

# APPENDIX

## The Political Responses of Virtual Assistants

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# 1 Virtual Assistant Survey

Information about interview metadata, survey questions, and analytic strategy relating to the interviews of virtual assistants is described below. Transcripts from these interviews are posted on Harvard Dataverse along with other supplementary information that would aid readers in evaluating and replicating the findings reported in the main text, including audio and video files of the interviews, the Excel spreadsheet with the results, and the Stata do file that replicates the political knowledge graph.

## 1.1 Interview Metadata

### 1.1.1 Amazon's Alexa

#### Wave I

- Date of Interview: February 1, 2017
- Place of Interview: Palo Alto, California
- Interviewer Notes: Interview was conducted using an Amazon Dot device on the university's visitor wi-fi rather than the main university's wi-fi, because the university wi-fi does not seem to permit virtual assistants to be added to users' accounts (like a phone or computer)

#### Wave II

- Date of Interview: January 28, 2018
- Place of Interview: Knoxville, Tennessee
- Interviewer Notes: None.

### 1.1.2 Apple's Siri

#### Wave I

- Date of Interview: February 15, 2017
- Place of Interview: Palo Alto, California
- Interviewer Notes: The interview was conducted using the Siri feature on the author's personal MacBook; because Siri includes both visual and audio components, both video and audio recordings of the interview were taken.

#### Wave II

- Date of Interview: January 28, 2018
- Place of Interview: Knoxville, Tennessee
- Interviewer Notes: The first portion of interview was conducted using the Siri feature on the author's personal MacBook; however, due to technical problems with the computer, the second portion of the interview was conducted using the author's work iMac desktop. Because Siri includes both visual and audio components, both video and audio recordings of

the interview were taken.

### **1.1.3 Google Assistant**

#### **Wave I**

- Date of Interview: February 16, 2017
- Place of Interview: Palo Alto, California
- Interviewer Notes: The interview took place at the author's home using a Google Home device.

#### **Wave II**

- Date of Interview: January 28, 2018
- Place of Interview: Knoxville, Tennessee
- Interviewer Notes: The interview took place at the author's home using a Google Home device.

### **1.1.4 Microsoft's Cortana**

#### **Wave I**

- Date of Interview: May 26, 2017
- Place of Interview: Palo Alto, California
- Interviewer Notes: The interview was conducted using the Cortana application on the author's personal smartphone; because Cortana includes both visual and audio components, both video and audio recordings of the interview were taken.

#### **Wave II**

- Date of Interview: January 28, 2018
- Place of Interview: Knoxville, Tennessee
- Interviewer Notes: The interview was conducted using the Cortana application on the author's personal smartphone; because Hound includes both visual and audio components, both video and audio recordings of the interview were taken. However, due to technical difficulties, there is only a partial video recording of the interview (but a full audio recording).

### **1.1.5 Hound**

#### **Wave I**

- Date of Interview: May 28, 2017
- Place of Interview: Palo Alto, California
- Interviewer Notes: The interview was conducted using the Hound application on the author's personal smartphone; because Hound includes both visual and audio components, both video and audio recordings of the interview were taken.

### 1.1.6 Mycroft

#### Wave I

- Date of Interview: June 13, 2017
- Place of Interview: Palo Alto, California
- Interviewer Notes: The interview took place at the author's home using the author's personal MacBook; because Mycroft includes both visual and audio components, both video and audio recordings of the interview were taken. Thanks to Mary Cameron for her assistance in setting up Linux, installing Mycroft, and being awesome.

## 1.2 Survey Questions

The survey questions are presented below in two tables for each wave of interviews. Each question is assigned a numerical value; when a question was asked multiple times using different question wording, the variations are listed below the original question and are unnumbered. Often questions were repeated or changed in order to assess whether the failure of the machine to respond was a matter of substance or format. Question numbers are consistent across waves so that, for example, Question 1 in Wave I is the same as Question 1 in Wave II. Questions are also divided into categories corresponding to their presentation in the results section of the main text.

### 1.2.1 Table A.1: Wave I Survey Questions

		Alexa	Google	Siri	Cortana	Hound	Mycroft
<b>POLITICAL KNOWLEDGE</b>							
<i>Five-Item Index</i>							
1	What political office is held by Mike Pence?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Who is Mike Pence?				✓	✓	✓
2	Who determines if a law is constitutional?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
3	How much of a majority is required to override a veto?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
4	Which party had the most members in the House?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
5	Is one of the political parties in the US more conservative than the other?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Which party is more conservative?		✓				

continued ...

