

Political Science 146 – Public Opinion and Mass Media: Organization of Political Attitudes

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Organization of Political Thinking

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- ▶ “If an attitude is a strand of feeling, then an ideology is a rope of intertwined attitudes and related fibers”
- ▶ Ideology refers to beliefs about the proper role of government
- ▶ Ideology more **constrained** among those with high political knowledge and education

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- ▶ Main tenet of debate though is over economic policy and role of government

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- ▶ Elites possess constrained belief systems; the general public much less so

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- ▶ (Draw Graph...to scale of course)

Groups: Source of Belief/Attitude Constraint

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- ▶ **Key Components of black political ideology: Radical egalitarianism; black nationalism; black feminism; black conservatism; disillusioned liberalism**

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 - ▶ Survey method itself not reflective of "real world"

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- ▶ Heuristics: a shortcut used to make reasonable policy choices absent detailed information or ideological thinking
- ▶ Knowing a candidate's Party ID (Democrat, Republican) is a heuristic; knowing that Rush Limbaugh is a right-wing commentator is a heuristic

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- ▶ **Misinformation in 2010 Election**

Examples of Misinformation by Media Source

Status of the Economy

The US Bureau of Economic Analysis concluded in September 2010 that the recession had ended in June 2009. "In determining that a trough occurred in June 2009, the [Business Cycle Dating] Committee did not conclude that economic conditions since that month have been favorable or that the economy has returned to operating at normal capacity," the bureau said. "Rather, the committee determined only that the recession ended and a recovery began in that month."⁵

At the time the poll was conducted, the US Bureau of Economic Analysis had recently made its first estimate of growth in 2010's third quarter and put it at 2.0%. On November 23 (shortly after the poll), the Bureau revised its estimate to 2.5%. The Bureau also reported that overall personal income increased 0.5% in October. Private wage and salary disbursements increased \$33 billion in October, compared with an increase of \$8 billion in September

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Status of Scientific Consensus on Climate Change

In 2005 the United States' National Academies of Science joined the national science academies of Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Russia, South Africa, and the United Kingdom in making a joint statement about all aspects of the climate change issue. As to the reality of climate change, the academies stated: "Carbon dioxide levels have increased from 280 ppm in 1750 to over 375 ppm today – higher than any previous levels that can be reliably measured (i.e. in the last 420,000 years). Increasing greenhouse gases are causing temperatures to rise; the Earth's surface warmed by approximately 0.6 centigrade degrees over the twentieth century."⁶

The US Congress in 2008 requested The National Academy of Sciences to research climate change. The NAS's information base, in turn, rests in great part on climate change research that was mandated by the Global Change Research Act of 1990 and has been conducted by various government departments and agencies.

In April 2010 the Proceedings of the NAS published a study of expert opinion, "Expert credibility in climate change," which found—after surveying the publications of 1,372 climate researchers—that "97% of self-identified actively publishing climate scientists agree with the tenets of ACC [anthropogenic climate change]."⁷

In May 2010 the NAS released its most recent report, which stated: "Climate change is occurring, is caused largely by human activities, and poses significant risks for—and in many cases is already affecting—a broad range of human and natural systems. This conclusion is based on a substantial array of scientific evidence, including recent work, and is consistent with the conclusions of recent assessments by the U.S. Global Change Research Program, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's Fourth Assessment Report, and other assessments of the state of knowledge on climate change."⁸

Examples of Misinformation by Media Source

Presently, the US economy is getting worse

	Never	Rarely	About once a week	About 2-3 times a week	Almost every day
Fox News	46	49	61	60	72
CNN	58	57	49	49	58
MSNBC	58	55	52	54	50
Network TV news broadcasts	64	51	60	63	50
Public broadcasting (NPR or PBS)	62	54	50	52	34
Newspapers and news magazines (in print or online)	59	54	57	52	56

Most scientists think climate change is not occurring + views are divided evenly

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- ▶ Most common and most salient groups in American society are race/ethnic, age, gender

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- ▶ **ATtitudes toward groups: Broad concept that includes citizens' prejudice toward and stereotypes about groups, as well as id with groups**

Attitude Variation by Group

Table : Differences in White and Black Attitudes (Dawson et al, 2006)

Question	Black	White	Difference
Approve of decision to go to Iraq War	39	66	37
Protesting war is unpatriotic	17	45	28
Federal gov't should spend whatever's necessary to rebuild and restore people to their homes in Katrina's aftermath	79	33	36
Federal gov't response faster if victims had been white	84	20	64
Racial equality in U.S. never achieved or at least not in respondent's life	78	34	44
Federal gov't should apologize for slavery	79	17	62
Support reparations for slavery	71	3	68