More Accurate Yet More Polarized?
Comparing the Factual Beliefs of Government Officials and the Public

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Abstract

Political elites in the United States have become increasingly polarized on matters of opinion, but are they similarly polarized on matters of fact? To date, scholars have not systematically examined factual beliefs among political elites, whom we hypothesize are likely to be even more polarized by party than the public despite their greater expertise. Employing a paired-survey approach, we conduct the first systematic comparison of politicized factual beliefs between the public and a national sample of government officials. Our results suggest that policymakers have somewhat more polarized factual beliefs than the public on controversial political issues *despite having consistently more accurate beliefs overall*. These patterns suggest elites reconcile the tension between accuracy and partisanship through differential learning of politically congenial facts — a tendency that is not consistently reduced by having domain-relevant expertise.

Surveys demonstrate that political misperceptions are widespread among the mass public and most commonly held when they are politically congenial (e.g., Frankovic 2016, 2018). To date, however, scholars have focused almost exclusively on party polarization in factual beliefs among the mass public, neglecting the beliefs of political elites, who play an especially influential role in shaping political and policy outcomes. Political elites are more sophisticated and knowledgeable than the mass public but also tend to hold more polarized policy preferences (e.g., Bafumi and Herron 2010).

In this study, we provide the first direct comparison of partisan belief polarization between American political elites and the mass public.[1] Our preregistered analysis compares factual beliefs about controversial policy issues between the American public and government officials at the local, state, and federal levels, examining the extent of belief polarization and whether it varies by issue expertise or geographic scale.[2]

The government officials we surveyed have consistently more accurate beliefs than the mass public, but that finding does *not* imply that their beliefs are also less polarized. The partisan gap in factual beliefs is actually somewhat greater among government officials than the public on controversial issues because officials are more likely to hold accurate beliefs that are congenial to their party. This pattern, which is not observed for beliefs about population statistics and not consistently reduced by domain expertise, suggests that increased knowledge does not necessarily reduce belief polarization; instead, it can in some cases actually *widen* the partisan divide.

Theoretical motivation and hypotheses

Studies directly comparing elites and the mass public typically contrast ideal point estimates for elites with the preferences of the general public or their constituents (e.g., Bafumi and

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[1]A note on terminology: We use *partisan belief polarization* to refer to differences in factual beliefs between supporters of the two major parties. We use *political elites* as a general term for individuals in positions of influence and power in American politics but refer to the elected and appointed officials and staff at the local, state, and federal level whom we survey in this study as *government officials*.

[2]Our anonymized preregistration is appended to this document.

Herron 2010). These studies typically find that elite preferences are more polarized, which is consistent with evidence showing elites have higher levels of issue constraint (e.g., Lupton, Myers, and Thornton 2015). However, previous research has neither examined the extent to which factual beliefs among elites have become polarized nor compared levels of partisan belief polarization between elites and the public. Based on prior research, we expect greater partisan belief polarization among elites. Elites are typically more knowledgeable and sophisticated, which is often associated with greater belief accuracy. For many partisan factual controversies, greater levels of education or knowledge are associated with *higher* levels of attitude-consistent factual beliefs (e.g., Kahan et al. 2017).

> H1: Partisan factual polarization on national political issues will be greater among elites than among the general public.

We also consider two factors that may mitigate belief polarization among elites: issue expertise and local experience. We test whether partisan factual polarization is lower among officials with relevant domain experience compared with officials who lack such experience. Lawyers and judges, for instance, are less likely to engage in biased reasoning on legal matters compared to other controversial issues (Kahan et al. 2015).

> H2: Partisan factual polarization will be lower among elites who have relevant domain experience than among those who do not.

In addition, we assess whether factual perceptions are less polarized by party at the local level, where both government officials and the public may observe conditions more accurately as a result of direct experience (e.g., Healy, Persson, and Snowberg 2017).

> H3: Partisan factual polarization will be lower for perceptions of local conditions compared to perceptions of the same issue at the national level.

Finally, we examine whether political elites report more accurate factual beliefs than the public. While not preregistered, considering accuracy differences is necessary to understand

our preregistered findings. Our findings challenge the folk hypothesis that belief accuracy and belief polarization are inversely related. In fact, polarization can widen even when belief accuracy increases. Most notably, Jerit and Barabas (2012) show that belief accuracy among partisans increases for issues with higher levels of media coverage, but these increases are concentrated among the party for whom the facts in question are politically congenial. As a result, belief polarization *and* belief accuracy are greater for issues receiving higher coverage. We consider whether the same logic applies here when comparing elites to the mass public.

Data and analyses

We analyze survey data from national samples of government officials and the American public.[3] Data from government officials comes from the Public Official Survey, an online survey of government officials at the local, state, and national levels. CivicPulse selected a random sample of government officials with publicly available email addresses using a database licensed from KnowWho, Inc. Individuals in the sample were emailed an invitation and Qualtrics survey link and sent a reminder email. Data was collected from February 23–April 28, 2017; the final sample includes 1062 officials from all fifty states. The public data were collected from April 7–19, 2017 by the survey firm Ipsos-MORI. The public sample consists of 2000 respondents from their opt-in Internet panel. Quotas for gender, age, and region were applied during data collection.[4]

We asked respondents in both surveys identical factual belief questions concerning voter fraud, climate change, federal spending and taxes, immigration, and economic conditions. Based on previous research, we expect that misperceptions on these topics are widespread in the mass public; however, less is known about how widespread misperceptions are among

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[3]A second elite sample we planned to study was not available to us. See Online Appendix D.

[4]Per our preregistration, we do not use survey weights because we pool public and survey data. See Online Appendix B for details on the composition of the elite and public samples and how the survey marginals change when weights are applied.

government officials or other political elites.[5]   We chose voter fraud and climate change as issues where accurate responses would be more congenial for Democrats (and dissonant for Republicans), and chose federal spending and tax rates on the wealthy as issues where accurate responses would be congenial to Republicans (and dissonant for Democrats).[6]

Variables are coded so that higher values indicate a more accurate response. The issue belief accuracy variables (i.e., voter fraud, global warming, spending, and taxes) are recoded to a 0–1 scale, and the population belief accuracy variables (i.e., foreign born population and unemployment) are recoded to a 0–100 scale.[7]

Analysis strategy

To test the hypothesis that factual belief polarization is greater among elites (H1), we estimate the belief gap between partisans for both the mass public and government officials.[8] We then compute a difference-in-differences estimate of whether factual belief polarization is greater among government officials.

We first examine the four non-continuous issue belief questions (voter fraud, global warming, spending, and taxes). We estimate separate models for each issue individually as well as a pooled model (Table 1). The pooled issue beliefs model includes issue fixed effects, respondent random effects, and standard errors clustered by respondent.[9] Our dependent variables are coded on a 0–1 scale where higher values indicate more accurate responses. We include indicators for whether issues are congenial or dissonant to respondents' party iden-

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[5]The population perceptions we consider may be especially vulnerable to misperceptions due to the human tendency to overestimate small proportions in a population (Landy, Guay, and Marghetis 2018). Providing numeric benchmarks may help people to respond more accurately in such questions (Ansolabehere, Meredith, and Snowberg 2013); however, such benchmarks are atypical in everyday life and we thus omit them here.

[6]See Online Appendix A for exact wording.

[7] Each issue belief accuracy measure is coded on a $[0,1]$ scale where response options take the value of 0 for the least accurate response ($i = 1$), 1 for the most accurate response option ($i = n$ when there are n response options), and the values $\frac{i}{n}$ for response options $i = \{2, \ldots, n-1\}$. Each population belief accuracy measure is calculated as $100 - |e - y|$ where e is the respondent estimate of the quantity in question on a 0–100 scale and y is the true population value, bounding responses to $[y, 100]$ when $y > 0$. This coding represents a minor deviation from the preregistration. See Online Appendix D.

[8]See Online Appendix C for a summary of overall belief accuracy by item for both groups.

[9]This model specification is a minor deviation from the preregistration. See Online Appendix D.

tification (accurate answers on voter fraud and global warming are congenial to Democrats; accurate answers on spending and taxes paid by the top 1% are congenial to Republicans). Independents are always the excluded category. The indicators for government official and the interaction terms allow us to compute the main quantities of interest.