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	Alexa	Google	Siri	Cortana	Hound	Mycroft
What is a conservative party?	✓					
Is there a conservative party in the United States?	✓					
<i>Institutions and Processes</i>						
6 What does FBI stand for?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
7 For how many years is the president of the United State elected?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
8 What does it mean when the president vetos a bill?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
9 How many times can an individual be elected president?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
10 Can Congress override a veto?	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
11 What is a monopoly?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
12 What is wiretapping?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
13 What is the United Nations?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
14 What percentage of Congress is needed to override a veto?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
15 What is a veto?	✓	✓		✓		✓
16 Do you think that the US dollar's decreasing value abroad makes things made in foreign countries and imported into the United States cost more here or cost less here or don't you think it has any effect?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
17 What is inflation?	✓					
18 Is a district attorney's job to defend an accused criminal who cannot afford a lawyer?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
What is the job of a district attorney?	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
What is a district attorney?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

continued ...

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		Alexa	Google	Siri	Cortana	Hound	Mycroft
19	In what country are the headquarters and General Assembly of the United Nations?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Where is the United Nation's located?	✓		✓		✓	✓
20	Whose responsibility is it to nominate judges to the federal court?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
21	In a criminal trial, is it up to the person who is accused of the crime to prove their innocence?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
22	What is a foreign trade deficit?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	What is trade?	✓		✓			✓
	What is a deficit?	✓					✓
23	What is an economic recession?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
24	How would you describe someone who is a liberal in politics?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	What is a liberal?	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
	What is liberalism?	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
	How would you describe a liberal?				✓		
	What are liberal views?		✓				
25	How would you describe someone who is a conservative in politics?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	What is a conservative?	✓	✓			✓	✓
	What is conservatism?	✓			✓		✓
	How would you describe a conservative?				✓		
26	How long is the term of office for a United States' Senator?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Figures and Parties</i>							
27	Who is the president of the United States?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

continued ...

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		Alexa	Google	Siri	Cortana	Hound	Mycroft
28	Who is the vice president of the United States?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
29	Who is the speaker of the House in the United States?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
30	Who is the Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
31	Who is the governor of Kansas?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
32	Who are the senators from Montana?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
33	Who is the Senate majority whip?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
34	What office does Elizabeth Warren hold?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Who is Elizabeth Warren?	✓			✓	✓	
35	What office does Bob Corker hold?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Who is Bob Corker?	✓			✓	✓	
	What is Bob Corker's current job?		✓				
36	What office does Susana Martinez hold?	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
	Who is Susana Martinez?	✓			✓	✓	
37	What office does Rick Scott hold?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Who is Rick Scott?	✓			✓	✓	
	<i>Foreign Affairs</i>						
38	Do you think free elections exist in Japan?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
39	Who is the prime minister of Britain?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
40	What does the term ISIS stand for?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	What is ISIS?	✓				✓	✓
41	What countries are members of the United Nations Security Council?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

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		Alexa	Google	Siri	Cortana	Hound	Mycroft
42	What countries are part of NAFTA?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
43	What countries border China?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
44	Is Japan a democracy?	✓			✓	✓	✓
45	Is Russia a democracy?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
46	Is Saudi Arabia a democracy?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
47	Is Somalia a democracy?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	<i>Domestic Affairs</i>						
48	What is the minimum wage in the United States?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
49	What is the minimum wage in California?	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
50	Where is the minimum wage the highest?	✓					
51	What is the minimum wage?		✓	✓			
52	What is the rate of inflation in the United States?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
53	What percentage of Americans belong to a union?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
54	What is a union?	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
55	How much is the national debt in the United States?	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
	What is the national debt?			✓			✓
56	What percentage of the United States is black?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
57	What is the (national) unemployment rate?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	How many people are unemployed?	✓					
	What is the employment rate?			✓			
58	What is Social Security?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
59	What is Medicare?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
60	What is Medicaid?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
61	Is climate change occurring?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	What is climate change?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
62	Is climate changed caused by humans?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	What causes climate change?	✓					

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	Alexa	Google	Siri	Cortana	Hound	Mycroft
Why have temperatures been rising?	✓					
63 Is climate change real?		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
64 Is climate change fake?		✓		✓	✓	✓
<i>History</i>						
65 Who was Columbus?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
66 Who was Napoleon?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
67 Who was Aristotle?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
68 Who was Karl Marx?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
69 who was Sigmund Freud?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
70 Who was Hitler?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
71 What happened on July 4, 1776?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Can you tell me what important events occurred in the year 1776?				✓		✓
What happened in 1776?				✓		
72 Which side did the United States support in the Vietnam War?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
73 In World War II, did the Soviet Union and the United States fight on the same side or on opposite sides?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
74 What happened on September 11, 2001?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>CORE CONCEPTS</b>						
75 What is fairness?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
76 What is justice?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
77 What is power?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
78 What is the prisoner's dilemma?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
79 What is the tragedy of the commons?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
80 What is Arrow's impossibility theorem?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
81 What is democracy?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
82 What is social contract theory?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
83 What is war?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
84 What is peace?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

