

Explaining Misperceptions of Crime

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Abstract

Promoting public safety is a central mandate of government. But despite decades of dramatic improvements, most Americans believe crime is rising—a mysterious pattern that may pervert the criminal justice policymaking process. What explains this disconnect? We test five plausible explanations: survey mis-measurement, extrapolation from local crime conditions, lack of exposure to facts, partisan cues and the racialization of crime. Cross-referencing over a decade of crime records with geolocated polling data and original survey experiments, we show individuals readily update beliefs when presented with accurate crime statistics, but this effect is attenuated when statistics are embedded in a typical crime news article, and confidence in perceptions is diminished when a copartisan elite undermines official statistics. We conclude Americans misperceive crime because of the frequency and manner of encounters with relevant statistics. Our results suggest widespread misperceptions are likely to persist barring foundational changes in Americans' information consumption habits, or elite assistance.

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The promotion of public safety is perhaps the central mandate of government, and by all standard measures most U.S. communities are safer than they have been in decades. In recent years, the violent crime rate in the U.S. has hovered under 400 offenses per 100,000 residents, roughly half the rate seen in the early 1990s (FBI, 2014), and property crimes have followed a similar trend. Homicides—recent surges in some cities notwithstanding—have generally plummeted as well. To cite one striking example, about 2,200 people were murdered in New York City in 1990; in 2017—after adding more than a million residents in the interim—the city saw fewer than 300 killings.

Despite these dramatic improvements, polling data consistently show that majorities of Americans believe that crime is on the rise (McCarthy, 2014). This belief brings with it the potential for consequential and misguided political change. Democratic accountability rests in part on citizens' ability to accurately perceive changes in social conditions in order to judge whether elected officials have improved them (Bartels, 2009; Downs, 1957; Ferejohn, 1986; Healy and Malhotra, 2010; Key, 1966; Lenz, 2013) and in turn mete out punishments and rewards at the ballot box (Bartels, 2002; Fiorina, 1978, 1981; Healy and Lenz, 2014). But the belief that crime is rising could allow politicians to promote tough-on-crime policy agendas based on false premises, since perceived security threats are thought to make citizens more willing to relinquish civil liberties (Davis and Silver, 2004; Jarvis and Lister, 2012; Mondak and Hurwitz, 2012). Consistent with these concerns, recent studies have found that changes in local crime fail to correlate with local electoral performance (Hopkins and Pettingill, 2015; Lenz and Freeder, N.d.). Such misperceptions may also create perverse incentives for elected officials while in office. If voters take no notice of even the most pronounced improvements in social conditions, it makes little sense for electorally-motivated politicians to spend time and resources pursuing them (Mayhew, 1974). Given the potential of misperceptions of crime to corrupt the democratic process, it is vital to understand the sources of this large disconnect.

A large literature has explored misperceptions in the mass public generally (Bartels, 2002;

Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1997; Campbell et al., 1960; Galston, 2001; Gilens, 2001; Nyhan and Reifler, 2010; Scheingold, 1995), but extant research has left the causes of widespread misperceptions of *crime* largely mysterious (though some recent work has measured the effects of corrective information (Larsen and Olsen, 2018; Nyhan et al., N.d.)). In this study, we arbitrate between five plausible theoretical causes of misperceptions of national crime trends: mismeasurement, extrapolation from local crime conditions, lack of exposure to facts, elite partisan cues and the racialization of crime. Cross-referencing over a decade of national surveys with administrative crime data, we first show how ambiguous question wording and analytic choices can confound the estimation of misperceptions, raising the specter of a measurement artifact. But after deploying improved surveys that are robust to these concerns—one of which included financial incentives to encourage sincere responses (Bullock et al., 2015; Prior and Lupia, 2008)—we still recover comparably high rates of misperceptions. We also find that misperceptions do not correlate with levels or changes in local crime rates in our survey respondents’ areas of residence, and therefore conclude that mismeasurement and extrapolation from local crime conditions are not to blame.

We then deploy a series of survey experiments designed to test whether exposure to facts or elite partisan cues are driving misperceptions. We show that—contrary to work that finds it difficult to correct misperceptions (Kuklinski and Hurley, 1994; Kuklinski et al., 1998; Nyhan and Reifler, 2016)—providing official statistics on crime trends substantially improves accuracy, sometimes by more than 40 percentage points. To understand how the context in which facts are presented alters their corrective power, we expose respondents to an episodic crime news article that does or does not contain official statistics on crime trends (Iyengar, 1991; Iyengar and Kinder, 1987). We find that the effects of corrective information are substantially attenuated when embedded in a news article about a violent crime. Additionally we include conditions where respondents receive messages from a copartisan elite urging them to mistrust or disbelieve crime data. We find these interventions have modest effects

on the accuracy of perceptions, and also diminish the level of confidence individuals hold about their perceptions, as well as the veracity of official statistics. Finally, we find little evidence that national misperceptions stem from Americans viewing crime through a racialized lens. Base rates of correctly believing that crime is declining, and the effects of corrective information, are both slightly larger among white respondents than nonwhite respondents, and levels and changes in the racial composition in respondents' areas of residence do not strongly predict rates of misperceptions. This is not to say race does not influence how elites discuss—and how Americans think about—violent crime in other ways (Gilliam and Iyengar, 2000; Lerman and Weaver, 2014; Mendelberg, 2001), but our data point to information exposure as a much more significant cause of misperceptions of national crime trends.

Consistent with work in other issue areas, such as illegal immigration (Hopkins, Sides and Citrin, 2016), we also find no evidence that corrective information alters related policy preferences, suggesting voters have difficulty connecting the status of social conditions to related issues (Hopkins and Mummolo, 2017), and that repeated exposure to facts may be required to cause changes in proximal issue preferences. That is, voters not only have difficulty perceiving improvements in social conditions, they may also have trouble mapping those improvements, in the event they learn of them, to how they think about policy.

Taken together, our results suggest that citizens are broadly accepting of corrective information when they encounter it, but that widespread misperceptions are largely a byproduct of the frequency and manner of encounters with relevant facts. That is, citizens would hold more accurate beliefs if they encountered relevant information, but common news reporting practices—the discussion of episodic crime events, or the allocation of space to elites who attempt to cast doubt on official statistics—may undermine the uptake of facts or the confidence in these facts. We conclude that widespread misperceptions of crime are likely to persist in the absence of foundational changes in Americans' information consumption habits, or elite assistance.

Theories of Misperceptions of Crime

While only a handful of studies have explicitly explored why perceptions of crime diverge so sharply from reality, a large literature on general misperceptions offers several plausible mechanisms for this trend. Below, we discuss each in turn.

Mismeasurement

One explanation for the prevalence of misperceptions is that they are not prevalent at all, but rather an artifact of faulty measurement. Survey items measuring perceptions often neglect to define with specificity the metric, time period or geography being asked about, making estimates vulnerable to subjective interpretation and researcher discretion. The most common approach to measuring the accuracy of perceptions is to compare survey responses with administrative measures of related (or ideally, the exact same) measure the survey respondent was asked about (Bartels, 2002). But survey respondents may interpret the survey item measuring perceptions in different ways (Ansolabehere, Meredith and Snowberg, 2013), and different data may plausibly be used to judge the accuracy of survey responses. Qualitative questions (e.g., “would you say the nation’s economy has gotten better, stayed the same, or gotten worse?”) are easily understandable (Ansolabehere, Meredith and Snowberg, 2013; Blendon et al., 1997; Conover, Feldman and Knight, 1986; Holbrook and Garand, 1996), but survey respondents may have reasonable but different interpretations of phrases like “gotten better,” as well notions of “the economy.” Even when specific measures are mentioned, such as the “unemployment rate,” respondents may interpret that to mean either the standard metric or the labor force participation rate, which also captures joblessness (Ansolabehere, Meredith and Snowberg, 2013). Moreover, because these qualitative questions are often impressionistic, results may reflect expressive views more than actual perceptions (Bullock et al., 2015; Prior, Sood and Khanna, 2015).

Asking about numeric values in open-ended questions allows for responses to be more

directly compared with quantities of interest, but objectively scoring the accuracy of responses can still be difficult. For example, Kuklinski et al. (2000) asks survey respondents to estimate the average annual welfare benefit for a family receiving government assistance. In discussing how they coded respondents for accuracy, they note, “In an admittedly arbitrary decision, we construed \$9,000 as accurate but not \$3,000, on the grounds that the latter is very close to zero, no payment at all,” (796). When asking about the unemployment rate, Holbrook and Garand (1996) point out that it was unclear which responses should be considered “accurate,” (p. 357). To address this they adopt two measures of response closeness, a reasonable approach, but one still vulnerable to researcher discretion.

To illustrate the consequences of these measurement issues, consider the task of measuring the accuracy of perceptions of crime using the following survey item asked by Gallup for over a decade:

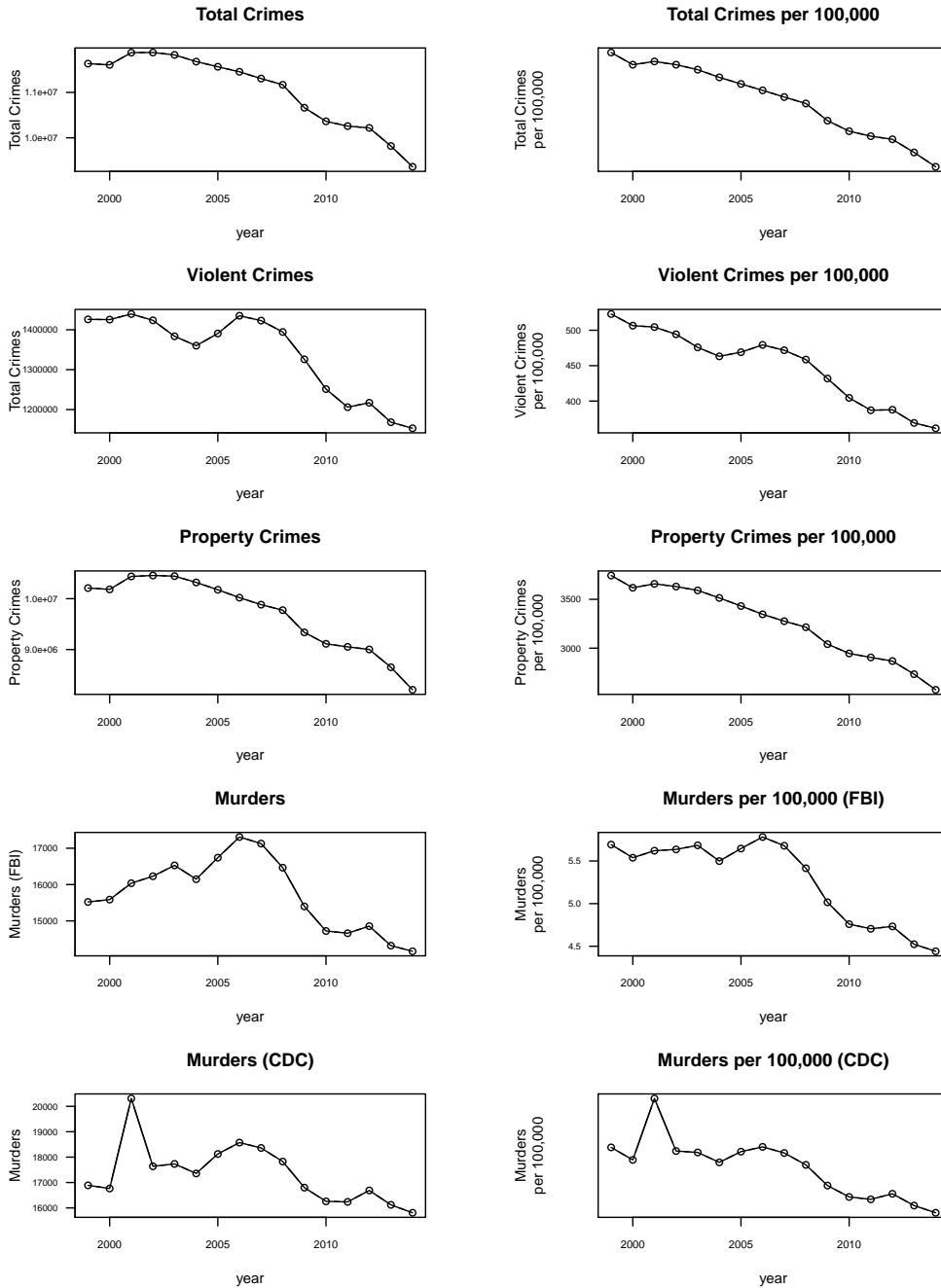
Is there more crime in the U.S. than there was a year ago, or less?

Because the item neglects to specify which type of crime is being asked about, the analyst scoring responses for accuracy must 1) infer the type of crime respondents imagined and 2) assume all respondents imagined the same type of crime. To measure the accuracy of responses to this item, we consider 10 plausible crime benchmarks rather than a single measure. Using the FBI’s UCR data, we computed year-to-year changes in: total crimes,¹ violent crimes, property crimes and homicides in both absolute and per-capita terms. We also use an alternative measure for homicides supplied by the National Vital Statistics Reports produced annually by the Centers for Disease Control (see Appendix for details), which provides its own independent estimate of homicides in the U.S.²

¹ We sum the major violent and property crimes listed in the FBI’s UCR reports from a given year: murder, rape, robbery, assault, burglary, larceny, motor vehicle theft and arson.

² Note: respondents who answered “I don’t know” are omitted from this descriptive analyses, since lack of knowledge is qualitatively different than holding mistaken beliefs. We also omit respondents who volunteered the response “same” since, when comparing year-to-

Figure 1: Recent crime trends by various government metrics



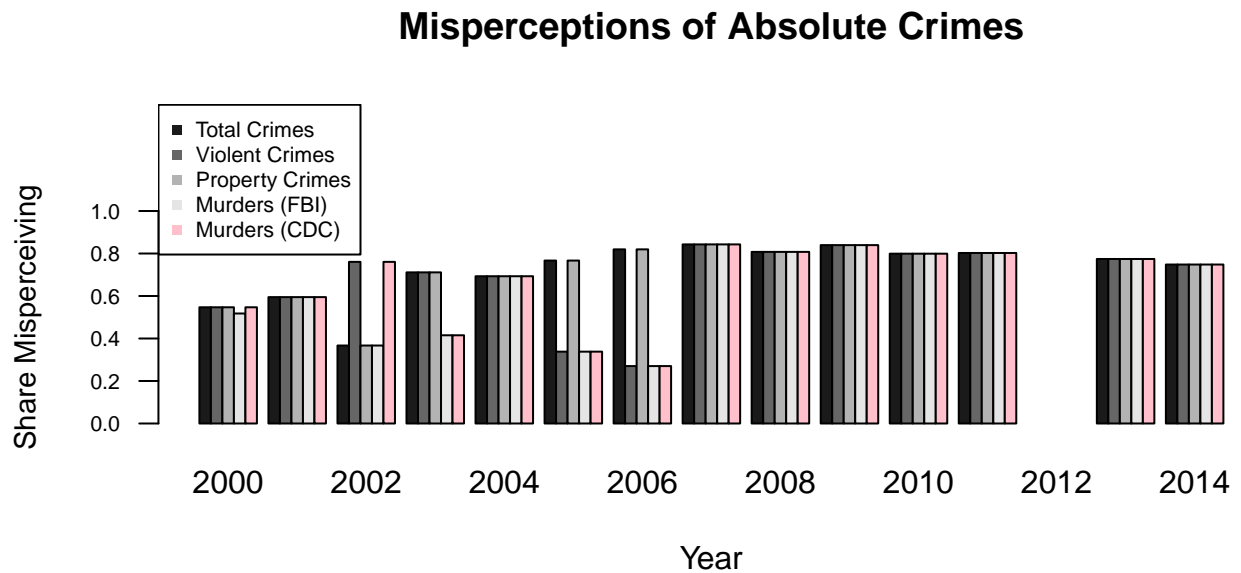
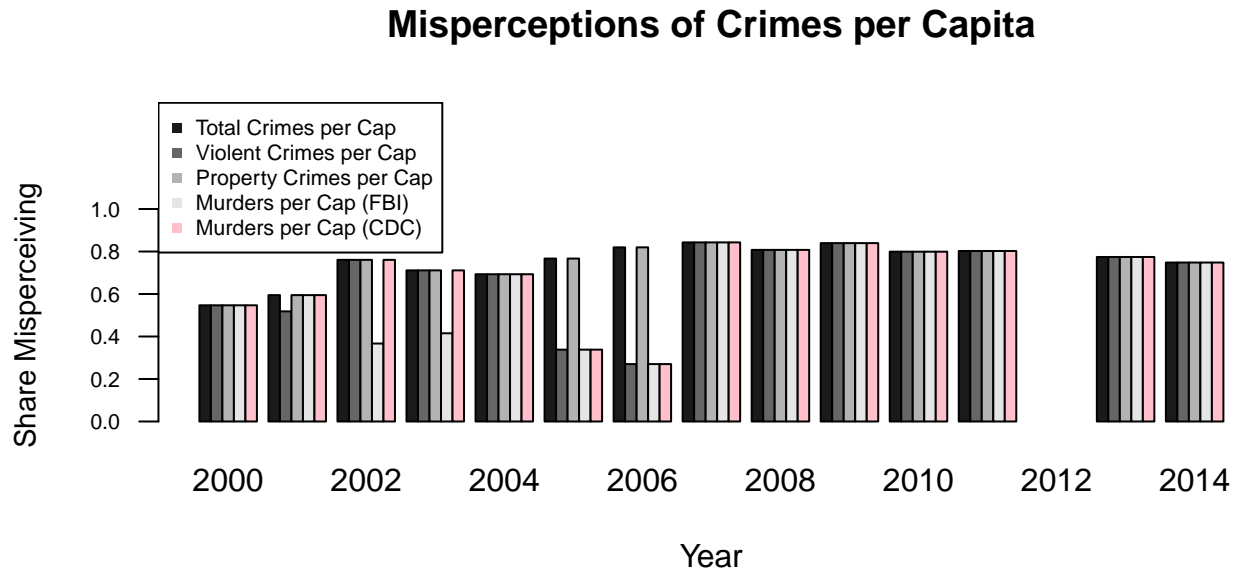
Sources: FBI, CDC

Figure 1 displays annual crime statistics according to these measures during the period covered by the Gallup data. In most cases, a downward trend is apparent across these metrics. But though most other measures fell in near-monotonic fashion in the early 2000s, the absolute count of murders according to the FBI rose in four consecutive years during the same period, and in six years total prior to 2007. Similar discrepancies between metrics can be seen when comparing violent crimes—which increase for several years in the mid 2000s—to total crimes and property crimes, which fell nearly every year. As Figure 2 shows, these inconsistencies result in markedly different conclusions when we score Gallup respondents on how accurately they perceive recent changes in crime. For example, using both the per capita and absolute results in 2006, we would conclude based on the total crime and property crime measures that 82% of respondents misperceived recent changes in crime. But that figure falls to 27% when the violent crime or homicide measures are used instead.

The choice of measure also affects our conclusions about which groups are most likely to misperceive crime. Figure 3 displays the rates of misperceptions in various subgroups of the pooled Gallup data, using total crimes per capita and murders per capita as benchmarks. When using total crimes, respondents below the median household income in the pooled sample display a misperception rate of 84%, but when using the homicide benchmark, that rate falls to 66%. Using total crimes, African American respondents display a misperception rate of 81% compared with a rate of 75% among whites, a difference of roughly 6 percentage points ($p < 0.001$). But with the homicide benchmark, the two rates are both approximately 63% ($p = 0.86$ for this difference). The same switch in benchmarks also erases a 9-point gap in misperceptions between men and women. Simply changing the standard for accuracy in this arbitrary fashion leads to drastically different substantive conclusions.

