Suiting Up or Speaking Out:

Analyzing Candidate Appearance & Message Complexity as Heuristics for Voter Evaluation

Supplemental Appendix

Abstract

When voters are exposed to political candidates, whether through a campaign ad, a mailer, or by attending a rally, they are simultaneously exposed to two distinct stimuli: the visual appearance of the candidate, and the message the candidate is conveying. How can voters use these concurrent information sources as heuristics when drawing important evaluations of candidates? What can voters infer from complementary, or contrasting, message and appearance styles? Through an original survey experiment, we examine the effects of the formality of a candidate's appearance and the complexity of their message on four measures of voter evaluation. We find compelling evidence that voter appearance has a direct effect on a candidate's perceived sophistication, and preliminary evidence of an indirect effect on candidate support. We find no evidence that message complexity affects how voters draw important evaluations.

Treatment Conditions

In order to evaluate variation in voter respond to candidate images and message complexity, we utilize an original survey experiment of approximately 620 participants recruited through an onlines survey platform. As part of the survey process, respondents were presented with a facsimile campaign flier containing both a policy message as well as an image of the (fictionalized) candidate; the complexity of the message and the perceived sophistication of the image are allowed to vary as treatment conditions in a 2x2 factorial design.

Complexity of the candidate's message is experimentally manipulated my altering the specific words used by the candidate in a message, but holding the policy area, proposed solution, and political significance of the message constant. For treatments involving a low level of message complexity, respondents received a message with a Flesch-Kinkaid grade level score of an 8.4, which is representative of a typical level of complexity. Those in treatments involving a high level of message complexity received a message with similar policy content, but with a Flesch-Kinkaid grade level score of 14.2, which is representative of a high level of textual complexity.

Candidate image formality is experimentally manipulated by altering the image included in each campaign advertisement. To do this, images are created of an identical subject in an identical location, but with systematically different clothing. In the low formality condition, respondents receive a professional, yet casual image of a young male in an oxford shirt with an open collar and no tie. In the high formality condition, respondents receive an image of the same male in the same shirt, but with a closed collar, a tie, and a suit jacket.

The specific four candidate flyers used as treatment conditions are:

Treatment 1: Formal Image, Simple Message

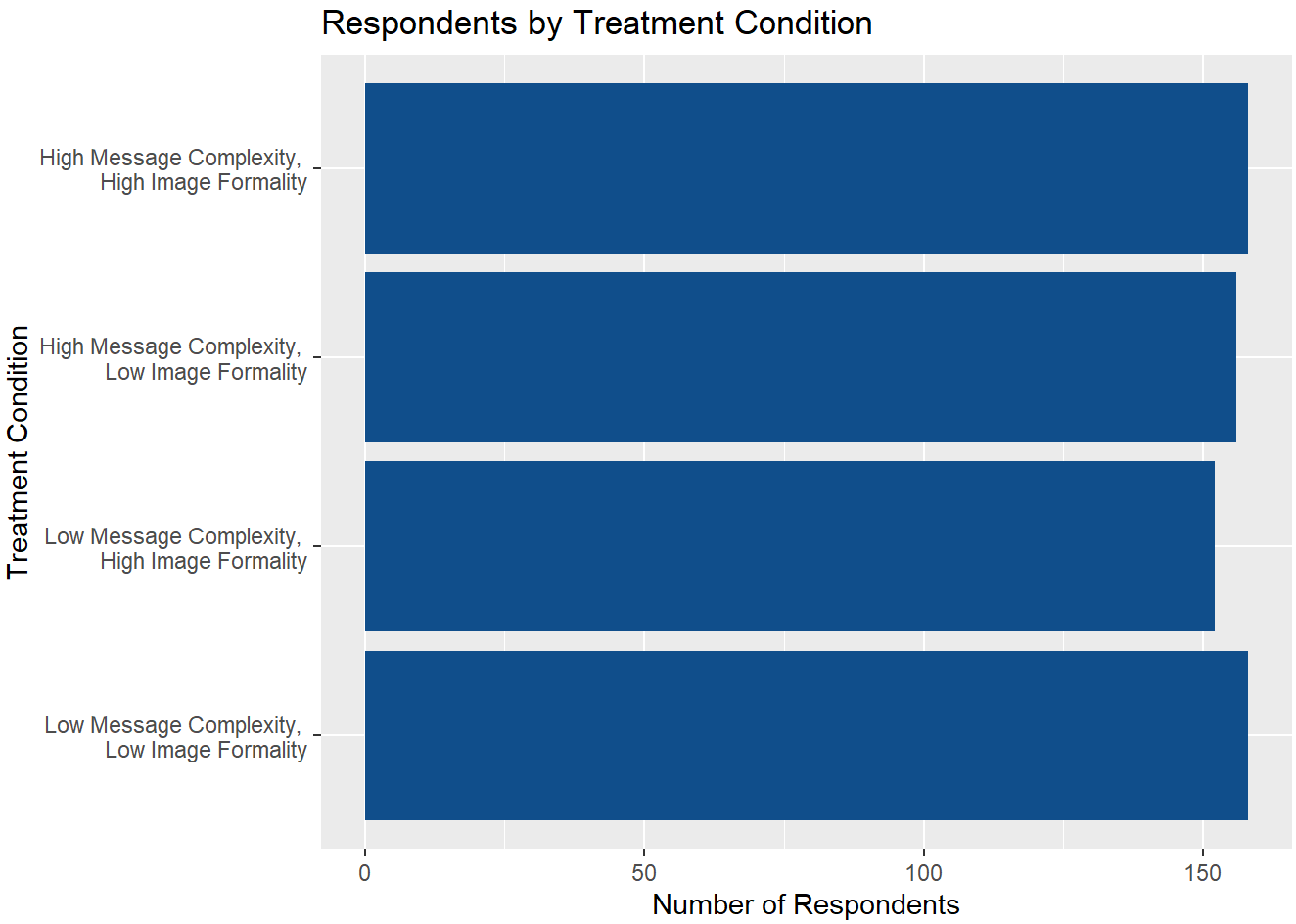
Treatment 2: Informal Image, Simple Message

