How Perspective Taking Can Deepen the Partisan Divide:

Presuming Others' Biases in Fake News Detection Fuels Them in the Self

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Abstract

Political perspectives should be informed by facts, but determining the facts requires people to distinguish legitimate from fake news. This article considers two accounts that make contrasting predictions about how perspective taking may reduce or exacerbate partisan biases in people's beliefs about what news is real or fake. In Studies 1 and 2, participants who considered whether a partisan would believe news headlines to be legitimate became more partisan themselves in their own beliefs about the articles' legitimacy (i.e., believing or rejecting headlines that are friendly or unfriendly to the partisan's own side). Study 3 found that after considering what a partisan would see, participants became more convinced of the relative gullibility (vs. rationality) of the other (vs. their own) political side, which explained participants' own exaggerated biases. The Discussion considers when perspective taking is likely to attenuate versus exacerbate divides between perspective takers and the targets of their consideration.

Keywords: political polarization, fake news, perspective taking, balance theory

Statement of Relevance

In many nations, political polarization is on the rise. It is difficult to address partisan division when there exists basic disagreement on what facts are even true. As social media has decentralized the distribution of politically relevant news, misinformation can easily spread. This places more onus on individuals to differentiate what is legitimate versus fake news. One challenge is that individuals naturally filter news through their own partisan lenses, being more likely to embrace (and be duped by) news that appears friendly to their own political tribe. We considered whether perspective taking—thinking through whether political out-group members would see news headlines as legitimate or fake—might reduce partisan biases in perceptions of what news headlines are real versus fake. Instead, perspective taking exacerbated bias. Although perspective taking has helped bridge certain divides, the present research highlights how focusing on out-group members' apparent irrationality can reinforce one's own partisan biases.

How Perspective Taking Can Deepen the Partisan Divide:

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Electorates are more polarized and less politically open-minded than they have been in decades (Pew Research Center, 2019). Various factors promote such tribalism. Different factions may have entrenched policy disagreements because people hold contrasting and overly simplified understandings of key political issues (Fernbach et al.,2013). People may seek out ideologically consistent information (Nickerson, 1998) or simply reinforce their own worldviews in their social media echo chambers (Schkade et al., 2010). Furthermore, people know this polarization exists. People project their own polarized worldviews onto their understanding of the political arena more generally (Van Boven et al., 2012). Perceptions of strong partisan divides then reinforce such polarization in the self (Van Bavel & Pereira, 2018).

One force that has served to promote cohesion in free, ideologically diverse societies is a well-functioning media that helps to identify and disseminate basic facts. But as the digital era has democratized the use of communication channels, bad actors can more easily produce and spread misinformation. Social media is an ideal environment for the spread of fake news. People can easily share news stories—including illegitimate ones—with the click of a button. They gain legitimacy in readers' eyes not merely because they are passed along by trusted members of their social networks, but because social media users display a certain *social loafing* by acting as if truth verification is someone else's responsibility (Jun et al., 2017). This contributes to an environment in which fake news stories—often those that people *want* to be true—spread more quickly than legitimate stories (Vosoughi et al., 2018). Such rapid spread—potentially coming from multiple members of one's social network—can promote perceived legitimacy through repeated exposure that often defeats the efforts of fact checkers (Pennycook et al. 2019).

We focus on a particular problem with regard to what news people believe is legitimate (as opposed to fake): whether it is friendly to one's own political worldview. In the American political context, it is often predictable which Americans will be quickest to accept an attack on or vindication of major political figures like Donald Trump or Joe Biden. And even when third-party fact-checkers flag statements as false, political biases remain in who believes those arbiters of truth are themselves impartial and thus credible (Galak & Critcher, 2023). In short, people display *partisan legitimacy beliefs* (PLBs) in evaluating partisan media stories: Independent of the actual legitimacy of news accounts, people are more likely to perceive stories as legitimate [fake] to the extent that they are friendly [hostile] to one's own political worldview (Batailler et al., 2022; Gawronski, 2021; Pennycook & Rand, 2019; Traberg & van der Linden 2022; Van Bavel & Pereira, 2018).

Previous research has shown that people's initial intuitions for what is real or fake news can change (and often improve) with analytical thought (Pennycook & Rand, 2019), which means there is malleability in perceptions of articles' legitimacy. In this article, we consider how and why induced perspective taking may affect partisan legitimacy beliefs. That said, the existing literature offers mixed evidence regarding whether and how asking people to first estimate what (il)legitimacy someone else (a political partisan) would see in an article might subsequently change people's own display of partisan legitimacy beliefs. On the one hand, perspective taking helps to bridge divides by fostering understanding and social connection (Gilin et al., 2013; Tuller et al., 2015) and encourage convergence with others' worldviews (Suzuki et al., 2016). In a quite different domain, Jung et al. (2020) showed that people's own affective experiences would assimilate toward those of another if participants themselves tried to see what the others saw. This *vicarious construal effect* might extend to the present work if

through trying to understand a partisan's—in particular, an out-group partisan's—construal, participants' own baseline partisan legitimacy beliefs might be counteracted by the (opposite) partisan legitimacy beliefs they expected others to display.

That said, perspective taking does not always promote social convergence. It sometimes backfires and leads to discord (Epley et al., 2006; Mooijman & Stern, 2016; Tarrant et al., 2012). For example, although in cooperative contexts perspective taking can increase prosocial behavior (Underwood & Moore, 1982), in competitive contexts it can fuel unethical behavior (Pierce et al., 2013). Particularly illuminating evidence comes from research showing that people can become more entrenched in their own political attitudes after considering why a partisan out-group member would arrive at a different policy belief (Catapano et al., 2019). This was largely because people appealed to contrasting values—those the self did not share—to make sense of out-group members' positions. Entertaining such value-incongruent argumentations convinced the self of its own initial perspective.

On the one hand, Catapano et al.'s (2019) work might appear to have little relevance to the present goals. That is, people's beliefs about what news is legitimate or fake do not require people to consider the relevance of values to different policy positions. After all, people can easily agree on what information is real or fake and then decide how that information—depending on its consonance with their values—should inform their own policy attitudes. But an unexpected finding in this work may be illuminating for our purposes. Catapano and colleagues found that generating arguments that a political *in-group* member would make also led to more self-persuasion, even though this was not explained by their focal value-incongruence mechanism. They speculate that balance theory (Heider, 1958) may help make sense of this mystery. That is, people may be motivated to assimilate toward the worldview of an

in-group member and contrast themselves away from an out-group member, even ones they merely conjured up internally.

We present four studies that consider whether partisan perspective taking will change people's partisan legitimacy beliefs. The two contrasting accounts are best differentiated by examining the effects of out-partisan perspective taking. By the first account—best reflected by the vicarious construal effect (Jung et al., 2020)—considering what a political opponent sees in media may counteract one's own baseline biases and reduce PLBs. By the second account—best foreshadowed by Catapano et al.'s (2019) findings and balance theory—considering an out-group's perspective may actually exacerbate PLBs. Adapted to our context, considering how a partisan may attempt to discern an article's legitimacy may encourage the self to dismiss an out-group member as gullible or embrace an in-group member as quite rational, thereby strengthening one's own biased construals in the process. After the first two studies find clear support for one of these two hypotheses, Study 3 will more directly test the mechanism.

Study 1

Study 1 tested whether partisan perspective taking reduced or exacerbated PLBs. We then aimed to distinguish effects of in-party versus out-party perspective taking.

Method

Participants and design. We recruited 1,684 Americans from Amazon Mechanical Turk (AMT). They were paid a nominal fee for their participation. We recruited from this population for this and subsequent studies for two primary reasons. First, AMT facilitated the recruitment of large samples. We did not know the effect sizes *a priori*. Appreciating this common limitation, Simmons et al. (2013) suggest that experiments include at least 50 participants per condition unless there is clear justification why fewer are needed. By maximizing sample sizes given

available lab resources for the month in which the study was run, we clearly exceeded this standard by averaging over 336 participants per condition (net exclusions). Second, AMT has been shown to offer a viable population for conducting research on politically relevant beliefs. Participants sampled from AMT have been shown to be comparable to those recruited from more traditional national panels with respect to demographics, psychological characteristics, and ideologies (Clifford et al., 2015).

Participants were randomly assigned to one of three between-participants *perspective* conditions: liberal, conservative, or control. All participants answered compliance and attention checks. We excluded participants—as was done in prior work (Pennycook, Cannon, & Rand, 2019)—who indicated searching online to determine the legitimacy of the headlines ($n = 77$). This left 1,607 in all analyses reported below. The interested reader can find results with even more stringent inclusion criteria for this and the remaining studies in the Supplemental Materials. As can be seen there, the consistency of the results with different exclusion criteria essentially verifies the robustness of all central results. The study was preregistered. All materials, data, and preregistrations associated with this manuscript are available online: https://researchbox.org/1772&PEER_REVIEW_passcode=EVGJDJ.

Procedure. Participants began by completing a set of demographic questions (see Supplemental Materials for full details). Two items measured political orientation. These questions asked, "On the following scale, indicate the extent to which you consider yourself to be…" The endpoints of each were 1 (*very liberal / very Democratic*) and 7 (*very conservative / very Republican*). We created a participant political orientation measure by averaging these items ($r = .79$) and subtracting the midpoint from the composite. This allowed the *participant political orientation* composite to have a meaningful midpoint of ideological neutrality. We then divided

by the sample standard deviation so that the composite's units reflected the number of standard deviations a participant differed from this neutral midpoint.

