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# The Effect of Knowledge on Attitudes towards the US Supreme Court

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THE EFFECT OF KNOWLEDGE ON ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE US SUPREME  
COURT

A Thesis Project Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree  
Bachelor of Arts with Honors College Graduate Distinction at Western Kentucky  
University

By

Harlee P. Havens

April 2019

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I dedicate this thesis to my mother, Beth Havens, who I wouldn't have been able to do any of this without and is easily the most important person in my life. I also dedicate this to my grandparents, Donald and Sue Havens, who are always willing to support from afar. I also dedicate this to Brynn Clemons and Lyn Dawsyn Steenbergen, who have been nothing but encouraging throughout this process. Finally, I dedicate this to 2018 Recruitment Staff, who are the most emboldening, empowering, and impactful women that I have gotten the pleasure to know.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In working on this thesis, I have challenged myself more than I have within any classroom. In my college career, I have always had a passion for the law – what it means, what it does, and how it can be used to shape the society that we live in. What I did not always have a passion for, was an understanding of *why* the law has that power despite the fact that knowledge of it is not highly saturated in the United States. This project allowed for me to have an empirical understanding of the field that I will spend the rest of my life in, for which I am grateful. The largest takeaway from this research is that there is no monopoly on knowledge. The Supreme Court and the legal system as a whole is not something that only impact those who are highly educated, nor does it only impact those who have been accused of a crime. Rather, it impacts all of us, the rights we put into action every day, and the liberties that we have been afforded.

I would not have been able to do this without Western Kentucky University and the Mahurin Honors College. Additionally, this research would not have been possible without the resources provided to me by FUSE (Faculty-Undergraduate Student Engagement). When I got to WKU, I was a good student. I was not a good researcher, a good academic, nor a good leader. Without the faculty and the peers that I have met here, I would not be the person I am today, ready to enter law school and the world that follows. Outside of the classroom I was fortunate enough to meet mentors and colleagues that pushed me to be better at things that I would never get graded on.

The most significant thank you that I can express is to the faculty and staff members who have encouraged me along the way: Rep. Patricia Minter, who was the most badass woman that I could have ever had the pleasure of having as my professor;

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## ABSTRACT

Knowledge regarding the judicial branch of the federal government, including the Supreme Court, is lacking in comparison to the two other branches. The Supreme Court generally receives better approval ratings than the executive and legislative branches of government. It is this relationship that I examine through a survey that measures knowledge and feelings of all three branches of government to assess if having more knowledge of the judicial branch has an impact on one's feelings towards it.

By measuring the knowledge of my respondents through a questionnaire that asked about information regarding, and functions of the US Supreme Court, I was able to compare that to how the respondents feel about the Supreme Court in terms of both diffuse and specific support. Does one's knowledge of the Supreme Court influence attitudes toward it? While the literature suggests that those with more knowledge will have higher levels of support for the Supreme Court, the results of this study only supported that higher judicial knowledge has an effect on measures of specific support, but not diffuse support.

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## INTRODUCTION

In 2015, the Supreme Court granted same-sex couples the right to marry regardless of the state in which they reside in *Obergefell v. Hodges*. The majority opinion, written by Anthony Kennedy, suggested that the right to marry was a right all Americans were entitled to, regardless of sexual orientation. In the year prior, fifteen states still had constitutional bans on gay marriage (Pew Research Center, 2015). This was a decision that was made not with the full support of the public; in fact, the public was still very torn on the issue of same-sex marriage. According to Flores and Barclay (2015), “In 2004, when not a single state had greater than 50% support for same-sex marriage, 13 states adopted prohibitions of same-sex marriage by popular vote.” (Flores and Barclay, 2015, 3) Many states still resist this decision. According to Kazyak and Stange, “...in the wake of marriage equality, states have introduced and passed laws that provide ‘religious exemptions’ for certain services and benefits for LGBTQ persons...” (Kazyak and Stange 2018, 2033). Additionally, according to the Pew Research Center, 40% of Americans opposed gay marriage in 2014, just one year before the *Obergefell* decision (Pew Research Center 2017).

Despite the controversy regarding the case, knowledge regarding previous same sex marriage decisions was not widespread. According to the Pew Research Center, only 49% of respondents knew that *United States v. Windsor*, the precursor to *Obergefell*, ruled in favor of same sex marriage and that it deemed the Defense of Marriage Act unconstitutional (Pew Research Center, 2013). In that same study, 15% respondents thought that the right for gay couples to get married in all 50 states had already been granted by the Supreme Court in *Windsor* (Pew Research Center, 2013). This confusion

suggests a lack of attentiveness to the decisions regarding same-sex marriage or lack of attentiveness to the Supreme Court as a whole, despite the controversial nature of the issue and the amount of media attention that it has received leading up to the *Obergefell* decision.

Despite the lack of knowledge of this important issue, the approval rating of the Supreme Court still remained steady. According to Gallup, 49% of Americans approved of how the Supreme Court was doing its job in July of 2015 and 45% the following September. These numbers fall within 43-49% every year since 2011 (Gallup, 2018). Why is it that despite the controversy in regard to this case and the misconceptions of the public impact, that the Court's approval rating remained steady and higher than the other branches of government?

The United States Supreme Court is the highest authority over the judicial branch of government. However, some research suggests that knowledge about the Court is lacking. For example, according to the American Council of Trustees and Alumni, 9.6% of college graduates actually believed that Judge Judy sat on the Supreme Court (American Council of Trustees and Alumni 2016, 19). Additionally, according to the Annenberg Public Policy Center, 32% of Americans cannot even name the judiciary as one of the branches of government (Bomboy, 2017). However, Ginn, Searles, and Jones (2015) note that "despite the public's lack of knowledge of the Court, most Americans view the Court as an enduring symbol of security and safety" (Ginn, Searles, and Jones, 2015, 165). Additionally, Gallup polls suggest that the Court has a notably higher approval rating than Congress (Bomboy, 2017). While Congress is an institution that is in the news every day and is made up of more familiar faces to the public than the Supreme

Court, the Court is still found more favorable than Congress. Why is the Supreme Court different? All of this leads to the central question of this thesis: Does one's knowledge of the Supreme Court influence attitudes toward it? If an understanding of the American judicial process can actually affect one's feelings about this branch of our government, it can help to determine the value of expanding civic education that details the lesser taught branch of the government.

Understanding this relationship is important to gaining insight into how Americans form their opinions about the Supreme Court. It would allow political scientists to gain understanding of how attitudes are created. Those who have been taught things about the Supreme Court, such as the inability to "make laws," would have a different understanding of the cases that the Court hears. Additionally, those people could know that the Supreme Court didn't make a law stating that gay marriage was legal in *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015), but rather that it extended same-sex couples right to privacy from sexual activity to marriage in every state. While ultimately both understandings have the same result – the ability for same sex couples to get married – that nuance is valuable in understanding how that decision now fits into America's legal system and how the understanding of the Constitution has changed.

