We Dislike Them, so They Lie: Partisan Bias in Perception of Accuracy of Factual Claims

Nemáme ich radi, preto klamú: Stranícke skreslenie vo vnímaní presnosti faktických tvrdení

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Abstract: The aim of this paper is to investigate how and to what extent partisan bias affects the perceived accuracy of factual claims made by politicians in Slovakia. In our research, respondents (N = 122) were asked to create their own ranking of the credibility of politicians. The respondents were later asked to estimate the average factual accuracy of the most trusted, moderately trusted, and least trusted politicians. Data from the non-partisan fact-check project Demagog.SK was used as the baseline data for testing the actual factual accuracy of politicians. This survey experiment also tests the effect of anchoring. The results suggest no positive partisan bias, and, hence, the absence of partisan favoritism. The study shows that people tend to believe that politicians use of false claims disproportionately more often than in reality.

Key words: *Partisan bias. Fact-check. Media. Anchoring. Trust.*

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Introduction

People have political preferences that influence the perception of information and attitudes toward politicians and political parties. It occurs in two ways: a.) people tend to have a positive view of their favorite politicians and b.) have negative attitudes toward their opponents – non-

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favorite politicians. As a result, people see politicians through different political lenses and hereby create eco-chambers with their own political reality. This phenomenon of distortion of facts based on political sympathies is called partisan bias.

Nonpartisan fact-check projects, such as Demagog.SK are relevant sources of information about the factual accuracy of politicians. They verify the factual accuracy of claims made by politicians in media, predominantly in TV political debates. People tend to read and follow fact-check projects, especially in pre- and post-election periods (Graves & Cherubini, 2016). According to Google Analytics, the number of visitors to the Demagog.SK website increases twofold above the average in the pre- and post-election periods and up to fourfold on the election day. Demagog.SK has verified more than 14 thousand political statements of more than 140 politicians since 2010. This provides interesting insights into the truthfulness of relevant political leaders in Slovakia. This paper uses Demagog.SK data to measure the baseline of truthfulness of each of the ten Slovak political leaders.

Politicians often juggle facts during political debates on TV. In this case, partisan bias could contribute to either subconsciously believing or doubting what political leaders say. We examine how and to what extent partisan bias affects the perception of the truthfulness of politicians, specifically the factual accuracy of political leaders' statements. For the purpose of this paper, we conceptualize partisan bias as a motivating reason that makes a political candidate seem more attractive while we do not address ideological bias, the idea that ideological views and positions influence opinions on policies or politicians.

Thiw paper contributes to the literature in four ways. Understanding partisan bias is based predominantly on research in Anglo-Saxon countries (Bullock & Lenz, 2019; Merkley, 2021; Walter & van der Eijk, 2019). The first contribution of this paper is to the literature on partisan bias and its potential effects in Eastern Europe. Moreover, this paper aims to fill a gap in understanding partisan bias in the context of a fragmented political system with a larger number of political parties. Second, partisan bias is not only about political parties which influence is usually studied, but it could also be about political leaders who impersonate political parties, and the focus of this study is specifically on politicians – political leaders. Third, the paper utilizes a unique and existing source of factual accuracy of political claims, the non-partisan fact-check project Demagog.SK. This allowed us to measure the baseline of truthfulness of each political leader in Slovakia and design a survey experiment that tested how partisan bias affects the perceived accuracy of factual claims made by political leaders in Slovakia. Fourth, the study tests the effect of anchoring the strength of partisan bias and provides insights into how this mechanism can work in this context.

1. Partisan bias

There is currently no consensus among scholars on how exactly partisan bias occurs (Baron & Jost, 2019; Bartels, 2002; Bullock et al., 2015; Ditto et al., 2019; Peterson & Iyengar, 2021). Some researchers define partisan bias as motivated reasoning. This approach describes partisan bias as an unconscious process of motivated reasoning when respondents assume that their factual beliefs are correct (Bullock & Lenz, 2019). The other researchers stand for partisan bias as motivated responding or partisan cheerleading. In the case of partisan cheerleading, individuals know the truth, but they intentionally say the truth just to promote their favorite politician or party or disrespect their political rivals (ibid). The researchers suggest that partisan cheerleading is motivated on the one hand by the desire of promoting respondents' preferred party or politician, and on the other hand by the intention to criticize their opponents (Bullock et al., 2015).

In the current study, we do not focus on the process of how partisan bias occurs but rather on its output – individuals communicate incorrect biased information based on their political preferences, and this information promotes their favorite political actors and demeans non-favorites (Bullock & Lenz, 2019).

Partisan bias can be also defined as the distortion of factual information due to partisanship (Bullock & Lenz, 2019). For the purposes of this study, we define partisan bias as a phenomenon that is related to political sympathies. This means, firstly, an association with certain politicians or political parties, rather than an ideological position and, secondly, trust in favored politicians and political parties as well as distrust in the non-favored.

The phenomenon of partisan bias occurs in two directions. The first one is about showing favorite politicians or political parties to the best advantage, that is, promoting them (Bullock et al., 2015). The second direction, on the contrary, consists in putting the least favorite politicians or political parties in an invidious position, so discrediting them (Peterson & Iyengar, 2021). Here, we define these directions as positive and negative partisan bias.

Typically, partisan bias is studied by asking respondents whether the news related to politicians or political parties is true or fake. For example, conservatives tend to claim that Barack Obama is a Muslim (Hollander, 2010), or strong Republicans and strong Democrats used to differently answer question on who is responsible for unemployment rate or inflation during the presidency of Ronald Reagan (Bartels, 2002).

Partisan bias could be also revealed in statements about public policies or important issues which are aligned with political party's attitudes toward this issue. For example, there are more

Republicans than Democrats who misinterpret data about climate trends such as the melting of Arctic Sea ice due to global warming (Guilbeault et al., 2018).

Despite the fact that there is a number of studies that investigate partisan bias through the identification of true or fake news, Gawronski (2021) argues that this approach is not appropriate because partisan bias is not only about how partisanship influences the perception of fake news, but rather how it affects an overall belief. Moreover, Van Bavel & Packer (2021) show in the research on group identities that there is a shift from in-group love to out-group hate. In other words, if it applies to partisan bias, it means that the individuals would rather disrespect non-favorites politicians or political party than promote their favorites.

