

Uses and Abuses of Ideology in Political Psychology

Nathan P. Kalmoe

Louisiana State University

Ideology is a central construct in political psychology. Even so, the field's strong claims about an ideological public rarely engage evidence of enormous individual differences: a minority with real ideological coherence and weak to nonexistent political belief organization for everyone else. Here, I bridge disciplinary gaps by showing the limits of mass political ideology with several popular measures and components—self-identification, core political values (egalitarian and traditionalism's resistance to change), and policy indices—in representative U.S. surveys across four decades (Ns ~ 13 k–37 k), plus panel data testing stability. Results show polar, coherent, stable, and potent ideological orientations only among the most knowledgeable 20–30% of citizens. That heterogeneity means full-sample tests overstate ideology for most people but understate it for knowledgeable citizens. Whether through top-down opinion leadership or bottom-up ideological reasoning, organized political belief systems require political attention and understanding to form. Finally, I show that convenience samples make trouble for ideology generalizations. I conclude by proposing analytic best practices to help avoid overclaiming ideology in the public. Taken together, what first looks like strong and broad ideology is actually ideological innocence for most and meaningful ideology for a few.

KEY WORDS: ideology, polarization, knowledge, values, attitudes, methods

Ideology is a central construct in political psychology—recently “resurgent” in scholarship and political life (e.g., Jost, 2006; Jost, Nosek, & Gosling, 2008). In theory, one or a few guiding beliefs structure a vast array of attitudes and behaviors. By maximal lights, most ordinary people carry ideological orientations that substantially influence their political judgments and their daily lives—a close fit between personality traits, cognitive processes, values, morals, motives, moods, emotions, and physiology (e.g., Carney, Jost, Goslin, & Potter, 2008; Duckitt & Sibley, 2010; Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009; Hibbing, Smith, & Alford, 2014; Inbar, Pizarro, & Bloom, 2008; Jost, 2017a, 2017b; Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004; Jost, Federico, & Napier, 2009; Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003; Napier & Jost, 2008; Oxley et al., 2008; Skitka & Tetlock, 1993). This paradigm subsumes core political values (CPV) research, which posits similar structuring effects within domains (e.g., Feldman, 1988, 2003; Goren, 2001, 2012; Markus, 2001; Schwartz, Caprara, & Vecchione, 2010).

In contrast, public opinion scholars usually find little evidence of widely held and potent political ideology. Several metrics across time and place show under one-third of the public thinking and acting ideologically, and usually well-informed about politics: (1) One-fifth interpret politics with reference to political principles; (2) one-fifth understand liberal/conservative terminology; (3) few have well-organized policy views; and (4) a minority holds policy views stably (e.g., Converse, 1964, 2000; Converse & Pierce, 1986; Ellis & Stimson, 2012; Freeder, Lenz, & Turney, 2018; Granberg

& Holmberg, 1996; Kam, 2005; Knight, 1985; Kinder, 1998; Kinder & Kalmoe, 2017; Lane, 1962; Sniderman & Stiglitz, 2012; Zaller, 1992). An adjacent perspective emphasizes affective symbolic attachments to ideological labels distinct from operational attitude organization (Brandt, Sibley, & Osborne, 2019; Conover & Feldman, 1981; Ellis & Stimson, 2012; Levitin & Miller, 1979; Mason, 2018; Sears, 1993). However, ideological identities and their power are similarly limited (Kinder & Kalmoe, 2017). In sum, a knowledgeable fraction shows signs of real ideology while most people do not. Some political psychologists incorporate this stratified view of political ideology (e.g., Brewer, 2003; Carrus, Panno, & Leone, 2018; Federico, Fisher, & Deason, 2011; Federico & Goren, 2009; Federico & Malka, 2018; Goren, 2012; Johnston, Lavine, & Federico, 2017), but much of the field has not grappled with the public's limits.

The key question, then, is not *whether* political ideology carries meaningful psychological distinctions, but *for how many* and *how much*? Here, I show how conventional tests subtly overstate the breadth and power of political ideology for most people. Only the most knowledgeable 20–30% of citizens carry polar, coherent, stable, and potent ideological orientations, in contrast with partisan ubiquity. That makes trouble for ideology generalizations using convenience samples, which may often exceed population knowledge levels. Finally, I propose analytic best practices to help scholars avoid overclaiming ideology in the public. I end reflecting on well-meaning efforts to reanimate mass ideology—political forms of what Abelson called “psychology’s rational man”—an unrealistic model of mass politics, unreachable for most.

Defining Political Ideology and Its Origins

The maximal and limited paradigms define ideology similarly, at least partly, as cohesive organizations of interdependent political views, with some elements exerting causal force on other elements in the belief system (e.g., Converse, 1964; Jost, 2006). Belief elements include views on issues, leaders, parties, symbols, and broad values. Citizens who carry a political ideology have highly constrained belief systems, such that change in one element demands change in others, particularly when a changed belief element is central to the system. Defining political ideology in this way does not require liberal-conservative organization of views, though most Americans who show some signs of organized beliefs structure their views that way (Converse, 1964; see Malka, Lelkes, & Soto, 2019 for cross-national variation in social-economic alignments). Several criteria may indicate ideology (though not necessary or sufficient on their own) including: (1) identification with ideological categories, (2) consistent polar attitudes (constraint), (3) stable individual attitudes, and (4) the predictive power of these elements.

Structure suggests an organizing force. Overarching worldviews are one route to ideological organization—subconscious predispositions or effortful principled reasoning. This bottom-up process develops naturally from logically and psychologically linked *ideas* when people recognize the connections. Belief structure also arises when group members notice and adopt the attitude packages assembled by group leaders without necessary ties to crowning principles, as in party coalitions and other politically influential social groups. This top-down organization is socially constructed, open to arbitrary belief combinations as groups coalesce and change, including constituent group interests. These routes need not be wholly independent. Maximal and limited paradigms recognize both mechanisms, but they differently emphasize bottom-up reasoning (maximal) versus top-down organization (limited) beyond disagreements over the *extent* of organization (e.g., Converse, 1964; Johnston et al., 2017; Jost et al., 2009). Principled reasoning and a partisan’s commitment to their coalition’s platform both organize political beliefs, but they have vastly different implications for political psychology—including the prevalence of organized beliefs in public, the global and temporal diversity of belief systems, and how much personality predisposes particular constellations.

Maximal Ideology and Its Critics

The most influential maximalist, John Jost (2006), says “ideology is everywhere” (p. 652), in the public, among politicians, and in media, each with “an interrelated set of moral and political attitudes that possesses cognitive, affective, and motivational components,” which together “explain why people do what they do; it organizes their values and beliefs and leads to political behavior” (p. 653)—broadly structured and influential orientations. The prevalence and power of elite ideology is noncontroversial, so I focus on public opinion. Jost concludes, “although ordinary people by no means pass the strictest tests imaginable for ideological sophistication, *most of them* do think, feel, and behave in ideologically *meaningful* and interpretable terms” (p. 667, emphases added).

The core dispute between maximal and limited ideology, then, is over the *proportion* of citizens with *meaningful* political ideology. Jost (2006) argues ideological self-placement by two-thirds to three-quarters of the public—plus its correlations with political and psychological constructs—shows “[a] large majority of the American public knows whether they usually prefer liberal or conservative ideas” (p. 656). My limited claim, like others, is that well under one-half the public carry a real, potent ideology. With generous classification, 20–30% fit the bill, and even they pale when compared to elites in principle, structure, durability, and potency of views (e.g., Converse, 1964, 2000; Converse & Pierce, 1986). Maximal arguments start from a disadvantage on the most common ideology measure, self-identification: One-half of the public declines to claim liberalism or conservatism (Kinder & Kalmoe, 2017). Even that turns out to be the *most* flattering result if taken on its face—itself a dubious proposition.

Ideology, Values, and Political Choice

Jost (2006) regards individual party loyalty, lopsided county-level partisan votes, partisan homophily, and partisan cable news viewership as signs of an ideologically polarized public. More recently, Jost and his colleagues regard racial, cultural, and partisan animus and distinction as evidence of ideological divides (Azevedo, Jost, Rothmund, & Sterling, 2019). If partisan behavior and social-group conflict are direct evidence of political ideology, rather than outcomes conditionally influenced by ideology, then “ideology” doesn’t have much meaning—it would be all-encompassing in politics and social life by definition. On the contrary, I see value in distinguishing the psychology of these group attachments from more orthodox ideological elements like political values and configurations of policy attitudes. The distinction matters: Identities like partisanship, race, and religion are broad and strong in politics; ideological identification, values, and policy views are relatively niche and weak (e.g., Achen & Bartels, 2016; Campbell, Converse, Miller, & Stokes, 1960; Ellis & Stimson, 2012; Kinder & Kalmoe, 2017).

