

A Gap in Our Understanding? Reconsidering the Evidence for Partisan Knowledge Gaps

Carolyn E. Roush* Gaurav Sood†

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Abstract

Conventional wisdom in political science suggests that there are large, frequently occurring gaps between what Democrats and Republicans know. This has long fanned concerns about citizens' ability to hold elected officials accountable. In this paper, we reconsider the evidence on the frequency and size of such gaps. We assemble a dataset of knowledge items with a "partisan relevance" from three prominent studies on partisan knowledge gaps. Our final dataset includes 152,124 responses to 161 political knowledge items on 39 surveys. We find that partisan knowledge gaps are both less common and are smaller than commonly understood. Tellingly, about 30% of knowledge gaps occur in the "wrong" direction; that is, on nearly one in three knowledge items, partisans are either *less* likely to know party-congenial facts or *more* likely to know party-uncongenial facts than their opponents. In addition, despite large sample sizes, more than half of the gaps in the expected direction are not statistically significant at conventional levels. We find that the average knowledge gap between Democrats and Republicans to be a mere four percentage points. These results suggest that we need to revisit our understanding of how partisanship affects information acquisition and retention.

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*Democracy Postdoctoral Fellow, the Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation at the Harvard Kennedy School, carolyn_roush@hks.harvard.edu

†Gaurav can be reached at gsood07@gmail.com

During Bill Clinton's first term as president, the U.S. budget deficit shrunk from \$255 billion to \$22 billion. Near the end of 1996, when the American National Election Study asked a representative sample of Americans whether the budget deficit had decreased, increased, or remained the same over the past four years, far fewer Republicans than Democrats knew that the deficit had declined. While 39% of Democrats correctly identified that the budget deficit had decreased, only 25% of Republicans did the same (Achen and Bartels 2016, 280).

Such large discrepancies are not considered anomalous. Instead, as Bullock et al. (2015) note, "a persistent pattern in American public opinion is the presence of large differences between Democrats and Republicans in statements of factual beliefs" (520). Our understanding of how partisan bias influences information processing suggests that there are good reasons to expect these partisan "knowledge gaps" to be large and ubiquitous. When people encounter information that conflicts with their predispositions, they experience cognitive discomfort, which they try to minimize by employing a variety of defense mechanisms (Festinger 1962). Specifically, they avoid exposing themselves to sources that provide them with uncongenial information, distrust such information when they do come across it, and do not work as hard to retain it (Bartels 2002; Jerit and Barabas 2012; Lodge and Taber 2013). In American politics, partisanship helps reduce cognitive discomfort by acting as a "perceptual screen," filtering in congenial facts that comport with an individual's partisan worldview while filtering out those that challenge it (Campbell et al. 1960; Zaller 1992). As a result, the theory goes, Democrats and Republicans come to "know" different types of information and consequently vary in their ability to answer political knowledge questions correctly.

Large knowledge gaps stemming from psychological biases are concerning. Theories of retrospective accountability hinge on the ability of citizens to judge how well the incumbent has performed in office (Fiorina 1981; Key and Cummings 1966; Kramer 1971). If Republicans and Democrats rely upon different sets of facts to make these judgments, elected officials' incentives to work for their constituents are distinctly weaker. Partisan disagreement about basic facts also

reduces the possibility of meaningful dialogue. If Republicans and Democrats disagree about how the economy is doing, a discussion about policies for improving the economy is unlikely to follow.

Given the long shadow that these gaps cast on the health of democracy, understanding how often and to what extent partisans differ in their knowledge of political facts is vital. To study the issue, we assembled a large dataset of partisan-relevant knowledge items. To do so, we made use of data from three prominent studies on the nature and pervasiveness of partisan knowledge gaps (Bullock et al. 2015; Jerit and Barabas 2012; Prior, Sood and Khanna 2015). We find that partisan knowledge gaps are highly variable, and that large differences in what Democrats and Republicans believe are less common than conventional wisdom suggests. Thirty percent (30%) of partisan knowledge gaps occur in the “wrong” direction; that is, partisans are either less accurate in their knowledge of party-congenial facts or more accurate in their knowledge of party-*uncongenial* facts than their opponents on nearly one in three questions. In addition, more than half of the gaps in the expected direction are not statistically significant at conventional levels, despite large sample sizes. On the whole, we find the average knowledge gap between Democrats and Republicans to be a mere four percentage points. In the pages that follow, we document the the nature of these knowledge gaps before discussing the implications of our findings.

Data and Research Design

How common and large are the differences between Democrats and Republicans in their factual beliefs about politics? To estimate the frequency and size of partisan knowledge gaps, we assemble a large dataset of political knowledge items. Because we are interested in the degree to which partisan reasoning produces knowledge gaps, we focus on questions asking about partisan-relevant facts—that is, facts that carry “positive or negative implications for one’s

party” (Jerit and Barabas 2012, 673).

To build the dataset, we harvested data from three prominent studies on partisan knowledge gaps. Two of the studies from which we sourced data probe the extent to which partisan gaps are “real” (Bullock et al. 2015; Prior, Sood and Khanna 2015). These studies treat partisan gaps on knowledge questions as fact but argue that these gaps are partly a result of partisans responding in a motivated manner, i.e. offering responses that portray one’s party in a favorable light. Both studies use survey experiments to estimate the extent of expressive responding. In this study, however, we are interested in measuring the extent to which partisan gaps exist on ordinary surveys, regardless of the process by which they are generated. Accordingly, we only use data from the control group of these studies. A third study from which we source data focuses on explaining partisan gaps, and includes both observational and experimental data (Jerit and Barabas 2012). Here, we use only data from the observational study, as the experiment focuses on partisan learning, not on gaps in partisans’ stores of knowledge.

Our final dataset includes 152,124 responses to 161 political knowledge items on 39 surveys conducted between 1993 and 2012. The knowledge items cover a range of topics, from unemployment to war casualties to global warming. For a full list of items along with question-wording and response options, please see Appendix A 2.¹

In general, partisans can be informed, misinformed, or ignorant of the political facts about which they are asked (Luskin and Sood 2018). Because we are interested in how Democrats and Republicans differ in the information they know—that is, whether there are differences in how *informed* they are—we focus on uncovering partisan gaps in *correct* responses to knowledge questions. To do so, we dichotomized response options into “correct” and “incorrect” categories. To identify “correct” answers, we relied upon the authors’ coding

¹We omit from our study three placebo questions from Bullock et al. (2015) relating to the price of gold in 1980, the Bangladeshi independence date, and the number of Mickey Mantle’s home runs in 1961.

scheme.

A partisan knowledge gap is the absolute value of the difference between the proportions of Republicans and Democrats answering a question correctly.² Using the absolute difference between partisans, however, treats all gaps equally, as we cannot discern whether the gap is a result of partisans knowing less party congenial information or more party uncongenial information than their opponents. For example, an absolute partisan gap of 14 percentage points on a question about the reduction of the budget deficit under Clinton could mean that Democrats were more accurate than Republicans (as expected, given that the correct answer has positive implications for Democrats) *or* that Republicans were more accurate than Democrats (an unexpected outcome, since the correct answer benefits the other side). Either way, partisan bias plays a role in producing the gap, but the implications are very different.

To better ascertain the nature of partisan knowledge gaps, we imputed the “sign” of the gap for each question in our dataset.³ To do so, we first categorized questions into groups based on question features that should influence the expected sign of each gap. The first and most common group contains questions based on performance. Previous research demonstrates that partisans tend to be more accurate than their opponents when responding to questions that have positive implications for their own party (Jerit and Barabas 2012). Quite often, these positive implications arise when outcomes that are universally desirable—for example, lower unemployment, lower inflation, a reduced federal deficit, higher spending on social services for children and seniors, fewer casualties in foreign wars, lower gas prices, lower taxes, etc.—can be attributed to a co-party president. Given how much presidents dominate the news (Hopkins 2018) and the imagination (Greenstein 1969), partisans should be more likely than their opponents to know positive things that happen under a co-partisan president. One classic example

²Following convention, we group together leaning Independents with partisans, as research shows that leaners behave and think much like other partisans (Keith et al. 1992).

³We later discuss our results using the absolute value of the partisan gap.

of this phenomenon is highlighted by [Bartels \(2002\)](#), who noted that, in 1988, Republicans were more accurate than Democrats in their responses to questions about unemployment and inflation rates, as both decreased during President Reagan’s administration (134). In this case, because Republicans were more accurate more about a party-congenial fact than Democrats, we code the sign on the partisan gap as positive.

Similarly, because partisan politics often plays out as a zero-sum game (e.g., [Lee 2016](#)), we also expect partisans to be more accurate about facts that bear negative implications for their opponents.⁴ For example, we expect Democrats to be more accurate than Republicans in their assessments of the unemployment rate if unemployment substantially increased under a Republican president, as it did, for example, between 2000 and 2008 under President George W. Bush. In our data, we code gaps that conform to these expectations as positive.⁵ Conversely, we code gaps that do *not* conform to expectations—that is, those instances in which partisans are *less* accurate about party-congenial facts or *more* accurate about party-*un*congenial facts than their opponents—as negative, as they occur in the “wrong” direction. For items for which the partisan implications are debatable—for example, if the unemployment rate stayed more or less the same over the past year—we opt for the conservative option of retaining the absolute

⁴This is especially likely given the rise of negative partisanship and the centrality of out-party feelings to several aspects of public opinion over the past few years ([Abramowitz and Webster 2016](#); [Iyengar, Sood and Lelkes 2012](#); [Mason 2015](#); [Nicholson 2012](#); [Roush 2016](#)).

⁵Here, we depart from [Jerit and Barabas \(2012\)](#), which differentiates between items that have positive implications for Democrats, negative implications for Democrats, positive implications for Republicans, and negative implications for Republicans. For the purposes of our analysis, we combine Democratic-positive/Republican-negative and Republican-positive/Democratic-negative. With the exception of collapsing these two categories, however, we rely on the authors’ coding of the partisan implication (in other words, the expected sign of the gap) for each item.

value of the partisan gap. In other words, we code partisan gaps in these ambiguous cases as positive.

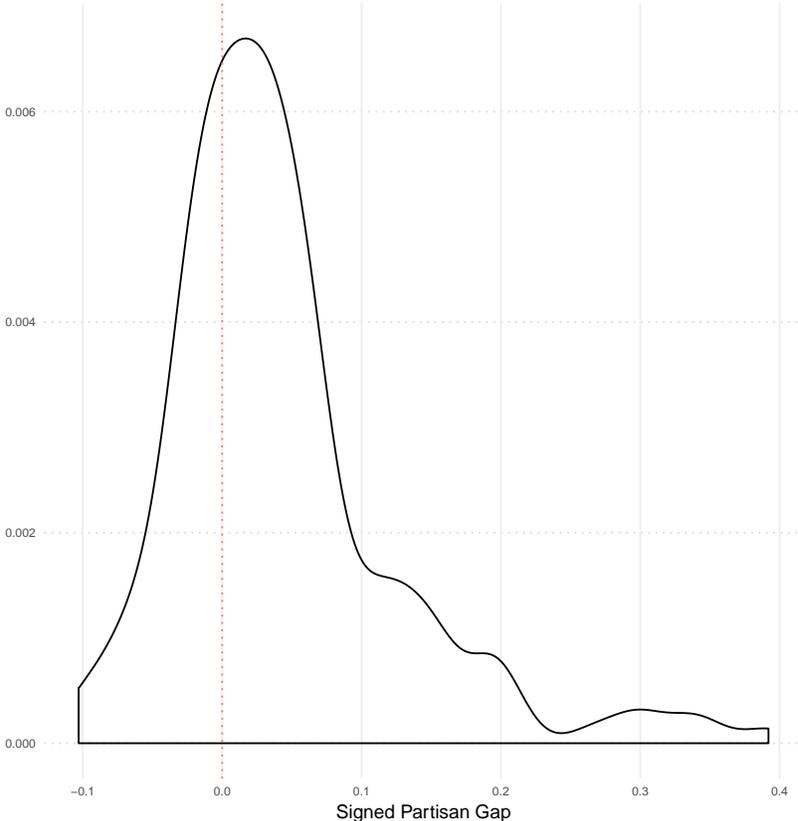
The second category features questions that bear partisan implications that do not hinge on performance. For example, some facts could be considered positive for one set of partisans because their favored party takes action on a particular fact. For example, Democratic environmental policy is based on the (correct) notion that global warming is real and its cause is man-made. Republican policy, on the other hand, is based on the (incorrect) belief that global warming has probably not been happening, and if it has, it is the result of natural causes. On questions related to the existence and source of global warming, therefore, we expect Democrats to know more. Another prominent example relates to the estate tax. In this case, Democratic policy pivots off the fact that a very small proportion of Americans pay estate taxes, while Republican policy is based off the (incorrect) notion that considerably more Americans would be subject to the tax. Again, we expect Democrats to be more accurate than Republicans on questions related to the percentage of Americans subject to an estate tax.

