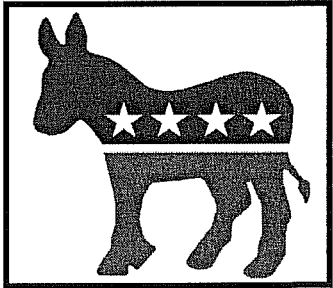
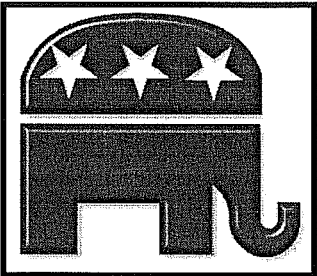
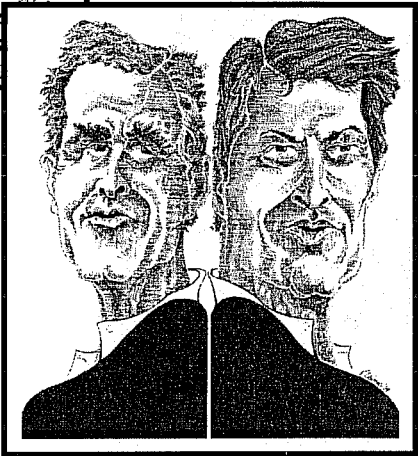
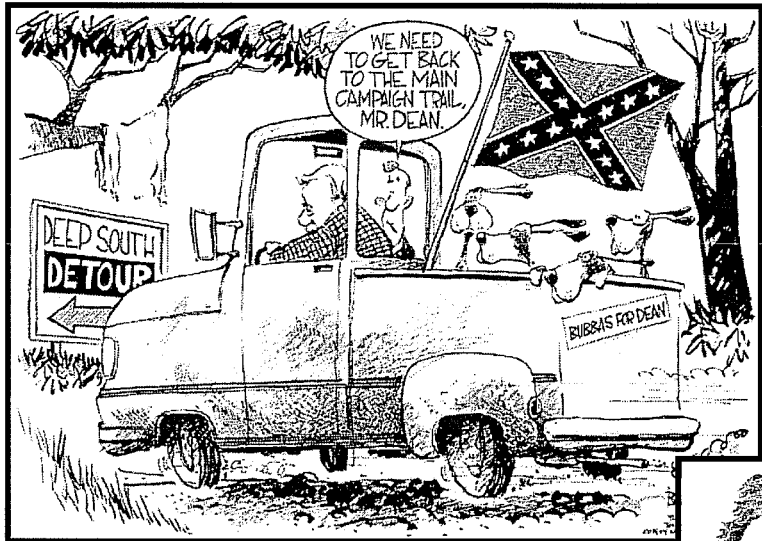
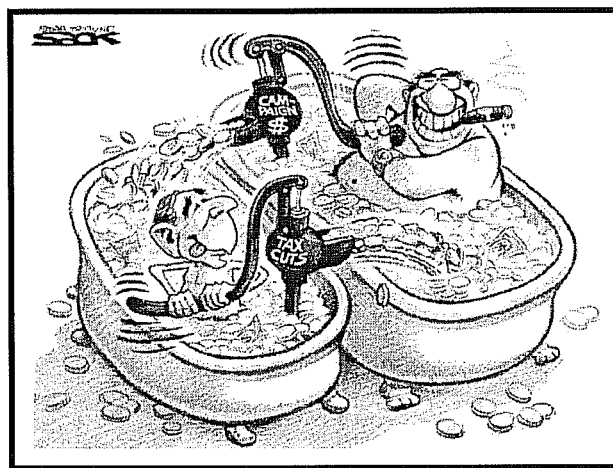
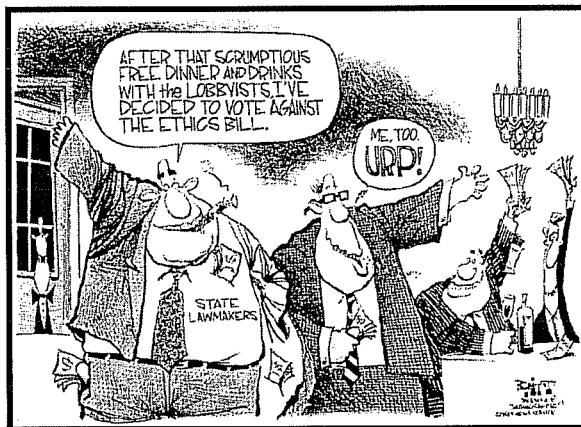
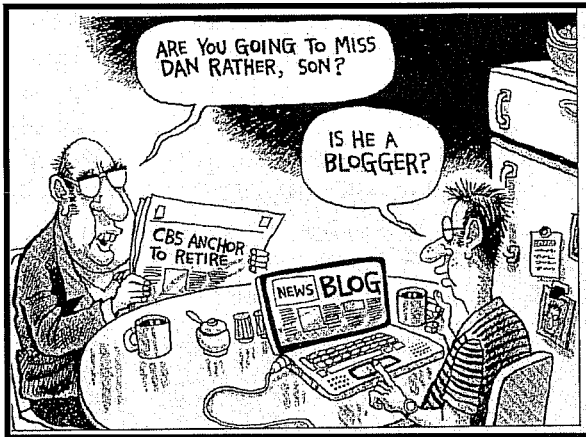


ADVANCED PLACEMENT GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS READER



UNIT II: OPINIONS, INTERESTS, AND ORGANIZATIONS

Unit II: Opinions, Interests, and Organizations



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Assessing public opinion in a democracy of 250 million people is no easy task. George Gallup, who is largely responsible for the development of modern opinion polling, argued that public opinion polls enhanced the democratic process by providing elected officials with a picture of what Americans think about current events. Despite Gallup's vigorous defense of his polling techniques and the contribution of polling to democracy, the public opinion poll remains controversial. While some express concern about the representativeness of "the public" through sampling techniques, others argue that opinion polls can be overemphasized by elected officials who should exercise informed, independent judgment rather than respond to rapid and short-term fluctuations in public opinion.

George Gallup "Polling the Public"

We have a national election every two years only. In a world which moves as rapidly as the modern world does, it is often desirable to know the people's will on basic policies at more frequent intervals. We cannot put issues off and say "let them be decided at the next election." World events do not wait on elections. We need to know the will of the people at all times.

If we know the collective will of the people at all times the efficiency of democracy can be increased, because we can substitute specific knowledge of public opinion for blind groping and guesswork. Statesmen who know the true state of public opinion can then formulate plans with a sure knowledge of what the voting public is thinking. They can know what degree of opposition to any proposed plan exists, and what efforts are necessary to gain public acceptance for it. The responsibility for initiating action should, as always, rest with the political leaders of the country. But the collective will or attitude of the people needs to be learned without delay.

THE WILL OF THE PEOPLE

How is the will of the people to be known at all times?

Before I offer an answer to this question, I would like to examine some of the principal channels by which, at the present time, public opinion is expressed.

The most important is of course a national election. An election is the only official and binding expression of the people's judgment. But, as viewed from a strictly objective point of view, elections are a confusing and imperfect way of registering national opinion. In the first place, they come only at infrequent intervals. In the second place, as Bryce pointed out in *The American Commonwealth*, it is virtually impossible to separate issues from

candidates. How can we tell whether the public is voting for the man or for his platform? How can we tell whether all the candidate's views are endorsed, or whether some are favored and others opposed by the voters? Because society grows more and more complex, the tendency is to have more and more issues in an election. Some may be discussed; others not. Suppose a candidate for office takes a position on a great many public issues during the campaign. If elected, he inevitably assumes that the public has endorsed all his planks, whereas this may actually not be the case. * * *

THE ROLE OF THE ELECTED REPRESENTATIVE

A second method by which public opinion now expresses itself is through elected representatives. The legislator is, technically speaking, supposed to represent the interests of all voters in his constituency. But under the two-party system there is a strong temptation for him to represent, and be influenced by, only the voters of his own party. He is subject to the pressure of party discipline and of wishes of party leaders back home. His very continuance in office may depend on giving way to such pressure. Under these circumstances his behavior in Congress is likely to be governed not by what he thinks the voters of his State want, but by what he thinks the leaders of his own party in that State want. * * *

Even in the event that an elected representative does try to perform his duty of representing the whole people, he is confronted with the problem: What is the will of the people? Shall he judge their views by the letters they write him or the telegrams they send him? Too often such expressions of opinion come only from an articulate minority. Shall the congressman judge their views by the visitors or delegations that come to him from his home district?

PRESSURE GROUPS AND THE WHOLE NATION

Legislators are constantly subject to the influence of organized lobbies and pressure groups. Senator Tydings, in a lecture here in Princeton, pointed out recently that the United States is the most fertile soil on earth for the activity of pressure groups. The American people represent a conglomeration of races, all with different cultural backgrounds. Sections and groups struggle with one another to fix national and international policy. And frequently in such struggles, as Senator Tydings pointed out, "self-interest and sectionalism, rather than the promotion of national welfare, dominate the contest." Senator Tydings mentions some twenty important group interests. These include labor, agriculture, veterans, pension plan advocates, chambers of commerce, racial organizations, isolationists and internationalists, high-tariff and low-tariff groups, preparedness and disarmament groups, budget balancers and spending advocates, soft-money as-

sociations and hard-money associations, transportation groups and states righters and centralizationists.

The legislator obviously owes a duty to his home district to legislate in its best interests. But he also owes a duty to legislate in the best interests of the whole nation. In order, however, to carry out this second duty he must *know* what the nation thinks. Since he doesn't always know what the voters in his own district think, it is just that much more difficult for him to learn the views of the nation. Yet if he could know those views at all times he could legislate more often in the interest of the whole country. * * *

THE CROSS-SECTION SURVEY

This effort to discover public opinion has been largely responsible for the introduction of a new instrument for determining public opinion—the cross-section or sampling survey. By means of nationwide studies taken at frequent intervals, research workers are today attempting to measure and give voice to the sentiments of the whole people on vital issues of the day.

Where does this new technique fit into the scheme of things under our form of government? Is it a useful instrument of democracy? Will it prove to be vicious and harmful, or will it contribute to the efficiency of the democratic process?

The sampling referendum is simply a procedure for sounding the opinions of a relatively small number of persons, selected in such manner as to reflect with a high degree of accuracy the views of the whole voting population. In effect such surveys canvass the opinions of a miniature electorate.

Cross-section surveys do not place their chief reliance upon numbers. The technique is based on the fact that a few thousand voters correctly selected will faithfully reflect the views of an electorate of millions of voters. The key to success in this work is the cross section—the proper selection of voters included in the sample. Elaborate precautions must be taken to secure the views of members of all political parties—of rich and poor, old and young, of men and women, farmers and city dwellers, persons of all religious faiths—in short, voters of all types living in every State in the land. And all must be included in correct proportion. * * *

RELIABILITY OF OPINION SURVEYS

Whether opinion surveys will prove to be a useful contribution to democracy depends largely on their reliability in measuring opinion. During the last four years the sampling procedure, as used in measuring public opinion, has been subjected to many tests. In general these tests indicate that present techniques can attain a high degree of accuracy, and it seems reasonable to assume that with the development of this infant science, the accuracy of its measurements will be constantly improved.

The most practical way at present to measure the accuracy of the sampling referendum is to compare forecasts of elections with election results. Such a test is by no means perfect, because a preelection survey must not only measure opinion in respect to candidates but must also predict just what groups of people will actually take the trouble to cast their ballots. Add to this the problem of measuring the effect of weather on turnout, also the activities of corrupt political machines, and it can easily be seen that election results are by no means a perfect test of the accuracy of this new technique. * * *

Many thoughtful students of government have asked: Why shouldn't the Government itself, rather than private organizations, conduct these sampling surveys? A few political scientists have even suggested the establishment of a permanent federal bureau for sounding public opinion, arguing that if this new technique is a contribution to democracy, the government has a duty to take it over.

The danger in this proposal, as I see it, lies in the temptation it would place in the way of the party in power to conduct surveys to prove itself right and to suppress those which proved it to be wrong. A private organization, on the other hand, must stand or fall not so much on what it reports or fails to report as on the accuracy of its results, and the impartiality of its interpretations. An important requirement in a democracy is complete and reliable news reports of the activities of all branches of the government and of the views of all leaders and parties. But few persons would argue that, for this reason, the government should take over the press, and all its news gathering associations. * * *

CLOTURE ON DEBATE?

It is sometimes argued that public opinion surveys impose a cloture on debate. When the advocates of one side of an issue are shown to be in the majority, so the argument runs, the other side will lose hope and abandon their cause believing that further efforts are futile.

Again let me say that there is little evidence to support this view. Every election necessarily produces a minority. In 1936 the Republicans polled less than 40 percent of the vote. Yet the fact that the Republicans were defeated badly wasn't enough to lead them to quit the battle. They continued to fight against the New Deal with as much vigor as before. An even better example is afforded by the Socialist Party. For years the Socialist candidate for President has received but a small fraction of the total popular vote, and could count on sure defeat. Yet the Socialist Party continues as a party, and continues to poll about the same number of votes.

Sampling surveys will never impose a cloture on debate so long as it is the nature of public opinion to change. The will of the people is dynamic; opinions are constantly changing. A year ago an overwhelming majority of voters were skeptical of the prospects of the Republican Party in 1940. To-

day, half the voters think the G.O.P. will win. If elections themselves do not impose cloture on debate, is it likely that opinion surveys will?

POSSIBLE EFFECT ON REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT

The form of government we live under is a representative form of government. What will be the effect on representative government if the will of the people is known at all times? Will legislators become mere rubber stamps, mere puppets, and the function of representation be lost?

Under a system of frequent opinion measurement, the function of representation is not lost, for two reasons. First, it is well understood that the people have not the time or the inclination to pass on all the problems that confront their leaders. They cannot be expected to express judgment on technical questions of administration and government. They can pass judgment only on basic general policies. As society grows more complex there is a greater and greater need for experts. Once the voters have indicated their approval of a general policy or plan of action, experts are required to carry it out.

Second, it is not the province of the people to initiate legislation, but to decide which of the programs offered they like best. National policies do not spring full-blown from the common people. Leaders, knowing the general will of the people, must take the initiative in forming policies that will carry out the general will and must put them into effect.

Before the advent of the sampling referendum, legislators were not isolated from their constituencies. They read the local newspapers; they toured their districts and talked with voters; they received letters from their home State; they entertained delegations who claimed to speak for large and important blocs of voters. The change that is brought about by sampling referenda is merely one which provides these legislators with a truer measure of opinion in their districts and in the nation. * * *

HOW WISE ARE THE COMMON PEOPLE?

The sampling surveys of recent years have provided much evidence concerning the wisdom of the common people. Anyone is free to examine this evidence. And I think that the person who does examine it will come away believing as I do that, collectively, the American people have a remarkably high degree of common sense. These people may not be brilliant or intellectual or particularly well read, but they possess a quality of good sense which is manifested time and again in their expressions of opinion on present-day issues. * * *

It is not difficult to understand why the conception of the stupidity of the masses has so many adherents. Talk to the first hundred persons whom you happen to meet in the street about many important issues of

the day, and the chances are great that you will be struck by their lack of accurate or complete knowledge on these issues. Few of them will likely have sufficient information in this particular field to express a well founded judgment.

But fortunately a democracy does not require that every voter be well informed on every issue. In fact a democracy does not depend so much on the enlightenment of each individual, as upon the quality of the collective judgment or intelligence of thousands of individuals. * * *

It would of course be foolish to argue that the collective views of the common people always represent the most intelligent and most accurate answer to any question. But results of sampling referenda on hundreds of issues do indicate, in my opinion, that we can place great faith in the collective judgment or intelligence of the people.

THE NEW ENGLAND TOWN MEETING RESTORED

One of the earliest and purest forms of democracy in this country was the New England town meeting. The people gathered in one room to discuss and to vote on the questions of the community. There was a free exchange of opinions in the presence of all the members. The town meeting was a simple and effective way of articulating public opinion, and the decisions made by the meeting kept close to the public will. When a democracy thus operates on a small scale it is able to express itself swiftly and with certainty.

But as communities grew, the town meeting became unwieldy. As a result the common people became less articulate, less able to debate the vital issues in the manner of their New England forefathers. Interest in politics lagged. Opinion had to express itself by the slow and cumbersome method of election, no longer facilitated by the town meeting with its frequent give and take of ideas. The indifference and apathy of voters made it possible for vicious and corrupt political machines to take over the administration of government in many states and cities.

The New England town meeting was valuable because it provided a forum for the exchange of views among all citizens of the community and for a vote on these views. Today, the New England town meeting idea has, in a sense, been restored. The wide distribution of daily newspapers reporting the views of statesmen on issues of the day, the almost universal ownership of radios which bring the whole nation within the hearing of any voice, and now the advent of the sampling referendum which provides a means of determining quickly the response of the public to debate on issues of the day, have in effect created a town meeting on a national scale.

How nearly the goal has been achieved is indicated in the following data recently gathered by the American Institute of Public Opinion. Of the 45,000,000 persons who voted in the last presidential election, approximately 40,000,000 read a daily newspaper, 40,000,000 have radios, and

only 2,250,000 of the entire group of voters in the nation neither have a radio nor take a daily newspaper.

This means that the nation is literally in one great room. The newspapers and the radio conduct the debate on national issues, presenting both information and argument on both sides, just as the townsfolk did in person in the old town meeting. And finally, through the process of the sampling referendum, the people, having heard the debate on both sides of every issue, can express their will. After one hundred and fifty years we return to the town meeting. This time the whole nation is within the doors.

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9

Public Opinion

See Lowi and Ginsberg, pp. 356–69, or brief edition, pp. 210–16

Are the media to blame for America's cynical and antagonistic view of politics? Critics of the media argue that the airwaves are full of negative commentators bent on exposing every public official's moral warts; network news coverage of campaigns reduces complex issues to trivial, quick sound bites. For every critic who claims that the media has a liberal slant, another alleges a conservative bias. Nobody, it seems, is happy with media coverage of politics.

The problem, Michael Nelson argues, is not the media. It is also not the politicians, the political process, or the political parties. The problem is that Americans hold tightly to fundamental, but contradictory, values about the way in which the American political system should work. First, we believe that government ought to function according to a higher law or "ultimate standard of right." Second, Americans believe that government ought to function according to "popular sovereignty"—it ought to do what the people want. Nelson argues that the problem is these two values can and often do conflict: What the people want is not always the same as the principles set out in higher law. Consequently, when government inevitably fails to meet both standards, we do not blame our governing principles or ourselves, but rather the politicians, the institutions within which they exercise their authority, or the media.

Michael Nelson

"Why Americans Hate Politics and Politicians"

Do psychiatrists still use word-association techniques with their patients? You know what I mean: Dr. Jungfreud says "food" and the patient says "mother," the doctor says "girls" and the patient says "mother," the doctor says "father" and the patient says "mother," and quickly they realize that the patient has a hangup with his mother. Modern psychiatric practices notwithstanding, I sometimes do a little word association on the first day of my introductory American government classes at Rhodes College. The first word I say is "politics" and back come the replies from the students (not "mother"): "corrupt," they say, "dirty," "games-playing," "ego trip," "a waste." (The nicest thing I heard the last time I did this was "bor-

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ing.") Here is what they say in response to "politician": "selfish," "ambitious," "mediocre," "unprincipled."

* * *

Why do Americans hate politics and politicians? There is no scarcity of answers to this question. 1993 being the 30th anniversary of President John F. Kennedy's assassination and the 25th anniversary of the assassinations of his brother Robert and of Martin Luther King, Jr., much was made of the despair about politics that spread among the American people in the wake of those brutal deaths. Other explanations of our distrust and cynicism are grounded in the lies and half-truths the government told about the Vietnam war and about Watergate and all its many offspring: Koreagate, Irangate, Iraqgate, and, most recently, Whitewatergate, to name but a few. The media is another likely suspect—remodeled network evening news programs that treat politics and government with a sneer, now joined by new-style trash TV news shows and radio talk shows (Rush Limbaugh, can you hear me?) that are overtly hostile to politics and politicians. On top of all that, professional political consultants use the media to air their increasingly negative campaign ads, the cumulative effect of which, some argue, is to convince Americans that all the candidates in all our elections are bums.

Still other explanations of our cynicism and indifference may be found in two recent and very thoughtful books by journalists. E. J. Dionne of *The Washington Post*, in the book whose title I have adapted for this essay—*Why Americans Hate Politics*—blames the poverty of our prevailing political ideologies. "Liberalism and conservatism are framing political issues as a series of false choices. . . ." he writes. "On issue after issue, there is consensus [among the public] on where the country should move or at least on what we should be arguing about; [but] liberalism and conservatism make it impossible for that consensus to express itself." Most Americans agree, for example, that to help lift the underclass out of poverty will require some combination of government help *and* greater personal responsibility. But, Dionne argues, conservatives don't want to admit the need for government help and liberals don't want to tell poor people to take responsibility for their lives, so nothing is done. The progress of welfare reform in Washington will provide a good test of how far the political process has come on this issue.

