

## Appendix E: Experimental stimulus



Americans have always stood up for what is right and what is true. Our country has been strongest when it fought for freedom, justice, and truth. In the American Revolution, we stood up for our liberty, rejecting the lies of a tyrant. In World War II, we stood up to fascist leaders who misled their people and spread propaganda. Falsehoods and deceit can divide and corrupt us. But maintaining a commitment to the truth will bind us together as one great nation.

Along with our faith in this country, many of us also hold deep religious beliefs; beliefs which point to truth as sacred. As a wise man once said, “the truth shall set you free.’ (John 8:31-32). And to share only the truth with others is a divine path: “Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body.” (Ephesians 4:25).

Yet, we also know that finding the truth is not always easy.

In recent years, foreign and domestic actors have emerged to spread lies on social media. Other media outlets -- online, on TV, on the radio -- exaggerate and distort the facts, offering a one-sided view of the world.

We must protect the sanctity of the truth by carefully evaluating information, particularly information that confirms our assumptions. If we accept information unquestioningly just because it favors our political positions, it degrades the integrity of our side. In order to be loyal Americans, we all must question information that is false, even if it supports our existing beliefs

## Truth, An American Value

Our country has always struggled with the corrupting influence of propaganda. Even in the time of our forefathers, political groups used their own newspapers to print biased information to further their political aims. Thus, we have always had to fight to maintain our nation's commitment to honesty. And it is a fight that happens, most of all, in our own minds, in the information we choose to accept and reject.

Now we fight similar battles, with foreign and domestic actors spreading lies and manipulating facts on social media.



It is a challenge that tests us all. It tests us as a country, and as individuals. Will we be able to remain loyal and respectful to our fellow Americans and to the country we love? Will we show the self-respect, courage, and dignity to see beyond the things we want to be true, to consider the views of others, and to find the truth we sometimes struggle to see?

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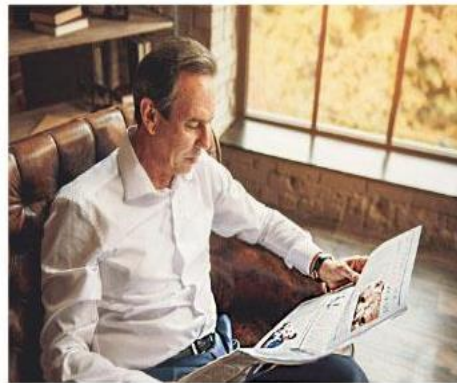
*Figure 3. Experimental stimuli, part 2.*

## Truth, An American Value

We can all agree that truth is a sacred American value. However, we also understand that it's hard to know what to believe, especially with so much questionable information circulating online, in newspapers, on television, and on the radio. How can we be careful and responsible judges of the information we consume and the conclusions we come to? How can we fulfill our duty as American citizens to prevent bias that can infect and corrupt our thinking? Here are two weapons we may use in this fight:


### *1) Stop to reconsider information that feels right.*

When we hear something that makes us feel right, we often accept it without carefully thinking about it. Of course, sometimes the information that we want to be true is true, but often things are not so simple. When we read or hear something that we would like to be true, it is good to slow down and think more carefully. Is the evidence really that convincing? Is the source credible? Am I being as careful and as responsible with this information as I would be if I heard the exact opposite information? When we accept information without question, just because it favors our position, it corrupts the virtue of our side. As patriotic Americans, we should make the courageous decision to reject false information, even when it supports our own beliefs.



### *2) Reconsider information that feels wrong.*

We also often hear things that seem to fit a different political side from our own. These things usually feel wrong to us and can even make us mad. We are tempted to dismiss this sort of information out of hand. Sometimes our gut instincts about this kind of information is right, but sometimes our instincts are wrong. Often, we need to give uncomfortable information a second look, to carefully consider if it has merit. Is the source credible? What would I think of the same information if it favored my own side on the issue? A patriot believes what is true, not what she or he would like to believe. As careful, responsible Americans, we should never deny the truth, even when it makes us mad or uncomfortable. If the truth supports an opposing view, loyal, responsible Americans don't dismiss this information. Instead, they confront their own beliefs and -- when the facts demand it -- even change those beliefs.



## Truth, An American Value

**P**atriotic Americans put honesty and truth over their political party. It's essential to reject false information, even when it supports our political views. It's also essential to accept true information, even when it opposes our views. Americans stand up for the truth.

Here are examples of some truths many people find uncomfortable.

*1) The US unemployment rate reached 3.5% during Donald Trump's presidency, the lowest it's been since 1969.*

Some Americans may resist this fact, yet most economists studying unemployment and the economy agree this is true. Despite some conversations highlighting contexts where unemployment is high, in the beginning of 2020 it reached its lowest level since 1969. Acceptance of this fact does not prove that the economy was working for everyone. All Americans are free to have their own principled opinion on former President Trump, and of the fairness of our economy. But our principled views should not determine which facts about the economy we believe.

*2)The crime rate among illegal immigrants is lower than among American citizens.*

Some Americans may hesitate to accept this fact as well yet it is also true. Many studies, conducted even by conservative groups, have found that the arrest rate is approximately 40% lower among illegal immigrants than native-born Americans. Acceptance of this does not prove that illegal immigration is morally acceptable. It also does not imply that we should reduce our broader security. All Americans are free to have their own principled opinion on immigration law and border enforcement. But our principled views should not determine which facts about immigration we believe.

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*Figure 5. Experimental stimuli, part 4.*

## Truth, An American Value

*3) Banning assault weapons from 1994 to 2004 did not lead to a decrease in gun deaths.*

Some Americans may be resistant to this fact, but research conducted by the FBI shows this is true. Though much conversation around assault rifles in the media is concerning, the vast majority of gun deaths are due to handguns. This does not mean it's unreasonable to discuss the best ways to reduce gun violence, or whether military-style rifles should be available to law-abiding citizens. All Americans are free to have their own principled opinion on gun control and firearm ownership. But our views should not determine which facts about guns we believe.

*4) The divorce rate among same-sex couples is equivalent to or less than the divorce rate among opposite-sex couples.*

Some Americans may hesitate to accept this fact, yet recent demographic research shows it is true. Some stereotypes of gay Americans include traits that make committed relationships seem rare, but evidence suggests gay and lesbian couples who make the choice to marry stay together at equal or higher rates than opposite-sex couples. Accepting this fact does not prove homosexuality is morally acceptable. All Americans are free to have their own principled opinion on sex and sexual desire. But our principled views should not determine which facts about divorce rates we believe.

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*Figure 6. Experimental stimuli, part 5.*

## Truth, An American Value

**P**atriotic Americans put honesty and truth over party. We show loyalty to our country always, and loyalty to our parties when it is deserved.

Sometimes, this means accepting difficult facts when they feel wrong. Other times, it means rejecting lies and misinformation that feel right. We are capable of great things, and we are strong enough to handle these discomforts. A patriot believes what is true, not what is easy.



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*Figure 7. Experimental stimuli, part 6.*