Public Opinion and Policy
Causal Flow in a Macro System Model

ROBERT S. ERIKSON, MICHAEL B. MACKuen, AND JAMES A. STIMSON

In a democracy such as the United States, policy is supposed to flow from the preferences of the public. Of the many studies of possible causal connections from public opinion to policy, almost all are cross-sectional, that is, involving a search for covariance between public opinion and policy across units measured over a constant time period. Although often reported as positive opinion-policy relationships, these studies invite the critique that reported cross-sectional correlations are subject to rival causal interpretations beyond the claims of representative democracy at work.

In this chapter, we again ask whether public opinion and public policy are connected. We do so, however, not with another cross-sectional analysis, but from a time-series perspective. We inquire whether current public opinion predicts subsequent policy activity and actual policy at the national level, and, if so,

Much of what we present here briefly reviews major results from our five-year investigation of public opinion and policymaking in The Macro Policy (Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson 2002), based on statistical modeling of a conditional sort. It serves to set the stage and define our interest. Then, we turn to thinking about systems of relationships and ask what we can learn by building models of systems in which each part influences the others.
Does public opinion influence public policy? Such is the evidence one can select in cross-sectional analysis. The views of constituents are statistically related to the positions their legislators take. The two are positively correlated. For example, in the U.S. Senate, roll call liberalism correlates with liberal ideological identification in the state (e.g., Wright and Bermeo 1984), in the House of Representatitves, roll call liberalism correlates with constituency Democratic presidential voting, a good proxy for the liberalism of House districts (Tibbitts and Wright 2004). In the American states, policy liberalism and the views of governors also correlate with the state electorates' degree of liberal ideological identification (Tibbitts, Wright, and McIver 1997). And at the national level, the left-right placement of the governing parties and coalitions correlate with the left-right preferences of national electorates (Powell 2002).

What are we to infer from patterns such as these, evident across numerous political arenas? The obvious answer would be strong evidence of democracy at work, with public opinion influencing public policy. But, if so, how? And can we be sure that some mechanism other than opinions causing policy is not responsible for the correlation?

A best-case interpretation is that the evidence shows democratic representation but fails to discriminate among alternative pathways. When we start thinking about those alternative pathways, the problem gets thornier. Do legislators consciously solicit the views of constituents? Do they take them into account, but only indirectly, making inference from indirect cases such as constituent demographics and constituency voting behavior? Or might we imagine a process where no legislator ever consciously considers the wishes of constituents but nonetheless reflects them because the election process has molded agreement between constituents and representatives. These different scenarios are all democratic in the fundamental sense that the will of the people is somehow reflected in governance.

But we have not exhausted the possible explanations for the positive correlation between opinion and policy. Suppose the truth was that the voters decide based on reasons that have nothing to do with public policy. Even under this hypothetical circumstance, opinions and policy could correlate in the cross-section, leading to the spurious conclusion that opinion caused the policy. Before making causal claims about democratic representation, we should not rule out alternative mechanisms for generating opinion-policy correlations. We need to consider three.

First, and most obviously, the representatives and the represented can agree not only because the represented cause their representatives’ behavior but also for the opposite reason—because representatives lead or “educate” their constituents. It is possible to think of voters as doubters, rationally susceptible to the views of those they trust. If that is the case, voters could be without a fully formed view on the policy issue at hand and not have a view to “cause” legislators to act in a certain way, but rather a view that legislators might have formed. This is a plausible explanation for the spurious correlation of opinion and policy. However, it is not enough to explain why the views of constituents would change to fit legislative action: we need an expanded view of opinion formation, one that recognizes the role of social networks, media, and other influences.
would like to diminish the possibility by greater regulation and restriction. In many areas of policy discourse and conflict, views come to be associated with the actors in which people live.

Given such a scenario, we can elucidate another explanation for observed opinion-policy correlations. Even if the geographic constituencies choose their leaders at random, the fact that the leaders are drawn from the constituencies they represent will ensure some sharing of opinion by the public and its representatives. All that matters is that candidates have relatively uniform views within a constituency. Evidence of representation will emerge even when no voter considers policy views and no representative consciously acts to honor constituent preferences.

When we observe correlation between opinion and policy, our inclination is to see it as evidence of democratic representation at work. However, given the possibilities of alternative causal mechanisms, it is no surprise that cross-sectional opinion-policy correlations are often viewed with skepticism (e.g., Sharp 1950). The skeptic's argument would have particularly strong force if cross-sectional correlations between constituency preferences and representative behavior were the sole evidence for ascertaining the degree of policy representation. By itself, the sharing of preferences by the representative and the representative demonstrating congruence but nothing more. In democratic theory, the aim is a causal dynamic by which the preferences of constituents cause the behavior of the representatives—beyond what would occur by elite persuasion, voter mobility, or geographic accident.

Fortunately, the case for democratic representation is enhanced by a full consideration of the extensive evidence beyond raw correlations—such as the findings of the considerable literature on policy issues and election outcomes and elite anticipation of the electoral response. Still, if we are to convince the skeptical, the strongest evidence comes from time series. The idea is not that time-series data patterns automatically trump cross-sectional ones, but rather that with time series one can exploit temporal order to infer causal ordering.

Imagine a body of evidence in which current public opinion is significantly related to future policy in a systematic pattern over time, in which opinion change precedes policy change in temporal sequence. Given such evidence, could one easily refute the idea that opinion is the cause of policy? If opinion leads policy—and particular if policy does not lead opinion—one could not comfortably argue that the causal arrow goes from policy to opinion. Given such time-series evidence, could the opinion-policy convergence be due to people rating with their feet? This possibility becomes implausible because it implies vast migrations in and out of the governmental entity (city, state, or nation) in advance of new turns in policy direction. And the mere sharing of opinions by elites and masses is an awkward explanation if public opinion predicts future policy independent of current policy, which presumably reflects current elite preferences. Of course, spurious relationships are always possible in the absence of a true controlled experiment. Thus, one would want some additional evidence that allows robust public policy

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In their desired direction while propagating so that the public will accept it as good. But before taking such prepositions too seriously, we must ask, why such powerful elites need to influence public opinion. If public opinion was irrelevant to policymaking?

The table is set to examine the dynamic causal. Time-lagged relationships are vastly easier to study for evidence of cause and effect. If we are to understand the process, it is helpful to observe change in progress. This idea is the starting point for the classic Page and Shapiro (1983) quasi-experimental study of change in opinions and policies. Page and Shapiro observe changes in particular opinions over a span of time and then ask whether policy changes lying between them move also in the same direction. They conclude that the answer is yes. Here we have evidence for representatives responding to changed preferences. Accident or coincidence can be ruled out.

Thinking about the very same question, "If opinion changes, does government respond?" we have moved toward representing the process in the correlation of two time series, rather than the before-after test scenario of the quasi-experimental. The quasi-experimental evidence establishes the fact of representation but offers little guidance for how it might be modeled. That further step motivates our work, both what has gone before and what will appear in this chapter.

**MEASURING PUBLIC OPINION: LIBERAL-CONSERVATIVE "MOOD"**

If the issues that governments process were discrete—that is, they arise, get discussed, resolved, or ignored; and then disappear—then the idea of representation as a continuous process would be intrinsically tempting. Alternatively, individual issues are merely specific cases of a general and continuing issue debate, then we may think of measuring the net liberalism or conservatism of both public opinion and policy, connecting the two. Another way to pose the question is to ask whether opinion has some common element that persists over time and across apparently dissimilar issues. Our traditions on this matter sharply conflict. Policy studies begin with the presumption that all policies are unique. There is education policy, environmental policy, transit policy, gun policy, and on and on, all different. In common parlance, policy, however, we contradict this view by referring to most (not all, issues are the same reference frame: liberalism and conservatism. If it is meaningful to refer to, say, a liberal position on environment, on education, on guns, and transit, then this "liberalization" must be something common to all: beliefs must somehow be related to trees, taxes, and guns.

The matter may be easier in operational terms than as an abstraction. Imagine that we have a technology for solving for the common element(s) of a large array of public attitudes toward distinct issues—a principal components analysis in which issues are variables and time is the unit of analysis. Then the number of dimensions required to adequately account for the variation in the issue array...
is an empirical question. One dimension might run through all, perhaps one in each policy domain (e.g., education, environment, guns, trade, and all the rest) that ties together more specific controversies, or perhaps each specific issue debate requires its own dimension. We approached the data willing to believe any outcome, without a strong prior belief. We learned (Stimson 1991, 1999; Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson 2002) that most of the systematic variation in measured policy opinion questions could be accounted for by a single left-right organizing dimension. That dimension we call public policy mood and interpret as a generic response to government itself. Mood liberalism taps willingness to expand the size and scope of federal activity in all policy domains. Mood conservatism taps a preference for a less federal role.

In retrospect, we should have expected this outcome. We know from scholarship on government policymaking (most prominently Poole and Rosenthal 1997) that it is characterized by low dimensionality; most issues fit nicely within a left-right divide. And we know, of course, that all conflicts have their electoral resolution in a two-party political system, which tends to force issue controversies into a bipolar mode, both for governors and the governed. And when issues arise aligned with the common dimension, there is great pressure to bend them to fit the ongoing debate (for the racial case, see Carnaghan and Stimson 1980 for the abortion controversy, see Adams 1997).

Thus, we have the first half of our question "If opinion changes" captured in a single time series, public policy mood. The measurement of mood is too complex to describe in much detail here (see instead Stimson 1991, 1999). Suffice it to say, mood is a composite incorporating virtually all available public opinion surveys that tap the common dimension of government activity. The annual or biennial measures of mood represent a weighted average of the trend, holding constant the specific survey question and weighting items according to their commonality with the dominant dimension. Using the ideological terms in common parlance, periods of high mood indicate a public at its most liberal, while low scores indicate a public at its most conservative. By the mood index, the public was most liberal in the early 1980s—just before the liberal Great Society legislation—and most conservative around 1990 (at the start of the series) and around 1980 at the advent of Reagan’s conservative revolution. From "high" to "low" points or back again, the amount of change in mood can be considered large—upward from a standard deviation of cross-sectional liberalism-conservatism by our estimates—and encompassing all segments of the electorate (see Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson 2002, chap. 4 for details).

To answer the representation question then requires also a continuous measure of the second piece, the policy response. The policy response, in turn, includes two parts: year-to-year adjustments, which are sometimes wholly symbolic and sometimes modify existing policies at the margin (policy activity in our usage to come), and the making of law, a matter of more gravity and permanence (policy). The former is captured by aggregate measures of partisan voting in Krehm, and MacKuen and Stimson’s (2002, chap. 4) work on congressional roll calls. The latter involves consideration questions, and the like.

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The latter is based on actual legislation passed by Congress (and overriding presidential vetoes).

We now have the two concepts necessary for analysis of government response to opinion. Public policy mood we treat as the current public view of the status quo, the answer to the question "Does government do too little, about the right amount, or too much?" Because the actual rush of government expands and contracts with alternating regimes, we expect public opinion to respond in a new programmatic, taxating mood, spending more, and "too little" when conservative regimes cut back and scale down. This would be true even if absolute preferences for the "best" size of government were wholly constant.

**DYNAMIC REPRESENTATION: MOOD AND POLICY ACTIVITY**

We postulate that rational politicians who wish to succeed in future elections and reelections use current public opinion as leverage in the calculation of which positions are dangerous or advantageous. We model policy activity as a function of previous policy activity and of public opinion (mood), as represented by an equation of the form:

\[ y_t = \beta_0 + \beta_1 y_{t-1} + \xi_t, \]

with \( y_t \) and \( y_{t-1} \) our policy activity construct and \( \xi_t \), the previous year’s public opinion. For the theoretical model, \( \beta_1 \) could equally well be current public opinion.

We use the lagged value to ensure correct causal ordering. The parameters \( \delta \) and \( \beta \) can then be estimated by some form of dynamic regression.

But equation (1) doesn’t fully close the loop on opinion influence. A nonzero \( \beta \) tells us that public opinion influences policy activity, but not quite how. Because influencing policy activity by changing the preferences of those who become entitled to be policymakers, Democrats, for example, are more liberal than Republicans, so a public opinion that tilt’s an election result toward the Democratic Party would tend to produce more liberal policy activity even if we elect politicians who act on public opinion in his or her behavior.

To sort out the two prevailing pathways to opinion influence, we need to allow the "electoral connection" scheme to work its influence in order to observe whether there is also direct influence of opinion on policy activity. To do so, we add the party composition, \( z_t \), to the difference equation specifications:

\[ y_t = \beta_0 + \beta_1 y_{t-1} + \xi_t + \gamma_t, \]

where \( z_t \) represents the current party composition, for example, percent Democrats, which is a function of public opinion in the most recent previous election. Simple though it is, equation (2) requires only an occasional control variable to be
a complete specification for assessing the impact of public opinion on policy activity. We have estimated the parameters of a for various governing bodies and under varying conditions. Table 3.4 is a summary statement, where the policy activity measure is a joint function across House, Senate, presidency, and Supreme Court.

To clarify inference, we estimate the model in two stages, entering only a "reduced form" specification that predicts policy activity only from mood, an empirical estimate of the parameters of equation 1. This is a test of whether public opinion influences policy activity, ignoring issues of process and pathway. The answer of table 3.4 is that it does; the modest coefficient (0.16) is statistically significant. The picture is shown in figure 3.4. Here we see a trapezoidal relationship stronger at some times than at others. To understand more fully, we must move beyond the bivariate case.

When we turn to the full model, the evidence is stronger and clearer. It tells us that composition matters (0.16) is a lot, a surprise to no one, and that public opinion also matters in addition (0.16). The evidence produces undeniable support for the key assertion: changes in public opinion produce changes in government policy activity. To our question, "If public opinion changes, does government respond?" the answer is unequivocal "Yes."

Table 2.4: Estimations of Global Representation: Predicting Policy Activity, 1990-1996

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Reduced Form</th>
<th>Full Model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Democracy (X,1)</td>
<td>0.16*</td>
<td>0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mood,1</td>
<td>0.16*</td>
<td>0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composition (average of percent Democratic, House, and Senate, Democratic dummy for presidency, percent liberal for Supreme Court)</td>
<td>0.16*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cumulative Vietnamese deaths</td>
<td>-0.25*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>-0.45*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of cases</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Policy Activity is a dependent variable of this analysis, a weighted function of (1) Senate President Liberal Wins, (2) Senate Minority Liberal Coalition Size, (3) House President Liberal Wins, (4) House Minority Liberal Coalition Size, (5) Presidential Key Vote Liberalism, (6) Presidential Support Coalition Liberalism, (7) Supreme Court, Civil Liberties Domain, and (8) Supreme Court, Economic Domain. Measurement details are available in Endnote, References, and Science, 1995, 7 referent are in parentheses.

* p < .05

Figure 2.4: Public Policy Mood and Policy Activity

Note that mood affects policy activity two ways. The compositional effect is simply that the party composition of government affects policy activity—with Democrats behaving more liberally than Republicans. A key part of the story—discussed shortly—is that the electorate chooses the party composition based on its current mood. The direct effect of mood on policy activity represents only the politicians' response in anticipation of the electorate's potential reactions. For instance, consider the electorate momentarily in a liberal mood. Democratic politicians become free to engage in their liberal proposals because the electorate's liberalism lowers the cost of policy liberalism. Republican politicians become compelled to act more liberal than usual because of the political costs of backing opinion.

DYNAMIC REPRESENTATION: MOOD AND POLICY

On the surface, the daily actions of Congress, the president, and courts appear to translate directly into public policy. Or they might not. One can imagine acts of government that amount to nothing more than posturing. Debates can be held and votes taken on matters of momentary import that amount to nothing. Thus, we ask whether the slow accretions of policy enunciated in law also move in response to public demands.

"Policy," in this conception, is the body of law that remains in place forever—or until reversed by other permanent changes. Given this cumulative character, policy cannot be a simple response to current public demands. Thus, we focus on change, asking what happens in each biennium that leaves a lasting residue. Our measurement strategy is an adaptation of Donald MacKinnon...
lalion of important laws—which we have coded for direction (liberal or conservative) and strength in time.

