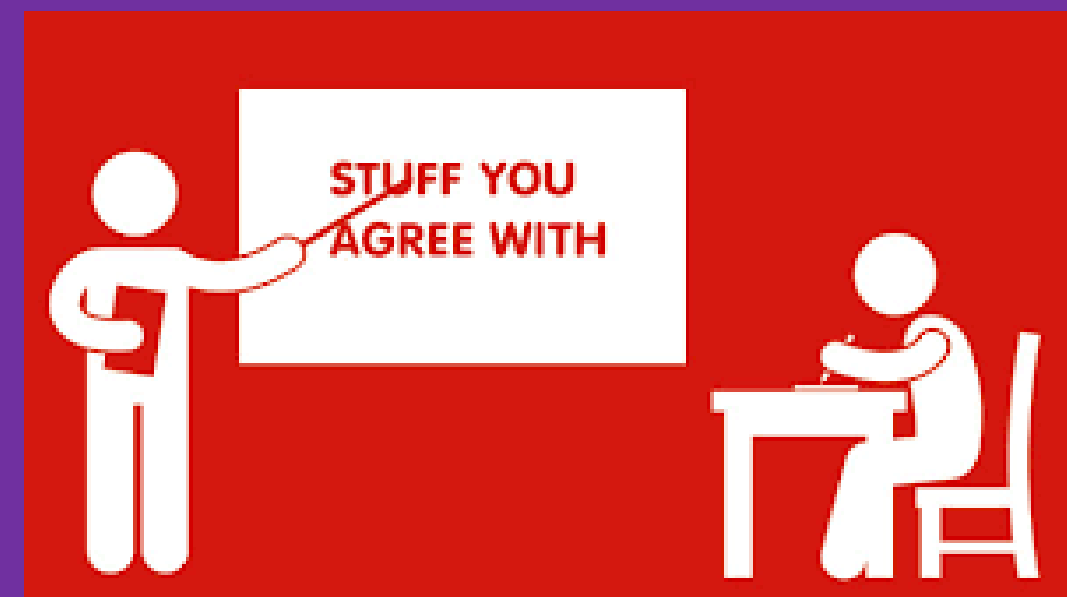
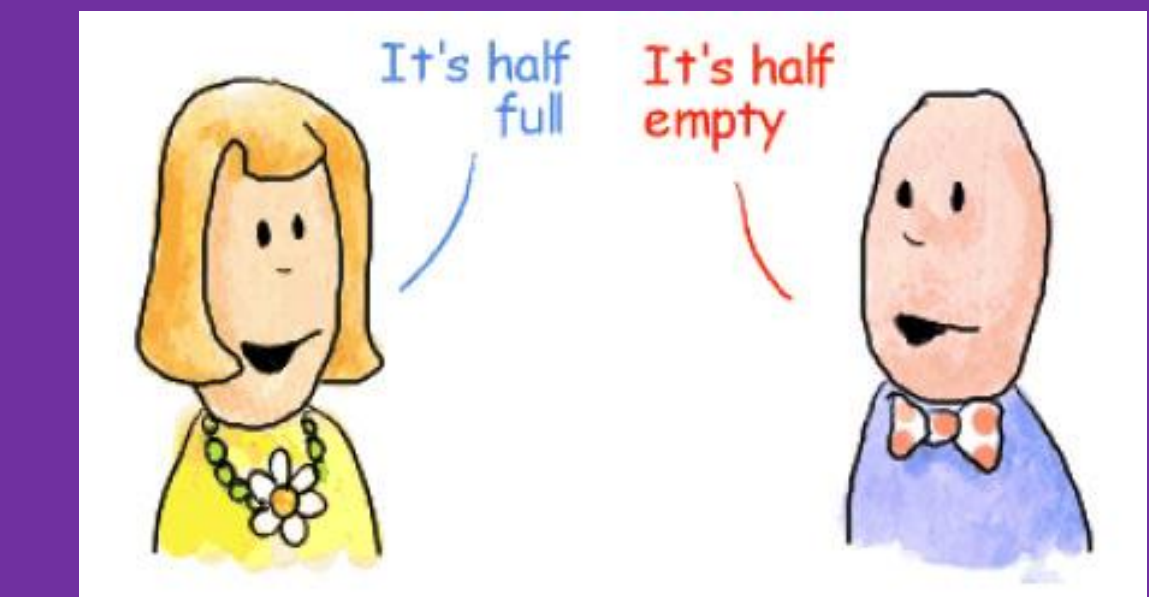