Based on this understanding of partisan bias, we study it through the perception of politicians' truthfulness. It means we ask them about the percentage of true statements said by concrete politicians, while we do not focus on content of politicians' claims because the answers to such type of question could be easily found on the internet so results could be biased and misinterpreted (Vezzoni & Ladini, 2017).

Writing about partisan bias, Goren (2002) explains both the negative perception and evaluation of political opponents by negativity bias. Negativity bias suggests that negative elements are stronger and steeper than positive elements (Rozin & Royzman, 2001). Therefore, negativity bias affected by partisanship has a beneficial effect at the aggregate level with the tendency that people see more political opponents' weaknesses and tend to ignore the weaknesses of favorite politicians (Goren, 2002, 2007).

Furthermore, the theory of partisan bias and greater intensity of negative statements is supported by a Spanish neuroimaging study. The results of this study show that negative political messages have a strong impact on brain regions associated with aversive, risk, and disappointment compared to positive political messages which have a weak impact on brain regions linked to trust, and empathy (Casado-Aranda et al., 2020). These differences in impact intensity of positive and negative messages are therefore the cause of the negativity bias in partisan bias. The study has also shown that partisan bias against a rival party is significantly more intensive than partisan bias in favor of preferred political parties (Agarwal, 2020).

2. Methodology

The purpose of this study is to investigate how partisan bias influences the perceived factual accuracy of politicians' statements in television debates by Slovak voters. Partisan bias can have a positive or negative direction. Therefore, we also investigate the direction and strength of partisan bias toward the most, moderately, and least trusted politicians. The research question

is as follows: how does partisan bias influence the perception of factual accuracy (truthfulness) of politicians' statements?

We presume (H1a) that partisan bias influences the perception of information about politicians whom the respondent perceives as their favorites. Goren (2002, 2007) states that people tend to see non-favorite politicians in worse light while they ignore the weaknesses of favorite politicians. Therefore, we expect that partisan bias will be positive for politicians who were evaluated by respondents as the most trusted. On the contrary, we expect partisan bias to be negative for politicians who were evaluated by respondents as the least trusted. Moreover, Casado-Aranda et. al. (2020) suggest that negative partisan bias may be larger or more intense than positive partisan bias.

The experiment utilizes anchoring. People tend to estimate the likelihood of an event's occurrence according to its salience (Sunstein, 2019). Anchoring — supplying specific information about the risk or relative prevalence of the incident — affects the respondent's answers in the direction of the anchor provided (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974). An anchor could refer to irrelevant information, (e.g., incidental number), but it still influences individuals' answers to factual questions (Critcher & Gilovich, 2008). The anchoring effect can be easily measured because it uses numbers (Kahneman, 2013). This study will randomly assign the anchor about the average factual accuracy of all politicians (according to Demagog.SK) in all political debates to half of the respondents. The group comparison —with and without anchoring — tests how anchoring influences partisan bias. We expect (H1b) that the anchoring moves the perceived accuracy of factual statements made by politicians (both most and least trusted) in the direction of the anchor. The anchor is that on average 75% of all factual claims are true. We expect that the anchor would predominantly decrease negative partisan bias toward the least trusted politicians because of larger room for potential change in perception of truthfulness (from 0 to 75).

2.1. Participants and data collection

The questionnaire was developed in Qualtrics and issued online to the participants. Data collection occurred in May 2020, two months after the general election in Slovakia. The general election received large media coverage because of the massive political campaign as well as several political debates on TV, radio, and new media (e.g., podcasts) in a relatively brief time frame. As a result of political campaigns and intense media coverage, people are more exposed to political claims than in the rest of the year. The focus of research on parliamentary elections and data collection in the period after the parliamentary elections was decided on because of

the increase in number of politicians' statements and television debates during the election campaign.

An overall sample of 151 participants (MA students) was recruited from the Faculty of Social and Economic Sciences, the Philosophical Faculty, and the Faculty of Law at Comenius University in Bratislava, Slovakia. In total, 29 participants were excluded because of incomplete answers, failing to correctly answer the attention check, exceeding the time limit, or failing to pass logical check in their answers (indicated trust toward the least trusted politicians had to be smaller or equal to indicated trust toward moderately trusted politicians, and the most trusted politicians, respectively). The final sample is 122.

The decision to use a sample of graduate students has several reasons. To some extent, this is a pilot research design that utilized the data from the fact-check project Demagog.SK on factual accuracy of politicians. We are aware that our sample is not representative of the Slovak population. Graduate political science students can have more sophisticated knowledge about political situation and are politically more homogenous and liberal than the public. To address this issue, we visualize data on trust toward politicians in Supplement A. The homogeneity of the sample in political preference is observable in the variability of the selection of the most popular politicians (Beblavy, Sulik, Pellegrini liberal politicians, Kiska conservative, and Matovic antisystem) and the least trusted politicians (Kotleba and Danko conservative and nationalist politicians). This variability is expected to influence the strength of negative partisan bias, especially in the case the Kotleba and Danko, and the strength of positive partisan bias especially in the case the Beblavy, Sulik, Pellegrini, Kiska, Matovic. However, for this reason, we do not measure the strength of partisan bias for each politician, but for the group based on expressed trust, e.g., most, least, and moderately trusted politicians.

We conducted a power analysis to determine the sample size required to detect an effect of a given size with a given degree of confidence. We used the pwr package and performed power analysis in the R program. We calculated the sample size needed in each group (anchor, no anchor) to obtain a power of 0.80, when the effect size is moderate (d=0.5) and a significance level of 0.05 is employed. The suggested sample size is 63.7 respondents in each group. The final sample size of the study is 65 respondents in the group without anchor and 57 respondents in the group with anchor in the final sample of this study.

2.2. Materials and procedures

The respondents received information that the research is about fact-checking in Slovakia. The questionnaire was developed in Qualtrics and had 18 questions and one check question to

check the respondent's attention. The questionnaire was piloted by eight users a week before its launch.

Emotions may influence the strength of partisan bias (Weeks, 2015). In general, people in a good mood rely more on an intuitive system of thinking, which is usually a source of heuristics and biases, while individuals in bad mood use the reflexive system (Kahneman, 2013). Angry people do not easily accept fact-checking but instead maintain their initial beliefs (Weeks, 2015), while anxiety, on the contrary, makes people more hesitant, increasing the probability that they will not believe their favorite politicians or could become more skeptical about their initial factual beliefs linked with partisan affiliation (Weeks, 2015). Therefore, the first question in the questionnaire measured the respondent's emotions – today's mood (Likert scale, 1 – very bad, 5 – very good). Information about basic background was collected (field of study, hometown, and political preferences).

