

**WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT KNOWLEDGE?
CITIZEN COMPETENCE, "PSYCHOLOGICAL REALISM"
AND POLITICAL INFORMATION**

BY

DAVID WILLIAM SCHWIEDER

B.A., University of Northern Iowa, 1986

M.A., University of Iowa, 1992

THESIS

**Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science
in the Graduate College of the
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2000**

Urbana, Illinois

UMI Number: 9971187

**Copyright 2000 by
Schwieder, David William**

All rights reserved.

UMI[®]

UMI Microform 9971187

Copyright 2000 by Bell & Howell Information and Learning Company.

**All rights reserved. This microform edition is protected against
unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.**

**Bell & Howell Information and Learning Company
300 North Zeeb Road
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346**

© Copyright by David William Schwieder, 2000

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN
THE GRADUATE COLLEGE

APRIL 2000

(date)

WE HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS BY

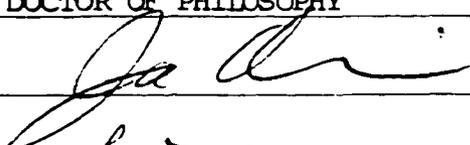
DAVID WILLIAM SCHWIEDER

ENTITLED WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT KNOWLEDGE?

CITIZEN COMPETENCE, "PSYCHOLOGICAL REALISM" AND POLITICAL INFORMATION

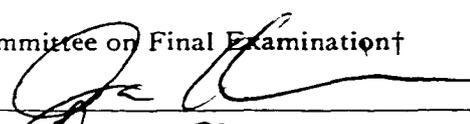
BE ACCEPTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR

THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY


Director of Thesis Research

Peter F. Wenzel
Head of Department

Committee on Final Examination†


Chairperson

Paul Quirk

Michael Kraus

Peter F. Wenzel

† Required for doctor's degree but not for master's.

Abstract

In this dissertation I address two fundamental--and previously overlooked--questions about political knowledge. First, what is the nature of this knowledge? More specifically, what are we measuring with survey knowledge questions? Does factual "knowledge" have to be correct? Does political knowledge have a structure?

I find that responses to survey knowledge items are often "constructed" rather than being retrieved from memory; that is, these answers take the form of "constructed judgments" rather than "fixed knowledge." Not surprisingly, I also find that many of these constructed knowledge judgments are inaccurate and incorrect. However I also argue that incorrect judgments function much like correct ones; thus "political knowledge" can be wrong as well as right, and citizens can possess incorrect factual "misbeliefs." In some cases, these misbeliefs can form organized "misbelief systems" which give individuals a skewed view of particular political issues. This can encourage skewed attitudes as well.

Second, how does knowledge function in the political judgment process? More specifically, what roles does it play? How does it influence and affect these political judgments?

Here I find that knowledge plays only one of two possible parts. While citizens use their knowledge to form attitudes that serve to "advance" their core interests and values, they do not seem to use their knowledge to "anchor" these attitudes. In other words, they do not use their knowledge to temper the expression of their preferences in light of existing "real world" conditions and constraints. The result can be polarized attitudes and poor public policy choices.

My analysis also yields several larger points. First, knowledge has much in common with other political cognitions. Like attitudes, knowledge can result from constructed

judgments, and, like attitudes or values, knowledge can comprise organized structures and systems. Second, though scholars typically assume that “more knowledge is better,” more knowledge can sometimes have undesirable effects. Incorrect “misbeliefs” can skew attitudes, and when core preferences are advanced but not anchored this can also have undesirable effects. Third, previous research may have overstated the role of political knowledge in facilitating “citizen competence.” While I find that knowledge is important, I also find that cognitive skills are crucial as well.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Elmer and Dorothy, for their love and support throughout this project and throughout my life.

Acknowledgments

I would like to take this opportunity to thank my dissertation committee; Jim Kuklinski, Paul Quirk, Mike Krassa and Pete Nardulli, and our department graduate secretary, Julie Elliott.

Jim has been my adviser ever since I came to the University of Illinois--indeed, he is the main reason I did so. Throughout my time here he has never wavered in his faith and support, and we have enjoyed an intellectual communion of the sort that one is rarely fortunate enough to find. Jim has never treated me as less than an equal and a friend, something all graduate students wish for in an advisor and rather few ever find.

Paul was also responsible for bringing me to Illinois. Throughout my time here, he too has been nothing less than consistently supportive. I owe much to his steady, unflappable demeanor; on a number of occasions he helped to keep me on track as I traversed the buffeting roller coaster ride that is the Ph.D. process.

Mike, as graduate director, has bent over backward to help and assist me in every way he could. I enjoyed a much wider and richer range of opportunities in my graduate assignments than I would have without him and his help, and I am a better rounded and better grounded academic because of it.

Pete's deft administrative talent helped to mold the supportive and encouraging environment that I describe. No important project proceeds outside of an institutional support structure, and Pete's actions as department head did much to promote the atmosphere and opportunities that enabled me to stand where I do today.

And finally, Julie. Your friendship and quiet competence has meant the world to me both personally and professionally. My time at the University of Illinois would have been much the poorer had I not had the chance to know and enjoy you.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1	Introduction	1
Chapter 2	Fixed Knowledge, Constructed Judgment, and the Mis-Measure of Political Knowledge	13
Chapter 3	The Nature of (Mis) Belief Systems in Mass Publics	52
Chapter 4	Motivated Reasoning, Unchained Preferences, and the “March of Folly”.	86
Chapter 5	Conclusion	119
	Endnotes	125
	References	136
	Appendix	140
	Curriculum Vitae	164

Chapter 1

Introduction

One of our most intuitively obvious and appealing beliefs is that judgments and choices ought to be “well-informed.” Whether choosing a career, buying a car, or even selecting a spouse, we assume that decisions turn out better when they are based on more knowledge and information rather than less. Indeed, “good judgments” and “well-informed judgments” are often viewed as virtually synonymous.

These personal beliefs are backed up by scholarly research. Findings from several disciplines suggest that our intuitions are correct, and that knowledge does help to produce better decisions and choices. “Expertise” has been much studied, in a variety of areas, and one consistent result is that experts are distinguished from non-experts by their possession of large amounts of specific, relevant information (Glaser and Chi 1988; Krosnick 1990).

And this seems to hold true in political science as well. Mass politics research shows that knowledgeable citizens outperform their less knowledgeable peers on a whole host of “citizen competence” measures. Simply put, better informed citizens tend to make better political judgments. However this is not an unmixed virtue, because the seemingly signal importance of political knowledge is matched by its relative scarcity; average knowledge levels in the American public are low. Thus political knowledge is important, but Americans don’t possess much of it.

These two findings--knowledge matters, but Americans are rather ignorant--comprise the core of the citizen knowledge literature; both are basic and important. However these findings

are only a first cut; knowledge levels and the knowledge-competence relationship are only the most obvious aspects of this subject. There is much more to study here, and some of the most basic questions in this area have received little systematic scholarly attention.

THE NATURE OF POLITICAL KNOWLEDGE

Most fundamentally, what is political knowledge? This question seems odd, because the answer seems obvious; a leading text defines it as “the range of factual information about politics that is stored in long-term memory” (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996, 10). This definition is clear and direct. However it may be *too* clear and direct to capture the complexity of the real world.

Fixed Cognitions and Constructed Judgments

This definition rests on two implicit assumptions. First, and most fundamentally, scholars have treated political knowledge as a sort of fixed entity. Knowledge is viewed rather like an object that a citizen encounters, acquires through learning, and stores in his head--again, this definition refers to “information....stored in long-term memory.” This assumption is intuitively appealing, for it fits well with our conventional assumptions about learning and knowledge. However, this may not describe how people actually think.

An analogy to attitudes is helpful here. Attitude research has long assumed that attitudes take this sort of fixed, object-like form--that is, that they are “fixed cognitions.” However more recent research challenges this view, suggesting that attitudes may typically be “constructed” from a mixture of “considerations” salient in memory. When an attitude is

required--for example, in a survey interview situation--people combine available, relevant considerations in order to construct it "on the spot" (Wilson and Hodges 1991; Zaller 1992).

At least one paper suggests that knowledge may sometimes work in a similar way. When citizens are asked a political knowledge question on a survey, it appears that some of them will sometimes "construct" an answer in a similar manner--that is, briefly canvass their beliefs and memories and make an inference about the matter at hand (Nadeau and Niemi 1995). This is not to say that people never really "know" any political facts--knowledge probably *is* largely static and fixed for many basic, enduring political facts like institutional structures and processes--but it does indicate that political knowledge is more plastic than the traditional view implies.

This suggests that "knowledge" --more precisely, answers to knowledge questions on surveys--may often be generated by inference. And this suggests, in turn, that some of the increased citizen competence manifested by "knowledgeable" citizens results not from the actual possession of greater knowledge but from superior cognitive and inferential skills.

So stated, this seems like a rather narrow technical point. It suggests that we have been crediting knowledge for some of the beneficial effects that are actually due to inferential skills, and thus that our measures are flawed and hence our slope coefficients are biased. However this point has much broader ramifications; indeed, it has the potential to redefine our conception of citizenship. Generally speaking, political knowledge has been seen as the "keystone" of citizen competence, and scholars have traditionally assumed that citizens need large amounts of knowledge to function effectively. However the argument here suggests that inferential skills--accompanied, of course, by some basic knowledge about politics--may be

much more important than we have previously realized.

This claim is both empirically and normatively appealing. It is empirically attractive because it dovetails neatly with the expanding interest in judgment heuristics. At heart, both this argument and the heuristics approach share a basic similarity; both shift our focus away from knowledge and toward cognitive skills. And this argument is normatively attractive as well. Like the heuristics approach, it helps to rehabilitate the citizen and the citizenry so battered by 50 years of pessimistic survey findings on political knowledge. Thus the reallocation of emphasis from knowledge to cognition lies directly in the mainstream of current political psychology thinking.

However I take this argument even farther here; in both respects, I make a stronger claim than the heuristics approach. Heuristics typically are viewed as a compensatory mechanism, one that allows people to “make up” for missing political knowledge. Thus the heuristics approach fails to challenge the privileged position of political knowledge; extensive knowledge is still seen as most desirable, and heuristics are merely the next-best thing. However my argument--that much of the effect attributed to knowledge actually results from cognitive skills--gives me grounds to argue that cognitive and inferential skills actually may be as or more important than encyclopedic political knowledge.

This view has a certain intuitive appeal, but more importantly, it fits congenially with emerging views of human reasoning processes from social and cognitive psychology. These views emphasize basic cognitive limitations-- bottlenecks in short term memory, cognitive capacity, and so on--and these limitations grow ever more acute in light of today's burgeoning “Information Tide.”¹

By these lights, no one can know and process enough information to make well-informed judgments on all of the issues of the day--indeed, no one can know enough to make a truly informed judgment about even one political issue. Bills and regulations often run hundreds or thousands of pages--and tens of pounds--and this obviously presents formidable, even insurmountable barriers to information acquisition and processing. Indeed, political professionals face the same problem; they too must rely on heuristics and short cuts to simplify these issues.

This suggests that citizens will always lack political information, and that this is less a personal or collective failing--or a rational choice--than a simple function of extant reality. And this suggests that knowledge cannot play the dominant role that scholars have supposed; it may be *a* keystone of citizen competence but not *the* keystone. Knowledge obviously is important--one must know *something* about a situation to make a sound inference about it -- but cognitive skills will assume vital, even paramount importance in this scheme. In the end, I suspect that citizen competence is less a matter of the knowledgeable citizen possessing and applying large amounts of detailed information than it is the cognitively able citizen making broad, flexible use of the limited information he does have.² If this is correct, it is important to pay more attention to inferential and cognitive skills--political psychology has often overlooked them--and to better define the relationship between political knowledge and cognitive ability.

Knowledge, Truth and Falsity

To continue my dissection of the nature of knowledge, I argued earlier that existing conceptions of knowledge rest on two basic--and questionable--assumptions. I have

discussed one assumption--fixed cognitions--but what is the other? The second assumption equates "knowledge" and "facts;" again, the definition mentioned earlier cites "factual information about politics." Like the first assumption, this one seems obvious and right; knowledge and correct facts intuitively seem synonymous. Again, however, this may not describe how people actually think.

The problem is the emphasis on facts. Facts serve as a sort of synonym for truth; it would seem strange to talk about "false facts." This is fine as far as it goes. However it also suggests that "knowledge" must also be "true." While this also seems intuitively appealing, it is problematic from another perspective. My dictionary defines knowledge as "familiarity, awareness or comprehension acquired by experience or study" or "the sum or range of what has been perceived, discovered or learned" (Webster's 1984). There is no mention of truth here, and more to the point, the processes mentioned--experience, perception or discovery--would be unlikely to occur without error. This dovetails with my earlier emphasis on inference. Human inference is a highly problematic process, one rife with error (indeed, it would be fair to say that social psychology partly rests on the description and explanation of inferential error). It is obvious that beliefs about matters of fact can often be false--no one would suggest that people hold only accurate beliefs about the world--and, moreover, we know that these false beliefs can be consequential; scholars since Lippmann have known and shown that people act on the basis of false beliefs about the world as well as true ones.^{3 4}

This suggests that mistaken factual beliefs-- "misbeliefs" --can function in the same way as accurate knowledge, that is, that people think and behave on the basis of incorrect beliefs as well as correct ones. And this suggests that the existing citizen knowledge literature is too

narrow. While misbeliefs are not “knowledge” in the traditional sense, they do function much like knowledge--again, right and wrong factual beliefs can have similar effects on cognitions and behavior--and thus political knowledge research should assess and examine not only accurate knowledge but also inaccurate factual misbeliefs.

THE MECHANISM AND PURPOSE OF POLITICAL KNOWLEDGE

Along with the basic nature of political knowledge, another equally important subject has also been overlooked; the way knowledge works in the political judgment process. Actually there are two narrower questions here. The first is mechanical; how does knowledge actually function within political judgment processes? The second is more normative; what purpose does knowledge serve? That is, what functions does political knowledge perform for citizens?

The Mechanism of Knowledge

This first question has received surprisingly little focused attention.⁵ Writing in 1990, John Zaller remarked that “no one has provided a comprehensive account of how one gets from political [knowledge] to each of its numerous dependent effects” (Zaller 1990, 126). Most previous research has either ignored this question entirely or else offered vague and poorly substantiated suggestions about how knowledge yields better judgments and choice.⁶ These works have generally suggested that citizens somehow ponder and process their knowledge in order to produce these desired effects.

Zaller has provided the only specific account of how knowledge is used in political judgment processes. While *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion* has been lauded for its

succinct, deductive explanation of opinion patterns and opinion change, scholars have been less aware that Zaller's "RAS" model offers the first detailed and comprehensive account of the way that knowledge works. Zaller argues that knowledge serves a sort of a gatekeeping function. Citizens use their knowledge to assess the fit between incoming political communications and their own basic, underlying preferences, and they attempt to accept only those communications that accord with those preferences. This screening process, performed more or less successfully, yields the considerations that are ultimately used to construct political attitudes in the manner described earlier in this paper. And this, in turn, yields differing levels of citizen competence; more knowledgeable citizens form more consistent sets of considerations, which leads to "belief systems" that are more stable and more constrained.⁷

The RAS model advances political knowledge research in two basic ways. As indicated, it is much more specific than the collection of vague accounts that preceded it. Furthermore, it not only posits a specific mechanism, it posits a *heuristic* mechanism-- knowledge serves a simple screening function here, and citizens never use their knowledge to directly shape or inform their attitudes.⁸ This is important, because previous knowledge research had implicitly assumed that knowledge works in a systematic fashion, that is, that citizens systematically ponder and process their knowledge to produce political judgments.⁹ This emphasis on systematic reasoning clearly clashes with the more recent emphasis on heuristic reasoning, and thus Zaller's model serves to square the knowledge mechanism with prevailing psychology findings and research.

The Purpose of Knowledge

While Zaller has broken important new ground on the first question, he is decidedly mainstream on the second question; the question of what purpose knowledge serves. Like the others who preceded him, he argues that knowledge helps citizens to “advance” their core preferences through their political attitudes and opinions. This argument suggests that political knowledge helps citizens to recognize their own values and interests, to express these core preferences consistently in their attitudes and opinions, and to advance these attitudes through various types of political participation. In sum, that knowledge helps citizens to do a better job of pressing their core preferences in the political system.¹⁰

While advancing core preferences undeniably is important--citizen preferences do provide the “starting point” for democracy¹¹ --this is not the only important function performed by knowledge. Another function-- “anchoring” or “tempering” core preferences --also is important.

Knowledge--that is, factual knowledge--can serve to chain deliberation and decision-making to the actual material problems and conditions that they are attempting to address (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996). Arguments and opinions may be the root stuff of politics, and citizens may enjoy wide latitude to hold and express them, but ultimately they must square with actual material conditions--that is, with important, relevant facts--if the policies they promote are to have a reasonable chance of success. Adherence to “unpopular” facts can facilitate sound opinions and sound public policies, while ignoring facts can produce the opposite result. The veridical status of facts allows factual knowledge to temper and guide political judgments by forcing people to face reality.

The point is that both of these functions--advancing preferences and anchoring/tempering preferences--are important, and, ideally, we would like to see citizens use their political knowledge in both of these ways. If citizens would develop attitudes that reflect their values and interests yet also acknowledge existing "real world" conditions and constraints then it would presumably help to produce opinions that are judicious and balanced--even wise.

Yet we do not really know if this occurs, since the citizen knowledge literature has emphasized the first function to the exclusion of the second. Thus while we do know that citizens use their knowledge to advance their basic interests and values--the literature contains ample evidence of this--we do not know whether they also use their knowledge to temper and anchor these core preferences.¹²

CONCLUSION

As the body of this chapter suggests, this dissertation is somewhat expansive in its approach. Unlike many theses, this one does not explore and develop a single subject. Rather, it investigates several linked questions in a single subject area.

However this should not be taken to indicate a lack of coherence. Far from it. Most obviously, these topics do cluster around a common substantive concern; political knowledge. Moreover, the three research questions fall in two related areas; the nature and use of knowledge. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the various parts of this dissertation are united by an underlying commitment to what we might call "psychological realism."

Plainly put, prior citizen knowledge research has rested on a rather simple view of political knowledge and a rather outdated model of individual psychological processes. This

traditional view has suggested that knowledge is a sort of fixed object, one which citizens encounter, learn, and store in their heads. It has equated knowledge with facts, and it has focused only on accurate “factual beliefs” about the world. And it has implied that citizens reason and employ their political knowledge in a systematic manner.

This traditional approach is intuitively appealing, and the basic assumptions in this approach fit comfortably with our gut intuitions about the way knowledge is and the way knowledge works. (Indeed, this is probably why this approach has lasted so long and faced so little challenge). However this approach has increasingly been undermined by modern research in political science and social and cognitive psychology. This research suggests that people construct many of their judgments, and that they rely heavily on inference to do so. It suggests that human inference processes are highly flawed, and quite prone to error, and that people are likely to hold inaccurate beliefs about the world. Finally, this research suggests that people typically reason heuristically, especially when it comes to peripheral matters like politics.

In sum, the model that has guided and undergirded traditional political knowledge work is intuitively appealing but increasingly implausible. Knowledge research has existed apart from several main streams of psychological research, but there is no reason to assume that it should; it seems unlikely that knowledge is *sui generis* or that it somehow exists apart from broader currents of psychology. This suggests the need to place political knowledge and citizen competence research on a firmer psychological footing. I attempt this here. First, I try to fuse citizen knowledge research with models of individual psychology in order to explain what citizen knowledge is and how it actually works in a world characterized by constructed judgments and heuristic reasoning. Second, I press for a recasting of citizen competence; that is, a reallocation

of emphasis from knowledge to cognitive abilities. I redefine citizen competence as a package of basic, broadly useful political knowledge coupled with the ability to apply it effectively to make “good judgments” in a variety of political situations.¹³

These basic revisions, important in themselves, also open the door to further findings. If many existing assumptions in this area are wrong, and people reason differently than scholars have supposed, then knowledge is likely to have some odd and unexpected effects; most interestingly, this new perspective casts some doubt on fundamental assumptions about the benefits of knowledge. While the opening paragraph of this chapter indicates that both laymen and scholars have assumed that knowledge is an unalloyed good--that is, the more knowledge, the better--my results suggest that knowledge can have some paradoxical and surprising effects. As I will show, higher levels of knowledge can encourage opinion rigidity and polarization and thus render political conflict more difficult to solve.

The bottom line, by my lights, is that we have known less about political knowledge and citizen competence than we thought we did. This dissertation is an attempt to redress these problems, to fill in some glaring gaps, and to chart a new course in these areas.

Chapter 2

Fixed Knowledge, Constructed Judgment, and the Mis-Measure of Political Knowledge

Perhaps our most basic assumption about knowledge is that it is akin to an object or a commodity. We assume that knowledge is acquired through learning, then held and possessed, and that it can also be lost through forgetting.

This “fixed cognition” model has dominated both lay and academic ideas about knowledge; indeed, it has dominated ideas about cognition in general. This model has substantial intuitive appeal, and we tend to assume that cognitions like attitudes, values and knowledge are generally stable and unchanging. More importantly, from an academic perspective, this model has dominated political science and psychology. The “trait vs. state” debate has largely been won by the former, and, revealingly, many types of cognitions are *defined* as stable and fixed.¹⁴

More recently, however, the fixed cognition model has come under attack. Attitude researchers, long puzzled by empirical irregularities that fixed cognition models cannot explain--chiefly the tendency for attitudes to oscillate rapidly back and forth--have suggested that most attitudes actually result from a “constructed judgment” process. That is, that attitudes are constructed, when needed, from thoughts then available in memory (Wilson and Hodges 1991; Zaller and Feldman 1992; Zaller 1992). According to this view, most attitudes are fluid rather than fixed.

This shift represents a basic sea change in our view of attitudes. And it suggests that this constructed judgment model may hold for other cognitions. Does this model apply to

knowledge--more specifically, to political knowledge? Some evidence suggests that it does.

Richard Nadeau and Richard Niemi examined answers to various survey questions about population demographics, and they found that these answers do seem to result from this sort of construction process. These authors use a colorful analogy to make their case here:

Anyone who has played question-and-answer games such as Trivial Pursuit knows that there is more to answering factual information questions than simply knowing the answer or not knowing it. Sometimes one can figure out what the answer "must be" --by a process of elimination, by reasoning from known, related facts, by various methods of approximation, and so on. . . . We [argue] that something similar takes place when respondents in surveys are asked factual knowledge questions (Nadeau and Niemi 1995, 340).

This does not mean that fixed political knowledge does not exist; people do often learn and possess more basic and enduring political knowledge--the name of the incumbent president, for example, or basic institutional features of the political system--but it does suggest that knowledge about many other sorts of facts may frequently be constructed.^{15 16 17}

If this view is correct, as these arguments and evidence suggest, what are the implications for political knowledge research? In other words--so what? What difference does it make if people are constructing their answers to factual knowledge questions?

Most directly, this would mean we have a measurement problem, and that accurate answers to political knowledge questions on surveys do not simply reflect pre-existing political knowledge. Rather, these correct answers reflect inferential skills as well as learned, fixed knowledge. This means that the widely trumpeted association between political knowledge and "citizen competence" has been overstated to some degree--in other words, we have mistakenly credited knowledge for some of the beneficial effects that actually result from inferential ability. Thus the merits of knowledge and cognitive skill have been over- and under-weighted,

respectively.

More fundamentally, this last point also has deeper ramifications; indeed, it has the potential to help recast our definition of competent citizenship. Political knowledge has traditionally been seen as the core of citizen competence, and scholars have assumed that citizens must learn and possess large amounts of knowledge to function effectively: “The good citizen is expected to have a storehouse of information . . . to inform her political preferences (Lodge, Steenbergen and Brau 1993).”¹⁸ However, pursuing the previous point, I would argue that cognitive skills (accompanied, of course, by some basic knowledge about politics) may be more important for political competence than possession of encyclopedic political knowledge.

This claim fits well with another emerging approach in political psychology; the emphasis on heuristic processing. While political scientists had traditionally assumed that citizens reasoned about politics through in-depth processing, more recent psychology research suggests that individuals typically reason by taking advantage of “short cuts.” This perspective has been highly influential in political science. It is empirically attractive, because it is well supported by logic and evidence. And it is normatively attractive, because it offers an opportunity to rehabilitate the American citizen; the heuristic perspective acknowledges low knowledge levels but suggests that citizens can be reasonably competent nonetheless.

Thus my argument complements the heuristic perspective. Both views shift our focus from knowledge toward reasoning skills; they suggest that citizens can compensate for a lack of extensive knowledge by effectively manipulating the knowledge that they do have.¹⁹ However I go a step further here. Heuristics research generally stops short of challenging the primacy of knowledge; heuristics are viewed as compensatory--that is, as a device to make up for missing

political knowledge. Extensive knowledge is still seen as most desirable, and heuristics are merely the next best thing.²⁰ However my argument--that much of the beneficial effect attributed to knowledge actually results from cognitive skills--gives me grounds to argue that cognitive and inferential skills may actually be as or more important than encyclopedic political knowledge.

All conceptions of the citizen assume that political competence results from some combination of relevant political knowledge and effective reasoning skills. Traditional approaches have emphasized knowledge, implicitly assuming that effective reasoning would follow in train. However I emphasize reasoning, and I assume that citizens can make good political judgments even with low levels of knowledge. Thus I reverse the equation. The traditional approach prizes citizens who have a large amount of knowledge, while my perspective favors the citizen who has a reasonable knowledge base and the cognitive skill to apply it in a variety of situations. I believe that the latter reflects a more psychologically realistic view of the individual, and, indeed, that it actually may produce more competent citizens overall.²¹

In this chapter, I investigate my narrower hypothesis in order to illuminate my broader claim; that is, I analyze the use of inference on survey knowledge questions in order to address my general contentions about the revised nature of citizen competence. A finding that “inference matters” here would strongly suggest that inferential skills are a key component of “good” political judgments and broad political competence. This finding would directly reallocate some of the “credit” for citizen competence from knowledge to inferential skills, thus underlining my general arguments for citizen competence revision with substantial clarity and power.

