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James Sunshine April 14, 2013

Ideology and the informed voter: analyzing the effect ideology has on an individual's ability to retain information

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Abstract

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This study argues that political knowledge is an aggregate of one's ability to a) identify political figures and b) retain factual information concerning salient issues. Through 500 survey responses, this study finds that ideology plays a significant role in determining whether or not voters retain certain factual information. This study also finds that a voter's self-perceived level of political knowledge and a voter's self-perceived level of political interest play strong roles in information retention among voters within specific ideological groups.

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Contents

Introduction

The question of whether or not voters can identify political figures and policies is an important component of democracy that is taken for granted, by political scientists. Hacker and Pierson argue that voters need to know whom to blame, whom to reward and, in both cases, for what reasons in order for democracy to work (2011: 108).

Abramowitz argues that voters who are more ideological are more informed than moderate voters (Abramowitz 2010: Chapter 2). Theoretically, liberals and conservatives should be more informed than moderates because something, presumably information, led them to conservatism or liberalism.

However, Westen (2008), Hetherington (2009), Jost (2004) and others have produced findings that suggest that ideological voters may not be more informed than non-ideological voters. These scholars found that ideological voters are more inclined to process information that supports their worldview and disregard information that challenges their worldview.

This study examines previous research that deals with the subject of political knowledge and ideological placement. It summarizes studies that have demonstrated that more ideological voters exercise motivated information processing as well as the various hypotheses that attempt to explain this phenomenon. It also presents independently obtained evidence that test this study's various hypotheses.

Definition of Important Terms

First, it is necessary to define the terms "politically informed" and "politically knowledgeable." This paper defines these terms as having become aware and accepting of facts related to politically salient topics. It is also necessary to define the word "facts."

Facts are defined as a past or ongoing event that has been recorded and proven to have occurred.

One recognizes that these are potentially tricky definitions. For instance, is it correct to claim that someone who does not accept the reality of human-induced climate change is uninformed? The same question could be asked of other charged topics. As is explained in the research design portion of this paper, questions with ideologically contentious answers should be separated from questions with ideologically non-contentious answers.

Political Identification

As Hacker and Pierson (2011) state, voters need to know who they can reward, who they can blame in order for democracy to function properly. However, voters are surprisingly ignorant as to who represents them in government. According to Hacker and Pierson, 45% of Americans could not identify the Republican Party as the majority party in Congress in the year 2000 (six years after the GOP took control of both the House of Representatives and the Senate). It was reported in the same year that 88% of Americans could not identify William Rehnquist as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, despite his time presiding over the impeachment trial of President Bill Clinton just two years prior (Hacker and Pierson 2011: 109). These poll numbers suggest that a large minority of voters did not know who to punish or reward in the 2000 general election.

According to Abramowitz (2010), there is a strong link between a voter's ideological placement and a voter's ability to identify political figures as well as a political figure's ideological leanings. To prove this, Abramowitz used a series of polls that assessed an individual's ideology, political party and ability to correctly identify

national political figures. He selected a 2008 Time Magazine poll that asked respondents a series of questions concerning their position on various political issues along with four questions asking voters to identify political figures in the United States (the U.S. Treasury Secretary, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, the Vice President and the Speaker of the House). He also used the ANES 2004 Survey results that assess individual ideology and individual ability to correctly sort the two major Presidential candidates by their ideology. Using this data, Abramowitz draws a connection between ideological placement and political information. According to his findings, a voter's probability of correctly identifying a political figure increases the further a voter is from the political center. In other words, ideological extremists (i.e. people who are very liberal and very conservative) were more politically informed than ideological centrists (Chapter 2).

One might see potential flaws with this method of assessing a voter's political knowledge. Does knowing the identity of the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court necessarily mean that an individual is informed on the issues? Not necessarily. For example, 17% of Americans incorrectly identified President Barack Obama as a Muslim as late as July 2012 (Pew Forum 2012). Should we consider these voters more politically informed than voters who do not know the identity of the President of the United States? It is certainly a debatable question. It is entirely possible that a voter's ability to identify public officials might not correspond with a voter's level of knowledge on salient issues. While one must recognize the possibility that political knowledge and political identification may be linked, such a link has yet to be sufficiently established.

Psychology of Ideological Voters

It becomes necessary to understand the psychology of ideological voters in the U.S in order to understand the relationship between ideology and political knowledge. One could argue that a voter's ability to identify public figures is a good indication of his or her enlightenment on salient issues. If this is the case, then available research suggests that a voter's distance from the political center is the best indication of his or her level of political knowledge. However, there is a body of evidence that suggests that such a relationship may not exist. According to Westen (2008: Introduction) and Lakoff (2008: 52-53), ideological voters may actually be predisposed to disregarding facts that challenge their worldviews.

Westen (2004) found 30 ideological partisans (15 strong Democrats and 15 strong Republicans) and provided each with incorrect information about Republican Presidential candidate George W. Bush and Democratic Presidential candidate John Kerry prior to the 2004 election. The false pieces of information were intended to demonstrate that either Bush or Kerry had engaged in some form of self-contradiction. Test subjects were also put in an MRI. This enabled Westen to view how partisan brains processed the new information in real-time.

Westen found that liberals and conservatives were less willing to accept information that harmed their own party's candidate but were more willing to accept information that harmed the opposing party's candidate. Westen's MRI tests showed that the participants actually went through forms of distress when presented with information

that they deemed to be damaging to their candidate. As a result of this distress, subjects' brains blocked the new and damaging information.[1]

Some scholars have even gone further than Westen by suggesting that conservatives are more likely to disregard facts than liberals. Mooney (2012) makes the case that individuals who fall on the right wing of the ideological spectrum are less likely to be informed than individuals who fall on the left wing. According to Mooney, right wing voters tend to be less informed than left wing voters because right wing voters are more likely to possess psychological characteristics associated with authoritarianism.[2] This means that right wing voters are not open to changing their minds on what they have already determined to be the truth regardless of any compelling and contradictory evidence that might challenge what they believe to be established truth.

To make his case, Mooney cites Hetherington (2009), who argues that individuals who possess authoritarian mindsets refuse to process information that harms their black-and-white worldviews.[3] According to Hetherington, the need for closure among authoritarians is so great that they are nearly impervious to facts that challenge their worldview. Instead, authoritarian brains actually attempt to disprove and discredit new facts that challenge their false, pre-conceived notions. Ultimately, the more authoritarian the person, the less open they are to the possibility that they are wrong, regardless of evidence (37).

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[1] It should be noted that this is an interpretation of Westen's findings. It is entirely possible that other scholars may draw different interpretations.
[2] Authoritarians are individuals who see the world in black and white terms. They possess a deep need to know, as opposed to think, what is right and what is wrong. They are less open to compromise than non-authoritarians.
[3] It is necessary to point out that Mooney makes "authoritarian" synonymous with "right-wing."

Other scholars have come to similar conclusions. Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski and Sulloway (2003) argue that authoritarian mindsets are more prevalent among right wing voters. According to Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski and Sulloway:

> *A meta-analysis (88 samples, 12 countries, 22,818 cases) confirms that several psychological variables predict political conservatism: death anxiety (weighted mean r = .50); system instability (.47); dogmatism–intolerance of ambiguity (.34); openness to experience (–.32); uncertainty tolerance (–.27); needs for order, structure, and closure (.26); integrative complexity (–.20); fear of threat and loss (.18); and self-esteem (–.09). The core ideology of conservatism stresses resistance to change and justification of inequality and is motivated by needs that vary situationally and dispositionally to manage uncertainty and threat* (Jost, Glaser, Kruglansky and Sulloway 2003: 339).

Cassino and Jenkins (2012) found that some popular conspiracy theories were likely to be believed almost exclusively by particular ideological groups. For instance, individuals who identify themselves as Democrats are more likely to believe that President George W. Bush played some role in the September 11th attacks than Independents and Republicans while Republicans are more likely to believe that President Barack Obama was not born in the United States than Independents and Democrats. Their study asked respondents various true or false questions on issues dealing with current events and politics. This helped Cassino and Jenkins establish each respondent's level of political knowledge.

According to their findings, the likelihood of Democrats and Independents believing such theories diminished with increasing levels of political knowledge. The opposite was found among Republicans. These findings add credence to Mooney's hypothesis that far-right voters are psychologically less able to process or store information that contradicts their black-and-white worldview than left wing voters.

However, Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski and Sulloway are quick to warn readers not to read their findings as conclusive. They argue that more analysis is required before reaching a conclusion on the right wing, or authoritarian, brain (Jost, Glaser, Kruglansky and Sulloway 2003: 366). Nor do Cassino and Jenkins appear to completely agree with Mooney. "There are several possible explanations for this (Republicans increasing their belief in conspiracy theories with increasing levels of knowledge)," said Cassino. "It could be that more conspiracy-minded Republicans seek out more information, or that the information some Republicans seek out just tends to reinforce these myths."

There is also evidence to suggest that a relationship exists between humility and fact retention among conservative voters. Hamilton (2010) compiled surveys that asked 9,500 individuals to assess their own level of knowledge on the subject of climate change as well as questions that would test their actual level of knowledge on the issue. Hamilton found that Democrats who rated themselves as having a moderate or great deal of knowledge on the subject of climate change generally believed that climate change was occurring as a result of human activities. However, Hamilton also found that equally confident Republican respondents generally denied that climate change was occurring as a result of human activities (5). This suggests that Democrats had a better understanding of their own level of knowledge than Republicans on the issue of climate change. Whereas self-confident Democrats were generally justified in believing themselves to be informed, self-confident Republicans were generally unjustified.

Hypotheses

While ideological citizens may be more likely than non-ideological citizens to correctly identify public officials, some scholars argue that ideology may have the

opposite effect on certain types of knowledge. A citizen's emotional attachments to a particular worldview may lead to the disregarding of information that challenges a citizen's worldview.

This information leads me to make the following predictions:

1. ***A citizen's likelihood of correctly identifying public officials and political parties increases with a citizen's distance from the ideological center.***
2. ***A citizen's likelihood of knowing the correct answer to ideologically neutral questions increases with a citizen's distance from the ideological center.***[4]
3. ***A citizen's level of political interest will have a positive effect on a citizen's ability to correctly identify public officials and political parties.***
4. ***Liberals are either more informed or less informed, depending on the subject. For instance, liberals will be more informed than moderates and conservatives on questions dealing with science. However liberals will be less informed than moderates and conservatives on questions that involved negative information about liberal politicians.***
5. ***Conservatives are either more informed or less informed, depending on the subject. For instance conservatives will be less informed than moderates and liberals on questions dealing with science. However conservatives will be more informed than moderates and liberals on questions that involve negative information about liberal politicians.***
6. ***Ideological citizens will believe themselves to be more informed than non-ideological citizens regardless of their actual level of knowledge.***

[4] See Section Research Design, subsection Measuring Knowledge for a definition of ideologically neutral questions.

Research Design

The method employed for the purpose of measuring the relationship between a citizen's level of knowledge and the strength of his or her ideology needs to accomplish two things. It must be able to decipher a citizen's level of knowledge and it must assess the strength of that same citizen's ideology. This led me to conclude that a survey would be the best means of measuring these characteristics.

It is desirable to have as much diversity of background, opinion and knowledge within the sample population as possible. However, I had to limit the surveyed population to college students in the Atlanta/North Georgia region due to limited resources and time. College populations that were included in the survey — Emory University, Georgia State University, the University of Georgia in Athens, Georgia Perimeter College — were selected because they include students with different backgrounds (black, white, poor, rich, rural, urban, suburban etc.) and political orientations.

Surveys were distributed in various classes at these colleges with the prior consent of the class' professor as well as the consent of the students who chose to participate in this survey. The method of obtaining survey responses was employed out of convenience (i.e. few resources at my disposal and groups of potentially willing participants) and necessity. The fact that this survey includes a knowledge test (see Organization of the Survey) makes it imperative that participants do not cheat and look up answers while filling out the survey; even small levels of cheating could contaminate the survey findings.