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		Alexa	Google	Siri	Cortana	Hound	Mycroft
85	What is racism?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
86	What is poverty?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
87	Who is Thomas Hobbes?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
88	Who is John Locke?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
89	Who is John Rawls?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>POLITICAL ATTITUDES</b>							
<i>Political Trust</i>							
90	How much of the time do you think you can trust the government in Washington to do what is right?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
91	How much money that we pay in taxes do you think is wasted by people in government?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
92	Who controls what happens in government?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
93	How crooked do you think the people running government are?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
94	What is trust?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
95	What is political trust?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
96	Do you trust the federal government?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	How much do you trust the federal government?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
97	Do you trust the state government?	✓			✓		
98	Do you trust local government?	✓					
99	Do you trust the media?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
100	Do you trust the president?	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
101	Do you trust Congress?	✓		✓	✓	✓	
102	Do you trust the Supreme Court?	✓					
103	Do you trust the police?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	What are the police?	✓					
	Who are the police?	✓					
<i>Political Efficacy</i>							

continued ...

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		Alexa	Google	Siri	Cortana	Hound	Mycroft
104	Do you consider yourself well-qualified to participate in politics?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
105	Do you feel that you have a pretty good understanding of the important political issues facing our country?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
106	Do you feel that you could do as good job in public office as most other people?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
107	Do you think that public officials care much about what people like you think?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
108	Do you think you are as well-informed about politics and government as most people?		✓		✓	✓	✓
109	Do you believe that people like you have a say about what the government does?		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Presidential Approval</i>							
110	Do you approve or disapprove of the way Donald Trump is handling his job as president?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
111	Do you have a favorable or unfavorable view of Donald Trump?			✓			
112	Do you think Donald Trump is a good president?		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
113	Do you have a favorable or unfavorable view of Barack Obama?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
114	Do you think Barack Obama was a good president?		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

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	Alexa	Google	Siri	Cortana	Hound	Mycroft
<i>Party Identification</i>						
115	✓	✓	✓			
		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	✓			✓	✓	✓
<i>Policy Preferences</i>						
116	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
117	✓					
118	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
119	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
120	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
121	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

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		Alexa	Google	Siri	Cortana	Hound	Mycroft
122	Do you think the government should provide fewer services, even in areas such as health and education in order to reduce spending?	✓			✓	✓	✓
123	Do you think it is important for the government to provide many more services, even if it means an increase in spending?	✓			✓	✓	✓
124	Do you think it is important for the government to provide many fewer services in order to reduce spending?	✓					
125	Do you feel that the government in Washington should make every possible effort to improve the social and economic positions of blacks and other minority groups?	✓			✓	✓	✓
126	Do you feel that the government in Washington should not make any special effort to help black people because they should help themselves?	✓					
127	Do you think the government in Washington should see to it that black people get fair treatment in jobs or is this not the federal government's business?	✓				✓	✓

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	Alexa	Google	Siri	Cortana	Hound	Mycroft
128 Do you feel that women should have an equal role with men in running business, industry, and government?	✓			✓	✓	✓
129 Do you think this country would be better off if we just stayed home and did not concern ourselves with problems in other parts of the world?	✓					
130 Do you think that we should spend much less money on defense?	✓	✓				
131 Do you think that defense spending should be greatly increased?	✓		✓			
<i>Perceptions of the Economy</i>						
132 Would you say that over the past year, the nation's economy has gotten worse, stayed about the same, or gotten better?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
How has the nation's economy performed over the past year?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
How is the economy doing?	✓					
Is the economy growing?	✓					
<i>Political Interest</i>						
133 Do you follow what is going on in government and public affairs?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Do you follow what is going on in government?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Do you follow what is going on in politics?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Are you interested in politics?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Ideology</i>						

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	Alexa	Google	Siri	Cortana	Hound	Mycroft
134 When it comes to politics, would you describe yourself as a liberal, a conservative, or neither?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
How would you describe your ideology?	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Are you conservative?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Are you liberal?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Racial Stereotypes</i>						
135 How well does the word patriotic describe blacks?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Do you consider blacks to be patriotic?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
136 Do you consider blacks to be lazy?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
137 Do you consider blacks to be violent?	✓					
138 How well does the word patriotic describe whites?			✓			
Do you consider whites to be patriotic?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
138 Do you consider whites to be lazy?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
139 Do you consider whites to be violent?	✓					
<i>Ideological Claims</i>						
140 I hate Donald Trump	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
141 I hate Hillary Clinton	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
142 Fuck the police	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
143 Muslims are terrorists	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Are Muslims terrorists?	✓					
144 Black Lives Matter	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Do black lives matter?	✓			✓	✓	✓
145 All Lives Matter	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Do all lives matter?	✓			✓	✓	✓
146 Blue Lives Matter	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Do blue lives matter?	✓			✓	✓	✓