Another journalist, Alan Ehrenhalt, turns his gaze to the politicians in a book called *The United States of Ambition*. Ehrenhalt argues that running for and serving in political office has become so time consuming and demanding that only people who are willing to become fulltime politicians can do it. Pernicious effects flow from this modern fact of political life. The talent pool from which leaders are drawn has narrowed—it now excludes the business or professional person (much less the blue collar or pink collar worker) who could spare some time for public service but not abandon a career or job to do so. The talent pool also includes many more

liberals than conservatives, according to Ehrenhalt. Liberals, after all, like government and are more likely to be drawn to it on a fulltime basis. And with politics as their vocation, those who are elected in the modern era feel compelled to do everything they can to stay in office.

All of these explanations of why Americans hate politics and politicians have three things in common. First, they all point the blame away from the American people and fix it on somebody else—politicians, political consultants, the media, liberals, conservatives, assassins, and so on. (How convenient for us.) Second, they are all ahistorical, grounded almost entirely in recent events and developments. Third, they are all partial explanations—accurate, especially in explaining why antipolitical feelings are higher now than ever, but accurate only to a degree. In truth, there has never been a time when Americans were pro-politics and pro-politicians. Historically, the United States has lagged far behind other Western democracies in the development and extent of its welfare state. The American approach has been to regulate businesses rather than nationalize them. Political ideologies that exalt government—from fascism to communism—simply have not taken root in American soil; the United States is the only Western country in which Socialists were never able to form a leading political party. We seem to be antipolitical in our very bones.

II

Clearly another piece needs to be added to the great jigsaw puzzle that, once assembled, can reveal why Americans hate politics and politicians. This new piece would be a picture of us—of “we the people”—and not just of us in this generation but us through all the generations that, taken together, constitute the history of the United States. The label on the new piece would read: “American political culture.”

American political culture consists of our longstanding, widely-shared, and deeply-felt values about how the political system ought to work (our process values) and the ends it ought to serve (our purpose values). It has become fashionable to speak of multiculturalism, and in many areas of American life it is accurate to do so as well. But when it comes to the purposes the political system ought to serve, almost everything that Americans in all their hyphenated variety have ever valued can be grouped under the headings “liberty” and “equality.” One can argue—as Americans have for more than two centuries—about what these values mean and how they should be applied in specific situations. But liberty and equality are the banners under which such battles invariably are fought.

More pertinent to the question of why Americans hate politics and politicians are the process values of our political culture, our values concerning how the American political system ought to work, the rules of the game.

Deeply rooted in American political culture—that is, in us—is the be-

lief that government ought to work in accordance with "higher law," some ultimate standard of right.

* * *

"Higher law" philosophy certainly prevailed in the America of 1776, when, as the historian Gordon Wood has shown, "the traditional covenant theology of Puritanism combined with the political science of the eighteenth century [Enlightenment] into an imperatively persuasive argument for revolution." (If that seems densely academic, does this sound more familiar? "We hold these *truths* to be *self-evident*." That is higher law philosophy in a nutshell.) And it endures in the modern practice of inscribing our ideals into public policy.

* * *

But Americans' political process values include more than higher law. They also believe that the political system ought to operate in accordance with "popular sovereignty," a value that consists of the related beliefs that the only legitimate basis of political authority is the consent of the governed ("government of the people," to quote another greatest hit from American history) and that government is supposed to work in accordance with what the public wants ("government by the people"). The belief in popular sovereignty not only infuses virtually every political writing of the founding period, but it forms the philosophical foundation of the Constitution itself: "We the people . . . do ordain and establish this Constitution of the United States of America." * * * Since 1787, the belief in popular sovereignty has manifested itself in an endless and, by the standards of other Western nations, radical series of democratic reforms: universal suffrage; primaries, initiatives, referendums, recalls; and direct election of senators, presidential electors, and, in many states, judges, school boards, sheriffs, clerks, trustees, and commissioners—the American people are asked to speak authoritatively in so many ways. Popular sovereignty also underlies Americans' widely shared expectations of members of Congress and other legislators, whom we insist should vote in accordance with our wishes, not with their own considered judgments as to what is best.

Matters grow especially interesting when these two process values from the political culture are laid alongside each other, which is what most of us do, without thinking very much about it, in our own minds. Let's review the bidding. As Americans, we believe that government is supposed to work according to higher law—a fixed, external, eternal standard of right that is embodied in the Constitution. We also believe that it is supposed to work according to what the people want—popular sovereignty. An obvious problem arises. Which standard is supposed to prevail when what the higher law seems to require and what the people want are not the same? Never fear—Americans take pride in being great problem-solvers. And one of the most effective strategies for dealing with problems is to pretend

that they do not exist. That is what we have done in this case. Listen, for example, to that great American problem-solver, Andrew Jackson:

I believe that man can be elevated; man can become more and more endowed with divinity; and as he does he becomes more God-like in his character and capable of governing himself. Let us go on elevating our people, perfecting our institutions, until democracy shall reach such a point of perfection that we can acclaim with truth that the voice of the people is the voice of God.

Vox populi, vox dei—the voice of the people is the voice of God. How convenient the doctrine that allows us to believe that popular sovereignty will never conflict with the higher law.

And the doctrine endures, as reflected in comparative studies of civic competence and social trust in a number of Western democracies. To a far greater extent than Britons, Germans, Austrians, Netherlanders, Mexicans, Italians, and the French, Americans have been found to feel personally competent to participate intelligently in politics and to trust each other to do the same. In short, we see no contradiction between government of the people and by the people, and government for the people.

Americans also revere the Constitution. Ask a random sample of Europeans (as political scientists have done) what they are proudest of about their country and they are likely to mention its physical beauty or cultural achievements; ask Americans the same question and they will describe their form of government—democracy, freedom, “all men are created equal,” etc. When Americans travel to Washington with their families (which most who can afford to do so eventually do), they are making pilgrimages of a sort. They visit the city’s sacred shrines to Lincoln, Washington, Jefferson, Kennedy, and our fallen soldiers. They gaze upon its sacred texts—the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence—at the National Archives. They visit its temples of law and democracy—the Supreme Court, the Capitol, the White House. Their attitude is serious, even reverential; their gaze open-mouthed.

Why, then, do Americans hate politics and politicians? We hate them because we have left ourselves no alternative. When things go wrong, as most people think they have in the political system, we have no one else to blame. We can not blame the Constitution for what is wrong—far from it, it is our embodiment of higher law. And we certainly are not about to blame ourselves. And so we blame the only people who are left—the politicians. And they, wanting to please us, are only too happy to confirm us in our beliefs by pointing their own fingers of blame at each other.

for equality in freedom; if they cannot obtain that, they still call for equality in slavery. They will endure poverty, servitude, barbarism—but they will not endure aristocracy.

This is true at all times, and especially true in our own. All men and all powers seeking to cope with this irresistible passion, will be overthrown and destroyed by it. In our age, freedom cannot be established without it, and despotism itself cannot reign without its support. ■



American Politics Today

Politics in the modern era hardly seems to support the idea that Americans are united in a common political culture. Instead, politics today seems to emphasize a wide range of conflicts over fundamental values. Some Americans have even proclaimed the existence of a “culture war,” starkly dividing the nation as never before.

The culture conflicts of the present day, write the *Washington Post* reporters David S. Broder and Richard Morin, can be traced to the struggles of the 1960s. Moreover, Americans do not line up neatly on one side or the other of the cultural battlefield. Instead, as the public’s reaction to the Bill Clinton–Monica Lewinsky affair suggests, many Americans are deeply torn between the two sides.

Questions

1. What values were challenged by the cultural “revolution” of the 1960s? What values struggled to emerge in their place? How were these conflicting values reflected in the contentious politics surrounding the Clinton impeachment controversy?
2. Do modern controversies over values threaten to undermine the existence of a distinctive and unified American political culture? Or should these conflicts be seen as taking place under the broad umbrella of American political culture?

5.2 A Question of Values (1999)

David S. Broder and Richard Morin

The sharply divided public reaction to the impeachment of President Clinton has provided a dramatic showcase of a struggle for American values that goes back to the 1960s and remains unresolved today.

David S. Broder and Richard Morin, “A Question of Values,” *Washington Post*, January 11, 1999, pp. 6–7, Weekly Edition. Copyright © 1999, The Washington Post. Reprinted with permission.

As an emblematic figure from that troubled decade, polls and analysts say, Clinton confronts his fellow citizens with choices between deeply held moral standards and an abhorrence of judging others' behavior, a conflict the baby boomers have stirred all their adult lives.

This survey about values by The Washington Post, the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation and Harvard University follows on reports emphasizing the growing tolerance Americans now display for groups such as homosexuals that have suffered discrimination and toward practices ranging from interracial marriage to premarital sex that once might have been condemned. That tolerance also extends to free expression of controversial views.

But few issues are more revealing than Clinton's impeachment when it comes to highlighting how values have changed over the past 30 years. Almost without exception, experts interviewed said the public verdict in his case is far different than it would have been in the late '60s because the values environment has changed.

That conflict over the social order is notably less violent than it was in 1968, when the assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy, anti-Vietnam War demonstrations, urban riots, and violent clashes between police and protesters at the Democratic National Convention scarred the nation's consciousness. But 1998, with a bitter, year-long battle in the courts and Congress climaxing in the first presidential impeachment in 130 years, has left deep divisions across social, political and generational lines.

They begin, according to the Post/Kaiser/Harvard survey, with a near-even split between those (50 percent) who think a president "has a greater responsibility than leaders of other organizations to set the moral tone for the country" and those (48 percent) who say, "As long as he does a good job running the country, a president's personal life is not important."

Reflecting the partisanship engendered by the long investigation of Clinton's relationship with Monica S. Lewinsky, most Republicans demand a moral example and most Democrats reject it.

But sociologists and other students of American life interviewed in late December said the divisions go much deeper and have their roots in long-standing controversy generated not just by Clinton but by his baby boom generation.

While most Americans want Clinton to finish his term, and prefer censure as an alternative, few believe he is a good role model. Seven in 10 Americans—including a majority of baby boomers—said in the survey that Clinton does not have high personal moral or ethical standards. Six in 10—again including a majority of baby boomers—also said his standards are no better or worse than "most people of his generation."

The public sees a nation that lacks agreed-upon ethical guidelines for itself. More than six out of 10 said the country "was greatly divided when it comes to the most important values," rather than being in agreement. Ironically, on this one question there was unity. Republicans and Democrats, men and women, young and old all said they see a society split on moral and ethical issues.

With some exceptions, the experts tend to agree. Some describe it as a battle of extremes—the Puritanism of the Religious Right vs. the permissiveness of the

aging children of the '60s. Others see the acceptance of Clinton's actions as proof that Americans are utterly cynical about their political leaders, mute spectators at a television drama they despise but cannot escape.

Some say it is a symptom of national ambivalence, of individuals longing for moral values but resistant to imposing their standards on others. And the more hopeful say the preference for censuring the president—rather than absolving him or removing him—is a healthy effort at synthesizing those opposing tendencies.

A few optimists say the upshot of all the discussion will be a standard for future presidents that is both more demanding and more realistic.

Few of the scholars are comfortable with the status quo, however.

"No analysis can absolve the people themselves of responsibility for the quandary we appear to be in," says Don Eberly, director of the Civil Society Project in Harrisburg, Pa. "Nonjudgmentalism, the trump card of moral debate, seems to have gained strength among the people, especially in the sexual realm, and this clearly does not bode well for America."

Over the last 30 years, polling shows the proportion of people saying they think their fellow citizens generally are as honest and moral as they used to be has fallen significantly. In a 1952 survey, as many answered yes as said no. In 1965, there were three yeses for every four noes. But this year there were almost three noes (71 percent) for every yes (26 percent).

In the same period, trust in government also has declined radically. In 1968, 61 percent said they trusted the government in Washington to do the right thing most or all the time; in 1998, only 33 percent felt that way.

Pollster Dan Yankelovich writes that "the transformation in values from the mid-'60s to the late-'70s confronts us with one of the sharpest discontinuities in our cultural history." In that period's "radical extension of individualism . . . from the political domain to personal lifestyles," he notes, the concepts of duty, social conformity, respectability and sexual morality were devalued, in favor of expressiveness and pleasure seeking.

This was a time in which Bill Clinton, moving through his twenties at Georgetown, Oxford and Yale, rejected military service, experimented with marijuana. But in general, according to his biographer, Washington Post reporter David Maraniss, Clinton followed "a moderate course during an increasingly immoderate period." The stamp of that period remained on Clinton, in at least two areas: the evasiveness that characterized his dealings with the "threat" of military service and the permissiveness he allowed in his sexual life.

In judging Clinton's morals to be typical of his generation—only 7 percent thought them better; 27 percent, worse—most of those surveyed made it clear they disapproved of them.

Yankelovich argues that in the 1990s, "a shift is now occurring toward a perception of the self as a moral actor with obligations and concerns as well as rights . . . we are beginning to measure a shift back toward absolute as distinct from relative values." That theme of individual responsibility is one Clinton has emphasized in his speeches, if not always in his actions.

From this perspective, the divided public verdict on the Clinton case represents not just a legal argument about the standards for impeachment and removal of a

president, or a partisan battle between Republicans and Democrats, but also an unresolved debate about fundamental values.

At the extremes, the conflict amounts almost to the "culture war" some trace directly back to the 1960s. Randy Tate of the Christian Coalition and William J. Bennett, former Education secretary, have accused Clinton of subverting standards of honesty and decency so blatantly that he cannot be allowed to remain in office. Harvard professor Alan Dershowitz and many Democrats in the House have accused Clinton's opponents—notably independent counsel Kenneth W. Starr—of practicing "sexual McCarthyism," trampling civil liberties and invading people's privacy.

Alan Wolfe, a Boston University sociologist, argued in his book, "One Nation, After All," that the "culture war" is confined to political elites, and that most individuals struggle to balance their yearning for clear standards against their discomfort with passing judgment on others.

Wolfe said in an interview that he sees exactly that happening in the Clinton case—"even though people are torn, they are looking to find a way to negotiate through these competing impulses." Wolfe says he thought last January, when Lewinsky first became a household name, that "people would forgive adultery but lying in public would not pass. But people realized that the lying and the adultery were part of the same thing. I don't agree, but I recognize the wisdom in making that connection."

Others see the conflict in starker—and more worrisome—terms. David Blankenhorn, president of the Institute of American Values in New York, says the reaction to Clinton demonstrates that "many middle-class Americans obey an 11th Commandment: Thou shalt not judge. They view morality as a private matter. What I find troublesome is that . . . apart from treason, there is nothing worse than a democratic leader engaging in ongoing public lying. And yet, a substantial number of Americans have accepted this. . . . Remove ethics, and it makes this a society where politics trumps everything else."

Several observers traced this back to the 1960s. Christopher Gates, president of the Denver-based National Civic League, says that pollster George Gallup Jr. "says the '60s and '70s were the time when our country fell apart and the bonds began to dissolve. You had a war between the generations, a war between the genders, you had Vietnam, break-ins, resignations, pardons. You had a huge dissolution of trust. And we have gone from a time when we presumed good intentions on the part of our leaders to the presumption of bad intentions."

Blankenhorn suggests that as a result of that legacy, "Clinton is in many ways the beneficiary of people's very low expectations of politicians and government."

But Georgia Sorenson, director of the center for political leadership and participation of the University of Maryland, points out that "participation has been deteriorating since the '60s, and it makes it hard for any person to lead now, no matter how committed."

Michael Sandel, director of the Harvard Institute for Policy Studies, says the consequences go further. "We've witnessed a politics of scandal, sensation and

spectacle that has turned the president into another figure in the celebrity culture," he says. "The majesty and dignity of the presidency have been stripped away, but paradoxically that hasn't destroyed the popularity of this president. "As citizens, we have become just spectators, even voyeurs. . . . We've told the pollsters we want the whole issue to be over, and yet we can't bring ourselves to change the channel. . . . It reflects a cynicism beyond mistrust. It reflects a view that government really doesn't matter, except as it provides occasional spectacular entertainment. It is not good news for democracy."

The Post/Kaiser/Harvard survey attempted to test Sandel's thesis by asking how many respondents had contacted their members of Congress about the impeachment issue. About one out of nine—11 percent—claimed to have done so. Among the vast majority who did not, the main reasons were that they didn't think it would make a difference (53 percent) or the issue wasn't important enough for them to get involved (21 percent).

But other experts interviewed are not nearly so concerned about public indifference or a decline in trust or an erosion of values. And there was some support for their views in the survey. About half those interviewed (48 percent) said they thought their representative in Congress had paid at least "a fair amount of attention" to opinions in their district, while only a third (35 percent) thought their elected officials largely ignored their constituents.

Charles Quigley, executive director of the Center for Civic Education in Calabasas, Calif., says, "What the Clinton thing says to me is that the majority are making subtle, sophisticated distinctions. They condemn what he did, but they want proportionality in punishment. They're questioning not only Clinton's values but those of the people who have gone after him."

Michael Josephson, president of the Josephson Institute of Ethics in Marina del Rey, Calif., and David Mathews, president of the Charles F. Kettering Foundation in Dayton, Ohio, say the partisanship of the House impeachment proceedings sent a worrisome signal to people. "Everyone thinks it is [political] positioning," Josephson says. "Otherwise, why would Republicans and Democrats come out so differently?"

"But," Mathews adds, "they have deep feelings about accountability and taking responsibility, not just by the president but by everyone. And when they see it disappearing, it scares them."

That may be true, but Wolfe and Eberly say politicians are not seen as the ones to lead a values revival. "When government becomes involved in moral matters, Americans are no longer sure they can trust it," Wolfe wrote in "One Nation, After All."

Eberly says: "The people just don't see the answer to our moral condition coming predominantly from lawmakers. . . . Americans tend to be generous toward sinners and hard on hypocrites, and the working assumption of many Americans is that most politicians fall into the latter category. While the American people strongly disapproved of Clinton's behavior, they grew steadily more unwilling to approve of action against him as it became clear that Congress would serve as judge and jury."

When asked what will be important to them in the presidential election of 2000, more of those surveyed in the Post/Kaiser/Harvard poll said the candidates' stands on issues than the combined total for those naming personal morals and ethics and broad principles and values.

On the other hand, looking to the future, a majority of Americans—55 percent—said in the survey they fear this society will become too accepting of behaviors that are bad for people, while 38 percent said their greatest worry was that the country would become too intolerant of actions that pose no such threat.

The survey indicates the divisions that have marked the past 30 years are likely to continue into the next generation.

Although more young people between 18 and 34 say they are more pessimistic about the threat of moral decline than their parents and grandparents, they are also more conflicted over values. They, more than their elders, express the greatest tolerance toward divorce, adultery and casual drug use. While many young Americans say that values are important to their politics, young adults are the least likely to agree that a president has a special obligation to “set an example with his personal life.” ■



The Comparative Context

The idea that American political culture differs fundamentally from the political cultures of Europe and elsewhere in the world has long been central to discussions of American politics. As we have seen, this so-called American exceptionalism thesis was first put forward by Tocqueville (see selection 5.1) in the 1830s. Later, it reemerged as part of the effort to explain why the United States—unlike virtually every other industrialized society—failed to develop a viable socialist or communist movement. In this essay, the political scientist Seymour Martin Lipset examines the history of the American exceptionalism thesis and explains how America's distinctive political culture helps illuminate the peculiar nature of American liberalism and conservatism.

Questions

1. Why, according to advocates of the American exceptionalism thesis, did the United States develop a political culture different and distinct from those of Europe? What role did the American Revolution play in the development of this unique political culture?
2. How do American conceptions of liberalism and conservatism differ from their European counterparts? How does the American exceptionalism thesis help explain these differences?

only to create an equilibrium in which settlements can be reached directly and by consent. The burden of carrying on the work of the world, of inventing, creating, executing, of attempting justice, formulating laws and moral codes, of dealing with the technic and the substance, lies not upon public opinion and not upon government but on those who are responsibly concerned as agents in the affair. Where problems arise, the ideal is a settlement by the particular interests involved. They alone know what the trouble really is. No decision by public officials or by commuters reading headlines in the train can usually and in the long run be so good as settlement by consent among the parties at interest. No moral code, no political theory can usually and in the long run be imposed from the heights of public opinion, which will fit a case so well as direct agreement reached where arbitrary power has been disarmed.

It is the function of public opinion to check the use of force in a crisis, so that men, driven to make terms, may live and let live.

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V. O. KEY

From Public Opinion and American Democracy

Professor V. O. Key was a pioneer in the study of many facets of modern American politics, including elections, political parties, and public opinion. His detailed study of public opinion attempted to explain the relationship between the people's opinions and the political leadership's opinions. Key's analysis is complicated but clear in its recognition of both elite and mass influence. A particularly useful concept is Key's "opinion dike." He believed that the public's opinion keeps leaders from straying too far outside the parameters acceptable to the people in the making of policy. Most important, Key lifted the blame for "indecision, decay, and disaster" from the shoulders of the public onto the leadership stratum where, he alleged, it really belongs.

