Avoiding Dissonant Information*

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Abstract

I examine whether prior exposure to information that contradicts one's beliefs drives information avoidance. More specifically, I focus on the outlook towards abortion and the two main beliefs on abortion rights: "pro-life" (opposes abortion rights) and "pro-choice" (advocates abortion rights). In experiments with US respondents, I first vary the prior exposure to information: whether the information participants receive is in line with (consonant information) or contrary to their beliefs (dissonant information). I then measure avoidance of dissonance information using a willingness to pay measure. I find that a strikingly high proportion of participants are willing to avoid dissonant information at a material cost, using up almost half of their experimental budget. Prior exposure to dissonant information is insignificant in driving information avoidance. What matters most are beliefs: Pro-life participants are willing to spend a substantially higher proportion of their experimental budget to avoid dissonant information than pro-choice participants. An attempt to use text analysis to examine the reasoning behind dissonant information avoidance suggests that anticipation of negative emotions is a key mechanism driving information avoidance. This can also explain the difference in willingness to pay among opposing belief groups. These findings have implications for policies aiming to reduce political polarisation through information provision.

JEL codes: ***C91, C99, D83, D91.***

Keywords: Information avoidance, attention avoidance, willingness to pay, dissonance, gender, experiment.

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1 Introduction

There has been a rise in social and political polarisation in many large democracies. Populist movements have emerged across the world in countries as varied as the United States, the United Kingdom, Brazil, India, and the Philippines (Boxell et al. 2020, Stewart et al. 2020). Researchers have identified selective exposure to information as one of the main contributors to polarisation: people seek information that supports their beliefs and avoid information that contradicts them (Festinger 1954, Klapper 1960, Lazarsfeld et al. 1968, Smith et al. 2008, Hart et al. 2009). When individuals are only exposed to confirmatory information, they tend to form groups with more extreme views containing people who share similar beliefs, which contributes to the occurrence of echo chambers and group polarisation (Sunstein 1999, Garrett 2009, Neuman et al. 2011, Jang 2014). Additionally, avoiding opposing viewpoints poses a special challenge to discursive democracy, as it requires people to arrive at political decisions through the collection of competing arguments and viewpoints. The benefits of innovation and exploration that result from interaction with diverse out-groups are frequently greater than those that result from only interacting with a homogeneous in-group (Stewart et al. 2020). Therefore, in order to tackle political polarisation and make well-informed policy recommendations, I explore people's propensity to avoid dissonant information and investigate the effect of prior exposure to dissonant information on information avoidance.[1]

To quantify the effect of prior exposure to dissonant information on further information avoidance, I design an experiment to vary prior exposure to information for different belief groups, while controlling for lack of attention.[2] I conduct a controlled experiment with 1,000 US participants using the online research platform Prolific. I focus on the topic of abortion rights to study information avoidance in the context of political polarisation, as abortion is considered to be one of the most universal and polarising issues in the world. I concentrate on two opposing belief groups on abortion rights: "pro-choice" and "pro-life".[3] Previous studies in political sciences and psychology have shown that fundamental behavioural differences exist between supporters of opposing ideologies (Cooper et al. 2013, Sweetser 2014). For example, conservatives hold values that prioritise certainty and tradition, whereas liberals

[1] Information avoidance is defined by Sweeny et al. (2010) as any behaviour designed to prevent or delay the acquisition of available but potentially unwanted information.

[2] I define information as it is defined in belief-based utility models. It has a consumption utility. Information carries both instrumental and hedonic value. It includes both factual information and subjective opinions, therefore, it has a non-neutral valence. As pure information without any subjective views in the context of abortion rights would be almost impossible to achieve, it could be considered noisy information. Alternative terms could be used to reference information in my study's context such as news or messages.

[3] Prolific uses the terms "pro-choice" and "pro-life". To keep consistent terminology, I use these terms in the experiment and in the paper. I do not intend for this choice to be taken as a signal of my ideology. For simplicity, I do not use quotation marks around these two terms in the remainder of this paper.

value change and diversity (Graham et al. 2009, Jost et al. 2007). As political conservatism negatively correlates with supporting abortion rights (Osborne et al. 2022), I expect to observe a heterogeneous effect of exposure to information driving information avoidance between two opposing belief groups. To balance the sample on these two belief groups, I run two sessions of the experiment. Session 1 has only pro-choice participants, and Session 2 has only pro-life participants. In the experiment, subjects are asked to complete an effort task that includes reading a short article followed by comprehension questions based on the content of the article. Subjects are informed that they will receive 0.10$ for each correct answer they give to these questions.[4] I randomly allocate half of the subjects to a consonant group (i.e. the assigned article supports their beliefs on abortion rights) and the other half to a dissonant group (i.e. the assigned article opposes their beliefs on abortion rights). This creates exogenous variation in prior exposure to information.

To gauge how exposure to varying information affects information avoidance, I then assign each participant a dissonant article and offer them the chance to switch to a consonant article.[5] Participants who want to switch to a consonant article are asked to indicate their willingness to pay for the switch.[6] I then draw a random number between 0 and 100; if their maximum willingness to pay is higher than or equal to this number, I replace the dissonant article with the consonant article. Participants then complete the second effort task using an article that is chosen based on their individual mechanism results. The experiment finally concludes with a post-treatment questionnaire. There are questions on participants' posterior beliefs on abortion, political beliefs, media consumption, risk and information preferences, and demographic information.

My main results on information avoidance show that a strikingly high proportion of people avoid dissonant information at a monetary cost. On average, 42.60% of the participants choose to avoid dissonant information at a monetary cost of 44.40% of their experimental budget. This suggests that people pay to avoid information that might undermine the validity of their beliefs. These results do not differ significantly when participants are previously exposed to dissonant or consonant information ($p = 0.999$). However, in explaining the difference in willingness to pay to avoid dissonant information, prior beliefs matter significantly. Pro-life people are willing to spend 10.30% more of their additional experimental budget to avoid dissonant information than pro-choice people, compared to the pro-choice

[4]Therefore, information has both instrumental and non-instrumental value in my experiment. It could be used as an incentive to create financial rewards, and as a tool to create cognitive dissonance.

[5]Both of the articles in this stage use arguments that are distinct from those in the articles given to the participants in the stage before. Both the content and the side of the argument the article supports are again communicated to the participants through its title and a sentence-long summary.

[6]Participants receive 100 cents at the start of the experiment and can use this to pay for the switch. Unspent money is added to their bonus payments.

group's mean of 39.90% ($p = 0.002$). This result holds irrespective of the treatment group that participants are randomly assigned to ($p < 0.050$), suggesting that no matter what prior information a person has been exposed to, their current belief demonstrates the severity of information avoidance.

My secondary analysis of the results reveals that there are certain demographic and behavioural factors associated with the variation in willingness to pay among people who choose to forfeit money to avoid dissonant information. I find that in addition to those who are opposed to abortion rights, older people, females, and people who spend less time reading the news are willing to make greater monetary sacrifices to avoid dissonant information. Females are willing to forego 6% more money to avoid dissonant information than males on the topic of abortion rights ($p < 0.100$). On average, being one year older and spending one less hour reading the news in a day are related to 4% ($p < 0.000$) and almost 1% ($p < 0.000$) increase in the willingness to pay, respectively. I also observe belief-confirming but biased evaluations of the articles. If an article supports one's belief about abortion rights, readers perceive it as more reliable and accurate and less untrustworthy and biased ($p < 0.000$). This is consistent with the avoidance of cognitive dissonance. Rating a dissonant article as reliable and accurate might cause people to experience cognitive dissonance because they are holding two conflicting beliefs. Overall, my results prove the existence of motivated information avoidance, which can provide a behavioural explanation for the existence and growth of group polarisation and political extremism.

To investigate how people explain their avoidance behaviour, I collect direct data on people's reasons for switching the dissonant article with a consonant one. To uncover their true justification, I ask an open-ended question about why participants paid to switch or did not pay to switch to a consonant article. Answers to open-ended questions capture the first-order considerations that individuals deem important and the key aspects of a matter that are at the forefront of their thoughts (Ferrario & Stantcheva 2022). Using Natural Language Processing, I show that people who choose to avoid dissonant information experience higher levels of negative emotions in anticipation of exposure to dissonant information than people who choose not to avoid dissonant information. Additionally, they frequently use words related to the moral side of the abortion discussion, associated with negative emotions such as "murder, innocent, religion" to justify their avoidance behaviour, whereas people who choose not to avoid dissonant information frequently use words related to monetary terms such as "money, bonus, keep" to explain their non-avoidance behaviour. These results indicate that anticipation of negative emotions plays a significant role in information avoidance. Furthermore, results suggest a significant difference in tone between pro-life and pro-choice people who choose to avoid dissonant information. I find that the words that characterise

pro-life justifications are more negative and emotional. Therefore, they are more likely than pro-choice people to experience a higher level of negative emotions when anticipating dissonant information. These results explain the higher willingness to pay to avoid dissonant information by pro-life people, as they suffer more from the anticipation of being exposed to dissonant information, which creates cognitive dissonance.

I conduct more tests to rule out alternative explanations. A major identification problem in quantifying the effect of prior exposure to dissonant information is that theories based on prior exposure often make predictions based on the assumption that equal levels of attention are given to the dissonant and consonant stimuli. However, the literature on emotion regulation in psychology suggests that human brains self-regulate by strategically avoiding exposure to stimuli that will generate negative emotions (Gross 1998, Koole 2010, Cisler & Koster 2010). Therefore, theories based on information avoidance and predictions based on prior exposure lack the differentiation between attention avoidance and information avoidance.[7] This makes it challenging to quantify the true extent of information avoidance and the true importance of prior exposure to dissonant information with naturally occurring data where attention to dissonant stimuli is unobserved.To the best of my knowledge, for the first time in the literature, I differentiate information avoidance from attention avoidance by using several variables as an instrument for attention. I then show that the avoidance behaviour observed in my study stems from information avoidance, not attention avoidance.

I also show that treatments generate a significant first-stage effect on exposure to information. In both sessions of the experiment, participants allocate a significant amount of time to reading the article. I ask participants to answer several multiple-choice questions based on the article. These questions define their bonus payment and serve as a comprehension check. Participants answer 89.48% of the questions correctly on average, which confirms that they pay attention to the articles. Furthermore, when they are asked for a subjective evaluation of the article, they rate it as being more reliable and accurate and less untrustworthy and biased if the article is in line with their beliefs than if it is against their beliefs, suggesting belief-consistent and biased evaluations.

My main contributions to several strands of the literature are threefold. First, this is the first study to quantify the extent of information avoidance on the topic of abortion rights, an important source of polarisation in the USA and elsewhere. Second, my paper is the first to systematically analyse the effect of prior exposure to information on dissonant information avoidance in a unified framework. Third, I utilise a novel experimental design that allows me to differentiate attention avoidance from information avoidance in an

[7]Attention avoidance is defined in psychology as allocating attention towards locations opposite the location of threat (Fox et al. 2002).

experimental setting. To my knowledge, this paper is the first to differentiate information avoidance from attention avoidance. My study has significant policy ramifications. Overall, my results confirm the importance of the hedonic value of information. This finding is relevant for policymakers who want to share information with the public (Reisch et al. 2021). Considering the abortion discussions, people's opinions on abortion rights did not change even after being made to read dissonant articles that contained both objective facts and subjective opinions. More generally, people were willing to forfeit money to maintain their echo chambers. Generalising beyond positions on abortion, it appears that any effort to foster agreement through the provision of balanced or competitive sources of information will be hampered by people's willingness to pay to avoid dissonant information. Further, the results from my text analysis suggest that experiencing negative emotions in anticipation of dissonant information drives information avoidance. This finding lends itself to several policy implications. First, as Nordström et al. (2020) highlighted, if the goal of the policy is to maximise welfare, the mechanisms driving strategic ignorance should not be overlooked. Therefore, providing emotionally neutral information could stop people from avoiding dissonant information. Second, my text analysis approach could be used to identify which public figures, including politicians, and policymakers, are more likely than others to experience negative emotions in anticipation of dissonant information and are willing to pay to avoid dissonant information. This predicted avoidance behaviour could then be used to identify their involvement in political polarisation.

This paper is closely related to the literature on information avoidance (Sweeny et al. 2010, Jang 2014, Thunström et al. 2016, Hertwig & Engel 2016, Sharot & Sunstein 2020, Nordström et al. 2020, Ho et al. 2021), selective exposure (Klapper 1960, Lazarsfeld et al. 1968, Sunstein 1999, Knobloch-Westerwick & Meng 2009) and information demand (Zimmermann 2015, Ganguly & Tasoff 2016, Falk & Zimmermann 2016, Golman et al. 2017, Nielsen 2020, Faia et al. 2021*a*, Chopra et al. 2022*b*, Fuster et al. 2022). The standard economic model predicts that a rational utility-maximising agent would never deliberately avoid information because information can never have a negative instrumental value (Stigler 1961). However, belief-based utility models have established that people might consciously avoid information for hedonic reasons (Loewenstein 1987, Golman & Loewenstein 2018). If the value of information depends on its emotional content, then people would be willing to forego monetary gains to acquire information that can confirm favourable beliefs and avoid information that can confirm unfavourable beliefs (Charpentier et al. 2018). Studies focusing on exposure to dissonant information have not reached a consensus on the effect of being exposed to contradictory information on the radicalism of beliefs. One class of studies argues that it reduces the extremism of the belief as it challenges the existing stereotypes (Mutz

2002, Huckfeldt et al. 2004, Pettigrew & Tropp 2006, Grönlund et al. 2015), while another class of studies highlights a backfire effect as the information challenges people's identities and creates dissonance (Lord et al. 1979, Nyhan & Reifler 2010, Taber & Lodge 2006, Bail et al. 2018). My main contribution to this literature is to identify the significance of prior exposure to dissonant information in driving dissonant information avoidance by exogenously varying the prior exposure to dissonant information.

I add to the literature on theories of belief-based utility (Loewenstein 1987, Golman & Loewenstein 2018, Golman et al. 2017, Nordström et al. 2020) by assessing the psychological motives driving information avoidance. Previous studies in this literature have argued that risk aversion and loss aversion over beliefs (Bénabou & Tirole 2002, Köszegi 2006, 2010), uncertainty aversion (Golman & Loewenstein 2018), anticipatory feelings over information such as anxiety, sadness or any negative valence emotion (Sullivan et al. 2004, Ganguly & Tasoff 2016, Golman et al. 2017, Reisch et al. 2021) or psychological distress otherwise known as cognitive dissonance (Festinger 1954, Akerlof & Dickens 1982, Taylor & Brown 1988) might explain a part of the information avoidance behaviour. My main contribution to this literature is that by using first-hand text data, I show that anticipation of negative emotions drives information avoidance, as people are motivated to avoid experiencing dissonance. I also contribute to the literature on cognitive dissonance by quantifying the psychological cost of dissonant information using a willingness to pay measure.

Finally, my results also contribute to the growing body of research on the interaction between preference for belief confirmation and accuracy and the demand for news (Mullainathan & Shleifer 2005, Gentzkow & Shapiro 2006, Prat & Strömberg 2013, Di Tella et al. 2015, Gentzkow et al. 2018, Druckman & McGrath 2019, Metzger et al. 2020, Faia et al. 2021*b*, Chopra et al. 2019, 2022*a*,*b*). Previous studies in this literature have assessed whether people tend to read like-minded news because they trust it more or because they want to confirm their existing beliefs. I add to this literature by showing that people are motivated by the desire to confirm their beliefs. They are more inclined to rate an ideologically aligned article as being more reliable and accurate than an ideologically non-aligned article, even though both articles contain equally reliable and accurate ideas.

The remainder of the paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 states the testable hypotheses. Section 3 describes the experimental design. Section 4 presents the main results and discusses the main mechanism that drives the results and alternative mechanisms. Section 5 concludes. Appendices provide additional empirical results and full instructions for the experiment.

2 Testable Hypotheses

In this section, I state the main and supplementary hypotheses I test in this study.[8] First of all, a standard economic theory assumes that information has no hedonic value, therefore it predicts that no subjects pay to avoid dissonant information (Stigler 1961). However, as belief-based utility models suggest, I expect this prediction to fail. Furthermore, it has not yet been studied to what extent people avoid dissonant information, in particular when that information relates to a contentious social issue such as abortion rights. I provide an estimate of the proportion of people who avoid dissonant information at a material cost on the topic of abortion rights.

Hypothesis 1: People pay to avoid dissonant information.

The remaining hypotheses are only applicable if some subjects pay to avoid dissonant information. Assuming that there are people who pay to avoid dissonant information, I provide an estimate of the extent of information avoidance by analysing the average amount of money people are willing to sacrifice to avoid dissonant information. This estimate could be interpreted as the psychological cost of being exposed to dissonant information on the topic of abortion rights, i.e. the cost of cognitive dissonance.

The next hypothesis addresses the main treatment effect. I seek to identify the effect of prior exposure to dissonant information on the propensity to avoid dissonant information and on the willingness to pay to avoid dissonant information. In light of previous literature, I expect that being exposed to only consonant information might exaggerate the group polarisation while being exposed to only dissonant information has no clear effect. To understand how prior exposure to dissonant or consonant information translates into information avoidance behaviour, I compare two study groups in my experiment: the dissonant treatment in which participants are randomly assigned to a dissonant article and the consonant treatment in which participants are randomly assigned to a consonant article.

Hypothesis 2 (A): Prior exposure to dissonant information affects the propensity to avoid dissonant information.
Hypothesis 2 (B): Prior exposure to dissonant information affects the willingness to pay to avoid dissonant information.

Next, I explore if having different beliefs on abortion rights is associated with the propensity to avoid dissonant information and the willingness to pay to avoid dissonant information on the topic of abortion rights. I compare two main belief groups: pro-choice people who

[8] These hypotheses are also referenced in my pre-registered RCT entry and analysis plan.

support abortion rights and pro-life people who oppose abortion rights. I anticipate observing different avoidance behaviour among these groups as they differ in several behavioural characteristics including big-five personality traits and locus of control (Cooper et al. 2013, Sweetser 2014). This hypothesis builds upon recent studies that indicate conservatives hold values that prioritize certainty and tradition, whereas liberals value change and diversity (Graham et al. 2009, Jost et al. 2007). As political conservatism negatively correlates with supporting abortion rights (Osborne et al. 2022), I expect to observe a difference in information preference between two opposing belief groups.

Hypothesis 3 (A): There is a difference in the propensity to avoid dissonant information between the two opposing belief groups on the topic of abortion rights.
Hypothesis 3 (B): There is a difference in the willingness to pay to avoid dissonant information between the two opposing belief groups on the topic of abortion rights.

Lastly, the availability of text data from the open-ended question on participants' reasoning for choosing to avoid or not to avoid dissonant information enables me to carry out a text analysis in order to explain the motives underlying avoidance behaviour (Ferrario & Stantcheva 2022). Therefore, I expect that anticipated negative emotions would be a significant element driving the information avoidance behaviour. People who choose to avoid dissonant information might expect to incur negative emotions as their beliefs conflict with the information (Sweeny et al. 2010). As people are motivated to reduce cognitive dissonance, they might choose to avoid dissonant information to escape from enduring dissonance.

Hypothesis 4: Anticipated emotions play a role when deciding to avoid dissonant information.

I also eliminate alternative mechanisms that could explain the results. One of the main mechanisms other than anticipated emotions is attention avoidance stemming from the conflict between one's beliefs and the dissonant information they are exposed to. I run several auxiliary analyses on attention avoidance to differentiate attention avoidance from information avoidance.

These four hypotheses conclude my primary analysis. Next, I test additional supplementary hypotheses to further gauge the information avoidance behaviour. First of all, because of the nature of the topic, I expect females to be more inclined to avoid dissonant information and to pay more to avoid dissonant information on the topic of abortion rights as a consequence of suffering a higher level of cognitive dissonance in anticipation of dissonant information than males. Therefore I test the null hypothesis that the propensity to avoid

dissonant information and the willingness to pay are associated with being female in the context of abortion rights.

As a final supplementary analysis, I investigate if people rate dissonant contents as less reliable and accurate and more untrustworthy and biased as compared to consonant contents. In light of cognitive dissonance discussions (Festinger 1954, Akerlof & Dickens 1982), I expect that assessing a dissonant article as reliable and accurate creates cognitive dissonance as the article supports a belief that is against their own. To avoid experiencing cognitive dissonance, I expect people to evaluate the articles in a belief-confirming and biased way. Therefore, I test whether people rate the dissonant articles and the consonant articles, equivalently in four dimensions: reliable, untrustworthy, accurate and biased.

3 Experimental Design

The data for the experiment was collected in September 2022 using Prolific, which is a leading market research company widely used in social science research. The experiment features two main sessions that examine how prior exposure to dissonant information affects information avoidance for opposing belief groups.[9] Session 1 includes only participants with pro-choice beliefs (in favour of abortion rights), while session 2 includes only participants with pro-life beliefs (against abortion rights). session 1 consists of 619 participants and session 2 consists of 650 participants.[10,11] The study sample includes only US respondents and is gender-balanced. In both sessions, the study groups do not differ in terms of the majority of observable characteristics (see Table A1 and Table A2).[12] Figure 1 presents an overview of the main design features. Full instructions for the experiment can be found in Appendix C.

[9] I chose to run two separate sessions on people from opposing belief groups since fundamental psychological differences are shown to exist between different partisan groups. For example, Sweetser (2014) showed that Democrats were driven by an external locus of control (a belief that life is controlled by outside factors which the person cannot influence, or that chance or fate controls their lives) while Republicans by internal locus of control (a belief that one can control one's own life) (Rotter 1966).

[10] Even though I hire participants based on their pre-recorded response on abortion rights by Prolific, there were 20 pro-life participants in session 1 and 137 pro-choice participants in session 2. These participants were excluded from the main analysis as pre-registered in the AEA RCT Registry.

[11] I employed two simple attention checks throughout the experiment to eliminate inattentive participants from the sample as pre-registered in my AEA RCT Registry. Over 96% of the participants passed both of the attention checks. Only 1 participant is dropped from the analysis as they failed both of the attention checks.

[12] Demographic variables are included later in the regression analyses to account for any imbalances.

Session 1 and Session 2

One of the most important reasons I chose Prolific to collect data (in addition to its high-quality responses (Eyal et al. 2021)) is that it is possible to pre-screen participants based on their beliefs on abortion rights. Prolific subjects were asked the following question when they signed up for the platform for the first time: "When it comes to others having the right to terminate their pregnancy, are you pro-life or pro-choice?" I balance my experimental sample based on participants' responses to this question about their opinions on abortion rights.[13] People who responded to this question "pro-choice" are hired for the first session of the experiment, while people who responded to this question "pro-life" are hired for the second session of the experiment. Subjects could only participate in one of the two sessions.

Pre-treatment beliefs

The experiment begins with a question to determine the participant's opinion on abortion rights, i.e. whether they are: pro-choice or pro-life. The answers to this question are compared with Prolific's pre-screen variable on abortion rights to make sure that Prolific's categorisation is correct and up-to-date. Participants with inconsistencies between their Prolific pre-screening variable and the answer they provided in my experiment are excluded from the main analysis as pre-registered in AEA RCT Registry. I also ask participants to indicate to what extent they oppose or support the right to an abortion to measure the intensity of their prior beliefs.

