The Scope and Correlates of Political Misperceptions in the Mass Public*

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Political misperceptions are an increasingly salient concern in American politics. However, we know little about the extent of misperceptions across policy issues because existing research focuses overwhelmingly on an unrepresentative subset of political facts. This paper reports the results of an original national survey into the scope and correlates of misperceptions in the mass public. The survey measured Americans' beliefs—and associated confidence levels—about 11 political facts spanning numerous issues: taxes, debt and deficits, welfare, gun control, unemployment, the environment, and foreign aid. I find evidence of substantial misperceptions. Across all facts, an average of 20 percent of respondents hold misperceptions "very" or "extremely" confidently. There is considerable heterogeneity in the frequency of misperceptions across issues. The strongest individual-level predictor of confident misperceptions is political interest, which increases misperceptions about 9 of the 11 facts under study. Formal education and general political knowledge reduce misperceptions in certain policy areas, but their effects are weaker and less consistent than that of interest. These findings have important implications for the scholars, civic educators, and others interested in understanding and correcting misperceptions in contemporary politics.

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Misperceptions are an increasingly salient concern among scholars, journalists, and other observers of American politics.[1] False claims have featured prominently in recent policy debates (e.g., Nyhan 2010), and there is accumulating evidence that these false beliefs can influence citizens' policy preferences (Howell and West 2009), candidate evaluations (Fridkin, Kenney, and Wintersieck 2015; Cobb, Reifler, and Nyhan 2013; Bullock 2007), and electoral decision-making (Weeks and Garrett 2014). Recognizing these risks, Hochschild and Einstein (2015, 14) write, "political activity in accord with...misinformation can lead to irresponsible governance and bad policies, with at times devastating societal consequences."

A growing literature spanning numerous fields investigates where misperceptions originate (e.g., Lauderdale 2016; Thorson 2015; Reedy, Wells, and Gastil 2014), how they spread (e.g., Del Vicario et al. 2016; Weeks and Southwell 2010), and effective strategies for correcting them (e.g., Berinsky N.d.; Bode and Vraga 2015; Nyhan and Reifler 2015; Young et al. 2015; Nyhan et al. 2014; Lewandowsky et al. 2013; Nyhan and Reifler 2010). However, the bulk of this research focuses on misperceptions about an unrepresentative subset of political facts: those with clear partisan and/or ideological implications (Pasek, Sood, and Krosnick 2015, 661).[2] As a result, we know little about the extent of misperceptions across policy issues or the types of individuals most likely to endorse them.

This paper reports the results of an original national survey into the scope and correlates of political misperceptions in the mass public. The survey measured Americans' beliefs—and associated confidence levels—about 11 policy-relevant facts spanning numerous issues: taxes, debt and deficits, welfare, gun control, unemployment, the environment, and foreign affairs. In addition to documenting aggregate patterns, I also theorize and test the individual-level correlates of misperceptions.

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[1]Following Nyhan and Reifler (2010, 305), I define misperceptions as "cases in which people's beliefs about factual matters are not supported by clear evidence and expert opinion" (cf., Gaines et al. 2007). I discuss measurement at length below.

[2]These include facts regarding the Affordable Care Act (Berinsky N.d.; Pasek, Sood, and Krosnick 2015), Barack Obama's birthplace (Krosnick, Malhotra, and Mittal N.d.) and religion (Nyhan et al. 2016), the Bush tax cuts (Nyhan and Reifler 2010), and the existence of WMDs in Iraq (Nyhan and Reifler 2010; Gaines et al. 2007; Kull, Ramsay, and Lewis 2003).

The data reveal substantial misperceptions about a range of political facts. Across all facts, an average of 20 percent of respondents hold confident misperceptions—that is, they are wrong and "very" or "extremely" confident in their beliefs. There is substantial heterogeneity in these patterns across policy issues, reinforcing the key point that our understanding of misperceptions depends critically on the issues under study. Further, I find that the strongest predictor of confident misperceptions is an individual's level of political interest, which increases misperceptions about 9 of the 11 facts under study. Formal education and general political knowledge reduce misperceptions about certain facts, but their effects are considerably weaker and less consistent than that of interest. These results have implications for scholars, civic educators, and others interested in measuring misperceptions in surveys and designing strategies to correct them.

## Theory and Expectations

I begin by offering some expectations about the types of citizens likely to hold misperceptions about political facts. My starting point is the observation that contemporary politics is largely mediated—that is, citizens increasingly rely on journalists and other elites to glean politically relevant information, rather than collecting information themselves (Bennett and Entman 2001; Page 1996). A logical implication of mediated politics is that citizens' understanding of political facts will reflect the quantity and quality of political information contained in the mass media.[3] For instance, when the media devote greater attention to a policy issue, policy-specific knowledge in the mass public increases (Barabas and Jerit 2009, 80, 85).

In order to be affected by information contained in media coverage, an individual must be exposed and attentive (Zaller 1992). A large body of research suggests that the most reliable indicator of media exposure and attentiveness is an individual's level of political interest (Iyengar and Hahn 2003; Prior 2007, 2003; Drew and Weaver 2006; Lupia and Philpot 2005; Delli Carpini 2004;

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[3]More generally, the information environment affects a range of political attitudes and behaviors. For instance, the environment affects how citizens make tradeoffs between competing goals (Kuklinski et al. 2001), identify credible information (Lupia and McCubbins 1998), and form opinions (Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus 2013; Druckman et al. 2010).

Johnson and Kaye 2005; Atkin, Galloway, and Nayman 1976).[4] A number of studies demonstrate a strong positive correlation between political interest and media use (e.g., Prior 2007; Delli Carpini 2004). Going a step further, Stromback and Shehata (2010) use panel data to demonstrate robust positive causal effects of political interest on media use. As the authors explain, "being politically interested increases the propensity to seek out news about politics in the media...[T]here is a causal...relationship between political interest and attention to political news" (588).[5] In short, political interest generates media exposure and attention.

In light of these effects, some scholars argue that society should take steps to increase political interest in order to stimulate political engagement (e.g., Zukin et al. 2006). As Prior (2010, 747) explains, a common assumption is that a large portion of the potentially salubrious effects of increased interest would result from increases in political knowledge: "it is tempting to prescribe a boost in political interest as a way to improve democratic governance *through a more informed public*, higher rates of participation, and greater political equality" (emphasis added).[6] According to this account, increased interest would lead more citizens to come into contact with political information, which would presumably stimulate learning (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996), participation (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995), deliberation (Page 1996), and other normatively desirable behaviors.

However, a growing concern in the contemporary media environment is *misinformation* (Nyhan and Reifler 2010; Kuklinski et al. 2000). Consider the explosion in so-called "fact-checking" websites in recent years (e.g., PolitiFact, FactCheck.org), which occurred largely in response to the proliferation of misinformation, online and elsewhere (Del Vicario et al. 2016; Lewandowsky et al. 2013; Weeks and Southwell 2010; Sunstein 2009). Consistent with this logic, scholarly research suggests that media reports do often contain misinformation. For instance, Jerit and Barabas

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[4]An obvious alternative is self-reported media exposure. Unfortunately, these measures are notoriously unreliable (e.g., Prior 2009*a*,*b*).

[5]The authors also present evidence for the opposite causal path: media exposure increases political interest. It is important to note that due to the panel design, the existence of a reverse causal path does not undermine the key inference—that is, a positive causal effect of interest on news exposure.

[6]Indeed, in the national survey data presented below, there is a significant positive correlation between interest and general political knowledge (r=0.28, p<.001).

([2006](#)) content analyze media coverage of the 1998-1999 entitlement reform debate and show that a majority of factual statements were misleading (see also Page and Simmons 2000).[7] Similarly, Nyhan ([2010](#), 4) documents the role misinformation played in the 2009-2010 and 1993-1994 health reform debates, concluding that "misinformation distorted the national debate, misled millions of Americans, and damaged the standing of both proposals before Congress." Luskin, Sood, and Blank ([2016](#), 10) point to similar media effects in the domain of crime: "A great deal of misinformation clearly comes from the media … The saturation of local news by stories about crime, especially violent crime, coupled with the profusion of crime dramas on TV and in the cinema, may leave many people thinking the rates of crime, especially violent crime, much higher than they are" (also see Gilens 1999).