We separately estimate models for the foreign-born and unemployment population questions where the outcome variables measure belief accuracy on a 0–100 scale where higher values indicate greater accuracy (Table 2). Our preregistered partisanship coding simply uses indicators for Democrat or Republican. For presentational simplicity, both tables exclude control variable coefficients that were estimated in the models.[10]

To test the hypothesis that domain expertise decreases partisan factual polarization (H2), we examine issues where some government officials have relevant domain experience (local unemployment and voter fraud). For unemployment, we define mayors, city council members, and city managers as those with domain expertise. For voter fraud, we conduct two tests. First, we compare partisan factual polarization between (non-federal) officials who ran for elected office and (non-federal) officials who did not run for office (i.e., were appointed or hired as staff). Second, we compare local government officials who report that their job involves the implementation of elections and/or the tallying of votes to local government officials who do not perform these functions.

Finally, we test the hypothesis that local issues generate less partisan factual polarization than national issues (H3) using models of perceptions of the proportion of unemployed or foreign born residents at the national and local level. We use county-level unemployment estimates from the Bureau of Labor Statistics Local Area Unemployment Statistics and the proportion of foreign-born residents from the 2015 American Community Survey 5-year estimate as our measures of ground truth.

Each table reports the key quantities of interest in a shaded bottom panel. For hypothesis H1 (Table 1), the bottom panels report, respectively, the magnitude of differences in

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[10]See Online Appendix D for explanation of two deviations from the preregistration.

beliefs between the partisans for whom accurate responses would be congenial and the partisans for whom accurate responses would be dissonant in the public sample, the magnitude of differences between the beliefs of the corresponding partisan groups in the government official sample, and the difference-in-differences (i.e., whether the magnitude of the partisan difference among government officials is larger, equal, or smaller than partisan difference in the public sample). The bottom panels instead report equivalent quantities for expert versus non-expert government officials in our test of H2 (Table C1) and for local versus national conditions in our test of H3 (Table C2).

Results

We first present graphs comparing belief polarization among the public and government officials. We separately consider measures of beliefs about controversial issues in Figure 1(a) and perceptions of population conditions in Figure 1(b). For clarity, these graphs present group means of our belief accuracy measures after removing issue- and party-specific differences in overall belief accuracy (the equivalent of the issue fixed effects and party indicators we use in our statistical analysis below).

Figure 1 shows that government officials tend to have more accurate yet more polarized beliefs. First, government officials are vastly more polarized by party on voter fraud than the public. This finding is driven by Democratic officials, who hold more accurate beliefs than their co-partisans — specifically, they are far less likely to endorse claims of widespread voter fraud than are Democrats in the public. As a result, elites have more accurate beliefs on average even though they are also more polarized. Other issues show similar patterns. As with voter fraud, the pattern of greater polarization we observe among government officials is seemingly driven by them being more likely to hold accurate beliefs on issues when those beliefs are congenial. Specifically, Democratic officials are relatively less likely to disbelieve climate change and to endorse widespread voter fraud than their co-partisans in the public,

Figure 1: Partisan factual belief polarization among government officials and the public

(a) *Issue beliefs*

(b) *Population beliefs*
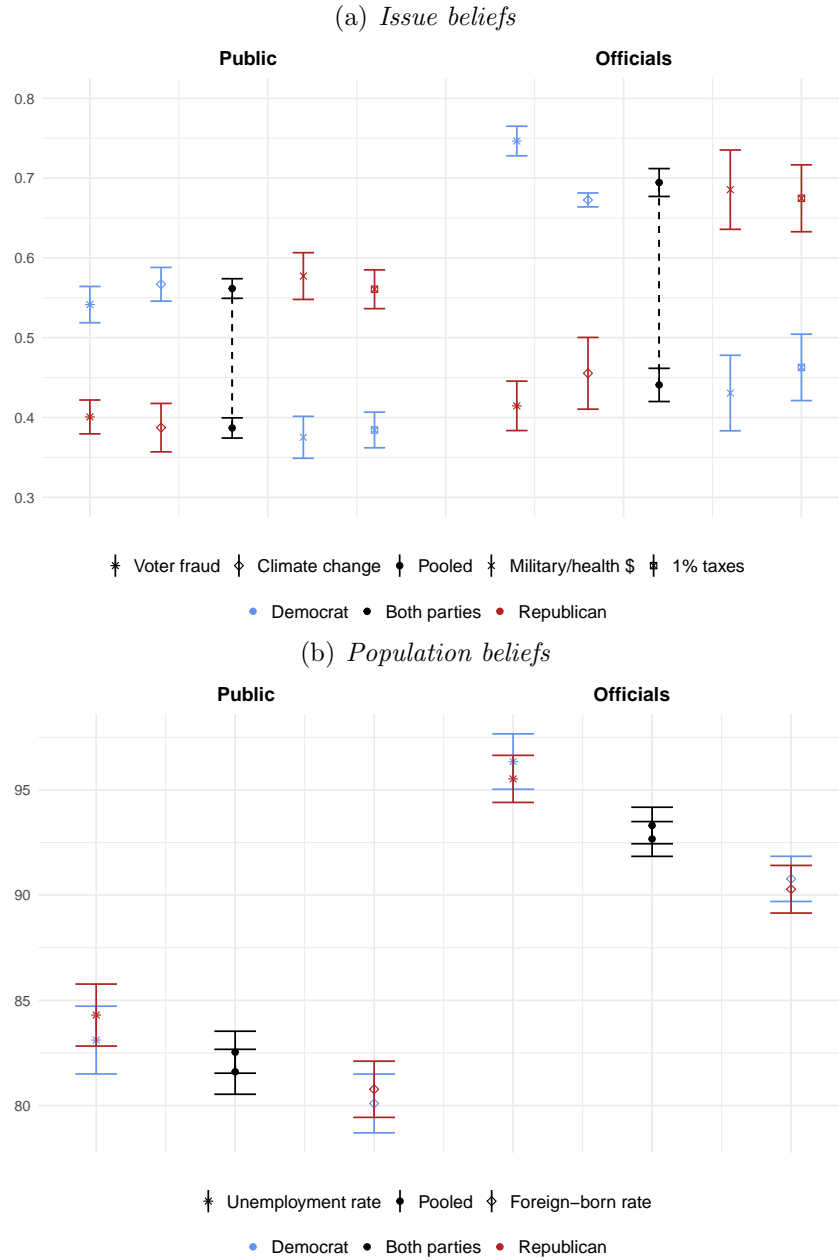
Issue beliefs are measured on a 0–1 scale where 1 represents the most accurate response and 0 represents the least accurate response. Population beliefs are measured on a 0–100 scale where 100 represents the most accurate response and 0 represents the least accurate response. Both graphs present adjusted means for each measure net of issue- and party-specific differences in overall belief accuracy.

while Republican officials are more likely to hold accurate views about the extent of military versus health care spending and the share of federal income tax revenue from the top 1% compared to GOP identifiers in the public.

Our formal tests of hypothesis H1 are reported in Table 1. First, we find that government officials have more accurate issue beliefs overall ($p < .01$ in the pooled model). Second, we find as expected that partisans in the public are more likely to hold accurate views when those views are congenial and less likely to hold them when those views are dissonant relative to independents ($p < .01$ for each in the pooled model). To test whether these relationships vary for government officials, we interact the partisan congeniality indicators and the indicator for government officials. Because interpreting interaction models is complex, the key quantities are summarized in the bottom shaded panel of the table, which indicates that factual beliefs among government officials on controversial issues are more polarized overall by party than among the public ($p < .01$). This difference is strongest on the highly polarized issue of voter fraud ($p < .01$), where government officials have differentially more or less accurate beliefs on the issue based on whether it is congenial or dissonant to their partisanship ($p < .05$ in both cases). By contrast, we do not observe statistically measurable partisan differences in belief accuracy between government officials and the public on global warming, military versus health care spending, and the share of income tax paid by the top 1%.

