

Quote of the Day:

“I could stand in the middle of Fifth Avenue and shoot somebody, and I wouldn’t lose any voters.”

-- Donald Trump, during the 2016 primaries

Readings for next time

Polarization and tribalism



NEW EDITION

EXPERT POLITICAL JUDGMENT

HOW GOOD IS IT?
HOW CAN WE KNOW?

PHILIP E. TETLOCK

WITH A NEW PREFACE BY THE AUTHOR

**284 credentialed experts, thousands of predictions
between 1988 and 2003**

Examples:

fall of apartheid in South Africa

election outcomes

central bank interest rates

budget deficits

outbreak of war in former Yugoslavia

acquisition of nuclear weapons by certain countries

unemployment rate in postcommunist countries

outbreak of war in Persian Gulf

Tetlock asked them to quantify their degree of uncertainty

Overall the predictions were poor (prediction is hard), but some experts were better than others. Can you guess the qualities of the best ones?

Foxes: many ideas, flexible, willing to revise. Had some predictive accuracy.



Hedgehogs: one big idea, rigid, resistant to acknowledging error. Performed no better than chance.



Tetlock also found that experts with the poorest records (disproportionately hedgehogs) were most likely to get media attention. Why?

Jerry Taylor, “The Alternative to Ideology”

- **Ideologies give pre-packaged answers to complex issues**
- **Ideologies encourage confirmation bias and motivated reasoning**
- **Ideologies encourage focusing on one value (e.g., liberty) to the exclusion of others**
- **People will be better able to discover truth if they either abandon ideology entirely, or hold their ideologies loosely**

Experts and other political elites often hold coherent political ideologies based on unifying principles (e.g., Jerry Taylor used to be a libertarian). According to Hyrum Lewis and Verlan Lewis, the political system as a whole has the opposite problem—a lack of principles to tie together disparate issues.

What is the logical connection between the full set of positions on each side of the table?

**stronger gun control
higher minimum wage
pro-choice on abortion
aggressive action on
climate change
more gov. support for
health care
less military spending
require masks to fight
Covid**

**weaker gun control
lower minimum wage
pro-life on abortion
minimal action on
climate change
less gov. support for
health care
more military spending
mask mandates are
gov. overreach**

Hyrum Lewis and Verlan Lewis cite a large body of research indicating that political positions get packaged for contingent historical reasons involving group identities, not because of underlying principles.

The upshot, according to Lewis and Lewis: there is no logical connection among the positions grouped together as left and right, or liberal/progressive and conservative

big government vs. small government?

individual rights?

the people vs. the powerful?

egalitarian vs. hierarchical?

change and progress vs. order and the status quo?

If Lewis and Lewis are right about the lack of a unifying thread connecting what we call left and right, what would you do with that information?

In the last few years, people have often defined their political views through their reactions to one person, Donald Trump:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3PHQKiNZu_0&ab_channel=RyanLong

tribalism, as used in a political context: “the behavior and attitudes that stem from strong loyalty to one’s own tribe or social group”

That loyalty can shape a person’s beliefs in sometimes surprising ways:

Medical researchers have developed a new cream for treating skin rashes. New treatments often work but sometimes make rashes worse. Even when treatments don't work, skin rashes sometimes get better and sometimes get worse on their own. As a result, it is necessary to test any new treatment in an experiment to see whether it makes the skin condition of those who use it better or worse than if they had not used it.

Researchers have conducted an experiment on patients with skin rashes. In the experiment, one group of patients used the new cream for two weeks, and a second group did not use the new cream.

In each group, the number of people whose skin condition got better and the number whose condition got worse are recorded in the table below. Because patients do not always complete studies, the total number of patients in each two groups is not exactly the same, but this does not prevent assessment of the results.

Please indicate whether the experiment shows that using the new cream is likely to make the skin condition better or worse.

	Result	
	Rash Got Better	Rash Got Worse
Patients who <u>did</u> use the new skin cream	223	75
Patients who did <u>not</u> use the new skin cream	107	21

What result does the study support?

- People who used the skin cream were more likely to get better than those who didn't.
- People who used the skin cream were more likely to get worse than those who didn't.

Dan Kahan et al., “Motivated Numeracy and Enlightened Self-Government”

***crime
went up**

**crime
went down**

**cities that passed
a gun control
measure**

223

75

**cities that did not
pass a gun control
measure**

107

21

***labels flipped for some subjects**

Greater math skills predicted likelihood of answering the question correctly if and only if the correct answer matched the person's partisan and ideological dispositions.

What lessons would you draw from the Kahan et al. study?

