

**The Malady of Democratic States:
Isolationism in Mid-Century Thinking about Public Opinion**

Abstract

When scholars worry about "isolationism," they are implicitly concerned about a return to the conditions that prevailed in the interwar period, when many believe that the American unwillingness to play a leadership role in world politics contributed to World War II. We will argue that observers of American public opinion at the time, including such major figures as Walter Lippmann and Gabriel Almond, did not see "isolationism," as scholars currently understand the term, as the central problem. They identified a range of pathologies in public opinion that included isolationism of this sort, but all were rooted in a deeper issue: public ignorance and apathy about world affairs. The critical problem was not principled convictions of any sort--isolationist or otherwise--but instead the systematic biases apparent when uninformed and uninterested people are called upon to evaluate foreign policies. In this paper, we investigate a pattern of overreaction and underreaction in public opinion among uninformed respondents using survey data from the World War II era, the period around the end of the Cold War, and the time around the 9/11 terrorist attacks. We find evidence that low-information respondents react much as mid-Century writers on public opinion argued they would.

Katja B. Kleinberg
kkleinbe@binghamton.edu

Benjamin O. Fordham
bfordham@binghamton.edu

Department of Political Science
Binghamton University (SUNY)

Paper prepared for presentation to the 2017 annual meeting of the American Political Science Association. Please contact the authors for the most current version of this paper.

In research on the topic, isolationism is generally understood as principled opposition to extensive involvement in world affairs (e.g., Wittkopf 1990; Fordham 2008; Page and Shapiro 1992). The survey items most often used to study isolationism reflect this understanding of the phenomenon. The ANES has long asked respondents if they agree that "[t]his country would be better off if we just stayed home and did not concern ourselves with problems in other parts of the world." The Chicago Council on Global Affairs uses a similar question: "Do you think it will be best for the future of the country if we take an active part in world affairs or if we stay out of world affairs?" This conception of isolationism makes sense because it taps into a genuine intellectual tradition in the United States that encompasses not only the opposition to American involvement in World War II, but also to other instances of anti-interventionism in American history (Kinzer 2017; Mayers 2007; Nichols 2011). It is also general enough to be examined in other national settings. People in nearly any country might oppose engagement with "problems in other parts of the world," and might prefer to "stay out of world affairs."

This current scholarly understanding of the term "isolationism" is not its only meaning. As the Google N-gram in Figure 1 suggests, the term came into wide use during the interwar period. The timing makes sense. Most scholarly observers of public opinion before and immediately after World War II--including luminaries such as Walter Lippmann and Gabriel Almond--believed that the United States should play a much more active leadership role in world affairs than it had in the past. They were deeply concerned about public opposition to such a role in aftermath of World War I, and especially to intervention in World War II prior to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. While a focus on public opposition to an activist foreign policy would have made sense in light of these events, a closer look at major works on public opinion and foreign policy during this period reveals that principled "isolationism" was not a major concern.

Their diagnosis of the problems public opinion posed for American foreign policy ran quite a bit deeper. Isolationist attitudes were just one possible symptom of a larger "malady of democratic states" (Lippmann 1955, 16). For nearly all of them, public ignorance and apathy about world politics lay at the root of a wide range of problems. These included an isolationist tendency toward complacency in the face of real but distant security threats. However, ignorance and apathy also produced overreaction to these same threats once they could no longer be ignored. Once mobilized, those with little information about the world would also tend to prefer simple but extreme policy options.

This remainder of this paper has four parts. The first examines the role of ignorance and apathy in mid-Century thought about public opinion and American foreign policy. It sets out a range of specific tendencies these observers thought followed from these phenomena, and explains a general pattern of which isolationism was one part. The second section sets out a research design for testing hypotheses derived from this pattern. The third section presents the results of our tests, using public opinion data on American entry into World War II, the NATO alliance during and after the Cold War, and the response to 9/11 terrorist attacks. A fourth section assesses this evidence across all three tests and offers our conclusions.

What is "Isolationism" in Public Opinion?

Most recent research on isolationism in American public opinion focuses on a specific attitude: that the country would be better off if it "stayed out of world affairs" or "just stayed home and did not concern ourselves with problems in other parts of the world." The framing of the question and indeed much of the research about it suggests that this position represents a principled conviction about the role of the United States in the world, one likely to influence individual attitudes on a variety of more specific policy matters. In this view, isolationism is a shorthand for a logically coherent cluster of policy positions (Wittkopf 1990), or perhaps a basic predisposition from which individuals deduce other policy views (Hurwitz and Peffley 1987).

This is not the only way to understand isolationism. Scholars writing in the 1930s and 1940s thought of it as one part of a larger pattern in public opinion. This pattern did not arise out of a set of consistent convictions about world affairs but rather out of ignorance and apathy. The problem was not that the public held views that were antipathetic to the more active role these scholars hoped the United States would play in the world, but rather that predictable patterns arising out of ignorance would blindly obstruct a prudent and effective foreign policy.

The Importance of Ignorance and Apathy

Concerns about ignorance and apathy in democratic publics were nothing new in the mid-20th Century. However, these factors played a specific and central role in thinking about public opinion and American foreign policy during this period. Scholars differed about why the public knew so little about world affairs, and they identified a range of different pathologies that ignorance produced in public attitudes. However, public ignorance always played a central role.

Many citizens were ignorant of (and apathetic about) foreign policy issues because these matters are complex and demanding. As Almond (1950, 25) noted

[t]he bewildering variety of peoples, cultures, issues, and movements cannot fail to have some basic impact on broader masses of the population. The basic danger is that, when confronted with this range of exasperating complexity and subtlety in the world of foreign affairs, the public might prefer the certainty of bias and prejudice to the possibilities and probabilities of rational calculation.

Other writers agreed. Bailey (1948, 12) noted that understanding foreign policy required people to make many potentially obscure connections among policy initiatives and the responses of other states. As an example, he noted that, in spite to public opposition to entering World War II, "sympathy for the democracies led to Lend-Lease, Lend-Lease led to convoy, convoy led to shooting, and shooting led to war." Because of the complexity of the issues involved, public ignorance and apathy reinforced one another on foreign policy matters. The difficulty of the issue prompted many to abandon efforts to understand it.

To make matters worse, foreign policy issues necessarily entailed matters that were remote from the everyday experience of most people. Lippmann (1922, 8-9) illustrated this point with an example involving a character from Sinclair Lewis' *Main Street*:

Miss Sherwin of Gopher Prairie is aware that a war is raging in France and tries to conceive it. She has never been to France, and certainly she has never been along what is the battlefield. Picture of French and German soldiers she has seen, but it is impossible for her to imagine three million men. No one, in fact, can imagine them, and the professionals do not try. They think of them as, say, two hundred divisions. But Miss Sherwin has no access to order of battle maps, and so if she is to think about the war, she fastens upon Joffre and the Kaiser as if they were engaged in a personal duel.

The motives of unfamiliar and frequently unsympathetic foreign actors are difficult to grasp. Niebuhr (1932, 85) commented that "[n]ations do not have direct contact with other national communities, with which they must form some kind of international community. They know the problems of other peoples only indirectly and at second hand."

Some authors suggested that the difficulty and remoteness of foreign policy issues would lead many in the public to turn to experts for help. These authors did not always exalt the role of these experts, however, because they did not always serve the public well. Indeed Lippmann (1922, 48-9) included weak elite communication and efforts to manipulate the public among the

barriers to public understanding. Even sincere efforts to comprehend foreign policy were blocked:

by censorship and privacy at the source, by physical and social barriers at the other end, by scanty attention, by the poverty of language, by distraction by unconscious constellations of feeling, by wear and tear, violence, monopoly. These limitations upon our access to that environment combine with the obscurity and complexity of the facts themselves to thwart clearness and justice of perception, to substitute misleading fictions for workable ideas, and to deprive us of adequate checks upon those who consciously strive to mislead.

Lamenting the same problem, Almond (1950, 8) commented that "[i]n some measure the problem of public apathy and ignorance might be solved if the political, bureaucratic, pressure group, and communications elites were governed by codes of conduct which minimized these elements of distortion and panic in the stream of communication."

Apathy was intimately related to ignorance in these accounts, arising from many of the same sources, with the two phenomena reinforcing each other. Thomas Bailey (1948, 116) wrote that "[a]pathy is perhaps the single greatest barrier in a democracy to the conduct of an intelligent foreign policy." In his account, apathy increased ignorance, but even when the public was relatively well informed it was still "not well informed enough to exercise understandingly [its] present direct and hence dangerous control of foreign policy" (130). Almond (1950, 83) commented that "[m]ost Americans either feel that they can do nothing about improving the world situation, or are ignorant of what they can do." Almond was not entirely unsympathetic to this outlook: "so-called apathy and indifference are at least in part an acceptance of a sound division of labor in a complex and interdependent world" (84). The onus, according to Almond, was on the "more well-to-do and better educated elements of the population." (84).

Political information (and the lack thereof) continues to play an important role in more recent research on public opinion. In spite of advances in communication technology, scholars generally agree that the public continues to know very little about policy in general and foreign policy in particular (Key 1966; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Visser, Holbrook, and Krosnick 2008; Guisinger 2009). Recent scholarship includes sophisticated efforts to disentangle and measure knowledge, attentiveness, and information (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1993; Mondak 1999; Luskin and Bullock 2011; Dolan 2011), as well as their effects on the shape of public opinion (e.g., Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Baum 2005).

