

How Do Politicians Respond to Misinformed Constituents? Results from an Elite Survey Experiment

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Abstract

A large literature examines how misperceptions affect citizens' opinions, but much less attention has been paid to whether and how politicians respond to misinformed citizens. To address these questions, I conducted a survey experiment on state legislative offices that manipulated the factual content of a sample constituent e-mail. I find that, compared to a control e-mail with no factual content, *misinformed* and *informed* constituents are viewed as less persuadable, while *uninformed* constituents are viewed as more persuadable. Most notably, participants report less willingness to respond to e-mails from *misinformed* constituents and greater willingness to respond to e-mails from *uninformed* constituents (relative to control). However, conditional on responding, elites are willing to provide factual information to both groups. Thus, although politicians are willing to provide information to their uninformed and misinformed constituents, the misinformed—who presumably need information the most—are much less likely to receive it.

I thank Daniel Diermeier, Jamie Druckman, Matt Lacombe, Nathan Lee, Brendan Nyhan, Dan O'Keefe, Ben Page, John Rutka, Jenny Wolak, and participants at the 2016 Dartmouth Experiments Conference for helpful advice. James Adams and Bit Meehan provided technical assistance.

Many citizens hold misperceptions about the state of the economy, health reform, climate change, campaign finance, and other issues (Ramsay et al. 2010).¹ These misinformed citizens often lobby their elected officials to take certain actions or cast specific votes. For instance, during the 2009–2010 debate over the Affordable Care Act (ACA), many members of Congress were confronted by constituents who held misperceptions about the proposal (Scherer 2010). As Representative Michael Honda explained in an editorial, “[constituent] town halls are tough because...a vast amount of misinformation has permeated parts of society” (Honda 2009). Confronted with misinformed constituents, politicians might choose to simply ignore them, to respond without providing information, or to respond and provide information.² Despite these options, scholars know little about which approach politicians take when contacted by misinformed constituents.

This article develops and tests a theory of how politicians respond to constituents who vary in their factual (mis)understanding of a policy issue. I argue that, unlike uninformed constituents, misinformed constituents are viewed as holding strong opinions and being closed-minded, which makes politicians less likely to respond to their messages. (I also develop expectations about responsiveness to *informed* and *uninformed* constituents.) I test these expectations with a survey experiment on a national sample of state legislative offices. The experiment manipulates whether the writer of a sample constituent e-mail is *informed*, *uninformed*, or *misinformed* about a key policy-relevant fact. I then measure perceptions of the constituent, likelihood of responding to the e-mail, and the likely content of that response.

Consistent with my theory, I find that misinformed constituents are viewed as holding stronger opinions and being less open-minded, while uninformed constituents are viewed as holding weaker opinions and being more open-minded (relative to a control condition). Most notably, participants report *less* willingness to respond to e-mails from misinformed constituents and *greater* willingness to respond to e-mails from uninformed constituents. Thus, ignorance and

¹Following Nyhan and Reifler (2010, 305), I define misperceptions as “cases in which beliefs about factual matters are not supported by clear evidence and expert opinion.”

²For example, during the ACA debate, some members of Congress chose not to hold town hall meetings over the summer recess (Erickson 2009), while others used town hall meetings “to hopefully correct some really bad misinformation” about the bill (e.g., Hornick 2009).

misperceptions—two widely studied problems in public opinion—have opposite effects on responsiveness. Finally, I find that, conditional on responding, participants report a willingness to provide factual information to both misinformed and uninformed constituents. These results suggest that, although politicians are willing to provide information to their uninformed and misinformed constituents, the misinformed—who presumably need information most—are much less likely to receive it.

Expectations

Dahl (1971, 1) famously argued that “a key characteristic of democracy is the continuing responsiveness of the government to the preferences of its citizens.” In contemporary politics, citizens increasingly express preferences via correspondence with elected officials (e.g., e-mails). Previous research on responsiveness therefore examines whether and how elites respond to e-mails from constituents who differ in terms of partisanship, race, gender, and other characteristics (see Costa 2016 for overview). However, no previous study considers whether and how elites respond to messages from constituents who differ in factual knowledge—a variable with wide-ranging implications for voting and public opinion (Campbell et al. 1960).³

In this section, I develop of a theory of elite responsiveness to communications that centers on the perceived persuadability of constituents.⁴ Based on the theory, I derive expectations about whether and how elites will respond to messages depending on whether the constituent is informed, uninformed, and misinformed about a key policy-relevant fact (compared to a constituent who does not reveal his/her factual understanding of an issue). I focus in particular on whether elites will provide factual information in their replies to uninformed and misinformed constituents.

Consider first how elites perceive *informed* constituents. Research in communications and psychology suggests that citing factual information generally increases the perceived expertise

³The only related study comes from Jaeger, Lyons, and Wolak (N.d.), who examine how levels of political knowledge (not misperceptions) affect policy responsiveness in state legislatures (not responsiveness to communications).

⁴While numerous factors affect perceived persuadability (e.g., Hersh 2015, ch. 2), I focus in particular on perceived opinion strength and open-mindedness.

of communicators (O’Keefe 2002, 182–183). Constituents who cite facts should thus be viewed by politicians as more expert in a policy area. Indeed, qualitative evidence from members of Congress suggests that knowledgeable constituents are perceived as more expert and invested in an issue (Fenno 1978, 142). It follows that informed constituents should be viewed as holding stronger opinions and being less open-minded than constituents who know less.

These perceptions of persuadability likely affect elite responsiveness to constituent e-mails. However, when deciding whether to respond to e-mails from informed constituents, politicians are faced with competing considerations. On the one hand, informed constituents are likely be perceived as difficult to persuade. On the other hand, failing to reply could also be costly because informed constituents are politically active (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996). It is therefore unclear whether being informed about a policy issue should increase, decrease, or have no effect on elite responsiveness. I examine this relationship below.

This same line of thinking yields a clear theoretical expectation about how politicians should respond to messages from *uninformed* constituents. In particular, the uninformed should be viewed as being less expert about a particular issue and being more persuadable. These perceptions should make elites more likely to respond to e-mails and also more likely to provide factual information in their replies.

By contrast, scholars know much less about how politicians perceive their *misinformed* constituents. As discussed, misperceptions have been documented on numerous policy issues (Ramsay et al. 2010). Moreover, many people hold misperceptions confidently (Kuklinski et al. 1998) and reject corrective information (Nyhan and Reifler 2010). Whether elites recognize these realities is an open question, but statements by Representative Honda (quoted above) suggest they do: “It’s difficult to deconstruct...misinformation once people have already made up their minds” (Honda 2009). In other words, misinformed citizens are viewed as holding strong opinions and being closed-minded. As a result, we should expect elites will be less likely to respond to messages from misinformed constituents and also less likely to provide information in their replies.