Organization of the Survey

The survey is divided into two sections. The first portion of the survey is designed to acquire demographic information. This includes requesting information having to do with a respondent's age, race and gender. This section also asked respondents for a self-assessment of their political knowledge, interest in politics and ideological position. These self-assessments were made on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being very uninformed, very uninterested and very liberal and 5 being very informed, very interested and very conservative, respectively.[5] [6]

The second portion of the survey tested knowledge on five topics (political identification, foreign policy, science, healthcare reform and the economy). These questions were presented to respondents as statements that they would have to identify as being either true or false. This portion also included questions that asked respondents to grade their opinion on eight ideologically potent statements on a scale of 1 to 5, which gives a comparison to see if their self-perceived ideology matches their actual ideological position.

Measuring Knowledge

It was important that the survey distinguish between questions that were likely to elicit an ideologically influenced result and questions that were not. For instance, available data shows a strong correlation between a voter's opinion on the existence of human-induced climate change and a voter's ideological placement. The likelihood that a

[5] See Codebook for a more complete breakdown of offered responses.
[6] To summarize, respondents were provided with five different options on this portion of the survey (very liberal, liberal, moderate, conservative and very conservative). This is a very crude measure, as respondents might argue that they are socially liberal but fiscally conservative, or vice versa. However, it serves the purposes of this study.

voter denies human causes for climate change increases with a voter's conservatism. The same can be said of a voter's probability of accepting or rejecting the theory of evolution.

While I understood how these issues — human-induced climate change and the theory of evolution — should be included in the category of facts, I also understood that these questions might prove less reliable in terms of indicating a voter's overall level of knowledge. After all, it makes little sense to only ask voters questions that are intended to elicit a wrong response.

The questions I predicted would produce ideologically contentious answers were still included in the survey; not doing so would have surrendered an important portion of this study's research. However, I determined that ideologically neutral or ideologically non-contentious questions might prove to be a better barometer for knowledge across the ideological spectrum.

Sample Characteristics and Planned Tests

500 students completed this survey. As was stated previously, the sample used for this survey was almost entirely college-aged students; 97.1% of all respondents classified themselves as being between the ages of 17 and 29 years and 100% of the sample had some college experience in the state of Georgia. This is in stark contrast to the general population. Only 21% of eligible voters are between the ages of 18 and 29 in the United States. Only 60% of this age group (18-29 years-old) has any college experience (Tufts 2012).

There are other factors about the survey that are atypical of the general population. For instance, a large majority (58%) of respondents were female. Respondents were also more evenly distributed racially than is the general population.

Roughly 40% of respondents classified themselves as white, 23% as African American and 20% as Asian American, 5% as Hispanic and 11% as Mixed Race or Other.[7]

The sample also found fewer Romney supporters than were found in the general population of 18-29 year olds. Roughly 65% of those sampled supported Barack Obama in 2012 as opposed to the 19% who stated that they supported Mitt Romney. This would inflate Obama's support, and deflate Romney's, among young Americans (CNN 2012).

As stated previously, political scientists have found that voters who are more ideological are also more informed and more interested in politics than non-ideological, or centrist, voters (e.g. Abramowitz 2010).[8] This has generally been confirmed by this survey's data.

- 55% of very liberal respondents claim to be either very informed or informed when it comes to politics and current events; 68% claim to be either very interested (35% or interested in politics and current events.
- 32% of liberal respondents claimed to be either very politically informed or politically informed; 47% claim to be either very politically knowledgeable or politically knowledge.
- 32% of conservatives claimed to be either very politically knowledgeable or politically knowledgeable; 46% claimed to be either very politically interested or politically interested in politics and current events.
- Moderates were fairly evenly split between identifying themselves as very politically informed, informed, uninformed or very uninformed; they were just as

[7] The sample is actually more evenly distributed by race than is the general population of the sample's age group (17-29 years old) (Tufts 2012).

[8] When I state that they are more informed in this section, one must recognize that this means that ideological voters think that they are informed more often than non-ideological voters. As is stated in the methodology section of this study, the survey provides respondents with the opportunity to assess their level of political knowledge (informedness) and interest in politics.

evenly split in terms of stating their level of interest in politics and current events. In other words, moderates were generally less interested in politics and less sure of their level of political knowledge than conservatives and liberals.[9]

The number of observations included in this study's analysis is reduced slightly when missing observations are excluded from the dataset (n = 498). This slightly reduced sample is slanted towards the center-left of the political spectrum. Roughly 40% of respondents identified themselves as liberal while roughly 18% identified themselves as conservative.

I proceeded to combine conservative and very conservative respondents into a single category as well as combine liberal and very liberal respondents into a single category. These helped me reach more representative conclusions given the small number of very conservative (n = 12) and very liberal (n = 32) respondents. The overall conservative variable produced a larger number of observations (n = 88) and the overall liberal variable produced a larger number of observations (n = 199). No combined variables were created for moderate respondents, as this survey did not take into account different intensity levels of moderates, as opposed to those available for conservatives and liberals. In any case, there are already a large number of moderate respondents included in this sample (n = 211).

Question responses were then combined into four question indexes. These four indexes are as follows:

1. Every neutral question or questions that I determined would be no more and no less difficult for conservative and/or liberals to answer correctly. I selected these

[9] I did not mention very conservative respondents because of the relatively small size (n = 12) of this ideological sub-group.

questions prior to any statistical tests. This index is used to test my hypothesis that ideological respondents will be more likely to answer ideologically neutral questions correctly than moderate respondents.[10]

2. Every political identification question. These questions ask voters to identify public officials and political parties.[11] This index is used to test my hypothesis that moderate respondents will be less likely to answer political identification questions correctly than more ideological respondents.
3. Every question that I predicted would be more difficult for conservative respondents to answer correctly than less conservative respondents.[12] I selected these questions before I ran any statistical tests. The reasons for the selection of these questions were based on research performed by other researchers and my own judgment.
4. Every question that I predicted would be more difficult for liberal respondents to answer correctly than less liberal respondents.[13] I selected these questions before I ran any statistical tests. The reasons for the selection of these questions were based on research performed by other researchers and my own judgment.

I also determined that I would test the effect of a respondent's ideology on each question individually. This permitted me to perform more, in-depth analysis on particular questions that different ideological groups are either more or less likely to answer correctly.

[10] See Codebook: Questions 16-21, 31, 34
[11] See Codebook: Questions 16-22
[12] See Codebook: Questions 22, 23, 24, 25, 27, 28, 29, 30 and 33
[13] See Codebook: Questions 24, 25, 36

Tests and Results

I ran two OLS regressions for each index and question. The first regressions only included the question index, or individual question, and a respondent's ideology. The second regression introduced a respondent's race, gender, self-identified level of political interest and self-identified level of political knowledge as controls. The regressions with controls were used to confirm or reject the influence of ideology. These regressions also provided me with a better understanding of ideology's substantive effect on a respondent's ability to answer questions correctly.

I also created bar graphs to illustrate the relationship of ideology and a respondent's self-identified level of political interest and knowledge. In most cases, I isolated a particular strand of ideology using the larger conservative, liberal and moderate variables. These isolated observations were then put into bar graph form with either a respondent's self-identified level of political interested or a respondent's self-identified level of political knowledge as the graphs independent variable.

Testing Ideologically Neutral Knowledge

I tested the neutral index first. I made extreme liberals and extreme conservatives as well as moderate liberals and moderate conservatives individual values in order to test my hypothesis that ideological extremism would have a positive effect on a respondent's ability to know the answers to these questions.[14] This updated variable was used to test my hypothesis on ideologically neutral questions and political identification questions.

An OLS regression without controls shows that extremism has a statistically significant and large effect on a respondent's ability to answer ideologically neutral

[14] In this updated variable, 1 = extreme conservatives + extreme liberals; 2 = moderate conservatives + moderate liberals; 3 = moderates

questions correctly.[15] An OLS regression with controls makes extremism statistically insignificant and reduces the variable's effect.[16] This regression details the relationship between a respondent's self-identified political interest, political knowledge and their ability to answer questions correctly. As Table 1 demonstrates, both variables (self-identified political interest and political knowledge) had a statistically significant and large effect on a respondent's ability to answer questions correctly.

(Table 1 Goes Here)

Political Identification Index

An initial OLS regression for the political identification index shows that ideology has a statistically significant and large effect of a respondent's ability to answer identification questions correctly.[17] The effects of ideology become statistically and substantively insignificant when controls are added to the OLS regression.[18] However, a respondent's self-identified level of political interest and self-identified level of political knowledge had statistically significant and large effects on a respondent's ability to answer political identification questions correctly.[19]

(Table 2 Goes Here)

I was admittedly surprised by these results. Not only do the results go against my hypothesis that more ideological respondents would be more likely to answer ideologically neutral questions and political identification questions correctly, but they also go against the findings of researchers (e.g. Abramowitz 2010: Chapter 2). A variety

[15] P>|t| = 0.019; Coef. = -.0342467
[16] P>|t| = 0.782; Coef. = -.0036142
[17] P>|t| = 0.018; Coefficient = -.0378393
[18] P>|t| = 0.543; Coefficient = -.0089888
[19] Self-Identified Level of Political Knowledge: P>|t| = 0.000, Coefficient for informed = .0632614; Self-Identified Level of Political Interest: P>|t| = 0.001, Coefficient for interest = .0370917

of factors could be contributing to this result, all of which is explained later in this study.[20]

Conservative Question Index

An initial OLS regression shows us that ideology has a statistically significant and large effect on a respondent's ability to answer questions correctly.[21] The percentage of questions a respondent answers correctly falls the closer their views are to extreme conservatism. As Table 3 illustrates, the statistical significance and large effect of a respondent's ideology does not diminish in an OLS regression that includes controls.[22] [23]

(Table 3 Goes Here)

(Figure 1 Goes Here)

An OLS regression with controls also finds that a respondent's self-identified level of political interest has a statistically significant and substantive effect on a respondent's ability to answer questions correctly.[24] Respondents who are more interested are usually more likely to answer questions correctly irrespective of their ideological views.

Liberal Question Index

The initial OLS regression shows us that ideology has a statistically significant and large effect on a respondent's ability to answer questions correctly.[25] The percentage of questions a respondent answers correctly falls the closer their views are to extreme

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[20] See sections entitled *Sample Characteristics: Deviations from the General Population* and *Was There A Problem With the Sample?* for potential answer to why respondents do not behave as was expected
[21] P>|t| = 0.000; Coefficient = -.0390264
[22] P>|t| remains 0.000; Coefficient = -.0336331
[23] The regression model finds no relationship between a respondent's ideology and a respondent's ability to answer questions in the index correctly when three questions are taken out of this index (Question Codes: evolution, warming, jobs).
[24] P>|t| = 0.000; Coef. = .027944
[25] P>|t| = 0.045; Coef. = .0304749

liberalism. As Table 4 illustrates, an OLS regression with controls produces a similar result. Ideology is the only variable that has a statistically significant and large effect on a respondent's ability to answer questions correctly.[26]

(Table 4 Goes Here)

(Figure 2 Goes Here)

Questions the Conservatives Had Difficulty Answering[27]

OLS regressions with controls found an inverse relationship between conservatism and a respondent's ability to answer five (warming, evolution, jobs, iraq, banks) questions correctly.

(Figure 3 Goes Here)

(Figure 4 Goes Here)

(Figure 5 Goes Here)

(Figure 6 Goes Here)

(Figure 7 Goes Here)

Further analysis also reveals other patterns within these results. Self-identified political knowledge has an inverse relationship on a conservative's ability to answer four of these questions (see codebook: warming, jobs, iraq, banks) correctly while it has either no relationship or a positive relationship among liberals and moderates.

The question dealing with climate change (codebook: warming) produces the most striking results. As Figures 8-10 illustrate, conservatives who are more confident of their political knowledge are less likely to answer this question correctly than

[26] P>|t| = 0.045; Coef. = .0314653
[27] I ran logistic regressions as well as OLS regressions. The results were essentially unchanged.

conservatives who are less confident about their political knowledge. The opposite is true among moderates and liberals.