Jost (2006) says citizens who locate themselves on an ideological scale “do so with a reasonable (but not perfect) degree of accuracy, stability, and coherence” (p. 656). That’s hard to square with the majority of “conservative” identifiers who hold liberal policy views (Stimson, 2004). Jost and colleagues (2009) attribute that disconnect to system justification (p. 312), even as conservatives’ defense of the status quo would seemingly push them *against* liberal policies. Confusion is a better explanation for why ideological identity only modestly predicts most policy views (Converse, 1964; Kinder & Kalmoe, 2017).

What about vote choice? Jost (2006) heralds the 80% vote-ideology alignment among voters in the four outlying categories of the 7-point ideological scale, where one-half would align by chance. However, those four categories encompass just 28% of voters. By his own evidence, then, a small minority of voters choose candidates in line with their ideologically polar views. Jost reports a .90

vote ideology—perhaps by correlating summary statistics rather than individual-level data (p. 658).¹ I find .49 in the same individual data; even pre-election vote intention fails to predict votes at .90.

Jost (2006) says he can't think of a better survey question for predicting votes than ideology ID in all social science (p. 659). I nominate partisan identity, the most substantial force in mass politics (e.g., Campbell et al., 1960). Partisanship correlates with vote choice at .68 in comparable data. Sixty-two percent of voters fall in its four polar categories, and they are 71–97% loyal. Put differently, partisan ID explains nearly twice the variance while dropping one-half as many people. That's without stratifying by knowledge, which multiplies party-ideology gaps for most people (Kinder & Kalmoe, 2017).

Political psychologists also use CPV to predict policy views, vote choice, and ideological identification. This research developed before psychology's renewed attention to ideology, and maximalists subsume the CPV of egalitarianism and traditionalism as major dimensions of political ideology (e.g., Jost et al., 2003). CPV scholarship recognizes mass ideological limits and tries to sidestep ideology per se with values performing similar heuristic and organizational feats within narrower domains, rather than one superstructure across all areas (e.g., Feldman, 1988, 2003; Goren, 2001, 2004, 2005, 2012; Markus, 2001; Schwartz et al., 2010).

Ideology maximalists argue that egalitarianism and traditionalism constrain views even more powerfully than liberal/conservative concepts (Carney et al., 2008; Jost, 2006; Jost et al., 2003, 2008). But because CPVs function like ideology, they carry nearly the same limits on capacity. Kinder (1998) writes: "How are citizens who are demonstrably unwilling or incapable of developing ideological points of view somehow quite willing and capable of acquiring and deploying principles?" (p. 812). CPV scholars argue significant estimates even among people with low political knowledge support broad structural claims. I see those weak relationships as more modest, and I expect CPVs to perform no better than other ideological constructs, as Kinder suggests.

Ideology, Personality, and Lifestyles

In tracing the origins (or at least the correlates) of political ideology, Jost and colleagues' (2003) meta-analyses and subsequent studies relate several ideological constructs—self-placement, CPV, policy views—with prepolitical psychological needs: epistemic motives (e.g., need for order and certainty), existential motives (e.g., self-esteem and mortality avoidance), and ideological motives (e.g., self-interest, group dominance). Political conservatism satisfies needs caused by uncertainty and threats (see their Figure 1)—stable individual differences expressed distinctly in everyday interactions and lifestyles (Carney et al., 2008; Jost, 2017b; Jost et al., 2008).

Modest correlations between political ideology, psychological traits, and lifestyle measures are informative but do not justify maximal claims. Jost and colleagues (2003) find small correlations between .18 and .27 in six categories and moderate correlations between .32 to .50 in five categories. Jost and colleagues (2008) report similar results ranging between .09 and .47, with a median of .25. A .3 correlation explains under 10% of variance; a .2 correlation predicts 4%, which seems insubstantial. The "secret lives" title is apt (Carney et al., 2008)—those differences are statistically significant, but their small substantive size makes them easy to miss without quantitative tests.

Recent meta-analyses contest ideological asymmetry for many traits or add moderating conditions (e.g., Burke, Kosloff, & Landau, 2013; Ditto et al., 2019; Sibley, Osborne, & Duckitt, 2012; Van Hiel, Onraet, & De Pauw, 2010). Meta-analytic evidence from Jost and colleagues (2017) suggests more context-dependent results, with smaller and less reliable threat-conservatism linkages in

¹Jost (2006): "In separate general linear models, ideological self-placement was a powerful predictor of self-reported voting for both Democratic, $F(1,61) = 352.89$, $p < .001$, adjusted $R^2 = .85$, and Republican, $F(1, 61) = 424.19$, $p < .001$, adjusted $R^2 = .87$, candidates" (p. 659). The 61 degrees of freedom seem to match the 63 cells of summary statistics for 7-point ideology across nine election cycles, minus two for model parameters.

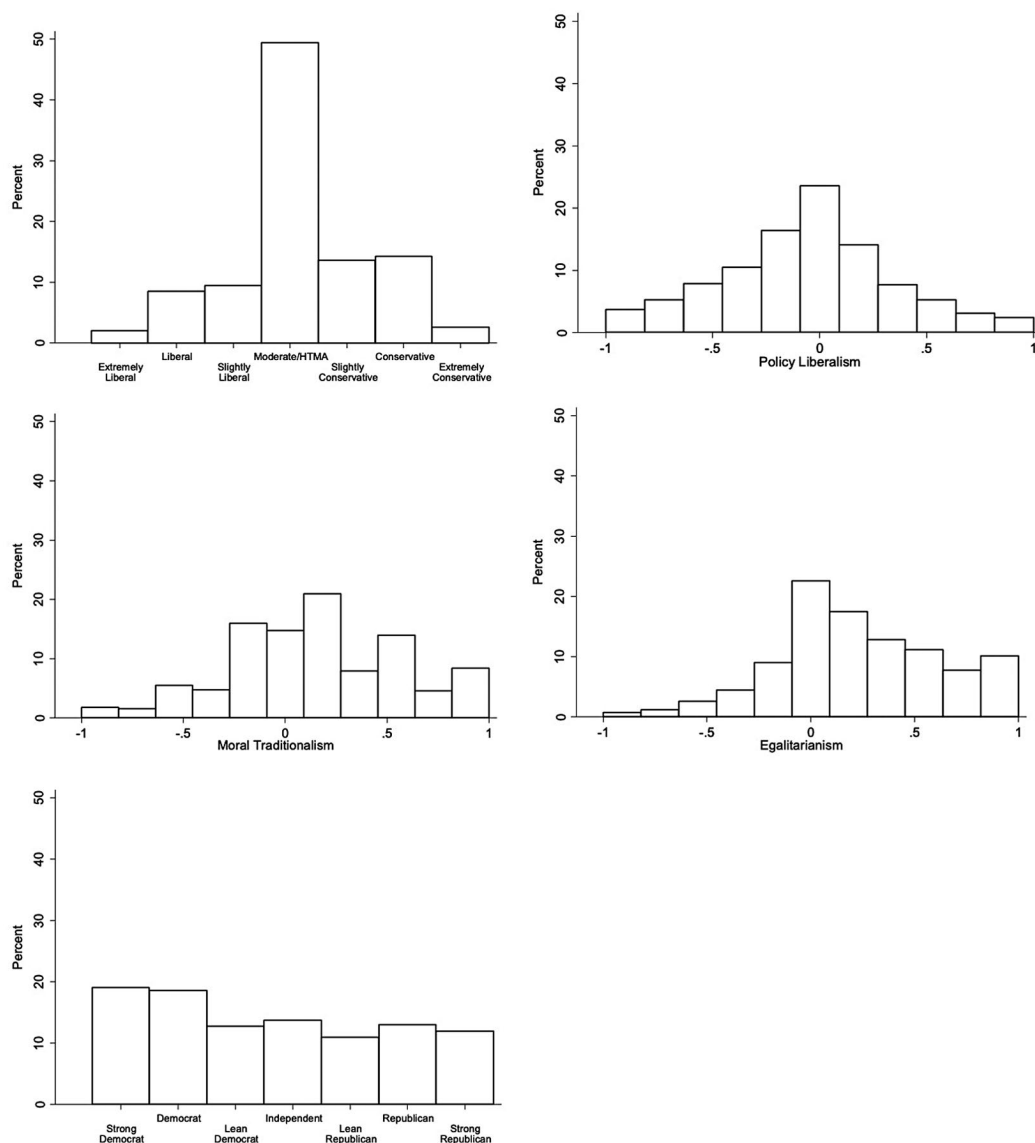


Figure 1. Distributions for ideological constructs and partisanship, 1984–2016. Unweighted responses from the American National Election Studies cumulative file.

a 16-country study. Others note the cross-national idiosyncrasy of cultural and economic ideology linkages, which makes it harder to sustain a general model for conservatism (Feldman & Johnston, 2014; Malka et al., 2019). Azevedo and colleagues (2019) reply with evidence of one dimension in U.S. and U.K. studies, not two.