Main task

Subjects are then asked to complete an effort task that includes reading a short article followed by several comprehension questions based on the content of the article. Subjects are informed that they receive 0.10$ per correct answer they give to these questions (excluding the practice round). In order to familiarise participants with the format of the main task, they are first given a practice article titled "*The Orchid Mantis and its Characteristics*". Participants are represented with the title of the article and a sentence-long description before they see the article itself. They are then asked to answer several questions based on the article. I remind them that they should only answer the questions based on the text and should not interpret the text or use their own opinions. Various types of questions employed in the main task are also introduced in the practice round. Once the practice round is complete, participants move on to the main tasks where treatment randomization occurs.

[13] Prolific has about 6.3 times more registered pro-choice participants than pro-life participants.

Treatments

To generate exogenous variation in prior exposure to dissonant information, subjects are divided into two groups with half of the subjects being randomly allocated to a consonant group and the other half being randomly allocated to a dissonant group. If subjects are randomly allocated to a consonant group, they receive an article which is in line with their beliefs on abortion rights, whereas if they are randomly allocated to a dissonant group, they receive an article which is against their beliefs on abortion rights. As in the practice task, both the content and the side of the argument that the article supports are made clear to the participants through a descriptive article title and through a sentence-long summary of its content. If the article supports abortion rights, participants are provided with the following information before seeing the full article: "On the next page, you will be presented with an article titled "*Endangering Women – Health Cost of Banning Abortion*" which includes the speech of some anonymous members of Congress against banning abortions (pro-choice)." If the article opposes abortion rights, participants are shown: "On the next page, you will be presented with an article titled "*It is not a Blob of Tissue, but a Human Being – Science and Abortion*" which includes speech of some anonymous members of Congress in favour of banning abortions (pro-life)." These articles consist of a collection of some anonymous Congress people's speeches on abortion rights, supported by relevant research.[14] Participants are then asked to answer several questions based on the article. They are reminded that they should only answer the questions based on the text and should not interpret the text or use their own opinions. This comprises the first stage of the experiment.

Main outcome variable

In the next stage, all subjects receive a dissonant article as a second article, regardless of their treatment group. As before, subjects are first presented with the article title and its sentence-long description to convey the content of the article (support/oppose abortion rights) before having to read it. Regardless of the treatment group participants are assigned to in the first stage, in session 1 (which only includes Pro-choice participants), they are given an article opposing abortion rights, titled "*Fight for Defenseless - Stop Abortion!*" whereas, in session 2 (which only includes pro-life participants), participants are given an article supporting abortion rights, titled "*Abortion: Women Should Decide for Themselves!*". Both of these articles include different arguments than the ones that participants have already

[14] Detailed information about how these articles were formed can be found in Appendix D.

seen in the previous stage.[15,16] Subjects are then given an opportunity to switch from the dissonant article that is assigned to them in this stage (against their beliefs on abortion rights) to a consonant one (in line with their beliefs on abortion rights). In order to switch, they can use a pot of money (100 cents) given to them at the beginning of the experiment to use for the switch. Any unused amount of money is added on top of their bonus payments. This makes the choice of willingness to pay measure instrumental as it affects the remaining bonus directly. Once they have indicated their preference to switch articles and have quantified their willingness to pay, a random number is drawn between 0 and 100. Similar to the Becker–DeGroot–Marschak method (BDM) (Becker et al. 1964), if their maximum willingness to pay to switch articles is greater than or equal to the random number, the dissonant article that is assigned to them is replaced with the one that is in line with their beliefs on abortion rights. If their maximum willingness to pay is less than the random number, the initial article is not replaced. Participants are explicitly informed that a greater reported willingness to pay results in a greater likelihood of the articles being switched.[17]

Subsequently, subjects are shown the result of the lottery whether or not the article has been switched. Following the reveal of the result of the lottery, subjects are then provided with the new article and then asked to answer several questions based on the article. In all treatment groups, assuming information does not have any hedonic value, participants should not use any of their money to switch articles.

Post-treatment questionnaire

Participants are then asked to respond to post-treatment questions about their posterior beliefs on abortion rights, political beliefs, media consumption, demographic information, risk preference, and information preference (IPS) (Ho et al. 2021).[18] They are also asked to explain why they chose to switch articles or why they chose not to switch articles. This open-ended text question helps to understand their real motivation to avoid dissonant information. They are also asked to rate both of the articles -in which they completed the tasks- on four

[15]The articles used in the first stage of the experiment include arguments from the health effects side of the discussion while the ones used in the second stage include arguments from the moral side of the discussion.

[16]Articles are around the same length - consist of around 308 words and are created to be identical except the main idea. I run a cosine similarity analysis on the articles to make sure that they both carry similar emotional messages and implications. For a detailed comparison of articles, see Appendix D.

[17]To make sure that they fully comprehend the mechanism after reading the description, they are then given two comprehension questions on the mechanism. Only 13 people respond to both of the comprehension questions on the mechanism incorrectly, therefore are excluded from the main analysis as pre-registered in AEA RCT Registry.

[18]The IPS consists of 13 hypothetical scenarios on three domains: finance, health and personal characteristics which elicit an individual's desire to obtain or avoid information that may be unpleasant by using a 4-point Likert scale.

dimensions: reliable, untrustworthy, accurate, and biased. Key design differences between session 1 and session 2 as well as a summary of the experimental design, are represented in Figure 1.

4 Results

This section presents my main results. I first demonstrate evidence on information avoidance, and then investigate the effect of prior exposure to dissonant information on dissonant information avoidance. I then show the importance of prior beliefs. I conclude with discussions on the main psychological mechanism driving information avoidance and alternative mechanisms.

4.1 Avoiding Dissonant Information

Table 1 presents the main treatment effects on i) the propensity to avoid dissonant information and ii) the willingness to pay to avoid dissonant information. Overall, 42.60% of the participants chose to avoid dissonant information (Panel A). On average, people were willing to forego 18.90% of their experimental budget to pay to avoid dissonant information (Panel B). Conditional on being willing to pay, they were willing to forego 44.40% of their experimental budget to pay to avoid dissonant information (Panel C). It demonstrates that a substantially high proportion of people are willing to forfeit material utility to avoid dissonant information. Participants paid to maintain their existing beliefs by engaging in *blissful ignorance* (Bénabou & Tirole 2002). It refers to the case when confidence in beliefs is valuable capital, therefore people prefer to remain uninformed than to put their beliefs at risk by exposing themselves to new information. I summarise the first main result of the paper below.

Result 1: People pay to avoid dissonant information. On average, 43% of the sample chose to avoid dissonant information at a material cost of 44% of their experimental budget.

On average, people who were previously exposed to consonant information in the experiment are 1.6 percentage points more likely to avoid dissonant information ($p = 0.617$, Table 2, Column 3) and are willing to pay 0.7% less ($p = 0.737$, Table 2, Column 3) to avoid dissonant information than people who were previously exposed to dissonant information. Conditional on being willing to pay to avoid dissonant information, the difference between the consonant and the dissonant group increases to 3.2% in willingness to pay to avoid

dissonant information. However, these results are statistically insignificant.[19] Therefore, it could be concluded that the average effect of prior exposure to dissonant information on the propensity to avoid dissonant information or on the willingness to pay to avoid dissonant information is of no economic importance.

It is possible that the effect of exposure to dissonant information might be different for distinct belief groups. Table 3 represents the results of the main treatment effect for pro-life (Panel A) and pro-choice groups (Panel B), separately. Results show that pro-life people are more likely to avoid dissonant information if they were previously exposed to a dissonant article than a consonant article ($p = 0.703$) while pro-choice people are less likely to avoid dissonant information if they were previously exposed to a dissonant article than a consonant article ($p = 0.315$). However, the differences among these groups are statistically non-significant, henceforth, no heterogeneity is observed. Also, conditional on wanting to avoid dissonant information, both pro-life and pro-choice groups are willing to spend a non-significantly higher proportion of money to avoid dissonant information if they were exposed to the dissonant information rather than the consonant information ($p = 0.532$ and $p = 0.543$, respectively).

Table 4 displays the difference in main outcome variables between two belief groups: pro-choice and pro-life. People from both belief groups are equally likely to avoid dissonant information ($p = 0.999$). However, the results suggest that both unconditional and conditional on being willing to pay to avoid dissonant information, pro-life people are willing to spend a substantially higher proportion of their additional budget to avoid reading a dissonant article than pro-choice people. They are willing to pay 4.40% more ($p = 0.029$) and this amount increases to 10.40% when only people who have a positive willingness to pay are included ($p = 0.002$).

It is also possible that being previously exposed to dissonant or consonant information might affect pro-choice and pro-life groups differently. Panel C of Table 3 compares pro-life and pro-choice people under Consonant Treatment (Column 1) and Dissonant Treatment (Column 2), separately. The results from Table 2 are confirmed. Both groups of people have a statistically identical propensity to avoid dissonant information regardless of the treatment group they were assigned to ($p = 0.508$ and $p = 0.495$, respectively). Also, in both of the treatment groups, pro-life people are willing to pay around 10% more to avoid dissonant information than pro-choice people ($p < 0.050$), confirming the results in Table 4, which

[19] Ex-post power calculations at 80% with around 1,000 observations on the main variables of interest give a minimum detectable effect size of around 7.4 to 8.8 percentage points. This study satisfies the ex-ante power calculations reported in the AER RCT registry. However, as this study is to first investigate the effect of prior exposure to dissonant information on abortion rights in a controlled experimental setting, my predicted effect sizes are above the relatively small effect sizes observed in the data.

suggest that the intensity of information avoidance is independent of the exposure to prior information and is mainly explained by prior beliefs. The next main finding of the study could be summarised as follows:

Result 2: Exposure to dissonant information does not reduce information avoidance. Despite the prior information participants were exposed to, pro-life participants spent 10% more to avoid dissonant information than pro-choice participants, showing that prior beliefs are the key determining factor.

Table 5 represents the probit regression results on the propensity to avoid dissonant information. Column 1 includes only the main experimental variables and a variable that represents the interaction between being pro-choice and being exposed to dissonant information. In line with the previous findings, I find no significant relation between beliefs or prior exposure to dissonant information on the propensity to avoid dissonant information. Column 2 adds basic demographic variables to the previous probit regression. I find that being female increases the likelihood of avoiding dissonant information on the topic of abortion rights ($p = 0.001$). Also, age is an important factor in predicting the likelihood of which group of people avoid dissonant information: being one year older correlated with a 0.64 percentage points higher propensity to avoid dissonant information ($p = 0.035$). Column 3 adds additional interaction variables of the female variable to the regression. Including an interaction term of the female variable is reasonable considering that abortion is a gender-specific issue and I expect that the effect of being exposed to dissonant information or being pro-choice might not be the same for females and males. The findings show no significant difference between males and females in their proclivity to avoid dissonant information. The last column of Table 5 adds further behavioural control variables to the analysis.[20] The findings confirm that there is no significant relationship between prior exposure or beliefs and the propensity to avoid dissonant information. Being older and being female are still important predictors of the propensity to avoid dissonant information on the topic of abortion rights ($p = 0.091$ and $p = 0.054$, respectively). However, given the multiple hypotheses testing, these significant results should be interpreted with caution.

Next, Table 6 represents the OLS regression results on the amount of money people are willing to pay to avoid dissonant information. Column 1 represents the effects of the main experimental variables on the willingness to pay. Consistent with Table 4 pro-choice participants are willing to forego 10.05 cents (10.05% of their additional budget) less than

[20]The list of behavioural control variables includes average daily time spent reading the news, risk preference, and information preference.

pro-life participants to avoid dissonant information ($p = 0.028$). Column 2 adds the main demographic variables to the regression. In addition to confirming the results in Column 1, I find that females are willing to spend 6.40 cents (6.40% of their additional budget) more to avoid dissonant information on the topic of abortion rights than males ($p = 0.061$). Also, being one year older increases the willingness to pay by 0.38 cents ($p = 0.002$). These results are consistent throughout Table 6.

Column 3 of Table 6 adds additional interaction variables of the female variable to the regression. As mentioned before, including an interaction term for the female variable makes sense considering the gender-specific dimension of the topic. I expect that the effect of being exposed to dissonant information or being pro-choice might be different for females and males. The interaction variables between being female and being pro-choice, being female and being exposed to dissonant information, and the interaction of these three variables are all statistically significant. First of all, it implies a differential effect of being pro-choice for females and males ($p = 0.044$). Pro-choice females spend a relatively lower amount of money than pro-life females, whereas pro-choice males spend a substantially lower amount of money than pro-life males to avoid dissonant information ($p = 0.000$). Additionally, results suggest a differential effect of being exposed to dissonant information for females and males ($p = 0.019$). The predictive margin results confirm that females spend a higher amount of money to avoid dissonant information after being exposed to dissonant information than after being exposed to consonant information, whereas males spend a lower amount of money after being exposed to dissonant information than after being exposed to consonant information ($p = 0.000$). As in line with the results reported in the previous columns, the overall effect of being female is positive ($p < 0.05$), indicating that females spend a higher amount of money to avoid dissonant information than males and the overall effect of being pro-choice is negative ($p < 0.05$), showing that pro-life people spend a higher amount of money to avoid dissonant information than pro-choice people.

In Column 4 of Table 6, a set of behavioural control variables are added to the previous analysis. I confirm the results reported in Column 3. Furthermore, I find that spending more time reading the news on a daily basis reduces people's willingness to pay to avoid dissonant information by nearly 1% ($p = 0.060$). These results are in line with the findings reported in Table 5. Overall, findings from various regression analyses reported in Table 6 conclude that several behavioural and demographic variables are important in predicting the intensity of dissonant information avoidance. Conditional on being willing to pay to avoid dissonant information, pro-life people, older people, females or people who spent less time reading the news spend more money to avoid dissonant information. The next result summarises the main finding on gender.

Result 3: There is a significant difference between women and men in terms of avoiding dissonant information on the outlook toward abortion. Women spend a substantially higher amount of their experimental budget to avoid dissonant information than men.

I also investigate if people display belief-confirming motives when it comes to rating the content of articles. In the last stage of the experiment, participants are asked to rate the content of the articles they read on four main dimensions: reliable, untrustworthy, accurate and biased. Figure 2a and Figure 2b represent participants' subjective evaluations of articles content of the articles they read in the first and second stages of the experiment, respectively. Table A3 reports the exact mean values and the results from a-two sided mean comparison test. Results suggest that the pro-life article is considered to be 3.27 units (equivalently 30.27%) more reliable than the pro-choice article by pro-life people. On the other hand, the pro-choice article is considered to be around 5.17 units more reliable than the pro-life article by pro-choice people ($p < 0.000$). The trends are reversed when I examine participants' ratings on untrustworthiness. Pro-life people evaluate the pro-life article to be 1.61 units less untrustworthy than the pro-choice article, whereas pro-choice people evaluate the pro-choice article to be 3.28 units less untrustworthy than the pro-life article ($p < 0.000$). Furthermore, pro-life people consider the pro-life article as being 3.21 units more accurate and 2.06 units less biased than the pro-choice article whereas pro-choice people consider the pro-choice article as being 5.30 units more accurate and 3.46 units less biased than the pro-life article ($p < 0.000$). Results from the second stage article reinforce these findings as Figure 2b and Table A3 represent. Overall, I conclude that people assess content as being more reliable and accurate and less untrustworthy and biased if the content is in line with their beliefs than if it is against their beliefs even though articles do not differ in terms of these dimensions.

These results support belief-confirming motives, in which people significantly favour the article that is in line with their beliefs and criticise the article that contradicts their beliefs. These behaviours might stem from the motivation to reduce cognitive dissonance, as rating a dissonant article as reliable and accurate might cause people to experience cognitive dissonance since the arguments discussed in the dissonant article contradict their beliefs. In addition, pro-choice people's ratings on four dimensions seem to be more extreme than those of pro-life people. As the difference in mean values suggests in Table A3, they praise the consonant articles more favourably than pro-life people do, and they criticise the dissonant articles more harshly than pro-life people do. I summarise these findings in the following result.

Result 4: People rate contents as being more reliable and accurate and less untrustworthy and biased if the content is in line with their beliefs than if it is opposed to their beliefs, suggesting that they are motivated by belief-confirming motives.

4.2 Motives for (not) Avoiding Dissonant Information

In this section, I provide evidence of psychological mechanisms underlying the avoidance behaviour. My experimental findings suggest that both pro-life and pro-choice people have a preference for reading harmonious news articles. To explore how people justify their preference for like-minded articles, I gather first-hand data on their motives for choosing to avoid reading a dissonant article at a monetary cost. To get a true response, I asked participants to answer an open-ended question on their motives for choosing to switch or not to switch from reading a dissonant article to a consonant one. This provides a clear glimpse into people's reasoning about the motives underlying their avoidance decision (Ferrario & Stantcheva 2022). People who are willing to spend any positive amount to switch articles are classified as "avoiders" whereas people who do not want to switch articles at a monetary cost are classified as "non-avoiders."

I use Natural Language Processing Sentiment Analysis to identify the dominant emotional tone of the responses to the open-ended question by avoiders and non-avoiders. Sentiment analysis is a method of analysing text data to determine the overall emotional tone of the text, whether it is positive, negative, or neutral. It takes into account the quantity and type of emotions expressed, the strength of those emotions, and the context in which they are used. The compound score from the sentiment analysis takes a value between -1 (which represents the most extreme negative valence) and 1 (which represents the most extreme positive valence). The overall compound score of the text written by avoiders is equal to -0.999, which is very close to the extreme negative, whereas the overall compound score of the text written by non-avoiders is equal to 0.999. Moreover, Figure 3 represents the average negative (Panel A) and positive (Panel B) emotional score of the text written by non-avoiders and avoiders, separately. People who choose to switch the dissonant article with the consonant one use language that is more negative and less positive than people who choose not to switch the articles. There is a 0.06 unit difference in the negative valence in the text between avoiders and non-avoiders, corresponding to a 55.55% increase in the negative emotion score of the text written by avoiders as compared to the mean value of 0.108 by non-avoiders ($p = 0.020$).

Furthermore, I use Python's Natural Language Toolkit (Bird et al. 2009) to identify

phrases that characterise the participant's responses.[21] Figure 4 represents the 50 most commonly used words by non-avoiders and Figure 5 represents the same analysis on avoiders. Out of the fifty most commonly used words by both groups, 34 of them intersect. Words that are more characteristic of justifications provided by non-avoiders are "money, opinion, bonus, keep, point, spend, mind, change, say, viewpoint, differ, need, inform, understand, way" and "worth". These words are highly related to monetary terms. The pattern indicates that people who choose not to pay to avoid dissonant information are mostly motivated by monetary gains as the participants could keep the money as an additional bonus payment if they chose not to spend on paying to switch the articles. On the other hand, words that are more characteristic of justifications provided by avoiders are "choose, support, child, anti, baby, something, take, get, murder, human, unborn, decide, manipulation/manifest, another, body, kill" and "religion". These words are mostly associated with negative connotations associated with abortion. Given the emotional tone of these texts, results conclude that anticipation of negative emotions drives the decision to avoid dissonant behaviour. Economists have recently identified this tendency of people seeking information congruent with their established beliefs while actively shunning information that might contrast with their pre-existing beliefs as one of the most effective strategies for motivated reasoning (Bénabou & Tirole 2016, Gino et al. 2016, Golman et al. 2017, Grossman & Van Der Weele 2017, Exley & Kessler 2021, Momsen & Ohndorf 2022).

Even though both pro-life and pro-choice people are equally likely to avoid dissonant information, their willingness to pay to avoid dissonant information significantly differs. In order to investigate whether pro-life people suffer more than pro-choice people in the anticipation of dissonant information, I run the same analyses separately for pro-life and pro-choice people who choose to avoid dissonant information. First of all, I compare the sentiment scores of the text written by them to justify their avoidance behaviour. There is a 4.49 units difference in the negative valence in the text written by pro-life and pro-choice people, corresponding to a 33.02% increase in the negative emotion score of the text written by pro-life avoiders as compared to the mean value of 13.60 by pro-choice avoiders ($p = 0.331$). Then, I compare the most commonly used words by pro-life and pro-choice people who choose to avoid dissonant information. Words that are more characteristic of justifications provided by pro-life avoiders are "baby, murder, unborn, kill, human, good, another, fight, interest, manipulation, innocent, wrong, pay, mind, response, fact" and "defenceless" whereas the words that are more characteristic of justifications provided by pro-choice avoiders are "anti, body, care, religion, give, away, decide, enough, govern, belief, need, decision, legal, real,

[21] I exclude stop words, reduce all words to their stem using the Porter stemmer and group the words with all of their variant and inflected forms using Word net lemmatizer.

try, decision" and "rhetorical". The emotional compound of words used by pro-life avoiders is clearly more negative than the one used by pro-choice avoiders. The sentiment analysis confirms the prediction. The words that are characteristics of pro-life people and used to justify their avoidance carry 50% negative emotional value, which is 40% higher than the ones that characterise the justifications by pro-choice people. These analyses suggest that pro-life people experience higher negative emotions than pro-choice people when anticipating dissonant information. This finding explains their higher willingness to pay to avoid dissonant information as discussed in Section 4.1 and validates anticipated negative emotions as the main mechanism driving information avoidance. The next result summarises the mechanism.

Result 5: Anticipation of negative emotions drives the decision to avoid dissonant information and explains the higher willingness to pay by pro-life people.

4.3 Alternative Mechanisms

In this section, I discuss potential alternative mechanisms driving the results, including attention avoidance, the strength of beliefs, cognitive constraints, and experimenter demand effects.

Attention Avoidance

It is important to understand if participants dedicate similar levels of attention to the dissonant and consonant information to be able to differentiate information avoidance from attention avoidance. Attention avoidance is a strategic process in human beings use to regulate their emotions (Gross 1998, Koole 2010, Cisler & Koster 2010). Participants might have devoted significantly less attention to the dissonant information since they might expect to experience negative emotions if they pay attention to the dissonant stimuli. If this is the case in my experiment, it would not be possible to distinguish whether the resulting behaviour is the consequence of information avoidance or lack of attention.

A key advantage of running a pre-registered controlled experiment is that I can control attention given to the experimental tasks in different treatment groups, eliminating the concern of attention avoidance. To start with, all results mentioned in Section 4.1 include participants who passed at least one of the two attention checks employed throughout the experiment. This criterion was registered with others in the AEA RCT Registry platform before data collection.[22] However, I run several analyses to ensure that the participants allocate

[22]For more details on the exclusion criteria and analysis plan, see the link to the AEA RCT Registry Experimental Design and Analysis Plan

the same amount of attention to the articles in both dissonant and consonant treatments.

First of all, I analyse the average time participants spent while reading the articles in the first stage of the experiment.[23,24] It has been shown that for English silent reading, the average reader reads 238 words per minute in non-fiction (Brysbaert 2019). The articles used in the experiment consist of 327 words on average, with a standard deviation of 12.04. Therefore, participants are expected to spend at least 82 seconds to satisfy the minimum required time. On average, they spend 110 seconds reading the articles that are randomly assigned to them. It is above the estimated average. Therefore, it could be concluded that participants devote an adequate amount of time, and hence, attention, to these articles. I also compare the average time spent reading the articles in the consonant and dissonant treatments to eliminate potential concerns regarding allocating significantly less attention to dissonant stimuli. Table A4 represents the average time taken by the participants while reading the articles in both treatment groups. They spend an indistinguishable amount of time reading a consonant article and a dissonant article ($p = 0.999$). The result is still valid once the comparison is carried over for the pro-life article ($p = 0.119$) and the pro-choice article ($p = 0.154$), separately.

