Dædalus

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On Public Opinion

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VOTING
PLACE
Norman Rockwell

Inside front cover : Norman Rockwell, *Election Day, 1944*, watercolor and gouache, 14 x 33.5 in., Cedar Rapids Museum of Art, Museum purchase, Save-the-Art fund, 2007.037.1. Image © SEPS licensed by Curtis Licensing, Indianapolis, Ind. All rights reserved.

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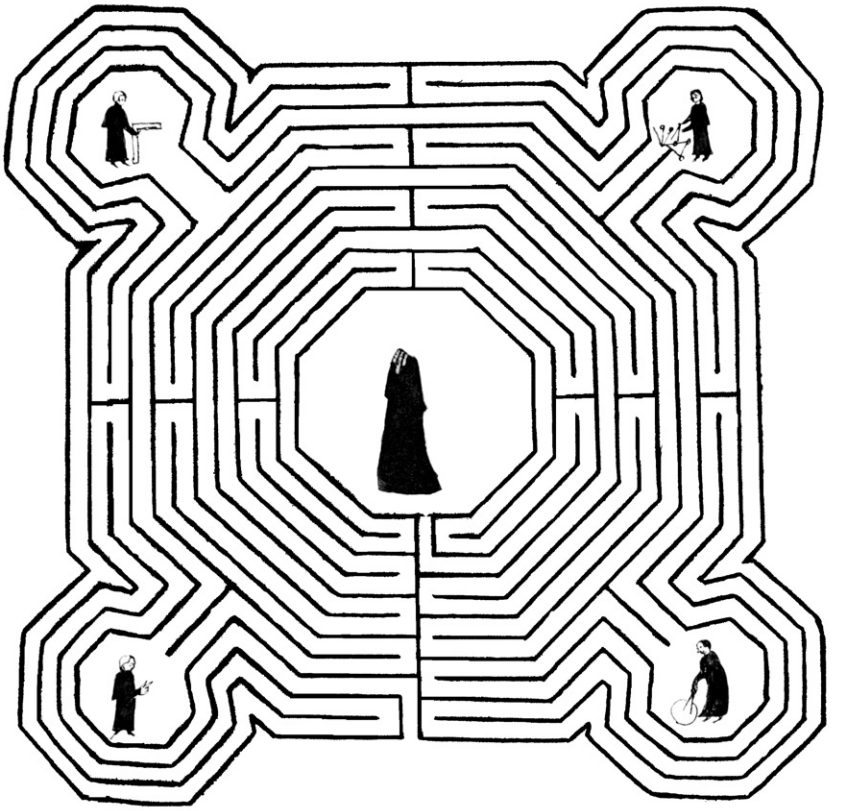

The pavement labyrinth once in the nave of Reims Cathedral (1240), in a drawing, with figures of the architects, by Jacques Cellier (c. 1550 – 1620)

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On the Importance of Public Opinion

Lee Epstein

"The president's job approval rating is up"; "50 percent of Americans believe that their taxes will increase in the next year"; "The incumbent senator is the projected winner by a 2-1 margin." This is how most of us follow and understand public opinion: through survey and election results that seem to be *everywhere*. But there is much more to public opinion than a percentage or an outcome reported in a headline, posted on a website, or tweeted, emailed, or texted. The authors in this issue speak to the "much more."

How do we learn about public opinion, and what does it tell us? These are the questions considered in our first four essays. D. James Greiner and Kevin Quinn begin the volume with a fascinating glimpse into the world of polling, especially exit polls. Greiner, an expert on voting rights, and Quinn, a political scientist with expertise in statistical methodology, are uniquely poised commentators. The two have conducted exit polls of their own – but that may be damning with faint praise. After the debacle in Florida with the 2000 presidential election, many of us are skeptical of exit polls. Greiner and Quinn share our skepticism, suggesting that exit polls "are most prone to fail when we most want them to work" – that is, in close elections. But this is not their only concern. In a day and age when conventional (telephone) and more au courant (Internet) polling techniques can provide vast amounts of information far more cheaply, Greiner and Quinn question whether exit polls will and should survive.

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Their answer is yes, though not as a device for calling elections or even for mapping voters' preferences. Rather, Greiner and Quinn suggest that the exit poll is an apt mechanism for learning about the administration of elections. As the authors remind us, U.S. history is full of attempts at vote manipulation – whether through poll taxes, literacy tests, or, more recently, discretionary application of voter ID laws.[1] Because exit polls are nearly contemporaneous with the act of voting, they can be a powerful method for detecting bias.[2]

As a policy recommendation, Greiner and Quinn's is meticulously developed. As a descriptive matter, we know that news organizations will continue to rely on exit polls, along with many other types of surveys, to predict electoral outcomes and, more generally, to provide a snapshot of public preferences. So how should we interpret all the numbers that so bombard us weekly, if not daily? Do they provide candidates and policy-makers with meaningful information about "We the People"?

To address these and other questions emerging from the plethora of polls, we turn to essays by two deans of the study of mass behavior, James Stimson and Robert Erikson. Together (with Michael MacKuen) they wrote *The Macro Polity*, a landmark study on the impact of public opinion on elections and public policy.[3] Individually, their contributions to the field have been no less impressive, as their essays here well exemplify.

Stimson takes us on a tour of public policy *mood*, a concept and measure he invented more than two decades ago.[4] Despite its age, Stimson's concept remains central to social science inquiries into public opinion. One reason is that his idea of mood is simple to understand: it is a single number summarizing the mood of the public along a liberal/conservative dimension (see Figure 1 in Stimson's essay). Higher numbers indicate a more liberal public mood, lower numbers a more conservative mood. (In his essay, Stimson explains how he uses public opinion surveys to construct the mood measure.)

Another reason why Stimson's invention took public-opinion research by storm: it helps forecast election outcomes. Well before anyone predicted a Democratic win in the 1992 presidential election, Stimson identified the then-unnoticed drift "toward a liberalism of substantial proportions."[5] A year later, Bill Clinton won 370 (68.8 percent) electoral votes.

Erikson's essay demonstrates that mood (separately and in relation to a candidate's ideology) and the public's partisan leanings ("macropartisanship") provide a highly satisfactory explanation of election results – even better than the state of the economy. But it is not only elections that respond to mood. Erikson shows that when the "electorate asks for an ideological change in policy . . . eventually – perhaps after many years, given the roadblocks in the way of congressional policy-making – the demand is satisfied."

Erikson and Stimson focus on the aggregation of individual opinions: for example, the fraction of the public that supports gun control ("macro" public opinion). James Druckman, a scholar well known for his work on how Americans make decisions, and Thomas Leeper, a doctoral student and collaborator with Druckman, turn to the individual opinion itself: for example, an individual's preference for gun control ("micro" public opinion). Among the puzzles they investigate is whether public opinion is stable. The importance of this question is obvious. If preferences are stable, then all of us, Americans and our representatives alike, could place some stock in the poll numbers. On the other hand, if preferences are unstable, the meaning of those numbers at any point in time could be called into question. Druckman and

Leeper's work reveals that the answer depends on whether we look at macro or micro trends in the data. While Americans' policy preferences are stable at the macro level, this is decidedly not the case at the micro level. Druckman and Leeper consider the explanations for this disconnect, as well as its consequences.

Despite their different approaches, Stimson, Erikson, and Druckman and Leeper agree on the important role public opinion plays in shaping public policy. Perhaps this isn't so surprising in a democracy; we expect elected representatives to pay some attention to those who elect them. That's one reason why social scientists shower attention on public opinion. But what of the unelected federal courts? Should we expect a connection with the public in that domain?

What better commentator to address this question than Linda Greenhouse, who for thirty years covered the U.S. Supreme Court for *The New York Times* and now teaches at Yale Law School. For the uninitiated, Greenhouse provides an analytic review of the literature on "how the Supreme Court and the public observe and understand one another." Ultimately, the answer seems to be better than we might expect. These observations frame her case study of *Roe v. Wade* (1973). Her focus is not on *Roe*'s constitutional aspects but rather on how the ruling became "*Roe*": a polarizing decision over abortion – and the Court itself. The answer, Greenhouse tells us, lies less in this one decision than in how strategists from the emerging New Right used it to help create a "pro-family" movement consisting largely of Catholics and Evangelicals.

If strategists can use a single Supreme Court decision to bring about major political change, it would seem that the media – whether through political programs or campaign advertisements – too could influence the public's opinion of candidates. Surely, most Americans think as much, and it is hard to blame them given the enormous amounts of money spent on campaigns, the ubiquitous ads on television and elsewhere, and the emergence of a profession devoted to electing candidates. But they are wrong. At least when it comes to the direct effect of the media on voters' decisions, social scientists have called the impact "marginal at most," as Diana Mutz writes in her essay.

Explaining the gap between public perceptions and reality, as well as assessing its implications, is no small task. Mutz, director of the Institute for the Study of Citizens and Politics at the University of Pennsylvania, is more than up to confronting the challenge. For decades now, Mutz has provided both scholars and the public with crucial insights into public opinion and political communication. Her essay here is no exception. Mutz begins by taking us through the history of the divide between the public and the experts on the media's influence. This makes for a fascinating read, but Mutz's goal is not solely descriptive. She argues powerfully that Americans are not "well served by [their] extreme beliefs in media power."

We end with two essays that examine public opinion and perceptions in the Latino and black communities, respectively. The author of the first, Gary Segura of Stanford University, is unparalleled in his knowledge of Latino politics. Not only has he written extensively on the subject, he is also a principal in Latino Decisions, which provides independent polling data to decision-makers and news outlets.[6] James Gibson, of Washington University in St. Louis, is an equally savvy observer of mass behavior. For his work on this and related topics, Gibson has received numerous honors, including the Decade of Behavior Research Award for 2000 – 2010.

Readers will quickly see that Segura's essay both reinforces and challenges some conventional understandings of Latinos. Segura confirms that this community is growing rapidly, from 12 percent of the population in 2000 to more than 16 percent in 2010. No doubt about it: "What Latinos think about government and politics matters a great deal to the future direction of the country," he asserts.

It is what Latinos think that may come as a surprise. Latinos may embrace the idea of self-reliance, Segura explains, but they also see a crucial role for government in solving societal problems. Taken with the other data Segura has amassed, the implication is that the Democratic Party is likely the winner in the partisan race for the Latino vote today and in the future. Segura writes: "The most rapidly growing segment in the American electorate is increasingly unified and demonstrably left of center."

Gibson's take on race is equally enlightening. His concern is less with the political preferences of black and white Americans than with their perceptions of political freedom – whether they feel free to speak their minds or whether they feel free, for example, to organize a public meeting to oppose the government. Using survey data he has collected over the years, Gibson demonstrates that both blacks and whites believe that there are fewer constraints on their freedom than there were two decades ago. But differences between the two groups persist. Only 32.3 percent of whites but fully 50.5 percent of blacks believe that the government would not allow them to organize meetings, to provide but one example. Gibson also shows that Barack Obama's election in 2008 empowered black Americans, increasing their perception of political freedom, but the effect was short-lived. By 2011, perceptions had returned to 2005 levels.

These analyses, along with Gibson's data on intrablack differences, deserve close attention. Indeed, all the essays in this volume merit careful study. Each illuminates a fascinating aspect of a subject that occupies an important place in the social science literature. Even more than that, taken together they make a compelling case for why public opinion should matter to all of us.

ENDNOTES

1 Rachael Cobb, D. James Greiner, and Kevin M. Quinn, "Can Voter ID Laws Be Administered in a Race-Neutral Manner? Evidence from the City of Boston in 2008," *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 7 (1) (2012): 1 – 33.

2 Ibid. The exit poll the authors conducted for their study captured clear evidence of racial bias by poll workers.

3 Robert S. Erikson, Michael B. MacKuen, and James A. Stimson, *The Macro Polity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

4 James A. Stimson, *Public Opinion in America: Moods, Cycles, and Swings* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1991). The second edition was published in 1999.

5 Ibid., 117.

6 See http://latinodecisions.wordpress.com/.

Long Live the Exit Poll

D. James Greiner & Kevin M. Quinn

Abstract: We discuss the history of the exit poll as well as its future in an era characterized by increasingly effective and inexpensive alternatives for obtaining information. With respect to the exit poll's future, we identify and assess four purposes it might serve. We conclude that the exit poll's most important function in the future should, and probably will, be to provide information about the administration of the franchise and about the voter's experience in casting a ballot. The nature of this purpose suggests that it may make sense for academic institutions to replace media outlets as the primary implementers of exit polls.

Is the exit poll intellectually dead? That is, in the foreseeable future, can exit polling serve a purpose other than allowing media operations to "call" elections a few hours earlier than official results become available? This process of calling elections, and the race among media organizations to be the first to do so, may serve a recreational purpose; but whether calling elections contributes much to a thriving democracy is uncertain.

Even if we consider a set of questions crucial to the social sciences and law about the nature of the electorate, it is still not immediately clear that exit polls have much of a future. Suppose we want to learn about the characteristics and motivations of voters. Are we better off with the exit poll – currently around forty-five years old – or with a combination of older (mail, telephone) and younger (Internet) forms of polling, which may now be able to provide a great deal of information more cheaply than exit polls can? The question becomes even sharper when we consider that it may be possible to combine results from the older and younger techniques with information from data aggregators, which compile a vast (and increasing) amount of specific and wide-ranging data on voters and potential voters. In short, we might conclude that the exit poll is unlikely to live much past middle age.

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*(*See endnotes for complete contributor biographies.)*

But another set of questions, perhaps less fundamental than those articulated above but nevertheless important, should allow the exit poll to survive into its golden years and perhaps beyond: What is the nature of the voting experience for the sizable majority of U.S. voters who continue to use traditional polling booths? Do voter ID laws prevent persons who reach the voting area from casting valid ballots, and are such laws administered in a race-neutral manner? Is voting equipment sufficiently available, and easy enough to use, to allow ready access to the franchise? What do voters understand when they are told, at least initially, that they cannot cast a valid ballot at a particular polling place? Is the voting experience affected by the failure to enforce laws that proscribe electioneering from occurring within a certain distance of the voting area?

In this essay, we suggest that the exit poll's future should lie in the study of this second set of questions – questions central to the field of election administration. This field has long been a subject of interest to political scientists, but it has an even longer history in the legal community. As we discuss below, the law governing how voters vote has been in flux since the early 1600s. Scrolling ahead a couple of centuries, voting in the early United States looked nothing like it does now. And even more recently, rules surrounding voting have constituted an important component of efforts by local, partisan officials to shape the electorate. For at least as long as a substantial portion of the U.S. electorate votes in traditional voting locations, and for as long as local and partisan officials oversee those voting locations, the exit poll should remain a vital tool for compiling information to support regulation of a democracy's most essential function.

At least since the 1634 adoption of the written ballot system in Massachusetts,[1] some fraction of voting in the United States has been conducted via the in-person presentation of a written indication of the voter's preference.[2] The first exit poll in the United States was not, however, conducted until 1967, 343 years after the adoption of the Massachusetts written ballot system. Why did it take so long for exit polling to become an identifiable feature of U.S. elections? As it turns out, both the law and statistical inference required some development before the exit poll could become either useful or practical.

The Law. Exit polling during much of the colonial period would have been profoundly silly. At that time, and for about one hundred years into our nation's history, voting was public or conducted in such a way that, despite the law as written, a voter's choice could frequently be observed. Some voting was by voice or show of hands.[3] Some voting was by means of a written ballot (which, through the first several decades of our history, the voter ordinarily had to supply himself); secrecy in voting was nominally required by a fair number of state constitutions adopted around the time of the Revolutionary War.[4] But even with written ballots, the mechanics of the voting process often meant that little was in fact secret. Certainly, the opportunities that open voting provided for bribery and intimidation did not go unexercised. Political parties provided hapless voters with paper ballots of a distinct color, or with a visible symbol or emblem, then posted observers in the voting area. Companies that owned towns generously provided free transportation of voters to polling places, along with free printed ballots, and likewise posted observers. Retaliation against those who voted the "wrong" way could take a variety of forms, from loss of employment, to eviction, to physical violence. Meanwhile, bribery and intimidation were not the only ways in which candidates and their

minions influenced ballot-casting. In some well-reported instances, the area surrounding the ballot box was a cross between a circus and a boxing match. According to one observer, "Sham battles were frequently engaged in to keep away elderly and timid voters of the opposition."[5]

Some viewed the lack of secrecy as a good thing. In the early Republic and stretching into the mid-1800s, at least a few elites argued that public voting was essential to the proper functioning of a democracy. Secret ballots, it was thought, would tempt a man to vote in his own narrow self-interest and would encourage ill-considered choices. More abstractly, voting was believed to be a public act, a declaration for whom and for what a man stood. Virginia politician John Randolph is said to have opined in 1847, "I scarcely believe that we have such a fool in all Virginia as even to mention the vote by ballot, and I do not hesitate to say that the adoption of the ballot would make any nation a nation of scoundrels, if it did not find them so."[6]

When reform finally came, it moved swiftly on two fronts, both with implications for the exit poll. On the first, from approximately 1888 to the turn of the century, the overwhelming majority of states switched to what was known as the "Australian system" of voting, whereby a government-provided ballot, available only at an official polling area, was given to the voter to mark in secret. That fundamental system is in place in most elections conducted in the United States today, although a recent trend toward "convenience voting" (which takes a variety of forms, from increased use of absentee ballots to early-voting stations at high-volume precincts) continues; and some variation exists even with traditional ballot-casting. On the latter point, for example, state laws differ on whether a voter may *voluntarily* show another her ballot. Illinois law illustrates the dominant regime: "[A]ny person who knowingly marks his ballot so that it can be observed by another person . . . shall be guilty of a Class 4 felony."[7] By requiring the voter to keep her ballot secret, Illinois law attempts to provide a haven to anyone requested to allow voluntary verification that a would-be vote-purchaser has received the benefit of her bargain; the voter can legitimately claim that allowing voluntary verification will expose her to prosecution. West Virginia, in contrast, allows the voter to choose to show her ballot to another.[8]

In the second reform area, governments asserted control over the location surrounding voting booths. Some went so far as to exclude anyone but a would-be voter or an election official from entering a legally defined halo (say, within 150 feet) around polling booths. Others prohibited certain activities, such as electioneering, from occurring inside a halo but allowed members of the public to occupy spaces close enough to voting booths to observe the administration of the vote. The latter approach eventually dominated when its utility as an antifraud measure became evident.

With respect to the exit poll, the two types of reform operated at cross-purposes. On the one hand, the secret ballot created a need to gain information about voter choices and voter experiences; that need gave rise to the exit poll. On the other hand, laws mandating control and decorum around voting booths provided local administration officials with what they perceived to be a statutory basis for attempting to push exit pollsters outside sometimes large halos around the voting area. Requiring pollsters to stand more than a few feet from the exit to a building in which voting occurs is death to an exit poll because voters often disperse (and sometimes disappear down public transportation entrances) before they can be approached. Not all election administra-

tion officials sought to push exit pollsters to a prohibitive distance from the polling area, but enough of them did to necessitate a discussion of one other piece of legal history: the development of First Amendment jurisprudence in the court system, particularly in the federal courts.

As is true of the secret ballot and the exit poll, the development of First Amendment jurisprudence occurred far later in our nation's history than many realize. Beginning in the early 1900s, the U.S. Supreme Court began to use the First Amendment as a constitutional basis for scrutinizing federal laws that regulated speech, particularly political speech. During this time, the First Amendment had little to do with political polling or voting but had everything to do with politics. Some of the earliest First Amendment cases were prosecutions against political figures, including the Secretary of the Socialist Party[9] and an alleged founder of a wing of the Communist Party.[10] In 1925, the Supreme Court broke substantial new ground by holding that the First Amendment provided the judiciary with a textual basis for scrutinizing state (not just federal) laws regulating speech.[11]

First Amendment law evolved substantially in its first hundred years, and it continues to evolve today. When the first exit polls were conducted in the late 1960s, however, there was a general rule that courts would take a hard look at content-based restrictions on speech, particularly political speech in some kind of public environment, to determine whether such restrictions were truly necessary to meet articulated state goals. Thus, when local officials sought to use halo laws to push exit pollsters to untenable distances from the voting area, media outlets and exit polling firms sued. Courts, particularly federal courts, held almost uniformly that exit polling was a protected form of speech, and that election officials could not constitutionally prevent exit pollsters from approaching voters within a few feet of the exits to the buildings in which voting took place.[12] Legally, then, the ability of exit pollsters to do their work became firmly established.

The Statistics. An additional step in the exit poll's historical development has been the evolution of polling itself. Survey sampling had its genesis before the 1800s, and political polling that focused on an election was used at least as early as 1824 to allow newspapers to report projections of the results of that year's presidential elections.[13] But like most forms of statistical inference, polling did not mature until the Great Depression. A breakthrough came in 1934, with the publication of a paper by Russian-Polish mathematician Jerzy Neyman, one of a handful of true founders of modern probability and statistics.[14] Until this paper, statisticians attempting to make inferences about a large population purposively chose the units that would be observed (that is, the sample). Sophisticated statisticians allocated observations to categories thought to be salient (for example, large versus small units in industrial samples, men versus women in samples involving people), but the statistician himself controlled that allocation. Neyman's proposal was to apply the idea of randomization (developed earlier by R. A. Fisher in the context of agricultural experiments) to the selection of a subset of units in a large population for observation – that is, to create a random sample. Neyman showed that good things happened when the statistician gave up at least some control of the selection of the sample to a randomizer. Among these good things was the ability to create ranges within which the true value of some population parameter was reasonably likely to fall. These ranges are now known as *error bands*, or more technically, *confidence intervals*.[15] The probability sample ranks next to the

randomized experiment as one of the most important creations in the field of statistics. Survey samplers of all kinds now make extensive use of the tool Neyman gave them.

In the years after Neyman's article, survey sampling grew increasingly sophisticated. When exit polls finally came along, they involved a mixture of randomized and nonrandomized sampling. Statisticians in charge of exit polls ordinarily use randomization to determine which precincts to send pollsters to, but the selection of voters to be approached within each precinct was rarely, if ever, truly random. For instance, in the dominant method of selecting voters, the exit pollsters approach every *k*th voter, where *k* is some fixed integer. We have adopted this practice ourselves in our own exit-polling work. Other exit polls sample according to an exiting voter's characteristics (for example, sample every *k*th African American male).[16] Even with these techniques, however, the idea of randomization serves as the backbone for analysis of polling results (particularly confidence intervals). Essentially, those who run exit polls pretend that they randomize even though they do not.

The First Exit Poll. In 1967, political pollster Warren Mitofsky designed and administered the first exit poll in the United States, focusing on Kentucky's gubernatorial contest.[17] Oddly, Mitofsky was inspired by the practice of canvassing moviegoers as they left theaters to obtain viewer opinions.[18] Mitofsky's client was CBS, which was attempting to find ways to project election results and to break down voter preferences by demographics.[19] Apparently, CBS was satisfied, and as other media outlets sought to compete, the exit poll's popularity grew. Mitofsky himself was said to have conducted exit polls for more than three thousand electoral contests, some of them occurring abroad.[20]

One final aspect of U.S. election administration deserves mentioning: "A longstanding peculiarity of US federalism has been to reject in principle the Federal definition of voting rules. In practice the system remained profoundly fragmented until the 1960s and was indeed unified at that time only with respect to certain features, specifically those relating to blatant forms of racial discrimination."[21] In other words, voting administration has always been controlled by (i) locals who are (ii) political partisans. The United States has never professionalized or centralized election administration. And to state the obvious, partisans have powerful incentives to manipulate voting rules to their advantage.

To determine what future the exit poll should have, we need to assess the purposes it can serve, how well it can serve them, what alternatives exist, and what the relative costs and benefits of exit polls are vis-à-vis alternative techniques. The exit poll's most familiar purpose is to provide the backbone of a system that can be used to predict winners of elections earlier than the official results are available. As we noted above, it is not immediately clear that enabling media outlets to call elections a few hours earlier than official results are available contributes to the democratic process or to any other process of serious social concern. Even for those inclined to believe that calling elections has democracy-promoting value, evaluating how well the exit poll serves this purpose is nonetheless complicated. In our view, the record of exit poll–based[22] projections of winners and losers is both helpful and frustrating. The record is helpful because reasonably well-executed and well-analyzed exit polls, particularly when used with other available information, generally do allow pollsters to predict the right winners. That is, those who

run and use exit polls are right more often (much more often, in fact[23]) than they are wrong. The record is frustrating because exit polls are most prone to fail when we most want them to work. Specifically, exit polls run into the greatest difficulties when predicting close elections. Here, various hard-to-adjust-for biases, weaknesses in field operations or analysis techniques, and the uncertainty inherent in any kind of sampling scheme can overwhelm slim margins of victory. These shortcomings have led to some spectacular failures of exit poll–based predictions and erroneous election calls by media organizations. A notable example is the 2000 presidential election, when the contest came down to Florida, which was – or rather, should have been[24] – too close to call.

A second purpose that exit polls might serve is to provide information about the electorate, specifically its characteristics, thinking, and motivations. Such information is valuable. True, democracies can function without it, and additional information is not inevitably democracy-promoting. Nevertheless, information about the electorate can further short- and long-term purposes. With respect to the short term, to the extent that we want politicians to do what the electorate wants them to do, and to the extent that we want the electorate to be able to punish politicians when they fail to do so, it is probably better that politicians know what the electorate wants – or at least that they know more than they would from the raw results of elections in which, most often, no more than two candidates seek each office.[25] Thinking long term, greater information can support academic study of the electorate's characteristics and desires; one hopes that such study would lead to deeper understanding and, concomitantly, a better-functioning democracy.

How well have exit polls furthered this second purpose? Again, the record is mixed. Turning, for example, to a subject of our own research, exit polls have conclusively established that voting in United States presidential elections is racially correlated, meaning that African American voters have preferences noticeably and predictably different from those of Caucasian voters, and that both have noticeably different preferences from those of Hispanic/Latino voters (with the latter's preferences harder to predict).[26] This fact seems so obvious at present that one might ask why we need exit polls to keep proving it; but it is obvious in large part because exit polls have established it so conclusively for so long. Exit polls have also contributed to the information we have about offices below the presidency, where again, racially correlated voting appears to be stubbornly persistent in some jurisdictions. And depending on one's worldview, this stubborn persistence of racially correlated voting may have consequences for subjects as varied as candidate strategy and constitutional law.[27] Nevertheless, exit polls are limited in the complexity of the subjects they can probe; as we discuss below, one source of such limitations is the fact that exit poll questionnaires must be short and individual questions simple. In terms of information production, then, exit polls may allow finer cuts than the raw results of two-party elections, but they hardly allow scalpel-like precision.

A third purpose the exit poll might serve is as a check against official shenanigans. Here, the theory is that if the official results do not match the exit poll results, then the official results might be the result of tampering. At least in the United States, and thinking systematically (as opposed to focusing on an occasional freak occurrence), we view the exit poll's ability to serve this purpose as almost a nonstarter. First, exit polls are visible to election administrators, so the presence of an exit poll might deter the behavior it is at-

tempting to detect.[28] Second, the margin of error involved in exit polls, and the hard-to-adjust-for biases that plague any complex field operation, mean that fraud would have to be large for an exit poll to detect it. Yet "the entire art of electoral fraud, as ample evidence from history shows, is to manipulate the outcome only to the extent required."[29] Third, on what basis would one conclude that a discrepancy between official and polling results indicates problems with the former as opposed to the latter? Given the difficulty that exit polls have had in predicting the results of some high-profile elections in which fraud was never seriously alleged, one would need substantial additional evidence external to the exit poll to suggest that the official count, not the exit poll, is suspect, in which case it is not clear how much value an exit poll adds.[30]

A fourth purpose that exit polls might serve is to allow study of the voting experience. In the 2008 presidential election, at least 70 percent of the civilian electorate[31] voted via the Australian ballot system (with some technological bells and whistles added) – that is, by visiting in person an officially run polling location and casting, in secret, a written or electronic ballot. As noted above, elections in the United States are administered by local partisans, who have powerful incentives to manipulate laws and practices governing election administration. Registration, purging of voting lists, ballot design, waiting times (which may increase relative to a jurisdiction's failure to respond to changing demographics by redrawing precinct lines),[32] the presence or absence of interpreters and multilingual ballot materials, operation of voting machines, and voter identification requirements: these are just a few of the areas of law that might be altered to make voting more – or less – difficult, either across the board or for identifiable groups. Moreover, poll workers are often volunteers or poorly paid temporary employees who are given one- to two-hour training sessions – this despite the complex overlay of law that governs the voting process. Indeed, relevant law comes from the U.S. Constitution, federal statutes, federal regulations, state constitutions, state statutes, and state regulations, all as interpreted in state and federal court cases. Meanwhile, even more pedestrian concerns, such as the layout of the room in which voting occurs, may determine ease of access. Exit polls can provide valuable information about such aspects of the voting experience. And as we explain in the next section, they may be uniquely situated to do so.

Exit polls are only one kind of poll. To assess what the exit poll's future will or should be, we need an overview of its strengths and weaknesses vis-à-vis the alternatives. We limit our discussion to polling techniques, although we concede that polls are only one way to collect information that might further one or more of the four purposes listed in the preceding section.

One strength of the exit poll, and the argument most often made by its proponents, is that comparatively speaking, pollsters conducting an exit poll are more likely to request information from a person who has actually voted or attempted to vote. This advantage can be overstated. Refusal rates in exit polls are high, particularly in the current era; in a well-executed exit poll, about half of persons approached will refuse to participate. Moreover, a less appreciated problem is that a great deal of voting occurs in schools, churches, apartment buildings, elderly residences, malls, and other high-traffic multiuse buildings. Exit pollsters, who ordinarily must stand outside a building's exit, can have trouble distinguishing between a voter exiting the building and a non-voter who came to

the building on other business.[33] Still, at present, exit polls target the electorate (or the would-be electorate) much more effectively than polls using the mail, the telephone, or the Internet. These other forms of polling must target a set of people who *say* they will vote or did vote.

But the exit poll has a second strength that proponents articulate less frequently: namely, the fact that respondents are approached within minutes of having experienced the voting process and having cast their ballots. Their memories of whom they voted for are still fresh. Perhaps more important, their memories of the voting experience are still fresh. With respect to voter choices, freshness matters particularly for state and local contests, such as elections for state legislative representative, mayor, city council, or school board. To illustrate: as we write this essay, neither of us can remember for whom we voted in the most recent set of state representative and municipal contests. Moreover, catching voters shortly after they have cast ballots can help prevent certain kinds of biases that may be related to – but more complicated than – mere recall problems. For example, there is evidence that if voters are polled (via, say, the telephone or the mail) after the winner of the contest has been announced, they overreport having voted for the winner or the incumbent.[34]

Memory issues are even more critical with respect to voter experiences. To cite an example from our own work, an exit poll we conducted documented how poll workers in one jurisdiction requested voter IDs from minority voters at a higher rate than they did white voters, with the disparity difficult to explain on grounds other than racial bias. This was true even though there was supposedly no element of discretion in whether to request IDs from voters. That is, under applicable state law, poll workers were to request an ID if a would-be voter had one of two particular symbols next to her name on the registrant list, but not to request an ID if no such symbol appeared.[35] Our point is that we would have difficulty trusting a finding of this nature had it come from a polling technique other than an exit poll. We suspect that for many a voter, being asked to show an ID is a low-salience event, one she is not likely to recall accurately a few hours after leaving the voting area. And yet, currently, it is hard to find an issue in voting administration that occupies more attention in the press than voter ID laws,[36] attention we think is well deserved.

So the exit poll has advantages – big ones. It also has big disadvantages. Each exit poll requires a complicated, expensive, and delicate field operation that includes the temporary hiring and training of hundreds of personnel. Because of the length of time between elections, there is no feasible way to keep pollsters permanently on staff. The expense involved in running, say, a national exit poll puts pressure on poll architects to cut corners in the field operation. For example, pollster training for the 2004 presidential election exit poll – a poll performed on behalf of major media operations – ran into difficulties.[37] Training had been carried out via the telephone and was surprisingly short in duration.[38] Our experience, consistent with that of others, is that in-person training of pollsters is important.[39] Similarly, cost concerns have driven professional exit polls to place only one pollster at each precinct; our experience (which, again, dovetails with that of others[40]) is that multiple pollsters – preferably at least three at a time in two shifts, or six per precinct – are necessary. In busy precincts, more may be needed. Greater numbers allow pollsters simultaneously to keep an accurate interval count, to administer questionnaires, and to take care of basic requirements such as the need for food or rest.

Even well-funded and well-executed exit polls have severe limits; we discuss two here. First, exit poll questionnaires must be short, typically no more than one page; questionnaires can certainly be longer, but if they are, the response rate usually declines. The questions themselves typically must be short and simple enough to be read and answered accurately by an impatient voter standing outside a voting area (perhaps in the rain), delaying the next activity in her day. Complex questions are not an option. Second, exit polls have no effective way to incentivize persons approached to respond to the poll. In contrast, the business models of online polling services include substantial incentives.

So what are the alternatives to an exit poll, and what are their strengths and weaknesses? For the most part, the strengths of the exit poll are the weaknesses of the alternatives, and vice versa. Consider surveys conducted via mail. Mail surveys typically struggle with low response rates. On the issue of whether questionnaires reach actual voters, statisticians who take the time to pull voter lists from official records can be assured that their questionnaires arrive at the right destination. But this process takes time, so voter memories will be at least somewhat stale. Addresses will be out of date. Results will be delayed, although again, delay on its own (apart from what it does to the integrity of the responses) may not be a serious concern. Mail surveys have some advantages. Pollsters can sometimes risk longer and/or more complicated questions, on the supposition that respondents might have longer than two minutes to respond (an admittedly risky supposition). Mail polls are comparatively cheap and easy to administer. And mail polls remove the aspect of human pollsters-to-respondent interaction, which can obviate the concern that answers might change depending on interviewer/pollster characteristics.[41]

The analysis for telephone polls is similar. Telephone polls can be administered before, during, or after elections. If administered after an election, official voter lists can be obtained and matched to commercially available telephone lists in an attempt to reach actual voters. Such matching inevitably misses a sizable fraction of actual voters, and the pattern of such misses might be worrisome; one might be concerned, for example, that matching is more likely to miss transient voters, and that transience might be correlated with a result of interest. Even with the right telephone numbers, reaching voters by phone and persuading them to respond to the poll is an uncertain business. Again, what causes potential respondents to fail to answer the telephone or refuse to take the poll after a connection is made is always uncertain. In fact, uncertainties associated with matching voter lists are so great that many telephone polls abandon a strategy based on official voting lists in favor of random digit dialing. Putting aside matching and response rates, telephone polls have other drawbacks. Questions must be read aloud, which puts a limit on their complexity. One might suppose that interviewer characteristics would not matter in telephone polls; alas, it is not certain that this is the case.[42] In terms of advantages, telephone surveys can be quickly and cheaply administered.

A final option is the Internet. Some firms now maintain stables of Internet users who are willing to respond to polls in return for some form of compensation, such as free high-speed Internet service.[43] A firm can attempt to match the demographics of a subset of its stable to those of some target population (such as voters or potential voters). The process can be tricky, particularly for a characteristic like age or income, because Internet usage varies widely among different age or income groups. For instance, how readily

would one believe that the political preferences of sixty-five-year-old Internet users are representative of those of all sixty-five year olds, given that, at present, less than half of persons sixty-five or older regularly use the Internet?[44] Nevertheless, Internet polls can be fielded quickly and comparatively cheaply. And questions can potentially be much more complex than in other formats. Specifically, the poll can be programmed so that the questions a respondent sees depend on prior answers in a way that engenders minimal confusion. As before, the weakness of the Internet poll is the exit poll's strength: at present, the Internet poll's ability to reach actual voters, or persons who attempted to vote, is uncertain.

We close our discussion of strengths and weakness with one recent development: the rise of information aggregation firms. These firms either already do or have the potential to make available vast (some might say disturbing) amounts of information on individuals or sets of individuals, such as registered voters.[45] Depending on how these information aggregators evolve, and the extent to which the government regulates them, these firms have the capacity to revolutionize polling (and indeed may have done so already). Imagine, for example, a world in which official voter lists are electronically matched to files from information aggregation firms, and that these files are then electronically matched to an Internet polling firm's databases. Such a system could potentially allow polling of actual voters within, say, a day or so of their having voted. And the vast array of demographic and other information available from the information aggregation firm could allow statisticians to compare the characteristics of the sample respondents to those of the voting populace. Such a system would have holes, no doubt. At some point, for example, one might worry about the effect on survey responses of the near-total loss of anonymity on the part of respondents. Exit polls go to great lengths not just to preserve anonymity but also to demonstrate that anonymity to respondents.[46] But again, as we now know, exit polls have holes, too.

So where does all this leave us? We surmise that the only important purpose that exit polls will be able to serve in the foreseeable future – and the one they should serve – is the fourth one on our list: namely, to provide information about the voting experience. As we suggest above, the early calling of elections serves only to provide entertainment value. Given the financial pressure placed on traditional newspaper and television organizations in recent years, we wonder how much longer these media outlets will choose to finance exit polling for this purpose. The process of cutting costs by cutting corners, already under way in the form of measures such as a single pollster per location and reduced pollster training, may degrade the information obtained beyond the point of usefulness. With respect to information about the electorate's characteristics and its views, we speculate that other polling sources, particularly Internet polling augmented by information from aggregation firms, will evolve to the point that this method of polling provides a cheaper and easier way to produce information of equivalent quality. And given the uncertainties and challenges associated with the exit poll, we cannot reasonably expect it to serve as a fraud-detection device.

The exit poll is, however, uniquely well suited to provide information about the voting experience. In our view, the details of election administration matter. As our short history illustrates, the method in which voting occurs has been the frequent subject of political battles since colonization. And in the past half-century or so,

the election administration battle has been ugly. Poll taxes, literacy tests, and other "details" of the voting experience led to passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965[47]; the constitutionality of reauthorizing a portion of this statute promises to be among the nastier fights waged in the U.S. Supreme Court over the next several years.[48] Moreover, assuming the Supreme Court takes its own decision in *Bush v. Gore*[49] seriously (a debatable assumption), miniscule differences in voting procedures may have constitutional significance. And we have already mentioned the ferocity of the debate on voter ID laws. These developments demonstrate the need to seek information about the voting experience – information that exit polls are well positioned to provide.

The question then arises: who should conduct the exit polls? If the primary role of exit polling becomes to document, evaluate, and (perhaps) combat partisan efforts to manipulate the electorate and the voting experience, what institution can best pursue these goals? The numerous failings (in the business sense) of local and regional newspapers, together with consolidation in the exit polling industry, suggest that the press – the traditional watchdog over governance – is probably unable or unwilling to finance the gathering of needed information. Our view is that academia should step in. As we mentioned above, some of the highest-quality exit polling in the nation is currently done in Utah, and it is overseen by academics who use the experience as a "teachable moment" for college and graduate students. Our own experience with student-based exit polling was similarly positive; it revealed startling and potentially unpopular (with election administrative officials) data on voter identification requests. In short, while the practicality behind exit polling may make it at first seem like an unusual task for academics, we believe that exit polling provides an opportunity for academia to perform one of its noblest functions: to speak unpopular truth to power.

ENDNOTES

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1 Eldon Evans, *A History of the Australian Ballot System in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1917), 1.

2 Nick Moon, *Opinion Polls: History, Theory, and Practice* (Manchester, U.K.: Manchester University Press, 1999), 6.

3 Paper ballots began to replace a show of hands in most of the original colonies in the mid- to late 1600s; Evans, *A History of the Australian Ballot System in the United States*, 1 – 6.

4 Joseph P. Harris, *Election Administration in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1934), 16 – 17.

5 *Burson v. Freeman*, 504 U.S. 191, 202 (1992).

6 John Crowley, "The Secret Ballot in the American Age of Reform," in *Cultures of Voting: The Hidden History of the Secret Ballot*, ed. Romain Bertrand, Jean-Louis Briquet, and Peter Pels (London: Hurst, 2007), 43, 52.

7 10 I.L.C.S. sec. 5/29-9.

8 Const. W. Va. art. IV, sec. 2.

9 *Schenck v. United States*, 249 U.S. 47 (1919).

10 *Whitney v. California*, 274 U.S. 357 (1927).

11 *Gitlow v. New York*, 268 U.S. 652 (1925).

12 See, for example, *NBC, Inc. v. Cleland*, 697 F. Supp. 1204 (N.D. Ga. 1988).

13 Moon, *Opinion Polls*, 6.

14 Jerzy Neyman, "On the Two Different Aspects of the Representative Method: The Method of Stratified Sampling and the Method of Purposive Selection," *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society* 97 (1934): 558. Opinion pollsters appear to have anticipated some of the benefits of random selection of sampling units that Neyman demonstrated in his paper; see Moon, *Opinion Polls*, 11.

15 Morris Hansen, "Some History and Reminiscences on Survey Sampling," *Statistical Science* 2 (1987): 180.

16 It might be more accurate to say that polls sample according to pollsters' *perceptions* of voter characteristics. In our experience, pollsters' perceptions of voter characteristics do not always match voters' self-identification.

17 Mark R. Levy, "The Methodology and Performance of Election Day Polls," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 47 (1983): 54.

18 J. Michael Brick and Clyde Tucker, "Mitofsky-Waksberg: Learning from the Past," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 71 (5) (2007): 703–716, http://poq.oxfordjournals.org/content/71/5/703.full.

19 Levy, "The Methodology and Performance of Election Day Polls," 54.

20 Pew Research Center, "Mitofsky on Mexico's Standoff," July 6, 2006.

21 Crowley, "The Secret Ballot in the American Age of Reform," in *Cultures of Voting*, ed. Bertrand et al., 43, 46.

22 At least in the current era, media outlets rarely rely solely on exit polls to call elections. To the contrary, the predictions they rely on result from a constantly changing mix of official returns, exit poll results, telephone and mail polling (targeted at absentee voters in particular), and the application of complex weighting schemes designed to attempt to correct for over- and underrepresentation of particular categories of voters.