Limited Ideology: Explaining Ideological Innocence for Most

Lack of political information keeps most people from becoming ideological, via any route, unlike the sophisticated few. Converse (1964) conceptualized ideological belief systems as efficient

heuristics that ease political cognition, but few citizens know enough to develop principles and then recognize where and how to apply them (Converse, 1964, 2000; Freeder et al., 2018; Kinder & Kalmoe, 2017; Knight, 1985; Lane, 1962; Sniderman & Stiglitz, 2012; Zaller, 1992).

Likewise, most people do not notice party-elite guidance that would help them form organized, durable beliefs (e.g., Barber & Pope, 2019; Berinsky, 2008; Federico & Malka, 2018; Lenz, 2012; Zaller, 1992). Few pay enough attention to absorb those messages, for which political knowledge is the best indicator (e.g., Price & Zaller, 1993). Thus, most lack the ability, motivation, and opportunity to make ideological structure possible (Converse, 2000; Fiske, Lau, & Smith, 1990; Graber, 1994; Jerit, 2009; Lane, 1962; Luskin, 1990). Abelson (1976) sums up the ideological challenge for ordinary people in politics: “Why should he care? Even if he cares, how would he have the wherewithal to carry out such an examination? There are many events in the world so remotely or indirectly caused that rational access to their analysis is difficult and tedious” (pp. 59, 60).

Belief instability is especially important evidence against mass ideology—whereas interitem correlations (constraint) tell the degree of *shared* organization for the whole public, stability tests allow idiosyncratic individual-level organization. Short-term instability across many views is evidence against ideological organization of any kind. The knowledgeable few are stable (and constrained) while the low-knowledge majority is not. That helps rule out measurement error as a cause of low average stability (and constraint) in the public (Converse, 2000; Freeder et al., 2018).

It’s easy for scholars to forget the extent of public ignorance—we live and work with people who know a lot about politics. In contrast, only 53% of the public in 2012 linked Republicans with favoring small government, 61% connected Republicans with abortion limits, and 67% tied Democrats to higher taxes for the wealthy—the top Democratic issue that year (Pew, 2012)—when roughly one-half would be right by chance. Information revolutions have stratified knowledge further (Pew, 2007; Prior, 2007). Whereas partisanship is the most potent *directional* force in mass politics, knowledge is the most important *structuring* force in mass politics (Converse, 2000; Zaller, 1992).

Psychologists find similar knowledge dependencies for many traits linked to politics (Brewer, 2003; Carrus et al., 2018; Federico et al., 2011; Federico & Goren, 2009; Federico & Malka, 2018; Goren, 2012; Johnston et al., 2017). CPV studies in particular attend to differences in political knowledge. Knowledge conditions citizens’ ability to connect values and preferences, and it signals who is likely to notice when leaders advocate for values and policies and explain the connection (Brewer, 2003; Goren, 2001, 2012; Kam, 2005). However, knowledge tests remain the exception rather than the rule in the broader study of political ideology in psychology. Jost (2006) denies knowledge is necessary for political ideology, and he incorrectly claims political scientists take public ignorance alone as decisive evidence against ideology, ignoring tests that directly show minimal ideological structure, durability, and potency when knowledge is absent. Jost’s recent work addresses the knowledge-structure link more squarely, as detailed below (Azevedo et al., 2019).

Reconciling Differences: Theory and Methods

Differences between maximal ideology and innocence for most can be theoretically reconciled with attention to *predispositions* versus *actualization*. Jost and others may be right that most people are inclined toward liberalism or conservatism of some sort by psychological needs, but its political expression depends on political information. Without knowledge, citizens have no way to map inclinations onto what are often complex, opaque choices. Likewise, careful methods attention can resolve the empirical dispute over the *proportion* of citizens carrying realized political ideology.

What accounts for wide chasms between claims about proportions? The likeliest culprits are (in)attention to political knowledge, polar distributions, unrepresentative subjects, and omitted variables. I pose the following tests, for full samples and stratified by knowledge, to find ideological proportions.

1. *Middling versus polar scores*: How many people occupy the ideological periphery? The breadth of political ideology's power is minimal if big effect sizes are driven by a small portion of people at the poles, as in the Jost (2006) voting example. Additionally, the fact that the poles are more populated by sophisticates than the middle means that all full-sample (unstratified) tests are subtly conditioned by knowledge because those polar scores exert more analytic leverage.
2. *Reliability of multi-item ideology constructs*: Political ideology requires organization of items within each of its subcomponents. Do they cohere even when knowledge is low?
3. *Construct stability over time*: As a trait, political ideology is only widespread and influential if its elements are stable (Feldman, 2003). Is it stable even when knowledge is low?
4. *Relationships between constructs*: Political ideology is a constellation of interrelated constructs. If ideology is common—and one-dimensional, as Jost and colleagues claim—these links must be strong for all people. Do they relate even when knowledge is low?
5. *Power in predicting votes*: Political ideology is potent. How well does it predict votes? Is it powerful throughout the public, including among the low-knowledge majority?
6. *Convenience samples*: College and adult samples may carry more political knowledge than the public, which inflates political ideological estimates. To what extent?
7. *Omitted variables*: Political ideology may masquerade as the cause for effects driven by correlated factors. Partisan identity is the likeliest culprit, along with race and religion.

I expect results to vary markedly by political knowledge, but stratification alone does not falsify maximal claims. For that, the low-knowledge majority must also show a lack of *meaningful* political ideology. That does not mean zero relationships—just substantively small ones, by the discipline's standards—especially in contrast with partisanship. I expect the combination of tests to show meaningful political ideology in well under one-half of the public.

Research Methods

Data and Measures

For broad coverage, I test the properties of ideological identification, CPV, policy views, and partisanship. I employ the American National Election Studies (ANES), a series of nationally representative surveys of age-eligible U.S. adults in all presidential elections and most midterms since 1948 (electionstudies.org). Multilevel sampling yielded response rates over 50%. I limit my attention to face-to-face (FTF) and telephone interviews by highly trained interviewers.

Seven-point partisanship and vote choice are available throughout. Seven-point scales for ideological identification and five broad policy views (defense spending, services/spending, jobs guarantee, aid to blacks, government healthcare) begin in 1972. I combine policy views in an index. Multi-item indices for egalitarianism and moral traditionalism start in 1984 and 1986, respectively. I report party and ideological identification and policy results from 1984 to the present for comparability. All scales are coded -1 to $+1$, with high values indicating Republican ID, conservative ID, policy liberalism, high egalitarianism, and high traditionalism. I measure political knowledge with 5-point interviewer ratings, the only consistent measure across decades (coded 0–1). Past research validates the stratifying power of this common measure (Zaller, 1992). Results substituting quiz measures are similar, though slightly less distinct (see the online supporting information). ANES panels for 1990–92 and 1992–96 have all relevant measures for stability tests, and 2000–2002 has all but values. The online supporting information also replicates tests with data since Jost's (2006) call to revive mass ideology (2008–16). Most full-sample tests look similar in recent data, and stratification by knowledge remains enormous.

Results

Opinionation and Distribution

One-half of the public declines to identify as liberal or conservative (“moderate” or “haven’t thought much about”), and they are much less knowledgeable, educated, and interested than those who do (Kinder & Kalmoe, 2017). Average knowledge for “haven’t thought” respondents here is .36 versus .63 for “liberals” and “conservatives.” “Moderates” score between. (I code “haven’t thought” with moderates, at 0 hereafter.)

The policy index items have “don’t know” rates between 12% and 15%, and only 66% of respondents answered all five questions. Average knowledge for those who said “don’t know” for three or more items is .32; people who answer all five average .63. (“Don’t know” answers are scored hereafter as middling.) In short, much of the public can’t give substantive responses to ideological identification and policy questions for lack of knowledge. Obviously, “don’t knows” can’t be organized as ideology—they’re nonattitudes. Many seemingly substantive survey responses are too (Converse, 1964).

CPV items (5-point agree-disagree) and party identification have “don’t know” rates of 1% or less, so nonresponse is not a concern. In sum, many folks decline to give substantive responses on ideology items, unlike partisanship. Those who answer know more.

Outlier Tests

Outlying ideological scores wield more statistical leverage in tests. If knowledgeable people populate the poles, then their sophistication disproportionately drives results. Figure 1 compares the distributions. Large portions of partisans occupy the poles; few do for ideology measures. Ideological identification is especially nonpolar.

Table 1 shows how many respondents have outlying scores on each construct, first for all, and then by knowledge level (group size up top). “Percent in the Polar Half” indicates respondents with scores in the outer one-half of each scale (i.e., upper and lower quarters). Not a high bar. Nonetheless, small minorities give polar ideological responses. Relative outlying-ness—one standard deviation from the mean—shows similar (see the online supporting information).

