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Public Opinion and Foreign Policy: Challenges to the Almond–Lippmann Consensus
Mershon Series: Research Programs and Debates

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This article surveys and assesses theories and research on public opinion and foreign policy. Most of the evidence is drawn from the literature on the United States. Three twentieth-century wars have had a significant impact on theory and scholarship. World War I—the first public relations war—and postwar efforts to create a new international order directed much attention to the nature of public opinion and its impact on foreign affairs, issues on which realists and liberals came to quite different conclusions. The period surrounding World War II coincided with the development of scientific polling. Much of the attention during and immediately after the war focused on the extent to which the public might support or oppose an internationalist American role. Extensive research during the first two decades after World War II yielded a broad agreement (the "Almond-Lippmann consensus") on three propositions about public opinion: (1) it is volatile and thus provides inadequate foundations for stable and effective foreign policies, (2) it lacks coherence or structure, but (3) in the final analysis, it has little if any impact on foreign policy. The Vietnam War and its aftermath stimulated a new outburst of research activity on public opinion and foreign policy, much of which has challenged each of these three propositions. The article concludes with suggestions for further research efforts, including: (1) case studies employing archival sources to assess more directly the impact of public opinion, (2) cross-national studies, (3) development of standard questions in order to encourage better cumulation of survey results, and (4) research that will enable us to distinguish findings that are time- and context-bound from those that transcend the Cold War period.

Introduction

Many questions about the role of public opinion in foreign policy are at the center of persisting debates between the liberal-democratic and realist approaches to foreign affairs. Is public opinion a force for enlightenment—indeed, a necessary if not sufficient condition for sound foreign policy—as celebrated by the Wilsonians

and other liberals? There is a long, liberal-democratic tradition, dating back at least to Kant and Bentham, that foreign policies of democracies are more peaceful, at least in part because the public can play a constructive role in constraining policy makers; only accountability to the public can restrain the war-making proclivities of leaders.[1]

Alternatively, are Hans Morgenthau and others of the realist school correct in describing public opinion as a barrier to thoughtful and coherent diplomacy, hindering efforts to promote national interests that transcend the moods and passions of the moment? The realist tradition is intensely skeptical of the public's contribution to effective foreign policy. At the very minimum, most realists would distinguish between foreign policy and other public policy issues; the public might be sufficiently informed to deal with local issues that impinge on their daily lives, but foreign affairs are too remote from their experience, and in any case they have little inclination to become more informed about such complex and remote issues. Finally, the effective conduct of diplomacy requires secrecy, flexibility, and other qualities that would be seriously jeopardized were the public to have a significant impact on foreign policy. Thus, to permit the public a strong voice in policy would be to place the democracies, if not the stability of the international system itself, at a distinct disadvantage. Moreover, it would permit the emotional to govern the rational. Hans Morgenthau summarized the case against an active role for public opinion in words that would gain the support of most if not all realists: "The rational requirements of good foreign policy cannot from the outset count upon the support of a public opinion whose preferences are emotional rather than rational" (Morgenthau, 1978:558).

The long-standing debate between liberals and realists was intensified by World War I, which might be described as the first public relations war. From its inception both the Allied and Central Powers tried to win over "world opinion" in various ways, including publication by many governments of highly selective document collections—the so-called color books—all of which were intended to absolve them and to place the blame for the war on their adversaries. The propaganda war during the conflict was almost as intense as that on the battlefield.

President Wilson's hopes for a new postwar world order depended significantly on democratizing foreign affairs and diplomacy. Elihu Root, a distinguished Republican and former Secretary of State, effectively summarized the position of those who welcomed an increasing role for the public in the conduct of foreign affairs.

> When foreign offices were ruled by autocracies or oligarchies the danger of war was in sinister purpose. When foreign affairs are ruled by democracies the danger of war will be in mistaken beliefs. The world will be gainer by the change, for, while there is no human way to prevent a king from having a bad heart, there is a human way to prevent a people from having an erroneous opinion. (Root, 1922:5)

By more effective international education, "the people themselves will have the means to test misinformation and appeals to prejudice and passion based on error" (Root, 1922:5).

But not all observers joined Wilson and Root in applauding the prospect of popular diplomacy. During the postwar era, the journalist Walter Lippmann published two trenchant critiques of the central premises of classical liberalism (Lippmann, 1922, 1925). According to Lippmann, the common man is too fully engaged in the requirements of earning a living and otherwise attending to his

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[1] Recent research has found that the foreign policies of democracies are indeed different from those of other polities and, further, that democracies do not engage in war against each other.

most immediate needs to have the time or inclination to satisfy the heroic, but clearly unrealistic, assumptions about the informed and engaged citizen celebrated in classical democratic theory. The chasm between theory and reality is especially wide on foreign affairs, which are typically far removed from the direct experiences of the mass public. Consequently, the "pictures in the head" of the average citizen are unlikely to have much correspondence with the real world of international affairs. Moreover, journalist Lippmann became increasingly skeptical about the ability of his own profession effectively to fill in the gap between the real world and the average citizen's stereotypes. His study of the Russian revolution, as depicted in the pages of the *New York Times* during the period 1917–20, did nothing to assuage his pessimism about the ability of the media to serve as a source of valid information about the world for the public (Lippmann and Metz, 1920). The events of the 1930s and the outbreak of World War II, which seemed to raise serious questions about Wilsonian assumptions while apparently providing compelling empirical confirmation for the realist approach to international relations, further tipped the balance of the debate on public opinion and foreign policy in favor of the skeptics.

The period encompassing World War II and its immediate aftermath coincided with the inception of scientific public opinion polling. Despite the wounds to the reputation of polling and pollsters inflicted by the *Literary Digest* debacle in the Roosevelt-Landon election, we can date the era of scientific surveys from the establishment of the Gallup poll in 1936 or of the *Public Opinion Quarterly* two years later. It may be worth noting that President Roosevelt was a pioneer in the use of a public opinion consultant—Hadley Cantril, one of the founding fathers of the new science—for guidance on policy.

Policy makers and many others who felt that an irresponsible American isola-tionism after 1919 had contributed to the outbreak of World War II worried that the public mood might trace out a pattern resembling the experience of the period after World War I: wartime idealism and internationalism, followed soon thereafter by cynicism and disenchantment with active American leadership in efforts to create a more stable international order.[2] This concern was reflected in the frequency with which polling organizations during World War II asked respon-dents general questions about the United States taking an active role in, or staying out of, world affairs, and specific queries about support for or opposition to American membership in the United Nations.

These two features—an empirical approach that relied heavily on systematic polling data and a normative concern that an isolationist public might lead the United States to repeat the failed isolationist policies of the interwar period—may be found in two of the pioneering works on public opinion and foreign policy: Thomas Bailey's *The Man in the Street* (1948) and Gabriel Almond's *The American People and Foreign Policy* (1950).

The Post–World War II Consensus

The availability after World War II of growing sets of polling data and the institution of systematic studies of voting behavior, combined with the assumption

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[2] Just before President Roosevelt left for the Yalta Conference in 1945, Hadley Cantril gave the president a memo which stated: "Although the overwhelming majority of the American people now favor a strong international organization necessarily dominated by the big powers, it is unrealistic to assume that Americans are international-minded. Their policy is rather one of expediency, which, at the moment, takes the form of internationalism. The present internationalism rests on a rather unstable foundation: it is recent, it is not rooted in any broad or long-range conception of self-interest, it has little intellectual basis" (Cantril, 1967:76).

of a leadership role in world affairs by the United States, served to stimulate a growth industry in analyses of public opinion. The consensus view that developed during this period of some fifteen or twenty years after the end of World War II and just prior to the Vietnam escalation centered on three major propositions:

- *Public opinion is highly volatile and thus it provides very dubious foundations for a sound foreign policy.*
- *Public attitudes on foreign affairs are so lacking in structure and coherence that they might best be described as "non-attitudes."*
- *At the end of the day, however, public opinion has a very limited impact on the conduct of foreign policy.*

Let us examine each of these propositions, and the evidence upon which they rested, in more detail.

Public Opinion Is Volatile

As noted earlier, Walter Lippmann's books of the interwar period described the mass public as neither sufficiently interested nor informed to play the pivotal role assigned to it by classical democratic theory. At the height of the Cold War thirty years later, Lippmann had become even more alarmed, depicting the mass public as not merely uninterested and uninformed, but as a powerful force that was so out of synch with reality as to constitute a massive and potentially fatal threat to effective government and policies.