THE EXPLORATION of public attitudes is a pursuit of endless fascination—and frustration. Depiction of the distribution of opinions within the public, identification of the qualities of opinion, isolation of the odd and of the obvious correlates of opinion, and ascertainment of the modes of opinion formation are pursuits that excite human curiosity. Yet these endeavors are bootless unless the findings about the preferences, aspirations, and prejudices of the public can be connected with the work-

ings of the governmental system. The nature of that connection has been suggested by the examination of the channels by which governments become aware of public sentiment and the institutions through which opinion finds more or less formal expression.

When all these linkages are treated, the place of public opinion in government has still not been adequately portrayed. The problem of opinion and government needs to be viewed in an even broader context. Consideration of the role of public opinion drives the observer to the more fundamental question of how it is that democratic governments manage to operate at all. Despite endless speculation on that problem, perplexities still exist about what critical circumstances, beliefs, outlooks, faiths, and conditions are conducive to the maintenance of regimes under which public opinion is controlling, at least in principle, and is, in fact, highly influential. . . . Though the preceding analyses did not uncover the secret of the conditions precedent to the practice of democratic politics, they pointed to a major piece of the puzzle that was missing as we sought to assemble the elements that go into the construction of a democratic regime. The significance of that missing piece may be made apparent in an indirect manner. In an earlier day public opinion seemed to be pictured as a mysterious vapor that emanated from the undifferentiated citizenry and in some way or another enveloped the apparatus of government to bring it into conformity with the public will. These weird conceptions, some of which were mentioned in our introductory chapter, passed out of style as the technique of the sample survey permitted the determination, with some accuracy, of the distribution of opinions within the population. Vast areas of ignorance remain in our information about people's opinions and aspirations; nevertheless, a far more revealing map of the gross topography of public opinion can now be drawn than could have been a quarter of a century ago.

Despite their power as instruments for the observation of mass opinion, sampling procedures do not bring within their range elements of the political system basic for the understanding of the role of mass opinion within the system. Repeatedly, as we have sought to explain particular distributions, movements, and qualities of mass opinion, we have had to go beyond the survey data and make assumptions and estimates about the role and behavior of that thin stratum of persons referred to variously as the political elite, the political activists, the leadership echelons, or the influentials. In the normal operation of surveys designed to obtain tests of mass sentiment, so few persons from this activist stratum fall into the sample that they cannot well be differentiated, even in a static description, from those persons less involved politically. The data tell us almost nothing

about the dynamic relations between the upper layer of activists and mass opinion. The missing piece of our puzzle is this elite element of the opinion system. . . .

While the ruling classes of a democratic order are in a way invisible because of the vagueness of the lines defining the influentials and the relative ease of entry to their ranks, it is plain that the modal norms and standards of a democratic elite have their peculiarities. Not all persons in leadership echelons have precisely the same basic beliefs; some may even regard the people as a beast. Yet a fairly high concentration prevails around the modal beliefs, even though the definition of those beliefs must be imprecise. Fundamental is a regard for public opinion, a belief that in some way or another it should prevail. Even those who cynically humbug the people make a great show of deference to the populace. The basic doctrine goes further to include a sense of trusteeship for the people generally and an adherence to the basic doctrine that collective efforts should be dedicated to the promotion of mass gains rather than of narrow class advantage; elite elements tethered to narrow group interest have no slack for maneuver to accommodate themselves to mass aspirations. Ultimate expression of these faiths comes in the willingness to abide by the outcome of popular elections. The growth of leadership structures with beliefs including these broad articles of faith is probably accomplished only over a considerable period of time, and then only under auspicious circumstances.

If an elite is not to monopolize power and thereby to bring an end to democratic practices, its rules of the game must include restraints in the exploitation of public opinion. Dimly perceptible are rules of etiquette that limit the kinds of appeals to public opinion that may be properly made. If it is assumed that the public is manipulable at the hands of unscrupulous leadership (as it is under some conditions), the maintenance of a democratic order requires the inculcation in leadership elements of a taboo against appeals that would endanger the existence of democratic practices. Inflammation of the sentiments of a sector of the public disposed to exert the tyranny of an intolerant majority (or minority) would be a means of destruction of a democratic order. Or by the exploitation of latent differences and conflicts within the citizenry it may at times be possible to paralyze a regime as intense hatreds among classes of people come to dominate public affairs. Or by encouraging unrealistic expectations among the people a clique of politicians may rise to power, a position to be kept by repression as disillusionment sets in. In an experienced democracy such tactics may be "unfair" competition among members of the politically active class. In short, certain restraints on political competi-

tion help keep competition within tolerable limits. The observation of a few American political campaigns might lead one to the conclusion that there are no restraints on politicians as they attempt to humbug the people. Even so, admonitions ever recur against arousing class against class, against stirring the animosities of religious groups, and against demagoguery in its more extreme forms. American politicians manifest considerable restraint in this regard when they are tested against the standards of behavior of politicians of most of those regimes that have failed in the attempt to establish or maintain democratic practices. . . .

. . . Certain broad structural or organizational characteristics may need to be maintained among the activists of a democratic order if they are to perform their functions in the system. Fundamental is the absence of sufficient cohesion among the activists to unite them into a single group dedicated to the management of public affairs and public opinion. Solidification of the elite by definition forecloses opportunity for public choice among alternative governing groups and also destroys the mechanism for the unfettered expression of public opinion or of the opinions of the many subpublics. . . .

. . . Competitive segments of the leadership echelons normally have their roots in interests or opinion blocs within society. A degree of social diversity thus may be, if not a prerequisite, at least helpful in the construction of a leadership appropriate for a democratic regime. A series of independent social bases provide the foundations for a political elite difficult to bring to the state of unification that either prevents the rise of democratic processes or converts them into sham rituals. . . .

Another characteristic may be mentioned as one that, if not a prerequisite to government by public opinion, may profoundly affect the nature of a democratic order. This is the distribution through the social structure of those persons highly active in politics. By various analyses, none founded on completely satisfactory data, we have shown that in the United States the political activists—if we define the term broadly—are scattered through the socio-economic hierarchy. The upper-income and occupational groups, to be sure, contribute disproportionately; nevertheless, individuals of high political participation are sprinkled throughout the lesser occupational strata. Contrast the circumstances when the highly active political stratum coincides with the high socioeconomic stratum. Conceivably the winning of consent and the creation of a sense of political participation and of sharing in public affairs may be far simpler when political activists of some degree are spread through all social strata. . . .

Allied with these questions is the matter of access to the wider circles of political leadership and of the recruitment and indoctrination of these

political activists. Relative ease of access to the arena of active politics may be a preventive of the rise of intransigent blocs of opinion managed by those denied participation in the regularized processes of politics. In a sense, ease of access is a necessary consequence of the existence of a somewhat fragmented stratum of political activists. . . .

This discussion in terms of leadership echelons, political activists, or elites falls painfully on the ears of democratic romantics. The mystique of democracy has in it no place for ruling classes. As perhaps with all powerful systems of faith, it is vague on the operating details. Yet by their nature governing systems, be they democratic or not, involve a division of social labor. Once that axiom is accepted, the comprehension of democratic practices requires a search for the peculiar characteristics of the political influentials in such an order, for the special conditions under which they work, and for the means by which the people keep them in check. The vagueness of the mystique of democracy is matched by the intricacy of its operating practices. If it is true that those who rule tend sooner or later to prove themselves enemies of the rights of man—and there is something to be said for the validity of this proposition—then any system that restrains that tendency however slightly can excite only awe. . . .

Analytically it is useful to conceive of the structure of a democratic order as consisting of the political activists and the mass of people. Yet this differentiation becomes deceptive unless it is kept in mind that the democratic activists consist of people arranged along a spectrum of political participation and involvement, ranging from those in the highest posts of official leadership to the amateurs who become sufficiently interested to try to round up a few votes for their favorite in the presidential campaign. . . . It is in the dynamics of the system, the interactions between these strata, that the import of public opinion in democratic orders becomes manifest. Between the activists and the mass there exists a system of communication and interplay so complex as to defy simple description; yet identification of a few major features of that system may aid in our construction of a general conception of democratic processes.

Opinion Dikes

In the interactions between democratic leadership echelons and the mass of people some insight comes from the conception of public opinion as a system of dikes which channel public action or which fix a range of discretion within which government may act or within which debate at official levels may proceed. This conception avoids the error of personify-

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ing "public opinion" as an entity that exercises initiative and in some way functions as an operating organism to translate its purposes into governmental action.

In one of their aspects the dikes of opinion have a substantive nature in that they define areas within which day-to-day debate about the course of specific action may occur. Some types of legislative proposals, given the content of general opinion, can scarcely expect to attract serious attention. They depart too far from the general understandings of what is proper. A scheme for public ownership of the automobile industry, for example, would probably be regarded as so far outside the area of legitimate public action that not even the industry would become greatly concerned. On the other hand, other types of questions arise within areas of what we have called permissive consensus. A widespread, if not a unanimous, sentiment prevails that supports action toward some general objective, such as the care of the ill or the mitigation of the economic hazards of the individual. Probably quite commonly mass opinion of a permissive character tends to develop in advance of governmental action in many areas of domestic policy. That opinion grows out of public discussion against the background of the modal aspirations and values of people generally. As it takes shape, the time becomes ripe for action that will be generally acceptable or may even arouse popular acclaim for its authors. . . .

The idea of public opinion as forming a system of dikes which channel action yields a different conception of the place of public opinion than does the notion of a government by public opinion as one in which by some mysterious means a referendum occurs on very major issue. In the former conception the articulation between government and opinion is relatively loose. Parallelism between action and opinion tends not to be precise in matters of detail; it prevails rather with respect to broad purpose. And in the correlation of purpose and action time lags may occur between the crystallization of a sense of mass purpose and its fulfillment in public action. Yet in the long run majority purpose and public action tend to be brought into harmony. . . .

The argument amounts essentially to the position that the masses do not corrupt themselves; if they are corrupt, they have been corrupted. If this hypothesis has a substantial strain of validity, the critical element for the health of a democratic order consists in the beliefs, standards, and competence of those who constitute the influentials, the opinion-leaders, the political activists in the order. That group, as has been made plain, refuses to define itself with great clarity in the American system; yet analysis after analysis points to its existence. If a democracy tends toward

indecision, decay, and disaster, the responsibility rests here, not in the mass of the people.

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indecision, decay, and disaster, the responsibility rests here, not in the mass of the people.

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DANIEL YANKELOVICH

From Coming to Public Judgment

Refining the concept of public opinion is the task of professional poll expert Daniel Yankelovich. Yankelovich makes an important distinction between two ideas that are normally thought of as one: mass opinion and public judgment. Mass opinion tends to be uninformed and fickle, while public judgment is well-thought-out and lasting. Yankelovich develops the concept of public judgment more fully by comparing it to expert opinion. Both represent knowledge but different kinds of knowledge. In making political decisions, the public's judgment is often more valid than the expert's view.

THERE ARE TWO great advantages to defining the quality of public opinion in terms of responsibility for consequences, firmness, and consistency. The first is that the definition leads directly to an objective method for ascertaining quality so that all can agree that a particular specimen of public opinion is either of poor quality or good quality, whether or not one happens to like or disapprove of it. The second and more far-reaching advantage is that the definition enables us to understand how and why public opinion has distinctive value and is not merely a second-rate reflection of expert opinion. Each form of opinion—expert and public—has its own excellences and its own failings. But public opinion is not, as is generally assumed, simply less well-informed expert opinion. It has its own integrity, and different standards of quality apply to it. It is only when we understand the differences between public and expert opinion that we have insight into the special nature of public opinion and the role it plays in democratic society.

To see the first advantage clearly—the value of an objective definition—it is useful to formalize a distinction implicit in the discussion thus far. In what follows, I will use the term *mass opinion* to refer to poor-quality public opinion as defined by the defects of inconsistency, volatility, and nonresponsibility. (People's failure to take the consequences of their views into account is mostly *nonresponsible* rather than *irresponsible*, which implies a willfulness that is usually absent. The term *nonresponsible*

is meant to show that the public is not usually at fault for its failure to take responsibility. Most of the time the public is not given an opportunity to undertake the form of responsibility I am discussing.) I will use the term “public judgment” to refer to good-quality public opinion in the sense of opinion that is stable, consistent, and responsible.

To say that public judgment has been reached on an issue does not imply that people comprehend all of the relevant facts or that they agree with the views of elites. It does imply that people have struggled with the issue, thought about it in their own terms, and formed a judgment they are willing to stand by. It also means that if leaders understand the public’s judgments, they have a stable context to work in—either to offer solutions that fit within the public’s tolerances, or if they disagree with the public’s judgment, to take their case forcefully to the public with full awareness that the public’s view will not change easily.

Unfortunately, the umbrella term “public opinion” obscures the distinction between mass opinion and public judgment. It is almost as if we were to use the word *bread* to refer both to the baked loaf one buys from the bakery or supermarket and also to an unbaked or half-baked lump of dough. If consumers were to use the word *bread* for both objects, they would never know when they were buying the baked loaf or the half-baked one. Just so, when we refer to public opinion, we do not know whether we are referring to half-baked mass opinion or to fully developed public judgment.

Words reveal a great deal about a culture. The Eskimos have many words for *snow*. The French have a fabulous vocabulary for food. The fact that our culture has no generally accepted vocabulary to distinguish between raw mass opinion and mature public judgment reveals a blind spot in the way Americans think about this subject. . . .

We come now to the most significant advantage of the concept of public judgment. By focusing on public judgment we can crawl out from under the quality-as-information trap. We can begin to shape a concept of public opinion in which quality is defined by evidence that the public has faced up to the consequences of its convictions.

This conception gives public opinion the *gravitas** that theorists of democracy have long recognized to be a prerequisite for genuine citizenship. We begin to understand why public opinion need not be taken seriously when it manifests itself in the form of mass opinion but must be taken quite seriously when it appears as public judgment, even when it is not as well informed as journalists and political philosophers would

* *Gravitas* is the Latin word for seriousness, authority, dignity.—EDS.

like. In short, we can begin to develop an alternative to the ideal of the attentive well-informed citizen, so favored by tradition. . . .

One major difficulty in developing an alternative model of quality in public opinion is that being well informed *is* the proper defining characteristic of scientific and expert opinion. We should not apply the same criteria to expert opinion as to public opinion. Generally, for expert opinion we do not have to worry about the same things as for public opinion. Well-educated and trained experts are expected to be well informed; they are rarely self-contradictory or fickle in their views, and the kinds of questions on which we consult experts—questions of fact—do not enmesh them as readily in the value conflicts that beset public opinion. Of course, experts, being human, cannot always set aside their personal feelings; but mainly we judge them on their records on being correct in their special fields of expertise.

At first glance, differentiating public opinion from expert opinion may seem unnecessary. The general view is “Everyone knows the difference between experts and the public. We do not expect the public to be experts, just reasonably informed.” But familiarity with the way public opinion is judged makes it plain that a clear-cut distinction between expert opinion and public opinion is sorely needed.

Suppose an engineering expert on bridges is asked whether a particular bridge is safe for heavy traffic. The engineer’s opinion, especially after studying the bridge and conducting tests on it, carries more weight than that of the citizens who live in the community. When it comes to questions of bridge safety, we consult the expert, not public opinion.

Here, quality of opinion is clearly defined in terms of knowledge and information. The bridge expert has far more knowledge about bridges than the public. But engineering knowledge may not be sufficient for the expert to know with certainty that the bridge will be safe in the future. Asked the question, “Can this bridge safely carry an anticipated 20 percent increased traffic load over the next five years?” the engineer might reasonably respond, “I do not know the answer to that question.” Whereupon the question will almost surely be asked, “Well, can you give us your opinion? Is it your opinion that the bridge will safely carry the increased traffic?” Usually, the expert will then offer an opinion. (“In my opinion, this bridge is not safe. I wouldn’t let my family cross it in rush hour conditions.”)

In this hypothetical exchange, the expert holds firmly held convictions, but correctly and responsibly refuses to characterize them as knowledge. Part of the expert’s expertise is the ability to distinguish personal opinions from knowledge. Conventional standards of what constitutes quality apply

quite well to this situation. The trouble comes when we apply this same standard of quality to public opinion, which we always do for the simple reason that we have no other. . . .

Why, we might ask, is public opinion judged by standards appropriate to expert opinion rather than by its own special standards? The most obvious answer relates to the meaning of opinion in our culture. Opinion is generally defined in opposition to knowledge. We fall back on opinion when knowledge is lacking.

Using opinion as a substitute for knowledge is a common practice, and this practice gives the word *opinion* its principal meaning. The first meaning of opinion in *Webster's International Dictionary* is a belief that is "less strong than positive knowledge . . . a belief . . . based only on opinion." In this sense of opinion, the more knowledge and information the person holding the opinion has, the better that opinion is deemed to be—and rightly so.

Knowledge in the modern era has come to have a special, almost technical meaning. Knowledge is linked to validation. One *knows* that the earth is round rather than flat because this discovery has been scientifically validated: it has been proven through well-accepted empirical methods. Validated knowledge does not have to be scientific. We validate a small part of our stock of knowledge every day. Suppose you are asked, "Are you wearing your black shoes or your brown ones?" You remember putting on your black shoes, but the chances are that you will glance down before answering. Having done so, you now "know" you are wearing your black shoes because you have validated that knowledge with methods suitable for the occasion. In daily life—whether that of the expert on bridges or the person wearing black shoes—the distinction between knowledge and opinion is largely a matter of validation. The validation is carried out by empirical methods, more or less casual or scientific depending on the occasion.

In our complex society, the pool of validated knowledge is tiny compared to our need to know. We could not survive without depending on opinion—based on information—as a substitute for validated knowledge. A large proportion of our national resources are devoted to educating and training specialists on whose opinions we depend because of the excellence of their information and their skill in interpreting it. The opinions of the general public never count as much as those of the experts when it is expert-type opinion that is needed.

The reason our society judges all opinion by the standards appropriate to expert opinion is that both the dictionary definition and custom support the meaning of opinion as a substitute for knowledge. Therefore, the

closer one comes to meeting the standards of knowledge, the better the quality of the opinion is deemed to be. In practice, therefore, expert opinion and public opinion are judged by a single criterion. . . .

The confusions created by these contradictions persist to the present. Public opinion is regarded with profound ambivalence. Among the general public, respect for public opinion is high. The public holds itself and its powers and privileges in great esteem. Healthy respect for public opinion is also found in those members of the business community who cater to consumers and among members of those branches of the legal profession with everyday experience with the public as jurors. In subcultures that lack daily contact with the public, public opinion often seems remote, mysterious, and abstract. For university professors, laboratory scientists, the foreign policy community, the high civil service, and the upper reaches of the press, public opinion appears fickle, impulsive, disorganized, ill-informed, and unreliable. These elites may be sincerely devoted to the principles of democracy, but their outlook is, simply stated, elitist. They think they know better than the public because they are well educated and articulate. They have superior knowledge, and because they do, they assume in the great classic tradition that they are, therefore, endowed with superior moral virtue. . . .

There *is* a logical way to resolve the conflicting traditions surrounding the status and quality of public opinion. Implicit in the discussion to this point is a fundamental distinction between public opinion and expert opinion. Both are "opinion" in the negative sense that they are not validated knowledge—in the same sense that a book on ancient Greek philosophy and contemporary sports bloopers are both categorized as nonfiction. But they differ radically from one another in their positive relation to validated knowledge. Expert opinion relates to knowledge in the conventional dictionary sense: it is a substitute for it. We fall back on expert opinion when validated knowledge is lacking. In principle, expert opinion should be capable of being validated. It should take the form of an empirical proposition. If it does not, it is not "expert opinion." The expert on bridge safety could have said, "We can test the safety of the bridge by letting the traffic build and seeing whether it collapses or not. Then we will know." Opinions are frequently elicited from experts precisely to avoid the undesirable consequences of this type of pragmatic validation.

What we want above all from expert opinion is that it be correct. The best criterion for judging the quality of expert opinion is whether it proves to be right or wrong. ("In my opinion the Democrats will continue to choose losing presidential candidates.") It will take time to

validate this opinion, but, in principle, it is capable of being proven or disproven.

Because being correct is so central to the experts' mission, experts generally accept the same constraints that scientists accept in their pursuit of knowledge. Modern knowledge is empirically based. Information is its lifeblood. As we will discuss later, there are other modes of knowing than the scientific. But so great is the prestige of science that knowledge in our day has come to be virtually synonymous with scientific knowledge. In addition, and this is more controversial, scientific or expert knowledge presents itself as value-free. Experts accept the ethos of giving an "objective opinion" whether or not they personally approve of it. If experts are smokers and also research scientists studying the impact of smoking on heart disease and lung cancer, and if they are paid by a tobacco company, their self-respect as experts requires them to give an objective opinion that implicates smoking, even though it may offend their employers, ruin their careers at the tobacco company, and be dissonant with their own personal habits and values. Others may be skeptical about the experts' ability to retain objectivity under such strong cross pressures. But if they let personal bias or career concerns color their opinions, they will have violated their vocations as experts and scientists.