The first task for the respondents was to rank 10 leaders of major political parties in Slovakia according to trust (drag and drop type of question). MacKuen, Erikson and Stimson (1989) state that partisan bias is generally stronger toward a politician (leader) than toward a political party. The default position of political leaders was randomized, and the respondent had to make at least one change to be able to continue to the next question. For this study, the politician who ranked as the first was considered as the most credible (trusted). Trust toward the politician in the fifth position was considered moderate while the politician in the last position was considered as least trusted. Each respondent was asked (separately) to specify to what extent they felt trust toward a politician in the first, fifth, and last position on the scale from 0 to 100 (slider, 100 – the highest possible trust, 'Please, specify your degree of trust - in other words, to what extent you feel trust toward <name of the politician>'). The default position in each question was 50.

The check question asks respondents the result of the simple mathematical operation 3 + 2. The respondents who did not correctly answer this check question were excluded from the final sample. Half of the respondents answered the attention check question with the anchor, and the other half without the anchor. The questionnaire randomly assigned the anchor to half of the respondents ('According to Demagog.SK, on average 75% of all factual claims are true') about the average factual accuracy of politicians in political debates.

In the next three questions, respondents were asked to indicate the share of true statements by the most trusted, moderately trusted, and least trusted politicians. The respondents moved the slider to answer questions 'Please indicate how many factual statements out of 100 made by <name of the politician> in TV debates are factually correct (true)?' Each respondent

answered this question about the most trusted, moderately trusted, and least trusted politicians. Right after each single-choice question, the respondents were asked to answer a question about the politician's intention to make false statements. The respondent could answer that making a false statement is generally an intentional act, unintentional, or indicate that they do not know.

2.3. Operationalization

The research on partisan bias measures bias in the context of politically sensitive issues such as immigration policy, the health care system, the tax burden, and more (Bartels, 2002; Gerber & Green, 1999). This paper measures partisan bias in the context of factual accuracy of political party leaders. We can assume that partisan bias shifts the perception of factual accuracy of the favored politician in his favor (there was no female leader of any relevant political party in Slovakia in the general election 2020). The baseline information about the average factual accuracy of selected leaders was sourced from Demagog.SK.

Partisan bias (outcome variable) is calculated as the difference in the respondent's perception of the average truthfulness of the concrete political leader (e.g., Andrej Kiska) and the actual value of the truthfulness of the same politician (e.g., Andrej Kiska) according to Demagog.SK (see Supplement C for further information). The average share of true factual statements influences the magnitude of the difference between the lowest (0%) and the highest (100%) possible value of factual accuracy. We calculate partisan bias as a simple mathematical difference between the respondent's perceived truthfulness of politician (e.g., Andrej Kiska) and his average factual accuracy from Demagog.SK. If the result of mathematical operation is positive, the respondent thinks that the politician (e.g., Kiska) is more factually accurate than he is according to Demagog.SK (positive partisan bias). A negative result indicates that the respondent thinks that the politician (e.g., Kiska) is less factually accurate than he is according to Demagog.SK (negative partisan bias).

The experiment randomly divides the respondents into two groups. One group with the anchor and the group with no anchor.

Table 1 Variables

Variable	Description
Partisan bias	Outcome variable Interval variable
Anchor	Predictor variable Factor variable Dummy (1 – anchor, 0 – no anchor)
Level of trust toward a politician	Predictor variable Level of trust toward the politician Continuous

Variable	Description
Politician's intention to claim false statement	Predictor variable Nominal scale 1 - Intentional, 2 - unintentional, 3 - I do not know
Mood	Control variable Ordinal variable 5-point Likert scale (1 – very bad, 5 – very good)

Source: authors

We use a t-test for the most, moderately, and least trusted politicians to test whether the difference between these two groups is statistically significant. To avoid making false-positive type of errors (Type 1 Errors) in situation of multiple testing we 'correct' the p-value and utilize two-tailed t-test, thereby making the test more conservative. We use the conservative Bonferroni correction method which multiplies the raw p-values by the number of tests.

To investigate the determinants of partisan bias, we use linear regression (see Table 1 for variables). Anchoring, politician's intention to claim false statement, and level of trust toward politician are predictor variables. The variable level of trust toward politician measures the level of trust on the scale from 0 (no trust) to 100 (the highest level of trust).

3. Results

Partisan bias can have a positive or negative value. The maximum negative value is the baseline value of the relative truthfulness of a given politician according to Demagog.SK. This is the scenario when respondents state that the politician says on average 0 true statements out of 100 in a TV debate. In our case, the minimum value is – 85.7. As with the minimum value of partisan bias, the maximum positive value is different for each politician because it depends on the baseline value of the truthfulness of each politician according to Demagog.SK. Considering the least factually accurate politician in our database, the maximum value of partisan bias is + 66.5. We presuppose that the partisan bias will be closer toward positive value for politicians who were evaluated as the most trusted. And quite on the contrary, we expect that the value of partisan bias will be closer to the negative number in the case of a less trusted politician.

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics of Partisan Bias

	The most trusted politician			Moderately trusted politician			The least trusted politician		
	Min	Max	Median	Min	Max	Median	Min	Max	Median
anchor	-47.8	22.9	-0.714	-81.9	16.1	-16.9	-85.7	7.52	-33.5
no anchor	-41.9	40.5	2.08	-71.9	6.94	-26.8	-85.7	6.52	-38.5

Source: authors

Note: N = 122

Table 2 provides descriptive statistics for each level of trust toward politicians. The median value of partisan bias is close to 0 in the case of the most trusted politicians. The value is slightly higher when the respondents received the anchor about the average truthfulness of all politicians according to Demagog.SK. In fact, this anchor seems to decrease the size of partisan bias also in the case of moderately and the least trusted politicians. For moderately and least trusted politicians, the median values of partisan bias are negative numbers. The median values of negative partisan bias in the case of the least trusted politicians range from 39% to 45% of the maximum negative value. The size of positive partisan bias is smaller for the most trusted politicians when the median value of positive partisan bias is about 3% of the maximum positive value. In sum, the negative partisan bias seems to be more than ten times larger.

