g., Sherif & Sherif, 1979) speak to strong dynamics of a group’s behavior such as competing for resources and stereotyping outgroups. But SIT emphasizes people’s self-image being constructed through belonging to a group. Members compare themselves as better or worse in relation to another group. The lion’s share of research on group behavior indicates that intergroup conflict results in positive identity among ingroup members and antagonism toward the outgroup because of the ingroup’s competition with the outgroup over resources. However Tajfel and Turner (1979) figured there was more to the social-psychological process of developing positive group identity. Tajfel and Turner noted the interesting power of group identification accumulating in the literature. Experimental studies were revealing that even when groups were not competing for resources, and even when there was no expressed or observable conflict or hostility, and ingroup members had no apparent similarities, and outgroups had no apparent differences, the resources were trivial, and even when the groups were randomly assigned, experiments still suggested ingroup favoritism and outgroup discrimination—simply as a function of group
categorization (Billig & Tajfel, 1973; Rabbie & Wilkens, 1971; Tajfel, Billig, Bundy, & Flament, 1971). Tajfel and Turner (1979) suspected that the competitiveness of an ingroup and outgroup may be an outcome of a psychological process that begins in a person’s mind which then reinforces more conflict. Earlier theorizing from others had posited that intergroup conflict arises after group formation and then competition increases. But Tajfel and Turner proposed that the initial categorization was enough to trigger conflict and then competition spiraled further.

Salient Ingroups

SIT (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) offers an explanatory framework for people’s group affiliations becoming salient. The concept of social identity is defined as “aspects of an individual’s self-image that derive from the social categories to which he perceives himself as belonging” (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, p. 40). A salient ingroup arises as the members strongly perceive favoritism toward their own members and derogation of an outgroup. The attachment toward the ingroup is a cognitive process of accentuated belonging relative to exaggerated detachment from the outgroup (Leonardelli, Pickett, & Brewer, 2010).

Some seminal SIT work focused on the distorted perceptions that people have of others when they categorize each other into groups (Tajfel, 1981). Early experiments demonstrated how discrimination could foment with the slightest of intergroup assignments (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). SIT also posits that people’s self-esteem may be tied to their ingroup identity. People are motivated to
perceive favorable qualities of their fellow members. Otherwise, negativity would reflect poorly not only on their fellow members but on themselves. As the status of their group increases or decreases so would their own personal status. Meta-analysis has affirmed a basic tenet of SIT that the more salient a group is, the more bias people will develop in favor of their ingroup (Mullen, Brown, & Smith, 1992).

The differentiation between an ingroup’s trust among themselves and distrust for the outgroup is most distinct when the groups are political groups, according to Brewer (1999). Non-political groups can consider themselves morally superior. But politics presents an extreme degree of factors that propound the divide between in- and outgroups. Ingroup loyalties are tied to outgroup opponents being distrusted.

The partisanship of American voters has been discussed as synonymous with ingroup/outgroup social identity (Green, Palmquist, & Schickler, 2002). However, few studies have empirically examined voters’ partisan behavior under a framework of SIT (Greene, 2004). One study pointed to the influence of categorization of groups in partisan political terrain. Gerber, Huber, and Washington (2010) contacted registered voters in Connecticut before the state’s 2008 U.S. presidential primary. The voters were not affiliated with a party but “leaned” or “felt close” to the Democratic or Republican party. Gerber et al. reminded the voters that in order to vote in the primary they would need to formally register with a party. That is, the researchers tried to induce party affiliation—at least to some degree—in an ecological fashion preceding behavior/opinions to examine causality, as opposed to other studies which experimented with the effects of partisanship without manipulating PID (e.g., Cowden & McDermott, 2000). Gerber et al. (2010) sent
survey materials to the voters and also accessed public voter files. Results indicated that the reminder seemed to cause voters to become more entrenched in their partisanship and more favorable toward their preferred candidate—as evidenced by comparisons with pretest baseline attitudes as well as a control group. The researchers concluded that their letter prompting the act of registering with a party induced more biased processing by voters toward their favored group and toward their preferred politician.

Group comparison is the necessary—and sometimes sufficient—condition for intergroup comparison. To reach this effect of comparative competition, according to Tajfel and Turner (1979), two ingredients are necessary. First, members derive their self-concept through attachment to the ingroup. Second, members have a relevant outgroup to compare their group. In regards to the first ingredient, people evaluate themselves through their identity with the group. A person’s identity is wrapped up in the social status of his or her group. If the group wins then the individual feels like he or she wins. In regards to the second ingredient, as a person’s identity is evaluated in concert with the rise or fall of their group, their identity also relies on comparison with the outgroup. Success of the outgroup at the expense of the ingroup would be a threatening reflection on the member’s own identity.

Based on SIT this closeness with one’s own group and perceived detachment from the outgroup is the primary way people achieve or boost their self-esteem. While the outgroup must remain aversive, the ingroup must also stay favorable. A person’s own group must be perceived as superior to the opposing group. Members actively engage in
considering themselves positive on important dimensions and consider the other group negative on important dimensions.
Chapter 9: Partisan Bias

As suggested from earlier experiments with cue choosing, an important heuristic in politics is a politician’s PID (Lau & Redlawsk, 2001; Lodge & Hamill, 1986; Rahn, 1993). Knowing a person’s PID provides the best predictor of whom that person would vote for and whether a voter would express liking or disliking a given politician (Heit & Nicholson, 2010; Rahn, 1993). In fact, in an interview during the 2016 U.S. election—when a major party had a female presidential nominee atop the general election ballot for the first time in history—Professor Kathleen Hall Jamieson, perhaps the leading scholar on female politicians, was asked whether women would be voting for the first woman president (Matter of Fact, 2016). Yet Jamieson answered, “The strongest predictor of whether or not you’re going to vote for a woman candidate is whether she is of your political party.” Other commonly employed political heuristics include ideology (e.g., liberalism and conservatism; Conover & Feldman, 1986) and endorsements (e.g., the local sheriff endorsing a candidate; Brady & Sniderman, 1985). People tend to make the most immediate and impactful assumptions in their political decision-making based on a politician’s party label (Fiske, 1986). Knowing a politician’s party helps people make default judgments. Such a shortcut would probably be accurate in terms of assuming where the politician stands on particular issues for which their party has taken an official
stance. For example, a Democrat is probably pro-choice on abortion and probably supports more government spending whereas a Republican is probably pro-life and probably seeks to cut government spending. Other cognitive heuristics, such as “likability,” serve less utility in helping a voter predict a candidate’s priorities and stances in office.

With PID being perhaps the strongest cue upon which people exhibit decision-making processes regarding politics, this section helps explain partisanship and its role in biasing people’s perceptions. People embrace the cue of PID and exhibit partisanship which may lead to polarization between partisans of two opposing political groups.

**Partisanship**

The root of the terms partisanship and partisan comes from the word *party*—as in political party. A political party in a democracy may be defined as a group or organization that seeks to control government through winning elections (Schlesinger, 1985). In the United States the two main (or major) rival parties are the Democratic and Republican parties. For the purposes of this dissertation experimentally testing effects on a sample of U.S. voters, *partisans* may be defined as people who call themselves Democrats or Republicans (Nie, Verba, & Petrocik, 1979). If a person does not necessarily call him- or herself a Democrat or Republican, but votes consistently for one of the parties, then he or she is also considered a partisan (Muirhead, 2014).

The term partisanship can have negative connotations in the literature when partisans exhibit staunch one-sidedness (Bafumi & Shapiro, 2009). When partisans have
partisan affect they go beyond supporting their own party and become more concerned with disliking or even loathing the opposing party (Iyengar, Sood, & Lelkes, 2012). Their affiliation with a party thus becomes less about kinship with their ingroup members and more about opposition to the outgroup (Iyengar et al., 2012).

As noted earlier, seminal voting studies (e.g., Berelson et al., 1954; Campbell et al., 1960; Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1944) harped on the influence of partisanship in people’s assumptions about politicians. Lazarsfeld et al. (1944) reported voters making assumptions about presidential candidates’ economic plans based on whether the politician was a Democrat or Republican. Campbell et al. (1960) found that voters of particular socioeconomic statuses aligned with the party they presumed represented their fiscal interests. Going back even further, Alexis de Tocqueville (1835/2000) railed against partisans in America. He observed that they lose sight of themselves in their fervor against opponents. Tocqueville said partisan American voters are given to excessive opinions favoring their party and ardent antagonism of the opposing party.

In the next section I will note that perceptions or stereotypes that partisans develop based on policy stances are logical. That is, by knowing a politician’s PID one will probably accurately know the politician’s stance on key issues. (But knowing a politician’s PID obviously is not diagnostic of whether he or she engages in deception. Even when a politician is asked questions about stances on particular issues, people would be advised to pay attention to the content of the politician’s answer rather than presume veracity of the answer aligning with the question.)
Processing PID

Now that I have briefly discussed the terms partisan and partisanship, I move to its processing. I touched on partisan processing in the opening of this partisan bias section. In this part I offer further detail, bridging the previous chapter on biased cue-based processing with its cognitive application among partisans.

Party identification, or party identity (both abbreviated PID), operate as a heuristic for cognitive processing (Rahn, 1993). The cognitive processing can be at fairly superficial levels assuming ideological or policy leanings. Heuristics can also operate at slightly deeper levels of cognitive processing (Rahn, 1993). For example, people assume a politician who shares their party affiliation is more similar to themselves and assume a politician of the opposing party is more dissimilar. This finding arises from experiments with college students (Rahn, 1993) as well as in polls of the general public (Pew Research Center, 2016a).

Partisans hold stereotypes of each other. A politician’s party label provides an immediate heuristic for people’s assumptions about the stances of the politician. If a voter has nothing but the politician’s PID to guess the politician’s policies and priorities then the voter will often be correct (Page, 1978). For example, if a voter’s most important issue is abortion and he or she knows nothing about the candidates except which one is Democratic and which one is Republican then voting solely on PID provides a guess that is rational and probably correct.

PID is one of the most stable identifications over time (Sears & Funk, 1999). While there have been shifts in people calling themselves Independents rather than
Democrats or Republicans, in longitudinal studies people tend to report the same PID with more stability than most other social category labels (Huddy, 2001). Those interested in reading more about the rather unshakable attachment that people have to their PID may enjoy Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes (1960) and Miller and Shanks (1996). Those interested in reading about how enough negative information about one’s party can cause attachment to slip may enjoy Downs (1957) and Fiorina (1981).

Studies of Ingroup/Outgroup Biased Processing in Politics

As suggested earlier, there is no more influential group categorization into which people place themselves in politics than party affiliation (Bartels, 2002). People who align with a political party tend to report political beliefs in lock-step with the party (Cohen, 2003). In this section I briefly summarize studies which have measured the strength of biased group processing specific to political parties. I will start with a few survey studies and then experiments.

In a study measuring ingroup and outgroup perceptions, Ehrlich and Gramzow (2015) had undergrads fill out scales tapping perceptions of members of their own party and members of the opposing party. Results indicated that people rated their own ingroups more favorably (e.g., honest and ethical) and outgroups more negatively (e.g., immoral and ignorant).

Miller and Conover (2015) collected nationally representative survey data during the 2010 U.S. elections. Results indicated partisans have animosity toward their outgroup opposition. More than half of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement that they
were “angry” the opposing party was “destroying American democracy” (p. 231). More than three quarters of respondents agreed at least somewhat with that statement of anger toward their outgroup. In a model including numerous variables—from political ideology, religiosity, and specific issue stances, to standard demographic variables—PID was the strongest predictor of people’s level of anger toward the other party for destroying America.

Carlin and Love (2013) ran an experiment with college students who identified as either Democrats or Republicans. Participants played a trust game over the internet. The trust game ran as follows. Participants were split into dyads in which each player was allotted ten lottery tickets and given options to keep the tickets or share a portion. If a player shared, his or her allotment of tickets would be tripled. But there was no way of knowing if the other player would reciprocate. The other player could share or could keep theirs for themselves. The only experimental manipulation by the researchers was telling participants that the other player was a Democrat or a Republican. Results indicated that the partisan participants gave about one more lottery ticket to an ingroup member (e.g., both Republican players) than an outgroup member (i.e., Republican player and Democratic player). It is worth noting that Carlin and Love’s (2013) trust game had nothing to do with politics, the task prize concerned lottery tickets, and the participants never met. Trust between the undergrads was based on PID.

Collectively research consistently indicates that partisans perceive themselves and the opposing party differently. Partisans trust their ingroup and distrust their opposing party members. Thus far in this section and throughout this section on ingroup/outgroup
party dynamics I have spoken generally about perceptions of trustworthiness and honesty among ingroups and antagonism toward outgroups, as measured in various prior studies. This dissertation is specifically concerned with politicians dodging questions. As explained above, perceptions of ingroup and outgroup politicians encounter biased processing by members of the respective partisan group members. Thus for the purposes of this dissertation I will examine the biased processing of political groups in terms of their perceptions of a politician responding to questions.

As I mentioned earlier concerning Jacobs and Jackson’s (1983) rational model of conversational coherence, we could extend the validity and reason rule to a partisan political interview. We may expect a partisan viewer to perceive the ingroup dodge as coherent and relevant because it is efficiently meeting the goals of the exchange for the ingroup, while outgroup dodges are not meeting the goals of the exchange for the ingroup. A presumption of cooperation among ingroup members may also be placed in terms of Grice’s (1989) theory of conversational implicature. People presume cooperation in their interactions. We connect our understanding of conversational exchanges to the context and who is speaking. We do not draw inferences of verbal exchanges in isolation from situational factors and the identity of speakers.

When a Gricean maxim is flouted or exploited people derive implied meanings. People who share an identity as members of a group may “read into” a violation of a maxim. For example, they may think that when a likeminded interactant diverged from proper quantity or relevance in an utterance, the exchange was not intended to mislead but actually carried additional meaning. Grice (1989) gives an example of attendees at a
party. One person commits a verbal gaffe. Another person swiftly changes the subject. According to Grice, the violation of his relevance maxim would be understood as a conversational maneuver to save a person from embarrassment and salvage social graces. Grice does not speak of ingroups and outgroups, yet we may infer that his example of an off-topic shift maintaining cooperation among the group of partygoers represents a recognition among interactants in a joint pursuit. Even the most obvious off-topic deflection may be assumed by observers as serving a purpose. Similarly, in IMT2, McCornack gives an example of a conversation he had with another professor and flagrantly flouting a Gricean maxim (McCornack et al., 2014). The other professor thanked McCornack for his informative answer. The two shared a professional identity, and they were discussing a student. A student may be in the role of outgroup relative to the professors’ kinship. The other professor did not react averagely to McCornack violating a Gricean maxim. Instead he read meaning into McCornack’s flout. The professor was correct to do so, but McCornack could have instead diverged from a Gricean maxim with misleading intentions, which the other professor may not have caught because of their presumed cooperation as sharing professional identities during a discussion of a bad student.

To summarize this section, voters consider their own party’s politician more trustworthy, and opposing politicians untrustworthy. The tenets of ingroup favoritism and outgroup derogation should transfer to perceptions of deception. People should perceive less dodging from a politician of their favored group and more dodging from a politician of their opposition group. However, this dissertation presents the first empirical test of
such an assertion. Such an assertion is derived from the above logical justification based on previous experiments of partisans responding to politicians of their ingroup or outgroup affiliation, the expressed sentiments of political partisans toward the opposing party, and social identity theory. Accordingly I offer the following proposition.

**H₂**: People who are exposed to a politician from their partisan ingroup will be less likely to report that he dodged a question than people who are exposed to a politician from their partisan outgroup.
Chapter 10: Accuracy in Deception Detection

The previous chapter sketched basic distinctions between perceptions and accurate detection. This chapter further discusses accuracy in deception detection. I start with conceptual accuracy in deception experiments, followed by its measurement.

