

POLARIZED LENSES:
PARTY IDENTIFICATION AND TENNESSEANS' RATINGS OF THE STATE
AND NATIONAL ECONOMIES, 2004 - 2011

By

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ABSTRACT

Tichenor, Donahue & Olien's (1970) "knowledge gap" hypotheses asserts that members of higher socioeconomic status groups tend to acquire knowledge about public affairs from media at a faster rate than do members of lower socioeconomic status groups. In response, some theorists (Hindman, 2009) are expanding the knowledge gap hypothesis to consider "belief gaps" that pertain to politically contested facts and arise among groups defined more by ideological traits than by socioeconomic ones.

Based on data from 14 MTSU Poll Random Digit Dialing (RDD) telephone polls conducted in Tennessee between 2004 and 2011, this study hypothesizes that a belief gap will be evident between ratings of the national economy provided by self-identified Republicans, Democrats, and independents. Republicans rated the national economy better than did Democrats while a Republican occupied the White House and, conversely, Democrats rated the national economy better than did Republicans while a Democrat was in the White House.

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CHAPTER ONE

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK — BELIEF GAP

For more than four decades, researchers have been reviewing and revising their approach to the knowledge gap hypothesis. While the majority of researchers agree that the knowledge gap is based on the assumption that knowledge is power, they also acknowledge that privileged groups, e.g. opinion elites, will often have the influence necessary to define what counts as knowledge and what does not.

Countless researchers have examined the knowledge gap hypothesis from several angles: The majority of research is spent trying to explain *how* and *why* knowledge gaps occur. Some explanations blame an increasingly fractured media landscape which results in a loss of neutrality in reporting the news; others point to problems that arise in how researchers measure political knowledge, citing problems with survey questions, use of media, and the gender gap.

The original knowledge gap hypothesis assumed that knowledge accumulation would increase with increased media consumption; other researchers like Hindman (2009) posit that the knowledge gap would persist in the politically polarized environment in which we now find ourselves. Hindman's re-examination of the knowledge gap assumptions has begun a new chapter of thinking about knowledge assessment and measurement.

Hindman's research deploys beliefs as a dependent variable and education and ideology as independent variables as it strives to re-examine the knowledge gap hypothesis within the context of an increasing political partisanship and polarization in

the media. Hindman questions the traditional predictors of knowledge gap—education and socioeconomic status—when an issue is politically contested and introduces belief, operationalized as party identification, as a new dependent variable.

Hindman (2009) notes that from the beginning, knowledge gap studies have focused on information that might more accurately be thought of as beliefs rather than objective, verifiable facts. Tichenor et al.'s (1970) study, for example, measured “belief” (Table 1, p. 165) that humans would reach the moon and that smoking cigarettes causes lung cancer. At the time these data were collected and measured, these assertions were truly more about what *might* happen in the future than actual verifiable facts. More than forty years later, these “beliefs” are now considered by the science community as verifiable fact. Hindman (2009) believes that part of the problem lies in how one might measure knowledge and that in essence, beliefs have a much lower standard of merit than political knowledge. He posits: “Beliefs are *accepted*, but knowledge must be *acceptable*” (Hindman, 2009). Hindman also discusses the difference between micro- and macro-level sources of knowledge gaps, the former including individual-level information selectivity processes, cognitive dissonance, and ceiling effects while the latter might include “the intentional promotion of ideologically congruent beliefs among purposive sources and partisan media” (Hindman, 2009, p. 792) who have a stake in encouraging the circulation of particular versions of facts. Mindful of the potential impact of such macro-level factors and of the present trend toward political polarization of elites, media and media audiences, Hindman proposed renewing investigation of political orientation’s role in knowledge distribution, particularly of “facts” that have become so

politicized as to more closely resemble beliefs. In short, he believes that beliefs have become a “shortcut” for what counts as political knowledge.

Toward that end, Hindman (2009) investigated the roles of education and political orientation in predicting belief in global warming as well as whether it was caused by human activity. Political conservatives and liberals have staked out opposite views on both questions, with conservatives generally rejecting the scientific consensus that human-induced global warming is taking place (Hindman, 2009). Hindman found evidence that political orientation outstripped education as a predictor of belief that global warming is occurring and that the “belief gap” between liberals and conservatives grew over time. However, political orientation and education both tended to explain significant portions of variance in belief that human activity was causing global warming. Accordingly, this study’s modeling includes controls for education as well as income – both components of socioeconomic status. Hindman’s belief gap theory (2009) explains the links between the social distribution of beliefs and elite political interests. His research suggests that ideology may be a stronger predictor of beliefs than educational attainment, especially when the issue is a politically polarizing one.

The focus of Hindman’s (2009) study on global warming suggests one of the many aspects of belief gap awaiting exploration. Specifically, global warming’s evidence is not directly verifiable for most individuals sampled in a general population survey. Asking such individuals whether they believe in global warming thus puts them in much the same position as individuals asked in Tichenor et al.’s (1970) study whether they believed that smoking caused cancer or that humans would eventually walk on the moon.

Also, Hindman looked at belief gap changes over essentially three periods of time: the summer of 2006, the winter of 2007 and the spring of 2008. Observing belief gaps over longer a longer period of time, with more data points within the period, might reveal a more complex pattern. For example, worsening economic conditions might start out as abstractions for most people but become directly observable, thus shifting from a matter of belief to something more like a matter of knowledge. Furthermore, beliefs about economic conditions may be subject to variability over time in response to the way elite partisans represent them in public discourse.

In Hindman's exploration of belief gap, he makes a detailed explanation about the differences between belief and knowledge. Although this difference may seem inherently self-explanatory, these differences have been explored in earlier political science public opinion literature and can be applied here. Beliefs are often thought of as our understanding of the way things are (Glynn, et. al, 2004). Sometimes beliefs are grouped together forming belief systems and these systems, in turn, form the basis of attitudes and opinions (Glynn, et al, 2004). While belief systems might determine how we understand the world, researcher Richard Perloff posits that values, on the other hand, dictate our understanding of how things should be (Glynn, et. al, 2004). In politics it is common to see the belief systems and values that are inherent in one party clash with the beliefs and values of another. In terms of ratings and attitudes about the state of the economy, beliefs can have an important impact especially in an election cycle.

In Conover & Feldman's 1983 article, *Emotional Reactions to the Economy*, the authors spell out the differences between "affective" and "cognitive" reactions to the

economy. Affective reactions are often conveyed as any strong emotional reaction such as moods, feelings, and emotions, positive or negative (Conover and Feldman, 1983; see also Fiske and Taylor, 1984, Simon, 1982). On the other hand, cognition is described as a representation of knowledge and processes involved in acquiring knowledge (Conover & Feldman, 1983; see also Fiske, 1981, Simon, 1982). Numerous studies have shown that “affect” does not always depend on cognition; evaluative impressions can often be made largely independent on memory for details. In fact, sometimes affect can be separate from cognition altogether. Studies show that people’s moods may influence their memory and emotions can shape cognitive processing (Conover & Feldman, 1983; Fiske & Taylor, 1984).

