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Can the Same Politician Help and Hurt the Evaluations of Another Politician? The Role of Categorization on the Elicitation of Assimilation and Contrast Effects in the Mexican Political Context

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Two studies investigated the effects of bringing a highly controversial politician to mind on the evaluations of another politician in the Mexican political context. We took advantage of the dynamic nature of the Mexican political context in which politicians often threaten to leave or actually leave their political parties, influencing the categorization process. We hypothesized that the same controversial politician could elicit assimilation and contrast effects on the evaluations of another politician, depending on whether both political figures were treated as lateral categories or members of the same superordinate category. Study 1 found support for the predicted contrast effects but only among those who did not classify both political figures as members of the same political party. Study 2 found support for the expected interexemplar assimilation effects but only among those who classified both political figures as members of the same political party. The theoretical and applied implications of our results were discussed.

KEY WORDS: assimilation, contrast, political evaluations, political context, inclusion/exclusion

It is a psychological truism that human judgment is context dependent. The context dependency of judgments is particularly relevant for understanding the evaluations and judgments of political figures and parties. The inclusion/exclusion model (Schwarz & Bless, 1992a) has been proposed as a guiding framework to explain and predict how the same piece of information can produce assimilation or contrast effects, depending on how it is used. In the present investigation, we want to take advantage of a highly controversial politician, his ambiguous party membership (study 1), and the change in the ambiguity of his political membership (study 2) to explore how bringing this politician to mind can elicit assimilation or contrast effects on the evaluation of another politician in the Mexican political context. Thus, we are interested in examining how the effects of bringing one piece of information to mind, the context (a highly controversial politician), on the evaluation of a target (another politician), depends upon whether the highly controversial politician and the target are treated as lateral categories or as members of the same superordinate category and also in how the categorization process is influenced by the political landscape. What makes our investigation unique is that how the highly controversial politician is treated—as a lateral category or as a member of the same superordinate category—is influenced by internal factors, individual differences in whether the controversial politician is assigned to the same superordinate category as the target

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politician, and external events, the ambiguity and reduced ambiguity regarding the political membership of the controversial politician. We first review some of the propositions set by the inclusion/exclusion model and how it has been used to explain political judgments and evaluations.

The Inclusion/Exclusion Model

The inclusion/exclusion model suggests that a given piece of accessible information can produce assimilation or contrast effects (Bless & Schwarz, 2010). For assimilation effects, we refer to a positive relationship between the specific judgment of interest and a given piece of accessible information. Conversely, contrast effects occur when there is a negative relationship between the specific judgment of interest and a given piece of accessible information (Bless & Schwarz, 2010). Thus, the same piece of information can produce assimilation or contrast effects depending on how it is used. Specifically, it can be used to form a representation of the target, something thought to produce assimilation effects, or it can be used to form a standard of comparison, something hypothesized to elicit contrast effects.

The inclusion/exclusion model has devoted a great deal of attention to examining three filters hypothesized to influence how a given piece of information is used. The first filter relates to why a given piece of information comes to mind. In other words, it pays attention to its relevance. The second filter deals with how representative is the information that comes to mind: representativeness. Lastly, the third filter relates to conversational norms. The focus of our investigation is on the representativeness filter which deals, among other aspects, with how a given piece of information is categorized and is considered the filter that drives most assimilation and contrast effects (Bless & Schwarz, 2010). The inclusion/exclusion model has been used in several investigations across different domains such as social psychology, political psychology, and public opinion. We are particularly interested in its application to explain political evaluations and judgments.

Political Evaluations and Judgments

The process of constructing an evaluation or judgment has received a great deal of attention from social psychologists, political scientists, and public opinion experts (Bless & Schwarz, 2010; Lavine, 2001; Tourangeau, Rips, & Rasinski, 2000). Recent studies in social cognition have challenged the assumption that evaluations or judgments are stable, favoring a view in which evaluations are constructed on the spot, using information that is chronically and temporarily accessible and context dependent (Bless & Schwarz, 2010; Tourangeau et al., 2000). The inclusion/exclusion model (Schwarz & Bless, 1992a) has been used as a guiding framework to explain how evaluations and judgments of political figures can change as a function of the context. The model suggests that how a given piece of information (e.g., the context) and a target are categorized influences evaluations of political candidates and parties. Therefore, the categorization process is responsible for eliciting assimilation or contrast effects (Bless & Schwarz, 2010). This categorization process has many implications for political evaluations since politicians can be evaluated based on their individual performance and accomplishments or based on their membership to a political party or organization.