Conceptual Accuracy in Deception Experiments

For my present purposes, accuracy may be understood as correctly identifying whether a message is deceptive or not. Recall that deception may broadly be defined as information which the sender knows to be misleading (Levine, 2014b; McCornack et al., 2014). More specific to the terrain of dodging, deception may be defined as communication that violates Grice’s (1989) maxims (Burgoon et al., 1996; McCornack, 1992). Even more specific to the present dissertation concerning dodging via an off-topic response, deception may be defined as violating Grice’s relevance maxim (Rogers & Norton, 2011). That is, the form of deception explored herein is a response to a question whereby the response addresses a different topic than the question raised (Clementson, in press; Clementson, 2016b; Clementson & Eveland, 2016).

Recall that an off-topic response is measured empirically by coders reaching adequate intercoder reliability agreeing on (1) the topic of the question and (2) the topic
of the response, thus if the question and response present different topics then it was an off-topic response (Clementson, in press; Clementson, 2016b; Clementson & Eveland, 2016). Accuracy of dodge detection would therefore be delineated by participants identifying on-topic responses as not being dodges and identifying an off-topic response as dodging.

The present dissertation only tackles one form of deception—dodging a question. Recall that deception includes equivocation and evasion. But to the best of my knowledge all the deception studies which have inspired truth-default theory—the deception detection theory most relevant to the present work—involve lying (Levine, 2014b). The studies feature message encoders either telling a truth or a lie. They are a dichotomy without “grey” area. Participants make a binary decision whether the message was a truth or a lie.

The stimuli may offer a sequence of messages that vary in the extent to which they present participants with truths and lies (e.g., six truths and four lies, two truths and eight lies), but stimuli in deception experiments more commonly feature 50% truths and 50% lies (Levine, 2014a). That is, deception experiments usually present participants which a series of messages in which exactly half of the messages are completely true statements and half are false. The researchers then measure accuracy by comparing participants’ judgments dichotomized as accurate or inaccurate. Overall the percentage “right” tends to average out to 54%, slightly above chance (Levine, 2014a).
Measuring Accuracy in Deception Experiments

In this part I briefly discuss efforts to measure accuracy in deception detection research. I focus on the work of the authors of truth-default theory and information manipulation theory as exemplifying the latest deception detection experimentation.

McCornack and Levine (1990) showed participants video recordings of people telling six true statements and six lies. The researchers paused the tape after each statement to ask participants if they thought the person was lying or telling the complete truth. McCornack and Levine compared the judgments to whether the speaker had indeed told the truth or lied in each of the twelve statements to calculate the percentage of overall accuracy. Despite McCornack et al.’s (2014) admonition for researchers to avoid relegating the study of deception to an unrealistic forced dichotomy of “bald-faced truths” versus “bald-faced lies” (see also Burgoon, 2015), most deception experiments do exactly that. Accordingly, accuracy in deception experiments has most commonly been defined as “correct truth-lie discrimination” (Levine, 2015, p. 1) or “making a truth/lie judgment” (McCornack & Levine, 1990, p. 219). Similar to deception detection studies that appraise dichotomous truth-lie judgments by assessing truthfulness relative to deception, the present dissertation assesses truthfulness vs. dodging.

The Park-Levine Probability Model

A theoretical model holds particular relevance to our discussion of studies measuring whether observers correctly judge truths vs. deceptions. The Park-Levine Probability Model (PLM: Park & Levine, 2001) helps describe, predict, and explain
general accuracy in deception detection experiments. The PLM makes a couple propositions. (1) Barring particularly suspicious contexts or a speaker having an obvious motive to lie, people’s default mental setting is a presumption of veracity. (2) People in deception detection experiments, as well as outside artificial lab settings, are far more likely to expect truths than lies. This second point is called the veracity effect (Levine et al., 1999). The veracity effect occurs when truthful messages are more prevalent as emitted by speakers and thus their correct detection will appear to increase as well because of message recipients’ truth bias. The truth-default is a cognitive presumption which then leads to a manifestation of the truth bias. Given (1) and (2) the PLM posits that as truths increase relative to lies, accuracy goes up. Message recipients’ accuracy is largely a function of message senders’ truth-lie base rate, according to the PLM. Thus, if experimenters wanted to demonstrate impressive success in their participants’ accuracy in deception detection, experimenters should have far more truths than lies in their stimulus materials for participants to judge. The more truths there are to spot, the higher probability participants will score accurately, because the participants were more likely to assume veracity. Conversely, if an experimentalist wanted to embarrass his participants with them scoring highly inaccurately in their deception detection judgment, the experimenter would make most of the stimulus messages lies.

Taken to its extension, the PLM would suggest that if people want to reduce inaccurately judging others’ veracity then in their interactions people should appraise all messages as being truths not lies. Of course a healthy dose of skepticism is necessary at times in our daily lives (McCornack & Levine, 1990) so no one is endorsing constant
gullibility in the practical applicability of the PLM. The PLM merely points out—especially as lab-based deception detection experiments are concerned—that the probability of accuracy increases as the number of truths relative to lies increases.

The PLM has sustained some criticism from Burgoon (2015). She notes that it is technically a misnomer to speak of truth “bias”—a term that denotes measurement error—as improving “accuracy.” (Funder [1987, 1995] and Kruglanski [1992] provide counterarguments and examples in which people’s error in perceptual social judgments in lab settings produces accuracy in the real world—and vice versa, accurate lab observations signaling erroneous judgments in ordinary social situations. Furthermore, Kruglanski and Ajzen [1983] say bias is not the same as error. “Bias need not result in error, if by the latter term is meant a departure from some accepted criterion of [external] validity” [p. 18].) She also points out that truth-lie base rates lack ecological validity because outside the lab people do not utter messages which are purely either truths or lies but rather include equivocations among other deceptions. (This point is a tenet of information manipulation theory 2.) However, Burgoon (2015) does not quibble over the logic of the model nor the robustness of the veracity effect. She even says her latest version of interpersonal deception theory (Burgoon, 2014) embraces the gist of the PLM, agreeing that deception detection accuracy increases as honest messages increase in truth-lie base rates because of the truth bias.

The PLM applies generally to interpersonal contexts. An exception—in which people certainly do not seem to expect truthful messages at a rate exceeding deceptive
messages—is in politics. In the next chapter I discuss how political messages trigger the perception of deception.
Chapter 11: Politics Triggering Deception Perception and Detection

Extending the PLM to a type of deception in which people may dodge questions, the veracity effect would manifest as people would be more “accurate” in detecting non-dodges than dodges. That is, at least if the people were in routine, nonpolitical contexts it would manifest. Politics may however present an exception to the PLM’s truth-bias postulates. According to truth-default theory (TDT: Levine, 2014b) various cues suspend the truth bias. These cues cause us to go from one extreme—presuming honesty and being susceptible to deception—to another extreme of kicking us out of our truth-default stupor and presuming deception, thus being susceptible to mistaking honesty for deception.

Others have commented on TDT and suggest that politics presents the most applicable context for these suspicion-inducing cues to manifest which would suspend people’s truth-default (Clementson, 2016b; Harwood, 2014; Verschuere & Shalvi, 2014). Earlier I mentioned that people should be better at discerning politicians’ dodges from non-dodges and the pervasive public perception of politicians being expected to dodge questions. This chapter helps bridge these previously-mentioned perceptual observations with accurate observations as if I am extending the PLM via TDT as people expect deception in politics. TDT points out that politics presents several cues that suspend our
truth-default. Those include politics being a trigger event and triggering suspicion because politicians have a motive to deceive through dodging (McCornack et al., 2014).

**Empirical Efforts to Measure Dodge Detection**

Having earlier discussed the distinction between perceptions vs. accurate detection and accuracy in deception detection, I now turn to empirical efforts at capturing the detection of dodging. To my knowledge no studies have measured accuracy in dodge detection. Clementson (in press, studies 1 and 2) created a composite measure that included estimations of the occurrence of dodges and an item tapping perceptions of dodging. Rogers and Norton (2011, study 2) included a multiple choice response option where participants chose one of four possible topics to try to recall the question topic, whereby the researchers inferred if participants correctly realized the politician had dodged the question. Swann, Giuliano, and Wegner (1982, studies 1 and 2) manipulated participants’ exposure to question-response sequences and found that whether people were exposed to just the question, just the answer, or both the question and answer, participants’ inferences of the speaker responding to a question were mostly based on her answer as if participants did not attend to the question wording in their inferences. Although these studies all seem to indicate the extent to which people attend to a question-response event when the sequence involves dodging and/or has the potential for deception, no studies have tapped accuracy in dodge detection.

As noted earlier, TDT suggests politics presents a trigger event instilling suspicion. There is a pervasive presumption of evasiveness from politicians. A suspicious
trigger event of politics may flip the Park-Levine Probability Model. Whereas ordinary
detection would result in more accurate truth detection because of the veracity effect, in
political contexts we may instead have a deception bias. People would theoretically be
more likely to observe evasiveness from a politician’s message than veracity.

Despite the lack of empirical efforts to measure dodge detection accuracy, the
literature would suggest that people already accurately detect politicians dodging all the
time. Unlike the truth bias and veracity effect whereby people presume honesty from
each other—and thus, the more truthful messages they are exposed to, the more they
seem accurate in their detection—I posit that a deception bias arises in the processing of
politicians’ messages. I propose that people presume politicians are deceptive and thus
the more politicians dodge the more observers will appear accurate in their detection
simply because they assumed they would receive deceptive messages anyway.

Academic literature and mainstream media reports seem to be replete with the
impression that people expect deception from politicians. There is a famous joke: “How
can you tell when a politician is lying? His lips are moving” (Braun, Van Swol, & Vang,
2015). An article in the *New York Times* by the editor of PolitiFact had the headline “All
politicians lie” (Holan, 2015). The media certainly give the impression that people spot
politicians deceiving at extraordinary rates. Plug the words “politicians” and “lie” or
“dodge questions” into search engines such as Google or YouTube and articles and video
compilations from top media outlets pile up. Deception research pioneer Paul Ekman
closing remarks about IMT2 they say politicians exemplify incessant deception.
According to Braun et al. (2015) deception is ubiquitous in politics. According to political discourse analyst Romaniuk (2013), “There is a widely held belief—at least in the West—that politicians often produce evasive responses under questioning from members of the news media” (p. 145). People believe “politicians are notorious for not answering questions” (ibid). Romaniuk points out, for example, that a U.S. presidential debate opened with a questioner challenging the politicians to “do something revolutionary and…actually answer the questions” (ibid). Psychologist Daniel Kahneman (2011) speculates that people (himself included) think politicians are the most deceptive people group because unlike other professions politicians’ verbal indiscretions are covered prominently in the media. He suggests cognitive effects such as the availability bias make the frequency of deception salient when we think of stereotypical politicians.

Just as people’s truth bias causes them to appear more accurate in their detection of truths in lie-detection experiments because they are presuming truths anyway, I venture that when exposed to a political interview a deception bias will manifest. People will expect the politician to dodge questions. When they are exposed to stimuli where the politician either does or does not dodge those exposed to the dodging will seem more accurate in their detection. Audience members should presume deception, turning the truth bias (and veracity effect) upside down, and appear to be better at detecting dodges than no-dodges. Thus I propose:

**H₃:** Participants who are exposed to a politician dodging will be more accurate in their dodge detection than those who are exposed to a politician not dodging.
Chapter 12: Trusting the Ingroup and Disbelieving the Outgroup

The last chapter suggested that people appraising deception in a political context should be more accurate in detecting dodging when a politician indeed dodges. The intersection of a person’s PID and that of a politician may influence accuracy in deception detection. In this part I return to social identity theory (SIT) in its relevance to people’s group affiliations. I proposed that accuracy would be influenced by exposure to a dodge or no-dodge. In my final proposition I combine dodge/no-dodge and ingroup/outgroup which may have an interaction effect on accurate dodge detection. We can gain a sense of understanding the phenomenon of dodging questions and predict the causal effects of a politician dodging or not dodging on accuracy as moderated by whether the politician is ingroup or outgroup.

At the outset of this chapter I note an implicit assumption that although the veracity of politicians may be perceived through biased lenses of partisan voters, the actual veracity of politicians should not differ based on whether they are speaking to their own party or the opposing party. In a political interview the audience is typically not constrained to an ingroup or outgroup. There are exceptions when comments from interviewees were intended not to be captured by a “hot mic” and carried live or recorded for future public dissemination beyond the specific live audience. Examples include Jesse
Jackson saying, about Obama, “I want to cut his nuts out” (Verney, 2011), U.S. Sen.
George Allen’s “macaca moment” (Bogard & Sheinheit, 2013), and Obama dismissing
white working class voters for “clinging to guns and religion” (Kellner, 2009). In each of
these scandalous instances the public figure thought he was speaking to one confined
group of select likeminded individuals without considering the ramifications of the
remarks being picked up and dissected by broader audiences. In other words, they meant
for their comments to stay within one ingroup. The present study concerns a public
interview setting. The politician in this “interview set piece” would know that his
message must find resonance across a broad viewership (Clayman & Heritage, 2002).
Politicians address an overhearing audience (Heritage, 1985) composed of their own
particular ingroup(s) while also trying to appeal to outgroups. At the least, democratically
elected politicians cannot target their messages solely to an ingroup without expecting an
outgroup to catch wind of their message. While their ingroup might assume cooperation
and trustworthiness, and the outgroup might suspect deception, their messages cannot be
quantifiable truths when speaking to one group and veritable lies when decoded by
another group. Put another way, it would be ludicrous for the host of a mass-mediated
news interview to tell the audience to turn off their TVs if they do not share the PID of
the guest who is about to appear because the politician is only speaking to members of his
own party, as if politicians can tell the truth to their ingroup but then lie to their outgroup.

The same fact-checking that reports “pants on fire” lies or truths from political
messages does not report varying base rates depending on whether the politician was
speaking to an audience of supporters or a general viewing audience (Braun et al., 2015;
Holan, 2015). One may even speculate that politicians are more factual when being heard by opposing outgroups, for fear of being held to higher scrutiny, whereas they may have more latitude to embellish and exaggerate when speaking to supporters. Because politicians are largely talking to both ingroups and outgroups in their interviews, and thus they cannot expect to be able to tell the truth to their ingroup and lie to their outgroup, there is no reason to believe there is actual variation in deception based on ingroup/outgroup audience reception. Content analysis has borne this out. Clementson and Eveland (2016) reported that there were not significant differences between Republican and Democratic politicians giving on- or off-topic responses. There does not appear to be meaningful variation in dodging by party. In support of equivocation theory (Bavelas et al., 1990), styles of answering are a norm of the occupation rather than idiosyncratic to one party.

Having noted this implicit assumption that politicians’ messages are not actually truths or lies depending on whether their message decoders are of their ingroup or outgroup, I now return to TDT and its specific postulates concerning groups and deception detection. TDT asserts that members’ processing of messages as being honest or deceptive may be an outgrowth of ingroup favoritism and outgroup aversion. TDT says that—in presumably rare instances of an ingroup member deceiving a fellow member—salient ingroup members would be susceptible to deception from their own members. Ingroup members presume honesty. They have a truth-default—perhaps to a fault. Their group’s existence and survival requires implicitly trusting each other. In the
occurrence of a member potentially deceiving another member, therefore, the deception would likely escape detection.

Prior experiments have looked at perceptions of dodging from an interpersonal standpoint. But to the best of my knowledge no studies have brought intergroup dynamics into the equation. Although studies from Rogers and Norton (2011) and Clementson (in press) tried to measure the effects of politicians dodging questions, they did not account for partisan group affiliation. And as explained earlier in the section on biased processing from cues and partisan bias, PID is arguably the biggest influence on people’s perceptions of a politician. In the United States, UK, and elsewhere, a politician rarely only speaks for him- or herself but typically represents a political party. Even if a politician tries to figuratively distance him- or herself from the party establishment, the politician still probably holds a party label. (Beyond party labels, politicians can also hold any number of group affiliations, such as sex or race. But party label is the most consequential in driving biased processing by voters, based on prior research discussed earlier.)

