

Running Head: POLITICAL LIES

Who Sees Which Political Lies as More Acceptable and Why:  
A New Look at In-Group Loyalty and Morality

**Author Note**

Interested readers can find data and materials from all studies reported below  
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### Abstract

Many politicians—even those who occupy some of the most powerful offices in the world—lie. Six studies ( $N_{\text{Total}} = 9,449$ ) examined how conservative and liberal Americans responded to media reports of politicians' lies. Even accounting for partisan biases in how much participants dismissed such reports as fake news and assumed that such lies were unintentional, we consistently observed partisan leniency in how much lies were seen as justifiable: Republicans and Democrats alike saw their own party's lies as more acceptable (Studies 1-5). This leniency did not reflect unconditional in-group favoritism. Instead, such leniency was strongest for policy lies—those meant to advance a party's explicit agenda—as opposed to personal lies about a politician's past (Studies 2-3) or electoral lies that strayed from parties' explicit goals by aiming to disenfranchise legally eligible voters (Study 5). We distinguished among four mechanistic accounts and found clear support for one that implicated the role of perceived trust (Study 3). Although lies can undermine general trustworthiness, policy lies in particular signal partisan trustworthiness (Studies 4-6)—the belief that a politician can be trusted by their own political side and not by another. For likeminded partisans, such partisan trustworthiness predicted not only the perceived acceptability of lies, but also perceptions of the politician as a more prototypically moral actor, even outside of the political sphere. Discussion focuses on the implications of these findings for the prevalence of lying in politics, political polarization, and a new understanding of the role of loyalty in moral judgment.

*Keywords:* lying, politics, trust, moral character, social media, fake news, loyalty

### Who Gives Which Political Lies a Pass and Why:

#### A New Look at In-Group Loyalty and Morality

In 2016, the Oxford Dictionary selected the phrase “post-truth politics” as its word of the year (O. Dictionary, 2016). Although politicians may be lying to an increasing degree (Oborne, 2014), the joke “How do you know a politician is lying? His lips are moving,” dates to at least the 1950s. It would seem the phenomenon is not completely new. What is notable is that neither a watchful media nor the informational empowerment afforded by the digital age has kept liars out of the highest office(s) in the land (Holan, 2015; Kessler & Kelly, 2018). Why does exposing liars not elicit career-killing outrage?

One answer may be Collins Dictionary’s 2017 word of the year: “fake news” (C. Dictionary, 2017). In the leadup to the 2016 U.S. presidential election, most Americans both saw and believed intentionally inaccurate news stories (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). And as fake news spreads and is thus seen repeatedly, it is more likely to be believed (Pennycook, Cannon, & Rand, 2018), in particular by those for whom such stories may help create a sense of personal control over an often chaotic and unpredictable political world (Whitson, Kim, Wang, Menon, & Webster, 2019). President Donald Trump frequently weaponized this phrase in an effort to cast doubt on an often-skeptical media. Liars may thus remain in power if the electorate distrusts the sources trying to hold these fibbers accountable. A second possibility is that voters may give lying politicians the benefit of the doubt, assuming that they do not mean to stretch the truth. Intentionality is typically a key precondition for culpability (Cushman, 2008; Malle, Knobe, & Nelson, 2007; Shaver, 1985; Weiner, 1995; Young & Saxe, 2011).

These two strategies—denying a lie, or at least denying its intentionality—presume that there is something unacceptable to address. After all, calling someone a “Liar!” is a reproach that

typically does not need the follow-up “and that is a bad thing...” This presumption is why we have a special qualifier for acceptable, “white” lies (Erat & Gneezy, 2012). But in this paper, we focus on a third way that lies are given a relative pass—by tempering assessments of how much they are actually unacceptable.

Most simply, we might expect the hyperpolarization in American politics to find its way into evaluations of politicians’ lies. Group memberships guide people’s sense of self (Brewer, 1979; Tajfel & Turner, 1979.) Such social identities influence judgments of the seriousness of their own group members’ misdeeds (Dunbar et al., 2016.) People discount or rationalize the unethical actions of other members of their group (Valdesolo & DeSteno, 2007), particularly when group memberships are salient (Bernhard, Fehr, & Fishbacher, 2006).

Political partisanship has been conceptualized as a core social identity (Green et al., 2004; Mason, 2015). And indeed, partisanship has been shown to color perceptions of fellow political in-group members. Democrats and Republicans are more likely to believe false reports that are beneficial to their own political group (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017), especially when they can convince themselves that those statements *could* have been true even when they are clearly not (Effron, 2018). These precedents suggest that partisan loyalty likely affects partisans’ assessments of whether accused liars are indeed guilty as charged, and such charitable assessments may extend to determinations that lies are acceptable (independent of their perceived intentionality).

Although we do believe that such in-group loyalty colors evaluations of lies, we suggest that this simple hypothesis misses the reason that partisans may be relatively sympathetic to liars. And, as a result, a basic appeal to in-group favoritism may simultaneously overestimate (by suggesting that partisan leniency is extended to all misdeeds or lies committed by political in-

group members) and underestimate the possible scope of this partisan leniency (by seeing such effects as commentaries on specific politically relevant actions instead of as signals of broader, non-political moral character). Our analysis relies on the convergence of two ideas. First, we lean on a recently articulated person-centered approach to morality (Uhlmann, Pizarro, & Diermeier, 2015). People care about morally relevant actions because of what they signal about moral character (Landy & Uhlmann, 2018)—in particular, whether someone will make a good social partner (Heiphetz, Strohminger, & Young, 2017; Helzer & Critcher, 2018). Central to such considerations is who can be trusted (Everett, Pizarro, & Crockett, 2016).

Second, and building on this point, we consider that lies vary in what truth they misrepresent, and thus what they signal about the critical quality of trustworthiness. This analysis begins with a consideration of the social function of trust. More generally, moral systems are adaptive because they encourage social harmony (Tepe & Aydinli-Karakulak, 2019) and cooperation (Delton & Krasnow, 2015). And it is trust within social groups, in particular, that permits cooperation (Tomasello, Melis, Tennie, Wyman, & Herrmann, 2012). Because groups reap the benefits of their size through collective action, the ability to trust fellow group members as loyal to the mission of a group (and not merely their own personal agenda) is a key condition for group survival (Misch, Over, & Carpenter, 2014). This logic foreshadows that those who take a functional approach to morality—seeing it as a system of rules that facilitate the healthy and smooth functioning of group life (Haidt, 2008)—identify in-group loyalty as one of the major foundations of morality (Haidt & Graham, 2007). Indeed, loyalty itself is among a broad set of values that people embrace (Shweder, Much, Mahapatra, & Park, 1997), leading it to also be a key feature of Fiske and colleagues' relational approach to morality (Fiske, 1991; Fiske & Haslam, 2005; Rai & Fiske, 2011).

People signal their loyalty to a group when they take actions that show that they will help to advance the cause and purpose of a group even at a cost to the self or another member of the group (Crone & Laham, 2015). The moral worth of such team players is appreciated quite early in the developmental process. In one study, children of four and five years of age saw those who maintained membership on a losing team (instead of defecting last-minute to the winning team) as more moral people (Misch et al., 2014). Reflecting such social evaluations, the children indicated they would be more willing to place their pet hamster in the care of these loyal losers (compared to the disloyal, team-switching winners)—a meaningful marker of trust for these young participants. And although going down with the ship may seem selflessly commendable, loyalty can also lead people to compromise other moral concerns (e.g., fairness) to engage in cronyism, nepotism, and other morally questionable behaviors (Heilman, Block, & Lucas, 1992; Hildreth, Gino, & Bazerman, 2016; Padgett & Morris, 2000; Thau et al., 2015; Umphress et al., 2010).

In the previous examples, group commitment is demonstrated quite directly, by explicitly sticking with or even favoring one's own group. But in other cases, an individual's degree of loyalty (or disloyalty) to a group is signaled more indirectly. Somewhat ironically, whistleblowers are often disliked by other members of an organization (Cortina & Magley, 2003), for the negative signal of their disloyalty outweighs the fact that they are trying, quite literally, to enhance the morality of the group (McManus, 2019; Waytz et al., 2013). By analogy, to understand what political lies are acceptable, it may be important to understand the nature of those lies and what they reflect about an individual's commitment or loyalty to their own (political) group.

More specifically, we consider how the *content* of people's lies does or does not serve to undermine perceptions of the liars as trustworthy, loyal members of the in-group. Numerous taxonomies have been introduced to differentiate lies by their content, motivation, and acceptability (Kashy & DePaulo, 1996; Lindsfold & Walters, 1983; Seiter, Bruschke, & Bai, 2002). As one example of how such distinctions bear on the current questions, prosocial deception can be seen as ethical (Levine & Schweitzer, 2014) and even breed trust (Levine & Schweitzer, 2015). In politics, what types of lies may not undermine trust—at least among likeminded partisans—and may thus be seen as less unacceptable?

To begin, we introduce a distinction between policy and personal lies. Policy lies express a false premise upon which a policy position could be based. Personal lies make false claims about an individual's own life or actions. When 2016 U.S. presidential candidate Ben Carson said, "Every time we raise the minimum wage, the number of jobless people increases," he told a policy lie (Jacobson, 2015). When Carson also recounted his adolescent involvement in knife fights—part of an evangelical Christian redemption narrative that does not match any contemporaries' recollection of him—or an episode in which he was almost shot while eating at "a Popeye's organization"—a similarly unverified story that was part of an attempt to paint the wealthy neurosurgeon as personally familiar with the challenges of urban life (Gosa, 2017)—he (most likely) told a personal lie (Resnick, 2015). This distinction is important to our analysis because these lies may vary in what they seem to reveal about the liars' trustworthiness or loyalty (at least to their own political team or party), which may explain why likeminded people may be more accepting of some lies than others.

Political parties organize in an effort to elect candidates who, they hope, will enact their party's policy platform. So central is a policy agenda to political identity that people will endorse

contradictory policies because they believe their preferred party backs them (Cohen, 2003).

Although such work is often characterized as reflecting the flimsiness of people's ideologies, this work also reinforces the notion that party loyalty demands policy loyalty. In this sense, policy lies reveal an individual to be a loyal group member who can still be trusted, meaning that such liars may merit less reproach.

In our studies, participants of varied political orientations learn about a Democratic or Republican politician whose public statements have been called out as falsehoods by a fact-checking newspaper story. We then examine whether, when, and why people display partisan leniency: judging lies as more acceptable when they come from politicians of their own stripes.<sup>1</sup> We proceed in six steps:

First, we ask whether partisan disagreements about the acceptability of political lies—if observed—stem not merely from disagreement about what occurred (i.e., that the politician actually did lie and did so intentionally), but also from different subjective evaluations of the same agreed-upon facts. Second, we ask whether these effects apply to all political lies (thereby merely offering confirmation of oft-observed in-group favoritism) or only lies that signal commitment to the political party's explicit agenda. Third, we explore the role of trustworthiness in these results, asking whether policy lies in particular undermine perceptions of trustworthiness more among those of the political out-group than among members of the liar's own party. In so doing, we also test alternative accounts for partisan leniency rooted in motivated reasoning (e.g., concluding that one's own party's politician lied only because all politicians lie) or a naked ends-justify-the-means mentality (e.g., "If it takes a lie to get this bill passed or this congressman reelected, then I'm OK with it..."; Skitka, 2002)

Fourth, we examine the role of trustworthiness more deeply by asking whether there is a



partisan disagreement about whether politicians who lie are generally trustworthy (to Democrats and Republicans alike) or whether partisans actually lean on political liars' apparent partisan trustworthiness in forming divergent moral judgments and evaluations (i.e., that politicians who can be trusted by one's own side but not the other has implications for the politician's moral character, even as evidence outside of the political sphere). Resolving this question has crucial implications for understanding partisan disagreement: Do partisans merely disagree about who is generally trustworthy, or do partisans go further in actually embracing that being selectively trustworthy to the partisan's own group and not the other is an independent cue to morality? Fifth, we recognize that not all group-serving lies advocate the *explicit* goals of one's group, and thus may differ in the extent to which they signal general and partisan trustworthiness. For example, a politician may lie in an effort to undermine a free, democratic process instead of to advance the stated agenda of one's party. As such, we test whether this represents a boundary on which group-serving lies are seen granted partisan leniency. Sixth, we move beyond our examinations of explaining variability in how different people respond to different types of political lies to directly compare the effects of lying versus telling the truth. In so doing, we examine how perceptions of political liars as moral actors may both be tainted (due to the degradation in general trustworthiness they suffer) but also salvaged in the eyes of some (due to the perceptions of partisan trustworthiness they encourage).

### **Studies 1a-1d**

The first set of four studies tests whether people display partisan leniency when evaluating their own partisans' policy lies relating to immigration (Study 1a), the minimum wage (Studies 1b-1c), or school vouchers (Study 1d). Critically, in each study, we also measure participants' beliefs that the statement (identified by the media as a lie) is instead true or that the

politician believed it to be true. Although readers may find what predicts these beliefs to be of interest in its own right, our primary purpose is to use both measures as covariates for our critical analyses. In this way, we test for partisan leniency toward these political lies that cannot simply be explained by partisan leniency in generating these two excuses.

## Method

**Participants and Design.** American participants were recruited from Amazon's Mechanical Turk participant panel ( $N_{1a} = 401$ ;  $N_{1b} = 401$ ;  $N_{1c} = 1,042$ ;  $N_{1d} = 199$ ). Sample sizes for all studies were chosen to maximize potential power given available research funds of the funding lab. Of note, Amazon's Mechanical Turk participant panel has been shown to be a valid panel for conducting research on political ideology and beliefs. Specifically, both liberal and conservative participants on Amazon Mechanical Turk mirror those from more traditional national panels in terms of their demographics, psychological differences, and ideologies (Clifford, Jewell, & Waggoner, 2015).<sup>2</sup> We excluded participants from analyses for two reasons. To begin, we excluded all completions from duplicate IP addresses ( $n_{1a} = 10$ ;  $n_{1b} = 10$ ;  $n_{1c} = 8$ ;  $n_{1d} = 4$ ). This was done to ensure that we did not include participants who may have been attempting to complete the study multiple times via different Amazon Mechanical Turk accounts. Moreover, in each study, two or three memory-based attention checks were included—multiple-choice questions designed to determine whether participants had carefully read and remembered key details from the experimental materials. Participants who incorrectly responded to more than one of these checks were excluded from all further analyses ( $n_{1a} = 27$ ;  $n_{1b} = 34$ ;  $n_{1c} = 89$ ;  $n_{1d} = 22$ ). This left final sample sizes of 364 (Study 1a), 357 (Study 1b), 945 (Study 1c), and 173 (Study 1d).

In each study, participants were randomly assigned to learn about a *Democrat* or a *Republican* who had issued a tweet or a public statement. A media outlet called out the person (almost always a politician) for lying, referenced evidence in support of its claim, and indicated that the person did not reply to requests for comments. Two studies included an additional exploratory condition that had no influence on our effects of interest. We mention these next, but they are detailed only in Appendix A. In Study 1a, the liar was either a politician or an ordinary citizen. In Study 1c, the lie was said to be the basis or not the basis of the politician's own policy belief. We mention these manipulations here so that readers know that the findings below are robust to such variations.

**Procedure.** Although each study focused on a different lie related to one of three distinct policy domains, the basic structure of the experiments was almost identical. Participants first saw what was designed to look like a screen shot of a webpage from *The Albuquerque Journal*, the most widely circulated newspaper in New Mexico. To promote experimental realism, the image displayed not merely the newspaper story but a series of headers, links, and banner ads that online readers are accustomed to seeing (see Appendix B). The article was recently dated and had the title “Stay Informed of The Truth” (Study 1a, 1c) or “Steve Wooley ([*party affiliation*]) Tweets False Information about [*policy issue*]” (Studies 1b, 1d).

Although the evidence calling into question the policy lie's veracity was real, the news story (including the politician) was not. We debriefed participants on these facts at the study's conclusion. The newspaper article began by reporting that Steve Wooley, the leading [*party affiliation*] on the Regulatory and Public Affairs committee in the New Mexico State Legislature<sup>3</sup>, had tweeted or publicly stated supposed facts related to his (depending on party affiliation) support for or opposition to the issue. The article displayed a screenshot of the tweet

(Studies 1a, 1b, and 1d) or quote from a speech (Study 1c), and claimed that non-partisan groups had pointed out the claim was false (see Appendix A for the specific language used in each study). To bolster the charge that Wooley's claim was indeed false, the article always closed by describing that the "calls to Wooley...asking for comments on the charge that Wooley had not been truthful...were not returned."

***Reactions to the politician's lie.*** Following exposure to the newspaper article, participants again read Wooley's tweet or statement and answered three questions on 7-point scales. Each was bounded at -3 and +3. First, we determined whether participants came to the politician's defense with a charge that the media rebuke must have been *fake news*: "Given the information you have, how likely do you think it is that [Wooley's] statement is true?" Second, we assessed whether participants thought the politician was *unaware* that he had told a lie: "Regardless of whether you think [Wooley's] statement is true, how likely do you think it is that the representative believes his statement is true?" Third, we asked whether the lie was *acceptable*: "Regardless of your answers above, do you think it was justifiable or unjustifiable for [Wooley] to post this tweet?" Each response scale included labels at -3 (*very unlikely to be true / very unlikely to have believed it to be true / very much not justifiable*), 0 (*equally likely to be true and untrue / equally likely to have believed it to be true and untrue / equally justifiable and unjustifiable*), and +3 (*very likely to be true / very likely to have believed it to be true / very much justifiable*).

***Political ideology.*** In order to gauge participants' political ideology, we used a combination of global and (issue-)specific measures. In all studies, participants answered two general questions by identifying themselves along Likert-type scales. One read, "Although some people do not strongly align themselves along this single continuum, please do your best to

determine where you fit.” The 7-point scale was anchored at -3 (*staunchly Democrat*) and +3 (*staunchly Republican*), with the midpoint 0 labeled “*equal Democrat and Republican*.” A second asked, “How would you describe your political views?” Participants selected one of seven categories, presented in this order: *extremely conservative*, *very conservative*, *somewhat conservative*, *neither liberal nor conservative*, *somewhat liberal*, *very liberal*, *extremely liberal*.

Next, participants indicated their stance on seven policy issues on a scale from -3 (*totally opposed*) to +3 (*totally supportive*), with 0 labeled “*neutral*.” One issue was relevant to the lie in each particular study: “policies that aim to limit immigration of any kind into the country” (Study 1a), “policies that favor implementing a \$15/hour minimum wage” (Studies 1b), “policies that would raise the minimum wage” (Study 1c), or “policies that support school vouchers” (Study 1d). We scored each scale so that it was centered at 0 and higher numbers reflected a more conservative or Republican-leaning position. We created a composite by averaging the two general and one relevant specific item (all  $\alpha$ 's > .72). To norm these composites, we divided this average by the sample's standard deviation. Note that this standardized participant *political orientation* composite has a meaningful 0, reflecting neutrality on the standard left-right dimension.

## Results

We conduct analyses that combine across Studies 1a-1d. All analyses include a random effect of study, to account for the non-independence of errors for responses that come from the same study. Each model includes three fixed-effects predictors: the politician's *party* (+1: Republican, -1: Democratic), the participant's *political orientation* (centered at political neutrality), and the Party X Political Orientation interaction. In presenting our results, we refer to our model's predictions for “conservatives” and “liberals”: those who are +1 or -1, respectively,

on our political orientation composite. This allows us to roughly equate the groups in terms of their distance from our meaningful, neutral 0. Predicting outcomes at identical deviations from the sample mean (instead of 0) would leave our labels and results at the whims of arbitrary sample characteristics (i.e., its average political orientation). Although we proceed to describe key results below, key predicted means appear in Figure 1, and the full regression output appears in Table 1.

After examining effects on the most basic excuse for a lie (fake news), we control for this perception in examining the second excuse (unaware). Analyses for the final excuse (lie is acceptable) control for both fake news and unaware. In all cases, we standardize the covariate(s). The covariates are meaningful in how our results are interpreted in two ways.

First, the mean value of each covariate is useful in considering at what level an effect is estimated (Table SM 9). In every study in which these two measures were included (Studies 1-5), the average participant declined to deny that the politician had in fact told a falsehood but directionally (even if not always statistically significantly) thought the politician was unaware of lying. In the General Discussion, we return to all studies to test whether evidence of partisan leniency toward policy lies: 1) emerges similarly regardless of the participants' standing on the two covariates, and 2) even when only including in analyses those who see the statement as an intentional lie. At that point, we discuss the more nuanced implications of these findings.