Some events from recent years that are hard to understand as anything other than tribalism:

- **Republican opposition to the Affordable Care Act (“Obamacare”), especially Republican governors who rejected federal Medicaid money**
- **Democratic opposition to reopening schools after Trump came down strongly in favor during the summer of 2020**

Tribalism can help explain why Donald Trump's approval rating in office fluctuated within only a narrow band:

<https://projects.fivethirtyeight.com/trump-approval-ratings/>

Some of Donald Trump's strongest support came from white evangelicals (80% in 2016 election, roughly the same afterward).

What would you put on a list of Trump's behaviors that, if done by someone else, would upset white evangelicals?

So did those behaviors jeopardize Trump's support among white evangelicals?

“An elected official who commits an immoral act in their personal life can still behave ethically and fulfill their duties in their public and professional life.”

Agree/disagree?

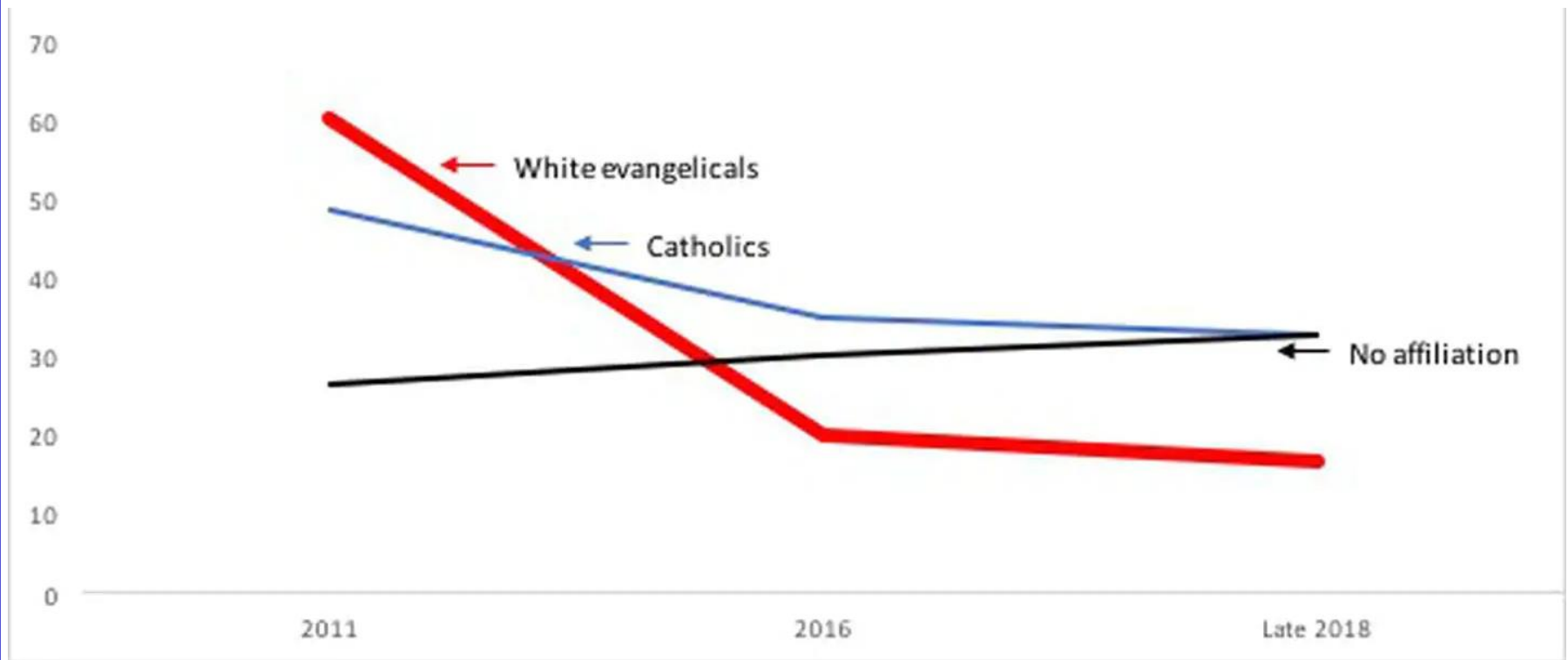
As of 2011, here's the % disagree among three large religious groups in America:

white evangelicals: 60%

Catholics: 48%

no religious affiliation: 25%

% disagreeing over time



Cognitive dissonance: white evangelicals could either reduce their support for Donald Trump, or give up their belief that elected officials must be moral in their private lives. They did the latter.