(Figure 8 Goes Here)

(Figure 9 Goes Here)

(Figure 10 Goes Here)

A similar pattern emerges when one analyzes the effects of political interest. Figures 11-13 illustrate the inverse relationship between a conservative's ability to answer the evolution question correctly and a conservative's self-identified level of political interest. No relationship or a positive relationship exists among moderates and liberals (see codebook: evolution). This pattern emerges in the results of two other (codebook: warming, banks) questions.

(Figure 11 Goes Here)

(Figure 12 Goes Here)

(Figure 13 Goes Here)

Questions the Liberals Had Difficulty Answering

An OLS regression with controls finds an inverse relationship between liberalism and a respondent's ability to answer one question correctly (see codebook: unemp).[28]

(Figure 14 Goes Here)

Further analysis also reveals a surprising pattern within these results. As Figures 15-17 show, there is an inverse relationship between a conservative's ability to answer this question correctly and a conservative's self-identified level of political knowledge. There is a weaker inverse relationship or no relationship among moderates and liberals.

[28] P>|t| = 0.041

(Figure 15 Goes Here)

(Figure 16 Goes Here)

(Figure 17 Goes Here)

Errors That Did Occur or May Have Occurred[29]

Informed and Interested: The Same Thing?

A legitimate question might be raised as to whether or not a person's interest in politics is necessarily equivalent to a person's level of political knowledge. After all, one might presume that the more interested one thinks they are in politics the more likely one is to know, or believe one knows, something about politics. In fact, the data from this survey supports the view that there is a high degree of correlation between the two variables. According to the data, a respondent's interest covaries with their self-identified level of political knowledge.

But I do not believe that self-identified levels of political interest and political knowledge are the necessarily measuring the same thing. While it is possible that high level of interest necessarily leads to an individual believing that he or she is more politically knowledgeable, I do not think that individuals who claim to be politically knowledgeable are necessarily interested in the subject. Nor do I believe that the

[29] Only one error damaged this project's findings. As stated previously, the survey asks eight questions that are worded in order to asses a respondent's ideology. These questions asked respondents to assess their level of agreeability with ideologically potent questions. For example, question 9 asks respondents to express their agreeability with the statement that all same sex couples should be given the right to marry on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree). Unfortunately the first 381 respondents received surveys that reversed the numerical order of agreements. In these surveys, one equaled "strongly agree" and five equaled "strongly disagree." This error was compounded by the fact that questions 4 and 5 of the survey – which asked respondents for a self-assessment of their level of interest and informedness on a 1 to 5 scale – specify that respondents are to answer 1 if they believe they are "very uninterested" or "very uninformed" and that they are to answer 5 if they believe they are "very interested" or "very informed." This error was not noticed during the editing process but was quickly noticed after the first 381 surveys were distributed. It quickly became apparent while I built the datasets that respondents were taking positions that were different from their stated ideological positions. I did not see such varying positions after the error was corrected. Unfortunately, this has resulted in my elimination of this particular measure from being studied.

covariation between the two variables is large enough to warrant the exclusion of one or the other.

Political Knowledge: Tautological?

There is a legitimate point to be made that asking a respondent for a self-assessment of his or her level of political knowledge is, at least for the neutral and identification question indexes, tautological. After all, this survey is asking respondents to identify their ability to answer subjective knowledge questions correctly and this assessment was generally a good predictor of a respondent's ability to answer subjective knowledge questions correctly.

But I am not convinced that this is necessarily the case. As the other question indexes show, a respondent's self-assessment of his or her level of knowledge does not necessarily match their actual level of knowledge. Therefore, the reader should understand this measure as a respondent's self-confidence in his or her level of knowledge. At times, this self-confidence is justified and, at other times, it is not and may even be detrimental to an individual's ability to accept facts. This can be seen from results on individual questions. It is possible that self-confidence can, in certain instances, correspond with an individual's unwillingness to accept new information.

Was There a Problem with the Sample?

An argument can be made that this study's sample population harms the survey. Obviously, for the reasons that have already been presented, the results of this survey cannot be generalized to the overall U.S. population. But there are other considerations that must be taken into account. For instance, is the fact that the majority of the

respondents were, at the time of the survey, taking a political science course affect the results?

I would argue in the affirmative. The reasons why I would do so can be illustrated using an example of my experience in one of these classes just moments prior to distributing this survey. In these moments, the professor, still lecturing his class, discussed the role of the Supreme Court. In this discussion to the class, the professor talked about how the Supreme Court upheld the majority of President Obama's controversial health care reform package in the summer of 2012. Unfortunately for this study, this particular professor's lecture provided an exact answer to one of the questions on the survey just moments before the survey was distributed (see Question 30).[30]

The point of this example is not to eliminate the reliability of group's answer to a single question but to point out the fact that other professors may have given lectures that answered various questions that were in this survey. How much of an effect this may have had on the actual results is not something that I can answer with any certainty. [31]

Discussion

The results have showed us that ideology does have an effect on an individual's ability to retain factual information. Ideological extremism does not appear to have played a role in a respondent's ability to correctly identify public officials and political parties despite previous research demonstrating a positive relationship between

[30] Another professor who volunteered his class time in order for his students to participate in this survey told me something similar, though with a better result. He said that he was planning on discussing the Todd Aiken "forcible rape" controversy (see Question 29) in his class the day he planned to distribute the survey. However, after reading the survey prior to distributing it to his class, the professor chose not to include Todd Aiken's comments and the resulting media storm in his lecture on the day he distributed the survey.

[31] I personally think that this may explain why more ideological respondents were no more or less likely to correctly identify public officials than non-ideological respondents, despite various and more rigorous academic studies that show exactly the opposite.

ideological extremism and an individual's ability to correctly identify public officials and political parties. Nor did ideological extremism have a significant role in determining a respondent's ability to know the answers to ideologically neutral questions.

Conservatism was detrimental to a respondent's ability to know the correct answers to questions within the conservative question index while liberalism was also detrimental to a respondent's ability to know the correct answers to questions within the liberal question index. The survey's results also showed an inverse relationship between a respondent's self-identified level of political knowledge, a respondent's self-identified level of political interest and a respondent's ability to answer certain politically contentious questions correctly. The more politically informed and interested a respondent believed his or herself to be, the less a respondent actually knew when it came to certain questions. This relationship was found almost exclusively among conservative respondents.

The individual questions conservatives found difficult to answer correctly fell into two categories. The first of these two falls within a category this paper will refer to as science and morality. This paper anticipated an unwillingness among conservatives to accept even moderate statements concerning climate change and evolution for two reasons: 1) previous studies found that conservatives were less willing to accept the validity of climate change and evolution, and 2) these two subjects are viewed as attacks against an already established worldview that questions the validity of science out of fear of its liberalizing impact on morality. In other words, the answers to both of these questions potentially flew in the face of the social conservative outlook. Likewise,

American liberals generally do not subscribe to social conservatism and are therefore more capable of absorbing scientific information.

The other three questions provided potential answers that could shed a favorable or unfavorable light on President Obama. Removing all combat troops from Iraq and net-positive job creation are both major accomplishments for a Democratic president or, in the case of the bank bailout, unpopular initiatives of a conservative predecessor. Conservatives, however, did not feel it was necessary to credit the President with his accomplishments while liberals were happy to do so. The killing of Osama bin Laden and the Supreme Court's ruling in favor of President Obama's healthcare reform were the only two accomplishments of President Obama's where ideology played no statistically significant role.

The question that liberals were less likely to answer correctly than conservatives and moderates also falls into the Barack Obama category. The answer to the question undermines President Obama's record on unemployment. However, most liberals overlooked this blemish on President Obama's record.

It is important to note that these are only what I consider to be reasonable explanations for why ideology proved to be a statistically significant factor in determining a respondent's ability to answer these six questions correctly. Interviewing the respondents themselves is necessary in order to provide a more solid explanation.

Taken at face value, the results suggest that there is a link between ideology and knowledge. With the exception of a respondent's ability to identify public figures, the findings concur with my original hypotheses. Ideology influences individuals' ability to absorb relevant factual information depending on how factual information fits into a

particular ideology's worldview. This can be clearly seen with questions dealing with contentious issues like climate change and evolution.

However, it is difficult to say that someone who is liberal will be more likely to know the correct answer on a question dealing with evolution by virtue of being liberal. Perhaps they are liberal because they know the answer to questions dealing with evolution and conservatives are conservatives because they do not. The possibility that various information sources (i.e. media outlets, friends, family etc.) provide conflicting information to different ideological groups, thus contributing to a deficit of knowledge for certain ideologies on certain questions, must also be considered.

It is unclear why conservatives had trouble with five questions and why liberals had trouble with only one. It is possible that I did not include enough questions that were designed to challenge liberals. However, even if one were to consider the survey biased in favor of stumping conservatives, the results still suggest that conservatives are far more influenced by their ideological position.

The results of the analysis support Mooney's argument that conservatives are more likely than liberals to possess an "authoritarian" mindset while liberals are more likely than conservatives to possess an "open mind." Conservatives in this dataset appear less willing than liberals to accept that their view of facts, or their worldview, is incorrect even if they are incorrect. Some liberals also possess this ability to block out information that contradicts their opinions, as their response to the question on current levels of unemployment demonstrates. However, they are more open to the possibility of being wrong than are their more conservative counterparts.

The research conducted by Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski and Sulloway provides some basis for this suspicion. Their study found that increasing an individual's conservatism had a positive correspondence with authoritarian mindsets. This study shows that this mindset may be prevalent among conservative members of the sample population. While I would not be surprised to find a sizeable authoritarian liberal population, this study does not provide evidence of its existence.

This study also backs up Hamilton's claims. For instance, conservatives who believed they were more informed were less likely to answer four questions correctly than their more intellectually humble conservative colleagues. However, liberals and moderates who claimed to be more informed generally proved themselves to be more informed on these questions than their intellectually humble liberal and moderate colleagues.

This roughly corresponds with Hamilton's study on the impact ideology plays in understanding and accepting evidence of climate change. As this paper has already pointed out, this study found that conservatives who believed they understood more about climate change actually knew less than their "less informed" conservative colleagues. The opposite proved true for liberal and moderate participants.

These findings would tell us a great deal about the effects of polarization if they happened to be generalizable. For instance, these results would tell us that ideological voters are not only more active and interested in politics, as Abramowitz (2010) has shown, but they are also more self-confident. Self-confidence likely makes ideological citizens unwilling, or less willing than actors with low political and intellectual self-confidence, to compromise with their political opponents. Why would people be willing

to compromise if they are confident that they are right and others are wrong? Self-confidence also makes it more difficult for politicians to educate or convince their political opponents of their factual errors. Figures like President Obama, who use large events like the State of the Union to try and educate ideological opponents about the real dangers posed by climate change, may find efforts to persuade politically interested and self-confident conservatives of limited value.

This formula, if accurate, does not bode well for institutions like the U.S. Senate, where ideological opponents are required to compromise with one another. The acceptance by all concerned parties that there is a kernel of truth in the other party's opinion is inherent in the idea of compromise. The results of this survey suggest that politically interested and self-confident conservatives may be less inclined to accept this possibility, or the truth itself.

Conclusion

Generally, this study finds that a respondent's self-identified level of political knowledge and interest has a statistically significant and substantive effect on a respondent's ability to accurately identify public officials and political parties. This study also finds that ideology plays a role in determining a respondent's ability to absorb knowledge where such knowledge undermines or reinforces that respondent's particular ideological worldview. Ideology appears to have a much greater effect among conservative respondents than among liberal and moderate respondents.

While a variety of possible explanations for these findings present themselves (e.g. Mooney and Hetherington argument about authoritarian minds and open minds), none can, at this juncture, be proven. Additional research with fewer limits on time and

resources can build on these results and answer some of the questions that arise from these findings.

