



# The Influence of Episodic Information on Political Elites: Evidence from Chile

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## Abstract

Are politicians more influenced by anecdotal information than statistical data? While extensive research has explored the implications of this question for the general public, studies examining the role of anecdotes or exemplars among politicians are lacking. If politicians are disproportionately influenced by information derived from personal experiences (episodic information), their agendas, priorities, and perceptions may become biased. Through a series of preregistered survey experiments conducted among elected officials in Chile, this study examines the extent to which politicians are more sensitive to episodic information over statistical information. The findings suggest that politicians consistently ignore statistical information while relying more on episodic information, measured as the effect of each type of information on both their assessment of policies and how much they remember about experiences in a public service. Furthermore, the study reveals that the effect size and magnitude are comparable to those observed among the general population. These findings shed light on politicians' use of this cognitive shortcut, and raises the need for further research on this topic.

## Introduction

Politicians regularly deal with an overabundance of information because of their positions (Walgrave and Dejaeghere 2017). How they process—and are influenced by—it can be especially important in their roles, as it affects judgments, perceptions, and creates biases. Evidence on misinformed politicians (Belchior 2012; Broockman and Skovron 2018; Butler 2009; Miller and Stokes 1963; Pereira 2021) has urged

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See pre-registration here: [https://osf.io/gktn8/?view\\_only=f0049f40e5d046959735bc7c87af7ec9](https://osf.io/gktn8/?view_only=f0049f40e5d046959735bc7c87af7ec9).

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scholars to pay closer attention to the underlying mechanisms behind the processing of information. A growing body of literature suggests that when dealing with information, politicians encounter more problems than originally thought. Using a series of cognitive mechanisms, they are influenced by their prior attitudes (Baekgaard et al. 2019; Butler and Dynes 2016; Christensen and Moynihan 2020) and are susceptible to frequent choice anomalies (Linde and Vis 2017; Sheffer et al. 2017; Walgrave et al. 2017).

Despite these findings, previous research has overlooked one characteristic of information that may be relevant for explaining bias. The information politicians receive comes not only in the form of technical reports with systematized and generalized data. Instead, politicians frequently listen to or read about the experiences, perspectives, and opinions of individual constituents, friends, family members, other party members, and colleagues—a relevant portion of which can be considered anecdotal in nature. The problem is that, according to research on citizens, individuals are more emotionally influenced by anecdotal information (Aaroe 2011; Olsen 2016; Gross 2008), and their opinions are, on some occasions, more susceptible to it (Olsen 2016; Spence 2010; Zillmann 2006). This constitutes yet another heuristic in information processing. In this article, I focus on this previously ignored cognitive mechanism in information processing among political elites. Specifically, I examine whether previous evidence on the influence of episodic information (that is, exemplars or anecdotes from people's experiences) versus statistical information on citizens' cognitive effects applies to elected officials. I argue that while this mechanism has been overlooked in previous literature, it may play an important role in shaping how politicians process and are affected by information.

Building on existing research on average citizens, we know that the effect of episodic information, compared to statistical information, has significant political implications for voters. Evidence suggests that individuals are not only more affected by personalized information than by generalized information about policies and political issues (e.g. Olsen 2016; Spence 2010; Zillmann 2006), but also that episodic information leads individuals to attribute responsibility to single actors for outcomes rather than holding society or the government accountable for broader problems (e.g. Iyengar 1994). Moreover, some authors argue that episodic information is more effective in shaping political attitudes (Spence 2010; Springer and Harwood 2015).

These findings may have even greater implications for politicians, as the importance of their decisions can amplify the impact of a potential sensitivity to one type of information. Not only does the nature of their profession require them to make constant decisions on issues affecting entire communities, but they are also subject to constant attempts of influence from a wide variety of individuals and groups with as wide a diversity of intentions. These individuals and groups are unlikely to represent the broader population. Instead, they tend to be those with easier access to political representatives. One prominent group is interest organizations, which may rely on episodic information to craft strategies that effectively promote their positions to elites. Similarly, conservative, wealthy, and well-connected citizens are more likely to approach politicians with their concerns (Broockman and Skovron 2018; Verba and Nie 1987; Hirlinger 1992; Zhang and Zhu 2021). Lastly, those within a politician's immediate social circle often have opportunities to share their opinions and

concerns directly, further shaping the politician's perceptions by the views of those closest to them.

In sum, if episodic information is indeed more influential than statistical information, politicians' opinion formation will be highly contingent on the perceptions of a select few individuals. They would rely on the experiences and anecdotes of specific types of individuals to form their understanding of the general public, ultimately generalizing the problems or priorities on which they act from a very limited group. These people are likely to represent a more advantaged segment of society, increasing the risk that the issues prioritized by politicians diverge from those most demanded by the broader population. Understanding how politicians process such information is therefore crucial, as it can have profound consequences for the policymaking process. Their agenda-setting, priorities, voting behavior, and ultimately their ability to represent the public may, in part, be explained by how they process and respond to episodic information.

This study examines this mechanism among elected officials using a survey conducted with Chilean political elites ( $n = 300$ ). Employing three preregistered vignette experiments, I investigate whether episodic information has a greater impact on politicians in three distinct situations: its *influence* in the evaluation of a public service, how *memorable* certain political information is, and how *salient* news is. I show that politicians are excessively susceptible to personal stories and experiences while ignoring statistical information when assessing a policy, demonstrating that episodic information is more influential than statistical information. Furthermore, my findings indicate that politicians recall episodic information better than statistical information. Furthermore, I complement these results by examining whether politicians differ from citizens in this regard. Using a survey of Chileans ( $n = 1325$ ), I show that politicians share with citizens not only the direction of the treatment effect but also its magnitude, consistent with previous findings on politicians' reliance on heuristics. This supports the notion that politicians, like average citizens, use cognitive shortcuts in many aspects of their decision-making.

These findings are revealing, as they suggest a potential mechanism that has not yet been fully explored but may help explain earlier evidence on unequal responsiveness. Episodic information may play a key role in amplifying the impact of specific information on politicians' perceptions. Moreover, these results are significant for organized interests seeking to build support for specific policies. At the same time, they highlight potential risks of political manipulation, raising questions about the importance of statistical and evidence-based policy training for policymakers. Finally, it is worth noting that not only are my results in line with those of previous articles on the use of cognitive shortcuts from political elites, but that this paper is one of the few to examine these kinds of mechanisms in the global south and beyond W.E.I.R.D countries<sup>1</sup> (Henrich et al. 2010). Thus, my findings offer external validity for the idea that politicians share more similarities with average citizens than previously thought.

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<sup>1</sup> Acronym stands for western, educated, industrialized, rich and democratic countries.

## Episodic Information and Heuristics in Political Decision-Making

According to attribution theory (Kelley 1967), episodic information refers to information derived from personal stories. It focuses on the experiences of a single person or a small group and recounts events in great detail from a circumstantial, single-point perspective. This contrasts with statistical information (also referred to as thematic frames in the communications literature), which provides a more generalized and distant perspective. While, to the best of my knowledge, there is no research investigating the effect of episodic information as a mechanism for information processing among politicians, it has been extensively explored in other fields. Studies on this type of information trace back to the psychology of causality (Kelley 1967; Nisbett and Borgida 1976), with Nisbett and Ross (1980) and Iyengar (1994) offering more specific insights into the differences between episodic and statistical information. They argued that the empirical results psychologists obtained when testing attribution theory could be explained by a sensory mechanism: individuals systematically ignore statistical information (also called base rates or consensus information) when attributing causality to an event. This occurs because statistical information lacks the concreteness needed to engage individuals emotionally, making them less likely to be affected by it. Personal stories, termed episodic information by Iyengar (1994), are more vivid, providing relatable details that prompt stronger emotional engagement and sensations Nisbett and Ross (1980).