By being in one political group the politician would also presumably hold interests contrary to members of an opposing group. A group’s existence and survival requires a clear distinction from its outgroup. According to SIT, ingroups are inclined to presume positive attributes of themselves and aversive qualities of their outgroup. Just as ingroup members share an affiliation with each other, the group is also defined by its separation or detachment from another group of opposing values.
In regards to group members appraising the veracity of messages from representatives of an outgroup, TDT suggests that just as groups tend to exhibit an inflated truth bias amongst themselves they might also err on the side of too much suspension of the truth-default toward outgroups. According to TDT, this positive bias toward one’s ingroup and negative bias toward the outgroup should translate to people’s observations of deception. Ingroups are susceptible to deception from their own members because they presume honesty. And they are susceptible to mistaken presumptions of dishonesty from outgroup members.

A group would overly suspect deception from representatives of an outgroup. TDT does not address a phenomenon known as the “lie bias” (perhaps because research is conflicted on its occurrence [McCornack & Levine, 1990], although seminal deception detection work from Zuckerman et al. [1979, 1981] mentioned that some people are predisposed to disbelieve others regardless of the sender’s demeanor). However, the effect I am describing could be thought of as an opposite of the truth bias, hence a suspicion bias. An ingroup member expects his or her fellow members to tell the truth. Thus an ingroup member is prone to missing deception if and when it may occur from a fellow member. And an ingroup member is suspicious of his or her outgroup members’ veracity. Thus an ingroup member may be prone to assume deception from outgroups even when it does not occur.

TDT suggests that these effects would be especially likely for “important ingroups” (Levine, 2014b, pp. 385, 387; see also “relevant” group comparisons, Tajfel & Turner, 1979). In the political context of politicians responding to questions, it would
seem likely that partisan observers would tend to be more accurate when deception happens from an outgroup than an ingroup.

An interaction may reveal optimal accuracy rather than expecting direct effects of dodge/no-dodge or ingroup/outgroup to produce accuracy. SIT would suggest that if a study were to pit perceptions of ingroups against outgroups in a 50:50 chance of correctly reporting dodges/no-dodges, a group’s observations of *its own* should be more accurate in reporting *no-dodge* while a group’s observations of the *opposing side* should be more accurate in reporting a *dodge*. So they would balance each other out, in terms of better accuracy by ingroups or outgroups overall. The Park-Levine Probability Model (PLM) would also suggest that each side would have equal odds of accurately spotting dodges vs. no-dodges, although it would have nothing to do with dodges but solely because each group would be more accurate at reporting no-dodges. According to the PLM, in deception detection truth-lie experiments people tend to report seeing more truths than lies.

TDT takes this dissertation’s predictions one step further. TDT builds from SIT and the PLM when ingroup tensions arise in deception detection. Salient ingroups presume honesty from their members and presume dishonesty from the outgroup. A group’s competition for resources forces a salient ingroup to presume and exaggerate trust among their own members and distrust an opposing group (Abrams et al., 2003). I extend this theoretical position operationalized as an ingroup member observing a member of the opposing group answering a question. I propose that because salient ingroups strongly presume dishonesty from an outgroup, when a politician of the
opposing party does not dodge a question it is likely that the ingroup members will have inaccurately presumed deception. Also, as mentioned previously, TDT notes that in trigger events—which politics is an exemplar (Harwood, 2014; Verschuere & Shalvi, 2014)—people are more suspicious and the truth bias falters. So combining the effects of the truth bias faltering à la TDT and ingroup trust vs. outgroup distrust à la SIT, we may expect salient ingroup members to more correctly observe their politician telling the truth and their opposing politician deceiving. Accordingly I propose testing the following proposition.

**H4:** The relationship between whether a politician dodges or does not dodge and accuracy depends on whether the politician represents a person’s ingroup or outgroup. Ingroup people will be more accurate when their politician does not dodge than when he dodges. Outgroup people will be more accurate when the politician dodges than when he does not dodge.
Chapter 13: Method

Recruitment and Inclusion

Qualtrics recruited participants for a nondescript online study. Qualtrics did not alert recruits that they would only qualify to be paid to participate if they were registered voters who identify as Democrats or Republicans. The first question in the survey asked recruits if they were registered voters in Ohio. If they indicated No or they were unsure then they were filtered out. The survey next asked participants for their PID. Using the standard wording of the American National Election Study (ANES), respondents were asked, “Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an independent, or something else?” Respondents who selected Democrat or Republican were retained. Those who selected Independent or “something else” was filtered out by Qualtrics and went unmentioned in data analysis.

I purged nonpartisans because this dissertation compares groups. Specifically, I am comparing the deception perception and detection of ingroups and outgroups. I did not include leaners and/or “weak” partisans. Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope (2011) state that when polls include leaners and weak partisans then partisan effects dissolve, suggesting that polarized opinions of partisans are isolated to those who identify as such and those who identify weakly with a party or are Independents but lean toward a party would not
demonstrate ingroup/outgroup effects that provide as valid a test of TDT’s assertions of salient group perceptions.

Data collection was courtesy of Time-Sharing Experiments for the School of Communication (TESoC) at Ohio State University. Qualtrics provided quotas of 25% Democratic (D) women, 25% D men, 25% Republican (R) women, and 25% R men. Qualtrics provided 640 respondents but I deleted 22. The deletions were as follows. I deleted 19 duplicate IP addresses. I deleted one whose post-survey feedback indicated it was not a human respondent (“I think I can do you think. I have a great. I will be in jdufuududuhfhf, but the fact that you can use to make sure it's the best way to get referrals to the change in my life. you will”). I deleted one whose feedback indicated he noticed the off-topic video clip was edited for the study manipulation (“When asked the question about jobs the interview was edited and the politician ended up talking about something else”). And I deleted one who sped through the survey (in 7 minutes 15 seconds) much faster than the median time (20 minutes) and a full minute faster than the second-fastest respondent. (“Speeders” in web surveys can contaminate data quality [Greszki, Meyer, & Schoen, 2015]. Fast response time may indicate inattentiveness by online panelists. In an experiment of primacy effects and responses in a web survey, Malhotra [2008] found that “extremely quick completion time may be a valuable criterion in filtering out participants or their data” [pp. 926, 929]. Malhotra recommends removing outliers who complete a survey more than 1.5 standard deviations below the mean.) My total sample size was $n = 618$. The following are the characteristics in the data set with the 618 participants.

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Participant Demographics

This section summarizes participants’ key demographics. I also indicate how the sample reflects this state’s actual demographics. Participants were 48.4% male and 51.6% female. The state of Ohio is 51.0% female (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.).

Participants were 50.2% Democratic and 49.8% Republican. Of those who are affiliated with either the Republican or Democratic party in Ohio’s voter rolls from voting in a primary (3,348,538), 61.09% are Republican (Ohio Voter Project, 2017). The state has one Democratic and one Republican U.S. Senator. The state can swing from one presidential election cycle to another. For example, in the 2016 presidential election in Ohio the Republican beat the Democrat by 8.1%, but in 2012 the Democrat beat the Republican by 1.9%, in 2008 the Democrat beat the Republican by 4.0%, and in 2004 the Republican beat the Democrat by 2%. The state is known as a battleground which can go Democratic or Republican any given presidential year (Dillon, 2016) so this study’s party affiliation recruitment reflects reality to an extent.

Males and females were split fairly evenly by PID. About half of males (50.5%, or 151) identified as Democrats and 49.5% (148) as Republicans. And about half of females (50.2%, or 160) identified as Republicans and 49.8% (159) as Democrats. Differences were not significant across the two categories, $\chi^2 (1) = .027, p = .870$.

Age ranged from 18 to 90 ($M = 53.85, SD = 27.84$). While the state of Ohio obviously has a meaningful number of residents under the age of 18 and my study excluded anyone under 18, I can draw an age parallel that 18.9% of our participants were
65+ while a somewhat similar 15.9% of the Ohio population is 65+ (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.).

Participants reported their race as 86.6% White alone (not Hispanic/Latino), 8.3% Black or African-American alone (not Hispanic/Latino), 1.5% Asian, 1.5% Hispanic or Latino, 0.6% American Indian or Alaska Native, 1.1% Other, 0.0% Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander, and 0.5% declined answering. Ohio is 82.7% White alone, 12.7% Black alone, 2.1% Asian, 3.6% Hispanic or Latino, 0.3% American Indian or Alaska Native, 0.1% Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander, and 2.1% two or more races (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.).

Comparing Caucasian (86.6%) and non-Caucasian (13.4%) participants and their PID, Caucasians were slightly more Republican (294, or 55%) than Democratic (241, or 45%). Non-Caucasians were far more Democratic (69, or 83.1%) than Republican (14, or 16.9%). The differences with Caucasian and non-Caucasian participants identifying as Democrats or Republicans were significantly different, $\chi^2 (1) = 41.69, p < .001$.

Caucasian non-Hispanic participants identifying as 55% Republican were similar to national trends in which 54% of Caucasian non-Hispanics identify as Republican (Pew, 2016b). Non-Caucasian participants identifying as 83.1% Democrats were reflective of national trends in which 87% of Black non-Hispanics, 63% of Hispanics, and 66% of Asians identify as Democrats (ibid).

For annual income, nine response options were categories ranging from “less than $5,000” a year to “more than $100,000” a year, plus “I don’t know” and “Prefer not to answer.” Of the 590 who entered an estimate, participants’ mean range was $35-49K, the
median was $50-75K, and the modal range (representing 21.8% of participants) was also $50-75K. Ohio’s median income is $49,429, based on the latest (2015) estimates (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.).

To measure education level, participants placed themselves in one of seven categories based on their highest degree. About a third (34.6%) had a college degree, 13.3% had a graduate school diploma, 24.6% started college, 4.2% had some graduate school, 21.2% had a high school diploma, 1.6% some high school, 0.3% less than high school, and 0.2% declined to answer. This demographic departed from Ohio population figures as 97.9% of our participants were high school graduates or higher but 89.1% of state residents report being high school graduates or higher (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.). Also, 52.1% of our participants had a bachelor’s degree or higher, while 26.1% of Ohio residents report the same (ibid).

Experimental Design

Participants watched a news interview embedded in an online survey. In the 4-minute clip a reporter interviews a (fake) congressional candidate from Ohio and asks four questions about national and state issues. Appendix A presents the full transcript.

I constructed the stimulus to be as realistic and relevant for participants as possible. I strove for ecological validity and subject salience. I also scripted the politician’s answers to include bipartisan/nonpartisan rhetoric so that the manipulation was believable for him to fill the partisan and ideological roles of a Republican or Democrat. For example, the politician’s answer to the question about gun control pieced...
together agreeable lines from both Republican George W. Bush and Democrat Al Gore in their 2000 U.S. presidential debates. A timer kept participants from advancing to the next screen until the video played in full. And Qualtrics monitored that the clip played on screens of desktop, tablet, or laptop computers; participants could not use mobile phones to take the study.

All participants were randomly assigned to be exposed to one of four video clips. The between-subjects design had 2 (dodge or no-dodge) X 2 (Democratic or Republican politician PID) experimental conditions. In the dodge version the politician gives an off-topic answer to one question. It is the second question in the interview. The journalist asks the politician about his plan for the economy and jobs. In the no-dodge version the politician answers all the questions on-topic.

Another independent variable concerns PID of the politician. The screen identifies the politician as either a Democrat or a Republican.

The interview was filmed at a real TV studio. The interviewer was the real senior political reporter for the Columbus Dispatch. The journalist plays himself. The politician was not a real politician and had never appeared on the news before, to mitigate the “halo effect” (Feeley, 2002). The actor playing the politician was a real professional political consultant.

The variables were coded such that odds ratios could be attained. Exposure to a treatment in which the politician dodged was coded 1 (for “success” in the parlance of odds ratios) and 0 for no-dodge condition.
Measures

**Ingroup/Outgroup**

Participants were categorized as ingroup or outgroup. These variables were based on two items in the survey: (1) a person’s self-identified PID (Democratic or Republican) and (2) exposure to a stimulus in which the politician was a Democrat or Republican. Then a participant was identified as being either of the same party (ingroup) or the other opposing party (outgroup) in party affiliation exposure. For example, a Republican participant who was exposed to a stimulus in which the politician was identified as a Republican would be classified as ingroup. A Democratic participant exposed to a stimulus with the politician identified as a Republican would be classified as outgroup. This variable was manually created by the study author after data collection concluded. Qualtrics randomization resulted in 291 outgroup participants (47.1% of the sample) and 327 ingroup participants (52.9% of the sample). The two groups were not significantly different from 50%, based on a one-sample $t$-test with the test value of .5 as the groups were coded 0 and 1, $t(617) = 1.449$, $p = .148$.

**Observation of Dodging**

After exposure to the stimulus and a manipulation check, participants were asked: “Did he dodge any of the questions?” There were two response options randomly presented: Yes or No. If “yes” was selected then a follow-up question asked: “How many questions did he dodge?” A dropdown offered response options 1 through 5.
The majority of participants (62.3%, or 385) said No the politician did not dodge any questions, while 37.7% (233) said Yes he did. A one-sample \( t \)-test with the test value of .5 indicated the differences significantly varied from a 50/50 split, \( t(617) = 57.56, p < .001 \). Although about half were exposed to a dodge, only about a third of the participants reported seeing the politician dodge a question.

Both Republicans and Democrats were more likely to say that the politician did not dodge any questions than that the politician did dodge questions, and the difference between the parties was not significant, \( \chi^2 (1) = 2.29, p = .130 \). See Figure 3.

![Figure 3. Percent of each party who perceived dodging](image)

Among the participants who said the politician dodged a question, when asked how many, the average and median were 2 while the modal response was 1 (\( M = 2.03, \) Mdn = 2, Mode = 1, SD = 1.08, range: 1-5). See Figure 4 for the distribution including...
those who saw zero dodges. Figure 5 compares the percentage for those in a dodge condition and those in a no-dodge condition.

Of the participants who said the politician dodged at least one question (126 Democrats and 107 Republicans) each party’s adherents indicated, on average, the politician dodged two questions (Democrats: $M = 2.02, SD = 1.16$; Republicans: $M = 2.04, SD = 0.99$). The difference was not significant, $t(231) = .095, p = .924$.

Figure 4. The number of dodges that people reported seeing (0-5), and the proportion who reported seeing that many dodges
Accuracy

A variable was created to reflect whether participants were accurate or inaccurate in their perception. The dichotomous variable was coded 1 for accurate and 0 for inaccurate. This variable was manually created by the author, based on (a) whether a participant selected yes or no in response to the question asking if the politician dodged any questions and (b) whether the participant was in a dodge (i.e., off-topic response) or no-dodge (i.e., all on-topic responses) condition. For example, if a participant was exposed to a dodge condition but when prompted as to whether the politician dodged any questions indicated No, that participant would be coded as inaccurate (0). However, if a person was exposed to a dodge condition and when asked whether the politician dodged any questions indicated Yes then he or she would be coded as accurate (1). (I stipulate
that this variable did not take into consideration whether those who said the politician dodged also went on to say that he dodged more than one question. As noted earlier, some respondents—in both the dodge and no-dodge conditions—said they saw upwards of five dodges. And obviously if someone reported that the politician dodged five questions yet he only actually dodged one, then technically the person may be considered inaccurate. Nonetheless for this study’s purposes, those in the dodge condition who reported observing at least one dodge were all coded as accurate.) Overall, the majority (59.5%, or 368) were accurate and 40.5% (250) were inaccurate. A one-sample t-test with the test value of .5 confirmed that the participants had significantly greater accuracy than chance, \( t(617) = 4.83, p < .001. \)

**Manipulation Checks**

The Qualtrics survey forbade respondents from returning to a prior screen. I included a manipulation check immediately after exposure to the stimulus. After the video clip, participants were asked what the politician’s PID was. Options were Democrat or Republican (randomly presented) or “the video clip didn’t say,” or “I don’t remember.” If they got it wrong for their particular condition then they were filtered out. If they selected “the video clip didn’t say” or “I don’t remember” they were filtered out. Here is the breakdown of those filtered out who failed that manipulation check, based on their treatment condition: 6.39% of the participants randomly assigned to the Democratic (D) politician Dodge condition failed, 6.95% randomly assigned to the D politician No-Dodge condition failed, 6.39% in the Republican (R) politician Dodge condition failed,
and 5.46% in the R politician No-Dodge failed. So each of the four conditions had around 6% fail their respective manipulation check.