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Codebook

QUESTION #	VARIABLE NAME	VARIABLE	Values of Explanation
	participant	Individual Observations As They Were Input Into Dataset	
	date	The Date That Each Observation Was Taken	2 = February 3 = March . = Point Beween The Month and Day # after '.' = Day Of The Month
1)	race	Self-Identified Race Or Ethnicity	1 = Non-Hispanice Whie 2 = African American 3 = Asian American 4 = Hispanic American 5 = Mixed-Race Or Other
2)	age	The Self-Identified Age	1 = 17 To 29 Years Old 2 = 30 To 44 Years Old 3 = 45 To 64 Years Old 4 = 65 Years Old Or Older
3)	male	The Self-Identified Gender	1 = Male 0 = Female
4)	informed	The Self-Identified Level Of Knowledge On Politics and Current Events	1 = Very Uninformed 2 = Uninformed 3 = Neither Uninformed Nor Informed 4 = Informed 5 = Very Informed
5)	interest	The Self-Identified Level Of Interest In Politics And	1 = Very Uninterested 2 = Uninterested

		Current Events	3 = Not Very Interested Nor Very Uninterested 4 = Interested 5 = Very Interested
6)	c1	The Self-Identified Level Of Agreement To The Statement "A Woman Should Have The Right To Have An Abortion During The First Six Months Of Pregnancy"	1 = Very Much Disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Neither Very Much Disagree Nor Very Much Agree 4 = Agree 5 = Very Much Agree
7)	c2	The Self-Identified Level Of Agreement To The Statement "The U.S. Government Has The Right To Assassinate Enemy Combatants And Terrorists In Other Countries Including U.S. Citizens"	1 = Very Much Disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Neither Very Much Disagree Nor Very Much Agree 4 = Agree 5 = Very Much Agree
8)	c3	The Self-Identified Level Of Agreement To The Statement "The Government Should Impose Stricter Regulations Of Large Banks And Financial Institutions."	1 = Very Much Disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Neither Very Much Disagree Nor Very Much Agree 4 = Agree 5 = Very Much Agree
9)	c4	The Self-Identified Level Of Agreement To The Statement "Same Sex Couples Should Be Given The Right To Marry."	1 = Very Much Disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Neither Very Much Disagree Nor Very Much Agree 4 = Agree

			5 = Very Much Agree
10)	c5	The Self-Identified Level Of Agreement To The Statement "Taxes Should Be Raised On Individuals Making $250,000 A Year Or More."	1 = Very Much Disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Neither Very Much Disagree Nor Very Much Agree 4 = Agree 5 = Very Much Agree
11)	c6	The Self-Identified Level Of Agreement To The Statement "Affirmative Action, Or Giving Preference To Racial Minorities, Is Something That Should Be Instituted For College Admissions."	1 = Very Much Disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Neither Very Much Disagree Nor Very Much Agree 4 = Agree 5 = Very Much Agree
12)	c7	The Self-Identified Level Of Agreement To The Statement "The Government Ban Assault-Type Firearms."	1 = Very Much Disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Neither Very Much Disagree Nor Very Much Agree 4 = Agree 5 = Very Much Agree
13)	c8	The Self-Identified Level Of Agreement To The Statement "The Government Should Ensure That Every American Has Access To High-Quality Healthcare."	1 = Very Much Disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Neither Very Much Disagree Nor Very Much Agree 4 = Agree 5 = Very Much Agree
14)	vote	The Answer To The Question	1 = Barack Obama

		"Regardless Of Whether Or Not You Voted, Whom Did You Support In The Last Presidential Election?"	2 = Mitt Romney 3 = Someone Else 4 = Nobody
15)	views	The Answer To The Question "How Would You Describe Your Political Views In General?"	1 = Very Liberal 2 = Liberal 3 = Moderate 4 = Conservative 5 = Very Conservative
16)	speaker	Multiple Choice Question Asking "Who Is The Current Speaker Of The House Of Representatives?"	1 = Correct (Boehner) 0 = Incorrect
17)	leader	Multiple Choice Question Asking "Who Is The Current Senate Majority Leader?"	1 = Correct (Reid) 0 = Incorrect
18)	house	Multiple Choice Question Asking "Which Political Party Currently Has A Majority Of Seats In The U.S. House Of Representatives?"	1 = Correct (Republican Party) 0 = Incorrect
19)	senate	Multiple Choice Question Asking "Which Political Party Has A Majority Of Seats In The U.S. Senate?"	1 = Correct (Democratic Party) 0 = Incorrect
20)	state	Multiple Choice Question	1 = Correct (Kerry)

		Asking "Who Is The Current Secretary Of State?"	0 = Incorrect
21)	party	Multiple Choice Question Asking "Which Political Party In The U.S. Is Generally Considered More Conservative?"	1 = Correct (Republican Party) 0 = Incorrect
22)	laden	Multiple Choice Question Asking "Who Was The President Of The United States When Osama Bin Laden Was Killed?"	1 = Correct (Obama) 0 = Incorrect
23)	taliban	True Or False: Al Qaeda And The Taliban Are The Same Organization.	1 = Correct (False) 0 = Incorrect (True)
24)	russia	True Or False: Russia Is Ruled By A Communist Government.	1 = Correct (False) 0 = Incorrect (True)
25)	afghan	True Or False: President Obama Increased The Number Of American Troops Serving In Afghanistan During His First Term.	1 = Correct (True) 0 = Incorrect (False)
26)	iraq	True Or False: American No Longer Has Combat Troops In Iraq.	1 = Correct (True) 0 = Incorrect (False)
27)	evolution	True Or False: The Theory Of	1 = Correct (True)

		Evolution Is The Only Scientifically Accepted Explanation For The Development Of Life On Earth.	0 = Incorrect (False)
28)	warming	True Or False: There Is No Scientific Consensus On The Causes Of Global Warming.	1 = Correct (False) 0 = Incorrect (True)
29)	women	True Or False: Women's Bodies Can Usually Prevent Pregnancy In The Case Of Forcible Rape.	1 = Correct (False) 0 = Incorrect (True)
30)	court	True Or False: The Supreme Court Has Ruled That The Main Provisions Of President Obama's Healthcare Reform Law Are Unconstitutional.	1 = Correct (False) 0 = Incorrect (True)
31)	health	True Or False: President Obama's Healthcare Reform Package Allowed Young Americans To Stay On Their Parent's Healthcare Plans Until They Are 25 Years Old.	1 = Correct (True) 0 = Incorrect (False)
32)	banks	True Or False: The Bailout Of Major U.S. Banks Began Under President Obama.	1 = Correct (False) 0 = Incorrect (True)
33)	jobs	True Or False: More Jobs Were Created Than Lost During President Obama's First Term.	1 = Correct (True) 0 = Incorrect (False)
34)	mega	True Or False: The Law That Allowed Commercial And Investment Banks To Merge Into Megabanks was signed by President Bill Clinton.	1 = Correct (True) 0 = Incorrect (False)
35)	unemp	True Or False: More Than 12 Percent Of Americans Are Either	1 = Correct (True) 0 = Incorrect (False)

		Unemployed Or Underemployed.	
36)	credit	True Or False: The United States Lost Its AAA Credit Rating Under President Obama.	1 = Correct (True) 0 = Incorrect (False)

Tables and Figures Included Within the Text

Table 1[32]

Source	SS	df	MS		
Model	4.82118914	5	.964237829	Number of obs =	458
Residual	13.5661266	452	.030013554	F(5, 452) =	32.13
Total	18.3873158	457	.040234827	Prob > F =	0.0000
				R-squared =	0.2622
				Adj R-squared =	0.2540
				Root MSE =	.17324

neutral	Coef.	Std. Err.	t	P>|t|	[95% Conf.	Interval]
views	-.0036142	.0130407	-0.28	0.782	-.0292421	.0220137
informed	.057137	.0116624	4.90	0.000	.0342178	.0800562
interest	.0448338	.0093873	4.78	0.000	.0263856	.0632821
male	.0460095	.0166278	2.77	0.006	.013332	.078687
race	-.0167047	.0061593	-2.71	0.007	-.0288091	-.0046002
_cons	.4037374	.0475637	8.49	0.000	.3102639	.4972108

Table 2

Source	SS	df	MS		
Model	4.63512156	5	.927024311	Number of obs =	464
Residual	17.7688529	458	.038796622	F(5, 458) =	23.89
Total	22.4039744	463	.048388714	Prob > F =	0.0000
				R-squared =	0.2069
				Adj R-squared =	0.1982
				Root MSE =	.19697

identifica~n	Coef.	Std. Err.	t	P>|t|	[95% Conf.	Interval]
views	-.0089888	.0147818	-0.61	0.543	-.0380373	.0200597
informed	.063147	.0130801	4.83	0.000	.0374426	.0888514
interest	.0369072	.0105902	3.49	0.001	.0160957	.0577187
race	-.0105643	.0069213	-1.53	0.128	-.0241658	.0030372
male	.0448962	.0188001	2.39	0.017	.007951	.0818413
_cons	.3915133	.0533381	7.34	0.000	.2866955	.4963311

[32] See Codebook for values of variable names. The variable "views" in both Table 1 and 2 measures ideological extremism rather than ideological placement.

Figure 1

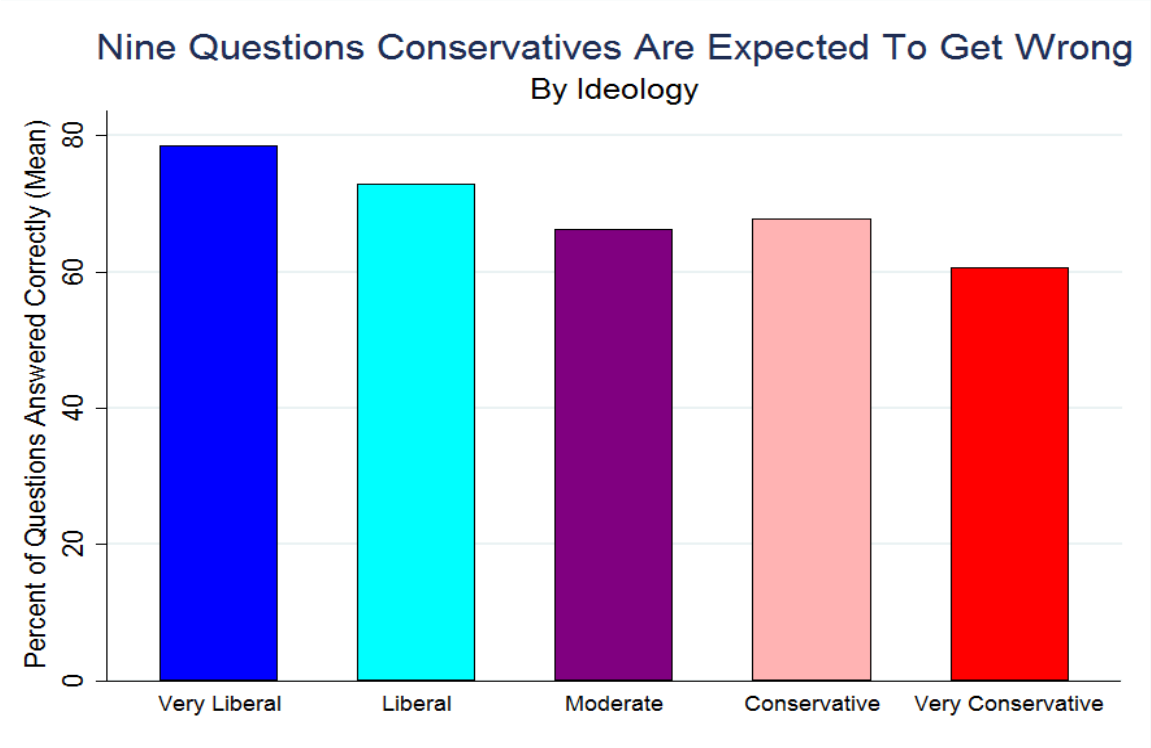


Table 3

Source	SS	df	MS
Model	1.59396933	5	.318793866
Residual	9.7545211	455	.021438508
Total	11.3484904	460	.024670631