Secondly, I analyse the average performance on the incentivised multiple-choice questions. In the experiment, participants are asked to answer several questions based on the article they read. The more questions they answer correctly, the higher the bonus payment they earn. As these questions are required to be answered based on the article, they could be used as an additional measure of comprehension to test their understanding of the article and check if they actually paid attention to it. On average, participants answer 89.48% of the questions correctly in the first stage of the experiment (Table A1 and Table A2), which indicates a high success rate. Also, participants correctly answer 0.08 more questions out of 4 questions, corresponding to a 2.08% difference when they were randomly assigned to a consonant article than a dissonant article in the first stage of the experiment ($p = 0.035$, Panel A, Table A5). Even though this difference is significant, there could be other factors that explain the difference in performance. For example, participants might have already known or correctly guessed the answers to the questions in the consonant article as they could be more familiar with the arguments supported in it. On the other hand, Panel B of Table A5 represents the opposite relationship between performance and an article type.

[23] In the first stage of the experiment, participants are randomly assigned to a dissonant or a consonant article. In the second stage, the type of article they read depends on their willingness to pay and the result of a random process. Since there could be other factors affecting the time spent reading the article in the second stage of the experiment, I only focus on the first-stage articles.

[24] Average time spent while reading the first article is included as an attention control variable in the regression analyses reported in Column 4 of Tables 5 and 6.

In the second stage of the experiment, participants correctly answer 0.058 more questions out of 5 questions, corresponding to a 1.16% difference when they complete the task in a dissonant article than in a consonant article ($p = 0.262$). Therefore, the results reported in Panel A and Panel B of Table A5 do not provide a clear conclusion on the argument that different levels of attention are given to the dissonant and consonant articles. However, it can be concluded that an adequate level of attention is dedicated to both types of articles, as participants' scores in multiple-choice questions are around 90% in both treatments.

Lastly, another important indicator of whether identical levels of attention are dedicated to the dissonant and consonant articles is the subjective ratings of the articles. I ask participants to rate the articles they read in the first and second stages of the experiment in terms of being reliable, untrustworthy, accurate, and biased. Figure 2a represents participants' ratings for the article they are randomly assigned to in the first stage of the experiment. People rate the articles as more reliable and accurate if the article is in line with their beliefs, while they rate the articles as more untrustworthy and biased if the article is against their beliefs ($p = 0.000$, Table A3). Pro-life articles are rated more positively and less negatively by pro-life people than pro-choice people, while pro-choice articles are rated more positively and less negatively by pro-choice people than pro-life people. Given that a significant amount of time is spent reading the articles and that the time spent did not differ between dissonant and consonant articles, the result on subjective ratings of articles once again confirms that people devote adequate and equivalent levels of attention to the dissonant and consonant articles. Therefore, the main results discussed in Section 4 are not driven by attention avoidance.

Cognitive Constraint

I investigate if reading a consonant or a dissonant article requires identical levels of mental power. Participants in the dissonant treatment might find reading a dissonant article to be more cognitively demanding as it might be harder to pay attention and process it (Cisler & Koster 2010). If that is the case, I would expect participants to spend more time reading the dissonant article than the consonant article. As it can be seen in Table A4, participants spend almost identical amounts of time reading a dissonant article and reading a consonant article. This suggests that the dissonant article is as mentally costly as the consonant article in terms of the time spent and attention dedicated. Additionally, none of the participants mentioned cognitive constraints when explaining their reasoning to switch articles in the open-ended questions.[25]

On the other hand, it is possible that participants in the dissonant treatment might

[25]No participants used the word "complex", or any synonym of the word complex to justify their avoidance of dissonant information.

find the dissonant article more entertaining than the consonant article just because they are less logical in their opinions. The open-ended responses that identify the reasoning behind people's avoidance behaviour demonstrate that entertainment is not a key factor when deciding to switch articles. Only 1 person out of 1000 mentions that they enjoy reading about the other side of the argument because it is more entertaining.[26]

Strength of Beliefs

It is worth mentioning that pro-life people in my study sample have less strong beliefs on abortion than pro-choice people (see Figure A1). If the strength of the beliefs were to explain the difference in willingness to pay between pro-life and pro-choice people, then I would expect to observe a higher willingness to pay by pro-choice people. However, I find that pro-life spend more money to avoid dissonant information than pro-choice people. Also, the correlation coefficient between the willingness to pay and the strength of the beliefs is not statistically significant.[27] Therefore, the strength of the beliefs does not explain the results of the willingness to pay.

Experimenter Demand Effect

It is likely that participants in different treatment groups have different opinions on what the experimenter expects them to do, even though my study employs a between-subjects design. In order to guard against any possible experimenter demand effect concerns, my experiment includes a series of measures. Firstly, I ask participants to write about their opinion on the purpose of the study at the end of the experiment. In both treatment groups, the majority of participants thought that the study was about abortion rights. However, no one was able to correctly guess the main research question in either of the treatment groups.

Moreover, I compare participants' beliefs on researchers' stand on abortion rights discussions to eliminate the possibility of holding different beliefs' about researchers' expectations. Figure A2 represents the distribution of participants' beliefs about researchers' bias. Around 50% of the participants in both treatment groups think that researchers are neither pro-life nor pro-choice. A Kolmogorov–Smirnov equality-of-distributions test confirms that the participants' beliefs about the researchers' bias in both of the treatment groups are drawn from the same probability distribution ($p = 0.707$). In addition, a two-sample t-test of mean comparison shows equality of average beliefs about researchers' bias among the treatment groups ($p = 0.614$).

[26] The words "enjoy, entertaining, ridiculous, funny" and their synonyms are used to search for this motive.
[27] P-values are for overall sample 0.739, for pro-life people only 0.472 and pro-choice people only 0.293.

In addition to the results from the measures I employ, recent research suggests that experimental subjects only minimally react to clear signals regarding the experimenter's demand, indicating the limited quantitative importance of experimenter demand effects (De Quidt et al. 2018, Mummolo & Peterson 2019). The results from the experimental measures along with the evidence supported in the literature provide a consistent message suggesting that my experiment did not suffer from an experimenter demand effect, which gives me greater confidence in applying this paper's findings to real-world settings.

5 Concluding Remarks

In this study, I conduct a large-scale online experiment with US respondents to determine the impact of prior exposure to dissonant information on information avoidance behaviour. For this purpose, I design an experiment in which I balance the sample among two main belief groups on the topic of abortion rights and vary the prior exposure to dissonant information. This allows me to investigate the possible differential effects of prior exposure to dissonant information for distinct belief groups. I first study people's avoidance of dissonant information. I find that almost half of the participants are willing to sacrifice money to avoid learning about the opposite viewpoint. The amount they are willing to sacrifice reaches almost half of their experimental budget. These results show the extensive prevalence of dissonant information avoidance. I then examine this behaviour for different belief and treatment groups. My main finding is that while prior exposure to dissonant information does not significantly reduce information avoidance, beliefs serve as the key element explaining the intensity of information avoidance. Even though both pro-life and pro-choice people have muted reactions to prior exposure to dissonant information, when further avoidance of dissonant information is considered, their willingness to pay to avoid dissonant information differs significantly. Results suggest that pro-life people are willing to pay more to avoid dissonant information than pro-choice people. Further, looking into people's true reasoning through first-hand text data, anticipated negative emotions are established as the main psychological mechanism explaining avoidance behaviour.

These findings provide empirical support for belief-based utility models, arguing that anticipation of negative emotions affects information avoidance. As information has hedonic value, individuals forego monetary rewards to avoid information that can confirm unfavourable beliefs, even when the information cannot guide action. These findings have relevance for theories of group polarisation and political extremism. In particular, my paper provides the first step to understanding how prior exposure to dissonant information drives information avoidance while differentiating information avoidance from attention avoidance.

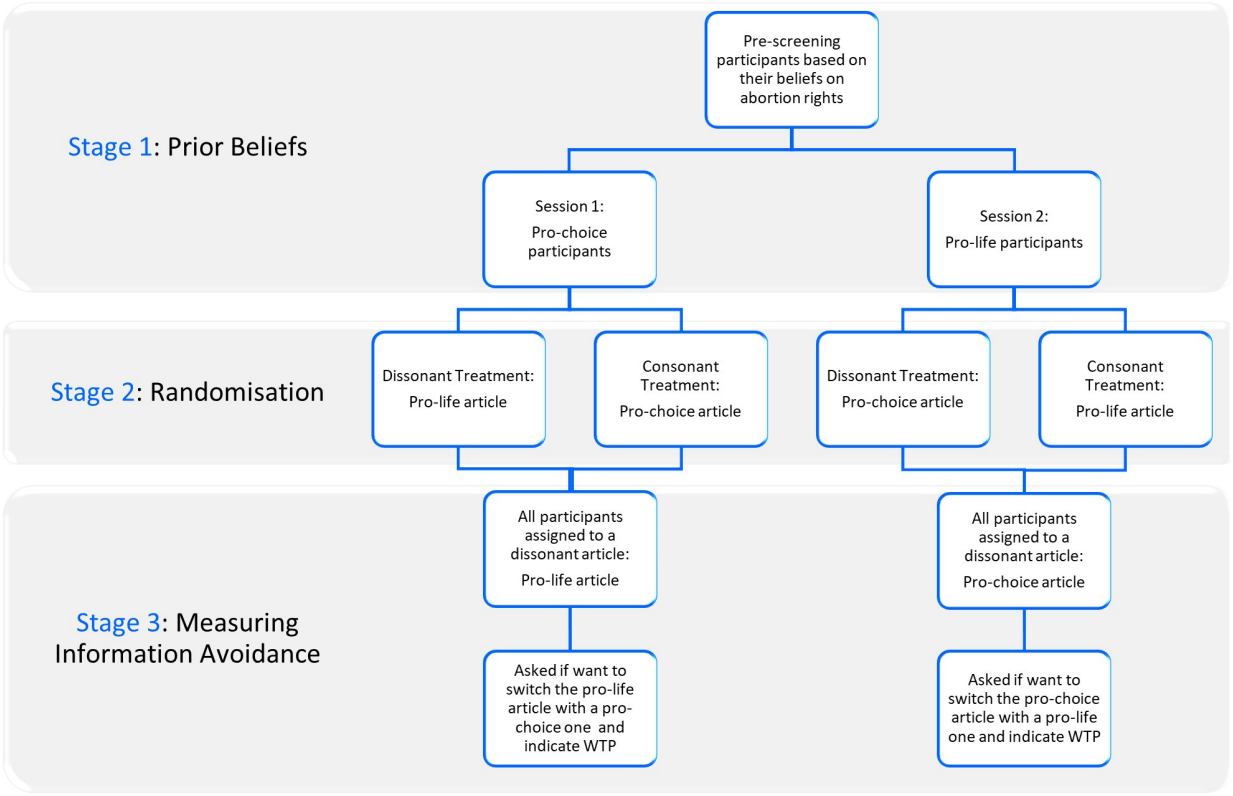
In this paper, I study one possible intervention to reduce avoidance behaviour, which is found to have no significant effect. Even though an adequate level of attention is given to the dissonant information, people's beliefs on the topic do not change after being exposed to dissonant information. My results suggest that beliefs on topics such as abortion rights define an individual's identity. Therefore, short-term exposure to dissonant information does not seem to alter dissonant information avoidance.

My study has significant policy ramifications. In terms of abortion rights, even when people were made to read dissonant news content that included both factual information and subjective opinions, they did not change their beliefs. More generally, people were willing to forfeit money to avoid conflicting information and, in turn, maintain their echo chambers. Generalizing beyond positions on abortion, it seems likely that any attempt to build consensus through the provision of balanced or competitive sources of information will suffer from an individual's willingness to pay to avoid contrary information. Polarisation is a natural consequence of avoiding dissonant information (Sunstein 1999) and short-term exposure to dissonant information seems unlikely to be the solution. As the results of my text analysis suggest, people experience dissonance when exposed to dissonant information, some more than others. My research method could be used to identify which public figures, including politicians and policymakers, are more likely than others to experience negative emotions in anticipation of dissonant information and are willing to pay to avoid dissonant information. I can use their predicted avoidance behaviour to identify their involvement in political polarisation.

In my future research, I will investigate whether producing news content that causes less dissonance in those who disagree with the viewpoint lessens information avoidance. I will also explore alternative interventions and ways to tackle this societal problem, as avoiding opposing viewpoints poses a special challenge to discursive democracy. Also, a deliberative public sphere requires the exchange of ideas with a broad range of individuals. The limited breadth of knowledge in like-minded communities, however, could exacerbate public polarisation and division if avoiding diverse points of view becomes ingrained as a habit (Garrett 2009, Neuman et al. 2011, Jang 2014). In order to produce valuable lessons for policymakers, future research should also focus on identifying the significance of prior exposure to dissonant information across a variety of diverse themes and study samples.

6 Figures

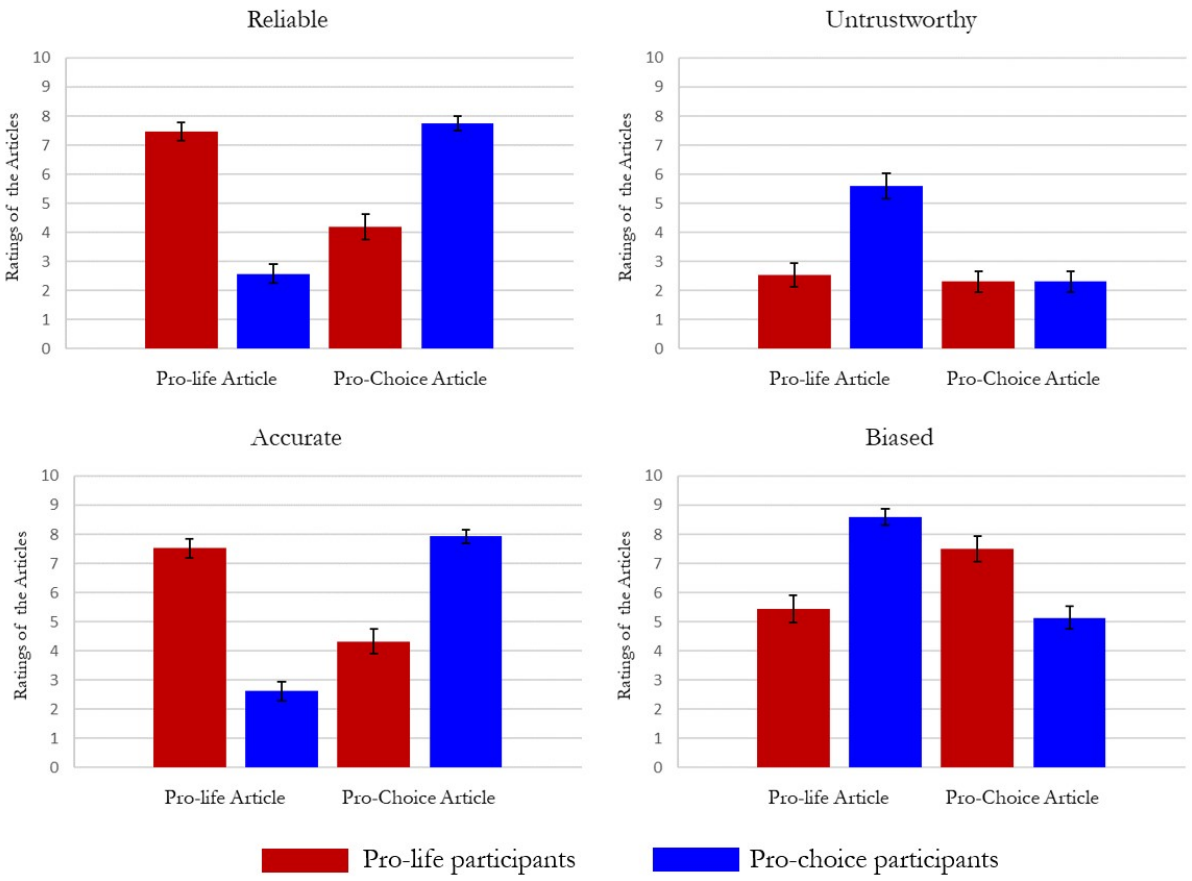
FIGURE 1: Overview of the Experimental Design



Notes: This figure provides an overview of the main design features of session 1 and session 2. Appendix C contains the full experimental instructions.

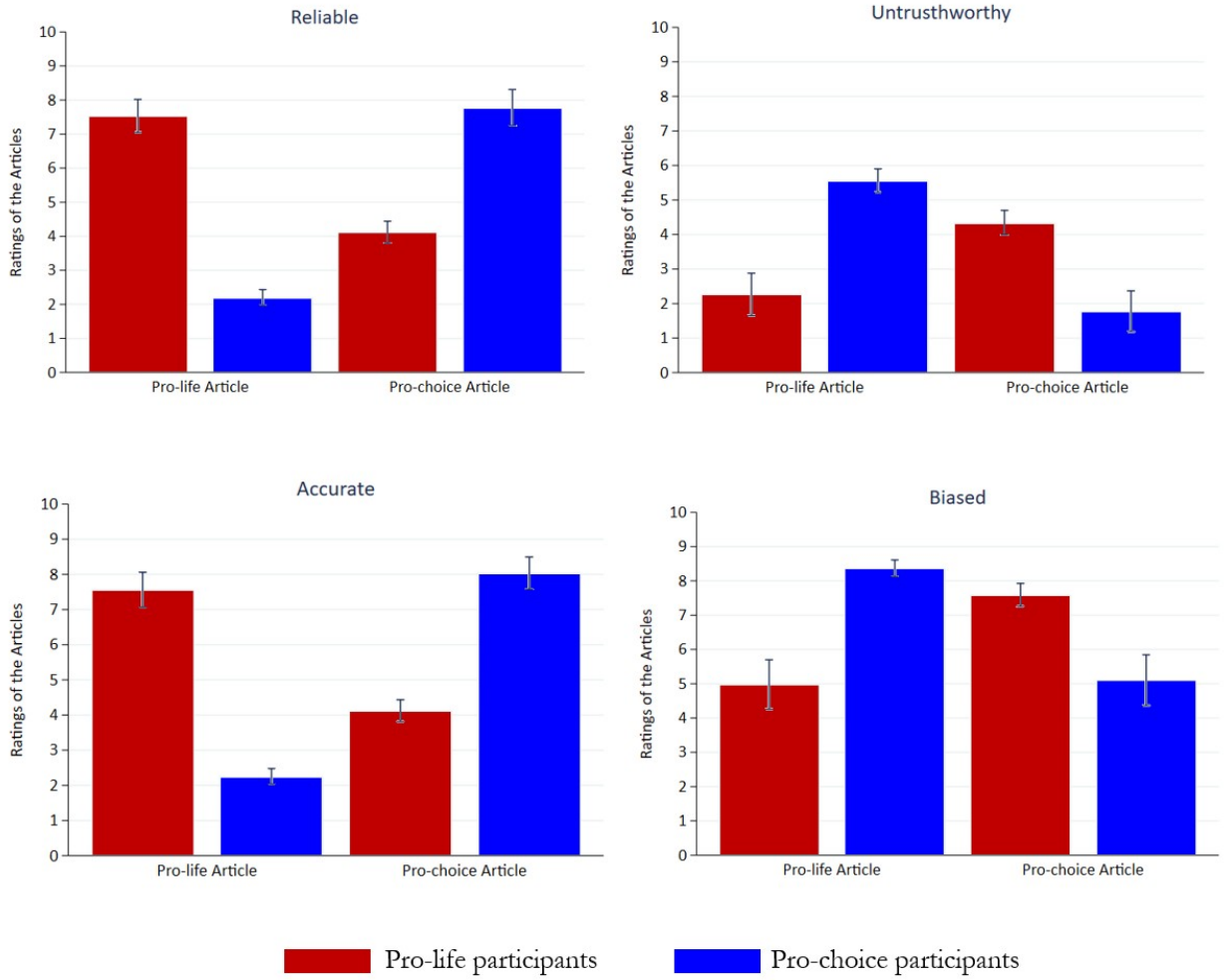
FIGURE 2: Subjective Evaluation of Articles

(a) Panel A: Stage 1 Articles



Notes: Ratings are out of 10. 0 represents the lowest and 10 represents the highest rankings. 95% confidence intervals for the mean are shown.

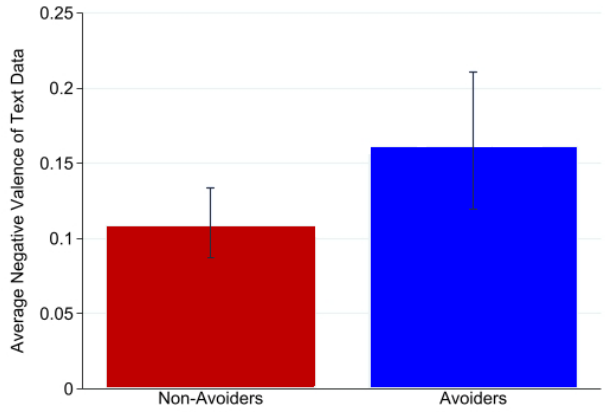
(b) Panel B: Stage 2 Articles



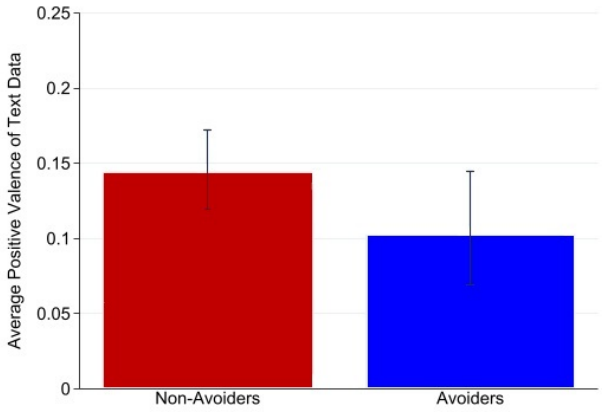
Notes: Ratings are out of 10. 0 represents the lowest and 10 represents the highest rankings. 95% confidence intervals for the mean are shown.

