

Experiment 1

Version April 30, 2006

Welcome to a social experiment. The purpose of this experiment is to test how certain factors affect the average person's behavior.

To perform the experiment, please read the following statements and then answer the questions that follow. Please do this quietly, without chatting with your neighbor, so as to avoid contaminating the results. When you are finished, copy your odd numbered answers onto the anonymous answer sheet and pass the sheet in. You can keep the questionnaire.

Each statement is a quote from an actual decisive political speech, debate, or writing. After everyone has completed the experiment, we will tally up the results on the spot and share them with you. We will also pass out material revealing who the politicians were.

In modern politics, the purpose of political statements is not to objectively state the truth of a situation, but to cleverly persuade voters to support politicians. Deception and rhetoric is used to do this. Please study the following material, and see if you can use it to determine who is telling the truth and who is really the better candidate as you take the questionnaire.

Most political statements are arguments to convince people that certain conclusions are true. It is possible to apply what we call the Truth Test to these arguments and to very quickly tell if an argument is true or false about 90% of the time. The rest take longer or an expert. The Truth Test consists of these four simple questions:

1. What is the argument?
2. Are any common fallacies present?
3. Are the premises true, complete, and relevant?
4. Does each conclusion follow from its premises?

Let's take each question one at a time. An argument consists of one or more conclusions and the premises to support them. If a statement is not an argument, then there is no reason to support the politician. Examples of non-arguments are "It's time for a change" and "A vote for me is a vote for a better future." These are non-arguments because no reasons (premises) are given as to why the conclusion is true.

It is the second question that is the most effective, because most political statements employ very clever types of fallacies to "prove" their truth. A fallacy is a pattern of appealing but unsound reasoning. One popular fallacy is the *biased sample*. This is the use of a sample that is not representative of the full situation. For example, if the full situation consists of 12 months of data and the politician picks the one month that best supports their position, then that is a biased sample. Another popular fallacy is the *false dilemma*. This occurs when you are presented with a limited number of choices, usually two, but in reality there are more choices. A classic example of a false dilemma was George W. Bush's statement on September 20, 2001 that "Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists." This is fallacious, because you can also be undecided or neutral. You can also be both for and against, as were many countries that supported some of the Bush administration's policies and not others. There are many more common fallacies. Some of the most popular are creating a *false enemy*, *pushing the fear hot button*, promoting the *wrong priorities* instead of the right ones, and the most popular one of all, the *false promise*. A false promise is something that is promised but never delivered, or never delivered fully.

The third question is self-explanatory. The fourth question, the use of conclusions that do not follow from the premises, is very common and often subtle. An example is "I served your country valiantly in the war. This country needs strong, solid leadership." The premise of bravery does not support the implied conclusion that the politician can provide good leadership, because the ability to be brave does not translate into the ability to manage a country.

Politician A – “This is a great country, but I think it could be a greater country; and this is a powerful country, but I think it could be a more powerful country. I'm not satisfied when the United States last year had the lowest rate of economic growth of any major industrialized society in the world.”

1. To what extent do you agree with this statement and its implications?

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree or disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

2. Very briefly, why do you feel this way? _____

Politician B – “In the last few years government has gotten bigger and bigger; industry has gotten larger and larger; labor unions have gotten bigger and bigger; and our children have been the victims of mass education. We must make this next century the century of the individual. We should never forget that a government big enough to give us everything we want is a government big enough to take from us everything we have. The individual worker in the plants throughout the United States should not be a small cog in a big machine.

3. To what extent do you agree with this statement and its implications?

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree or disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

4. Why do you feel this way? _____

5. Suppose this was all the information you had. Which politician would you vote for?

Politician A Politician B Neither

6. Why do you feel this way? _____

Politician C – “My fellow citizens, trade statistics indicate that this country is in a state of unexampled prosperity. The figures show that we are furnishing profitable employment to the millions of workingmen throughout the United States, bringing comfort and happiness to their homes, and making it possible to lay by savings for old age and disability. That all the people are participating in this great prosperity is seen in every American community and shown by the enormous and unprecedented deposits in our savings banks.”

7. To what extent do you agree with this statement and its implications?

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree or disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

8. Why do you feel this way? _____

Politician D – “I’m only here to tell you that I believe with all my heart that our first priority must be world peace, and that use of force is always and only a last resort, when everything else has failed, and then only with regard to our national security. I believe that meeting this mission, this responsibility for preserving the peace, is a responsibility peculiar to our country, and that we cannot shirk our responsibility as a leader of the free world because we’re the only ones that can do it. Therefore, the burden of maintaining the peace falls on us. And to maintain that peace requires strength.”

9. To what extent do you agree with this statement and its implications?

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree or disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

10. Why do you feel this way? _____

11. Suppose this was all the information you had. Which politician would you vote for?

Politician C Politician D Neither

12. Why do you feel this way? _____

Experiment 1 – Answer Sheet – WTT

1. To what extent do you agree with this statement and its implications?

- Strongly agree - 5
- Somewhat agree - 4
- Neither agree or disagree - 3
- Somewhat disagree - 2
- Strongly disagree - 1

3. To what extent do you agree with this statement and its implications?

- Strongly agree - 5
- Somewhat agree - 4
- Neither agree or disagree - 3
- Somewhat disagree - 2
- Strongly disagree - 1

5. Suppose this was all the information you had. Which politician would you vote for?

- Politician A - 1 Politician B - 1 Neither - 0

7. To what extent do you agree with this statement and its implications?

- Strongly agree - 5
- Somewhat agree - 4
- Neither agree or disagree - 3
- Somewhat disagree - 2
- Strongly disagree - 1

9. To what extent do you agree with this statement and its implications?

- Strongly agree - 5
- Somewhat agree - 4
- Neither agree or disagree - 3
- Somewhat disagree - 2
- Strongly disagree - 1

11. Suppose this was all the information you had. Which politician would you vote for?

- Politician C - 1 Politician D - 1 Neither - 0

Note – The numbers following the answers are the point system used for scoring the results of the experiment. We have used the simplest point system possible.