> The unhappy truth is that the prevailing public opinion has been destructively wrong at the critical junctures. The people have impressed a critical veto upon the judgments of informed and responsible officials. They have compelled the government, which usually knew what would have been wiser, or was necessary, or what was more expedient, to be too late with too little, or too long with too much, too pacifist in peace and too bellicose in war, too neutralist or appeasing in negotiations or too intransigent. Mass opinion has acquired mounting power in this country. It has shown itself to be a dangerous master of decision when the stakes are life and death. (Lippmann, 1955:20)

Similarly pessimistic conclusions and dire warnings were emerging from disparate other quarters as well. Drawing on a growing body of polling data and fearing that the American public might relapse into a mindless isolationism, because only a thin veneer of postwar internationalism covered a thick bedrock of indifference to the world, Gabriel Almond depicted public opinion as a volatile and mood-driven constraint upon foreign policy: "The undertow of withdrawal is still very powerful. Deeply ingrained habits do not die easy deaths. The world outside is still very remote for most Americans; and the tragic lessons of the last decades have not been fully digested" (Almond, 1950:85). Consequently, "Perhaps the gravest general problem confronting policy-makers is that of the instability of mass moods, the cyclical fluctuations which stand in the way of policy stability" (Almond, 1950:239).[3] Six years later, Almond restated his thesis in Lippmannesque language, citing not only the instability of public moods, but other deficiencies as well. He told an audience at the National War College, "For persons responsible for the making of security policy these mood impacts of the public have a highly

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[3] Almond's use of the term "mood" differs from that of Frank Klingberg. Almond refers to sudden shifts of interest and preferences, whereas Klingberg has used the term to explain American foreign policy in terms of generation-long societal swings between introversion and extraversion. For the latter usage, see Klingberg (1952, 1979, 1983) and Holmes (1985).

irrational effect. Often the public is apathetic when it should be concerned, and panicky when it should be calm" (Almond, 1956:372, 376).

Others whose writings provided support for the main outlines of the pessimistic Almond-Lippmann thesis included a distinguished list: the dean of American diplomatic historians (Thomas A. Bailey); the foremost proponent of a realist approach to international affairs (Hans J. Morgenthau); and the diplomat-historian who has often been depicted as the intellectual father of the American policy of containment, George F. Kennan. For the latter, the metaphor of a dinosaur vividly depicted the problems of democratic foreign policy.

> But I sometimes wonder whether in this respect a democracy is not uncomfortably similar to one of those prehistoric monsters with a body as long as this room and a brain the size of a pin: he lies there in his comfortable primeval mud and pays little attention to his environment; he is slow to wrath—in fact, you practically have to whack his tail off to make him aware that his interests are being disturbed; but, once he grasps this, he lays about him with such blind determination that he not only destroys his adversary but largely wrecks his native habitat. (Kennan, 1951:59)

Further support for the critics and skeptics emerged from the growing body of polling data which yielded ample evidence of the public's limited store of factual knowledge about foreign affairs. Innumerable surveys revealed such stunning gaps in information as: X percent of the American public are unaware that there is a communist government in China, Y percent believe that the Soviet Union is a member of NATO, or Z percent cannot identify a single nation bordering on the Pacific Ocean. Such data reinforced the case of the critics and led some of them to propose measures to reduce the influence of the public. Thus, Lippmann (1955) called for stronger executive prerogatives in foreign affairs, and Bailey (1948:13) wondered whether the requirements of an effective foreign policy might make it necessary for the executive deliberately to mislead the public.

Public Opinion Lacks Structure and Coherence

A growing volume of data on public opinion and voting behavior, as well as increasingly sophisticated methodologies, enabled analysts not only to describe aggregate results and trends, but also to delve into the structure of political beliefs. Owing to immediate policy concerns about the U.S. role in the postwar era, many of the early studies were largely descriptive, focusing on such issues as participation in international organizations and alliances, the deployment of troops abroad, security commitments, foreign aid, trade and protectionism, and the like. The underlying premise was that a single internationalist-isolationist dimension would serve to structure foreign policy beliefs, much in the way that a liberal-conservative dimension was assumed to provide coherence to preferences on domestic issues.

In a classic study based on data from the late 1950s and early 1960s, Philip Converse (1964) concluded that the political beliefs of the mass public lack a real structure or coherence. Comparing responses across several domestic and foreign policy issues, he found little if any "constraint" or underlying ideological structure that might provide some coherence to political thinking. In contrast, his analyses of elites—congressional candidates—revealed substantially higher correlations among responses to various issues. Moreover, Converse found that both mass and elite attitudes on a given issue had a short half-life. Responses in 1956 only modestly predicted responses two years later, much less in 1960. These findings led him to conclude that mass political beliefs are best described as "non-attitudes." Although Converse's findings were later to become the center of an active debate, it should be emphasized that his was not a lone voice in the wilderness. His data were drawn from the National Election Studies at the University of Michigan, and his findings were only the most widely quoted of a series of studies from the NES

that came to essentially the same conclusion about the absence of structure, coherence, or persistence in the political beliefs of the mass public—especially on foreign affairs (Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes, 1964).

Public Opinion Has Limited Impact on Foreign Policy

A significant reason for interest in public opinion on foreign affairs arises from the assumption that in some ways and at least some of the time it has an impact, for better or worse, on the conduct of the nation's external policy. Certainly it is easy to find public expressions by policy makers avowing the importance of public opinion. During his debates with Stephen Douglas, Abraham Lincoln asserted that, "with public sentiment on its side, everything succeeds; with public sentiment against it, nothing succeeds"; and in 1936 Secretary of State Cordell Hull stated that, "since the time when Thomas Jefferson insisted upon a 'decent respect to the opinions of mankind,' public opinion has controlled foreign policy in all democracies" (*New York Times*, Dec. 6, 1936).

Although such hyperbolic statements are unlikely to withstand serious empirical scrutiny, the driving force behind much of the post–World War II attention to public opinion on foreign policy issues was the fear that an ill-informed and emotional mass public would serve as a powerful constraint on the conduct of American diplomacy, establishing unwise limits on policy makers, creating unrealistic expectations about what was feasible in foreign affairs, otherwise doing serious mischief to American diplomacy and, given the American role in the world, perhaps even to international stability. As Bernard Cohen (1973) demonstrated in a critical survey of the literature, however, the constraining role of public opinion was often asserted but rarely demonstrated—or even put to a systematic test.

By the middle of the 1960s a consensus in fact seemed to emerge on a third point: Public opinion has little if any real impact on policy. Or, as the point was made most pithily by one State Department official: "To hell with public opinion. . . . We should lead, and not follow" (quoted in Cohen, 1973:62). The weight of research evidence cast doubt on the potency of public opinion as a driving force behind, or even a significant constraint upon, foreign policy-making. For example, a classic study of the public-legislator relationship revealed that constituents' attitudes on foreign policy had less impact on members of the House of Representatives than did their views on domestic issues (Miller and Stokes, 1963). Cohen's research on the foreign policy bureaucracy indicated that State Department officials had a rather modest interest in public opinion, and to the extent that they even thought about the public, it was as an entity to be "educated" rather than a lodestar by which to be guided (Cohen, 1973). The proposition that the president has "almost a free hand" in the conduct of foreign affairs received support from other analysts, including Lipset (1966), LaFeber (1977), Levering (1978), Paterson (1979), and Graebner (1983).

This period also witnessed a proliferation of case studies of key foreign policy decisions; with rare exceptions, however, they make no reference to public opinion. But it is not always clear whether that is because: (1) public opinion was irrelevant as an explanation to the decisions under consideration, (2) decision-makers quietly anticipate public opinion without consciously doing so, (3) it was excluded from the research design and thus no effort was made to assess its impact, or (4) disproportionate research attention to international crises—events that are usually characterized by short decision time—tended to exclude episodes in which decisions are the culmination of a long political process; all other things being equal, the more protracted the decision process, the more likely are policy makers to be subjected to the impact of public opinion through the activities of Congress, pressure groups, the media, and opinion leaders.

Although these studies did not answer all questions about the impact of the public—for example, the realities of research access required Cohen to focus on precisely those persons who are most sheltered from the effects of elections—the weight of the evidence would at least have assuaged those who shared fears that mass public opinion "has shown itself to be a dangerous master of decision when the stakes are life and death" (Lippmann, 1955:20).

