JUDGEMENTS OF PROPAGANDA NEAR AND FAR:

NATIONAL IDENTITY AND MEDIA EVALUATIONS

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Abstract

We often judge others differently than we judge ourselves. This study aimed to investigate whether this asymmetry in judgements also exists for extensions of the self and the other: judging one's own nation compared to a foreign nation. We also asked whether these judgements would be moderated by national identity such that Canadians who identified more strongly with their nation would judge foreign media as more like propaganda than Canadian media. To assess such judgements, we created identical propaganda videos that ostensibly originated from either the Canadian government or a foreign government. When judgements of propaganda were measured covertly, we found no difference in judgements of Canadians and foreign videos. However, when asked explicitly about propaganda, Canadians judged videos from their own nation as more like propaganda compared to foreign videos. Contrary to our prediction, Canadian national identity did not moderate propaganda judgements.

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Recognizing our own flaws can be difficult and uncomfortable, whereas finding these very same flaws in others tends to be effortless. Oftentimes, we attribute the actions of others to their innate character but use context to justify our own identical actions (i.e., the fundamental attribution error; Ross 1977). If we make asymmetrical judgments of ourselves compared to judging others, something similar might occur for extended aspects of our identity, such as our national identity. In this study we ask, do people judge the actions of other nations more harshly than the actions of their own nation? And is this more pronounced among those who identify more with their own country? To help answer these questions, we employ a tightly-controlled experiment in which participants judged the degree to which an ostensibly government-made video can be considered propaganda, with the video attributed to either their own country or a foreign country and the content of the video held constant.

Asymmetrical Judgments of the Self and Others

Judging others more harshly than ourselves is far from a new phenomenon, as one can find very early examples including documentation within ancient religious texts:

Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the

plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of

your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye?

(Matt. 7: 3-5, New International Version Bible)

Although this analogy was offered millennia ago, it still rings true today. How is it that we are so perceptive of everyone else's specks while ignoring the planks in our own eyes? In current psychological research, this phenomenon is known as moral hypocrisy (Batson et al., 1999; Hale & Pillow, 2015), for which several possible explanations have been proposed.

One explanation is that noticing the flaws of others is not as personally costly as noticing our own flaws. If I inform someone that they have a habit of interrupting others, my work is complete. I have highlighted a flaw, but it is not my responsibility to remedy the bad habit. On the other hand, if I reflect on my own habit of interrupting others, I must confront possible feelings of discomfort, regret, or guilt (Tangney, 1991; Smith et al., 2002; Wolf et al., 2010). Since these negative feelings often motivate a desire to change, I am now responsible in an actionable way (De Hooge et al., 2010; Lickel et al., 2014). To avoid the personal cost of change, one might be motivated to explain away their own poor behaviours to avoid cognitive dissonance (Kunda, 1990; Festinger, 1957). Cognitive dissonance describes the experience of a discrepancy between actions and beliefs and usually results in discomfort (Festinger, 1957). A common example is the paradox between those who care about the wellbeing of animals but choose to eat meat (Loughnan, Bastian, & Haslam, 2014). To rid oneself of cognitive dissonance, a person may either remedy their disjointed actions (e.g., stop eating meat) or compromise their beliefs with justifications (e.g., "The meat is already being made, I can't stop the meat industry because I'm just one person").

This leads to another possible explanation for asymmetrical judgements: the ability to justify our own behaviour. We have an unparalleled amount of information about ourselves and often rely on this extra information to justify our own poor behaviours. It is easy to feel less guilty for snapping at someone when we know we haven't slept well the past few days, for example. In contrast, we lack the same information about the sleeping habits of others that might usefully explain their flawed behaviors. This asymmetry is the basis for the Fundamental Attribution Error, in which negative judgments of others are attributed to their intrinsic quality, whereas the same judgments of the self are attributed to contextual factors (Ross, 1977, Berry &

Frederickson 2015; Hooper et al., 2015). Apart from over-attending to the contextual factors that might excuse our own behaviour, we can also fall prey to the belief that we are more multifaceted than others (Sande et al., 1988). This belief in our multi-faceted nature can easily justify our negative actions by focusing on our positive attributes (i.e., self-serving bias; Heider, 1958; Campbell & Sedikides, 1999). Although an asymmetry in judgments of the self versus others is well-established, one aspect that has not been much explored is whether this asymmetry extends to broader aspects of the self. Do similar errors in judgement also occur for extensions of the self, like when comparing one's own nation with a foreign nation?

Nations as Extensions of the Self

The nature of one's self-concept includes factors related to one's surroundings and individual roles, called "self-extensions" (e.g., I am a dentist, I am a mother, I am Estonian; Ronsenberg, 1986; Lancaster & Foddy 1988). National identity is one salient self-extension, in which one's sense of belonging to their nation informs how they see themselves as an individual (Huddy & Khatib, 2007). Contemporary work on national identity stems from empirical work demonstrating a tendency to create self-extensions for one's group, even when the nature of that group is rooted in the most trivial of ties (e.g., our group overestimates dots in a guessing task; Tajfel 1970; see also Tajfel 1974; Clement & Krueger, 2002; Gramzow & Gaertner, 2005). Compared to these meaningless group ties, national identity represents a far more meaningful and influential self-extension, since it is shaped by powerful cultural narratives (Hammack, 2008). Because we draw clear distinctions between the self and others that bias our judgments, it follows that we are likely to do the same with respect to our own nation and other nations, based on a sense of national identity. In other words, national identity may cloud judgements of our

own nation in the same way we experience clouded judgements of the self, and clarify judgements of other nations the way we experience clarity when judging others.

Possible Asymmetries when Judging our own Nation and Foreign Nations

Just as it can be personally costly to identify our own flaws, it can also be costly to identify the flaws of our nation. Bringing attention to another nation's negative actions highlights a flaw, but it is not my civic responsibility to remedy the actions of another nation. To the extent that we include our nation within our sense of self, criticisms of our nation have far more severe negative implications. Similar to the negative emotions we experience when identifying our own flaws (Tangney, 1991; Smith et al., 2002; Wolf et al., 2010), we may experience the same discomfort when identifying our nation's flaws. One form of avoiding negative emotions and the personal costs of change is to find ways to justify our own nation's flaws.