We measure policy as the accumulation of "laws." The laws index is constructed in simple fashion from Mayhew's (1974) compilation as the number of liberal (important) laws minus the number of conservative (important) laws for the Congress (biennium), from 1903-54 through 1991-92. Policy is measured by adding up the laws scores, cumulatively, from 1903-54 through 1991-92. As liberal important laws outnumber conservative important laws by about 9 to 1, we disregard the measure. On average, the net change (laws) is between five and six major laws in the liberal direction, each Congress.7

Asking again, "Does government respond to public demands?" we have a model of the pathways to representation similar to the policy activity discussion before. Again looking at all of government output, we are concerned with responses to government composition—now measured as a scale of party control of the three elected branches, House, Senate, and presidency. 0-1 for number in Democratic hands—and with response to public opinion directly. Equation 2 again captures the structure. Table 2.3 presents the equations; Figure 2.2 shows the pattern of mood leading laws over time. The story with laws is much the same as we saw earlier with policy activity. The liberalism of laws produced by the U.S. government is very much a function of which party is in control and also of public opinion as measured by mood. Liberal policy comes from Democratic governments. But holding composition constant, what government does is also responsive directly to public opinion, expressed in the public policy mood of the previous biennium. With regard to changes in important public policies.

Table 2.3: Policy Change (Laws) as a Function of Mood and Party Control

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Variable:  A Policy (Laws)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Policy Mood, tv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean policy mood, tv-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic Party control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of cases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted R²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RMSE</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Bimodality, 1953-1962: Change (Laws) in Policy = Laws, Democratic Party control: the number of the three institutions (presidency, House of Representa-
| tions, Senate) controlled by Democrats. T values are in parentheses.

government is responsive to public opinion, now demonstrated for a second policy construct.8

THE FLOW BACK TO OPINION

Our interest in opinion and policy goes beyond how government responds to public opinion, representation. It is also important to understand how people react to the government response. We expect citizens to want more government when government in fact does little, to want less when it does much. That implies a negative association between what government does (policy) and how citizens respond (mood). We model such a relationship in table 2.5. We ask in that analysis whether public opinion (mood) responds to changes in policy. We answer the question first in a specification that lets mood be a function only of its previous value and of policy in the previous biennium. The key coefficient of -0.23 tells us that the response is an expected liberalism in policy in one biennium produces a conservative reaction in opinion in the next and vice versa.9 We know from other analyses that mood is a function of economic outcomes also. Thus, that first specification, ignoring that information, is not quite complete. We supplement the analysis by adding inflation and unemployment effects in the second column. The result is a slight reduction of the key policy coefficient (to -0.22), which nonetheless leaves the effect in the predicted direction and quite highly significant. We have asked, "if government policy changes, do citizens respond?" The answer clearly is that they do.

Then, we complete the loop. Government action and its cumulative residue responds to public opinion and public opinion responds to government action.
Table 2.3  Mood as a Function of Policy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy</th>
<th>Policy and Economics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Policy</td>
<td>-0.27*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-0.25*</td>
<td>(1.45)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy mood,</td>
<td>0.38*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.41*</td>
<td>(0.40)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inflation,</td>
<td>-0.62*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-1.65*</td>
<td>(1.60)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment,</td>
<td>1.34*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.59*</td>
<td>(2.19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>35.20*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37.25*</td>
<td>(5.40)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of cases</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>(21.44)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted R²</td>
<td>.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.31</td>
<td>(2.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RMSE</td>
<td>1.85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Unbalanced data, 1955-56. Policy is cumulative; laws, deterrent. * values are at 0.05 percent level.

These two dynamics are related in a system of equations. We start the system with a shock to mood—say, an exogenous "conservative" shock. Politicians immediately become more conservative in their posturing or policy activity, eventually, actual policy becomes more conservative. In appreciation, the public lowers its demand for more conservatism and, barring further disruptions, the system returns to equilibrium.

So far we have said little about the process that makes this work—the voters' behavior at election time. We turn next to the electoral connection. For politicians to respond to mood requires that by doing so they gain—or at least think they gain—an electoral advantage.

THE ELECTORAL CONNECTION

The pivotal link in the chain of requirements for policy representation is that the electorate votes in a policy-oriented fashion. We have seen that for the direction of national policy, party composition matters and so does mood, when party composition is controlled. This mood effect represents the anticipation of elected officials—the belief that leading public opinion enhances electoral security. This anticipatory response is contingent on the electorate paying a certain degree of attention, or at minimum that elected officials think they are paying attention. Is the electorate's responsiveness to policy considerations real or does the anticipatory response of politicians rest on an illusion?

Decades of electoral research provide a bleak picture of the political qualifications of the typical American voter. The typical voter is not particularly interested in policy issues and often is shockingly ill-informed. At election time, our typical voter starts with a standing preference based on a long-term party identification but also shows a tendency to defect based on evidence that the in party is governing well or poorly. Is there room for policy voting to emerge, given the state of the typical voter? Perhaps we should be reminded that not too long ago, the central debate of electoral politics was whether the American voter was even "rational."

Two points must be raised in this concern. First, one must distinguish between occasional ignorance and irrationality. Contemporary research claims that although the American electorate may often be un-informed, voters do make intelligent use of the information that they possess (see, for instance, Page and Shapiro 1992; Popkin 1983; Lupia and McCubbins 1997). Second, and perhaps more important in the context here, the macro-level entity (the American electorate) must be distinguished from the micro-level construct (the typical American voter). To put it simply, if the typical American voter is (by definition) at the fifteenth percentile of attentiveness to policy issues, the macro-level behavior of the American electorate is heavily weighted by the behavior of the people above the fifteenth percentile of attentiveness. The behavior of the electorate shows more intelligence than our knowledge of the typical voter would suggest.

Is there a degree of policy responsiveness to voting in the United States that is observable with time-series evidence? The statistical question is whether election year mood predicts election results. We show that it does, for three dependent variables: the Democratic vote for president, the Democratic percentage of House seats, and the Democratic percentage of Senate seats among those up for election in the particular year. Our primary control variable is macro-partisanship (party identification in Gallup surveys) in October of the election year. For the two congressional equations, we add a midterm dummy for the midterm effect. For the House seats equation, we add lagged seats. The statistical efficiency of the two congressional equations is enhanced by using "seemingly unrelated regressions." The results appear in table 2.4.

The results of table 2.4 imply that mood is a considerable influence on national elections. The mood coefficients are all highly significant, at the .01 level or better. To appreciate the size of the coefficients, consider that each percentage point of mood represents an average across-the-board change of 0.1% in liberal-conservative policy items in opinion polls. The parameter estimates suggest that each percentage point opinion shift carries with it almost 1% of the two-party presidential vote, about two-thirds of House seats and about two-thirds of a Senate seat.

Clearly, elections are at the center of the representation process. The more liberal the electorate, the more Democratic its voting. The more Democrats elected, the more liberal become the policies. At the same time, politicians anticipate this process and the effects of their actions on public opinion.
THE REPRESENTATIVE SYSTEM

The representation system consists of not a single equation but instead a system of interrelated equations. The parameters of these equations are themselves contingent on other variables we have ignored. The size of the mood effect on elections, for instance, is ultimately a function of the ideological attentiveness of individual voters and the diversity of ideological choices presented by the two major parties. Widen the ideological gulf between the parties, for example—or enlighten the electorate—and the parameters capturing the electorate’s responsiveness will change.

The anticipatory policy response of elites to mood in turn depends on the degree to which the electorate responds to policy issues. It also depends on their balancing of electoral versus policy considerations in the politicians’ optimizing equations. At one extreme, professional politicians striving only to stay elected follow their constituencies at the expense of personal preferences. At the other extreme, elected officials (perhaps when term-limited) follow their preferences and shirk their responsibilities to their constituents.

An important element of the system is the feedback from the policy process to the electorate. Liberal policies cause conservative mood and vice versa. We should therefore not figure out why this should be. It is not that legislation generates a bunch of disillusionments. And it is not that politicians spend their capital passing unpopular legislation. (Available poll data show that, although major laws are often controversial, they are usually favored by the median voter.) Rather, liberal policy breeds conservative mood and vice versa because popular liberal legislation lessens the perceived need for more liberal legislation and popular conservative legislation lessens the perceived need for more conservative legislation. To take an example, Johnson’s Great Society was popular but lessened the perceived need for further liberalization of the kind that the Democratic Party could deliver. Similarly, Reagan’s conservative revolution was popular but lessened the perceived need for further conservative legislation of the kind the Republicans could deliver.

The mood measure represents the relative judgment of the American electorate. When the electorate is in a liberal mood, the people see their policies as more conservative than they want. When the electorate is in a conservative mood, the people see their policies as more conservative than they want. Mood then responds “negatively” to policy because liberal (conservative) legislation lowers the demand for liberalism (conservation).

This theorizing suggests still another aspect to the system. If mood measures the difference between policy and preferences, we should introduce preferences as a further latent (or unmeasured) variable. Mood can change when policy changes, but when it changes in a way not readily attributed to policy, the source might be unmeasured changes in the electorate’s preferences.

At this point, we pause the modeling of the line. A potentially useful way to model the representation process has mood as a thermostat, with the public opinion registering its view of policy and the electorate being a case of either “more liberal” or “more conservative” (see Wlezien 1991). The unmeasured preference then is the electorate’s set point, but one that can vary over time. Rotating the model in the language of time-series statistics, policy equals preferences plus error in an error correction model, where mood represents the error. By this formulation, one can visualize a graph of policy and preferences over time, where mood represents the difference between the two, or the error.11

If one pursues this idea to the next step, mood represents a parameter k times the quantity [lent preferences minus policy] where preferences are measured in policy units. The value of k calibrates how many units of major legislation (the policy measure) constitute one unit of mood. That is, one unit of mood is a demand for k major laws. But what is k?

We can offer a speculative answer, based on assumptions of rationality. When modeling representation, we can impute rational expectations to the actors. Rational expectation does not mean the absence of error, but rather the absence of systematic errors. Actors do not persist in making the same mistake; they are able to learn. For instance, if voters have rational expectations, they would cast partisan votes based on their personal issue positions (liberal vote Democratic, conservatives vote Republican) only if the political parties actually pursue different policies in office. Similarly, if politicians have rational expectations, they would not

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### Causal Flow in a Macro System Model

Table 3.4 Predicting Election Results from Policy Mood and Macropartisanship

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Variable</th>
<th>Democratic Presidential Vote</th>
<th>Democratic Percent of House Seats</th>
<th>Democratic Percent of Senate Seats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mood, election year</td>
<td>0.68*</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macropartisanship, October, election year</td>
<td>1.9*</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midterm (- 1 Dem. Reps., - 1 Rep. Dems.)</td>
<td>-1.5*</td>
<td>-0.8%</td>
<td>-1.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legged Dem. percentage of House seats</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-75.95*</td>
<td>-49.04*</td>
<td>-10.03*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of cases</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted R²</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>0.60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

* OLS equation. Democratic presidential vote is as a percent of the two-party vote.
* Standard errors clustered by state.
* SCF = squared correlation of SCF’s. SCF’s are standardized. Seats are measured as the percent of two-party seats.
* The balance sheet equation is based on all Senate seats up to the specific election cycle. Seats decided before election years are ignored.

$T$ values (t-values for SCF’s) are in parentheses. Based on all national elections, 1992-96.
act as if the electorate were paying attention to their policies unless the electorate was paying attention. If, in fact, politicians have rational expectations, they learn the magnitudes of the signals sent by the electorate when the electorate changes its mood. This is the key for calibrating mood and policy on a common scale.

Using this rational expectations framework, we see a $\lambda$ value of about 3, meaning that one unit (percentage point) of mood is equivalent to a demand for three major laws. If, say, Congress enacted three extra major liberal programs, mood moves conservative one percentage point. If $\lambda$ is less than 3, according to the pattern of the mood and policy time-series data, the policy response to mood would be too strong. Congress would move policy farther than the public's target, requiring a spiral of overcorrections in each direction that would imply that politicians are unable to learn. If $\lambda$ is greater than 3, then the data suggest the policy response to mood is too weak—Congress would always under-estimate the public demand and never reach the public's target. In this sense, a $\lambda$ value of about 3 is just about right.

The potential payoff of this theorizing is the speculative depiction of the time series of public preferences overlaid with actual policy. Figure 3.3 presents the picture. Here, mood equals the preferences minus policy gap. The greater the gap, the more liberal the mood. By this depiction of figure 3.3, preferences move quite a bit. The contemporaneous correlation between hypothetical preferences and measured policy is not great (a mere .30), but preferences do correlate at an impressive .83 with policy eight years later. Preferences by this model took up to eighty years to translate into law. If this is the correct depiction, the response of policy (unlike policy activity) is slow. This is exactly what we expect, given a Madisonian system of checks and balances. Policy responds surely but slowly so that preferences sometimes change faster than the system can respond.

THE LARGER SYSTEM: MACRO POLICY

The representation process that we have described is only one part of a larger set of dynamics that compose the macro political system. We have examined the public opinion-policy system of equations as if it were in a vacuum from which other political variables were sealed off so as not to interfere and complicate the analysis. Although this isolation is appropriate in a first step, a complete understanding requires that we place the representation sub-system within the context of the larger system of equations.

In social science, we abstract a piece of a larger system of relationships for study. We declare our explanatory focus on a "dependent variable" and set about building theoretical and then statistical models to account for it. With this familiar approach, our larger study has modeled presidential approval, macro-partisanship, and the economic perceptions that affect them. We have also modeled public policy mood; election outcomes for the presidency and both congressional chambers; policy activity in the House, Senate, presidency, and the Supreme Court; and the production of important laws.

Over time, almost all the "dependent" variables of our analysis become in some way the result of another. We could start a causal chain at an arbitrary point and consider the consequences. Economic performance, for example (measured as familiar employment and inflation outcomes), moves presidential approval, macro-partisanship, and mood in different ways. Each of these three variables influence election outcomes and policy activity. Elections sometimes cause shifts in party control, which alter future levels of unemployment and inflation, thereby bringing us back to where we (thought) we started—the economy's performance. This is, in short, a system.

The Cascade of Casualties—An Example

To illustrate the properties of the system, we trace in greater detail the impact of a hypothetical increase in unemployment at a particular time. We ask, what are the short-term and long-term ramifications for other variables, including those involving the representation process?

The story begins with a public response in terms of economic perceptions, and then the expectation of the unemployment shock in advance of the realization. The first political response is an immediate decline in presidential approval. Then, both directly and via approval, the public's economic pessimism finds its way into macro-partisanship, harming the standing of the party occupying the White House. Already the process is complicated, as the effect on approval decays with a half-life in months, whereas the (smaller) influence on macro-partisanship leaves a permanent imprint.

Although these first impacts are contingent on which party holds the presidency, another effect is not. Increasing unemployment causes a surge of support...
Electoral flows in Congress are not to feel the direct effects of our unemployment shock. They are a function of approval, of systematization, and of public policy mood, all of them carrying some of the signal of our unemployment shock. Thus, we leverage the number of seats in Congress and the probabilistic presidential outcome down the temporal road from the initial unemployment shock. The next responses to consider are the changes in policy activity. These are in part from the personnel changes brought about by the election. But even before the next election, they are generated by elite anticipation of the electoral forces including mood, which, of course, is affected by the unemployment shock that starts the process. Policy activity—the actions of Congress and the president—leads to actual policy, which has a permanent and cumulative character. Laws passed remain in force permanently or until some explicit counteraction.

Change in laws (the accumulation of policy) sets off a later effect in mood, now contrary to the original impetus. When the unemployment shock leads to liberal laws, the electorate's mood shifts in the conservative direction. Meanwhile, if the unemployment shock helps to put a Democrat in the White House, the president would be inclined toward economic initiatives that target unemployment. Thus, one net effect of the hypothetical unemployment shock that started our chain of events is a negative (and possibly muted) reflection of unemployment.

At this point, we might ask the simple question, familiar from the old path-modeling tradition: what is the total effect of the election in unemployment? Although our cascade of consequences in all legal univariate regression analyses, obtaining an answer is not as simple as multiplying through the known coefficients to get total effects. Some of the effects are contingent and some are not. Some influence future events only as probabilities (for example, the party of the president) that have no certain and nonlinear translation into outcomes. And all of the cascading effects move through the system over time at differing rates. Some decay quickly. Some are permanent. Some, for example, election effects, do not even begin until several months after the cascade begins. Moreover, much of the variance in some of our variables appears to be due to stochastic error, deterring us from making deterministic predictions.

Computer simulation is one approach we are pursuing to understand the long-term effects of changes in political variables. To simulate from a series of causal equations, one manipulates various aspects of the system by changing some or holding others constant and running the system (in some instances many times) to study the consequences.