Second, the inclusion of the covariate(s) means that any effects of partisan leniency (the Party X Political Orientation interaction) on one excuse are partialled out before examining the next excuse. In essence, this allows us to avoid double (or triple) counting the effects of partisan leniency. If likeminded partisans display a partisan bias in determining which politicians are telling a lie at all, then inclusion of the fake news covariate allows us to control for such

variability (and the partisan bias that explains it) in estimating whether people are likely to excuse their own side's political liars as being unaware of lying. Note that as a result, the models estimate the judgments of liberals and conservatives as being more similar than the covariate-free, raw means reflect. For example, averaged across our studies, participants who were likeminded partisans tended to see lies as slightly more justifiable than not, though the model output depicted below will identify likeminded partisans as seeing lies to be mildly unacceptable.<sup>4</sup>

**Fake news.** We began by predicting perceptions of the tweet's or statement's actual truth. We observed main effects of party,  $B = 0.09$ , 95% CI [0.02, 0.16],  $t(1832.44) = 2.45$ ,  $p = .014$ , and political orientation,  $B = 0.25$ , 95% CI [0.18, 0.32],  $t(1834.82) = 7.21$ ,  $p < .001$ , which were qualified by a Party X Political Orientation interaction,  $B = 0.59$ , 95% CI [0.52, 0.65],  $t(1832.26) = 16.91$ ,  $p < .001$ . In considering the Republican lie, conservative participants ( $M = -0.41$ ) thought it was less likely to be false than did liberal participants ( $M = -2.09$ ),  $t(1833.96) = 17.20$ ,  $p < .001$ . But in judging the Democratic lie, liberal participants thought it was less likely to be false ( $M = -1.10$ ) than did conservative participants ( $M = -1.76$ ),  $t(1833.89) = -6.70$ ,  $p < .001$ . Although the strong interaction shows that charges of "fake news" displayed partisan leniency, the main effect of political orientation showed that conservatives were more willing to leverage this charge.

**Unaware.** We proceeded to examine whether participants excused politicians as not believing or realizing they were lying. Crucially, we added as a covariate (standardized) perceptions that the tweeter was actually telling the truth. This allows us to probe variation in how much different participants think a politician believes what they are saying that is independent of (i.e., estimated at the same level of) belief that the statement was in fact true.

Unsurprisingly, we observed a strong influence of this covariate,  $B = 0.41$ , 95% CI [0.33, 0.49],  $t(1831.308) = 10.27$ ,  $p < .001$ . The communicators were seen as more likely to believe they were telling the truth to the extent that participants themselves thought the tweeter was speaking the truth. More relevant are effects observed once this covariate's explanatory power is partialled out.

We observed no main effect of party,  $B = 0.02$ , 95% CI [-0.05, 0.09],  $t < 1$ , nor political orientation,  $B = -0.00$ , 95% CI [-0.07, 0.07],  $t < 1$ . However, we did observe a Party X Political Orientation interaction,  $B = 0.14$ , 95% CI [0.07, 0.22],  $t(1831.071) = 3.86$ ,  $p < .001$ . In considering the Republican lie, conservative participants thought the tweeter was more likely to be unaware of lying ( $M = 1.47$ ) than did liberals ( $M = 1.20$ ),  $t(1832.39) = 2.65$ ,  $p = .009$ . Conversely, in judging the Democratic tweeter, liberal participants assumed the target was more likely to be unaware of lying ( $M = 1.44$ ) than did conservative participants ( $M = 1.15$ ),  $t(1832.05) = -2.94$ ,  $p = .004$ . The lack of main effects shows that the partisan willingness to assume one's own side's candidate is lying unintentionally is roughly symmetric.

**Lying is acceptable.** Do people merely show partisan patterns in explaining away their politicians' lies as inaccurately implicated or at least as unintended sins, or—above and beyond partisan differences in this excuse making—are they actually more likely to feel their own side's lies are more justified? We included both previously identified excuses—fake news and unawareness—as standardized covariates in this model. Unsurprisingly, participants saw the lies as more acceptable both when they denied that they were actually falsehoods,  $B = 0.83$ , 95% CI [0.76, 0.91],  $t(1830.86) = 22.25$ ,  $p < .001$ , and when they saw the liar as having lied without awareness,  $B = 0.36$ , 95% CI [0.29, 0.43],  $t(1830.28) = 10.47$ ,  $p < .001$ . Of more central interest was whether there were partisan differences in the perceived acceptability of lying that could not be traced back to these two excuses. Although we did not observe a main effect of party,  $B = -$



0.02, 95% CI [-0.09, 0.04],  $t < 1$ , we did see a main effect of political orientation,  $B = 0.07$ , 95% CI [0.01, 0.14],  $t(1832.58) = 2.29$ ,  $p = .022$ . Of more central interest, we also identified a significant Party X Political Orientation interaction,  $B = 0.34$ , 95% CI [0.27, 0.40],  $t(1830.25) = 9.82$ ,  $p < .001$ .

When considering a Republican liar, conservative participants found his lies more acceptable ( $M = -0.13$ ) than did liberals ( $M = -0.94$ ),  $t(1832.85) = 8.52$ ,  $p < .001$ . But in judging a Democratic liar, liberal participants found his lies more acceptable ( $M = -0.22$ ) than did conservatives ( $M = -0.75$ ),  $t(1832.42) = -5.66$ ,  $p < .001$ . Much as with claims of fake news, there was a strong effect of partisan leniency in downplaying the unjustifiability of lying. The main effect of political orientation suggested that liberals were more likely to see lies as unjustifiable.

These findings converge in suggesting strong partisan differences in how people explain politicians' policy-focused lies. We found weak evidence that conservative participants express more skepticism toward the media's identifications of lies (fake news) and see lying as more justifiable (acceptable). We found strong evidence that conservatives and liberals alike come to their own politicians' defense, seeing their policy lies as: less likely to be false, more likely to be delivered from a belief of truthfulness, and more acceptable (even controlling for these prior assessments, which were subject to their own partisan biases). That is, we found these effects were independent, with each emerging while statistically controlling for the partisan biases in the (logically and literally) preceding excuses.

### **Studies 2a and 2b**

We have argued not that there is partisan leniency in judging the unacceptability of all lies, but more specifically the lies that signal allegiance to the defining goals of one's political group. Studies 2a and 2b test whether this charitability is extended less willingly to

autobiographical fibs about politicians' own pasts—that is, personal lies—than to lies advocating for policy positions. We extend our investigation by testing for reactions to policy and personal lies that relate to new issues: gun control (Study 2a) and affirmative action (Study 2b). Of course, if our reasoning is wrong, and Study 1's findings merely reflect unconditional leniency toward one's in-group, then the nature of the lie should not matter.

## Method

**Participants and design.** American participants were recruited from Amazon's Mechanical Turk participant panel ( $N_{2a} = 400$ ;  $N_{2b} = 401$ ). Participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions in a 2(party: Democrat or Republican) X 2(lie: policy or personal) full-factorial design. As before, we excluded participants with duplicate IP addresses ( $n_{2a} = 12$ ;  $n_{2b} = 15$ ). Next, we removed participants who answered the two memory-based attention checks incorrectly ( $n_{2a} = 17$ ;  $n_{2b} = 11$ ). This left sample sizes of 371 (Study 2a) and 375 (Study 2b).

**Procedure.** The basic procedure followed the same structure as that of Studies 1a-1d, but included the following key change: The state representative tweeted a lie either about a reason to support or oppose a policy position (policy lie) or about a detail from his own past (personal lie). Policy lies provided a false fact that helped make the case for a particular policy position, whereas the personal lies provided a false autobiographical detail that suggested the politician had a personal connection to the issue. To bolster the article's claim that the tweet was indeed false, the article always closed by describing that the "calls to Wooley...asking for comments on the charge that Wooley had not been truthful...were not returned."

The measures took a similar form to those used in Studies 1a-1d. Participants began by responding to the three excuses for lying: fake news, unaware, and acceptable. Then, participants indicated their own political ideology on the two general scales and seven issue-specific ones.

The relevant items in Study 2a and 2b were “all citizens’ right to bear arms” and “affirmative action policies,” respectively. As before, we created a three-item composite for each participant so that 0 reflected absolute neutrality and higher values reflected a more conservative or Republican-leaning position (both  $\alpha$ ’s > .78).

## Results

Much as in Studies 1a-1d, we conducted a single analysis that combined across Studies 2a and 2b. Each model includes the following fixed-effects predictors: the politician’s *party* (+1: Republican, -1: Democratic), the participant’s *political orientation* (centered at political neutrality), and the type of *lie* (+1: policy, -1: personal). The three possible two-way and one three-way interaction terms were included as well. We included a random effect for study. The full model output is in Table 2, and the adjusted means (whose interpretation are subject to the caveat described in Footnote 4) for lie justifiability are displayed in Figure 2. We focus on the key results below:

**Fake news.** We begin by testing whether participants cast doubt on the media’s claim, thus seeing the tweet as actually true. Demonstrating that the nature of the lie changed partisan leniency, we observed a Party X Political Orientation X Lie interaction,  $B = 0.30$ , 95% CI [0.20, 0.41],  $t(738) = 5.86$ ,  $p < .001$ . To understand the nature of the interaction, we conducted analyses separately for policy and personal lies.

**Policy lies.** When considering policy lies, we observed a significant main effect of party,  $B = 0.28$ , 95% CI [0.11, 0.44],  $t(738) = 3.34$ ,  $p < .001$ , and of political orientation,  $B = 0.26$ , 95% CI [0.11, 0.41],  $t(738) = 3.47$ ,  $p < .001$ . Crucially, we also observed a Party X Political Orientation interaction,  $B = 0.67$ , 95% CI [0.53, 0.82],  $t(738) = 8.97$ ,  $p < .001$ . When considering a Republican policy lie, conservative participants thought the media challenge was much more

likely to be fake news ( $M = -0.16$ ) than did liberal participants ( $M = -2.02$ ),  $t(738) = 8.18$ ,  $p < .001$ . But those considering Democratic lies showed the reverse pattern: Liberal participants thought the lie was less likely to be false ( $M = -1.23$ ) than did conservative participants ( $M = -2.06$ ),  $t(738) = -4.23$ ,  $p < .001$ . This pattern replicates what we saw in Studies 1a-1d: Conservatives were more willing to disbelieve the media, but partisans on both sides were skeptical of the media's corrections of their side's candidate.

**Personal lies.** In contrast, there was no disagreement about whether the personal lies were actually true. That is, we observed no main effects of policy or party,  $Bs < 0.11$ ,  $ps > .14$ . The Party X Political Orientation interaction was non-significant as well,  $B = 0.06$ ,  $t < 1$ . In other words, participants showed partisan denial of lying only on group-serving policy questions, not when politicians self-servingly lied about their pasts.

**Unaware.** Having observed partisan differences in how participants differentially believed policy (and only policy) lies, we proceeded to conduct our same analyses on the second excuse—that the politician was likely unaware of having lied. As in Studies 1a-1d, we controlled for (standardized) beliefs that the media was incorrect in identifying the lie as a lie,  $B = 0.69$ , 95% CI [0.57, 0.82],  $t(737) = 10.85$ ,  $p < .001$ . In this way, we can examine beliefs that a politician was unaware of lying that hold constant participants' belief the politician was in fact lying.

In this case, we observed only a main effect of lie type,  $B = 0.85$ , 95% CI [0.73, 0.98],  $t(737) = 13.66$ ,  $p < .001$ . Participants assumed the politician was more likely to be unaware of lying when distorting the truth around a policy argument ( $M = 1.08$ ) than when distorting his own autobiography ( $M = -0.72$ ). We observed neither a Party X Political Orientation,  $B = 0.03$ , 95% CI [-0.09, 0.15],  $t < 1$ , nor a Party X Political Orientation X Lie interaction,  $B = -0.02$ , 95%

CI [-0.13, 0.10],  $t < 1$ . In other words, we did not observe partisan effects in thinking politicians were lying volitionally.

**Lying is acceptable.** Finally, we aimed to understand when lying is seen to be more or less justified. We included both fake news,  $B = 0.90$ , 95% CI [0.79, 1.00],  $t(736) = 16.37$ ,  $p < .001$ , and unaware,  $B = 0.42$ , 95% CI [0.30, 0.53],  $t(736) = 7.32$ ,  $p < .001$ , as covariates. In this way, we can test what explains when people see politicians' lies as more acceptable, on top of what is explained by variation in the previously discussed excuses. And indeed, we observe a Party X Political Orientation X Lie interaction,  $B = 0.16$ , 95% CI [0.07, 0.26],  $t(736) = 3.50$ ,  $p < .001$ . We decompose this interaction by examining policy and personal lies separately:

**Policy lies.** In predicting the perceived acceptability of policy lies, we observe a marginal main effect of party,  $B = 0.14$ , 95% CI [-0.00, 0.29],  $t(736) = 1.95$ ,  $p = .052$ , and a significant effect of political orientation,  $B = 0.21$ , 95% CI [0.07, 0.34],  $t(736) = 3.07$ ,  $p = .002$ . Of more key import, we find a Party X Political Orientation interaction,  $B = .42$ , 95% CI [0.29, 0.56],  $t(736) = 6.06$ ,  $p < .001$ . When considering a Republican politician's lie, conservative participants ( $M = -0.22$ ) deemed it more acceptable than did liberal participants ( $M = -1.45$ ),  $t(736) = 5.97$ ,  $p < .001$ . But when evaluating a Democratic politician's lie, liberal participants saw it as more acceptable ( $M = -0.92$ ) than did conservative participants ( $M = -1.38$ ),  $t(736) = -2.50$ ,  $p = .013$ .

**Personal lies.** This partisan leniency did not extend to personal lies. We did not observe main effects of party,  $B = -0.03$ , 95% CI [-0.16, 0.10],  $t < 1$ , nor political orientation,  $B = -0.06$ , 95% CI [-0.19, 0.06],  $t(736) = -1.01$ ,  $p = .314$ . Furthermore, the Party X Political Orientation interaction failed to reach significance,  $B = 0.09$ , 95% CI [-0.03, 0.22],  $t(736) = 1.47$ ,  $p = .143$ . This reflects that partisan leniency was applied to group-serving lies designed to advance a party's policy agenda, but not those written merely to exaggerate a politician's own connection

to an issue. Stated differently, partisan leniency—both in decrying media fake news and seeing lies as more acceptable—reflected loyalty to a partisan agenda, not to all of a party’s members.

### Study 3

Study 3 distinguishes among four accounts of why partisan leniency extends to policy lies, but not personal lies. The reasoning developed in the Introduction anticipates support for a *trustworthiness hypothesis*—that lies that reflect an individual’s ideological allegiance (i.e., policy lies) do not call into question the individual’s status as a trustworthy group member, and thus merit less condemnation. We tested three alternative possibilities. According to a *prevalence hypothesis*, people may inflate the assumed prevalence of lying in an effort to make their own politicians’ lies seem less worthy of singling out for condemnation. This possibility is foreshadowed by work showing that when the goodness of one’s own partisan identity is challenged, partisans may call to mind negative information about the political out-group, thereby appealing to a “we are the lesser of two evils” mentality (Groenendyk, 2011).

By an *effectiveness hypothesis*, policy lies are seen as more likely to actually achieve policy change, and this end justifies the prevarication. And by a final *reelection hypothesis*, certain lies may seem likely to help a favored politician get reelected, thus justifying the misdeed. Note that these final two alternatives both subscribe to an “ends justify the means” mentality (Doherty & Wolak, 2012; Skitka, 2002), but vary in what ends people may prioritize. In contrast, the trustworthiness hypothesis distinguishes itself by recognizing that lies vary in what they signal about whether the liar can be trusted by likeminded partisans even when such lies do not have clear potential to deliver results.

### Method

**Participants and Design.** American participants were recruited from Amazon's Mechanical Turk participant panel ( $N = 400$ ). Participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions in a 2(party: Democrat or Republican) X 2(lie: policy or personal) full-factorial design. We identified and removed four responses that came from duplicate IP addresses. Following the same standard as in our earlier studies, the eighty participants who responded incorrectly to both memory-based attention checks were excluded as well. This left 316 participants in our analyses reported below.

**Procedure.** The basic procedure for this study was similar to that of Studies 2a and 2b, but we moved to a different issue for which we had not yet examined the distinction between policy and personal lies: raising the minimum wage. When New Mexico Representative Steve Wooley was called out by the media for a policy lie, it was because Republican [Democratic] Rep. Wooley claimed that every time a state raised its minimum wage, its unemployment rate increased [decreased]. The article accurately pointed to non-partisan research that had found inconsistent effects of minimum wage increases. When Wooley was called out for a personal lie, it was because he falsely claimed that he "understood life on the minimum wage" because he "worked for 5 years earning minimum wage." This was found by the newspaper not to be true. Participants first responded to our three excuses for lying measures. This gave participants the opportunity to deny the media report that the tweet was false (fake news), say that the politician probably thought he was telling the truth (unaware), and indicate that the lie was justified (acceptable). The issue-specific political orientation measure asked about participants' support for or opposition to "policies that favor implementing a \$15/hour minimum wage." New measures were designed to disentangle different mechanistic accounts for why we have found (and expected to find again) partisan leniency toward policy but not personal lies:

**Did lying signal Wooley was untrustworthy?** According to the *trustworthiness hypothesis*, lies that advocate for a policy position signal that one is a loyal, trustworthy teammate or an unscrupulously conniving opponent. Personal lies—given that they do not show a commitment to a group—may instead universally undermine perceptions of trustworthiness. To permit assessment of this hypothesis, participants answered this question: “Given this Tweet, how trustworthy do you think Representative Wooley is?” Participants responded on a 7-point Likert-type scale anchored at -3 (*extremely untrustworthy*) and +3 (*extremely trustworthy*), with 0 labeled “*equally trustworthy and untrustworthy*.”

**Do Wooley’s lies change beliefs about each party’s lying prevalence?** One might excuse an ally’s misdeeds by deciding that they are commonplace sins. To assess whether leniency toward an individual’s own party’s liars may stem from a determination that such lies are widespread—a *prevalence hypothesis*—we asked participants how common it was for Democrats and Republicans to lie when making public statements (to the mainstream media or on social media). Participants indicated what percentage of Democrats’ public statements were “completely true,” “partially true,” and “completely untrue.” They made the same evaluation of Republicans’ statements. Participants were informed that the three judgments had to sum to 100% in each case.

**Could lying actually bring about policy change?** Whereas the trustworthy hypothesis considers what a liar’s actions may say about his character, the *effectiveness hypothesis* speculates that lying may be more or less acceptable to the extent it is assumed to bring about changes that partisans would (vs. would not) like to see. In other words, the ends may justify the means. We asked participants, “If this tweet were widely disseminated and believed, how do you think it would influence the debate about raising the minimum wage in New Mexico?”



Participants responded on a 101-point slider scale anchored at 0 (*make it certain minimum wage would stay the same*) and 100 (*make it certain minimum wage would increase*). The midpoint (50) was labeled “*no clear influence either way.*”

**Could lying help with reelection?** A related possibility is that the lies may be seen to be acceptable to the extent that they help to reelect politicians from one’s own party. To evaluate the *reelection hypothesis*, we asked participants, “If this Tweet were widely disseminated and believed, how do you think it would influence the representative’s chance of being reelected?” Participants responded on a 101-point slider scale anchored at 0 (*make it certain he would NOT be reelected*) and 100 (*make it certain he would be reelected*). The midpoint (50) was labeled “*no effect on whether he would be reelected.*”

## Results

We begin by testing how our manipulations and participants’ political orientation combine to predict how people excuse lies. For these tests, we use almost the same model that we did in Studies 2a-2b. The only difference is that because we assess the results of only a single experiment, there is no need to have a random effect of study. Table 3 details the model output. We first discuss the highlights below. Then we proceed to test our four mechanistic accounts of why we observe partisan leniency for policy lies.