The Renaissance of Interest in Public Opinion and Foreign Policy

Just as World War II and fears of postwar isolationism among the mass public gave rise to concern about public opinion and its impact on foreign policy, the war in Vietnam was the impetus for a renewed interest in the subject. It was a major catalyst in stimulating a reexamination of the consensus that had emerged during the two decades after World War II. The Vietnam War had at least two direct effects. Most *broadly*, many of those who had believed that a stronger executive hand on the tiller of public policy, relatively free from the whims and vagaries of public moods, best serves both national interests and global stability, came to reexamine their views in the light of the Vietnam War. Indeed, the widely read columnist Walter Lippmann, who only a little more than a decade earlier had despaired of the tyranny of a feckless public and had called for a stronger executive to counteract the mass public, became a leading critic of the Johnson administration's Vietnam policy; eventually he came to regard the public, which had become increasingly skeptical of the war effort, as more enlightened than the administration.

At a *narrower* level, some critics of the war became increasingly persuaded that the Gallup, Harris, and other commercial polls distorted public attitudes toward the war by posing excessively restrictive and simplistic questions. For example, among the most widely asked questions was whether respondents supported or opposed current American policy in Vietnam; deeper probes that might have offered respondents an opportunity to express their views about other policy options were far less commonly employed by these polling organizations. Thus, in addition to secondary analyses of survey data relating to the war (e.g., Mueller, 1973), the conflict in Southeast Asia also stimulated independent surveys designed specifically to assess foreign policy in greater depth and breadth than the typical survey conducted by Gallup and the other major polling organizations.

The first of these studies, the Verba-Stanford surveys, focused on American policy in Vietnam (Verba, Brody, Parker, Nie, Polsby, Ekman, and Black, 1967; Verba and Brody, 1970). Verba and his colleagues in fact found support for the administration's Vietnam policy, but they also unearthed approval for such alternative policies as negotiating an end to the conflict. The period following the Verba-Stanford polls has witnessed a proliferation of studies with a foreign affairs focus, including surveys of both the mass public (Rielly, 1975, 1979, 1983, 1987, 1991; Hurwitz and Peffley, 1987, 1990; Americans Talk Security, 1987–1991; Americans Talk Issues, 1991) and of opinion leaders (Barton, 1974–75, 1980; Rielly, 1975, 1979, 1983, 1987, 1991; Russett and Hanson, 1975; Holsti and Rosenau, 1984, 1988, 1990; Chittick and Billingsley, 1989; Koopman, Snyder, and Jervis, 1990a, 1990b, 1991). As a consequence, we are no longer totally dependent on evidence generated by the major polling organizations. Moreover, these independent surveys are often designed with policy and/or theoretical concerns that can only imperfectly be probed by secondary analyses of the Gallup and other, more general public opinion polls.

Thus, armed with growing central archives of data generated by the major polling organizations as well as evidence produced by the independent surveys, during the past two decades analysts have begun to challenge important aspects of the consensus described above.

Challenge #1: Is Public Opinion Really So Volatile?

William Caspary presented the first systematic challenge to the Almond thesis that public opinion on foreign affairs is best characterized by volatile moods.[4] He took issue with Almond's heavy reliance on a single question in which respondents were asked to identify "the most important issue today." Caspary's analysis of a broader set of questions led him to conclude that "American public opinion is characterized by a strong and stable permissive mood" toward active international involvement (Caspary, 1970:546).

Mueller's (1973) study of public opinion toward the Korean and Vietnam wars posed another challenge to the thesis of mindless changes in public attitudes. To be sure, public support for the U.S. war effort in both conflicts eventually changed, but in ways that seemed explicable and rational, rather than random and mindless. More specifically, he found that increasing public opposition to the conflicts traced out a pattern that fit a curve of rising battle deaths, suggesting that the public used an understandable, if simple, heuristic to assess American policy.[5]

The most comprehensive challenge to the Almond-Lippmann thesis has emerged from studies conducted by Benjamin Page and Robert Shapiro. Their evidence includes all questions that have been posed by major polling organizations since the inception of systematic surveys in the 1930s. Of the more than 6000 questions, almost 20 percent have been asked at least twice, providing Page and Shapiro with a large data set to assess the degree of stability and change in mass public attitudes. Employing a cutoff point of a difference of 6 percent from one survey to another to distinguish between continuity and change, they found that mass opinion in the aggregate is in fact characterized by a good deal of stability, and that this is no less true of foreign policy than on domestic issues (Page and Shapiro, 1988). More important, when attitude shifts take place, they seem to be neither random nor 180 degrees removed from the true state of world affairs. Rather, changes appear to be "reasonable, event driven" reactions to the real world, even if the information upon which they are based is marginally adequate at best. They concluded that,

> virtually all the rapid shifts [in public opinion] we found were related to political and economic circumstances or to significant events which sensible citizens would take into account. In particular, most abrupt foreign policy changes took place in connection with wars, confrontations, or crises in which major changes in the actions of the United States or other nations quite naturally affect preferences about what policies to pursue.[6]

Because their analyses are based on aggregate responses rather than on panel studies in which the same respondents are interviewed repeatedly, Page and Shapiro cannot address definitively one aspect of the volatility question: Precisely what proportion of individuals have in fact changed their minds? For an issue on which the public divided 50 percent–50 percent in each of two time periods, it is theoretically possible that all respondents did so. However, volatility approaching

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[4] By 1960, Almond himself was backing away from his most pessimistic diagnoses. See his new preface to a reprinting of *The American People and Foreign Policy*.

[5] "During the summer of 1965, as the Johnson Administration was moving toward fateful decisions regarding Vietnam, George Ball warned: 'We can't win,' he said, his deep voice dominating the Cabinet Room. 'The war will be long and protracted, with heavy casualties. The most we can hope for is a messy conclusion. We must measure this long-term price against the short-term loss that will result from withdrawal.' Producing a chart that correlated public opinion with American casualties in Korea, Ball predicted that the American public would not support a long and inconclusive war" (Clifford, 1991:412).

[6] Page and Shapiro (1982:34); see also Page and Shapiro (1983, 1984, 1988, 1992); Page, Shapiro, and Dempsey (1987); Shapiro and Page (1988).

this magnitude seems highly unlikely because, as Page and Shapiro have shown, opinion changes tend to be in directions that "make sense" in terms of events.

The volatility thesis can be tested most directly by individual-level rather than aggregate analysis of opinion data. Using different methods for correcting for measurement error, several studies have shown convincingly that at the individual level mass foreign policy attitudes are every bit as stable as domestic attitudes (Achen, 1975; Peffley and Hurwitz, 1992a). These studies revealed an impressive level of stability during times of constancy in the international environment. A panel study by Peffley and Hurwitz (1992a) also found very substantial stability in policy attitudes and international images even during a period—the late 1980s—that witnessed rapid and dramatic changes in Soviet–American relations and other aspects of international affairs.

Similar conclusions, supporting Page and Shapiro and casting doubt on the Almond-Lippmann thesis, have also emerged from other studies. Jentleson (1992) found that during the post-Vietnam era, variations in public support for the use of force are best explained by differences between force to coerce foreign policy restraint by others, and force to influence or impose internal political changes within another state; the former goal has received much stronger support than the latter.[7]

An interesting variant of the "rational public" thesis stipulates that the public attempts to moderate American behavior toward the USSR by expressing preferences for a conciliatory stance from hawkish administrations while supporting more assertive policies from dovish ones (Nincic, 1988). To the extent that one can generalize from this study focusing on the Carter and Reagan administrations to other periods or other aspects of foreign policy, it further challenges the Almond-Lippmann thesis—indeed, it turns that proposition on its head—for it identifies the public as a source of moderation and continuity rather than of instability and unpredictability.

It is important to emphasize that none of these challenges to the Almond–Lippmann thesis is based on some newly found evidence that the public is in fact well informed about foreign affairs. Not only do polls repeatedly reveal that the mass public has a very thin veneer of factual knowledge about politics, economics, and geography; they also reveal that it is poorly informed about the specifics of conflicts, treaties, negotiations with other nations, characteristics of weapons systems, foreign leaders, and the like. Because the modest factual basis upon which the mass public reacts to international affairs remains an unchallenged—and unchallengeable—fact, we are faced with a puzzle: If a generally poorly informed mass public does indeed react to international affairs in an events-driven, rational manner, what are the means that permit it to do so? Recall that a not-insignificant body of research evidence indicated that mass public attitudes lack the kind of ideological structure that would provide some coherence across specific issues and persistence through time.

Challenge #2: Do Public Attitudes Lack Structure and Coherence?