We informed participants that the study was examining how people distinguish real and fake news headlines, the sort they might see on social media. We asked participants to provide assurance that they would not search for more information on these headlines during the experiment itself. Participants saw 24 headlines, each as would appear on a social media newsfeed. Half of the headlines were legitimate news stories, whereas half were fake. Within each set of 12, six headlines included content that was friendly to the Democratic Party, whereas six headlines were friendly to the Republican Party (see Materials below).

Overall, participants considered these 24 news stories twice. In each block, the headlines appeared in a random sequence. Only for the first exposure did participants' task vary by condition. For each headline, those in the control condition answered, "To what extent are you interested in reading this article?" Responses were offered on a 7-point scale anchored at 1(*very uninterested*) and 7(*very interested*).

Those in the liberal and conservative perspective conditions were instead asked to perspective-take and estimate how likely it was that a yoked participant would think that the story was real or fake. More specifically, these participants were told they would be paired with a future participant who responded in one of two ways to the two political orientation items that participants themselves had completed. Those in the liberal perspective condition saw that the other person would be someone who had answered a "2" on each item; those in the conservative perspective condition, a "6". To make certain that participants internalized this manipulation, we asked them to write a few sentences characterizing the yoked participant's political views. Then, upon seeing each headline, participants had to guess how the yoked other would respond to this

question: "If you had to guess, do you think this is real news (a legitimate story that describes real events) or fake news (a fictitious story, one meant to masquerade as a legitimate news article, meaning it has the intent to trick or fool readers)?" The 7-point scale was anchored at 1(*definitely fake*) and 7 (*definitely real*).

During the second viewing of the headlines, all participants responded to each headline by indicating "what percent chance is it that this story is real news (a legitimate story that describes real events) as opposed to fake news (a fictitious story, one meant to masquerade as a legitimate news article, meaning it has the intent to trick or fool readers)?" Participants indicated these *article legitimacy beliefs* on 101-point slider scales anchored at 0% (*definitely fake*) and 100% (*definitely real*). Participants adjusted from the default response of 0 to arrive at their final judgment.

Materials. We identified a set of 24 headlines—12 legitimate and 12 fake—that were in circulation that we thought had a partisan bent to them. To validate this assumption, we recruited 100 Americans from AMT to rate each headline on the following question: "Would you say that this headline (and the accompanying article) is likely to offer content that is more likely to please, be friendly to, or justify the perspective of someone who is more of a liberal or Democrat, or someone who is more of a conservative or Republican?" Responses were offered on five-point scales anchored at 1 (*Definitely a liberal / Democrat*) and 5 (*Definitely a conservative/Republican*). The midpoint (3) was labeled "*Equally friendly to both sides*". Articles *a priori* categorized as having a conservative bent were seen as more friendly to conservatives ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 0.45$) than articles categorized as having a liberal bent ($M = 2.00$, $SD = 0.68$), paired $t(99) = 22.49$, $p < .001$, $d = 2.25$. When we analyzed the articles in isolation, all 24 headlines differed from the midpoint (3) in the expected direction, and 23 of them

significantly so ($2.28 < t\text{s} < 21.63$, $10^{-5} < p\text{s} < .025$). Ratings of one article, although

directionally rated as liberal leaning ($M = 2.75$, $SD = 1.53$), did not reach significance, $t(99) =$

1.64, $p = .105$, $d = 0.16$. We retained it in the main study.

Results

　　　　We aimed to test how partisan perspective taking changed the partisan bent of

participants' beliefs that news stories reflected actual (instead of fake) news. Overall, we conduct

our analyses in two complementary ways. First, we use all data to test whether the partisan

nature of participants' article legitimacy beliefs is amplified (or diminished) in response to each

partisan perspective taking intervention. Second, we recode our data to differentiate whether the

perspective taking manipulations encouraged participants to consider how an in-group member

or an out-group member would interpret the articles. In this way, the second set of analyses have

the potential to determine whether effects identified by the first set of the analyses are driven by

the effects of in-group perspective taking and/or out-group perspective taking.

　　　　Does partisan perspective taking affect partisan legitimacy beliefs? We conducted a

mixed model predicting article legitimacy beliefs. We included fixed effects of *perspective*

(categorical: liberal, conservative, control), *article bent* (-1 = liberal, +1 = conservative), *article*

truth (-1 = fake news, +1 = legitimate news), and *participant political orientation* (higher scores,

more conservative). As preregistered, we included all higher-order interactions that could be

created from these variables. In addition, we included random effects of *participant* and *article*

to account for non-independence across judgments.

　　　　A main effect of article truth suggested that participants could distinguish between the

fake ($M = 29.62\%$) and legitimate ($M = 55.42\%$) news stories, $F(1, 20.01) = 34.37$, $p < .001$.

That said, an Article Bent X Participant Political Orientation interaction suggested that

participants were responding to the news articles in a partisan way, $F(1, 36923) = 2,994.91$, $p <$ .001. Although not focal to our central hypotheses, an Article Bent X Participant Political Orientation X Article Truth interaction indicated that partisan legitimacy beliefs were qualified by whether the story was legitimate, $F(1, 36923) = 27.48$, $p < .001$. This reflected that although there was a partisan bent to participants' beliefs about the legitimacy of fake news stories, $F(1, 36923) = 1,224.32$, $p < .001$, this pattern was magnified for legitimate news stories, $F(1, 36923) = 1,798.08$, $p < .001$. We suspect that this pattern—replicated in Studies 2 and 3—reflects that in the minds of participants there was more ambiguity about whether the legitimate stories (compared to the fake stories) were in fact real. That is, the article legitimacy beliefs about the legitimate news stories were closer to 50%; such uncertainty likely offered more room for partisanship to then color people's perspectives.

Of central interest, we observed a Perspective X Article Bent X Participant Political Orientation interaction, $F(2, 36923) = 23.98$, $p < .001$. We decomposed the critical three-way interaction by comparing each of the partisan perspective taking conditions (conservative and liberal) against the control condition. A 2(Perspective: conservative or control) X Article Bent X Participant Political Orientation interaction, $B = 2.10$, $SE = 0.33$, $t(36923) = 6.46$, $p < .001$, showed that participants who first tried to imagine how much legitimacy a conservative would see in the articles became more entrenched in their own partisan perspective on what was legitimate and what was fake news. A parallel 2(Perspective: liberal or control) X Article Bent X Participant Political Orientation interaction, $B = 1.66$, $SE = 0.32$, $t(36923) = 5.16$, $p < .001$, showed the liberal perspective manipulation had a similar effect. A non-significant Perspective X Article Bent X Participant Political Orientation X Article Truth interaction suggested that the effects of the perspective taking manipulation on how much participants showed a partisan bent

in their evaluation of what news stories were legitimate did not depend on whether the article was fake or legitimate news, $F < 1$.

Does in-group and/or out-group perspective taking enhance partisan legitimacy beliefs? Our initial analyses showed that partisan perspective taking increased the partisan lens by which participants differentiated legitimate from fake news. Left untested is whether it is taking the perspective of in-group members, out-group members, or both, that leads to these polarized partisan perceptions. To distinguish these possibilities through clarifying analyses, we first defined a new variable *congruence.* Recall the participant political orientation variable possesses a meaningful 0, such that participants with positive scores are on the conservative or Republican end of the spectrum, whereas those with negative scores are on the liberal or Democratic end. Participants engaged in congruent (or in-group) perspective taking when they were in the liberal or conservative perspective taking condition and had a negative or positive political orientation score, respectively. Participants instead engaged in incongruent (or out-group) perspective taking when they were in the liberal or conservative perspective taking condition but had a positive or negative political orientation score, respectively. Participants in the control perspective-taking condition again formed the reference or comparison group for this analysis. For these analyses, we excluded the 264 participants—spread across all three conditions—who expressed perfect neutrality on the participant political orientation variable.

We again conducted a mixed model predicting the article legitimacy beliefs. In this case, we included a fixed effect of congruence (categorical: in-group, out-group, or control) in place of the perspective taking condition. The model again included article bent, article truth, and participant political orientation. All possible interaction terms, as well as random effects of participant and story, were again included.

The Congruence X Article Bent X Participant Political Orientation interaction was significant, $F(2, 30851) = 20.62$, $p < .001$ (see Table 1). We proceeded to examine whether this interaction reflected that it was taking the in-group and/or the out-group perspective that increased the partisan bent of participants' perceptions. First, we found that the 2(Congruence: out-group or control) X Article Bent X Participant Political Orientation was significant, B = 1.79, $SE = 0.33$, $t(30851) = 5.48$, $p < .001$. That is, when participants considered how an out-group member would judge the legitimacy of news sources, participants displayed amplified partisan biases in their assessments of what was legitimate versus fake. Second, we also found that the 2(Congruence: in-group or control) X Article Bent X Participant Political Orientation interaction was significant, B = 1.78, $SE = 0.32$, $t(30851) = 5.48$, $p < .001$. In other words, first considering how an in-group member would assess the headlines also amplified participants' partisan biases in evaluating what was real, legitimate news. The 2(Congruence: in-group or out-group) X Article Bent X Participant Political Orientation was not significant, B = 0.02, $SE = 0.34$, $t < 1$.