Overall, the public is *not* substantially polarized on ideological measures. Only one-seventh to one-third have scores in the outer halves: *two to three times* as many have polar partisanship. As expected, polarity depends on political knowledge. Only one-tenth to one-quarter of the lowest one-third have polar ideological views, while the highest groups double or quadruple those levels. By contrast, *one-half* of the lowest group is polar on party. Put differently, ideological constructs aren’t polarized gut orientations for all—they concentrate among the informed (Bartels, 2005; Fiorina, Abrams, & Pope, 2005).

Remember this minimal, stratified polarization in all subsequent tests. The high-knowledge group is twice as likely to be outlying as the low. Their polar leverage means full-sample estimates disproportionately reflect the judgments of sophisticated people. Polarity isn’t a prerequisite for ideological thinking—principled moderates exist—but political attention usually polarizes people.

Reliability

Next, I test the coherence of multi-item constructs with Cronbach’s reliability and interitem covariance levels for a simpler view. Alphas above 0.7 are acceptable, down to 0.6 is questionable, down to 0.5 is poor, and lower is unacceptable. Low reliability (and stability) could be measurement

Table 1. The Breadth of Values, Policy Views, and Identities by Knowledge

	Full Sample	Political Knowledge					Info Gain	
		Lowest 9%	Low 20%	Middle 34%	High 25%	Highest 13%	Highest – Lowest	Highest ÷ Lowest
<i>Egalitarianism</i> 1984–2000, 2004, 2008, 2012, 2016	N = 21,579							
Percent in Polar Half	32%	26%	26%	30%	35%	43%	+17%	1.65
<i>Moral Tradition</i> 1986–2000, 2004, 2008, 2012, 2016	N = 19,306							
Percent in Polar Half	35%	17%	25%	33%	42%	45%	+28%	2.65
<i>Policy Views</i> 1984–2000, 2004, 2008, 2012, 2016	N = 23,134							
Percent in Polar Half	18%	11%	13%	16%	21%	29%	+18%	2.64
<i>Ideology ID</i> 1984–2004, 2008, 2012, 2016	N = 25,332							
Percent in Polar Half	27%	11%	16%	24%	34%	44%	+33%	4.00
<i>Partisanship</i> 1984–2004, 2008, 2012, 2016	N = 24,307							
Percent in Polar Half	61%	41%	55%	63%	66%	67%	+26%	1.63

Note. Weighted percentages.

error, but high reliability for some implicates individual differences instead. Notably, a respondent consistently choosing the middle counts equivalently with consistent liberal or conservative responders, which overestimates reliability when many people give insubstantial middling responses (e.g., Kinder & Kalmoe, 2017).

Table 2 presents full-sample results and results by knowledge. Few citizens have ideological orientations above the 0.7 standard (bolded). The top 38% have acceptable levels for egalitarianism. Only the upper 13% hit the mark for traditionalism, though the rest of the upper one-third comes close. Results for policy views are similar. A fair reading says 40% hold coherent values and policy views. Notably, values can't bootstrap people out of ideological innocence—they share similar limits. Knowledge differences are even starker for interitem covariance, which is tiny except for the most knowledgeable respondents. Covariance is three times stronger or more in the top than the bottom, and twice as strong as the middle group. Ordinal correlations are similar (see the online supporting information).

Although reliability is often seen as a measurement property, the items in each construct perform just fine among politically knowledgeable citizens. The unreliability is in the majority of people who don't attend closely to politics, not the measures.

Stability

Valid trait constructs are stable across a few years' time (Feldman, 2003), and the personality traits said to anchor political ideology leave little room for short-term movement. Causal attributions also require stability. Table 3 presents two-year squared continuity correlations for the 1990–92 ANES panel and four-year tests for the 1992–96 ANES panel. Following Converse (2000), it tells the amount of variance explained by the earlier measure. Due to small samples and knowledge-linked attrition, I merge the two lowest knowledge groups.

Average stability is low for ideological constructs compared to partisanship, which is roughly twice as durable. Policy views equal or surpass stability for values and ideology ID, which undermines arguments that those constructs *cause* policy views. These fit McCann's (1997) evidence that elections shift values and Goren's (2005) finding that partisanship shapes values over time. Both implicate partisan opinion leadership rather than ideology-based partisan choice.

Once again, knowledge discriminates immensely. Values and policy are two to four times more stable in the highest group versus low. Ideological identification varies even more due to near-zero stability in the bottom 18%. The top group even has three times more ideology ID stability than the middle. Only partisanship is highly stable at all knowledge levels.² Kinder and Kalmoe (2017) find the same in tests over decades: Stable ideology requires substantial knowledge; partisanship is stable for all.

Relating Ideological Constructs

Political scientists tend to see political beliefs as social constructions reflecting groups in party coalitions (e.g., Converse, 1964; Feldman, 2003; Zaller, 1992), whereas psychologists emphasize bottom-up ties to psychological traits. Top-down models require attention to political discourse (proxied by knowledge), whereas bottom-up models may require knowledge for connecting worldviews with attitude objects. But if ideology guides political and life choices for most people, then ideological components should correlate strongly across levels of sophistication.

Table 4 presents the correlations. Strong links between ideological constructs mostly appear among the knowledgeable few. Only the top 13% of the public consistently show large correlations

²Moral foundations appear to be similarly unstable (e.g., Smith, Alford, Hibbing, Martin, & Hatemi, 2017).

Table 2. Reliability for Multiple Measures of Core Political Values and Policy Views

	Full Sample	Political Knowledge					Info Gain	
		Lowest 9%	Low 20%	Middle 34%	High 25%	Highest 13%	Highest – Lowest	Highest ÷ Lowest
<i>Egalitarianism</i>								
Cronbach's α	.67	.50	.53	.64	.73	.79	+.29	1.58
Avg. interitem covariance	.10	.05	.06	.09	.13	.17	+.12	3.40
<i>Moral Traditionalism</i>								
Cronbach's α	.62	.35	.47	.59	.68	.73	+.38	2.09
Avg. interitem covariance	.11	.04	.06	.10	.14	.18	+.13	4.25
<i>Policy Views</i>								
Cronbach's α	.64	.38	.46	.58	.69	.80	+.42	2.11
Avg. interitem covariance	.08	.03	.04	.06	.09	.14	+.11	4.67

Note. Acceptable alphas (bold), questionable alphas (bold-italic). Table S11 in the online supporting information shows similar covariance contrasts by knowledge for ordinal (polychoric) and continuous (Pearson's) correlations. That supports interval assumptions for calculating alphas. Unweighted.

Table 3. The Stability of Core Political Values, Policy Views, and Identifications

1990–92 ANES

	Full Sample	Political Knowledge				Info Gain	
	<i>N</i> ~ 625	Lowest 18%	Middle 38%	High 30%	Highest 14%	Highest – Lowest	Highest ÷ Lowest
<i>Egalitarianism</i>	.24	.14	.14	.32	.38	+.24	2.71
<i>Moral Tradition</i>	.34	.13	.26	.40	.55	+.42	4.23
<i>Policy Views</i> (<i>N</i> ~ 1,359)	.32	.13	.28	.40	.51	+.38	3.92
<i>Ideology ID</i> (<i>N</i> ~ 1,359)	.29	.05	.20	.33	.60	+.55	12.00
<i>Partisanship</i> (<i>N</i> = 1,334)	.61	.44	.59	.66	.73	+.29	1.66

1992–96 ANES

	Full Sample	Political Knowledge				Info Gain	
	<i>N</i> ~ 585	Lowest 20%	Middle 35%	High 31%	Highest 14%	Highest – Lowest	Highest ÷ Lowest
<i>Egalitarianism</i>	.31	.18	.28	.41	.30	+.12	1.67
<i>Moral Tradition</i>	.37	.16	.42	.38	.37	+.21	2.31
<i>Policy Views</i>	.42	.26	.39	.38	.62	+.36	2.38
<i>Ideology ID</i>	.37	.03	.26	.48	.71	+.68	23.67
<i>Partisanship</i>	.59	.49	.58	.66	.58	+.09	1.18

2000–02 ANES

	Full Sample	Political Knowledge				Info Gain	
		Lowest 17%	Middle 31%	High 29%	Highest 22%	Highest – Lowest	Highest ÷ Lowest
<i>Policy Views</i> (<i>N</i> = 1,016)	.27	.19	.22	.30	.30	+.11	1.58
<i>Ideology ID</i> (<i>N</i> = 564)	.38	.04	.37	.46	.61	+.57	15.25
<i>Partisanship</i> (<i>N</i> = 1,165)	.71	.56	.69	.77	.76	+.20	1.36

Note. Cells give unweighted squared continuity correlations.

Table 4. Relating Ideological Constructs and Partisanship (Correl.)