Before I proceed, however, I must address two key points. First, with knowledge questions, “constructed judgments” obviously are similar to “guesses.” In each case, a respondent who has not actually learned a particular fact nevertheless attempts to come up with a correct answer. We have long known that respondents must guess on survey knowledge questions, so what do we gain from treating these responses as “constructed judgments”?

We gain two things. One, guessing on surveys has received little attention; researchers have tended to briefly acknowledge the subject and then move on (see Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996, 65, 95, 296; and also Zaller 1992, 335, for a slightly more systematic treatment). This is hardly surprising; “guesses” seem rather random, and thus there would seem to be little profit from studying them. However treating these responses as constructed judgments subsumes them within broader categories--i.e. as instances of constructed judgment and inference--and this puts them on a more systematic footing, one that permits a more productive exploration of this subject. Two, an emphasis on inference also helps to remind us that individuals do vary in their general political knowledge and cognitive skills. This suggests that the accuracy of constructed survey knowledge responses will vary systematically across citizens, and, by extension, that this variance may have important political consequences. Ultimately, I am rather agnostic about the exact nature of these survey responses--I could comfortably call accurate responses either “educated guesses” (as Nadeau and Niemi do) or “good inferences”--and my preference for the latter springs strictly from its analytical advantages.

The second key point is that however we characterize these survey responses--guesses, constructed judgments, or whatever--we are equating these responses with enduring factual beliefs. This may seem a bit strained; constructed responses would seem to have a sort of ad-

hoc quality rather than reflecting enduring cognitions. This would lead one to question the significance of these constructed survey responses, since they might seem to have little or no consequence outside of the survey interview situation.

Once again, however, I refer to the attitude research here. This literature has been plagued by precisely the same problem--whether attitudes expressed on surveys are "real"--and the constructed judgment position offers a middle ground between the polarized "black and white" positions have traditionally dominated this debate. While constructed attitudes are produced "on the spot," they do spring from more basic cognitions--i.e. "considerations"--that are quite fixed and enduring (Wilson and Hodges 1991, Zaller 1992). I argue that answers to factual knowledge questions have essentially the same sort of status; they result when citizens map vague and inchoate--but enduring--perceptions of the world onto specific survey questions. Thus constructed factual beliefs do have a meaningful substantive status; like attitudes, they are indeed enduring and "real."

INFERENCEAL PROCESSES AND POLITICAL KNOWLEDGE

My basic claim is that answers to knowledge questions on surveys result from inferential processes as well as from simple reports of fixed knowledge about the particular subject at hand. This suggests that variance in individuals' performance on knowledge questions results partly from variances in their inferential abilities; in other words, people who make better inferences will tend to do better on political knowledge scales.

This points our focus toward the inferential process; generally speaking, what factors help people to make accurate inferences? What are elements of inferential success? Because

inference plays a central part in human affairs, psychologists have devoted a substantial amount of attention to this question. One influential text, *Human Inference: Strategies and Shortcomings*, identifies two basic factors; knowledge and judgment heuristics (Nisbett and Ross 1980). This is a general psychological stance, but political behavior scholars have tended to embrace it as well.

Political Knowledge and Political Inference

I consider it self-evident that some fixed political knowledge is a basic requirement for accurate inference on survey knowledge questions about politics. It is hard to imagine anyone making accurate inferences about American politics if they lack any awareness of the U.S. political system; this would be like asking an American to make inferences about politics in Mongolia or Zaire. All political affairs are situated in a particular context and hence some factual knowledge of this context is required.

However saying that fixed political knowledge is important simply restates the traditional wisdom; knowledge matters when answering survey knowledge questions. What is different here? The degree of relevance. The traditional view assumes that judgments are made systematically, via systematic reasoning, and thus it implicitly emphasizes possession of political knowledge that relates directly and specifically to the issues at hand.²² One needs in-depth information to engage in in-depth processing. However my approach assumes heuristic processing, and hence knowledge plays a different role; rather than facilitating detailed judgments, it facilitates the use of heuristics. Since most heuristics involve simple cues--cues which tend to utilize very basic knowledge--I emphasize this sort of basic, general political

knowledge because it is likely to facilitate effective heuristic use across many types of political issues.

Thus, to refocus on my main hypothesis here, I would argue that broad, basic, knowledge about politics--that is, fixed knowledge about politics--will facilitate accurate inferences on other political knowledge questions on surveys.

Cognitive Skills and Political Inference

Fixed, basic political knowledge provides a necessary foundation, the “raw material” for political inference. However it is incomplete by itself. Individuals must also be able to apply this knowledge. Competent citizens must be able to effectively manipulate their basic political knowledge with simple cognitive strategies.

While people probably employ a large number of such simple strategies, many probably idiosyncratic,²³ most of the widely recognized heuristics involve the use of simple cues. Party ID may be the most venerable; it has been recognized as a heuristic since *The American Voter* was published in 1960. Other cues have been identified and examined as well; group memberships, emotions and feelings, and so on (Popkin 1991; Sniderman, Brody and Tetlock 1991).

It would be difficult to investigate all of these specific heuristic strategies here, and fortunately we can take a more general approach. I would label my subject of concern here as “cognitive sophistication.” Of course, this is a catch-all term, one representing an agglomeration of related characteristics, such as political interest, cognitive skills--even knowledge (Converse 1964; Converse 1970; Zaller 1992, 333-4). However one can parse the term to focus on its specific components. I do so in this paper, and I focus on cognitive reasoning skills.

Conclusion

My general argument is that basic, fixed political knowledge and cognitive skill--structure and process--can combine to create a broad, flexible political competence. And, to return to the main emphasis of this chapter, my specific argument is that this general point holds for answering political knowledge questions on surveys; I argue that inference is an important part of this process, and that basic political knowledge and basic reasoning skills combine to yield better inferences and more accurate answers to survey knowledge questions. I test this latter argument here.

EMPIRICAL ANALYSES

In this section, I address my core claims with a variety of evidence and analyses. These analyses examine the role of constructed judgments in respondents' answers to political knowledge questions, and they assess whether cognitive skill and basic political knowledge promote accuracy in making these sorts of constructed judgments.

Constructed Judgments and the Answering of Survey Knowledge Questions

Constructed Judgments and "Don't Know" Responses

I open with a new analysis of existing research; more precisely, a reexamination of "Don't Know" items. As every pollster is aware, "DK" responses are a basic feature of survey research. But while their presence is obvious, their exact meaning and significance has remained unclear. Consider attitude research. A traditional "fixed attitude" perspective suggests that DK responses might result for one of several reasons. Most obviously, the

respondent who gives a DK responses may truly lack an opinion. Alternatively, he may possess an opinion but be unwilling or unable to report it (Schuman and Presser 1996).

However a constructed judgment approach would reject all of these explanations. If virtually everyone lacks fixed opinions, as the constructionist approach suggests, then a lack of opinions cannot explain why some respondents give DKs while others do not. Similarly, respondents cannot be reluctant to report a fixed opinion they do not hold, and there are no fixed opinions to recall from memory. Instead, a constructed judgment approach would suggest that DKs result when respondents are unable to construct an opinion. ²⁴

Empirical research provides substantial support for this claim. Research consistently shows that the strongest predictor of a DK response is education. Poorly educated respondents are more likely to give DK responses than their better educated peers (J. Converse 1976-1977). Schuman and Presser go a step further, noting that education and political knowledge interact and that education effects are stronger when questions also require knowledge: “Particularly where knowledge of public affairs is needed, less educated persons are more apt to give DK or ‘no opinion’ answers (1996, 150).” If education is a proxy for cognitive skill, then different levels of cognitive skill would seem primarily responsible for different levels of Dks; better cognitive skills render respondents better able to construct credible opinions.

However this finding is also compatible with a fixed cognition approach; educated respondents might offer fewer DK s because more of them have fixed opinions. After all, educated respondents presumably are more aware about politics. However I would argue that the robustness of the relationship between education and DK responses suggests that this cannot be a complete explanation; it seems unlikely that educated people would almost always be more

likely to hold fixed opinions on a very large set of widely divergent political issues. More difficult to dismiss, however, is the argument that educated respondents are simply better socialized to the mainstream political culture, and thus more likely to give substantive answers to survey questions because of a heightened sense of citizen duty or a greater desire to avoid appearing ignorant.

However an intriguing set of experiments argues against this explanation. Attempting to shed more light on DK responses, Schuman and Presser asked respondents for their opinions about two then-pending bills; the Agricultural Trade Act of 1978 and the Monetary Control Bill of 1979. These efforts built on some rather curious earlier findings which revealed that a large majority of respondents were willing to offer opinions about entirely fictitious political issues; most notoriously, the near-whimsical “Metallic Metals Act (Gill 1947).” While the ATA and MCB were real--the authors didn’t wish to directly mislead their subjects--they were selected because they were so obscure that they might as well have been imaginary. As with the “Metallic Metals Act,” then, few respondents could have actually had an opinion. about them. Intriguingly, the authors found that the usual education-DK relationship was reversed, and that educated respondents were *more* likely to give DK responses on these items. The authors viewed this as a function of cognitive sophistication, arguing that educated respondents had recognized the obscurity of these items and had responded accordingly. The key point here is that this argument mirrors our own; even though Schuman and Presser are operating in the fixed cognition paradigm, they claim that better-educated respondents did “better” with DKs because they have superior inferential skills.²⁵

These examples are instructive, but they are somewhat indirect; they involve attitude

items while my argument focuses on factual knowledge questions. While extending arguments and conclusions from the former area to the latter seems reasonable, it would be preferable to have more direct evidence. Fortunately such evidence does exist. As mentioned earlier, Niemi and Nadeau argue that respondents often answer factual knowledge questions by using a constructed judgment process. Several results from their research supports my argument here. These authors found that higher cognitive ability and the presence of simple cues in the questions tended to reduce the rates of DK responses on difficult knowledge items, presumably because these “tools” helped respondents to construct answers to these questions. (Moreover, they also found that DK rates were higher for lesser educated respondents).²⁶ These findings support my basic claim--that inference and constructed judgments are important in answering knowledge questions--more directly.

Though this section does not present any original empirical analyses, the results I report are consistently supportive of my basic claim that constructed judgment processes play a non-trivial part in answering political knowledge questions on surveys.

“Knowledge” Responses and Change Over Time

The evidence in the previous section is suggestive, but hardly definitive. I have shown that my argument is credible, but these findings are rather indirect. What would represent stronger proof? It is useful to recall that the main spur prompting development of the constructed judgment model was the consistent evidence of attitudinal instability (Wilson and Hodges 1991). Attitude reports are “extremely labile . . . over time” to borrow Converse’s original phrase (Converse 1964, 241). The fixed cognition paradigm simply cannot construct a

credible explanation for these patterns (though several scholars made heroic attempts; most notably in Converse's "black and white" model and Achen's "measurement error" account (Converse 1964; Achen 1975)).

Accordingly, changes in responses to knowledge questions also could illuminate my analyses; with my research question, over-time analysis offers more leverage than cross sectional analysis does.

Aggregate Opinion Change Over Time

Though my focus concerns individual processes, I begin by reviewing evidence about stability and change in aggregate knowledge. This is a useful enterprise, because it can help to shed light on our individual-level analyses.

To state the case succinctly, aggregate knowledge levels in the American public have remained quite stable over the last half of the 20th century. Delli Carpini and Keeter summarize:

We find that in spite of numerous changes in their political, social, economic and technological environments, Americans are essentially no more nor less informed about politics than they were fifty years ago (1996, 105).²⁷

This is a fairly striking finding; it seems that everything has changed except political knowledge. While this stability in aggregate knowledge levels says little about the actions of individuals--aggregate patterns can accrete from many different combinations of individual acts--one point is more revealing. The most interesting finding, from my point of view, involves the relationship between knowledge and education. While knowledge levels have remained flat, average education levels have risen sharply during this time. Contrary to hopeful predictions,

then, increases in education have failed to yield increases in overall political knowledge.

How does this speak to my question here? Does this tell us whether people use fixed knowledge or constructed judgments to answer survey knowledge questions? On the surface, this finding seems agnostic, because both theories predict that greater education should produce higher knowledge levels. The traditional fixed cognition view argues that education should teach citizens more factual knowledge and also give them the tools to learn more on their own, while I argue that a better education should give citizens better inferential skills. Thus neither theory would seem able to account for these findings.

However this is not necessarily the case; the evidence for static knowledge levels is highly general; that is, all respondents and all types of knowledge items are lumped in together. However this may be too general from the constructed judgment perspective. The problem here is that different sorts of questions may be more or less susceptible to inferential construction; as Delli Carpini and Keeter suggest, some types of questions invite guessing more than others (1996, 94-95).²⁸ For my purposes, the important point is that the constructed judgment approach predicts that we will see over-time gains on some types of knowledge questions but not on others. What sorts of questions would facilitate inference (i.e., what sorts of political “knowledge” would show improvement as education levels rise)? Delli Carpini and Keeter identify two; multiple choice questions, especially those with few response categories, and questions that ask for numbers or percentages (1996, 94-95). Thus finding that answers to these sorts of questions showed a greater than average gain would constitute evidence for my constructed judgment approach.

Unfortunately, there is little or no evidence for this. Delli Carpini and Keeter

collected a large set of knowledge items asked on more than one occasion, and the results are not particularly supportive of the constructed judgment thesis. Most change occurred on questions not particularly susceptible to guessing, such as identifying particular political terms or current political figures. (Indeed, in many cases, the percentage of correct answers actually declined over time.) For example, these authors identified a small set of items that showed particularly large gains over time. Almost all of these items asked respondents to define political terms or identify prominent--or notorious--political figures like Harry S Truman or Marion Barry (1996, 127-30, Appendix Three). Again, these "textual" questions would not seem to be especially amenable to inferential construction, and moreover, each of these issues or persons became more prominent during the period when knowledge about them increased. Thus these instances would seem likely to involve fixed knowledge and actual learning.

In sum, then, my analysis of aggregate, over-time results generally fails to support my claims about "constructed knowledge." However I would argue that this evidence is not definitive. The data requirements are exacting here: I need items spaced a long time apart--since the effects of increasing cognitive skills would be felt only gradually--and these items must measure political topics susceptible to constructed judgment and inference. Unfortunately, few of these repeated questions met these criteria. Thus I view these results as inconclusive.

Individual Opinion Change Over Time

Whatever the utility of aggregate analyses, individual level analysis is the gold standard here. Again, the main spur for the development of the constructed judgment model was the overwhelming evidence of individual attitudinal instability; the fixed cognition paradigm

is forced to perform Ptolemaic-like contortions to explain these back and forth oscillations.²⁹

Thus demonstration of a similar lability in “knowledge” responses would constitute powerful proof that these responses also can result from a similar constructed judgment process.

Unfortunately, the data requirements for this analysis also are exacting; here I need panel studies that include repeated factual knowledge items. However this sort of data is scarce. Panel studies are relatively rare, and knowledge items are also uncommon--pollsters have tended to downplay knowledge questions on surveys for fear of damaging rapport with respondents who cannot answer them. Moreover, when knowledge questions *are* asked on panel studies, they usually are asked only in one wave. This last point is unfortunate but hardly surprising. When researchers view knowledge as a fixed cognition, as they typically have, they believe that asking knowledge questions more than once would simply represent repetition.

Fortunately, however, at least two suitable data sets do exist. The first is from a panel study conducted by Delli Carpini and Keeter in late 1992. The following items were asked in more than one wave:

Which party is more conservative?

What sort of majority is required to override a presidential veto?

Who nominates judges to the federal courts?

What job does Richard Cheney hold?

Does [Bush/Clinton/Perot] support the death penalty?

Does [Bush/Clinton/Perot] favor raising taxes on the wealthy?

Does [Bush/Clinton/Perot] want to prohibit abortion under most circumstances?

Does [Bush/Clinton/Perot] favor requiring employer-provided health insurance?

This panel study had three waves, with the waves designed to bracket the 1992 presidential election. Respondents were recruited and assembled to watch the second presidential debate; the first wave was conducted immediately before the debate, with the second

wave conducted immediately after the debate. The third wave was conducted by telephone several weeks later after the election. Each of the questions in the first set of four items was asked twice, in waves one and three. Each of the questions in the second set of four items was asked three times, i.e. in each of the three waves.

In some respects, this arrangement is less than ideal for my purposes. There are two basic problems here. First, the first and second iterations are so closely spaced that “waves” is probably a poor term to use. It seems highly likely that respondents would have remembered their first answer when it came time to give the second. Second, the waves were interrupted by a critical, prominent political event; by most accounts, presidential elections attract unparalleled levels of popular interest and attention. While this served the principal investigators’ purpose--Delli Carpini and Keeter wanted to see if the debates changed perceptions about the candidates’ issue positions--this renders the four questions in the second set less than ideal for my purposes, since any changes here are likely to represent reactions to the debate.

This leaves the first four questions. Unfortunately, the first of these may also suffer from the problem just elaborated; real change. Respondents may have changed their minds about party conservatism while watching the party presidential nominees debate. This leaves the items on veto overrides, judicial appointments, and Richard Cheney. Unlike the others, these items address basic, fixed facts and thus answers to these items are less subject to “real” change of the sort that might be produced specifically by debates and by the presidential campaign environment more generally. Thus I would argue that these items are well-suited for my purposes. Though none is ideal, each should be relatively resistant to “political effects,” even the potentially intense political effects of a hard-fought presidential campaign. Tables 2.1

through 2.4 report the results on these four questions. (First wave answers are indicated in the left columns, while third wave answers are indicated in the top rows.)

Table 2.1

Which Party More Conservative

	REPS	DEMS	SAME	DK/NA
REPS	79 (82.3%)	2 (2.1%)		
DEMS	4 (4.2%)	5 (5.2%)	1 (1.0%)	1 (1.0%)
SAME		1 (1.0%)		
DK/NA		3 (3.1%)		
N = 96				

Table 2.2

Majority to Override a Veto

	RIGHT	WRONG	DK/NA
RIGHT	53 (55.2%)	5 (5.2%)	2 (2.1%)
WRONG	4 (4.2%)	2 (2.1%)	3 (3.1%)
DK/NA	12 (12.5%)	4 (4.2%)	11 (11.5%)
N = 96			

Table 2.3

Who Nominates Federal Judges

	PRESIDENT	CONGRESS	SUPREME CT.	DK/NA
PRESIDENT	64 (66.7%)	4 (4.2%)	3 (3.1%)	1 (1.0%)
CONGRESS	3 (3.1%)	5 (5.2%)	2 (2.1%)	1 (1.0%)
SUPREME CT.	1 (1.0%)		1 (1.0%)	
DK/NA	2 (2.1%)	3 (3.1%)	3 (3.1%)	3 (3.1%)
N = 96				

Table 2.4

Job Held by Richard Cheney

	RIGHT	WRONG	DK/NA
RIGHT	47 (49.0%)	4 (4.2%)	1 (1.0%)
WRONG	1 (1.0%)	3 (3.1%)	5 (5.2%)
DK/NA	9 (9.4%)	5 (5.2%)	21 (21.9%)
N = 96			

What do these response patterns tell us? More specifically, do they allow us to distinguish between fixed cognitions and constructed judgments? Table 2.5 summarizes these individual tables.

Table 2.5

Summary of Individual Knowledge Items

	Party More Conservative	Veto Override Percent	Judicial Nominations	Job Held by Cheney
Stable - Correct	82.3%	55.2%	66.7%	49.0%
Stable - Incorrect	5.2%	**	6.2%	**
Stable - DK/NA	0%	11.5%	3.1%	21.9%
“Learn”	***	16.7%	6.2%	10.4%
“Forget”	***	2.1%	1.0%	1.0%
Other Change	***	7.3%	12.4%	10.4%

**** These figures are not ascertainable. Incorrect responses were simply coded as incorrect on these items--i.e. actual responses were not recorded--and thus it is impossible to tell if respondents gave the same wrong answer on both waves.**

***** Change figures were not computed for the “Which party more conservative” question because of the likelihood that answers could have changed for substantive reasons; i.e. because of the presidential debate and campaign.**

Table 2.5 shows that a plurality of respondents gave the correct answer on both waves on each of the questions (and this consistently correct group comprised a majority on three of the four questions). Moreover, the proportion of stable responses, of all types, ranges from 66.7% to 87.5% across the four questions. However these tables also show that there is a fair amount of change over the two waves.

What do these findings tell us about the cognitive processes that underly the answering of survey knowledge questions? Do these findings favor either fixed knowledge or accurate

construction? An examination of specific findings points us toward an answer.

First, the most obvious result--stability. As mentioned, the percentage of stable, correct answers varies across the four items. This tells us little by itself, but, more interestingly, the size of these correct answer groups does vary by question type. Questions one and three (Which Party More Conservative, Who Nominates Judges) are closed-ended, multiple choice items, each with three possible responses. Questions two and four (Veto Override Percent, Cheney's Job) are open-ended items, where respondents had to come up with answers on their own. Because multiple choice questions can "cue" respondents, we would expect items one and three to show higher rates of correct answers than items two and four.

Indeed, this is what we see (Table 2.5). However this does not necessarily mean that respondents are making constructed judgments here. Fixed cognitions would produce this same pattern if questions one and three were easier or more obvious and thus more respondents actually knew the answers. Is this likely to be the case? In part, yes. At one extreme, political parties are some of the most enduring and obvious features on the political landscape. Conversely, both Dick Cheney and his job are fairly obscure; he was the temporary occupant of a fairly non-prominent post (Secretary of Defense). Thus fixed knowledge levels should be higher on the party question than on the question about Cheney. However items two and three seem roughly comparable on this dimension; both reference basic, enduring institutional processes. Given this, the higher percent correct on the judicial nomination item would seem to suggest that "cues mattered," and that constructed judgments were involved here.

Again, however, an alternate interpretation exists; perhaps the better performance on the judicial nomination question simply reflects the "tenor of the times." The issue of Supreme

Court nominations has become a prominent subtheme in presidential elections, and thus this fact may have simply been more salient during the period when these polls were taken. However another finding argues against this interpretation. The fourth row of Table 2.5 shows that the “learn” figure across the two waves is much higher for the veto item than for the nomination item (learners moved from non-correct responses to correct ones). This suggests that salience is unlikely to account for the higher correct rates on the judicial nominee question. If salience was solely responsible for the differing proportions of correct answers, we would have expected higher “learn” rates on the judicial nominee question. Overall, then, better performance on the more “guessable” question--judicial nominations--seems consistent with the argument that some respondents really are making constructed judgments about these knowledge items.³⁰

Second, it is also useful to examine the patterns of change. Stable answers of one kind or another constitute a clear majority on each question, but that still leaves a substantial amount of instability and change (Table 2.6 summarizes, again in a more focused format).

Table 2.6

Stability and Change on Individual Knowledge Items

	Party More Conservative	Veto Override Percent	Judicial Nominations	Job Held by Cheney
Stable	87.5%	66.7%	76.0%	70.9%
Overall Change	12.6%	31.3%	23.8%	26.0%
Learn/Forget	***	18.8%	7.2%	11.4%
Random Change	***	12.5%	16.6%	14.6%

What do these patterns of change tell us about constructed judgments and fixed cognitions? To answer this, it is useful to consider the two cognitive processing models in more detail. While the constructed judgment model predicts a substantial amount of near-random change, the fixed cognition model suggests that answers should change for only two basic reasons; learning and forgetting. These latter types of changes should show characteristic patterns; answers should change from non-correct (wrong, DK, NA) to correct when people learn, and the answers should change from correct to non-correct (DK, NA) when people forget.³¹ I classify all such changes as instances of learning or forgetting, and I summarize these figures in the next to last row of Table 2.6. Obviously, this is a conservative strategy; I am probably classifying some random change as learning or forgetting--because some random change probably follows these patterns--so this strategy probably understates the amount of random change. Even so, the bottom row of this table shows that a substantial amount of random instability remains for each of the three analyzable items. Since these sorts of random fluctuations are the signature of a constructed judgment process--again, they cannot be plausibly explained by the fixed cognition approach--this represents further evidence for the constructed judgment hypothesis.³²

The previous analyses are suggestive but not definitive. We do see change here, but a two-wave survey gives me less purchase than I would like (more precisely, it gives me insufficient variance). Much of the change we have seen can be explained as either inference or learning/forgetting, and this "observational equivalence" makes it difficult to prove that constructed judgments are occurring on knowledge questions. Fortunately, another data set has three waves of repeated knowledge questions--M. Kent Jennings' "Youth-Parent Socialization

Panel Study”--and this allows me to look for more complex patterns of change. More specifically, it allows me to look for the back and forth oscillations that are the key signature of constructed judgments.

The waves for this survey were conducted in 1965, 1973 and 1982. (The first wave was conducted the year that respondents graduated from high school, with the second and third waves conducted eight and seventeen years afterward, respectively.) The survey included six questions that were repeated in each wave of the study (Jennings 1996). These questions included in this survey were as follows;

About how many years does a U.S. Senator serve?

Do you happen to know how many members there are on the United States Supreme Court?

Marshall Tito is/was a leader in what country?

Who is the governor of [name of this state] now?

Do you happen to recall whether President Franklin Roosevelt was a Republican or a Democrat?

During World War II, which nation had a great many concentration camps for Jews?

These questions tested three basic types of knowledge; textbook institutional facts (the first two questions), “surveillance facts” involving current affairs (the middle two questions) and historical facts (the last two questions). These can be considered to be among the most important types of political knowledge; covering awareness of basic, fixed institutions, current events, and the happenings that led up to these events and set the stage for them.