The other difference between affect and cognition is while affect may form quickly, as gut reactions or “knee-jerk” reactions, cognitive reactions may develop over a longer period of time and after considerable exposure to, and processing of, the information. Despite cognition, knowledge is often forgotten, leaving affect as the only trace of a person’s original reaction. Affect can sometimes be more enduring and “less vulnerable to persuasion than cognitive judgments” (Conover and Feldman, 1983).

In terms of the national economy, studies show that people react to information about the economy sometimes without processing actual information. In fact, emotions play “a key role in structuring perceptions of economic conditions” (Conover and Feldman, 1983, p. 52). In light of the current political polarization, “affect has important political implications” (Conover and Feldman, 1983, p. 64). Numerous studies validate that emotional reactions to the nation’s economy, as well as to personal economic

situations, can have a “sizeable impact on predicting political evaluations” of the sitting president (Conover & Feldman, 1983).

In 1970 when Tichenor and his colleagues believed that television might be the “knowledge leveler” aimed at making all people more or less equal in their political knowledge, they did not anticipate the rise of cable television and the increasing use of the Internet for information dissemination. Whereas network television had generally been considered politically homogeneous, the decline of network television and its neutrality left the door open to the fragmented media landscape that we know today. News cycles on cable television, talk radio and the internet are now 24/7, and the competition for ratings is fierce. This diversified information atmosphere provides a strong incentive for news organizations to cater to their viewers’ political preferences since consumers’ political preferences will often determine what news organizations will be preferred (Iyengar & Hahn, 2009). This “perfect storm” — a fractured media landscape and increasing political partisanship — has provided the ideal environment for examining belief gaps and has made such examination critically important.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Since its landmark conceptualization by Tichenor, Donohue and Olien (1970), the knowledge gap hypothesis has seen many incarnations over four decades of discourse. Each new research study unveils a different variable, a new approach, and new schools of thought that challenge, refute, or refine the original hypothesis. In the last two decades much of what has been written about the knowledge gap centers around measuring political knowledge, but in doing so, the research has challenged the original hypothesis with an emerging awareness of cultural differences that may redefine the concept of knowledge, as well as variables that contribute to the measurement of socioeconomic status. Also included are various studies that discuss the motivational factors inherent in acquiring information: how information may be socially constructed; how personal relevance may enhance an individual or group need for information; how gender differences may or may not influence knowledge gap research; how community boundedness contributes to the flow of information; and lastly, how new technology, such as the Internet, cable, and satellite radio may change how information reaches different segments of the population. In addition, this new technology has fractured a once homogenous media landscape and the abundant media stations and channels have greatly influenced viewers' media choices.

The knowledge gap hypothesis as first conceptualized by Tichenor, Donohue & Olien (1970), began as a way to examine how information is dispersed through a social

system and how different segments of the population would acquire and use this information. The original theory states:

As the infusion of mass media information into a social system increases, segments of a population with higher socioeconomic status tend to acquire this information at a faster rate than the lower status segments, so that the gap in knowledge between the segments tends to increase rather than decrease” (Tichenor, Donohue & Olien, 1970, pp. 159-160).

This groundbreaking hypothesis contained several assumptions in its formulation:

Firstly, the growth of knowledge would be relatively greater among the higher SES segments; secondly, that if a point of diminishing returns is reached at all, that it will occur at different levels for different segments; thirdly, this hypothesis applies primarily to public affairs and science news and not to various audience-specific topics such as society news, sports, or gardening (Tichenor, et al., 1970). Perhaps the most important assumption given in this hypothesis is the underlying value placed upon formal education level as an indicator of socioeconomic status (Tichenor, et al., 1970). Tichenor, Donohue and Olien (1970) gave several reasons why they believed the knowledge gap appears and widens with increasing media information. They posited that increased formal education indicates larger reference groups of well-educated peers and a wider frame of reference in daily awareness of public affairs, life experience, as well as more exposure to mass media, therefore making a natural accumulation of knowledge possible (Tichenor et al., 1970). They also believed the nature of the mass media system seemed geared toward those with a higher SES because traditionally public affairs news appears in print media, which is generally oriented toward the interests of higher SES readers (Tichenor, et al., 1970, p. 162; Severin & Tankard, 2001, p. 249).

Although written over three decades ago, Tichenor, Donohue and Olien (1970) speculated that given these key points, the knowledge gap would continue to widen in developing countries as the media systems for delivering information changed from that of print media to broadcast media. They hypothesized that since television viewing and use was less correlated to education, there was the distinct possibility that television might be the “knowledge leveler” of the future and warranted further research (Tichenor et al, 1970).

Why knowledge gaps occur

There have been several schools of thought on the causes of the knowledge gap. The first major challenge to the original hypothesis was Ettema and Kline (1977). They introduced the idea of motivational factors that might contribute to the acquisition of information for differing segments of the population (Kwak, 1999, p. 388; Gaziano & Gaziano, 1999, p.122). They suggested that in situations when the lower SES group’s motivation is higher than the high SES group, it is possible to see the gap close or even reverse itself (Kwak, 1999, p. 388). In this motivation-contingency model, Ettema and Kline (1977) believed that a divisive issue might motivate those affected by the issue to acquire the needed information at a faster rate and lessen an SES-based knowledge gap (Kwak, 1999). Ettema and Kline’s (1977) hypothesis recast the debate to include concepts such as attitudes, belief systems, motivation, perceptions, thought and choice. They believed that motivation to acquire information was situational and individuals would employ different cognitive schemata to interpret incoming information (Gaziano & Gaziano, 1999, p. 123). They argue that members of different SES groups might have

different yet equivalent types of knowledge and that certain knowledge may serve a function in their environment. Although empirical support for this version of the hypothesis has been mixed, motivational variables continue to intrigue researchers.

Brenda Dervin (1980) and her colleagues headed another challenge to the original hypothesis. Her focus was more context-driven: she viewed individuals as users in the information delivery system, and believed that knowledge gaps might be due to differences in the construction of meaning between the source and receiver (Gaziano & Gaziano, 1999, p. 125; Severin & Tankard, 2001, p. 257). She called for more user-constructed information, which emphasized the user's need to construct meaning unique to his or her situation, rather than an externally constructed meaning. She believed that the majority of communications research has focused on a "blame the victim" syndrome, but her detractors claim she does not account for an individual's place in society in the form of social groups (Gaziano & Gaziano, 1999, p. 127).

Much of the research on the knowledge gap has focused heavily in the last decade on assessing political knowledge. One might argue that this is important because political knowledge might correlate to an individual's overall interest and knowledge of the world around him. The underlying assumption that formal education level may indicate a person's SES leads us to believe that people with more education have a greater cognitive ability and learning capacity and can better integrate new information into their lives. It is this assumption that fuels the recent study by researchers Liu and Eveland (2005) to examine not only education as an indicator of SES, but also how other moderators such

as the need for cognition (NFC) and campaign interest might influence the knowledge gap in terms of political knowledge (Liu & Eveland, 2005, p. 910).