Participants were debriefed at the end of the survey. For example, they were informed that it was not a real news interview and the politician was not a real congressional candidate. But before the debriefing I asked participants how much prior media exposure they had to the politician in the video clip. On a scale of 0 (None) to 10 (An extreme amount), responses ranged from 0 to 10 ($M = 1.61$, $SD = 2.35$, $Mdn = 0$, Mode = 0). Most (64.9%) indicated (the truth) that they had zero exposure. And the median and mode were zero. However, participants indicated, on average, that the stimulus apparently held enough ecological validity for the mean to be between 1 and 2. In prior studies where I have used these video clips, between 20% and 50% of participants report having seen this politician in the news before.

**Randomization and Validity Checks**

For random assignment to conditions of participants’ own PID and whether the politician dodged or not, the breakdown was as follows. D participants who were exposed to No-Dodge, $n = 157$ (25.4%); D participants who were exposed to Dodge, $n = 153$ (24.8%); R participants who were exposed to No-Dodge, $n = 162$ (26.2%); and R participants who were exposed to Dodge, $n = 146$ (23.6%). Those were not significantly different, $\chi^2 (1) = 0.236, p = .627$.

Slightly more participants were randomly assigned to a No-Dodge condition (51.6%, or 319) than a Dodge condition (48.4%, or 299). There was not a significant
difference between the two conditions, in a one-sample $t$-test with the test value of .5 as those two conditions were coded 0 and 1, $t(617) = -0.80, p = .422$. There were no significant differences in Republicans or Democrats being exposed to a No-Dodge or Dodge condition, $\chi^2 (1) = 0.24, p = .627$.

For random assignment to conditions of whether participants were exposed to their ingroup or outgroup politician and whether the politician dodged or not, the breakdown was as follows. Ingroup No Dodge, $n = 165 (26.7\%);$ Ingroup Dodge, $n = 162 (26.2\%);$ Outgroup No Dodge, $n = 154 (24.9\%);$ and Outgroup Dodge, $n = 137 (22.2\%)$. Those four were not significantly different, $\chi^2 (1) = 0.374, p = .541$.

I examined whether participants were randomly assigned to conditions based on race. I split the file into Caucasian and non-Caucasian respondents. About 87% (535 of 618) identified as Caucasian. Both the politician and journalist in the stimulus were Caucasian. A chi-square test affirmed there were not significant differences in the number of Caucasian and non-Caucasian participants in the conditions of ingroup/outgroup and dodge/no-dodge, $\chi^2 (3) = 3.597, p = .308$. There were not significant differences with Caucasian and non-Caucasian participants in the group treatment conditions of Democrat/Republican dodge/no-dodge, $\chi^2 (3) = 3.359, p = .339$.

Comparing sex across the conditions of ingroup/outgroup and dodge/no-dodge, there were not significant differences in the random assignment of males and females across conditions, $\chi^2 (3) = 2.841, p = .417$. Comparing sex across the conditions of Democrat/Republican dodge/no-dodge, there were not significant differences, $\chi^2 (3) = 3.363, p = .339$. Comparing sex and dodge or no-dodge conditions, there were not
significant differences in their random assignment, $\chi^2 (1) = 2.773$, $p = .096$. The dodge condition had 155 males and 144 females. The no-dodge condition had 144 males and 175 females. (There is no theoretical reason for females and males to perceive or detect dodges differently, yet ideally this would have been randomized more extensively.)
Chapter 14: Results

All the variables for the hypotheses are dichotomous in their level of measurement. The first hypothesis predicted that people who are exposed to a politician dodging a question will be more likely to report that the politician dodged a question than people not exposed to a politician dodging a question. I tested H1 by running a chi-square test of association. The independent variable was the randomized interview condition of exposure to the politician dodging or not dodging. This variable merely took into consideration whether the politician dodged or not, regardless of the politician’s PID. The dependent variable was the dichotomous response option of whether or not (yes or no) people reported that the politician dodged any questions.

Figure 6 presents the results. There was a significant association between the variables, Pearson \( \chi^2 (1) = 22.047, p < .001; G^2 (1) = 22.168, p < .001 \). Of the people who were exposed to the politician dodging, 47% reported that he dodged a question. Of the people who were not exposed to a dodge, 29% reported that he dodged a question. I note that even in the dodge condition most people reported not seeing a dodge, albeit a slim majority relative to the 71% in the no-dodge condition who reported not seeing a dodge. The odds of a person perceiving dodging were about 2.2 times larger when the politician actually dodged than when the politician did not dodge, Odds Ratio: 2.202, 95%
CI[1.580, 3.069]. This represents a 120.2% increase in the odds. H1 received support.

People exposed to a politician dodging a question are more likely to report that the politician dodged a question than people not exposed to a politician dodging a question.

![Bar chart](image)

Figure 6. Percentages who perceived dodging in no-dodge and dodge treatment conditions

H2 predicted that people who were exposed to a politician from their partisan ingroup would be less likely to report that the politician dodged a question than people exposed to a politician from their partisan outgroup. Put another way, I predicted that people who were exposed to a politician from their outgroup would be significantly more likely to report that the politician dodged a question than people exposed to a politician from their ingroup. The dependent variable is the same from the first hypothesis—whether a person reported perceiving a dodge.

There was a significant association between the variables, Pearson $\chi^2 (1) = 16.309, p < .001$; $G^2 (1) = 16.348, p < .001$. Thirty percent perceived a dodge in the
ingroup condition and 46% percent perceived a dodge in the outgroup condition.

Meanwhile, of those who reported that the politician did not dodge any questions, more of them were in an ingroup exposure condition than outgroup. Figure 7 presents the results. The odds of a person perceiving dodging were about 2 times larger when a politician was from people’s outgroup than when the politician was from people’s ingroup, Odds Ratio: 1.966, 95% CI[1.413, 2.734]. This represented a 96.6% increase in the odds. H2 received support. People exposed to a politician from their outgroup were significantly more likely to report that the politician dodged a question than people exposed to a politician from their ingroup.

![Figure 7. Percentages who perceived dodging in ingroup and outgroup conditions](image)

H3 predicted that people who are exposed to a politician dodging will be more accurate in reporting that the politician dodged than those who are exposed to a politician not dodging will be accurate in their observation. The independent variable in this
proposition is the dodge treatment condition, whether a person was exposed to a dodge or not exposed to a dodge. The dependent variable is whether participants were accurate or inaccurate in assessing whether they were exposed to dodging.

There was a significant association between the variables—Pearson $\chi^2 (1) = 36.913, p < .001$; $G^2 (1) = 37.270, p < .001$—but in the opposite way predicted. Contrary to my prediction, among those in the dodge condition, accuracy was 47% compared to those in the no-dodge condition, where accuracy was 71%. Meanwhile, of those who were inaccurate, more were exposed to dodging than no-dodging. Figure 8 presents the results.

The odds of a person being accurate in their dodge detection when exposed to a dodge was a little over a third of the odds of someone not exposed to a dodge being accurate, Odds Ratio: $0.362, 95\% \text{ CI}[0.259, 0.504]$. Being exposed to a dodge appears to decrease the odds of accurate dodge detection by 63.8%. Put another way, the odds of someone not exposed to dodging being accurate in their dodge detection was 2.76 times the odds for someone exposed to dodging being accurate. H3 was rejected. People who are exposed to a politician dodging appear significantly less—not more—likely to be accurate in their dodge detection.
H4 predicted that the relationship between dodge/no-dodge exposure and accuracy depends on whether the politician represents a person’s ingroup or outgroup. The previous three hypotheses lead us to finally ask whether there is a statistical interaction between the effects of group membership and dodging. I examine if—over and above any additive combination of the separate effects of group affiliation and dodging or not-dodging—they have a joint effect.

I specifically proposed that people would be more accurate when their ingroup politician does not dodge than when their ingroup politician dodges. I also specifically proposed that people would be more accurate when their outgroup politician does dodge than when their outgroup politician does not dodge. This hypothesis was tested with binary logistic regression. The reason I employed binary logistic regression was because—as with all the other variables used to test the hypotheses—all three variables

Figure 8. Percent accurate in dodge detection for dodge vs. no-dodge conditions
were dichotomous. With only two categories of an outcome variable (e.g., accurate vs. inaccurate dodge detection), logistic regression models the likelihood of the outcome being a “success” as a function of a set of independent variables (O’Connell, 2006). Logistic analyses for binary outcomes model the odds of occurrence of successful accurate dodge detection and to estimate the effects of input and moderator variables on these odds. The dependent variable was whether or not the person was accurate. The independent variable was whether a person was in a dodge or no-dodge exposure condition. The moderator was whether a person was exposed to their ingroup or outgroup politician.

A two-predictor logistic model with its interaction term was fitted to the data to test H4. The result showed:

Predicted logit of (Accuracy) = 0.190 – 0.565(InGroup) + 0.286(No-Dodge) + 
1.475(Group x Dodge)

After affirming overall model fit, \( G_m (3) = 56.25, p < .001 \), I ran sequential analysis to inspect the unique contribution of the interaction. I entered the two independent variables first without the interaction term. Then I entered the interaction term as a second block. When the interaction variable is included in the model—Wald \( \chi^2 (1) = 18.07, p < .001 \)—there is a statistically significant decrease in the proportion reduction of error (log-likelihood), \( \chi^2 (1) = 18.48, p < .001 \). The statistical significance affirms that including the interaction term in the model decreases error. From the first block to the second block, Cox and Snell \( R^2 \) improves by 0.028, from 0.059 to 0.087. Nagelkerke \( R^2 \) improves by 0.037, from 0.080 to 0.117. About 12% of the null deviance
was accounted for by the set of predictors. About 4% of the null deviance was accounted for by the interaction term.

The prediction of H4 that group membership would moderate the effect of dodge exposure on detection accuracy was affirmed. Ingroup observers are more likely to be accurate in detection when their politician does not dodge than when their politician dodges. However results did not support the proposed assertion that outgroup observers would be more likely to be accurate in detection when their opposing politician dodges than when he does not dodge. A person who perceives dodging will not necessarily be more or less likely to detect dodging accurately from his or her outgroup politician. The interaction term’s odds ratio indicated that the odds of being accurate are 4.371 times greater when an ingroup member is exposed to no-dodging than when an ingroup member is exposed to dodging. Being in the ingroup and being exposed to no-dodging increases the odds of accuracy by 337.1% compared to an ingroup member being exposed to dodging. I had proposed that people would be more accurate when their ingroup politician does not dodge than when their ingroup politician dodges. This part of H4 received support. Figure 9 illustrates the moderation effect.
As depicted above, for outgroup exposure in the model, accuracy is not significantly different whether the politician dodges or does not dodge, \( \exp(\beta) = 1.210, p = .267 \). Ingroup exposure does however depend on whether the politician dodges or does not dodge, as ingroup observers were accurate in detecting dodging when the politician dodged but inaccurate in their detection when the politician did not dodge, \( \exp(\beta) = 4.37, p < .001, 95\%\text{CI [2.21, 8.63]} \).

H4 received mixed support. The relationship between whether the politician dodges or does not dodge and accuracy does depend on ingroups/outgroups. I specifically predicted that people would be more accurate when their ingroup politician does not dodge than when he dodges. This was affirmed. I also predicted that people would be more accurate when their outgroup politician dodges than when he does not dodge. This
part of my hypothesis was rejected. When exposed to their outgroup politician, people
were still, on average, more accurate when they did not detect dodging than when they
reported detecting dodging.
Chapter 15: Discussion

Summarizing the Findings

I begin this section by discussing each hypothesis. The first hypothesis essentially replicated prior work from Clementson (in press) testing whether people notice a dodge when it occurs. This part of the dissertation concerned perceptions of dodging questions without factoring in people’s partisan identification, even though every participant was either a Democrat or Republican and every exposure to the news interview included the politician being labeled either a Democrat or Republican. People who were exposed to a dodge were more likely to report that the politician dodged than people not exposed to a dodge.

The second hypothesis concerned ingroup/outgroup dynamics. When people were exposed to a politician sharing their PID then 30% perceived dodging, but when they were exposed to a politician of their opposing PID then nearly half (46%) perceived dodging—a significant difference.

The third hypothesis concerned people’s accuracy in perception of dodging. I predicted that people would be more accurate when dodges were present than when they were absent. Alas my prediction was wrong. In this first test of people’s accuracy in
dodge detection, I found that people were significantly more accurate in the absence (71%) than in the presence (47%) of a dodge.

The fourth hypothesis brought together all the elements of this study. I found that people’s accuracy in perception of dodging depends on whether they are exposed to a politician from their ingroup or outgroup. When the politician dodged, a majority (55%) of people were accurate in their detection when he represented the outgroup, but less than half (41%) were accurate if he represented the ingroup. When people were not exposed to dodging, a majority accurately perceived accordingly when the politician represented the outgroup (62%) and especially when he represented the ingroup (80%).

Theoretical Implications

The first takeaway from this study concerned basic observations of a politician in a news interview. More people say he dodged when he did than say he dodged when he didn’t. And more people say he did not dodge when he did not, than say he did not dodge when he did. Such findings may seem intuitive. However, no prior research has explicitly tested the perceptions of whether or not people notice a politician’s answer to be a dodge or not. Furthermore, conjectures in the literature about politicians’ rampant deception would have us believe they dodge with impunity against suspicious yet oblivious spectators. The proceeding implications will dive deeper in to people’s accuracy and theoretical processes at work, but at this juncture I note a few ways this finding enriches our understanding of perceptions of politicians dodging questions. First, a few prior experiments which worked around the periphery of this empirical question have been
replicated or extended. Rogers and Norton (2011, study 2) played audio clips of mock political debates and found that listeners could correctly identify the question when the speaker gave an off-topic answer, but the participants were not prompted to react to the answer. The closest precursor to this dissertation’s study was Clementson (in press) which exposed people to variations of a political interview and found that people perceived more dodging in the off-topic answer condition, but his composite continuous measure did not ask observers point-blank if they saw any dodging.

A second way the initial finding enriches our understanding of political question-answer sequences is that we see a sliver of hope for people’s perceptions. Politicians are expected to equivocate (Bavelas et al., 1990; Key, 1958), deceive (McCornack et al., 2014), lack trustworthiness (Gallup, 2016), say whatever they must to win votes (Jucker, 1986), rarely give direct answers (Page, 1976; Tomz & Van Houweling, 2009), and never answer questions (Bull & Mayer, 1993; Harris, 1991). Yet—as if a rejoinder to pervasive assumptions in public opinion and academic scholarship—in this first test of whether people’s perceptions of dodging would align accordingly, more people reported that they saw dodging when there was dodging than when there was not dodging, and more reported that they did not see dodging when there was not dodging.

This was the first study to test TDT’s assertion that the truth bias would be especially impactful in the deception detection of salient ingroups (Levine, 2014b). Salient ingroup members indeed presume honesty of each other and presume deception from their outgroup. I note, however, that TDT also would predict that in a political trigger event rife with suspicion, the truth bias should have faltered. The findings
revealed that perceptions of veracity did not succumb to ingroup/outgroup distrust as much as one might have imagined when theoretically adjoining TDT and SIT.

This dissertation’s findings supported TDT’s emphasis on people having as their default mental setting a presumption of veracity. What is particularly surprising is that most of the experiments that have supported the truth bias—while being artificial experiments in which participants surely looked for deception at higher rates than in their everyday lives—have involved stimuli of undergraduates discussing low-stakes life details. Yet my stimulus concerned a political interview with a real journalist at a real TV studio questioning a politician for whom half the participants held the opposing PID. Unlike most studies that have contributed to the corpus of research supporting the truth bias, this study used a suspicion-invoking trigger event which had never been tested in such a way before. And the truth bias still prevailed. People expected honesty from each other—even when the other was a politician of their opposing party.