To summarize, political interest is an attractive measure of an individual's general use of and attentiveness to political media—two necessary conditions for the receipt of politically relevant information (Zaller 1992). Other measures (e.g., self-reported media use) are less attractive because they tap only exposure, overlooking attentiveness (see Chaffee and Schleuder 1986). Additionally, cognitive limitations and social desirability pressures prevent most survey respondents from accurately reporting recent media exposure (Prior 2009$a$,$b$; Schwarz and Oyserman 2001; Tourangeau, Rips, and Rasinski 2000; Schwarz 1999). Following the preceding discussion, politically interested individuals are most likely to be exposed and attentive to political media, which often contain misinformation. Thus, I expect that:

> H1: An individual's level of political interest should be positively correlated with factual misperceptions, all else constant.

Of course, all else is not constant, and other individual-level variables shape citizens' reactions to information contained in media coverage. I consider two in this section. The first is education. In general, education should promote the cognitive skills necessary to scruitinize factual claims.

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[7] To identify misleading statements, the authors conducted an experiment in which they estimated the effect of each statement on participants' perceptions of the viability of the Social Security Trust Fund (relative to an accurate factual statement). They find that 21 out of 41 statements—51.2 percent—increased misperceptions (see Jerit and Barabas 2006, Appendix Table A1). For analyses of the prevalence of misleading versus accurate statements in this debate, see Jerit (2006, study 2).

Two other widely documented effects of education—increased trust (Hetherington 2005; Milligan, Moretti, and Oreopoulous 2004; Niemi and June 1998) and lower levels of stereotypical thinking (Schuman, Steeh, and Krysan 1997)—also decrease the likelihood of misperceptions.[8] As Miller, Saunders, and Farhart (N.d., 2) explain, certain types of misperceptions are common among people who "believe that the world is the type of place in which secretive, malevolent actions are not only possible, but also probable (i.e., *people low in trust*)" (emphasis added).[9] Stereotypical thinking can also contribute to misperceptions, especially when the relevant fact involves groups, such as racial minorities (Gilens 1999), immigrants (Sides and Citrin 2007), or party coalitions (Ahler and Sood 2015). Collectively, this research suggests the following hypothesis:

> H2: Education should be negatively correlated with factual misperceptions, all else constant.

Second, general political knowledge—understood as "the range of factual information about politics that is stored in long-term memory" (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996, 10)—gives citizens the contextual understanding necessary to evaluate the plausibility of factual claims. As Gilens (2001, 383) explains, "[t]hose who are generally more knowledgeable about politics are more likely to know...policy-specific facts."[10] For example, individuals high in general knowledge—who presumably have a decent understanding of the general state of the economy—were less likely to falsely believe that the deficit decreased or unemployment increased during the Reagan administration (Gilens 2001, 383). Moreover, the politically knowledgeable are less likely to change their beliefs in response to claims contained in the media (e.g., misinformation). As Nelson, Clawson, and Oxley (1997, 227) explain in the context of media framing, "assuming that a message is easily comprehended, ... more sophisticated [i.e., knowledgeable] people are, in general, less likely to change their beliefs than less sophisticated people." This work suggests my final hypothesis:

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[8]There is an ongoing debate about the magnitude of the effect of education on trust (see Bullock 2016, 25-26).
[9]The authors study the effect of trust on belief in conspiracy theories (CTs), which are a subset of misperceptions generally understood as "effort[s] to explain some event or practice by reference to the machinations of powerful people, who attempt to conceal their role" (Sunstein 2009, 205; cf., Uscinski and Parent 2014, 31).
[10]On the relationships between different types of political knowledge, see Barabas et al. (2014).

H3: General political knowledge should be negatively correlated with factual misperceptions, all else constant.

## Data and Methods

To evaluate the scope and correlates of misperceptions in the mass public, I conducted a national survey in Feburary 2016.[11] The sample (N=605) resembled the U.S. population in terms of age, gender, race, education, and partisan identification (see Appendix Table A1). Participants began the survey by answering a series of standard demographic and political questions, which included measures of political interest, education, general political knowledge, partisan identification, and ideology.

The next section of the survey measured participants' beliefs—and associated certainty levels—about 11 politically relevant facts (see Appendix B for question wordings). Participants were instructed to give their "best guesses about these topics" and asked not consult outside sources (instruction taken from Pasek, Sood, and Krosnick 2015).[12] These included facts relating to taxes, debt and deficits, welfare, gun control, unemployment, the environment, and foreign aid. Care was taken to avoid priming partisan considerations, both because such considerations could promote expressive responding (Bullock et al. 2015; Prior, Sood, and Khanna 2015) and because highly partisan facts have been studied extensively in previous research.

A recurring challenge in studying misperceptions is the interpretation of incorrect answers to survey questions (see Flynn, Nyhan, and Reifler 2016). In particular, it is unclear whether incorrect answers reflect pre-existing misperceptions, incorrect inferences, unlucky guesses, or

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[11]Data were collected by Qualtrics per a Behavioral Research Grant.

[12]The full text of the instruction was:

These next few questions ask about politics in Washington, D.C.

We'd like to learn your best guesses about these topics. We will also ask you how sure you are that each answer you give is correct.

It's fine if you are sure of an answer or if you are not sure of an answer. We just want to find out your best guesses.

We want to know what people think without asking someone else for the answer and without looking up the answers on the Internet or in any other way. So please do not do any of these things. Please just give us your best guesses.

expressive responding. One recently suggested strategy for identifying misperceptions is to ask certainty questions alongside factual belief measures.[13] Pasek, Sood, and Krosnick (2015) use this approach to study misperceptions about the Affordable Care Act (ACA). While misperceptions are common, they find that only a small share of misperceptions are held confidently (i.e., "very" or "extremely" confidently). In this paper, I adopt the two-step belief/certainty measurement approach to gauge misperceptions across a wide range of policy issues.

This two-step approach proceeds as follows. First, participants answered a multiple-choice question about each fact (e.g., "Which of the following owns the largest share of the U.S. federal debt?").[14] Second, participants were asked to report how confident they were in their answer: "How sure are you about this?" Responses were recorded on a five-point scale ranging from "not sure at all" to "extremely sure."

In the analyses that follow, I first consider the distribution of all misperceptions—that is, the percentage of participants who answer factual questions incorrectly. I also consider the mean certainty levels for each misperception. When I turn to the individual-level correlates of misperceptions (to evaluate the hypotheses presented above), I need to adopt a standard for distinguishing the misinformed from the uninformed. Thus, for the individual-level analyses, I follow Pasek, Sood, and Krosnick (2015) in defining the misinformed as those who hold false beliefs *and* do so confidently.[15] This includes participants who answer a question incorrectly and report they are "very" or "extremely" sure they are correct.[16]

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[13]On the importance of certainty in political judgment, see Kuklinski and Quirk (2000); Kuklinski et al. (2000); Alvarez and Franklin (1994).

[14]All questions included four response options (i.e., one correct answer and three incorrect answers). A "Don't Know" (DK) response option was not offered. To ensure that this decision did not affect my results, I conducted a follow-up experiment using student participants (N=235; details available from author). The experiment randomly assigned participants to answer all of the factual belief questions from this study with or without a DK option. Across all 11 facts, there are no significant differences in the frequency of misperceptions across experimental conditions. This is consistent with results from Luskin and Bullock (2011).

[15]An alternate approach counts all participants who answer incorrectly as misinformed (i.e., the only "uninformed" participants are those who choose DK or, in my case, those who skip the question) (e.g., Thorson 2015). I eschew this approach for two reasons. First, a non-trivial number of ignorant participants will guess an incorrect answer by random chance (Luskin and Bullock 2011). The resulting "misinformed" subsample, then, contains a heterogeneous mix of participants, some of whom likely recognize their ignorance and others who are confidently wrong. Second, treating unlucky guessers as misinformed prevents us from cleanly comparing the effects of ignorance and misperception on outcomes.

[16]As a result, the uninformed include participants who answer incorrectly but with low or moderate certainty. It

For the individual-level analyses, my primary dependent variable is the number of factual misperceptions a participant holds.[17] I construct this count variable by summing all the "very" or "extremely" confident (incorrect) answers a participant gives across all 11 facts. More formally, the count for each participant $i$ is simply the total number of misperceptions on factual items $j = 1, 2, ...11$:

$$\sum_{j=1}^{11} \text{misperception}_{i,j}$$

The result is an integer variable that ranges from a minimum of zero misperceptions to a maximum of 11, although the most misinformed participant in the sample held 9 misperceptions. The mean number of misperceptions is 1.99; the median is 1 (see Appendix Figure A1).

