

MUNI
FSS

Attitudes, opinions, attitude stability

POLb1013
7.10. 2024

What is an attitude?

- “.. a mental and neural state of readiness, organized through experience, exerting a directive and dynamic influence upon the individual's response to all objects and situations with which it is related” (Allport 1935, p. 810).
- "An attitude can be defined as an enduring organization of motivational, emotional, perceptual, and cognitive processes with respect to some aspect of the individual's world" (Krech and Crutchfield 1948, p. 152).
- Or the probability that a person will show a specified behavior in a specified situation.

Newer approaches

- More emphasis on evaluative dimension:
- „Attitudes are likes and dislikes“ (Daryl Bem 1970, p. 14)
- „psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor“ (Eagly and Chaiken 1993, p. 1)
- Limits: how about political phenomena? Are all attitudes equal?

ANES - Feeling Thermometers

I'd like to get your feelings toward some of our political leaders and other people who are in the news these days. I'll read the name of a person and I'd like you to rate that person using something we call the feeling thermometer. Ratings between 50 degrees and 100 degrees mean that you feel favorable and warm toward the person. Ratings between 0 degrees and 50 degrees mean that you don't feel favorable toward the person and that you don't care too much for that person. You would rate the person at the 50 degree mark if you don't feel particularly warm or cold toward the person. If we come to a person whose name you don't recognize, you don't need to rate that person. Just tell me and we'll move on to the next one.



Q25 For each of the following statements I read out, or disagree with each. Do you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or disagree strongly?

		agree strongly
v72	When a mother works for pay, the children suffer	1
v73	A job is alright but what most women really want is a home and children	1
v74	All in all, family life suffers when the woman has a full-time job	1
v75	A man's job is to earn money; a woman's job is to look after the home and family	1
v76	On the whole, men make better political leaders than women do	1

- Please, answer some survey questions



Are all attitudes important to the same extent?

Are all attitudes important to the same extent?

- Attitude strength
 - Krosnick and Petty 1995
 - Makes attitudes „durable and impactful“
 - Objective measurement
 - Subjective measurement
- Certainty
 - Importance
 - Accessibility
 - Knowledge
 - Extremity
 - Intensity
 - Elaboration
 - Stability
 - Moral basis
 - Affective vs. Cognitive base
 - Self-Relevance

Attitude ambivalence

- Can something be good and bad at the same time?
- In Allport's definition: attitudes either positive or negative!
- But things can be more complex not unidimensional
- (do measures reflect this?)
- People have ambivalent or contradicting attitudes!

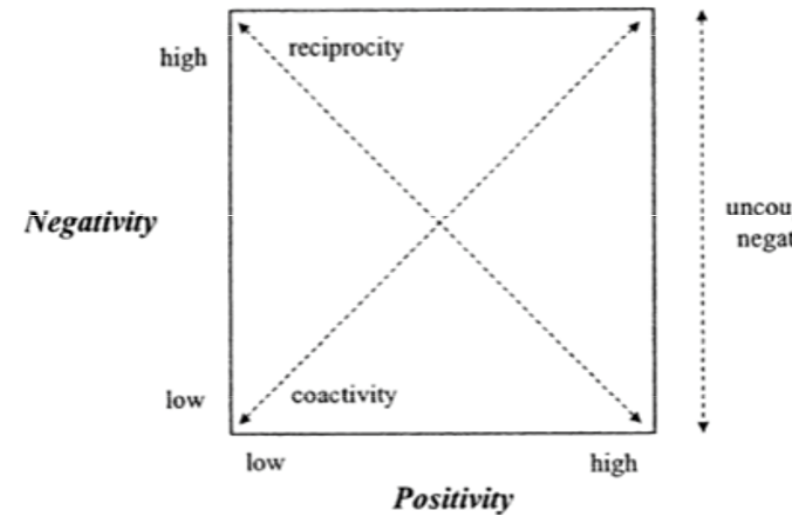


Figure 3.1 Bidimensional evaluative space. *Source:* Adapted from Cacioppo, Gardner, and Berntson 1997.