23 See Moon, *Opinion Polls*, for a review of the record on this score.

24 On the basis of projections that relied in great part on exit polling results, major media outlets called Florida for Gore even before all precincts in the state had closed. Matt A. Barreto, Fernando Guerra, Mara Marks, Stephen A. Nuno, and Nathan D. Woods, "Controversies in Exit Polling: Implementing a Racially Stratified Homogenous Precinct Approach," *PS: Political Science & Politics* 39 (2006): 477, http://faculty.washington.edu/mbarreto/papers/exitpoll.pdf. The U.S. Supreme Court ultimately declared Bush the winner in Florida; see *Bush v. Gore*, 531 U.S. 98 (2000).

25 Of course, some of what polls reveal is contradictory or nonsensical: various polls (none of them exit polls, and each possessing different methodological weaknesses) find that U.S. citizens want the foreign aid share of the federal budget to be simultaneously cut and increased in size by a factor of ten. The problem is that we think that foreign aid makes up about 25 percent of the federal budget and that it should be reduced to about 10 percent. The true share is

less than 1 percent. See CNN Opinion Research Poll, April 2011, http://i2.cdn.turner.com/cnn/2011/images/03/31/rel4m.pdf; and WorldPublicOpinion.org, "American Public Opinion on Foreign Aid," November 2010, http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/nov10/ForeignAid_Nov10_quaire.pdf.

[26] See, for example, CNN Election Center, http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2008/results/polls/#val=USP00p1.

[27] With respect to constitutional law, one might think of the upcoming battle in the Supreme Court over the constitutionality of Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act. See Stephen Ansolabehere, Nathaniel Persily, and Charles Stewart, "Race, Region, and Vote Choice in the 2008 Election: Implications for the Future of the Voting Rights Act," *Harvard Law Review* 123 (2010): 1385. The authors use exit poll results and other techniques to discuss the implications of voting patterns by race for the future viability of Section 5.

[28] One might argue that deterrence is itself a good thing. But for reasons we explain, the expense and operational difficulty involved in exit polling make it an unattractive prophylactic.

[29] Jasjeet Sekhon, "Data Troubles: Explaining Discrepancies between Official Votes and Exit Polls in the 2004 Presidential Election," May 24, 2006, 5, http://sekhon.berkeley.edu/papers/SekhonExit.pdf. Note that the author of this piece is more sanguine than we are about the usefulness of exit polls as fraud-detection devices.

[30] To be clear, we are referring here to manipulation of contests in the United States, where, as noted above, we suspect that the existing fraud is designed to be just great enough to tip the balance and thus difficult for an exit poll to detect. In newer democracies, according to media reports, fraud can be large and flagrant.

[31] The figure comes from the 2008 Current Population Survey. See Thom File and Sarah Crissey, "Voting and Registration in the Election of November of 2008," Report Number P20-562 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Commerce, 2010), 13, http://www.census.gov/prod/2010pubs/p20-562.pdf.

[32] By way of example, the City of Boston's precinct lines have not been redrawn for decades, leading to some polling locations that serve thousands of voters in contrast to other locations that serve a few hundred.

[33] We have had to face the problem of what to do when our results appeared to demonstrate that our pollsters approached too many voters. (In fact, the presence of non-voters exiting the building interfered with our pollsters' attempts to count ever *k*th voter.)

[34] See, for example, Lonna Rae Atkeson, "Sure, I Voted for the Winner! Overreport of the Primary Vote for the Party Nominee in the National Election Studies," *Political Behavior* 21 (1999): 197. Overreporting for the winner could come from several psychological mechanisms: voters remember correctly who they voted for but lie about it because they do not want to admit that they backed a loser; voters forget who they voted for but remember who won, and confuse the two; or voters who voted for the winner remember more clearly who they voted for than voters who voted for the loser, so the former are more likely to respond to a post-election poll, to name a few possibilities.

[35] Rachael Cobb, D. James Greiner, and Kevin M. Quinn, "Can Voter ID Laws be Administered in a Race-Neutral Manner? Evidence from the City of Boston in 2008," *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 7 (1) (2012): 1–33.

[36] See, for example, Corey Dade, "South Carolina Sues Justice Department for Blocking Its Voter ID Law," NPR blog, http://www.npr.org/blogs/itsallpolitics/2012/02/07/146536214/south-carolina-sues-justice-department-for-blocking-its-voter-id-law.

[37] See Rick Brady, "A Critical Review of *The Unexplained Exit Poll Discrepancy*," March 28, 2005, http://web.archive.org/web/20060502035232/http://stonescryout.org/files/unexplained.pdf.

[38] "Evaluation of Edison/Mitofsky Election System 2004," January 2005, 53, http://abcnews.go.com/images/Politics/EvaluationofEdisonMitofskyElectionSystem.pdf.

39 Barreto, Guerra, Marks, Nuno, and Woods, "Controversies in Exit Polling."

40 Some of the best exit polling in the nation is done in Utah by the Utah Colleges Exit Poll. This poll ordinarily assigns at least eight pollsters per precinct, four in each of two shifts. See Mark Blumenthal, "What About Those German Exit Polls?" Mystery Pollster, December 19, 2005, http://www.mysterypollster.com/main/2004/12/what_about_thos.html.

41 Some research has suggested that respondents' answers or propensities to answer change according to, say, the age (or race, or other characteristic) of the interviewer/pollster. On the correlation between the age of the pollster and response rate, see Daniel M. Merkle and Murray Edelman, "Nonresponse in Exit Polls: A Comprehensive Analysis," in *Survey Nonresponse*, ed. Robert M. Groves et al. (New York: Wiley, 2002), 243, 250. For a discussion of the so-called Bradley or Wilder effect in a preelection poll prior to a racially charged election, see Steven E. Finkel, Thomas M. Guterbock, and Marian J. Borg, "Race-of-the-Interviewer Effects in a Preelection Poll: Virginia 1989," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 55 (1991): 313.

42 Patrick R. Cotter, Jeffrey Cohen, and Philip B. Coulter, "Race-of-Interviewer Effects in Telephone Interviews," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 46 (1982): 278; Darren W. Davis, "The Direction of Race of Interviewer Effects among African-Americans: Donning the Black Mask," *American Journal of Political Science* 41 (1997): 309.

43 For an example of one such firm's public opinion polling operation, see http://www.ibopezogby.com/services/public-opinion-polling/.

44 See http://pewinternet.org/Trend-Data/Whos-Online.aspx.

45 See, for example, http://catalist.us/product.

46 See, for example, George F. Bishop and Bonnie S. Fisher, "Secret Ballots and Self-Reports in an Exit-Poll Experiment," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 59 (1995): 568.

47 42 U.S.C. sec. 1973 – 1973aa-6.

48 See Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, codified as amended at 42 U.S.C. 1973c. See also, *Northwest Austin Municipal Utility District No. 1 v. Holder* (2009) (avoiding the issue of Section 5's constitutionality).

49 *Bush v. Gore*, 531 U.S. 98 (2000).

On the Meaning & Measurement of Mood

James A. Stimson

Abstract: Public policy mood, a concept now more than twenty years old, is the measure of left/right preferences over policy choices in American politics. In this essay, I comment on the theoretical need for such a measure and discuss the strategy for estimation. I produce the measure itself for the years from 1952 to 2011. Then I take on the question of how many dimensions of such operational ideology exist. I find two, which is far from novel. But unlike much previous work, my own included, the present analysis utilizes prior theoretical information about the content of the dimensions in order to interpret them. I find the conventional two dimensions, economic and cultural, to be very highly correlated. A final section explores the thermostatic properties of mood.

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For about as long as we have interpreted politics, and certainly for as long as we have collected data on mass preferences, we have found it convenient to think of political choices as arrayed on a single dimension, left to right. We have done so – often in lieu of any evidence on the point – because it seemed to make sense. We have observed that, for at least some people, preferences appear to be encapsulated in neat little bundles that we term *ideologies*. And where such bundles exist, as they commonly do for the most visible actors on the political stage, there is great economy in ignoring all the complexities and specificities about preferences over a myriad of issues, and instead treating ideology as a single coherent dimension.

Much political theory begins with the idea that preferences may be usefully encapsulated into unidimensional ideology. This is particularly true in the work of Anthony Downs[1] and all those who have followed his lead into rational accounts of politics. That hypothetical left/right dimension is ubiquitous in studies accounting for political behavior of all kinds.[2] Theory thus creates a demand for a measure of unidimensional preferences. That demand has been satisfied with two sorts of relatively crude

proxies. One approach is to find a single issue – for example, government responsibility for providing jobs – and assume that it captures much of the wider meaning of left and right. A second approach is to measure preferences according to self-identification: that is, how survey respondents identify themselves in ideological terms. Both approaches are just proxies, the first capturing only a portion of the wider meaning of ideology, the second introducing huge distortions arising from both failed and downright false perceptions.[3]

What is needed is a direct measure, one that covers the full range of political preferences in play and that is based on actual preferences and not an inference from self-identification. That direct measure is *public policy mood* (or *mood* for short). How to develop such a measure and what it means are the focus of this essay.

In a more perfect world, survey organizations would know what kinds of preferences are worthy of being measured and would set out to measure each of them every year. This is an impossible demand. It asks commercial organizations to acquire data for which there are no customers, and it asks all organizations to measure issues that are not yet known to be relevant to politics. In that unobtainable perfect world, we would have variables (each possible preference question) and cases (each year for analysis). Thus, the latent dimensions underlying the data could be extracted by principal components analysis, an old and robust method.

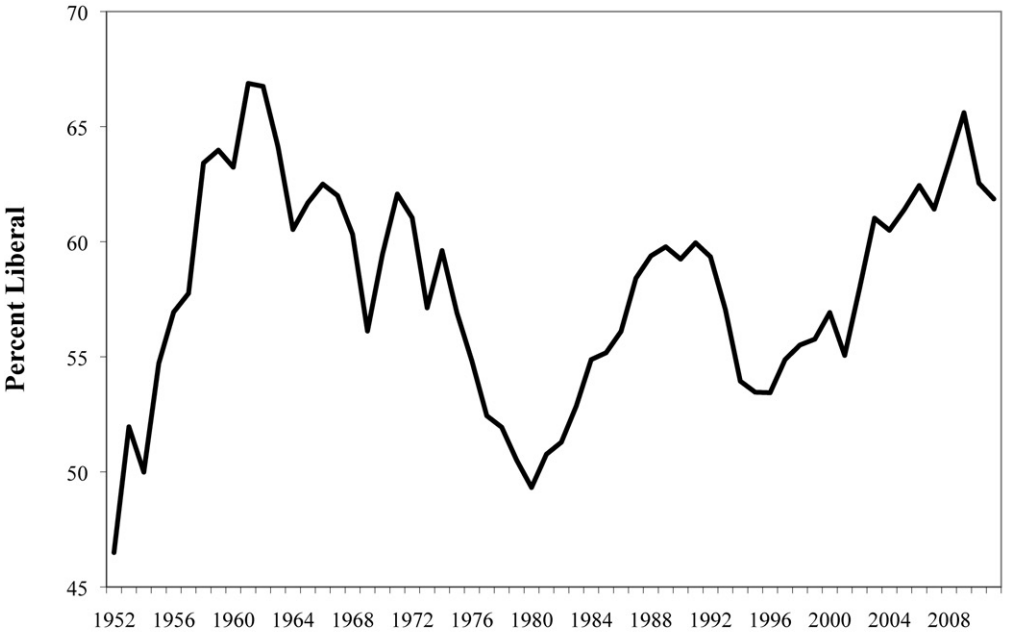
In the real – and very imperfect – world of public opinion research, most opinion queries are posed once and then never again. These surveys are worthless for understanding change over time. A smaller, but nonetheless substantial, set has been posed more than once, over the course of as few as two years to as many as twenty-five (as in the case of the uniquely valuable General Social Survey series). Those queries posed most often are themselves capable of being aggregated (simply by averaging) into a series covering about forty years (but with many cases interpolated). However, critics worry that the content of these queries, mostly about government spending issues, may not be representative of the full left/right discourse.

A useful estimate would span sixty years or so – yielding data rich enough to permit estimation – and would be broadly representative of the controversies that have been important to ideological discourse. That requires an entirely different approach. The dyad ratios algorithm is one such approach.[4] Abandoning the shared variance concept, which is central to principal components analysis but unworkable with the available data, it leverages ratios between dyads of the same issue preference question at multiple points in time to build an alternative estimation strategy that does not require variance estimation.

This estimation method, too detailed to describe here, is strongly analogous to principal components analysis, even though it does not utilize the fundamental mathematics of shared variance estimation. It does all the same things: it solves for latent dimensions, estimates correlations or loadings, estimates shared variance, and produces as many "factor scores" as there are dimensions. And these outcomes and outputs all have similar interpretations.

Figure 1 displays that first dimension of ideology for a sixty-year span. A careful perusal of the figure reveals three features: (1) that estimated mood corresponds loosely to popular expectations of distinctive political eras; (2) that it tends to forecast election outcomes, with liberal moods yielding Democratic wins and conservative moods Republican wins[5]; and (3) that it tends to move in a direction contrary to the distinctive ideology of the party in power.

Figure 1
Public Policy Mood (Liberalism), 1952 – 2011



Source: Figure created by author.

Many observers believe that the American political issue space is two-dimensional. The first dimension entails controversies over the proper scope of government in the domestic sphere, whether it should do more or less, spend more or less, and tax more or less. In the private economy, it involves the controversy between the rights of ownership and management on the one hand versus those of labor on the other. This dimension is often called *economic*, although the label does not capture the full range of issue controversies. On top of the economic dimension are sets of controversies about social and cultural issues, broadly defined, including questions about religion in public life, the use of government to enforce conventional sexual behaviors, and equal rights for women and gays.

The two sorts of issues are clearly different. The former has to do with the extension or retraction of the welfare state and the structure of economic opportunity. The second takes in traditional or nontraditional beliefs about culture and the role of the state in regulating religiously derived beliefs about proper behavior. To say that the two sorts of issues are different, however, does not mean that they are completely unrelated. Both the ideological left and the ideological right in the United States take distinctive positions on *both* issue sets. And standard left and right definitions of both imply that they must have something in common.

Using purely statistical criteria, one can solve for the number of longitudinal dimensions of public opinion. Almost always, the answer is two. That is, more than one dimension is required to account for all of the common variance, and two are sufficient to do so. But the dimensions observed statistically do *not* correspond to the economic and social dimensions commonly postulated. Neither of the statistically derived dimensions taps the two expected dimensions. The first captures economic controversies, but it also includes numerous cultural issues that do not belong. The second is generally a meaningless amalgam of stray and unrelated issues that does not correspond at all to our understanding of social and cultural concerns.

These are general patterns, observed over the years and under a wide variety of estimation assumptions. Table 1 presents the loadings of various topics on the estimated first dimension for 1952 to 2011. The highest loading topic (although not by much) is gun control – not a conventional "economic" issue. The dimension also includes items about the war on drugs, crime, capital punishment, and another gun issue. Most other dimension-defining issue controversies are from the economic/scope-of-government-activity rubric, which defines conventional liberal and conservative positions.

The estimated second dimension is a mishmash of stray issues that appear to have nothing in common with one another (see Table 2). Not a single one of the four strongest loading issues fits a conventional understanding of cultural issues. This analysis would seem to disconfirm the widely shared idea that there are economic and cultural dimensions to American politics.

How can this be? Is the problem that almost everybody who comments on issues in American politics is wrong? Or is something not quite right about estimating common dimensions extracted by statistical criteria? It is indeed the latter. Principal components – and the dyad ratios algorithm that is modeled on it – employ explicitly orthogonal rules. They assign all the variance associated with an estimated underlying dimension to that dimension and then go on to explain what is left after that common variance has been removed from the data.

If one assumes that it is more normal for people to take the same side on both issue dimensions (left on both or right on both), then the solution to the estimation problem is apparent: the two political parties help out by giving relatively clear cues on both dimensions. Yet what is fascinating is the opposite pattern (left on one and right on the other); it is the sort of thing that keeps pundits fully employed. Part of the fascination derives from the fact that such patterns are uncommon. These exceptional cases are interesting precisely because they do not appear often.

Left on both or right on both is the norm. That assumption, which, as I discuss below, is an empirical fact, suggests a solution to dimensional estimation. If the two dimensions are correlated, then they will run afoul of the orthogonal estimation rules. The first estimated dimension will contain the economic issues *and* the positively correlated part of the cultural dimension. In turn, the orthogonal second dimension will not cover the scope of the social/cultural domain because a large part of that issue set will have been removed from the data matrix by assignment to the first dimension. There is no independent second dimension to be found because much of it was already misassigned to the first dimension. Instead, one will find what has repeatedly been seen in longitudinal dimensional analyses – namely, junk. The second dimension will consist of scraps of correlated variance

Table 1
The First Dimension of Mood: Topics and Loadings

Topic	Years	Loading
Gun Control	18	0.93
Education	15	0.92
Fight Drugs	18	0.90
Environment	19	0.85
Spending, Crime	18	0.84
Spending, Environment	18	0.80
Approve Unions	27	0.79
Wealth Equality	20	0.73
Spending, Crime	27	0.68
Help Poor	19	0.68
Spending, Health Care	18	0.68
Help Poor	21	0.67
Minority Aid	15	0.67
Help Blacks	19	0.65
Consumer Protection	14	0.65
Fight Drugs	27	0.64
Spending, Military	29	0.63
Capital Punishment	45	0.62
Environment	21	0.61
Privacy	14	0.60
Help Poor	17	0.60
Health Care	17	0.59
Government Waste	16	0.57
Spending, Health Care	30	0.57
Employment	16	0.57
Spending, Cities	30	0.54
Spending, Cities	31	0.53
Gun Control	21	0.50

The table includes all items with loadings over 0.50 of those available in fourteen or more years. Some 229 different survey series contributed to the estimates. Source: Table created by author.

Table 2
The Second Dimension of Mood: Topics and Loadings

Topic	Years	Loading
Gun Control	21	0.65
Urban Renewal	17	0.63
Health Care	17	0.53
Minority Aid	16	0.50

The table includes all items with loadings over 0.50 of those available in fourteen or more years. Some 229 different survey series contributed to the estimates. Source: Table created by author.

that have the common property of being unrelated to economic issues.

The solution to this problem is first to admit that the two dimensions are correlated – highly correlated, in fact. Thus, although there may be a second independent dimension, it is not the social and cultural dimension of political issues. How, then, can we observe what we think to be true about American politics, that it has two dimensions, but not two *independent* dimensions? The answer is to impose some prior structure on the solution, rather than letting it work independently. That prior structure is the assumption that economic and cultural dimensions both exist and are correlated.

The secret to uncovering a correlated second dimension is to find a second dimension that is not forced to be independent of the first. If nature has joined the two, then attempting to separate them by statistical criteria of independence is unwise. Once the dimensions are defined, the axes of the solution can be rotated in such a way as to maximize their interpretability as economic and cultural. This necessarily implies that the rotation must not enforce orthogonality. Instead, each axis must be rotated separately, without constraining the second to be independent of the first (at 90 degrees).

To provide a more accurate picture of the dimensionality of everyday American politics, it is useful to set aside statistical criteria for an adequate solution in lieu of those driven by theory. In our 2012 book *Ideology in America*, my coauthor Christopher Ellis and I begin with the assumption that there are economic and cultural dimensions to political discourse and that they are related to one another, if imperfectly. To impose our understanding on the data, we consider what "economic" and "cultural" mean in common usage. This allows us to isolate particular issue series that can serve as criteria for our substantive understanding. We use those criteria to force a dimensional solution to fit what we believe we know, rather than let statistical maximization criteria dominate the solution.

How do we obtain criterion variables? We can go a long way just by simple classification of the content of series. A series concerning whether government should do more or less to provide health care, for example, is plainly "economic" in the common popular and scholarly usage. A series about whether or not children in public schools should be required to say prayers is plainly cultural.

But the outcome should not depend too much on such judgments. Thus, we follow

a two-step procedure to select criterion variables. In the first step we sort issues, from their face content, into economic and cultural categories.[6] Second, we perform dimensional analyses within issue sets to find clusters of series that are both of the right type (from their face content) and are strongly correlated with the obtained latent dimension in each domain. We select as criterion series those that (1) are available for many years, (2) have the correct face content, and (3) are tightly intercorrelated with other issues from the same set.

With criterion variables in hand, we proceed to a two-dimensional solution, defined, as above, by statistical criteria. This solution is orthogonal, meaning that the two obtained dimensions are perfectly independent. And the orthogonal second dimension is, as always, uninterpretable. Next, we separately rotate the reference axes to maximize fit with the criterion variables. This step gives us an interpretation that should align with our understanding about the two dimensions and provide information about the fact of their intercorrelation.

Figure 2 shows the two-dimensional result. To position the issues in space, the figure uses the obtained loadings for ninety-six issue series that are available for ten or more years. Open circles represent issues from the economic domain; solid circles represent those from the cultural domain. There are two notable facts about the data. One is that economic and social items are very much intermixed, not cleanly separated. The second is that the space is unevenly filled by data points. Most of the data points cluster on the right side of the graph.

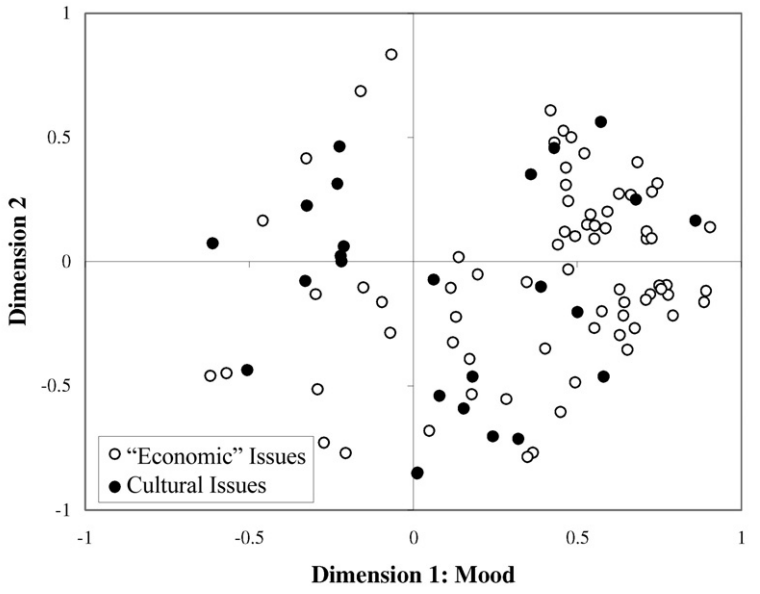
These patterns illustrate why separation by statistical criteria does not work well. Ultimately, the two issue sets are closely related to one another. Imposing the statistical criterion of independence is an attempt to separate what nature – that is, American political culture – has joined. The figure shows that a second *independent* dimension is not supported by the data.

To make sense of this conundrum – and to make it square with what we think we know about American political discourse – we now independently rotate the two axes. Here, *independently* implies that the constraint of orthogonality has been removed, allowing the axes to be mutually correlated to the degree that is necessary to maximize their alignment with criterion variables. As Figure 3 shows, moving the *x* (economic) axis a mere 5 degrees (clockwise) maximizes its fit with the economic criterion variables.[7] This result is expected because the first dimension of the unrotated solution should be closely related to the largest chunk of systematic variance.

When we free up the second dimension and let it rotate to the point where it best fits the cultural issues set, we learn something important. The second dimension is aligned, by definition, with the first at 90 degrees. When it is free to rotate, it moves 58 degrees in a clockwise direction to align at 32 degrees relative to the original *x*-axis. That leaves the two dimensions, now with meaningful economic and cultural interpretations, strongly associated with one another. The connection between the statistical concept of correlation and the geometry of angles is given by $r = \cos(\theta)$, where θ is the angle of separation of the two axes (37 degrees) expressed in radians (0.646), giving a result of $r = 0.799$.[8]

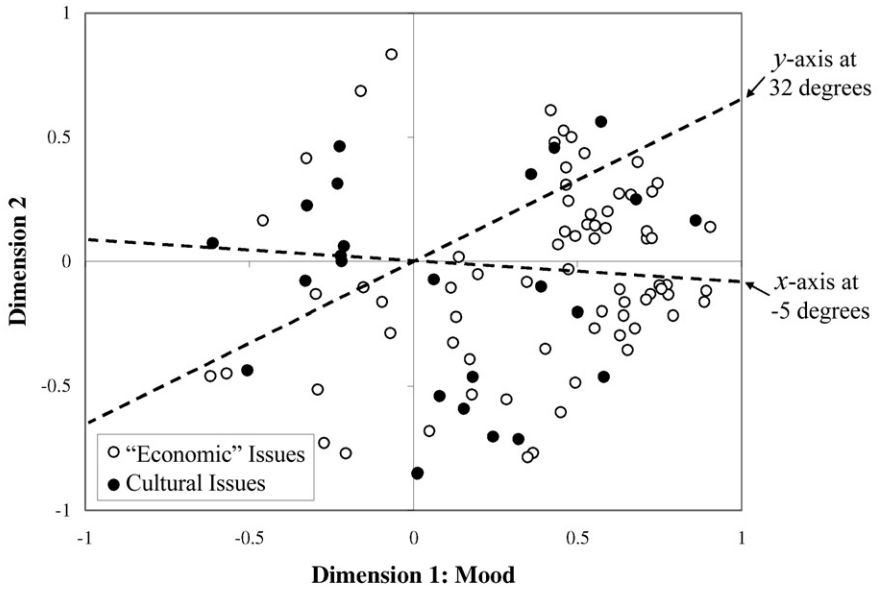
The rotation result confirms what the eye can see in Figures 2 and 3. While we can think of economic and cultural domains as clearly separable (and we see that they are, at least to some extent), they are far from completely distinct in the view of the American electorate. It remains meaningful to think that differ-

Figure 2
Locating Issue Series in Two-Dimensional Space



Source: Figure created by author.

Figure 3
Locating Issue Series in Two-Dimensional Space: Rotated



Source: Figure created by author.

ent considerations might move different sorts of voters, and that different citizens will arrange preferences on these two dimensions in different ways. But the independence of the two domains is so small that the separable effects are not likely to be large.

We conclude that the two-dimensional idea is correct for our longitudinal understanding. But the two dimensions are correlated, not independent. Now I take up the question, what moves mood? What accounts for a nation that is sometimes relatively liberal and sometimes relatively conservative?

To explain the highs and lows of preferences for more or less government, an immediate starting point is Christopher Wlezien's theory of thermostatic politics.[9] In Wlezien's conception, citizens determine their own preferences, at least in part, relative to what government is doing. Electorates, or at least portions of them, judge when governments have gone too far. If electorates demand more of something (for example, health care reform) and government delivers more than was demanded (or even exactly what was demanded), then many citizens who demanded "more" government action will come to prefer "less."[10] Given that each party has a noncentrist policy tendency, with Democrats to the left and Republicans to the right, the public tends to act in reverse of the policies associated with each. When Democrats (or Republicans) are in control, the public gets more liberalism (or conservatism) than it wants and begins to demand less. The electorate is still operationally liberal on average, but the magnitude of that liberalism depends in part on what government is doing.

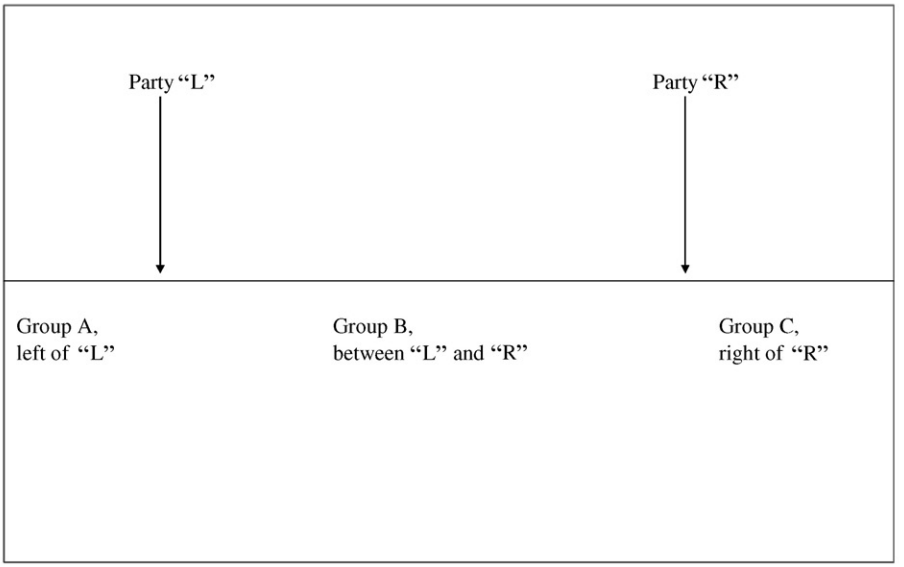
In Wlezien's view, public opinion is mainly relative: a matter of "more" or "less" rather than absolutes. While I believe that public preferences are a bit more complicated than this – that an electorate, for example, that generally calls for more government action rather than less is, on balance, operationally liberal – public preferences do have a strong relativistic component. Survey questions that ask whether government should "do more" or "do less" than it is currently doing illustrate this relativistic conception explicitly.

Public policy mood moves in the direction opposite to control of the White House, and does so quite systematically. It tends to reach high points in either the liberal or conservative directions in the years in which out parties regain control. And then it moves steadily away from the winning and controlling party. As shown in Figure 1, highs for conservatives (lows in the graph) occur in the presidential election years 1952 (Eisenhower), 1980 (Reagan), and 2000 (George W. Bush); and highs for liberals occur in 1960 (Kennedy), 1964 (Johnson), 1992 (Clinton), and 2008 (Obama). After those highs, opinion moves contrary to the party in power.

To understand this process, scholars have found it useful to disaggregate.[11] Figure 4 positions the two political parties and three groups of voters in left/right unidimensional space. The figure identifies a party of the left on the left side, a party of the right on the right side, and three groups of voters. Group A is left of Party "L"; Group B has preferences between the two parties; and Group C is to the right of Party "R."

The model makes the following assumptions about group dynamics: Group A prefers more leftist policies than it ever gets from either party. Therefore, it is never satisfied and will continuously advocate more leftist policies. Group C is the conservative counterpart; preferring more rightist policies than it ever gets from either party, it will continuously advocate more rightist policies. Group B, between

Figure 4
A Simple Conception of Party and Voter Spaces in Left and Right



Source: Figure created by author.

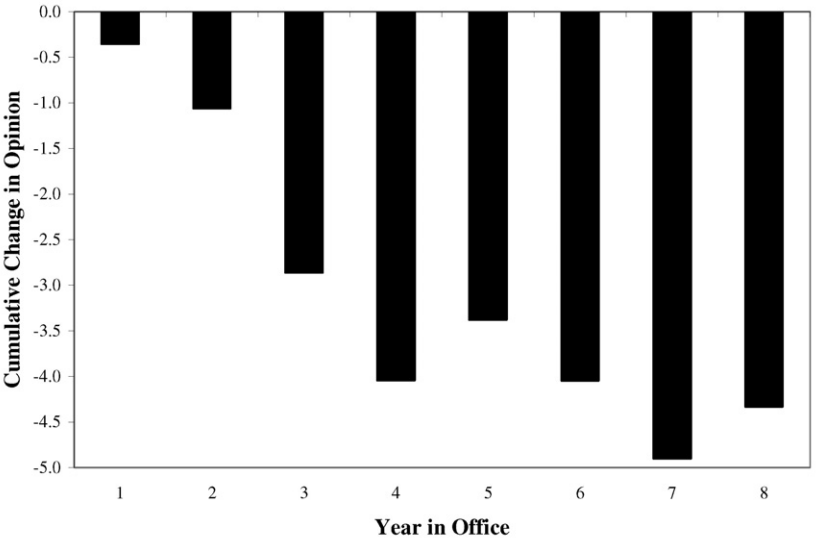
the two parties, provides all the dynamics of the thermostat. The typical policies of L are more leftist than it prefers. It will therefore advocate rightist adjustments when L is in power. When R is in power, by contrast, it will always advocate leftist adjustments to R's conservative policies.

The electorate as a whole is a mix of the three groups. But because only Group B changes in response to party control, it forms the longitudinal signal for the entire electorate. Thus, the whole electorate acts, *on average*, as if it were entirely composed of Group B.[12] What is crucial in this simple account is that even if no voter ever changes preferences (in an absolute sense), relative changes of opinion will regularly follow changes in party control. Thus, a thermostatic response is always to be expected.[13]

What is the evidence for the thermostatic response? The first item of interest is year-to-year differences in estimated mood, which reveal the size and direction of movement in opinion. That opinion must then be reflected so that it is always expressed in the direction of the current president, rather than measuring liberalism as Figure 1 does. The expected outcome is movement away from the position of the president. Thus, if change in opinion is scored to account for the direction of the president, the effect should, on average, be negative.

The creation of a simple variable, scored 1 for Democrats in office or -1 for Republicans in office, controls for the expected direction. A regression of first differences in mood on the party control dummy produces a coefficient of -0.538, which is statistically significant (at $p < 0.05$).[14] This means that for each year in office, a president can expect to see public opinion move 0.54 points in the wrong direction. Were it only a single-year effect, that would not be very strong. But when the typical span of party control of the White

Figure 5
Cumulative Loss of Support for the President's Ideological Position: An Average Across Presidents Eisenhower to Bush (II)



Source: Figure created by author.

House is eight years, eight times that effect is large enough to move opinion most of the way in its practical range. Thus, a president elected in a wave of liberalism can expect to leave office in eight years with a more conservative than average mood; and, equally, a president elected by conservatism can expect to leave liberal public opinion as his or her legacy of time in office.

Figure 5 captures this effect by averaging the actual first differences, reflected in the appropriate direction by party control. A simple average of eight-year effects, the graph averages over the entire fifty-eight-year experience, excepting only the last four years of the Reagan-Bush (I) twelve-year span.

My conclusion is simple: public opinion moves because of basic thermostatic response. Much political commentary, failing to take this fact into account, ends up looking to mystical and exotic sources to explain the commonplace. And much of that commentary sees the changes of the moment as harbingers of a future in which the political landscape will be fundamentally different than it currently is. But the changes of the moment will be reversed as quickly as they came, as the public reacts against the ideological direction of the party in power.

ENDNOTES

[1] Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper, 1957).

[2] Some also add a second social or cultural dimension to the story. I deal with that complication below.

[3] Christopher R. Ellis and James A. Stimson, *Ideology in America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

[4] James A. Stimson, *Public Opinion in America: Moods, Cycles, and Swings* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1991).

[5] See Robert Erikson's essay in this volume for a discussion of mood as a predictor of political outcomes.

[6] The economic issues category primarily includes concerns over size and scope of government, particularly with regard to taxing, spending, and redistribution. Again, though, this dimension also includes other long-standing controversies in American politics, particularly those related to race. The cultural domain is narrower and includes attitudes toward traditional behavioral norms, religion, immigration, homosexuality, and abortion choice.

[7] The solution criterion is maximum average correlation with the set.

[8] This correlation of dimensions is large in part because it is pure, free from the stochastic errors that usually attenuate observed correlations.

[9] Christopher Wlezien, "The Public as Thermostat: Dynamics of Preferences for Spending," *American Journal of Political Science* 39 (4) (1995): 981–1000.

[10] This model of opinion-policy feedback has been shown to be fairly general and pervasive, applying across levels of government (Martin Johnson, Paul Brace, and Kevin Arceneaux, "Public Opinion and Dynamic Representation in the American States: The Case of Environmental Attitudes," *Social Science Quarterly* 86 [1] [2005]: 87–108); types of citizens (Christopher R. Ellis, Joseph Daniel Ura, and Jenna Ashley-Robinson, "The Dynamic Consequences of Nonvoting in American National Elections," *Political Research Quarterly* 59 [2] [2006]: 2–27; Paul M. Kellstedt, David A.M. Peterson, and Mark D. Ramirez, "The Macro Politics of a Gender Gap," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 74 [3] [2010]: 477–498); policy areas (Stuart Soroka and Christopher Wlezien, *Degrees of Democracy* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010]); and Western democracies (Will Jennings, "The Public Thermostat, Political Responsiveness and Error-Correction: Border Control and Asylum in Britain, 1994–2007," *British Journal of Political Science* 39 [4] [2009]: 847–870; Stuart Soroka and Christopher Wlezien, "Opinion Representation and Policy Feedback: Canada in Comparative Perspective," *Canadian Journal of Political Science/Revue canadienne de science politique* 37 [3] [2004]: 531–559; John Bartle, Sebastian Dellepiani, and James A. Stimson, "The Moving Centre: Policy Preferences in Britain, 1950–2005," *British Journal of Political Science* 41 [2010]: 259–285; James A. Stimson, Vincent Tiberj, and Cyrille Thiébaut, "The Evolution of Policy Attitudes in France," *European Union Politics* 13 [2] [2012]: 293–316).

[11] Alberto Alesina and Howard Rosenthal, *Partisan Politics, Divided Government, and the Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

[12] This model, like Wlezien's, does not need to make the assumption that the public has an exact preferred level of policy in mind, or that it knows exactly what the federal government is doing or how much it is spending in various issue domains. Rather, it simply assumes that some citizens are broadly cognizant of the ideological direction in which federal policy is moving and has the capacity to react accordingly. For a more in-depth discussion of this point, see Soroka and Wlezien, *Degrees of Democracy*, chapter 1.

[13] To make this logic even tighter, I could add an assumption that the parties actually enact part of their ideological program. Otherwise voters would have nothing to react to. But the same theoretical result emerges by merely assuming that voters *think* that Democrats are liberal and that Republicans are conservative.

[14] The same basic result emerges, with or without a constant in the model.

Public Opinion at the Macro Level

Robert S. Erikson

Abstract: My book "The Macro Polity," coauthored with Michael B. MacKuen and James A. Stimson and published in 2002, depicts the dynamics of public opinion and electoral politics in the United States at the macro level; the analysis is based on micro-level foundations of micro-level political behavior. This essay presents the book's main arguments, in some instances extending the analysis beyond its original 1956 – 1996 time frame to incorporate data from the George W. Bush administration. The central thesis is that there is more rationality and predictability to American politics when viewed in the aggregate than one might infer from considering only the limited political awareness of the average citizen.

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From the earliest academic studies of individual voters, researchers have emphasized the shallowness of the average voter's level of political attention, information, and sophistication. One is inclined to question the very health of a democracy when government policies are traced to the collective decisions of an ignorant, inattentive electorate. But if one shifts the focus of analysis from the individual voter (the micro level) to the collective views of the aggregate public and its impact on elections and policy (the macro level), the results are considerably different. Macro-level analyses often discover a greater degree of political intelligence in public opinion at large than one would expect given the positions taken by individual citizens with the typical level of political involvement.[1]

There are at least three reasons why macro-level analysis shows a greater political intelligence than we might anticipate from our understanding of individual voters. First, there is the familiar argument that the wisdom of the crowd can greatly exceed that of the individuals it comprises.[2] As we have known since the days of the Marquis de Condorcet and Sir Francis Galton, the mean estimate by a group of observers can show an uncanny accuracy when compared to the erratic estimates by individual

members of the group. The greater the number of members in the group, the more the errors of perception cancel themselves out – at least if the observers are responding to an unbiased signal.

Second, when the electorate changes in the aggregate, it is typically the informed voters who shift. Even when "the news" would seem to cause attitudes to shift, some individuals are not paying attention. Without the information necessary to change their outlook, they remain inert, while those who are informed change. In this way, shifts in public views tend to reflect the perceptions of the informed electorate.

Third, shifts that seem small when looking at survey data loom large in the aggregate. This is particularly true in electoral politics, where in a closely divided electorate, a few percentage points can change who governs. Consider the "wave election" of 2010, when Republicans took back control of the House of Representatives. The shift of the national partisan vote was a mere 8 percentage points from the previous election in 2008, when Democrats appeared to be safely in control. A theoretical shift of only one voter in twelve was more than enough to create a major shift in party control of the House.

In 2002, Michael MacKuen, James Stimson, and I published a study of public opinion at the macro level titled *The Macro Polity*.[3] The book examines the origins of public opinion and its influence in a variety of contexts. The unit of analysis throughout is the nation at the macro level as it moves through time. The analysis is dynamic, considering changes in aggregate attitudes and preferences over time and their ultimate impact on elections and policy.

The Macro Polity explores the ways in which perceptions of the economy are formed and how they impact the president's popularity, policy choices, and election outcomes. We examine individuals' party identifications as Democrat or Republican; whereas scholars previously treated this partisan division as a constant rather than as a variable, we show that change in the national division of Democrats and Republicans (what we call *macropartisanship*) not only affects election outcomes but is also governed by the public's cumulative response to political and economic issues.

The Macro Polity also demonstrates, using Stimson's measure of the public's "mood," that the demand for liberal or conservative policies varies over time in predictable ways and affects both elections and the policies that result. In general, we find that when measured as the public's collective position on a broad ideological dimension of liberalism-conservatism, the movement is rational and in turn governs the ideological tone of government policy. The public may not get everything it wants, and it can take a frustrating length of time for the public's goals to be achieved. But public opinion does have a major impact on national policy.

The time frame for *The Macro Polity* is 1952 through 1996; I write the present essay from the perspective of 2012. What follows is partly a capsule presentation of *The Macro Polity*'s central arguments. In some instances, the analysis is augmented to incorporate data from the years of Bill Clinton's second term and the presidency of George W. Bush.

Starting in the late 1930s and interrupted only by World War II, Gallup and other organizations have polled the public on the following question or some variant of it: "Do you approve or disapprove of how President _____ is doing his job?" The president's approval level is one of the most closely watched political indicators. A president perceived as popular with the public has an easier time governing and

persuading others. According to common belief, a president needs an approval rating of at least 50 percent in order to win reelection.