Because the dependent variable is a count, I test my expectations by estimating a Poisson regression model.[18] Following my hypotheses, I include measures of political interest, education, and general political knowledge as predictors. I also include age, sex, race, partisanship, and ideology as controls. Political interest is measured using the standard ANES question ("Generally, how interested are you in politics?"), with a five-point response scale ranging from "Not at all interested" to "Extremely interested." Education is measured on a five-point scale of educational attainment ranging from "Less than high school credential" to "Graduate degree." General political knowledge is measured using a 7-item battery of factual questions, with participants awarded one point for each correct answer (i.e., resulting variable ranges from 0 to 7). Appendix B gives the wording for all questions.

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also includes participants who skipped the question.

[17] In supplemental analyses, I present separate models to predict confident misperceptions about each of the 11 facts.

[18] All results presented below are robust to using negative binomial or ordinary least squares regression, and to excluding control variables (see Appendix Table A3).
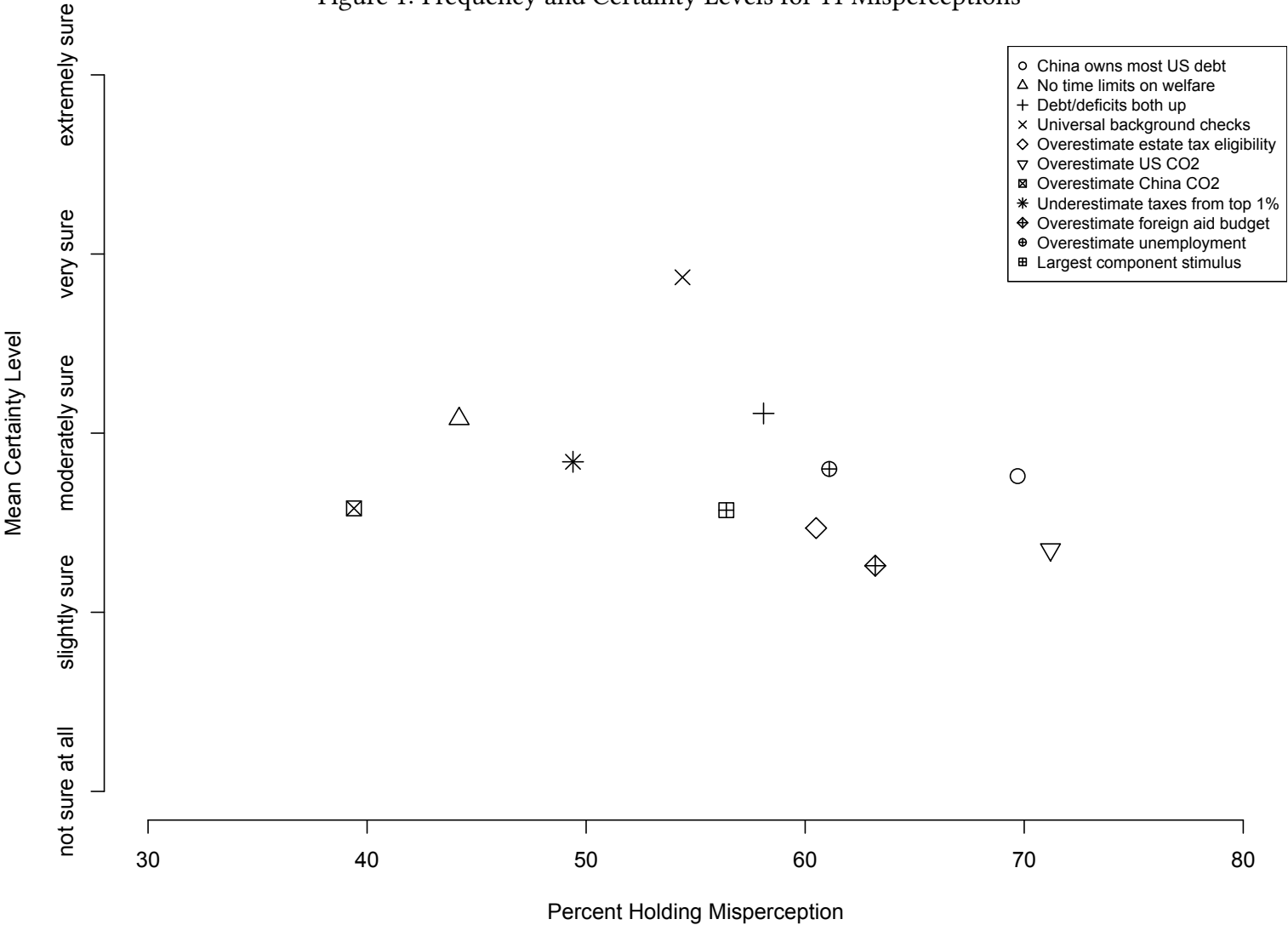
## Results

### *The Scope of Misperceptions*

Before turning to the correlates of misperceptions, it is instructive to consider the distribution of misperceptions in the sample. As mentioned, for this aggregate analysis, I include all participants who gave an incorrect answer to a factual question, regardless of certainty level. This approach permits visual inspection of the distribution of both misperceptions and certainty levels across all 11 facts. Figure 1 gives the results. The percentage of misinformed participants is given on the horizontal axis, and the mean certainty level (among misinformed participants) on the y-axis. Each point represents one of the 11 facts surveyed.

Across all 11 facts, an average of 58.1 percent of participants offer incorrect responses—a high number but perhaps unsurprising in light of the difficulty of these questions and the fact that I included an instruction that discouraged DKs (see Appendix Table A2). More interesting is the percentage of participants who offer incorrect answers "very" or "extremely" confidently: that figure is 19.6 percent.[19] Put differently, across all 11 facts examined, approximately one-in-five participants is confidently misinformed.

Figure 1 offers several important insights about participants' factual beliefs. First, there is substantial variance in terms of both the prevalence of misperceptions and the certainty with which misperceptions are held. Consider first the range of the prevalence data: at the low end, 39.4 percent of participants overestimate China's $CO_2$ emissions; at the high end, 71.2 percent overestimate U.S. $CO_2$ emissions. This difference in prevalence covers 31.8 percent of the response scale. Now consider the range of the certainty data. Participants were least confident in their overestimate of U.S. foreign aid spending (mean certainty=2.26), and most certain about the existence of a universal background check under existing law (mean=3.87). This difference in certainty levels covers virtually the same portion of the response scale: 32.2 percent. In sum, there is substantial variation across facts in terms of both prevalence and certainty.

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[19]This figure is calculated by summing across the percentage of confident incorrect answers to each question and dividing by 11.

Figure 1: Frequency and Certainty Levels for 11 Misperceptions

Legend:
- ○ China owns most US debt
- △ No time limits on welfare
- + Debt/deficits both up
- × Universal background checks
- ◇ Overestimate estate tax eligibility
- ▽ Overestimate US CO2
- ⊠ Overestimate China CO2
- ✳ Underestimate taxes from top 1%
- ⊕ Overestimate foreign aid budget
- ⊕ Overestimate unemployment
- ⊞ Largest component stimulus

Mean Certainty Level (y-axis): not sure at all, slightly sure, moderately sure, very sure, extremely sure

Percent Holding Misperception (x-axis): 30, 40, 50, 60, 70, 80

Note: The percent holding a given misperception is calculated by summing the relevant responses and dividing by the sample size. Mean confidence level is calculated among the subset of participants who hold the misperception. See Appendix C for data in tabular form.

A second key point concerns the appropriate standard to use to identify misperceptions. As discussed, recent work suggests certainty measures as a useful tool for distinguishing misperceptions from other constructs. Pasek, Sood, and Krosnick (2015) take a first step in this direction by classifying participants as misinformed about the ACA if they answer a question incorrectly *and* express a high degree of certainty, which they define as choosing "very" or "extremely" sure." However, as shown in Figure 1, participants demonstrate this level of certainty for only one of the 11 misperceptions under study: the existence of a universal background check.[20] On the 10 other misperceptions, participants show only moderate levels of confidence. Importantly, this is true even among the most prevalent misperceptions, such as overestimates of U.S. $CO_2$ pollution, the foreign aid budget, estate tax eligibility, and beliefs about the owner of U.S. debt. Put differently, some of the most common misperceptions—held by up to 71 percent of participants!—are held with only a moderate degree of confidence. However, false beliefs this common should not be neglected simply because they are not held with high confidence. Thus, any analysis of the misperceptions problem should take account of both prevalence and certainty.