Number of obs	= 461
F(5, 455)	= 14.87
Prob > F	= 0.0000
R-squared	= 0.1405
Adj R-squared	= 0.1310
Root MSE	= .14642

bconservat~e	Coef.	Std. Err.	t	P>|t|	[95% Conf.	Interval]
views	-.0336331	.0078615	-4.28	0.000	-.0490824	-.0181838
informed	.0101078	.0098023	1.03	0.303	-.0091555	.0293711
interest	.027944	.0078869	3.54	0.000	.0124448	.0434432
male	.0474532	.0140128	3.39	0.001	.0199153	.0749911
race	-.005806	.005161	-1.12	0.261	-.0159483	.0043362
_cons	.6583503	.0382365	17.22	0.000	.5832082	.7334923

Figure 2

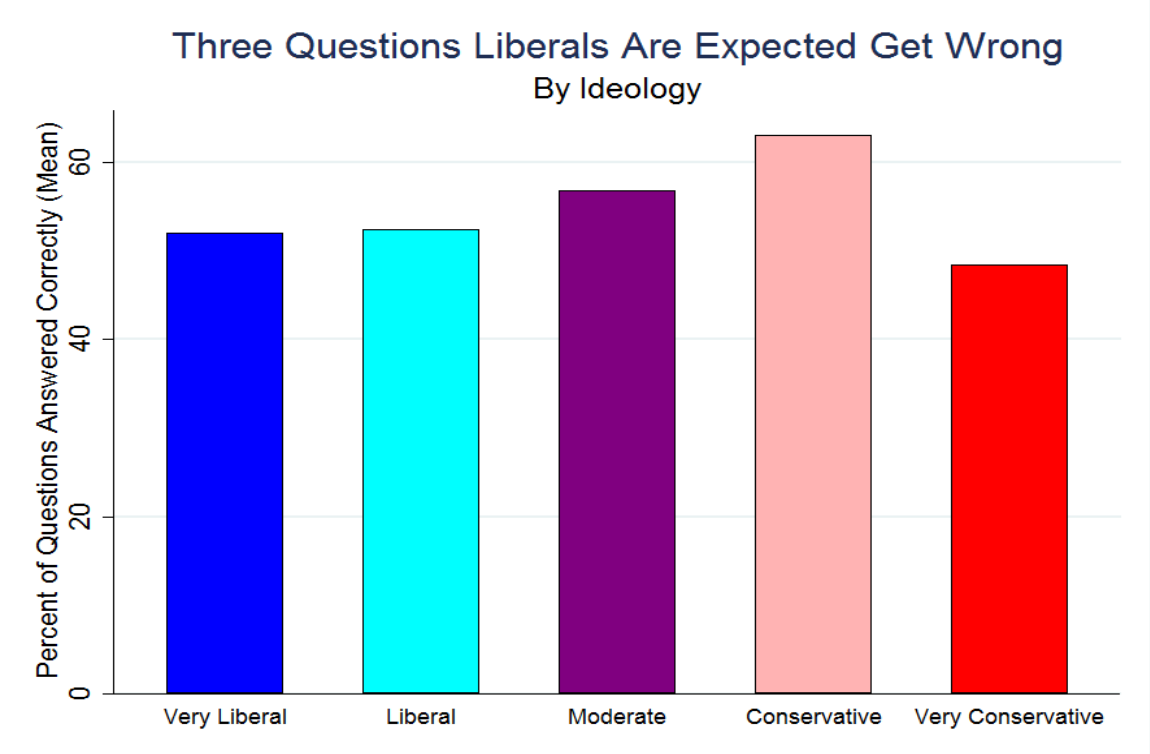


Table 4

Source	SS	df	MS
Model	.397341493	5	.079468299
Residual	38.0700579	449	.084788548
Total	38.4673994	454	.084729955

Number of obs = 455
F(5, 449) = 0.94
Prob > F = 0.4565
R-squared = 0.0103
Adj R-squared = -0.0007
Root MSE = .29118

pliberal	Coef.	Std. Err.	t	P>|t|	[95% Conf.	Interval]
views	.0314653	.015651	2.01	0.045	.0007069	.0622236
informed	-.0062592	.0195604	-0.32	0.749	-.0447004	.032182
interest	.0097809	.0154542	0.63	0.527	-.0205906	.0401524
race	.0050066	.0103431	0.48	0.629	-.0153203	.0253335
male	-.0007939	.0279488	-0.03	0.977	-.0557205	.0541327
_cons	.4480041	.0766047	5.85	0.000	.297456	.5985523