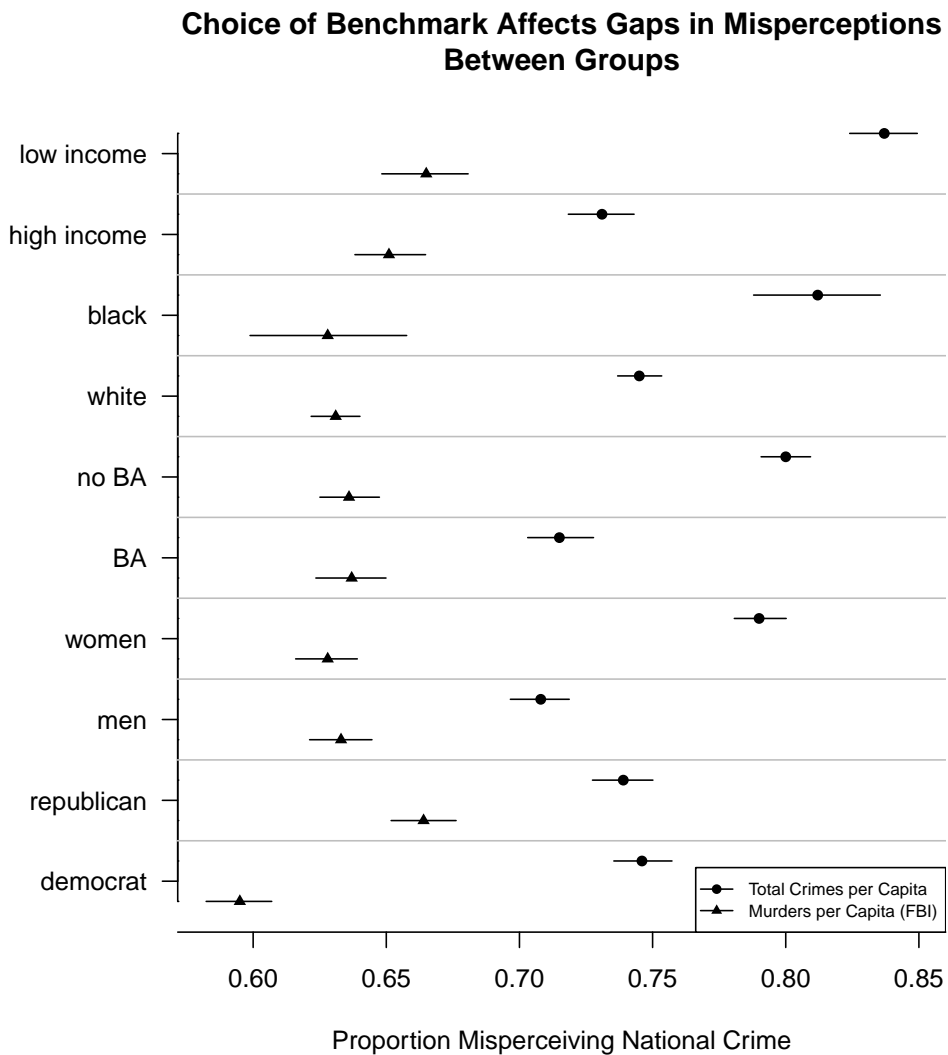
A final threat to accurate measurement stems from the sincerity and care with which year continuous measures such as crimes per capita, such a response is almost guaranteed to be incorrect.

Figure 2: Rates of misperceptions of national crime, 2000-2014.



Sources: Gallup, FBI, CDC. Note: Gallup did not measure perceptions of crime in 2012.

Figure 3: Misperceptions of crime in the pooled gallup data by subgroup, using total national crimes per capita and murders per capita as benchmarks.



respondents answer questions. Personal biases, or a simple lack of attention, may result in responses that deviate from respondents' actual beliefs, inflating the rate of misperceptions. We thus incorporate financial incentives in our surveys, described in detail below, to ensure our results are not distorted by insincere responses Bullock et al. (2015).

Local Crime Conditions

Individuals may use a variety of heuristics to determine trends in social conditions. One of these is local conditions. For example, if citizens live in an area where crime is high or on the rise, they may incorrectly extrapolate to conclude that this is true in the country as a whole. Relatedly, Ansolabehere, Meredith and Snowberg (2014) demonstrate that citizens' perceptions of macro-economic performance are based on the conditions of people similar to themselves rather than factual indicators. If local crime rates are responsible for perceptions of national conditions, we should observe a correlation between the levels/changes in these measures and national crime trends.

Information Exposure

Misperceptions of crime may spread because most people are simply not exposed to relevant facts. This can stem from at least two phenomena: 1) citizens choose not to consume media that would convey this information or 2) the media on which citizens rely for such facts presents them in ways that inhibit retention. There is considerable evidence for both avenues. The diversification of the news media market has allowed citizens who would once have been incidentally exposed to hard news to either consume preferred news content only, or to opt out of news consumption altogether, a behavioral change that has widened gaps in political knowledge (Iyengar and Hahn, 2009; Levendusky, 2009; Pariser, 2011; Prior, 2007). But even for those who consume news, the nature of coverage may limit exposure to relevant information. For example, the episodic nature of many news stories could overshadow thematic

reports on broad trends: e.g., reporting on individual murders with little or no comment on homicide trends (Iyengar, 1991; Iyengar and Kinder, 1987). In line with this, some work has found that consumption of television news—and even crime dramas—increases concern about crime, although this work has not focused explicitly on misperceptions of crime rates (Alderman, 1994; Bartels, 2002; Goidel, Freeman and Procopio, 2006; Holbrook and Hill, 2005). Prior work has also shown how episodic crime coverage serves to prime racialized fears. For example, Gilliam and Iyengar (2000) finds that many people recall seeing a Black criminal suspect in a crime news report even when the race of the suspect was not conveyed. In this sense, stereotypes associating violent crime and racial minorities, and the manner in which news is presented, may interact to promote misperceptions of crime.

Relatively little work focuses on the impact of correcting misperceptions on knowledge directly, instead identifying the downstream consequences on related policy preferences. For example, Gilens (2001) finds that providing information about crime rates significantly affects support for prison spending. In work done concurrently with this study, Nyhan et al. (N.d.) shows corrective information on crime trends can improve the accuracy of perceptions but has little effect on candidate choice. Similarly, Hopkins, Sides and Citrin (2016) finds that providing Americans' with information about the size of the immigrant population does not change attitudes towards migrants. This, they note, may mean that misperceptions are “more a consequence than a cause of attitudes” (p. 3).

Both a lack of exposure to news, and exposure to news that omits information on crime trends, suggest a common observable implication: misperceptions of crime should be able to be corrected simply by providing clear, relevant information to citizens. In addition, if misperceptions are influenced by the episodic nature of news coverage rather than omission alone, presenting facts alongside a news story about a specific crime should reduce the effect of this corrective information. And if episodic news coverage alone increases fears of crime, providing news about a single crime event without corrective information should exacerbate

misperceptions.

Elite Partisan Cues

Though most studies on misperceptions proceed from the reasonable assumption that objective political facts exist, and define misperceptions as beliefs which deviate from these facts (e.g. Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1997), political elites often start from a very different assumption: facts are an object of political contest (Kuklinski et al., 2000). That is, elites strategically advance alternative accounts of the very social conditions government is tasked with improving, often by calling into question the validity and usefulness of relevant data and scientific analysis.

The routine practice of “balancing” news coverage to represent both sides of a debate affords this opportunity to elites (Boykoff and Boykoff, 2004; Dearing, 1995; Stocking, 1999), and may present issues as more contested than they are. Both Democrats and Republicans have either hinted or outright asserted publicly that vaccines cause autism in children, despite consistent scientific results to the contrary (Aron, 2015; Miller, 2015). For years, Republicans have questioned the validity of data on climate change (Milman, 2015; O’Toole and Johnson, 2016) and asserted without evidence that undocumented immigrants are voting en masse (Martin, 2017). Featuring these “debates” in news coverage may decrease confidence in these empirical facts, although we know relatively little about the impact of such contestation (Einstein and Glick, 2015; Jolley and Douglas, 2013).

Elite commentary undermining FBI statistics on crime are reported frequently. Questioned about his candidate’s assertion that crime was on the rise when federal statistics showed otherwise, Paul Manafort, Donald Trump’s then campaign manager, said that crime statistics from the FBI were “suspect” (Bump, 2016). In his inaugural address, Trump himself promised to put an end to “American carnage.” Politicians may also ascribe undue importance to temporary fluctuations in the crime rate that may not be systematic. After

the national violent crime rate increased for the first time in nearly a decade in 2007, then-Senator Joe Biden criticized the Bush administration: “It’s time to get back to crime-fighting basics—that means more cops on the streets, equipped with the tools and resources they need to keep our neighborhoods safe” (Ye Hee Lee, 2017). By the next year, the crime rate was falling again.

If the public follow the lead of their preferred politicians (Lau and Redlawsk, 2001; Lupia and McCubbins, 1998; Lupia, 1994; Popkin, 1995; Sniderman, Brody and Tetlock, 1991)—and politicians are politically motivated to undermine some factual information—elite cues could go far in explaining the prevalence of political misperceptions (Jerit and Barabas, 2006; Krosnick and Kinder, 1990; Page and Shapiro, 1992; Zaller, 1992, 1994). For example, Jerit and Barabas (2006) find that misleading statements from politicians about Social Security cause some individuals to get facts concerning this policy wrong. If elite priming drives misperceptions, providing misleading elite statements should substantially increase misperceptions, as well as mute the effect of corrective information.

The Racialization of Crime

Crime in the United States has long been understood through a racial lens in the mass public (Alexander, 2010; Lerman and Weaver, 2014). Deliberate efforts by elites to stoke racial resentment and fear among white voters (Mendelberg, 2001)—Nixon’s “Southern Strategy” being but one example—have helped to cement associations between violent crime and racial minorities. These efforts have continued to unfold alongside persistent increases in America’s nonwhite population, with nonwhite citizens projected to outnumber white citizens later this century (Bowler and Segura, 2011).

Relatedly, a large literature on racial threat suggests that local demographic indicators, such as levels or changes in the share of nonwhite residents in an area, can induce fear and resentment among whites (Blalock, 1967; Hopkins, 2006; Key, 1949). While most studies

of racial threat focus on intergroup conflict as an outcome (Gay, 2006), it is plausible that the presence of racial minorities may also distort residents' perceptions of crime. Consistent with this hypothesis, Sampson and Raudenbush (2004), Skogan (1995) and Quillian and Pager (2001) all find that the concentration of minorities in an area increase perceptions of disorder or fear of crime *in the neighborhood*, controlling for actual crime rates, raising the possibility that perceptions of *national crime* may be affected as well.

These prior findings suggest several plausible hypotheses. For one, popular associations between racial minorities and crime, combined with efforts to stoke fear of racial minorities among white voters (Valentino, Hutchings and White, 2002; White, 2007), could imply that mistaken beliefs about crime are more pronounced among white citizens than nonwhite citizens. Second, levels or changes in the nonwhite population in survey respondents' areas of residence may be associated with rates of misperceptions of crime.³ Finally, we might expect that responses to corrective information may be heterogeneous across racial groups. If white citizens are convinced that increasing minority populations in the U.S. are spreading crime, they may be especially resistant to updating perceptions of crime even when presented with accurate statistics.

Research Design

We draw on a collection of extant polling data, administrative crime records and original survey experiments to arbitrate between these explanations for misperceptions of crime. Our strategy for testing whether mismeasurement is responsible for widespread misperceptions of crime is straightforward: we design a survey measure that is robust to the concerns of subjective interpretation and researcher discretion demonstrated above, deploy it and

³ We note that these hypotheses, while plausible, are not dispositive, since nonwhite residents may also internalize racial stereotypes and thus hold similar associations between race and crime (Jefferson, N.d.).

see if misperceptions remain widespread. We also include financial incentives for accurate responses for a randomly chosen set of participants to assess the prevalence of insincere responses.

Ansolabehere, Meredith and Snowberg (2013) recommend asking for quantitative values of commonly known metrics or, for more complex political issues, benchmarking against specific values in the survey question itself. We draw on these lessons, but focus on perceptions of over-time national trends rather than point-in-time levels. This focus has several advantages. Perceived changes are believed to be central to mechanisms behind retrospective voting (Bartels, 2002; Hopkins, 2011; Fiorina, 1981, 1978; Healy and Lenz, 2014). We focus on national crime trends both because these statistics are more often reported and discussed, and because evidence suggests that citizens increasingly focus on national issues even in local political contexts (Hopkins, 2018). In addition, asking individuals to judge the direction of changes in these metrics rather than the exact level at a point in time eliminates the need to establish a subjective accuracy bandwidth when coding responses. To measure perceptions of national crime trends, we included the following item in a series of surveys:

A “homicide” is the willful (non-negligent) killing of one human being by another.

The national homicide rate is the number of homicides per 100,000 people in the United States.

Was the homicide rate in the U.S. in 2015 larger or smaller than it was in 2000?⁴

Measuring the accuracy of public perceptions requires the researcher to know the true state of the world. We ask respondents to consider the change in the homicide rate between

⁴ The order of the words “larger” and “smaller” was randomized across respondents, as was the order of the response options which were “larger,” “smaller” and “I don’t know.” Note that by omitting a response option of “about the same,” we avoid the need to choose an accuracy bandwidth when coding such responses.

2000 and 2015 because there was clear movement in the rate during this time. The national homicide rate fell from 5.5 to 4.9 (-11%) according to FBI data, a sizable decrease. These agency estimates surely contain some error, but because we have clearly identified the metric of interest in our survey items, we can code responses in terms of whether they align with the best estimates of those same metrics according to authoritative sources—our working definition of an “accurate” perception in this study. Further, this technique is robust to the presence of measurement error by the FBI at points in time. Because we are asking about perceptions of a change, measurement error could be present every year, but would have to change enough over time to flip the sign in the difference between 2000 and 2015 to invalidate our choice of benchmarks. The close correspondence between the FBI and CDC homicide data over time displayed in Figure 1, as well as the magnitude of the estimated differences in the crime rates between these two years, suggest that this is unlikely.

We conducted a series of survey experiments to test between competing mechanisms, as summarized in Tables 1 and 2. Data from the control conditions in these surveys serve to establish base rates of misperceptions—a test of the “mismeasurement” hypothesis—and also facilitate various tests for associations between local crime and racial composition and misperceptions (the “local conditions” and “racialization of crime” hypotheses). Our experimental interventions provide further tests related to racialization, as well as the “information exposure” and “elite partisan cues” theories.

In our first survey experiment, respondents on Amazon’s Mechanical Turk ($N=912$) were randomly assigned to one of four conditions: (1) receive a brief report on a European soccer match (the control condition); (2) receive information on the change in homicides between 2000 and 2015 according to the FBI data; (3) receive the same information plus an appeal from a copartisan (unnamed) U.S. Senator⁵ (Cobb and Kuklinski, 1997) meant to undermine the facts provided; and (4) receive the same information plus an appeal that both undermines

⁵ We identify the official as a U.S. Senator that is of the same party as the respondent, as indicated in a battery of pre-treatment demographics that appeared earlier in the sur-

Table 1: Summary of Survey Experiments

Survey	Sample Size	Date	Treatments
Study 1 (M-Turk)	912	March 2017	(1) Control (soccer match); (2) Information treatment (FBI data on homicides, 2000-2015); (3) Information and elite undermining data; (4) Information, elite undermining data, and elite providing competing claim.
Study 2 (Qualtrics)	1,942	March 2017	(1) Control (soccer match); (2) Information treatment (FBI data on homicides, 2000-2015); (3) Elite undermining data; (4) Information and elite undermining data.
Study 3 (Qualtrics)	4,242	May 2018	(1) Control (soccer match); (2) Information treatment (FBI data on homicides, 2000-2015); (3) News article on specific crime; (4) Information and news article. Random assignment to financial incentives and distractor task.

the factual information and provides a competing claim (i.e., “The homicide rate has been climbing.” See Appendix for wording of all treatments.)

The second survey was conducted on 1,942 members of an online panel maintained by the survey vendor Qualtrics.⁶ The sample was quota-targeted to be representative of the U.S. population in terms of age, race and gender based on the 2010 U.S. Census.⁷ Respondents in the second homicide rate experiment were randomly assigned to one of four conditions: (1) the European soccer match control condition; (2) FBI data on the change in homicides between 2000 and 2015; (3) an appeal from a copartisan (unnamed) U.S. Senator undermining crime data; and (4) the politician’s appeal *and* the FBI crime statistics. In addition to having a larger and more representative sample, this experiment extends the M-Turk study

vey. Note: this survey also contained an analogous experiment regarding perceptions of the national unemployment rate which yielded highly similar results; see Appendix Figure 11.

⁶ Note: N varies during estimation due to nonresponse on various survey items.

⁷ To ensure high-quality responses, Qualtrics also screened out participants who completed the survey in less than one third of the median completion time based on a pilot sample.

by having a condition in which the politician's appeal is not challenged by official statistics, allowing us insight into the ability of politicians to skew perceptions when corrective information is not presented.⁸ Additionally, the crime trend information provided was identical to that in the M-Turk survey, but the appeals from copartisan officials raised the prospect of a threat to public safety,⁹ a rhetorical approach that has been used often by elites seeking to claim that crime is on the rise. Note that in all cases in both studies, the Senator's claim, or implied claim, is that crime is trending up—the opposite direction than that indicated by official statistics.

The third survey was conducted on 4,242 members of a Qualtrics online panel. As with Study 2, the sample was quota-targeted to be representative of the U.S. population in terms of age, race and gender. Demographic comparisons of the three study samples appear in Appendix Table 6. This survey expanded on our previous studies by embedding statistics in a news article about a specific crime. Respondents were assigned to one of four primary conditions: (1) the European soccer control; FBI data on the change in homicides between 2000 and 2015; (3) a news story describing a specific crime, reflecting episodic methods of crime reporting; and (4) the same news story *and* the FBI crime statistics. Respondents were also randomly assigned to receive financial incentives for accuracy, to ensure results are not driven various forms of insincere response. Finally, unlike the previous surveys, where perceptions were measured directly after exposure to treatment, a random half of the third survey was asked to provide their views on a variety of major companies and brands following treatment. This distractor task allowed us to test whether the effects of corrective information persist even when questions about the homicide rate do not quickly follow the

⁸ We also included a timer in the second study that prevented respondents from advancing to the screen after the treatment for 15 seconds in order to increase the probability that each respondent was exposed to the treatment text.

⁹ The reference to public safety was taken from a real statement made by former New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani during the 2016 presidential campaign (Drabold, 2016).

Table 2: Explanations for Misperceptions of Crime

Explanation	Mechanisms	Test
<i>Mismeasurement</i>	Survey questions allow for respondent or researcher discretion. Insincere responses.	Original survey questions that objectively measure misperceptions. Financial incentives for accuracy.
<i>Local Conditions</i>	Respondents extrapolate national trends from local conditions.	Correlations between survey respondents' local crime rates and misperceptions
<i>Lack of Exposure</i>	Lack of information, due to media omission or citizen media selection. Episodic news coverage buries facts or inflates fears of crime.	Corrective information provided clearly. Crime news article, with or without corrective information embedded.
<i>Partisan Cues</i>	Elite cues mislead copartisans.	Elite statements countering corrective information.
<i>Racialization of Crime</i>	Respondents extrapolate national trends from changes in local demographics. Correlations between survey respondents' local racial composition and misperceptions.	Respondents resist corrective information due to internalized associations between race and crime. Tests for heterogeneous responses to corrective information across racial groups.

relevant statistics. This design results in sixteen total treatment conditions in the third survey.

If episodic news coverage of individual crime events drives misperceptions, we should see this treatment increase citizens' perception that crime is on the rise. The combined treatment—which places the FBI crime statistics at the bottom of the news article—tests for whether providing factual information in the context of episodic news coverage reduces the effectiveness of the corrective treatment.

Results

To reiterate, this paper tests five competing explanations for the high rates of crime misperceptions: mismeasurement, extrapolation from local crime conditions, lack of exposure to information, elite partisan cues and the racialization of crime. For each explanation we test a set of associated hypotheses using observational and experimental survey data. We discuss the results of each set of results in turn below.

Results: Mismeasurement

As described above, traditional survey instruments often do not explicitly benchmark statistics for survey respondents, making estimates vulnerable to respondent and researcher discretion and interpretation. We verify the prevalence of misperceptions by analyzing responses to our improved measure of crime perceptions in the control conditions in our survey experiments. Since the Qualtrics samples are more representative of the U.S. population, we confine most of this analysis of base rates to pooled data from studies 2 and 3 ($N = 1,559$). We find that only 22% of participants responded correctly to the item asking about the direction of recent change in the national homicide rate—a strikingly low share, considering the dramatic reduction in homicides between 2000 and 2015. Among those who indicated having greater than the median level of confidence in their response, the results are highly similar, with 20% answering correctly. In fact, as Figure 4 shows, across a range of demographic groups assigned to the control condition, including those with a college degree or an above average income, less than 50% of people are able to correctly sign the change in the national homicide rate.¹⁰ The relative ranking of certain groups in the data also comport with well-

¹⁰ Confidence intervals are constructed using robust (“HC1”) standard errors throughout. In generating all experimental results, we code responses of “I don’t know” for the perception item as incorrect, since dropping responses in the experimental context risks post-treatment bias. Results are robust to this coding decision; see Appendix.

known empirical regularities in the literature on political knowledge, lending credence to our survey item. For example, respondents with a college degree perceives national crime trends at the highest rate, while low income respondents, and respondents who reported not voting in 2016, showed the lowest rates of correct perceptions (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1997).