Table 2 tests for partisan belief polarization in beliefs about characteristics of the U.S. population. In this case, we compare perceptions of the national unemployment rate and foreign born population between the public and government officials. For these models, the dependent variable is coded from 0–100 with higher values indicating an answer that comes closer to the correct population value. We again find that government officials have more accurate beliefs than the public ($p < .01$ for both outcome measures). But unlike the issue belief measures reported in Table 1, we find no evidence of greater polarization among government officials. This finding may be the result of measurement error in the population belief measures (respondents tended to greatly overestimate the number of unemployed and

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Table 1: Issue belief accuracy by partisan congeniality

	Pooled model	Voter fraud	Global warming	Military/HC spending	Top 1% tax rate
Congenial issue (partisans)	0.09***	0.02	0.05*	0.15***	0.14***
	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.02)
Dissonant issue (partisans)	-0.08***	-0.12***	-0.13***	-0.04	-0.04
	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.02)
Government official	0.08***	0.11***	0.12***	0.07	0.04
	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.06)	(0.05)
Congenial × official	0.04	0.08**	-0.02	0.01	0.07
	(0.02)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.07)	(0.06)
Dissonant × official	-0.03	-0.10**	-0.02	-0.04	0.04
	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.06)	(0.06)
Constant	0.63***	0.58***	0.79***	0.30***	0.45***
	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Control variables	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Issue fixed effects	✓				
Respondent random effects	✓				
Partisan belief differences (R−D): Govt. officials	0.25***	0.32***	0.18***	0.24***	0.21***
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.04)	(0.03)
Partisan belief differences (R−D): Public	0.17***	0.14***	0.17***	0.19***	0.18***
	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Officials/public difference in belief polarization	0.07***	0.17***	0.00	0.05	0.03
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.03)
N	10,604	2,651	2,650	2,651	2,652

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$ (two-sided). Cell entries are OLS coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses (clustered at the respondent level in the pooled model). Dependent variables are measured on a 0–1 scale where 1 represents the most accurate response and 0 represents the least accurate response. The congenial partisan groups are Democrats for voter fraud and climate change and Republicans for federal spending; the converse applies for dissonant partisan groups. All independent variables are binary. Control variables are indicators for sex, college degree, nonwhite, and age ranges 30–44, 45–64, and 65 and older. The omitted reference group for partisanship is independent.

foreign born people in the United States) or the lower salience of these statistics compared to the issue belief measures tested.

In Table C1, we evaluate whether domain expertise reduces partisan belief polarization among government officials (H2). For local unemployment, we define relevant experience as respondents who are mayors, city council members, and city managers. For voter fraud, we define relevant domain expertise as respondents who report that their job involves the implementation of elections and/or the tallying of votes. We find no support for H2. Looking first at perceived local unemployment, we find no measurable partisan factual polarization among non-expert or expert government officials nor a significant difference between them. Similarly, though perceptions of voter fraud are highly polarized among government officials, we find no measurable difference in partisan belief polarization between elected and

Table 2: Population belief accuracy by partisanship

	National unemployment	National foreign born
Republican	-1.80	-0.93
	(1.41)	(1.41)
Democrat	-1.71	-0.82
	(1.47)	(1.41)
Government official	6.87***	5.86***
	(1.66)	(1.96)
Republican × official	0.71	1.54
	(1.91)	(2.14)
Democrat × official	1.23	1.69
	(1.96)	(2.13)
Constant	77.14***	76.50***
	(1.91)	(1.69)
Control variables	✓	✓
Partisan belief differences (R−D): Govt. officials	-0.61	-0.26
	(0.95)	(0.83)
Partisan belief differences (R−D): Public	-0.09	-0.11
	(1.08)	(0.97)
Officials/public difference in belief polarization	-0.52	-0.15
	(1.43)	(1.26)
N	2,527	2,638

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$ (two-sided). Cell entries are OLS coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses. Dependent variables are measured on a 0–100 scale where 100 represents the most accurate response and 0 represents the least accurate response. Control variables are indicators for gender, college degree, nonwhite, and age ranges 30–44, 45–64, and 65 and older. The omitted reference group for partisanship is independent.

unelected officials and only a marginal difference between those with expertise in election administration and those who lack it ($p < .10$).

Finally, Table C2 in Online Appendix C considers whether personal experience mitigates partisan belief polarization. Hypothesis H3 predicts that partisan factual belief polarization will be lower for local conditions than national ones. However, though we find significant correlations between factual beliefs and ground truth at the county level ($p < .01$ in both cases), we do not find significant partisan factual polarization in these perceptions among government officials or the public.

Conclusion

We provide the first systematic comparison of partisan belief polarization between political elites and the mass public. Strikingly, partisan belief polarization is somewhat higher among

government officials on controversial policy issues than among the public even though officials hold more accurate beliefs. Further, we find no evidence that partisan belief polarization on these issues is mitigated by domain expertise. These results suggest that government officials do not just have more polarized policy preferences than the public — this heightened level of elite polarization extends to matters of fact. (This pattern does not extend, however, to population beliefs, where we find little evidence of partisan polarization at the national or local level.)

This finding challenges the folk hypothesis that greater factual knowledge will reduce polarization between Democrats and Republicans or lead to convergence in factual beliefs. Instead, it is quite possible that the public, like elites, could come to hold more accurate beliefs on issues where the correct answer would be congenial to their political preferences. If in-party elites promote such cues, then we could see a significant increase in partisan belief polarization among the mass public even as overall belief accuracy increases.

Our findings also raise important questions about the potential consequences of partisan belief polarization among elites, who play an especially important role in public policy and political debate. To what extent do factual beliefs affect the actions of government officials in office? Or do these stated beliefs derive from their policy views rather than the converse? Further research is necessary to investigate the extent to which misperceptions affect the behavior and decisions of policymakers.

Of course, our results have other important limitations. First, only a subset of factual belief measures could be included given limits on survey length. Second, both samples and our measures of domain expertise and local conditions have limitations; future replications would be valuable. Third, any study trying to measure the accuracy of factual beliefs of course assumes that respondents are reporting their beliefs accurately. Further research should assess whether these results are sensitive to designs intended to reduce expressive responding (e.g., Bullock et al. 2015; Prior, Sood, and Khanna 2015), though we note that recent evidence suggests that expressive responding is low, even on controversial issues (Berinsky

2018), and may be even less prevalent among elites (Butler and Pereira 2018). In addition, the robustness of our results across the included issues, which vary in terms of controversy and partisan relevance, increases our confidence in the reported findings.

These results provide new evidence about an unappreciated manifestation of polarization. American political elites are not only more polarized by party on issues than the constituents they serve, but can disagree even more than the public about the state of the world itself despite having more accurate beliefs. Partisan belief polarization among elites is therefore likely to pose a serious challenge to political consensus and compromise around some of the nation's most pressing challenges.

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Online Appendix A: Question wording

Consider the issue of voter fraud – that is, people voting who are not legally eligible or voting multiple times. About 135 million votes were cast in the 2016 presidential election. Roughly how many of those votes do you think were the result of voter fraud? (direction of scale randomized)

-Millions [0]

-Hundreds of thousands [.25]

-Tens of thousands [.5]

-Thousands [.75]

-Less than a thousand [1]

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

-Has probably been happening [1]

-Probably hasn't been happening [0]

What is your best guess of the percentage of federal income tax revenue that comes from the top 1 percent of earners?

-0-10 percent [0]

-11-20 percent [.33]

-21-30 percent [.67]

-31 percent or more [1]

To the best of your knowledge, does the federal government spend more on health care or the military or are they about the same? (order of options in questions and response options randomized)

-Health care [1]

-Military [0]

-About the same [.5]

Out of every 100 people living in [RESPONDENT'S COUNTY], how many do you think were born outside of the United States? (Please enter a number from 0 to 100.)

-[answers recoded to 0–1 scale]

Out of every 100 people living in the United States, how many do you think were born outside of this country? (Please enter a number from 0 to 100.)

-[answers recoded to 0–1 scale]

Out of every 100 people living in [RESPONDENT'S COUNTY] who have a job or are actively looking for a job, how many do you think are are currently unemployed? (Please enter a number from 0 to 100.)

-[answers recoded to 0–1 scale]

Out of every 100 people living in the United States who have a job or are actively looking for a job, how many do you think are are currently unemployed? (Please enter a number from 0 to 100.)

-[answers recoded to 0–1 scale]

Online Appendix B: Sample composition

Sample demographics and survey marginals

Table B1: Sample demographics

	Public	Officials
Female	51%	31%
Nonwhite	15%	8%
Age 45 or older	50%	84%
College graduate	60%	78%
Democrats	43%	44%
Republicans	43%	45%
N	2,000	700

Public values are unweighted. Partisanship was measured as follows: for the mass public, we use respondent self-placement on a standard seven-point party ID measure (with leaners treated as partisans). For government officials, we include both government officials who reported running for office as partisans or who identify as Democrats or Republicans (including leaners).