So what drives the numbers? Since at least political scientist John Mueller's pioneering study of the subject,[4] we have known a great deal about what makes the president's popularity rise and fall. Presidents start with a honeymoon of exceptional popularity, which inevitably fades with time. Their approval levels rise following "rally events" (9/11 being the prime example) and deflate following scandals (Watergate being the prime example here). The variable that is followed most closely as an augur for the president's popularity, however, is the state of the economy.

There is no debate about whether the economy matters. But a hotly contested topic among political scientists is the sophistication level of this economy-based response. We can ask: what kinds of information about the economy affect people's judgment of the president? As a starting point, we can look to what research tells us is the typical voter's abysmally limited information about the economy.[5] We might assume that the economy that voters see is only the economic circumstances within their immediate physical environment rather than economic conditions at large. We might think voters are myopic, responding only to their version of the economy as it happens and ignoring any news about future economic prospects. When times are bad, this version of the economic voter reacts emotionally, with blind anger directed at elected authorities. In *The Macro Polity*, we call this the *peasant model*: voters respond to their narrow environment, with emotion rather than thinking, looking backward rather than forward in time.

But there is another interpretation. The model that more closely fits the data looks at voters as "bankers." That is, individuals learn information about the nation's probable economic future and respond accordingly. Their shifting attitudes toward the president are based not on personal circumstances or even their views of the current economy, but rather on the economic outlook for the future. They incorporate information about the economy from the recent past into their judgment only to the extent that it is relevant for predicting the future economy.

How can this be, given the electorate's impoverished information levels about the economy and politics? The economic reactions that matter in the aggregate are those of voters who are most attentive to economic news. And people are capable of absorbing general news about the economy at no cost, simply by going about their daily lives. While individual perceptions err, the average perception of the prospective economy reflects expert forecasts (which, of course, can be wrong). Just as one does not need to read meteorological reports in order to know whether to carry an umbrella, people do not need to conduct costly information searches to sense whether the economy is about to get better or worse.

The Macro Polity argues that when the electorate evaluates the president based on judgments about the economy, it does so as a nation of bankers rather than peasants. The evidence is supplied by the University of Michigan's quarterly Survey of Consumers, which has measured "consumer sentiment" about the economy since the 1950s. The surveys include questions on whether the national economy and the respondent's family income have been improving or worsening over the past year and on whether the economy and the respondent's family income will improve or worsen over the next year. Aggregate answers to each of these questions predict the president's approval level

somewhat; but the best predictor is the question that asks whether the economy will be "good" or "bad" (rather than "better" or "worse") in the coming year. This variable dominates the others when they are included together in a properly specified multivariate equation predicting the president's approval level.

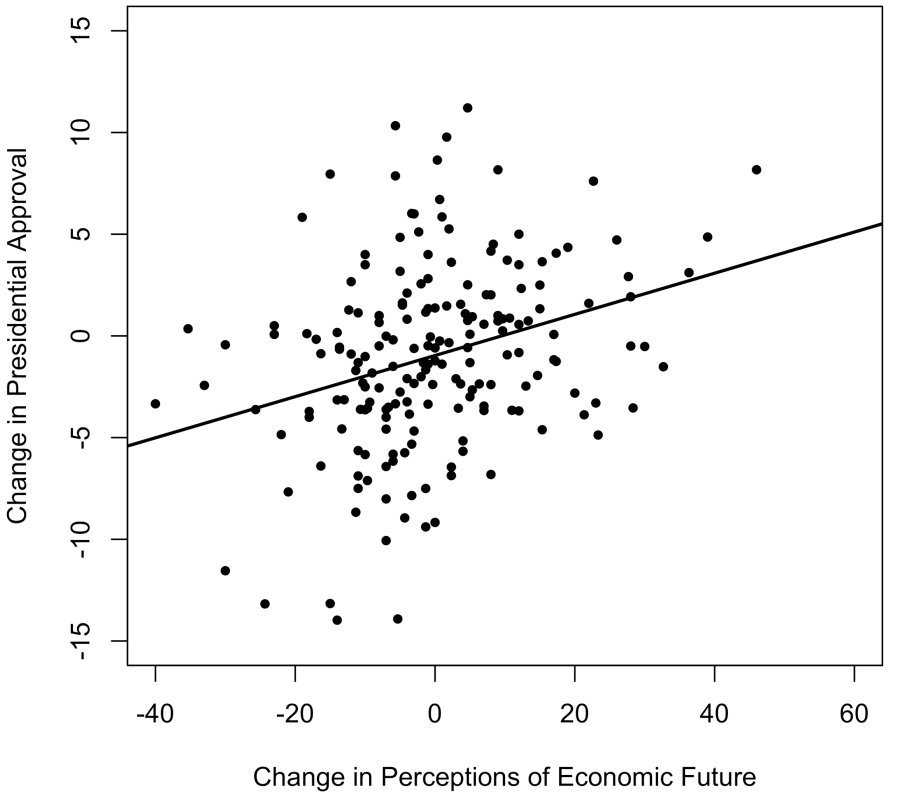
Figure 1 illustrates the impact of economic expectations on presidential approval. Here, the challenge is to show a positive relationship between quarterly *change* in economic expectation (on the *x*-axis) and quarterly *change* in approval (on the *y*-axis). Clearly, a positive relationship exists. The observed relationship is modest, owing to the fact that the test is handicapped because both measures of change (expectations and approval) are estimated from (separate) surveys, each of which is subject to an unavoidable sampling error.

In short, if you want to predict future changes in the president's approval rating, consult what the electorate collectively says *will* happen, not what it says happened in the recent past. Moreover, the electorate's collective expectations about the future can themselves be predicted from plausible indicators. Whereas aggregate perceptions of the recent (past) economy are correlated appropriately with lagging indicators of the economy, changes in perceptions of the economic future are best predicted from variables such as measures of what is in the "news" and the index of leading economic indicators.[6] The electorate's collective evaluation of future economic change does incorporate aggregate perceptions of economic change over the past year, but only to the extent that doing so appears rational.[7] Most impressive, the correlation between the electorate's expectation for the economy in the next year correlates at +0.42 with the next year's actual growth in per-capita income. While far from perfect, this correlation is surprisingly close to the +0.56 correlation between perceptions of the past year's economy and actual per-capita income growth experienced over the past year. In terms of explained variance (correlation squared), this is a ratio of 2 to 1. Could it be that, collectively, people see the economic past only twice as accurately as they foresee the economic future?

When electoral analysts try to explain voting decisions by individual voters, their primary model assumes that people vote based on their long-standing party identification, their ideological leanings, and their perceptions of the candidates' relative quality. Of these three independent variables, the last is the one that most clearly changes from one election to another, in effect deciding the outcome. Thus, the difference in outcome from one election to the next is explained in terms of candidate quality or (in the case of incumbent presidents) performance in office. But what about aggregate-level ideology (or policy preferences) and partisanship? Did these variables change much over time? And to the extent that they changed, did they matter for elections? According to *The Macro Polity*, the answer to both these questions is yes.

Until at least the 1980s, public opinion researchers generally treated partisanship and ideology at the macro level as constants rather than variables. There was ample reason for them to do so. When measured sophisticatedly in terms of latent attitude (as opposed to a literal reading of the survey response), party identification rarely changes for individual respondents.[8] The same is true for policy preferences on specific issues. From the 1950s to the early 1980s, it was easy to observe the national division of party identification into Democrats, Republicans, and Independents and "see" a constant. Similarly, changes in national opinion on specific issues rarely looked mean-

Figure 1
Quarterly Change in Presidential Approval by Quarterly Change in Perceptions of the Economic Future, 1952 – 2008



Certain potential cases are omitted: namely, those at the beginning of presidencies and outlier pairs of quarters surrounding the first Gulf War and 9/11. The scale of the *x*-axis is based on a measure in which zero is equal to perfect pessimism (all say the economy will be bad) to 200 (all say the economy will be good). The graph suggests that the maximum quarterly change of about 80 points would generate about 8 points in approval. This finding is similar to results with more complex multivariate analysis. Source: Figure created by author. All subsequent figures are updated versions of figures that first appeared in Robert S. Erikson, Michael B. MacKuen, and James A. Stimson, *The Macro Polity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

ingful when measured over the short term. What little change was observed could be rationalized as due to survey sampling error. This emphasis on constancy fit nicely with orthodox theory at the time. Party identification was viewed as the voter's anchoring political belief. People were far less wed to their personal positions on policy issues, but their lack of attention to these issues was reason to believe that aggregate opinion would be slow to change with events.

As described in *The Macro Polity*, macro-level partisanship and ideology (left/right policy preferences) change over time and do so in meaningful ways. Below, I first discuss the *Macro Polity* team's aggregate measure of party identification, which we

call *macropartisanship*. Then I turn to the nation's aggregate ideological leanings, for which we now have a standard measure thanks to the pioneering research of my collaborator James Stimson.

Macropartisanship. Our *Macro Polity* team has measured macropartisanship as the proportion of self-declared partisans who call themselves Democrats rather than Republicans. We measure this variable on a quarterly basis, using Gallup polls going back as far as 1952 and, now, forward to as recently as 2011. Figure 2 shows the time series of macropartisanship. The first notable feature is that within the electorate, Democrats usually outnumber Republicans. The second is that the time series is dynamic, changing over time. Each party has its high and low points in terms of public allegiance. The long-term trend shows an electorate that today is less Democratic than the electorate of the 1960s and 1970s.

When we first demonstrated that macropartisanship moves as it does, the result was somewhat controversial.[9] The central question is, how do we reconcile this shift in partisanship with micro-level evidence that people rarely change their party identifications? While complicated in its details, the answer is simple: the small changes seen in over-time panel surveys of party identification are equivalent to the changes we observe. That is, what looks small at the micro level can look large at the macro level.

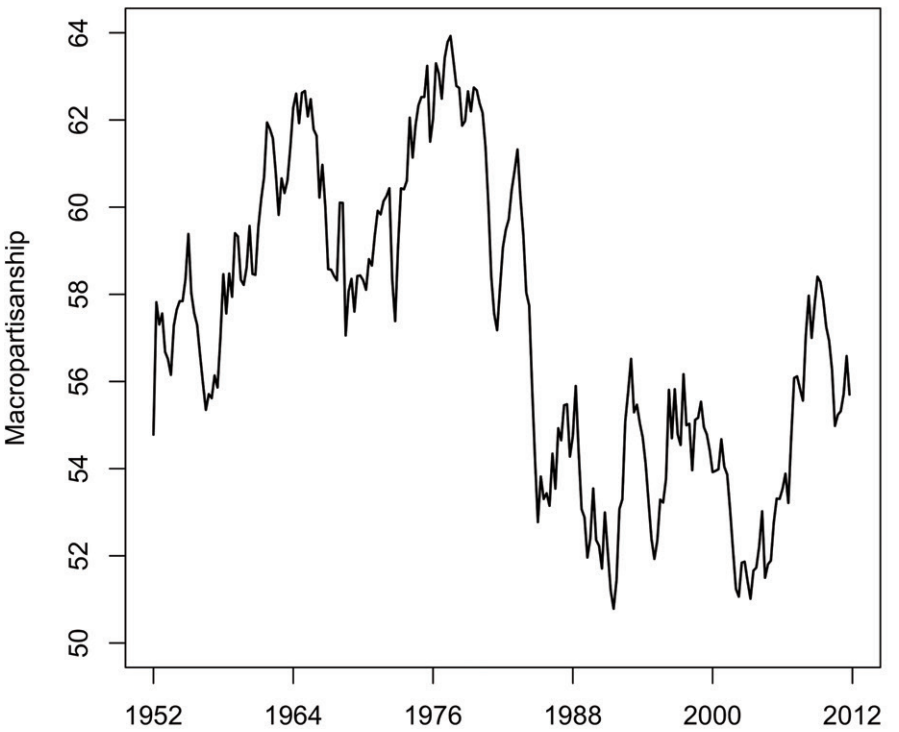
Perhaps the most interesting aspect of macropartisanship is that its change can largely be accounted for as the sum of small increments of change resulting from the economic and political environment. The same political and economic shocks that affect presidential approval also impact macropartisanship, with good news helping the presidential party's standing and bad times hurting it.

There is, however, one crucial difference between the time series for presidents' approval levels and macropartisanship. The impact that events have on approval is transient, so that a president's approval at one time has virtually no predictive power even two years later. Statistically, presidential approval is a *stationary* series, whereby effects decay over time. In contrast, the impact of the same events on macropartisanship, though smaller in the short term, are long lasting. The main component of macropartisanship behaves, statistically, as a *unit-root* series, whereby effects are permanent. The implication is that at any point in time, the electorate's collective party identification is a sum of small inputs from the past: the present quarter's reading is a sum of inputs that includes the Great Depression, Watergate, Ronald Reagan's political success, and two Gulf wars – plus all the economic and political factors in between.

This unit-root process means that macropartisanship is a random walk; as it moves, one cannot forecast the direction of change from the current value. One cannot assume, for example, that because Democrats are less dominant than was once the norm that they will return to their former level of numerical supremacy. Rather, because one can know only the current level of Democratic party support, the next shift is as likely to go up as down.

The permanence of partisan inputs can be seen in the distinct macropartisanship of different political generations, particularly in the contrast between the pre-Depression generation (coming of political age before 1932) and the post-Depression generation (coming of political age between 1932 and World War II). As these two generations moved through the later parts of their life cycles, they experienced the same political events – except that only the older generation lived through the pre-Depression period, when the inputs were more favorable to the Republican party.

Figure 2
Quarterly Macropartisanship Over Time, 1952 – 2011



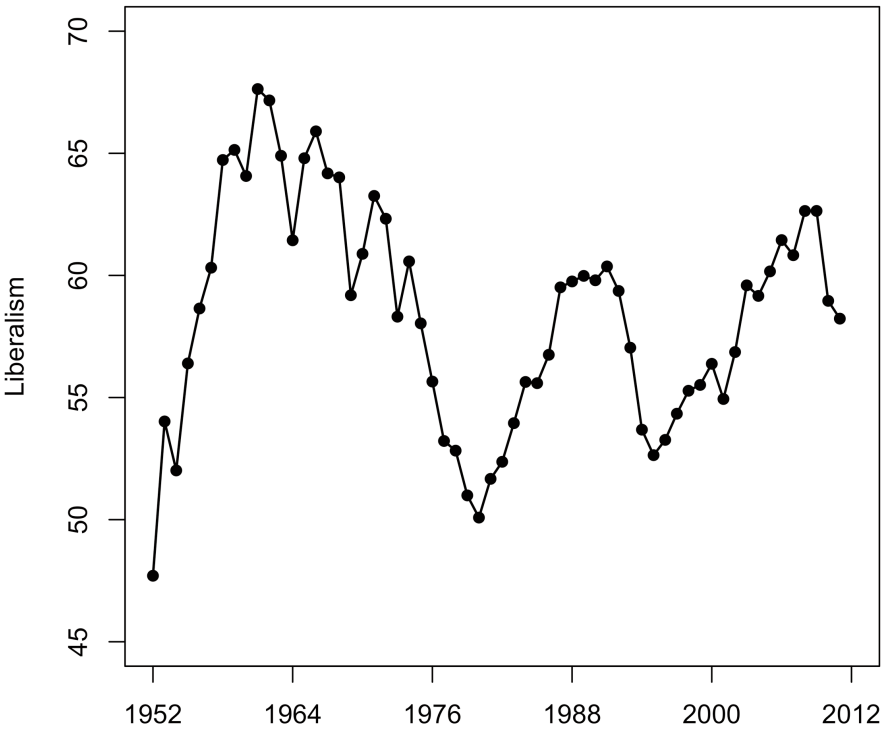
The updated series shown here is not restricted to Gallup readings. *The Macro Polity* imposed a correction for telephone versus in-person surveys that is not incorporated here. Source: Figure created by author.

As the two groups approached old age in the latter part of the twentieth century, the gap in their partisanship never varied; to the end, the pre-Depression generation was more Republican than the post-Depression generation. In terms of their partisanship, the pre-Depression generation never forgot the effects of the better economic times prior to the Depression.

Mood. Stimson introduced political science to his concept of the electorate's policy *mood*: that is, the summary measure of the electorate's position on the liberal/conservative ideological continuum.[10] This index, a weighted composite of virtually all available polls on domestic policy issues, gauges the liberalism/conservatism of public policy preferences in the United States, starting in the year 1952. Because mood is item adjusted, it is a composite measure of ideological change as determined by a weighted average of change on specific policy questions.

Figure 3 shows the annual division of the electorate's ideological mood from 1952 through 2011. As with macropartisanship, there is considerable movement. One trend is that, except for Richard Nixon's presidency, mood tends to move against the ideological bent of the sitting

Figure 3
Annual Mood (Public Opinion Liberalism) Over Time, 1952 – 2011



Source: Figure created by author.

president. For instance, during the eight years of the Reagan presidency, mood became more liberal; during the eight years of the Clinton presidency, mood turned more conservative. The reason for this pattern is simple. Presidents tend to get elected when mood is favorable to their party. As the president successfully promotes and passes his ideological agenda, the demand for that agenda decreases.

Unlike macropartisanship, Stimson's concept of mood behaves as a stationary series. That is, it tends to oscillate around its mean. We can speculate that when mood is at its historical average, the median voter is content with the ideological direction of policy, wanting to move neither left nor right.

Macropartisanship and Mood Compared. In today's world of ideologically contentious politics, individual Americans tend to polarize as either liberal Democrats or conservative Republicans. We might therefore expect aggregate measures of partisanship and ideology to correspond somewhat over time. But this is decidedly not the case. On average, the two time series are virtually uncorrelated. Close to an election, in fact, the correlation is slightly negative. It is rare for the two measures to align as highly Democratic and liberal or highly conservative and

Republican. (A rare period of alignment occurred around 1964, when the electorate chose Democrat Lyndon Johnson as its president in a landslide and he went on to enact the historic, and liberal, Great Society legislation.) The general lack of alignment can be traced to the different factors that drive each series. Macropartisanship is driven by performance; a president gains when times are good. Mood is driven by policy, favoring the out party as the demand for the president's legislation wanes.

The typical approach to predicting elections is to consult the state of the economy. The more positive the economic outlook, the more likely the president's party will be to win the presidential election. But economic conditions can explain only about half the variance of the vote, leaving the bottle both half empty and half full. Where does voters' partisanship and relative ideological proximity to the candidates fit in the equation? *The Macro Polity* presents an equation that can explain more of the variance of the vote than the economy can on its own. This equation is not a prediction model, however, because the key variables can be measured only after the election has transpired.

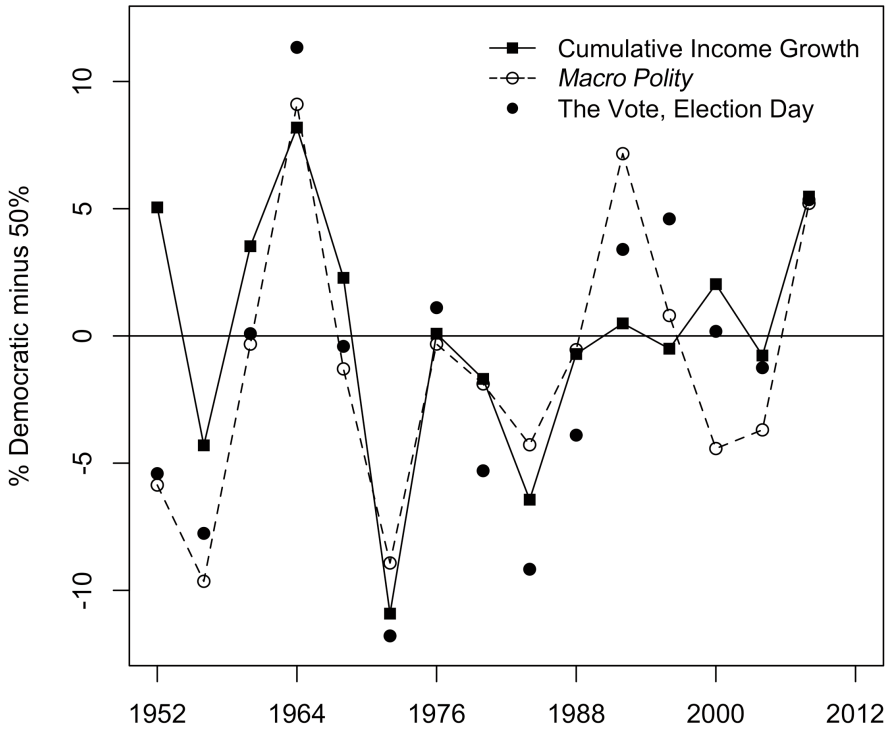
There are three variables in the *Macro Polity* equation for predicting presidential elections. Two are our familiar measures, macropartisanship and ideological mood. The third is a measure of candidate ideological positions, which is used to determine the relative ideological proximity of the median (or mean) voter and each candidate. We calculate candidate positions indirectly via the ideological placement of party platforms, as measured through the years by political scientist Ian Budge and his colleagues.[11] Budge and his team locate each party's platform on a scale representing the proportion of liberal positions minus conservative positions it contains.

The expectation, of course, is that the closer the candidate is to the median voter on the ideological scale, the greater the election chances.[12] Given that the Democratic platform is always to the left of the Republican platform, the expectation translates so that the more liberal the electorate, the more electoral support there is for the Democratic candidate; while the more liberal the mean of the two party platforms, the more electoral support there is for the Republican candidate.

For the period of the *Macro Polity* analysis (1952 – 1996), these three variables – macropartisanship, mood, and mean platform liberalism – explained a whopping 95 percent of the variance in the vote. A more recent update, extending through 2008, lowers the power of that prediction to a still-impressive 70 percent. All three variables are statistically significant. The more Democratic and liberal the electorate and the more conservative the two parties, the greater the Democratic vote will be. With these variables in the prediction equation, the degree of economic growth adds no further statistical information.

If this model is accurate, what happened to the economy? In effect, our model subsumes the economy. This does not mean that the economy is irrelevant or that the economy/vote correlation is spurious in any way. Rather, our model reveals that the economic effect must be largely indirect. The economy affects macropartisanship in that good times reflect well on both the presidential party and its ideological leanings. Speculatively, the most appropriate individual-level explanation for how the state of the economy influences voters may be that it causes some small number of voters to shift their partisanship and/or their ideological leanings. This is a very different interpretation than one that assumes voters decide based on their evaluation of the current economy independent of core partisan or ideological beliefs.

Figure 4
Predicting the Election-Day Vote: Two Regression Models, 1952 – 2008



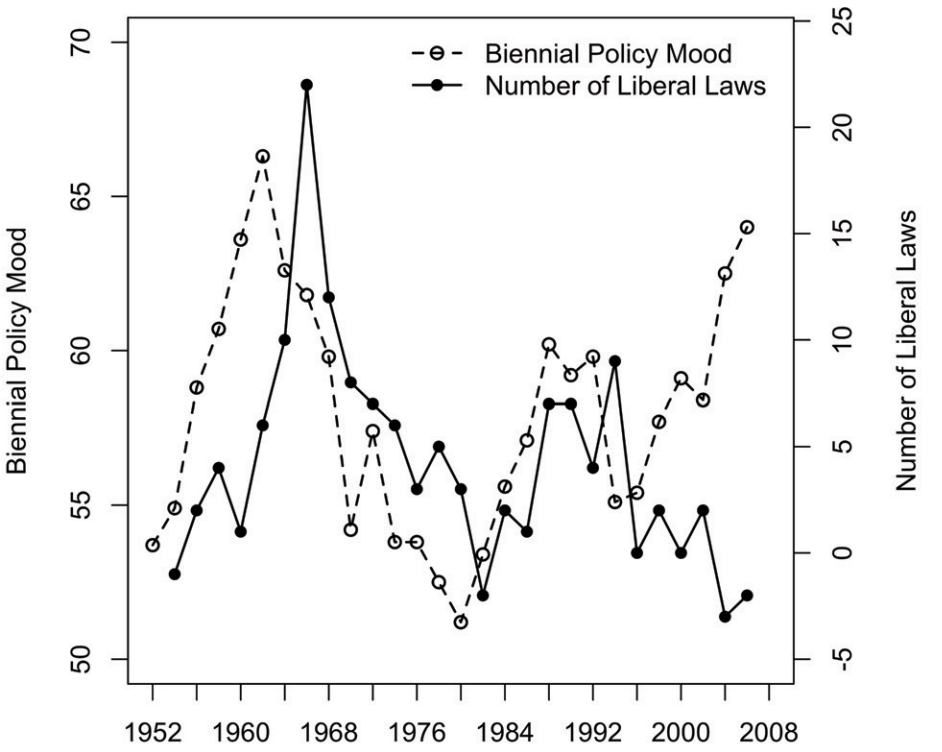
The economic model is based on cumulative income growth alone. The political model is based on macropartisanship, policy mood, and platform ideology. Source: Figure created by author. The economic model is based on the model from Douglas A. Hibbs, Jr., *The American Political Economy: Macroeconomics and Electoral Politics* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987).

Figure 4 shows actual presidential election outcomes (black dots) from 1952 to 2008 as compared with two regression models predicting the votes. Election outcomes are measured as the Democratic candidate's share of the two-party vote. One set of predictions is based on the economy (the Douglas Hibbs measure[13]), the other on the *Macro Polity* three-variable model. Both the economic model and the *Macro Polity* model perform well, with the *Macro Polity* model offering the best predictions.

To a lesser extent, it is possible to predict congressional elections from the same set of variables, especially in presidential election years. Significantly, when appropriate controls are imposed in the statistical analysis, public opinion in the form of the electorate's ideological mood matters at election time. This fact should, in turn, have policy consequences, which I discuss below.

In this section, I summarize the *Macro Polity* findings with regard to the connection between public opinion (mood) and national policy. We can think of *policy* as an accumulation of laws over the years. Here, I focus on *laws* as the change in pol-

Figure 5
Biennial Mood (Opinion Liberalism) and Laws (Liberal Legislation) Over Time, 1952 – 2008

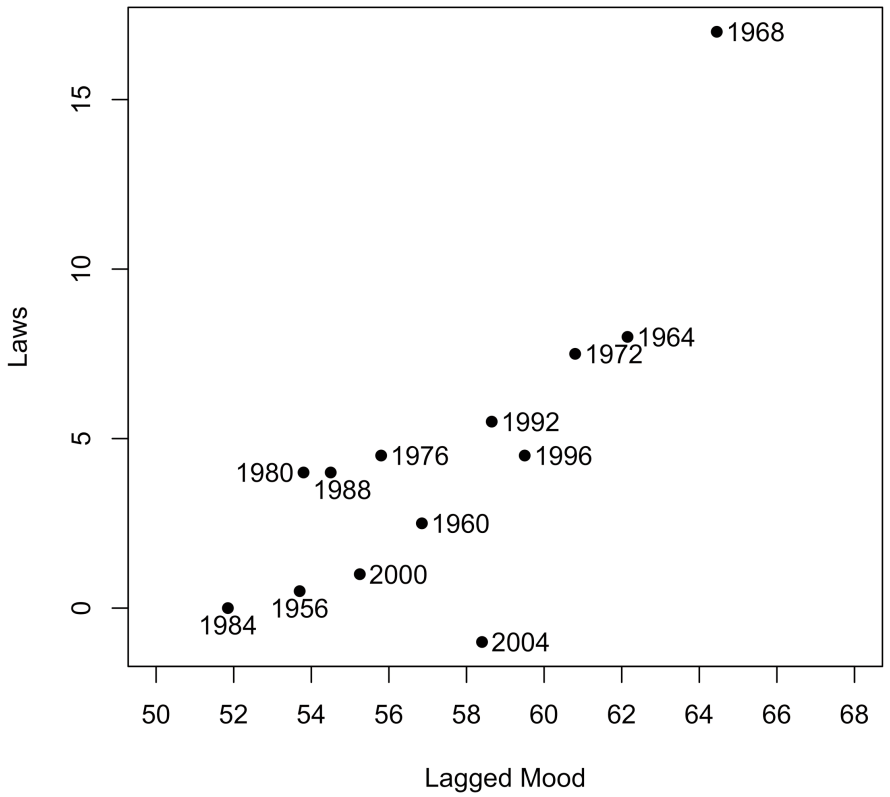


Source: Figure created by author. The measure of laws enacted is based on an index from David Mayhew, *Divided We Govern: Party Control, Law Making, and Investigations, 1946 – 1990* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1991).

icy over a biennium (Congress) or a four-year presidential term. *Mood* represents the demand for ideological change, as a relative degree of liberalism or conservatism. Thus, the relationship between mood and laws is the relationship between demand for policy change and the degree of policy change that occurs.

The laws index is constructed from political scientist David Mayhew's[14] compilation of the number of (important) liberal laws minus the number of (important) conservative laws passed by Congress in a biennium, which we measure from 1953 – 1954 through 1995 – 1996. The *Macro Polity* team has since extended the series through the years of the George W. Bush presidency. The net output for the average Congress is about five major laws in the liberal direction. Figure 5 shows (on different scales) biennial policy mood and laws (by liberal legislation) enacted over time. The graph reveals a rough pattern whereby shifts in public opinion (mood) are generally followed by a shift in laws. A notable exception is the period of the George W. Bush administration, when laws took a decidedly conservative turn greater than would be anticipated by changing mood. The result was a buildup of liberal demand, which, arguably, contributed mightily to Barack Obama's election in 2008.

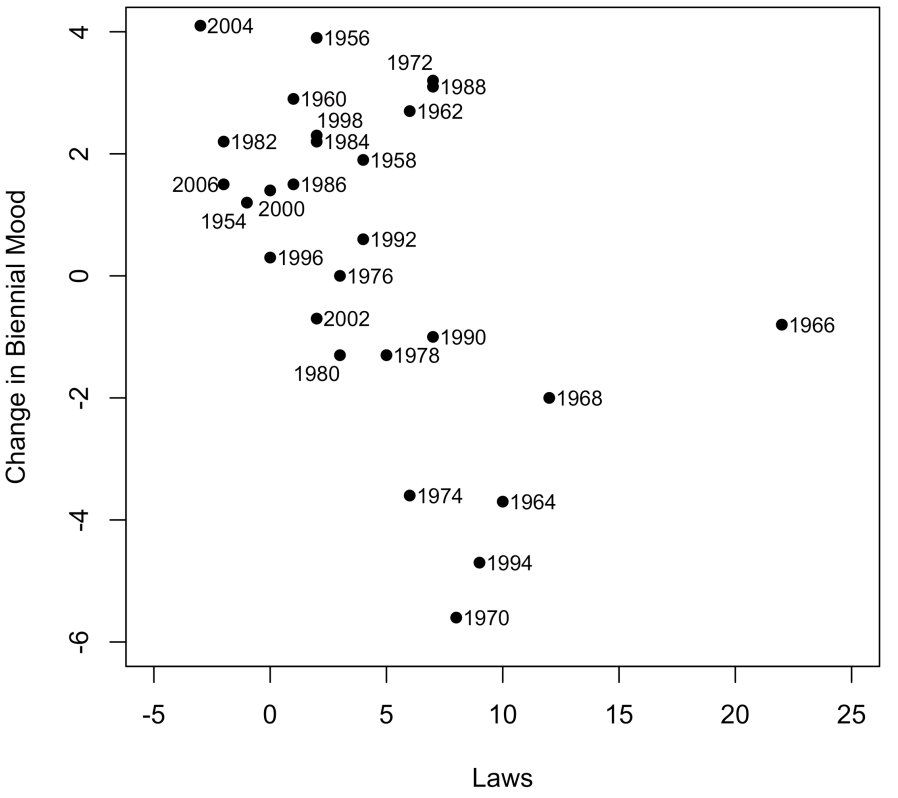
Figure 6
Quadrennial Laws by Mood Lagged Four Years, 1956 – 2004



Each year represents the final year of a presidency. For example, "1968" represents the presidency of LBJ; the laws enacted from 1965 – 1968; and the mood measured from 1961 – 1964. Source: Figure created by author.

Clearly, mood's impact on policy is delayed. The best way to show this effect graphically is by (1) measuring mood and laws on a quadrennial basis, with separate scores for each presidential term; and (2) presenting laws as a function of mood with a four-year delay. Thus, for instance, the laws enacted during George W. Bush's first term are treated as an upshot of public opinion during Clinton's final term. Figure 6 shows this striking correlation. During each presidential term, the ideological direction of new policy initiatives is a sharp function of public preferences with a delay. Our statistical analysis suggests a specific calibration to the effect. Each percentage point of shift in mood (that is, the average percent change in the liberalism/conservatism of survey responses) eventually generates about three major laws.

Why do we find this strong result? The key is the liberalism/conservatism of the public at the time of an election. The more liberal the electorate, the more likely it is to elect (liberal) Democrats rather than (conservative) Republicans to office. This part of the explanation is straightforward. But there are two additional factors. For



Each year represents the final year of a Congress (biennium or two-year period). For example, "1968" represents mood change from 1969 – 1970 minus 1965 – 1966 ; and laws enacted in 1967 – 1968. Source : Figure created by author.

one, elected politicians want to stay elected. Second, a crucial segment of the electorate is paying sufficient attention to congressional legislation such that the actions of Congress matter electorally. If either linkage is broken, policy representation could disintegrate. If politicians were indifferent to reelection, or if they cared but knew that voters were not paying attention to legislative activities, they could make policy without worrying about defying public opinion under such conditions. In either scenario, the only recourse for the electorate is to choose one of the competing parties at the ballot box.

The Macro Polity's statistical analysis shows that laws respond to public opinion partly by way of the electorate's collective choices for electing Democrats and Republicans to the presidency and Congress. But even when the party composition of government is controlled for, mood still matters. Statistically, both the indirect effect via elections and the direct effect from politicians responding to mood help account for the net liberalism or conservatism of the laws index.

It is not surprising that politicians respond to public opinion. Given what we know about individual voters, however,

one might be tempted to challenge the seemingly necessary condition that voters pay attention to what Congress does. Could politicians bow to public opinion only because their egos allow them to inflate their own visibility? If so, an important aspect of representing public opinion would rest on widespread belief in something that is not true. In fact, as *The Macro Polity* shows, public opinion does respond to legislation. When liberal (or conservative) laws are passed, the public becomes less demanding of liberal (or conservative) legislation and thus a bit more receptive to electing Republicans (or Democrats). We can see this effect in Figure 7 (previous page), which relates biennial laws on the *x*-axis to before/after change in mood on the *y*-axis. Clearly, the more liberal (or conservative) a Congress's policy output, the more the public's mood shifts in a conservative (or liberal) direction.

The Macro Polity's model of policy representation contains further aspects that can be summarized only briefly here. Consider, for instance, the thermostatic model of the representation process.[15] In this model, the electorate asks for an ideological change in policy, and eventually – perhaps after many years, given the roadblocks in the way of congressional policy-making – the demand is satisfied. Change in mood can occur not just when policy is out of touch with public preferences; to some degree, there is idiosyncratic change in the electorate's ideological set point independent of current policy – a phenomenon that is poorly understood.

Not all is rosy. The policy response can take years, and it competes with other influences on legislative attention besides public opinion. Moreover, when policy responds to opinion, we must ask whose opinion is exerting the most influence. A common concern these days is political equality and the degree to which politicians listen to only one segment of public opinion. Yet there is also some comfort in a thermostatic model, whereby the more policy is disconnected from public opinion, the sharper the eventual correction will be.

Many voters have an impoverished understanding of politics. Yet this should not lead us to believe that the various kinds of macro-level changes in public opinion lack rationality or meaning. To a greater degree than we might think, there is an intelligence to public opinion at the macro level that often seems absent among individual citizens at the micro level.

ENDNOTES

[1] For two useful introductions to the contrasting views of the U.S. electorate from the micro- and macro-level perspectives, see Larry Bartels, "The Irrational Electorate," *The Wilson Quarterly* (Autumn 2008); and Benjamin Page and Robert Y. Shapiro, *The Rational Public: Fifty Years of Trends in Americans' Policy Preferences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

[2] See, especially, the popular treatment by James Surowiecki, *The Wisdom of Crowds* (New York: Anchor Books, 2005).

[3] Robert S. Erikson, Michael B. MacKuen, and James A. Stimson, *The Macro Polity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

[4] John Mueller, *War, Presidents, and Public Opinion* (New York: Wiley, 1973).

5 Pamela Conover, Stanley Feldman, and Kathleen Knight, "The Personal and Political Underpinnings of Economic Forecasts," *American Journal of Political Science* 31 (1987): 559 – 583.

6 Analysis of consumer expectations as a response to leading economic indicators can be conducted only through the year 1988 because the 1990 revision of the index of leading indicators incorporated consumers' economic expectations into the measure.

7 An important argument in the literature is that people use their retrospective views of the past economy mainly as a tool to estimate the future economy. See Morris Fiorina, *Retrospective Voting in American National Elections* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1982). According to this argument, retrospective evaluations of the economy should predict presidential approval, but not when expectations are controlled for. This is what we show in *The Macro Polity*.

8 Note the distinction between the actual survey response to a question and the latent opinion. A member of a survey panel may give different responses to the same question over time, representing some sort of error, but would rarely change his or her underlying position. That much is generally accepted in the methodological literature on survey responses, though there is some controversy regarding the source of the error.

9 Michael B. MacKuen, Robert S. Erikson, and James A. Stimson, "Macropartisanship," *American Political Science Review* 83 (4) (1989).

10 James A. Stimson, *Public Opinion in America: Moods, Cycles, and Swings*, rev. ed. (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1999).

11 Ian Budge, Hans-Dieter Klingeman, Andrea Volkins, and Judith Bara, *Mapping Policy Preferences: Estimates for Parties, Electors, and Governments, 1945 – 1998* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

12 Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper, 1957).

13 Douglas A. Hibbs, Jr., *The American Political Economy: Macroeconomics and Electoral Politics* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987).

14 David Mayhew, *Divided We Govern: Party Control, Law Making, and Investigations, 1946 – 1990* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1991).

15 The model of policy representation as a thermostatic process was first articulated by Christopher Wlezien. See Christopher Wlezien, "The Public as Thermostat: Dynamics of Preferences for Spending," *American Journal of Political Science* 39 (1995): 981 – 1000.

Is Public Opinion Stable? Resolving the Micro/Macro Disconnect in Studies of Public Opinion

James N. Druckman & Thomas J. Leeper

Abstract: Public opinion matters, both as a central element of democratic theory and as a substantive foundation for political representation. The origins and nature of public opinion have long attracted the attention of social scientists. Yet a number of questions remain; among the more perplexing is whether – and under what conditions – public opinion is stable. The answer depends in large part on whether one looks at aggregations of individual opinions (macro public opinion) or at the individual opinions themselves (micro public opinion). In this essay, we explore the macro/micro divide and offer a framework to determine when opinions are likely to be stable or volatile. This framework reflects both the content of the political environment and the nature of individuals' opinions. Using public opinion dynamics surrounding the Patriot Act as a primary example, we discuss the role of opinion stability in interpreting public opinion and in understanding the normative implications of public preferences.

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*(*See endnotes for complete contributor biographies.)*

Public opinion matters. In theory, it serves as the foundation on which democratic governmental action is based.[1] In practice, elected officials tend to respond to public opinion[2]; moreover, politicians invest massive resources in an effort to track and influence opinions that will affect election outcomes. Scholars have been interested in the origins and nature of public opinion since the emergence of the modern social sciences. Yet a number of questions remain, in particular: *is public opinion stable?* Stability in public preferences suggests that sentiments expressed at one point in time will largely sustain and thus may reflect clearly held beliefs. On the other hand, instability *could* suggest that less stock should be placed in the meaning of public preferences at a given point in time.[3]

Whether one concludes stability or instability depends to a significant extent on whether one looks to macro trends in aggregated opinions (for example, the percentage of the public that supports in-

creased defense spending) or micro-level individual opinions (for example, an individual's preference for defense spending). Consider the conclusions from two highly influential books published in 1992, the first focused on macro opinion and the second on micro:

- "Our data reveal a remarkable degree of stability in America's collective policy preferences."[4]
- "Opinion statements vary randomly across repeated interviews of the same people; entirely trivial changes in questionnaire constructions . . . can easily produce [large] shifts in aggregate opinion."[5]

These conclusions are not time-bound, as similar conclusions can be found in recent research on macro trends[6] and micro-level opinions.[7]

We explore the sources of the micro-instability and macro-stability divide. We begin with a general discussion of micro versus macro studies via an extended example of public opinion surrounding the Patriot Act. We then offer a framework for understanding when opinions should be stable or volatile. Next, we identify three sources of the micro/macro disconnect that we believe explain why the type of data employed yields such distinct conclusions. We end by discussing the implications of our argument for both understanding public opinion and interpreting what (in)stability implies from a normative perspective. We consider why this matters for those who report on and read about public opinion in the news. Among other ideas, we conclude that stability, often presumed to indicate "higher quality" opinions, may bring with it some undesirable features.

The divide between micro and macro perspectives in the social sciences is well established, studied by such prominent scholars as William James, Harold Lasswell, Kurt Lewin, and Thomas Schelling.[8] In his aptly titled autobiography, *Micro-Macro Dilemmas in Political Science*, Heinz Eulau explains, "The fancy terms 'micro' and 'macro' have come to mean large and small or individual and aggregate or part and whole. . . . Once micro and macro had been attached to persons or groups . . . [i]t was only a small step to insist on 'bridging' the micro-macro gap."[9] This gap pervades a range of topics, but we focus here on how it manifests in relation to public opinion and communication.