Within political science, considerable attention has been paid to the effects of episodic versus statistical information in the realms of political communication, public policy, and political psychology. Scholars have explored how news frames influence attributions of responsibility (e.g., Aaroe 2011), how episodic information shapes perceptions of public services (e.g., Olsen 2016), and how disparities in attention to these types of information affect political decision-making. Political psychologists have argued that episodic information is particularly relevant in the construction of political and group attitudes (Spence 2010). Despite this extensive body of research emphasizing the significant consequences of episodic information, it is surprising that little attention has been given to how it may specifically affect politicians, especially given its potential implications for political decision-making.

For political elites, episodic information poses two major potential disadvantages. First, as noted earlier, if politicians overestimate the value of personal experiences, this can distort their understanding of social conditions and realities, as they are exposed to only a narrow subset of them (see: Thal 2016). Whether politicians learn these stories through the news, from constituents who contact them, or from their inner circles, these anecdotes are unlikely to represent a random selection of the population. Research shows that conservative-leaning citizens are more likely to contact their representatives (Broockman and Skovron 2018; Verba and Nie 1987). Similarly, predictors of citizen-initiated contact with elected officials include personal efficacy and socioeconomic status (Verba and Nie 1987; Hirlinger 1992; Sharp 1982), strong social and political ties (Hirlinger 1992; Aars and Strømsnes 2007; Zhang and Zhu 2021), and high political awareness (Miewald and Comer 1986). Broockman and Skovron (2018) illustrate this concretely, arguing that asymmetric polarization in the United States can be explained by the fact that Republicans—particularly a conser-

vative subset within the party—are more likely to directly contact elected officials, thereby skewing those officials’ perceptions of the electorate. Second, following Iyengar (1994) findings, if politicians prioritize episodic information over statistical information, they are more likely to attribute responsibility to individual actors rather than the governments they serve in. This ultimately leads them to underestimate the role their own decisions may play in addressing or resolving certain issues.

Nevertheless, when it comes to elites, there is currently little to no research examining the specific effects of anecdotes or episodic information. Instead, the closest literature focuses on how politicians process information. This research suggests two possible approaches. On one hand, politicians may diverge from the patterns observed in average citizens. Politicians differ from ordinary citizens in ways that could predict expert-like behavior. First, they may be presumed to hold higher standards for processing information. Given the nature of their roles, it is reasonable to anticipate that during their terms in office, politicians develop skills to effectively handle information—a trait often assumed (see: Hafner-Burton et al. 2013). Second, politicians are not fully representative of the general population in a descriptive sense. They typically belong to a particular subgroup of individuals, often being highly educated, which suggests they possess techniques for efficiently processing information. Specialists in various fields often develop “trained” heuristics that enable them to achieve optimal results more quickly (e.g. Gigerenzer and Selten 2001; Gigerenzer 2015; Raufaste et al. 1998). Additionally, politicians have privileged access to readily available statistical information through regular reports from governmental institutions, interest groups, and their staff. Following evidence on experts’ information processing, these factors should predict differences in decision-making processes compared to average citizens (e.g. Herrnstein and Murray 2010; Vis 2019).

On the other hand, politicians may process information much like the general public. Motivated by the implications of choice anomalies, scholars have explored whether the heuristics found among average citizens are also present in politicians. Empirical studies reveal that politicians, like ordinary individuals, frequently rely on heuristics, which often lead to suboptimal decision-making. Existing research indicates that politicians are susceptible to choice anomalies and are influenced by the way information is presented (Baekgaard et al. 2019; Butler and Dynes 2016; Sheffer et al. 2017; Stolwijk and Vis 2021; Walgrave et al. 2017). Along similar lines, Kertzer (2020) meta-analysis suggests that the gap between elites and the public may be overestimated in the literature. These findings challenge the notion that politicians behave as experts.

But what can these studies teach us about the relationship between the type of information and its effects on politicians? Similar to mechanisms examined in prior research, differences in attention to episodic versus statistical information are likely a result of unconscious information processing. As previously mentioned, scholars have argued that the emotional responses evoked by episodic information make individuals more sensitive to it (Nisbett and Ross 1980). This sensitivity persists even when individuals claim they prefer to learn about a problem through statistical data (Olsen 2016). In line with the Tversky and Kahneman (1974) notion of heuristics, or what Vis (2019) refers to as the *heuristics and biases* tradition, the exaggerated

effect of episodic over statistical information can be understood as yet another *choice anomaly*.

Building on evidence from other heuristics, the central expectation of my theoretical argument is that episodic information will have a greater impact on politicians than statistical information. Episodic information offers a vivid and detailed depiction, providing a richer narrative about the characters and context involved. In contrast, statistical information, with its cold and impersonal nature, is less likely to evoke emotional responses. Episodic information, by triggering a sensory reaction, is more effective at eliciting emotional engagement (Aaroe 2011; Nisbett and Ross 1980; Gross 2008). This emotional response is key to the underlying mechanism behind the effect of episodic information. Following the arguments of Aaroe (2011) and Gross (2008), it is plausible that the lack of observed effects of episodic information in prior research (e.g., Peter and Beckers 2022) could be attributed to the use of vignettes lacking sufficient emotional vividness. Additionally, a meta-analysis by Krämer and Peter (2020) demonstrates a consistent effect of exemplars or anecdotal information on first-level reality judgments, such as public opinion, which aligns closely with the focus of this article. As the authors suggest, the representativeness heuristic—where individuals perceive a few instances as representative of a broader population—is a clear effect of episodic information. Thus, the cognitive mechanisms, both through emotional vividness and heuristics, are likely to render individuals more receptive to information derived from personal experiences while discounting generalized information.

More specifically, existing studies on episodic information have focused on its effects on both cognitive functions and behavior. In terms of cognitive functions, (Olsen 2016) examines how episodic information influences citizens' perceptions of public policies. He shows that when evaluating a public service, individuals are more influenced by the experiences of another user than by statistical reports about the service. This supports claims made by researchers in related fields that episodic information is inherently more persuasive than statistical information (Herr et al. 1991; Zillmann 2006). By extension, when legislators evaluate a policy, episodic information should likewise have a greater impact than statistical information. Formally:

*(1) Hypothesis 1: Episodic information will be more influential on politicians' assessment of the quality of a policy than statistical information*

The effect of episodic information extends beyond an immediate reaction to the content presented. A crucial aspect of decision-making involves not only processing available information in the moment but also the ability to retain and retrieve relevant information from memory. In this regard, memorable information tends to carry greater weight in judgments and evaluations (Nisbett and Ross 1980). Episodic memory, in particular, serves as a specialized mechanism evolved in humans to store emotionally charged information. This type of memory is distinguished by its capacity to retain vivid, emotional experiences, which can be easily retrieved later with minimal cues (Allen and Fortin 2013; Tulving 2002). The emotional intensity of such information ensures that it remains accessible for future use in decision-making, making it a critical factor in shaping judgments over time.