Figure 3

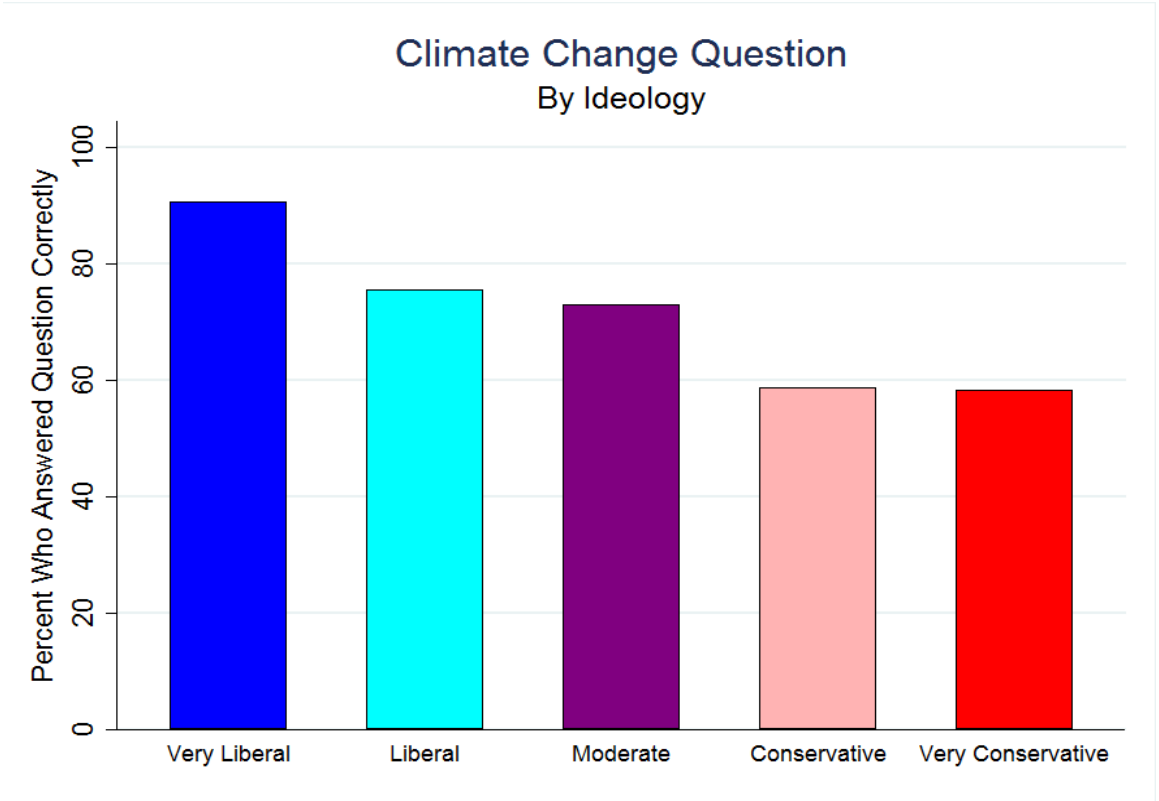


Figure 4

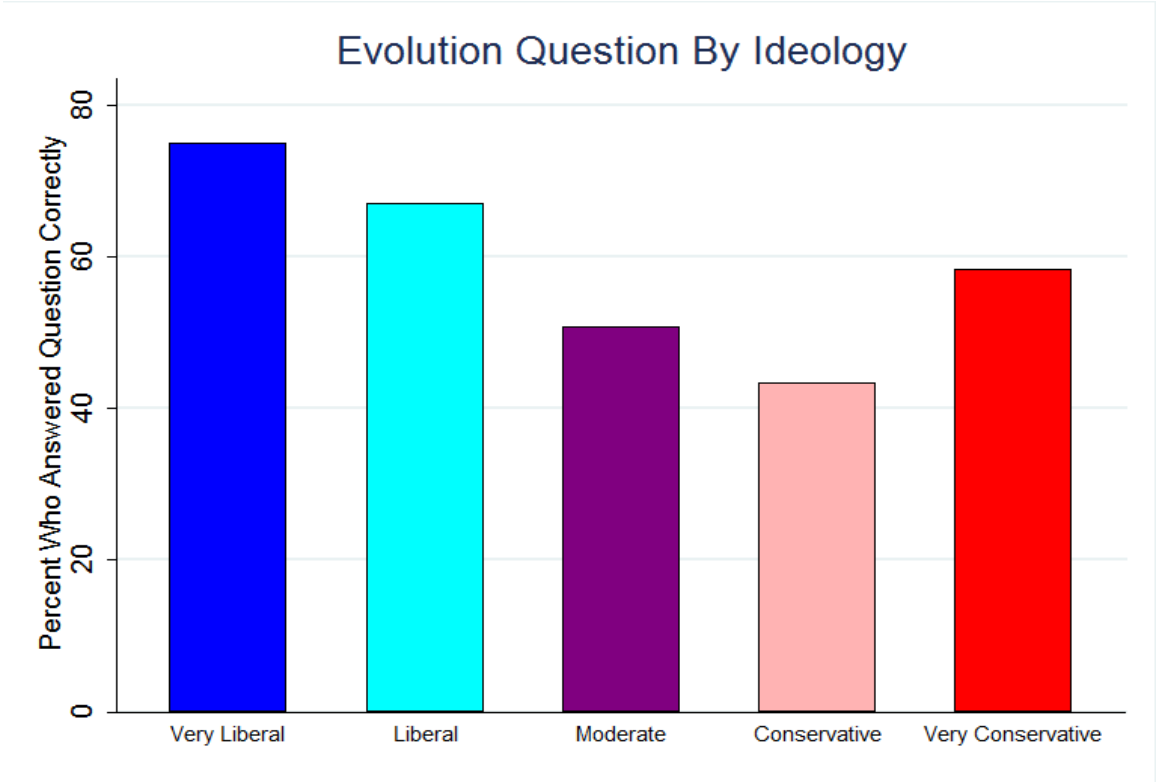


Figure 5

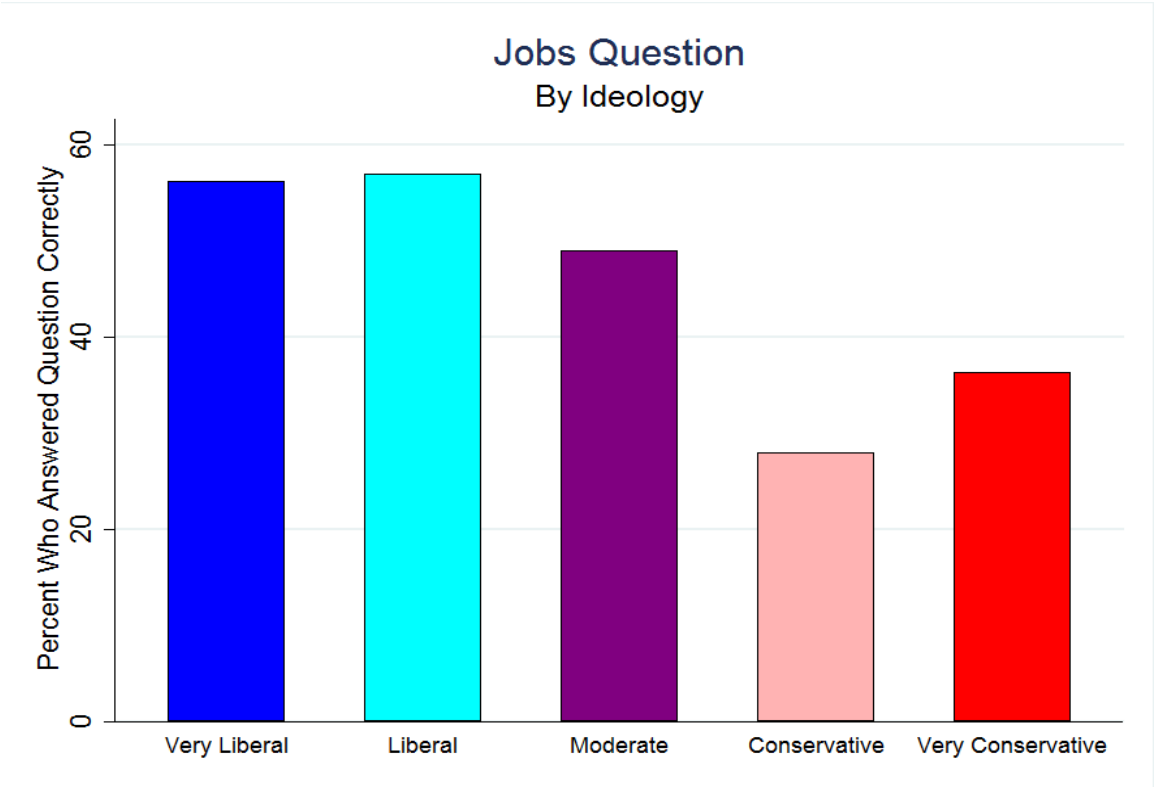


Figure 6

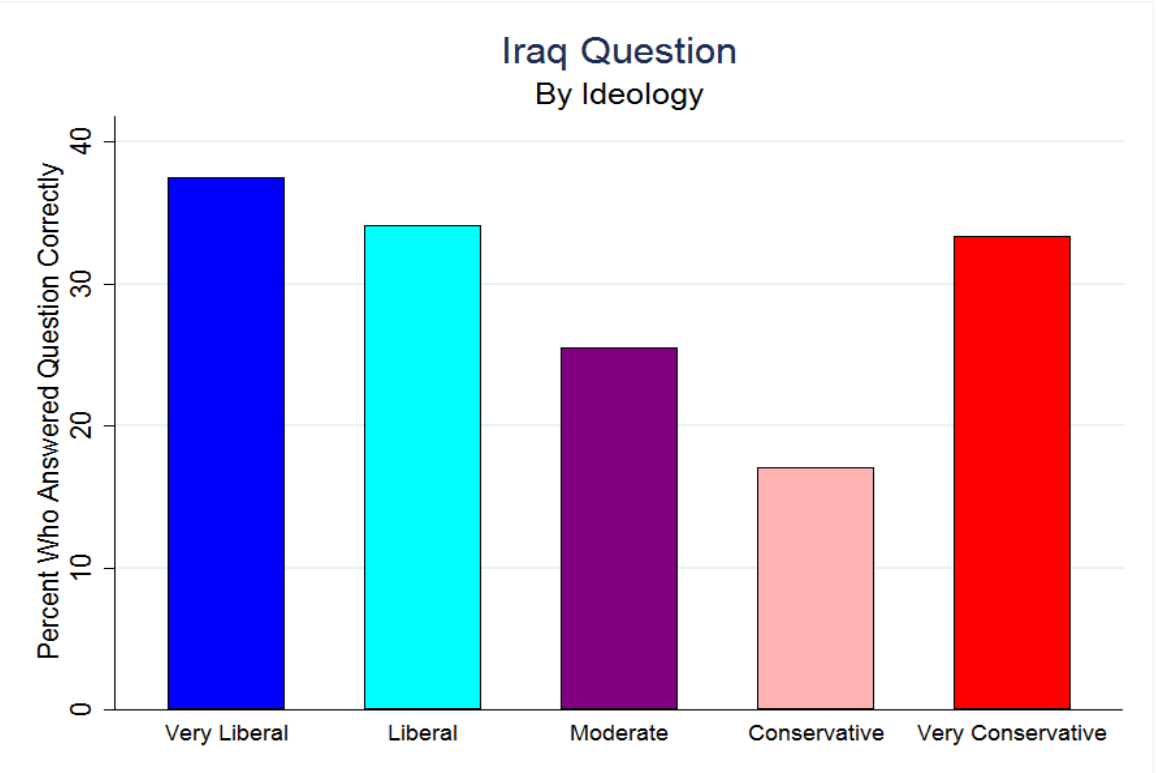


Figure 7

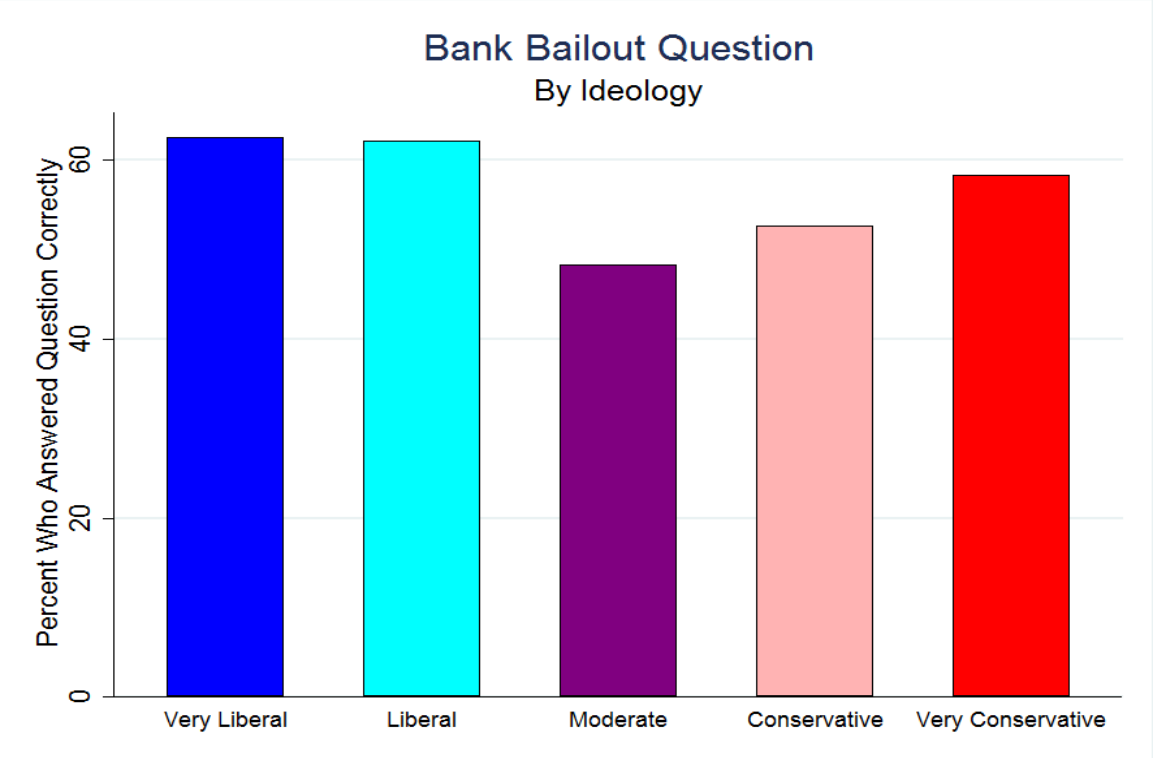


Figure 8

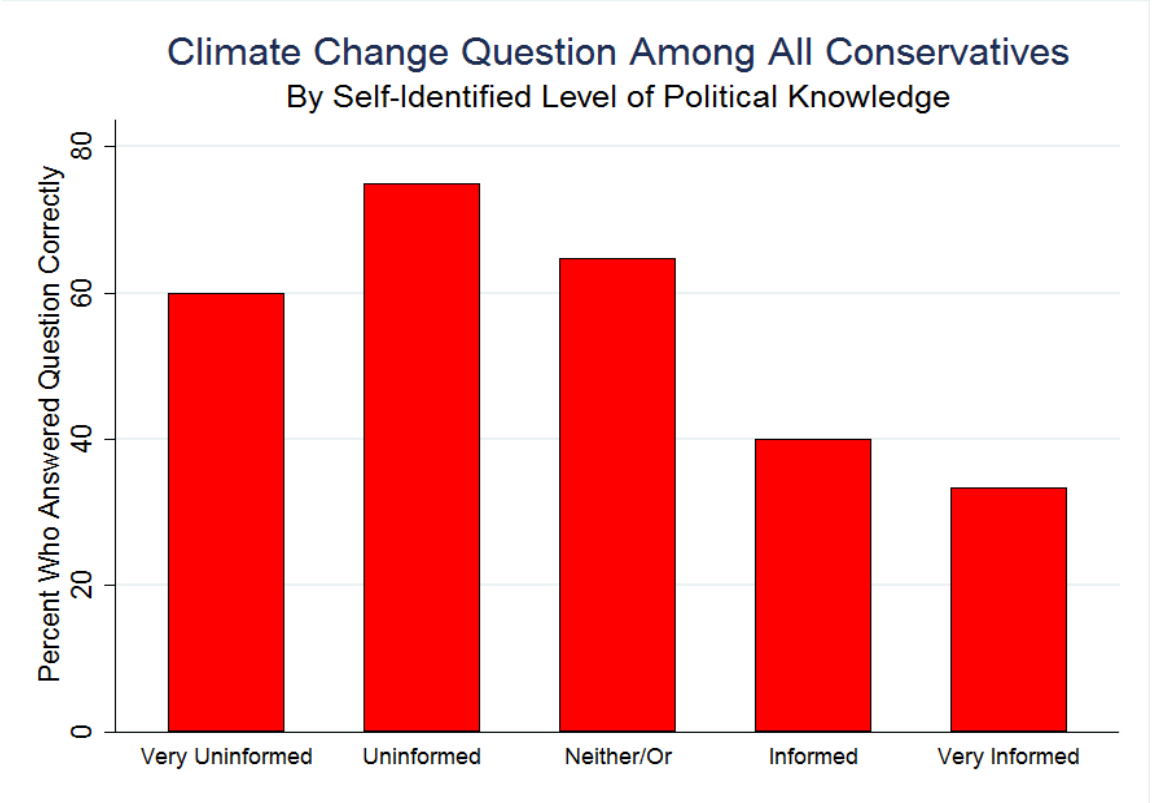