Liu and Eveland (2005) wanted to replicate earlier studies that reviewed the relationship between political knowledge and television viewing versus newspaper reading (Liu & Eveland, 2005, p. 911). In addition, they examined motivation (in the form of campaign interest) and the need for cognition (NFC) as variables. Most importantly in this review, they challenge the idea that instead of talking “not of what variables alter SES-based knowledge gaps, but instead what factors influence how strongly various forms of news media produce learning effects” (Liu & Eveland, 2005, p. 911). Essential to their study was the idea that much of the earlier research on political learning focused on the public’s ability to learn from print media rather than television. It is argued that newspapers provide more contextual and background information than the audiovisual messages of television and by virtue of this structure, newspapers were superior to television for learning (Liu & Eveland, 2005, p. 911). On the other hand, other studies have extolled the virtue of television for learning because messages rich in audiovisuals enhance memory capacity and recall (Liu & Eveland, 2005, p. 912). In brief, their study evaluated the relationship between television news use, newspaper use and political knowledge and whether the knowledge gap would be lower or greater due to political interest. Using data gathered from the 2000 and 2004 American National Election Study (ANES) pre- and post-election surveys, they tested each hypothesis (Liu & Eveland, 2005, p. 914). Most of the results of this evaluation were mixed. Of the four hypotheses tested, only the evidence that showed strong newspaper use tied to those with

higher NFC (and higher SES) remained significant. Among the other findings was that overall men were more likely to possess greater political knowledge than women (Liu & Eveland, 2005, p. 917).

Of the many variables tested in knowledge gap research, gender is almost always a fundamental variable. Researchers Mondak and Anderson (2004) reexamined the gender-based knowledge gap hypothesis as it relates to political knowledge and contend that the knowledge gap is partly due to *how* the knowledge is measured. Using the data from the 1998 National Election Study (NES), their hypothesis set out to determine if the survey questions affect the outcome. After reviewing other studies on the topic, Mondak and Anderson (2004) realized that questions in most surveys measure political awareness using “right” or “wrong” answers and this can be problematic if respondents have varying levels of political knowledge. These various states of knowledge may not necessarily match up to answers provided by surveys and can bring about a possible large degree of error. One possible source of error may be the propensity for respondents to answer questions with a “don’t know” (DK) response. Partially informed respondents may garner higher scores over equally informed peers simply by guessing while others answer DK. Therefore, Mondak and Anderson (2004) believe that this propensity to guess may lead to misleading results on knowledge tests (Mondak & Anderson, 2004, p. 496). This is important because studies may show that men are more likely to guess than women and less likely to answer DK than women. This gender-based propensity may have its roots in socialization and therefore studies testing political knowledge will find that men’s scores may be somewhat inflated. Because men are more likely to guess, they

may gain some advantage from scoring systems that do not penalize wrong answers (Mondak & Anderson, 2004, p. 497). Their review of several multiple-choice battery tests showed that women were more likely to concede political ignorance and men were reluctant to answer DK (Mondak & Anderson, 2004, p. 499). Having reviewed other research on this same topic, they conclude that most studies do not count incorrect answers and that multiple-choice formats and eliminating DK responses may result in a better measurement of political knowledge (Mondak & Anderson, 2004, p. 497). In several simulation tests, they found that guessing could account for almost half of the gender disparity in political knowledge (Mondak & Anderson, 2004, p. 501).

Mass media efforts to increase public awareness of issues may result in an overall increase of knowledge, but they may also increase the level of information inequality already inherent in society (Holbrook, 2002, p. 437). Given that most of the research about the knowledge gap stems from concerns about social hierarchy and distribution of resources (information), Holbrook contends that it is important to understand the knowledge gaps that may or may not occur during a presidential campaign. Using data from the National Election Studies (NES), Holbrook (2002) investigates the validity of the knowledge gap hypothesis of voters' information acquisition during presidential campaigns from 1976 to 1996. Holbrook contends that presidential campaigns are simply another large-scale mass media effort to communicate information to voters with the hope of changing their behavior (Holbrook, 2002). During presidential campaigns, "the flow of campaign information may not be accessible to all voters and may increase underlying inequalities in levels of candidate information" (Holbrook, 2002, p. 440). As

campaign information increases, some people will learn about candidates and issues at different rates than others depending on their level of media sophistication. Presidential campaigns are unique in several ways: campaign information is readily available through radio, television and print; information is given in heavy daily doses; and lastly, campaigns often have several high visibility events that garner special coverage by the media, such as conventions and debates (Holbrook, 2002). Presidential campaigns are contentious in nature and command more media coverage over a longer period of time than most news events. In effect, because of the media coverage, voters are generally saturated with information.

Among other things, the pre-election portions of the NES surveys Holbrook looked at attempted to capture the amount of information a respondent could access and articulate about a candidate (Holbrook, 2002, p. 441). Open-ended questions allowed respondents to define the issues most relevant to their lives and helped to minimize any bias that might occur in closed-ended questions. The study hoped to evaluate whether there was a correlation between the level of education and the amount of candidate information held by respondents and whether this changes over the course of a presidential campaign. The resulting analysis did, indeed, show predictable findings: Those with the highest levels of education were able to articulate twice as many comments about candidates than those with lower levels of education, with one exception. Holbrook found that special events such as presidential debates “interrupted the general trend of the knowledge gap (Holbrook, 2002, p. 442). In four of the six campaigns (1976, 1980, 1988 and 1996), the knowledge gap did narrow following a

highly publicized presidential debate, sometimes quite dramatically (Holbrook, 2002). Holbrook hypothesizes that this might support the claim that the debates, as highly publicized and contentious events, can offer a good opportunity for political learning. Although his findings that presidential debates may reduce knowledge gaps is at odds with accepted knowledge gap literature, Holbrook believes that it is because debates differ from the rest of campaign for several reasons: Debates are high profile events that typically garner intense media coverage (Holbrook, 2002, p.449).

A spirited political campaign offers a valuable opportunity for knowledge gaps to narrow if the media campaign information is effectively dispersed. Newspapers and television coverage of a campaign may be able to bring issues to the forefront of the public's attention and provide ample opportunities for political learning. Although not a presidential campaign, researchers Craig, Kane and Gainous (2005) studied a heated gubernatorial Florida campaign in hopes of learning what variables contribute to issue stance knowledge. If the earlier study holds true, that a fair amount of learning occurs during high visibility presidential campaigns, and that newspapers and television provide ample opportunities for issue-related learning, then Craig and his colleagues (2005) assert that the combination of newspaper and TV coverage, even campaign ads, positive or negative, can also contribute to issue knowledge (Craig, et al., 2005, p.485). Their review of several previous studies seems to support the idea that "persons with a higher exposure to television advertising showed a greater increase in knowledge [about the candidates' positions] than persons with low exposure" (Craig, et al., 2005, p.485). Although political advertisements might be viewed as a low form of campaign

