

The persuasiveness of the straw man rhetorical technique

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The straw man technique takes place when an opponent's argument or position is distorted or oversimplified so that it can easily be refuted. Two experiments assessed the technique's effectiveness. Participants read two passages ostensibly written by two people competing for a public office, the second of which did or did not include a straw man argument. In Experiment 1, participants led to believe that the office was of low personal relevance were more persuaded by the straw man technique. In Experiment 2, participants low in need for structure were less persuaded when a candidate used the technique. Our research therefore suggests that whereas the straw man may be effective when motivation to elaborate is low, the technique may be unsuccessful or even backfire when such motivation is high.

Keywords: Persuasion; Straw man; Personal relevance; Need for structure.

During elections, one can expect that politicians will use almost any means necessary to garner support from voters. Character attacks and policy misrepresentations often consume the political arena as politicians rely on a range of rhetorical techniques to tarnish an opponent's image. One such technique that has saturated the political landscape is the straw man. A straw man takes place when a person exaggerates, distorts, or oversimplifies the views of a specific or hypothetical opponent so that the new, ridiculous position can be knocked down, like a person made of straw (e.g., Porter, 2002). Social scientists and political observers alike have argued that the technique is a mainstay of today's political scene. For example, Porter

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(2002) indicated that the technique is “frequently used in political rhetoric, functioning as a cheap way of winning points while evading the main issue” (p. 104). Talisse and Aikin (2006) commented that the straw man technique “is among the most prevalent forms of fallacious argumentation at work in contemporary popular political discourse” (p. 349). And Dunham (2002) noted, “One thing good about a straw man: You can keep punching away at him all you want, and he’ll never hit you back. That’s one reason politicians love to cart straw men around with them on the campaign trail.” Indeed, as these authors attest, the straw man is a commonly used technique.

It is therefore not surprising that well-known politicians have employed the technique. For example, when discussing the war in Iraq, United States President George W. Bush stated, “There’s a lot of people in the world who don’t believe that people whose skin color may not be the same as ours can be free and self-govern. I reject that. I reject that strongly” (Milbank, 2004). This is a classic straw man argument: Obviously, not even Bush’s harshest critics would make such a preposterous claim that people with a certain skin color cannot self-govern. However, after hearing the views of Bush’s critics mischaracterized, an individual might infer that Bush’s argument is, in fact, the sound one. Similarly, during the campaign leading up to the 2008 Democratic primaries, candidate John Edwards used the technique to attack fellow candidate Barack Obama’s stance that insurance companies and the government should negotiate regarding health care. During a debate in Des Moines, Iowa, Edwards stated, “Some people argue that we’re going to sit at a table with these people and they’re going to voluntarily give their power away. I think it is a complete fantasy; it will never happen” (Krugman, 2007). To be sure, Obama would never have suggested that any company would simply “give its power away” voluntarily. But it is conceivable that a viewer of the debate might feel that Edwards’ position on the issue is stronger after hearing his stance compared to a distorted, absurd version of Obama’s stance.

Because the straw man technique is so common, it is surprising that no research to date has tested its effectiveness. Some researchers, however, have investigated people’s ability to *identify* similar logical fallacies, such as appealing to popularity (e.g., “Lots of people think this, so it’s probably right”) and arguing from ignorance (e.g., “Nobody has disproven this, so it’s probably right”). Such studies have generally demonstrated that people with higher cognitive ability and greater reasoning ability tend to be more successful in identifying such fallacies. Specifically, this research has demonstrated that people who are more aware of argumentation norms (Weinstock, Neuman, & Tabak, 2004), who are more epistemologically sophisticated (Weinstock, Neuman, & Glassner, 2006), who have higher grade-point averages, and who are better at deductive reasoning (Ricco, 2007), are more likely to successfully identify arguments that suffer from

such logical fallacies. Even with this important emerging research, however, it is unclear which variables might serve to moderate the actual *persuasiveness* of logical fallacies like the straw man technique.