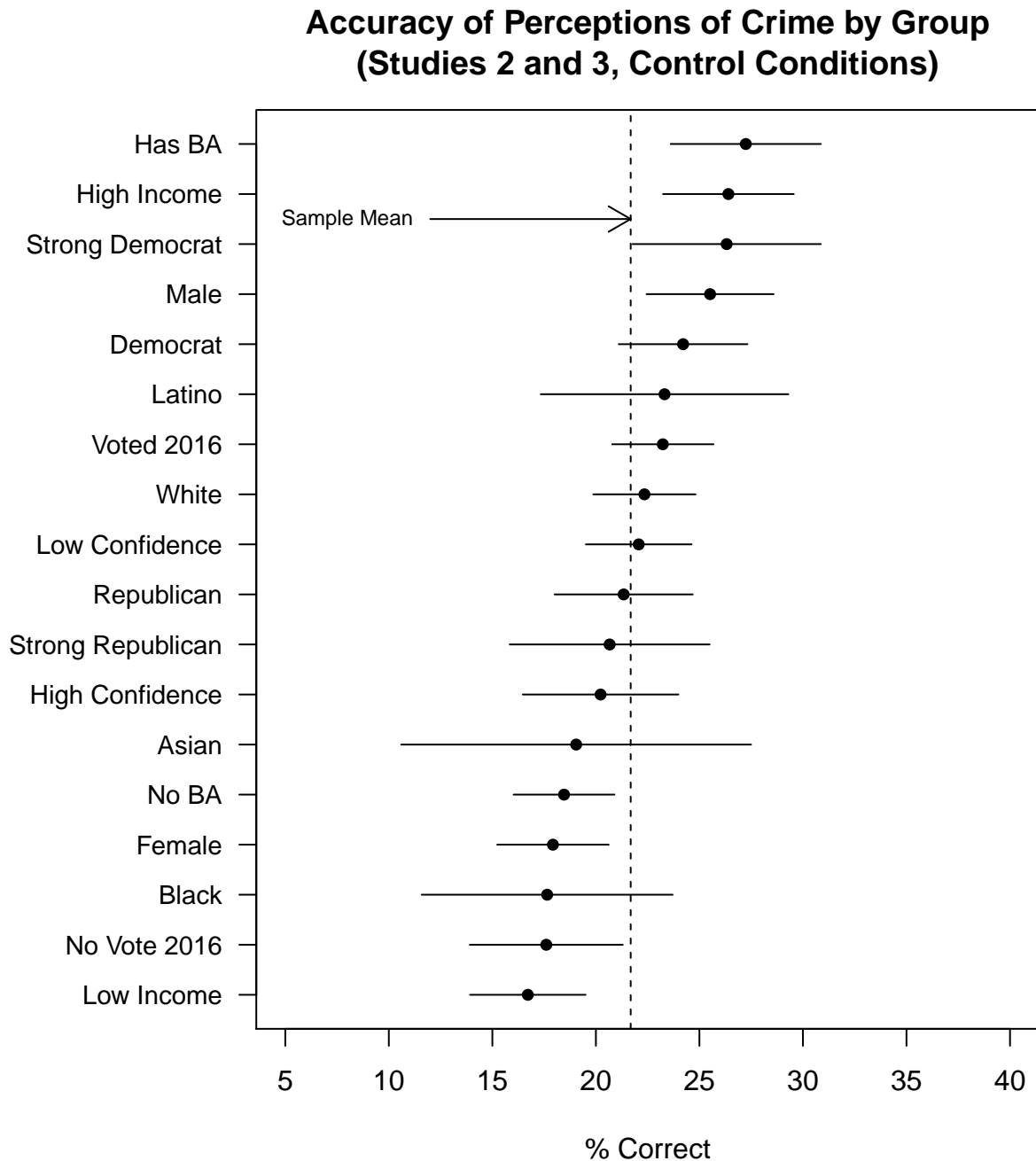
To ensure that this pattern is not driven by insincere responses, Study 3 includes a condition in which respondents are offered an additional financial incentive for responding correctly (\$.25), which Bullock et al. (2015) found to reduce similar biases.¹¹ Comparing respondents within the control condition, financial incentives appear to lead to only a small decrease in rates of misperception compared to the non-incentive baseline, (the estimated difference is 5.13 on a scale that ranges between 0 and 100, 95% CI [0.1,10.2]). We therefore pool over the incentive and non-incentive conditions in remaining tests. Having confirmed these high rates of misperceptions, we now turn to adjudicating between alternative explanations for their prevalence.

Results: Local Crime Conditions

Individuals may mistakenly perceive national crime to be rising because they are extrapolating from either levels or changes in their local crime conditions. In this case, survey respondents residing in areas with high or rising crime should be more likely to incorrectly state that national crime is on the rise. We pair data from both Gallup polls and our own surveys with county-level FBI crime data to test for this observable implication. While sub-county crime data would more accurately capture “local” crime trends, county data has the advantage of nationwide coverage, making it feasible to pair crime data with the dispersed locations of survey respondents.

¹¹ To avoid prompting respondents to look up answers online in order to obtain the extra \$.25, all respondents were alerted prior to the perceived crime question that they would only have 30 seconds to respond to the item.

Figure 4: Rates of accurate perceptions of the direction change in the national homicide rate between 2000 and 2015 by subgroup in Studies 2 and 3 (control conditions only, pooled). Bars denote 95% confidence intervals.



We use several approaches to labeling counties as high and low crime. We define crime as “falling” (“rising”) in a county if, during the period of interest, the per capita crime rate of interest decreases (increases). For the Gallup data, we focus on change in county crime rates since the previous year (in line with the Gallup question wording), and for the Qualtrics sample we use change between 2000 and 2014, since this most closely reflects the national benchmark we provide.¹² We define counties as having “low” (“high”) crime if, in that year for the Gallup data or in the most recent year available (2014) for the Qualtrics data, the crime rate is below (at or above) the median. We report high and low crime counties using both total number of crimes and violent crimes only.

Figure 5 displays the mean proportion of misperceptions in national crime trends across groups of respondents living in counties experiencing various crime conditions. As the figure shows, respondents living in counties with high or rising crime are not substantially more likely to believe the national overall crime rate (our chosen benchmark for the Gallup data) is rising,¹³ or that the national homicide rate is increasing for the Qualtrics sample. This is true across crime benchmarks. For the Gallup data, the only statistically significant difference is between counties with rising and falling overall crime, but the direction—with falling crime county residents *more* likely to misperceive crime trends—runs in the opposite direction from what the local conditions hypothesis would predict, and the difference is substantively small.

Results: Information Exposure

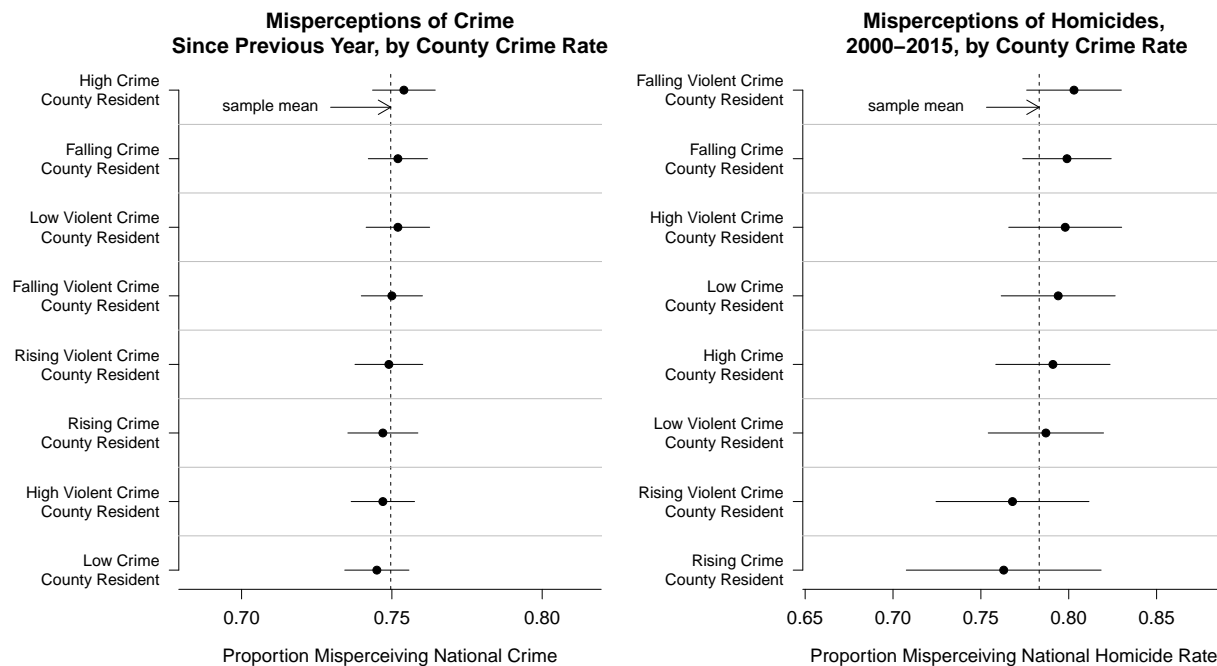
We now test the effectiveness of supplying a random subset of survey respondents with information on changes in the homicide rate on the accuracy perceptions. To the extent providing accurate information about crime trends can correct misperceptions, we have evidence that a lack of exposure to said information is likely contributing to these mistaken beliefs. If, on

¹² County-level crime data has not yet been released for 2015.

¹³ Gallup results are robust to alternative benchmarks of misperceptions of national crime.

See Appendix Figures 10-12.

Figure 5: Misperceptions of crime by crime conditions in survey respondents' counties of residence, Gallup (left) and Qualtrics (right).



the other hand this information does not lead to large improvements in accuracy, we have a strong piece of evidence that individuals are resistant to updating their prior beliefs, perhaps due to one of our other theorized mechanisms.

Figure 6 displays the effect of the corrective information treatments.¹⁴ The left panel displays results from all three studies, demonstrating that the proportion of the sample correctly stating that the U.S. homicide rate fell between 2000 and 2015 was substantially higher among those exposed to the FBI data (relative to the control condition), with effects ranging between 42 and 55 percentage points. The information treatment similarly increased confidence in perceptions, causing a 14 percentage-point increase in Study 2 (relative to the control condition; 95% CI = [10.1,17.1]). A distractor task added in Study 3, to ensure that results hold when adding additional time between respondents seeing statistics and providing their perceptions of the crime rate, has negligible, statistically insignificant and

¹⁴ Numeric results for all analyses can be found in the Appendix.

positive effects on the corrective power of the information treatment (3.77 percentage points, 95% CI [-1.3,8.9]).

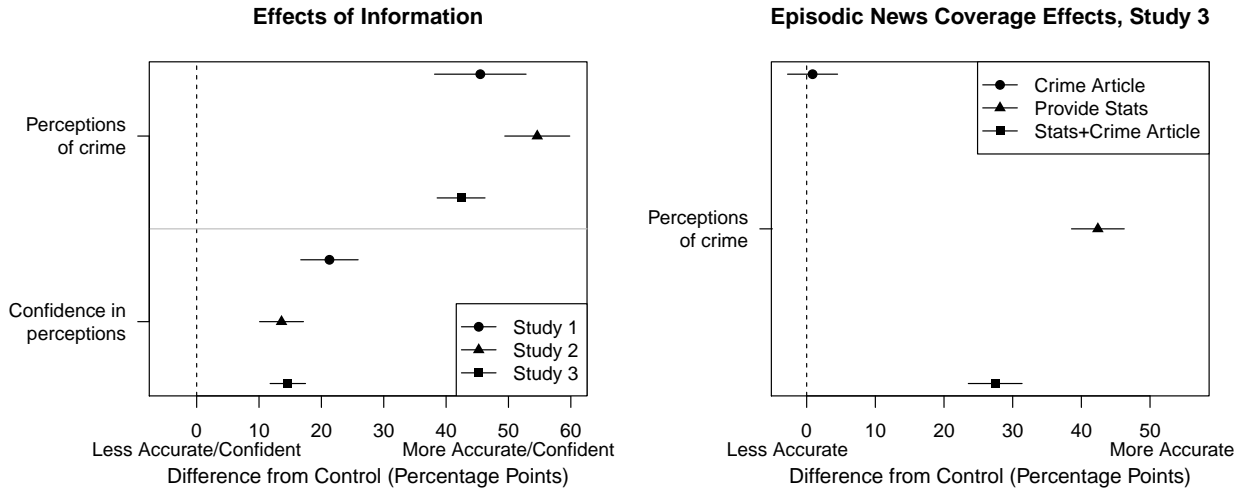
These results suggest that lack of exposure to information about crime plays a significant role in driving misperceptions. To further test this interpretation, we examine the heterogeneous treatment effects of information by self-reported engagement in public affairs. Respondents who said they follow public affairs “hardly at all” misperceived crime at a rate of 87.39%, compared to the average across all other groups of 75.21% ($p < .05$). The information treatment decreases misperceptions to 41.94%, for those who do not follow public affairs, and 33.23%, for those who do, though the difference in treatment effect sizes is not significant. Respondents who do not follow public affairs thus appear to have considerably higher rates of misperceptions pre-treatment than those who do, further suggesting that lack of exposure to information plays a significant role in driving misperceptions.

The right panel of Figure 6 shows the effects of each treatment in Study 3, which included conditions in which respondents were provided with a story about a specific violent crime (a double homicide), with and without the FBI crime data. While the news article alone does not significantly change misperceptions, including it alongside the crime trend statistics depresses the effect of corrective information by about a third, from an increase of 42% to 27%. Together, this provides evidence that both a lack of exposure and the *nature* of exposure to statistics—particularly the format of typical crime reports—significantly impacts rates of misperceptions. Individuals are broadly accepting of crime trend statistics when they encounter them, but when embedded in a news article about episodic crime, the impact of the information on perceptions is substantially reduced.

Results: Partisan Cues

Corrective information appears to have a large effect on misperceptions, but the media often reports political facts alongside elite statements contesting them. Placing corrective

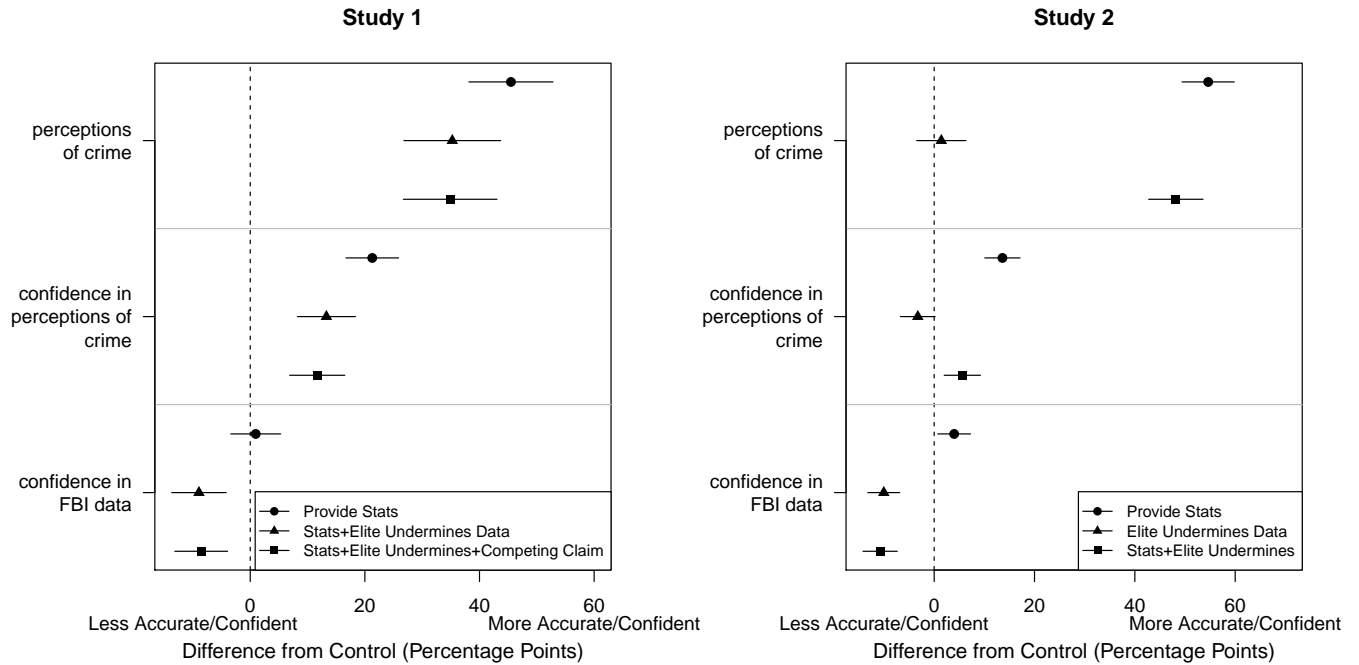
Figure 6: Treatment effects on perceptions of crime



The left panel shows average differences in responses between the pure crime information condition and the control condition. Estimates from Study 3 include respondents who did or did not have additional financial incentives or face a distractor task following treatment, since those independently randomized interventions imposed negligible effects. The right panel displays the effect of each information treatment separately. Bars denote 95% confidence intervals.

information next to copartisan elite statements undermining or contradicting the FBI crime data may reduce the effects of corrections. We tested this in Studies 1 and 2. In the first study, we had a copartisan elite undermine the validity of the FBI data or additionally issue a competing claim (e.g., “the homicide rate is climbing”). The addition of these partisan cues caused the effects of the information treatments to fall by about 10 points. We see similar but smaller point estimates in Study 2. When a copartisan Senator questions the veracity of FBI data and suggests that America is a dangerous place to live, there is no discernible effect on perceptions of crime. However, when the information and copartisan rhetoric treatments are provided together, we see a large, but discernibly smaller, increase of 48 percentage points in accuracy than we did in the condition where FBI data are presented alone. Effects by respondent partisanship, reported in the Appendix, show little difference between Democrats and Republicans. This suggests that when pitted against official statistics, copartisan elites cause a somewhat lower rate of correct perceptions than we would see absent their rhetoric. However, the effects drop considerably less than when embedding

Figure 7: Treatment effects on perceptions of social conditions and confidence in institutions



Average differences in responses between each treatment condition and control condition. Bars denote 95% confidence intervals.

statistics in a news article about a specific crime, suggesting that elite cues play a less central role in driving misperceptions of crime than the manner in which news is presented.

But while the accuracy of perceptions did not drastically change, respondents exposed to copartisan elite rhetoric had less confidence in both their own perceptions of the homicide rate and in the FBI's ability to document that rate accurately. Compared with those in the pure information condition, respondents in the conditions with copartisan appeals score 9.6 and 8 points lower on the item measuring confidence in the accuracy of their own perceptions (95% CIs are [-12.6,-3.4] and [-13.9,-5.3], respectively), and 9.9 and 9.5 points lower on the item measuring confidence in the accuracy of FBI data, (95% CIs are [-14.7,-5.1] and [-14.2,-4.9], respectively).

In Study 2 we again see a marked reduction in the confidence when copartisans challenge the conclusions of official sources. While providing FBI data alone causes a 14 percentage-

point increase in the confidence with which perceptions are reported (95% CI = [10.1,17.1]), hearing a copartisan official undermine official crime data causes a -3-point shift in confidence on this measure (95% CI = [-6.7,0.2]). When both treatments are presented together, the effect is an increase of 6 points (95% CI = [2,9.2]), which is -8 smaller than the effect of the FBI data alone (the 95% CI on this difference is [-11.5,-4.4]). These treatments also affected confidence in the validity of the FBI data, with the conditions featuring a copartisan challenge causing -10.04 and -10.77-point shifts.

Results suggest that the common reporting practice of “balancing” coverage in an attempt to show both sides of the issue may undermine confidence in official statistics and their providing institutions. While elite cues do not directly drive misperceptions about crime, continued exposure to such statements may make citizens less likely to trust official statistics and more likely to rely on heuristics—like episodic reporting of specific news events—to judge conditions.¹⁵

Results: The Racialization of Crime

If race-based fears of rising crime are responsible for misperceptions, we might expect to see several patterns in the data. For one, given the established efforts of political elites to stoke racial resentment among whites by associating violent crime with racial minorities (e.g. Mendelberg, 2001), combined with persistent increases in the nonwhite population in the U.S. (Bowler and Segura, 2011), we might expect to see higher rates of misperceptions among white citizens than non-white citizens.

Figure 4 displays rates of misperceptions of national homicide trends across racial groups in the control conditions of Studies 1 and 2. As the figure shows, white respondents correctly perceive this crime trend at a rate of 22.3%, roughly the same rate as Latinos (21.4%), but

¹⁵ In the Appendix, we provide estimates of all treatment effects separately by the partisanship of respondents, and find little evidence for heterogeneous responses.

slightly larger than the rate among Black respondents (a difference of -4.7 percentage points, 95%CI=[-11.2,1.8]). If we include respondents from the M-Turk sample, this difference grows to -7.7 points and is statistically significant (95%CI=[-14,-1.4]). These results are in the opposite direction of the “racialization of crime” theory, as white respondents appear to hold slightly more accurate beliefs about national crime trends than Black and Latino respondents. However, it is important to emphasize that *all* groups have very high rates of misperceptions, well above 70%.