Just as we can explain away our personal flaws with help of contextual information (Ross, 1977, Berry & Frederickson 2015; Hooper et al., 2015), it follows that we can justify the flaws of our nation in the same way. This is the Fundamental Attribution Error at a macro-level, judging foreign nations solely by their actions while crafting contextual explanations for our own nation's actions. Again, it is the illusion of complexity that leads us astray, with the multifaceted self becoming one's multifaceted nation (Sande et al., 1988; Monson, Tanke, & Lund, 1980). Seeing other nations in a simple and one-dimensional fashion is just another way of widening the gap between the self and others. This tendency is also likely to vary across individuals. To the extent that we are invested in our nation—possessing a stronger sense of national identity—we seem more likely to engage in asymmetric judgments for the actions of our nation compared to those of a foreign one.

Moderation by Strength of National Identity

National identity, like any self-extension, is subject to varying degrees of strength depending on one's sense of connectedness to the nation and is experienced by people across the political spectrum (Huddy & Khatib, 2007). How might a stronger sense of national identity influence judgements of other nations? We propose that the more central one's nation is to their identity, the greater the self-other distinction when judging foreign nations. If one's identity extends to their nation in a meaningful way, criticisms of the nation may be experienced as self-criticisms. In fact, for those with a strong sense of national identity, we can experience strong "self-feelings" tied to the actions of the nation, feelings like pride or shame (Rosenberg, 1986). We therefore suspect that it is more difficult for those who have a strong sense of national identity to judge their own nation accurately, for the very same reasons we experience clouded judgments of the self.

It is also possible that those with a strong sense of national identity over-attend to information that justifies the actions of their nation, in parallel with what occurs at the individual level. When confronted with a national action that seems questionable, producing cognitive conflict, those with a strong national identity may be equipped with positive counter-information to justify that action. In contrast, it is unlikely that the same contextual information is considered when making judgements of foreign nations, in part because such information is likely unknown. Importantly, national identity is a self-extension of substantial consequence. Citizenship in any given nation affords all kinds of advantages and disadvantages that affect quality of life (Poushter, 2020). Therefore, those with a strong sense of national identity may be more motivated to see their own nation in a favourable light and more susceptible to judging foreign nations more harshly because they have a personal stake in the former.

Government Propaganda as a Target of Critique

Every nation can be judged on a multitude of factors, such as government spending, healthcare, education, or infrastructure. However, the use of propaganda—media produced with an intent to persuade—is the only means by which governments can rally support for their actions (e.g., advertisements touting public transit projects). As a medium, propaganda necessarily communicates national values and champions causes that align with government agendas. Given its usage in times of war or under brutal regimes, the term 'propaganda' is almost exclusively seen as negative in valence. However, its conceptual definition contains some nuance.

In its original usage, propaganda merely meant to "propagate or disseminate information", derived from the Latin verb *propagare* (Kim, n.d.; OED: Simpson & Weiner, 1989). A modern definition, from the field of communications, is as follows:

> Propaganda is neutrally defined as a systematic form of purposeful persuasion that attempts to influence the emotions, attitudes, opinions, and actions of specified target audiences for ideological, political or commercial purposes (Nelson, 1996).

Though there is an abundance of theories and conceptualizations dedicated to propaganda, this definition aptly summarizes the most popular scholarship on the subject (see Definitions of Propaganda: Cull, Culbert, & Welch 2003).

Government propaganda. According to the definition above, all governments produce propaganda. Whether it is encouraging citizens to recycle or enlist in the military, these messages involve systematic attempts to persuade citizens. In line with theories of self-extension (Ronsenberg, 1986; Lancaster & Foddy 1988), it stands to reason that citizens may look upon

government propaganda favourably if the nation in question is an extension of themselves. For example, one of Canada's greatest propaganda efforts took place in the 1940's when the National Film Board (NFB) of Canada released *Peoples of Canada* to promote multiculturalism (Cull et al., 2003). This film subsequently became a staple of Canadian national identity and the NFB a real point of pride for Canadians. All over the world, governments produce persuasive media that promotes their values and those whose identities lie with the nation are positioned to endorse it.

Although we established that propaganda can technically be positive or negative in nature, lay beliefs surrounding propaganda are predominantly negative because the term is often used in association with regimes such as Communist China (PEW, 2021). If producing propaganda is seen as a "fault", there is potential for asymmetrical judgements of national propaganda depending on its context. As one scholar put it, "After World War I the word [propaganda] came to be applied to 'what you don't like of the other fellow's publicity" (McKean, 1949). Because propaganda is an action by a nation that is viewed in a negative light, it is a perfect target for examining the potential for asymmetric evaluations based on nations as an extension of the self.

There is already some evidence that propaganda is judged asymmetrically in popular culture. For example, one American entertainment magazine, *Variety*, frequently reports on propaganda efforts in film. Unsurprisingly, the vast majority of these articles focus on China, a country heavily associated with government propaganda. One such article details the controversial actions from the Chinese National Film Administration that require theatres to screen two propaganda films per week (Davis, 2021). Although this kind of mandate is concerning and certainly worth reporting, *Variety* is not particularly even-handed in its criticism of government involvement in film. As an American publication, similar critiques could be

levelled at their own government. The United States Department of Defense (DoD) plays a critical role in curating the way their military is portrayed in film, with U.S. taxpayers "footing the bill" (Keegan, 2011). Interestingly, the U.S. government's involvement in the making of entertainment is hardly considered suspect to the majority of the public. In fact, the DoD has a Twitter account where they publicly champion their efforts to influence Hollywood films:

> It's #Oscars90 Sunday and did you know the #DoD works with #Hollywood to ensure the #military is correctly portrayed in films? Find out how these partnerships work: https://go.usa.gov/xneSX Be sure to follow our #Oscars coverage over on @DoDOutreach! #cooljobs #KnowYourMil (@DeptofDefense, 2018)

When it comes to China, *Variety* considers the meddling of the government in media to be newsworthy. But when it comes to their own nation, this same criticism remains absent

Measuring Propaganda. Unfortunately, there are no established means within scholarly work for measuring the degree to which something is viewed to be propaganda. Although many papers on propaganda and psychology exist (e.g., Doob, 1935; Sproule, 1987; Marek, 2008; Chakotin, 2017), none measured perceptions of propaganda. It was therefore necessary to develop items to measure the degree to which a given media could be considered propaganda. Although a face-valid question is informative (i.e., "Is this media propaganda?"), we wished to also measure perceptions of propaganda covertly, which would allow for a more powerful within-subjects design. To develop this covert measure, we relied on theoretical scholarship on propaganda which identifies four main components: Persuasion, Bias, Emotion, and Symbolism.

