*The Etiology of Public Support for the Supreme Court**

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The Supreme Court, like all political institutions, requires some minimal level of support because, as the high bench performs its political and constitutional roles, the justices must on occasion stand against the winds of public opinion. With data from a recent national survey, we reexamine the levels, sources, and explanations of public support for the Supreme Court. Since racial differences in attitudes toward the Court are so great, we focus here only on the attitudes of white U.S. citizens. Our purposes are both substantive and methodological. On the substantive front, we examine changes in the etiology of support. We investigate the traditional explanations of diffuse support, but, more important, we introduce and evaluate the power of a new set of variables, political values. These political values do an uncommonly good job of predicting attitudes toward the Court. In addition, we devote particular attention to the important role of "opinion leaders" as supporters of the Court. These leaders relate to the Court in a fashion very different from that of the mass public. On the methodological front, we offer an alternative means of thinking about and capturing diffuse support for the Court among the mass public. We close with speculations about the process by which diffuse support for the Court changes over time and, more generally, the implications of attitudes among the mass public and opinion leaders for the functioning of the Supreme Court.

To persist and function effectively, political institutions must continuously try to amass and husband the goodwill of the public. For the Supreme Court, public support bulks especially large; it is an uncommonly vulnerable institution. The Court lacks an electoral connection to provide legitimacy, is sometimes obliged to stand against the winds of public opinion, operates in an environment often intolerant of those in need of defense, and has none of the standard political levers over people and institutions (see Marshall 1989).

Still, the Supreme Court has traditionally fared well in the estimations of the public, especially in comparison with other political institutions. Even during the 1960s, when support for other institutions plummeted, public evaluations of the Court remained relatively high. The seeming paradox of widespread

*This paper is a joint product of the two authors. It is based on research funded by the National Science Foundation (SES 86-06642). For helpful criticism and comment on an earlier draft, we thank Joel B. Grossman, Stephen Wasby, Larry Baas, and Herbert Jacob. We are deeply indebted to Felice Levine at NSF for support for the project. A number of colleagues have contributed significantly to the development of the research, including Jonathan Casper, James Davis, Jennifer Hochschild, Stanley Presser, Lee Sigelman, Paul Sniderman, John L. Sullivan, and Tom Tyler. We are also indebted to the National Opinion Research Center—and especially Dick Rubin—for its excellent execution of the survey. Bernadette McKinney, Steven Shamberger, and Marilyn Yale provided helpful research assistance. James P. Wenzel has been Gibson's invaluable assistant throughout. We appreciate the comments of the anonymous referees and in particular one who provided a long and extraordinarily helpful report.

American Journal of Political Science, Vol. 36, No. 3, August 1992, Pp. 635–664

support for an institution bereft of the normal political resources has captured considerable attention from scholars (e.g., Adamany 1973; Daniels 1973; Murphy and Tanenhaus 1968, 1970, 1990; Jaros and Roper 1980; Casey 1974; Baas and Thomas 1984; Handberg 1984).

Nevertheless, popular support for the Supreme Court is limited, and it changes over time in response to the actions of the Court itself and to external political conditions (Caldeira 1986; Tanenhaus and Murphy 1981; Handberg 1984). Public confidence in the Court in the aggregate shifts as a result of judicial activism and defense of the rights of the accused (Caldeira 1987; Lehne and Reynolds 1978), and the demographic and political correlates of individual evaluations of the high bench have changed (Murphy and Tanenhaus 1968; Tanenhaus and Murphy 1981; Sigelman 1979; Handberg and Maddox 1982; Secret, Johnson, and Welch 1986; Hirsch and Donohew 1968). Since the 1960s, the Supreme Court itself has made a pronounced shift in ideological direction, and we might anticipate by now some public awareness of, and consequences from, these important changes in public policy.

For all these reasons, now is an appropriate juncture at which to reexamine the levels, sources, and explanations of public support for the Supreme Court. On the methodological front, we offer an alternative means of thinking about and capturing diffuse support for the Court among the mass public. On the substantive front, we articulate and then test a series of explanations of the etiology of support for the Court. Naturally, we examine the traditional explanations of diffuse support (Murphy, Tanenhaus, and Kastner 1973), but, more important, we introduce and demonstrate the explanatory power of a new set of variables, political values. For the mass public, contrary to previous research, we find *no* connection between support for specific policies and diffuse support for the Supreme Court. Instead, broad political values—commitment to social order and support for democratic norms—do a good job of predicting attitudes toward the Supreme Court. We then consider the important role of "opinion leaders" as supporters of the Supreme Court. In contrast to the mass public, opinion leaders show a greater tendency to link support for the Supreme Court to the satisfaction of specific policy preferences. Finally, we place these results within the context of change by suggesting some of the crucial components of a broader theory of the ebb and flow of support and conclude with speculation on the consequences of attitudes among the mass public and elites for the effective functioning and resilience of the Supreme Court.

1. The Meaning of Support

Easton has described support "as an attitude by which a person orients himself to an object either favorably or unfavorably, positively or negatively. Such an attitude may be expressed in parallel action" (1975, 436). Polities and political institutions require a certain amount of political support to persist and to flourish.

No political institution can survive if support for it is contingent upon satisfaction with policy outputs; all political institutions require a "reservoir" of goodwill.

Each citizen will at some time disagree with the policies, dislike or distrust the incumbents, or criticize the procedures of an institution such as the Supreme Court. Normally, however, discontent with officials, policies, or procedures does not translate into a withdrawal of support for an institution. In gist, a citizen may well disagree with what an institution does but nevertheless continue to concede its legitimacy as a decision maker. "Specific support" consists of a set of attitudes toward an institution based upon the fulfillment of demands for particular policies or actions. "Diffuse support," by contrast, refers to a "reservoir of favorable attitudes or good will that helps members to accept or tolerate outputs to which they are opposed or the effects of which they see as damaging to their wants" (Easton 1965, 273). In principle, diffuse support differs from specific support in its sources, greater durability, and more fundamental basis.