Those who have not had a formal education about the Supreme Court may not know that subtle distinction and could have a different opinion about whether or not the Supreme Court did the "right thing." They could have an opinion about the Court that comes out of a misunderstanding, thus possibly creating a view of the Court that is different than if they knew the difference, making the one based on little knowledge inaccurate. Someone may think that same-sex couples should have the right to get

married, but they may not agree with that conclusion coming from the “right to privacy,” and believe rather that the right to same-sex marriage comes from the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment’s Equal Protection Clause.

An educated public is desirable – especially when it comes to government and politics because we desire educated voters. If knowledge about the judicial branch can have a real impact on the way people feel about US institutions and the way that they vote in response to those feelings, it can indicate to us that we need to make greater efforts to be clearer with the way that we teach government and judicial information to Americans. This relationship can indicate whether or not we have a population of people who have attitudes towards the highest court in the United States that are formed using incorrect information. The Supreme Court cares about public opinion, despite the fact that justices are not elected, nor do they need to be confirmed by the public (Mondak and Smithey, 1997, 1114) The reason they care is so that the Court maintains institutional legitimacy. Institutional legitimacy means that the public has a level of inherent trust in a given institution, allowing for it to have a sense of leeway that not all other institutions have. Caldeira and Gibson (2003) give an example of *Bush v. Gore*. This case was highly contentious and caused the justices to vote in ways that contradicted their traditional interpretations of the Constitution due to the political outcome of the presidency. Even though the justices all acted in a way that coincide with their typical decision-making process, the Court had such a large amount of institutional legitimacy that it was able to maintain decent approval ratings because it had a “reservoir of goodwill” (Caldeira and Gibson, 2003, 354).

In order to examine this relationship, I have conducted a survey that measures the judicial knowledge of respondents alongside their feelings towards the Supreme Court. This survey took questions that inquire about fundamentals about how the Supreme Court functions, followed by statements regarding the Supreme Court with which the respondents were able to agree or disagree. Using that data, I will examine their relationship through an analysis of multiple regression to see if a relationship exists between these two variables, and if so, in what way?



## LITERATURE REVIEW

There are two strands of literature that inform the discussion of the relationship between American knowledge of the judicial branch of the United States. The first strand is literature that measured knowledge of the Supreme Court. The second examined public support for the Supreme Court, allowing me to compare these two strands of literature. I also consider literature by Caldeira and Gibson (1992) that considers some of the reasoning that could contribute to the relationship between judicial knowledge and opinions.

### *Judicial Knowledge*

Numerous surveys and studies have shown the lack of knowledge about the Supreme Court. As mentioned earlier, 9.6% of college graduates believe that Judy Sheindlin (better known as Judge Judy) serves on the United States Supreme Court (American Council of Trustees and Alumni, 2016, 19). Many of these knowledge comparisons are done to show the severity of knowledge gaps. Caldeira and Gibson note, "...an oft-cited survey in 1989 reported that 71% of the respondents could not name a single member of the Supreme Court; in contrast, 54% of the same sample was able to name the judge on the television show 'The People's Court' (Caldeira and Gibson, 2009, 429). They also noted a study in which "77% of American people were able to identify two of Snow White's Seven Dwarfs; only 24% could name two Supreme Court justices" (Caldeira and Gibson, 2009, 429). While these statistics are shared to get a rise out of readers, what do they really mean about knowledge of the Supreme Court?

These statistics are representative of the lack of education that American students receive in this area of social studies and civic government. The American Council of

Trustees and Alumni notes, “studies show that our colleges and universities are doing little or nothing to address the knowledge gap,” and that “a recent survey by the American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA) of over 1,100 liberal arts colleges and universities found that only a handful—18%—require students to take even one survey course in American history or government before they graduate” (American Council of Trustees and Alumni, 2016, 1). In a CBS News article, Erica Hill noted, “This isn't really a problem of -- or an issue, rather, of stupidity, it's more an issue of ignorance” (CBS News, 2011). All of this suggests that Americans simply are not educated about this aspect of our government.

This lack of education can be seen in public school social studies standards. To provide one example, I examined the Kentucky Academic Standards, distributed by the Kentucky Department of Education. Within the 60 pages of standards that outline the curriculum for primary-high school social studies education the word “judicial” only appears three times, all preceded by the words “legislative” and “executive” (Kentucky Department of Education, 2015, 247, 253, 457). This suggests the lack of emphasis on student’s ability to understand judicial processes specifically, given that the judicial branch is only discussed when considering and teaching the separations of power.

Knowledge regarding the legislative and executive branches of government are somewhat more saturated. For example, in a 2004 survey, respondents were able to identify the Vice President and the British Prime Minister at higher rates than they were able to identify the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court (Caldeira and Gibson, 2009, 431).

This translates to their knowledge as adults as well. The Pew Research Center showed, “fewer Americans correctly answered a basic question about the court’s

ruling on the Affordable Care Act. Despite a lengthy buildup to the court's ruling and high public interest in the case, just 55% knew that the court had upheld most provisions of the ACA; 15% said the court had rejected most parts of the law, while 30% said they didn't know" (Dost, 2015). The Annenburg Public Policy Center also showed that 41% of respondents were not completely familiar with the Supreme Court confirmation process, thinking that the House of Representatives and the Senate had to approve Supreme Court nominees (Annenburg Public Policy Center, 2018).

Knowledge however, can be impacted by many things. Caldeira and Gibson argue that there are different factors that can lead to one being more or less knowledgeable about the Supreme Court. They write, "...citizens tend to know about court decisions of local interest and that directly affect them...highly salient controversies often penetrate the consciousness of the American people...and most black Americans know that Clarence Thomas is a justice on the Supreme Court" (Caldeira and Gibson, 2009, 431). Ginn, Searles, and Jones (2015) also assert this idea stating, "while most Americans are blissfully unaware of the Supreme Court's actions, there is evidence that suggests that individuals living in the region affected by a decision are more likely to be aware..." (168). Research by Herbert M. Kritzer after the decision in *Bush v. Gore* also suggested an increase in public knowledge about the Supreme Court after the focusing event that that case served as (Kritzer, 2001, 37). These factors are important in understanding that knowledge is not static. One does not simply have knowledge or not have – it can be gained or refocused on certain topics.

Our perception of knowledge is also not static. While statistics about Judge Judy and the Seven Dwarfs suggest that knowledge about the Supreme Court is limited,

Caldeira and Gibson argue that the public is not as ignorant about the Supreme Court as some studies suggest. They state, “In 2001, nearly three out of four knew that the justices of the Court are appointed; and, despite having to choose from among the Court, the Congress, and the President, more than 60% answered that the Supreme Court has the ultimate ‘say’ on the Constitution,” and ‘only 13.6% of the respondents got none of these questions correct; 44.4% answered all three accurately’ (Caldeira and Gibson, 2009, 433). Not only do respondents know more than expected about the Supreme Court itself, but about the decisions that it makes. According to Caldeira and Gibson, “...42% know that the Court has *not* made decisions on the maximum income tax rate (a very difficult test indeed)” (Caldeira and Gibson, 2009, 434). It is important to take note of the consideration that the public knows more about the Supreme Court than it seems to because the data collected in this study may reflect a more aware public, similar to Caldeira and Gibson.