	Political Knowledge					Info Gain	
	Full Sample	Lowest 9%	Low 20%	Middle 34%	High 25%	Highest 13%	Highest – Lowest
Egalitarianism							
Moral Tradition (rev.)	.28	.04	.11	.23	.32	.45	+41
Policy Views	.44	.27	.29	.40	.51	.59	+32
Ideology ID (rev.)	.35	.06	.11	.27	.42	.55	+49
Partisanship (rev.)	.35	.12	.17	.29	.42	.52	+41
Moral Tradition							
Policy Views (rev.)	.29	.03	.13	.22	.31	.49	+46
Ideology ID	.40	.08	.18	.32	.46	.59	+51
Partisanship	.27	.03	.08	.21	.32	.48	+45
Policy Views							
Ideology ID (rev.)	.39	.05	.18	.29	.47	.64	+59
Partisanship (rev.)	.44	.12	.22	.37	.50	.62	+50
Ideology ID							
Partisanship	.44	.06	.17	.35	.54	.68	+62

Note. Unweighted Pearson's correlations. Moderate correlations (.30 to .49) in bold-italic, large correlations (.50 or more) in bold.

(.5 or larger) linking constructs. Moderate correlations (.3 or larger) characterize the next quarter in knowledge. Only two of eight correlations reach that level in the middle one-third. In other words, ideological constructs only relate moderately (or better) for the most knowledgeable 38%; weak links for the low-knowledge majority.

Partisanship has the strongest links to three of the four ideological constructs, which indicates its centrality. The one exception is traditionalism, which has closer links to ideology ID. Recall, though, that partisanship has twice as many outliers as ideology ID, which makes partisanship more influential overall.

These results are broadly similar with new evidence from Azevedo and colleagues (2019). Their full-sample ideology ID-policy correlations from recent data are roughly similar in size to recent ANES data, and so changing context may account for some average differences. Azevedo and colleagues also compare high and low political-knowledge correlations with a median split. Their U.S. YouGov study shows minimal knowledge differences (i.e., +.04, +.05), and their U.S. SSI samples indicate larger high-low differences (i.e., +.16 to +.30). Results here show a median split pools indisputably ideological individuals with others who perform poorly, muting much larger stratification seen clearly with more knowledge categories. The difference between their two samples may be due to different political knowledge items: The YouGov items involved judging national conditions in an election year, making them vulnerable to partisan cheerleading biases. That would reduce the power of high-low distinction tests compared to the neutral civic facts in the SSI studies.

The Electoral Impact of Ideology

Voting is the most powerful democratic expression. How does ideology weigh in that choice? And does it differ by knowledge? To cover more elections, I use data in which all constructs are measured within two months of the election, after most people have decided their vote. That risks overstating ideology's power since voters often adopt the views expressed by their preferred presidential candidate, rather than choosing the candidate because of those views (e.g., Goren, 2005; Lenz, 2012; McCann, 1997). Republican votes are coded 1, Democrats 0, and "missing" for others.

I estimate bivariate probit models for each factor to show the maximal power of each. Probit coefficients indicate substantive power, which matters, but coefficients are insensitive to underlying distributions. The pseudo- R^2 tells us how much variance each factor explains in vote choice. That accounts better for the power *and* the portion of the sample it applies to simultaneously. Naturally, these tests are limited to voters, who are more knowledgeable than nonvoters. Only 2% fall in the lowest group, so I combine them with the second lowest group. Table 5 presents the results.

Overall, partisanship accounts for two to four times more variance in presidential votes than ideological constructs. Among those, ideology ID and policy views outperform values. Huge differences by knowledge appear again for each ideological construct. Ideology explains five to 11 times more variance for the top 22% in knowledge than for the bottom 13%, and about three times more than the next highest one-third of the public. Values perform especially poorly overall. Although values, policy, and ideology ID coefficients remain statistically significant for low-knowledge respondents, they explain nearly no variance in voting. Moreover, the polarity of substantive scores is much smaller for this group when calculating expected probabilities with those large coefficients. Adjusting for those differences further reduces apparent ideological influence on voting. In contrast, partisanship powerfully predicts voting even at the lowest knowledge levels. In fact, partisanship's predictive power in the *lowest* group exceeds values for the *highest* group, and partisanship in the second lowest group surpasses ideology ID and policy views at top knowledge levels.

What does this say about the breadth of ideology? Only the most informed 22% have ideology that consistently explains one-quarter of the vote choice, even as partisanship explains well over one-half. Generously, we could include the next one-third for whom ideology explains even less

Table 5. Ideology in Presidential Vote Choice, 1984–2016

	Full Sample	Political Knowledge				Info Gain	
		Lower 13%	Middle 32%	High 33%	Highest 22%	Highest – Lowest	Highest ÷ Lowest
<i>Egalitarianism</i> (rev.)	<i>N</i> = 10,403						
Probit estimate	1.58 (.08)	1.03 (.16)	1.32 (.08)	1.75 (.11)	2.00 (.11)	+97	1.94
pseudo <i>r</i> ²	.15	.05	.10	.19	.28	+23	5.60
<i>Moral Tradition</i>	<i>N</i> = 9,036						
Probit estimate	1.29 (.10)	.88 (.09)	1.07 (.11)	1.29 (.10)	1.74 (.10)	+86	1.98
pseudo <i>r</i> ²	.13	.04	.08	.14	.26	+22	6.50
<i>Policy Views</i> (rev.)	<i>N</i> = 9,891						
Probit estimate	2.10 (.32)	1.38 (.21)	1.75 (.34)	2.35 (.38)	2.67 (.43)	+1.29	1.93
pseudo <i>r</i> ²	.21	.08	.14	.26	.37	+29	4.63
<i>Ideology ID</i>	<i>N</i> = 9,834						
Probit estimate	1.91 (.14)	.97 (.19)	1.57 (.16)	2.12 (.14)	2.54 (.11)	+2.57	2.62
pseudo <i>r</i> ²	.23	.04	.14	.29	.43	+39	10.75
<i>Partisanship</i>	<i>N</i> = 10,416						
Probit estimate	1.81 (.06)	1.42 (.08)	1.77 (.06)	1.89 (.07)	2.11 (.08)	+69	1.49
pseudo <i>r</i> ²	.49	.32	.47	.52	.60	+38	1.88

Note. Weighted bivariate probit estimates, robust standard errors clustered by year (in parentheses). All estimates are statistically significant. Pseudo *r*² bolded for legibility.

variance. Like other tests above, these suggest a minority who vote ideologically. That fits well with Jost's (2006) evidence that the 28% of voters in the four outlying ideological ID categories (of seven) choose presidential candidates who match their ideology at 80% rates.

Remember, bivariate tests are the *best* case for ideology, not accounting for likely confounds—especially partisanship—in multivariate models. In multivariate tests with all factors, values add little purchase at any level of political sophistication. That suggests values largely overlap with partisanship and ideological identification, which correlate highly among knowledgeable people.

Of course, party identity has the advantage of matching party labels on the ballot. But this is the whole point of parties in the electorate (Aldrich, 1995): They provide heuristics so voters don't have to weigh policies and values (that they may not carry) for each candidate's positions (that many people wouldn't know). Parties carry reputations that voters use to judge all party candidates, and those reputations are centered more on group interests than ideology for most people (Converse, 1964). If U.S. parties were named "Liberal" and "Conservative," the ideological identification measure would surely perform better—but then it would be a measure of partisanship.

Inconvenient Truths About Samples

The results show ideological performance depends on levels of political knowledge. Sophistication in study samples is therefore paramount for inferences drawn from convenient samples. Adult samples are often more representative than student samples, as Jost and colleagues (2003) recognize: "[P]olitical ideology probably has greater consistency and meaning for college-educated respondents" (p. 368), and conservatism on campus may differ from conservatism beyond. However, adult convenience samples still bias ideology inferences when they diverge substantially from the population on political knowledge (see Krupnikov & Levine, 2014; Sears, 1986).

Knowledge has crosscutting confounds in college students: (1) Knowledge, participation, and partisanship are weaker in young people, which inhibits ideological organization, but (2) college-educated people excel on those dimensions. Jost (2006) says under 10% of his student samples decline to place themselves on the ideology scale, compared to one-quarter to one-third in representative samples. That threatens generalizations to the full public, especially when higher identification rates indicate more sophisticated participants. So what is the distribution of knowledge across sample types of varying representativeness? I examine several studies with identical items.

In 2010, I fielded two nationally representative U.S. surveys with Knowledge Networks (now GfK) that asked three standard multiple-choice political-knowledge questions: (1) John Roberts' position in government, (2) the governing branch that ultimately decides constitutionality, and (3) the proportion of Congressional votes to override a veto. I summed correct answers in a 0-to-1 index. Merging both studies shows average U.S. answers just over one-half right ($m = .59$, $SD = .32$, $n = 906$).

I fielded the same questions in three studies on Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk)—a popular and inexpensive alternative for adult samples more diverse than student samples. The platform produces representative results on some tests and not others (Berinsky, Huber, & Lenz, 2012; Krupnikov & Levine, 2014). My MTurkers had higher levels of political knowledge than my representative samples—about 74% correct compared to 59% (2012 study: $m = .73$, $SD = .29$, $n = 1017$; 2013 study: $m = .76$, $SD = .28$, $n = 887$; 2015 study: $m = .73$, $SD = .30$, $n = 835$). Averages for other kinds of convenient adult samples would depend on sample particulars.