The distinction between diffuse and specific support strikes us as conceptually sound and intuitively pleasing.[1] Unfortunately, previous studies of the Supreme Court have not escaped the peril of mixing together elements of specific support in measures of diffuse support. For instance, Murphy and Tanenhaus built a scale of diffuse support from items asking (1) how well the Court does its basic job, (2) whether the Court is too much involved in partisan policies, (3) whether it is basically fair in its decisions, and (4) the relative degree of trust in Congress as opposed to the Court.[2] On at least two counts, the resulting index fails to provide sufficient separation of diffuse and specific support.[3]

First, although by definition diffuse and specific support should not correlate strongly (see Easton 1975, 442 n. 21), Murphy and Tanenhaus report consistently strong relationships between diffuse support and various measures of specific support (correlations range from .45 to .55 for mass samples). Second, the wording of the first two items strongly suggests an element of specific support. For most citizens, views of "how well the Court is doing its basic job" depend in part on whether they agree with the Court's decisions. The scale as a

[1]It is, of course, difficult and some would argue impossible to separate the two in the real world. Thus, Loewenberg states, "The distinction between [them] raises what would appear to be insuperable problems of measurement. . . . It is a distinction resting on differences of motive for supportive behavior which it would be extraordinarily difficult to distinguish empirically" (1971, 184). In response to this empirical difficulty, some scholars have given up the task entirely and considered support as a generic concept (e.g., Davidson and Parker 1972). We disagree. We think it possible with careful conceptualization and measurement to keep the two separate.

[2]Murphy and Tanenhaus (1990) have changed their view about whether this last item is a good indicator of diffuse support for the Court.

[3]We could levy a similar charge against many other scholars, including one of us. Murphy and Tanenhaus's project serves as a good example because it is the most thorough, visible, and often-cited study of support for the Supreme Court.

whole does not tap to a sufficient degree the fundamental and relatively enduring features of the public's orientations to the Supreme Court. It captures too much of transient feelings about particular decisions and policies. We believe another approach is in order.

To capture the enduring components of public evaluations of the Court, we need to pose respondents with tough questions about their willingness to accept, make, or countenance major changes in fundamental attributes of how the high bench functions or fits into the U.S. constitutional system (cf. Loewenberg 1971). For this variant of support, some have used the term "institutional commitment" (e.g., Patterson, Hedlund, and Boynton 1975).[4] Note that commitment is *not* the same thing as compliance; we differentiate "institutional commitment" and "compliance" as distinct components of support (see Patterson, Hedlund, and Boynton 1975). This strategy has the advantage of allowing an empirical test of the link between institutional commitment and compliant behavior once we have established the prerequisites of diffuse support. Thus, in our conceptualization and measurement of diffuse support for the Supreme Court, we depart from the practices of earlier researchers. We focus on support for the maintenance of the institution rather than on broader and more diffuse affective orientations toward the Court as a whole.

Much of the earlier research, dating back to Dahl's (1957) seminal paper, has been motivated by a concern with the ability of the Supreme Court to legitimize the actions and policies of other governmental institutions: Can the justices translate positive affect toward the Supreme Court into support for unpopular public policies? By contrast, we spotlight the ability of the Court to maintain itself in the face of its own unpopular rulings—not with the capacity of the institution to legitimize the policies of other governmental units. Several scholars (e.g., Adamany 1973) have called attention to the important distinction between general affect and support for the institution.[5]

[4]We have, moreover, some historical precedent for items of this sort. In the 1930s, when the Supreme Court pushed the limits of its constitutional warrant to the hilt, President Roosevelt and others proposed major changes in the procedures and roles of the Court. Pollsters took soundings on a number of these proposals (see, e.g., Caldeira 1987). These questions went to the very heart of the matter: Would the respondent support truly radical changes in the nature of the Supreme Court's position in our constitutional polity? For example, during 1935, as the crisis around the Court intensified, Gallup asked a sample of the public: "As a general principle, would you favor limiting the power of the Supreme Court to declare acts of Congress unconstitutional?" (Cantril and Strunk 1951). Even though most of the public opposed the stands the Court had taken against the New Deal, far fewer than half of the sample expressed any degree of approval for a limitation on judicial review. These data show the strong resistance among the U.S. public to proposals for large alterations of the Supreme Court and the functions it performs.

[5]There is, as Adamany (1973) and others have shown, not much evidence for the ability of the Supreme Court to legitimize the controversial decisions of other institutions. Three recent articles give new life and lend some plausibility once again to this proposition. Both Gibson (1989) and Tyler (1990) demonstrate the importance of supportive attitudes toward the police and the courts for compliance with the law. Perceptions of institutional legitimacy affect compliance even in a relatively

Measuring Diffuse Support

Institutional commitment can range from complete unwillingness to support the continuing existence of the institution to an unswerving institutional allegiance. We have calibrated the continuum with points that indicate willingness to accept fundamental structural changes in the institution. For the Supreme Court, we have measured diffuse support with a set of items that concerns willingness to support elemental changes in the powers, process, and structures of the high bench. In constructing this set of items, we have taken cues from the work done on the Court in the 1930s and by Patterson, Hedlund, and Boynton (1975) and Loewenberg (1971) on legislatures. And we have purposively offered respondents more than mere tinkering with minor procedural aspects of the Court; diffuse support is opposition to basic structural and functional change. The collapsed responses of our sample to these five items appear in Table 1. For analytical reasons, which will become apparent below, we present the sample broken down by race. We collected the original responses via a five-point Likert scale in a national in-person, two-wave panel survey conducted in 1987.[6]

sophisticated multivariate model. Mondak (1990), based on an intriguing series of experiments, shows how, under well-specified conditions, an endorsement from the Supreme Court *can* affect policy legitimacy; and affect toward the institution affects the way in which people evaluate the Court's messages. Support for the Supreme Court as an institution probably constitutes a necessary but not a sufficient condition for the conferring of legitimacy on controversial policies (see also Mondak 1991). For our purposes here, we need make no claims for a link between support for the Court and capacity to confer legitimacy.

