

# Political Science 146: Mass Media and Public Opinion

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- Participatory democratic theorists says yes because “political info. is to democratic politics what money is to economics: currency of citizenship.”
- Elite democratic theorists say no because citizens use info. shortcuts, such as cues from elites, groups they trust, social networks to form their political opinions

## Political Knowledge, March 2011

**Table :** “Next I’d like to ask about some things that have been in the news. Please answer as best you can.”

Issue / fact	% Correct	% Incorrect	DK/Ref
No Child Left Behind is about? (Education)	80	9	11
Hillary Clinton’s job? (Secretary of State)	73	16	10
Moammar Gadhafi is leader of? (Libya)	71	12	16
Current unemployment rate (9%)	57	28	14
Founder of Facebook? (Zuckerberg)	55	10	35
Speaker of the house? (Boehner)	43	27	30
Pct. of Americans who are obese (25%)	39	51	11
Republicans have majority in? (House)	38	35	27

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- Same with people and players. Citizens know presidents, but have a harder time identifying parties with certain stances, and knowledge about foreign leaders.

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- “It is irrational to be politically well-informed because the low returns from data simply do not justify their cost in time and other scarce resources” (Anthony Downs)

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- Limited Information Processors: People use heuristics not because of its rationality, but because it is impossible to be fully informed – the world is complex, changing, and the media can only cover so much.

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- This misinformation leads people to be less supportive of welfare

## Misinformation & the Iraq War

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- “Since the war with Iraq ended, is it your impression that the US has or has not found Iraqi weapons of mass destruction?”
- “Do you think that the majority of people in the world oppose the US having gone to war, or Views are evenly balanced?”

# Misinformation and the Iraq War: Links with Al Qaeda

TABLE 1

*Evidence of Link between Iraq and al Qaeda  
(percentages)*

Is it your impression that the US has or has not found clear evidence in Iraq that Saddam Hussein was working closely with the al Qaeda terrorist organization?	8-9/03	7/03	6/03	(6/03-9/03)
US has	49	45	52	48
US has not	45	49	43	46
(No answer)	6	6	5	6

Source: Program on International Policy Attitudes/Knowledge Networks.

# Misinformation and the Iraq War: WMDs

TABLE 2

*Existence of Weapons of Mass Destruction in Iraq  
(percentages)*

Since the war with Iraq ended, is it your impression that the US has or has not found Iraqi weapons of mass destruction?

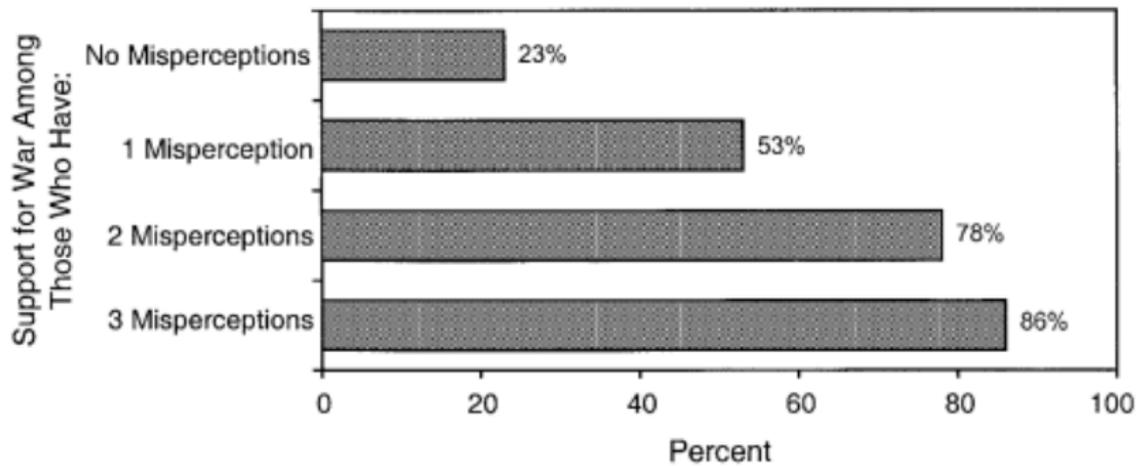
	9/03	7/03	6/03	3/03	(6/03–9/03)
US has	24	21	23	34	22
US has not	73	76	73	59	75
(No answer)	3	3	4	7	3

Source: Program on International Policy Attitudes/Knowledge Networks.

# Misinformation and Support for Iraq War

FIGURE 5

*Cumulative Effect of Having Key Misperceptions on Support for the War*



Composite of Polls Conducted June-September 2003

# Misinformation & Media Source

TABLE 4

*Frequency of Misperceptions per Respondent: WMD Found, Evidence of al Qaeda Link, and World Majority Support for War (percentages)*

<i>Number of misperceptions per respondent</i>	<i>Fox</i>	<i>CBS</i>	<i>ABC</i>	<i>CNN</i>	<i>NBC</i>	<i>Print Media</i>	<i>NPR/PBS</i>
None of the three	20	30	39	45	45	53	77
One or more misperception	80	71	61	55	55	47	23

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- Delli Carpini and Keeter found that citizens can best be characterized as generalists, which makes measurement much easier. These scholars recommended 5 questions.

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- Do you happen to know which party had the most members in the House of Representatives in Washington before the election this/last month?
- Would you say that one of the parties is more conservative than the other at the national level? Which party is more conservative?

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- Income and education gap: Education improves cognitive abilities, allows people to obtain jobs where knowledge of politics is necessary (university professor, lobbyist, etc.)

# Political Knowledge and Demographic Variation

**Table :** “The chief justice of the Supreme Court is John Roberts. Can you tell me if he is generally considered a liberal, a moderate, or a conservative?”

Characteristic	Answered Correctly (%)
Total	37
Male	41
Female	33
White	39
Black	28
Hispanic	29
Age 18-29	29
Age 30-49	39
Age 50-64	41
Less than \$20K	23
\$50-75K	38
\$100K +	54
HS or less	23
Some college	38
College grad	61