Table B1 compares the demographic characteristics of the unweighted public sample and the government official sample. One potential concern is that the public sample overrepresents college graduates. However, this bias is unlikely to threaten our inferences. Given higher levels of polarization among more educated people (e.g., Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock 1993), the underrepresentation of less educated respondents in our public sample should make it *less* likely that we would observe greater polarization among government officials than among the public. Empirically, Table B2, which presents mean belief accuracy estimates for each outcome measure by party and sample, shows that incorporating survey weights causes little change in estimated partisan belief polarization in the public sample.[1]

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[1]Results are similar when instead including weights for non-white respondents instead of education. We do not weight by race and education simultaneously because the values of the weights become too extreme (details on both points available upon request).

Table B2: Mean accuracy of factual beliefs by item

Party	Democrats			Republicans		
Sample	Public	Public	Officials	Public	Public	Officials
Weights	None	Education	None	None	Education	None
Issue beliefs						
Voter fraud	0.71	0.69	0.92	0.57	0.57	0.59
Global warming	0.89	0.87	0.99	0.71	0.68	0.77
Military/health care spending	0.24	0.24	0.30	0.45	0.45	0.55
Top 1% tax rate	0.33	0.32	0.41	0.50	0.50	0.62
Population beliefs						
National unemployment	83.1	79.7	96.3	84.3	81.5	95.5
Local unemployment	86.7	85.2	95.1	87.8	86.1	95.7
National foreign born	80.1	78.1	90.8	80.8	78.8	90.3
Local foreign born	81.8	81.0	91.1	81.6	79.6	91.5
N	2000	2000	700	2000	2000	700

The weights for the public data also take into account age, gender, region, working status, and annual income in addition to education. Partisanship was measured as follows: for the mass public, we use respondent self-placement on a standard seven-point party ID measure (with leaners treated as partisans). For government officials, we include both those who reported running for office as partisans or who identify as Democrats or Republicans (including leaners).

Government official sample

How representative is the sample of government officials who participated in our online survey? While there is limited demographic information available covering officials across U.S. states, we can gain some insights into this question by comparing the demographic features of the municipalities, counties, and state legislative districts represented in the survey sample compared with the nation as a whole. Respondents associated with state legislative districts (legislators and staffers associated with specific legislators) were matched to Census data using standard district-specific IDs that identify state legislative districts in each state. The county respondents were matched to Census data using standard county-level FIPS codes. Municipal officials were matched to Census data the state and name of the municipalities (e.g., town, township, or city). Exact matching rates of 95% was achieved for

municipal officials, 92% for state legislators and their staffers, and 100% for county officials.

By using this matching technique, we compare how representative each geographic boundary unit represented in this survey is with the full distribution of municipalities and counties in the United States. We do so using three key variables: the population of residents living in the area, the proportion of those residents classified as living in an urban area, and the proportion of residents with a four-year college degree (out of all residents twenty five years or older). As shown below, the distribution of municipalities and counties represented in our study are modestly more populous, more urban, and more educated than the full distribution of municipalities and counties in the United States.

Representativeness of municipalities

|	Survey Sample	Census Population
Proportion Urban, 25th Percntile	0.98	0
Proportion Urban, Median	1	0.85
Proportion Urban, 75th Percntile	1	0.99
Proportion College-educated, 25th Percentile	0.19	0.11
Proportion College-educated, Median	0.28	0.17
Proportion College-educated, 75th Percentile	0.43	0.25
Population Size, 25th Percentile	8,229	383
Population Size, Median	14,934	1,557.5
Population Size, 75th Percentile	30,494	6,663

Representativeness of counties

	Survey Sample	Census Population
Proportion urban, 25th percentile	0.25	0.14
Proportion urban, 50th percentile	0.55	0.41
Proportion urban, 75th percentile	0.80	0.68
Proportion college-educated, 25th percentile	0.17	0.14
Proportion college-educated, 50th percentile	0.22	0.18
Proportion college-educated, 75th percentile	0.29	0.24
Population size, 25th percentile	16,422	7,762
Population size, 50th percentile	36,522	17,776
Population size, 75th percentile	108,916	44,506

Representativeness of state legislative districts

	Survey Sample	Census Population
Proportion urban, 25th percentile	0.71	0.49
Proportion urban, 50th percentile	0.97	0.87
Proportion urban, 75th percentile	1	1
Proportion college-educated, 25th percentile	0.21	0.19
Proportion college-educated, 50th percentile	0.31	0.26
Proportion college-educated, 75th percentile	0.43	0.37
Population size, 25th percentile	17,020	20,622
Population size, 50th percentile	40,650	38,482
Population size, 75th percentile	120,736	79,722

Figure B1: Map of government officials who took the CivicPulse survey
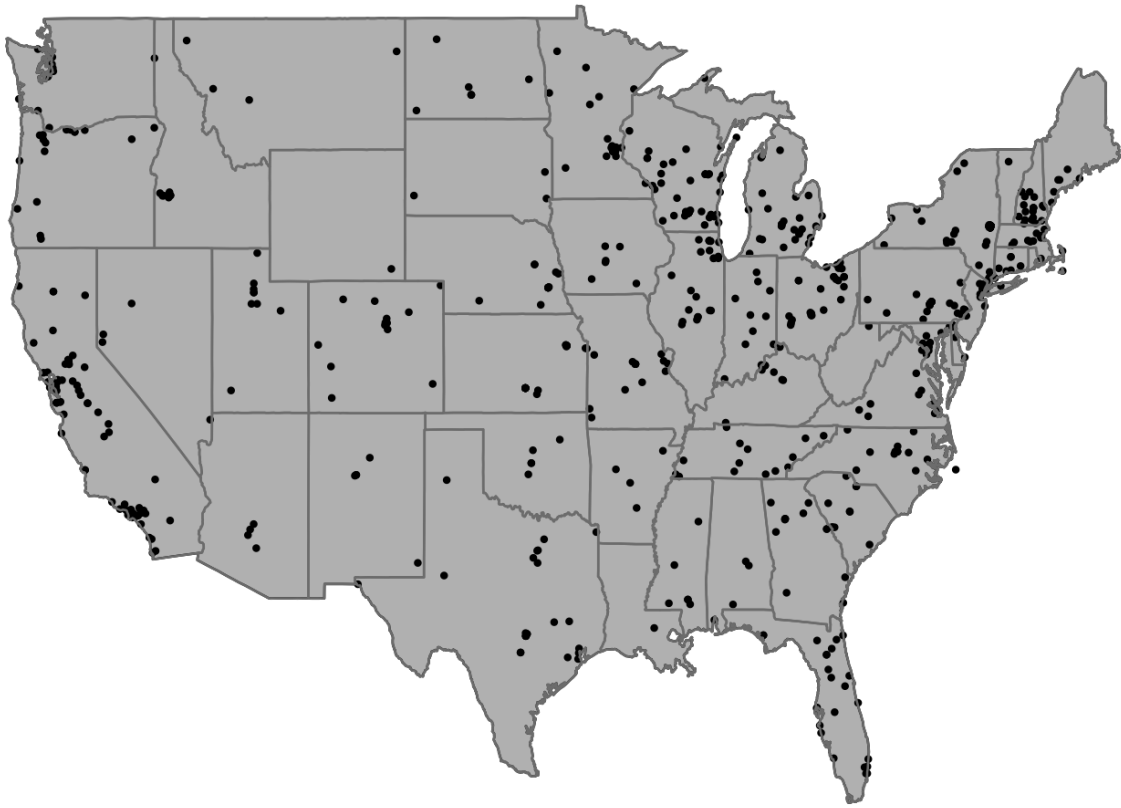
This map shows the approximate geographic location of each of the government officials who participated in the CivicPulse survey (to protect anonymity, we do not show the exact location). The government officials who who participated in the CivicPulse survey represent all regions in the country.

Online Appendix C: Additional results

Table C1 contains the tests of H2 described in the main text. The outcome measures are factual perceptions where higher values indicate greater accuracy.