In the political realm, the relevance of this mechanism is closely tied to the factors outlined above. If episodic information is not only more emotionally engaging but also more easily stored and recalled, it implies that this type of information has a sustained influence on political decision-making. Anecdotes can leave lasting impressions, shaping perceptions well beyond the initial exposure. Evidence from research on citizens supports this argument. Olsen (2016) found that citizens are more likely to recall anecdotal performance information about public services than statistical data. Similarly, Graeber et al. (2024) demonstrate that the effect of statistical information on individuals' perceptions diminishes by 73% within a day, whereas episodic information declines by only 32% in the same period. These findings underscore the enduring power of episodic information in shaping opinions and guiding decisions.

For politicians, I anticipate this effect to be present as well. Therefore:

*(2) Hypothesis 2: Politicians will be more likely to remember episodic information than statistical information*

Research on episodic information has demonstrated effects that extend beyond perceptual and attitudinal changes, showing that such information can drive concrete behavioral outcomes. Studies have found that vivid and specific (i.e., episodic) cues are more likely to prompt pro-environmental behaviors, such as adopting energy-saving measures or choosing environmentally friendly meals (Lee et al. 2018). The framing of a story has also been shown to influence individuals' likelihood of engaging in voluntary services (Han et al. 2017) and their willingness to support protests or social mobilization efforts (Spence 2010). Most relevant to this paper, the focus people place on certain news topics is often shaped by how the information is framed—whether episodic or statistical (Price et al. 1997). If politicians' attention to news is similarly influenced by episodic versus statistical framing (thematic framing in communication studies), they risk prioritizing issues that disproportionately represent a smaller segment of the population, potentially misaligning with broader societal concerns.

The power of episodic information in shaping behavior lies in one of its central characteristics: its concreteness. Episodic information provides specific, tangible examples that make otherwise abstract issues more relatable and emotionally engaging. This concreteness enables individuals to form more vivid, realistic impressions of the consequences associated with the issue being presented. As noted earlier, the emotional vividness embedded in episodic frames amplifies the perceived stakes of an issue, making it feel more immediate and personal. This heightened emotional engagement increases the likelihood of the issue being perceived as salient and acted upon.

In light of evidence from studies on framing effects in media, I hypothesize that episodically framed news will be more likely to capture politicians' attention than news framed in statistical or thematic terms. Given the emotional and concrete nature of episodic frames, politicians are expected to find these stories more compelling and relevant. Consequently, they may prioritize reading articles with episodic frames over thematic ones, which could influence their perceptions of which issues are most pressing or salient. This is specially relevant as politicians seem to consider

traditional media as one of the most useful sources of information (Walgrave and Soontjens 2023). This dynamic could shape their policy focus and decision-making, potentially leading to an overemphasis on highly visible, emotionally charged issues rather than those with broader societal impact. Formally:

(3) *Hypothesis 3: Episodic frames will be more salient for politicians than thematic frames in news stories, increasing their inclination to pay attention to them.*

## Empirical Setting and Design

To test the three hypotheses outlined above, a series of pre-registered vignette experiments was conducted as part of a survey targeting elected officials in Chile. The target population consisted of members of local governments (mayors and councilors), regional governments (governors and regional councilors), and the National Congress. This approach allowed for testing the hypotheses with a high degree of internal validity across a significant sample of real politicians. Since elections were being held at the time the survey began, both outgoing and incoming congress members were included in the sample. Additionally, members of the Constitutional Convention were incorporated, as the constitutional process was ongoing during the survey period. The total target population consisted of approximately 3,400 representatives.

More specifically, in Chile, the national representatives numbered around 360. The National Congress comprises 50 senators and 155 deputies, while an additional 155 representatives were elected to the Constitutional Convention in 2021, all of whom were part of the study's target population. National representatives are elected through regional districts using an open-list proportional system. Local politicians in Chile, by contrast, fall into three categories. Sixteen regional governors oversee the 16 regional governments, elected through a majority system for four-year terms. Similarly, mayors lead the 345 communes across the country, also serving four-year terms. Local councilors, the most numerous group, total 2,252 individuals, with between 6 and 10 councilors elected per commune through a proportional representation system. While regional governors and mayors are full-time roles, councilors are permitted to hold other employment and are compensated for their work. Despite this flexibility, the majority of councilors possess tertiary education qualifications. Although non-partisan representatives are more common at the local level, most candidates are affiliated with national parties. Notably, all representatives in Chile, except for the president, are eligible for re-election. This provides insights into the incentives and structures faced by local politicians in Chile, offering potential for generalization to other countries with similar political contexts.

The study was conducted online, with representatives receiving email invitations to participate in the survey. Since no prior centralized system of email addresses existed, a team of four research assistants compiled contact information from various online sources. This team also followed up with representatives via phone calls, both to encourage participation and to update the contact database, as many email addresses found online were outdated. The survey was fielded between March 15 and May 15. Of the 3,400 representatives, approximately 2700 were contacted, as some

representatives lacked accessible contact information and about 400 emails bounced. All 700 representatives I failed to reach were local politicians. Ultimately, the survey yielded approximately 300 responses, resulting in a response rate of about 13% among those contacted (see Table 3 in the appendix).

Three sets of experiments were conducted within the survey, each designed to test a specific hypothesis. Respondents were asked a series of questions regarding some policy-related information based solely on the provided texts. Although based on real information, the texts were specifically created for this study to minimize the influence of the respondents' prior experiences with the policies.

### Influence - Information Type and Public Service Evaluation

The first experiment aims to determine how politicians' assessments of the performance of a public service are influenced by statistical versus episodic information. This experiment mostly builds on the seminal work of Nisbett and Ross (1980), who argue that individuals are prone to ignore statistical (consensus) information when attributing causality. I refer to this mechanism as *influence*.

The first hypothesis theorizes that episodic information is more influential than statistical information. To test this, I employ a vignette experiment in which subjects read information about the performance of medical procedures at a local hospital. Respondents are presented with a scenario that includes both a personal experience and statistical information about medical procedures at their local hospital. The design randomly assigns participants to one of two conditions. In the first condition, subjects receive negative episodic information—a story about Jorge, who had a poor experience following a medical procedure at his local public hospital—paired with positive statistical information (a low percentage of reported unpleasant experiences at the hospital, 1%). In the second condition, subjects receive positive episodic information—a story about a patient who had a good experience at the hospital—paired with negative statistical information (a high percentage of reported unpleasant experiences, 20% - see Table 1). Respondents are then asked to evaluate the hospital service based on the information provided (see Fig. 5 in the appendix for balance tests).

**Table 1** Episodic vs Statistics Influence Vignettes

Vignette	Treatment 1	Treatment 2
	Jorge just had medical treatment in the local public hospital. He claims his experience was <i>[very bad, the care providers treated him poorly, and that he will never go back to the same hospital]</i> . Despite this, the hospital reports <i>[about 1%]</i> of the users complain about the service.	Jorge just had medical treatment in the local public hospital. He claims his experience was <i>[excellent and he was very grateful for the service provided. He will always go to the same hospital from now on]</i> . Despite this, the hospital reports <i>[about 20%]</i> of the users complain about the service.