Our simulations of the macro policy are a work in progress, with much to tax and observe what "happened." The short-term effects of the counterfactual changes in these exercises are usually and understandably predictable: that is, in terms of policy, mood and party control matter. The long-run effects are often another matter. For instance, in one version of our model when we reselected Carter over Reagan in 1980, the Republicans win control of the House of Representatives in the 1980s rather than in 1994, a triumph that would not be deducible from the equations alone. Similarly, when we induce an artificial liberal boost to mood in 1975, in time for the Ford-Carter election, policy changes in the expected liberal direction, but in the long-run mood shifts in the conservative direction, contrary to the initial induction of a liberal shock.

Where the simulation yields counterintuitive outcomes, the question becomes, is the problem with the intuition or with the simulation? The answer can be debated, and the model can be tweaked to seek better fits with expectations. Unfortunately, we cannot know whether the changes induced are normal, typical, or representative; we have no sampling theory for systems. But there are unconventional lessons that can be learned. More surprising than infallible, they nonetheless are lessons derived from looking at systems as systems.

CONCLUSIONS: THE OPINION-POLICY DYNAMIC

This chapter has focused on the time-series dynamics of policy representation in the United States. Much of our analysis is on short-dynamics within the representation subsystem. The presented evidence to show that not only the liberal-conservatism of public opinion influences national policy but also that policy alterations in the direction of public opinion shift the publics demand in the reverse direction: liberal electorates cause liberal policies that lower the demand for further liberalism.

The representation process is embedded in a larger series of equations, from which we have explored simulation models with the goal of an improved understanding of long-term processes. Our preliminary simulations suggest an emphasis on the predictability of long-run consequences. For instance, what are the policy consequences of the Bush presidential victory in 2000? The short-run consequence is surely a more conservative swing of public policy. But what of the long run? Does policy eventually "correct" to a less conservative course? In the long run, is Bush-Leads-Gore "good news" politically for the Republican or the Democratic Party? Our answer must be that we do not know. We still have much to learn.

NOTES
1. The theory of a market of mobile consumers shopping for commodities to Tavistock (1965). For recent reviews of the evidence, see Dowding, John, and Riggos (1994) and Holman and Brown (1994).

2. The analysis of the opinion-policy feedback loops involves exactly counterintuitive.
2. Luttborg (1967) first identified this process as the "voting" model (see also Erikson and Tien 1967).

3. We were, and remain, agnostic about the possibility of a second dimension. The statistical evidence supports it. The interpretive evidence is, however, so conflicting and contradictory that we feel that little substantive meaning to it and cannot rule out the possibility that the evidence of a common dimension is an artifact of some red herring correlation that is not substantively meaningful. We can be more confident of what it is not; that is, this is not the "social issue" that is almost uniformly the second dimension of American politics in the views of partisans.

4. And we need to apologize for a slight miscalculation on the terms. The measure we called "policy" in our prior article directly on this subject (Stimson, Mackuen, and Erikson 1982) have become "policy activity" in our newest work. The new label for old content was necessitated by our realization that we had to treat the two components separately, even though they share a single name in our literature.

5. In equation (2.1), public opinion is lagged, but composition is not. In reality, the impact of public opinion can be immediate, requiring no delay. Empirically, we modeled the direct impact of public opinion with a lag to avoid ambiguity about causal direction. See also Erikson, Mackuen, and Stimson (2002a, chap. 6).

6. Table 2.1 includes Vietnam casualties (thousands only) in its control. This variable acts as a suppressor variable, with the war shortening liberal activity at a time of liberal public opinion. Note that the coefficient for mood goes up in the full model compared to the reduced form model. The major reason is that the dynamic term—the effect of lagged policy activity—disappears in the full model and the substantive variables compensate. The correlation between independent variables mood and composition is positive, as one would expect, with more Democrats elected when the electorate is in a liberal mood. For further elaboration, see Erikson, Mackuen, and Stimson (2002a, chap. 6) and Stimson, Erikson, and Mackuen (2002).

7. See Erikson, Mackuen, and Stimson (2002a), particularly chapter 9, for discussion of the policy concept and measure. We use an extension of Mayhew’s causal laws through 1996 that was compiled by Jay Greene.

8. This is yet a third, which we have not reported here or elsewhere: the content of the budgetary process also responds to both composition and public opinion. Spending on liberal domestic programs goes up when Democrats are in power and when public opinion demands more spending, going down with Republican control and with conservative opinion. This suggests a similar budgetary claim by Weisberg (1995).

9. The significance of the relationship also holds up in a simpler test, regressing current mood change on lagged laws. The more liberal the legislation of one Congress, the more conservative the mood change from that bicameral to the next.

10. The midterm effects in table 2.5 are significant and negative, meaning that each party’s share of states decreases at midterms when it holds the presidency. This fact is often treated by itself as evidence of an ideological reaction by the public, with the electorate adding seats to the out-party to ideologically balance the president (see, for instance, Alton and Rosenblatt 1993).

11. The equations of table 2.4 are bootstrapped versions of our modeling of election results in The Macro Factor. Party platforms also matter for presidential races, although not for congressional races. Presidential approval and economic prosperity show little direct impact on election results with competitiveness controlled. See Erikson, Mackuen, and Stimson (2002a, chap. 7).

12. Technically, mood would represent the error with a minus sign. A liberal mood...
Politics and Policymaking in the Real World
Crafted Talk and the Loss of Democratic Responsiveness

LAWRENCE R. JACOBS AND ROBERT Y. SHAPIRO

The public opinion polls that fill newspapers and the offices of government officials and election campaigns have fueled the nearly unquestioned assumption among observers of American politics that elected officials “pander” to public opinion. Politicians, they charge, tailor government policy to polls and other indicators of public opinion.

The presumption that politicians slavishly follow public opinion when they design policy is wrong or, more precisely, less true today than it was two or three decades ago. As a thought experiment, consider some of the most significant government decisions and policy proposals over the past decade or so: committing American troops to fighting Iraqi troops from Kuwait; the House decision to impeach President Clinton; failed campaign finance reforms; abstention from tobacco legislation; Clinton’s proposals in his first budget for an energy levy and an increased tax on Social Security benefits (despite his campaign promises to cut middle-class taxes); the North American Free Trade Agreement (at its outset); U.S. intervention in Bougainville; Republican proposals after the 1994 elections for a “revolution” in policies toward the environment, education, Medicare, and other issues; President George W. Bush’s tax cut, the Bush administration’s rejection of the Kyoto agreement on global warming; and President Bush’s support for partial privatization of Social Security. On all of these issues (and others), government officials made decisions and offered proposals that defied what most Americans preferred.

This initial notion that politicians may not be quite so responsive to public opinion when making policy decisions as commonly assumed is corroborated here with more systematic evidence.

The term “pandering” is most commonly associated with the notion that polls and public opinion drive substantive policy choices; this substantive responsiveness, we suggest, is on the decline (though it has by no means disappeared). A second form of responsiveness involves the use of polls and focus groups to attempt to manipulate public opinion; this instrumental responsiveness is amply present today. Politicians and other political activists spend a fortune on focus groups and public opinion polls to pinpoint the most alluring words, symbols, and arguments for their desired policies; the purpose is to move Americans to “hold opinions that they would not hold if aware of the best available information and analysis” (Zaller 1992, p. 313). Politicians and political activists respond to public opinion in order to craft their presentations of already decided policy. This strategy of “crafted talk” is used to instigate responsiveness—political activists’ words and presentations are crafted to change the public’s perceptions, understandings, and evaluations of specific policy proposals and create the appearance of responsiveness as they pursue their desired policy goals. Although the public’s values and fundamental preferences (such as strong and sustained support for Social Security and environmental protection) are unlikely to change, politicians do work to alter the public’s perceptions, of specific proposals, such as President George W. Bush’s initiative to privatize Social Security or his proposal for greater exploration for oil and gas. Politicians, then, use polls and focus groups not to move their positions closer to the public’s (as commonly assumed) but just the opposite—to find the most effective means to move public opinion closer to their own desired policies. Elected officials follow a simple motivation in opting for crafted talk: lower the potential electoral costs to themselves and their supporters of following the preferences of average voters while increasing the electoral costs to rival politicians. They want the best of both worlds: to enact their preferred policies and to maximize the probability that they and their allies will be reelected and their opponents defeated.

In short, the widespread image of politicians as “pandering” to public opinion when making policy decisions is mistaken. We suggest in this chapter and in our recent book, Politicians Don’t Pander: Political Manipulation and the Loss of Democratic Responsiveness, that the influence of public opinion on policy decisions has declined since the 1970s. Instead, politicians’ own policy goals (and those of their supporters) are increasingly driving their major policy decisions and their public policy research, which is used to identify the language, symbols, and arguments to “win” public support for their policy objectives. Responsiveness to public opinion and attempted manipulation of public opinion are not mutually exclusive: politicians attempt to manipulate public opinion by trusting public thinking to select the actions and words that resonate with the
public. The recent section provides evidence of declining responsiveness and situates this trend within larger institutional and political changes in American politics since the 1980s. We, then, compare our conclusions with the systems analysis offered in the previous chapter by Robert Erikson, Michael MacKuen, and James Stimson.

STUDYING PUBLIC OPINION AND GOVERNMENT POLICY ISSUES

Research on the connection between public opinion and specific government policies reveals two key findings: first, political responsiveness has risen and fallen over time; second, and more specifically, it has declined since the 1970s.

Benjamin Page and Robert Shapiro (1983; Shapiro 1981) tracked the variation over time in the congruence of changes in public preferences toward specific policy issues and changes in subsequent government policy. Table 3.1 shows that the degree of congruence between government policy change and opinion change varied noticeably between the 1950s and 1960s. The incidence of changes in policy paralleling changes in public opinion declined from 67% in the 1953 to 1954 period (heavily dominated by wartime issues) to 54% during the 1960s, and then increased to 75% during the 1970s. The clear implication of this analysis is that government responsiveness to public opinion has changed over time, with the 1970s as a high point of responsiveness.

In another study using a different methodology, Stephen Ansolabehere, James Snyder, and Charles Stewart (2005) examined the responsiveness of members of the House of Representatives in their policymaking activity between 1874 and 1996. They used the Republican share of the presidential two-party vote within each congressional district as an indicator of constituency opinions and compared it to the ideological direction of the policymaking of each party's candidates for the House of Representatives. Figure 3.1 also shows substantial variation over time in political responsiveness. In particular, they found that the candidates' ideological responsiveness to opinion within their districts was weak prior to the 1950s, rose in 1954 and peaked in the early 1970s, then declined into the 1990s (particularly among Republican candidates). The finding that responsiveness peaked in the 1970s corroborates the results Page and Shapiro's different approach produced. One of the most striking findings in figure 3.1 is the precipitous decline since the high point in responsiveness during the 1970s.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3.1 Variations in Congruence over Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time Period</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1879-85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1886-91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1892-95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1896-1948</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1949-75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percentages are based on 7s in parentheses, which are the total number of congruent plus noncongruent cases.


A third methodology for studying substantive responsiveness has also found a decline since the 1970s. Alan Monroe (1979, 1991) investigated whether 50 separate government policies were consistent with the preferences of a majority of Americans. Table 3.2 shows that government policies in the 1980-83 period were less consistent with the preferences of a majority of Americans than during 1960-72. This pattern holds both overall and within eight of nine separate policy areas: the overall consistency of government policies with majority public preferences declined from 66% in the 1960-72 period to 53% in the 1980-83 period, with the steepest declines in the policy areas of social welfare, economic and labor issues, and, especially, political reform.

Monroe’s study is partly confirmed by our own preliminary study, which used the approach adopted by Page and Shapiro (1983). We examined the congruence of changes in public preferences and subsequent changes in government policy toward a subset of issues. We found a noticeable decline in the correspondence between opinion and policy changes during the 1980s and especially the 1990s (Jacobson and Shapiro 1992). Focusing on four areas of social policy (welfare, crime, Social Security, and health care), we found that congruent changes in opinion and policy fell from 67% during Reagan’s second term (1984-86) to 48% during the Bush administration (1989-92) and 39% during half of Clinton’s first term (1993-94).

In short, the evidence suggests that government responsiveness to public opinion varies over time and has declined over the past several decades. The findings indicate that politicians’ policy decisions do respond to public opinion but that responsiveness has fallen off since the 1970s. The change in responsiveness underscores the most significant feature of government responsiveness: it is not static but rather has ebbed over time.

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### Crafted Talk and the Loss of Democratic Responsiveness

Research on government institutions and political dynamics has shown systemic changes that account for the variation in substantive responsiveness and, in particular, the decline since the 1970s. As a general rule, politicians who enjoy long careers in elected office are skilled at relating the political costs and benefits of their statements and actions. Their perceptions of the costs and benefits of their behavior affect their motivation and willingness to pursue two distinct goals. The first goal is electoral and suggests pleasing as many voters within their constituencies as possible. The second goal is to enact the policies they and their supporters most desire. Obviously, the skilled politician prefers to take actions that advance both electoral goals and policy goals. But political reality often presents politicians with unpleasant choices. Electoral goals are a constant concern of elected officials, though the intensity of concern increases as election day approaches. But the pressure on politicians to pursue policy goals favored by supporters has varied over time as political and institutional conditions have changed.

A series of significant and widely researched developments in American politics has elevated the expected benefits to politicians of pursuing policy goals that they and their supporters favor. We discuss two here; others are examined more fully in Politicians Don’t Pass On (Jacobson and Shapiro 2000, chap. 1 and 3).

Changes since the 1970s in the organization and balance of power within political parties dramatically increased the power of party activists, as well as core partisan voters who routinely support each party. As a result, control over the selection of congressional and presidential candidates and the platforms of presidential campaigns, shifted from party organizations and a small cadre of party leaders to party activists and direct primaries after the 1960s. Instead of winning the party nomination by battling for support among the small cadre of party leaders, candidates since the 1970s have depended on securing the support of party activists, who provide the bulk of the contributions, volunteers, and votes necessary to win the party’s nomination and then the general election (Aldrich 1995, chap. 6; Rohde 1991; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995; Davenport and Olmsted 2000, pp. 67-68).

The knitting of political activism to the selection of each party’s nominee has had enormous political consequences since the 1970s. Political activists vote for party policies that are more ideologically extreme than those of the general public or even their fellow (but less active) partisans. The consequence is that each party’s nomination requires cementing the support of party activists, which in turn pressures the candidates and officeholders to support ideologically extreme positions that diverge both from those of the opposing party and from centrist opinion (Finifter 1974; Aldrich 1995; Poldby 1980; Jacobson 1987, p. 20; Wright 1994). (‘Centrist opinion’ refers to the median voter or citizen in the distribution of public opinion and not to an ideologically fixed ‘left’ or ‘right.’)

Indeed, the traditional expectation of officeholders has eroded over time.
DOES POLICY RESPONSIVENESS EXIST?

Crafted Talk and the Loss of Democratic Responsiveness

The desire to run: each party tends to recruit candidates whose own personal attributes and ideological views about “good public policy” closely mirror those of activists.

The pressure of party activists has produced national Democratic and Republican parties that have become increasingly polarized since the 1970s, as evident in two trends. First, there is greater unity within each political party in the proportion of moderates in both parties (but especially the Republican Party) has declined dramatically from the 1970s to the 1990s. Loggers who harbored party views outside their party’s mainstream and regularly voted with the opposing party—the liberal New York Republican Jacob Javits and conservative Arkansas Democrat Wilbur Mills—have been replaced in each party by more ideologically extreme politicians (McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 1997; Mood and Fleisher 1990; Fleisher and Bond 1996). The diminishing number of moderates and the decline of intra-party differences are evident in roll call votes on the floor of the House and Senate, which no longer divide each party as they did from 1963 to 1976. Since the mid-1970s, the proportion of close floor votes in Congress on which more than 20% of each party disagreed with a majority of their party has declined. Moreover, the ideological position of each party’s members has moved closer together. Poole and Rosenthal’s (1997) measures of the distance between the votes of members of the same party in the House and Senate show less division within each party during the 1990s than at any time since 1947. The second trend producing partisan polarization has been the growing ideological distance between each party. Poole and Rosenthal’s analysis suggests that the distance separating the average House and Senate Democrat from the average Republican increased over time. In addition, roll call votes in Congress were more frequently divided between liberals and conservatives in the 1990s than at any time since 1947, when President Harry Truman faced a contentious Congress. Democrats and Republicans became more ideologically homogeneous and polarized by the 1990s and the first years of the twenty-first century (as illustrated by gridlock on economic and fiscal policy). The implications are significant: the combination of fewer legislators outside a party’s ideological mainstream and growing policy differences between the parties on social and economic issues has increased the costs of compromising the policy goals of partisans. Responsiveness to centrist opinion becomes less likely if it means an erosion of support from party activists.