Table C1: Factual belief accuracy by domain expertise

	Local unemployment	Voter fraud (model 1)	Voter fraud (model 2)
Democrat	-1.93	0.10***	0.20***
	(1.29)	(0.03)	(0.05)
Republican	-1.63	-0.25***	-0.09
	(1.03)	(0.03)	(0.06)
Economic expertise	-0.58		
	(1.28)		
Democrat × economic expertise	1.58		
	(1.48)		
Republican × economic expertise	0.42		
	(1.49)		
Elections expertise		-0.05	
		(0.09)	
Elections expertise × Democrat		0.06	
		(0.09)	
Elections expertise × Republican		0.14	
		(0.10)	
Elected official			0.14**
			(0.06)
Elected official × Democrat			-0.16**
			(0.06)
Elected official × Republican			-0.20***
			(0.07)
Constant	92.62***	0.89***	0.77***
	(6.85)	(0.07)	(0.08)
Control variables	✓	✓	✓
Partisan accuracy differences (R−D): Experts	-0.86	-0.26***	-0.34***
	(0.76)	(0.04)	(0.02)
Partisan accuracy differences (R−D): Non-experts	0.30	-0.34***	-0.29***
	(1.34)	(0.02)	(0.04)
Expert/non-expert difference in belief polarization	-1.16	0.08*	-0.04
	(1.50)	(0.05)	(0.04)
N	460	653	653

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$ (two-sided). Cell entries are OLS coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses. Dependent variables are measured on a 0–1 (voter fraud) or 0–100 scale (local unemployment) where higher responses indicate greater accuracy. (See Online Appendix A for question wording; details on coding of the belief accuracy measures are provided in footnote 7.) All independent variables are binary. We define mayors, city council members, and city managers as officials with economic expertise because their job responsibilities involve some aspect of the local economy. We define government officials who report that their job involves the implementation of elections and/or the tallying of votes as having elections expertise. Control variables are indicators for gender, college degree, nonwhite, and age ranges 30–44, 45–64, and 65 and older. We measure partisanship to include both government officials who reported running for office as partisans and those who identify as Democrats or Republicans (including leaners). The omitted reference group for partisanship is independent.

Table C2 contains the tests of H3 described in the main text. The outcome measures are factual perceptions where higher values indicate greater accuracy.

Table C2: Factual belief accuracy about local versus national quantities

	Unemployment (national or county)	Foreign born (national or county)
Democrat	-1.32	-0.35
	(1.22)	(1.17)
Republican	-1.37	-0.50
	(1.18)	(1.16)
Local perception	2.52***	0.65
	(0.66)	(0.76)
Democrat × local	0.06	0.63
	(0.76)	(0.87)
Republican × local	0.32	0.10
	(0.76)	(0.88)
Government official	6.69***	7.54***
	(0.62)	(0.61)
Constant	78.47***	77.00***
	(1.66)	(1.53)
Control variables	✓	✓
Respondent random effects	✓	✓
Partisan accuracy differences (R−D): Local	0.21	-0.15
	(0.76)	(0.76)
Partisan accuracy differences (R−D): National	-0.05	0.68
	(0.88)	(0.80)
Local/national difference in belief polarization	0.26	-0.52
	(0.52)	(0.62)
N	4,983	5,179

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$ (two-sided). Cell entries are OLS coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses (clustered at the respondent level). Dependent variables range from 0–100 with higher values indicating greater accuracy (see Online Appendix A for question wording). All independent variables are binary. Control variables are indicators for gender, college degree, nonwhite, and age ranges 30–44, 45–64, and 65 and older. Partisanship was measured as follows: for the mass public, we use respondent self-placement on a standard seven-point party ID measure (with leaners treated as partisans). For government officials, we measure partisanship to include both those who reported running for office as partisans and those who identify as Democrats or Republicans (including leaners). The omitted reference group for partisanship is independent.

Table C3 contains the preregistered tests of H1 for the scale-based belief measures. The outcome measures are factual perceptions where higher values indicate perceptions that are more congenial to Republicans.

Table C3: Factual belief perceptions (partisan-coded scale measures)

	Pooled model	Voter fraud	Global warming	Military/HC spending	Top 1% tax rate
Democrat	-0.04**	-0.02	-0.05*	-0.04	-0.04
	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.02)
Republican	0.14***	0.12***	0.13***	0.15***	0.14***
	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.02)
Government official	-0.03	-0.11***	-0.12***	0.07	0.04
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.06)	(0.05)
Democrat × official	-0.01	-0.08**	0.02	-0.04	0.04
	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.06)	(0.06)
Republican × official	0.14***	0.12***	0.13***	0.15***	0.14***
	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.02)
Constant	0.35***	0.42***	0.21***	0.30***	0.45***
	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Control variables	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Issue fixed effects	✓				
Respondent random effects	✓				
Partisan belief differences (R−D): Officials	0.24***	0.32***	0.18***	0.24***	0.21***
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.04)	(0.03)
Partisan belief differences (R−D): Public	0.17***	0.14***	0.17***	0.19***	0.18***
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Officials/public difference in belief polarization	0.06***	0.17***	0.00	0.05	0.03
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.03)
N	10,604	2,651	2,650	2,651	2,652

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$ (two-sided). Cell entries are OLS coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses (clustered at the respondent level in the pooled model). Dependent variables are measured on a 0–1 scale where 1 represents the most Republican congenial response and 0 represents the most Democratic congenial response (see Online Appendix A for question wording and response options/values). All independent variables are binary. Control variables are indicators for gender, college degree, nonwhite, and age ranges 30–44, 45–64, and 65 and older. Partisanship was measured as follows: for the mass public, we use respondent self-placement on a standard seven-point party ID measure (with leaners treated as partisans). We code public officials as partisans who reported running for office as a partisan or who identify as Democrats or Republicans (including leaners). The omitted reference group for partisanship is independent.

Table C4 contains the preregistered tests of H1 for the continuous belief measures at the national level. The outcome measures are factual perceptions where higher values indicate perceptions that are more congenial to Republicans (i.e., higher levels of unemployment and foreign born residents).

Table C4: Factual belief perceptions (partisan-coded continuous measures)

	National unemployment	National foreign born
Republican	1.90	1.35
	(1.42)	(1.64)
Democrat	1.74	0.63
	(1.48)	(1.64)
Government official	-6.80***	-6.28***
	(1.68)	(2.38)
Republican × official	-0.69	-1.07
	(1.93)	(2.60)
Democrat × official	-1.32	-2.83
	(1.98)	(2.60)
Constant	27.10***	33.13***
	(1.93)	(1.94)
Control variables	✓	✓
Partisan belief differences (R−D): Officials	0.79	2.49
	(0.96)	(1.09)
Partisan belief differences (R−D): Public	0.16	0.73
	(1.09)	(1.14)
Officials/public difference in belief polarization	0.63	1.76
	(1.44)	(1.56)
N	2,527	2,638

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$ (two-sided). Cell entries are OLS coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses. Dependent variables are the estimated unemployment rate or percentage foreign born at the national level in percentage form (0–100; see Online Appendix A for question wording). All independent variables are binary. Control variables are indicators for gender, college degree, nonwhite, and age ranges 30–44, 45–64, and 65 and older. Partisanship was measured as follows: for the mass public, we use respondent self-placement on a standard seven-point party ID measure (with leaners treated as partisans). For government officials, we measure partisanship to include both those who reported running for office as partisans and those who identify as Democrats or Republicans (including leaners). The omitted reference group for partisanship is independent.

Table C5 contains the preregistered tests of H2 for the continuous belief measures at the local level. The outcome measures are factual perceptions where higher values indicate higher perceived levels of unemployment and foreign born residents.