Finally, in a handful of cases, question wording and response options influence the partisan implication of a particular question. For example, in [Bullock et al. \(2015\)](#), a question about the total casualties in Iraq from 2003 to 2008 provides four response options. The correct answer to the question—4,000—is the lowest option provided; the highest option is 20,000. In this case, the correct answer is congenial for Republicans, as it suggests that casualties are relatively low in comparison to other response options. If different response options were provided, however, it might shift the implications of the question by changing the implicitly suggested reference point to be less favorable to Republicans ([Tversky and Kahneman 1974](#)). For a full list of items in the dataset, along with their signed partisan gap and supporting information, see Appendix Table [A 1.2](#); for question wordings and response options, please see Appendix [A 2](#).

Partisan Knowledge Gaps in Context

Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of partisan knowledge gaps in our dataset. A few features stand out. First, the the average gap is just 4.3 percentage points. The median gap is even smaller at 2.8 percentage points. In addition to being small on average, the gaps are also highly variable. Partisan gaps in our data range from -10 percentage points (on a question from [Jerit and Barabas \(2012\)](#) about whether the Senate approved a tax cut in 2001) to 35 percentage points (on another question from [Jerit and Barabas \(2012\)](#) about whether Iraq had weapons of mass destruction in 2004). Moreover, the standard deviation of partisan gaps is sizable at 8.3 percentage points.

Figure 1: Distribution of Partisan Gaps



Not only are the gaps relatively small on average, they are also not always consistently

signed. Thirty percent (30%) of these gaps are *negative*; that is, on nearly one in three knowledge items, partisans are either *less* likely to know party-congenial facts or *more* likely to know party-uncongenial facts than their opponents. Of the knowledge gaps in the expected direction, nearly two thirds—63%—are not statistically significant at the 95% confidence level, despite an average sample size of 945 respondents per question. If we lower the threshold to 90%, 54% of the positive gaps are not statistically distinguishable from zero. If we further limit our analysis to items with a sample size large enough to draw reliable conclusions (that is, when $n(\text{Republicans})$ and $n(\text{Democrats})$ both ≥ 100 , or roughly 85% of the items in our dataset), we find that more than half (55%) of the positive gaps are not statistically significant at the 95% confidence level. Taken together, fewer than half of the partisan knowledge gaps are both in the expected direction and statistically significant at conventional levels.

Perhaps these findings are an artifact of our judgments regarding the expected sign of the partisan gap. While the vast majority of the items in our dataset have clear positive or negative implications for one party or another, for others, one might reasonably argue that the direction of the sign is debatable. For example, regarding a question about repayment of the 2009 financial bailout, one could argue that Republicans “should” know more on the topic as (1) the bailout was unpopular (thus signaling a negative connotation for Democrats) and (2) the GOP has traditionally made reducing government debt a central focus of its policy agenda. On the other hand, Democrats might be expected to be more correct in their answers because a high proportion (about 70%) of the debt had been repaid in three years (a positive outcome under a Democratic president). In this case, the signed partisan gap could reasonably be coded as positive or negative.

Importantly, our findings do not appear to be overly sensitive to coding decisions. Averaging across the absolute value of all partisan gaps produces a mean gap of 6.2 percentage points, a median gap of 3.8 percentage points, and a standard deviation of 7 percentage points.

On a scale ranging from 0-100, these figures remain surprisingly small.⁶

Explaining Variation in Knowledge Gaps

In an era of hyperpartisan thinking and behavior, how do we account for the fact that partisan knowledge gaps are small on average, and that a significant portion of the gaps have the “wrong” sign? One explanation may be that the knowledge items we include here are not a representative set of relevant cognitions that partisans have. In other words, it may well be that the knowledge gaps are larger on partisan-relevant facts that are not asked about in the studies described above.

To what degree this is so, we cannot say, except to note that the general bias is to “shoot where the ducks are.” That is, in at least two of our studies ([Bullock et al. 2015](#); [Prior, Sood and Khanna 2015](#)), expert political scientists included knowledge questions that they reasonably believed *a priori* would produce large partisan gaps. The fact that statistically significant, “positive” knowledge gaps only emerge on about half of the items from these studies suggests that partisan knowledge gaps are less common even when looking in (what should be) the most obvious place.

A potentially more satisfying explanation for the discrepancy between conventional wisdom regarding “large differences...in factual beliefs” ([Bullock et al. 2015](#), 520) and our findings here is that conventional wisdom is largely based off of studies using data from the American

⁶In addition, in the process of cleaning and collecting data for this project, we identified coding errors related to partisan implications on six items in [Jerit and Barabas’s \(2012\)](#) dataset. Correcting these errors produces a mean gap of 4.1 percentage points, a median gap of 2.6 percentage points, and a standard deviation of 8.4 percentage points. Nevertheless, we include the coding errors as part of the data in our main analysis in an effort to replicate published findings.

National Election Studies (ANES) ([American National Election Studies N.d.](#)). Much of the literature surrounding partisan knowledge gaps has built upon [Bartels \(2002\)](#), who was the first to write about these differences in a systematic way ([Bullock and Lenz 2019](#)). Using ANES data, [Bartels \(2002\)](#) discovered that Democrats and Republicans reported different beliefs on a variety of objective matters, such as how inflation and unemployment changed over the previous eight years. In 1988, the estimated differences between Democrats and Republicans on knowledge questions ranged from approximately 12 to 36 percentage points, depending on the specific question.⁷

However, there are several reasons why we might expect the magnitude of knowledge gaps on items from the ANES to be usually large. First, most of the ANES questions about “factual beliefs” that carry a partisan implication do not actually ask respondents to identify a factually correct answer. Rather, these questions tend to ask respondents to make relative *assessments* about performance or policy over a certain time period. Canonical ANES questions, for example, ask people to gauge whether the budget deficit increased, decreased, or remained the same over a president’s tenure, or how the rate of inflation may have changed over the past year. Because the given response options for these questions are not precise (what does “about the same” mean, really?), people have greater opportunities to fill in and interpret the meanings themselves using common heuristics ([Sood and Guess 2017](#)), including partisanship. As a result, a large partisan “knowledge” gap may actually be more reflective of how partisans interpret response options rather than a true difference between what Democrats and Republicans know.

This means that these ANES questions leave room for partisan bias *even if* individuals know the correct answer. Suppose that two highly knowledgeable survey respondents (who

⁷These figures have been rescaled in percentage point terms. [Bartels \(2002\)](#) originally notes that “estimated differences between Democrats and Republicans rang[e] from .249 to .715 on the -1 to +1 scales” (137).

perhaps work together in an unemployment office) know for a fact that the unemployment rate grew from 6.0% to 6.2% over the past year, a time during which a Democratic president sat in the White House. When the first respondent, a Democrat, is asked to evaluate whether unemployment got better, stayed the same, or got worse over the past 12 months, she she might reasonably view an increase of .02 percentage points as negligible and therefore answer that unemployment stayed more or less the same over the past year. On the other hand, the second respondent, a Republican, may also (correctly) answer that unemployment increased over the past year. In this situation, two people who know the exact same fact could plausibly choose two different “correct” answers, leaving room for partisan interpretation and thereby creating artificially large “knowledge” gaps.

Finally, the context in which the ANES surveys are administered may result in larger than average partisan knowledge gaps. Surveys conducted during times in which politics is particularly salient—such as the fall of a national election year, during which the ANES surveys respondents—may induce people to think about these knowledge questions in even more political (and therefore partisan) terms. Just as partisan loyalties crystallize as Election Day approaches (Erikson and Wlezien 2012; Sides and Vavreck 2013), partisan bias may also increase as the campaign wears on, thus producing larger knowledge gaps on items included in surveys conducted closer to November.

In order to gain a better understanding of the size of knowledge gaps in the ANES data—and to place the results above in context—we compiled all the knowledge questions that carry a partisan implication appearing on ANES surveys over the past 32 years. To gauge partisans’ accuracy on these items, we identified correct responses based on information sourced from federal agencies like the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the Federal Reserve, and the Census Bureau, in addition to information gleaned from news reporting or academic studies.⁸ As before, we

⁸For reasons of subjectivity, we exclude questions that ask respondents to assess how “the economy” has fared. We do so because answers to the question hinge on both what survey re-

dichotomized response options into “correct” and “incorrect” categories. Like the authors in the other studies, we also assume that there is no “hidden knowledge” behind “don’t know” responses and code them as incorrect (Luskin and Bullock 2011). In total, the ANES data provides us with an additional 43,502 responses to 22 questions on nine surveys. For a full list of ANES items, along with their signed partisan gap, see Appendix Table A 3.3; for a full accounting of the sources used to identify correct answers, see Appendix A 4.

Table 1: Partisan Gap by Study

Study	Mean gap	Median gap	Standard deviation	n (Items)
ANES	0.153	0.139	0.127	22
Prior et al. (2015)	0.062	0.038	0.095	10
Bullock et al. (2015)	0.105	0.091	0.126	21
Jerit & Barabas (2012)	0.032	0.025	0.069	130

Table 1 compares partisan gaps on ANES items to those included in the other studies in our analysis. As expected, the mean and median gaps on ANES knowledge items are larger than those produced in the other three studies. In fact, the mean partisan knowledge gap in respondents think “the economy” means and on what they think is a good indicator of its health. For example, in answering a question about how the economy did over the previous year, some respondents may read the question as asking about their state or local economy, while others may mentally reference the unemployment rate, changes in their disposable income, or (among the highly knowledgeable) the performance of the stock market. While some political scientists have attached their own metrics, like real disposable income per capita (e.g., Achen and Bartels 2016; Hibbs Jr. 2000), to “objectively” gauge how the economy is doing, many survey respondents will plausibly differ in their reference points. Nevertheless, in Appendix A 5, we track partisan gaps in economic evaluations. As expected, there are much larger differences between Democrats and Republicans in their assessments of “the economy” compared to other knowledge items. These items produce an average gap of 18 percentage points.

the ANES data (15 percentage points) is 50% larger than the largest mean gap in the other three studies (10 percentage points, from [Bullock et al. \(2015\)](#)).

Further parsing our data by date lends some credence to the idea that partisan differences in factual beliefs are conditioned by the timing of the survey. To analyze how partisan gaps in the ANES data compare to partisan gaps produced in other electoral contexts, we categorized each non-ANES knowledge item by whether it was asked during a presidential election year, a midterm election year, or a non-election year. We find that questions asked during non-election years produce the smallest partisan knowledge gaps (mean = 1.1 percentage points, $n=65$), followed by questions asked during midterm years (mean = 4.1 percentage points, $n=34$), with questions asked during presidential years inciting the largest differences in factual beliefs between Democrats and Republicans. In fact, the mean knowledge gap in presidential election years (9.8 percentage points, $n=84$) approximates the magnitude of the gaps seen the ANES data (10.5 percentage points).

Some cursory evidence also suggests that the timing within an election year matters as well. The first study in [Bullock et al. \(2015\)](#), for example, was conducted as part of the 2008 Cooperative Congressional Election Study, which interviewed respondents in October and November of that year. The average partisan gap on these items is 13 percentage points. By contrast, the authors' second study, conducted on MTurk in March-April 2012, produces a mean gap of 6.7 percentage points—despite the fact that it shared many of the same questions featured in the 2008 study. Similarly, the first study featured in [Prior, Sood and Khanna \(2015\)](#) was conducted in October 2004 by Knowledge Networks produced a mean gap of 3.8 percentage points. The second study was conducted in March-April 2008 (again by Knowledge Networks) with an average gap of 0 percentage points. Though these results are by no means conclusive, they suggest that the political context in which knowledge questions are asked may influence the responses partisans provide.

