7 | *Individual Vote Choice*

When Tom Brady, then the quarterback of the highly successful professional American football team the New England Patriots, was accused of illegally tampering with a football before a playoff game in January 2015, the response was divided. His team's supporters vehemently denied any wrongdoing, while many fans of other teams ganged up in opposition to Brady and the Patriots during the scandal, known as "Deflategate." Those who championed other teams maintained that this was evidence that the Patriots did not win by playing fairly but by manipulating the playing field in their favor. In the absence of a "smoking gun," fans' assessments of the evidence – including a contested scientific report on air pressure – were strongly related to which team they supported.

Backing a political party can be similar to supporting a sports team (albeit with much higher stakes), especially in polarized societies. And in much the same way that fans' emotions are heightened during key matches, partisans' emotions run hottest in the weeks before and after competitive elections.[1] When people support a party – similar to when they back a sports team – it can become a core aspect of their identity. Therefore, they not only want their party to do well, but they also want to believe good things about it, including that it has fairly competed in (and won) elections. Consequently, people who support winning parties may be less receptive than those who support losing parties to news about electoral malpractice. This type of dynamic represents a form of motivated reasoning. As we explained in Chapter 2, individuals' partisan attachments can prompt them to engage in *directionally* motivated reasoning in response to new political information.

Individuals' vote choice can also lead them to process information in partisan ways even when they are driven more by *accuracy* goals. Returning to the Deflategate example, one reason why

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[1] Flynn, Nyhan, and Reifler (2017, 134).

Patriots fans may not have been persuaded by incriminating information is that they already had a great deal of confidence in their team's integrity after years of watching it play. A contested scientific report may not have convinced them to reassess the accuracy of their long-held views. For individuals who may have been uncertain about the team's integrity, the incident created an environment in which critical news reports caused them to downgrade their opinions of Brady. Extending this logic to elections provides another explanation for why winning partisans might be less influenced by negative information about election integrity than losing partisans: They have different pre-existing levels of information and certainty about elections.

Chapters 4 and 5 explored how individuals updated their beliefs about election credibility in response to information about monitoring and meddling and found limited overall effects. Then, Chapter 6 demonstrated that the effects of monitors and meddlers depend on individuals' perceptions of foreign actors' capabilities and biases. This chapter investigates how individual vote choice – specifically, the distinction between election "winners" and "losers" – conditions foreign actors' effects on trust.

The chapter first describes how we define and measure winning and losing in elections. It then illustrates that winning and losing affect beliefs about election credibility in all three countries studied. Finally, the central contribution of the chapter is to examine partisan differences in responses to monitors' reports and meddling.

Across our three case studies and both types of foreign actors (monitors and meddlers), election losers updated their beliefs about election credibility in response to new information about foreign actors' involvement in elections more often than election winners. In many cases, the partisan conditional effects we identify could weaken the foundations of democracy, which requires that supporters of a losing candidate consent to be governed by the winner. For example, we find that monitors' positive reports do *not* reassure losers that an election is credible. Yet, their criticisms can sometimes cause election losers' confidence in election credibility to plummet even in broadly fair elections. We also find that election losers are more likely than winners to believe that meddling occurred. Across all cases, election winners have extremely high levels of trust in elections, which information about foreign meddling does not undermine.

Although our finding that citizens respond to foreign actors in partisan ways may seem obvious to those who are familiar with the degree of polarization in American and comparative politics, several relevant strands of international relations (IR) research on the topic do not anticipate these diverging responses. On the one hand, most literature on foreign influences on elections explores their overall – that is, average – effects, including the policy and practitioner literature on foreign influences on elections. Though clearly important, such a focus fails to capture some of the dynamics that our conditional analysis reveals. For example, our finding that election winners do not downgrade their assessments of election credibility in response to information about foreign meddling means that politicians who allow or invite such interference may not be held accountable by their supporters, a point we analyze in more depth in the conclusion.

On the other hand, a growing concern among IR scholars relates to the way in which citizens resist outside influences on domestic politics, especially in the areas of democracy and human rights. Such studies have found that the public resents external criticism of state policies,[2] which creates a political opportunity for enterprising domestic politicians to engage in repression in order to be seen as defying foreign actors. Our findings demonstrate that foreign interventions – *even blatant meddling in elections* – do not inevitably provoke a public backlash. Only some citizens view such interventions negatively; others tolerate or even welcome them. As we discuss in more detail later, these dynamics have important implications for policymakers' decisions about whether to invite foreign influences – and how to respond to them.

7.1 Defining Election Winners and Losers

Because people who take the time to vote are the most engaged in politics, this chapter focuses on winning and losing *voters* as opposed to nonvoters.[3] We do not expect nonvoters to engage in partisan-motivated reasoning to the same extent because they tend to be less

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[2] Grossman, Manekin, and Margalit (2018); Gruffydd-Jones (2019); Snyder (2020).

[3] The literature on partisan differences in perceptions of election credibility typically focuses on voters for this reason. See, for example, Alvarez, Hall, and Llewellyn (2008, 756–757); Cantú and García-Ponce (2015, 6).

politically engaged and informed than voters.[4] They are also less likely to have strong prior beliefs about election integrity since they do not follow politics as closely.

For voters, we further distinguish theoretically between the *main* election losers (e.g., Democratic Party voters in the 2016 US presidential election) and other election losers (e.g., voters for third-party candidate Jill Stein in the 2016 US presidential election). Although this distinction departs from some of the literature on this topic,[5] it is both conceptually merited and empirically justified here.

All four presidential elections we study were either de facto or de jure races between two main candidates; it is therefore relatively easy to identify voters associated with the winning and the main losing candidates. Tunisia (2014) and Georgia (2018) both held first-round elections involving numerous candidates and second-round contests between the two leading candidates, who were widely anticipated at the beginning of the election cycles. For the post-presidential surveys in both countries, our analysis focuses on winning and losing voters from the second round. We expect respondents who voted for the winning candidate to report greater trust in the election than those who voted for the losing candidate.

US presidential elections constitute a single round. Hillary Clinton (Democrat) and Donald Trump (Republican) were the main candidates in 2016, while Joe Biden (Democrat) and Donald Trump (Republican) were the main candidates in 2020. The vast majority of voters supported one of these two candidates, although third-party candidates also ran in both elections with no expectation of winning. A losing outcome could be perceived as a victory for third-party candidates if they out-performed expectations or influenced the overall election result. Thus, in the United States, we focus on winning and losing voters from the two main parties.

Deciding how to code winners and losers in legislative elections must take the electoral and party context into account. Our analysis is based on legislative elections in two cases: Tunisia (2014) and the United States (2018).[6] Tunisia's 2014 parliamentary election was

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[4] Robertson (2017, 599).
[5] Anderson et al. (2005, 34–35).
[6] The 2016 and 2020 US elections were both presidential and legislative elections. However, since the main focus in a presidential election year is

anticipated to be a contest between Nidaa Tounes, the main secular party, and Ennahda, the country's only Islamist party.[7] Nidaa Tounes won the most seats, which was considered a victory. Ennahda received the second-most seats, but this result was characterized as a loss, as proclaimed in headlines such as "Islamist Party in Tunisia Concedes to Secularists" and "Tunisia's Islamists Down But Not Out After Election Defeat."[8] Other, smaller, losing parties fielded candidates but had not anticipated winning a majority. Ennahda was a realistic contender since it had won a plurality of seats in the Constituent Assembly that governed Tunisia between 2011 and 2014. Thus, the negative emotions associated with losing should have been more evident among Ennahda voters than the smaller parties' voters.

In the 2018 US Congressional election, the Democrats won a majority in the House of Representatives, but the Republicans expanded their Senate majority. Although Democrats taking control of the House was an important shift, the narrative that the election was a "wave" for Democrats only emerged over time as it became clear that the party had won several outstanding races in the House and Senate. Initially, many newspapers emphasized the mixed outcome, with headlines such as "Split Decision" in *The Wall Street Journal* and "Democrats Secure Control of the House; Republicans Build on Majority in Senate" in *The New York Times*.[9] Reflecting this tone, when we asked a subset of respondents in our post-election survey to describe the overall results of the election in an open-ended question, more than three times as many respondents emphasized the mixed result as emphasized the Democrats' victory in the House.[10] Thus, it is not possible to define a winner or loser at the national level. However, people may have experienced the emotions associated with voting for a winning or losing candidate in their district-level (House of Representatives) or state-level (Senate) elections.

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usually the presidential outcome (and that was certainly the case in 2016 and 2020), we focus on the winner–loser dynamic in those races.

[7] See, for example, Tavana and Russell (2014, 8).

[8] Gall (2014); Markey and Amara (2014).

[9] Graham (2018). Another article written the day after the election began, "It wasn't necessarily the night of either party's dreams." See Cohn (2018).

[10] See the online appendix (www.cambridge.org/bushprather) for more information. As described in Chapter 3, this survey was conducted within seven days of the election.