The resilience of the truth bias is remarkable. In this dissertation I asked participants directly, “Did the politician dodge any questions?” My findings indicated that the human presumption of honesty surfaced. Even when the politician dodged a question and he represented voters’ opposing PID, people’s truth bias manifested.

When I combined dodge and no-dodge conditions and isolated whether people would exhibit such blatantly biased processing from their own PID, they indeed tended to think a politician of their opposing party was dodging while their own politician was not dodging. Results supported tenets of social identity theory’s (SIT) ingroup-trust vs. outgroup-distrust coupled with TDT’s salient ingroup honesty-presumption vs. outgroup
dishonesty-presumption. Findings extended SIT and TDT into political news interview terrain.

Differences in perceptions of deception by the opposing groups were not as staggering as we might have expected considering rampant partisan bickering that pervades media depictions of politics. While the predictions were affirmed as people’s perceptions appeared to convey ingroup-trust and outgroup-distrust, we still see an overriding influence of the truth bias. Even in the outgroup exposure condition, a majority (54%) reported that the politician did not dodge. However with ingroup exposure the truth bias appeared more pervasive—as predicted by TDT concerning salient ingroups. Seventy percent did not think their ingroup politician dodged. The fact that 30% still said their ingroup politician dodged may point to the suspicion people have of politicians in a news interview trigger event, another TDT assertion, perhaps suggesting that people attend to dodging to a degree somewhat beyond mere partisan bias.

Fears of partisan bias clouding people’s judgments seem overblown. Although ingroup members were far more likely to say that their politician did not dodge questions, a majority of outgroup observers also did not perceive dodging. Tensions between partisan groups did not rise to a level of concern in their peripheral processing like the competing entities hypothesized in Aristotle’s (350 BC/1984) rivaling regimes, Madison’s (1787/2003) clashing factions, Tocqueville’s (1835/2000) ardent antagonism, or Washington’s (1796/2015) blindly jealous party interests. Just as Berelson et al. (1954) suspected that peripheral processing from PID was clouding people’s judgments but
giving voters confidence in their judgments concerning politics, the truth bias prevailed in this dissertation.

Having covered perceptions of dodging now I move to discussion of accuracy of those perceptions. Of those who were exposed to the politician dodging, less than half (47%) reported that he dodged. Of those who were not exposed to a dodge, nearly a third (29%) still reported that he dodged a question. A silver lining amidst conflicting perceptions of dodging vs. no-dodging may be that 71% of the people in the no-dodge condition reported not seeing a dodge. That could suggest support for the Park-Levine Probability Model (PLM: Park & Levine, 2001) in a terrain of political deception experiments distinct from standard lie-vs.-truth experiments. The PLM asserts two key things. First, people have a truth bias because—barring suspicious trigger events or sensing the speaker has a motive to lie—our default mental setting is a presumption of honesty. Therefore, second, the more truths an observer is presented with, the more the observer will appear to spot. The present dissertation suggested support for the veracity effect (Levine et al., 1999). Even when the politician flagrantly dodged a question most people exposed to it thought he did not dodge. Perhaps people expected the politician to not dodge. Prior research asserts that under routine circumstances deception tends to escape detection (Levine et al., 2010). Even partisan audience members of a political interview exhibited such a tendency. While participants did appear to trust their ingroup and disbelieve the outgroup—based on significant differences in perceptions of ingroup and outgroup dodge perceptions—people seemed to exhibit the truth bias across conditions.
Politics presents an applicable context for suspicion-inducing cues to manifest which would suspend people’s truth-default (Harwood, 2014; Verschuere & Shalvi, 2014). I discussed theoretically flipping the PLM—from a truth bias to a deception bias—because politicians are expected to dodge questions. These results point to the merits of TDT’s truth bias and the PLM’s veracity effect. Just as decades of deception detection studies with dozens of experiments have revealed people are more likely to be accurate in truth-lie stimuli when the speaker tells the truth (Park & Levine, 2001), this first deception detection experiment to test accuracy in a political interview context also found support for the influence of the truth bias. The odds of being accurate in dodge detection are more than two-and-a-half times (2.76) greater when a politician does not dodge than when he dodges. Despite popularized depictions to the contrary, when people are exposed to a politician dodging, it is unlikely that they will accurately detect it. In the parlance of signal detection theory, people were best at “correct rejections”—reporting that the politician did not dodge when indeed the politician did not dodge. When the politician actually did dodge, people appeared about the same at hits and misses, as if people are less accurate when a politician dodges than when he does not.

The implications of apparently granting a presumption of truth may be different if, instead of dodging one out of four questions, he dodged half. Maybe in such a case dodging would be observed at multiplicative rates because he hardly appeared as cooperative. Perhaps if an experimental stimulus featured four on-topic answers versus four off-topic answers implications would differ dramatically. Or the implications could
be quite different if participants had only been exposed to one question-answer sequence and were deprived of establishing the politician’s demeanor, cooperativeness, etc.

I also combined TDT’s salient ingroup truth bias versus a suspicion-provoking trigger event political news interview. And I combined the biased processing of partisanship from SIT’s ingroup-trust versus outgroup disbelief. People trust their ingroup and disbelieve their outgroup—but not to the extent that SIT might have projected. Thus people may have been attending to the politician’s message and appraising whether he was dodging rather than merely relying on the heuristic cue of PID. People also seemed far better at accurately detecting no-dodging than dodging. The effect of dodging or not dodging on accuracy depended on the politician representing people’s ingroup or outgroup. This finding extended TDT’s truth bias for salient ingroups and could be said to show support for the PLM’s assertions about correct detection increasing the more a target tells the truth. As if finding that the truth bias and PLM trump partisan bias and suspicious trigger event cues, people remained slightly more accurate in their detection when the politician did not dodge—even among outgroup members.

As the PLM has similarly established with human lie detection experiments, accuracy appears to be a function of a politician giving on-topic answers and not dodging any questions. Whether people are exposed to their ingroup or outgroup politician, they seem more likely to be accurate in their dodge detection when the politician does not dodge. Conversely, people are likely to be inaccurate in their detection when the politician dodges. There was an interaction with ingroup condition and dodging exposure.
A partisan group member is most likely to be accurate when their ingroup politician does not dodge.

The majority of participants in the dodge condition reported observing no dodging. The majority of participants in the outgroup condition reported observing no dodging. Perhaps the truth bias outweighs partisan bias. (Whether partisans would ever admit such a heretical political notion is another question.) At least 70% of participants in the no-dodge condition and 70% of participants in the ingroup condition reported observing no dodge. The vast majority of participants in the no-dodge condition were accurate in their observations. Whether or not the politician shared their PID the majority in a given condition reported no dodge. The truth bias clearly exists in the political context. People are more accurate when exposed to “truth” (i.e., not dodging) than when exposed to untruth (dodging).

This experiment’s voters exhibited prejudice toward the outgroup and preferential perceptions of the ingroup. We can glean that partisan perceptions manifested as cooperation and trust for the ingroup, based on Brewer’s (1999) theory of the evolution of social groups. People were significantly more likely to say their ingroup politician did not dodge any questions and distrusted the outgroup politician’s veracity. Brewer’s (1991) optimal distinctiveness theory would assert that people were far more inclined to say that their ingroup politician did not dodge—even when he did—because members need to trust each other and believe they are more honest than the outgroup. Partisans must be strongly attached to each other and presume cooperation to survive.
Most evident, perhaps, with group members’ biased perceptions, was the interaction of ingroup/outgroup and dodge/no-dodge manifesting SIT (Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). We saw group members process their own politician as being favorably positive—accurately detecting no-dodge but inaccurately missing when he did dodge—while not necessarily being more or less significantly accurate in appraisals of the opposing politician whether or not he dodged. SIT points out that group members tend to evaluate outgroups negatively. Aligning with TDT (Levine, 2014b), salient ingroups would presume honesty from their fellow members and presume dishonesty from group members competing for resources (Brewer, 1999; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Partisan voters appeared cognitively attached with a politician sharing their party label. Their positive group identity displayed accentuated truth bias.

Based on speech act theory (Austin, 1962), perhaps people thought the politician’s answer was *doing* something rather than just *saying* something. Participants clearly saw the politician’s answers as speech acts rather than appraising the mere syntactical content of his message. The illocutionary force of his utterances conveyed meaning to the participants beyond the linguistics of his answer diverging from the topic of the question. (Meanwhile we note that the concept of dodging has negative connotations, as operationalized and tested, which I will mention later.) Even though his answer was off-topic maybe people thought there was more to it. A true or false declaration in the sense of constatives may have been of less concern to observers than the subjective impression created by his performatives.
The politician’s message appeared to succeed in its felicity condition. Observers made favorable inferences about the politician’s intentions, such as thinking his answers were appropriate. As a news interview, the politician and journalist handled the conventional procedure properly. The journalist asked the politician for information. The politician provided information. The procedure appeared conducted as instructed. Neither the politician nor the journalist alerted audience members to the contrary. Neither threatened the other’s face (Goffman, 1955). The conversation appeared to be executed correctly, even if the politician represented the opposing party of half the observers. The politician was not perceived as being infelicitious even when the journalist asked him about his plan for jobs and the economy and the politician talked about his plan for peace in the Middle East. Nothing overtly would have caused observers’ antennas to pop up suspecting the politician was engaging in a directive (Searle, 1979) attempting to control the journalist. People may have interpreted the politician’s answers as speech act types, such as representatives, describing something factual, or commissives, describing something that will happen in the future. The journalist’s questions were directives, and perhaps in keeping with particular Gricean maxims, audience members assumed the politician’s divulgence of information was responsive as a felicitous speech act comporting with the sincerity condition (Searle, 1976).

In line with theorizing from pragmatics and discourse analysis, there are other reasons people may not have noticed a change of topics. The question-answer sequences flowed with structured rules of turn taking (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974). Each question in the adjacency pair expected and received an orderly answer (Schegloff &
Sacks, 1973). Each response seemed coherent and relevant. The journalist did not call attention to topic shifts (Sacks, 1971) or unlinked topic jumps (Levinson, 1983). The journalist and politician conversed in an orderly fashion. They appeared to be talking in a series of topical exchanges with linked concepts (Levinson, 1983). Neither speaker objected to the other’s moves or called attention to transgressions. Even the off-topic answer about peace in the Middle East may have appeared to be a logical subject for a political interview. Based on Jacobs and Jackson’s (1983) rational model of conversational coherence, the orderly turn-taking bespeaks assumed cooperation. Each speaker appeared to cooperate in structured rules. They seemed to be advancing each other’s agenda symbiotically. Both the journalist and politician appeared to offer coherent contributions so why would observers think otherwise? Unlike my initial predictions that partisans would exhibit more biased processing of their opposing politician, it appeared as though both ingroup and outgroup observers felt the politician abided by Jacobs and Jackson’s (1983) validity rule and reason rule. The politician’s speech acts may have carried sincerity in his intentions while believably aligning his interests with those of the journalist and audience.

As noted previously, the findings suggest the theory of implicature (Grice, 1989) and TDT’s truth bias prevailed above and beyond ingroup/outgroup biased processing. Grice’s cooperative principle exhorts communicators to “make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged” (p. 26). We may posit that observers of the interview thought the expected components of a response were present.
Grice’s four maxims—quantity, quality, relevance, and manner—are necessary for a normatively ideal transaction. As IMT2 has suggested, a deceiver can manipulate information and escape detection by appearing to supply those maxims in utterances. By appearing to offer a proper amount of information in his replies (quantity) which were truths and not lies (quality) expressed in the correct demeanor (manner), the politician’s violation of the relevance maxim—the off-topic reply—went unnoticed. An off-topic deflection is the most “efficacious” diversionary tactic, according to Turner et al.’s (1975, p. 77) real-world study. The present experiment found further credence for its effectiveness. The politician’s demeanor might not have even mattered to people in their apparent presumption of his veracity, as evidenced by decades of experiments that have revealed that people can be predisposed to believe each other regardless of message sender demeanor (Levine, 2014b; Zuckerman et al., 1979, 1981).

A chief pursuit of deception detection theorists is meaningfully bringing observers’ accuracy levels above those of coin-flip chance. A meta-analysis of 40 years’ worth of 300 studies revealed that correct truth-lie discrimination was 53.46% (Bond & DePaulo, 2006). Levine (2014a) noted that such a level was barely better than the odds of people accurately predicting random future events: 53.1% (Bem, 2011). For about the past decade, though, researchers have found methods and contexts that bring accuracy of human judges upwards of 69-100%. Successful modes include strategic questioning (Levine, Shaw, & Shulman, 2010), strategic use of evidence (Hartwig, Granhag, & Stromwall, 2006), expert questioning (Levine, Blair, & Clare, 2014), and content in context (Blair, Levine, & Shaw, 2010).
The advancement in deception detection accuracy has been credited to a shift from cue theories to content-based lie detection (Levine & McCormack, 2014). Cue theories, such as interpersonal deception theory (Buller & Burgoon, 1996), focus on passively observing people and trying to interpret their behavior as leaking their mental state. By looking for cues such as nervousness or cognitive load, for example, an observer can spot manifestations of psychological differences in people telling the truth versus lying, according to cue theorizing.

Content-based lie detection, however, focuses on comparing what someone says with some sort of evidence or other consistent knowledge. The two theories that have arisen from content-based deception detection are truth-default theory (TDT: Levine, 2014b) and information manipulation theory 2 (IMT2: McCormack et al., 2014). Both are inspired by Grice’s (1989) theory of conversational implicature. As TDT’s name implies, it is also grounded on the truth bias. TDT dispatches with observing misleading and unhelpful cues. Instead the theory exhorts observers to attend to the content of a speaker’s message. Rather than suspiciously looking for beads of sweat, twitching, or other behavioral cues that allegedly betray deception, TDT takes a different tact. TDT says that most people tell the truth most of the time, so we should let them talk and assume most of what they say is honest, but keep our antennae attuned to instances when their utterances diverge from other knowable facts. As far as lies going undetected, TDT says that deceivers exploit the truth bias. Similarly, IMT2 says that deceivers covertly exploit Grice’s maxims.
As already noted a couple paragraphs above, the corpus of deception detection literature I am describing regards distinguishing truths from lies. No deception detection studies have tested accuracy in distinguishing dodges vs. answers, or any other elusive phenomena of deception such as equivocating (Bavelas et al., 1990) or paltering (Rogers et al., 2017). For the first time, we can now compare accuracy rates in lie-detection studies to dodge-detection. The accuracy rates from my dissertation are comparable to those in deception detection research mentioned above that ranged from 55% to 71%. And interestingly, my study included tests of both cue-based theorizing—considering that PID is a heuristic cue—and also content-based theorizing as observers could attend to the content of the politician’s dodge/no-dodge and also see Grice’s cooperative principle and TDT’s truth bias at work.

My findings indicated that the outgroup was above 50% accurate both when the politician dodged and when he did not. This suggested that perhaps people’s PID cue inspires them to attend more closely to the message. Such a finding weds conflicting cue-based and content-based theorizing to produce successful accuracy. The marginal means of accuracy for the ingroup exceeded 80% when the politician did not dodge—a success rate among some of the most rigorous deception detection methods reported by Levine and his colleagues. TDT predicts that the truth bias would manifest most strongly among salient ingroups, and not only did this conjecture find its first empirical support in this dissertation but the level of accuracy was comparable to those from other extensive methods such as “projecting motive” (Bond, Howard, Hutchison, & Masip, 2013; Levine et al., 2010) and content in context (Blair et al., 2010). But the ingroup was inaccurate
when their politician dodged. In the no-dodge condition, accuracy was 71%, another remarkable level of detection. Alas though it is not comparable to other theoretical detection modes as much as further support for TDT’s emphasis on the truth bias. In the dodge condition, however, accuracy was 47%. In the meta-analysis of human lie detector studies that I mentioned above, about half the experiments had accuracy levels between 40 and 50%. So the tendency for people to be slightly more inaccurate in detecting a dodge is comparable to deception detection work that preceded the advent of content-based lie detection.