Policies related to the functioning of public health services were chosen as the focus because of their relevance to both local and national politicians. National politicians play a critical role in making decisions about budget, investments and general structures of the public health services (Asociación Chilena de Municipalidades 1997). Simultaneously, municipalities are tasked with developing management tools and overseeing the quality of care provided by local health providers (*ibid*, pg. 31). Moreover, the statistical information used in the treatments is inspired by actual data from regional government surveys. Studies focusing on Municipal Health Services indicate that, on average, approximately 17% of users that undergo medical treatments are dissatisfied with their experiences (Ministerio de Desarrollo Social 2012; Servicio Nacional de Inversión 2022). Moreover, looking into the types of formal complaints hospitals receive, there is marked concentration on treatment from doctors and other care providers (Espinoza-González et al. 2021; Unidad Municipal de Gestión de Usuarios 2024), which closely relates to the episodic treatments provided in the vignettes. Thus, the context used in the experiment is at least partially reflective of the responsibilities of both local and national representatives.

Crucially, the experiment was designed with the understanding that the subjects' prior beliefs are unknown, making it difficult to predict how each piece of information will interact with their baseline assessments. Earlier studies have addressed this challenge by employing multiple treatment and control groups (e.g., Olsen 2016, p. 412). However, due to survey space constraints and the anticipated sample size, I limited the experiment to only two treatments. This is specially relevant in light of the increasingly important discussion on statistical power in social and political science (Arel-Bundock et al. 2024).

Instead, considering that the main intention of this article is to compare the effect of the information types relative to each other, this experiment solves the problems by incorporating statistical and episodic information bundled in both treatments. Including radically different statistical information (1% vs. 20% of complaints) alongside contrasting personal experiences (positive vs. negative) allows for better control of participants' priors. I opted for this design instead of holding one type of information constant for several reasons. First, holding statistical information constant would only measure the marginal effect of episodic information, rather than determining whether episodic information is more or less influential overall. Second, holding episodic information constant would fail to account for potential "positive" or "negative" biases, such as whether one specific direction of the information is inherently more influential. Finally and maybe most importantly, holding one type constant risks conflating a dominant effect of one type of information with a null result. For instance, if episodic information strongly outweighs statistical information, holding it constant would result in consistently negative (or positive) outcomes across treatments, obscuring whether the effect stems from the episodic information itself or the ineffectiveness of the treatments. The same problem arises if statistical information is more influential. This would make it impossible to isolate the source of the observed effects without variation in both types of information.

Thus, this design enables a direct comparison of the effects of episodic versus statistical information without relying on a control group. Following the argument outlined in the theory section, if hypothesis 1 is correct, participants should be more

influenced by episodic information than by statistical information. Specifically, if episodic information drives the treatment effect as expected, participants exposed to the negative personal experience should evaluate the hospital more negatively than those exposed to the positive personal experience, regardless of the statistical information provided.

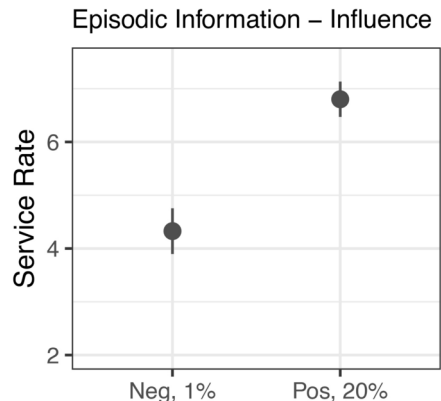
## Results

Figure 1 illustrates the results of the experiment. Respondents were asked to rate the quality of the hospital service based on the information provided to them. Their evaluations were measured on a 10-point scale, with higher scores indicating a more favorable assessment. The figure reports the mean differences between the treatment groups along with their confidence intervals, derived from a t-test analysis.

The results indicate a clear and significant effect of episodic information on participants' evaluations of the hospital. As expected, representatives exposed to the negative personal experience rated the hospital 2.5 points lower than those who read about a favorable personal experience (4.3 vs. 6.8 on a 1 to 10 scale,  $p < .01$ ). This difference occurred despite the hospital being described as having only 1% of complaints in the negative episodic treatment, compared to a much higher rate of 20% in the positive episodic treatment. In other words, the statistical information provided in the treatments appears to have had minimal influence on subjects' evaluations. The stark difference in complaint rates between the two conditions (1% vs. 20%) did not substantially alter participants' assessments of the hospital when paired with contrasting episodic information. This outcome highlights the overriding power of episodic information in affecting respondents' perceptions, underscoring its ability to shape judgments more strongly than abstract statistical data.

These findings support hypothesis 1. Representatives are far more influenced by episodic information than by statistical information when judging a policy, even though statistical information may reflect a completely different reality. As the information included in the treatments is hardly ideologically laden (as they point to a more administrative function) the results are unlikely to be explained by unbalances

**Fig. 1** Episodic vs. Statistical Info on Policy Evaluation. T-test for Negative Episodic + Positive Statistical information vs Positive Episodic + Negative Statistical information.  $P < 0.01$



in the sample (i.e. more left-wing politicians). Furthermore, all these results are consistent even after including a series of covariates (see Table 5 in appendix).

### Memory - Information Type and Recall

Hypothesis 2 predicts that respondents will more readily recall episodic information compared to statistical information. I test this hypothesis using an experiment designed to assess memory capacity. At the start of the survey, participants are instructed to carefully read information about the performance of a public service—the Chilean Internal Revenue Service (*Servicio de Impuestos Internos*)—as they will later be asked questions regarding this service. After a series of unrelated questions, respondents are prompted to write down what they remember about the initial information. The recall question states: “*At the beginning of this survey, we presented you with some information regarding a public service,*” without providing any cues specifying the service’s name or context.

To test this hypothesis, the information presented to respondents is manipulated into two randomly assigned groups. One group reads about a specific personal experience with the public service (episodic treatment), while the other group receives statistical data on user satisfaction (statistical treatment). The episodic treatment describes Juan’s complaints following a negative experience with the service, whereas the statistical treatment provides the percentage of complaints reported about the service. The percentage cited is near actual user satisfaction reports for this service (Secretaría de Modernización 2020), and personal complaints are frequent enough to be plausible. This exercise tests how much respondents retained from the information despite having to engage with other topics during the survey.

The outcome is measured by two criteria: the number of respondents recalling something about the information and the concreteness of their recall. Coders blinded to the treatments evaluated the written responses using a three-point accuracy scale. First, coders determined whether the response was related to the information provided. Irrelevant phrases (e.g., “Something about a fire?”) or statements like “I can’t recall anything” were coded as 0. Responses that vaguely referred to the topic were coded as 1. These included phrases that mentioned the service without context (e.g., “something about the IRS”) or the context without clarity about subjects or services (e.g., “30% complaints somewhere,” “a bad experience at some service”). Finally, responses that accurately recalled both the context and details about the service (e.g., “A person had a bad experience at the IRS” or “The IRS reported a percentage of negative experiences”) were coded as 2.

As a result, responses were scored on a 3-point scale: 0 for no recall or unrelated content, 1 for vague recall, and 2 for specific recall (see Appendix Table 8 for coding examples and Table 9 for inter-coder reliability). Differences in the average scores between treatment groups reflect the treatment effects. If the theory behind Hypothesis 2 is correct, reading about a personal experience with a public service (i.e., episodic treatment) should elicit stronger emotional reactions than reading about the number of general complaints about the same service, making the information easier to recall from memory (see Fig. 6 in the appendix for balance tests).