Table 2.7 summarizes my results here. It provides rather comprehensive information, reporting the patterns of right and wrong answers for each of the six items across all three waves.³³

Table 2.7

Response Patterns Across Three Waves

Response Pattern*	Senate Term Length	Supreme Court Size	Tito's Country	Roosevelt's Party	Conc. Camp Location
1. RRR	28.5%	27.8%	54.0%	63.1%	84.3%
2. RRW	11.7%	13.5%	12.0%	11.6%	12.1%
3. RWW	13.0%	15.4%	1.5%	2.6%	.7%
4. RWR	6.6%	5.6%	4.9%	2.6%	.6%
5. WRW	6.3%	7.3%	4.0%	5.1%	1.7%
6. WRR	6.1%	5.8%	11.0%	7.1%	.2%
7. WWR	5.3%	4.4%	2.8%	2.7%	.2%
8. WWW	22.6%	20.1%	9.8%	5.2%	4%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

*R indicates right answer, W indicates wrong answer, DK s not included

Analysis of these responses shows three basic patterns. Patterns one and eight are completely stable, at least in the sense of right and wrong (As with the previous survey, actual wrong answers were not recorded, so we cannot tell if an individuals' wrong answers were the same or different across waves). Patterns two and three show correct answers changing to incorrect, while patterns six and seven show incorrect answers changing to correct. Patterns four and five show a back and forth oscillation.

What does this table tell us about cognitive processing? I believe it shows what I had expected; that fixed knowledge and constructed judgments are both occurring here. The

strongest evidence for fixed knowledge is the first row, which shows the percentage of respondents who gave correct answers on each of the three survey waves--in other words, the percentage of respondents who gave completely fixed and stable answers. Answers to the historical facts were quite stable, followed by the current affairs item about Tito. Interestingly, the proportions are lower for the institutional items; barely over a quarter of respondents fit this pattern.³⁴

However the most prominent feature of this table is change. All patterns except the first one show respondents reporting different answers over time.³⁵ Most obviously, patterns four and five show the sort of back and forth oscillations so common in attitude research. And, though several of the other patterns do seem likely to include some forgetting (and to a lesser extent, some learning), it is nonetheless apparent that there is a great deal of judgment construction taking place here. The majority of respondents here are giving different answers across waves, and many or most of these answers are incorrect.³⁶ Since relatively few of these patterns and respondents are consistent with the fixed knowledge approach, we see strong evidence for judgment construction here.

Formal Statistics

While these results are strongly suggestive, it would be desirable to accompany them with precise statistical measures. This would have an additional benefit as well; it would allow us to directly compare the stability of survey knowledge items with the stability of attitude items. Since we know that attitude responses result at least partly from constructed judgments, comparable levels of instability in attitude and knowledge responses would suggest that the

latter result from constructed judgments as well. Accordingly, I “return to our roots” here and follow the methodology originally used by Philip Converse in his classic “Belief Systems” paper (1964). Converse measured stability by comparing responses to attitude questions between the 1958 and 1960 NES surveys.³⁷

Converse used attitude items with 5 point scales; answers ranged from “Strongly Agree” to “Strongly Disagree” with “Don’t Know” in the middle. Unfortunately, this format does not match the format used on any of my knowledge questions. As is apparent, only three of these items are ordinal--the Delli Carpini and Keeter item on party conservatism, and the Youth Survey items on Senate terms and Supreme Court size--and the others are nominal items with “Right” and “Wrong” responses.

Given this, I recoded the original NES items to make them comparable to the nominal knowledge items. I discarded the middle DK alternative and lumped “Agree” with “Strongly Agree” and “Disagree” with “Strongly Disagree.” This gave me a two-point nominal scale that was comparable in form to the knowledge items. Of course, these items are not directly analogous; the two categories on the attitude items are “Favor” and “Oppose” while the two categories on the knowledge items are “Right” and “Wrong.” Nonetheless, I would defend these items as functionally similar, since there are two “sides” to each. (Indeed, this was how Converse framed the conclusions from his original analysis of instability, observing that “only about thirteen people out of twenty manage to locate themselves even on the same *side* of [a particular political issue] over successive interrogations (1964, 239, emphasis added).” In both cases, then, respondents can show either stasis or change, and I believe that these dichotomous measures are appropriate for both attitude and knowledge items. Table 2.8 reports the results

for Converse's original NES items and the Delli Carpini and Keeter knowledge items.

Table 2.8

Correlations for Panel Knowledge Items (*Tau*)

NES (Converse)		DC & K Survey	
Housing	.125	Party Cons.	.299
Job Guarantees	.184	Veto Override Pct.	.053
Isolationism	.203	Judicial Nominations	.270
Education Aid	.207	Cheney Job	.274
Foreign Aid	.203		
Military Aid	.103		
Aid to Blacks	.234		

As is apparent, the "knowledge" items are only slightly more stable than Converse's original attitude items. Since substantial attitudinal instability necessitates a constructed judgment approach--once again, this instability cannot be satisfactorily explained with a fixed knowledge model--this evidence suggests that answers to knowledge questions must be constructed in a similar manner, and to a similar degree.

Constructed Judgments and the Accuracy of Inference

So far, I have presented a variety of evidence suggesting that constructed judgments

can play a prominent role in answering survey knowledge questions. However this addresses only the first part of our two-part research hypothesis; I have argued not only that constructed judgments will occur, but that some people will be better at this process than others. That is, that education and a basic, flexible core of political knowledge will promote accurate inferences and accurate answers to survey knowledge questions.

A second Delli Carpini and Keeter data set gives me a way to test this. In 1989 these authors conducted a one-time national survey designed to assess citizens' factual knowledge about politics. This survey--to my knowledge, the most comprehensive political knowledge survey ever conducted--included a total of 54 factual knowledge items, covering a wide range of political topics and concerns. (A complete list of these questions is located in the Appendix.)

The nature of these questions requires some comment. Similar to the items in the Youth-Parent Socialization Panel, these questions tested three basic types of knowledge; textbook institutional facts, "substantive facts" involving current political issues and affairs, and the identities and positions of present and past political actors. However the Delli Carpini and Keeter items had one important additional characteristic; they included facts that varied from quite prominent to relatively obscure.

This distinction is critical for my analysis. My argument is that accuracy in constructed survey knowledge judgments results from a combination of skillful inference and fixed, existing knowledge. Thus I am arguing that basic, fixed political knowledge helps citizens to make accurate inferences about less fundamental matters of political fact. To test this, however, I have to be able to isolate each type of "knowledge," that is, to ensure that the basic knowledge really is fixed, and that the inferences about less obvious facts really are inferences.

In other words, I have a validity concern, and I must try to ensure that the items I use are appropriate in each case.

Unfortunately, it is impossible to establish this with certainty; I cannot reliably distinguish fixed knowledge from constructed judgments nor definitively label any given survey response as an example of either. Accordingly, I resort to another strategy; I accomplish this task with question types. As Delli Carpini and Keeter discovered, some types of questions-- i.e. quantitative and multiple choice--are more vulnerable to guessing than others (1996, 94 and 95, discussed here, 8). Conversely, then, qualitative, open-ended questions will be least susceptible to guessing because they do not contain any cues. When knowledge questions follow this form, and also address political matters that are prominent, obvious and repeatedly "taught" by the media--i.e. matters that the public has had ample chance to learn about--I can be reasonably sure that correct answers actually do represent fixed, previously learned knowledge.

For my inferential items, I rely on obscurity. With a nod back to Schuman and Presser's work on obscure acts of Congress (6,7), I would argue that some political facts are so rarely mentioned or taught by the media that virtually no one will actually know them in a fixed, learned sense. This contention, of course, relies on the assumption that citizens rely on the media for virtually all of their information about politics. I would argue that this assumption is easy to defend. The only other routes of information acquisition are interpersonal conversation and direct experience, and both of these are likely to be quite limited for most political issues. Simply stated, few political occurrences take place within the direct experience of citizens. This does not mean that these facts are not basic or important, just that citizens will not have had a chance to actually encounter and learn them. No learning, no knowing.

I believe that selecting items which meet these respective requirements will ensure a reasonable degree of validity for both of these question types. Accordingly, I chose the following items:

Basic, Fixed Knowledge Items

How much of a majority is required for the Senate and House to override a presidential veto?

Do you happen to know the names of the two United States senators from your state? (1st sen. only)

What is the Superfund?

Inferential "Knowledge" Items

About how many cents of your federal tax dollar are going to the defense department these days?

And how many cents of your federal tax dollar are spent on Social Security and Medicare?

How about for education?

What is your best guess as to what percentage of the U.S. population is black?

What percentage of Americans live below the poverty line, that is, officially in poverty according to the government?

And what percentage of all Americans has no health insurance?

I contend that these items meet my criteria. The basic fixed items are part of the general political discourse; vetoes and Senators obviously receive some coverage--though variable and irregular--and the Superfund was a major story that has also received media mention.³⁸ More importantly, all of these items are open-ended, and two of the three are textual. Accordingly, respondents would have had a reasonable chance to learn these facts, and these items are relatively resistant to guessing. As a result, correct answers to these questions should generally represent actual, fixed political knowledge. Conversely, the obscure items really are obscure;

though the first two topics probably received some mention--defense and social security spending were prominent issues during this general period of time--in general none of these figures have received much media attention.^{39 40} Thus these two sets of items should represent valid operationalizations of our two “cognitive products;” fixed knowledge and constructed judgments respectively.

Furthermore, the basic, fixed items meet my broader theoretical specifications. These questions do address broad, basic aspects of politics--again, I have argued that citizen competence springs from the application of broad, basic political knowledge. And finally, there is a bonus here; the quantitative nature of the six “inference” items allows me to assess degrees of accuracy here rather than just whether answers are “right” and “wrong.”

To return to my main argument, I have not only argued that accurate answers to survey questions result from skillful inference (and sometimes from actual fixed knowledge) but that fixed, general knowledge and cognitive skills are the building blocks of these inferential skills. Thus I can test this latter claim by analyzing whether or not general political knowledge and cognitive skills are related to accuracy on specific political knowledge questions. Positive correlations would constitute evidence in favor of my argument.

In order to examine this, I created a scale for general political knowledge and a scale for knowledge on the “inference” items. These were simple indexes created by summing the number of correct answers. (As the list of questions on page 20 reveals, the inference items required answers phrased as percentages. This required me to designate “cut points” distinguishing correct and incorrect answers. The coding conventions used for this are included in the Measurement Appendix.) I used education as a proxy variable for cognitive skills. I then

regressed the inference item scale on the index of general political knowledge and education. This procedure controls each of these two independent variables for the other, and we also included two additional control variables likely to affect inferential ability, income and interest in politics. The results suggest that both general knowledge and education (and income and interest) did boost performance on the inference items (Table 2.9).

Table 2.9
Performance on Inference Items

Variable	B	SE B	Beta	T	Sig T
EDUCATION	.095	.047	.092	2.048	.041
GEN. KNOW.	.191	.049	.176	3.896	.000
INCOME	.103	.036	.120	2.833	.005
POL. INT.	-.181	.055	-.153	-3.283	.001
(Constant)	-.268	.614		-.437	.662
Adj. R ² = .15 N=569					

These results suggest that basic political knowledge and cognitive skills can affect the accuracy of inferences on political knowledge items. However I can make an even stronger case here. In an analysis of response patterns on survey knowledge questions, Delli Carpini and Keeter identified a type of answer that they labeled as “close calls” (1996, 96). Close calls are answers that are nearly correct; most commonly, they occur on numeric questions when respondents give answers that fall just outside of the necessarily arbitrary right/wrong cutoffs

imposed by the researchers (Thus close calls can also be viewed as answers that would be correct under a slightly less stringent coding convention). If basic knowledge and cognitive skills drive inferential accuracy, as I claim, we would expect consideration of close calls to further boost the advantage enjoyed by “inferentially skilled” respondents, because more skilled respondents than unskilled respondents would fall inside this “close” range. Table 2.10 reports the results for an analysis that credited “close calls” as one-half correct.

Table 2.10
Performance on Inference Items (Including “Close Calls”).

Variable	B	SE B	Beta	T	Sig T
EDUCATION	.137	.050	.121	2.768	.006
GEN. KNOW.	.241	.052	.205	4.641	.000
INCOME	.127	.039	.135	3.280	.001
POL. INT.	-.184	.059	-.143	-3.141	.002
(Constant)	-.640	.653		-.980	.328
Adj. R ² = .19 N=569					

This table shows a moderate but significant increase in the adjusted R², most of which comes from better performance by the education variable; this variable moves from borderline significance to strong significance and its Beta weight increases relative to the other variables. This is further evidence that cognitive skills boost inferential accuracy (and, more fundamentally, it is further evidence that constructed judgments play an important part in answering knowledge

questions). Skilled respondents not only do better at being strictly correct, they do better at getting close as well.

However this significance is statistical, not substantive. It tells us little about performance differences in the real world; that is, how much practical effect differing levels of inferential skills can have. Since this point is the “bottom line” here, it is important to examine it. To do so, I compared the performance of groups with different levels of inferential skills, with performance again measured by the number of inferential items that were answered correctly. Since basic knowledge and cognitive skills seem likely to be synergistic, we compared “extreme” groups which scored lowest and highest on both general political knowledge and education.⁴¹ I created two groups; one consisting of respondents with low general knowledge scores and low levels of education, the other consisting of respondents with high general knowledge scores and high levels of education.⁴² I then compared the performances of these extreme groups on the summary inference item scale, with and without “close calls” (Tables 2.11, 2.12).

Table 2.11

Mean Number of Correct Answers on “Inference Items” (0-6 Scale)

Low Sophist/Low Education	.26	N = 89
High Sophist/High Education	1.65	N = 42

Table 2.12

Mean Number of Correct Answers on “Inference” Items (Including “Close Calls”) (0-6 Scale)

Low Sophist/Low Education	.36	N = 89
High Sophist/High Education	2.10	N = 42

These are unpartialed, zero-order measures, but they do suggest that general political knowledge and cognitive skills facilitate substantively meaningful gains in inferential accuracy. Between-group differences of this size would be sufficiently large to paint “good guessers” as significantly more knowledgeable than “poor guessers” on the sorts of knowledge indexes that are commonly employed in survey research. These indexes often contain between three and five items (Delli Carpini and Keeter recommend a five-item scale as optimal (1996, 304)).

These differences are especially significant given the limited range of scores on these items.⁴³ Though the scale runs from 0-6, the observed scores ranged from 0-4. Furthermore, the performance of the groups varied from virtually “nothing” to “something”; respondents who lacked base knowledge and education were virtually helpless here, while those with greater base knowledge and more education were nonetheless able to correctly answer more than one-fourth and one-third of questions depending on the stringency of the coding conventions. This is powerful evidence that inferential skills can meaningfully affect performance on standard survey knowledge scales.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have attempted to show that constructed judgments can play an important role in the process of answering survey knowledge questions, and that differing levels of basic knowledge and cognitive skills can result in differing levels of political “knowledge,” that is, better or worse performance on survey knowledge items. How have I fared?

My first claim is that constructed judgments will be common with survey knowledge questions; in plain English, that a substantial proportion of respondents will guess on many types of knowledge items. The most difficult task here has been to distinguish fixed knowledge from constructed judgments; these two “cognitive products” will frequently look and act the same. Nonetheless, I have pieced together a variety of evidence, in a detective-like fashion, and, the sum of this evidence--“Don’t Know” rates and patterns of over-time stability and change in responses to knowledge items--suggests that a non-trivial fraction of respondents do construct their answers on a variety of survey knowledge items.

By itself, this analysis adds little--if I halted here, I would simply have taken a particularly detailed and systematic look at guessing. However analysis of this first claim also serves to set up my second, more important claim; the contention that “guessing matters.”⁴⁴ I have also shown that guessing skill--or, more formally, skill at constructing judgments -- is unequally distributed across the citizenry; some people are better at making “educated guesses” than others. And these differences in cognitive and inferential skills can yield substantively significant performance differences on standard survey knowledge scales.

This suggests that the “knowledge” differences we see on surveys actually spring from differences in cognitive and inferential skills as well as from differences in levels of fixed political

knowledge; in other words, fixed knowledge has received some of the “credit” that actually should go to cognitive skills. And this suggests that the much celebrated relationship between factual knowledge and citizen competence is overstated; the various varieties of citizen competence so prized by scholars--political tolerance, attitude constraint and so on--must derive from cognitive skill as well as from actual political knowledge possession.

My findings suggest that we may need to revise the balance between these two basic factors. Obviously both are important, but we need to ratchet back the overwhelming emphasis on knowledge in order to make room for an increased emphasis on cognitive skills. Mass behavior research must consider recasting the nature of citizen competence; moving from the current emphasis on extensive amounts of knowledge--knowledge so encyclopedic as to apply to almost any political situation--to an emphasis on a reasonable political knowledge core combined with the ability to effectively apply this knowledge in many different types of situations.

This would offer a variety of benefits. First, and most foremost, it would promote “psychological realism” by bringing political knowledge research into closer alignment with basic psychological findings about human cognitive processing. Political knowledge work has implicitly posited a systematic reasoning process, but social psychology research stresses heuristic reasoning and paint the individual as a limited “cognitive miser.” Thus knowledge research has existed outside the mainstream in this respect. A popular academic maxim suggests that scholars should not propose psychological mechanisms at odds with their own thought processes. I concur, and I suggest that scholars should not propose psychological mechanisms that fail to conform with relevant social and cognitive psychology literatures.⁴⁵

Second, this shift would also help to rehabilitate the citizen. A more realistic view would no longer demand an unrealistic level of knowledge; existing knowledge levels might be viewed as sufficient for heuristic reasoning rather than insufficient for in-depth systematic processing. Stated more strongly, extant knowledge levels would not be a central deficit necessitating constant compensation, but rather a base for a more realistic--and more attainable--citizen competence.

And, finally, this revised citizen competence is also likely to be more flexible and effective in the long run. It is hard to believe that even the most conscientious citizens have enough specific political knowledge to address most or even many political issues and situations, and it is even harder to believe that they could effectively retrieve and apply this knowledge if they did have it; the whole thrust of heuristic reasoning argues against this, and, more directly, attitudinal and decision making research suggests that citizens use only a small subset of available cognitions to make any given judgment (Simon 1976; Zaller 1992). Conversely, however, broad, basic political knowledge and sound, simple reasoning skills will likely prove to be efficient and adaptive. To restate an old aphorism; "Give a man a political fact and he will reason well on one issue, teach a man to make political inferences and he will reason well on many issues."

In the next chapter, I further develop my analysis of the basic nature of political knowledge.

Chapter 3

The Nature of (Mis)Belief Systems in Mass Publics

In the last chapter, I showed that some answers to survey knowledge questions result from “constructed judgments.” While this finding is interesting and important in itself--the basic “nature of knowledge” is one of the most fundamental things we should wish to understand in this area--it also has a variety of additional implications. One of these implications involves the accuracy of citizens’ beliefs about politics; constructed judgments can be right or wrong, and, as we saw, some people make more accurate inferences about political facts than others do.⁴⁶

In this chapter I shift my focus from accuracy to error, and from responses to individual political knowledge items to broader patterns of responses that extend across sets of related political knowledge items. Here I analyze the structure of inferential errors on factual knowledge questions to see if they form coherent, politically meaningful patterns.

MISBELIEFS AND MISBELIEF SYSTEMS

As before, attitudes represent my point of departure. As I did in the last chapter, I use attitude research as a template and a model; here I borrow the widely noted observation that people tend to organize their political issue attitudes into superordinate structures, or “belief systems.” I argue here that people will hold many “factual beliefs” about political affairs, that these factual beliefs will often be wrong--that is, that people will hold many “misbeliefs”--and that many people will possess organized “misbelief systems.”

Simply put, **factual beliefs are beliefs about matters of fact.** For example, suppose that we are interested in knowledge about welfare, and we ask citizens about the size of the average annual welfare payment. Some people will have no idea; that is, they will be entirely ignorant. However many others will have some sort of belief about this matter; a tiny number will actually know the correct answer (\$6,000), a few will construct accurate judgments when asked, and many others will construct judgments that are inaccurate--that is, these judgments will be either too high or too low. I call these inaccurate factual beliefs "misbeliefs."⁴⁷

This points us toward the notion of a "misbelief system." If people tend to "misbelieve" in a consistent direction on related matters of fact, we could say that they have an organized misbelief system. If we treat an overestimate of welfare spending as an "anti-welfare" misbelief, then someone who erred in a similar anti-welfare direction on other welfare facts--by overestimating the percent of Americans on welfare, for example, or the size of the government welfare budget--would possess an anti-welfare misbelief system. Conversely, someone who consistently erred by underestimating on these matters would possess a pro-welfare misbelief system that was ordered in the opposite direction.

The Origins of Misbelief Systems

So far, I have suggested that factual misbeliefs will often be structured in the same way that attitudes are. But this claim begs a logically prior question; why should we expect "misbeliefs" to be structured at all? Indeed, at first glance, it might seem that the opposite is likely to be true, and that cognitions grounded in error would be unorganized jumbles of discordant bits and pieces.

To see why we would expect order rather than chaos, it is useful to consider the basic psychological needs of individuals and the ways in which cognitive organization helps to satisfy them. As psychologists long have known, nothing is more fundamental to life than making sense of the world. People seek--indeed need--to understand why events occur, why certain conditions exist, and why others behave as they do.

Thus people need a way to organize seemingly discrete, chaotic bits and pieces into a meaningful whole--that is, they need a schema. A schema contains one's "knowledge" about some particular aspect of the world--a person or persons, situation, object or concept--and it holds that information in an organized, integrated structure. In essence, schemas can be thought of as theories about the nature of the world. They guide how people perceive, understand and make inferences about their environments (Fiske and Taylor 1984).

Factual beliefs are clearly relevant here. While schemas will incorporate a variety of non-factual elements--assumptions, evaluations, beliefs about causality and so on--factual beliefs are likely to play an important part as well. A schema about "welfare" might contain a number of assumptions and evaluations--e.g. "welfare people are lazy" or "welfare people ought to work"--but these elements are likely to be accompanied by factual beliefs; e.g. "welfare people get a lot of money," "most people on welfare are black" and so on. Thus factual beliefs--and misbeliefs--are likely to be an important subset of many political schemas, and the organized nature of schemas suggests that these misbeliefs will show a strong tendency to be organized as well.

The Nature of Misbelief Systems

The ordered nature of schemas suggests that misbelief are also likely to be ordered. But what form of organization are misbelief systems likely to take? Once again, it is useful to borrow from attitude research. In his “Belief Systems” paper, Philip Converse argued that attitude structures might arise from several possible sources; logical, psychological and political (1964).⁴⁸⁴⁹ Like Converse, I reject logic as an important ordering force. While some factual beliefs may sometimes have logical relationships, it seems unlikely that these connections will be very consequential. This suggests that these ordering forces will be political and/or psychological.

Political Sources

As political scientists regularly note, politics is primarily a distant affair, and citizens thus depend on media and elites for most of their information about politics. This basic reality led Converse to argue that attitude structures usually are conveyed to masses from elites. Is this likely to hold true for factual beliefs as well?

Yes, but in a somewhat different manner. First, elite influences on factual beliefs are likely to be less direct than they are on attitudes. Elites are generally eager to express their opinions and attitudes about political issues and affairs, and citizens presumably pick these up rather directly. However this sort of straightforward “teaching and learning” model is unlikely to apply to factual misbeliefs. Were it to hold here, we would necessarily have to assume that elites regularly provide citizens with incorrect factual information. This seems unlikely. Facts are distinguished by their susceptibility to empirical verification, and thus misstating or

misrepresenting them can invite scrutiny, rebuke, and charges of dishonesty. Most elites undoubtedly prize their credibility--such as it is--and few enjoy issuing corrections. Thus the direct provision of factual misinformation is probably rather rare.⁵⁰

However this does not mean that elites do not mislead citizens about matters of fact. They may speak and act in ways that encourage citizens to draw mistaken conclusions about such matters. Some of this is undoubtedly deliberate, since political elites have an obvious incentive to induce misperceptions which bolster support for themselves or their positions. A study of the 1991 Persian Gulf war, for example, suggests that the Bush administration encouraged citizens to misperceive key facts in a manner that favored U.S. aims (Lewis, Jhally and Morgan 1991). In other cases, elites or the media may mislead inadvertently. In one example, Martin Gilens found that media portrayals consistently exaggerate the proportion of African-Americans among the poor. Over a recent five year period--in the three major newsweeklies and on the three network evening newscasts--over 60 percent of the photos accompanying poverty stories pictured blacks, even though blacks comprised a much smaller proportion of the poor. Gilens placed primary blame for this discrepancy on the racial stereotypes held by news professionals, though he did not suggest that this was intentional (Gilens 1996).

Intentional or otherwise, these sort of misleading messages are likely to be rather common. Moreover, they may also follow certain patterns. Benjamin Page and Robert Shapiro argue that:

Many of the instances of misleading information ...seem to fit into consistent patterns. That is, they appear to represent not just isolated incidents of deception by particular

individuals or groups, but general tendencies in the whole body of political information that is provided to the American public (1992: p.375).

Page and Shapiro argue that these misleading messages seem to follow several broad patterns; they are nationalistic, anti-communist, pro-capitalist, and, ultimately, they favor the status quo. And these patterns may have results--other research suggests that these patterns of misinformation may shape factual misbeliefs. Delli Carpini and Keeter argue that citizens' misbeliefs "disproportionately benefit those in political and economic power (1996: p. 100)," a finding that is broadly consistent with Page and Shapiro's claims.

These preceding paragraphs suggest that misinformation will come in a variety of forms, from a variety of sources, they also suggest that this misinformation will often follow some basic patterns. Communications from individual elites or institutions will typically reflect and express their particular interests and ideologies. More broadly, the collective body of elite and media communications will undoubtedly tend to reflect the prevailing natures and values of major American political, social, and economic institutions. Thus, broadly speaking, we would expect that factual misbelief systems, like systems of issue attitudes, would show a tendency toward being organized along conventional political axes like partisanship and ideology.

Psychological Sources

As mentioned, Converse also argued that attitudinal belief systems are likely to spring from psychological sources. Is this likely to hold true for factual misbelief systems as well?