Current scholars of public opinion differ on the effects of ignorance on individual attitudes. Many scholars are less pessimistic than the mid-Century writers, holding that the effect of information on policy opinion is not especially large (e.g., Visser, Holbrook, and Krosnick 2008). Individuals with little information may be able to use cues or heuristics to form opinions similar to those they would have held if they had more information. At the aggregate level, public opinion may respond reasonably to relevant events and conditions if the mistakes caused by the lack of information at the individual level cancel one another out (e.g., Page and Shapiro 1991).

Taking a more pessimistic position, others argue that individuals with little political information have difficulty translating their interests and predispositions into corresponding views about policy matters. For instance, Althaus (1998) finds that the uneven distribution of political information across the public leads to the systematic underrepresentation of some opinions in aggregate public opinion, as low-information respondents decline to answer questions, or offer answers that differ from those of more informed respondents with similar interests and predispositions. Caplan (2011) argues that systematic biases undermine the ‘miracle of aggregation’ in collective public opinion on economic policy. Rho and Tomz (2017) find that the opinions of low-information respondents are less likely to correspond to their economic interests but come to reflect these interests more closely when relevant information is provided to respondents. Kertzer (2013) similarly presents evidence that the opinions of highly informed respondents react more to international events than those of less informed respondents.

Another important line of research stresses the role of information in mediating elite leadership. Zaller (1992; 1994) and Berinsky (2009) argue that those who know more about politics and policy are better able to attend to the positions of elites with whom they sympathize. In these accounts, the elite cues move individual opinion. Knowledge matters because it affects individuals' ability to attend to these cues. High levels of information and elite cues together give public opinion a coherent shape; less informed public opinion is shapeless. What these recent treatments of public opinion have in common is that political information plays a mediating role. On its own ignorance does not have a direct effect on individual opinions, as earlier scholars had claimed.

Finally, some recent work on foreign policy issues has tended to set political information aside and focus on other influences. Scholars focused on the use of force, trade, and other

specific issues use education, but typically to indicate other things, such as economic interests or cosmopolitanism. There are of course some exceptions, such as Todorov and Mandisodsa (2004), who find that false beliefs about public support for multilateralism affect policy views on the topic. Even if scholars wanted to consider information, surveys do not usually include a battery of factual questions that would allow them to do so.

In sum, to the extent that scholarship on foreign policy public opinion has concerned itself with the impact of public ignorance, it has been treated as unproblematic or a source of noise in public opinion. Political knowledge and attention permit interests, predispositions, international events, and elite leadership to give public opinion coherence and shape. On its own, ignorance does not have any definite implications for the content of individual attitudes. Earlier writers regarded ignorance somewhat differently. It was not simply a barrier to the influence of other considerations. They claimed that less-informed individuals would tend toward certain definite--and, in their view, unfortunate--policy positions.

The Consequences of Ignorance and Apathy for Foreign Policy Opinion

Mid-Century writers advanced many different claims about how ignorance and apathy would influence public opinion. They derived these from a range of different mechanisms. It would be a mistake to view this body of work as a unitary whole. However, there are several specific patterns in public opinion arising from ignorance and apathy that several of them noted.

Status Quo Bias and the Public's "No." Perhaps the most immediate consequence of ignorance and indifference toward foreign policy is a resistance to engagement with it. Departures from the status quo will necessarily force people to consider policy issues more deeply, something many people resist. Leaving things as they are requires no further thought. Noting this tendency, Almond (1950, 69) harkened back to Tocqueville and attributed it to "the extraordinary absorption of most Americans with the values of private material life." Others writing around the same time echoed this claim. Bailey (1948, 118) argued that "[a] primary reason of our indifference to foreign policy is that our own personal affairs seem to us more pressing."

This bias toward the status quo has important substantive implications, even though it arises from disinterest rather than conviction. Writing in 1955, and recalling the experience of the preceding 20 years, Lippmann wrote that

[t]he rule to which there are very few exceptions--the acceptance of the Marshall Plan is one of them--is that at critical junctures when the stakes are high, the prevailing mass opinion will impose what amounts to a veto upon changing the course on which the government is at the time proceeding. Prepare for war in time of peace? No. It is bad to raise taxes, to unbalance the budget, to take men away from their schools or their jobs, to provoke the enemy. Intervene in a developing conflict? No. Avoid the risk of war. Withdraw from the area of the conflict? No. The adversary must not be appeased. Reduce your claims on the area? No. Righteousness cannot be compromised. Negotiate a compromise peace as soon as the opportunity presents itself? No. The aggressor must be punished. Remain armed to enforce the dictated settlement? No. The war is over (19-20).

Lippmann and others writing in the same vein had their eyes on the failure to prepare adequately for World War II. Some, though not Lippmann, worried that the public would again be overly complacent in the face of the Soviet threat. However, one does not have to share their conviction that existing policies are incorrect in any particular instance to recognize that an unthinking bias in favor of the status quo is potentially problematic. The bias will eventually pose problems regardless of one's preferred outcome because it is unresponsive to conditions in the world. Lippmann (1955, 20) charged that this tendency in public opinion had "compelled the governments, which usually new what would have been wiser, or was necessary, or was more expedient, to be too late with too little, or too long with too much, too pacifist in peace, too bellicose in war, too neutralist or appeasing in negotiation, or too intransigent."

Overreliance on Enemy Images and Other Simplifying Devices. In order to overcome the public's reluctance to change course and take costly foreign policy action, policymakers may feel compelled to exploit another of the pathologies arising from public ignorance: a reliance on cognitive shortcut or simplifying devices. Extreme images of a foreign enemy are one obvious example. Converse (1964) pointed out that individuals with little political information could use hostility toward another group as an organizing device. He was especially concerned about the role of race in shaping public opinion, but a hated foreign enemy might work in much the same way. Elite reliance on such an enemy image as a way of reaching low-information citizens increases their importance and magnifies the problems that come along with them. As Lippmann (1955, 21) put it, "the enemy has to be portrayed as evil incarnate, as absolute and congenital wickedness. The people wanted to be told that when this particular enemy had been forced to

unconditional surrender, they would re-enter the golden age." Almond (1950, 23) worried about much the same thing, noting that the public had trouble processing the complex demands of the Cold War, which reached them only "in the form of distortions and caricatures." Later scholars have pointed out that policymakers themselves are not immune from these distortions (Jervis 1976; Snyder 1991).

Inability to Imagine Other States' Interests. It is no surprise that it is difficult to form a realistic conception of a foreign state's interests when an enemy image dominates one's understanding of that state. Some, like Niebuhr (1932, 85-6) worried that public ignorance about foreign states would be sufficient to create this problem even without such an overwhelming enemy image. The public would demand selfish behavior at all times, simply because most people have no understanding of why other states might have different preferences. As in Lippmann's work, this public ignorance poses problems not only for the ethical behavior of nations, but even for their ability to pursue their own self-interest. "Such is the social ignorance of peoples that, far from doing justice to a foe or a neighbor, they are as yet unable to conserve their own interests wisely. Since their ultimate interests are always protected best by at least a measure of fairness toward their neighbors, the desire to gain an immediate selfish advantage always imperils their ultimate interests" (86).

In more modern parlance, individuals who have no conception of how their international allies and adversaries understand their interests will have great difficulty understanding (or supporting) strategic behavior by their own state. Their leaders know perfectly well the strategic situation they face, but they have to justify their policies to a public that does not, and in the face of domestic political opponents who have good reason to turn this "social ignorance" to their advantage. E.H. Carr (1939, 38) noted the same problem, commenting that "[i]t became a commonplace for statesmen at Geneva and elsewhere to explain that they themselves had every desire to be reasonable but that public opinion in their countries was inexorable; and though this plea was sometimes a pretext or a tactical maneuver, there was often a solid substratum of reality beneath it."

Opposition to Complex Policies. Mid-Century writers worried that the low-information public would reflexively oppose complex policies. This is a consequence of seeing the world through

enemy images and opponents whose interests are hard to imagine. Complex policies also make more cognitive demands, requiring people to accept tradeoffs and make connections that they may not be in a position to understand. Almond (1950, 56) noted that when evaluating specific policy responses to international crises, "American distrust of intellectualism and subtlety, the faith in 'common sense,' and the belief in simple answers lead to oversimplifications of the threat and the methods of coping with it." Lippmann (1922, 100) offered a similar observation. "For we do not like qualifying adverbs. They clutter up sentences, and interfere with irresistible feeling... Yet nearly every opinion about public affairs needs to be deflated by some word of this sort."

The necessity for give and take in international negotiations poses a particular problem. The public was unable to understand either the concessions to foreign interests that these agreements nearly always entailed, or the policy gains that made these concessions worthwhile. Cottrell and Eberhardt (1948) discussed the public's difficulty in understanding what the United States gets from foreign aid programs. Noting public opposition to the 1946 British loan, they argued that people were unaware that the loan was supposed to have benefits for the United States as well as Britain, even though these were obvious and widely discussed (43-4). Other observers noted the same failure to understand quid pro quo in negotiated outcomes (Bailey 1948, 76; Kriesberg 1949, 57-8). Lippmann (1922, 73) attributed the difficulty of accepting negotiated outcomes to simplifying devices among those with little political information. "The stereotype, instead of economizing effort, and focusing energy as it did in 1917 and 1918, may frustrate and waste men's energy by blinding them, as it did for those people who cried for a Carthaginian Peace in 1919 and deplored the Treaty of Versailles in 1921."