Study 2

Following initial evidence that partisan perspective taking exacerbated PLBs, Study 2 tests whether these findings replicate with a different set of real and fake headlines used in previous research (Pennycook et al., 2019).

Method

Participants and design. We recruited 599 American participants from AMT. They were paid a nominal fee for their participation. Participants were randomly assigned to one of three between-participants *perspective* conditions: liberal, conservative, or control. Forty-seven participants were excluded because they admitted to searching online for the headlines during the study. This left 552 participants in all analyses reported below.

Table 1

Article Legitimacy Beliefs by Political Orientation, Article Bent, and Congruence (Study 1)

	Liberal participants		Conservative participants		Partisan Legitimacy Beliefs	
Congruence	Liberal articles	Conservative articles	Liberal articles	Conservative articles	B (SE)	t
Control	47.34	35.72	39.80	52.83	6.16 (0.22)a	28.04***
In-Group	48.30	33.63	36.82	53.90	7.94 (0.24)b	33.13***
Out-Group	48.44	33.03	35.84	52.24	7.95 (0.24)b	32.93***

Note. Results for liberal and conservative participants are model-predicted values for those who are -1SD or +1SD from political neutrality. The Partisan Legitimacy Belief columns provide information on the partisan nature of article legitimacy beliefs for each level of congruence. The unstandardized beta (standard error), along with the accompanying *t* statistic, describes the Article Bent X Participant Political Orientation interaction for that congruence level. The significant positive interactions reflect that participants in each condition are strongly biased toward believing partisan-congruent (vs. partisan-incongruent) news stories are legitimate, a pattern that in-group and out-group perspective taking exacerbates. Unstandardized betas that do not share a subscript differ at the $p < .001$ level. ***$p < .001$.

Procedure. The Study 2 procedure was similar to that of Study 1, but instead made use of a different set of 24 headlines. Pennycook et al. (2019) used these headlines in a study of people's ability to distinguish legitimate from fake news. Participants indicated their political orientation on two items ($r = .89$), which we transformed (like in Study 1) so that 0 reflected ideological neutrality. Participants considered the headlines twice. On the first pass, participants considered either the articles' veracity through the eyes of a (liberal or conservative) partisan or instead participants' own personal interest in reading the article. On the second viewing, participants responded to the key measures of interest, the article legitimacy beliefs.

Results

As in Study 1, we performed our analyses in two parts. First, we conducted analyses using all of the data to test whether the partisan perspective taking manipulation—with this new set of headlines—exacerbated partisan legitimacy beliefs. Second, we performed clarifying analyses to determine whether any effects of the partisan perspective taking manipulation were driven by participants taking an in-group and/or an out-group perspective.

Does partisan perspective taking affect partisan legitimacy beliefs? We conducted a mixed model predicting participants' article legitimacy beliefs. The model specification was identical to that used in Study 1. Once again, we observed a main effect of article truth, suggesting that participants distinguished between fake ($M = 32.24\%$) and legitimate ($M = 57.43\%$) news stories, $F(1, 12668) = 2{,}946.05$, $p < .001$. Participants displayed partisan legitimacy beliefs, as evidenced by a significant Article Bent X Participant Political Orientation interaction, $F(1, 12668) = 372.91$, $p < .001$. This effect was again further qualified by Article Truth, $F(1, 12668) = 34.78$, $p < .001$. This reflected that although people displayed partisan

legitimacy beliefs when evaluating fake news stories, $F(1, 12668) = 89.95$, $p < .001$, this pattern was magnified for legitimate news stories, $F(1, 12668) = 317.74$, $p < .001$.

Most centrally, we observed a Perspective X Article Bent X Participant Political Orientation interaction, $F(2, 12668) = 8.87$, $p < .001$. We decomposed the critical three-way interaction by comparing each of the partisan perspective taking conditions (conservative and liberal) against the control condition. We observed a 2(Perspective: conservative or control) X Article Bent X Participant Political Orientation interaction, B = 1.37, $SE = 0.54$, $t(12668) = 2.53$, $p = .011$. A parallel 2(Perspective: liberal or control) X Article Bent X Participant Political Orientation interaction, B = 2.33, $SE = 0.56$, $t(12668) = 4.15$, $p < .001$, showed the liberal perspective manipulation had a similar effect. This shows that participants who first considered whether a partisan—liberal or conservative—would see an article to be legitimate then displayed elevated partisan legitimacy beliefs. The central three-way interaction was not further qualified by whether the article was actually fake or real, $F(2, 12668) = 2.68$, $p = .069$.

Does in-group and/or out-group perspective taking amplify partisan legitimacy beliefs? We created a *congruence* (in-group, out-group, or control) variable using the same approach as in Study 1. For these analyses, we excluded 50 participants—who came from all three perspective conditions—who expressed perfect neutrality on the participant political orientation composite. The model specification also matched that used in Study 1. The Congruence X Article Bent X Participant Political Orientation interaction was significant, $F(2, 10828) = 9.28$, $p < .001$ (see Table 2). We proceeded to examine whether this interaction reflected that it was taking the in-group and/or the out-group perspective that increased partisan legitimacy beliefs.

Table 2

Article Legitimacy Beliefs by Political Orientation, Article Bent, and Congruence (Study 2)

Congruence	Liberal participants		Conservative participants		Partisan Legitimacy Beliefs	
	Liberal articles	Conservative articles	Liberal articles	Conservative articles	B (SE)	t
Control	45.58	41.20	42.67	51.14	3.21 (0.37)$_a$	8.71***
In-Group	49.21	38.65	43.07	50.36	4.46 (0.40)$_b$	11.07***
Out-Group	47.21	36.90	41.09	53.09	5.58 (0.41)$_b$	13.62***

Note. Results for liberal and conservative participants are model-predicted values for those who are -1SD or +1SD from political neutrality. The Partisan Legitimacy Belief columns provide information on the partisan nature of article legitimacy beliefs for each level of congruence. The unstandardized betas (standard error), along with the accompanying *t* statistic, describe the Article Bent X Participant Political Orientation interaction for that congruence level. The significant positive interactions reflect that participants in each condition are strongly biased toward believing partisan-congruent (vs. partisan-incongruent) news stories are legitimate, a pattern that in-group and out-group perspective taking exacerbates. Unstandardized betas that do not share a subscript differ at the $p < .05$ level. ***$p < .001$.

Again, we found that the 2(Congruence: out-group or control) X Article Bent X Participant Political Orientation interaction was significant, B = 2.36, *SE* = 0.55, *t*(10828) = 4.29, *p* < .001. Participants who first considered the perspective of an out-group member showed amplified partisan legitimacy beliefs. We also found that the 2(Congruence: in-group or control) X Article Bent X Participant Political Orientation was significant, B = 1.25, *SE* = 0.55, *t*(10828) = 2.29, *p* = .022; thus, in-group perspective taking amplified partisan legitimacy beliefs as well. The 2(Congruence: out-group or in-group) X Article Bent X Participant Political Orientation interaction fell just shy of significance, B = 1.12, *SE* = 0.57, *t*(10828) = 1.94, *p* = .052.

Study 3

In an effort to better understand the mechanism underlying these effects, we first conducted a preliminary study (Supplemental Materials Study) using a different (now, third) set of legitimate and fake headlines. The study found that it was important that partisan perspective taking was about how the others would judge the articles' legitimacy; simply estimating those partisans' interest in reading the article did not produce the same level of partisanship in article legitimacy beliefs. Study 3 aims to more directly capture the process by which partisan perspective taking—by having participants focus on another's information processing—leads participants to simulate a political reasoning process that they may wish to dismiss as irrational and gullible (for out-group perspective taking) or embrace as rational and reasoned (for in-group perspective taking). Such shifts in perceptions of the rationality of partisans' political reasoning may then explain the amplification in participants' own PLBs, a reflection of a dismissal of the out-group member's (imagined) conclusions or an embrace of the in-group member's.

Method

Participants and design. We recruited 2,021 Americans from AMT to participate. Participants received a nominal fee for their participation. Participants were randomly assigned to one of three *perspective* conditions: liberal, conservative, or control. One hundred forty-five participants were excluded because they admitted to searching online for the headlines during the study. This left 1,876 participants in all analyses reported below. The study was preregistered.

Procedure. Participants started by completing the two-item political orientation measure ($r = .76$) used in previous studies. As before, *liberal* and *conservative* perspective participants were told they would be paired with a future participant who responded to the political orientation items in a particular way. Participants considered the headlines twice. The first time, liberal and conservative perspective participants estimated whether the yoked other would judge each headline to be legitimate or fake. Control participants instead rated their own interest in reading each article.

Study 3's procedure was different from the previous studies' in two critical respects. First, although we used the headlines that were used in Study 1, this time we removed the news source from the images. This required participants to lean solely on the content of the headline in determining its legitimacy. Second, after Wave 1, we added a new measure to assess participants' beliefs about the rationality of Democrats' and (separately) Republicans' political reasoning.

These *partisan rationality* measures were administered following the first viewing (and thus after the critical manipulation), but before participants' second viewing of the headlines (when they would provide their own article legitimacy beliefs). Participants considered both a liberal and a conservative. Each target was identified in the same way that the perspective-taking

targets were—as someone who answered a 2 (liberal) or a 6 (conservative) to both political orientation items that all participants completed at the study's beginning.