[6]The analysis reported in this article is based on a national survey conducted in 1987. The survey was an extension of the 1987 General Social Survey (GSS). The sample for the GSS is a full probability sample. The 1987 GSS was conducted in the spring, with a response rate of approximately 75%.

In June and July, the respondents in the 1987 GSS were resurveyed. Of the 1,466 subjects in the spring GSS, 1,106 were eligible to be interviewed. This subsample was selected randomly, within gender strata. Because the 1987 GSS cross-section had a relatively large differential nonresponse rate by gender, there is some gender imbalance in the pool of subjects eligible for the second wave interview. Consequently, stratified random sampling was thought desirable. For the reinterviews, males and females were selected with equal probability. Approximately 87% of these subjects were reinterviewed. Most of these were in-person interviews. Since some subjects had moved, some small percentage of the reinterviews were conducted by telephone.

The 1987 GSS also included a special oversample of 353 black respondents. This sample was also a full probability sample. This means that extraordinary efforts had to be mounted in order to draw this supplementary sample: roughly 5,000 households nationwide were sampled and contacted in order to locate the black subjects. The response rate for the black respondents was 79%. All of these subjects were eligible for the reinterview, and reinterviews were successfully completed with nearly 90% of the original subjects. It should be noted that the black oversample also overrepresents females. Because the universe of the black oversample was selected for inclusion in the reinterview project, no sampling techniques could ameliorate this problem. Thus, interviews were completed with a total of 1,267 respondents. Since the sample is stratified by race, most analyses must be conducted on weighted data.

The first and most remarkable thing in Table 1 is that on each item we see a statistically significant difference between blacks and whites. Thus, in all of our thinking about public attitudes toward the Supreme Court, we need to remain mindful of the fundamental differences between racial groupings.

We comment first on the sample of whites. Diffuse support for the Supreme Court is fairly substantial among whites. Few of them express willingness to eliminate the Court, even if it "continually makes decisions that the people disagree with." Over two-thirds of the subjects claim that they would do everything possible to defeat an effort to abolish the Court. Only 10% of the sample said it would support the elimination of the Court's power to review and invalidate acts of Congress. About 80% oppose the abolition of the Court, and approximately 70% agreed that people should be willing to do everything they can to ensure the defeat of such a measure. Only when we pit the Court against Congress do we observe a diminution of support, and even there, only a minority is unwilling to support the Court. Nonetheless, we do encounter variance. Even though our items offer drastic alternatives, nontrivial portions of the sample respond with willingness to countenance change.

Blacks, like whites, are for the most part favorably disposed toward the Court as an institution. For example, a majority of both blacks and whites believe people should be willing to do everything they can to defeat a proposal to abolish the Supreme Court. But on every item, blacks show substantially less support for the Court than do whites. In part, of course, this is the result of greater uncertainty among blacks. Still, even if we take uncertainty into account, blacks exhibit lower levels of support. Perhaps even more important, the sources of diffuse support for the Court differ markedly between blacks and whites. Accordingly, we limit the statistical analysis in this article to support among the sample of whites.[7]

Table 1 also shows the factor loadings that result from a common factor analysis of the five items. The factor structure is strongly unidimensional; the first factor accounts for 52% of the variance in the items. The first unrotated factor score from this analysis will serve as our indicator of diffuse support for the Court. Despite the distribution of responses within the individual items, the factor score for diffuse support is not markedly skewed.

[7]For a full account of the sources of black support for the Supreme Court, see Gibson and Caldeira (forthcoming). Using data from an unusually large national sample of blacks, we describe the attitudes of this group toward the Court as an institution and offer and test two competing theoretical accounts of support. Blacks, as we note in the text, are fairly positive toward the Court, but much less so than are whites. We explain a significant portion of the persistent support among blacks for the Court as a residue of positive affect created during the era of the Warren Court. Among cohorts of younger and older blacks, attitudes toward the institution reflect levels of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with policy. The segment we label as the "Warren Court" cohort shows support even in the face of disagreement with the outputs of the current justices.

Table 1. Indicators of Diffuse Support for the Supreme Court, 1987

Indicator	Attitudes toward the Supreme Court			
	Percent Supportive[a]	Percent Uncertain	Percent Unsupportive	Factor Loading[b]
The power of the Supreme Court to declare acts of Congress unconstitutional should be eliminated.				.74
Blacks	57.5	30.8	11.7	
Whites	70.6	20.0	9.4[c]	
If the Supreme Court continually makes decisions that the people disagree with, it might be better to do away with the Court altogether.				.66
Blacks	64.0	21.1	14.9	
Whites	81.2	10.8	8.0[c]	
It would not make much difference to me if the U.S. Constitution were rewritten so as to reduce the powers of the Supreme Court.				.65
Blacks	55.3	27.1	17.7	
Whites	74.0	16.3	9.7	
The right of the Supreme Court to decide certain types of controversial issues should be limited by the Congress.				.63
Blacks	39.5	31.7	28.7	
Whites	49.0	22.7	28.3[c]	
People should be willing to do everything they can to make sure that any proposal to abolish the Supreme Court is defeated.				.46
Blacks	55.9	22.8	21.4	
Whites	71.4	14.1	14.6[c]	

[a]The minimum (unweighted) number of whites is 794; the minimum for blacks is 435.

[b]Loadings come from the first factor from the unrotated solution of a common factor analysis. Because the subsequent factors all had trivial eigenvalues, we performed no rotation. The correlations between the items and the factor scores are .84, .74, .73, .71, and .51, respectively.

[c]Racial difference is significant at .001 or less.