These arguments suggest the following hypotheses, which are all relative to a counterfactual

situation in which a constituent does not reveal his/her factual understanding of the policy issue:

H1: *Informed* constituents will be viewed as holding stronger opinions and being less open-minded. (No prediction is made about responsiveness to informed constituents.)

H2: *Uninformed* constituents will be viewed as holding weaker opinions and being more open-minded. Elites will show greater responsiveness to communications from uninformed constituents, and be more likely to cite factual information in their replies.

H3: *Misinformed* constituents will be viewed as holding stronger opinions and being less open-minded. Elites will show less responsiveness to communications from misinformed constituents, and be less likely to cite factual information in their replies.

Data and Methods

I tested these hypotheses in a survey experiment in February 2016. I invited all legislators in the 45 states that have a retail sales tax—the focus of the experiment—to participate in a study about how they handle constituent e-mails.⁵ This approach is increasingly popular because it permits estimation of treatment effects among elite samples without requiring the deception inherent in audit studies (see, e.g., [Butler and Dynes 2016](#); [Butler 2014](#), ch. 4; [Harden 2013](#)).

The experiment asked participants to evaluate a sample constituent e-mail, which requested that the legislator work to lower the state sales tax.⁶ I focus on sales tax policy because (1) it is a salient issue on which constituents can be reasonably expected to hold opinions; (2) policymaking occurs exclusively at the state level; and (3) it involves quantitative information (e.g., tax rates), which can be easily manipulated to be true or false. The full text of the sample e-mail is provided in Online Appendix Table A1.

The experimental treatments were embedded in the body of the e-mail. Participants were randomly assigned to one of three treatment conditions (or a control group): *informed*, *uninformed*,

⁵At the time the study was fielded, Alaska, Delaware, Montana, New Hampshire, and Oregon did not collect a retail sales tax. E-mail address data for all legislators were originally collected by [Williams \(2015\)](#).

⁶The full text of the instruction was: “We are interested in how your office responds to constituent emails. Below is a sample constituent email. Please read this sample email as if you were receiving it from a constituent, and then answer the questions that follow.”

or *misinformed*.⁷ In the control condition, the constituent neither cites information nor claims to be well informed about sales taxes. In the informed condition, the constituent states that “I have read extensively about sales taxes. I know the national average for state sales taxes is around 5 percent”—a correct statistic (Drenkard and Kaeding 2016). In the uninformed condition, the constituent states that “I don’t know very much about how other states deal with [sales taxes]...” In the misinformed condition, the treatment is identical to the informed treatment—except that the misinformed constituent falsely claims that “the national average for state sales taxes is around 25 percent.” This treatment captures two important properties of misperceptions: inaccuracy and confidence that one is well-informed about the issue at hand (Kuklinski et al. 1998). To summarize, all e-mails advocated for lowering the state sales tax; they varied only with respect to the constituent’s factual (mis)understanding of the issue.⁸

After reading the sample e-mail, participants answered four outcome measures: perceived opinion strength, perceived open-mindedness, likelihood of responding to the e-mail, and likelihood of citing factual information in the response.⁹

In total, 416 participants completed the survey: 240 (57.7%) self-identified legislators and 176 (42.4%) non-legislators (e.g., staffers, interns). Legislators and non-legislators offered similar responses (see Online Appendix F), so I do not distinguish them below. Descriptive statistics are provided in Online Appendix A.

Results

I present the results graphically in Figure 1, which displays condition means and 95% confidence intervals for each dependent variable. I tested my hypotheses by conducting difference-in-means tests comparing means in each treatment condition to the control group.¹⁰ Panels a-d give the

⁷Randomization checks confirm that conditions were balanced on pre-treatment covariates (see Online Appendix B).

⁸As a manipulation check, I included a measure of perceived knowledge of sales tax policy. Results show that my treatments changed perceptions of tax knowledge in expected ways (see Online Appendix Figure A1).

⁹Question wordings for all variables are provided in Online Appendix C. Wordings for the knowledge and opinion strength variables come from Butler and Dynes (2016).

¹⁰Results are substantively the same when estimated using regression, with or without covariates (see Online Appendix E).

results on the opinion strength, open-mindedness, likelihood of responding, and likelihood of citing factual information variables, respectively. I discuss each variable in turn.

I focus first on the opinion strength dependent variable, which is displayed in the top left panel of Figure 1. In the control group, participants viewed the e-mail writer as holding a moderately strong opinion (4.71 on a 7-point scale, standard deviation= 1.67). The effects of all three treatments are consistent with my expectations. Compared to the control group, participants rated the informed constituent as holding a stronger opinion (difference= 0.82, $p < .01$), the uninformed constituent as holding a weaker opinion (difference= -0.39, $p = .06$), and the misinformed constituent as holding a stronger opinion (difference= 0.77, $p < .01$).¹¹ These results suggest that factual knowledge serves as a powerful signal of the strength of constituents' opinions.

[Figure 1 about here]

Turning to the open-mindedness results in the top right panel of Figure 1, we again see the expected patterns. Participants rated the writer of the control e-mail as slightly closed-minded: 2.71 on a 5-point scale (standard deviation=0.91). Compared to the control group, participants rated the informed constituent as 0.21 points less open-minded ($p = .06$), the uninformed constituent as 0.22 points more open-minded ($p = .04$), and the misinformed constituent as 0.36 points less open-minded ($p < .01$). Thus, elites use factual knowledge as a signal not only of opinion strength, but also the extent to which constituents are open to changing their minds.

I now turn to the likelihood of responding and likelihood of citing factual information results.¹² The likelihood of responding measure is displayed in the bottom left panel of Figure 1. Not surprisingly, in all conditions, participants report being likely to respond to the constituent's email. In the control group, this likelihood is 5.57 on a 7-point scale, which corresponds to being between "somewhat" and "very" likely to respond. However, my hypotheses concerned whether being uninformed or misinformed should cause this likelihood to increase or decrease (relative

¹¹I report one-sided p-values for my directional hypotheses.