We should be clear in what we mean by micro and macro public opinion data. For micro data, the unit of analysis is an individual (for example, a survey respondent). Typically, the researcher is interested in knowing what opinion(s) that person holds, why, and with what effects. For example, one may be interested in knowing whether an individual respondent opposes or supports the Patriot Act, which is a piece of legislation enacted by the U.S. Congress and signed by President George W. Bush shortly after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. It increases the powers that law enforcement agencies have to monitor communications, records, and financial transactions in an effort to identify terror threats.[10] With micro data, it is instructive to understand why the individual holds an opinion – does it reflect deeply held values, knowledge about an issue, social experiences, and/or media coverage? – *and* whether the opinion shapes subsequent behavior: for example, is the individual willing to sign a petition in support of that issue? Much of this work employs surveys that measure an individual's support for an issue, asking, for example:

- The Patriot Act was enacted in the weeks after September 11, 2001, to strengthen law enforcement powers and technol-

ogy. What do you think – do you oppose or support the Patriot Act?

Researchers then correlate answers to this opinion measure (typically measured on a seven-point scale ranging from 1, oppose strongly, to 7, support strongly) with other variables such as demographic features (gender or income, for example), partisan attributes, experiences (media exposure, for example), values (such as importance of law and order), and so on. Some of the first survey research reported responsive instability, meaning individuals' opinions measured at one point in time changed at a later point in time.[11]

More recent work has built on this finding by employing experiments that randomly assign respondents to different types of questions.[12] For example, some respondents randomly receive the following (civil liberties) version of the Patriot Act question:

- The Patriot Act was enacted in the weeks after September 11, 2001, to strengthen law enforcement powers and technology. Under the Patriot Act, the government has access to citizens' confidential information from telephone and e-mail communications. As a result, it has sparked numerous controversies and been criticized for weakening the protection of citizens' civil liberties. What do you think – do you oppose or support the Patriot Act?

Others receive a distinct (terrorism) version that asks:

- The Patriot Act was enacted in the weeks after September 11, 2001, to strengthen law enforcement powers and technology. Under the Patriot Act, the government has more resources for counterterrorism, surveillance, border protection, and other security policies. As a result, it enables security to identify terrorist plots on American soil and to prevent attacks before they occur. What do you think – do you oppose or support the Patriot Act?

Much of the work that takes this (experimental) approach finds that respondents' opinions, on average, differ widely depending on which version of the question they receive. To many researchers, this finding suggests that opinions are not grounded and are malleable based on whatever rhetoric is most recently heard by respondents.[13] In many ways, these conclusions offer an explanation for responsible instability by showing that instability stems, at least in part, from alternative rhetoric found in discourse or in survey questions.

Other relevant work has tracked individuals' opinions over time by asking the same respondents the same question several weeks apart. The modal finding here is that opinions change and any effects (for example, from a certain type of question at one point in time) quickly decay.[14] For instance, when individuals receive the terrorism version of the Patriot Act question, they likely become more supportive of the Act. Yet for the modal individual, that support quickly dissipates and, in fact, may flip if the individual later receives the civil liberties frame. According to a 2010 study by Dennis Chong and James Druckman, "[W]hen competing messages are separated by days or weeks, most individuals give disproportionate weight to the most recent communication because previous effects decay over time."[15]

Whether this instability suggests that citizens' opinions are baseless and of little value is a topic of debate; reasonable movements, rather than ineptitude, could explain an individual's change in opinion.[16] Still, when studied at the micro-level, individuals' political attitudes appear unstable on many issues.[17] Such dynamics led Samuel Best and Monika McDermott to conclude that "reported opinions on . . .

the USA Patriot Act . . . vary greatly due to simple variations in question wording, content, and response options."[18]

This view of public opinion as fickle is somewhat puzzling because it appears to contradict macro-level studies. For macro studies, the unit of analysis is not the individual per se, but rather a given issue or a given point in time. The focus is often on the overall percentage of individuals who support or oppose a perspective, such as the percentage that support the Patriot Act or the frequency of each response at a given point in time.[19] Much macro-level work studies whether government policies respond to aggregate trends in opinions (does the government increase Patriot Act spending when support increases over time?), and conversely, whether public opinion reacts to governmental actions (does support wane once spending increases?) or other events (for example, the effect that a terrorist threat has on support).[20] Studies of macro opinions toward the Patriot Act report tremendous stability, contradicting the micro findings: a 2011 report from the Pew Research Center states, "Public views of the Patriot Act, whose renewal is being debated by Congress, have changed little since the Bush administration."[21] This assertion means that the level of support for the Act at one point in time, for example, is near equivalent to support at a later time. These findings of micro instability and macro stability are not unique to the Patriot Act; rather, they extend across countless issues and times.[22] Peter Mortensen explains, "Studies convincingly demonstrate that aggregated voter opinions are rather sticky . . . [yet there are] random fluctuations at the individual level."[23]

This contradiction emerges even though macro opinion is the aggregation of micro attitudes: macro support for the Patriot Act comes from simply counting the number of individual respondents who expressed support. What explains this striking micro/macro instability/stability inconsistency?[24] Unraveling the ostensible micro/macro inconsistency is more than a pedantic exercise.[25] Politicians often turn to aggregate opinion for guidance,[26] and media outlets typically report on aggregate trends.[27] To interpret these trends and to understand how one might go about altering them, we must contemplate their micro-foundations. Do these trends reflect reasoned judgments, or is their meaning less substantive?

What generates stability? Opinions are *stable* if they sustain or do not change when measured at two or more points in time. Two factors are critical for creating *unstable* opinions. The first is a weak attitude. Attitudes can range from nonexistent (a nonattitude) to weak to extremely strong.[28] For example, an individual may be asked for her opinion on a policy that she has never heard of (regulation of vending machines, say) or an issue on which she is highly committed to a position (abortion, for instance). As attitudes become stronger, they also exhibit greater stability; indeed, by some definitions, a strong attitude is (tautologically) one that persists and resists change.[29] Thus, change occurs mostly when attitudes are weak.

Attitude strength is a multidimensional concept. The strength of a given attitude depends on the nature of the attitude (for example, more extreme opinions tend to be stronger), the attitude's structure (more accessible attitudes tend to be stronger), and the process by which one forms attitudes (those based on elaborative thinking tend to be stronger, as are attitudes formed in an "online" fashion[30]). Attitudes also tend to be stronger when they are deemed personally important or are viewed as more certain.[31] Finally, attitude strength grows when individuals think about their attitudes or have atti-

tude-relevant experiences,[32] including being exposed repeatedly to the same information (as from continuous media coverage).[33] Attitude strength lies on a continuum from weak to strong; however, we focus here on either strong or weak attitudes.

The second factor that contributes to instability in opinions is the presence of a stimulus. For an attitude to change, there typically must be a stimulus that induces the change; such stimuli might include an ostensibly persuasive argument (even one not consciously processed), a world event, a novel experience, and/or rethinking a viewpoint. That said, most micro studies attend to stimuli contained in communications, as in the case of the experimental example described above. These studies are meant to mimic the types of rhetoric found outside the study context (communications that may influence macro trends). Macro movements, and hence instability, could be driven by other factors such as world events and experiences. Because we seek to explain micro instability and macro stability (rather than vice versa), we limit our following discussion to communications. We also attend to stimuli that are potentially persuasive: that is, information that has sufficient credibility to induce change under at least some conditions.

Our *attitude strength x stimulus* framework maps into four model scenarios (Table 1). All else constant, we expect stability at both the micro and macro level to occur in three of the four situations. In the first two cases, in which there are no stimuli, we expect stability because there are no experiences that would stimulate reconsideration of an attitude, such as encountering new information. We expect instability when opinions are weak and there is a stimulus (assuming the stimulus is sufficiently credible to induce change). As explained, weak attitudes are relatively open to change, and thus a stimulus may induce such modifications (assuming the stimulus pushes the opinion in a direction counter to the prior stance).

Perhaps most interesting is when an individual possesses a strong opinion and encounters a potentially persuasive stimulus (countering one's present opinion, such as a terrorism argument presented to an individual who opposes the Patriot Act). When this occurs, we expect that, all else constant, the individual will reject the stimulus and cling to the extant opinion. This happens because individuals with strong attitudes tend to engage in motivated reasoning, whereby they seek out information that confirms priors (confirmation bias), view evidence consistent with prior opinions as stronger (prior-attitude effect), and spend more time counterarguing and dismissing evidence inconsistent with prior opinions, regardless of objective accuracy (disconfirmation bias).[34]

Strong attitudes are likely to "come inescapably to mind, whether consciously recognized or not, and for better or worse these feelings guide subsequent thought."[35] When people receive new information about George W. Bush, for example, those with strong feelings interpret that information in light of their existing opinions about Bush. Thus, a pro-Bush voter might interpret information suggesting that Bush misled voters about the Iraq War either as false or as evidence of strong leadership in a time of crisis, rather than as an indication of incompetence or deception. Such voters maintain their support of Bush and may even become more supportive. An individual strongly opposed to the Patriot Act, by contrast, will reject arguments about its utility for combating terrorism, even if the argument is otherwise objectively sound. Ironically, those with less developed, weaker attitudes "are processing infor-

Table 1
Conditions for Opinion Stability

Attitude Strength	Stimuli	Stability?
Weak	No Stimuli	Yes
Strong	No Stimuli	Yes
Weak	Stimuli	No
Strong	Stimuli	Yes

Source: Table created by authors.

mation more 'objectively' than those with [stronger] attitudes."[36]

As explained, micro-level public opinion work tends to suggest instability while macro-level work suggests stability. With our *strength x stimulus* framework in mind, we can now turn to three possible sources that may explain the inconsistent micro/macro findings.

Measurement Error. Measurement error can generate instability on individual survey responses that, when randomly distributed in the sample, cancel out at the macro level. Measurement error occurs when a survey response departs from its "true value"; for example, on the seven-point scale measuring support for the Patriot Act, ranging from strongly opposed to strongly support, a respondent's true attitude could be around 5.5. If the survey were to be administered twice, the respondent might report a 5 in one instance and a 6 in another.

Measurement error can stem from characteristics of the respondent (for example, he or she is not paying attention or did not understand the question), the interviewer (misreading the question, including the response options), the questionnaire (the order in which questions are asked), or other factors such as the context of data collection. At the micro level, measurement features can cause a respondent to offer different answers at distinct points in time, leading to instability over time. Yet at the macro level, random measurement error cancels out because roughly the same number of respondents who move in one direction (for example, 40 percent offer a lower level of support at the time a question is first answered than at the second time) will move in the other (40 percent offer a higher level of support the first time than the second).[37] Thus, stability exists in aggregation (even though 40 percent of respondents increased their support between the first and second instances, and 40 percent decreased their support, the averages at each time are the same).[38]

Measurement error can generate micro instability in any of the four scenarios presented in Table 1. Such error would appear to be less likely among individuals with strong opinions, because they tend to cling to those attitudes. Yet measurement error is not about substantive changes, and therefore susceptibility is not contingent on attitude strength. Jon Krosnick and Robert Abelson posit that the "relatively simple hypothesis that these effects [that is, responsive instability] are greater in the case of weaker attitudes has clearly been disconfirmed."[39]

Stephen Ansolabehere and colleagues offer compelling evidence that once corrections for measurement error are put in place (for example, using multiple measures and taking averages), the result is

micro-level (and macro-level) stability. "[T]he low correlations of individuals' issue preferences over time," they explain, "are easily reconciled with a model in which there is a high degree of measurement error and a high degree of stability in preferences."[40]

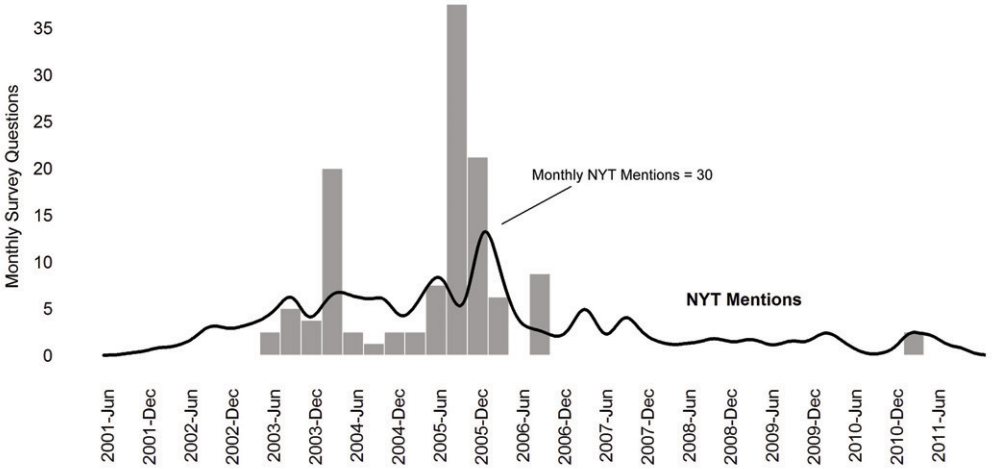
Sample Inconsistencies. Most discussions about a survey sample focus on the selection of respondents: for example, are the respondents representative of the target population? Yet sampling also includes the selection of issues and times. Researchers aim to draw inferences about opinions on the universe of issues across time; however, they have no choice but to focus on select issues at particular times. We suspect that at least some of the micro/macro discrepancy can be traced to distinct foci in the issues examined and the timing of the studies. Aggregate studies almost always rely on publicly available survey data from credible polling organizations (Gallup, American National Election Study, and so on); consequently, these studies focus on public opinion toward the issues that were asked about in these surveys. This selection turns out to be a very small and likely nonrandom sample of the possible universe of issues (for instance, all issues the government addresses over a term). Paul Burstein explains that "the entire set of issues studied may be so small that it is unrepresentative of the set of all issues and an inadequate basis for generalization. . . . [W]hat should be emphasized is how our capacity to generalize is limited by the narrowness of the range of issues studied." He also states that "it's no secret that public opinion data don't exist for most policies legislatures consider."[41]

Importantly, the issues that tend to be included in public surveys are those that are more salient, and it makes sense that survey organizations would prefer to gauge issues salient to the public. James Druckman and Lawrence Jacobs explain that there is pressure "to collect policy opinion data on issues seen as important by the public."[42] In his survey of extant work, Burstein shows that these issues include social welfare, taxes, and defense: issues that have the potential to affect citizens directly.[43]

Thus, macro studies may be biased toward issues on which citizens possess stronger opinions because the issues are more likely to be of personal importance, a key dimension of attitude strength.[44] Also, these issues are more likely to be covered in the media, thereby providing citizens with repeated exposure, which, as mentioned, enhances attitude strength.[45] In Figure 1, we chart the number of questions asked regarding the Patriot Act (by all survey organizations contained in the iPoll database) along with media coverage of the Patriot Act (as captured by nonediterial mentions of "Patriot Act" in Section A of *The New York Times*). The number of survey questions in the field (gray bars) peaks when media coverage increases. Survey questions are not asked consistently across the period; none were in the field during initial authorization in October 2001, and few were asked between the July 2005 and May 2011 reauthorizations. Effectively, polls that are responsive to media coverage select upon opinions that are strong and salient; this nonrandom selection of times for assessing public opinion problematizes the assessment of stability. Indeed, as mentioned above, access to information tends to generate stronger attitudes, which in turn lead to stability.

In short, the strong opinions on issues that are polled during times of increased media activity lead to stability. This fact sharply contrasts with the foci of many micro-level studies that typically choose issues for the exact opposite reason. These studies search for issues on which prior opinions are weak, since that may allow

Figure 1
Patriot Act Survey Questions and Mentions in *The New York Times*



The histogram depicts the number of survey questions fielded each month (grouped into three-month intervals for clarity of presentation). The dark black line is a kernel-smoothed density plot of noneditorial mentions of "Patriot Act" in Section A of *The New York Times* (NYT) over the same period. Source: Figure created by authors.

for change (the focus of many of these studies), and/or issues that have been absent from recent media coverage. Dennis Chong and James Druckman echo many other micro studies in stating that they selected issues for their 2010 study because "opinions on these issues are liable to change, which allows us to test hypotheses [about opinion change]."[46] Studies also opt to select issues "that receive scant attention outside of the experiment itself."[47] Examples from the micro-studies that demonstrate volatility include attitudes about a particular ballot proposition,[48] an election involving a new candidate about whom individuals have scant prior opinions,[49] regulation of hog farms,[50] urban sprawl in situations where respondents are not directly affected,[51] or abstract and impersonal subjects, such as people's trust in institutions.[52]

In sum, varying measures of stability in studies of macro- and micro-level opinion may stem in part from differences in the issues explored and the timing of that exploration.[53] The disconnect originates in samples of issues and times that are incomparable.

To see how opinion strength can generate distinct patterns of stability, consider Chong and Druckman's survey experiment.[54] Their December 2009 study involved a nationally representative sample of about 1,300 individuals and focused on opinions about the Patriot Act. Their specific dependent measure was the same as that presented above, where respondents reported their support for the Patriot Act on a seven-point scale, with higher scores indicating increased support. They measured opinions at two points in time (t1 and t2), separated by about ten days.

There are two critical features of this study. First, it employed versions of the aforementioned terrorism ("pro") and civil liberties ("con") frames. (The frames,

however, were presented as a series of statements rather than in the wording of the question, as in the example above.) Respondents received different mixes of these frames at t1 and t2. Second, Chong and Druckman randomly assigned respondents to conditions that induced them to form strong opinions at t1, or induced them to form weaker opinions at t2.[55] We will not go into the details of the specific opinion-strength manipulations, but suffice it to say that Chong and Druckman offer evidence that their inducements (which are commonly used in psychology) did in fact generate stronger or weaker t1 opinions about the Patriot Act.[56]

Figure 2 reports the average opinions at t1 and t2 for the weak-attitude conditions, for various frame combinations.[57] Figure 2a shows conditions that did not include a frame at t2, while Figure 2b is from conditions with a t2 frame. Substantial over-time volatility is evident in the figure, with opinions at t1 reflecting the direction of whatever frame the respondents received, but then either moving toward the control group at t2 (that is, the t1 "No," t2 "No" condition) when no t2 frame is offered or flipping to reflect the direction of the t2 frame when a t2 frame is offered. There is no stability whatsoever.

Figure 3, which contains analogous results but in this case for those induced to form strong opinions, presents an entirely different portrait. Here we see tremendous stability when no t2 frame is offered (Figure 3a). Moreover, Figure 3b shows similar stability even in the presence of a contrary t2 frame; individuals with strong attitudes reject it and cling to their t1 opinion (which was affected by the t1 frame). This latter dynamic reflects motivated reasoning, whereby respondents counterargue and reject contrary evidence.[58]

These results have been replicated with various issues, including attitudes about urban sprawl, a state-funded casino, new scientific technologies, and health care.[59] The implication is that if macro studies focus on issues at times when individuals develop strong attitudes, then stability is to be expected; however, instability would be the norm for micro studies to the extent that they focus on less-developed issues.

While Chong and Druckman's experiment reveals a source of the macro/micro disconnect, it cannot explain the discrepancy in the case of the Patriot Act, given that it focuses on one issue during one time period. Moreover, there are undoubtedly issues on which most possess weak opinions that nonetheless lead to differing macro and micro dynamics (putting measurement error aside). We suspect that these issues as well as the aforementioned Patriot Act inconsistency stem from a third possible cause of inconsistency.

Ecological Validity of the Rhetorical Environment. One possible reason why micro instability on a given issue at a certain time would exhibit macro stability is that the instability cancels out. Consider the weak-attitude conditions in the Patriot Act experiment. In that case, proportional numbers of individuals were exposed to the pro and con frames at each point in time. There was considerable movement; but because the numbers were largely equivalent (due to the assignment to conditions), the consequence was a canceling out. Indeed, if we merge all the weak-attitude scenarios, it would appear as if there was aggregate macro stability, as the overall t1 mean is 4.40 (standard deviation = 1.79; N = 575) and the t2 mean is 4.38 (standard deviation = 1.70; N = 575).

This finding suggests one possibility: that stability stems from a macro environment that includes a broad array of contrasting information. Such environments would differ from micro studies that often expose individuals to informa-

Figure 2a
Weak Opinions/No t2 Frame

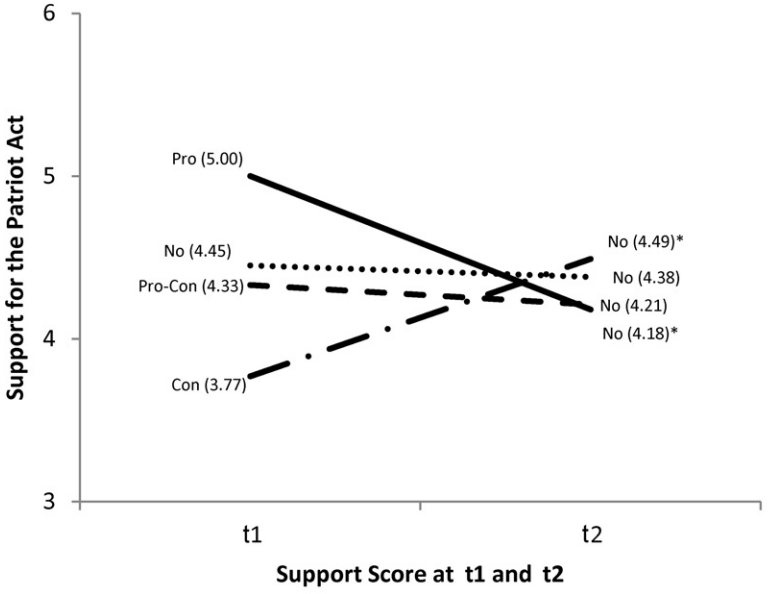
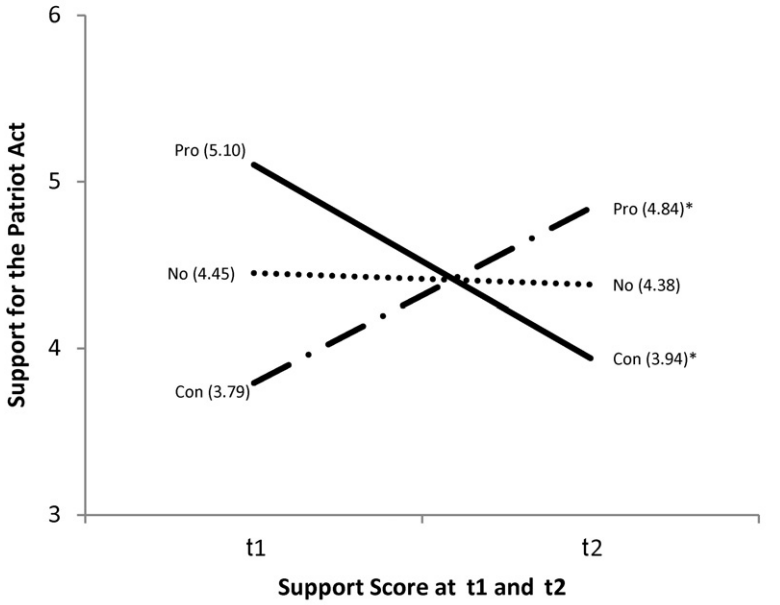


Figure 2b
Weak Opinions/t2 Frame



*$p \leq 0.01$ for one-tailed tests (for changes between t1 and t2). Source: Dennis Chong and James N. Druckman, "Dynamic Public Opinion: Communication Effects over Time," *American Political Science Review* 104 (4) (2010); used here with permission of Chong and Druckman.

Figure 3a
Strong Opinions/No t2 Frame

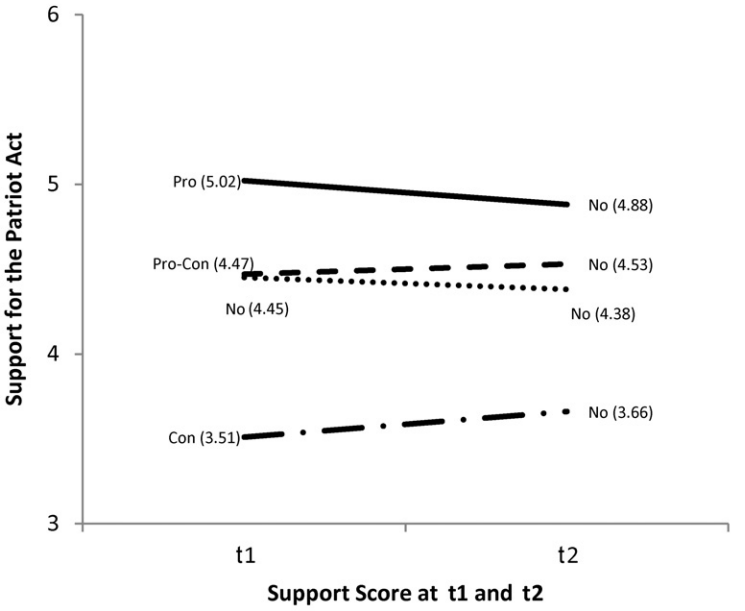
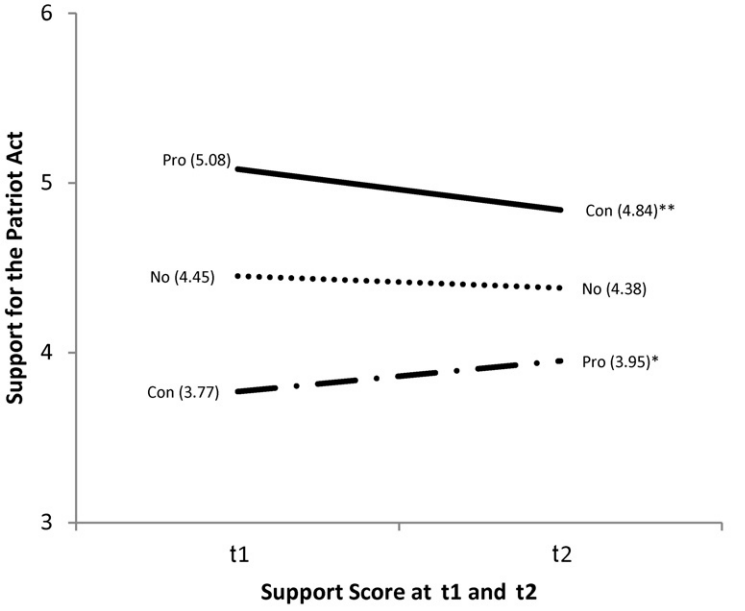


Figure 3b
Strong Opinions/t2 Frame



*$p \leq 0.10$; **$p \leq 0.05$ for one-tailed tests (for changes between t1 and t2). Source: Dennis Chong and James N. Druckman, "Dynamic Public Opinion: Communication Effects over Time," *American Political Science Review* 104 (4) (2010); used here with permission of Chong and Druckman.

tion pushing them in a single direction. In terms of the Patriot Act, Chong and Druckman report that the civil liberties and terrorism frames appeared with nearly identical frequency in *The New York Times* from 2001 through 2005. When this occurs, the competing frames often cancel out, leaving opinions unaffected.[60] The results in Figures 2 and 3 support this contention. Notice that for both the strong- and weak-attitude conditions, when individuals receive pro *and* con frames at t1, their opinions are unmoved relative to the control and consequently sustain until t2.[61]

Micro work may be lacking in ecological validity, that is, the extent to which studies approximate "real life" situations. If most stimuli in the world (and thus in macro studies) involve competing information streams, but micro studies explore asymmetric information, the disconnect may simply reflect a lack of ecological validity in micro studies (particularly those experimental studies on which we have focused). Chong and Druckman make this exact point upon discovering that across many issues, media coverage incorporates competing information: "Because news stories typically contain *more* than one or two effective frames, readers rarely encounter a scenario – common in experimental studies – in which they are restricted to a single monolithic frame of the issue. Thus, framing effects that occur outside of controlled experimental settings are not well understood."[62]

The implication is that stability is the norm, due to competing communications, and that micro studies overstate instability due to scant attention to competition. This raises the question of how these competing communications work. On the one hand, Paul Sniderman and Sean Theriault suggest that "political debate, being exposed to opposing sides, tightens the linkages of mass belief systems and increases the constraint between basic principles and specific issue choices."[63] In other words, individuals exposed to competing messages largely ignore them and fall back on their well-formed values. On the other hand, John Zaller suggests that "the mass media routinely carry competing political messages [and] each message . . . has its effects, but the effects tend to be mutually canceling in ways that produce the illusion of modest impact." That is, citizens do not rely on well-formed, reasoned values, but rather move back and forth in response to the messages.[64]

We began by asking whether public opinion is stable. Our answer may be less than satisfying: it depends. More important, however, is our identification of *when* we can expect stability. We predict that opinions will be stable on issues and at times when individuals possess strong opinions or, putting measurement error aside, when there is a lack of persuasive stimuli in the environment. We argued that micro-level studies significantly overstate the malleability of the mass public by focusing on issues on which individuals possess weak attitudes. On the flip side, macro studies likely overstate the extent of stability by relying on publicly available data that overrepresent issues that receive substantial media coverage and on which individuals possess strong opinions.

We offer a fairly clear blueprint for steps that can be taken to vitiate the micro/macro gap:

- All possible efforts should be put forth to reduce measurement error in surveys.

While some approaches to doing so – such as using multiple items, as Stephen Ansolabehere and colleagues suggest – come with costs (for example, the cost of survey time or demand effects), there are also more straightforward steps that can be taken to minimize error.[65]

- Studies should consciously assess the representativeness of the issues and the times on which they focus.

A first step is to carry out a more systematic appraisal of the exact issues and times that have been the focus in micro and macro study. Then, going forward, studies should attempt to incorporate multiple issues (ones that are likely to have varying distributions of attitude strength), or at least recognize the consequences of not doing so. While most instruments include a vast array of questions about respondent demographics, they rarely incorporate attitude-strength questions that could provide insight into expected stability or instability.[66] Twenty years ago, Jon Krosnick and Robert Abelson made a plea for the regular inclusion of attitude-strength measures in public opinion surveys, but thus far, it has gone largely unheeded.[67]

- More attention should be paid to issues of ecological validity.

The intellectual evolution of many political communication studies led to an overemphasis on documenting the possibility of effects.[68] This is no longer a critical goal, and scholars should invest more time in identifying the nature of the rhetorical environment that surrounds an issue. They should seek to theorize and emulate the effects of that environment. We recognize that this task brings with it a host of challenges: it requires more intensive content analyses, and it introduces the likelihood of fewer statistically significant findings, which then face a publication bias. This raises a larger concern about the publication process and the biases that result from a narrow focus on p-values.[69]

We urge caution to anyone inferring much at all from survey evidence that suggests mass opinions either have changed or remained stable on a given issue. Politicians frequently legitimize their stances by referring to public opinion, particularly when majorities are on their side or opinions seem to be shifting their way. Whether a bare majority or a few-percentage-point shift is meaningful requires an understanding of survey practice – question wording, sampling, and so on – but also some sense of why opinions might behave the way they do. To comprehend the latter, reports of mass opinion need to be contextualized with information about the environment in which opinions were measured and some sense of the strength of those opinions. Unfortunately, present reporting rarely mentions either. Observers and reporters should aim to present richer narratives to make sense of public opinion.

A final point concerns the normative implications of our argument. Strong opinions and stability are often seen as signs of an engaged and thoughtful citizenry – coveted attributes. Attitude strength promotes constraint[70] and engagement.[71] Yet strong attitudes also lead to motivated reasoning that can cause individuals to resist consideration of relevant alternative perspectives. At the extreme, such individuals can be close-mindedly dogmatic, which might be as problematic as extremely labile preferences. In terms of opinion "quality," theorists should not presume that the quality of well-developed and thought-out opinions always trumps that of fleeting opinions.[72]

Micro/macro gaps pervade the social sciences, and we have focused on just one example. In so doing, however, we affirm Heinz Eulau's hope for the field of communication and public opinion. He believed that it had the potential to bridge the micro/macro gap: "the new 'discipline' of Communication represents the fulfillment of the dream for . . . [i]nterdisciplinary behavioral science that can address the gap."[73]

ENDNOTES

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1 See, for example, Robert A. Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1971).

2 Robert Y. Shapiro, "Public Opinion and American Democracy," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 75 (5) (2011).

3 We emphasize that it *could* suggest that less meaning should be attached to public opinion; another possibility is that instability stems from systematic and thoughtful opinion changes in response to meaningful events.

4 Benjamin I. Page and Robert Y. Shapiro, *The Rational Public: Fifty Years of Trends in Americans' Policy Preferences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 45.

5 John Zaller, *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 28.

6 For example, Robert S. Erikson, Michael B. MacKuen, and James A. Stimson, *The Macro Polity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 235; Bryan D. Jones and Frank R. Baumgartner, "A Model of Choice for Public Policy," *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 15 (2005): 325–351; B. Dan Wood and Arnold Vedlitz, "Definition, Information Processing, and the Politics of Global Warming," *American Journal of Political Science* 51 (3) (2007): 553; Frank R. Baumgartner, Jeffrey M. Berry, Marie Hojnacki, David C. Kimball, and Beth L. Leech, *Lobbying and Policy Change: Who Wins, Who Loses, and Why* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 175–178; Stuart N. Soroka and Christopher Wlezien, *Degrees of Democracy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 69.

7 For example, Christopher H. Achen and Larry M. Bartels, "Musical Chairs: Pocketbook Voting and the Limits of Democratic Accountability," paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Chicago, Illinois, 2004; Douglas A. Hibbs, Jr., "Implications of the 'Bread and Peace' Model for the 2008 Presidential Election," *Public Choice* 137 (2008): 1–10; Dennis Chong and James N. Druckman, "Dynamic Public Opinion: Communication Effects over Time," *American Political Science Review* 104 (4) (2010): 665.

8 For a historical discussion, see Heinz Eulau, *Micro-Macro Dilemmas in Political Science: Personal Pathways Through Complexity* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996); see also Thomas C. Schelling, *Micromotives and Macrobehavior* (New York: Norton, 1978).

9 Eulau, *Micro-Macro Dilemmas in Political Science*, 37–38.

10 The Act contains a number of other elements, such as redefining *terrorism* to include domestic incidents. The actual name of the Act is the USA PATRIOT Act, which stands for Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism. The Patriot Act is a good issue to focus on insofar as it resembles many other issues by being periodically salient and touching on both economic and social dimensions.

11 For example, Philip E. Converse, "The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics," in *Ideology and Discontent*, ed. David Apter (New York: Free Press, 1964).

[12] See James N. Druckman, Jordan Fein, and Thomas J. Leeper, "Framing and Biased Information Search," paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Seattle, Washington, 2011.

[13] For instance, Zaller, *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*; and Larry M. Bartels, "Democracy with Attitudes," in *Electoral Democracy*, ed. Michael Bruce MacKuen and George Rabinowitz (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003).

[14] Chong and Druckman, "Dynamic Public Opinion."

[15] Ibid., 663.

[16] See James N. Druckman, "On the Limits of Framing Effects: Who Can Frame?" *Journal of Politics* 63 (2001): 1041–1066; Paul M. Sniderman and Sean M. Theriault, "The Structure of Political Argument and the Logic of Issue Framing," in *Studies in Public Opinion: Attitudes, Nonattitudes, Measurement Error, and Change*, ed. William E. Saris and Paul M. Sniderman (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004).

[17] As is typical, we treat the terms *opinion* and *attitude* as interchangeable.

[18] Samuel J. Best and Monika L. McDermott, "Measuring Opinions vs. Non-Opinions – The Case of the USA Patriot Act," *The Forum* 5 (2007): 1.

[19] The measure could be the same as the previously presented individual-level measure, where support is construed as any score above 4. Alternatively, a measure could report percentages for each of the seven response options (for example, percentage of respondents who registered a 6) or use a distinct set of response options (for example, "support," "not sure," "oppose").

[20] See Page and Shapiro, *The Rational Public*; Erikson et al., *The Macro Polity*; and Soroka and Wlezien, *Degrees of Democracy*. There is a related debate on whether political actors respond to issue-specific opinions (for example, specific trends regarding the Patriot Act) or more generalized ideological trends (for example, liberalism versus conservatism); see James N. Druckman and Lawrence R. Jacobs, "Lumpers and Splitters: The Public Opinion Information that Politicians Collect and Use," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 70 (4) (2006): 453–476.

[21] Pew Research Center, "Public Remains Divided Over the Patriot Act," 2011, http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1893/poll-patriot-act-renewal.

[22] For example, see Bartels, "Democracy with Attitudes," in *Electoral Democracy*, ed. MacKuen and Rabinowitz.

[23] Peter B. Mortensen, "The Impact of Public Opinion on Public Policy," Ph.D. dissertation, Aarhus University, Denmark, 2006, 18.

[24] The micro/macro inconsistency is a prototypical example of an ecological inference problem, whereby stable trends at the macro level belie the underlying volatility at the micro level.

[25] John E. Jackson and Ken Kollman, "Connecting Micro- and Macropartisanship," *Political Analysis* 19 (2011): 507.

[26] Erikson et al., *The Macro Polity*.

[27] Michael W. Traugott and Paul J. Lavrakas, *The Voter's Guide to Election Polls* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008).

[28] Russell H. Fazio, "Attitudes as Object-Evaluation Associations of Varying Strength," *Social Cognition* 25 (5) (2007): 603–637.

[29] Jon A. Krosnick and Wendy A. Smith, "Attitude Strength," in *Encyclopedia of Human Behavior*, ed. V. S. Ramachandran (San Diego: Academic Press, 1994); Joanne M. Miller and David A.M. Peterson, "Theoretical and Empirical Implications of Attitude Strength," *The Journal of Politics* 66 (3) (2004): 847–867; Penny S. Visser, George Y. Bizer, and Jon A. Krosnick, "Exploring the Latent Structure of Strength-Related Attitude Attributes," *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* 38 (6) (2006): 1–67.

30 Richard E. Petty and Jon A. Krosnick, eds., *Attitude Strength: Antecedents and Consequences* (New York: Psychology Press, 1995); George Y. Bizer, Jon A. Krosnick, Allyson L. Holbrook, S. Christian Wheeler, Derek D. Rucker, and Richard E. Petty, "The Impact of Personality on Cognitive, Behavioral, and Affective Political Processes," *Journal of Personality* 72 (2004): 995–1027.

31 Jon A. Krosnick, "Attitude Importance and Attitude Change," *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 24 (1988): 240–255; Visser et al., "Exploring the Latent Structure of Strength-Related Attitude Attributes."

32 Ibid.; Krosnick and Smith, "Attitude Strength," in *Encyclopedia of Human Behavior*, ed. Ramachandran; Laura R. Glasman and Dolores Albarracín, "Forming Attitudes that Predict Future Behavior: A Meta-Analysis of the Attitude-Behavior Relation," *Psychological Bulletin* 132 (2006): 778–822.

33 Dennis Chong and James N. Druckman, "Public-Elite Interactions," in *The Oxford Handbook of American Public Opinion and the Media*, ed. Robert Y. Shapiro and Larry R. Jacobs (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

34 See Milton Lodge and Charles S. Taber, "Three Steps Toward a Theory of Motivated Political Reasoning," in *Elements of Reason: Cognition, Choice, and the Bounds of Rationality*, ed. Arthur Lupia, Mathew D. McCubbins, and Samuel L. Popkin (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Ziva Kunda, *Social Cognition: Making Sense of People* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1999); Larry M. Bartels, "Beyond the Running Tally: Partisan Bias in Political Perceptions," *Political Behavior* 24 (2) (2002): 117–150; David P. Redlawsk, "Hot Cognition or Cool Consideration? Testing the Effects of Motivated Reasoning on Political Decision Making," *The Journal of Politics* 64 (4) (2002): 1021–1044; Thomas J. Rudolph, "Triangulating Political Responsibility: The Motivated Formation of Responsibility Judgments," *Political Psychology* 27 (1) (2006): 99–122; Alan S. Gerber and Gregory A. Huber, "Partisanship and Economic Behavior: Do Partisan Differences in Economic Forecasts Predict Real Economic Behavior?" *American Political Science Review* 103 (2009): 407–426; Alan S. Gerber and Gregory A. Huber, "Partisanship, Political Control, and Economic Assessments," *American Journal of Political Science* 54 (2010): 153–173; Paul Goren, Christopher M. Federico, and Miki Caul Kittilson, "Source Cues, Partisan Identities, and Political Value Expression," *American Journal of Political Science* 53 (4) (2009): 805–820; James N. Druckman, Cari Lynn Hennessy, Kristi St. Charles, and Jonathan Weber, "Competing Rhetoric Over Time," *The Journal of Politics* 72 (2010): 136–148; James N. Druckman and Toby Bolsen, "Framing, Motivated Reasoning, and Opinions About Emergent Technologies," *Journal of Communication* 61 (4) (2011): 659–688; Howard Lavine, Christopher Johnston, and Marco Steenbergen, *The Ambivalent Partisan: How Critical Loyalty Promotes Democracy* (forthcoming, Oxford University Press).

35 Milton Lodge and Charles S. Taber, "The Rationalizing Voter: Unconscious Thought in Political Information Processing," unpublished manuscript, Stony Brook University, 2008, 33.

36 David A. Houston and Russell H. Fazio, "Biased Processing as a Function of Attitude Accessibility: Making Objective Judgments Subjectively," *Social Cognition* 7 (1) (1989): 64. Motivated reasoning is less likely to occur if the individuals are motivated to process information in an accurate way. Taber and Lodge, however, argue that in most political contexts, this is unlikely; see Charles S. Taber and Milton Lodge, "Motivated Skepticism in the Evaluation of Political Beliefs," *American Journal of Political Science* 50 (3) (2006): 755–769 (although see James N. Druckman, "The Politics of Motivation," forthcoming in *Critical Review*).

37 There is also the possibility of nonrandom measurement error, such as a question written in a biased fashion ("Most support the Patriot Act since it helps prevent terrorism. What do you think?"). This type of measurement error would generate micro instability only if it were corrected or changed in over-time surveys.

38 Page and Shapiro, *The Rational Public*; Mortensen, "The Impact of Public Opinion on Public Policy," 18. See also Larry M. Bartels, "Uninformed Votes: Information Effects in Presidential Elections," *American Journal of Political Science* 40 (1) (1996): 194–230.