## Results

As Fig. 2 illustrates, the differences between the treated groups align with the expectations outlined in Hypothesis 2. Although, on average, participants did not recall information very concretely (both groups scored less than 1 on a 2-point scale), the text containing episodic information proved to be easier for participants to recall compared to the text with statistical data. Specifically, the group that read the episodic information at the start of the survey had an average score of 0.79 on the accuracy scale when asked to write what they remembered. In contrast, participants who read the statistical text scored an average of 0.59 on the same scale ( $p < .05$ ), a result that remains statistically significant when including covariates (see Table 7).

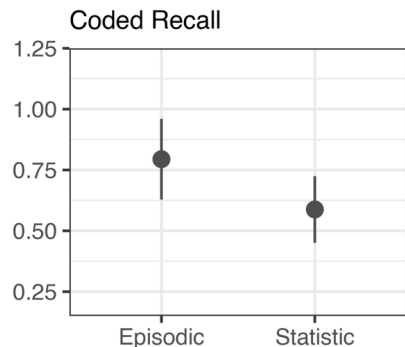
This finding suggests that the nature of the information (episodic vs. statistical) had a meaningful impact on participants' ability to retrieve the information. This outcome supports the hypothesis that episodic information facilitates better recall compared to abstract, statistical data.

### Saliency - Information Type and News Attention

So far, I have examined memory and influence as indicators of how episodic information affects politicians. The final indicator I look at is based on the literature on news framing and behavior. It aims to determine whether news presented in an episodic frame is more salient to politicians than news framed thematically (Hypothesis 3), thereby making politicians more likely to pay attention to it. (See Table 2).

To test the third hypothesis, I conduct a vignette experiment using news headlines. Survey respondents are asked to choose between two newspaper headlines, each covering the same topic, based on which article they would personally choose to read. The actual topic of each headline remains constant across both treatment groups, with only the framing manipulated. In one treatment group, topic A (wildfires) is presented episodically while topic B (droughts) is presented thematically; in the other group, topic A is framed thematically while topic B is framed episodically (see Table 2). This design captures the effect of framing on participants' attention by directly measuring their preference for a particular frame. The chosen topics are based on real newspaper reports and align with similar experiments conducted in existing research (e.g. Feezell et al. 2019).

**Fig. 2** Episodic vs Statistical Information on Memory. T-test for differences in the concreteness of recall based on accuracy scale.  $p < 0.05$



**Table 2** News Framing Vignettes

Treatment	Topic A	Topic B
Treatment 1	[Wildfires-Episodic] Victim of the 2018 forest fires: 'I lost everything, even my memories were destroyed by the fire. I can't even look at old photos anymore'	[Droughts-Thematic] Problematic Desertification: Some areas of the country are completely dependent on cistern trucks to access water
Treatment 2	[Wildfire-Thematic] Two years after the 2018 fires, victims have not recovered their previous lifestyle. About 40% of them reported having lost everything to the fire	[Droughts-Episodic] Neighbors of decertified areas: 'We have to survive with what the cistern trucks bring us every week. Sometimes we have to decide between flushing the toilet or giving water to our animals'

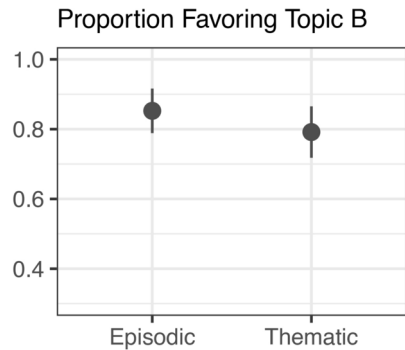
The news headlines were selected for their similarities. Both address environmental issues and highlight people's struggles caused by external forces. The intention is to ensure that respondents have roughly similar priors regarding the two topics when presented in the same frame. Thus, owing to the similarities of the topics, discrepancies in preferences for one or the other should be explained solely by the framing manipulation (see Fig. 7 in appendix for balance tests).

If episodic framing has a stronger effect on politicians' behavior, I predict that respondents will show a preference for headlines framed episodically. Considering that base-rate preferences are topic-dependent (i.e., they vary between topics A and B), it is more appropriate to compare the same topic across treatments. Specifically, I expect that respondents who receive topic B's headline framed thematically (treatment 1) will pay less attention to it than those who receive the same topic framed episodically (treatment 2). If Hypothesis 3 is correct, respondents in the second treatment group will prefer topic B in a greater proportion than those in the first treatment group. Since respondents' options are binary (choosing either topic A or topic B), comparing preferences for topic B is functionally equivalent to comparing preferences for topic A.

## Results

The percentage of respondents who preferred Topic B over Topic A for each treatment is shown in Fig. 3. Contrary to the predictions of Hypothesis 3, these results show that, while in the expected direction, there is no statistically significant difference between the groups in terms of attention to each issue. The mean of both treatments' attention to topic B is close to 0.8, as shown in the figure (0.86 and 0.79, respectively;  $p = 0.21$ ). Despite efforts to select two very similar news headlines, about 80% of survey respondents chose Topic B, regardless of its framing. This suggests that when compared to Topic A, B was a very salient issue to representatives to begin with. In light of this, I find no impact of episodic information on individuals' behavior.

**Fig. 3** Thematic vs Episodic Frames and News Selection. T-test for differences in proportion of respondents favoring Topic B in each treatment group.  $P = 0.21$



There may be several explanations behind these results. For instance, it could be that the Topic B was more politically relevant than A as it is a topic that calls for immediate political action (e.g. provide more cistern trucks). Also, the fact the experimenter's question does not ask for respondents to think about the decision in their role as politicians, it could be that this makes them more susceptible to the media-saliency of the topic more than what would be more relevant for their work as representatives.

Regardless, while these results do not support hypothesis 3, they still suggest that politicians will choose to ignore information even when it is referring to a broader group of people.

## Politicians v. Citizens

The hypotheses tested in the previous section were based on the expectation that politicians would respond to information similarly to citizens. In other words, the effects observed among citizens were expected to “travel” and replicate among elites. So far, however, the evidence indicates only that politicians are more influenced by and have an easier time recalling episodic information than statistical data. Yet, while the direction of this effect may mirror that of citizens, its magnitude could be smaller for elites. This distinction is relevant, as politicians—despite being more responsive to anecdotes—may still possess cognitive skills that nuance these effects compared to average citizens.

From a theoretical standpoint, and building on earlier discussions, the literature offers two competing perspectives. On the one hand, some authors have argued that politicians are a fundamentally different breed from citizens. The so-called elite exceptionalism (Kertzer 2016) suggests that elites exhibit distinct cognitive processes—a more rational architecture—compared to average citizens. Empirically, some authors contend that these differences between elites and the public explain the gaps in positions, perceptions, and strategies observed in existing research, particularly regarding international policies (Byman and Pollack 2001; Page and Barabas 2000).

On the other hand, an emerging body of research suggests that politicians and citizens share strikingly similar decision-making processes when faced with comparable scenarios (Kertzer 2020; Sheffer et al. 2017). Kertzer (2020) argues that while elite-public perception gaps may exist, both groups tend to respond in comparable ways to

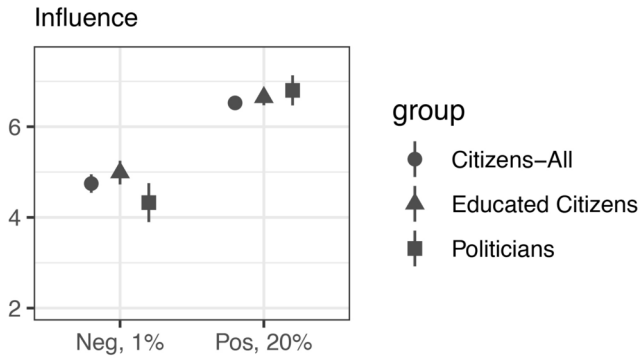
the same stimuli. Moreover, the elite-public gaps observed in existing research may result from group composition factors (e.g., age, education, gender) rather than elite status itself (p. 547).

