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Authors

Sommer, Joseph
Lombrozo, Tania

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Judgment Under Inconsistency: Tolerance for Inconsistent Political Beliefs

Joseph Sommer (joseph.sommer@princeton.edu)

Princeton University, University Center for Human Values and Program in Cognitive Science, Princeton, NJ 08540

Tania Lombrozo (lombrozo@princeton.edu)

Princeton University, Department of Psychology, Princeton, NJ 08540

Abstract

Holding inconsistent beliefs is widely considered irrational, yet inconsistencies appear pervasive. How do such inconsistencies arise, and when are they remediated? Recent work indicates that inconsistent beliefs can arise and persist when they are not mutually accessible in memory. However, several theories propose that political inconsistencies result from different mechanisms, making them resistant to consistency checking and remediation. Across two preregistered studies ($N_s = 1,026; 3,211$), we compared the role of accessibility in political versus general knowledge inconsistencies. Participants responded to sets of three interrelated questions designed to elicit inconsistent responses. We found that political beliefs generated inconsistencies at rates similar to trivia beliefs (15–20%). However, upon reviewing their inconsistent responses, participants were significantly less likely to revise political beliefs. Moreover, manipulating accessibility reduced inconsistencies for trivia, but not politics. These results suggest that while accessibility plays an important role in consistency, additional mechanisms govern political inconsistencies.

Keywords: Belief; Consistency; Rationality; Accessibility; Politics; Motivated Reasoning

Introduction

A central norm of rationality is that beliefs should be mutually consistent (e.g., Gärdenfors, 1988, Titelbaum, 2022). Yet, people often seem to hold inconsistent beliefs. For example, a recent political poll (Ipsos, 2025) revealed that 68% of Republicans believe that “the President of the United States SHOULD obey federal court rulings even if the president does not want to,” but 76% believed that “The Trump Administration should continue to deport people they view as a risk despite the court order [to stop],” implying that 44%–68%¹ of respondents held inconsistent beliefs. Similar examples can be found across the political spectrum.

But do these responses really reflect inconsistent political beliefs? Poll responses may be collected over time, allowing people to change their minds. Often, there is no option to skip a question if one has no opinion (as is true of the Ipsos poll above), so inconsistent *responses* could fail to reflect *beliefs*. Additionally, questions rarely rule out consistent interpretations (e.g., maybe people believe that the president should obey court rulings in general, but not on certain topics). So, do people truly hold inconsistent political beliefs? And if they do, what psychological mechanisms allow inconsistencies to arise and persist?

In this paper we report two experiments addressing these questions. Specifically, we find that many people in fact hold inconsistent political beliefs simultaneously (“*synchronic inconsistencies*”), and that the mechanisms that sustain such beliefs differ from those for inconsistencies concerning general knowledge, or trivia beliefs. These findings have implications for theories of belief and belief revision in general, and for our understanding of the rationality and malleability of motivated and partisan beliefs.

Prior Work on Inconsistent Beliefs

Explaining inconsistent beliefs has occupied researchers for decades. For instance, early proposals included thresholds of tolerance before inconsistencies required remediation (Rosenberg, 1960), inertial forces that slow the impact of inconsistent evidence on prior beliefs (McGuire, 1960; see also Eagly & Chaiken, 2014), and fragmented storage of beliefs in memory, which block consistency checking across fragments (Cherniak, 1986; Stalnaker, 1984; see Borgoni, Kindermann, & Onofri, 2021).

More recently, Sommer, Musolino, and Hemmer (2023) argued that inconsistencies do not require a special explanation. Achieving perfect consistency is *computationally intractable* due to the combinatorial explosion of consistency checks required as the number of beliefs grows (Cherniak, 1986; Kornblith, 1989). Rather, what requires explanation is the imperfect consistency that people *do* achieve. Sommer et al. proposed accessibility in memory as a boundedly rational method for achieving consistency – i.e., people only remediate inconsistencies when they are simultaneously accessible in working memory.