Does negativity begets negativity?: The role of biased assimilation in attitude polarization



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Introduction

We are interested in studying the extreme hatred that lone wolf terrorists have towards their target groups and how this hatred is influenced by biased assimilation of new information about these groups. Biased assimilation involves favoring confirming over disconfirming new information.

To study biased assimilation, we will be screening participants from college students to everyday persons. Those who have mildly negative attitudes towards our target group, PETA, will be allowed to participate in our study. We picked PETA because many people already dislike them.

Present Research

We are interested in determining how people's attitudes polarize. To do this, we must first measure people's attitudes about a common and well known object. We are interested in *negative* polarization, so we must pick objects that plausibly many people have negative attitudes toward.

Study 1 Methods

Participants: 78 TCU students, ages 18 – 23. Participants will also soon encompass Amazon Mechanical Turk Workers

Procedure

Prescreen: Participants must show some sort of negative assessment of the attitude of PETA.

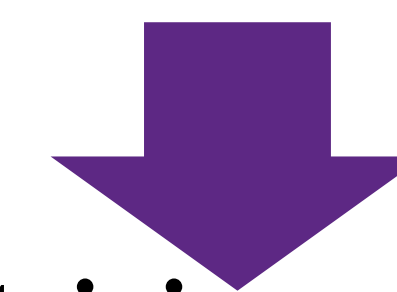
Article Presentation: Participants are shown two articles (given in random order), one positive toward PETA and one negative.

Biased Assimilation: Participants are asked to rate articles on validity and believability and then asked to give their attitudes towards PETA once more.

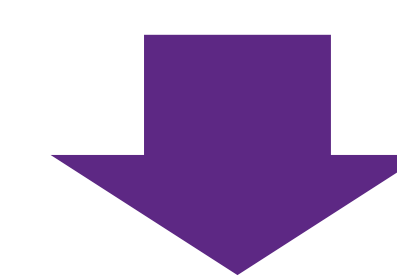
Control Measures: Participants are asked a series of individual difference measures that we believed might affect their attitudes. These included a Dehumanization scale, Social Desirability, and an Absorption scale which measures a person's ability to become absorbed in things like stories or everyday events.

Biased Assimilation:

Negative attitudes



Balanced information containing equally positive and negative factors

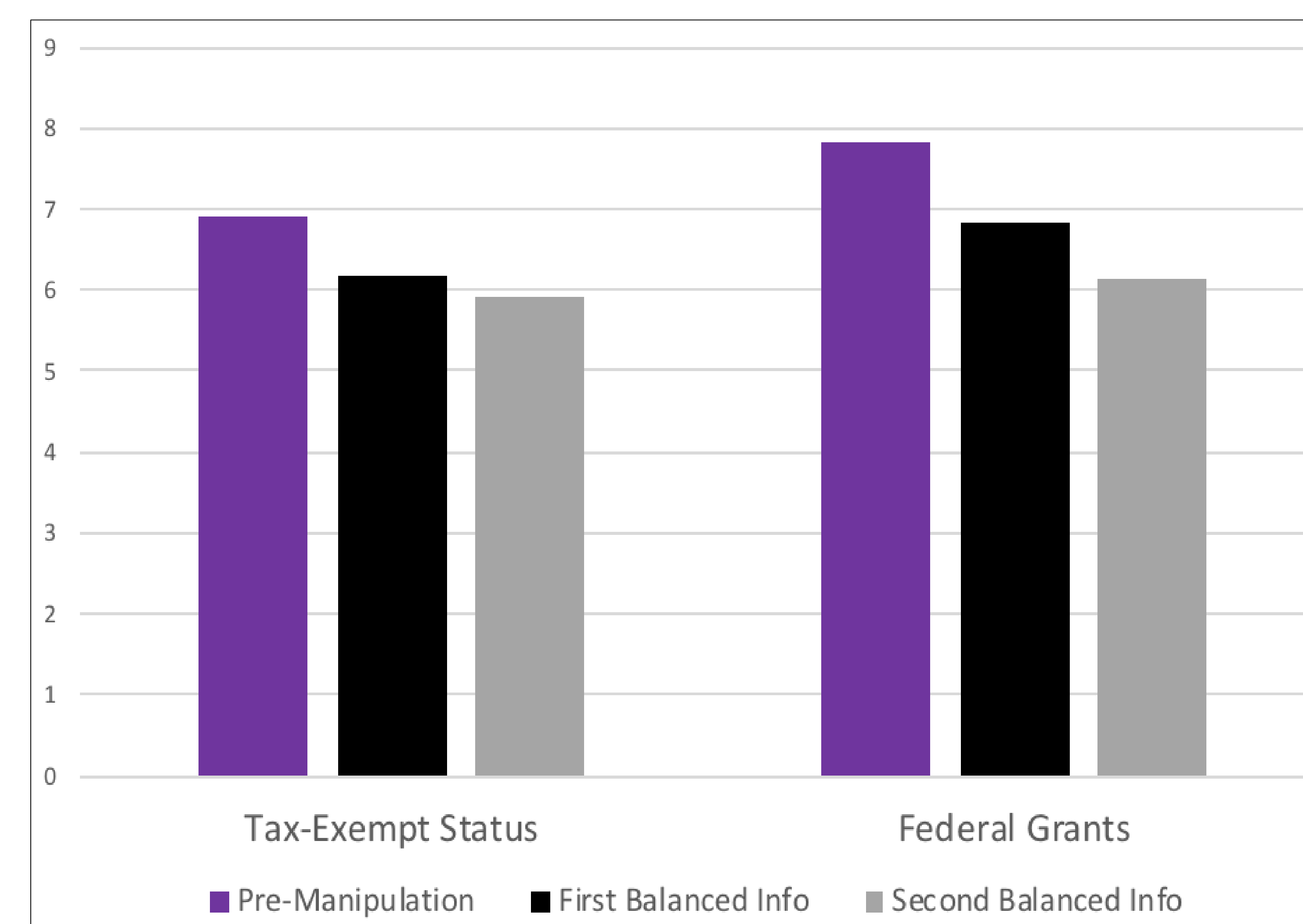


Negative Attitude Polarization

PETA

PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) ranks as one of the most controversial organizations in the world. The organization's members espouse animal rights and oppose animal experimentation, but in several regions of the country its members have been charged with using extreme tactics to pursue their goals, like vandalizing research facilities and attacking research workers and their families.

	Tax-Exempt	Federal Grants
Pre-Manipulation	6.92	7.84
First Balanced Info	6.19	6.84
Second Balanced Info	5.92	6.13



Study 1 Results

We ran analyses to determine the trend that best fit our data, and whether or not this trend was statistically significant. Indeed, we found that participants attitudes trended linearly and negative whether it was tax exemption or federal grant money we asked about.

Initial negative attitudes that are based on incomplete knowledge of a group can be polarized by new information this is objectively balanced, as positive as it is negative, and that polarization can be progressive as additional balanced information is encountered.

For participants who reported pre-manipulation attitudes toward PETA that were neither very positive nor based on high levels of knowledge, encountering two new sets of information about PETA members—one as positive as the other was negative—caused them to become more opposed to giving PETA tax-exempt status or federal grants.

This polarization effect of new objectively balanced information was progressive, in that encountering two additional sets of information about PETA members elicited even more opposition to tax-exemptions and federal grants for PETA.

Discussion

The present research concerned how people's attitudes polarize in the face of balanced information. Many people might claim that if people are presented with equally balanced and positive information that overall, attitudes should not change. In other words, information is treated equally. However, we have provided continuing evidence that people engage in biased assimilation of information. In other words, our attitudes are affected more by information that already fits our attitude.

This research has numerous implications for lone wolf terrorists who read constant streams of negative media about an already disliked attitude object, and for everyday people reading simple news stories.