In chapter one of this dissertation, I argued that judgment heuristics play a central part in inference, and that inference plays a central part in the formation of constructed judgments. This

suggests that heuristics will play an important role in determining the nature of misbeliefs and misbelief systems. Which heuristics are likely to be important here, and what effects are they likely to have on the formation and structure of misbelief systems?

Psychologists and political scientists have identified a number of heuristics, and several of these seem likely to be relevant here. One of these is the “availability heuristic,” which suggests that people will tend to over-weight factors that are readily available to them. People are likely to rely heavily on information that is available in memory or salient in their environment.

Though availability has generally been studied in connection with other types of cognitions, it seems reasonable to expect that it would affect factual beliefs and misbeliefs as well (Nisbett and Ross 1980, p. 19-21). At least one study has found empirical evidence that this does seem to occur. Richard Nadeau and Richard Niemi examined factual beliefs about the size of minority populations and party control of the U.S. House of Representatives. They found that people who live in areas with high minority populations tend to overestimate minority population size, and that beliefs about party control of the House are affected by the party affiliation of the incumbent in one’s local congressional district (Nadeau and Niemi 1995).

But perhaps the most pervasive political heuristics involve “cues.” People often rely on simple cues to make judgements about more complex matters. A variety of such cues exist--party affiliations, group memberships, one’s own feelings or opinions--and these are used to generate inferences and judgments. Here again, it seems reasonable to expect that this will affect factual beliefs about politics, and, here again, empirical evidence suggests that this does seem to occur. Scholars have studied citizens’ perceptions of candidates since the earliest Columbia studies, and they have consistently found that citizens’ beliefs about candidates’ issue

positions are often biased and inaccurate (Berelson et al. 1954; Meier and Campbell 1979; Page and Jones 1979). Though prevailing explanations have traditionally attributed such “projection” effects to motivational factors, Pamela Conover and Stanley Feldman have shown that these misbeliefs may result not from projection but rather from flawed inferential processes that occur when citizens use cues--such as candidates’ party affiliation or their own attitudes on these issues--to make inferences about the candidates’ issue positions (Conover and Feldman 1989). Similarly, in the piece cited immediately above, Nadeau and Niemi found also that attitudes about minorities affected citizens’ factual beliefs about population demographics (1995).

Finally, other heuristics may be involved as well. Group membership can serve as a heuristic; one study found that blacks and whites differ systematically in their beliefs about the relative economic fortunes of these two groups (Morin 1995; Hochschild 1999). And finally, some factors may be rather philosophical or idiosyncratic; Delli Carpini and Keeter suggest that misbeliefs can result from overly generous or overly restrictive impressions about individual rights and liberties and from expansive ideas about presidential powers (1996 pp. 98-101).⁵¹

While it is difficult to make precise predictions about how these various judgment heuristics will shape factual beliefs and misbeliefs, it seems likely that they will tend to organize them along conventional political lines. Most of the most common heuristics involve traditional political factors--parties and party affiliations, most directly, and group memberships and political attitudes, which also are influenced by parties--and so we would expect that misbeliefs will be ordered in a similar manner.

Conclusion

The discussion in this section allows me to advance some cautious hypotheses about the nature of factual misbeliefs and misbelief systems. First, psychology research tells us that citizens will frequently make inferences, and that many of these inferences will be incorrect. Second, as the main discussion suggests, these inferential errors will often tend to show a pattern. Third, these patterns will tend to reflect the nature of the judgment heuristics and elite communications that molded the inferences (indeed, these two sources may be synergistic). And, finally, modern psychology research confirms what Walter Lippmann always knew; the extent and consistency of misbelief may sometimes be rather striking, because individuals actively construct their own realities (Lippmann 1922; Fiske and Taylor 1984).⁵²

Before concluding, however, a final important point must be made. While I have implicitly been suggesting a similarity between factual beliefs and other types of cognitions--i.e. that beliefs will be structured just as these other cognitions are--factual misbelief systems are likely to work quite differently than attitudinal belief systems.

Belief system research has consistently found that the organization of attitudinal belief systems is critically dependent upon individuals' political sophistication--more precisely, it is dependent upon their level of political knowledge. Knowledgeable sophisticates will tend to develop well organized belief systems, while uninformed non-sophisticates will not. Stated slightly differently, sophisticates are able to form attitudes that match their personal interests and values--i.e. attitudes that are personally "accurate" or "correct" for them--and this leads them to manifest more organized attitude structures.

At first glance, it may seem likely that factual misbelief systems will show a similar pattern--that is, that more sophisticated citizens will have better organized misbeliefs. However this is almost surely mistaken; the somewhat perverse nature of misbeliefs means that sophistication will have very different effects here. This point revolves around sophistication and judgment accuracy. For attitudes and factual beliefs alike, sophistication promotes accuracy. I show how this works with attitudes in the preceding paragraph, and in the first chapter of this dissertation I showed that knowledge also plays a critical role in determining the accuracy of constructed factual beliefs. However increased accuracy will have different effects in these two areas. While response accuracy tends to increase consistency in attitudinal belief systems-- that is, "constraint" will increase--it should tend to reduce consistency in factual misbelief systems. Misbelief systems involve *consistent errors*--that is, errors in one direction or another --and so increased accuracy reduces the consistency of these systems. To recall my earlier example, the individual who constructs correct answers on all three of our welfare fact questions will exhibit no misbelief system at all; simply put, he has no misbeliefs. Only individuals who err --in a consistently pro or anti welfare direction--will show coherent misbelief systems.

This has an interesting implication. While there are good reasons to desire consistency with values or attitudes, this is not necessarily the case with factual beliefs. A consistency in factual beliefs is generally likely to represent an imposed, artificial order that will seriously distort perceptions of what is actually a rather messy, disordered world. "Constraint," so prized with other political cognitions, would actually appear to be undesirable here.

EMPIRICAL ANALYSES

In order to test my argument, I draw data from two different sources.⁵³ One data set comes from the 1985 NES Pilot study. This survey was specifically designed to facilitate evaluation of information measures, so it contained an unusually large number of factual information items. Two items were suitable for use here; one question asked respondents about the current (at that time) U.S. inflation rate, and the other asked for the current U.S. unemployment rate.⁵⁴ Both questions were open ended, and answers were coded as “Underestimate” “Overestimate,” “Correct” and “Don’t Know ” (Full details of these coding conventions are included in the Appendix). The other set of questions came from a survey specifically designed to measure misinformation about political facts. In 1996, the Institute for Government and Political Affairs at the University of Illinois sponsored a statewide survey of 1160 Illinois residents. A subsample of these respondents received two sets of factual information questions dealing with two issues that were prominent at that time: welfare reform and health care reform. (Only welfare is considered here). Respondents were asked the following questions:

Of all American families, what percent would you say are on welfare-- would you say 3 percent, 7 percent, 13 percent, 18 percent, or 25 percent of all American families are on welfare?

Of all the families on welfare, what percent would you say are African-American? Would you say 10 percent, 25 percent, 45 percent, 65 percent, or 80 percent of all are families are African-American?

On average, how much would you say a single welfare mother who has no income and has two children receives in welfare payments each year-- \$3,000, \$6,000, \$9,000, \$12,000, or \$18,000?

Of every total dollar that the states and federal government spend each year, what percent would you say goes to welfare-- 1 percent, 5 percent, 8 percent, 11 percent, or 15 percent?

Of all families on welfare right now, what percent would you say have been on welfare for more than eight years--10 percent, 20 percent, 50 percent, 60 percent, or 75 percent?

Of all mothers who have been on welfare for more than two years, what percent would you say have less than a high school education--10 percent, 25 percent, 50 percent, 65 percent, or 80 percent?

As is apparent, these questions were close-ended, with five answers to choose from (Respondents who answered "Don't Know" were prompted to give their "best guess." Those who refused to do so were coded as "DK"). All of these answers took the form of percentages. Thus the answer choices were ordered, and meaningfully so. One end indicates the most "pro" answer--that is, the answer that the principal investigators felt was most likely to be associated with attitudes that favor welfare reform--with the other end representing the most "anti" answer --conversely, the answer most likely to be associated with attitudes opposed to these reforms. Obviously, I am not claiming that these facts exhaust the information that is relevant to welfare or health care reform. No finite set of items could accomplish this. However these facts -- which were selected after consultation with several public policy experts--do represent a reasonable sample of this sort of information. Moreover, these items do assess beliefs about two fundamental aspects of welfare; personal characteristics of welfare recipients (items two, five and six) and institutional characteristics of the welfare system (items one, three and four).

Immediately after these "quizzes," respondents were asked to indicate their attitudes about welfare reform. Two questions were used. One measured support for "cutting back" welfare programs, while the other measured support for placing a two-year time limit on welfare. This survey also include a standard battery of demographic items and three items designed to measure general knowledge of politics. Respondents were asked to identify the current vice president,

the current speaker of the House, and to indicate the number of justices on the U.S. Supreme Court. Again, these are rather standard survey knowledge items. Respectively, they measure knowledge of two important incumbent political actors and one basic institutional feature of the American political system.

The Existence and Extent of Factual Misbelief

Analysis of the NES economic items showed that a plurality of respondents answered each of these items correctly. However, a majority of respondents gave incorrect answers, and these respondents showed a strong tendency to overestimate on each of these economic indicators (Tables 3.1, 3.2).

Table 3.1
Inflation Rate

	Percent
Underestimate	8.5
Correct	42.4
Overestimate	28.7
DK	20.5
N = 342	

Table 3.2

Unemployment Rate

	Percent
Underestimate	1.7
Correct	42.0
Overestimate	35.0
DK	21.3
N = 343	

Respondents fared less well on the IGPA welfare items. Percentages of incorrect answers ranged from 62.7 to 88.6 percent (Tables 3.3 - 3.8, Correct answer marked with asterisk).

Table 3.3

Total Percent on Welfare

3 Percent	8.4
7 Percent*	28.1
13 Percent	29.6
18 Percent	20.4
25 Percent	11.3
DK (After Prompt)	2.2
N = 274	

Table 3.4

Percent Black

10 Percent	5.8
25 Percent	23.7
45 Percent*	33.2
65 Percent	26.6
80 Percent	6.6
DK (After Prompt)	4.0
N = 274	

Table 3.5

Average Annual Payment

3K	8.8
6K*	25.5
9K	25.2
12K	23.7
18K	10.9
DK (After Prompt)	5.8
N = 274	

Table 3.6

Percent of Budget

1 Percent*	9.5
5 Percent	24.8
8 Percent	24.5
11 Percent	16.8
15 Percent	21.5
DK (After Prompt)	2.9
N = 274	

Table 3.7

Percent on Welfare > 8 Mos.

10 Percent	17.5
20 Percent	33.2
50 Percent*	28.1
60 Percent	9.1
75 Percent	10.9
DK (After Prompt)	1.1
N = 274	

Table 3.8

Percent on Welfare < H.S. Educ.

10 Percent	6.9
25 Percent	20.8
50 Percent	25.5
65 Percent*	24.8
80 Percent	21.5
DK (After Prompt)	.4
N = 274	

In sum then, both of my analyses here resonate with and reinforce results from chapter one. All of these analyses suggest that citizens are rather misinformed about politics--in other words, that factual misbeliefs are quite common.

Misbelief Structure

The preceding analysis supports the hypothesis that citizens are misinformed about politics--that is, that they hold a number of factual "misbeliefs." My second hypothesis suggested that these misbeliefs would be patterned and organized. Is this also the case? In order to assess this hypothesis, I looked for correlations between items within each of these two issue areas. Since misbeliefs in each area would be expected to scale together--a perception of economic woe would yield high estimates of unemployment and inflation, while pro- or anti-welfare misbeliefs would yield low and high estimates on welfare items

respectively--I would expect to find positive inter-item correlations within each of these two areas.

These hypothesized results did occur. The correlation between the two economic indicators does show evidence of a pattern (*tau b* =.304, significant at .001, n=246). This suggests that answers to these items tend to vary together, that is, that respondents who overestimate on one have a moderate tendency to overestimate the other, and vice versa.

Moving to welfare, Table 3.9 suggests that the welfare beliefs show a similar pattern. Respondents who express pro-welfare beliefs about one question tend to express pro-welfare beliefs about others, and vice versa.

Table 3.9

Correlations for Factual Beliefs about Welfare

	% on Welf	% Black	Avg. Pay.	% of Bdgt.	% > 8 Yrs.	% < H.S.
% on Welf						
% Black	.172***					
Avg. Pay.	.017	.138**				
% of Bdgt.	.261***	.155**	.111*			
% > 8 Yrs.	.278***	.356***	.070	.207***		
% < H.S.	.062	.241***	.133**	.076	.182***	
<i>tau b</i> , N= 252-271, * p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001						

At this point, then, there is evidence that factual beliefs do tend to exhibit a pattern. However, to reiterate the concluding point of the opening section, this sort of structure is not necessarily desirable. This would appear to be the case here. There is no logical reason to expect a positive relationship between inflation and unemployment (indeed, Keynesian macroeconomic theory suggests that this relationship should be a negative one). Similarly, while some of the welfare indicators do have a logical relationship to one another--for example, the percent of Americans on welfare should covary with welfare budget expenditures--there is no reason to expect most of them to covary in a positive manner. Thus the respondents would seem to be imposing an artificial consistency here.

Further analysis further elaborates this finding. Earlier in this chapter, I cautiously predicted that respondents' level of general political knowledge--that is, their degree of political sophistication--would influence the degree of consistency of their misbelief systems. Indeed, this is precisely what I find. I split the NES and IGPA samples into "sophisticates"--those who scored in the top third and top fifth on general knowledge measures, respectively--and "non-sophisticates," who comprised the rest of the samples.⁵⁵ For the economic indicators, the non-sophisticates showed a fairly strong correlation between items ($\tau b = .371$, significant at .001, $n = 133$) while sophisticates showed no apparent correlation ($\tau b = .091$, not significant, $n = 86$). Results were similar for the welfare items. Again, non-sophisticates show a substantial amount of structure, while sophisticates do not (Tables 3.10 and 3.11).

Table 3.10
Correlations for Factual Beliefs about Welfare (Non-Sophisticates)

	% on Welf	% Black	Avg. Pay.	% of Bdgt.	% > 8 Yrs.	% < H.S.
% on Welf						
% Black	.187***					
Avg. Pay.	.001	.104				
% of Bdgt.	.246***	.179**	.130*			
% > 8 Yrs.	.285***	.357***	.046	.226***		
% < H.S.	.106	.272***	.149**	.084	.219***	
<i>tau b</i> , N= 205-220, * p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001						

Table 3.11
Correlations for Factual Beliefs about Welfare (Sophisticates)

	% on Welf	% Black	Avg. Pay.	% of Bdgt.	% > 8 Yrs.	% < H.S.
% on Welf						
% Black	-.044					
Avg. Pay.	.133	.376**				
% of Bdgt.	.363**	.086	.029			
% > 8 Yrs.	.131	.242	.277*	.161		
% < H.S.	-.125	.129	.050	.048	.055	
<i>tau b</i> , N= 46-51, * p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001						

The results here would seem to suggest that misbeliefs do indeed have a structure, at least for the majority of citizens who possess relatively little general knowledge about politics.⁵⁶ Consistency may or may not be the hobgoblin of simple minds, but it would seem to be a characteristic of politically unsophisticated Americans. Thus my second hypothesis would also seem to find some support--I do see "misbelief systems" here.

The Causes of Misbeliefs

My third hypothesis suggests that these misbelief systems will be molded by political and psychological factors, factors which themselves are molded by the wider political environment. Hence I expect that misbeliefs will be statistically associated with these factors.⁵⁷

I began with factual beliefs about economic conditions. One possibility is that these beliefs might be shaped by partisanship or partisan feelings--that is, that citizens may be allowing their partisan stances or views about the president to color their beliefs about prevailing economic conditions. Democrats or people who disliked Ronald Reagan might disapprove of him or his performance, and these feelings might lead them to believe that economic conditions (like many other things in the country, presumably) were worse than they actually were. Conversely, for Republicans or people who approved of the president, the opposite might hold true. Another possibility might be that peoples' own economic circumstances--or their feelings about these circumstances--are influencing their beliefs about general economic conditions. Finally, it may also be the case that political elites or the media somehow shape these economic beliefs in other ways.

To test these speculations, I regressed the inflation and unemployment measures on

party ID, feelings about Reagan, two measures of respondents' personal economic situation and several measures of media consumption. Partisanship was measured by a standard party ID variable, feelings about Reagan by an NES feeling thermometer, personal economic situation by family income and a "work status" variable indicating whether the respondent was working or unemployed. Media consumption was measured by variables which assessed exposure to newspapers and television news broadcasts.

The results show statistically significant relationships between factual beliefs about inflation and partisanship, income and both measures of media exposure (Table 3.12). Only family income is significantly associated with factual beliefs about unemployment (Table 3.13).

Table 3.12

Inflation

Variable	B	SE B	Beta	T	Sig T
PARTY ID	-.056791	.023294	-.189319	-2.438	.0155
FEELREAG	-8.666E-05	.001755	-.003879	-.049	.9607
WORKSTAT	.015469	.030210	.032296	.512	.6091
INCOME	-.017049	.007480	-.149492	-2.279	.0235
NEWSPPR	-.026124	.013105	-.122488	-1.993	.0473
NEWSTV	.068839	.033635	.124316	2.047	.0418
Constant	2.616737	.172469		15.172	.0000
Adj. R² = .10, N=252					

Table 3.13

Unemployment

Variable	B	SE B	Beta	T	Sig T
PARTY ID	.013729	.020866	.052666	.658	.5112
FEELREAG	-.002495	.001562	-.128710	-1.598	.1114
WORKSTAT	-.033140	.027478	-.079378	-1.206	.2290
INCOME	-.015108	.006684	-.152979	-2.260	.0247
NEWSPPR	-.014121	.011887	-.076282	-1.188	.2360
NEWSTV	.029889	.030665	.062513	.975	.3307
Constant	2.797933	.163870		17.074	.0000
Adj. R ² = .03, N=251					

With inflation, higher income leads to lower estimates of inflation rates.⁵⁸ Moreover, Democrats tend to believe that inflation rates are higher than Republicans do. The media exposure variables also are interesting. Greater exposure to newspapers is associated with lower estimates of inflation rates, while greater exposure to television news is associated with higher estimates. Since lower estimates are more accurate--given the positive skew caused by the general tendency toward overestimation--newspaper readership seems to promote accuracy while TV viewing seems to promote error. As for unemployment, income is the only significant factor, and, again, higher income leads to lower estimates. Looking across both of these economic items, then, there is some evidence that an individual's economic situation is associated with these factual beliefs; although work status falls short, income is a highly significant predictor for both inflation and unemployment. The lower someone's income, the

more they tend to overestimate these economic indicators. So too with partisan factors. Party ID is highly significant with inflation, though not with unemployment. However all of these specific associations must be considered within a general context of weak effects; the adjusted R² measures for both regressions are quite low.

Following my earlier analysis, I then split the sample into “sophisticates”--again, those who scored in the top third on a general knowledge measure composed of all the non-economic NES information items--and “non-sophisticates,” who comprised the rest of the sample. Consistent with my hypothesis that political and psychological factors shape consistent misbelief systems, and with my earlier results, which showed greater structure among non-sophisticates, I would expect to find that non-sophisticates are more affected by these factors than sophisticates. Though the gap was small, there was some evidence for this (Tables 3.14 - 3.17).

Table 3.14

Inflation (Non-Sophisticates)

Variable	B	SE B	Beta	T	Sig T
PARTY ID	-.078202	.029961	-.268195	-2.610	.0101
FEELREAG	.002780	.002629	.113963	1.057	.2923
WORKSTAT	.037729	.043152	.075995	.874	.3835
INCOME	-.023124	.010603	-.204559	-2.181	.0310
NEWSPPR	.007288	.017053	.035750	.427	.6698
NEWSTV	.093459	.041376	.185726	2.259	.0256
Constant	2.391869	.222888		10.731	.0000
Adj. R ² = .10, N=137					

Table 3.15

Inflation (Sophisticates)

Variable	B	SE B	Beta	T	Sig T
PARTY ID	-.040013	.046530	-.142918	-.860	.3924
FEELREAG	-9.008E-04	.003003	-.050068	-.300	.7650
WORKSTAT	1.943E-04	.051712	4.044E-04	.004	.9970
INCOME	-.014873	.012301	-.130681	-1.209	.2302
NEWSPPR	-.064622	.022618	-.292997	-2.857	.0054
NEWSTV	.035242	.058979	.061259	.598	.5518
Constant	2.766156	.295056		9.375	.0000
Adj. R ² = .10, N=87					

Table 3.16

Unemployment (Non-Sophisticates)

Variable	B	SE B	Beta	T	Sig T
PARTY ID	.055208	.030030	.198669	1.838	.0684
FEELREAG	-.006975	.002624	-.294465	-2.658	.0089
WORKSTAT	-.003596	.044904	-.007545	-.080	.9363
INCOME	-.012137	.010290	-.115492	-1.180	.2405
NEWSPPR	.009178	.017263	.047818	.532	.5959
NEWSTV	.041644	.042666	.087572	.976	.3310
Constant	2.851074	.243540		11.707	.0000
Adj. R ² = .05, N=128					

Table 3.17

Unemployment (Sophisticates)

Variable	B	SE B	Beta	T	Sig T
PARTY ID	.036430	.039019	.162468	.934	.3531
FEELREAG	-.002290	.002517	-.158974	-.910	.3655
WORKSTAT	-.054283	.043167	-.139066	-1.258	.2119
INCOME	-.018481	.010283	-.198604	-1.797	.0758
NEWSPPR	-.011124	.018701	-.062464	-.595	.5535
NEWSTV	-.027642	.048799	-.059654	-.566	.5725
Constant	2.751667	.247480		11.119	.0000
Adj. R ² = .01, N=93					

These results suggest that media exposure also affects beliefs about inflation.

Sophisticates who read the newspaper more often have more accurate beliefs, while non-sophisticates who watch TV more often tend to have beliefs about inflation that are less accurate.⁵⁹ Next I assessed factual beliefs about welfare. I regressed a directional index of these individual welfare belief items on measures of partisanship, three politically relevant values (government role, egalitarianism, and humanitarianism) and an index created from two variables measuring support for welfare reform (support for welfare cuts and support for putting time limits on welfare).^{60 61} Here again, I found that non-sophisticates are more affected--at least by psychological factors--than sophisticates (Tables 3.18, 3.19).

Table 3.18

Welfare (Non-Sophisticates)

Variable	B	SE B	Beta	T	Sig T
PARTY ID	.01859	.034	.043	.539	.590
FEELREAG	.01240	.034	.028	.363	.717
WORKSTAT	.07720	.057	.106	1.366	.174
INCOME	.07075	.055	.098	1.296	.197
NEWSPPR	.138	.065	.152	2.118	.036
NEWSTV	.04887	.011	.335	4.339	.000
Constant	-1.088	.252		-4.309	.000
Adj. R ² = .12, N=184					

Table 3.19

Welfare (Sophisticates)

Variable	B	SE B	Beta	T	Sig T
PARTY ID	.00476	.084	.014	.056	.955
FEELREAG	.03780	.091	-.108	-.416	.680
WORKSTAT	.03190	.077	.085	.416	.680
INCOME	.134	.094	.292	1.427	.162
NEWSPPR	.04847	.130	.064	.374	.711
NEWSTV	-.01638	.029	-.132	-5.73	.570
Constant	-.377	.426		-8.84	.382
Adj. R ² = .02, N=44					

For non-sophisticates, one value--humanitarianism--is associated with factual beliefs about welfare. However the strongest predictor of welfare beliefs here are attitudes about welfare. The more negative one's attitudes toward welfare, the more he or she will tend to have anti-welfare beliefs.

This analysis gives some evidence to suggest that economic beliefs are associated with media exposure, political attitudes and demographic factors, and that welfare beliefs are associated with attitudes and values. This is broadly consistent with my theoretical claims--i.e. that factual beliefs are likely to be shaped by psychological and political factors. However it is important to note the overall lack of explanatory power in all of these analyses. While these variables were statistically significant, the coefficients of determination were small, sometimes strikingly so. Thus it is difficult to argue that misbelief systems are overwhelmingly molded--or even strongly influenced--by these political and psychological factors.

Causation and Consequence

At this point, I have presented evidence in support of my main hypotheses. However several important questions remain about the last area of analysis. One of these questions concerns the direction of causation. While I have shown that misbeliefs are associated with various political and psychological factors, I have not shown that they are caused by them. As always, simple regression is agnostic on causal flow.

While I cannot give a definitive answer on this point, I can bring some evidence to bear here. Most obviously, a number of my explanatory variables--media use, demographics, and to some degree, values and party ID--are not logically amenable to reverse causation. It

would seem rather unlikely that factual beliefs on one issue would drive these sorts of factors. Thus these observed associations would seem to indicate that these factors do influence factual beliefs. While other relationships are less clear, or even imply reverse causation--most particularly, the relationship between beliefs about the economy and presidential approval--the overall thrust of our results suggest that factual beliefs are shaped by these political and psychological factors, just as I have claimed.

A second, related question asks “so what?.” What difference does it make if citizens are factually misinformed about politics? Broadly speaking, two possible consequences might result; bias and polarization. To illustrate this, it may be useful to borrow from John Zaller’s *Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*. Here Zaller argues that the nature of elite discourse will shape the basic nature of public opinion; he reiterates Converse’s earlier point--that elites influence political attitudes because citizens tend to follow elites who seem to share their own values or interests--and notes that this can produce two characteristic patterns. When elites agree, public opinion tends to be unified, but when elites divide, public opinion tends to be divided as well. I suggest that an analogous process should operate here. When political and psychological factors lead most citizens to “err” in the same direction with their misbeliefs, then public opinion may be biased from what it would be if citizens were accurately informed. Conversely, when citizens err in opposite directions, then opinion will be unduly polarized.

However this raises an obvious problem, one that brings us back to causality. If attitudes drive beliefs, as I suggest, then it is difficult to see how beliefs would influence attitudes--beliefs would be at the “end of the causal line.” The answer, I would suggest, is that beliefs will matter when they are primed or otherwise made salient to citizens. When this

occurs, these aroused beliefs can then affect attitudes.