Sommer and Lombrozo (2025) tested this accessibility hypothesis, predicting that if accessibility in memory is an important mechanism for achieving consistency, then *inaccessibility* of mutually relevant beliefs will allow inconsistencies to escape remediation. To illustrate, consider one set of three questions (“triplets”) used in their study:

Whales

1. Do all whales have hair?
2. Are all whales mammals?
3. Do all mammals have hair?

This *Opaque*-ordered triplet was predicted to induce inconsistent responses because participants would not access information about whales being mammals until the first

¹ For this calculation, see Davis-Stober and Regenwetter (2019).

question had already been answered. In the *Transparent* order, Questions 1 and 3 were reversed, making information about mammals accessible before whales are mentioned.

In line with the accessibility hypothesis, Opaque triplets induced more inconsistent responses relative to Transparent triplets. Additionally, upon reviewing their responses, inconsistent participants often chose to revise their answers, suggesting sensitivity to a norm for changing inconsistent beliefs.

These results indicate that the inaccessibility of relevant information in memory is one reason why inconsistent beliefs might escape remediation. In the case of our introductory example, for instance, it could be that someone would only endorse the president always obeying court orders when the specific court order to stop deporting immigrants is inaccessible. But another possibility is that political inconsistencies arise or persist due to mechanisms that go beyond inaccessibility alone.

Inconsistency in Political Beliefs

In fact, many theories across fields propose that beliefs in certain domains – such as politics, religion, or beliefs tied to one’s identity – involve distinct psychological mechanisms that make them especially prone to (or tolerant of) inconsistency. In psychology, one prominent theory proposes that beliefs about “distal” subjects, including politics, might be held for the utility they provide, rather than the evidence supporting them (Abelson, 1986; see also Loewenstein & Molnar, 2018). Additionally, political beliefs could be biased by motivated cognition, leading people to care less about accuracy and to double-down when faced with dissonance (Van Bavel & Pereira, 2018). More generally, ideological beliefs have been suggested to offer instrumental benefits, e.g., in signaling one’s ingroup membership (Funkhouser, 2022). This value might outweigh the costs of inconsistency. For example, Pinsof, Sears, and Haselton (2023) argue that political beliefs are adopted to serve coalitional interests among allied groups. Thus, liberals might believe that “we should support all unions” but also believe that “we should not support police unions.” This discrepancy is proposed to arise because liberals are politically aligned with workers and opposed to the police. They therefore adopt beliefs that serve their allies’ goals and oppose their outgroups’. Alternatively, classic research in political science suggests that people lack consistent ideologies because they uncritically absorb mixed messages from opposing parties, ultimately arriving at contradictory beliefs (Converse, 1964; Zaller, 1992).² Finally, in philosophy, Van Leeuwen (2023) argues that ideological *credences* are not true beliefs at all, but a distinct cognitive attitude closer to imagination, which tolerates inconsistency. Each of these theories predicts inconsistencies to be more common in the political domain.

² Interestingly, Converse (1964) and Zaller (1992) stress the relevance of accessibility for consistency. Note, however, that both Converse and Zaller were mainly interested in whether beliefs are *ideologically consistent*, in the sense of matching a party platform.

Furthermore, there are reasons to expect that *resolution* of inconsistencies might differ for political beliefs. Abelson’s distal beliefs are theorized to be checked for consistency in a non-rational way (in accordance with Heider’s [1958] *balance principle*). If political beliefs function to preserve an alliance structure between groups, consistency might not be required (Pinsof et al., 2023). Likewise, Van Leeuwen’s (2023) credences might not be subject to consistency norms at all. Additionally, social psychologists have theorized that the personal importance of beliefs mediates dissonance, or the urge to revise inconsistent beliefs (Devine et al., 1999; Festinger, 1957; 1999), allowing important beliefs to avoid revision. These views imply that political inconsistencies may be particularly resistant to change.

The Present Work

In this work, we examined whether political inconsistencies operate similarly to general knowledge inconsistencies. If they do, then we would expect political beliefs to show the two signatures of synchronic inconsistencies observed in Sommer and Lombrozo (2025) for general knowledge beliefs: (1) reviewing one’s inconsistent responses to a triplet should frequently lead to belief revision, reflecting the operation of a norm against inconsistent belief (tested in Study 1), and (2) manipulating the accessibility of information in memory by changing the order in which questions are asked should have a considerable impact on the rate of inconsistent responses (tested in Study 2). By contrast, if political beliefs are more tolerant of inconsistencies and/or driven by mechanisms other than inaccessibility, we would expect political inconsistencies to result in belief change less reliably, and to be less susceptible to order effects. In fact, this is what we find – suggesting the existence of mechanisms beyond accessibility in the formation and/or preservation of inconsistent beliefs, at least in the political domain.