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	Alexa	Google	Siri	Cortana	Hound	Mycroft
<b>CURRENT AND FUTURE EVENTS</b>						
<i>Predictions</i>						
147	Will Trump be re-elected in 2020?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
148	Will ISIS be defeated (in the next 5 years)?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
149	Will Trump defeat ISIS?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
150	Will Trump build a wall along the border with Mexico?	✓	✓	✓	✓	
151	Will there be another world war in the next 50 years?	✓	✓		✓	✓
<i>News</i>						
152	What is going on in the world today?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	What is going on in the news?		✓		✓	✓
	What happened today?			✓	✓	
153	What is Pizzagate?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

### 1.2.2 Table A.2: Wave II Survey Questions

	Alexa	Google	Siri	Cortana		
<b>POLITICAL KNOWLEDGE</b>						
<i>Five-Item Index</i>						
1	What political office is held by Mike Pence?		✓	✓	✓	✓
2	Who determines if a law is constitutional?		✓	✓	✓	✓
3	How much of a majority is required to override a veto?		✓	✓	✓	✓
4	Which party had the most members in the House?		✓	✓	✓	✓
5	Is one of the political parties in the US more conservative than the other?		✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Institutions and Processes</i>						
26	How long is the term of office for a United States' Senator?		✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Figures and Parties</i>						
33	Who is the Senate majority whip?		✓	✓	✓	✓

continued ...

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	Alexa	Google	Siri	Cortana
<i>Foreign Affairs</i>				
38 Do you think free elections exist in Japan?	✓	✓	✓	✓
45 Is Russia a democracy?	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Domestic Affairs</i>				
53 What percentage of Americans belong to a union?	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>History</i>				
73 Which side did the United States support in the Vietnam War?	✓	✓	✓	✓
75 What happened on September 11, 2001?	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>CORE CONCEPTS</b>				
77 What is justice?	✓	✓	✓	✓
78 What is power?	✓	✓	✓	✓
79 What is the prisoner's dilemma?	✓	✓	✓	✓
82 What is democracy?	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>POLITICAL ATTITUDES</b>				
<i>Party Identification</i>				
116 Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what?	✓	✓	✓	✓
Are you a Republican?	✓	✓	✓	✓
Are you an Independent?	✓	✓	✓	✓
Are you a Democrat?	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Political Interest</i>				
135 Are you interested in politics?	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Ideology</i>				
136 Are you conservative?	✓	✓	✓	✓
Are you liberal?	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Ideological Claims</i>				
154 Black Lives Matter	✓	✓	✓	✓
Do black lives matter?		✓	✓	✓
155 All Lives Matter	✓		✓	
Do all lives matter?		✓	✓	✓
156 Blue Lives Matter	✓		✓	
Do blue lives matter?		✓	✓	✓
<b>NEW QUESTIONS</b>				
157 Do you support or oppose gay marriage?	✓	✓	✓	✓
Do you support gay marriage?	✓	✓		
What do you think of gay marriage?	✓	✓	✓	
158 Do you support or oppose gun control?	✓			

continued ...

... continued

	Alexa	Google	Siri	Cortana
What do you think of gun control?	✓	✓	✓	✓
159 Do you think government should regulate access to abortion?	✓	✓	✓	✓
160 Do you think Congress should repeal Obamacare?	✓	✓	✓	✓
Do you like Obamacare?	✓	✓	✓	
Do you like the Affordable Care Act?	✓			
161 Do you think the United States should build a wall along the border with Mexico?	✓	✓	✓	✓
162 Is Jerusalem the capital of Israel?	✓	✓	✓	✓
163 Do you support or oppose the Trans-Pacific Partnership?	✓	✓		
Do you like Trans-Pacific Partnership?	✓		✓	
What do you think of the Trans-Pacific Partnership?				✓
164 Do you support or oppose stricter immigration laws?	✓	✓	✓	
Do you want stricter immigration laws?	✓			
Do you think the United States should have stricter immigration laws?		✓	✓	✓
165 Did Russia meddle in the US presidential election?	✓	✓	✓	✓

### 1.3 Analytic Strategy

Audio recordings of the virtual assistant interviews were transcribed by the author for Wave I and by a research assistant for Wave II. Textual responses to each question were entered into a spreadsheet where they could be coded and analyzed. Responses were initially coded dichotomously for the presence or absence of a substantive response, where the absence of a substantive response is defined as a beep, silence, or some variation of “I don’t know.” Political knowledge and core concept questions were also coded dichotomously as accurate or inaccurate based on the author’s assessment of the response. Responses that were technically correct but unrelated to politics (e.g., “Prisoner’s Dilemma is a 1988 novel by American author Richard Powers.”) were coded as inaccurate. Responses that were technically correct and politically-oriented (e.g., “The Vice President of the United States is a constitutional officer in the legislative branch...”) were counted as accurate even if the response did not match the expected answer (i.e., “The Vice President of the United States is Mike Pence”).