Studying the differences between citizens and elites is therefore important when interpreting the results of this study. If politicians diverge significantly from citizens, other implications of episodic information, including those not addressed in this article, may be less applicable to elites. Furthermore, exploring these differences contributes to the growing body of literature on elites' heuristics and cognitive processes versus those of average citizens—the so-called public-elite gap discussion. With this in mind, this section examines the differences in how Chilean political elites and citizens respond to episodic versus statistical information. It is important to note that this section was not preregistered and is therefore exploratory in nature.

A survey conducted among Chilean citizens ( $N = 1325$ ) was used as a benchmark. The survey targeted a representative sample of the Chilean public. Due to budgetary and time constraints, it was only possible to compare one of the experiments. Vignette 1 was selected for this purpose because it incorporates both episodic and statistical information in its treatments, offering a more comprehensive view of the treatment effects. This vignette also has the clearest implications for the study. Additionally, since education has been linked to the use of heuristics (Lesgold et al. 1988), I also tested for differences within a subset of citizens with completed higher education. This is particularly relevant, as politicians constitute a significantly more educated group, with over 90% holding a higher education degree.

Recall that, as described in Section [Empirical Setting and Design](#), for experiment 1 subjects were presented with a text about a public hospital. Half of them read a text with a negative personal experience (episodic information), together with a small (1%) percentage of unpleasant experiences reported in the hospital (statistical information). The other half were presented instead with a text with a positive personal experience in the hospital and a 20 times larger (20%) percentage of unpleasant experiences reported in the same hospital (see [Table 1](#) for more information).

The results reported in [Fig. 4](#) show that the effects are consistent across groups. As observed, for those treated with positive episodic information and negative statistical information, both direction and magnitude are shared across all groups (undefined  $p > 0.2$ ). Nevertheless, for those treated with negative episodic information and positive statistical information, elected officials actually show a higher magnitude of effect from episodic information. They rated the policy worse than both the general public and the group of educated citizens (4.3, 4.8, and 5.0, respectively;  $p < 0.1$ ), while no statistically significant differences can be observed between the highly educated citizens and the complete citizen sample. This suggests not only that, generally speaking, there are no discernible differences between political elites and the general population, but where a slight difference is found, its direction is against what the notion of “highly skilled politicians” would predict.



**Fig. 4** Citizens v. Politicians - Influence of Episodic Information. Averages of the policy for treatment with negative episodic information t-test p-values =.07 and.009 when comparing citizens to politicians. For second treatment group t-test p-values =.2 and.6 when comparing citizens to politicians. P-value < 0.01 for all treatment effects

## Discussion

Is episodic information more prominent for politicians than statistical information? The short answer is *yes*. In this paper, through a series of experiments, I have demonstrated that, according to two out of the three indicators used, politicians are significantly more susceptible to episodic information than statistical information. Specifically, these results suggest that when assessing the quality of a public service, episodic information is substantially more *influential* than statistical information in contexts where politicians are exposed to both types of information with conflicting directions. The results also indicate that reports on user satisfaction show episodic information to be more *memorable* than statistical information.

While these findings align with earlier research examining various cognitive mechanisms (Baekgaard et al. 2019; Butler and Dynes 2016; Sheffer et al. 2017; Stolwijk and Vis 2021; Walgrave et al. 2017), supporting the notion that politicians often behave more like the general public than experts, the specific cognitive mechanism explored here carries important implications. First, as argued, the disproportionate impact of episodic information may lead to policy positions or agenda-setting based on the opinions and experiences of a small group of individuals. In light of the literature on citizen-initiated contacts with politicians (Broockman and Skovron 2018; Verba and Nie 1987; Hirlinger 1992; Sharp 1982; Zhang and Zhu 2021; Miewald and Comer 1986), these individuals are unlikely to be representative of the general population but instead belong to particular subgroups. Furthermore, it is important to consider who typically has better access to politicians: their social circles. The social groups politicians belong to may influence the effect of anecdotal information. This connects to Thal's (2016) argument that people tend to perceive their immediate social situations (i.e., their communities and neighbors) as representative of broader societal conditions. Consequently, by being disproportionately influenced by episodic information, politicians risk forming a conception of social reality that is shaped by specific subgroups of the population or even their close personal circles.

A second implication is that representatives' susceptibility to episodic information may present an opportunity for certain actors, such as interest groups, to develop more effective strategies for influencing policy and advancing their positions among elites. Thirdly, since episodic information serves as a cognitive shortcut, what politicians are influenced by is not necessarily the most important issue. Susceptibility to episodic information is orthogonal to its importance. To be clear, episodic information can indeed be very important—potentially even more so than statistical information in some cases. However, the key point here is that it is not intrinsically more relevant, yet politicians appear to be more affected by it across the board.

Finally, drawing on Iyengar (1994) thesis, attention to episodic information is correlated with attributing responsibility to individual actors rather than to collectives, such as governments. This is critical given that politicians themselves are central agents in the actions a government can take. If they underestimate their own responsibility in addressing certain issues, this can result in suboptimal decision-making. Thus, the heightened attention to episodic information may play a crucial role in explaining politicians' misinformation and biases.

### Limitations and Future Research

All things considered, while this is, to my knowledge, one of the first articles to examine the effects of episodic information among political elites, my results are limited by both design and context. Starting with the former, it is important to note that the typically low response rates among political elites significantly constrained the empirical strategy for this paper. Power limitations allowed for only two treatments in each experiment. This meant that no control group was included, and the results reflect only the comparison between episodic and statistical information, not their independent absolute effects relative to a control. Unfortunately, this means we cannot determine the extent to which episodic information shifts politicians' priors. However, this decision allowed for a clear comparison of two types of information that likely constitute a substantial portion of politicians' workflow.

Focusing specifically on the first experiment, bundling episodic and statistical information, while necessary, results in a clear trade-off. From the findings, we can only conclude that episodic information is more influential than statistical information in contexts where both are presented with competing directions. Once again, we cannot ascertain their absolute effects relative to a control. Nevertheless, this setup allows for relevant claims about the impact of episodic information versus statistical information, as it reflects a least-likely scenario in which the statistical information directly contradicts the anecdotal information. On that note, it is worth mentioning that, in all treatments, episodic information was presented first and statistical information second, introducing a potential risk of order effects confounding the results. However, existing literature suggests that order effects in vignette experiment setups are typically minor or non-existent (e.g. Düval and Hinz 2019; Sauer et al. 2020), especially with shorter texts like those used in this study. Regardless, my design does not allow for controlling this potential issue.