Next Steps

Though the results above provide some insight into potential sources of knowledge gap variation, they are by no means conclusive. To that end, we anticipate conducting additional analyses using the existing dataset as well as fielding an original survey experiment to examine how additional features may exacerbate or minimize partisan knowledge differences. Below, we outline some variables that we believe may influence the size of partisan knowledge gaps.

- In their study of political misinformation, [Luskin et al. \(2018\)](#) examine how question design features influence estimates of incorrect responses. Specifically, they demonstrate that the number of response options and phrasing of questions as a matter of opinion instead of fact can dramatically affect estimates of how much respondents know. We might expect similar features to influence the size of partisan knowledge gaps in the following ways:
 - Fewer response options may artificially inflate the proportion of Democrats or Republicans who appear to know something, since fewer options encourage guessing by heightening the probability that a respondent will select the correct answer ([Luskin et al. 2018](#), 4). Similarly, we might expect more of these “false positives” on close-ended questions compared to open-ended questions, since there is no opportunity to accidentally guess the right answer in the latter. Questions that provide “don’t know” as a response option are less likely to have false positives, as it discourages guessing by providing an “out” to respondents. Of course, [Luskin et al. \(2018\)](#) examined how these features influence the *levels* of misinformation in the *population*, not among partisans, so it is plausible that these features affect the proportions of Democrats and Republicans who answer correctly in the same way. If, however, Democrats and Republicans differ in their propensity to guess the correct

answer, we might expect the number and nature of response options to impact the size of knowledge gaps.

- We might also expect larger partisan knowledge gaps on questions that begin with phrases like “do you think,” “do you believe,” “based on what you have heard,” “to the best of your knowledge,” etc. as these phrases are likely to invite respondents who know they do not know the correct answer to choose what they see as the most probable response. In doing so, they are likely to rely upon what they would *like* to believe the correct answer is, which would likely activate partisan reasoning, thereby exacerbating observed differences in knowledge between Democrats and Republicans.
- The mention of an elected official or party in a question stem is likely to exacerbate knowledge gaps, as these are likely to prime partisan thinking more than questions that do not reference political actors (e.g., [Mondak 1993](#); [Zaller 1992](#)). Accordingly, we plan on coding the questions in our dataset by whether they reference a political actor to determine whether source cues influence the knowledge differences between Democrats and Republicans.
- Question difficulty likely plays a role in producing knowledge gaps, particularly if Democrats or Republicans tend to be more knowledgeable about the topic at hand. Moving forward, we plan on assessing item difficulty by examining the proportion of pure Independents—that is, respondents without a partisan motive—who select the correct answer.

Discussion and Conclusion

The data clarify our understanding of partisan knowledge gaps in important ways. First, partisan knowledge gaps are less ubiquitous than what conventional wisdom suggests. For three

in ten items, partisans either know *less* party-congenial information or *more* party-uncongenial information than their opponents. Among gaps occurring in the correct direction, we can only be certain that Democrats and Republicans actually differ from one another in their factual understanding of politics less than half the time. Secondly, the average gap in our data is small, with a mean gap of four percentage points and a median gap of about three percentage points. Third, at least part of the variation in the size of partisan knowledge gaps can be explained by the electoral context in which the questions are asked.

Why don't Democrats and Republicans differ more in their factual beliefs about politics? One promising explanation lies in the evidence on processes underlying knowledge gaps. Data suggest that most people consume very little political news (Prior 2007; Flaxman, Goel and Rao 2016), and the news that they do consume appears to be relatively ideologically balanced (Flaxman, Goel and Rao 2016; Garz et al. 2018; Gentzkow and Shapiro 2011; Guess 2016). There is little reason, therefore, to believe that knowledge gaps emerge as a result of partisans simply knowing different facts gleaned from different sources. Furthermore, while partisans learn facts in a motivated fashion, the effects are rather modest (Gerber and Green 1999; Jerit and Barabas 2012), with people exhibiting little bias in their recall of information (Khanna and Sood 2018). Taken together, studies suggest that knowledge gaps should be relatively small—a notion that contradicts the conventional wisdom in the discipline that knowledge gaps are “persistent” and “large” (e.g. Bullock et al. 2015).

That said, the prognosis may be worse. Partisan selective exposure is increasing over time, partly as a consequence of people increasingly getting their news from social networking sites (Bakshy, Messing and Adamic 2015; Peterson, Goel and Iyengar 2018). Peterson, Goel and Iyengar (2018), for example, find that in 2016, partisans on social media gravitated toward like-minded news sources at a rate two to three times higher than that documented in studies from 2009 and 2013. If partisan segregation in news consumption is on the rise, we may very well uncover larger partisan knowledge gaps as Democrats and Republicans approach politics

with different sets of facts.

Based on current data and research, however, we suspect that the vast majority of partisan gaps—when they do appear—are more likely to be a product of motivated responding than of partisans simply knowing different things (Bullock et al. 2015; Prior, Sood and Khanna 2015). None of this is to say that partisan bias does not play a role in shaping how Democrats and Republicans interpret what they know; there is ample evidence to suggest that it does (e.g. Bisgaard 2015; Gaines et al. 2007; Khanna and Sood 2018). Nor should the small size of the average gap prevent us from noting that on many of the questions, a majority of partisans on both sides of the aisle were either ignorant or misinformed about the facts: the average proportion of Republicans who provided correct answers to these knowledge questions is 41%, and the average proportion of Democrats is 42%. In all, however, the data provide a reason for optimism. Partisans are not as willing to say up is down and down is up as commonly believed. Further, if motivated responding is the source of knowledge gaps, the concern about biases in partisans' stores of knowledge is plausibly yet more modest. Overall, the case that people can hold government officials accountable and engage with each other in reasoned discourse looks a shade stronger.

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APPENDIX

A 1 Partisan Gaps By Item

Table A 1.2: Partisan Knowledge Gaps by Item

Item	Study	Year	R ⁹	n(R) ¹⁰	D ¹¹	n(D) ¹²	Signed gap	p(Gap) ¹³
Afghanistan casualties, 2007 vs. 2008	Bullock et al.	2008	0.268	97	0.297	111	-0.029	0.641
Estimated Bush approval among Republicans	Bullock et al.	2008	0.206	97	0.175	114	0.031	0.570
Estimated Bush approval	Bullock et al.	2008	0.370	100	0.716	116	0.346	0.000
Bush deficit change	Bullock et al.	2008	0.909	99	0.920	113	0.011	0.769
Bush inflation change	Bullock et al.	2008	0.520	99	0.853	109	0.333	0.000
Bush unemployment change	Bullock et al.	2008	0.454	97	0.721	111	0.267	0.000
Iraq casualties, 2007 vs. 2008	Bullock et al.	2008	0.747	99	0.451	113	0.296	0.000
Iraq total casualties	Bullock et al.	2008	0.768	99	0.622	111	0.146	0.022
McCain age	Bullock et al.	2008	0.820	100	0.774	115	0.046	0.403
Obama age	Bullock et al.	2008	0.545	99	0.658	114	0.112	0.094
Global warming	Bullock et al.	2012	0.377	53	0.444	81	0.067	0.441
Debt service spending	Bullock et al.	2012	0.098	51	0.099	91	0.001	0.987
Defense spending	Bullock et al.	2012	0.262	42	0.256	78	0.005	0.948
Foreign born population	Bullock et al.	2012	0.264	53	0.395	86	0.131	0.114
Bush II unemployment	Bullock et al.	2012	0.093	43	0.088	91	-0.005	0.923

⁹Proportion of Republicans who answered correctly

¹⁰*n*, Republicans

¹¹Proportion of Democrats who answered correctly

¹²*n*, Democrats

¹³Statistical significance of partisan gap (in *p* values)

Iraq deaths	Bullock et al.	2012	0.143	35	0.074	94	-0.068	0.234
Iraq deaths: percent black	Bullock et al.	2012	0.278	54	0.168	95	0.109	0.114
Medicaid spending	Bullock et al.	2012	0.105	38	0.299	97	0.194	0.019
Obama unemployment	Bullock et al.	2012	0.111	36	0.175	80	-0.064	0.379
Obama vote in 2008	Bullock et al.	2012	0.351	35	0.158	97	0.193	0.015
TARP: percent paid back	Bullock et al.	2012	0.132	38	0.222	81	0.091	0.243
Clinton health plan - all Americans	Jerit & Barabas	1993	0.527	992	0.589	487	0.062	0.024
Clinton health plan - unemployed workers	Jerit & Barabas	1993	0.458	992	0.480	487	0.023	0.408
Congress considered - raise Medicare eligibility	Jerit & Barabas	1997	0.585	359	0.541	135	0.044	0.376
Congress considered - rich seniors pay higher Medicare premiums	Jerit & Barabas	1997	0.616	359	0.630	135	-0.014	0.775
Congress considered - no Medicare for rich seniors	Jerit & Barabas	1997	0.370	359	0.385	135	0.015	0.763
Congress considered - expand choice under Medicare	Jerit & Barabas	1997	0.448	359	0.511	135	0.063	0.214
Congress considered - cut Medicare payments	Jerit & Barabas	1997	0.451	359	0.489	135	-0.038	0.455
Clinton SOTU health mention - children	Jerit & Barabas	1997	0.760	200	0.828	116	0.068	0.159
Clinton SOTU health mention - workers	Jerit & Barabas	1997	0.695	200	0.716	116	0.021	0.701
Clinton SOTU health mention - low-income people	Jerit & Barabas	1997	0.210	220	0.181	116	0.029	0.534
Clinton SOTU health mention - long-term care	Jerit & Barabas	1997	0.145	220	0.121	116	0.024	0.544
Budget agreement - increase senior premiums	Jerit & Barabas	1997	0.394	830	0.390	372	0.004	0.891
Budget agreement - prescription drugs	Jerit & Barabas	1997	0.304	830	0.331	372	-0.027	0.350
Budget agreement - raising payroll tax	Jerit & Barabas	1997	0.283	830	0.242	372	-0.040	0.137
Control of House - 1997	Jerit & Barabas	1997	0.516	1819	0.502	909	0.014	0.490
Gingrich ethics fine	Jerit & Barabas	1997	0.384	1819	0.325	909	-0.059	0.002
Trent Lott recognition	Jerit & Barabas	1997	0.197	412	0.133	203	0.064	0.051
Louis Freeh recognition	Jerit & Barabas	1997	0.095	412	0.079	203	-0.016	0.517

John Huang recognition	Jerit & Barabas	1997	0.233	412	0.192	203	0.041	0.249
Kenneth Starr recognition	Jerit & Barabas	1997	0.235	412	0.167	203	0.068	0.053
Ralph Reed recognition	Jerit & Barabas	1997	0.108	426	0.118	187	-0.010	0.726
Wester Hubbell recognition	Jerit & Barabas	1997	0.169	426	0.171	187	-0.002	0.949
Commission rec - increasing payroll taxes	Jerit & Barabas	1998	0.207	808	0.188	394	-0.019	0.443
Commission rec - increasing retirement age	Jerit & Barabas	1998	0.609	808	0.596	394	0.012	0.678
Commission rec - investing Social Security \$ in stock market	Jerit & Barabas	1998	0.200	808	0.228	394	0.028	0.264
Commission rec - moving Social Security \$ to retirement accounts	Jerit & Barabas	1998	0.377	808	0.302	394	0.075	0.010
Law to protect consumers in HMOs	Jerit & Barabas	1998	0.507	841	0.496	359	0.011	0.734
Right to sue HMO	Jerit & Barabas	1998	0.232	841	0.237	359	-0.005	0.854
Existence of Medicare commission	Jerit & Barabas	1999	0.297	421	0.271	181	-0.026	0.516
SOTU proposal - health care tax credits for elderly and disabled	Jerit & Barabas	1999	0.363	852	0.427	356	0.064	0.036
SOTU proposal - rich seniors pay more for Medicare	Jerit & Barabas	1999	0.252	852	0.247	356	0.005	0.850
SOTU proposal - use budget surplus for Medicare	Jerit & Barabas	1999	0.506	852	0.511	356	0.005	0.865
SOTU proposal - offer option to buy Medicaid before 65	Jerit & Barabas	1999	0.234	852	0.225	356	-0.009	0.739
SOTU proposal - use budget surplus for Social Security	Jerit & Barabas	1999	0.577	852	0.626	356	0.049	0.115
SOTU proposal - invest Social Security funds in stock market	Jerit & Barabas	1999	0.487	852	0.475	356	-0.012	0.695
SOTU proposal - individual retirement savings accounts	Jerit & Barabas	1999	0.376	852	0.466	356	-0.091	0.003
SOTU proposal - raising age for Social Security to 70	Jerit & Barabas	1999	0.262	852	0.292	356	0.030	0.278

