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Tell It Like It Is: When Politically Incorrect Language Promotes Authenticity

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When a person's language appears to be political—such as being politically correct or incorrect—it can influence fundamental impressions of him or her. Political correctness is “using language or behavior to seem sensitive to others’ feelings, especially those others who seem socially disadvantaged.” One pilot study, 6 experiments, and 3 supplemental experiments ($N = 4,956$) demonstrate that being politically incorrect makes communicators appear more authentic—specifically, less susceptible to external influence—albeit also less warm. These effects, however, are moderated by perceivers’ political ideology and how sympathetic perceivers feel toward the target group being labeled politically correctly. In Experiments 1, 2, and 3 using politically incorrect language (e.g., calling undocumented immigrants *illegals*) made a communicator appear particularly authentic among conservative perceivers but particularly cold among liberal perceivers. However, in Experiment 4 these effects reversed when conservatives felt sympathetic toward the group that was being labeled politically correctly or incorrectly (e.g., calling poor Whites *white trash*). Experiment 5 tests why political incorrectness can boost authenticity, demonstrating that it makes communicators seem less strategic. Finally, Experiment 6 examines the use of political language in a meaningful field context: perceived persuasion in real political debates. Debaters instructed to be politically correct (vs. politically incorrect) were judged by their uninstructed conversation partners to be easier to persuade during the conversation, although they actually reported being similarly persuaded. Together, these findings demonstrate when and how using politically incorrect language can enhance a person's authenticity.

Keywords: authenticity, communication, impression formation, politics, warmth

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During a U.S. presidential debate in 2015, then-candidate Donald J. Trump said, “I think the big problem this country has is being politically correct” (Milbank, 2015). His statement illustrates the growing debate over the role of political correctness in modern American discourse. Dozens of articles are written about political correctness every month in media outlets spanning the political spectrum (e.g., *Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Post*, Fox News, *The New York Times*, and even the *Omaha World-*

Herald). While discussions (and concerns) about political correctness are becoming increasingly common, so too are imperatives to use politically correct language. Given the enormous focus on political correctness in the media and government, it seems particularly surprising that there is scant scholarly research on the topic. The current paper seeks to address this gap in the literature by examining a fundamental question: How does the use of political language—being politically correct or incorrect—affect impressions of a communicator?

We propose that using politically correct language may harm communicators by making them seem less authentic—but may also benefit them by making them seem warmer, creating a trade-off in impressions. In degrading politically correct communicators’ authenticity, perceivers may also feel less certain when predicting these communicators’ opinions, inferring their beliefs are more likely to change. However, perceivers’ impressions are moderated both by their own political ideology and their sympathy for the target group to whom the politically correct or incorrect language is being applied.

Political Language: Defining *Political Correctness*

Language can appear to be politically motivated when it aligns with a party's platform or signals a message to a particular constituency. Indeed, people readily form opinions about a commu-

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nicator based not only on what they say but also what is implied or unsaid (e.g., Pinker, Nowak, & Lee, 2008). One well-known type of political language is *political correctness*, a term that originated almost a century ago in Russia (*politicheskaya pravil'nost*; Andary-Brophy, 2015) but is also commonly used in modern-day America.

Current definitions of political correctness involve two components: first, the use of words, thoughts, or actions that minimize offensiveness or conform to social norms (which is sometimes considered a form of censorship; Chatman, Goncalo, Kennedy, & Duguid, 2012; Levin, 2003; Loury, 1994; Strauts & Blanton, 2015; Van Boven, 2000), and, second, the use of tactics that are seemingly intended to help the disadvantaged (e.g., “a way of thinking . . . that espouses sensitivity, tolerance, and respect,” Gauthier, 1997, p. 1; see also Andary-Brophy, 2015; Friedman & Narveson, 1995; Gauthier, 1997; Lalonde, Doan, & Patterson, 2000; Millington & Leierer, 1996; Stark, 1997; Wilson, 1995). Supplementing these prior conceptualizations, we further collected empirical data to understand how individuals currently living in the United States who identify across the political spectrum define the term (see Pilot Study, $n = 201$).

By aggregating these empirical definitions with the components derived from prior research, we created the following definition: Political correctness is *using language (or behavior) to seem sensitive to others' feelings, especially those others who seem socially disadvantaged*. Examples of political correctness include using the title of “person of the year” instead of “man of the year” to show sensitivity to all gender identities, using the term “Happy Holidays” instead of “Merry Christmas” to avoid excluding people who practice faiths other than Christianity, or using the label “Inuit” instead of “Eskimo,” which the Inuit population finds to be a derogatory racial slur.¹

To provide clarity for our empirical operationalization, we focus primarily on politically correct *labels* rather than having a politically correct *opinion*. For example, the opinion that “illegal immigrants are destroying America” might be considered by some to be politically incorrect, but we instead focus on the label used for the group (i.e., *illegal immigrants* is a less politically correct label than *undocumented immigrants*). In this way, it is possible to reduce ideological bias in our manipulations of politically correct language because in contemporary America politically correct *opinions* typically align more with politically liberal or “left-leaning” platforms (Lalonde et al., 2000; Strauts & Blanton, 2015; Suedfeld, Steel, & Schmidt, 1994). Politically correct (or incorrect) labels can be applied either to groups for whom conservatives may feel more sympathy (e.g., *poor whites* or *white trash*; *religious people* or *Bible-thumpers*) or to groups for whom liberals may feel more sympathy (e.g., *undocumented immigrants* or *illegal immigrants*).

Political Correctness Versus Other Forms of Political Language

We differentiate politically incorrect language from related forms of political language such as hate speech and demagoguery. Hate speech is a legally actionable attack on an individual or group on the basis of certain attributes (e.g., gender) that “publicly provokes hatred” against that group (e.g., advocating genocide; Criminal Code, Revised Statutes of Canada, 1985, c. C-46, s. 318).

Whereas certain group members may find politically incorrect language offensive, this language does not necessarily constitute an attack or be legally actionable. For example, David Popescu was convicted of using hate speech in Ontario, Canada in 2009 for saying “homosexuals should be executed.” His conviction was largely based on the fact that he promoted the execution of the group, rather than his use of a relatively politically incorrect term (“homosexuals”) rather than a more politically correct term (e.g., “LGBTQ individuals”).

Demagoguery is “an appeal to prejudices” in the pursuit of power (Hahl, Kim, & Zuckerman Sivan, 2018, p. 6) and is characterized by attributes such as oversimplification, appealing to emotion (especially fear), ad hominem attacks, anti-intellectualism, and political pageantry (Gustainis, 1990; Hogan & Tell, 2006). Whereas demagoguery uses prejudice as a tool to obtain power, politically incorrect language does not require the pursuit of power and indeed is commonly used by people other than politicians in apolitical domains. Political incorrectness is also orthogonal to many of the attributes that characterize demagoguery, such as simplification and emotionality. Consider Senator Joseph R. McCarthy’s famous 1950 speech accusing the United States government of harboring communists: “Today we are engaged in a final, all-out battle between communistic atheism and Christianity. The modern champions of communism have selected this as the time, and ladies and gentlemen, the chips are down—they are truly down.”² This statement, and the movement of “McCarthyism” more broadly (Gustainis, 1990), fits many aspects of demagoguery as defined by the literature (e.g., appealing to fear, simplification, and political pageantry). In contrast, we note that the label “champions of communism” might be considered more politically correct than a label that McCarthy later used: “Stalin sympathizers.” Indeed, demagoguery could contain either politically incorrect or politically correct language, underscoring that demagoguery is a separable construct from political incorrectness.

Political incorrectness is further differentiated from both demagoguery and hate speech by the communicator’s intent. One aspect of political incorrectness involves a perceived lack of sensitivity toward a group being discussed. This lack of sensitivity can be intentional but also commonly occurs out of ignorance. Although one can be politically incorrect without intent (as a result of ignorance about what is the politically correct term), one cannot stumble into using hate speech or demagoguing language, as these both involve an explicit, deliberate call to action against an identified “other.”

Finally, our definition and operationalization of political correctness is agnostic to what is objectively true or false. Although *political correctness* uses the word *correct* in the term, this reflects

¹ Although not the focus of the current paper, we note that an interesting aspect of political correctness is that its identification and very definition has changed over time. For instance, some of the stimuli used in our studies that were considered “politically correct” by the majority of participants at the time they were run and may no longer be deemed politically correct (e.g., some believe that the politically correct term for *LGBTQ* is now *LGBTQIA*). Therefore, it is possible that certain terms that we deemed to be relatively more politically correct at the time of writing this paper may later be deemed to be relatively less politically correct.

² Excerpted from Joseph McCarthy’s speech in Wheeling, West Virginia on February 9, 1950. See full speech here: <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/6456>.

its original definition in which the party line is considered a *moral truth* (the communist platform; Andary-Brophy, 2015; Counts & Lodge, 1949; Medvedev, 1969) and is not as relevant for modern-day usage. The aforementioned examples (e.g., *Inuit* vs. *Eskimo*) highlight how politically correct language does not necessarily convey the truth, nor is it necessarily a lie. This distinguishes the current research from recent work examining reactions to politicians or lay individuals who are clearly lying (e.g., Hahl et al., 2018).

Impressions of Politically Correct Communicators

The current paper specifically examines how the use of politically correct language affects impressions of a communicator. Given the proximity of the specific construct of political correctness to the broader concept of political discourse, this paper seeks to investigate impressions that are central to the study of politics: persuasion. In particular, this paper focuses on impressions that prior research has linked closely to persuasion or being persuadable: impressions of authenticity and warmth (Barasch, Berman, & Small, 2016; Burgoon, Birk, & Pfau, 1990; Dubois, Rucker, & Galinsky, 2016; Gunnery & Hall, 2014; Lessard, Greenberger, & Chen, 2010; Liebes, 2001; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Shell & Moussa, 2007; Tan & Kraus, 2018; Ward & McGinnies, 1974). Assessments of authenticity and warmth (along with competence) are focal points of the content of political discourse and those who engage in it.

Political Correctness and Inauthenticity

Three lines of prior research link political correctness with reduced authenticity. First, politically correct language is typically perceived to be more socially desirable (Strauts & Blanton, 2015). For instance, people are more likely to take a politically correct position publicly than privately (e.g., Barker, 1994; Cook & Heilmann, 2013; Van Boven, 2000), especially those who show greater discrepancy between their implicit and explicit attitudes (Levin, 2003). In one study, ratings of how politically correct it is to support affirmative action correlated with the extent to which people overestimated others' support for affirmative action (Van Boven, 2000).

This difference between publicly endorsed beliefs and privately held beliefs has been described as a *frontstage* and a *backstage*, in which the frontstage is manipulated by the communicator to gain extrinsic rewards, such as social acceptance (Hahl, 2016; Trilling, 1972; Turner, 1976). When observers perceive a difference between the frontstage and backstage, they may consider communicators less authentic (Hahl & Zuckerman, 2014; Reilly, 2018; Sagiv, 2014). Using politically correct language provides the possibility of such a difference because the communicator could be aspiring to be viewed more favorably by observers rather than presenting a truly held belief (Willer, Kuwabara, & Macy, 2009; cf. Kim & Zuckerman Sivan, 2017).

Second, across a variety of contexts, using politically correct language can obscure information, leading to maladaptive social outcomes. In the domain of education, some scholars argue that pressure to be politically correct reduces faculty interest in teaching classes regarding diversity and student interest in taking such classes (Avery & Steingard, 2008). Therapists who avoid being

politically incorrect may provide less effective therapy (Chabot, 1996; Hope, Milewski-Hertlein, & Rodriguez, 2001; Menagé, 1997). When indirect comments (e.g., euphemisms) replace explicit prejudice, this can enhance implicit discrimination and perceived microaggression (Barreto & Ellemers, 2005; Butler, 1997; Halmari, 2011; Mills, 1998; Norton et al., 2006). If people observe how political correctness can change the course of institutional outcomes, then they might come to associate political correctness with a lack of transparency, further harming perceptions of the authenticity of politically correct communicators.

Finally, politically correct language has been anecdotally tied to other forms of communication—including self-censorship (Loury, 1994), coded communication (Albertson, 2015), impression management (von Collani & Grumm, 2009), and indirect speech (Pinker, 2007)—that have each, separately, been linked to reduced authenticity. For instance, individuals who self-censor appear less trustworthy and more strategic (Hay & Stoker, 2009; Loury, 1994). Coded communication uses content that is strategically designed to reach a target audience while evading the outgroup, such as a speech with subtle religious references that are intended to appeal to a religious audience and escape notice by a mainstream audience (Albertson, 2015).

Although each of these separate findings converge on the same prediction that political correctness will seem less authentic, at least two papers make competing predictions. First, Arokiasamy, Strohmer, Guice, Angelocci, and Hoppe (1994) found that using politically correct or incorrect language did not affect counselors' credibility ratings, but these findings only indicate that language did not influence perceived credibility beyond variations in the counselors' skill levels, which were not controlled for in the analyses. Second, Chatman et al. (2012) found that instituting norms of political correctness reduced uncertainty around interactions in intersex groups. However, they specifically examined uncertainty about how to interact with nonmajority group members within diverse groups; the current research is focused on uncertainty about the true beliefs of the communicator.

Though authenticity is a multifaceted psychological construct (see Harter, 2002), we focus on *susceptibility to external influence*—defined as the extent to which one accepts the influence of other people and the belief that one has to conform to the expectations of others (Wood, Linley, Maltby, Bahousis, & Joseph, 2008).³ This aspect of authenticity is particularly relevant to persuasion and politics, because observers must often ascertain whether communicators endorse a particular belief because they truly believe it, or for an ulterior motive (e.g., succumbing to peer pressure or financial incentives). We predict that using politically correct (vs. incorrect) language makes communicators appear more malleable to various sources of influence, and consequently easier to persuade.

³ Throughout our empirical studies, we further consider two other dimensions of authenticity: *authentic living* (behaving and expressing emotions in such a way that is consistent with the conscious awareness of physiological states, emotions, beliefs, and cognitions), and *self-alienation* (the extent to which the person experiences self-alienation between conscious awareness and actual experience [the true self]).

Political Correctness and Warmth

Another predicted interpersonal consequence of communicators' use of politically correct language is that it will make them seem warmer. Using politically correct language is typically considered an endorsement of antibias views and behaviors (Batty, 2004; Crandall, Eshleman, & O'Brien, 2002; Garrett & Baquedano-Lopez, 2002; Norton et al., 2006; Ochs, 1993). Antibias norms compel people to avoid words and actions that might be offensive to various demographic groups, attempting to reduce the negative evaluation of others based on their identity group membership (Crandall et al., 2002; Crandall & Eshleman, 2003; Lee & Fiske, 2006; Norton et al., 2006). Individuals who endorse antibias norms should seem more likely to be allies of disadvantaged groups, and, as such, should be seen as warmer than those who use politically incorrect language (Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2008). We define warmth as being caring, tolerant, and likable, in line with Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, and Xu (2002) and Cuddy, Glick, and Beninger (2011). To our knowledge, only two experiments have examined causal consequences of using politically correct language, and both examined impressions of the target of the language (Carnaghi & Maass, 2007; Millington & Leierer, 1996) instead of impressions of the communicator as we do in this paper.

The Role of Political Ideology in Evaluating Political Correctness

Although prior research suggests that one's political ideology influences identification of political correctness (Lalonde et al., 2000; Strauts & Blanton, 2015), we propose that even when conservatives and liberals similarly identify political correctness, they will still have different reactions to it. There are at least four possible reasons why ideological reactions to political correctness might diverge.

First, one possibility is that, because ideological groups utilize different moral foundations (Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009; Haidt & Graham, 2007; Haidt, Graham, & Joseph, 2009), liberals care more about harm/care and therefore may be particularly sensitive to political incorrectness seeming harmful, whereas conservatives care more about purity, which is linked to authenticity (Gino, Kouchaki, & Galinsky, 2015) and therefore may be particularly sensitive to political incorrectness seeming authentic. Providing empirical support that conservatives demonstrate more consistency between their publicly and privately espoused beliefs, conservatives show stronger correlations than liberals between their implicit and explicit attitudes (across 95 different attitude topics; Jost & Krochik, 2014), suggesting that they are more likely to explicitly say what they implicitly mean, and, in such a way, might present as more authentic. These differences in moral principles suggest that liberals may be more concerned with protecting the feelings and rights of seemingly disadvantaged groups, whereas conservatives may be more concerned with avoiding hypocrisy and praising honesty.

Second, a different explanation that would predict a similar pattern of results is that, because liberals like political correctness more than conservatives (Lalonde et al., 2000; Strauts & Blanton, 2015; Suedfeld et al., 1994), liberals may primarily attend to the positive qualities that such language conveys (e.g., warmth; Hasson, Tamir, Brahm, Cohrs, & Halperin, 2018) and ignore any

negative qualities (e.g., inauthenticity). Similarly, because conservatives dislike political correctness, they may attend to negative qualities (e.g., inauthenticity) and ignore positive qualities (e.g., warmth). Such an account might be predicted by the literature on motivated reasoning, which posits that individuals are more likely to arrive at conclusions that support their preexisting beliefs (Kunda, 1990; Kunda & Sinclair, 1999; Taber & Lodge, 2006). One way to test between the moral foundation and motivated reasoning explanations for ideological differences is to examine attributions of competence. Different moral foundations would not predict different assessments of communicators' competence as a function of their political language, but because competence is typically considered a positive trait, liberals who are motivated to attend to positive aspects of politically correct language might perceive a politically correct communicator as more competent (and warmer).

Third, perceivers could form different inferences about a communicator's own political ideology as a function of their language. Political incorrectness is associated more with authoritarianism and conservatism (Brustein, 1994; Dickstein, 1994; Kimball, 1994; Lessing, 1994; Marcus, 1994; Radosh, 1993). Liberal (vs. conservative) perceivers might tend to evaluate political correctness more positively if they perceive that the communicator is liberal and therefore shares their values (consistent with partisan bias; Iyengar & Krupenkin, 2018; Van Bavel & Pereira, 2018). However, this would not predict that liberal perceivers are particularly attuned to assessing warmth whereas conservative perceivers are particularly attuned to assessing authenticity.