THE CURRENT RESEARCH

The goal of the current research is to explore the straw man technique in several ways. First, we did not aim to learn whether *people can identify* the fallacy, as has been demonstrated by prior research, but rather whether *people will be influenced by* the fallacy. Again, it is surprising, given the ubiquity of the technique, that no published research to date has assessed whether the technique is actually effective in changing attitudes. Second, we wanted to explore potential motivational moderators of the technique: It is unlikely that the technique is universally influential across people with varying degrees of motivation to process the message.

Which motivational variables, then, might serve to moderate the straw man's effectiveness? To answer this question, we turn to research on manipulations of argument quality in the context of the elaboration likelihood model (ELM; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; see also e.g., Briñol, Petty, & Wheeler, 2006; Petty & Cacioppo, 1984; Petty, Tormala, Briñol, & Jarvis, 2006). Research consistent with this model has shown that to the extent that people have the motivation and ability to process a message carefully, resultant attitudes will be impacted by the relative quality of the arguments within that message. People with less motivation and ability to process a message carefully, on the other hand, will have attitudes that are less affected by argument quality. For example, in a classic study, Petty, Cacioppo, and Schumann (1983) presented participants with arguments about a razor that were either strong (e.g., "new advanced honing method creates unsurpassed sharpness," and "unique angle placement of the blade provides the smoothest shave possible") or weak (e.g., "designed with the bathroom in mind," and "floats in water with a minimum of rust"). Attitudes of participants who were led to believe that the razor was to be test-marketed in their community—participants for whom motivation to process the message was high—were more impacted by the quality of the arguments than were attitudes of participants who were led to believe that the razor was to be test-marketed in far-off locales. Thus, Petty et al. (1983) showed that the effect of argument quality on attitudes differed as a function of motivation to process the message carefully: Higher motivation was associated with a stronger relation between argument quality and resultant attitudes.

The straw man may be a real-world technique that works in a manner consistent with the "weak" arguments used in the context of the ELM. At first glance, the argument that a named or unnamed opponent made an

outrageous claim may be compelling: Considering President Bush's straw man, a person might think, "I can't believe that Bush's critics would think that people with different-colored skin can't govern. Bush is clearly right on this one!" But if a person scrutinizes the straw man message, the fact that it consists of a distorted and unfair version of an opponent's stance should become evident. A person with the motivation and ability to scrutinize the message might instead think, "Nobody says that people with different-colored skin can't govern. That's not at all what the debate is about."

Thus, consistent with work in line with the ELM, we predicted that participants with low motivation to process a message would be more persuaded by the straw man technique, while participants with high motivation to do so would be less persuaded by the straw man technique. Specifically, Experiment 1 assessed whether a manipulation of personal relevance would moderate the technique's effectiveness: We hypothesized that participants who believed that a campaign was personally irrelevant would be more persuaded by a straw man than participants who believed that a campaign was relevant. Experiment 2 tested whether, in a situation of high personal relevance, personality would also serve as a moderator. We hypothesized that participants low in need for cognitive closure (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994) would be less persuaded by the technique than participants high in need for cognitive closure.

EXPERIMENT 1

The goals of Experiment 1 were to test the effectiveness of the straw man technique and, in so doing, assess whether personal relevance might serve as a moderator. We chose personal relevance as our variable because it has repeatedly been shown to increase the scrutiny with which participants process persuasive messages (e.g., Martin, Hewstone, & Martin, 2007; Petty, Cacioppo, & Goldman, 1981). Thus, in a high-relevance scenario, we expected that participants would expend the mental effort necessary to realize the speciousness of the straw man: When exposed to the technique, such participants would recognize that the straw man does not provide a meaningful reason to prefer a candidate, yielding relatively lower preference scores for such a candidate. Conversely, in a low-relevance scenario, we expected that participants would not expend the mental effort necessary to notice the invalidity of the straw man. These people would prefer candidates when they employ the technique relative to when they do not. Consequently, we predicted a $\text{Relevance} \times \text{Straw man}$ interaction, with participants assigned to a high-relevance condition being relatively less persuaded by the straw man technique than participants assigned to a low-relevance condition.