¹²One potential concern is that these measures invite socially desirable responding. However, even if participants over-report how responsive they would be to e-mails, this effect would be observed in all conditions, including control. Thus, social desirability does not confound the treatment-control comparisons necessary to test my hypotheses. Further, there is no evidence of ceiling effects on the responsiveness measure. Participants have room to shift significantly in both the positive and negative direction (see Figure 1(c) and Online Appendix Table A3).

to the control group). Specifically, I hypothesized that elites should be more likely to respond to uninformed constituents and less likely to respond to misinformed constituents.¹³ Both hypotheses are supported. Compared to the control group, participants in the uninformed group report being 0.39 points more likely to respond ($p = .03$), and participants in the misinformed group report being 0.61 points less likely to respond ($p = .01$). These patterns suggest that constituents who highlight their lack of knowledge are more likely to receive responses from politicians, while constituents who are misinformed are likely to receive less.

The final outcome measure concerns the content—rather than the extent—of elite responses. I focus in particular on whether elites are likely to cite factual information in their responses to uninformed and misinformed constituents. For this part of the analysis, I focus on the subsample of participants who indicated that they would respond to the e-mail ($n=304$).¹⁴ The bottom right panel of Figure 1 displays the results. In the control group, participants indicate that they are approximately “somewhat likely” to cite factual information in their replies (mean=5.48 out of 7, standard deviation=1.30). Consistent with expectations, participants in the uninformed group are *even more likely* to cite information in their replies (difference= 0.46, $p = .02$). Contrary to my expectations, however, participants in the misinformed group are also *even more likely* to cite information in their replies (difference= 0.68, $p < .01$). Reassuringly, these findings suggest that elites become more inclined to cite information when they realize their constituents are uninformed or misinformed.

Discussion

This article reports the results of an elite survey experiment examining elite responsiveness to messages from informed, uninformed, and misinformed constituents. I show that informed and misinformed constituents are viewed as holding strong opinions and being less open-minded,

¹³Recall that I did not offer a prediction for the effect of the informed treatment on responsiveness. Looking at this relationship, I cannot reject the null hypothesis of no effect (difference= -0.04, two-sided $p = .84$).

¹⁴This includes participants who indicated they would be “somewhat likely,” “very likely,” or “extremely likely” to respond ($n=58, 116, 130$, respectively). Results are substantively the same if I include all participants, including those who indicated they would be unlikely to respond (see Online Appendix Figure A2).

while uninformed constituents are viewed as holding weak opinions and being more open-minded. Most notably, I showed that uninformed constituents are more likely to receive responses to their messages, while misinformed constituents are less likely to receive responses. These responsiveness results are especially troubling since, as I also show, elites are willing to provide factual information to both uninformed and misinformed citizens. Thus, while politicians could serve as a source of information for uninformed and misinformed constituents, the misinformed are much less likely to receive it.

Of course, this study is not without limitations. First, it focused on perceptions of a single fact about a single policy issue. Future research should consider whether misperceptions have similar effects on other issues. Second, this study relied on reported—rather than observed—behavior. If possible, future work should seek to validate the results reported here against the observed behavior of political elites. Finally, this study necessarily focused on only one aspect of representation: responsiveness to constituent communications. An important question for future research is how misperceptions affect other components of representation, such as policy responsiveness. Studies along these lines would improve our understanding of how factual misperceptions distort democratic representation.

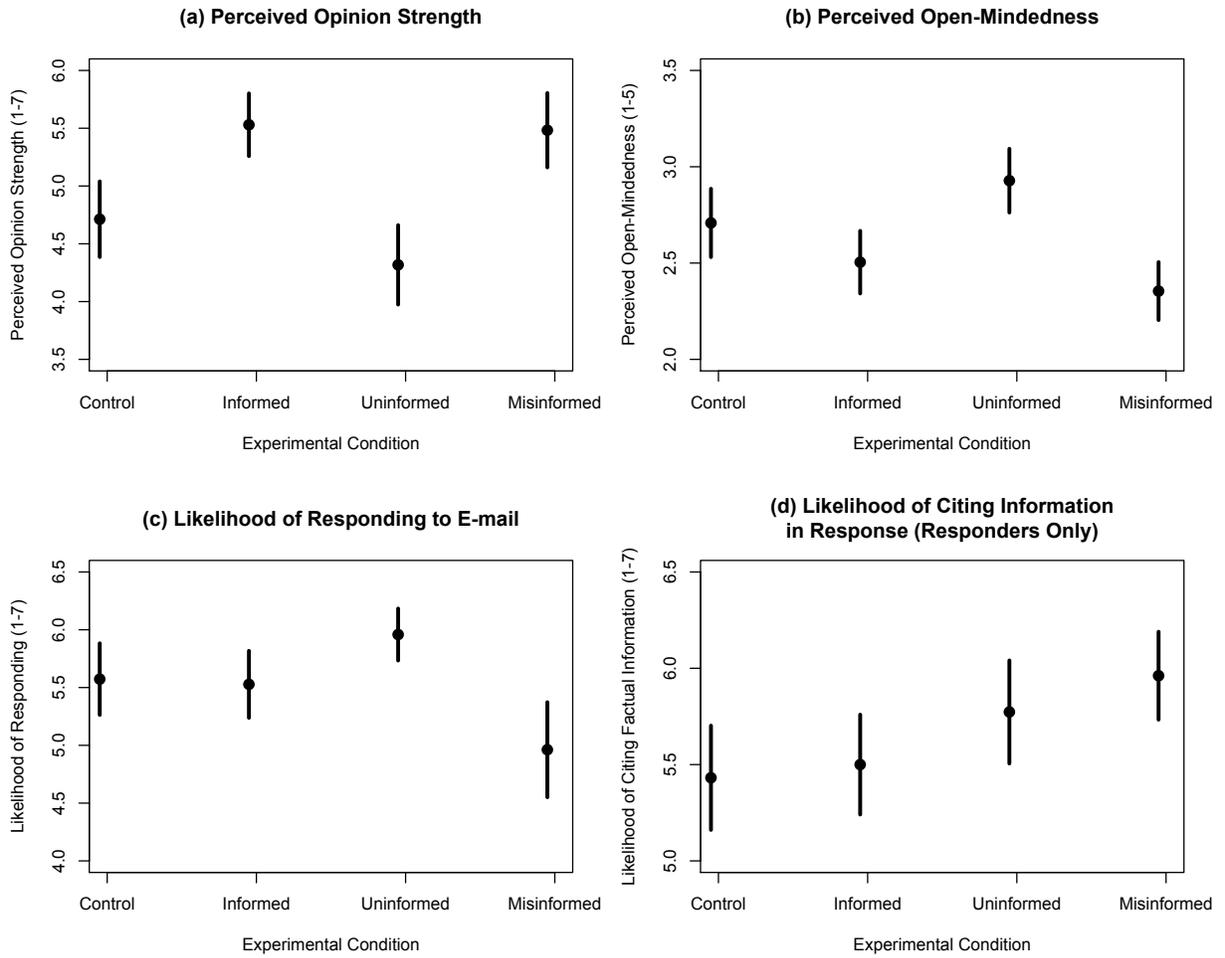
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Figures

Figure 1: Perceptions of Constituent and Likely Response Behavior, by Condition



Note: Dots are condition means. Lines contain 95% confidence intervals.