Finally, assessments of a communicator may also depend on the target group to whom the political language is being applied. If perceivers are sympathetic toward the target group (e.g., liberals may feel more sympathetic toward immigrants; conservatives toward religious or rural Americans), then the perceivers may degrade a politically incorrect communicator's warmth. In contrast, if perceivers are unsympathetic toward the target group, then perceivers may augment a politically incorrect communicator's authenticity.

Hypotheses

We propose that using politically correct (vs. incorrect) language influences opinions of a communicator in two predictable ways. First, it will make the communicator seem less authentic—and in particular, more susceptible to external influence (H1). Second, it will make the communicator seem warmer (H2). The extant literature does not make clear predictions about how language use could influence perceptions of a communicator's competence, another primary dimension of person perception; but for thoroughness, we additionally measure perceived competence in eight of our nine studies.

We also predict that the perceiver's ideological stance will moderate the effect of language use on impressions. We test for several possible patterns of results. First, in line with prior research on ideological differences in moral foundations, one possibility is that conservatives will be more attuned to differences in perceived authenticity, whereas liberals will be more attuned to differences in perceived warmth (H3a). Another possibility is that liberals generally have more positive evaluations of political correctness than do conservatives, which would further suggest that liberals might

view politically correct communicators as more competent (H3b). Finally, assessments of communicators' traits may depend on whether the politically correct or incorrect label is applied to a group toward which liberals or conservatives feel sympathy (H3c).

We further consider two consequences of political correctness making communicators appear less authentic. For one, we hypothesize that people will feel less certain in their predictions about politically correct communicators' future attitudes and behaviors, because they have more reason to doubt politically correct communicators' true intentions and believe that politically correct communicators are more susceptible to external influence (H4). For another, people will believe they are personally more able to persuade a politically correct individual to accept their own viewpoint (because a politically correct person appears more susceptible to influence; H5).

Overview of Studies

Our pilot study first examines how laypeople define political correctness. Each of our six main experiments tests whether framing a statement politically correctly or politically incorrectly affects beliefs about the communicator's authenticity and warmth, and whether these beliefs are influenced by perceivers' political ideology (testing H1–H3b). Experiments 3 and 4 further assess whether perceivers are less certain when predicting communicators' future attitudes when communicators are politically correct (testing H4). Experiment 4 examines whether perceiver ideology and the perceived ideology of the target group (to whom a politically correct or incorrect label is being applied) affects assessments of a communicator's authenticity (testing H3c).

Experiment 5 tests whether communicators' political ideology influences the effect of their political language on impressions and whether alignment in perceiver and communicator ideology moderates the effect of language. We suspect the effect of language will be present regardless of whether perceivers agree or disagree with communicators' political ideology. Experiment 5 also tests our predicted mechanism for why political correctness seems inauthentic, examining perceivers' inferences of ulterior motives.

Finally, in Experiment 6, we assigned pairs to engage in real political debates, instructing one person to use politically correct or politically incorrect language and leaving the other person uninstructed. Here, we predict that a partner who uses politically correct language will appear easier to influence (i.e., more persuadable) than a partner who uses politically incorrect language (testing H5). By examining both uninstructed and instructed participants' beliefs about persuading their partner and actual persuasion, we can further test whether people's predictions are accurate.

For all experiments, we report how we determined our sample size, all data exclusions, all manipulations, and all measures. For experiments with similar designs, we did not allow individuals who had participated in a prior experiment to participate. Materials and data from all experiments can be found on Open Science Foundation at <https://osf.io/kvme3/>.

Pilot Study: What Is Political Correctness?

To better understand individuals' intuitive definitions of *political correctness*, we ran an online survey with 201 adults from Amazon's Mechanical Turk (for \$0.30; 121 males; $M_{\text{age}} = 35.65$,

$SD = 10.68$; 62.69% self-identified liberal). We asked participants to define political correctness in "their own words" and to provide "an example of someone being 'politically correct.'"

Three coders who were blind to our hypotheses read participants' definitions and suggested the categories into which the definitions fit. As a decision rule, in cases in which all three coders were not unanimous, we coded the response as the majority of coders indicated. In total, the coders recommended five categories (7.0% uncategorized): not being offensive (53.7%), trying to be socially acceptable or fit the perceived social norm (20.9%), having to censor yourself or change the terms you want to use (25.9%), having consideration for others' feelings (16.9%), and being overly sensitive (7.0%). The same coders also categorized participants' examples into three categories (4.0% uncategorized): using one term or phrase instead of another (51.2%, e.g., "using 'autistic' instead of 'retarded,'" "saying 'Native-American' instead of 'Indian,'" "not calling a 'little person' a 'midget,'" etc.); being extremely conscientious of social rules (31.8%, e.g., "not making derogatory comments on sensitive subjects," "not making jokes about race"); changing behavior other than language (9.0%, e.g., "I will not cook pork for my Jewish friends"). Representative definitions and examples are shown in Table 1.

From these data, we created a definition of political correctness that captured participants' lay intuitions: *using language or behavior to seem sensitive to others' feelings, especially those others who seem socially disadvantaged*. We use this definition in our future studies.

We additionally measured how much participants "like political correctness" (1 = *dislike a great deal*; 7 = *like a great deal*), how often they "behave in a politically correct way in [their] daily life" (1 = *never*; 5 = *very often*), their political ideology (three items: "overall political views," "economic policy related political views," and "social policy related political views;" 1 = *very liberal*; 2 = *moderately liberal*; 3 = *moderately conservative*; 4 = *very conservative*), political party affiliation, demographics (race, age, gender, education), and five questions intended to measure participants' adherence to each of the five moral foundations (Graham et al., 2009). Most relevant for the current paper, the self-identified liberals (those whose selected "1" or "2" on the "overall political views" question; $n = 126$) reported liking political correctness more ($M = 4.30$, $SD = 2.04$) than conservatives (those whose selected "3" or "4" on the "overall political views" question; $n = 75$; $M = 2.91$, $SD = 1.85$), $t(199) = 4.85$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.69$, and using more politically correct language ($M = 3.59$, $SD = 0.99$) than conservatives ($M = 2.99$, $SD = 1.15$), $t(199) = 3.92$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.56$.

Interestingly, there were no meaningful differences in the categorizations of liberal versus conservative examples of political correctness, $ps > .113$, and there were only two statistically significant differences between the categorizations of definitions of political correctness such that conservatives' definitions were more likely to fit in the category of "censoring oneself" (36.0% vs. 19.8%), $\chi^2 = 6.40$, $p = .011$, whereas liberals' definitions were more likely to fit in the category of "considering others' feelings" (23.8% vs. 5.3%), $\chi^2 = 11.42$, $p = .001$. This suggests that there is at least some difference in how liberals and conservatives define political correctness, although it is relatively subtle (for full details, see online supplemental materials). Our experiments seek to fur-

Table 1
Coding Categories of Participants' Definitions and Examples of Political Correctness in Pilot Study

Definitions of political correctness	Examples of political correctness
Category 1: Not being offensive Example 1: "Not saying something that may offend a group of people." Example 2: "Watching what you say so as to not offend anyone of a particular group."	Category 1: Substituting one phrase for another Example 1: "Someone saying physically disabled instead of handicapped." Example 2: "Saying African American instead of Black."
Category 2: Censoring oneself Example 1: "Censoring yourself or others to avoid judgement from the general public." Example 2: "[S]ugar-coating one's words to describe a person or a thing such that no one is offended; the verbal form of walking on eggshells."	Category 2: Being conscientious of social rules Example 1: "Not making derogatory comments on sensitive subjects." Example 2: "People not making jokes that others may deem offensive is an example of someone being politically correct."
Category 3: Being socially acceptable Example 1: "[It] means conforming to the attitudes and beliefs of a societal norm." Example 2: "Adhering to social norms in order to not be considered argumentative or outside of a group."	Category 3: Changing behavior Example 1: "I will not cook pork for my Jewish friends." Example 2: "The song 'Baby It's Cold Outside' being pulled out of rotation because someone might find it offensive."
Category 4: Being overly sensitive Example 1: "Sensitive people who put emotions before logical matters." Example 2: "Being overly worried about everyone getting their feelings hurt by the littlest comment that does not even have to be aimed at being offensive just that some feelings are hurt."	
Category 5: Having consideration for others' feelings Example 1: "Political correctness means taking the time to be considerate and inclusive of another person's identity by not acting in a manner which is insulting or demeaning, whether intentionally or unintentionally." Example 2: "Avoiding saying or doing things that may hurt others."	

ther examine ideological reactions to political correctness even when both liberals and conservatives similarly recognize its use.

Experiment 1: Politically Incorrect Politicians

Experiment 1 tests our primary hypotheses that political incorrectness promotes authenticity at a cost to interpersonal warmth and that these impressions are influenced by perceivers' political ideology. To be comprehensive, we also measured beliefs about communicators' competence and trustworthiness, and perceivers' willingness to act on behalf of communicators.

Method

Participants. Because we did not know exactly what effect size to expect, we predetermined that we would collect 100 participants per condition, which we expected to provide adequate statistical power to detect a small to medium effect size. In total, 415 adults from Amazon Mechanical Turk (188 males; $M_{\text{age}} = 41.28$, $SD = 12.74$; 63.68% self-identified liberal) completed the main study in exchange for \$0.65 each.

Procedure. The experiment design was 2 (communicator language: politically correct vs. politically incorrect) \times 2 (topic: transgender policy vs. immigration policy) between-participants. We included two statement topics to increase generalizability. Participants first imagined watching a senator make a speech to a group of people and then read a statement from the senator. The statement was either politically correct or incorrect, and discussed either transgender or immigration policy. Next, participants completed a survey measuring their impressions of the politician. At

the end of the study, participants reported their demographic information.

Stimuli selection. To pick controversial statements (i.e., statements that about half of our sample would agree or disagree with), we conducted a pretest in which we asked participants ($n = 207$ MTurk participants, 115 males, $M_{\text{age}} = 35.59$, $SD = 9.79$) whether they agreed or disagreed with 14 political statements. Two statements in particular showed a relatively equal split of agreement and disagreement: one about transgender individuals ("The sex listed on a person's birth certificate should be the only way to define a person's gender. We must continue to identify gender as we have done in the past. Changing this identification would be a logistical nightmare. For identification purposes, there should only be two sexes: male or female"; 51.0% agree, 44.5% disagree, 4.5% other) and another about immigrants ("Overall, immigrants to the U.S. make the American economy stronger. Immigrants are more willing to work for low wages in unattractive jobs. This allows companies to hire more workers and sell products at a lower price"; 52.0% agree, 42.5% disagree, 5.5% other).⁴

For the main study, we used these two piloted statements but added one or two politically correct or politically incorrect sentences to the statements. The added sentences for each statement are shown below ([politically correct]/[politically incorrect]):

⁴ These were also statements with which conservatives were more likely to agree (conservatives' agreement: 68% and 69%, respectively vs. liberals' agreement: 34% and 12%, respectively, $ps < .001$).

Transgender individuals: “[The way to help ‘LGBTQ’ persons is not to change how we identify citizen’s sex. Of course I believe that ‘LGBTQ’ persons are among the most vulnerable members of our society and we must do everything in our power to protect them.]/[These people who call themselves ‘LGBTQ’ are often profoundly disturbed and confused about their gender identity. But they WERE born of a certain sex. We must make them identify as the sex they were born, not as the sex they might want to be on a whim.] It may be politically [correct]/[incorrect] to say, but it’s true and important for our country.”

Immigrants: “[Immigrants are hard workers and they add diversity to the American fabric, which makes us better as a nation.]/[However, we must make sure that these foreigners from third world countries aren’t taking jobs from real Americans.] It may be politically [correct]/[incorrect] to say, but it’s true and important for our country.”

To strengthen the manipulation, participants described “in [their] own words what the Senator said.”⁵

Survey. As our manipulation check, participants reported whether the Senator’s statement was more politically correct or politically incorrect (1 = *more politically correct*, 2 = *more politically incorrect*).

Primary measures. To measure perceived *authenticity*, we adapted a version of Wood et al.’s (2008) “accepting external influence” authenticity subscale: He or she is strongly influenced by the opinions of others; He or she usually does what other people tell him to do; He or she always feels the need to do what others expect him to do; Other people influence him/her greatly (1 = *very inaccurate*, 7 = *very accurate*; $\alpha = .89$).⁶ To measure judgments of the politician’s warmth, we used the warmth scale from Fiske et al. (2002): sincere, good-natured, caring, tolerant, and likable (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *extremely*; $\alpha = .91$).

Secondary measures. For thoroughness, we also measured perceived *competence* using the competence scale from Fiske et al. (2002): competent, intelligent, confident, competitive, and independent (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *extremely*; $\alpha = .85$). Measuring competence allows us to examine whether political incorrectness is generally perceived negatively (i.e., makes the communicator appear less warm and competent) or if it uniquely degrades a communicator’s warmth but not competence. We also created our own measure of *trustworthiness* (6 items: I can take him/her at his or her word; He or she seems honest; I trust him/her; I have confidence in his or her judgment; He or she seems authentic; and He or she will make good decisions about voting on matters of public policy; 1 = *very inaccurate*, 7 = *very accurate*; $\alpha = .94$) and assessed *behavioral intentions* toward the politician (5 items: I would vote for him/her; I would listen to his or her opinion on other policies; I would volunteer for his or her election campaign; I would donate money to his or her election campaign; I would attend a political speech or rally that he or she held; 1 = *very inaccurate*, 7 = *very accurate*; $\alpha = .92$).

Control measures. At the end of the survey, participants reported “how much [they] like when politicians are politically correct” (1 = *dislike a great deal*, 7 = *like a great deal*) and “how much [they] like politicians in general” (1 = *dislike a great deal*, 7 = *like a great deal*). Finally, participants reported their demographics (gender, age, ethnicity, political ideology, and education). To measure perceivers’ political ideology,⁷ we asked, “How would you describe your overall political views?” with four options (Very liberal; Moderately liberal; Moderately conservative; Very conser-

vative). We used this scale because it is a commonly used scale among major polling organizations (Maniam & Smith, 2017).

Results

There were no interactions between language and topic on any of our dependent measures, $ps > .250$; therefore, we collapsed across topic in our analyses. Confirming our manipulation, participants in the politically incorrect condition believed that the statement they read was less politically correct ($M = 1.74$, $SD = 0.44$) than those in the politically correct condition ($M = 1.46$, $SD = 0.50$), $F(1, 413) = 38.49$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.09$. Importantly, there was no main effect of participants’ political ideology on their belief that the statement was politically correct, $F(1, 413) = 0.21$, $p = .892$, $\eta_p^2 < 0.01$, nor was there an interaction between ideology and experimental condition, $F(3, 413) = 0.86$, $p = .464$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.01$, indicating that both liberals and conservatives perceived the statements as similarly politically correct or incorrect.

Primary measures. In a 2 (communicator language: politically correct vs. politically incorrect) \times 4 (perceiver political ideology: very liberal vs. moderately liberal vs. moderately conservative vs. very conservative) ANOVA on perceived susceptibility to influence, we found the predicted effect of language, $F(1, 413) = 15.18$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.04$, such that participants believed the politician whose statement was politically incorrect was more authentic (less susceptible to influence; $M = 3.66$, $SD = 1.41$) than the politician whose statement was politically correct ($M = 4.06$, $SD = 1.36$). This effect was qualified by the predicted interaction, $F(3, 413) = 3.05$, $p = .028$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.02$. The effect of language was driven more by conservative participants (very conservative: $M_{PIC} = 4.44$, $SD = 1.80$; $M_{PC} = 2.72$, $SD = 1.49$; $t(31) = -2.99$, $p = .005$, $d = -1.04$; moderately conservative: $M_{PIC} = 3.50$, $SD = 1.32$; $M_{PC} = 3.95$, $SD = 1.29$; $t(115) = -1.87$, $p = .064$, $d = -0.34$) than by liberal participants (very liberal: $M_{PIC} = 4.12$, $SD = 1.36$; $M_{PC} = 4.26$, $SD = 1.16$; moderately liberal: $M_{PIC} = 3.74$, $SD = 1.39$; $M_{PC} = 3.97$, $SD = 1.39$; $ts < 1.10$, $ps > .271$, $ds < 0.11$) (see Figure 1A). There was also a marginal main effect of perceiver ideology, $F(3, 413) = 2.42$, $p = .065$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.02$, such that conservatives perceived the Senator to be marginally more authentic (less susceptible to influence) than did liberals.

We conducted the same analysis on perceived warmth. The effect of language, $F(1, 413) = 4.59$, $p = .033$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.01$ (the politically incorrect politician seemed less warm, $M = 3.74$, $SD = 1.53$, than the politically correct politician, $M = 4.33$, $SD = 1.39$) was qualified by the predicted interaction with perceiver ideology,

⁵ In all experiments, we included two exploratory measures: “Do you agree with what the Senator said?” (*Yes* or *No*), and, “What percentage of Americans do you think would agree with what the Senator said?” (1 = 0% [*no one*], 7 = 100% [*everyone*]). We report these results in the online supplemental materials.

⁶ For thoroughness, in this study we also measured the “authentic living” subscale in the Wood et al. (2008) authenticity scale, which showed a similar pattern of results as the “accepting external influence” subscale reported in the main text (see online supplemental materials).

⁷ In this experiment and in subsequent experiments, we also asked: (a) “How would you describe your economic policy related political views?” (1 = *very liberal*, 4 = *very conservative*) and (b) “How would you describe your social policy related political views?” (1 = *very liberal*, 4 = *very conservative*). Economic, social, and overall political ideologies were positively correlated in every experiment ($ps < .001$).