Treatment 3: Formal Image, Complex Message

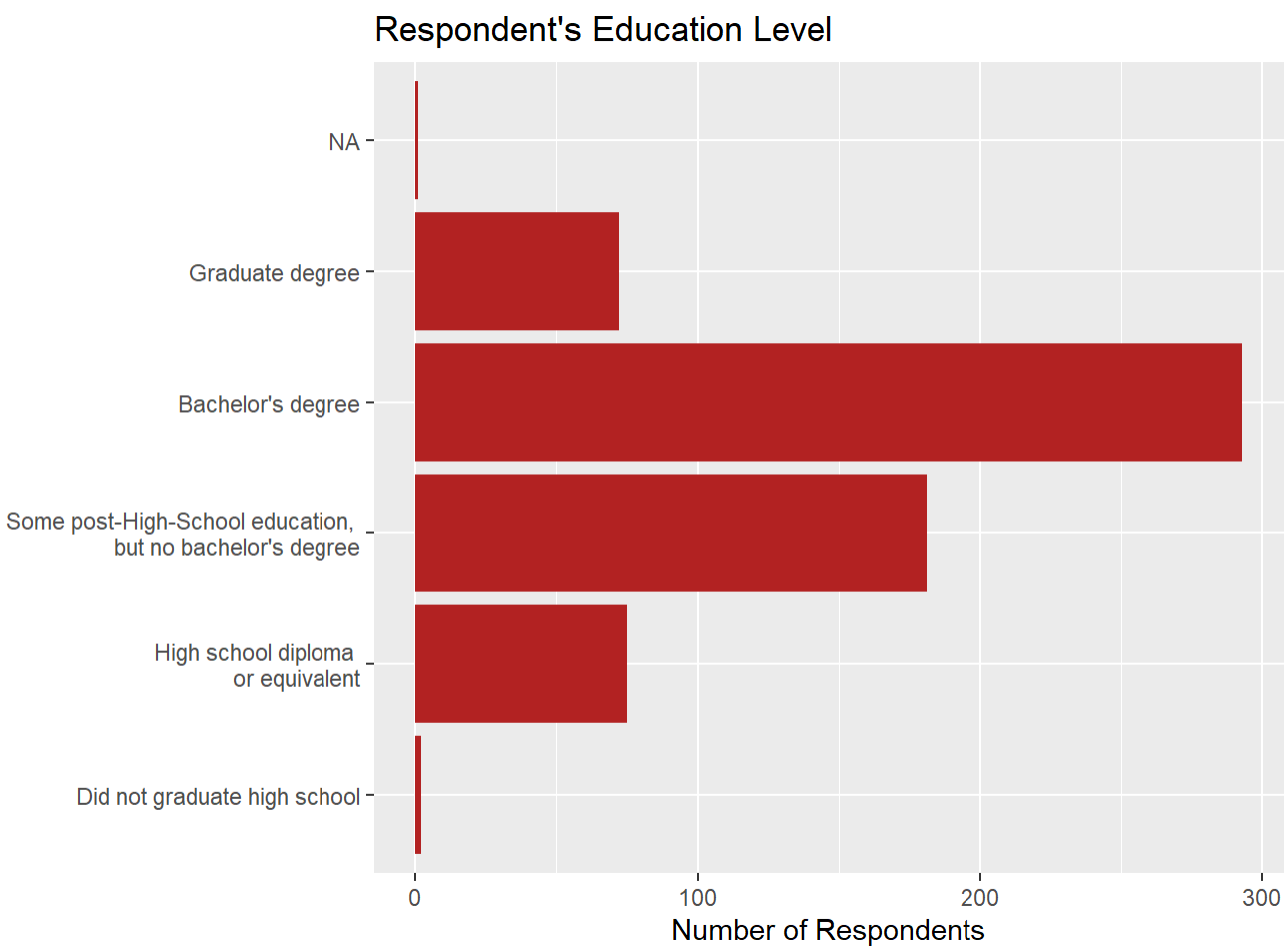
Treatment 4: Informal Image, Complex Message

Sample Characteristics

A total of 624 respondents completed the survey and passed a series of non-experiment related attention checks. On average, each treatment group had 156 participants.