Persuasion. What makes propaganda unique from other media is that it has a discernable goal distinct from entertainment: to persuade. This goal may involve direct action (e.g., take the

bus, invest in local tourism) or it may be the indirect adoption of certain ideas (e.g., freedom is the highest good, support the war overseas). Notable propaganda theorists have argued that that the only "true propaganda is successful propaganda" (Ellul, 1912-1944 as cited in Cull et al., 2003), meaning that if a media fails to persuade, it fails to be propaganda. This is an extreme standard, but the sentiment gives us insight the critical role of persuasion.

Bias. Although propaganda can serve positive or negative goals, it cannot escape from being biased (Laswell, 1927; Lumley, 1933; Doob, 1935; Qualter, 1985; Backer, 1993; Cull et al., 2003). Because its goal is to persuade, it might be biased towards a particular goal or cause. We selected bias as a key element of propaganda because it describes the orientation of the media and is a feature that viewers are relatively well equipped to detect. Said another way, "The purpose of education is to broaden one's knowledge, by offering new information, whereas the purpose of propaganda is to narrow one's perceptions" (Welch 2013). This narrowing of perceptions is the primary role of bias in the creation of propaganda.

Emotion. For propaganda to be engaging, like any other media, it must connect with its audience. Appeals to emotion do not need to be particularly dramatic, although some propaganda takes this approach (e.g., a photograph of a cancer patient accompanied by the caption, "This is what dying of lung cancer looks like"; Healy, 2011). Some scholars argue that the primary emotions of propaganda are love and hate (Laswell, 1927), whereas others focus on the feeling of stress evoked by propaganda (Bartlett, 1973) or state that anything non-rational forms the emotional component of propaganda (Albig, 1939). Regardless of the particular emotion in question, propaganda relies on appeals to emotion in order to be successful.

Symbolism. Symbolism, the use of images to express ideas, is one of the key techniques through which propaganda serves to persuade and elicit emotions. The most well-known

discourse around symbolism in propaganda focuses on the mass media (Chomsky & Herman, 1995). For many theorists, mass media is the primary means of producing propaganda, using symbols and visual spectacle to work political ideologies into the minds of the viewer (Chomsky & Herman, 1995). The more that government propaganda resembles the style and feel of mass media, the greater the chance of its success. For example, many police departments post and circulate memes that include trending symbols of the popular culture (Wood & McGovern, 2021). Memes may be considered the modern day 'leaflet propaganda', with memes now playing the role of propaganda flyers dropped from planes during wartime (Nieubuurt, 2021). In order for propaganda to be effective, it must employ symbols that connect with a target audience (Chomsky & Herman 1995; Benaim, 2018; Nieubuurt, 2021).

Current Study

In this study, we examine whether judgements of one's own nation differ from judgements of foreign nations with respect to propaganda. Media produced by a government provides a useful target for evaluating diversity in judging national actions, because these media can elicit a wide spectrum of judgements, from helpful and harmless to potentially harmful and disturbing. Our study asks whether, for example, a government-sponsored video about national pride appears more or less like propaganda depending on whether it ostensibly originates in a foreign nation or our own. We have two hypotheses: (1) videos will receive higher ratings of propaganda when it ostensibly originates from a foreign nation, compared to when it originates from one's own country, and (2) this effect will be moderated by national identity, in that the positive effect of foreignness on propaganda ratings will be stronger among those who score higher in national identity.

Method

Participants

Participants were recruited from the online crowd-sourcing platform Prolific Academic. Because our manipulation is a comparison of national versus foreign media, it was important that our sample reflect monocultural Canadians. For example, a bicultural person who identifies as Japanese Canadian will likely view an example of Japanese media as less foreign than our manipulation intends. To employ a particularly Westernized Canadian sample, we imposed some necessary constraints to participate in the study. Participants had to be (1) born in Canada, (2) monolingual, (3) monocultural, and (4) participants could not have a history of living abroad. Including these exclusion criteria, we recruited 304 participants. Following our preregistered exclusion criteria (https://osf.io/h28d9/?view_only=c4446c0615844d168d17911f10bc70dc), we removed participants who failed the attention-checks (n = 11) and had more than 5% of their data missing (n = 1). In addition, we employed two other exclusion criteria that were not pre-registered but were enacted prior to any hypothesis-testing. First, we elected to remove participants who were not born in Canada or were not Canadian citizens (as per the requirements to participate, n = 2). Second, to increase the validity of our data by reducing demand characteristics, we also removed participants who indicated that they knew the study was about propaganda (n = 7). This left a final sample of 283 Canadians with an average age of 32.43 years (SD = 11.63). The sample was predominantly female (195 females, 81 males, 4 nonbinary individuals, 1 genderqueer individual, and 2 trans females). The majority of our sample made over $50,000 annually (n = 209), grew up in a city (n = 225), and attended university (n = 164).

Country of Origin

The independent variable was country of origin for the presented media: Canadian or Foreign. In the Canadian condition, all videos were portrayed as created in Canada and in reference to Canada. In the Foreign condition, videos were attributed to one of the following three countries: Ecuador, Japan, or Armenia. Results across these three countries were collapsed to form the Foreign condition. Using a counterbalanced within-subjects design in which all randomized variables were presented equally across the entire sample, participants were exposed to both the Canadian and Foreign conditions, allowing us to assess judgements of propaganda for media originating in one's own nation (Canadian) compared to other nations (Foreign) with maximum power (Maxwell, Delaney, & Kelley, 2004).