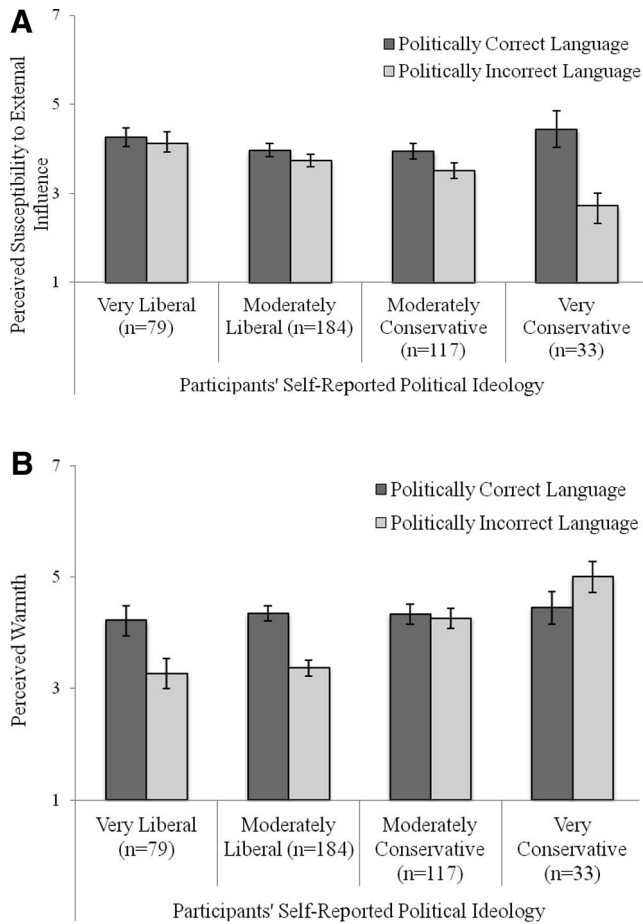


Figure 1. The effect of politically correct or politically incorrect language on perceptions of a politician's susceptibility to influence (A) and warmth (B) moderated by participants' political ideology in Experiment 1. Error bars represent the standard error around the mean.

$F(1, 413) = 4.61, p = .003, \eta_p^2 = 0.03$. Here, liberal participants drove the effect of language on perceived warmth (very liberal: $M_{PIC} = 3.27, SD = 1.62; M_{PC} = 4.22, SD = 1.73$), $t(77) = -2.50, p = .014, d = -0.57$; moderately liberal: $M_{PIC} = 3.37, SD = 1.44; M_{PC} = 4.35, SD = 1.28$; $t(182) = -4.87, p < .001, d = -0.72$), more so than conservative participants (very conservative: $M_{PIC} = 5.00, SD = 1.26; M_{PC} = 4.45, SD = 1.03$; moderately conservative: $M_{PIC} = 4.26, SD = 1.33; M_{PC} = 4.33, SD = 1.42$; $t_s < 1.14, p_s > .182, d_s < 0.48$) (see Figure 1B). There was also a main effect of perceiver ideology, $F(3, 413) = 5.95, p = .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.04$, such that conservatives perceived greater warmth than liberals.

Secondary measures. Controlling for perceivers' political ideology, there were additional main effects of language condition on trustworthiness and behavioral intentions, $F_s > 6.20, p_s < .013, \eta_p^2 > 0.02$, such that politically correct politicians were seen as more trustworthy and participants had more positive behavioral intentions toward them, but there was no effect on perceived competence, $F < 1$. There were main effects of perceiver ideology: Conservative perceivers were more likely to believe politicians were competent and trustworthy and more likely to act on

their behalf than liberal perceivers, $F_s > 3.73, p_s < .011, \eta_p^2 > .03$. Finally, interactions between language and perceiver ideology emerged on each of these measures (competence: $F[3, 413] = 4.22, p = .006, \eta_p^2 = 0.03$, trustworthiness: $F[3, 413] = 7.92, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.06$, behavioral intentions: $F[3, 413] = 11.77, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.08$). Collapsing across the ideological groups to examine the effects of language among liberal versus conservative perceivers, contrast analyses revealed that conservatives saw the politically incorrect politician as more competent ($M_{PIC} = 5.22, SD = 1.15; M_{PC} = 4.64, SD = 1.50$; $t(148) = 2.76, p = .007, d = 0.45$) and trustworthy ($M_{PIC} = 4.64, SD = 1.50; M_{PC} = 3.75, SD = 1.73$; $t(148) = 3.40, p = .001, d = 0.56$) than the politically correct politician and were more likely to act on their behalf ($M_{PIC} = 3.84, SD = 1.60; M_{PC} = 2.86, SD = 1.38$; $t(148) = 4.01, p < .001, d = 0.66$), whereas liberals perceived the politically incorrect and politically correct politician as only marginally different in competence, ($M_{PIC} = 4.84, SD = 1.06; M_{PC} = 4.57, SD = 1.27$; $t(261) = -1.92, p = .056, d = -0.24$), and saw the politically correct politician as *more* trustworthy ($M_{PIC} = 3.50, SD = 1.57; M_{PC} = 4.84, SD = 1.06$; $t(261) = -2.05, p = .042, d = -0.25$). Liberals were more likely to act on behalf of the politically correct politician ($M_{PIC} = 2.39, SD = 1.33; M_{PC} = 2.97, SD = 1.58$; $t(261) = -3.23, p = .001, d = -0.40$).

Liking of political correctness and politicians. Unsurprisingly, supporting prior research, there was an effect of participants' ideology on their liking of political correctness, $F(1, 413) = 26.91, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.17$, such that very liberal participants liked political correctness the most ($M = 4.73, SD = 1.65$), followed by moderately liberal ($M = 4.08, SD = 1.61$), moderately conservative ($M = 3.10, SD = 1.82$), and very conservative participants ($M = 2.15, SD = 1.70$). The aforementioned effects of language use on perceived authenticity and warmth remain robust when controlling for liking of political correctness. There was no effect of ideology on liking of politicians, $F(1, 413) = 0.45, p = .720, \eta_p^2 < 0.01$, and no effects of language on liking of political correctness or liking of politicians, $F_s < 1.57, p_s > .211, \eta_p^2 < 0.01$.

Discussion

This study provides evidence that a politician who adopts more politically incorrect language (e.g., labeling immigrants "foreigners from third world countries") compared with one who adopts more politically correct language appears more authentic but less interpersonally warm, creating a trade-off in impressions. These effects remained statistically significant when controlling for overall liking of political correctness, suggesting that they do not simply derive from having a more negative evaluation of politically incorrect language. These effects also emerged on at least two different topics (regarding immigration and transgender policy), suggesting at least some robustness to the topic of the statement. Moreover, perceivers' political ideology moderated these judgments. Conservative perceivers drove the effect of language use on perceptions of authenticity, whereas liberal perceivers drove the effect on perceptions of warmth. These data are consistent with ideological reactions to political language resulting from differences in moral foundations.

We wondered whether the effect of language use on perceptions of warmth and authenticity might be limited to only politicians' language use. This is possible because politicians' motives might appear

particularly suspect because they have extra reason to adhere to social norms and not offend seemingly disadvantaged minority groups (e.g., Parry-Giles, 2001). To test this possibility, we conducted a subsequent, preregistered experiment (Supplemental Experiment S1; $n = 401$ online participants; 226 males; $M_{\text{age}} = 37.6$, $SD = 12.40$; 69.85% self-identified liberal; paid \$0.70 each) manipulating whether a politician or an acquaintance said something politically correct or incorrect (using a different set of statements to increase generalizability). Conceptually replicating the results from Experiment 1, we again found main effects of political language on authenticity and warmth, $F(1, 397) = 3.04$, $p = .082$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.01$ and $F(1, 397) = 126.38$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.24$, respectively, and the predicted interactions of language and perceiver ideology on authenticity and warmth, $F(3, 393) = 25.23$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.16$ and $F(3, 393) = 29.12$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.18$, respectively. However, there were no interactions of language and communicator-type on either perceived warmth or authenticity, $F_s < 1.14$, $p_s > .250$, indicating that language use has similar consequences for impressions of politicians and acquaintances (see online supplemental materials for full details).

One concern about our manipulations of political correctness in Experiment 1 is that they were relatively noisy, changing both the labels used for a target group as well as the opinions of the communicator and making it more difficult to conclude that perceivers' different reactions to the statements are driven only by the political correctness of the language. To alleviate this concern, our second experiment uses a cleaner manipulation in which only a single word in a statement is changed to reflect a more or less politically correct term.

Experiment 2: Ideological Reactions to Political Correctness

Experiment 2 seeks to replicate Experiment 1 using a more controlled set of stimuli: embedding a politically correct or incorrect label for a group (e.g., *undocumented immigrants* vs. *illegal immigrants*) into an otherwise politically neutral sentence. To better understand ideological differences in evaluations of communicators' authenticity and warmth, we measured participants' adherence to the five moral foundations, intending to test whether any of these foundations mediated the effect of ideology on assessments of authenticity and warmth when communicators used either politically correct or politically incorrect language.

Method

We preregistered our hypotheses and analysis plan for this experiment on OSF (https://osf.io/8m7sv/?view_only=1e4f46ec3d52435290e12cc72217e1f4).

Participants. Based on the effect size in Experiment 1, we predetermined that we would collect 50 participants per condition and topic (with 150 participants total viewing a politically correct statement and 150 viewing a politically incorrect statement across three topics). In total, 305 adults from Amazon Mechanical Turk (171 males; $M_{\text{age}} = 37.53$, $SD = 12.31$; 65.90% self-identified liberal) completed the study in exchange for \$0.50.

Procedure. The experiment design was 2 (communicator language: politically correct vs. politically incorrect) \times 3 (topic: immigrants, LGBTQ individuals, and individuals with disabilities) between-participants. We included three different topics to increase

generalizability. Participants first read a statement ostensibly said by a senator that included either a politically correct or incorrect term. Next, participants completed a survey measuring their impressions of the communicator and alignment with moral principles. Finally, participants reported their demographic information.

Stimuli. We created three sets of statements and simply changed the labels for the target groups in the statement to make the statement either more politically correct or more politically incorrect. One of the [politically correct]/[politically incorrect] statements is shown below:

I think it's important for our country to have a national conversation about people coming into this country – [“I think the appropriate term for them is ‘undocumented immigrants’/“I think we all know that I’m talking about ‘illegal immigrants’]. It helps no one to pretend that the situation doesn’t exist or that it will take care of itself. The sooner we come to the table with serious proposals about what to do about issues relating to [undocumented immigrants/illegals], the sooner we can help the public at large and move the country in the right direction.

The other two sets of statements were written identically except for using the following [politically correct]/[politically incorrect] terms: “LGBTQ”/“homosexuals” and “people with learning disabilities”/“mentally challenged” (see online supplemental materials for full statements).

Survey. As our manipulation check, participants answered: “To what extent was the politician’s statement politically correct or politically incorrect?” (1 = *very politically correct*, 7 = *very politically incorrect*).

Impression measures. To measure perceived authenticity and warmth, we used the same scales from Wood et al. (2008; $\alpha = .93$) and Fiske et al. (2002; $\alpha = .93$) described in Experiment 1. We also measured perceived *competence* (using the scale from Fiske et al., 2002 described in Experiment 1; $\alpha = .85$).

Control measures. To assess participants’ adherence to different moral principles, we used the Moral Foundations Questionnaire (30 items measuring five foundations: Harm/Care: $\alpha = .77$; Fairness: $\alpha = .73$; Loyalty: $\alpha = .78$; Authority: $\alpha = .79$; Purity: $\alpha = .88$; Graham et al., 2009). At the end of the survey, participants reported “how much [they] like political correctness” (1 = *dislike a great deal*, 7 = *like a great deal*) and their demographics (gender, age, ethnicity, political ideology, and education).

Results

Because we observed interactions between language use and topic on some of our dependent measures (see online supplemental materials for analyses), we first conducted 2 (communicator language: politically correct vs. politically incorrect) \times 3 (topic: immigration, homosexuality, disability) ANOVAs on each dependent measure to control for the effect of topic. Confirming the validity of our manipulation, the politically correct statements were viewed as more politically correct ($M = 3.75$, $SD = 1.85$) than the politically incorrect statements ($M = 4.68$, $SD = 1.60$), $F(1, 299) = 64.21$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.07$. A subsequent 2 (language use) \times 4 (political ideology: very liberal vs. moderately liberal vs. moderately conservative vs. very conservative) ANOVA on the manipulation check revealed no interaction with participants’ political ideology, $F(3, 297) = 0.17$, $p = .918$, $\eta_p^2 < 0.01$, indicating that conservatives and liberals interpreted the statements as similarly politically correct.

Impression measures. More important, the politically correct (vs. politically incorrect) politician was viewed as warmer, $F(1, 299) = 16.67, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.05$ ($M_{PC} = 4.31, SD = 1.57$; $M_{PIC} = 3.60, SD = 1.51$), but less authentic (more susceptible to influence), $F(1, 299) = 15.76, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.05$ ($M_{PC} = 4.46, SD = 1.50$; $M_{PIC} = 3.77, SD = 1.55$) and similarly competent, $F(1, 299) = 0.15, p = .697, \eta_p^2 < 0.01$, conceptually replicating the results from Experiment 1. Next aggregating across topics, in 2 (communicator language: politically correct vs. politically incorrect) \times 4 (perceiver political ideology) ANOVAs, we observed the predicted interaction on perceived susceptibility to influence, $F(3, 297) = 9.37, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.09$, although not on perceived warmth, $F(3, 297) = 1.40, p = .242, \eta_p^2 = 0.01$. Because we had preregistered predictions about the nature of both effects, we decomposed each of them. As expected, and shown in Figure 2, the effect of language on perceived authenticity was stronger among conservative participants ($M_{PIC} = 4.44, SD = 1.80$; $M_{PC} = 2.72, SD = 1.49$; $t(31) = -2.99, p = .005, d = -1.04$) than liberal

participants ($M_{PIC} = 4.12, SD = 1.36$; $M_{PC} = 4.26, SD = 1.16$; $t_s < 1.10, p_s > .271, d_s < 0.11$), whereas the effect on perceived warmth was stronger among liberal participants ($M_{PIC} = 4.44, SD = 1.80$; $M_{PC} = 2.72, SD = 1.49$; $t(31) = -2.99, p = .005, d = -1.04$) than conservative participants ($M_{PIC} = 4.12, SD = 1.36$; $M_{PC} = 4.26, SD = 1.16$; $t_s < 1.10, p_s > .271, d_s < 0.11$).

There were no effects of language use, political ideology, nor an interaction on perceived competence, $F_s < 2.11, p_s > .100$.

Moral foundations. Supporting prior research, liberals reported that the harm and fairness foundations mattered relatively more to them, $t_s > 3.32, p_s < .001, d_s > 0.39$, whereas conservatives reported that the ingroup loyalty, authority, and purity foundations mattered relatively more to them, $t_s < -4.45, p_s < .001, d_s < -0.55$ (see Supplemental Table 2 for M s and SD s). We next tested whether any of the five moral foundations mediated the effect of perceiver ideology on perceived authenticity or warmth when evaluating a politically incorrect or politically correct communicator. In 10 separate 5,000-sample bootstrapped mediation models, none of the moral foundations mediated the effect of perceiver political ideology (1 = liberal; 0 = conservative) on authenticity when the communicator was politically incorrect (all 95% CI for bias-corrected indirect effects contained 0), but three foundations mediated the effect on warmth (ingroup loyalty: 95% CI [-0.65, -0.16], authority: 95% CI [-0.73, -0.22], and purity: 95% CI [-0.68, -0.16]). We further tested whether any of the moral foundations mediated the effect of ideology on authenticity when the communicator was politically correct; here, we observed only one foundation marginally mediated (purity: 95% CI [0.00, 0.39]). Because there was no direct effect of ideology on perceived warmth when the communicator was politically correct, we did not test for mediation under this condition.

Liking of political correctness and politicians. Unsurprisingly, there was an effect of participants' ideology on their liking of political correctness, $F(3, 305) = 18.94, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.16$, such that liberals liked it more than conservatives. The aforementioned effects of language use on perceived authenticity and warmth remain robust controlling for liking of political correctness (Authenticity: $F(1, 305) = 15.11, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.05$; Warmth: $F(1, 305) = 15.58, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.05$). There was no effect of language on liking of political correctness, $F(1, 305) = 1.11, p = .294, \eta_p^2 < 0.01$.

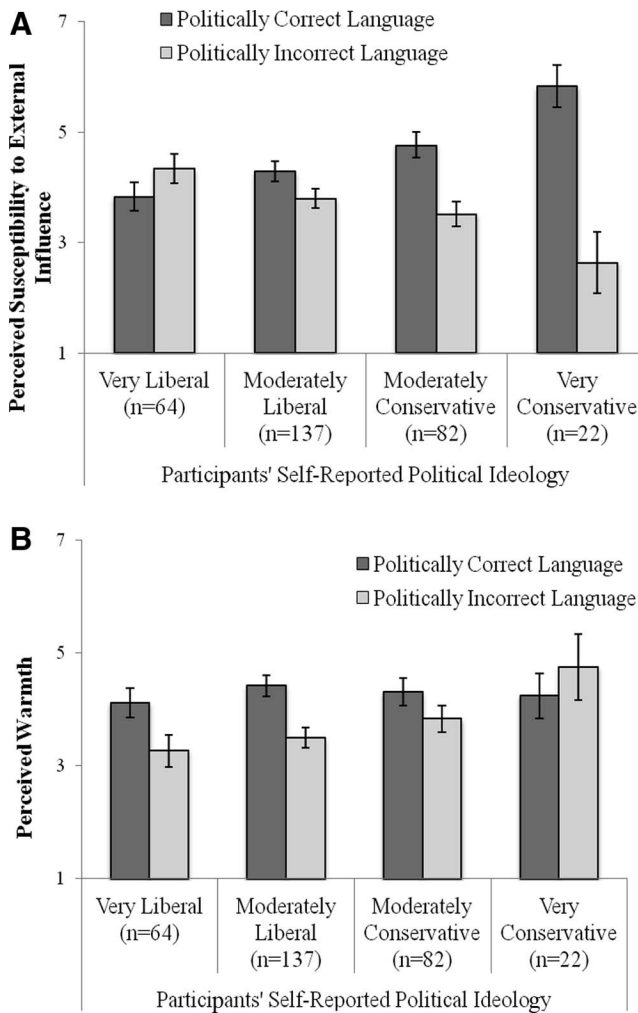


Figure 2. The effect of politically correct or politically incorrect language on perceptions of a politician's susceptibility to influence (A) and warmth (B) moderated by participants' political ideology in Experiment 2. Error bars represent the standard error around the mean.