### *Judicial Attitudes*

Public opinion regarding the Supreme Court has also been studied extensively. According to the National Constitution Center, “Last September, Gallup said 95 percent of people polled had some opinion about the Supreme Court: 50 percent disapproved of the Court, while 45 percent approved of the job it was doing. In 2000, 62 percent of Americans approved of the Court” (Bomboy, 2016). Caldeira and Gibson found that Americans had “a remarkably high level of loyalty toward the Supreme Court...” (Caldeira and Gibson, 2003, 358). They even found that “over four of five Americans assert that it would *not* be better to do away with the Court, even if there were fairly widespread displeasure with its decisions.” (Caldeira and Gibson, 2003, 358) Overall,

Americans have relatively positive feelings towards the Supreme Court. (Caldeira and Gibson, 2003, 360).

Even though the Supreme Court does not always look like it has a great approval rating, they are not the lowest rated out of the three branches of government. According to one researcher, “the Gallup numbers show that while current Court approval numbers are lower, as of 2015, the Court as an institution far outranks Congress, which had an approval rating of 14 percent last September. President Obama’s approval rating last September was 47 percent” (Bomboy, 2016). Mondak and Smithey also note this, “aggregate support for the Supreme Court consistently exceeds levels for Congress and the executive branch, according to GSS and Gallup Poll data for the period 1973-1986” (Mondak and Smithey, 1997, 1116). They also found in their own research that “support for the Court outpaces support for Congress and the executive; support for the Court averages .58, versus .47 for the executive branch and .46 for Congress” (Mondak and Smithey, 1997, 1119).

The Supreme Court has had a stable foundation of support. According to Mondak and Smithey, “instead of fluctuating, opinion of the Court has seemed remarkably constant” (Mondak and Smithey, 1997, 1116). Caldeira and Gibson go further to note that, “even during the 1960s, when support for other institutions plummeted, public evaluations of the Court remained relatively high” (Caldeira and Gibson, 1992, 635). Mondak and Smithey conducted research trying to determine the cause of that stable support, they considered factors like “divisions by race...partisanship...political activism...religion...and commitment to democratic values...” (Mondak and Smithey, 1997, 1120). Their results led to a conclusion that inspires the research done in this paper;

“We believe that the matter of availability of information may lie at the heart of discrepancies among past empirical studies: it may be that most people rarely form substantive reasoning to the Supreme Court’s decisions.” They go on to note, “if almost no one is listening, then few would hold the Court accountable for what it has to say.” They continue that, “few have the necessary awareness to give-or withhold-support” (Mondak and Smithey, 1997, 1121).

Caldeira and Gibson (1992) also looked into the relationships between many factors and how they affect support for the Supreme Court. They outlined the opinions that they asked respondents for to see how those influenced feelings about the Court. Specifically, they investigated “opinions on residential segregation, abortion, capital punishment, gun control, leniency in criminal courts, pornography, and legalization of marijuana. Of policy considerations structure diffuse support among the public, we should encounter a significant relationship between our measure of support and indicators of attitudes on social issues on the Court’s agenda” (Caldeira and Gibson, 1992, 644). They found there to be a relationship between these opinions and judicial support; “generally, those who adopt a ‘liberal’ position on these social issues tend to evince greater commitment to the Court as an institution,” but those relationships did not show to be significant (Caldeira and Gibson, 1992, 644).

It is important to consider attitudes toward the Supreme Court because they contribute to its institutional legitimacy. Calderia and Gibson say in regard to this concept that many, “use ‘diffuse support’ as a synonym for legitimacy. Diffuse support refers to ‘a reservoir of favorable attitudes or good will that helps member to accept or tolerate outputs to which they are opposed or the effects of which they see as damaging to their

wants” (Caldeira and Gibson, 2003, 356). Even though justices are not elected, their institutional legitimacy is still essential due to the fact that, “A disgruntled public may not only refuse to cooperate with a Supreme Court decision, but may also pressure elected officials to resist implementation of judicial orders” (Mondak and Smithey, 1997, 1114). If the Court has a higher level of legitimacy, then they have more leeway to make controversial decisions without this result. Caldeira and Gibson note that “legitimacy theory hypothesizes that institutions without a reservoir of good will may be limited in their ability to go against the preferences of the majority, even when it may be necessary or wise to do so” (Caldeira and Gibson, 2003, 356). They also state, “institutions like courts need the leeway to be able to go against public opinion (as for instance in protecting unpopular political minorities)” (Caldeira and Gibson, 2003, 356).

The United States Supreme Court has a substantial amount of this institutional legitimacy. Caldeira and Gibson found that “...over three-fourths of the sample believes that the Court...can generally be trusted. These data indicate that the Supreme Court enjoys a reasonably deep reservoir of good will, even after the tumultuous presidential election of 2000” (Caldeira and Gibson, 2003, 359). The Court has so much institutional loyalty that it can even be found with those that don’t have confidence in the Court (Caldeira and Gibson, 2003, 361). This very much works in favor of the Court. Caldeira and Gibson note, “due to that legitimacy, a large proportion of the American people are predisposed to judge confirmation controversies in terms of criteria of judiciousness, apart from normal partisan or ideological politics” (Caldeira and Gibson, 2009, 153).

### *Relationship Between Knowledge and Attitudes*

In order to explain the failure of the relationship between ideology and support, Caldeira and Gibson suggested, “one of the best substantiated set of hypotheses in research on the origins of diffuse support concerns the effect of political information, elite status, and activism. Those who are more knowledgeable...generally show more support for the Supreme Court” (Caldeira and Gibson, 1992, 649). They continue, “attentiveness to the Supreme Court looms as the most potent predictor of support: the most attentive evince the greatest commitment to the institution” (Caldeira and Gibson, 1992, 649). While the relationship between knowledge of the judicial branch and one’s public support was not directly tested, this suggests that there is an environment in which knowledge may have an impact on support. In this research they found that, “Political activism increases support because those who engage in more activity receive more effective socialization to norms that tend to legitimize political institution.” (Caldeira and Gibson, 1992, 694). This suggests that the level of institutional legitimacy mentioned before can be influenced by political activism, which is not the same thing as political knowledge, but knowledge is a facet of activism. Similarly, they also note that attentiveness to the Court has an influence on attitudes (Caldeira and Gibson, 1992, 653), again suggesting that those who pay attention to the Court more are more likely to have a positive attitude towards it.

In 2009, Caldeira and Gibson conducted a study that took a closer look at the relationship between judicial knowledge and attitudes. They found that knowledge can indirectly have an impact on attitudes. Their research found that “the best predictors of Court support are democratic values...the dominant value here, not unexpectedly, is



support for the rule of law: Those more supportive of the rule of law are considerably more likely to express loyalty to the Supreme Court” (Caldeira and Gibson, 2009, 438). As it relates to knowledge however, they continue, “having political knowledge means one has some understanding of the nature of American democracy and the values that undergird it” (Caldeira and Gibson, 2009, 438). This suggests that knowledge about the Court results in that larger trust in democratic values, which when present, results in a more supportive attitude towards the Court. This is also supported in another study by Ginn, Searles, and Jones, they state that “...we find that those who have more positive feelings about the Court are more likely to be aware” (Ginn, Searles, and Jones, 2015, 172).

