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## AMERICANS DISTRUST SCIENCE, BUT *THE DAILY SHOW* HELPS

Distrust in science is not an isolated phenomenon, according to the most recent national survey from Fairleigh Dickinson University's PublicMind. A third (33%) of Americans believe that global warming is a myth propagated by scientists, and 19 percent believe early childhood vaccinations cause autism.

The same survey finds that people with more education are less likely to doubt the science that proves global warming and more likely to discount those who claim vaccinations cause autism. Also, people who get their information from cable news are more likely to endorse beliefs that run contrary to scientific evidence. On the other hand, Americans who get their news from political satire programs like *The Daily Show* and *Last Week Tonight* are the least likely to endorse such beliefs.

The national poll asked respondents whether various conspiracy theories were "definitely true," "probably true," "probably not true," or "definitely not true." Fifteen percent say that global warming was "definitely" a myth propagated by scientists, and another 18 percent say that it's "probably" a myth. Such views are highly politicized: 20 percent of Democrats say that it's probably or definitely true, along with 30 percent of political independents and 48 percent of Republicans. Along with partisan beliefs, education is a significant driver of whether or not people accept the scientific consensus on global warming: 39 percent of Americans with a high school education or less think that global warming isn't real, compared with only 27 percent of those with a college degree.

"Global warming has become an enormously political issue," said Dan Cassino, a professor of political science at Fairleigh Dickinson, and the director of experimental research for the poll. "People who don't favor policies to remedy climate change have a strong motivation to decide that it isn't happening."

Respondents were also asked about where they get their television news, and which they rely on most, and these choices are strongly connected to anti-science beliefs. For instance, 23 percent of CNN viewers think that global warming is a myth, compared with a majority (54 percent) of those who watch the Fox News Channel. On the other hand, only 7 percent of the smaller group who watch MSNBC say that global warming is a myth, and only 13 percent of those who report watching *The Daily Show* do so.

All told, 39 percent of Americans who say that cable is their main source of television news think that global warming is likely a myth, compared with 31 percent of those who mostly get their news from network broadcasts, and 9 percent of those who mostly get information from political satire programs like *The Daily Show*, *Last Week Tonight* and the recently ended *Colbert Report*.

“Cable news programs often show debates, even when there isn’t much disagreement in the scientific community,” said Cassino. “So it isn’t surprising that viewers fail to realize that there is a consensus on these issues.”

The belief that early childhood vaccines cause autism is less politicized, but education and media choices still matter a great deal. Nationwide, four percent of Americans think that autism is “definitely” linked to early childhood vaccinations, and 15 percent say that it’s “probably” true. Twenty percent of Democrats, as well as 20 percent of Republicans, say that the vaccination-autism link is likely.

As with beliefs about global warming, increased levels of education correspond with a greater likelihood of accepting the scientific consensus on the issue. Twenty-five percent of Americans who never attended college think that autism is likely linked with vaccinations, a stance that’s only occupied by 14 percent of those with a college degree.

“A child developing autism is a terrifying idea for parents,” said Cassino. “People want an explanation, any explanation, to give themselves a sense of control over something that beyond their control.”

Among those who get their news from cable, CNN’s audience is the most likely to see a connection between vaccinations and autism, with 25 percent of Americans who get news from CNN saying that it’s “probably” or “definitely” true. In contrast, only 14 percent of those who watch Fox see a link, and only 10 percent of the MSNBC audience does. Viewers of *The Daily Show* are the least likely to say that vaccinations and autism are linked, with only 9 percent rejecting the scientific consensus. More broadly, 22 percent of Americans who say that they mostly rely on cable news for information think that there’s a link between vaccinations and autism, compared with 16 percent of those who get their news from network broadcasts, and 12 percent of those who mostly rely on political satire programs.

“It seems likely that exposure to comedy programs, like *The Daily Show* or *Last Week Tonight*, that lampoon the media makes viewers more skeptical of what they see and hear on the air,” said Cassino. “In this case, it makes them more likely to disregard claims that just aren’t supported by the weight of evidence.”

The Fairleigh Dickinson University poll of 964 was conducted by telephone with both landline and cell phones from December 8 through December 15, 2014 and has a margin of error of +/- 3 percentage points.