A third and final initial observation from Figure 1 is that several of the misperceptions on the far right side of the plot involve highly salient policy issues, such as the owners of U.S. debt, trends in the debt and deficit, and unemployment. This general pattern is consistent with the theory elaborated above, as well as with past research documenting a substantial amount of false or misleading information in media coverage (e.g., Nyhan 2010; Jerit 2009). If the media often convey misinformation, then we would expect misperceptions in the mass public to be most common on issues receiving significant amount of media coverage. Jerit and Barabas (2006, 286) make a similar observation in their study of misleading rhetoric in media coverage of Social Security: "more [media] attention to an issue will increase knowledge *only if the overall quality of political rhetoric is high*. If greater media attention to Social Security simply reminded citizens of menacing images (such as an empty bank account), we might expect media salience to be associated with lower levels of knowledge" (emphasis added). While not dispositive, the patterns

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[20]Notably, this question was framed as true/false, which likely caused participants to report higher certainty than they would when faced with the same question framed differently (e.g., more answer choices).

in Figure 1 offer some initial support for this account.

### *The Correlates of Misperceptions*

With these general patterns in mind, I now turn to my hypotheses about the correlates of misperceptions. Here, I follow Pasek, Sood, and Krosnick (2015) in focusing on misperceptions that are held very or extremely confidently. As discussed, I estimated a Poisson regression model, using political interest, education, general political knowledge, and controls to predict each participant's total number of confident misperceptions. The results are presented in Table 1.

The results are consistent with my expectations. We see that political interest has a positive, statistically significant effect: the more politically interested an individual is, the more likely he or she is to hold misperceptions (p<.001). Turning to education and political knowledge, we see that these variables also perform as expected. Both have statistically significant negative effects: the more educated and politically knowledgeable an individual is, the less likely he or she is to hold misperceptions (p<.05 on both). These results are consistent with hypotheses 1-3.

Because results are robust across Poisson and OLS models, I consider substantive effects by examining the OLS regression model in the third column of Appendix Table A3. Here we see that interest has a substantively large effect, while the effects of education and knowledge are more modest. In particular, the model indicates that each one-unit increase in political interest corresponds to holding 0.72 more misperceptions (p<.001). Because interest is measured on a five-point scale, this estimate suggests that an individual who is "extremely interested" in politics will hold 2.88 more misperceptions than an individual who is "not at all interested," all else constant. Turning to education, we see that each one-unit increase in educational attainment results in 0.17 fewer misperceptions (p<.05). Thus, moving from the lowest (less than high school credential) to highest (graduate degree) level of educational attainment results in 0.68 fewer misperceptions, all else constant. The coefficient on general political knowledge indicates that each one-unit increase in knowledge corresponds to 0.14 fewer misperceptions (p<.05). Thus, an individual who answered all seven knowledge questions correctly is expected to hold 0.98 fewer misperceptions than someone who failed to answer any questions correctly, all else constant.

Table 1: Poisson Regression Model Predicting the Total Number of Factual Misperceptions

| | |
|---|---|
| Political Interest | 0.34*** (0.03) |
| Education | −0.06** (0.03) |
| General Political Knowledge | −0.06*** (0.02) |
| | |
| Strong Democrat | −0.23** (0.11) |
| Weak Democrat | −0.43*** (0.13) |
| Lean Democrat | −0.14 (0.12) |
| Lean Republican | −0.16 (0.12) |
| Weak Republican | −0.13 (0.14) |
| Strong Republican | 0.03 (0.12) |
| | |
| Very Liberal | 0.06 (0.12) |
| Mostly Liberal | 0.18 (0.11) |
| Somewhat Liberal | 0.31*** (0.11) |
| Somewhat Conservative | 0.25** (0.11) |
| Mostly Conservative | 0.11 (0.12) |
| Very Conservative | 0.43*** (0.12) |
| | |
| Constant | 0.16 (0.21) |
| Controls? | Yes |
| Observations | 605 |
| Log Likelihood | −1,104.20 |
| Akaike Information Criterion | 2,246.41 |

Note: Dependent variable is the number of misperceptions held by each participant. Omitted reference group for partisanship and ideology are Independent and moderate, respectively. The following control variables are suppressed: age, sex (male), and race (white). For robustness checks, see Appendix Table A3. Significance codes: *p<.10, **p<.05, ***p<.01.

Some additional findings from the regression models deserve note. Certain partisan and ideological groups are more likely than independents and moderates, respectively, to hold misperceptions.[21] Specifically, strong and weak Democrats are less likely to hold misperceptions, while somewhat liberal, somewhat conservative, and very conservative participants are more likely to hold misperceptions. Focusing first on partisanship, it is unclear why Democrats would be less likely than independents to hold misperceptions about this particular set of facts. Most of the facts surveyed lack obvious partisan implications. Also, the facts covered an array of issues, including issues that are traditionally "owned" by both Democrats (e.g., gun control, welfare, pollution) and Republicans (e.g., taxes, debt and deficits) (Egan 2013). Finally, the lengthy prompt that was used at the start of the survey likely attenuated partisan or ideologically motivated responding Bolsen, Druckman, and Cook 2014.[22]

To investigate these patterns further, I estimated a series of multinomial logit models to predict confident misperceptions (i.e., one model for each of the 11 facts). Details are provided in Appendix E, but I provide an overview of results here. The quantities of interest are the coefficients on interest, education, and knowledge in the third column on the tables, which capture the effect of each of these variables on the probability that a participant is confidently misinformed about a given fact (relative to being correctly informed). As shown in Appendix Table A4, political interest is a strong, consistent predictor of confident misperceptions. Interest is positively associated with misperceptions in 9 of the 11 models. In particular, interest is positively related to confident misperceptions about the holders of U.S. debt, trends in the debt and deficit, taxes on the top one percent, welfare, carbon pollution, the stimulus bill, foreign aid, and the estate tax.[23] It is worth pointing out that interest appears to fuel *confident* misperceptions—but *not* weak misperceptions (compare the second and third columns of Appendix Table A4).

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[21]Note that the dependent variable is coded such that all misperceptions (e.g., pro-Democratic and pro-Republican) are treated similarly. Thus, if factual beliefs were polarized along partisan lines, we would expect the coefficients on both parties to be positive and significant (i.e., partisans significantly more likely than independents to hold misperceptions). Significant coefficients for one and only one party would indicate that only members of that party are polarized, relative to independents.

[22]Notwithstanding the prompt, we see clear evidence of partisan motivated reasoning on some of the arguably more partisan questions (e.g., unemployment rate; see Appendix Table A10) (Bartels 2002; Gerber and Huber 2010).

[23]Political interest does *not* predict confident misperceptions about current gun laws or the unemployment rate.

Turning to the other two key variables, we see that the effects of education and knowledge are mostly in the expected direction, but less consistent than the influence of interest. Out of the 11 facts examined, knowledge is negatively associated with confident misperceptions about five facts: current gun laws, the unemployment rate, carbon pollution, foreign aid, and the estate tax.[24] Education is negatively associated with confident misperceptions about two facts: the holders of the U.S. debt and the tax burden.[25] Collectively, these results suggest that politically interested individuals are confidently misinformed about a range of political facts. Education and general political knowledge decrease confident misperceptions about some—but by no means all—facts.

## Discussion and Conclusion

Scholars are increasingly interested in the influence of misperceptions in democratic politics. To date, most research has focused on misperceptions about a small subset of unrepresentative, highly partisan and/or ideological facts. The purpose of this study was to document the scope of misperceptions—and the predictors of those misperceptions—across a wider, more representative subset of policy issues.

The aggregate results presented here suggest that misperceptions are widespread in the mass public. Indeed, even adopting the stringent standard of *confident* misperceptions, approximately one-in-five participants were misinformed. There was considerable heterogeneity in the prevalence of misperceptions across issues, with some misperceptions being held by more than seven-in-ten participants. So, who holds misperceptions? The individual-level evidence indicates that the most consistent predictor of misperceptions is an individual's level of political interest. This novel finding conflicts with a large body of existing research, both empirical and normative. Empirically, research suggests that the politically interested not only consume more political information, but are better equipped to scrutinize it (Luskin 1990, 335; Chaiken 1980; Petty and

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[24]Knowledge is positively associated with confident misperceptions about the largest holder of the U.S. debt and the tax burden. In total, the effect of knowledge on misperceptions is negative and significant for five facts, positive and significant for two facts, and insignificant for four facts.

[25]In no case is education positively associated with misperceptions. In total, the effect of education on misperceptions is negative and significant for two facts and insignificant for nine facts.

Cacioppo 1979). The results presented here contradict this claim. Political interest, it appears, fuels confident misperceptions. I argued that this occurs because the politically interested are likely to consume political media, which often contain misinformation. Normatively, many scholars describe interest as desirable—both for its own sake (Schuessler 2000) and because of its effects on general knowledge (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996), participation (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995), deliberation (Page 1996), and other outcomes.[26] My results suggest that, although such effects are possible, they are not costless: increased interest would, in all likelihood, also increase misperceptions.