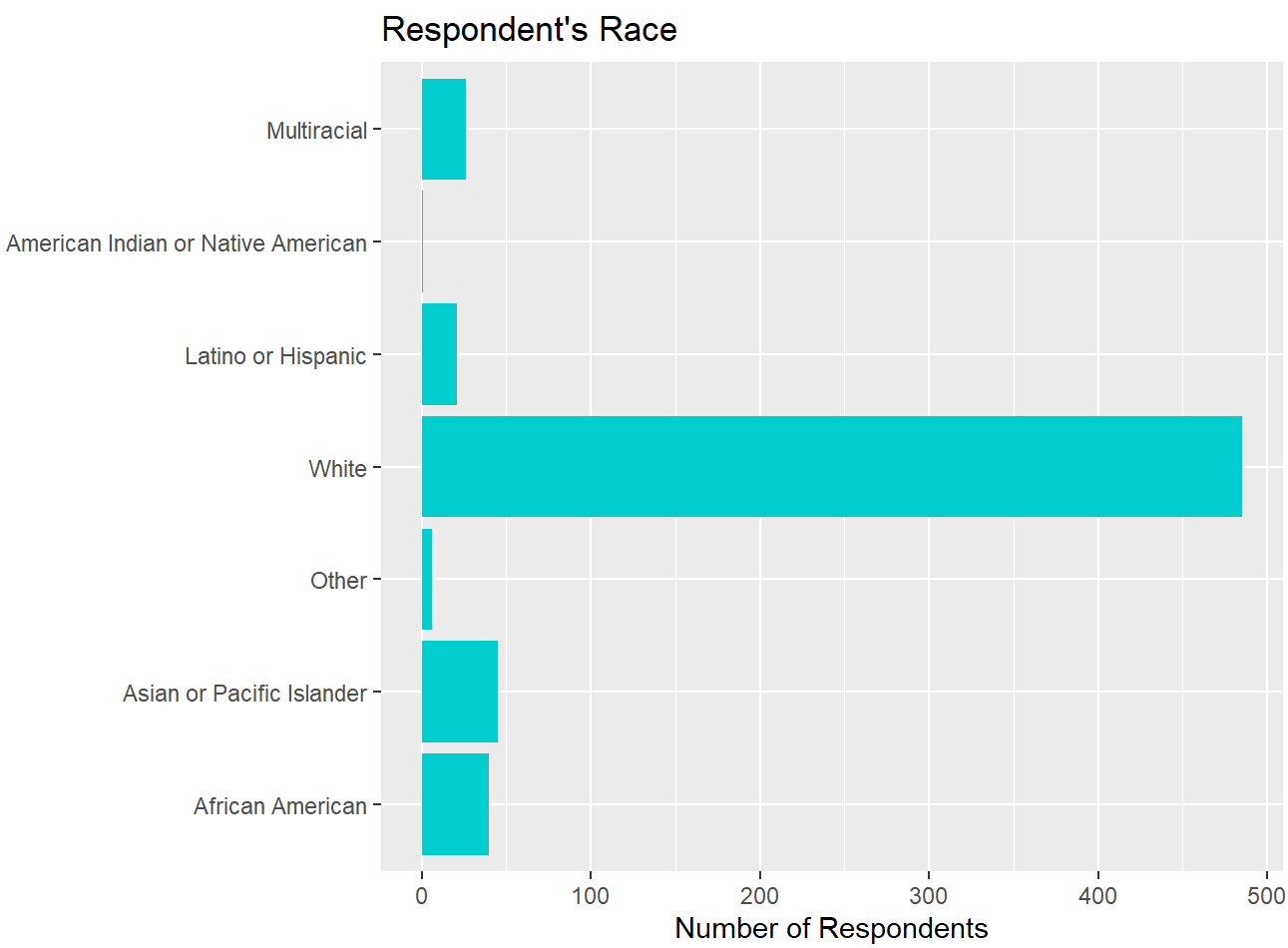


Below are a series of measures reporting respondent demographic characteristics:



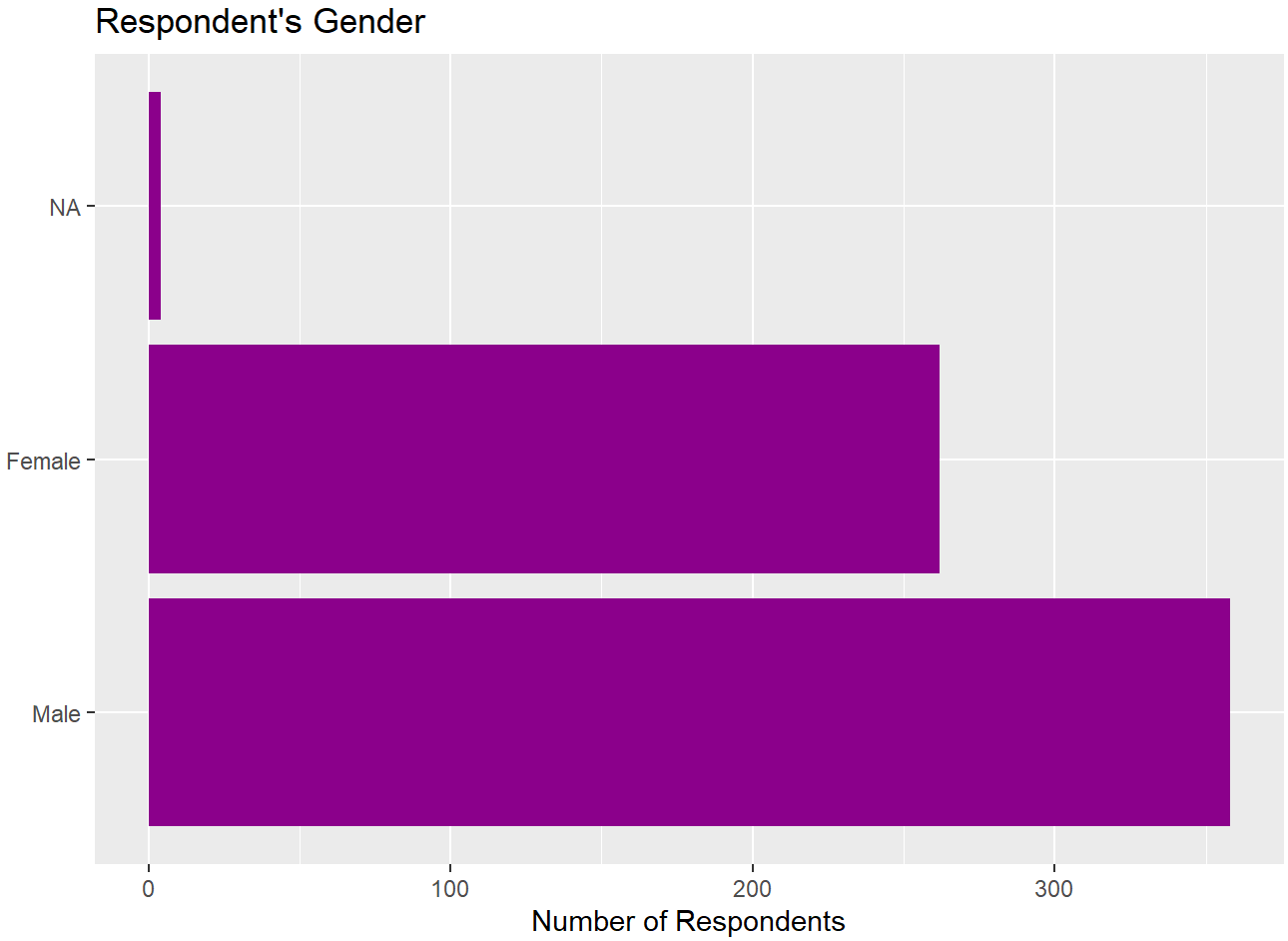

```
##    Min. 1st Qu.  Median    Mean 3rd Qu.    Max.    NA's
##   1.000   3.000   4.000   3.575   4.000   5.000       1
```

```
##
##   1   2   3   4   5
##   2  75 181 293  72
```