The Dynamic of Underreaction and Overreaction

In addition to the specific pathologies arising from ignorance and apathy that mid-century observers discussed, they also identified broader patterns to which these pathologies contributed. Their concerns about isolationism in public opinion need to be seen in the context of these patterns. Rather than a principled policy position, isolationism in public opinion was one component of a dynamic of under-reaction and over-reaction to world events. Kennan (1985 [1951], 59) used a memorable metaphor to describe this process.

But sometimes I wonder whether in this respect a democracy is not uncomfortably similar to one of those prehistoric monsters with a body as long as this room and a

brain the size of a pin: he lies there in his comfortable primeval mud and pays little attention to his environment; he is slow to wrath--in fact, you practically have to whack his tail off to make him aware that his interests are being disturbed; but, once he grasps this, he lays about him with such blind determination that he not only destroys his adversary but largely wrecks his native habitat.

Other writers described a similar pattern using somewhat less vivid language. For example, Almond (1950, 54-5) described the American character as "prone to cyclical withdrawal-intervention problem," which "suggests at least two serious dangers for foreign policy decision-making: (1) possible overreaction to threat; (2) possible overreactions to temporary equilibria in world politics."

Such a cyclical process was at the heart of Lippmann's (1955, 16) "malady of democratic states." Elites played a more central role in his account than they do in Kennan's metaphor. Democratic policymakers first faced the difficulty of overcoming public indifference to threats that were not yet acute. Once the crisis arrived, as in 1941, leaders turned to simplifying devices to mobilize the public. "It seemed impossible to wage war except by inciting people to paroxysms of hatred and to utopian dreams" (23). Unfortunately, "[t]his mixture of envenomed hatred and furious righteousness made a public opinion which would not tolerate the calculated compromises that durable settlements demand" (23-4).

If this cyclical pattern really arises from public ignorance, as the mid-Century writers we have reviewed here suggest, we should observe several differences in the substantive policy positions that informed and uninformed members of the public adopt. Isolationism is only the first part of the story.

1. During periods of relative international stability, less informed respondents should support costly policy actions less than more informed respondents do.
2. During periods of acute crisis, less informed respondents should support costly policy actions more than more informed respondents do.
3. During periods of acute crisis, less informed respondents should support extreme policy options more than more informed respondents do.

These are obviously not the only testable propositions that one could draw from this literature. However, they place isolationism into the context of the broader and more important pattern of which it was a part in mid-Century thinking.

Research Design

The argument about overreaction and underreaction hinges on the shift from periods of relative calm to acute crisis, and from acute crisis back to relative calm. We have identified three such historical moments: the period before and after Pearl Harbor, the period around the end of the Cold War, and the period before and after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. All of these periods featured sudden, external events that had profound policy implications. One might argue that public opinion around such events constitutes a relatively easy test of the dynamics mid-Century writers identified. However, events resembling the U.S. entry into World War II provide a suitable plausibility probe for the dynamics we wish to test since it was this event that most of them had in mind when they were writing.

Mid-Century writers were understandably preoccupied with major wars. Most could recall both World Wars, and many thought the Cold War might be the prelude to yet another. They thus devoted little attention to the specific characteristics of events that might cause the public mood to shift from underreaction to overreaction. The decades since they wrote have made it clear that elites have a good deal of control over whether such a transition happens (e.g., Page and Shapiro 1990, 336). For now, we will set this important issue aside and simply assume that the periods we have identified are at least plausible candidates for such a change in the public's posture toward international affairs.

To test the three hypotheses set out above, we need survey questions that involve costly foreign policies, and that ask respondents to choose from among a range of options. Policy options with a cost or risk attached to them are likely to elicit the dynamics we wish to test. Many surveys include items that ask respondents whether a particular issue should be a priority, or what they think are the most important problems facing the country. Affirmative responses to these questions do not necessarily imply that the government must undertake any particular costly policy response. The choices respondents must make are thus less weighty than the foreign policy problems Almond, Lippmann, and other writers were concerned about.

We need surveys that measure political knowledge because the hypotheses concern different levels of information. We will not rely on measures of education, in spite of the fact that they are more readily available than measures of political information based on responses to factual questions. Education has many different effects explored in previous research. The highly educated have greater human capital, higher incomes, and may be more cosmopolitan. Providing

the highly educated with somewhat greater levels of political information may not be its most important effect.

Political interest, as indicated by attention to media reports about world affairs, is closer to political information than education. Political interest and information should be mutually reinforcing. One potential difficulty is that political interest may fluctuate more rapidly than political information. Acute crises may interest many people who had previously been indifferent to world events. Acquiring political information takes more time because it involves not just immediate facts but also the background information required to make sense of them. For this reason, while we expect measure of political information and interest to be closely related most of the time, they may diverge during acute crises.

Political information is correlated with a range of individual-level characteristics that might influence foreign policy opinion. In our empirical analysis, we will control for partisanship, race, gender, age, and income because we do not want our measure of political information to proxy the effect of these variables. Of course, education is also closely related to political information and is even used as a proxy for it in some research. Because these considerations are so closely related, we will not control for education here. Our other controls should sort out some of education's other effects on opinion.

We proceed as follows. We will introduce the surveys we will use by time period. The specific questions we use, and thus the precise character of the hypotheses we test, will differ depending on the issues under discussion in each period.

Empirical Results

For each of the three periods we will examine, our precise hypotheses differ depending on the questions available to us. The nature of costly policy options under consideration at the time depended on the historical context as well as the interests of pollsters at the time.

World War II

We examined two surveys taken within a year of American entry into the war in December 1941, one on January 28, 1941, the other on March 12, 1942, both by the Office of Public Opinion Research (1941; 1942). Our choices were limited mainly by the availability of information items. Fortunately, though this was not the norm in surveys conducted at the time, the two surveys we

used each had a battery of factual questions about world politics. The 1941 survey had five such questions. The March 1942 survey had three.

We found two questions on each survey that asked respondents to evaluate costly policy options. In the 1941 survey, administered before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, these questions focused on lending to Britain and the prospect of American entry into the war.

If the British are unable to pay cash for war materials bought in this country, should our government lend war materials to the British, to be paid back in the same materials and other goods after the war is over?

- Yes
- Qualified answer
- Give, not lend
- No
- No opinion

Which of these two things do you think is more important--

- That this country keep out of war, or
- That Germany be defeated, even at the risk of our getting into the war?
- No choice

Both these questions bear on hypothesis 1, that less informed should offer less support for costly policy options in the absence of an acute international crisis. We expect information to be positively associated with the costly options--lending or aid to the British and defeating Germany even at the risk of war--and negatively associated with a refusal to lend to Britain and a preference for keeping out of war.

The 1942 survey included two questions that provided especially good tests of the hypotheses about the effect of information during times of acute crisis.

If Hitler offered peace now to all countries on the basis of not going farther, but of leaving matters as they are now, would you favor or oppose such a peace?

- Favor
- Oppose
- No opinion

If we win the war, how do you think we should treat the people of Germany?
[Open-ended responses coded into several categories.]

The first question gets at hypothesis 2, that low-information respondents should support costly policy actions more than more informed respondents. If so, information should be positively

associated with accepting the peace offer. The second question bears on hypothesis 3, that low-information respondents should support more extreme policy options. While there was near-unanimous agreement that Nazi leaders should be punished, 74% of respondents opposed punishing the German people as a whole. However, 12% favored punishment of some sort, illustrating Lippmann's (1955, 23-4) fear that the mobilized wartime public "would not tolerate the calculated compromises that durable settlements demand."¹ We expect information to be negatively associated with this response category.

We estimated the effect of information on responses to these questions using a multinomial logit model. This model avoids artificially imposing an order on the policy options. It also permits us to model the "no opinion" and "no choice" responses. These answers are strongly correlated with political information, and simply dropping them could bias our estimates of the effect of information (Kleinberg and Fordham, n.d.; Berinsky 2004). The coefficients on political information for each response category indicate its effect on the probability of selecting each option compared to the omitted modal category. In each model, we control for presidential approval (in lieu of party identification, which was not available), gender, race, age, and social class.²

Table 1 presents the results. For reasons of space, it reports only the coefficient estimates concerning political information, which test our hypotheses. Responses to the prewar questions support hypothesis 1. Low-information respondents were not overwhelmingly isolationist in January 1941, but they were statistically significantly more likely to oppose costly or risky policy options. They were also much more likely to offer no opinion. Figure 2 displays the predicted probabilities of offering each response for two otherwise similar high-information and low-information respondents. All respondents preferred making loans to the British, but those with little information were substantially less likely to select this option. By contrast, high-information respondents were more likely to volunteer that the aid should take the form of a gift rather than a loan. Turning to the question on the most important goal, low-information

¹ The categories we coded as calling for punishment were "Put them in their place--keep them in subjection--like conquered nation--don't treat them very good," "Treat them harshly--give them a

² These surveys did not ask respondents about family income, but instead had the interviewers rate their social class as wealthy, above average, average, below average, poor, or on various types of government assistance. We recoded the government assistance categories as "poor," producing a social class variable with the five categories just listed.

respondents were roughly evenly split between keeping out of war and defeating Germany. On the other hand, high-information respondents were almost 4 times more likely to prefer defeating Germany, even at the risk of war.