Online Appendix for “How Do Politicians Respond to Misinformed Constituents? Results from an Elite Survey Experiment”

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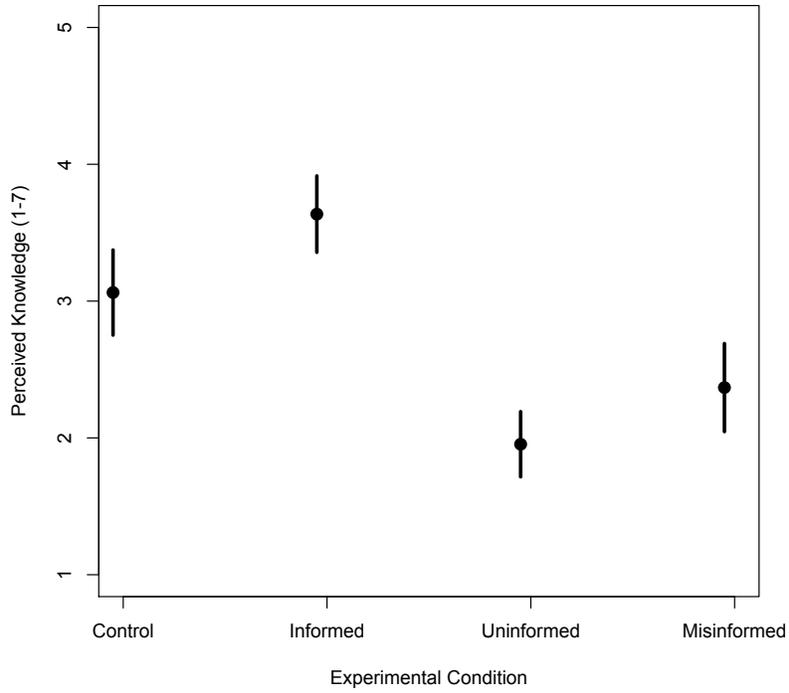
Online Appendix Tables and Figures

Online Appendix Table A1: Experimental Treatments

Condition	Body of E-mail
Control	<p>Dear [Representative/Senator],</p> <p>As your constituent, I'm writing about our state's sales tax and asking that you consider lowering it. We need to keep taxes as low as possible.</p> <p>Thank you for your attention to this matter, Sam Larson</p>
Informed	<p>Dear [Representative/Senator],</p> <p>As your constituent, I'm writing about our state's sales tax and asking that you consider lowering it. I have read extensively about sales taxes. I know the national average for state sales taxes is around 5 percent. We need to keep taxes as low as possible.</p> <p>Thank you for your attention to this matter, Sam Larson</p>
Uninformed	<p>Dear [Representative/Senator],</p> <p>As your constituent, I'm writing about our state's sales tax and asking that you consider lowering it. I don't know very much about sales taxes or how other states deal with them, but we need to keep taxes as low as possible.</p> <p>Thank you for your attention to this matter, Sam Larson</p>
Misinformed	<p>Dear [Representative/Senator],</p> <p>As your constituent, I'm writing about our state's sales tax and asking that you consider lowering it. I have read extensively about sales taxes. I know the national average for state sales taxes is around 25 percent. We need to keep taxes as low as possible.</p> <p>Thank you for your attention to this matter, Sam Larson</p>

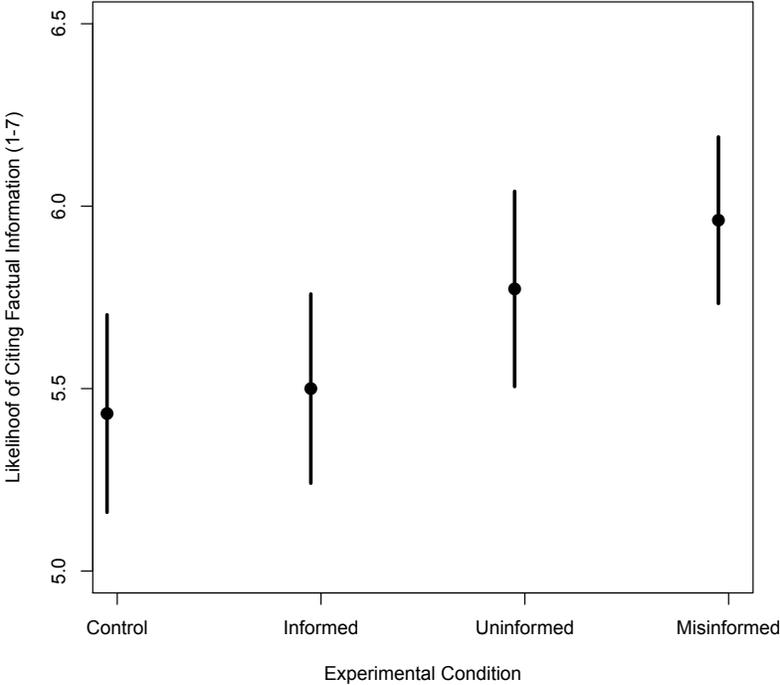
Note: Manipulations were not in bold in the experiment.

Online Appendix Figure A1: Perceived Tax Policy Knowledge, by Condition



Note: Dots are condition means. Lines contain 95% confidence intervals. Means and standard deviations are: Control (M=3.06, sd=1.59), Informed (3.64, 1.56), Uninformed (1.95, 1.27), Misinformed (2.37, 1.53).

Online Appendix Figure A2: Likelihood of Citing Information in Response, by Condition (Full Sample)



Note: Dots are condition means. Lines contain 95% confidence intervals. Means and standard deviations are provided in Online Appendix Table A3.