Table C5: Factual belief perceptions (unemployment/foreign born residents)

	Local unemployment (0–100)	Voter fraud (test 1) (0–1)	Voter fraud (test 2) (0–1)
Republican	-0.42	0.09	0.25***
	(1.33)	(0.06)	(0.03)
Democrat	0.28	-0.20***	-0.10***
	(1.52)	(0.05)	(0.03)
Economic expertise	-3.02*		
	(1.60)		
Republican × economic expertise	2.99		
	(1.88)		
Democrat × economic expertise	0.69		
	(1.82)		
Elected		-0.14**	
		(0.06)	
Republican × elected		0.20***	
		(0.07)	
Democrat × elected		0.16**	
		(0.06)	
Elections expertise			0.05
			(0.09)
Republican × elections expertise			-0.14
			(0.10)
Democrat × elections expertise			-0.06
			(0.09)
Actual local unemployment	0.97***		
	(0.19)		
Constant	5.06	0.23***	0.11
	(7.78)	(0.08)	(0.07)
Control variables	✓	✓	✓
Partisan belief differences (R−D): Experts	1.60*	0.34***	0.26***
	(0.96)	(0.02)	(0.04)
Partisan belief differences (R−D): Non-experts	-0.70	0.29***	0.34***
	(1.52)	(0.04)	(0.02)
Expert/non-expert difference in belief polarization	2.30	0.04	-0.08
	(1.76)	(0.04)	(0.05)
N	460	653	653

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$ (two-sided). Cell entries are OLS coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses. Dependent variables are the estimated unemployment rate or percentage foreign born at the national level in percentage form (0–100; see Online Appendix A for question wording). All independent variables are binary. We define mayors, city council members, and city managers as officials with economic expertise because their job responsibilities involve some aspect of the local economy. We define government officials who report that their job involves the implementation of elections and/or the tallying of votes as having elections expertise. Control variables are indicators for gender, college degree, nonwhite, and age ranges 30–44, 45–64, and 65 and older. We measure partisanship to include both government officials who reported running for office as partisans and those who identify as Democrats or Republicans (including leaners). The omitted reference group for partisanship is independent.

Table C6 contains the preregistered tests of H3 for all continuous belief measures. The outcome measures are factual perceptions where higher values indicate higher perceived levels of unemployment and foreign born residents.

Table C6: Factual belief perceptions (unemployment/foreign born)

	Unemployment (US or county)	Foreign born (US or county)
Republican	1.62	1.08
	(1.20)	(1.36)
Democrat	1.17	-1.29
	(1.24)	(1.37)
Local question	-1.95***	-4.60***
	(0.65)	(0.85)
Republican × local	-0.56	-0.25
	(0.75)	(0.99)
Democrat × local	-0.07	0.92
	(0.74)	(0.98)
Government official	-6.72***	-6.45***
	(0.67)	(0.73)
Actual county population	1.10***	1.18***
	(0.15)	(0.08)
Constant	17.66***	23.60***
	(2.04)	(1.74)
Control variables	✓	✓
Respondent random effects	✓	✓
Partisan belief differences (R−D): Local	-0.04	1.19
	(0.92)	(0.86)
Partisan belief differences (R−D): National	0.45	2.36
	(0.89)	(0.92)
Local/national difference in belief polarization	-0.49	-1.17*
	(0.69)	(0.69)
N	4,926	5,111

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$ (two-sided). Cell entries are OLS coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses (clustered at the respondent level). Dependent variables range from 0–100 with higher values indicating greater accuracy (see Online Appendix A for question wording). All independent variables are binary. Control variables are indicators for gender, college degree, nonwhite, and age ranges 30–44, 45–64, and 65 and older. We measure partisanship to include both government officials who reported running for office as partisans and those who identify as Democrats or Republicans (including leaners). The omitted reference group for partisanship is independent.

Table C7: Issue belief accuracy by partisan congeniality (ordered probit)

	Voter fraud	Global warming	Military/HC spending	Top 1% tax rate
Congenial issue (partisans)	0.12	0.22**	0.41***	0.41***
	(0.08)	(0.11)	(0.08)	(0.07)
Dissonant issue (partisans)	-0.42***	-0.43***	-0.15*	-0.13*
	(0.07)	(0.10)	(0.08)	(0.07)
Government official	0.41***	0.74***	0.18	0.10
	(0.15)	(0.28)	(0.16)	(0.16)
Congenial × official	0.51***	0.51	0.02	0.22
	(0.17)	(0.38)	(0.18)	(0.18)
Dissonant × official	-0.39**	-0.43	-0.07	0.12
	(0.16)	(0.30)	(0.18)	(0.18)
Control variables	✓	✓	✓	✓
Partisan belief differences (R−D): Govt. officials	1.44***	1.59***	0.65***	0.65***
	(0.09)	(0.27)	(0.11)	(0.10)
Partisan belief differences (R−D): Public	0.54***	0.65***	0.56***	0.54***
	(0.05)	(0.07)	(0.06)	(0.05)
Officials/public difference in belief polarization	0.89***	0.94***	0.09	0.10
	(0.11)	(0.27)	(0.12)	(0.11)
N	2,651	2,650	2,651	2,652

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$ (two-sided). Cell entries are ordered probit coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses (cutpoints omitted). Dependent variables are measured on a 0–1 scale where 1 represents the most accurate response and 0 represents the least accurate response. The congenial partisan groups are Democrats for voter fraud and climate change and Republicans for federal spending; the converse applies for dissonant partisan groups. All independent variables are binary. Control variables are indicators for sex, college degree, nonwhite, and age ranges 30–44, 45–64, and 65 and older. The omitted reference group for partisanship is independent.

Table C8: Factual belief accuracy by domain expertise (ordered probit)

	Voter fraud (model 1)	Voter fraud (model 2)
Democrat	0.65***	1.25***
	(0.18)	(0.28)
Republican	-1.03***	-0.37
	(0.17)	(0.26)
Elections expertise	-0.17	
	(0.40)	
Elections expertise × Democrat	0.28	
	(0.45)	
Elections expertise × Republican	0.51	
	(0.44)	
Elected official		0.65**
		(0.29)
Elected official × Democrat		-0.85**
		(0.35)
Elected official × Republican		-0.89***
		(0.32)
Control variables	✓	✓
Partisan accuracy differences (R−D): Experts	-1.45***	-1.66***
	(0.23)	(0.13)
Partisan accuracy differences (R−D): Non-experts	-1.68***	-1.62***
	(0.12)	(0.22)
Expert/non-expert difference in belief polarization	0.23	-0.04
	(0.25)	(0.24)
N	653	653

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$ (two-sided). Cell entries are ordered probit coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses (cutpoints omitted). The dependent variable was measured on a 0–1 scale where higher responses indicate greater accuracy. (See Online Appendix A for question wording; details on coding of the belief accuracy measures are provided in footnote 7.) All independent variables are binary. We define government officials who report that their job involves the implementation of elections and/or the tallying of votes as having elections expertise. Control variables are indicators for gender, college degree, nonwhite, and age ranges 30–44, 45–64, and 65 and older. We measure partisanship to include both government officials who reported running for office as partisans and those who identify as Democrats or Republicans (including leaners). The omitted reference group for partisanship is independent.

Online Appendix D: Deviations from the preregistration

1. Our preregistration discusses elite data from the National Candidate Survey (NCS) and corresponding public data from the American National Election Studies (ANES). We lack access to the NCS data so omit these measures and analyses.

2. Our preregistration mistakenly said that we would use respondent and issue fixed effects in the pooled model. However, the respondent fixed effects are perfectly collinear with coefficients in our models, which are therefore not estimable. We thus use individual-level random effects and issue fixed effects instead.

3. Our preregistration states that we would code variables so that higher values indicate responses that are more congenial to Republicans. We changed the coding so that readers could more easily discern the greater belief accuracy of government officials. Results are equivalent using preregistered specifications (see Online Appendix C).

4. We deviate from the preregistration in two additional respects. First, we exclude control variables for appointed and elected officials (defined among elites only; the excluded category is staff). This change allows us to provide an overall estimate of the coefficient for government officials in the tables (which is otherwise confusingly defined as the difference between staff and the public) and to calculate differences in partisan belief polarization among government officials and the public more straightforwardly. Second, we must omit the true population values of county unemployment and foreign born populations from our models of those quantities because we use them to construct the belief accuracy outcome measures described above.

5. To maintain consistency with the planned analyses described in preregistration after coding change described in footnote 7, we include an indicator for whether an issue is congenial or dissonant for partisans in the pooled model, which allows us to test whether the observed pattern holds across issues that differ in congeniality by party.

EGAP Project Registration Form

A. Information about the respondent

[REDACTED]

B. General information about the project

B1. Title of project

Political Misperceptions among Public Officials and the General Public

B2. Author(s)

[REDACTED]

Is this registration prospective or retrospective?

Prospective

Registration prior to researcher access to outcome data

Is this an experimental study?

No.