Measuring Specific Support

We measured specific support by asking the respondents whether the Supreme Court is "too liberal or too conservative or about right in its decisions?"[8] The great majority, roughly 58%, of our respondents judge the Supreme Court as "about right." Nearly equal percentages view the Court's decisions as "too liberal" (22%) or "too conservative" (19%) (cf. Gallup Poll 1987, 24–27). Since specific support refers to whether the subject is satisfied or dissatisfied with the outputs of the institution, not whether he or she views policy as too liberal or too conservative, we have transformed the responses into a dichotomous variable indicating satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the Court.

Validity of the Measures

Just as Easton predicted, we find little relationship between diffuse support and specific support. There is a slight tendency for those who think the Court's decisions have been too liberal to be less supportive of the institution, but the Pearson correlation between satisfaction with Court decisions and diffuse support is a mere .05. This finding contradicts virtually all previous reports, largely, we believe, because the measures used in earlier studies confound diffuse and specific support. Thus, the lack of a correlation between the two indicators lends credence to the validity of our measure of diffuse support.[9]

We have developed a new scale of diffuse support for the Supreme Court. This scale seems to tap diffuse support reliably and validly and is, as anticipated, unrelated to evaluations of the specific decisions of the Court. We move now to an evaluation of alternative explanations of diffuse support for the Supreme Court in sections 2 through 5.

2. Partisanship, Political Ideology, and Diffuse Support

By now, virtually everyone concedes the policymaking roles of the Supreme Court, and that inevitably puts the justices in the midst of some of the hottest

[8]Does the pair of ideological referents in this item do violence to it as a measure of specific support? What if a respondent does not see a judicial decision as liberal or conservative but dislikes it nonetheless? Our impression is that respondents seem to pass over the ideological frames of reference and tell interviewers whether they like or dislike the direction of the Court's policies. Few respondents opt out of the item—in contrast to the sizable number who cannot or will not pick a label as a liberal, conservative, or moderate. Of course, we would prefer to have a battery of items to measure specific support, but we did not have the resources to include one. The significant correlations between this indicator and other policy opinions increase our confidence in it as a good measure of specific support for the Supreme Court.

[9]There is some relationship between diffuse support for the Court and levels of confidence in the justices of the Supreme Court ($r = .23$). Even though the item on confidence confounds attitudes toward the current incumbents with the institution, we derive some additional confidence in our measure of diffuse support from this correlation.

ideological battles in U.S. politics. Scholars in previous work have emphasized the impact of ideological considerations on popular evaluations of the high bench. People, by this view, do not distinguish between the institution and the policies its incumbents pursue at particular times. Those who favor the bundle of policies enunciated by the Court will find much to be said in favor of the high bench as an institution; conversely, those who disagree with most or all of the justices' decisions will not accord much support to the Supreme Court. This is a variant of the specific support hypothesis.

Murphy, Tanenhaus, and Kastner (1973) report strong relationships between diffuse support and agreement with recent decisions of the Court, general political outlook, and partisanship (see also Dolbeare and Hammond 1968). Indeed, focusing on issues salient during the 1960s, Murphy and Tanenhaus discover disagreement with the Supreme Court as one of the most potent predictors of diffuse support. For the mass public, the correlation between several indicators of ideology (e.g., ideological preferences and partisanship) and support ranges from .45 to .55; and, for elite samples, these correlations run as high as .80 (Murphy and Tanenhaus 1970).

Our own expectations are at variance with previous findings. Because diffuse support for the Supreme Court represents a basic institutional commitment, irrespective of outputs at a particular juncture, we do not believe it should be related either to ideological preferences or to partisanship. To be sure, specific support may well reflect perceptions of policy outputs evaluated on ideological or partisan grounds, but we expect liberals and conservatives, Democrats and Republicans, to show equal commitment to the continued existence of the Court in its current institutional form.

The Results

The wide range of measures of ideology in our survey permits us to test propositions about the connection between preferences for particular policies and support for the Supreme Court in great depth. We begin with political ideology. The correlation for whites is small (gamma = $-.04$); self-identified liberals and conservatives do not differ in their levels of support for the Court. This relationship is not even monotonic and could hardly be less significant in a substantive sense. Similarly, we encounter no relationship between partisan identification and our measure of diffuse support for the Supreme Court (gamma = .08). Thus, we find no evidence to buttress the argument for a connection between partisanship and institutional support for the Court.

We hypothesize a connection between support and a host of measures of preference on controversial issues of public policy, some of which bear a relationship to the work of the Supreme Court.[10] Given the salience of the Court's

[10]We have used seven items from the GSS on policy opinions. The wording and scoring of these items follow. (1) *Capital punishment:* Do you favor or oppose the death penalty for persons convicted

role in addressing "social issues," we think individuals' views on these matters constitute promising determinants of support. Thus, we investigate opinions on residential segregation, abortion, capital punishment, gun control, leniency in criminal courts, pornography, and legalization of marijuana.[11] If policy considerations structure diffuse support among the public, we should encounter a significant relationship between our measure of support and indicators of attitudes on social issues on the Court's agenda. The correlations between diffuse support and opinions on these social issues appear in Table 2.[12]

Two of these relationships prove particularly noteworthy: those who would permit women to have an abortion under any circumstances and those who oppose racial segregation in neighborhoods show significantly more support for the Supreme Court. This pair of relationships does not surprise us, in light of the close identification of the issues of abortion and racial segregation with the Supreme Court over the years.[13] We observe a slight but significant relationship between views on pornography and support for the Court. Generally, those who adopt a "liberal" position on these social issues tend to evince greater commitment to the Court as an institution.