Unlike the Tunisia survey, the US survey included questions designed to identify local winner–loser dynamics. We asked respondents whether the House and Senate candidates they voted for won or lost. We then coded voters as either winners (both candidates won) or losers (both candidates lost), and drop respondents who voted for one winner and one loser as well as those voting in states with no Senate election that year.[11] We use the resulting variable to assess whether supporting winning or losing local candidates affects beliefs about election credibility in the same way as supporting them nationally does. Almost one-third (29 percent) of the voters in our survey did not know the winner of one or both elections; we do not expect such individuals to be subject to local winner–loser dynamics.[12]

An important characteristic of how we define winning and losing voters is that winning and losing are co-determined with voting for a certain candidate or party, which makes it difficult to determine which dynamic has more influence on perceptions of election credibility. We address this problem in two ways. First, given the panel nature of our surveys, the same people are interviewed before and after the election. If a voter's beliefs about election credibility differ between the pre- and post-election surveys, then this dynamic suggests that winning or losing the election has affected their beliefs about election credibility. Second, we use an experiment with a hypothetical election scenario in Georgia to randomly vary the imagined winner of a future election, as detailed in Chapter 5. Briefly, we asked Georgians in 2018 to imagine the 2020 parliamentary election. We then experimentally varied which party won the most seats. In Chapter 5, we examined how an election meddling treatment decreased trust in elections. In this chapter, we first limit our analysis to the experiment's control group, which received no information about election meddling, but did hear that either the Georgian Dream (GD) or United National Movement (UNM) party won more seats, which allows us to experimentally identify the winner–loser gap. Later, we interact the winner treatment with respondents' partisan affiliation to examine the effect of winning or losing.

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[11] Since US Senate terms are 6 years, one-third of the seats are contested in each election. Thus, some states would not have had a senator on the ballot in the 2018 election.

[12] To the extent that voters in our survey reported knowing the winner but were incorrect, it should mainly introduce noise into our analysis.

Although these analyses help differentiate between the effects of winning and losing vs. the effects of party identification in some cases, it remains very difficult to differentiate between the dynamics of information processing that reflect accuracy goals vs. directional goals. As discussed in Chapter 2, social scientists who study public opinion generally struggle to distinguish between these two dynamics. After all, it is not possible to directly observe individuals' cognitive processes. Moreover, many responses to new information are consistent with either accuracy or directional goals, depending on the researcher's assumptions about how individuals weigh the probability that different pieces of information are true.[13] For example, a winner–loser gap in perceptions of election credibility could reflect partisans' different assessments due to variation in either (1) their emotional responses to election outcomes or (2) their cool-headed responses to political information. We note instances in which the conditional effects of vote choice suggest a particular mechanism, but we generally do not seek to determine whether an accuracy or directional mechanism better fits the data. Instead, our goal is to understand how individual vote choice conditions the effects of foreign actors on perceptions of election credibility.

7.2 The Winner–Loser Gap in Trust

In this section, we examine evidence of a winner–loser gap in perceptions of election credibility (Table 7.1 summarizes the winners and losers in our three cases). Two noteworthy patterns emerge. First, winners have more confidence in elections than losers across all of our surveys. Although numerous studies have investigated citizens' perceptions of election credibility in the United States[14] and elsewhere,[15] to the best of our knowledge, our study is the first to establish the existence of a winner–loser gap in Georgia and Tunisia. Second, we find that winning or losing an election *changes* individuals' beliefs about election credibility. In the United States, for example, Trump voters were much more distrustful than Clinton voters before the

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[13] Coppock (2021, Ch. 7).

[14] For example, Alvarez, Hall, and Llewellyn (2008); Beaulieu (2014b); Sances and Stewart (2015); Norris, Cameron, and Wynter (2018).

[15] For example, Anderson et al. (2005); Moehler (2009); Cantú and García-Ponce (2015); Robertson (2017); Wellman, Hyde, and Hall (2017).

Table 7.1 *Summary of election winners and losers in our study*

Country	Year	Election	Winner	Main Loser
Tunisia	2014	Legislative	Nidaa Tounes	Ennahda
Tunisia	2014	Presidential runoff	Beji Caid Essebsi	Moncef Marzouki
United States	2016	Presidential	Donald Trump	Hillary Clinton
United States	2018	Legislative	Ambiguous nationally	Ambiguous nationally
United States	2020	Presidential	Joe Biden	Donald Trump
Georgia	2018	Presidential runoff	Salome Zourabichvili	Grigol Vashadze
Georgia	2020*	Legislative	Assigned randomly	Assigned randomly

Note: The * denotes that this refers to a hypothetical future election in Georgia as described in our experiment in the 2018 post-second-round presidential election survey.

2016 election and much more trusting afterwards. In 2020, Biden and Trump voters had similar levels of confidence in the election before it took place, but afterwards, Biden voters had much more trust in the results than Trump voters. Our observational and experimental data in Georgia exhibit similar patterns.

We begin by examining the winner–loser gap in election credibility in all three cases. We use ordinary least squares (OLS) regression models that regress our standard measure of election credibility (which ranges from 0 to 2, as described in Chapter 3) on an indicator for whether an individual supported the party or candidate that ultimately won or lost the election. These models also include control variables to account for other factors that could influence both vote choice and perceptions of election credibility.[16] We only examine voters in the control group

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[16] These variables include the respondent's age, educational attainment, employment status, level of political interest, political knowledge, reported knowledge about election observers, and sex. In the United States and Georgia, the controls also included the respondent's race or ethnicity, whereas in Tunisia (a more homogenous society), they also included geographic location. We use this standard set of control variables throughout this chapter. A table containing the full analysis is in the online appendix (www.cambridge.org/bushprather).

in the surveys to avoid including responses about election credibility that may have been influenced by information about monitoring or meddling.

In all of our post-election surveys, we expected voting for the winning candidate or party to be positively correlated with perceptions of election credibility. And indeed, we find a significant winner–loser gap in almost every post-election case (see Figure 7.1). With the exception of the US 2018 survey, which concerned an election for which there was no clear national winner, we find a strong and significant positive association between perceived credibility and voting for the winning candidate or party. This pattern therefore holds across multiple types of elections (legislative and presidential) and in countries with varying regime types (consolidated democracy, transitional democracy, and stable partial democracy). The winner–loser gap is substantial where it exists, ranging from 0.4 to 1.3 points on the 3-point scale. As would be expected, it is generally larger, and in most cases several times larger, than the treatment effects associated with monitoring and meddling that we identified in experiments described in earlier chapters.

Figure 7.1 contains two other notable results. The first is that in the three cases for which we have both pre- and post-election surveys (the United States in 2016 and 2020, and Georgia in 2018), the election triggered dramatic partisan changes in beliefs about election credibility. This change is especially stark for the US 2016 election. In the survey fielded just before the 2016 election, Trump voters (i.e., the eventual election winners) were much *less* likely to think the election would be credible than Clinton voters (i.e., the eventual election losers). After the election, the pattern reversed: Trump voters were *more* likely than Clinton voters to believe the election was credible. One explanation for the pre-election pattern is that Trump consistently warned his supporters of the likelihood of voter fraud during the campaign.[17] Another possible explanation, which is likely related to Trump's pre-election warnings about voter fraud, is that many pre-election polls suggested that Clinton would win, which could have cultivated a pre-election winner–loser mentality. While not as stark, the results from 2020 also show that the election represents an inflection point in partisan differences in electoral trust. Before the election, Trump and Biden voters had similar levels of trust; the winner–loser gap emerged afterwards.
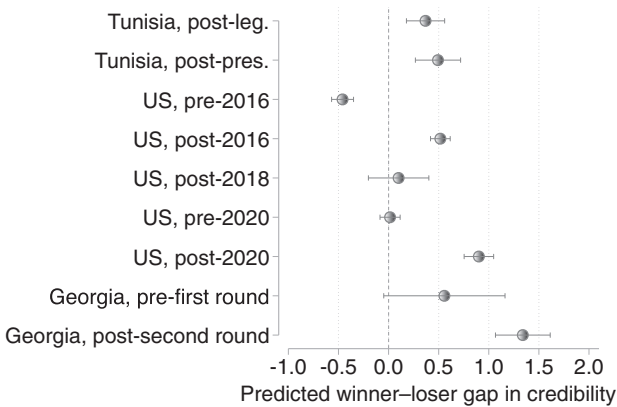
[17] Gabriel (2016).

Figure 7.1 The winner–loser gap in perceived credibility
Note: This figure displays point estimates with 95 percent confidence intervals. All predictions are based on OLS models that contain control variables (see discussion in main text). The outcome variable is perceived credibility and uses the standardized measure, which ranges from 0 to 2. The sample size is small in some models because we restrict the sample to voters for the main winning and losing candidates or parties and to the control group in any experiments concerning election meddling or monitoring, which generates fairly large standard errors in some cases. $N = 84$ (Tunisia, post-legislative), 119 (Tunisia, post-presidential), 334 (US, pre-2016), 364 (US, post-2016), 81 (US, post-2018), 342 (US, pre-2020), 189 (US, post-2020), 27 (Georgia, pre-first round), and 95 (Georgia, post-second round).