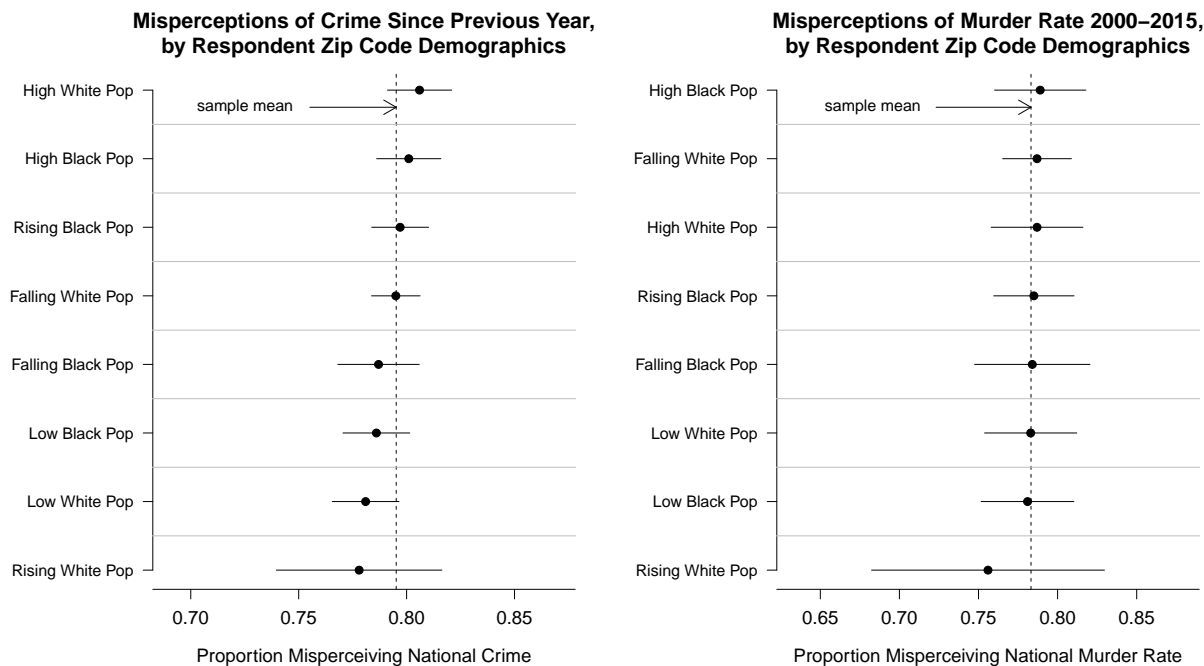
To test whether racial threat generated by the levels or changes in local nonwhite populations is driving misperceptions, Figure 8 shows rates of misperceptions by various measures of the racial composition in survey respondents’ zip codes of residence.¹⁶ “High” (“Low”) black (white) population zip codes are defined as those where the per capita black (white) population is at or above (below) the median in the previous census. For Qualtrics this is always the 2010 census. “Rising” (“Falling”) black (white) population zip codes are defined as those that saw a per capita increase in the black (white) population between the 2000 and 2010 censuses. Results show little difference in misperceptions across these groups, suggesting that local demographic shifts cannot explain their persistence.¹⁷

To test whether corrective information has weaker effects among white respondents, Figure 9 displays treatment effects estimated separately for non-Hispanic white, non-Hispanic Black and Latino respondents. In this analysis, we pool across all three survey experiments to maximize statistical power in these subsamples. To pool across studies, all conditions in Studies 1 and 2 in which an elite contradicted official crime data were combined. The results displayed in Figure 9 do not generally support the “racialization of crime” theory. We find

¹⁶ Note: The Gallup data does not provide zip codes prior to 2008. Qualtrics respondents provided self-reported zip codes.

¹⁷ Results look similar using different benchmarks for the Gallup data, looking at demographic shifts at the county level, or restricting analysis only to white respondents (see Appendix).

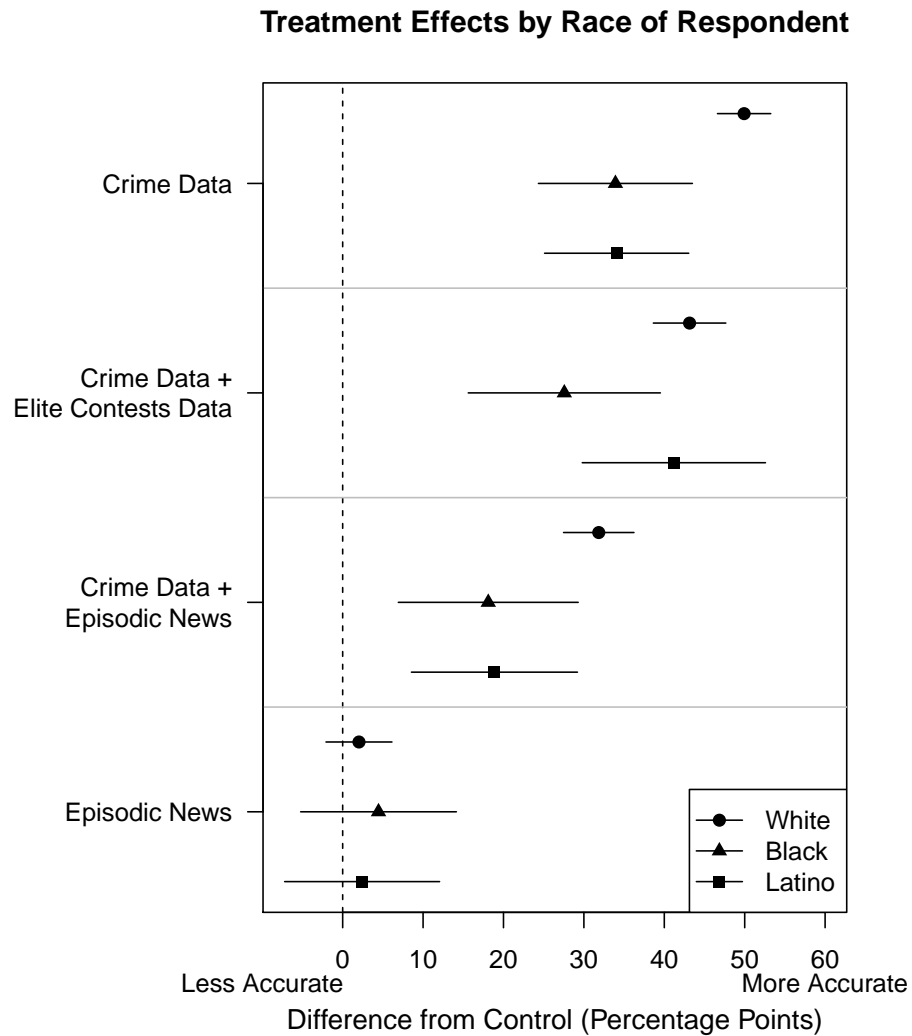
Figure 8: Misperceptions of crime by demographics in survey respondents' zip codes of residence, Gallup (left) and Qualtrics (right).



that corrective information was *more* effective among white respondents (49.9 percentage points) than Black or Latino respondents (33.9 and 34.1 points, respectively). In addition, we see all three groups responded similarly to the episodic news treatment with near-zero changes in the accuracy of perceptions. Results using confidence in crime data and the FBI as outcomes reveal little heterogeneity by racial group; see Appendix.

We note that it remains possible that race is playing a role in mass perceptions of national crime in ways these tests could not detect. For example, nonwhite respondents may have internalized the same negative stereotypes associating crime and racial minorities, thereby producing relatively homogeneous responses to treatments (Jefferson, N.d.). Still, these tests produce estimates that bear the opposite signs of our predictions. While race may play a significant role in the formulation of perceptions of crime in many venues, we have little evidence that it is responsible for high rates of misperceptions of national crime trends.

Figure 9: The figure displays treatment effects by the race of respondents among non-Hispanic white, non-Hispanic Black and Latino respondents. Surveys 1-3, pooled. Models estimating treatment effects included study fixed effects. Bars denote 95% confidence intervals.



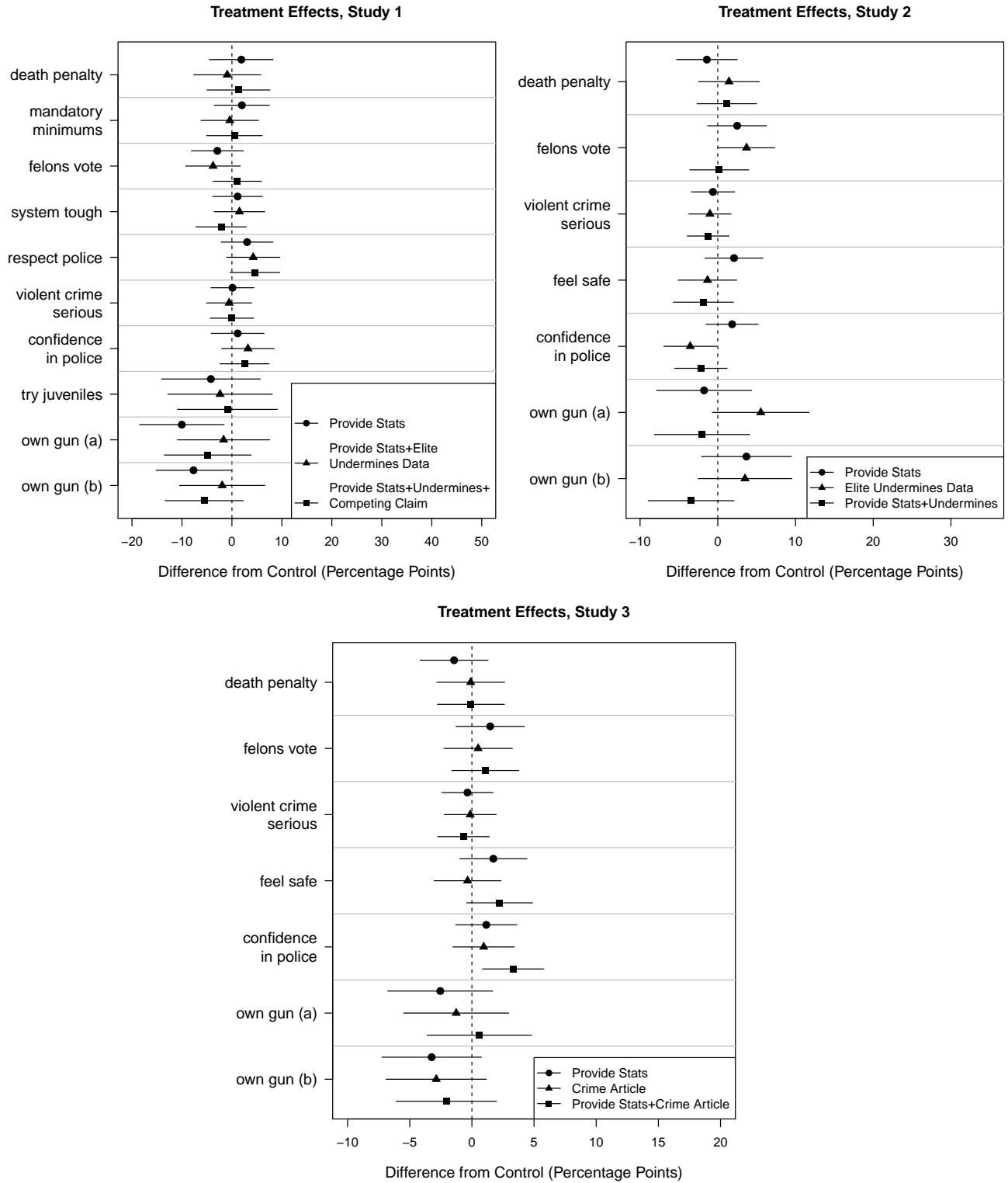
Effects on Related Policy Attitudes

Given the clear increase in the share of respondents who correctly perceived trends in conditions as a result of our experimental interventions, we might expect that policy preferences on related issues would change as well. For example, if people come to learn that the national homicide rate has been falling, they may be less likely to support “tough on crime” initiatives (Gilens, 2001). Figure 10 displays the effect of each homicide rate treatment on support for various criminal justice policies, as well as related attitudes (e.g. confidence that police will keep one safe and whether the respondent plans to purchase a gun).¹⁸ Across a host of policies and attitudes, we rarely see discernible effects. Receiving information on the falling homicide rate appears to reduce the probability of the respondent indicating they plan to buy a gun in Study 1, perhaps because they come to believe they are safer than they had previously thought, but these effect estimates are imprecise, and the result failed to replicate in Study 2. We see a significant increase in the share of respondents preferring a tough approach on crime in Study 1 in the condition where the elite claims the homicide rate is climbing, but given the null results on a host of related items, such as whether violent crime is a serious problem, we do not put much stock in this result. In general, we find little evidence that corrective information about crime trends alters related policy attitudes. These results are consistent with previous studies finding tenuous links between factual perceptions and related policy preferences (Hopkins, Sides and Citrin, 2016) as well as weak links between attitudes on seemingly related issues (Hopkins and Mummolo, 2017).¹⁹ Consistent with prior work, we thus find little evidence that corrective information leads citizens to update policy preferences, another potential obstacle to efficient retrospective voting.

¹⁸ Note: The outcomes displayed are those common to both studies. See Appendix for additional results.

¹⁹ See Figures 3, 4 and 5 in the Appendix for treatment effects within subgroups of the data. These results show little indication of substantially heterogeneous effects.

Figure 10: Treatment effects on policy preferences



Policy variables measured on seven-point scale. Figures show average percent differences in responses between each treatment condition and control condition. Bars denote 95% confidence intervals.

Discussion and Conclusion

Although crime rates have fallen dramatically in recent decades, most Americans believe they are rising. This trend has potentially important political implications: effective retrospective voting requires accurately evaluating social conditions, “law and order” platforms may remain popular due to faulty perceptions of crime, and research suggests that security threats make individuals more willing to relinquish civil liberties (Davis and Silver, 2004). It is therefore critical to investigate the causes of widespread misperceptions of crime trends.

Our results suggest that the prevalence of misperceptions of national crime is largely a byproduct of the lack of exposure—and the nature of exposure—to factual information about crime. Contrary to several prior studies which find it difficult to correct misperceptions (Kuklinski and Hurley, 1994; Kuklinski et al., 1998; Nyhan and Reifler, 2010, 2016), we find that citizens readily update their beliefs in response to crime statistics attributed to authoritative sources. We also find that rates of misperceptions are lower among the highly educated and those who report keeping up with current affairs, consistent with the “lack of exposure” hypothesis.

This is not to say that other factors do not contribute to mistaken beliefs. We also find that partisan cues mildly enhance misperceptions and diminish individuals’ confidence in both their beliefs and the institutions providing official data. Providing elite commentary without the relevant data did not have a meaningful impact on misperceptions of crime rates. But when presented alongside official statistics, we saw the corrective effect of crime data diminished. This suggests that the practice of “balancing” news coverage by offering critical voices even when those voices undermine objective reality may also be contributing to faulty perceptions in the mass public. Even when corrective information is given in the absence of elite cues, moreover, our results show that embedding crime data in a typical episodic news story significantly attenuates the data’s corrective power (Gilliam et al., 1996; Gilliam and Iyengar, 2000).

We find little evidence that widespread misperceptions are being driven by either local crime conditions or concerns about race. However, given the long history of racial discrimination in the U.S. and overt efforts by elites to associate race and crime in the minds of the mass public, we share this conclusion with some caution, and further research is necessary before ruling out this explanation completely. Most of our tests of this theory pertain to estimating differences in responses between racial groups, but it is possible these groups all view crime through a racial lens, thereby producing a homogeneous pattern of results (Jefferson, N.d.). It is also possible that some of the effects regarding the presentation of facts we observe in our data would be even more dramatic if our treatments explicitly mentioned race (Gilliam and Iyengar, 2000).

Finally, we show that informing individuals about broad improvements in crime rates does not affect theoretically proximal criminal justice policy preferences. This suggests a further obstacle to effective retrospective voting. Even in the event that voters learn about the status of politically relevant social conditions, they may have difficulty using that information to logically update their policy views.

While the consistency of our results gives us confidence in their validity, several caveats are in order, and a number of additional tests could shed further light on these questions. For one, we have specifically chosen a social condition frequently measured in a standardized fashion, thus affording us a reasonable method of scoring individuals' perceptions for accuracy. While crime is an important social condition that conveys information relevant to a wide array of government responsibilities, it remains possible that elite influence may be more pronounced in areas where less authoritative data are available, such as the impact of a specific policy. One drawback of our design is that we are only able to give our respondents a single "dose" of the information and elite rhetoric treatments. While elite rhetoric fails to produce large effects in our study, repeated messaging over the course of a campaign could have a cumulative effect on perceptions (Druckman, Fein and Leeper, 2012; Larsen

and Olsen, 2018). Implementing a panel design that allowed us to repeatedly expose respondents to these sorts of messages over a longer period of time could test this proposition, as well as determine whether the large increases in the accuracy of perceptions persist. While we show that a distractor task that expands the amount of time between treatment and response does not substantially change results, over the longterm the corrective effect may decay, particularly if citizens are consistently consuming episodic news coverage.

With these caveats in mind, our results give reason for both optimism and concern. On the one hand, we find that individuals appear readily willing to update their beliefs about crime. But our results also imply widespread misperceptions of crime are likely to persist barring a foundational change in the types of media individuals consume, or in the reporting practices that weaken the corrective power of crime statistics. Absent such changes, we believe Americans' perceptions of crime may continue to diverge even more sharply from reality.

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Supplementary Appendix: Explaining Misperceptions of Crime

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1 Data

1.1 Crime Data

National murder rates were obtained directly from the FBI's web site here: <https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2015/crime-in-the-u.s.-2015/tables/table-1>. FBI county crime data used was used in the local conditions analysis (DOJ, 2000, 2014).

As an alternative measure of homicides, the Centers for Disease Control tracks homicides via coroner's reports from local agencies. We use the data contained in their annual reports as an alternative measure of homicides to the FBI data when characterizing national crime trends (Hoyert et al., 2001; Miniño et al., 2002; Arias et al., 2003; Kochanek et al., 2004, 2006; Miniño et al., 2007; Kung et al., 2008; Heron et al., 2009; Xu et al., 2010; Miniño et al., 2011; Kochanek et al., 2011; Murphy, Xu and Kochanek, 2013; Kochanek, Murphy and Xu, 2015; Murphy et al., 2015; Xu et al., 2015; Kochanek et al., 2016).

1.2 Gallup Data

Gallup data on perceptions of crime were collected through the Gallup Poll Social Series (GPSS), public opinion surveys conducted every year in the same month on a series of social issues (Gallup Analytics, 2018). Results were provided through Gallup Analytics, and are also available on a year-by-year basis through the Roper Center. Data cover 2000 to 2014, with the exception of 2012, when Gallup did not measure perceptions of crime.