Philip Converse's (1964) chapter on mass belief systems is one of the most widely cited studies in the American political science literature. In recent years it has also spawned a vast literature which has, on the one hand, vigorously challenged his findings and, on the other, supported the main thrust of Converse's conclusions

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[7] For additional evidence about the "rational public," the stability of policy preferences, and issue voting, see Bennett (1972:742), Free and Watts (1980:50), Wittkopf (1986, 1990), Graham (1986, 1988, 1989), Krosnick (1988a, 1988b, 1990, 1991), Russett (1990), and Peffley and Hurwitz (1992a, 1992b).

that mass public attitudes lack ideological structure, whereas those of leaders are characterized by far greater coherence. Part of the debate is methodological, centering on the manner in which questions are framed, the clarity of questions, the degree to which the unsure are prodded to state a position, and similar issues of research procedures. Did the evidentiary base include enough questions to support the conclusions? Did the analytical methods deal adequately with problems of measurement error? Does an analysis that examines correlations across specific public policy issues exhaust the possible structures that might be used to lend coherence to political thinking? Studies that have raised significant methodological questions about the Converse findings include Achen (1975) and Sullivan, Pierson, and Marcus (1978).

Another part of the controversy focuses on trends, specifically on the durability of findings that, to a large degree, drew from evidence generated during the 1950s. This was a period of American economic, political, and military dominance in foreign affairs—the shock of Sputnik in 1957 notwithstanding—with the 1956 and 1960 elections taking place after the Korean War and before escalation of the Vietnam conflict. Domestically, the Eisenhower years were marked by relatively low inflation and unemployment and, despite the Montgomery bus boycott and Greensboro sit-ins, the full impact of the civil rights movement had yet to be felt. According to the critics, this period, both celebrated and criticized for marking "the end of ideology," is insufficiently representative for assessing the degree of ideological consistency among the general public. In support of that view, a number of analysts found that, beginning with the Johnson-Goldwater election campaign of 1964, ideological consistency among the public did in fact increase (Nie and Anderson, 1974; Nie, Verba, and Petrocik, 1976). Some corroborating evidence also appeared to emerge from Hero's (1969) assessment of public opinion polls on domestic and foreign policy issues from the late 1930s to 1967. In general, he found a very weak relationship between the two, with some indications of a strengthening during the post-Eisenhower years.

Those who claim to have found a greater ideological consistency among the general public during the turbulent era of the 1960s and 1970s have also encountered criticism. Are the claims of greater issue consistency rooted in increasing ideological consciousness? Alternatively, are they merely the result of parroting of ideological rhetoric, or of some methodological artifact? This is not the place to provide a blow-by-blow account of the many and varied answers to these and other questions on the issue; for excellent and detailed summaries of the vast literature, see Kinder (1983), Kinder and Sears (1985), and Sniderman and Tetlock (1986). It will suffice to say that there appears to be an emerging consensus that public responses to issues are not adequately captured by the most familiar bipolar dimensions: liberal-to-conservative or internationalist-to-isolationist. If these dimensions constitute the standard, then mass public attitudes do indeed appear to lack structure. Given that tentative conclusion, does the literature on foreign policy attitudes reveal anything else about organizing concepts that might lend some coherence to mass public attitudes on international affairs?

Although the more recent research literature has yet to create a consensus on all aspects of the question, there does appear to be a considerable convergence of findings on two general points relating to belief structures:

1. Even though the general public may be rather poorly informed, attitudes about foreign affairs are in fact structured in at least moderately coherent ways. Indeed, low information and an ambiguous foreign policy environment are actually likely to motivate rather than preclude some type of attitude structure.
2. A single isolationist-to-internationalist dimension inadequately describes the main dimensions of public opinion on international affairs.

An early study, based on the first of the quadrennial Chicago Council on Foreign Relations (CCFR) surveys, employed factor analysis and other methods to uncover three foreign policy outlooks: "liberal internationalism," "conservative internationalism," and "non-internationalism" (Mandelbaum and Schneider, 1979). A comparable trichotomy ("three-headed eagle") emerged from early analyses of the data on opinion leaders generated by the Foreign Policy Leadership Project (FPLP) (Holsti, 1979; Holsti and Rosenau, 1979, 1984).

Others have questioned the division of foreign policy attitudes into three *types* rather than *dimensions*, and they have offered compelling evidence in support of their critiques. Chittick and Billingsley (1989) have undertaken both original and secondary analyses which indicated the need for three *dimensions*, including one that taps unilateralist-multilateralist sentiments, not three *types*, to describe adequately the foreign policy beliefs of both the mass public and leaders. (See also Bardes and Oldendick, 1978; Chittick, Billingsley, and Travis, 1990).

A major set of contributions to the debate about how best to describe foreign policy attitudes has come from Wittkopf's exemplary secondary analyses of the CCFR surveys of both the general public and leaders (Wittkopf, 1986, 1990). His results, developed inductively from the first four CCFR surveys, revealed that with a single exception, two dimensions are necessary to describe foreign policy attitudes: "support-oppose militant internationalism" (MI) and "support-oppose cooperative internationalism" (CI). Dichotomizing and crossing these dimensions yields four types, with the quadrants labeled as *hard-liners* (support MI, oppose CI), *internationalists* (support MI, support CI), *isolationists* (oppose MI, oppose CI), and *accommodationists* (oppose MI, support CI).

Support for Wittkopf's MI/CI scheme also emerges from a reanalysis of the FPLP data on American opinion leaders (Holsti and Rosenau, 1990). That study put the MI/CI scheme to a demanding test because of three major differences in the data sets: (1) The CCFR surveys were undertaken in 1974, 1978, 1982, and 1986, whereas the four FPLP studies followed two years later in each case; (2) the two sets of surveys have only a few questionnaire items in common; and (3) the MI/CI scheme was developed largely from data on the mass public, whereas the FPLP surveys focused solely on opinion leaders.

It may be worth noting that although the origins of the MI/CI scheme are strictly inductive, the militant internationalism and cooperative internationalism dimensions correspond closely to the most venerable approaches to international relations: realism and liberalism. Realism views conflict between nations as a natural state of affairs rather than an aberration that is subject to permanent amelioration. Such realist concepts as security dilemma, relative capabilities, and "zero sum" view of conflict are also basic to the MI dimension. There are similarly intimate links between liberalism and the cooperative internationalism dimension. Liberalism denies that conflict is an immutable element of relations between nations. It defines security in terms that are broader than the geopolitical-military dimensions, and it emphasizes the cooperative aspects of relations between nations. Institution building, improved international education and communication, and trade are but a few of the ways in which nations may jointly gain and thus mitigate, if not eliminate, the harshest features of international relations in an anarchic system. In short, the CI dimension shares important elements with the liberal school of international relations theory. These MI and CI dimensions also seem clearly related to other conceptualizations of American thought on foreign affairs. For example, Hughes's (1980:50) distinction between the "security culture" and "equity culture" in American foreign policy, or Billington's (1987:632) categories of "realist-conservatives" and "idealist-liberals" appear to parallel, if not match exactly, the MI and CI dimensions.

Even if one accepts the necessity of tapping attitudes on both militant and cooperative internationalism, however, there is also some evidence that they are

not sufficient to describe all contours of contemporary foreign policy attitudes. A further distinction between *unilateralism* and *multilateralism* has been suggested by a number of studies (Wittkopf, 1986; Hinckley, 1988, 1992; Chittick and Billingsley, 1989; Russett, 1990). It is not reasonable to demand that any belief structure should encompass all possible aspects of foreign affairs, and there is indeed rather persuasive evidence that attitudes toward some rather important issues cut across the main dimensions identified above. Trade and protectionism, an issue that is likely to become more rather than less contentious during the 1990s, is one such example; questions revolving around Israel and American policy toward that nation appear to form another cluster of attitudes that does not fit neatly into the MI/CI scheme.

A somewhat different approach toward attitude structures emerges from several important studies of the mass public conducted by Jon Hurwitz and Mark Peffley (1987, 1990; Peffley and Hurwitz, 1985, 1992a, 1992b). In contrast to Converse's search for "horizontal" coherence that relies on correlations among attitudes toward various issues, Hurwitz and Peffley proposed and tested a hierarchically organized foreign policy belief structure in which specific policy preferences are derived from *postures* (militarism, anticommunism, and isolationism) that, in turn, are assumed to be constrained by a set of *core values* (morality of warfare, ethnocentrism) about the international community. They found that such structures did in fact exist among respondents to their surveys. Thus, a few rather general beliefs—for example, attitudes toward militarism, or a general preference toward a "tough-minded" approach toward foreign affairs—appear to serve as heuristics which enable one to respond in a reasonably coherent manner to a broad range of issues, including defense spending, nuclear arms policy, military involvement abroad, Soviet policy, and international trade (Hurwitz and Peffley, 1987).