FIGURE 3: Sentiment Analysis Results on the Motives for Information Avoidance

(a) Panel A: Negative Sentiment Score

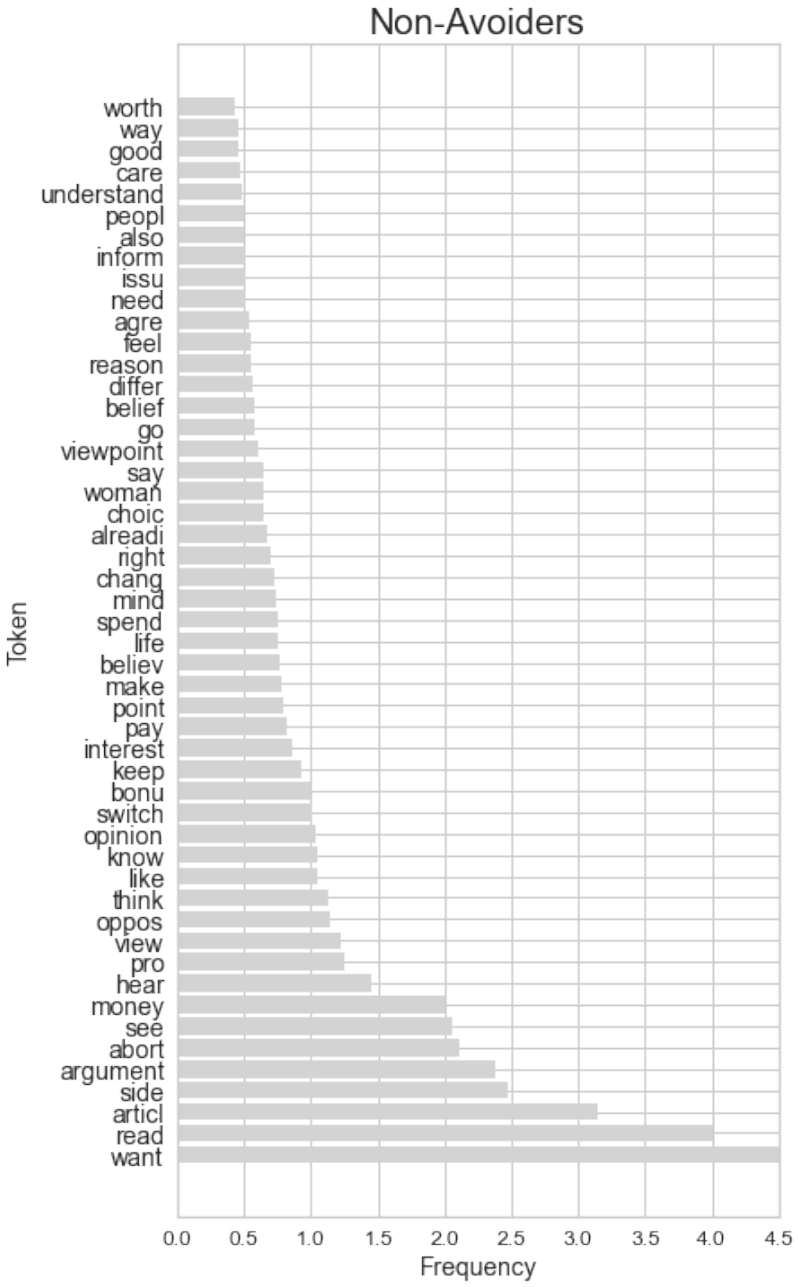


(b) Panel B: Positive Sentiment Score



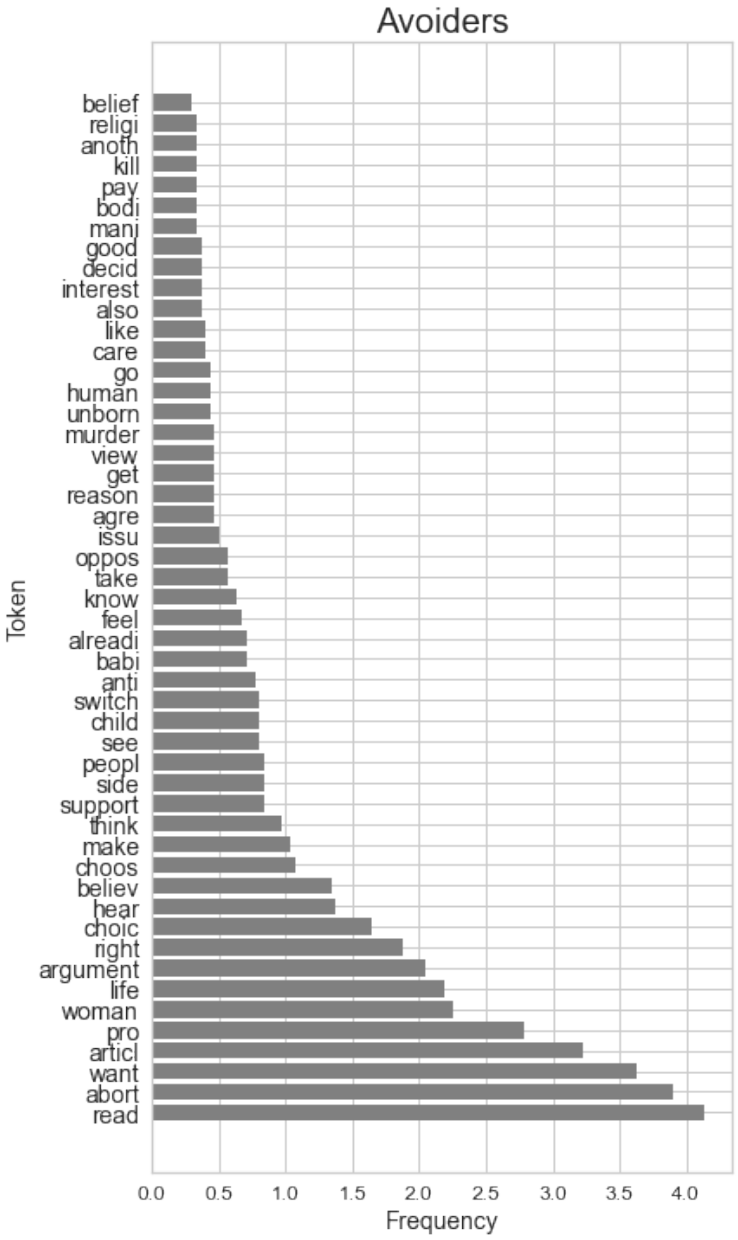
Notes: Panel A represents the average negative valence and Panel B represents the average positive valence of the text written by the participants while explaining their reasoning to switch the dissonant article with the consonant one. Valence can take a value between 0 and 1. 0 represents the lowest score and 1 represents the highest score. Valence consists of three components: negative, neutral and positive score. 95% confidence intervals for the mean are shown.

FIGURE 4: Frequency of Most Common Words - Non-Avoiders



Notes: The figure represents the frequency of the 50 most commonly used words in the text written by people who chose to switch the dissonant article with the consonant one. I use Python's Natural Language Processing to identify phrases that characterise the participant's responses. I exclude stop words, reduce all words to their stem by using Porter stemmer and group the words with all of their variant and inflected forms by using Word net lemmatiser.

FIGURE 5: Frequency of Most Common Words - Avoiders



Notes: The figure represents the frequency of the 50 most commonly used words in the text written by people who chose to switch the dissonant article with the consonant one. I use Python's Natural Language Processing to identify phrases that characterise the participant's responses. I exclude stop words, reduce all words to their stem by using Porter stemmer and group the words with all of their variant and inflected forms by using Word net lemmatiser.

7 Tables

TABLE 1: People pay to avoid dissonant information.

	Belief		
	Pro-Life	Pro-Choice	Overall
Panel A : Avoid Dissonant Info			
Consonant Treatment	0.417	0.446	0.434
Dissonant Treatment	0.435	0.404	0.418
Overall	0.426	0.426	0.426
Panel B: Willingness to Pay			
Consonant Treatment	0.203	0.172	0.186
Dissonant Treatment	0.226	0.167	0.193
Overall	0.214	0.170	0.189
Panel C: Willingness to Pay[1]			
Consonant Treatment	0.487	0.386	0.429
Dissonant Treatment	0.519	0.413	0.461
Overall	0.502	0.399	0.444

Notes: Mean values are shown in the table. Panel A represents the mean proportion of people who wanted to switch the dissonant article with the consonant one in each study group. Panel B represents the mean amount of money (in terms of US dollars) participants were willing to pay to switch the articles in each treatment group. [1] Panel C represents the mean amount of money (in terms of US dollars) participants were willing to pay to switch the articles in each treatment group for only those who were willing to pay any positive amount. Participants were given an additional 1$ to use if they want to pay for switching the articles. Any unused amount was added on top of their bonus payment.

TABLE 2: Prior Exposure to Dissonant Information

	Treatment		
	Consonant	Dissonant	Diff. in Proportions (p-value)
Avoid Dissonant Info (%)	0.434	0.418	0.016 (0.617)
WTP	0.186	0.193	-0.007 (0.737)
WTP[1]	0.429	0.461	-0.032 0.346

Notes: The table represents results from a two-sided t-test to test the null hypothesis that prior exposure to dissonant information does not affect the propensity to avoid dissonant information (willingness to pay to avoid dissonant information). Column 1 and Column 2 show the mean values for the consonant and dissonant treatment groups, respectively. Column 3 shows the difference in proportions with p-values in parentheses. "Avoid dissonant info" takes the value of 1 if participants wanted to pay to switch the dissonant article with the consonant one, 0 otherwise. "WTP" represents the willingness to pay to switch the articles in terms of US dollars. [1] Second willingness to pay measure only includes participants who were willing to pay any positive amount of money to switch the articles. Participants were given an additional 100 cents to use if they want to pay for switching the articles. Any unused amount was added on top of their bonus payment. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

TABLE 3: Prior Exposure to Dissonant Information and Beliefs

	Treatment		
	Consonant	Dissonant	Diff. in Proportions (p-value)
Panel A: Pro-Life People			
Avoid Dissonant Info (%)	0.417	0.435	-0.018 (0.703)
WTP	0.203	0.226	-0.023 (0.480)
WTP[1]	0.487	0.519	-0.033 (0.532)
Panel B: Pro-Choice People			
Avoid Dissonant Info (%)	0.446	0.404	0.042 (0.315)
WTP	0.172	0.167	0.005 (0.837)
WTP[1]	0.386	0.413	-0.027 (0.543)
Difference in Proportions (A=B)			
Avoid Dissonant Info (%)	-0.029 (0.508)	0.031 (0.495)	-
WTP	0.031 (0.261)	0.059 (0.050)	-
WTP[1]	0.101 (0.029)	0.106 (0.039)	-

Notes: The table represents the mean values by treatment and belief groups. "Avoid dissonant info" takes the value of 1 if participants wanted to pay to switch the dissonant article with the consonant one, 0 otherwise. "WTP" represents the willingness to pay to switch the articles in terms of US dollars. [1] Second willingness to pay measure only includes participants who were willing to pay any positive amount of money to switch the articles. Participants were given an additional 100 cents to use if they want to pay for switching the articles. Any unused amount was added on top of their bonus payment. Column 1 and Column 2 show the mean values for the consonant and dissonant treatment groups, respectively. Column 3 represents results from a two-sided proportion test to test the null hypothesis that prior exposure to dissonant information does not affect the propensity to avoid dissonant information for the given group. Panel A includes only pro-life participants while Panel B includes only pro-choice participants. Panel C represents results from a two-sided proportion test to test the null hypothesis that there is no difference in the propensity to avoid dissonant information (willingness to pay to avoid dissonant information) between the two opposing belief groups on the topic of abortion rights for each treatment group, separately. "Avoid dissonant info" takes the value of 1 if participants wanted to pay to switch the dissonant article with the consonant one, 0 otherwise. "WTP" represents the willingness to pay to switch the articles in terms of US dollars. [1] Second willingness to pay measure only includes participants who were willing to pay any positive amount of money to switch the articles. Participants were given an additional 100 cents to use if they want to pay for switching the articles. Any unused amount was added on top of their bonus payment. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

TABLE 4: Participants' Beliefs

	Belief		
	Pro-Life	Pro-Choice	Diff. in Proportions (p-value)
Avoid Dissonant Info (%)	0.426	0.426	-0.00006 (0.999)
WTP	0.214	0.170	0.044** (0.029)
WTP[1]	0.502	0.399	0.104*** (0.002)

Notes: The table represents mean values and results from a two-sided t-test to test the null hypothesis that Panel C represents results from a two-sided proportion test to test the null hypothesis that there is no difference in the propensity to avoid dissonant information (willingness to pay to avoid dissonant information) between the two opposing belief groups on the topic of abortion rights. Column 1 and Column 2 show the mean values for pro-life and pro-choice belief groups, respectively. Column 3 shows the difference in proportions with p-values in parentheses. "Avoid dissonant info" takes the value of 1 if participants wanted to pay to switch the dissonant article with the consonant one, 0 otherwise. "WTP" represents the willingness to pay to switch the articles in terms of US dollars. [1] Second willingness to pay measure only includes participants who were willing to pay any positive amount of money to switch the articles. Participants were given an additional 100 cents to use if they want to pay for switching the articles. Any unused amount was added on top of their bonus payment. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

TABLE 5: Determinants of Paying to Avoid Dissonant Information

$y = \mathbb{I}$(paid to avoid)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Pro-choice	0.0737	0.106	0.130	0.147
	[0.111]	[0.114]	[0.165]	[0.165]
Dissonant Tr.	0.0459	0.0589	-0.117	-0.108
	[0.121]	[0.121]	[0.177]	[0.177]
Pro-choice x Dissonant	-0.153	-0.173	0.0590	0.0520
	[0.161]	[0.164]	[0.237]	[0.238]
Female		0.285***	0.269	0.330*
		[0.0822]	[0.168]	[0.171]
Age		0.00642**	0.00562*	0.00537*
		[0.00306]	[0.00308]	[0.00318]
White		-0.0907	-0.0746	-0.0404
		[0.0996]	[0.100]	[0.101]
Income		-0.00976	-0.00918	-0.00942
		[0.0118]	[0.0118]	[0.0119]
College		-0.0298	-0.0236	-0.0277
		[0.0869]	[0.0870]	[0.0876]
Pro-choice x Female			-0.0545	-0.118
			[0.226]	[0.227]
Dissonant x Female			0.359	0.340
			[0.247]	[0.247]
Pro-choice x Dissonant x Female			-0.464	-0.426
			[0.330]	[0.332]
Av. time reading news				0.0742***
				[0.0197]
Risk pref. (std)				0.0469
				[0.0434]
IPS (std)				0.0243
				[0.0418]
Time Spent Article 1				0.000037
				[0.000565]
Constant	-0.209**	-0.488***	-0.464**	-0.636***
	[0.0833]	[0.182]	[0.199]	[0.210]
Observations	1,000	979	979	979
Demographic variables	×	✓	✓	✓
Female Interactions	×	×	✓	✓
Behavioural variables	×	×	×	✓

Notes: The table represents the coefficients from probit analyses. The dependent variable is equal to 0 if a participant chose not to pay to switch articles, and is equal to 1 if a participant chose to pay to switch articles. "Pro-choice" takes the value of 0 if a participant is against abortion rights and takes the value of 1 if a participant is in favour of abortion rights. "Dissonant treatment" is also a dummy variable which is equal to 0 if a participant is randomly allocated to the consonant treatment and 1 if a participant is randomly allocated to the dissonant treatment. The notation "x" represents an interaction variable between the variables. Demographic controls include female (a dummy variable which takes 1 if the participant classified themselves as female, 0 otherwise), age, white (a dummy variable that takes 1 if the participants classified their race as white, 0 otherwise), income, college (a dummy variable that takes 1 if the participant has a college degree, 0 otherwise). Behavioural control variables include average daily time spent reading the news, risk preference and information preference. "Av. time reading news" shows the number of hours spent reading the news per day. "Risk pref. (std)" represents the standardised score from the following question: How do you see yourself: Are you generally a person who is fully prepared to take risks or do you try to avoid taking risks?" on a scale from 0 to 10 ("unwilling to take risks" to "fully prepared to take risks"). "IPS (std)" represents the standardised score from Information Preference Scale by Ho et al. (2021): the lower the score, the higher the willingness to avoid information. 21 participants were dropped after Column 1 since they did not identify themselves as a female or a male. Column 4 also includes time spent reading the article that was randomly assigned to the participants in the first stage of the experiment to account for attention differentiation. "Time Spent Article 1" shows the time spent reading the first stage article in seconds. Robust standard errors are in brackets and are clustered at the treatment (individual) level. * p<0.1; ** p<0.05; *** p<0.01.

TABLE 6: Determinants of Amount of Money Spent to Avoid Dissonant Information

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Pro-choice	-10.05**	-8.443*	-26.17***	-26.99***
	[4.548]	[4.646]	[6.448]	[6.483]
Dissonant Tr.	3.255	2.565	-12.02	-11.93
	[5.215]	[5.188]	[7.885]	[7.916]
Pro-choice x Dissonant	-0.534	-0.328	16.07	17.04*
	[6.869]	[6.845]	[9.874]	[9.838]
Female		6.401*	-15.03**	-12.97*
		[3.402]	[6.664]	[6.984]
Age		0.381***	0.368***	0.411***
		[0.122]	[0.122]	[0.127]
White		1.525	1.646	1.780
		[3.978]	[3.959]	[4.088]
Income		-0.835*	-0.802	-0.893*
		[0.494]	[0.496]	[0.504]
College		4.226	3.445	2.838
		[3.641]	[3.616]	[3.613]
Pro-choice x Female			30.46***	30.91***
			[8.898]	[9.070]
Dissonant x Female			24.54**	24.71**
			[10.38]	[10.41]
Pro-choice x Dissonant x Female			-29.02**	-27.77**
			[13.67]	[13.66]
Av. time reading news				-0.954**
				[0.505]
Risk pref. (std)				3.026
				[1.913]
IPS (std)				-0.302
				[1.907]
Time Spent Article 1				-0.013
				[0.024]
Constant	48.65***	30.34***	43.69***	45.28***
	[3.387]	[6.892]	[8.024]	[8.653]
Observations	426	416	416	416
R-squared	0.023	0.068	0.096	0.107
Demographic variables	×	✓	✓	✓
Female Interactions	×	×	✓	✓
Behavioural variables	×	×	×	✓

Notes: The table represents the results from OLS regressions. The dependent variable is the amount of money participants are willing to pay to switch articles from the pot of 100 cents. The sample includes participants with positive willingness to pay. "Pro-choice" takes the value of 0 if a participant is against abortion rights and takes the value of 1 if a participant is in favour of abortion rights. "Dissonant treatment" is also a dummy variable which is equal to 0 if a participant is randomly allocated to the consonant treatment and 1 if a participant is randomly allocated to the dissonant treatment. The notation "x" represents an interaction variable between the variables. Demographic controls include female (a dummy variable which takes 1 if the participant classified themselves as female, 0 otherwise), age, white (a dummy variable that takes 1 if the participants classified their race as white, 0 otherwise), income, college (a dummy variable that takes 1 if the participant has a college degree, 0 otherwise). Behavioural control variables include average daily time spent reading the news, risk preference and information preference. "Av. time reading news" shows the number of hours spent reading the news per day. "Risk pref. (std)" represents the standardised score from the following question: How do you see yourself: Are you generally a person who is fully prepared to take risks or do you try to avoid taking risks?" on a scale from 0 to 10 ("unwilling to take risks" to "fully prepared to take risks"). "IPS (std)" represents the standardised score from Information Preference Scale by Ho et al. (2021): the lower the score, the higher the willingness to avoid information. 21 participants were dropped after Column 1 since they did not identify themselves as a female or a male. Column 4 also includes time spent reading the article that was randomly assigned to the participants in the first stage of the experiment to account for attention differentiation. "Time Spent Article 1" shows the time spent reading the first stage article in seconds. Robust standard errors are in brackets and clustered at the treatment (individual) level. * p<0.1; ** p<0.05; *** p<0.01.

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Appendix A: First Stage Treatment Manipulation

Results presented in Section 4.3 in addition to the attention avoidance discussion help me to validate an important aspect of the experimental manipulation. I discussed that participants spent 110 seconds on average reading the article that consisted of about 327 words which are above the average time estimated to be spent to read these articles. They also answered almost 90% of the incentivised comprehension questions correctly which indicates a high success rate. Furthermore, as mentioned before, participants' subjective ratings of the articles match with their beliefs. When an article confirms individuals' beliefs, people rate it as more reliable and accurate than when it contradicts their beliefs. It shows that participants are well-informed about the content of the article after they read it, therefore, they consistently classify them as more reliable and accurate if they agree with the article, and as more untrustworthy and biased if they do not agree with the article. These results indicate that participants took the experimental tasks seriously as an adequate level of attention is devoted to the experimental tasks, supporting the validity of the treatment manipulation.

Appendix B: Secondary Results

As a supplementary analysis, I test whether people perform better in an effort task when the task is based on a consonant article than a dissonant article. This hypothesis builds upon discussions that argue unfamiliarity with arguments discussed in a dissonant article and cognitive constraints stemming from the difficulty of paying attention to dissonant stimuli might lead to lower performance scores in dissonant articles. In the experiment, participants are asked to respond to several incentivised questions based on the article they read. The more questions they answer correctly, the higher bonus payment they earn. I compare the average number of correct answers between a consonant article and a dissonant article to investigate if the performance in the tasks correlates with the prior beliefs on the topic.

Table A5 represents the mean performance in first and second-stage articles in the experiment. In the first stage of the experiment, both pro-life and pro-choice people perform worse in a dissonant article than in a consonant article, (Panel A: $p = 0.005$ and $p = 0.973$, respectively). In the second stage of the experiment, pro-life people correctly answer 0.50 more questions out of 5 questions when they complete the task in a dissonant article than a consonant article ($p = 0.000$), corresponding to a 10.06% difference while pro-choice people correctly answer 0.37 more questions out of 5 questions when they complete the task in a consonant article than a dissonant article ($p = 0.000$), corresponding to a 7.38% difference. These results do not detect any clear association between performance and beliefs.

Additionally, I explore if people harden their beliefs on abortion after being exposed to consonant or dissonant information. I ask them to rate how strongly they identify themselves as being "pro-choice" or "pro-life" before they are exposed to any information and after they complete two effort tasks on different articles related to abortion. First of all, pro-choice participants on average have stronger beliefs on abortion than pro-life participants in my study sample ($p = 0.000$). Prior to the treatments, pro-choice participants identify themselves as 92.79% pro-choice, whereas pro-life participants identify themselves as 85% pro-life.[28] Table A6 represents the mean value of their beliefs before and after the treatment based on the number of times they were exposed to dissonant information. Results show that people's beliefs on abortion intensify when they are only exposed to consonant information, supporting the echo-chamber discussion (Sunstein 1999). On average, after being exposed to two consonant articles, pro-life people's beliefs on abortion enhanced by 4.92% ($p = 0.137$), whereas pro-choice people's beliefs on abortion enhanced by 1.86% ($p = 0.027$). Being exposed to one consonant and one dissonant article boosts pro-life people's beliefs by a non-significant 1.82% ($p = 0.0.152$) whereas it boosts pro-choice people's beliefs by a significant 1.21% ($p = 0.000$). On the other hand, both groups of people did not update their beliefs on abortion after being exposed to two dissonant articles, resulting in a non-significant 0.97% drop in pro-life people's beliefs ($p = 0.460$) and a non-significant 0.04% increase in pro-choice people's beliefs (0.906). Overall, pro-choice participants identify themselves as 93.58% pro-choice posterior to information treatments, 0.79% higher than their prior beliefs ($p = 0.001$) whereas pro-life people identify themselves as 86.29% pro-life posterior to information treatments, 1.15% higher than their prior beliefs ($p = 0.201$). These results might indicate that informational interventions on the beliefs on abortion are likely to fail as it seems that these beliefs are a strong part of individuals' identities.

It is important to remember that this paper does not find any effect of exposure to dissonant information on people's information avoidance behaviour. The fact that no significant belief updating is observed after being exposed to dissonant information might explain the null result.