MUNI FSS

Belief systems: Do people have them?

- Belief system: how people organize their attitudes
- Attitudes are bounded together (constraint)



Converse: The Nature of Belief Systems (1964)

- **Main Idea: differences in belief systems** between political elites and the mass public
- focusing on how people organize their political attitudes
- **Key Concepts:**
 - **Belief System (BS):** A structured set of attitudes and ideas bound by **constraints**.
 - **Constraint:** The degree to which knowing one attitude helps predict others within a belief system.
 - **Elites vs. Mass Public:** Elites tend to have more **consistent and structured** belief systems, while the public often has less constrained, less coherent systems.
 - **Non-attitudes:** people don't have structured attitudes



The Nature of Belief Systems

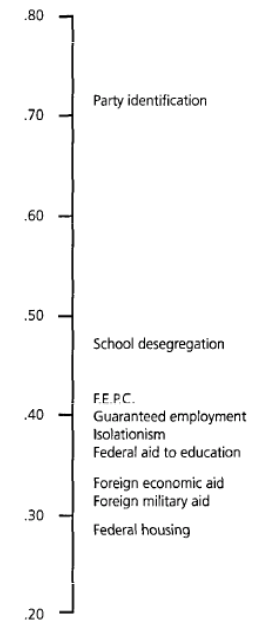
- **Static Constraint:** one attitude (e.g., support for welfare) predicts others (e.g., opposition to tax cuts)
- **Dynamic Constraint:** changing one belief = adjusting others
- **Centrality of Idea Elements**
- **Elite more constrained than the public**
- **Elite** able to use abstract ideological constructs



The Nature of Belief Systems

- Ideologues (10%)
 - Near-Ideologues
 - Group-specific interests
 - Some attitudes but low constraint
 - No belief system, no issue content (22%)
-
- Shifts from liberal to conservative government not motivated by ideology!
 - Low levels of stability in time (13 out of 20 on the same side of dimension)
 - Black and white model of the public
 - Issue public

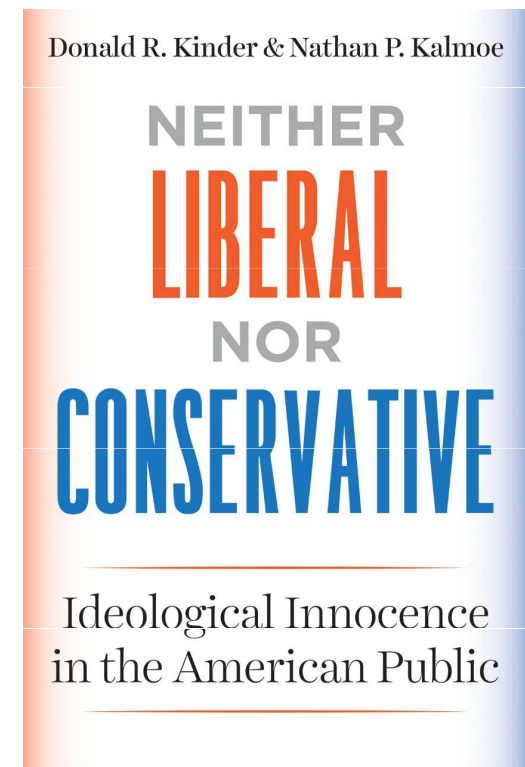
Figure 3. Temporal Stability of Different Belief Elements for Individuals, 1958–60^a



a. The measure of stability is a rank-order correlation (tau-beta) between individuals' positions in 1958 and in 1960 on the same items.