The political incentives of the new political order were well illustrated in the impeachment of Bill Clinton. The congressional Republicans’ relentless pursuit of impeachment was largely driven by the priority that Republican activists attached to the policy goal (removing Clinton) instead of the electoral goal (appealing to a majority of Americans). Moderate Republicans could not ignore the risk of opposing impeachment—it could lead to a challenge in the next primary election. But another way, Republican members of Congress disregarded the two-thirds of Americans who opposed impeachment because their electoral goal of winning their policy goals of enacting legislation that Republican activists and other supporters favored.

The second factor that heightened politicians’ expectations about the benefits of pursuing policy goals that they and their supporters favored was the rapid growth in the number and diversity of national interest groups that could mobilize particularistic groups within a legislature’s constituency and use national political action committees to provide campaign contributions to supporters (Cigler and Loezen 1983; Salisbury 1990; Walker 1992; Heclo 1973). Until the 1960s, interest groups were relatively few in number and those from similar sectors of society came together under relatively strong peak associations such as the American Medical Association, which dominated health policy. The dominance of a few peak organizations aggregated the demands of interest groups and provided a tangible bargaining partner for politicians as they balanced electoral pressure to follow centrist opinions.

After the 1960s, however, indicators—from the number of registered lobbyists to the number of corporations operating offices in Washington—reveal a dramatic growth in the number and variety of organizations engaged in pursuing their interests in Washington. New groups and new coalitions on social, economic, and political issues formed continually. Moreover, once-dominant peak organizations were replaced by associations that specialized in small policy niches or that formed complicated coalitions that cut across formal associations (Cigler and Loewe 1983; Salisbury 1990; Walker 1992; Heclo 1979). The groups increasingly used campaign contributions, grass-roots organizing, and media appearances to pressure politicians to advance their particularistic policy concerns.

Organized labor—a decisive influence into the 1960s—saw its membership slip from over 30% to 14% of the workforce in just three decades, recording one of the lowest rates of union membership among industrial nations. The AFL-CIO, once the leading voice for organized labor, no longer served as a dominating peak association. Labor’s decline combined with intensified business opposition to government social welfare programs has been credited with shifting the political balance to the right and moving the average off-the-shelf politician away from centrist opinion (Reger and Ferguson; Weitz 1998).

The result was that a relatively small number of powerful interest groups no longer dominated government decision making, in particular policy areas such as health care. The proliferation of narrowly-based interest groups increased the pressure on politicians to pursue specific policy goals politicians could no longer negotiate with a peak organization to gain flexibility on some issues in exchange for supporting an organization’s priorities. Greater numbers of interest groups with focused agendas also stimulated volunteers and, especially, contributions (Stinnett and Hicken 1995).

Incentives to pursue policy goals grew (though perhaps not as extensively as some reformers assume) with the increasing importance of money in politics—
in the form of campaign contributions by political action committees (PACs) and well-funded individual contributors. 

Due to the limitations of the text preview, the full content of the document is not fully displayed.
million spent by opponents of the Clinton health plan in 1993–94 and by the infamous "Harry and Louise" commercials (West, Heith, Goodwin 1996, pp. 41–43; but cf. Jacob 2001). Although researchers disagree on the nature and extent of the influence extracted by contributors to campaigns and policy initiatives, there is some agreement that the pressure on politicians to fund media advertising and political consultants has advantaged private interests by disproportionately increasing their access to politicians and the mass public and enabling them to prevent threatened actions by lawmakers (McChester 1997; Sorauf 1988; West and Loomis 1994; Fergason 1995).

Since the 1970s, the rise of ideological polarization, the proliferation of interest groups, the increasing importance of campaign expenditures, and other factors have elevated the perceived benefit to politicians of pursuing policy goals that they and their supporters favor rather than responding to centrist public opinion. Responding to centrist public opinion at the expense of policy goals entails compromising their own philosophical convictions and possibly alienating ideologically extreme party activists and other supporters who volunteer and contribute money to their primary and general election campaigns. In contemporary America, designating policy to reflect what most Americans prefer has increasingly become costly to politicians and therefore something that the ambitious politicians will avoid. To get the best of both worlds, politicians pursue the policy goals they and their supporters prefer yet try to lower the electoral risks by attempting to manipulate public opinion.

The approach of inimical elections, however, temporarily interrupts the drive of politicians to reach their policy objectives. As the elections approached in the summer of 1996, congressional Republicans and Clinton briefly replaced partisanship gridlock with compromise and cooperation to pass legislation that had strong public support, such as the minimum wage law, the Kennedy-Kassebaum reform of private health insurance operations, and, arguably, welfare reform. The clearest evidence for the impact of electoral proximity comes from studies of senators who moderate their earlier positions and increase their responsiveness to their state's median voter as election day nears (Levitt 1996; Kallianais 1998; Amacher and Bryan 1998; Ellings 1992; Wright 1982; Wood and Anderson 1998). Our own analysis found a similar pattern for presidents; comparing the publicly enunciated positions of Lyndon Johnson with his private polling revealed a pattern of rising responsiveness as the 1964 presidential election approached (Jacob and Shapiro 1997). The heat of an upcoming presidential election and elevated attention from average voters appear to motivate politicians for a short period to respond to public opinion and run the risk of absorbing the costs of compromising their policy goals.

Although the drift of institutional changes over the past several decades have both increased the costs to politicians of compromising policy goals and responding to centrist opinion and raised their benefits of pursuing the policy goals of supporters, standard models of competitive elections predict long-term respon-

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**Political Making in Action**

Our book, *Politics Don't Muster*, builds a theory and explanation for variations in responsiveness and, in particular, the decline since the 1970s. We intensively analyzed President Clinton's drive for health care reform in 1993–94 and the first Gephardt Congress (1995–96) to explain why policymakers were discounting public opinion in fashioning policy decisions. We combined quantitative research with a review of White House memoranda, content analysis of the statements and decisions of leading policymakers, and semi-structured interviews with senior officials. In this section, we briefly outline the political motivations and strategic considerations that led authoritative officials from diametrically opposed ideological perspectives to converge on a similar approach to public opinion.

*Clinton Revisionism: Where Is the Great Persuader?*

Perhaps the second most common rap on President Clinton—beyond the questions about his private conduct—was that he was poli-addicted. Here was the...
costant analysis, and other evidence suggest that during the formulation of Clint-
on's health reform proposal—the centerpiece of his domestic policy agenda—
public opinion was repeatedly discounted in favor of policy goals that arose from
the president's own philosophy and policy preferences, interest group pressure,
and other factors not directly related to public opinion. Only after the president's
plan began to take shape were his pollsters called in to "poll the presentation."

Clinton advisers, both defensive and critical, agreed that the president's New
Democratic philosophy and economic considerations regarding universal cover-
age and other issues were "uppermost in Clinton's mind." Health reform rose to
the top of Clinton's agenda during his campaign and his first two years in office
because he and his advisors identified it as the means to achieve his overriding
goals of economic reinvigoration and deficit reduction. Public opinion toward
health care reform did not elevate it on his agenda. One senior aide during the
campaign and the administration explained that Clinton promoted health care
reforms from the start of the 1992 presidential race because "he viewed health care
primarily as an economic issue first, and as a social issue second." According
to a wide spectrum of Clinton's aides, Clinton's commitment to economic growth
and deficit reduction led to his support of universal health insurance. Universal
coverage was expected to control government and business costs by ending the
rampant practice of shifting the expenses for treating the uninsured to the insured
and by focusing Americans on remaining healthy and efficiently using the health
system. According to advisers, Clinton's goal was not a social goal of coverage
carried out per se; he "went in as a way to save and reduce the deficit" and, per-
haps, to "finance high priority new initiatives in such areas as education or the
environment.

The novel approach to health care reform that Clinton embraced was the
offspring of his New Democratic philosophy; it seemed to promise an approach
to health care reform that would expand insurance coverage yet avoid a visible
government role and massive tax increase. Clinton backed a liberal variant of
managed competition that proposed to establish universal access to health insur-
ce by requiring employers to contribute to their employees' insurance and by
creating new regional bodies that negotiated with private health plans and mon-
tored competition between them. Clinton viewed his novel approach, according
to an aide, as allowing him to "say I have a competitive bill, not a regulatory
bill" that would finance health care reform by squeezing waste out of the system
rather than imposing enormous direct tax hikes. White House officials, especially
Ira Magaziner, who coordinated health care reform, repeatedly assured the pres-
ident and Mrs. Clinton that by eliminating "waste in the current system, ... system
savings will exceed system costs significantly" and would "cover universal
access and possibly contribute to deficit reduction." Managed competition seemed
to promise "something for nothing." (The Congressional Budget Office [1994]
would later report that Clinton's managed competition approach did not
produce greater savings than costs.) By contrast, health policy experts or advo-

cates of health care reform who would later support what "you care about... and believe," Polls and focus groups were aimed at determining, as one official said, "where people [are] in relation-

crafts talk and the loss of democratic responsiveness 55

dation of health care spending were labeled "Old Democrats" and were de-

cided as "Washington people" dependent on the outdated ideas of "direct... tax

increase... and... regulatory approaches that the president was not fond of." Put
simply, the president and his senior aides like Ira Magaziner preferred the liberal
variant of managed competition to alternative approaches because of their
strong views of what constituted "good public policy."

Apparent interest groups and Democratic constituents also drove White
House decisions, especially in designing the framework of the president's managed
competition approach. Long-term care and drug benefits were added, according
to White House documents, to "make the Medicare and Medicaid savings possible
for the American Association of Retired Persons (and other senior and disability
groups) to support"; the early retiree discounts were created to "solidify large
business, labor, senior, state and state and local government support"; and numerous
other policies were designed to curry favor with small businesses, urban areas,
provider groups, and single-payer advocates. Even on the issue of comprehensive
benefits, for which White House pollster Stanley Greenberg reported strong na-
tional support, several administration officials suggested that aggregate public
opinion was not as influential as "a lot of pressure from a lot of seniors." "We
knew," one political advisor recalled, "that if we didn't have long-term care we
wouldn't get the AARP."

In short, within the White House, Clinton officials repeatedly insisted that
their "plan [was] constructed by the policy people" and that "polling didn't drive
the policy decision." They fully accepted, as aids reported, that "the most com-
pelling features of our package are policy terms may not yield the highest public
support" (emphasis added). Public opinion was discounted (often explicitly) in
favor of the policy preferences of interest groups, party activists, and the president
himself.

One intensive case study provides an opportunity to penetrate the black box
of policymaking portrayed in systems analysis and analysis of aggregated data;
the purpose is to investigate how politicians understand, evaluate, and use public
opinion (Jacobson, 1993, b, c, 1993). Studying the strategic calculations of policy-
makers unveils a perplexing puzzle of the Clinton era: why would Clinton gorge
himself at a sumptuously provided banquet of polls and focus groups yet discount
public opinion in favor of policy goals when designing policy? Why spend a
fortune on researching public opinion when it does not drive your policy deci-
sion?

Our analysis of the Clinton White House's health care operations suggests
that it used polls and focus groups as part of a strategy of crafted talk or, as
White House aides put it, to "craft the communication strategy and the message"
in order to appeal more effectively to the public. The White House aides cautiously
acknowledged that the purpose of public opinion research was to move Americans
toward supporting what "you care about... and believe," Polls and focus groups were aimed at determining, as one official said, "where people [are] in relation-
poll the policy," well-placed aides explained, to discover what "people really wanted policy wise"; rather, "we polled the presentation of the policy." 26

In particular, White House aides most consistently used polls and focus groups to identify the language, symbols, and "arguments that will resonate with people." 27 Questioning the "words that people use" in everyday life told the White House staff how to "talk, describe, and sell" the reform package in a manner that effectively appealed to public opinion. 28 The White House staff used public opinion research, then, to identify existing public attitudes and information that supported aspects of the Clinton plan (e.g., universal coverage) as well as unfavorable views (e.g., proposals to control costs and expand government bureaucracy); then, they crafted presentations to prompt Americans to bring attitudes and information favorable toward the Clinton plan into the top of their minds. White House research on Americans' attitudes directed decisions on three aspects of "message" development: its choice of "security for all" as an overriding theme, its emphasis on the personal benefits of reform, and its selection of specific words to describe its plan—such as the word "alliance" to publicly describe the new entities that were to purchase health insurance for consumers (health policy designers referred to them as "health insurance purchasing cooperatives," or HIPs). 29

Bill Clinton's policy preferences, philosophy toward government, and political judgments about the policy goals of his supporters drove the formulation of his health care reform plan. Only after he and his advisers reached their decisions did they focus on public opinion, and then the strategic objective was to win over the public to their policy positions and thereby induce cooperation from policymakers.

**Political Learning: What Gingrich Republicans Shared with Clinton Democrats**

The stark policy differences between congressional Republicans (especially in the House after Speaker Newt Gingrich took the gavel) and the Clinton White House produced the Washington version of the "war between the Tates." Even as Washington's political titans squared off during the 1990s, they were driven by common motivations and strategies: they pursued the policy goals that they and their supporters wanted to achieve into the fall of 1996, and they discounted the fact that most citizens did not support some of these desired policies. The Republicans echoed both the public's broad objectives (evident in the supermajority of more than 70% that favored balancing the budget, cutting taxes, establishing a presidential line-item veto, eliminating "welfare," and passing term limits) as well as the public's philosophical leanings toward individualism and limited government (about two-thirds of Americans consistently tell pollsters that the government does too many things that are better left to business and individuals). 30

The Republicans' specific proposals to achieve these broad objectives, however, contradicted the public's specific policy preferences. They ran counter to the

and safety regulations, school lunchers, student loans, Americans save volunteers, education and training, increased defense spending, and other policy areas (Cook and Bartlett 1993, Page and Shapiro 1992). 31 Although Americans favored ending "welfare," they did not support either the sharp cuts in government spending for poor people or the punitive approach to children and the poor that the House proposed. During the 104th Congress, majorities of nearly 60% of Americans continued to support government assistance for "poor" people and over 80% believed that the government was spending too little or about the right amount on "assistance to the poor" and "poor children." Moreover, the 104th Congress failed to act on the popular political reforms of term limits and lobbying regulations, despite Republican promises in the Contract with America to enact them.

An intensive analysis of the Republicans' motivations for discounting public opinion points to the importance legislators attached to their own policy goals (what they considered "good public policy"), as well as the demands of party activists and interest groups. The policy decisions of inner House Republicans were driven by the fact that—in the words of House Republican Whip Tom Delay—they were "ideologues [with]... an agenda [and]... philosophy" (quoted in Drew 1996, p. 165). House Republican Sam Brownback, a leader of legislators who first entered Congress in 1994, agreed that "most of my colleagues are very ideologically driven" and came to Washington committed to making good on a "very aggressive, very ideological campaign...[to] reduce the size of the federal government" (quoted in Drew 1996, pp. 154-75).

The views of Delay and Brownback were repeated in our interviews with staff; legislators were determined to "do what's best" according to their personal values. One Republican respondent explained: "On policy, beliefs are more important than public opinion." Another explained that the member of Congress "just does what he feels he needs to do. Public opinion is not at all useful in day-to-day policy making." Eighty-eight percent of the legislative staff we interviewed (46 out of 52) acknowledged that public opinion information was used to lobby the office but argued that it had no influence on the member; their member "stuck" in his or her beliefs and distrusted the results because the "members are so easy to manipulate" to serve the interests of the lobbyist, whether an interest group, another legislator, or the White House. The persistent and unequivocal downsizing of public opinion by the staff we interviewed is consistent with the gap between public opinion and Republican positions as well as with the previously cited research on a member of Congress and his constituents, which suggests that the preferences of a member's constituents has a modest and highly contingent effect on the legislator's voting decisions and electoral prospects.

The policy goals of Republicans were the product of not only legislators' own beliefs but also the preferences of the Republican Party activists and interest groups who supported them, especially the Christians Coalition, the National Rifle Association, and the National Association of Small Businesses (Drew 1996). The scoring of the Republicans' allies was reflected in the dramatic rise during the
advocacy groups, business groups, and others sympathetic to the party's goals (Gormley 1998).