Pot panel rec - help cancer and AIDS pain	Jerit & Barabas	1999	0.547	839	0.551	361	0.004	0.894
Pot panel rec - no evidence of gateway drug	Jerit & Barabas	1999	0.219	839	0.277	361	0.058	0.031
Pot panel rec - pot smoke more toxic than tobacco smoke	Jerit & Barabas	1999	0.285	839	0.291	361	0.006	0.833
Medical error report - new government agency	Jerit & Barabas	1999	0.293	1982	0.356	433	0.063	0.017
Medical error report - tougher malpractice laws	Jerit & Barabas	1999	0.213	1982	0.189	433	0.023	0.313
Senate gun bill - background checks at gun shows	Jerit & Barabas	1999	0.796	692	0.768	311	-0.028	0.320
Senate gun bill - prohibits concealed carry	Jerit & Barabas	1999	0.382	692	0.347	311	0.034	0.299
Senate gun bill - raising gun owner age to 21	Jerit & Barabas	1999	0.172	692	0.174	311	-0.002	0.948
Senate gun bill - manufacture safety locks	Jerit & Barabas	1999	0.702	692	0.662	311	-0.040	0.206
Senate gun bill - using gun illegal under 18	Jerit & Barabas	1999	0.296	692	0.264	311	0.033	0.291
Country stealing nuclear tech	Jerit & Barabas	1999	0.522	586	0.423	307	0.099	0.005
U.S. troops in Bosnia	Jerit & Barabas	1999	0.687	1209	0.667	577	0.019	0.414
U.S. troops in Haiti	Jerit & Barabas	1999	0.356	1209	0.300	577	0.056	0.020
SOTU proposal - offer option to buy Medicare before 65	Jerit & Barabas	2000	0.315	660	0.451	346	0.136	0.000
SOTU proposal - rich seniors pay more for Medicare	Jerit & Barabas	2000	0.223	660	0.254	346	-0.032	0.260
SOTU proposal - extend Medicare to provide Rx benefits	Jerit & Barabas	2000	0.468	660	0.624	346	0.156	0.000
SOTU proposal - expand CHIP to kids' parents	Jerit & Barabas	2000	0.336	660	0.442	346	0.106	0.001

SOTU proposal - tax credit for elderly health care	Jerit & Barabas	2000	0.241	660	0.402	346	0.161	0.000
Clinton on guns - make agreement with NRA	Jerit & Barabas	2000	0.450	662	0.431	350	-0.019	0.569
Clinton on guns - make agreement re: safety locks	Jerit & Barabas	2000	0.647	662	0.677	350	0.031	0.329
Clinton on guns - ask Congress to pass background checks	Jerit & Barabas	2000	0.674	662	0.726	350	0.052	0.088
Clinton on guns - discontinue gun buyback	Jerit & Barabas	2000	0.335	662	0.403	350	0.068	0.033
GWB on Social Security - reduce benefits	Jerit & Barabas	2000	0.405	802	0.347	398	-0.059	0.050
GWB on Social Security - allow investment of SS payroll taxes	Jerit & Barabas	2000	0.439	802	0.382	398	0.057	0.060
GWB on Social Security - increase SS taxes	Jerit & Barabas	2000	0.363	802	0.281	398	0.081	0.005
Part of world with highest HIV/AIDS	Jerit & Barabas	2000	0.790	689	0.769	312	-0.020	0.470
Teenagers die of AIDS	Jerit & Barabas	2000	0.412	689	0.449	312	0.037	0.279
Which candidate allows investment of SS in stocks/bonds	Jerit & Barabas	2000	0.320	1418	0.286	756	0.034	0.098
Which candidate's wife advocates for mental illness	Jerit & Barabas	2000	0.416	1418	0.470	756	0.053	0.017
Which candidate proposes missile defense system	Jerit & Barabas	2000	0.206	1418	0.153	756	0.052	0.003
Which candidate proposes using surplus Medicaid \$	Jerit & Barabas	2000	0.257	1418	0.335	756	0.078	0.000
Next Democratic presidential nominee	Jerit & Barabas	2000	0.744	796	0.784	388	0.040	0.134
Next Republican presidential nominee	Jerit & Barabas	2000	0.770	796	0.786	388	-0.016	0.536
Office recognition - Tommy Thompson	Jerit & Barabas	2001	0.253	684	0.223	337	0.030	0.287
Office recognition - John Ashcroft	Jerit & Barabas	2001	0.542	684	0.493	337	0.050	0.134
Issue behind Kyoto Protocol	Jerit & Barabas	2001	0.186	1350	0.151	651	0.035	0.051
Senate approve tax cut	Jerit & Barabas	2001	0.536	388	0.433	210	-0.103	0.016
Senate pass McCain-Feingold	Jerit & Barabas	2001	0.240	388	0.219	210	-0.021	0.568

Limits on carbon emissions	Jerit & Barabas	2001	0.302	388	0.319	210	-0.018	0.658
Regulation of arsenic in water	Jerit & Barabas	2001	0.200	135	0.302	63	-0.102	0.115
Bush support of Kyoto Protocol	Jerit & Barabas	2001	0.222	392	0.222	212	0.000	0.995
Spending on education	Jerit & Barabas	2001	0.594	392	0.552	212	-0.043	0.313
Regulations on lead	Jerit & Barabas	2001	0.196	392	0.175	212	-0.022	0.512
HIV infection rates	Jerit & Barabas	2002	0.405	867	0.463	341	0.058	0.064
HIV/AIDS prevention	Jerit & Barabas	2002	0.406	867	0.554	341	0.148	0.000
Spread of AIDS	Jerit & Barabas	2002	0.423	867	0.490	341	0.066	0.036
Office recognition - VP	Jerit & Barabas	2002	0.665	791	0.618	309	0.047	0.152
Office recognition - Secretary of State - 2002	Jerit & Barabas	2002	0.531	657	0.504	345	0.027	0.419
Office recognition - Secretary of Defense	Jerit & Barabas	2002	0.332	675	0.308	315	0.024	0.454
Iran WMD	Jerit & Barabas	2002	0.436	702	0.431	299	0.004	0.896
Iraq WMD	Jerit & Barabas	2002	0.402	702	0.415	299	-0.013	0.701
North Korea WMD	Jerit & Barabas	2002	0.509	702	0.488	299	0.020	0.558
Approval for military force in Iraq	Jerit & Barabas	2003	0.634	869	0.687	335	0.053	0.087
Iraq allow UN inspectors	Jerit & Barabas	2003	0.634	869	0.603	335	0.031	0.318
Public evidence about Iraq involvement in 9/11	Jerit & Barabas	2003	0.632	869	0.597	335	0.035	0.265
Saddam Hussein threaten Israel	Jerit & Barabas	2003	0.451	869	0.487	335	-0.035	0.268
Iraq nuclear weapons	Jerit & Barabas	2003	0.651	869	0.576	335	0.075	0.015
Iraq chemical/biological weapons	Jerit & Barabas	2003	0.894	869	0.854	335	0.040	0.051
North Korea nuclear weapons - 2003	Jerit & Barabas	2003	0.456	869	0.454	335	-0.002	0.951
North Korea chemical/biological weapons	Jerit & Barabas	2003	0.270	869	0.284	335	0.013	0.646
Patriot Act - hold terrorism suspects indefinitely	Jerit & Barabas	2004	0.223	363	0.303	142	-0.080	0.061
Medicare law - prescription drug benefit	Jerit & Barabas	2004	0.370	805	0.348	396	-0.022	0.462
Medicare law - prescription drug discount card	Jerit & Barabas	2004	0.278	805	0.280	396	0.002	0.941
Medicare law - drug subsidy	Jerit & Barabas	2004	0.158	805	0.154	396	-0.004	0.867
Medicare law - new cost estimates	Jerit & Barabas	2004	0.422	805	0.447	396	0.025	0.418

Discount card program - when available	Jerit & Barabas	2004	0.592	245	0.650	143	0.059	0.254
Discount card program - financial benefits for poor people	Jerit & Barabas	2004	0.322	245	0.364	143	0.041	0.408
Patriot Act - non-citizens before military tribunal	Jerit & Barabas	2004	0.355	363	0.275	142	0.081	0.083
Patriot Act - enter churches or attend rallies	Jerit & Barabas	2004	0.534	363	0.570	142	-0.036	0.465
Iraq WMD - 2004	Jerit & Barabas	2004	0.219	311	0.611	203	0.392	0.000
Iraq connected to 9/11	Jerit & Barabas	2004	0.421	311	0.606	203	0.185	0.000
Saddam Hussein a threat to Middle East	Jerit & Barabas	2004	0.884	311	0.724	203	0.160	0.000
Saddam Hussein a threat to United States	Jerit & Barabas	2004	0.756	311	0.453	203	0.302	0.000
Iran nuclear weapons	Jerit & Barabas	2005	0.234	355	0.304	158	-0.070	0.093
Talks with North Korea	Jerit & Barabas	2005	0.639	1361	0.578	645	0.060	0.009
North Korea nuclear weapons - 2005	Jerit & Barabas	2005	0.750	344	0.747	162	0.003	0.940
Control of House - 2006	Jerit & Barabas	2006	0.679	1348	0.701	665	-0.022	0.318
Office recognition - Secretary of State - 2006	Jerit & Barabas	2006	0.473	1348	0.469	665	0.004	0.862
Deadline for Medicare drug plan	Jerit & Barabas	2006	0.373	975	0.412	471	-0.039	0.158
Financial penalty for no Rx coverage	Jerit & Barabas	2006	0.426	975	0.382	471	0.043	0.115
Blacks vs. whites better off - health insurance	Jerit & Barabas	2006	0.318	975	0.516	471	0.198	0.000
Blacks vs. whites better off - infant mortality	Jerit & Barabas	2006	0.290	975	0.418	471	0.128	0.000
Blacks vs. whites better off - life expectancy	Jerit & Barabas	2006	0.318	975	0.439	471	0.122	0.000
Latinos vs. whites better off - health insurance	Jerit & Barabas	2006	0.370	975	0.476	471	0.105	0.000
Latinos vs. whites better off - infant mortality	Jerit & Barabas	2006	0.369	975	0.359	471	0.010	0.700
Latinos vs. whites better off - life expectancy	Jerit & Barabas	2006	0.086	975	0.076	471	0.010	0.530

Blacks vs. whites - medical attention for heart disease	Jerit & Barabas	2006	0.349	975	0.499	471	0.150	0.000
Blacks vs. whites - medical attention for HIV/AIDS	Jerit & Barabas	2006	0.403	975	0.527	471	0.123	0.000
Office recognition - CT Dem Senator who lost primary	Jerit & Barabas	2006	0.449	510	0.448	221	0.001	0.979
Medicare drug plan - cost program for poor seniors	Jerit & Barabas	2006	0.352	1683	0.331	834	-0.021	0.301
Medicare drug plan - premium penalty	Jerit & Barabas	2006	0.570	1683	0.588	834	-0.018	0.397
Medicare drug plan - wait to switch	Jerit & Barabas	2006	0.457	403	0.432	220	0.025	0.553
Medicare drug plan - coverage gap	Jerit & Barabas	2006	0.355	403	0.327	220	0.028	0.489
Debt	Prior et al.	2004	0.239	92	0.216	148	-0.023	0.679
Estate tax	Prior et al.	2004	0.348	92	0.385	148	0.037	0.561
Poverty	Prior et al.	2004	0.413	92	0.280	150	0.133	0.033
Unemployment	Prior et al.	2004	0.432	88	0.233	146	0.199	0.001
Uninsured	Prior et al.	2004	0.315	92	0.277	148	0.038	0.527
Public debt	Prior et al.	2008	0.189	148	0.210	157	-0.021	0.647
Estate tax	Prior et al.	2008	0.453	181	0.453	214	0.000	0.996
Gas price	Prior et al.	2008	0.370	181	0.308	214	-0.062	0.196
Unemployment	Prior et al.	2008	0.403	181	0.293	215	0.110	0.021
Uninsured	Prior et al.	2008	0.475	181	0.270	215	0.205	0.000

A 2 Knowledge Question Wordings and Correct Answers

Correct answers are in bold unless otherwise noted.