[39] Jon A. Krosnick and Robert P. Abelson, "The Case for Measuring Attitude Strength in Surveys," in *Questions About Questions: Inquiries into the Cognitive Bases of Surveys*, ed. Judith M. Tanur (New York: Russell Sage, 1992), 193. For a more recent discussion, see Visser et al., "Exploring the Latent Structure of Strength-Related Attitude Attributes."

[40] Stephen D. Ansolabehere, Jonathan Rodden, and James M. Snyder, Jr., "The Strength of Issues: Using Multiple Measures to Gauge Preference Stability, Ideological Constraint, and Issue Voting," *American Political Science Review* 102 (2) (2008): 216.

[41] Paul Burstein, "The Impact of Public Opinion on Public Policy: A Review and an Agenda," *Political Research Quarterly* 56 (2003): 31, 36, 68.

[42] Druckman and Jacobs, "Lumpers and Splitters," 470.

[43] Burstein, "The Impact of Public Opinion on Public Policy." Another point is that publicly available surveys tend to focus on policy generalities rather than on specific topics: for instance, questions about support for welfare in general rather than for a particular welfare provision. It may be that attitudes toward such general areas are more stable.

[44] On attitude strength, see Visser et al., "Exploring the Latent Structure of Strength-Related Attitude Attributes." While we focus on the issue and time, we also note that another possible reason for the micro/macro gap is the nature of the samples used (for example, more student samples in many micro studies). However, recent work that relies on representative sample survey experiments leads us to put less emphasis on this possibility.

[45] Chong and Druckman, "Public-Elite Interactions," in *The Oxford Handbook of American Public Opinion and the Media*, ed. Shapiro and Jacobs.

[46] Chong and Druckman, "Dynamic Public Opinion," 667.

[47] Claes H. de Vreese, "The Effects of Strategic News on Political Cynicism, Issue Evaluations, and Policy Support: A Two-Wave Experiment," *Mass Communication and Society* 7 (2) (2004): 191–214; Chong and Druckman, "Dynamic Public Opinion"; James N. Druckman and Thomas J. Leeper, "Learning More from Political Communication Experiments: The Importance of Pretreatment Effects," *American Journal of Political Science* (forthcoming): 3.

[48] Bethany L. Albertson and Adria Lawrence, "After the Credits Roll: The Long-Term Effects of Educational Television on Public Knowledge and Attitudes," *American Politics Research* 37 (2) (2009): 275–300.

[49] For example, Alan S. Gerber, James G. Gimpel, Donald P. Green, and Daron R. Shaw, "How Large and Long-Lasting are the Persuasive Effects of Televised Campaign Ads? Results from a Large-Scale Randomized Experiment," *American Political Science Review* 105 (1) (2011): 135–150.

[50] David Tewksbury, Jennifer Jones, Matthew W. Peske, Ashlea Raymond, and William Vig, "The Interaction of News and Advocate Frames," *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* 77 (4) (2000): 804–829.

[51] For example, Dennis Chong and James N. Druckman, "Framing Public Opinion in Competitive Democracies," *American Political Science Review* 101 (4) (2007): 637–655.

[52] For example, de Vreese, "The Effects of Strategic News on Political Cynicism, Issue Evaluations, and Policy Support"; Diana C. Mutz and Byron Reeves, "The New Videomalaise: Effects of Televised Incivility on Political Trust," *American Political Science* 99 (1) (2005): 1–15. For discussion, see Kathleen M. McGraw and Thomas Dolan, "Personifying the State: Consequences for Attitude Formation," *Political Psychology* 28 (2007): 299–328.

[53] See also Wood and Vedlitz, "Definition, Information Processing, and the Politics of Global Warming."

[54] Chong and Druckman, "Dynamic Public Opinion."

[55] They also included conditions with no attitude-strength inducement, but we do not discuss those results here.

56 They did this by inducing "online" or memory-based processing; for details, see Chong and Druckman, "Dynamic Public Opinion."

57 We recognize that it may be ironic that we are using aggregated averages to make a case about micro opinion, which we have argued differs from macro opinion because it is not aggregated. Nonetheless, we take this approach for presentational clarity, noting that if we instead looked at individual opinion change across periods, the story would be the same. What is critical here are the conditions that generate different types of micro-level opinions – and these conditions accentuate common differences in micro and macro samples given when measurement typically takes place (as explained).

58 Direct evidence of this dynamic comes from a question that asked strong-attitude individuals to rate the "effectiveness" of the t1 and t2 statements, in terms of "providing information and/or making an argument about the Patriot Act," on a seven-point scale, with higher scores indicating increased effectiveness. Participants who received the con frame at t1 reported an average effectiveness score of 4.84 (standard deviation = 1.65; N = 83) whereas those who received the same frame at t2 (after having received the pro frame at t1) registered a significantly lower 4.40 (standard deviation = 1.44; N = 83) average ($t_{164} = 1.83$, $p \leq 0.05$ for a one-tailed test). Similarly, the average t1 pro rating is 5.05 (standard deviation = 1.54; N = 83), but only 4.29 (standard deviation = 1.59; N = 83) at t2 ($t_{164} = 3.13$, $p \leq 0.01$ for a one-tailed test). In short, those induced to form strong attitudes at t1 downgraded the t2 frames that contradicted their t1 priors.

59 For example, see James N. Druckman, "Competing Frames in a Political Campaign," in *Winning with Words*, ed. Brian F. Schaffner and Patrick J. Sellers (New York: Routledge, 2010); Druckman and Bolsen, "Framing, Motivated Reasoning, and Opinions about Emergent Technologies"; Druckman et al., "Framing and Biased Information Search"; and Druckman and Leeper, "Learning More from Political Communication Experiments."

60 Chong and Druckman, "Public-Elite Interactions," in *The Oxford Handbook of American Public Opinion and the Media*, ed. Shapiro and Jacobs, 257. One challenge to this, however, is if individuals select information consistent with their prior opinions and thus segment themselves such that those with pro (or con) prior opinions view only pro (or con) information. Indeed, this is a manifestation of motivated reasoning. In this scenario, we would find micro stability rather than instability; see Druckman et al., "Framing and Biased Information Search."

61 Alternatively, stimuli in the world may be less likely to change in macro contexts: for example, see Baumgartner et al., *Lobbying and Policy Change*, 175 – 178.

62 Chong and Druckman, "Public-Elite Interactions," in *The Oxford Handbook of American Public Opinion and the Media*, ed. Shapiro and Jacobs, 255. See also Sniderman and Theriault, "The Structure of Political Argument and the Logic of Issue Framing," in *Studies in Public Opinion*, ed. Saris and Sniderman, 141; and Donald R. Kinder, "Curmudgeonly Advice," *Journal of Communication* 57 (1) (2007): 155 – 162.

63 Sniderman and Theriault, "The Structure of Political Argument and the Logic of Issue Framing," in *Studies in Public Opinion*, ed. Saris and Sniderman, 158.

64 John Zaller, "The Myth of Massive Media Impact Revived: New Support for a Discredited Idea," in *Political Persuasion and Attitude Change*, ed. Diana C. Mutz, Richard A. Brody, and Paul M. Sniderman (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 20. Based on an explicit testing of these alternative accounts, Chong and Druckman report, "The participants in our experiments were open to argumentation on both sides of the issue and did not merely revert to standing positions"; see Chong and Druckman, "Framing Public Opinion in Competitive Democracies," 651.

65 Ansolabehere et al., "The Strength of Issues." For a general discussion, see Jon A. Krosnick and Stanley Presser, "Question and Questionnaire Design," in *Handbook of Survey Research*, ed. Peter V. Marsden and James D. Wright, 2nd ed. (Bingley, U.K.: Emerald, 2010).

[66] Page and Shapiro explore potential volatility differences among various demographic subgroups (based, for example, on age, income, education, region, and race). They conclude that "the bulk of the evidence indicates that different groups do not tend to *change* their preferences very often in very different ways"; see Page and Shapiro, *The Rational Public*, 285–320, italics in original. Our point, however, is that much more relevant subgroup differences may be found if one focuses on attitude strength instead of conventional demographics.

[67] Krosnick and Abelson, "The Case for Measuring Attitude Strength in Surveys," in *Questions about Questions*, ed. Tanur.

[68] See James N. Druckman, James H. Kuklinski, and Lee Sigelman, "The Unmet Potential of Interdisciplinary Research," *Political Behavior* 31 (2009): 485–510.

[69] See Alan S. Gerber, Neil Malhotra, Conor M. Dowling, and David Doherty, "Publication Bias in Two Political Behavior Literatures," *American Politics Research* 38 (2010): 591–613.

[70] Christopher M. Federico and M. C. Schneider, "Political Expertise and the Use of Ideology: Moderating Effects of Evaluative Motivation," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 71 (2) (2007): 221–252.

[71] Thomas J. Leeper, "Information Choice and Opinion Change Over Time," paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, Illinois, 2012.

[72] See Druckman, "The Politics of Motivation."

[73] Eulau, *Micro-Macro Dilemmas in Political Science*, 359.

Public Opinion & the Supreme Court: The Puzzling Case of Abortion

Linda Greenhouse

Abstract: The relationship between the Supreme Court and public opinion remains ambiguous, despite efforts over many years by scholars both of the Court and of mass behavior to decipher it. Certainly Supreme Court Justices live in the world, and are propelled by the political system to their life-tenured positions. And certainly the Court, over time, appears to align itself with the broadly defined public mood. But the mechanism by which this occurs – the process by which the Court and the public engage one another in a highly attenuated dialogue – remains obscure. The Court's 1973 abortion decision, Roe v. Wade, offers a case in point. As the country began to reconsider the wisdom of the nineteenth-century criminalization of abortion, which voices did the Justices hear and to which did they respond? Probing beneath the surface of the public response to Roe serves to highlight rather than solve the puzzle.

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Students of judicial behavior strive to understand how public opinion reaches and influences the Supreme Court, while scholars of mass behavior study how Supreme Court decisions shape public perceptions of the Court and the issues it addresses. These overlapping inquiries reflect the constant dialogue between the Court and the public. It is an imperfect and sometimes inaudible dialogue, to be sure: one side seemingly remote and theoretically insulated from external influence, the other only episodically attentive and often woefully uninformed. It is a highly attenuated dialogue, filtered through, and at times distorted by, the intervening structures of the media, electoral politics, and the legal system itself.[1] It is dynamic, not static, fluctuating over time and across substantive areas of the Court's and the public's concern.

Clearly, "public opinion and the Supreme Court" is a big subject, the topic of a steady flow of books and articles, most of which acknowledge the ambiguity at the heart of the relationship. In this essay, I offer as a case study the Court's decision in 1973 to constitutionalize a woman's right to abortion. My

focus is not the doctrinal basis of that decision, *Roe v. Wade*,[2] but rather the puzzle of what preceded it and what followed from it. How did the majority in *Roe* – seven middle-aged to elderly men, including three of President Richard M. Nixon's four appointees to the Court – understand the abortion issue in 1973? How did a ruling that did not at first appear particularly polarizing come to symbolize conflict not only over abortion but over the role of the Supreme Court itself? And what does the Court's encounter with abortion, and the public's response to *Roe v. Wade*, tell us about the broader subject of the Supreme Court and public opinion?

Roe v. Wade ended the century-old regime of criminalized abortion, invalidating the laws in all but the handful of states where reform had recently been achieved through legislative action or state-court decision.[3] *Roe* is thus often depicted as having exploded like a bombshell on an unprepared and unaccepting public. Further, given the fact that the abortion issue continues to fester and to influence our domestic politics down to the present day, *Roe* is also often blamed for having caused a "backlash" that, in this account, should serve as a warning to those who would seek judicial resolution of social problems. Indeed, the case has come to many to symbolize the peril of adjudication itself.[4] Consider, for example, a colloquy that took place in a federal courtroom in San Francisco in June 2010, at the end of the federal district court trial in the California same-sex marriage case. Theodore Olson, the lawyer representing same-sex couples seeking the right to marry, had just risen to begin his closing argument when the presiding judge, Vaughn Walker, asked him this question:

> [I]sn't the danger, perhaps not to you and perhaps not to your clients, but the danger to the position that you are taking, is not that you're going to lose this case, either here or at the Court of Appeals or at the Supreme Court, but that you might win it? And, as in other areas where the Supreme Court has ultimately constitutionalized something that touches upon highly-sensitive social issues, and taken that issue out of the political realm, that all that has happened is that the forces, the political forces that otherwise have been frustrated, have been generated and built up this pressure, and have, as in a subject matter that I'm sure you're familiar with, plagued our politics for 30 years? Isn't the same danger here with this issue?

Mr. Olson responded: "I think the case that you're referring to has to do with abortion." "It does, indeed," said Judge Walker.[5]

In what follows, I take issue with the conventional accounts both of the context in which *Roe v. Wade* entered the world and of the decision's aftermath. But first, some necessary background on our broader subject: how the Supreme Court and the public observe and understand one another.

* * *

> The great tides and currents which engulf the rest of men do not turn aside in their course and pass the judges by.
>
> –Benjamin N. Cardozo[6]

Fifteen years into his Supreme Court tenure and just months before becoming Chief Justice, William H. Rehnquist, reflecting Cardozo's well-known observation, commented that it would be "remarkable indeed" if judges were not influenced by the "currents and tides of public opinion which lap at the courthouse door."[7] Judges may be isolated in their courthouses, he said, but "these same judges go home at night and read the newspapers

or watch the evening news on television; they talk to their family and friends about current events."[8]

One dramatic example was to occur late in Chief Justice Rehnquist's tenure. On April 28, 2004, the Court heard oral argument in two cases challenging the Bush administration's approach to detaining "enemy combatants" in the wake of the September 11, 2001, attacks.[9] Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg pressed Deputy Solicitor General Paul Clement, arguing for the administration, to acknowledge some limit to the claim of inherent executive authority that he had put forward in his brief. Without some limit, Justice Ginsburg wanted to know, what would stop the president from invoking executive authority to authorize torture? "Well, our executive doesn't," Mr. Clement replied.[10]

Hours later, the CBS News program *60 Minutes* broke the story of the atrocities committed by Americans against inmates of the Abu Ghraib prison in Baghdad. Perhaps some members of the Court were watching. Undoubtedly, with the rest of the country, all learned of the revelations soon enough. Did the major public scandal that unfolded during the weeks between the April arguments and the Court's June opinions influence the majority's rejection of the administration's essential claim – a claim of unilateral power with which judges should not interfere?[11] An intriguing question, unanswerable with any certitude. "Does Public Opinion Influence the Supreme Court? Possibly Yes (But We're Not Sure Why)" was the title of a 2010 law review article by Lee Epstein (the editor of this issue) and Andrew D. Martin.[12] To their title, the coauthors might have added "or How."

One recently published historical overview, legal scholar Barry Friedman's *The Will of the People: How Public Opinion Has Influenced the Supreme Court and Shaped the Meaning of the Constitution*,[13] conveys the author's premise in its very title and subtitle. The message is that yes, public opinion matters, and that only the mechanics of its influence remains to be unpacked and explained. Other scholars, responding to Professor Friedman's work, question the identity of the relevant "public" whose opinion reaches the Court. Lawrence Baum and Neal Devins, in their article "Why the Supreme Court Cares About Elites, Not the American People,"[14] note that Chief Justice Rehnquist, in his 1986 lecture cited above, specifically referred to "family and friends," rather than to "the public at large."[15]

While "we think that the Court is not immune from changing social norms and that the Justices' opinions will eventually reflect changing social conditions," Professors Baum and Devins write, "[a]t the same time, we do not think that public opinion has a significant direct effect on Court decision making."[16] Few people know much about the Court or its work, they point out, and most Supreme Court decisions pass under the radar of public attention. But Supreme Court Justices, like other people, "want most to be liked and respected by people to whom they are personally close and people with whom they identify. For the Justices, those people are overwhelmingly part of elite groups" – including the legal profession itself.[17]

More than a half-century earlier, in his classic article on the Supreme Court as a "national policy-maker," Robert A. Dahl described the Court as "an essential part of the political leadership." He said, "The main task of the Court is to confer legitimacy on the fundamental policies of the successful coalition" – by which he meant "not simply on the particular and parochial policies of the dominant political alliance, but upon the basic patterns of behavior required for the operation of a democracy."[18] Professor Dahl explained further that the Court can succeed at this

task "only if its action conforms to and reinforces a widespread set of explicit or implicit norms held by the political leadership."[19]

Political scientist Thomas R. Marshall examined Supreme Court decisions over a fifty-year period on issues for which available opinion polling indicated the public's preferred outcome. He found 146 "matches," concluding that "[w]here clear poll margins exist, three-fifths to two-thirds of Court rulings reflect the polls."[20] Professor Marshall's analysis does not suggest simple cause and effect: "No single theory could adequately explain the linkage process."[21] He ascribes considerable significance to the "federal policy process" itself, noting that when the Court defers to congressional action, as it most often does, it is in effect deferring to public opinion.[22]

Common to these and many other studies is the assumption that most Justices, most of the time, do care about maintaining at least a rough alignment with the public mood. Perhaps they care – or perhaps we should hope that they care – only subconsciously; as the legal scholar Paul Freund once said, "[J]udges . . . should not be influenced by the weather of the day, but they are necessarily influenced by the climate of the age."[23] As Lee Epstein and Andrew Martin put it in their article quoted above, "When the 'mood of the public' is liberal (conservative), the Court is significantly more likely to issue liberal (conservative) decisions. But why is anyone's guess."[24]

A possible reason, as Robert Dahl suggested, is that periodic appointments to the Court will almost always reflect the preferences of the ruling regime. Or perhaps, as Lee Epstein and her coauthors proposed in an earlier article, Justices make strategic choices aimed at maximizing the Court's own effectiveness within a system of separated powers:

> We argue that, given the institutional constraints imposed on the Court, the Justices cannot effectuate their own policy and institutional goals without taking account of the goals and likely actions of the members of the other branches. When they are attentive to external actors, Justices find that the best way to have a long-term effect on the nature and content of the law is to adapt their decisions to the preferences of these others.[25]

Tocqueville, as is so often the case, may have put it best: "The power of the Supreme Court Justices is immense, but it is power springing from opinion. They are all-powerful so long as the people consent to obey the law; they can do nothing when they scorn it."[26]

The Gallup Poll made headlines in Fall 2011 when its annual governance poll showed that the percentage of Americans who approved of the Supreme Court had dropped over the preceding two years, from 61 percent to 46 percent.[27] The Court had begun the millennium with an approval rating of 62 percent, dropping into the 40s just once during the ensuing decade, in 2005. The Gallup report did not endeavor to explain the poll result, noting only that the drop "could be a result of the broader decline in Americans' trust in government in general, rather than a response to anything the Court has done recently." Gallup also observed that "Americans still have significantly more trust in the judicial branch than in either the executive or the legislative branch." A separate poll measuring public support for Congress at the end of 2011 showed an approval rating of 11 percent, the lowest since Gallup began polling on public attitudes toward Congress more than thirty years ago.[28]

It is difficult to know how to interpret the Gallup result. Historically, public

support for the Supreme Court has been both high and "remarkably constant."[29] One political science article from 1997 concluded that "an active and even controversial Court can enjoy strong, stable aggregate support."[30] The authors of course could not foresee the Court's controversial intervention in the 2000 presidential election. But even *Bush v. Gore*[31] did almost nothing to dent the Court's high approval rating, either in the immediate aftermath of the decision or in the longer term. "[T]he net effect on the public's evaluation is essentially nil," one researcher concluded a half-year after the ruling.[32] A Gallup poll in June 2001 that asked the question, "Do you approve or disapprove of the way the Supreme Court is handling its job?" found no overall change from the 62 percent approval rate of the previous summer – that is, from before the election. While the results by party affiliation showed that Democrats' approval had declined (although still a majority) while Republicans' had risen, more Democrats said they had a "great deal or quite a lot" of confidence in the Court in June 2001 than had expressed the same level of confidence a year earlier (46 percent compared with 44 percent).[33]

Despite the recent dip in public support, unexplained and perhaps evanescent, the question remains: on what basis does the public support the Supreme Court *at all*? One answer might be that the Court, as discussed earlier, remains attuned over time to the prevailing public mood. Yet this cannot be a complete answer. Many of the Court's most important rulings, from *Brown v. Board of Education*[34] to the Guantánamo decisions,[35] if not demonstrably counter-majoritarian, have plunged the Justices into deeply and emotionally contested territory. Al Gore received more than a half-million more votes nationwide than George W. Bush – including, possibly, more votes in Florida, depending on the recount methodology – yet people generally accepted the result of the Court's intervention.

There is, of course, a difference between diffuse support – general loyalty to the institution and its role – and specific support for a particular set of outcomes. According to James L. Gibson and Gregory A. Caldeira, "[S]upport for the Court has little if anything to do with ideology and partisanship," and instead is "grounded in broader commitments to democratic institutions and processes, and more generally in knowledge of the role of the judiciary in the American democratic system."[36] Diffuse support, in turn, translates into a "positivity bias" under which "the effect of popular and unpopular decisions is asymmetrical."[37] Because people generally support the Court, regarding it as a special institution and not simply another political actor, they tend over time to fit even those decisions they oppose into the overall legitimizing frame. Exposure even to unwelcome decisions "necessarily means exposure to the legitimizing symbols of judicial power."[38]

In one creative study of the "legitimation hypothesis," political scientist Jeffery J. Mondak presented people with one of two versions of a controversial decision, one version said to have been made by the Supreme Court and the other by a school board or other agency of local government. For example, people were given the facts of a 1988 Supreme Court decision, *Hazelwood School District v. Kuhlmeier*,[39] which authorized public school principals to censor the content of the student newspaper. In one version, the outcome was accurately presented as the result of a Supreme Court decision, while in the other, the decision-maker was said to have been the local school board. People in each group were asked whether they agreed with the decision and whether they felt it was "a good or a bad development for public

education." As hypothesized, attributing the result of this and other cases to the Supreme Court conferred more "policy legitimacy" on the outcomes, particularly when the issue was one to which the respondents had not yet been exposed and so did not yet have a fixed view. "Legitimation likely operates on the margins of public opinion," the author concluded, adding: "But incremental does not mean insignificant; the Supreme Court retains a meaningful capacity for legitimation even if that process is confined to the margins of public opinion."[40]

Observing recent Supreme Court confirmation hearings, one might assume that a powerful source of public support for the Court is the belief that judging is basically a mechanical exercise in which judges simply connect the dots. "In each case I have heard, I have applied the law to the facts at hand," Judge Sonia Sotomayor told the Senate Judiciary Committee in her opening statement on July 13, 2009.[41] More colorfully, Judge John G. Roberts, Jr., declared in his opening statement at his confirmation hearing in 2005: "Judges are like umpires. Umpires don't make the rules, they apply them."[42] Senators cheered – indeed, appeared to insist upon – these value-free formulations, endorsing what political scientists have called "the myth of legality."[43]

Not only is this a mythic description of the judicial function, but it does not appear to be a description in which the public actually believes. On the basis of a recent survey, James Gibson and Gregory Caldeira conclude that "most Americans reject the mechanical jurisprudence model: Most believe that judges have discretion and that judges make discretionary decisions on the basis of ideology and values, even if not strictly speaking on partisanship."[44] While Americans are thus legal realists, the authors observe, institutional support for the Supreme Court remains robust nevertheless. Their explanation is that the public is culturally primed to see the exercise of discretion by Supreme Court Justices as "principled discretion," and "[i]t appears that this conception of principled but discretionary judicial policymaking renders realistic views compatible with judicial legitimacy."[45] On this reading, the public is a good deal more sophisticated than its political leaders give it credit for.

To consider *Roe v. Wade* is to confront head-on the many contradictions and ambiguities of our general subject. How did the Justices understand the debate over abortion's legalization and what were the sources of their knowledge? It seems clear that the Justices viewed the issue through the eyes of the elite class in which they moved. The abortion reform movement was driven by the elites: first by the public health profession, which as early as the 1950s called attention to back-alley abortions as a serious public health problem[46]; followed shortly by the American Law Institute, which proposed reform as part of its 1962 Model Penal Code[47]; and eventually by the American Medical Association, which in a resolution adopted by its House of Delegates in June 1970 authorized its members to perform abortions consistent with the "standards of sound clinical judgment" and in the "best interests" of their patients.[48] Four months later, the appeal in *Roe v. Wade* arrived at the Supreme Court.

Although many people today assume that the abortion reform movement was fueled by the women's movement, feminists actually came late to the abortion issue. Equality of economic opportunity was the goal that united feminist activists in the late 1960s and early 1970s, with claims to reproductive freedom only gradually moving up on their list of priorities as Betty Friedan and other leaders made

the connection between women's ability to participate fully in the workforce and to control their reproductive lives. The National Organization for Women's "bill of rights," published in 1967, listed access to contraception and abortion as number ten of its ten "demands." Women who did not view abortion as part of the feminist agenda split from the organization at that point and formed the Women's Equity Action League, focusing on educational and workplace equality.[49]

Women's groups did adopt the abortion-rights cause in a major way in the early 1970s – by which time *Roe v. Wade* was already on the Court's docket. It is plausible to suppose that the publicly feminist cast the abortion issue acquired while the case was under consideration largely escaped the Justices' notice. In any event, women and their now-familiar claims to dignity, autonomy, and equality in matters of reproductive freedom are almost completely absent from the opinion itself.[50] Consider one of the concluding paragraphs of Justice Harry A. Blackmun's majority opinion:

> The decision vindicates the right of the physician to administer medical treatment according to his professional judgment up to the points where important state interests provide compelling justifications for intervention. Up to those points, the abortion decision in all its aspects is inherently, and primarily, a medical decision, and basic responsibility for it must rest with the physician.[51]

Roe remained on the Court's docket for an unusually long time. Typically, the Court disposes of a case within a year or so; a petition that arrives over the summer and that is granted within a few months after the start of the new term in October will be argued after the first of the new year and decided by the end of June. *Roe* was different. After the appeal from a federal district court in Texas arrived in October 1970, the Justices put the case aside while they proceeded to decide two other cases with possible implications for *Roe*.[52] Not until April 1971 did the Court add *Roe* to its calendar for argument and decision.

By the time the case was scheduled for argument, in December 1971, Justices Hugo L. Black and John Marshall Harlan had unexpectedly retired, and the Court was down to only seven members. In cases they deemed sufficiently important to be heard by a full nine-member Court, the remaining Justices deferred the scheduled arguments until the vacancies could be filled. They did not see *Roe* as such a case ("How wrong we were," Justice Blackmun later reflected[53]), and the seven Justices heard argument on December 13, 1971. The following month, the two new Justices, Lewis F. Powell, Jr., and William H. Rehnquist, took their seats, and the Court decided in June 1972 that *Roe* should be reargued. The second argument took place on October 11, 1972, and the Court issued the decision on January 22, 1973.

Roe's unusual trajectory through the Court is significant because it was during those crucial twenty-seven months that the cultural and political resonance of the abortion issue began to shift. Women marching under banners that called for "free abortion on demand" conveyed a message very different from articles in medical journals calling for abortion restrictions to be relaxed for the sake of public health. There were many such articles in Justice Blackmun's files.[54]

At the same time, the Catholic Church was mobilizing energetically against the tides of reform. The New York legislature, which had repealed the state's nineteenth-century criminal abortion statute in 1970, repealed the repeal in 1972 under intense pressure from the church on Catholic legislators. Only Governor Nelson A. Rock-

efeller's veto kept New York from recriminalizing abortion.[55] President Nixon, running for reelection, was being urged by his advisors to take a strong stand against abortion as a way of drawing Catholic voters away from their traditional home in the Democratic Party.[56] Following that advice, the president in May 1972 had sent a public letter to New York's Cardinal Cooke expressing his support for the Cardinal's campaign to reinstate the abortion prohibition.[57]

Also that spring, President Nixon rejected the proposal by the Rockefeller Commission on Population and the American Future, a blue-ribbon group he himself had established more than two years earlier, that restrictions on access to contraception and abortion be lifted as a matter of federal policy.[58] That a presidential commission composed of civic, business, and political leaders from throughout the country could make such a recommendation could only have served to reinforce the Justices in their belief that there was broad public support for decriminalizing abortion.

Indeed, a Gallup poll in Summer 1972 made the point powerfully, showing broad agreement across all demographic groups with the statement: "The decision to have an abortion should be made solely by a woman and her physician." Sixty-three percent of all men and 64 percent of women agreed with the statement. So did 65 percent of Protestants and 56 percent of Catholics. Surprisingly from today's perspective, and significantly for understanding what was to come, more Republicans than Democrats agreed: 68 percent to 59 percent. In his *Roe v. Wade* working file, Justice Blackmun had a copy of George Gallup's syndicated column describing the poll results.[59]

It is not surprising that this poll, with the broad question it posed, did not reflect the growing conflict over abortion. A more nuanced poll on abortion attitudes, conducted by the National Opinion Research Center of the University of Chicago (NORC) beginning in 1965 as part of its General Social Survey, was more revealing. This poll asked whether a woman should be able to obtain a legal abortion under any of six circumstances. Three of the circumstances, often described as "hard" reasons for abortion, were health endangerment, rape, and "a strong chance of a serious defect in the baby." The other three, the "soft" circumstances, were income too low to afford another child; an unmarried woman who did not wish to marry the father; and a married woman who did not want more children. In the 1972 NORC survey, support for an abortion right for the "hard" reasons ranged between 79 percent (for rape and fetal defect) to 87 percent (pregnant woman's health). But fewer than half the respondents (40 to 49 percent) supported legalized abortion for any of the three "soft" reasons. Diffuse support for ending the regime of criminalized abortion was clearly much greater than specific support when respondents were asked to envision particular reasons for terminating a pregnancy.[60]

In any event, the messages of the increasingly energized opposition were strategically targeted and, at that time, almost entirely Catholic. For example, on a Sunday in late Summer 1970, Republican election registrars set up tables in front of more than a dozen Catholic churches in Southern California with the purpose of encouraging Sunday Mass worshipers to change their registration from Democrat to Republican. From the pulpit, priests urged their parishioners to take advantage of the opportunity, in protest against an abortion-rights plank in the state Democratic Party platform. The Republican State Committee had reached out to the priests to enlist their cooperation. The in-

cident was reported critically in the progressive Catholic magazine *Commonweal*.[61]

Still, the right-to-life position had not yet become part of the fabric of public Catholic identity by the time of the Gallup poll, so respondents could both identify themselves as Catholic and also express agreement with the poll's broad statement of support for abortion. That the one Catholic on the Supreme Court, William J. Brennan, Jr., also favored legalizing abortion made it all the more unlikely that the other Justices would perceive what was happening outside their quiet precinct. They had little way of realizing that *Roe v. Wade*, having arrived at the Court from one world, would emerge into another.

Clearly, conflict over abortion was growing before the Supreme Court ruled. In no sense did the Court "start it." At most, *Roe* served as accelerant on a smoldering fire. But did it even serve that purpose? Not right away and not directly. Turning *Roe v. Wade* the decision into *Roe v. Wade* the symbol took concerted effort by those whose interests the transformation served. The polarization and party realignment that eventually – but only eventually – occurred define the abortion landscape that we know today.

Newspaper commentary the morning after the decision was highly favorable, including in media markets far from centers of liberal sentiment. *The Atlanta Constitution*'s editorial called the decision "realistic and appropriate," despite the fact that in *Doe v. Bolton*,[62] the companion decision to *Roe*, issued the same day, the Court had invalidated Georgia's abortion law, which was based on the American Law Institute model. Although *Roe* struck down a Texas law, newspapers in Texas praised the opinion, with the *Houston Chronicle* calling it "sound" and the *San Angelo Standard-Times* calling it "wise and humane." The *San Antonio Light* commented: "The ruling is not perfect, but it was as close to it as humanly possible."[63] Overall support for abortion rose slightly in the aftermath of *Roe*, as reflected in the NORC poll results from 1972 to 1973[64] – evidence, perhaps, of the "legitimation hypothesis" discussed earlier.[65] (Although one frequently cited article, based on a more granular study of the poll data, concluded that while net support changed little, even rising slightly, there was evidence that attitudes toward the legitimacy of abortion for the NORC "discretionary" reasons had diverged and "changed in the direction of greater group differences and conflict," evidence of early polarization.[66])

The Catholic hierarchy, of course, reacted with outrage, and varieties of a "human life amendment" were introduced in Congress. But the church was essentially alone. The Evangelical Protestant churches, which today are at the forefront of anti-abortion activism, had not yet expressed the categorical opposition to abortion that they would come to embrace. As the abortion issue became increasingly visible in the late 1960s and early 1970s, many religious denominations felt obliged to formulate a position. In June 1971, the Southern Baptist Convention adopted a resolution calling for "legislation that will allow the possibility of abortion under such conditions as rape, incest, clear evidence of severe fetal deformity, and carefully ascertained evidence of the likelihood of damage to the emotional, mental, and physical health of the mother."[67] The same year, the National Association of Evangelicals likewise announced that "we recognize the necessity for therapeutic abortions" for reasons of health and possibly for other reasons as well.[68]

Evangelicals regarded abortion as a Catholic issue, and it was some years before they adopted the issue as their own. The Reverend Jerry Falwell, a prominent

Evangelical, did not preach against abortion until five or six years after *Roe*, when Republican Party strategists approached him and urged his help in creating the "pro-family" coalition that became the Moral Majority.[69]

Into the mid-1970s, the abortion issue remained quiescent as a target of political mobilization. In December 1975, President Gerald Ford (whose wife, Betty, spoke openly in favor of abortion rights) named Judge John Paul Stevens to succeed Justice William O. Douglas on the Supreme Court. Justice Douglas's retirement created the first vacancy on the Court since *Roe* was decided. Yet at his Senate confirmation hearing, nearly three years after *Roe*, Judge Stevens, whose views on the issue were unknown, did not receive a single question about abortion before being confirmed by a vote of 98-0.[70] In October 2011, I had occasion to ask Justice Stevens whether the absence of abortion questions had surprised him. Not at all, he replied, because the Supreme Court had ruled, and abortion was not an open issue.

As late as 1980, the Republican national platform offered only mild criticism of the Court and *Roe*, declaring that "we recognize differing views on this question among Americans in general – and in our own party."[71] Reflecting the fact that many Republicans supported legalized abortion, as revealed by Gallup in the 1972 poll, the party still remained, to at least some degree, a "big tent" on the issue. But by 1984, its platform declared: "The unborn child has a fundamental individual right to life which cannot be infringed."[72] Those who thought otherwise were no longer welcome.

While the mechanics of party realignment are beyond the scope of this article, it is highly unlikely, given the evidence from the early years after the decision, that *Roe* alone could have been the engine. Rather, several brilliant political strategists of the New Right, including Richard Viguerie, Paul Weyrich, and Phyllis Schlafly – all Catholic – saw the opportunity to bring Catholics and Evangelicals together under a "pro-family" banner that included opposition not only to abortion, but also to the proposed equal rights amendment, which had been approved by Congress and sent to the states for ratification.

Evangelicals also were highly energized by the controversy over whether religious schools and colleges that discriminated on the basis of race should be entitled to tax-exempt status. The Carter administration's decision to withdraw tax exemption infuriated the Evangelical community, all the more so when the Supreme Court upheld the policy in the *Bob Jones* case, even after the Reagan administration had repudiated it.[73] While this episode has largely faded from public memory, it has been the subject of recent scholarship and is now generally understood as having "marked a key moment in the formation of modern evangelical politics."[74]

We need not decide whether to give *Roe*, or the equal rights amendment (or the transformation in the role of women, which of course continued despite the defeat of the proposed amendment[75]), or the *Bob Jones* controversy pride of place in bringing about the party realignment that produced the recent spectacle of a half dozen Republican presidential hopefuls vying to prove the fervor of their opposition to abortion.[76] But certainly those who attribute our ongoing culture wars to a single Supreme Court decision, now entering its fifth decade, must explain away numerous crosscurrents, contingencies, and ambiguities – the many pieces of the puzzle that is the Supreme Court and public opinion.

ENDNOTES

1 See, for example, Dan M. Kahan, "Foreword: Neutral Principles, Motivated Cognition, and Some Problems for Constitutional Law," *Harvard Law Review* 125 (2011): 29. Kahan notes "the role that mediating institutions play in bridging the work of the Court and public consciousness of it."

2 *Roe v. Wade*, 410 U.S. 113 (1973).

3 Those states were New York, California, Washington, and Alaska. While other states had liberalized their laws to a lesser degree (not sufficiently to meet the test of *Roe v. Wade* or its companion case, *Doe v. Bolton*), thirty states retained their nineteenth-century laws, under which abortion was a crime except when necessary to save a pregnant woman's life.

4 Examples of these critiques of *Roe* in popular as well as academic literature are legion: for example, Jeffrey Rosen's reference to the Court's "aggressive unilateralism" in his book *The Most Democratic Branch: How the Courts Serve America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 93; Benjamin Wittes's assertion that "[o]ne effect of *Roe* was to mobilize a permanent constituency for criminalizing abortion – a constituency that has driven much of the southern realignment toward conservatism," in "Letting Go of *Roe*," *The Atlantic*, January/February 2005, 48, 51; and Cass Sunstein's charge that "the decision may well have created the Moral Majority, helped defeat the equal rights amendment, and undermined the women's movement by spurring opposition and demobilizing potential adherents," in "Three Civil Rights Fallacies," *California Law Review* 79 (1991): 766. See generally Linda Greenhouse and Reva B. Siegel, "Before (and After) *Roe v. Wade*: New Questions About Backlash," *Yale Law Journal* 120 (2011): 2028.

5 Transcript of Record, *Perry v. Schwarzenegger*, No. C 09-2292-VRW (N.D. Cal. June 16, 2010), 3095. Of course, Judge Walker went on to rule that Proposition 8, which barred same-sex marriage, was unconstitutional; see *Perry v. Schwarzenegger*, 701 F. Supp. 2d 921 (N.D. Cal. 2010).

6 Benjamin N. Cardozo, *The Nature of the Judicial Process* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1921), 168.

7 William H. Rehnquist, "Constitutional Law and Public Opinion," *Suffolk University Law Review* 20 (1986): 768–769. Then-Associate Justice Rehnquist delivered his lecture at Suffolk University Law School on April 10, 1986.

8 Ibid., 768. Indeed, Chief Justice Rehnquist went on to lead a Court that was unusually attentive to public opinion. Political scientist Thomas R. Marshall notes that 123 opinions of the Rehnquist Court (majority, concurring, and dissenting opinions as well as *per curiam* decisions) referred directly to public opinion, more than in any previous Court. Thomas R. Marshall, *Public Opinion and the Rehnquist Court* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), 4, 21.

9 *Hamdi v. Rumsfeld*, 542 U.S. 507 (2004); *Padilla v. Rumsfeld*, 542 U.S. 426 (2004). Paul Clement argued for the government in both cases. The quoted exchange is from the argument in *Padilla*.

10 For an account of this colloquy in the context of the detainee cases, see Joseph Margulies, *Guantánamo and the Abuse of Presidential Power* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006), 152.

11 The *Padilla* case was decided on procedural grounds. The Court rejected the administration's substantive positions in *Hamdi* and in *Rasul v. Bush*, 542 U.S. 466 (2004), which had been argued the previous week.

12 Lee Epstein and Andrew D. Martin, "Does Public Opinion Influence the Supreme Court? Possibly Yes (But We're Not Sure Why)," *University of Pennsylvania Journal of Constitutional Law* 13 (2010): 263.

13 Barry Friedman, *The Will of the People: How Public Opinion Has Influenced the Supreme Court and Shaped the Meaning of the Constitution* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009).

[14] Lawrence Baum and Neal Devins, "Why the Supreme Court Cares About Elites, Not the American People," *Georgetown Law Journal* 98 (2010): 1515.

[15] Ibid., 1520.

[16] Ibid., 1519.

[17] Ibid., 1537.

[18] Robert A. Dahl, "Decision-Making in a Democracy: The Supreme Court as a National Policy-Maker," *Journal of Public Law* 6 (1957): 293–295.

[19] Ibid., 294.

[20] Thomas R. Marshall, *Public Opinion and the Supreme Court* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 192. An appendix comprising the 146 "matches" can be found at 194–201. Three "matches" for three parts of the holding in *Roe v. Wade* appear at 198. See my discussion beginning on page 74.

[21] Ibid., 191.

[22] Ibid., 187–188.

[23] A Colloquy, Proceedings of the Forty-Ninth Judicial Conference of the District of Columbia Circuit (May 24, 1988) in *Federal Rules Decisions* 124 (1989): 338.

[24] Epstein and Martin, "Does Public Opinion Influence the Supreme Court?" 263.

[25] Lee Epstein, Jack Knight, and Andrew D. Martin, "The Supreme Court as a Strategic National Policymaker," *Emory Law Journal* 50 (2001): 584.

[26] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, ed. J. P. Mayer and Max Lerner; trans. George Lawrence (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 137; as quoted by Ralph Lerner, "The Supreme Court as Republican Schoolmaster," *Supreme Court Review* 1967 (1967): 127.

[27] http://www.gallup.com/poll/149906/supreme-court-approval-rating-dips.aspx.

[28] http://www.gallup.com/poll/145238/congress-job-approval-rating-worst-gallup-history.aspx.

[29] Jeffery J. Mondak and Shannon Ishiyama Smithey, "The Dynamics of Public Support for the Supreme Court," *The Journal of Politics* 59 (1997): 1116.

[30] Ibid., 1115.

[31] *Bush v. Gore*, 531 U.S. 98 (2000).

[32] Herbert M. Kritzer, "The Impact of *Bush v. Gore* on Public Perceptions and Knowledge of the Supreme Court," *Judicature* 85 (2001): 37.

[33] Ibid., 38.

[34] *Brown v. Board of Education*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

[35] *Hamdi v. Rumsfeld*, 542 U.S. 507 (2004); *Padilla v. Rumsfeld*, 542 U.S. 426 (2004); *Rasul v. Bush*, 542 U.S. 466 (2004); *Hamdan v. Rumsfeld*, 548 U.S. 551 (2006); and *Boumediene v. Bush*, 553 U.S. 723 (2008).