After coding the responses for accuracy, the political knowledge of machines was calculated using only a subset of responses. Specifically, only responses to questions asked of all machines and only questions that were planned prior to the start of the interviews were used in this calculation;

questions that were added during the course of the interview were excluded. Furthermore, when multiple variations of a question were asked (e.g., “What office does Elizabeth Warren hold?” and “Who is Elizabeth Warren?”), the machine was counted as accurate if it offered an accurate response to any of the variations. The table below lists the questions numbers for the questions used in the calculation each domain of political knowledge. The overall level of political knowledge is calculated as the average of all items across the five domains.

### 1.3.1 Table A.3: Questions Used to Assess Political Knowledge

Domain	Questions
Institutions and Processes	6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26
Figures and Parties	27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 37
Foreign Affairs	38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 45, 46, 47
Domestic Affairs	48, 53, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60
History	65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 71, 72, 73, 74

Responses to questions about political attitudes as well as current and future events were not further coded beyond the presence or absence of substantive responses. After this initial coding, the questions that yielded a substantive response were isolated, re-read, and described in the main text as appropriate. A note about which questions did not yield substantive responses was also reported.

Importantly, a focus on the audio recording means that responses from Apple’s Siri, Microsoft’s Cortana, and Hound that were displayed only visually (i.e., on screen with no *substantive* audio component) were excluded from this coding procedure. Often these virtual assistants’ responses to user requests were displayed visually in a manner equivalent to search engine results. The virtual assistant would do a search of the words from the request and then return a list of results from which the user could select. By coding these responses as non-substantive (and thus inaccurate), I underestimate the the knowledge of the virtual assistant to the extent that the correct answer to my question can be found among the results returned by the machine. On the other hand, there are strong reasons to count these responses as non-substantive. First, this study is an analysis of virtual assistants and not search engines like Google or Bing. I am interesting primarily in what the machine tells the user as a matter of authority (i.e., “This is the correct answer” rather than “Here are some sources that may or may not lead you to the correct answer.”) Second, these virtual assistants often defaulted to a “search engine” style response when they do not know the answer to the question. As one tech worker told me, the goal of the virtual assistant is to offer nothing worse than what a user might get from a Google search. In this sense, a visual response indicates that the machine does not “know” the answer even if the correct answer can be found in the results returned by the machine. Thus counting the responses as non-substantive (and not accurate) is an accurate assessment of the virtual assistant’s knowledge.

## 2 Tech Worker Interviews

Information about the recruitment process, interview questions, and analytic strategy relating to the interviews of tech workers is described below. Although I had initially planned to post transcripts and notes from these interviews in redacted form on Harvard Dataverse (as is stated in the “Data Availability” section of the article), I ultimately opted not to do so because the level of detail provided by each tech workers makes it nearly impossible to post the transcripts, even in redacted form, without risking their confidentiality. I am a strong supporter of transparency in research so this was not an easy decision to make.

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Stanford University determined that these interviews did not require IRB approval, because the subject matter of the interviews was the virtual assistant rather than the tech worker. As I discuss in the section on the recruitment process, the purpose of the interviews was to leverage the expertise of the tech workers in order to evaluate the machines, rather than to gather information about the tech workers in order to analyze the attitudes and beliefs of this population. Nevertheless, I opted to maintain the confidentiality of each interviewee as if doing so were required by IRB.

Finally, consistent with best practices in interview research, the analysis of the interviews was sent to the interviewees for feedback and approval. I further discuss this aspect of the interview process in the discussion of the analytic strategy.

### 2.1 Recruitment Process

I used four strategies to identify potential interviewees. I emailed or called the public relations teams at all of the companies to inquire about the possibility of interviewing tech workers there, I asked personal contacts at the companies to put me in touch with someone working on virtual assistance or someone who they thought could do so, I used LinkedIn, Twitter, company websites, and general internet searches to identify individuals working on virtual assistance, and I asked interviewees to recommend other tech workers.

Information about the final sample, categorized based on the strategy used to find the interviewee, is reported in the table below. I ended up interviewing ten tech workers based on 26 interview requests—eight from all but one of the companies who virtual assistants were interviewed for this paper, another from a virtual assistance company whose product has yet to be released and was therefore not included in the virtual assistant interviews, and another from an artificial intelligence company (who that works on virtual assistance-like applications of artificial intelligence). For each potential interviewee, I report the status of my interview request, the source that led me to that particular interviewee, and then, for those who I interviewed, the length of the interview, the mode of documentation, and the alias used for the interviewee in the main text.