⁸ We collected pilot data to test whether communicators themselves could predict how they would be perceived differently as a function of their political language ($n = 100, 57$ males, $M_{\text{age}} = 34.26, SD = 10.27$). Specifically, we asked communicators how they thought an observer would rate their own warmth, authenticity, and competence if the observer heard them use a politically correct (e.g., *undocumented immigrants*) vs. politically incorrect (e.g., *illegal immigrants*) term. Communicators selected from one of three options: the observer would think each description (i.e., they are warm, authentic, and competent) was (a) less true of them, (b) more true of them, or (c) no differently true of them. The majority (62%) of communicators correctly inferred that others would find them warmer if they were politically correct (and the other 38% thought there would be no difference or they would be seen as colder). But only a minority of communicators (22%) correctly inferred that others would find them less authentic if they were politically correct (with 40% believing it wouldn't make a difference and 38% believing they would seem more authentic); 30% of communicators believed political correctness would make them seem less competent (with 28% believing it wouldn't make a difference and 42% believing they would seem more competent). These data indicate that communicators themselves cannot fully predict the effect of their political language on others' impressions of them.

Discussion

Across a new set of statements with a subtler manipulation of politically correct or incorrect language, individuals across the political spectrum perceived a communicator using a politically correct label as warmer but less authentic. The stimuli in this experiment more clearly differentiate political incorrectness from other forms of political language like hate speech or demagoguery by using a manipulation of political incorrectness in which only the label applied to a social group is changed, without changing the opinion expressed in the statement.⁸

As in Experiment 1, we observed different ideological reactions particularly to a politically incorrect communicator, with conservatives perceiving him as more authentic but liberals perceiving him as colder. We further examined the possibility that different ideological reactions may be attributable to differences in adherence to moral foundations, specifically that differences in perceived authenticity are attributable to conservatives endorsing the purity foundation more than liberals whereas differences in perceived warmth are attributable to liberals supporting the harm/care moral foundation more than conservatives. Our results provided only partial support for this possibility: As expected, the endorsement of purity (partly) mediated the effect of ideology on authenticity, but endorsements of ingroup loyalty, respect for authority, and purity (but not harm/care) mediated the effect of ideology on warmth. At a high level, these mediation models do suggest that different moral beliefs may be implicated in different ideological reactions to communicators' language use, but that more research should examine exactly *which* moral foundations could underlie these reactions. Furthermore, an interaction between perceiver political ideology and communicator political language emerged on perceived competence of the communicator in Experiment 1 but not in Experiment 2, providing mixed evidence for whether ideological assessments could be driven by liberals simply liking political correctness more than conservatives. We return to testing explanations for different ideological reactions to political language in Experiment 4.

Experiment 3: Real Politicians

Experiment 3 provides a more externally valid test of our hypothesis, using actual politicians who expressed viewpoints on videotape that were pretested as appearing more or less politically correct. We matched their statements on topic and selected one statement that was relatively politically correct and a second that was relatively politically incorrect for three different politicians. We expected to replicate our prior results: Communicators who used politically incorrect language would seem more authentic but less warm than communicators who used politically correct language. Because this study was run with an extremely liberal undergraduate student population, we did not know whether there would be sufficient statistical power to observe an interaction with perceivers' political ideology but tested for it regardless.

A second purpose of this study was to examine possible downstream behavioral consequences of the use of politically incorrect or politically correct language. We hypothesized that observing political incorrectness (vs. correctness) would lead evaluators to feel more certainty about the communicator's political positions and language use in the future, because politically incorrect com-

municators appear less susceptible to external influence and, therefore, seem less likely to change their attitudes and behavior.

Method

We preregistered our hypotheses and analysis plan for this experiment on OSF (https://osf.io/g2ms4/?view_only=6e2e0e8dfa7342e5b59b4fc85b9beba8).

Participants. Using the same stopping rule in Experiment 2, we predetermined that we would collect 50 participants per each of six conditions. In total, 302 undergraduate students and community members from a West Coast university (108 males; $M_{\text{age}} = 20.83$, $SD = 6.13$; 87.09% self-identified liberal) completed the survey in exchange for \$5.00 each.

Procedure. The experiment design was 2 (communicator language: politically correct vs. politically incorrect) \times 3 (politician: Representative Steve King, Senator Jim Inhofe, and Governor Jeb Bush) between-participants. In all conditions, participants first read a short biography and viewed a photograph of one of the politicians (randomly assigned). Participants then watched a short video (less than one minute) of the politician giving a speech and subsequently completed a survey evaluating the politician.

Stimuli selection. To increase generalizability, we strove to select politicians who would vary in familiarity and status; we selected a congressman (Steve King), a Senator (Jim Inhofe), and a Governor (Jeb Bush).⁹ We matched the politically correct and politically incorrect videos from each communicator by the topic they discussed (e.g., immigration) and matched the length of the videos as closely as possible. Below we provide an example of one of the sets of statements (see statements from the other two politicians in the online supplemental materials):

Bush Politically Correct Statement. "So, look, my record is pretty clear. I'm married to a Mexican-American United States citizen, I'm immersed in the culture, I'm bilingual, I feel like I'm bicultural. I'm proud of the diversity of my own family and my record, not just yesterday, but over my lifetime is one that people can look at. I was talking about a very narrow casted system of fraud where people are bringing pregnant women in to have babies to get birthright citizenship. I support birthright citizenship, by the way. I support it. I think that is a noble thing that we should do."

Bush Politically Incorrect Statement. "There's abuse that people are bringing. Pregnant women are coming in to have babies simply because they can do it. There ought to be greater enforcement. That's the legitimate side of this. Greater enforcement so that you don't have these 'anchor babies,' as they are described, coming into the country."

To strengthen our manipulation, we asked participants to "describe in your own words what happened in the video."

Survey. As our manipulation check, we asked, "To what extent was the politician's statement politically correct or politi-

⁹ Politicians were conservative because we were unable to find videos of liberal politicians making very politically incorrect statements about topics which they had also spoken about in a very politically correct manner. We test explicitly whether communicator ideology and perceiver ideology moderate impressions of political language in Experiment 5.

cally incorrect?" (1 = *very politically correct*, 7 = *very politically incorrect*).¹⁰

Primary measures. Participants reported perceived *authenticity* ($\alpha = .88$) and *warmth* ($\alpha = .88$) on the same scales described in Experiment 1.

Secondary measures. To be thorough, we also measured *competence* on the same scale described in Experiment 1 ($\alpha = .70$). We measured *behavioral intentions* using the scale described in Experiment 1 except that we replaced one item, "I would donate money to his election campaign" with: "I have confidence in his judgment" because we thought it was unlikely that our liberal, student-based sample would be willing to donate very much to any of the politicians we selected ($\alpha = .86$).

Predictions. We selected two policy positions different from the ones that the communicators discussed on video, support for affirmative action and transgender rights. To test predictions about politicians' platforms, for each topic, we asked participants, "To what extent do you think the politician will support (or oppose) affirmative action/transgender rights?" (1 = *he will strongly oppose*, 5 = *he will strongly support*). To test predictions about politicians' future language use, for each topic we asked, "To what extent do you think that the politician will use politically correct (or politically incorrect) language when defending his opinions?" (1 = *his language will be very politically correct*, 5 = *his language will be very politically incorrect*). Finally, we asked participants to report how certain they were about their "response regarding the politician's stance" and about their "response regarding the politician's use of politically correct or incorrect language" (1 = *not at all certain*, 4 = *extremely certain*).

Control measures. At the end of the survey, participants reported "how much [they] like when politicians are politically correct" (1 = *dislike a great deal*, 7 = *like a great deal*). We also asked participants, "Before you began this survey, how familiar were you with the politician about whom you read?" (1 = *not at all familiar*, 7 = *very familiar*). Participants' familiarity with politicians did not interact with their language use on our primary measures. Finally, participants reported their demographics (gender, age, ethnicity, political ideology, and education).

Results

Our manipulation check showed the predicted effect of language, $F(1, 296) = 285.88, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.49$, such that participants in the politically incorrect condition believed that the statement they read was less politically correct ($M = 5.74, SD = 1.08$) than those who were in the politically correct condition ($M = 3.25, SD = 1.47$).¹¹ We next tested whether language condition interacted with politician condition. In 2 (communicator language: politically correct vs. politically incorrect) \times 3 (politician: King vs. Inhofe vs. Bush) ANOVAs on participants' judgments of the politician, unpredicted marginal interactions between language and politician emerged on perceived authenticity, $F(2, 296) = 2.58, p = .078, \eta_p^2 = 0.02$, and perceived warmth, $F(2, 296) = 2.86, p = .059, \eta_p^2 = 0.02$. We report these results in more detail in the online supplemental materials but focus our analyses in the main text on the effect of language and perceiver ideology collapsing across politician.

Primary measures. Because only 17 participants identified as "very conservative" and 22 identified as "moderately conserva-

tive," we collapsed across these two categories to create a "conservative" category ($n = 39$) and likewise collapsed across the very liberal and moderately liberal categories to create a "liberal" category ($n = 263$). A 2 (communicator language: politically correct vs. politically incorrect) \times 2 (perceiver ideology: liberal vs. conservative) ANOVA on perceived authenticity showed the predicted albeit marginal effect of language, $F(1, 298) = 3.39, p = .067, \eta_p^2 = 0.01$ ($M_{PC} = 4.45, SD = 1.14; M_{PIC} = 4.12, SD = 1.27$), but no interaction, $F(1, 298) = 0.20, p = .659, \eta_p^2 < 0.01$. A marginal effect of perceiver ideology also emerged, $F(1, 298) = 3.37, p = .068, \eta_p^2 = 0.01$ ($M_{Liberal} = 4.34, SD = 1.22; M_{Conservative} = 3.92, SD = 1.19$; see Figure 3A).

We conducted the same analysis on perceptions of politicians' warmth. This analysis revealed a significant effect of language, $F(1, 298) = 38.54, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.12$, ($M_{PC} = 4.25, SD = 1.14; M_{PIC} = 2.87, SD = 1.04$), and the predicted interaction, $F(1, 298) = 4.35, p = .038, \eta_p^2 = 0.01$. Specifically, the effect of language was driven by liberals ($M_{PC} = 4.21, SD = 1.15; M_{PIC} = 2.70, SD = 0.94$), $t(261) = 11.57, p < .001, d = 1.44$, more so than by conservatives ($M_{PC} = 4.61, SD = 1.02; M_{PIC} = 3.86, SD = 1.01$), $t(37) = 2.29, p = .028, d = 0.74$. There was also a main effect of perceiver ideology, $F(1, 298) = 18.61, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.06$ ($M_{Liberal} = 3.47, SD = 1.30; M_{Conservative} = 4.20, SD = 1.07$; see Figure 3B).

Secondary measures. We further tested the effect of experimental condition on perceived competence and intent to act on the politician's behalf using the same 2 \times 2 ANOVAs described above. There was an effect of ideology on perceived competence, $F(1, 298) = 10.28, p = .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.03$, such that liberals perceived the politicians as less competent ($M = 4.34, SD = 0.97$) than conservatives ($M = 4.89, SD = 0.93$), but there was no effect of language and no interaction, $F_s < 2.67, p_s > .104, \eta_p^2 < 0.01$. There was also an effect of ideology on behavioral intentions, $F(1, 298) = 21.96, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.07$ ($M_{Liberal} = 2.60, SD = 1.19; M_{Conservative} = 3.49, SD = 1.38$). In the same analysis, an effect of language on behavioral intentions emerged, $F(1, 296) = 47.47, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.14$: Participants reported greater intent to act on behalf of politically correct politicians ($M = 3.18, SD = 1.20$) than politically incorrect politicians ($M = 2.26, SD = 1.12$). This effect was qualified by an interaction, $F(1, 296) = 7.99, p = .005, \eta_p^2 = 0.03$, such that liberal participants were more likely to undertake behaviors on behalf of politically correct politicians ($M = 3.14, SD = 1.16$) than politically incorrect politicians ($M = 2.05, SD = 0.94$), $t(261) = -8.38, p < .001, d = -1.04$, but conservatives were no more likely to undertake behaviors on behalf of politically correct ($M = 3.49, SD = 1.47$) or politically incorrect politicians ($M = 3.48, SD = 1.34$), $t(37) = -.03, p = .978, d = -0.01$.

¹⁰ We asked two more questions immediately following the manipulation check, which we analyze in the online supplemental materials: (a) "To what extent do you think the politician's position is liberal or conservative on this topic?" (1 = *very liberal*, 5 = *very conservative*) and (b) "On the whole, do you agree or disagree with what the politician said?" (1 = *I disagree*, 2 = *I agree*).

¹¹ The effect of language use on our manipulation check interacted with participant ideology ($n = 39$ conservatives; $n = 263$ liberals), $F(1, 296) = 6.99, p = .009, \eta_p^2 = 0.02$, such that conservatives reported less difference between conditions than liberals. However, the effect of condition was still statistically significant separately among liberals and conservatives, $p_s < .001$.

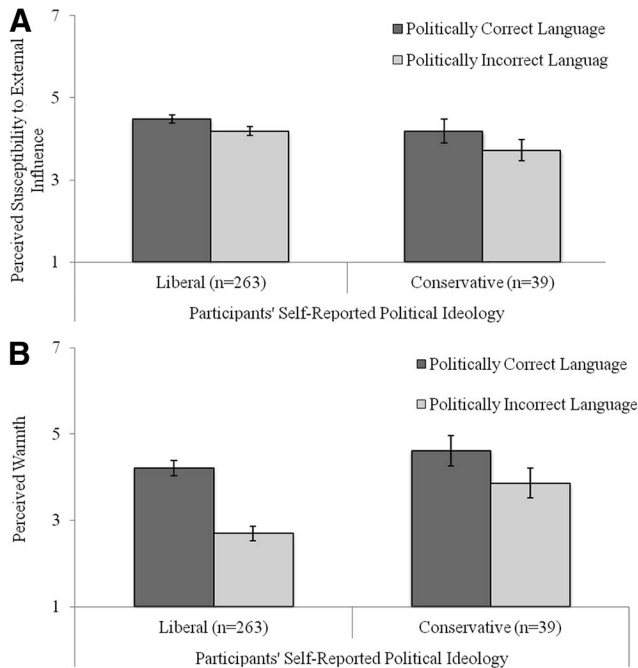


Figure 3. The effect of politically correct or politically incorrect language on perceptions of a politician's susceptibility to influence (A) and warmth (B) moderated by participants' political ideology in Experiment 3. Error bars represent the standard error around the mean.

Predictions. We collapsed across the affirmative action and transgender questions, which showed high correlations for each of the four prediction and certainty items ($r_s = .452, .456, .595, \text{ and } .581, p_s < .001$, for predicted position, certainty about position, perceived future language used, and certainty about future language, respectively). Even though all politicians espoused a relatively conservative opinion in their statements, participants predicted that those who used politically correct language would support a liberal position (i.e., supporting affirmative action and transgender rights) more in the future ($M = 2.37, SD = 0.86$) than those who used politically incorrect language ($M = 1.47, SD = 0.57$), $F(1, 296) = 117.61, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.28$. Unsurprisingly, participants were also more likely to predict politicians would be politically incorrect in the future if they heard the politically incorrect politician ($M = 3.95, SD = 0.83$) than the politically correct politician ($M = 2.79, SD = 1.07$), $F(1, 296) = 109.34, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.27$. Most interesting, and in line with our hypothesis, participants who heard a politically incorrect politician felt more certain about their predictions about the politician's future position ($M = 2.86, SD = 0.72$) and language use ($M = 2.81, SD = 0.74$) than participants who heard a politically correct politician (support: $M = 2.28, SD = 0.79$; language use: $M = 2.51, SD = 0.71$), $F(1, 296) = 44.92, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.13$ and $F(1, 296) = 13.57, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.04$, respectively.

We predicted that participants have more certainty about politically incorrect politicians' future position and language because those politicians seem less susceptible to influence. To test this possibility, we examined whether perceptions of influence mediated the effect using 5,000-sample bootstrap mediation models. It did for beliefs about future language, 95% CI [0.01, 0.07], al-

though not for future position, 95% CI [-0.01, 0.05]. We further examined an alternative possibility: that politically incorrect language is rarer and therefore seems more diagnostic of true beliefs. If this is true, then the effect of language type on certainty should be larger among liberal perceivers (for whom political incorrectness is relatively less commonly used) than among conservative perceivers. We found no evidence for this possibility (interaction $p_s > .673$).

Liking of political correctness. There were no effects of language or politician and no interaction on participants' liking of political correctness, $F_s < 0.96, p_s > .371, \eta_p^2 < 0.01$, but there was an effect of ideology, $F(1, 300) = 36.19, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.11$, such that liberal participants preferred political correctness ($M = 5.26, SD = 1.47$) more than conservative participants ($M = 3.69, SD = 1.79$). The aforementioned effects were robust controlling for liking of political correctness.

