

Project 2020: Predicting Resentment from Political Attitudes & Misinformation



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Abstract:

The current study examines the **psychological impact of election-related misinformation on social media by measuring resentful reactions to tweets that have been flagged for election-related misinformation**. The authors examined whether people who are exposed to election-misinformation content on President Trump's Twitter account tend to score higher on indicators of resentment in three domains: (1) public resentment; (2) republican resentment; and (3) democrat resentment. They also examined whether political identity, including support for former President Trump, changes the effect of the election-misinformation content in each resentment domain.

Methods:

Participants were randomly assigned to one of three conditions, with each condition exposing participants to a different collection of tweets posted the week following the 2020 presidential election:

- **Condition 1:** Presented election-related misinformation.
- **Condition 2:** presented valid election-related information (a misinformation control)
- **Condition 3:** served as a control group — meaning the tweets presented were not flagged for misinformation, did not contain political or election-related content, and were not posted by former president Donald Trump.

After reviewing the Twitter/X content, participants completed a series of short subscales, assessing indicators of resentment toward democrats, republicans, and people in general.

Results:

- Political identity explained differences in resentment toward the public and in resentment toward republicans. Particularly, participants who identified as democrats were more likely to resent the general public and republicans compared to participants who identified as republicans and independent-conservatives.
- Political identity did not explain differences in resentment toward democrats.
- The misinformation conditions did not explain differences in resentment toward the public, democrats, or republicans.
- The effect of misinformation on resentment did not change depending on one's level of support for Donald Trump, but support for Donald Trump did predict resentment toward the public and republicans.
- Support for Donald Trump did not predict resentment toward democrats

Discussion:

- Overall, the findings suggest that one's political identity played an influential role in a person's resentful response to opposing political identities, regardless of whether political misinformation was involved.
- If the findings are to be true, they suggested that Democrats were more resentful toward Republicans—and toward the public in general—compared to those of other political identities.
- The findings also suggested that Democrats had stronger emotional reactions to Republicans, than Republicans had toward Democrats.

Why are Republicans less Resentful?: One possible factor is the influence of political ideology. Republican participants might have pre-existing beliefs that aligned with perceptions of the current time, leadership, or nation's status at large, leading to less resentment. Other factors could be that they felt a strong sense of loyalty to their own party or purposefully answered more socially desirable.