**Fake news.** We began by predicting a perception that the story was fake news, meaning the tweet was actually true. Unlike in Study 2, we did not observe a Party X Political Orientation X Lie interaction,  $B = -0.01, t < 1$ . We did, though, observe a Party X Political Orientation interaction,  $B = 0.35, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.19, 0.52], t(308) = 4.27, p < .001$ . When considering a Republican lie, conservative participants thought it was less likely to actually be false ( $M = -0.92$ ) than did liberal participants, ( $M = -2.14; t(308) = 5.43, p < .001$ ). In contrast, when

considering a Democratic lie, liberals were no more likely to think the tweet was false ( $M = -1.66$ ) than were Republicans ( $M = -1.82$ ),  $t(308) = -0.72$ ,  $p = .473$ . In other words, Republicans were unique in showing a partisan defense with a charge of fake news.

**Unaware.** We proceeded to test beliefs that the tweeter was not aware of lying. Once again, we wanted to examine such perceptions that were not merely attributable to variation in participants' own belief that the tweeter was not lying. As such, we included (standardized) fake news as a covariate. Unsurprisingly, participants' own belief that the tweet was indeed true positively predicted a perception that the tweeter believed his own statement to be true,  $B = 0.65$ , 95% CI [0.44, 0.85],  $t(307) = 6.27$ ,  $p < .001$ . We again observed a Party X Political Orientation interaction,  $B = 0.23$ , 95% CI [0.05, 0.43],  $t(307) = 2.45$ ,  $p = .015$ . The results did not, however, further vary by lie type,  $B = -0.04$ , 95% CI [-0.22, 0.14],  $t < 1$ . In judging a Republican lie, conservative participants thought it was marginally more likely that the politician believed what he was saying ( $M = 0.22$ ) than liberal participants did ( $M = -0.36$ ),  $t(307) = 1.88$ ,  $p = .061$ . But in judging the Democratic lie, liberal participants were no more likely to think the politician believed the lie ( $M = 0.24$ ) than were conservative participants ( $M = -0.09$ ),  $t(307) = -1.61$ ,  $p = .109$ .

**Lying is acceptable.** Finally, we tested whether people thought the lying was relatively justifiable. As before, we included both of the first two excuses—fake news and unaware—as standardized covariates in this model. Unsurprisingly, lying was seen as more acceptable when participants denied that it was a lie,  $B = 1.06$ , 95% CI [0.90, 1.22],  $t(306) = 13.05$ ,  $p < .001$ , as well as when they thought the politician did not believe himself to be lying,  $B = 0.24$ , 95% CI [0.08, 0.40],  $t(306) = 2.96$ ,  $p = .003$ . We observed a main effect of lie type,  $B = 0.19$ , 95% CI [0.04, 0.35], such that policy lies were seen as more justifiable than personal lies. We observed

neither a main effect of party,  $B = -0.01$ , nor political orientation,  $B = -0.04$ ,  $t_s < 1$ . We did again observe a Party X Political Orientation interaction,  $B = 0.27$ , 95% CI [0.14, 0.42],  $t(306) = 3.94$ ,  $p < .001$ . But, in this case, it was (marginally) qualified by lie type,  $B = 0.12$ , 95% CI [-0.02, 0.25],  $t(313) = 1.71$ ,  $p = .089$ . Given that this effect fell just shy of the traditional significance threshold, it would be all the more important to see if the more focused tests by lie type fit the predicted pattern (see Figure 3):

***Policy lie.*** When predicting the policy lie, we observed neither a main effect of party,  $B = 0.05$ , nor a main effect of political orientation,  $B = -0.05$ ,  $t_s < 1$ . We did, however, observe a Party X Political Orientation interaction,  $B = 0.39$ , 95% CI [0.20, 0.59],  $t(306) = 4.01$ ,  $p < .001$ . In judging the Republican policy lie, conservative participants found it to be more acceptable ( $M = -0.65$ ) than did liberal participants ( $M = -1.34$ ),  $t(306) = 2.30$ ,  $p = .022$ . Conversely, when judging the Democratic policy lie, liberal participants found it more acceptable ( $M = -0.66$ ) than did conservative participants ( $M = -1.56$ ),  $t(306) = -3.48$ ,  $p = .001$ .

***Personal lie.*** In considering the personal lie, we did not observe a main effect of politician party,  $B = -0.06$ ,  $t < 1$ , nor of participant political orientation,  $B = 0.14$ , 95% CI [-0.05, 0.33],  $t(306) = 1.48$ ,  $p = .141$ . Also, we saw a reduced (marginally significant) Party X Political Orientation interaction,  $B = .16$ , 95% CI [-0.03, 0.35],  $t(306) = 1.66$ ,  $p = .098$ . In other words, participants did not display the same partisan leniency in assessing the acceptability of personal lies. In order to understand why there was particularly strong partisan leniency concerning the acceptability of policy lies, we proceeded to test for support for our four mechanisms. Estimated marginal means for all measures reported below can be found in the Supplemental Materials (Table SM 5).

**Trustworthiness hypothesis.** By this account, policy lies and personal lies differ in terms of what they signal about who can trust the liar. More specifically, it predicts that we should observe the same Party X Political Orientation X Lie interaction on perceptions of trustworthiness that we predicted for perceptions of lie acceptability. Using the same model, we did indeed observe the hypothesized three-way interaction,  $B = 0.21$ , 95% CI [0.11, 0.32],  $t(306) = 4.07$ ,  $p < .001$  (see Figure 4). We proceeded to decompose this by lie condition to understand how much trust different participants placed in politicians depending on the liars' party and the nature of their lie. Keep in mind the caveat reviewed in Footnote 4, that the covariates understate likeminded partisans' trust for their own side's policy liars.

**Policy lie.** For participants who learned about a policy lie, we observed neither a main effect of politician party,  $B = -0.02$ , nor of participants' own political orientation,  $B = -0.05$ ,  $t_s < 1$ . But we did observe a Party X Political Orientation interaction,  $B = 0.49$ , 95% CI [0.34, 0.64],  $t(306) = 6.32$ ,  $p < .001$ . In considering a Republican policy liar, conservative participants found him less untrustworthy ( $M = -0.64$ ) than did liberal participants ( $M = -1.67$ ),  $B = 0.52$ ,  $SE = 0.12$ ,  $t(306) = 4.54$ ,  $p < .001$ . But in considering a Democratic policy liar, liberal participants ( $M = -0.66$ ) found him less untrustworthy than did conservative participants ( $M = -1.57$ ),  $t(306) = -4.53$ ,  $p < .001$ .

**Personal lie.** In contrast, for participants who learned about a personal lie, we observed a different pattern. We observed a marginally significant effect of politician party,  $B = -0.15$ , 95% CI [-0.31, 0.02],  $t(306) = -1.75$ ,  $p = .080$ , and a clearer main effect of participant political orientation,  $B = 0.20$ , 95% CI [0.06, 0.35],  $t(306) = 2.71$ ,  $p = .007$ . The Party X Political Orientation interaction did not approach significance,  $B = 0.05$ ,  $t < 1$ . In other words, conservative participants placed more trust in personal-lying politicians, regardless of such liars'

political views. This null effect is important, because it reflects that perceptions of trustworthiness were responsive to the lies themselves and did not merely reflect preexisting opinions about the trustworthiness of one party vs. another.

**Connecting trustworthiness and acceptability.** Participants found lies to be more or less acceptable to the extent that they did or did not signal untrustworthy character. Most simply, we observed a positive partial correlation between lie acceptability and perceived trustworthiness (controlling for fake news and the politician being unaware of lying),  $pr(312) = .53, p < .001$ . Furthermore, controlling for perceived trustworthiness eliminated the focal Party X Political Orientation X Lie interaction on perceived acceptability of the lie,  $B = -0.01, t < 1$ . In this model, perceived trustworthiness was a strong predictor,  $B = 0.60, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.48 \text{ } 0.73], t(305) = 9.39, p < .001$ . Indeed, Hayes's (2017) PROCESS (model 4) macro identified evidence consistent with a significant indirect effect through perceived trustworthiness,  $95\% \text{ CI } = [0.0639, 0.2155]$ . In combination, these results support the trustworthiness hypothesis: Policy lies are unique in prompting partisan leniency because partisans differ in their opinions about whether policy liars (but not personal liars) can be trusted. Stated differently, he who lies on behalf of a partisan agenda retains more trust from (and is similarly seen to have done less bad by) other members of his own political group.

**Prevalence hypothesis.** By this account, participants will downplay the news that their own party's politician has lied, by convincing themselves that political lying is commonplace. We tested this possibility in two ways—by examining whether participants convinced themselves of a partisan bias in lying (a belief that one party lies more than the other) and by testing for shifts in the perceived prevalence of the overall quantity of lying. For the first goal, we calculated a *partisan lying index*: (Democratic[completely untrue] - Democratic[completely

true]) - (Republican[completely untrue] - Republican [completely true])). Higher values reflect a belief that Democrats are more dishonest than Republicans. For the second goal, we calculated a *total lying index*. It was similar to the partisan lying index, but it reflected the sum of the Republican and Democratic lying composites instead of their difference.

We used the same model that we used to predict lie acceptability to predict the partisan lying index. We did find that participants displayed group-serving beliefs, assuming that their own party's politicians lied relatively less,  $B = 28.28$ , 95% CI [23.95, 32.61],  $t(306) = 12.84$ ,  $p < .001$ . We also observed an unexpected marginal effect of political party: After observing a Republican lie, participants were somewhat more likely to believe that Democratic politicians lie more,  $B = 4.23$ , 95% CI [-.36, 8.82],  $t(306) = 1.82$ ,  $p = .070$ . A significant Party X Political Orientation interaction showed that the just-reported effect of party was driven by conservative participants,  $B = 4.46$ , 95% CI [0.03, 8.89],  $t(306) = 1.98$ ,  $p = .049$ . Critical to evaluating the prevalence hypothesis, the three-way Party X Political Orientation X Lie interaction was not significant,  $B = -2.63$ , 95% CI [-6.89, 1.63],  $t(306) = -1.21$ ,  $p = .225$ . Although conservative participants did respond to Republican liars by reactively elevating how much they saw Democrats as the actual liars, the fact that this effect was not bipartisan and not specific to policy lies suggests it does explain our central effect.

Next, we tested whether our manipulations changed perceptions of political lying's overall prevalence. We used our basic model to predict the total lying index. In this case, we did find a significant Party X Political Orientation X Lie interaction,  $B = -8.35$ , 95% CI [-14.62, -2.10],  $t(306) = -2.63$ ,  $p = .009$ . Decomposing this interaction showed it did not provide support for the prevalence hypothesis. That is, after considering a policy lie, there was no tendency to decide that lying was more prevalent if a participant's *own* side's politician had been called out

for lying,  $B = -4.93$ , 95% CI  $[-13.98, 4.12]$ ,  $t(306) = -1.07$ ,  $p = .285$ . Instead, it was after considering a personal lie that participants showed this pattern,  $B = 11.79$ , 95% CI  $[2.80, 20.79]$ ,  $t(306) = 2.58$ ,  $p = .010$ .

**Effectiveness hypothesis.** By this account, partisans find political lies to be justifiable when such lies are seen as capable of effectively advancing the partisan agenda. Whereas the trustworthiness hypothesis focused on what politicians' mendacity suggested about their character, the effectiveness hypothesis focuses on what lies are able to practically accomplish. For this account to explain our key results, two conditions must be met. First, policy lies should be seen as more likely than personal lies to positively influence a policy's chances for enactment. Second, this effectiveness should explain partisans' leniency toward these lies.

To test the first condition, we regressed participants' belief about how the lie—if believed—would ultimately influence policy on: politician party, participant political orientation, lie type, and the interactions that can be created from these predictors. Confirming the first condition, we observed a significant Party X Lie type interaction,  $B = -7.57$ , 95% CI  $[-9.85, -5.31]$ ,  $t(306) = -6.56$ ,  $p < .001$ . When participants considered the policy lies, they assumed that the Democratic lie would be more likely to help the minimum wage pass than would the Republican lie,  $B = -16.87$ , 95% CI  $[-20.10, -13.89]$ ,  $t(306) = -10.77$ ,  $p < .001$ . But when considering the personal lies, they did not think the Democratic lie would encourage the minimum wage to pass any more than the Republican lie would,  $B = -1.84$ , 95% CI  $[-5.17, 1.49]$ ,  $t(306) = -1.09$ ,  $p = .277$ . These initial tests make the effectiveness hypothesis plausible.

But does the perception that policy lies may more effectively advance an agenda explain why partisans find such lies acceptable? If so, we should find that, in examining how participants respond to lies, how acceptable participants find the lie should be traced to whether it is likely to

produce a policy outcome compatible with the participant's own political orientation. In other words, we should observe a significant Lie Effect X Political Orientation interaction predicting lie acceptability. We added lie effect and its interaction with political orientation to our model predicting perceived lie acceptability. The crucial two-way interaction did reach significance,  $B = 0.01$ , 95% CI [0.00, 0.02],  $t(304) = 2.14$ ,  $p = .033$ ; however, the sign is the opposite of that which the effectiveness hypothesis would predict. This result is unexpected, but suggests that the effectiveness hypothesis is unsupported.

**Reelection hypothesis.** To test our final account, we examined whether participants showed partisan leniency toward policy lies because they think that those lies in particular will help their preferred candidates get reelected. Two conditions would support this account. First, policy lies should be seen as more likely to help candidates get reelected than personal lies. Second, the perception that policy lies help candidates get reelected should explain the partisan effects in evaluating the acceptability of policy (but not personal) lies.

Marginally satisfying the first condition, we found that policy lies were indeed seen as somewhat more capable of aiding with reelection,  $B = 2.30$ , 95% CI [-0.23, 4.83],  $t(306) = 1.79$ ,  $p = .075$ . To test the second condition, we returned to our model used to predict lie acceptability. We added both an effect of reelection help as well as its interaction with candidate party, participant political orientation, and the two together. Speaking against the reelection hypothesis, the Reelection Help X Party X Political Orientation interaction did not approach significance,  $B = 0.00$ ,  $t < 1$ . In other words, lies were not more acceptable because partisans thought they could help their own party's candidates get reelected.

#### Study 4



Study 3 established the key role of trustworthiness in explaining why certain liars' lies are seen as more acceptable than others. That is, we saw not only a partisan bias in how participants evaluated the acceptability of policy lies, but also a parallel partisan bias in how much participants said they could still trust the politician. But still unresolved was what form this exculpatory trust takes. Do ideologically similar policy liars get more of a pass for their lies because they are still assumed to be generally trustworthy people, the sort of people who can be counted on by in-group and out-group members alike? Or instead do partisans essentially see moral value in partisan trustworthiness, offering more charitable evaluations of those who can be counted on by a partisan's own political team and not by the other enemy side? Study 4 dives into this distinction between general and partisan trustworthiness, respectively, to better understand how trust—in particular, the nature of that trust—predicts the evaluation of policy liars.

Participants considered one of the policy lies used in Study 3. Those tweets mischaracterized the strength of the connection between the minimum wage and unemployment rates. In addition to completing our standard battery of measures that permit participants to explain away or excuse politicians' lies, participants completed two new measures. The first was a more nuanced measure of trustworthiness foreshadowed by the earlier discussion. We asked whether Democrats and, separately, Republicans could trust the politician. The second was a measure of whether the politician was seen as a generally moral actor, one who is likely to take moral actions and avoid immoral ones in his day-to-day life. We used two rounds of pretesting to identify prototypical everyday moral and immoral behaviors. Participants forecast how likely the politician was to engage in each when provided the opportunity.

These new measures allowed us to advance our investigation in two primary ways. First, we were able to assess the extent to which a politician was seen as *generally trustworthy* (able to be trusted by Democrats and Republicans alike) or *partisan trustworthy* (able to be trusted by his own party more than by the other party). This would permit a more nuanced test of how a candidate's trustworthiness relates to perceptions of lie acceptability. We could distinguish two main possibilities. One is that there may be a partisan bias in deciding that a lying candidate is still generally trustworthy. Alternatively, people may actually see the partisan trustworthiness that a policy lie signals as a reflection of that lie's acceptability (when judging a likeminded politician) or unacceptability (when judging a politician from the political out-group).

Second, the new moral behavior composite—as a judgment of how much the candidate is likely to behave in moral or immoral ways more generally—would allow us to probe the breadth of the partisan bias we have been investigating. That is, one possibility is that the partisan bias is narrow, applying specifically to how political partisans judge political lies. That is, partisans may not be too bothered by the lies themselves (explaining why they are judged to be less unacceptable), but may then take a harsher view of the politician's moral character outside of the political arena. But a second possibility is that the same psychology that explains who excuses certain political lies may encourage more fundamental shifts in how that politician is viewed. After we achieve a better understanding of the role of perceived trustworthiness in evaluations of lie acceptability, we then proceed to test whether the same partisan biases extend to forecasts of the politician's (non-political) moral and immoral behaviors.

## Method

**Participants and design.** We recruited 756 Americans from Amazon's Mechanical Turk. These participants were randomly assigned to one of two *party* conditions; they learned about

either a Democratic or a Republican politician whom the media had identified as issuing a policy-related lie. Applying the same standard used in our earlier studies, we identified and excluded from further consideration the 43 participants who missed both memory-based attention checks. This left 713 participants in the analyses reported below.

**Procedure.** Participants considered one of the two policy lies also used in Study 3. In each case, a politician tweeted that minimum wage increases always produced a consistent effect on unemployment. Each exaggerated when tweeting that minimum wage increases *always* reduced (Democrat) or increased (Republican) unemployment. At that point, participants completed our standard trio of measures that allowed them to make different excuses for the politician's lies. These included denying the media report that the tweet was a lie (fake news), claiming that the politician likely believed he was telling the truth (unaware), and labeling the lie as justified (acceptable). After then completing two new measures (described below), participants indicated their own political orientation using the same general and issue-specific measures administered in Study 3 ( $\alpha > .84$ ).

**General and partisan trustworthiness.** In Study 3, participants commented on the politician's trustworthiness. But what went unspecified was *to whom* the politician was seen to be trustworthy. In the present study, we divided the measure of trustworthiness into two questions. Participants indicated whether "Wooley is the type of person Democrats can trust" and someone "Republicans can trust." Responses were offered 7-point scales anchored at 1 (*not at all*) and 7 (*completely*). This measurement modification permitted us to create two composites that would allow for a more precise understanding of the nature of trustworthiness in evaluations of lying politicians.

By summing the two measures, we created an index of *general trustworthiness*

( $M = 6.60$ ,  $SD = 3.05$ ). That is, a candidate who was seen as someone whom both Democrats and Republicans could trust would score the highest on this composite. We also created a difference score by taking perceptions of how much Wooley's own party could trust him and subtracting how much the other party could trust him. This *partisan trustworthiness* composite is maximized when Wooley is seen as someone whom his own side can trust but whom the other side cannot ( $M = 0.94$ ,  $SD = 2.24$ ). Perceptions of general and partisan trustworthiness were largely independent,  $r(711) = .07$ ,  $p = .084$ .

***Moral behaviors.*** We developed a new measure to help us better understand how participants viewed the target's moral disposition and character more generally, outside of the political realm. That is, we wanted to capture perceptions of the target as a generally moral person, one who would perform moral behaviors and avoid immoral ones. Toward this end, we conducted two pretests (described below) to identify a set of everyday moral (5) and immoral (5) behaviors. In the main study, we asked participants, "In your best estimate, what percentage chance is there that Rep. Wooley will do each of the behaviors in the context or circumstance described?" Participants provided a percentage response for each behavioral forecast. In general, perceptions that the target would perform one moral behavior predicted perceptions that the target would perform other moral behaviors ( $\alpha = .92$ ). The same was true of immoral behaviors ( $\alpha = .89$ ). Furthermore, the more the target was believed to perform moral behaviors, the less he was seen as likely to perform immoral ones,  $r(711) = -.36$ ,  $p < .001$ . As such, we made a single *moral behavior* composite by taking the average forecast for the moral behaviors and subtracting the average forecast for the immoral behaviors ( $M = 11.19\%$ ,  $SD = 42.17\%$ ).

*Pretest 4a: Generation of potential target behaviors.* In the first pretest ( $N = 93$ , Americans recruited from AMT), participants were asked to think of five everyday moral and

five everyday immoral acts. They were deliberately instructed *not* to list behaviors that were “rare, once-in-a-lifetime acts of generosity” or “rare, extremely heinous acts that most people would never do.” Participants were given two minutes to generate five moral behaviors and another two minutes to generate five immoral behaviors. The order in which participants provided moral and immoral behaviors was counterbalanced. We identified the 15 most frequently listed moral behaviors and the 15 most frequently listed immoral behaviors.