[36] James L. Gibson and Gregory A. Caldeira, *Citizens, Courts, and Confirmations: Positivity Theory and the Judgments of the American People* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2009), 61.

[37] Ibid., 10.

[38] James L. Gibson, Milton Lodge, Charles Taber, and Benjamin Woodson, "Can Judicial Symbols Produce Persuasion and Acquiescence? Testing a Micro-Level Model of the Effects of Court Legitimacy," paper prepared for the 2010 Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, http://mysbfiles.stonybrook.edu/~bwoodson/symbol/Text%2023,%20Midwest%20Paper1.pdf.

[39] *Hazelwood School District v. Kuhlmeier*, 484 U.S. 260 (1988).

40 Jeffery J. Mondak, "Policy Legitimacy and the Supreme Court: The Sources and Contexts of Legitimation," *Political Research Quarterly* 47 (1994): 690.

41 Confirmation Hearing on the Nomination of Sonia Sotomayor to be an Associate Justice of the United States Supreme Court Before the Senate Committee on the Judiciary, 111th Cong. 59 (2009) (statement of Judge Sonia Sotomayor).

42 Confirmation Hearing on the Nomination of John G. Roberts, Jr., to be Chief Justice of the United States Before the Senate Committee on the Judiciary, 109th Cong. 55 (2005) (statement of Judge John G. Roberts, Jr.).

43 For example, Brandon L. Bartels and Christopher D. Johnston, "Political Justice? Perceptions of Politicization and Public Preferences Toward the Supreme Court Appointment Process," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 76 (Spring 2012): 105; John M. Scheb II and William Lyons, "Judicial Behavior and Public Opinion: Popular Expectations Regarding the Factors That Influence Supreme Court Decisions," *Political Behavior* 23 (2001): 182.

44 James L. Gibson and Gregory A. Caldeira, "Has Legal Realism Damaged the Legitimacy of the U.S. Supreme Court?" *Law & Society Review* 45 (2011): 207 – 208.

45 Ibid., 213.

46 See, for example, Mary Steichen Calderone, "Illegal Abortion as a Public Health Problem," *American Journal of Public Health* 50 (1960): 948.

47 Model Penal Code (1962 official text), Section 230.3. The proposal made exceptions to the general prohibition of abortion, regarding as "justifiable" the termination of a pregnancy resulting from rape, incest, or other "felonious intercourse"; pregnancy that threatened grave harm to the woman's physical or mental health; or instances when "the child would be born with grave physical or mental defect." Two doctors needed to certify in writing that one of these indications was present. Twelve states rather quickly amended their laws along the lines of the American Law Institute model: Arkansas, California, Colorado, Delaware, Georgia, Kansas, Maryland, Mississippi, New Mexico, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia. See endnote 3, above.

48 American Medical Association, House of Delegates Proceedings: Annual Convention 1970, "Resolution No. 44, Therapeutic Abortion," 221.

49 Linda Greenhouse and Reva B. Siegel, eds., *Before* Roe v. Wade*: Voices That Shaped the Abortion Debate Before the Supreme Court's Ruling* (New York: Kaplan Publishing, 2010), 36 – 38; available at http://documents.law.yale.edu/before-roe.

50 For further discussion of this point, see Linda Greenhouse, "How the Supreme Court Talks About Abortion: The Implications of a Shifting Discourse," *Suffolk University Law Review* 42 (2008): 41.

51 *Roe v. Wade*, 410 U.S., 165 – 166.

52 The cases were *Younger v. Harris*, 401 U.S. 37 (1971) (dealing with federal court jurisdiction over ongoing state criminal proceedings; one of the challengers to the Texas abortion law in *Roe* was a doctor facing state prosecution for performing an illegal abortion) and *United States v. Vuitch*, 402 U.S. 62 (1971) (challenging the District of Columbia's abortion statute as unconstitutionally vague).

53 Linda Greenhouse, *Becoming Justice Blackmun: Harry Blackmun's Supreme Court Journey* (New York: Henry Holt/Times Books, 2005), 80.

54 Ibid., 90 – 91.

55 Greenhouse and Siegel, *Before* Roe v. Wade, 158 – 160.

56 Ibid., 215 – 218.

57 Ibid., 157 – 158. See also Greenhouse and Siegel, "Before (and After) *Roe v. Wade*," 2052 – 2059.

58 Greenhouse and Siegel, *Before* Roe v. Wade, 201 – 207. The report and a list of the Rockefeller Commission's members can be found at http://www.population-security.org/rockefeller/001_population_growth_and_the_american_future.htm.

59 George Gallup, "Abortion Seen Up to Woman, Doctor," *The Washington Post*, August 25, 1972. See Greenhouse, *Becoming Justice Blackmun*, 91.

60 Donald Granberg and Beth Wellman Granberg, "Abortion Attitudes, 1965 – 1980: Trends and Determinants," *Family Planning Perspectives* 12 (1980): 252. This dichotomy in public support for what are sometimes called "health" reasons versus "discretionary" reasons has remained visible in the decades since *Roe*. See Charles H. Franklin and Liane C. Kosaki, "Republican Schoolmaster: The U.S. Supreme Court, Public Opinion, and Abortion," *American Political Science Review* 83 (1989): 761 – 763; and Karlyn Bowman and Andrew Rugg, *AEI Public Opinion Studies: Attitudes About Abortion* (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 2010), 11 – 12.

61 Lawrence T. King, "Abortion Makes Strange Bedfellows: GOP and GOD," *Commonweal*, October 9, 1970, 37 – 38.

62 *Doe v. Bolton*, 410 U.S. 179 (1973).

63 These newspaper responses are collected in David J. Garrow, *Liberty and Sexuality: The Right to Privacy and the Making of* Roe v. Wade (New York: Macmillan, 1994), 605 – 606 and n.8, 873.

64 Granberg and Granberg, "Abortion Attitudes, 1965 – 1980," 252.

65 See Gibson, Lodge, Taber, and Woodson, "Can Judicial Symbols Produce Persuasion and Acquiescence?"; *Hazelwood School District v. Kuhlmeier*, 484 U.S. 260 (1988); and Mondak, "Policy Legitimacy and the Supreme Court."

66 Franklin and Kosaki, "Republican Schoolmaster," 759.

67 Greenhouse and Siegel, *Before* Roe v. Wade, 71 – 72.

68 Ibid., 72 – 73.

69 Greenhouse and Siegel, "Before (and After) *Roe v. Wade*," 2064 – 2065.

70 Linda Greenhouse, "Justice John Paul Stevens as Abortion-Rights Strategist," *UC Davis Law Review* 43 (2010): 749.

71 Greenhouse and Siegel, "Before (and After) *Roe v. Wade*," 2068.

72 Ibid.

73 *Bob Jones University v. United States*, 461 U.S. 574 (1983).

74 Joseph Crespino, "Civil Rights and the Religious Right," in *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s*, ed. Bruce J. Schulman and Julian E. Zelizer (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008), 101. For an authoritative account of the *Bob Jones* litigation and its background, see Olatunde Johnson, "The Story of *Bob Jones University v. United States*: Race, Religion, and Congress' Extraordinary Acquiescence," in *Statutory Interpretation Stories*, ed. William N. Eskridge, Jr., Philip P. Frickey, and Elizabeth Garrett (New York: Foundation Press/Thomson Reuters, 2011), 127 – 163.

75 See Reva B. Siegel, "Constitutional Culture, Social Movement Conflict and Constitutional Change: The Case of the De Facto ERA," *California Law Review* 94 (2006): 1323.

76 See, for example, Julian Pecquet, "Republican Candidates Move to the Right on Abortion Ahead of Caucuses," *The Hill*, December 31, 2011, http://thehill.com/blogs/healthwatch/abortion/201857-gop-candidates-move-to-the-right-on-abortion-ahead-of-iowa-caucuses.

The Great Divide: Campaign Media in the American Mind

Diana C. Mutz

Abstract: There is a huge difference between public perceptions of the power of media in elections and academic evidence of its influence. This gap stems from the fact that the public uses different forms of evidence than academics use to infer media power. This essay outlines the reasons for this great divide, then highlights the seriousness of its consequences for the allocation of political resources. Public beliefs in omnipotent media contribute to wasted time and money; ultimately, they undermine the legitimacy of election outcomes.

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As a scholar of media and politics, I am frequently asked to participate in media commentary during election years. Although I wholeheartedly believe in the importance of academic outreach to the larger world, I suspect that this is my least favorite part of my job. It is in this context that I am most often told – strongly, unequivocally, and unanimously – that I am wrong. The multitude of observations involving media and politics about which I am wrong is both wide and deep. They converge around my relative naiveté in understanding the sheer power of the monster. When I take part in a radio call-in program or appear on an election-night television broadcast, then I, too, become part of the monster, wielding its incredible power while simultaneously denying its very existence.

While both the public and academics agree that media have influence in elections, the scales on which these two entities believe media matter suggest an enormous chasm. Public perceptions of the power of media in elections, and the academic evidence of its influence, could not be further apart. This essay conveys an understanding of the origins and consequences of this great divide with respect to assessments of campaign media, including both political programming and political advertising.

First, I provide a sketch of how academic thinking on this topic has evolved since the early twentieth century. Second, I explain in greater detail the origins of public beliefs in omnipotent media. I also respond to the counterarguments that are frequently offered up to prove that academics are simply too out of touch with the real world to understand what is actually going on. Finally, I explore the reasons that this gap in understanding has only widened in recent years.

For American citizens, it often seems self-evident that, as the old adage goes, political candidates are sold like soap: they are simply advertised directly to the public.[1] In reality, there are fewer similarities than one might expect between the selling of packaged goods and the winning of votes for candidates. Because of these dissimilarities, public assessments of the importance of paid and unpaid media in campaigns may be off by miles rather than inches. Candidates are much more difficult to sell than soap, particularly when they run for high-level offices that attract the most press attention and the strongest claims for media influence. The purpose of this essay is to outline the reasons for this great divide, and then to highlight the seriousness of its consequences for the allocation of political resources.

When academics talk about the effects of mass media on elections, the received history is often described in terms of three distinct periods in scholarly thought about the importance of media in altering mass opinion. This evolution characterizes scholars as initially believing that media had massive effects on political attitudes and opinions, followed by a period in which these effects were assumed to be minimal, and ending with a third era in which such effects were once again assumed to be at least substantial, if somewhat different in nature.

This received view is nothing more than a conveniently reconstructed straw man, with little connection to the weight of scholarly research on media effects at any given point in time.[2] In the early part of the twentieth century, to the extent that scholars studied political persuasion at all, they used a case study approach. Between the two world wars, covert propaganda was of particular concern, and many academic case studies were used as part of a large-scale public education effort known as the Institute for Propaganda Analysis. The Institute prepared and distributed instructional materials to schools and adult education groups in order to educate the mass public about how to recognize covert propaganda. The Institute's reformist mission was to protect the public from potential influence, and the best way to do that, its founders believed, was to heighten public awareness of the threat.[3]

Historians suggest that one would be hard pressed to find evidence of a scholar from this interwar period claiming actual evidence of the massive effects of propaganda.[4] However, implicit in the scholars' meticulous attention to analyzing media messages, and in their desire to protect the public, was the assumption that media at least had the *potential* for great influence, and thus the public was at risk. Their goal was "to alert the public to the dangers of manipulation." Many academics from this period "shared an impulse to protect . . . against the new alliance of institutional persuaders and modern communication practitioners."[5] In essence, social scientists engaged in "a kind of clinical social science" in which the public in its entirety was their at-risk patient. Clearly, scholars were worried, but they did not go so far as to claim or document an actual impact from propaganda or from mass media more generally.

From the 1940s onward, researchers have empirically evaluated media influ-

ence on political opinions and on vote choice in particular. Sociologist Paul Lazarsfeld and his colleagues at Columbia University initiated this work, using a series of panel surveys of single communities in the United States. These studies, later known collectively as the Columbia Studies,[6] suggested that most citizens knew for whom they would vote long before the general election campaign; and in interview after interview, they stuck to that preference. In the original Erie County, Ohio, study of the 1940 election, only 8 percent ever changed their minds between May and the November election. Those few who did change their preference had exceedingly low levels of exposure to political media, thus making it difficult to argue that they were persuaded by campaign communications.[7] On this basis, the minimal-effects conclusion was launched.

Starting in the 1950s and continuing to the present, a nationwide data collection effort known as the American National Election Studies (ANES) took over the task of understanding how people decide for whom to vote. However, by the time the ANES was organized and under way, the notion that media had only minimal effects on vote choice was already firmly entrenched in academe. As a result, the ANES directed little effort toward studying media effects, and even if it had done so, the results would most likely have been disappointing. The central pattern originally observed in the Columbia Studies persists today: those most likely to change their vote choice are the least likely to be heavily exposed to political media. Upon reflection, this pattern is not all that surprising; those most heavily interested and involved in politics in this country are also heavily partisan, highly committed to their choices, and thus unlikely to be dissuaded, regardless of any media to which they are exposed. Heavy exposure to media simply does not go hand in hand with a propensity to change opinions.

In fact, now as then, an overwhelming majority of voters decide for whom they will vote many months in advance of an election. Many know that they will vote for the Democratic or Republican candidate even before the parties have officially chosen their nominees. As a result, the number of people who are available as possible targets of persuasion is relatively small. In 2008, for example, between 70 and 80 percent of partisans knew their vote choice well before the general election campaign officially began, thus making it difficult to argue that they were persuaded by any campaign communications. Notably, this proportion is even greater than what Lazarsfeld and his colleagues found in the 1940s. As media scholars point out, presidential elections can be decided by very small margins, so Lazarsfeld's 8 percent who changed preference – or the more recent, substantially lower estimates from 2008 – can still be highly consequential.[8] But then as now, few of the changers are exposed to a great deal of political media.

In what is typically characterized as a third era of scholarly study, the consensus has drifted back toward an equilibrium in which most researchers claim evidence of neither massive nor minimal media effects, particularly when speaking to the issue of whether media directly persuade people to support one candidate over another in the context of an election. Although occasional studies demonstrate statistically significant persuasion effects,[9] efforts to study entirely different kinds of media influence are now most common. These media effects include learning from media exposure, agenda setting, and priming. As a result of this greater diversity in study outcomes, scholars today often do not define *effect* in the same way that scholars of these earlier eras did. In particular, the

realm of effects of interest has shifted away from media's direct persuasive influence on public opinion to more subtle and indirect means of altering political processes.

For example, media's ability to prime certain issues over others has indirect implications for vote choice. To the extent that campaign media emphasize an issue that is perceived as one candidate's strength or another's weakness, the voter's decision-making calculus will be skewed more heavily toward evaluating candidates on that particular issue, which could favor one candidate over another. Few people are single-issue voters, but issue priming could to some extent shift a candidate's overall favorability. Nonetheless, this process is subtle and indirect relative to more obvious, direct efforts to persuade.

Not everyone has shied away from direct persuasive effects, however. One prominent exception to these generally lower expectations is the perspective advanced by political scientist John Zaller, who argues that media effects are indeed massive on an ongoing basis; we are simply unable to observe them in most observational (that is, non-laboratory) contexts. In short, Zaller denies the absence of evidence as evidence of absence. Instead, he suggests that the gross influence of competitive media in the political environment is huge, but that because the two-candidate and party organizations generally cancel one another out through their persuasive efforts, the net impact of media on opinion is often slim to none. As long as the amount of media is balanced and both sides promote their messages to roughly the same extent and with the same degree of skill, the net influence will appear to be zero even though it results from large amounts of persuasion on both sides. According to this theory, if one side chose, for example, not to advertise, the opponent would experience a landslide victory. But under ordinary circumstances, competing communication flows from each side maintain the status quo.[10]

This clever idea makes a great deal of sense in many political contexts. It also highlights the need to study situations with large imbalances of media on one side versus the other in order to observe media impact in the real world. Some of Zaller's work has been able to do just that, primarily in the context of down-ballot races – for example, elections for the House of Representatives in which one candidate's communication budget swamps the other candidate's budget. But such scenarios are still difficult to interpret in unambiguous causal terms. After all, the reason one candidate has so much more money to spend on advertising than the other is typically because he or she is more popular to begin with. Moreover, down-ballot races are precisely the kind in which advertising works most easily. In these cases, persuasion is not necessarily required to change an individual's vote; name recognition alone may be enough.[11]

While Zaller's argument is compelling, it is nonetheless surprising that evidence of media persuasion in politics remains so slim. As a recent review noted, "Volumes of research on electoral communication in recent years have produced precious little evidence of large effects."[12] Although the recognition of new types of effects has meant that scholars now claim at least "not so minimal" influence, current findings are not all that different from the conclusions drawn in the 1970s minimal-effects classic, *The Unseeing Eye: The Myth of Television Power in National Politics*:

> Symbolic manipulation through televised political advertising simply does not work. Perhaps the overuse of symbols and stereotypes in product advertising has built up an

> immunity in the television audience. Perhaps the symbols and postures used in political advertising are such patently ridiculous attempts at manipulation that they appear more ridiculous than reliable. Whatever the precise reasons, television viewers effectively protect themselves from manipulation by staged imagery.[13]

Others have argued that the lack of evidence in academic research is due to problems in the reliability of media-exposure measures in observational studies. Self-reported survey measures of exposure are indeed suspicious for a number of reasons[14]; however, their true-score reliabilities are no worse than the kinds of outcome measures they are used to predict.[15] Thus, it is difficult to explain why a noisy *independent* variable is problematic, but a noisy *dependent* variable is not. Survey research using similarly unreliable measures indeed produces evidence of effects such as political learning. For these reasons, the methodological argument falls short of explaining this pervasive pattern. Yet another possibility is that usual sample sizes do not have sufficient statistical power to detect effects.[16]

Whether the problem in documenting media influence during campaigns is largely methodological or instead comes from the fact that actual effects are typically much smaller and more infrequent than anticipated when they occur at all, the end result is the same. The small to null effects that can be "teased out of massive electoral communication campaigns" are not terribly impressive.[17] Although advertising is just one form of election media, conclusions about the impact of the news are similarly underwhelming, unless one looks for effects other than a change in vote preference, or if one looks at low-profile, local races. The scholarly consensus, specifically on *direct persuasive effects of media on vote choice* – the type of effect that most fascinates the public and the media – is still that media's impact is marginal at most. Advertising appears most influential in races for low-level offices where name recognition alone can produce votes. The slick, highly professional advertising that most Americans think of as powerful appears in high-level races such as the presidency – and there is little evidence of direct persuasive effects in these races. Moreover, advertising effects appear to be short lived when they do occur. Although laboratory studies can easily demonstrate what works and what does not, these results are widely believed to be ungeneralizable to the rough-and-tumble world of real politics.

In contrast to the waxing and waning (and rewaxing) of the academic consensus regarding media's influence on opinions, the American public has consistently believed in very powerful media effects on vote choice and public opinion for a long time. Is this yet another case of poor communication between the academic world and the public? To some extent; but this gap stems more directly from the public's use of different forms of evidence for inferring media power.

For most Americans, evidence of media's political power is obvious and omnipresent. After all, they watch television, read newspapers (both online and in print), and see the ads, whether on the air or as a topic of discussion in other media. Thus, foremost among the heuristics that signify media's power is ubiquity. Media are literally everywhere in Americans' physical environments. They follow people into their cars, accompany them while on vacation, and permeate day-to-day life. Size matters; in the eyes of citizens, things that are large or widespread are usually also perceived to be important. Indeed, the more publications by a particular author that graduate students are required to read, the taller they will estimate that scholar

to be, and the more facial hair they will expect him to have.[18]

Media's ubiquity leads people to infer that media must be powerful, if only because its presence dominates all aspects of life and reaches all kinds of people. Although political media flood the airwaves only during election years, Americans think about the sheer number of people reached by these political messages and assume high levels of persuasion from the high visibility of media. Further, many of these messages are obviously designed to be persuasive, so it seems self-evident that they must move opinions.

Americans believe in the political power of television in particular. The 1987 *U.S. News & World Report* cover heralded "Television's Blinding Power." This "telemythology," as it has since been dubbed by academics, consists of "a set of widely circulated stories about the dangerous powers of television."[19] There is a strong belief among Washington elites "that the general public can be mesmerized by television images. . . . The power of television is perhaps more firmly an article of faith in Washington than anywhere else in the country."[20]

In addition to the tremendous reach and visibility of television, most Americans are well aware of the mass persuasion industry and of political consultants and political advertising in particular. Given the received wisdom that politicians are sold just like soap, why shouldn't the public infer that political ads, like product advertisements, typically persuade people to "purchase" the product? This simple analogy often fails because the political context includes several important differences. First, although there is brand loyalty when one buys soap, it is nothing like the long-term brand loyalty inspired by political parties, which tends to remain stable throughout adulthood. Given that most Americans vote consistent with their preexisting party identification, these persuasive communications are up against fairly powerful adversaries.

Moreover, the product marketplace includes dozens of choices for soap. For this reason, one brand rarely campaigns against another by throwing mud at a specific target. If Dove badmouths Irish Spring, consumers can easily turn to Dial instead of Dove, so negativity is not an efficient approach to boosting sales. Further, as noted above, it is easier to observe effects from product advertising because Dial and Dove seldom launch their advertising campaigns at exactly the same time. When one brand is promoted, but not the other, it is far easier to observe the effectiveness of an advertising campaign in influencing purchases. In the political world, this kind of timing seldom happens; election day is the same for both candidates, so the candidates run their campaign communications more or less simultaneously.

If ubiquity and the analogy to product advertising are not enough to convince Americans of the power of mass media, then surely the prevalence of political consultants will do so. As my nonacademic friends typically argue, "No candidate in his or her right mind would spend that kind of money on something if it didn't work!" This is an excellent and extremely interesting point. If media are not a powerful force for mass persuasion, why do political candidates spend the bulk of their campaign budgets on media? Indeed, nothing is more visible about the campaign than media consultants:

> The airwaves teem with political commercials. The newspapers overflow with commentary about the broadcast spots. And then new TV spots incorporate the print commentary about the old spots. At times candidates and voters seem to be on the sidelines, passively observing the media consultants and ad agencies on the playing field.[21]

Citizens logically infer that all this activity must somehow make a difference.

To push this argument further, why wouldn't political media consultants eventually go out of business if they were ineffective at producing the results their candidates desire? The rise of highly professionalized political campaigns is known worldwide as the "Americanization" of campaigns: "The USA is universally acknowledged as the leader in campaign innovation, historically the first to embrace the paraphernalia of political marketing."[22] Campaigns in many other countries have now followed suit because professionalized American campaigns are believed to be more effective.

Professionalized campaigns emerged in the United States not because they demonstrated superior abilities relative to former methods of campaigning but because of the decline in patronage labor to run campaigns. As the patronage system waned in the United States, fewer people volunteered to work for campaigns; thus, commercial firms with paid employees stepped in to fill the void.[23] Around the same time, the development of computerized voter databases and specialized communications technology encouraged the formation of firms that offer expertise on everything from producing television advertisements, to sending direct mail, to the use of commercial telephone banks.

Does this specialized expertise give a competitive advantage to those who hire campaign consultants? Possibly, but this is far from a foregone conclusion. The limitations of informal observation as a means of assessing effectiveness are severe in the context of elections. As one consultant has noted, the dominant assumption is that "everything you did in a winning campaign was a good idea and everything that you did in a losing campaign was a bad idea."[24] Given that winning or losing is a very crude outcome measure, learning via this kind of evidence takes place only very slowly, if at all. This problem is further complicated by the fact that election outcomes are consistently overdetermined. There are so many factors to which one might attribute a victory (or loss) that one is never certain. Was it the ad campaign? The negative ads in particular? The press's discussion of the negative ads? The debate performance? A lack of success in getting out the vote on election day? The economy? The weather?[25]

With as many possible claims as there are components to a campaign, campaign professionals tend to rely on tradition and intuition rather than data. As one seasoned campaign manager noted: "It's probably the only industry in the world where there's no market research. . . . But a billion dollars is spent on politics every cycle. No company, no entity, no business would spend that amount of money without knowing what works. . . . No one who gets hired wants to admit they don't know anything."[26]

Indeed, campaign operatives seldom do their own research on what works most efficiently, and they have systematic disincentives to consider independent academic research on these topics if it suggests substantially changing what they do:

> Consultants make money by selling specialized expertise (e.g. crafting ads, conducting polls, buying airtime). The profitability of their firms is greatly enhanced by selling the same type of service to a variety of different campaigns. Thus, for example, a given consultant who specializes in running campaigns that rely on direct mail and phone banks has an incentive to manage several campaigns that each rely on these technologies.[27]

Campaign consultants are heavily invested in certain approaches. They make money by transporting these capacities

from place to place and election to election. If what they do is not as effective as has been assumed, they may not want to know about it because that would wreak havoc on their business models: "Few involved in management of campaigns have an interest in developing a clear sense of what works."[28]

In a few isolated cases, consultants have collaborated with academics to run scientific field experiments in order to test, for example, which techniques have the greatest effect in increasing turnout.[29] But for the most part, consultants are uninterested in empirically validated best practices and prefer to stick with folk wisdom. Tracking polls, which show overtime trends in a candidate's standings, are about as close as they come to gathering evidence that allows them to ascertain whether one approach works better than another. But in an uncontrolled campaign environment in which everyone receives the "treatment," there are typically so many potential interpretations of what caused any observed change that strong causal inference is impossible.

Often, the knowledge gained can only benefit those campaigns that follow the one invested in the research. As one campaign operative complained, "Finding out the day after the election that Treatment A was the best is of limited value to an organization like ours. We're actually trying to win the election."[30] Moreover, if you are a campaign consultant, trying something new can easily lead to blame for a loss, whereas sticking with what everyone else does carries less risk. Given that there are no independent firms systematically monitoring the effectiveness of campaign strategies, sticking with what is assumed to matter most is the safest strategy.[31]

If campaign professionals generally do not execute these kinds of studies, then why not academics? Do political scientists or market researchers have useful things to say about campaign tactics? Neither the National Science Foundation nor any other foundations fund research on "what works" to gain votes for one candidate over another; this would be considered partisan spending. The closest academics come to this kind of focus is research on turnout. Because turnout is considered a public, nonpartisan good, research on this topic is widely funded in academe. Certainly, knowledge about how to increase turnout can be used for partisan purposes when areas favorable toward a given candidate are targeted for increased turnout while others are not. But studies of political persuasion in the context of campaigns are seldom the focus of academic research because of their partisan implications. As a former editor of *Campaigns and Elections* suggests, "Practitioners think that political scientists are not studying problems of interest and are therefore not helpful."[32]

To summarize, a combination of factors collude to make elusive any well-controlled empirical research on how media can most efficiently influence public opinion. First, the accumulation of knowledge is hindered by the fact that campaign consultants are reluctant to participate in the research that would be necessary to find out how to use media most efficiently. They fear that purposely not exposing parts of the population to their media will lose votes. When one campaign did sign on for an experimental field study, the move "potentially set one campaign manager up for malpractice."[33] No one wants to undermine the chance for victory. The fact that only subsequent campaigns might benefit from the research provides another disincentive. Finally, campaign consultants' business models rest on certain assumptions that, if untrue, could prove financially disastrous for them.

Ironically, America leads the world in spending huge amounts of money on something that only possibly accomplishes what it sets out to do. If campaign media does persuade voters, it does so highly inefficiently. In reality, "The claim of political savants and insiders that the right commercials and the right consultants can win any election . . . is fed by the self-serving myth that certain 'magic moments' on television have turned elections around."[34]

But perhaps more important, because observers of campaigns *perceive* highly professionalized campaigns to be more likely to succeed, candidates continue to pay huge amounts to campaign professionals, who continue to rely on instinct and tradition in spending candidates' money. There is a self-fulfilling aspect to the professionalization of campaigns. If a candidate does not spend large sums on television (the least efficient of campaign communications), then he or she is seen as less "serious" as a candidate. This impression can impair fundraising ability and the candidate's perceived electability, even if the ads themselves affect no one.

The visibility and professionalism of campaign media heavily influence perceptions of its potential impact:

> In an environment where very little is known about what kinds of campaign tactics actually work, those who purchase these campaign services must rely on their intuitive sense of what makes for an effective campaign. There is a natural tendency to gravitate toward tactics that command the attention of others, particularly potential donors. Campaigns crave attention and credibility: expensive, large-scale, professionally crafted communication is a way to demonstrate one's seriousness of purpose.[35]

Thus, while the general public associates greater professionalism with greater impact, research findings often suggest otherwise. Expensive television advertisements attract a great deal of attention, but they may be one of the least cost-effective means of persuading voters.

A psychological tendency known as the *persuasive press inference*, or *third person effect*, further exacerbates the public tendency to perceive large media effects. More educated and involved partisans are especially likely to perceive that *others* are influenced by media, though certainly not themselves. Their assessments of the extent of influence from any given message systematically exaggerate the amount of influence. As a result, "The power of the media resides in the perception of experts and decision makers that the general public is influenced by the mass media, not in the direct influence of the mass media on the general public. That is to say, the media's political appeal lies less in its ability to bend minds than in its ability to convince elites that the popular mind can be bent."[36]

Today, the great divide between public and academic perceptions of media influence on vote choice may be widening still further. The more overtly partisan political media environment has led many academics to assume that the potential for changing preferences through political news has waned a great deal. As news and talk shows become more plentiful and increasingly partisan, citizens can more easily self-select like-minded programming that is unlikely to change their preferences as much as reinforce them. To what extent these theories of waning influence will be borne out has yet to be observed, but many scholars have speculated that individuals' exposure to ideas they do not already agree with will be increasingly limited, thus making persuasion unlikely as well. Thus, academics have already begun to note "the waning of mass media influence in the lives of most citizens."[37]

The mass public, on the other hand, looks at some of the programming on offer today and finds it to be heavily biased toward one candidate or the other – more so than in the past. As a result, the public sees the potential for persuasive influence from media as greater than ever before. Without taking into account the likely audiences for these programs, the content itself seems far more hard-hitting and potentially persuasive than the news programs of the past, which at least attempted to achieve balance and neutrality.

Further, through a bizarre trend dubbed *media narcissism*, *self-reflexive reporting*, or *metacoverage*, media have become fascinated with themselves as a political force, and they increasingly cover their own importance in the political process as a standard part of election coverage.[38] According to many journalists, the campaign story has become the analysis of candidates' use of media to manipulate the public into voting for them. In 1980, one reporter claimed, "Never before, it seemed, had so many reporters, correspondents, editors, executives, candidates, consultants, and just plain citizens been so conscious of the power of the press."[39]

It is doubtful that this phenomenon emerged full blown in 1980; after all, popular assumptions about the importance of media in winning elections were also high in the 1940s. According to popular legend, Roosevelt's victories were attributable to his "superb radio voice," which enabled him to exploit the medium better than Landon or Willkie.[40] And books such as author Joe McGinniss's *The Selling of the President* offered entertaining anecdotal tales of media power to popular audiences in the 1960s. But according to scholars, media metacoverage has increased. Thus, in 1988, Michael Dukakis's loss was attributed to his failure to "package" himself successfully for the demands of media politics, and George H.W. Bush's success was attributed to his superior media consultants.[41] The amount of time the media spend talking to and about themselves has increased relative to the time they spend talking about actual politics. In short, the media have shifted their focus increasingly to themselves.[42]

Metacoverage is obviously self-serving to a degree, in that media are continuously celebrating their own importance in the political process. But my view is that this practice stems from more than a sense of self-importance. Rather, political media see themselves as a modern-day Institute for Propaganda Analysis, focusing on strategy and tactics in an effort to prevent the unwitting public from becoming victims of political persuasion. By covering potentially persuasive media, they make us "cognoscenti of our own bamboozlement"[43]; they make us feel as if we are smarter than others who may fall prey to these tactics.[44] The same protective impulse that drove early assessments of propaganda's potential still influences journalists' perceptions of their audiences' susceptibility. Moreover, expressing cynicism about persuasive appeals makes the individual cynic feel smarter, and media coverage of politics encourages us to be among those "in the know." Although the press's intentions may be good, this portrayal of campaigns and elections is not a flattering portrait of the public or of the political process. The public is viewed as gullible and easily manipulated by all things nonpolitical, and the process itself is portrayed as a sham.

The extremely high levels of spending on American political campaigns are a perennial cause for disdain of the American electoral process. For the 2012 presidential election, the Supreme Court's 2010 *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* decision has become the whipping boy, but other previous decisions, such as *Buckley v. Valeo* in 1976, have produced

similar outcries about the increasingly high costs of elections. The underlying reason that people are upset about the amount spent on campaigns is that they believe money buys television airtime, which, in turn, buys votes. When television time does buy votes, it does so highly inefficiently. Thus, my own complaint is somewhat different: the problem with the high costs of campaigns is that such huge amounts of money are spent unproductively and inefficiently when they could be spent in ways that more directly affect Americans. Despite the rise of narrowcasting, television is still among the least efficient means of persuasion, dollar for dollar. But the high costs of television and its perceived necessity mean that political leaders feel they must spend more and more of their time raising money rather than governing.

For a variety of reasons, media influence is indeed a difficult topic to study outside the laboratory. But regardless of the extent to which media actually influence election outcomes, we are not, as a political culture, well served by these extreme beliefs in media power. My problem with this common approach to covering campaigns runs deeper than the usual gripe, which is that coverage of strategy and tactics displaces more serious coverage of the campaign. The real problem stems from our culture's underlying attitude toward political persuasion more generally.

I was struck by this underlying assumption when the human subjects committee at one of my former universities decided that political persuasion was a form of harm to human subjects. Even though the experiment involved nothing more than exposing subjects to highly substantive political arguments on different sides of an issue, this approach was deemed potentially harmful to research participants because their political views might be changed in all manner of directions. The Institutional Review Board wanted the study participants to be persuaded *back* to their former opinions at the conclusion of the study. This struck me as absurd. If persuasion equals harm, then our political system has some pretty serious problems on its hands. The entire purpose of election campaigns is to provide politicians with opportunities to expose the public to their persuasive arguments. Persuasion, rather than coercion or violence, was thought by our Founders to be a preferable means of conducting politics. But today we are ambivalent, at best, about this core part of our political system.

Presidential candidates spend around 70 percent of their extremely large campaign budgets producing and airing political ads.[45] Even in the relatively low-profile midterm elections in 2010, candidates spent around $1.5 billion. Outside groups, such as Super PACs, now add substantially to total campaign spending. Professionalization of campaigns sends a signal to citizens that these people know what they are doing; they have expertise that we do not, so we are the potential victims of their efforts to manipulate us. But if the emperor has no clothes, then what?

The real tragedy here is not that so much is being spent or that people are being persuaded to change their minds willy-nilly, but rather that so much is being spent *without* effect. If campaigns effectively inspire, galvanize, and mobilize the American public, it is easier to defend their massive expenditures on media. But if they do so only through a highly inefficient waste of time and resources, then this reality is indeed regrettable.

Does it matter that the mass public believes in large media effects instead of smaller, more realistic ones? Beyond sheer waste and inefficiency, the tremendous emphasis of journalists on media power in elections, and the corresponding

strong belief in its influence among the mass public, have negative consequences for the perceived legitimacy of our system of government. It has long been argued that political participation in the form of voting in elections is an especially inefficient way to express one's political views. The chance that one's vote will matter is infinitesimal, and even if one is lucky enough to have supported the candidate who ultimately wins, our political system is sufficiently complex that there is no guarantee that the elected official will be able to accomplish his or her specified goals. What makes elections legitimate in the eyes of the mass public is not that the electorate always gets its way. Instead, the process itself is what confers legitimacy on the outcome. But if the process is believed to be a function of who hired the better political consultants or who spent more on advertising, then it becomes very difficult for those on the losing side to see the election outcome as legitimate.

If elections are believed to be won and lost because of the tactics of professional campaign consultants – not because of the beliefs of the mass public, or the merits of candidates, or politics – then how can the outcome be respected? As one observer put it, "What better excuse than that the game was rigged, the press bought, the television networks intimidated . . . and voters led like lambs to the polling booths."[46] Today, there are strong differences of opinion among Americans about the appropriate role of government in society and about how that government should be run. These are real differences, not made-for-TV conflicts. Sadly, the "mythology of the great power of U.S. election campaign practices" does little to advance public understanding of or respect for these very real differences.[47]

Finally, in addition to wasted resources and less perceived legitimacy in election outcomes, beliefs in the power of campaign media ultimately elevate media's actual power in elections. It is a cliché to say that politics is about perceptions, but it is also true. As long as 90 percent of the American public believes that the news media influence who becomes president[48] and more than 70 percent see that influence as growing,[49] candidates and their campaigns will continue to behave as if these perceptions were true. To do anything else risks being seen as less serious and, therefore, less electable.

ENDNOTES

1 Alex Marland, "Marketing Political Soap: A Political Marketing View of Selling Candidates Like Soap, of Electioneering as a Ritual, and of Electoral Military Analogies," *Journal of Public Affairs* 3 (2) (May 2003): 103 – 115.

2 J. Michael Sproule, "Progressive Propaganda Critics and the Magic Bullet Myth," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 6 (3) (September 1989): 225 – 246.

3 Benjamin Fine, "Propaganda Study Instills Skepticism in 1,000,000 Pupils," *The New York Times*, February 21, 1941.

4 Sproule, "Progressive Propaganda Critics and the Magic Bullet Myth."

5 Ibid., 231.

6 The first two of these studies focused on the 1940 and 1948 elections, respectively, and were published as Paul Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson, and Hazel Gaudet, *The People's Choice: How the Voter Makes Up His Mind in a Presidential Campaign* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1944);

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8 For example, see Richard Johnston, Michael G. Hagen, and Kathleen Hall Jamieson, *The 2000 Presidential Election and the Foundations of Party Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

9 See Jonathan McDonald Ladd and Gabriel S. Lenz, "Exploiting a Rare Communication Shift to Document the Persuasive Power of the News Media," *American Journal of Political Science* 53 (2) (April 2009): 394–410.

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11 See Shanto Iyengar and Jennifer McGrady, *Media Politics: A Citizen's Guide* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2007); Michael L. Rothschild and Michael L. Ray, "Involvement and Political Advertising Effect: An Exploratory Experiment," *Communication Research* 1 (3) (July 1974): 264–284; Gary C. Jacobson, *The Politics of Congressional Elections*, 7th ed. (New York: Pearson/Longman, 2009).

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14 John Zaller, "The Statistical Power of Election Studies to Detect Media Exposure Effects in Political Campaigns," *Electoral Studies* 21 (2002): 297–329.

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16 Zaller, "The Statistical Power of Election Studies to Detect Media Exposure Effects in Political Campaigns."

17 Bennett and Iyengar, "A New Era of Minimal Effects?" 714.

18 Thankfully, this pattern does not hold for female academics, although the data in this case suffer from a small sample size. Data for this unpublished study were gathered from first-year Ph.D. students at Stanford University.

19 Michael Schudson, "Trout or Hamburger: Politics and Telemythology," in *The Power of News* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), chap. 5.

20 Ibid., 119, 121.

21 Ibid., 113.

22 Margaret Scammell, "The Wisdom of the War Room: U.S. Campaigning and Americanization," *Media, Culture & Society* 20 (2) (April 1998): 252.

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[25] Green and Smith, "Professionalization of Campaigns and the Secret History of Collective Action Problems."

[26] Quoted in Sasha Issenberg's e-book, *Rick Perry and His Eggheads: Inside the Brainiest Political Operation in America: A Sneak Preview from The Victory Lab* (New York: Crown, 2011).

[27] Green and Smith, "Professionalization of Campaigns and the Secret History of Collective Action Problems," 334.

[28] Ibid.

[29] See Donald P. Green and Alan S. Gerber, *Get Out the Vote! How to Increase Your Voter Turnout* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2004); and Issenberg, *Rick Perry and His Eggheads*.

[30] Quoted in Issenberg, "Nudge the Vote."

[31] Ibid.; Green and Smith, "Professionalization of Campaigns and the Secret History of Collective Action Problems."

[32] Ron Faucheux, "Consultants on Trial," *Campaigns and Elections* 17 (10) (1996): 5.

[33] Quoted in Sasha Issenberg, *Rick Perry and His Eggheads*, Location 335.

[34] Samuel L. Popkin, *The Reasoning Voter* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 20.

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[46] John O'Sullivan, "Britain: Under the Iron High Heel?" *Commentary* 88 (September 1988): 52.

[47] David L. Swanson and Paolo Mancini, *Politics, Media, and Modern Democracy: An International Study of Innovations in Electoral Campaigning and Their Consequences* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1996).

[48] This figure is based on responses to the following question: "Thinking more about the news media's coverage of presidential campaigns, please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree with each of the following statements....

Media coverage has too much influence on who Americans vote for"; Confidence in Leadership Survey, September 2007. Data are provided by the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.

49 This figure is based on responses to the following question: "Please tell me whether you think the news media today have more, less or about the same influence as they did 40 or 50 years ago [on] [w]ho becomes President"; Roper Starch Worldwide, January 27–30, 2000. Data are provided by the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.

Latino Public Opinion & Realigning the American Electorate

Gary M. Segura

Abstract: The growth and significance of the Latino electorate raises important questions about its preferences, identity, and impact. In this essay, I explore three facets of Latino public opinion and offer thoughts regarding their political impact. First, I demonstrate that Latino core beliefs about the role of government are progressive. Second, I explore the ways in which national origin, nativity, and generational status reveal important differences in how Latinos think about and participate in politics; I caution against over-interpreting the importance of these differences. Finally, I offer evidence that Latino panethnic identity is sufficiently developed to constitute a political "group." Given that this segment in the American electorate is increasingly unified and demonstrably left of center, I suggest that the growth of the Latino population and electorate could have substantial electoral and social impact.

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The share of Latinos in the U.S. population has grown rapidly in the last decade, a phenomenon that is now widely recognized in academic and political circles. Just over 12 percent of the U.S. population in 2000, Latinos accounted for 16.3 percent in the 2010 Census – a 33 percent increase in ten years. A majority of that growth comes from native births rather than immigration. According to Census Bureau projections, Latinos will make up a third of the national population by 2050.