It is important to state once again that none of these studies challenges the overwhelming evidence that the American public is poorly informed about international affairs; indeed, even the Persian Gulf War, the first conflict to be telecast in real time, increased the normally low level of information among the general public by only a very modest amount (Bennett, 1992). Rather, these studies appear to suggest that, even in the absence of much factual knowledge, members of the mass public use some simple—perhaps even simplistic—heuristics in order to make some sense of an increasingly complex world; a few salient criteria rather than complete information may serve as the bases of judgment. Stated differently, although lacking a deep reservoir of factual information, members of the mass public may operate as "cognitive misers," employing a few superordinate beliefs to guide their thinking on a broad range of issues. For further evidence that people organize their political worlds in richer and more diverse ways than indicated by Converse and his colleagues, see Conover and Feldman (1984).

Clearly the recent research has yet to produce a consensus on many important issues relating to the structure and foreign policy beliefs among the mass public. Nevertheless, it is evident that the earlier consensus depicting public attitudes as lacking any real coherence has been challenged from various quarters. As a result of substantial empirical research, there is now a good deal of credible evidence suggesting that the public does use various heuristics—although not necessarily the traditional liberal-to-conservative or internationalist-isolationist blueprints—for organizing political thinking.

Challenge #3: Is Public Opinion Really Impotent?

Among the most important questions about public opinion are: To what extent, on what kinds of issues, under what circumstances, and in what types of political

systems, if any, does it have an impact on public policy? If it has an influence, what are the means by which public attitudes make their impact felt by decision-makers? These are also the most difficult questions, for our ability to answer them is not materially enhanced by the many technical improvements that have characterized public opinion research during the past half century: better sampling designs, greater attention to construction of questions, more sophisticated statistical models to analyze the data, and the like. Not surprisingly, then, we have a good deal more systematic evidence describing the state of, or trends in, public opinion than on how it has affected the actual conduct of foreign affairs.

As noted earlier, most of the evidence through the 1960s pointed toward the conclusion of public impotence in the foreign policy–making process. Even when there appeared to be some correspondence between public sentiments and foreign policy, not all analysts were prepared to accept the inference that the former had any independent impact on the latter. According to several of them, including revisionist historians, any evidence of a correlation between public opinion and foreign policy merely serves to underscore the effectiveness of efforts by policy makers, aided and abetted by pliant print and electronic media, to manipulate the mass public into acceptance of the ruling elites' class-based interests.

There is no shortage of evidence that most post–World War II presidents have followed Theodore Roosevelt in thinking that the White House is a "bully pulpit," whether it is used to "scare the hell out of them" in order to gain support for aid to Greece and Turkey, to warn against the dangers of "unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex," or to drum up support for assistance to the contras in Nicaragua. It is also evident that such efforts have not been equally successful. At least one noted public opinion analyst has asserted that the relationship between leaders and the public has changed— "farewell to 'the President knows best,'" as he put it—but it remains to be demonstrated that the equation has been permanently changed (Yankelovich, 1979).

The more difficult question concerns the influence in the other direction. How much did public impatience lead the Carter administration to embark on the ill-fated effort to free American hostages in Iran, or the Reagan administration to withdraw U.S. Marines from Lebanon? Did President Kennedy genuinely believe that he would be impeached should he fail to force removal of Soviet missiles from Cuba, as he told his brother, or was he merely seeking to bolster decisions arrived at for reasons that had nothing to do with public opinion? Perhaps a more telling example from the Caribbean confrontation emerges from recently published transcripts of a crucial White House meeting on October 27, the day before the crisis was resolved peacefully. It appears that Kennedy was prepared to accept a compromise solution—withdrawal of Soviet missiles in Cuba in exchange for removal of American missiles in Turkey—rather than initiate a further escalation of the confrontation, and that he would have done so in large part *because it would have been hard to explain to the public why such a seemingly equitable arrangement had been rejected* (Bundy and Blight, 1987).

Some other anecdotal evidence may also be suggestive, but it hardly offers irrefutable answers to this question. Franklin D. Roosevelt was the first president to make extensive use of public opinion data, but during recent decades every administration has employed public opinion professionals. We have relatively few detailed accounts from these analysts about how their expertise and data were used in the policy process, but those that exist (e.g., Cantril, 1967; Beal and Hinckley, 1984; Hinckley, 1992) suggest that the mass public is not viewed merely as an essentially shapeless, malleable lump that can readily be molded through public relations activities and compliant media to meet the immediate needs of the administration. Hadley Cantril, who undertook public opinion analyses for

Presidents Roosevelt, Eisenhower, and Kennedy, summarized his experience in this manner: "I want to emphasize that no claim is made here that the [public opinion] data and suggestions Lambert and I provided the President [Roosevelt] were crucial to his decisions. But actions taken were certainly very often completely consistent with our recommendations" (Cantril, 1967:42).

Although it bears repeating that the evidence describing public opinion still far outstrips, both in quantity and quality, that on the causal links between public opinion and foreign policy, research in recent years has begun to cast doubt on the earlier consensus about public impotence. In addition to anecdotal evidence, two classes of studies have contributed to challenging the thesis that foreign policy processes are impervious to impact from the public: quantitative/correlational analyses and case studies.

Several recent quantitative studies have challenged some important foundations of the theory that, at least on foreign and defense issues, the public is virtually impotent. One element of that thesis is that policy makers are relatively free agents on foreign policy questions because these issues pose few dangers of electoral retribution by voters; elections are said to be decided by domestic questions, especially those sometimes described as "pocketbook" or "bread and butter" issues. However, a systematic study of presidential campaigns between 1952 and 1984 revealed that in five of the nine elections during the period, foreign policy issues had "large effects." Or, as the authors put it, when presidential candidates devote campaign time and other resources to foreign policy issues, they are not merely "waltzing before a blind audience" (Aldrich, Sullivan, and Borgida, 1989).

Recent research on voting behavior has also emphasized the importance of retrospective evaluations on performance on voter choice among candidates, especially when one of them is an incumbent (Fiorina, 1981; Abramson, Aldrich, and Rhode, 1990). Because voters are perceived as punishing incumbent candidates or parties for foreign policy failures (for example, the Iran hostage episode) or rewarding them for successes (for example, the invasion of Panama to capture General Noriega), decisions by foreign policy leaders may be made in anticipation of public reactions and the probabilities of success or failure.

The electoral retribution hypothesis received a different kind of test in a study of American policy toward China during the three decades following establishment of Mao Tse-tung's government in 1949. Kusnitz found that, with few exceptions, the correspondence between public preferences and U.S. policy was remarkably high. At times policy led opinion and at other times opinion led policy, but on the whole the two remained in harmony. These findings are explained by issue visibility, partisan differences, and the nonrandom changes of opinion, which combined to create the belief among leaders that the possibility of electoral retribution required them to pay close attention to public opinion on the China issue (Kusnitz, 1984:173, 176).

Another recent study seems to cast some doubt on the universal validity of the classic Miller-Stokes (1963) finding that, compared to domestic issues, public attitudes on foreign policy questions have far less impact on members of Congress. A careful analysis of voting on Pentagon appropriations at the beginning of the Reagan administration's defense buildup revealed that ". . . public opinion was a powerful force for policy change in the realm of defense spending in the first year of the Reagan administration. Moreover, the impact of constituency opinion appears to have been remarkably broad-based, influencing all sorts of representatives across a wide spectrum of specific defense spending issues" (Bartels, 1991:467).

Finally, two major studies have measured the congruence between changes in public preferences and a broad range of policies over extended periods. The first, a study of public opinion and policy outcomes spanning the years 1960–1974, revealed that in almost two thirds of 222 cases, policy outcomes corresponded to

public preferences. The consistency was especially high (92%) on foreign policy issues. Monroe (1979:11) offers three possible explanations for his findings: Foreign policy issues permit more decision–making by the executive, are likely to be the object of relatively less interest and influence by organized interest groups, and are especially susceptible to elite manipulation. The second study covered an even longer span—1935 to 1979—which included 357 significant changes of public preferences (Page and Shapiro, 1983). Of the 231 instances of subsequent policy changes, 153 (66%) were congruent with changes in public preferences. There was little difference in the level of congruence for domestic (70%) and foreign policy (62%) issues.