*Pretest 4b: Selection of final target behaviors.* We conducted Pretest 4b with a separate group of Americans recruited from AMT ( $N = 94$ ) to determine which of the 15 moral and 15 immoral behaviors generated from Pretest 4a were the most representative exemplars. Participants indicated the extent to which each behavior was seen as a good or a bad example of a moral or immoral behavior, depending on the list. They indicated their responses on Likert-type scales ranging from 1 (“*this is not a very good example [this behavior does NOT fit my idea of what is (im)moral]*”) to 7 (“*this is a perfect example [this behavior is a very good example of what is (im)moral]*”). The five highest-rated items from each subgroup were those forecast by participants in the main study. The five moral behaviors were: return a lost item (e.g., by tracking down the owner, to a “lost and found”) ( $M = 5.68, SD = 1.56$ ), help a stranger retrieve dropped possessions ( $M = 5.61, SD = 1.47$ ), help someone cross the street (e.g., elderly person, visually impaired person) ( $M = 5.60, SD = 1.65$ ), return excess change to a cashier ( $M = 5.59, SD = 1.74$ ), and give up a seat so family members can sit together ( $M = 5.47, SD = 1.66$ ). The five immoral behaviors were: knowingly lie on tax returns ( $M = 5.49, SD = 1.72$ ), pretend not to hear someone calling for help ( $M = 5.45, SD = 1.90$ ), make fun of someone in front of other people ( $M = 5.44, SD = 1.79$ ), make a racist joke ( $M = 5.30, SD = 2.04$ ), share a secret that one was asked to keep ( $M = 5.13, SD = 1.84$ ). Crucially, these moral and immoral behaviors are not described as

directed toward the political in-group or out-group. In this way, we can use the measure to see to what extent the politician is seen as a moral paragon, as opposed to one who tends to display moral partiality toward his own party.

## Results and Discussion

We begin with streamlined reporting of those results that merely replicate what we have observed before—that is, our tests of whether there is a partisan bias (i.e., an interactive influence of our party manipulation and participants' political orientation) on the three excuses for candidates' lying. Following that, we will disentangle whether it is perceptions of the candidate's general trustworthiness or partisan trustworthiness that help to explain why participants see likeminded politicians' lies as more acceptable. We then probe this trustworthiness distinction more deeply by examining how general and partisan trustworthiness predict perceptions of the politician as a moral person more generally, even outside of the political context.

**Excuses for lying.** Given that all participants considered a policy lie, we returned to our simplified model used in Studies 1a-1d. Because we report the results of a single study, we omitted the random effect of study. We observed a partisan bias (i.e., a Party X Political Orientation interaction) on all three excuses for lying. That is, we observed a partisan bias in deciding whether the media report calling out the lie was legitimate or worthy of being dismissed as fake news,  $B = 0.57$ , 95% CI[0.44, 0.70],  $t(709) = 8.72$ ,  $p < .001$ . Controlling for these fake news perceptions, we found an incremental partisan bias in perceptions that the lie was intentional,  $B = 0.37$ , 95% CI[0.25, 0.49],  $t(708) = 5.89$ ,  $p < .001$ . Of central interest, controlling for both of these excuses, we also found a partisan bias in characterizations of the tweet as acceptable,  $B = 0.33$ , 95% CI[0.22, 0.44],  $t(707) = 6.05$ ,  $p < .001$ . These effects are all depicted

in Figure 5. In short, we again find that participants were more sympathetic in their characterization of liars from their own party—more likely to label the news report as fake news, more likely to then claim the politician was not lying intentionally, and then more likely to find the lie acceptable. In addition, main effects of political orientation suggested that conservative participants were especially likely to label the media as fake news,  $B = 0.33$ , 95% CI[0.21, 0.46],  $t(709) = 5.12$ ,  $p < .001$ , and see the prevaricating tweet as more acceptable,  $B = 0.17$ , 95% CI[0.07, 0.28],  $t(707) = 3.34$ ,  $p < .001$ . A main effect of the politician's party showed that the Republican representative was seen as more likely to actually be telling the truth,  $B = 0.23$ , 95% CI[.10, .36],  $t(709) = 3.38$ ,  $p < .001$ .

**Trustworthiness.** In Study 3, we observed a connection between perceptions of a politician's trustworthiness and the perceived acceptability of his lies. In other words, when politicians from a participant's own party lied, perceptions of his trustworthiness were less undermined, a charitable inference that went hand-in-hand with a sense that the lie was more justified. But what was not addressed was the nature of this perceived trustworthiness, *who* it was who could supposedly trust the politician. We proceeded by asking 1) whether there is a partisan bias in evaluations of general trustworthiness (how much Democrats + Republicans can trust him) and/or 2) whether the perception that the lying politician can be trusted more by his own party than by the opposing party is connected in a partisan way (i.e., differently by members of his own vs. the other party) to a sense that the candidate's behavior was acceptable. Either route (or both routes) could produce the partisan evaluations of lie acceptability that we have consistently observed.

**General trustworthiness.** We used the same model as above that predicted lie acceptability to predict general trustworthiness, the sum of perceptions that Democrats and

Republicans can trust the politician. As a reminder, this model controls for beliefs that the tweet was actually true and that the lie was perhaps unintentional. We observed a main effect of party,  $B = -0.33$ , 95% CI $[-0.54, -0.13]$ ,  $t(707) = 3.21$ ,  $p = .001$ : The Republican politician ( $M = 6.23$ ) was seen as less generally trustworthy than the Democratic one ( $M = 6.90$ ). We did not, however, observe a significant Party X Political Orientation interaction,  $B = 0.19$ , 95% CI $[-0.02, 0.40]$ ,  $t(707) = 1.80$ ,  $p = .071$ . In other words, participants' own political orientation did not significantly relate to their perceptions of the politician as generally trustworthy. Although this effect was marginally significant, this can be contrasted with our findings on lie acceptability, for which a strong partisan bias was observed. This suggests that partisan biases in lie acceptability may instead be more rooted in perceptions of partisan trustworthiness and how those perceptions are connected with lie acceptability. We now turn to those tests.

***Partisan trustworthiness.*** We started by testing what seemed straightforward and intuitive, whether Rep. Wooley was seen as being more trustworthy to his own party than to the opposing party. We used the same model as that predicting general trustworthiness, but predicted partisan trustworthiness instead. The partisan trustworthiness composite has a meaningful zero: It reflects being equally trustworthy to both members of his political in-group and out-group. For this reason, we were interested in this first model's intercept.

The intercept was significantly greater than 0,  $B = 0.87$ , 95% CI $[0.70, 1.04]$ ,  $t(707) = 10.07$ ,  $p < .001$ . Wooley was seen as one who could be trusted more by members of his own party than by members of the opposing party. Furthermore—much like with perceptions of general trustworthiness—this perception of partisan trustworthiness did not vary as a function of participants' own political orientation: The Party X Political Orientation interaction did not approach significance,  $B = -0.10$ , 95% CI $[-0.28, 0.08]$ ,  $t(707) = 1.12$ ,  $p = .262$ . Combined, these



analyses demonstrate that there was broad agreement that Wooley can be trusted by members of his own party more than by members of the other party. But next we ask whether such partisan trustworthiness connects to lie acceptability in a partisan way. That is, is partisan trustworthiness a cue to lie acceptability when evaluating a likeminded politician but not an outgroup one? If so, this could offer insight into why there are partisan biases in perceived lie acceptability.

***Connecting trustworthiness to lie acceptability.*** We return to our model predicting lie acceptability but add several additional predictors. We include both general trustworthiness and partisan trustworthiness (each standardized). But because we thought that the connection between trustworthiness and lie acceptability may differ for those considering a politician of their own political stripes, we also permit each trustworthiness measure to interact with party, political orientation, and the interaction of these two variables (what we have called partisan bias). Although we will guide readers through the most relevant findings, the results of the full model are detailed in Table 4.

Let us begin with the connection between general trustworthiness and lie acceptability. We observe a main effect of general trustworthiness,  $B = 0.54$ , 95% CI [0.43, 0.66],  $t(699) = 9.28$ ,  $p < .001$ . This reflects that the more generally trustworthy the politician was seen to be, the more acceptable participants found his lie. Just as there was not a significant partisan bias in judgments of general trustworthiness, there was also no partisan bias in the connection between general trustworthiness and lie acceptability. That is, the General Trustworthiness X Party X Political Orientation interaction did not approach significance,  $B = -0.04$ , 95% CI [-0.13, 0.06],  $t(699) = .76$ ,  $p = .445$ ). This shows that targets' general trustworthiness does relate to the perceived acceptability of their lies, but also that general trustworthiness will not help to make sense of the partisan leniency that has been the focus of this paper. That said, as we turn our

attention to partisan trustworthiness, it will be important to keep in mind that any such effects observed there are those that exist independently of (or above and beyond) the non-partisan effects of general trustworthiness just discussed.

Turning to the effects of partisan trustworthiness, we did not in this case observe a main effect,  $B = -0.04$ , 95% CI  $[-0.15, 0.06]$ ,  $t(699) = .81$ ,  $p = .417$ , but we did observe a Partisan Trustworthiness X Party X Political Orientation interaction,  $B = 0.17$ , 95% CI  $[0.07, 0.26]$ ,  $t(699) = 3.54$ ,  $p < .001$  (see Figure 6). This reflects a partisan bias in the connection between trustworthiness and lie acceptability. Those who saw the politician as especially trustworthy to his own political party at the expense of the other (+1 SD partisan trustworthiness) showed the partisan bias (Party X Political Orientation interaction) in evaluations of lie acceptability,  $B = 0.43$ , 95% CI  $[-0.31, 0.56]$ ,  $t(699) = 6.74$ ,  $p < .001$ . But for those did not assume greater trustworthiness to the target's own party (-1 SD partisan trustworthiness), this partisan bias evaporated,  $B = 0.10$ , 95% CI  $[-.05, .25]$ ,  $t(699) = 1.34$ ,  $p = .179$ . In other words, everyone sees politicians' political lies as more acceptable to the extent that the politician seems generally trustworthy, but partisans also see lies as more acceptable to the extent that politicians can be trusted by their own party and not the other political side.

**Moral behaviors.** Our next analyses distinguish two possibilities. One is that we have been examining the narrow effect of excusing one's own side's political misdeeds (misdeeds that are at least consistent with one's own political ideology). The second is we have been studying a more general effect, that partisan trustworthiness is a divergent cue to the morality of others' actions and character more generally. If the latter, we should see evidence that the partisan bias in evaluating political lies is one instantiation of a broader phenomenon by which cues to partisan trustworthiness take on different moral meaning depending on the political allegiances

of the perceiver. To explore this question, we ran the same model but predicted the moral behavior composite, the forecast that the politician would engage in more prototypically good and less prototypically bad behaviors in his daily life.

We begin with general trustworthiness, which our above analyses found was neither assessed nor leaned upon in a partisan way. We observed a main effect of general trustworthiness,  $B = 6.54$ , 95% CI [3.44, 9.94],  $t(699) = 4.14$ ,  $p < .001$ . In a sense, this is something of a validation of our new moral behavior measure that was developed through two rounds of pretesting: The more that the politician was viewed to be generally trustworthy, the more he was forecast to display prototypically moral (and not immoral) behaviors. Furthermore, this relationship was similar when judging a politician from a participant's own side or the other: The General Trustworthiness X Party X Political Orientation interaction was not significant,  $B = 0.13$ , 95% CI [-2.48, 2.75],  $t < 1$ . To everyone, general trustworthiness means being generally trustworthy: someone who does more good and less bad.

But what about partisan trustworthiness? Much as it did with evaluations of lie acceptability, would partisan trustworthiness independently and similarly help explain the moral behavior composite? To begin, we observed a main effect of partisan trustworthiness,  $B = 2.90$ , 95% CI [0.08, 5.72],  $t(699) = 2.02$ ,  $p = .044$ . But of more central interest, and as depicted in Figure 7, that effect was qualified by partisan bias: The Partisan Trustworthiness X Party X Political Orientation interaction was significant,  $B = 4.35$ , 95% CI [1.86, 6.84],  $t(699) = 3.43$ ,  $p < .001$ . In other words, the more that the politician was seen to be trustworthy to a participant's own political group (as opposed to the opposing one), the more he was seen to be a good person more generally (see Figure 7).

These final results—when considered in the broader context of our studies—paint a more complete picture of why the electorate can take such sharply divergent views of political liars. Study 3 found that political policy lies (unlike personal lies) invited partisan evaluations of candidate trustworthiness that explained a partisan bias in lie acceptability. Study 4 clarified this finding by probing what *form* of trustworthiness explains this partisan effect. *Partisan* trustworthiness explained these divergent perceptions of the acceptability of policy lies—not directly, but because partisan trustworthiness was imbued with different moral meaning by different people. This contrasts with general trustworthiness, which had the same positive, moral significance to everyone. A politician’s *partisan* trustworthiness helped to blunt the perceived unacceptability of his lie to the extent that the perceiver and the liar were on the same political team. And as these findings show, partisan trustworthiness is similarly used as a cue of more general moral character. Those who can be trusted by one’s own political in-group but not by the political out-group are also those who are assumed to go through life doing more good and less bad. As a result, when the electorate is confronted by a politician who is willing to throw around political policy lies, it quite literally sees a person of two divergent moral resumés. In this way, two political partisans can be in complete agreement regarding the extent to which a policy lie has been intentionally issued, but then diverge sharply in the perceived moral acceptability and implications of such behavior. Loyalty is a cue to morality, but only when those loyalties belong to one’s own (and not another’s) group.

**Further consideration of the role of partisan trustworthiness.** We have been careful to avoid making strong claims that our key dependent measures are necessarily connected in a single linear causal sequence. After all, we are most interested in these results because of what they reveal about how partisan trustworthiness has different moral connotations to different

people. But consider a feature that differentiates perceptions of partisan trustworthiness from perceptions of both lie acceptability and forecasts of moral behaviors: Liberal and conservative participants did not differ in perceptions of the target's partisan trustworthiness. Instead, they seemed to vary only in their views about whether a partisan trustworthy politician is a good person who should escape special condemnation for his misdeeds. It would be surprising if, for example, liberals and conservatives first drew diametrically opposing conclusions about the lie's acceptability and the liar's moral character, only to then ultimately perfectly re-converge at precisely the same perceptions of the politician's partisan trustworthiness. Instead, a more parsimonious interpretation is that identical perceptions of partisan trustworthiness have different meaning for (and thus have different effects on) perceptions of lie acceptability and moral character. That said, we identify three lingering questions raised by these analyses.

First, consider our findings regarding forecasts of moral behavior. Although we think it is most parsimonious that perceptions of partisan trustworthiness shape our participants' forecasts of another's moral behavior (after all, we doubt participants were actively thinking about forecasts of those 10 behaviors spontaneously), it is certainly possible that when people learn of another's non-political moral or immoral deeds, perceptions of partisan trustworthiness shift in turn. If so, this would reinforce our basic point that moral evaluations relate not only to general trustworthiness but also to a special trustworthiness to one's own group in particular. We leave this question for future research.

A second question is whether the political lie itself exaggerated perceptions of partisan trustworthiness, or whether it simply failed to undermine such preexisting perceptions. On the one hand, policy lies may simply not call into question assumptions of partisan trustworthiness that people already hold. On the other hand, policy lies—as acts that serve to advance one side's

partisan agenda—may exaggerate such perceptions. Although the resolution of this question is not necessary to substantiate our central point that partisan trustworthiness holds different moral connotations for different people, Study 6 will begin to address it by testing whether those who embrace a policy lie are seen to be more partisan trustworthy than those who instead aim to truthfully correct the lie.

Third, we considered whether these results shed better light on our previous findings that policy lies are treated with more partisan leniency than are personal lies. The present study suggests that may be because policy liars are seen to be more partisan trustworthy than personal liars. We conducted a post-test ( $N = 220$  Americans on AMT, 185 after excluding those who failed a memory-based attention check) that tested this directly. We described to participants the distinction between policy lies and personal lies (in a counterbalanced order) by referencing the lies of each type from Studies 2a, 2b, and 3. We then asked (within-subjects), “If you knew a politician told a [policy, personal] lie, how much do you think he or she could be trusted by...: members of his/her own party, members of the other party?” A 2(lie: policy or personal)  $\times$  2(target: own party, other party) interaction suggested that partisan trustworthiness differed in response to a policy and a personal lie,  $F(1, 184) = 9.21, p = .003, \eta p^2 = 0.05$ . That is, partisan trustworthiness was inferred to be greater about a policy liar ( $M_{\text{dif}} = 0.81, SD = 1.73$ ) than a personal liar ( $M_{\text{dif}} = 0.42, SD = 1.49$ .)

### Study 5

To this point, we have argued that policy lies—in part because they signal a politician’s partisan trustworthiness—are deemed more acceptable by likeminded partisans. Consider further why policy lies send this signal. They bend the truth in the service of supporting policy goals that

are part of what defines a party's purpose and thus a partisan identity. People affiliate with parties because of what those parties represent. After all, a party's agenda is reflected in a party's platform. Supporting that agenda—even, or (as the last study will explore) perhaps especially, with a set of “alternative facts”—displays one's loyalty to one side of a partisan divide.

But one can also think of dishonest statements that could serve to help one's own party, but not by displaying one's unwavering commitment to advancing what one's party explicitly aims to accomplish. For example, a politician could tell an *electoral lie*, one that tries to meddle in the conduct of a free and democratic election. Although recent events in American history have revealed alarming anti-democratic sentiment in American society, neither the Democratic nor Republican platforms explicitly include a commitment to denying members of the other party knowledge of how of how to exercise their right to vote. Although the major parties differ in how they balance concerns about election security and voting access, neither party's platform endorses fraud. Even the recent pro-Trump “Stop the Steal” movement was couched in the language—even if unsupported by facts—of concern for election integrity.

Motivated by this reasoning, we had all participants in Study 5 consider a politician who tweeted a lie that had the potential to help his own party. This communication either offered unsubstantiated facts in support of a policy position (policy lie) or provided false information about certain voters' ability to cast their ballot (electoral lie). Whereas the former lie reflects a dishonest approach to supporting the party line, the latter lie reflects a questionable tactic to more directly undermine democracy. In light of Study 3's finding that partisan differences in lie acceptability cannot be traced to an ends-justify-the-means sort of thinking, we suspected that electoral lies—given they do not reflect a direct commitment to a party's aims—would not send the same signal of partisan trustworthiness as would policy lies. As a result, we expected that

judgments of the acceptability of policy lies would be characterized by more partisan leniency than would judgments of electoral lies.

## Method

**Participants and Design.** American participants were recruited from Amazon's Mechanical Turk participant panel ( $N = 4,175$ ). Participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions in a 2(party: Democrat or Republican)  $\times$  2(lie: policy or electoral) full-factorial design. Following the same standard as in our earlier studies, the 394 participants who responded incorrectly to both memory-based attention checks were excluded. This left 3,781 participants in our analyses reported below.<sup>5</sup>

**Procedure.** Participants read a newspaper article detailing a tweet from (fictitious) New Mexico State Representative Steven Wooley. In all cases, the tweet was reported to be a lie, but the topic of that lie varied by condition. For those exposed to a *policy* lie, the tweet was similar to that used in Study 2a. More specifically, the Republican politician stated that higher rates of gun ownership produce less crime, whereas the Democratic politician stated that higher rates of gun ownership produce more crime. The newspaper article then went on to explain that the tweet is a lie by citing evidence that there is no relationship between gun ownership and crime.

But for those who saw the *electoral* lie, the politician tweeted false information about voting access. More specifically, the politician—regardless of his political party—was reported to have tweeted inaccurate information on election day regarding the ability to still vote in Downtown Albuquerque precincts. Crucially, those precincts' electorate was said to be disproportionately allegiant to the opposing party. Specifically, the tweet from the afternoon of the election read, "Lines in Downtown Albuquerque voting precincts are 4 hours long. If you're not already in line, you won't get to vote because polls close at 7." The article then explained



that the newspaper's own journalists saw no such lines and that, by law, anyone who was in line to vote prior to 7pm would be eligible to vote, regardless of when they ultimately were able to cast their vote. In so doing, the article made clear that the tweet was not true, but also explained how it could ultimately help Wooley's own party—not by promoting its policy agenda (the aim of the party-serving lies in our previous studies), but by attempting to disenfranchise voters from the opposing party. Both lie conditions' articles concluded with the statement that Wooley's office had not responded to media inquiries about the tweet.