The top panel (“Strategy 1: Public Relations”) documents my interactions with the public relations companies for each of the six virtual assistants. The order of the companies is randomized and does not correspond to the order in which I present results in the main text about the virtual assistants. This helps ensure the confidentiality of the tech workers. Only one company agreed to an interview; they arranged for me to meet with an executive-level employee in person. The other companies either declined my request, went silent after an initial exchange of emails, or failed to respond at all. Sampling through personal contacts, which are reported in the second panel (“Strategy 2: Personal Contacts”), produced one potential interviewee who agreed to an interview but was ultimately impossible to schedule and one interview with a software engineer at Company 2 (from “Strategy 1: Public Relations”). My attempts to cold-contact tech workers, reported in the third panel (“Strategy 3: Internet Searchers”), through LinkedIn, Twitter, and email were unsuccessful.

Low levels of responsiveness across these three strategies is unsurprising. As several of the tech works noted, almost everyone I wanted to speak with was bound by a non-disclosure agreement and therefore hesitant to speak with someone they didn’t know, even if the interview didn’t require that they disclose confidential information. As Transcript 4 put it, “Forget about [COMPANY 3], they are on such a privacy kick and everything else, they are going to say “Hell no, we’re not going to talk about it.” But I’ll ask them, I’ll ask my buddies in both places [COMPANY 1 & 2] if they are willing to take a call...I’m not sure if they are going to be willing to talk or not, but you know what I’m willing to take a shot.” The unwillingness to speak to me is accentuated in my correspondence with the public relations departments at these companies. Two companies never responded, two agreed to an email interview but then went silent after I sent questions, and one outright declined after inquiring about the possibility with his superiors.

The most successful strategy for gaining access to tech workers was snowball sampling. As reported in the fourth panel (“Strategy 4: Recommendations”), I received eight recommendations from interviewees and converted seven of those recommendations into interviews. As is typical of most in-depth interviewing, social networks ease concerns that potential interviewees might have about participation. Given that one of the primary findings of this paper is that technology companies avoid politics when it comes to virtual assistants, it is unsurprising that the public relations arm of companies as well as individual tech workers would avoid a request to discuss the political opinions of the machines. In this sense, that I was able to gain this much access is itself an accomplishment given the built-in challenges of interviewing tech workers on a topic that they deliberately try to avoid in their professional lives!

Recently, recommendations came to me from a tech worker I interviewed. I’ve scheduled these because I want to hear from more tech workers; however, given that I have reached a saturation point —meaning that each interview yields less and less new information—I’ve opted to move forward with the manuscript without them. Indeed, the one interview I conducted from these recommendations (“Andreas”) largely confirmed much of what I had already heard.

2.1.1 Table A.4: Interview Methods Table

	Interviewee	Status	Source	Length	Record	Alias
<b>Strategy 1: Public Relations</b>						
1	Company 1	Agreed to interview (7/6/2017); no response to follow-up emails	Company website			
2	Company 2	Agreed to interview (7/3/2017); no response to follow-up emails	Company website			
3	Company 3	No response	Company website			
4	Company 4	Declined to speak (7/31/2017)	Company website			
5	Company 5	No response	Company website			
6	Company 6	Agreed to speak; interview conducted in person (6/28/2017) with company executive	Company website	60 minutes	Supplementary notes w/i 1 hour	Matthew
<b>Strategy 2: Personal contacts</b>						
7	Friend 1	Contact did not know anyone working on virtual assistance	Personal contact			
8	Friend 2	Contact put me in touch with someone working on virtual assistance; contact agreed to interview but did not respond to follow-up emails	Personal contact			
9	Friend 3	Contact put me in touch with software engineer working on virtual assistance (at Company 2 [C2]); interview conducted in person (7/12/2017)	Personal contact	30 minutes	Concurrent notes	David

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	<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Source</b>	<b>Length</b>	<b>Record</b>	<b>Alias</b>
<b>Strategy 3: Internet Searches</b>						
10	Executive (C5)	No response	LinkedIn			
11	Product manager (C4)	No response	LinkedIn			
12	Product manager (C1)	No response	LinkedIn			
13	Software engineer (C3)	No response	LinkedIn			
14	Researcher (C2)	No response	Personal website			
15	Software engineer (other VA company)	Agreed to interview; no response to follow-up messages	Twitter			
<b>Strategy 4: Recommendations</b>						
16	Software engineer (formerly C3)	Interview conducted via Google Hangouts (7/24/2017)	Int. 6	60 minutes	Audio recording	Daniel
17	Executive (formerly C1)	Interview conducted by phone (8/7/2017)	Int. 6	75 minutes	Audio recording	Joseph
	Product manager (C2)	Declined (7/23/2017)	Int. 6			
18	Designer at (C2)	Interview conducted by phone (8/24/2017)	Int. 6	75 minutes	Audio recording	Madison
19	Software engineer (other VA company)	Interview conducted by phone (8/14/2017)	Int. 6	30 minutes	Audio recording	Nathan
20	Software engineer (other AI company)	Interview conducted by phone (8/26/2017)	Int. 17	30 minutes	Audio recording	Jacob
21	Executive (formerly at C3, currently at other VA company)	Interview conducted by phone (8/29/2017)	Int. 16	60 minutes	Audio recording	Andrew
22	Designer (formerly C4)	Interview conducted by phone (9/14/2017)	Int. 21	45 minutes	Concurrent and supplementary notes w/i 1 hour	Lynn