When we contrast public opinion with expert opinion, we see that it has a different relationship to knowledge. Unlike expert opinion, most instances of public opinion cannot be scientifically validated, even in principle, because they do not take the form of empirical propositions. Consider the typical form that expert opinion takes: "It is my opinion that smoking can cause heart disease." "It is my opinion that this bridge cannot safely absorb a 20 percent increase in traffic." "It is my opinion that this man was not legally sane on the night he shot his wife." These are empirical propositions. Most instances of public opinion do not assume this form. Their most typical form is that of a value judgment. Instead of deliberately avoiding values, they focus directly on them: "In my opinion flag burners should be put in jail, whatever the Supreme Court says." "In my opinion, doctors with AIDS should not practice medicine." Expressions of values such as these are like matters of taste: there are canons of good taste and bad taste. So, too, there are good values and bad values. But whatever the method of differentiating them may be, it is not the same as the method of validation that applies to empirical knowledge and expert opinion. . . .

The startling conclusion we draw . . . is that there are potentially as many varieties of knowing as there are human purposes and interests. The idea of varieties of knowledge linked to purpose is radical and unfamiliar. It

has many implications. It means that there are modes of knowing not yet discovered or codified. It means that in the rush over the past two centuries to acquire scientific knowledge as rapidly as we can, we may have mindlessly shoved aside older authentic modes of knowing, thereby losing access to important truths. It means that we cannot judge one mode of knowing by the rules that apply to another. We cannot assume, for example, that scientific knowledge is canonical and that all other forms of knowledge are to be evaluated by whether they meet the standards of "scientific proof," as science defines it.

In this light, we are ready to examine the claim that public judgment is a genuine form of knowledge. In practice, what does this claim mean? It is a radical claim and one should be fully aware of how far-reaching its implications are. It means, in practice, that for certain purposes, public judgment should carry more weight than expert opinion—and not simply because the majority may have more political power than the individual expert but because the public's claim to *know* is actually stronger than the expert's. It means that the judgment of the general public can, under some conditions, be equal or superior in quality to the judgment of experts and elites who possess far more information, education, and ability to articulate their views. . . .

Another concept supporting the vision is [the] insight that it is disastrous to divorce human reason from the world of ordinary life—the struggle to make a living, raise families, and live peacefully as a community. When experts . . . conceive reason as something separate and apart from everyday life—the property of a trained class of specialists, scientists, and other elites—then the deepest ideals of the founding fathers of the nation are betrayed. Reason is *not* the exclusive property of a class of experts whose training and credentials certify the possession of a special endowment. Reason is a more humble, more universal, more democratic gift.

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THOMAS CRONIN

From Direct Democracy

Although the United States is a representative—republican—system of government, elements of direct democracy have been introduced on the state and local levels over time, especially in the early twentieth century during the Progressive era. Initiative, referendum, and recall give citizens an immediate and direct voice in their government, beyond just electing officials.

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Professor Thomas Cronin explains these instruments of direct democracy and cites California's 1978 tax-cutting Proposition 13 as a leading example of an important statewide ballot question. Controversy swirls over the wisdom of such exercises in direct democracy. Cronin weighs the advantages against the potential problems of allowing voters to have a direct say in policy-making. His conclusion is that initiative, referendum, and recall will neither destroy American government nor save it. Yet in the 1990s, with voters' openly-expressed distrust of public officials, direct democracy will surely become more and more a part of the state and local political scene.

FOR ABOUT A hundred years Americans have been saying that voting occasionally for public officials is not enough. Political reformers contend that more democracy is needed and that the American people are mature enough and deserve the right to vote on critical issues facing their states and the nation. During the twentieth century, American voters in many parts of the country have indeed won the right to write new laws and repeal old ones through the initiative and referendum. They have also thrown hundreds of state and local officials out of office in recall elections.

Although the framers of the Constitution deliberately designed a republic, or indirect democracy, the practice of direct democracy and the debate over its desirability are as old as English settlements in America. Public debate and popular voting on issues go back to early seventeenth-century town assemblies and persist today in New England town meetings.

Populist democracy in America has produced conspicuous assets and conspicuous liabilities. It has won the support and admiration of many enthusiasts, yet it is also fraught with disturbing implications. Its most important contributions came early in this century in the form of the initiative, referendum, and recall, as a reaction to corrupt and unresponsive state legislatures throughout the country. Most of us would not recognize what then passed for representative government. "Bills that the machine and its backers do not desire are smothered in committee; measures which they do desire are brought out and hurried through their passage," said Governor Woodrow Wilson at the time. "It happens again and again that great groups of such bills are rushed through in the hurried hours that mark the close of the legislative sessions, when everyone is withheld from vigilance by fatigue and when it is possible to do secret things." The threat, if not the reality, of the initiative, referendum, and recall helped to encourage a more responsible, civic-minded breed of state legislator. These measures were not intended to subvert or alter the basic character

of American government. "Their intention," as Wilson saw it, was "to restore, not to destroy, representative government."

The *initiative* allows voters to propose a legislative measure (statutory initiative) or a constitutional amendment (constitutional initiative) by filing a petition bearing a required number of valid citizen signatures.

The *referendum* refers a proposed or existing law or statute to voters for their approval or rejection. Some state constitutions require referenda; in other states, the legislature may decide to refer a measure to the voters. Measures referred by legislatures (statutes, constitutional amendments, bonds, or advisory questions) are the most common ballot propositions. A *popular* or *petition referendum* (a less frequently used device) refers an already enacted measure to the voters before it can go into effect. States allowing the petition referendum require a minimum number of valid citizen signatures within a specified time. There is confusion about the difference between the initiative and referendum because *referendum* is frequently used in a casual or generic way to describe all ballot measures.

The *recall* allows voters to remove or discharge a public official from office by filing a petition bearing a specified number of valid signatures demanding a vote on the official's continued tenure in office. Recall procedures typically require that the petition be signed by 25 percent of those who voted in the last election, after which a special election is almost always required. The recall differs from impeachment in that the people, not the legislature, initiate the election and determine the outcome with their votes. It is a purely political and not even a semijudicial process.

American voters today admire and respect the virtues of representative government, yet most of them also yearn for an even greater voice in how their laws are made. They understand the defects of both representative and direct democracy and prefer, on balance, to have a mixture of the two. Sensible or sound democracy is their aspiration.

Although Americans cannot cast votes on critical national issues, voters in twenty-six states, the District of Columbia, and hundreds of localities do have the right to put measures on their ballots. Legislatures can also refer measures to the public for a general vote. And constitutional changes in every state except Delaware must be approved by voters before becoming law. Voters in fifteen states and the District of Columbia can also recall elected state officials, and thirty-six states permit the recall of various local officials.

When Americans think of their right to vote, they think primarily of their right to nominate and elect legislators, members of school boards and of city councils, and the American president. Yet California's famous Proposition 13 in June 1978 focused nationwide attention on the public's

right to participate in controversial tax decision making, as Californians voted to cut their property taxes by at least half. More voters participated in this issue contest than in the same day's gubernatorial primaries.

California's Proposition 13 had two additional effects. It triggered similar tax-slashing measures (both as bills and as direct legislation by the people) in numerous other states, and it encouraged conservative interest groups to use the initiative and referendum processes to achieve some of their goals. In the past decade conservative interests have placed on state and local ballots scores of measures favoring the death penalty, victims' rights, English-only regulations, and prayer in schools, and opposing taxation or spending, pornography, abortion, and homosexuality. Several states have regularly conducted referenda on issues ranging from a nuclear freeze to seat-belt laws. Citizens are now voting on hundreds of initiatives and referenda at state and local levels. . . .

Skeptics, however, worry about tyranny by the majority and fear voters are seldom well enough informed to cast votes on complicated, technical national laws. People also worry, and justifiably, about the way well-financed special interest groups might use these procedures. Corruption at the state level is much less common today than it was early in the century, but special interests are surely just as involved as ever. The power of campaign contributions is clear. The advantages to those who can afford campaign and political consultants, direct mail firms, and widespread television and media appeals are very real. Although in theory Americans are politically equal, in practice there remain enormous disparities in individuals' and groups' capacities to influence the direction of government. And although the direct democracy devices of the initiative, referendum, and recall type are widely available, the evidence suggests it is generally the organized interests that can afford to put them to use. The idealistic notion that populist democracy devices can make every citizen a citizen-legislator and move us closer to political and egalitarian democracy is plainly an unrealized aspiration.

The initiative, referendum, and recall were born in an era of real grievances. They made for a different kind of democracy in those areas that permitted them. At the very least, they signaled the unacceptability of some of the most corrupt and irresponsible political practices of that earlier era. It is fashionable among political analysts today to say that although they have rarely lived up to their promises, neither have they resulted in the dire outcomes feared by critics. Yet they have had both good and questionable consequences. . . .

By examining direct democracy practices we can learn about the strengths and weaknesses of a neglected aspect of American politics, as

well as the workings of representative democracy. We seek to understand it so we can improve it, and to improve it so it can better supplement rather than replace our institutions of representative government. . . .

A populist impulse, incorporating notions of “power to the people” and skepticism about the system has always existed in America. Americans seldom abide quietly the failings and deficiencies of capitalism, the welfare state, or the political decision rules by which we live. We are, as historian Richard Hofstadter wrote, “forever restlessly pitting ourselves against them, demanding changes, improvements, remedies.” Demand for more democracy occurs when there is growing distrust of legislative bodies and when there is a growing suspicion that privileged interests exert far greater influences on the typical politician than does the common voter.

Direct democracy, especially as embodied in the referendum, initiative, and recall, is sometimes viewed as a typically American political response to perceived abuses of the public trust. Voters periodically become frustrated with taxes, regulations, inefficiency in government programs, the inequalities or injustices of the system, the arms race, environmental hazards, and countless other irritations. This frustration arises in part because more public policy decisions are now made in distant capitals, by remote agencies or private yet unaccountable entities—such as regulatory bodies, the Federal Reserve Board, foreign governments, multinational alliances, or foreign trading combines—instead of at the local or county level as once was the case, or as perhaps we like to remember.

Champions of populist democracy claim many benefits will accrue from their reforms. Here are some:

- Citizen initiatives will promote government responsiveness and accountability. If officials ignore the voice of the people, the people will have an available means to make needed law.
- Initiatives are freer from special interest domination than the legislative branches of most states, and so provide a desirable safeguard that can be called into use when legislators are corrupt, irresponsible, or dominated by privileged special interests.
- The initiative and referendum will produce open, educational debate on critical issues that otherwise might be inadequately discussed.
- Referendum, initiative, and recall are nonviolent means of political participation that fulfill a citizen’s right to petition the government for redress of grievances.
- Direct democracy increases voter interest and election-day turnout. Perhaps, too, giving the citizen more of a role in governmental processes might lessen alienation and apathy.

• Finally (although this hardly exhausts the claims), citizen initiatives are needed because legislators often evade the tough issues. Fearing to be ahead of their time, they frequently adopt a zero-risk mentality. Concern with staying in office often makes them timid and perhaps too wedded to the status quo. One result is that controversial social issues frequently have to be resolved in the judicial branch. But who elected the judges?

For every claim put forward on behalf of direct democracy, however, there is an almost equally compelling criticism. Many opponents believe the ordinary citizen usually is not well enough informed about complicated matters to arrive at sound public policy judgments. They also fear the influence of slick television advertisements or bumper sticker messages.

Some critics of direct democracy contend the best way to restore faith in representative institutions is to find better people to run for office. They prefer the deliberations and the collective judgment of elected representatives who have the time to study complicated public policy matters, matters that should be decided within the give-and-take process of politics. That process, they say, takes better account of civil liberties.

Critics also contend that in normal times initiative and referendum voter turnout is often a small proportion of the general population and so the results are unduly influenced by special interests: big money will win eight out of ten times.

A paradox runs throughout this debate. As the United States has aged, we have extended the suffrage in an impressive way. The older the country, the more we have preached the gospel of civic participation. Yet we also have experienced centralization of power in the national government and the development of the professional politician. The citizen-politician has become an endangered species.

Representative government is always in the process of development and decay. Its fortunes rise and fall depending upon various factors, not least the quality of people involved and the resources devoted to making it work effectively. When the slumps come, proposals that would reform and change the character of representative government soon follow. Direct democracy notions have never been entirely foreign to our country—countless proponents from Benjamin Franklin to Jesse Jackson, Jack Kemp, and Richard Gephardt have urged us to listen more to the common citizen. . . .

The American experience with direct democracy has fulfilled neither the dreams and expectations of its proponents nor the fears of its opponents.

The initiative and referendum have not undermined or weakened representative government. The initiative, referendum, and recall have

been no more of a threat to the representative principle than has judicial review or the executive veto. Tools of neither the "lunatic fringe" nor the rich, direct democracy devices have become a permanent feature of American politics, especially in the West.

The initiative, referendum, and recall have not been used as often as their advocates would have wished, in part because state legislatures have steadily improved. Better-educated members, more-professional staff, better media coverage of legislative proceedings, and longer sessions have transformed the legislative process at the state level, mostly for the better. Interest groups once denied access to secret sessions now regularly attend, testify, and participate in a variety of ways in the legislative process. Although individuals and some groups remain frustrated, the level and intensity of that frustration appear to be lower than the discontent that prompted the popular democracy movements around the turn of the century.

Still, hundreds of measures have found their way onto ballots in states across the country, and 35 to 40 percent of the more than 1,500 citizen-initiated ballot measures considered since 1904 have won voter approval. About half of these have been on our ballots since World War II. A few thousand legislatively referred measures have also been placed on the ballot, and at least 60 percent of these regularly win voter approval. Popular, or petition, referenda, placed on the ballot by citizens seeking a voter veto of laws already passed by state legislatures, have been used infrequently. . . . Recall, used mainly at the local and county level, is seldom used against state officials. The marvel is that all these devices of popular democracy, so vulnerable to apathy, ignorance, and prejudice, not only have worked but also have generally been used in a reasonable and constructive manner. Voters have been cautious and have almost always rejected extreme proposals. Most studies suggest that voters, despite the complexity of measures and the deceptions of some campaigns, exercise shrewd judgment, and most students of direct democracy believe most American voters take this responsibility seriously. Just as in candidate campaigns, when they give the benefit of the doubt to the incumbent and the burden of proof is on the challenger to give reasons why he or she should be voted into office, so in issue elections the voter needs to be persuaded that change is needed. In the absence of a convincing case that change is better, the electorate traditionally sticks with the status quo.

Few radical measures pass. Few measures that are discriminatory or would have diminished the rights of minorities win voter approval, and most of the exceptions are ruled unconstitutional by the courts. On balance, the voters at large are no more prone to be small-minded, racist, or sexist than are legislators or courts.

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A case can be made that elected officials are more tolerant, more educated, and more sophisticated than the average voter. "Learning the arguments for freedom and tolerance formulated by notables such as Jefferson, Madison, Mill, or the more libertarian justices of the Supreme Court is no simple task," one study concludes. "Many of those arguments are subtle, esoteric, and difficult to grasp. Intelligence, awareness, and education are required to appreciate them fully." Yet on the occasional issues affecting civil liberties and civil rights that have come to the ballot, voters have generally acted in an enlightened way. This is in part the case because enlightened elites help shape public opinion on such occasions through endorsements, news editorials, talk-show discussions, public debates, and legislative and executive commentary. Further, those voting on state and local ballot measures are usually among the top 30 or 40 percent in educational and information levels.

The civic and educational value of direct democracy upon the electorate has been significant, but this aspect of the promise of direct democracy was plainly overstated from the start. Most voters make up their minds on ballot issues or recall elections in the last few days, or even hours, before they vote. The technical and ambiguous language of many of these measures is still an invitation to confusion, and about a quarter of those voting in these elections tell pollsters they could have used more information in making their decisions on these types of election choices.

Like any other democratic institution, the initiative, referendum, and recall have their shortcomings. Voters are sometimes confused. On occasion an ill-considered or undesirable measure wins approval. Large, organized groups and those who can raise vast sums of money are in a better position either to win, or especially to block, approval of ballot measures. Sometimes a recall campaign is mounted for unfair reasons, and recall campaigns can stir up unnecessary and undesirable conflict in a community. Most of these criticisms can also be leveled at our more traditional institutions. Courts sometimes err, as in the *Dred Scott* decision and in *Plessy v. Ferguson* or *Korematsu*. Presidents surely make mistakes (FDR's attempt to pack the Supreme Court, 1937; Kennedy's Bay of Pigs fiasco, 1961; Nixon's involvement in the Watergate break-in and subsequent coverup, 1972–1974; Reagan's involvement in the Iran-contra arms deal, 1986). And legislatures not only make mistakes about policy from time to time but wind up spending nearly a third of their time amending, changing, and correcting past legislation that proved inadequate or wrong. In short, we pay a price for believing in and practicing democracy—whatever the form.

Whatever the shortcomings of direct democracy, and there are several, they do not justify the elimination of the populist devices from those state

constitutions permitting them. Moreover, any suggestion to repeal the initiative, referendum, and recall would be defeated by the voters. Public opinion strongly supports retaining these devices where they are allowed. . . .

In sum, direct democracy devices have not been a cure-all for most political, social, or economic ills, yet they have been an occasional remedy, and generally a moderate remedy, for legislative lethargy and the misuse and nonuse of legislative power. It was long feared that these devices would dull legislators' sense of responsibility without in fact quickening the people to the exercise of any real control in public affairs. Little evidence exists for those fears today. When popular demands for reasonable change are repeatedly ignored by elected officials and when legislators or other officials ignore valid interests and criticism, the initiative, referendum, and recall can be a means by which the people may protect themselves in the grand tradition of self-government.

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WALTER LIPPMANN

From The Phantom Public

Walter Lippmann was a prominent American journalist who wrote during the first half of the twentieth century. In his much-read book on public opinion, The Phantom Public, Lippmann took a hard and realistic look at the role played by the American people in government decision-making. His conclusions were startlingly critical. He portrayed citizens as relatively uninformed, often disinterested, and usually haphazard in their views. Opinions emerge only in time of crisis, and then fade quickly. Many people do not participate at all. Lippmann extended his harsh judgment to political leaders who skillfully manipulate public opinion. To soften his criticisms, Lippmann pointed to what he believed to be the fallacy behind public opinion: "It is bad for a fat man to try to be a ballet dancer." To expect more of the public, Lippmann felt, was an unrealistic and self-defeating illusion.

THE PRIVATE CITIZEN today has come to feel rather like a deaf spectator in the back row, who ought to keep his mind on the mystery off there, but cannot quite manage to keep awake. He knows he is somehow affected by what is going on. Rules and regulations continually, taxes annually and wars occasionally remind him that he is being swept along by great drifts of circumstance.

Yet these public affairs are in no convincing way his affairs. They are for the most part invisible. They are managed, if they are managed at all, at distant centers, from behind the scenes, by unnamed powers. As a private person he does not know for certain what is going on, or who is doing it, or where he is being carried. No newspaper reports his environment so that he can grasp it; no school has taught him how to imagine it; his ideals, often, do not fit with it; listening to speeches, uttering opinions and voting do not, he finds, enable him to govern it. He lives in a world which he cannot see, does not understand and is unable to direct.

In the cold light of experience he knows that his sovereignty is a fiction. He reigns in theory, but in fact he does not govern. . . .

There is then nothing particularly new in the disenchantment which

the private citizen expresses by not voting at all, by voting only for the head of the ticket, by staying away from the primaries, by not reading speeches and documents, by the whole list of sins of omission for which he is denounced. I shall not denounce him further. My sympathies are with him, for I believe that he has been saddled with an impossible task and that he is asked to practice an unattainable ideal. I find it so myself for, although public business is my main interest and I give most of my time to watching it, I cannot find time to do what is expected of me in the theory of democracy; that is, to know what is going on and to have an opinion worth expressing on every question which confronts a self-governing community. And I have not happened to meet anybody, from a President of the United States to a professor of political science, who came anywhere near to embodying the accepted ideal of the sovereign and omniscient citizen. . . .

[Today's theories] assume that either the voters are inherently competent to direct the course of affairs or that they are making progress toward such an ideal. I think it is a false ideal. I do not mean an undesirable ideal. I mean an unattainable ideal, bad only in the sense that it is bad for a fat man to try to be a ballet dancer. An ideal should express the true possibilities of its subject. When it does not it perverts the true possibilities. The ideal of the omniscient, sovereign citizen is, in my opinion, such a false ideal. It is unattainable. The pursuit of it is misleading. The failure to achieve it has produced the current disenchantment.

The individual man does not have opinions on all public affairs. He does not know how to direct public affairs. He does not know what is happening, why it is happening, what ought to happen. I cannot imagine how he could know, and there is not the least reason for thinking, as mystical democrats have thought, that the compounding of individual ignorances in masses of people can produce a continuous directing force in public affairs. . . .

The need in the Great Society not only for publicity but for uninterrupted publicity is indisputable. But we shall misunderstand the need seriously if we imagine that the purpose of the publication can possibly be the informing of every voter. We live at the mere beginnings of public accounting. Yet the facts far exceed our curiosity. . . . A few executives here and there . . . read them. The rest of us ignore them for the good and sufficient reason that we have other things to do. . . .