The questions asked after Pearl Harbor support hypothesis 3, but not hypothesis 2. Figure 3 displays the predicted probabilities of selecting each response category on these two questions for otherwise identical high-information and low-information respondents. As the results concerning the treatment of the German people indicate, low-information respondents were indeed more likely to support the extreme option of collective punishment. In contradiction to hypothesis 2, however, low-information respondents were also more likely to favor a compromise peace with Germany than high-information respondents.

The result concerning information and opposition to a hypothetical German peace offer are consistent with Berinsky's (2009) and Zaller's (1992; 1994) argument about information and support for war. As we noted earlier, they held that information made people better able to respond to elite cues. These cues, rather than patterns arising directly from ignorance, account for the differences between low-information and high-information respondents. American leaders nearly unanimously endorsed a policy of "unconditional surrender" in 1942. The stronger support for this option among high-information respondents might thus reflect the "mainstream effect," in which those better aware of their party's position adopt identical positions in opposition to acceptance of any German peace offer. If one could show that elites generally opposed punishing the German people, the results of that question would also be consistent with this account of information.

While the results concerning the German peace offer support this account of information, those from the 1941 questions do not. Elites were divided about whether to aid Britain and risk entering the war before Pearl Harbor. A substantial faction of Republicans was vocally isolationist. Zaller's and Berinsky's account of information thus suggests that high-information respondents should thus be divided along party lines, the "polarization effect." We estimated an alternative model that tested this effect using an interaction term. Table 1 reports the difference in the Bayesian Information Criterion statistic for this model and the one reported in Table 1. In every case, the comparison strongly favored the simpler model without the interaction term. This result by no means decisively falsifies the polarization effect in general. However, the simpler treatment of information better fits the data in this case.

The Commitment to NATO, 1974-98

Our goal in analyzing a second set of surveys is to test variation in the uninformed public's willingness to support costly policy options as the international environment shifts from a period of tension to one of relative calm. To this end, we examine the first seven iterations of the American Public Opinion and United States Foreign Policy survey, still regularly conducted by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs, then the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations (1974-1998). The CCFR administered the survey every four years beginning in 1974. This period includes two of the "temporary equilibria in world politics" to which Almond (1950, 54-5) thought the uninformed public might overreact, one during the U.S.-Soviet détente of the 1970s, and another following the end of the Cold War. The argument of Almond and others on this point imply one version of hypothesis 1, that less-informed respondents will be more reluctant than better-informed respondents to support costly policies related to the Cold War during these periods. This set of CCFR surveys also includes two iterations--1982 and 1986--when Cold War tensions were higher. These serve as a baseline. We expect the distance between more- and less-informed respondents on these costly policies to be less during these years than during less tense times.

All 7 CCFR surveys included an identically worded question about the commitment to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), one of the most important military pillars of containment.

Some people feel that NATO, the military organization of Western Europe and the United States, has outlived its usefulness, and that the United States should withdraw militarily from NATO. Others say that NATO has discouraged the Russians from trying a military takeover in Western Europe. Do you feel that we should increase our commitment to NATO, keep our commitment what it is now, decrease our commitment but still remain in NATO, or withdraw from NATO entirely?

- Increase commitment
- Keep commitment what it is
- Decrease our commitment
- Withdraw entirely
- Not sure

Although the CCFR surveys did not regularly include a battery of political information questions, they did include a set of questions intended to gauge political interest. They asked

respondents how much attention they paid to news about other countries, and to news about American foreign relations. They also asked a set of questions about how much attention respondents had paid to various issues in world politics that were prominent at the time each survey was conducted. We used these responses to construct an index of attentiveness to international politics.³ Interest and knowledge were closely related in mid-Century thinking about public opinion, with ignorance and apathy treated as strongly related and mutually reinforcing. More recent scholars have made much the same point. Converse (2000, 332) commented that "authors using some shorthand for the core variation at issue choose among a wealth of terms to follow the adjective 'political': awareness, attentiveness, expertise, informedness, interest, involvement, knowledge, or sophistication, to name a few. There are different nuances here, but a central construct lurks." We found that the same variables that predicted political information in the other surveys used in this analysis--age, race, gender, education, income, and identification with one of the major parties--also predicted political interest in these 7 surveys.

As we did with the World War II surveys, we analyzed each of these using a multinomial logit model, including the "not sure" option alongside the other four response options. We used "keep the commitment what it is," always the modal response, as the omitted baseline category. Following hypothesis 1, we expect less-informed respondents to gravitate toward the low-cost options (decreasing the commitment, or withdrawing from the alliance), and away from the high-cost alternative (increase our commitment), during less tense periods. More specifically, the gap between more- and less-interested respondents on this point should be greater in the 1974, 1978, 1990, 1994, and 1998 surveys than it is in the 1982 and 1986 surveys.

Table 2 presents the results. Once again, we report only the estimates for information, but we included controls for age, race, gender, Republican and Democratic identification, and family income in each model. (The CCFR survey did not include a question about party identification in 1994, but the models were otherwise identical.) The table also reports the marginal effect of political interest when it is statistically significant. The results offer qualified support for the

³ The CCFR itself constructed an index of interest in the 1982 survey. Across 7 questions, they gave respondents two points if they reported that they were "very interested" in a particular issue or topic, one point if they were "somewhat interested," and zero if they said they were "hardly interested at all" or did not know. We have followed exactly the same procedure for each survey, rescaling the index so that it ranges from 0 to 1.

hypothesis that low-interest respondents turn more sharply against costly international commitments during low-tension periods. In three of the five surveys where we expected the gap between low- and high-interest respondents to be relatively large, low-interest respondents were indeed more likely to say the United States should withdraw entirely from NATO. This was not the case in either the 1982 or 1986 survey. In three of the five surveys conducted during low-tension periods, low-interest respondents were also less likely to say the United States should expand its commitment.⁴

This evidence in support of hypothesis 1 is qualified by the relatively small size of the effects compared to those found in the World War II surveys. There is also the surprising and anomalous finding that high-interest respondents were *more* likely to want to withdraw entirely from NATO in the 1974 survey. It is not possible to say with confidence why these effects were not stronger. One possibility is that the variation in international tension during the 1974-98 period was less than before and after Pearl Harbor or the 9/11 attacks. The end of the Cold War was certainly a dramatic event, but the American public was far less mobilized during the last two decades of the Cold War than it had been earlier in the rivalry, let alone during World War II. We will return to the question of what constitutes an acute crisis period in our conclusion. It is an issue that the mid-Century writers we have surveyed here did not consider in depth.

Terrorism and the 9/11 Attacks

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, were arguably the most dramatic and visible intrusion of the international system into American life since Pearl Harbor. Did Americans regard the threat of terrorism before and after 9/11 in the same way they did the threat from Germany and Japan before and during World War II? All three of the hypotheses we set out above apply at different points in time before and after the terrorist attacks. Before, 9/11, we expect that low-information respondents should be less willing to support costly policy options for handling the threat. After the attacks, we expect that they should be more supportive of costly

⁴ We do not present BIC statistics comparing our multinomial logit models to the alternative treatments of information that Berinsky and Zaller suggest here. There was always widespread elite support for NATO during this period, so we would expect a mainstream effect. This is observationally equivalent to the simpler account of information the earlier writers suggested. As one would expect, more complicated specifications produce much higher BIC statistics in this case.

policies proposed for dealing with it, and more willing to endorse extreme options than informed respondents are.

As in our analysis of World War II era surveys, the great data-collection issue we confronted was identifying surveys that included both appropriate questions about the threat of international terrorism and a battery of factual questions to assess political information.⁵ We found two surveys conducted by the Pew Research Center that met these criteria. The first, conducted April 6-May 6, 1999, was intended primarily to assess opinions about the end of the 20th Century (Pew Research Center for the People & the Press 1999). However, it also included a battery of factual questions about politics and the following item about international terrorism:

And now a few more items... (First,) is/are [five items, presented in random order] a major threat, a minor threat, or not a threat at all? How about...international terrorists?⁶

- Major threat
- Minor threat
- Not a threat at all
- Don't know/refused

The second survey was conducted January 9-13, 2002, and included a range of questions about possible responses to international terrorism (Pew Research Center for the People & the Press 2002). Not surprisingly, surveys items about terrorism were far more common at the 9/11 attacks than they were beforehand. We selected six questions about costly policy options to test whether low-information respondents were more supportive of the war on terror in general, and whether they were more likely to endorse extreme policy options. The first question concerned the ongoing military operation in Afghanistan:

Do you think the United States should keep military forces in Afghanistan in order to maintain civil order there, or should the United States not do this?

- Yes, keep forces in Afghanistan
- No

⁵ We are reluctant to use political interest or attentiveness as a substitute for political information in this case because we suspect that even less-informed persons who would normally be inattentive might report following the news in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. Attentiveness and information might thus diverge and not capture the same underlying concept during this period.

⁶ The other four items included along with international terrorists were anti-government groups, racial conflict, special interest groups in politics, and environmental problems.