Method

Procedure. The sample consisted of 183 people (49.70% male, mean age = 34.00 years, $SD = 15.7$) approached in two coffee shops in Albany, New York. Participants took part in exchange for a \$5 gift certificate to the coffee shop.

Participants were provided with a packet containing two forms ostensibly completed by two candidates who were vying for the position of "Commissioner of the Department of Traffic Safety." Each form contained space for each candidate's name, contact information, and "summary statement." For all forms, the candidate's name and contact information was blacked out. In place, "Candidate A" or "Candidate B" was handwritten across the top of the forms.

Next, participants were asked a series of questions. First, participants indicated their candidate preferences by responding to the question, "On the following scale, where does your preference for the candidates stand?" Participants indicated their response on a 7-point scale anchored with 1 = *intensely support Candidate A* and 7 = *intensely support Candidate B*. Participants then reported demographic information including gender, age, political ideology, and whether they worked, studied, or lived in the region. Finally they were given the opportunity to provide additional comments about the survey. None of these demographic variables moderated any effect, so they are not discussed further.

Manipulations. Whereas all participants read the same statement from Candidate A, participants were randomly assigned to read one of two messages from Candidate B. Some participants read an excerpt in which Candidate B concluded the statement using the straw man technique, while others read an excerpt that did not (see Appendix).

In an orthogonal manipulation, personal relevance was manipulated. Half the participants were assigned to the high-relevance condition. These participants were told, prior to reading the statements that the candidates had applied for the position in New York's "Capital Region" (a term commonly used to describe the Albany metropolitan area). The other participants, those assigned to the low-relevance condition, were instead told, prior to reading the statements that the candidates had applied for the position in "East-Central Arkansas." This was presumably a locality about which we thought our participants would be unfamiliar and thus not find personally relevant.

Results

Data from 10 participants (5.5%) were removed from analyses because these participants indicated some degree of suspicion as to the study's purpose or

the materials' validity in an open-ended suspicion-check measure conducted at the conclusion of the study. For the remaining participants, candidate-preference scores were submitted to a 2 (Straw man: with or without) \times 2 (Personal relevance: high or low) ANOVA, with higher scores indicating greater preference for Candidate B.

There were no main effects of personal relevance or straw man on candidate preference, $F_s < 1$, *ns*. More importantly, as demonstrated in Figure 1, there was a significant Relevance \times Straw man interaction, $F(1, 169) = 6.01$, $p = .02$, $\eta^2 = .03$. Among participants assigned to the low-relevance condition, participants preferred Candidate B more ($M = 4.49$, $SD = 1.33$) when a straw man was used than when a straw man was not used ($M = 3.81$, $SD = 1.61$); $F(1, 169) = 4.69$, $p = .03$, $\eta^2 = .03$. Conversely, among participants assigned to the high-relevance condition, inclusion of a straw man had no effect on candidate preference, $F(1, 169) = 1.67$, *ns*; $M_{\text{included}} = 4.07$, $SD = 1.36$; $M_{\text{excluded}} = 4.47$, $SD = 1.47$.

Discussion

Experiment 1 tested, for the first time, the effectiveness of the straw man technique. Across the entire sample, the inclusion or omission of the straw man technique had no effect on participants' preference. However, the observed interaction demonstrates that relevance played an important role: Whereas participants assigned to the low-relevance condition were more persuaded by the straw man, participants assigned to the high-relevance condition were not.

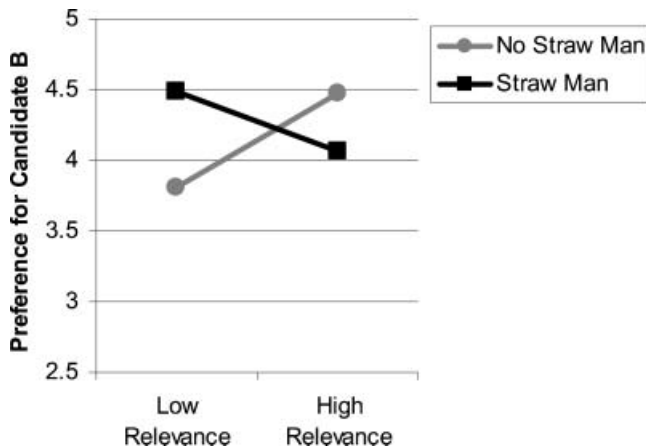


Figure 1. Preference for Candidate B as a function of relevance and straw man inclusion.