[Bullock et al. \(2015\)](#)¹⁴

2008 CCES Study

- **Iraq casualties, 2007 vs. 2008**

Was the number of U.S. soldiers killed in Iraq in the first half of 2008 lower, about the same, or higher than the number who were killed in the second half of 2007?

Response options: lower (0), about the same (.5), higher (1)

- **Bush inflation change**

Compared to January 2001, when President Bush first took office, has the level of inflation in the country increased, stayed the same, or decreased?

Response options: increased, stayed about the same, decreased

- **Bush unemployment change**

Compared to January 2001, when President Bush first took office, has the level of unemployment in the country increased, stayed the same, or decreased?

Response options: increased, stayed about the same, decreased

- **Estimated Bush approval**

About what percentage of *Americans* approve of the way that George W. Bush is handling his job as President?

Response options: 20%, 30%, 40%, 60%, 60%

- **Iraq total casualties**

About how many U.S. soldiers have been killed in Iraq since the invasion in March 2003?

Response options: 4,000, 8,000, 12,000, 16,000, 20,000

- **Estimated Bush approval among Republicans**

About what percentage of *Republicans* approve of the way George W. Bush is handling his job as president?

Response options: 40%, 50%, 60%, 70%, 80%

- **Obama age**

How old is Barack Obama?

Response options: 37, 42, 47, 52

¹⁴The correct answers from [Bullock et al. \(2015\)](#), [Jerit and Barabas \(2012\)](#), and [Prior, Sood and Khanna \(2015\)](#) provided by the authors.

- **McCain age**
How old is John McCain?
Response options: 62, 67, 72, 77
- **Afghanistan casualties, 2007 vs. 2008**
Was the number of U.S. soldiers killed in Afghanistan in the first half of 2008 lower, about the same, or higher than the number who were killed in the second half of 2007?
*Response options: lower, **about the same**, higher*
- **Bush deficit change**
Compared to January 2001, when President Bush first took office, has the federal budget deficit in the country increased, stayed the same, or decreased?
*Response options: **increased**, stayed about the same, decreased*

2012 MTurk Study

- **Defense spending**
For every dollar the federal government spent in fiscal year 2011, about how much went to the Department of Defense (US Military)?
Range of response line: 3 to 27 cents
*Correct response: **19.4 cents***
- **Iraq deaths**
About how many U.S. soldiers were killed in Iraq between the invasion in 2003 and the withdrawal of troops in December 2011? *Range of response line: 1,000 to 7,000*
*Correct response: **4,486***
- **Iraq deaths: percent black**
Approximately 12 to 13% of the US population is Black. What percentage of US Soldiers killed in Iraq since the invasion in 2003 are Black?
Range of response line: 9% to 21%
*Correct response: **9.90%***
- **Bush II unemployment**
From January 2001, when President Bush first took office, to January 2009, when President Bush left office, how had the unemployment rate in the country changed?
Range of response line: -2% (unemployment decreased) to 4% (unemployment increased)
*Correct response: **increased by 3.6%***
- **Obama vote in 2008**
In the 2008 Presidential Election, Barack Obama defeated his Republican challenger John McCain. In the nation as a whole, of all the votes cast for Obama and McCain, what percentage went to Obama?
Range of response line: 50% to 62%
*Correct response: **53.70%***

- **Global warming**

According to NASA, by how much did annual average global temperatures, in degrees Fahrenheit, differ in 2010 from the average annual global temperature between 1951 and 1980? *Range of response line: -1 (temperatures cooler) to 2 (temperatures warmer)*
Correct response: increased by 1.1 degrees

- **Medicaid spending**

Medicaid is a jointly funded, Federal-State health insurance program for low-income and needy people. For every dollar the federal government spent in fiscal year 2011, about how much went to Medicaid?

Range of response line: 3 to 27 cents
Correct response: 7.5 cents

- **Debt service spending**

The Treasury Department finances U.S. Government debt by selling bonds and other financial products. For every dollar the federal government spent in fiscal year 2011, about how much went to pay interest on those Treasury securities?

Range of response line: 3 to 27 cents
Correct response: 6.2 cents

- **Obama unemployment**

From January 2009, when President Obama first took office, to February 2012, how had the unemployment rate in the country changed?

Range of response line: -2% (unemployment decreased) to 4% (unemployment increased)
Correct response: increased by 0.5%

- **TARP: percent paid back**

The Treasury Department initiated TARP (the first bailout) during the financial crisis of 2008. TARP involved loans to banks, insurance companies, and auto companies. Of the \$414 billion spent, what percentage had been repaid, as of March 15, 2012? *Range of response line: 1 (less repaid) to 100 (more repaid)*

Correct response: 69.56%

- **Foreign born population**

According to the Census Bureau, in 2010 what percentage of the total population of the United States was born outside of the United States (foreign-born)?

Range of response line: 1 to 100%
Correct response: 12.92%

Prior, Sood and Khanna (2015)

2004 Study

- **Unemployment**

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics counts a person as unemployed if they are not employed at any job and are looking for work. By this definition, what percentage of Americans was unemployed in August of 2004? If you do not know the answer, please give us your best guess.

*Response options: around 11%, around 9%, around 7%, **around 5%**, around 3%*

- **Estate tax**

There is a federal estate tax—that is, a tax on the money people leave to others when they die. What percentage of Americans leaves enough money to others for the federal estate tax to kick in? If you do not know the answer, please give us your best guess.

*Response options: about 95% of all Americans, about 70% of all Americans, about 50% of all Americans, about 25% of all Americans, **less than 5% of Americans***

- **Debt**

The outstanding public debt of the United States is the total amount of money owed by the federal government. Every year the government runs a deficit, the size of the public debt grows. Every year the government runs a surplus, the size of the public debt shrinks. In January of 2001, when President Bush took office, the outstanding public debt of the United States was approximately 5.7 trillion dollars. Which of the following responses is closest to the outstanding public debt today? If you do not know the answer, please give us your best guess.

*Response options: less than 3.5 trillion dollars, 4.5 trillion dollars, 5.5 trillion dollars, 6.5 trillion dollars, **7.5 trillion dollars**, 8.5 trillion dollars, more than 9.5 trillion dollars*

- **Uninsured**

In August 2004, the United States Census Bureau reported an estimate of the number of Americans without health insurance. The Census Bureau classified people as uninsured if they were not covered by any type of health insurance at any time in 2003. By this definition, what percentage of Americans did not have health insurance in 2003? If you do not know the answer, please give us your best guess.

Response range: 0-100%

*Correct response: **12.6-18.6%***

- **Poverty**

In August 2004, the Census Bureau reported how many Americans live in poverty. The poverty threshold depends on the size of the household. For example, a person under age 65 is considered to live in poverty if his or her 2003 income was below \$9,573 and a family of four is considered to live in poverty if its 2003 income was below \$18,810. By this definition, what percentage of Americans lived in poverty in 2003? If you do not know the answer, please give us your best guess.

Response range: 0-100%

*Correct response: **9.5-15.5%***

2008 Study

- **Unemployment**

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics counts a person as unemployed if the person is not employed at any job and is looking for work. By this definition, 4.7 percent of Americans were unemployed in 2001 [at the beginning of President Bush's first term in office]. What percentage of Americans are currently unemployed?

Response range: 0-100%

Correct response: 4.2-5.4%

- **Estate tax**

There is a federal estate tax—that is, a tax on the money people leave to others when they die. [President Bush has repeatedly proposed to eliminate the estate tax.] What percentage of Americans leave enough money to others for the federal estate tax to kick in?

Response options: less than 5% of all Americans, about 25% of all Americans, about 50% of all Americans, about 75% of all Americans, about 95% of all Americans

- **Debt**

The outstanding public debt of the United States is the total amount of money owed by the federal government. Every year the government runs a deficit, the size of the public debt grows. Every year the government runs a surplus, the size of the public debt shrinks. [In January of 2001, when President Bush took office, the outstanding public debt of the United States was approximately 5.7 trillion dollars.] Which of the following responses is closest to the outstanding public debt today?

Response options: less than 5.5 trillion dollars, 6.5 trillion dollars, 7.5 trillion dollars, 8.5 trillion dollars, 9.5 trillion dollars, 10.5 trillion dollars, more than 11.5 trillion dollars

- **Uninsured**

Each year, the United States Census Bureau reports an estimate of the number of Americans without health insurance. The Census Bureau classifies people as uninsured if they were not covered by any type of health insurance at any time during the year. By this definition, 14.1 percent of Americans did not have health insurance in 2001[, the year President Bush took office]. According to the latest estimate (for 2006), what percentage of Americans do not have health insurance?

Response range: 0-100%

Correct response: 12.6-19.0%

- **Gas price**

According to the American Automobile Association (AAA), the national average price for a gallon of regular gasoline was \$1.49 [at the beginning of George W. Bush's presidency] in January 2001. What is the current national average price for a gallon of regular gasoline?

Response range: open-ended; format given \$xx.xx
Correct response: 3.22-3.32

Jerit and Barabas (2012)

Jerit and Barabas (2012) sourced questions from multiple surveys in their study. We present them in chronological order below. Correct responses provided by the authors unless otherwise noted.

1993

- **Clinton health plan - all Americans**

Do you happen to know, does the (President Bill) Clinton health care reform plan guarantee health insurance coverage to all Americans, or doesn't the plan go that far?

Response options: *Yes, guarantees; no; does not guarantee*

- **Clinton health plan - unemployed workers**

Do you happen to know, does the (President Bill) Clinton health care reform plan guarantee health insurance coverage to all Americans, or doesn't the plan go that far?

Response options: *Yes, guarantees; no; does not guarantee*

1997

- [Common introduction] As I read each of the following, please tell me to the best of your knowledge if Congress considered proposals to...

- **Congress considered - raise Medicare eligibility**

...Gradually raise the age at which someone is eligible for Medicare from 65 to 67...or not?

Response options: *Yes; no*

- **Congress considered - rich seniors pay higher Medicare premiums**

...Require upper income seniors to pay higher Medicare premiums...or not?

Response options: *Yes; no*

- **Congress considered - no Medicare for rich seniors**

...No longer provide Medicare to upper income seniors who can afford other health insurance...or not?

Response options: *Yes; no*

- **Congress considered - expand choice under Medicare**

...Give seniors wider choice of health plans under Medicare...or not?

Response options: *Yes; no*

- **Congress considered - cut Medicare payments**
 ...Cut Medicare payments to doctors, hospitals, and HMOs...or not?
Response options: Yes; no

- [Common introduction] (I would like to ask you a few questions about some things that have been in the news recently. Not everyone will have heard about them.)... In his (State of the Union) speech (January, 1997), did (Bill) Clinton propose expanding health care coverage to...
 - **Clinton SOTU health mention - children**
 ...Children?
Response options: Yes; no

 - **Clinton SOTU health mention - workers**
 ...Working people who are currently uninsured?
Response options: Yes; no

 - **Clinton SOTU health mention - low-income people**
 ...All low-income people?
Response options: Yes; no

 - **Clinton SOTU health mention - long-term care**
 ...People who need long term care?
Response options: Yes; no

- [Common introduction] (I would like to ask you a few questions about some things that have been in the news recently. Not everyone will have heard of them.) As you may know, the budget agreement by President Bill Clinton and members of Congress to balance the budget by the year 2002 included many specific measures having to do with Medicare. As far as you know, does the plan call for...
 - **Budget agreement - increase senior premiums**
 ...Increasing premiums for all elderly Americans, or not?
Response options: Yes, part of plan; no, not part of plan

 - **Budget agreement - prescription drugs**
 ...Adding a new prescription drug benefit, or not?
Response options: Yes, part of plan; no, not part of plan

 - **Budget agreement - raising payroll tax**
 ...Raising the payroll tax that pays for part of Medicare?
Response options: Yes, part of plan; no, not part of plan

- **Control of House - 1997**

Do you happen to know which political party has a majority in the U.S. House of Representatives?

*Response options: **Republicans**; Democrats*

- **Gingrich ethics fine**

Do you happen to know who lent New Gingrich the money he needed to pay off his ethics fine?