In the larger picture, however, none of these relationships is particularly strong; indeed, even with the additions of measures of ideological and partisan identifications, we can explain barely 9% of the variance in support for the

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of murder? (opposed scored high). (2) *Gun control:* Would you favor or oppose a law which would require a person to obtain a police permit before he or she could buy a gun? (opposed scored high). (3) *Leniency in criminal courts:* In general, do you think the courts in this area deal too harshly or not harshly enough with criminals? (not harshly enough scored high). (4) *Legalization of marijuana:* Do you think the use of marijuana should be made legal or not? (should not scored high). (5) *Residential racial segregation:* White people have a right to keep (Negroes/blacks) out of their neighborhoods if they want to, and (Negroes/blacks) should respect that right (disagree strongly scored high). (6) *Abortion:* Do you think abortion should be legal under any circumstance, legal only under certain circumstances, or never legal under any circumstances? (never legal scored high). (7) *Pornography:* Which of these statements comes closest to your feelings about pornography laws? There should be laws against the distribution of pornography whatever the age. There should be laws against the distribution of pornography to persons under 18. There should be no laws forbidding the distribution of pornography (opposition to laws scored high).

[11]We would, of course, prefer to have at our disposal more items on the most controversial matters before the Supreme Court in the 1980s. Still, these items do tap evaluations of public policy and therefore help us to discern whether policy preferences shape diffuse support in a significant fashion.

[12]We include the standardized regression coefficients and use these results later in our multivariate analysis of the data. There we include all of the variables significant at .01 in Tables 2 through 4. We have used the pairwise method of deleting missing data in order to maximize the number of cases available for analysis. It should be noted, however, that virtually all of the results are unchanged if we use the listwise method.

[13]From their two-wave panel (1966–75), Tanenhaus and Murphy (1981) report that attitudes on abortion, an issue not salient in 1966, substantially decreased specific support for the Court in 1975.

Table 2. The Relationship between Diffuse Support and Policy Opinions, White Sample, 1987

	Diffuse Support	
Opinion Regarding	*r*	Beta
Capital punishment	.01	−.01
Gun control	−.04	−.02
Leniency in criminal courts	−.01	.02
Legalization of marijuana	−.12*	−.03
Residential racial segregation	.20*	.17*
Abortion	−.21*	−.16*
Pornography	.15*	.08*
Ideological self-identification	−.07	−.02
Partisan identification	.04	.03

*Significant at .01 or less.

$R^2 = .09$.

Minimum pairwise $N = 933$.

Court. And what is more, opinions toward even some of the most contentious issues of our time make little or no dent in citizens' commitments to the basic elements of the Court as a political institution. Consider just one issue. Even though the question of whether capital punishment should be permitted has sparked a substantial amount of controversy, we observe *no* connection between opinions on this issue and support for the Court. These findings do not link policy opinions commitments to the institution in any very strong fashion. Thus, we conclude: preferences on policy issues hold some implications for diffuse support for the Court, but the effects are far from overwhelming.

3. Trust, Satisfaction, and the "Governing Coalition"

To this point we have treated diffuse support for the Supreme Court as something apart from support for the political system. Perhaps members of the public do not make distinctions between the various institutions of the national government. The public might instead see the Court, Congress, and the president in much the same light—despite important differences among the institutions known to more attentive citizens. If the three branches of the national government take on the same complexion for long periods of time (see Dahl 1957), ill-informed citizens might conceive of the federal government as a single "governing coalition" in response to vague but generally consistent cues from public policy (see, e.g., Murphy, Tanenhaus, and Kastner 1973, 27). Given the remoteness of the federal government for many of us and the lack of concern for politics

among such a large part of the public, we should probably not be surprised that some take a crude and undifferentiated view of political institutions. Thus, we hypothesize that trust in other governmental institutions has an effect on attitudes toward the Supreme Court.

Some students of public opinion conceptualize support for particular political institutions and authorities as a result, not of actions taken by them but, rather, a generalized optimism about life, economics, and politics (e.g., Lipset and Schneider 1987). We divide these propositions into two sets: (1) trust in and optimism about people and institutions and (2) satisfaction with one's lot in life. If the public has positive feelings toward the political system, the citizenry will express support for the associated political institutions and incumbents (cf. Citrin 1974; Miller 1974). For example, Lipset and Schneider (1987) report a strong relationship between confidence in particular institutions and general levels of confidence in government. In addition, they pursue the possibility of trust in people as a source of confidence in political and other institutions (see also Almond and Verba 1963).

Only a few scholars have taken up satisfaction in one's life as an explanation of support for political institutions (e.g., Inglehart 1988). It is nevertheless an attractive idea: those who express happiness or satisfaction might carry good feelings over into their evaluations of political things. Indeed, Lipset and Schneider report substantial relationships between confidence in institutions, on the one hand, and personal happiness and satisfaction with financial condition, on the other hand (1987, 117–19).

For our test of the connection between diffuse support and satisfaction with one's life, we have a number of indicators: satisfaction with financial condition, general happiness, happiness of marriage, condition of health, and excitement in life. For our assessment of the relationship between support and trust in people and government, we can rest upon four separate measures: trust in people, perceptions of the fairness of others, trust in local government, and trust in the federal government. For a test of the ability of the public to distinguish between the Supreme Court and other national institutions, we have more difficulty. We can look at the relationship between trust in the federal government and diffuse support for the Supreme Court, but for the connection between the specific branches of government, we must make do with a comparison of confidence in the Court with the levels of confidence in Congress, the executive branch, and institutions in general.

The Results

Table 3 presents the relationships between our measure of diffuse support and the indicators of trust and of personal satisfaction. Overall, the 10 variables in Table 3 can account for less than 5% of the variation in diffuse support for the Court—not an impressive showing. Of these indicators, only trust in people

Table 3. Trust, Satisfaction, and Diffuse Support for the Supreme Court, White Sample, 1987

	Diffuse Support	
Measure	*r*	Beta
Trust in people	−.19*	−.18*
Fairness of others	.07	−.01
Trust in local government	−.05	−.02
Trust in federal government	−.01	.02
Confidence in institutions	−.02	.01
Financial satisfaction	−.02	.00
General happiness	−.03	.04
Happiness of marriage	.02	.04
Condition of health	−.13*	−.10
Excitement in life	−.10*	−.07

*Significant at .01 or less.