Specific opinions give rise to immediate executive acts; to take a job, to do a particular piece of work, to hire or fire, to buy or sell, to stay here or go there, to accept or refuse, to command or obey. General opinions give rise to delegated, indirect, symbolic, intangible results: to

a vote, to a resolution, to applause, to criticism, to praise or dispraise, to audiences, circulations, followings, contentment or discontent. The specific opinion may lead to a decision to act within the area where a man has personal jurisdiction, that is, within the limits set by law and custom, his personal power and his personal desire. But general opinions lead only to some sort of expression, such as voting, and do not result in executive acts except in coöperation with the general opinions of large numbers of other persons.

Since the general opinions of large numbers of persons are almost certain to be a vague and confusing medley, action cannot be taken until these opinions have been factored down, canalized, compressed and made uniform. . . . The making of one general will out of a multitude of general wishes . . . consists essentially in the use of symbols which assemble emotions after they have been detached from their ideas. Because feelings are much less specific than ideas, and yet more poignant, the leader is able to make a homogeneous will out of a heterogeneous mass of desires. The process, therefore, by which general opinions are brought to cooperation consists of an intensification of feeling and a degradation of significance. Before a mass of general opinions can eventuate in executive action, the choice is narrowed down to a few alternatives. The victorious alternative is executed not by the mass but by individuals in control of its energy. . . .

. . . We must assume, then, that the members of a public will not possess an insider's knowledge of events or share his point of view. They cannot, therefore, construe intent, or appraise the exact circumstances, enter intimately into the minds of the actors or into the details of the argument. They can watch only for coarse signs indicating where their sympathies ought to turn.

We must assume that the members of a public will not anticipate a problem much before its crisis has become obvious, nor stay with the problem long after its crisis is past. They will not know the antecedent events, will not have seen the issue as it developed, will not have thought out or willed a program, and will not be able to predict the consequences of acting on that program. We must assume as a theoretically fixed premise of popular government that normally men as members of a public will not be well informed, continuously interested, nonpartisan, creative or executive. We must assume that a public is inexpert in its curiosity, intermittent, that it discerns only gross distinctions, is slow to be aroused and quickly diverted; that, since it acts by aligning itself, it personalizes whatever it considers, and is interested only when events have been melodramatized as a conflict.

The public will arrive in the middle of the third act and will leave before the last curtain, having stayed just long enough perhaps to decide who is the hero and who the villain of the piece. Yet usually that judgment will necessarily be made apart from the intrinsic merits, on the basis of a sample of behavior, an aspect of a situation, by very rough external evidence. . . .

. . . The ideal of public opinion is to align men during the crisis of a problem in such a way as to favor the action of those individuals who may be able to compose the crisis. The power to discern those individuals is the end of the effort to educate public opinion. . . .

Public opinion, in this theory, is a reserve of force brought into action during a crisis in public affairs. Though it is itself an irrational force, under favorable institutions, sound leadership and decent training the power of public opinion might be placed at the disposal of those who stood for workable law as against brute assertion. In this theory, public opinion does not make the law. But by canceling lawless power it may establish the condition under which law can be made. It does not reason, investigate, invent, persuade, bargain or settle. But, by holding the aggressive party in check, it may liberate intelligence. Public opinion in its highest ideal will defend those who are prepared to act on their reason against the interrupting force of those who merely assert their will.

That, I think, is the utmost that public opinion can effectively do. With the substance of the problem it can do nothing usually but meddle ignorantly or tyrannically. . . .

For when public opinion attempts to govern directly it is either a failure or a tyranny. It is not able to master the problem intellectually, nor to deal with it except by wholesale impact. The theory of democracy has not recognized this truth because it has identified the functioning of government with the will of the people. This is a fiction. The intricate business of framing laws and of administering them through several hundred thousand public officials is in no sense the act of the voters nor a translation of their will. . . .

Therefore, instead of describing government as an expression of the people's will, it would seem better to say that government consists of a body of officials, some elected, some appointed, who handle professionally, and in the first instance, problems which come to public opinion spasmodically and on appeal. Where the parties directly responsible do not work out an adjustment, public officials intervene. When the officials fail, public opinion is brought to bear on the issue. . . .

This, then, is the ideal of public action which our inquiry suggests. Those who happen in any question to constitute the public should attempt

only to create an equilibrium in which settlements can be reached directly and by consent. The burden of carrying on the work of the world, of inventing, creating, executing, of attempting justice, formulating laws and moral codes, of dealing with the technic and the substance, lies not upon public opinion and not upon government but on those who are responsibly concerned as agents in the affair. Where problems arise, the ideal is a settlement by the particular interests involved. They alone know what the trouble really is. No decision by public officials or by commuters reading headlines in the train can usually and in the long run be so good as settlement by consent among the parties at interest. No moral code, no political theory can usually and in the long run be imposed from the heights of public opinion, which will fit a case so well as direct agreement reached where arbitrary power has been disarmed.

It is the function of public opinion to check the use of force in a crisis, so that men, driven to make terms, may live and let live.

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V. O. KEY

From Public Opinion and American Democracy

Professor V. O. Key was a pioneer in the study of many facets of modern American politics, including elections, political parties, and public opinion. His detailed study of public opinion attempted to explain the relationship between the people's opinions and the political leadership's opinions. Key's analysis is complicated but clear in its recognition of both elite and mass influence. A particularly useful concept is Key's "opinion dike." He believed that the public's opinion keeps leaders from straying too far outside the parameters acceptable to the people in the making of policy. Most important, Key lifted the blame for "indecision, decay, and disaster" from the shoulders of the public onto the leadership stratum where, he alleged, it really belongs.

THE EXPLORATION of public attitudes is a pursuit of endless fascination—and frustration. Depiction of the distribution of opinions within the public, identification of the qualities of opinion, isolation of the odd and of the obvious correlates of opinion, and ascertainment of the modes of opinion formation are pursuits that excite human curiosity. Yet these endeavors are bootless unless the findings about the preferences, aspirations, and prejudices of the public can be connected with the work-

Gender and Public Opinion

Kristi Andersen

Few developments in public opinion and voting in recent decades have been as widely discussed as the “gender gap”—the tendency for women to be more supportive than men of liberal policies and Democrat candidates. In the essay that follows, Kristi Andersen reviews the recent history of gender differences in political opinion and behavior. In addition, she describes how women’s groups exploited early polling results to identify issues that had popular appeal and find supportive segments of the public. The results, as Andersen demonstrates, began to shape their thinking about campaigns and election outcomes.

IN THE LAST decade of the twentieth century, women’s and men’s political differences [occupied] center stage in popular and academic debates. The Year of the Woman in 1992 saw the number of female members of the U.S. House of Representatives increase by two-thirds and the number of female senators double; those numbers remained constant during the Republican takeover of Congress in 1994. Pollsters and politicians attend to the gender gap in voting, for women constitute a majority of the electorate and are more likely than men to support Democratic candidates. With all the recent attention to gender politics, it may seem odd that gender distinctions were barely studied until the 1970s.

Discovering the Difference

For the most part, social scientists, at least until the mid-1970s, denied that men and women held significantly different political beliefs. The prevalent thinking could be described as a convergence model, in which men and women were seen as being subject to similar economic and social forces

and thus unlikely to differ significantly in politics. Typically, studies written in the 1950s and 1960s either omitted sex altogether as a classification worth considering or mentioned the comparison only in passing. As one among many examples, James Sundquist in *Dynamics of the Party System* includes a table that delineates “changes in political affiliation of various population groups” between 1960 and 1970. He lists race, region, social class, education, place of residence (urban or rural), religion, and age—but not sex (1973, 348–349).

Later, when sex differences in public opinion and political behavior surfaced, researchers tried to explain them. These difference models can be classified as either essentialist or constructionist. Essentialist arguments assume that biological differences between men and women are the basis of most—if not all—observable differences on political attributes. Within an essentialist approach we can distinguish between arguments that see women as inferior (for example, those made in the nineteenth and early twentieth century opposing women’s suffrage) and those that view women as essentially superior to men (such as the recent “woman-centered” brand of feminism). The alternative to essentialism is a constructionist position, which assumes that differences in how women and men perceive and act on their environment are social constructions. That is, there is no such thing as an essential male or female nature; rather, each culture develops assumptions and expectations about the ways men and women think, talk, and act.

While most American political scientists in the 1950s and 1960s used an unstated convergence model, a few scholars did seriously look at the way women’s political thinking and behavior differed from men’s. These researchers found small gender differences and attributed them to the essential or natural character of the sexes. For example, whenever women’s opinions or preferences seemed to differ from men’s, the difference was explained by women’s “moralistic” or “apolitical” nature. Thus Robert Hess and Judith Torney (1967, 186) in their study of children’s political development remark that “there was some tendency for girls to make a higher assessment [than boys] of the influence of rich people and labor unions in determining laws.” Rather than interpreting these views of girls as realistic cynicism or political sophistication, the authors attributed such attitudes to “the tendency of girls to personalize governmental processes.” The source of this personalization, Hess and Torney suggest, lies in the fact that girls’ “experience with their major role model (mother) is a more

Table 1. Mentions of Gender and Race in Public Opinion Textbooks

<i>Years of publication</i>	<i>Number of books</i>	<i>Index references to sex, gender, or women</i>	<i>Index references to race or blacks</i>
1964–1981	10	9 (in 4 books)	110 (in 6 books)
1982–1995	10	147 (in 8 books)	226 (in 8 books)

personal one and [that] authority figures deal with them in more expressive and personalized ways” (Hess and Torney 1967, 193). . . .

In recent years, social scientists and historians have adopted gender as an important category of analysis.¹ Gender analysis, which now takes a generally social constructionist stance, looks not only at men and women but also at the way language, social interactions, and politics are shaped by assumptions and expectations about feminine and masculine attributes. This research has fundamentally reshaped our understanding of American history, political theory, power, and leadership—just to name a few areas.² In studying public opinion, researchers might use the social construction approach to account for observable sex differences in political attitudes by examining the different kinds of familial or work situations in which men and women find themselves. People who study public opinion have, like other scholars, paid more attention recently to the thinking of women and have shifted, in general, from convergence and essentialist models to more social constructionist models.

To get a better sense of the analytical role played by “sex” or—in later years—“gender” in the field of public opinion, I examined twenty public opinion textbooks written between 1964 and 1995, as well as the content of articles appearing in *Public Opinion Quarterly* between 1944 and 1993. For each textbook, I counted references in the index under “sex,” “gender,” “women,” and—for purposes of comparison—“blacks” and “race.” Table 1 summarizes the findings. Between 1964 and 1981, six out of ten books made no reference to sex, gender, or women in the index. The fact that only nine references were made to gender in the ten books demonstrates the dominance of the convergence model in this time period. Between 1982 and 1995, only two out of ten books failed to include index entries under gender, sex, or women, and the number of total references to gender increased dramatically. Nevertheless, race was more frequently cited than gender in public opinion textbooks in both eras. In the earlier period, race

was mentioned about twelve times as frequently as gender. In the latter period, race received one and a half times as many references as sex.

In *Public Opinion Quarterly*, the major journal of the public opinion and survey research community, only four articles dealt with women, sex differences, sex roles, or gender before 1964 (about 0.5 percent of the total number of articles and research notes). Between 1964 and 1981, nine articles, or approximately 1.4 percent, referred to gender, and between 1982 and 1993 the journal contained sixteen articles about women or gender, or about 3.8 percent.

Even when sex differences in public opinion are examined, however, it is often on a limited number of women's or moral issues. In Richard Niemi, John Mueller, and Tom Smith's (1989) useful collection of survey data, the issues on which opinions are broken down by sex are the following: abortion, child care and work, divorce, drinking, euthanasia, extramarital sex, homosexuality, marijuana, nudity, women as politicians, premarital sex, sex education, smoking, suicide, and working. This is an interesting commentary on the extent to which women are still seen as primarily defined by family and by their sexuality—only on these kinds of “family,” social, or sexual issues is sex or gender considered a significant category of analysis.

In examining textbooks and journal articles, I counted references to both “sex” and “gender” (as well as to “women”). In fact, often the word *gender* is used interchangeably with the word *sex*. I try in this chapter to use the two terms in distinct and—I believe—appropriate ways. According to our biological differences, we are categorized by sex as either male or female. But gender is a socially constructed set of assumptions and expectations about how these biological differences play out in people's interactions, including political interactions. Unfortunately, the current intellectual fashion to substitute *gender* for *sex* can blind us to the implications of the distinctions between the two.³ As Sue Tolleson-Rinehart and Jeannie Stanley argue in a recent book (1994, 155–156), in politics we are interested in both sex and gender. For example, we ask questions about how many women senators there are, and also about whether women, because of their particular experiences, bring different perspectives to the policy process. In the first case, we are asking questions that can be answered by categorizing the population in terms of biological sex. In the second case, an answer would need to be shaped by an understanding of gender differences, which we might or might not find among senators.

Should we be interested in questions of sex or questions of gender when we approach the topic of gender and public opinion? I believe the answer is both. When we find differences between men's and women's policy preferences, candidate choices, or party identifications, we will be able to understand those differences if we cast them in the framework of gender. We account for such differences by discovering how men's and women's socialization, structural positions in society, or family relationships affect their politics. But it is also important to understand the political impact of gender differences. Have these differences resulted in the election of more women, changed the policy agenda to be more sensitive to women's issues, meant defeat for some candidates and victory for others, or forced the parties to craft new sorts of appeals? When we ask these questions, we are bringing to the foreground questions about sex differences, that is, women's political behavior and women's representation; questions about gender, though related, recede into the background.

Opinion Differences over Time

Sex differences in public opinion vary by region and over time. The ways that gender affects public opinion (and political behavior) are historically and politically contextual. This chapter focuses on the United States in the 1990s, but we should not lose sight of the fact that the differences we observe now reflect a particular place and time. In this section I examine some of the vast array of data comparing men's and women's opinions on a variety of public issues. . . .

Two trends converged in the 1970s to increase women's visibility and to focus new attention on possible sex differences in public opinion. First, women's rates of participation in electoral politics increased. Although as late as the 1968 elections men outpaced women in voting turnout by 4 to 5 percentage points, by 1980 the relationship was reversed. For the first time women turned out to vote at a higher rate than men. Because women outnumber men in the population, women voters now constitute a clear majority of voters everywhere in the country. Women constituted about 54 percent of the presidential electorate in 1992.

The second trend was the rise of the feminist movement and the dramatic increase in the size and visibility of women's organizations. These organizations worked to move the national political agenda toward concerns

for “women’s issues,” such as reproductive rights, equal opportunity in employment and education, the Equal Rights Amendment, and electing more women to high political office. Suddenly, possible differences between men’s and women’s opinions took on political meaning. By the end of the decade, pollsters were discovering a gender gap in candidate preference. Gallup polls found that 38 percent of men supported Carter in 1980, compared with 44 percent of women. The discovery of the gender gap in 1980 led to a systematic exploration of gender differences in policy preferences.

Gender Differences on Women’s Issues

On most of the issues directly related to women or to women’s interests, sex differences have recently been small to nonexistent, but this has not always been the case. Hazel Erskine’s 1971 study examined sex differences in opinions about women’s roles in politics and society. Until the 1960s, women were much more likely than men to support such things as equal employment opportunities for women or the idea of women in public office. As one example among many, Gallup asked in 1952: “Some people say that if there were more women in Congress and holding important government positions, the country would be better governed. Do you agree or disagree?” Only 31 percent of men agreed, but 47 percent of women did (Erskine 1971, 282). During and after the 1960s, however, such differences were erased or reversed, primarily because men increased their support for sex equality. For example, Gallup poll questions about support of the Equal Rights Amendment, asked seven times between 1975 and 1982, found that an average of 57 percent of the women respondents and 61 percent of the men respondents supported the ERA (Simon and Landis 1989, 275). Similarly, Robert Shapiro and Harpreet Mahajan (1986, 53) found that “on other women’s issues [other than abortion, that is] there are few clear and consistent differences.” It is worth noting here that black women were more supportive than white women of the ERA in the 1970s, and they were also more supportive of collective and legal action to improve women’s status (Wilcox 1990).

When men and women were asked about their thinking on the issue of abortion, in the aggregate their responses looked similar. For example, over a twenty-two-year period (1972–1994), the General Social Survey (GSS) asked this question: “Please tell me whether or not you think it should be possible for a pregnant woman to obtain a legal abortion if there is a strong chance of serious defect in the baby.” The approval averaged just over 79

Table 2. Abortion Opinions in 1990 (in percentages)

	Men	Women	Difference: women–men	Men aged 18–29	Women aged 18–29	Difference: women–men
Favor leaving decision . . . to woman and her physician	69	72	+3	65	80	+15
Should be able to get abortion . . . no matter what the reason	40	45	+5	40	48	+8
Abortion should be legal only in certain circumstances	50	41	–9	52	42	–10
Personally believe having an abortion is wrong	44	50	+6	—	—	—
Abortion should be illegal in all circumstances	18	12	–6	6	10	+4

Source: 1990 General Social Survey.

percent for the whole sample, and there was never more than a 4 percentage point difference between the positive responses of men and women (the difference averaged 1.9 points). This pattern is the norm on the so-called traumatic reasons for approving of abortion: the chance of a serious defect in the baby, or pregnancy as a result of rape or incest. To the extent that there is a difference, men are slightly more favorable to abortion in these circumstances than women.

It is possible that men and women reach similar issue positions through very different routes. Women, not men, confront the possibility of pregnancy because of rape or incest and have to deal most immediately with the reality or the possibility of a severely ill or handicapped child. Furthermore, virtually all women of childbearing age have had to deal intimately with the implications of having a child at a particular moment in their lives—with all the economic, emotional, educational, and career implications associated with such a decision.⁴ Consequently, women may tend to have more intensely held views on abortion, to have views based on their own experiences with pregnancy and child rearing, and to make more use of the abortion issue in deciding how to vote.

Opinion polls on abortion, as illustrated by Table 2, show that women place themselves at the extremes more often than do men. That is, while

Table 3. Abortion and Voting in 1992 by Age Group (Percentage Saying Abortion Was Important to Their Vote)

	18-29	30-44	45-59	60+
Men	10	9	8	6
Women	21	18	12	8

Source: *American Enterprise*, January/February 1993, 102.

women are more likely than men to endorse free access to abortion or to view abortion as a private matter best left to the woman and her physician (the first two questions in Table 2), more women than men also believe that having an abortion is wrong. Among eighteen- to twenty-nine-year-olds, more women than men believe that abortion should be illegal in all circumstances. These sex differences appear to be accentuated among people ages eighteen to twenty-nine, the ages when women are feeling the full force of the choices and constraints represented by their childbearing capabilities.

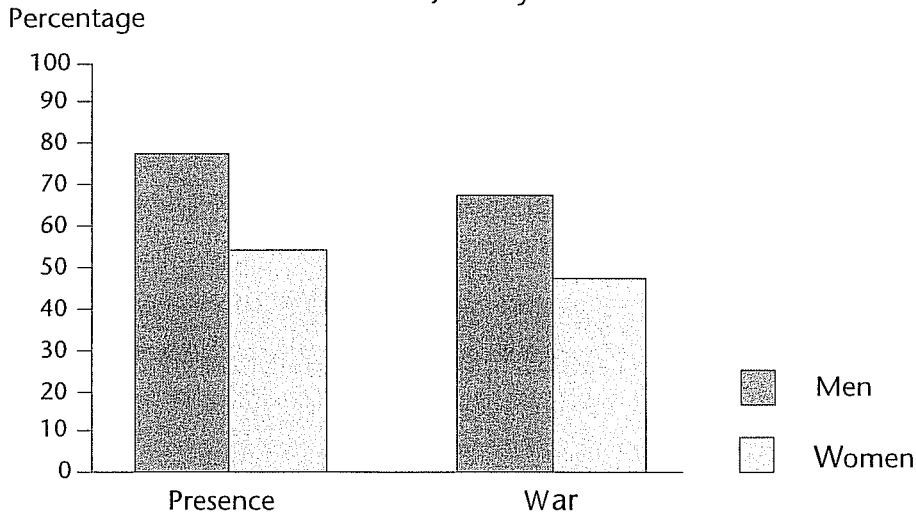
In the GSS time series (1972-1994) there are few sex differences in responses to questions on abortion, and when they do occur, men are likely to be more liberal than women. But in thirteen of the sixteen surveys, women aged eighteen to twenty-nine are more likely than men in that age group to endorse abortion in the case of a serious defect in the baby. Furthermore, women are more likely to see candidates' stands on abortion issues as an important component of their voting decisions. In 1992, women in all age groups were more likely than men to say that abortion was important to their vote. Women of childbearing age were twice as likely as men to have used abortion as a factor, as illustrated by Table 3.

Gender Differences on Use-of-Force Issues

Polls have found the clearest differences between men and women in the area of force and violence. During the 1970s and 1980s there were consistent differences between the sexes in their responses to questions from all major survey organizations on gun control, capital punishment, military and defense spending, and withdrawal from Vietnam. Men consistently chose the more violent options (such as supporting capital punishment, higher military spending, and less regulation of handguns).