Although anecdotal evidence and correlational analyses can make useful contributions toward understanding the opinion–policy relationship, they are not an entirely satisfactory substitute for intensive case studies that could shed more direct light on how, if at all, public opinion influences foreign policy–making. It is not wholly sufficient to describe the state of or trends in public opinion on an issue immediately preceding or during foreign policy decisions. A finding that major decisions seemed to be correlated with public preferences does not, by itself, establish a causal link; for example, policy-makers might be responding to pressures and constraints from the international system—as realist theorists insist that they should—without any significant attention to public sentiments on the issue, even if those attitudes are highly congruent with those of the decision-makers. Alternatively, the actual direction of causality might run from policy-makers to the public rather than vice versa, as depicted by critics who describe the public as the malleable targets of public relations efforts by American elites (Ginsburg, 1988; Margolis and Mauser, 1989). When opinion change precedes policy change, this interpretation loses potency. However, we could not rule out still another possibility: the administration manipulates events; the events, now part of the information available to the public, result in opinion change, followed by policy changes that are congruent with opinions. A somewhat related variant of this sequence is the "rally 'round the president" hypothesis, according to which the executive may manipulate the public indirectly by undertaking external initiatives and responding to events abroad in a manner calculated to increase his popularity with domestic constituents (Brody and Shapiro, 1989; Marra, Ostrom, and Simon, 1990).

Among the more difficult cases are those dealing with public opinion as a possible constraint on action. During the 1980s, the Reagan administration undertook a massive public relations campaign of dubious legality to generate public support for assistance to the "contra" rebels in Nicaragua (Parry and Kornbluth, 1988), but a careful analysis of surveys on the issue revealed that a majority of the public opposed American military involvement in Central America (Sobel, 1989; see also Hinckley, 1992). Would the Reagan administration have intervened more directly or massively in Nicaragua or El Salvador in the absence of such attitudes? Solid evidence about contemporary non-events is, to understate the case, rather hard to come by. Case studies seem to be the only way to address such questions, although even this approach is not wholly free of potential problems. Does an absence of documentary references to public opinion indicate a lack of interest by decision-makers? Alternatively, was attention to public attitudes so deeply ingrained in their working habits that it was unnecessary to make constant references to it? Are frequent references to public opinion an indication of a significant impact on decisions—or of a desire on the part of officials to be "on record" as having paid attention to public sentiments?

These examples do not imply that we are limited to simple one-directional models of the links between the public and policy makers; examples of more complex alternatives may be found in Rosenau (1961), Graber (1968), Russett (1990), Hughes (1978), and Hinckley (1992). Moreover, a full analysis of the

opinion–policy links would often require explorations into many aspects of the domestic political process, including the role of parties and candidates in raising issues, the impact of interest groups, the role of the media, the level of elite competition on specific issues, and the like. The literature on each of these topics, even if strictly limited to foreign policy issues in the United States, is enormous, and space limitations preclude their inclusion in this essay; Bauer, Pool, and Dexter (1963) and Hughes (1978) are useful in this respect.

In order to select between competing hypotheses about opinion–policy linkages, there are no satisfactory alternatives to carefully crafted case studies employing interviews and/or archival research designed to uncover how, if at all, decision-makers perceive public opinion; feel themselves motivated or constrained by it; factor it into their analyses of policy options; and otherwise take it into account when selecting a course of action, including a decision not to take external action.

Although the literature addressing these questions is not large, especially when compared to the number of studies that describe the state of public opinion, several examples illustrate this type of research. The availability of substantial collections of documents relating to the 1914 European crisis enabled Richard Fagen (1960) to study the uses and assessments of public opinion during the weeks leading up to World War I. Doris Graber undertook an intensive study of four decisions during the early period of American history—Adams's decision to renew negotiations with France in 1800, the Louisiana Purchase, Madison's policies leading up to the War of 1812, and enunciation of the Monroe Doctrine. Despite personality, ideological, and other differences among the four presidents, she found that in each case public opinion was "an important factor in decision making, but by no means the most important single factor" (Graber, 1968:318).

A study of foreign policy–making about a century later came to a rather different conclusion. Robert Hilderbrand was unable to discover that public opinion had a significant impact on foreign policy–making during the quarter century (1897–1921) encompassing the McKinley, Roosevelt, Taft, and Wilson administrations; to the extent that public opinion entered into executive discussions, it was only after policy decisions had been made (Hilderbrand, 1981:202). Still different findings emerged from a study of public opinion and foreign policy from the period leading up to World War II through President Truman's 1947 speech requesting aid to Greece and Turkey. Michael Leigh (1976) tested two approaches to the foreign policy process: the traditional model that the public constrains American policy makers, versus the radical model that manipulation of the public in favor of predetermined policy choices not only takes place but also invariably succeeds. His findings validated neither model.

Striking evidence that public opinion has a significant impact on policy emerges from a study of four cases of American arms control policy—international control of atomic energy, the Limited Test Ban Treaty, the SALT I/ABM Treaty, and SALT II—spanning every administration between Presidents Truman and Reagan. Graham (1989) used a research design that included an analysis of over 500 public opinion surveys and an examination of primary source materials to determine if correlations between public opinion and policy decisions were causal or spurious. The evidence revealed that public opinion had an important impact on decisions at all stages of the policy process, from getting on the agenda through negotiation, ratification, and implementation. Moreover, its impact varied, depending on whether public support for a policy reached the level of *majority* (50–59%), *consensus* (60–69%), *preponderant* (70–79%) or *virtually unanimous* (80%+).

Studies of the opinion–policy links are not limited to cases in which sufficient time has passed to permit full examination of the relevant archives. Philip Powlick's analysis of the role of public opinion in U.S. decisions on the Lebanon

intervention during the first Reagan administration relied almost wholly on interviews with policy makers. Whereas public opinion influenced many mid-level officials and a few higher ones—for example, Caspar Weinberger[8]—it had little impact on others, including Ronald Reagan, Robert McFarlane, and George Shultz. Foreign policy officials tended to regard congressional moods as the relevant manifestation of public opinion.[9] Powlick concluded that public opinion formed the basis of several recommendations to pull the Marines out of Lebanon; it helped ensure that the decision to withdraw would be warmly received by most officials and members of Congress. However, President Reagan's decision to withdraw was apparently less influenced by public opinion than by the kinds of external sources that realists would advocate following. Public opinion was thus only one of several factors that came together to bring about the evacuation from Beirut in February, 1984 (Powlick, forthcoming).

Taken as a whole, these case studies would seem to suggest that the impact of public opinion has increased during recent decades. This tentative conclusion also receives some support from interviews of foreign policy officials. Although the bureaucrats interviewed by Powlick (1991) were not notably more sanguine about the public than were those taking part in similar research by Cohen (1973) two decades earlier, they were more inclined to accept the legitimacy of a public contri-bution to the policy process. Consequently, these officials tended to avoid policies that were seen as likely to engender public opposition. In contrast, Graham (1989) found little change over time because the public opinion has played an important role in arms control decisions since the Truman years. This, then, is one of the areas in which the need for additional research is most apparent.

Other Recent Research Developments

Opinion Leaders

Until recently, one of the glaring gaps in public opinion research has been the neglect of opinion leaders. Virtually all approaches to government—from theories that view the United States as a pluralist democracy to those that depict it as pseudo-democracy ruled by self-perpetuating elites who seek to use foreign policy as an instrument of narrow, class-based interests—recognize the disproportionate influence of some citizens (Devine, 1970). Moreover, at least since Almond's seminal study of *The American People and Foreign Policy* (1950), it has been customary to distinguish between various strata of the public. Typically a distinction has been drawn between opinion leaders, the informed public, and the mass or uninformed public, although the precise terms and the shape of the distribution among strata may vary from study to study (compare Kreisberg, 1949; Almond, 1950; Rosenau, 1961; Genco, 1984; and Neuman, 1986). But only rarely have systematic studies of respondents in the top strata been undertaken. On occasion the Gallup Organization has surveyed samples of persons listed in *Who's Who in America*—for example, a July 1953 poll on tariffs—but not frequently enough to be of value in

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[8] Among six conditions that should be met before the United States commits combat forces abroad, according to Weinberger, "there must be some reasonable assurance we will have the support of the American people" (*New York Times*, November 26, 1984, A5:1). There is also evidence that General Schwarzkopf was reluctant to fight in the Persian Gulf without appropriate public support (Hinckley, 1992:20).