*Methodology, questions, and tables on the web at: <http://publicmind.fdu.edu>*

*Radio actualities at 201.692.2846*

*For more information, please call 201.692.7032*

## **Methodology**

The most recent survey by Fairleigh Dickinson University's PublicMind was conducted by telephone from December 8 through December 15 using a randomly selected sample of 994 adults nationwide. One can be 95 percent confident that the error attributable to sampling has a range of +/- 3 percentage points. The margin of error for subgroups is larger and varies by the size of that subgroup. Survey results are also subject to non-sampling error. This kind of error, which cannot be measured, arises from a number of factors including, but not limited to, non-response (eligible individuals refusing to be interviewed), question wording, the order in which questions are asked, and variations among interviewers.

PublicMind interviews are conducted by Opinion America of Cedar Knolls, NJ, with professionally trained interviewers using a CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing) system. Random selection is achieved by computerized random-digit dialing. This technique gives every person with a landline phone number (including those with unlisted numbers) an equal chance of being selected.

Landline households are supplemented with a separate, randomly selected sample of cell-phone respondents interviewed in the same time frame. The total combined sample is mathematically weighted to match known demographics of age, race and gender.

## Tables

Global warming is a myth propagated by scientists											
	Overall	Source				Network		Primary Source			
		CNN	Fox	MSNBC	Daily Show	Yes	No	Cable news	Network news	Political satire	Combo
Definitely True	<b>15</b>	7	28	2	8	14	20	19	16	2	12
Probably True	<b>18</b>	16	26	5	5	17	12	20	15	7	13
Probably Not True	<b>22</b>	26	24	17	17	23	23	26	22	16	21
Definitely Not True	<b>41</b>	48	20	71	68	43	40	31	43	74	52
Don't Know (Vol)	<b>4</b>	3	2	5	1	3	4	3	4	0	3
Refused (Vol)	<b>1</b>	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0

Global warming is a myth propagated by scientists									
	Overall	Party ID			Race		Education		
		Dem	Indp	Rep	White	Non-White	HS or less	Some College	College Grad +
Definitely True	<b>15</b>	7	17	22	15	15	16	16	13
Probably True	<b>18</b>	13	13	26	18	17	23	20	14
Probably Not True	<b>22</b>	18	21	25	22	21	28	22	19
Definitely Not True	<b>41</b>	60	43	23	41	43	29	37	51
Don't Know (Vol)	<b>4</b>	1	5	4	3	4	4	4	3
Refused (Vol)	<b>1</b>	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	0

Early childhood vaccinations cause autism											
	Overall	Source				Network		Primary Source			
		CNN	Fox	MSNBC	Daily Show	Yes	No	Cable news	Network news	Political satire	Combo
Definitely True	<b>4</b>	4	4	0	0	4	5	4	3	5	4
Probably True	<b>15</b>	21	10	10	9	11	24	18	13	7	10
Probably Not True	<b>32</b>	31	36	36	37	38	25	31	42	30	30
Definitely Not True	<b>38</b>	38	39	43	43	37	40	35	32	53	48
Don't Know (Vol)	<b>9</b>	7	11	12	11	10	6	11	10	5	7
Refused (Vol)	<b>1</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Early childhood vaccinations cause autism									
	Overall	Party ID			Race		Education		
		Dem	Indp	Rep	White	Non-White	HS or less	Some College	College Grad +
Definitely True	<b>4</b>	5	3	4	4	5	5	6	2

Probably True	<b>15</b>	15	14	16	12	22	20	18	12
Probably Not True	<b>32</b>	30	33	37	33	32	31	33	34
Definitely Not True	<b>38</b>	45	40	32	40	35	29	36	45
Don't Know (Vol)	<b>9</b>	5	11	11	10	6	16	7	7
Refused (Vol)	<b>1</b>	0	-	-	0	0	0	0	0

Number of Political Knowledge Items Answered Correctly											
		Source				Network		Primary Source			
	<b>Overall</b>	CNN	Fox	MSNBC	Daily Show	Yes	No	Cable news	Network news	Political satire	Combo
0	33	20	11	18	8	18	13	14	21	17	16
1	26	31	28	18	31	33	32	31	37	30	23
2	27	35	40	24	34	33	38	36	30	38	37
3	13	13	21	39	27	16	18	19	12	16	24
<i>Mean</i>	<i>1.2</i>	<i>1.4</i>	<i>1.7</i>	<i>1.8</i>	<i>1.8</i>	<i>1.5</i>	<i>1.6</i>	<i>1.6</i>	<i>1.3</i>	<i>1.5</i>	<i>1.7</i>