Study 1

Study 1 investigated whether participants hold inconsistent political beliefs and whether they remediate inconsistencies when they are made explicit. Additionally, Study 1 aimed to replicate and extend Sommer and Lombrozo’s (2025) findings regarding synchronically held inconsistencies about general knowledge or Trivia (their “Accessibility” triplets). Here, we moved beyond the measures used in prior work to more directly evaluate whether participants changed their minds or suspended judgment after responding to a triplet.

To elicit political inconsistencies, we developed four new triplets based on Pinsof, Sears, and Haselton (2023).³ These triplets were theorized to make relevant information inaccessible (in the Opaque order) by first asking about a political generalization and only later asking about an exception that was in tension with the generalization (all

We are here concerned with logical inconsistencies among political beliefs, which they also discuss, but more briefly.

³ One of the four (*Autonomy*) was our own invention with a similar structure.

triplets from Studies 1-2 as well as preregistrations are available at: <https://osf.io/je94n>). Example triplets included:

Autonomy

1. Should people always have the right to choose whether to receive a medical intervention?
2. Are vaccines a medical intervention?
3. Should people be required to get vaccines?

Race

1. Is it always wrong to treat people differently on the basis of their race?
2. Does affirmative action treat people differently based on race?
3. Is it sometimes appropriate to have race-based affirmative action?

Participants

We collected data from 1,100 adults based in the U.S. whose first language is English (568 Female, 436 Male, 12 Non-binary, 9 Preferred not to answer; mean age: 42). Participants were recruited via Prolific and were paid \$0.50 for a 2-minute study. We excluded 74 participants who failed one of two attention checks, resulting in a final sample of 1,026.

Procedure

Study 1 used a fully between-subjects design. Participants responded to one of eight triplets (4 Politics; 4 Trivia), all presented in the Opaque order. All questions were multiple choice and included an “I don’t know” option to reduce guessing. As an attention check, participants received an additional triplet of simple questions. After responding to the three questions, participants were re-presented with the full triplet, along with their selected answers, and asked to evaluate whether their answers could all be true at the same time. We were interested in two dependent variables, explained below.

Inconsistent Responses We coded participants’ responses to each triplet for inconsistent patterns. To be conservative, participants who responded with “I don’t know” to any question in a triplet were not classified as inconsistent.

Evaluation Participants were asked, “Can all of your answers be true at the same time?” Options provided were:

1. My answers can all be true at the same time. [All True]
2. My answers might appear as if they cannot all be true at the same time, but there’s a way to interpret them so that they can all be true. [Apparent]
3. My answers cannot all be true at the same time and I have changed my mind or am withholding judgment about one (or more) of them. [Change]
4. My answers cannot all be true at the same time, but I stand by them. [Persist]
5. Other (please write in) [Other]

⁴ Note that this does not mean that all other participants were correct, only that they were not inconsistent by our coding (i.e., they could also have been consistent but incorrect, or said “I don’t know”

Results

Replicating Sommer and Lombrozo (2025), we found that 20.2% of participants provided inconsistent responses for Opaque-ordered triplets in the Trivia condition.⁴ Crucially, we also found that 15.2% of participants responded inconsistently to our Politics triplets. A mixed-effects model predicting inconsistency with random effects for triplet did not find a significant difference across domains ($p = 0.53$).

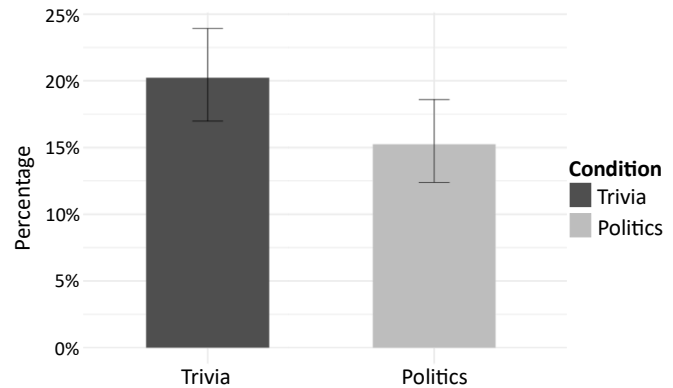


Figure 1: Inconsistent responses by Condition.