For example, previous investigations have mainly focused on: (1) understanding how a given politician might help/hurt the evaluations of the politician's party (e.g., lateral category influencing the evaluations of a superordinate category), depending on whether the shared membership is made salient experimentally (Bless & Schwarz, 1998); (2) assessing whether politicians involved in scandals hurt (assimilation effect) the perception of politicians in general, but help (interexemplar contrast effect) the evaluation of other politicians (Schwarz & Bless, 1992b); (3) examining the size of context effects (Bless, Igou, Schwarz, & Wänke, 2000); (4) testing whether the categorization process is influenced by variables such as political ambivalence (Haddock, 2003); and (5) examining

how a given politician might help/hurt the evaluation of another politician (e.g., lateral category influencing the evaluation of another lateral category, something known as "interexemplar effects"), depending on whether the shared membership of both lateral categories is made salient (Wänke, Bless, & Igou, 2001).

Regarding political judgments, there are some investigations conducted in laboratory settings relevant to our research questions. For example, one investigation related to ours since it focused on negatively perceived politicians tested the influence of bringing to mind politicians involved in scandals on judgments of trustworthiness of politicians in general and of three specific politicians (Schwarz & Bless, 1992b). Results showed that bringing controversial politicians to mind led to lower judgments of trustworthiness of politicians in general (superordinate category), but higher judgments of trustworthiness of specific politicians (lateral categories).

What seems to be consistent across different investigations is that lateral categories tend to produce contrast effects, but these investigations also showed that the categorization process is relevant to determine whether assimilation or contrast effects are observed. One investigation tried to precisely examine how lateral categories influence each other as a function of the categorization process. Specifically, researchers investigated the effects of bringing an extremely positive exemplar to mind on the evaluation of a moderate exemplar and also the effects of manipulating the shared membership of both politicians (Wänke et al., 2001). Results showed the expected contrast effect in the evaluation of the moderate exemplar. However, this effect was eliminated when the shared membership of the extremely positive and moderate exemplars was made salient. Thus, when the shared membership was made salient, both politicians were treated as members of the same super-ordinate category rather than as lateral categories, eliminating the previously found contrast effect. Yet, it is worth noting that the saliency of the shared membership only eliminated the contrast effect but did not result in an observed assimilation effect. To our knowledge, however, less attention has been given to individual differences in the categorization process caused by the dynamic nature of the political context and their influence on assimilation or contrast effects. This is where we believe the present investigation can make a contribution.

Specifically, the categorization process can be influenced by internal and external factors (Bless & Schwarz, 2010). Regarding internal factors, one can make, experimentally, the shared membership salient influencing the categorization of both the context and the target, as shown in the investigations reviewed above. However, to our knowledge, researchers have paid less attention to whether people can spontaneously assign the context to the same category as the target or not, due to the ambiguous membership of political figure acting as the context. In other words, the political membership of the politician acting as the context can be ambiguous enough to leave room for individual differences in the categorization process. These differences, in turn, can moderate whether assimilation or contrast effects are observed.

Similarly, researchers have paid less attention to how the categorization process can be affected by external factors such as the political context. For example, it is common, in the Mexican political context, to find politicians who threaten to leave one party, start appearing as members of other parties, and end up coming back to their original party, influencing how they are categorized by the electorate. Thus, the political context can also be a source of confusion/clarity regarding the categorization process.

In sum, the purpose of the present investigation is to examine how the same piece of information can produce assimilation and contrast effects on the evaluations of a political figure as a function of the categorization process, which in turn is influenced by the political landscape. We take advantage of the membership ambiguity of a highly controversial, negatively perceived politician (study 1) and also of how this ambiguity is reduced (study 2) to examine how the same piece of information can elicit assimilation and contrast effects. Based on the propositions set by the inclusion/exclusion model and the studies reviewed, we formulate some hypotheses. In study 1, we expect, due to the

ambiguous membership of the controversial politician, significantly more variation in the categorization of the controversial politician than in study 2. If both politicians are not assigned to the same superordinate category, their political party, bringing to mind the highly controversial politician will result in better evaluations of the performance of another politician, a contrast effect, as compared with the control condition. Conversely, if both politicians are assigned to the same superordinate category, their political party, bringing to mind the highly controversial politician will result in worse evaluations of the performance of another politician, an assimilation effect, as compared with the control condition. Yet, this second effect might be somewhat weaker due to the ambiguity in the political membership of the controversial figure.