Appendix C: Experimental Instructions

[28] It does make sense considering that Prolific is considered to be more left-leaning. For example, while screening the participants for my experiment, there were around 80.000 eligible participants to take part in session 1 of the experiment (which consists of only pro-choice people) and there were only around 10.000 eligible participants to take part in session 2 (which consists of only pro-life participants). Also, even though the data collection for session 1 and session 2 started at the same time, session 1 was completed within the next twenty-four hours whereas session 2 took three days to be completed.

SESSION 1

Redacted transcript: online only. [Bold text in square brackets was not seen by subjects.]

Participation Agreement

You have been invited to take part in a research study run by academic researchers at the University of Warwick. The project will require you to answer a number of tasks and make decisions under uncertainty. There will also be some personality and demographic questions. Please read the following statements carefully and answer the question below.

Our commitments and privacy policy

We never deceive participants. For example, if we inform you that another participant made a choice on which you can then react, this is indeed the case. We keep our promises made to participants. For example, if we promise a certain payment, participants will indeed receive it. In the event that we are responsible for a mistake that is to the disadvantage of participants, we will inform and compensate the respective participants. We design, conduct, and report our research in accordance with recognized scientific standards and ethical principles. This study has been reviewed and given a favorable opinion by the University of Warwick's Department of Economics Ethics Committee.

We adhere to the terms of our privacy policy as stated below:

The data in the participants' database will only be used for the purpose of the study. There is no link between the personal data in the participants' database and the data collected during a study. The generated anonymous data will be used for analysis. The end product will be publicly available. Your participation in this study is purely voluntary, and you may withdraw your participation at any time without any penalty to you. Please note that the software (Qualtrics) automatically notes the time you spent on each question and this data will be made available to researchers for analysis. Please refer to the University of Warwick Research Privacy Notice which is available here or by contacting the Legal Compliance Team at GDPR@warwick.ac.uk

Data will be securely stored on the University of Warwick computers and will be processed only for scientific analysis. Summaries may be presented at conferences and included in scientific publications. Data will be reviewed after a period of 10 years, in line with the University of Warwick data retention policy.

Who should I contact if I wish to make a complaint?

If you would like to make a complaint about the way you have been dealt with during the study or any possible harm you might have suffered please address your complaint to the person below, who is a senior University of Warwick official entirely independent of this study:

Head of Research Governance, Research & Impact Services, University House, University of Warwick, Coventry CV4 8UW
Tel: +44 (0)24 765 75733 ; Email: researchgovernance@warwick.ac.uk

If you wish to raise a complaint on how we have handled your personal data, you can contact our Data Protection Officer and Information and Data Director who will investigate the matter: DPO@warwick.ac.uk

If you are happy to proceed please tick the "I agree" button below to continue.

○ I agree

Your Understanding and Attention
It is important for our research that you understand what you are doing in the experiment. To check this, we will ask you questions on your understanding and attention at certain points.

Also, you are likely to earn a better bonus with a better understanding of the tasks and choices. As such, we ask you to please read the instructions carefully.

- ○ I understand

Bonus Payments
You will have the chance to win a bonus payment. The nature of the bonus payment will be made clear on the page when there is an opportunity.

We quote payments in US dollars. The Prolific platform operates in British pounds. Although we will send bonus payments to match the US dollar amounts we quote, the final amount you receive may be very slightly different due to exchange rate fluctuations.

All participants -including you- are given **100 cents** separate from your potential bonus payment. There will be **possibilities** for you **to use** this money later in the experiment. Any amount unused from this pot will be added on top of your bonus payment.

- ○ I understand

Your Understanding
Is the following statement correct according to the information given to you on the last page?

You are given an additional 100 cents and you will be given a possibility to use this money later in the experiment.

- ○ True
- ○ False

What is your Prolific ID? (please copy and paste it to avoid typos)

Attention Check
If we later ask you what the favorite number of "person X" is, please choose "10".

Questions about your beliefs:
When it comes to others having the right to terminate their pregnancy, do you oppose or support abortion?

- ○ Oppose abortion
- ○ Support abortion

Please indicate the extent to which you oppose or support the abortion right by moving the slider. (0 being strongly oppose, 100 being strongly support)

[A slider from 0 to 100 is given.]

Task 1/5: Short Articles with Questions
Your next task includes reading a short article about various topics and opinions and answering some questions based on the article.

If you are happy with your answer, click the button at the bottom of the screen to continue. Once you have moved on to the next page, you cannot go back.

Bonus Payment
Your bonus payment will be decided based on **the number of correct answers** you give to these questions. You will earn 10 cents for every correct answer.

Remember, you should only answer the questions based on the information given to you in the article.

Next, you have a practice task. This will allow you to get a feel for the format. It does not count for the bonus.

- ○ I understand these instructions.

Practice Article

On the next page, you will be presented with an article titled **"The Orchid Mantis and its Characteristics"** which summarizes some descriptive features of the insect.

Please read the article **carefully** as you will be asked to answer some questions based on the article.

Remember, you should only answer the questions based on the information given to you in the article.

- ○ Continue with the article titled "The Orchid Mantis and its Characteristics"

PRACTICE ARTICLE

"The Orchid Mantis and its Characteristics"

Hymenopus coronatus, the orchid mantis, is a remarkable creature. Against any opponent but a careful entomologist with a cardboard box, the mantis is a lethal hunter and master of camouflage. Its four front legs, head and thorax are covered in delicate structures resembling colorful flower petals.

As for its behavior, like any good mantis, it is an ambush predator. It takes full advantage of its unique appearance, settling amongst the petals of orchids and awaiting visiting insects. It favors butterflies and moths for its meals, but will happily take any insect on offer. Indeed, it need not even

be an insect: particularly voracious orchid mantises have been known to feed on small lizards, frogs, mice and even birds.

Question 1:
Could you please list as much information as possible about the orchid mantis **mentioned in the text?** Please use a separate text box for each argument. (You do not need to use the exact numbers or phrases mentioned in the text for your answer to be considered correct.)

[Five essay boxes are given.]

Next, we would like you to answer some questions about the article you have just read which is also reproduced below.

[The same article is shown again.]

Please respond to the following questions based on the information given to you in the article.

Question 2:
How many front legs does an orchid mantis have?

1 2 3 4

Question 3:
What does orchid mantis eat? (Choose all that apply.)

Grass Butterflies Moths Frogs Mice Birds

The real tasks start **immediately** on the next page, please make sure you are ready.

[EITHER: TREATMENT GROUP 1– PRO-CHOICE ARTICLE]

Task 1/5: Short Articles with Questions

On the next page, you will be presented with an article titled "**Endangering Women – Health Cost of Banning Abortion**" which includes speeches of some anonymous members of Congress against banning abortions (pro-choice).

Please read the article **carefully** as you will be asked to answer some questions based on the article.

Your bonus payment will be decided based on **the number of correct answers** you give to these questions. You will earn 10 cents for every correct answer.

Remember, you should only answer the questions based on the information given to you in the article.

○ Continue with the article titled "Endangering Women – Health Cost of Banning Abortion"

ARTICLE 1

"Endangering Women – Health Cost of Banning Abortion"

Over in the House, Members are expected to consider legislation that would strip away women's right to access abortion care without government interference. Republican legislatures across the country are continuing to pass bills that control women's bodies. Women across this country face the most devastating blow to their rights and freedom in decades. There is no question that these bills have an incredibly discriminatory impact and will disproportionately harm those who are already facing far more obstacles when it comes to accessing healthcare.

This whole argument is not really about whether or not there will be abortions in this country, for there have always been, and there will always be abortions in this country and around the world. The only question is: Will those abortions be safe and legal?

Today, because of new abortion care restrictions, 90 percent of counties in the United States do not have an abortion provider. Women are faced with impossible decisions and, as a result, might be forced to have babies under life-threatening conditions. And, tragically, women may also die because they lack the access or resources to safely end a pregnancy. Abortion bans are a matter of life and death.

In addition to physical health concerns, maternal mental health depreciated significantly among women who had an unwanted pregnancy and were denied an abortion. According to a study conducted in 2008, women whose unwanted pregnancy was just days past the abortion clinic's gestational limit, therefore denied an abortion, experienced more anxiety and depression symptoms and reported lower life satisfaction as compared to women who also had unwanted pregnancies and whose pregnancy was just days before the abortion clinic's gestational limit.

When people have access to a full range of healthcare services, including the full spectrum of reproductive health and maternity care, they are healthier, and their families thrive. It is the government's job to rightfully keep abortion safe, legal, and accessible.

Question 1:
Could you please list as many arguments as possible in favor of abortion **mentioned in the text?** Please use a separate text box for each argument. (You do not need to use the exact numbers or phrases mentioned in the text for your answer to be considered correct.)

[10 essay boxes are given.]

Question 2:
Is the article in favor of or against women's abortion rights?

- ○ In favor of women's abortion rights
- ○ Against women's abortion rights

Next, we would like you to answer some questions about the article you have just read which is also reproduced below.

[The same article is shown again.]

Please respond to the following questions based on the information given to you in the article.

Question 3:
Do Republican lawmakers pass bills that discriminate against women, control their bodies, and make it harder for them to access healthcare?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

Question 4:
What percentage of counties in the US do have an abortion provider?

0% 10% 50% 90% 100%

Question 5:
Restricting access to abortion care might … (Choose all that apply.)

- ○ Detoriate women's physical health
- ○ Cause maternal deaths
- ○ Lead to experience more anxiety and depression symptoms
- ○ Lower life satisfaction

[OR: TREATMENT GROUP 2– PRO-LIFE ARTICLE]

Task 1/5: Short Articles with Questions

On the next page, you will be presented with an article titled **"It is not a Blob of Tissue, but a Human Being – Science and Abortion"** which includes speeches of some anonymous members of Congress in favor of banning abortions (pro-life).

Please read the article **carefully** as you will be asked to answer some questions based on the article.

Your bonus payment will be decided based on **the number of correct answers** you give to these questions. You will earn 10 cents for every correct answer.

Remember, you should only answer the questions based on the information given to you in the article.

- ○ Continue with the article titled "It is not a Blob of Tissue, but a Human Being – Science and Abortion"

ARTICLE 1

"It is not a Blob of Tissue, but a Human Being – Science and Abortion"

Over in the House, Members are expected to consider legislation that would pre-empt virtually all State restrictions on abortion. Democrats are calling the bill the Women's Health Protection Act. A more accurate name would be the most anti-life legislation ever to be considered in the U.S. Congress. This bill would eliminate pretty much any abortion restriction in every State across the country: no matter how unsafe the method of abortion is.

Thanks to ultrasounds and scientific advances and plain old common sense, Americans know just how ridiculous it is to claim that unborn children are just blobs of tissue. Scientific evidence suggests that the beginning of the third week after conception marks the start of the embryonic period, a time when the mass of cells becomes distinct as a human. Around the fourth week, the head begins to form, quickly followed by the eyes, nose, ears, and mouth. Most people are well aware that an unborn baby with its own heartbeat and fingers and toes and DNA is, in fact, not a blob of tissue but a human being. A study reported that on average 91 percent of abortions occur between 4 to 13 weeks of pregnancy. It is mostly when the baby has already formed its human form and is recognized as a fetus, not a tissue.

Even though there are abortion restrictions in this country, these restrictions do not include the cases where the mother's life is in danger. Regarding maternal mental health concerns, according to a study conducted in 2008, women who had unwanted pregnancies and whose pregnancy was just days past the abortion clinic's gestational limit, therefore denied an abortion, did not differ in terms of anxiety symptoms or life satisfaction four years after seeking an abortion from women who also had unwanted pregnancies and whose pregnancy was just days before the abortion clinic's gestational limit.

There is no limit to human love for one another, and when in doubt, it is the government's job to rightfully protect the lives of its current citizens as well as its unborn citizens.

Question 1:
Could you please list as many arguments as possible in favor of banning abortion **mentioned in the text?** Please use a separate text box for each argument. (You do not need to use the exact numbers or phrases mentioned in the text for your answer to be considered correct.)

[10 essay boxes are given.]

Question 2:
Is the article in favor of or against women's abortion rights?

- ○ In favor of women's abortion rights
- ○ Against women's abortion rights

Next, we would like you to answer some questions about the article you have just read which is also reproduced below.

[The same article is shown again.]

Please respond to the following questions based on the information given to you in the article.

Question 3:
Are Democrat lawmakers trying to pass a bill that prevents imposing any restrictions on abortion no matter how unsafe the method is?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

Question 4:
What percentage of abortions occur between 4 to 13 weeks of pregnancy, when the baby has its own heartbeat, fingers and toes?

0% 9% 50% 91% 100%

Question 5:
Restricting access to abortion care might …

- ○ Cause maternal deaths
- ○ Lead to experiencing more anxiety
- ○ Lower life satisfaction
- ○ All of the above
- ○ None of the above

Attention Check
Based on the text you read before starting the tasks, what is the favorite number of "person X"?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

On the next page, you will be asked to repeat the same task with a **new** article titled **"Fight for the Defenseless – Stop Abortion!"** (pro-life) which includes speeches of another group of anonymous members of Congress in favor of banning abortions.

Changing the Article:
Before moving on to the next article, this time, you are given a chance to switch the article assigned to you with a different one.

If you would like to, you can change the article **"Fight for the Defenseless – Stop Abortion!"** (pro-life) with the article **"Abortion: Women Should Decide for Themselves!"** (pro-choice).

If you decide to switch the articles, you can use the **pot of 100 cents** given to you at the beginning of the experiment **to pay for it.**

We will draw a random number between 0 and 100.

If the random number is **smaller than or equal** to the maximum amount you are willing to pay to switch the articles, we will **switch** the articles for you and you will be given **"Abortion: Women**

Should Decide for Themselves!" to complete the task.

If the random number is **bigger** than the maximum amount you are willing to pay to switch the articles, we will **not switch** the articles i.e. you will be given the original article assigned to you on the previous page: "**Fight for the Defenseless – Stop Abortion!"** to complete the task.

This procedure is designed to make it better for you to be honest about your true preferences. The **higher** the number is the **higher** the chance of switching articles.

- ○ I understand these instructions

Your Understanding
When will the articles be switched?

- ○ When my maximum willingness to pay to switch is greater than or equal to the randomly drawn number
- ○ When my maximum willingness to pay to switch is less than the randomly drawn number

Your Understanding
Is the following statement false or true?

"I can use the pot of 100 cents given to me at the beginning of the experiment to pay to switch the articles."

- ○ False
- ○ True

Do you want to switch the article **"Fight for the Defenseless – Stop Abortion!"** (pro-life) with the article **"Abortion: Women Should Decide for Themselves!"** (pro-choice)?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

You can **remove** the article titled **"Fight for the Defenseless – Stop Abortion!"** (pro-life) from the task list and **add** the article titled **"Abortion: Women Should Decide for Themselves!"** (pro-choice).

Please indicate **the maximum amount of money (cents) you are willing to pay** from the separate pot of 100 cents given to you at the beginning of the experiment to **switch** the articles mentioned **above**.

(Choosing 0 means that you do not want to switch and choosing 100 means that you want to switch for sure.)

[Slider from 0 to 100 is given.]

[If the willingness to pay reported in the previous question is greater than or equal to the random number drawn.]

You chose to pay X cents {*amount chosen in the previous question*} to switch the articles.

The randomly chosen number was Y {*random number drawn*}.

As X is greater than or equal to Y, we switched the articles for you.

- ○ Continue with the article

Task 2/5: Short Articles with Questions

On the next page, you will be presented with an article titled **"Abortion: Women Should Decide for Themselves!"** which includes speeches of some anonymous members of Congress against banning abortions (pro-choice).

Please read the article **carefully** as you will be asked to answer some questions based on the article.

Your bonus payment will be decided based on **the number of correct answers** you give to these questions. You will earn 10 cents for every correct answer.

Remember, you should only answer the questions based on the information given to you in the article.

- ○ Continue with the article titled "Abortion: Women Should Decide for Themselves!"

ARTICLE 2

"Abortion: Women Should Decide for Themselves!"

The US Supreme Court Justices had been holding arguments in Roe v. Wade, which ensured women in the US have the right to choose whether to have abortions in the first three months of pregnancy without government restrictions.

Choosing whether to become a parent is one of the most important decisions a person will make in their lifetime. It is a decision the child-bearer should be able to make for themselves. Our laws should protect our rights, like the right to abortion, not control and dehumanize us. We aren't truly free unless we can control our own bodies, lives, and future. Women of the United States are ready to fight for their freedom and liberty. They deserve to have their decisions protected and respected.

Over the past decade, extremist anti-abortion politicians have passed more than 450 laws that undermine the freedom to make that decision. We have already seen what Republicans are capable of when it comes to women's personal liberties. This is about politicians controlling women's bodies and decisions.

The legislation that the current administration wants to pass will protect access to healthcare and reproductive rights for all Americans. It will ensure that going forward, we all have the freedom to control our own bodies, safely care for our families, and live with dignity. The evidence from Planned Parenthood shows that Black, indigenous people, LGBTQI-plus communities, and people struggling

to make ends meet are the ones who are hurt the most by harmful abortion bans.

A recent poll from this May found that 85 percent of Americans believe that abortion should be legal in some or all circumstances.

The government has a responsibility to protect human rights, especially for the women who have been the subject of discrimination for decades. This is a fight worth fighting. We should not give up on this country, give up on democracy, and certainly not give up on a woman's right to make her own healthcare decisions.

Question 1:
Could you please list as many arguments as possible in favor of abortion **mentioned in the text?** Please use a separate text box for each argument. (You do not need to use the exact numbers or phrases mentioned in the text for your answer to be considered correct.)

[10 essay boxes are given.]

Question 2:
Is the article in favor of or against women's abortion rights?

- ○ In favor of women's abortion rights
- ○ Against women's abortion rights

Next, we would like you to answer some questions about the article you have just read which is also reproduced below.

[The same article is shown again.]

Please respond to the following questions based on the information given to you in the article.

Question 3:
Who should be able to make a decision to become a parent or not?

- ○ The politicians
- ○ The government
- ○ The child-bearer
- ○ The man

Question 4:
In the last 10 years, how many laws have been passed by anti-abortion politicians that undermine women's freedom to decide about their own bodies and lives?

- ○ None
- ○ 0-200
- ○ 200-400
- ○ 400+

Question 5:
Which group of people are the ones who are harmed the most by the deleterious laws that prevent people from making their own decision about abortion?

- ○ Indigenous people
- ○ People who have trouble covering their financial cost
- ○ Black people
- ○ All of the above
- ○ None of the above

Question 6:
What percentage of people living in the USA believe that abortion should be legal in some or all circumstances according to the recent survey result?

0% 45% 65% 85% 100%

[If the willingness to pay reported in the previous question is less than the random number drawn.]

You chose to pay X cents {*amount chosen in the previous question*} to switch the articles.

The randomly chosen number was Y {*random number drawn*}.

As X is less than Y, we did not switch the articles for you.

- ○ Continue with the article

Task 2/5: Short Articles with Questions

On the next page, you will be presented with an article titled **"Fight for the Defenseless – Stop Abortion!"** which includes speeches of some anonymous members of Congress in favor of banning abortions (pro-life).

Please read the article **carefully** as you will be asked to answer some questions based on the article.

Your bonus payment will be decided based on **the number of correct answers** you give to these questions. You will earn 10 cents for every correct answer.

Remember, you should only answer the questions based on the information given to you in the article.

- ○ Continue with the article titled "Fight for the Defenseless - Stop Abortion!

ARTICLE 2

"Fight for the Defenseless – Stop Abortion!"

The US Supreme Court Justices had been holding arguments in Roe v. Wade, which ensured women in the US have the right to choose whether to have abortions in the first three months of pregnancy without government restrictions.

Sadly, abortion reveals society's inability to love, protect, and care for the most innocent and helpless among us. When we devalue life, our society suffers. When we deem some to be nonessential, we devalue their lives. Our laws should prevent our legislators from enacting the will of the people and instead should pass laws to protect the unborn. Taking the life of an unborn child is simply unconscionable.

The current administration suspended basic healthcare regulations so doctors could pass out abortion pills like candy. We have already seen what Democrats are capable of when it comes to unborn babies. They know the ability to murder unborn children is not one of our fundamental rights.

The abortion bill will not only harm society but violate the religious freedoms of thousands of Americans. It will make it impossible to impose any meaningful restrictions at all on abortion at any stage of pregnancy including after the point of fetal viability when the baby can survive outside the mother's uterus. The bill would also jeopardize doctors' and nurses' right to refuse to participate in abortions and specifically prevent them from having recourse under the Religious Freedom Restoration Act to protect their conscience rights.

A recent poll from this May found that 65 percent of Americans believe that abortion should not be legal in any circumstances.

The government has a responsibility to protect life at every stage, especially that of the defenseless unborn who are unable to advocate for themselves. This is a fight worth fighting. We should not give up on this country, give up on democracy, and certainly not give up on an unborn child's right to live, an unborn child whose heartbeat can be felt and heard.

Question 1:
Could you please list as many arguments as possible in favor of banning abortion **mentioned in the text?** Please use a separate text box for each argument. (You do not need to use the exact numbers or phrases mentioned in the text for your answer to be considered correct.)

[10 essay boxes are given.]

Question 2:
Is the article in favor of or against women's abortion rights?

- ○ In favor of women's abortion rights
- ○ Against women's abortion rights

Next, we would like you to answer some questions about the article you have just read which is also reproduced below.

[The same article is shown again.]

Please respond to the following questions based on the information given to you in the article.

Question 3:
Why does abortion reveal society's inability to love?

- ○ Because it shows that we devalue the lives of the most innocent and helpless human beings
- ○ Because it shows that we consider the most innocent and helpless human beings to be nonessential
- ○ All of the above
- ○ None of the above

Question 4:
Did the current government implement changes in basic healthcare regulations that help doctors to prescribe abortion pills to patients as easy as candy?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

Question 5:
Why will the abortion bill breach people's religious freedom? (Choose all apply)

- ○ It will not breach people's religious freedom.
- ○ Healthcare workers will not have a choice to refuse to participate in abortion.
- ○ According to the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, the baby has a right to live right after it fell into its mother's uterus.
- ○ It will not allow for the necessary restrictions on abortion even when the baby is able to live outside of the mother's uterus.

Question 6:
What percentage of people living in the USA believe that abortion should not be legal in any circumstances according to the recent survey result?

0% 45% 65% 85% 100%

Task 4/5: Your Opinion

Question 1:
If you had to guess, what would you say was the purpose of this study?

[If earlier responded "Yes" to the following question: Do you want to switch the article "Abortion: Women Should Decide for Themselves!" (pro-choice) with the article "Fight for the Defenseless – Stop Abortion!" (pro-life)?]

Question 2:
Could you please explain briefly why you chose **to switch** the article "Abortion: Women Should Decide for Themselves!" with the article "Fight for the Defenseless – Stop Abortion!"?

[If earlier responded "No" to the following question: Do you want to switch the article "Abortion: Women Should Decide for Themselves!" (pro-choice) with the article "Fight for the Defenseless – Stop Abortion!" (pro-life)?]

Question 2:
Could you please explain briefly why you chose **not to switch** the article "Abortion: Women Should Decide for Themselves!" with the article "Fight for the Defenseless – Stop Abortion!"?