My student samples at large research universities had more mixed results. They came from a public university in the Midwest in 2010 (psychology, communication), a private mid-Atlantic university in 2012 (media & public affairs), and two at a public Southern university in 2016 and 2017 (mass communication, political science). Student political knowledge levels are greater than national levels in two samples and equal in two, reinforcing the importance of measuring and accounting for

knowledge (Midwest: $m = .64$, $SD = .31$, $n = 370$; mid-Atlantic: $m = .81$, $SD = .23$, $n = 277$; South 2016: $m = .55$, $SD = .33$, $n = 535$; South 2017: $m = .51$, $SD = .39$, $n = 453$). The Midwestern and mid-Atlantic school averages are significantly larger than the national study; the Southern school's averages were significantly smaller. All samples showed substantial variation in knowledge levels.³

Knowledge differences are not *direct* evidence of external validity trouble for ideology, so, for that, I estimated correlations between ideological and partisan IDs for each sample, where available.⁴ The Pearson's correlation in the nationally representative sample is .62; by contrast, the two non-South student samples have correlations of .82 and .77, respectively, and one MTurk sample has a correlation of .75. In other words, ideological links are substantially stronger in each of the convenience samples—38% shared variance versus 59%—corresponding with higher average levels of political knowledge. The threat of inflated relationships in convenience samples is real, and it limits broad generalizations about ideological power from that data.

These results fit with Clifford and colleagues' (2015) validation tests comparing MTurk political ideology to a nationally representative survey with two interview modes. All their psychological correlates with ideological identification were directionally similar, and Big Five personality relationships were virtually identical across samples. However, they found values, racial resentment, and authoritarianism correlated with ideological identification at much higher levels in MTurk than in FTF and web modes of the representative survey (Authoritarianism: FTF $r = .18$, Web $r = .23$, MT $r = .36$; Racial Resentment: FTF $r = .34$, Web $r = .44$, MT $r = .57$; Traditionalism: FTF $r = .46$, Web $r = .58$, MT $r = .62$; Egalitarianism: FTF $r = .40$, Web $r = .50$, MT $r = .62$). MTurk correlations were 48% to 100% larger than the representative tests. The same inflation appeared for economic policy views (FTF $r = .57$, Web $r = .59$, MT $r = .65$) and social issues (FTF $r = .37$, Web $r = .46$, MT $r = .53$). These results reinforce the need for representative samples, or at least knowledge measures in every study for benchmarking.

Best Practices for Ideological Analysis

Rancor sanctified by “data” is mindless when, as is not uncommon, contrasting results actually stem from differences in method. (Converse, 2000, p. 336)

To reduce the chances of talking past each other with conflicting empirics, I propose four practices for improving ideological inferences, based on the results above.

1. Describe distributions when claiming widespread ideology. Many ideological measures suffer from nonattitudes and insubstantial middling scores. A minority of sophisticated participants are distributed out in the poles to drive results generalized to the whole. Bartels (2000) presents a modeling and inference method that incorporates distributions in estimates for ordinal measures.
2. Measure political knowledge and compare your sample to representative surveys of your population. General knowledge is okay, but study-specific information is even better. Avoid national conditions items that could be read as evaluations of the ruling party. If your participants are more knowledgeable than the public, relationships involving ideology are probably inflated.
3. Test knowledge-ideology interactions to see whose results drive full-sample estimates. Note that some political judgments are easy while others are hard (Carmines & Stimson, 1980). Hard judgments—abstract, technical, complex—are where knowledge matters most. All signs indicate real

³Student rates of ideological nonidentification (Midwest 2010 8%, mid-Atlantic 2012 3%) were similar to Jost's (2006) reports for student studies, all many times lower than population probability samples with similar response options.

⁴Ideological identification was unmeasured in a national study, the Southern student studies, and two MTurk studies.

ideological reasoning is hard. But even seemingly obvious connections still depend on knowledge. For example, moral traditionalism predicts five times more variance in U.S. abortion views for the most knowledgeable one-third of the public compared to the rest.⁵

4. Finally, try substituting partisanship for ideology measures, or at least consider whether results attributed to ideology aren't better explained by partisanship. The two correlate strongly, but partisan identification has broader and stronger empirical and theoretical foundations for guiding public opinion. Evidence here shows that mass partisanship routinely outperforms ideology. Many "ideology" findings would grow stronger if reconceptualized and measured as party identity.

The distinction between partisan identity and ideological worldviews is key, so I need to say a bit more here. Party identity usually originates from parental socialization before principles and policy views (Green, Palmquist, & Schickler, 2004; Huddy, 2018; Jennings, Stoker, & Bowers, 2009).⁶ Even for politically engaged people, most experimental and longitudinal evidence shows partisanship causing political attitudes and self-description, not the reverse (e.g., Berinsky, 2008; Lenz, 2012; Zaller, 1992). For example, Barber and Pope (2019) find many strong Republicans and "conservative" identifiers endorsing liberal views when experimentally exposed to Trump's liberal policy statements, and they move equally and oppositely when exposed to his conservative remarks. Attentive citizens follow group leaders out of trust, not ideological conviction. Most attitude structure is top-down, not bottom-up.

Jost and others are noncommittal on causality within the ideological structure (e.g., Jost et al., 2009), but their tests usually exclude politically and psychologically potent identities like partisanship, race, religion, and place (e.g., Acharya, Blackwell, & Sen, 2018; Achen & Bartels, 2016; Cramer, 2016; Dawson, 1994; Green et al., 2004; Huddy, 2001, 2018; Huddy, Mason, & Aarøe, 2015; Jardina, 2019; Mason, 2018; Piston, 2018). The omissions are notable: Group interests and attitudes tower over ideology in mass partisanship (e.g., Converse, 1964; Huddy et al., 2015; Kinder, 2003; Kinder & Kalmoe, 2017; Mason, 2018). For example, contemporary evangelical Christians strongly identify with the Republican Party, and those who attend to politics espouse conservative political views. That cultural identity brings a host of lifestyles and practices with it, beyond Republican vote choice. In short, party identity is a likely confound in ideological tests, but other social identities may be too.

These four best practices will improve generalizations of ideological breadth and power while helping scholars avoid talking past each other. Many political psychologists already take some of these steps, and more should follow (e.g., Azevedo et al., 2019; Brandt et al., 2019; Brewer, 2003; Carrus et al., 2018; Federico et al., 2011; Federico & Goren, 2009; Federico & Malka, 2018; Goren, 2012; Johnston et al., 2017).⁷

Conclusions

Donald Kinder (1998) writes: "If, in the end, the modesty and contingency of the effects of principles disappoint those who yearn for a politics of ideas, others may be surprised that ideas count at all" (p. 812). As I have shown, political ideas do seem to count for some—quite a bit, in fact—but

⁵ANES cumulative file. In an ordered probit model, moral traditionalism explains five times more variance in abortion attitudes for the most knowledgeable one-third compared to the least knowledgeable two-thirds of the public. The probit coefficient is twice the size. The abortion item is a standard 4-point scale on circumstances for restriction.

⁶Ideology could function similarly as a social identification, but its prevalence, strength, and potency is far less and more conditional than for partisanship (Kinder & Kalmoe, 2017).

⁷Researchers might also benefit by considering multidimensional ideology, as some studies have done (e.g., Azevedo et al., 2019; Feldman & Johnston, 2014; Malka et al., 2019). My tests involving ideological identity and policy views assumed one dimension, while values tests made room for dimensional flexibility.

those ideas matter little for *most* people. Results here confirm the rarity of *realized* political ideology, as expressed in ideological identity, CPV, and policy views. Political ideology is only polar, coherent, durable, and potent for a sophisticated minority—perhaps 20–30%. Partisan identity, by contrast, is all those things for nearly everyone.

Ideological performance for the low-knowledge majority is not zero, but neither is it substantively meaningful. That judgment is subjective, though majorities fail some tests here that have well-established thresholds. On others, the variance explained is miniscule for most. On all, indisputably ideological citizens vastly outperform the low-knowledge majority. Calling both “ideological” obliterates the term’s meaning. In any case, ideological tests here allow readers to judge for themselves who counts as an ideological. I’m sure “statistically significant” is far too low a bar.

One implication is that full-sample averages in ideology research *understate* its relationships in knowledgeable citizens. Accordingly, the evidence here does not contest the directional relationships found in past ideology studies, but it does undermine their generalization to the whole public. In other words, psychological models need to account for the moderating mechanism of political knowledge when citizens map their personal traits into the “blooming, buzzing confusion” of politics, as Walter Lippmann put it. Modeling political knowledge is necessary for both the top-down “discursive superstructure” of elite cues and for bottom-up reasoning based on motivational affinities, even as opinion leadership seems to outweigh reasoning in practice.