Now in terms of the context and sample, not only should we be careful when generalizing these results as they are bound to the Chilean reality, but also because the

sample is composed of a high proportion of local politicians, as well as an over-representation of women and left-wing politicians. While my results show a consistent effect in different subgroups of the sample (see interaction models in the appendix Table 6), given the statistical power constraints of the size of my sample, these should be interpreted carefully. Perhaps most crucially, the various implications arising from these findings, along with the distinct political backgrounds and incentive structures, underscore the importance of paying particular attention to these mechanisms among national politicians. Unfortunately, the data collected for this study does not permit such an analysis. Further research is needed, focusing on different contexts and national-level representatives, to build on these findings and provide more comprehensive evidence.

Finally, given the limitations of lab-like experimental setups such as this one, it is important to emphasize that the results reported reflect short-term effects. In their daily work, decision-makers often take time to consider and weigh information from a variety of sources and types. Here, however, participants were asked to make assessments and decisions immediately after being exposed to the treatments. As a result, the findings may overestimate the magnitude of these effects in real-world contexts. This is particularly relevant in light of earlier discussions: institutions often provide elected officials with resources designed to mitigate biases and other information-driven challenges in the decision-making process.

Although this paper focuses empirically on a single mechanism in a specific context, rather than on its broader implications, it opens the door for future research. This study represents a first approach to the topic, and further exploration is much needed. These findings raise several important questions that warrant further investigation. Do these results generalize to other contexts? Is episodic information more likely to prompt politicians to update their beliefs about constituents' preferences? Does episodic information lead politicians to attribute responsibility to individual actors? Are politicians more likely to take political action or promote policies based on episodic information compared to statistical information? Addressing these questions through future research will be essential for understanding the broader implications of episodic information in political decision-making.

## **Appendix: The Influence of Episodic Information on Political Elites: Evidence from Chile**

### **A. Survey Details**

#### **A.1 Politician Sample**

The target population consists of elected officials. This includes members of local governments (majors and councils), regional governments (governors and regional councils), and the National Congress. As elections were held at the time the survey

**Table 3** Elites sample v. population. Resp rate: 353

		Population	Contacted	Sample
Position	Local	85.9%	79.6%	93.1%
	National	14.1%	13.3%	6.9%
Party Ideology	Left	38.3%	37.9%	45.4%
	Right	25%	24.6%	22.3%
	Indep.	36.6%	37.5%	32.3%
Gender	Female	31.9%	32.6%	44.0%
	Male	68.1%	67.4%	56.0%
Total		3359	2700	13%

started, both outgoing and incoming congresspeople were included in the sample. Members of the Constitutional Convention were also included given that the process was ongoing during the fielding of the survey. The target population totaled approx. 3400 representatives. The representatives received an email invitation to participate in the survey. As no previous systematization of their emails existed, a team of four research assistants had the task of compiling the contact information from different websites. The same team was used for calling representatives both as a follow-up to the invitation and, more importantly, as a process to update the database with the contacts, as in many cases the online information found was outdated. The survey was applied between the 15th of March and the 15th of May. Of the 3400 representatives, about 2700 were contacted. This is because for some of them there was no way to reach them, and about 400 of the sent emails failed. The number of usable responses for my project was approximately 300, which means that the total response rate considering those contacted was about 11%. The response distribution with comparison to the population can be seen in Table 3.

## A.2 Citizen Sample

The survey was sent to a representative samples of respondent in the country in March, 2022. The resulting sample size was of 1325. Table 4 presents the sample characteristics of the Chilean citizen sample, and associated values among the Chilean population. Education is coded as Incomplete Secondary Education (“Low”), Secondary Education Completed (“Middle”), Some University or Vocational Certification (“Middle”), Vocational Certification or University Completed (“High”), Post-graduate Education Completed (“High”), Doctorate, Post-doctorate or equivalent Completed (“High”). Party ID is measured by the question “Do you consider yourself close to a particular political party? If so, which party do you feel closest to?”

**Table 4** Citizen sample v. population. Resp rate: 1325

		Population	Sample
Gender	Men	49.2%	43.3%
	Women	50.8%	56.7%
Age	18-24	16.4%	16.1%
	25-34	21.6%	26.5%
	35-44	19.4%	24.8%
	45-54	20.0%	18.1%
	55-64	14.0%	10.1%
	65 +	8.6%	4.4%
Education	Low	22.1%	10.9%
	Middle	56.5%	61.2%
	High	21.4%	27.9%
Region	AysC)n	0.6%	0.5%
	Antofagasta	3.3%	3.2%
	AraucanC-a	5.5%	5.1%
	Arica	1.3%	1.2%
	Atacama	1.8%	1.6%
	BiobC-o	11.9%	8.6%
	Coquimbo	4.3%	3.9%
	O'higgins	5.3%	4.7%
	Los Lagos	4.7%	5.6%
	Los RC-os	2.2%	1.1%
	Magallanes	1.0%	0.9%
	Maule	5.8%	4.7%
	RM	40.3%	45.2%
	TarapacC!	1.8%	2.4%
ValparaC-so	10.4%	11.4%	
Party ID	Frente Amplio	–	6.8%
	Chile Vamos	–	6.3%
	Nueva MayorC-a	–	9.4%
	Others	–	8.7%
	Not Identify	–	68.7%

## B. Experiments' balance test

For every experiment, every survey respondent was randomly assigned to one treatment. This process was repeated in each experiment. The three figures bellow show balance tests for each of the experiments. See Fig. 5, 6, 7.

Fig. 5 Balance Test - Experiment 1

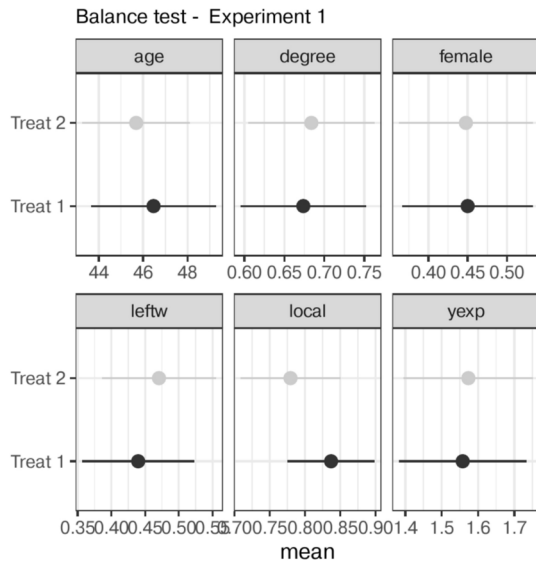


Fig. 6 Balance Test - Experiment 2

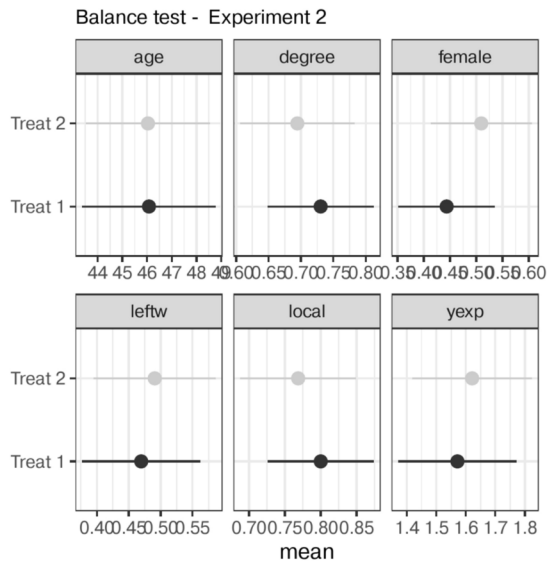
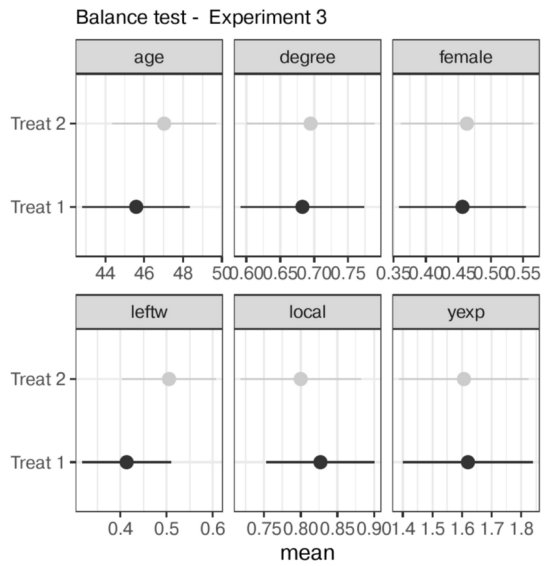