The Latino share of the electorate has considerably lagged the population share. Nevertheless, it has grown substantially. In 2008, Latinos were an estimated 9 percent of the national electorate, up considerably from 5.4 percent in 2000 and dramatically from 3.7 percent in 1992, when Bill Clinton was elected president.[1] Disadvantages in education and income are generally associated with lower rates of voter registration and turnout, but even here, Latinos have been closing the gap largely by overperforming their socioeconomic status. Controlling

for income and education, reported voter participation by Latinos trails that of non-Hispanic whites by a mere 4 percent.[2]

The remainder of the lag can be attributed to two factors, both of which will become less significant with time. First, Latinos in the United States are a very young population; among those who are citizens, only 57.7 percent are over the age of eighteen (compared with 79.1 percent of non-Hispanic whites) according to the 2010 American Community Survey. Second, non-citizens make up around 40 percent of the adult Latino population. While many of them are undocumented residents whose future in the country is uncertain at best, in time, these non-citizens will be replaced in the population with their U.S.-born offspring.

As a consequence, what Latinos think about government and politics matters a great deal to the future direction of the country. The growth of the Latino electorate has significantly reshaped politics in the Southwest and California and is beginning to do so in other states such as Texas, Florida, and even Georgia and North Carolina. As population increase and electoral growth continue, the impact that Latino public opinion has on the national conversation – and on political outcomes in particular – will only increase.

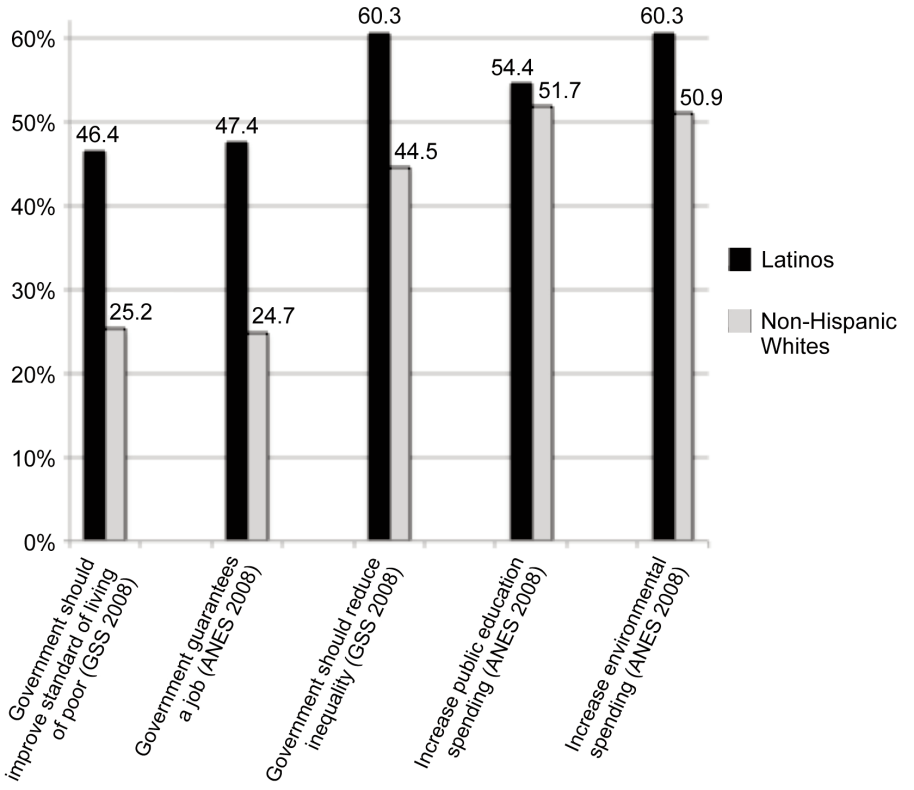
In this essay, I examine three facets of Latino public opinion that deserve closer scrutiny. First, focusing on the general orientation, or "ideology," of Latino voters, I suggest that Latino core beliefs about the role of government are progressive or liberal. Second, I examine diversity among Latinos and its effects, both potential and realized, on public opinion and political behavior. The role of national origin, nativity, and generational status reveals important differences in how Latinos think about and participate in politics. Third, the diversity of the Latino population raises the question of whether we can meaningfully consider Latinos a "group" for the purpose of evaluating America's political future. I argue that Latino identity is sufficiently developed to constitute a political category and show that the evidence for strong and politically meaningful pan-ethnic identification is present and growing.

The summary effect of these three observations is clear. The most rapidly growing segment in the American electorate is increasingly unified and demonstrably left of center. If these realities remain steady and relatively unchanged, the growth of the Latino population and electorate could have substantial electoral and social impact.

For most of the last thirty years, Latinos have given a preponderance of their votes to Democrats at both the state and national level, with the exception of South Florida Cubans. The Democratic ticket has taken between 65 and 70 percent of the two-party vote in national elections since the 1980s, with the notable exception of 2004, when George W. Bush secured approximately 40 percent of the vote in his quest for reelection.[3] For some time, GOP strategists have expressed frustration with this state of affairs, largely – so the story goes – because they believe that a church-going and entrepreneurial group should naturally be Republican. Ronald Reagan best expressed this sentiment when he reportedly told GOP Latino pollster Lionel Sosa, "Hispanics are Republicans, they just don't know it yet."

How much evidence is there to support this contention? The answer is: somewhere between little and none. Latinos are significantly to the left of non-Hispanic whites on virtually every issue of public policy. With regard to issues that are minority- or race-specific, such as immigration and affirmative action, this is hardly surprising. Latinos are significantly more

Figure 1
Selected Policy Liberalism of Latinos and Non-Hispanic Whites, 2008

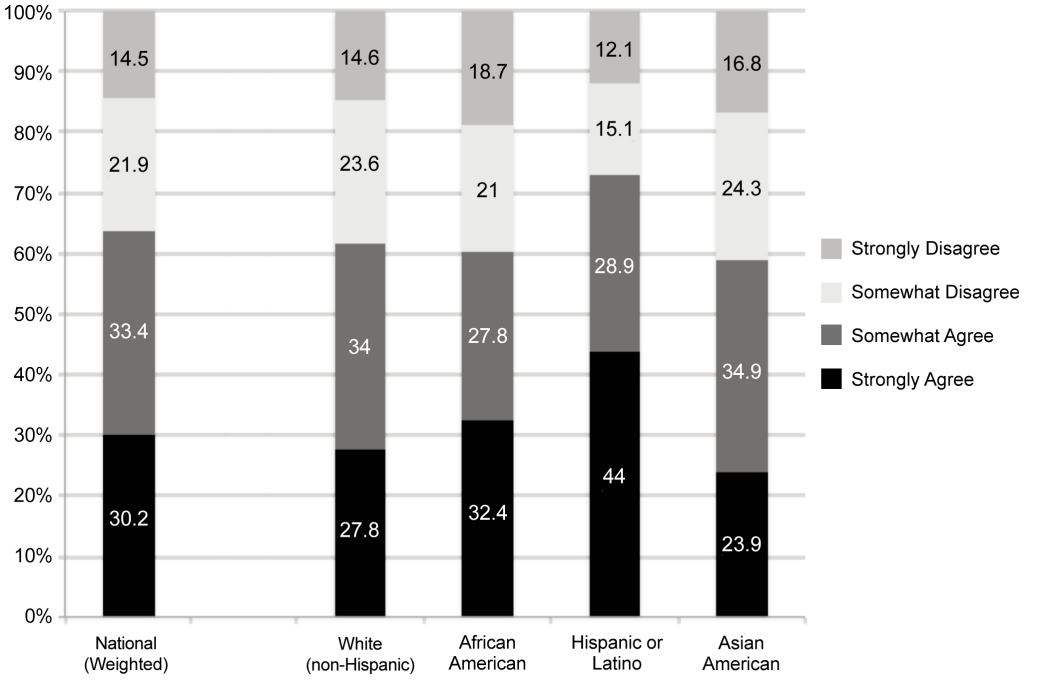


Bars represent the total share of respondents holding "liberal," or left of midpoint, views on each issue. Source: Figure created by author using data from the American National Election Study (ANES), 2008; and the General Social Survey (GSS), 2008.

pro-immigrant, more supportive of affirmative action, and less enthusiastic about the death penalty than non-Hispanic whites. But as Donald Kinder and Nicholas Winter first noted, this liberalism extends to issues of redistributive policy.[4] And as Shaun Bowler and I report in our recent book, even issues without implicit racial content reveal a systematic liberal shift among Latinos.[5] Figure 1 illustrates that in terms of government guarantees on standards of living, education, and the environment, Latinos are more liberal than their non-Hispanic white fellow citizens. Even on matters of relative consensus (education), the difference between groups is meaningful.

But policy preferences are not the same as an overall approach to government. That is, the fact that Latinos are more liberal than whites on specific issues does not necessarily mean that they are philosophically pro-government. The high frequency of entrepreneurial activity among Latinos and a stereotypic perception of their strong work ethic have allowed conservatives to argue on behalf of Latinos' "natural," albeit unrealized, Republican-

Figure 2
Views on whether Minorities Should Be Self-Reliant



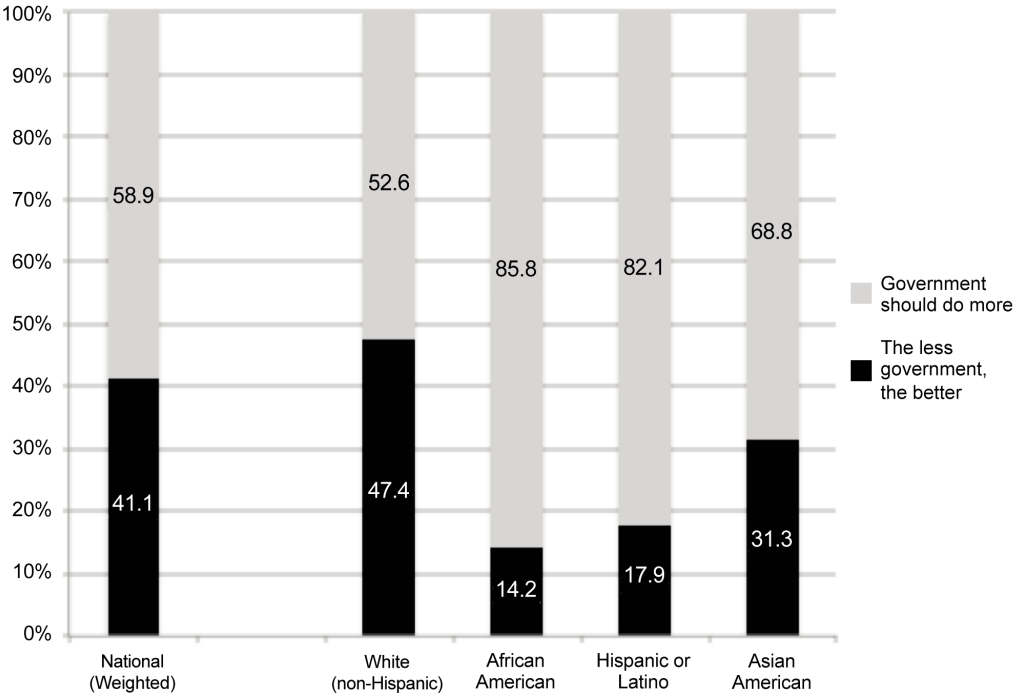
Respondents answered the following question: "If racial and ethnic minorities don't do well in life they have no one to blame but themselves. Do you . . . strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree?" Source: Figure created by author using data from the National Politics Study, 2004; figure adapted from Shaun Bowler and Gary M. Segura, *"The Future is Ours": Minority Politics, Political Behavior, and the Multiracial Era of American Politics* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press, 2011).

ism. In fact, significant evidence suggests that, consistent with conservatives' claims, Latinos embrace the core individualist norm of self-reliance.

Figure 2 shows an across-group comparison on a key indicator of self-reliance: specifically, the question, "If racial and ethnic minorities don't do well in life they have no one to blame but themselves. Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree?" Latinos hold the most "conservative" position on this question of any major racial or ethnic group. That is, a significantly higher percentage of Latinos somewhat agree or strongly agree with the stated contention than any other group, including non-Hispanic whites. Certainly, this enthusiasm for a norm of self-reliance casts doubt on the underlying liberalism of Latino citizens.

Adherence to norms of self-reliance is generally associated with more conservative views on the role of government, which would seem to invite an accompanying preference among Latinos for limited government. Such an inclination would undermine the claim of Latino liberalism. However, the evidence does not support this conclusion. In fact, though a significant majority of Latinos express support for self-reliance, supermajorities of Lati-

Figure 3
Views on Government Action to Solve Problems, by Race and Ethnicity



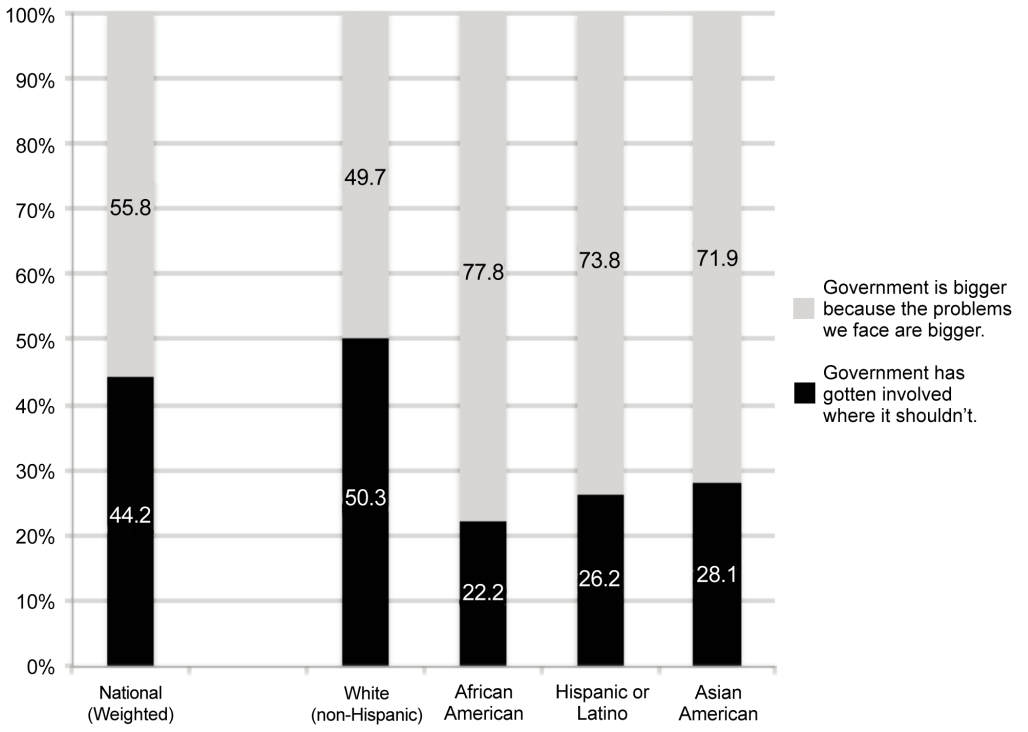
Respondents answered the following question: "Which of two statements comes closer to your own opinion: ONE, the less government, the better; OR TWO, there are more things that government should be doing?" Source: Figure created by author using data from the American National Election Study, 2008; figure adapted from Shaun Bowler and Gary M. Segura, *"The Future is Ours": Minority Politics, Political Behavior, and the Multiracial Era of American Politics* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press, 2011).

nos also reliably embrace a greater role for government.

Figures 3 through 5 show Latino citizens' responses to three questions designed to capture core feelings about the role of government, distinct from any particular policy area. Figure 3 reports group distributions on the following question: "Which of two statements comes closer to your own opinion: ONE, the less government, the better; OR TWO, there are more things that government should be doing?" This question juxtaposes the core contention of movement conservatism – that government is better when it is smaller – with a desire for government to do more, not less. The stark choice is revelatory. More than 82 percent of Latino respondents would like government to do more, an almost 30-point difference compared with non-Hispanic whites. African Americans are only slightly more liberal.

Figure 4 compares responses across groups to the following question: "Which of two statements comes closer to your own opinion: ONE, the main reason government has become bigger over the years is because it has gotten involved in things that people should do for themselves; OR TWO, government has become bigger

Figure 4
Attitudes on Government Growth, by Race and Ethnicity

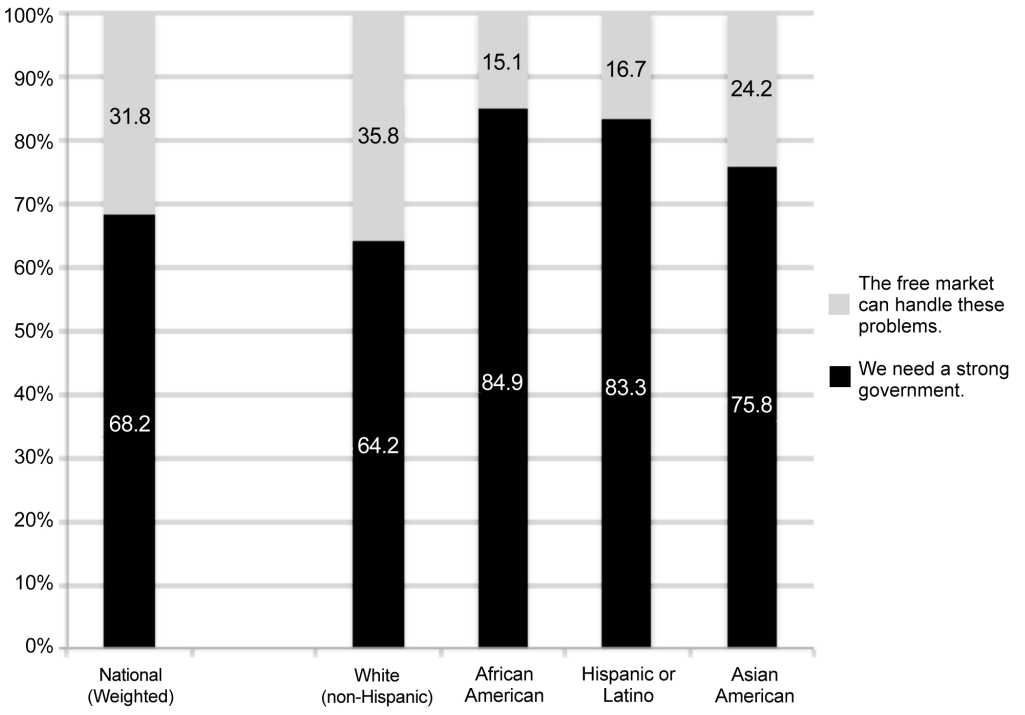


Respondents answered the following question: "Which of two statements comes closer to your own opinion: ONE, the main reason government has become bigger over the years is because it has gotten involved in things that people should do for themselves; OR TWO, government has become bigger because the problems we face have become bigger?" Source: Figure created by author using data from the American National Election Study, 2008; figure adapted from Shaun Bowler and Gary M. Segura, *"The Future is Ours": Minority Politics, Political Behavior, and the Multiracial Era of American Politics* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press, 2011).

because the problems we face have become bigger?" As above, the question offers a choice between dichotomous sentiments regarding the growth of government, thereby tapping a core element of ideology. Here, once again, Latinos are significantly more liberal than non-Hispanic whites, more than half of whom believe that government has become involved in matters of personal responsibility. Almost 74 percent of Latinos believe that government growth has been justified by the scope or size of the problems we expect it to address.

Finally, Figure 5 shows citizen enthusiasm for the most frequently identified alternative to government action: namely, the free market. Specifically, respondents were asked: "Which of two statements comes closer to your own opinion: ONE, we need a strong government to handle today's complex economic problems; OR TWO, the free market can handle these problems without government being involved?" This dichotomy again captures ideology in terms resonant with the public debate. And once again, Latinos are significantly to the left of non-Hispanic

Figure 5
Preferences for Free Market vs. Government Solutions, by Race and Ethnicity



Respondents answered the following question: "Which of two statements comes closer to your own opinion: ONE, we need a strong government to handle today's complex economic problems; OR TWO, the free market can handle these problems without government being involved?" Source: Figure created by author using data from the American National Election Study, 2008; figure adapted from Shaun Bowler and Gary M. Segura, *"The Future is Ours": Minority Politics, Political Behavior, and the Multiracial Era of American Politics* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press, 2011).

whites. Less than 17 percent of Latinos see the free market as the preferred instrument of social change, whereas more than twice that share of non-Hispanic whites prefer the free market. However, it is worth noting that even among whites, the free market loses out to government action by almost two to one.

Among Latino citizens, there is general enthusiasm for an active, growing, and problem-solving government, and little enthusiasm for the alternative as described by the right: a shrinkage of government and reliance on the free market to solve problems. Despite their embrace of a norm of self-reliance – a clear belief that individuals are for the most part responsible for their own outcomes – Latinos' underlying ideology appears to be solidly progressive. This finding is directly reflected in their policy preferences, which, uniformly, are to the left of views held by non-Hispanic whites.

The oft-identified "exception" to this policy liberalism, one noted by pundit and politician alike, are "social" issues: specifically, abortion and gay rights. Even here, there is more to the story than meets

the eye. For one, Latinos are not significantly more conservative on gay rights than their non-Hispanic fellow citizens. In November 2011, a Univision News-Latino Decisions poll found that a plurality of all Latino registered voters – 43 percent – favored same-sex marriage equality, and another 17 percent favored civil union recognition. Less than a quarter of respondents opposed government recognition of same-sex relationships. Indeed, on the 2008 American National Election Study (ANES), Latino support for marriage equality (43.2 percent) exceeded that of non-Hispanic whites (39.6 percent); support for adoption rights (53.3 percent) was marginally higher than among non-Hispanic whites (52.5 percent); and support for nondiscrimination protection (71.3 percent), while slightly lower than that of whites (75.5 percent), was still espoused by a supermajority. None of these findings suggest that opinions on gay and lesbian rights deviate significantly from Latinos' overall liberalism; nor do they imply an opportunity for Republican outreach.

This brings us to the issue of abortion. In fairness, every measure of opinion on reproductive choice does suggest that Latinos are more conservative on this issue than non-Hispanic whites. However, the difference is less significant than generally assumed. In the 2008 ANES, 39.5 percent of non-Hispanic whites favored broad abortion rights; the comparable number among Latinos was 33.1 percent. Similarly, while 46.6 percent of whites supported choice in the instances of rape or incest, or when the life of the mother is in danger, the comparable figure for Latinos was 44 percent. In short, while Latinos appear to be marginally more conservative than whites on the issue of reproductive choice, the difference hardly seems sizable.

Perhaps most damning to the claim that social conservatism is a bridge from Latinos to a more conservative or Republican identity is the persistent disinterest in these issues from Latino registered voters themselves. Polls of Latino voters that ask respondents to identify the issues most important to them generally find that voters do not pay much attention to the matters of gay rights and abortion. With supermajorities of Latinos voting Democratic despite somewhat conservative views on abortion, this result is hardly surprising.

Although Latinos are generally left of center on policy matters – and in their core beliefs about government – intragroup variation could temper expectations about their ability to drive political change. The Latino population of the United States is diverse on several important dimensions. These distinctions complicate analysis of Latino public opinion, but their effect – that is, the degree to which they yield meaningful differences in views or behavior – varies considerably. Here, I focus on three demographic characteristics that are important to understanding Latino opinion and behavior: national origin, nativity (including differences by age), and generation in the United States.

National Origin. Among the myriad complications of examining Latino public opinion and political participation is the definitional question of who, exactly, is a Latino. As foolish as this might sound, the issue of identity has considerable social and methodological implications. For one, Latinos are descended from nineteen Latin American nations (including the U.S. Commonwealth of Puerto Rico) from which Latino residents of the United States might have migrated or descended. Second, while the ethnic histories of the Iberian Peninsula and Southern Europe are complex enough, the varied racial histories of Latin America add another layer of complexity. Each Latin American nation reflects a mixture of indigenous,

European, and African ancestral origins in permutations and combinations that make Latino identity racially complex.[6] In the 2006 Latino National Survey, 51.2 percent of the 8,634 respondents believed that Latinos constituted a distinct racial category, but the reality of that claim varies across national origins. Mexicans, many Central Americans, Peruvians, and Bolivians are of mestizo and indigenous ancestries; Colombian, Venezuelan, and Caribbean national origins more clearly reflect the African diaspora in the Western hemisphere; and individuals from Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, and Paraguay better represent Spanish (and other European) colonization. Yet despite these differences, in the context of American politics all are considered Latino or Hispanic. Research suggests that this racial complexity has an effect in the American political environment.[7]

That said, we should not overstate the diversity of national origins in the Latino population. More than 65 percent of all Latinos are Mexican or Mexican American, and another 9.1 percent are Puerto Rican. Salvadorans make up 3.6 percent; Cubans, 3.5 percent; and Dominicans, 2.8 percent.[8] Almost 86 percent of the Latino population is from those five national origin groups. Guatemalans (2.2 percent) and Colombians (1.9 percent) are by far the largest of the remaining groups. While more than a dozen other Latin American nations are represented in the U.S. populace, the population shares of those national-origin groups are tiny. Mexicans and Mexican Americans, and to a lesser extent Puerto Ricans, dominate the conversation.

Though these national-origin groups have distinct cultural characteristics and racial histories, the Spanish language, Roman Catholicism, and decades of increasingly integrated entertainment and media cultures have served to knit the distinct communities more closely together.[9] Nevertheless, several national-origin-specific characteristics can, and do, shape public opinion and political participation.

The most politically distinct group is made up of Cuban Americans in South Florida, many of whom are refugees (or offspring of refugees) of the Cuban revolution. Stereotypically Republican, Cubans have been influenced by the unique circumstances of their arrival in the 1960s; by the privileged legal immigration regime that they and no other Latino immigrants enjoy; and by their economic circumstances relative to other Latinos. Many who arrived in the 1960s and 1970s came with some resources and received considerable assistance from the United States. Their Republicanism is rooted in both these resource differences and their experience of the Cold War. Moreover, under the 1995 revisions of the Cuban Adjustment Act, Cuban migrants who reach U.S. soil are afforded nearly automatic asylum and legal status, removing immigration status as a barrier to growth and political incorporation.

Cuban distinctiveness appears to be eroding, however. Younger Cubans, several generations removed from the Castro experience, and those descended from the wave of arrivals associated with the Mariel Boatlift in 1980 ("Marielitos," who came with fewer resources and face some within-group bias from the longer-established population) are far less likely to be Republican. Their opinions and political characteristics more closely reflect those of other U.S. Latinos.

The Puerto Rican experience is also unique. Because Puerto Rico is part of the United States, Puerto Ricans, including those born on the island, are U.S. citizens from birth – a provision of the Jones Act of 1917. Citizenship, along with the fact that migration to and from the island is without legal consequence, highlights two key distinctions between Puerto Ricans and other

Latinos: namely, that immigration is not an immediate issue, and that access to the political process is straightforward.

Nevertheless, and for reasons that remain underexplored, political participation among mainland Puerto Ricans lags considerably behind other Latino national-origin groups and, more curiously, behind the performance of voters on the island. As Louis DeSipio noted in 2006, "Despite these relatively equal opportunities to participate politically in the United States or in Puerto Rico, turnout in Puerto Rican Elections is approximately twice as high as Puerto Rican participation in mainland elections."[10] DeSipio attributes this difference to electoral institutions and the absence of meaningful party mobilization on the mainland; and to different dimensions of contestation on the island. The effect is significant: Puerto Rican turnout hovers around 40 percent on the mainland but is more than twice that on the island. The under-mobilization of Puerto Ricans remains a missed opportunity in terms of Latino impact on the U.S. political system.

Nativity and Generation. Approximately 40 percent of all Latinos are foreign born. This number, however, understates the role of nativity in Latino political life. About 34 percent of the Latino population is under the age of eighteen; 93 percent of those young people are U.S. citizens, with just 1 percent naturalized and 92 percent native born. By contrast, 52 percent of adults are foreign born, less than a third of whom (31 percent of the total) have naturalized to U.S. citizenship.[11] These totals indicate two important facts about the Latino population: only 64 percent of adults are citizens of the United States; and naturalized citizens make up just 25 percent of the total. An additional share are island-born Puerto Ricans who, while not naturalized citizens of the United States, have still experienced the economic, social, and linguistic challenges of migration.

While these percentages vary significantly by state, place of birth can shape attitudes and engagement in American politics in three important ways. First, the path to migration and citizenship is a profound self-selection process. Those who migrate are arguably different from their countrymen who do not, and moving from immigrant status to citizenship is an even more strenuous selection process. In the past, the naturalization process was primarily driven by life events – marriage, childbirth, and the like – and naturalized immigrants voted less often than native citizens.[12] More recently, however, considerable evidence has shown that naturalization may occur as a consequence of political events, particularly rhetoric, initiatives, and legislation that target immigrants. Among the consequences of a politically driven naturalization may well be a higher propensity to turn out for elections.[13]

Second, foreign-born citizens may hold beliefs and expectations about politics that are rooted in home-country experience. Sergio Wals has demonstrated that variations in nation of birth can shape turnout propensity, as experience with democracy (or lack thereof) may affect both expectations from and orientations toward the U.S. political system.[14]

Finally, for immigrants who arrive after school age, foreign birth implies adult socialization to the U.S. political system. Melissa Michelson has observed a curious process of adverse socialization, whereby foreign-born citizens have a more favorable view of U.S. politics than those of later generations, a finding confirmed elsewhere with regard to efficacy.[15] Foreign-born citizens are more likely to identify as independents than as partisans[16] and less likely to see commonality with African Americans. The takeaway is that the process of "becoming" American carries with it a growing familiarity with U.S. political coalitions, an increasing aware-

ness of racial hierarchies in American society, and decreasing satisfaction with American institutions and processes.

The passage of generations, in theory, has the potential to erode the political distinctiveness of Latino citizens across national-origin groups and between Latinos and non-Latinos. As data from the Latino National Survey reveal (see Table 1), Latinos in later generations are significantly more likely to out-marry (with declining frequency of Hispanic surnames) and to experience substantial economic and educational mobility; they are less likely to retain their Catholic identity and significantly less likely to speak Spanish.

It is certainly the case that in later generations, assimilation and acculturation produce changes in political behavior. These changes can vary in form and function over time. For example, while self-reported electoral participation increases monotonically over generations, participation in ethnically based political activities – including protests, rallies, and organizations – increases through the first two generations but decreases thereafter.[17]

The Effects of In-Group Variation. We should take care not to over-interpret the political effects of within-group diversification. There are at least as many similarities as differences among national-origin groups, generations, and nativities. For example, a commitment to the Spanish language and the retention of Latino cultural practices are widely shared across cohorts. Community and identity are enormously unifying factors.

A critical dynamic in this process is the ongoing debate over immigration and policy toward undocumented immigrants. It has become increasingly clear that perceived attacks on the community have a substantial ability to unify political views, notwithstanding nativity and generation. A perfect example is the Latino community's reaction to the passage of SB 1070 in Arizona, the "papers please" law designed to allow local police to identify undocumented aliens during virtually any contact with the public. According to polling data gathered just a week after the bill was signed into law, opposition among Latino registered voters transcended generational boundaries. As Figure 6 illustrates, supermajorities of all generations opposed the law. Two facts about the figure are especially revealing. First, all respondents in the poll are citizen registered voters – that is, the most secure and incorporated Latino members of society. Second, the fourth generation (last column) is limited to individuals whose *grandparents* were U.S.-born and thus who have an established history as part of American society. The breadth of opposition across generations is informative.

How are the citizens in the poll interpreting this law, which ostensibly is aimed at undocumented immigrants? Their consensus is likely a result of the widespread expectation that enforcement would involve racial profiling and therefore would conceivably threaten all Latinos, a belief that again transcended generation (see Figure 7). These 2010 findings from Arizona are deeply reminiscent of the political effects of Proposition 187 in California and other anti-Latino or anti-immigrant actions, which appear to have had large-scale and significant political effects on Latinos across generations.[18] Issues that cut to the heart of ethnic identity are particularly likely to transcend differences in nativity, generation, or national-origin group.

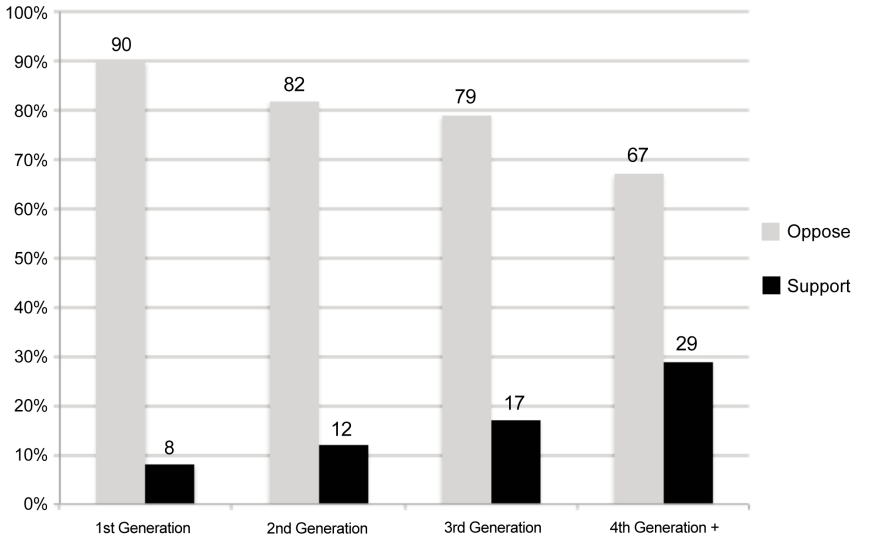
Though I have presented evidence of substantial similarity across what is in many ways a diverse population, the above discussion is still a step shy of establishing a sense of group identity: that is, an awareness of commonality that could serve as a mobilizing factor and facilitate political

Table 1
Selected Markers of Assimilation and Acculturation by Generation, 2006

Generation	1st	2nd	3rd	4th
Roman Catholic	73.8%	69.7%	66.8%	58.1%
Social Capital (Group Participation)	14.1	25.0	29.4	33.4
Military Service, Self or Family	16.1	48.9	68.6	72.3
Education < High School	49.7	22.9	17.6	16.2
Household Income < $35K	53.4	34.9	29.2	33.4
Percent Marrying Non-Latinos	13.3	32.2	42.6	53.3
English Proficiency	38.3*	93.2	98.6	99.0
Spanish Proficiency	99.2	91.6	68.7	60.5

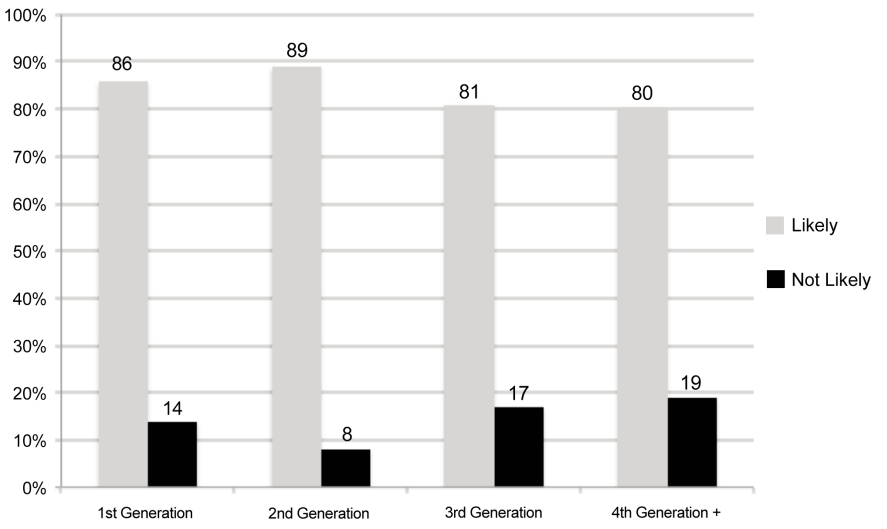
*Includes non-citizens. Source: Table created by author using data from the Latino National Survey, 2006.

Figure 6
Support and Opposition to SB 1070 among Arizona Latino Registered Voters, May 2010



Respondents answered the following question: "Arizona has passed a law that will require state and local police to determine the immigration status of a person if there is a reasonable suspicion he or she is an illegal immigrant, and would charge anyone with trespassing who is not carrying proof of legal status when questioned by the police, and also prohibit immigrants from working as day laborers. From what you have heard, do you [rotate: support or oppose] the new immigration law in Arizona?" Source: Figure created by author using data from National Council of La Raza/Service Employees International Union/Latino Decisions Arizona Poll, April – May 2010.

Figure 7
Estimation of the Likelihood that Non-Immigrants Will Be Caught Up in Enforcement of SB 1070, as Expressed by Arizona Latino Registered Voters, May 2010



Respondents answered the following question: "How likely do you think it is that Latinos who are legal immigrants or U.S. citizens will get stopped or questioned by the police? Is it very likely, somewhat likely, not too likely, or not likely at all?" Source: Figure created by author using data from National Council of La Raza/Service Employees International Union/Latino Decisions Arizona Poll, April – May 2010.

coherence and collective action. The cross-generation reaction to anti-immigrant political developments suggests at least the possibility that this superordinate identity exists.

Do Latinos (or Hispanics) see themselves as a "group"? In other words, do persons of Latin American ancestry from different national-origin groups constitute a politically significant pan-ethnic identity? When the Latino National Political Survey was completed in 1989, there was little evidence for the claim that Latinos were a group in any meaningful sense.[19] The vast majority of those respondents understood themselves in terms of national identities.[20]

However, a mountain of evidence now suggests that this social reality has changed. The Latino National Survey completed in 2006 found very high levels of identification with pan-ethnic terminology, with at least 87.6 percent of respondents saying that they thought of themselves in these terms "somewhat strongly" or "very strongly." Moreover, when asked to choose between national-origin identifiers, the pan-ethnic term, or merely "American" (an arbitrary, forced choice that only an academic could devise), more than a third of them chose the pan-ethnic identifier (38.3 percent). My colleagues in the Latino National Survey and I have argued that this forced choice is artificial, that identities are multiple and simultaneous.[21] Nevertheless, the change between 1989 and 2006 reflects a significant shift in how Latinos or Hispanics envision themselves in the national fabric.

Moreover, evidence shows that this pan-ethnic identification has social and political import. Latinos from all groups per-

ceive significant commonality and linked fate with other Latinos, even those expressly from national-origin groups other than their own. The 2006 Latino National Survey assessed whether respondents felt they and their national-origin group shared political, economic, and social conditions in common with other Latinos. Overwhelmingly, they did. A surprising 71.9 percent said that, in their individual capacity, they had "some" or "a lot" in common with other Latinos in "[t]hinking about issues like job opportunities, educational attainment or income." When the question was posed with respect to the respondent's national-origin group, 74.6 percent said that their group had "some" or "a lot" in common with Latinos of other national-origin groups. While there was some variation, these results were largely consistent across national-origin groups.

When the focus turns to political concerns, the level of perceived commonality is again high, though it is lower than on the social dimension. Here, 56.1 percent of respondents felt that as individuals they had "some" or "a lot" in common with other Latinos in "thinking about things like government services and employment, political power, and representation"; an even healthier 64.4 percent felt the same when assessing commonality between their own national-origin groups and others.

Finally, respondents were asked whether their fate and their group's fate were linked to the fate of other Latinos – the "linked fate" measure first described by political scientist Michael Dawson.[22] At the individual level, 63.4 percent said their fate was linked "some" or "a lot" to others'. When asked about the fate of their national-origin group relative to other Latino groups, 71.6 percent said the two were linked "some" or "a lot." Thus, huge majorities of Latinos believe that their futures and those of their co-ethnics are intrinsically linked.

The belief that Latinos and their futures are linked very likely gives rise to greater efforts at group-based mobilization. Most major national organizations, political and otherwise, use pan-ethnic terminology and view the Latino constituency as being composed of the entire population – both across generations and, most important, across nationality groups. The National Council of La Raza, the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials, and the Univision and Telemundo television networks all define their constituency as the pan-ethnic Latino or Hispanic population.

It is not clear why Latinos increasingly identify with pan-ethnic descriptors, but scholars have offered a variety of explanations. Pan-ethnic identity may emerge as a consequence of population diversity and political cooperation, where pan-ethnic groups would possess political power that individual national-origin groups do not.[23] Similarly, it may have been created by political entrepreneurs seeking to empower Latinos through coalition and, in so doing, run roughshod over important community, cultural, and social distinctions.[24] Or it may merely reflect changes in the cultural and media establishment, mentioned above, which has increasingly addressed Latinos as a somewhat undifferentiated whole. Whatever the case, we can now say with confidence that Latinos are a group: they see themselves in this way, and they use this shared identity to act politically.

And when they act politically, they act progressively. Latinos prefer more government engagement in solving society's challenges, not less. Despite an embrace of self-reliance, they see a critical and de-

cisive role for government. The result is a supermajority that votes Democrat, with a political effect that is likely to grow as the Latino share of the electorate continues to rise rapidly. If the recent past is prologue, and without substantial changes in current preference distributions, this increasingly unified and empowered population has the potential, almost by itself, to signal a political realignment in American politics.

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Being Free in Obama's America: Racial Differences in Perceptions of Constraints on Political Action

James L. Gibson

Abstract: Many studies of interracial differences in rates of political participation pay too little attention to African Americans' perceptions of whether they can freely participate in politics. Survey evidence collected over the last several decades has consistently shown that black Americans perceive much less political freedom available to them than do white Americans. The gap in perceived freedom has narrowed somewhat in recent years but remains large. Following the empowerment hypothesis of Lawrence Bobo and Franklin Gilliam, black perceptions of freedom increased with the election of Barack Obama to the American presidency. But perhaps unexpectedly, the empowerment bonus has not persisted, especially among conservative and fundamentalist blacks. Because African Americans do not perceive that their government would permit various types of political action, it is likely that substantial interracial differences exist in non-voting types of political participation, especially political action directed against governmental authority.