Question 3:
Do you think that the researchers behind this study are pro-life or pro-choice?

- ○ Strongly support banning abortion (extremely pro-life)
- ○ Somewhat support banning abortion (pro-life)
- ○ Neither
- ○ Somewhat oppose banning abortion (pro-choice)
- ○ Strongly oppose banning abortion (extremely pro-choice)

Please rate the articles you just read in terms of the dimensions below. (0 being the lowest rating and 10 being the highest rating)

[The respective titles of the articles are shown based on the treatment group participants were assigned and the result of the lottery for switching the articles.]

Article 1

[A slider from 0 to 10 is given for each dimension.]

Reliable
Untrustworthy
Accurate
Biased

Article 2

[A slider from 0 to 10 is given for each dimension.]

Reliable
Untrustworthy
Accurate
Biased

Task 5/5 : Final Questions

1/4 : About you
Please indicate the extent to which you oppose or support the abortion right. (0 being strongly oppose, 100 being strongly support)

[A slider from 0 to 100 is given.]

Final Questions 2/4: About you

Generally speaking, which point on this scale best describes your political views?

[A slider from 0 to 100 is given with the following titles. 0: Liberal, 100: Conservative]

In politics, as of today, do you consider yourself a Republican, a Democrat or an Independent?

- ○ Republican
- ○ Democrat
- ○ Independent

Who did you vote for in the 2020 presidential election?

- ○ Donal Trump
- ○ Joe Biden
- ○ Other
- ○ Did not vote

How engaged are you with politics?

[A slider from 0 to 100 is given with the following titles. 0: Not at all, 100: Very much]

How many hours on average do you spend reading or listening to the news each day? (including news websites, social media, television, radio and print newspapers)

[A slider from 0 to 24 is given.]

Which of these platforms are you most likely to use as your main news source?

- ○ News websites
- ○ Social media
- ○ Television
- ○ Radio
- ○ Print newspapers

How many hours on average do you spend on social media each day? (social media channels include: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, Youtube etc...)

[A slider from 0 to 24 is given.]

Final Questions 3/4: About you

What is your gender?

- ○ Female
- ○ Male
- ○ Non-binary
- ○ Prefer not to say
- ○ Other

What is your age?

What is your race?

- ○ White
- ○ Black or African American
- ○ Hispanic or Latino
- ○ American Indian or Alaska Native
- ○ Asian American
- ○ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- ○ Other

What is your household income? (US dollars, before tax)

- ○ 0-9,999
- ○ 10,000 - 19,999
- ○ 20,000 - 29,999
- ○ 30,000 - 39,999
- ○ 40,000 - 49,999
- ○ 50,000 - 59,999
- ○ 60,000 - 69,999
- ○ 70,000 - 79,999
- ○ 80,000 - 89,999
- ○ 90,000 - 99,999
- ○ 100,000 - 124,999
- ○ 125,000 - 149,999
- ○ 150,000 +

What is the highest grade of school you have completed, or the highest degree you have received?

- ○ No schooling (or less than 1 year)
- ○ Nursery, kindergarten, and elementary (grades 1-8)
- ○ High school (grades 9-12, no degree)
- ○ High school graduate (or equivalent)
- ○ Some college (1-4 years, no degree)
- ○ Bachelor's degree (BA, BS, AB, etc)
- ○ Master's degree (MA, MS, MENG, MSW, etc)
- ○ Professional school degree (MD, DDC, JD, etc)
- ○ Doctorate degree (PhD, EdD, etc)

In which state do you currently reside?

[A dropdown list with all states is given.]

How do you see yourself: Are you generally a person who is fully prepared to take risks or do you try to avoid taking risks?" on a scale from 0 to 10 ("unwilling to take risks" to "fully prepared to take risks")

[A slider from 0 to 10 is given.]

[Information Preference Scale]

Final Questions 4/4: About you
Please respond to the statements below using the scales provided:

[A 4-point Likert scale is given for all the questions.]

Question 1:
As part of a semiannual medical check-up, your doctor asks you a series of questions. The answers to these questions can be used to estimate your life expectancy (the age you are predicted to live to). Do you want to know how long you can expect to live?

Question 2:
You provide some genetic material to a testing service to learn more about your ancestors. You are then told that the same test can, at no additional cost, tell you whether you have an elevated risk of developing Alzheimer's. Do you want to know whether you have a high risk of developing Alzheimer's?

Question 3:
At your annual check-up, you are given the option to see the results of a diagnostic test, which can identify, among other things, the extent to which your body has suffered long-term effects from stress. Do you want to know how much lasting damage your body has suffered from stress?

Question 4:
Ten years ago, you had the opportunity to invest in two retirement funds: Fund A and Fund B. For the past 10 years, you have invested all your retirement savings in Fund A. Do you want to know the balance you would have if you had invested in Fund B instead?

Question 5:
You decide to go to the theatre for your birthday and give your close friend (or partner) your credit card so they can purchase tickets for the two of you, which they do. You aren't sure but suspect that the tickets may have been expensive. Do you want to know how much the tickets cost?

Question 6:
You bought an electronic appliance at a store at what seemed like a reasonable, though not particularly low, price. A month has passed, and the item is no longer returnable. You see the same appliance displayed in another store with a sign announcing "SALE." Do you want to know the price you could have bought it for?

Question 7:
You gave a close friend one of your favorite books for her birthday. Visiting her apartment a couple of months later, you notice the book on her shelf. She never said anything about it; do you want to know if she liked the book?

Question 8:
To check you are reading, please select "Probably don't want to know" for this statement.

Question 9:
Someone has described you as quirky, which could be interpreted in a positive or negative sense. Do you want to know which interpretation they intended?

Question 10:
You gave a toast at your best friend's wedding. Your best friend says you did a good job, but you aren't sure if he or she meant it. Later, you over hear people discussing the toasts. Do you want to know what people really thought of your toast?

Question 11:
As part of a fundraising event, you agree to post a picture of yourself and have people guess your age (the closer they get, the more they win). At the end of the event, you have the option to see people's guesses. Do you want to learn how old people guessed that you are?

Question 12:
You have just participated in a psychological study in which all of the participants rate others' attractiveness. The experimenter gives you an option to see the results for how people rated you. Do you want to know how attractive other people think you are?

Question 13:
Some people seek out information even when it might be painful. Others avoid getting information that they suspect might be painful, even if it could be useful. How would you describe yourself?

Question 14:
If people know bad things about my life that I don't know, I would prefer not to be told.

[End of the experiment]

SESSION 2

Redacted transcript: online only. [Bold text in square brackets was not seen by subjects.]

Participation Agreement

You have been invited to take part in a research study run by academic researchers at the University of Warwick. The project will require you to answer a number of tasks and make decisions under uncertainty. There will also be some personality and demographic questions. Please read the following statements carefully and answer the question below.

Our commitments and privacy policy

We never deceive participants. For example, if we inform you that another participant made a choice on which you can then react, this is indeed the case. We keep our promises made to participants. For example, if we promise a certain payment, participants will indeed receive it. In the event that we are responsible for a mistake that is to the disadvantage of participants, we will inform and compensate the respective participants. We design, conduct, and report our research in accordance with recognized scientific standards and ethical principles. This study has been reviewed and given a favorable opinion by the University of Warwick's Department of Economics Ethics Committee.

We adhere to the terms of our privacy policy as stated below:

The data in the participants' database will only be used for the purpose of the study. There is no link between the personal data in the participants' database and the data collected during a study. The generated anonymous data will be used for analysis. The end product will be publicly available. Your participation in this study is purely voluntary, and you may withdraw your participation at any time without any penalty to you. Please note that the software (Qualtrics) automatically notes the time you spent on each question and this data will be made available to researchers for analysis. Please refer to the University of Warwick Research Privacy Notice which is available here or by contacting the Legal Compliance Team at GDPR@warwick.ac.uk

Data will be securely stored on the University of Warwick computers and will be processed only for scientific analysis. Summaries may be presented at conferences and included in scientific publications. Data will be reviewed after a period of 10 years, in line with the University of Warwick data retention policy.

Who should I contact if I wish to make a complaint?

If you would like to make a complaint about the way you have been dealt with during the study or any possible harm you might have suffered please address your complaint to the person below, who is a senior University of Warwick official entirely independent of this study:

Head of Research Governance, Research & Impact Services, University House, University of Warwick, Coventry CV4 8UW
Tel: +44 (0)24 765 75733 ; Email: researchgovernance@warwick.ac.uk

If you wish to raise a complaint on how we have handled your personal data, you can contact our Data Protection Officer and Information and Data Director who will investigate the matter: DPO@warwick.ac.uk

If you are happy to proceed please tick the "I agree" button below to continue.

○ I agree

Your Understanding and Attention
It is important for our research that you understand what you are doing in the experiment. To check this, we will ask you questions on your understanding and attention at certain points.

Also, you are likely to earn a better bonus with a better understanding of the tasks and choices. As such, we ask you to please read the instructions carefully.

- ○ I understand

Bonus Payments
You will have the chance to win a bonus payment. The nature of the bonus payment will be made clear on the page when there is an opportunity.

We quote payments in US dollars. The Prolific platform operates in British pounds. Although we will send bonus payments to match the US dollar amounts we quote, the final amount you receive may be very slightly different due to exchange rate fluctuations.

All participants -including you- are given **100 cents** separate from your potential bonus payment. There will be **possibilities** for you **to use** this money later in the experiment. Any amount unused from this pot will be added on top of your bonus payment.

- ○ I understand

Your Understanding
Is the following statement correct according to the information given to you on the last page?

You are given an additional 100 cents and you will be given a possibility to use this money later in the experiment.

- ○ True
- ○ False

What is your Prolific ID? (please copy and paste it to avoid typos)

Attention Check
If we later ask you what the favorite number of "person X" is, please choose "10".

Questions about your beliefs:
When it comes to others having the right to terminate their pregnancy, do you oppose or support abortion?

- ○ Oppose abortion
- ○ Support abortion

Please indicate the extent to which you oppose or support the abortion right by moving the slider. (0 being strongly oppose, 100 being strongly support)

[A slider from 0 to 100 is given.]

Task 1/5: Short Articles with Questions
Your next task includes reading a short article about various topics and opinions and answering some questions based on the article.

If you are happy with your answer, click the button at the bottom of the screen to continue. Once you have moved on to the next page, you cannot go back.

Bonus Payment
Your bonus payment will be decided based on **the number of correct answers** you give to these questions. You will earn 10 cents for every correct answer.

Remember, you should only answer the questions based on the information given to you in the article.

Next, you have a practice task. This will allow you to get a feel for the format. It does not count for the bonus.

- ○ I understand these instructions.

Practice Article

On the next page, you will be presented with an article titled **"The Orchid Mantis and its Characteristics"** which summarizes some descriptive features of the insect.

Please read the article **carefully** as you will be asked to answer some questions based on the article.

Remember, you should only answer the questions based on the information given to you in the article.

- ○ Continue with the article titled "The Orchid Mantis and its Characteristics"

PRACTICE ARTICLE

"The Orchid Mantis and its Characteristics"

Hymenopus coronatus, the orchid mantis, is a remarkable creature. Against any opponent but a careful entomologist with a cardboard box, the mantis is a lethal hunter and master of camouflage. Its four front legs, head and thorax are covered in delicate structures resembling colorful flower petals.

As for its behavior, like any good mantis, it is an ambush predator. It takes full advantage of its unique appearance, settling amongst the petals of orchids and awaiting visiting insects. It favors butterflies and moths for its meals, but will happily take any insect on offer. Indeed, it need not even

be an insect: particularly voracious orchid mantises have been known to feed on small lizards, frogs, mice and even birds.

Question 1:
Could you please list as much information as possible about the orchid mantis **mentioned in the text?** Please use a separate text box for each argument. (You do not need to use the exact numbers or phrases mentioned in the text for your answer to be considered correct.)

[Five essay boxes are given.]

Next, we would like you to answer some questions about the article you have just read which is also reproduced below.

[The same article is shown again.]

Please respond to the following questions based on the information given to you in the article.

Question 2:
How many front legs does an orchid mantis have?

1 2 3 4

Question 3:
What does orchid mantis eat? (Choose all that apply.)

Grass Butterflies Moths Frogs Mice Birds

The real tasks start **immediately** on the next page, please make sure you are ready.

[EITHER: TREATMENT GROUP 1– PRO-CHOICE ARTICLE]

Task 1/5: Short Articles with Questions

On the next page, you will be presented with an article titled "**Endangering Women – Health Cost of Banning Abortion**" which includes speeches of some anonymous members of Congress against banning abortions (pro-choice).

Please read the article **carefully** as you will be asked to answer some questions based on the article.

Your bonus payment will be decided based on **the number of correct answers** you give to these questions. You will earn 10 cents for every correct answer.

Remember, you should only answer the questions based on the information given to you in the article.

○ Continue with the article titled "Endangering Women – Health Cost of Banning Abortion"

ARTICLE 1

"Endangering Women – Health Cost of Banning Abortion"

Over in the House, Members are expected to consider legislation that would strip away women's right to access abortion care without government interference. Republican legislatures across the country are continuing to pass bills that control women's bodies. Women across this country face the most devastating blow to their rights and freedom in decades. There is no question that these bills have an incredibly discriminatory impact and will disproportionately harm those who are already facing far more obstacles when it comes to accessing healthcare.

This whole argument is not really about whether or not there will be abortions in this country, for there have always been, and there will always be abortions in this country and around the world. The only question is: Will those abortions be safe and legal?

Today, because of new abortion care restrictions, 90 percent of counties in the United States do not have an abortion provider. Women are faced with impossible decisions and, as a result, might be forced to have babies under life-threatening conditions. And, tragically, women may also die because they lack the access or resources to safely end a pregnancy. Abortion bans are a matter of life and death.

In addition to physical health concerns, maternal mental health depreciated significantly among women who had an unwanted pregnancy and were denied an abortion. According to a study conducted in 2008, women whose unwanted pregnancy was just days past the abortion clinic's gestational limit, therefore denied an abortion, experienced more anxiety and depression symptoms and reported lower life satisfaction as compared to women who also had unwanted pregnancies and whose pregnancy was just days before the abortion clinic's gestational limit.

When people have access to a full range of healthcare services, including the full spectrum of reproductive health and maternity care, they are healthier, and their families thrive. It is the government's job to rightfully keep abortion safe, legal, and accessible.

Question 1:
Could you please list as many arguments as possible in favor of abortion **mentioned in the text?** Please use a separate text box for each argument. (You do not need to use the exact numbers or phrases mentioned in the text for your answer to be considered correct.)

[10 essay boxes are given.]

Question 2:
Is the article in favor of or against women's abortion rights?

- ○ In favor of women's abortion rights
- ○ Against women's abortion rights

Next, we would like you to answer some questions about the article you have just read which is also reproduced below.

[The same article is shown again.]

Please respond to the following questions based on the information given to you in the article.

Question 3:
Do Republican lawmakers pass bills that discriminate against women, control their bodies, and make it harder for them to access healthcare?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

Question 4:
What percentage of counties in the US do have an abortion provider?

0% 10% 50% 90% 100%

Question 5:
Restricting access to abortion care might … (Choose all that apply.)

- ○ Detoriate women's physical health
- ○ Cause maternal deaths
- ○ Lead to experience more anxiety and depression symptoms
- ○ Lower life satisfaction

[OR: TREATMENT GROUP 2– PRO-LIFE ARTICLE]

Task 1/5: Short Articles with Questions

On the next page, you will be presented with an article titled **"It is not a Blob of Tissue, but a Human Being – Science and Abortion"** which includes speeches of some anonymous members of Congress in favor of banning abortions (pro-life).

Please read the article **carefully** as you will be asked to answer some questions based on the article.

Your bonus payment will be decided based on **the number of correct answers** you give to these questions. You will earn 10 cents for every correct answer.

Remember, you should only answer the questions based on the information given to you in the article.

- ○ Continue with the article titled "It is not a Blob of Tissue, but a Human Being – Science and Abortion"

ARTICLE 1

"It is not a Blob of Tissue, but a Human Being – Science and Abortion"

Over in the House, Members are expected to consider legislation that would pre-empt virtually all State restrictions on abortion. Democrats are calling the bill the Women's Health Protection Act. A more accurate name would be the most anti-life legislation ever to be considered in the U.S. Congress. This bill would eliminate pretty much any abortion restriction in every State across the country: no matter how unsafe the method of abortion is.

Thanks to ultrasounds and scientific advances and plain old common sense, Americans know just how ridiculous it is to claim that unborn children are just blobs of tissue. Scientific evidence suggests that the beginning of the third week after conception marks the start of the embryonic period, a time when the mass of cells becomes distinct as a human. Around the fourth week, the head begins to form, quickly followed by the eyes, nose, ears, and mouth. Most people are well aware that an unborn baby with its own heartbeat and fingers and toes and DNA is, in fact, not a blob of tissue but a human being. A study reported that on average 91 percent of abortions occur between 4 to 13 weeks of pregnancy. It is mostly when the baby has already formed its human form and is recognized as a fetus, not a tissue.

Even though there are abortion restrictions in this country, these restrictions do not include the cases where the mother's life is in danger. Regarding maternal mental health concerns, according to a study conducted in 2008, women who had unwanted pregnancies and whose pregnancy was just days past the abortion clinic's gestational limit, therefore denied an abortion, did not differ in terms of anxiety symptoms or life satisfaction four years after seeking an abortion from women who also had unwanted pregnancies and whose pregnancy was just days before the abortion clinic's gestational limit.

There is no limit to human love for one another, and when in doubt, it is the government's job to rightfully protect the lives of its current citizens as well as its unborn citizens.

Question 1:
Could you please list as many arguments as possible in favor of banning abortion **mentioned in the text?** Please use a separate text box for each argument. (You do not need to use the exact numbers or phrases mentioned in the text for your answer to be considered correct.)

[10 essay boxes are given.]

Question 2:
Is the article in favor of or against women's abortion rights?

- ○ In favor of women's abortion rights
- ○ Against women's abortion rights

Next, we would like you to answer some questions about the article you have just read which is also reproduced below.

[The same article is shown again.]

Please respond to the following questions based on the information given to you in the article.

Question 3:
Are Democrat lawmakers trying to pass a bill that prevents imposing any restrictions on abortion no matter how unsafe the method is?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

Question 4:
What percentage of abortions occur between 4 to 13 weeks of pregnancy, when the baby has its own heartbeat, fingers and toes?

0% 9% 50% 91% 100%

Question 5:
Restricting access to abortion care might …

- ○ Cause maternal deaths
- ○ Lead to experiencing more anxiety
- ○ Lower life satisfaction
- ○ All of the above
- ○ None of the above

Attention Check
Based on the text you read before starting the tasks, what is the favorite number of "person X"?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

On the next page, you will be asked to repeat the same task with a **new** article titled **"Abortion: Women Should Decide for Themselves!"** (pro-choice) which includes speeches of another group of anonymous members of Congress against banning abortion.

Changing the Article:
Before moving on to the next article, this time, you are given a chance to switch the article assigned to you with a different one.

If you would like to, you can change the article **"Abortion: Women Should Decide for Themselves!"** (pro-choice) with the article **"Fight for the Defenseless – Stop Abortion!"** (pro-life).

If you decide to switch the articles, you can use the **pot of 100 cents** given to you at the beginning of the experiment **to pay for it.**

We will draw a random number between 0 and 100.

If the random number is **smaller than or equal** to the maximum amount you are willing to pay to switch the articles, we will **switch** the articles for you and you will be given **"Fight for the**

Defenseless – Stop Abortion!" to complete the task.

If the random number is **bigger** than the maximum amount you are willing to pay to switch the articles, we will **not switch** the articles i.e. you will be given the original article assigned to you on the previous page: **"Abortion: Women Should Decide for Themselves!"** to complete the task.

This procedure is designed to make it better for you to be honest about your true preferences. The **higher** the number is the **higher** the chance of switching articles.

- ○ I understand these instructions

Your Understanding
When will the articles be switched?

- ○ When my maximum willingness to pay to switch is greater than or equal to the randomly drawn number
- ○ When my maximum willingness to pay to switch is less than the randomly drawn number

Your Understanding
Is the following statement false or true?

"I can use the pot of 100 cents given to me at the beginning of the experiment to pay to switch the articles."

- ○ False
- ○ True

Do you want to switch the article **"Abortion: Women Should Decide for Themselves!"** (pro-choice) with the article **"Fight for the Defenseless – Stop Abortion!"** (pro-life)?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

You can **remove** the article titled **"Abortion: Women Should Decide for Themselves!"** (pro-choice) from the task list and **add** the article titled **"Fight for the Defenseless – Stop Abortion!"** (pro-life).

Please indicate **the maximum amount of money (cents) you are willing to pay** from the separate pot of 100 cents given to you at the beginning of the experiment to **switch** the articles mentioned **above**.

(Choosing 0 means that you do not want to switch and choosing 100 means that you want to switch for sure.)

[Slider from 0 to 100 is given.]

[If the willingness to pay reported in the previous question is greater than or equal to the random number drawn.]

You chose to pay X cents {*amount chosen in the previous question*} to switch the articles.

The randomly chosen number was Y {*random number drawn*}.

As X is greater than or equal to Y, we switched the articles for you.

- ○ Continue with the article

Task 2/5: Short Articles with Questions

On the next page, you will be presented with an article titled **"Fight for the Defenseless – Stop Abortion!"** which includes speeches of some anonymous members of Congress in favor of banning abortions (pro-life).

Please read the article **carefully** as you will be asked to answer some questions based on the article.

Your bonus payment will be decided based on **the number of correct answers** you give to these questions. You will earn 10 cents for every correct answer.

Remember, you should only answer the questions based on the information given to you in the article.

- ○ Continue with the article titled "Fight for the Defenseless - Stop Abortion!

ARTICLE 2

"Fight for the Defenseless – Stop Abortion!"

The US Supreme Court Justices had been holding arguments in Roe v. Wade, which ensured women in the US have the right to choose whether to have abortions in the first three months of pregnancy without government restrictions.

Sadly, abortion reveals society's inability to love, protect, and care for the most innocent and helpless among us. When we devalue life, our society suffers. When we deem some to be nonessential, we devalue their lives. Our laws should prevent our legislators from enacting the will of the people and instead should pass laws to protect the unborn. Taking the life of an unborn child is simply unconscionable.

The current administration suspended basic healthcare regulations so doctors could pass out abortion pills like candy. We have already seen what Democrats are capable of when it comes to unborn babies. They know the ability to murder unborn children is not one of our fundamental rights.

The abortion bill will not only harm society but violate the religious freedoms of thousands of Americans. It will make it impossible to impose any meaningful restrictions at all on abortion at any stage of pregnancy including after the point of fetal viability when the baby can survive outside the mother's uterus. The bill would also jeopardize doctors' and nurses' right to refuse to participate in

abortions and specifically prevent them from having recourse under the Religious Freedom Restoration Act to protect their conscience rights.

A recent poll from this May found that 65 percent of Americans believe that abortion should not be legal in any circumstances.

The government has a responsibility to protect life at every stage, especially that of the defenseless unborn who are unable to advocate for themselves. This is a fight worth fighting. We should not give up on this country, give up on democracy, and certainly not give up on an unborn child's right to live, an unborn child whose heartbeat can be felt and heard.