- Don't know/refused

The next two questions concerned proposed policies for dealing with the threat of terrorism. The invasion of Iraq was already being publicly discussed in January 2002, though it was not entirely clear that it would happen at that point. The survey included two variants of a question about an attack on Iraq:

As part of the U.S. war on terrorism, would you favor or oppose taking military action in Iraq to end Saddam Hussein's rule?

- Favor
- Oppose
- Don't know/refused

As part of the U.S. war on terrorism, would you favor or oppose taking military action in Iraq to end Saddam Hussein's rule, even if it meant that U.S. forces might suffer thousands of casualties?

- Favor
- Oppose
- Don't know/refused

The survey also included two additional questions about military action against countries other than Iraq: Somalia and Sudan. Both had certainly played host to terrorists at various points in time. However, unlike Iraq, military action against them was not then being widely discussed. We take these as tests of whether low-information respondents were more willing to endorse extreme policy options.

Would you favor or oppose the U.S. taking military action to destroy terrorist groups in Somalia?

- Favor
- Oppose
- Don't know/refused

Would you favor or oppose the U.S. taking military action to destroy terrorist groups in Sudan?

- Favor
- Oppose
- Don't know/refused

The last question also concerns respondents' willingness to endorse extreme policy proposals. In this case, respondents were presented with a menu of four policy options for dealing with international terrorism and asked to rate the importance of each one. This question

is especially useful because respondents either had seen, or knew they would see, an array of options for reducing international terrorism when they evaluated the military option. Hypothesis 3 suggests that low-information respondents should be more likely to view the most violent option as very important.

As I read from a list tell me how important each of the following is as a way to reduce terrorism in the future...Take military action to wipe out facilities of countries attempting to build nuclear weapons.

- Very Important
- Fairly Important
- Not too Important
- Not at all Important
- Don't know/refused

The other options did not involve military force. They were "decrease American dependence on oil imported from the Middle East," "encourage more democracy in Mideast countries like Egypt and Saudi Arabia," and "increase foreign aid to countries that help the U.S. combat terrorism."

Table 3 presents the results concerning international terrorists in 1999, as well as those concerning the use of force in Afghanistan and Iraq from the 2002 survey. For reasons of space, we once again present only the coefficient estimates and standard errors for the political information variable. Turning first to the pre-9/11 attitudes, we find evidence to support hypothesis 1, that low-information respondents are reluctant to endorse costly policy options in the absence of an acute crisis. Because the question does not attach a specific costly policy option to the threat of international terrorists, it is a relatively difficult test of this hypothesis. It requires respondents to infer that rating something as a "major threat" implies a greater need for potentially costly action than rating it as a "minor threat" or "not a threat at all." Even so, low-information respondents showed a preference for the "not a threat at all" response over the "major threat" option. As always, low-information respondents were much more likely to express no opinion. Those who did offer an opinion were more than five times more likely to say terrorists posed "no threat at all" than the most informed respondents were.

The 2002 survey items about Afghanistan and Iraq involved policies that were either already underway or were then under active discussion as part of the effort to reduce the probability of further terrorist attacks. Hypothesis 2 holds that low-information respondents should be more likely to support policies like these. As the results presented in Table 3 indicate,

we find evidence that this was indeed the case with two of these three survey items. Figure 4 displays the results graphically. High-information respondents were closely divided on the wisdom of keeping American troops in Afghanistan. Low-information respondents were more likely to support the effort. It is worth noting that neither Democratic nor Republican party identification was a statistically significant predictor of answers to this question. Moreover, as the difference in BIC statistics reported in Table 3 indicates, the data do not support an alternative model that estimates separate information effects for Republicans and Democrats.

One of the two items on military action to remove Saddam Hussein from power supports hypothesis 2: the one that omits mention of American casualties. Low-information respondents were quite a bit more likely to favor military action, and less likely to oppose it, than were high-information respondents. Party identification made a substantial difference in this instance, with Republicans more supportive of the proposed military action than were Democrats. However, in spite of the fact that one might expect a party polarization effect here, the data do not support a model that estimates separate information effects. It is possible that the party divisions that would emerge later in the Iraq War were not yet entirely clear.

The information effect disappears when the question raised the (quite realistic) possibility that "U.S. forces might suffer thousands of casualties." Highly informed respondents answered both variants of the question in much the same way. The statement about casualties greatly reduced support for military action among low-information respondents, though. This outcome suggests that these respondents did not really consider the possibility of American casualties when answering the question that did not mention of it, or that they had rather unrealistic expectations about it. Even though the model results do not support the specific hypothesis we set out, they do reveal something important and troubling about the potential effects of ignorance on public opinion.

Table 4 summarizes the multinomial logit results concerning hypothesis 3, that low-information respondents were more likely to support extreme policy options in times of acute crisis. The first two questions concern the use of force against states that were not being widely discussed as likely targets. The last concerns support for military action to "wipe out facilities of countries attempting to build nuclear weapons" the most violent of four policy options respondents evaluated together. Figure 5 depicts the predicted probability of each response for high-information and low-information persons, holding the other variables at their modal values.

The results concerning military action against Somalia and Sudan provide partial support for the hypothesis 3. Low-information respondents were more likely to approve the proposed military action against Sudan, but not Somalia. Information had no effect at all in the latter case. Once again, the data provide no support for estimating separate information effects for Democrats and Republicans. This result is less surprising than it was in the case of Iraq, because neither party had staked out a clear position on military action against these two countries.

Analysis of the item concerning military action to prevent the development of nuclear weapons provide clearer support for hypothesis 3. Less-informed respondents were most likely to rate this extreme policy option as "very important," while "not too important" was the modal response for the most informed respondents. Interestingly, more informed respondents were also somewhat more likely to choose the "don't know" option, perhaps reflecting the fact that the question did not specify a potential target. One wonders if low-information respondents' indifference to or lack of knowledge about the potential costs of military action, evident in their response to the two questions on the Iraq War in the same survey, affected their responses here. Though party identification made a difference in responses to this question, with Republicans rating it as more important than Democrats or independents, there was once again no support for a model estimating separate information effects.

Overall, the evidence analyzed here supports the notion that the patterns in public opinion evident before and after Pearl Harbor were repeated before and after the 9/11 attacks. Indeed, support for the three hypotheses we drew from mid-Century writing about public opinion found more unequivocal support during this more recent period than during World War II. Low-information respondents were less likely to support costly policy options before September 11, 2001. Afterward, however, they were more likely to support the ongoing war in Afghanistan, as well as the prospective military action in Iraq, unless they were warned about casualties. They were also more likely to endorse military action against countries that were not even the subject of widespread public discussion, and to rate military action against potential nuclear proliferators highly.

Conclusion

"The people have acquired power that they are incapable to exercising, and the governments they elect have lost powers which they must recover if they are to govern." Thus Lippmann (1955,

14) summarized the malady of democratic states. His critique of foreign policymaking in democracies had two parts. First, public ignorance and apathy gave rise to certain patterns in public opinion. Second, policymakers alternately tried to manipulate public opinion or slavishly follow its demands. "The consequences were disastrous and revolutionary. The democracies became incapacitated to wage war for rational ends and to make a peace which would be observed or could be enforced" (Lippmann 1955, 14). Isolationism, as we remember it today, was only one half of a larger pattern of overreaction and underreaction in foreign policy as international crises arose and abated. This pattern was itself only one instance of the problems arising from public ignorance and apathy.

In this paper, we tested this pattern of overreaction and underreaction in public opinion. The evidence reviewed here generally supports this claim. First, in periods of relative international stability, less informed respondents tended to oppose costly foreign policy actions. Such respondents were less willing to aid the British or risk American entry into the World War II before Pearl Harbor. They were less supportive of NATO than their more informed fellow citizens during the *détente* of the 1970s and after the end of the Cold War. They tended to regard terrorism as a less serious threat before the 9/11 attacks.

Second, in periods of greater international tension or acute crisis, we found evidence that less-informed or less interested persons sometimes offered greater support for costly policies than more informed and interested respondents. The tendency toward less support for the NATO alliance among the less informed was absent in CCFR surveys conducted during the 1980s, when Cold War tensions were higher than they were in the 1970s or 1990s. In 2002, the less informed were also more supportive of maintaining American troops in Afghanistan and in taking military action to remove Saddam Hussein from power. This pattern did not hold up in all our tests. Examining World War II surveys, we found that less informed respondents were more willing to consider a possible German peace offer than more informed respondents, deviation from the wartime policy of unconditional surrender.

Third, we found that the less informed were more likely to endorse extreme and violent policy options than were better informed respondents during periods of acute crisis. During World War II, the less informed were more likely to favor punishing the German people as a whole rather than just Nazi leaders. After 9/11, they were more likely to endorse proposals to take military action even against countries that were not much discussed as possible targets, and

to view military action against possible nuclear proliferators as a very important policy option for dealing with international terrorism.

In all three cases, the point is not that any particular position was correct or incorrect, but rather that there were systematic tendencies in public opinion arising from ignorance and apathy under specific circumstances. Those who fell prey to these tendencies might well have resisted them if they had more knowledge and information. Indeed, in the case of the proposed military attack on Iraq in 2002, the tendency of the less informed to support the idea disappeared when they were reminded that many American military casualties were possible.