Response options: open-ended

*Correct answer: **Bob Dole***

- [Common introduction] I'm going to read a list of names of people who have been in the news. Not everyone will have heard of them. For each one, please tell me if you happen to know who that person is.

- **Trent Lott recognition**

Trent Lott (If yes, ask:) Who is Trent Lott?

Response options: Open-ended

*Correct response: **coded by Pew [Senate Majority Leader]***

- **Louis Freeh recognition**

Louis Freeh (If yes, ask:) Who is Louis Freeh?

Response options: Open-ended

*Correct response: **coded by Pew [FBI Director appointed by Clinton]***

- **John Huang recognition**

John Huang (If yes, ask:) Who is John Huang?

Response options: Open-ended

*Correct response: **coded by Pew [Scandal-tainted fundraiser for Clinton]***

- **Kenneth Starr recognition**

Kenneth Starr (If yes, ask:) Who is Kenneth Starr?

Response options: Open-ended

*Correct response: **coded by Pew [Special Prosecutor]***

- **Ralph Reed recognition**

Ralph Reed (If yes, ask:) Who is Ralph Reed?

Response options: Open-ended

*Correct response: **coded by Pew [Christian Coalition Director]***

– **Wester Hubbell**

Wester Hubbell (If yes, ask:) Who is Wester Hubbell?

Response options: Open-ended

Correct response: coded by Pew [Clinton Justice Department Official; involved in Whitewater scandal]

1998

- [Common introduction] Now I'm going to read you some things that might be done to help keep the Social Security System financially sound. As I read each one, tell me if you think the commission on Social Security which is made up of members of Congress and the private sector has recommended that this be done, or has not made this recommendation. (First), as far as you know, has the commission recommended...

– **Commission rec - increasing payroll taxes**

...Increasing Social Security payroll taxes on the wages of employed people under 65?

Response options: Yes; no

– **Commission rec - increasing retirement age**

...Raising the retirement age at which someone becomes eligible for Social Security benefits?

Response options: Yes; no

– **Commission rec - investing Social Security \$ in stock market**

...Investing Social Security funds in the stock market?

Response options: Yes; no

– **Commission rec - moving Social Security \$ to retirement accounts**

...Shifting some money from the Social Security trust fund into individual retirement accounts?

Response options: Yes; no

- **Law to protect consumers in HMOs**

There have been stories in the news lately about whether Congress should pass laws to make sure people get the care they need from HMOs and other managed care plans. From what you've seen or heard, has Congress passed a law to protect the rights of consumers in managed care plans?

Response options: Yes, passed a law to protect consumer rights; no, hasn't passed a law to protect consumer rights

- **Right to sue HMO**

From what you've heard or read, do people in this country have the right to sue an HMO or managed care plan if the plan inappropriately denied services or treatments, or not?

Response options: Yes, have the right to sue; no, do not

1999

- **Existence of Medicare commission**

Now I have a few questions about Medicare...National bipartisan commissions are sometimes created to study national problems and make recommendations to the President and Congress. As far as you know, is there such a commission now studying the future of Medicare, or not?

Response options: Yes, there is a commission studying Medicare; no, there is not a commission studying Medicare; don't know if there is a commission

- [Common introduction] In his recent State of the Union address, President Clinton made some proposals that would affect health care for seniors. Based on what you've seen or heard in the news lately, tell me whether or not the President proposed doing each of the following: (First), as far as you know, did he propose...

- **SOTU proposal - health care tax credits for elderly and disabled**

...Offering tax credits to help people pay for long-term health care for the elderly and disabled?

Response options: Yes; no

- **SOTU proposal - rich seniors pay more for Medicare**

...Asking seniors with higher incomes to pay more for Medicare?

Response options: Yes; no

- **SOTU proposal - use budget surplus for Medicare**

...Using part of the federal budget surplus to help make the Medicare program financially sound?

Response options: Yes; no

- **SOTU proposal - offer option to buy Medicaid before 65**

...Offering early retirees the option of buying insurance under Medicare before they turn 65?

Response options: Yes; no

- **SOTU proposal - use budget surplus for Social Security**
 ...Using a part of the federal budget surplus to help make the Social Security program financially sound?
Response options: Yes; no

- **SOTU proposal - invest Social Security funds in stock market**
 ...Taking part of the Social Security funds and having an independent board invest them in the stock market?
Response options: Yes; no

- **SOTU proposal - individual retirement savings accounts**
 ...Helping people set up individual savings accounts that can be used for retirement?
Response options: Yes; no

- **SOTU proposal - raising age for Social Security to 70**
 ...Raising the age of eligibility for Social Security to 70 years?
Response options: Yes; no

- [Common introduction] Thinking again about the government panel studying marijuana...From what you've seen or heard in the news, tell me whether the panel did or did NOT reach the following conclusions. (First), did the panel conclude that...
 - **Pot panel rec - help cancer and AIDS pain**
 ...Marijuana can help cancer and AIDS patients manage pain and nausea?
Response options: Yes, did; no, did not

 - **Pot panel rec - no evidence of gateway drug**
 ...There is no evidence that marijuana leads to the use of harder drugs like cocaine?
Response options: Yes, did; no, did not

 - **Pot panel rec - pot smoke more toxic than tobacco smoke**
 ...Marijuana smoke is more toxic than tobacco smoke?
Response options: Yes, did; no, did not

- [Common introduction] Recently the Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences delivered a report about medical errors in hospitals. [And] to the best of your knowledge, did this report call for each of the following actions or not? (First,) did the report call for...
 - **Medical error report - new government agency**
A new government agency to protect patients against medical errors in hospitals?
Response options: Yes; no

- **Medical error report - tougher malpractice laws**
 ...Tougher malpractice laws against doctors and hospitals who commit medical errors?
Response options: Yes; no
- [Common introduction] Recently the Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences delivered a report about medical errors in hospitals. [And] to the best of your knowledge, did this report call for each of the following actions or not? (First,) did the report call for...
 - **Medical error report - new government agency**
 ...A new government agency to protect patients against medical errors in hospitals?
Response options: Yes; no
 - **Medical error report - tougher malpractice laws**
 ...Tougher malpractice laws against doctors and hospitals who commit medical errors?
Response options: Yes; no
- [Common introduction] The U.S. Senate recently passed a bill containing new laws about guns. The U.S. House of Representatives is now considering whether to pass this bill and send it to the President. As I read you a list of some different proposals, please tell me whether or not you think each was part of the bill passed by the Senate. (First), as far as you know, was this proposal part of the bill passed by the Senate...
 - **Senate gun bill - background checks at gun shows**
 ...Requiring background checks on people who buy firearms at gun shows?
Response options: Yes, did; no, did not
 - **Senate gun bill - prohibits concealed carry**
 ...Prohibiting states from allowing citizens to carry concealed weapons?
Response options: Yes, did; no, did not
 - **Senate gun bill - raising gun owner age to 21**
 ...Raising the minimum age for buying a gun to 21?
Response options: Yes, did; no, did not
 - **Senate gun bill - manufacture safety locks**
 ...Requiring gun manufacturers to include safety locks on all guns they sell?
Response options: Yes, did; no, did not
 - **Senate gun bill - using gun illegal under 18**
 ...Making it illegal for children under 18 to fire or use a gun?
Response options: Yes, did; no, did not

- **Country stealing nuclear tech**

Do you happen to know which country was recently accused of stealing nuclear technology from the United States?

Response options: Open-ended

*Correct response: **China***

- **U.S. troops in Bosnia**

As far as you know, does the United States currently have troops stationed in Bosnia, or not?

*Response options: **Yes, in Bosnia**; no, not in Bosnia*

- **U.S. troops in Haiti**

As far as you know, does the United States currently have troops stationed in Haiti, or not?

*Response options: **Yes, in Haiti**; no, not in Haiti*

2000

- [Common introduction] In his recent State of the Union address, President Clinton made some proposals affecting health care. From what you've seen or heard in the news, please tell me whether or not the president proposed doing each of the following. (First), did he propose...

- **SOTU proposal - offer option to buy Medicare before 65**

Extending Medicare, the federal program that provides health insurance to the elderly and some disabled people, by allowing individuals between the ages of 55 to 65 to buy into it?

*Response options: **Yes, proposed**; no, not proposed*

- **SOTU proposal - rich seniors pay more for Medicare**

...Asking seniors with higher incomes to pay more for Medicare?

*Response options: **Yes, proposed**; no, not proposed*

- **SOTU proposal - extend Medicare to provide Rx benefits**

...Extending Medicare to provide prescription drug benefits?

*Response options: **Yes, proposed**; no, not proposed*

- **SOTU proposal - expand CHIP to kids' parents**

...Expanding current government programs that provide health coverage for uninsured children to cover their parents as well?

*Response options: **Yes, proposed**; no, not proposed*

- **SOTU proposal - tax credit for elderly health care**
 ...Offering a \$3,000 tax credit to help people pay for long-term health care for the elderly??
Response options: Yes, proposed; no, not proposed
- [Common introduction] Thinking about President Clinton and gun control...From what you've seen or heard in the news, which of the following things, if any, did President Clinton do over the past month...
 - **Clinton on guns - make agreement with NRA**
 ...Make an agreement about gun control policies with the NRA – that is, the National Rifle Association?
Response options: Yes, he did; no, he did not
 - **Clinton on guns - make agreement re: safety locks**
 ...Make an agreement with a large gun manufacturer to provide safety locks on handguns within the year?
Response options: Yes, he did; no, he did not
 - **Clinton on guns - ask Congress to pass background checks**
 ...Call on Congress to pass legislation requiring background checks for guns sold at gun shows?
Response options: Yes, he did; no, he did not
 - **Clinton on guns - discontinue gun buyback**
 ...Decide to discontinue his gun buyback program due to lower crime rates?
Response options: Yes, he did; no, he did not
- [Common introduction] From what you've seen or heard in the news in the last month regarding presidential candidate George W. Bush's proposals to make the Social Security program more financially sound, please tell me whether or not Bush proposed doing each of the following. Did he propose...
 - **GWB on Social Security - reduce benefits**
 ...Reducing Social Security benefits, or not?
Response options: Yes, proposed; no, not proposed
 - **GWB on Social Security - allow investment of SS payroll taxes**
 ...Allowing workers to invest some of their Social Security payroll taxes in the stock market, or not?
Response options: Yes, proposed; no, not proposed

– **GWB on Social Security - increase SS taxes**

...Increasing Social Security taxes, or not?

Response options: Yes, proposed; no, not proposed

• **Part of world with highest HIV/AIDS**

Now I have some questions about the problem of AIDS and HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. Which ONE of the following parts of the world today do you think has the largest number of people with HIV and AIDS? Is it...Africa, Latin America, or the U.S.?

Response options: Africa; Latin America; U.S.; Eastern Europe

• **Teenagers die of AIDS**

In the African countries hit hardest by HIV, about how many teenagers do health officials think will eventually die of AIDS...one-quarter, one-third, or one-half?

Response options: One-quarter; one-third; one-half

• **Which candidate allows investment of SS in stocks/bonds**

Do you happen to know which candidate has proposed allowing workers to invest some of their Social Security contributions in stocks and bonds?

Response options: Open-ended

Correct response: George W. Bush

• **Which candidate's wife advocates for mental illness**

Do you happen to know which candidate's wife has spoken out about the need to help Americans with mental illnesses?

Response options: Open-ended

Correct response: Al Gore

• **Which candidate proposes missile defense system**

Do you happen to know which candidate has proposed a missile defense system and to reduce the number of U.S. nuclear warheads, even if Russia refuses to do the same?

Response options: Open-ended

Correct response: George W. Bush

• **Which candidate proposes using surplus Medicaid \$**

Do you happen to know which candidate has proposed using surplus Medicare funds to protect the program's future?

Response options: Open-ended

Correct response: Al Gore

• **Next Democratic presidential nominee**

Do you happen to know who will probably be the (2000) Democratic presidential nominee?

Response options: Open-ended

Correct response: Al Gore

- **Next Republican presidential nominee**

Do you happen to know who will probably be the (2000) Republican presidential nominee?

Response options: Open-ended

*Correct response: **George W. Bush***

2001

- **Office recognition - Tommy Thompson**

From what you have seen or heard in the news, which Cabinet position did President (George W.) Bush nominate former Wisconsin Governor Tommy Thompson to fill? Was it Attorney General, Secretary of Health and Human Services, or Secretary of the Interior?