For study 2, if both politicians are assigned to the same superordinate category, bringing to mind the same highly controversial, negatively evaluated politician from study 1 will result in worse evaluations of the performance of the same politician from study 1, an assimilation effect, as compared with the control condition. Conversely, if both politicians are not assigned to the same superordinate category, their political party, bringing to mind the highly controversial politician will result in better evaluations of the performance of another politician, a contrast effect, as compared with the control condition. Yet, once again, this effect might be somewhat weaker due to the reduced ambiguity in the political membership of the controversial figure and the related small sample size of participants not categorizing the controversial figure as a member of the same political party as the target politician.[1]

The Present Studies

Two studies investigated the effects of bringing a highly controversial politician to mind on the evaluations of another politician. Study 1 took advantage of the ambiguity related to the party membership of the controversial politician. The controversial politician was Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (the context). Lopez Obrador was the mayor of Mexico City and ran for the presidency of Mexico in the 2006 elections. He was the favorite to win, but he lost by a very close margin (less than 1%). Lopez Obrador claimed that he was robbed, and he decided to close one of the main avenues in Mexico City as a protest. This main avenue stayed closed for weeks causing a great deal of problems for drivers. The second politician, Marcelo Ebrard, was the mayor of Mexico City at the moment these two studies were conducted. Ebrard was one of the potential candidates for the upcoming presidential elections in 2012. Lopez Obrador and Ebrard belong to the same party, Partido de la Revolucion Democratica (PRD), but when we conducted study 1, Lopez Obrador threatened to leave the party and was being promoted as a member and potential presidential candidate of other left-wing parties (PT and Convergencia). Thus, we capitalized on the controversial nature of Lopez Obrador and also on the ambiguity of his political membership to design study 1.

For study 2, the political landscape changed. Lopez Obrador and Marcelo Ebrard were officially contending to be the presidential candidate for PRD. Thus, the ambiguity involving the political membership of Lopez Obrador was reduced. In sum, two studies examined how the same piece of information could elicit assimilation and contrast effects, depending how it is used in the mental construal process.

Participants, Design, and Procedure of Study 1

Participants were 255 college students (142 females and 113 males; ages 18 to 28, M = 20.95 years and SD = 1.55) from a private university in the Mexico City area. Students received extra credit

[1] We would like to thank one of the reviewers for suggesting a possible explanation for the expected weaker effects in both studies

for their participation. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions. The first condition was labeled as the "controversial politician condition" and the second condition as the "control condition." In both conditions, the target of evaluation was Marcelo Ebrard, and the presence of the context information, Lopez Obrador, was manipulated.

Controversial politician condition. In this condition, participants were asked to spontaneously report the political party that Lopez Obrador belonged to (question 1) and then estimate the number of years that Marcelo Ebrard had been a member of PRD (question 2). After these two questions, we asked participants to evaluate the political performance of Marcelo Ebrard in a scale from 1 (very bad) to 10 (very good). The objective of question 1 was to activate Lopez Obrador and allow participants to spontaneously categorize Lopez Obrador as a member of a political party. Since his political membership was somewhat ambiguous, we expected variability in the answers provided by participants. The purpose of question 2 was to ratify information that was already known, that Marcelo Ebrard was a member of PRD, and to also present participants with the possibility of categorizing both politicians as members of the same superordinate category, PRD.

Bringing Lopez Obrador to mind could produce contrast effects regarding the evaluation of Marcelo Ebrard if they are both treated as lateral categories or two different exemplars. Yet, this effect might be qualified by whether participants spontaneously assign Lopez Obrador to the same superordinate category, PRD (Bless & Schwarz, 2010). A similar experimental design was used by Wänke et al. (2001). However, in their investigation, the political membership of the politician used to elicit the contrast/assimilation effects was not ambiguous.

Control condition. In this condition, participants answered the same questions as in the controversial politician condition, but in different order. The evaluation of Marcelo Ebrard was first followed by the questions about the political membership of Lopez Obrador and the length of membership of Ebrard as a member of PRD.

Analytical Strategy

Since we developed specific hypotheses supported by previous investigations for study 1 and 2, we adopted the analytic strategy of using planned comparisons between the experimental cells of interest for both studies. A similar strategy has been used in other investigations. We first report the contrast analysis between the individual cells followed by the combined analysis. Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics for both studies.