As Republican leaders would discover, legislative proposals that compromised the party's policy goals and responded to centrist opinion faced a potential revolt by rank and file legislators as well as party supporters. Conservative Republicans (especially in the House) were vigilant in protruding what they saw as backsliding on key elements of their agenda, equating "compromise" and "splitting" the difference" with the abdication of principle (Drew 1999, p. 310). The Christian Coalition and other supporters pressured Republicans to enact their preferred legislation and ominously warned (in one mocking of reticulation for failing to follow its policy goals) "We'll show you out. We mean it" (quoting in Schlesinger 1999).

In short, the intensive cases studies of the Clinton and Republican policy initiatives in the 1990s, as well as more systematic research on political responsiveness, point to three findings. First, the responsiveness of government policy to the public is not static but varies over time. Second, it has declined since the 1970s. Third, changes in American political dynamics and institutional developments have increased the perceived political benefits of pursuing policy goals over electoral goals, increasing the incentives for discounting the preferences of centrist opinion when it has diverged from those of party activists and other supporters of ambitious officeholders.

STUDYING VARIATION AND POLITICAL CONFLICT IN SUBSTANTIVE RESPONSIVENESS

The extensive chapter by Etzioni, MacKuen, and Stimson, as well as their previous work (Stimson, MacKuen, and Erikson 1999, 1997), offers an alternative interpretation of government policy and public opinion in which politicians incessantly follow public opinion.

Stimson, MacKuen, and Erikson base their conclusions on highly aggregated measures of domestic public opinion (or, in their terms, "mood") and government policy. They use global measures of liberalism and conservatism for each year to track the decisions of American government on domestic affairs since the 1970s (such as legislation enacted by Congress). They have similarly conditioned available public opinion toward domestic policies into comparably global measures of liberal and conservative public "mood." The researchers then asked: Did changes in government policy in a liberal or conservative direction correspond to changes in public mood for more or less government? In short, their method treats policy decisions and national public opinion as a single dimension of ideological conservatism and liberalism and then compares the public's liberal-conservative "mood" to overarching policy measures.

Based on these highly aggregated measures of public opinion and policy
empirical portrayal of public opinion and policy and their inferences about democratic governance are incomplete not allowing for strategic attempts to manipulate public opinion leads them to conclude responsiveness to genuine public preferences with possible simulated responsiveness. Their conceptualization of public opinion, the nature of their data, and their research design do not allow them to distinguish variations in responsiveness over time that stem from changing political and institutional dynamics.

Overaggregation
Stimson, Eriksen, and MacKuen claim that highly aggregated measures of liberal-conservative trends in public mood and national policy are more accurate and realistic than studying public opinion and policy toward actual policy issues. Their case primarily rests on two claims. First, typical citizens, in their views, form only highly generalizable policy attitudes and "slowly fall" to develop specific preferences (Stimson, Eriksen, and MacKuen 1994); on the other hand, they are confident that their mood measure identifies the "common element that persists over time and across apparently dissimilar issues" (chap. 2). Second, politicians are preoccupied with the public's general "mood" instead of attitudes toward government policies: "it is the general public disposition, the mood, which policy makers must monitor" (Stimson, MacKuen, and Eriksen 1994, pp. 30-33).

The macro or systemic approach to public opinion and government policy is susceptible to the macroscopic errors Stimson identified in an earlier generation systems analysis. Most notably, important distinctions that the public make among different policies do not fit along a single ideological continuum. Americans' thinking about social welfare policies is quite different from their evaluation of social policies (abortion, capital punishment, law and order issues, and different racial issues): Americans may be liberal on social welfare issues even as they express conservative views on social policies.19 Research on public support for specific policies and on changes in these preferences over time demonstrates for the public consistently draws reasonable distinctions—based on available information—between different government programs (Jacobs and Shaprio 1981, chap. 7; Page and Shaprio 1981; Zaller 1980; Best 1991; Cook 1979; Cook and Brerett 1981; Meyer 1987).

Overaggregation has significant statistical consequences that obscure critical empirical patterns. First, the efforts of Stimson, Eriksen, and MacKuen to aggregate a number of diverse issues that move in opposite directions greatly reduce the variance that they have to explain. Second, they limit the variance they do measure to a particular trend that fits the model nicely. Their approach is akin to any group mean rather than individual behavior: it is in this manner and scale that obscures critical patterns in the data.20 Our point, then, is not for greater precision and "thick description"; accurate tracking of empirical patterns is necessary to build worthwhile theory, yet the authors' approach masks critical aspects of the data.

Problems with Model Specification
Eriksen, MacKuen, and Stimson mis-specify their model because they fail to adequately control for endogeneity and spuriousness, despite their initial acknowledgment of the problem (chap. 2). First, research on policymakers' calculations, behavior, and strategy reveals that they are not content to rely on global indicators of public opinion. Instead, presidents and other officeholders and political activists devote enormous time, money, and organizational resources to tracking and analyzing public preferences and reactions toward specific policy issues (Jacobs 1992a and b; Jacobs and Shaprio 1995; Heath 1995). Even a cursory review of presidential archives reveals a veritable warehouse of polling data on specific policy issues. During the 1996 presidential campaign, for instance, Bill Clinton and his advisers tracked the public's preferences toward an array of policy issues from welfare reform to health care and income policy, with many surveys probing voters' reactions to specific options for policy change (Morell 1999, appendix 1). Clinton decided in 1996 to move simultaneously in a conservative direction by leaning welfare reform and in a liberal direction by expanding the government's role in health care and income policy. A global approach to public opinion and policy would have conflated these two quite different sets of public attitudes and markedly characterized Clinton's behavior as moving in strictly a conservative direction. Put another way, the systematic approach to public representation leads it to false foundations to bolster its assumption that politicians follow global mood.

The veraggregation of public opinion and government policy produces a substantial risk: the systems approach may lose sight of politicians' efforts to manipulate public opinion in order to simulate responsiveness. A long (and perhaps dominant) line of research on American politics has documented the substantial costs of politicians to changing public opinion through "explorations" and orchestrated presentations (Fenno 1973; 1978; Ginsburg 1980; Kernell 1982) on occasion mimicking the work of Maslow and others where they present their representatives by tracking the public's approval of some policy toward a single vote (Arnold 1986). The commitment of politicians to changing public opinion is consistent with much of the research on contemporary government institutions and elections, which point to party activism and other factors as the primary influences on politicians (Aldrich 1989; Rusbult 1988; Page 1978; Wittman 1978; 1990; Poole and Rosenthal 1997; Kingdon 1984; and 1989; Shaprio, Brady, and Persson 1995).

20 Focusing on global outcomes runs the risk of obscuring causal connections. The public opinion policy decisions or do politicians make strategic and short-term efforts to alter public opinion? What the authors so successfully develop as genuine responsiveness may in fact be the product of "simulated responsiveness"—case in which politicians (with the inadvertent aid of the media) influence public opinion in order to create the appearance of responsiveness to public policy issues. In short, the study of global ideological trends may both underestimate
make it clear that public opinion also exerts substantial indirect influences as well—namely, a determinative impact on partisanship (see chapter 2) and Democratic Party control (see chapter 3). The combined direct and indirect impact of public opinion is substantial and consistent with an interpretation of the political system as highly responsive.

The systems approach to political representation outlined in the previous chapter treats substantive responsiveness as stable over time: what is heralded as a dynamic model is, in fact, quite static in important respects. Global aggregation and the omission of direct attention to political conflict and institutional dynamics led the authors to miss the ways in which changing political and institutional patterns alter the motivations and strategic calculations of politicians as they weigh policy goals and electoral goals. The underlying—and theoretically underdeveloped—presumption is that politicians' goals do not vary over time.

But there is a larger point here: the impact of partisan composition varies over time and alters political calculations and thereby the levels of responsiveness. Politicians have been caught in a tug-of-war between wanting the benefits of pleasing voters (as the "median voter" theory predicts) and fearing the costs of displeasing party and interest group supporters. The costs and benefits that politicians attach to pleasing voters by responding to their policy preferences and pursuing cherished policy goals vary over the course of both short-term election cycles as well as longer-term historical cycles of several decades or more. Although the authors acknowledge that "policy will always err in the direction of the ideological position of the party" (chapter 3), they treat this as a fixed rather than changing condition. Indeed, it is precisely the intensification of partisan polarization that has increased the incentives for ambitious politicians to discount public opinion over the past two decades or so. We need a dynamic theory of political representation that explains rises and falls in substantive responsiveness as a function of real and changing political and institutional factors.

Let us be clear, then, about our criticism of the approach Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson use. Their models examine changes in variables over time. Our point, however, is that the structure and parameters of the statistical models Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson employ are static.

POLITICS AND POLITICAL REPRESENTATION

Political representation is one of the most significant indicators of the health of a working democracy. Popular sovereignty and the notion that government largely follows the wishes of its citizenry is a normative rationale for representative government. Many of the most heavily studied areas of American politics and political science more generally—from elections and interest groups to legislative and executive politics—are the tools for achieving political representation, and their study is intellectually uncontested by just this concern with popular sovereignty. Yet the amount and depth of the actual research on political representation has
for behind the importance attached to it. More and better research on the connection between government policy and the wishes of the citizen is a high priority for political scientists.

Perhaps the most significant challenges for future research on political representation are to include real institutions and political dynamics and to identify variations over time. Failing to examine the political costs and benefits that real politicians associate with responsiveness threatens to cast a serious illusion. The substantive responsiveness of politicians to construct opinion varies over time. Identifying this variation and developing grounded explanations for it is a daunting but significant challenge for future research.

NOTES

1. Rather than attempting to alter fundamental preferences, most politicians pursue a "priming" strategy that focuses on activating already existing preferences and associations. For instance, opponents of President Clinton's health-care reform plan highlighted "big government" to activate already established public preferences, just as President Bush has accentuated "choice" in promoting Social Security privatization (Jacobson and Shapiro 2000).

2. For a review of research on public opinion and policymaking, see Jacobson and Shapiro (1999, chap. 6), Shaffer and Brunstein (1999), and Glick, Hoffereth, Ott, and Shapiro (1999, chap. 6). Our previous research pointed to the influence of public opinion on policymaking, but we also emphasized that policymakers' responsiveness to public opinion was conditioned by political and institutional dynamics, as evident in the variations across policy areas and periods, and political environments (Jacobson 1998a, b, and c; 1999; Shapiro 1998; Page and Shapiro 1989, esp. pp. 188, n. 127).

3. Party activists influence the selection of candidates not only by dominating the nomination process but also by recruiting candidates. Many candidates are drawn to politics by their initial experience as activists and by their attraction to the policy positions of the party and their fellow activists (Abramitz 1995, chap. 6).

4. Disagreements among scholars stem from difficulties in measuring the preferences and contributions of different groups (Dowdell 1997).sound (1988) and others argue whether money is dispersed to reflect the distribution of influence in American politics (Campbell 1987) or concentrated in the hands of blocs of business interests to advance (at least since the 1970s) conservative interests (Thebes 1999). Our challenge (requiring an empirical analysis) is to link variations in campaign finance to the size and kinds of contributions before 1980.

5. For an explanation of Clinton's placement of health care high on his agenda in his adoption of a managed competition approach, see Jacob Hacker's (1995) useful book.

6. Interview with #1 by L.R.I., 12/19/94, in person, White House, Washington, D.C.

7. Interview with members of Congress and advisers to the president were conducted on an anonymous basis by Lawrence Jacobs; each interview was assigned a random number. Interview with #6 by L.R.I., 12/19/94, in person, White House, Washington, D.C.; interview with #7 by L.R.I., 12/24/94, in person, White House, Washington, D.C.; interview with #8 by L.R.I., 12/24/94, in person, White House, Washington, D.C.
In chapter 3 and in an earlier award-winning book (Jacobs and Shapiro 2006), Jacobs and Shapiro argue that "politicians don't pander." What does this mean? Jacobs and Shapiro make a compelling case that politicians are more complicated than mere machines seeking reelection. Politicians, they say, are also motivated by policy considerations. Politicians try to create public policies that, from their diverse ideological perspectives, please society and, to the extent possible, are in line with the public interest. Jacobs and Shapiro assert, moreover, that when facing the dilemma of satisfying public opinion to get elected or making good policy, politicians often try to educate the public. For politicians, the policy decision comes first; then the crafting of a message to sell it to the public. When politicians successfully merge the public's policy preferences to those of their constituents, they improve their chances both for re-election and achieving desirable public policies.

So far, so good. Political scientists are all too familiar with the idea that elected politicians actually care about the policies they produce. Of course, members of Congress, for example, are not indifferent to the policy implications of their work. And Jacobs and Shapiro's idea that politicians try to "educate" is a refreshing insight. If they were to stop there, what they say would generate little controversy. The trouble is, the next step. What they sometimes seem to really mean by "politicians don't pander" is that politicians care that they try to educate, and that they don't give a damn about public opinion. "Pandering," in other words, means being slaves to public opinion and the polls. To do the opposite—not to pander—means ignoring public opinion.

In short, Jacobs and Shapiro write as if compelled not only to defend their facetious explanation but also to challenge the relevance of other contentions. The analogy would be if our work that contends that public opinion does matter (chapter 3 of this volume; Erikson, Stimson, and Mackuen 2002) went on to argue that politicians follow only public opinion at the expense of all else. Then we could title our contribution "Politicians Don't Think." Like "not panderings," "not shirking" is an awkward phrase that implies a mono-variable explanation. As applied to politicians, to "shirk" means to ignore the interests of their clients, the public. When a politician's actions stray from the preference of the constituency median voter, the politician "shirks.

Do politicians "not shirk" or do they "not pander"? This would be an unconstructive debate that neither side would (or should) win. Although we have no quarrel with their conclusion—Don't Pander, they evidently challenge The Macro Poilitics. The last part of their contribution in chapter 3 launches a critique of our research, summarized in chapter 8, which claims to show policy as responsive to public opinion. Does fundamental incompatibility prevent politicians from responding both to their own policy preferences and the preferences of their constituents?

Jacobs and Shapiro exaggerate our position. They say we say that "politicians increasingly follow public opinion" (p. 24, our italics) as if "public opinion is the only signal that matters" (p. 25). Not so. Perhaps more disturbingly, and in a surprise to us, we are guilty of an alleged "enthusiasm for reincarnating systems analysis" (p. 25) by which they mean a deductive theoretical approach that Sartori proclaimed dead over two decades ago. Finally, we are all wrong in our evidence anyway. We "miss-specify" our model because we "fail to control for endogeneity and spuriousness." (p. 28). As no statistical critique follows this remark, one may interpret it to mean that any statistical evidence that public opinion matters is inherently suspect. Jacobs and Shapiro do not actually claim that public opinion has no impact on public policy. After all, they purport to take seriously the research showing that public opinion or policy changes usually agree with majority opinion or change in opinion. Similarly, we grant that we cannot really believe that our modeling assumes that politicians either have no policy beliefs or set aside their personal beliefs when they make policy. For the rest of this chapter, we focus on areas of agreement and disagreement between us and discuss how the differences and misunderstandings might be resolved. Jacobs and Shapiro raise some interesting points that deserve discussion.

**ARE POLITICIANS DON'T PANADER AND THE MACRO POLICY IN LOGICAL CONFLICT?**

Suppose, in the abstract, that X causes Y. What does this fact imply about the underlying effect of a social independent variable? All it "tells us is that the social variable..."
however, it is a troublesome simplification. Politicians must stay in touch with public opinion in order to exert the leverage to move it.

Policy-driven politicians do not necessarily favor policy representation. When politicians make policy based on their personal policy preferences, they can actually enhance representation by providing a valuable policy cue that voters

Instead of relying on the cheap talk of campaign rhetoric, voters can use the information that Democratic and Republican politicians have different policy tastes and choose accordingly. Democratic and Republican politicians may both try to follow public opinion somewhat, but the voters know also that when elected, Democratic politicians "cheat" to the left and Republican "cheat" to the right. Aggregated to the national level, the party composition of Congress reveals most that is needed to know about the net liberalism-conservatism of the membership.