Caldeira and Gibson also introduce the theory of positivity in regard to the relationship between knowledge and attitude in another 2009 study. They argue, “this theory was created in part to account for the U.S. Supreme Court’s unexpected success at protecting its institutional legitimacy even while awarding the presidency to George Bush in a bold and highly controversial 5-4 decision (*Bush v. Gore*),” and describe the theory as, “when ordinary citizens become motivated to pay attention to the U.S. Supreme Court-when their attitudes come out of hibernation-they approach the context with preexisting beliefs about law and politics” (Caldeira and Gibson, 2009, 140). This theory suggests that citizen’s policy beliefs and political ideologies also contribute to feelings towards the Supreme Court. They detail how issue framing works to adjust feelings about the Supreme Court in the context of the issue at hand, adjusting that perception of the Court (Caldeira and Gibson, 2009, 142).

Based on the lack of knowledge that Americans have exhibited about the judicial branch of government and the average support (ranging in the 40-50 percent approval ratings), I have developed a hypothesis that states: Those who scored higher overall on the judicial knowledge test are more likely to be satisfied by the Supreme Court.

Research mentioned in the literature discussion earlier suggested the possibility that knowledge and education may be responsible for the overall high public support for the Supreme Court (in comparison to the legislative and executive branches). I hypothesize that if people were more aware of how the Supreme Court and the judicial branch of government worked, that they would then be more likely to be satisfied with how it performs. I support this hypothesis with Caldeira and Gibson's (1992) conclusion that knowledgeable elite showed to be more supportive. If more people became knowledgeable, it would be assumed that they would then follow that trend in furthering support for the Court.

## METHODS AND DATA

I investigated the relationship between knowledge and attitudes by producing and distributing a survey that is comprised of three parts (survey can be found in appendix). The first part measured demographic information, such age, gender, level of education, religious affiliation, ethnicity, marital status, political party affiliation, political ideology, and employment status. The second portion of the survey measured how much knowledge of the Supreme Court that the respondent possessed. Questions in this section included asking how many justices sit on the Supreme Court, how long a Supreme Court justice's "term" is, and some other questions about the power of the Supreme Court. In addition to questions about the Supreme Court, I also asked similar questions regarding Congress and the President and his Cabinet. This was in an effort to not give away the intent of the survey to the respondents.

In order to distribute this survey, I used Amazon's MTurk system to gain a national sample. Respondents would opt to take the survey and would then be paid by money that I provided to Amazon to compensate them. I did this and received all of my responses between January 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> of 2019. I received 795 responses.

Questions for the judicial knowledge portion were based on previous research done by other authors and institutions. This was done out of the desire to create a clear line to be able to compare and contrast results over time and to have a greater understanding of the question at hand regarding the effect of knowledge on satisfaction of the Supreme Court. By using the same questions done in previous research, it will be easier for future scholars to aggregate literature for future studies. I drew questions from

the surveys both administered by Herbert M. Kritzer (2001) and Ginn, Searles, and Jones (2015).

I also decided to ask a majority of close-ended questions (aside from one where I asked for the respondents to provide the number of justices who typically sit on the Supreme Court). This was an intentional decision to more accurately measure respondents' knowledge. According to Caldeira and Gibson, close-ended questions do just this. In their research they found that, "Only 7.0% of the respondents hearing the open-ended versions of the question replied that Roberts is the Chief Justice. But when the other half of the sample (randomly assigned) was asked to identify the Chief Justice from a list of three names, 46.3% correctly selected John G. Roberts" (Caldeira and Gibson, 2009, 435).

I asked these questions specifically to get a range of one's knowledge regarding the Supreme Court. Some of the questions deal with who is on the Court, some deal with how Justices get there, some with how the Supreme Court decision making process works, and some about what happens once one is on the Court. While using questions that have been asked in previous research, I still made sure that this range of questions was present. Some respondents may have substantial knowledge regarding who is on the Court, but not how the Court actually works. By asking different types of knowledge questions, I hopefully was able to get a more accurate understanding of the knowledge that the respondents actually possess, rather than if they just so happened to know the answers to my specific questions.

While asking close-ended questions is a strength of this portion of the survey, it should be noted that it asked 8 questions about judicial knowledge (the respondents were

asked eight questions, but one of them could not be analyzed due to coding issues when transferring the data, so when calculating the judicial score independent variable, it is only calculated out of 7). I presume that if one asked a larger number of questions that one would have a greater understanding of the knowledge that the respondents have of the Supreme Court. Due to the length of the survey already, given that I asked questions about attitudes as well, in addition to both knowledge and attitudes for the other branches of government, I did not want to spend extra time on the judicial knowledge questions in addition to all of the other sections of the survey.

Finally, the third portion of the survey was designed to gauge the respondent's feelings about the Supreme Court. In addition to a simple question that measured satisfaction, I asked questions that inquire whether or not the respondent thinks that the Court abuses their power, that they're too partisan, and whether or not they trust the Supreme Court to protect their individual rights.

I set out to ask the respondents to answer a number of questions that all revolved around how they felt about the Supreme Court so that instead of just having an approval rating, I would be able to figure out where that support comes from. I had wanted to be able to measure both diffuse and specific support to see if there was a distinction between them. To do this I asked four questions, two aimed at diffuse support and two aimed at specific support. In order to measure diffuse support, I asked them to agree or disagree in varying degrees with the statements "I trust the Supreme Court to defend my rights," and "I believe that the Supreme Court is fair in its decisions." The statement about trust measures diffuse support because trust does not exactly ask about anything that the Supreme Court has done, but rather how they feel about the institution as whole. It asked

more about how the Supreme Court has made one feel, not how they feel about a decision that it made. Similarly, the second statement reflects whether or not the respondent thinks that the Court is fair in its decisions. It does not ask about a specific decision or about thematically related decisions, but just the decisions that it makes as a whole – making it reflective of diffuse support. Table one shows the frequencies of all of the dependent variables.

Table 1: Dependent Variable Descriptive Statistics

	<i>Trust</i>	<i>Fairness</i>	<i>Satisfied</i>	<i>Kavanaugh</i>
<b>Strongly Agree</b>	65 (8.2%)	66 (8.3%)	46 (5.8%)	111 (14.0%)
<b>Moderately Agree</b>	170 (21.4%)	164 (20.6%)	180 (22.6%)	77 (9.7%)
<b>Slightly Agree</b>	195 (24.5%)	215 (27.0%)	176 (22.1%)	65 (8.2%)
<b>Neither Agree or Disagree</b>	160 (20.1%)	174 (21.9%)	168 (21.1%)	150 (18.9%)
<b>Slightly Disagree</b>	95 (11.9%)	87 (10.9%)	104 (13.1%)	76 (9.6%)
<b>Moderately Disagree</b>	54 (6.8%)	56 (7.0%)	77 (9.7%)	76 (9.6%)
<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	56 (7.0%)	33 (4.2%)	44 (5.5%)	240 (30.2%)
<b>Total</b>	795 (100%)	795 (100%)	795 (100%)	795 (100%)

These two statements do not have identical responses, so by asking questions that vary slightly, I am able to form a greater understanding of how people feel towards the Supreme Court. The difference shown in this example shows why I have asked similar questions but that vary in a slight degree. Table 2 below shows the correlations of these dependent variables to illustrate what asking difference questions can show.