R^2 = .05.

Minimum pairwise N = 576.

reaches statistical significance in the multivariate analysis. The more citizens express trust in people, the greater the degree of support they accord to the Supreme Court. Neither trust in local government nor trust in the federal government showed any appreciable connection to diffuse support for the Supreme Court. Similarly, there is no measurable relationship between the confidence the sample bestows upon our national institutions and the degree of diffuse support it lends the Court. Moreover, we have regressed diffuse support for the Supreme Court on indicators of confidence in 12 institutions,[14] and the resulting equation explains only about 8% of the variance.

Perhaps at one time, back in the 1960s, Americans saw the Supreme Court and other national political institutions as peas in the same pod, but our best evidence, based upon a wide range of indicators, suggests that this is no longer true. Furthermore, the public does not seem to condition diffuse support for the Court upon personal satisfaction or optimism.

4. Political Values and Diffuse Support

Earlier research on attitudes toward the Supreme Court by and large has not considered the role played by more general commitments to due process of law,

[14]These institutions include the armed services, press, science, organized labor, clergy, business, television, education, medicine, financial institutions, the federal government, and Congress.

democratic values, and civil liberties. In the main, scholars have investigated the impact of ideology on support in light only of liberalism versus conservatism, with little attention to broader preferences on issues such as democracy and liberty. Because the Supreme Court occupies such a central position within the confines of the U.S. democratic tradition, we suspect that attitudes toward the high bench in large part reflect more general views toward democracy and democratic values.

We expect that those who value liberty very highly will support the Court more strongly than those who do not. Regardless of how we judge the historical performance of the Supreme Court, lawyers, judges, commentators, and the public seems to regard the contemporary high bench as the institution particularly charged with the responsibility of protecting basic civil liberties. Those who value liberty, especially when juxtaposed with the disorder with which people so often associate it, should show greater support for the Supreme Court.

Likewise, we expect those who are more firmly committed to democratic norms (e.g., the protection of the political rights of minorities) to show more support for the Court. Commitment to these democratic values is likely to contribute to support because the rule of law constitutes an important component of democracy, and because the Court is most directly concerned with ensuring the rule of law in this system. We expect those most committed to democratic values to find the Supreme Court a congenial institution and thus to extend it more support.

We have measured commitment to liberty through a six-item scale (see the appendix for details). The items all pose conflicts between order and liberty and ask the subject to accept one or the other. The resulting index locates the respondent in terms of the relative valuation he or she places on social order versus liberty. This scale has proved a powerful predictor of political intolerance and perceptions of individual liberty (see Gibson 1988, 1989). Sullivan, Piereson, and Marcus (1982) have developed a measure of commitment to democratic values, and we have found this indicator relevant here. Their measure, composed of five items, focuses on such issues as belief in due process, equal protection of the laws, and freedom of speech (see the appendix).

The Results

We encounter moderately strong relationships between diffuse support for the Court and support for the norms of democracy and commitment to social order. The correlation between norms and support is .38; for social order and support, $-.46$. Those who express greater commitment to democratic values and to liberty generally evince greater diffuse support for the Supreme Court. This is strong evidence indeed for our chief proposition: basic value orientations structure evaluations of the Court.

Is commitment to order merely a proxy for policy agreement with the

institution's decisions? We think not. Belief in democratic norms and commitments to liberty constitute more basic and fundamental opinions than do positions on ordinary policies. These value orientations may lead to some policy preferences, but it is the values, not preferences, that contribute to diffuse support (cf. Feldman 1988). Thus, these correlations may indicate that diffuse support flows from those who are sympathetic to the function of the Supreme Court—the protection of liberty and democracy. This logic implies that diffuse support for an institution stems from agreement with the basic political purposes of that institution. Empirically, as we shall see in the multivariate analysis, whatever linkage there is between policy opinions and diffuse support is probably spurious.

5. Political Knowledge, Attentiveness, and Support

One of the best substantiated set of hypotheses in research on the origins of diffuse support concerns the effect of political information, elite status, and activism. Those who are more knowledgeable, more "elite," and more active in politics generally show more support for the Supreme Court (Murphy, Tanenhaus, and Kastner 1973; Adamany and Grossman 1983; Murphy and Tanenhaus 1970). This is normally taken to reflect a social learning process in which greater exposure to dominant cultural norms leads to greater support for the institutions and values of the polity. Political activism increases support because those who engage in more activity receive more effective socialization to norms that tend to legitimize existing political institutions (cf. Sniderman 1975).

Thus, we hypothesize that those who are more active, elite, and knowledgeable will express more diffuse support for the Court. We investigate the relationship between diffuse support and a bevy of relevant indicators, including interest in politics, attentiveness to the Supreme Court, opinion leadership, political activism, political knowledge, sense of political efficacy, frequency of voting and of political discussion, membership in political organizations, and use of ideological schema.

The Results

Table 4 arrays the results of a regression of diffuse support for the Supreme Court on our set of indicators of knowledge, attentiveness, and political activism. First of all, 7 of the 10 variables did *not* pass muster in our analysis. Of the statistically significant variables, attentiveness to the Supreme Court looms as the most potent predictor of support: the most attentive evince the greatest commitment to the institution (standardized regression coefficient, beta = .20). Political sophistication, as indicated by the use of ideological schema in response to questions (see Hamill, Lodge, and Blake 1985), and diffuse support go together: the more sophisticated evince higher levels of support (beta = .15). Typically, those who have the greatest confidence in their ability to influence the political system express great interest in politics, so we are not surprised to see a

Table 4. Political Information, Attentiveness, Activism, and Diffuse Support, Whites Only, 1987

	Diffuse Support	
Measure	*r*	Beta
Attentiveness to the Supreme Court	.30*	.20*
Interest in politics	.22*	.01
Sense of political efficacy	.23*	.16*
Political activism	.21*	.09
Membership in political organizations	.15*	.01
Voting frequency	.14*	.01
Frequency of political discussions	−.23*	−.09
Opinion leadership	−.13*	.09
Use of ideological schema	.25*	.15*
Political knowledge	.13*	.03

*Significant at .01 or less.