Figure 9

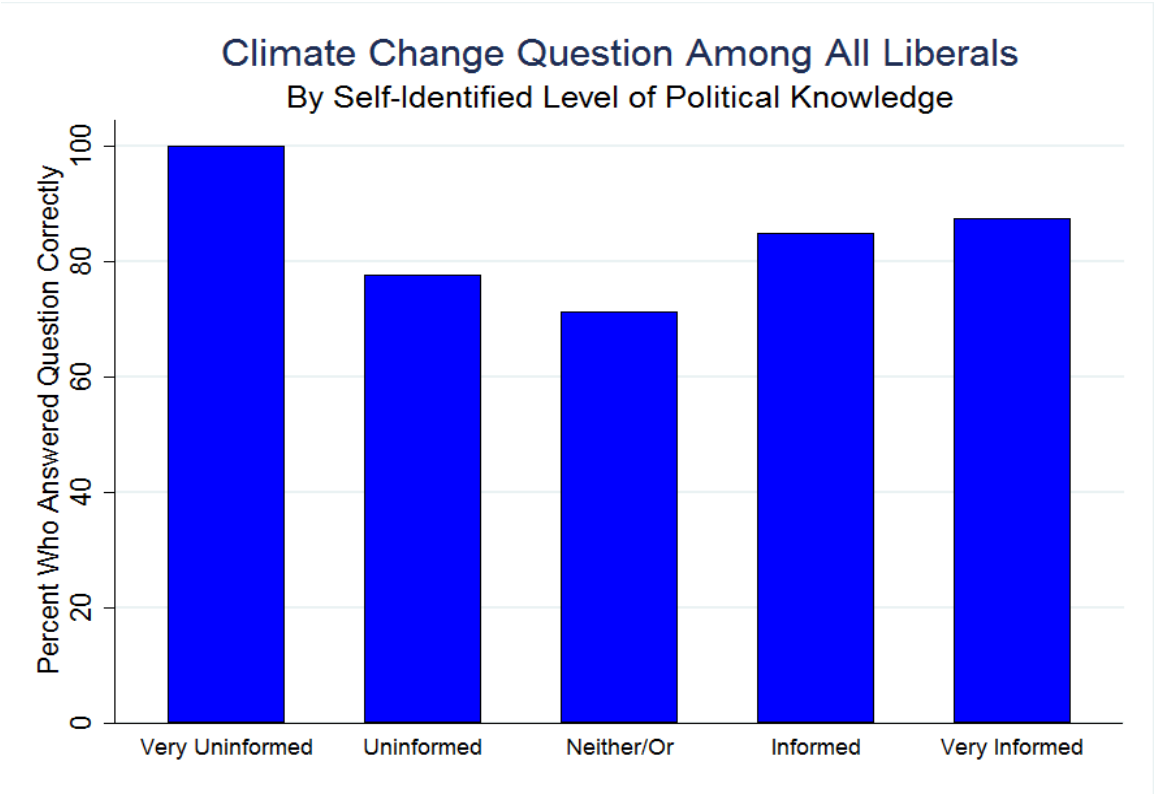


Figure 10

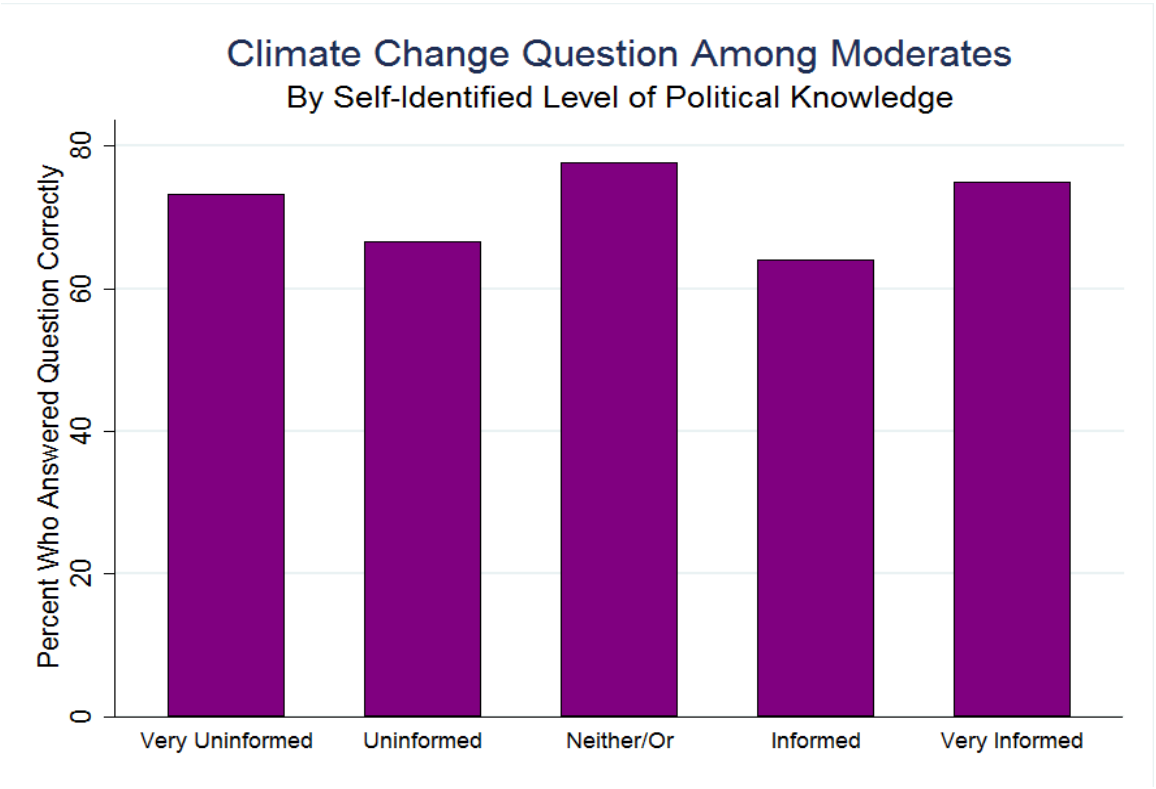


Figure 11

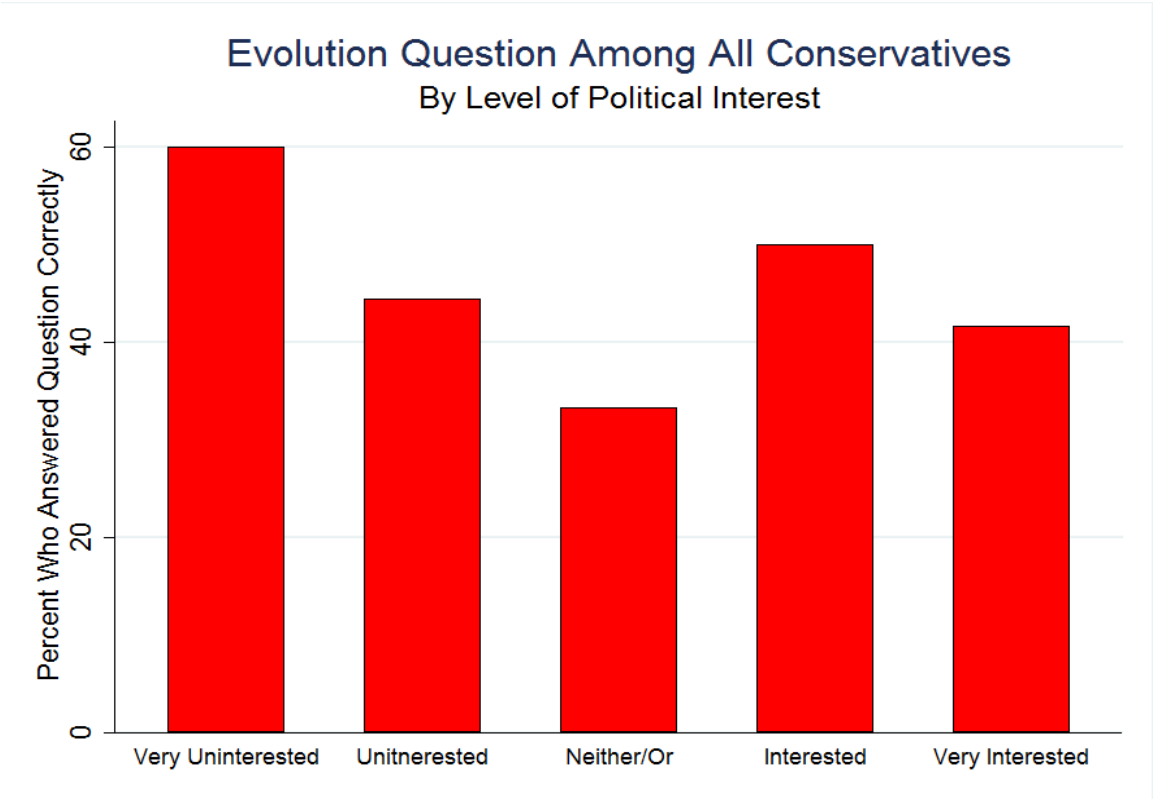


Figure 12

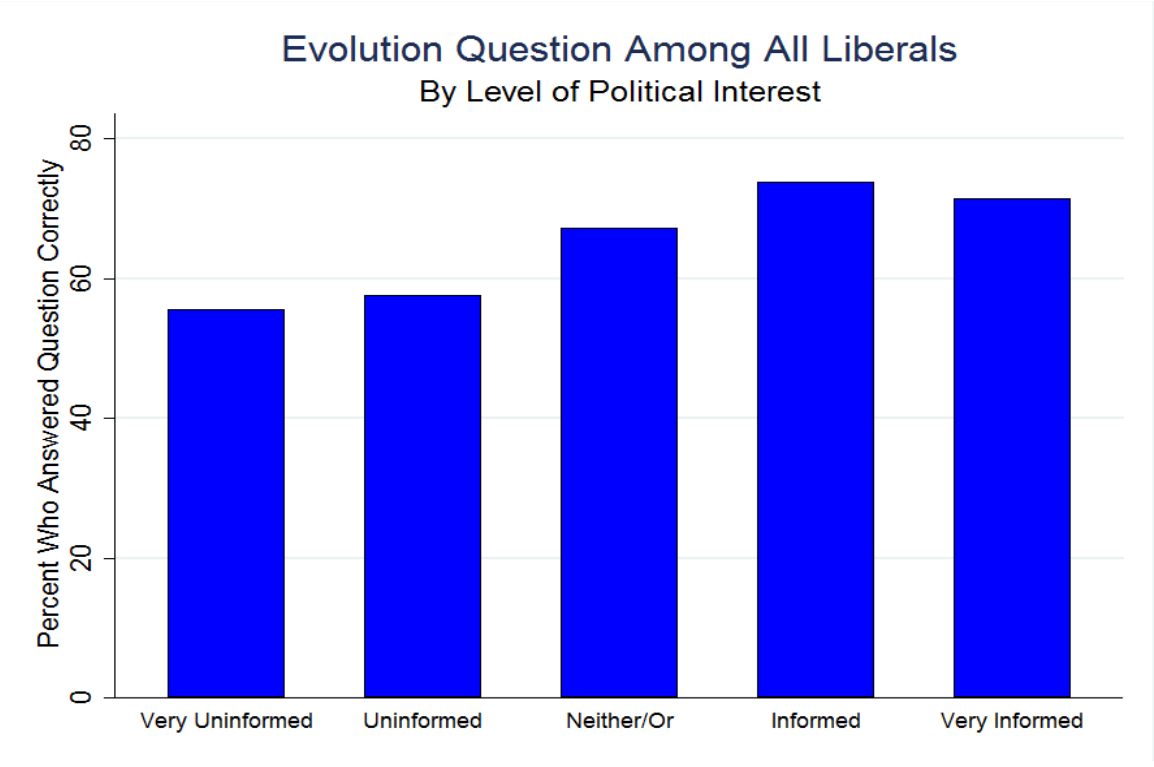


Figure 13

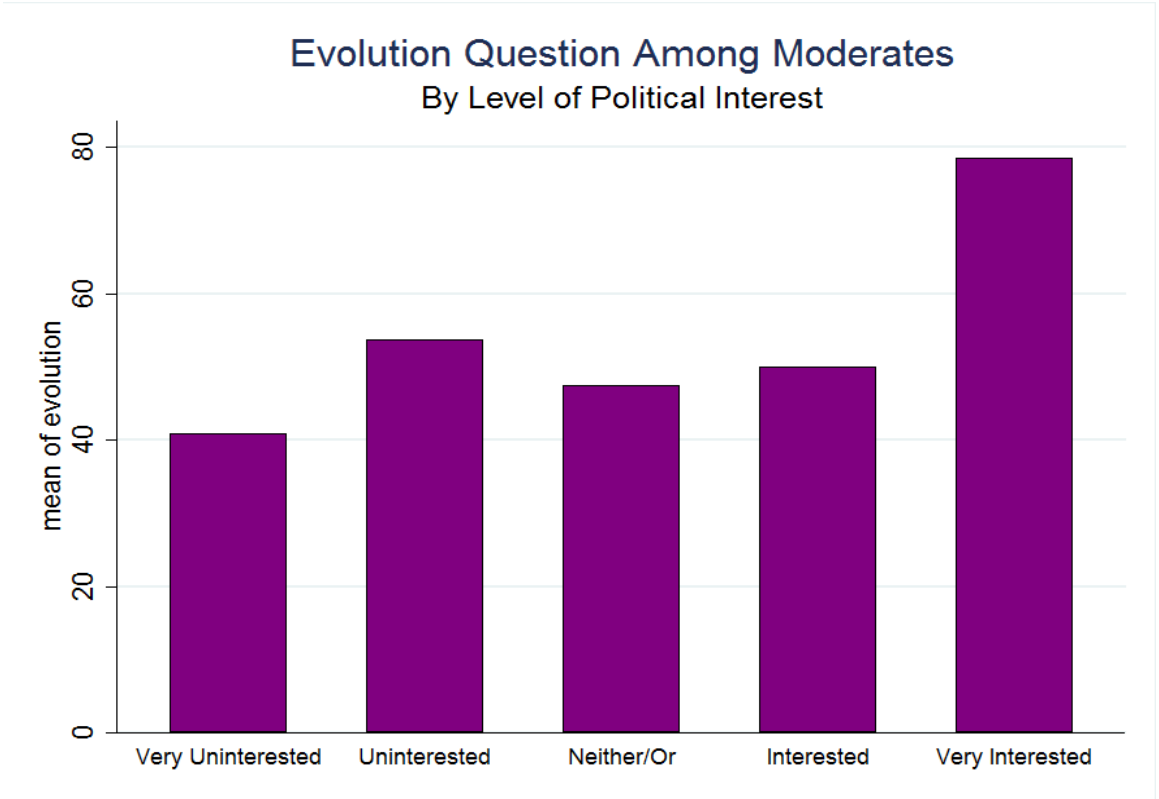


Figure 14