Figure 1 shows the value of partisan bias for each of these three groups of politicians. The results suggest that there is a small positive partisan bias for the most trusted politician when respondents did not receive the anchor about the average truthfulness of politicians in political debates. In the case of the most trusted politicians, the respondents who received the anchor (M = -2.13, SD = 13.7) compared to the respondents who did not receive the anchor (M = 1.72, SD = 15.2) do not report statistically different partisan bias, t(121), -0.16, p = .87 (Bonferroni correction, p = 1.0). The negligible size of positive partisan bias (abound zero) for politicians with the highest trust of the respondents can be caused by the general perception of politics as 'dirty' and politicians as 'liars'. The respondent might systematically underestimate the average factual accuracy of politicians' claims in TV debates.
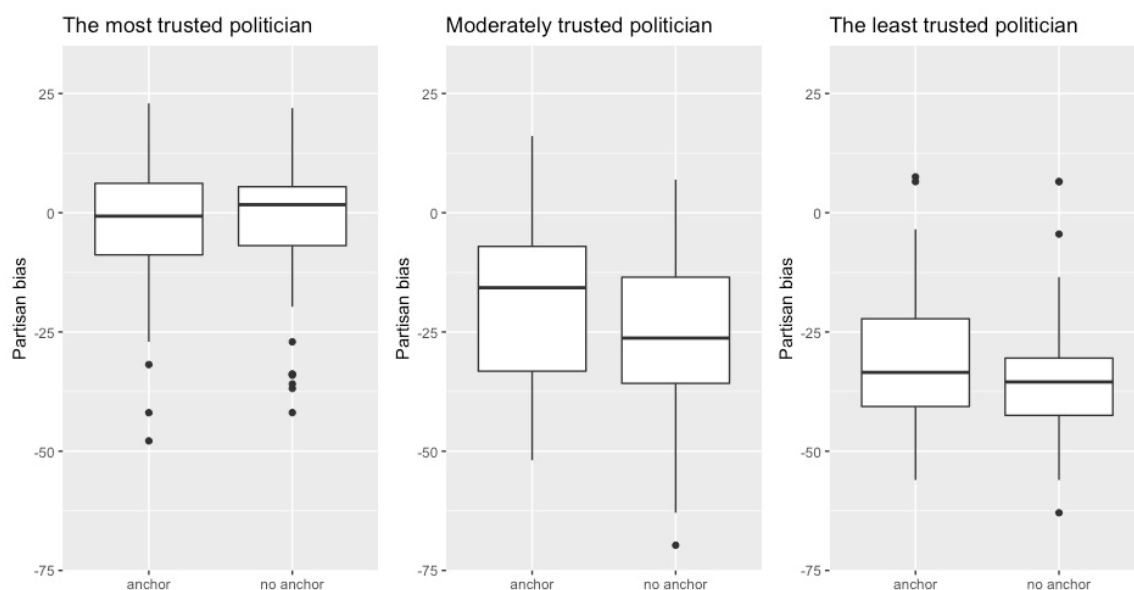
Figure 1 Partisan Bias Toward the Most, Moderately, and Least Trusted Politicians
Source: authors
Note: N = 122, the figure is composed from three separate boxplots (the most trusted, moderately, and the least trusted politicians) each divides responses into two groups (respondents with or without anchor). Black dots are outliers (extreme values).

Data show negative partisan bias for both the moderately trusted politician and the least trusted politician. The strength of negative partisan bias is larger for the least trusted politicians. A negative partisan bias for the least trusted politician is twofold larger when the respondents were not exposed to the anchor and about 50% larger when the respondents saw the anchor. Respondents who received the anchor (M = -30.9, SD = 16.4) compared to the respondents who did not receive the anchor (M = -37.9, SD = 16.8), after correction, did not report a statistically different (alpha level 0.05) partisan bias when asked about the least trusted politician, t(121), 2.03, p < .05 (Bonferroni correction, p = .06). Anchoring also does not statistically significantly influence partisan bias for the moderately trusted politician, t(121), 1.32, p = .19 (Bonferroni correction, p = .43). This shows that anchoring does not move the perceived accuracy of factual statements made by politicians, regardless of the level of trust, in the direction of the anchor. Therefore, we do not find sufficient evidence that the anchor moves the perceived accuracy of factual statements made by politicians in the direction of the anchor. However, the results also show that partisanship influences the perception of truthfulness of politicians — we tend to significantly underestimate the truthfulness of claims made by the least trusted politician in comparison to the politician's baseline.

A linear regression was calculated for each of the three politicians (most trusted, moderately trusted, and the least trusted). Therefore, we have three models, one model for each

group of politicians. The dependent variable was partisan bias. Each model has five independent variables. The anchor variable indicates whether the respondent received the anchor or not. The trust toward the politician is reported by each respondent on a scale from 0 to 100. We controlled the mood (how do you feel today) and respondent's perception about politician's intention to make false statements.

For each of the three models the formula was as follows:

$$Y_{partisan\ bias} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_{anchor} + \beta_2 X_{trust} + \beta_3 X_{mood} + \beta_4 X_{motivation} + \varepsilon \qquad 1.$$

In this formula $Y_{partisan\ bias}$ represents the dependent variable, which measures partisan bias. β_0 is the intercept. β_1, β_2, β_3, and β_4 are the regression coefficients associated with an independent variable anchor (X_{anchor}), and the control variables trust toward a politician (X_{trust}), mood (X_{mood}), and motivation to make a false statement ($X_{motivation}$), respectively. ε represents the error term.

Trust toward a politician is a statistically significant predictor of partisan bias in all three models (p < .001). For the most trusted politicians, one unit increase in trust toward the most trusted politician increases partisan bias by 0.7 points. This effect is approximately by 0.1 points higher for the least trusted politicians in comparison to the most trusted politicians. However, the interpretation must consider that the median value of trust is around 80 for the most trusted politicians, while it is around 5 for the least trusted politicians. Therefore, it is not surprising that one unit increase in trust toward the least trusted politician has a larger impact on partisan bias.