[9] If congressional moods are more generally viewed by the executive as expressions of public opinion, then it opens up another large body of evidence on intervening variables between public opinion and foreign policy. For recent studies that explore these linkages on the Strategic Defense Initiative, weapons procurement, and sanctions on South Africa, see Lindsay (1990, 1991) and Hill (1992).

assessing trends. Until the first of the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations surveys in 1974 (Rielly, 1975)—followed by similar studies in 1978, 1982, 1986, and 1990 (Rielly, 1979, 1983, 1987, 1991)—and the Foreign Policy Leadership surveys instituted two years later (1976, 1980, 1984, 1988, and 1992), there was relatively little systematic information about leadership views on foreign affairs. In addition to the CCFR and FPLP surveys, during recent years there have also been a number of one-time studies of opinion leaders (Barton, 1974–75, 1980; Russett and Hanson, 1975; Sussman, 1976; Chittick and Billingsley, 1989). A continuing series of surveys, focused on national security experts, has also been initiated recently (Koopman, Snyder, and Jervis, 1990a, 1990b, 1991).

The prior question of identifying "opinion leaders" is among the possible barriers and sources of controversy in studies of this type. There is, of course, an extensive debate on the precise definition of opinion leaders in the United States, and if consensus on that question were a prerequisite to elite surveys, they would never be undertaken. Those designing leadership studies have typically bypassed the broader question and selected subjects in one of two ways: (1) identifying key roles and then surveying a sample of those filling them, or (2) identifying groups thought to be logical sources of opinion leaders and then drawing samples from directories or rosters of such persons—for example, biographies in *Who's Who in America*, *Who's Who in American Politics*, and similar sources; subscribers to the journal *International Security*; or students at the National War College.

A somewhat narrower area of disagreement revolves around the ability to use data from national probability samples for studying elites. To oversimplify somewhat, the contending views can be reduced to two positions on the adequacy of respondents' education levels as a surrogate measure of leadership status. The affirmative view was presented in a prognosis of how public opinion research is likely to develop during the next half century.

> The mathematics and economics of surveys make them most cost-effective for assessing large undifferentiated populations, i.e. mass publics. And until you get to a handful of individuals at the very top, you don't learn very much from studying "elites"—they seem to be just like better educated people in the general population. These two generalizations suggest no major shift in our attention. The same is true in totalitarian countries (and, I suspect, poor countries). (Davis, 1987:S178–S179)

Although the question is far from settled, at this point the proponents of the opposite viewpoint would appear to have at least a plausible case. A number of studies have found that, by itself, the level of educational attainment is an inadequate yardstick for identifying opinion leaders. Extensive analyses of the 1968, 1980, and 1984 National Election Studies and the first three Chicago Council surveys by Krosnick and Carnot (1988) indicate that education is an insufficient indicator of the attentive foreign policy public, much less of foreign policy opinion leadership. Their findings reveal little support for the hypothesis that the "foreign policy attentive public" is composed simply of highly educated persons who are concerned with all aspects of public policy. An earlier study also cast doubt on the sufficiency of education as a measure of leadership (Rogers, Stuhler, and Koenig, 1967).

Several studies have compared the views of opinion leaders and the general public (Luttbeg, 1968; Rielly, 1975, 1979, 1983, 1987, 1991; Holsti, 1987, 1991; Chittick et al., 1990; Wittkopf, 1990; Schneider, 1992). Much of the evidence indicates greater similarities than differences in the ways that respondents in the two groups *structure* their political beliefs (Luttbeg, 1968; Wittkopf, 1990), but Chittick and his colleagues (1990) found some differences when foreign policy belief structures are traced over time. On the other hand, there exist some rather substantial differences in the *substance* of their policy opinions. A few examples from the most recent (1990) Chicago Council survey will be sufficient to illustrate

some of the more persistent gaps between opinion leaders and the general public (Rielly, 1991). Leaders overwhelmingly (97%) supported an active U.S. role in world affairs, whereas the general public was more tepid in its enthusiasm (59%). Both groups have shown little variation in this respect over a period of nearly two decades. Almost three fourths of the leaders agreed that the Cold War has ended, but only about a third of the general public expressed that view. Whereas 90 percent of the leaders favored foreign economic aid, especially to Eastern Europe, only half that proportion of the general public did so; moreover, among the latter, fighting drugs in Latin America was a favorite target of assistance programs. When asked to identify the most important foreign policy problems, the top three items for leaders included issues with an overwhelmingly international character: spread of nuclear weapons, arms control, and improvement of the international environment. The comparable list for the general public included issues with a significant domestic dimension: protection of American jobs, protection of U.S. business interests abroad, and adequate energy supplies.

The momentous changes in the former Soviet Union and elsewhere that have characterized the period since 1988 suggest the possibility—but certainly not the inevitability—of a "great debate" on the appropriate values, goals, roles, and strategies that the United States should pursue in the post–Cold War era. If one assumes that top officials and opinion leaders will have overwhelming influence, whereas the general public will have little or none, then the evidence suggests that the United States will continue to pursue an internationalist foreign policy, broadly defined. In that case, the debates are likely to center on *how* the United States participates (hard-liners vs. accommodationists). If, on the other hand, public preferences play a significant role in shaping at least the broad contours of American foreign policy, then the policy debates are likely to focus on *whether* the United States should play an active international role or focus more on issues that have a direct domestic impact (internationalists vs. isolationists).

The Sources of Foreign Policy Opinions

During the early post–World War II years, bipartisan cooperation between the White House and Congress made possible such initiatives as aid to Greece and Turkey, the Marshall Plan, and NATO. Each of these striking departures from traditional foreign policies had rather solid public support; for further evidence on these and other undertakings, see Levering (1978), Foster (1983), and Wittkopf (1990:166–193). Agreement among prominent leaders of the two major parties no doubt contributed to the fact that, among the general public, Democrats and Republicans differed little with respect to these and other internationalist foreign policy undertakings. A 1946 Gallup Poll revealed that 72 percent of respondents in both political parties favored an "active" international role for the United States, and the 1947 program of aid to Greece and Turkey received approval from 56 percent of both Democrats and Republicans. Nor were there notable partisan differences in opposition to sending U.S. troops to Indo-China in 1953 and 1954.

Since the Vietnam War, sharp partisan differences, reinforced by even deeper ideological cleavages, have characterized the foreign policy beliefs of both opinion leaders and the general public (Wittkopf, 1990; Holsti and Rosenau, 1984, 1990). These differences have persisted into the 1990s, although President Reagan's second-term turnaround on such issues as arms control and conciliation of the Soviet Union did tend to reduce Republican and conservative opposition to such policies, thereby closing somewhat the partisan and ideological gaps (Holsti, 1991).

The ideological-partisan cleavages on domestic issues tend to reinforce those on foreign policy. This was distinctly not the case during the period between the end of World War II and escalation of the conflict in Vietnam. In their study of the

1948 election, Berelson and his colleagues (1954) found a limited correlation between domestic economic issues and either civil rights or international issues. "To know, for example, that someone supported the New Deal on economic issues provided no indication of his international or civil rights position" (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee, 1954:197–198). For further evidence of the lack of correlation between domestic and foreign policy issues during the decade and a half after World War II, see Campbell et al. (1964:113) and Key (1961:158).

During the past two decades the lines of cleavage on domestic and foreign policy issues have increasingly come to overlap (Russett and Hanson, 1975; Wittkopf, 1990). The evidence is especially strong at the level of opinion leadership (Holsti and Rosenau, 1988). Consequently, the putative, moderating influence of cross-cutting cleavages has often been absent in the strident politics of the 1970s and 1980s.

Two other "gaps" have received considerable attention from opinion analysts. The Vietnam War era spawned interest in generational theories of politics. The writing of distinguished social scientists, from Karl Mannheim to Sam Huntington, seemed to offer cogent hypotheses to explain the divisions of American society during the Vietnam trauma, pitting, according to some, the "Munich generation," which had witnessed the bitter consequences of efforts to appease expansionist dictators, against the "Vietnam generation," which argued that it was experiencing the poisoned legacy of an ill-informed effort to apply the "lessons of Munich" to the jungles of Southeast Asia (Allison, 1970–71; Roskin, 1974). This explanation has encountered mixed success when confronted with hard evidence. Wittkopf (1990) found evidence of generational differences among the general public. However, at the level of opinion leaders the primary lines of cleavage appear to lie within rather than between generations (Holsti and Rosenau, 1980, 1990). The generational hypothesis appears to fare best when applied to specific groups such as political activists (Converse, 1987) or protesters (Jennings, 1987).