Table 2: Dependent Variable Correlation Table

	<b>Trust</b>	<b>Fairness</b>	<b>Satisfied</b>	<b>Kavanaugh</b>
<b>Trust</b>	1	.825*	.664*	.292*
<b>Fairness</b>	.825*	1	.665*	.338*
<b>Satisfied</b>	.664*	.665*	1	.452*
<b>Kavanaugh</b>	.292*	.338*	.452*	1

\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

This table shows that all four of these dependent variables are correlated, suggesting that they generally are warranting the same responses from respondents, which is expected. Noteworthy are the different levels in which they are correlated to one another, showing that no two questions measure the exact same thing, which is the reasoning behind having multiple measures of support.

In addition to the questions that gauge feeling towards the Supreme Court, I also asked two questions that measure specific support. This asked the respondent to agree or disagree with the statements, “I am satisfied with the Supreme Court,” and “Confirming Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court was the right thing to do.” The statement about satisfaction measures specific support because in asking if one is satisfied with the Court, it is intended to inquire about how the respondent feels about the Supreme Court right now, rather than about how they feel about the institution in its entirety over time. Additionally, the statement regarding Brett Kavanaugh is plainly a question of a specific appointment to the Court, thus measure a single event that took place. While these questions asked about specific decisions and appointment to the Court, it could reflect patterns when compared to the statements that measure diffuse support, thus still showing their feelings towards the Court, but specifically about events that affect it. For example, if you compare the descriptive statistics between “I trust the Supreme Court to defend my

rights,” and “I believe that the Supreme Court is fair in its decisions,” to the statement about Kavanaugh, you can see that there are much more polarized feelings regarding the appointment of Kavanaugh, but that is not as equally represented by their trust. All of this shows the need for questions that also measure specific support.

Specific support for the institution based on a specific ruling or specific members of the Supreme Court suggests that those types of focusing events have a larger impact on the public’s opinion than the overall esteem of the institution does. Occurrences that have to do with the Court that make national news - due to either praise or controversy – have greater power to resonate with the general public. This possibly offers an explanation as to why these attitudes are stronger, rather than the ones that are weaker in the diffuse support statements.

My survey had 795 respondents, there were 55.8 percent men, 43.3 percent women, .3 percent transgender women, .1 percent transgender man, .1 percent gender fluid/non-conforming respondent, and .4 percent preferred not to disclose their gender. 76.1 percent of the respondents were Caucasian (non-Hispanic), 9.7 percent African-American, 6.3 percent Hispanic, 4.8 percent Asian, 1 percent American Indian or Alaska Native, .5 percent Pacific Islander, and 1.6 percent non-disclosed. All respondents were between the ages of 18-81.

#### *Data*

I have utilized one independent variable to measure against my dependent variables to see how much knowledge affects public support of the US Supreme Court. The dependent variables measure different types of support with the Supreme Court and the independent variable measures overall knowledge of the Supreme Court.



### *Dependent Variables*

The first dependent variable examined whether or not the respondents trust the Supreme Court to defend their rights. This ordinal measure of support was named “trust”. In the survey, respondents were asked to respond to the prompt: “I am satisfied with the Supreme Court” with “strongly agree,” “moderately agree,” “slightly agree,” “neither agree or disagree,” “slightly disagree,” “moderately disagree,” and “strongly disagree.” These responses were coded 1-7, respectively. They were coded 1-7 (Strongly agree to strongly disagree, so that when showing the regression, the negative relationships reflected decreasing support) This was the formatting for the other three dependent variables as well, which prompted the respondent with the statements, “I believe that the Supreme Court is fair in its decisions,” (*fairness*) “I am satisfied with the Supreme Court,” (*satisfied*) and “Confirming Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court was the right thing to do.” (*kavanaugh*)

The modal category of *trust* is three, suggesting that the respondents tend to slightly agree with the statement that they trust the Supreme Court to defend their rights. 24.5 percent of respondents fall within the modal category. The modal category of *fairness* is three, suggesting that the respondents tend to slightly agree with the statement that they find the Supreme Court to be fair in its decisions. 27 percent of respondents fall within the modal category. The modal category of *satisfied* is two, suggesting that the respondents tend to moderately agree with the statement that they are satisfied with the Supreme Court. 22.6 percent of respondents fall within the modal category. The modal category of *kavanaugh* is seven, suggesting that the respondents tend to strongly disagree

with the statement that confirming Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court was the right thing to do. 30.2 percent of respondents fall within the modal category.

### *Independent Variable*

The primary independent variable that will be examined is the score of the respondent of the overall judicial knowledge test. The variable is named *score*, which is an interval-level measure of judicial knowledge. This variable is represented by the number of questions about the Supreme Court that the respondent answered correctly out of seven. These questions asked: How many members typically sit on the Supreme Court?; Please tell me the name of the current chief justice of the United States; Who appoints the justices of the Supreme Court?; Can you tell me whether the Supreme Court uses juries to help decide it's cases?; Is it correct to say that the U.S. Supreme Court has to decide every case that is appealed to it?; Is it correct to say that the U.S. Supreme Court can choose which of the cases appealed to it that it wants to decide?; Can you tell me the name of the individual who most recently became a Supreme Court justice? More respondents answered the questions regarding the specific justices on the Court correctly than they did the questions regarding how cases come to the Court.