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations for Study 1 and 2 as a Function of the Experimental Condition and the Categorization Process

	Bringing Lopez Obrador to Mind[1]		Not Bringing Lopez Obrador to Mind	
	Study 1	Study 2	Study 1	Study 2
Categorizing Lopez Obrador as Member of PRD[2]	M = 4.98[3] SD = 1.87 Range = 8	M = 5.61 SD = 2.12 Range = 9	M = 4.61 SD = 1.93 Range = 8	M = 6.37 SD = 2.17 Range = 9
Not Categorizing Lopez Obrador as Member of PRD	M = 5.50 SD = 1.99 Range = 8	M = 5.78 SD = 1.56 Range = 5	M = 4.71 SD = 1.97 Range = 8	M = 5.96 SD = 2.09 Range = 8

[1]Bringing Lopez Obrador to mind was an experimentally manipulated variable.

[2]The categorization of Lopez Obrador was done by the participants spontaneously.

[3]The dependent variable was the evaluation of the political performance of Marcelo Ebrard measured in a scale from 1 to 10.

Results of Study 1

The classification of Lopez Obrador as a member of PRD did not vary as a function of the experimental condition. In both conditions, 46% of the participants classified him as a member of PRD and 54% as a member of other parties (e.g., PT, Convergencia), supporting the idea that his political membership was ambiguous. We first conducted the comparison among those who did not classify Lopez Obrador as a member of the same superordinate category as Marcelo Ebrard. We assigned weights of 2 and −2 to the cells representing the control condition and the experimental condition and weights of 0 to the other cells not involved in this comparison. Results showed a significant effect of the experimental manipulation, $F (1, 231) = 6.01$, $p < .05$. The political performance of Marcelo Ebrard obtained better evaluations when the controversial politician was brought to mind ($M = 5.50$, $SD = 1.99$, $N = 71$) than when it was not ($M = 4.71$, $SD = 1.97$, $N = 76$). Thus, a contrast effect was observed, supporting the idea that lateral categories produce contrast effects when they are not assigned to the same superordinate category.

The second comparison involved testing the effects of the experimental manipulation among those who classified Lopez Obrador as a member of the same superordinate category as Marcelo Ebrard. We assigned weights of 1 and −1 to the cells representing the control condition and the experimental condition and weights of 0 to the other cells not involved in this comparison. Results failed to show a significant effect of the experimental manipulation, $F (1, 231) = < 1$. The political performance of Marcelo Ebrard obtained similar evaluations when the controversial politician was brought to mind ($M = 4.98$, $SD = 1.87$, $N = 52$) than when it was not ($M = 4.61$, $SD = 1.93$, $N = 54$). Thus, an assimilation effect was not observed.

We then tested for the overall effects. Results showed that this a priori contrast reached statistical significance, $F (1, 231) = 6.96$ $p < .05$. In sum, we found support for one of our two predictions.

Brief Discussion of Study 1

Results showed the expected contrast effects when the highly controversial politician, Lopez Obrador, was brought to mind on the evaluations of another politician, Marcelo Ebrard, supporting one of our hypotheses. Yet this effect was observed only among those participants who did not assign Lopez Obrador to the same political party as Marcelo Ebrard. However, we did not find support for the reverse effect, assimilation, among those who classified Lopez Obrador as a member of the same political party as Marcelo Ebrard. The ambiguity of the political membership of Lopez Obrador was significantly reduced with the passage of time since both political figures contended for the chance to be the presidential candidate for PRD. We intended to take advantage of these changes in the political context to examine the effects of bringing the same politician to mind on the evaluations of Marcelo Ebrard in study 2.

Participants, Design, and Procedure of Study 2

Participants were 176 college students (104 females and 72 males; ages 18 to 25, $M = 20.38$ years and $SD = 1.55$) from a private university in the Mexico City area. Students received extra credit for their participation. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the same two conditions as in study 1: "controversial politician condition" and "control condition." As in study 1, the target of evaluation was Marcelo Ebrard, and the presence of the context information, Lopez Obrador, was manipulated. Since the design, procedure, and questions were identical to the ones used in study 1, the specific details were omitted.