Next, we investigated inconsistent participants’ evaluations of their answers upon reviewing the full triplet. Evaluations differed markedly across domains (Figure 2). For Trivia inconsistencies, the modal response (45.2%) was *Change* (i.e., to acknowledge the inconsistency and either revise or suspend a belief). Another 30.8% of participants responded that their answers could all be true at the same time (*All True*), 17.3% responded that the inconsistency was merely *Apparent*, while only 4.8% chose to *Persist*, and 1.9% responded with *Other*.

In sharp contrast to these results, participants who responded inconsistently to Politics triplets were far less likely to respond with *Change* (16.7%). Instead, participants more often responded either that their answers were only *Apparent* inconsistencies (42.3%) or that their answers were *All True* (33.3%). As in the Trivia condition, relatively few participants chose *Persist* (5.1%) or *Other* (2.6%).

A chi-squared test found significant differences in evaluations between Trivia and Politics ($\chi^2 = 21.13$, $p < 0.0001$). However, a Bayesian mixed-effects model accounting for triplet-level variation revealed substantial uncertainty. Model comparison using leave-one-out cross-validation showed negligible differences between models with and without item-level random effects ($\Delta\text{ELPD} = 2.5 \pm 3.6$). We retained the random effects per our preregistration and to acknowledge heterogeneity. A directional hypothesis test on this model found that participants were more likely to categorize their inconsistent Trivia responses as requiring *Change*, relative to Politics (posterior probability = 96%,

to any question). Similar considerations apply to “consistent” participants in the Politics condition, where there is arguably no ground truth.

evidence ratio = 25:1), though wide credible intervals (90% CI [0.12, 2.65]) reflect substantial uncertainty from estimating effects across 5 response categories with only 8 triplets and 182 inconsistent participants.⁵

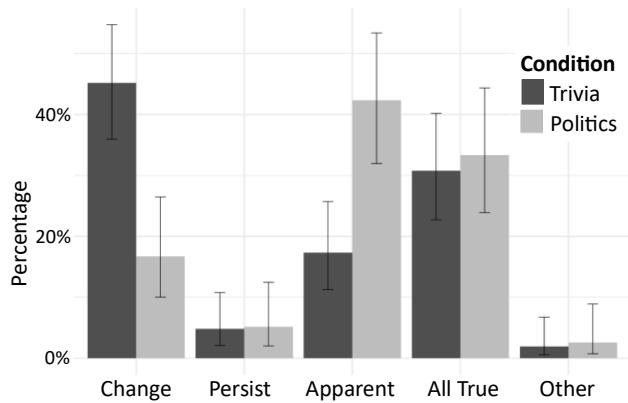


Figure 2: Evaluations by Condition.

Discussion

Study 1 replicated Sommer and Lombrozo's (2025) finding that Opaque-ordered Trivia triplets can induce inconsistent responses. Moreover, our evaluation measure strengthens the interpretation that participants' inconsistent responses reflect true inconsistencies among beliefs and that these inconsistencies are sensitive to a norm for change. The most frequent reaction among inconsistent Trivia participants was to perceive their responses as incompatible and requiring change (or at least suspension of judgment).

More importantly, we found that participants generated inconsistent responses to Politics triplets at similar rates to Trivia triplets. However, unlike Trivia inconsistencies, participants were not inclined to change their beliefs about politics. Instead, participants more often reported that their answers were all true or only apparently inconsistent.

This result indicates that political inconsistencies are indeed treated differently than trivia inconsistencies. However, the mechanism underlying this difference is not obvious. While political beliefs might simply not be subject to norms of inconsistency (e.g., Abelson, 1986; though see Sommer, Nabeshima, & Lombrozo, in preparation), there are other possibilities as well. For example, political beliefs might be very important to participants – or more strongly held in other ways (cf. Eagly & Chaiken, 2014) and therefore relatively difficult to change. We return to these possibilities in the General Discussion, after providing additional evidence – in Study 2 – that the mechanism driving political inconsistencies is in fact different from the inaccessibility mechanism supporting inconsistencies about trivia.

Study 2

Study 2 further investigated the differences between Politics

and Trivia inconsistencies. Specifically, we were interested in testing the hypothesis that political beliefs might be prone to inconsistencies via mechanisms other than inaccessibility. If this is the case, then increasing accessibility should *not* reduce inconsistencies.