The preferences of both men and women on the appropriate level of defense spending have fluctuated over the years. Both sexes initially approved

Figure 1. Support of U.S. Presence in Gulf and for Possibility of War in January 1991



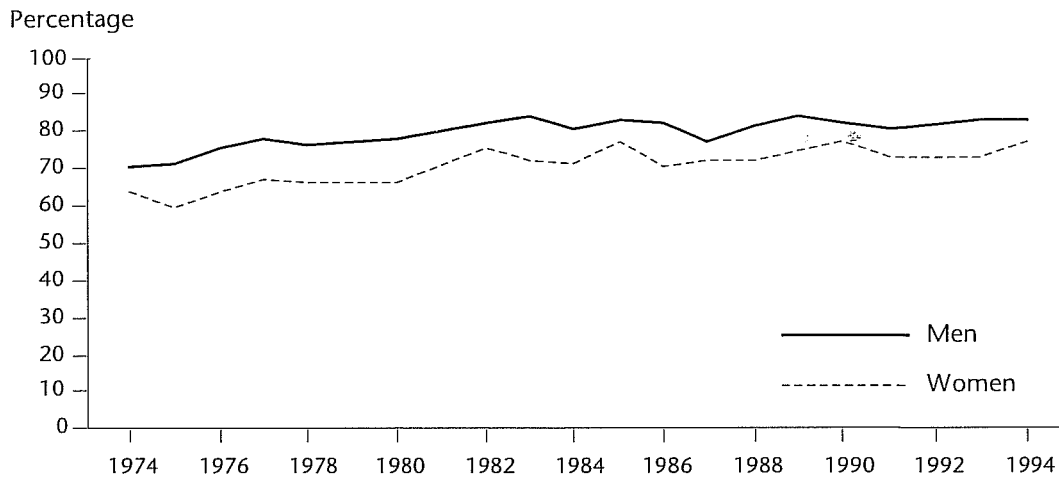
Source: *Gallup Poll Monthly*, January 1991, 14.

of Ronald Reagan's plea for the strengthening of American military capabilities. However, over the last twenty-one years, men generally have been more willing than women to have the government spend more on the military, armaments, and defense.

Fairly dramatic differences between men and women were characteristic of public opinion during the Gulf War. For instance, consider two questions asked by Gallup in January 1991. One asked for approval or disapproval of the decision to send U.S. troops to Saudi Arabia, and the other asked, "If the current situation in the Middle East involving Iraq and Kuwait does not change by January 15, would you favor or oppose the U.S. going to war with Iraq in order to drive the Iraqis out of Kuwait?" Figure 1 shows clear differences between men's and women's responses, with women showing less support for resorting to war.

Even clearer is the tendency for women to oppose the use of force in situations that arise in the United States. Women are much more likely to endorse stricter controls on firearms. For example, in 1994, 84 percent of female General Social Survey respondents versus 70 percent of male respondents endorsed the idea of requiring a police permit to own a handgun. Women have been consistently less likely to support the death penalty than men, as shown in Figure 2. It is also worth noting that more women than men disagreed with the statement on the General Social Survey that "it is sometimes necessary to discipline a child with a good hard spanking."

Figure 2. Percentage Favoring the Death Penalty, 1974–1994



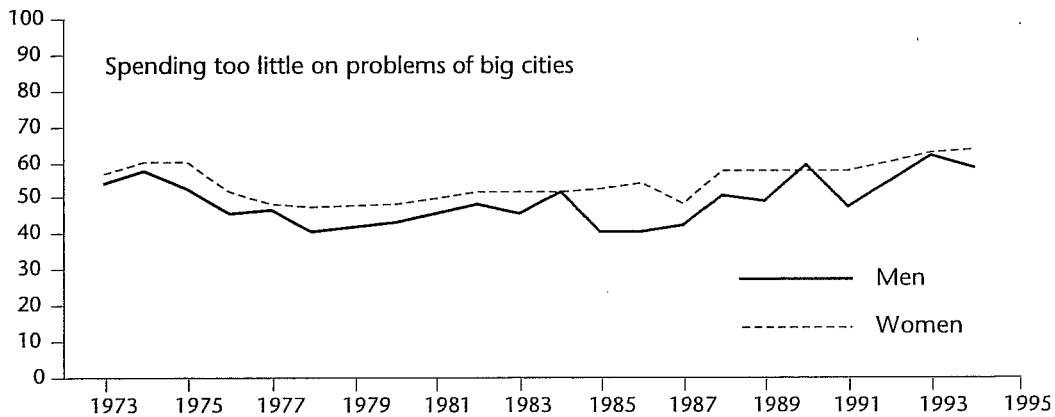
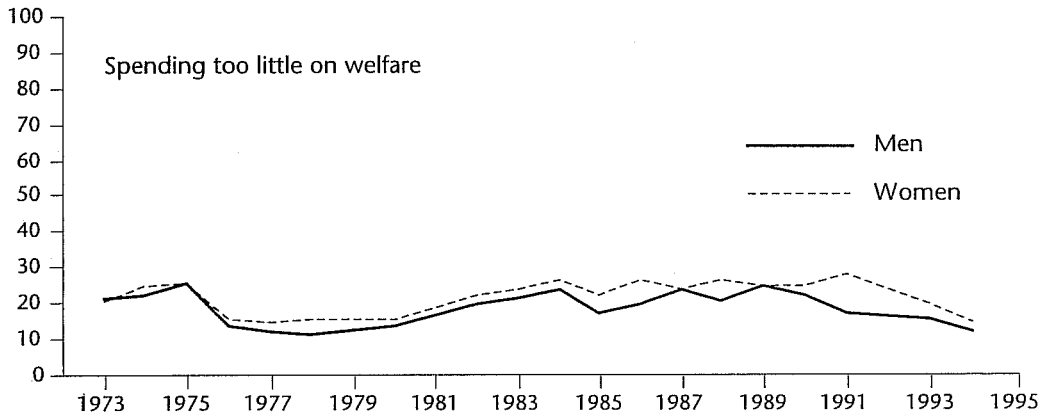
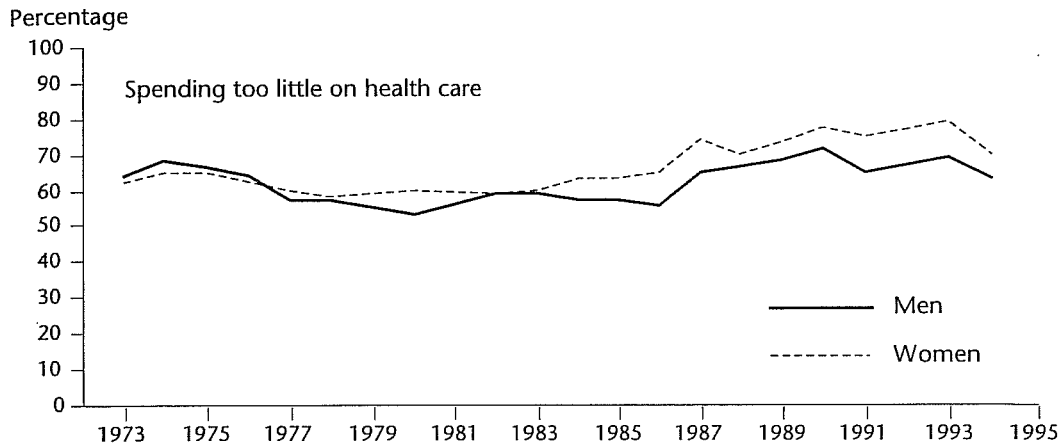
Note: Question wording is: "Do you favor or oppose the death penalty for persons convicted of murder?"

Source: 1974–1994 General Social Surveys.

Gender Differences on Compassion Issues

Compassion issues, such as welfare, care for the elderly, and environmentalism, make up the second area to show consistent gender differences in public opinion. These distinctions, however, tend to be slightly smaller than those found for use-of-force issues. While Shapiro and Mahajan (1986) found an average of 6 percentage points difference between men's and women's responses on force and violence issues, they found an average 3-point difference on compassion issues. Women in the 1970s and 1980s were "more supportive of a guaranteed annual income, wage-price controls, equalizing wealth, guaranteeing jobs, government-provided health care, student loans, and rationing to deal with scarce goods" (Shapiro and Mahajan 1986, 51). They found larger differences in opinion on policies which "regulate and protect consumers, citizens, and the environment." More women than men, in a number of different surveys, opposed cigarette advertising and nuclear power plants. Women were more likely than men to support stiffer penalties for those who drive drunk or fail to wear seatbelts, and to support highway speed limits. Women's greater support for environmental regulation appears to be a product of the 1980s (Shapiro and Mahajan 1986, 51–52). In Figure 3 men and women are compared on the GSS time series asking about government spending on health care, welfare, and the problems of big cities. Differences are consistent and minor, and they generally appear to be larger now than in the 1970s.

Figure 3. Gender Gaps in Spending on Social Services, 1973-1994



Note: Question wording is: "We are faced with many problems in this country, none of which can be solved easily and inexpensively. I'm going to name some of these problems, and for each one I'd like you to tell me whether you think we are spending too little money, too much money, or about the right amount. Improving and protecting the nation's health./Welfare./Solving the problems of big cities." Entries are proportion saying too little is spent.

Source: 1973-1994 General Social Surveys.

(204)

Gender differences on issue opinions become politically important as they are linked to policy and candidate preferences. Women's more liberal opinions since 1980 have been associated with less positive evaluations of Republican presidents, more positive evaluations of Bill Clinton, and (relative to men) a preference for the Democratic Party. The "gender gap" began when analysts discovered that women's evaluations of Ronald Reagan were significantly less positive than men's. Gallup and other polls during Reagan's first administration found a consistent difference of about 8 percentage points (and sometimes as much as 12 to 14 points) between men and women. Analysis of forty-one Gallup polls through 1983 found that "gender differences existed not only on the national level, but in every major population subgroup as well," including both groups that had many Reagan supporters (for example, Republicans) and groups that were generally less supportive (blue-collar workers, blacks).⁵ George Bush also received a lower approval rating from women than from men during his four years in office, by an average of about 6 points on the Gallup polls. Correspondingly, Clinton's ratings have been higher among women (by about 4 percentage points in 1993) than among men.

Bases of Opinion Differences

Just how does gender shape citizens' thinking about politics? Why should the fact that one is male or female, and thus brought up in certain ways and confronted with particular life choices, affect the way one thinks about capital punishment or welfare? Thinking about this question is an important next step beyond identifying gender differences.

Age or generational differences—in addition to work status, education, and race—almost certainly supply different conditions in which gender expectations and ideologies work themselves out for individuals. Political scientists mostly have sought to understand how gender influences opinion as part of a larger effort to explain the gender gap in political opinions. In general, the dependent variables in these analyses have been gender differences in presidential vote or presidential approval, but others have examined differences in issue positions and in basic values. Virginia Sapiro and Pamela Johnston Conover (1993) tested alternative explanations of gender differences in attitudes toward militarism and war, and particularly toward the

Gulf War. One primarily journalistic explanation—that the gender gap in the 1980s was simply a reaction on the part of women to Ronald Reagan’s particular “macho” rhetoric and political style—has been disproved by time. As we have seen, the pro-Democratic, liberal bias among women, though not dramatic, has persisted in the post-Reagan era.

When social scientists attempt to explain the gender gap in voting or presidential approval, they have generally sought to identify other demographic factors that might cause men and women to think differently. For example, many studies focus on structural or economic explanations, and attempt to compare men and women with similar levels of income. Although women make less money than men, are economically more vulnerable, and are more dependent on government benefits, these economic differences do not explain voting patterns in 1980 and 1984 (Miller 1988, 261–264; Frankovic 1982, 443–444). Susan Carroll has suggested a more sophisticated theory which uses psychological as well as economic independence from men to construct a successful explanation of gender differences in voting and Reagan approval in 1980.

A second set of explanations has to do with the women’s movement or with feminist ideology. Arthur Miller (1988) found that correlations between feminism and the vote in 1984 were weak and similar for men and women. Kathleen Frankovic (1982) agreed: opinions on ERA or abortion did not predict opinions about Reagan. Conover (1988) finds that feminist identity provides a robust explanation of differences. She writes, “There is not so much a gap between men and women [but] a gap between men and feminist women” (p. 1005). But Elizabeth Adell Cook and Clyde Wilcox (1991) argue persuasively that feminist identity cannot “explain” the gender gap because feminism has a reciprocal relationship with liberal opinions and egalitarian values. When feminism is seen as an ideology that can characterize men as well as women, they show, there remain gender gaps between feminist men and women and nonfeminist men and women. Without some long-term panel data or alternative kinds of research into people’s political life histories, our view of causal relationships between feminist attitudes and other political values and opinions remains cloudy.

In searching for an explanation for the gender gap as it manifests itself in vote choice, scholars have focused on issues of war and peace and compassion, arguing that women’s typical positions on these issues predisposed

them to vote less Republican in 1980 and 1984 (see Frankovic 1982, 444–446; Miller 1988, 272–277). Such issue differences have persisted, widening in some cases, and it may be that women and men construct different political agendas in making up their minds about how to vote (see Miller 1988).

Explaining voting differences in terms of issue differences begs the question of why men's and women's opinion distributions are distinct in the first place. While the structural and feminist mobilization arguments may have some explanatory power here, Conover and Sapiro (1993) address the question of issue differences (in the area of war and violence) directly, offering the contending explanations of "maternalism," feminism, and gender. Maternalism introduces a version of a socialization explanation which others (notably Miller 1988) have rejected. The maternalist hypothesis posits that the practices and experience of mothering foster antimilitaristic attitudes. Though this hypothesis has not been thoroughly tested—there are problems measuring "motherhood"—Conover and Sapiro's (1993) analysis suggests that the maternal model does not explain gender difference. The feminist consciousness hypothesis, according to Conover and Sapiro (1993), is only partially supported. In particular, feminist consciousness led to greater emotional distress over the Gulf War but not to a more negative overall evaluation of the war. The best explanation, in their view, is the "gender hypothesis." In the context of the Gulf War, women were more fearful and concerned about the war than men and more strongly opposed to bombing civilians (though not less supportive of the war in general). The fact that these differences "cannot be eliminated by controlling for the effects of a wide-range of other explanatory elements points to a pervasive, gendered pattern of *early* learning of cognitive and especially affective orientations toward the use of violence" (Conover and Sapiro 1993, 1096). In a nutshell, women are simply different from men and this difference is, though "socially constructed," virtually innate. It seems that we are back to square one.

The Political Impact of Differences: From Gender Gap to Gender Wars?

Gender is socially constructed. It is socially contextual—constructed differently for different generations and races—and it is a complex phenomenon. Over the past fifteen years the differences between men's and women's po-

litical attitudes and opinions have received new and vigorous attention. I think it is fair to say that the differences we find are persistent (if still time-bound) and that research into their correlates and antecedents has contributed to our (still partial) understanding of how gender affects politics. Perhaps the questions that now deserve more thought have to do with the political implications of these differences.

When the gender gap became apparent after the 1980 election and was publicized by women's organizations such as the National Organization for Women as a way to drum up support for the Equal Rights Amendment and for the Democrats' nomination of a woman for vice president, it marked an important turning point in the long struggle to reshape the policy agenda to incorporate issues of particular concern to women (Mueller 1988). Today the perception that women have a distinct agenda—or even that citizens as a whole are increasingly embracing aspects of what might be termed a women's agenda—continues to shape candidacies and campaigns. Candidates like one of Barbara Boxer's opponents in her 1992 Senate primary, who declared breast cancer “a state emergency,” try to stake out advantageous positions on what have been conventionally described as women's issues. Of course how such issues translate into votes and eventually into policy depends critically on the parties and political leaders who are mobilizing support for them.

The often small differences between men's and women's opinions, as well as the dramatic variance among women, means that women voters are far from a monolithic bloc, despite media oversimplifications to that effect. Karen Paget (1993) argues that “if the pitfall in the past was to assume that women's interests were identical to men's, it is equally misleading today to equate the gender gap with an emergent female voting bloc, let alone a monolithic one” (p. 101). Nonetheless, women's votes are more important than ever, and over time they have had the effect of electing more women to office, increasing the electoral salience of issues that interest women voters, and reshaping the policy agenda. Small differences can be politically significant depending on the media interpretation of the differences, public perceptions of these interpretations, and the actions and goals of the political leaders who make use of them to mobilize resources and supporters.

In this context, the 1990s might be characterized as the era of gender wars rather than of the gender gap. Susan Faludi's 1991 bestseller *Backlash* described a variety of vocal and belligerent antifeminist reactions. What we might consider as opinion differences seem frequently to have escalated

Table 4. Group Differences in Percentage Approving of Hillary Clinton

<i>Age and party groups</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Difference: women–men</i>
Overall	40	60	+20
Republicans	23	39	+16
Independents	35	60	+25
Democrats	69	75	+6
18–29 years old	32	55	+23
30–44 years old	41	67	+26
45 and over	43	57	+14

Source: Gallup poll, June 1993.

into bitter conflicts: violence and killing at abortion clinics, record numbers of sexual harassment grievances, including men's claims against women,⁶ an intense focus on domestic violence, and Rush Limbaugh's derogatory term "femi-Nazis" applied to feminists.

Since the 1992 presidential election, Hillary Rodham Clinton has been a focal point of the gender wars. One of the more interesting public opinion phenomena during the Clinton administration has been the over-time and across-group variation in approval of the First Lady. Over the course of 1992 and the first half of 1993, for example, the proportion of respondents expressing "generally favorable" opinions of Hillary Clinton ranged from a low of 25 percent to a high of 61 percent (Yankelovich/Time/CNN polls). In the Gallup poll conducted in June 1993, the overall gender gap (that is, the difference between male and female respondents' favorable opinions) was a substantial 20 points, with 60 percent of women but only 40 percent of men expressing a favorable opinion. Table 4 shows how this male/female difference is exacerbated among certain groups. Party and age are important determinants of favorability also. Those women who, we might expect intuitively, would identify most strongly with Hillary Clinton—those who are thirty to forty-four years old and Democrats—are most positive toward her.

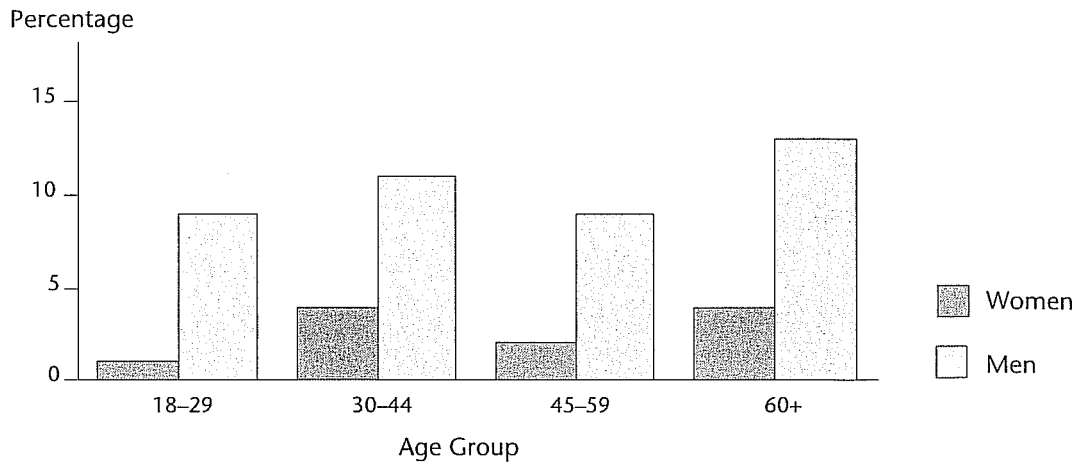
The data in Table 4, which show a remarkable difference between men and women in the thirty- to forty-four-year-old group of 26 percentage points, suggest that the gender wars are being fought among people in similar situations or close proximity. A few more examples of these striking

differences follow. The *Los Angeles Times* surveyed 2,346 enlisted men and women on active duty in February 1993. When asked, "How do you feel about allowing women to take combat roles in the U.S. Armed Forces?" 55 percent of the men and fully 79 percent of the women approved.⁷ In 1992, exit polls in four states asked whether the nomination of Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court should have been confirmed. In all four states men essentially said yes and women said no. This was true in every age group and particularly for younger people. For example, in Pennsylvania, 52 percent of eighteen- to twenty-nine-year-old men backed Thomas, whereas only 31 percent of women in that group did.⁸ A Gallup poll in May of 1992 asked registered voters their opinion of Clarence Thomas. Among the college-educated, 55 percent of the men but only 37 percent of the women had a favorable opinion. Perhaps picking up on this conflictual atmosphere, Gallup asked a national sample in August 1993, "How often would you say that you feel resentful specifically toward men/women because of something they do, or perhaps something they don't do, that you find irritating and just typically male/female?" Twenty percent of men and a substantial 40 percent of women replied "very often" or "often"—virtually no one said "never."