<center>**Results of Study 2**</center>

As expected, the ambiguity of the political membership of Lopez Obrador was significantly reduced since 75% of the respondents classified the controversial politician as a member of the same party as Marcelo Ebrard. We first conducted the comparison among those who did classify Lopez Obrador as a member of the same superordinate category as Marcelo Ebrard. We assigned weights of 2 and −2 to the cells representing the control condition and the experimental condition and weights of 0 to the other cells not involved in this comparison. Results showed a significant effect of the experimental manipulation, $F(1, 169) = 4.24$, $p < .05$. Contrary to the results obtained in study 1, the political performance of Marcelo Ebrard obtained better evaluations when the controversial politician was not brought to mind ($M = 6.37$, $SD = 2.17$, $N = 59$) than when it was ($M = 5.61$, $SD = 2.12$, $N = 70$). Thus, the reduced ambiguity in the political membership of Lopez Obrador resulted in the expected assimilation effect.

The second comparison involved testing the effects of the experimental manipulation among those who did not classify Lopez Obrador as a member of the same superordinate category as Marcelo Ebrard. We assigned weights of 1 and −1 to the cells representing the control condition and the experimental condition and weights of 0 to the other cells not involved in this comparison. It is worth noting that due to the reduced ambiguity of his political membership, we were left with only 44 participants to conduct the analysis. Results failed to show a significant effect of the experimental manipulation, $F(1, 169) = < 1$. The political performance of Marcelo Ebrard obtained similar evaluations when the controversial politician was brought to mind ($M = 5.78$, $SD = 1.56$, $N = 18$) than when it was not ($M = 5.96$, $SD = 2.09$, $N = 26$). Thus, a contrast effect was not observed.

Lastly, we tested for the overall effects. Results showed that this a priori contrast was marginally significant, $F(1, 169) = 3.03$ $p = .08$. As in study 1, we found support for one of our two predictions.

As a final analysis, we aggregated the data from study 1 and 2 and examined the interaction between the experimental condition and the change in the political landscape acknowledging this second factor was not randomized. The results showed a significant interaction, $F(1, 426) = 9.32$, $p < .05$).

<center>**Brief Discussion of Study 2**</center>

Study 2 was a replication of study 1, but it was conducted in a different political landscape since 75% of participants assigned Lopez Obrador to the same political party as Marcelo Ebrard. The target politician, Marcelo Ebrard, obtained better evaluations when the controversial politician, Lopez Obrador, was not brought to mind. Thus, we found support for the expected assimilation effect.

<center>**General Discussion**</center>

The political context, in most countries, is dynamic, and Mexico is not the exemption. It is common for political figures to either threaten to leave their political party or to actually switch political parties. We took advantage of this situation and examined how the categorization process was influenced by external events in two studies. Most social cognition researchers would agree that attitudes toward political candidates are not stable, but rather malleable (Lavine, 2001). When evaluating the performance of a political figure, information might come to mind which could influence, positively or negatively, the evaluation process. The inclusion/exclusion model suggests that the categorization process is one the most robust variables to understand assimilation and contrast effects (Schwarz & Bless, 1992a). Interestingly, the categorization process is likely to be influenced by the dynamic nature of the political context.

In study 1, we examined the effects of bringing a controversial politician to mind on the evaluation of another politician. These two political figures represent lateral categories which should produce contrast effects as long as they are not categorized as members of the same political party. We found support for this proposition. However, these two political figures could be treated as members of the same political party (PRD). If these two figures are treated as members of the same political party, we would expect the evaluation of the noncontroversial political figure to assimilate toward the context, the highly controversial politician. We did not find support for this proposition in study 1. We would return to discuss some possible explanations later on.

Taking advantage of the dynamic nature of the political context, we also examined the effects of the reduced ambiguity of the controversial politician on the evaluations of the same political figure in study 2. Specifically, we found that the reduced ambiguity of the party membership of the controversial politician did not only eliminate the previously observed contrast effect but elicited the opposite: an assimilation effect among those who classified Lopez Obrador as a member of the same political party as Marcelo Ebrard. Yet among those who did not classify Lopez Obrador as a member of the same political party as Marcelo Ebrard, the expected contrast effect, since they are lateral categories, was not found.

What explains this pattern of results? The observed contrast effect on the evaluation of the target politician, in study 1, among those who did not classify Lopez Obrador as a member of the same superordinate category as Marcelo Ebrard, is consistent with the proposition set by the inclusion/exclusion model (Bless & Schwarz, 2010) and with previous investigations (Schwarz & Bless, 1992b). Similarly, the observed assimilation effect in study 2 among those who classified Lopez Obrador as a member of the same superordinate category as Marcelo Ebrard is also in line with the propositions set by the inclusion/exclusion model (Bless & Schwarz, 2010). It is the lack of significant assimilation effects—among those who classified the controversial politician and the target politician as member of the same political party in study 1—and the lack of significant contrast effects—among those who did not classify the controversial politician and the target politician as member of the same political party in study 2—that were unexpected. There might be two possible, yet speculative explanations.