Question 1:
Could you please list as many arguments as possible in favor of banning abortion **mentioned in the text?** Please use a separate text box for each argument. (You do not need to use the exact numbers or phrases mentioned in the text for your answer to be considered correct.)

[10 essay boxes are given.]

Question 2:
Is the article in favor of or against women's abortion rights?

- ○ In favor of women's abortion rights
- ○ Against women's abortion rights

Next, we would like you to answer some questions about the article you have just read which is also reproduced below.

[The same article is shown again.]

Please respond to the following questions based on the information given to you in the article.

Question 3:
Why does abortion reveal society's inability to love?

- ○ Because it shows that we devalue the lives of the most innocent and helpless human beings
- ○ Because it shows that we consider the most innocent and helpless human beings to be nonessential
- ○ All of the above
- ○ None of the above

Question 4:
Did the current government implement changes in basic healthcare regulations that help doctors to prescribe abortion pills to patients as easy as candy?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

Question 5:
Why will the abortion bill breach people's religious freedom? (Choose all apply)

- ○ It will not breach people's religious freedom.
- ○ Healthcare workers will not have a choice to refuse to participate in abortion.
- ○ According to the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, the baby has a right to live right after it fell into its mother's uterus.
- ○ It will not allow for the necessary restrictions on abortion even when the baby is able to live outside of the mother's uterus.

Question 6:
What percentage of people living in the USA believe that abortion should not be legal in any circumstances according to the recent survey result?

0% 45% 65% 85% 100%

[If the willingness to pay reported in the previous question is less than the random number drawn.]

You chose to pay X cents {*amount chosen in the previous question*} to switch the articles.

The randomly chosen number was Y {*random number drawn*}.

As X is less than Y, we did not switch the articles for you.

- ○ Continue with the articles

Task 2/5: Short Articles with Questions

On the next page, you will be presented with an article titled **"Abortion: Women Should Decide for Themselves!"** which includes speeches of some anonymous members of Congress against banning abortions (pro-choice).

Please read the article **carefully** as you will be asked to answer some questions based on the article.

Your bonus payment will be decided based on **the number of correct answers** you give to these questions. You will earn 10 cents for every correct answer.

Remember, you should only answer the questions based on the information given to you in the article.

- ○ Continue with the article titled "Abortion: Women Should Decide for Themselves!"

ARTICLE 2

"Abortion: Women Should Decide for Themselves!"

The US Supreme Court Justices had been holding arguments in Roe v. Wade, which ensured women in the US have the right to choose whether to have abortions in the first three months of pregnancy without government restrictions.

Choosing whether to become a parent is one of the most important decisions a person will make in their lifetime. It is a decision the child-bearer should be able to make for themselves. Our laws should protect our rights, like the right to abortion, not control and dehumanize us. We aren't truly free unless we can control our own bodies, lives, and future. Women of the United States are ready to fight for their freedom and liberty. They deserve to have their decisions protected and respected.

Over the past decade, extremist anti-abortion politicians have passed more than 450 laws that undermine the freedom to make that decision. We have already seen what Republicans are capable of when it comes to women's personal liberties. This is about politicians controlling women's bodies and decisions.

The legislation that the current administration wants to pass will protect access to healthcare and reproductive rights for all Americans. It will ensure that going forward, we all have the freedom to control our own bodies, safely care for our families, and live with dignity. The evidence from Planned Parenthood shows that Black, indigenous people, LGBTQI-plus communities, and people struggling to make ends meet are the ones who are hurt the most by harmful abortion bans.

A recent poll from this May found that 85 percent of Americans believe that abortion should be legal in some or all circumstances.

The government has a responsibility to protect human rights, especially for the women who have been the subject of discrimination for decades. This is a fight worth fighting. We should not give up on this country, give up on democracy, and certainly not give up on a woman's right to make her own healthcare decisions.

Question 1:
Could you please list as many arguments as possible in favor of abortion **mentioned in the text?** Please use a separate text box for each argument. (You do not need to use the exact numbers or phrases mentioned in the text for your answer to be considered correct.)

[10 essay boxes are given.]

Question 2:
Is the article in favor of or against women's abortion rights?

- ○ In favor of women's abortion rights
- ○ Against women's abortion rights

Next, we would like you to answer some questions about the article you have just read which is also reproduced below.

[The same article is shown again.]

Please respond to the following questions based on the information given to you in the article.

Question 3:
Who should be able to make a decision to become a parent or not?

- ○ The politicians
- ○ The government
- ○ The child-bearer
- ○ The man

Question 4:
In the last 10 years, how many laws have been passed by anti-abortion politicians that undermine women's freedom to decide about their own bodies and lives?

- ○ None
- ○ 0-200
- ○ 200-400
- ○ 400+

Question 5:
Which group of people are the ones who are harmed the most by the deleterious laws that prevent people from making their own decision about abortion?

- ○ Indigenous people
- ○ People who have trouble covering their financial cost
- ○ Black people
- ○ All of the above
- ○ None of the above

Question 6:
What percentage of people living in the USA believe that abortion should be legal in some or all circumstances according to the recent survey result?

0% 45% 65% 85% 100%

Task 4/5: Your Opinion

Question 1:
If you had to guess, what would you say was the purpose of this study?

[If earlier responded "Yes" to the following question: Do you want to switch the article "Abortion: Women Should Decide for Themselves!" (pro-choice) with the article "Fight for the Defenseless – Stop Abortion!" (pro-life)?]

Question 2:
Could you please explain briefly why you chose **to switch** the article "Abortion: Women Should Decide for Themselves!" with the article "Fight for the Defenseless – Stop Abortion!"?

[If earlier responded "No" to the following question: Do you want to switch the article "Abortion: Women Should Decide for Themselves!" (pro-choice) with the article "Fight for the Defenseless – Stop Abortion!" (pro-life)?]

Question 2:
Could you please explain briefly why you chose **not to switch** the article "Abortion: Women Should Decide for Themselves!" with the article "Fight for the Defenseless – Stop Abortion!"?

Question 3:
Do you think that the researchers behind this study are pro-life or pro-choice?

- ○ Strongly support banning abortion (extremely pro-life)
- ○ Somewhat support banning abortion (pro-life)
- ○ Neither
- ○ Somewhat oppose banning abortion (pro-choice)
- ○ Strongly oppose banning abortion (extremely pro-choice)

Please rate the articles you just read in terms of the dimensions below. (0 being the lowest rating and 10 being the highest rating)

[The respective titles of the articles are shown based on the treatment group participants were assigned and the result of the lottery for switching the articles.]

Article 1

[A slider from 0 to 10 is given for each dimension.]

Reliable
Untrustworthy
Accurate
Biased

Article 2

[A slider from 0 to 10 is given for each dimension.]

Reliable
Untrustworthy
Accurate
Biased

Task 5/5 : Final Questions

1/4 : About you
Please indicate the extent to which you oppose or support the abortion right. (0 being strongly oppose, 100 being strongly support)

[A slider from 0 to 100 is given.]

Final Questions 2/4: About you

Generally speaking, which point on this scale best describes your political views?

[A slider from 0 to 100 is given with the following titles. 0: Liberal, 100: Conservative]

In politics, as of today, do you consider yourself a Republican, a Democrat or an Independent?

- ○ Republican
- ○ Democrat
- ○ Independent

Who did you vote for in the 2020 presidential election?

- ○ Donal Trump
- ○ Joe Biden
- ○ Other
- ○ Did not vote

How engaged are you with politics?

[A slider from 0 to 100 is given with the following titles. 0: Not at all, 100: Very much]

How many hours on average do you spend reading or listening to the news each day? (including news websites, social media, television, radio and print newspapers)

[A slider from 0 to 24 is given.]

Which of these platforms are you most likely to use as your main news source?

- ○ News websites
- ○ Social media
- ○ Television
- ○ Radio
- ○ Print newspapers

How many hours on average do you spend on social media each day? (social media channels include: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, Youtube etc...)

[A slider from 0 to 24 is given.]

Final Questions 3/4: About you

What is your gender?

- ○ Female
- ○ Male
- ○ Non-binary
- ○ Prefer not to say
- ○ Other

What is your age?

What is your race?

- ○ White
- ○ Black or African American
- ○ Hispanic or Latino
- ○ American Indian or Alaska Native
- ○ Asian American
- ○ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- ○ Other

What is your household income? (US dollars, before tax)

- ○ 0-9,999
- ○ 10,000 - 19,999
- ○ 20,000 - 29,999
- ○ 30,000 - 39,999
- ○ 40,000 - 49,999
- ○ 50,000 - 59,999
- ○ 60,000 - 69,999
- ○ 70,000 - 79,999
- ○ 80,000 - 89,999
- ○ 90,000 - 99,999
- ○ 100,000 - 124,999
- ○ 125,000 - 149,999
- ○ 150,000 +

What is the highest grade of school you have completed, or the highest degree you have received?

- ○ No schooling (or less than 1 year)
- ○ Nursery, kindergarten, and elementary (grades 1-8)
- ○ High school (grades 9-12, no degree)
- ○ High school graduate (or equivalent)
- ○ Some college (1-4 years, no degree)
- ○ Bachelor's degree (BA, BS, AB, etc)
- ○ Master's degree (MA, MS, MENG, MSW, etc)
- ○ Professional school degree (MD, DDC, JD, etc)
- ○ Doctorate degree (PhD, EdD, etc)

In which state do you currently reside?

[A dropdown list with all states is given.]

How do you see yourself: Are you generally a person who is fully prepared to take risks or do you try to avoid taking risks?" on a scale from 0 to 10 ("unwilling to take risks" to "fully prepared to take risks")

[A slider from 0 to 10 is given.]

[Information Preference Scale]

Final Questions 4/4: About you
Please respond to the statements below using the scales provided:

[A 4-point Likert scale is given for all the questions.]

Question 1:
As part of a semiannual medical check-up, your doctor asks you a series of questions. The answers to these questions can be used to estimate your life expectancy (the age you are predicted to live to). Do you want to know how long you can expect to live?

Question 2:
You provide some genetic material to a testing service to learn more about your ancestors. You are then told that the same test can, at no additional cost, tell you whether you have an elevated risk of developing Alzheimer's. Do you want to know whether you have a high risk of developing Alzheimer's?

Question 3:
At your annual check-up, you are given the option to see the results of a diagnostic test, which can identify, among other things, the extent to which your body has suffered long-term effects from stress. Do you want to know how much lasting damage your body has suffered from stress?

Question 4:
Ten years ago, you had the opportunity to invest in two retirement funds: Fund A and Fund B. For the past 10 years, you have invested all your retirement savings in Fund A. Do you want to know the balance you would have if you had invested in Fund B instead?

Question 5:
You decide to go to the theatre for your birthday and give your close friend (or partner) your credit card so they can purchase tickets for the two of you, which they do. You aren't sure but suspect that the tickets may have been expensive. Do you want to know how much the tickets cost?

Question 6:
You bought an electronic appliance at a store at what seemed like a reasonable, though not particularly low, price. A month has passed, and the item is no longer returnable. You see the same appliance displayed in another store with a sign announcing "SALE." Do you want to know the price you could have bought it for?

Question 7:
You gave a close friend one of your favorite books for her birthday. Visiting her apartment a couple of months later, you notice the book on her shelf. She never said anything about it; do you want to know if she liked the book?

Question 8:
To check you are reading, please select "Probably don't want to know" for this statement.

Question 9:
Someone has described you as quirky, which could be interpreted in a positive or negative sense. Do you want to know which interpretation they intended?

Question 10:
You gave a toast at your best friend's wedding. Your best friend says you did a good job, but you aren't sure if he or she meant it. Later, you over hear people discussing the toasts. Do you want to know what people really thought of your toast?

Question 11:
As part of a fundraising event, you agree to post a picture of yourself and have people guess your age (the closer they get, the more they win). At the end of the event, you have the option to see people's guesses. Do you want to learn how old people guessed that you are?

Question 12:
You have just participated in a psychological study in which all of the participants rate others' attractiveness. The experimenter gives you an option to see the results for how people rated you. Do you want to know how attractive other people think you are?

Question 13:
Some people seek out information even when it might be painful. Others avoid getting information that they suspect might be painful, even if it could be useful. How would you describe yourself?

Question 14:
If people know bad things about my life that I don't know, I would prefer not to be told.

[End of the experiment]

Appendix D: Formation of Articles

Practice Article

In order to introduce the task to the participants, I first give them a short essay that follows the structure and format of the real task but is unrelated to the topic of abortion rights. I first searched for apolitical objective essay topics and found technical essays on animal species to be suitable. I then googled descriptive essay examples and opened the first non-advertised website. The first objective descriptive article was about the orchid mantis. Subsequently, I composed a short article using the information provided on the website.[29]

Articles on Abortion Rights

To run the experiment, I need four articles on abortion: two of which support abortion rights (pro-choice) and the other two oppose abortion rights (pro-life). To create these articles, I decided to use Congress people's speeches. On the website www.congreess.gov.uk, I added "abortion" as a keyword and searched for the results. I included search results from September 2021 to May 2022. While reading the speech from Congress people, I decided to form the articles on two main dimensions: moral and scientific/health. In the end, I had one pro-choice and one pro-life article from the moral side of the discussion as well as one pro-choice and one pro-life article from the scientific side of the discussion. In order to strengthen the arguments in the articles, I used results from some research studies and articles such as the Turnaway Study (Miller et al. 2020), WHO's fact-sheet on abortion[30] and BBC's news article on abortion.[31]

In order to make sure that the final articles that are used to create treatment variation convey the same emotional arousal and message, I run a cosine similarity analysis on the abortion rights articles.

Cosine Similarity Analysis

Cosine similarity is a metric that is used to measure the text similarity between two documents irrespective of their size in NLP (Natural Language Processing). Cosine similarity captures the orientation of the words, not just the magnitudes. I have 4 articles used in this research: pro-choice moral, pro-life moral, pro-choice scientific, and pro-life scientific. The word counts are 324, 323, 322 and 326, respectively. The cosine similarity between pro-choice

[29] https://examples.yourdictionary.com/descriptive-essay-examples.html
[30] https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/abortion
[31] https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/election-us-2020-54003808

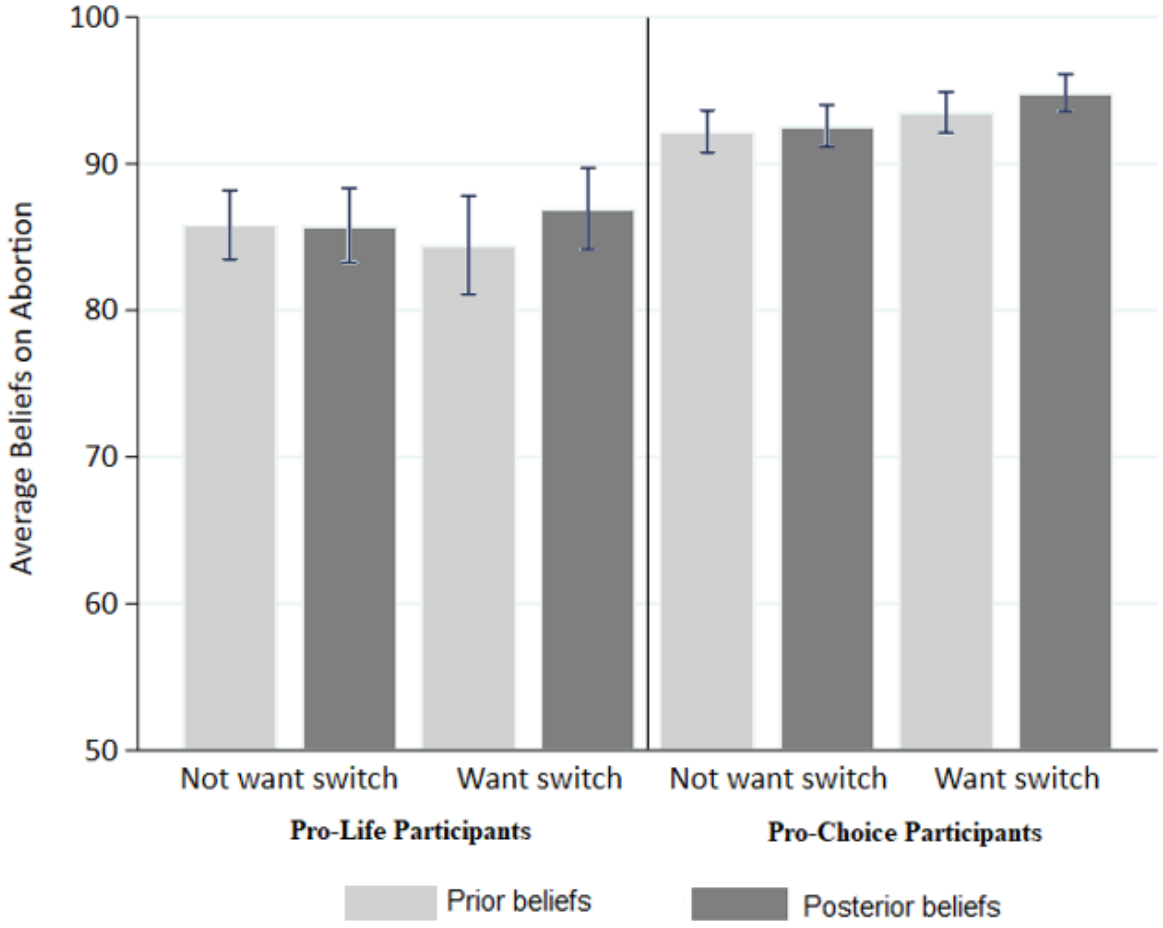
and pro-life moral articles is 0.826. The cosine similarity between pro-choice and pro-life scientific articles is 0.730. The closer the cosine value to 1, the smaller the angle between these two texts (multi-dimensional vectors) and the greater the match between texts. Usually, a cosine value which is greater than 0.5 indicates that texts show strong similarities. Both of the values I obtained from these analyses are greater than 0.5. Therefore, one can conclude that pro-life and pro-choice articles in both moral and scientific dimensions are significantly similar.

Appendix E: AEA RCT Registry

Please use the link to the Experimental Design and Analysis Plan to learn more about my RCT registry. The RCT ID for this research is AEARCTR-0009582.

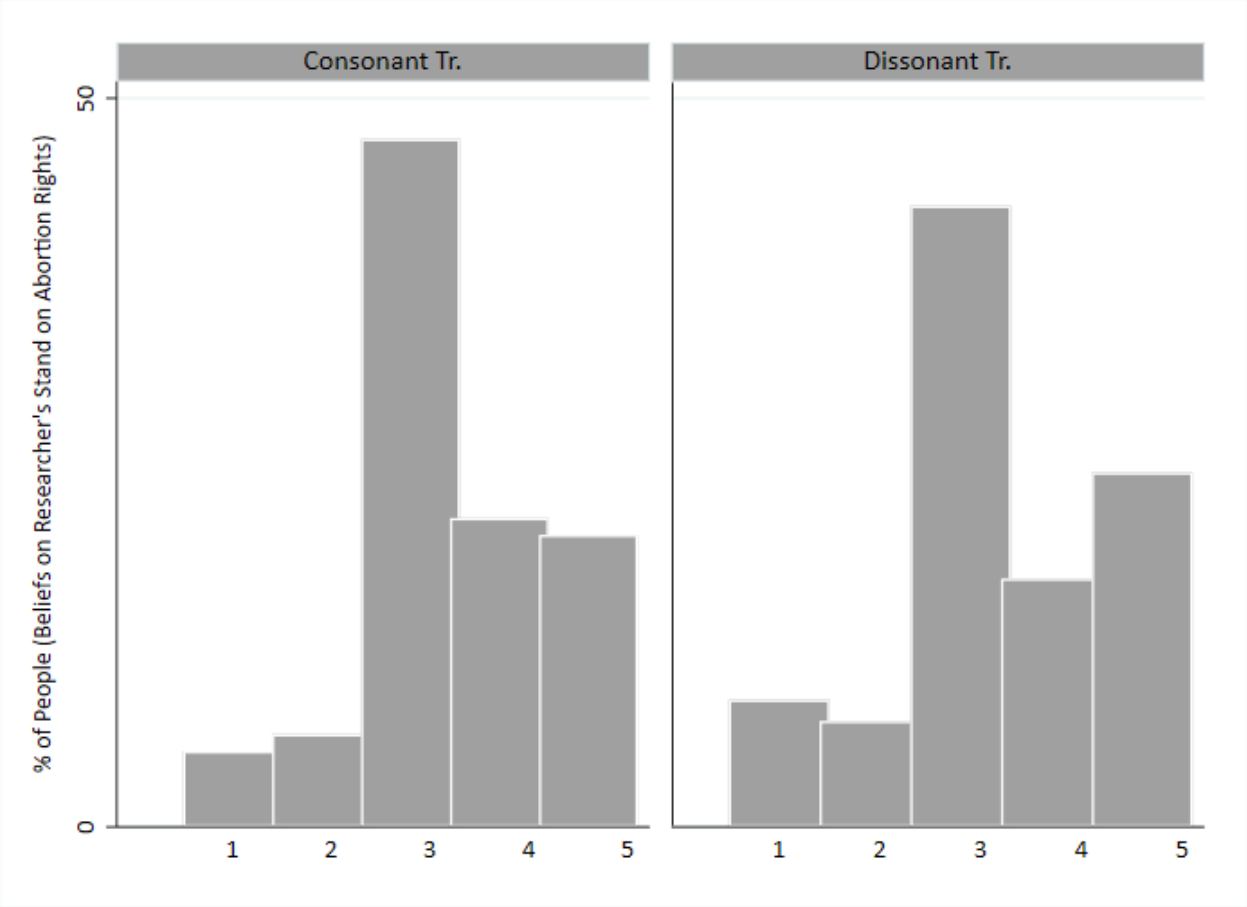
Additional Figures

FIGURE A1: Prior vs Posterior Beliefs



Notes: The figure represents the intensity of participants' beliefs on abortion rights at the beginning and at the end of the experiment. The first four bars represent the beliefs of pro-life participants while the last four bars represent the beliefs of pro-choice participants. The first two bars of each panel include participants who did not want to switch the dissonant article with the consonant one, whereas the last two bars of each panel include participants who wanted to switch the dissonant article with the consonant one. The scores are out of 100. 0 represents the lowest intensity, and 100 represents the highest intensity. 95% confidence intervals for the mean are shown.

FIGURE A2: Beliefs on Researcher's Stand on Abortion Rights by Treatment



Notes: The figure represents the distribution of participants' beliefs about researchers' standpoint on abortion rights discussions by treatment group. 1: Extremely pro-life, 2: Somewhat pro-life, 3: Neither, 4: Somewhat pro-choice, 5: Extremely pro-choice

FIGURE A3: Words Frequently Used by Avoiders

Notes: The figure represents the frequency of the most commonly used words in the text written by people who chose to switch the dissonant article with the consonant one. I use Python's Natural Language Processing to identify phrases that characterise the participant's responses. I exclude stop words, reduce all words to their stem by using Porter stemmer and group the words with all of their variant and inflected forms by using Word net lemmatiser.