*Response options: Attorney General; Secretary of Health and Human Services; **Secretary of the Interior***

- **Office recognition - John Ashcroft**

From what you have seen or heard in the news, which Cabinet position did President (George W.) Bush nominate former Missouri Senator John Ashcroft to fill? Was it Attorney General, Secretary of Health and Human Services, or Secretary of the Interior?

*Response options: **Attorney General**; Secretary of Health and Human Services; Secretary of the Interior*

- **Issue behind Kyoto Protocol**

Recently, President (George W.) Bush withdrew U.S. (United States) support for an international treaty known as the Kyoto Protocol. What issue does this agreement address?

Response options: Open-ended

*Correct response: **Environment/global warming/greenhouse gas emissions/climate change/pollution/clean air/air quality/ozone***

- **Senate approve tax cut**

To the best of your knowledge, did the Senate approve George W. Bush's 1.6 trillion dollar tax cut proposal, did they vote for a larger tax cut or did they vote for a smaller tax cut?

*Response options: Approved Bush's 1.6 trillion dollar proposal; voted for a larger tax cut; **voted for a smaller tax cut***

- **Senate pass McCain-Feingold**

Do you happen to know whether the Senate passed the (John) McCain-(Russ) Feingold campaign finance reform bill, or did they vote it down?

*Response options: **Passed the bill**; voted it down*

- **Limits on carbon emissions**

Do you happen to know whether George W. Bush has decided to place limits on carbon dioxide emissions from power plants, or has he decided not to do this?

*Response options: Has decided to place limits on emissions; **has decided not to do this***

- **Regulation of arsenic in water**

Do you happen to know whether George W. Bush has decided to tighten regulations on the amount of arsenic that can be allowed in drinking water, or has he decided to make these regulations less stringent?

*Response options: Has decided to tighten regulations; **has decided to make regulations less stringent**; has left regulations unchanged (vol.)*

- **Bush support of Kyoto Protocol**

Do you know whether George W. Bush has decided that the U.S. (United States) will continue to support the global warming agreement, enacted in Kyoto, Japan in 1997, or has he decided to withdraw US support from that agreement?

*Response options: Decided to continue to support the agreement; **decided to withdraw U.S. support***

- **Spending on education**

In his budget proposal, do you happen to know whether George W. Bush proposed increasing spending on education, decreasing spending on education, or keeping spending on education about the same?

*Response options: **Proposed increasing spending**; proposed decreasing spending; proposed keeping spending the same*

- **Regulations on lead**

Do you happen to know whether George W. Bush has decided to impose stricter regulations on manufacturers who release lead into the environment, or has he decided to make these regulations less stringent?

*Response options: **Decided to impose stricter regulations**; decided to make regulations less stringent; left regulations unchanged (vol)*

- **HIV infection rates**

Thinking about what you have heard or seen in the news, which of the following statements best summarizes the latest reports on global HIV/AIDS from the (2002) International AIDS conference in Barcelona (Spain)?...HIV infection rates are declining worldwide. The projected number of worldwide AIDS cases in the next 20 years will be higher than researchers initially thought. While HIV infection rates are rising, new treatments are widely available around the world and allowing many more people worldwide to live with the disease.

*Response options: HIV infection rates are declining worldwide; **the projected number of worldwide AIDS cases in the next 20 years will be higher than researchers initially thought**; while HIV infection rates are rising, new treatments are widely available around the world and allowing many more people worldwide to live with the disease*

- **HIV/AIDS prevention**

Thinking about what you have heard or seen in the news, which of the following statements comes closest to the findings about global HIV/AIDS prevention presented at the (2002) International AIDS conference in Barcelona (Spain)?

*Response options: **Prevention programs could dramatically reduce the spread of HIV if given more funding**; prevention programs are not effective and more funding for prevention will not have a big impact*

- **Spread of AIDS**

To the best of your knowledge, which of the following statements about global HIV/AIDS is more accurate?

*Response options: **The majority of AIDS cases worldwide are among women and youth who get AIDS through heterosexual contact**; majority of AIDS cases worldwide are among gay men and intravenous drug users who get AIDS through sharing contaminated needles*

- **Office recognition - VP**

Can you tell me the name of the current vice president of the United States?

Response options: Open-ended

*Correct answer: **Dick Cheney***

- **Office recognition - Secretary of State - 2002**

Can you tell me the name of the current Secretary of State?

Response options: Open-ended

*Correct answer: **Colin Powell***

- **Office recognition - Secretary of Defense**

Can you tell me the name of the current Secretary of Defense?

Response options: Open-ended

*Correct answer: **Donald Rumsfeld***

- **Iran WMD**

Do you think Iran currently has weapons of mass destruction, is trying to develop these weapons but does not currently have them, or is not trying to develop weapons of mass destruction?

*Response options: **Currently has weapons**; is trying to develop weapons; **is not trying to develop weapons***

- **Iraq WMD**

Do you think Iraq currently has weapons of mass destruction, is trying to develop these weapons but does not currently have them, or is not trying to develop weapons of mass destruction?

*Response options: **Currently has weapons**; is trying to develop weapons; is not trying to develop weapons*

- **Iraq WMD**

Do you think Iraq currently has weapons of mass destruction, is trying to develop these weapons but does not currently have them, or is not trying to develop weapons of mass destruction?

*Response options: **Currently has weapons**; **is trying to develop weapons**; is not trying to develop weapons*

- **North Korea WMD**

Do you think North Korea currently has weapons of mass destruction, is trying to develop these weapons but does not currently have them, or is not trying to develop weapons of mass destruction?

*Response options: **Currently has weapons**; is trying to develop weapons; is not trying to develop weapons*

- [Common introduction] Now thinking about more recent events, please tell me whether—as far as you know—each of the following happened or did not happen over the past few months? As far as you know...

- **Approval for military force in Iraq**

...Did President (George W.) Bush win the approval of Congress to use military force against Iraq?

*Response options: **Yes, happened**; no, did not happen*

- **Iraq allow UN inspectors**

...Did Iraq agree to allow United Nations weapons inspectors into the country to look for evidence of banned nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons?

*Response options: **Yes, happened**; no, did not happen*

- **Public evidence about Iraq involvement in 9/11**

...Did the Bush Administration publicly release evidence that Iraq was involved in the planning and funding of the September 11th (2001) terrorist attacks (on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon)?

*Response options: **Yes, happened**; no, did not happen*

- **Saddam Hussein threaten Israel**

...Did the Bush Administration publicly release evidence that Iraq was involved in

the planning and funding of the September 11th (2001) terrorist attacks (on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon)?

Response options: Yes, happened; no, did not happen

- **Iraq nuclear weapons**

As far as you know, does Iraq now have nuclear weapons, or not?

Response options: Yes; no

- **Iraq chemical/biological weapons**

As far as you know, does Iraq now have chemical or biological weapons, or not?

Response options: Yes; no

- **North Korea nuclear weapons - 2003**

As far as you know, does North Korea now have nuclear weapons, or not?

Response options: Yes; no

- **North Korea chemical/biological weapons**

As far as you know, does North Korea now have chemical or biological weapons, or not?

Response options: Yes; no

2004

- [Common introduction] Next, I will read a list of things government officials can do when conducting a terrorism investigation. For each, please tell me if this is something government officials can do specifically because of the Patriot Act, or if it is something they could have done prior to the Patriot Act being passed. How about...

- **Patriot Act - hold terrorism suspects indefinitely**

...hold terrorism suspects indefinitely without charging them with a crime or allowing them access to a lawyer?

Response options: Can do because of the Patriot Act; could do before Patriot Act passed

- **Medicare law - prescription drug benefit**

You may have heard news in late 2003 about debates in Congress on a bill that would add a prescription drug benefit to Medicare. To the best of your knowledge, was this bill passed by Congress and signed into law by President (George W.) Bush, or not?

Response options: Yes, has been passed and signed into law; no, has not been passed

- **Medicare law - prescription drug discount card**

As far as you know, does the new Medicare law include a prescription drug discount card for seniors that will be available this year (2004), is this not something that's included in the law, or don't you know enough to say?

Response options: Drug discount will be available this year; drug discount card is not included in the law

- **Medicare law - drug subsidy**

And as far as you know, does the Medicare law include a financial subsidy that will be available this year for low-income seniors to help them with their drug costs, is this not something that's included in the law, or don't you know enough to say?

*Response options: **Financial subsidy will be available this year**; financial subsidy is not included in the law*

- **Medicare law - drug subsidy**

And as far as you know, does the Medicare law include a financial subsidy that will be available this year for low-income seniors to help them with their drug costs, is this not something that's included in the law, or don't you know enough to say?

*Response options: **Financial subsidy will be available this year**; financial subsidy is not included in the law*

A 3 Partisan Gap by Item - ANES

Table A 3.3: Partisan Knowledge Gaps by Item - ANES

Item Description	Study	Year	R ¹⁵	n(R) ¹⁶	D ¹⁷	n(D) ¹⁸	Signed gap	p (Gap) ¹⁹
Inflation over past year	ANES	1986	0.431	276	0.427	532	0.004	0.903
Unemployment over past year	ANES	1986	0.366	276	0.301	532	0.065	0.060
Deficit compared to 1980	ANES	1988	0.768	776	0.729	883	-0.039	0.070
Inflation over past year	ANES	1988	0.504	830	0.393	954	0.111	0.000
School spending since 1980	ANES	1988	0.286	774	0.210	900	0.076	0.000
Social Security benefits since 1980	ANES	1988	0.490	774	0.393	900	0.096	0.000
Unemployment over past year	ANES	1988	0.581	830	0.268	954	0.312	0.000
Inflation over past year	ANES	1992	0.091	929	0.033	1229	-0.057	0.000
Unemployment over past year	ANES	1992	0.684	928	0.885	1229	0.201	0.000
Deficit under Clinton	ANES	1996	0.247	654	0.341	894	0.094	0.000
Taxes under Clinton	ANES	1996	0.599	652	0.373	896	0.226	0.000
Crime compared to 1992	ANES	2000	0.298	646	0.420	822	0.122	0.000
Deficit compared to 1992	ANES	2000	0.300	579	0.308	778	0.007	0.791
Inflation over past year	ANES	2004	0.376	445	0.603	518	0.227	0.000
Income tax for average person under Bush	ANES	2004	0.298	485	0.131	592	0.167	0.000
Unemployment over past year	ANES	2004	0.442	446	0.109	518	0.334	0.000
Inflation over past year	ANES	2008	0.189	646	0.148	1338	0.041	0.068
Unemployment over past year	ANES	2008	0.748	644	0.903	1343	0.155	0.000
Unemployment over past year	ANES	2012	0.130	2013	0.461	3102	0.331	0.000
Cause of global warming	ANES	2016	0.222	1724	0.530	1937	0.308	0.000
Existence of global warming	ANES	2016	0.676	1723	0.904	1934	0.228	0.000
Unemployment over past year	ANES	2016	0.193	1728	0.559	1939	0.366	0.000

A 4 Knowledge Question Wordings and Correct Answers - ANES Items

- **Unemployment over past year**²⁰

Would you say that over the past year, the level of unemployment in the country has gotten better, stayed about the same, or gotten worse?²¹

Response options: Better, stayed about the same, gotten worse

Table A 4.4: Unemployment over the past year - correct responses by year

Year	Correct answer
1986	Stayed about the same
1988	Better
1992	Worse
2004	Better
2008	Worse
2012	Better
2016	Better

- **Inflation over past year**²²

Would you say that over the past year, inflation has gotten better, stayed about the same, or gotten worse?²³

²⁰National unemployment rates based on information from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (available at data.bls.gov). The specific indicator is Annual Unemployment Rates. To determine “correct” responses, we compared unemployment levels from previous year’s annual average. (With the exception of 2008, in all years listed, unemployment did not change measurably—that is, by an increase or decrease of more than one third of one percentage point—over the course of the election year.) Unemployment was considered to have stayed “about the same” if it did not increase or decrease more than one third of one percentage point from the previous year.

²¹1986 version: “Would you say that over the past year, the national unemployment rate has gotten better, stayed about the same, or gotten worse?”