communication (and certainly has the fair share of detractors), studies show that voters do pay attention to them and use the information within to validate their own values and belief systems when they cast a vote (Craig, et al., 2005, p.486). This particular study used data from a three-wave telephone panel survey conducted by the *Florida Voter* polling organization during the 1998 gubernatorial campaign (Craig, et al., 2005, p.487). Results were tabulated and limited to the 301 respondents who had participated in all three surveys. They noticed several findings: Although name recognition was high between both campaigns (Jeb Bush and Buddy McKay), issue knowledge associated with each candidate early in the campaign was not. As the frequency of ads increased, the researchers identified several issues relevant to this campaign (gun laws, school vouchers, abortion, patient rights) and set about testing participants knowledge of the issues and if they could match the issue to the candidate's platform. The researchers were also curious about what voters learned from their respective peer groups or political party affiliations (group awareness) (Craig, et al., 2005). Not surprisingly, the findings showed that those voters who were generally interested in politics, and who possessed a strong attachment to a political party, generally had higher political knowledge. Those richer in knowledge tended to acquire more information as the campaign continued (Craig, et al., 2005, p.493). Negative ads were also seen as having an impact on issue stance knowledge: Jeb Bush's negative ads toward his opponent seemed to have been effective in engaging his constituency (Craig, et al., 2005, p.497). The researchers were dismayed at the results of negative campaign ads, and hoped that future research on

alternative communications channels, including direct mail, would yield better measures of campaign attentiveness (Craig, et al., 2005, p.497).

In the belief gap hypothesis, the issue of political party affiliation brings up another concept that has intrigued communications researchers in the past few years: How an issue affects a group or community may determine the knowledge acquisition for members of that said community. This concept, termed “community boundedness,” may pose a greater influence in determining the creation, maintenance or demise of SES-based differences in information acquisition (Rucinski, 2004, p.472). While the previous study (Craig, et al., 2005) did not specifically examine the issue of personal relevance, it suggested that voters with higher political knowledge had the ability to match their candidate’s platform and party affiliation to those important issues in their lives that had personal relevance. Rucinski (2004) states that while motivation to acquire information and its perceived functionality may contribute to differences in knowledge, “community boundedness speaks not to how an issue affects an individual but to the extent to which an issue affects a community” (Rucinski, 2004, p. 473).

While the motivation contingency model of the hypothesis stated that personal relevance—interest in a topic and how it relates to a person’s personal situation--might motivate people to acquire information, Rucinski (2004) argues, “the greater relevance to a particular community, the more likely the members of a community will attend to information about that topic, resulting in higher awareness and the absence of knowledge gaps” (Rucinski, 2004, p. 475). In 2000, Viswanath and colleagues (Rucinski, 2004) defined community as sharing geographic propinquity, race and ethnicity and that certain

topics might have special relevance for different cultural communities. Since so few knowledge gap studies consider the strong associations between race, ethnicity and SES, these factors must be examined in an increasingly pluralistic society that has historical discrimination and racism in the distribution of resources (Rucinski, 2004). Rucinski found that the greater the community boundedness of an issue, the more likely members of that community would attend to the information (Rucinski, 2004, p. 476).

Many of the reviewed studies have focused on cultural variables as well as the differences between broadcast and print media and their effects on learning. Earlier research has shown us that higher SES segments of society tend to gain more from print media than television. Television, in many cases, was seen as the great “leveler” by Tichenor, Donohue and Olien because of its popular and homogenous source of shared information and its availability to a large segment of the general population (McQuail, 2005, p. 492). The advent of the Internet offers more opportunities for learning and how it may impact knowledge gap research.

Researcher Henri Bonfadelli (2002) posits that the Internet will “result in the creation of an information elite and new knowledge gaps” (Bonfadelli, 2002, p. 66). In his analysis of two Swiss surveys that measured Internet access and use, he concludes that the knowledge gap will, indeed, become a digital divide, separating better-educated media users from the less educated segment of the population (Bonfadelli, 2002, p.69). He also contends that knowledge gaps occur because different segments of the population belong to different media environments: the trend of television and print media to tailor their information to specific target groups and the growing availability of cable has

further fragmented audiences and left no real captive mass audience (Bonfadelli, 2002; McQuail, 2005, p. 492). The old hypothesis was based on old media use, which was mostly homogenous. The structure of the Internet is pluralistic, potentially unlimited and heterogeneous (Bonfadelli, 2002). Bonfadelli (2002) believes that knowledge gaps formed in the old media are due in part as a result of education and motivation, but that knowledge gaps in the future may be partly because of gaps in access, use and skills (Bonfadelli, 2002). Use of the Internet requires a more active and skilled user and the affluence to afford the high cost of hardware and Internet access (Wei & Hindman, 2011, Hargittai & Hinnant, 2008, Bonfadelli, 2002). In the ten years since Bonfadelli's findings, research on the digital divide has shifted conceptually from access to use (Wei & Hindman, 2011, Hargittai & Hinnant, 2008). Although the cost to own technology has declined, people use technology for vastly different reasons, including entertainment, information-gathering, online banking, and news. Bonfadelli (2002) conducted a content analysis of the information people accessed and cross-examined this data with people's educational backgrounds. He found that "people with higher education use the Internet for informational and service-oriented purposes; people with lower education use the Internet significantly for entertainment reasons" (Bonfadelli, 2002, p. 79). Most of the research on this second level of the digital divide is comprised of studying this "usage gap." Researchers seem to agree that using digital technologies (new media) for information gathering would lead to an increase to the user's political knowledge (Hargittai & Hinnant, 2008; Bonfadelli, 2002). Lastly, Bonfadelli (2002) believes that further research is needed to understand how and why people use the Internet, since the

basic underlying assumption is that access to information can translate into social power and inequalities in knowledge acquisition can lead to further exclusion from social resources (Bonfadelli, 2002). Because so much of the world still is underdeveloped technologically, how will this translate into sharing the world's resources?

“Perfect storm”: fractured media landscape, political polarization and belief gap

This particular study attempts to place belief gap in the long canon of knowledge gap research by examining the landscape in which it occurs. Belief gap extends the knowledge gap hypothesis by adding ideology to the model and investigating its role in knowledge gaps regarding politically contested beliefs. The addition of party identification as an independent variable explains the growing gap of cognitive political knowledge. It is the combination of a fractured media landscape coupled with political polarization where the belief gap clearly becomes measurable.

The research in last few years suggests that the decline of the three major networks coupled with the rise of the Internet, cable television and talk radio will change the scope of belief gap research as consumers' media preferences will determine what news organizations will be preferred (Iyengar and Hahn, 2009). The development of cable and Internet has led to a fractured media environment in which cable news, talk radio and Internet have our attention as 24/7 news outlets and in turn has changed the public's media diet (Iyengar and Hahn, 2009).