At the same time, certain types of citizens can insulate themselves from misinformation contained in media coverage or elsewhere. In particular, highly educated individuals and those high in general political knowledge are less likely to hold confident misperceptions. Given the breadth of facts examined in this study, these results lead credence to past studies, which have tended to show negative (but inconsistent) effects of education and knowledge on misperceptions (Nyhan and Reifler 2012, 5). It is important to note that the effects of education and knowledge were considerably more modest than the influence of interest. These resources, then, cannot completely insulate the politically interested from becoming confidently misinformed. Further research is surely needed to understand the mechanisms by which interest, education, knowledge, and other individual-level factors affect misperceptions.

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[26]For explications of the normative importance of interest, see Dahl (1989); Barber (1984); Mansbridge (1983), Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee (1954, chapter 13); Dewey (1927).

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# Appendices

## Appendix A: Sample Demographics

Appendix Table A1: Sample Demographics

|                | Sample | ANES 2012 |
|----------------|--------|-----------|
| Median Age     | 44     | 51        |
| % Male         | 49.3   | 48.1      |
| % White        | 62.8   | 73.3      |
| % BA or Higher | 63.6   | 45.3      |
| % Democrat     | 48.4   | 52.7      |
| % Republican   | 38.7   | 33.9      |

## Appendix B: Question Wordings

**Demographic/Political Questions**

- In what year were you born?

- Please indicate your sex. [Male, Female, Other]

- What racial or ethnic group best describes you? [White, Black, Native American, Hispanic, Asian American, Other]

- Generally speaking, which of the options on the scale below best describes your party identification? [Strong Democrat, Weak Democrat, Lean Democrat, Independent, Lean Republican, Weak Republican, Strong Republican]

- Which point on this scale best describes your political views? [Very Liberal, Mostly Liberal, Somewhat Liberal, Moderate, Somewhat Conservative, Mostly Conservative, Very Conservative]

**General Political Knowledge**

- Do you happen to know how many times a person can be elected President of the United States under current laws? [Free response. **2**]

- Is the U.S. federal budget deficit – the amount by which the government's spending exceeds the amount of money it collects – now bigger, about the same, or smaller than it was during most of the 1990s? [**Bigger**, About the same, Smaller, Don't know]

- For how many years is a United States Senator elected – that is, how many years are there in one full term of office for a U.S. Senator? [Free response. **6**]

- What is Medicare? [**A program run by the U.S. federal government to pay for old people's health care**, A program run by state governments to provide health care to poor people, A private health insurance plan sold to individuals in all 50 states, A private, non-profit organization that runs free health clinics, Don't know]

- On which of the following does the U.S. federal government spend the least? [**Foreign aid**, Medicare, National defense, Social Security, Don't know]

- Do you happen to know which job or political office is currently held by Paul Ryan? [**Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives**, Vice President of the United States, Chief Justice on the U.S. Supreme Court, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Don't know]

- Do you happen to know which job or political office is currently held by Joe Biden? [Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, **Vice President of the United States**, Chief Justice on the U.S. Supreme Court, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Don't know]

**Misperceptions**

- Which of the following owns the largest share of the U.S. federal debt? [China, Saudi Arabia, Japan, **federal government accounts**]

- To the best of your knowledge, does the federal government set a limit on how long a person is eligible to receive welfare (TANF) benefits? [No, there is no limit. **Yes, there is a limit.**]

- Which of the following statements is correct? Compared to the previous fiscal year, in 2014-2015 the federal budget deficit __ and the debt __. [increased, increased; increased, decreased; **decreased, increased**; decreased, decreased]

- Is this statement true or false? Anyone who purchases a firearm in the United States— regardless of location of the sale—is required to undergo a federal criminal background check. [True, **False**]

- There is a federal estate tax – that is, a tax on the money people leave to others when they die. What percentage of Americans leave enough money to others for the federal estate tax to kick in? [about 95 percent of all Americans, about 70 percent of all Americans, 50 percent of all Americans, about 25 percent of all Americans, **less than 5 percent of all Americans**]

- There is a lot of talk these days about environmental pollution from carbon dioxide ($CO_2$). What is your best guess of the percentage of total global $CO_2$ emissions that comes from **the United States**? [**0-25 percent**, 26-50 percent, 51-75 percent, 76-100 percent]

- What is your best guess of the percentage of federal income tax revenue that comes from the top 1 percent of earners? [0-25 percent, **26-50 percent**, 51-75 percent, 76-100 percent]

- What is your best guess of the percentage of the federal budget goes to foreign aid? [**0-10 percent**, 11-20 percent, 21-30 percent, 31 percent or more]

- The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics counts a person as unemployed if he or she is not employed at any job and is looking for work. By this definition, what percentage of Americans was unemployed in October of 2015? [around 9 percent, around 7 percent, **around 5 percent**, around 3 percent]

- In 2009, President Obama signed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (also referred to as "the stimulus bill") into law. What was the single largest (i.e., most expensive) component of this bill? [**tax relief**, Medicaid expansion, transportation and infrastructure spending, scientific research]

- There is a lot of talk these days about environmental pollution from carbon dioxide ($CO_2$). What is your best guess of the percentage of total global $CO_2$ emissions that comes from **China**? [0-25 percent, **26-50 percent**, 51-75 percent, 76-100 percent]

- Last year, the United States spent about $600 billion on its military. Did **China** spend more, less, or about the same on its military? [China spent more, **China spent less**, China spent the same]

– Last year, the typical U.S. household earned about $50,000. Did the average household in **China** earn more, less, or about the same? [Typical Chinese household earned more, **Typical Chinese household earned less**, Typical Chinese household earned about the same]

# Appendix C: Distribution of Misperceptions

Appendix Table A2: Distribution of Misperceptions (used to create Figure 1)

| Misperception | Percent Holding [95% MOE] | Mean Confidence [95% CI] |
|---|---|---|
| China owns most U.S. debt | 69.7 [65.7, 73.7] | 2.76 [2.56, 2.97] |
| No time limits on TANF | 44.2 [40.2, 48.2] | 3.08 [2.96, 3.21] |
| Debt and deficits both up | 58.1 [54.1, 62.1] | 3.11 [2.99, 3.24] |
| Universal background checks required | 54.4 [50.4, 58.4] | 3.87 [3.76, 3.99] |
| Overestimate estate tax eligibility | 60.5 [56.5, 64.5] | 2.47 [2.36, 2.58] |
| Overestimate $CO_2$ from U.S. | 71.2 [67.2, 75.2] | 2.35 [2.24, 2.46] |
| Overestimate $CO_2$ from China | 39.4 [35.4, 43.4] | 2.58 [2.41, 2.74] |
| Underestimate tax revenue from top 1% | 49.4 [45.5, 53.4] | 2.84 [2.66, 2.94] |
| Overestimate foreign aid budget | 63.2 [59.2, 67.2] | 2.26 [2.15, 2.37] |
| Overestimate unemployment | 61.1 [57.1, 65.1] | 2.80 [2.69, 2.92] |
| Largest component of stimulus | 56.4 [52.4, 60.4] | 2.57 [2.44, 2.70] |
| **Mean (SD)** | **57.1 (9.8)** | **2.79 (0.45)** |

Note: N=605. The percent holding a given misperception is calculated by summing the relevant responses and dividing by the sample size. Mean confidence level is calculated among the subset of participants who hold the misperception.

Appendix Figure A1: Distribution of Dependent Variable (Count of Factual Misperceptions)
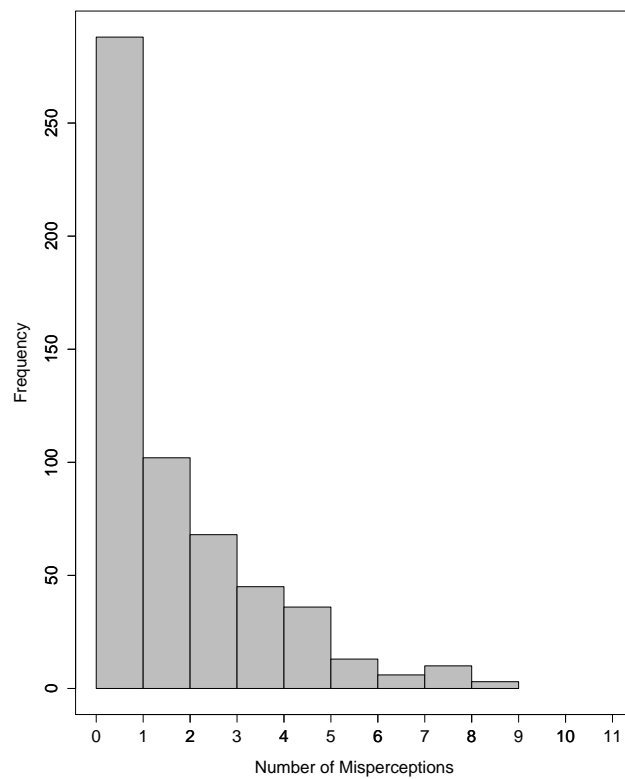


Note: Histogram shows the number of participants holding each number of misperceptions. The mean and standard deviation are 1.99 and 1.95, respectively. The median is 1.