Foreign Country Selection. We included several countries for the Foreign condition to ensure that judgements of Foreign videos were not dependent on one particular country. The selection of these countries was carefully considered, taking into account both reputation and perceived foreignness of the nation. We endeavoured to select countries that were perceived as distant from Canada in their culture, but without a widely held negative reputation. For example, if we included videos from Australia or the United Kingdom, we may not detect a difference in propaganda judgements since Canadians view these countries as Western nations similar to Canada. Countries like China or Russia, on the other hand, are seen as quite different from Canada, but any difference in judgements could be due to the fact that Canadians are likely to hold these countries in contempt thanks to their global reputations (Silver, Devlin, & Huang, 2021; Vice, 2020).

Fortunately, cultural psychologists have created a publicly available database that contains the 'cultural distance' score between any two given countries (Bell et al., n.d.). These scores are

calculated based on responses to the World Values Survey (World Values Survey Association, 2014). To determine which countries we would use for our Foreign condition, we selected 16 countries that were high in cultural distance score compared to Canada and whose reputations were not obviously in question (e.g., China, Russia). Next, we ran a pilot study using an undergraduate sample of monocultural Canadians at York University (N = 67) to determine which countries had the most favourable reputation. This pilot study identified three countries that were maximally distant, but most favourable in reputation: Japan (Reputation = 2.67 [all scores out of 5, higher scores indicate a more positive reputation]; Distance = 3.26), Armenia, (Reputation = 2.24; Distance = 4.13) and Ecuador (Reputation = 2.23; Distance = 4.05).

Stimuli

Topics. Due to our within-subjects design, with participants watching both Canadian and Foreign videos, it was necessary for us to present videos with two different topics (to conceal our experimental manipulation). This also allows us to examine whether our results generalize beyond judgements on a single issue. Participants therefore saw one video that promoted national pride and another that promoted the police department for that given nation's capital city. These topics were selected because of they are realistic examples of government media that could be viewed as propaganda. In addition, it was advantageous for these videos to differ in their possible controversiality since we are collapsing across topic for the analysis, again helping us to demonstrate generalizability.

Stimuli. Considerable effort was dedicated to making these videos appear identical apart from their national origin. To make good on this goal, it was critical that depictions of people in the videos were race-neutral. This was a strategic choice to avoid triggering any negative biases that may emerge from the detection of racialized features. Consequently, we elected to use

animated characters instead of live action photos to reduce the salience of race. To further

obscure ethnicity, we employed a student animator to design characters whose complexion and

features were simplistic and universal (See Figure 1). This allowed us to employ the exact same

visuals regardless of country of origin. Beyond these characterizations, all other features of the

videos were held constant, including fonts, phrases, music, and transitions. Videos are publicly

available for viewing on the Open Science Framework

(https://osf.io/h28d9/?view_only=c4446c0615844d168d17911f10bc70dc).
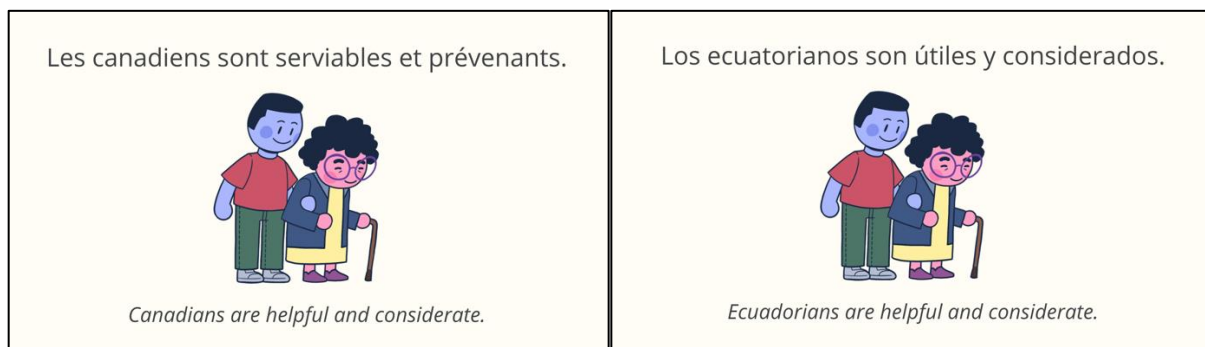
Figure 1. Example of the neutral design used for both National and Foreign conditions.

Per a within-subjects design, participants watched one propaganda video for each condition,

Canadian and Foreign, with order randomly determined, and the two topics also randomized and

counter-balanced (national pride and support for police; See Figure 2).
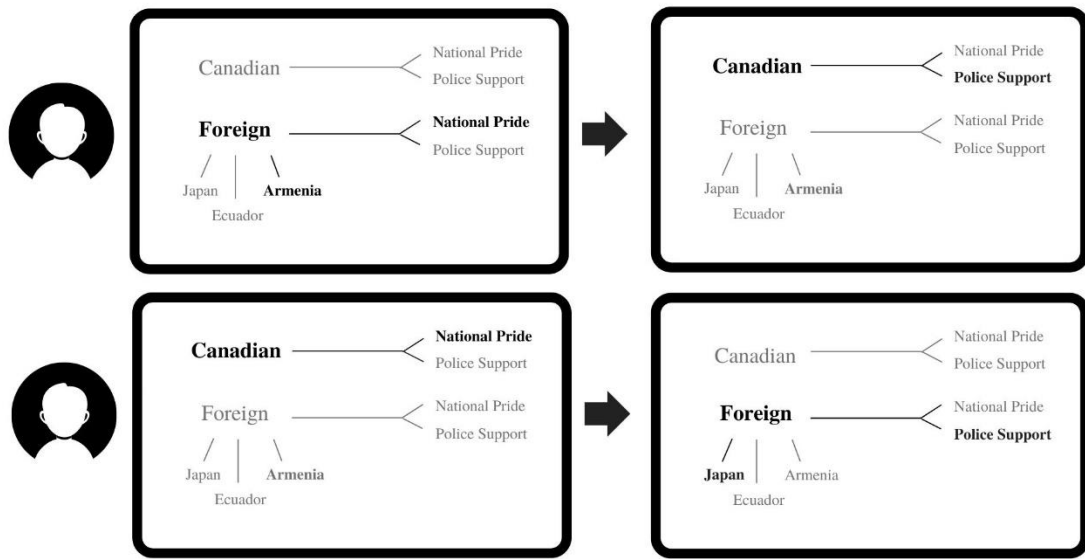
Figure 2. Visualization of different trial outcomes. Every participant will see a Canadian and Foreign video and be exposed to Topic 1 (National Pride) and Topic 2 (Police Support). The order and combinations of these variables will differ per participant.