Politicians Responding to Public Opinion versus Politicians Educating the Public?
The inner workings of policy representation are commonly depicted as politicians responding to exogenous policy preferences emanating from public opinion. Jacobs and Shapiro turn this around to show that politicians often decide on a policy program and then try to convince the public of their position. At first glance, it might seem that if politicians try to educate public opinion, public opinion must actually have little influence on policymaking. But the truth is that one depends on the other. Politicians would likely try to educate the public if the public's policy preferences affect the politicians' electoral fate. Voters' policy positions affect their electoral choices and ultimately public policy. If policy issues were essentially irrelevant to voters, politicians would not need to gain the voters' agreement for the policies they are about to institute.

Does it matter whether voters get their ideas from politicians and other political elites? It is possible to misperceive the contentious that public opinion matters as an assertion that public opinion impossibly emanates from the exogenous preferences of uninformed voters—the opinions of the "lowsider," as opposed to worldly "elites." Although we remain neutral on the matter, it does seem unlikely that the shifting currents of public opinion regularly bubble up exogenously from the bottom strata of society. The alternative is that opinion change originates disproportionately from "elites," including Jacobs and Shapiro's politicians.

That opinion change originates with the opinions of informed "elites" is no reason to dismiss the causal connections from opinion to policy. Elite ideas may trickle down to the mass public, mass opinion change then might generate policy change. But this is not to argue that elite consensus is then propagandised to a compliant public for its differential rationalisation. Political arguments emanate from competing elite points of view, and the public chooses which to endorse.
HEALTH CARE AND THE FIRST REPUBLICAN CONGRESS: AN ALTERNATIVE INTERPRETATION

Jacobs and Shapiro present two detailed examples of policymaking—Clinton’s failed health care plan and Gingrich’s aborted “Contract with America.” Jacobs and Shapiro inform us of the central ideals that shaped the debate over health care and how those ideas were refuted by the eventual policy enactments. From there, the two experts turn to Gingrich’s “Contract with America,” which was similarly marketed as a means to reduce the burden of health care costs on the average American consumer. The two authors argue that the policy enacted by the Republican Congress was not merely an attempt to reduce costs but also a calculated strategy to shift the burden of health care costs to the individual in a way that could not be reversed by a Democratic administration.

We have no reason to dispute the main points of Jacobs and Shapiro’s account of these policy events. Of course, one can quibble with the details. For instance, was the “Canadien” health care model scrapped because it was supposed inferior to “Hillarycare,” or was the budget effects too “leftist” and therefore disavowed by the public? And did the early post-1994 Republican Congress really pursue a mission too important to be constrained by public opinion? The Republican leadership tried to sell its contract as mandated by the Republican success to power. One can assert that the congressional Republicans had convinced themselves that they had the ear of the people, only to express befuddlement at extensive public opposition to many of their decisions.

All this is somewhat beside the point, however. In each instance, two important things happened that receive little notice in the Jacobs and Shapiro narrative. First, both the health care initiative and the Contract received a rebuke at the polls—when the public turned Congress over to the Republicans in 1994 and when they gave Clinton his easy victory in 1996. After 1994, a major health care initiative was a dead issue. After 1996, there was no hope of passing the Contract of the contract. And in each instance, even before the electoral rebuke, the politicians realized that the policy initiative had overreached. Already, by summer 1994, “Hillarycare” proved so unpopular that it was pronounced “dead on arrival” at the doorstep of a Democratic Congress. In summer 1996, the Republican Congress, realizing its disadvantage with the more moderate president in the eyes of public opinion, desperately tried to backtrack from its rightward course, even passing the first increase in the minimum wage in nearly a decade.

In the end, the essentially moderate public was the decisive determinant of the policy agenda of the 1990s. The Clinton administration steered too far left and then the Republican Congress steered too far right, each convinced that the public supported them. The electorate made the call to produce the ideological balance of divided government.

HAS THE ROLE OF PUBLIC OPINION DECLINED?

Has the importance of public opinion declined over the years? Jacobs and Shapiro argue that the role of public opinion has been declining in recent years, particularly in the context of policy making. They cite several examples to support their argument, including the failure of the Clinton health care reform and the rejection of the Republican Contract with America. Jacobs and Shapiro argue that public opinion is becoming more fragmented and that policymakers are less responsive to mass preferences.

MACRO-ISSUES, MACRO-ANALYSIS VERSUS SINGLE-ISSUE ANALYSIS

As summarized in chapter 2, our analysis of the opinion-policy connection tests for the impact of global opinions, measured as a single dimension of liberalism-conservatism (measured on policy activity and policy, measured on one-dimensional liberalism-conservatism. Jacobs and Shapiro say that by aggregating so much we miss the nuance and subtleties of policymaking. Moreover, they note that the political world contains ideological inconsistencies—opinion does not always move the same way in a policy domain as it is another, and Congress sometimes makes “liberal” decisions in one domain but “conservative” ones in another. Evidently, they think that each issue and policy decision should be examined separately, as if no common ideological context exists.

If one wishes to explain passage or failure of a specific congressional bill, one might consult opinion polls on that issue (if any) rather than global mood and be measured on other relevant dimensions (e.g., perceptions of government, expectations for the future, and so forth).
degrees of freedom. We prefer a macroscopic approach precisely because, by aggregating and averaging, "errors" cancel out. The electorates' global taste for liberalism or conservatism will predict the liberal or conservative tone of policy decisions, averaged over many issues. Indeed, this is what we find, and it is difficult to explain away as a statistical illusion.

General versus specific is a familiar argument. How is it to be resolved? If we asserted that the general was also universal, that every specific opinion manifested underlying mood, then finding a single exception would defeat the generalization. But we make no such assertion. We find a common domestic policy domain that does not include issues related to crime or to the abortion controversy. We claim only a high degree of comonality across issues. Then an occasional exception is nothing more than an error term. We can do better than simply argue the matter. We estimate how much variance in public opinion series is common; it is about half. How do Democrats and liberals manage to overcome the odds and line up on the "liberal" side of health care and the "contract"? How do conservatives managed to sort themselves in the "conservative" position on both? The odds of doing so by chance, taking exception and variance at face value, are appalling. But no reasonable person, Jacobs and Shapiro included, actually believes that everything is independent. Exceptionalism is a useful argument as criticism, impossible to define as theory.

Actually, when important proposals are being made on the agenda and in the public eye, the circumstantial evidence shows that public opinion plays a major role. We have examined available public opinion polls regarding major laws on the eve of their passage. Because the legislative path is fraught with obstacles, one should not treat polls as gospel. But if public opinion is an important part of the policy mix, one should expect Congress to be wary of passing major legislation that polls show to be unpopular. That is the case. Policies that were controversial in our collective memory were popular at the time of passage, including the major civil rights bills of the Johnson years and the major legislation of the early Reagan presidency. In more recent issues, the polls showed that the George W. Bush tax cut of 2001 enjoyed a plurality in support. Moreover, we are struck by how roll call support for major legislation tends to be one-sided on the eve of passage, with close votes the interesting exceptions. It is as if much major legislation obtains not only the support of the national median voter but also the support of the median voter in the vast majority of states and congressional districts. Could it be that when the preponderant weight of public opinion is unambiguous, members of Congress rush like ants to the popular position?

Jacobs and Shapiro critique our bundling of disparate issues into a composite measure of liberalism-conservatism for mood. They worry that preferences on different issues—for example, social policy issues and social welfare issues—can move differently over time. By forcing all issues into one aggregation, we compromise the evidence and "robustly criticize our data" (p. 123). Of course, public opinion does not move in precise lockstep across all issues at the same time. The methodology of mood measurement takes into account that opinion on disparate issues tends to change in part due to common currents of shifting ideological change. The mood measurement extracts this commonality, discarding the differences. Specific opinion items are reflected in mood only if they show opinion following the common trend on the dominant dimension.

Assume that the public evaluates politicians in a piece-meal fashion (Nye 1988), from the sum of their separate behaviors on separate issues rather than merely identifying their global ideological position. Assume also that this is how politicians perceive their reputations, as the sum of evaluations of their behavior other than an evaluation of their global position. The complication (for us) is when a conservative policy might be popular in a liberal era or vice versa.

Even so, measuring opinion as the weighted average across many issues distills a common component of policy preferences, just as aggregating policy activities or policies distills the common component. Even if voters are inclined to judge by summing microscopic evaluations, the evidence should be visible in an opinion-policy correspondence at the macroscopic level.

Jacobs and Shapiro misunderstand the consequences that would result if public opinion were more multidimensional than our portrait. A worst case would be if responses to roll call votes on salient issues move independently of the common trend's mood. Opinion on these issues would be heavily discounted, ignored, or (if counterfactual) even given the wrong sign in the measurement of mood. Such a hypothetical distortion of the evidence would work against the representation hypothesis, not provide false support. If mood mixes opinions on key issues salient to the public, these omissions make all the more remarkable the fact that a flawed measure still predicts policymaking and policy.

CONCLUSIONS

The title of this chapter sets up a false dichotomy. Politicians in the representation process do not choose pandering or shrugging. These choices imply excessive reliance on opinion polls or constituency abandonment. Elected politicians deal with the complex trade of satisfying constituents (to stay elected) versus achieving "good" policy. Jacobs and Shapiro show one solution to this problem: convince the constituents of the "goodness" of one's preferred policies. But even through politicians try to persuade (and are sometimes successful) the public controls its policy destiny.

NOTES

1. This usage of "shrugging" issues to certain politicians who have ventured into the study of politics. Interestingly, economists view the representation process differently from political scientists. Whereas political scientists are conditioned to be skeptical of claims that democracy works the way it is supposed to, economists are conditioned to believe in
their theories, not the facts. For economists, the starting point for understanding democratic politics is that politicians must behave as the agent for the median voter (e.g., Downs 1957). The interesting questions to econonists are why theory sometimes fails and why elected officials often shirk their duty, among other things, following their own conception of the public interest.

2. We plead guilty as charged for the offense of portraying a causal "system." "System" is one of a handful of great unifying ideas in science. A political science that rejected it would itself need renunciation.

3. In this example of crime and crime, the two simultaneous effects have opposite signs. The same logic can apply for two simultaneous effects with the same sign. A political science example is the relationship between a nation's electoral system and its number of political parties. A system of proportional representation encourages multiple parties. This only encourages the complementary effect—that nations with multiple parties tend to adopt proportional representation.

4. The logic of Downs's model of party competition would apply to both candidates in a two-candidate race must represent the median voter because the opponent would successfully exploit any deviation.

5. We lay no claim to the originality of this idea. For an excellent explanation, see Garr (1995).

6. Jacoby and Shapiro hint at a nonelucrative motivation for politicians influencing voter opinion. At several places, they write of politicians engaging in "simulated responsiveness," whereby politicians "induce public opinion in order to create the appearance of responsiveness to public opinion" (p. 30, their italics). They do not fully develop the reasons why politicians would want to engage in this bourgeois maneuver.

7. A good example of elite manipulation of public opinion is provided by the Public Accommodations Bill of 1964. Before passage, polls show that opinion shifted from about an even split to about 2 to 1 in favor of the bill. This growth is generally attributed to the appeals of President Johnson and to the acquiescence of Republican congressional leaders. 

8. Or at least that is the commonly believed causal story. The attribution of reasons for election outcomes is not easily subject to validitation.

9. Health care is an intriguing exception. In the 1990 to 1991 period leading to the health care debate of 1994, movement specific to the health care domain was notably more liberal—the trend stronger—than was the case for the full domestic agenda. (Notably also in this period of great public support for change, nonprofit groups from both sides of the debate jumped on board the reform bandwagon.) One would have done better predicting the eventual defeat from global mood than from measures specific to health care. Eventually the specific converged on the global; the support for radical change did not exist.

10. More specifically, we estimate explicit variance by an Eigenvalue analogue. Using the full set of all known relevant question series, a set that includes large numbers of series on crime and abortion controversies that we know do not belong to the mood domain, we estimate an overall first dimension explained variance of 43. Excluding the

remaining terms produces numbers in the 90 to 90 range. These numbers imply correlations between series and scale that average .6 or more.
CONCLUSION

Those who, like Ms. Huffington, attack the polls are, whether they realize it or not, arguing against the influence of public opinion. Perhaps they believe we should go back to a restricted franchise when only those citizens who were "qualified" to vote were allowed to do so.

Without public opinion polls, the deep pockets that finance, influence, and (Ms. Huffington, and many others, believe) corrupt our politicians and our government would have more, not less, power. The polls are often a strong counterbalance to the loud voices of the special interests whose political goals are different from those of the general public. Public opinion would sometimes not be heard if there were no polls.

As former British Prime Minister James Callaghan once wrote, "If you cannot trust the public with polls, you should not trust them with the vote." Knowledge of public opinion, whether well used or misused, is far better than ignorance, and those who attack, censor, corrupt, or intimidate the polls are the enemies of democracy.

More than forty years ago, E.E. Schattschneider—the great advocate of responsible parties and governmental responsiveness to ordinary citizens—wrote about the "semi-sovereign people" of the United States. He maintained that the public can exert substantial control over government policymaking, particularly when issues are made highly visible through conflict and when citizens are mobilized by competitive, well-organized political parties. Still, Schattschneider insisted that "public opinion about specific issues does not necessarily govern the course of public policy." Instead, he argued, a "pressure system" dominated by well-organized business groups often gets its way, particularly when the people are not looking (1960, p. 113 and chaps. 6 and 8).

I believe that the research reported in this volume largely confirms, or is consistent with, Schattschneider’s view of American politics. There is substantial evidence of government responsiveness to public opinion, especially on high-salience issues. But the evidence also indicates that there is considerable room for interest groups, party activists, policymakers, and others to prevail against the public on many issues. Often anti-popular policy decisions can be kept out of the public spotlight or cleverly packaged to avoid offense. Sometimes public opinion can be manipulated. Moreover, the extent of responsiveness to public opinion varies by type of issue and over time. Schattschneider’s picture of a quite imperfect democracy appears to be correct.
HOM MUCH RESPONSIVENESS?

Statistical studies that explore connections between policies and poll-measured public opinion have invariably found substantial covariation between opinion and policy. This has been true for quite a variety of research designs. Assessments of "consistency" between majority opinion and existing policies on various issues, correlation or regression coefficients between policies and central tendencies of opinion across the American states, measures of association between changes over time in opinion and changes in policy have all indicated strong relationships.

It is important to recognize, however, that all such studies (including those in which I have participated) have very likely underestimated the extent of responsiveness. All have been prey to varying combinations of sampling and aggregation biases and specification errors, especially specification errors involving the omission of relevant variables and relationships that might have revealed the opinion-policy relationship to be purely spurious or reciprocal. The very design of these studies has ruled out, a priori, certain processes that are likely to occur in the real world. Nearly all studies have excluded from the analysis a number of factors, such as world events, mass media stories, and interest group lobbying and propagandas, that may directly affect both opinion and policy and create a spurious relationship between the two. A number of studies have also excluded (or inadequately modeled) processes by which policymakers or policy itself may reciprocally affect opinion—"preparing" the public for new policies or selling those policies after they are enacted—or that one-way estimates of the effects of opinion on policy are exaggerated. Some have overestimated the independent and dependent variables, producing excessively strong relationships.

The problems are most obvious in the earliest studies, which looked only at bivariate relationships between opinion and policy (omitting all other variables), and posited a purely one-way causal relationship, with opinion influencing policy but not vice versa. Both Monroe (1952) and Page and Shapiro (1980), for example, offer evidence that seems to support a "two-thirds rule": that government policy tends to correspond with majority opinion, or to move in the same direction as opinion changes, on about two-thirds (66% or 68%) of sampled issues. Of course, the finding that policy mover in the opposite direction from public opinion about one third of the time might be taken as a sobering limit on public influ-

opinion in the analysis, so neither could test for possible spuriousness; and neither empirically ruled out a reciprocal relationship in which policy affected opinion. (Page and Shapiro’s 1980, pp. 195-96) somewhat strained effort in that direction cast doubt on reciprocal influence in only about half the subset of cases considered.)