Next, participants completed our standard slate of three measures that allowed participants to make different excuses for the lie. As a reminder, these allow participants to deny the conclusion of the news story that the tweet was a lie (fake news), to claim that the politician believed himself to be telling the truth (unaware), and to label the lie itself as justifiable (acceptable). Then, participants completed the two trustworthiness measures introduced in Study 4 from which we could calculate general trustworthiness (how much Democrats + how much Republicans can trust him) and partisan trustworthiness (how much his own party – how many the other party can trust him). As in that study, the two composites were correlated, but weakly so,  $r(3781) = .15, p < .001$ . Finally, participants completed the same two general political orientation questions ( $r = .73$ ) used in all previous studies. Although participants did complete issue-specific items as well (including one on gun control), we did not use this measure in our political orientation composite given its differential applicability to the policy and electoral lies.

## Results and Discussion

**General and partisan trustworthiness.** To begin, we ask whether the policy lie and electoral lie differ in the extent to which they signal general trustworthiness and partisan trustworthiness. And, indeed, both did. When the politician told a policy lie, he was seen as more

generally trustworthy ( $M = 6.96$ ,  $SD = 2.91$ ) than when he told an electoral lie ( $M = 5.38$ ,  $SD = 3.19$ ),  $t(3759.83) = 15.93$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.52$ . Furthermore, the policy liar was also seen as more partisan trustworthy ( $M = 1.34$ ,  $SD = 2.11$ ) than the electoral liar ( $M = 0.87$ ,  $SD = 2.05$ ),  $t(3745.41) = 6.78$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.22$ . Even when we controlled for the first two excuses for lying—reporting that the tweet was not a lie (fake news) and that the politician was unaware of lying (unaware)—we observed a diminished but still significant difference on general trustworthiness,  $t(3777) = 6.25$ ,  $p < .001$ , and a largely unchanged difference on partisan trustworthiness,  $t(3777) = 6.18$ ,  $p < .001$ . In other words, the differential signals sent by policy and electoral lies were not merely explained by any differences in their perceived believability and intentionality.

**Lie acceptability.** If the policy and electoral lies differ in the extent to which they reflect trustworthiness—and partisan trustworthiness, in particular—then by our logic they may differ in the extent to which they are deemed acceptable by likeminded as opposed to opposing partisans. We begin by replicating the partisan bias (i.e., the Party X Political Orientation interaction) on our first two excuses for lying: fake news and unaware (controlling for fake news). That is, we observed partisan bias in denying that the lie was, indeed, a lie,  $B = 0.47$ , 95% CI [0.41, 0.53],  $t(3773) = 15.62$ ,  $p < .001$ . Even controlling for any differential perceptions of fake news, we also identified a partisan bias in believing the politician was unaware of having told a lie,  $B = 0.13$ , 95% CI [0.08, 0.19],  $t(3772) = 4.78$ ,  $p < .001$ . Although not of central theoretical interest, these effects were stronger for policy lies,  $t(3773) = 5.37$ ,  $p < .001$ , and electoral lies,  $t(3772) = 2.92$ ,  $p = .004$ , respectively. That is, like-minded partisans were especially likely to claim that the policy lie (more than the electoral lie) was actually true, and were also likely to believe that the electoral lie (more than the policy lie) was believed by the politician to be true. Although these patterns

are intriguing in their own right, keep in mind that we control for both excuses (and the partisan interpretations responsible for them) in examining lie acceptability.

Of more central interest are our effects on lie acceptability. Given the policy lie was seen to be a stronger signal of partisan trustworthiness than was the electoral lie, we expected that policy lies should encourage more partisan bias in evaluations of lie acceptability than electoral lies. In short, that was the case. Although we replicated our finding that there was a partisan bias in evaluating the acceptability of lies (even with fake news and unaware controlled),  $B = 0.23$ , 95% CI [0.19, 0.27],  $t(3771) = 11.05$ ,  $p < .001$ , this effect was further qualified by the type of lie,  $B = 0.11$ , 95% CI [0.07, 0.15],  $t(3771) = 5.21$ ,  $p < .001$  (see Figure 8). For the policy lie, there was a strong partisan bias concerning lie acceptability,  $B = 0.34$ , 95% CI [0.28, 0.40],  $t(3771) = 11.32$ ,  $p < .001$ . Whereas for the electoral lie, this partisan bias was still present, though significantly diminished,  $B = 0.13$ , 95% CI [0.07, 0.18],  $t(3771) = 4.39$ ,  $p < .001$ .

Although we have argued that this effect follows from the policy lie being a stronger signal of partisan trustworthiness, it was also the case that policy lies were stronger signals of general trustworthiness. As such, we proceeded to conduct a more precise test of our hypotheses. More specifically, we built on this model by adding in terms for general trustworthiness (standardized), partisan trustworthiness (standardized), as well as an additional slate of interaction terms that simply replaced our lie variable with each form of trustworthiness. That is, the three interaction terms from the previous model that included the lie condition remained but were complemented by six interactions terms (three using general trustworthiness and three using partisan trustworthiness). This is because we have argued that the lie manipulation (policy or electoral) has the moderating effect it does on lie acceptability because of the different signal it sends about partisan trustworthiness (but not general trustworthiness). Consistent with this

possibility, we found that to the extent that the politician was assumed to be more partisan trustworthy, the partisan bias in lie acceptability grew,  $B = 0.17$ , 95% CI [0.14, 0.21],  $t(3763) = 9.38$ ,  $p < .001$ . But the more the politician was assumed to be generally trustworthy, the partisan bias in lie acceptability did not significantly vary,  $B = 0.02$ , 95% CI [-0.02, 0.06],  $t(3763) = 1.19$ ,  $p = .235$ . In short, although the policy lie (compared to the electoral lie) prompted greater perceptions of both general trustworthiness and partisan trustworthiness, it was its effect on partisan trustworthiness that explained the greater partisan leniency toward policy lies.

**Additional analyses.** We reasoned that the electoral lie was less a signal of partisan trustworthiness than was the policy lie given that the policy lie directly promotes a goal a party actively embraces (thereby signaling partisan loyalty). In contrast, the electoral lie displays party loyalty by transparently aiming to disenfranchise voters, something that parties do not intentionally affiliate themselves with. This logic suggests that if there are partisan biases in responding to electoral lies, they may take a different form. That is, whereas likeminded partisans may have no problem admitting that a policy liar is intending to advance a party's goal (a worthy outcome in the eyes of the party), such partisans may simply deny that an electoral liar is truly trying to interfere with the election (the action that could reflect group loyalty).

And, indeed, we saw evidence of this in a study (in full disclosure, run for another purpose<sup>6</sup>) using only the electoral lie ( $N = 1,006$  Americans from AMT; 907 after exclusions based on memory-based attention checks). We added the question, "Did Representative Wooley hope or intend that his tweet would decrease the number of voters in Downtown Albuquerque?" (1 = *not at all*, 9 = *definitely*). Although not predicted *a priori*, we observed a partisan bias in responses to this question, one that reflected that likeminded partisans *denied* that depressing voting was the politician's intent,  $t(897) = 6.35$ ,  $p < .001$ . Of course, if likeminded partisans

dismiss the electoral liar's intent, then in essence they are denying that the electoral lie actually had a group-serving aim. This could offer the more nuanced answer to why electoral lies are less signals of partisan trustworthiness (and thus are greeted with less leniency by likeminded partisans).

Guided by this intriguing finding, we returned to the present study's data to probe perceptions of partisan trustworthiness more carefully. We returned to our initial model that probed for partisan leniency in lie acceptability, but used the model to predict partisan trustworthiness instead. We observed a Party X Political Orientation X Lie interaction,  $B = 0.08$ , 95% CI [0.01, 0.15],  $t(3771) = 2.39$ ,  $p = .017$ . The relevance of this effect becomes clear upon examining the partisan bias (the Party X Political Orientation) in perceptions of partisan trustworthiness for the policy and electoral lies separately. Like in Study 4, policy lies signaled elevated partisan trustworthiness fairly universally, for likeminded partisans as strongly as those from the other ideological side,  $B = -0.06$ , 95% CI [-0.16, 0.04],  $t(3771) = 1.25$ ,  $p = .210$ . But for electoral lies, there was a partisan bias in the extent to which they signaled partisan trustworthiness,  $B = -0.23$ , 95% CI [-0.32, -0.13],  $t(3771) = 4.71$ ,  $p < .001$ . The negative coefficient reflects that it was likeminded partisans who were especially likely to see diminished evidence of partisan trustworthiness in this lie. After all, it is these politically sympathetic participants who were prone to see less malintent in this out-of-bounds act. It seems the policy lie (unlike the electoral lie) was universally accepted for what it was—an effort to promote the party's aims—thereby explaining the clearer partisan take on that lie's acceptability.

## 6

Our previous studies identified, documented systematic variation in, and aimed to explain the occurrence of partisan leniency in evaluations of politicians' lies. This final study extends on

our previous experiments in three ways. First, we manipulated whether a politician told a lie or the truth. In both cases, the politician expressed support for a policy position that is compatible with his own party's platform; however, we varied whether, as part of that support, he cited an unsubstantiated research finding that supported the position (*lie* condition) or explicitly called out the false premise (*truth* condition). To begin, this allowed us to assess the effect of telling a lie (vs. the truth) on perceptions of a candidate's general trustworthiness and partisan trustworthiness. Recall that Studies 4 and 5 showed that general trustworthiness and partisan trustworthiness connected to our dependent variables (lie acceptability, moral behavior forecasts) in a non-partisan and partisan way, respectively. If telling a policy lie (vs. the truth) has different implications for general and partisan trustworthiness, then we may be able to identify dual, distinct effects of lying.

After all, lying itself has been shown to erode trust (Schweitzer, Hershey, & Bradlow, 2006). Within our framework, it may be that telling a policy lie diminishes perceptions of general trustworthiness. On the other hand, other-oriented lies (especially compared to egoistic or self-oriented lies) have been shown to be more acceptable (Lindsfold & Walter, 1983; see also DePaulo et al., 1996)—especially when the self (or, by extension, the self's political group) stands to gain from the liar (Bocian & Wojciszke, 2004). And given policy lies display a differential willingness to help one side of the political divide over the other, they should also communicate partisan trustworthiness. Of course, whether heightened partisan trustworthiness stems not merely from support for the party's policy position but also from a willingness (versus refusal) to add a position-bolstering lie as part of that support will be revealed by the comparison between the lie and truth conditions. In combination, this suggests that lying (vs. telling the truth) may generally lower perceptions of a politician as a moral actor (to the extent it depresses

general trustworthiness) while simultaneously increasing partisan disagreement on that perspective (to the extent it increases partisan trustworthiness). Whereas our previous studies aim to explain variation in how people respond to lies, this design allows us to identify these (possibly dual) effects of (policy) lying itself.

Second, we probed for these dual effects using only the moral behavior composite, without first measuring the standard slate of excuses for lying. One reason was practical: These measures have less clear interpretations in the context of the new truth condition. Additionally, excluding these measures allowed us to understand perceivers' (non-political) perceptions of the target, without such impressions being influenced by the excuse-making suggested by the measures themselves. Third, we added a baseline moral behavior forecast measure. Before reading the newspaper story reporting on the politician's tweet, participants made similar forecasts about all elected officials from one party or the other—in particular, the party of which the target politician was a member. In this way, we could isolate the effects of our manipulations on perceptions of the specific politician, independent of participants' preexisting beliefs about the moral character of elected officials from that party.

## Method

**Participants and design.** We recruited 1,274 Americans from Amazon's Mechanical Turk. We randomly assigned participants to one of four conditions in a 2(party: Democrat or Republican) X 2(veracity: truth or lie) full-factorial design. Applying the same standard used in our previous studies, we identified and excluded from further consideration the 184 participants who missed more than one memory-based attention checks. This left 1,090 participants in the analyses reported below.

**Procedure.** To begin, participants completed the moral behavior composite used in Study 4, but, rather than the prompts being about the specific politician who lied, these items were about Democratic or Republican officeholders in general (depending on party condition). That is, participants considered the 5 everyday moral and 5 everyday immoral behaviors, and indicated what percentage of Democratic (or Republican) elected officials “in your best estimate, would do each of the behaviors in the context or circumstance described?” This *baseline moral behavior composite* allowed us to measure (and then control for) preexisting differences between participants—especially that might be tied to their political orientation—in their moral evaluations of candidates of one party or the other.

At that point, participants read a newspaper article describing a tweet from (fictitious) New Mexico State Representative Steven Wooley. The tweet always related to the relationship between gun ownership and crime, but its veracity varied by condition. When the tweet was identified as a *lie*, the politician indicated that the research was clear concerning the relationship between gun ownership and crime. When the politician was said to be a Democrat, he indicated his support for gun control by tweeting that higher rates of gun ownership produce more crime; when a Republican, he indicated support for gun rights by stating higher rates of gun ownership produce less crime.

For other participants, the news article reported on a tweet from the politician that was said to be *true*. When the politician was a Democrat, he said, “The research is clear: Higher rates of gun ownership DON’T produce more crime (or have any effect on crime).” The tweet from the Republican was similar, but noted gun ownership does not “produce less crime (or have any effect on crime).” But just as in the lie versions, the politician followed up with a statement supporting “getting guns off NM streets” (Democratic) or “protecting NM gun owners’ rights”



(Republican). In both cases, the newspaper article did not take a position on the wisdom of gun control, but simply focused on the factual component of the tweets.

After participants completed three memory-based attention checks, they completed the two trustworthiness items (also used in Studies 4 and 5) from which a general trustworthiness and partisan trustworthiness composite could be calculated. In this case, general and partisan trustworthiness were weakly *negatively* correlated,  $r(1090) = -.07, p = .019$ . At that point, participants completed the moral behavior measures used in Study 4. Unlike the baseline moral behavior measures, this one asked about the likelihood that Representative Wooley in particular would engage in 5 everyday moral ( $\alpha = .90$ ) and 5 everyday immoral behaviors ( $\alpha = .89$ ) when in the next relevant situation. Finally, participants responded to the same two general political orientation questions used in all previous studies. They also indicated their support for or opposition to a number of more specific policy positions. Their response to “a citizen’s right to bear arms” was combined with the two general items to identify participants’ political orientation ( $\alpha = .75$ ), such that higher values reflected greater conservatism.

## Results and Discussion

**General and partisan trustworthiness.** To begin, we tested whether learning that the politician told a lie as opposed to the truth encouraged different inferences about his general trustworthiness and partisan trustworthiness. And, indeed, the truth-telling politician was seen to be more generally trustworthy ( $M = 9.08, SD = 2.58$ ) than the lying politician ( $M = 7.64, SD = 2.88$ ),  $t(1083.22) = 8.70, p < .001, d = 0.53$ . In contrast, when the politician lied, he was seen as more partisan trustworthy ( $M = 1.59, SD = 2.08$ ) than when the politician told the truth ( $M = 1.29, SD = 2.10$ ),  $t(1088) = 2.34, p = .019, d = 0.14$ . Note that these two effects have distinct implications for how the politician should be morally evaluated. The greater general

trustworthiness that telling the truth implies should lead liberals and conservatives alike to see the politician as more moral. But the greater partisan trustworthiness that telling a (policy) lie prompts should, independently, add more of a partisan bent to the lying politician's perceived morality.

**Moral behaviors.** We proceed by running a regression that predicts the moral behavior composite, the belief that the target politician would be more likely to engage in everyday moral behaviors and less likely to engage in everyday immoral behaviors. Crucially, this model controls for the baseline moral behavior composite, which allows us to isolate effects of partisan leniency on this composite from preexisting beliefs about Democratic and Republican politicians' morality. The predictors were party (+1: Republican -1: Democratic), veracity (+1: lie, -1: truth), and political orientation, as well as all interaction terms that could be made from these variables. As anticipated by the veracity manipulation's effect on perceptions of general trustworthiness, we observed a main effect of veracity: The lying politician was forecast to behave less morally than the truthful one,  $B = -5.28$ , 95% CI  $[-6.87, -3.68]$ ,  $t(1081) = 6.50$ ,  $p < .001$ . In addition, we observed a partisan bias (i.e., a Party X Political Orientation interaction) on the moral behavior composite,  $B = 2.95$ , 95% CI  $[1.11, 4.79]$ ,  $t(1081) = 3.16$ ,  $p = .002$ . But, as foreshadowed by the effects of the lie manipulation on perceptions of partisan trustworthiness, this partisan bias was magnified when the politician told a lie as opposed to the truth,  $B = 1.81$ , 95% CI  $[0.22, 3.39]$ ,  $t(1081) = 2.23$ ,  $p = .026$  (see Figure 9). More specifically, we observed clear evidence of this partisan bias when the politician told a lie,  $B = 4.76$ , 95% CI  $[2.39, 7.12]$ ,  $t(1081) = 3.95$ ,  $p < .001$ . But when the politician told the truth, the partisan bias disappeared,  $B = 1.14$ , 95% CI  $[-1.33, 3.64]$ ,  $t < 1$ .

In a final model, we aimed to connect the two sets of effects just discussed. That is, does tweeting the truth instead of a lie elevate perceptions of the politician as a generally moral person because telling the truth signals general trustworthiness? And does tweeting a lie instead of the truth magnify the partisan bias in moral behavioral forecasts because the lie elevates perceptions of partisan trustworthiness? To see whether our data were consistent with these possibilities, we built on the previous model. We not only included general trustworthiness (standardized) and partisan trustworthiness (standardized), but also added the six interaction terms that come from replacing the veracity variable with each of these two trustworthiness composites. That is, we retained the three interactions terms from the previous model that included the veracity manipulation. We thus created six new interaction terms that replaced the veracity manipulation: three included general trustworthiness instead and three included partisan trustworthiness instead.

In this expanded model, we observe a main effect of general trustworthiness,  $B = 9.42$ , 95% CI [7.58, 11.26],  $t(1073) = 10.06$ ,  $p < .001$ , one that was not qualified by a partisan bias,  $B = 0.68$ , 95% CI [-0.89, 2.26],  $t < 1$ . In other words, when the politician was seen as generally trustworthy (as the truth-telling politician was), he was seen as a more generally moral actor, regardless of whether his political party did or did not match the perceiver's political orientation. And even though we did not observe a main effect of partisan trustworthiness,  $B = 0.34$ , 95% CI [-1.25, 1.93],  $t < 1$ , its predictive power was qualified by a partisan bias,  $B = 3.65$ , 95% CI [2.08, 5.22],  $t(1073) = 4.56$ ,  $p < .001$ . This reflects that to the extent a politician was seen as partisan trustworthy (as the lying politician more was), then like-minded partisans saw this politician as a more moral actor even in the non-political sphere.

Whereas in our previous studies, we aimed to understand when and why there is variation in the extent to which political lies are judged to be acceptable and a signal of a target's moral character, these final findings instead document dual signals that are sent by telling a (policy) lie as opposed to telling the truth. On the one hand, political liars are seen as less morally upstanding people, an effect that can in part be traced to their being seen as less generally trustworthy people. But, on the other hand, liars prompt more politically polarized perceptions, an effect that can, in part, be traced to the greater perceptions of partisan trustworthiness that the policy lie prompted. Note that this helps to resolve a tension between likeminded partisans' apparent commitment to honesty (in their bias toward saying that their own side's politicians were likely telling the truth, as observed on our fake news measure) and their leniency toward dishonesty (as observed in our lie acceptability measure). If general trustworthiness (as reflected in telling the truth) and partisan trustworthiness (as reflected in a willingness to lie to advance the group's agenda) are independent (but directionally opposing) contributors to or signals of moral character, then it makes sense why likeminded partisans may both be skeptical that their own side's politicians have indeed lied even as they see some redeeming virtue in the added in-group loyalty that such lies reflect.

### **General Discussion**

Quite literally engraved into Judeo-Christian morality as part of the Ten Commandments, "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor" is typically interpreted as a simple moral prohibition against lying. Calling someone a liar can seem tantamount to claiming they are a bad, untrustworthy person. From this perspective, it is surprising how much lying seems to be tolerated in those who occupy the most powerful political positions in the U.S. and around the world. In this paper, we find that who is lying, what they lie about, and who is listening all help

predict how people explain and evaluate politicians who lie. In so doing, we highlight that the moral acceptability of *bearing false witness* really depends on the extent to which such lies are used in support of or against the aims of *thy neighbors*, one's political in-group. We refer to this as partisan leniency.