Figure One: Judicial score results

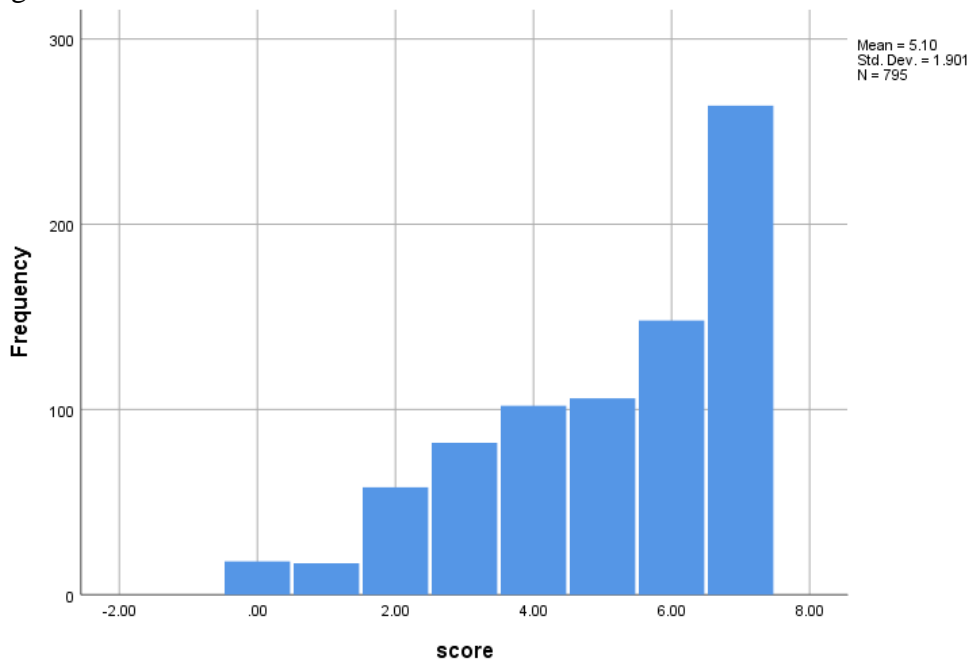


Figure one shows the frequencies of that variable. The mean of this variable is 5.10, suggesting that the average respondent answered 5 out of the 7 questions correctly. The modal category of this variable however is 7.00, suggesting that most respondents got seven of the seven judicial knowledge questions correct. These results do suggest that the respondents' knowledge of the Supreme Court was higher than expected, with the largest percentage of them getting all seven questions correct. However, this is not exactly surprising. In 2009, Caldeira and Gibson had a more knowledgeable sample of respondents than previous research showed to have. They suggest, "Our data thus suggest that Americans are far more knowledgeable about the Supreme Court than many scholars and commentators suggest or imply and than most previous researchers have reported" (Caldeira and Gibson, 2009, 433). They even noted, "...even in 2005, substantial majorities of Americans held correct information about their Supreme Court" (Caldeira

and Gibson, 2009, 434). Due to my asking close-ended questions as Caldeira and Gibson did, this seemingly knowledgeable sample is not surprising. They noted after showing the accuracy difference between open and close ended questions, “According to these data, people are *vastly* more knowledgeable about politics than is typically portrayed” (Caldeira and Gibson, 2009, 435). Given that this was a survey that was distributed online, it did allow for the possibility that some of the respondents looked up the correct answers online, which may account for some of the correct responses. It is also possible that this could have been an highly informed sample.

### *Control Variables*

In addition to the independent and dependent variables, I have also controlled for a number of other factors. The first control variable is level of education. This was asked in the demographics portion of the survey, where respondents could indicate their level of education through seven different options, ranging from less than a high school diploma to a doctoral degree, which were label 1-7, respectively. The average level of education of the respondents was a completed Associate’s Degree.

The second control was whether or not the respondent was a Republican. This was also asked in the demographics portion of the survey, where respondents could indicate the political party that they affiliated with via the options of “strong Republican,” “Republican,” “weak Republican,” “weak Democrat,” “Democrat,” “strong Democrat,” or other. To create the “Republican” variable, I recoded the original “party” variable to be dichotomous. All respondents that identified as a “weak Republican,” “Republican,” or “strong Republican” were coded as a 1 and all other respondents were coded as a “0.” I followed a similar strategy with the third control variable, Democrat, where all

respondents that identified as a “weak Democrat,” “Democrat,” or “strong Democrat” were coded as a 1. All other respondents were coded as a 0.

Finally, the fourth control variable reflects whether or not the respondent was a female or not. To create the “female” variable, I recoded the initial “gender” variable in the demographics section of the survey. I coded all of the respondents who stated that they were either a female or a transgender female as a 1, and then the rest of the respondents were coded as 0 (This includes all of the respondents who answered “male,” “transgender male,” “gender non-conforming,” other, or those who preferred not to answer).

## RESULTS

After performing an ordinary least squares regression analysis where I controlled for the variables listed above. The table below shows the results of the independent variable's relationship to all four of the dependent variables. Higher scores on the dependent variable indicate greater levels of support for the Court.

Table 3: Regression Results

	<i>Trust</i>	<i>Fairness</i>	<i>Satisfied</i>	<i>Kavanaugh</i>
<b>Constant</b>	3.559 (.289)	3.705 (.269)	3.884 (.278)	4.547 (.318)
<b>Judicial Score</b>	-.019 (.031)	.012 (.029)	-.010 (.029)	-.151* (.034)
<b>Level of Education</b>	.100* (.045)	.105* (.042)	.041 (.044)	-.029 (.050)
<b>Republican</b>	.974* (.193)	.719* (.180)	.993* (.186)	1.493* (.212)
<b>Democrat</b>	.443* (.182)	.175 (.170)	.124 (.175)	-1.086* (.200)
<b>Female</b>	-.016 (.115)	-.001 (.107)	-.128 (.110)	-.170 (.126)

\*p < .05

To examine the results, I will begin by examining the dependent variables that gauge diffuse support. In this context, diffuse support means overall support for the institution, rather than support for specific decisions that it makes or support for the people on the Court themselves. Column 1 of Table 3 demonstrates the effect of judicial knowledge on trust, as measured by asking respondents 'I trust the Court to defend my rights.' The regression analysis shows that judicial score did not have a statistically significant relationship with trust in the Supreme Court. However, the level of education was statistically significant. Those with a higher level of education trust the Supreme Court to defend their rights more. Additionally, both the Republican and Democrat

variables were statistically significant. If one identifies as a Republican or a Democrat, he/she is more likely to trust the Supreme Court than those who do not identify as a member of either party. However, the magnitude of the relationship between Republicans and trust is stronger than that of Democrats and trust. The magnitude of the relationship between Republican and trust is more than double that of Democrats and trust, showing that Republicans are much more likely to have this sense of trust within the Court.

In Column 2 of Table 3, the results of the second dependent variable are shown. This variable asked the respondents to agree or disagree with the statement “I believe that the Supreme Court is fair in its decisions,” which similarly measures diffuse support. The regression analysis shows that judicial score did not have a statistically significant relationship with perceived fairness. However, similar to degree of trust in the Court, level of education does exhibit a statistically significant effect. Those with a higher level of education believe that the Supreme Court makes fair decisions more than those with a lower level of education. Additionally, whether or not one is Republican was also statistically significant. If one identifies as a Republican, he/she is more likely to believe that the Supreme Court is fair in its decisions compared to non-partisan identifiers.

Turning to the variables that measure specific support. In this context, specific support refers to direct feelings about how the Court is doing, what they’ve accomplished and other things that don’t concern the overall feelings of the institution. Column 3 of Table 3 shows the results of the third variable. The third dependent variable asked respondents to agree or disagree with the statement “I am satisfied with the Supreme Court.” The regression analysis shows that judicial score did not have significance statistically to overall Supreme Court satisfaction. However, there was significance for

the “Republican” control variable did demonstrate a statistically significant relationship. Individuals who identify as Republican are more likely to be satisfied by the Supreme Court.

Column 4 of Table 3 shows the results of the fourth variable. The fourth dependent variable has the respondents agree or disagree with the statement “Confirming Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court was the right thing to do,” which similarly measures specific support. The regression analysis shows that the judicial score variable was statistically significant. Those who scored higher on the judicial score section were less likely to agree that Kavanaugh should have been confirmed to the Court. Whether one was a Republican or if one was a Democrat were also significant to whether or not he/she thought that Kavanaugh should have been confirmed. If one is a Republican, he/she is more likely to agree that Kavanaugh should have been confirmed than non-partisan identifiers, whereas if one is a Democrat, he/she is less likely to agree compared to the same group.