The term "gender gap" has also become a prominent part of our political vocabulary. There is some evidence of a systematic gender gap. For example, Converse (1987:61) found substantial gender differences and that "'Rambo' themes come very disproportionately from males." According to Baxter and Lansing (1983), war/peace concerns are an exception to the general rule that men and women agree on most issues. Wittkopf (1990) also found gender-based differences along both the militant internationalist and cooperative internationalist dimensions, and another study identified gender as among the most important demographic predictors of foreign policy attitudes (Fite, Genest, and Wilcox, 1990). A broad examination of survey data led Shapiro and Mahajan (1986) to the conclusion that systematic gender differences also emerge from "compassion" issues and those involving regulation and protection. However, Conover (1988) argues that "feminism," an ideological predisposition toward a certain stance on women's issues, overshadows gender in explaining beliefs and values. A number of recent Americans Talk Security surveys also cast some doubt on stereotypical views of gender differences. Women consistently expressed more skeptical opinions about the USSR than did men. Although women were more inclined to describe themselves as doves (ATS–9:119), men offered more support on all five arms control items by an average margin of 6 percent; expressed more trust in the USSR on six of seven items (6 percent); assessed Gorbachev more favorably on eight items (9 percent); had more benign views of Soviet motives on six of nine items (3 percent); assessed relations between the superpowers more favorably on ten of thirteen items (5 percent); and expressed a more optimistic view on the likelihood of nuclear war (10 percent). In the only exception to this pattern, women were more critical on three items relating to the impact of defense spending (6 percent).

At the level of opinion leaders, evidence of systematic gender differences is harder to come by, except on such issues as trade and the environment; women are more protectionist and pro-environment. Four FPLP surveys spanning a dozen years indicate that women in leadership positions hold attitudes, including on war/peace issues, that are generally quite similar to those of men in comparable roles. Moreover, in their political attitudes, liberal women are likely to resemble liberal men, Republican women tend to resemble Republican men, and so on.

Survey researchers have also produced evidence on other background factors, including occupation, education, military service, travel abroad, region, and so on, but the mutually reinforcing partisan and ideological cleavages have clearly been dominant in recent years. The public opinion data generally support the conclusion of three perceptive observers: "For two decades, the making of American foreign policy has been growing far more political—or more precisely, far more partisan and ideological" (Destler, Gelb, and Lake, 1984:13). Whether the end of the Cold War will contribute to softening and blurring the partisan-ideological chasm remains to be demonstrated.

Conclusion

The consensus of the mid-1960s on the nature, structure, and impact of public opinion has clearly come under vigorous challenge during the past quarter century. The Vietnam War, while not the sole causal factor in the reexamination of the conventional wisdom, was certainly a catalyst. If a new consensus has yet to emerge on all of the issues discussed above, at least it seems safe to state that the field is marked by innovative research and active debates on the implications of the results. Nevertheless, there are at least four areas that seem to call for additional effort: case studies employing archival sources that will provide the most directly relevant evidence on the impact of public opinion, cross-national research, development of standard questions in order to encourage cumulation of survey results, and research that will enable us to distinguish results that are time- and context-bound from those that transcend the Cold War period.

As indicated earlier, by far the least well developed of the areas discussed in this essay has been the opinion–policy link. We have impressive correlational evidence that policy changes are in fact predominantly in the direction favored by the public, but our confidence would be enhanced by more substantial evidence of a causal nature. The type of research design employed in the previously cited study by Thomas Graham (1989), combining analyses of survey data with archival research in order to assess the causal impact of public opinion on decision making, is a good model for future studies. More research of this type should go a long way toward answering some of the most important questions about the opinion-policy relationship. It should also provide further insight into other important questions: What are the relevant indicators of public opinion? How much do polls matter? What about expressions of congressional preferences? What about the impact of the media or interest groups? How and why do policy makers (and administrations) differ in their sensitivity to different indicators of public sentiments?

It will no doubt have occurred to readers by now that this essay is almost wholly confined to evidence of American public opinion. But questions about public opinion and foreign policy are obviously of much broader concern, especially in an era of expanding democracy, and a good deal of future effort should be directed toward comparative analysis. Some examples of innovative comparative research include Eichenberg (1989) and Risse-Kappen (1991). The latter found that

although public opinion was important in each of four countries—France, Japan, West Germany, and the United States—its impact was significantly affected by domestic structures and coalition-building processes among elites. Distinctions of this kind clearly take us a long way toward a fuller understanding of opinion–policy linkages. Dramatic changes in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union should open up possibilities for a range of comparative studies that would have been quite impossible just a few years ago.

Mueller (1973:265) has appropriately pointed to an important limitation on opinion surveys arising from the fact that "the poll interview is a rather primitive stimulus-response social situation in which poorly thought out answers are casually fitted to questions that are overly ingenuous." At minimum, that warning reminds us to be cautious about making inferences from a single datum on public opinion. It is permissible to be more venturesome in drawing trends from longitudinal data, but doing so assumes that the questions posed have remained constant. Whereas commercial polling organizations ask certain standard questions at quite regular intervals—for example, on rating presidential performance—there is nothing comparable with a strictly foreign policy focus. During and immediately after World War II, respondents were regularly asked about the desirability of an active U.S. role in the world, but interest in that question appears to have died in the mid-1950s; it was only revived in the wake of the war in Vietnam when global activism came under increasing criticism. In other cases, longitudinal analyses may be rendered suspect, as in 1956 when Gallup made a "minor" alteration to its standard question on foreign aid by adding the phrase, "to prevent their [the recipients of aid] going communistic" at the end of the question.

Among the useful features of the Chicago Council quadrennial studies (Rielly, 1975–1991) has been a carryover of certain questions from survey to survey. Their question asking respondents to rate the importance of a series of foreign policy goals has been especially useful for those with an interest in trend analyses.

With a few exceptions, however, the independent surveys that have been undertaken in recent years appear to have taken little note of questions in other studies that might provide the basis for comparative analysis. In one sense this is understandable; the whole rationale for an independent survey is to undertake probes that have been overlooked by others. But it is also regrettable that there appears to be rather limited communication at the planning stage between those who are designing surveys. The development of even a handful of standard foreign policy questions that would be included in all such surveys would go a long way toward improving a less-than-outstanding record of cumulative findings.

Finally, so much of the evidence cited above has emerged from a four-decade-long period in which foreign affairs were dominated by the Cold War that we need to address questions about whether and how the end of that confrontation may affect or even render obsolete what we have learned about public opinion and foreign policy. At the most obvious level, there has been a sea change in public attitudes toward virtually all of the issues that dominated the Cold War era. Indeed, one could make a plausible case that in many respects changing public attitudes *preceded* rather than followed those at the pinnacles of government on such issues as the appropriate level of defense spending, the primary threats to American national security, assessments of Mikhail Gorbachev's goals, and the motivations underlying Soviet foreign policy (ATS surveys; Holsti, 1991). For example, well before the demolition of the Berlin Wall or the final collapse of the USSR, the public ranked the danger to American national security from the Soviet Union in seventh place, just behind the greenhouse effect (ATS–9:51–54).

The end of the Cold War also raises some questions about the structuring of foreign policy attitudes. Substantial evidence indicates that assessments of the Soviet Union have played a key role in foreign policy belief structures; for example,

it is a central element in the hierarchical model developed by Hurwitz and Peffley (1990) as well as in Wittkopf's (1986, 1990) militant internationalism dimension. Some interesting research questions emerge from the collapse of the Soviet Union. Will it result for many in a loss of structure and consequent disorientation about foreign affairs? In a replacement of the Soviets by another adversary such as Japan? Are there persons who, if deprived of one enemy, must search for another? Alternatively, are the key concepts that structure beliefs about foreign affairs sufficiently generic that they will survive the dramatic international changes of the past few years? It is my guess that such dimensions as militant internationalism, cooperative internationalism, and unilateralism-multilateralism will continue to structure foreign policy attitudes, but the changes we have witnessed since the late 1980s are of such unprecedented magnitude that this must be treated as a hypothesis that requires systematic testing.

At the broadest level, if we are indeed entering into a period of fewer major power confrontations, and greater attention to such nonmilitary issues as trade, immigration, the environment, and the like—there is ample survey data that much of the American public believes this to be the case—it may also be an era in which public opinion plays a more autonomous role. Even those who do not fully accept the "manipulated public" thesis would acknowledge that crises and confrontations abroad provide a setting in which opportunities and temptations for manipulating the public are far greater than on nonstrategic issues. Not only are the latter typically resolved over a longer time period—providing greater opportunities for the public, pressure groups, the media, and Congress to play a significant role— but they also tend to be more resistant to claims that the needs for secrecy, flexibility, and speed of action make it both necessary and legitimate for the executive to have a relatively free hand.

In short, we may be moving into a period in which the relationship between public opinion and foreign policy takes on added rather than diminished significance, but we should also be wary of assumptions that the theories, evidence, and linkages emerging from research during the Cold War era will necessarily travel intact into an era of strikingly different circumstances.

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