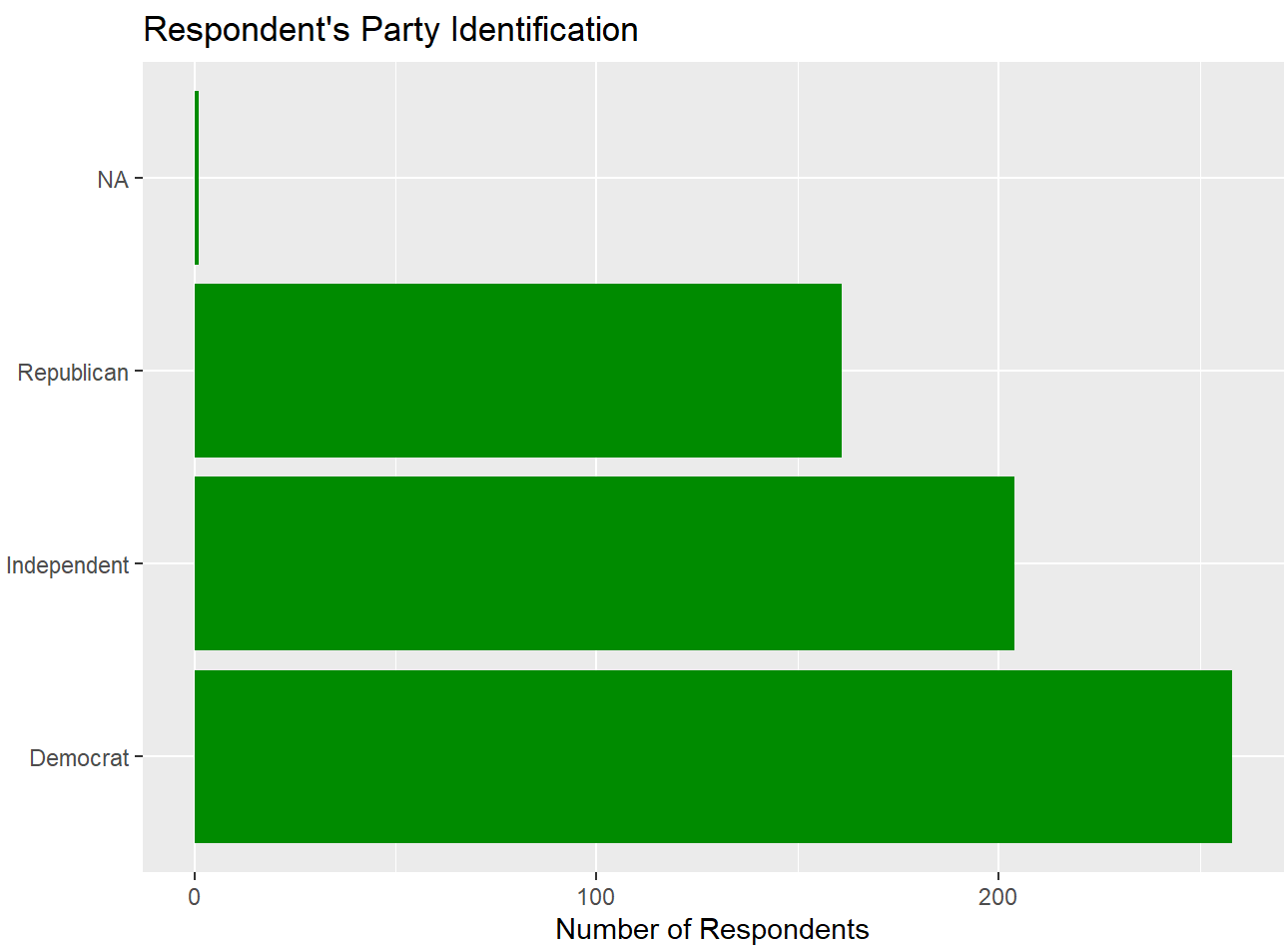

```
##    Min. 1st Qu.  Median    Mean 3rd Qu.    Max.
##   1.000   4.000   4.000   3.816   4.000   7.000
```

```
##
##   1   2   3   4   5   6   7
##  40  45   6 485  21   1  26
```




```
##    Min. 1st Qu.  Median    Mean 3rd Qu.    Max.    NA's
##  0.0000  0.0000  0.0000  0.4226  1.0000  1.0000       4
```

```
##
##   0   1
## 358 262
```




```
##    Min. 1st Qu.  Median    Mean 3rd Qu.    Max.    NA's
##   1.000   1.000   2.000   1.844   3.000   3.000       1
```

```
##
##   1   2   3
## 258 204 161
```