Discussion

Using six real statements made by three politicians, Experiment 3 demonstrates that listening to politically incorrect language can affect explicit attitudes toward politicians even when perceivers already have opinions about the politicians. In particular, our results revealed only marginal interactions between the language used and the politician evaluated, suggesting that language exerted similar effects on impressions for each politician. This is particularly interesting for one of our politicians, Jeb Bush, with whom our participants indicated very high familiarity ($M = 4.09, SD = 1.64$) and likely already held strong opinions toward (because he had recently run in the U.S. presidential election primaries at the time of the study). We did not find an interaction between communicator language and perceiver political ideology on perceived authenticity, but we suspect that this was because our sample contained so few conservatives (12.9% of the sample). Finally, Experiment 3 suggests an interesting downstream behavioral consequence: participants were more certain about their predictions about politically incorrect politicians' future behavior (specifically, the language those politicians would use and their political position on novel topics). Our initial mediational evidence suggests that participants' certainty may at least partly be due to their assessment that politically incorrect politicians are more authentic. We further tested an alternative possibility: that participants' certainty might be driven by politically incorrect language being more rarely observed and therefore seeming more diagnostic of one's true attitudes. The data did not support this possibility.

This study left several remaining questions. First, would the results replicate (and would perceivers' political ideology moderate the effect of language on impressions) with a broader representation of perceiver ideologies? Second, would perceivers assess politicians whose language that they did not hear more like the politically correct politicians or the politically incorrect politicians, providing a baseline comparison for the effect of political language?

To answer these questions, we conducted a follow-up experiment with a larger sample size using an online platform (Supplemental Experiment S2; $n = 430$ MTurk participants, 257 males, $M_{\text{age}} = 37.47, SD = 27.98$; 68.4% self-identified liberal, for \$0.60 each), adding a baseline condition in which participants only read a biography of the politician without listening to the politically

correct or incorrect statement (see online supplemental materials for full method and results). The results replicated and extended Experiment 3: politically incorrect politicians were seen as more authentic (less susceptible to influence; $\alpha = .89$; $M = 3.53$, $SD = 1.45$) than both politically correct politicians ($M = 4.02$, $SD = 1.38$), $t(427) = -2.52$, $p = .012$, $d = -0.35$, and baseline politicians ($M = 4.17$, $SD = 1.13$), $t(293) = -4.30$, $p < .001$, $d = -0.50$, and there were no differences between politically correct and baseline politicians, $t(291) = -1.00$, $p = .320$, $d = -0.12$. However, politically correct politicians were seen as warmer ($\alpha = .86$; $M = 4.30$, $SD = 1.37$) than both politically incorrect politicians ($M = 3.65$, $SD = 1.54$), $t(270) = 3.73$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.45$, and baseline politicians ($M = 3.96$, $SD = 1.36$), $t(293) = 4.30$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.50$, and there was only a marginal difference between politically incorrect and baseline politicians, $t(293) = -1.83$, $p = .068$, $d = -0.21$. In other words, politically incorrect politicians seem particularly authentic compared with politically correct and baseline politicians whereas politically correct politicians seem particularly warm compared with politically incorrect and baseline politicians. In this way, political incorrectness uniquely grants the communicator authenticity, whereas political correctness uniquely grants the communicator warmth. These effects were also moderated by participants' political ideology in the same pattern observed in prior studies (interaction of language use and ideology for authenticity was statistically marginal: $F[1, 447] = 1.80$, $p = .097$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.03$; interaction for warmth was statistically significant: $F[1, 447] = 2.76$, $p = .012$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.04$). This suggests that different ideological reactions to political correctness are not driven by inferences about communicators' political ideology, because the communicator was clearly politically conservative in this experiment.

Experiment 4: Targeting Liberal or Conservative Groups

Experiment 4 tests two possible reasons why perceiver political ideology moderates evaluations of political correctness. Prior experiments suggest that differences in perceivers' ideological reactions are unlikely to be attributable only to liberals simply liking political correctness more than conservatives or to different inferences about communicators' political ideology. A more likely possibility is that liberal perceivers tend to be more sensitive to violations of warmth, whereas conservative perceivers tend to be more sensitive to violations of authenticity, which may be attributable to ideological differences in morals (Graham et al., 2009; Haidt & Graham, 2007; Haidt et al., 2009; Haidt, Rozin, McCauley, & Imada, 1997; Koleva, Graham, Iyer, Ditto, & Haidt, 2012), although we observed only weak evidence supporting this possibility in Experiment 2. Experiment 4 tests another possibility: that perceivers derogate communicators' warmth when they apply politically incorrect language to a group for whom perceivers feel sympathy, but augment communicators' authenticity when they apply political incorrectness to a group for whom perceivers do not feel sympathy. Our prior experiments cannot test between these possibilities because our stimuli used target groups for whom liberals tend to feel more sympathy (e.g., immigrants, LGBTQ, and people with disabilities).¹² Experiment 4 manipulates whether the target of political incorrectness is a group for whom liberals feel more sympathy (e.g., pro-choice individuals) or conservatives feel

more sympathy (e.g., pro-life individuals). If liberal perceivers believe political incorrectness is less warm and conservatives believe it more authentic regardless of the target group, this would support the first explanation (i.e., differences in morals). However, if instead the target group moderates the effect of language use and perceiver ideology on evaluations, this would support the second explanation (i.e., differences in sympathy toward the target group).

We again tested the effect of communicators' language use on perceivers' certainty about communicators' future political positions but included both a liberal and conservative position to test whether perceivers felt similarly more certain of politically incorrect communicators' future positions regardless of their ideology.

Method

We preregistered our hypotheses and analysis plan for this experiment on OSF (https://osf.io/j3d95/?view_only=f5ac1a2369a14ac799b35e859573b72d).

Participants. Based on the effect sizes in the results of our primary analyses of interest in prior studies, we predetermined that we would collect 100 participants per each of eight conditions. In total, 801 adults from Amazon Mechanical Turk (393 males; $M_{\text{age}} = 38.06$, $SD = 11.70$; 58.30% self-identified liberal) completed the survey in exchange for \$0.40 each.

Procedure. The experiment design was 2 (communicator language: politically correct vs. politically incorrect) \times 2 (target group ideology: liberal vs. conservative) \times 4 (perceiver ideology: very liberal, moderately liberal, moderately conservative, and very conservative). In all conditions, participants read a single statement directed at one of six target groups (randomly assigned) and subsequently completed a survey evaluating the politician.

Stimuli selection. We selected six target groups, three for whom liberals feel sympathy and three for whom conservatives feel sympathy, as determined by a pretest. In our pretest ($n = 106$; 53 males; $M_{\text{age}} = 37.2$, $SD = 11.18$; 58.5% self-identified liberal), we asked participants to report their opinions about 23 different groups (e.g., White people, Black people, undocumented immigrants, religious people, and so on—see full list in the online supplemental materials). They reported: how positively or negatively they felt toward the group, how much sympathy they had for the group, how similar they felt to the group, and the extent to which they felt the group was “on their side” on 1 to 7 Likert scales. We then collapsed these four items into an index of sympathy ($\alpha = .82$) and selected the three groups for whom liberals had most sympathy (undocumented immigrants, LGBTQ, pro-choice individuals: $M_s = 4.78$, 5.10, and 5.15, respectively) and the three groups for whom conservatives had most sympathy

¹² This statement is empirically supported based on the pilot data collected in this Experiment (see Stimuli Selection section).

¹³ Specifically, we used the following politically correct labels: *undocumented immigrants*, *LGBTQ individuals*, *people who are “pro-choice,”* *poor whites in rural America*, *religious Americans in the “Bible Belt,”* and *people who are “pro-life.”* We used the following politically incorrect labels (respectively): *illegals*, *trannys*, *dykes*, and *queers*, *anti-fetus*, *anti-life*, *selfish murderers*, *hillbillies*, *rednecks*, and *white trash*, *Bible Thumpers*, *Jesus freaks*, and *religious nutjobs*, and *anti-choice*, *anti-women*, *misogynistic fascists*. We do not endorse any of the offensive language used in this paper; we included terms only as they were relevant to our research question.

(religious Christians, poor Whites, pro-life individuals: $M_s = 4.48, 4.80, \text{ and } 4.70$, respectively).

To create the statements for the main study, we used the same statements from Experiment 2 (“I think it’s important for our country to have a national conversation about X group. It helps no one to pretend that the situation doesn’t exist or that it will take care of itself. The sooner we come to the table with serious proposals about what to do about issues relating to X group, the sooner we can help the public at large and move the country in the right direction”) but replaced “X group” with either a politically correct or politically incorrect term for the group.¹³

Survey. As our manipulation check, we asked, “To what extent was the politician’s statement politically correct or politically incorrect?” (1 = *very politically correct*, 7 = *very politically incorrect*). We measured perceived authenticity ($\alpha = .94$), warmth ($\alpha = .92$), and competence ($\alpha = .77$) using the scales described in Experiment 1. To measure predictions about politicians’ future attitudes and behavior, we selected a liberal topic (support for affirmative action) and a conservative topic (support for the death penalty) that were different from the communicator topics and for each topic asked participants, “To what extent do you think the politician will support (or oppose) [topic]?” (1 = *he will strongly oppose*, 5 = *he will strongly support*). Participants also predicted: “To what extent do you think that the politician will use politically correct (or politically incorrect) language when defending his opinions?” (1 = *his language will be very politically correct*, 5 = *his language will be very politically incorrect*). Finally, participants reported how certain they were about their “response regarding the politician’s stance” and about their “response regarding the politician’s use of politically correct or incorrect language” (1 = *not at all certain*, 4 = *extremely certain*).

As a control measure at the end of the survey, participants reported “how much [they] like when politicians are politically correct” (1 = *dislike a great deal*, 7 = *like a great deal*). Finally, participants reported their demographics (gender, age, ethnicity, political ideology, and education).

Results

We conducted 2 (communicator language: politically correct vs. politically incorrect) \times 2 (target group ideology: liberal vs. conservative) \times 4 (perceiver ideology: very liberal, moderately liberal, moderately conservative, and very conservative) ANOVAs on participants’ judgments of the politician. First, our manipulation check showed the predicted effect of language, $F(1, 785) = 79.92, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .09$, such that participants in the politically incorrect condition believed that the statement they read was less politically correct ($M = 5.47, SD = 1.75$) than did those who were in the politically correct condition ($M = 4.03, SD = 1.66$). There was also an effect of target ideology, $F(1, 785) = 11.28, p = .001, \eta_p^2 = .01$, such that speaking about conservative targets was perceived to be more politically correct ($M = 5.04, SD = 1.78$) than speaking about liberal targets ($M = 4.11, SD = 2.21$). There was no effect of perceiver ideology or interactions, $F_s < 1$.

Impression measures. Testing our primary hypothesis, the predicted effects of language on perceived authenticity, $F(1, 785) = 22.56, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .03$ ($M_{PIC} = 3.53, SD = 1.53$; $M_{PC} = 4.20, SD = 1.41$) and perceived warmth, $F(1, 785) = 49.60, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .06$ ($M_{PIC} = 3.67, SD = 1.52$; $M_{PC} = 3.96,$

$SD = 1.52$) were both qualified by three-way interactions, $F(3, 785) = 3.73, p = .011, \eta_p^2 = .014$ and $F(3, 785) = 4.08, p = .007, \eta_p^2 = .02$, respectively (see Figure 4A and 4B). Decomposing these three-way interactions showed that the effect of language on perceived warmth was significantly stronger among conservative participants evaluating conservative targets, two-way interaction, $F(1, 395) = 4.79, p = .029, \eta_p^2 = .01$ (conservative: $M_{PC} = 4.17, SD = 1.44$; $M_{PIC} = 2.96, SD = 1.51$; $t(176) = -5.45, p < .001, d = -0.82$; liberal: $M_{PC} = 4.05, SD = 1.42$; $M_{PIC} = 3.48, SD = 1.44$; $t(219) = -2.95, p = .004, d = -0.40$), whereas the effect of language on authenticity was driven by liberal participants evaluating conservative targets, two-way interaction, $F(1, 398) = 6.56, p = .011, \eta_p^2 = .02$ (conservative: $M_{PC} = 3.89, SD = 1.44$; $M_{PIC} = 3.73, SD = 1.62$; $t(176) = -0.67, p = .502, d = -0.10$; liberal: $M_{PC} = 4.09, SD = 1.44$; $M_{PIC} = 3.15, SD = 1.60$; $t(219) = -4.62, p < .001, d = -0.62$).

In contrast, when evaluating liberal targets, the effect of language on warmth was similar among both liberal participants ($M_{PC} = 4.44, SD = 1.39$; $M_{PIC} = 3.22, SD = 1.58$), $t(244) = -6.43, p < .001, d = -0.82$, and conservative participants ($M_{PC} = 4.80, SD = 1.12$; $M_{PIC} = 3.56, SD = 1.31$), $t(154) = -6.38, p < .001, d = -1.03$, (no two-way interaction: $F(1, 398) = 0.01, p = .943, \eta_p^2 < .01$). The effect of language on authenticity when evaluating liberal targets was also similar among liberal perceivers ($M_{PC} = 4.38, SD = 1.17$; $M_{PIC} = 3.68, SD = 1.47$), $t(244) = -4.08, p < .001, d = -0.52$, and conservative perceivers ($M_{PC} = 4.43, SD = 1.58$; $M_{PIC} = 3.52, SD = 1.34$), $t(154) = -3.87, p < .001, d = -0.62$ (no two-way interaction: $F(1, 398) = 0.59, p = .442, \eta_p^2 < .01$). Examining only the most extreme perceiver ideologies, however, reveals that very liberal participants reported the most difference between the politically incorrect and politically correct communicators’ warmth, $t(74) = -4.88, p < .001, d = 1.13$ (vs. very conservative participants, $t < 1, p > .250$), whereas the conservative participants rated the most difference between politically incorrect and politically correct communicators’ authenticity, $t(135) = 3.16, p = .002, d = 0.54$ (vs. very liberal participants, $t = 1.50, p = .139$).

In other words, when communicators spoke about target groups for whom liberals feel sympathy, the pattern of results of perceiver political ideology and communicator language showed a similar pattern as in prior experiments, but when communicators spoke about target groups for whom conservatives feel sympathy, the opposite pattern emerged. This suggests that perceivers’ political ideology influences their assessments of communicators’ warmth and authenticity based on whether communicators are being politically incorrect toward a group for which the perceivers feel sympathy.

There were also effects of target ideology on authenticity, $F(1, 801) = 7.06, p = .008, \eta_p^2 = 0.01$, and warmth, $F(1, 801) = 7.96, p = .005, \eta_p^2 = 0.01$, such that speaking about conservative targets was generally perceived to be more authentic ($M = 3.72, SD = 1.56$) but less warm ($M = 3.67, SD = 1.52$) than speaking about liberal targets (authenticity: $M = 4.01, SD = 1.43$; warmth: $M = 3.96, SD = 1.52$).

Finally, an effect of language emerged on perceived competence, $F(1, 801) = 5.14, p = .024, \eta_p^2 = 0.01$: politically incorrect politicians seemed less competent ($M = 4.55, SD = 1.15$) than politically correct politicians ($M = 4.87, SD = 1.05$), but there

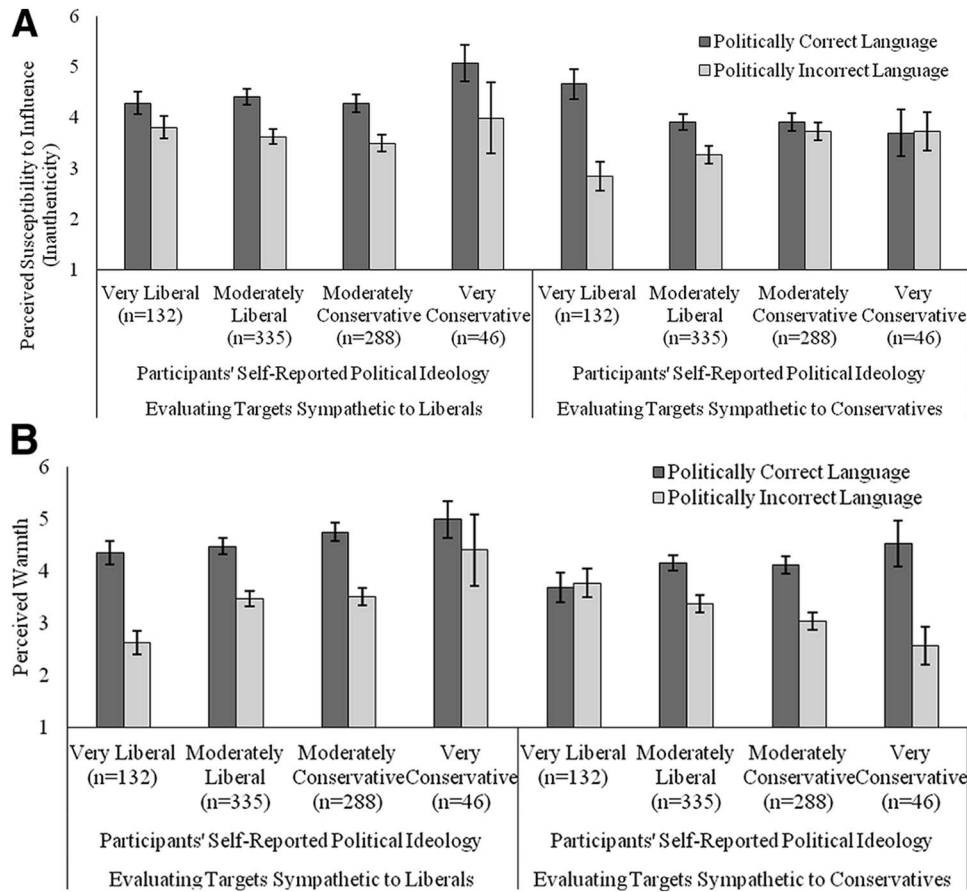


Figure 4. The effect of politically correct or politically incorrect language on perceptions of a politician's susceptibility to influence (A) and warmth (B) moderated by participants' political ideology and whether liberals or conservatives feel sympathetic toward the target group in Experiment 4. Error bars represent the standard error around the mean.

were no other effects or interactions on perceived competence, $F_s < 1$.