In an effort to minimize cognitive dissonance, many citizens are reluctant to seek out information that is inconsistent with their beliefs. This selective exposure means that many cable television viewers or radio listeners will be drawn to those news outlets that

validate their own beliefs; therefore, consumers' political preferences will determine what news organizations will be preferred (Iyengar and Hahn, 2009). This becomes a vicious cycle for those who seek non-partisan news broadcast as many media conglomerates then find themselves fighting over market share by catering to viewers' political preferences (Iyengar and Hahn, 2009, p. 21). As competition drives media outlets to cater to their audiences' political leanings and prejudices, media owners will strive to "gain market share by injecting more rather than less political bias into the news" (Iyengar and Hahn, 2009; see also Gentzhow and Shapiro, 2006). This narrowing of media offerings, referred to as a "niche news" paradigm, acts as a self-imposed "echo chamber" where news only serves to reinforce the audience's current beliefs and attitudes (Iyengar and Hahn, 2009). Fox News is a perfect example of the "niche news" paradigm. Between 2000 and 2004, Fox News increased its ratings by 50 percent, surpassing all other cable news programming (Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 2004). This Pew research poll also revealed that respondents' ideological leanings generated a polarizing effect in news selection (Iyengar and Hahn, 2009, p.28). Furthermore, the polling revealed that polarization is growing increasingly more intensified among the more engaged strata and that the political divide in news selection between conservatives and liberals is considerably large (Iyengar and Hahn, 2009).

Given this narrowed media diet, some researchers believe that increasing numbers of citizens have migrated to opposite ends of the liberal-conservative scale (Iyengar and Hahn, 2009). Polarization happens when self-identified Democrats and Republicans respond differently to the same information (McAvoy & Enns, 2010). In terms of

evaluating the national economy, this polarization has important implications in an election year. Voters often perceive the national economy through the prism of their own experiences; in states where unemployment is high, voters are likely to have negative feelings about the economy. Voters themselves may be out of a job or know neighbors who have home foreclosures and the salience of these experiences can bring on strong emotional affects. In turn, these strong emotional reactions to the state of the national economy can have a sizeable impact on predicting political evaluations of a president's performance (Conover and Feldman, 1983). A perfect example of a political faction that has become an extremelyextremely vocal opinion elite for some voters is the Tea Party. Comprised of far right Republican voters who are vocal in their disagreement with President Obama and his administration, they are a perfect example of what Conover and Feldman describe as angry voters: "When people perceive poor economic conditions to be externally controllable...they react with anger and direct that anger at whomever they hold accountable for the situation" (Conover and Feldman, 1983). This description, written three decades ago, is still relevant in today's political environment. Voters who are angry about their own economic conditions (salience) and find the conditions beyond their control tend to blame the state of the economy on the sitting president and the current administration. In other words, this "affect" of anger/disgust has important political implications, especially during an election year, because "a public that is angry over the economy is more of a threat to the president's popularity than one that is merely uneasy" (Conover and Feldman, 1983).

This study advances the belief gap hypothesis in several important ways. First, this study looks at citizens' attitudes at more regular intervals and across a longer period of time compared to earlier studies. It allows for an opportunity to see if a pattern is established that can be clearly identified. Secondly, this study, while utilizing education and income as standard socio-economic indicators, evaluates the use of party identification as a reasonable predictor of how voters may feel about the state of the economy. Partisanship may hold a key to predicting how certain voters may react given the third element – the highly politicized topic of interest. Issues that are highly politically charged, such as global warming, the state of the economy or women's reproductive rights, may be predictable based on voter partisanship or party affiliation. In the more than four decades of knowledge gap research, we speculate that the original hypothesis still holds a key to further research: the idea that belief (“affect”) and actual, verifiable knowledge (cognition) are, indeed, two separate things. Citizens' beliefs sometimes persist long after the cognitive knowledge has been forgotten, yet both can be measured. Belief gap simply adds the element of partisanship to the mix as a variable. The knowledge gap hypothesis, in some ways, has come full circle.

CHAPTER THREE

HYPOTHESES

The behavior of belief gaps over a longer period of time has been underexplored. Hindman's original hypotheses looked at three points in time and did not find a huge difference. The findings suggest that belief gaps across time can occur in more of a relative than absolute sense. In this study of how Tennesseans view the national and state economies, it is theorized that partisanship, or party identification, will act as a reasonable predictor in determining citizens' perceptions.

More specifically, Republicans were consistently more optimistic than Democrats regarding the economy -- at least until the election of President Barack Obama, at which point the pattern reversed. The "out-partisans" (Democrats) then become the "in-partisans" (Lawrence, 2012). However, the overall trend among Democrats, Republicans and Independents is clearly downward -- just like the actual health of the economy. So, in an absolute sense, everyone -- regardless of political ideology -- realized and acknowledged that the economy was getting worse. When external reality (as indicated, for example, by monthly unemployment estimates) is more readily validated (has salience for the voter) and the media landscape has reported on the data on a wider basis, the belief gap seems to close. When there is less opportunity for an external reality check (as might be the case with global warming, or Obama's religiosity or place of birth), "absolute" and "relative" belief gaps might be more equally persistent.

This study utilizes the belief gap theory as one way of explaining the polarizing partisan views on economic data during the time period of 2004 to 2011. During this

time period, George W. Bush occupied the White House at the same time that economists, as well as the media, were reporting on the national economic recession and that economic conditions were, in fact, worsening, according to objective measures such as the unemployment rate at the state level and the Leading Economic Indicators Index at the national level. Our study examines how Republicans, Independents, and Democrats of Tennessee viewed the state and national economies in this context. In an effort to measure belief gaps over a longer period of time, we examine attitudes toward the state and national economies among these same partisan groups after the election of Democrat Barack Obama and to 2011.

As the country saw a shift in the political landscape — the end of an eight-year incumbency of a Republican president and the beginning of a Democratic one — Tennesseans were noting the opposite political shift in their home state. Popular moderate Democratic Governor Phil Bredesen ended his second and final term only to be replaced by moderate Republican Bill Haslam in 2010. Given these significant political shifts on the national and state level, and informed by the above discussion, this study set out to examine the following research questions using data collected during biannual random-digit dialing telephone polls of Tennessee adults conducted between February 2004 and October 2011:

RQ1: Did Tennesseans' ratings of the national economy during the period correlate significantly with national unemployment rates during the period?

RQ2: Did Tennesseans' ratings of the state economy between during the period correlate significantly with state unemployment rates during the period?

RQ3: Did Tennesseans' ratings of the national economy differ significantly by political orientation during the period, even after controlling for education and income?

RQ4: Did Tennesseans' ratings of the state economy differ significantly by political orientation during the period, even after controlling for education and income?

RQ5: Did Democrat Barack Obama's 2008 election to the U.S. presidency significantly alter the relationship between political orientation and ratings of the national economy?

RQ6: Did Republican Bill Haslam's 2010 election to the Tennessee governorship significantly alter the relationship between political orientation and ratings of the state economy?

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY

Data

Utilizing data from the Middle Tennessee University Poll, 2004 to 2011, the study applied a series of regression analyses to measure factors contributing to the belief gap on attitudes about the economic recession and recovery.

The study drew data from several years of random-digit dialing telephone poll of Tennessee adults from 2004 to 2011. University students trained as interviewers for course credit conducted telephone interviews in a lab supervised by a field director and equipped with a server-based computer-assisted telephone interviewing system.

Sponsored by the Office of Communication Research at Middle Tennessee State University's College of Mass Communication, the poll tracks attitudes regarding free expression, faith in major institutions, and a wide range of public issues. Surveys are conducted twice yearly, during the fall and spring, under the direction of faculty specialists in public opinion research.