FIGURE A4: Words Frequently Used by Non-Avoiders

Notes: The figure represents the frequency of the most commonly used words in the text written by people who chose not to switch the dissonant article with the consonant one. I use Python's Natural Language Processing to identify phrases that characterise the participant's responses. I exclude stop words, reduce all words to their stem by using Porter stemmer and group the words with all of their variant and inflected forms by using Word net lemmatiser.

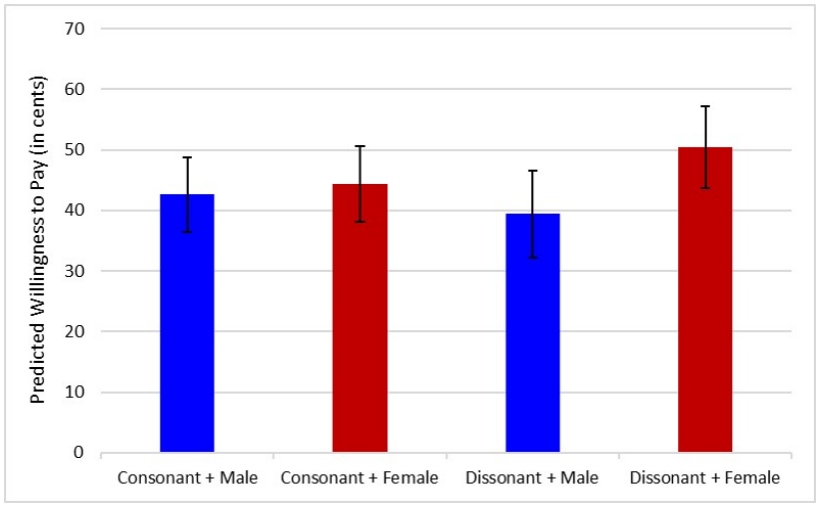
FIGURE A5: Words Frequently Used by Pro-life Avoiders

Notes: The figure represents the frequency of the most commonly used words in the text written by pro-life people who chose to switch the dissonant article with the consonant one. I use Python's Natural Language Processing to identify phrases that characterise the participant's responses. I exclude stop words, reduce all words to their stem by using Porter stemmer and group the words with all of their variant and inflected forms by using Word net lemmatiser.

FIGURE A6: Words Frequently Used by Pro-choice Avoiders

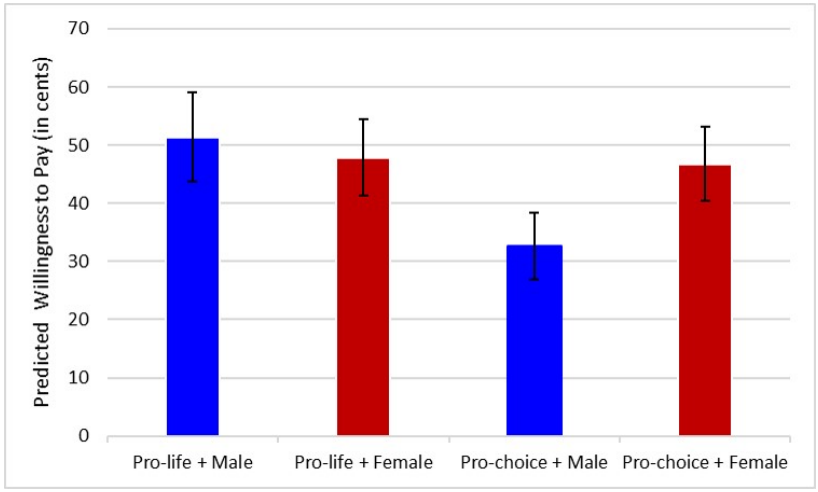
Notes: The figure represents the frequency of the most commonly used words in the text written by pro-choice people who chose to switch the dissonant article with the consonant one. I use Python's Natural Language Processing to identify phrases that characterise the participant's responses. I exclude stop words, reduce all words to their stem by using Porter stemmer and group the words with all of their variant and inflected forms by using Word net lemmatiser.

FIGURE A7: Predicted Margins of Willingness to Pay: Dissonant vs Consonant Tr.



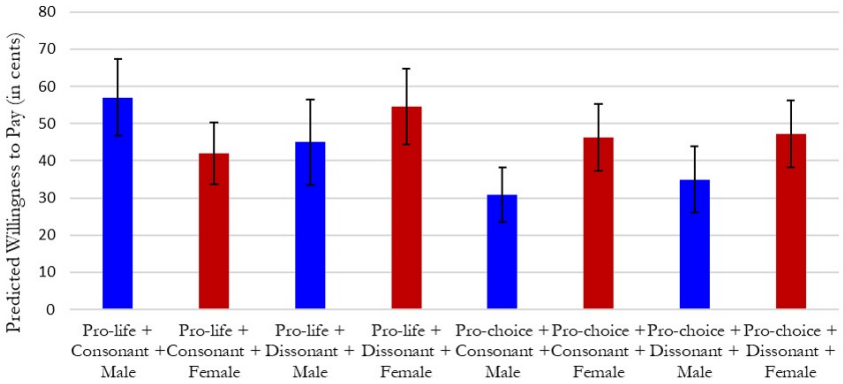
Notes: This figure represents predicted margins from the regression in Column 4 of Table 6. The bars represent the mean willingness to pay to avoid dissonant information for the given group. It compares the willingness to pay among different gender and treatment groups. 95% confidence intervals for the mean are shown.

FIGURE A8: Predicted Margins of Willingness to Pay: Pro-choice vs Pro-life



Notes: This figure represents predicted margins from the regression in Column 4 of Table 6. The bars represent the mean willingness to pay to avoid dissonant information for the given group. It compares the willingness to pay among different gender and belief groups. 95% confidence intervals for the mean are shown.

FIGURE A9: Predicted Margins of Willingness to Pay: Treatment and Prior Beliefs



Notes: This figure represents predicted margins from the regression in Column 4 of Table 6. The bars represent the mean willingness to pay to avoid dissonant information for the given group. It compares the willingness to pay among different gender, treatment and belief groups. 95% confidence intervals for the mean are shown.

Additional Tables

TABLE A1: Summary Statistics

	Overall		***Session 1***		***Session 2***	
	Mean	Std.Dev.	Mean	Std.Dev.	Mean	Std.Dev.
Age	40.90	13.85	38.63	12.81	43.79	14.57
Female	0.51	0.50	0.51	0.50	0.50	0.50
White	0.77	0.42	0.76	0.43	0.78	0.41
College	0.56	0.50	0.60	0.49	0.51	0.50
Risk preference	4.86	2.63	4.91	2.62	4.78	2.65
Performance in Article 1	3.58	0.62	3.64	0.53	3.51	0.71
Observations	1000		561		439	

Notes: Female is a dummy variable which takes 1 if the participant classified themselves as female, 0 otherwise. 21 participants were excluded since they did not identify themselves as a female or a male. White is a dummy variable that takes 1 if the participant has a college degree, and 0 otherwise. College is also a dummy variable that takes 1 if the participant has a college degree, and 0 otherwise. Risk preference represents the score from the following question: How do you see yourself: Are you generally a person who is fully prepared to take risks or do you try to avoid taking risks?" on a scale from 0 to 10 ("unwilling to take risks" to "fully prepared to take risks"). Performance in article 1 represents the number of correct answers participants gave to the multiple-choice questions in the first stage of the experiment. Scores are out of 4 questions.

TABLE A2: Summary Statistics by Study Groups

	Session 1				***Session 2***			
	Consonant Tr.		Dissonant Tr.		Consonant Tr.		Dissonant Tr.	
	Mean	Std.Dev.	Mean	Std.Dev.	Mean	Std.Dev.	Mean	Std.Dev.
Age	38.64	13.00	38.63	12.64	43.67	14.14	43.93	15.06
Female	0.51	0.50	0.52	0.50	0.53	0.50	0.47	0.50
White	0.78	0.42	0.74	0.44	0.80	0.40	0.77	0.42
College	0.60	0.49	0.60	0.49	0.52	0.50	0.50	0.50
Risk preference	5.04	2.64	4.78	2.59	4.91	2.68	4.65	2.63
Performance in Article 1	3.64	0.50	3.64	0.57	3.60	0.67	3.41	0.75
Observations	289		272		230		209	

Notes: Female is a dummy variable which takes 1 if the participant classified themselves as female, 0 otherwise. 21 participants were excluded since they did not identify themselves as a female or a male. White is a dummy variable that takes 1 if the participant has a college degree, and 0 otherwise. College is also a dummy variable that takes 1 if the participant has a college degree, and 0 otherwise. Risk preference represents the score from the following question: How do you see yourself: Are you generally a person who is fully prepared to take risks or do you try to avoid taking risks?" on a scale from 0 to 10 ("unwilling to take risks" to "fully prepared to take risks"). Performance in article 1 represents the number of correct answers participants gave to the multiple-choice questions in the first stage of the experiment. Scores are out of 4 questions.

TABLE A3: Ratings of Articles by Participants' Beliefs

	Article		
	Pro-life	Pro-choice	Difference in Means
Panel A: Pro-life People			
Article 1: Reliable	7.465	4.191	3.274*** (0.000)
Article 1: Untrustworthy	2.548	4.153	-1.605*** (0.000)
Article 1: Accurate	7.526	4.321	3.206*** (0.000)
Article 1: Biased	5.443	7.507	-2.064*** (0.000)
Article 2: Reliable	7.532	4.123	3.408*** (0.000)
Article 2: Untrustworthy	2.327	4.346	-2.020*** (0.000)
Article 2: Accurate	7.551	4.126	3.425*** (0.000)
Article 2: Biased	5.020	7.592	-2.572*** (0.000)
Panel B: Pro-choice People			
Article 1: Reliable	2.585	7.754	-5.170*** (0.000)
Article 1: Untrustworthy	5.599	2.315	3.284*** (0.000)
Article 1: Accurate	2.621	7.924	-5.303*** (0.000)
Article 1: Biased	8.599	5.135	3.464*** (0.000)
Article 2: Reliable	2.206	7.711	-5.505*** (0.000)
Article 2: Untrustworthy	5.561	1.789	3.772*** (0.000)
Article 2: Accurate	2.257	7.944	-5.688*** (0.000)
Article 2: Biased	7.592	5.078	3.292*** (0.000)

Notes: The table represents the average subjective ratings of articles participants read throughout the experiment in four main dimensions: reliable, untrustworthy, accurate and biased. Ratings are out of 10. 0 represents the lowest and 10 represents the highest ranking. 95% confidence intervals for the mean are shown. Column 1 shows the ratings of pro-life articles, whereas Column 2 shows the ratings of pro-choice articles. Column 3 reports the difference in means with p-values in parentheses from a two-sided t-test which compares the ratings of pro-life and pro-choice articles in each dimension. Panel A includes ratings by pro-life people whereas Panel B includes ratings by pro-choice people. Article 1 represents the article participants read in the first stage of the experiment in which randomisation occurred. Article 2 represents the article participants read in the second stage of the experiment. * p<0.1; ** p<0.05; *** p<0.01.

TABLE A4: Time Spent Reading the Articles (in seconds) by Treatment

	Treatment		
	Consonant	Dissonant	Difference in Means
Article 1	110.433	110.426	0.008 (0.999)
Pro-life Article 1	121.602	110.418	11.184 (0.119)
Pro-choice Article 1	101.545	110.435	-8.891 (0.154)

Notes: The table represents the average time spent in seconds reading the article in the first stage of the experiment by treatment groups. Column 1 and Column 2 show the mean values. Column 3 reports results from a two-sided t-test. P-values are in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.050$, *** $p < 0.010$

TABLE A5: Performance on the Effort Task by Treatment

	Article		
	Consonant	Dissonant	Difference in Means
Panel A: Stage 1 Articles			
Pro-Life People	3.596	3.406	0.190*** (0.005)
Pro-Choice People	3.638	3.636	0.002 (0.973)
Overall	3.619	3.536	0.083** (0.035)
Panel B: Stage 2 Articles			
Pro-Life People	4.321	4.824	-0.503*** (0.000)
Pro-Choice People	4.922	4.553	0.369*** (0.000)
Overall	4.609	4.667	-0.058 (0.262)

Notes: The table reports the average number of correct answers participants gave to the multiple-choice questions for each article type. Column 1 represents the mean values for the consonant article and Column 2 represents the mean values for the dissonant article. Column 3 shows the results from a two-sided t-test and reports the p-values in parentheses. Panel A reports participants' performance in the first stage articles whereas Panel B reports their performance in the second stage articles. Participants answered four multiple-choice questions in the first stage and five multiple-choice questions in the second stage of the experiment. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

TABLE A6: Belief Updating by the Number of Exposure to Dissonant Information

	Number of Exposure		
	None	Once	Twice
Panel A: Pro-life Participants			
Prior Belief	88.085	85.120	84.310
Posterior Belief	93.000	86.940	83.342
Diff. in Means	-4.915 (0.137)	-1.821 (0.152)	0.968 (0.460)
Panel B: Pro-choice Participants			
Prior Belief	93.952	91.858	93.795
Posterior Belief	95.810	93.064	93.835
Diff. in Means	-1.857** (0.027)	-1.207*** (0.000)	-0.040 (0.906)

Notes: The table represents the intensity of participants' beliefs on abortion rights at the beginning and the end of the experiment. The scores are out of 100. 0 represents the lowest intensity, and 100 represents the highest intensity. Throughout the experiment, participants read two articles on abortion rights. They either read 0 dissonant articles, 1 dissonant article or 2 dissonant articles. Column 1, Column 2 and Column 3 report the beliefs of the participants who read 0, 1 and 2 dissonant articles, respectively. "Diff. in Means" represents the difference between the prior and posterior beliefs of the participants under the given column. P-values from a two-sided t-test are in parentheses. Panel A reports the results for pro-life participants while Panel B reports the results for pro-choice participants. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

TABLE A7: Treatment Effect on the Propensity to Avoid Dissonant Information for Different Samples

$y = \mathbb{I}$ (paid to avoid)	(1)	(2)	(3)
	Sample with No Exclusion	Session 1	Session 2
Pro-choice	0.100	-	-
	[0.099]	-	-
Dissonant Tr.	0.065	-0.115	0.065
	[0.099]	[0.102]	[0.0.99]
Pro-choice x Dissonant	-0.179	-	-
	[0.142]	-	-
Constant	-0.230***	-0.130*	-0.230***
Observations	1,269	619	650

Notes: The table represents the coefficients from probit analyses. The dependent variable is equal to 0 if a participant chose not to pay to switch articles, and is equal to 1 if a participant chose to pay to switch articles. Column 1 includes all participants before applying the exclusion criterion. Column 2 only includes data from session 1 whereas Column 3 only includes data from session 2. "Pro-choice" takes the value of 0 if a participant is against abortion rights and takes the value of 1 if a participant is in favour of abortion rights. "Dissonant treatment" is also a dummy variable which is equal to 0 if a participant is randomly allocated to the consonant treatment and 1 if a participant is randomly allocated to the dissonant treatment. The notation "x" represents an interaction variable between the variables. The coefficients correspond to Model 1 in Table 5. Robust standard errors in brackets. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

TABLE A8: Treatment Effect on the Willingness to Pay to Avoid Dissonant Information for Different Samples

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Sample with No Exclusion	Session 1	Session 2	Sample with WTP ≥ 0
Pro-choice	-9.883**	-	-	-3.076
	[4.100]	-	-	[2.758]
Dissonant Tr.	4.233	1.374	4.233	2.294
	[4.293]	[4.209]	[4.293]	[3.263]
Pro-choice x Dissonant	-2.859	-	-	-2.813
	[6.012]	-	-	[4.126]
Constant	49.67***	39.78***	49.67***	20.30***
Observations	538	264	274	1,000
R-squared	0.028	0.0004	0.004	0.005

Notes: The table represents the results from OLS regressions. The dependent variable is the amount of money participants are willing to pay to switch articles from the pot of 100 cents. The samples in Column 1 to Column 3 include people with a positive willingness to pay. Column 1 includes all participants before applying the exclusion criterion. Column 2 only includes data from session 1 whereas Column 3 only includes data from session 2. The sample in Column 4 includes people with both positive and zero willingness to pay. "Pro-choice" takes the value of 0 if a participant is against abortion rights and takes the value of 1 if a participant is in favour of abortion rights. "Dissonant treatment" is also a dummy variable which is equal to 0 if a participant is randomly allocated to the consonant treatment and 1 if a participant is randomly allocated to the dissonant treatment. The notation "x" represents an interaction variable between the variables. The coefficients correspond to Model 1 in Table 6. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

TABLE A9: Determinants of Paying to Avoid Dissonant Information - OLS Regressions

$y = \mathbb{I}$ (paid to avoid)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Pro-choice	0.029	0.041	0.050	0.054
	[0.0438]	[0.0443]	[0.0627]	[0.0621]
Dissonant Tr.	0.0180	0.0230	-0.0429	-0.0399
	[0.0474]	[0.0468]	[0.0645]	[0.0639]
Pro-choice x Dissonant	-0.0600	-0.0675	0.0210	0.0182
	[0.0632]	[0.0632]	[0.0883]	[0.0882]
Female		0.111***	0.104	0.125*
		[0.0318]	[0.0649]	[0.0652]
Age		0.00248**	0.00218*	0.00207*
		[0.00119]	[0.00119]	[0.00121]
White		-0.0350	-0.0289	-0.0161
		[0.0386]	[0.0386]	[0.0385]
Income		-0.00380	-0.00357	-0.00352
		[0.00455]	[0.00456]	[0.00454]
College		-0.0115	-0.00953	-0.0106
		[0.0336]	[0.0335]	[0.0334]
Pro-choice x Female			-0.0200	-0.0439
			[0.0878]	[0.0873]
Dissonant x Female			0.139	0.129
			[0.0937]	[0.0926]
Pro-choice x Dissonant x Female			-0.181	-0.163
			[0.127]	[0.126]
Av. time reading news				0.0265***
				[0.00621]
Risk pref. (std)				0.0177
				[0.0165]
IPS (std)				0.00932
				[0.0158]
Time Spent Article 1				-1.70e-05
				[0.000214]
Constant	0.417***	0.311***	0.320***	0.259***
	[0.0326]	[0.0699]	[0.0755]	[0.0782]
Observations	1,000	979	979	979
R-squared	0.001	0.021	0.027	0.042
Demographic variables	×	✓	✓	✓
Female Interactions	×	×	✓	✓
Behavioural variables	×	×	×	✓

Notes: The table represents the results from OLS regressions. The dependent variable is equal to 0 if a participant chose not to pay to switch articles, and is equal to 1 if a participant chose to pay to switch articles. "Pro-choice" takes the value of 0 if a participant is against abortion rights and takes the value of 1 if a participant is in favour of abortion rights. "Dissonant treatment" is also a dummy variable which is equal to 0 if a participant is randomly allocated to the consonant treatment and 1 if a participant is randomly allocated to the dissonant treatment. The notation "x" represents an interaction variable between the variables. Demographic controls include female (a dummy variable which takes 1 if the participant classified themselves as female, 0 otherwise), age, white (a dummy variable that takes 1 if the participants classified their race as white, 0 otherwise), income, college (a dummy variable that takes 1 if the participant has a college degree, 0 otherwise). Behavioural control variables include average daily time spent reading the news, risk preference and information preference. "Av. time reading news" shows the number of hours spent reading the news per day. "Risk pref. (std)" represents the standardised score from the following question: How do you see yourself: Are you generally a person who is fully prepared to take risks or do you try to avoid taking risks?" on a scale from 0 to 10 ("unwilling to take risks" to "fully prepared to take risks"). "IPS (std)" represents the standardised score from Information Preference Scale by Ho et al. (2021): the lower the score, the higher the willingness to avoid information. 21 participants were dropped after Column 1 since they did not identify themselves as a female or a male. Column 4 also includes time spent reading the article that was randomly assigned to the participants in the first stage of the experiment to account for attention differentiation. "Time Spent Article 1" shows the time spent reading the first stage article in seconds. Robust standard errors are in brackets and clustered at the treatment (individual) level. * p<0.1; ** p<0.05; *** p<0.01.

TABLE A10: Determinants of Amount of Money Spent to Avoid Dissonant Information - Tobit Analysis

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Pro-choice	-2.006	0.377	-7.261	-6.518
	[6.132]	[6.105]	[8.917]	[8.931]
Dissonant Tr.	4.165	4.613	-12.55	-11.84
	[6.609]	[6.477]	[9.564]	[9.569]
Pro-choice x Dissonant	-7.830	-8.468	12.43	12.42
	[8.861]	[8.756]	[12.88]	[12.87]
Female		17.63***	5.226	9.138
		[4.432]	[8.963]	[9.113]
Age		0.526***	0.471***	0.482***
		[0.162]	[0.163]	[0.167]
White		-3.497	-2.390	-0.751
		[5.351]	[5.339]	[5.355]
Income		-0.913	-0.863	-0.891
		[0.638]	[0.635]	[0.636]
College		0.764	0.970	0.656
		[4.691]	[4.671]	[4.659]
Pro-choice x Female			13.37	10.10
			[12.04]	[12.05]
Dissonant x Female			31.93**	30.45**
			[13.05]	[13.03]
Pro-choice x Dissonant x Female			-38.81**	-36.72**
			[17.60]	[17.55]
Av. time reading news				2.340**
				[0.955]
Risk pref. (std)				3.977*
				[2.303]
IPS (std)				1.143
				[2.246]
Time Spent Article 1				-0.00654
				[0.0298]
Constant	-10.27**	-33.57***	-25.40**	-32.19***
	[4.801]	[9.925]	[10.79]	[11.40]
Observations	1,000	979	979	979
Demographic variables	×	✓	✓	✓
Female Interactions	×	×	✓	✓
Behavioural variables	×	×	×	✓

Notes: The table represents the results from Tobit regressions. The dependent variable is the amount of money participants are willing to pay to switch articles from the pot of 100 cents. The sample includes participants with both zero and a positive willingness to pay. "Pro-choice" takes the value of 0 if a participant is against abortion rights and takes the value of 1 if a participant is in favour of abortion rights. "Dissonant treatment" is also a dummy variable which is equal to 0 if a participant is randomly allocated to the consonant treatment and 1 if a participant is randomly allocated to the dissonant treatment. The notation "x" represents an interaction variable between the variables. Demographic controls include female (a dummy variable which takes 1 if the participant classified themselves as female, 0 otherwise), age, white (a dummy variable that takes 1 if the participants classified their race as white, 0 otherwise), income, college (a dummy variable that takes 1 if the participant has a college degree, 0 otherwise). Behavioural control variables include average daily time spent reading the news, risk preference and information preference. "Av. time reading news" shows the number of hours spent reading the news per day. "Risk pref. (std)" represents the standardised score from the following question: How do you see yourself: Are you generally a person who is fully prepared to take risks or do you try to avoid taking risks?" on a scale from 0 to 10 ("unwilling to take risks" to "fully prepared to take risks"). "IPS (std)" represents the standardised score from Information Preference Scale by Ho et al. (2021): the lower the score, the higher the willingness to avoid information. 21 participants were dropped after Column 1 since they did not identify themselves as a female or a male. Column 4 also includes time spent reading the article that was randomly assigned to the participants in the first stage of the experiment to account for attention differentiation. "Time Spent Article 1" shows the time spent reading the first stage article in seconds. Standard errors are in brackets and clustered at the treatment (individual) level. * p<0.1; ** p<0.05; *** p<0.01.