In Georgia, we also detect a difference in perceptions of election credibility before and after the election. Voters who supported the eventual winner, Salome Zourabichvili, reported more trust than those who supported the main loser, Grigol Vashadze, in both surveys.[18] However, the winner–loser gap is more than twice as large in the post-election survey than in the pre-election survey.[19] Whereas the gap is

[18] Though nominally independent, Zourabichvili was supported by the GD party, which held a majority in the Georgian parliament in 2018 and was the party of the outgoing president, Giorgi Margvelashvili. Because GD was the ruling party and had won these previous elections, its voters likely had more faith in the electoral system to begin with.

[19] The precision of our estimate also improves, as the statistical significance shifts from $p = 0.069$ to $p < 0.001$. The sample size for the Georgia pre-election survey is quite small because most people had not made up their minds or would not tell us who they intended to vote for, and because our focus in this

around 0.6 points on our 3-point scale in the pre-election survey, it is around 1.3 points in the post-election survey, which is the largest gap we observe in Figure 7.1. This widening gap is consistent with the emotional highs and lows that would be predicted for supporters of Georgia's two presidential candidates after the election outcome became known, as well as a changing information environment.

The second noteworthy finding reported in Figure 7.1 is that there was not a clear winner–loser gap after the 2018 US midterm election. As noted earlier, this election is a somewhat unusual case in our study because the Democratic Party won a majority in the House of Representatives and the Republican Party expanded its majority in the Senate. To reflect this ambiguity, we define *Winners* in Figure 7.1 with the local-level measure based on whether the respondent's candidates for the House *and* Senate won or lost. The results shown in Figure 7.1 demonstrate that there was no significant relationship between one's candidates winning at the local level and perceptions of election credibility.

As an alternative, we consider the relationship between partisanship and perceptions of election credibility in the United States over the same period (see Figure 7.2).[20] The figure illustrates that prior to the election, Democrats had lower levels of trust in the election than Republicans. Yet afterwards, partisanship was not clearly related to beliefs about election credibility. This post-election pattern is precisely what we would expect to find if individuals' directional goals were mixed due to an ambiguous election result. On the one hand, people would like to believe the election was credible since their party controls one chamber of the legislature. On the other hand, they would also like to believe the election was *not* credible, since their party did not gain control of the other chamber. It is also possible that the pattern shown in Figure 7.2 reveals a more rational form of information updating. Democrats may have been more distrustful than Republicans prior to the election due to their lingering concerns about the integrity

analysis is on respondents in the experimental control group. The positive coefficient for *Winners* in the pre-election regression would likely be estimated with a great deal of confidence if we had a larger sample, similar to the post-election regression.

[20] This analysis includes the same variables, measured in the same way, as that reported in Figure 7.1. A table containing this analysis is in the online appendix (www.cambridge.org/bushprather).
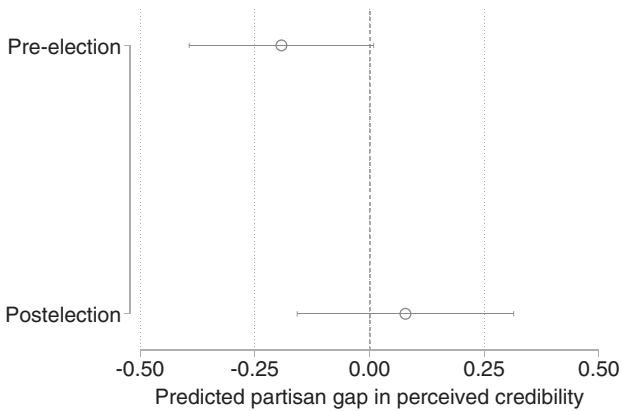
Figure 7.2 Partisanship and perceived credibility in the United States, 2018
Note: This figure shows point estimates with 95 percent confidence intervals. All predictions are based on OLS models that contain control variables (see discussion in main text). The outcome variable is perceived credibility and uses the standardized measure, which ranges from 0 to 2. *Democrat* is coded 1 for voters who identify as Democrat and 0 for voters who identify as Republican, meaning that positive values in this figure indicate that Democrats have more trust than Republicans. The sample is restricted to the control group in any experiments concerning election meddling or monitoring. $N = 170$ (pre-election) and 138 (postelection).

of the 2016 election, which we discuss later. If this were the case, then the ambiguous election outcome in 2018 (which was broadly consistent with our pre-election survey) may have caused accuracy-motivated Democrats to update their beliefs about election credibility in a positive direction, indicating that they were reassured that foreign meddling had not undermined the contest.

The reason why we observe a partisan shift in Figure 7.2 but no winner–loser gap in the same election (2018) in Figure 7.1 may be because national-level results matter more to American voters. We asked people whether they cared more about their party winning the House (Senate) or winning the election in their district (state). For both the House and Senate, about twice as many respondents cared more about the national result than the district or state result.

As discussed earlier, the disadvantage of using observational data to explore the winner–loser gap is that winning and losing are always co-determined with party. For example, what if supporters of the winning party also happen to trust democratic institutions more to begin with?
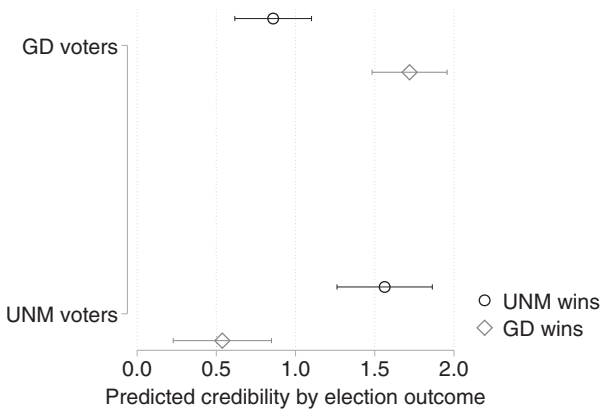
Figure 7.3 The effect of winning on perceived credibility in Georgia, hypothetical election, post-second-round presidential election survey
Note: This figure shows point estimates with 95 percent confidence intervals. All predictions are based on OLS models that contain control variables (see discussion in main text). The outcome variable is perceived credibility and uses the standardized measure, which ranges from 0 to 2. The sample is limited to the control group of the hypothetical meddling experiment. Vote choice is based on reported actual vote choice in the 2018 presidential election. $N = 152$.

There are two ways to overcome this issue. The first is to use observational data over time as winners and losers shift, as we just did in the 2018 US election survey. The second approach is to use a hypothetical scenario and randomly assign respondents to imagine their party winning or losing, as we did in the post-second-round survey in Georgia. This experiment randomized information about whether GD or UNM won the hypothetical 2020 legislative election; it confirms the causal effect of winning or losing on perceptions of election credibility. When we analyze this experiment, we include our standard set of control variables (discussed earlier) to account for the other factors that potentially shape both vote choice and perceptions of election credibility.

Figure 7.3 shows that both GD and UNM voters were significantly more likely to believe the election was credible if their party was described as winning. The gap is substantial: UNM voters had around 1 point more electoral trust on the 3-point scale when their party won. The treatment effect is similar among GD voters. Since voters from both parties reacted to the treatment in the same way, we can be

confident that the winner–loser effect is independent of partisanship at least in Georgia.

Yet can foreign actors ever alter individuals' vote choices? For example, can learning negative information about election integrity from monitors and meddlers cause people to change who they vote for? We can test this proposition using our data from Tunisia, since our experiment about election observers' (EOs') reports on the parliamentary election was contained in a survey prior to the presidential election held 2 months later. In this survey, we queried respondents about their intended presidential vote choice after the EO report experiment. Although we found in Chapter 4 that hearing about positive vs. negative reports caused a modest shift in Tunisians' perceptions of election credibility, there is no evidence that doing so caused them to shift their likelihood to vote for Essebsi vs. Marzouki in the presidential election 2 months later.[21]

7.3 Vote Choice and Responses to Monitors' Reports

In all the post-election surveys in which we would expect to find evidence of a winner–loser gap in perceptions of election credibility, we found it. Next, we examine how individuals responded to information from election monitors that could have reinforced or challenged their pre-existing beliefs about the credibility of elections. We focus on monitors' positive and negative reports rather than their presence. The effects of monitors' reports are more likely to be conditional on vote choice given that they can be explicitly positive and/or negative in content.