Upon reaching a household, interviewers first asked to speak with the youngest male age 18 or older who is at home at the time of the call. If no such individual was available, interviewers asked to speak with the oldest female age 18 or older who is home at the time of the call. This process encourages participation by groups that previous polling has shown would be under-represented otherwise. Each poll consisted of about 600 unique respondents, with the total dataset consisting of 9,651 interviews. Response

rates calculated using AAPOR's RR1 definition ranged between 5 and 13 percent. Data for each poll was weighted to match contemporary U.S. Census estimates of age, race and gender proportions.

Dependent Variables

Ratings of the U.S. and Tennessee economies. Most – but not all – of the polls asked a random half of the respondents, “How would you rate economic conditions in the United States today - as excellent, good, only fair, or poor?” The other random half of each poll's respondents, meanwhile, were asked, “How would you rate economic conditions in Tennessee today - as excellent, good, only fair, or poor?” These questions are similar to the questions asked in numerous Gallup polls as well as the yearly American National Election Studies (ANES) polls and Pew Center polls (Lawrence, 2012; Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 2012). Respondents were asked to rate the economy on a four-point ordinal scale. Volunteered responses of “don't know” were accepted for both questions. A few of the polls asked all respondents only about the state economy and omitted questions about the national economy.

U.S. and state unemployment rates. The state of the economy is often viewed through one of two economic indicators: the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) or the unemployment rate. Since GDP may seem an abstract concept for most citizens to comprehend, unemployment rates as an economic indicator was utilized as it has general personal salience for the average citizen. The time period used in the poll data roughly corresponds with the time period given in the data used to describe the Great Recession

(Center on Budget and Policy Studies, 2013). Unemployment rates downloaded from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and Tennessee's Department of Labor and Workforce Development provided a validity check on Tennesseans' perceptions of the national and state economies, respectively (U.S. Department of Labor, 2013). Because the study focused on information absorbed from public discourse, a slight time lag was adopted when pairing each poll with the unemployment data. Specifically, each poll's economic ratings were compared to the unemployment figures released for the month preceding the month during which the poll took place.

Independent Variables

Political orientation. All polls included a question asking respondents to self-identify as a Democrat, independent, Republican or something else. The study's regression analyses used dummy codes to represent Democrats and Republicans, with independents as the base category against which Democrats and Republicans were compared. The analysis omitted respondents who designated themselves as "something else" or who gave no answer.

Significant political events. Together, research questions five and six explore whether patterns of association between political orientation and perceptions of economic conditions can change following a significant and salient shift in political power, either at the national or state level. This study focused on two such events: Democrat Barack Obama's election to the U.S. presidency in 2008, and Republican Bill Haslam's election to the Tennessee governorship in 2010. Obama's election ended the eight-year

administration of a Republican president, George W. Bush. Conversely, Haslam's election ended the eight-year administration of a Democratic governor, Phil Bredesen. The study's regression analyses relied on dummy codes to represent the time periods before and after these events.

Education and income. All polls measured respondents' self-reported education in 10 levels ranging from "never went to school" to "doctor's degree." Here, too, refusals and "don't know" responses were omitted from the list and the analysis. Knowledge gap studies have traditionally used education as a measure of socioeconomic status (Tichenor, Donohue & Olien 1970; Tichenor, Rodenkirchen, Olien, & Donohue, 1973), and Hindman's (2009) foundational belief gap study treats education as a factor that competes with political orientation as an explanation of beliefs regarding politically contested information. The study's modeling also included income, measured in 12 levels, as a supplemental measure of socioeconomic status.

Poll date. To help explore patterns across time, the study's modeling included a variable indicating the month during which each poll was conducted. The month was represented by a six-digit number consisting of four digits indicating the year and two more digits indicating the month. Thus, data from the first poll in the series, conducted in February 2004, were represented as 200402.

Interaction terms. The regression analyses that the study employed relied on interaction terms to check for the differences that research questions five and six describe. In keeping with standard practice for creating interaction terms from dummy-coded categorical variables (Hardy, 1993), the study calculated the interaction terms by

multiplying all pairs of dummy codes and entering them as a block into the regression model along with the dummy codes themselves. Specifically, the analysis created one set of dummy codes for the interaction of political orientation and the time periods before and after Obama's election. It created another set of dummy codes for the interaction of political orientation and the time periods before and after Haslam's election.

Procedures

In addition to descriptive statistics and some line charts depicting attitudes toward the national and state economies over time across Republicans, independents and Democrats, the study employed hierarchical linear regression to explore each independent variable's unique contribution to the models tested. The first two models – essentially validity checks on Tennesseans' ability to accurately perceive the health of the national and state economies as indicated by the unemployment rate – involved predicting the national or state unemployment rate with models including the poll date and Tennesseans' ratings of the national or state economies, respectively. Two additional regression models predicted ratings of the national and state economies from variable blocks including poll date, education, income, political orientation, and the interaction of political orientation and the time periods before and after the political power shifts described above.

CHAPTER FIVE

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics and Charts

Across all polls, respondents gave the national economy an average rating of .771 on the zero-to-three scale, with three indicating “excellent” conditions. The Tennessee economy received a somewhat higher average of 1.12. The difference was intriguing, considering that a comparison of the national and state unemployment rates showed Tennessee with a higher unemployment rate than the nation for all but two of the 14 polling periods considered. Tennessee’s unemployment rate averaged 7.31 percent across the period, while the national unemployment rate averaged 6.82 percent. Tennessee’s rate averaged about half a percentage point higher than the national rate during the period.

One immediately apparent pattern was Democrats’ tendency across the period to rate both national and state conditions lower than independents did and for Republicans to rate national and state economic conditions higher than independents did. Republican ratings of the national economy averaged .965, while independent ratings average .703, and Democratic ratings averaged .617 ($F(2,3316) = 66.16, p < .05$). State economic conditions, meanwhile, received an average of 1.28 from Republicans, 1.07 from independents, and exactly 1 from Democrats ($F(2,3316) = 68.22, p < .05$). At least in a relative sense, then, Democrats could be considered closer to the mark at the state level, given Tennessee’s unemployment rate exceeded the nation’s unemployment rate for nearly the entire period.

Furthermore, Democratic ratings of the national economy surged upward – if momentarily – after President Obama took office. Republican ratings rose, too, as did those from independents, but not nearly as sharply. Democrats remained relatively upbeat – and Republicans relatively depressed – about the national economy until roughly the spring of 2011, when perceptions about the economy began to homogenize across political orientations. Figure 1 illustrates the patterns described.

Similar patterns appeared in ratings of the state economy. Republicans remained more – and Democrats less – optimistic about the economy for most of the period until, about a month before the 2010 gubernatorial election, Republicans ended up in about the same place, with Democrats perhaps even a bit more optimistic than Republicans. But in the aftermath of the election the following spring, Republican optimism jumped, while Democratic optimism sagged. Figure 2 illustrates the patterns.