Erikson, Wright, and McIver (1993), with their clever use of an across-state design, produced even better estimates of the effects of opinion upon policy. They found an estimated "true" correlation between state ‘"opinion liberalism'" and "composite policy liberalism" of .59 (.p. 83), which remained nearly as high when controlling for demographic factors (wealth, urbanism, and education level); p. 83.) Beyond those demographics, however, they did not include independent variables that might produce spurious relationships between opinion and policy. State political parties, for example, were treated as part of the processes by which opinion affects policy, but not as possible shapers of opinion itself. The authors tried to rule out possible reciprocal influences of policy upon opinion through an instrumental-variables approach that yielded a big opinion/policy coefficient of .88 (p. 84), but the specification of exogenous variables was questionable. (The crucial "exogenous" factor of religious fundamentalism, for example, probably influences policy directly through organized lobbying, not just indirectly through public opinion—as posited—but inhibiting the estimate of public opinion's impact; see p. 68, 84.) Moreover, any gains in accuracy due to improved measurement and model specification may have been offset by errors due to excessive aggregation in both the independent and the dependent variables. All issues were compressed into liberal-conservative scales that blurred variations in responsiveness—and may have concealed substantial responsiveness—across specific issues. Aggregation over time also permitted such processes as selective political migration to inflate the apparent effect of opinion on policy. That is, people may tend to move to states whose policies they like, rather than the states responding to their residents' policy preferences.

The tremendously influential time-series analysis of liberal-conservative trends in national domestic opinion and policy by Stimson, McClosky, and Erikson (1996) made important methodological advances, but still very likely overstated the impact of public opinion on policy. It gained some leverage on the causal direction of the opinion/policy relationship by using a time-lagged independent variable ("domestic policy mood"), thus ruling out any reciprocal impact by policy itself (but not earlier action by policymakers or others) upon the opinion prestated to affect it. And partisan-composition of government independent variables were included in the analysis, which indicated that the party balance in Congress and the presidency—indeed, of public opinion, and itself only moderately affected by the public's policy preferences—has strong effects upon policy (a coefficient of .204 in the "global" regression, p. 536). This consideration of substantial concession to critics of a "public opinion drives everything" view, because policy in government effects do not merely reflect the policy preferences...
(often distinctly contrary to public opinion) of party activists and money givers. Within the time-series model itself (though unexamined by the author), therefore, exists the possibility of substantial elite influence upon policy of the sort discussed by William Domehoff in chapter 6, insofar as it operates through differences between the political parties (see Ferguson and Rogers, 1986; Ferguson, 1999).

There is room within the framework for a number of factors and processes unrelated to public opinion that may influence policymaking. But such factors were not explicitly modeled. They were not, in most cases, even mentioned. As a result, the authors run the risk of being unfairly criticized for proposing precisely what they reject (in chapter 4 of this volume): a univariate or mono-causal model of politics.

The chief impression given by Stimson, MacKuen, and Erikson (1995) and carried through in their later work reported here—is one of enormous, virtually unappreciated influence of public opinion upon public policy. In their full global analysis, the coefficient for indirect (through parties-in-government) plus direct impact of "domestic policy mood" upon policy was estimated as a remarkable .70. That is, they found "about a one-to-one translation" of preferences into policy. The authors offered a striking image of politicians stampeding like antelopes at the slightest noise from public opinion (pp. 558-57, 559). This, I believe, is seriously misleading.

A major problem, the same problem that has plagued nearly all quantitative research in this area, is the omission of independent variables that may affect both opinion and policy and create a spurious relationship between the two. Stimson et al. did not allow, for example, for the possibility of influence by corporations, interest groups, and elites upon both opinion and policy, working outside of (or through) both political parties. Yet William Domehoff, in chapter 7, offers several compelling historical examples of precisely that kind of influence, and he outlines plausible mechanisms (including an "opinion-shaping process" in which foundations, think tanks, and policy discussion groups propagate elite views through a large dissemination network) that could bring it about. Other scholars (e.g., Ferguson, 1999, chap. 1 and appendix 1) have uncovered strong historical evidence of similar phenomena.

For example, the apparent congruence of conservative Reagan-era policy changes with a rightward shift in public opinion helped drive Stimson et al.'s time-series statistical findings. But the causal connection is questionable. Most of American business (including firms that had formerly backed the Democrats) made a sharp right turn in the middle and late 1970s, coming to oppose government spending and social spending (Ferguson and Rogers, 1986). This was followed by—and may have influenced—a shift in public opinion that is discernable but very faint: considerably weaker than is implied by the big change in measured "domestic policy mood." There was very little decline in American's overwhelming support for economic regulation and for government spending or...
or "policy activity" trend line. Little wonder that public opinion and policy, as measured, move in close harmony with each other.

There is yet another important, though subtle and often ignored, way in which the Stimson et al. time-series analysis (and, indeed, nearly all quantitative work on this subject) restricts the phenomena to be accounted for. By focusing on correlation (over time or cross-sectionally) between opinion and policy, it neglects the question of whether or not the level of policy corresponds to what the public wants on the average or at a given moment in time. For example, if corporations' lobbying led to a steady conservative tilt in policy by a uniform amount every year, this effect would not generally show up at all in regression or other studies based on correlation. A perfect correlation of low between opinion and policy could conceal the fact that policy was always (by a constant amount) more conservative than the average American wanted. (That such a situation is not totally implausible is suggested by the frequent General Social Survey findings that many more Americans favor spending "more" than favor spending "less" than the current amount on education, medical care, and other domestic programs.) This, along with overregression and omitted variable means that considerable room is left outside, as well as inside, the model for anti-popular influences upon policy of the sorts that elite theorists like Dumbrell, "biased pluralism" theorists like Scharpf and Schneider, and others propose.

The new statistical and computer simulation work that Robert Erikson, Michael MacKuen, and James Stimson report in chapter 2 and in their recent book (which does not alter the model or the core statistical findings of their 1995 paper) in any major way. It does extend and modify them in certain important respects—exploring the negative feedback effects of policy on public opinion; bringing in trends in unemployment and inflation; distinguishing the old policy measures—reclassified "Policy Activity"—from "Policies" or fundamental laws; and taking explicit account of how Constitutional provisions (especially the separation of powers) complicate the policy-making process. But its main contribution is to work out the complex ways in which the pieces of their model interact and to show how disturbances to one variable can cascade through the whole system.

Certain modifications in their model take better account of the real-world limits to the responsiveness of policy to public opinion. "Policy," as opposed to "Policy Activity," is found to react only slowly, incrementally, cumulatively to the public's preferences. Policy changes are slowed by the separation of powers and multiple voting points (modeled by multiplicative interactions among branches of government and a partial adjustment, "error correction" process), so that there can be about an eight-year delay in fully translating public preferences into policy. The importance of party control of government (and, implicitly, therefore, the importance of party activity, investors, and money-givers) is shown to be profound and parties are shown to overreact, regularly pushing their agendas further than the public wants. Small electoral changes that tip the balance of party control in Congress or the presidency can have sharp, kneedege impacts upon policy activity, some of them quite contrary to the public's preferences, that followed the narrow Republican victories in election year 2000. There is no talk here of a 1994, "one-to-one" translation of public preferences into policy, any of the spooky politicien-antipoliticians.

Yet the overall impression is once again of public opinion as an extremely powerful force on policy. The modest-looking finding that just over a third (33.6%) of each year's "Policy Mood" change shows up in a global measure of next year's "Policy Activity" understates the estimated immediate impact of public opinion on some of the separate institutions of government. And we can see that the estimated total, direct plus indirect (through elections and party-in-government) effects of public opinion are larger still. Perhaps most striking of all is the estimate, within the error-correction model, that unmeasured public "Preferences" correlate at a solid .7 level with "Policy" (accumulated laws) eight years later. Similarly, the measured bimodal "Policy Mood" correlates fully .71 with Policy changes over the subsequent eight years. The picture here is of a ship that oversteps a bit to the left and then steers a bit to the right, but in the long run holds true to exactly the course that the public wants.

Once again, however, the model almost certainly overestimates the impact upon policy of public opinion, for the same old reasons. It still omits major factors—such as many sorts of external events, the mass media, politicians' talk, and corporate and interest group activity—that may affect both opinion and policy (opinion first) and produce a partly spurious relationship between the two. The analysis still rests on the highly aggregated, liberal-conservative measures of opinion and policy, ignoring—and excluding from the variance to be explained—movements in policy or opinion that cut across, contrast, shrink, or magnify a general liberal-conservative trend. The results are important and intriguing; they indicate a general tendency for summary liberal-conservative opinion "mood" and certain summary features of domestic policy to move together. But this does not tell us to what extent the whole set of different public policies is actually influenced by the public's preferences on each of those policies.

Let me comment briefly on Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson's chapter 4 response to Jacobs and Shapiro. In that response, they seem largely to disregard the possibility that opinion-policy relationships are spurious: that public opinion has no real causal impact on policy, but only appears to do so because some third factor—perhaps interest groups, or politicians with their own agendas—indeed affects both opinion and policy. (Indeed, they do not mention interest groups at all.)

Instead, Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson focus on the possibility that politicians or other elites may influence public opinion, which itself then affects policy: that is, the possibility that public opinion acts as an intervening variable between some third factor and policy. They correctly point out that in such a case, public opinion would still have an important causal status as the proximate cause of policy change. (They suggest that politicians or others would bother
confuses actual with potential public influence. It neglects the possibility of puerility, in which policy shapers might defend public opposition to their plans before it had any actual effect, or in which they might affect opinion only incidentally or even accidentally. Their use of the appealing term “educate” to characterize such cases, however, seems to rule out the possibility of systematic misinformation or deception, which would not alter the causal picture (public opinion as an intervening variable) but might drastically change our normative reaction. Presumably, we would not want to call democratic a process in which elites grossly deceived the public and then bowed to the god of public opinion. Terms like “crafty talk” and the “deception” or “manipulation” of opinion not only address causal structure but also have normative connotations (particularly concerning the truth or falsehood of persuasive information) that Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson do not address in chapter 4.

How Big Are the Biases in Quantitative Studies?

It is easy enough to point out that the quantitative estimates of public opinion's effect on policy are almost certainly biased upward. But it is much harder to figure out precisely how big the biases are.

In order to be more sure about how responsive policy is to public opinion, we will need more studies that take account of all the key variables, including the activities of interest groups and opinion shapers, and that allow for public opinion to be endogenous, in a variety of ways, to the policymaking process. It would be unrealistic to hope for a simple, definitive coefficient summarizing opinion's impact, both because that impact is likely (in the real world) to vary routinely across issues, time, and other circumstances, and because each feasible type of research design suffers from inherent weaknesses that are bound to render all results less than definitive. Cross-sectional, multiple-issue studies face the daunting challenge of finding truly exogenous variables, in order to identify reciprocal effects among many potentially endogenous variables. Time-series studies must either be fragmented by issue or must aggregate issues and lose the ability to analyze the effects of issue-specific variables and processes. Yet issue-specific case studies (unless and until many such studies cumulate) inevitably raise questions about generalizability. Quantitative studies of all sorts risk neglecting subtleties and factors that are hard to measure, including actors' private intentions, secret communications and agreements, under-the-table money, and the like, which may (or may not) play significant parts in the policymaking process.

Moreover, one fundamental type of sampling bias subtly, and almost inevitably, affects nearly all studies of opinion-policy links. We can study the impact of public opinion only to the extent that public opinion is measured. But opinion is measured—at least polls and surveys are conducted—only with respect to a relatively small and rather vaguely formulated subset of policy alternatives that politicians and their clients are interested in investigating. This usually excludes any 16), and it excludes anything very detailed or obscure. To restrict in this way the range of policy that is studied, to consider only general tendencies of opinion on relatively high salience issues, almost certainly leads to overestimates of the impact of public opinion on the whole range of actually existing policy choices. Detailed examinations of policymaking can alert us to this problem by revealing the wide range of policy alternatives about which measured public opinion has nothing to say. But this invites the opposite error, of assuming that public opinion has no impact (by anticipated reactions, for example) when convenient measures of opinion do not exist.

Thus, we should continue to embrace methodological pluralism of the sort represented in this volume. We will need to pursue a variety of methods (definitely including observational and historical) as well as quantitative methods, each with significant strengths and significant weaknesses. Still, even the presently existing, incomplete, quite imperfect research can begin to give us some idea of the extent of biases in the quantitative estimates of public opinion's impact. The trick is to pay serious attention to case studies, limited to one or a few policy issues, that include additional variables and/or that closely examine the details of the policymaking process.

Certain quantitative studies that limit their attention to a single policy issue over time have included independent variables in addition to public opinion. They generally find that adding the new variables lowers estimates of public opinion's impact. Hartley and Fessenden (1982), for example, found that from 1965 to 1973 the public's judgment that "too much" or "too little" was being spent on defense had a statistically significant but modest effect (standardized coefficient of .21) upon subsequent annual changes in U.S. military spending. Soviet spending, lagged two and three years, had considerably more impact (coefficients of .37 and .30, p. 99). If the study had included such additional factors as corporate lobbying, opinion shaping and Reagan policy influencing by the Committee on the Present Danger, and media hype over the Iranian "hostage crisis," it might have found a still more limited effect of public opinion upon the main policy variable in the data (the Reagan era spike in spending).

The inclusion of analogous opinion-related variables that may affect other kinds of policymaking (unemployment rates, inflation rates, crime statistics, poverty levels, etc.) generally lowers estimates of opinion's impact by comparable amounts, even when indirect policy effects of those factors, through their impact on public opinion, are (as is proper) attributed to opinion.

Also helpful are detailed, "inside the black box" case studies of the policymaking process that consider public opinion along with other influences upon particular elements of policy. Such studies generally demonstrate that there is no instantaneous, knee-jerk responsiveness of policy to opinion. Far from it. Even though these studies, too, may suffer from sampling bias (they usually concentrate issues big and visible enough to interest researchers and readers, where public opinion is presumably at its strongest), they generally reveal messy, start-and-
important evidence of spurious opinion-policy relationships due to outside factors, including manipulation of public opinion (and independent influence on policy) by presidents and other policymakers.

Paul Buchanan, for example, looking at sixty years of policymaking on equal employment opportunities for minorities and women (see chap. 5), found that congressional action and inaction on major legislation has generally been quite consistent with the public, even when salience has been relatively low. On only one of ten major decisions (i.e., not ending affirmative action) did Congress clearly go against the public's preferences. Yet plenty of years passed in which opinion changes were not responded to, and countless small policy changes doubtless occurred without regard to public opinion.

More closely examining a single important piece of legislation, R. Kent Weaver (chap. 6) found that high-salience public disgust with the old AFDC program propelled action on some sort of welfare "reform," and that certain provisions of the 1996 legislation (e.g., work and training requirements; increased funding for child care) did indeed reflect the public's preferences. But other provisions (e.g., "hard" time limits without work guarantees) did not. Those who controlled the legislative agenda, namely, congressional Republicans, had considerable leeway under the rubric of "reform" to enact provisions without public support.

Again scrutinizing a single important legislative issue, chapter 7, Fay Cook, Jason Barna, and me, indicates that accurately measured public opinion was certainly not a consciously articulated preoccupation among legislators, presidents, and experts as they discussed Social Security reform. To be sure, research about public opinion could conceivably gain currency there, but the frequent muddling or downright erroneous references to poll results tend to cast doubt on this possibility.

More broadly, Steven Koll and Clay Rasnake, in chapter 10, summarize substantial evidence that for many of the foreign policy elite systematically misperceive public opinion about foreign policy. Many of the surveyed elites (including members of Congress) were quite convinced that "the American people"—or at least their own constituents—held isolationist opinions on foreign policy that they simply did not hold, including alleged opposition to the United Nations and aversion to peacekeeping operations. National survey evidence in the contrary seemed to cast little; even data from surveys of their own opinion were sometimes dismissed out of hand. We need to know more about exactly why officials (especially elected officials) could be so out of touch with the views they are supposed to serve. One factor, no doubt (pointed out by Koll and Rasnake), is mythology about the supposed representativeness of Congress, the media, and interest groups as surrogates for public opinion. Further factors may include elites' adherence to "vocal publics" with quite unrepresentative views; their isolation from electoral punishment due to the relatively low salience of foreign policy issues; their location in safe, one-party seats; their need to please activists and voters in their party primaries; and the highly restricted turnout in compara-

particularly useful is the work by Lawrence Jacobs and Robert Shapiro (chap. 5), which reports on a detailed inside look at how the Clinton administration.

As in the welfare case, public discontent with the existing system pushed for some preferences of the public. Instead, it created its own managed-competition scheme and Shapiro's detailed interview and archival evidence on administration efforts of whom have not allowed for such a possibility—to investigate whether and to what extent it occurs in other policy areas.