R^2 = .17.

Minimum pairwise N = 935.

significant association between diffuse support and sense of political efficacy (beta = .16).

Note the relatively weak relationship between opinion leadership and diffuse support (r = .13). That correlation seems low indeed, but, as we shall see in the multivariate analysis, status as an opinion leader does not directly affect the dependent variable so much as it conditions the influence of the variables in our statistical model on diffuse support. To give this important variable a proper hearing, we present separate multivariate analyses for opinion leaders and the mass public (i.e., non–opinion leaders) in the next two sections.

Taken together, these variables explain approximately 17% of the variation in diffuse support—a moderate amount. Of this set of variables, only three—attentiveness to the Court, sense of political efficacy, and use of ideological schema—reach significance at .01 or less. The results in this section, unlike our earlier findings, dovetail neatly with previous reports of research.

6. Multivariate Analysis: Mass Public

Thus far, we have tested essentially "bivariate" hypotheses (using multiple indicators) about the relationships between diffuse support for the Court and various commonly employed predictors. Here we sort out their independent influences via multivariate analysis. For our full sample of white members of the mass public, Table 5 summarizes the bivariate and multivariate relationships between

Table 5. Bivariate and Multivariate Relationships with Diffuse Support, White Mass Public, 1987

	Diffuse Support	
	r	Beta
Norms of democracy	.39*	.12*
Commitment to social order	−.46*	−.23*
Attentiveness to the Court	.33*	.18*
Use of ideological schema	.26*	.10*
Trust in people	−.19*	−.03
Political efficacy	.24*	.09*
Residential racial segregation	.21*	.03
Abortion	−.20*	−.05
Pornography	.16*	.02
Gender	−.17*	−.06
Age	−.04	.07
Education	.34*	.11*
Occupational prestige	.23*	−.03

*Coefficient significant at .01 or less.

$R^2 = .32$.

diffuse support and the independent variables we have found to be significantly related to diffuse support. We include several demographic variables—gender, age, education, and occupational prestige—as controls and focus on that portion of the sample not composed of opinion leaders; we refer to this group as the mass public. The table shows bivariate Pearson correlations and standardized coefficients from a regression of diffuse support on all of the predictors. By the standards of survey research, the overall equation predicts diffuse support reasonably well; $R^2 = .32$.

One of the more notable aspects of Table 5 is the extremely weak independent effect of policy opinions on diffuse support for the Court. None of the regression coefficients reaches significance, and each is trivial. Diffuse support, as we anticipated, is independent of the policy preferences of the citizenry. These findings run in direct and strong contrast to the findings of earlier researchers.

There are at least two ways to reconcile these apparently contradictory findings. We do not view these explanations as mutually exclusive. First of all, these disparate findings might derive from differences in measurement of support in the various research projects. This is a plausible account. Second, the differences in findings could stem from behavioral changes in the Supreme Court. We can

speculate—for clearly our data do not permit us to do more—about how that process might have worked. For the Supreme Court, the preceding decade has marked important changes. During the highly salient disputes of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, most political elites and the public perceived the Court as "activist." That is, rather than deferring to the wishes of the ruling majority, the Court often set substantial limits to the policy schemes of this coalition. Perhaps more important, the Court pursued its policy aims straightforwardly, without stealth. The requisite data to test the proposition do not exist, but we strongly suspect that the American people viewed the Supreme Court as an activist court during this period.

Accordingly, we hypothesize: to the extent that the Supreme Court openly embraces judicial activism, the citizenry may judge the institution in the same light as other political institutions; policy agreement and disagreement will significantly affect support for the institution. If the Court retreats behind a veil of restraintism, the criteria used to evaluate the justices might well change. People would no longer ground their views of the Court in ideological and political preferences. If the public perceived the Court to have moved away from its earlier posture and adopted a more restrained approach during the 1980s—in appearance if not in the content of policy—then that shift might account for the difference between our results and those from the 1960s and 1970s. Unfortunately, we lack the data to decide which of these is the better explanation.

Table 5 also reveals the political values of the individual as the strongest predictors of diffuse support for the Supreme Court. Those who are strongly committed to liberty are substantially more likely to support the Supreme Court than those who place particular value on social order. And, similarly, support for democratic norms has an independent impact on support, as does sense of political efficacy: those who express confidence in their own abilities to influence politics show greater commitment to the Court. These basic value orientations constitute important sources of diffuse support; relatively ephemeral policy positions make little or no difference. Both of our measures of information and attention have a significant impact on diffuse support: for attentiveness to the Court, beta = .18; for use of ideological schema, beta = .10. This pair of relationships provides tantalizing evidence for social learning as an explanation of support.

Does support derive from a generalized trust in institutions or from trust in government or fellow citizens? Our indicator of trust does not exert any independent influence on diffuse support for the Court among the mass public. The data permit us to reject with thoroughness this set of hypotheses (see Murphy, Tanenhaus, and Kastner 1973).

Gender, age, and occupational prestige have no significant direct effect on diffuse support. Level of education, by contrast, retains a significant coefficient

in the multivariate analysis. Education is an old standby in the scholarship on public opinion. This relationship holds even when we control for attitudes toward policy issues, ideology, basic political values, and information and attentiveness.