The first explanation deals with how confident participants might be about the categorization of the controversial politician. As suggested before, the political membership of Lopez Obrador was more ambiguous in study 1 than in study 2. Whereas 46% of the participants identified Lopez Obrador as a member of the same party as Marcelo Ebrard, 75% did so in study 2. The ambiguity and the reduction of ambiguity might have caused participants to be more confident about classifying Lopez Obrador as a member of other left-wing political parties in study 1 and as a member of PRD in study 2. The influence of confidence/doubts in the categorization process on assimilation and contrast effects might represent an interesting opportunity for future research.

The second explanation is related to the idea that contrast and assimilation effect might operate simultaneously (Bless & Schwarz, 2010). In study 1, participants, who classified Lopez Obrador as a member of the same political party as Marcelo Ebrard, might have still used Lopez Obrador as a standard of comparison even though their shared membership was acknowledged, resulting in a nonsignificant contrast effect but not in an observed assimilation effect. There is some empirical evidence in political judgments showing that when shared membership are made salient, it often leads to the elimination of a contrast effect but not to observed assimilation effects (Wänke et al., 2001). For study 2, the relatively small number of participants who did not classify Lopez Obrador as a member of the same party as Marcelo Ebrard might have found Lopez Obrador to be a relevant standard to compare Marcelo Ebrard, yet the influence was not strong enough to elicit a contrast effect.[2] More research is needed to understand how assimilation and contrast might operate simultaneously.

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[2] We would like to thank one of the reviewers for suggesting these two explanations of the observed discrepancies in our results.

In our opinion, results from our investigation make an interesting theoretical and applied contribution. From a theoretical point of view, our results showed that the political context can increase (decrease) the ambiguity of the political membership of politicians, increasing (decreasing) the likelihood of two actors being treated as lateral categories or members of the same superordinate category. Thus, the categorization process can be influenced by the dynamic nature of the political context. Evidence for how the meaning of a category changes as a function of who is included or not has been obtained from other investigations in which fit, defined as the degree of correspondence between the behavior of an actor and his or her social category, was experimentally manipulated (Oakes, Turner, & Haslam, 1991). Similarly, other investigations in self-evaluation have found that the meaning of categories can change as a function of whether individuals are classified as members of majority/minorities groups. Classifying individuals as members of majority/minority groups can lead to assimilation/contrast effects, presumably because it activates more interpersonal/intergroup comparisons (Brewer & Weber, 1994). Thus, findings from other investigations support the dynamic nature of meaning of social categories.

From an applied perspective, we see two major implications. First, our results suggest that public opinion experts should pay close attention to how the electorate perceives political figures: as lateral categories, as members of a specific superordinate category, a political party, or as members of a broad superordinate category, politicians in general. That is, public opinion experts should take into account the mental construal process. As shown in our two studies and in other investigations (Schwarz & Bless, 2007), the mental construal process influences judgments and evaluations of candidates, parties, and politicians in general.

Second, our results might also have implications for political advisors or strategists. Specifically, in almost any political race, there are some associations or memberships that are better than others for political figures. Strategists could figure out which memberships or associations are optimal for their political candidates and put more emphasis on making them explicit to the electorate. In other words, it might be advantageous (disadvantageous) for one political candidate to emphasize (deemphasize) her or his shared membership with another politician.

Our investigation had limitations. First, we used a sample of convenience, college students. The ability to generalize our results is limited due to the sample used in our investigation. A closely related limitation is that most of our participants belong to the top tier in terms of socioeconomic status. It is among members of this socioeconomic status that the controversial politician, Lopez Obrador, is more likely to be considered a controversial, negative figure. Conversely, Lopez Obrador could be considered, among members from other socioeconomic status, a positive exemplar. Thus, research with a more diverse sample is needed.

In sum, the results from this investigation showed that a highly controversial politician can help/hurt the evaluations of another politician, being the mental construal process the determinant of the observed assimilation and contrast effects. Our results are in line with the propositions set by the inclusion/exclusion model and also with recent models of situated social cognition (Smith & Semin, 2007). The context dependency of evaluations and judgments has relevant implications for any field interested in examining people's opinions including, but not limited to, political psychology, marketing, and public opinion.

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