Number of the 3 conspiracies that are "probably" or "definitely" true									
		Party ID			Race		Education		
	<b>Overall</b>	Dem	Ind	Rep	White	African-American	HS or less	Some College	College Grad +
0	55	66	50	46	55	52	45	51	64
1	31	26	35	37	32	37	40	33	26
2	12	7	13	15	12	9	13	15	9
3	2	1	2	2	1	2	2	1	1

Party Identification											
		Source				Network		Primary Source			
	<b>Overall</b>	CNN	Fox	MSNBC	Daily Show	Yes	No	Cable news	Network news	Political satire	Combo
Republicans	42	61	19	76	74	43	45	39	41	61	46
Democrats	20	20	6	8	9	18	23	13	21	16	19
Independents	38	20	75	16	17	39	32	48	38	23	35

### Exact Question Wording and Order

US1 through US3 released December 17, 2014

EDUC1 thru EDUC6 held for future release

H1 through H4 released January 8, 2015

RENT1 through RENT2 withheld

*And turning to some items in the news recently...*

*PN1 Can you name the three branches of government?*

- 1 Correct answer: Legislative, judicial, executive (or congress, courts. Presidency)
- 2 Incorrect response
- 8 DK (vol)
- 9 Refused (vol)

*PN2 Just your best guess... do you know which party controls the US House of Representatives*

- 1 Republicans (correct)
- 2 Democrats
- 8 DK (vol)
- 9 Refused (vol)

*PN3 And again, just your best guess, can you tell me who the current Chief Justice of the Supreme Court is?*

- 1 John Roberts (correct)
- 2 Someone else
- 8 DK (vol)
- 9 Refused (vol)

*For each of the following statements, could you tell me whether you think the statement is definitely true, probably true, probably not true, or definitely not true.*

- 1 Definitely true
- 2 Probably true
- 3 Probably not true
- 4 Definitely not true
- 8 DK (vol)
- 9 Refused (vol)

[Randomize CONS1 thru CONS6]

*CONS1 withheld for future release*

*CONS2 President Obama is not legally a citizen of the United States*

*CONS3 Global warming is a myth propagated by scientists*

*CONS4 Early childhood vaccinations cause autism*

*CONS5 The Secret Service is intentionally leaving President Obama unprotected*

*CONS6 American forces found active weapons of mass destruction program in Iraq*

[ROTATE NEWS1 THROUGH NEWS3]

*Americans now have more ways than ever before to get their news about politics and world affairs.*

*NEWS1 [If first in series]: Can you tell me if you get your news and information from cable news networks? [If not first in series]: What about news and information from cable news networks?*

*If yes, which one?*

- 1 CNN
- 2 Fox
- 3 MSNBC
- 4 BBC

5 Other

**NEWS2** *[If first in series]: Can you tell me if you get your news and information from network news broadcasts, like those on CBS, ABC and NBC? [If not first in series]: What about news and information from network news broadcasts, like those on CBS, ABC and NBC?*

- 1 Yes
- 2 No
- 8 DK (vol)
- 9 Refused (vol)

**NEWS3** *If first in series]: Can you tell me if you get your news and information from political satire shows, like the Daily Show, Colbert [COAL-BEAR] Report, or Last Week Tonight with John Oliver? [If not first in series]: What about news and information from political satire shows, like the Daily Show, Colbert [COAL-BEAR] Report, or Last Week Tonight with John Oliver?*

*If yes, which one?*

*Responses precoded*

- 1 Daily Show
- 2 Colbert Report
- 3 Last Week Tonight with John Oliver
- 4 Other
- 8 Dk (vol)
- 9 Refused (vol)

**NEWS4** *Of all of those you named, which would you say you rely on the most for news and information about politics and world affairs?*

*[Open: use precodes]*

- 1 Cable news
- 2 Network news
- 3 Political satire shows
- 4 Combo (vol)
- 8 DK (vol)
- 9 Refused (vol)

**Sample Characteristics**

		<b>Registered voters N = 994; MoE = +/- 3</b>
<b>Gender</b>	<i>Male</i>	49%
	<i>Female</i>	51%
<b>Age</b>	<i>18-29</i>	22%
	<i>30-44</i>	26%
	<i>45-59</i>	26%
	<i>60+</i>	24%
	<i>Refused</i>	1%
<b>Race</b>	<i>White</i>	68%
	<i>African American</i>	10%
	<i>Hispanic</i>	13%
	<i>Asian</i>	3%
	<i>Other/Refused</i>	7%
<b>Party (with leaners)</b>	<i>Dem</i>	39%
	<i>Ind/DK/Refused</i>	27%

	<i>Repub</i>	35%
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