Fortunately, the IGPA data allow me to test this hypothesis. This survey included an experimental manipulation specifically designed to analyze the effects of factual beliefs on attitudes. As I have noted, one group of respondents were “quizzed” on their factual beliefs about welfare, and they then were asked for their attitudes about welfare programs. This treatment group was accompanied by a control group where respondents were simply asked about their attitudes. This manipulation allows me to analyze the effects that result when factual beliefs are primed.

Results here suggest that this priming did have an effect. Though the difference did not quite achieve statistical significance, welfare attitudes did seem to move in an anti-welfare direction (Table 3.20). This was expected, since factual beliefs about welfare were biased in an anti-welfare direction (-.12 on a -1 to +1 scale).

Table 3.20

Welfare Attitudes (Mean Scores, 2-10 Scale)

No Prime Condition	5.46
Fact Quiz Condition	5.11
$t = 1.74, p = .083, n = 251$	

(Note: Lower numbers indicate lower support for welfare.)

This suggests that priming factual beliefs can produce attitude shifts, at least when these beliefs are biased in one direction or another. Thus it suggests that biased factual beliefs can bias

aggregate opinion. However this says little about the precise nature of these shifts. Who moved, and in what direction? In order to analyze this question, I examined Democrats and Republicans separately, reasoning that I would expect to see partisan effects on a highly partisan issue like welfare, and that such effects would be politically consequential. The results show that Republicans moved in an anti-welfare direction, while Democrats did not move at all (Table 3.21).

Table 3.21

Welfare Attitudes (Mean Scores, 2-10 Scale)

	Democrats	Republicans
No Prime Condition	6.16	4.68
Fact Quiz Condition	6.20	4.12
$t = .103, p = .918, N = 76$		$t = 1.64, p = .104, N = 66$

(Note: Lower numbers indicate lower support for welfare.)

This suggests that both bias and polarization did occur here. Aggregate opinion became more negative toward welfare, and the division of opinion between Democrats and Republicans grew wider, with both of these effects due to Republicans' shift towards anti-welfare attitudes. This shows that beliefs can bias opinions.

But what about significance? As is apparent, the opinion shifts in Tables 3.20 and 3.21 did not quite achieve statistical significance. Substantively, however, we see a different story, particularly with polarization. Priming factual beliefs about welfare widened the split in attitudes

between Democrats and Republicans by over 40 percent. This would seem to be a rather substantial increase, one that might have been twice as large--nearly doubling the gap--had Democrats also moved in the opposite direction. Thus this borderline statistical insignificance cloaks strong evidence for substantive political significance.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has presented evidence in favor of three logically sequential points. First, I have supplemented the analysis from chapter one by further demonstrating that many citizens are misinformed about matters of political fact. Second, I have shown that these “misbeliefs” are structured and patterned in a coherent manner, at least for non-sophisticates. Third, I have presented weak but clear evidence that these patterns are influenced by important political and psychological factors.

These results help to extend our understanding of the nature of political knowledge. First, they show that knowledge is a broad, multifaceted phenomenon. While previous work in this area has almost invariably focused solely on correct factual knowledge--as measured by accurate answers on survey questions--I have argued and shown that people also possess incorrect factual “knowledge” about politics. As Walter Lippmann always knew, the “pictures in our heads” can be right or wrong (Lippmann 1922).

Given this, I urge a change in focus from factual knowledge to factual beliefs. The former conceptualization limits us to measuring knowledge levels and mapping a basic, checkerboard-like quilt of knowledge and ignorance. This obviously is useful--again, extant analyses of political knowledge have told us much--but it is also rather limited. The broader

concept of factual beliefs allows for the possibility that “knowledge” can be either right or wrong, and this moves us toward a fuller, richer understanding of the nature--and structure--of political information.

It also moves us towards a fuller understanding of how political information affects political thought and behavior. Factual beliefs comprise an important element in our perceptions of our environment. If these beliefs are correct, we see clearly; our attitudes and behaviors are shaped by an accurate view of the world. However if these factual beliefs are incorrect --i.e., if we possess “misbeliefs” and “misbelief systems”--then these beliefs are likely to lead us astray. As we saw, encouraging respondents to canvass their beliefs about welfare caused their attitudes to deviate from what they would have been had these beliefs been accurate.

This suggests an unsettling conclusion. While philosophers and scholars generally suggest that citizens should base their opinions on knowledge--that is, that people should express “informed” opinions--this may hurt rather than help when people are misinformed. Again, rumination about welfare beliefs led to substantial shifts in welfare opinions. This sort of shift is not bad *per se*, but it would seem undesirable when it is driven by error. Moreover, this may polarize opinions and make conflict more difficult to resolve--why compromise when you have “the facts” on your side? Like sleeping dogs, then, misinformed Americans may best be left alone.⁶²

More broadly, my analyses suggest that current research actually understates the extent of citizen knowledge problems. Conventional wisdom extolls the virtues of knowledge, supposing that the alternative is ignorance. However my findings suggest that being misinformed may be a common problem as well. And, as bad as ignorance might be, misbelief may

well be worse--it seems unlikely that ignorance would directly bias attitudes, or polarize or cement existing positions. Odd as it seems, citizen ignorance may sometimes represent a relatively desirable state of affairs.

In the final empirical chapter of this dissertation, I extend and further develop my analysis of how factual political beliefs shape and affect political thoughts and attitudes.

Chapter 4

Motivated Reasoning, Unchained Preferences, and the “March of Folly”

In the two previous chapters, I addressed different facets of what may be the most fundamental question in this area; what is the basic nature of political knowledge? In chapter one, I showed that knowledge is not always “fixed,” and that people frequently construct their answers to political knowledge questions on surveys. In chapter two, I showed that many of these constructed judgments are inaccurate, and that the inaccurate factual “misbeliefs” yielded by these erroneous judgments can frequently coalesce into coherent “misbelief systems.”

In this chapter, I move to address yet another fundamental--and previously over-looked--question about knowledge and politics; how do people use their political knowledge to guide and inform their political attitudes?

THE USE AND DISUSE OF POLITICAL KNOWLEDGE

Whatever the precise nature of knowledge, its main attraction for political scholars has come from its demonstrated utility. Research consistently shows that knowledgeable citizens outperform their less knowledgeable peers on a whole host of “citizen competence” measures. Accurate political knowledge helps citizens to recognize their own values and interests, to express these core preferences in specific attitudes and opinions, and to advance these opinions through various types of political participation (see Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996 ch. 6). In sum, better informed citizens do a better job of pressing their core preferences in the political system.

This is an impressive list--citizen preferences do provide the "starting point" for democracy--and many scholars have placed political knowledge at the heart of political sophistication. Factual political knowledge is often treated as the "master" or "keystone" variable of mass politics research (Zaller 1992; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996). Knowledge is celebrated for its ability to advance individual preferences.⁶³

However this approach is a limited one, and it fails to capture the whole function of knowledge. While knowledge should serve to advance citizens' core preferences, it should also serve to "anchor" them. Knowledge--that is, factual knowledge--should not only help citizens to develop opinions that accord with and express their idealized desires, it should also help them to square these opinions with existing material conditions (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996). This anchoring function is indelibly illustrated by a scene from the movie, *Gone With the Wind*:

Early in the film, a group of young Southerners has gathered to discuss the looming prospect of war with the North. There is much boasting, and many predictions of quick and glorious victory. After a time, however, a skeptical Rhett Butler interjects to ask "Do any of you realize that there isn't a single cannon factory in the entire South? (Schwieder 1996)."

Core values and preferences may be the root stuff of politics, and citizens may enjoy wide latitude to express and pursue them, but ultimately these preferences must be informed by actual material conditions--that is, by important, relevant facts--if they are to foster positions that have a reasonable chance of success. Recognition of facts can facilitate sound opinions and sound public policy, or, as the *GWTW* example suggests, ignoring facts can lead to catastrophe. The veridical status of facts lets factual knowledge temper and guide political judgments by forcing people to face reality.

This can also be framed as a matter of motivation. Research suggests that human judgment processes are animated by two basic motives; accuracy seeking motives and directional motives (Kunda 1990). Accuracy seeking is probably the most obvious and familiar; it drives people towards judgments that recognize reality and yield optimal solutions to problems. Directional motives, on the other hand, lead people toward judgements that they already wish to reach. Thus using knowledge to anchor or temper core preferences should tend to facilitate accurate judgments, while using knowledge to advance core preferences should tend to facilitate desired, directional judgments.

However this matter is framed, the point is that both advancing and anchoring are important, and, ideally, we would like to see people use their knowledge in both of these ways. If citizens would develop attitudes that reflect their values and interests, yet also acknowledge existing conditions and constraints, this would presumably bring them closer to the oft-cited goal of “enlightened opinion,” which is generally defined as the opinions that people would hold if fully informed (Mansbridge 1980). However we have no solid information about what goes on here, because the political knowledge literature has emphasized the first function while ignoring the second. Thus we know that citizens use their knowledge to advance their basic interests and values, but we don’t know whether they use their knowledge to temper these core preferences as well.

Unfortunately, existing evidence counsels pessimism here; psychology research suggests that directional “motivated reasoning” is likely to predominate, that is, that it will be the “default” motivation in most situations (Kunda 1990). Milton Lodge further argues that motivated reasoning is pervasive in political reasoning as well; “Citizens are rarely, if ever,

dispassionate when thinking about politics. . . . [They] are often 'partisan' in their political beliefs, motivated more by their desire to maintain prior beliefs than by their desire to make 'accurate' or otherwise optimal decisions (Lodge, Taber and Galonsky 1999, abstract).” Moreover, political attitude research also implies that citizens use knowledge more to advance their preferences than to anchor them. This research shows that increasing political knowledge leads citizens to express attitudes that increasingly reflect their core preferences (see Zaller 1992 for an extended discussion of this point). This suggests that knowledge is serving to advance preferences but not necessarily to anchor them.

This evidence suggests that anchoring may be unlikely to occur, but it is only suggestive; no one has conducted a direct analysis of this question. Accordingly, I do so here.

POLITICAL KNOWLEDGE AND POLITICAL REASONING

I begin with a general model of the political judgment process, one that offers specific hypotheses about how knowledge functions and how it might temper citizens' preferences and anchor their attitudes. I posit a two-step “constructed judgment” process. When people encounter elite or media messages, they accept or reject them and then store the accepted messages as “considerations” in long term memory. Later, when an attitude or judgment is required, they combine available, relevant considerations in order to construct it.⁶⁴

I posit that knowledge could work to temper attitudes at either of these two stages. First, I assume that citizens might use their factual political knowledge to “reality test” elite messages--that is, accept or reject a message based on its plausibility. Second, I assume that they might also use their knowledge to anchor their attitudes at the actual construction

stage--that is, ensure that these attitudes accord with actual material conditions. Third, I also assume that reality testing and anchoring depend heavily on relevant political knowledge; that is, that citizens must possess--or construct--knowledge directly relevant to an issue in order to successfully perform either of these two tasks.⁶⁵ In the sections that follow, I investigate each of these three assumptions.

Relevant Political Knowledge

Most fundamentally, I argue that citizens must possess factual information relevant to the issue at hand. Scholars often stress that useful knowledge is “domain specific” (Krosnick 1990; Zaller 1992, 43, 336-7; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996, 14), that is, that knowledge must be directly relevant to the particular judgment being made. I advance this argument because information that is not directly relevant would not seem especially helpful for anchoring or reality testing. Knowing the vice president’s name or the length of a senator’s term does little to help citizens make reasoned judgments about welfare policy, for example, or health care reform. Highly general knowledge may facilitate heuristic reasoning, and help citizens to advance their core preferences in their attitudes--since many heuristics rely on simple cues--but the sort of “reasoning on the merits” necessary for anchoring and reality testing would seem to require information with a high degree of relevance.

Do citizens possess this sort of specific, relevant factual knowledge? Can they accurately construct it? Past research offers little direct evidence here. Though survey researchers have asked thousands of information questions over the fifty-year span of the survey research era, most of these questions have addressed very general facts: fundamental features of

institutions, identities of prominent political figures, and the basic thrust and nature of the major issues of the day. Moreover, when more specific questions are asked, pollsters rarely ask more than one question in any given area, thus we rarely get clusters of related items. This situation is even more pronounced with academic surveys. Scholars have asked relatively few knowledge questions, because they fear embarrassing respondents and damaging interview rapport (Dimock and Popkin 1995; Neuman 1986). Accordingly, specific questions are even scarcer here.

However we do have some evidence that bears on this. In chapter two of this dissertation, I briefly examined performance on a cluster of factual knowledge items directly relevant to welfare reform, and I found that citizens seem to have low to moderate levels of knowledge on these matters. However this analysis was not only limited but also indirect; there I was focusing on wrong answers rather than right ones. Thus I extend and expand my analysis here, focusing directly on citizens' levels of relevant, specific political knowledge.

Data and Methods

The data for this section come from the same 1996 Institute for Government and Public Affairs survey that was used in the previous chapter. In addition to the welfare reform questions discussed previously, respondents were asked another set of questions on health care reform (the welfare items are repeated here for reference):⁶⁶

Welfare:

Of all American families, what percent would you say are on welfare-- would you say 3 percent, 7 percent, 13 percent, 18 percent, or 25 percent of all American families are on welfare?

Of all the families on welfare, what percent would you say are African-American? Would you say 10 percent, 25 percent, 45 percent, 65 percent, or 80 percent of all welfare families are African-American?

On average, how much would you say a single welfare mother who has no Income and has two children receives in welfare payments each year-- \$3,000, \$6,000, \$9,000, \$12,000, or \$18,000?

Of every total dollar that the states and federal government spend each year, what percent would you say goes to welfare-- 1 percent, 5 percent, 8 percent, 11 percent, or 15 percent?

Of all families on welfare right now, what percent would you say have been on welfare for more than eight years-- 10 percent, 20 percent, 50 percent, 60 percent, or 75 percent?

Of all mothers who have been on welfare for more than two years, what percent would you say have less than a high school education-- 10 percent, 25 percent, 50 percent, 65 percent, or 80 percent?

Health Care:

Of all people in the United States today, what percentage would you say have no health coverage? Would you say that 1 percent, 10 percent, 20 percent, 35 percent, or 60 percent of all people lack health coverage?

Of all the heads of households who do not have health coverage, what percent would you say either work full-time or have a spouse who works full-time? Would you say that 10 percent, 25 percent, 40 percent, 60 percent, or 75 percent work full-time or have a spouse who works full time?

Of people who do not have health coverage, what percent would you say can get emergency health care at a hospital if they need it? Would you say that 10 percent, 25 percent, 50 percent, 75 percent or 100 percent can get emergency care even If they do not have health care coverage?

Of all the health care systems in the world, how expensive would you say the United States system is? Would you say it is the least expensive, about in the middle, or the most expensive?

Analysis of knowledge about these sets of facts will help us to determine whether or not citizens have enough specific, relevant knowledge to reality test messages about welfare and health care reform and to anchor their attitudes about these issues to actual conditions. Of course, this test is suggestive rather than definitive. The finding that citizens do possess--or can construct--specific information would not tell us that citizens do anchor and reality test, but the finding that citizens lack this information would strongly suggest that they do not.

Results

Analysis of the specific information items suggests that citizens are not especially well-informed about these sorts of specific facts; the percentages of correct answers ranged from 9.5 to 33.2 percent on welfare (Table 4.1), and from 13.7 to 54.6 percent on health care (Table 4.2).

Table 4.1

Percent Giving Correct Answer (Welfare)

Q1.	Total Pct. On Welfare	28.1%
Q2.	Pct. Black	33.2%
Q3.	Avg. Annual Paymnt.	25.5%
Q4	Percent of Budget	9.5%
Q5	Pct. On Welf. For > 8 Mos.	28.1%
Q6.	Pct. On Welf. < H.S. Educ	24.8%

Table 4.2

Percent Giving Correct Answer (HC)

Q1.	Total Pct. On Welfare	31.7%
Q2.	Pct. Black	13.7%
Q3.	Avg. Annual Paymnt.	32.2%
Q4	Percent of Budget	54.6%

While these figures may seem lower than we might like, it is important to remember that these questions do address rather specific matters of fact. By way of comparison, Delli Carpini and Keeter found that the mean percentages of correct answers averaged around 50% for the question in their 1989 knowledge survey, but these items did address matters that tended to be more general (and enduring) than these welfare and health care items (1996, 153). Since eight of the ten questions were answered correctly by a quarter of the samples or more, it would appear that citizens may be moderately well informed about these matters.

However this situation is more complex than it appears. First, this conclusion fails to account for what Delli Carpini and Keeter call “close calls.” As mentioned in chapter one, their analysis of their own knowledge survey found that many answers are nearly correct, though not quite close enough to count *as* correct (1996, 96). A more detailed look at response patterns suggests that there were a number of close calls here as well (Tables 4.3-4.8, 4.9-4.12, correct answers marked with asterisks). The categories bracketing the correct responses contain between 25 and 50 percent of the respondents. Obviously, classifying these as roughly correct yields a much rosier picture here. Of course, the validity of this finding varies from item to item depending on the fineness of the scale. Adjacent categories deviate from the correct answer by

varying degrees, and thus some can be labeled as close calls more easily than others. Overall, however, there is evidence that citizens know more than a simple summation of correct answers would suggest.

Table 4.3

Total Percent on Welfare

3 Percent	8.4
7 Percent*	28.1
13 Percent	29.6
18 Percent	20.4
25 Percent	11.3
DK (After Probe)	2.2
N = 274	

Table 4.4

Percent Black on Welfare

10 Percent	5.8
25 Percent	23.7
45 Percent*	33.2
65 Percent	26.6
80 Percent	6.6
DK (After Probe)	4.0
N = 274	

Table 4.5

Average Annual Welfare Payment

3K	8.8
6K*	25.5
9K	25.2
12K	23.7
18K	10.9
DK (After Probe)	5.8
N = 274	

Table 4.6

Percent of Budge Spent on Welfare

1 Percent	9.5
5 Percent*	24.8
8 Percent	24.5
11 Percent	16.8
15 Percent	21.5
DK (After Probe)	2.9
N = 274	

Table 4.7

Percent on Welfare > 8 Mos.

10 Percent	17.5
20 Percent	33.2
50 Percent*	28.1
60 Percent	9.1
75 Percent	10.9
DK (After Probe)	1.1
N = 274	

Table 4.8

Percent on Welfare < H.S. Educ

10 Percent	6.9
25 Percent*	20.8
50 Percent	25.5
65 Percent	24.8
80 Percent	21.5
DK (After Probe)	.4
N = 274	

Table 4.9

Percent w/o HC Coverage

1 Percent	2.4
10 Percent*	6.3
20 Percent	25.4
35 Percent	42.9
60 Percent	21.0
DK (After Probe)	2.0
N = 205	

Table 4.10

Percent w/o Coverage who Work

10 Percent	15.1
25 Percent	24.9
40 Percent	28.3
60 Percent	13.2
75 Percent*	13.7
DK (After Probe)	4.9
N = 205	

Table 4.11

Percent who can get ER Care

10 Percent	22.9
25 Percent	11.7
50 Percent	10.7
75 Percent	19.5
100 Percent*	32.2
DK (After Probe)	2.9
N = 205	

Table 4.12

Cost of U.S. HC System

Least Costly	5.9
In the Middle	36.6
Most Costly*	54.6
DK (After Probe)	2.9
N = 205	

So far, these results suggest that citizens are not particularly well informed about welfare and health care reform. However this is not really a clear test of my hypothesis--I am more interested in the percentage of citizens who are generally well informed than the percentage of citizens who can answer particular questions correctly. Analyses of these welfare and health

care items suggests that there may be a small group of people who are relatively well informed about these issues and who got most or all of the questions correct. Is this so?

Tables 4.13 and 4.14 speak to this question. They show the distribution of the number of correct answers in these two issue areas.

Table 4.13

Number of Welf. Items Answered Correctly

0 Correct	19.0%
1 Correct	33.6%
2 Correct	29.9%
3 Correct	14.2%
4 Correct	3.3%
5 Correct	0%
6 Correct	0%

Table 4.14

Number of HC Items Answered Correctly

0 Correct	18.0%
1 Correct	41.0%
2 Correct	31.7%
3 Correct	9.3%
4 Correct	0%

These results paint a somewhat bleaker picture. Tables 4.13 and 4.14 suggest that the “well informed group” hypothesis is highly suspect. As is apparent, over half of the samples got one question or less correct on each, and very few got more than half of the items right in either area. The mean number of items correct was 1.49 for welfare and 1.32 for health care. Respectively, no one answered more than four or three items correctly.

Moreover, allowing for “close calls” does little to improve the situation. To analyze the effects of this, coded “close calls”--again, answers in adjacent categories--as one-half correct, and then resummed to generate the number of “correct” answers. This had relatively little effect, as the means, 2.38 and 1.39, respectively, and frequency distributions show (Tables 4.15 and 4.16).

Table 4.15

Number of Welfare Items Answered Correctly (Including Close Calls)

0 Correct	1.1%
.5 Correct	4.4%
1 Correct	7.7%
1.5 Correct	11.3%
2 Correct	20.1%
2.5 Correct	20.1%
3 Correct	18.2%
3.5 Correct	8.4%

Table 4.15 (cont.)

4 Correct	5.8%
4.5 Correct	2.2%
5 Correct	.7%
5.5 Correct	0%
6 Correct	0%

Table 4.16

**Number of Health Care Items Answered
Correctly (Including Close Calls)**

0 Correct	14.6%
.5 Correct	3.4%
1 Correct	33.7%
1.5 Correct	7.3%
2 Correct	29.3%
2.5 Correct	2.4%
3 Correct	9.3%
3.5 Correct	0%
4 Correct	0%

Discussion

Our central focus here concerned knowledge of specific, relevant facts. Our results suggest that relatively few citizens have a strong grasp of specific facts, at least on facts relevant

to welfare and health care reform. This suggests, in turn, that they will have a hard time either reality testing persuasive elite messages or anchoring their attitudes, since these tasks would seem to depend on possession of reasonably precise, domain-specific knowledge. Obviously there is no clear cutoff point separating “informed” from “ignorant,” but, at minimum, the results reported here fail to engender confidence in this regard.

Political Knowledge and the Acquisition of Information

While the relative absence of specific knowledge casts doubt on whether citizens can anchor and reality test, it does not prove that they cannot. Thus we must take a more direct look at this subject. I have posited a general model specifying how knowledge is likely to be used in the political reasoning process, and thus tests of this model will give us a more direct purchase on this question.

The first step in the model involves acquisition of political information. I have hypothesized that citizens may use their political knowledge to “reality test” persuasive messages presented by political elites and the media. That is, that people will use their knowledge to judge the plausibility of these arguments, claims or contentions--i.e., to evaluate them in light of important, relevant facts--and then accept or reject them based on their feasibility or congruence with actual material conditions.⁶⁷ Here I subject this hypothesis to empirical test.

Data and Methods

Most obviously, I could test this hypothesis by measuring whether precise, domain-

specific political knowledge mediates acceptance of persuasive messages concerning the same domain. In other words, I could expose subject to persuasive claims and analyze whether well-informed individuals are more likely to reject implausible claims than are their more poorly informed peers. However this approach is actually less desirable than it seems. It would be difficult to determine whether or not reality testing was actually responsible for any effects we might observe; broad correlational analyses tell us little about specific mechanisms, and thus little about how knowledge is actually used in reasoning processes.

Given this, a more direct approach may be more desirable. Alternatively, I could ask people to judge the plausibility of elite messages. This would ensure that “reality testing” is being measured directly, though, of course, this would not directly measure information acquisition. Still, I would argue that this trade-off is acceptable, and that this is probably a better approach overall; internal validity is higher here since we are measuring our phenomenon of interest more directly.

Fortunately, the IGPA survey contains data that allows me to address this question. The survey included a set of items where respondents were asked to choose between different policy proposals on health care reform. I treat policy proposals as elite messages here, that is, I assume that policy proposals are one of the types of persuasive messages that elites send to citizens.

The following three health care items were asked:

Some people say that to control rising health care costs, we need to put some limits on the services that people receive. Others say that all we need to do is cut waste, high profits, and fraud in medicine. Would you say that to control the rising costs of health care, we need to put some limits on the services that people receive, or all we need to do is cut waste, high profits, and fraud in medicine?

Experts say we cannot provide health coverage for everyone and at the same time keep taxes down. They say we have three options. First we could provide health coverage for everyone by raising taxes. Second, we could keep taxes down by not providing health coverage for everyone. Third, we could choose a compromise between these two goals. What would you do? Would you provide health coverage for everyone, keep taxes down, choose a compromise, or disagree with the experts and insist on achieving both goals fully?

Experts say we cannot require businesses to pay for their employees' health coverage and at the same time avoid a loss of jobs. They say we have three options. First, we could require businesses to pay for their employees' coverage and accept a loss of jobs. Second, we could avoid a loss of jobs by not requiring businesses to cover their employees. Third, we could compromise and achieve some of each goal. Would you require businesses to pay for coverage, avoid the loss of jobs, compromise and achieve some of each goal, or disagree with the experts and insist on achieving both goals fully?

My analysis here is predicated on the assumption that there are right and wrong answers to these questions, or at minimum, that some answers are better than others. Obviously this is a potentially controversial claim, so it is important to be clear here. This claim does not rest on a partisan or value base; rather, it rests on plausibility. Reality testing hinges on this sort of concern, and on the notion that some arguments or positions are so inaccurate, unfeasible or unrealistic that they can essentially be counted as "wrong," or at least demonstrably worse than competing alternatives. Here I use this criteria to discriminate between potential policy options.

The first question provides a particularly clear example. It poses a simple dichotomy; respondents are charged with controlling rising health care costs, and they are asked to choose between doing so by rationing medical services or by cutting "waste, high profits, and fraud."

