Blank and Shaw, “Does Partisanship Shape Attitudes toward Science and Public Policy? The Case for Ideology and Religion”

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- article examines an October 2013 national survey of 2,000 respondents
- question: to what extent Democrats, Republicans, and independents are likely to defer to scientific expertise in matters of public policy?
- main finding: most Americans see science as relevant to policy, but that their willingness to defer to science in policy matters varies considerably across issues
- party, ideology, and religious beliefs influence attitudes toward science
- Republicans are NOT notably more skeptical about accepting scientific recommendations
- Democrats are particularly receptive to scientific recommendations
- there has been a lot of literature arguing that the right/left/the general electorate is antiscience but not much empirical evidence

- a great deal of public opinion research suggests that most Americans do not know much about public affairs and are not very interested in politics
- attitudes and party identification develop in early childhood and adolescent years
• political attitudes consist mostly of broad notions of affect and identity with little substance

• when it comes to political and policy questions, people construct opinions from their environment, the media and elites

• individuals are more interested in reinforcing than challenging their opinions ("motivated reasoning")

• most people think that scientists have a mostly positive effect on society and contribute a lot to society's well-being (even people who disagree with science)

• both scientists and the public think that it is appropriate for scientists to be active in political debates

• scientists do have distinct political and ideological preferences and are much more liberal and Democratic than the general public

• Democrats defer significantly more to science on every single policy issue

• Independents are much closer to Republicans than to Democrats

• the public generally defers to scientific expertise on a range of public policy issues

• political ideology and religious beliefs influence one's willingness to defer to science

• Biblical literalism is negatively associated with deference to science but self-reported religious behavior is much less associated with deference to science

• age has inconsistent effects on scientific deference

• more educated people are more likely to defer to science

• African Americans and Hispanics are more deferential to science than Whites and Asians

• gender is not strongly correlated with scientific deference