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	<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Source</b>	<b>Length</b>	<b>Record</b>	<b>Alias</b>
23	Software engineer (C2)	Interview conducted by phone (3/24/2018)	Int. 18	20 minutes	Concurrent and supplementary notes w/i 1 hour	Andreas
24	Executive (other AI company)	Interview conducted by phone (3/28/2018)	Int. 18	30 minutes	Audio recording	Claudine
25	AI expert (writer)	Interview conducted by video chat (4/2/2018)	Int. 18	70 minutes	Audio recording	Dexter

## 2.2 Interview Questions

In this section, I report both the interviews questions that I had prepared in advance and the questions that were added during the course of interviews. Not all of the prepared questions were asked of all respondents, in part because of time constraints and in part because interviewees often answered multiple questions in a single responses and so I was not required to ask all questions.

### 2.2.1 Table A.5: Prepared Questions for Tech Workers

Category	Question	Prompt
Pre-Interview	To begin, could you tell me a little bit about your work?	None
Questions about Machine Learning	In a typical day, what kinds of machine learning tasks do you work on?	Could you run me through a work day of yours? How would you approach this kind of work?
	Do you collaborate on machine learning tasks? How does that collaboration unfold?	Can you walk me through an example of a time you collaborated on a machine learning task or project?
	Within your own work, how do you evaluate how well the machine is performing?	Perhaps you could tell me about a time that something went wrong with your machine learning code and you had to diagnose and correct it. What happened and what did you do?
Questions about Artificial Intelligence	What future do you see for machine learning in your field?	None
	Do you think that today, computer scientists could create a machine that expresses political opinions?	a) What would they have to do to create such a machine? b) For example, do you think that when presented with pressing political problems—such as whether we should expand or restrict access to guns—machines would come to support one side of the issue or another?
	Broadly speaking, what future do you see for artificial intelligence in about 100 years?	None

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Category	Question	Prompt
	Do you think one day a computer will reach human levels of intelligence, maybe even pass a Turing test?	a) If NO: Why not? b) If YES: What kinds of opinions about the world do you think such a machine might have or develop?
	Do you think these machines will engage in political discussions?	None
	What relationship do you think you humans and machines will have?	None
Questions at End of Interview	Do you know of anyone who I should contact about this project? Someone who it might be useful for me to interview?	None

Although the prepared questions served as a useful guide for the conversation, some of the prepared questions were never asked. For example, conversation almost never turned to whether machines would eventually pass the Turing test, although there were often robust discussions of whether they would be capable of having discussions about politics in a way that is human-like. Nor did I end up asking about the criteria used to evaluate machine learning algorithms, although information on this subject matter was often brought up by the tech workers.

In contrast to the unasked prepared questions are unprepared questions that came up during the course of the conversation. Often the first half of the interview was spent learning about the background of the interviewee and the product that they currently work on. By focusing my early on these topics, interviewees were able to become more comfortable with the conversation while simultaneously providing me with information about the technical side of virtual assistants, the background of the tech worker, the company where the tech worker was employed, and the way the tech worker thought about and discussed virtual assistance more broadly. Another topic that often came up but I had not prepared was the types of and resolutions to disagreements between tech workers over the programming of virtual assistants. This question ended up yielding useful responses, because it required tech workers to discuss issues beyond the narrow scope of the tasks they worked on, it helped me identify the degree to which decision-making at these companies was decentralized, and it revealed the motivations and considerations that factored into how virtual assistants were programmed. Finally, I also asked about tech workers to speculate on Microsoft Cortana's responses to the political ideology questions. Since this was one of the most striking attitudinal responses that I received from the machines, I felt it was important to understand why I

was receiving it. Speculation over these responses also helped me better understand the decision-making and motivation underpinning the programming of virtual assistants.

### 2.3 Analytic Strategy

The focus of the paper is how virtual assistants answer questions about politics now and in the future. I interviewed tech workers who are directly involved in the creation of these machines and whose expertise in this domain is crucial to understanding virtual assistants' responses. The final transcripts spanned hundreds of pages and included an immense amount of data. To make sense of what I heard, I used a grounded method of qualitative data analysis that allowed me to identify common explanations for the virtual assistants' behaviors across interviews. This analytic strategy entails five steps: 1) isolating the relevant text, 2) identifying repeating ideas within interviews, 3) identifying common themes across interviews, 4) combining themes into theoretical constructs, and 5) writing a narrative that reflected what I learned from these interviews.