Which is the right--or at least best--answer here? Rationing services. The idea that we can achieve fiscal success by cutting "waste, fraud and abuse" is a classic chimera, typically the province of thinkers who are wishful, fuzzy or both.⁶⁸ This is so for two reasons. First, one cannot cleanly carve out these undesirable elements. Government programs are more like

sausage than steak, for the “meat” is intimately intertwined with the “fat” rather than clearly distinct from it.⁶⁹ Public policy is necessarily a rather blunt tool, and so cuts inevitably slash both--critics commonly wield the “meat axe” metaphor. Second, pruning undesirable elements would rarely be enough, even if it could be done. While the definition of “waste and abuse” is inevitably somewhat arbitrary, these excesses will rarely be so egregious that excising them will solve fiscal problems by itself.

The other survey items are similar. For the other two health care items, some answers have to be grouped. For example, on the second question, we group “providing health coverage for everyone, keeping taxes down, and choosing a compromise between the two.” This lumps plausible, realistic options, whatever their pedigree or ideology, so they can be juxtaposed against the demonstrably implausible alternative--here, an insistence on accomplishing all desirable goals.

Unfortunately, in one sense my data is more limited than I would like; all of the usable items concern health care reform. There is one welfare item available, but it is not suitable for use, since we cannot reliably discriminate between “good” and “bad” policy choices.⁷⁰ This item is as follows:

How possible is it that the government, if it tried, could get nearly all welfare recipients into jobs in the next three years--very possible, somewhat possible, slightly possible or not possible at all?

This question asks how possible it would be to find employment for “nearly all” welfare recipients within three years. Unfortunately, the adjective “nearly” renders this question highly ambiguous. Definitions of “nearly” will vary widely, and hence it is difficult to call one answer less plausible than another. One could surely suggest that this goal would be difficult to reach,

but it also seems reasonable to suggest that it might not be.

To reiterate, the basic point here is that some policy options are so impossible or implausible that the alternatives, however undesirable, must logically be preferred. My basic goal is to see if political knowledge helps citizens to reject the “bad” policy options—in other words, to see if knowledge does facilitate reality testing of political messages and claims. Accordingly, I analyze correlations between knowledge of specific, relevant health care facts (measured by a summary index of correct answers to the four relevant health care facts), and policy choices on these health care reform items.

Results

My results suggest that relevant knowledge may have little effect on citizens’ ability to “reality test” and reject implausible claims. I examined the second set of questions first, that is, the items that ask citizens to choose between the “good” choice of achieving a particular goal or compromise and a “bad” choice of insisting on achieving all goals. These analyses show that relatively well-informed citizens failed to reject the unrealistic “insist on all” alternative to a substantially greater degree than their more poorly informed peers; as is apparent, there was virtually no difference between sophisticates and non-sophisticates in either case (Tables 4.17 and 4.18).

Table 4.17

Health Care Policy Choice by Health Care Sophistication

	Raise Taxes, Increase Coverage, or Compromise	Insist on Increasing Coverage and Not Raising Taxes
Non Sophisticates (HC Items)	65.5% (78)	34.5% (41)
Sophisticates (HC Items)	68.8% (55)	31.3% (25)
<i>chi-square</i> = .222, <i>df</i> = 1, <i>p</i> = .638		

Table 4.18

Health Care Policy Choice by Health Care Sophistication

	Make Business Pay, Avoid Job Loss, or Compromise	Insist on Making Business Pay & Avoiding Job Loss
Non Sophisticates (HC Items)	79.2% (95)	20.8% (25)
Sophisticates (HC Items)	75.6% (62)	24.4% (20)
<i>chi-square</i> = .356, <i>df</i> = 1, <i>p</i> = .551		

However further reflection suggests that this may not be a fair test. These items contain obvious “cuing messages.” The phrase “Experts say....” indicates that there *is* a correct--or at least authoritative--answer here. This is important, because a number of scholars have argued that simple cuing messages can have powerful effects on attitudes. Cues can compensate for a lack of political knowledge, and thus allow non-sophisticates to perform as well as sophisticates on citizen competence tests (Zaller 1992; Althaus 1996). Poorly informed people can use simple

heuristic cues--rather than extensive political knowledge--to figure out which attitudes and opinions they ought to hold.

If this is the case here, then poorly informed respondents may be using heuristics to “catch up” to their better informed peers. This would be a problem, because it might tend to mask any performance advantage by people who are relatively well-informed about relevant health care facts (that is, it might tend to mask the effects of this knowledge). If non-sophisticates--or indeed, all subjects--are using heuristics here, we might expect to see little difference between groups.

The best solution would be run the analysis twice--with and without cuing messages--or to find another item that is similar yet lacks the cue (see Zaller 1992, 24-25 for an excellent example of this). Unfortunately, I lack the data to do this. However I can take a less direct tack. The first health care question--the one that asks respondents to choose between rationing medical services and cutting “waste, high profits, and fraud”--has no such cues. Both of the alternatives are introduced with “Some people say” and thus both have the same status; neither is obviously preferred over the other. If the above argument is right, would expect that approval for the “bad” policy would grow overall, and that sophisticates would be more able to reject it. As Table 4.19 shows, there is some evidence of this; overall approval of the “bad” option--“cutting waste and abuse”--is strikingly high, and sophisticates do seem to do better than non-sophisticates (the difference is larger than it was on the other items, although--perhaps in part because of the small N--it fails to achieve statistical significance).⁷¹

Table 4.19

Health Care Policy Choice by Health Care Sophistication

	Ration Services	Just Cut Waste
Non-Sophisticates (HC Items)	17.2% (5)	82.8% (24)
Sophisticates (HC Items)	30.0% (6)	70% (14)
<i>chi-square</i> = 1.1, <i>df</i> = 1, <i>p</i> = .293		

Discussion

These results accord with the first set of findings--both cast doubt on citizens' ability to "reality test" elite messages (that is, their ability to screen implausible arguments and claims). The findings from the first section suggest that people lack the basic knowledge to perform this task. In this section, I posited a mechanism by which citizens might use the knowledge they do have to do this, but this analysis has failed to find much evidence that such reality testing actually occurs. Thus these findings combine to tentatively suggest that citizens do not use their knowledge to "reality test" elite messages.

Political Knowledge and the Construction of Attitudes

This third section analyzes another anchoring mechanism and another part of our political reasoning model. I have also hypothesized that citizens might use their factual knowledge to directly construct their political judgments--that is, that factual knowledge might directly anchor attitudes and bring them into accord with actual material conditions. Given that constructed judgments result when individuals combine available "considerations" to create attitudes, the

most direct analysis involves simply recording and analyzing these considerations. In other words, one simply asks an attitude question on a survey and then follows it by asking citizens to recite the thoughts that came to mind as they answered the question.⁷² This provides a direct measure of considerations. Thus it shows us whether factual knowledge is included in these considerations, and, hence, whether it is being directly used to construct attitude judgments.

Data and Methods

Measures of considerations are not common, but fortunately the IGPA survey included suitable sets of items. Respondents were asked two questions to measure their attitudes about welfare policy and welfare reform:

Do you support, strongly support, oppose, strongly oppose, or have no feeling about the idea of cutting back welfare programs?

Do you support, strongly support, oppose, strongly oppose, or have no feeling about the government stopping welfare payments to mothers after two years?

Following the second question, respondents were asked “What thoughts came to mind when you answered that last question?” Interviewers then recorded these thoughts verbatim. These comments provide the raw material for our analysis of considerations.

Following completion of the survey, considerations from a random sample of respondents (n = 311, approximately one-fourth of the overall survey sample) were coded in order to classify these considerations. Categories were empirically driven and considerations were sorted into several broad categories; beliefs, values, attitudes, and miscellaneous items. Within each of these general categories, more specific categories were included:

Attitudes

Attitude about Welfare Time Limits
 General Attitude about Welfare
 Attitudes about other Welfare Policies
 Attitudes about non-Welfare Policies

Beliefs

Factual Beliefs
 Non-Factual Beliefs
 Causal Beliefs
 Predictive Beliefs

Values

Self-Reliance
 Government Role
 Humanitarianism
 Fairness

Miscellaneous

Mentioned Effects on Children
 Mentioned Own Personal Situation
 Mentioned Feelings of Ambivalence
 Said Support for Time Limits “Depends on the Situation”
 Mentioned Association
 Mentioned Feeling Ignorant or said “Don’t Know”
 Mentioned Elite or Media Message
 Attributed Welfare to Structural Cause(s)
 Mentioned Race
 Unrelated Comment
 Meaning of Comment Unclear
 None

Comments in the first three categories were coded more specifically. For example, the type of factual belief was noted--beliefs about time spent on welfare, education levels of welfare recipients, and so on--and most of these comments were coded directionally as well, i.e. I noted whether they were pro or anti welfare. Comments in the last category were simply listed as “mentioned.” (Full details of these coding procedures are included in the Appendix).

Results

Analysis of these considerations suggests that facts or “factual beliefs”--beliefs about matters of fact, that is, matters amenable to reasonably definitive empirical verification--do not play a substantial role in the formation of attitudes, at least on the issue of welfare. Factual

beliefs were mentioned by only about 11% of these respondents, and most of these respondents mentioned only one factual belief. Table 4.20 describes that nature of these beliefs, as well as the frequency with which they were mentioned.

Table 4.20

Factual Beliefs about Welfare

Fact	Number of Mentions (Mentions of Second Fact in Parentheses)
Education of Welfare Recipients - Low	4(3)
Education of Welfare Recipients - High	
Time Spent on Welfare - Short	
Time Spent on Welfare - Long	11
Number of People on Welfare - Low	
Number of People on Welfare - High	1(1)
Age of Recipients - Young	4
Age of Recipients - Old	1
Size of Payments Received by Recipients - Low \$	
Size of Payments Received by Recipients - High \$	1
Other - Pro Welfare	6(1)
Other - Neutral	4

Table 4.20 (cont.)

Other - Anti-Welfare	2
Total 34(5)	
Total N= 311	

These results suggest that few citizens use facts at the “construction” stage and thus that few citizens will use facts in an anchoring capacity here. However it is not clear that this test is a fair one. Both intuition and scholarship suggest that political sophisticates do best at realizing and advancing their preferences, and analogously, if knowledge is operating at the construction stage, one would expect to find facts and factual beliefs disproportionately mentioned and used by sophisticates. Thus this overall analysis may be masking substantial use of factual beliefs by sophisticates.

However additional analysis suggests that this is not the case. Sophisticates--those who scored in the top 40% on an index formed from the six specific welfare knowledge questions--were not much more likely to make factual mentions than were non-sophisticates, who comprised the rest of the sample (Table 4.21). Moreover, regardless of any differences, the percentages were so low that no one could be said to be mentioning specific factual information to any significant extent. Any difference between sophisticates and non-sophisticates is overshadowed by the low levels overall.

Table 4.21

Factual Beliefs about Welfare

	Pct. Mentioning Fact Belief	Pct. Mentioning 2nd Fact Belief
Sophisticates (Welf Items)	5.2%	1%
Non-Sophisticates (Welf Items)	1.7%	0%

The directness of this “considerations” test suggests a rather direct conclusion; facts do not play a major role at the “sample” stage of the constructed judgment model. However, things are not quite so clear cut. Further reflection suggests that factual knowledge may be working in a more indirect manner. As the chart on page 112 shows, there are other types of considerations, and it seems possible that some of these may have an indirect effect here. For example, someone who mentions a predictive belief among his or her considerations--e.g. “welfare reform won’t work”--may be basing this belief on an unmentioned factual belief--for example, knowledge that welfare recipients lack education and job skills. To test this, I examined the prevalence of predictive beliefs among considerations (Table 4.22).

Table4.22

Predictive Beliefs about Welfare

	Pct. Mentioning Predictive Belief
Sophisticates	8.2%
Non-Sophisticates	2.8%

Though sophisticates do relatively better here, the results show that the prevalence of predictive beliefs is generally low. This suggests, in turn, that factual beliefs would have a minor effect even if they do operate in this indirect manner.

Discussion

The results from this section are the third piece of our puzzle. Here I fail to find any evidence that citizens use factual knowledge to directly anchor their attitudes. These results complement the findings from the first two sections; all three sets of results cast doubt on the hypothesis that citizens use their political knowledge to tether their preferences by “reality testing” elite messages or “anchoring” their attitudes.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have analyzed how citizens use political knowledge; more specifically, whether people use their political knowledge to temper their political judgments by “reality testing” elite messages and “anchoring” their attitudes. I have found little evidence that either of these processes occur. Political knowledge, at least as measured here, has little impact on the effectiveness of reality testing. Factual knowledge seem to play only a small part in the actual construction of attitudes. And, most fundamentally, citizens do not have much relevant political knowledge to begin with.

In a sense, we have come full circle. My finding that citizens do not seem to use their knowledge to temper their core preferences leaves us back where we started, with the large existing attitude literature which shows that citizens clearly do use their knowledge to help them

advance these preferences. However my effort has not been wasted. It has given us a broader perspective--one which shows that knowledge ought to both temper and advance interests and values--and this perspective suggests that the current knowledge literature is too narrow and that its conclusions about the benefits of knowledge may be too optimistic.

A brief recap shows why this is so. A central finding in the knowledge literature is that citizens act more like they “should” as levels of general political knowledge increase; liberals become more liberal, Republicans become more Republican, and so on. Attitudes become more consistent and constrained (Zaller 1992; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996). In sum, citizens who know basic facts about politics do a better job of linking their attitudes with their underlying interests and values--that is, they do a better job of using their attitudes to advance these core preferences. According to the prevailing perspective, this is desirable; it is a sign that knowledge is performing its role and working as it should.

However my broader view suggests that these results may be less desirable than they seem. When knowledge serves one key function, but not the other, are its effects really so beneficial? My analysis here suggests they are not.

Whether it is viewed as motivated reasoning or just the myopic pursuit of core preferences, emphasizing the advancement of preferences at the expense of anchoring them may have at least two undesirable effects. First, this sort of reasoning may exacerbate political conflict and make it harder to solve. When citizens succeed in forming attitudes that reflect their core preferences, opinions will often tend to polarize along partisan or ideological lines. Again, this is what the issue attitude literature reveals. Second, this sort of reasoning may produce poor public policies. Many laws and policies may be less effective and efficient than they would

be if they were tempered by a realistic awareness of existing conditions.

While both of these problems have the potential to be serious, poor public policy is likely to produce more spectacular results. Motivated reasoning is viewed as producing biased and problematic judgments (Kunda 1990; Lodge, Stroh and Wahlke 1990), and, stated more simply, myopic public policies can be catastrophic. My *Gone With the Wind* example returns to mind here, and this has been a broader academic theme as well. In her widely read *The March of Folly*, historian Barbara Tuchman addresses this same subject. She asks “Why do [political actors] often act contrary to the way reason points and enlightened self interest suggests? Why does intelligent mental process seem so often not to function?” Answering her own question, she notes that “. . . wisdom, which may be defined as the exercise of judgment acting on experience, common sense and *available information*, is less operative and more frustrated than it should be (Tuchman 1984, 4; italics added).” The scope and sweep of her investigation--the book is subtitled “From Troy to Vietnam”--suggests that this problem is hardly a limited one.

Thus a broader view of citizen knowledge reveals theoretical and practical problems, and this view suggests that the current citizen knowledge literature is too narrow and too sanguine. Significant political costs can be incurred when knowledge is used to advance core preferences at the expense of anchoring them, and thus, contrary to conventional wisdom, knowledge does not have entirely beneficial effects. Folk wisdom suggests that “a little knowledge is a dangerous thing,” however--given that increasing levels of knowledge leave citizens better able to advance their core preferences but seemingly no better able to anchor them--a lot of knowledge may actually be worse.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

In this dissertation, I set out to address two fundamental questions about political knowledge. First, what is the nature of knowledge? What are we measuring with survey knowledge questions? Does factual “knowledge” have to be correct? Second, how does knowledge function in the political judgment process? What parts does it play? How does it affect these political judgments? Despite their importance, these questions have received little scholarly attention.

THE NATURE OF POLITICAL KNOWLEDGE

The first question--on the nature of knowledge--has typically been resolved by assumption. Scholars have followed convention by assuming that knowledge is a “fixed cognition,” and that answers to survey knowledge questions simply represent cognitions retrieved from memory. Moreover, they have assumed that “knowledge” is synonymous with “correct knowledge.”

While these assumptions are intuitively satisfying--the idea that “knowledge” represents learned, correct factual information is both conventional and comforting--they are not well supported by broader scholarly research. While some political knowledge surely is fixed--i.e. learned, schoolroom-style, and then stored in memory--it seems foolish to suggest that this is the only form that knowledge can take, or that this is the only kind of knowledge measured by factual knowledge questions on surveys. Newer research on other cognitions, especially

attitudes, suggests that cognitions are often constructed, and there are good theoretical and empirical grounds for believing that this is likely to hold true for knowledge as well. I have addressed this point, and I have shown that this does seem to be the case.

If “constructed judgments matter,” this also strongly suggests that these judgments will often be inaccurate; as social psychologists never tire of reminding us, human inference is a rather problematic process. Simply put, this means that political “knowledge” can be right and wrong. Though this notion seems odd, it is easily defended; correct and incorrect factual beliefs are likely to have the same functional status, and the man who wrongly believes that welfare is consuming fifty percent of the government budget is as convinced of his correctness as the man who rightly believes welfare is taking only one percent. Thus it seems clear that the current practice of limiting “knowledge” to “correct” is too narrow. “Factual beliefs” is a broader concept and thus a better one; it subsumes both true and false beliefs and thus it treats accurate factual knowledge as a subset of factual beliefs. I have addressed this point as well, and I have shown that many factual beliefs are incorrect; that is, that “misbeliefs” do exist.

Recognizing the existence of misbeliefs further allows for the appreciation and analysis of cognitive structure. Previous political knowledge research barely acknowledged or addressed this concern. Based as it was on an “information-ignorance dichotomy”—that is, the assumption that individuals either possess correct factual information about a particular matter or else lack information about it entirely—this previous knowledge work could do little more than map levels of knowledge. A focus on structure implies that cognitions can vary and that they can be arranged in different ways—one may have liberal or conservative values, for example, or a liberal or conservative attitudinal “belief system”—but the traditional view has

trouble recognizing this; the ruling assumption that “knowledge” must be “correct” leaves no room for this sort of approach or analysis. However the recognition of misbeliefs addresses this problem and allows us to analyze cognitive structure. As we have seen, misbeliefs can vary, in politically meaningful ways, and thus individuals can have politically meaningful “misbelief systems.”

The Functions of Political Knowledge

The second question addressed here--on the function of knowledge--is nearly as fundamental as the first. The problem here has involved an inadequate breadth of focus more than any incorrect basic assumptions.

As mentioned earlier, previous political knowledge work has addressed part of this question. One of the central conclusions here has been that political knowledge helps citizens to realize and recognize their own core preferences and to advance them through their political attitudes and behaviors. This is obviously important; to reiterate, citizen preferences are the starting point of democracy. However they are only part of the story, or they are not the ending point. We expect that public opinions--and public opinion--will recognize that individual preferences must be realized in the real world; hence knowledge must temper and anchor preferences as well as advance them.

I have addressed this point, and I have found that anchoring is unlikely to occur. Few citizens appear to possess the specific, relevant knowledge that would presumably be needed to accomplish this task, and, more directly, few seem to use the knowledge they do possess in an anchoring fashion.

Broader Themes

My efforts to address these basic questions about the nature and workings of political knowledge have produced new insights in both of these areas. And these efforts and analyses have also touched on some larger concerns that extend beyond these more discrete subjects and areas.

First, I have attempted to bring political knowledge research into closer congruence with other types of political cognition research. Generally speaking, different cognitions have been studied separately. While this is understandable, given their divergent natures and functions--values do differ from beliefs, attributions do differ from attitudes, and so on--this emphasis on uniqueness may obscure elements of commonality. After all, all of these are types of political cognitions.

More specifically, I have attempted to use attitude research as a template and a model for my analyses of political knowledge. In part, this was a practical approach. Attitude research is the most advanced and best developed field of political cognition study, and thus it could offer suggestions and guidance about how to proceed here. However this approach was also an effort to see how well attitude research would apply here, and how much consolidation could be accomplished; as such, our approach was driven by the belief that political cognitions are likely to share a great deal of similarity and by the meta-assumption that the end goal of social science work is broad coverage and parsimonious explanation. It may be unrealistic to expect a "unified theory of cognition," but this still is likely to be a useful goal and exercise.

Second, and somewhat relatedly, I have tried to put political knowledge research on a sounder psychological footing. Political knowledge work has largely developed apart from the

mainstream--as I have noted, attitude research is much more advanced--and thus it has failed to incorporate some newer psychological research and to move beyond older approaches and assumptions.⁷³ I have endeavored to take two main thrusts of modern social psychology work--constructed judgments and heuristic reasoning--and to better incorporate them into political knowledge research.

Third, I have attempted to recast the nature of citizen competence. Though this term is not yet a "household word" in this area, even a casual glance at the mass behavior and political psychology literatures shows that most of the research topics here--political tolerance, issue voting, attitude stability and constraint, and, of course, political knowledge--do center on this concern; that is, on the question of whether Americans can competently perform their political responsibilities in our democratic, republican political system.

"Knowledge matters" here because it has been seen as the core of citizen competence; the "keystone" to use Delli and Carpini's phrase. This position has seemed well supported: strong correlations between political knowledge levels and various kinds of citizen competence. However this has approach has always seemed underdetermined; structure without process. More directly, we would expect that it is important how this knowledge is used. Introduction of constructed judgments further emphasizes this point; it puts a premium on process. Thus I have argued that recognition of the importance of process forces us to recognize the importance of cognitive skills as well; both matter in citizen competence.

Fourth, and finally, I have uncovered some interesting results concerning political knowledge. While conventional wisdom suggests knowledge is an unmitigated good--the more knowledge, the better⁷⁴ --a more complex view calls this convention into question. The

introduction of misbeliefs--that is, the notion that “knowledge” can be wrong--shows us that using that inaccurate beliefs to guide political opinion can have undesirable effects. Moreover, when people use knowledge to advance attitudes, but not anchor them, we can see similar biasing effects, and polarization as well.

Further Research

Finally, an obligatory call for “further research.” I advocate continued efforts to explore the nature of citizen competence, continued efforts to place political knowledge research on a sounder “psychological footing” and to integrate knowledge research and research on other political cognitions, and continued research on the nature of political knowledge and the ways that it functions in political judgment processes.

Endnotes

1. Quote is from Graber, 1984.
2. The author is grateful to James Kuklinksi for providing this key insight.
3. In *Public Opinion*, Lippmann cites a classic example of this latter point. He describes a remote island, peopled by Britons, Germans and Frenchmen. Ships called rarely, so the residents were almost always “behind the times.” Lippmann describes a scene in September, 1914, when an arriving ship shocked the island residents with news that their countries were now at war. “For six strange weeks they had acted as if they were friends, when in fact they were enemies (1922, 3).”
4. This point is made by psychologists as well; Fiske and Taylor note that several social psychology subfields point toward the common conclusion that individuals “actively construct their own reality (Fiske and Taylor, 1984, 139).”
5. Given the primacy of mechanisms in science, this lack of attention is surprising indeed. It would suggest that this results, at least in part, from the heavy reliance on correlational statistical methodology in mass behavior and political knowledge research.
6. Some specific effects have received more focused attention. For example, several scholars have argued that differing amounts of thought about politics account for the differing levels of attitudinal constraint that are seen (Fiske and Kinder 1981; Judd and Krosnick 1989).
7. It is interesting to note the irony here. Although Zaller places political knowledge at the center of his model--an individual’s level of political knowledge determines his success at the screening process and thus the nature of his considerations and the content, structure and stability of his political attitudes--this knowledge plays a decidedly peripheral role. Knowledge serves a simple screening function, and citizens never use their knowledge to directly shape or inform their attitudes.
8. Indeed, Zaller’s model posits a radically heuristic process, one which “makes no allowance for citizens to think, reason or deliberate” about politics (1992, 45).
9. On further consideration, it seems obvious that traditional research had no choice but to posit systematic reasoning. Extensive knowledge was the centerpiece of citizen competence, and this knowledge could only be employed through a process of extensive reasoning.
10. This argument is well supported by empirical results. Performance on survey knowledge items correlates strongly with various measures of citizen competence such as attitude stability and constraint.
11. Quote is from Achen 1975, 1220.

12. This point provides additional reason to study the accuracy of citizens political beliefs; after all, knowledge must be accurate in order to properly anchor attitudes.

13. I would note that this construction is purely cognitive; i.e. it does not explicitly consider the role and importance of motive.

14. Wilson and Hodges summarize a number of classic social psychology works by noting that “Historically, attitudes have been defined as evaluations that are stable over time (Wilson and Hodges 1991, 38).” Similarly, Kinder and Sears define values as “general and enduring standards (Kinder and Sears 1985, 674).” Delli Carpini and Keeter define political knowledge as factual information about politics that is “stored in long-term memory (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996, 10).”

15. It is also important to note that different types of questions are likely to be more or less susceptible to inference. I discuss this point in greater detail later in this dissertation (Chapter 2, 26-27; Chapter 3, 42-44).

16. Indeed, I can offer anecdotal evidence of this. One survey item (used in Chapters 3 and 4 of this dissertation) asked respondents what percentage of welfare recipients are African-American. I asked several academic colleagues to answer this question, and the answers were revealing. Several engaged in a spoken construction process, e.g. “Well, I know blacks make up about twelve percent of the U.S. population, and I know they tend to have higher welfare rates than whites, so I would say, oh, about fifty percent.”

17. Of course, John Zaller has taken a stronger stance here; he argues that respondents simply use a construction process to “answer questions” on surveys (1992). While this position is consistent with the general thrust of my argument, I stop short of making such a sweeping claim.

18. This is why low knowledge levels among the public have been such a continuing source of concern.

19. Indeed, inference and heuristics would seem to be similar. If we treat heuristics as a form of inference -- one based on the assumption that simple cues can reliably capture more complex situations -- then better inferential skills should promote more effective use of heuristics. This implies a broader and deeper homomorphism between the two.