We re-examine the experiments from Chapter 4 that were fielded in four post-election surveys: Tunisia in 2014, the United States in 2016, the United States in 2020, and Georgia in 2018. These surveys included experiments that randomized whether individuals received information about monitors' positive or negative evaluations of elections. Recall that we found in Chapter 4 that monitors' positive reports significantly increased perceptions of election credibility relative to negative reports in Tunisia and the United States, although the substantive effect was fairly modest. By contrast, if anything, positive reports were associated with *less* trust in Georgia.

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[21] The estimated difference in probability of voting for Essebsi vs. Marzouki was 3 percent ($p = 0.598$).

Figure 7.4 displays the average treatment effects (ATEs) for winners and losers.[22] The ATEs measure the difference in perceived credibility between respondents in the positive and negative reports treatment groups, respectively, and those in the control group, who did not receive any information about EO reports. Our results are consistent across the three cases: Winners did not update their beliefs about election credibility in response to the information in election monitors' reports in any of the surveys. Losers *did* update, but never in a positive direction. These findings complicate the conventional wisdom about election monitoring, which focuses on observers' overall effects.

We reach these conclusions through regression analysis. To assess the conditional relationship between election monitoring reports, vote choice, and perceptions of election credibility, we use OLS regression models that interact vote choice with indicators for assignment to the monitoring treatments.[23] These models include the same control variables used in our analysis of the effect of vote choice on perceived credibility (as shown in Figure 7.1) since vote choice is observed and not randomly assigned. We focus on the main election winners and losers, since they are the most relevant theoretically, as described earlier; the online appendix (www.cambridge.org/bushprather) contains details about the effects of reports on secondary election losers and nonvoters, which tend to be more limited.

In Tunisia, the main losers of the legislative election were voters for Ennahda, the Islamist party. Ennahda supporters, who had less trust in the election to begin with, did not update their perceptions of election credibility in response to the positive reports in the post-legislative election survey. However, they were more swayed by the negative reports relative to both the control group and the positive reports treatment group. Negative reports were considerably more likely to reduce losers' perceptions of election credibility than positive reports: around 16 percent. These patterns are potentially consistent with motivated

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[22] Our analysis includes the same set of control variables that we use throughout the chapter; see the discussion around Figure 7.1. In the online appendix (www.cambridge.org/bushprather), we also show the predicted levels of election credibility for election winners and losers in the positive and negative EO reports treatments, as well as tables containing the full analysis.

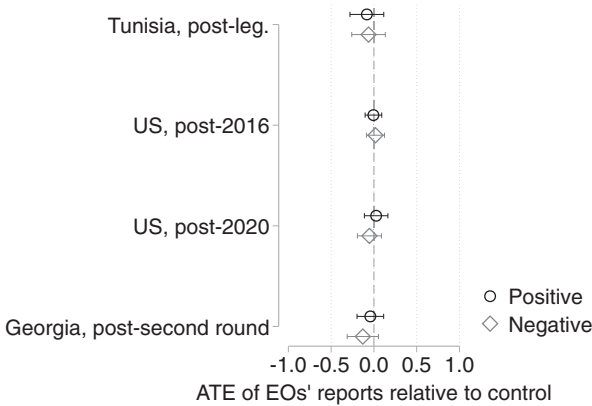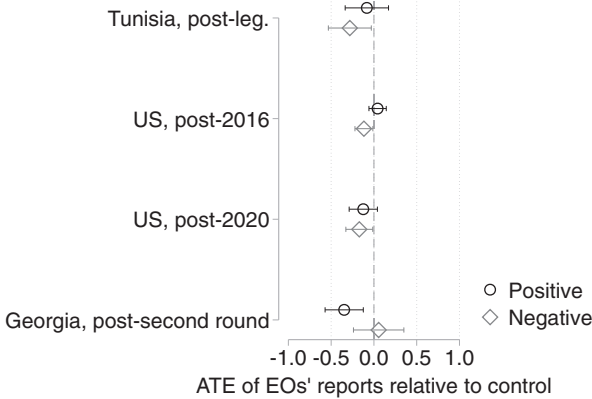[23] A table in the online appendix (www.cambridge.org/bushprather) contains the full regression results.

(a) Election winners

(b) Election losers

Figure 7.4 The effect of monitors' reports on perceived credibility, by vote choice

Note: This figure shows the ATEs for the positive and negative report treatments relative to control with 95 percent confidence intervals. All predictions are based on OLS models that contain control variables (see discussion in main text). The outcome variable is perceived credibility and uses the standardized measure, which ranges from 0 to 2. For definitions of election winners and losers, see Table 7.1. For the EO reports experiments overall, $N = 762$ (Tunisia, post-legislative), 676 (US, post-2016), 298 (US, post-2020), and 477 (Georgia, post-second round).

reasoning, since positive reports could contradict losers' directional goals of questioning the election's integrity, whereas negative reports could reinforce those goals. At the same time, election losers may have had less certain prior beliefs that the election was credible, which would be more consistent with accuracy-driven information updating.

A similar pattern emerged in the United States after the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections.[24] Similar to Tunisia, winners in these elections (i.e., Trump voters (2016) and Biden voters (2020)) had incredibly high levels of confidence in the election afterwards, and EO reports had no effect on their beliefs about election credibility. The main losers (i.e., Clinton voters (2016) and Trump voters (2020)) had significantly less trust in the election. Similar to Tunisia, the positive reports did not improve US respondents' confidence in the election, and in 2020 even slightly diminished it, whereas the negative reports significantly lowered losers' trust relative to the control group.[25] The decrease in perceived credibility for Clinton voters who heard the negative reports instead of the positive reports was meaningful, at about 13 percent. There was little difference between Trump voters in 2020 who heard positive vs. negative reports. Both reports the credibility of the election, but only the negative reports treatment was significantly different from the control.

In the post-second-round election survey in Georgia, as expected and similar to the other cases, voters for the winning candidate, Salome Zourabichvili, had high levels of confidence in the election. They did not update their perceptions of election credibility in response to monitors' reports. Moreover, losers (i.e., supporters of Grigol Vashadze) were not reassured by monitors' positive reports; in fact, their confidence in the election decreased significantly relative to the control when they learned of monitors' positive evaluations. Meanwhile, and unlike the previous two cases, negative reports did *not* reduce losers'

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[24] Although our 2018 US survey also included an experiment about election monitors (described in Chapter 4), we do not use it to test for conditional effects by vote choice since we showed earlier that Americans had ambiguous directional goals around the 2018 midterm election.

[25] As Chapter 4 noted, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe reports referenced in our negative treatment were somewhat critical of voter access issues in a way that was aligned with Democrats' concerns about election integrity in 2016. It is possible that this content made Clinton voters especially receptive to the information in the negative reports.

confidence in the election – perhaps due to Georgians' general distrust of international monitors, as discussed in Chapter 4.

This pattern may be evidence of a backlash or backfire effect whereby individuals' beliefs become more extreme when they are exposed to contradictory new information, which is not a pattern revealed in the other cases.[26] Prior studies suggest that strong partisans are the most prone to such backlash reactions. Following that logic, we use a pre-treatment question about satisfaction with the UNM party to explore whether UNM voters who were very or somewhat satisfied with the party were more likely to respond negatively to the monitoring treatment. They were not.[27]

What else might explain election losers' negative responses to monitors' positive reports? Chapter 4 provided evidence against a nationalist backlash. Another possibility we consider is that the positive reports caused election losers to question the integrity of international monitors. We find some evidence of this dynamic. Although both GD and UNM voters perceived international monitors as significantly less capable after hearing about their positive reports, the effect size was significantly larger among UNM voters.[28] Thus, we find further support for the idea (which we explore in more depth in Chapter 6) that individuals' perceptions of foreign actors shape their responses to electoral interventions from abroad. We emphasize that this negative partisan response to positive monitor reports only occurred in Georgia, which held the least democratic elections in our study. It is plausible that the negative response to foreign praise of a flawed election – especially among election losers – could apply in other settings.

Overall, the results depicted in Figure 7.4 confirm that individual vote choice is an important moderator of the effects of EO reports. The mechanism driving this pattern is more ambiguous. It could be the case that directionally motivated reasoning shapes how individuals process

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[26] Nyhan and Reifler (2010).

[27] Nearly one-fifth (19 percent) of Vashadze voters reported that they were very or somewhat unsatisfied with UNM. We find that the reports had a significant treatment effect on both strong ($p = 0.050$) and weak ($p = 0.027$) UNM voters, and the interaction between the treatment and party identification is at least marginally significant in both cases ($p = 0.108$ and $p = 0.032$) despite the reduced sample size.