# Appendix D: Robustness Checks of Poisson Model Presented in Table 1

Appendix Table A3: Negative Binomial and OLS Regression Models Predicting the Total Number of Factual Misperceptions (With and Without Controls)

|  | Negative Binomial | | Ordinary Least Sqares | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pol. Interest | 0.34*** (0.05) | 0.38*** (0.05) | 0.72*** (0.10) | 0.80*** (0.10) |
| Education | −0.06* (0.04) | −0.07* (0.04) | −0.17** (0.08) | −0.17** (0.08) |
| Gen. Pol. Know. | −0.06** (0.03) | −0.07** (0.03) | −0.14** (0.07) | −0.16** (0.07) |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| Strong Dem. | −0.23 (0.15) | −0.26* (0.15) | −0.65* (0.36) | −0.71** (0.36) |
| Weak Dem. | −0.43** (0.17) | −0.46*** (0.18) | −0.98*** (0.38) | −1.00*** (0.38) |
| Lean Dem. | −0.14 (0.16) | −0.17 (0.16) | −0.43 (0.36) | −0.49 (0.36) |
| Lean Rep. | −0.16 (0.17) | −0.21 (0.17) | −0.34 (0.38) | −0.46 (0.38) |
| Weak Rep. | −0.13 (0.18) | −0.20 (0.18) | −0.30 (0.43) | −0.48 (0.43) |
| Strong Rep. | 0.03 (0.16) | −0.03 (0.17) | 0.11 (0.42) | 0.01 (0.42) |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| Very Lib. | 0.06 (0.16) | 0.08 (0.16) | 0.19 (0.37) | 0.18 (0.36) |
| Mostly Lib. | 0.18 (0.15) | 0.20 (0.15) | 0.37 (0.33) | 0.42 (0.32) |
| Somewhat Lib. | 0.31** (0.15) | 0.39** (0.15) | 0.67* (0.36) | 0.84** (0.36) |
| Somewhat Cons. | 0.26* (0.15) | 0.28* (0.15) | 0.47 (0.34) | 0.54 (0.35) |
| Mostly Cons. | 0.11 (0.16) | 0.13 (0.16) | 0.12 (0.36) | 0.15 (0.37) |
| Very Cons. | 0.43*** (0.17) | 0.43*** (0.17) | 1.27*** (0.42) | 1.25*** (0.43) |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| Constant | 0.16 (0.28) | −0.14 (0.25) | 1.42** (0.60) | 0.67 (0.54) |
| Controls? | Yes | No | Yes | No |
| Observations | 605 | 605 | 605 | 605 |

Significance codes: *p<.10, **p<.05, ***p<.01.

## Appendix E: Multinomial Logit Models

This appendix provides more information on the multinomial logit models used to estimate the predictors of confident misperceptions. The first table (Appendix Table A4) gives an overview: it shows how the three key independent variables (interest, education, general political knowledge) affect the probability of being uninformed/weakly misinformed (column 2) or confidently misinformed (column 3) (both relative to being correctly informed). The remaining tables give the full results for each model (i.e., one model for each of the 11 facts surveyed).

Appendix Table A4: Overview of Results from Multinomial Logit Models (One Model for Each Fact)

|  | Uninformed | Misinformed |
|---|---|---|
| ***Largest Holder of U.S. Debt:*** | | |
| Political Interest | −0.083 (0.116) | 0.415*** (0.128) |
| Education | −0.101 (0.102) | −0.221** (0.108) |
| General Political Knowledge | 0.090 (0.077) | 0.300*** (0.086) |
| | | |
| ***Current Gun Laws:*** | | |
| Political Interest | −0.173 (0.124) | 0.076 (0.105) |
| Education | 0.019 (0.108) | 0.040 (0.091) |
| General Political Knowledge | −0.252*** (0.088) | −0.411*** (0.075) |
| | | |
| ***Change in Federal Debt and Deficit:*** | | |
| Political Interest | −0.160 (0.121) | 0.415*** (0.146) |
| Education | −0.047 (0.104) | −0.093 (0.121) |
| General Political Knowledge | 0.037 (0.080) | 0.042 (0.095) |
| | | |
| ***Tax Revenue from Top 1%:*** | | |
| Political Interest | −0.144 (0.106) | 0.369*** (0.139) |
| Education | −0.139 (0.092) | −0.228** (0.114) |
| General Political Knowledge | 0.183** (0.071) | 0.271*** (0.091) |
| | | |
| ***Time Limits on TANF:*** | | |
| Political Interest | −0.141 (0.101) | 0.421*** (0.130) |
| Education | 0.152* (0.088) | 0.084 (0.105) |
| General Political Knowledge | 0.068 (0.069) | −0.048 (0.082) |
| | | |
| ***Current Unemployment Rate:*** | | |
| Political Interest | −0.444*** (0.109) | 0.197 (0.145) |
| Education | −0.076 (0.089) | −0.194 (0.118) |
| General Political Knowledge | −0.231*** (0.073) | −0.279*** (0.093) |
| | | |
| ***China Carbon Pollution:*** | | |
| Political Interest | −0.180 (0.162) | 0.530** (0.207) |
| Education | 0.180 (0.146) | 0.070 (0.173) |
| General Political Knowledge | 0.138 (0.104) | 0.086 (0.127) |

**Largest Component of Stimulus:**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Political Interest | 0.002 (0.096) | 0.627*** (0.164) |
| Education | −0.041 (0.083) | −0.128 (0.128) |
| General Political Knowledge | −0.065 (0.066) | −0.139 (0.098) |

**U.S. Carbon Pollution:**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Political Interest | −0.247** (0.109) | 0.591*** (0.181) |
| Education | −0.154* (0.091) | −0.029 (0.137) |
| General Political Knowledge | −0.163** (0.076) | −0.337*** (0.108) |

**Foreign Aid:**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Political Interest | −0.233** (0.100) | 0.456** (0.208) |
| Education | −0.238*** (0.085) | −0.238 (0.163) |
| General Political Knowledge | −0.299*** (0.072) | −0.561*** (0.123) |

**Estate Tax Eligibility:**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Political Interest | −0.225** (0.098) | 0.407** (0.197) |
| Education | −0.103 (0.082) | −0.065 (0.170) |
| General Political Knowledge | −0.169** (0.069) | −0.621*** (0.121) |

Note: For the dependent variable, the omitted reference group is correctly informed. The following predictors are suppressed: age, sex (male), and race (white), partisanship, and ideology. Significance codes: *$p<.10$, **$p<.05$, ***$p<.01$.

Appendix Table A5: Multinomial Logit Model Predicting Beliefs about Largest Holder of U.S. Debt

|  | Uninformed | Misinformed |
|---|---|---|
| Political Interest | −0.083 (0.116) | 0.415*** (0.128) |
| Education | −0.101 (0.102) | −0.221** (0.108) |
| General Political Knowledge | 0.090 (0.077) | 0.300*** (0.086) |
|  |  |  |
| Strong Democrat | −0.034 (0.405) | −0.071 (0.431) |
| Weak Democrat | −0.042 (0.433) | −0.117 (0.470) |
| Lean Democrat | 0.330 (0.413) | 0.100 (0.458) |
| Lean Republican | 0.529 (0.460) | 0.007 (0.503) |
| Weak Republican | 0.661 (0.530) | 0.421 (0.559) |
|  |  |  |
| Strong Republican | 0.649 (0.526) | 0.827 (0.531) |
| Very Liberal | 0.696 (0.448) | 0.675 (0.477) |
| Mostly Liberal | 0.371 (0.385) | 0.592 (0.409) |
| Somewhat Liberal | 0.235 (0.418) | 0.469 (0.451) |
| Somewhat Conservative | 0.372 (0.422) | 0.645 (0.456) |
| Mostly Conservative | −0.143 (0.460) | 0.249 (0.476) |
| Very Conservative | −0.591 (0.533) | −0.199 (0.529) |
|  |  |  |
| Constant | 0.469 (0.617) | −2.265*** (0.711) |
| Akaike Information Criterion | 1,259.199 | 1,259.199 |

Note: For the dependent variable, the omitted reference group is correctly informed. Significance codes: *p<.10, **p<.05, ***p<.01.