20. This hierarchy is reflected in the debate about whether heuristics can work as well as extensive knowledge and systematic reasoning.

21. This claim would come as no surprise to social psychologists. Inference is basic in this field; indeed, one leading text flatly states that “inference is the central concern of social cognition (Fiske and Taylor, 1984, 246).” Psychologists emphasize inference for the same reasons I do; because the varied complexity of life demands it.

22. Perhaps surprisingly, given my claim that relevant information is required (Chapter 4, 90), past political knowledge research has typically relied on measures of very broad, general political information. However this work implicitly assumes that this general knowledge is a marker for more specific knowledge, and that specific, relevant knowledge is necessary for “good” political judgments.
23. The author has formulated two of these idiosyncratic cognitive tools. One is the “cynicism heuristic,” a predictive tool which states that the least desirable outcomes are the most likely to occur. The other, for lack of a better name, might be called the heuristic of “increasing pressure and diminishing return.” This heuristic holds that the harder a product or service is promoted, the less likely it is to be a bargain for the consumer (because it is more likely to be highly profitable for the seller).
24. While some DKs probably result when respondents lack the motivation to construct an answer, I would argue that it is more common to find situations where respondents are unable to construct a credible answer.
25. Of course, the most obvious and interesting finding here is that a substantial fraction of respondents--about 30%--did answer these questions. Breaking with earlier analyses, which suggest that such opinions are simply “made up,” Schuman and Presser view these sorts of responses as meaningful. Specifically, they argue that respondents “make an educated (though often wrong) guess as to what the obscure acts represent, then answer reasonably in their own terms about the constructed object (1996, 159).” Though this argument is not directly relevant to my argument about knowledge questions, it does support both the constructed judgment approach and the ubiquity and importance of inference in survey question answering.
26. Interestingly, Nadeau and Niemi found that several other factors also affected responses to factual knowledge questions. Respondents gave fewer DK responses and also fewer correct answers--i.e. they gave more *incorrect* answers--when relevant environmental cues were available and when they held strong opinions relevant to the facts being measured. For example, respondents who lived in areas with high Hispanic populations and who worried about high Hispanic immigration were more likely to overestimate the percentage of Hispanics in the American population as a whole. Thus these respondents were misled by bad cues more than they were aided by good ones. This speaks to the complexity of inference, and to the need for judicious and appropriate use of cues.
27. Moreover, this general finding is reflected in a wide variety of individual items. A number of factual knowledge questions have been asked, with identical or similar wording, at multiple points in time. Many of these items show high levels of over-time stability.
28. This is no surprise to any instructor who has used multiple choice tests in the classroom. Indeed, standardized testing firms have elaborate item construction rules to minimize and discourage this.

29. This example comes from early astronomy. Prevailing belief posited a “geocentric” universe, but this flawed theory fit poorly with empirical astronomical observations. The Greek astronomer Ptolemy provided a temporary solution by devising a rather tortured model that managed to “explain” this empirical evidence in terms of this incorrect theory.

30. A further elaboration on open-ended vs closed-ended questions further bolsters this claim. In an analysis of these two question types, Schuman and Presser found that open-ended questions tended to have slightly higher DK rates than close-ended questions. This is generally consistent with the constructed judgment hypothesis--it is harder to guess on open-ended questions because they lack any “cues.” Moreover, consistent with much previous research, these authors also found that differences in DK rates varied by education level, that is, that DK s were higher for respondents with lower levels of education (1996). Bringing these trends together, my analysis of my own questions showed that virtually all of the difference between open and closed question resulted from the tendency for poorly-educated respondents to give more DK answers on open ended questions. Clearly this is consistent with my general argument that constructed judgments play an important part in answering survey questions, and also with the claim that education facilitates effective inference.

DK/NA Rates, By Education and Question Type

	Educ (yrs)	Closed Question		Open Question		
		0-11	12	13+	0-11	12
DK/NA	5.7%	2.4%	1.8%	15.1%	5.7%	2.4%

31. Close reading shows an asymmetry here. Changes were classified as “learning” if respondents moved from any non-correct answer in the first wave--wrong answer, DK or NA--to the correct answer in the second wave. However the criteria for “forgetting” were slightly more stringent. Changes were classified as forgetting if respondents moved from a right answer in the first wave to a DK or NA in the second wave. Changes from correct answers to incorrect answers were not classified as forgetting.

32. One other finding is interesting as well. A glance back at Table 2.5 shows that learning consistently dwarfs forgetting by a wide margin. Absent any compelling psychological reason for this imbalance, I believe that some real learning probably did take place here. However this may be an artifact created by the demand effects of the panel design; respondents had their interest piqued on these matters--and they may have expected to answer these questions again--which would presumably tend to spur efforts to learn these facts.

33. Responses are reported only for the “youths” in the study, since data for the parents is not readily available. Also, the item on incumbent governors is omitted from my analysis. Answers to this item will vary across states, and, while this item is identically worded across waves, there was obviously a great deal of incumbent turnover over the 17-year span covered by this survey. Thus I cannot rigorously compare answers on this item.

34. The contention that these responses represent fixed knowledge is further supported by other evidence. As mentioned in the previous note, the data reported here is for the “youths” in the panel, who were recent high school graduates at the time of the first wave in 1965. This allows us to predict aggregate patterns over time. I would expect that young adults just out of high school would do reasonably well on institutional questions, since school curricula tend to emphasize these sorts of facts (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996, 190; Jennings 1996, 234). And, by extension, we would expect that these levels of institutional knowledge would drop off due to forgetting over time, particularly over the long spans in this survey. This is exactly what Jennings finds; aggregate knowledge levels on the senate term and Supreme Court size items do drop off sharply from the first to the second waves, and are stable after that (1996, 234-5). Conversely, however, we would expect knowledge of surveillance facts to increase. Current events receive little emphasis in schools, but people are more exposed in world, know levels do rise. Again, this is what Jennings finds; knowledge levels for the Tito item rises across both waves of the survey (235-6). These patterns are consistent with the play of real world events and learning.

35. While I cannot prove that respondents in pattern eight are giving different answers across waves--again, all of these respondents could conceivably be giving exactly the same wrong responses on all three waves--it seems highly likely that there was a substantial amount of change here.

36. Pattern eight might also seem to represent stability; respondents in this category gave wrong answers in each of the three waves, and so it is possible that they gave the same wrong answer on each occasion. Although it is impossible to determine this with certainty--exact answers were not recorded, and answers were merely coded as “right” and “wrong,”--the high levels of instability elsewhere in the table suggest that this pattern must have been unusual.

37. Actually, Converse compared across all three waves of the early NES panel; 1956, 1958 and 1960 (this provided the basis for the “black and white” model). However he found that patterns from 1956-1958 and from 1958-1960 were quite similar. Thus I report only the latter correlations here, just as Converse did.

38. I chose “senator” rather than congressman or governor because this helps to standardize across states. Political figures obviously vary in salience and this variance is likely to be especially high for figures like governors or congressmen. Different governors may be more or less active and prominent, and the numbers--and district sizes--of congressmen vary across states; the single representative from North Dakota is likely to be more prominent than one of the 54 representatives from California. Using senators helps to correct for these problems, because there are two from every state. First, this standardizes numbers across states. Second, it allows for two possible answers instead of one. Since I only ask for one name, it seems more likely that every state has a reasonably prominent senator than that every state or district has a prominent governor or congressman.

39. Furthermore, the basic, fixed knowledge items also include one question from each of the three major question types: institutional features, regime/political actors, and current affairs.

40. Recognizing that the Social Security and defense spending items may have been more widely known, I did conduct a formal test to back up my assumptions. I compared results for the full six-item scale and a four item scale with the SS and defense items removed. Removing these items--one third of the total--reduced the mean number of correct items by almost exactly one-third, for both groups, which suggests that the defense and Social Security items were performing much like the other four items. Accordingly, I report results from the full six item scale.

41. Again, Schuman and Presser found this pattern with “DK” responses (discussed here, Chapter 2, 22).

42. At first glance, it might seem that I could test for this by including an interaction term in my regression model. However I would argue that this is not the case; I am not specifying an interaction effect here. An interaction effect means that the effect of one independent variable varies as a function of the value of a second independent variable. Here I am simply arguing that variables are mutually reinforcing. (In any case, my attempts to include an education by sophistication interaction term resulted in unacceptable levels of multicollinearity).

43. I would note that these low means further bolster my contention that few, if any, citizens actually know the facts tested by these six items.

44. Though guessing has sometimes been acknowledged in political knowledge research, it has been marginalized as a minor point--indeed, as a sort of survey artifact--not worthy of serious scholarly study. Even the most exhaustive treatments, i.e. Schuman and Presser, tend to ignore it completely.

45. I would hasten to add that this practice is hardly surprising; the causal correlates--education, political interest, and so on--are the same for both knowledge and cognitive skills. Thus it is easy to mistakenly label the effects of cognitive skills as the effects of fixed knowledge.

46. While fixed knowledge can also be right or wrong, I would argue that fixed knowledge is substantially less likely to be incorrect. As I note elsewhere in this chapter, most fixed knowledge is learned from elites or the media, and it is unlikely that these “teachers” provide very much false factual information.

47. Here again, I am equating survey responses and enduring factual beliefs. Here again, I would justify this practice by reiterating the points originally made in Chapter 1 (3-4). Like constructed attitudes, constructed factual beliefs result when citizens map vague, inchoate cognitions onto specific survey questions; thus they spring from more basic cognitions that are quite fixed and enduring. Hence constructed factual beliefs do have a meaningful substantive status; like attitudes, they are indeed enduring and “real.”

48. There has been some disagreement over the nature of this third ordering force. Converse labeled it “social” in his original formulation (Converse 1964). And a later paper argued for the existence of a fourth “political” force (Carmines and Stimson 1982). However a close reading suggests that all these authors are talking about roughly the same thing: diffusion of attitude structures from elites to masses. Since this is primarily a political process, involving political elites, I call it political rather than social.

However this should not be taken to suggest that cognitive structures do not diffuse from social sources. Attitudes often are “packaged” into wholes by social actors like religious institutions. For example, the Catholic Church has a clear “moral ideology” -- that is, a well organized set of positions on a variety of moral and ethical issues. Moreover, we know that parents’ party ID is the strongest predictor of their childrens’ partisan stances, which suggests that cognitive structures probably diffuse via this route as well.

49. Political elites are the primary political force that structures attitudes, while the primary psychological forces include factors like motivation or processing modes, and logical structuring forces arise when divergent attitudes cannot logically co-exist; e.g. Converse’s eerily prescient comment that “One cannot believe that government expenditures should be increased, that government revenues should be decreased, and that a more favorable balance of the budget should be achieved all at the same time (Converse 1964, 209).”

50. However see Page and Shapiro 1992, ch. 9, for a short but admittedly impressive list of exceptions.

51. For example, Delli Carpini and Keeter found that many citizens believed that the Constitution guaranteed Americans a high school education and a job, or that double jeopardy is permitted and that accused persons must prove their innocence. Similarly, many citizens believed that the president could unilaterally dismiss Congress or suspend the Constitution, or appoint judges without Senate approval.

52. The point about “creating one’s own reality” occasions the opportunity to make a comment about motivational factors. Though eclipsed by the overwhelming emphasis on cognition, interest in motivation has never entirely disappeared in this area; analysis of citizens’ perceptions of candidates’ issue positions has always relied most heavily on a motivation based “projection” thesis. More generally, motivations may be able to explain some problems that cognition cannot (Kunda 1990). These points suggest that motivation may well play a role in the factual misbelief process. However, consistent with the “cognitive imperialism” that has ruled social psychology and political science in recent times, my analyses stress cognitive factors and explanations.

53. Unfortunately, the data for this study is more limited than one would like, a circumstance that results from several different factors. Most generally, factual knowledge questions are not common to begin with. Researchers have asked relatively few of these questions for fear of losing rapport with their respondents (Neuman 1986; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1991; Dimock and Popkin 1995).

This limitation is further compounded here; the special requirements of “misbelief” research mean that only a fraction of the questions in this already shallow pool are suitable. These items must meet two requirements. First, they must be ordered; that is, coded as a categorical or continuous scale rather than simply as true or false. This requirement rules out several broad categories of information measures, including identification of political figures and most other “textual” facts. Respondents may misidentify Martin Luther King, for example, but it is difficult to assign meaningful direction to these answers. Second, this scale must have a politically meaningful direction--that is, going from one end to the other must have political consequences. While some scales have such meaning, this need not always be the case; believing that there are seven justices on the U.S. Supreme Court--or eleven or fifteen--has no obvious political import. Practically speaking, these requirements typically limit suitable data to quantitative questions that record numerical responses--such as raw numbers or percentages--and also have a meaningful direction.

54. A third question--concerning recent trends in the size of the federal budget deficit--met the technical qualifications for inclusion but was dropped because of insufficient variability in the responses

55. These general knowledge measures consisted of all the non-economic factual knowledge items on the NES, and the three general knowledge items on the IGPA survey. I used different scoring standards for sophisticates here--top third for the NES items, top fifth for the IGPA items --because these divisions yielded the most desirable proportions for sophisticates and non-sophisticates. This procedure labeled approximately one third of respondents in each sample as sophisticates and two thirds as non-sophisticates.

56. This finding is interesting in itself, and it provides additional evidence that misbeliefs are “real,” since pure guessing would not be expected to yield such results. After all, “non-attitudes” are distinguished precisely by the *lack* of a coherent pattern (Converse 1964). If guesses were mostly random, we would not expect to see this type of covariance. Indeed, to the extent such guessing does occur, it would tend to attenuate these correlations.

57. A note on variable choice is probably appropriate here. As is apparent, I have no direct measures of judgement heuristics. This may seem to be problematic, since I have argued that constructed factual beliefs and inferences will largely result from the employment of these cognitive elements. However a closer examination shows that this is not the case. I have indeed argued that factual beliefs will be produced by heuristics, but I have also argued that these heuristics will be shaped by political and psychological factors like attitudes, demographics and elite and media communications. Thus these more distal variables should be related to factual beliefs as well, and hence it is reasonable to employ them.

58. Given the strong overestimation skew in the distribution of responses on the inflation measure, lower estimates are generally more accurate.

59. One might suspect that these results occur because sophisticates do better on the inflation and unemployment questions--that is, non-sophisticates exhibit more variance in their answers. While sophisticates were indeed more accurate, the two groups nonetheless had similar standard deviations on each of these items.

	<u>Inflation</u>		<u>Unemployment</u>	
	% Correct	Std. Dev	% Correct	Std. Dev.
Sophisticates	61.3	.57	67.3	.63
Non-Sophisticates	36.4	.47	29.9	.57

60. This index was created by summing the six factual belief scores, then standardizing them, which yielded a range from - 1 to + 1. The former value indicates maximally anti-welfare beliefs, the latter maximally pro-welfare beliefs, and zero indicates beliefs that are, on the whole, unbiased.

61. These values might benefit from some explanation. “Government role” refers to views about the size of the role government should assume in addressing and ameliorating social problems. “Egalitarianism” indicates views about the benefits and fairness of financial and social equality. “Humanitarianism” refers to views about the degree to which people are responsible for helping one another.

62. This result echoes a somewhat analogous finding from the political tolerance literature. In one study, citizens asked to reflect about tolerance actually voiced less tolerant views than citizens who gave immediate “gut” responses (Kuklinski et al. 1993).

63. Consistent with my arguments in Chapter 1, I reiterate here that knowledge is only partially responsible for these salutary effects, and that inferential and cognitive skills also play an important part.

64. This model obviously owes a strong debt to John Zaller; it is quite similar to--indeed it is based upon--his “RAS” model.

65. This approach obviously ignores the possibility that citizens might use an on-line process to generate their political opinions. I defend my reliance on the constructed judgment approach in two ways. First, the constructed judgment approach generally fits empirical issue attitude data more closely than does the on-line approach; indeed, the constructed judgment approach was inspired by the on-line approach’s failure to explain over-time fluctuations in issue attitudes. Second, and more broadly, it is difficult to see how an on-line process could facilitate the effective use of political knowledge. If knowledge is perceived, incorporated into the on-line judgment operator, and then forgotten, as most on-line models suggest, it is difficult to see how this knowledge could be effectively used to anchor attitudes and opinions.

66. Again, I am not claiming that these items exhaust the facts that are directly relevant to welfare or health care reform. No finite set of items could accomplish this. However these facts do represent a reasonable sample of this sort of information. They were selected after consultation with a number of public policy experts, and, moreover, they reflect two fundamental aspects of these policy situations; personal characteristics of recipients (items two, five and six on welfare; item two on health care) and institutional characteristics of the welfare and health care systems (items one, three and four on welfare; items one, three and four on health care).

67. Of course, this reality testing would be imperfect at best; following Zaller, it seems likely that more knowledgeable citizens would perform this screening function more successfully than their less knowledgeable peers. More fundamentally, it seems that relatively few persuasive messages are likely to fail this test--one can reality test matters of fact but not matters of value. The claim that welfare programs are “bankrupting America” could be measured against the fact that welfare consumes only about 1% of the federal budget, but the claim that welfare facilitates “moral decay” could not.

68. A perennial favorite of Ronald Reagan--need I say more?

69. Pundits often compare the public policy process to making sausage; here I extend the analogy to the actual products of this process as well.

70. Other items dealing with general issues--e.g. balancing the federal budget--are available, but these suffer from a different problem. While we can distinguish "good" and "bad" alternatives, the survey does not include any measures of specific knowledge relevant to these particular issues.

71. There is at least one other possible explanation for these findings; citizens may recognize the problems with the "bad" policy options, but they may be reluctant to make trade-offs between beneficial results. However we have at least indirect evidence that this is not the case. An experimental manipulation in the IGPA survey framed trade-offs in different ways, that is, as losses or gains. However this did not affect results, which tends to discount the trade-offs argument.

72. This procedure is not without potential problems. Some psychologists have claimed that citizens lack access to their own cognitive processes, and others have argued that these sorts of statements are likely to represent rationalizations for the attitudes that were expressed (Nisbett and Wilson 1977; Lodge, Stroh and Wahlke 1990). Still, this procedure performs well empirically (Zaller 1992), and it also gives us an unusually direct glimpse into the "black box" of cognitive reasoning. While we usually make inferences about reasoning processes based on end results--i.e. actual judgments--the nature of the constructed judgment model gives us an opportunity to examine these processes at an intermediate stage.

73. This tendency is apparent in the political knowledge literature. The leading book in this area Delli Carpini and Keeter's *What Americans Know*, is essentially a reference text based entirely on traditional knowledge research approaches.

74. See Delli Carpini and Keeter for expressions of this sentiment (1996, 14, 136).

References

- Achen, C.H. 1975. "Mass Political Attitudes and the Survey Response." *American Political Science Review* 69: 1218-1231.
- Althaus, Scott L. 1996. "Who Speaks for the People?" Ph.D. dissertation, Northwestern University.
- Berelson, Bernard R., Paul F. Lazarsfeld and William N. McFee. 1954. *Voting: A Study of Opinion Formation in a Presidential Campaign*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Carmines, Edward G., and James A. Stimson. 1982. "Racial Issues and The Structure of Mass Belief Systems." *The Journal of Politics* 44:2-20.
- Conover, Pamela Johnston, and Stanley Feldman. 1989. "Candidate Perception in an Ambiguous World: Campaigns, Cues and Inference Processes." *American Journal of Political Science* 33:912-940.
- Converse, Jean M. 1976-77. "Predicting 'No Opinion' in the Polls." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 40:515-30.
- Converse, Philip E. 1964. "The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics." In D. Apter (ed.), *Ideology and Discontent*. New York: Free Press.
- Converse, Philip E. 1970. "Attitudes and Nonattitudes: Continuation of a Dialogue." In E. Tufté (ed.), *The Quantitative Analysis of Social Problems*. Reading MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Delli Carpini, Michael X., and Scott Keeter. 1991. "Stability and Change in the U.S. Public's Knowledge of Politics." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 55:583-612.
- Delli Carpini, Michael X., and Scott Keeter. 1996. *What Americans Know About Politics and Why it Matters*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Dimock, Michael A., and Samuel L. Popkin. 1995. "Who Knows?: Political Knowledge in Comparative Perspective." Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, April 6-8.
- Fiske, Susan T., and Donald R. Kinder. 1981. "Involvement, Expertise, and Schema Use: Evidence from Political Cognition." In N. Cantor and J. Kihlstrom (eds.), *Personality, Cognition and Social Interaction*. Hillsdale, N.J.: Erlbaum.

- Fiske, Susan T., and Shelley E. Taylor. 1984. *Social Cognition*. New York: Random House.
- Gilens, Martin. 1996. "Race and Poverty in America: Public Perceptions and the American Media." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 60:515-541.
- Gill, S. 1947. "How do You Stand on Sin?" *Tide* (March 14): 72.
- Glaser, R., and Chi, M.T. 1988. "Overview." In M.T.H. Chi, R. Glaser and M.J. Farr (eds.), *The Nature of Expertise*. Hillsdale, N.J.: Erlbaum.
- Graber, Doris A. 1984. *Processing the News: How People Tame the Information Tide*. New York: Longman.
- Hochschild, Jennifer L. 1999. "Where You Stand Depends on What You See: Connections Among Values, Perceptions of Fact, and Prescriptions." In James H. Kuklinski (ed.), *Citizens and Politics: Perspectives from Political Psychology*.
- Jennings, M. Kent. 1996. "Political Knowledge Over Time and Across Generations." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 60:228-252.
- Judd, C.M., and Jon A. Krosnick. 1989. "The Structural Bases of Consistency among Political Attitudes: Effects of Political Expertise and Attitude Importance." In A.R. Pratkanis, S.J. Breckler, and A.G. Greenwald (eds.), *Attitude Structure and Function*. Hillsdale, N.J.: Erlbaum.
- Kinder, Donald R., and David O. Sears. 1985. "Public Opinion and Political Action." In Gardner Lindzey and Elliot Aronson (eds.), *Handbook of Social Psychology*. 3d ed.: 659-741. New York: Random House.
- Krosnick, Jon A. 1990. "Expertise and Political Psychology." *Social Cognition* 8:1-8.
- Kuklinski, James H., Ellen Riggle, Victor Ottati, Norbert Schwarz and Robert S. Wyer Jr. 1993. "Thinking About Political Tolerance, More or Less, with More or Less Information." In George E. Marcus and Russell L. Hanson. (eds.), *Reconsidering the Democratic Public*. 225-247. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Kunda, Ziva. 1990. "The Case for Motivated Reasoning." *Psychological Bulletin* 108: 480-498.
- Lewis, Justin, Sut Jhally and Michael Morgan. 1991. *The Gulf War: A Study of the Media, Public Opinion and Public Knowledge*. Amherst, MA: The Center for the Study of Communication, University of Massachusetts.

- Lippmann, Walter. 1922. *Public Opinion*. New York: The Free Press.
- Lodge, Milton, Patrick Stroh, and John Wahlke. 1990. "Black-Box Models of Candidate Evaluation." *Political Behavior* 12:5-18.
- Lodge, Milton, Marco Steenbergen and Shawn Brau. 1993. "The Non-Persistence of Memory: Learning and Forgetting in the Process of Candidate Evaluation." Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, April 16.
- Lodge, Milton, Charles Taber, and Aron Chase Galonsky. 1999. "An Exploration on the Mechanisms of Motivated Reasoning." Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, April 15-17.
- Mansbridge, Jane J. 1980. *Beyond Adversary Democracy*. New York: Basic.
- Meier, Kenneth J., and James E. Campbell. 1979. "Issues Voting: An Empirical Examination of Individually Necessary and Jointly Sufficient Conditions." *American Politics Quarterly* 7:21-50.
- Morin, Richard. 1995. "A Distorted Image of Minorities." *Washington Post* October 8, 1995. p. A1.
- Nadeau, Richard, and Richard G. Niemi. 1995. "Educated Guesses: The Process of Answering Factual Knowledge Questions in Surveys." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 59:323-346.
- Neuman, W. Russell. 1986. *The Paradox of Mass Politics: Knowledge and Opinion in the American Electorate*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Nisbett, Richard E., and Timothy DeCamp Wilson. 1977. "Telling More Than We Can Know: Verbal Reports on Mental Processes." *Psychological Review* 84:231-259.
- Nisbett, Richard, and Lee Ross. 1980 *Human Inference: Strategies and Shortcomings of Social Judgment*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Page, Benjamin I., and Calvin Jones. 1979. "Reciprocal Effects of Policy Preferences, Party Loyalties and the Vote." *American Political Science Review* 73:1071-1089.
- Page, Benjamin I., and Robert Y. Shapiro. 1992. *The Rational Public: Fifty Years of Trends in Americans' Policy Preferences*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Popkin, Samuel L. 1991. *The Reasoning Voter: Communication and Persuasion in Presidential Campaigns*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- Schuman, Howard, and Stanley Presser. 1996. *Questions and Answers in Attitude Surveys: Experiments on Question Form, Wording and Context*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Schwieder, David W. 1996. "What Do We Know About Knowledge?" University of Illinois. Unpublished Manuscript.
- Simon, H.A. 1976. *Administrative Behavior: A Study of Decision-Making Processes in Administrative Organizations*. 2d ed. New York: Free Press.
- Sniderman, Paul M., Richard A. Brody and Philip E. Tetlock. 1991. *Reasoning and Choice: Explorations in Political Psychology*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Tuchman, Barbara W. 1984. *The March of Folly: From Troy to Vietnam*. New York: Knopf.
- Webster's New Riverside University Dictionary. 1984. Boston: Houghton Mifflin. 669.
- Wilson, Timothy D., and Sara D. Hodges. 1991. "Attitudes as Temporary Constructions." In A. Tesser and L. Martin. (eds.), *The Construction of Social Judgment*. Hillsdale, N.J. : Erlbaum.
- Zaller, John. 1990. "Political Awareness, Elite Opinion Leadership, and the Mass Survey Response." *Social Cognition* 8:125-153.
- Zaller, John. 1992. *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Zaller, John., and Stanley Feldman. 1992. "A Simple Theory of the Survey Response: Answering Questions versus Revealing Preferences." *American Journal of Political Science* 36:579-616.