Supplemental Analysis on Perceptions of Dodging

With all the conclusions pointing to the truth bias and people missing a dodge even when partisan bias should have impaired presumptions of veracity, readers may wonder about participants’ judgments of dodging. For instance, did the people in this study consider dodging to be an aversive act? And if so, how might a politician dodging a journalist’s question compare to other people’s dodges in daily life?

As a post-hoc analysis to inform the findings, I solicited participants’ opinions on how averse they are to people dodging questions in different scenarios. This variable was used for two purposes. First, we can know the degree to which people express opposition to dodging as a general concept. This measure would help establish that the term dodging has validity as intended—with negative connotations, describing a form of deception—carrying essentially the same meaning for our participants. This measure helps insure that our results pertaining to the phenomenon of dodging have validity as something akin to
lying more than being something that people might favor as being appropriate across contexts. Second, we can compare the extent to which people hold negative views toward a politician dodging compared to other situations and occupations where people dodge questions. For example, as mentioned earlier, both equivocation theory and IMT2 posit that politicians need to dodge questions because of their profession (Bull, 1998; McCormack et al., 2014). Bavelas and colleagues’ (1990) work on equivocal communication suggests that avoidance-avoidance conflict situations are rampant across interpersonal and mass communication contexts. Yet, with few exceptions (e.g., Clementson, 2016a; Kline, Simunich, & Weber, 2008, 2009) research on equivocation and dodging exclusively concerns politicians. Dodging is a form of deception which the public condemns—at least from politicians. But are people more averse to politicians dodging than others in situations that also necessitate dodging? I examined whether participants considered the term “dodging” to be an aversive act. After all, this dissertation posits that dodging is a form of deception. If participants consider dodging to be acceptable, or have flagrantly different notions of dodging being good or bad, then it would suggest interpretations of the term do not serve utility in this study. Participants filled out scales in which items measured the extent to which they considered different forms of dodging aversive.

I created a five-item scale to tap participants’ aversion toward different scenario prompts. The items were randomly presented to participants, on 7-point semantic differentials: acceptable/unacceptable, appropriate/inappropriate, understandable/not understandable, OK/not OK, and excusable/inexcusable. Higher scores indicated
increased aversion to dodging. Six different situations were randomly presented to participants. The six prompts were: “When a politician dodges a direct question from a voter, that is…” ($\alpha = .941, M = 6.10, SD = 1.15$), “When a politician dodges a direct question from a journalist, that is…” ($\alpha = .952, M = 5.65, SD = 1.38$), “When a medical physician dodges a direct question from a patient, that is…” ($\alpha = .949, M = 6.45, SD = 0.99$), “When a teacher dodges a direct question from a student, that is…” ($\alpha = .964, M = 5.93, SD = 1.20$), “When a spouse dodges a direct question from his or her partner, that is…” ($\alpha = .958, M = 5.81, SD = 1.32$), and “When a sports athlete dodges a direct question from a reporter, that is…” ($\alpha = .970, M = 4.59, SD = 1.62$).

As indicated by the variables’ means on the 7-point scale in Figure 10, participants appear unfavorable toward others dodging. Dodging appears to be considered unacceptable, inappropriate, inexcusable, etc., across scenarios. These means suggest our participants probably consider dodging a form of deception, while distinguishing between scenarios. People consider physicians dodging their patients’ questions the most aversive and athletes dodging reporters’ questions the least aversive.
Regarding aversion to politicians dodging journalists’ questions, there were significant differences, on average, between Democrats ($M = 5.80, SD = 1.27$) and Republicans ($M = 5.50, SD = 1.47$), $t(616) = 2.70, p = .007$, Cohen’s $d = 0.218$, which is a small effect size (Cohen, 1988). Democrats were slightly more averse than Republicans to politicians dodging a journalist’s question.

Before I move to the next part on future directions, I note that future work could benefit from the results of this supplemental analysis. Upon comparing a series of potential scenarios where people dodge questions, I found that the most aversive is physicians dodging patients and the least aversive is athletes dodging reporters. I note that the second-to-least aversive was the setting of this dissertation—politicians dodging
journalists. There are four other specific dodging situations more aversive than that employed for the present experiment. Perhaps future experiments will reveal people attend more closely to other settings described and dodge detection rates are context-specific. For example, the truth bias flourished in the present setting but perhaps in settings where people consider dodging worse an offender might be detected more accurately.

Limitations and Future Directions

In the closing section of this chapter I discuss limitations of my study and future directions inspired by this work. There are seven parts. The first part discusses questioning, such as the question topic employed in experimentation and potential lines of questioning that could trigger different perceptions of dodging. The second part drills down into people’s perceptions of dodging specific to each question-response unit rather than testing reactions to a holistic event. The third part raises potential extensions based on expanding the participant pool to nonpartisans. The fourth discusses contributing factors to the exposure condition, such as social ties or media headlines priming people’s perceptions of the interview, or a journalist spotting the dodge and calling out the politician. The fifth offers conjectures about survey specifications that alter outcomes. The sixth waxes philosophical about accuracy, based on the Realistic Accuracy Model distinguishing between social judgment accuracy in an experimental lab and in the real world. The seventh and final part discusses applying signal detection theory to the pursuit
of judging accuracy. Along the way I recommend future studies and applicable extensions of theoretical principles.

Questioning

One limitation of this study—and opportunity for future exploration—lies in the question topic which the politician dodged. He was asked about his plan for jobs and the economy. He responded with his plan for peace in the Middle East. We can assume few, if any, real politicians would actually do that. The question probably would not provoke equivocating, lying, or otherwise deflecting. The question did not place the politician in an avoidance-avoidance conflict situation requiring dodging (Bavelas et al., 1990). I chose this off-topic dodge for three reasons. First, IMT2 proposes that a violation of Grice’s (1989) relevance maxim, originally called his “Relation” maxim, is the most overt form of information manipulation. An off-topic dodge is the most noticeable and least effective mode of deception, according to IMT2 proposition IM3. “If you abruptly change topic, or fail to answer a question, such deviations from conversational coherence are grossly apparent to listeners. … Relation violations are the last linguistic refuge of truly desperate deceivers” (McCornack et al., 2014, p. 366). So I put the allegedly most obvious form of deception to the test. I was able to see whether salient ingroup members still let it slide and compared perceptions with outgroup voters. I was not explicitly testing IMT2’s IM3 proposition because I did not compare detection rates of this Gricean maxim violation with other maxim violations. However we might be awed at how much deception escapes detection if even the type of dodge that is allegedly least successful can
go undetected in a suspicious trigger event with partisan political interlocutors. Second, I chose this off-topic dodge because a politician being questioned about his plan for jobs and the economy calls forth the biggest national problem voters consistently express in public opinion polls (Gallup, 2017). From an ecological standpoint a routine political news interview can reasonably be expected to ask a congressional candidate to speak on such an issue. Third, I chose this off-topic dodge because it provided a sort of replication building from the only other experiments (Clementson, in press; Rogers & Norton, 2011) in which someone was asked about one topic and replied with a totally different topic, to test observers’ perceptions.

Perhaps participants did not react suspiciously when a routine question was asked. Thus the politician responded exuding Gricean quantity and manner without jolting audience members from their truth-default state. The questioner did not pose a contentious or ideologically divisive topic. Future research may test whether people accurately detect dodging when the journalist asks more intriguing or conflictual questions. For example, if the journalist asks about abortion or about a salacious scandal and the politician responds about peace in the Middle East we would think/hope observers would detect the dodge.

However, such a future test may still support the strength of the truth bias if the politician appears cooperatively in keeping with Gricean maxims and his deflection goes unchallenged by the journalist. Rogers and Norton (2011) also varied the question asked and held the response constant. But they did not vary the salaciousness or intrigue of the question topic. The response option for that part of their study boiled down to participants
selecting from dropdown options which of four possible generic national political topics comprised the question. Future work could simply make the question topic more glittery for participants, or see if perception and deception depends on the salience of the question topic for particular participants. Also, future research might hold the question topic and answer constant but vary the combativeness of the journalist’s inquiry. Perhaps even a divisive topic such as abortion does not perk people up as much as attending to a question that sounds accusatory. The study could simply test the relative effects of the interviewer threatening the politician’s face with a line of questioning. Bull’s (2008) reconceptualization of equivocation under a facework framework would suggest that politician’s must directly respond to a face-threatening question. But such a conjecture has not been experimentally tested. Maybe observers of a political interview do not detect dodging in blasé sequences but perk up when the journalist lobd a rhetorical grenade and then scrutinize how the politician handles his or her answer. Although, upon attending more closely to the politician’s response under face-threatening questioning, observers might assign even more merit to the politician if he or she does not lash out at the journalist and return fire, but stays cooperative and maintains formal structure of the setting. Also, fervent likeminded partisans who share PID with the politician and view the antagonistic journalist as the opposing outgroup might disengage from quibbling over whether their ingroup politician fully answers the question because they share face threat from the journalist. This would be in keeping with TDT’s hypothesizing about salient ingroups and SIT’s assertions about ingroup trust. As shown above in my supplemental analysis, dodging voters is seen as significantly worse than dodging journalists. And
future work may reveal that such discrepancies depend on voter’s PID. For example, perhaps Republicans view journalists more antagonistically than Democrats. Or perhaps ingroup viewers will see the journalist as an opposing outgroup while outgroup viewers will see the journalist as part of their ingroup battling the politician.

Prior experimentation has revealed the extent to which partisans continue to favor their party’s politician over the opposition party—even when they hold a stance on a contentious issue in politics. So hypothetically the journalist might be trying to drill down for a response to an inquiry that the ingroup observer shares as well, but the combativeness of the tone places the journalist in an antagonistic role and the ingroup politician’s response is of less import. Arceneaux and Kolodny (2009) exposed pro-choice Republican voters to pro-choice appeals from a pro-choice Democrat. Results indicated that the Republicans were more motivated to vote against the Democrat afterward. The appeal seemed to backfire, as if PID trumps all. Future research may extend the present findings by testing whether a majority of people exposed to a flagrant off-topic dodge continue to miss it even when the question is more intriguing or places the respondent in a tougher avoidance-avoidance conflict situation.

I was testing salient ingroup dynamics, and Republicans and Democrats take qualitatively different approaches to the economy. However, the open-ended question soliciting a general plan for jobs and the economy is not necessarily a distinction that typically polarizes candidates and their constituencies on the campaign trail. Proposals for jumpstarting the economy tend to be less polarizing and passionate opinions, and more vague platitudes of a predictable nature. Plus, while the economy tends to be a
prominent issue in every presidential election of modern history, the candidates offer such a grab bag of proposals that even their supporters have trouble keeping track of whether it was the Democrat or Republican whose economic package features certain components, as Berelson et al. (1954) found. And studies of polarization tend to use as their stimulus issues abortion, gay marriage, environmental concerns, immigration, and racial identity (e.g., Druckman, Peterson, & Slothuus, 2013; Green, Palmquist, & Schickler, 2002). Basically I am positing—albeit without direct evidence for or against such an assertion—that while economic issues probably play a prominent role in people’s PID development, partisans may not find a journalist’s broad, open-ended question about a candidate’s plan for the economy to be as salient as other more polarizing topical inquiries. For instance, partisan voters’ general stances on economic issues have not changed dramatically since the days of Berelson et al. (1954). The Democratic voters expressing liberal pro-government-assistance economic messages in Lazarsfeld et al. (1944) sound similar to those from MSNBC viewers today, and the Republican voters expressing conservative limited government economic messages in Lazarsfeld et al. sound like Fox News viewers today. So other non-economic issues have contributed to partisan “sorting” (Mason, 2015). This may suggest that while partisans hold polar opposite positions on key facets of economic policy, it is not those differences which engender the most motivating factors in their allegiance toward their chosen party and aversion toward the opposition. Again, this is speculation and would require empirical testing of my hunch. If such assertions were corroborated then my stimulus—while
testing partisan perceptions—may have neglected to fully tap the type of partisan
inflammation feared by Madison and Washington.

If an experiment were to feature an emotional question topic which historically
drives partisan voters to the polls more fervently then perhaps observers would attend
more accurately to a dodge. Such an extension could, though, cause observers to report
dodging when it did not occur. Perceptions may hone-in on specifics that diverge from
merely inspecting whether the response was on- or off-topic. For example, imagine a
journalist asking a politician for his plan on abortion. Abortion may be the most
polarizing issue in U.S. politics. Imagine the politician responds by saying he is pro-life
and wants Roe v. Wade overturned. But he neglects to state whether abortion should be
outlawed in cases of rape, incest, and life of the mother. He omitted relevant information
either naturally and accidentally à la IMT2 (McCornack et al., 2014), or purposefully à la
paltering (Rogers et al., 2017). Either way ardent pro-life voters may observe his
omission rising to the degree of a dodge by withholding information via a Grician
quantity maxim violation in their perceptions.

_Question-Response Units_

My design correctly identified inaccuracy in people missing a flagrant off-topic
dodge, but was not totally precise when it came to accuracy. Even those who I labeled as
accurate or inaccurate—because there was or was not a dodge and they said the politician
did or did not dodge—may have made that judgment based on factors other than
attending to each question-response sequence and appraising whether the answers were
on- or off-topic. I acknowledge that I still do not know that viewers saw the dodge where
I put it in the stimulus. Without having participants go back and show me where the
dodge was, and reporting what they thought made it a dodge, the notion of accuracy
remains ambiguous. Future research should fix these limitations so that we can unpack
exactly what people perceived and detected to better assign accuracy in their dodge
detection.

A follow-up study could have partisan voters watch the same news interview,
randomly assigned to the same conditions. Participants could pause the clip after each
question-answer sequence to give immediate reactions. Coders would then analyze the
data for patterns. For example, coders might assign participants’ reactions into
dichotomous categories of an observation of either demeanor or message content. Each
category could be broken down to either a positive/complimentary or negative/critical
observation. In support of TDT, people might report significantly more positive
demeanor cues when the politician shares their PID and more negative demeanor cues
when the politician has the opposing PID. According to TDT those cue-based
observations would lead to inaccuracy. Participants might be attending to features of the
interview that have nothing to do with accurate discernment of the content of the
messages. But voters might scrutinize message content more when viewing an outgroup
politician and pick up on fine-grained features of his answer which—which technically
remaining on-topic—they might report as evidence of dodging nonetheless. Such work
could more richly pit cue-based theories of deception detection against content-based
TDT. Future research would be able to explore specific message content and demeanor
cues that people notice when appraising a politician’s veracity vs. deception. In- and outgroup observers might infer particular cues during each question-response sequence which in roundabout ways lead to accurate detection. Future research might ascertain the (probably misleading) cues that salient ingroup members draw upon to make their judgments of whether a Democratic or Republican politician is deceptive. Such work could test theoretically predictions that outgroup members would note more aversive demeanor cues than ingroup members, while salient ingroup members would note more cooperation (Grice, 1989) and informativeness (Levinson, 1983) than outgroup members.

Another feature of the study relevant to people’s varying perceptions based on each question-response unit relates to participants’ assignment to conditions. I balanced Democratic and Republican recruits 50/50. I also balanced sex with half female and half male. But participants were not split 50/50 ingroup/outgroup. The experimental design was slightly imbalanced with more respondents in the ingroup than outgroup. A manipulation check after the interview confirmed people’s accuracy in recalling the politician’s PID. Their continued participation in the study—i.e., not being filtered out upon failing the manipulation check—could have been based on a lucky guess or influenced by other preceding factors. People may have been projecting their own PID and luckily getting the manipulation check correct. Future research could help tease apart the factors that go into people noticing a politician’s PID and then appraising the politician accordingly.

Furthermore, regarding the observation of outgroups appearing to have more truth bias than deception bias in terms of accuracy, I acknowledge that I may have worded the
fourth hypothesis in a way that led to rejecting the second part of it when instead it may have been more meaningful for our understanding of biased partisan dodge detection to slightly tweak the hypothesis wording. The part of H4 was affirmed in which I predicted ingroups being more accurate in the no-dodge condition, but another part of the hypothesis predicted that people would be more accurate when their outgroup politician dodges than when he does not dodge. This part of my hypothesis was rejected. And technically it deserved rejection. When exposed to their outgroup politician, people were still, on average, more accurate when they did not detect dodging than when they reported detecting dodging. However, as shown in Figure 12, the outgroup was more accurate than the ingroup in the dodge condition. Logically, this is what one may have expected in terms of my theoretical predictions leading to the interaction of ingroup/outgroup and dodge/no-dodge impacting accurate detection. Yet the hypothesis’s wording may have hindered this result from surfacing.