1.3 Summary Statistics

Table 1: Summary Statistics, Gallup

Statistic	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max
Misperceptions of total crime rate	13,220	0.750	0.433	0	1
Misperceptions of violent crime rate	13,220	0.674	0.469	0	1
Misperceptions of murder rate	13,220	0.630	0.483	0	1
Misperceptions of property crime rate	13,220	0.750	0.433	0	1
Female	16,229	0.503	0.500	0	1
Hispanic or latino	16,064	0.061	0.239	0	1
Non-hispanic white	16,229	0.807	0.394	0	1
Non-hispanic black	16,229	0.078	0.268	0	1
Asian	16,229	0.016	0.127	0	1
Democrat	15,992	0.466	0.499	0	1
Republican	15,992	0.442	0.497	0	1
Independent	15,992	0.092	0.289	0	1
Has BA	15,193	0.427	0.495	0	1
High crime county resident	14,842	0.500	0.500	0	1
Low crime county resident	14,842	0.500	0.500	0	1
Rising crime county resident	14,842	0.418	0.493	0	1
Falling crime county resident	14,842	0.567	0.495	0	1
High violent crime county resident	14,842	0.500	0.500	0	1
Low violent crime county resident	14,842	0.500	0.500	0	1
Rising violent crime county resident	14,842	0.443	0.497	0	1
Falling violent crime county resident	14,842	0.533	0.499	0	1
High white population zip code resident	7,946	0.500	0.500	0	1
Low white population zip code resident	7,946	0.500	0.500	0	1
High black population zip code resident	7,945	0.500	0.500	0	1
Low black population zip code resident	7,945	0.500	0.500	0	1
Rising black population zip code resident	7,811	0.663	0.473	0	1
Falling black population zip code resident	7,811	0.337	0.473	0	1
Rising white population zip code resident	7,811	0.084	0.277	0	1
Falling white population zip code resident	7,811	0.916	0.277	0	1

Table 2: Summary Statistics, Study 1 (M-Turk)

Statistic	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max
Murder perception correct	1,571	0.564	0.496	0	1
Confidence in FBI	1,567	0.631	0.253	0.000	1.000
Confidence in perception	1,567	0.676	0.289	0.000	1.000
Definition of homicide	1,565	0.878	0.327	0	1
Republican	1,571	0.307	0.461	0	1
Democrat	1,571	0.586	0.493	0	1
Strong democrat	1,571	0.220	0.414	0	1
Strong republican	1,571	0.084	0.278	0	1
Has BA	1,571	0.528	0.499	0	1
Voted 2016	1,571	0.840	0.367	0	1
Non-hispanic asian	1,571	0.092	0.289	0	1
Non-hispanic black	1,571	0.080	0.272	0	1
Non-hispanic white	1,570	0.754	0.431	0	1
Hispanic or latino	1,570	0.080	0.271	0	1
Income (1,000s)	1,292	61.575	52.029	15	200
Death penalty	1,523	0.512	0.344	0.000	1.000
Mandatory minimums	1,523	0.665	0.306	0.000	1.000
Felons vote	1,523	0.748	0.278	0.000	1.000
Criminal justice tough	1,522	0.523	0.265	0.000	1.000
Respect police	1,523	0.678	0.275	0.000	1.000
Crime serious	1,523	0.639	0.240	0.000	1.000
Confidence in police	1,523	0.554	0.270	0.000	1.000
Try juveniles	1,215	0.587	0.493	0	1
Own gun (a)	1,518	0.349	0.477	0	1
Own gun (b)	1,192	0.171	0.377	0	1

Table 3: Summary Statistics, Study 2 (Qualtrics)

Statistic	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max
Murder perception correct	1,942	0.440	0.497	0	1
Confidence in FBI	1,940	0.558	0.272	0.000	1.000
Confidence in perception	1,940	0.676	0.286	0.000	1.000
Definition of homicide	1,939	0.829	0.377	0	1
Female	1,942	0.502	0.500	0	1
Republican	1,942	0.380	0.486	0	1
Democrat	1,942	0.485	0.500	0	1
Strong democrat	1,942	0.227	0.419	0	1
Strong republican	1,942	0.166	0.372	0	1
Has BA	1,942	0.395	0.489	0	1
Voted 2016	1,941	0.803	0.398	0	1
Non-hispanic asian	1,942	0.057	0.231	0	1
Non-hispanic black	1,942	0.111	0.314	0	1
Non-hispanic white	1,942	0.693	0.461	0	1
Hispanic or latino	1,942	0.114	0.318	0	1
Income (1,000s)	1,630	60.810	52.958	15	200
Death penalty	1,940	0.655	0.313	0.000	1.000
Safety	1,940	0.648	0.296	0.000	1.000
Felons vote	1,940	0.764	0.218	0.000	1.000
Crime serious	1,942	0.567	0.270	0.000	1.000
Confidence in police	1,940	0.408	0.492	0	1
Own gun (a)	1,433	0.198	0.399	0	1

Table 4: Summary Statistics, Study 3 (Qualtrics)

Statistic	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max
Murder perception correct	4,242	0.411	0.492	0	1
Confidence in perception	3,783	0.560	0.310	0.000	1.000
Female	4,235	0.503	0.500	0	1
Republican	4,242	0.384	0.486	0	1
Democrat	4,242	0.446	0.497	0	1
Strong democrat	3,884	0.252	0.434	0	1
Strong republican	3,920	0.197	0.398	0	1
Has BA	4,242	0.348	0.477	0	1
Voted 2016	4,231	0.716	0.451	0	1
Non-hispanic asian	4,236	0.053	0.223	0	1
Non-hispanic black	4,236	0.093	0.290	0	1
Non-hispanic white	4,232	0.719	0.450	0	1
Hispani or latino	4,234	0.119	0.324	0	1
Income (1,000s)	4,079	57.319	52.508	15	200
Hardly follows public affairs	4,236	0.118	0.323	0	1
Death penalty	4,192	0.650	0.316	0.000	1.000
Safety	4,194	0.608	0.318	0.000	1.000
Felons vote	4,190	0.758	0.239	0.000	1.000
Crime serious	4,191	0.537	0.285	0.000	1.000
Confidence in police	4,186	0.413	0.492	0	1
Own gun (a)	3,063	0.197	0.398	0	1

Table 5: Summary Statistics, Control Conditions Studies 2 and 3

Statistic	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max
Murder perception correct	1,559	0.217	0.412	0	1
Confidence in perception	1,455	0.540	0.316	0.000	1.000
Female	1,557	0.502	0.500	0	1
Republican	1,559	0.373	0.484	0	1
Democrat	1,559	0.469	0.499	0	1
Strong democrat	1,459	0.247	0.432	0	1
Strong republican	1,482	0.183	0.387	0	1
Has BA	1,559	0.372	0.484	0	1
Voted 2016	1,554	0.737	0.441	0	1
Non-hispanic asian	1,556	0.054	0.226	0	1
Non-hispanic black	1,556	0.098	0.298	0	1
Non-hispanic white	1,554	0.703	0.457	0	1
Hispanic or latino	1,555	0.124	0.330	0	1
Income (1,000s)	1,438	56.850	51.050	15	200
Death penalty	1,546	0.654	0.315	0.000	1.000
Safety	1,546	0.611	0.316	0.000	1.000
Felons vote	1,547	0.764	0.240	0.000	1.000
Crime serious	1,546	0.540	0.287	0.000	1.000
Confidence in police	1,547	0.415	0.493	0	1
Own gun (a)	1,143	0.208	0.406	0	1
Own gun (b)	1,200	0.500	0.500	0	1
High crime county resident	1,200	0.500	0.500	0	1
Low crime county resident	1,200	0.189	0.392	0	1
Rising crime county resident	1,200	0.811	0.392	0	1
Falling crime county resident	1,200	0.502	0.500	0	1
High violent crime county resident	1,200	0.498	0.500	0	1
Low violent crime county resident	1,200	0.302	0.459	0	1
Rising violent crime county resident	1,200	0.698	0.459	0	1
Falling violent crime county resident	1,498	0.673	0.469	0	1
Rising black population zip code resident	1,498	0.327	0.469	0	1
Falling black population zip code resident	1,498	0.087	0.283	0	1
Rising white population zip code resident	1,498	0.913	0.283	0	1
Falling white population zip code resident	1,535	0.500	0.500	0	1
High black population zip code resident	1,535	0.500	0.500	0	1
Low black population zip code resident	1,535	0.500	0.500	0	1
High white population zip code resident	1,535	0.500	0.500	0	1
Low white population zip code resident	1,535	0.500	0.500	0	1

1.4 Demographics of Survey Samples

Table 6: Makeup of Survey Samples

	Study 1 M-Turk	Study 2 Qualtrics	Study 3 Qualtrics	U.S. Census/ CCES
%Female		50	50	51
Median Age	34	46	46	37
%Latino	8	11	12	16
%Non-Hispanic White	76	69	72	72
%Non-Hispanic Black	8	11	9	13
%Non-Hispanic Asian	9	6	5	5
% w/ B.A.	53	40	35	28
Median HH Income (\$1,000s)	55	55	45	49
%Democrat	57	48	45	44
%Republican	32	38	38	39
<i>N</i>	912	1,942	4,242	

Party ID percentages taken from weighted 2014 Cooperative Congressional Election Study. All other numbers in final column taken from the 2010 U.S. Census. Percent female omitted from M-Turk sample because respondent sex was not measured in that survey. Note: sample size conveys number of complete responses used to estimate the model of crime perceptions on treatment conditions. *N* varies by model due to nonresponse on some items.

1.5 Balance Checks

Tables 7, 8, 9, and 10 report the results of balance checks to ensure that the random assignment to treatment conditions worked properly. OLS regressions of indicators for being assigned to each treatment arm on respondent race, self-reported turnout in 2016, education, income, age and party identification were estimated. The *p* values on the *F* statistics in these regressions refer to the null hypothesis that the coefficients on these predictors are jointly zero, which should be the case (in expectation) if random assignment was achieved (i.e., we should not be able to predict treatment assignment with this set of covariates). As the tables show, we fail to reject this null hypothesis in all cases.

Table 7: Check for Balance on Observables: Study 1 (M-Turk Sample)

	<i>F</i> Statistic	<i>p</i> value
control	1.32	0.22
crime info	1.36	0.2
crime info + undermine	0.56	0.83
crime info + undermine/claim	1.64	0.1

Table 8: Check for Balance on Observables: Study 2 (Qualtrics Sample)

	<i>F</i> Statistic	<i>p</i> value
crime info	0.47	0.89
undermine	0.77	0.64
control	0.38	0.95
crime info + undermine	0.94	0.49

Table 9: Check for Balance on Observables: Study 3 (Qualtrics Sample), Main Treatments

	<i>F</i> Statistic	<i>p</i> value
crime info	1.04	0.63
crime article	1.68	0.09
control	0.64	0.76
crime info + crime article	0.94	0.49

Table 10: Check for Balance on Observables: Study 3 (Qualtrics Sample), All Treatments

	<i>F</i> Statistic	<i>p</i> value
crime article+stats, incentive, no distractor	1.27	0.25
crime article+stats, no incentive, distractor	1.31	0.23
crime article+stats, incentive, distractor	0.74	0.74
crime article no incentive, no distractor	0.58	0.82
crime article, incentive, no distractor	0.93	0.5
control, no incentive, distractor	0.94	0.49
stats, no incentive, no distractor	0.76	0.65
crime article, no incentive, distractor	0.76	0.66
stats, incentive, distractor	0.76	0.66
control, incentive, no distractor	1.23	0.27
control, no incentive, no distractor	0.87	0.55
stats, no incentive, distractor	1.92	0.05
control, incentive, distractor	0.51	0.87
crime article+stats, no incentive, no distractor	0.92	0.51
stats, incentive, no distractor	1.61	0.11
crime article, incentive, distractor	1.07	0.38

2 Survey Design

2.1 Study 1

Control

Zlatan Ibrahimovic scored his first hat-trick for the European football squad Manchester United and the 17th of his career in a win over Saint-Etienne last week.

Ibrahimovic's deflected free-kick wrong-footed goalkeeper Stephane Ruffier and dribbled over the line for the opener, and he tapped home from close range after good work from Marcus Rashford, as well as adding a late penalty – his 23rd goal of the season.

Crime Information

According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the homicide rate in the U.S. was 5.5 homicides per 100,000 people in 2000, but was down to 4.9 homicides per 100,000 people in 2015.

Crime Information and Undermining

According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the homicide rate in the U.S. was 5.5 homicides per 100,000 people in 2000, but was down to 4.9 homicides per 100,000 people in 2015.

However, (Republican/Democratic) officials in Washington have recently called these statis-

tics into question.

“You can throw around all the numbers you want, but sometimes it’s better to rely on common sense than a bunch of statisticians,” said one (Republican/Democratic) U.S. Senator. “Local agencies often fail to report all their crime data to the FBI, so these statistics aren’t much use.”

Crime Information and Competing Claim

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Unemployment Information

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), the unemployment rate in the U.S.—the percent of the labor force that was out of work, looking for a job and available for

work—was 4% on average in 2000, but was up to 5.3% on average in 2015.

Unemployment Information and Undermining

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“You can throw around all the numbers you want, but sometimes it’s better to rely on common sense than a bunch of statisticians,” said one (Republican/Democratic) U.S. Senator. “These numbers are based on surveys that many people refuse to take, so these statistics aren’t much use.”

Unemployment Information and Competing Claim

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), the unemployment rate in the U.S.—the percent of the labor force that was out of work, looking for a job and available for work—was 4% on average in 2000, but was up to 5.3% on average in 2015.

However, (Republican/Democratic) officials in Washington have recently called these statistics into question.

“You can throw around all the numbers you want, but sometimes it’s better to rely on common sense than a bunch of statisticians,” said one (Republican/Democratic) U.S. Senator.

“These numbers are based on surveys that many people refuse to take, so these statistics aren’t much use. The unemployment rate has been falling.”

2.2 Study 2

Respondents in the Qualtrics studies were given the following instructions before seeing one of the blocks of text listed below:

You will now be asked to read an excerpt from a brief news report. Please read the text on the following screen carefully.

The report will be displayed for about 15 seconds before you are allowed to advance in the survey.

Note that all respondents were debriefed at the end of the survey with the following text:

Please note that the purpose of the survey was to gauge how information on social conditions affects perceptions, policy preferences and political opinions. Though the information concerning recent social conditions provided in the news item was accurate, the news item itself and the quotes within it were constructed for this survey. The news items we asked you to consider were hypothetical (not real), though some news items were based on real online news content.

Control

Zlatan Ibrahimovic scored his first hat-trick for the European football squad Manchester United and the 17th of his career in a win over Saint-Etienne last week.

Ibrahimovic's deflected free-kick wrong-footed goalkeeper Stephane Ruffier and dribbled over the line for the opener, and he tapped home from close range after good work from Marcus Rashford, as well as adding a late penalty – his 23rd goal of the season (Hafez, 2017).

Crime Information

According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the homicide rate in the U.S. was 5.5 homicides per 100,000 people in 2000, but was down to 4.9 homicides per 100,000 people in 2015.

Elite Cue

(Republican/Democratic) officials in Washington have recently called official crime statistics into question.

“Local agencies often fail to report all their crime data to the FBI, so federal crime statistics aren't much use,” said one (Republican/Democratic) U.S. Senator. “The vast majority of Americans today do not feel safe. They fear for their children and they fear for themselves.”

Crime Information and Elite Cue

According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the homicide rate in the U.S. was 5.5 homicides per 100,000 people in 2000, but was down to 4.9 homicides per 100,000 people in 2015.

(Republican/Democratic) officials in Washington have recently called official crime statistics

into question.

“Local agencies often fail to report all their crime data to the FBI, so federal crime statistics aren’t much use,” said one (Republican/Democratic) U.S. Senator. “The vast majority of Americans today do not feel safe. They fear for their children and they fear for themselves.”

2.3 Study 3

Financial Incentives

Prior to being assigned to one of the four main treatments, respondents were randomly assigned to a financial incentives treatment. Half of respondents were told: “You will now be asked to answer some factual questions about social conditions in the United States.” The other half saw the following additional prompt:

You will now be asked to answer some factual questions about social conditions in the United States.

Note: If you answer accurately, you will earn a \$0.25 bonus payment!

Control

Zlatan Ibrahimovic scored his first hat-trick for the European football squad Manchester United and the 17th of his career in a win over Saint-Etienne last week.

Ibrahimovic's deflected free-kick wrong-footed goalkeeper Stephane Ruffier and dribbled over the line for the opener, and he tapped home from close range after good work from Marcus Rashford, as well as adding a late penalty – his 23rd goal of the season (Hafez, 2017).

Crime Information

According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the homicide rate in the U.S. was 5.5 homicides per 100,000 people in 2000, but was down to 4.9 homicides per 100,000 people in 2015.

News Article

Two suspects on the run since Jan. 12 when the bodies of two men were found downtown have been located and arrested, police officials said.

According to police officials, the two victims were found shot to death by local police on Jan. 31.

Both suspects have been charged with two counts of first degree murder. Robbery is being considered as a possible motive, the department said today during a 1:30 p.m. press conference.

Information and News Article

Two suspects on the run since Jan. 12 when the bodies of two men were found downtown

have been located and arrested, police officials said.

According to police officials, the two victims were found shot to death by local police on Jan. 31.

Both suspects have been charged with two counts of first degree murder. Robbery is being considered as a possible motive, the department said today during a 1:30 p.m. press conference.

According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the homicide rate in the U.S. was 5.5 homicides per 100,000 people in 2000, but was down to 4.9 homicides per 100,000 people in 2015.

Distractor Task

Following treatment, half of respondents were funneled to a distractor task, in order to test whether the effects of information persist. Respondents were told: “We are interested in learning more about your preferences as a consumer. In the next section, we will display a series of brand names and ask you to indicate how you feel about each one.” The task then asked respondents to give their impression of well-known brands, like Google and Lego.

2.4 Dependent Variables

1. A “homicide” is the willful (non-negligent) killing of one human being by another. The national homicide rate is the number of homicides per 100,000 people in the United States.

Was the homicide rate in the U.S. in 2015 larger (smaller) or smaller (larger) than it was in 2000?

- Larger
- Smaller

2. How confident are you in your response to the previous question about the change in the national homicide rate between 2000 and 2015?

- 7-point scale, 1=Not at all confident, 4=Moderately confident, 7=Extremely confident

3. How confident are you that the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) provides accurate estimates of the national homicide rate?

- 7-point scale, 1=Not at all confident, 4=Moderately confident, 7=Extremely confident

4. When you think about the national homicide rate, do you think of the number of homicides per 100,000 people, or do you think of some other definition? If you think of another definition, please describe it in the text field below.

- Yes, that is the definition I think of
- No, I think of some other definition:

5. Based on your own personal definition of the homicide rate, was the homicide rate in the U.S. in 2015 larger (smaller) or smaller (larger) than it was in 2000?

- Larger
- Smaller

6. In a few sentences or less, please briefly describe why you think that the homicide rate in the U.S. in 2015 was larger (smaller) or smaller (larger) than it was in 2000.

1. Do you favor or oppose the death penalty for a person convicted of murder?
 - 7-point scale, 1=Strongly oppose, 4=Neither support nor oppose, 7=Strongly in favor
2. Do you favor or oppose allowing nonviolent drug offenders who have served their sentences to vote?
 - 7-point scale, 1=Strongly oppose, 4=Neither support nor oppose, 7=Strongly in favor
3. Please indicate how serious a problem you think violent crime is in the US today?
 - 7-point scale, 1=Not at all serious, 4=Moderately serious, 7=Extremely serious
4. How safe do you feel walking alone at night within a mile of where you live?
 - 7-point scale, 1=Not at all safe, 4=Moderately safe, 7=Extremely safe
5. Which of the following best describes you?
 - I own a firearm
 - I don't own a firearm but I plan on purchasing one
 - I do not own a firearm
6. How much confidence do you have in the police to protect you from violent crime?
 - 7-point scale, 1=Very little confidence, 4=A moderate amount of confidence, 7=Quite a lot of confidence

2.5 Unemployment Measures (Study 1 Only)

1. The “labor force” is defined as all people who either have a job, or are unemployed. The “unemployed” are people who are jobless, looking for a job, and available for work.

The “unemployment rate” is therefore the percent of people in the labor force who are unemployed.

Was the average unemployment rate in the U.S. in 2015 larger (smaller) or smaller (larger) than it was in 2000?

- Larger
- Smaller

2. How confident are you that the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) provides accurate estimates of the national unemployment rate?

- 7-point scale, 1=Not at all confident, 4=Moderately confident, 7=Extremely confident

3. When you think about the national unemployment rate, do you think of the percent of the labor force that is jobless, looking for a job and available for work, or do you think of some other definition? If you think of another definition, please describe it in the text field below.

- Yes, that is the definition I think of
- No, I think of some other definition:

4. Based on your own personal definition of the unemployment rate, was the average unemployment rate in the U.S. in 2015 larger (smaller) or smaller (larger) than it was in 2000?

- Larger
- Smaller

5. In a few sentences or less, please briefly describe why you think that the average unemployment rate in the U.S. in 2015 was larger (smaller) or smaller (larger) than it

was in 2000.

1. Thinking about taxes, do you support or oppose raising taxes on household income over \$250,000?
 - 7-point scale, 1=Strongly oppose, 4=Neither support nor oppose, 7=Strongly in favor
2. Do you see foreign trade as harmful or beneficial to the U.S. economy?
 - 7-point scale, 1=Harmful, 4=Neither beneficial nor harmful, 7=Beneficial
3. In your view, should immigration be kept at its present level, increased or decreased?
 - 7-point scale, 1=Decreased, 4=Kept the same, 7=Increased
4. In general, do you think that free trade agreements like NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) have been a good thing or a bad thing for the United States?
 - 7-point scale, 1=Definitely bad, 4=Neither good nor bad, 7=Definitely good
5. Do you favor or oppose a one-year extension of federal unemployment benefits for people who have been out of work for a long time?
 - 7-point scale, 1=Strongly oppose, 4=Neither favor nor oppose, 7=Strongly in favor
6. As you may know, the federal minimum wage is currently \$7.25 an hour. Do you favor or oppose increasing the minimum wage?
 - 7-point scale, 1=Strongly oppose, 4=Neither favor nor oppose, 7=Strongly in favor

3 Additional Results

3.1 Main Survey Experimental Results

Table 11: Study 1 (M-Turk) Treatment Effects

	Control Comparison	Info Comparison
(Intercept)	0.44*** (0.03)	0.89*** (0.02)
Provide Stats	0.45*** (0.04)	
Elite Undermines Data	0.35*** (0.04)	-0.10** (0.04)
Elite Competing Claim	0.35*** (0.04)	-0.11** (0.03)
Control		-0.45*** (0.04)
<i>N</i>	912	912
<i>R</i> ²	0.16	0.16
adj. <i>R</i> ²	0.15	0.15
Resid. sd	0.41	0.41

Robust (“HC1”) standard errors. M-Turk sample.