Date of start of study

National Candidate Survey: Sept. 6, 2016
Public official survey: February 22, 2017
Public survey: March 1, 2017 (anticipated)
[we also plan to analyze 2016 ANES pilot data (data collection started January 22, 2016), but the PIs have not analyzed for this study]

Should this study be gated (discouraged)?

Yes - until February 23, 2018 or publication.

Was this design "cliniced" at an EGAP meeting?

No.

C. Registration data

C1. Background and explanation of rationale

Many partisans are misinformed about important facts in politics and public policy. The objective of this project is to determine to what extent these beliefs differ among partisan government officials versus the general public.

We will administer a voluntary, anonymous online survey to two samples of respondents: (1) a sample of elected and appointed government officials and staff at the local, state,

and federal level in the U.S. and (2) a sample of adults living in the U.S. recruited via the Internet.

Our study will first compare partisan polarization in factual beliefs---that is, the difference in factual beliefs between members of opposite parties---among government officials and the public. We will then test whether this phenomenon, which we refer to as partisan factual polarization, is lower among officials with relevant domain experience compared with officials who lack such experience. Finally, we will test whether factual perceptions are less polarized by party at the local level, where both government officials and the public may observe objective (local) conditions more accurately. In particular, we test whether partisan factual polarization is lower for beliefs about local conditions compared with beliefs about the country as a whole.

What are the hypotheses to be tested?

H1: Partisan factual polarization on national political issues will be greater among elites than among the general public. The gap in partisan factual polarization between elites and the public will be even greater on issues that are highly salient and feature frequent partisan conflict over factual claims compared to ones that are less salient and/or where partisan conflict is less common. (We define the relevant issues and measures that we use to test this hypothesis below.)

H2: Partisan factual polarization should be lower among elites who have relevant domain experience than among elites who do not. (We define the relevant issues and measures that we use to test this hypothesis below.)

H3: Partisan factual polarization should be lower in circumstances in which which people observe relevant information about an issue in their daily lives compared to their perceptions of the same issue at the national level. (We define the relevant issues and measures that we use to test this hypothesis below.)

How will these hypotheses be tested?

Respondents and data collection

National Candidate Survey:

Public official survey: An online survey of 1000-2000 local, state, and federal government officials and staff in the U.S. (both elected and appointed).

Survey: Members of the adult population (18+) in the U.S.

Dates of administration

National Candidate Survey: Sept. 6, 2016-Nov. 8, 2016
Public official survey: February 23, 2017-April 6, 2017
Public survey: March 1-5, 2017 (anticipated)
[we also plan to analyze 2016 ANES pilot data collected January 22-28, 2016]

Eligibility and exclusion criteria for participants

National Candidate Study: We sent a confidential online survey to every candidate for state legislative office in the U.S. (using contact data compiled by the non-profit Project Vote Smart). Every candidate receives a postcard beforehand, an email containing a link to the online version of the survey, and a reminder email containing the survey link.

Public official survey: Public officials and staff will be invited to participate by email invitation. Invited participants will be selected by randomly sampling from a database of publicly-available email addresses of government officials licensed from KnowWho, Inc.

All U.S. residents age 18 or older are eligible to participate in the general population survey. Participants must be members of the YouGov panel to be selected for inclusion.

Primary and secondary outcome measures

[National Candidate Survey]

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 [0]
-About the same [.5]
-Smaller [1]
On which of the following does the U.S. federal government currently spend the least?
-Foreign aid (1)
-Medicare (0)
-National defense (0)
-Social Security (0)
In your opinion, how likely or unlikely is it that vaccines cause autism?
-Extremely likely (1)
-Moderately likely (.8)
-Slightly likely (.6)
-Slightly unlikely (.4)
-Moderately unlikely (.2)
-Extremely unlikely (0)

[Public official survey]

Consider the issue of voter fraud -- that is, people voting who are not legally eligible or voting multiple times. About 135 million votes were cast in the 2016 presidential election. Roughly how many of those votes do you think were the result of voter fraud?
-Millions [0]
-Hundreds of thousands [.25]
-Tens of thousands [.5]
-Thousands [.75]
-Less than a thousand [1]
[direction of scale randomized]

You may have heard about the idea that the world's temperature may have been going up slowly over the past 100 years. What is your personal opinion on this? Do you think this has probably been happening, or do you think it probably hasn't been happening?
-Has probably been happening [1]

-Probably hasn't been happening [0]
What is your best guess of the percentage of federal income tax revenue that comes from the top 1 percent of earners?
-0-10 percent [0]
-11-20 percent [.33]
-21-30 percent [.67]
-31 percent or more [1]

To the best of your knowledge, does the federal government spend more on health care or the military or are they about the same?
-Health care [1]
-Military [0]
-About the same [.5]
[order of options in questions and response options randomized]

Out of every 100 people living in [RESPONDENT'S COUNTY], how many do you think were born outside of the United States? (Please enter a number from 0 to 100.)
[answers recoded to 0-1 scale]

Out of every 100 people living in the United States, how many do you think were born outside of this country? (Please enter a number from 0 to 100.)
[answers recoded to 0-1 scale]

Out of every 100 people living in [RESPONDENT'S COUNTY] who have a job or are actively looking for a job, how many do you think are are currently unemployed? (Please enter a number from 0 to 100.)
[answers recoded to 0-1 scale]

Out of every 100 people living in the United States who have a job or are actively looking for a job, how many do you think are are currently unemployed? (Please enter a number from 0 to 100.)
[answers recoded to 0-1 scale]

Statistical analyses

All results will be estimated using OLS with robust standard errors and verified for robustness using appropriate GLM estimators (see below). All factual belief measures are coded on a 0-1 scale. Higher values = more accurate responses for all outcome measures except the quasi-continuous measures of perceptions of local/national unemployment and percentage foreign born (in those cases, higher values just mean perceptions of higher unemployment or foreign born).

Notes:
-For partisanship measures among the public, we will use respondent self-classification on a standard party ID measure and include leaners in the partisan groups.
-For the elite sample, we use the following definitions:
    -Democrat=1, Republican=0: Includes respondents to the National Candidate Survey who indicated they are running for office as a Democrat; respondents to the public official survey who indicated they ran for office as a Democrat; and elites and public respondents not in those categories who personally identify as a Democrat

-Democrat=0, Republican=1: Includes respondents to the National Candidate Survey who indicated they are running for office as a Republican; respondents to the public official survey who indicated they ran for office as a Republican; and elites and public respondents not in those categories who personally identify as a Republican

-Democrat=0, Republican=0: Includes respondents to the National Candidate Survey who indicated they are running for office as independent/unaffiliated/third party candidate; respondents to the public official survey who ran for office but did not run as a Democrat or Republican; and elites and public respondents not in those categories who personally identify as an independent

-The reference category for the elected official/candidate and appointed official indicators among elites is staff who work those officials and those who were hired by other means (e.g., directly through the civil service).

-Because we intend to test hypotheses about differences in partisan factual polarization between elites and the public, we intend to pool our public and elite data. We therefore will not use the survey weights provided by ANES or YouGov to approximate a nationally representative sample. We will report the weighted survey marginals for the public samples and how they compare to the relevant elite survey marginals in an appendix.

H1:

For H1, we will first estimate a pooled model of the following form for the DVs where accuracy = higher values that includes fixed effects by issue and respondent and SEs clustered by respondent:

Factual beliefs (where accuracy = higher values) = b0 + b1 * elite (0=public, 1=elite) + b2 * Democrat (0=not Democrat, 1=Democrat) + b3 * Republican (0=not Republican, 1=Republican) + b4 * elite X Democrat + b5 * elite X Republican + b6 * elected official or candidate (0 if no, 1 yes [elites only]) + b7 * appointed official (0 if no, 1 yes [elites only]) + b8 * female + b9 * college graduate (0 if no, 1 if yes) + b10 * non-white (0 if self-identify as white, 1 if self-identify as non-white) + b11 * age 18-29 (0 if no, 1 yes) + b12 * age 30-44 (0 if no, 1 yes) + b13 * age 45-64 (0 if no, 1 yes) + b14 * age 65+ (0 if no, 1 yes) + e

We will then compute the absolute value of the average difference in factual beliefs between Democrats and Republicans in the public (|b2-b3|), the absolute value of the average difference in factual beliefs between Democratic and Republican elites (|(b2+b4) - (b3+b5)|, and the absolute value of the difference-in-differences (|b4-b5|). We report differences in mean accuracy because the outcome variables are coded as either binary where 1=inaccurate, 0=accurate or ordered where higher values = more inaccurate. We take the absolute value of the D-R difference for the public and elites and the difference-in-differences because we are interested in levels of polarization, not its direction, and inaccuracy may be higher or lower for Democrats relative to Republicans for any given outcome measure. (We may also analyze or report the quantities above in directional terms (i.e., not take the absolute value) for expositional or analytical reasons.)