Predictions. To simplify our analyses, we conducted 2 (communicator language: politically correct vs. politically incorrect) \times 2 (target group ideology: liberal vs. conservative) \times 2 (perceiver ideology: liberal vs. conservative) ANOVAs on position predictions and certainty. Political incorrectness made perceivers more likely to believe the communicator would support a conservative position in the future, $F(1, 793) = 6.24, p = .013, \eta_p^2 = .01$, less likely to support a liberal position in the future, $F(1, 793) = 20.69, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .03$, and more likely to use politically incorrect language in the future, $F(1, 793) = 95.70, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.11$. Main effects of target group ideology and perceiver ideology also emerged for these predictions (see online supplemental materials).

Testing our primary hypothesis, political incorrectness also made participants more certain about all of their predictions, $F_s > 5.13, p_s < .024, \eta_p^2 > 0.01$ (aggregate $F[1, 793] = 19.38, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.02$). Like in Experiment 3, we again tested two possible explanations for this effect. First, political incorrectness may create more certainty because it makes the communicator seem less susceptible to influence. We did not find evidence for this, because susceptibility ratings did not mediate the effect of

language type on certainty using 5,000-sample bootstrap mediation models (both bias-corrected 95% CIs contained 0). Second, political incorrectness may seem more diagnostic because it is rarer, in which case the effect should be larger among liberals. We did find evidence for this: the effect of language on certainty was qualified by interactions with perceivers' political ideology ($F_s > 3.65, p_s < .056$) such that the effects of language on certainty were stronger for liberal than conservative perceivers (see Figure 5).

Discussion

Whereas our prior experiments indicated that liberals are particularly likely to attend to harm violations whereas conservatives are likely to notice authenticity violations, Experiment 4 demonstrates that these ideological tendencies can be reversed depending on perceivers' sympathy toward the target to whom the political language is applied. Specifically, when the communicator used a politically incorrect label for a target group for whom conservatives (but not liberals) feel sympathy (e.g., calling poor Whites *white trash*), conservative perceivers viewed the communicator as cold, whereas liberals viewed the communicator as authentic. This pattern of results suggests that the interpretation of political lan-

guage depends on the group to which it is being applied, and whether perceivers care about that group or not.

We further replicated the finding from Experiment 3 that political incorrectness makes perceivers feel more certain about communicators' future language use and positions, but did not find statistical evidence supporting that this result is attributable to politically incorrect communicators appearing more authentic. Instead, the evidence was more consistent with political incorrectness creating certainty because it may be more rarely used. Future research could more clearly disentangle the origins underlying these perceptions of certainty, a point to which we return in the General Discussion.

Finally, given these results, we wondered whether politically correct language could influence impressions even when the target group is entirely politically neutral. To test this, we selected a target group from our pretest in Experiment 4 that was evaluated no differently by liberal and conservative perceivers: obese individuals. We ran an online survey (Supplemental Experiment S3; $n = 402$ adults from Amazon Mechanical Turk; 219 males; $M_{\text{age}} = 34.8$, $SD = 11.05$; 68.41% self-identified liberal) in which participants read a statement about obese individuals that either used politically correct language (*obese individuals*) or politically incorrect language (*fatties*). Results revealed the predicted effects of language on perceived authenticity, $F(1, 401) = 15.20$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.04$, and perceived warmth, $F(1, 401) = 110.64$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.22$. There was no interaction with perceiver ideology for authenticity, $F(3, 394) = 1.37$, $p = .252$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.01$, although a small interaction emerged for warmth, $F(3, 394) = 2.72$, $p = .044$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.02$, such that the effect of language on perceived warmth was larger among liberal perceivers (see full results in online supplemental materials). This experiment suggests that language use can still influence evaluations of communicators even when the communicators are discussing an apolitical topic.

Experiment 5: Conservative and Liberal Communicators

In Experiment 5, politically correct and incorrect statements from both liberal and conservative communicators were evaluated by perceivers of varying political ideologies, providing a test of whether ideological agreement between communicators and evaluators moderates the effect of political language on impression

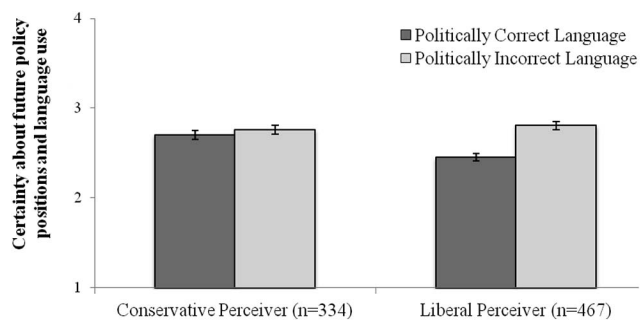


Figure 5. The effect of politically correct or politically incorrect language on certainty of predictions about a politician's future policy positions and language use moderated by participants' political ideology in Experiment 4. Error bars represent the standard error around the mean.

formation. It is possible, for instance, that the effect of using political correctness on impressions might be even stronger when perceivers disagree (vs. agree) with communicators' positions because perceivers may be more likely to overlook nuances in language when they already like the communicator and agree with what he or she says. By collecting a wide-ranging sample of stimuli, we enhance generalizability and reduce the likelihood of liberal bias in stimuli-creation (which is well-documented in psychology research; Duarte et al., 2015; Eitan et al., 2018; Inbar & Lammers, 2012).

We further tested our prediction that the effect of politically incorrect (vs. correct) language enhancing perceived authenticity is driven by the belief that such communicators lack ulterior motives. Specifically, we measured how strategic observers perceived the statement to be. For thoroughness, we additionally measured other aspects of the statements. We derived these aspects from Gustainis' (1990) seven rhetorical techniques habitually used by demagogues: how offensive, simplistic, logical, emotional, scripted, passionate, and important the statements seemed. Although political language might naturally vary on some of these aspects, we expected how strategic it seems would particularly influence beliefs about the communicator's authenticity.

Method

Participants. We aimed to collect 30 participants per pair of politically incorrect and politically correct statements (with 12 statement pairs, yielding 360 participants total). In total, 358 adults from Amazon Mechanical Turk (156 males; $M_{\text{age}} = 39.86$, $SD = 13.16$; 60.9% self-identified liberal) completed the main experiment in exchange for \$0.60.

Procedure (Perceivers). The design of this experiment was: 2 (statement language: politically incorrect vs. politically correct) within-participant \times 2 (statement position: liberal vs. conservative) between-participants \times 3 (statement topic: transgender vs. immigration vs. abortion) between-participants. For each of the three topics, we collected two liberal positions and two conservative positions; each position contained a politically correct and politically incorrect statement (see Stimuli Selection section for more details). Participants first imagined watching a local state senator make a speech to a group of people and then read a statement from the senator. The statement was either politically correct or politically incorrect, expressed either a liberal or conservative position, and was on one of three possible topics (transgender, immigration, or abortion policy). Next, participants completed a survey measuring their impressions of the statement first and of the senator subsequently. Participants then read another statement from, ostensibly, another local state senator. In reality, both statements had been created by the same communicator (collected from our presurvey). We used the cover story that a local senator had spoken the statement (instead of an online participant) because we intended to also examine voting behavior. The first and second statements were always on the same topic and held the same position, but differed in their language use (if the first was politically correct, the second was politically incorrect, and order was counterbalanced). After reading both statements and making judgments about the statements and the senators, par-

ticipants reported their own opinion on the topic and finally voted on one of the two senators to represent their position in a fight against their party leadership (see “Survey” section below for exact question text). At the end of the study, participants reported their demographic information.

Stimuli selection (Communicators). To create the politically incorrect and politically correct statements that our participants read in the primary survey, we conducted a presurvey in which we asked a separate set of participants ($n = 59$ Amazon Mechanical Turk adults; 34 males; $M_{\text{age}} = 36.23$, $SD = 12.48$; 77% self-identified liberal) to write their “true opinions” about five different topics (transgender, immigration, abortion, obesity, and diversity policies) in both a politically correct and a politically incorrect manner. Therefore, each participant wrote 10 separate statements for us (590 statements total).¹⁴ Specifically, we asked:

What are your true opinions about how transgender people should be treated in America? Please describe your opinions on this topic in a POLITICALLY [IN]CORRECT way. As you write your opinions, please [do NOT] avoid being insensitive to the feelings of others, especially to disadvantaged people.

Next, we asked three independent coders (blind to our hypotheses) to rate each pair of statements on which of the statements was more politically correct ($\alpha = .85$), whether the statements argued for the same position ($\alpha = .94$), and whether the statements contained any of the seven profane words ($\alpha = .93$; as defined by: H.R. 3687). We used these criteria because we needed to ensure that the statement that we expected to be more politically correct actually was (i.e., following our language instructions), that both statements argued for the same position (i.e., following instructions to express their true opinions), and that no profanity would be present in our primary survey to eliminate ethical concerns. Following this coding, we selected the statements for which all three coders agreed that (a) the communicator had followed our language instruction, (b) that both statements advocated the same position, and (c) that the statements contained no profanity. We further selected statements for which there were at least two usable politically incorrect and politically correct pairs that expressed a conservative position (i.e., written by a conservative communicator), and two that expressed a liberal position (i.e., written by a liberal communicator).

This resulted in 24 statements for use in the main experiment, which represented three topics (transgender, immigration, and abortion policies; see Supplemental Table 3 for a full list of statements). In total, for each of the three topics there were two liberal and two conservative communicators (who each wrote a politically incorrect and politically correct version, creating eight statements in each of the three topics). Specifically, the liberal position for transgender policy expressed that transgender people should be able to use any bathroom of their choosing, the conservative position for transgender policy expressed that transgender people should use the bathroom of their birth sex, the liberal position for immigration policy expressed that immigrants should be allowed to enter (or remain in) America, the conservative position for immigration policy expressed that immigrants should be limited from entering (or removed from) America, the liberal position for abortion policy expressed that women have the right to choose whether to abort their unborn children, and the conserva-

tive position for abortion policy expressed that unborn children have the right to life.

Survey.

Manipulation and attention check questions. For our manipulation check, we asked, “To what extent was [the senator’s] statement politically correct or politically incorrect?” (1 = *very politically correct*, 7 = *very politically incorrect*) after each statement. For our attention check, we asked participants to identify the position of the statement (e.g., “Did the statement support transgender rights?”).

Statement ratings. Participants rated the statement on nine different aspects (in randomized order). Our predicted mediator of authenticity was, “To what extent does the senator’s statement seem to be strategic?” but we additionally asked to what extent the statement seems: offensive, simple, logical, emotional, scripted, passionate, to be reflecting an opinion of high priority to the communicator, and to have a mismatch between the language used and the position taken, all measured on 7-point Likert scales.¹⁵

Impression measures. As our impression measures, we measured the degree to which the senator seemed susceptible to external influence ($\alpha = .95$), warm ($\alpha = .94$), and competent ($\alpha = .84$) using the scales described in Experiment 1.

Voting. After participants read each statement and evaluated the senator, we asked them to select which senator would better represent the position that both senators supported: “Now that you have read statements from two State Senators, please make a decision about which State Senator should represent this position in the debate against party leadership. Remember, the State Senator will have to fight against the leadership of the party which currently disagrees with this position.” This was an exploratory question, but we suspected that participants might prefer to select the politically incorrect senator if they believed this person would be less susceptible to external influence.

Own opinion. To measure whether the participants agreed more with the first or second position, we asked them to report their own opinion on the topic: “If you had to pick your own position on the topic of [transgender rights], would you say that you are more in support of these rights or in opposition to these rights?” The choice was always either: 1 = *support* or 2 = *oppose*.

Control measures. At the end of the survey, we asked participants “how much [they] like political correctness” (1 = *dislike a great deal*, 7 = *like a great deal*). Finally, participants reported their demographics (gender, age, ethnicity, political ideology, and education).

¹⁴ We also asked participants how authentic they felt when writing each statement on a 7-point Likert scale. Aggregating across the five topics for which they wrote politically correct and politically incorrect statements, communicators reported feeling *more* authentic when being politically correct ($M = 5.54$, $SD = 1.65$) than when being politically incorrect ($M = 4.53$, $SD = 2.32$), paired $t(549) = 8.15$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.50$. This effect emerged for both self-identified liberal and conservative communicators, $p_s < .001$.

¹⁵ Participants further rated the senator on two aspects: (a) “To what extent does the senator’s statement reflect a communicator who is reasonable?” (1 = *not reasonable at all*, 7 = *very reasonable*); and (b) “To what extent does the senator’s statement reflect a communicator who is willing to compromise?” (1 = *not at all willing to compromise*, 7 = *very willing to compromise*). These were exploratory items and analyses are reported in the online supplemental materials.

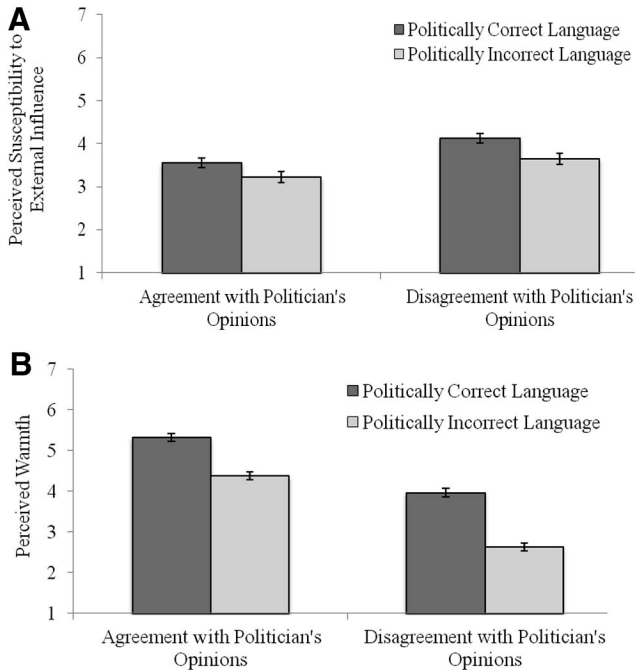


Figure 6. The effect of politically correct or politically incorrect language on perceptions of a politician's susceptibility to influence (A) and warmth (B) moderated by agreement with the politician's viewpoint in Experiment 5. Error bars represent the standard error around the mean.

Results

We coded whether participants' opinions matched the opinion expressed in the statement as our measure of whether the participant agreed or disagreed with the senator. In all subsequent analyses, we conducted a 2 (language: politically correct vs. politically incorrect) \times 2 (agreement between evaluator and communicator: agree vs. disagree) \times 3 (topic) mixed-model ANOVA on participants' judgments of the senator. We note that language is a manipulated within-participant factor whereas agreement is a measured between-participants factor. Conveniently, there was a relatively equal split of participants who agreed ($n = 175$) and disagreed ($n = 183$) with the senator. Because there were no consistent interactions between language and topic, we only report the primary 2 \times 2 analyses.

We first examined participants' responses to our manipulation check question. As expected, participants in the politically incorrect condition believed that the statement they read was less politically correct ($M = 3.62$, $SD = 1.89$) than those in the politically correct condition ($M = 5.32$, $SD = 1.81$), $F(1, 356) = 196.48$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.36$, and this was true for both liberal and conservative participants (interaction $p = .349$). We found an effect of agreement on political correctness perceptions, $F(1, 356) = 27.03$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.07$, such that participants who agreed saw the statement as more politically correct ($M = 4.10$, $SD = 1.86$) than did those who disagreed ($M = 4.86$, $SD = 1.76$). We found a marginal interaction of language and agreement on political correctness perceptions, $F(1, 356) = 2.74$, $p = .098$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.01$, such that the effect of language was larger when participants disagreed ($M_{PIC} = 3.90$, $SD = 1.80$; $M_{PC} = 5.81$; $SD = 1.73$),

$t(174) = -10.70$, $p < .001$, $d = -1.62$, than when they agreed ($M_{PIC} = 3.35$, $SD = 1.95$; $M_{PC} = 4.85$; $SD = 1.76$), $t(182) = -8.89$, $p < .001$, $d = -1.32$.

Impression measures. We found the predicted effect of language condition on the senator's perceived susceptibility to influence, $F(1, 356) = 19.22$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.05$, such that participants believed the politically incorrect senator was more authentic (less susceptible to external influence; $M = 3.43$, $SD = 1.72$) than the politically correct senator ($M = 3.83$, $SD = 1.51$). We also found an effect of agreement, $F(1, 356) = 12.31$, $p = .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.03$, such that participants who agreed with the statement believed the senator was more authentic (less susceptible to external influence; $M = 3.39$, $SD = 1.55$) than those who disagreed ($M = 3.88$, $SD = 1.65$). There was no interaction of language and agreement, $F(2, 356) = 0.59$, $p = .442$, $\eta_p^2 < 0.01$ (see Figure 6A).

We further found the predicted effect of language condition on perceived warmth, $F(1, 356) = 190.64$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.35$, such that participants believed that the politically incorrect senator was less warm ($M = 3.53$, $SD = 1.61$) than the politically correct senator ($M = 4.66$, $SD = 1.50$). There was an effect of agreement, $F(1, 356) = 186.32$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.35$, such that participants who agreed with the statement believed the senator was warmer ($M = 4.85$, $SD = 1.29$) than those who disagreed ($M = 3.30$, $SD = 1.39$). There was an interaction of language and agreement on warmth, $F(1, 356) = 6.07$, $p = .014$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.02$, such that the effect of language was larger when participants disagreed ($M_{PIC} = 3.97$, $SD = 1.51$; $M_{PC} = 2.63$; $SD = 1.27$), $t(174) = 12.70$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.93$, than when they agreed ($M_{PIC} = 5.33$, $SD = 1.56$; $M_{PC} = 4.38$; $SD = 1.42$), $t(182) = 7.28$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.08$ (see Figure 6B).