EXPERIMENT 2

Experiment 1 demonstrated that when participants felt that a persuasive message was of low personal relevance, the straw man technique was effective in changing attitudes. The goal of Experiment 2 was to extend these findings by exploring the technique's effectiveness in context that was relevant for all participants. Holding relevance constant, we assessed how individual differences might further moderate the effect.

We predicted that need for cognitive closure (Kruglanski, 1989; Webster & Kruglanski, 1994) would be an appropriate individual difference to test. This construct refers to the extent to which a person prefers decisiveness, predictability, order, and structure, particularly in regard to holding attitudes. People high in need for cognitive closure want to come to decisive, quick conclusions, while people low in need for cognitive closure are not motivated to do so: Instead, these people are more willing to delay attitude formation or change.

For this experiment we used Webster and Kruglanski's (1994) Need for Closure Scale, a 42-item scale designed to assess the construct. Since the scale was introduced, however, Neuberg, Judice, and West (1997) provided evidence that the scale should not be used as a unidimensional scale but rather as an amalgam of two independent scales. *Need for structure* (NFS) assesses the desire to come to *nonspecific* closure: People high in need for structure are motivated to form an attitude—any attitude—quickly. Conversely, *decisiveness* assesses the desire to come to specific closure: People high in decisiveness are motivated to yield a *specific* attitude, presumably due to confirmation or disconfirmation biases. Thus, in accord with Neuberg et al. (1997) and in line with prior research (e.g., Hirt, Kardes, & Markman, 2004), we assessed need for structure and decisiveness separately.

Our prediction was that, because participants should have no motivation to come to a specific conclusion, the decisiveness subscale should not moderate the straw man's effectiveness. Conversely, the need for structure subscale should do so: Participants high in need for structure should "latch on" to a quick decision, suggesting that they will accept the straw man without scrutinizing or questioning it. For these people, the technique should yield relatively positive attitudes toward the candidate employing the straw man. Conversely, those participants low in need for structure should not be so hasty in forming an attitude. These people will spend more effort scrutinizing the straw man technique. Such scrutiny should lead to relatively less persuasion when a candidate employs the fallacy.

Method

Procedure. The sample consisted of 62 undergraduates from Union College, (49.20% male, mean age=20.03 years, $SD=1.32$). They were

recruited to participate in this study in exchange for either course credit or monetary compensation (\$3).

Using the MediaLab computer program (Jarvis, 2002), participants viewed excerpts from speeches of two fictitious but ostensibly real candidates vying for the position of "Commissioner of the Department of Agriculture and Markets of New York." Participants were told that the commissioner oversees the state's food supply, and as such the person who will fill the position is responsible for safety of food consumed by all New York residents. Complete passages can be found in the Appendix.

After reading each of the two statements, participants indicated their candidate preferences by responding to the question "On the following scale, where does your preference for the candidates stand?" Participants indicated their response on a 7-point scale anchored with 1=*intensely support Candidate A* and 7=*intensely support Candidate B*. Participants then completed scales indicating their political ideology on a 5-point liberal-to-conservative continuum and the 42-item need for closure scale (Kruglanski, Webster, & Klem, 1993). Participants' political ideology did not moderate any of the effects, so the variable is not discussed further.

Manipulation. As was the case in Experiment 1, although all participants read the same message from Candidate A, participants were assigned to read one of two messages from Candidate B. Half the randomly assigned participants read a message in which Candidate B employed a straw man at the conclusion of the statement. The remaining participants read a message that did not include a straw man (see Appendix). Thus, Candidate A's entire message and all but the concluding sentences of Candidate B's message were consistent across all participants.