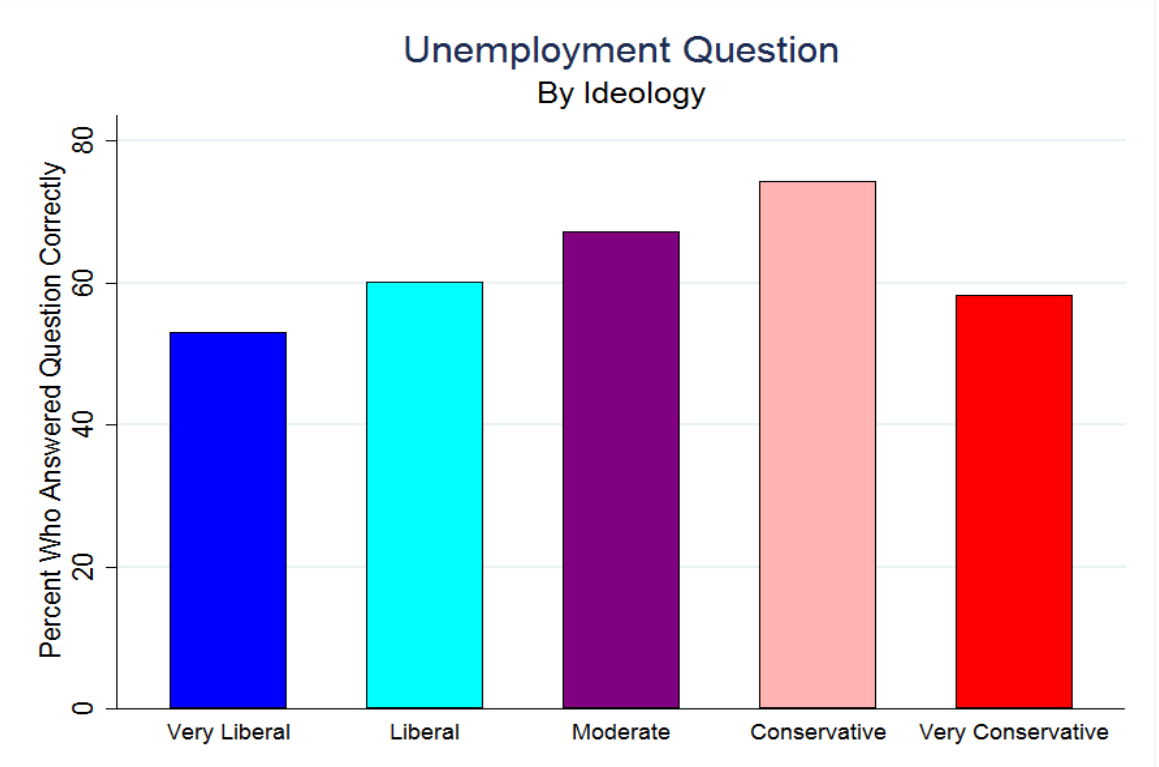


Figure 15

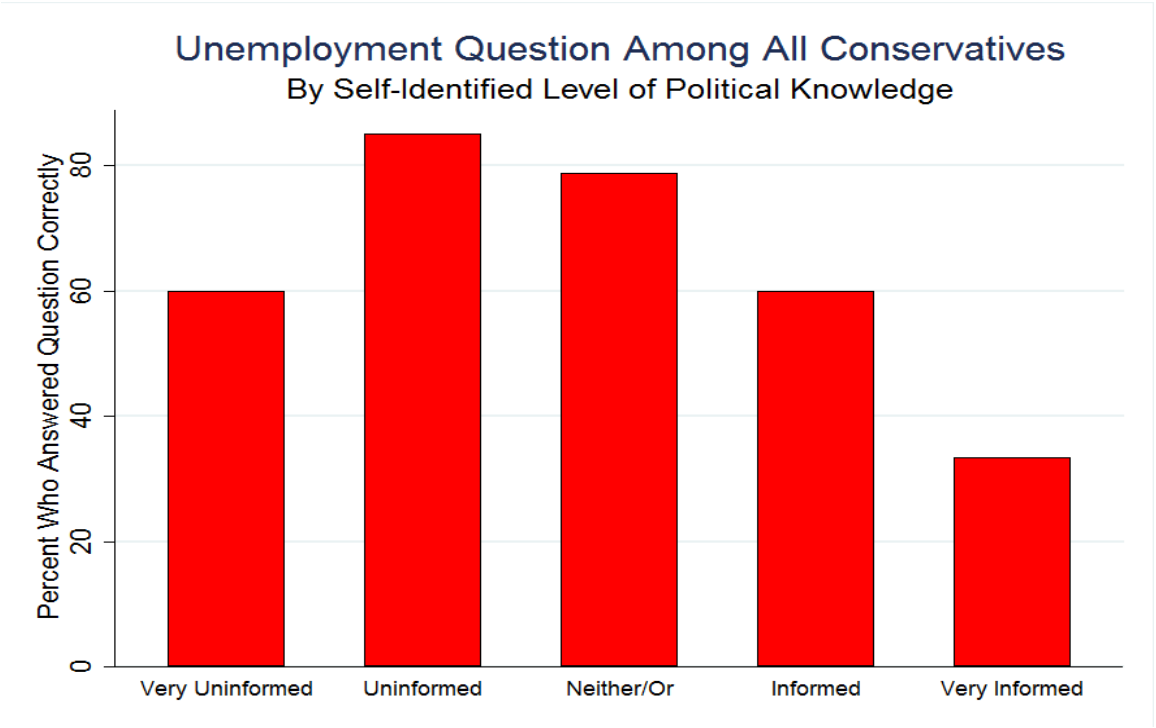


Figure 16

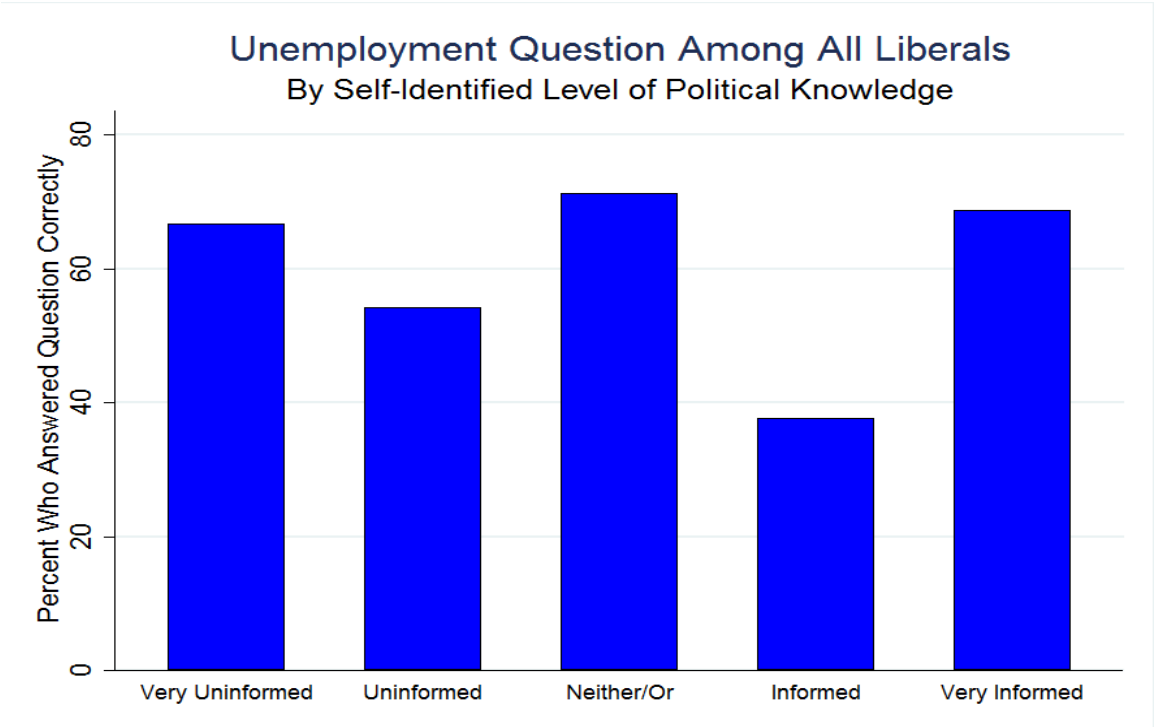
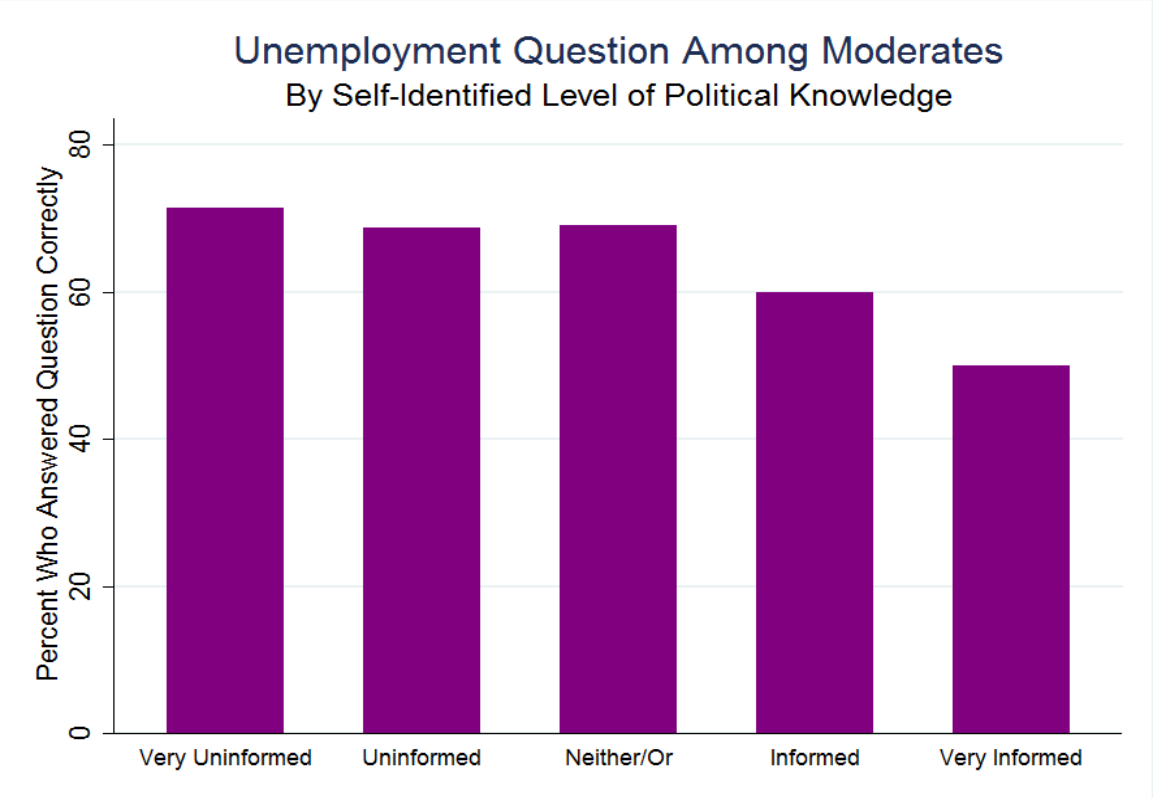


Figure 17



Tables and Figures that are referenced in the text but not available in this section are available upon request.