Regression Analyses

A pair of regression analyses indicated affirmative answers to the study's first two research questions. A model consisting of the poll date variable ($b = .007, t = 94.9, p < .05$) and Tennesseans' ratings of the national economy ($b = -.115, t = -.483, p < .05$) predicted a statistically significant ($F = 5311, p < .05$) 76 percent of the variance in the national unemployment rate. Meanwhile, a significant ($F = 5259, p < .05$) 67 percent of the variance in the state unemployment rate was predicted by a model consisting of the poll date variable ($b = .009, t = 97.9, p < .05$) and Tennesseans' ratings of the state economy ($b = -.286, t = -11.9, p < .05$).

The study found evidence for an affirmative answer to its third and fourth research questions, too. Even after controlling for the socioeconomic indicators of education and income – both of which remained significant and positive, incidentally – the political orientation made a significant difference in Tennesseans' assessments of the state and national economies. Tables 1 and 2 summarize the regression analysis results. Specifically, Republicans were significantly more optimistic about the national economy than independents were, while Democrats were significantly less optimistic about the national economy than independents were. Meanwhile, Democrats and independents averaged about the same levels of optimism about the state economy, while Republicans were significantly more optimistic. Notably, the model appeared less robust at the state level, with less than half the explanatory power of the national-level model. Here again, though, income and education both proved positive and significant predictors.

Regarding the study's fifth research question, Table 1 suggests that President Obama's election did, indeed, significantly alter the relationship between political orientation and ratings of the national economy that had prevailed during Republican George W. Bush's time in the White House. Republicans and Democrats abruptly changed places, at least for a time, with Democrats becoming the most optimistic group regarding the national economy, and Republicans becoming the least optimistic group.

While Figure 2 suggests at least some divergence between Democratic and Republican perceptions of Tennessee's economic fortunes following Gov. Haslam's election, the regression analysis found the depicted change to be not significant. Thus, the results suggested a negative answer to the study's final research question: There was no

evidence that Gov. Haslam's election in 2010 significantly altered the relationship between political orientation and ratings of the state economy. Democrats, who were relatively pessimistic about the state economy before Gov. Haslam's election, remained pessimistic despite, perhaps, briefly considering optimism. And Republicans, who had been relatively more optimistic before, remained optimistic. No evidence of their disquiet regarding the national economy appeared regarding the state economy, even though the two economies are substantially connected.

CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSION

Perhaps the most obvious lesson to be drawn from our data is that, at least as far as matters like economic conditions are concerned, belief gaps may be more apparent cross-sectionally than longitudinally. Over time, Republicans, independents and Democrats alike believed the U.S. and Tennessee economies were worsening – beliefs that appear to have been correct, at least to the degree that unemployment rates represent actual economic conditions in both economic systems. In our data, belief gaps appeared mainly as gaps among Republicans, independents and Democrats at a given point in time rather than as gaps that opened (or closed) between these groups as time passed.

Our data suggest, though, that these point-in-time gaps can change rapidly in response to changes in the political landscape. While a Republican occupied the White House, Republicans consistently exhibited more economic optimism than Democrats did. But when control of the presidency shifted to a Democrat, Republicans almost immediately became the least optimistic group, and Democrats, the most optimistic group. Thus, change in the belief gaps we observed tended not to manifest as widening gulfs between partisans over time but rather as abrupt reconsiderations by partisans in response to a change in the political balance of power.

One might have expected a mirror image of the pattern at the state level, where a Democrat held the governorship until, near the end of the period, a Republican took over. But such was not the case. Republicans, who were the most optimistic about a national economy overseen by a Republican president and the least optimistic about a national

economy overseen by a Democratic president, remained the most optimistic group at the state level, regardless of the governor's party affiliation. Democrats, meanwhile, remained the least optimistic at the state level, even under a Democratic governor. Perhaps beliefs about the national economy heavily influenced beliefs about the state economy, but not so much the other way around. It also may be that Tennessee's Democratic governor, known for his political moderation and popularity among both Republicans and Democrats, gave Tennesseans little reason to do anything other than simply generalize their beliefs about the national economy to the state economy. Additionally, it may be important that the switch at the state level from a Democratic administration to a Republican administration happened two years after the switch at the national level from a Republican administration to a Democratic administration. By the time the state-level political shift occurred, information about the poor economy both from political and media elites as well as from direct experience may have had sufficient time to penetrate the ideologically polarized lenses through which Tennesseans had been viewing the economy.

Finally, it may simply be that the regression analysis lacked sufficient sensitivity to pick up on what differences there were during this relatively brief moment in the timespan considered by the study. Simple analyses of variance conducted on state-level economic ratings after the election of a Republican governor found Republicans significantly more optimistic than independents in February 2011 ($F(2, 261) = 5.34, p < .05$) and significantly more optimistic than Democrats in October 2011 ($F(2, 258) = 3.29, p < .05$). Thus, perhaps partisan ratings of the state economy did diverge in response to a

power shift at the state capitol, at least to the degree that they could diverge during such obviously hard economic times. Even here, though, partisans may have been responding to gains in the 2010 midterm election that gave control of the U.S. House of Representatives to Republicans and seemed to be setting Democrats up for a defeat in the 2012 presidential election.

Unfortunately, our data offer no easy way to determine which group's beliefs were more accurate throughout the period or at any point within the period. As a result, it is perhaps no surprise that the strongest observed differences were among relative ratings of each group.

Re-conceptualizing the dependent variable as belief about the future direction of the economy relative to the present time, rather than as a relative rating of the economy's health at the present time, would allow more valid comparison with actual economic data and, perhaps, more accurate measurement of how distorted each group's beliefs ended up being, both longitudinally and crosssectionally. We urge research along these lines in the future, as well as of the many other areas of inquiry available within the belief gap domain.

The future of knowledge gap research: implications for future research

When Tichenor, Donohue and Olien (1970) first conceptualized the knowledge gap hypothesis over 40 years ago, they probably had no idea that it would still be the fascinating phenomenon that is today. Each new study brings with it a new set of variables that enhance, refute or challenge our understandings of why knowledge gaps

occur. These highlighted studies have shown that several variables must be considered in future knowledge gap research. Traditional empiricists may cringe at qualitative considerations of the roles of variables such as race, ethnicity, gender, and community boundedness, but overall, the current trend in research seems to be embracing the meshing of quantitative methodology with a qualitative, cultural awareness that, we hope, will bring new perspectives to the use and function of mass media and its effects. Cultural variables may help media professionals target their increasingly fragmented audiences using various forms of media that best fit the situation.

The future use of new media technology such as the Internet will pose new challenges to researchers as they try to capture data to determine the extent of the digital divide. The growing fractured media landscape, the narrowing of media diets and the resulting political polarization will challenge researchers to investigate the reasons why some topics are politically volatile and who votes and why. Why do some citizens vote their self-interest and others do not? What makes some topics politically charged? Belief gap has expanded knowledge gap research to include party identification as a variable in determining knowledge gaps in politically contested topics. It will be interesting to see how it the next chapter unfolds.