The effects of information that we tested here differ from recent prominent treatments of this consideration. In the work of Zaller, Berinsky, and others, information functions as a moderator of other influences, especially elite consensus. More informed respondents are better able to attend to the views of elites with whom they sympathize, and are more likely to reflect these views. While it was not the main focus of our analysis, we also tested this mechanism, comparing models that estimated separate information effects for respondents with different partisan loyalties. In principle, information might well have both types of effects but our analysis did not support this alternative argument.

Our findings provide preliminary evidence of one set of patterns that mid-Century writers argued existed in public opinion about foreign policy. Contrary to recent accounts of their views, writers like Lippmann and Almond did not describe public opinion as random, meaningless, or incoherent (Page and Shapiro 1990, 281; see also Holsti 1996). While public opinion may be said to have moods, such as those associated with the presence or absence of an acute crisis, it does not appear to "vacillate capriciously" between them (Page and Shapiro 1990, 172). Instead, Lippmann, Almond, and others argued that aggregate public opinion had a predictable shape and changed in predictable ways. The most important sources of these patterns were public ignorance and apathy.

Of course, the patterns that these older writers identified were not as normatively appealing as those suggesting the wisdom and deliberation of democratic publics. However, though they were unromantic about the character of public understanding, these writers were not opponents of democracy. Understanding how some might read his arguments, Lippmann (1955, 13) stressed that "I am a liberal democrat and do not wish to disenfranchise my fellow citizens." Nor did they exalt the superior wisdom of elites. In fact, they were quite critical of elite efforts to

manipulate public opinion, and pointed out that elites were often subject to some of the same problematic tendencies (Almond 1950, 56-7; Lippmann 1955, 25). However one regards the charge of elitism sometimes leveled at these writers, their claims deserve to be taken seriously and tested, just as we would any other theoretical argument.

The malady of democratic states is just as important today as it was when Lippmann began worrying about it in the 1930s. Many of the weaknesses of democratic foreign policy making are still apparent. The patterns in public opinion are actually clearer in our data concerning the period around the 9/11 attacks than in our data about World War II. Politicians still have to worry about public opinion, and the nature of the public has not fundamentally changed. In spite of new information technology, most people still know little about international affairs. People can't become fully informed just by getting facts as events unfold, however much easier it is to obtain them. Only deeper knowledge or better elites will overcome the problem, and neither appears on the horizon at the moment.

References

- Almond, Gabriel A. 1950. *The American People and Foreign Policy*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company.
- Althaus, Scott L. 1998. "Information Effects in Collective Preferences." *American Political Science Review* 92(3): 545-58.
- Bailey, Thomas A. 1948. *The Man in the Street*. New York: The Macmillan Company.
- Baum, Matthew. 2003. *Soft News Goes to War*. Princeton University Press.
- Berinsky, Adam J. 2004. *Silent Voices*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Berinsky, Adam J. 2009. *In Time of War*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Braumoeller, Bear F. 2010. "The Myth of American Isolationism." *Foreign Policy Analysis* 6(4): 349-71.
- Carr, Edward Hallett. 1964 [1939]. *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919-1939*. New York: Harper Collins.
- Chicago Council on Foreign Relations. 1974-1998. American Public Opinion and United States Foreign Policy Series. Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [distributor]. 1974: ICPSR 5808; 1978: 7748; 1982: 8130; 1986: 8712; 1990: 9564; 1994: 6561; 1998: 2747. Accessed 14 August 2017.
- Converse, Philip. 1964. "The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics." In David Apter, ed., *Ideology and Discontent*. New York: Free Press. 507-30. Reprinted in *Critical Review*, 18 (2006): 1-74.
- Converse, Philip E. 2000. "Assessing the Capacity of Mass Electorates." *Annual Review of Political Science* 3: 331-53.
- Cottrell, Leonard S., Jr., and Sylvia Eberhart. 1969 [1948]. *American Opinion on World Affairs in the Atomic Age*. New York: Greenwood Press.
- Delli Carpini, Michael X., and Scott Keeter. 1993. Measuring Political Knowledge: Putting First Things First. *American Journal of Political Science* 37(4): 1179-1206.
- Delli Carpini, Michael X., and Scott Keeter. 1996. *What Americans Know about Politics and Why It Matters*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Dolan, Kathleen. 2011. Do Women and Men Know Different Things? Measuring Gender Differences in Political Knowledge. *Journal of Politics* 73(1): 97-107.
- Guisinger, Alexandra. 2009. Determining Trade Policy: Do Voters Hold Politicians Accountable? *International Organization* 63(3): 533-57.
- Holsti, Ole R. 1996. *Public Opinion and American Foreign Policy*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Hurwitz, Jon, and Mark Peffley. 1987. "How Are Foreign Policy Attitudes Structured? A Hierarchical Model." *American Political Science Review* 81(4): 1099-1120.

- Jervis, Robert. 1976. *Perception and Misperception in World Politics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Kennan, George F. 1985 [1951]. *American Diplomacy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 55-103.
- Kertzer, Joshua D. 2013. "Making Sense of Isolationism: Foreign Policy Mood as a Multilevel Phenomenon." *Journal of Politics* 75(1): 225-40.
- Kertzer, Joshua D., and Thomas Zeitzoff. 2017. "A Bottom-Up theory of Public Opinion about Foreign Policy." *American Journal of Political Science*, forthcoming.
- Key, V. O., Jr. 1966. *The Responsible Electorate*. Harvard University Press.
- Kleinberg, Katja B., and Benjamin O. Fordham. n.d. "Don't Know Much about Foreign Policy: Assessing the Impact of 'Don't Know' and 'No Opinion' Responses on Inferences about Foreign Policy Attitudes." *Foreign Policy Analysis*, forthcoming.
- Kinzer, Stephen. 2017. *The True Flag*. New York: Henry Holt and Company.
- Lippmann, Walter. 1997 [1922]. *Public Opinion*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Lippmann, Walter. 1955. *Essays in the Public Philosophy*. New York: Little, Brown, and Company.
- Luskin, Robert C., and John G. Bullock 2011. "Don't Know" Means "Don't Know": DK Responses and the Public's Level of Political Knowledge. *Journal of Politics* 73(2): 547-57.
- Markel, Lester. 1949. *Public Opinion and Foreign Policy*. New York: Harper & Brothers.
- Mayers, David. 2007. *Dissenting Voices in America's Rise to Power*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Mondak, Jeffrey J. 1999. Reconsidering the Measurement of Political Knowledge. *Political Analysis* 8(1): 57-82.
- Morgenthau, Hans J. 1951. *In Defense of the National Interest*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Nichols, Christopher McKnight. 2011. *Promise and Peril*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Niebuhr, Reinhold. 1932. *Moral Man and Immoral Society*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.
- Office of Public Opinion Research. 1941. OPOP Poll # 1941-809: War Survey, Jul, 1941 [dataset]. USOPOR1941-809, Version 3. Office of Public Opinion Research [producer]. Cornell University, Ithaca, NY: Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, RoperExpress [distributor], accessed Aug-15-2017.
- Office of Public Opinion Research. 1942. Office of Public Opinion Research, Survey #813: War, Mar, 1942 [dataset]. USOPOR1942-813, Version 2. Office of Public Opinion Research [producer]. Cornell University, Ithaca, NY: Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, RoperExpress [distributor], accessed Aug-15-2017.
- Pew Research Center for the People & the Press. 1999. Pew Research Center Poll: 1999 Millennium Survey, Apr, 1999 [dataset]. USPEW1999-MILLENNIUM, Version 2.

- Princeton Survey Research Associates [producer]. Cornell University, Ithaca, NY: Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, *RoperExpress* [distributor], accessed Aug-15-2017.
- Pew Research Center for the People & the Press. 2002. Pew Research Center Poll: January News Interest Index--Politics/Television/Iraq, Jan, 2002 [dataset]. USPEW2002-01NII, Version 2. Princeton Survey Research Associates [producer]. Cornell University, Ithaca, NY: Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, *RoperExpress* [distributor], accessed Aug-15-2017.
- Sniderman, Paul, Richard A. Brody, and Philip E. Tetlock. 1991. *Reasoning and Choice*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Todorov, Alexander, and Anesu N. Mandisodsa. 2004. "Public Opinion on Foreign Policy: The Multilateral Public that Perceives Itself as Unilateral." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 68(3): 323-348.
- Visser, Penny S., Allyson Holbrook, and Jon A. Krosnick. 2008. "Knowledge and Attitudes." In *The Sage Handbook of Public Opinion Research*, edited by Wolfgang Donsbach and Michael W. Traugott. Los Angeles: Sage Publications. 127-40.
- Wittkopf, Eugene R. 1990. *Faces of Internationalism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Zaller, John R. 1992. *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Zaller, John. 1994. "Strategic Politicians, Public Opinion, and the Gulf Crisis." In *Taken by Storm: The Media, Public Opinion, and U.S. Foreign Policy in the Gulf War*. W. Lance Bennett and David L. Paletz, eds. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Table 1.
Multinomial Logit Results on Effect of Political Information, 1941-42

