

The Role of Policy Preferences in Mass Belief Systems

How much do they matter, and what matters when they don't?

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Some definitions, literature, etc.

What is a belief system?

What is ideology?

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- ▶ Operational: Based off of your issue preferences
- ▶ Symbolic: Based off your values (maybe), affective/valenced feelings towards groups

What is ideology?

Let's call these issue-based and identity-based ideology (Mason 2018).

Issue-based ideology

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- ▶ Kinder and Kalmoe 2017
- ▶ Poole and Rosenthal 1985
- ▶ Many, many more

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- ▶ Again, many more

These give us a comprehensive understanding of
the two types of ideological identity

There's a question hidden inside the literature:

A question

Ideology (when measured) is often self-identification. . .

. . . but what is self-identification?

What do people mean when they say they identify as “liberal” versus “conservative?”

The big question:

Is there a third route for ideology? One where voters categorize themselves both because of their policy preferences *and* social attachments?

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1. Do some policy preferences matter more than others in shaping our issue-based ideology?
2. For those that *don't* model their ideological identification off their policy preferences, what do they focus on?
3. (Implied: Are some voters' ideologies both identity- and issue-based?)

Research questions

In equation form:

$$\text{self-identification} = a + \text{policypreferences}[a-h] * b[1-8] + \text{politicalparty} * b9 + \text{groupaffect}[i-m] * b[10-14] + e$$

$$\begin{aligned} \text{self-identification} = & a + \text{abortion} * b1 + \text{spendingonhealthcare} * b2 + \\ & \text{spendingongeneralgovernmentservices} * b3 + \text{spendingonaidtothepoor} * b4 + \\ & \text{defensespending} * b5 + \text{environmentalprotection} * b6 + \\ & \text{preferredlevelofimmigration} * b7 + \text{fundingforpublicschools} * b8 + \\ & \text{politicalparty} * b9 + \text{netfeelingstowardconservatives} * b10 + \\ & \text{netfeelingstowardRepublicans} * b11 + \text{feelingstowardsblacks} * b12 + \\ & \text{feelingstowardsunions} * b13 + \text{feelingstowardsbigbusiness} * b14 + e \end{aligned}$$

Evidence from the American National Election Study

Ideology in the ANES

Ideology in the ANES is *ideological self-identification*

“Here is a 7-point scale on which the political views that people might hold are arranged from extremely liberal to extremely conservative.”

“Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this?”

- ▶ Extremely liberal
- ▶ Liberal
- ▶ Slightly liberal
- ▶ Moderate or middle of the road
- ▶ Slightly conservative
- ▶ Conservative
- ▶ Extremely conservative
- ▶ N/A

Ideology in the ANES

Data is the pooled 1992-2012 ANES election year surveys.
Responses are imputed (“filled in”) for missingness.

Variables for the litany of issue and identity questions from the ANES, placed on a 0-1 scale of increasing conservatism

Ideology in the ANES

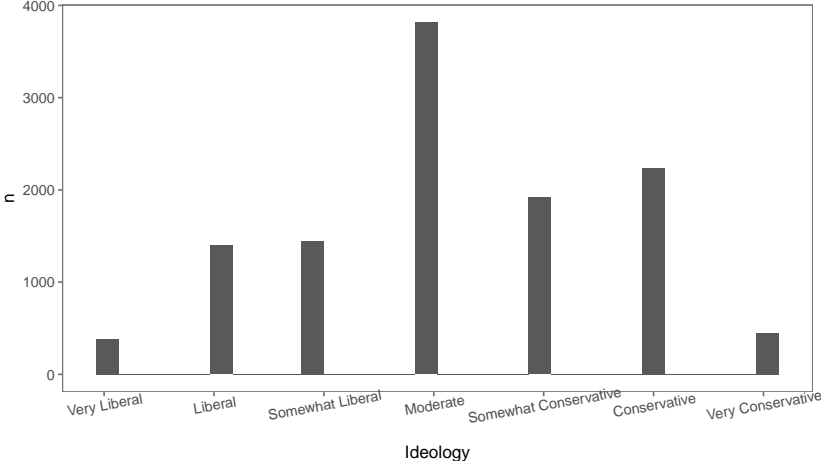


Figure 1: Graphs the distribution of ANES respondents who chose different categories of ideological identification

A model of ideological self-identification

term	estimate	std.error	statistic	p.value
(Intercept)	0.34	0.01	25.37	0.00
pid7	0.13	0.01	16.24	0.00
health	0.05	0.01	8.67	0.00
abortion	0.07	0.01	13.42	0.00
services	0.04	0.01	3.48	0.00
defense	0.05	0.01	6.76	0.00
aidtopoor	0.01	0.01	0.91	0.36
environment	0.08	0.02	5.29	0.00
immigration	0.01	0.01	2.12	0.03
school	0.02	0.01	2.99	0.00
thermo_netcon	0.21	0.01	39.60	0.00
thermo_netrep	0.04	0.01	6.80	0.00
thermoblacks	-0.01	0.01	-1.06	0.29
thermounions	0.00	0.01	0.69	0.49
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Three models of ideological self-identification