This work heeds Jon Krosnick and Kathleen McGraw’s (2002) call for political scientists to make “a self-conscious attempt to contribute to psychological theory by paying careful attention to political context” (p. 84), bridging disciplinary gaps to infuse ideology models with more realism: Most people bother little with politics, which yields incoherent and unstable political views beyond party. Psychologists have long criticized behavioral models that ignore known cognitive biases and motivational limits in ordinary people. Herbert Simon (1985) writes: “People are, at best, rational in terms of what they are aware of, and they can be aware of only tiny, disjointed facets of reality” (p. 302). That jibes well with political knowledge. Maximal ideology claims presume too much given the public’s limits—they suggest a “succession of steps grossly implausible as a model of standard human functioning,” to borrow Abelson’s (1976, p. 59) words. One-half the people may call themselves liberal or conservative, but they are “telling more than they can know” (Nisbett & Wilson, 1977, p. 231).

In 2006, ideology maximalist John Jost boldly proclaimed “the end of the end of ideology” (p. 651). A more faithful representation of the evidence—even some of his own—shows that majorities in mass publics today *aren’t* ideological in politics. The knowledge necessary to organize political views coherently—even stably—is absent for most people, and that is unlikely to change. Elite-level politics *is* broadly ideological (highly structured by party coalitions, if not principle), but little of that organized conflict reaches the public. Only the most attentive citizens receive that information, follow those cues, and reason from principles. The sound and fury of *mass* politics is real, but it expresses partisan identities and ethnocentric prejudices, signifying nothing ideological for most.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My thanks to Don Kinder for our long collaboration on the work that frames this article and to Chris Federico for feedback on a related paper that informs this one. A previous version of this article was presented at the 2018 annual meeting of the International Society for Political Psychology. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Nathan P. Kalmoe, 211 Journalism Building, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA 70803, USA. E-mail: nkalmoe@lsu.edu

REFERENCES

- Abelson, R. P. (1976). Social psychology's rational man. In S. Benn & G. Mortimore (Eds.), *Rationalism and the social sciences* (pp. 58–87). London, United Kingdom: Routledge and Kegan.
- Acharya, A., Blackwell, M., & Sen, M. (2018). *Deep roots: How slavery still shapes Southern politics*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Achen, C. H., & Bartels, L. M. (2016). *Democracy for realists*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Aldrich, J. H. (1995). *Why parties? The origin and transformation of political parties in America*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Azevedo, F., Jost, J. T., Rothmund, T., & Sterling, J. (2019). Neoliberal ideology and the justification of inequality in capitalist societies: Why social and economic dimensions of ideology are intertwined. *Journal of Social Issues*, 75, 49–88.
- Barber, M., & Pope, J. C. (2019). Does party trump ideology? Disentangling party and ideology in America. *American Political Science Review*, 113(1), 38–54.
- Bartels, L. M. (2000). Partisanship and voting behavior, 1952–1996. *American Journal of Political Science*, 44, 35–50.
- Bartels, L. M. (2005). What's the matter with “What's the Matter with Kansas”? *Quarterly Journal of Political Science*, 1(2), 201–226.
- Berinsky, A. J. (2008). *In time of war*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Berinsky, A. J., Huber, G. A., & Lenz, G. S. (2012). Evaluating online labor markets for experimental research: Amazon.com's Mechanical Turk. *Political Analysis*, 20(3), 351–368.
- Brandt, M. J., Sibley, C. G., & Osborne, D. (2019). What is central to political belief system networks? *Personality & Social Psychology Bulletin*, 45(9), 1352–1364.
- Brewer, P. R. (2003). Values, political knowledge, and public opinion about gay rights: A framing-based account. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 67(2), 173–201.
- Burke, B. L., Kosloff, S., & Landau, M. J. (2013). Death goes to the polls: A meta-analysis of mortality salience effects on political attitudes. *Political Psychology*, 34(2), 183–200.
- Campbell, A., Converse, P. E., Miller, W. E., & Stokes, D. E. (1960). *The American voter*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Carmines, E. G., & Stimson, J. A. (1980). The two faces of issue voting. *American Political Science Review*, 74(1), 78–91.
- Carney, D. R., Jost, J. T., Goslin, S. D., & Potter, J. (2008). The secret lives of liberals and conservatives: Personality profiles, interaction styles, and the things they leave behind. *Political Psychology*, 29(6), 807–840.
- Carrus, G., Panno, A., & Leone, L. (2018). The moderating role of interest in politics on the relations between conservative political orientation and denial of climate change. *Society & Natural Resources*, 31(10), 1103–1117.
- Clifford, S., Jewell, R. M., & Waggoner, P. D. (2015). Are samples drawn from Mechanical Turk valid for research on political ideology? *Research & Politics*, 2(4), 1–9.
- Conover, P. J., & Feldman, S. (1981). The origins and meaning of liberal/conservative self-identifications. *American Journal of Political Science*, 25(4), 617–645.
- Converse, P. E. (1964). The nature of belief systems in mass publics. In D. E. Apter (Ed.), *Ideology and discontent*. New York, NY: Free Press of Glencoe.
- Converse, P. E. (2000). Assessing the capacity of mass electorates. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 3, 331–353.
- Converse, P. E., & Pierce, R. (1986). *Political representation in France*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Cramer, K. C. (2016). *The politics of resentment: Rural consciousness in Wisconsin and the rise of Scott Walker*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Dawson, M. (1994). *Behind the mule: Races and class in African-American politics*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Ditto, P. H., Liu, B. S., Clark, C. J., ... Zinger, J. F. (2019). At least bias is bipartisan: A meta-analytic comparison of partisan bias in liberals and conservatives. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 14(2), 273–291.
- Duckitt, J., & Sibley, C. G. (2010). Personality, ideology, prejudice, and politics: A dual-process motivational model. *Journal of Personality*, 78(6), 1861–1894.
- Ellis, C., & Stimson, J. A. (2012). *Ideology in America*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Federico, C. M., Fisher, E. L., & Deason, G. (2011). Expertise and the ideological consequences of the authoritarian predisposition. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 75(4), 686–708.
- Federico, C. M., & Goren, P. (2009). Motivated social cognition and ideology: Is attention to elite discourse a prerequisite for epistemically motivated political affinities? In J. T. Jost (Ed.), *Social & psychological bases of ideology & system justification* (pp. 267–291). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

- Federico, C. M., & Malka, A. (2018). The contingent, contextual nature of the relationship between needs for security and certainty and political preferences: Evidence and implications. *Political Psychology*, 39(S1), 3–48.
- Feldman, S. (1988). Structure and consistency in public opinion: The role of core beliefs and values. *American Journal of Political Science*, 5(1), 416–440.
- Feldman, S. (2003). Values, ideology, and the structure of political attitudes. In D. O. Sears, L. Huddy, & R. Jervis (Eds.), *Oxford handbook of political psychology* (pp. 477–508). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Feldman, S., & Johnston, C. (2014). Understanding the determinants of political: Implications of structural complexity. *Political Psychology*, 35(3), 337–358.
- Fiorina, M., Abrams, S. J., & Pope, J. (2005). *Culture war? The myth of a polarized America*. New York, NY: Pearson-Longman.
- Fiske, S. T., Lau, R. R., & Smith, R. A. (1990). On the varieties and utilities of political expertise. *Social Cognition*, 8, 31–48.
- Freeder, S., Lenz, G. S., & Turney, S. (2018). The importance of knowing “what goes with what”: Reinterpreting the evidence on policy attitude stability. *Journal of Politics*, 81(1), 274–290.
- Goren, P. (2001). Core principles and policy reasoning in mass publics: A test of two theories. *British Journal of Political Science*, 31(1), 159–177.
- Goren, P. (2004). Political sophistication and policy reasoning: A reconsideration. *American Journal of Political Science*, 48(3), 462–478.
- Goren, P. (2005). Party identification and core political values. *American Journal of Political Science*, 49(4), 881–896.
- Goren, P. (2012). Political values and political awareness. *Critical Review*, 24(4), 505–525.
- Graber, D. A. (1994). Why voters fail information tests: Can the hurdles be overcome? *Political Communication*, 11, 331–346.
- Graham, J., Haidt, J., & Nosek, B. A. (2009). Liberals and conservatives rely on different sets of moral foundations. *Personality Processes and Individual Differences*, 96(5), 1029–1046.
- Granberg, D., & Holmberg, S. (1996). Attitude constraint and stability among elite and mass in Sweden. *European Journal of Political Research*, 29, 59–72.
- Green, D., Palmquist, B., & Schickler, E. (2004). *Partisan hearts & minds: Political parties and the social identities of voters*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Hibbing, J. R., Smith, K. B., & Alford, J. R. (2014). Differences in negativity bias underlie variations in political ideology. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 37, 291–307.
- Huddy, L. (2001). From social to political identity: A critical examination of social identity theory. *Political Psychology*, 22(1), 127–156.
- Huddy, L. (2018). The group foundations of democratic political behavior. *Critical Review*, 30(1–2), 71–86.
- Huddy, L., Mason, L., & Aarøe, L. (2015). Expressive partisanship: Campaign involvement, political emotion, and partisan identity. *American Political Science Review*, 109(1), 1–17.
- Inbar, Y., Pizarro, D. A., & Bloom, P. (2008). Conservatives are more easily disgusted than liberals. *Cognition and Emotion*, 23(4), 714–725.
- Jardina, A. (2019). *The new role of white identity in American politics*. Book manuscript.
- Jennings, M. K., Stoker, L., & Bowers, J. (2009). Politics across generations: Family transmission reexamined. *Journal of Politics*, 71(3), 782–799.
- Jerit, J. (2009). Understanding the knowledge gap: The role of experts and journalists. *Journal of Politics*, 71, 442–456.
- Johnston, C. D., Lavine, H. G., & Federico, C. M. (2017). *Open versus closed: Personality, identity, and the politics of redistribution*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Jost, J. T. (2006). The end of the end of ideology. *American Psychologist*, 61(7), 651–670.
- Jost, J. T. (2017a). The marketplace of ideology: “Elective affinities” in political psychology and their implications for consumer behavior. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 27(4), 502–520.
- Jost, J. T. (2017b). Asymmetries abound: Ideological differences in emotion, partisanship, motivated reasoning, social network structure, and political trust. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 27(4), 546–553.
- Jost, J. T., Banaji, M. R., & Nosek, B. A. (2004). A decade of system justification theory: Accumulated evidence of conscious and unconscious bolstering of the status quo. *Political Psychology*, 25(6), 881–919.
- Jost, J. T., Federico, C. M., & Napier, J. L. (2009). Political ideology: Its structure, functions, and elective affinities. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 60, 307–330.
- Jost, J. T., Glaser, J., Kruglanski, A. W., & Sulloway, F. J. (2003). Political conservatism as motivated social cognition. *Psychological Bulletin*, 129(3), 339–375.
- Jost, J. T., Nosek, B. A., & Gosling, S. D. (2008). Ideology: Its resurgence in social personality, and political psychology. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 3(2), 126–136.
- Jost, J. T., Stern, C., Rule, N. O., & Sterling, J. (2017). The politics of fear: Is there an ideological asymmetry in existential motivation? *Social Cognition*, 35(4), 324–353.