Ratings

All measures in this study used a 5-point Likert Scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly Agree*).

Propaganda Scores. To measure the degree to which participants perceived the stimuli as propaganda, we used a covert measure of propaganda consisting of 4 items, along with a single-item overtly measuring propaganda. The covert measure contained items that were derived from prior work on propaganda (Doob, 1935; Lasswell, 1935; Cull et al., 2003). As described in the introduction, the four critical components of propaganda are Persuasion, Bias, Emotion, and Symbolism. Consequently, we employed the following 4 items to measure each of these aspects, (1) The creators of this video are trying to be persuasive, (2) This video is biased, (3) This video uses emotion to convince the audience of something, and (4) This video uses symbols to change

the mind of the audience. Responses were averaged across these 4 items to form our covert measure of propaganda. Internal reliability was low for this measure, likely due to the fact that these items aim to measure notably different aspects of propaganda (Video 1 $\omega = 0.55$; 95% CI: .46, .64; Video 2 $\omega = 0.60$; 95% CI: .50, .67). Intermixed with these items were six filler questions intended to conceal the purpose of the study by obscuring our measurement of propaganda. These items related to the aesthetic properties of the video (e.g., "This video is creative") and were not analyzed.

Because our covert measure was new and untested, it was imperative that we ask participants directly whether the videos they watched could be classified as propaganda to ensure we were capturing our construct of interest. An overt item, "This video about [Country] was propaganda" responded to using a 5 point scale (1 = *Strongly Disagree*, 5 = *Strongly Agree*), was presented after the covert item and after participants described what they thought the study was about.

Reputation Control. To rule out alternative explanations for any condition differences, we measured participants' judgements of the countries featured in the Foreign condition. If participants believe that a country has a poor reputation, then this reputation may lead to the media being judged as propaganda rather than any self-other difference. To rule out this possibility, we measured each country's reputation with respect to propaganda-relevant qualities, using 3 items: (1) [Country] is democratic, (2) [Country] is controlling (R), and (3) [Country] is a fair place to live. Responses were averaged across these items, with higher scores indicating a more positive reputation ($\omega = 0.68$; 95% CI: .56, .77). We also asked these same questions about Canada, but consistent with our pre-registration, we did not include them as control variables in the analysis ($\omega = 0.68$; 95% CI: .58, .74).

Cultural Distance Manipulation Check. To ensure that the countries in the Foreign condition were perceived as culturally different from Canada, we measured cultural distance using 3 items: (1) [Country] is foreign to me, (2) [Country] feels far away to me, and (3) The average person from [Country] is quite different from myself. Responses were averaged across these items with higher scores indicating greater cultural distance ($\omega = 0.68$; 95% CI: .58, .74). For comparison, the same questions were asked about Canada ($\omega = 0.68$; 95% CI: .57, .77).

National Identity Measure. We hypothesized that National Identity may act as a moderator, which we measured using two different scales. First, we adapted the Inclusion of the Other in the Self Scale, which is a single item graphical scale assessing how much another person or group is incorporated into one's sense of self based on several pairs of overlapping circles (Aron et al., 1992). We presented circles labeled with "Self" and "Canada" to measure how much they feel that Canada is a part of their self, a measure we refer to as the Canadian-IOS (CAN-IOS). See Figure 3 below
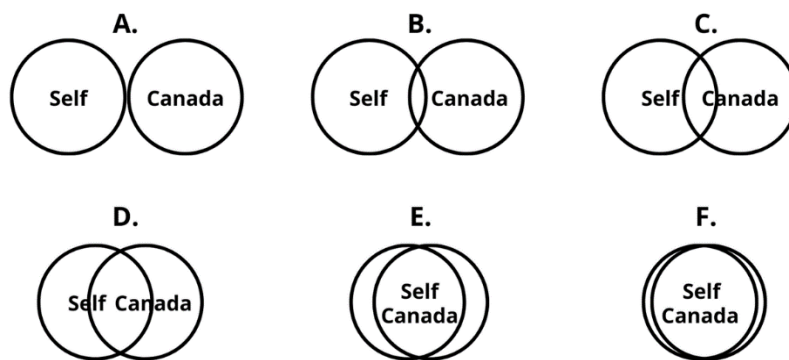
Figure 3. Canadian-IOS Scale.

The benefit of this measure is that it provides a clear picture of the degree to which participants

centralize their Canadian identity without the use of language, avoiding any political

connotations to national identity.

In addition to the CAN-IOS, we measured national identity using the National Identity

items from seminal work on American national identity (Huddy & Khatib, 2007), but adapted for

Canadians. The adapted scale included the following four items: (1) How important is being

Canadian to you?, (2) To what extent do you see yourself as a typical Canadian?, (3) How well

does the term Canadian describe you?, and (4) When talking about Canadians, how often do you

say "we" instead of "they"? ($\omega = 0.80$; 95% CI: .72, .85). .

Procedure

Those who met our eligibility criteria on Prolific Academic and elected to participate

were redirected to our Qualtrics survey (www.Qualtrics.com). In consenting to participate,

participants were told that their task was to evaluate the aesthetic quality of infographic videos.

After providing consent, participants watched the first infographic video (randomized to be

Canadian or Foreign) and then completed our covert propaganda measure intermixed with the

filler aesthetic items. Participants were also presented with an attention check question asking

them to write-in the national origin of the video they watched. Next, participants watched the

second infographic video (condition was opposite to the first video) and completed our covert

propaganda measure intermixed with the filler items and an identical attention check item.

