



NORTHERN

The persistence of Confirmation Bias Given Information on Gun Control among NNMC Students: an Exploratory Study

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Abstract

The topic I am researching is the persistence of Confirmation Bias Given Information on Gun Control among NNMC students, this topic is worth looking into because this type of bias can often lead to statistical errors when interpreting information. I would like to see how this bias although sometimes unintentional, might lead a person when it comes to decision making about gun control laws.

Introduction

In this research project, I am interested in looking at Northern New Mexico students and testing using a Solomon four group or a pretest/posttest with two groups, to see if student's preconceived ideas about a specific political issue such as gun control or mental health are affected by a stimulus which is presenting facts about the issue.

Theory

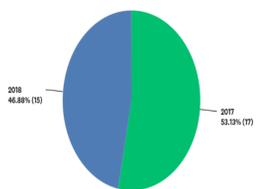
The term confirmation bias was originally coined by a psychologist named Peter Watson in the year 1960. A series of experiments were conducted in order to show that people actually are biased when it comes to confirming their preexisting beliefs. Another view on this bias is that people tend to assess the sacrifice of being wrong rather than taking the whole picture into consideration and investigating the subject in a more neutral way.

Hypothesis

My hypothesis is that student's preconceived ideas about a specific political issue such as gun control or mental health are affected by a stimulus which is presenting facts about the issue as well as the Null hypothesis, which is that there is no correlation between confirmation bias and student's opinions.

Data Collection and Methods

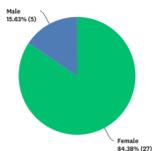
Q1 What semester was this data collected.



The chart above shows that the research was conducted over the course of two semesters. 53.13% or 17 of the respondents were from the 2017 semester and 46.88% or 15 of the respondents were from the 2018 semester.

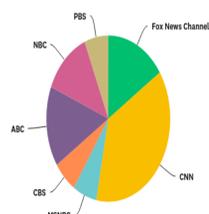
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Q3 First, I want to know a few things about you: What is your gender?



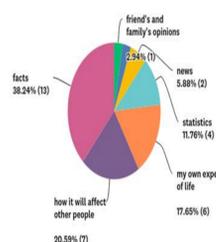
15.63% of my respondents were male while the other 84.38% were female. Making that 5 male respondents and 27 female respondents

Q10 When it comes to national political news, which of the following national television networks do you trust the most?



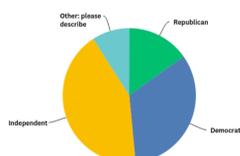
The table above shows the percentage of respondents that trust PBS, NBC, ABC, CBS, MSNBC, CNN, CNBC, or Fox News Channel as their most trustworthy national television networks when it comes to national political news. The majority of respondents (37.50%) put their trust in CNN. The least amount of respondents trust MSNBC, PBS and CBS (all three at 6.25%) and zero respondents choose CNBC

Q11 When it comes to making up your mind about national political issues, which of the following do you rely on most to make a decision?



The above table shows the frequency of the respondents that make up their minds or make decisions relying on either facts, news, statistics, their own experience, friends & family's opinions, or how it will affect others. According to the majority of respondents (38.24%) make their decisions relying on Facts. the least amount of respondents make up their mind or decisions on friends & family's opinions (2.94%)

Q9 Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or something else?



33 out of 34 respondents gave their input for the chart above. 15.5% answered as Republican, 33.33% answered as Democrat, 42.42% answered as Independent, and 9.09% answered as other, with the explanations of "Humanitarian", "No preference", and "i do not vote"

Data Analysis and Findings

Q10: When it comes to national political news, which of the following national television networks do you trust the most?