Table 3 Linear Regression

Predictors	PB - the most trusted politician			PB – moderately trusted politician			PB – the least trusted politician		
	Estimates	CI	*p*	Estimates	CI	*p*	Estimates	CI	*p*
(Intercept)	-55.90	-68.43 – -43.36	< .001***	-37.12	-53.31 – -20.92	< .001***	-53.68	-74.25 – -33.11	< .001***
Anchor	0.57	-2.93 – 4.07	.748	-2.05	-7.88 – 3.79	.488	-6.69	-12.34 – -1.05	.021*
Trust toward a politician	0.73	0.60 – 0.86	< .001***	0.58	0.40 – 0.76	< .001***	0.86	0.22 – 1.50	.009**
Mood - ordinal	-1.07	-2.91 – 0.78	.255	-1.90	-4.97 – 1.18	.224	4.47	1.51 – 7.44	.003**
Motivation making false	-1.53	-5.84 – 2.78	.484	-8.68	-16.79	.036*	1.64	-17.70	.867

Predictors	PB - the most trusted politician			PB – moderately trusted politician			PB – the least trusted politician		
	Estimates	CI	*p*	Estimates	CI	*p*	Estimates	CI	*p*
statement [uncertain]					– - 0.57			– 20.97	
Motivation making false statement [intentional]	-6.17	-10.75 – 1.59	.009**	-7.81	-16.03 – 0.41	.062	7.50	-10.75 – 25.74	.417
Observations	122			122			122		
R^2 / R^2 adjusted	0.567 / 0.549			0.345 / 0.317			0.179 / 0.144		

Source: authors

Note: The reference group for anchor is no anchor, for motivation of politician to make a false statement is unintentional.

Based on Cook's distance statistics two influential data points were excluded from each model.

The model is in correct functional form (resettest, p > .05)

No heteroscedasticity (the errors have constant variance) in the model (bptest, p > .05)

No multicollinearity (VIF), VIF below 10.

As it is already clearly visible in Figure 3, the anchoring, as well as the information about the average factual accuracy of politicians, is not statistically significant in each model. The anchor statistically and significantly influenced partisan bias only in the case of the least trusted politicians (p < .05). The respondents who received the anchor reported on average 6.7 points higher negative partisan bias. It is important to stress that the median value of partisan bias for the least trusted politicians is -33.5. This negative value of partisan bias means that the anchor did not bring the respondents' estimate of the perceived accuracy of the least trusted politician's statements closer to the real value of the politician's factual accuracy in political debates (Demagog.SK). On the contrary, the anchor increased the magnitude of negative partisan bias.

Moreover, the control variable about the mood of the respondent is statistically significant in the regression model for the least trusted politician. However, the result is difficult to interpret. Weeks (2015) states that control variables of mood and emotions may influence the strength of partisan bias. It seems that a better mood of the respondent lowered the overall level of negative partisan bias for the least trusted politicians.

The respondents answered questions about politician's intentions when making a false statement. When respondents believed that when the most trusted tells a false statement it is an intentional behavior, the positive partisan biased decreased by 5.8 points in comparison to when respondents believed that this is an unintentional behavior. However, this variable turned out to be not statistically significant in other models for the moderately trusted and least trusted politicians.

4. Discussion

We measured the intensity and direction (positive or negative value) of partisan bias by asking respondents to provide their perception of the share of true factual statements made by the most, moderately, and least trusted politicians on the scale from 0 to 100. Furthermore, we used anchoring and tested whether the anchor numeric value can significantly change the direction and/or magnitude of partisan bias. This value of partisan bias can have a positive or negative value. Positive value indicates positive partisan bias because the respondents portrayed politicians in a better light than they are in reality. Negative value indicates negative partisan bias because according to their own political preferences, respondents portray politicians worse in terms of factual accuracy than they are.

The study provides evidence that negative partisan bias is more prevalent than positive partisan bias. The median value of partisan bias toward the least trusted politicians is lower than -30. The median value of partisan bias toward the most trusted politicians tends to zero. Moreover, the results show that some respondents provided negatively biased answers also about their favorite politicians. We suppose that the domination of partisan discrediting could be explained by skepticism toward politicians and lack of trust which could be caused by negativity bias (Goren, 2002, 2007). This also suggests that negative elements outweigh positive elements during evaluation and perception (Rozin & Royzman, 2001).

Negative partisan bias could also dominate positive partisan bias due to the lack of trust in politicians in general. When trust relates to positive partisan bias, distrust is linked to negative partisan bias because the same regions in the brain are responsible for trust – positive partisan bias and distrust – negative partisan bias (Casado-Aranda et al., 2020). In addition, the results show a strong positive relationship between trust and partisan bias. These results also reveal that a relatively high level of trust (at the level of 90%) is needed for the activation of positive partisan bias. There is a relatively small range in trust variable between 90 and 100% causing positive partisan bias, while a significantly larger range in trust variable from 0 to 90% causes an underestimation of the actual level of factual accuracy of politicians.

Respondents' answers on the possible reason of false statements claimed by politician may indicate partisan bias of individuals. Results show that most respondents assume that the most trusted politicians claim false statements unintentionally. The data reveal partisan bias in extreme cases of high level of trust toward politicians and are in accordance with the definition of partisan bias because respondents portray their favorites in the best way (Bullock et al., 2015).

Anchoring had a significant effect on partisan bias only in the case of the least trusted politicians. Respondents' answers about the share of true statements in the case of the least trusted politicians were extremely low. In this situation, testing anchor on plausibility (Mussweiler & Strack, 1999) and then adjusting the answer (Epley & Gilovich, 2005) could affect the intensity of partisan bias and so increase the median answer about truthfulness of the least trusted politicians. At the same time, the respondent's answers in the case of the most and moderately trusted politicians were already close to the anchor, which may be a reason why the anchor was not effective.

The results also suggest that the respondent's mood affects partisan bias. However, this is only statistically significant in the case of the least trusted politicians. Respondents in a bad mood are more likely to discredit politicians, especially their least favorite politicians. We suppose that it could be explained by using the reflexive system of thinking by people in bad moods (Schwarz, 1998) and the automatic system by people in good moods (Kahneman, 2013). To answer the question, respondents in a bad mood use existing knowledge, which is already biased by selective perception (Blankenship et al., 2008; Furnham & Boo, 2011), that is why responses are more biased in comparison with intuitive answers of people in a good mood. However, further research is needed in this area.