Participants rated each target on four items (listed in descending order of their single factor loading): "How objective do you think this person is in their approach to politics?" (1 = *very biased*, 9 = *very objective*), "How much does this person leans on reason, versus ignorance, in their approach to politics?" (1 = *completely ignorance*, 9 = *completely reason*), "How rational, versus irrational, do you think this person is in their approach to politics?" (1 = *very irrational*, 9 = *very rational*), and "How gullible (easily fooled) is this person in their approach to politics?" (1 = *not very gullible*, 9 = *very gullible*; reverse-scored). The partisan targets were considered in a counterbalanced order.

We averaged the four liberal rationality items (α = .85). Separately, we averaged the four conservative rationality items (α = .86). The two composites were negatively correlated (r = -.37, p < .001). We subtracted the liberal from the conservative rational reasoning composite to create a (perceived) *partisan rational reasoning* composite. Positive values reflect a perception of greater rationality in a conservative's political reasoning compared to a liberal's (M = -0.49, *SD* = 2.95).

Participants also rated the degree to which they thought their own political worldview was reasonable. We conducted a regression analysis that included the perspective condition, participant political orientation variable, and their interaction as factors. We observed no differences across conditions (ts < 0.68, ps > .494), so we do not discuss this measure further.

Results

As in the previous studies, we performed our analyses in two parts. In the first part, we used all of the data to test whether the partisan perspective taking manipulations magnified the

partisan nature of participants' article legitimacy beliefs. In the second part, we tested whether

taking an in-group and/or out-group perspective drove these effects. We also examined whether

the perspective taking manipulations magnified the partisan nature of beliefs that a conservative

(vs. a liberal) partisan was more rational in their approach to politics. Finally, we tested whether

any such shifts could explain the magnification of partisan legitimacy beliefs.

Does partisan perspective taking affect partisan legitimacy beliefs? We conducted a

mixed model predicting participants' article legitimacy beliefs. The model specification was

identical to that used in Studies 1 and 2.

We observed a main effect of article truth, which suggested that participants could

distinguish, albeit imperfectly, between the fake ($M = 29.22\%$) and legitimate ($M = 54.88\%$)

news stories, $F(1, 20.01) = 31.38$, $p < .001$. That said, an Article Bent ✕ Participant Political

Orientation interaction demonstrated that participants were judging the legitimacy of the news

articles in a partisan way, $F(1, 43110) = 3,145.64$, $p < .001$. Although not focal to our central

hypotheses, this effect was further qualified by Article Truth, $F(1, 43110) = 4.55$, $p = .033$. This

reflected that although there was a partisan bent to participants' beliefs about the legitimacy of

fake news stories, $F(1, 43110) = 1,455.42$, $p < .001$, this pattern was again magnified for

legitimate news stories, $F(1, 43110) = 1,694.77$, $p < .001$.

Of central interest, we observed a Perspective ✕ Article Bent ✕ Participant Political

Orientation interaction, $F(2, 43110) = 31.35$, $p < .001$. We decomposed the critical three-way

interaction by comparing each of the partisan perspective taking conditions (conservative and

liberal) against the control condition. A 2(Perspective: conservative or control) ✕ Article Bent ✕

Participant Political Orientation interaction, $B = 2.29$, $SE = 0.29$, $t(43110) = 7.88$, $p < .001$,

showed that participants who first tried to imagine how much legitimacy a conservative would

see in the articles became more entrenched in their own partisan perspective on what was legitimate and what was fake news. A parallel 2(Perspective: liberal or control) ✗ Article Bent ✗ Participant Political Orientation interaction, B = 0.92, *SE* = 0.30, *t*(43110) = 3.04, *p* = .002, showed the liberal perspective manipulation had a similar effect. A non-significant four-way interaction suggested that the effects of the perspective-taking manipulation on how much participants displayed partisan legitimacy beliefs did not depend on whether the article was actually fake or legitimate, *F*(2, 43110) = 1.02, *p* = .359.

Does in-group and/or out-group perspective taking amplify partisan legitimacy beliefs? In the first part of our analyses, we found that partisan perspective taking increased the partisanship with which people rated news as legitimate versus fake. That is, we again tested whether taking the perspective of in-group members, out-group members, or both, leads to polarized partisan judgments. Using the same procedure we have in previous studies, we created a *congruence* variable. For these analyses, we excluded 363 participants—who came from all three perspective conditions—whose self-classifications reflected perfect neutrality on the participant political orientation composite. The model specification for this analysis was identical to the one used in Studies 1 and 2.

The Congruence ✗ Article Bent ✗ Participant Political Orientation interaction was significant, *F*(2, 34761) = 21.54, *p* < .001. We proceeded to examine whether this interaction reflected that it was taking the in-group and/or the out-group perspective that increased the partisan bent of participants' perceptions. Again, we found that the 2(Congruence: out-group or control) ✗ Article Bent ✗ Participant Political Orientation interaction was significant, B = 1.83, *SE* = 0.30, *t*(34761) = 6.03, *p* < .001. This shows participants who considered how an out-group member would judge the legitimacy of news sources displayed amplified partisan biases in their

assessments of what was legitimate versus fake. We also found that the 2(Congruence: in-group or control) X Article Bent X Participant Political Orientation interaction was significant, B = 1.53, *SE* = 0.30, *t*(34761) = 5.17, *p* < .001. Just as considering an out-group member's perspective amplified the partisan bent to participants' article legitimacy beliefs, reading the articles through an in-group member's perspective did the same. The 2(Congruence: out-group or in-group) X Article Bent X Participant Political Orientation interaction was not significant, indicating there was no difference between in-group and out-group perspective-taking in eliciting partisanship in news legitimacy ratings, *t* < 1.

Partisan rational reasoning. Next, we examined whether the perspective manipulations may have changed participants' beliefs about the rationality of partisans' (i.e., conservatives' vs. liberals') reasoning. We created two new dummy variables that identified whether a participant was in the liberal perspective condition (+1, 0 otherwise) or the conservative perspective condition (+1, 0 otherwise). We regressed the partisan rational reasoning composite on these liberal perspective and conservative perspective dummy codes, participant political orientation, as well as each dummy code's interaction with the participant political orientation. Positive interaction terms describe the extent to which partisan perspective taking left participants more convinced of the relative rationality of their own side.

We observed a significant main effect of participant political orientation, *b* = 1.81, *SE* = 0.08, *t*(1870) = 21.52, *p* < .001. This shows that at baseline (i.e., the control condition), more conservative (vs. liberal) participants were relatively convinced of conservatives' (vs. liberals') rational reasoning. A significant Liberal Perspective X Participant Political Orientation interaction, *b* = 0.26, *SE* = 0.13, *t*(1870) = 2.11, *p* = .035, as well as a significant Conservative Perspective X Participant Political Orientation interaction, *b* = 0.40, *SE* = 0.12, *t*(1870) = 3.36, *p*

< .001, showed that the partisan perspective-taking manipulations amplified these baseline tendencies.

Keep in mind that the partisan rational reasoning composite is a difference score of two perceptions: the perceived rationality of a conservative minus the perceived rationality of a liberal. By our reasoning, the liberal and conservative perspective taking manipulations should operate on perceptions of a liberal's and a conservative's political rationality, respectively. To test these more specific possibilities, we ran two versions of our last model. Instead of predicting the partisan rational reasoning composite, one model predicted perceived conservative rationality, whereas the other predicted perceived liberal rationality. Participants who engaged in conservative perspective taking showed more partisan bias in their perceptions of a conservative's rational reasoning, $b = 0.26$, $SE = 0.08$, $t(1870) = 3.17$, $p = .002$, whereas liberal perspective taking had no similar effect, $b = 0.03$, $SE = 0.09$, $t(1870) = 0.32$, $p = .748$. In contrast, participants who engaged in liberal perspective taking showed more of a partisan bent to their perceptions of a liberal's rationality, $b = -0.24$, $SE = 0.09$, $t(1870) = -2.77$, $p = .006$, whereas those who engaged in conservative perspective taking did show a marginal shift in this direction, $b = -0.14$, $SE = 0.08$, $t(1870) = -1.76$, $p = .079$. (These coefficients change sign because they reflect the extent to which participants' *conservative* political orientation predicts greater perceptions of a conservative's and a liberal's politically rational reasoning, respectively.)

As before, we tested whether these effects were driven by both in-party and out-party perspective taking. Once again, we excluded those participants who expressed perfect neutrality on the political orientation measure. We regressed the partisan rational reasoning composite on a dummy code identifying those who took an in-party perspective (+1, 0 otherwise), a dummy

code identifying those who took an out-party perspective (+1, 0 otherwise), participant political

orientation, as well as the interactions between each dummy-coded variable and participant

political orientation. A main effect of participant political orientation, $b = 1.81$, SE $= 0.09$,

$t(1645) = 21.21$, $p < .001$ (see Table 3), showed that those in the control condition had a partisan

bent to their partisan rationality reasoning perceptions. We also found that taking an in-party

perspective exaggerated this tendency, $b = 0.40$, $SE = 0.12$, $t(1645) = 3.27$, $p = .001$.

Furthermore, taking an out-party perspective also increased the partisan bent to how much

liberals vs. conservatives were seen to be rational reasoners, $b = 0.26$, $SE = 0.13$, $t(1645) = 2.10$,

$p = .036$.

Next, we wanted to test whether these experimentally induced shifts in the perceived

rationality of one political side versus the other might explain shifts in participants' own PLBs.