| | FOX NEWS CHANNEL | CNBC | CNN | MSNBC | CBS | ABC | NBC | PBS | TOTAL |
|-------------------|------------------|-------|--------|--------|-------|--------|--------|-------|--------|
| Q1: 2017 (A) | 11.76% | 0.00% | 41.18% | 0.00% | 5.88% | 11.76% | 23.53% | 5.88% | 56.67% |
| | 2 | 0 | 7 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 4 | 1 | 17 |
| Q1: 2018 (B) | 15.38% | 0.00% | 38.46% | 15.38% | 7.69% | 15.38% | 0.00% | 7.69% | 43.33% |
| | 2 | 0 | 5 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 13 |
| Total Respondents | 4 | 0 | 12 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 30 |

30 out of my 34 respondents answered this question. 17 of the 30 respondents were answers from the 2017 semester and 13 out of 30 were respondents from the 2018 semester with the Las Vegas concert shooting and the Parkland shooting happening in-between.

Q12: How much do you agree with the following statements regarding gun ownership/controls?

| | AGREE NOT AT ALL | AGREE A LITTLE BIT | AGREE SOMEWHAT | AGREE VERY MUCH | AGREE A GREAT DEAL | TOTAL | WEIGHTED AVERAGE |
|---|------------------|--------------------|----------------|-----------------|--------------------|-------|------------------|
| There are far too many guns out there today. | 24.24% | 21.21% | 18.18% | 18.18% | 18.18% | 33 | 2.85 |
| The major percentage of gun ownership are hunters. | 18.18% | 15.15% | 36.36% | 15.15% | 15.15% | 33 | 2.94 |
| The Second Amendment guarantees a person's right to own guns with no regulations. | 17.65% | 17.65% | 23.53% | 23.53% | 17.65% | 34 | 3.06 |
| There is no reason for people to own assault-style weapons. | 17.65% | 26.47% | 17.65% | 5.88% | 32.35% | 34 | 3.09 |
| Sensible gun regulations would make us all safer at public events. | 8.82% | 17.65% | 20.59% | 17.65% | 35.29% | 34 | 3.53 |
| There should be more regulations about guns. | 5.88% | 11.76% | 26.47% | 26.47% | 29.41% | 34 | 3.62 |
| Guns are important to help people protect themselves. | 0.00% | 2.94% | 29.41% | 23.53% | 44.12% | 34 | 4.09 |
| Guns don't kill people, people do. | 0.00% | 2.94% | 11.76% | 29.41% | 55.88% | 34 | 4.38 |

When looking at the fourth statement, "There is no reason for people to own assault-style weapons" we see that,

- 11 out of the 34 respondents AGREE A GREAT DEAL,
- 6 of the 34 AGREE NOT AT ALL,
- 9 respondents AGREE A LITTLE BIT

- 6 AGREE SOMEWHAT,
- 2 AGREE VERY MUCH.

Given statement six, "There should be more regulations about guns", We can see that,

- 10 of the 34 respondents AGREE A GREAT DEAL,
- 2 AGREE NOT AT ALL
- 4 AGREE A LITTLE BIT
- 9 AGREE SOMEWHAT,
- 9 AGREE VERY MUCH,

Discussion

Some limitations or some shortcomings that got in the way of my method of research was that a lot of absences took place in the class on the day I administered my survey. In the future I plan to ask more qualitative questions in order to gain a better understanding of the participants opinions. I had originally chosen classes based on a random sample however due to time constraint and unavailable classes, I had to switch to a convenience sample in order to get the surveys completed. The steps I took in order to ensure that the participants answers stayed both confidential and anonymous was to keep any and all personal information off of the survey and ensure that no information about participants is passed on to anyone else or shared in any way.

Conclusions

In this case I have to accept the null hypothesis. The students preconceived ideas about political issues such as gun control were not affected by the stimuli that I had presented in the survey. The Las Vegas concert shooting, as well as the Parkland Florida high school shooting happened between the time of my research on this topic, therefore it did have some effect on the opinions the students had regarding these issues from one semester to the other.

References

- Myers, David G., and Jean M. Twenge. Exploring social psychology. McGraw-Hill Education, 2018.
- Babbie, Earl R. The basics of social research. Cengage Learning, 2017

Acknowledgements

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