We will then estimate an identical model without fixed effects separately for each issue and examine the extent to which the overall relationship we observe holds at the issue level.

In addition, we will compare elite and public factual polarization on national issues where higher values indicate perceptions of greater prevalence (i.e., higher

unemployment/foreign born). We will estimate separate models for each national issue using the approach described above to verify that the findings above hold for this different type of outcome measure. We may report these results in an appendix due to the coding difference for expositional reasons.

Finally, among the set of issues where accuracy=higher values, we expect factual belief polarization to be higher for issues on which factual disputes are especially salient and controversial among partisan/ideological elites and the media: climate change, voter fraud, the tax system (i.e., the tax burden on the wealthy), and the distribution of federal spending (i.e., social versus military spending). We expect factual belief polarization to be less on issues that are more obscure or less closely aligned with the partisan/ideological divide: vaccines, foreign aid, and the deficit.

To test this, we will estimate a version of the pooled model described above with an issue group interaction and test whether levels of factual belief polarization are larger among elites relative to the public on high-salience issues compared to low. We will estimate a pooled model of the following form that includes fixed effects by issue and respondent and SEs clustered by respondent:

Factual beliefs (where accuracy = higher values) = b0 + b1 * elite (0=public, 1=elite) + b2 * Democrat (0=not Democrat, 1=Democrat) + b3 * Republican (0=not Republican, 1=Republican) + b4 * elite X Democrat + b5 * elite X Republican + b6 * high-controversy issue (0=no, 1=yes) + b7 * elite X high-controversy issue + b8 * Democrat X high-controversy issue + b9 * Republican X high-controversy issue + b10 * elite X Democrat X high-controversy issue + b11 * elite X Republican X high-controversy issue + b12 * elected official or candidate (0 if no, 1 yes [elites only]) + b13 * appointed official (0 if no, 1 yes [elites only]) + b14 * female + b15 * college graduate (0 if no, 1 if yes) + b16 * non-white (0 if self-identify as white, 1 if self-identify as non-white) + b17 * age 18-29 (0 if no, 1 yes) + b18 * age 30-44 (0 if no, 1 yes) + b19 * age 45-64 (0 if no, 1 yes) + b20 * age 65 (0 if no, 1 yes) + e

We will then compute the absolute value of the average difference in factual beliefs between Democrats and Republicans in the public on low-controversy issues (|b2-b3|), the absolute value of the average difference in factual beliefs between Democratic and Republican elites on low-controversy issues (|(b2+b4) - (b3+b5)|, and the absolute value of the difference-in-differences on low-controversy issues (|b4-b5|). We will then do the same for high controversy issues (|(b2+b8)-(b3+b9)|, |(b2+b8 + b10) - (b3+b9+b11)|, and (|b10-b11|), respectively) and compute the difference-in-difference-in-differences (|(b4-b5) - (b10-b11)|).

H2:

We test this hypothesis by estimating one model for each issue on which government officials in our sample have relevant experience: local unemployment and voter fraud. For unemployment, we consider whether partisan factual polarization is lower among mayors, city council members, and city managers (for whom experience=1) than among other officials whose job responsibilities do not involve some aspect of the local economy (for whom experience=0). For voter fraud, we conduct two tests. First, we compare partisan factual polarization among state and local officials who ran for elected office (experience=1) to state and local officials who did not run for (i.e., were appointed to) state and local office (experience=0). Second, we compare partisan factual

polarization across local government officials who report that their job involves the implementation of elections and/or the tallying of votes (experience=1) to local government officials who report that their job does not involve the implementation of elections and/or the tallying of votes (experience=0).

For both unemployment and voter fraud, the model will take the following form:

Factual beliefs = b0 + b1 * experience (0=no, 1=yes; described below) + b2 * Democrat (0=not Democrat, 1=Democrat) + b3 * Republican (0=not Republican, 1=Republican) + b4 * experience X Democrat + b5 * experience X Republican + b6 * elected official (0 if no, 1 yes) + b7 * appointed official (0 if no, 1 yes) + b8 * female + b9 * college graduate (0 if no, 1 if yes) + b10 * non-white (0 if self-identify as white, 1 if self-identify as non-white) + b11 * age 18-29 (0 if no, 1 yes) + b12 * age 30-44 (0 if no, 1 yes) + b13 * age 45-64 (0 if no, 1 yes) + b14 * age 65+ (0 if no, 1 yes) + b15 * unemployment level in respondent county + e

To test H2, we will compute the absolute value of the average difference in factual beliefs between Democratic and Republican officials who lack relevant experience (|b2-b3|), the absolute value of the average difference in factual beliefs between Democratic and Republican elites who have such experience (|(b2+b4) - (b3+b5)|, and the absolute value of the difference-in-differences (|b4-b5|), which tests whether partisan factual belief polarization is lower among officials with relevant experience than among those who lack it.

(These models are estimated only among elites who responded to the public official survey on these issues.)

H3:

To test H3, we will estimate separate models of the following form for unemployment levels and number of foreign born, the two issues for which we have both local and national perception measures:

Factual beliefs = b0 + b1 * elite (0=public, 1=elite) + b2 * Democrat (0=not Democrat, 1=Democrat) + b3 * Republican (0=not Republican, 1=Republican) + b4 * local issue (0=outcome is perception of national unemployment or percentage foreign born, 1=outcome is perception of county unemployment or percentage foreign born) + b5 * Democrat X local issue + b6 * Republican X local issue + b7 * elected official or candidate (0 if no, 1 yes [elites only]) + b8 * appointed official (0 if no, 1 yes [elites only]) + b9 * female + b10 * college graduate (0 if no, 1 if yes) + b11 * non-white (0 if self-identify as white, 1 if self-identify as non-white) + b12 * age 18-29 (0 if no, 1 yes) + b13 * age 30-44 (0 if no, 1 yes) + b14 * age 45-64 (0 if no, 1 yes) + b15 * age 65+ (0 if no, 1 yes) + b16 * actual county value (foreign born or unemployment level in respondent county) + e

For each issue, we will then compute the absolute value of the average difference in factual beliefs between Democrats and Republicans on national issues (|b2-b3|), the absolute value of the average difference in factual beliefs between Democrats and Republicans on local issues (|(b2+b5) - (b3+b6)|, and the absolute value of the difference-in-differences (|b5-b6|).

Notes:

-This study uses four data sources: National Candidate Study, public official survey, general public survey, and ANES (all discussed above). Because the public official survey and general public surveys will be fielded at roughly the same time, we may limit our in-text discussion to these two data sources and report the National Candidate Study and/or ANES results in an appendix. If all four datasets are pooled to test H1, we will account for unobserved differences resulting from pooling with fixed effects.
-We will compute and report appropriate auxiliary quantities from our models, including treatment effects by subgroup and differences in marginal effects between subgroups.
-We will compute all marginal effects appropriate to test the hypotheses of interest from any interaction models described below. In some cases, we may present treatment effects estimated on different subsets of the data for expositional clarity. If so, we will verify that we can reject the null of no difference in treatment effects in a more complex interactive model reported in an appendix when possible.
-Don't know responses will be considered missing data for the factual belief outcome measures.
-We will also compute and report summary statistics for our samples. We will also collect and may report response timing data as a proxy for respondent attention.
-The order of hypotheses and analyses in the final manuscript may be altered for expositional clarity.
-Where applicable, regression results for binary dependent variables will be verified for robustness using probit. Regression results for individual ordered dependent variables will be verified for robustness using ordered probit.

Has this research received Institutional Review Board (IRB) or ethics committee approval? *

Yes. [REDACTED]

Was a power analysis conducted prior to data collection? *

No.

Will the intervention be implemented by the researcher or a third party? If a third party, please provide the name.

N/A

Did any of the research team receive remuneration from the implementing agency for taking part in this research?

No.

If relevant, is there an advance agreement with the implementation group that all results can be published?

N/A.