Appendix Table A6: Multinomial Logit Model Predicting Beliefs about Current Gun Laws

|  | Uninformed | Misinformed |
|---|---|---|
| Political Interest | $-0.173$ (0.124) | 0.076 (0.105) |
| Education | 0.019 (0.108) | 0.040 (0.091) |
| General Political Knowledge | $-0.252^{***}$ (0.088) | $-0.411^{***}$ (0.075) |
|  |  |  |
| Strong Democrat | 0.016 (0.461) | $-0.406$ (0.370) |
| Weak Democrat | 0.259 (0.474) | $-0.494$ (0.418) |
| Lean Democrat | 0.328 (0.442) | $-0.518$ (0.398) |
| Lean Republican | 0.016 (0.494) | $-0.021$ (0.410) |
| Weak Republican | 0.138 (0.566) | 0.095 (0.470) |
| Strong Republican | $-0.177$ (0.561) | 0.074 (0.446) |
|  |  |  |
| Very Liberal | $-1.491^{***}$ (0.515) | $-0.847^{**}$ (0.392) |
| Mostly Liberal | $-1.103^{***}$ (0.409) | $-0.755^{**}$ (0.353) |
| Somewhat Liberal | $-0.596$ (0.437) | $-0.122$ (0.376) |
| Somewhat Conservative | $-0.784^{*}$ (0.429) | $-0.838^{**}$ (0.374) |
| Mostly Conservative | $-0.458$ (0.476) | $-0.521$ (0.401) |
| Very Conservative | $-0.122$ (0.566) | $-0.011$ (0.460) |
|  |  |  |
| Constant | $1.427^{**}$ (0.694) | $1.912^{***}$ (0.594) |
| Akaike Information Criterion | 1,231.256 | 1,231.256 |

Note: For the dependent variable, the omitted reference group is correctly informed. Significance codes: $^{*}$p<.10, $^{**}$p<.05, $^{***}$p<.01.

Appendix Table A7: Multinomial Logit Models Predicting Beliefs about Changes in the Federal Debt and Deficit

|  | Uninformed | Misinformed |
|---|---|---|
| Political Interest | −0.160 (0.121) | 0.415*** (0.146) |
| Education | −0.047 (0.104) | −0.093 (0.121) |
| General Political Knowledge | 0.037 (0.080) | 0.042 (0.095) |
|  |  |  |
| Strong Democrat | 0.708* (0.409) | −0.531 (0.482) |
| Weak Democrat | 0.853* (0.460) | −0.471 (0.567) |
|  |  |  |
| Lean Democrat | 0.568 (0.420) | −0.234 (0.508) |
| Lean Republican | 0.234 (0.463) | 0.140 (0.518) |
| Weak Republican | 1.499** (0.619) | 0.728 (0.683) |
| Strong Republican | 0.640 (0.524) | 0.469 (0.559) |
| Very Liberal | −0.103 (0.431) | −0.174 (0.559) |
| Mostly Liberal | −0.262 (0.392) | 0.429 (0.478) |
| Somewhat Liberal | −0.576 (0.413) | 0.330 (0.487) |
| Somewhat Conservative | 0.324 (0.473) | 0.559 (0.538) |
| Mostly Conservative | −0.495 (0.468) | −0.058 (0.523) |
| Very Conservative | −0.797 (0.557) | 0.565 (0.579) |
|  |  |  |
| Constant | 1.283** (0.637) | −1.427* (0.791) |
| Akaike Information Criterion | 1,152.746 | 1,152.746 |

Note: For the dependent variable, the omitted reference group is correctly informed. Significance codes: *p<.10, **p<.05, ***p<.01.

Appendix Table A8: Multinomial Logit Model Predicting Beliefs about Share of Tax Revenue Collected from Top 1%

|  | Uninformed | Misinformed |
|---|---|---|
| Political Interest | −0.144 (0.106) | 0.369*** (0.139) |
| Education | −0.139 (0.092) | −0.228** (0.114) |
| General Political Knowledge | 0.183** (0.071) | 0.271*** (0.091) |
|  |  |  |
| Strong Democrat | 0.836** (0.386) | 0.199 (0.445) |
| Weak Democrat | 0.735* (0.414) | −0.061 (0.511) |
| Lean Democrat | 0.749* (0.395) | 0.299 (0.477) |
| Lean Republican | 0.506 (0.410) | −0.770 (0.560) |
| Weak Republican | 0.314 (0.456) | −0.533 (0.582) |
| Strong Republican | 0.716 (0.461) | −0.006 (0.539) |
|  |  |  |
| Very Liberal | −0.007 (0.422) | 0.750 (0.492) |
| Mostly Liberal | −0.159 (0.361) | 0.377 (0.444) |
| Somewhat Liberal | −0.506 (0.389) | 0.486 (0.464) |
| Somewhat Conservative | 0.076 (0.372) | 0.473 (0.500) |
| Mostly Conservative | −0.636 (0.394) | 0.010 (0.508) |
| Very Conservative | −0.064 (0.492) | 0.817 (0.572) |
|  |  |  |
| Constant | 0.315 (0.568) | −2.494*** (0.764) |
| Akaike Information Criterion | 1,236.713 | 1,236.713 |

Note: For the dependent variable, the omitted reference group is correctly informed. Significance codes: *p<.10, **p<.05, ***p<.01.

Appendix Table A9: Multinomial Logit Model Predicting Beliefs about TANF Limits

|  | Uninformed | Misinformed |
|---|---|---|
| Political Interest | −0.141 (0.101) | 0.421*** (0.130) |
| Education | 0.152* (0.088) | 0.084 (0.105) |
| General Political Knowledge | 0.068 (0.069) | −0.048 (0.082) |
|  |  |  |
| Strong Democrat | 0.167 (0.370) | 0.055 (0.435) |
| Weak Democrat | 0.293 (0.392) | −0.330 (0.527) |
| Lean Democrat | 0.693* (0.381) | 0.869* (0.452) |
| Lean Republican | 0.238 (0.403) | 0.060 (0.511) |
| Weak Republican | 0.115 (0.458) | 0.242 (0.542) |
| Strong Republican | 0.047 (0.450) | 0.037 (0.521) |
|  |  |  |
| Very Liberal | 0.691* (0.383) | 0.800* (0.449) |
| Mostly Liberal | 0.327 (0.336) | 0.426 (0.416) |
| Somewhat Liberal | 0.393 (0.369) | 0.622 (0.437) |
| Somewhat Conservative | 0.559 (0.355) | 0.433 (0.444) |
| Mostly Conservative | 0.979** (0.394) | 0.767 (0.474) |
| Very Conservative | 0.704 (0.466) | 0.911* (0.516) |
|  |  |  |
| Constant | −1.167** (0.554) | −3.062*** (0.722) |
| Akaike Information Criterion | 1,280.947 | 1,280.947 |

Note: For the dependent variable, the omitted reference group is correctly informed. Significance codes: *p<.10, **p<.05, ***p<.01.

Appendix Table A10: Multinomial Logit Model Predicting Beliefs about Current Unemployment Rate

|  | Uninformed | Misinformed |
|---|---|---|
| Political Interest | −0.444*** (0.109) | 0.197 (0.145) |
| Education | −0.076 (0.089) | −0.194 (0.118) |
| General Political Knowledge | −0.231*** (0.073) | −0.279*** (0.093) |
|  |  |  |
| Strong Democrat | 0.305 (0.364) | 0.230 (0.499) |
| Weak Democrat | 0.321 (0.397) | 0.239 (0.561) |
| Lean Democrat | 0.527 (0.377) | 0.233 (0.552) |
| Lean Republican | 1.007** (0.430) | 1.453*** (0.552) |
| Weak Republican | 1.033** (0.472) | 1.071* (0.628) |
| Strong Republican | 1.156** (0.469) | 1.479** (0.589) |
|  |  |  |
| Very Liberal | −0.669* (0.392) | 0.041 (0.496) |
| Mostly Liberal | −0.370 (0.332) | −0.492 (0.493) |
| Somewhat Liberal | −0.214 (0.385) | 0.476 (0.478) |
| Somewhat Conservative | −0.337 (0.373) | −0.447 (0.495) |
| Mostly Conservative | −1.018** (0.410) | −0.712 (0.518) |
| Very Conservative | −0.536 (0.482) | −0.223 (0.574) |
|  |  |  |
| Constant | 3.068*** (0.596) | −0.036 (0.819) |
| Akaike Information Criterion | 1,198.515 | 1,198.515 |

Note: For the dependent variable, the omitted reference group is correctly informed. Significance codes: *p<.10, **p<.05, ***p<.01.