Toward this end, we returned to our models predicting participants' partisan legitimacy beliefs,

but added in two terms. First, we included the perceived rational reasoning composite. Second,

we allowed this composite to interact with article bent. This could show that as people become

convinced of the relative reasonableness of one side versus the other, this would predict the

adoption of PLBs that show biases that are consistent with that more *rational* side. This would

help to confirm our balance-theory-inspired account.

And indeed, the Article Bent ✕ Partisan Rational Reasoning interaction was significant, B

$= 1.44$, $SE = 0.06$, $t(43109) = 25.80$, $p < .001$. This reflects, for example, that the more that

conservatives (compared to liberals) are seen to be rational political reasoners, the more such

participants showed conservative biases in their judgments of what news was legitimate (seeing

more legitimacy in conservative-friendly news stories and less legitimacy in liberal-friendly

ones). With the inclusion of this term, we also observed a reduced (but not eliminated)

Table 3

Partisan Rational Reasoning Composite by Political Orientation and Congruence (Study 3)

Congruence	Liberal participants		Conservative participants		Partisanship in Perceived Partisan Rational Reasoning	
	Liberal rationality	Conservative rationality	Liberal rationality	Conservative rationality	B (SE)	t
Control	5.73	3.96	4.12	5.97	1.81 (0.085)a	21.21***
In-Group	6.12	3.94	3.88	6.13	2.21 (0.088)b	25.16***
Out-Group	5.75	3.57	4.05	6.02	2.08 (0.092)b	22.45***

Note. Results for liberal and conservative participants are model-predicted values for those who are -1SD or +1SD from political neutrality. The Partisanship in Perceived Partisan Rational Reasoning columns provide information on the partisan nature of perceptions that conservatives (vs. liberals) are politically rational reasoners for each level of congruence. The unstandardized beta (standard error), along with the accompanying t statistic, describes the main effect of Participant Political Orientation predicting the partisan rational reasoning composite for that congruence level. The significant positive coefficients reflect that participants in each condition are strongly biased toward viewing members of their own political group as relatively more politically rational, a pattern that in-group and out-group perspective taking exacerbates. Unstandardized betas that do not share a subscript differ at the $p < .001$ level. ***$p < .001$.

Perspective X Article Bent X Participant Political Orientation interaction, $F(2, 43109) = 18.18$, p < .001. In other words, experimentally induced shifts in perceptions of partisans' rational reasoning partially accounted for the magnification of PLBs that followed partisan perspective taking.

We then went through a similar process, but with the perspective manipulation recoded in terms of congruence (in-party, out-party, or control). Once again, the Article Bent X Partisan Rational Reasoning interaction was significant, B = 1.45, $SE = 0.06$, $t(34760) = 23.95$, $p < .001$. Furthermore, inclusion of this term reduced (but did not eliminate) the Congruence X Article Bent X Participant Political Orientation interaction, $F(2, 34760) = 12.40$, $p < .001$.

General Discussion

Although perspective taking may seem a promising path for addressing political polarization, the present results detail how it can contribute to partisan divides. Three studies demonstrated that partisan perspective taking can reinforce and even heighten polarization by magnifying partisan biases in what political news is seen as legitimate versus fake. Reflecting an extension of balance theory, mentally simulating what an out-group would see in a political headline enhanced the perceived gullibility of that target; the same consideration of an in-group member enhanced the perceived rationality of that reasoner. These shifts appeared to license perspective takers to display magnified partisan biases about what news is real or fake.

More generally, people are quick to see biases in others that they are blind to in themselves (Ehrlinger et al., 2005; Pronin et al., 2002, 2004). In contexts of disagreement, people are prepared to attribute bias to out-groups, which can lead to intergroup hostility (Kennedy & Pronin, 2008; see also Ross & Ward, 1996). The present work illustrates how merely perspective

taking about the reasoning of others can kickstart similar processes, thereby unleashing further bias in the self.

This research is the first to address the relationship between perspective taking, fake news, and partisanship. Much work on fake news detection has examined correlates of accuracy—markers of who can discriminate fake from legitimate news. These include reasoning ability, reliance on emotion, bullshit receptivity, and a tendency to overclaim one's level of knowledge (Martel, Pennycook, & Rand, 2020; Pennycook & Rand, 2019, 2020). Other work has identified contributors to bias—directional forces that encourage perception of news as legitimate or fake—such as repeated exposure (Pennycook, Cannon, & Rand, 2019) and general warnings about misleading information on social media (Clayton et al., 2020). The present research complements this latter tradition by demonstrating and explaining why partisan perspective taking heightens a partisan bias—the tendency to believe headlines are legitimate or fake based on their consonance with one's own political views. That said, additional analyses showed that partisan perspective taking typically—though not always—was accompanied by diminished accuracy (see Tables S2-S3, Supplemental Materials).

We started with competing predictions for how out-party perspective taking might affect one's own partisan biases. We consistently found that partisan perspective taking heightened such biases, but a natural question is why we did not instead find—consistent with the vicarious construal effect—that such biases were reduced. With the benefit of hindsight, we speculate on two factors that may explain this divergence. Future research may benefit from systematically examining the contribution of each.

First, Jung et al. (2020) found evidence for the VCE when participants engaged in perspective taking about relatively neutral targets, characterized merely by their past experience

(e.g., a first-time viewer of a film) or subjective preferences (e.g., a Seinfeld fan). Especially compared to political partisanship, those attributes are less identity relevant (Huddy, 2001). Social identity theory emphasizes that people are motivated to embrace or enhance in-group members but derogate and differentiate themselves from out-group members (Branscombe & Wann, 1994; Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner, 1975). We show perspective taking about political information processing heightens these tendencies.

Second, and relatedly, the VCE has been documented when perspective takers consider another's subjective experience, as opposed to objectively evaluable beliefs that are themselves the product of reason or irrationality. The VCE emerges when perspective takers pose directional hypotheses (e.g., "As I cross the Golden Gate Bridge for the hundredth time, what might a first-time visitor be awed by right now?"), which alter attention and emotional responses. In contrast, perspective takers in the present work may have posed questions about the reasoning process itself (e.g., "What might they be duped by in this headline?"). As a result, such hypothesis testing may not merely raise the consideration of non-focal construals, but encourage an embrace or dismissal of them.

It is difficult to imagine that warring ideological groups will bridge their divide without some basic agreement on the facts. The present research highlights how perspective taking may simply reinforce such disagreements. Although perspective taking can help people to more fully consider how others' worldviews are different from the self's, such exercises can also reinforce one's preexisting biases.

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Supplemental Study: Partisan Perspective Taking About Article Legitimacy Beliefs (vs.

Article Interest)

In the Supplemental Study, we consider whether merely judging the interests of a partisan (compared to our typical manipulations that prompt perspective taking about a partisan's article legitimacy beliefs) similarly amplifies partisan legitimacy beliefs. If participants' amplified partisan legitimacy beliefs are merely a function of taking a partisan's perspective in judging an article (instead of the article's legitimacy in particular), we should expect no difference between the two perspective taking interventions we use in this study. However, if perspective taking about another's article legitimacy beliefs causes a perspective taker to simulate how a partisan might rationalize the legitimacy of a news headline, perspective taking about another's legitimacy reasoning is likely to invite people to consider how others will be biased in their judgments. And indeed, people are quick to see bias in others (Pronin, Gilovich, & Ross, 2004). Our balance theory logic implies that an important kickstarter of the process that amplifies participants' own PLBs is focusing on (through their own perspective-taking simulation) biases in the formation of article legitimacy beliefs. This reminder is likely to invite one to introduce their own biases, either in an attempt to contrast away from the judgments of out-group members or in an attempt to assimilate toward how a likeminded partisan would provide judgements. In this way, perspective taking about others' legitimacy beliefs in particular should license the self to reveal their own partisan biases.

The Supplemental Study examines the importance of *the object* of this perspective taking. More specifically, we aim to pinpoint the portion of the effect on participants' own PLBs that is attributable not merely to considering a partisan's feelings about a target article, but their specific beliefs about whether that article is or is not legitimate. In the *legitimacy* task condition,

participants (like in the studies in the main paper) first considered whether a partisan would believe each headline to be legitimate or fake. In the *interest* task condition, participants considered whether a partisan (instead of the self, as in the control conditions in our other studies) would be interested in reading the article. Thus, any enhancement in participants' own PLBs in the legitimacy compared to the interest task condition will reflect the enhancement of PLBs that come not merely from considering a partisan's general approach or orientation toward an article, but their beliefs about whether the article is indeed legitimate. This has the potential to most clearly display the irony that through contemplating another's (ir)rationality, one's own baseline biases are exaggerated. Study 3 in the main text then tests the process behind this effect more directly.

Method

Participants and design. We recruited 1,309 Americans to participate from AMT. They received a nominal fee for their participation. Participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions in a 2(perspective: liberal or conservative) X 2(task: interest or legitimacy) full-factorial design. Per our preregistered criteria, we excluded 64 participants who completed the survey more than once or admitted to searching for the headlines online. This left 1,245 participants after exclusions. We preregistered the sample size, exclusion criteria, hypothesis, methods, and analysis plan.