Converse's work still alive today

- Most people unconstrained
- What is the role of ideology in polarization?
- Conservatives and liberals do not disagree
- No increasing trend over time
- US context

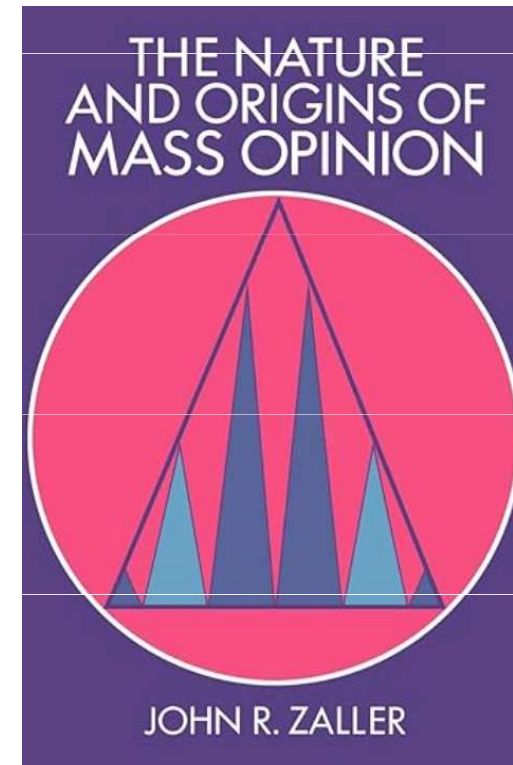


Response to Converse: Christopher Achen

- „Voters are not fools!“
- Not non-attitudes
- Problem of methodology
- Preferences as an interval
- Responses not the same all the time
- Vague questions = instability of responses
- Even church attendance does not correlate perfectly
- High interest in politics does not explain stability

John Zaller: R-A-S Model

- Comprehensive theory
 - How PO works
 - Elite discourse
 - Caution when using surveys
- **Receive:** People receive information from the political environment
 - **Accept:** They accept or reject this information
 - **Sample:** They sample from the considerations available in their mind



Online vs. memory-based information processing

- People keep „running tally“ of object’s evaluation
 - Update it in real time
 - Forget information
 - Keep evaluation available
- People encounter information
 - Store it in their memory
 - Retrieve from memory
 - Evaluate

Is ideological constraint increasing?

- What is polarization and how it matters for people's attitudes?
- Baldassari and Gelman 2008, *Partisans without Constraint: Political Polarization and Trends in American Public Opinion*
- Is US public more polarized over time (ANES 1972-2004)
- Correlations between issues, issue-partisanship correlation
- Partisan sorting
- Issue-partisanship
- Lack of constraint

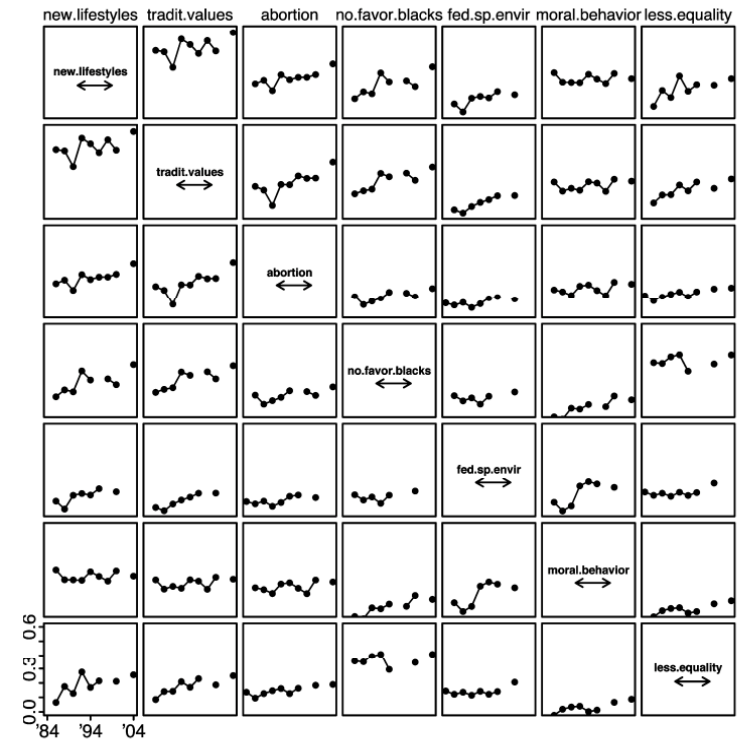


FIG. 6.—Trends in correlations between pairs of hot issues. The x-axis is time (1984–2004), and the y-axis is correlation (0 to .6). The plots are redundant: each pair of issues is plotted twice so that the reader can see on the same row (or column) the correlation between one issue and all the others.