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Appendices

Table 1:

*Summary of Beta Scores from Hierarchical Regression Predicting Ratings of the
National Economy (N=2,519)*

Variable	Step	
	1	2
Poll date	-.450*	-.450*
Democrat	-.094*	-.172*
Republican	.111*	.244*
Education	.065*	.072*
Income	.081*	.073*
Post Obama election	.114*	.155*
Post Obama election x Democrat		.141*
Post Obama election x Republican		-.219*
Adjusted R^2	.177	.220
F change	91.4*	69.3*

* $p \leq .05$.

Table 2:

*Summary of Beta Scores from Hierarchical Regression Predicting Ratings of the
Tennessee Economy (N=3,721)*

Variable	Step	
	1	2
Poll date	-.215*	-.214*
Democrat	-.028	-.027
Republican	.124*	.131*
Education	.063*	.063*
Income	.113*	.113*
Post Obama election	.039*	.055
Post Obama election x Democrat		-.002
Post Obama election x Republican		-.024
Adjusted R^2	.084	.084
F change	58.127*	.571

* $p \leq .05$.

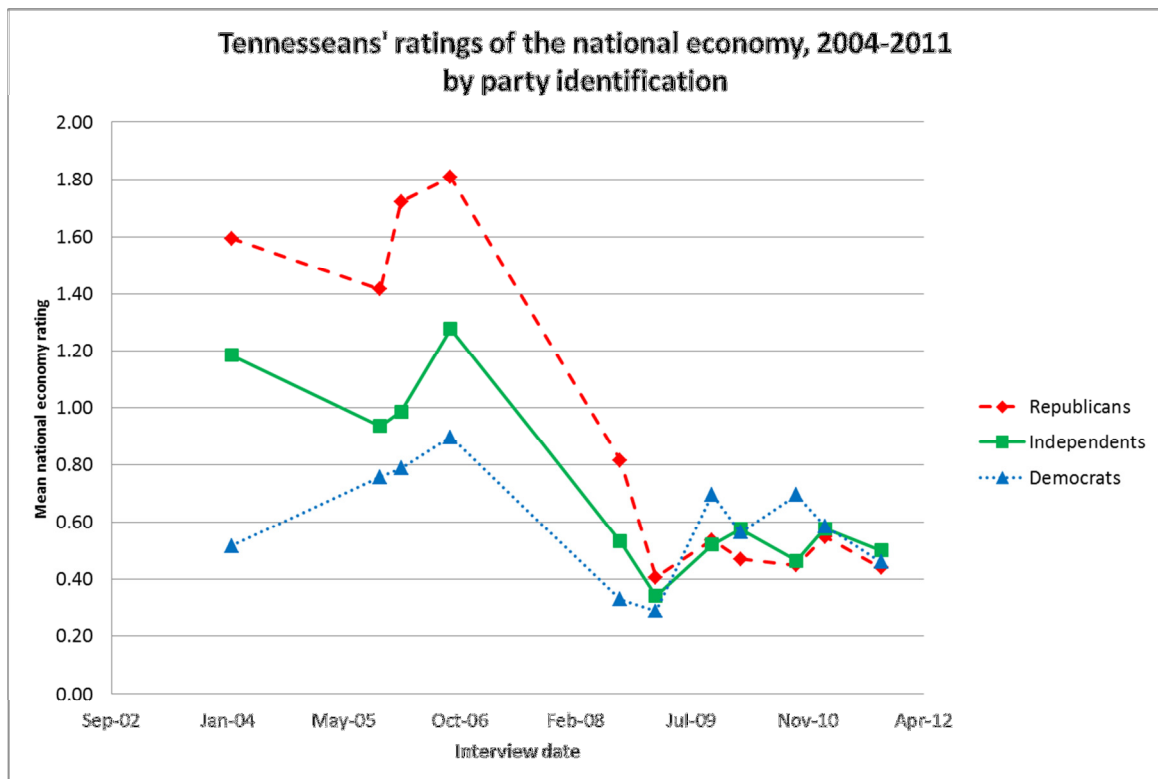


FIGURE 1: RATINGS OF THE NATIONAL ECONOMY BY POLITICAL
ORIENTATION, 2004-2011

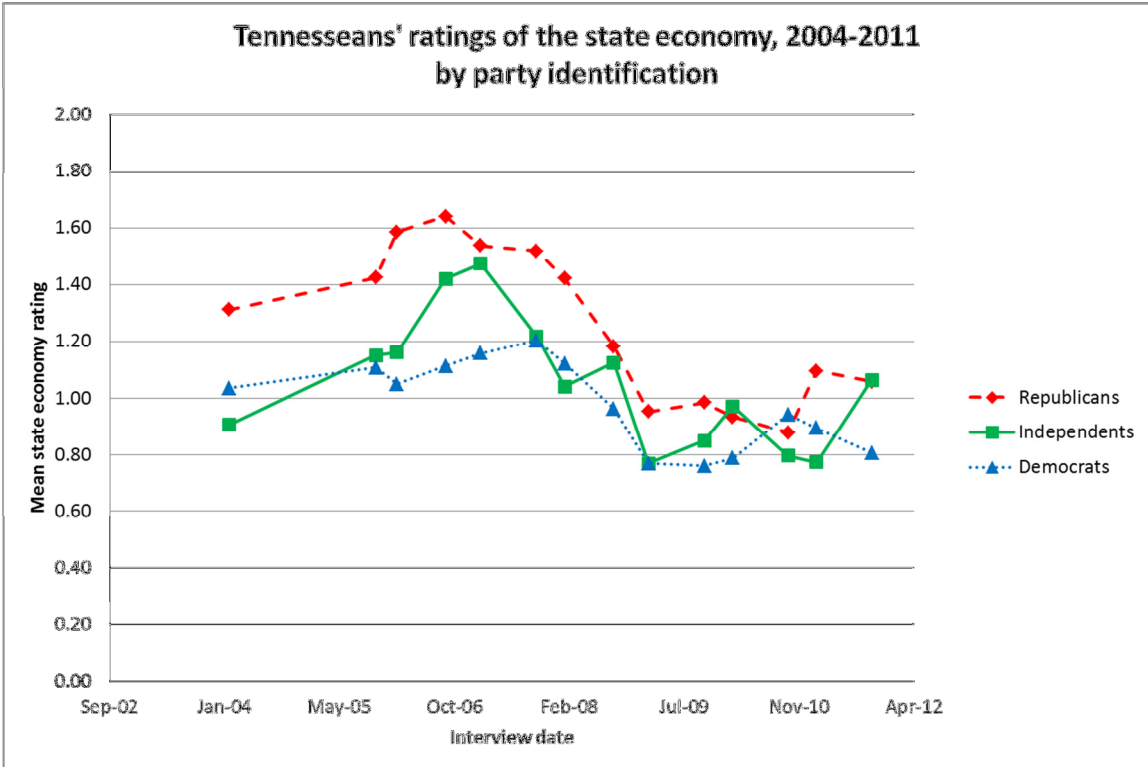


FIGURE 2: RATINGS OF THE STATE ECONOMY BY POLITICAL ORIENTATION, 2004-2011