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FUNDING NASA: EXAMINING THE EFFECT OF INFORMATIONAL FRAMES ON PUBLIC
OPINION ON SPACE EXPLORATION SPENDING BY THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT.

Abstract

The American public approves of our nation's space agency, NASA, but not enough to spend money on it; this is the overwhelming consensus of the majority of public opinion research conducted on the topic. There is also no clear evidence whether public opinion has measurable effects on setting any policy agenda for space in the U.S.; however, when space policies and topics are salient the public does appear to pay more attention. Space policy can be a difficult policy to study because most researchers in this topic rely on data from large surveys performed such as the General Social Survey (GSS), and questions about funding support for NASA are not always consistently asked. This paper explores if Americans' opinions on funding space can be affected by framing the question asked about NASA's funding with factual budget information. This is important because Americans' misconceptions about NASA's funding, and government spending in general, is likely to influence their opinions about tax dollars spent on space and science research, and the cost of NASA's deep space exploration plans. In order to investigate this issue, a live caller phone survey on a nationally representative sample, to be conducted during the spring of 2018, was commissioned. This survey embeds the GSS question about NASA's funding within a media use survey, utilizing an experimental design wherein some respondents are given factual frames to ascertain the effect of this information on their opinions of NASA's budget versus a control group which is given no informational frame. This test of how frames shape the public's opinion on NASA's budget is novel. The results of this paper will yield valuable insights which will be useful to many stakeholders, including NASA, advocacy groups, and policymakers. The survey and subsequent analysis of the data will be completed in time to present full results and implications to the audience at IAC 2018.