Having watched both propaganda videos, participants were then asked to describe what

they thought the study was about. This probe was later used to eliminate participants who

identified the videos as propaganda. Next, we asked participants to rate the degree to which each

video was propaganda using the overt item, "This video about [Country] was propaganda." (presented in the assigned condition order). We then collected demographic information (age, gender, citizenship, income, upbringing) and responses to the national identity measures in the same section with item order randomized. The final section of the survey included the Reputation and Distance measures for the countries features in each video (presented in the assigned condition order). Finally, we asked participants for permission to use their data and debriefed them on the true nature of the study, comparing judgements of foreign propaganda versus Canadian propaganda.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

National Identity. Participants reported having strong Canadian identities based on both the national identity items (M = 4.18, Med = 4.25, SD = 0.70; 5-point Likert scale used for this and all measures) and the CAN-IOS, with the latter exhibiting more variability (M = 4.11, Med = 4.00, SD = 1.23).

Cultural Distance. As a manipulation check, we examined the degree to which the foreign countries were perceived as culturally distant from Canada. As expected, participants rated the countries in the Foreign condition (Japan, Ecuador, Armenia) as culturally and physically distant (M = 4.17, Med = 4.33, SD = 0.6), whereas Canada received very low ratings of cultural distance (M = 1.61, Med = 1.33, SD = 0.61).

Reputation. Overall, participants perceived the reputations of the foreign nations (M = 3.26, Med = 3.33, SD = 0.59) to be very similar to Canada (M = 3.27, Med = 4, SD = 0.74), indicating that we were successful in choosing foreign countries without a poor reputation.

Correlations. Correlations between our main variables, aside from propaganda ratings, appear in Table 1. Our national identity items correlated positively with the CAN-IOS, validating the latter as a measure of Canadian identity. Those who were higher in national identity across both measures tended to perceive Canada as less distant and thought Canada had a more positive reputation compared to those lower in national identity. These associations are also consistent with expectations for national identity. Age was the only demographic variable to have any meaningful relationship with our key variables, with older Canadians having higher Canada-Self overlap on the CAN-IOS scale. Older Canadians also rated foreign countries as less distant compared to younger Canadians, likely as a function of having more opportunity to travel. Most importantly, our covert measure of propaganda and overt single-item measure were positively related, suggesting they capture a similar impression of propaganda across conditions (Video 1 $r(281)$ = 0.41 (95% CI: 0.31, 0.50), $p < 0.05$; Video 2 $r(281)$ = 0.41 (95% CI: 0.31, 0.50), $p < 0.05$

Table 1

Means, standard deviations, and correlations with confidence intervals

Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. National Identity	4.18	0.70						
2. CAN-IOS	4.11	1.23	.62** [.55, .69]					
3. Foreign Distance	4.17	0.60	-.02 [-.14, .09]	.01 [-.11, .12]				
4. Canada Distance	1.61	0.61	-.56** [-.63, -.47]	-.38** [-.48, -.28]	.07 [-.05, .19]			
5. Foreign Reputation	3.26	0.59	.03 [-.09, .15]	.03 [-.09, .14]	-.13* [-.25, -.02]	-.14* [-.25, -.02]		
6. Canada Reputation	3.97	0.74	.40** [.29, .49]	.37** [.26, .47]	-.00 [-.12, .11]	-.52** [-.60, -.43]	.19** [.07, .30]	
7. Age	32.43	11.63	.20** [.08, .31]	.31** [.20, .41]	-.21** [-.32, -.10]	.01 [-.11, .12]	-.05 [-.17, .07]	.15* [.03, .26]

Note. M and *SD* are used to represent mean and standard deviation, respectively. Values in square brackets indicate the 95% confidence interval for each correlation. The confidence interval is a plausible range of population correlations that could have caused the sample correlation (Cumming, 2014). * indicates $p < .05$. ** indicates $p < .01$

County of Origin Effects

     Propaganda Ratings. There was little difference between ratings of Canadian and Foreign propaganda based on the covert measure (Canada: $M = 3.69$, $Med = 3.75$, $SD = 0.72$, $SE = 0.04$; Foreign: $M = 3.7$, $Med = 3.75$, $SD = 0.62$). However, the overt measure yielded a difference in conditions that was contrary to our original hypothesis. Canadian propaganda was rated more harshly than foreign propaganda (Canada: $M = 3.34$, $Med = 4$, $SD = 1.23$; Foreign: $M = 3.07$, $Med = 3.$, $SD = 1.18$). To systematically examine these differences, we employed Linear Mixed Effects models

     Linear Mixed Effects Models. For each of our preregistered analyses, we used Linear Mixed Effects Models (LMMs) via the "lmer" package in R (Kuznetsova, Brockhoff, & Christensen, 2020; R Core Team, 2022). Using this method of analysis we tested our two main hypotheses: (1) videos will receive higher ratings of propaganda when they ostensibly originate in a foreign nation, compared to when it originates from one's own country; and (2) this effect will be moderated by national identity, in that the effect of foreignness on propaganda ratings will be stronger among those who score higher in national identity.

     The advantage of mixed effects models is their ability to account for random and fixed effects in a within-subject design. Random effects occur due to circumstances outside of the experiment itself. In our study, the participants represented a random effect since their responses reflect an inevitable variability that exists between individuals. Fixed effects occur due to circumstances within the experiment, like the order in which participants watched the propaganda videos and their perceived reputation of the foreign nations. Each of these factors likely account for some variability, and using a LMM allowed us to control for both these

random and fixed effects across the two conditions. LMMs are quickly becoming one of the favoured tools of experimental psychologists because these models can accommodate missing data, multiple groups, and nested factors (Magezi, 2015). In addition, a traditional ANOVA approach increases our risk of falsely positive results (Judd et al., 2012). As with simple linear regressions, the effect size estimate and r^2 value in an LMM provide meaningful parameters to understanding the magnitude of any effects.