Finally, we found an effect of language on competence, $F(1, 356) = 38.80$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.10$, such that participants believed the politically incorrect senator was less competent ($M = 4.68$, $SD = 1.32$) than the politically correct senator ($M = 5.09$, $SD = 1.18$). There was also an effect of agreement on competence, $F(1, 356) = 64.30$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.15$, such that participants who agreed with the statement believed the senator was more competent ($M = 5.30$, $SD = 1.14$) than those who disagreed ($M = 4.46$, $SD = 1.22$). We found an interaction of language and agreement on competence, $F(1, 356) = 4.68$, $p = .031$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.01$, such that the effect of language was larger when participants disagreed ($M_{PIC} = 4.17$, $SD = 1.22$; $M_{PC} = 4.74$, $SD = 1.21$), $t(174) = 6.62$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.00$, than when they agreed ($M_{PIC} = 5.16$, $SD = 1.24$; $M_{PC} = 5.43$, $SD = 1.05$), $t(182) = 2.58$, $p = .011$, $d = 0.38$.¹⁶

¹⁶ To test whether the evaluator's ideological position or communicator's position independently affected evaluations of the communicator, we ran an alternative analysis, 2 (language: politically correct vs. politically incorrect) \times 2 (evaluator position: support vs. oppose) \times 2 (communicator position: support vs. oppose) on our primary dependent measures (perceptions of the communicator's susceptibility to influence, warmth, and competence). This analysis showed largely the same results reported in the main text. Only two new results emerged on perceived warmth: first, communicators who supported the topic (i.e., the pro-immigration, pro-transgender, and pro-choice positions) always seemed warmer than communicators who opposed the topic regardless of the evaluator's own position ($M_{Support} = 4.25$, $SD = 1.58$; $M_{Oppose} = 3.92$; $SD = 1.33$), $F(1, 354) = 7.02$, $p = .008$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.02$. Second, there was a three-way interaction between language use, evaluator position, and communicator position such that the effect of language was largest on perceived warmth among people who were against the position when the communicator supported it, $F(1, 354) = 135.02$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.28$.

Statement ratings. As shown in Table 2, compared with the politically correct statement, the politically incorrect statement was rated to be less strategic, more offensive, simpler, less logical, more emotional, less scripted, more passionate, higher priority, and better matched the senator's position. All of these differences were statistically significant ($ps < .001$).

We next tested which of these aspects of the statements mediated the effect of language use (politically correct = 1; politically incorrect = 0) on perceived susceptibility to influence by including all of the ratings as parallel mediators in a mediation model (using SPSS MEMORE Macro). Consistent with our prediction, this analysis revealed only a significant indirect effect of how strategic the statement seemed, 95% CI [0.03, 0.23]; all other indirect effects included 0 in their confidence interval, suggesting they were not statistically significant. We also ran the same analysis but on perceptions of the senator's warmth instead; here, there were three significant mediators: how offensive the statement seemed, how passionate it seemed, and how strategic it seemed, 95% CIs [0.32, 0.65]; [-0.15, -0.02]; and [-0.11, -0.01], respectively.

Voting. We coded participants' votes such that 1 = *politically incorrect senator*; 0 = *politically correct senator*. Overall, participants showed a strong preference to vote for the politically correct senator ($M = 0.20$, $SD = 0.40$), one-sample $t = 14.30$, $p < .001$. However, there was a marginal effect of agreement, $t(356) = 1.78$, $p = .076$, $d = 0.19$, such that participants who agreed with the statement chose the politically incorrect senator slightly more often ($M = 0.23$, $SD = 0.43$) than did those who disagreed ($M = 0.16$, $SD = 0.37$).

Discussion

In Experiment 5, although people who disagreed with communicators believed the communicators were less authentic, warm, and competent than people who agreed with them, the effect of political language on impressions emerged both when perceivers shared communicators' political ideology (i.e., agreement) and when they did not share the same ideology (i.e., disagreement). These data therefore highlight the robustness of the effect. Interestingly, the effect of political language on perceived warmth and competence (but not authenticity) was stronger during disagreement than agreement.

Experiment 5 further provides support for our hypothesis about why political incorrectness appears authentic. Although there were significant differences between politically correct and politically incorrect statements on many aspects of language (e.g., simplicity, emotionality), only perceptions of how strategic the statement seemed statistically accounted for the effect of language use on perceived authenticity. Three aspects of the statements accounted for the effect of language on perceived warmth: how offensive, passionate, and strategic the statement seemed.

Experiment 6: Persuasion in Real Conversations

Experiment 6 tests our hypothesis in a more realistic and externally valid context: real conversations between individuals who hold opposing views on a political topic. We instructed conversation partners to be politically correct, politically incorrect, or to converse as they wished, predicting that using politically incorrect (vs. correct) language would make a communicator seem less susceptible to persuasion (from the perspective of the persuader).

Table 2
Difference Between Ratings of Statement Attributes for Politically Correct and Politically Incorrect Statements in Experiment 5

Rating of statement attribute	Politically correct statement		Politically incorrect statement		Statistical difference <i>t</i> statistic
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Strategic	4.10	1.84	4.74	1.80	5.18**
Offensive	3.00	1.91	5.34	1.81	19.01**
Simple	3.13	1.82	2.54	1.64	-4.63**
Logical	4.79	1.74	3.25	1.95	-12.50**
Emotional	4.22	1.82	5.25	1.76	8.27**
Scripted	3.45	1.78	5.01	1.81	12.20**
Passionate	4.75	1.50	5.58	1.50	7.95**
High priority	4.87	1.32	5.30	1.46	4.90**
Mismatch	2.77	1.62	3.29	1.95	4.06**

** $p < .001$.

We further tested whether the effect of political language is stronger on *perceived* persuasion than on *actual* persuasion.

Method

We preregistered this experiment on OSF (https://osf.io/f5sc4/?view_only=e652404a00c9422b96820fb4fe0abd11).

Participants. Based on the effect sizes of our primary analyses in prior studies, we predetermined that we would collect 100 pairs per condition (300 pairs total). Having used the "Chatplat" application before for a similar procedure, we expected that we would achieve a 30% completion rate so we precommitted to recruiting 2,000 participants. 519 pairs reported that they were successfully matched and had a full conversation with their partner, but 33 of these individuals did not complete the survey and the 33 pairs were dropped from analysis. Our final sample was 972 adults (486 pairs) recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk (370 males; $M_{\text{age}} = 39.09$, $SD = 12.92$; 59.5% self-identified liberal) who completed the survey in exchange for \$3.00.

Procedure. The experimental design was a 2 (instruction: instructed vs. uninstructed) within-pair \times 2 (language: politically correct vs. politically incorrect) between-pair \times 2 (position: support vs. oppose) within-pair. Participants first reported how much they agreed or disagreed with the assigned topic (which was increasing federal funding for historically Black churches; see below for description of how this topic was selected). We randomly assigned participants who disagreed with one another to converse for 15 min using ChatPlat, a third-party online application that enables researchers to match participants to have live text-based conversations (embedded within a Qualtrics survey) for a specified amount of time and based on specific parameters. Just before the conversation began, one person read instructions to either use politically correct or politically incorrect language during the conversation and the other person did not receive instructions. We saved the text of participants' conversations to ensure they complied with our instructions.

Following their conversation, participants completed a survey measuring their impressions of the target. At the end of the study, participants reported their demographic information.

Topic selection. To select the topic of conversation for the study, we conducted a pilot study asking 97 participants (64 males, $M_{\text{age}} = 33.45$, $SD = 10.60$, 51.5% self-identified as liberal) on Amazon Mechanical Turk their position on 36 different political policies (e.g., abortion, gun control). For each topic, we asked participants to report, “To what degree do you support or oppose the following policies?” ($-2 = \text{strongly oppose}$, $2 = \text{strongly support}$) and to report their own political ideology (on the same scale that we used in prior experiments). We intended to select a topic that (a) had roughly 50% support and 50% opposition in the sample, (b) had no significant difference in support or opposition by participants’ political ideology, and (c) could be discussed using politically correct and politically incorrect language. The topic that we selected, “increasing federal funding for historically Black churches”¹⁷: (a) had 56.7% of respondents at or below the midpoint of our 5-point support item, (b) showed no significant difference in support for the topic by participant ideology, $t(95) = 1.47$, $p = .144$, $d = 0.30$, ($M_{\text{Liberals}} = 0.26$, $SD = 1.24$; $M_{\text{Conservatives}} = -0.19$, $SD = 1.29$), and (c) involved both racial minorities and religious beliefs, which we reasoned would allow participants to discuss the topic in either a politically correct or politically incorrect manner regardless of whether they supported or opposed the position, and whether they themselves were liberal or conservative.

Materials.

Conversation instructions. The Politically Correct [Politically Incorrect] instructions read:

“During the conversation about immigration, please converse with your partner in only a politically [in]correct manner. Political correctness is [using] behavior and/or language to avoid being perceived as offensive or insensitive to the feelings of others, especially people who seem socially disadvantaged.”

Please [feel free to use]/[do NOT use] these politically correct terms:

- African-Americans/“people of African descent”/“people of color” (when referring to African Americans)
- religious Christians/religious Americans (when referring to religious individuals)
- “People with sincerely held religious beliefs” (when referring to religious individuals)

Please [do NOT use]/[feel free to use] these politically incorrect terms:

- bigot, close-minded, racist, snowflake, or xenophobic (when referring to your chat partner)
- “the Blacks” (when referring to African Americans)
- Inner city/Ghetto/ethnic (when referring to African Americans)
- Bible Thumpers/Jesus freaks/religious nuts/cultists (when referring to religious individuals)

(Please DO NOT tell your partner that you were given these instructions.)

It is very important that you make sure to only use politically [in]correct language during the conversation.”

The Neutral instructions read:

During the conversation about increasing federal funding for historically Black churches, please converse with your partner only about increasing federal funding for historically Black churches.

(Please DO NOT tell your partner that you were given these instructions.)

It is very important that you make sure to only discuss increasing federal funding for historically Black churches during the conversation.”

Questions to proceed to full survey. To ensure that participants could answer questions about their partner, we asked, “Were you paired with another participant?” (1 = *Yes*, 2 = *No*); “If you were paired with a participant, how would you best describe your interaction with the other participant?” (1 = *the other participant and I had a full conversation*; 2 = *the other participant only said a few lines, then didn’t respond*; 3 = *I only said a few lines, then didn’t respond*; 4 = *the other participant only said a few lines, then left the chat*; 5 = *the other participant never responded*; 6 = *I never responded to the other participant*). Only participants who reported being paired with another participant and having a full conversation were allowed to proceed to the rest of the survey.

Partner impression measures. To more directly measure beliefs about their partner’s susceptibility to their own influence, we asked participants about persuasion: “To what extent do you think you were able to change your chat partner’s opinion?” (1 = *no change in partner’s opinion at all*, 7 = *moderate change in partner’s opinion*). To further examine the partner’s ability to exert influence, we asked: “To what extent was your partner able to change your opinion?” (1 = *no change in my opinion at all*, 7 = *moderate change in my opinion*). Finally, we also measured perceived warmth and competence using the scales described in Experiment 1 ($\alpha_s = .94$ and $.83$, respectively).

Manipulation check. We included six manipulation checks to ensure participants followed our instructions. First, we asked participants, “To what extent did your chat partner speak in a politically correct or politically incorrect manner?” (1 = *extremely politically correct*, 7 = *extremely politically incorrect*). Second, we asked, “To what extent was your chat partner’s position on the conversation topic liberal or conservative?” (1 = *very liberal*, 5 = *very conservative*). As a follow-up to this question, we also asked: “To what extent do you support increasing federal funding for historically Black churches?” and “To what extent does your partner support increasing federal funding for historically Black churches?” (1 = *completely oppose*, 6 = *completely support*). Third, we asked, “On the whole, do you agree or disagree with what your chat partner said?” (1 = *I disagree*, 2 = *I agree*). Fourth, we asked, “Other than about the topic of discussion, were you given instructions to speak in a particular man-

¹⁷ Full topic description: “Historically Black churches are churches that currently or historically have ministered to predominantly African American congregations in the United States. Many of the first African American congregations and churches formed before 1800, but they have continued to open and operate through most of the 20th century because segregationist attitudes in both the North and the South discouraged and even prevented African Americans from worshipping in the same churches as whites. Today around 15% of all churches in the United States are considered historically Black churches. Currently, there is some debate across the U.S. about policies to increase federal funding for historically Black churches. Some people argue that historically Black churches should receive increased funding to help promote these religious institutions or to serve a minority community. Others argue that historically Black churches should not receive increased federal funding, as such institutions are religious institutions or because they serve only a particular segment of society.”

ner?" (1 = *yes*, 2 = *no*). Fifth, we asked, "In what manner were you instructed to speak?" (Open ended). Finally, we asked, "Did you speak in the manner in which you were instructed?" (1 = *yes*, 2 = *no*, 3 = *other*).

We additionally measured adherence to moral foundations and report ideological differences in the moral foundations in online supplemental materials.

Control measures. At the end of the survey, we collected participants' thoughts about political correctness: "How much do you like political correctness?" (1 = *dislike a great deal*, 7 = *like a great deal*) and "How often do you use political correctness?" (1 = *never*, 7 = *always*). We also asked, "How do you typically prefer to use politically correct or incorrect language when you engage in political conversations with others?" (1 = *I typically prefer to use politically correct language*; 2 = *I have no preference*; 3 = *I typically prefer to use politically incorrect language*). Finally, participants reported their demographics (gender, age, ethnicity, political ideology, and education).

Results

Predicted and actual persuasion. To test our primary prediction about how susceptible to influence one's partner seemed, we ran a 2 (language: politically correct vs. politically incorrect) between-pair \times 2 (instruction: instructed vs. uninstructed) within-pair mixed-model ANOVA on the participant's belief they had changed their partner's opinion. We found the predicted effect of language, $F(1, 975) = 14.76, p \leq .001, \eta_p^2 = .02$, but no effects of instruction or interaction, $F_s < 2.17, p_s > .141, \eta_p^2 < .01$ (see Figure 7). Because we had separate predictions for uninstructed and instructed individuals, we examined these groups separately. As expected, uninstructed participants believed they were more successful in changing their politically correct partner's opinion ($M = 2.91, SD = 1.80$) than in changing their politically incorrect partner's opinion ($M = 2.40, SD = 1.81$), $t(492) = 3.17, p = .002, d = 0.29$, indicating that politically correct (vs. incorrect) individuals did indeed appear more susceptible to their partner's influence. Next examining the instructed participants, politically correct participants did not report being significantly more persuaded ($M = 2.52, SD = 1.75$) than politically incorrect participants ($M = 2.36, SD = 1.75$), $t(483) = 1.00, p = .320, d = 0.09$ (although the full interaction did not achieve statistical significance, $F(1, 975) =$

2.46, $p = .117, \eta_p^2 < 0.01$), suggesting that their apparent susceptibility to influence may be illusory. In other words, the effect of political language exerted a larger effect on perceptions of susceptibility to influence than on actual susceptibility. These results did not meaningfully change when adding in fixed effects to account for pairs.

Interestingly, although beyond the scope of our predictions, uninstructed participants did report being more persuaded by a politically correct ($M = 2.33, SD = 1.82$) than politically incorrect partner ($M = 2.00, SD = 1.57$), $t(492) = 2.10, p = .036, d = 0.19$, and instructed participants correctly predicted that they would be more persuasive when they were politically correct ($M = 3.02, SD = 1.94$) versus incorrect ($M = 2.63, SD = 1.76$), $t(483) = 2.28, p = .023, d = 0.12$. This suggests that, although they were perceived as more persuadable, politically correct (vs. incorrect) debate partners were *actually* more persuasive.

We conducted a follow-up ANOVA examining the effects of language and participants' own opinions (i.e., support or oppose providing funding to historically Black churches) on uninstructed participants' beliefs about influencing instructed participants' opinions. The same effect of language emerged, $F(1, 490) = 11.49, p = .001, \eta_p^2 = .02$ ($M_{PC} = 2.91, SD = 1.80; M_{PIC} = 2.40, SD = 1.81$), but it was qualified by an interaction with opinion, $F(1, 490) = 10.54, p = .001, \eta_p^2 = .02$, such that the effect of language was driven primarily by supporters ($M_{PC} = 3.34, SE = 0.17; M_{PIC} = 2.27, SE = 0.16$) instead of opponents ($M_{PC} = 2.57, SE = 0.15; M_{PIC} = 2.54, SE = 0.17$). Finally, we examined whether this effect of language on beliefs about one's partner's susceptibility to influence interacted with participants' own political ideology; it did not, $F(3, 486) = 0.79, p = .499, \eta_p^2 < .01$.

Perceived warmth. In a 2 (language: politically correct vs. politically incorrect) between-pair \times 2 (instruction: instructed vs. uninstructed) within-pair mixed-model ANOVA on assessments of partners' warmth, we found the expected effect of language, $F(1, 970) = 38.07, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .04$, ($M_{PC} = 5.19, SD = 1.41; M_{PIC} = 4.58, SD = 1.67$), an effect of instructions, $F(1, 970) = 14.28, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .02$, ($M_{Instructed} = 5.07, SD = 1.45; M_{Uninstructed} = 4.70, SD = 1.66$), and an interaction $F(1, 970) = 16.82, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .02$ (see Figure 8). The interaction indicates that participants instructed to be politically correct indeed appeared warmer ($M = 5.20, SD = 1.37$) than participants instructed to be politically incorrect ($M = 4.20, SD = 1.78$) but that uninstructed participants who were paired with either politically correct ($M = 5.17, SD = 1.46$) or politically incorrect partners ($M = 4.97, SD = 1.45$) were not perceived differently from each other. These results did not meaningfully change when adding in fixed effects to account for pairs.