Procedure. Participants began by completing the two-item political orientation measures ($r = .89$) used in Studies 1 and 2. We transformed the two-item composite in the same way, so that a score of 0 reflected political neutrality and each unit reflected a standard deviation shift from this ideologically neutral point. Furthermore, participants were told they would be paired with a future participant who responded to the two political orientation items in a particular

way—either a 2 on both measures (suggesting they were *liberal*) or a 6 on both measures (suggesting they were *conservative*).

Participants were exposed to 24 headlines twice. During the initial exposure, participants estimated how the paired other would respond to one of two questions, which depended on participants' task condition, about each of the headlines. For *interest* task participants, they answered "To what extent will the other participant be interested in reading this article?" on a seven-point scale anchored at 1 (*Very uninterested*) and 7 (*Very interested*). *Legitimacy* task participants instead estimated how likely the paired other was to believe that the article was real as opposed to fake, just as liberal and conservative perspective participants did in the previous studies. During the second exposure, participants supplied their own article legitimacy beliefs using the same measure as in our other studies.

Materials. This study used a new (now, third) set of headlines that were in circulation online. We conducted a pretest to validate our perceptions that each of the headlines had more of a conservative or liberal bent. We recruited 100 American MTurk participants to rate each of twenty-four headlines. Half of the headlines were for fake news stories, and half were for legitimate news stories. Half of the headlines had what we thought was a liberal bent; half, a conservative bent. For each, participants responded to the following question on a 5-point scale: "Would you say that this headline (and the accompanying article) is likely to offer content that is more likely to please, be friendly to, or justify the perspective of someone who is more of a liberal or Democrat, or someone who is more of a conservative or Republican?" (1 = *Definitely liberal/Democrat*, 3 = *Equally friendly to both sides*, 5 = *Definitely conservative/Republican*). Articles *a priori* categorized as having a conservative bent were seen as more friendly to conservatives ($M = 4.02$, $SD = 0.77$) than articles categorized as having a liberal bent ($M = 2.29$,

SD = 0.80), paired *t*(99) = 13.34, *p* < .001, *d* = 1.33. When we analyzed the articles in isolation, all 24 headlines differed from the midpoint (3) in the expected direction, and 23 of them significantly so (2.00 < *t*s < 12.56, 10^{-22} < *p*s < .048). One article we *a priori* classified as liberal-leaning, although directionally rated as liberal-leaning (*M* = 2.86, *SD* = 1.46), did not significantly differ from the midpoint, *t*(99) = 0.96, *p* = .339, *d* = 0.10. We retained the article in the main study.

Results

   We conducted a mixed model predicting article legitimacy beliefs. We included fixed effects of *perspective* (-1 = liberal, +1 = conservative), *task* (-1 = legitimacy, +1 = interest), *article bent* (-1 = liberal, +1 = conservative), *article truth* (-1 = fake news, +1 = legitimate news), and *participant political orientation* (higher scores, more conservative). We included all higher-order interactions that could be created from these variables. In addition, we included random effects of *participant* and *article* to account for non-independence across judgments.

   Consistent with prior studies, a main effect of article truth supported that participants were able to distinguish between real (*M* = 51.96%) and fake news (*M* = 24.20%), *F*(1, 20.01) = 23.74, *p* < .001. However, a significant Article Bent X Participant Political Orientation interaction showed that participants were biased toward believing in the legitimacy of news articles that were friendly to their own partisan leanings, *F*(1, 28591) = 1,632.57, *p* < .001. Unlike in Studies 1-3, this effect was not further qualified by article truth, *F* < 1. Of central interest, we observed the predicted Task X Article Bent X Participant Political Orientation interaction, B = -0.42, *SE* = 0.15, *t*(28591) = 2.82, *p* = .005.

   This reflected that participants in the legitimacy conditions were significantly more likely to show amplified partisan biases in their article legitimacy ratings. This interaction did not

depend on whether participants first engaged in perspective taking about a liberal or conservative person, B = 0.17, *SE* = 0.15, *t*(28591) = 1.18, *p* = .240[1], nor did it depend on whether the headlines were actually real or fake, B = 0.14, *SE* = 0.14, *t* < 1. We decomposed the critical three-way interaction by examining the Article Bent X Participant Political Orientation interactions for each task. Participants who completed the interest task showed a significant Article Bent X Participant Political Orientation interaction, B = 5.55, *SE* = 0.21, *t*(28936) = 26.44, *p* < .001. However, we observed a stronger Article Bent X Participant Political Orientation interaction—a reflection of stronger partisan legitimacy beliefs—when participants completed the perspective task, B = 6.32, *SE* = 0.21, *t*(28936) = 30.83, *p* < .001.

More Detail on Other Measures Across All Studies

Demographic Questions

In this section, we report the demographic questions we collected at the beginning of each study on the same page as the political orientation measures:

"Please indicate your age (in years)." In Studies 2, 3, and the Supplemental Study, participants responded on a slider scale that ranged from 18 to 100. In Study 1, the scale went up to 75. Anyone who wished to indicate their age was higher 100 (or, in Study 1, 75) was to choose that as their age.

"What is your gender?" Response options included "male," "female," and "other." Those who responded with the final option could complete a textbox.

"Are you fluent in English?" The response options were "No" and "Yes."

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[1] Although the Task X Article Bent X Participant Political Orientation interaction did not depend on perspective, it did weakly depend on whether participants took an in-group or an out-group perspective. That is, after we excluded the 187 participants who expressed political neutrality on the political orientation measures, we did find that the focal Task X Article Bent X Participant Political Orientation interaction was stronger for those taking an out-group than an in-group perspective, B = .29, *t*(24290) = 1.96, *p* = .049 (see Table S1).

Random-Responding Probe, Compliance Check, and Attention Check

In this section, we report a random-responding probe that was administered in Studies 1 and 2, a memory-based attention check that was asked in Studies 1-3, a different memory-based attention check that was asked in the Supplemental Study, and a compliance check that participants were asked across Studies 1-3. To probe the robustness of the results reported in the main text, we then repeat all analyses using more stringent inclusion criteria.

Random-responding probe. "Did you respond randomly at any point during the study? Note: Please be honest! You will get your HIT regardless of your response." Response options were "No" and "Yes."

Compliance check. "Did you search the internet (via Google or otherwise) for any of the news headlines? Note: Please be honest! You will get your HIT regardless of your response." Response options were "No" and "Yes."

Memory-based attention check for Studies 1-3. "You read a collection of headlines twice. What did you judge the first time you read them? What did you judge the second time you read them?" The four multiple-choice response options were:

- First, I rated my own interest in reading the stories. Second, I rated the likelihood that the story was real (as opposed to fake) news.

- First, I rated the likelihood that the story was real (as opposed to fake) news. Second, I rated my own interest in reading the stories.

- First, I estimated how likely a future participant would see the story as real (as opposed to fake) news. Second, I offered my own perspective on the likelihood that the story was real (as opposed to fake) news.

- First, I offered my own perspective on the likelihood that the story was real (as opposed to fake) news. Second, I estimated how likely a future participant would see the story as real (as opposed to fake) news.

The first option was the correct answer for participants in the control perspective condition. For participants in the liberal and conservative perspective conditions, the third option was the correct response.

Memory-based attention check for the Supplemental Study. "You read a collection of headlines twice. What did you judge the first time you read them? What did you judge the second time you read them?" The three multiple-choice response options were:

- First, I indicated whether I personally thought each headline was real or fake. Second, I made a guess about how *someone else* would respond to the headlines.

- First, I made a guess about how *someone else* would respond to the headlines. Second, I indicated whether I personally thought each headline was real or fake.

- First, I indicated how often I read articles from different news sources. Second, I rated how interested I was in reading each headline.

For participants across all conditions, the second option was the correct response.

Analyses Using More Stringent Exclusion Criteria Than Those in Main Text

In the analyses reported in the main text, we exclude only participants who admitted to searching the internet—despite promising at the beginning of the study they would not—to find the target headlines. As a robustness check, we repeat all analyses using more stringent exclusion criteria. That is, we continued to exclude those who reported searching for the news headlines (the compliance check), but then also excluded those who failed the memory-based attention check (Studies 1-3), as well as those who admitted to random responding (Studies 1-2). Note that

the random-responding probe was administered only in Studies 1 and 2, which is why it is only

in those studies that this exclusion criterion is added.

Study 1

Does partisan perspective taking affect partisan legitimacy beliefs? A main effect of

article truth suggested that participants could distinguish between the fake ($M = 26.67\%$) and

legitimate ($M = 55.50\%$) news stories, $F(1, 20.02) = 36.27$, $p < .001$. That said, an Article Bent X

Participant Political Orientation interaction suggested that participants were responding to the

news articles in a partisan way, $F(1, 27838) = 2,636.59$, $p < .001$. Although not focal to our

central hypotheses, an Article Bent X Participant Political Orientation X Article Truth interaction

indicated that partisan legitimacy beliefs were qualified by whether the story was legitimate, $F(1,$

$27838) = 21.13$, $p < .001$. This reflected that although there was a partisan bent to participants'

beliefs about the legitimacy of fake news stories, $F(1, 27838) = 1092.84$, $p < .001$, this pattern

was magnified for legitimate news stories, $F(1, 27838) = 1564.89$, $p < .001$.