1. Ideological self-identification \sim political party
2. Ideological self-identification \sim political party + policy preferences
3. Ideological self-identification \sim political party + policy preferences + social affect

3 models: ideology ~ party

term	estimate	std.error	statistic	p.value
(Intercept)	0.39	0.00	118.40	0
pid7	0.39	0.01	74.47	0

3 models: ideology ~ party + policy preferences

term	estimate	std.error	statistic	p.value
(Intercept)	0.11	0.01	11.47	0
pid7	0.26	0.01	44.63	0
health	0.09	0.01	14.47	0
abortion	0.12	0.01	21.42	0
services	0.10	0.01	8.37	0
defense	0.10	0.01	13.64	0
aidtopoor	0.02	0.01	3.31	0
environment	0.19	0.02	11.08	0
immigration	0.04	0.01	5.95	0
school	0.04	0.01	5.15	0

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This has changed over time.

Three models of ideological self-identification

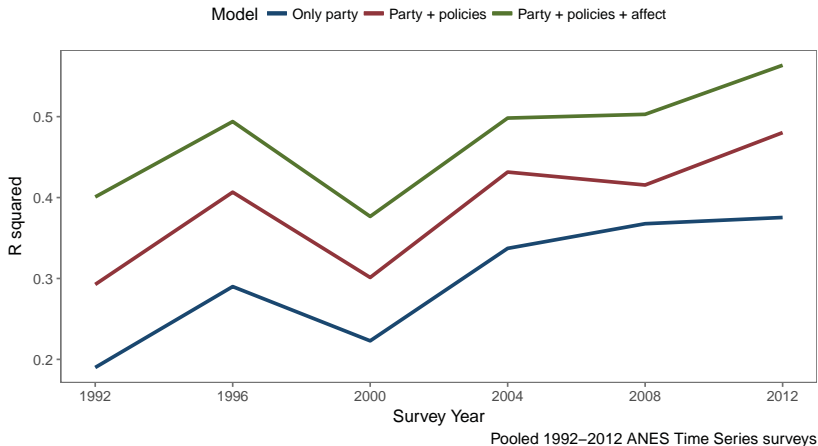


Figure 2: Graphs the R-squared of three different ordinary least squares regression models of ideological identification over time

Knowledge

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- ▶ Geoffrey Cohen says that policy cues from party elites can often override our own issue positions.
- ▶ Delli-Carpini and Keeter point out the low knowledge in the American public
- ▶ Samuel Popkin argues that low-information voters will do this more than those that are knowledgeable about politics (1991).

Knowledge

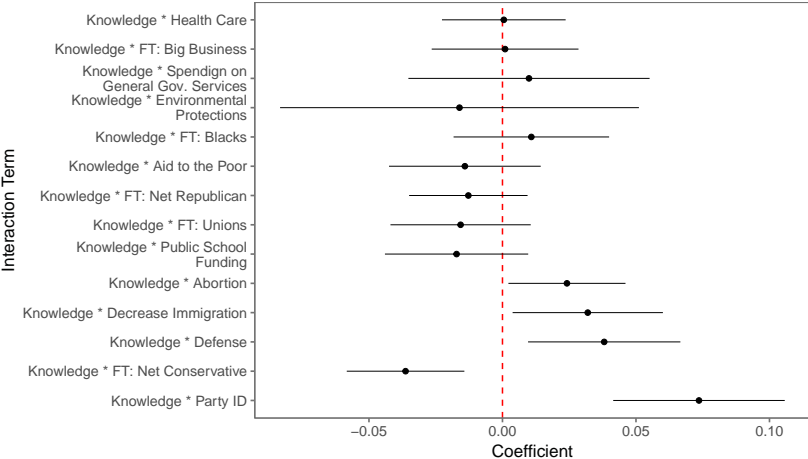
I expect similar results, that respondents will use their social affect more in determining their ideological self-identification when they are *low knowledge* compared to when they know quite a bit about politics.

In other words, I'm looking for negative, statistically significant values for the differences in the coefficients for social affect among politically educated and uneducated

Knowledge

Create an interaction term in my model, for every policy and social variable, that can tell us the varying significance of different variables for low- and high-knowledge voters.

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Conclusions from the ANES

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- ▶ There is still room for political party to influence policy preferences (ie: there might be meaningful endogeneity in this model)
- ▶ There is still a lot of “ideology” that means to be explained — r-squared is just barely over 50%!

What the ANES data don't say...

- ▶ Whether or not ideological identification influences policy preferences

Evidence from a Survey Experiment

The mission

Use a survey experiment to assess the causality of ideological identification

How?

- ▶ Use a sample of 780 online respondents from Amazon's Mechanical Turk platform
- ▶ Measure the differences in mean policy preference among those primed with ideological identification and those not primed

The survey experiment

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- ▶ receive 5 additional policy questions
- ▶ receive a standard demographics battery: race, education, income, and party identification (presumably, asking ideological ID here would be itself primed)

Hypothesis

For us to say that ideological identification plays a causal role in changing voters' policy preferences, I test whether the effects of treatment are greater than 0.