Results

Candidate-preference scores were submitted to a 2 (Need for structure: high, low) \times 2 (Straw man argument: included, excluded) ANOVA. There were no main effects of need for structure or straw man inclusion, $F_s < 1$, *ns*, but there was, as predicted, a significant interaction between the two variables, $F(1, 59) = 8.46$, $p = .005$, $\eta^2 = .13$. As shown in Figure 2, participants low in need for structure were less persuaded by Candidate B when he used a straw man ($M = 3.00$, $SD = 1.22$) than when he did not ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 1.70$); $F(1, 59) = 5.54$, $p = .02$, $\eta^2 = .09$. Conversely, participants high in need for structure showed a trend in the opposite direction, $F(1, 59) = 3.07$, $p = .09$, $\eta^2 = .05$, such that these participants were slightly more persuaded by Candidate B when he used a straw man ($M = 3.65$, $SD = 1.41$) than when he did not ($M = 2.85$, $SD = 0.91$).

Candidate-preference scores were then submitted to a 2 (Decisiveness: high, low) \times 2 (Straw man argument: included, excluded) ANOVA. No

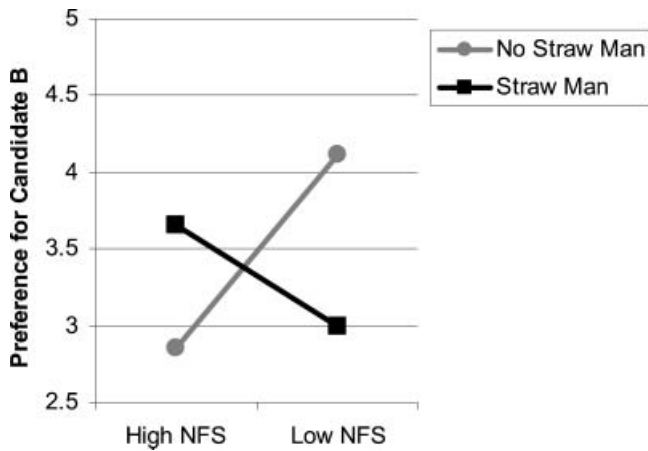


Figure 2. Preference for Candidate B as a function of need for structure and straw man inclusion.

effects involving decisiveness were reliable ($F_s < 1.32$, $p_s > .25$), indicating that, as predicted, the decisiveness subscale did not moderate the effectiveness of the straw man technique.

DISCUSSION

Based on its widespread use in the political arena, one might presume that the straw man technique is a reliably effective means of persuasion. Our research, however, suggests that this may not be the case. In Experiment 1, participants who were led to believe that their opinions were of low personal relevance were persuaded more when a candidate used the straw man technique; participants who were led to believe that their opinions were of high personal relevance were not influenced by the straw man. Similarly, in Experiment 2, participants low in need for structure were persuaded less when a candidate employed the technique, while those high in need for structure were not significantly influenced by the straw man. Together, then, the two experiments demonstrate that the straw man technique seems not to be universally effective. Rather, the technique seems to be relatively effective when people are disinclined to carefully process a message, whether that disinclination comes from dispositional or situational causes.

Implications

Our research has a variety of implications. At the most basic level, our research suggests that the straw man technique may not be as effective as politicians and other practitioners apparently presume. Indeed, in neither

study was the straw man effective across all levels of motivation. Rather, although the technique was relatively successful among people who lacked motivation to process the message carefully, it was ineffective (Experiment 1) or backfired (Experiment 2) among people who had such motivation. This suggests that the straw man may indeed be unpersuasive or even counterproductive among a portion of the electorate.

The current research also adds to the growing body of work on predicting which people are most likely to identify logical fallacies. Whereas that body of research has focused on people's abilities to *identify* logical fallacies, our research has investigated a later "downstream" cognitive process—when the straw man logical fallacy leads to persuasion and when it does not. This later cognitive outcome likely has a more direct effect on relevant behavioral consequences. Together, then, the current research and the nascent line of research discussed earlier should inspire psychologists and political scientists alike to further explore among which portion of the electorate various common logical fallacies will be effective and among which portion of the electorate such techniques will not.