Our studies permitted us to draw four conclusions. First, we showed there is partisan leniency in how people evaluate political lies. Lies that supported a policy position—regarding immigration reform (Study 1a), minimum wage laws (Studies 1b-1c, 3-4), school voucher policy (Study 1d), gun control measures (Study 2a, 5), and affirmative action (Study 2b)—were seen to be more acceptable or justifiable when they emanated from the perceiver's own political side. Crucially, all effects held when controlling for participants' beliefs that the lie was in fact true and that the liar had fibbed unintentionally. In other words, partisans disagree about the acceptability of lies independent of their disagreements about the the facts of what they are judging.

Although this partisan leniency was established controlling for two excuses for lying, it also means that partisan leniency was established at the average level of those excuses. We conducted two follow-up tests to determine: 1) whether the partisan leniency in lie acceptability depended on participants' making these previous excuses, and relatedly 2) whether even those who indicated the politician was indeed telling a falsehood (fake news < 0) and was aware of doing so (unaware < 0) would also show partisan leniency toward the acceptability of policy lies. Given these analyses require the examination of higher-order interactions or a subsetting sample of the data, respectively, we maximized power for these analyses by pooling across the 4,925 participants in Studies 1-5 who considered a policy lie. A random effect of study was included in each model.

For our first robustness check, we included fixed effects of the fibber's party, participant's political orientation, the fake news excuse (centered at the scale midpoint), the unaware excuse (centered at the scale midpoint), as well as all interaction terms that can be made from these four variables. The dependent variable was lie acceptability. First, we replicate the effect of partisan leniency (Party X Political Orientation) on lie acceptability,  $B = 0.32$ ,  $t(4905.88) = 7.78$ ,  $p < .001$ , now estimated for someone perfectly unsure if the statement was indeed false and if the fibber was aware of issuing a falsehood. Partisan leniency did not depend on participants' beliefs about whether the article made a false accusation and was thus fake news,  $B = 0.00$ ,  $t < 1$ , whether the fibber was seen to be unaware of lying,  $B = 0.03$ ,  $t(4905.48) = 1.49$ ,  $p = .137$ , nor the interaction of those two excuses,  $B = -0.00$ ,  $t < 1$ . In other words, although lie acceptability was sensitive to the size of these two excuses (fake news:  $B = 0.55$ ,  $t(4905.47) = 32.19$ ,  $p < .001$ ; unaware:  $B = 0.19$ ,  $t(4904.61) = 10.26$ ,  $p < .001$ ), partisan leniency in lie acceptability was not sensitive to these details. Considered in light of Study 6's findings, which showed that partisan leniency *was* sensitive to whether the politician actively embraced or disavowed the false premise when offering support for a party-platform-consistent position, this reflects that what invites partisan leniency is the loyal statement of support, regardless of the platform-friendly premise's perceived truth value.

The first robustness check foreshadows that it is likely that in a subsetting analysis that includes only those participants who did indeed believe that the statement was an intentional lie, that we would see similar evidence of partisan leniency. Of course, the two covariates also foreshadow that in general these participants should also tilt toward seeing the lie as less acceptable. In this second robustness check, we included those 692 participants who responded below the neutral midpoint on both excuses, thereby indicating the statement was likely a false

one that was likely issued with awareness of its being false. Even in this restricted sample—still controlling for the (now more restricted) variability in fake news and unaware—we continued to observe the Party X Political Orientation interaction that displays partisan leniency toward political lies,  $B = .27$ ,  $t(686) = 6.17$ ,  $p < .001$ . The interaction was symmetric: Liberals judged a Democrat seen to be intentionally lying as more justified in telling the lie ( $M = -1.73$ ) than did conservative participants ( $M = -2.23$ )  $t(686) = 3.99$ ,  $p < .001$ ; conservative participants judged a Republican seen to be intentionally lying as more justified in telling the lie ( $M = -1.72$ ) than did liberal participants ( $M = -2.29$ ),  $t(686) = 4.76$ ,  $p < .001$ . In other words, all else equal, false statements are unsurprisingly seen as more justified to the extent they are not seen to be intentional lies. But the partisan bent to these evaluations emerges just as strongly for those who believe the statements are intentional lies.

Our second central contribution is that partisan leniency did not extend equally to all lies (Studies 2a-3, 5). This demonstrated that the present effects did not merely reflect an evaluative charitability extended to members of an individual's own group. Instead, partisans came down less hard on liars who had fibbed on behalf of their party's agenda, those who distorted the facts in a way that signaled commitment to the political in-group and its explicit goals. These partisan differences reduced or disappeared when considering mischaracterizations of the liar's own life story (personal lies), or group-serving prevarications that were inconsistent with a party's explicit values (electoral lie).

Third, partisan leniency toward political liars could be traced to partisan differences in judgments of trustworthiness. Participants saw their own side's politicians as more trustworthy following a policy lie, but not a personal lie (Study 3). In other words, judgments of liars' trustworthiness were not unconditional reflections of partisan similarity; they emerged only

when the lie signaled commitment to the group's goals, thereby discouraging condemnation. Studies 4-6 established more directly that it is perceptions of partisan (instead of general) trustworthiness—a belief that a politician will be more trustworthy to one's own party than to the opposing party—that identifies when likeminded partisans give liars a relative pass. Policy lies were found to signal more partisan trustworthiness than personal lies (follow-up to Study 4), electoral lies (Study 5), or telling the truth (Study 6); partisan leniency toward policy lies was, thus, especially strong. Of course, the generality of these conclusions is necessarily constrained by the specific lies used to test them. Within each category of lie, there is no doubt variability in how much they signal partisan trustworthiness in the liar. If future research develops a more fine-grained understanding of what features of a lie communicate partisan trustworthiness, one would be able to better predict *a priori* precisely which lies are reacted to most divergently by partisans of different stripes.

Fourth, we moved beyond commentaries on the lies themselves to understand how liars' moral standing is perceived, outside of the political domain and in their everyday lives (Studies 4, 6). On the one hand, policy liars (compared to truth-tellers) are seen as less generally trustworthy, which explains why they are believed to be less moral actors (without respect to partisanship). But on the other hand, policy liars (again, compared to truth-tellers) are seen as more partisan trustworthy—a sign of better or worse moral character in the eyes of political in-group and out-group members, respectively. This reflects how partisan leniency toward political lies does not simply reflect shifting standards for excusing political misbehavior. Instead, it reflects a broader moral standard—one that prioritizes in-group loyalty—that identifies which in-group and out-group members are good, moral actors in their everyday (non-political) lives. But in combination, these findings speak to the dual nature of trustworthiness—one type (general



trustworthiness) has more universal meaning, whereas the other type (partisan trustworthiness) holds different significance depending on the eye (and really, the group status) of the beholder.

Although it was not focal to our theorizing, we also consistently observed across our studies that conservative participants in particular were skeptical that media reports were fake news—especially those that called out Republican liars. It is unclear why this occurred. One possibility is that this merely mirrors a distrust of the media spread by the current iteration of the Republican Party. A second possibility is that this difference has more psychological roots, perhaps reflecting conservatives' greater baseline loyalty to their in-group and distrust of outsiders (Graham et al., 2009). Tests in new cultural contexts and epochs will be necessary to understand whether this effect is indeed contextually specific or fairly universal.

We close by discussing theoretical implications of our findings, addressing some superficial inconsistencies between the present and past research, and identifying some open questions for future research.

### **Moral Mandates**

We argued that partisan leniency extends to policy lies in particular because such lies signal commitment to an ideological groups. But not all policy lies may serve this function. Political attitudes that tie into an individual's moral mandates (Skitka, 2002) help to define the individual's identity and thus delineate group membership (Rokeach, 1973; Taylor, 1989), thereby warping the individual's assessments of the justice of actions taken in defense of them. This suggests that the partisan leniency we explored may have been particularly robust if the issues we chose were related to participants' own moral mandates. Future research should explore whether policy lies in support of less morally relevant issues (e.g., tariff policies) would

receive the same partisan leniency. This may depend on whether such lies still signal trustworthy allegiance to a group that advances a morally laden agenda in other ways.

### **In-Group Loyalty**

Moral foundations theory adopts a functional perspective, arguing that morality is that which promotes harmony and cooperation within social groups (Haidt, 2008). By this perspective, loyalty to one's in-group is a binding foundation, one that encourages group solidarity; it encourages coalitional thinking, motivating individuals to get on board with, and not question, the aims of the group (Graham et al., 2013). Looking at responses to the moral foundations questionnaire (MFQ)—developed to measure moral commitment to in-group loyalty as well as four other moral foundations—it seems that in-group loyalty is more core to conservatives' than to liberals' morality (Clifford et al., 2015; Graham et al., 2011; Weber & Frederico, 2013). It also correlates with darker markers of conservatism, such as right-wing authoritarianism (Frederico, Weber, Ergun, & Hunt, 2013) and social dominance orientation (Kugler, Jost, & Noorbaloochi, 2014; Milojev et al., 2014). This might lead one to expect that conservatives would have been more likely than liberals to excuse their own politicians' lies.

More recently, it was argued that liberals and conservatives may show differences in how they evaluate moral principles or *issues*, but that need not imply that they show the same differences in their evaluations of *people* (Frimer et al., 2013). Indeed, liberals and conservatives were fairly similar in how they leaned on moral foundations to judge historical figures' moral standing. Most relevant to the current analysis, for neither liberals nor conservatives did targets' behavioral reputation of in-group loyalty predict the extent to which the target was judged as a moral exemplar. Given that we found that both liberals and conservatives displayed moral

leniency to those who reflected in-group loyalty, how do we resolve these apparent inconsistencies?

First, it is certainly possible that conservatives—responding to the sort of abstract questions that constitute the MFQ—might be more likely (than liberals) to endorse the principle that fealty to one's own party is paramount, but conservatives and liberals could still display the same partisan biases when evaluating actual political lies. After all, strong partisans are marked by greater loyalty, whether they be on the left or the right (Clifford, 2017). Second, although Frimer et al. (2013) found that in-group loyalty was not a predictor of moral evaluations for either liberals or conservatives, it is important to note that their targets who were judged high in in-group loyalty (e.g., Ayatullah Khomeini, Pope John Paul II, Che Guevara) did not necessarily display loyalty to the judges' own group. Our own results showed that it is not targets' loyalty to the targets' own group, but loyalty to the judge's own political group, that is taken as a reflection of better moral behavior and character. Third, it is not that our participants went out of their way to heap praise on their own party's political liars. Instead, partisan leniency was reflected in participants' middling acceptability ratings of their own politicians' lies (seen most clearly in the unadjusted means reported in the Supplemental Materials). As Study 6 demonstrated, lying can have dual, opposing effects: diminishing moral evaluations due to its signal of diminished general trustworthiness and boosting (or diminishing) moral evaluations due to its signal of partisan trustworthiness. In other words, partisan leniency more discouraged like-minded partisans from condemning lies instead of encouraging them to see the lies as perfectly moral.

Of course, psychology's interest in whether in-group loyalty is or is not core to morality did not begin with moral foundations theory. Kohlberg (1981) saw the prizing of unconditional loyalty to a small group (e.g., one's family) or a broader in-group as a relatively unsophisticated

moral stage beyond which morally sophisticated reasoners would ultimately grow, but at which others would stagnate (Walker, 2004). Turiel (1983) characterized in-group loyalty as a wise convention instead of a basic component of moral character. More recently, Kugler, Jost, and Noorbaloochi (2014) suggested that moral foundations like loyalty not be legitimized as *moral* foundations unless they can be shown to predict prototypically moral behavior. Our own findings—specifically those presented in Studies 4 and 6—adopt this final standard to understand whether people perceive in-group loyalty as a signal of moral character. Given that perceptions of partisan trustworthiness (differential trustworthiness to an in-group and out-group) predicted forecasts that the target would behave in prototypically moral ways, it seems that in-group loyalty is seen as a reflection of moral character. But, crucially, the nature of that signal varied depending on the eye of the beholder: Liars who were particularly loyal or disloyal to the perceiver's in-group (vs. out-group) were forecast to look more like moral or immoral paragons, respectively.

### **Becoming A Liar Oneself**

One natural question is whether partisans' relative comfort with their own politicians' policy lies also implies a comfort with telling or spreading such lies themselves. Social media websites like Twitter make passing on (or retweeting) such information as simple as the click of a button. When Hildreth and Anderson (2018) placed groups of participants in competition and made the importance of loyalty salient to them, their participants saw themselves as moral when they lied to benefit their own group financially. Outside observers did not view their lies so charitably. This work offers an initial suggestion that partisans—who occupy a political battlefield marked by severe tribalism—may be willing to serve up such lies themselves.

Whether such comfort would apply more to policy lies—as stronger displays of loyalty and trustworthiness—is a topic for future exploration.

Finally, although we have focused on how people respond to lies, our findings may also speak to why political lying has been so prevalent. Of course, there is always a chance that liars will not be caught. But when they are—if those lies are in the service of an ideological agenda—the response is likely to be politically polarized. Those who never would have supported such a candidate may protest, while those in ideological agreement may be inclined to tolerate (even if not explicitly endorse) it. That pattern has become an increasingly common storyline in the American political arena as of late.

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## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>We refer to these media-flagged falsehoods as “lies,” but note that for most of our studies, it is not possible to know whether they were intentional lies. In Studies 1-5, we measure whether participants think these statements are indeed false and whether participants think the politician thought they were indeed false. In the General Discussion, we report a cross-study analysis to examine whether the subset of participants who believed the statement to be an intentional lie also displayed partisan leniency in evaluating the lie’s acceptability, and whether the partisan leniency that we find consistent characterizes responses to policy lies depends on such a characterization.

<sup>2</sup>Although we ran (and replicated) some of the studies presented in this paper using in-lab university participant samples, the liberal skew of such samples makes extrapolation to conservatives suspect. To avoid engaging in such a problematic research practice, we focus on on-line samples whose political orientation is more representative of the American electorate.

<sup>3</sup>Half of participants in Study 1a were instead told Steve Wooley was an ordinary citizen.

<sup>4</sup>Consider further why predicting means at the sample average of each covariate understates how much likeminded partisans find their own politicians’ lies to be acceptable. Because likeminded participants are more likely to excuse political lies through claims of fake news or skepticism that the politician lied intentionally, predicting acceptability judgments for someone at the sample average of the two covariates (thereby estimating a conservative and liberal participant’s responses if they interpret the statement’s truth and intentionality as the average person would) in effect shrinks the partisan gap and thus understates just how acceptable likeminded partisans judge the politicians’ lies to be. To illustrate this and to give a more direct sense of partisans’ comfort with their own side’s lies, we provide a table of predicted means

from models that do not include the two other excuses for lying covariates when predicting lie acceptability in the Supplemental Materials for Studies 1-5 (Table SM6). Still, the reader should be mindful that when we say likeminded partisans excuse lies as more acceptable, a more nuanced characterization is that opposing partisans see the lies as unacceptable whereas likeminded partisans see the lies as neither acceptable nor unacceptable.

<sup>5</sup>In our previous studies, one funding lab maximized sample size given available funds. In this study, we knew on the basis of a previously run study that participants were likely to display some partisan leniency even toward electoral lies. This means that our central prediction was that a partially attenuated three-way interaction would emerge. Given that partially attenuated interactions make achievement of adequate statistical power difficult without very large sample sizes, we combined resources across two funding labs to reach this enormous (by experimental social psychological standards) sample size.

<sup>6</sup>We varied whether the tweet was actually visible to voters during or (due to the liar's error) only after the election to see whether its ability to actually influence the election influenced partisan leniency. Although we replicated the partisan bias in lie acceptability,  $t(897) = 2.34, p = .019$ , this did not depend on the ability of the lie to actually influence the election,  $t < 1$ . Although we appreciate that null effects should be interpreted with caution, this reinforces a point from Study 3: The partisan bias in evaluating a lie's acceptability did not stem from the lie's ability to exert an actual effect on a group-relevant outcome.



**Table 1***Estimated Betas (Standard Errors) from Models for Studies 1a-1d*

Predictors	Fake News (Lie is True)	Unaware (Lie is Unintentional)	Lie is Acceptable
Politician (+1: Republican, -1: Democratic)	0.09 (0.04)*	0.02 (0.04)	-0.02 (0.03)
Participant Political Ideology	0.25 (0.04)***	-0.00 (0.04)	0.07 (0.03)*
Politician x Participant Political Ideology	0.59 (0.03)***	0.14 (0.04)***	0.34 (0.03)***
Fake News	-	0.41 (0.04)***	0.83 (0.04)***
Unaware	-	-	0.36 (0.03)***

Note: All models also include a random effect of study (1a, 1b, 1c, or 1d). All row variables are simultaneous predictors of the variable that is the column header. \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

**Table 2***Estimated Betas (Standard Errors) from Models for Studies 2a-2b*

Predictors	Fake News (Lie is True)	Unaware (Lie is Unintentional)	Lie is Acceptable
Lie Type (+1: Policy Lie, -1: Personal Lie)	0.11 (0.06)*	0.85 (0.06)***	0.21 (0.06)***
Politician (+1: Republican, -1: Democratic)	0.19 (0.06)***	0.06 (0.06)	0.06 (0.05)
Participant Political Ideology	0.16 (0.05)***	0.06 (0.06)	0.07 (0.05)
Lie Type x Politician	0.08 (0.06)	-0.02 (0.06)	0.09 (0.05)
Lie Type x Participant Political Ideology	0.10 (0.05)	-0.04 (0.06)	0.13 (0.05)***
Politician x Participant Political Ideology	0.37 (0.05)***	0.03 (0.06)	0.26 (0.05)***
Lie Type x Politician x Participant Political Ideology	0.30 (0.05)***	-0.02 (0.06)	0.16 (0.05)***
Fake News	-	0.69 (0.06)***	0.90 (0.05)***
Unaware	-	-	0.42 (0.06)***

Note: All models also include a random effect of study (2a or 2b). All row variables are simultaneous predictors of the variable that is the column header. †p < .1, \*p < .05, \*\*p < .01, \*\*\* p < .001

**Table 3.***Estimated Betas (Standard Errors) from Models for Study 3*

Predictors	Fake News (Lie is True)	Unaware (Lie is Unintentional)	Lie is Acceptable
Lie Type (+1: Policy Lie, -1: Personal Lie)	0.02 (0.09)	0.66 (0.10)***	0.19 (0.08)**
Politician (+1: Republican, -1: Democratic)	0.11 (0.09)	-0.05 (0.10)	-0.01 (0.07)
Participant Political Ideology	0.27 (0.08)***	0.02 (0.09)	0.04 (0.07)
Lie Type x Politician	0.03 (0.09)	0.06 (0.10)	0.06 (0.07)
Lie Type x Participant Political Ideology	0.06 (0.08)	-0.08 (0.09)	-0.10 (0.07)
Politician x Participant Political Ideology	0.35 (0.08)***	0.23 (0.09)*	0.28 (0.07)***
Lie Type x Politician x Participant Political Ideology	-0.01 (0.08)	-0.04 (0.09)	0.12 (0.07) †
Fake News	-	0.65 (0.10)***	1.06 (0.08)***
Belief Speaker Thought Lie Was True Covariate	-	-	0.24 (0.08)***

Note: All row variables are simultaneous predictors of the column outcome. † $p < .1$ , \* $p < .05$ .