Participants

We collected data from 3,401 U.S. adults whose first language is English (1,978 Female, 1,361 Male, 43 Non-binary, 5 Other, 14 Preferred not to answer; mean age 42). Participants were again recruited via Prolific and were paid \$0.50 for a 2-minute study. After excluding 190 participants who failed an attention check, the final sample was 3,211.

Procedure

Like Study 1, Study 2 was fully between-subjects. Again, participants were randomly assigned to one of eight triplets (4 Politics; 4 Trivia) in either the Opaque or Transparent order. This order manipulation preserves the questions within each triplet and only alters the order in which Questions 1 and 3 are presented, making the belief targeted by Question 3 accessible (for Transparent triplets) when Question 1 arrives. Otherwise, the procedure was identical to Study 1: participants responded to their triplet (as well as an attention check “triplet”), reviewed the full triplet along with their answers, and evaluated whether their answers could all be true at the same time.

Results

Once again, Trivia triplets produced more inconsistent patterns of responses in the Opaque order (17.8%) than in the Transparent order (8.4%; see Figure 3). Interestingly, this pattern was much reduced for Politics triplets. While the Opaque order induced slightly more inconsistent responses (11.9%) relative to the Transparent order (10%), this difference was much smaller than in the Trivia condition. A mixed-effects binomial logistic regression predicting inconsistent responses with Order (Opaque vs. Transparent) and Condition (Trivia vs. Politics) as fixed effects along with random effects for Triplets found a significant interaction between Trivia and Order. Transparent-ordered Trivia triplets were less likely to induce inconsistent responses ($\beta = -2.05$, $SE = 0.24$, $p < 0.0001$). There was no significant main effect of Condition or Order ($ps > 0.18$).

Next, we examined participants' evaluations of their answers. Figure 4 displays evaluations by Condition and Order. Evaluations again showed striking differences between conditions. Like Study 1, the modal response for Opaque-ordered Trivia inconsistencies was to change one's mind (42%). *Change* responses were lower for Transparent-ordered Trivia triplets (17.9%), which could mean that people who answer their triplet with the relevant information accessible are satisfied with their answers.

⁵ The difference in *Apparent* evaluations between Trivia and Politics conditions was not significant in the random effects model,

but was credibly different in the fixed-effects-only model (posterior probability = 98%, evidence ratio = 60:1, 90% CI [-0.19, -1.48]).

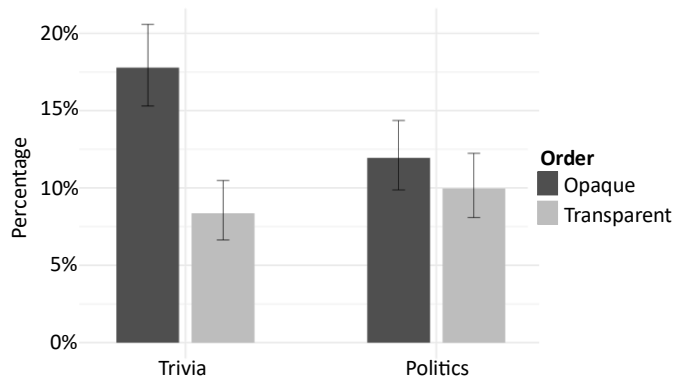


Figure 3: Inconsistent responses by Condition and Order.

Again, like Study 1, Opaque-ordered Politics triplets received far fewer *Change* evaluations (12.5%), though – interestingly – Transparent-ordered Politics triplets received even fewer *Change* evaluations (3.75%). Politics triplets were more likely to receive *All True* (36.5% Opaque; 42.5% Transparent) or *Apparent* (41.7% Opaque; 37.5% Transparent) evaluations, with little difference across orders. Trivia triplets also received moderate responses of *All True* (32.2% Opaque; 40.3% Transparent) and *Apparent* (18.2% Opaque; 32.8% Transparent), with a slight tendency for increased rates in the Transparent order. This might further support the interpretation that participants who selected their responses with the relevant context accessible believed that their responses were appropriate. Rates of *Persist* (Trivia: 3.5% Opaque; 7.5% Transparent; Politics: 7.3% Opaque; 12.5% Transparent) and *Other* (Trivia: 4.2% Opaque; 1.5% Transparent; Politics: 2.1% Opaque; 3.8% Transparent) evaluations were relatively low across the board.