[28] The p-value for the interaction between vote choice and the positive reports treatment is 0.030.

information from international election monitors. Indeed, the manner in which election losers updated is consistent with directional updating: Positive reports from international monitors did not increase their trust (and in one case, decreased it), while negative reports decreased trust in two of the three cases. Yet, motivated reasoning would also predict that election winners would respond to positive reports since such information is consistent with both their partisan goals and their desire to view election integrity in a good light. In general, however, we did not find that positive reports increased credibility. It is possible that what social scientists term "ceiling effects" were at play: election winners may have already perceived elections to be so credible that there was no room for the EO report treatments to significantly enhance those perceptions. For example, three-quarters (75 percent) of the Tunisian respondents said they had "some" or "a lot" of trust in the parliamentary election results and thought it was "somewhat likely" or "very likely" that they reflected the will of the people.

The patterns we observe could also be consistent with an updating model that assumes individuals are motivated by accuracy – rather than partisan – goals. For example, election losers may have believed the elections we studied were somewhat credible but were not very certain about that. In such a scenario, respondents who voted for a losing party or candidate would be expected to update in response to negative (but not positive) reports.

While we cannot rule out this interpretation, our finding that election losers responded more than election winners to negative reports does not seem to be explained by losers being less certain. We can compare winners' and losers' post-election certainty about election credibility in the 2016 US and 2018 Georgia surveys. We focus on respondents in the control groups, who were not provided any information about monitors or meddlers. In both countries, losers and winners had very high levels of certainty after the elections. In the United States, 91 percent of the main losers (Clinton voters) were "somewhat" or "very" certain of their beliefs about election credibility, compared to 93 percent of the winners (Trump voters). In Georgia, at least 98 percent of both winners and losers were "somewhat" or "very" certain about their beliefs in election credibility after the presidential runoff. Given the high levels of certainty in both cases, we think it is unlikely that the concentration of effects among losers is due to greater uncertainty in their prior beliefs about election credibility.

7.4 Vote Choice and Responses to Meddling

Having established that vote choice conditions how individuals process information from monitors, we now consider how it conditions responses to meddling. We replicate the analysis from Section 7.3 using the meddling experiments included in the 2018 post-election surveys in the United States and Georgia and the 2020 post-election survey in the United States. We find that, contrary to our expectations, vote choice did *not* moderate the effect of meddling on perceived credibility in the United States in either survey, but it did in Georgia. As we discuss later, there are several reasons why the design of our studies in the United States and the electoral context cannot provide conclusive evidence that vote choice does not condition the effect of meddling on perceived credibility.

We then explore other ways in which vote choice may affect responses to foreign meddling and find significant evidence that winning and losing shaped respondents' beliefs about the existence and success of meddling.

7.4.1 Conditioning the Effect of Meddling Treatments

In this section, we re-examine the postelection experiments about meddling from Chapter 5 that were fielded after the 2018 and 2020 US elections and the 2018 Georgian election. Recall from that chapter that information about the *absence* of Russian meddling in these US elections increased electoral trust among Americans, although information about the occurrence of meddling did not have a clear effect. In Georgia, information about meddling in a hypothetical future election significantly decreased trust. Since each country had a slightly different experimental design, we discuss the results separately.

In the United States, since there was no clear national winner in the 2018 election we did not find evidence of a winner–loser gap using the local measure of winning and losing. There were, however, partisan differences in perceptions of election credibility (recall Figure 7.2). In our analyses of vote choice, we therefore examine party identification as the conditioning variable. This measurement choice likely approximates how meddling would have occurred in the 2018 election, as the practice in a legislative election usually targets parties rather than specific candidates in local elections. For the 2020 election, we

examine the differences in the effects of meddling across Biden and Trump voters.

Figure 7.5 displays the results from 2018 and plots the predicted levels of election credibility from OLS models that regress election credibility on the treatment indicator, party identification, the interaction between treatment and party identification, and our standard set of control variables introduced in the analysis of Figure 7.1. The results indicate that neither the "meddling" treatment (which told respondents about Russia's efforts to spread misinformation on social media) nor the "no meddling" treatment (which told respondents Russia's efforts were not as widespread as in 2016) clearly affected Democratic and Republican voters' beliefs about the credibility of the election, although the latter treatment effect trends positive for *both* Democrat and Republican voters.[29] This lack of clear directional updating is potentially consistent with the logic of motivated reasoning, since Democratic and Republican voters had ambiguous directional goals vis-á-vis the 2018 election results. Given the lack of a clear winner–loser dynamic, as well as the lower salience of election meddling in 2018, the conditions were arguably not ripe for motivated reasoning in response to our meddling treatment. At the same time, the limited effect of vote choice as a moderator may reflect relatively strong prior beliefs about election credibility and meddling, such that our modest treatments were not sufficient to cause accuracy-driven updating.

The results displayed in Figure 7.6 demonstrate that the treatments have small and insignificant effects on the credibility of the 2020 election for Biden and Trump voters. Biden voters do not update their beliefs about the credibility of the election in response to new information about meddling in either the full sample or the attentive sample. The largest effect is among Trump voters: The meddling treatment did decrease trust in the election somewhat, but the treatment effect is not statistically significant. There are at least two reasons for these null results. The first is that, as we have discussed elsewhere, foreign meddling was not promoted by government intelligence agencies as

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[29] The *p*-values are 0.039 and 0.103, respectively, for the attentive sample. Chapter 5 discusses how we define the attentive sample and the advantages and disadvantages of restricting the sample in this way. The online appendix (www.cambridge.org/bushprather) contains the full results.
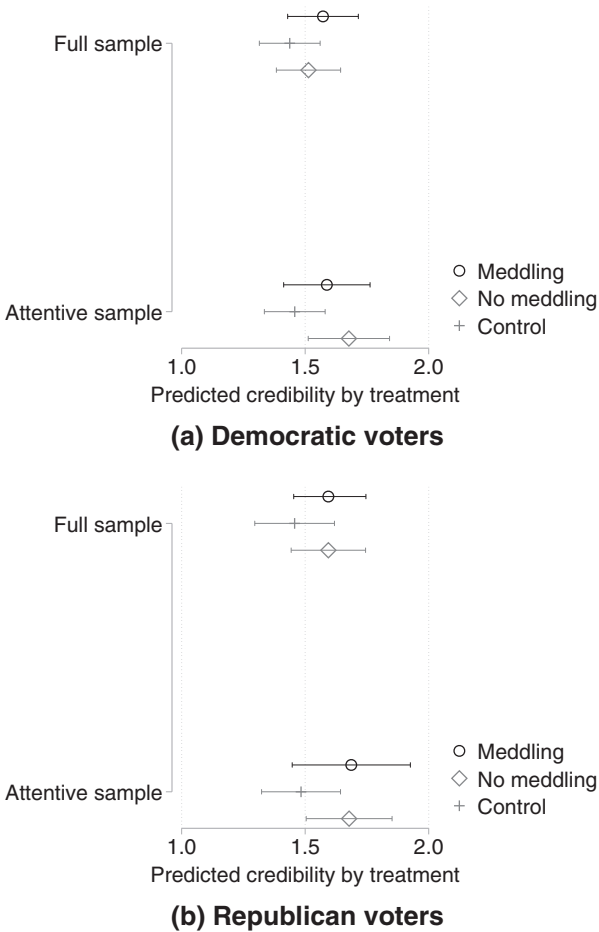
(a) Democratic voters

(b) Republican voters

Figure 7.5 Perceived credibility of the 2018 US election, by meddling treatment and vote choice, post-election survey
Note: This figure shows point estimates with 95 percent confidence intervals. All predictions are based on OLS models that contain control variables (see discussion in main text). The outcome variable is perceived credibility and uses the standardized measure, which ranges from 0 to 2. For the meddling experiment overall, $N = 629$ (full sample) and 472 (attentive sample).

a significant concern after the election when this survey was fielded. The primary narrative that emerged was related to fraud by domestic actors. Thus, it is possible that our foreign meddling treatment did not resonate with Trump voters in the way that it might have with Democrats after the 2016 and 2018 elections. A second, related, reason
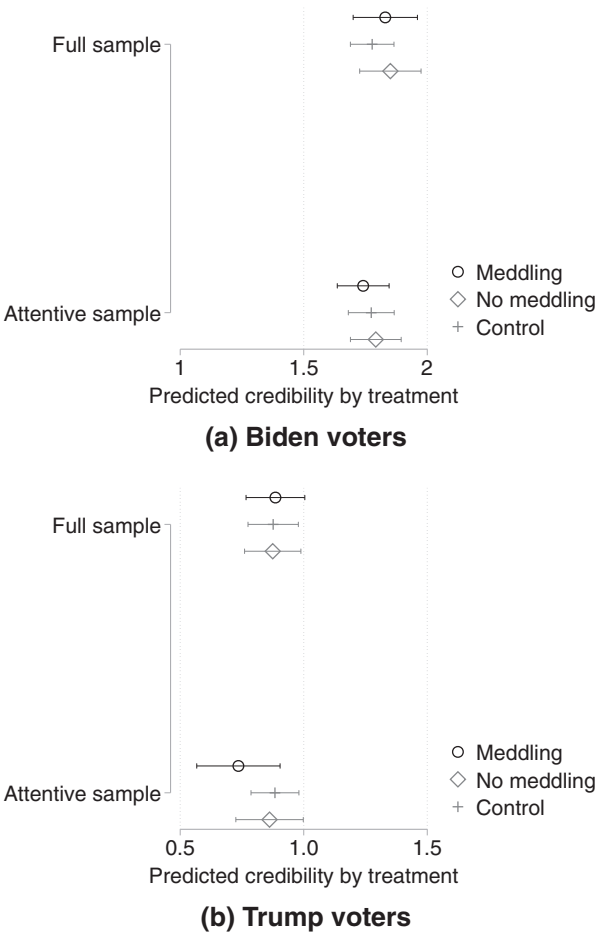
(a) Biden voters