Conclusion

Earlier research focused on partisan bias in Anglo-Saxon countries (Bullock & Lenz, 2019; Merkley, 2021; Walter & van der Eijk, 2019) in the system of two dominant political parties. Furthermore, when scholars studied partisan bias in countries with a high number of political parties, they focused on two poles, for example, two coalitions or two ideological wings (right vs. left) (Casado-Aranda et al., 2020) or supports and rivals of government (Carlson, 2016), which may not reflect the entire political spectrum. This research aimed to explore partisan bias in a political system with a high number of relevant political parties.

Furthermore, the current study focuses on partisan bias toward politicians while this phenomenon is mostly studied in relation to political parties. This paper investigates the partisan bias in the context of participants' perceptions about the factual accuracy of political leaders' statements — their truthfulness. The value of partisan bias is calculated as the difference between the respondent's perception of the average truthfulness of the politician and the actual value of the truthfulness of the politician according to Demagog.SK (baseline). The respondents answered questions about the factual accuracy of politicians in TV debates for three politicians – the most trusted politician, moderately trusted politician, and least trusted politician.

The key finding of this study is that level of trust toward a politician at the level of 90% or more can activate positive partisan bias. In other words, people tend to be positively biased only in the case of politicians toward whom they feel a high degree of trust (90% and more). The indicated level of trust below 90% activates negative partisan bias. Moreover, this study shows that negative partisan bias is far more prevalent, and positive partisan bias tends to oscillate around the value of zero. This suggests a high level of skepticism and lack of trust toward politicians in society. Moreover, the results have shown that anchoring significantly affected partisan bias only in the perception of the least trusted politicians. The absence of an anchor effect in the case of the most trusted politicians could be because respondents' answers were already close to the anchor (baseline).

Operationalization of partisan bias through fact-checking and perception of factual accuracy of politicians has an advantage. It is easy to calculate the strength of partisan bias as well as its positive or negative direction. Nevertheless, limitations are visible. First, this approach decreases the range for a positive partisan bias and increases the range for negative partisan bias. Second, the choice of politicians used in the study depends on the number of fact-checked statements needed for baseline and the existence of non-partisan and reliable source of such information. Further research in this field can focus on the effects of partisan bias on the perception of public policies associated with favorites and non-favorites politicians. This approach could deepen understanding of the influence of partisan bias and could help to avoid the limitations mentioned above.

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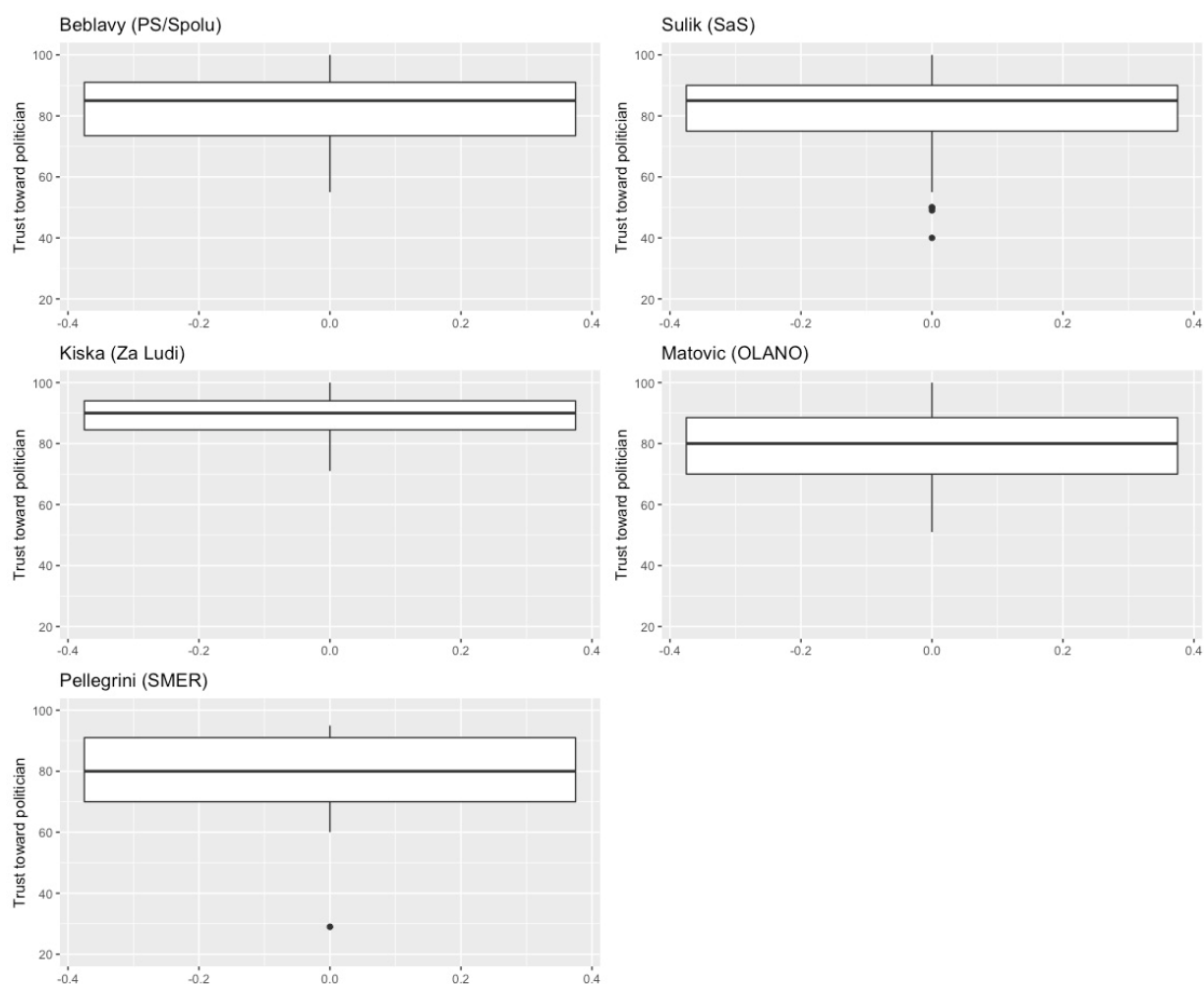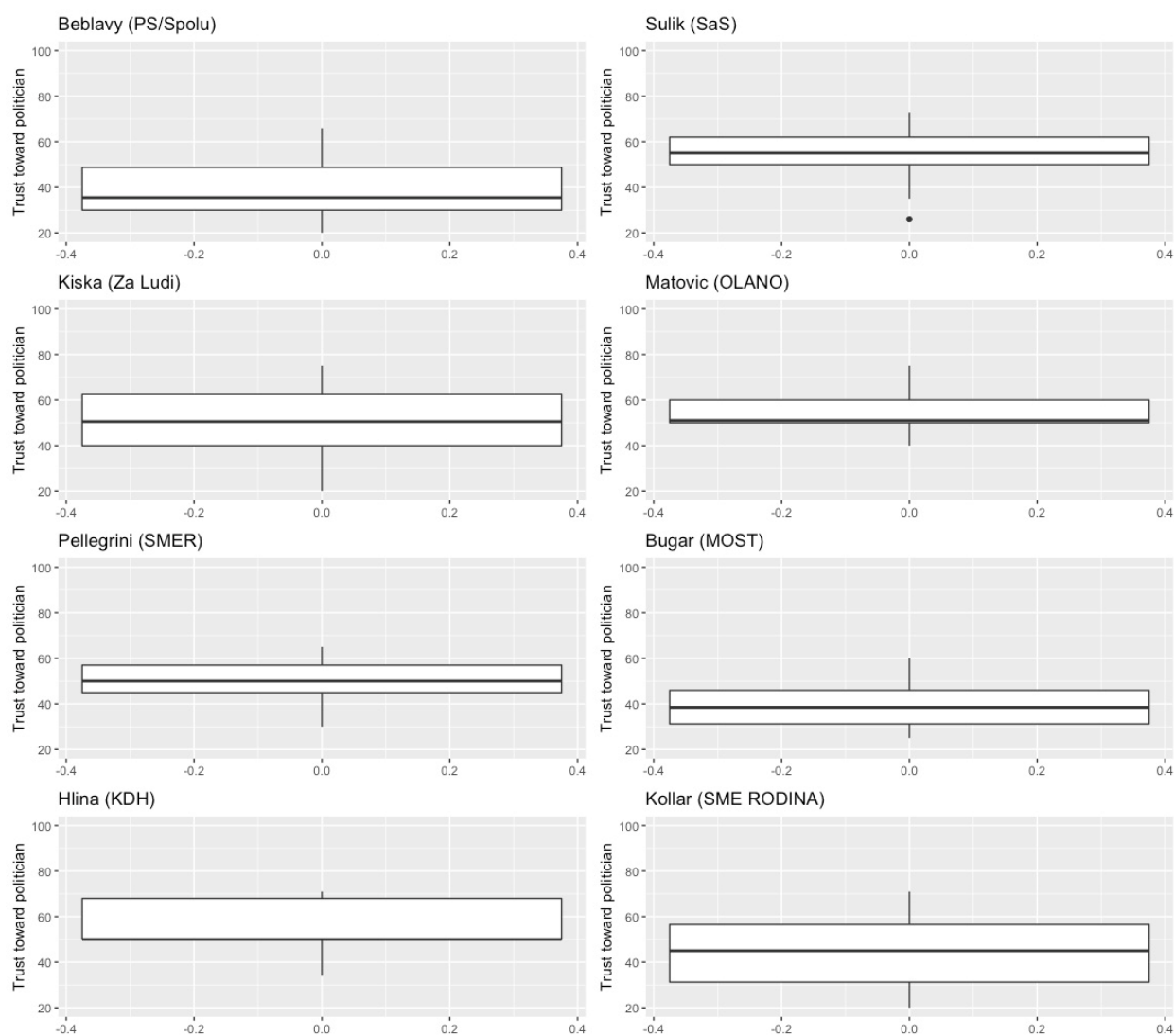## Supplement A - Political leaders by level of trust