† significant at $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Table 12: Study 2 (Qualtrics) Treatment Effects

	Control Comparison	Info Comparison
(Intercept)	0.18*** (0.02)	0.73*** (0.02)
Provide Stats	0.55*** (0.03)	
Elite Undermines Data	0.01 (0.03)	-0.53*** (0.03)
Stats+Elite Undermines	0.48*** (0.03)	-0.06* (0.03)
Control		-0.55*** (0.03)
<i>N</i>	1942	1942
<i>R</i> ²	0.26	0.26
adj. <i>R</i> ²	0.26	0.26
Resid. sd	0.43	0.43

Robust (“HC1”) standard errors. Qualtrics sample.

† significant at $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Table 13: Study 3 (Qualtrics) Treatment Effects

	Control Comparison	Info Comparison
(Intercept)	0.18*** (0.02)	0.68*** (0.03)
Crime Article	0.07* (0.04)	-0.50*** (0.04)
Stats+Crime Article	0.31*** (0.04)	
Stats	0.50*** (0.04)	
Incentive	0.07† (0.04)	-0.04 (0.04)
Distractor	0.05 (0.04)	-0.07 (0.04)
Crime Article x Incentive	-0.06 (0.05)	0.10† (0.05)
Stats+Crime Article x Incentive	0.00 (0.06)	
Stats x Incentive	-0.10† (0.05)	
Crime Article x Distractor	-0.07 (0.05)	0.12* (0.06)
Stats+Crime Article x Distractor	-0.10† (0.06)	
Stats x Distractor	-0.12* (0.06)	
Crime Article x Incentive x Distractor	-0.03 (0.05)	0.11† (0.06)
Stats+Crime Article x Incentive x Distractor	0.00 (0.07)	
Stats x Incentive x Distractor	0.06 (0.08)	-0.14† (0.08)
Control+Crime Article		-0.43*** (0.04)
Control		-0.19*** (0.04)
Control+Crime Article x Incentive		0.04 (0.05)
Control x Incentive		0.11† (0.06)
Control+Crime Article x Distractor		0.06 (0.06)
Control x Distractor		0.02 (0.06)
Control+Crime Article x Incentive x Distractor		-0.14† (0.08)
<i>N</i>	4242	4242
<i>R</i> ²	0.14	0.14
adj. <i>R</i> ²	0.14	0.14
Resid. sd	0.46	0.46

Robust (“HC1”) standard errors. Qualtrics sample.

† significant at $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Table 14: Unemployment Treatment Effects (M-Turk)

	Control Comparison	Info Comparison
(Intercept)	0.41*** (0.04)	0.46*** (0.04)
Provide Stats	0.48*** (0.04)	
Elite Undermines Data	0.46*** (0.04)	-0.06 (0.05)
Elite Competing Claim	0.45*** (0.04)	-0.13* (0.05)
Control		-0.15** (0.05)
<i>N</i>	766	766
<i>R</i> ²	0.21	0.01
adj. <i>R</i> ²	0.21	0.01
Resid. sd	0.38	0.48

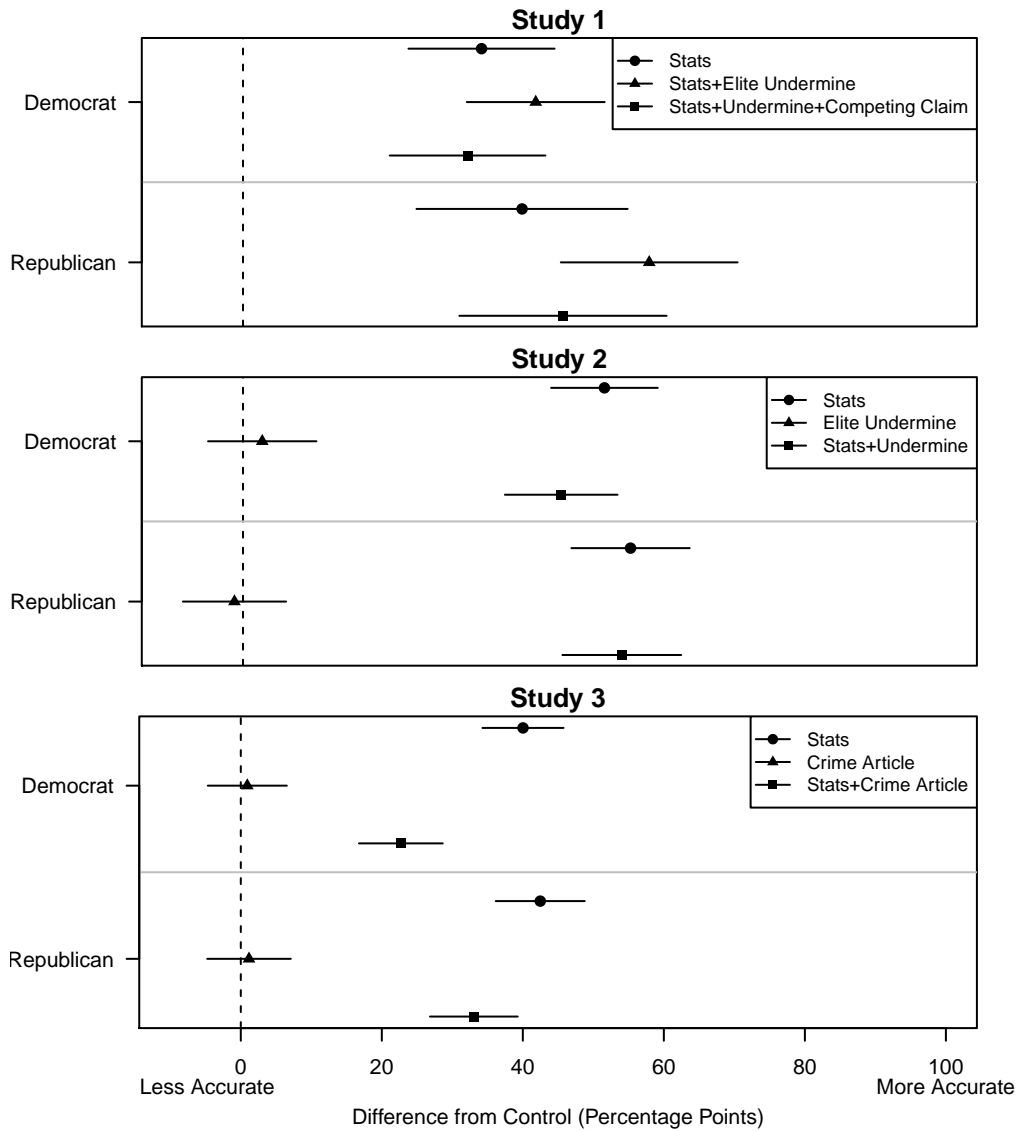
Robust (“HC1”) standard errors. M-Turk sample.

† significant at $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Effects by Party

We have so far restricted our analysis to main effects, but it remains possible that these interventions affected partisans in different ways. To explore this, Figure 1 displays treatment effects across the two studies by the partisanship of respondents. In Study 1, effects appear to be more pronounced among Republicans when it comes to the accuracy of perceptions of crime, but it is difficult to draw strong conclusions because the small number of Republicans in the M-Turk sample resulted in large confidence intervals on these effects. The same general pattern is echoed in Study 2, but with much smaller differences in effects. For example, in the second study, the effects of providing FBI statistics on the accuracy of perceptions are 61 points for Democrats and 59 for Republicans, though this difference is not statistically detectable. The elite rhetoric condition seems to have had no effect on any partisan group. The results of Study 3 similarly hold across partisan differences: all groups show the same pronounced effect of corrective information, and a significant attenuation of that effect when placing statistics in the context of a news article. The depressing effect of the news story is particularly strong for Democrats, with a drop of 13.6 percentage points from the information only treatment compared to 17.7 percentage points for Republicans. In general, however, the analysis shows that information treatments had massive effects across partisan groups.

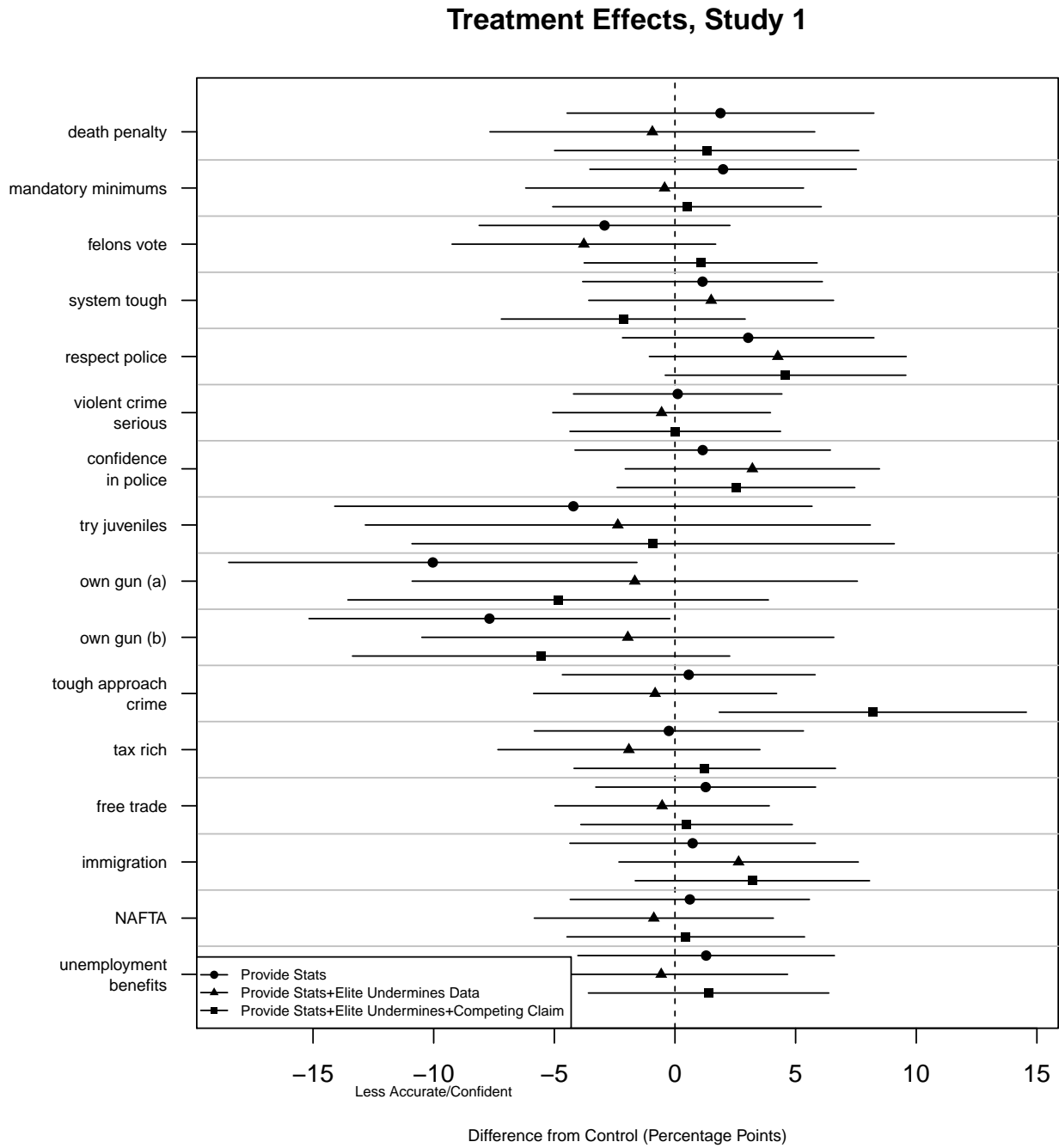
Figure 1: Crime treatment effects on perceptions of social conditions by partisanship of respondents.



Average differences in responses for Democrats and Republicans between each treatment condition and control condition. Bars denote 95% confidence intervals.

3.2 Other Policy Outcomes

Figure 2: Treatment effects on all policy preferences, Study 1



3.3 Heterogeneous Effects

Figure 3: Treatment effects on all policy preferences by Subgroup, Study 1.

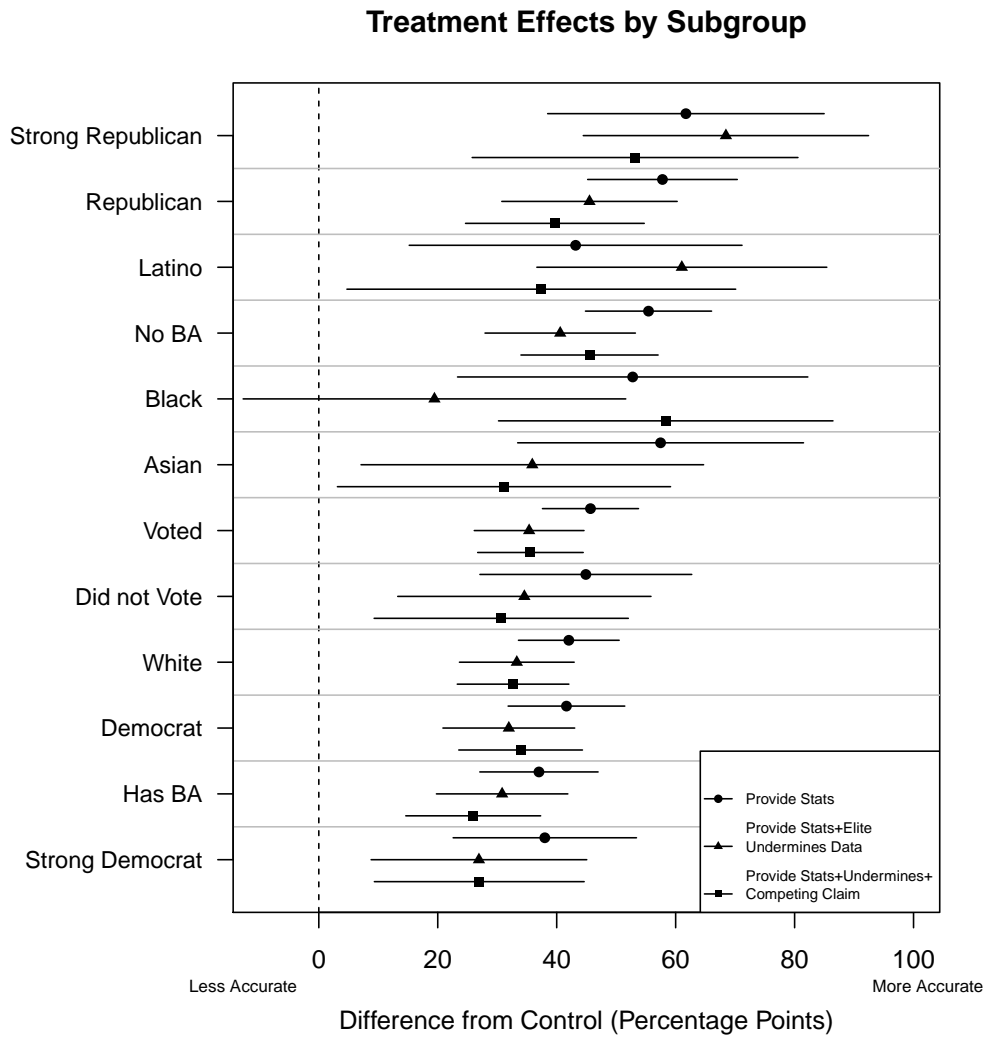


Figure 4: Treatment effects on all policy preferences by Subgroup, Study 2.

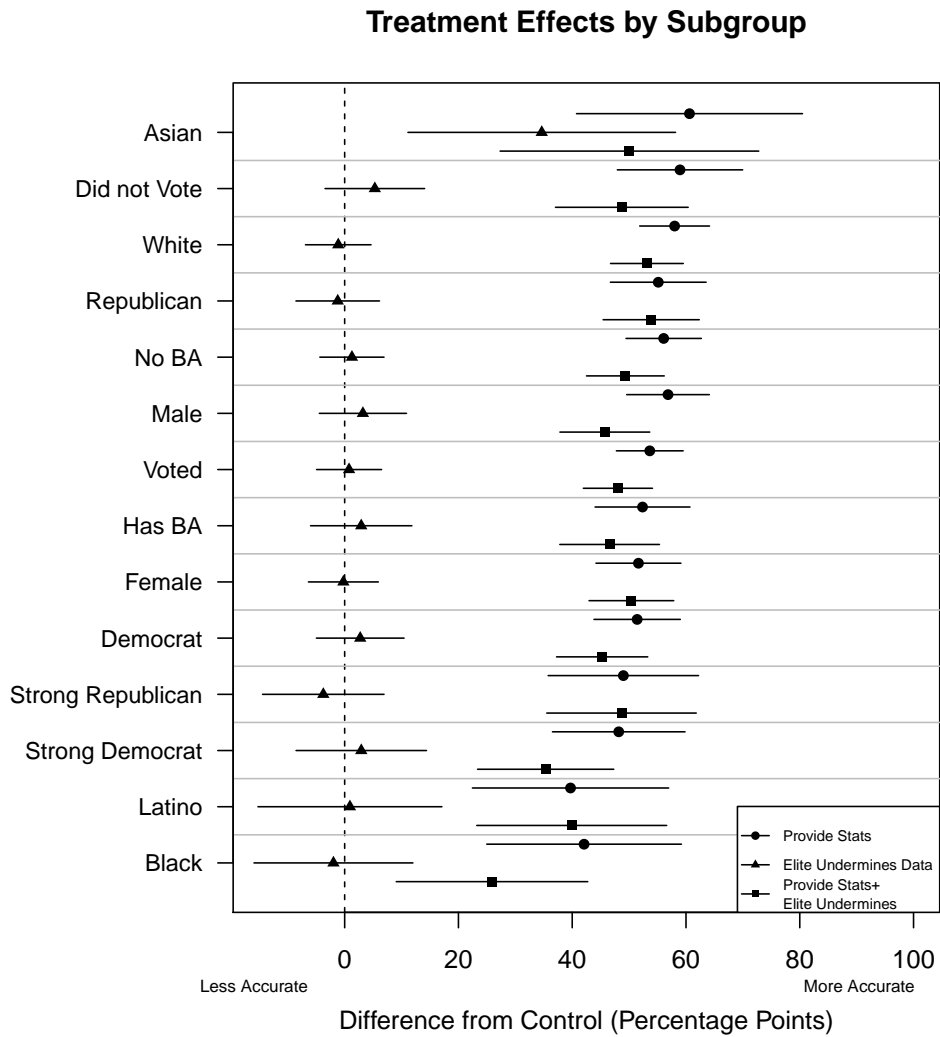
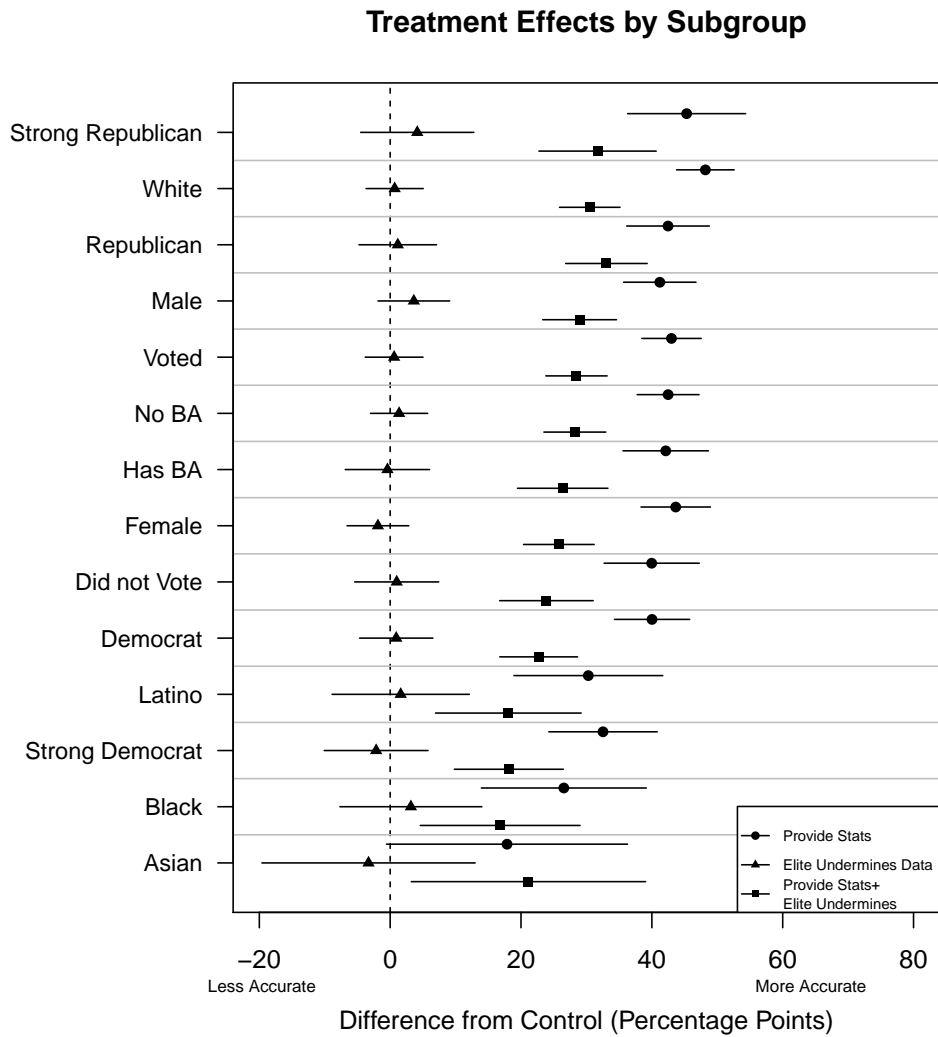


Figure 5: Treatment effects on all policy preferences by Subgroup, Study 3.