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- ▶ But among those who believed the treatment (responded “accurate” to the question asking if they believe our categorization), there is some evidence of causal influence of ideological identification
- ▶ Among those who *did not* believe the treatment, there are strong effects of priming ideology *in the opposite direction of the treatment*

Results

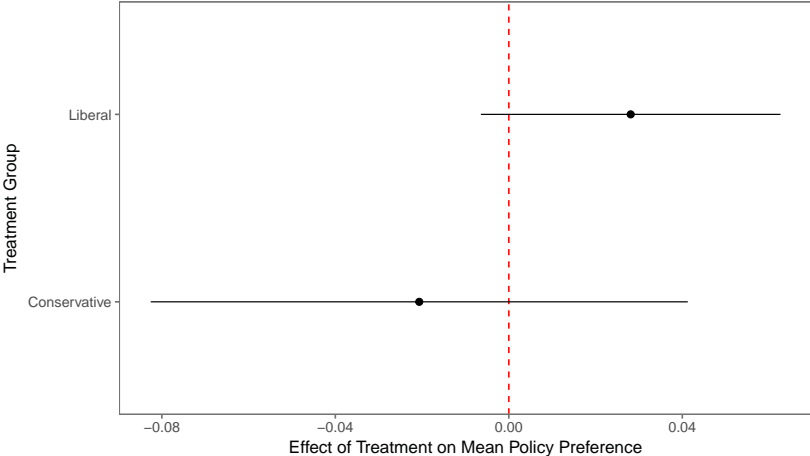


Figure 3: Coefficient plot for the effect of manipulating ideology on mean policy preference across five issue positions

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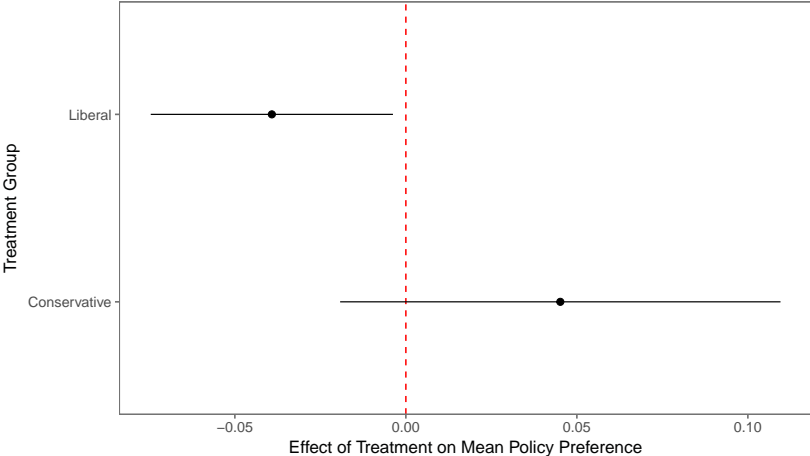


Figure 4: Coefficient plot for the effect of manipulating ideology on mean policy preference across five issue positions — among respondents who did believe the treatment

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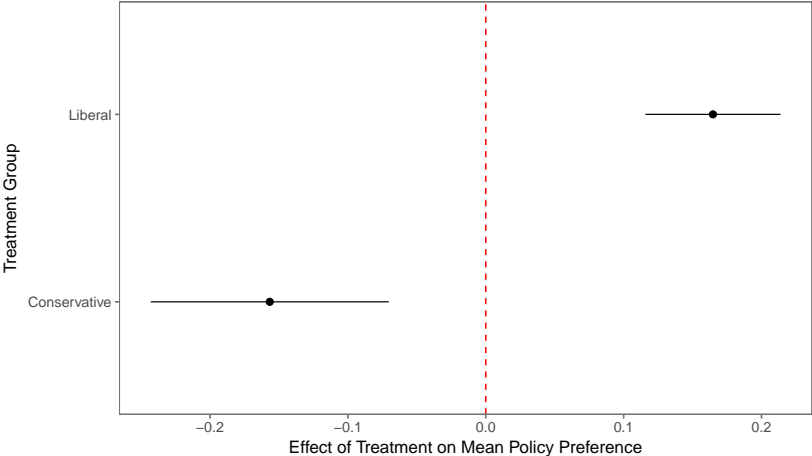


Figure 5: Coefficient plot for the effect of manipulating ideology on mean policy preference across five issue positions — among respondents who did not believe the treatment

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1. The survey experiment provides evidence that ideological identification plays no causal role in influencing respondents' policy preferences.
2. The strong effects of mis-priming ideology suggest that there is some role for ideological identification to play in influencing policy preferences.
3. However, the failed manipulation in the survey forces us to treat these questions with uncertainty. It is possible that a manipulation with a lighter hand could have influenced preferences in aggregate.

So.. what does all of this mean?

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2. In determining their ideological identification, respondents rely less on party identification than we typically think. This is likely due to affect toward ideological groups co-opting the role of party identification.
3. In a model predicting ideological self-identification, the explanatory power of these variables has increased over time.
4. Ideological identification is not causal of policy preferences (at least, there is no direct evidence of this in a survey experiment)

Thanks

Any questions?

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