²²Inflation rates based on information from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (available at data.bls.gov). The specific indicator is Consumer Price Index, All Urban Consumers, which according to BLS is the inflation index most reported by national media. To determine “correct” responses, we compared inflation levels from previous year’s annual average. Inflation was considered to have stayed “about the same” if it did not increase or decrease more than one third of one percentage point from the previous year.

²³1986 version: “Would you say that over the past year, the inflation rate has gotten better, stayed about the same, or gotten worse?”

Response options: *Better, stayed about the same, gotten worse*

Table A 4.5: Inflation over the past year - correct responses by year

Year	Correct answer
1986	Stayed about the same
1988	Stayed about the same
1992	Better
2004	Worse
2008	Stayed about the same

- **Gap between rich and poor - 2004, 2008, 2012, 2016²⁴**

Do you think the difference in incomes between rich people and poor people in the United States today is larger, smaller, or about the same as it was 20 years ago? *Response options: Larger, smaller, stayed about the same*

1988

- **Deficit compared to 1980²⁵**

Would you say that compared to 1980 the federal budget deficit has gotten smaller, stayed about the same, or gotten larger?

*Response options: Gotten smaller, stayed about the same, **gotten larger***

- **Social Security benefits since 1980²⁶**

Have Social Security benefits been increased, decreased, or stayed about the same as they were in 1980, or haven't you paid much attention to this?

*Response options: **Increased**, decreased, stayed about the same*

- **School spending since 1980²⁷**

Has federal spending on public schools been increased, decreased, or stayed about the same as it was in 1980, or haven't you paid much attention to this?

*Response options: Increased, **decreased**, stayed about the same*

²⁴Several sources, including [Bartels \(2008\)](#) and [inequality.org](#) demonstrate that the gap has been growing for decades.

²⁵Size of the federal budget deficit based on information from [usgovernmentspending.com](#), a site that aggregates federal data from multiple sources. Specific indicator used is Deficit-Federal in Billions of Nominal Dollars.

²⁶Social Security benefits based on information from the Social Security Administration ([ssa.gov](#)). The specific indicator is Minimum and Maximum Monthly Retired-Worker Benefits Payable to Individuals who Retired at age 62, 1957-2010 (Table A27).

²⁷School spending based on information from the Department of Education [ed.gov](#). Specific indicator used is Total Spending, Elementary and Secondary - Appropriation Numbers.

1996

- **Deficit under Clinton**²⁸

Would you say that the size of the yearly budget deficit increased, decreased, or stayed about the same during Clinton's time as President?

*Response options: **Increased**, decreased, stayed about the same*

- **Taxes under Clinton**²⁹

Would you say that the federal income tax paid by the average working person has increased, decreased, or stayed about the same during Clinton's time as President?

*Response options: **Increased**, decreased, stayed about the same*

2000

- **Deficit compared to 1992**³⁰

As you know, Bill Clinton was first elected President in November 1992. He will soon be leaving office after 8 years as President. The next several questions ask whether you think things have changed since Clinton came into office. First, would you say that compared to 1992, the federal budget deficit is now smaller, larger, or about the same?

*Response options: Gotten smaller, **gotten larger**, about the same*

- **Crime rate compared to 1992**³¹

Would you say that compared to 1992 the nation's crime rate has gotten better, gotten worse, or stayed about the same?

*Response options: **Better**, worse, the same*

2004

²⁸Deficit based on information from usgovernmentspending.com, a site that aggregates federal data from multiple sources. Specific indicator used is Federal Deficit in Nominal Billions of Dollars.

²⁹Tax rates based on information contained in [Allen \(1996\)](#).

³⁰Size of the federal budget deficit based on information from usgovernmentspending.com, a site that aggregates federal data from multiple sources. Specific indicator used is Deficit-Federal in Billions of Nominal Dollars.

³¹Crime rate based on information from the Brennan Center (available at <https://www.brennancenter.org/sites/default/files/publications/Crime%20Trends%201990-2016.pdf>).

- **Income tax for average person under Bush**³²

Would you say that, compared to 2000, the federal income tax paid by the average working person has increased, decreased, or stayed about the same during George W. Bush's time as President?

*Response options: Increased, **decreased**, stayed about the same*

2016

- **Global warming happening**³³

You may have heard about the idea that the world's temperature may have been going up slowly over the past 100 years. What is your personal opinion on this? Do you think this has probably been happening, or do you think it probably hasn't been happening?

*Response options: **Has probably been happening**, probably hasn't been happening*

- **Global warming cause**³⁴

(Do/Assuming it's happening, do) you think a rise in the world's temperatures would be caused mostly by human activity, mostly by natural causes, or about equally by human activity and by natural causes?

*Response options: **Mostly by human activity**, mostly by natural causes, about equally by human activity and natural causes*

³²Income tax information based on information from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (available at <https://www.cbpp.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/3-31-17tax.pdf>).

³³Information on global warming taken from the Union of Concerned Scientists (available at <https://www.ucsusa.org/global-warming>).

³⁴Information on global warming taken from the Union of Concerned Scientists (available at <https://www.ucsusa.org/global-warming>).

A 5 Partisan Gaps by Item - ANES Economic Retrospection Questions

Table A 5.6: Partisan Gap by Economic Retrospection Item

Item	Study	Year	R ³⁵	n(R) ³⁶	D ³⁷	n(D) ³⁸	p(R-D)	Signed Gap
Economy over past year	ANES	1980	0.962	528	0.931	841	0.000	0.031
Economy over past year	ANES	1982	0.530	445	0.758	774	0.000	0.228
Economy over past year	ANES	1984	0.627	883	0.246	1063	0.002	0.381
Economy over past year	ANES	1986	0.316	772	0.170	1088	0.000	0.146
Economy over past year	ANES	1988	0.281	829	0.104	954	0.000	0.177
Economy over past year	ANES	1990	0.958	714	0.954	1012	0.658	0.004
Economy over past year	ANES	1992	0.080	927	0.024	1228	0.000	0.056
Economy over past year	ANES	1994	0.329	749	0.366	834	0.165	0.036
Economy over past year	ANES	1996	0.260	654	0.482	895	0.000	0.222
Economy over past year	ANES	1998	0.384	467	0.529	656	0.000	0.145
Economy over past year	ANES	2000	0.262	680	0.492	888	0.000	0.23
Economy over past year	ANES	2002	0.357	665	0.198	703	0.000	0.159
Economy over past year	ANES	2004	0.426	479	0.101	585	0.000	0.325
Economy over past year	ANES	2008	0.873	653	0.937	1364	0.000	0.064
Economy over past year	ANES	2012	0.441	1993	0.824	3100	0.000	0.383
Economy over past year	ANES	2016	0.115	1727	0.459	1938	0.000	0.344
Economic condition of blacks over past year	ANES	1984	0.388	872	0.283	1023	0.000	0.105
Economic condition of women over past year	ANES	1984	0.543	875	0.411	1057	0.000	0.132
Economy compared to four years ago	ANES	1992	0.756	857	0.856	1145	0.000	0.100
Economy since July 4th	ANES	1992	0.730	857	0.575	1145	0.000	0.155
Economy since Clinton took office	ANES	1998	0.646	468	0.839	659	0.000	0.193

³⁵Proportion of Republicans who answered correctly

³⁶*n*, Republicans

³⁷Proportion of Democrats who answered correctly

³⁸*n*, Democrats

Economy compared to 1992	ANES	2000	0.648	646	0.771	822	0.000	0.123
Economy compared to 2008	ANES	2016	0.214	1724	0.613	1936	0.000	0.399

A 6 Knowledge Question Wordings and Correct Answers - ANES Economic Retrospection Items

- **Economy better or worse over past year**³⁹

Would you say that over the past year the nation's economy has gotten better, stayed⁴⁰ the same or gotten worse?⁴¹

Response options: Better, stayed [about] the same, gotten worse

³⁹National economic conditions based on Federal Reserve Economic data (available at fred.stlouisfed.org). The specific indicator is Real Gross Domestic Product per Capita, Quarterly, Seasonally Adjusted Rates, Chained to 2009 Dollars. To determine "correct" responses, we calculated the difference between real GDP per capita in Q3 in the year prior to the election and real GDP per capita in Q3 of the election year. Any difference with an absolute value of less than \$500 was coded as "stayed about the same;" anything above \$500 was coded as "better," and anything less than \$500 was coded as "worse." As noted in the manuscript, in calculating the signed partisan gap for these items, we did not change the sign of the partisan difference if the correct answer is coded as "stayed about the same."

⁴⁰1984: "about" inserted here

⁴¹An alternate version in 2002 reversed the direction of the options in the question.

Table A 6.7: Economy over the past year - correct responses by year

Year	Correct answer
1980	Worse
1982	Worse
1984	Stayed about the same
1986	Stayed the same
1988	Stayed the same
1990	Worse
1992	Stayed the same
1994	Better
1996	Better
1998	Stayed the same
1990	Worse
1992	Stayed the same
1994	Better
1996	Better
1998	Stayed the same
2000	Stayed the same
2002	Worse
2004	Stayed the same
2008	Worse
2012	Worse
2016	Better

1984

- **Economic condition of women over past year**⁴²

What about women? Would you say that over the past year the economic position of women has gotten better, stayed about the same, or gotten worse? *Response options: **Better**, stayed about the same, gotten worse*

- **Economic condition of blacks over past year**⁴³

Would you say that over the past year the economic position of blacks has gotten better, stayed about the same, or gotten worse?

*Response options: **Better**, stayed about the same, gotten worse*

1992

- **Economy compared to four years ago**⁴⁴

Compared to four years ago, would you say that the nation's economy has gotten better, stayed about the same, or gotten worse?

*Response options: Gotten better, stayed about the same, **gotten worse***

- **Economy since July 4th**⁴⁵

What about in the last few months, since about the 4th of July. Would you say that the nation's economy has gotten better, stayed about the same, or gotten worse?

*Response options: **Gotten better**, stayed about the same, gotten worse*

1998

- **Economy since Clinton took office**⁴⁶

Would you say that since Clinton took office, the nation's economy has gotten better,

⁴²Economic condition of women based on subgroup unemployment figures from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (available at data.bls.gov). We follow our previous coding scheme for unemployment as described in [APPENDIX].

⁴³Economic condition of blacks based on subgroup unemployment figures from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (available at data.bls.gov). We follow our previous coding scheme for unemployment as described in [APPENDIX].

⁴⁴Economy compared to four years ago based on information chronicled in [Hershey Jr. \(1993\)](#).

⁴⁵Economic information since July based on information chronicled in [Apple Jr. \(1992\)](#).

⁴⁶Economy better/worse based on Federal Reserve Economic data (available at fred.stlouisfed.org). The specific indicator is Real Gross Domestic Product per Capita, Quarterly, Seasonally Adjusted Rates, Chained to 2009 Dollars. To determine the "correct" response, we calculated the difference between real GDP per capita in Q1 of 1993 and real GDP per capita in Q3 of 1998. We also checked the quarterly data between these endpoints to ensure the indicator trended upward.

stayed about the same, or gotten worse?

*Response options: **Gotten better**, stayed about the same, gotten worse*

2000

- **Economy compared to 1992**⁴⁷

Since 1992, would you say President Clinton has made the nation's economy better, made the economy worse, or had no effect on the economy one way or the other?

*Response options: **Made the economy better**, made the economy worse, no effect*

2016

- **Economy compared to 2008**⁴⁸

Would you say that compared to 2008, the nation's economy is now better, worse, or about the same?

*Response options: **Better**, worse, about the same*

⁴⁷Economy better/worse based on Federal Reserve Economic data (available at fred.stlouisfed.org). The specific indicator is Real Gross Domestic Product per Capita, Quarterly, Seasonally Adjusted Rates, Chained to 2009 Dollars. To determine the "correct" response, we calculated the difference between real GDP per capita in Q1 of 1993 and real GDP per capita in Q3 of 2000. We also checked the quarterly data between these endpoints to ensure the indicator trended upward.

⁴⁸Economy better/worse based on Federal Reserve Economic data (available at fred.stlouisfed.org). The specific indicator is Real Gross Domestic Product per Capita, Quarterly, Seasonally Adjusted Rates, Chained to 2009 Dollars. To determine the "correct" response, we calculated the difference between real GDP per capita in Q3 of 2008 and real GDP per capita in Q3 of 2016. We also checked the quarterly data between these endpoints to ensure the indicator trended upward.