Online Appendix A: Sample Demographics

Online Appendix Table A1: Sample Demographics

Median Age	54
% Male	53.9
% White	87.6
% Liberal	43.1
% Moderate	15.1
% Conservative	41.8
% Legislator (Non-Legislator)	57.7 (42.4)

Online Appendix B: Randomization Checks

Online Appendix Table A2: Randomization Checks

	Experimental Condition			
	Control	Informed	Uninformed	Misinformed
Median Age (K-W $\chi^2=1.03$, $p=0.79$)	53.5	49.5	57.0	56.0
% Male ($\chi^2=5.61$, $p=0.13$)	49.5	57.4	47.3	63.5
% White ($\chi^2=1.09$, $p=0.78$)	86.0	90.0	86.2	89.2
I (1-7) ($\chi^2=15.69$, $p=0.61$)	4.11	4.00	4.02	3.71
% Legislator ($\chi^2=3.09$, $p=0.38$)	63.0	57.5	51.4	59.8

Note: K-W = Kruskal-Wallis rank-sum test for difference-in-medians.

Online Appendix C: Question Wording

This appendix gives the wording for all variables. Wordings for the knowledge and opinion strength variables are based on questions asked in [Butler and Dynes \(2016\)](#).

- Thank you for agreeing to participate. Before we get started, what is your role in your office? [I am a legislator; I am a staff member; I am an intern/volunteer; Other]
- In what year were you born? [free response]
- What is your sex? [Male, Female, Other]
- Which racial or ethnic group best describes you? [White, Black, Native American, Hispanic, Asian American, Other]
- Which point on this scale best describes your political views? [Very Liberal, Mostly Liberal, Somewhat Liberal, Moderate, Somewhat Conservative, Mostly Conservative, Very Conservative]
- What do you think about the state sales tax rate in your state – should it be decreased a lot, decreased a little, kept the same, increased a little, or increased a lot? [Decreased a lot; Decreased a little; Kept the same; Increased a little; Increased a lot]
- Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? The writer likely understands the complexities of state sales tax policy. [Strongly Agree, Somewhat Agree, Slightly Agree, Neither Agree Nor Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Somewhat Disagree, Strongly Disagree]
- Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? The writer likely holds his/her position on the state sales tax strongly. [Strongly Agree, Somewhat Agree, Slightly Agree, Neither Agree Nor Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Somewhat Disagree, Strongly Disagree]
- Do you think this constituent is open to changing his/her mind on the state sales tax? [Definitely NOT OPEN to changing, Probably NOT OPEN to changing, Not Sure, Probably OPEN to changing, Definitely OPEN to changing]
- How unlikely or likely would you be to respond to this email? [Extremely Unlikely, Very Unlikely, Somewhat Unlikely, Neither Unlikely Nor Likely, Somewhat Likely, Very Likely, Extremely Likely]
- If you were to reply, how unlikely or likely would you be to cite factual information or evidence on the sales tax? [Extremely Unlikely, Very Unlikely, Somewhat Unlikely, Neither Unlikely Nor Likely, Somewhat Likely, Very Likely, Extremely Likely]

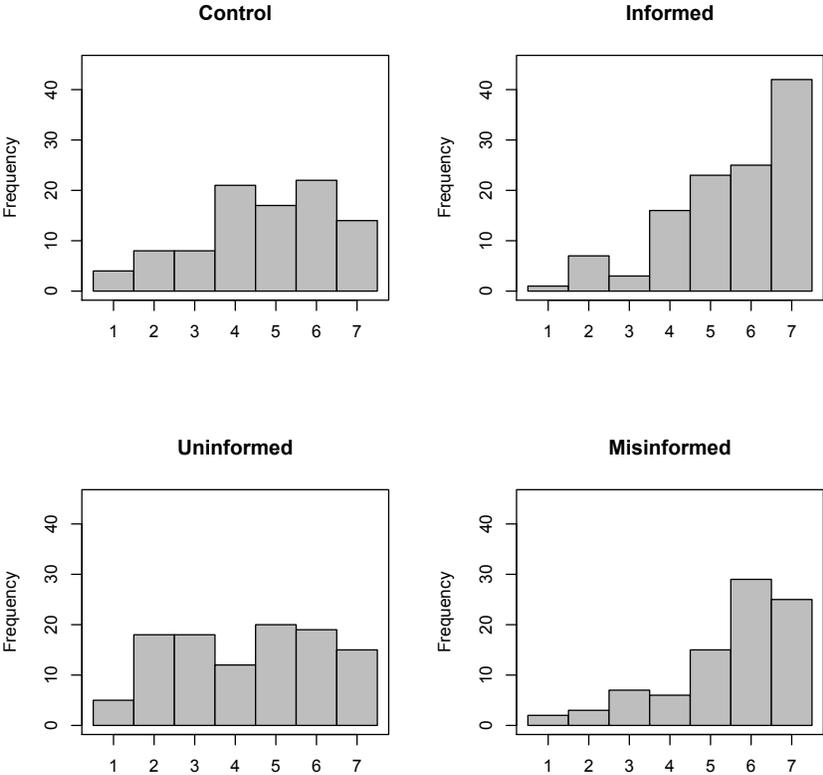
Online Appendix D: Distribution of Dependent Variables