Issue alignment and partisanship in the American public: Revisiting the ‘partisans without constraint’ thesis

Austin C. Kozlowski ^{a,1,*}, James P. Murphy ^{b,1}

^a Department of Sociology, University of Chicago, USA

^b Institute for Policy Research, Northwestern University, USA

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Political ideology
Public opinion
Political identification
Polarization

ABSTRACT

Prior studies of American polarization suggest that the public gradually sorted themselves into partisan camps in the late 20th century while remaining largely non-ideological. Drawing on more recent data, we reassess these trends and discover a striking increase in the ideological organization of American public opinion in the beginning of the 21st century. Using a broad set of issues from the American National Election Studies, we identify rapid growth in the correlations between political attitudes from 2004 to 2016. This emergence of issue alignment is most pronounced within the economic and civil rights domains, challenging the notion that current “culture wars” are grounded in moral issues. While elite subpopulations show the greatest gains,

- Extending the analysis to 2016
- Increase of consistency after 2004

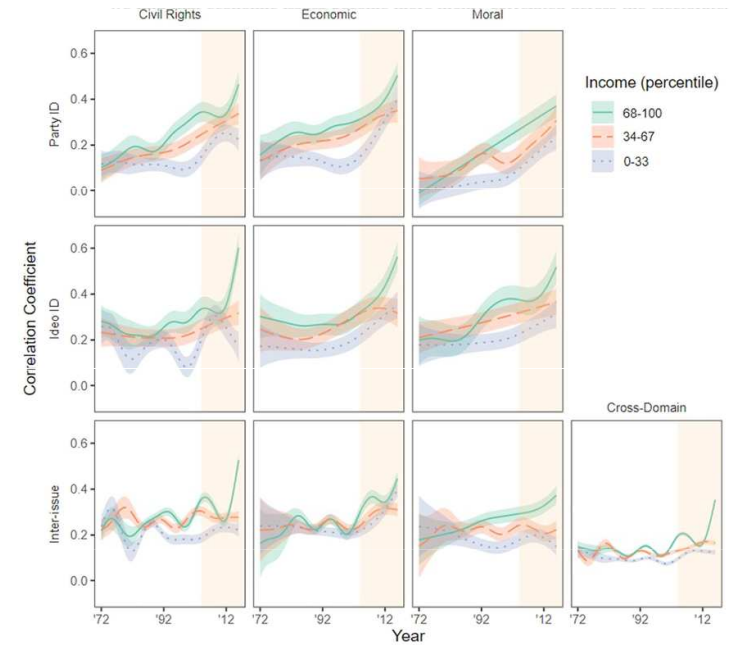
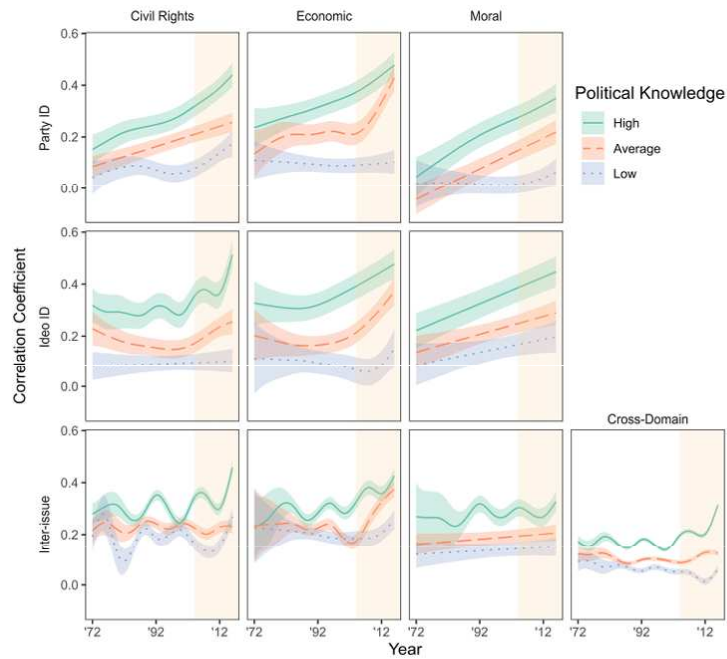
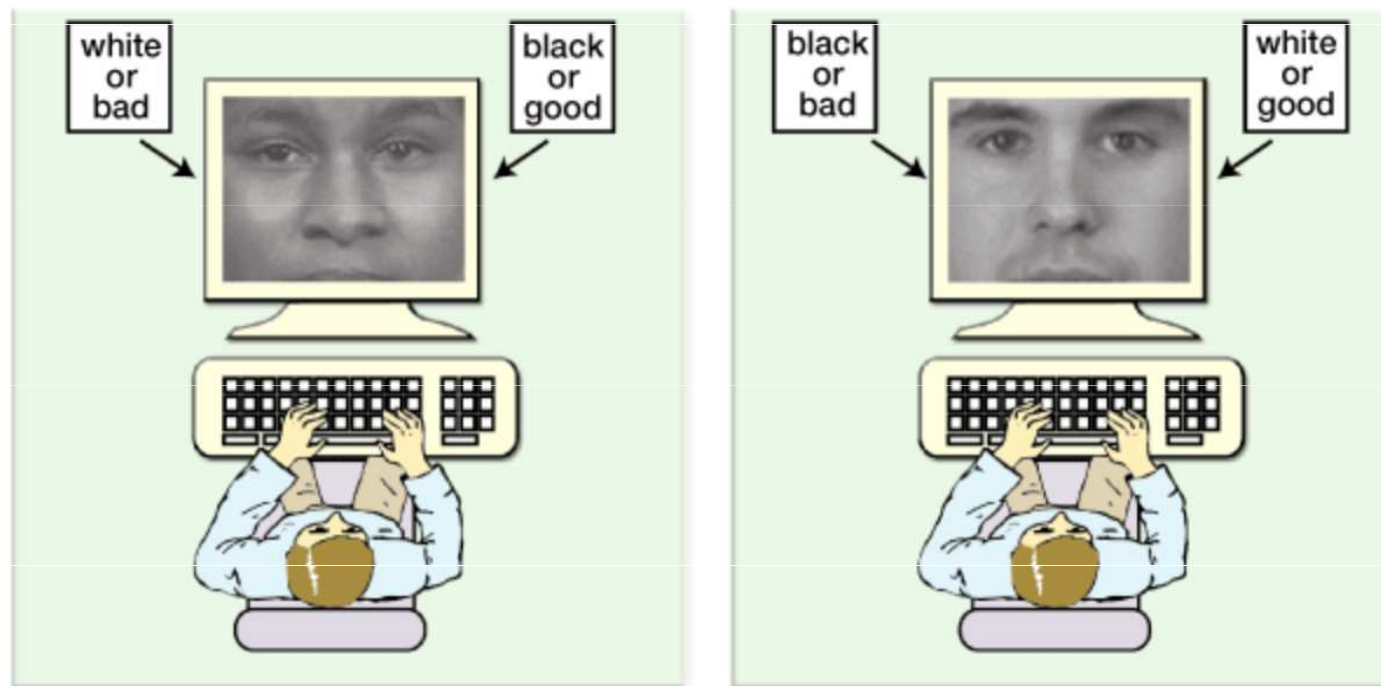


Fig. 7. Estimates from Generalized Additive Mixed Models (GAMMs) of party, ideological, and issue alignments by issue domain, stratified by income terciles, 1972–2016.

Implicit attitudes



Summary

- Attitudes as evaluations of concepts
- Different features of attitudes (strength and ambivalence)
- Measurement in surveys
- Converse: people without real attitudes
- Differences between elites and non-elites
- Others less strict (Achen, Zaller, Lodge)
- Polarization = constraint might increase