(b) Trump voters

Figure 7.6 Perceived credibility in the United States, by meddling treatment and vote choice, 2020, post-election survey

Note: This figure shows point estimates with 95 percent confidence intervals. All predictions are based on OLS models that contain control variables (see discussion in main text). The outcome variable is perceived credibility and uses the standardized measure, which ranges from 0 to 2. For the meddling experiment overall, $N = 498$ (full sample) and 370 (attentive sample).

is that the meddling mentioned in our survey was still tied to Russia and still likely believed to benefit Trump voters. Thus, Trump voters may not have reacted as negatively to information about Russian meddling as Biden voters would have (if they had lost), given that Russia appeared to have intervened on Trump's behalf.
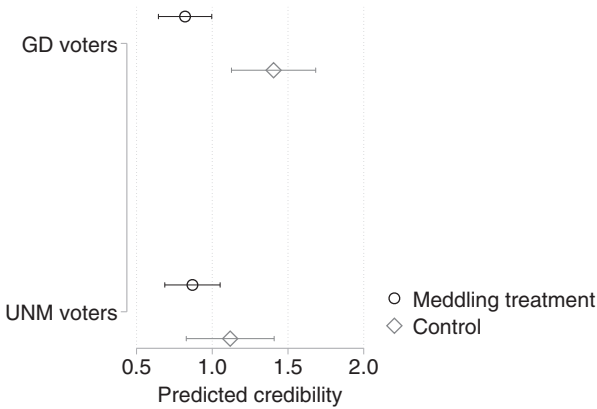
Figure 7.7 Perceived credibility in Georgia, by meddling treatment and vote choice, post-second-round presidential election survey
Note: This figure is based on an OLS model and contains control variables (see discussion in main text). The outcome variable is perceived credibility and uses the standardized measure, which ranges from 0 to 2. For the overall experiment, $N = 317$.

In Georgia, we conducted a hypothetical vignette experiment in the post-second-round presidential election survey in which a foreign country (Russia) meddled on behalf of GD in a future legislative election. As discussed in Chapter 5, the experimental design was based on Tomz and Weeks' experiment on how meddling affects public attitudes in the United States.[30] Our experiment randomized the election winner as either of the country's two leading parties: GD or UNM. In Chapter 5, we found that meddling diminished trust in this hypothetical election and showed earlier in this chapter that supporting the victorious party in this election caused respondents from both parties to have significantly more trust in the election. Now, we consider whether vote choice also moderates the negative effect of the meddling treatment.

First, we regress perceived credibility on vote choice, an indicator of whether the respondent received the meddling treatment, and their interaction, and the same control variables included in the analysis presented in Figure 7.1.[31] As Figure 7.7 shows, the meddling treatment

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[30] Tomz and Weeks (2020).
[31] The online appendix (www.cambridge.org/bushprather) contains tables with the full results.

tended to decrease trust for both GD and UNM voters. This effect is statistically significant ($p = 0.001$), and we find no evidence of a significant interaction between vote choice and the meddling treatment. Recall, however, that this analysis pools across conditions in which half of the UNM and GD voters are treated with information about their party winning and the other half with information about their party losing. Thus, we next examine the conditional effects of the winning and losing treatments.

For this analysis, we repeat our approach in Figure 7.7 but subset the data according to which party the experiment described as winning. This approach enables us to disentangle partisan vs. winner–loser dynamics in Georgia. Figure 7.8 shows that the meddling treatment's negative effect on election credibility is concentrated among election winners. When GD voters heard that their party won and that meddling had occurred, they were less trusting than when they heard nothing about meddling. The effect is substantial, as GD voters' perceptions of election credibility decreased by around 38 percent on our scale. Similarly, when UNM voters heard that their party won and that meddling had occurred (in favor of the rival party, GD), they also had less trust (about 28 percent less). This pattern is intriguing, since we found that monitors' reports only significantly affected election *losers'* trust; here, meddling affected the *winners'* perceptions of election integrity.

One way of thinking about this finding is that losers' trust was already so low that negative information could not cause it to decline further. Put differently, and in much the same way that ceiling effects may have prevented us from identifying an effect of monitors' positive reports among election winners in Tunisia and the United States, floor effects may have prevented us from identifying an effect of meddling among election losers in Georgia.

This finding also seems to cut against a motivated reasoning interpretation, which suggests that election winners' directional goals would cause them to discount negative information about election credibility, or even double down on their pre-existing belief in response to new information that suggested this original belief was wrong. Instead, accuracy-driven respondents in Georgia who were somewhat uncertain about election credibility may have downgraded their assessments of the election's validity when they learned that meddling had occurred. Accuracy goals may have outweighed directional goals in
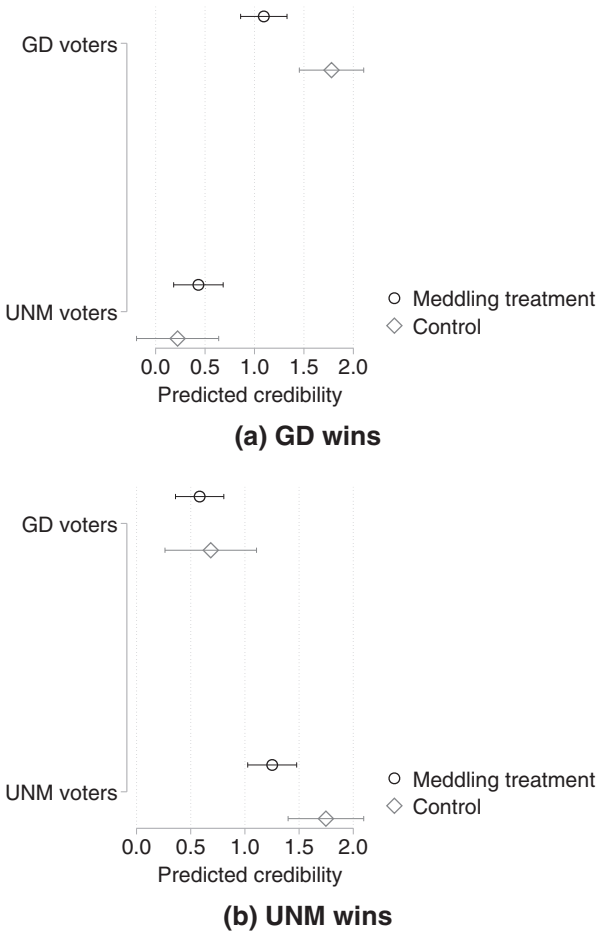
(a) GD wins

(b) UNM wins

Figure 7.8 Perceived credibility in Georgia, by party winner, post-second-round presidential election survey
Note: This figure is based on an OLS model and contains control variables (see discussion in main text). The outcome variable is perceived credibility and uses the standardized measure, which ranges from 0 to 2. $N = 151$ (GD wins) and 166 (UNM wins).

this experiment due to its hypothetical nature.[32] We asked respondents to imagine their opinions if meddling occurred in a future election. Motivated reasoning may be more likely in real elections when emotions are stronger.

[32] Tomz and Weeks (2020), however, found some evidence of directional reasoning when they used a similar design in the United States.

In summary, we found evidence that vote choice conditioned the effect of meddling in one of our cases, Georgia. The negative effects of meddling were clearest in the hypothetical experiment for GD voters when GD was described as winning, although UNM voters also reported a loss in trust in the election when UNM was described as winning. In the United States, we did not find such effects in our 2018 post-election survey, although there are at least two reasons why it might have been quite a difficult case for finding significant effects. First, given the saturation of information about Russian meddling in the two years before the election, Americans' prior beliefs about foreign actors and election credibility may have been relatively firm by the time of our study and thus difficult to alter via our experimental treatments. Second, the 2018 election did not have a clear national winner, which may have discouraged directional updating that can occur based on winner–loser status. The 2020 US election did have a clear winner, but the losers' post-election concerns focused more on domestic sources of election fraud than foreign actors.

7.4.2 Vote Choice and Perceptions of Meddlers

Because meddling is often covert and difficult to observe, it is plausible that members of the public will hold divergent views about it. Partisans may view meddlers' capabilities in distinct ways. Moreover, even if meddling is exposed, it may be unclear whether foreign assistance actually affected the election outcome. Chapter 6 established that perceptions of meddlers' capabilities are key to their effects on credibility; here, we consider how vote choice may affect those perceptions.