Online Appendix Table A3: Distribution of Dependent Variables

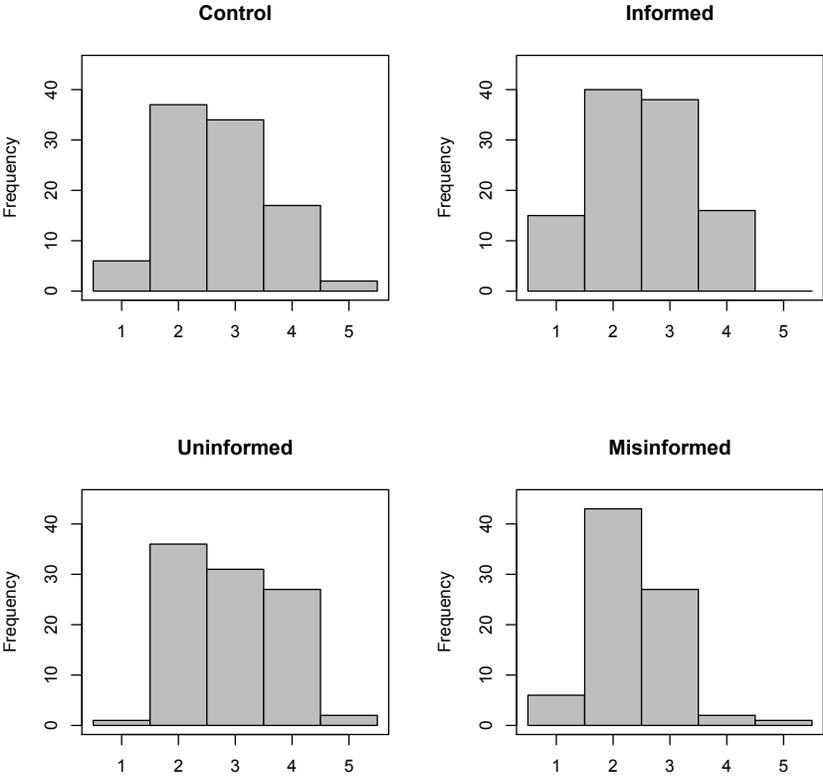
	Dependent Variable:				
	Opinion Strength (1-7)	Open-Mindedness (1-5)	Likelihood of Responding (1-7)	Likelihood of Citing Info (Responders Only) (1-7)	Likelihood of Citing Info (Full Sample) (1-7)
Control	4.71 (1.67)	2.71 (0.91)	5.57 (1.58)	5.48 (1.30)	5.43 (1.38)
Informed	5.53 (1.52)	2.50 (0.91)	5.53 (1.62)	5.57 (1.41)	5.50 (1.45)
Uninformed	4.32 (1.83)	2.93 (0.88)	5.96 (1.20)	5.94 (1.28)	5.77 (1.43)
Misinformed	5.48 (1.53)	2.35 (0.72)	4.96 (1.96)	6.16 (1.06)	5.96 (1.09)

Note: Cell entries are means with standard deviations in parentheses.

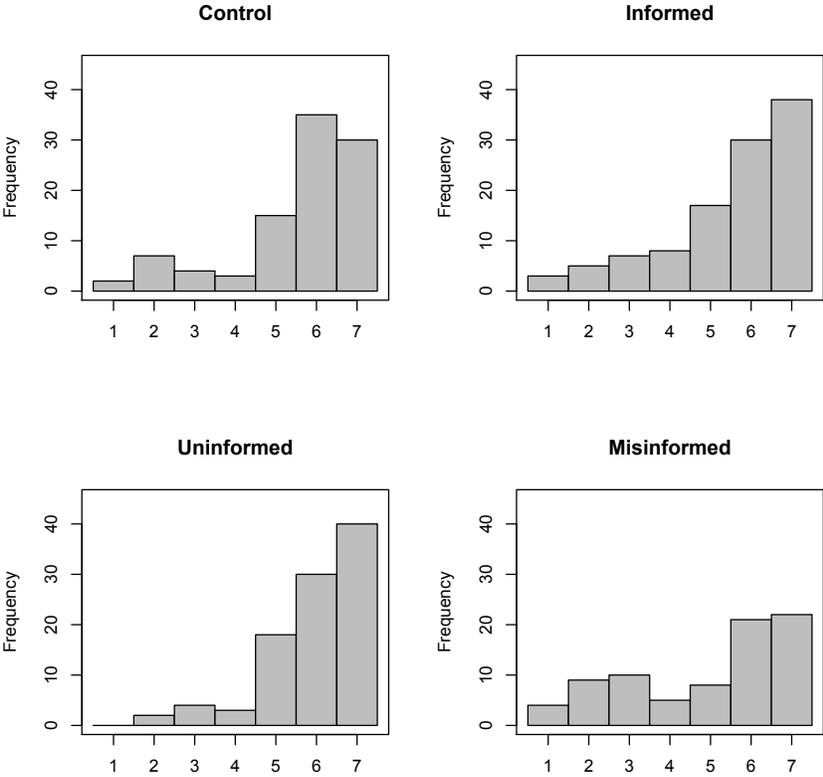
Online Appendix Figure A2: Distribution of Opinion Strength Dependent Variable, by Experimental Condition



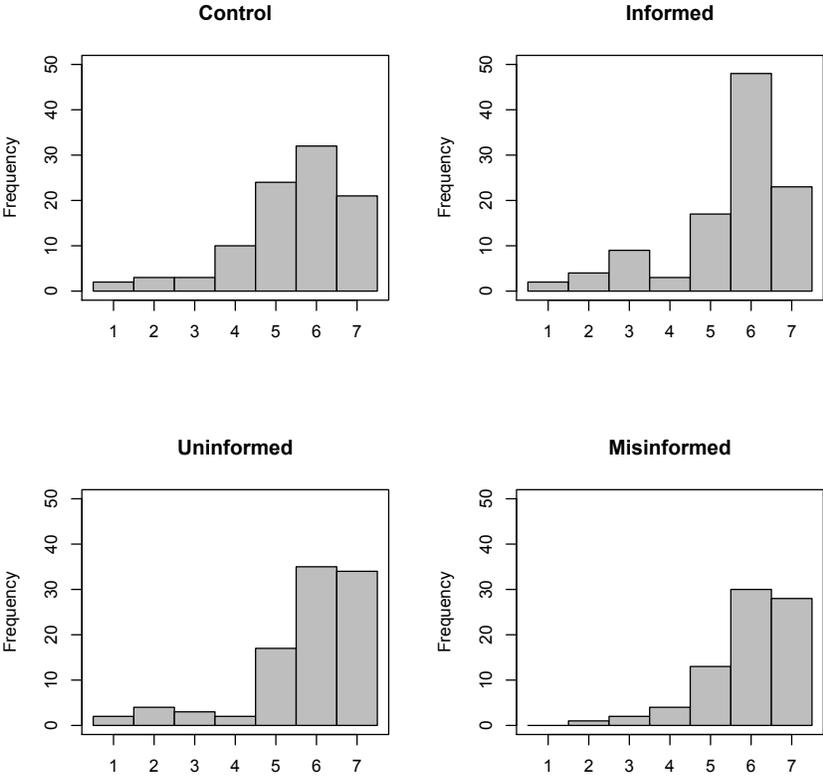
Online Appendix Figure A3: Distribution of Open-Mindedness Dependent Variable, by Experimental Condition



Online Appendix Figure A4: Distribution of Responsiveness Dependent Variable, by Experimental Condition



Online Appendix Figure A5: Distribution of Citing Information Dependent Variable, by Experimental Condition



Online Appendix E: Regression Models

The analyses reported in the main text rely on difference-in-means tests. In this appendix, I show that my results are robust to estimating treatment effects using regression, and to adding demographic and political covariates. For each dependent variable, I estimated five OLS regression models. The models vary in the covariates included: demographics (age, race, gender), ideology¹, and agreement with the position being advocated in the e-mail (i.e., lowering the state sales tax). The results are displayed in Online Appendix Tables A4-A7. As shown in the tables, the regression results are consistent with results presented in the main text.