To ensure that respondents are balanced between treatment factor levels, we ran a series of independent sample two-tailed T tests to ensure there are no significant differences between groups on a series of important respondent characteristics. These tests are reported below, and indicate that respondents are balanced in regards to education, gender, party identification, political knowledge, and prior voting behavior.

```
##
##  Welch Two Sample t-test
##
## data:  dta$Education by dta$Treatment_Complex2
## t = 0.41387, df = 620.67, p-value = 0.6791
## alternative hypothesis: true difference in means is not equal to 0
## 95 percent confidence interval:
##  -0.1066824  0.1636568
## sample estimates:
##  mean in group Low Complexity mean in group High Complexity
##                      3.588997                      3.560510
```

```
##
##  Welch Two Sample t-test
##
## data:  dta$Education by dta$Treatment_Formality2
## t = -0.73358, df = 620.46, p-value = 0.4635
## alternative hypothesis: true difference in means is not equal to 0
## 95 percent confidence interval:
##  -0.18561181  0.08465334
## sample estimates:
## mean in group Informal   mean in group Formal
##               3.549521               3.600000
```

```
##
##  Welch Two Sample t-test
##
## data:  dta$Gender by dta$Treatment_Complex2
## t = 0.32471, df = 617.99, p-value = 0.7455
## alternative hypothesis: true difference in means is not equal to 0
## 95 percent confidence interval:
##  -0.06513343  0.09093988
## sample estimates:
##  mean in group Low Complexity mean in group High Complexity
##                     0.4290323                     0.4161290
```

```
##
##  Welch Two Sample t-test
##
## data:  dta$Gender by dta$Treatment_Formality2
## t = 0.093741, df = 617.98, p-value = 0.9253
## alternative hypothesis: true difference in means is not equal to 0
## 95 percent confidence interval:
##  -0.07431755  0.08176820
## sample estimates:
## mean in group Informal   mean in group Formal
##              0.4244373              0.4207120
```

```
##
##  Welch Two Sample t-test
##
## data:  dta$PartyID_7 by dta$Treatment_Complex2
## t = -0.32536, df = 619.94, p-value = 0.745
## alternative hypothesis: true difference in means is not equal to 0
## 95 percent confidence interval:
##  -0.3831489  0.2742332
## sample estimates:
##  mean in group Low Complexity mean in group High Complexity
##                      3.488673                      3.543131
```

```
##
##  Welch Two Sample t-test
##
## data:  dta$PartyID_7 by dta$Treatment_Formality2
## t = -0.48178, df = 618.05, p-value = 0.6301
## alternative hypothesis: true difference in means is not equal to 0
## 95 percent confidence interval:
##  -0.4091165  0.2479246
## sample estimates:
## mean in group Informal   mean in group Formal
##               3.476038               3.556634
```

```
##
##  Welch Two Sample t-test
##
## data:  dta$Quiz_TotalScore by dta$Treatment_Complex2
## t = -0.69657, df = 602.02, p-value = 0.4863
## alternative hypothesis: true difference in means is not equal to 0
## 95 percent confidence interval:
##  -0.2977743  0.1418466
## sample estimates:
##  mean in group Low Complexity mean in group High Complexity
##                      5.584416                      5.662379
```

```
##
##  Welch Two Sample t-test
##
## data:  dta$Quiz_TotalScore by dta$Treatment_Formality2
## t = 0.77582, df = 602.68, p-value = 0.4382
## alternative hypothesis: true difference in means is not equal to 0
## 95 percent confidence interval:
##  -0.1330192  0.3067434
## sample estimates:
## mean in group Informal   mean in group Formal
##               5.666667               5.579805
```

```
##
##  Welch Two Sample t-test
##
## data:  dta$Voted_Pres_2016 by dta$Treatment_Complex2
## t = 0.56581, df = 604.62, p-value = 0.5717
## alternative hypothesis: true difference in means is not equal to 0
## 95 percent confidence interval:
##  -0.04214564  0.07625851
## sample estimates:
##  mean in group Low Complexity mean in group High Complexity
##                     0.8438538                     0.8267974
```

```
##
##  Welch Two Sample t-test
##
## data:  dta$Voted_Pres_2016 by dta$Treatment_Formality2
## t = 0.455, df = 604.18, p-value = 0.6493
## alternative hypothesis: true difference in means is not equal to 0
## 95 percent confidence interval:
##  -0.04550690  0.07295175
## sample estimates:
## mean in group Informal   mean in group Formal
##              0.8421053              0.8283828
```