\*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

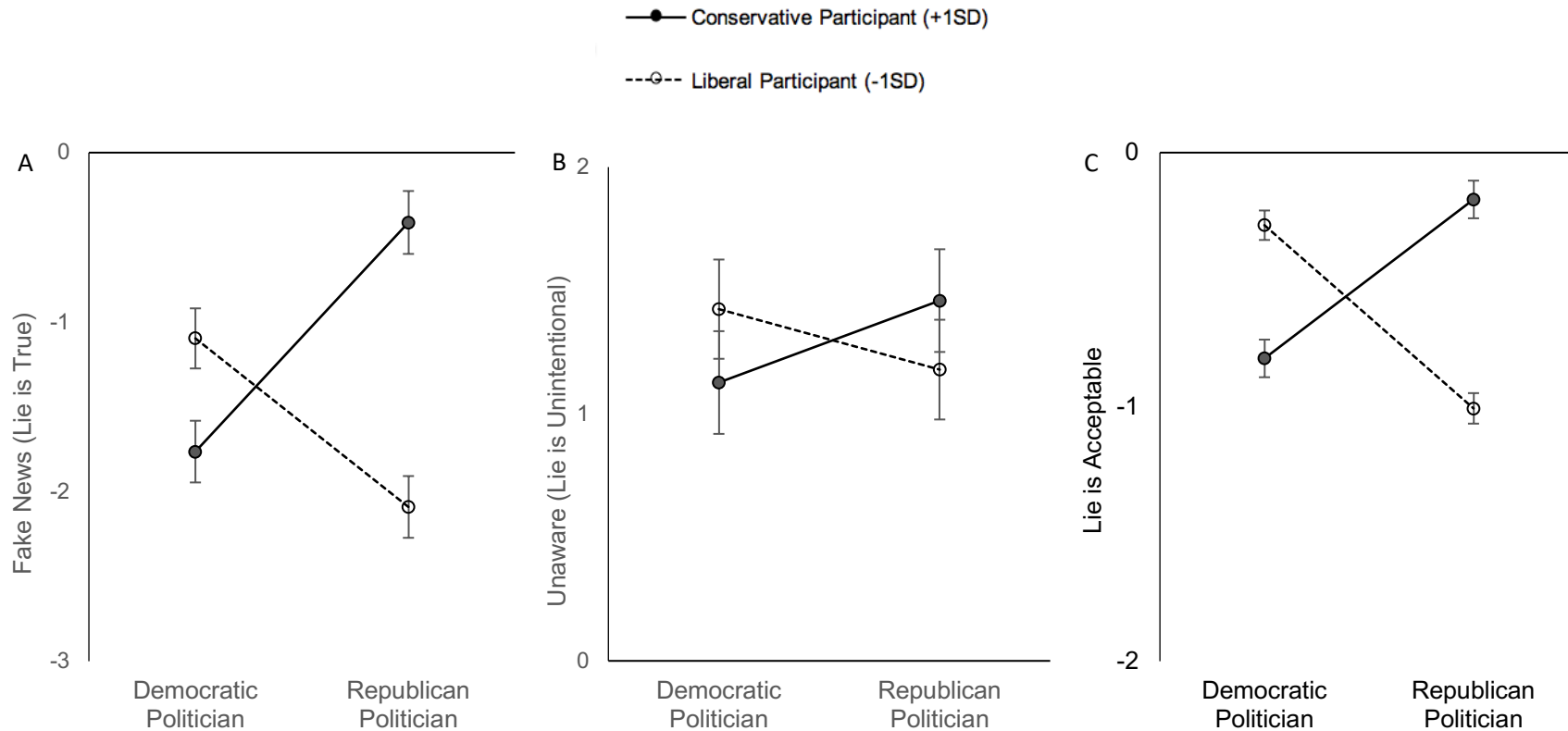
**Table 4***Estimated Betas (Standard Errors) from Models for Study 4*

Predictors	Belief Lie Was Acceptable	Moral Behavior Composite
Politician (+1: Republican, -1: Democratic)	0.01 (0.05)	-4.70 (1.41)***
Participant Political Orientation (Conservative, higher)	0.27 (0.05)***	2.69 (1.42)
Politician x Participant Political Orientation	0.27 (0.05)***	13.07 (1.45)***
Belief Lie Is True (standardized)	0.68 (0.06)***	-0.42 (1.63)
Belief Speaker Thought Lie Was True (standardized)	0.37 (0.05)***	8.79 (1.40)***
<b>General Trustworthiness (standardized)</b>	<b>0.54 (0.06)***</b>	<b>6.54 (1.58)***</b>
General Trustworthiness X Politician	-0.16 (0.05)**	1.81 (1.40)
General Trustworthiness X Political Orientation	-0.01 (0.05)	-1.09 (1.34)
General Trustworthiness X Politician X Political Orientation	-0.04 (0.05)	0.14 (1.33)
Partisan Trustworthiness (standardized)	-0.04 (0.05)	2.90 (1.44)
Partisan Trustworthiness X Politician	-0.02 (0.05)	-3.66 (1.42)*
Partisan Trustworthiness X Political Orientation	-0.10 (0.05)*	0.96 (1.26)
<b>Partisan Trustworthiness X Politician X Political Orientation</b>	<b>0.17 (0.05)***</b>	<b>4.35 (1.27)***</b>

Note: The key terms discussed in the main text are bolded. Values represent regression betas, and values in parentheses represent standard errors. \*p < .05. \*\*p < .01, \*\*\* p < .001

**Figure 1**

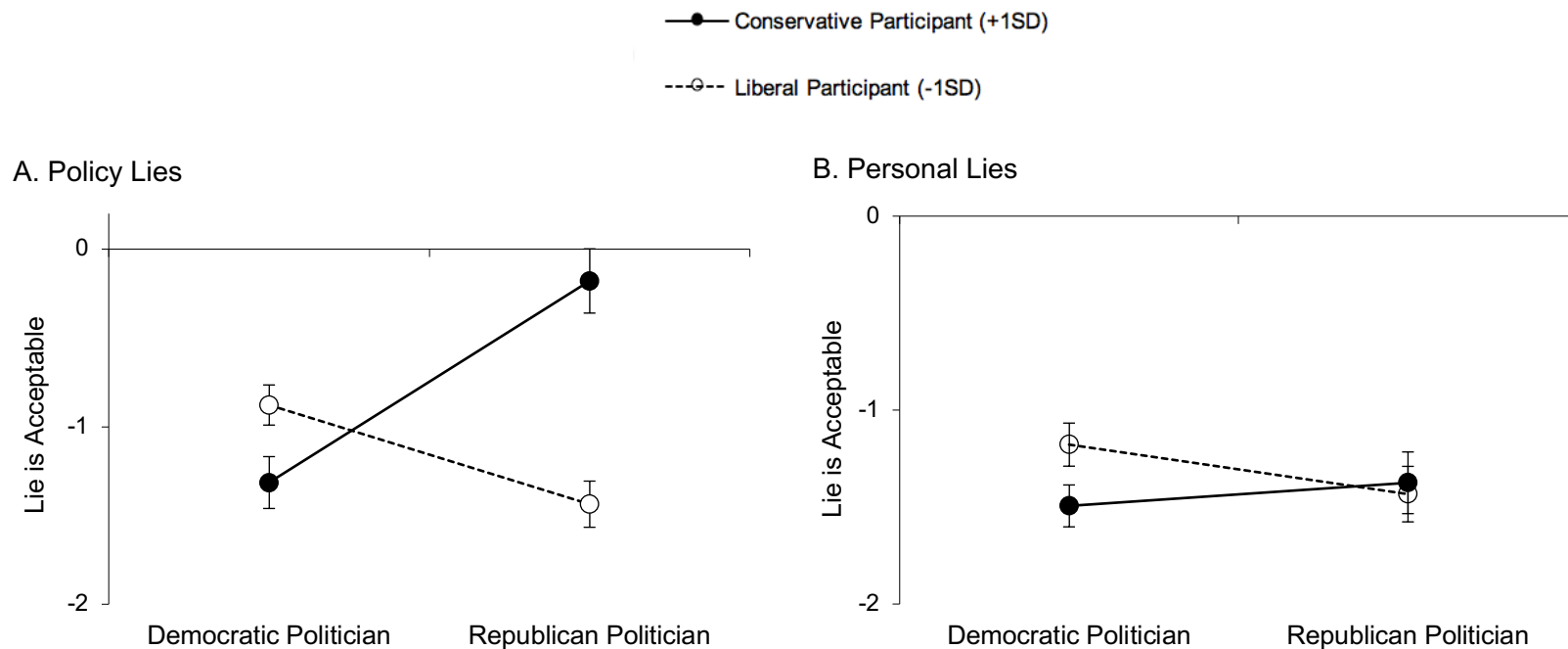
*Excuses for Lying by Participant Political Orientation and the Politician's Political Party (Studies 1a-1d)*



Note: Depicted values are predicted means (and standard errors) as a function of the party of the lying politician and participants' political orientation ( $\pm 1$  SD from political neutrality) in Studies 1a-d for (A) fake news (lie is actually true), (B) unaware (lie is unintentional), and (C) lie acceptability. Means are predicted at the overall average response for the dependent variable or variables predicted in the earlier panel or panels.

**Figure 2**

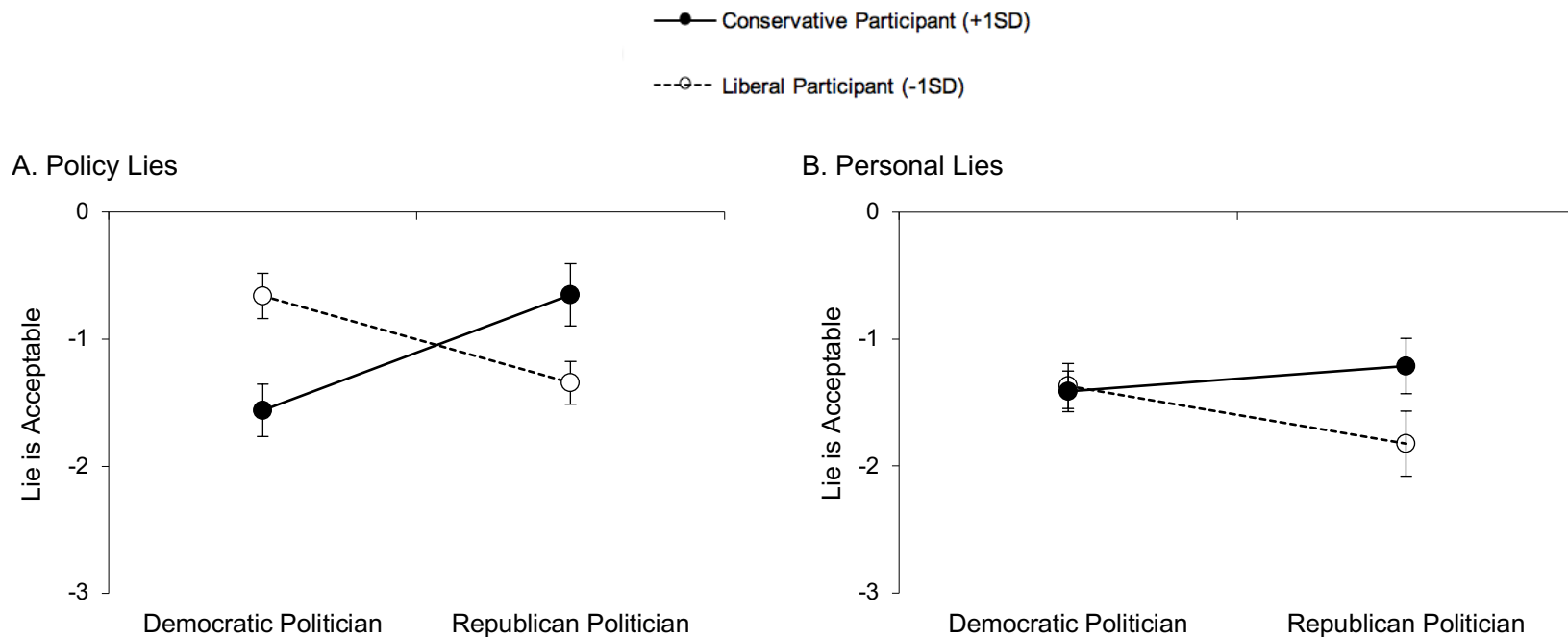
*Perceived acceptability of A) policy lies and B) personal lies by participant political orientation and politician political party (Studies 2a-b)*



Note: Depicted values are predicted means (and standard errors) as a function of the party of the lying politician and participants' political orientation ( $\pm 1$  SD from political neutrality). Means are predicted at the overall average response for the fake news and unaware measures.

**Figure 3**

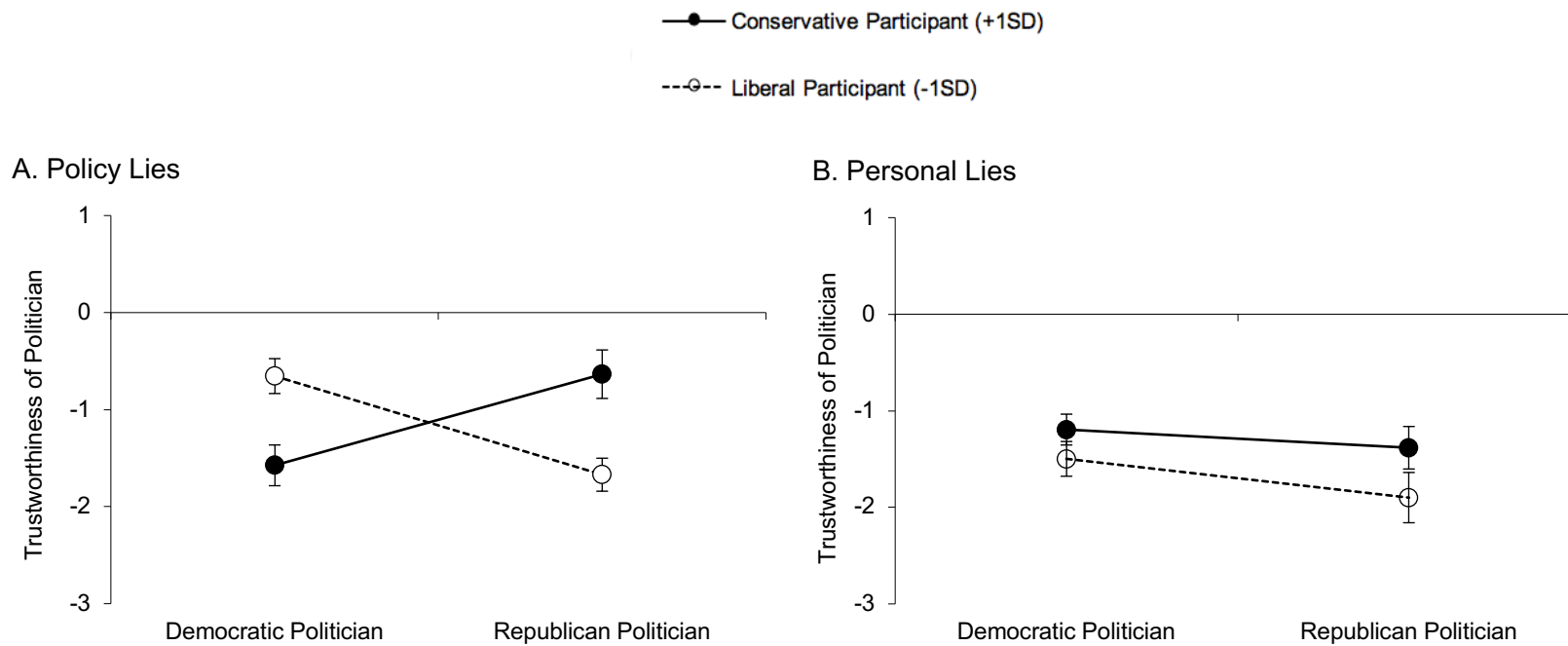
*Perceived acceptability of A) policy lies and B) personal lies by participant political orientation and politician political party (Study 3)*



Note: Depicted values are predicted means (and standard errors) as a function of the party of the lying politician and participants' political orientation ( $\pm 1$  SD from political neutrality). Means are predicted at the overall average response for the fake news and unaware measures.

**Figure 4**

Perceived trustworthiness of the politician who told a A) policy lie or B) personal lie (Study 3).

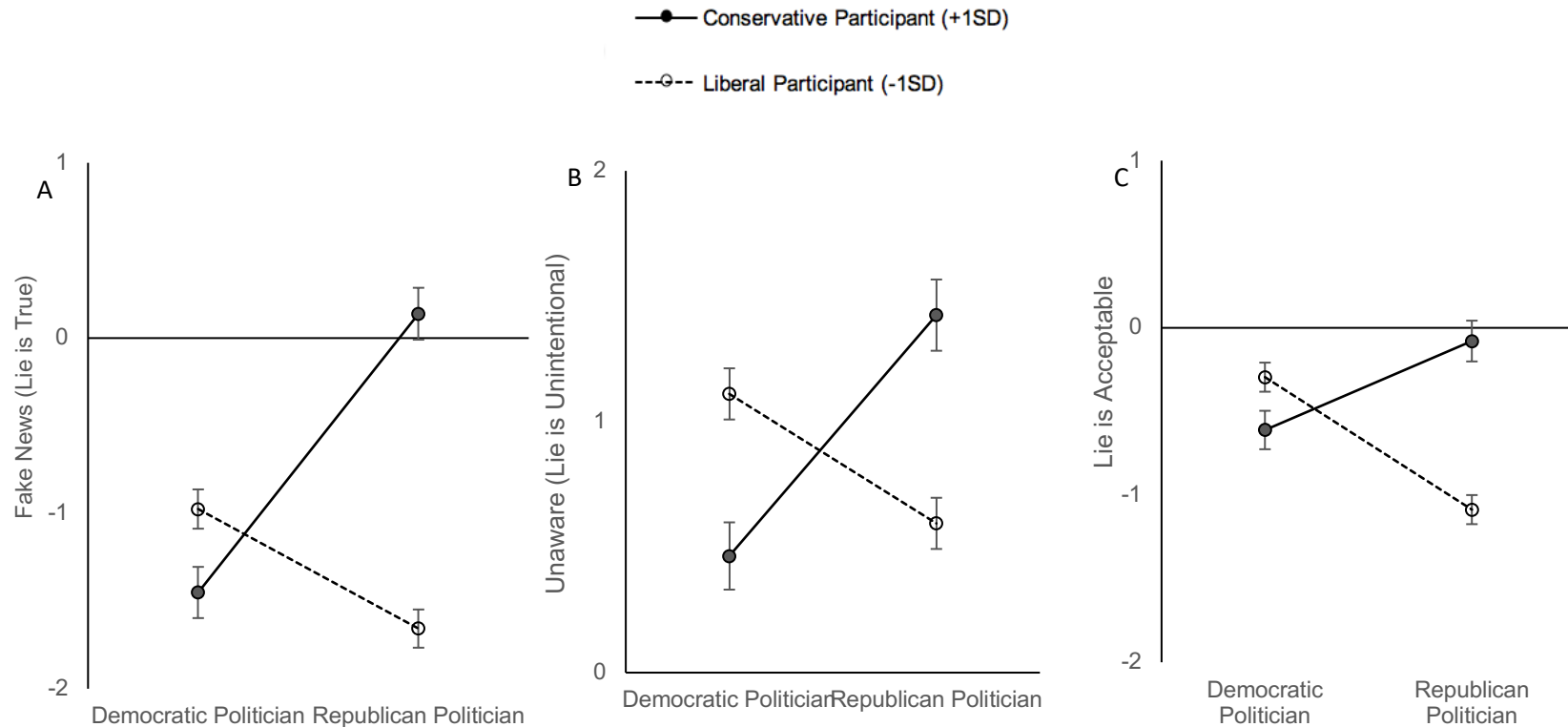


Note: Depicted values are predicted means (and standard errors) as a function of the party of the lying politician and participants' political orientation ( $\pm 1$  SD from political neutrality). Means are predicted at the overall average response for the fake news and unaware measures.