In hindsight perhaps I could have more logically worded hypothesis 4 as: “The relationship between whether a politician dodges or does not dodge and accuracy depends on whether the politician represents a person’s ingroup or outgroup. When a politician does not dodge, ingroup people will be more accurate in their detection than outgroup people. Ingroup people will be more accurate when their politician does not dodge than when he dodges. When a politician dodges, outgroup people will be more accurate than ingroup people.” Future work might tease apart the distinction that both ingroup and outgroup exposure is more accurate than inaccurate when the politician does not dodge,
but ingroups are more accurate when the politician does not dodge while outgroups are more accurate when the politician dodges.

**Participant Pool**

Another limitation in this study—which provides opportunities for future research—is with my partisan subject pool. I only recruited participants who identified as “pure” Republicans or Democrats. I did not include “leaners” or “weak” party affiliates. I had two reasons for this decision. First, I was testing TDT’s assertion that the truth bias would be most evident with salient ingroups. I wanted participants firmly entrenched in their partisanship, to examine whether they trust their ingroup and disbelieve the outgroup in a dodge detection setting, as SIT would posit. Accordingly this dissertation presents the first test of TDT’s hypothesis about salient ingroups being most susceptible to the truth bias and ingroup deception. Second, and similarly, prior research of partisan passions reports that when “leaners” and “weak” PID is included in polling and surveys then the expected effects of polarized opinions disappear (Fiorina et al., 2011). The researcher is essentially adding people to groups who—by their own initial admission—said they did not identify. My recruitment delineation may be a limitation from a generalizability standpoint. The public’s impressions of a politician’s deceptiveness includes Independents and those who are not “pure” partisans. Future research may test whether the findings of this dissertation extend to Independents and others less fervently partisan. Absent identity, people might be more observant in attending to the politician’s message and more accurate than those who are partisans relying on their PID bias to
discern whether a politician’s utterances are honest or dishonest. In a setting such as mine where a theoretical driver of people’s impressions should have been the irrelevant PID cue—because it was not actually a different politician giving different ideological answers but rather one of the variables was merely whether the screen said he was a Democrat or Republican—my dissertation’s participants may have exhibited less accuracy than the general population including “swing” voters who supposedly make their decisions on case-by-case bases. If future participants in a similar study are nonpartisans who do not ardently vote or align with a party then perhaps they are cynical and distrusting of “all” politicians.

Future work which does not filter out nonpartisans may find that voters tend to see dodging practically everywhere. Or if nonpartisans are disengaged from politics and uninformed on most routine political issues then they might be too confused by “noise” in the interview and assume all responses are adequate answers. Low-information voters lack understanding of issues so they might be particularly susceptible to relying on superficial appearances of Grician cooperation and Levinson informativeness. Results might indicate rather frightening degrees of truth bias allowing politicians to flagrantly dodge questions to epic degrees which more scrutinizing partisan voters would have noticed.

**Contributing Exposure Factors**

Another limitation and future direction considers other real-world factors affecting people’s biased perceptions. Participants encountered one type of exposure to a
political event in which it was incidental—akin to watching a live televised interview or a political debate—where people must make judgements on their own, removed from other naturally occurring forms of influence from the media. But there is another type of exposure which Lemert, Elliott, Bernstein, Rosenberg, and Nestvold (1991) call “news verdicts.” People derive their impressions of a political event from media influence emphasizing their own views on what transpired. Lemert et al. focus on debate contexts where live viewership and post-debate media coverage can give vastly different perspectives of what transpired and the emphases of focus. But the same effect can arise with media repackaging news interviews and giving their own “spin.” For example, Yahoo! News excerpted a live televised interview from Good Morning America and posted the clip online with the headline “HHS Secretary Tom Price dodges on whether new health care plan is guaranteed to cover all Americans” (Hayden, 2017). The interviewer did not overtly accuse Price of dodging a question. Price did not say he was dodging any questions. And all of his responses would be coded as on-topic, based on prior operationalizations (e.g., Clementson, 2016b; Clementson & Eveland, 2016). Someone in the media made a subjective judgment that Price dodged. Presumably viewers of the interview exposed to that headline would be impacted by the news verdict and probably report that they too perceived dodging whereas if they had watched the interview live they may not have judged for themselves that dodging transpired.

No one primed, warned, or recommended this clip exposure for viewers in my dissertation. No “teaser” or advance title previewed the interview before it was presented to participants. (Obviously the methodological choice was necessary for isolating the
effect of the manipulation.) The implications may be different if the interview encountered a media verdict rather than incidental exposure similar to watching a live event. Other forms of media verdicts can also arise these days, such as in social media. Social media framing can shape people’s opinions of news events (Hamdy & Gomaa, 2012). Oftentimes people are sent to web clips by some referring agent. Their social media newsfeed or a contact via word-of-mouth or e-mail might recommend the viewing. Before their exposure to such an interview, people may have been shown a “clickbait” headline. Or they may have been referred from a link in a campaign e-mail, such as “Watch Our Next Congressman Discuss His Plan for the Future in this Interview.” Even prior to live viewing, audiences can be primed by commentators of what to expect to see. For example, in pre-debate coverage journalists speculate about what particular politicians may say or do to win strategic points in style or rhetoric.

The present findings are probably more relevant to incidental exposure to live events such as debates, wide-ranging sit-down interviews, or full press conferences. If I had included a seemingly-realistic teaser or title appearing to be a social tie recommending the clip, or a headline announcing that the politician acts a certain way, such inclusion may have dramatically altered perceptions. For example, a study on innuendo in news headlines indicated that a headline will influence people’s perceptions of a news item even if the content of the report differs from a suggestive headline (Wegner, Coulton, & Wenzlaff, 1985). A disqualifying headline such as “Watch the Politician Answer All the Questions and Not Dodge Them” would also probably—ironically—cause people to spot dodging (Wegner, 1984). Rogers and Norton (2011) ran
an experiment where—before exposure—they directed participants to pay attention to whether the politician dodges. Results indicated that participants complied. Rogers and Norton opined that telling people to watch for dodging will make them better dodge detectors. Alas the researchers did not test people’s observations of the politician’s response, so the literature lacks insight into whether telling someone to carefully attend to the question-answer sequences looking for dodging actually works. Other deception detection experiments have revealed that telling participants before exposure that the speaker may be lying will cause them to report seeing more lying (McCornack & Levine, 1990). But it did not lead to increased accuracy rates. Increased suspicion does not positively correlate with increased accuracy in lie detection (ibid). The extent to which priming suspicion leads to higher accuracy in deception detection seems too context- and relationship-specific for researchers to yet assert that one form of state or personality trait suspicion leads to accuracy.

Future research could extend this study by incorporating conditions in which the journalist spots the dodge. In this study he let the egregious off-topic response go unannounced to the audience. Journalists lament that power dynamics in news interviews have shifted to their interviewees (Ekström & Fitzgerald, 2014). A report in the *Columbia Journalism Review (CJR)* indicates journalists fight a losing battle trying to get answers out of interviewees who are coached by public relations strategists to dodge questions (Lieberman, 2004). Reporters sometimes “call out” dodges when they happen. A takeaway from this dissertation indeed was that journalists probably should call out dodges. Otherwise half of their audience probably will not notice. Lieberman (2004) of
the CJR wondered whether a journalist launching an allegation of evasion would “cause
the viewer to question the guest’s credibility” (p. 43). Or perhaps it could “splash” on the
journalist too and impede both interactants’ credibility. The net result could be turning
viewers off from politics even more than they probably are.

Future research should address these dynamics of an interviewer calling out a
dodger. To launch an allegation of evasion is called a “challenge” in Goffman’s (1955)
theorizing on threats to face. It would also qualify as a bald-on-record face-threatening
act in Brown and Levinson’s (1978) theorizing on politeness. The journalist would be
“altercasting” the politician as untrustworthy (Weinstein & Deutschberger, 1963)
according to the altercasting theory of source credibility (Pratkanis & Gliner, 2004). The
next move, according to Goffman (1955), would be for both people to try to maintain
their faces. Goffman says the ideal correction is a response that is smoothly incorporated
into the flow. The alleged offender shows respect for the rules of conduct without
threatening the accuser’s face. Goffman (1955) calls this full process the standard
corrective cycle.

This dissertation found that people are significantly better at accurately detecting
no-dodging. Granted, the politician gave a flagrantly off-topic answer which went
unchallenged, and one would think that in a real interview an overt deflection would be
called out by the interviewer. Yet, a majority of the participants in this study who were
exposed to a dodge had it escape their detection. Journalists may have the same truth bias
that is human nature as exhibited in decades of experiments and evident in this study with
partisan voters exposed to a flagrant deflection. Future work could test this with ready-to-
Prefacing exposure by telling participants “Watch for Dodging!” or some such realistic online referent could prove a lucrative future study building from my findings. Participants could be randomly assigned to the same interview except the clip has different headlines. A control group would essentially be my study’s stimulus whereby participants encountered incidental exposure sans any leading inferences and were expected to detect deception influenced by the content of the politician’s message and PID. People may see dodging where it did not occur if the headline said so. People’s impressions of whether or not a politician dodged could solely depend on whether the exposure was preceded by a stranger telling them what to expect. Future research may find that in this age of news exposure largely referred by social ties instead of people reading through a newspaper on their own or watching live news broadcasts, the headline or teaser referring viewers to click the link carries the lion’s share of influence. Perhaps people are predisposed to suspect deception—or, conversely, presume veracity—before a politician begins speaking, with the power of influence held by opinion leaders, like Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) in Web 2.0, with little attention to the content of the message. Left alone to appraise veracity with no other cues except a party label in a routine political interview, the truth bias largely prevails, according to the present findings. This may indicate—and future studies would need to test such a possibility—the pervasive perceptions that politicians “never” answer questions and “always” dodge is based on
stereotypical illusory correlations (Hamilton & Rose, 1980) uncharacteristic of people’s actual processing of politicians answering questions.

Speaking of real-world web clips that vary in presentation from this dissertation’s stimulus, online news also often includes exposure to a comment section below the news item. People’s perceptions of a news interview could be affected by the posts of strangers. Most online news consumers report that they read user-generated comments (Diakopoulos & Naaman, 2011). According to Shi, Messaris, and Cappella (2014), “It is no longer possible to consider the influence of news or other messages in the public information environment apart from the comments which follow them” (p. 988). The social identification deindividuation (SIDE) model posits that in computer-mediated communication people conform their behavior to perceived norms endorsed by others (Postmes, Spears, & Lea, 1998). Accumulating research reveals that people tend to express agreement with viewpoints in comment sections (Lee, 2012; Lee & Jang, 2010). Experiments have shown that strangers’ comments below a web news item can: influence people’s attributions of crime in news reports (Lee, Kim, & Cho, 2016), cause people to perceive media bias (Houston, Hansen, & Nisbett, 2011), and affect attribution of responsibility in a scandal (Von Sikorski & Hänelt, 2016).

In the present randomized experiment the stimulus featured no other influences on people’s perceptions of the news interview beyond the content of the clip itself. Future research will probably reveal that comment sections below a web clip affect observers’ perceptions of whether a politician dodged questions. Experimental manipulations can vary the extent to which a single viewpoint is presented—such as a stream of comments
that all accuse the politician of dodging or all defend the politician against an antagonistic line of questioning—or a mix of comments offering diverse considerations of the interview. Prior research of the effects of comment sections has tended to find that mixed comments serve the same function as a control group without comments (e.g., Houston, Hansen, & Nisbett, 2011; Von Sikorski & Hänelt, 2016). Furthermore, studies with a control group sans a comment section can find that people’s reactions are mixed as they may express attitudes, opinions, or attributions beyond those exposed to a comment section that uniformly expressed one viewpoint (e.g., Lee, Kim, & Cho, 2016; Shi, Messaris, & Cappella, 2014).

**Survey Specifications**

I acknowledge that asking people immediately after exposure to an artificial stimulus whether a politician dodged any questions may lack ecological validity in terms of accurately reflecting people’s memory and comprehension of a suspicious trigger event. Political communication researchers, political scientists, campaign operatives, and pollsters grapple with trying to tap the effects of any given political message on people’s behavior. For example, those who study negative attack ads debate the sleeper effect (Lariscey & Tinkham, 1999). Delaying participants’ recall of a political message can result in finding that negative messages are more memorable while positive or defensive messages are more likely to be forgotten (ibid). Set to my context of a political interview in which a politician either dodged or did not dodge, the dodge might be more memorable to viewers. But no-dodges might also turn into false memories of dodges. A person could
forget the substance of the interview and rely on stereotypes of politicians. Thus when asked whether the politician dodged the person might guess in the affirmative. Future research may explore how the survey flow impacts results on people’s detection of dodging. The immediacy or recency of my survey items may lack realism. My study had no distractor items or time lapse from the news interview to asking participants to make a judgment on whether or not the politician dodged. There may also be a stronger ingroup/outgroup effect over time—presuming they remember the politician’s PID. The implications of waiting could be that partisan voters revert back to recalling the politician’s PID and then make their judgments in accordance with trusting or distrusting the politician à la SIT’s ingroup favoritism and outgroup distrust plus TDT’s salient ingroup truth bias.

In the opening section of this dissertation I stated that a premise of this study was that partisans would disagree on the felicity conditions of a politician’s illocutionary speech act in the context of a conventional news interview procedure. I made this prediction because partisans should apply different sincerity conditions on the basis of the speaker’s PID. I did not directly measure whether people considered the politician felicitous or infelicitous, nor whether they considered him sincere, appropriate, or any other subjective perception. However, we may extrapolate that partisan ingroup perceptions tended to be more biased toward the truth than outgroup perceptions gave the benefit of the doubt to veracity. Yet even the outgroup still tended to say that the politician did not dodge any questions. He must have been complying with the conversational norms in the eyes of the audience. Audience members must have thought
normal rules of the exchange were observed. Future work might include measures operationalizing felicity conditions to tap the extent of people’s subjective impressions of the politician’s helpfulness providing answers.

The findings suggest that a Democrat or Republican observed by likeminded or opposing partisan voters can dodge a journalist’s question with an off-topic response and a meaningful proportion of voters will presume he did not deceptively dodge. Future work may tease apart distinctions in how much the politician would need to appear comporting with Grice’s maxims and cooperative principle in order to continue skirting detection. Such future experimentation might also test differences with the journalist correctly detecting dodging (i.e., accusing the politician of dodging when indeed he went off-topic) and incorrectly (i.e., accusing the politician of dodging when he did not dodge). Just as politicians appear granted leeway to go off-topic and retain perceptions of not-dodging, perhaps journalists can also exploit the truth bias and accuse politicians of evasion whether or not the politician dodged, and audiences take the journalist’s word for it. Future work could measure the extent to which participants thought the politician comported with each of the four Gricean maxims, using the 16-item scale recommended by McCornack et al. (1992, p. 29).