In the 1992 election, the Perot candidacy seemed to bring out gender conflict. Among his strongest supporters in June, according to a Gallup poll for *USA Today*/CNN, were men aged thirty to forty-four (43 percent "considered themselves a supporter"). Women in this age group were much more negative (only 21 percent were supporters). While Democratic men and women were similar to one another in their preferences for Perot, a gender gap of 19 points existed among Republicans, with men much more supportive of Perot than women.⁹

One thing that most all of the explanations of the gender gap have had in common is that they seek understanding by looking at women—that is, they try to explain why women think or behave as they do. Male behavior or opinion is, implicitly, the norm. Why are women more supportive of welfare spending? It must be women's socialization, women's mothering experiences, women's dependence on government benefits. Why are women more opposed to war? It must be women's nurturing, compassionate nature. Why were women less supportive of Reagan? It was something about his message or style of presentation to which women did not respond. Much of the time when journalists and even social scientists say something has to do with gender, they really mean that it has to do with women. This is even more strongly the case with politics, where a deep and

Figure 4. Percentage Shift to Republicans (between 1992 and 1994 House Votes) for Age/Sex Groups



Source: Everett Carl Ladd, "1994 Vote: Against the Background of Continuing Realignment," in *America at the Polls, 1994*, ed. Everett Carl Ladd (Storrs, Conn.: Roper Center, 1995), 48.

hard-to-shake assumption that politics is a male domain means that it is women's behavior that demands explanation.

Looking at the party identification measure in the American National Election Studies from 1952 to 1992, women's preferences have remained quite a bit more stable than men's. Averaging the first four and the last four surveys in the series, the level of Democratic identification among men fell 12 points (from 48 percent to 36 percent) while women's dropped only 5 points (47 percent to 42 percent). Certainly the change in voting behavior from 1992 to 1994 was far greater for men than for women, as illustrated in Figure 4. Here we see that men's shift toward the Republicans was about three times the magnitude of women's.

These data suggest that perhaps men's behavior or thinking is just as deserving of explanation as women's, that gender is not just about women. Political discourse should ask how (or whether) men should fulfill their traditional "breadwinner" role; where assertiveness, independence, and other traditionally male attributes fit into an effective leadership style; how men can balance the demands of family with the demands of careers; whether, and in what ways, men or women are better off in present-day American society. The expectations and conflicts of modern American society affect men as well as women.

In the 1992 election cycle, the media seemed quite taken with the number of women running for and winning office. In 1994, the spotlight shifted

away from women candidates (as the *New York Times* announced in October, “In 1994, ‘Vote for Woman’ Does Not Play so Well”) and toward the angry male electorate. In the 1994 elections, fifty-one of sixty-three races covered by Voter News Service exit polls (twenty-four of thirty gubernatorial races, twenty-one of twenty-seven senatorial races, all four of the state attorney general races covered, and both of the at-large House races) were characterized by a gender gap of 4 points or more. In virtually all these situations (forty-nine of fifty-one) women were more supportive of the Democratic candidate.

One of the most striking things about coverage of the 1994 election was that the media began to broaden its understanding of gender. Rather than continuing to try and explain why women again voted more Democratic than men, we saw attempts to explain why men (particularly young white men) voted so heavily for Republicans. *USA Today's* front page story in the weekend edition of November 11–13, 1994, headlined “Angry White Men: Their Votes Turn the Tide for GOP.” As Celinda Lake described it when interviewed for that article, “Women want to change Washington. Men want to torch it.” Another pollster suggested that working-class white men are “increasingly convinced society and government aren’t making room for them. They feel they are the butt of jokes, condescended to.” These men opposed Clinton’s attempt to allow openly gay people to remain in or join the military, distrusted and disliked Hillary Clinton and her role, and objected to high taxes and spending on social programs. The gender wars—real conflict over sex roles, rules of discourse, and expectations—combined with the economic insecurity increasingly felt by those in traditionally male jobs (such as assembly-line, heavy industry workers as well as the middle management ranks which many companies are shrinking) to produce a distinctive outlook which can be usefully approached via a gender analysis.

The relationship between gender and public opinion over the past thirty years has been a complicated one. Through the 1970s, women were presumed to be identical to men on one level and different from men on another—a combination that reduced sex to a politically uninteresting distinction. That is, women were seen as essentially and uniquely conservative and apolitical—but to the extent that they did think about politics or vote, their interests were assumed to be identical to men’s. When empirical sex differences suggested in the 1980s that the essential attributes of women were perhaps not so fixed, women’s organizations took advantage of this change in perception to construct a new picture of women as having distinct political interests. At the same time, the emergence of gender analysis

as a way of achieving a deeper understanding of men's and women's political thinking and behavior allowed social scientists and historians to suggest reasons for the observed sex differences. From these perspectives, differences in the opinions held by males and females became both intellectually interesting and politically important. As the 1980s waned, gender itself and gender issues became a focus of political contestation; now, in the 1990s, gender may become a useful tool of analysis to understand both men and women, just as women's issues and women candidates assume an ever more central role in American politics.

NOTES

1. Joan Scott's 1986 article, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," is particularly relevant in this context.

2. A few of the books which have had an impact on historians' thinking about various periods in American history include Kerber (1980), Muncy (1991), and Skocpol (1992); on political theory, Susan Muller Okin's two books (1979 and 1991); and on power see Hartsock (1983).

3. If you order clothing from Lands End, for example, the shipping label will be marked with color, size, and "gender." I would argue that Lands End is really talking about biological sex but is (incorrectly) substituting what seems to be a more current term.

4. Klein (1984) also discusses the possibility that while men may come to their stands on abortion through general principles based on rights or liberalism, the issue for women may be more strongly shaped by their personal experience.

5. *Gallup Report* 1983, cited by Kenski 1988, 47-49.

6. The press in February 1995 reported a suit by eight men who had worked for Jenny Craig Inc., a corporation dominated by women, who claimed they had been the target of sexual remarks, been asked to perform demeaning jobs, and denied promotions because of their sex.

7. Data from *American Enterprise*, July/August 1993, 102.

8. Data from *American Enterprise*, January/February 1993, 104.

9. Data from *American Enterprise*, July/August 1993, 98.

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8.4 Breaking the Two-Party Monopoly

Douglas J. Amy

The Problem of Only Two Parties

For the sake of argument assume that the Democrats and Republicans were to develop into parties offering detailed and distinctly different policy options to the voters. Would this eliminate the problems surrounding our two-party system? The answer is no—because having only two parties from which to choose is itself limiting and problematic. It unreasonably restricts the political options available to the electorate. Many combinations of positions can be taken on the pressing issues of the day, but in our party system they are automatically reduced to two. A simple example illustrates the extent of the problem. Assume that we face only five political issues in an election—say, defense, education, welfare, farm policy, and health policy—and that we can choose to increase or decrease expenditures in each area. Even this simplified situation presents thirty-two combinations of positions that could be offered by parties. In a two-party system, one party might advocate increasing defense spending and cutting the others, and the other party might advocate the opposite. But where does that leave all the voters who desire any of the other combinations? They are left with no choice they can enthusiastically endorse and with the task of deciding which is the lesser of two evils. And that is the basic problem with a two-party system—it simply cannot offer anything approaching a reasonable variety of positions on the issues.

Again, the inherent limitations of choice in our party system become even more obvious when compared with European party systems—systems that offer not only a larger number of parties but also a wider variety of parties with distinct ideologies and policy programs. Voters there have the option of moderate parties in the middle, as well as a socialist party on the far left or a conservative party on the right, or even a Green party that claims to be neither left nor right. In these multiparty systems, voters have a much better chance of finding parties and candidates with policy positions close to their own.

Supporters of the two-party system sometimes suggest that limiting the public to two choices may in fact be an advantage—that reducing our options conveniently minimizes the complexity and difficulty of election choices. The assumption is that any more than two options would strain the intellectual capacity of most voters. But this logic is hardly accepted in others areas of American life. American consumers would be outraged if they were offered only two choices of houses or cars to meet their different needs. As political consumers we should hardly be less infuriated with the same overly restricted electoral choices.

One-Party Systems

Having only two options in the election booth is bad enough, but our choices are often even more restricted than that. In many areas of the country we do not even have a two-party system; we have a one-party system. In cities, counties, and states in which one party has a reliable majority of the voters, that dominant party is usually the only viable option. Indeed, for most of this century, one-party systems have been the rule in most areas of the United States. Until the 1950s the South had a one-party system dominated by the Democrats, while several northern states were often controlled by Republicans. Similar situations remain in many parts of the country today. Recent years have seen some increase in party competition in some states, but one part of the state often is dominated by the Democrats and another by the Republicans.

In this sense, our current party system often closely resembles a corporate oligopoly in which the two dominant companies divide up their territories and agree not to compete with each other in them. Indeed, Mayhew and others present evidence that Republicans and Democrats sometimes collude in exactly this way, with legislators agreeing on gerrymandering schemes that ensure safe districts for the representatives of each party. So it is misleading to call ours a competitive two-party system; often it is more accurately described as a pair of one-party monopolies. The big loser in this situation is the same one that suffers in a one-company territory—the public. Such arrangements severely curtail the choices of American voters and ultimately undermine their power to control the political system. Americans have long been aware of the evils of economic monopolies and oligopolies, but we have been slow to awaken to the dangers of the same arrangements in our party system.

The Electoral Connection

If our two-party system is so frustrating, why does it persist? Why haven't we developed a multiparty system that offers a set of genuine political choices? The first reason is the power of tradition. Most Americans are socialized in our party system and learn to view our political universe in those limited terms. We come to think of having only two parties as natural. The media contribute to this view by giving little coverage to any minor-party candidates who do happen to run, making it more difficult for these challengers to get their messages out and to build larger bases of public support. Equally important, the two parties have also devised numerous election procedures that discourage minor parties. Many states, for example, still require excessively large numbers of voter signatures on petitions before minor parties can even get access to the ballot.

But the electoral rule that is by far the biggest obstacle to the emergence of viable minor parties in the United States is plurality voting. Plurality rules tend to foster two-party systems by systematically discriminating against minor parties and making it extremely difficult for them to achieve any electoral success. In the 1950s the French political scientist Maurice Duverger described the supportive relationship between plurality rules and two-party systems, and it remains one of the most extensively examined propositions in political science. Duverger noted that

plurality voting rules tend to work against minor parties in two ways. First is what Duverger called the *mechanical effect* of these rules: The tendency of the plurality system to give the largest party more seats than it deserves and to give smaller parties fewer seats than they deserve. Such underrepresentation is often a problem for the second party, but it can prove disastrous for third or fourth parties.

As a rule, the smaller the party, the larger the proportion of seats out of which it is cheated. For example, in the 1987 British elections for Parliament, the Conservative party won 42.3 percent of the vote and received 57.7 percent of the seats. The second-place Labor party was actually slightly overrepresented as well, winning 30.8 percent of the vote and 35.5 percent of the seats. But the third party, the Alliance of Social Democrats and Liberals, suffered the brunt of the underrepresentation. It received a respectable 22.8 percent of the vote, but was given a minuscule 3.4 percent of the seats in Parliament. Similar fates have befallen third-party efforts in New Zealand's plurality elections. The Social Credit party received 16.1 percent of the vote in 1978, but won only one seat (1.1%) in the ninety-two-seat national parliament. In 1981 its portion of the vote increased to 20.7 percent, but the party only managed to receive two seats (2.2%).

Underrepresentation is typical of the fate of minor parties under plurality rules. And it is quite possible to imagine worse situations, in which minor parties receive a substantial portion of the votes, only to get no seats at all. For example, in 1989 British elections to the European parliament, the British Green party received 15 percent of the vote, but because of plurality election rules received no seats. Similarly, in 1984 the New Zealand party received 12 percent of the vote in that country and no seats. The only way for minor parties to enjoy any kind of consistent electoral success in plurality systems is by being concentrated in local or regional enclaves, where they can sometimes muster a plurality of the votes. This is the case with the small Welsh and Scottish parties in Great Britain; regional popularity allows them to send several members to Parliament. In the United States some third parties have been concentrated in particular states. In the 1930s the Progressive party in Wisconsin was able to elect a governor and many state legislators; during that same period the Farmer-Labor party in Minnesota captured the governorship for three successive terms. Without such regional sanctuaries, however, it is difficult, if not impossible, for minor-party candidates to win office, making it more likely that these parties will be short-lived in single-member plurality systems.

The tendency of the mechanical effect of plurality systems to discourage minor parties is compounded by what Duverger called the *psychological effect* of those rules. Potential supporters will hesitate to vote for a minor-party candidate if they believe that candidate has little chance of winning a plurality or majority of the vote. They fear wasting their votes on a minor-party candidate. It is much more rational for voters to support a candidate who stands a chance of winning—usually one from the two major parties. Thus even though minor parties and their candidates might enjoy some support among the electorate, supporters will often realize that the only realistic choice is to vote for a major-party candidate. This was the case, for instance, for those who supported the Independent John Anderson in the 1980 presidential elections. Opinion polls indicated that up to 24 percent of voters supported Anderson, but only 7 percent cast ballots for him

on election day. Similarly a University of Michigan national survey indicated that of those voters who rated Anderson the highest among the three candidates, only 39 percent actually voted for him. In contrast, Ronald Reagan and Jimmy Carter received 95 percent of the votes of people who rated them the highest. Studies done in other countries support the conclusion that voters often will abandon a preferred minor-party candidate to reluctantly cast a vote for a major-party candidate with a better chance of being elected.

Thus plurality rules subject minor parties to a kind of double penalty: They first ensure that these parties will be severely underrepresented in the legislature, which discourages voters from voting for these candidates in the first place. But the plight of minor parties under plurality rules is actually even worse. Minor-party voters also can be contributing to the election of the very candidate they oppose the most. Imagine, for instance, being a voter faced with a choice of a liberal Democrat, a moderate Republican, and a Libertarian. A far-right conservative may be tempted to support the Libertarian candidate, if only as a protest vote, but doing so only takes that vote away from the moderate Republican and thus boosts the chances of the conservative's least preferable candidate, the Democrat. Or take a real example of this dilemma: the 1980 U.S. Senate race in New York. That year three candidates ran—Alphonse D'Amato (Republican party), Elizabeth Holtzman (Democratic party), and Jacob Javits (Liberal party). Eleven percent of the voters opted for Javits, which took votes away from the other liberal candidate, Holtzman. She lost to D'Amato by one percentage point—45 percent to 44 percent—largely because probable supporters defected to Javits. Polls indicated that most of Javits's votes would have gone to Holtzman in a two-way race between she and D'Amato. But in a plurality system those votes for the Liberal party candidate simply ensured that the most conservative candidate won. Thus an additional punishment often is meted out to those who dare vote for minor-party candidates in the United States—the election of the candidate they most detest.

Plurality election rules undermine minor parties primarily by discouraging voters from supporting their candidates. However, scaring voters away can have several secondary effects that further handicap these parties. For example, because minor parties lack a realistic chance of getting candidates elected under current rules, they usually have trouble recruiting experienced and talented politicians. Such politicians are inevitably attracted to the two mainstream parties where the career opportunities are dramatically better. Also minor parties usually have difficulty attracting financial contributors, who are understandably hesitant to invest money in quixotic campaigns. Thus minor parties are caught in a vicious circle: Plurality rules discourage voter support, which makes potential candidates and contributors reluctant to join up, which further erodes the ability of these parties to conduct effective campaigns and to attract voters, and so on. These effects can quickly seal the fate of a minor party.

Clearly, then, our SMP election rules are much of why ours is one of the few countries that continues to lack viable and ongoing minor parties. These parties have not failed to thrive in the United States because Americans are all political centrists who always prefer our two middle-of-the-road parties. The long history of third-party efforts in the United States—including the Populists, Socialists, Progressives, American Independents, and others—clearly indicates that millions of

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Americans have frequently been interested in a wider range of political options. But plurality election rules usually squelch such options by putting the minor parties at such a disadvantage that most have found it impossible to survive. By discriminating against minor parties, our plurality rules provide artificial and unfair support for the two major parties. They discourage competition and help to maintain a political oligarchy. Instead of creating an open electoral market in which all parties compete freely for the support of voters, plurality rules put minority parties at a huge competitive disadvantage and virtually ensure the continued dominance of the two major parties.

The Predicament for Nonmainstream Groups

The current U.S. election system also severely limits the organizational options of groups outside the political mainstream. Under SMP rules, political groups on the far left or far right inevitably face a difficult dilemma: they can try to work within the major parties (which will generally tend to ignore them) or they can try to start their own party (which will most likely be doomed). Neither option is particularly attractive or effective. For example, consider the position of those who see themselves to the left of the Democratic party: militant labor unionists, left liberals, democratic socialists, radical environmentalists, feminists, civil rights activists, and others. They often face just this sort of difficult, no-win choice. They can try to work within the Democratic party, but this often turns out to be fruitless. The party generally refuses to adopt genuine leftist political positions out of fear that they might alienate the centrist base. It has also been able to take the support of leftist groups for granted, even without giving them any substantial concessions. Leftists' political impotence within the Democratic party often leads these groups to consider splitting off and starting their own party. But leftist groups intensely disagree on and debate such moves. Many leftists, well aware of the electoral obstacles that exist for minor parties, believe that such efforts are a waste of time and money. In addition, such third-party efforts are often criticized as divisive. For example, NOW's efforts to establish a new women's party created friction with some black political activists who feared that the effort would undercut support for Jesse Jackson, who has chosen to work within the Democratic party.

Forces on the far right have faced similar political predicaments. Some try to fashion a niche within the Republican party, with mixed success. Others strike out on their own and create new parties, including the Right-to-Life party and the U.S. Taxpayers party. But with a few exceptions these parties are quixotic efforts that have failed to elect candidates to office. The main point, of course, is that the frustrating political position of these nonmainstream groups is entirely a creation of the peculiar rules of single-member plurality elections. And the only real way to escape this dilemma is to escape the SMP system itself.

The Need for PR and a Multiparty System

Americans have suffered under our two-party system for so long that we tend to view its problems and limitations as unfortunate but inevitable. In reality, of course, many of these problems are inevitable only under single-member plurality

voting rules. The adoption of proportional representation in the United States would go a long way toward addressing many of these shortcomings. PR would allow for the development of a multiparty system with a variety of genuine political alternatives. Minor parties would no longer be unfairly penalized, and they would be able to elect representatives in numbers that reflect their political strength in the electorate. In short, PR would be an antitrust law for the party system. It would discourage party monopolies and oligopolies and allow for free competition among parties. It would create a level playing field on which all parties could vie fairly for public support.

A more hospitable political environment for minor parties under PR would probably result in the expansion of the party system in the United States. Voter support for minor parties would increase as voters realize that voting for minor-party candidates no longer means wasting their votes. Talented politicians would be more attracted to these parties. They could run for office on those tickets without fearing that they are throwing their careers away. Donations to these parties would probably increase as the contributors realize that these investments could actually produce some electoral dividends.

It is important to recognize that the adoption of PR in the United States would not *force* us to have a multiparty system; it simply would *allow* such a system to develop, if it reflected the wishes of the American voter. As political scientists often observe, many factors other than electoral systems help determine the number of parties in a political system—such as the number and depth of political cleavages in a society. Thus if American voters choose to support only the two major parties, PR would produce a two-party system, as has happened in Austria. In this sense, PR does not mandate any particular kind of party system; it simply does not inhibit the development of a multiparty system the way plurality rules do. With proportional representation what the public wants in a party system, it gets.

This principle was evident in the experiments with PR in U.S. cities. The effect of PR on party systems varied from city to city, depending on local political conditions and public preferences. In some cities that adopted PR, such as Cincinnati, essentially two parties still contested local elections, though PR produced a much more accurate representation of those parties in the city council. In cities with more heterogeneous political populations, like New York, a vigorous multiparty system emerged. Before the adoption of proportional representation, New York City was dominated by the Democratic machine, which elected virtually the entire city council. The onset of PR broke the political monopoly of the Democrats, and what was a one-party system became a multiparty system. The PR city council in 1947 reflected the wide variety of political persuasions among the New York city electorate and consisted of twelve Democrats, five Republicans, two Liberals, two Communists, and two American Laborites.

If we were to move toward a multiparty system today, what new parties would be likely to develop in the United States? A coalition of leftists might break from the Democratic party—perhaps something like the recently formed 21st Century party or the New party. A far right party—perhaps resembling a Moral Majority party—could split off from the Republican party. On the right, the Libertarian party probably would see some growth in membership as electing its candidates became more realistic. Another possibility is an independent, nonideological cen-

trist party—perhaps along the lines of the group that supported Ross Perot's presidential candidacy in 1992. In areas with concentrations of racial minorities, we could see the emergence of an African-American party or a Latino party. PR could also spur growth in the several Green parties that have already sprouted in the United States. Other parties are possible—the variety limited only by the wishes of American voters.

Is it likely that the two major parties would fracture into smaller parties and disappear entirely? Probably not. One reason for their persistence is the presence and importance of presidential elections in our political system. Unlike parliamentary systems, the chief executive in our presidential system is elected separately by a plurality vote. The winning presidential candidate must garner a majority or substantial plurality of the vote, and this requirement encourages large political parties like the Democrats and Republicans. These broad-based parties are best equipped to muster the wide voter support required. In fact, the presidential election may be much of why two-party dominance has been stronger in the United States than in other plurality countries, like Great Britain and Canada, which have parliamentary systems. In any case, the most likely scenario for the United States would be for the Democratic and Republican parties to remain in some form, with a number of minor parties emerging.