Figure 2 The Most Trusted Politicians
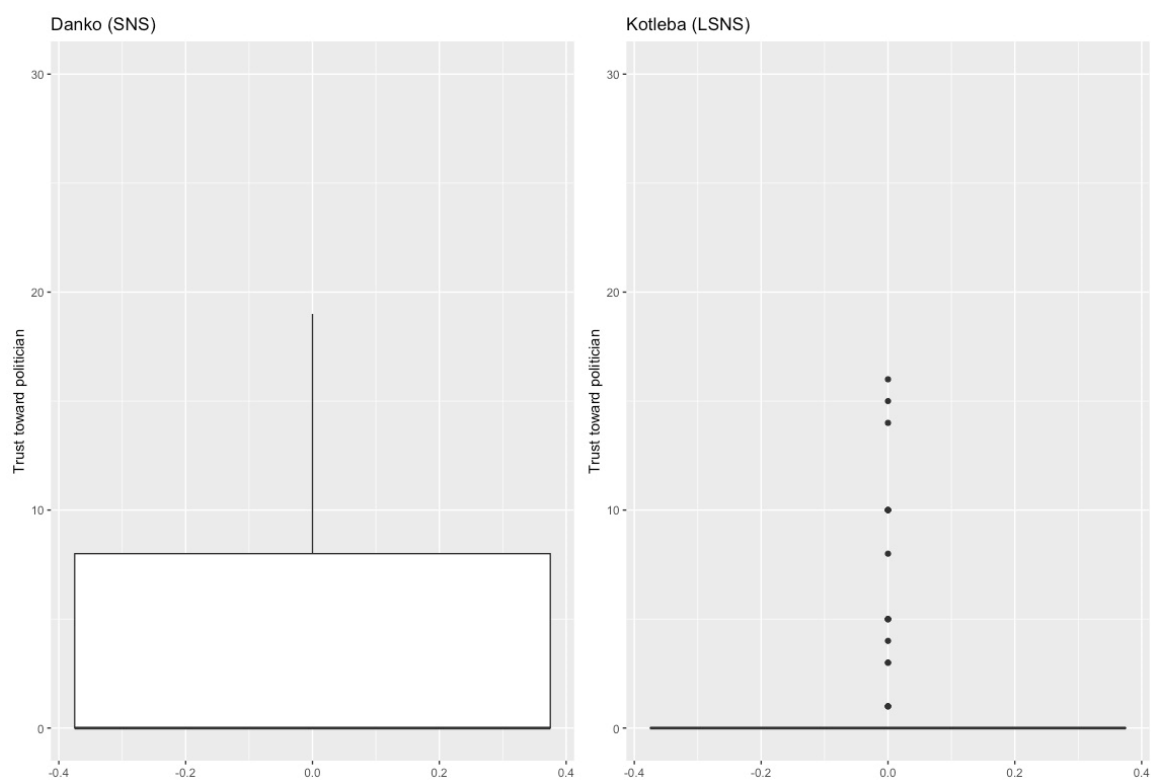Source: authors
Note: Politicians who were rated as the most trusted politicians by less than 5 respondents are not in the figure. The boxplots vizualize the level of trust (min=0, max=100) for each politician. Black dots are outliers (extreme values).