### *Discussion*

The results shown in this chapter do not support the specific hypothesis presented in this research. The first three dependent variables that asked about trust, perceived fairness, and satisfaction were not affected by the score that respondents received in the judicial knowledge section of the survey. There was a relationship between the score and the dependent variable asking about the confirmation of Brett Kavanaugh. This is a specific and contemporary issue regarding the Supreme Court. This speaks to the possibility that judicial knowledge can have an effect on specific support, rather than diffuse support. Trust and perceived fairness are overall instincts towards the Court,



whereas the specific question regarding Kavanaugh's appointment speaks more to particular makeup and issues of the Court.

While questions of overall diffuse support for the Court may not be answered by judicial knowledge, questions regarding feelings toward specific Supreme Court events, like decisions and appointments, may warrant more positive feelings from those with higher judicial knowledge. This could be because one paying more attention to the Court and what it does, thus having more knowledge about how the Court works as a whole, all the while forming opinions about those specific events.

While the judicial knowledge score did not show a relationship between the dependent variables that reflected diffuse support, the relationship between score and Kavanaugh suggest that there could be a relationship to be examined there. In future research, it would be valuable to ask those agree/disagree questions with statements that are in regard to more specific outcomes of the Supreme Court, possibly referring to decisions in certain cases or of judicial decision-making methods.

While the findings of this study did not support the original hypothesis, they still show noteworthy relationships regarding attitudes towards the US Supreme Court. The most glaring indicator of attitudes towards the Court is whether or not one is a Republican. This variable had a significant relationship with all four of the dependent variables, suggesting that whether or not one is a Republican can have an overall effect on one's attitude towards the Court.

Notably, the regression showed that if one was a Republican they would have a more positive attitude towards the Court, for the relationship was positive with all four dependent variables. Those who were more Republican were more likely to express high

levels of trust and perceptions that the court was fair in its decisions. They also were more likely to think that confirming Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court was the right decision and to be overall satisfied with the Court. These results are likely due to the current state of the Court, suggesting that all of these stem from specific support.

Republicans were more favorable to the Court because in recent terms, the Court has been ruling fairly conservative in its decisions due to the makeup of the Court.

Additionally, it is not a surprise that Republicans were likely to support the confirmation of Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court because he is a Justice expected to make conservative decisions, appointed by a Republican President.

One's level of education also had an impact on attitudes towards the Supreme Court in a couple of the dependent variables, specifically trust and perceived fairness, the two diffuse support variables. Those respondents who had higher levels of education were more likely to both trust the Supreme Court and see it as fair in its decision making. This suggests that a higher level of education can have an impact on overall diffuse support. While level of education does not indicate that one has a relatively high knowledge of the Supreme Court specifically, it does suggest that they may have more knowledge as a whole. This supports the findings made by Caldeira and Gibson that suggested that those with more knowledge as a whole are more likely to support the Supreme Court. Higher levels of education in undergraduate and graduate careers warrant more overall knowledge gained over time, suggesting that while specific knowledge about how the Court works may not make up each respondent's education, that higher levels of education teach the impact of the Court and respect of the institution itself.

It is interesting that level of education only had an impact on the measures of diffuse support, but not on the measures of specific support. This may speak to how people gain the information that forms their attitudes. Those with higher levels of education, in their studies, presumably learned at least briefly the history of the Court and the responsibilities of it within the US government. This type of learning environment may facilitate overall respect, thus trust and other forms of diffuse support. Additionally, it does not have an impact on measures of specific support, or support for specific events that affect the Supreme Court. This may be due to the fact that many people learn about specific and timely events from media sources, which are available to all, regardless of level of education. The way that people gain their information about the Court may warrant different types of support, or lack thereof.

Whether or not a respondent was a Democrat also showed some relationships between measures of both diffuse and specific support. Democrat was statistically significant in the models examining trust in the Supreme Court and opinions on the confirmation of Brett Kavanaugh. If one was a Democrat they were more likely to have trust in the Supreme Court to defend their rights compared to individuals who did not identify with either major political party. While the Court has not made many liberal decisions in the most recent terms, it does have a history of protecting many of the liberties outlined in the Constitution, particularly with the Warren Court. The Court also has a history of making decisions regarding criminal justice that protect the rights of the accused, which is a relatively common topic at the time this research took place with states making moves towards providing voting rights to formerly incarcerated felons.

Unsurprisingly, if one identified as a Democrat, they were less likely to agree with the statement that Brett Kavanaugh should have been confirmed to the Supreme Court. This is understandable due to the fact that he is a Justice that is expected to make relatively conservative decisions and was appointed by a Republican president. Additionally, there was a large amount of outrage among Americans, but more specifically Democrats, regarding the allegations of sexual assault surrounding Justice Kavanaugh. If this research were to continue, I would look closer at the female variable and see if there was a different relationship depending on whether or not the female was a republican or a democrat.

Somewhat surprisingly, being female did not have a statistically significant relationship in any of the models. Whether or not the respondent was a female was used as a control variable because of the nature of the Court at the time of the survey. In the confirmations of Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh, the two justices were asked about their willingness to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, a case that focuses on rights for women to have an abortion. Additionally, as previously mentioned, Brett Kavanaugh faced allegations of sexual assaulting a woman, which suggests that some subset of women may not completely be comfortable with him on the Court. Despite these factors, being a female did not impact attitudes towards the courts, not even whether or not Kavanaugh should have been confirmed.

While the results of this survey could not support the hypothesis that more judicial knowledge would result in more positive attitudes towards the Supreme Court, it did show that other factors can have an impact on one's diffuse or specific support.

## CONCLUSION

The original hypothesis set forth in this research was not supported by its findings, but it does suggest the importance of the distinction of diffuse and specific support, when discussing knowledge of the Supreme Court. The findings showed that there was no statistically significant relationship between the measures of knowledge that were used and the diffuse support variables, *trust* and *fairness*, nor one of the diffuse variables, *satisfied*.

Where there was a significant relationship however, was between judicial knowledge score and the dependent variable that measured support for the Brett Kavanaugh appointment. The only dependent variable that judicial score had an impact on was this variable that measured support for the specific appointment of this one Supreme Court Justice. This can show us the impact that judicial score can have. It may not have an impact on overall support for the Court, but it can for questions regarding specific occurrences that happen due to, or to the Supreme Court.

What does this mean? Considering the anecdote that was presented at the beginning of this thesis, it can explain how support for the Court can maintain when controversial decisions are made. The decision in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, was a direct measure of specific support – the type of support that this research found can be affected by judicial knowledge. Could it suggest that those who knew more about the Court were the ones who maintained that support for the Court, despite the perceived controversy?

With the finding of this research, that knowledge may have an effect on specific support, a foundation has been provided to complete further research on how knowledge affects these instances that measure specific support. This could consist of questions like

“Are those who have more knowledge of the Supreme Court more supportive of the decision made in *Obergefell v. Hodges*?” or “Are those who have more knowledge of the Supreme Court more supportive of the retirement of Anthony Kennedy?” and other questions that measure such specific support, all to see if knowledge can have an impact on specific support in its entirety.

This thesis does not assert that those with more knowledge about the Supreme Court have more positive or negative feelings towards the institution, but it does provide the basis for what could be a great understanding of specific support for the highest court in the United States.

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## APPENDIX: SURVEY

INTRODUCTORY PROMPT: “This is a survey gauging public perceptions concerning American political institutions. In addition to questions about demographics, you will be asked a series of questions about the legislative, judicial and executive branches of the federal government. Please do your best to answer all questions to the best of your ability.”