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Like many things of value in the contemporary United States, participation in politics is unequally distributed among racial groups.[1] For instance, the political right that the U.S. Supreme Court established in its *Citizens United* decision – the right to spend without limits in an effort to influence election outcomes – does not affect all groups, racial and otherwise, equally. But more mundane forms of political participation also exhibit large inequalities. As Zoltan Hajnal and Jessica Trounstine summarize, "Study after study of American elections has found that individuals with ample resources vote much more regularly than those with few resources – the poor, racial and ethnic minorities and the less educated."[2] Many other, non-voting forms of political participation also exhibit stark differences in the rates at which different groups engage in such activities.

Because participation levels are unequal, the fruits of politics may not flow equally to all groups.

A rich but varied literature has emerged documenting substantial class-based bias in the public policies adopted by government at both the national and state level; the literature indicates general agreement that the working class and the poor are the least well represented.[3] Because social class is closely related to race, one might also infer that public policies are often tinged with the preferences of white Americans. Thus, substantial public policy inequalities may emerge from inequalities in rates of political participation.

While interracial differences in levels of political participation are commonly noted by researchers, they are not as simple as might be supposed. Black Americans tend to participate at equal or even higher levels than white Americans when it comes to voting, at least in presidential elections.[4] (Some evidence indicates that participation rates are lower in subnational elections.[5]) However, political participation involves far more than just voting; indeed, voting may be one of the least efficacious ways to participate in American politics. Many believe that non-electoral rates of participation are considerably lower among racial minorities.[6] It is unquestionably more difficult to research participation in state and local elections and in non-voting forms of participation than it is to examine presidential voting patterns, but the limited evidence available suggests lower participation rates by African Americans.

Extant research has developed reasonably comprehensive models of the factors affecting levels of individual political participation. The conventional explanations for differences in levels of political participation have to do with (1) individual attributes, (2) institutional structures, and (3) cultural values and norms. Individual attributes are typically characterized as involving "resources and roots"; that is, resources such as political knowledge and social class enhance participation,[7] as does "connectedness" to a local community.[8] Institutional structures involve the "rules of the game," including laws affecting the ease of voting and disclosure laws for political contributions.[9] Cultural values and norms – the principal focus of this essay – are represented in the literature by senses of political efficacy and empowerment,[10] as well as perceptions that political participation is possible[11] and that it is encouraged and desirable.[12]

A large body of research addresses the role of individual attributes in shaping political participation.[13] However, as I have noted, this research generally concludes that African Americans vote as frequently as whites, even if scholars are less certain about the precise roles of resources and roots in accounting for interracial differences in other forms of political action.

Perhaps more promising as an explanation of unequal participation rates is the differential impact of institutions and cultures on racial minorities. For instance, a recent analysis by John Logan and his colleagues examined the hypothesis that the political behavior of blacks in the United States is influenced by environmental and contextual factors. They discovered that voting regulations, especially voter identification requirements, have a strong negative effect on black voting, decreasing the voting rate by 18 percent among African Americans.[14]

Other, more positive environmental and contextual factors may also be at work. In a widely cited paper, Lawrence Bobo and Franklin Gilliam discovered that the election of an African American to a local political position (mayor) seemed to lead to more trusting and efficacious attitudes among black citizens, in turn creating heightened levels of electoral participation.[15] In their recent follow-up analysis, John Logan and colleagues found similar results; they concluded: "The effect of

having more than five co-ethnic public officials in the metropolitan area is positive and very strong for blacks, resulting in an increase of *more than 30 percent* in registration and *more than 40 percent* in voting."[16] This empowerment effect is among the strongest influences on rates of political participation among black Americans.[17]

Beyond empowerment, other cultural norms and expectations may influence rates of political participation. One finding that is often overlooked concerns interracial differences in perceptions of available political freedom. At least in the 1980s, interracial differences were quite substantial, with blacks perceiving much less political freedom available across a variety of behaviors and contexts.[18] And context matters for perceptions of freedom: black Americans living in communities that were more politically tolerant were more likely to perceive freedom as available to them. Perhaps ironically, even tolerance of racists (those who assert that blacks are genetically inferior) enhanced black political freedom, most likely because communities tolerant of racists were also tolerant of many forms of minority political opinion.

The empowerment findings, the findings on perceptions of political freedom, and the finding that electoral institutions affect rates of political participation suggest that rates of political participation for African Americans are particularly sensitive to environmental and contextual factors; indeed, participation may be more strongly affected by these factors than by resources and roots. Black Americans seem to perceive important external constraints on their ability to engage in political action and therefore are fairly easily dissuaded from participating by institutional barriers and impediments – but there are also means by which African Americans can gain a sense of empowerment that would enhance their political participation.[19]

Research on black perceptions of political freedom is now dated, with most of the evidence drawn from a 1987 survey. Although change in interracial relations has not been uniformly positive in the last few decades,[20] one might suspect that black Americans no longer perceive strong constraints on their political freedom. Indeed, from the empowerment findings, one might also hypothesize that the election of Barack Obama to the American presidency has extinguished any interracial differences in perceived freedom to participate.

The purpose of this essay is to investigate subjective political freedom among black Americans. This is not the freedom of laws and constitutions, but is instead the belief that one can freely choose to participate in various forms of political activity. Using data from earlier studies, I consider how perceptions of freedom have changed over the long term. More important, I test the empowerment hypothesis by comparing survey evidence from before Obama's election (2005 – 2008) with comparable data from after his inauguration (2009 – 2011). Finally, in light of the growing diversity among blacks, I consider how political freedom is distributed across various subgroups, looking at ideological and social-class differences in particular. While Obama's ascension did elevate black perceptions of political freedom, I conclude that the effect was short-lived; soon after his election, strong black/white differences in perceptions of freedom reemerged. These differences have important implications for contemporary American politics.

The analysis in this paper is based primarily on nationally representative surveys conducted between 2005 and 2011.[21] Two specific design features of the surveys

should be noted. First, the 2005 survey was conducted face to face; the remaining surveys were conducted over the telephone. Second, the telephone survey samples in 2010 and 2011 combined a typical random digit dial subsample with a cell phone subsample. I suspect that the latter feature is of little consequence. However, as the data will show, the 2005 findings often stand out.

Do black and white Americans perceive the same levels of political freedom? To answer this first question, the surveys included the simple freedom questions first asked by sociologist Samuel Stouffer in his 1954 survey.[22] Table 1 reports the results.

Black Americans are significantly more likely than whites to perceive limits on political freedom. While 14.8 percent of whites assert that hardly anyone feels free to speak their mind, 22.1 percent of blacks hold this view; this interracial difference is highly statistically significant. Blacks are only slightly (but significantly) more likely than whites to say that they feel less free to speak their minds than in the past (34.3 percent versus 30.0 percent), although this interracial difference is perhaps muted by the comparative phrase "as you used to" in the question wording. Generally, however, African Americans perceive less political freedom available to them than do whites.

Table 1 also reports the answers to a question about what sorts of political activities the government would allow. Here we see more dramatic interracial differences in perceived freedom. For example, 67.7 percent of whites assert that the government would allow them to make a speech in public, whereas only 45.7 percent of African Americans hold this view.[23] Across the three specific political activities given in the question, interracial differences are large and highly statistically significant. These results replicate the findings of earlier studies: black Americans today perceive much greater constraints on their political freedom than do white Americans.[24]

A comparison of these findings to older data on perceived freedom may be enlightening. Comparing the data in the third section of Table 1 with my report on the same items from a 1987 survey reveals that both black and white Americans perceive fewer constraints on their freedom today, but that the change has been somewhat greater among blacks.[25] For instance, in 1987, 63.7 percent of the black respondents thought that the government would not allow them to organize meetings; in these contemporary surveys, this figure drops to 50.5 percent. The percentage of whites viewing government constraints on their ability to organize meetings dropped from 39.5 percent to 32.3 percent. These data seem to confirm the conclusion that perceptions of available political freedom are indeed sensitive to external environmental, contextual, and temporal constraints, and that black/white differences have not been extinguished in the last few decades.

Have black perceptions of freedom changed from the time prior to the election of Obama to the time after? That is, do we see any evidence of the *empowerment hypothesis* at work since Obama's election? Because the surveys reported in Table 1 were conducted over the period from 2005 to 2011, temporal trends can be investigated.[26]

Figure 1 reports the percentages of blacks and whites who claimed that they feel as free as they used to. Among whites, the differences across the six surveys are statistically significant, but they are small in magnitude (eta = 0.07) and are driven mainly by the relatively high level of freedom observed in 2005 as well as the dip in perceived freedom in 2011.[27]

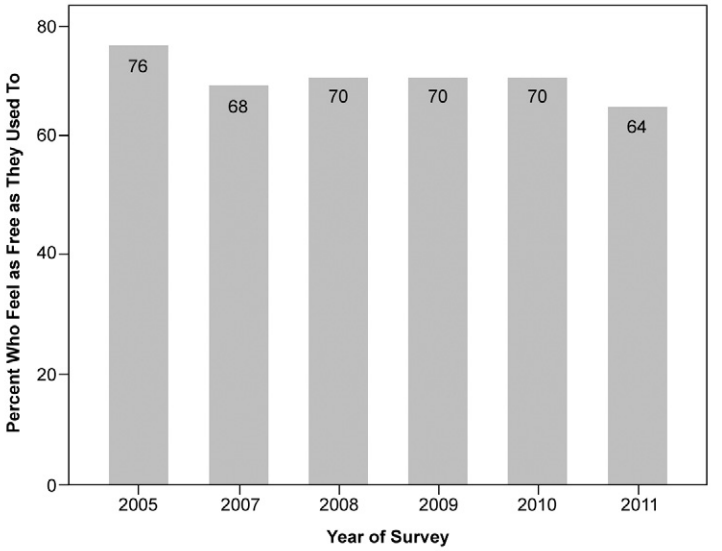
Table 1
Differences between Blacks and Whites in Perceptions of Political Freedom

	Whites	Blacks	$p(\chi^2)$	Gamma
Perceived Freedom of Others				
All feel free	33.7%	27.5%		
Some feel free	51.4%	50.4%		
Hardly any feel free	14.8%	22.1%		
Total	100% (3,528)	100% (575)	<0.001	0.17
My Own Freedom				
As free as used to be	70.0%	65.7%		
Not as free as used to be	30.0%	34.3%		
Total	100% (3,531)	100% (578)	0.041	0.10
*Whether Government Would Allow Me To**				
Make a speech – allow	67.7%	45.7%		
Uncertain; don't know	1.3%	2.2%		
Make a speech – not allow	31.0%	52.1%		
Total	100% (3,589)	100% (584)	<0.000	0.37
Organize meetings – allow	65.1%	47.2%		
Uncertain; don't know	2.6%	2.4%		
Organize meetings – not allow	32.3%	50.5%		
Total	100% (3,588)	100% (583)	<0.000	0.33
Hold demonstrations – allow	73.5%	54.2%		
Uncertain; don't know	2.2%	2.7%		
Hold demonstrations – not allow	24.3%	43.1%		
Total	100% (3,589)	100% (583)	<0.000	0.32

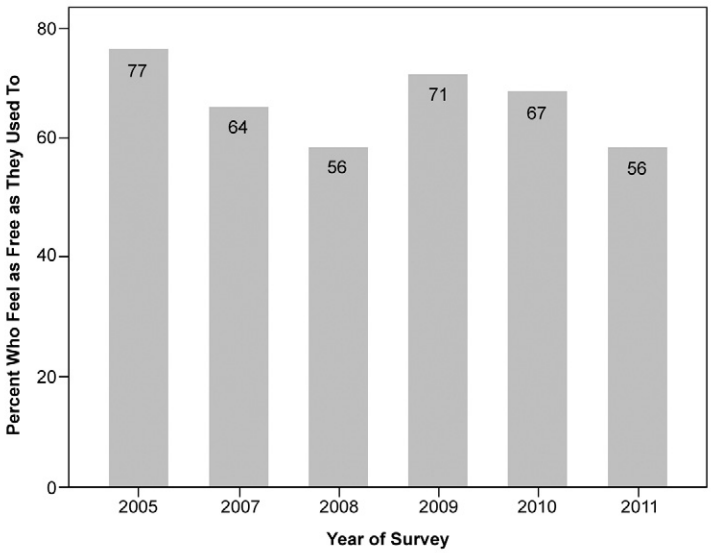
*The test results reported are based on the five-point response sets, which ranged from "definitely allow" to "definitely not allow." $p(\chi^2)$ = probability associated with a chi-square test. Gamma = degree of association between race and the freedom responses. The freedom questions read: Which of these views is closest to your own? 1) All people in this country feel as free to say what they think as they used to; 2) Some people do not feel as free to say what they think as they used to; 3) Hardly anybody feels as free to say what they think as they used to. What about you personally? Do you or don't you feel as free to speak your mind as you used to? 1) Yes, I do feel as free; 2) No, I feel less free. Suppose you felt very strongly that something the government was doing was very wrong and you wanted to do something about it. Do you think the government would definitely allow, probably allow, probably not allow, or definitely not allow you to a) make a speech in public criticizing the actions of the government; b) organize public meetings to oppose the government; c) organize protest marches and demonstrations to oppose the actions of the government? Source: Table created by author based on data from Freedom and Tolerance Surveys, 2005 – 2011.

Figure 1
Interracial Differences in Feeling Free to Speak One's Mind

White Americans



Black Americans



The year 2006 is not included in the survey data because no survey was conducted in 2006.
Source: Figure created by author based on data from Freedom and Tolerance Surveys, 2005 – 2011.

For blacks, the relationship is statistically significant and considerably stronger (eta = 0.16), and a suggestive pattern can be found in the data. Like whites, blacks expressed a somewhat higher level of perceived freedom in the 2005 survey. More important, however, is the rather substantial spike in perceived political freedom in the first survey after Obama's inauguration in 2009. Yet since then, black perceptions of freedom have reverted to pre-Obama levels. This trend is based on a small number of surveys and a small number of black respondents within each survey. But if the data are to be believed, there was some effect of the Obama presidency on black perceptions of political freedom, though it was short-lived.

Figure 1 also reveals a rather marked decline in black perceptions of freedom in the run-up to the 2008 presidential election.[28] This trend may reflect heightened racial tensions associated with Obama's campaign, as anti-black sentiment found a somewhat legitimate outlet via partisan politics. The same may be true of the 2011 findings, as partisan attacks on Obama reached a crescendo. These data strongly suggest that environmental and contextual influences on perceptions of available political freedom are substantial.

I also consider whether perceptions of governmental constraints on political freedom exhibit this same temporal pattern.[29] As Figure 2 shows, among white Americans, a significant difference exists across time, but again, the relationship is weak (eta = 0.08). Among African Americans, the same pattern emerges as in Figure 1: perceptions of freedom rise immediately after the election of Obama but then quickly recede to pre-election levels (eta = 0.16). Electing an African American to the presidency raised black perceptions of political freedom, but only for a fairly short period. By 2011, perceptions of freedom among blacks were at the same level as in 2005. Yet the data do not reveal a dip in perceived freedom prior to the election in late Fall 2008. Comparing the findings in Figures 1 and 2 seems to indicate that the constraints on black political freedom in 2008 were more cultural in nature (and hence more stable) and were not specifically attributable to governmental institutions.

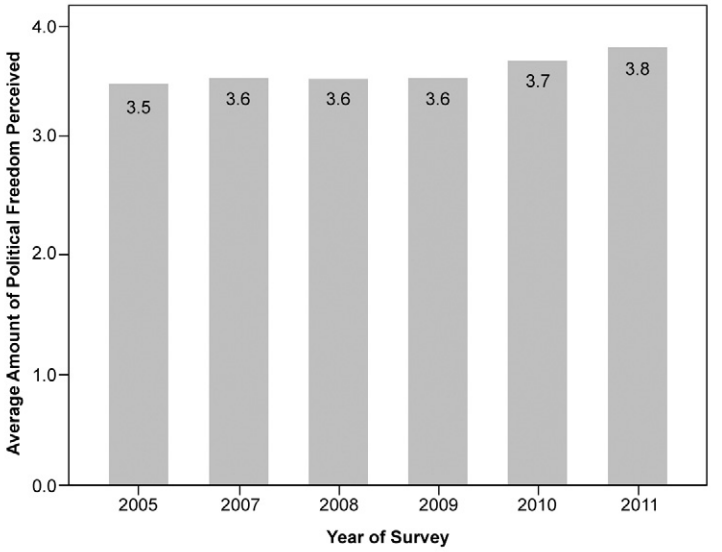
These data provide an important amendment to the empowerment hypothesis. Following earlier research, I find that perceptions of available political freedom seem to be boosted among this minority group when a co-ethnic is elected to a salient political office. This effect, however, is ephemeral. Empowerment waxes, but then wanes. Cross-sectional research such as that by Franklin Gilliam and Karen Kaufmann could not, by design, find that the effect of empowerment deteriorates over time.[30]

As Lawrence Bobo has noted, one of the salient characteristics of the racial divide in the contemporary United States is the growing heterogeneity within the black population.[31] My data on black perceptions of freedom support Bobo's observation: on many of the measures, blacks separate roughly between half who perceive constraints on their freedom and half who do not. This raises the question of whether there are systematic differences among blacks in how political freedom is perceived. One hypothesis is that perceptions of freedom reflect one's social class, as much or even more than one's race. Perceptions of freedom might also reflect other demographic characteristics. To be certain that these data point to true racial differences, we must consider the correlates of perceptions of political freedom. Table 2 reports the results.

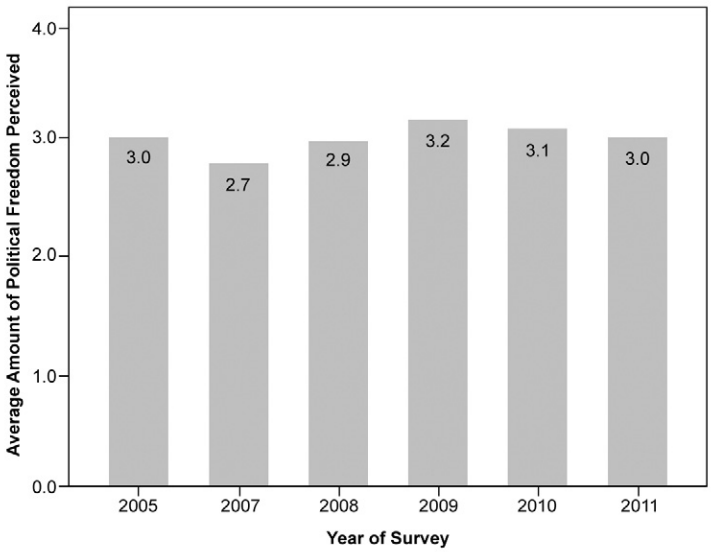
By far, the most powerful predictor of levels of perceived freedom is education: those with more education are consider-

Figure 2
Interracial Differences in Perceived Governmental Constraints on Political Freedom

White Americans



Black Americans



The year 2006 is not included in the survey data because no survey was conducted in 2006.
Source: Figure created by author based on data from Freedom and Tolerance Surveys, 2005 – 2011.

Table 2
Predictors of Perceptions of Political Freedom among African Americans, 2005 – 2011

	b	s.e.	β	r
Level of education	0.19	0.03	0.31**	0.32
Home ownership	-0.02	0.10	-0.01	0.05
Age	0.00	0.00	0.05	0.04
Gender	0.13	0.09	0.06	0.07
Party identification	0.02	0.03	0.03	0.04
Ideological identification	0.07	0.02	0.13*	0.21
Born again?	-0.27	0.10	-0.11*	-0.15
Religiosity	-0.06	0.03	-0.07	-0.13
Intercept	1.53	0.27		
Standard Deviation – Dependent Variable	1.19			
Standard Error	1.09			
R^2			0.16**	
N	567			

The dependent variable for this analysis is a continuous variable that ranges from 1 to 5. Significance of standardized regression coefficients (β, R^2): *$p < 0.01$; **$p < 0.001$. Source: Table created by author based on data from Freedom and Tolerance Surveys, 2005 – 2011.

ably more likely to judge that more freedom is available to them. Poorly educated black Americans do not believe that they have the freedom to participate fully in politics. Looking beyond education, my measure of social class (home ownership) bears no relationship to freedom.

Two other significant predictors of perceived freedom bear mentioning. Liberal African Americans feel freer, as do those who are not "born again." Put differently, levels of perceived political freedom are lowest among blacks who identify as conservatives and who consider themselves "born again." To be clear, these results are not necessarily a function of blacks with these attributes being distinct minorities within the black community. Fully 39.1 percent of the respondents rate themselves as at least somewhat conservative; 55.6 percent regard themselves as "born again." With these data it is impossible to determine exactly why conservative and black fundamentalists see constraints on their freedom. However, the lack of freedom seems to reflect something about the attitudes and beliefs that black Americans hold.

I have considered how these respondent attributes interact with the election of President Obama. By adding a dummy variable indicating whether the survey was conducted before or after Obama's election as well as interaction terms for each of the variables shown in Table 2, I find that the influence of ideological self-identification on perceived freedom is different before and after the election.

Before Obama's election, no relationship exists: b = -0.01, which is not statistically significant. After the election, the coefficient balloons to 0.17, which is highly statistically significant. Thus, conservative blacks and liberal blacks perceived equivalent levels of freedom prior to the election. After, conservative blacks felt markedly less free than liberal blacks.

Although the diminishing numbers of cases make analysis a bit shaky, it appears that the empowerment effects of the Obama victory continued to be felt by moderate and liberal blacks, but not by conservative blacks. Figure 3 reports these relationships.

I reiterate that the numbers of cases are small for this complicated analysis. Nonetheless, it appears that whatever the effect of empowerment may be, it is at least in part an empowerment of ideology, not of race. Indeed, note that the correlations between ideological self-identifications and perceptions of freedom are -0.13, 0.07, 0.17, 0.13, 0.51, and 0.57, for 2005, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, and 2011, respectively. This dramatic change in the interconnection of ideology and perceived freedom among black Americans seems to overwhelm any possible effects of racial empowerment. Instead, it seems to imply a strong ideological component to minority group empowerment.

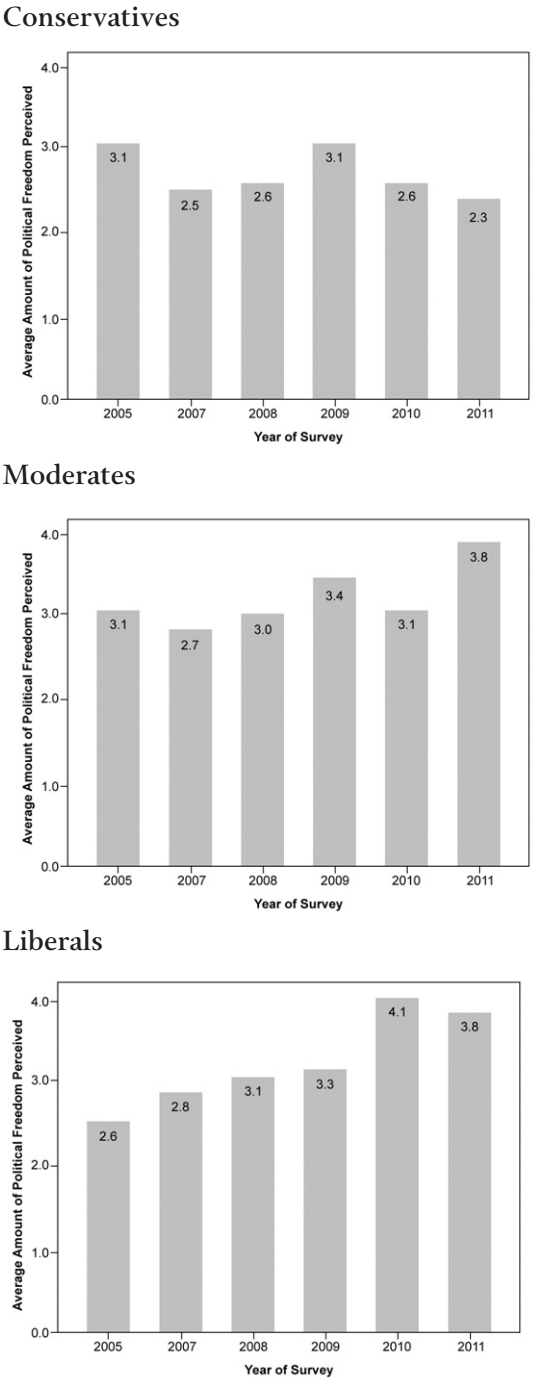
Research on political participation typically looks first to the attributes of individuals – their resources and roots – as predictors of high levels of participation. Political scientists usually assume that if people do not engage in political action, it is because they are not resourceful enough to do so, or because their levels of resources are insufficiently powerful to overcome institutional impediments to participation (for example, voter registration regulations). Simple models of individual resources paired against barriers to political action carry the day when it comes to understanding why some participate in politics and others do not.

A somewhat different approach to understanding variability in degrees of political involvement focuses instead on individual perceptions of the availability of freedom to participate in one form or another. Rather than asking whether citizens are sufficiently knowledgeable to participate, this approach asks whether citizens perceive relatively cost-free opportunities to engage in political action. Earlier research has shown that objective characteristics of the environment, such as restrictive voting laws, influence the participatory behavior of African Americans. My research points to beliefs about available freedom, and especially interracial differences in such beliefs, as an important influence on rates of political participation. For many Americans, perceived freedom to act seems to be a necessary condition for political participation.

Black Americans are much less likely than whites to perceive that their government will allow them to engage in ordinary (but non-voting) forms of political participation. The election of a black American to the U.S. presidency did seem to empower African Americans, causing an increase in levels of perceived freedom. But that increase seems to have been epiphenomenal, with perceived levels of freedom after 2009 soon reverting to their prior level. The boost in empowerment that earlier research has documented may be of little long-term consequence.[32]

Instead, ideology and religiosity are now fairly strongly connected to perceptions of freedom among black Americans. As I have shown elsewhere, perceptions of freedom among Christian fundamentalists (irrespective of race) are among the most constrained in contemporary American politics.[33] The evidence of my current analysis perhaps points to the devel-

Figure 3
Empowerment Effects across Different Ideological Self-Identifications of African Americans



The year 2006 is not included in the survey data because no survey was conducted in 2006.
Source: Figure created by author based on data from Freedom and Tolerance Surveys, 2005 – 2011.

opment of noticeable fissures within the black community along the lines of religion and ideology.[34]

There is little need to reiterate that the political freedom I consider in this paper is subjective, not objective. It is the freedom that resides in the minds of citizens, not in laws or constitutions. I offer no judgment as to whether this is a "false consciousness," especially in the context of continuing battles over who is and is not allowed to participate in American politics. Not everyone in America wants everyone to participate fully in politics. After all, elections turn on whether different segments of the electorate participate at greater or lesser rates. If citizens with opposing viewpoints can be dissuaded, impeded, or intimidated into not participating, elections can be more easily shaped. Given the objective reality of participation wars in contemporary American politics, it is hardly surprising that some would perceive serious constraints on the freedom available to them, and that even the election of a co-ethnic to America's highest office would have little long-term ability to inoculate against those constraints.

ENDNOTES

Acknowledgments: I am grateful for comments from Chris Wlezien, Frank Gilliam, and Eric L. McDaniel on an earlier version of this essay. The Freedom and Tolerance Surveys were funded by the Weidenbaum Center on the Economy, Government, and Public Policy at Washington University in St. Louis. I greatly appreciate the support provided for this research by Steven S. Smith, Director of the Weidenbaum Center.

1 Kay Lehman Schlozman, Sidney Verba, and Henry E. Brady, *The Unheavenly Chorus: Unequal Political Voice and the Broken Promise of American Democracy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2012).

2 Zoltan Hajnal and Jessica Trounstine, "Where Turnout Matters: The Consequences of Uneven Turnout in City Politics," *The Journal of Politics* 67 (2) (May 2005): 515.

3 For example, Patrick Flavin, "Income Inequality and Policy Representation in the American States," *American Politics Research* 40 (1) (2012): 29–59; Ellen Rigby and Gerald C. Wright, "Whose Statehouse Democracy? Policy Responsiveness to Poor versus Rich Constituents in Poor versus Rich States," in *Who Gets Represented?* ed. Peter K. Enns and Christopher Wlezien (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2011), 223–246; Larry M. Bartels, *Unequal Democracy: The Political Economy of the New Gilded Age* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2008); and Martin Gilens, "Inequality and Democratic Responsiveness," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 69 (5) (2005): 778–796.

4 See Sidney Verba, Kay Lehman Schlozman, and Henry E. Brady, *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995).

5 Ibid.; Hajnal and Trounstine, "Where Turnout Matters"; and Jan E. Leighley, *Strength in Numbers: The Political Mobilization of Racial and Ethnic Minorities* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001).

6 For example, Hajnal and Trounstine, "Where Turnout Matters," 531.

7 Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, *Voice and Equality*.

8 Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000); Nicholas H. Wolfinger and Raymond E. Wolfinger, "Family Structure and Voter Turnout," *Social Forces* 86 (4) (2008): 1513–1528.

9 Raymond E. Wolfinger and Steven J. Rosenstone, *Who Votes?* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1980).

[10] Lawrence Bobo and Franklin D. Gilliam, Jr., "Race, Sociopolitical Participation, and Black Empowerment," *American Political Science Review* 84 (2) (June 1990): 377 – 393.

[11] James L. Gibson, "The Political Consequences of Intolerance: Cultural Conformity and Political Freedom," *American Political Science Review* 86 (2) (June 1992): 338 – 356.

[12] Adrian D. Pantoja, Ricardo Ramirez, and Gary M. Segura, "Citizens by Choice, Voters by Necessity: Patterns in Political Mobilization by Naturalized Latinos," *Political Research Quarterly* 54 (4) (December 2001): 729 – 750.

[13] Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, *Voice and Equality*; Schlozman, Verba, and Brady, *The Unheavenly Chorus*.

[14] John R. Logan, Jennifer Darrah, and Sookhee Oh, "The Impact of Race and Ethnicity, Immigration and Political Context on Participation in American Electoral Politics," *Social Forces* 90 (3) (March 2012): 1014. They also discover that "immigrant receptivity" in the local context strongly influences the participation rates of Hispanics. See also Gordon F. De Jong and Quynh-Giang Tran, "Warm Welcome, Cool Welcome: Mapping Receptivity Toward Immigrants in the U.S.," *Population Today* 29 (8) (2001): 1, 4 – 5; and Jennifer Van Hook, Susan K. Brown, and Frank D. Bean, "For Love or Money? Welfare Reform and Immigrant Naturalization," *Social Forces* 85 (2) (2006): 643 – 666.

[15] Bobo and Gilliam, "Race, Sociopolitical Participation, and Black Empowerment."

[16] Logan, Darrah, and Oh, "The Impact of Race and Ethnicity, Immigration and Political Context on Participation in American Electoral Politics," 1014; emphasis added.

[17] Ebonya Washington, "How Black Candidates Affect Voter Turnout," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 121 (3) (2006): 973 – 998.

[18] James L. Gibson, "The Political Freedom of African Americans: A Contextual Analysis of Racial Attitudes, Political Tolerance, and Individual Liberty," *Political Geography* 14 (1995): 571 – 599.

[19] Some research shows that government monitoring of citizens' political activities actually increases political participation: for example, Wendy K. Tam Cho, James G. Gimpel, and Tony Wu, "Clarifying the Role of SES in Political Participation: Policy Threat and Arab American Mobilization," *The Journal of Politics* 68 (4) (November 2006): 977 – 991; and Brian S. Krueger, "Government Surveillance and Political Participation on the Internet," *Social Science Computer Review* 23 (4) (Winter 2005): 439 – 452. How, then, can I reconcile the hypothesis that perceptions of constraints on freedom limit political action? Samuel Best and Brian Krueger offer an interesting and plausible answer, focusing on the emotions aroused by government surveillance; see Samuel J. Best and Brian S. Krueger, "Government Monitoring and Political Participation in the United States: The Distinct Roles of Anger and Anxiety," *American Politics Research* 39 (1) (January 2011): 85 – 117. In response to learning that the government is monitoring one's behavior, two emotions may arise: anger and/or anxiety. These emotions seem to have the opposite consequences for political action. As Best and Krueger show, anger *increases* the likelihood of action; anxiety *decreases* the likelihood. If members of minority groups feel more disempowered to do anything about the monitoring, whereas members of majority groups feel more efficacious, then the dominant emotion among minorities would be the participation-blocking anxiety while the dominant emotion among majorities would be the action-enhancing anger. This conjecture relies on linking majority/minority status to the type of emotion experienced, largely through mechanisms involving personal efficacy. Each of the linkages in this model would profit from further empirical investigation.

[20] See, for example, Lawrence D. Bobo, "Somewhere between Jim Crow & Post-Racialism: Reflections on the Racial Divide in America Today," *Dædalus* 140 (2) (Spring 2011): 11 – 36.

[21] Methodological details of the Freedom and Tolerance Surveys are discussed at the conclusion of the endnotes, on pages 128 – 129. Note that no survey was conducted in 2006.

[22] Samuel C. Stouffer, *Communism, Conformity, and Civil Liberties: A Cross-Section of the Nation Speaks Its Mind* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1955). Stouffer's research is often used as a benchmark for studying changes in political intolerance and perceptions of political freedom; see, for example, James L. Gibson, "Intolerance and Political Repression in the United States: A Half-Century After McCarthyism," *American Journal of Political Science* 52 (1) (January 2008): 96–108. However, Stouffer did not report his results by the race of the respondents, so interracial comparisons cannot be made.

[23] One of the findings from Table 1 is that African Americans are only slightly less likely than whites to say that they feel free when asked in general terms; but when asked about specific government restraints on political activities, blacks are dramatically more likely to perceive such restraints. The data suggest that this is because perceptions of restraints translate into holistic judgments at a considerably stronger rate among whites.

[24] It is perhaps ironic that an earlier study found that perceived political freedom was similar for white Americans and residents of the Soviet Union, with black Americans lagging considerably behind both whites and Soviets in the days of the "Evil Empire"; see James L. Gibson, "Perceived Political Freedom in the Soviet Union," *The Journal of Politics* 55 (4) (November 1993): 936–974.

[25] Gibson, "The Political Freedom of African Americans," 577.

[26] Considerable caution must be taken with interpreting my findings when the surveys are broken down by year and by race of the respondent; the numbers of cases are typically of insufficient power to reveal statistically significant differences. These findings must therefore be treated as highly tentative and, to a considerable degree, speculative.

[27] Recall that the 2005 interview was face to face, whereas the other interviews in the series were via telephone. Face-to-face interviewing generates relatively high social desirability effects, and feeling free is most likely judged to be desirable by most Americans. Therefore, I tend to slightly discount the 2005 findings, attributing part of their differences from the later surveys to survey mode effects.

[28] Note that the 2008 survey was fielded in the early summer of that year.

[29] For analytical purposes, a scale of perceived governmental constraints on political freedom would be useful. As it turns out, the three indicators of freedom (as given in the survey question) have desirable psychometric properties. There is strong support for the hypothesis that a unidimensional latent construct underlies the responses to these items. A Common Factor Analysis of the three items produces a strongly unidimensional solution, with the eigenvalue of the second extracted factor of only 0.41, and with nearly equal loadings of each of the items on the first factor. In addition, the three-item set has unusually high reliability for only three indicators (Cronbach's alpha = 0.82). Because the factor score from this analysis is correlated with a simple summated index derived from the three items at 0.999, I will use the index, which is somewhat more intuitively understandable, in the analysis that follows. With such a strong inter-correlation, it matters not at all whether the index or the factor score is used in the analysis. Highly significant racial differences exist on this index, which is not surprising in light of the findings reported in Table 1 for the individual items. On a simple count of the number of activities thought to be allowed by the government, the mean (and standard deviation) is 2.06 (1.14) for whites and 1.47 (1.25) for blacks.

[30] Gilliam and Kaufmann investigated the longevity of empowerment using longitudinal data on voting; see Franklin D. Gilliam, Jr., and Karen M. Kaufmann, "Is There an Empowerment Life Cycle? Long-Term Black Empowerment and Its Influence on Voter Participation," *Urban Affairs Review* 33 (6) (July 1998): 741–766. They find that empowerment effects persist, at least in the three cities that they studied. They note, however, that empowerment may have a "life cycle" in the sense that empowerment raises expectations, which are often unsatisfied, resulting in political alienation. I somewhat resist comparing the election of a black mayor with the election of a black president; and general perceptions of available political freedom are not the same as voting in elections. Moreover, the effects that I observe

in these data may be in part a function of backlash among white conservatives as they have mobilized to defeat Obama; and given presidential politics, this process may have evolved in a shorter time span than characterizes local politics. However, Gilliam and Kaufmann are certainly right in calling for more research on the dynamics of political empowerment and alienation.

31 Bobo, "Somewhere between Jim Crow & Post-Racialism."

32 I note as well that it is not clear that voter mobilization campaigns necessarily do much to reduce inequities in political participation. See, for example, Kevin Arceneaux and David Nickerson, "Who is Mobilized to Vote? A Re-Analysis of 11 Field Experiments," *American Journal of Political Science* 53 (1) (January 2009): 1–16.

33 Gibson, "Intolerance and Political Repression in the United States."

34 Although Obama was speaking about white Pennsylvanians at the time, perhaps some in the black community have never gotten over his criticism of working class voters for clinging to their "guns or religion" in times of stress. See http://blog.christianitytoday.com/ctliveblog/archives/2008/04/obama_they_clin.html (accessed April 24, 2012).

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

The 2005 Survey. This survey is based on a nationally representative sample interviewed face to face during Summer 2005. The fieldwork took place from mid-May until mid-July 2005. A total of 1,001 interviews were completed, with a response rate of 40.03 percent (American Association for Public Opinion Research [AAPOR] Response Rate #3). No respondent substitution was allowed; up to six callbacks were executed. The average length of interview was 83.8 minutes (with a standard deviation of 23.9 minutes). The median length of interview was 77 minutes. The difference between the mean and the median is due to a handful of extremely long interviews. The data were subjected to some minor "post-stratification," with the proviso that the weighted numbers of cases must correspond to the actual number of completed interviews. Interviews were offered in both English and Spanish (with the Spanish version of the questionnaire prepared through conventional translation/back-translation procedures). Samples such as this have a margin of error of approximately ±3.08 percent.

The 2007–2011 Surveys. Each of these surveys was conducted by Schulman, Ronca, and Bucuvalas Inc. (SRBI/Abt Associates). In 2007, 2008, and 2009, we used a standard random digit dial (RDD) design; in 2010 and 2011, the RDD sample was supplemented with a cell phone subsample.

2007–2009: These surveys are based on a nationally representative RDD sample. Conducted by SRBI, the surveys utilized computer-assisted telephone interviewing. The initial questionnaires were subjected to a formal test, and, on the basis of the results of the pretests, were significantly revised. Within households, the respondents were selected randomly. The final data sets were subjected to some relatively minor post-stratification and were also weighted to accommodate variability in the size of the respondents' households.

In 2007, the interviews averaged around 25 minutes in length. The AAPOR Cooperation Rate #3 was 43.8 percent, and the AAPOR Response Rate #3 was 29.5 percent (see AAPOR 2004), which is close to the current average for telephone surveys; see Allyson L. Holbrook, Jon A. Krosnick, and Alison Pfent, "The Causes and Consequences of Response Rates in Surveys by the News Media and Government Contractor Survey Research Firms," in *Advances in Telephone Survey Methodology*, ed. James M. Lepkowski et al. (Hoboken, N.J.: John Wiley & Sons, 2008).

In 2008, the interviews averaged about 30 minutes. The AAPOR Cooperation Rate #3 was 43.6 percent, and the AAPOR Response Rate #3 was 30.5 percent.

In 2009, the interviews averaged around 37 minutes in length. The AAPOR Cooperation Rate #3 was 43.6 percent, and the AAPOR Response Rate #3 was 30.5 percent.

2010–2011: The 2010 and 2011 surveys used a research design that combines a standard RDD subsample with a cell phone subsample. Samples were drawn from both the landline and cell phone national RDD frames. Persons with residential landlines were not screened out

of the cell-phone sample. Both samples were provided by Survey Sampling International, LLC, according to SRBI specifications. Numbers for the landline sample were drawn with equal probabilities from active blocks (area code + exchange + two-digit block number) that contained one or more residential directory listings. The cell-phone sample was drawn through a systematic sampling from 1000-blocks dedicated to cellular service according to the Telcordia database. For the landline portion of the sample, the respondents were selected randomly within households.

In 2010, the interviews averaged around 28 minutes in length. The overall AAPOR Cooperation Rate #3 was 47.6 percent, and the overall AAPOR Response Rate #3 was 30.9 percent. For the RDD stratum, the AAPOR Cooperation Rate #3 was 49.1 percent, and the overall AAPOR Response Rate #3 was 30.0 percent. The rates within the cell-phone stratum are slightly lower: the AAPOR Cooperation Rate #3 was 41.6 percent, and the overall AAPOR Response Rate #3 was 26.6 percent.

In 2011, the interviews averaged around 28 minutes in length. The overall AAPOR Cooperation Rate #3 was 43.7 percent, and the overall AAPOR Response Rate #3 was 29.6 percent. For the RDD stratum, the AAPOR Cooperation Rate #3 was 43.3 percent, and the overall AAPOR Response Rate #3 was 30.3 percent. The rates within the cell-phone stratum are similar: the AAPOR Cooperation Rate #3 was 45.5 percent, and the overall AAPOR Response Rate #3 was 27.0 percent.

Inside back cover: Voters wait in line to vote at a polling place. © Hill Street Studios/Blend Images/ Getty Images.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