Appendix Table A11: Multinomial Logit Model Predicting Beliefs about Chinese $CO_2$ Emissions

|  | Uninformed | Misinformed |
|---|---|---|
| Political Interest | −0.180 (0.162) | 0.530** (0.207) |
| Education | 0.180 (0.146) | 0.070 (0.173) |
| General Political Knowledge | 0.138 (0.104) | 0.086 (0.127) |
|  |  |  |
| Strong Democrat | 0.096 (0.564) | −0.834 (0.666) |
| Weak Democrat | 0.186 (0.637) | −0.220 (0.742) |
| Lean Democrat | −0.507 (0.541) | −0.610 (0.656) |
| Lean Republican | 0.281 (0.690) | −0.367 (0.812) |
| Weak Republican | 0.050 (0.750) | −1.299 (0.918) |
| Strong Republican | 0.376 (0.752) | −0.477 (0.844) |
|  |  |  |
| Very Liberal | −0.258 (0.530) | 0.092 (0.680) |
| Mostly Liberal | 0.244 (0.530) | 1.034 (0.636) |
| Somewhat Liberal | 0.628 (0.665) | 1.394* (0.759) |
| Somewhat Conservative | 0.203 (0.587) | 0.873 (0.708) |
| Mostly Conservative | 0.843 (0.761) | 1.689* (0.865) |
| Very Conservative | −0.440 (0.705) | 0.860 (0.807) |
|  |  |  |
| Constant | 1.473* (0.872) | −2.265** (1.120) |
| Akaike Information Criterion | 852.047 | 852.047 |

Note: For the dependent variable, the omitted reference group is correctly informed. Significance codes: *p<.10, **p<.05, ***p<.01.

Appendix Table A12: Multinomial Logit Models Predicting Beliefs about the Largest Component of the Stimulus Bill

|  | Uninformed | Misinformed |
|---|---|---|
| Political Interest | 0.002 (0.096) | 0.627*** (0.164) |
| Education | −0.041 (0.083) | −0.128 (0.128) |
| General Political Knowledge | −0.065 (0.066) | −0.139 (0.098) |
|  |  |  |
| Strong Democrat | −0.328 (0.348) | −0.379 (0.499) |
| Weak Democrat | 0.018 (0.373) | −0.561 (0.599) |
| Lean Democrat | −0.414 (0.352) | −0.763 (0.580) |
| Lean Republican | −0.140 (0.379) | −1.040 (0.647) |
| Weak Republican | −0.449 (0.432) | −1.161* (0.660) |
| Strong Republican | 0.071 (0.437) | −0.618 (0.580) |
|  |  |  |
| Very Liberal | −0.148 (0.356) | −0.231 (0.566) |
| Mostly Liberal | −0.357 (0.318) | −0.198 (0.514) |
| Somewhat Liberal | 0.335 (0.341) | 0.347 (0.570) |
| Somewhat Conservative | 0.576* (0.338) | 0.681 (0.564) |
| Mostly Conservative | 0.677* (0.378) | 1.319** (0.559) |
| Very Conservative | −0.130 (0.463) | 1.435** (0.571) |
|  |  |  |
| Constant | 0.501 (0.520) | −2.482*** (0.892) |
| Akaike Information Criterion | 1,192.032 | 1,192.032 |

Note: For the dependent variable, the omitted reference group is correctly informed. Significance codes: *p<.10, **p<.05, ***p<.01.

Appendix Table A13: Multinomial Logit Model Predicting Beliefs about U.S. $CO_2$ Emissions

| | Uninformed | Misinformed |
|---|---|---|
| Political Interest | −0.247** (0.109) | 0.591*** (0.181) |
| Education | −0.154* (0.091) | −0.029 (0.137) |
| General Political Knowledge | −0.163** (0.076) | −0.337*** (0.108) |
| | | |
| Strong Democrat | 0.842** (0.405) | −0.464 (0.543) |
| Weak Democrat | 0.895* (0.457) | 0.002 (0.618) |
| Lean Democrat | 0.189 (0.389) | −1.078* (0.649) |
| Lean Republican | −0.172 (0.404) | −0.838 (0.651) |
| Weak Republican | 0.185 (0.453) | −0.721 (0.746) |
| Strong Republican | −0.019 (0.445) | 0.077 (0.637) |
| | | |
| Very Liberal | 0.160 (0.447) | 1.088* (0.630) |
| Mostly Liberal | −0.401 (0.375) | 0.960* (0.552) |
| Somewhat Liberal | −0.443 (0.392) | 1.093* (0.575) |
| Somewhat Conservative | −0.335 (0.366) | 0.670 (0.566) |
| Mostly Conservative | −0.304 (0.378) | −0.994 (0.741) |
| Very Conservative | −1.234*** (0.451) | −0.541 (0.661) |
| | | |
| Constant | 2.919*** (0.611) | −1.500 (0.985) |
| Akaike Information Criterion | 1,064.028 | 1,064.028 |

Note: For the dependent variable, the omitted reference group is correctly informed. Significance codes: *p<.10, **p<.05, ***p<.01.

Appendix Table A14: Multinomial Logit Model Predicting Beliefs about Size of Foreign Aid Budget

|  | Uninformed | Misinformed |
|---|---|---|
| Political Interest | −0.233** (0.100) | 0.456** (0.208) |
| Education | −0.238*** (0.085) | −0.238 (0.163) |
| General Political Knowledge | −0.299*** (0.072) | −0.561*** (0.123) |
|  |  |  |
| Strong Democrat | 0.408 (0.356) | −0.392 (0.641) |
| Weak Democrat | 0.281 (0.387) | −0.580 (0.809) |
| Lean Democrat | 0.046 (0.364) | 0.119 (0.705) |
| Lean Republican | 0.443 (0.387) | −0.723 (0.948) |
| Weak Republican | 0.074 (0.434) | 0.023 (0.781) |
| Strong Republican | 0.147 (0.429) | 0.005 (0.719) |
|  |  |  |
| Very Liberal | −0.166 (0.371) | 0.770 (0.746) |
| Mostly Liberal | −0.414 (0.327) | 0.866 (0.672) |
| Somewhat Liberal | −0.192 (0.355) | 0.554 (0.790) |
| Somewhat Conservative | −0.399 (0.345) | 1.091 (0.676) |
| Mostly Conservative | −0.181 (0.371) | 0.503 (0.776) |
| Very Conservative | 0.336 (0.466) | 2.151*** (0.745) |
|  |  |  |
| Constant | 3.408*** (0.577) | −0.656 (1.178) |
| Akaike Information Criterion | 1,047.906 | 1,047.906 |

Note: For the dependent variable, the omitted reference group is correctly informed. Significance codes: *p<.10, **p<.05, ***p<.01.

Appendix Table A15: Multinomial Logit Model Predicting Beliefs about Federal Estate Tax Eligibility

| | Uninformed | Misinformed |
|---|---|---|
| Political Interest | −0.225** (0.098) | 0.407** (0.197) |
| Education | −0.103 (0.082) | −0.065 (0.170) |
| General Political Knowledge | −0.169** (0.069) | −0.621*** (0.121) |
| | | |
| Strong Democrat | 0.445 (0.351) | −0.464 (0.553) |
| Weak Democrat | 0.476 (0.379) | −0.797 (0.696) |
| Lean Democrat | 0.670* (0.359) | −2.081* (1.103) |
| Lean Republican | 0.309 (0.378) | −14.436*** (0.00000) |
| Weak Republican | 0.143 (0.429) | −0.428 (0.770) |
| Strong Republican | 0.218 (0.421) | 0.133 (0.686) |
| | | |
| Very Liberal | −0.024 (0.362) | 0.401 (0.652) |
| Mostly Liberal | −0.185 (0.317) | 0.090 (0.634) |
| Somewhat Liberal | 0.079 (0.355) | 1.041 (0.680) |
| Somewhat Conservative | 0.442 (0.349) | 0.949 (0.674) |
| Mostly Conservative | 0.128 (0.362) | −1.188 (0.931) |
| Very Conservative | −0.036 (0.432) | 0.307 (0.704) |
| | | |
| Constant | 1.898*** (0.543) | −0.030 (1.082) |
| Akaike Information Criterion | 1,054.091 | 1,054.091 |

Note: For the dependent variable, the omitted reference group is correctly informed. Significance codes: *p<.10, **p<.05, ***p<.01.