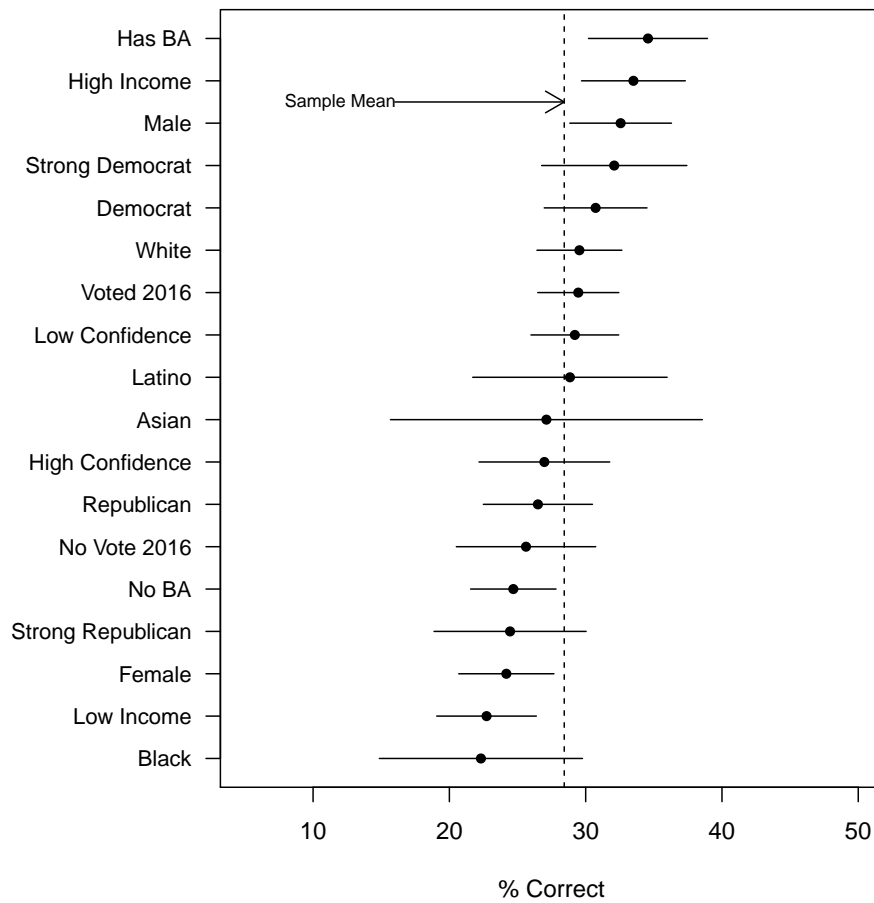


3.4 Removing ‘I don’t know’ responses

In the analysis in the main text, we code responses of “I don’t know” to the perception questions as incorrect. We do this because dropping these responses may induce post-treatment bias, since different treatment arms could differentially affect the probability of answering in this way. However, we realize this coding choice comes with a trade: not knowing the answer to these questions and holding a mistaken belief are qualitatively different, and our coding scheme conflates the two. We therefore display all results below after dropping respondents who answered “I don’t know” to assess whether this coding choice is consequential. We recover highly similar results when using this alternative coding scheme.

Figure 6: Rates of accurate perceptions of the direction change in the national homicide rate between 2000 and 2014 by subgroup in Studies 2 and 3 (control conditions only, pooled, 'don't knows' excluded)

**Accuracy of Perceptions of Crime by Group
(Studies 2 and 3, Control Conditions, Excluding 'Don't Knows')**



Bars denote 95% confidence intervals.

Figure 7: Misperceptions of crime by high and low crime counties, Qualtrics, excluding 'don't know' responses.

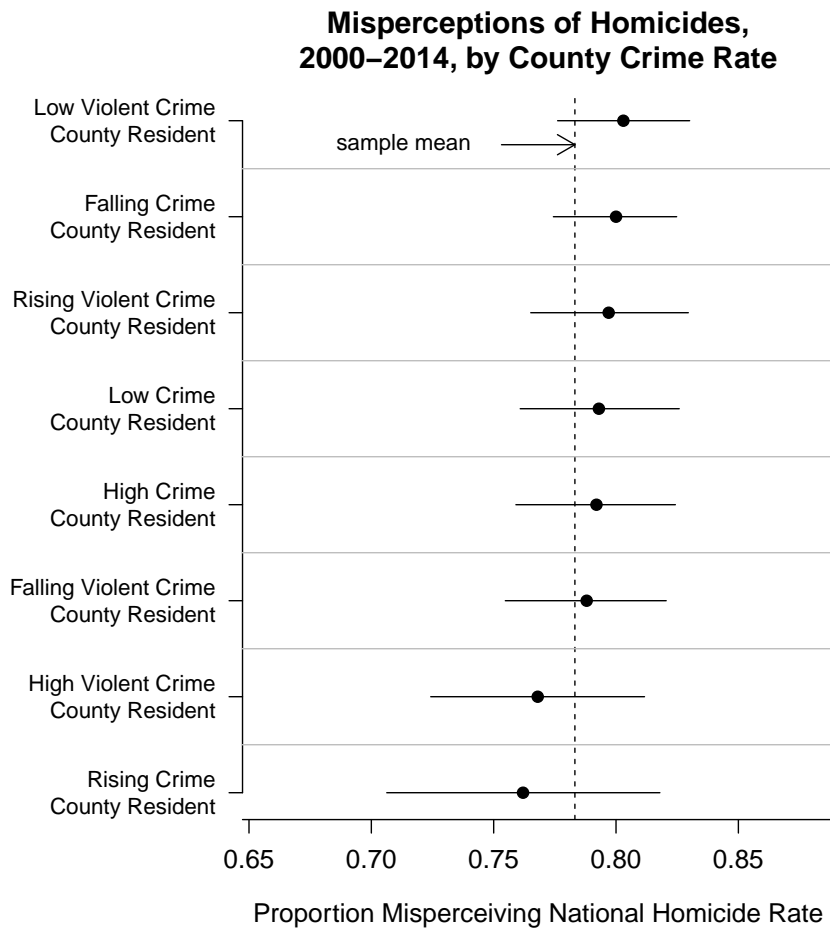


Figure 8: Treatment effects on perceptions of crime, excluding 'don't know' responses.

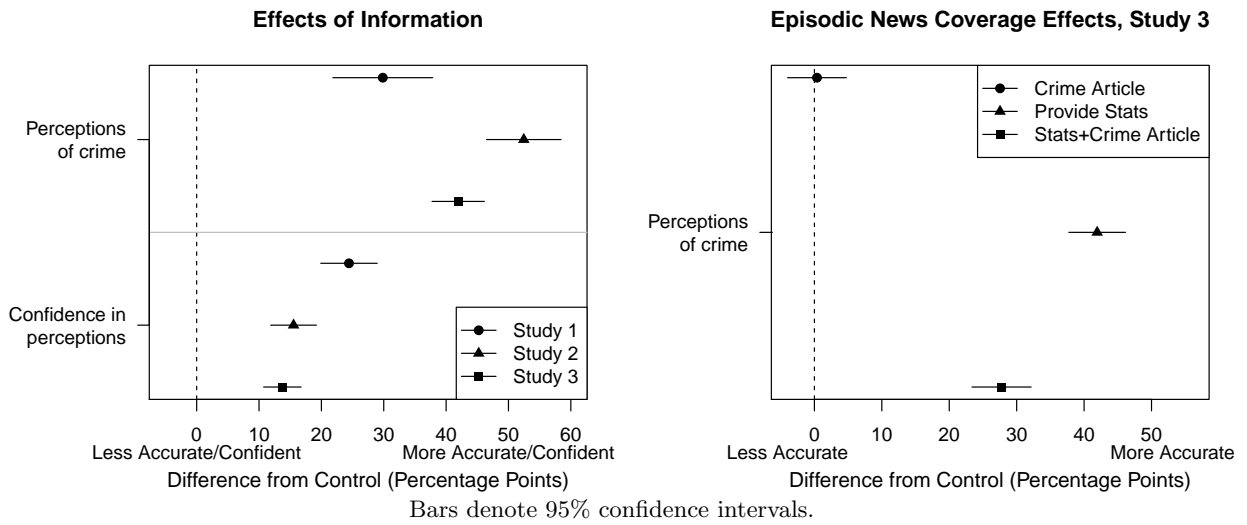
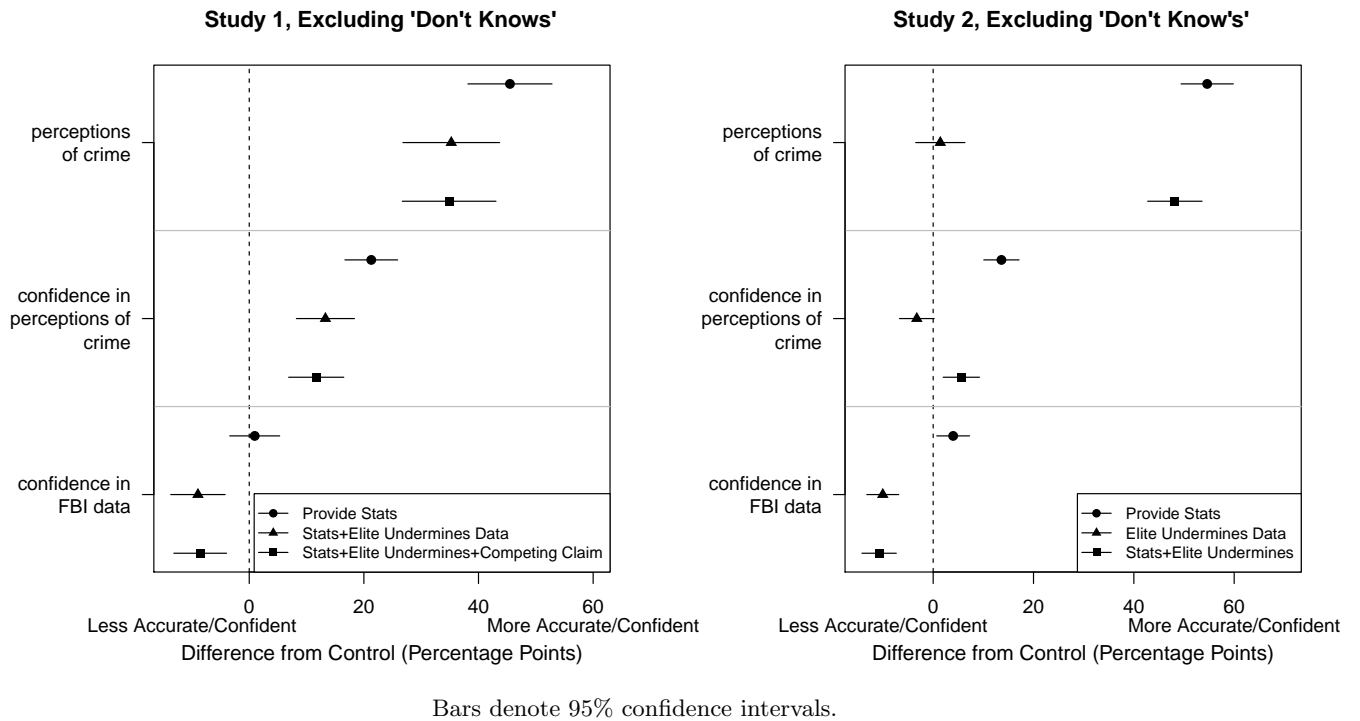


Figure 9: Treatment effects on perceptions of social conditions and confidence in institutions, excluding 'don't know' responses.



3.5 Local Conditions and Misperceptions of National Crime, Alternative Benchmarks (Gallup)

Figure 10: Misperceptions of violent crime by high and low crime counties (Gallup)

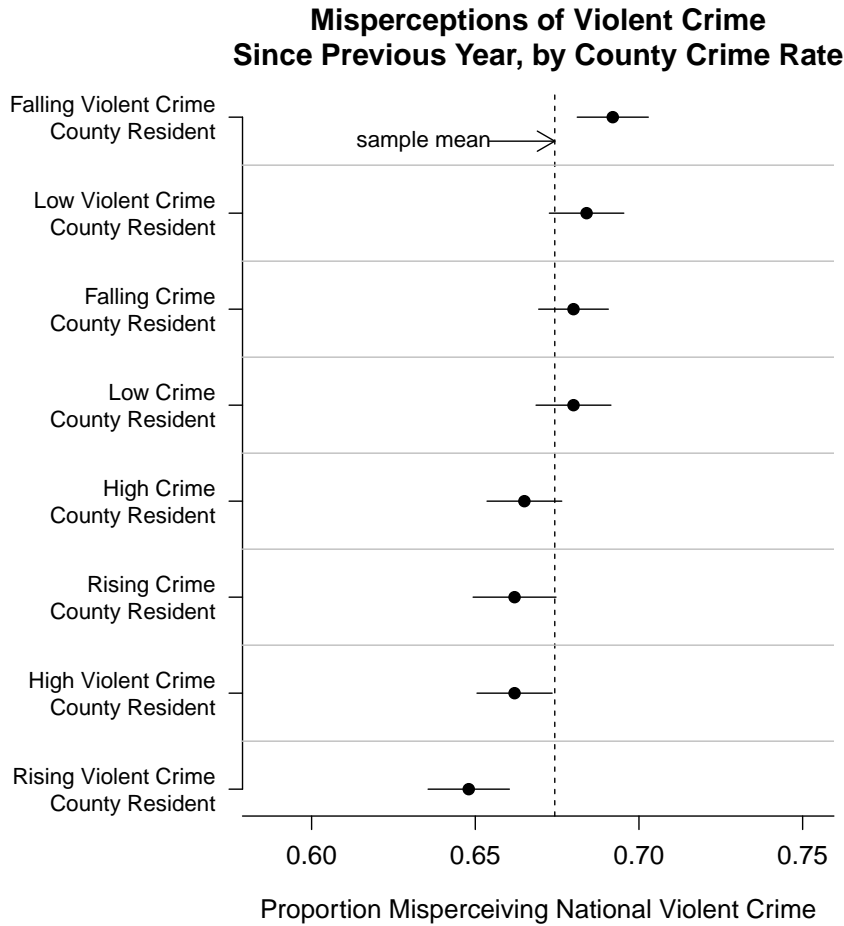


Figure 11: Misperceptions of property crime by high and low crime counties (Gallup)

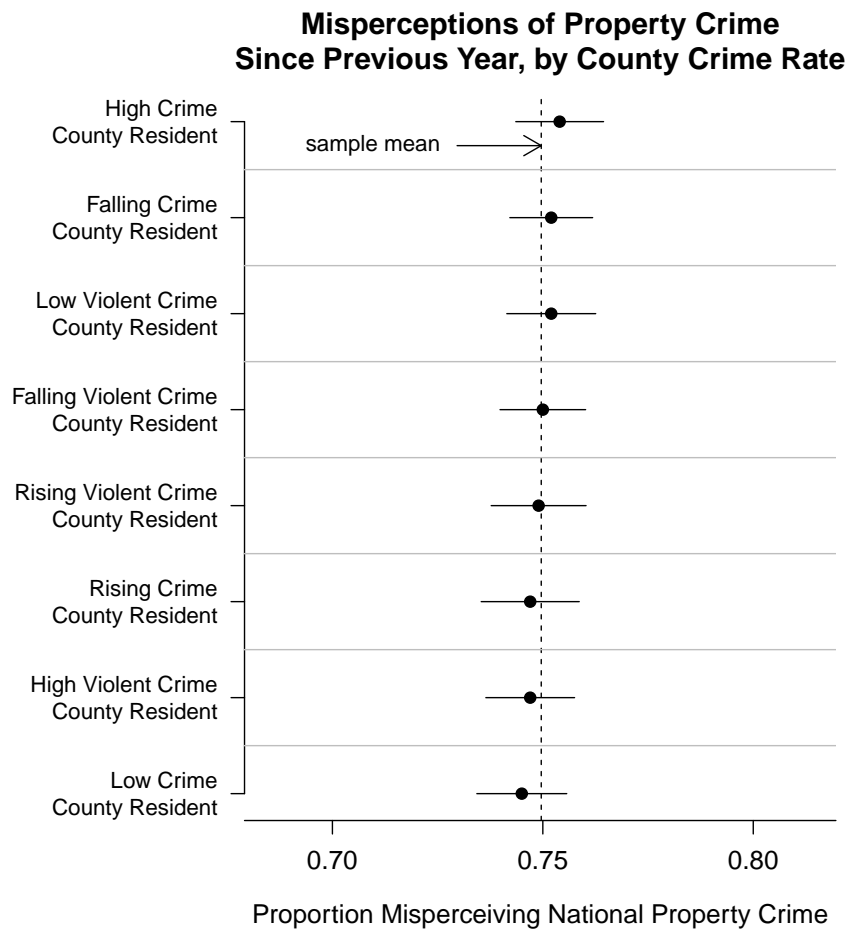
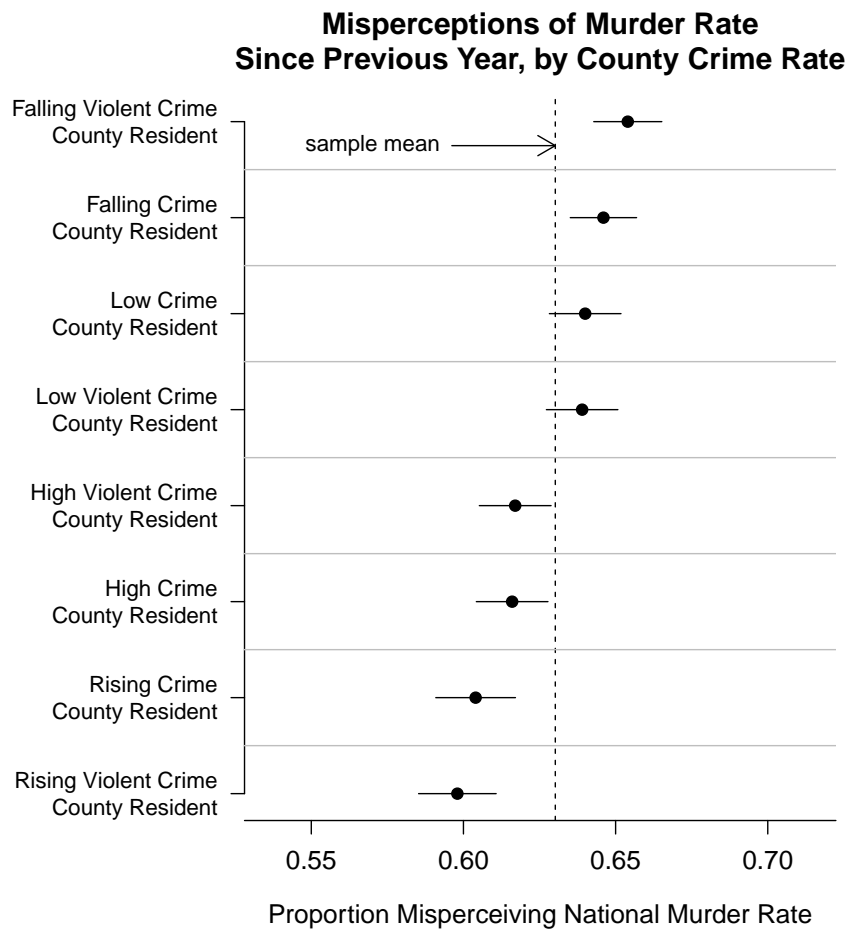


Figure 12: Misperceptions of murder rate by high and low crime counties (Gallup)



3.6 Racial Threat and Misperceptions of National Crime, Additional Tests

Figure 13: Misperceptions of national violent crime by zip code demographics (Gallup)