Covert Propaganda Ratings. In our first model, we treated the national origin of the video as the main predictor of our dependent variable: covert propaganda scores. Per our preregistration, we controlled for additional variance by including condition orders (Country: National vs. Foreign, Topic: Police vs. National Pride) and foreign reputation scores as fixed effects. To control for external variance from participants, we included participant ID as a random effect.

After controlling for order effects, foreign reputation, and participant variability, we found no effect of condition on propaganda ratings. That is, participants did not meaningfully differ in their judgements of foreign compared to Canadian propaganda based on the covert measure of propaganda, $\beta = 0.01$ (95% CI: -0.07, 0.09), $SE = 0.04$, $t(282) = 0.27$, $p = 0.79$. The marginal r^2 value also demonstrates that the fixed effects explain little variance in the model ($r^2 = 0.01$). Much of the variance observed could be explained by the constrained r^2 value which includes the random effect of participant variability, $r^2 = 0.53$. To confirm the observed null effect, we used a Bayesian analysis to compare the likelihood of the model with our main condition included (i.e., country of origin for the video) along with our control variables to the model with this condition omitted (i.e., only control variables) and found that our data were 10.7

times more likely under the assumption of there being no difference in information explained by the additional inclusion of condition (i.e., country of origin).

Overt Propaganda Ratings. Our second model was identical to the first in terms of fixed and random effects, but overt propaganda scores took the place of covert propaganda scores as the dependent variable. After controlling for order effects, foreign reputation, and participant variability, we found a small effect of condition on the overt propaganda rating. Participants rated Canadian propaganda more negatively than foreign propaganda ($\beta = 0.27$ (95% CI: -0.42, -0.12), $SE = 0.08$, $t (282) = -3.47$, $p < 0.001$). In this model, the fixed effects accounted for 4% of the variance in overt propaganda ratings (marginal $r^2 = 0.04$), with the constrained r^2 exhibiting a larger proportion of variance explained ($r^2 = 0.43$).

Moderation by National Identity

In our moderation models, we programmed the national origin of the video and national identity as an interaction term predicting our dependent variables: covert and overt propaganda scores, respectively. We analyzed the moderation for each national identity measure separately (National Identity items and CAN-IOS). As with our original LMMs, we controlled for additional variance by including condition orders and foreign reputation scores as fixed effects and participant ID as a random effect. We hypothesized that national identity would moderate propaganda ratings such that those who identified more strongly as Canadians would rate Canadian propaganda less harshly than those who reported lower national identity.

Covert Ratings. Contrary to our hypothesis, there was no evidence of moderation by national identity on covert propaganda scores. This was true for both the National Identity items

(β= 0.03 (95% CI: -0.08, 0.14), *SE* = 0.06, *t* (281) = 0.46, *p* = 0.64) and the CAN-IOS (β= 0.01

(95% CI: -0.06, 0.07), *SE* = 0.03, *t* (281) = 0.16, *p* = 0.87).

Overt Ratings. In the same fashion, there was no evidence of moderation by national

identity for overt propaganda scores, for neither the National Identity items (β= 0.06 (95% CI: -

0.16, 0.28), *SE* = 0.11, *t* (281) = 0.54, *p* = 0.59) nor the CAN-IOS (β= 0.02 (95% CI: -0.11,

0.14), *SE* = 0.06, *t* (281) = 0.26, *p* = 0.79).

Discussion

We aimed to study whether differences exist in propaganda judgements for media that

originates in one's own nation compared to a foreign nation. Extending theories of why we judge

others differently than we judge ourselves (Ross, 1977, Berry & Frederickson 2015; Hooper et

al., 2015)—often with greater scrutiny (Batson et al., 1999; Hale & Pillow, 2015) —we expected

Canadians to perceive foreign media as more like propaganda compared to Canadian media,

holding everything else equal. Because national identity can act as an extension of the self

(Ronsenberg, 1986; Lancaster & Foddy 1988; Huddy & Khatib, 2007), we also expected that

those with a stronger sense of national identity would be more prone to this effect. Our findings

challenged these original hypotheses. When judgements of propaganda were probed using a

covert measure, we found no difference in propaganda ratings based on the country-of-origin.

However, when judgements of propaganda were probed using an overt item (i.e., "This video

about [Country] is propaganda"), Canadians rated Canadian media as more like propaganda than

identical media from a foreign country.

Although these results did not support our predictions, this surprising result is unlikely a

result of low data quality. First, it was essential that we recruit a sample of Canadians who saw

themselves as such. As intended, our sample possessed a strong sense of national identity on average, so these results do indeed reflect the intuitions of those who are staunchly Canadian. In other words, we can be confident that participants were not judging Canadian media as propaganda as a form of rejecting being Canadian. Second, we took great pains to conceal the true intent of our study in order to reduce demand characteristics, by including filler questions, probing for suspicion, and structuring our study so that overt mention of propaganda did not contaminate any other measurement. As we hoped, very few participants identified the goal of the study as being related to propaganda. This allows us to conclude that our stimuli were highly effective in portraying government messaging without betraying the true purpose of our experiment. Lastly, we can be certain that the covert propaganda measure we developed succeeded in capturing perceptions of propaganda because these items predicted the overt propaganda item for both Canadian and foreign videos, despite these covert items never using the word "propaganda".

In light of these results, we must revisit some of our guiding theories for why asymmetrical judgements were anticipated and question their relevance to our study. Importantly, however, we still assert that nations act as an extension of the self. This is supported by the results of the Canadian version of the Inclusion of the Other in the Self Scale (IOS; Aron et al., 1992), in which visual overlap between Canada and the self successfully predicted our measure of national identity.

One of the reasons we expected Canadians to judge foreign media as more like propaganda compared to Canadian media comes from what we know about the "costliness" of recognizing our own flaws. Once a flaw is identified, feelings of shame or regret often follow (Tangney, 1991; Smith et al., 2002; Wolf et al., 2010) and these feelings evolve into a burden to

address that flaw (De Hooge et al., 2010; Lickel et al., 2014). This burden is often the need to change or improve oneself. We surmised that since this same personal burden does not exist for identifying the flaws of others, it may be easier to see the flaws in other countries. However, in hindsight, focusing on propaganda as a costly "flaw" of a nation differs significantly from the costly personal flaws we originally imagined.