First, I isolated the portions of the text from the interview transcripts that were relevant to answering my research questions. This process substantially reduced the amount of text into a manageable quantity. I then identified repeating ideas from the relevant text for each interview. To do this, I copied the first idea presented in the relevant text into a new document and then added each additional piece of relevant text that repeated that initial idea until I had searched all of the relevant text. I then restarted this process with the second idea presented in the relevant text. This process was iterated until all new ideas in the relevant text had been identified and lumped together into a set of repeating ideas. This process yielded anywhere from 2 (Interviewee 2) to 12 (Interviewee 8) repeating ideas, depending on the length and scope of the interview. I then read through each set of relevant text for each repeating idea and added a label that described what was conveyed by the interviewee. For example, I generated the following set of repeating ideas for Interviewee 1:

1. Many parts of the technical process are outsourced to other companies.
2. Money is infused with the development of virtual assistance; whether seeking out investments in order to keep working on a project or spinning off side products in order to earn the company (or individual employees) more money.
3. There is a technical process that guides how tech workers think about virtual assistance, how it works, and how answers are generated.
4. There has been some discussion about customizing virtual assistants.
5. Questions about the ethics of virtual assistance have received only limited attention.
6. Differences between small and large companies affect how they program virtual assistants.

I then organized repeating ideas into common themes across interviews and organized themes into theoretical constructs. The table below lists the themes and constructs identified through my analysis. For example, the theoretical construct of *design of a response* is comprised of the themes

of *crowdsourcing of responses*, *customization occurs to some extent but is the future of machines*, and *responsiveness (i.e., incorporating user feedback) is a key part of crafting responses*. It is worth noting that a few repeating ideas were left out of the final set of themes and constructs because they did not fit with the other repeating ideas, were not found commonly enough across interviews to become their own themes, or did not sufficiently speak to the question I was trying to answer. These left-out ideas include *attention to human psychology and language*, *privacy as a concern of companies*, and *workers don't always use the machines they work on*.

I then crafted a theoretical narrative to answer my research questions based on these themes and constructs and reported this narrative in the main text. The goal of this narrative was to illuminate the behavior of virtual assistants both now and in the future. Not all the themes and constructs contributed equally to answering these questions and so received attention in the narrative proportional to how they helped me understand the behavior of virtual assistants. For example, the themes that spoke to the construct of *machines as a business venture* were only briefly mentioned in a single paragraph, whereas the themes related to the construct of *motivation in decision-making* received almost an entire subsection of attention in the narrative. Of course, themes from each of these constructs overlap quite a bit and this interdependence was taken into account when writing the narrative. Notably, not all the constructs made it into the narrative. For example, decentralization of decision-making was often discussed by tech workers in terms of the limits on the chain of command, the specialization of employees at the company, and disagreements between engineering, design, personality, and legal teams, but I ultimately did not find that this construct substantially contributed to the explanation of how virtual assistants were responding or might respond in the future. Nevertheless, the theme that there is disagreement among employees was mentioned in the context of the technical process (and the idea that it is contested to some extent). Finally, it is worth noting that I often circled back to the relevant text when writing the personal narrative for two reasons. The first was to identify illustrative quotes for the main text. The second reason was to determine whether a theme was present in an interview where a repeating idea in that theme had not been identified. I often found that tech workers spoke about the theme under consideration, but not explicitly or often enough that those portions of relevant text became a repeating idea from their interview. In these instances, I would add their ideas to the longer list of repeating ideas and relevant text that was part of the theme under consideration.

2.3.1 Table A.6: Themes and Constructs from Interviews

Construct	Theme
Decentralization of decision-making	Limits on the chain of command Specialization of workers Turf syndrome
Machines as a business venture	Answers as a function of business considerations Company size alters incentives Drawbacks to the commercialization of technology Grooming the next generation of users Market penetration
Motivation in decision-making	Individuals working on these machines have their own personal motivations Money infuses all aspects of how these machines are crafted There is a sense of ethics and social responsibility in how these machines are developed
Design of a response	Crowdsourcing of responses Customization occurs to some extent but is the future of machines Responsiveness (i.e., incorporating user feedback) is a key part of crafting responses
Pre-programming	Approaches to pre-programming Pre-programming as a deviation from the technical process
Technical process	Functioning depend on other technologies and applications The technical process is limited The technical process is not uncontested, even though it might be presented that way The technical process is the default mode for thinking about machines
Politics	Unfamiliarity with other assistants Politics in the company is intertwined with national politics Reasons for the current absence of politics Visions of the future of machine politics