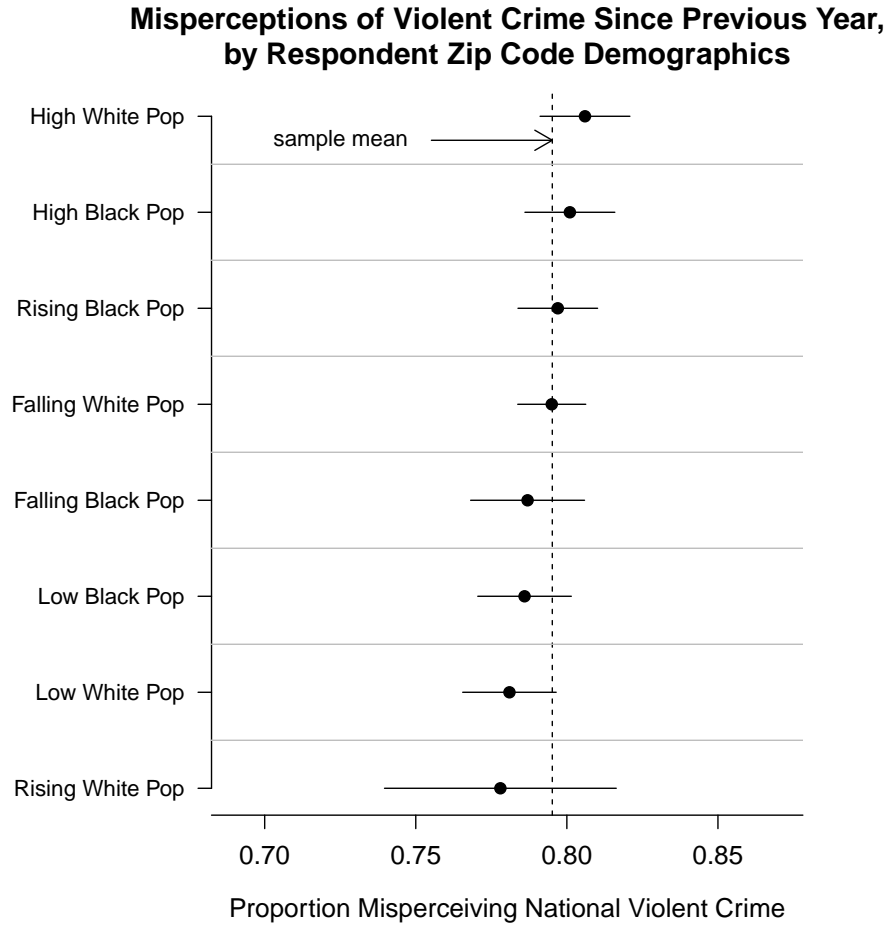


Figure 14: Misperceptions of national property crime by zip code demographics (Gallup)

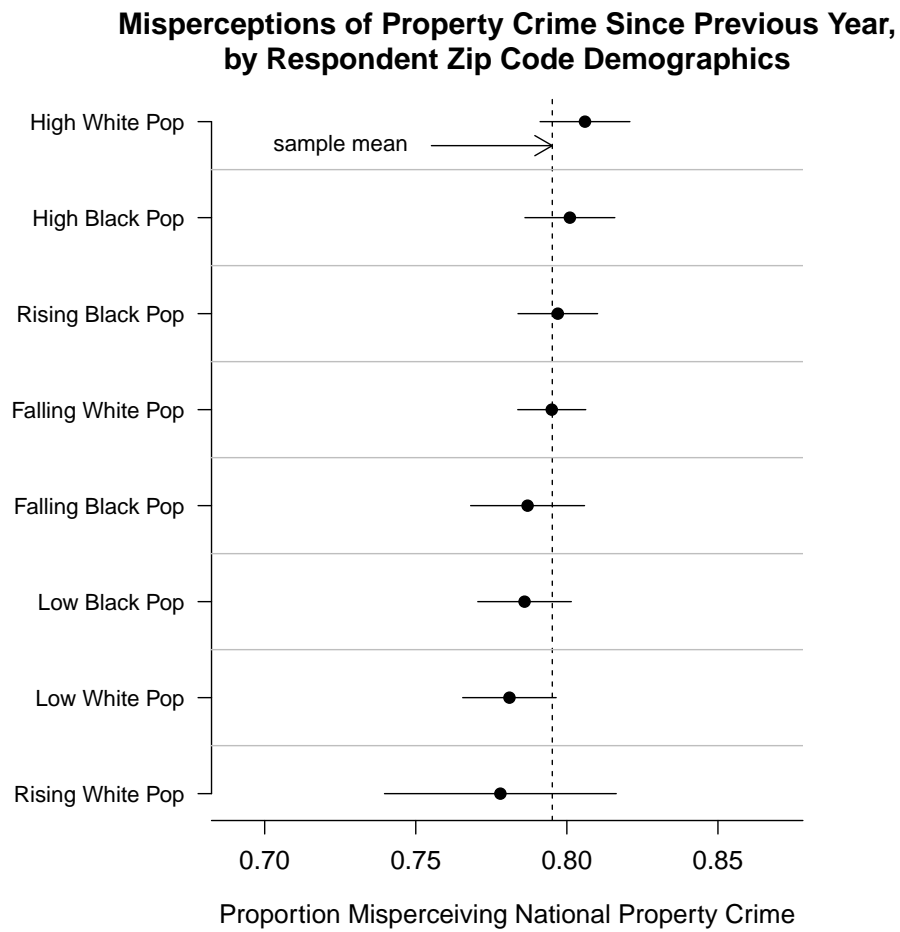


Figure 15: Misperceptions of national murder rate by zip code demographics (Gallup)

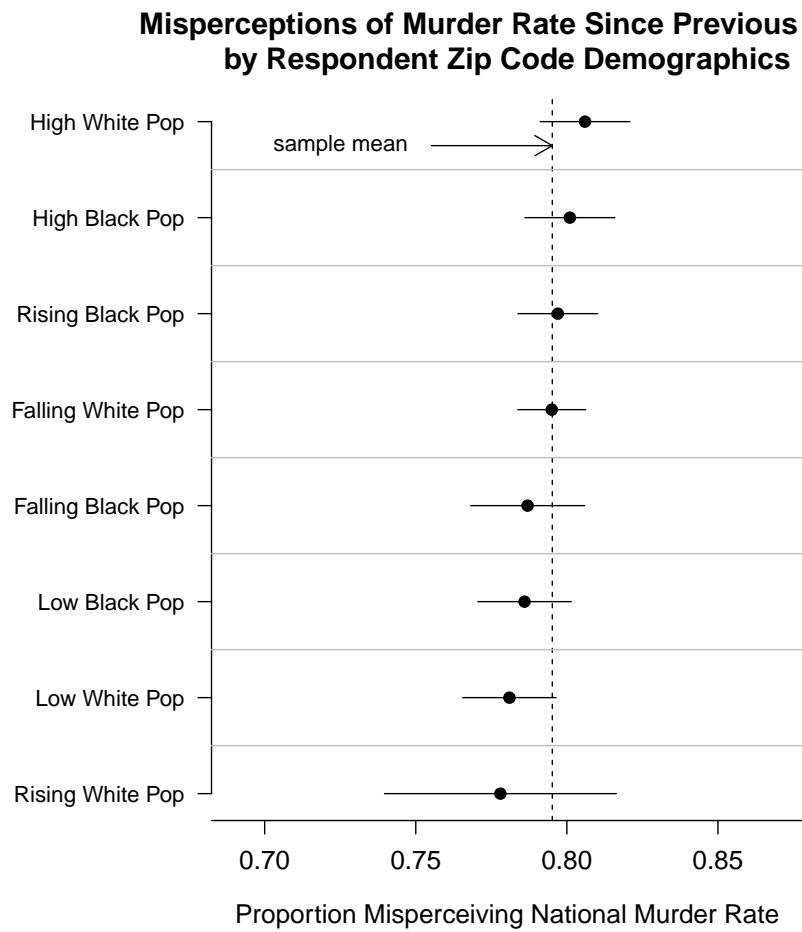


Figure 16: Misperceptions of crime by demographics in survey respondents' counties of residence, Gallup (left) and Qualtrics (right).

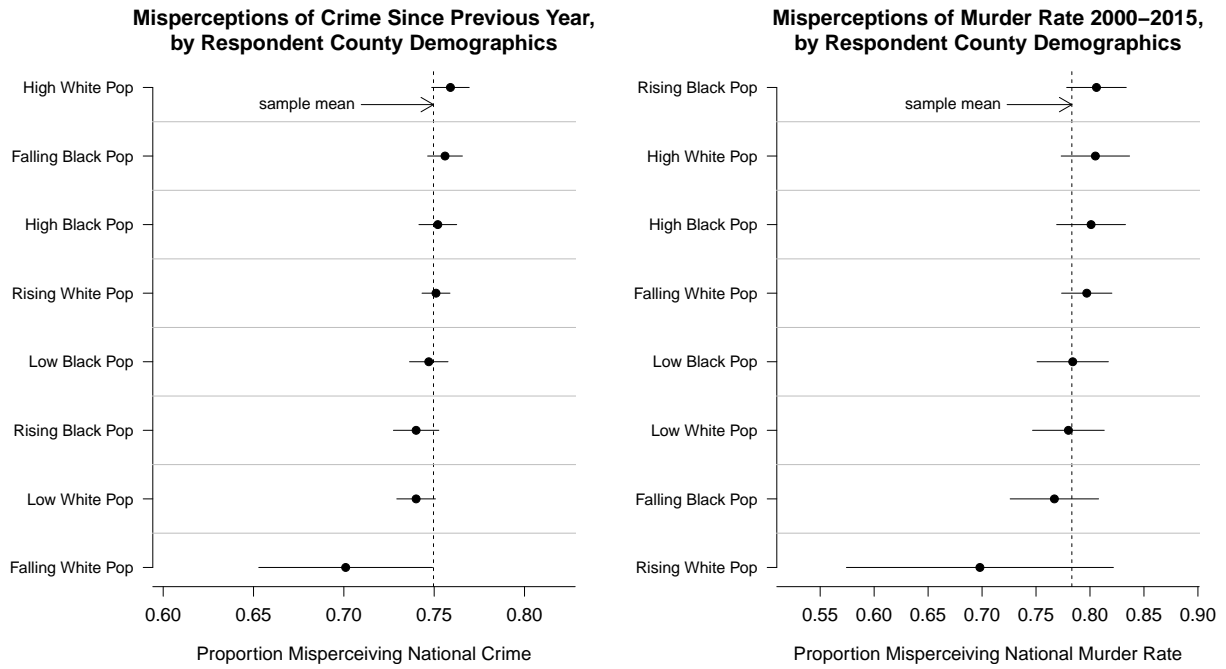


Figure 17: Misperceptions of crime by demographics in survey respondents' counties of residence, white respondents only, Gallup (left) and Qualtrics (right).

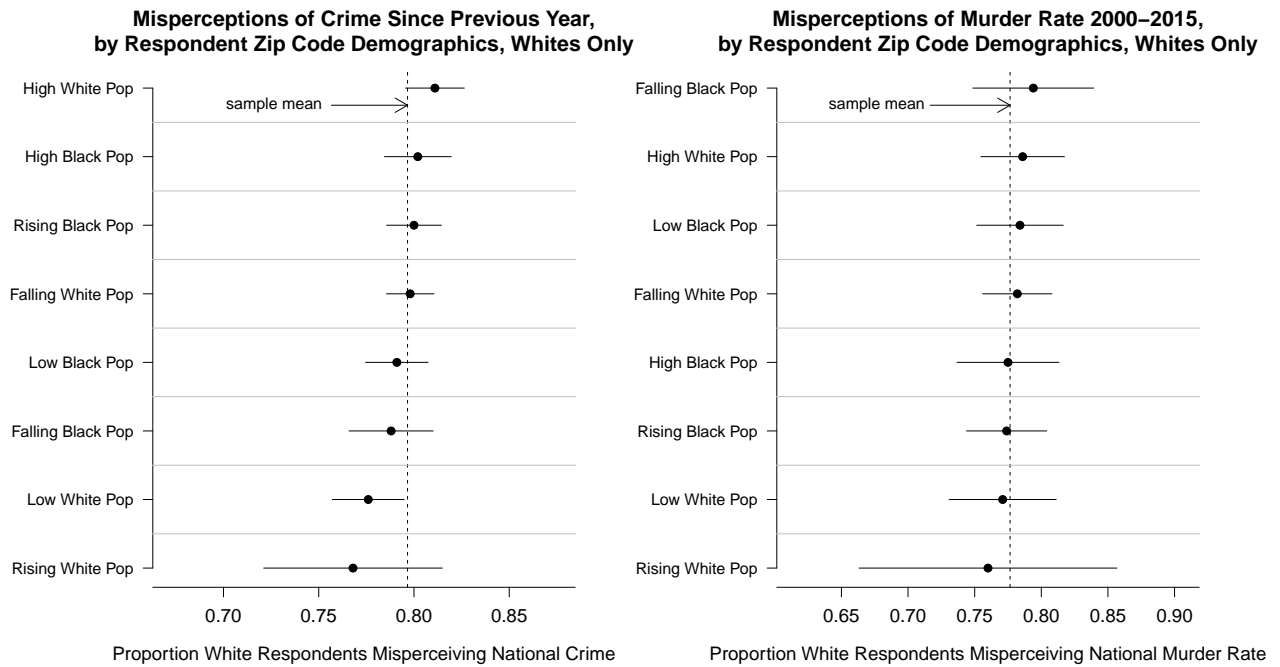


Figure 18: The figure displays treatment effects on confidence in perceptions of crime by the race of respondents among non-Hispanic white, non-Hispanic Black and Latino respondents. Surveys 1-3, pooled. Models estimating treatment effects included study fixed effects. Bars denote 95% confidence intervals.

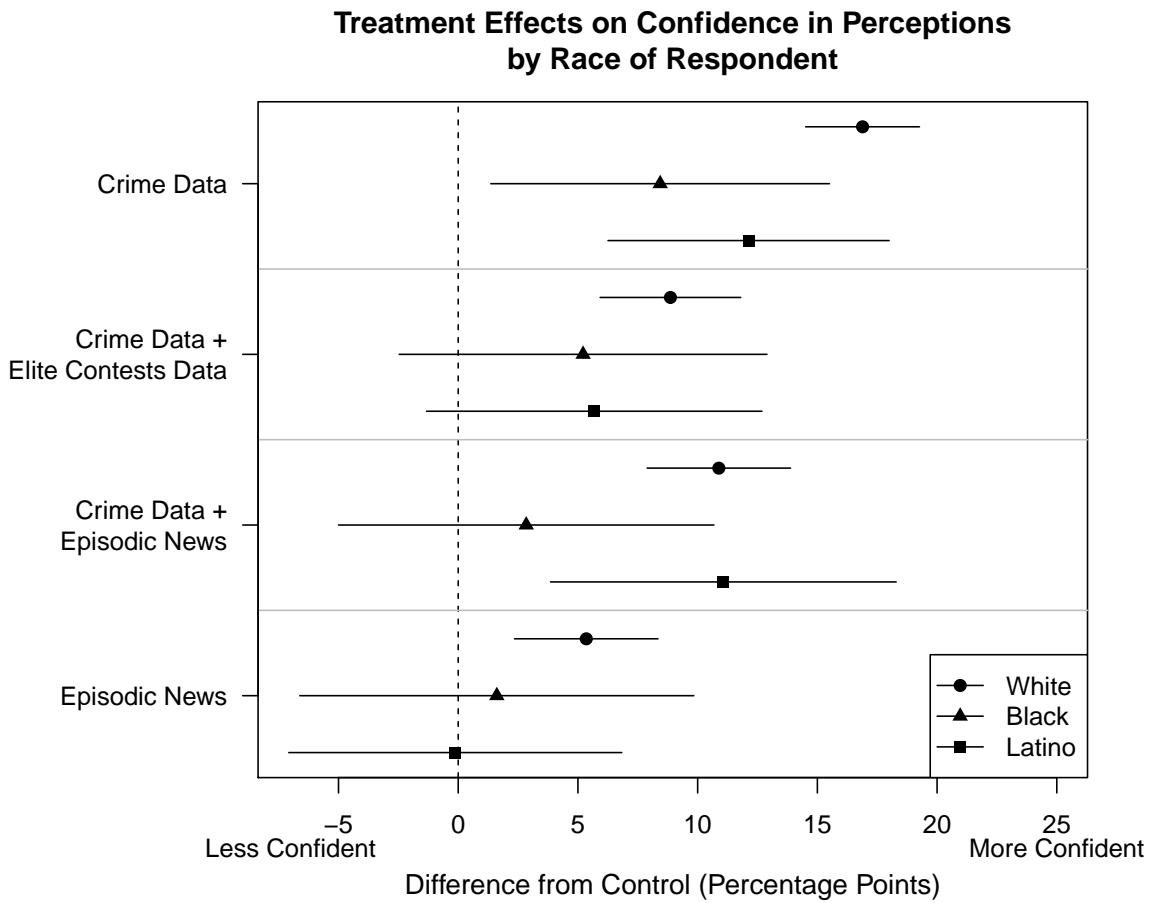
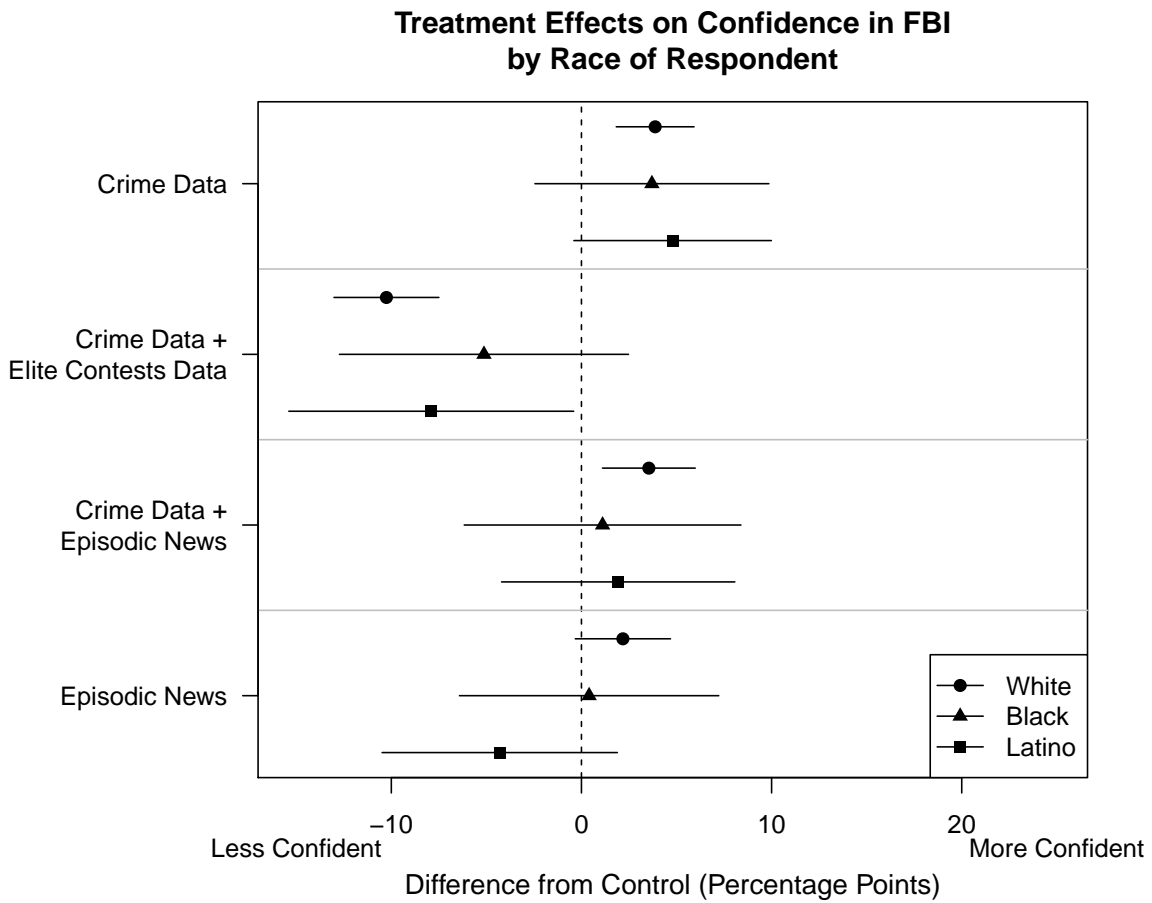


Figure 19: The figure displays treatment effects on confidence in the FBI by the race of respondents among non-Hispanic white, non-Hispanic Black and Latino respondents. Surveys 1-3, pooled. Models estimating treatment effects included study fixed effects. Bars denote 95% confidence intervals.



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