Fig. 7 Balance Test - Experiment 3



### C. Results with Covariates and interaction models

In this section you will find the regression models with covariates for all experiments as well as the interaction models for experiment 1.

Bellow, Table 5 depicts the treatment effect when including control variables. As observed, the effect of treatment 2 is consistent regardless of the models' specification. Table 6 shows the interactions as depicted in Figure 2 of the main text. As can be observed, no interaction term results significant, suggesting that the effect of being on Treatment 2 is significant for every subset of the sample, even when controlling for covariates. Finally, Table 7 shows the results for the models for Experiment 2. As can be observed, the effects are consistent across model specification.

**Table 5** Results with Covariates - Exp 1

	<i>Dependent variable</i>			
	Policy Evaluation			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Constant	4.55*** (0.29)	4.63*** (0.34)	4.25*** (0.53)	3.73*** (0.55)
treat.stat	2.38*** (0.28)	2.38*** (0.28)	2.35*** (0.28)	2.34*** (0.28)
yearsexp_num	-0.11 (0.14)	-0.11 (0.14)	-0.14 (0.14)	-0.16 (0.14)
ideoLeft		-0.17 (0.33)	-0.26 (0.33)	-0.28 (0.32)
ideoRight		-0.07 (0.39)	-0.20 (0.39)	-0.33 (0.39)
educEducaciC3n media			0.11 (0.84)	0.33 (0.83)
educSuperior no universitaria			0.01 (0.58)	0.25 (0.58)
educSuperior universitaria			0.71 (0.50)	0.83* (0.49)
genderMasculino				0.83*** (0.28)
Observations	267	267	267	267
R <sup>2</sup>	0.21	0.22	0.23	0.25
AdjustedR <sup>2</sup>	0.21	0.20	0.21	0.23

\*p&lt;0.1;\*\*p&lt;0.05;\*\*\*p&lt;0.01

**Table 6** Interaction Models -  
Exp 1

	<i>Dependent variable</i>			
	Policy Evaluation			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Constant	3.56*** (0.54)	3.47*** (0.57)	3.93*** (0.57)	3.80*** (0.56)
treat.stat	2.32*** (0.34)	2.83*** (0.42)	1.76*** (0.48)	2.28*** (0.31)
Experienced	-0.62 (0.43)			
position_dicNational				0.55 (0.55)
ideoLeft	-0.21 (0.33)	-0.32 (0.32)		-0.37 (0.33)
ideoRight	-0.26 (0.39)	-0.37 (0.39)		-0.42 (0.39)
party_ideoLeft			-0.73 (0.46)	
party_ideoRight			-0.75 (0.52)	
educEducaciC3n media	0.34 (0.83)	0.39 (0.83)	0.51 (0.84)	0.09 (0.84)
educSuperior no universitaria	0.30 (0.58)	0.33 (0.58)	0.34 (0.58)	0.17 (0.58)
educSuperior universitaria	0.90* (0.49)	0.88* (0.49)	0.92* (0.50)	0.73 (0.49)
treat.stat:genderMasculino		-0.89 (0.56)		
genderMasculino	0.87*** (0.29)	1.27*** (0.40)	0.87*** (0.29)	0.86*** (0.29)
treat.stat:Experienced	0.13 (0.60)			
treat.stat:party_ideoLeft			0.90 (0.65)	
treat.stat:party_ideoRight			0.83 (0.77)	
treat.stat:position_dicNational				0.20 (0.75)
yearsexp_num		-0.15 (0.14)	-0.16 (0.14)	-0.17 (0.14)
Observations	267	267	267	267
R <sup>2</sup>	0.26	0.26	0.26	0.26
AdjustedR <sup>2</sup>	0.23	0.24	0.23	0.23

\*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01

**Table 7** Results with Covariates - Exp 2

	<i>Dependent variable</i>			
	Coded Recall			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Constant	0.49*** (0.11)	0.48*** (0.13)	0.49 (0.31)	0.45 (0.32)
Q1_test	0.24** (0.11)	0.25** (0.11)	0.25** (0.11)	0.26** (0.11)
yearsexp_num	0.06 (0.05)	0.06 (0.05)	0.06 (0.05)	0.06 (0.05)
ideoLeft		0.11 (0.13)	0.10 (0.13)	0.09 (0.13)
ideoRight		-0.22 (0.15)	-0.24 (0.15)	-0.26* (0.15)
educEducaciC3n media			0.08 (0.39)	0.08 (0.39)
educSuperior no universitaria			-0.20 (0.33)	-0.20 (0.33)
educSuperior universitaria			0.05 (0.31)	0.04 (0.31)
genderMasculino				0.08 (0.11)
Observations	214	214	214	214
R <sup>2</sup>	0.03	0.05	0.07	0.07
AdjustedR <sup>2</sup>	0.02	0.04	0.04	0.03

\*p&lt;0.1;\*\*p&lt;0.05;\*\*\*p&lt;0.01

## D. Experiment 2 Coding Example

As mentioned in text, for Experiment 2, coders blind to the treatments were used to code what respondents wrote on a 3-point scale. Below are examples of coding for both treatments. See Table 8.

Because two coders were used, how similar their coding was will reflect the clarity of the coding instructions. The table below indicates the intercoder reliability tests run between the coding outcomes of both. See Table 9.

**Table 8** Coding Examples

Code	Meaning	Episodic Treatment	Statistical Treatment
		Example Coding T1	Example Coding T2
0	Does not recall anything about the topic	"I don't remember anything" "Was it about a fire?"	"Problems with the law" "Some text"
1	Recalls vaguely about the topic	"A person had a bad experience somewhere" "Something happened in the IRS"	"30% of dissatisfied users" "Some problems with users at the IRS"
2	Concrete recalls the topic and details	"Juan and his bad experience at the IRS" "A person had a bad experience in the IRS"	"30% of users of the IRS complain about the service" "The percentage of users complains received by the IRS"

**Table 9** Intercoder Reliability Tests - Exp 2

Var	n	Coders	n Cat	Agreement	Kripp. $\alpha$	Cohen's $\kappa$
Code	222	2	3	0.8738739	0.7928109	0.7924679

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## Declarations

**Conflict of interests** The author declares no competing nor conflicting interests.

**Ethical standard statement** This research complies with the journal's ethical standards and has been approved by an ethical committee regarding research involving human participants.

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