**Figure 5**

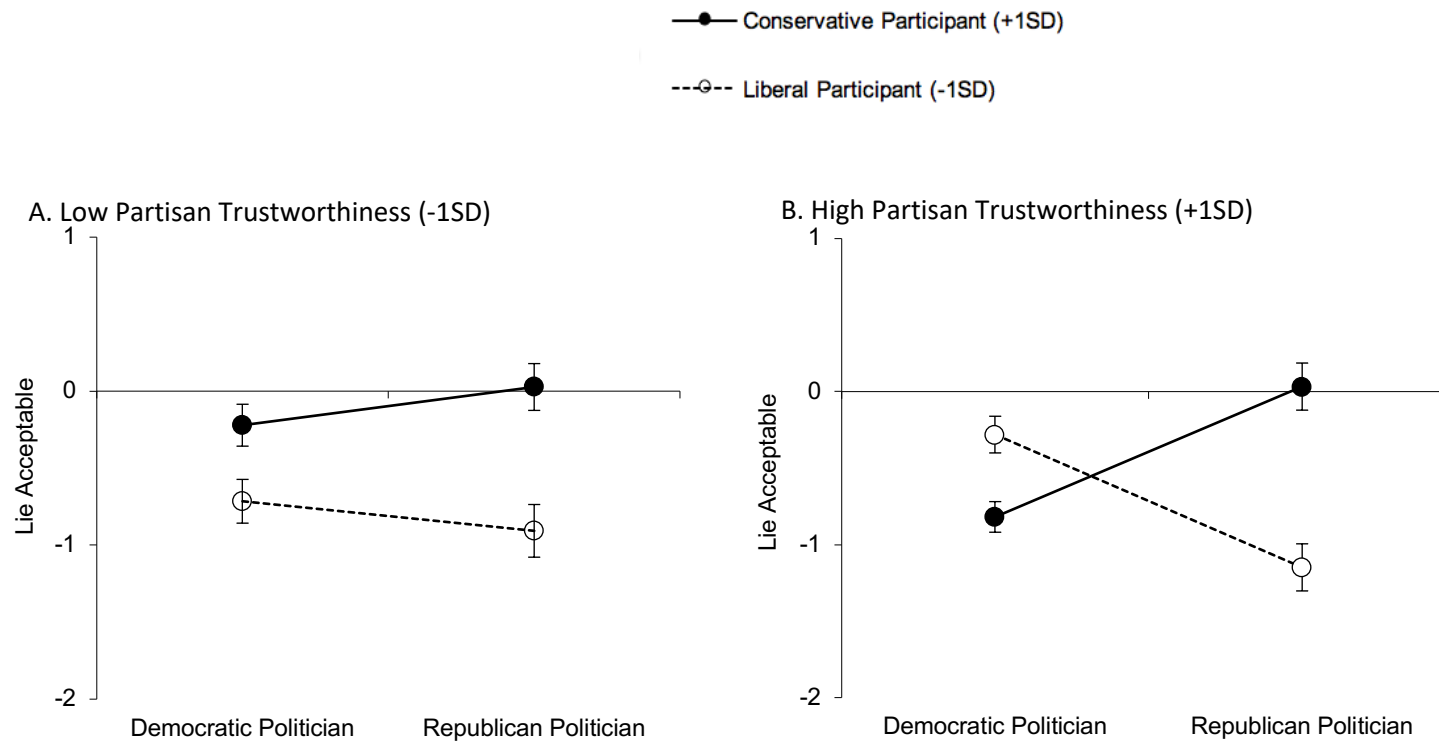
*Excuses for Lying by Participant Political Orientation and the Politician's Political Party (Study 4)*



Note: Depicted values are predicted means (and standard errors) as a function of the party of the lying politician and participants' political orientation ( $\pm 1$  SD from political neutrality) in Study 4 for (A) fake news (lie is actually true), (B) unaware (lie is unintentional), and (C) lie acceptability. Means are predicted at the overall average response for the dependent variable or variables predicted in the earlier panel or panels.

**Figure 6**

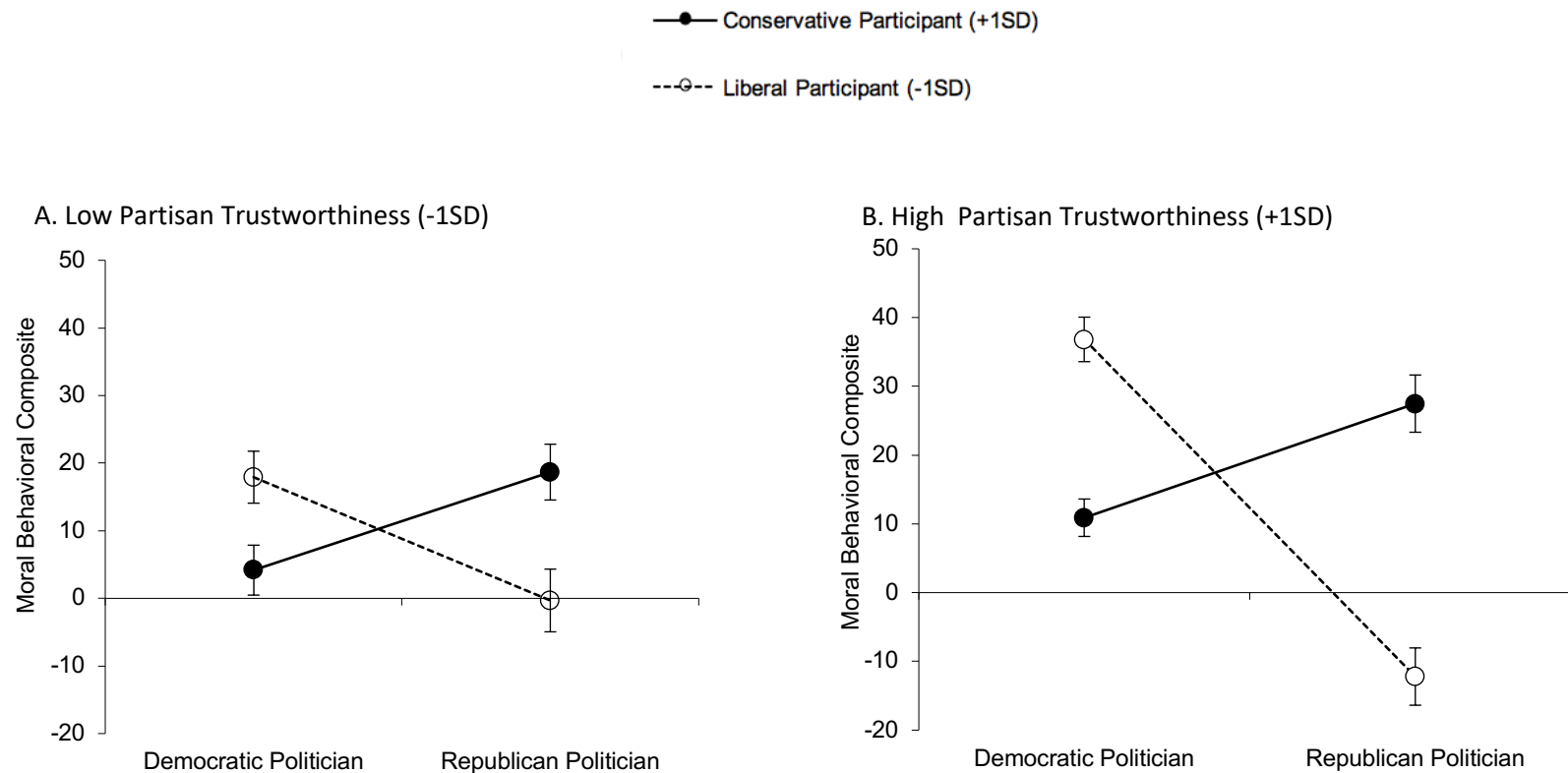
*Acceptability of the lie by politician party, participant political orientation, and perception of the politician as A) relatively high (+1 SD) or B) low (-1 SD) in partisan trustworthiness (Study 4)*



Note: Depicted values are predicted means (and standard errors) as a function of the party of the lying politician and participants' political orientation ( $\pm 1$  SD from political neutrality). Means are predicted at the overall average response for the fake news and unaware measures.

**Figure 7**

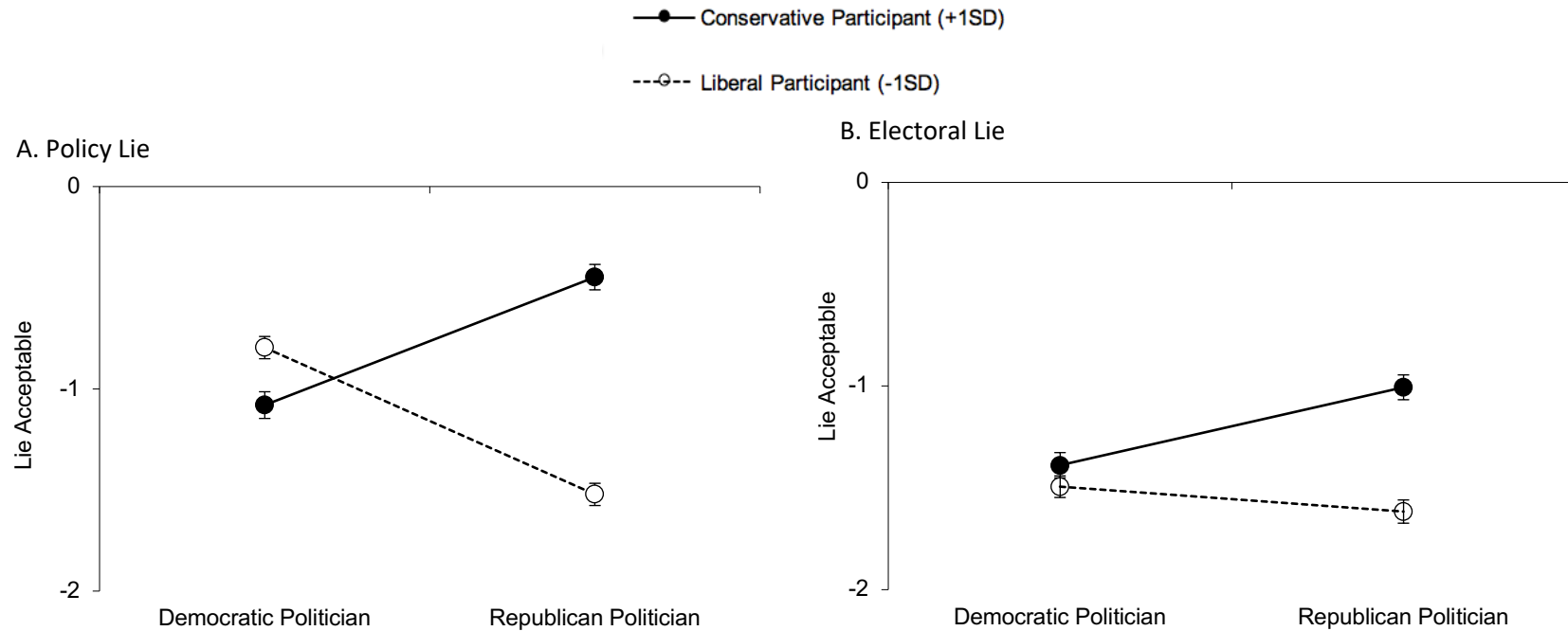
*Forecasted moral behavior by candidate party, participant political orientation, and perception of the politician as relatively high (+1 SD) or low (-1 SD) in partisan trustworthiness (Study 4)*



Note: Depicted values are predicted means (and standard errors) as a function of the party of the lying politician and participants' political orientation ( $\pm 1$  SD from political neutrality). Means are predicted at the overall average response for the fake news and unaware measures.

**Figure 8**

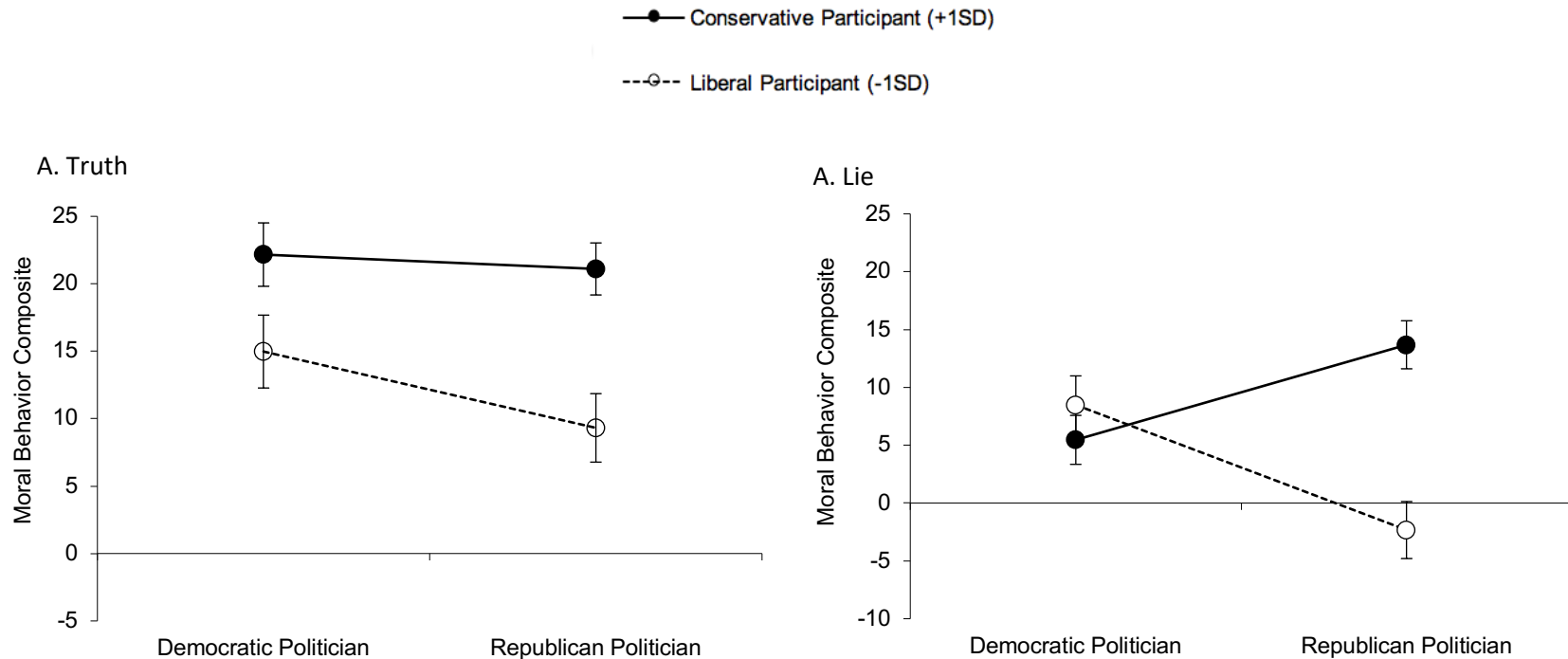
*Acceptability of the lie by politician party, participant political orientation, and whether the politician told A) a policy lie or B) an electoral lie (Study 5)*



Note: Depicted values are predicted means (and standard errors) as a function of the party of the lying politician and participants' political orientation ( $\pm 1$  SD from political neutrality). Means are predicted at the overall average response for the fake news and unaware measures.

**Figure 9**

*Forecasted moral behavior by candidate party, participant political orientation, and the veracity of the politician communication (Study 6)*



Note: Depicted values are predicted means (and standard errors) as a function of the party of the lying politician and participants' political orientation ( $\pm 1$  SD from political neutrality). Means are predicted at the average level of the baseline moral behavior composite.

## Appendix A

### Language of Tweet by Study

	Republican Lie	Democratic Lie
Study 1a (Tweet – Immigration)	The facts are clear: when immigrants move into your neighborhood, crime increases. #ImmigrationCausesCrime	The facts are clear: when immigrants move into your neighborhood, crime decreases. #ImmigrationStopsCrime
Study 1b (Tweet – Minimum Wage)	The facts show that every single time other states raised their minimum wage, unemployment rose. NM should clearly avoid that mistake. #KeepTheMinimumWage	The facts show that every single time other states raised their minimum wage, unemployment fell. NM should clearly follow their lead. #RaiseTheMinimumWage
Study 1c (Speech – Minimum Wage)		
Variant 1	Although studies show that the expense of raising the minimum wage keeps most working-class families from getting any pay raises at all, that isn't why I oppose increasing the minimum wage. My steadfast opposition is rooted in research that consistently shows that raising the minimum wage leads to increases in unemployment.	Although studies show that the benefit of raising the minimum wage leads to most working-class families getting larger pay raises than they would have, that isn't why I support increasing the minimum wage. My steadfast support is rooted in research that consistently shows that raising the minimum wage leads to decreases in the unemployment rate.
Variant 2	Although studies show that the expense of raising the minimum wage leads to increases in the unemployment rate, that isn't why I oppose increasing the minimum wage. My steadfast opposition is rooted in research that consistently shows that raising the minimum wage keeps most working-class families from getting any pay raises at all.	Although studies show that the benefit of raising the minimum wage leads to decreases in the unemployment rate, that isn't why I support increasing the minimum wage. My steadfast support is rooted in research that consistently shows that raising the minimum wage leads to most working-class families getting larger pay raises than they would have.
Study 1d	Support our kids, support vouchers! All the research is clear: Children who use vouchers to attend	Support our kids, oppose vouchers! All the research is clear: Children who use vouchers to attend

(Tweet – School Vouchers)	private/parochial schools see soaring test scores. #VouchersForNM	private/parochial schools see plummeting test scores. #NOVouchersForNM
Study 2a (Gun Control)		
Policy Lie	NM gun owners need their rights protected. U.S. crime stats show that states with more guns have less gun violence #GunOwnersRights	NM gun control laws need to be better. U.S. crime stats show that states with more guns have more gun violence #GunOwnersRights
Personal Lie	Gun violence has touched us all. When I was a teenager, I was a customer at McDonalds and was shot at during a robbery attempt. #GunViolence.	Gun violence has touched us all. When I was a teenager, I was a customer at McDonalds and was shot at during a robbery attempt. #GunViolence.
Study 2b (Affirmative Action)		
Policy Lie	Even though affirmative action tries to help minorities, it hurts everyone. U.S. Census data show Whites and African Americans earn less in states with affirmative action #BanAffirmativeAction	Affirmative action helps everyone. U.S. Census data show both Whites and African Americans earn more in states with affirmative action #AffirmativeAction
Personal Lie	College is where we learn about ourselves. I learned about the complex issues of race in America from my African American roommate. #CollegeLife	College is where we learn about ourselves. I learned about the complex issues of race in America from my African American roommate. #CollegeLife
Studies 3-4 (Minimum Wage)		
Policy Lie	The facts show that every single time other states raised their minimum wage, unemployment rates rose. NM should clearly avoid that mistake. #KeepTheMinimumWage	The facts show that every single time other states raised their minimum wage, unemployment rates fell. NM should clearly follow their lead. #RaiseTheMinimumWage

Personal Lie (Study 3 only)	I understand life on the minimum wage. I worked for 5 years earning minimum wage. #UnderstandTheMinimumWage	I understand life on the minimum wage. I worked for 5 years earning minimum wage. #UnderstandTheMinimumWage
Study 5 (Gun Control / Polling Access)		
Policy Lie	NM gun owners need their rights protected. US crime stats show that states with more guns have less gun violence. #GunOwnersRights	NM gun control laws need to be better. US Crime stats show that states with more guns have more gun violence. #GunControl
Electoral Lie	Lines in Downtown Albuquerque voting precincts are 4 hours long. If you're not already in line, you won't get to vote because polls close at 7.	
Study 6 (Gun Control)		
Lie	The research is clear: Higher rates of gun ownership DO produce less crime. But what matters to me is protecting NM gun owners' rights. #GunOwnersRights	The research is clear: Higher rates of gun ownership DO produce more crime. But what matters to me is getting guns off NM streets. #GunControl
Truth	The research is clear: Higher rates of gun ownership DON'T produce less crime (or have any effect on crime). But what matters to me is protecting NM gun owners' rights. #GunOwnersRights	The research is clear: Higher rates of gun ownership DON'T produce more crime (or have any effect on crime). But what matters to me is getting guns off NM streets. #GunControl



## Appendix B

## Sample Stimulus from Study 1b (Minimum Wage), Republican Politician Condition

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## State Representative Steve Wooley (R) Tweets False Information about the Minimum Wage

By Mick Mathanson / Journal Staff Writer  
Monday, April 7th, 2016 at 12:45pm

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ALBUQUERQUE, N. M. - In the wake of discussions about imposing a higher State minimum wage New Mexico, Steven Wooley (R)—the leading Republican on the Regulatory and Public Affairs committee of the New Mexico State Legislature—tweeted his unwavering support for the need to maintain the New Mexico State minimum wage as it is.



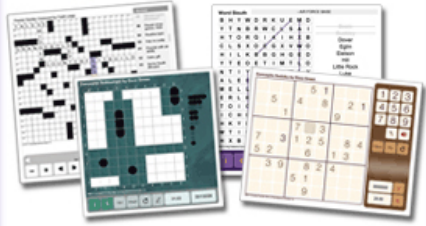
Steven Wooley
@StevenWooleyNMStateLegislature

The facts show that every single time other states raised their minimum wage, unemployment rates rose. NM should clearly avoid that mistake.  
[#KeepTheMinimumWage](#)


Unfortunately for Representative Wooley (R), the stated employment statistic has been shown to be false. All major non-partisan groups who have reviewed the evidence agree: There is no relationship of any kind between state minimum wages and employment rates. Whether minimum wages go up or down, employment levels are unaffected. There is no dispute to the fact that what Representative Wooley (R) Tweeted was false.

Calls to Wooley's office asking for comment on the charge that Wooley had not been truthful in his tweet were not returned.

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