The cost of recognizing that one's government is engaging in propaganda does not result in a burden to improve oneself. Rather, the cost of identifying a national flaw such as this lies in the realization that there is harm being done to you by a force outside of yourself: the nation's government. This suggests that although people create national identities and conceive of their nation as an extension of themselves, they may not view their nation's government in the same way. People may not identify with their government, even if they do identify with their nation. If one's government does something they are proud of, it can feel emblematic of their nation and its principles, therefore reflecting their national identity. For example, a government developing a system of public healthcare might be seen as a reflection of core principles for the nation, such as equality. In contrast, if a citizen disapproves of a government decision, they might deem this government a poor reflection of the nation with which they identify. A federal government that engages in propaganda might be seen as "not Canadian". The institution of the government becomes an "other", leaving solidarity with the nation intact. In other words, we might observe a different kind of asymmetry, with government actions we agree with being interpreted as Canadian and part of our identity, and those with which we don't agree not seen as particularly Canadian and therefore having no implications for our identity.

The other theory that informed our original hypothesis was the Fundamental Attribution Error (FAE), which describes how people attribute their own bad behaviour to external forces,

rather than to themselves (Ross, 1977, Berry & Frederickson 2015; Hooper et al., 2015). If Canadians can recognize their own country's bad behaviour in the form of propaganda, it may be that they are able to reduce that threat to the self by attributing the behaviour to external forces. Although we do not know why people made the justifications of propaganda that they did, we can still explore the importance of context as suggested by the FAE. When people use context to justify their actions, it often mimics a kind of blame (e.g., "I only lashed out at my partner because I had a really stressful day"). It is possible that Canadians are employing this same kind of contextual blame in the face of government propaganda.

Consider the context in which we collected our data, during March of 2022. Canadians were entering the second year of the COVID-19 pandemic and for two months leading up to March, tens of thousands of Canadians were gathered at Parliament to protest mandates designed to mitigate the spread of this virus (Ottawa Police Service, 2022). In general, there was a far greater awareness of persuasive messaging than ever before as groups urged people to either support or condemn these mandates. Moreover, this issue was highly divisive, with Canadians reporting record losses of trust in both the media and public information (Edelman, 2021). Given these factors, it is possible that identifying national media as propaganda was not particularly difficult for Canadians at this time. Rather, just as the FAE theory predicts, internalization of that judgement is not likely given the possibility of outside blame (e.g., "Government messaging is only biased because of the party currently in power"). These kinds of justifications would allow Canadians to identify propaganda without any corresponding threat to their Canadian identity.

These explanations fail to reveal why Canadians judged Canadian media more harshly than foreign media, however. One possibility is that Canadians are simply more familiar with Canada and therefore feel more comfortable making judgements regarding media produced by

the Canadian government. Canadians are often exposed to government messaging on TV, social media, or in public spaces. Our stimuli were crafted to be stylistically similar to these examples of Canadian propaganda and, as a result, participants were perhaps more prepared to recognize it as such. Because Canadians have less knowledge and experience regarding foreign countries, they also might be more reluctant to make such judgements about what occurs abroad and prefer to remain agnostic. Consistent with this idea, our Canadian participants rated the foreign countries featured in the stimuli as being high in cultural distance. Lack of knowledge about a foreign country's norms and attitudes may have resulted in Canadians feeling relatively ill-equipped to evaluate whether foreign media is propaganda compared to Canadian media. What participants assumed is propaganda *here* may not be informative with respect to what is propaganda elsewhere.

When it comes to judgements of foreign nations, Canadians could also have some embedded hesitancy about cultural criticism. Consider the ways in which "being Canadian" is tied to pluralism and tolerance. Canada is known for its cultural pluralism, which extends past multiculturalism since it is not only a description of co-existence, but an embrace of other cultures and an acknowledgment of their distinctiveness (Berdichewsky, 2007) One contributor to the *Huffington Post* writes: "To me, being Canadian means being a citizen of one of the more sane, civilized and respected nations on the planet, and a member of a community that includes, and welcomes, the best the world has to offer" (Flora, 2017). If this is the prevailing sentiment of the majority culture in Canada, we can begin to see how making judgements about other nations (or their media) could be seen as an intolerance of foreign norms and practices. Future research on cross-cultural judgements in media might consider measuring participant attitudes on

tolerance to discern whether a desire to appear accepting impedes the ability or willingness to make judgments of foreign media.

Limitations and Future Directions

One limitation of our study is that we did not measure relevant individual differences that may have clarified our results. For example, if we included a measure of political orientation, we would have had a clearer picture of our sample, and political orientation may well have acted as a moderator of these effects. Leading research on national identity and political orientation suggests that American conservatives with a stronger sense of national identity are less likely to criticize their nation (Schatz and Staub 1997, 231; Schatz, Staub, and Lavine 1999; Huddy & Khatib, 2007). It is not clear if this would have replicated in our Canadian sample, as we observed high levels of national identity but preferential criticism of Canadian media. Unfortunately, without a measure of political orientation we cannot examine this possibility directly.

We were eager to understand Canadian judgements of propaganda in part because we are Canadian, but also because Canadian national identity and attitudes are understudied compared to their Americans counterparts and may differ in meaningful ways. In order to compare the two, it would be useful to conduct a follow up study on an American sample and see whether we obtain similar results or observe a different pattern. This kind of replication with Americans would provide insight into potential cultural differences and differences in expressions of national identity that may exist between such two nations that appear culturally similar in many other regards.

Conclusion

Our study examined whether government-sponsored media would be considered more or less like propaganda depending on whether it ostensibly originates in a foreign nation or one's own nation, using a Canadian sample. When judgements of propaganda were measured covertly, we found no difference in how Canadians judged media from their own nation compared to foreign ones. However, when responding to an overt item that asked participants about propaganda directly, Canadians judged media from their own nation as more like propaganda compared to foreign media. Our sample reported having a strong sense of national identity overall, but this sense of national identity did not moderate the strength or direction of any propaganda judgements. Future work would do well to examine these findings cross-culturally and also consider examining the role of political orientation.

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