OPOR Survey, 28 January 1941			
If the British are unable to pay cash for war materials bought in this country, should our government lend war materials to the British, to be paid back in the same materials and other goods after the war is over?		Which of these two things do you think is more important--that this country keep out of war, or that Germany be defeated, even at the risk of our getting into the war?	
Response option	Coefficient for political information	Response option	Coefficient for political information
Yes	Omitted category	Defeat Germany	Omitted category
Give, not lend	1.21 (0.52)*	Keep out of war	-1.34 (0.20)*
Qualified answer	0.08 (0.41)	No choice	-1.59 (0.36)*
No	-0.56 (0.22)*		
No opinion	-2.42 (0.38)*		
Difference in BIC statistic from alternative model interacting support for the president and information	-26.57		-8.53
OPOR Survey, 26 March 1942			
If Hitler offered peace now to all countries on the basis of not going farther, but of leaving matters as they are now, would you favor or oppose such a peace?		If we win the war, how do you think we should treat the people of Germany? [Open-ended responses coded into several categories.]	
Response option	Coefficient for political information	Response option	Coefficient for political information
Oppose	Omitted category	Do not punish them	Omitted category
Favor	-1.92 (0.29)*	Punish them	-0.52 (0.25)*
No opinion	-1.36 (0.44)*	No answer	-0.79 (0.25)*
Difference in BIC statistic from alternative model interacting support for the president and information	-15.55		-13.66

Note: * $p < 0.05$ in a two-tailed test. All multinomial logit models included controls for age, race, gender, social class, and support for the president. The interactive model used for comparison was identical except for the inclusion of an interaction term for political information and support for the president.

Table 2.
Effect of Political Interest on Attitudes toward NATO, 1974-98

Response option:	CCFR Survey						
	1974	1978	1982	1986	1990	1994	1998
Increase commitment	1.90* (0.55)	1.45* (0.45)	1.12* (0.39)	0.15 (0.38)	0.51 (0.53)	0.53 (0.42)	1.79* (0.39)
	+0.10	+0.11	+0.14				+0.08
Decrease commitment	0.57 (0.35)	0.20 (0.40)	0.04 (0.36)	-0.02 (0.33)	0.06 (0.28)	0.15 (0.23)	-0.07 (0.26)
Withdraw entirely	1.03* (0.46)	-1.13* (0.56)	-0.12 (0.58)	-0.51 (0.45)	-0.74 (0.49)	-0.95* (0.37)	-0.75* (0.37)
	+0.10	-0.03				-0.08	-0.04
No opinion	-2.52* (0.32)	-2.97* (0.34)	-2.59* (0.37)	-2.42* (0.34)	-2.42* (0.37)	-1.22* (0.28)	-0.94* (0.28)
	-0.36	-0.34	-0.25	-0.27	-0.24	-0.10	-0.11

Note: * $p < 0.05$ in two-tailed test. The omitted category in the multinomial logit model is "keep commitment as it is," which was always the modal response. Standard errors reported in parentheses beneath the multinomial logit coefficient for political interest. The marginal effect is reported in bold beneath the coefficients and standard errors when there was a statistically significant effect. It is the change in the probability of the indicated response associated with a shift from the least to most interested respondent, holding other variables at their modal values.

Table 3.
Political Information and Attitudes in 1999 and 2002

April 6-May 6, 1999: And now a few more items... (First,) is/are [five items, presented in random order] a major threat, a minor threat, or not a threat at all? How about...international terrorists?	
Response option:	Coefficient for political information:
Major threat	Omitted base category
Minor threat	0.21 (0.27)
Not a threat at all	1.74 (0.59)*
Don't know/refused	-3.44 (1.09)*
Difference in BIC statistic from alternative model interacting support for the president and information: -36.95	
January 9-13, 2002: Do you think the United States should keep military forces in Afghanistan in order to maintain civil order there, or should the United States not do this?	
Response option:	Coefficient for political information:
Yes, keep forces in Afghanistan	Omitted base category
No	0.54 (0.18)*
Don't know/refused	-0.24 (0.38)
Difference in BIC statistic from alternative model interacting support for the president and information: -20.76	
January 9-13, 2002: As part of the U.S. war on terrorism, would you favor or oppose taking military action in Iraq to end Saddam Hussein's rule?	
Response option:	Coefficient for political information:
Favor	Omitted base category
Oppose	0.82 (0.30)*
Don't know/refused	-0.23 (0.40)
Difference in BIC statistic from alternative model interacting support for the president and information: -19.24	
January 9-13, 2002: As part of the U.S. war on terrorism, would you favor or oppose taking military action in Iraq to end Saddam Hussein's rule, even if it meant that U.S. forces might suffer thousands of casualties?	
Response option:	Coefficient for political information:
Favor	Omitted base category
Oppose	0.23 (0.26)
Don't know/refused	-0.59 (0.40)
Difference in BIC statistic from alternative model interacting support for the president and information: -19.24	

Note: * $p < 0.05$ in a two-tailed test. Estimates are from multinomial logit models that include controls for age, race, gender, social class, and Democratic and Republican party identification. The interactive model used for comparison was identical except for the inclusion of interaction terms for political information and the two party variables.

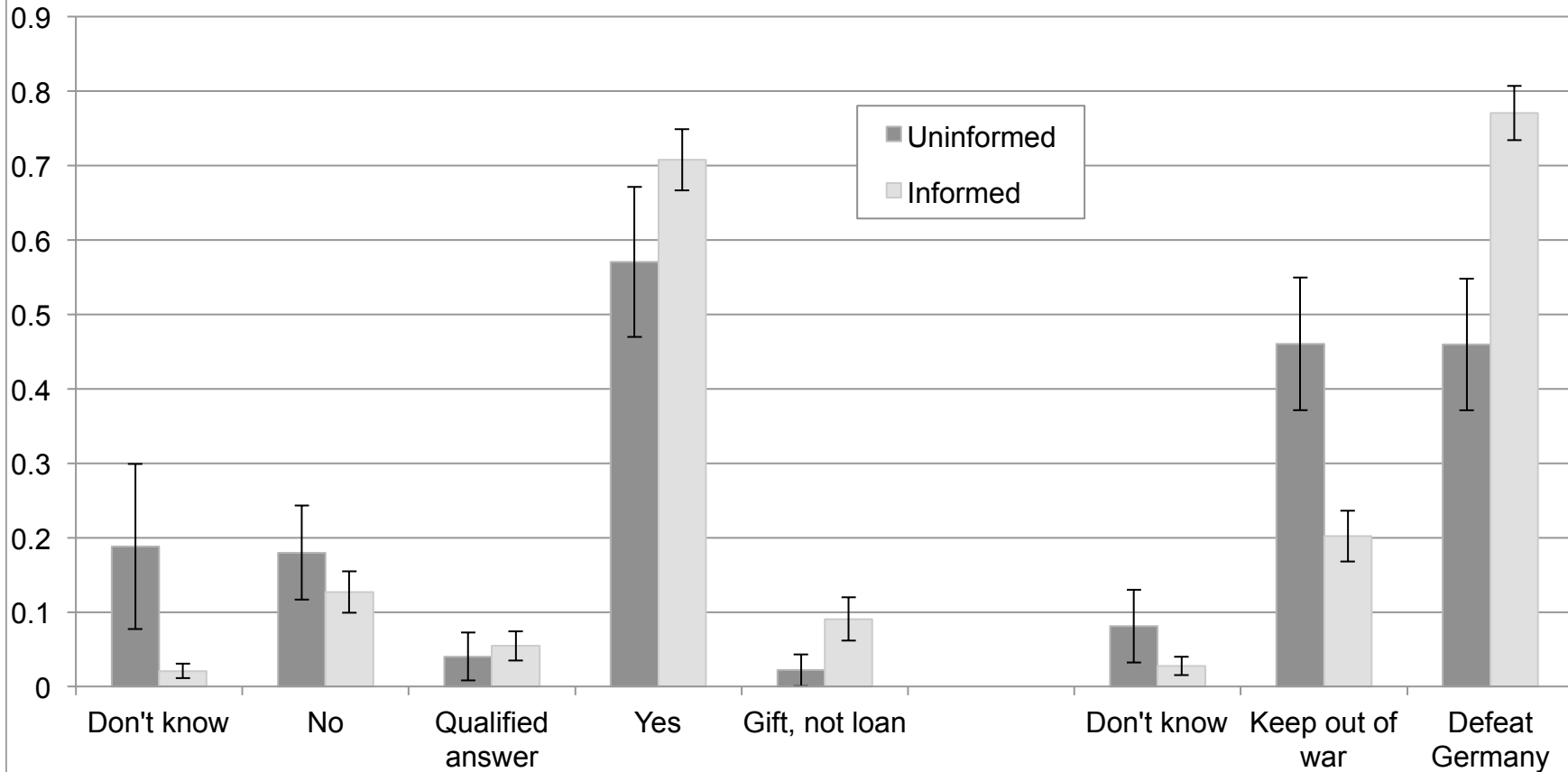
Table 4.
Political Information and Extreme Policy Options, 2002

January 9-13, 2002: Would you favor or oppose the U.S. taking military action to destroy terrorist groups in Somalia?	
Response option:	Coefficient for political information:
Favor	Omitted base category
Oppose	0.36 (0.32)
Don't know/refused	-0.57 (0.33)
Difference in BIC statistic from alternative model interacting support for the president and information: -12.76	
January 9-13, 2002: Would you favor or oppose the U.S. taking military action to destroy terrorist groups in Sudan?	
Response option:	Coefficient for political information:
Favor	Omitted base category
Oppose	0.72 (0.32)*
Don't know/refused	0.09 (0.35)
Difference in BIC statistic from alternative model interacting support for the president and information: -17.82	
January 9-13, 2002: As I read from a list tell me how important each of the following is as a way to reduce terrorism in the future...Take military action to wipe out facilities of countries attempting to build nuclear weapons.	
Response option:	Coefficient for political information:
Very Important	Omitted base category
Fairly Important	0.42 (0.27)
Not too Important	1.55 (0.38)*
Not at all Important	0.42 (0.56)
Don't know/refused	1.20 (0.52)*
Difference in BIC statistic from alternative model interacting support for the president and information: -45.23	

Note: * $p < 0.05$ in a two-tailed test. Estimates are from multinomial logit models that include controls for age, race, gender, social class, and Democratic and Republican party identification. The interactive model used for comparison was identical except for the inclusion of interaction terms for political information and the two party variables.