### SECTION 1: DEMOGRAPHICS

PROMPT: “In this section you will be asked some basic demographic questions. Please answer each to the best of your ability.”

1. What is your current age?
2. What is your gender?
  - a. Female.
  - b. Male.
  - c. Transgender Female.
  - d. Transgender Male.
  - e. Gender Non-Conforming.
  - f. Other.
  - g. Prefer not to answer.
3. What is the minimum level of education you have completed?
  - a. Less than a high school diploma.
  - b. High school diploma/GED.
  - c. Some College.
  - d. Associate Degree.
  - e. Bachelor’s Degree.
  - f. Master’s Degree.
  - g. Doctoral Degree.
4. What is your religious affiliation?
  - a. Christian.
  - b. Jewish.
  - c. Muslim.
  - d. Other.
  - e. Nonreligious.
  - f. Prefer not to answer.
5. What is your ethnic background?
  - a. American Indian or Alaska Native.
  - b. Asian.

- c. African-American.
  - d. Pacific Islander.
  - e. Caucasian – Non-Hispanic.
  - f. Hispanic.
  - g. Prefer not to answer.
6. What is your marital status?
- a. Single – never married.
  - b. Single – divorced.
  - c. Married.
  - d. Widowed.
7. What is your partisan affiliation?
- a. Strong Republican.
  - b. Republican.
  - c. Weak Republican.
  - d. Weak Democrat.
  - e. Democrat.
  - f. Strong Democrat.
  - g. Other.
8. How you would best describe your political ideology?
- a. Very Conservative.
  - b. Conservative.
  - c. Slightly Conservative.
  - d. Moderate.
  - e. Slightly Liberal.
  - f. Liberal.
  - g. Very liberal.
9. What is your current employment status?
- a. Employed full time.
  - b. Employed part time.
  - c. Unemployed.
  - d. Student.
  - e. Retired.

## **SECTION 2: KNOWLEDGE OF POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS**

**PROMPT:** “Some people follow politics very closely. Others do not pay much attention. In this section, you will be asked some questions about our national government. Please do your best to answer each question to the best of your ability.”

PROMPT: “First, you will be asked some questions about the United States Supreme Court.”

10. How many members typically sit on the Supreme Court?
11. Please tell me the name of the current chief justice of the United States.
  - a. Thurgood Marshall
  - b. John Roberts
  - c. Sandra Day O’Connor
  - d. Don’t know
12. Who appoints the justices of the Supreme Court?
  - a. President
  - b. Congress
  - c. Other \_\_\_\_\_
  - d. Elected
  - e. Don’t know
13. What is the mandatory retirement age of Supreme Court justices?
  - a. 70
  - b. 80
  - c. None
  - d. Don’t know
14. Can you tell me whether the Supreme Court uses juries to help decide it’s cases?
  - a. Yes, uses juries
  - b. No, does not use juries
  - c. Don’t know
15. Is it correct to say that the U.S. Supreme Court has to decide every case that is appealed to it?
  - a. Yes, correct
  - b. No, not correct
  - c. Don’t know
16. Is it correct to say that the US Supreme Court can choose which of the cases appealed to it that it wants to decide?
  - a. Yes, correct
  - b. No, not correct
  - c. Don’t know
17. Can you tell me the name of the individual who most recently became a Supreme Court justice?
  - a. Amy Coney Barrett
  - b. Thomas Hardiman
  - c. Brett Kavanaugh

d. Don't know

PROMPT: "Now you will be asked some questions about Congress."

18. How many members are typically in the Senate?

- a. 50
- b. 435
- c. 100
- d. Don't know

19. Who is the current Senate majority leader?

- a. Mitch McConnell
- b. Chuck Schumer
- c. Kamala Harris
- d. Don't know

20. How are United States Senators selected?

- a. Appointed by the President
- b. Appointed by the House of Representatives
- c. Elected
- d. Don't know

21. What is the maximum amount of terms a senator can serve?

- a. 2
- b. 4
- c. None
- d. Don't know

22. Can you tell me if Congress works with lobbyists to help decide on laws?

- a. Yes, works with lobbyists
- b. No, does not work with lobbyists
- c. Don't know

23. Is it correct to say that the U.S. Senate has to vote on every law that is proposed to it?

- a. Yes, correct
- b. No, not correct
- c. Don't know

24. Is it correct to say that the US Senate can choose which of the laws proposed to that it wants to vote on?

- a. Yes, correct
- b. No, not correct
- c. Don't know

PROMPT: "Now you will be asked some questions about the Presidency."

25. How many positions are typically part of the President's cabinet?
- 7
  - 16
  - 30
  - Don't know
26. Please tell me the name of the current President of the United States
- Barack Obama
  - Hillary Clinton
  - Donald Trump
  - Don't know
27. How is the President of the United States selected?
- By the outgoing President
  - By Congress
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_
  - Elected
  - Don't know
28. What is the maximum amount of terms the President may serve?
- 2
  - 4
  - None
  - Don't Know
29. Is it correct to say the President has to sign into law every bill passed by both Houses of Congress?
- Yes, correct
  - No, not correct
  - Don't know
30. Can you tell me if the individuals who serve in the President's cabinet are active members of Congress?
- Yes, correct
  - No, not correct
  - Don't know
31. Is it correct to say that the President can choose to veto bills passed by Congress?
- Yes, correct
  - No, not correct
  - Don't know

### **SECTION 3: OPINIONS ABOUT POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS**

PROMPT: “In the final section, you will be asked your opinions about American political institutions. You will be provided a statement and will be asked if you strongly agree, moderately, slightly agree, neither agree nor disagree, slightly disagree, moderately disagree or strongly disagree.” Please answer all questions honestly.

PROMPT: “First, you will be asked to provide some statements about the Supreme Court.”

	Strongly Agree	Moderately Agree	Slightly Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I am satisfied with the Supreme Court.							
The Supreme Court is too powerful.							
The Supreme Court is too influenced by public opinion							
The Supreme Court is the weakest branch of the federal government							
I trust the Supreme Court to defend my rights.							
I believe that the Supreme Court is fair in its decisions.							
The Supreme Court is essential to a fair and							

free democracy.							
Confirming Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court was the right thing to do.							

PROMPT: “Now, you will be asked to provide some statements about Congress.”

	Strongly Agree	Moderately Agree	Slightly Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I am satisfied with the Congress.							
I am satisfied with how the Republican Party has led Congress for the past two years.							
Paul Ryan has done a good job as Speaker of the House.							
Mitch McConnell has done a good job as Senate Majority Leader.							
Congress is too powerful.							
Congress is too influenced							

by public opinion							
Congress is the weakest branch of the federal government							
I trust Congress to do what is right.							
I believe that Congress is fair in its decisions.							

PROMPT: “Finally, you will be asked to provide some statements about the President.”

	Strongly Agree	Moderately Agree	Slightly Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I am satisfied with President Trump							
The President is too powerful in our political system							
The President is too influenced by public opinion							
I trust President Trump to do what is right.							



I believe that President Trump is fair-minded when he makes decisions.							
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