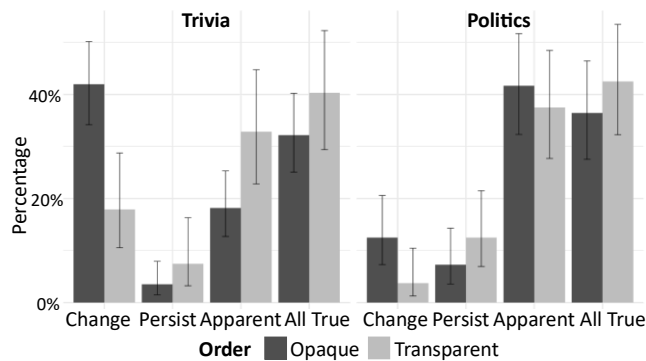


Figure 4: Inconsistent participants' evaluations by Condition and Order. *Other* evaluations are omitted for readability.

To analyze evaluations, we fit a Bayesian mixed-effects multinomial regression predicting evaluations from Condition (Trivia vs. Politics), Order (Opaque vs. Transparent), and their interaction, with random intercepts for the 8 triplets. The model found that the difference in *Change* evaluations between Trivia and Politics triplets was significant ($b = 1.49$, 90% CI [0.61, 2.44], posterior probability = 99%, evidence ratio = 167:1). Additionally, the

model found a significant main effect of Order on *Change* evaluations – but no significant interaction between Order and Condition. That is, the Opaque order was associated with more *Change* responses across *both* conditions ($b = 1.47$, 90% CI = [0.33, 2.77], posterior probability = 99%, evidence ratio = 68:1). No other effects were significant.

Discussion

Replicating Study 1, we found that Opaque-ordered Trivia triplets induced inconsistent responses and participants often reported that they would like to change their answers, suggesting their responses represented true inconsistencies among beliefs. These findings are also consistent with Sommer and Lombrozo (2025), as are our results that the Transparent order reduced inconsistent responses for Trivia items. Additionally, we replicated Study 1's finding that Opaque-ordered Politics triplets induce inconsistent responses, and these inconsistencies are *not* associated with participants changing their minds. Instead, participants were again inclined to say that their inconsistent responses to Politics triplets could all be true at the same time or that any inconsistencies were merely apparent.

Critically, order effects were much weaker for Politics triplets. While the Opaque order slightly increased political inconsistencies, this effect was nonsignificant. This weighs against inaccessibility as an explanation for political inconsistencies. Notably, however, there was a significant main effect of order on *Change* evaluations, with no interaction – i.e., this effect applied to both Trivia and Politics triplets. One possible interpretation of this result is that while political inconsistencies are driven by mechanisms other than inaccessibility for most people, inaccessibility does play a role for some (perhaps for “fanatics” [Van Leeuwen, 2023] who hold ideological beliefs as factual beliefs or people who are not strongly committed to their political beliefs). Despite this weak evidence of an accessibility effect, there remain far fewer *Change* responses to politics triplets, suggesting that political beliefs respond differently to inconsistencies.

Finally, the absence of an order effect for politics triplets speaks against an alternative explanation of the politics results from Studies 1 and 2. The alternative is that participants' answers reflect merely inconsistent responses (i.e., not inconsistent beliefs) due to misinterpreting one or more of the questions (see Sommer and Lombrozo [2025]'s “Ambiguity” triplets). For example, participants could have interpreted “medical intervention” in Question 1 of the Autonomy triplet to refer to medical interventions that only have an impact on oneself, and broaden their interpretation to interventions with public health implications only after vaccines are mentioned. If inconsistent responses were due to different default interpretations of common terms, we would expect question order to shift which interpretation dominated, resulting in different responses across orders. The absence of an order effect therefore suggests that participants did not misunderstand a question, as inconsistencies persisted even with the full context provided by Transparent triplets.

General Discussion

In an early comment on consistency theories in psychology, Rosenberg (1968) observed that “All consistency theories, having put forth an axiomatic proposition that inconsistency is motivating, then go on to acknowledge that it is often nothing of the sort.” Our findings indicate that this acknowledgement may be warranted for political beliefs.