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PR: Giving Voters a Real Choice

Voting is one of our most fundamental acts of political choice. But a crucial difference exists between simply having a choice and having a real or a meaningful choice. For any choice to be real, we must have some control over the options we are given. Otherwise our choice may be only a fraud or an illusion. If we were told that we were free to choose between being hit in the face and kicked in the stomach, we would probably protest that this is hardly freedom and really no choice at all. Many Americans find themselves in just that situation with our two-party system. Plurality rules artificially limit our choices to two similar parties, and for many voters this does not seem like a real choice at all. In contrast, proportional representation elections would ensure that voters have as wide a variety of distinct political choices as they desire. The adoption of PR in the United States would finally allow the American voter—not our plurality election rules—to decide which political parties and political views deserve to be represented in our legislatures. Putting this power of choice back in the hands of the American voters would help make our election system much more fair and democratic. ■

CHAPTER 10

Political Parties

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“The Decline of Collective Responsibility in American Politics”

MORRIS P. FIORINA

For more than three decades political scientists have studied the decline of the political parties. Morris P. Fiorina argues that the decline not only weakens political participation, but eliminates the motivation for elected members of the parties to define broad policy objectives. Instead, he asserts, policies are aimed at serving the narrow interests of the various single-issue groups that now dominate politics. Without strong political parties to provide electoral accountability, American politics has suffered a “decline in collective responsibility.”

In the effort to reform the often corrupt political parties of the late 1800s—often referred to as “machines” that dominated the electoral process in many cities—it is important to ask whether we have eliminated the best way to hold elected officials accountable at the ballot box. The Republican Party’s victory in 1994, in conjunction with its clear party platform contained in the Contract With America, prompted many to argue we were witnessing a party resurgence. But, as Joshua Micah Marshall argues in the next article, it’s not clear that the resurgence was permanent.

Though the Founding Fathers believed in the necessity of establishing a genuinely national government, they took great pains to design one that could not lightly do things *to* its citizens; what government might do *for* its citizens was to be limited to the functions of what we know now as the “watchman state.”

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Given the historical record faced by the Founders, their emphasis on constraining government is understandable. But we face a later historical

record, one that shows two hundred years of increasing demands for government to act positively. Moreover, developments unforeseen by the Founders increasingly raise the likelihood that the uncoordinated actions of individuals and groups will inflict serious damage on the nation as a whole. The by-products of the industrial and technological revolutions impose physical risks not only on us, but on future generations as well. Resource shortages and international cartels raise the spectre of economic ruin. And the simple proliferation of special interests with their intense, particularistic demands threatens to render us politically incapable of taking actions that might either advance the state of society or prevent foreseeable deteriorations in that state. None of this is to suggest that we should forget about what government can do *to us*—the contemporary concern with the proper scope and methods of government intervention in the social and economic orders is long overdue. But the modern age demands as well that we worry about our ability to make government work *for us*. The problem is that we are gradually losing that ability, and a principal reason for this loss is the steady erosion of *responsibility* in American politics.

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Unfortunately, the importance of responsibility in a democracy is matched by the difficulty of attaining it. In an autocracy, individual responsibility suffices; the location of power in a single individual locates responsibility in that individual as well. But individual responsibility is insufficient whenever more than one person shares governmental authority. We can hold a particular congressman individually responsible for a personal transgression such as bribe-taking. We can even hold a president individually responsible for military moves where he presents Congress and the citizenry with a *fait accompli*. But on most national issues individual responsibility is difficult to assess. If one were to go to Washington, randomly accost a Democratic congressman, and berate him about a 20-percent rate of inflation, imagine the response. More than likely it would run, "Don't blame me. If 'they' had done what I've advocated for *x* years, things would be fine today."

* * *

American institutional structure makes this kind of game-playing all too easy. In order to overcome it we must lay the credit or blame for national conditions on all those who had any hand in bringing them about: some form of *collective responsibility* is essential.

The only way collective responsibility has ever existed, and can exist given our institutions, is through the agency of the political party; in American politics, responsibility requires cohesive parties. This is an old claim to be sure, but its age does not detract from its present relevance. In fact, the continuing decline in public esteem for the parties and con-

tinuing efforts to "reform" them out of the political process suggest that old arguments for party responsibility have not been made often enough or, at least, convincingly enough, so I will make these arguments once again in this essay.

A strong political party can generate collective responsibility by creating incentive for leaders, followers, and popular supporters to think and act in collective terms. First, by providing party leaders with the capability (e.g., control of institutional patronage, nominations, and so on) to discipline party members, genuine leadership becomes possible. Legislative output is less likely to be a least common denominator—a residue of myriad conflicting proposals—and more likely to consist of a program actually intended to solve a problem or move the nation in a particular direction. Second, the subordination of individual officeholders to the party lessens their ability to separate themselves from party actions. Like it or not, their performance becomes identified with the performance of the collectivity to which they belong. Third, with individual candidate variation greatly reduced, voters have less incentive to support individuals and more incentive to support or oppose the party as a whole. And fourth, the circle closes as party-line voting in the electorate provides party leaders with the incentive to propose policies that will earn the support of a national majority, and party back-benchers* with the personal incentive to cooperate with leaders in the attempt to compile a good record for the party as a whole.

In the American context, strong parties have traditionally clarified politics in two ways. First, they allow citizens to assess responsibility easily, at least when the government is unified, which it more often was in earlier eras when party meant more than it does today. Citizens need only evaluate the social, economic, and international conditions they observe and make a simple decision for or against change. They do not need to decide whether the energy, inflation, urban, and defense policies advocated by their congressman would be superior to those advocated by [the president]—were any of them to be enacted!

The second way in which strong parties clarify American politics follows from the first. When citizens assess responsibility on the party as a whole, party members have personal incentives to see the party evaluated favorably. They have little to gain from gutting their president's program one day and attacking him for lack of leadership the next, since they share in the president's fate when voters do not differentiate within the party. Put simply, party responsibility provides party members with a personal stake in their collective performance.

Admittedly, party responsibility is a blunt instrument. The objection immediately arises that party responsibility condemns junior Democratic

* [Back-benchers are junior members of the Parliament, who sit in the rear benches of the House of Commons. Here, the term refers to junior members of political parties.]

representatives to suffer electorally for an inflation they could do little to affect. An unhappy situation, true, but unless we accept it, Congress as a whole escapes electoral retribution for an inflation they *could* have done something to affect. Responsibility requires acceptance of both conditions. The choice is between a blunt instrument or none at all.

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In earlier times, when citizens voted for the party, not the person, parties had incentives to nominate good candidates, because poor ones could have harmful fallout on the ticket as a whole. In particular, the existence of presidential coattails (positive and negative) provided an inducement to avoid the nomination of narrowly based candidates, no matter how committed their supporters. And, once in office, the existence of party voting in the electorate provided party members with the incentive to compile a good *party* record. In particular, the tendency of national midterm elections to serve as referenda on the performance of the president provided a clear inducement for congressmen to do what they could to see that their president was perceived as a solid performer. By stimulating electoral phenomena such as coattail effects and mid-term referenda, party transformed some degree of personal ambition into concern with collective performance.

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The Continuing Decline of Party in the United States

Party Organizations

In the United States, party organization has traditionally meant state and local party organization. The national party generally has been a loose confederacy of subnational units that swings into action for a brief period every four years. This characterization remains true today, despite the somewhat greater influence and augmented functions of the national organizations. Though such things are difficult to measure precisely, there is general agreement that the formal party organizations have undergone a secular decline since their peak at the end of the nineteenth century. The prototype of the old-style organization was the urban machine, a form approximated today only in Chicago.

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[Fiorina discusses the reforms of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.]

In the 1970s two series of reforms further weakened the influence of organized parties in American national politics. The first was a series of

legal changes deliberately intended to lessen organized party influence in the presidential nominating process. In the Democratic party, “New Politics” activists captured the national party apparatus and imposed a series of rules changes designed to “open up” the politics of presidential nominations. The Republican party—long more amateur and open than the Democratic party—adopted weaker versions of the Democratic rules changes. In addition, modifications of state electoral laws to conform to the Democratic rules changes (enforced by the federal courts) stimulated Republican rules changes as well.

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A second series of 1970s reforms lessened the role of formal party organizations in the conduct of political campaigns. These are financing regulations growing out of the Federal Election Campaign Act of 1971 as amended in 1974 and 1976. In this case the reforms were aimed at cleaning up corruption in the financing of campaigns; their effects on the parties were a by-product, though many individuals accurately predicted its nature. Serious presidential candidates are now publicly financed. Though the law permits the national party to spend two cents per eligible voter on behalf of the nominee, it also obliges the candidate to set up a finance committee separate from the national party. Between this legally mandated separation and fear of violating spending limits or accounting regulations, for example, the law has the effect of encouraging the candidate to keep his party at arm’s length.

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The ultimate results of such reforms are easy to predict. A lesser party role in the nominating and financing of candidates encourages candidates to organize and conduct independent campaigns, which further weakens the role of parties. . . . [I]f parties do not grant nominations, fund their choices, and work for them, why should those choices feel any commitment to their party?

Party in the Electorate

In the citizenry at large, party takes the form of a psychological attachment. The typical American traditionally has been likely to identify with one or the other of the two major parties. Such identifications are transmitted across generations to some degree, and within the individual they tend to be fairly stable. But there is mounting evidence that the basis of identification lies in the individual’s experiences (direct and vicarious, through family and social groups) with the parties in the past. Our current party system, of course, is based on the dislocations of the Depression period and the New Deal attempts to alleviate them. Though only a small proportion of those who experienced the Depression directly are

active voters today, the general outlines of citizen party identifications much resemble those established at that time.

Again, there is reason to believe that the extent of citizen attachments to parties has undergone a long-term decline from a nineteenth-century high. And again, the New Deal appears to have been a period during which the decline was arrested, even temporarily reversed. But again, the decline of party has reasserted itself in the 1970s.

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As the 1960s wore on, the heretofore stable distribution of citizen party identifications began to change in the general direction of weakened attachments to the parties. Between 1960 and 1976, independents, broadly defined, increased from less than a quarter to more than a third of the voting-age population. Strong identifiers declined from slightly more than a third to about a quarter of the population.

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Indisputably, party in the electorate has declined in recent years. Why? To some extent the electoral decline results from the organizational decline. Few party organizations any longer have the tangible incentives to turn out the faithful and assure their loyalty. Candidates run independent campaigns and deemphasize their partisan ties whenever they see any short-term electoral gain in doing so. If party is increasingly less important in the nomination and election of candidates, it is not surprising that such diminished importance is reflected in the attitudes and behavior of the voter.

Certain long-term sociological and technological trends also appear to work against party in the electorate. The population is younger, and younger citizens traditionally are less attached to the parties than their elders. The population is more highly educated; fewer voters need some means of simplifying the choices they face in the political arena, and party, of course, has been the principal means of simplification. And the media revolution has vastly expanded the amount of information easily available to the citizenry. Candidates would have little incentive to operate campaigns independent of the parties if there were no means to apprise the citizenry of their independence. The media provide the means.

Finally, our present party system is an old one. For increasing numbers of citizens, party attachments based on the Great Depression seem lacking in relevance to the problems of the late twentieth century. Beginning with the racial issue in the 1960s, proceeding to the social issue of the 1970s, and to the energy, environment, and inflation issues of today, the parties have been rent by internal dissension. Sometimes they failed to take stands, at other times they took the wrong ones from the standpoint of the rank and file, and at most times they have failed to

solve the new problems in any genuine sense. Since 1965 the parties have done little or nothing to earn the loyalties of modern Americans.

Party in Government

If the organizational capabilities of the parties have weakened, and their psychological ties to the voters have loosened, one would expect predictable consequences for the party in government. In particular, one would expect to see an increasing degree of split party control within and across the levels of American government. The evidence on this point is overwhelming.

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The increased fragmentation of the party in government makes it more difficult for government officeholders to work together than in times past (not that it has ever been terribly easy). Voters meanwhile have a more difficult time attributing responsibility for government performance, and this only further fragments party control. The result is lessened collective responsibility in the system.

What has taken up the slack left by the weakening of the traditional [party] determinants of congressional voting? It appears that a variety of personal and local influences now play a major role in citizen evaluations of their representatives. Along with the expansion of the federal presence in American life, the traditional role of the congressman as an all-purpose ombudsman has greatly expanded. Tens of millions of citizens now are directly affected by federal decisions. Myriad programs provide opportunities to profit from government largesse, and myriad regulations impose costs and/or constraints on citizen activities. And, whether seeking to gain profit or avoid costs, citizens seek the aid of their congressmen. When a court imposes a desegregation plan on an urban school board, the congressional offices immediately are contacted for aid in safeguarding existing sources of funding and in determining eligibility for new ones. When a major employer announces plans to quit an area, the congressional offices immediately are contacted to explore possibilities for using federal programs to persuade the employer to reconsider. Contractors appreciate a good congressional word with DOD procurement officers. Local artistic groups cannot survive without NEA funding. And, of course, there are the major individual programs such as social security and veterans' benefits that create a steady demand for congressional information and aid services. Such activities are nonpartisan, nonideological, and, most important, noncontroversial. Moreover, the contribution of the congressman in the realm of district service appears considerably greater than the impact of his or her single vote on major national issues. Constituents respond rationally to this modern state of affairs by weighing nonprogrammatic constituency service heav-

ily when casting their congressional votes. And this emphasis on the part of constituents provides the means for incumbents to solidify their hold on the office. Even if elected by a narrow margin, diligent service activities enable a congressman to neutralize or even convert a portion of those who would otherwise oppose him on policy or ideological grounds. Emphasis on local, nonpartisan factors in congressional voting enables the modern congressman to withstand national swings, whereas yesteryear's uninsulated congressmen were more dependent on preventing the occurrence of the swings.

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[The result is the insulation of the modern congressional member from national forces altogether.]

The withering away of the party organizations and the weakening of party in the electorate have begun to show up as disarray in the party in government. As the electoral fates of congressmen and the president have diverged, their incentives to cooperate have diverged as well. Congressmen have little personal incentive to bear any risk in their president's behalf, since they no longer expect to gain much from his successes or suffer much from his failures. Only those who personally agree with the president's program and/or those who find that program well suited for their particular district support the president. And there are not enough of these to construct the coalitions necessary for action on the major issues now facing the country. By holding only the president responsible for national conditions, the electorate enables officialdom as a whole to escape responsibility. This situation lies at the root of many of the problems that now plague American public life.

Some Consequences of the Decline of Collective Responsibility

The weakening of party has contributed directly to the severity of several of the important problems the nation faces. For some of these, such as the government's inability to deal with inflation and energy, the connections are obvious. But for other problems, such as the growing importance of single-issue politics and the growing alienation of the American citizenry, the connections are more subtle.

Immobilism

As the electoral interdependence of the party in government declines, its ability to act also declines. If responsibility can be shifted to another level or to another officeholder, there is less incentive to stick one's neck out in an attempt to solve a given problem. Leadership becomes more difficult, the ever-present bias toward the short-term solution becomes more

pronounced, and the possibility of solving any given problem lessens. . . . [P]olitical inability to take actions that entail short-run costs ordinarily will result in much higher costs in the long run—we cannot continually depend on the technological fix. So the present American immobilism cannot be dismissed lightly. The sad thing is that the American people appear to understand the depth of our present problems and, at least in principle, appear prepared to sacrifice in furtherance of the long-run good. But they will not have an opportunity to choose between two or more such long-term plans. Although both parties promise tough, equitable policies, in the present state of our politics, neither can deliver.

Single-Issue Politics

In recent years both political analysts and politicians have decried the increased importance of single-issue groups in American politics. Some in fact would claim that the present immobilism in our politics owes more to the rise of single-issue groups than to the decline of party. A little thought, however, should reveal that the two trends are connected. Is single-issue politics a recent phenomenon? The contention is doubtful; such groups have always been active participants in American politics. The gun lobby already was a classic example at the time of President Kennedy's assassination. And however impressive the antiabortionists appear today, remember the temperance movement, which succeeded in getting its constitutional amendment. American history contains numerous forerunners of today's groups, from anti-Masons to abolitionists to the Klan—singularity of purpose is by no means a modern phenomenon. Why, then, do we hear all the contemporary hoopla about single-issue groups? Probably because politicians fear them now more than before and thus allow them to play a larger role in our politics. Why should this be so? Simply because the parties are too weak to protect their members and thus to contain single-issue politics.

In earlier times single-issue groups were under greater pressures to reach accommodations with the parties. After all, the parties nominated candidates, financed candidates, worked for candidates, and, perhaps most important, party voting protected candidates. When a contemporary single-issue group threatens to "get" an officeholder, the threat must be taken seriously.

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Not only did the party organization have greater ability to resist single-issue pressures at the electoral level, but the party in government had greater ability to control the agenda, and thereby contain single-issue pressures at the policy-making level. Today we seem condemned to go through an annual agony over federal abortion funding. There is little doubt that politicians on both sides would prefer to reach some reason-

able compromise at the committee level and settle the issue. But in today's decentralized Congress there is no way to put the lid on. In contrast, historians tell us that in the late nineteenth century a large portion of the Republican constituency was far less interested in the tariff and other questions of national economic development than in whether German immigrants should be permitted to teach their native language in their local schools, and whether Catholics and "liturgical Protestants" should be permitted to consume alcohol. Interestingly, however, the national agenda of the period is devoid of such issues. And when they do show up on the state level, the exceptions prove the rule; they produce party splits and striking defeats for the party that allowed them to surface.

In sum, a strong party that is held accountable for the government of a nation-state has both the ability and the incentive to contain particularistic pressures. It controls nominations, elections, and the agenda, and it collectively realizes that small minorities are small minorities no matter how intense they are. But as the parties decline they lose control over nominations and campaigns, they lose the loyalty of the voters, and they lose control of the agenda. Party officeholders cease to be held collectively accountable for party performance, but they become individually exposed to the political pressure of myriad interest groups. The decline of party permits interest groups to wield greater influence, their success encourages the formation of still more interest groups, politics becomes increasingly fragmented, and collective responsibility becomes still more elusive.

Popular Alienation from Government

For at least a decade political analysts have pondered the significance of survey data indicative of a steady increase in the alienation of the American public from the political process. . . . The American public is in a nasty mood, a cynical, distrusting, and resentful mood. The question is, Why?

If the same national problems not only persist but worsen while ever-greater amounts of revenue are directed at them, why shouldn't the typical citizen conclude that most of the money must be wasted by incompetent officials? If narrowly based interest groups increasingly affect our politics, why shouldn't citizens increasingly conclude that the interests run the government? For fifteen years the citizenry has listened to a steady stream of promises but has seen very little in the way of follow-through. An increasing proportion of the electorate does not believe that elections make a difference, a fact that largely explains the much-discussed post-1960 decline in voting turnout.

Continued public disillusionment with the political process poses several real dangers. For one thing, disillusionment begets further disillusionment. Leadership becomes more difficult if citizens do not trust their

leaders and will not give them the benefit of a doubt. Policy failure becomes more likely if citizens expect the policy to fail. Waste increases and government competence decreases as citizens disrespect for politics encourages a lesser breed of person to make careers in government. And "government by a few big interests" becomes more than a cliché if citizens increasingly decide the cliché is true and cease participating for that reason.

Finally, there is the real danger that continued disappointment with particular government officials ultimately metamorphoses into disillusionment with government per se. Increasing numbers of citizens believe that government is not simply overextended but perhaps incapable of any further bettering of the world. Yes, government is overextended, inefficiency is pervasive, and ineffectiveness is all too common. But government is one of the few instruments of collective action we have, and even those committed to selective pruning of government programs cannot blithely allow the concept of an activist government to fall into disrepute.

Of late, however, some political commentators have begun to wonder whether contemporary thought places sufficient emphasis on government *for* the people. In stressing participation have we lost sight of *accountability*? Surely, we should be as concerned with what government produces as with how many participate. What good is participation if the citizenry is unable to determine who merits their support?

Participation and responsibility are not logically incompatible, but there is a degree of tension between the two, and the quest for either may be carried to extremes. Participation maximizers find themselves involved with quotas and virtual representation schemes, while responsibility maximizers can find themselves with a closed shop under boss rule. Moreover, both qualities can weaken the democracy they supposedly underpin. Unfettered participation produces Hyde Amendments* and immobilism.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How could political parties provide "collective responsibility"? What are the obstacles standing in the way of strong parties that could provide such accountability?
2. Are strong parties in the interest of individual politicians? Can you think of instances where members of Congress either agreed to strong parties or distanced themselves from party leadership?
3. As the articles on campaign finance reform indicate, the political parties are playing an increasingly important role in fund raising, and hence have the capacity to run "independent" campaigns on behalf of candidates. How does this reflect on Fiorina's argument?

* [The Hyde Amendment, passed in 1976 (three years after *Roe v. Wade*), prohibited using Medicaid funds for abortion.]