Appendix

DELLI CARPINI AND KEETER 1989 FACTUAL KNOWLEDGE QUESTIONS

We are interested in knowing how well the media and the schools help people in understanding what's going on in politics. To help us do that, we'd like to ask you some questions about politics. Most people will not know the answers to many of these; if you don't know, don't worry about it, just tell me and we'll move on to the next one.

First, will you tell me who the Vice-President of the United States is?

- <1> DAN QUAYLE
- <2> SOMETHING ELSE
- <8> DON'T KNOW
- <9> NO ANSWER

For how many years is a president of the United States elected--that is, how many years are there in one term of office?

- <0-6> ENTER NUMBER OF YEARS
- <7> 7 OR MORE YEARS
- <8> DON'T KNOW
- <9> NO ANSWER

Will you tell me what the term "veto" means to you?
For example, what does it mean when the President vetoes a bill sent him by Congress?

- <1> PRESIDENT PREVENTS IT FROM BECOMING LAW;
SENDS IT BACK TO CONGRESS
- <2> DOESN'T AGREE WITH THE BILL
- <3> SOMETHING ELSE
- <8> DON'T KNOW
- <9> NO ANSWER

IF CORRECT: If the president vetoes a bill, can Congress override his veto?

- <1> YES
- <2> NO
- <8> DON'T KNOW
- <9> NO ANSWER

IF CORRECT: How much of a majority is required for the Senate and House to override a presidential veto?

- <1> TWO-THIRDS MAJORITY
- <2> SIMPLE MAJORITY
- <3> OTHER MAJORITY
- <8> DON'T KNOW
- <9> NO ANSWER

For each of the following political figures, please tell me if they are or were Democrats or Republicans.

Was former President Harry Truman a Democrat or a Republican?

- <1> DEMOCRAT
- <2> REPUBLICAN
- <3> SOMETHING ELSE
- <8> DON'T KNOW
- <9> NO ANSWER

How about former President Richard Nixon? (Was he a Democrat or a Republican?)

- <1> DEMOCRAT
- <2> REPUBLICAN
- <3> SOMETHING ELSE
- <8> DON'T KNOW
- <9> NO ANSWER

And how about former President Franklin Roosevelt?

- <1> DEMOCRAT**
- <2> REPUBLICAN**
- <3> SOMETHING ELSE**
- <8> DON'T KNOW**
- <9> NO ANSWER**

The Chief Justice of the Supreme Court is William Rehnquist. Can you tell me if he is generally considered a liberal, a moderate, or a conservative?

- <1> LIBERAL**
- <2> MODERATE**
- <3> CONSERVATIVE**
- <8> DON'T KNOW**
- <9> NO ANSWER**

Do you happen to know the names of the two United States Senators from your state?

- <1> [fill sen1]**
- <2> [fill sen2]**
- <3> SOMEONE ELSE NAMED**
- <8> DON'T KNOW**
- <9> NO ANSWER**

(SECOND SENATOR'S NAME)

- <1> [fill sen1]**
- <2> [fill sen2]**
- <3> SOMEONE ELSE NAMED**
- <8> DON'T KNOW**
- <9> NO ANSWER**

Can you remember offhand the name of the person who represents your district in the U.S. House of Representative... that is, your Congressman or Congresswoman?

- <1> YES**
- <2> NO**
- <8> DON'T KNOW**
- <9> NO ANSWER**

What is that person's name?

IF CORRECT: People often use a scale from 1 to 10 to rate things. Think about a scale on which 10 is extremely liberal, and 1 is not liberal at all. Where would you place the person who represents your district in the U.S. House?

**<1-10> ENTER EXACT NUMBER
<88> DON'T KNOW
<99> NO ANSWER**

Can you tell me the name of the current Governor of your state?

**<1> [fill gov]
<2> SOMETONE ELSE
<8> DON'T KNOW
<9> NO ANSWER**

Have you ever heard of THE NEW DEAL?

**<1> YES
<2> NO
<8> DON'T KNOW
<9> NO ANSWER**

IF CORRECT: Do you know about when the New Deal occurred?

**CODE DECADE (E.G. 1930S) OR YEAR
8888 FOR DON'T KNOW
9999 FOR NO ANSWER**

IF CORRECT: Can you tell me anything about the New Deal?

Can you tell me if the U.S. Constitution always guaranteed women the right to vote, or did a woman's right to vote have to be added to the Constitution as an amendment?

- <1> ALWAYS GUARANTEED**
- <2> ADDED AS AN AMENDMENT**
- <8> DON'T KNOW**
- <9> NO ANSWER**

IF CORRECT: Do you know approximately when that amendment was ratified?

**CODE DECADE (E.G. 1930S) OR YEAR
8888 FOR DON'T KNOW
9999 FOR NO ANSWER**

What are the first 10 Amendments in the Constitution called?

- <1> THE BILL OF RIGHTS**
- <2> SOMETHING ELSE**
- <8> DON'T KNOW**
- <9> NO ANSWER**

Can you tell me anything that the First Amendment to the Constitution says?

- <1> FREEDOM OF RELIGION**
- <2> NO GOVERNMENT RELIGION**
- <3> FREEDOM OF SPEECH**
- <4> FREEDOM OF THE PRESS**
- <5> FREEDOM TO ASSEMBLE**
- <6> FREEDOM TO PETITION THE GOVERNMENT FOR REDRESS OF GRIEVANCES**
- <7> OTHER**
- <8> DON'T KNOW**
- <9> NO ANSWER**

Anything else about the First Amendment?

- <1> FREEDOM OF RELIGION**
- <2> NO GOVERNMENT RELIGION**
- <3> FREEDOM OF SPEECH**
- <4> FREEDOM OF THE PRESS**
- <5> FREEDOM TO ASSEMBLE**
- <6> FREEDOM TO PETITION THE GOVERNMENT FOR REDRESS OF GRIEVANCES**
- <7> OTHER**
- <8> DON'T KNOW**
- <9> NO ANSWER**

Anything else?

- <1> FREEDOM OF RELIGION**
- <2> NO GOVERNMENT RELIGION**
- <3> FREEDOM OF SPEECH**
- <4> FREEDOM OF THE PRESS**
- <5> FREEDOM TO ASSEMBLE**
- <6> FREEDOM TO PETITION THE GOVERNMENT FOR REDRESS OF GRIEVANCES**
- <7> OTHER**
- <8> DON'T KNOW**
- <9> NO ANSWER**

When you hear or read about the fifth amendment, what does it mean to you?

- <1> CAN'T BE FORCED TO TESTIFY AGAINST YOURSELF; "TAKE THE FIFTH"**
- <2> "DUE PROCESS OF LAW" NECESSARY TO TAKE YOUR PROPERTY, LIBERTY, OR LIFE**
- <3> YOUR PROPERTY CAN'T BE TAKEN WITHOUT JUST COMPENSATION**
- <4> INDICTMENT BY GRAND JURY**
- <5> NO DOUBLE JEOPARDY (CAN'T BE TRIED TWICE FOR SAME CRIME)**
- <6> SOMETHING ELSE**
- <8> DONT KNOW**
- <9> NO ANSWER**

Anything else about the fifth amendment?

- <1> CAN'T BE FORCED TO TESTIFY AGAINST YOURSELF; "TAKE THE FIFTH"**
- <2> "DUE PROCESS OF LAW" NECESSARY TO TAKE YOUR PROPERTY, LIBERTY, OR LIFE**
- <3> YOUR PROPERTY CAN'T BE TAKEN WITHOUT JUST COMPENSATION**
- <4> INDICTMENT BY GRAND JURY**
- <5> NO DOUBLE JEOPARDY (CAN'T BE TRIED TWICE FOR SAME CRIME)**
- <6> SOMETHING ELSE**
- <8> DON'T KNOW**
- <9> NO ANSWER**

I am going to read a few political rights. For each one please tell me if it is currently guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution:

Does a member of the Communist Party have the right to run for president of the United States?

- <1> YES**
- <2> NO**
- <8> DON'T KNOW**
- <9> NO ANSWER**

If someone is accused of a very serious crime but they can't afford a lawyer, does the Constitution require that the government provide them with a lawyer?

- <1> YES**
- <2> NO**
- <8> DON'T KNOW**
- <9> NO ANSWER**

Can a public school teacher require students to say the pledge of allegiance?

- <1> YES**
- <2> NO**
- <8> DON'T KNOW**
- <9> NO ANSWER**

Suppose a woman in your state wanted to have an abortion during the first 3 months of her pregnancy. Could your state government prohibit her from having an abortion?

- <1> YES
- <2> NO
- <8> DON'T KNOW
- <9> NO ANSWER

Prior to the Supreme Court's decision in the case of Roe versus Wade, was abortion illegal in all states, or did it vary from state to state?

- <1> ILLEGAL IN ALL STATES
- <2> VARIED FROM STATE TO STATE
- <8> DON'T KNOW
- <9> NO ANSWER

On a different issue, can you tell me whether the U.S. government under Ronald Reagan supported the contras or the Sandinistas in Nicaragua?

- <1> CONTRAS
- <2> SANDINISTAS
- <3> NEITHER
- <4> SOMETHING ELSE
- <8> DON'T KNOW
- <9> NO ANSWER

Are the Contras the government of Nicaragua or are they trying to overthrow the government?

- <1> GOVERNMENT
- <2> TRYING TO OVERTHROW GOVERNMENT
- <8> DON'T KNOW
- <9> NO ANSWER

Are the Sandinistas the government of Nicaragua or are they trying to overthrow the government?

- <1> GOVERNMENT**
- <2> TRYING TO OVERTHROW GOVERNMENT**
- <8> DON'T KNOW**
- <9> NO ANSWER**

And what about El Salvador... does the U.S. support the government of El Salvador or the rebels there?

- <1> GOVERNMENT**
- <2> REBELS**
- <3> NEITHER**
- <4> SOMETHING ELSE**
- <8> DON'T KNOW**
- <9> NO ANSWER**

Last year the Reagan administration negotiated an arms agreement with the Soviet Union. Do you recall anything about that?

- <1> YES**
- <2> NO**
- <8> DON'T KNOW**
- <9> NO ANSWER**

(IF HEARD OF ARMS AGREEMENT) Can you tell me what kind of arms were limited by those negotiations? (PROBE FOR DETAIL... WHERE)

- <1> MEDIUM RANGE NUCLEAR MISSILES IN WESTERN EUROPE**
- <2> MEDIUM RANGE NUCLEAR MISSILES -- DON'T KNOW WHERE**
- <3> NUCLEAR MISSILES**
- <4> NUCLEAR WEAPONS**
- <5> SOMETHING ELSE**
- <8> DON'T KNOW**
- <9> NO ANSWER**

Have you ever heard of the "Superfund"?

- <1> YES**
- <2> NO**
- <8> DON'T KNOW**
- <9> NO ANSWER**

(IF HEARD OF SUPERFUND) What is is the Superfund?

- <1> MONEY TO CLEAN UP TOXIC WASTE SITES**
- <2> ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION**
- <3> SOMETHING ELSE**
- <8> DON'T KNOW**
- <9> NO ANSWER**

Please tell me if each of the following is the responsibility of the President, the Congress, or the Supreme Court.

Whose responsibility is it to determine if a law is constitutional or not?

- <1> PRESIDENT**
- <2> CONGRESS**
- <3> SUPREME COURT**
- <8> DON'T KNOW**
- <9> NO ANSWER**

Whose responsibility is it to declare war (the president, the Congress, or the Supreme court)?

- <1> PRESIDENT**
- <2> CONGRESS**
- <3> SUPREME COURT**
- <4> BOTH PRESIDENT AND CONGRESS**
- <5> OTHER COMBINATION (E.G. ALL)**
- <8> DON'T KNOW**
- <9> NO ANSWER**

And whose responsibility is it to appoint judges to the Federal Courts?

- <1> PRESIDENT**
- <2> CONGRESS**
- <3> SUPREME COURT**
- <8> DON'T KNOW**
- <9> NO ANSWER**

From what you've heard, what kind of an effect do you think a high American tax on foreign goods would have on our trade?

- <1> US WOULD BUY LESS FROM FOREIGN COUNTRIES**
- <2> WOULD MAKE TRADE DEFICIT GO DOWN; IMPROVE BALANCE OF TRADE**
- <3> OTHER COUNTRIES WOULD RETALIATE; "TRADE WAR"**
- <4> PRICES WOULD GO UP**
- <5> SOMETHING ELSE**
- <8> DON'T KNOW**
- <9> NO ANSWER**

When you read about an economic recession, what does that mean to you?

- <1> ECONOMIC SLOWDOWN**
- <2> BUSINESSES NOT DOING WELL, CLOSING, FAILING**
- <3> UNEMPLOYMENT; UNEMPLOYMENT INCREASES**
- <4> SOMETHING ELSE**
- <8> DON'T KNOW**
- <9> NO ANSWER**

In the past few years, has the U.S. government taken in more money in taxes than it has spent, has it spent more than it has taken in, or has it pretty much balanced the money it taxes and spends?

- <1> TAKEN IN MORE THAN IT HAS SPENT**
- <2> SPENT MORE THAN IT HAS TAKEN IN**
- <3> BALANCED TAXING AND SPENDING**
- <8> DON'T KNOW**
- <9> NO ANSWER**

And in the past few years, have people in the U.S. bought more foreign goods than we have sold to people overseas, or have we sold more to them than we have bought, or has it pretty much balanced out?

- <1> BOUGHT MORE FOREIGN GOODS THAN WE HAVE SOLD**
- <2> SOLD MORE OVERSEAS THAN WE HAVE BOUGHT**
- <3> BALANCED OUT**
- <8> DON'T KNOW**
- <9> NO ANSWER**

As a result of the election last year which party now has the most members in the U.S. House of Representatives in Washington?

- <1> REPUBLICAN PARTY**
- <2> DEMOCRATIC PARTY**
- <3> PARTIES ARE EQUAL (VOLUNTEERED)**
- <8> DON'T KNOW**
- <9> NO ANSWER**

And as a result of the election last year which party now has the most members in the U.S. Senate?

- <1> REPUBLICAN PARTY**
- <2> DEMOCRATIC PARTY**
- <3> PARTIES ARE EQUAL (VOLUNTEERED)**
- <8> DON'T KNOW**
- <9> NO ANSWER**

Before we hang up I would like to ask you about how the government in Washington spends the money it gets in taxes. Most people don't know exactly, but we would be interested in your guess.

About how many cents of your federal tax dollar are going to the defense department these days?

(PROMPT: "Do you have a guess?")

**<00-96> CODE ACTUAL AMOUNT
<97> 97 OR MORE
<98> DON'T KNOW
<99> NO ANSWER**

And how many cents of your federal tax dollar are spent on Social Security and medicare?

**<00-96> CODE ACTUAL AMOUNT
<97> 97 OR MORE
<98> DON'T KNOW
<99> NO ANSWER**

How about for education?

**<00-96> CODE ACTUAL AMOUNT
<97> 97 OR MORE
<98> DON'T KNOW
<99> NO ANSWER**

What is your best guess as to what percentage of the U.S. population is Black?

**<0-97> ENTER EXACT PERCENTAGE, OR MIDPOINT OF RANGE
<98> DON'T KNOW
<99> NO ANSWER**

And what percentage of the U.S. population currently is unemployed, according to the government?

**<0-97> ENTER EXACT PERCENTAGE, OR MIDPOINT OF RANGE
<98> DON'T KNOW
<99> NO ANSWER**

What percentage of Americans live below the poverty line, that is, is officially in poverty according to the government?

- <0-97> ENTER EXACT PERCENTAGE, OR MIDPOINT OF RANGE**
- <98> DON'T KNOW**
- <99> NO ANSWER**

And what percentage of all Americans has no health insurance?

- <0-97> ENTER EXACT PERCENTAGE, OR MIDPOINT OF RANGE**
- <98> DON'T KNOW**
- <99> NO ANSWER**

Can you tell me approximately how large the National government's budget is in 1989--that is, how much money will it spend? Is it closer to a million dollars, a billion dollars, a trillion dollars, or much more than that?

- <1> CLOSER TO A MILLION**
- <2> BILLION**
- <3> TRILLION**
- <4> MUCH MORE THAN A TRILLION**
- <8> DON'T KNOW**
- <9> NO ANSWER**

CODING CONVENTIONS FOR "INFERENCE" ITEMS

Military Spending (Correct Answer 26%)

0 - 14%
15-19% **Close Call**
20-34% **Correct**
35-39% **Close Call**
40-50%
51% -->

Soc. Sec./Medicare Spending (Correct Answer 30%)

0 - 20%
21-24% **Close Call**
25-35% **Correct**
36-39% **Close Call**
40-50%
51% -->

Education Spending (Correct Answer 3%)

0%
1 - 9% **Correct**
10-14% **Close Call**
15-25%
26-50%
51% -->

Size of Black Population (Correct Answer 12.5%)

0 - 5%
6 - 9% **Close Call**
10-15% **Correct**
16-19% **Close Call**
20-34%
35% -->

Population in Poverty (Correct Answer 12%)

0 - 5%
6 - 9% **Close Call**
10-15% **Correct**
16-19% **Close Call**
20-34%
35% -->

Lacking Health Insurance (Correct Answer 14%)

0 - 5%
6 - 10% **Close Call**
11- 19% **Correct**
20 - 24% **Close Call**
25- 34%
35% -->

CODING CONVENTIONS FOR NES ECONOMIC ITEMS

Unemployment Rate		Inflation Rate	
< 6%	Underestimate	< 2%	Underestimate
6 - 8.5%	Correct	2 - 5%	Correct
> 8.5%	Overestimate	> 5%	Overestimate

(Note: Coding Criteria Set by NES)

CODING CONVENTIONS FOR “CONSIDERATIONS”

CODING SHEET -- “CONSIDERATIONS” IGPA SURVEY

Attitudes

ATTPOLWF Attitude about Welfare Time Limits

Value Label

- 0 Favor Time Limit - Conditional**
- 1 Favor Time Limit**
- 2 Neutral or Unclear on Time Limit**
- 3 Oppose Time Limit**
- 4 Oppose Time Limit - Conditional**
- 5 Two Years Not Enough**

ATTGENWF Attitude about Welfare (General)

Value Label

- 1 Anti Welfare**
- 2 Neutral**
- 3 Pro Welfare**

ATT2NDWF Attitude about 2nd Welfare Policy

Value Label

- 1 Favor Other Welfare Policy (Pro Welfare)**
- 2 Neutral**
- 3 Oppose Other Welfare Policy/Support Anti-Welfare Policy (Anti Welfare)**
- 4 Workfare**

ATTNOWF1 Attitude (Other Non-Welfare Policy)

Value Label

- 1 Give Training or Educ
- 2 Give Child Care
- 3 Other
- 4 Give Birth Control

ATTNOWF2 Attitude (Other Non-Welfare Policy)

Value Label

- 1 Give Training or Educ
- 2 Give Child Care
- 3 Other
- 4 Give Birth Control

Beliefs

BELFACT1 Beliefs about Welfare Facts

Value Label

- 1 Educ - Low
- 2 Educ - High
- 3 Welfare Persistence - Short
- 4 Welfare Persistence - Long
- 5 Welfare Prevalence - Low
- 6 Welfare Prevalence - High
- 7 Age of Recipient - Young
- 8 Age of Recipient - Old
- 9 Other - Pro Welfare
- 10 Other - Neutral
- 11 Other - Anti Welfare
- 12 Welf Recip - High \$
- 13 Welf Recip - Low \$

BELFACT2 Beliefs about Welfare Facts

Value Label

- 1 Educ - Low
- 2 Educ - High
- 3 Welfare Persistence - Short
- 4 Welfare Persistence - Long
- 5 Welfare Prevalence - Low
- 6 Welfare Prevalence - High
- 7 Age of Recipients - Young
- 8 Age of Recipients - Old
- 9 Other - Pro Welfare
- 10 Other - Neutral
- 11 Other - Anti Welfare
- 12 Welf Recip - High \$
- 13 Welf Recip - Low \$

BELNFCT1 Non Factual Belief about Welfare

Value Label

- 1 Pro Welfare
- 2 Anti Welfare
- 3 Neutral or Unclear

BELNFCT2 Non Factual Belief about Welfare

Value Label

- 1 Pro Welfare
- 2 Anti Welfare
- 3 Neutral or Unclear

BELCAUSE Beliefs about Welfare Cause

Value Label

- 1 Pro Welfare
- 2 Anti Welfare

BELPRED Beliefs about Welfare (Predictive)

Value Label

- 1 Poverty will Result**
- 2 Work will Result**
- 3 Unclear or Neutral**
- 4 Pro-Welfare (General)**
- 5 Anti-Welfare (General)**

BELVAL Belief/Value (Unclear Which or Both)

Value Label

- 1 Favor Time Limit**
- 2 Oppose Time Limit**

Values

VLSELFREL Value (Self Reliance)

Value Label

- 1 Mentioned Self Reliance**

VLGVRL Value (Govt. Role)

Value Label

- 1 Govt Responsible for Poor**
- 2 Govt NOT Responsible for Poor**

VLHUMN Value (Humanitarianism)

Value Label

- 1 Humanitarian**
- 2 Non - Humanitarian**

VLFAIR Value (Fairness)

Value Label

- 1 Fairness Mentioned**

Miscellaneous

CHILD Mentioned Children

Value Label

- 1 Children Mentioned**

PERSONAL Mentioned Own Personal Situation

Value Label

- 1 Pro Welfare Import**
- 2 Neutral Import or Unclear**
- 3 Anti Welfare Import**

AMBVLNT Expressed Obvious Ambivalence

Value Label

- 1 Expressed Ambivalence**

DEPENDS "Depends on the Case"

Value Label

- 1 Mentioned Depends**

ASSOC Mentioned Association

Value Label

1 Mentioned Association

IGNORNCE Expressed Ignorance

Value Label

1 Expressed Ignorance

NORELATE Unrelated Comment

Value Label

1 Unrelated Comment

UNCLEAR Nature of Comment Unclear

Value Label

1 Unclear Comment

NONE Said "None" or Said Nothing

Value Label

1 None

ELITE Elite or Media Message Mentioned

Value Label

1 Elite or Media Mentioned

STRUCTURE Specifically Mention Structural Causes of Welfare

Value Label

- 1 Mentioned Structural Cause**

RACE Race Mentioned

Value Label

- 1 Black**
- 2 Other**

COMPLEX Mentioned Issue is Complex

Value Label

- 1 Mentioned Issue is Complex**

EMPATHY Expressed Empathy for Welfare Recipients (put self in shoes)

Value Label

- 1 Mentioned Empathy**

PRIVATE Mentioned Private Help or Assistance

Value Label

- 1 Mentioned Private**

FORGET Said they Forgot

Value Label

- 1 Said Forgot**

AFFECT Expressed Affect

Value Label

1 Expressed Affect

HEALTH Mentioned Health

Value Label

1 Mentioned Health

DIFFCULT Mentioned Difficult

Value Label

1 Mentioned Difficult

Curriculum Vitae

DAVID WILLIAM SCHWIEDER

EDUCATION

Ph.D., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2000
M.A., University of Iowa, 1992
B.A., University of Northern Iowa, 1986

AREAS OF EXPERTISE

American Mass Politics
American Political Institutions

TEACHING AREAS

American Politics
 American Government
 Mass Behavior
 American Political Institutions
Comparative Politics
International Relations
Research Design and Statistical Methodology

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Instructor

Introduction to Political Research, University of Illinois, Summer 1997
Introduction to American Government, University of Illinois, Fall 1995, Spring 1996, Fall 1999
Introduction to Political Science, University of Illinois, Spring 1995, Summer 1995

Teaching Assistant

Introduction to Public Policy, University of Illinois, Spring 2000
Graduate Research Design and Methodology, University of Illinois, Fall 1994
Civil Liberties, University of Illinois, Spring 1994
Introduction to Political Research, University of Illinois, Fall 1992, Fall 1992
Introduction to American Politics, University of Iowa, Fall 1991, Spring 1992

Teaching Awards

Named to All-University list of Teachers Ranked as Excellent, Spring 1996

OTHER ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE

Statistical Analyst/Computer Analyst and Consultant, Office of Computing and Communications for the Social Sciences, University of Illinois, Fall 1996 - Present

PUBLICATIONS

"Just the Facts, Ma'am: Political Facts and Public Opinion". (With James H. Kuklinski, Paul J. Quirk and Robert F. Rich). Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science. November 1998.

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

"Misinformation and Public Opinion" Paper presented to the Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, April 1998.

"Misinformation and the Currency of Citizenship" Paper presented to the Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, April 1997. Co-authored with James H. Kuklinski, Paul J. Quirk, and Robert Rich.

"Framing Facts" Paper presented to the Annual Meeting of the Southwestern Social Science Association, New Orleans, March 1997.

"Political Facts and Public Opinion" Paper presented to the Conference on the Future of Facts, University of Pennsylvania, February 1997. Co-authored with James H. Kuklinski, Paul J. Quirk, and Robert Rich.

“Two Democratic Norms Meet Some Empirical Evidence” Paper presented to the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, San Francisco, August 1996. Co-authored with James H. Kuklinski, Paul J. Quirk, and Robert Rich.

“Misinformation in Public Opinion” Paper presented to the Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, April 1996. Co-authored with James H. Kuklinski, Paul J. Quirk, and Robert Rich.

“Misinformation and Ignorance” Paper presented to the Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, April 1996.

“Educators, Partisans and the Public” Paper presented to the Annual Meeting of the Southwestern Social Science Association, Houston, March 1996.

ACADEMIC AWARDS

Kneier Fellowship, Department of Political Science, University of Illinois, 1997-1998
Fairlie Fellowship, Department of Political Science, University of Illinois, 1996-1997

RELATED EMPLOYMENT

Independent Test Consultant, American College Testing Program, 1988-1990
District Chief (Third Cong. District, Iowa) Gary Hart Presidential Campaign, 1987