Accuracy

This study went to reasonably extensive lengths to test people’s judgments of a politician responding to questions. I employed elements to depict a real news interview. I used registered voters in the state of Ohio for my participants. And the results appeared to
affirm theoretical predictions from truth-default theory and social identity theory—particularly as the truth bias was concerned. However, I acknowledge a theoretical deficiency in “accuracy” which was the dependent variable for two hypotheses. I assigned the label of accuracy to those who reported that the politician did not dodge when all his answers were actually on-topic and those who reported that the politician did dodge when he answered a question about the economy and jobs by talking about his plan for peace in the Middle East. Such a label seems reasonable. Readers would probably agree that it is an error to say “No the politician did not dodge any questions” when he talked about the Middle East upon being asked about his plan for jobs and the economy. However, I am an experimental researcher. I exposed people—who knew they were participants in a study—to stimuli in an artificial setting. Although their judgments may have been accurate or inaccurate based on my criteria, I cannot assert that seemingly inaccurate judgments were necessarily mistakes. In his experimental work, psychologist David Funder (1987) draws philosophical distinctions between theoretical errors and practical “real world” mistakes. According to Funder, an error is an incorrect judgment from an artificial stimulus in a laboratory experiment in which the judgment deviates from an ideal normative model. But a mistake concerns the real world. Mistakes are misjudgments of stimuli in real life. Just because I consider their inaccurate appraisal to be an error does not mean their thought process was mistaken (Funder, 1987). Errors are relatively easy to detect from an experimentalist’s standpoint. Scientists can define errors literally based on their concrete stimuli. However, how are people to agree on mistakes if they involve social judgments in the real world?
People draw upon their social situations and experiences, which would be taken into account to discern what qualifies as a mistake. If one considers the context of a person’s lived experiences then perhaps participants’ reactions to artificial stimuli are actually reasonable, logical, and accurate. According to Funder (1987) in an essay about psychologists experimenting with people’s social judgments and meting out declarations of error, “The same judgment that is wrong in relation to a laboratory stimulus, taken literally, may be right in terms of a wider, more broadly defined social context, and reflect processes that lead to accurate judgments under ordinary circumstances” (p. 76). Lab subjects making social judgments in contrived, artificial settings do not necessarily equate to “external validity or accuracy” (p. 77, emphasis original). People can make perceptual errors from artificial stimuli which indicate accuracy—not mistakes—in situation-based, real life outside the lab (Gregory, 1968).

The analogy I am making here from psychological philosophizing to this dissertation concerns partisan voters having particular perceptions of a politician in my artificial experiment who I labeled “wrong” or “inaccurate” in their perceptions who might outside the lab in most situations make correct judgments of dodging. Voters choose their party affiliation because it makes the complex and confusing world of politics easier to comprehend. The partisans in my experiment may have exhibited judgments in their perception and detection of dodging which I labeled inaccurate but actually may manifest as accurate perception and detection of dodging for their real-world understanding of political messages in their everyday situations. Any number of impressionistic interpretations drawn from speech act theory and felicity conditions could
also help explain the discrepancies. It is possible that voters who I labeled as making inaccurate judgments of perceiving and detecting dodges may not necessarily exhibit mistakes in their daily walks of life as they appraise partisan politicians.

Partisans may draw from any number of experiential and personally salient considerations when they appraise whether or not a politician dodged a question. In the review of the literature concerning biased processing I discussed central and peripheral cues. I noted that attending to the content of a politician’s message requires effortful central processing. I also noted that assumptions about a politician based on the politician’s PID aligning or diverging from one’s own PID is routed through automatic peripheral processing. I then reported whether or not participants’ judgments were accurate and theoretically derived the extent to which TDT’s truth bias and SIT’s ingroup/outgroup bias surfaced. However some caution is in order before assigning effortful central vs. superficial peripheral linkages to people’s accurate vs. inaccurate observations. As noted by Kruglanski (1992), accurate and inaccurate judgments can both result from the same general process. One single judgmental process might produce suboptimal heuristics and also normatively ideal modes of judgment. For example, the “representativeness heuristic” implies that people’s judgments are based on less-effortful considerations, such as recency or giving cognitive weight to salient anchors, instead of fully contemplative base-rates. But what if people’s considerations—including recency and salient anchors—are representative of an exhaustive-information thought process based on a series of past experiential knowledge-acquiring evaluations? People’s presumption of truth is hardly a bad belief state. Most speakers tell the truth most of the
time (Levine, 2014b). That is, humanity’s truth default in our reception of messages matches the real world in speakers’ encoded messages.

Based on the PLM, people are hardly better than chance in laboratory lie detection studies that typically feature 50% true and 50% lie stimuli because—barring your social ties being sociopaths—exposure to human messages that are 50% lies bares no relation to reality. Our truth default is well suited to reality because most of the time people are not lying to us. It serves a good judgmental process to presume veracity in the real world to produce accuracy in appraising others’ messages. Similarly, most politicians give on-topic responses—at least based on content analyses of U.S. presidential debates and press conferences (Clementson & Eveland, 2016). In press conferences, presidential responses nearly always (97%) adhered to the topic from the journalist’s question at least in part (p. 419). Similarly, in presidential debates the contenders addressed the same topic of the question in 97.5% of their answers (p. 422). Although more extensive content analyses have yet to be tackled, it seems reasonable to assert that real-world dodging by politicians occurs less than half the time in interviews. This dissertation randomly assigned half of the participants to 100% on-topic responses and half to 25% off-topic, 75% on-topic. Those who used the truth bias heuristic would thus be accurate in the real world whether or not my dissertation labeled them accurate or inaccurate in this experimental setting. People’s presumption of truth found in this study may be well suited to real-world political observations.

This dissertation did not test the PLM although as mentioned above I found preliminary support in the findings for extensions of the model. On a basic theoretical
level, this study revealed support for the premise of the PLM. People seemed significantly more likely to be accurate in their deception detection when there was less deception. The PLM is officially tested by manipulating the truth-to-lie ratios people are exposed to in experimental stimuli and then comparing people’s accuracy rates relative to the ratio in the stimuli. For example, if I wanted to test the PLM in this context of politicians dodging questions I would have randomly exposed participants to the same news interview except with more versions manipulating whether the politician gives dodges to all four questions, two out of four of the questions, and the two versions I used herein with the politician giving zero dodges and one dodge.

Future research should continue to illuminate partisans’ criteria for making their judgments. Various untapped considerations meaningfully concern them. Under anyone’s particular motivations he or she might be “accurate” in arriving at judgments. Perhaps people have put painstaking effort into considering relevant, rational, logical information to formulate their seemingly-snap judgments. It seems a standard assumption by researchers running lab experiments concerning people’s judgments of others that heuristics produce errors (Funder, 1995). But this assumption is itself an error and a mistake. Funder’s (1995) Realistic Accuracy Model (RAM) strives to bring attention to people’s social judgments being far more than accurate or inaccurate based on artificial experimental stimuli. The RAM posits (1) “the accuracy of personality judgment is an extremely complex matter” and (2) accuracy should consider the person being judged and not only the person judging (Funder, 1995, p. 653). “Accuracy in personality judgment is
a joint product of the attributes and behavior of the target as well as of the observation and perspicacity of the judge” (ibid).

Future research should thus attempt to tap the attributes and behavior of the politician in the news interview which trigger observers’ assertions that the politician dodged or did not dodge. Maybe people are using correct routes of central processing but then arriving at inaccurate appraisals. Or maybe people who were accurately perceiving and detecting dodging were actually using incorrect cues to get there. Funder’s (1995) RAM also is concerned with “what goes on within the head of each judge” (p. 666). Researchers meting out rulings on what was an accurate judgment and what was inaccurate should be just as concerned with the judge’s criteria in making their evaluations as the attributes of the target stimulus person.

As I mentioned earlier, a follow-up study could apply these features of the RAM to my work. Participants could be exposed to the same stimuli except the researcher could take a qualitative approach in pausing each question-response response for participants to offer their open-ended comments on whether the politician dodged in that given sequence and what observations led them to that judgment. Observers might notice things about the politician that contributed to judgments of dodging or no-dodging which would lead to accurate appraisals in their real-world experiences but were not accounted for in this dissertation.

Future research should also attempt to tap into other more realistic depictions of political interviews in people’s everyday lives. To call a social judgment “accurate” should be reflected correctly in reality based on external evidence. Funder’s (1995) RAM
points to the necessity of “real people in realistic settings” affirming judgments in lab-based artificial settings (p. 656). Judges should be able to function in their own social environment for investigators to ascribe accuracy or inaccuracy to participants’ natural judgments. When people are exposed to political interviews they may process their thoughts of whether or not a politician dodged a question in different ways than what was displayed from this experiment. To do any less than aspire for realistic insight into how people actually process a political interview would be dodging a phenomenal empirical question.

Testing Accuracy via Signal Detection Theory

Another way of distinguishing between an experimental model of “accuracy” and a real-world exploration is that we do not know whether participants’ judgments were based on accurate information or “noise.” People may appear to be better at perceiving dodging under particular circumstances. But perceptions and accuracy are two different things. Put another way, it is one thing for one group of participants to report seeing “something” more than another group saw it, but quite a different question whether the group correctly saw a square (Dienes & Seth, 2010).

As just mentioned, perceptions are different from accuracy. One is perceptual and wholly subjective. The other bespeaks precision. In terms of signal detection theory (Swets, 1959) applied to deception detection, the distinction is similar to discrimination versus a criterion setting (Forgas & East, 2008). Discrimination involves correctly observing instances of deception versus no-deception. Criterion setting involves spotting
deception as it occurs but not as a function of precision but rather from, for example, being more skeptical of a political message.

The question remains as to whether people can discriminate accurately between a politician’s on- and off-topic responses. Most deception detection studies test accuracy. The most common experiment involves exposing participants to messages which are either a truth or a lie and then assessing those judgments as being either accurate or inaccurate. Extending the present findings to future research appraising both perceptions and accuracy would help illuminate a linkage that has received scant attention in the deception detection literature (Forgas & East, 2008).

Signal detection theory describes the cognitive processing when a person tries to discern whether a stimulus is present amidst “noise” in a confusing situation. In this dissertation, the situation involves politics, which most people consider confusing (Bennett, 1997). The presence or absence of a dodge would be the signal to be detected. The discernment of the signal amidst noise is the ability to accurately judge whether the politician dodged or did not dodge during an interview replete with plenty of other stimuli that could distract observers’ attention.

In the parlance of signal detection theory, when people report whether or not they detected a signal there are four resultant options: hits, misses, false alarms, and correct rejections. A hit would be a participant reporting that the politician dodged a question and the participant’s observation was indeed accurate. A miss would be reporting there was no dodge but alas there actually was a dodge. A false alarm would be reporting the
politician dodged but he actually did not dodge. And a correct rejection would be reporting there was no dodge and indeed there was no dodge.

In the below matrix each of the four cells presents a judgment an observer could make of a political interview. The participant reports whether or not a signal (i.e., dodge) was present and accuracy can be assessed. This study’s data set can be filled into the cells as follows in Figure 11.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Politician actually did dodge</th>
<th>Observer reports that the politician dodged</th>
<th>Observer reports that the politician did not dodge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Politician actually did not dodge</td>
<td>Hit 22.8%</td>
<td>Miss 25.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>False Alarm 14.9%</td>
<td>Correct Rejection 36.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 11. Dodge detection of \( n = 618 \) in terms of signal detection theory

This dissertation’s participants appeared best at “correct rejections”—reporting that the politician did not dodge when indeed the politician did not dodge. When the politician did dodge, there were more misses than hits. And as indicated earlier in the chi-square and odds ratio analyses for Hypothesis 3, the difference was statistically significant. Participants seemed more apt to report that the politician did not dodge any questions, and were particularly accurate at saying so when the politician did not actually dodge any questions. Future research may draw upon signal detection theory (Swets, 1959) to extend “hits” and “misses” to perceptions of deception amidst “noise” in a political interview.

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Conclusion

This dissertation contributes to our understanding of the perils of partisan bias and deception in politics. I explored people’s perception and detection of a politician dodging a journalist’s question. Using my own stimuli of a news interview, Democratic and Republican voters watched a politician labeled as either a Democrat or Republican give all on-topic responses or dodge a question flagrantly off-topic. I tested three assertions of truth-default theory (TDT). In support of TDT I found that (1) salient ingroup members are susceptible to missing a dodge, and (2) the truth bias trumps partisan bias as outgroup members seem to believe the politician more than suspect him of deception. Contrary to TDT, (3) the suspicious trigger event of a political interview bows to people’s truth bias. Yet, in line with social identity theory (SIT), outgroup members perceive more dodging than ingroup members—even if both contingents tend toward the truth bias.

People are not as bad at detecting dodging as some may fear. Audience members spotted more dodging—or “hits,” in the parlance of signal detection theory—when dodging occurred than when it did not, and made more “correct rejections” when the politician did not dodge than when he did. I combined TDT and SIT finding support for their linkage. People’s accuracy in detecting dodges and non-dodges is moderated by whether the politician is from their ingroup or outgroup. A dodge is more likely to be detected by outgroup members while no-dodging is more likely to be detected by ingroup members.
In addition to practical ramification for deceptive politicians—and the need for journalists to call them out—theoretical implications arise. People’s perceptions beyond the syntactical content of the interview suggest—in line with speech act theory—observers derive impressions of a politician’s answers as informative and responsive illocutionary acts in a sincere felicity condition. The influence of the truth bias points to the power of Grice’s (1989) theory of conversational implicature. Politicians seem able to thwart dodge detection if they appear to comply with maxims of cooperation. Fortunately, though, most people tell the truth most of the time. This includes politicians, based on content analyses (Clementson & Eveland, 2016). Humanity’s truth bias overriding partisan bias in the real world of politics may be a healthy mental default.
References


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REPORTER: “Hello, and welcome. I’m Randy Ludlow, senior political reporter for the 
*Columbus Dispatch.*”

“We are honored to be joined today by [name blinded], a candidate for the U.S. House of 
Representatives. We thank him for joining us, to answer some questions about issues 
important in this campaign for the House. Welcome.”

POLITICIAN: “Thank you for having me.”

REPORTER: “I’d like to ask you about the environment. What is your stance on such 
key issues as our dependence on oil, renewable energy, and the continued use and 
depletion of our coal resources?”

POLITICIAN: “Sure, well I have a plan for cleaning up the environment and protecting
our natural resources. Our nation has increased oil production to the highest levels in 16
years. Natural gas production is the highest it’s been in decades. We have seen increases
in coal production and coal employment. But we can’t just produce traditional sources of
energy. We’ve also got to look to the future. That’s why we need to double fuel
efficiency standards on cars. We ought to double energy production from sources like
wind and solar, and as well as biofuels.”

REPORTER: “I would like next to inquire about jobs. Our economy has strengthened
across certain sectors, but employment is not near where it needs to be. For example, the
manufacturing industry continues to sustain deep cuts and layoffs. What is your plan to bolster the workforce and create jobs?”

POLITICIAN:

*********************************

***ON-TOPICT VERSION***

“I was just at a manufacturing facility, where some twelve hundred people lost their jobs. Yes, I agree that we need to bring back manufacturing to America. This is about bringing back good jobs for the middle class Americans. And Randy, I want you to know, and your newspaper to know, that’s what I’m going to do. I will work to create incentives to start growing jobs again in this country.”

***OFF-TOPICT VERSION***

“I’ve got a strategy for the Middle East. And let me say that our nation now needs to speak with one voice during this time, to diffuse tensions. Look, we’re going to face some serious new challenges, and as your Congressman I have a plan to deal with the Middle East.”

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REPORTER: “Let me ask you about taxes. As you run for the U.S. House, what is your tax plan? And what would you specifically do to benefit middle-income Americans?”

POLITICIAN: “My view is that we ought to provide tax relief to people in the middle class. As you know, Randy, and as has been reported in your paper, the people who are
having a hard time right now are indeed middle-income Americans. Folks in our state have seen their income go down by forty-three hundred dollars a year. I believe that the economy works best when middle-class families are getting tax breaks so that they’ve got some money in their pockets.”

REPORTER: “Where do you stand on gun control? Do you favor new restrictions or do you believe our current climate we handle gun ownership responsibly?”

POLITICIAN: “I believe law-abiding citizens ought to be able to own a gun. I believe in background checks to make sure that guns don’t get in the hands of people that shouldn’t have them. The best way to protect our citizens from guns is to prosecute those who commit crimes with guns. And I am a strong supporter of the Second Amendment.”

REPORTER: “That concludes our interview. We thank [name blinded], candidate for the U.S. House of Representatives, for being here and taking our questions.”

“Thank you.”

POLITICIAN: “Thank you Randy, I appreciate you having me.”

REPORTER: “From the Columbus Dispatch, I am Randy Ludlow. Thank you for joining us.”