Figure 3 Moderately Trusted Politicians
Source: authors
Note: Politicians who were rated as moderately trusted politicians by less than 5 respondents are not in the figure. The boxplots vizualize the level of trust (min=0, max=100) for each politician. Black dots are outliers (extreme values).

Figure 4 The Least Trusted Politicians
Source: authors
Note: Politicians who were rated as the least trusted politicians by less than 5 respondents are not in the figure. The boxplots vizualize the level of trust (min=0, max=100) for each politician. Black dots are outliers (extreme values).
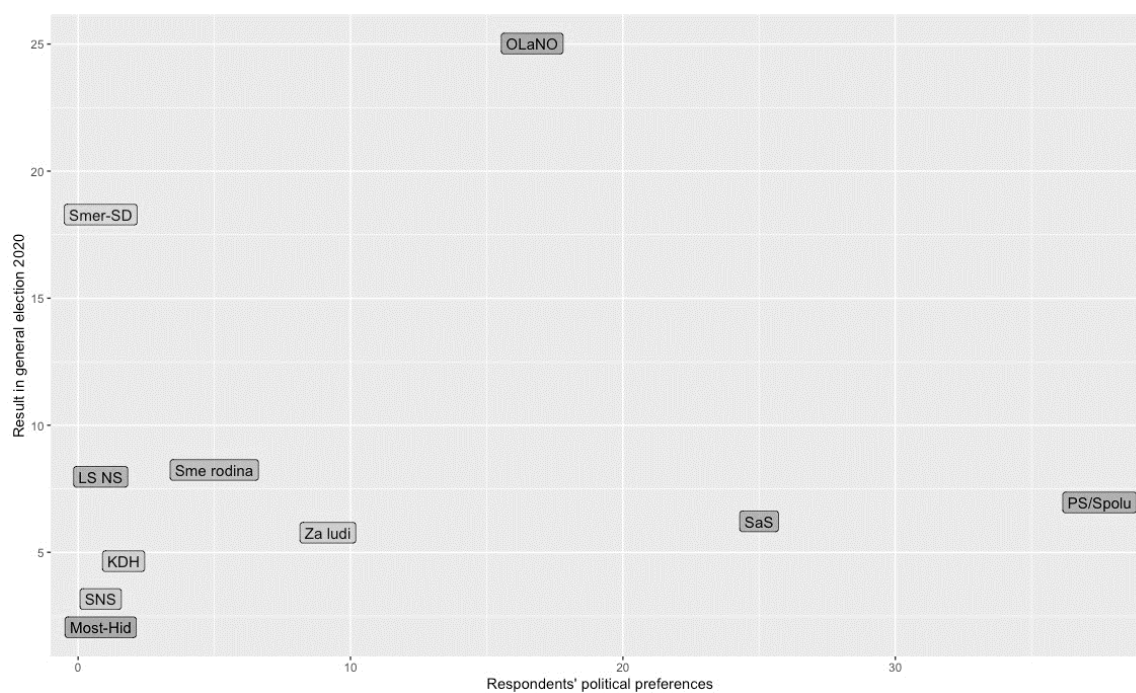
Supplement B – Respondents' political preferences

Figure 5 Respondents' Political Preferences vs Results in General Election 2020
Source: authors

Supplement C – Share of True Statements

For each politician mentioned in the questionnaire we calculated his own share of true statements:

$$share\ of\ true\ statements = \frac{True\ statements}{True\ statements + False\ statements + Misleading\ statements} \times 100 \qquad 2.$$

Hence, we operationalized partisan bias as a difference between the real share of true statements and the share of true statements assumed by respondents.

Table 4 Share of True Statements (According to Demagog.SK)

Politician	True statements	False statements	Misleading statements	Total number	Share of true statements
Béla Bugár	389	78	48	515	75.53
Richard Sulík	389	39	36	464	83.84
Igor Matovič	215	38	26	279	77.06
Andrej Danko	139	77	32	248	56.05
Andrej Kiska	174	22	7	203	85.71
Peter Pellegrini	146	29	15	190	76.84
Boris Kollár	72	24	10	106	67.92
Miroslav Beblavý	86	12	7	105	81.90
Marian Kotleba	40	34	18	92	43.48
Alojz Hlina	18	3	0	21	85.71

Source: authors

Note: The mean share of true statements is based on all Slovak politicians statements having 50 or more statements (unverifiable statements are excluded) checked by Demagog,SK.

Alojz Hlina's statements were excluded from calculations of mean because the number of his checked statements was below 50.

Supplement D – Linear Regression

Linear regression — partisan bias as outcome variable. Calculated as one model (each respondent has 3 answers — for the most, least and moderately trusted politicians.

Table 5 Linear Regression

Predictors	Partisan bias		
	Estimates	CI	*p*
(Intercept)	-31.81	-39.15 – -24.47	< .001
anchor [no anchor]	-3.03	-6.01 – -0.05	.046
trust level [moderately trusted]	9.62	5.64 – 13.60	< .001
trust level [most trusted]	29.91	25.59 – 34.23	< .001
motivation [I don't know]	-4.62	-9.10 – -0.15	.043
motivation [intentional]	-3.37	-7.83 – 1.09	.138
Mood	0.93	0.63 – 2.48	.241
diff trust and mean trust	0.63	0.52 – 0.74	< .001
observations	378		
R^2 / R^2 adjusted	0.559 / 0.550		

Source: authors

Note: the reference group for anchor is no anchor, for motivation of politician to make false statements is unintentional.
No influential data points (Cook's distance)
The model is in correct functional form (resettest, p > .05)
Heteroscedasticity (the errors do not have constant variance) in the model (bptest, p < .05)
No multicollinearity (VIF), VIF below 10.