Holding inconsistent beliefs is widely considered irrational. While several researchers allow that unrecognized inconsistencies can persist (e.g., Harman, 1986; Stalnaker, 1984), a line is generally drawn upon recognition of the inconsistency: “An agent who discovers a conflict between [their] separate beliefs must modify them in some way. One cannot agree to disagree with oneself” (Stalnaker, 1984). Despite this fact, many of our participants appear disinclined to modify apparently inconsistent responses.

Across two preregistered studies, participants offered inconsistent sets of responses to general knowledge (Trivia) and political questions. While political inconsistencies are widely assumed, these findings are the first – to our knowledge – to offer systematic evidence for such inconsistencies. Anecdotal or polling evidence (such as the poll we cite in our introductory example) does not guarantee that people hold inconsistent beliefs and does not assess people’s reactions to any inconsistent responses they provide.

While trivia and political beliefs can both be inconsistent, the mechanisms by which inconsistencies arise and persist might be distinct. In Study 1, we found greater tolerance for inconsistencies among political beliefs. While trivia inconsistencies were most frequently associated with participants changing their minds, this was far less likely for political inconsistencies. We replicated this result in Study 2, and additionally found that while the prevalence of trivia inconsistencies was significantly affected by question order, politics did not show similar effects. This suggests that political inconsistencies were not driven by mere inaccessibility of relevant information in memory.

These results raise an important question: what mechanism(s) explains how political inconsistencies arise and are maintained? While our present data cannot answer this definitively, there are several possibilities.

First, in line with many existing theories (e.g., Abelson, 1986; Pinsof, Sears, & Haselton, 2023; Van Leeuwen, 2023), there might indeed be something qualitatively different about political beliefs such that they resist remediation. For example, perhaps political beliefs are sufficiently important to people to be (somehow) resistant to change (Festinger, 1957). Or political beliefs (or credences; Van Leeuwen, 2023) could be adopted for social reasons, such as signaling in-group loyalty (Funkhouser, 2022), which could immunize them against consistency pressure.

Second, it is possible that participants genuinely do not

view their responses as inconsistent. There are several ways this might occur. Participants might reason their way into an exception or alternative interpretation that renders their beliefs consistent (Petrović & Žeželj, 2025; cf. Henle, 1962).⁶ Political inconsistencies might be especially prone to motivated reasoning to avoid relinquishing important beliefs. There is also evidence that inconsistent participants are less able to recognize their own inconsistency than to detect inconsistency in others, though the mechanism underlying this lack of recognition remains elusive (Luptáková et al., 2025). An additional possibility we are investigating is that deontic obligations are unlike descriptive claims in tolerating conflict (cf. Nute, 1997). For example, one might believe that people should always keep their promises but that one should break a promise in an emergency. This example shares a deontic structure with our Politics items (and, indeed, with many common examples of political inconsistencies), yet it seems plausible that one could agree with both premises without contradiction (cf. Davidson, 1969; see also Ganzach et al., 2023 for a similar observation in the context of general attitudes vs. actions in a given time and place).

Third, it is possible that participants perceive a conflict, but do not think it is strong enough to change their mind. As an illustration, Laudan (1978) observes that if two scientific theories are realized to be in tension with one another, this represents a weakness for both theories, but does not require abandoning either. Instead, one might hold out hope that the tension can be resolved by additional research. Relatedly, if political beliefs are often formed by deference to authorities, people might lack awareness of the underlying reasons that authorities have for their beliefs. However, they might still believe that the authorities could reconcile the inconsistency, even if they cannot (see Sommer, in press). While our *Persist* option was intended to capture such evaluations, it is possible that participants with this impression felt that the inconsistency was merely *Apparent*.

These mechanisms are not mutually exclusive. Clarifying which are operative – and when – is critical for addressing the relationship between political beliefs and inconsistency. In turn, understanding how inconsistencies motivate belief change is essential for theories of belief, political disagreement, and resistance to persuasion.

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⁶ For example, in our *Autonomy* triplet, participants might retroactively restrict their definition of “medical interventions that should be mandatory” to “personal interventions,” rendering their answers consistent. While similar definitional restrictions are

theoretically available for trivia triplets (e.g., perhaps “all mammals have hair” could be restricted to land mammals in the *Whales* triplet), trivia beliefs might induce less motivation to search for such alternative interpretations.

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