¹Due to a survey programming error, partisanship was not measured. Instead, I use ideology, which is highly correlated with partisanship in state legislatures ([Shor and McCarty 2011](#)).

Online Appendix Table A4: OLS Regression Models Predicting Perceived Opinion Strength

Informed	0.82*** (0.23)	0.46* (0.28)	0.63*** (0.24)	0.66*** (0.25)	0.53* (0.27)
Uninformed	-0.40* (0.23)	-0.49* (0.28)	-0.49** (0.25)	-0.54** (0.25)	-0.47* (0.28)
Misinformed	0.77*** (0.24)	0.74** (0.30)	0.68*** (0.26)	0.61** (0.26)	0.86*** (0.30)
Age		0.003 (0.01)			0.004 (0.01)
Male		0.03 (0.21)			-0.06 (0.21)
White		-0.32 (0.31)			-0.21 (0.31)
Liberal			-0.29 (0.26)		-0.60** (0.30)
Conservative			0.08 (0.26)		-0.14 (0.30)
Agree with Position				0.54** (0.21)	0.46* (0.25)
Constant	4.71*** (0.17)	4.98*** (0.45)	4.88*** (0.28)	4.68*** (0.18)	5.02*** (0.51)
Observations	405	279	357	338	267

Note: Dependent variable is perceived opinion strength (1-7). Significance codes: ***p<.01; **p<.05; *p<.10.

Online Appendix Table A5: OLS Regression Models Predicting Perceived Open-Mindedness

Informed	-0.20*	-0.22	-0.22*	-0.26**	-0.28*
	(0.12)	(0.14)	(0.12)	(0.13)	(0.14)
Uninformed	0.22*	0.33**	0.21	0.17	0.30**
	(0.12)	(0.14)	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.14)
Misinformed	-0.35***	-0.30*	-0.41***	-0.38***	-0.32**
	(0.13)	(0.15)	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.16)
Age		-0.004			-0.004
		(0.003)			(0.003)
Male		-0.02			0.02
		(0.11)			(0.11)
White		-0.22			-0.30*
		(0.16)			(0.16)
Liberal			0.02		-0.06
			(0.14)		(0.16)
Conservative			-0.13		-0.09
			(0.14)		(0.16)
Agree with Position				-0.19*	-0.27**
				(0.11)	(0.13)
Constant	2.71***	3.08***	2.78***	2.78***	3.26***
	(0.09)	(0.23)	(0.14)	(0.10)	(0.27)
Observations	381	284	363	344	272

Note: Dependent variable is perceived open-mindedness (1-5). Significance codes: ***p<.01; **p<.05; *p<.10.

Online Appendix Table A6: OLS Regression Models Predicting Likelihood of Responding to E-mail

Informed	-0.05 (0.22)	-0.05 (0.25)	-0.05 (0.23)	0.04 (0.24)	-0.06 (0.26)
Uninformed	0.39* (0.23)	0.29 (0.26)	0.41* (0.24)	0.42* (0.24)	0.32 (0.26)
Misinformed	-0.61** (0.24)	-0.77*** (0.28)	-0.66*** (0.25)	-0.71*** (0.26)	-0.86*** (0.29)
Age		-0.002 (0.01)			-0.002 (0.01)
Male		-0.23 (0.19)			-0.19 (0.20)
White		0.71** (0.29)			0.76** (0.30)
Liberal			0.34 (0.25)		0.28 (0.28)
Conservative			0.22 (0.25)		0.10 (0.29)
Agree with Position				0.22 (0.21)	0.26 (0.24)
Constant	5.57*** (0.16)	5.30*** (0.41)	5.31*** (0.26)	5.47*** (0.18)	5.00*** (0.49)
Observations	380	284	362	343	272

Note: Dependent variable is likelihood of responding to e-mail (1-7). Significance codes: ***p<.01; **p<.05; *p<.10.

Online Appendix Table A7: OLS Regression Models Predicting Likelihood of Citing Information in Reply (Responders Only)

Informed	0.09 (0.20)	0.15 (0.25)	0.10 (0.21)	0.13 (0.22)	0.16 (0.25)
Uninformed	0.46** (0.20)	0.65*** (0.23)	0.45** (0.20)	0.52** (0.21)	0.61** (0.24)
Misinformed	0.68*** (0.23)	0.71** (0.28)	0.65*** (0.24)	0.70*** (0.25)	0.70** (0.29)
Age		0.002 (0.01)			0.003 (0.01)
Male		-0.14 (0.18)			-0.06 (0.19)
White		-0.22 (0.31)			-0.22 (0.32)
Liberal			-0.51** (0.23)		-0.59** (0.27)
Conservative			-0.56** (0.24)		-0.67** (0.28)
Agree with Position				0.003 (0.19)	0.03 (0.23)
Constant	5.48*** (0.15)	5.56*** (0.42)	5.94*** (0.24)	5.48*** (0.16)	6.01*** (0.49)
Observations	299	225	282	266	214

Note: Dependent variable is likelihood of citing information in reply (1-7). Significance codes: ***p<.01; **p<.05; *p<.10.

To account for potential bias resulting from item non-response, I multiply imputed missing data (King et al. 2001) and re-estimated the models reported in the tables above.² Online Appendix Tables A8-A11 display pooled estimates from five imputations of each model. As shown in the tables, the direction of all treatment effects remains the same when estimating the models with multiple imputation. However, some significance levels change. For instance, the positive effect of the uninformed treatment on the likelihood of responding to e-mails is less significant using the multiply imputed data (see Online Appendix Table A10). While this effect is in the expected direction in all models, it falls short of the $p < .10$ level (reading from left to right in the table, the p-values on the Uninformed coefficient are $p=.12$, $p=.29$, $p=.10$, $p=.11$, and $p=.30$, respectively). However, as shown in the tables, the effects of the informed and misinformed treatments presented in the main text are robust.

²There is considerable item non-response on the pre-treatment demographic and political questions. One possible explanation is that legislators and staffers chose not to answer questions that could potentially identify them. Multiple imputation was executed using the `mice` package (van Buuren and Groothuis-Oudshoorn 2011) in R (R Core Team 2016).