Of central interest, we observed a Perspective X Article Bent X Participant Political

Orientation interaction, $F(2, 27838) = 18.19$, $p < .001$. We decomposed the critical three-way

interaction by comparing each of the partisan perspective taking conditions (conservative and

liberal) against the control condition. A 2(Perspective: conservative or control) X Article Bent X

Participant Political Orientation interaction, $B = 2.08$, $SE = 0.37$, $t(27838) = 5.55$, $p < .001$,

showed that participants who first tried to imagine how much legitimacy a conservative would

see in the articles became more entrenched in their own partisan perspective on what was

legitimate and what was fake news. A parallel 2(Perspective: liberal or control) X Article Bent X

Participant Political Orientation interaction, $B = 1.76$, $SE = 0.37$, $t(27383) = 4.71$, $p < .001$,

showed the liberal perspective manipulation had a similar effect. A non-significant Perspective X

Article Bent X Participant Political Orientation X Article Truth interaction suggested that the effects of the perspective-taking manipulation on how much participants showed a partisan bent in their evaluation of what news stories were legitimate did not depend on whether the article was fake or real, $F < 1$.

Does in-group and/or out-group perspective taking amplify partisan legitimacy beliefs? The Congruence X Article Bent X Participant Political Orientation interaction was significant, $F(2, 23629) = 16.84$, $p < .001$ (see Table S4). We proceeded to examine whether this interaction reflected that it was taking the in-group and/or the out-group perspective that increased partisan legitimacy beliefs. First, we found that the 2(Congruence: out-group or control) X Article Bent X Participant Political Orientation was significant, B = 2.13, $SE = 0.38$, $t(23629) = 5.64$, $p < .001$. That is, when participants considered how an out-group member would judge the legitimacy of news sources, participants displayed enhanced partisan biases in their assessments of what was legitimate versus fake. Second, we also found that the 2(Congruence: in-group or control) X Article Bent X Participant Political Orientation interaction was significant, B = 1.45, $SE = 0.37$, $t(23629) = 3.89$, $p < .001$. In other words, first considering how an in-group member would assess the headlines also enhanced participants' partisan biases in evaluating what was real, legitimate news. The 2(Congruence: in-group or out-group) X Article Bent X Participant Political Orientation, which was not significant in the analyses reported in the main text, became marginally significant in this restricted sample, B = 0.67, $SE = 0.39$, $t(23629) = 1.74$, $p = .080$.

Study 2

Does partisan perspective taking affect partisan legitimacy beliefs? Once again, we observed a main effect of article truth, suggesting that participants distinguished between the

fake ($M = 26.91\%$) and legitimate ($M = 56.67\%$) news stories, $F(1, 9080) = 2{,}692.82$, $p < .001$.

Participants displayed partisan legitimacy beliefs, as evidenced by a significant Article Bent X

Participant Political Orientation interaction, $F(1, 9080) = 407.30$, $p < .001$. This effect was

further qualified by Article Truth, $F(1, 9080) = 28.32$, $p < .001$. This reflected that although

people displayed partisan legitimacy beliefs when evaluating fake news stories, $F(1, 9080) =$

110.42, $p < .001$, this pattern was magnified for legitimate news stories, $F(1, 9080) = 325.20$, $p <$

$.001$.

Most centrally, we observed a Perspective X Article Bent X Participant Political

Orientation interaction, $F(2, 9080) = 13.83$, $p < .001$. This three-way interaction was not further

qualified by whether the article was fake or real, $F(2, 9080) = 2.79$, $p = .061$. We decomposed

the critical three-way interaction by comparing each of the partisan perspective taking conditions

(conservative and liberal) against the control condition. We observed a 2(Perspective:

conservative or control) X Article Bent X Participant Political Orientation interaction, B = 1.51,

$SE = 0.65$, $t(9080) = 2.31$, $p = .021$. A parallel 2(Perspective: liberal or control) X Article Bent X

Participant Political Orientation interaction, B = 3.48, $SE = 0.66$, $t(9080) = 5.26$, $p < .001$,

showed the liberal perspective manipulation had a similar effect. This shows that participants

who first considered whether a partisan—liberal or conservative—would see an article to be

legitimate then showed elevated partisan legitimacy beliefs themselves.

Does in-group and/or out-group perspective taking amplify partisan legitimacy

beliefs? The Congruence X Article Bent X Participant Political Orientation interaction was

significant, $F(2, 7815) = 11.15$, $p < .001$ (see Table S5). We proceeded to examine whether this

interaction reflected that it was taking the in-group and/or the out-group perspective that

increased partisan legitimacy beliefs. Again, we found that the 2(Congruence: out-group or

control) X Article Bent X Participant Political Orientation interaction was significant, B = 3.03, $SE = 0.65$, $t(7815) = 4.66$, $p < .001$. Participants who first considered the perspective of an out-group member showed amplified partisan legitimacy beliefs. We also found that the 2(Congruence: in-group or control) X Article Bent X Participant Political Orientation was significant, B = 1.78, $SE = 0.66$, $t(7815) = 2.71$, $p = .007$; thus, in-group perspective taking amplified partisan legitimacy beliefs as well. The 2(Congruence: out-group or in-group) X Article Bent X Participant Political Orientation interaction was marginally significant, B = 1.25, $SE = 0.70$, $t(7815) = 1.79$, $p = .073$, indicating that in-group and out-group perspective taking did not have significantly different effects.

Study 3

Does partisan perspective taking affect partisan legitimacy beliefs? We observed a main effect of article truth, which suggested that participants could distinguish, albeit imperfectly, between the fake ($M = 27.13\%$) and legitimate ($M = 55.30\%$) news stories, $F(1, 20.01) = 34.48$, $p < .001$. That said, an Article Bent X Participant Political Orientation interaction demonstrated that participants were judging the legitimacy of the news articles in a partisan way, $F(1, 32990) = 2709.69$, $p < .001$. Unlike in the analyses reported in the main text, this effect was not further qualified by Article Truth, $F(1, 32990) = 0.90$, $p = .344$.

Of central interest, we observed a Perspective X Article Bent X Participant Political Orientation interaction, $F(2, 32990) = 31.06$, $p < .001$. We decomposed the critical three-way interaction by comparing each of the partisan perspective taking conditions (conservative and liberal) against the control condition. A 2(Perspective: conservative or control) X Article Bent X Participant Political Orientation interaction, B = 2.57, $SE = 0.33$, $t(32990) = 7.87$, $p < .001$, showed that participants who first tried to imagine how much legitimacy a conservative would

see in the articles became more entrenched in their own partisan perspective on what was legitimate and what was fake news. A parallel 2(Perspective: liberal or control) X Article Bent X Participant Political Orientation interaction, B = 1.39, *SE* = 0.34, *t*(32990) = 4.13, *p* < .001, showed the liberal perspective manipulation had a similar effect. A non-significant four-way interaction suggested that the effects of the perspective taking manipulation on how much participants displayed partisan legitimacy beliefs did not depend on whether the article was actually fake or legitimate, *F* < 1.

Does in-group and/or out-group perspective taking amplify partisan legitimacy beliefs? The Congruence X Article Bent X Participant Political Orientation interaction was significant, *F*(2, 26872) = 27.29, *p* < .001. We proceeded to examine whether this interaction reflected that it was taking the in-group and/or the out-group perspective that increased the partisan bent of participants' perceptions. Again, we found that the 2(Congruence: out-group or control) X Article Bent X Participant Political Orientation interaction was significant, B = 2.40, *SE* = 0.34, *t*(26872) = 7.15, *p* < .001. This shows participants who considered how an out-group member would judge the legitimacy of news sources displayed amplified partisan biases in their assessments of what was legitimate versus fake. We also found that the 2(Congruence: in-group or control) X Article Bent X Participant Political Orientation interaction was significant, B = 1.71, *SE* = 0.33, *t*(26872) = 5.12, *p* < .001. Just as considering an out-group member's perspective amplified the partisan bent to participants' article legitimacy beliefs, reading the headlines from an in-group member's perspective did the same. Unlike in the analyses reported in the main text, the 2(Congruence: out-group or in-group) X Article Bent X Participant Political Orientation interaction was significant, indicating that out-group perspective taking elicited more

partisanship in article legitimacy beliefs than did in-group perspective taking, B = 0.69, *SE* = 0.34, *t*(26872) = 2.04, *p* = .041.

Partisan rational reasoning. We observed a significant main effect of participant political orientation, *b* = 1.89, *SE* = 0.10, *t*(1430) = 19.89, *p* < .001. This shows that at baseline (i.e., the control condition), more conservative (vs. liberal) participants were relatively convinced of conservatives' (vs. liberals') rational reasoning. A significant Liberal Perspective X Participant Political Orientation interaction, *b* = 0.34, *SE* = 0.14, *t*(1430) = 2.42, *p* = .016, as well as a significant Conservative Perspective X Participant Political Orientation interaction, *b* = 0.42, *SE* = 0.13, *t*(1430) = 3.17, *p* = .002, showed that the partisan perspective-taking manipulations amplified these baseline tendencies.