Winners may be more likely to be exposed to information that minimizes the extent or impact of meddling, and their directional goals may also affect how they react to such information; for instance, it could cause them to perceive foreign interference as inconsequential to the eventual outcome. Public officials' reactions to Russian meddling in the United States in 2016 contain evidence of this dynamic. Whereas Democrats were open to the possibility that Russian meddling swung the election in Trump's favor, Republican Paul Ryan, former speaker of the House of Representatives, acknowledged meddling but said, "It is also clear... it didn't have a material effect on our elections."[33]

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[33] Economist (2018a, 35).

We use evidence from our surveys in three ways to shed light on this dynamic. First, we examine whether election winners were less likely than losers to believe election meddling had occurred. Second, using data from the United States, we analyze rates of passing an attention check related to our Russian meddling treatment to determine whether individuals were more likely to ignore information about meddling that was incongruent with their partisan commitments. Finally, our surveys explore perceptions of meddlers' capabilities to determine whether winners perceived meddlers as less capable than losers. In general, we find evidence of partisan differences across all three tests.

Beliefs about Negative Foreign Influence

To begin, we explore partisan differences in responses to questions about foreign influences. Recall from Chapter 5 that we asked a common question in all of our surveys about perceptions of foreign influence: "To what extent do you think other countries will/did influence the results of the [description] election?" For respondents who said they perceived at least some influence, we then asked, "Do you think this influence will be/was primarily positive, negative, or both positive and negative?" Although perceived negative influence is an admittedly blunt indicator of election meddling, we consider respondents who perceived at least some negative influence to be the most likely to have perceived at least some foreign meddling.

As explained in Chapter 2, we expect election losers to perceive more foreign meddling than winners. To test that expectation, we create a variable that takes a value of 1 if the respondent perceived as least some negative influence, and 0 otherwise.[34] We regress this variable on the individual's vote choice, operationalized in the same way as described earlier, and use logistic regressions. We also include the same control variables from our earlier analyses in this chapter since they are plausibly related to both vote choice and perceptions of foreign influence. This analysis focuses on the post-election surveys in Tunisia and the United States (in 2016 and 2020, the elections with clear winner–loser dynamics) since we did not ask the question about perceptions of foreign influence in the post-election survey in Georgia.

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[34] A score of 0 encompasses respondents who did not perceive at least some foreign influence as well as those who perceived some influence but thought it was more positive.
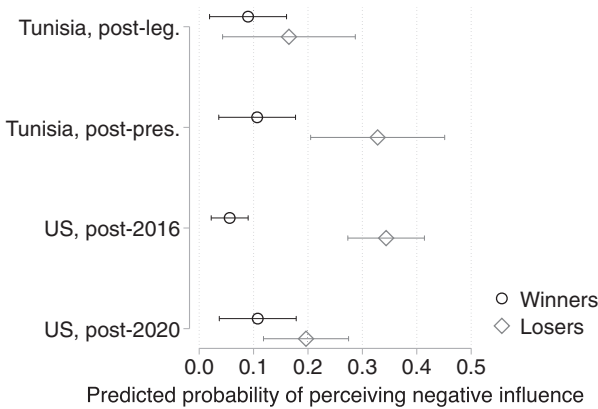
Figure 7.9 Perceived negative foreign influence, winners vs. losers, Tunisia and the United States (2016 and 2020)
Note: This figure shows predicted probabilities with 95 percent confidence intervals. All predictions are based on logit models that contain control variables (see discussion in main text). $N = 86$ (Tunisia, post-legislative), 120 (Tunisia, postpresidential), 364 (US 2016, postpresidential), and 196 (US 2020, post-presidential).

Figure 7.9 presents the results of our analysis, which reveal that election winners perceived less foreign influence than election losers in all four cases; this difference is statistically significant after the presidential elections in both Tunisia and the United States. Essebsi voters (the winners) had only an 11 percent probability of perceiving at least some negative foreign influence in the presidential election, compared to 33 percent of Marzouki voters (the losers). The winner–loser gap in perceptions of meddling is stark after the 2016 US election, but less pronounced after the 2020 election. In 2016, Trump voters had only a 6 percent chance of perceiving at least some negative influence, despite credible reports of Russian meddling. By contrast, Clinton voters had a 34 percent chance of perceiving such influence. While the winner–loser gap in perceptions of negative foreign influence persisted after the 2020 election, it was less than 10 percentage points. Yet in 2020, supporters of the winner (Democrats) perceived less negative influence than the losers (Republicans). In other words, *the winner–loser gap in perceived negative foreign influence held even though the party of the winner flipped from 2016 to 2020.*
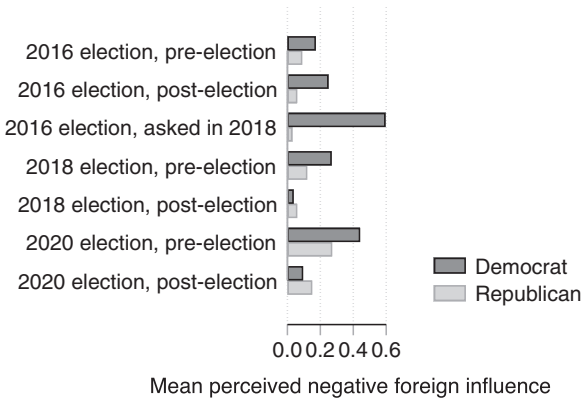
Figure 7.10 American perceptions of negative foreign influence over time
Note: The question about the 2016 election that was asked in 2018 appeared in the pre-election survey. This graph includes the same respondents across all surveys. $N = 129$.

Another interesting way to examine how directionally motivated reasoning shapes perceptions of foreign influence is to consider how Americans' views of meddling changed over the course of the 2016 election cycle. Since we interviewed the same people immediately before and after the 2016 election, we can measure how the election outcome changed their views about meddling. We also invited the 2016 survey participants to take follow-up surveys in 2018 and 2020, which were administered before and after the congressional and presidential elections in those years. As discussed in Chapter 5, the 2018 surveys asked respondents to reflect back on foreign influences in the 2016 election.

Figure 7.10 displays the changing opinions about foreign influences within the same group of Americans over time. It breaks these opinions down by self-identified party affiliation, which is strongly correlated with vote choice during the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections and is more relevant than winner–loser status for dynamics related to the 2018 midterm elections.[35] The figure demonstrates that Republicans and Democrats had similar views on election meddling on the eve of the 2016 election. In the days immediately following Trump's victory,

[35] We replicate Figure 7.10 in the online appendix (www.cambridge.org/bushprather) using Trump and Clinton voters and the differences are even starker.

however, these views became highly partisan: A large gap emerged between Democrats and Republicans with Democrats expressing significantly greater concerns about negative foreign influences. Polarization on this topic became even more intense over the next two years. When asked in 2018 to reflect back on the 2016 election, almost 60 percent of Democrats reported that at least some negative foreign influences occurred in 2016; the percentage of Republicans that believed that remained negligible.

Once again, our findings related to the 2018 midterm elections demonstrate that the split election results did not create an environment conducive to partisan differences on the topic of meddling. Whereas perceptions that foreign meddling had occurred in the 2018 election were still somewhat polarized, they were considerably less polarized than they were after the 2016 election. Although Democrats' serious concerns about foreign meddling persisted up until the 2018 election, they were largely allayed after the election, which did not have a clear national winner but did involve substantial Democratic gains. Interestingly, Republicans' concerns about foreign influence remained extremely low around the 2018 election, and much lower than in the period leading up to the 2016 election.

Concerns about negative foreign influence increased again around the 2020 election; Democrats were again more concerned about foreign meddling than Republicans. However, Republicans expressed more concern about meddling in 2020 than at any time in the previous four years. This likely reflects rhetoric from Republican elites as well as general concerns about the integrity of the vote leading up to the 2020 election in the context of large-scale changes to voting due to the COVID-19 pandemic. After Biden won the election, only 10 percent of the Democrats sampled reported concerns about negative foreign influence, while Republicans had slightly higher levels of concern. The overall relatively lower levels of concern after the 2020 election again likely reflect the fact that the dominant narrative in 2020 was about fraud perpetrated by domestic actors.

Attentiveness to Meddling
Next, we explore partisan differences in attentiveness to information about meddling. Directional goals may affect not only how individuals

respond to new information but also which sources of information they pay attention to.[36] Motivated reasoning suggests that individuals should search for (and pay closer attention to) information that is consistent with their directional goals rather than information that conflicts with those goals.