The review by Shapiro and Jacobs (chap. 10) of many foreign policy decisions of the growing White House "public opinion apparatus" suggests that policy opinion—may be particularly frequent in foreign policy. And such efforts may also be new. Qualitative case studies cannot, of course, assign precise numbers to the opinion's impact on policy, but multi-issue quantitative studies themselves can begin to tell us something about the magnitude of bias and the one particular source: variability. Within certain multi-issue studies, it is possible (while holding research on opinion-policy congruence on higher-salience issues with that on lower-salience issues)

Page and Shapiro (1989), for example, found congruent movement of policy and opinion on 90% of fifty-five issues about which opinion was highly salient at that lower salience. (Medium-low- and medium-high-salience issues were studied, policy actually moved in the opposite direction to public opinion change in a hypothetical universe of "all" policy issues, including the evenly lower-Page and Shapiro's 1990s, "two-thirds rule.""

All in all, the research to date seems to be more consistent with the view that the U.S. public is, at best, "semi-sovereign.

UNDER WHAT CIRCUMSTANCES?

...
opinion on issues of high salience than low. (Paul Burstein's interesting finding in chapter 3 of high consistency between opinion and policy even on relatively lower-salience equal opportunity cases does not really refute this tendency, since his lower-salience cases are still rather salient in absolute terms; all involve central provisions of major legislation.) This is very much in accord with E. E. Schattschneider's views concerning the "scope of conflict." When conflict is intense and widespread, even an issue is highly visible, when ordinary citizens are paying attention, citizens are more likely to prevail in policymaking. When politics is quiet, obscure, and out of sight, on the other hand, organized interests (especially corporate interests) are more likely to get their way (Schattschneider 1960, chap. 1 and 2).

One methodological caveat is noticeable: the high-salience/low-salience contrasts in opinion-policy congruence may be an artifact of a tendency for opinion manipulation—rather than genuine policy responsiveness to public opinion—to be greater when the public is more fully engaged. Perhaps elites work harder to bring public opinions into line with what they want when the issues are crucial and the public's inclinations seem threatening. This possibility is less worrisome than the analogous problem with foreign/domestic policy contrasts, however, because foreign policy—in contrast to many high salience domestic issues—regularly involves conditions especially conducive to manipulating public opinion. Foreign policy issues are often obscure, distant from everyday life, and the executive often enjoys a high degree of information control as well as substantial bipartisan deference from other elites. Still, we need to pin down high-versus low-salience distinctions using research techniques that better take account of possibly spurious or reciprocal relationships between opinion and policy.

What about differences in responsiveness to public opinion by different political institutions? Page and Shapiro (1983, p. 18) expressed surprise at finding higher levels of congruence with public opinion on state (as against national) polices. But their study may have magnified the extent of state responsiveness, at the state issues on which they had data were mostly important, nationally polled social issues (capital punishment, divorce, abortion) involving large, sizable, high-salience opinion changes to which high responsiveness would be expected. Stimson, MacRae, and Eskin (1991) found intriguing differences in connections between domestic liberal-conservative mood and policy activity by different institutions. Their estimated reduced-form coefficients (not controlling for party imposition) ranged from .13 to .40 for the Senate and .50 for the House of Representatives down to .20 for the presidency and just .10 for the Supreme Court. Moreover, the mechanisms seemed to differ; House members apparently moved quickly to anticipate and avoid the voters' biennial wrath, whereas the Senate responded to public opinion mainly through electoral replacement (1991, 552-56).

Has policy responsiveness to public opinion varied over time? Lawrence Jacobs and Robert Shapiro in chapter 4 argue that the answer is "yes," based on research by themselves and others. Shapiro (1981) and Page and Shapiro (1983), 106) found varying levels of congruence between opinion change and policy variation depending on the time period (early to late 1980s) and on the type of issue (e.g., crime, welfare). The relationship between opinion and policy has also changed over time in ways that appear to be related to political factors such as the size of government and the extent of federalism. In general, these studies suggest that political institutions and interest groups have become more responsive to public opinion over time, although there are still important differences among institutions and types of policies. 

As we continue to explore foreign/domestic differences, we need to be alert to the possibility highlighted by the work on presidential use of public opinion that Shapiro and Jacobs report in chapter 10 that policymakers may have more control over public opinion than expected. In other words, public opinion may not be as responsive to foreign/domestic differences as we thought. This is an important consideration, especially in light of the growing trend towards globalization and the increasing influence of international organizations and entities on national policy decisions.
change in different historical periods, with peak (75%) congruence in 1960-70, the New Deal period came in second at 69%, but after 1945 there was a slow, steady decline in congruence to the 45% level of 1956-68, before the jump to 75% in 1969-79. In a preliminary study of social welfare issues, Jacob and Shapiro found a drop in congruence in the post-1970 period. Monroe (1994), whose estimate of 45% consistency between policy and majority opinion in 1960-79 is quite consistent with Shapiro's congruence estimates for that same period, found a subsequent drop to 15% consistency in 1980-93.

As Jacobs and Shapiro acknowledge, the evidence for a recent drop in responsiveness is still preliminary and tentative; more research will be needed to firmly establish or refute it. In the case the finding holds up, however, Jacobs and Shapiro (here and in their 2000 book) have offered some rather convincing explanations for the drop, including the sharply increased party polarization in Washington and presidents' increased capability (through the institutionalization of "public opinion apparatus") to learn about public opinion and attempt to craft talk that will educe or manipulate it. It would also emphasize, perhaps most strongly than Jacobs and Shapiro do, other factors that may have contributed to a decline in responsiveness to public opinion. First is the long-term evolution in the already limited membership and political power of organized labor in the United States (see Goldfield 1987). Though often ignored, this is arguably one of the most important facts about politics in the United States as opposed to the rest of the industrialized world. Labor's decline has largely removed as key political actors internationalizing the views of millions of ordinary citizens and countervailing the power of business corporations. Second, the increasing globalization (increased trade flows, immigration, and, especially, capital mobility) has greatly enhanced the political power of business, by increasing the credibility and political pressure of the "offshore" political pressure. Third is the increasing concentration of power in corporate finance and the ensuing flood of "soft money" into the electoral process, which has probably increased the political power of moneyed minorities and decreased the influence of ordinary citizens on policy (Drew 1999).

If the recent trend in responsiveness is real and if these factors have contributed to it—perhaps more or less than we have been discussing for a long time (Burnham 1976, Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995)—then to respect popular control of government will be no simple matter.

**HOW TO MEASURE PUBLIC OPINION**

I have so far ignored the more important question of how public opinion—especially citizens' policy preferences—should be measured. Implicitly, I have assumed the dominant view that polls and surveys do it best, but that assumption is incorrect. To determine the political preferences of the public, one must not only assess public opinion, but also track how public opinion changes over time. This requires the use of survey research methods, which are the focus of this chapter.
of many different people on a particular issue, the most feasible way to do so is usually to ask them identical, specific questions about that issue. It can be enlightening to observe natural-setting conversations, letters, demonstrations, and the like, but such observations cannot generally provide the comparable information we need about everyone's views on a specific matter. Moreover, if we want to know the views of millions of citizens, it is not generally feasible to ask questions of everyone, much better to ask questions of a small but statistically representative sample.

Representativeness constitutes the prime advantage of surveys, both for the empirical purposes that Miller notes and for normative purposes. The sort of public opinion most relevant to democratic theory as I conceive it (granted, this is a liberal, individual-based democratic theory) consists of the aggregated policy preferences of all citizens, with each individual citizen weighted equally. I am unversed in political equality as absolutely central to democracy. Properly designed and analyzed surveys can deliver a good, highly representative picture of what citizens as a collectivity think, free of the participatory biases inherent in other measures of public opinion (see Verba 1996). Yes, we have to be careful about selective (and untoward) question asking, the vagaries of question wording, effects of interview context, sampling complexities due to new technology and altered ownership patterns, relabel, problems, possible biases in "don't know" responses, and so forth. These are serious problems, but they are not beyond our power to solve.

Indeed, as Humphrey Taylor points out in chapter 17—with a refreshing dose of comparative, outside-the-U.S. perspective—the existence of free, independent public opinion polls may be quite crucial to the establishment of political accountability and democracy. Polls make decision makers aware of what the public wants so that they can take public opinion into account. And accurate polls can expose (hence sometimes prevent) the stealing of elections.

Alternative measures of public opinion, in contrast to survey-based measures, are all subject to biases that tend to make them highly unrepresentative. Interest groups, for example, are notoriously unrepresentative of ordinary citizens. As practically every scholar since Maurice Olsen (1946) has recognized, David Truman's broadly based "potential groups" have trouble forming because of freerider problems. Actual groups tend to represent businesses, producers, and upper-income professionals much better than they represent workers, consumers, or middle-class people (Scholzman and Tierney 1986). Newspaper editorialists and other media voices often express very unrepresentative political opinions. Demonstrators, letter writers, party activists, and the like tend to be quite unlike ordinary citizens in their views and demography, with higher incomes, more formal education, and more extreme opinions (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995).

Hence, like Koff and Ramsey, provides some important findings about how politicians and their staffs often rely for readings of "public opinion" upon these biased sources rather than on polls or surveys. Hence, we need to know more about exactly why they do sit; besides nonavailability of pertinent surveys, one factor may be the electoral importance of unrepresentative activists, money givers, and organized groups. But I have no doubt that, in terms of democratic theory, they should rely, whenever possible, on more representative survey measures. The normative features of survey-based measures of public opinion make poll data—and their relation to policymaking—well worth studying. Democratic theory has provided a major motivation for researchers who, in this volume and elsewhere, have investigated connections between public opinion and policymaking. Poll data necessarily play a central part in such investigations.

That said, it does not follow that existing poll data are perfect or cannot be improved. Several of our authors, in fact, have suggested highly promising improvements.

Charles Manzki, for example (in chap. 14), proposes survey techniques to ascertain citizens' voting intentions in a fine-grained probabilistic fashion, rather than the usual dichotomous "Would you be more likely to vote for Bush or Gore?" or the crude verbal "How likely are you to vote? Very likely? Not too likely?" The preliminary evidence indicates that most citizens are able to assign meaningful numerical probability figures to their likelihood of voting for a particular candidate or to their likelihood of voting at all. Probabilistic data promise to be particularly useful for predicting outcomes in elections with multiple candidates (e.g., third-party candidates like Ralph Nader) and for studying the determinants—both over time and across individuals—of higher and lower uncertainty about voting.

Similarly, James Witte and Philip Howard in chapter 15 describe some exciting actual and potential uses for on-line survey research. Internet-based surveys would seem to be especially promising for the study of small, specialized, dispersed population subgroups (e.g., members of the John Birch Society, fans of National Geographic), where conventional surveys—even telephone surveys with screeners—would be far more expensive. And they are best suited for topics for which the wording problems of nonrepresentativeness (due to differential access to computers, self-selection of respondents, multiple hits by individuals, and even organized campaigns to "flood" surveys) are minimal. I would not, however, expect on-line surveys to replace conventional sample surveys any time soon in ascertaining Americans' collective policy preferences.

In chapter 15, Martin Gilens clearly describes the great power of survey experiments (relying on differential treatment of random subsets of respondents, especially through CATI technology) to illuminate a wide range of substantive and methodological issues. Experiments on question wording, question content, the interview relationship, and survey modes can help us improve survey data and analysis by pinning down the precise impact of using such trickier response words as "favor," and of priming respondents with cases about crime rates or foreign oil spending, relying on male versus female (or black vs. white) interviewers, using "secret ballots," mail surveys, or list techniques rather than straightforward
we have seen evidence that organized interests and policymakers themselves may sometimes shape public opinion rather than being moved by it.

The leading quantitative studies of opinion-policy links offer a number of important findings, but close scrutiny of these studies reveals a consistent tendency to overstate the impact of opinion on policy. Sampling and aggregation biases, as well as specification errors—especially the omission of variables that may influence both opinion and policy and generate spurious opinion-policy relationships—and failures to identify reciprocal effects of policy on opinion—effect all these studies to varying degrees and severely inflate their estimates of opinion's impact on policy. As a number of case studies confirm, the true relationship between opinion and policy is far from perfect.

If the empirical evidence does, in fact, support the views of Key and Schattschneider, and if we accept a populistic democratic theory that calls for close adherence of policy to the preferences of ordinary citizens, then the U.S. political system has a long way to go before it becomes fully democratic. And if our authors are right about the factors that impede responsiveness—such as increased party polarization in Washington, clever "crafted talk" by policymakers, economic globalization, and increasingly powerful political money, along with the separation of powers, the weakness of labor unions, the lobbying power of business and other organized interests, and restricted, class-based political participation—then movement toward more democracy will require considerable political struggle.

NOTES
1. In self-defense, I should point out that Page and Shapiro (1988) correctly qualified their findings and acknowledged that democracy worked perfectly in the United States. Still, it is true that Shapiro and I have subsequently come to put a greater emphasis on the undemocratic, non-popular influences on American politics, as we have pointed out those influences to grow in importance.
2. Mark Smith's (2000) data indicating that business (as represented by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce) has a good many highly visible allies on which it takes a stand (does not necessarily contradict this point. Such public stands may be taken more often on the (perhaps relatively dis interfered) occasions on which business is already losing, rather than being held or defeated, even at the outset. If, in my view, Smith is more interested in variations in business success over time, then the level of success, which he considered hard to measure objectively (pp. 79-80).
3. Thus, the difference in time periods over which different polls were taken may not translate into variations in the postulated public "intensity," over that period. Hence, one should not act too early when the measured mood or the point is too early for one's position to be made clear. If it is too early for the test of variance in individual items, even if the actual relationships were perfect.
4. The authors' estimates—using an eigenvector scaling—that "about half" of the variance in selected time series is common variance (see chap. 4, especially footnote 45) may come close to the truth, the 24% and 24% figure that I suggest. But to neglect even half the variance in such, standardized public opinion items is to neglect a lot. And seem...
time series and isolated items that may be particularly difficult to track a simple liberal-conservative mood.

4. An exception is Moeen (1975, 1978), whose "consistency" measure tries to assess discrepancies between the level of policies at a given moment and majority public preferences at that moment. But such judgments are necessarily difficult and subjective when (as is usually the case) opinion and policy are not measured on identical metrics.

5. If opinion and policy are measured on identical metrics, as is arguably true in Achen (1982), a constant deviation of policy from opinion should appear in the intercept term of a regression or in a simple arithmetic difference between the average values of the two variables. (See the intercept terms in Achen's 1978, pp. 495-496) estimates of "empirical," which do, in fact, suggest a degree of bias.

6. The authors do, however, regroup—by way of an ambiguous reference—by chapter 9.

7. A simulation result not included in the final version of chapter 9 actually produced an example of "negative representation" in policy activity. When the authors modestly disturbed public opinion by every year starting in 1977 adding an extra unit of liberalism to the "Democratic Policy Mood," this disturbance worked its way through the political system, tipping control of Congress to the Democrats in 1984 and 1986, and having a rather prolonged impact on policy activity that was larger than the change in public opinion itself. The authors did not claim that such an effect would be typical, but it did follow from their model.

8. Burstein, Bayldon, and Freese (2000) make this point concrete by tabulating the vast number of issues on the legislative agenda, few of which are the subject of opinion polls, and by noting that least legislative activity is a "virtually invisible" to the public. Studying a stratified random sample of policy proposals, they find responsiveness to public opinion to be very low, by conventional measures, though Congress seldom acts in direct opposition to the measured preferences of the public.

9. To be sure, measurement error in the opinion variable may have led the estimates of direct effects of Soviet spending to overstate the own impact that actually occurred indirectly through public opinion and should be attributed, in the sense of prospective causes, to opinion.

10. See Burstein, Bayldon, and Freese (2000). Note that even the modest levels of opinion-policy congruence that Page and Shapiro (1992) estimated for lower salience issues were presumably biased upward by the tendency of nonopinion independent variables, by its partial failure to rule out reciprocal causation, and by the fact that it considered only cases in which both public opinion and policy moved significantly and measurably (not created in instances of nonresonance, and in which public opinion did not move but policy did, or in which public preferences changed but policy did not.)

11. William Moeen's (1975, 1978) research design, however, issues of political influence a high hurdle for achieving consensus because they inherently involve ad hoc departures from the status quo. Measured policy consistency is thus higher on opinion items that do not call for such departures.

12. Nonsensical and "don't know" biases are particularly threatening to the substantive status of surveys, if the views of citizens with low political information (and often lower income) need to be understood (see Achen 1990). But these biases may not be too enormous. Achen's simulation of "full information" preferences found an average of seven percentage points of change in marginal frequencies. By my calculation, however, a measured majority actually switched sides on only two of his forty-five issues (i.e. 2:5).

REFERENCES