- Kam, C. D. (2005). Who toes the party line? Cues, values, and individual differences. *Political Behavior*, 27(2), 163–182.
- Kinder, D. R. (1998). Opinion and action in the realm of politics. In D. T. Gilbert, S. T. Fiske, & G. Lindzey (Eds.), *The handbook of social psychology* (pp. 778–867). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- Kinder, D. R. (2003). Belief systems after Converse. In M. MacKuen & G. Rabinowitz (Eds.), *Electoral democracy* (pp. 13–47). Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Kinder, D. R., & Kalmoe, N. P. (2017). *Neither liberal nor conservative: Ideological innocence in the American public*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Knight, K. (1985). Ideology in the 1980 election: Ideological sophistication does matter. *Journal of Politics*, 47(3), 828–853.
- Krosnick, J. A., & McGraw, K. M. (2002). Psychological political science versus political psychology true to its name: A plea for balance. In K. R. Monroe (Ed.), *Political psychology* (pp. 79–94). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Krupnikov, Y., & Levine, A. S. (2014). Cross-sample comparisons and external validity. *Journal of Experimental Political Science*, 1(1), 59–80.
- Lane, R. E. (1962). *Political ideology: Why the common man believes what he does*. New York, NY: Free Press of Glencoe.
- Lenz, G. S. (2012). *Follow the leader? How voters respond to politicians' policies and performance*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Levitin, T. E., & Miller, W. E. (1979). Ideological interpretations of presidential elections. *American Political Science Review*, 73(3), 751–771.
- Luskin, R. C. (1990). Explaining political sophistication. *Political Behavior*, 12(4), 331–361.
- Malka, A., Lelkes, Y., & Soto, C. J. (2019). Are cultural and economic conservatism positively correlated? A large-scale cross-national test. *British Journal of Political Science*, 49(3), 1045–1069.
- Markus, G. (2001). American individualism reconsidered. In J. H. Kuklinski (Ed.), *Citizens and politics: Perspectives from political psychology* (pp. 401–432). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Mason, L. (2018). Ideologues without issues: The polarizing consequences of ideological identities. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 82(S1), 866–887.
- McCann, J. A. (1997). Electoral choices and core value change: The 1992 presidential campaign. *American Journal of Political Science*, 41(2), 564–83. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2111777>
- Napier, J. L., & Jost, J. T. (2008). Why are conservatives happier than liberals? *Psychological Science*, 19(6), 565–572.
- Nisbett, R. E., & Wilson, T. D. (1977). Telling more than we can know: Verbal reports on mental processes. *Psychological Review*, 84(3), 231–259.
- Oxley, D. R., Smith, K. B., Alford, J. R., Hibbing, M. V., Miller, J. I., Scalora, M., ... Hibbing, J. R. (2008). Political attitudes vary with physiological traits. *Science*, 321(5896), 1667–1670.
- Pew Research Center. (2007). *Public knowledge of current affairs little changed by news and information revolutions*. Retrieved from <http://www.people-press.org/2007/04/15/public-knowledge-of-current-affairs-little-changed-by-news-and-information-revolutions/>
- Pew Research Center. (2012, April 11). *What the public knows about the political parties*. Retrieved from <http://www.people-press.org/2012/04/11/what-the-public-knows-about-the-political-parties/>
- Piston, S. (2018). *Class attitudes in America: Sympathy for the poor, resentment of the rich, and political implications*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Price, V., & Zaller, J. (1993). Who gets the news? Alternative measures of news reception and their implications for research. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 57(2), 133–164.
- Prior, M. (2007). *Post-broadcast democracy: How media choice increases inequality in political involvement and polarizes elections*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Schwartz, S. H., Caprara, G. V., & Vecchione, M. (2010). Basic personal values, core political values, and voting: A longitudinal analysis. *Political Psychology*, 31, 421–452.
- Sears, D. O. (1986). College sophomores in the laboratory: Influences of a narrow data base on social psychology's view of human nature. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 51(3), 515–530.
- Sears, D. O. (1993). Symbolic politics: A socio-psychological theory. In S. Iyengar & W. J. McGuire (Eds.), *Duke studies in political psychology. Explorations in political psychology* (pp. 113–149). Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Sibley, C. G., Osborne, D., & Duckitt, J. (2012). Personality and political orientation: Meta-analysis and test of a Threat-Constraint Model. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 46(6), 664–677.
- Simon, H. A. (1985). Human nature in politics: The dialogue of psychology with political science. *American Political Science Review*, 79(2), 293–304.
- Skitka, L. J., & Tetlock, P. E. (1993). Providing public assistance: Cognitive and motivational processes underlying liberal and conservative policy preferences. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 65(6), 1205–1223.
- Smith, K. B., Alford, J. R., Hibbing, J. R., Martin, N. G., & Hatemi, P. K. (2017). Intuitive ethics and political orientations: Testing moral foundations as a theory of political ideology. *American Journal of Political Science*, 61(2), 424–437.

- Sniderman, P. M., & Stiglitz, E. H. (2012). *The reputational premium: A theory of party identification and policy reasoning*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Stimson, J. A. (2004). *Tides of consent*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Van Hiel, A., Onraet, E., & De Pauw, S. (2010). The relationship between social-cultural attitudes and behavioral measures of cognitive style: A meta-analytic integration of studies. *Journal of Personality*, 78(6), 1765–1800.
- Zaller, J. (1992). *The nature and origins of mass opinion*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Supporting Information

Additional supporting information may be found in the online version of this article at the publisher's web site:

Table S1. The Breadth of Values, Policy Views, & Identities by Knowledge

Table S2. The Breadth of Values, Policy Views, & Identities by Quiz Knowledge (1986–92)

Table S3. Reliability by Quiz Knowledge (1986–92)

Table S4. Most of the Same Quiz Items are Difficult to Work with in the Panels, and so I don't Replicate the Stability Tests with them here.

Table S5. Relating Ideological Constructs & Partisanship (Correl.) (1986–92)—Quiz Knowledge

Table S6. Predicting Presidential Votes (1988, 1992) (bivariate probit models)—Quiz Knowledge

Table S7. The Breadth of Values, Policy Views, & Identities by Knowledge—2008–16

Table S8. Reliability for Multiple Measures of Core Political Values & Policy Views—2008–16

Table S9. Relating Ideological Constructs & Partisanship—2008–16

Table S10. Ideology in Presidential Vote Choice, 2008–16 (Probit Models, 1 Predictor)

Table S11. Comparing Average Pearson's (Continuous) vs. Polychoric (Ordinal) Inter-item Correlations (1986–92)

Table S12. The Stability of Ideological Identification: Follow-up for Moderates vs. Original Question