We examine this phenomenon using data from the 2018 and 2020 post-election surveys in the United States, which included a meddling experiment described briefly earlier in this chapter and in more detail in Chapter 5. The logic of motivated reasoning suggests that Republicans may have ignored our treatment in the experiment about Russia's attempts to meddle in the midterms (the "meddling" treatment) but could have been more attentive to our treatment about the lack of widespread Russian meddling (the "no meddling" treatment). This urge to resist information about Russian meddling in 2018 was likely higher than in 2020 since the Republican candidate who the Russian meddling would have supported did not win. Immediately following the experimental vignette, we asked respondents questions designed to gauge their perceptions of election credibility as well as the hypothesized moderators.

A subsequent follow-up question was designed to assess the extent of motivated reasoning. One observable implication of the selective attention individuals might pay to information that is incongruent with their partisan priors is that they may be unable to remember incongruent information and more likely to remember congruent information.[37] Therefore, our question probed how closely the respondent paid attention to the information revealed to them in the treatment text. It asked: "Now recall the information we gave you earlier in the survey about the midterm elections. Did US government security officials say that there was no indication of Russian interference in the midterms or did they say that Russia attempted to interfere in the midterms by spreading lies on the internet?" Only around half of the respondents in 2018 and 2020 correctly recalled the information in their randomly assigned vignette, which suggests that considerable motivated reasoning could have occurred.

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[36] Kertzer, Rathbun, and Rathbun (2020) refer to these two mechanisms as "motivated skepticism" and "selective attention," respectively.

[37] Jerit and Barabas (2010).
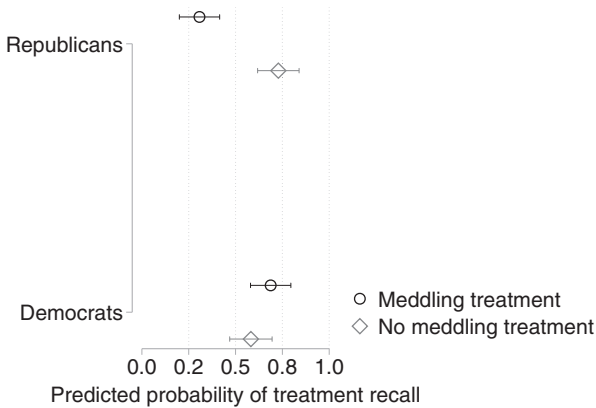
(a) 2018
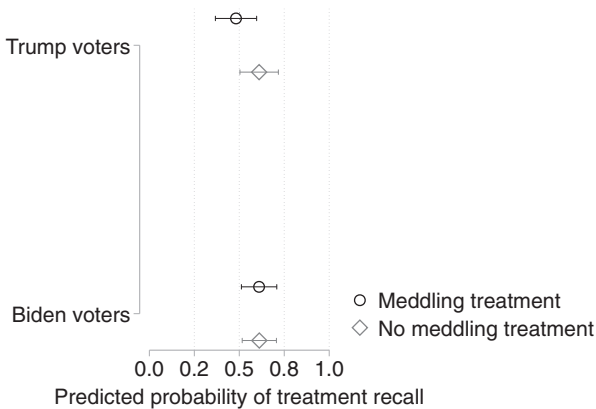
(b) 2020

Figure 7.11 Correct memory of meddling treatment by vote choice, United States, 2018 and 2020, post-election surveys
Note: This figure displays predicted probabilities with 95 percent confidence intervals. All predictions are based on logit models that contain control variables (see discussion in main text). The data come from the post-election surveys in 2018 and 2020. $N = 260$ and 300, respectively.

To test whether this was indeed the case, we regressed a variable indicating whether the respondent passed the attention check on their treatment assignment, the respondent's vote choice, and the interaction of the two. We also included our standard set of control variables, described earlier. Figure 7.11 plots the predicted probability of passing

the attention check by treatment condition and vote choice.[38] It indicates notable partisan differences in attentiveness in 2018, but less substantial differences in 2020. Republican voters were significantly more likely to pass the "no meddling" attention check question than the "meddling" attention check, whereas Democratic voters were much more likely to pass the "meddling" attention check question than Republican voters, although there was not a significant difference in Democratic voters' probability of passing the attention check between the "meddling" and "no meddling" treatment conditions. Given recent Russian meddling in support of Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump, Republican voters' greater attention to the treatment when it was about the absence of meddling rather than its presence makes sense. Republicans seem to have been directionally motivated to reject information about meddling that might delegitimize their party's leader. While Trump voters were still less likely to pass the attention check if they were in the meddling treatment in 2020, the difference between those in the meddling vs. no meddling treatments was still significant but much smaller. This suggests there was potentially less motivated reasoning around Russian meddling in 2020 – four years after the 2016 Russian intervention.

This analysis suggests that individuals' directional motivations may affect their ability to retain information about meddling. In particular, respondents may have dismissed or ignored information that was inconsistent with their partisan beliefs about election meddling. When individuals engage in this type of information processing, they are less likely to update their political beliefs in response to new information.

Beliefs about Meddlers' Capabilities

Although, as noted earlier, we did not ask our standard question about foreign influence in the postelection survey in Georgia, we asked a related question that was designed to measure individual perceptions of meddlers' capabilities: "How likely do you think it is that Salome Zourabichvili won because of support from Russia?" (1 = "not likely at all" and 4 = "very likely"). If respondents believed Zourabichvili's victory was due to Russian meddling, this pattern would indicate that they thought the meddling was successful.

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[38] The online appendix (www.cambridge.org/bushprather) reports the full results of this analysis.
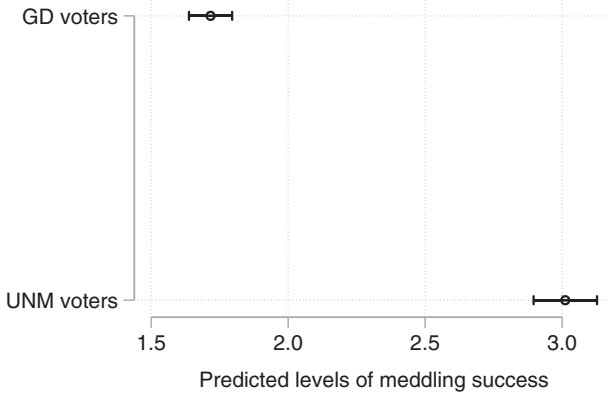
Figure 7.12 Georgian perceptions of successful Russian influence, 2018, post-second-round presidential election survey
Note: This figure displays point estimates with 95 percent confidence intervals. All predictions are based on an OLS model that contains control variables (see discussion in main text). The data come from the post-second-round presidential election survey. $N = 723$.

Russian meddling was the most appropriate case to consider when posing the question about meddling success. Although there was no credible public information about Russian meddling in support of Zourabichvili at the time of our surveys, as discussed in Chapters 3 and 5, there were fears prior to the election that GD was getting too close to Russia. Whereas Vashadze and his UNM party are vociferously pro-Western and pro-EU, Zourabichvili and GD have taken a more conciliatory (if not friendly) approach to Russia.[39] As such, Zourabichvili could have been considered Russia's preferred candidate.

We regressed the variable about perceived meddling success on respondents' treatment assignment, vote choice, and the interaction between the two. The regression included our standard set of control variables. Figure 7.12 presents the main results; the full results are available in the online appendix (www.cambridge.org/bushprather). The figure indicates that Zourabichvili voters were much less likely than Vashadze voters to perceive her success as due to Russian influence. This pattern suggests that Georgians' views about Russia's

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[39] Economist (2018b).

capabilities as a meddler were shaped by whether their preferred candidate won the election. Again, this pattern is consistent with the idea that individuals engage in directional reasoning when assessing whether election meddling has occurred, although it could also reflect partisan differences in information sources.

7.5 Conclusion

This chapter demonstrated the powerful effect of voting for a winning or losing candidate on individuals' perceptions of election credibility. Winners were much more likely than losers to trust the results of all elections that had a clear winner and loser; their beliefs were not affected by information about either monitors or meddlers.

By contrast, foreign influences on elections can strongly affect the main election losers. Losers were not reassured by monitors' reports and were more likely to believe that foreign meddlers had influenced the election outcome. This result is normatively troubling, since democracy requires citizens who voted for the losing candidate to consent to being governed by the winner.[40] If election losers cannot be reassured by monitors when elections are clean and are more likely to believe foreign meddling is present even when there is little evidence that it has occurred, then these dynamics undermine one of the necessary conditions for democracy to survive.

Partisan differences in beliefs about (and responses to) meddling have important implications for policies designed to combat negative foreign influences, which must be initiated by election winners. Distressingly, if winners are more likely to dismiss information about foreign meddling and less likely to believe it has occurred, we would not expect them to take strong policy action to improve electoral security. As we have shown, they (and their supporters) are the least likely to acknowledge the existence or success of election meddling. This dynamic may explain, for example, why there was limited US policy action to respond to or enhance election security in the wake of the 2016 election, which we investigate further in Chapter 8.

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[40] Anderson et al. (2005).