Online Appendix Table A8: OLS Regression Models Predicting Perceived Opinion Strength (Multiple Imputation of Missing Data)

Informed	0.57*** (0.21)	0.47* (0.27)	0.79*** (0.23)	0.82*** (0.23)	0.51* (0.27)
Uninformed	-1.10*** (0.21)	-0.48* (0.27)	-0.40* (0.23)	-0.39* (0.23)	-0.47* (0.27)
Misinformed	0.74*** (0.25)	0.68** (0.30)	0.74*** (0.24)	0.70*** (0.25)	0.72** (0.30)
Age		0.00 (0.01)			0.00 (0.01)
Male		0.03 (0.21)			-0.06 (0.21)
White		-0.24 (0.24)			-0.20 (0.30)
Liberal			-0.31 (0.23)		-0.41 (0.29)
Conservative			0.04 (0.24)		-0.01 (0.29)
Agree with Position				0.46** (0.21)	0.39 (0.25)
Constant	3.06*** (0.15)	4.94*** (0.44)	4.86*** (0.25)	4.63*** (0.17)	5.03*** (0.50)

Note: Dependent variable is perceived opinion strength (1-7). Significance codes: ***p<.01; **p<.05; *p<.10.

Online Appendix Table A9: OLS Regression Models Predicting Perceived Open-Mindedness (Multiple Imputation of Missing Data)

Informed	-0.20 (0.12)	-0.23* (0.14)	-0.20 (0.12)	-0.21* (0.12)	-0.24* (0.14)
Uninformed	0.23* (0.13)	0.31** (0.14)	0.22* (0.12)	0.22* (0.13)	0.31** (0.14)
Misinformed	-0.36*** (0.13)	-0.31** (0.15)	-0.37*** (0.13)	-0.35*** (0.13)	-0.31** (0.15)
Age		-0.00 (0.00)			-0.00 (0.00)
Male		-0.03 (0.10)			0.01 (0.11)
White		-0.28* (0.15)			-0.30* (0.16)
Liberal			0.01 (0.13)		-0.02 (0.15)
Conservative			-0.12 (0.13)		-0.08 (0.15)
Agree with Position				-0.16 (0.11)	-0.23* (0.13)
Constant	2.71*** (0.09)	3.12*** (0.23)	2.76*** (0.13)	2.75*** (0.09)	3.25*** (0.26)

Note: Dependent variable is perceived open-mindedness (1-5). Significance codes: ***p<.01; **p<.05; *p<.10.

Online Appendix Table A10: OLS Regression Models Predicting Likelihood of Responding to E-mail (Multiple Imputation of Missing Data)

Informed	-0.09 (0.23)	-0.07 (0.25)	-0.09 (0.23)	-0.09 (0.17)	-0.08 (0.25)
Uninformed	0.36 (0.23)	0.27 (0.25)	0.37 (0.23)	0.37 (0.23)	0.26 (0.25)
Misinformed	-0.56** (0.24)	-0.76*** (0.27)	-0.54** (0.24)	-0.57** (0.25)	-0.81** (0.28)
Age		-0.00 (0.01)			0.00 (0.01)
Male		-0.24 (0.19)			-0.21 (0.19)
White		0.60** (0.28)			0.64** (0.28)
Liberal			0.31 (0.26)		0.27 (0.27)
Conservative			0.24 (0.24)		0.06 (0.28)
Agree with Position				0.17 (0.20)	0.25 (0.23)
Constant	5.59*** (0.17)	5.37*** (0.41)	5.35*** (0.25)	5.55*** (0.17)	5.09*** (0.47)

Note: Dependent variable is likelihood of responding to e-mail (1-7). Significance codes: ***p<.01; **p<.05; *p<.10.

Online Appendix Table A11: OLS Regression Models Predicting Perceived Likelihood of Citing Information in Reply (Responders Only) (Multiple Imputation of Missing Data)

Informed	0.11 (0.21)	0.17 (0.24)	0.09 (0.20)	0.11 (0.20)	0.18 (0.24)
Uninformed	0.45** (0.20)	0.63*** (0.23)	0.43** (0.20)	0.46** (0.20)	0.61*** (0.23)
Misinformed	0.67*** (0.23)	0.70** (0.28)	0.65** (0.23)	0.67*** (0.23)	0.67** (0.28)
Age		0.00 (0.01)			-0.00 (0.01)
Male		-0.15 (0.18)			-0.09 (0.18)
White		-0.26 (0.30)			-0.27 (0.30)
Liberal			-0.48** (0.23)		-0.54 (0.26)
Conservative			-0.56** (0.24)		-0.67** (0.28)
Agree with Position				0.06 (0.18)	0.04 (0.22)
Constant	5.49*** (0.14)	5.62*** (0.41)	5.93*** (0.24)	5.48*** (0.15)	6.07*** (0.46)

Note: Dependent variable is likelihood of citing information in reply (1-7). Significance codes: ***p<.01; **p<.05; *p<.10.

Online Appendix F: Legislators Versus Non-Legislators

As noted in the main text, my sample includes self-identified legislators and non-legislators.³ In this appendix, I show that my results are not driven by either the legislator or non-legislator subsample.

Online Appendix Table A12: Legislators and Non-Legislators Offer Similar Responses

	Experimental Condition:			
	Control	Informed	Uninformed	Misinformed
<i>Tax Knowledge:</i>				
Legislators	3.06	3.61	1.98	2.42
Non-Legislators	3.06	3.67	1.92	2.29
p-value on difference	p=0.99	p=0.85	p=0.82	p=0.68
<i>Opinion Strength:</i>				
Legislators	4.81	5.49	3.93	5.56
Non-Legislators	4.53	5.58	4.72	5.37
p-value on difference	p=0.44	p=0.76	p=0.02	p=0.58
<i>Open-Mindedness:</i>				
Legislators	2.67	2.48	2.84	2.27
Non-Legislators	2.77	2.54	3.02	2.50
p-value on difference	p=0.60	p=0.69	p=0.32	p=0.16
<i>Would Respond:</i>				
Legislators	5.41	5.39	5.90	4.96
Non-Legislators	5.86	5.72	6.02	4.97
p-value on difference	p=0.17	p=0.29	p=0.62	p=0.99
<i>Would Provide Info:</i>				
Legislators	5.44	5.63	5.94	5.85
Non-Legislators	5.41	5.32	5.59	6.13
p-value on difference	p=0.92	p=0.28	p=0.23	p=0.27

Note: Significant differences are in bold.

³At the start of the survey, I asked all participants “What is your role in your office?” [I am a legislator; I am a staff member; I am an intern/volunteer; Other]. The sample includes 240 legislators, 165 staff members, 10 interns/volunteers, and 1 “other.”

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