Keep in mind that the partisan rational reasoning composite is actually a difference score of two perceptions: the perceived rationality of a conservative minus the perceived rationality of a liberal. By our reasoning, the liberal and conservative perspective-taking manipulations should operate on perceptions of a liberal's and a conservative's political rationality, respectively. To test these more specific possibilities, we ran two versions of our last model. Instead of predicting the partisan rational reasoning composite, one model predicted perceived conservative rationality, whereas the other predicted perceived liberal rationality. Participants who engaged in conservative perspective taking showed more partisan bias in their perceptions of a conservative's rational reasoning, *b* = 0.30, *SE* = 0.09, *t*(1430) = 3.36, *p* < .001, whereas liberal perspective taking had no similar effect, *b* = 0.14, *SE* = 0.09, *t*(1430) = 1.48, *p* = .139. In contrast, participants who engaged in liberal perspective taking showed more of a partisan bent to their perceptions of a liberal's rationality, *b* = -0.20, *SE* = 0.10, *t*(1430) = -2.08, *p* = .038,

whereas those who engaged in conservative perspective taking did not show a shift in this direction, $b = -0.12$, $SE = 0.09$, $t(1430) = -1.32$, $p = .187$.

As before, we tested whether these effects were driven by both in-party and out-party perspective taking. We began by excluding those participants who expressed perfect neutrality on the political orientation measure. We regressed the partisan rational reasoning composite on a dummy code identifying those who took an in-party perspective (+1, 0 otherwise), a dummy code identifying those who took an out-party perspective (+1, 0 otherwise), participant political orientation, as well as the interactions between each dummy-coded variable and participant political orientation. A main effect of participant political orientation, $b = 0.99$, $SE = 0.06$, $t(1268) = 15.77$, $p < .001$, showed that those in the control condition had a partisan bent to their partisan rationality reasoning perceptions. We also found that taking an in-party perspective exaggerated this tendency, $b = 0.18$, $SE = 0.09$, $t(1268) = 1.99$, $p = .047$. Furthermore, taking an out-party perspective marginally increased the partisan bent to how much conservatives vs. liberals were seen to be rational reasoners, $b = 0.29$, $SE = 0.09$, $t(1268) = 3.19$, $p = .001$.

Next, we wanted to test whether these experimentally induced shifts in the perceived rationality of one political side versus the other might explain shifts in participants' own PLBs. Toward this end, we returned to our models predicting participants' partisan legitimacy beliefs but added in two terms. First, we included the perceived rational reasoning composite. Second, we allowed this composite to interact with article bent. This could show that as people become convinced of the relative reasonableness of one side versus the other, this would predict the adoption of PLBs that show biases that are consistent with that more *rational* side. This would help to confirm our balance-theory-inspired account.

And indeed, the Article Bent ✕ Partisan Rational Reasoning interaction was significant, B = 1.43, *SE* = 0.06, *t*(32989) = 22.43, *p* < .001. This reflects, for example, that the more that conservatives (compared to liberals) are seen to be rational political reasoners, the more such participants showed conservative biases in their judgments of what news was legitimate (seeing more legitimacy in conservative-friendly news stories and less legitimacy in liberal-friendly ones). With the inclusion of this term, we also observed a reduced (but not eliminated) Perspective ✕ Article Bent ✕ Participant Political Orientation interaction, *F*(2, 32989) = 18.24, *p* < .001. In other words, shifts in perceptions of partisans' rational reasoning partially accounted for the magnification of PLBs that followed partisan perspective taking.

We then went through a similar process, but with the perspective manipulation recoded in terms of congruence (in-party, out-party, or control). Once again, the Article Bent ✕ Partisan Rational Reasoning interaction was significant, B = 1.41, *SE* = 0.07, *t*(26871) = 20.45, *p* < .001. Furthermore, inclusion of this term reduced (but did not eliminate) the Congruence ✕ Article Bent ✕ Participant Political Orientation interaction, *F*(2, 26871) = 17.56, *p* < .001.

Table S1

Article Legitimacy Beliefs, by Task and Congruence (Supplemental Study)

	Liberal participants		Conservative participants		Partisan Legitimacy Beliefs	
Congruence Task	Liberal articles	Conservative articles	Liberal articles	Conservative articles	B (SE)	*t*
Ingroup						
Perspective	45.03	27.87	37.05	43.75	5.99 (0.28)	21.38***
Interest	43.83	29.09	37.08	45.10	5.69 (0.31)	18.53***
Outgroup						
Perspective	46.77	28.51	35.49	44.65	6.98 (0.31)	22.26***
Interest	44.74	29.08	39.37	45.68	5.51 (0.30)	18.63***
Overall						
Perspective	45.90	28.19	36.27	44.20	6.49 (0.21)	30.83***
Interest	44.29	29.09	38.22	45.39	5.60 (0.21)	26.44***

Note. Results for liberal and conservative participants are model-predicted values for those who are -1SD or +1SD from political neutrality. The Partisan Legitimacy Beliefs columns include the unstandardized beta (standard error) and associated t statistic of the Article Bent X Participant Political Orientation interaction that applies to participants in the relevant row. ***$p < .001$.

Table S2

How Perspective Alters Truth Discrimination, by Study

| | Perspective | | | |
Study	Liberal	Conservative	Task X Article Truth	Omnibus *F*
Study 1	-0.93 (0.33)**	-0.77 (0.36)*		4.61*
Study 2	-1.12 (0.56)*	0.36 (0.55)		2.08
Study 3	-0.35 (0.31)	-0.94 (0.30)**		4.96**
Supplemental Study			0.04 (0.15)	

Note. The Perspective columns provide the unstandardized beta (standard error) of each 2(Perspective: [Liberal or Conservative] or Control) X 2 (Article Truth) interaction. Each interaction shows how PLBs departed from the control condition in either the liberal or conservative perspective condition. The Task X Article Truth column contains the unstandardized coefficient (standard error) of the Task X Article Truth interaction in the Supplemental Study. In Studies 1-3, negative coefficients reflect that the manipulation that enhances PLBs reduces truth discrimination. In the Supplemental Study, a positive coefficient would reflect that the manipulation that enhances PLBs reduces truth discrimination. The Omnibus *F* column provides the F ratio associated with the omnibus 3(Perspective) X 2(Article Truth) interaction as a complement to the two 2(Perspective) X 2(Article Truth) interaction coefficients reported in the Perspective Condition columns. *p < .05, **p < .01.

Table S3

How Congruent and Incongruent Perspectives Alter Truth Discrimination, by Study

| | Congruence | | | |
Studies	Incongruent	Congruent	Task X Article Truth	Omnibus *F*
Study 1	-1.38 (0.37)***	-0.91 (0.37)*		7.47**
Study 2	-0.82 (0.60)	-.83 (0.59)		1.32
Study 3	-0.22 (0.34)	-0.71 (0.34)*		2.33†
Supplemental Study			0.11 (0.17)	

Note. The Congruence columns provide the unstandardized beta (standard error) of each 2(Congruence [Incongruent or Congruent] vs. Control) X 2(Article Truth). The Task X Article Truth column is the unstandardized beta (standard error) of the Task X Article Truth interaction in the Supplemental Study. For the Supplemental Study, there were only two task conditions, so we do not decompose the interaction down further. The Omnibus *F* column provides the F ratio associated with the omnibus 3(Congruence) X Article Truth interaction in Studies 1-3. †*p*<.10, **p* < .05, ***p* < .01, ****p* < .001.

Table S4

Article Legitimacy Beliefs by Political Orientation, Article Bent, and Congruence (Study 1, Excluding Those Who Failed the

Compliance Check, the Memory-Based Attention Check, and the Random-Responding Probe)

	Liberal participants		Conservative participants		Partisan Legitimacy Beliefs	
Congruence	Liberal articles	Conservative articles	Liberal articles	Conservative articles	B (SE)	*t*
Control	47.07	34.88	35.62	50.55	6.78 (0.26)	26.16***
In-Group	47.12	32.61	33.44	51.88	8.24 (0.27)	30.47***
Out-Group	48.29	32.03	30.71	50.11	8.91 (0.28)	32.38***

Note. Results for liberal and conservative participants are model-predicted values for those who are -1SD or +1SD from political neutrality. The Partisan Legitimacy Belief columns provide information on the partisan nature of article legitimacy beliefs for each level of congruence. The unstandardized beta (standard error), along with the accompanying *t* statistic, describes the Article Bent Х Participant Political Orientation interaction for that congruence level. The significant positive interactions reflect that participants in each condition are strongly biased toward believing partisan-congruent (vs. partisan-incongruent) news stories are legitimate, a pattern that in-group and out-group perspective taking exacerbates. ***$p < .001$.

Table S5

Article Legitimacy Beliefs, by Political Orientation, Article Bent, and Congruence (Study 2, Excluding Those Who Failed the

Compliance Check, the Memory-Based Attention Check, and the Random-Responding Probe)

	Liberal participants		Conservative participants		Partisan Legitimacy Beliefs	
Congruence	Liberal articles	Conservative articles	Liberal articles	Conservative articles	B (SE)	*t*
Control	43.65	39.49	35.40	47.04	3.95 (0.43)	9.18***
In-Group	48.75	36.30	37.60	48.08	5.73 (0.50)	11.50***
Out-Group	45.87	34.87	35.04	51.99	6.99 (0.49)	14.29***

Note. Results for liberal and conservative participants are predicted values for those who are -1SD or +1SD from political neutrality. The Partisan Legitimacy Belief columns provide information on the partisan nature of article legitimacy beliefs for each level of congruence. The unstandardized beta (standard error), along with the accompanying *t* statistic, describes the Article Bent X Participant Political Orientation interaction for that congruence level. The significant positive interactions reflect that participants in each condition are strongly biased toward believing partisan-congruent (vs. partisan-incongruent) news stories are legitimate, a pattern that in-group and out-group perspective taking exacerbates. ***$p < .001$.