In a follow-up ANOVA examining the effects of language and participants' own opinions (i.e., support or oppose) on uninstructed participants' assessments of instructed participants' warmth, the effect of language was robust, $F(1, 490) = 11.49, p = .001, \eta_p^2 = .02$, but it was qualified by an interaction with opinion, $F(1, 490) = 10.54, p = .001, \eta_p^2 = .02$, such that the effect of language was driven primarily by supporters ($M_{PC} = 3.34, SE = 0.17; M_{PIC} = 2.27, SE = 0.16$) instead of opponents ($M_{PC} = 2.57, SE = 0.15; M_{PIC} = 2.54, SE = 0.17$). However, there was no interaction between partner's language and perceiver's own ideology, $F(3, 483) = 0.77, p = .510, \eta_p^2 = .01$.

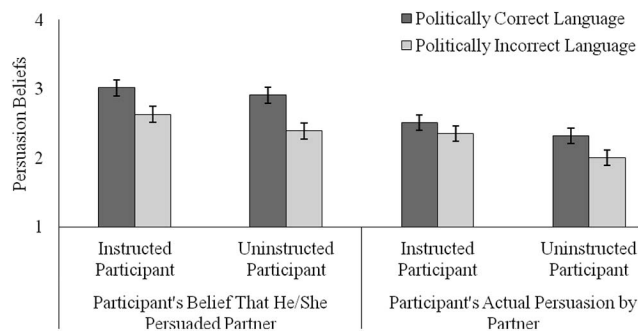


Figure 7. The effect of politically correct or politically incorrect language on participant's belief that they had changed their partner's opinion in Experiment 6. Error bars represent the standard error around the mean.

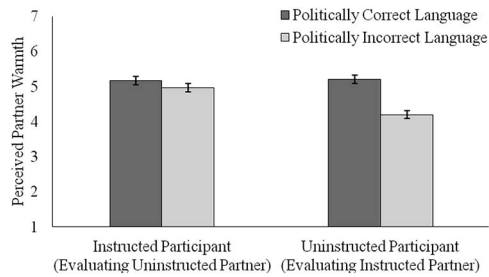


Figure 8. The effect of politically correct or politically incorrect language on participant's perception of their partner's warmth in Experiment 6. Error bars represent the standard error around the mean.

The pattern of results on perceived competence was similar to the pattern of results on perceived warmth (see online supplemental materials for analysis).

Manipulation check questions. As expected, participants whose partner received politically incorrect instructions were more likely to report that their partner was politically incorrect ($M = 4.35$, $SD = 1.87$) than participants whose partner received politically correct instructions ($M = 3.71$, $SD = 1.85$), $t(492) = 3.85$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.35$. Uninstructed participants appeared relatively more politically correct ($M = 3.36$, $SD = 2.16$), especially compared with the participants instructed to be politically incorrect, $t(731) = 6.08$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.45$, suggesting a norm of political correctness in our sample. The politically correct participants also were perceived to be more liberal ($M_{PC} = 2.81$, $SE = 1.03$; $M_{PIC} = 3.08$, $SE = 1.30$), $t(493) = 2.50$, $p = .013$, $d = 0.23$; however, statistically similar levels of self-reported conservatives and liberals were assigned to be politically correct or politically incorrect, $\chi^2(1, 485) = 0.10$, $p = .75$, indicating that participants did not select into conditions based on their ideological preferences. Most of the participants who received language instructions did indeed report that they got instructions ($M = 93.0\%$). Examining only the instructed participants, 89.0% reported that they actually did "speak in the manner they were instructed."¹⁸

Indicating that we successfully created pairs who disagreed with each other, pairs reported disagreeing with each other (66%) more than agreeing (44%) after the conversation had ended, one-sample $t(978) = -3.57$, $p < .001$, $d = -0.23$. However, partners of politically correct (vs. incorrect) participants were more likely to report that they agreed with what they said ($M_{PC} = 52\%$ vs. $M_{PIC} = 33\%$), $t(493) = 4.38$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.39$, again suggesting that politically correct debaters were more persuasive than politically incorrect debaters. Although we selected a relatively apolitical topic, supporters did report being more liberal (70.2%) than opponents (53.2%), $\chi^2(1, 979) = 29.76$, $p < .001$. Participants were marginally more likely to agree with supporters (47% vs. 41.7%), $\chi^2(1, 979) = 2.75$, $p = .097$.

Discussion

In a well-powered experiment examining real debates between people about a novel political topic (the use of federal funding for historically Black churches), debaters who used politically incorrect language appeared less persuadable—and colder—than those who used politically correct language. However, politically incor-

rect debaters did not report being any more or less persuaded than politically correct debaters, suggesting that perceivers' inferences about their partners' susceptibility to influence were somewhat illusory in this context. This experiment demonstrates that the use of politically correct language has real consequences for assessments of persuasion in everyday dialogues. Future research might explore whether language use can further influence relevant decisions, such as whether or not to enter into a debate with someone.

General Discussion

Political correctness is one of the most commonly discussed topics in modern discourse, with the phrase returning 36 million search results on Google, more than 500 articles on CNN.com, and more than 2,800 articles on FoxNews.com. However, scant psychological research has addressed the consequences of its use. Addressing this gap, the current paper presents one pilot study, six experiments, and three supplemental experiments with 4,956 participants. Our data provide evidence that politically incorrect communicators are seen as more authentic—but colder—compared with their politically correct counterparts. In contrast, political language did not consistently influence impressions of competence.¹⁹ The effect of language on communicator attributions was moderated by both the political ideology of the observer and the observers' felt sympathy toward the target group to whom the political language was applied. Overall, conservative perceivers attended more to violations of authenticity, rating politically incorrect communicators as more authentic, whereas liberal perceivers attended more to violations of harm, rating politically incorrect communicators as colder. These effects reversed, however, when conservatives felt sympathy toward the target of political incorrectness: in this case, conservatives believed a politically incorrect communicator was colder whereas liberals believed a politically incorrect communicator was authentic.

Our experiments are preregistered, well-powered, and show consistent and robust effects across different samples of communicators and participants. Our results point to at least two potential consequences of politically incorrect language promoting authenticity. First, speaking politically incorrectly makes observers more likely to infer that the communicator's beliefs are truly held and therefore makes them feel more certain about how the communicator will behave in the future. Second, politically incorrect communicators seem less susceptible to persuasion in dialogues, even when they do not report being any less susceptible. In other words, being politically correct may create an illusion that the communicator is persuadable.

Theoretical Contributions

This research makes several theoretical contributions. First, we contribute to a growing interdisciplinary literature in psychology,

¹⁸ 576 (89.0%) answered *yes*, whereas 52 (5.3%) answered *other*, and only 19 (2.9%) said *no*. Of the 52 who answered *other*, 51 provided written responses, and 34 of those responses indicated that the participant did try to follow the instructions (e.g., "I believe I did," "I tried").

¹⁹ We found no effect of language on impressions of competence in Experiments 1, 2, and 6 and Supplemental Experiment S2. We found a statistically significant effect of language on impressions of competence in Experiments 3, 4, and 5 and Supplemental Experiment S1, and a marginally statistically significant effect in Supplemental Experiment S3.

political science, education, sociology, and other fields that aims to identify the consequences of political language. Much of this research examines forms of political language other than political correctness, such as demagoguery (Gustainis, 1990; Hahl et al., 2018; Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1994; Hogan & Tell, 2006; Roberts-Miller, 2005), common-knowledge and special-access lies (Hahl et al., 2018), and hate speech (Cowan, Heiple, Marquez, Khatchadourian, & McNevin, 2005; Cowan & Hodge, 1996; Leets, 2002). However, given the reliance on norms of political correctness in American society, and the increasing pressure to be politically correct, we think that examining political correctness specifically is an important area of research (Fairclough, 2003). The majority of prior research on political correctness falls into three categories—first, it examines the consequences on targets of using politically correct or incorrect labels (Carnaghi & Maass, 2007; Millington & Leierer, 1996); second, it assesses associations between language use and evaluations of communicators in anecdotal or correlational data (Dickson, 2017; Strauts & Blanton, 2015; Walker & Jussim, 2002); and third, it examines the influence of norms on predictions and behaviors (Brustein, 1994; Dickstein, 1994; Kimball, 1994; Lalonde et al., 2000; Lessing, 1994; Marcus, 1994; Radosh, 1993; Suedfeld et al., 1994). In contrast, we experimentally test for the causal impact of political correctness on attributions of a communicator and examine behavioral consequences of these attributions.

Second, we add to theories of how language use, more generally, can influence person and mind perception. Prior research has shown how holding the semantic content of a message the same but changing nonverbal cues when expressing the message (e.g., tone of voice, facial expression) can meaningfully influence not only evaluations of a communicator's intentions (Abbey & Melby, 1986; Burgoon et al., 1990; Hall & Schmid Mast, 2007; Kraus, 2017; Kruger, Epley, Parker, & Ng, 2005; Riggio & Throckmorton, 1988; Zaki, Bolger, & Ochsner, 2008) but also evaluations of the communicator's mental capacities (Schroeder & Epley, 2015, 2016; Schroeder, Kardas, & Epley, 2017). Instead of manipulating nonverbal information, we manipulate minor aspects of verbal language such as changing the label used for a group, and test its impact on person perception.

Third, we add to the scientific understanding of authenticity by providing a new predictor that influences judgments of authenticity. Authenticity is a critical factor for key decisions such as deciding whether to trust someone (Lynch, 2000; Wang & Bird, 2011; Wang & Hsieh, 2013), to like someone (Kernis & Goldman, 2005; Liu & Perrew, 2006), to attribute status and rewards toward an individual (Hahl & Zuckerman, 2014; Hahl, Zuckerman, & Kim, 2017), and to disclose personal information to someone (Herek, 1996; Lopez & Rice, 2006; Miall, 1989; Tantillo, 2004). Extending from prior research which has indirectly linked political correctness to being strategic (Fairclough, 2003), we link it more directly (and causally) to perceptions of a communicator seeming inauthentic.

Finally, we combine across political science and social psychological theories to provide evidence that attributions about communicators who use political language do indeed depend on perceivers' political ideologies. In this way, we join a growing body of literature examining the differences in thinking styles between liberals and conservatives. Prior research has found that conservatives tend to score higher than liberals on social dominance ori-

entation, antiegalitarianism, traditionalism, and authoritarianism (Hiel & Mervielde, 2005; Ho et al., 2012; Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994; Whitley, 1999) and lower on the need for cognition scale (e.g., Carraro, Castelli, & Macchiella, 2011; Hennes, Nam, Stern, & Jost, 2012; Sargent, 2004; Stern, West, Jost, & Rule, 2013), and need for cognitive closure scale (e.g., Baldner, Pierro, Chernikova, & Kruglanski, 2018; Federico & Goren, 2009; Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003; Kimmelmeier, 1997). Future research might examine the extent to which each of these dimensions could, conceivably, come into play when individuals are making assessments of political statements. In particular, we tested at least four possible explanations for different ideological reactions to political correctness: (a) different moral foundations, (b) different overall liking of political correctness, (c) inferences about communicators' political ideology, and (d) sympathy toward the target group to whom the political language is applied. Our data provide evidence *against* different liking of political correctness and inferences about communicators' ideology driving ideological reactions (explanations b and c above), but at least weakly support differences in moral foundations and sympathy toward the target group as driving ideological reactions (explanations a and d above). These data potentially point to an even more direct explanation—that liberals typically care more about egalitarianism and disadvantaged groups than do conservatives (Hirsh, DeYoung, Xiaowen, & Peterson, 2010; Jost, Nosek, & Gosling, 2008; Poteat & Mereish, 2012; Pratto et al., 1994; Wetherell, Brandt, & Reyna, 2013); future research might test this possibility more specifically.

Future Directions

The current findings leave many unanswered questions for future research. First, to what extent are people's impressions of politically correct or politically incorrect communicators accurate? We designed our experiments so that participants evaluated the same communicator being politically correct or politically incorrect, to test whether language use can influence impressions in the absence of any other information. As a consequence, our results suggest that language use may be unduly changing impressions or changing them more than is warranted. But another possibility is that observers are overgeneralizing from real differences that exist between politically incorrect or politically correct communicators. For instance, some preliminary results suggest that politically correct people truly are warmer: Levin (2003) found that endorsing political correctness was associated with less explicit prejudice. Future research could disentangle to what extent relying on language use improves accuracy (vs. creates inaccuracy).

Second, future research might seek to understand when and why individuals naturally choose to use politically correct or politically incorrect language. Do individuals consciously make the decision to use political language and, if so, what factors and outcomes do they weigh in their decision? Some evidence suggests that communicators might modulate their language based on the ideology of their audience, such that politically correct language is more common for liberal audiences whereas politically incorrect language is more common for conservative audiences (Lalonde et al., 2000; Suedfeld et al., 1994). This hypothesis, that communicators might modulate their language based on their audience, is consistent with the institutional view presented by Turner (1976), which

hypothesized that one's authentic self is constructed with reference to one's societal considerations.

Our work also leaves open the question of the extent to which perceivers infer that communicators *intend* to use politically incorrect or correct language, and how the inference of intent influences their evaluations. We suspect that observers may naturally attribute intent to a communicator based on their language, like in other domains where people tend to automatically attribute intent (Fiske, 1989; Malle, 1995; Malle, 2006, 2011). We further suspect that this attribution of intent may matter for perceivers' evaluations.

Another generative direction could be exploring which features of the perceiver or communicator (other than their political ideology), or their environment, might interact with language use to influence impressions of communicators. One critical component could be culture, as political correctness is likely perceived differently in America than it is in other countries (e.g., Asia; Breslin, 2011; Parkes, 1997). Furthermore, the political environment is likely to influence people's reactions to political correctness. For example, Hahl et al. (2018) suggests that a lying demagogue can only achieve political success in an environment in which the public feels that the political establishment is not serving its interests and/or favoring the interests of new social groups over the interests of established groups. There may be analogous situations in which political correctness might be more or less valued. Another aspect that could influence reactions to political correctness is perceivers' race or gender, which might make the perceiver more attuned to particular types of language. Our results in Experiment 4 suggest that sympathy toward a target group affects evaluations of political language; extending from this, perhaps men would view politically incorrect language directed toward other men more negatively than the same language directed toward women. Relatedly, power or status differences between the communicators and observer may play an important role in evaluations of authenticity and warmth. For example, politically correct high-power communicators may be seen as particularly warm (as they do not have to use such language), and politically incorrect high-power communicators may be seen as exceptionally authentic (as they have more to lose by going against perceived norms of political correctness).

There are several specific results in the current paper that we think need further examination to improve understanding. For one, we observed an interaction between the perceiver and communicator's agreement or disagreement and evaluations of communicators using political language in Experiment 5, suggesting that political correctness (or incorrectness) is more likely to influence impressions under cases of disagreement than agreement. This could indicate that perceivers use different mental processes to form attributions of communicators depending on whether or not they agree with them. Other research shows that perceivers are more likely to egocentrically simulate target's minds when they feel more similar to them, but more likely to stereotype when they feel different (Ames, 2004). Future research could explore when people rely more or less on specific cues in language (e.g., political correctness) to make judgments of communicators.

For another, we observed that people felt more certain in their predictions about politically incorrect (vs. correct) communicators' future behavior (in Experiments 3 and 4). Although we predicted that this was because political incorrectness makes a communi-

tor seem susceptible to external influence, the empirical data only weakly support this prediction. Other possibilities are that political incorrectness may seem rarer, more extreme, or more shocking and therefore it appears more diagnostic. These alternative possibilities might also partly explain why, throughout our studies, we tended to observe stronger ideological differences in reactions to politically incorrect than politically correct language. Future research might try to elicit cases of extreme or shocking political correctness to use as stimuli, to more closely match the extremity and shock-value of politically incorrect terms. For instance, a female communicator who states that she is *cisgender* (i.e., her gender corresponds to her birth sex) and prefers the pronouns *she/her/hers* may be considered extremely politically correct, although the perceived extremity of the political language will be a moving target as what is considered mainstream language continues to evolve.²⁰

Relatedly, we wonder how much the perceived offensiveness of political incorrectness may be part of what makes it seem authentic, and whether the current findings would extend to other forms of offensive language. Would, for instance, using vulgarity or profanity in language make a communicator seem more authentic? Conversely, does being extremely polite make a communicator seem less authentic? Although possible, there is also research suggesting that conservatives support politeness more than liberals (Hirsh et al., 2010), indicating that the ideological reactions to profanity or politeness may not align with reactions to political incorrectness or correctness.

Finally, our research has practical implications to explore. It is interesting that people seem to associate susceptibility to external influence with inauthenticity in the context of democratic politics. One might expect politics to be a domain in which susceptibility to external influences should be rewarded if voters want to exert influence on politicians' opinions. It might be that voters prefer politicians who are not able to be influenced by other politicians or lobbyists, or it could be the case that voters want to select a candidate who is already aligned with them and then have that representative unmoved in their positions thereafter. This research suggests that, because politically correct communicators are considered more easily persuadable, people who wish to convey their certainty to others may choose to employ more politically incorrect language (albeit at the risk of appearing cold). However, a possible consequence of being politically incorrect is that others may be less likely to engage a politically incorrect communicator in debate or civil discourse. This may create an environment in which politically incorrect communicators are particularly ensconced in ideological echo chambers.

Conclusion

Political correctness is increasingly discussed as a standard of language in America, but little is known about how it influences attributions of communicators. Across nine experiments, even when a person expressed the same position, using politically incorrect language made the communicator seem more authentic—but also colder—than using politically correct language. Perceivers that identify as politically conservative are especially likely to believe political incorrectness is authentic, whereas those who identify as politically liberal are especially likely to believe political incorrectness is cold. As a result, politically incorrect com-

municators seem less easily persuadable and more predictable in their beliefs. These findings demonstrate how and when using politically incorrect language creates an impression of authenticity.

²⁰ Two authors on this article, Rosenblum and Schroeder, note that this language is already mainstream and even standard practice in the classroom at their home institution of UC Berkeley.

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