Our research also speaks to the personality measure we used: It provides further support for Neuberger et al.'s (1997) argument that Webster and Kruglanski's (1994) Need for Closure Scale might be better conceptualized as two independent subscales rather than a unidimensional construct. Indeed, although the subscale assessing need for structure served to moderate the straw man's effectiveness, the subscale assessing decisiveness did not. There has been much debate on how the need for cognitive closure scale should be conceptualized (e.g., Kruglanski, Atash, & DeGrada, 1997; Neuberger, Judice, West, & Thompson, 1997). The results of Experiment 2 add to this debate by providing additional evidence that separating the construct into two may be, at least in some situations, warranted.

Directions for future research

Generalizability. An important caveat to the research findings involves our samples. Experiment 2 employed students at a liberal-arts college. Relative to a general population, these students are likely to be lower in need for structure, as they chose to attend and were admitted to a selective liberal-arts college (see Sears, 1986). This would suggest that the effectiveness of the straw man technique might backfire only among a very small subset of the general population as opposed to the relatively large portion of our sample. Although the primary result is unlikely to be different among a broader sample (i.e., need for structure should still moderate the effectiveness of the straw man), the number of people who rejected the straw man may be fewer in a more representative sample.

Additionally, both experiments' samples were under-represented by self-described conservatives: Only 14.3% of participants from Experiment 1 and 11.7% of participants from Experiment 2 described themselves as conservatives. It may be possible that conservatives show different cognitive patterns than did our generally liberal sample (see, for example, Chirumbolo, 2002; Jost, Glaser, & Kruglanski, 2003; Tetlock, 1983). If political ideology does moderate the straw man effect, the under-representation of political conservatives may have obscured such an effect in our two samples. Therefore, future research testing the extent to which political ideology serves to moderate the straw man's effectiveness might prove interesting, both theoretically and practically.

Another potentially interesting line of research involves assessing the straw man's effectiveness using other techniques to control participants' motivation to elaborate. Again, in Experiment 1, participants who were told that the campaign was of low personal relevance were more persuaded by the straw man than were participants who thought that the campaign was of high personal relevance. Personal relevance, however, is but one way in which motivation to process a message carefully can be manipulated. Other techniques—including some that might be more practical in the context of actual campaigns—may also serve to moderate the straw man's effectiveness. For example, controlling the extent to which participants feel accountable for their attitudes might prove interesting.

In a similar vein, it may be interesting to learn if our findings generalize to different types of persuasive messages. Indeed, although we were able to find evidence of the straw man's effectiveness, we did so utilizing persuasive messages of similar style: Both studies employed brief, straightforward persuasive messages. Therefore, replicating the study using messages that vary in terms of length, tone (i.e., respectful or attacking), or even medium (i.e., written or spoken) would attest to the generalizability of the effect or identify important boundary conditions thereof. Furthermore, the current research tested the straw man by presenting both candidates' persuasive messages sequentially. In real-world politics, this is less common than a situation in which a candidate presents a straw man without the other candidate being present. Using a method in which participants are exposed to a straw man without having just read the opponent's speech would further attest to the effect's generalizability.

Another potential direction for future research involves testing the extent to which motivational factors impact the two types of straw men as identified by Talisse and Aikin (2006). These scholars argued that there are two forms of straw man argumentation. One form, the *representation* form, is consistent with the method used in the current research: A person distorts the positions or arguments of an adversary and then attacks those distorted stances. Another form, the *selection* form, instead involves attacking "a

relatively weak version of, or inept spokesman for, the opposition to her view” (p. 347). In other words, the selection form of straw man argumentation takes place not when Candidate B attacks a distorted form of Candidate A’s argument, but rather when Candidate B attacks a weak person or stance that is merely *associated with Candidate A*. Future research employing a similar methodology could assess whether the effect we found utilizing the *representation* straw man generalizes to the *selection* straw man.