Figure 1.
Google Ngram on Uses of “Isolationism”

Figure 2.
Information and Responses to January 1941 Survey Questions



If the British are unable to pay cash for war materials bought in this country, should our government lend war materials to the British, to be paid back in the same materials or other goods after the war is over?

Which of these two do you think is more important--that this country keep out of war, or that Germany be defeated, even at the risk of our getting into the war?

Figure 3.
Information and Responses to March 1942 Survey Questions

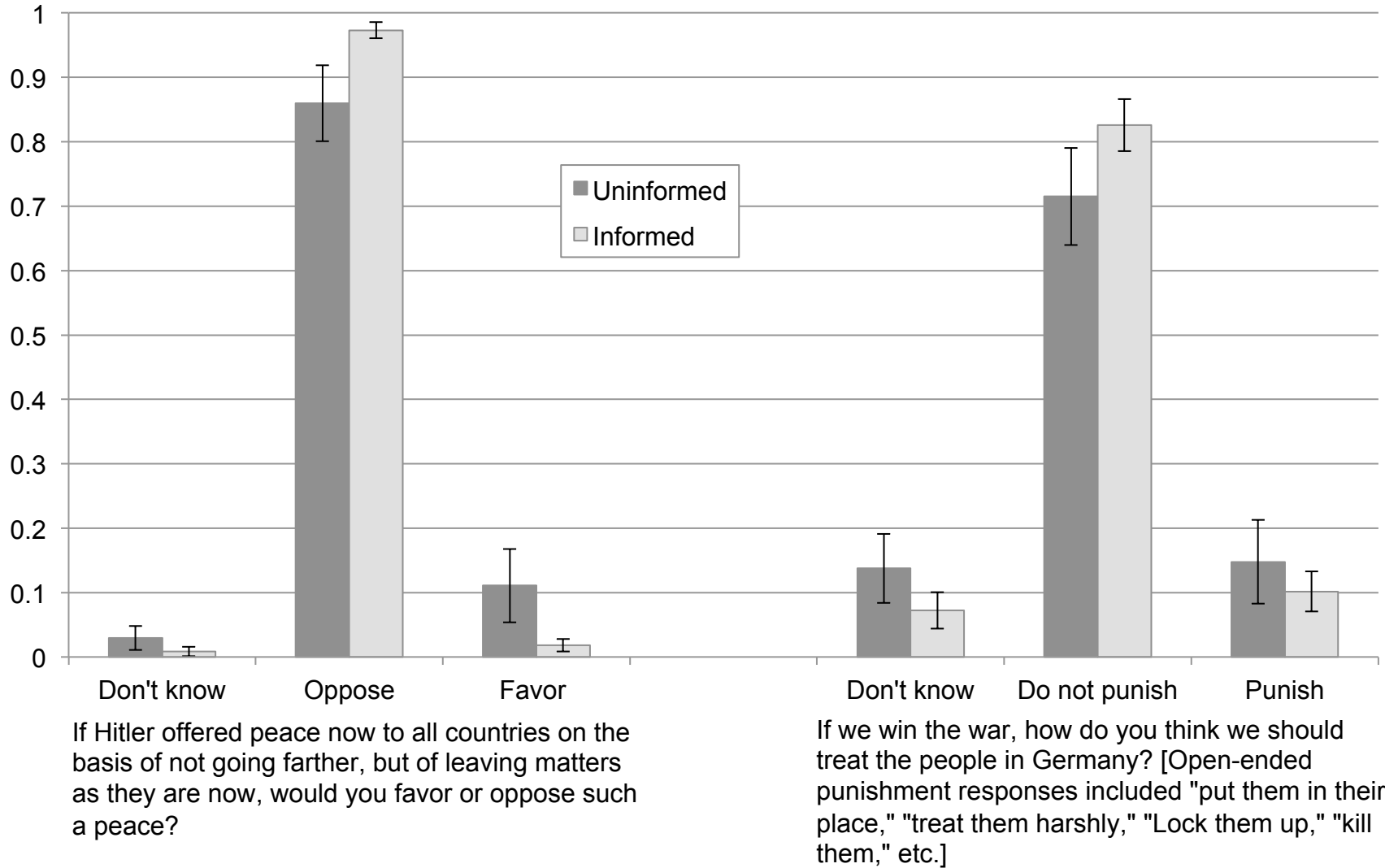


Figure 4.
Information and Responses to Terrorism, 1999-2002

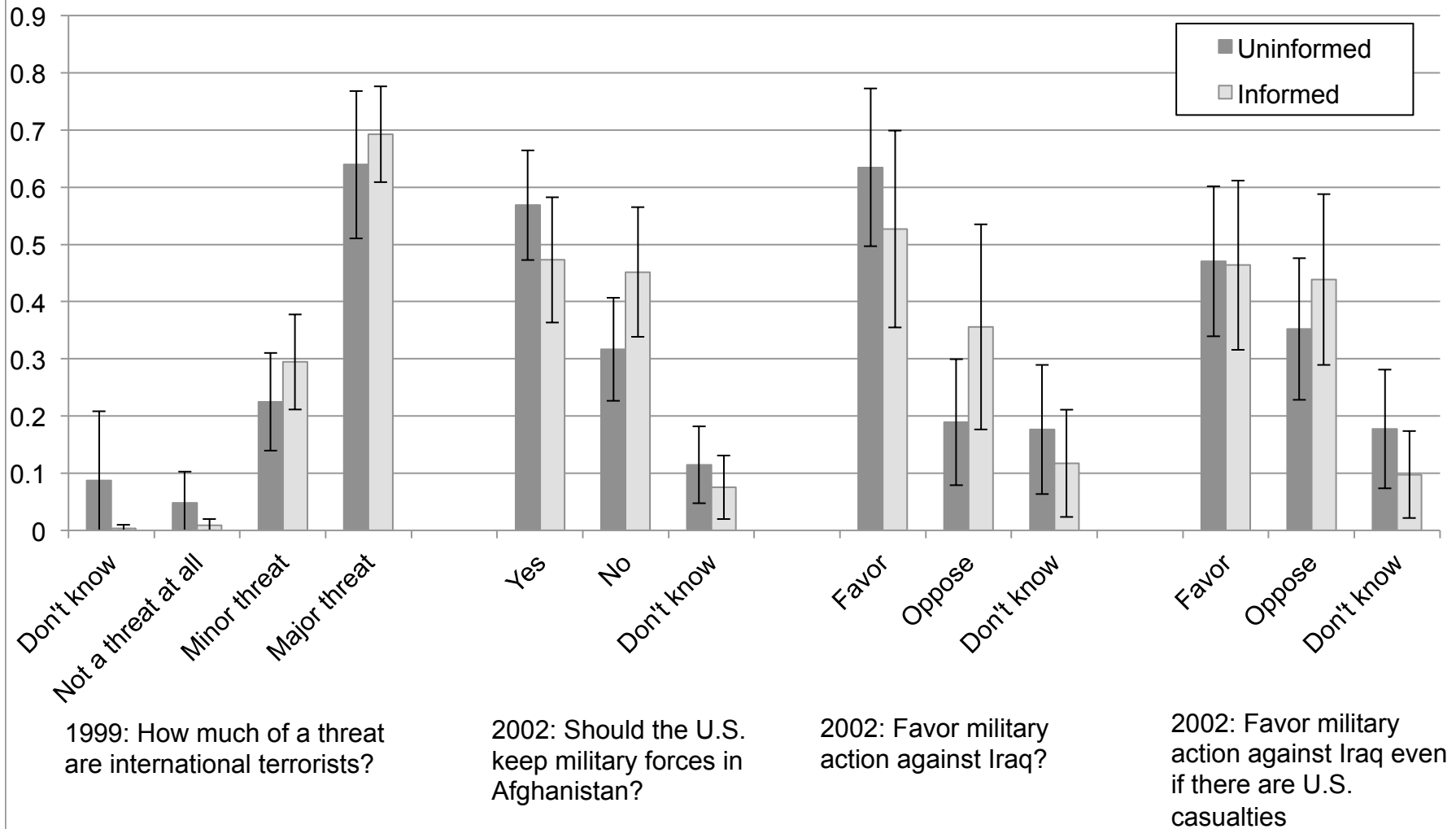


Figure 5.
Information and Extreme Options, 2002