Our research also brings to light a new area within the persuasion literature that may be of interest for future study: Exploring the multitude of logical fallacies that, although common in political and everyday conversation, have been largely ignored by the scientific community. Studying persuasive techniques like the slippery slope (suggesting that an unpleasant event will lead to an unacceptable event in the future), *ad hominem* (attacking the irrelevant personal character of an opponent rather than his or her arguments), red herring (responding to a compelling attack by changing topics or distracting the audience from recognizing the compelling attack), and others may prove fruitful. Indeed, scholars have much to learn about the effectiveness of these persuasive techniques so common in discourse. Understanding whether our findings generalize to other similar rhetorical techniques would be of interest to both academics and practitioners.

Clarifying the process. An important question left unresolved by our research is the extent to which participants’ identification of the straw man’s speciousness accounts for the findings observed. Indeed, we have argued that the effects observed in our two studies take place “downstream” of identifying the logical fallacy (e.g., Ricco, 2007; Weinstock et al., 2004, 2006). Consequently, a study in which persuasion *and* identification of the logical fallacy are both assessed would test this potential mediational process. Furthermore, a study employing a control condition (i.e., concluding Candidate B’s statement with an “empty” argument) would also help clarify the straw man. Such a condition would further isolate the technique’s effectiveness, as it would compare the straw man against the absence of an argument rather than the presence of an actual argument.

Conclusion

Because politicians so routinely utilize the straw man technique in their persuasive communications, one can speculate that they view the fallacy as being an effective tool of persuasion. Our research, however, suggests that the straw man may only be effective among people who lack the motivation to carefully scrutinize a persuasive message: In the current research, people who were motivated to process a message—due to disposition or situation—were not persuaded by the technique. Thus, researchers and

practitioners alike may be served warning: Although the straw man may be effective in some cases, it may actually backfire in others. Understanding the motivation of one's audience to carefully process the message, it seems, is of critical importance.

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APPENDIX

Experiment 1: Candidate A's statement

If chosen as the Regional Commissioner of the Department of Transportation Safety, I would improve our area's roads, rails, and aviation facilities to a level of quality that we all deserve. To do this, I would partner with national organizations (including the federal government itself) with expertise in these areas. Access to safe and reliable transportation should be an inherent right and under no circumstance should it be compromised. Looking to national organizations for ideas and policy will be one important way in which this access can be ensured.

Experiment 1: Candidate B's statement

As Regional Commissioner of the Department of Transportation Safety, I would work to the best of my ability to enhance the region's transportation network. Without question, our region's economy and vitality depend on a

safe, efficient system. There's a great deal of talented minds and organizations in the area who have the know-how to deliver such a system – yet they have largely been ignored. By using this resource, we can build and improve our region's transportation system for years to come. [Straw man: Some say that if we just hand everything over to the federal government, everything will be fixed and there will never be any problems. That is a ridiculous argument with which I wholeheartedly disagree.]

Experiment 2: Candidate A's statement

If elected as the Commissioner of the Department of Agriculture and Markets, I would demand change in all sectors dealing with food safety. The access to safe and healthy food should be an inherent right and under no circumstance should it be compromised by big business. As a servant to the people, I would fight for higher standards for food production, particularly when it comes to the food that children consume in public schools. Local governments must lobby for higher standards for their constituents, and if elected Commissioner I would hold every major food producer accountable.

Experiment 2: Candidate B's statement

If re-elected as the Commissioner of the Department of Agriculture and Markets, I would continue to regulate the food and agriculture industry in New York State. My current record shows my dedication to the promotion of safe and healthy food for all New York State residents. The contamination of our food supply is not an issue that should be taken lightly. Big business and the public must work together to ensure the most efficient production level of food without compromising its safety. Overregulation will drive up the cost of food for everybody, especially for those people who can least afford it. [Straw man: Some say that by passing a bunch of laws, we will fix everything and there will never be another problem in the food system. That is a silly argument with which I wholeheartedly disagree.]¹

¹ The reader may be concerned by the fact that, in Experiment 2, Candidate A is seeking election, whereas Candidate B is seeking re-election. The hypothesis, however, is that the preference of Candidate B over Candidate A will differ as a function of personality and inclusion of the straw man. As such, any differences between Candidate A and B that might be impacted by this asymmetry are not relevant to the hypothesis.

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