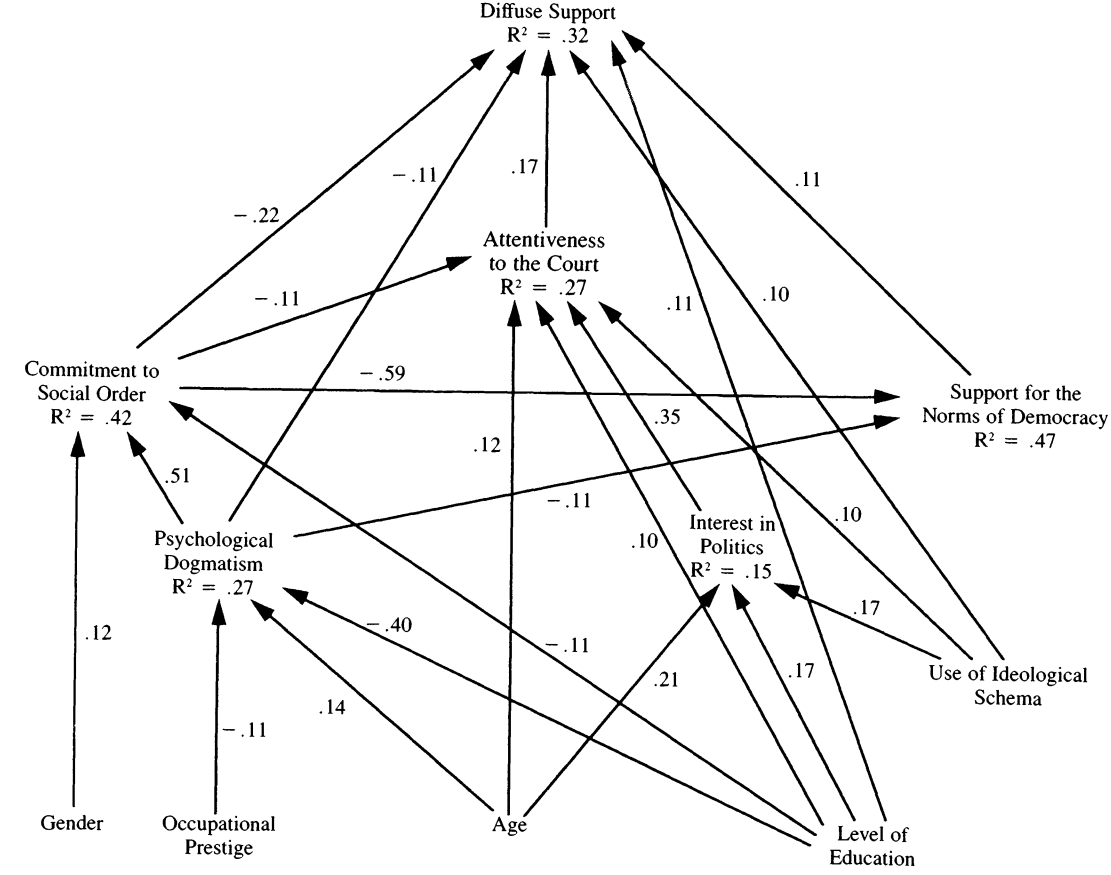
It is difficult to make much sense of a multivariate analysis with such a large number of variables, especially in light of our desire to unravel some causal pathways to diffuse support. Consequently, to simplify this model, we have reestimated the equation with only those variables with a significant regression coefficient in Table 5. In the causal model, we specify two additional variables without a direct effect on diffuse support—psychological dogmatism (Rokeach 1960) and interest in politics. We added this pair of variables to achieve a more properly specified causal structure. The results appear in Figure 1, which also depicts the variables in their hypothesized causal structure.[15]

The model is reasonably successful in predicting diffuse support for the Court. We can explain over 30% of the variance in support with the handful of variables. The most potent predictor is commitment to social order: those most concerned with order show less support for the Court. Attentiveness to the Court, in addition, has a moderate direct effect; the more attentive accord more support. Similarly, those who value democracy more highly are more likely to support the Court. Note also that the effect of attitudes toward order is not just direct but also goes through attentiveness (people who value order over liberty pay less attention to the Court) and through support for the norms of democracy (those who value order place less emphasis on democratic values). Dogmatism also exerts a direct effect on support: the less dogmatic among our sample tend to lend the Court greater support. Since dogmatism is a psychological analogue of commitment to order, we are not surprised to witness a direct effect. Finally, we find a small direct effect of educational level on support for the Court: the more highly educated provide more support. Generally, this refined multivariate analysis reinforces our earlier conclusion: support for the Court reflects basic value orientations toward liberty, social order, and democracy.

This model also accounts for one-fourth of the variance in attentiveness to the Court (see Kosaki and Franklin 1991). Not surprisingly, those who have greater interest in politics pay more attention to the Court. The relationship between commitment to social order and attentiveness suggests processes of selective perception, which, in turn, may account for the relatively slow change of

[15]We draw the causal structure depicted in part from Sullivan, Piereson, and Marcus (1982). It is, of course, not the only possible structure of interrelationships, but earlier work has demonstrated the utility of this model for understanding the origins of political tolerance. That research has also shown that commitment to social order strongly reflects levels of dogmatism, so we would be remiss if we did not include dogmatism in the model. Similarly, the best predictor of attentiveness to the Supreme Court is level of political interest; to ignore this variable would be to test a badly misspecified model.

Figure 1. A Simplified Model of the Origins of Diffuse Support for the U.S. Supreme Court, White Mass Public, 1987



attitudes toward the Court over time. We are also successful at predicting the "rear-end" of the model uncommonly well, even though this is not of central concern to us. We can account for nearly one-half of the variance in support for the norms of democracy and commitment to social order. The powerful effect of dogmatism and level of education shows throughout the model.

6. Multivariate Analysis: Opinion Leaders

To determine whether diffuse support among opinion leaders reflects the same sorts of attitudes and attributes as among the mass public, we have conducted a closer examination of opinion leaders.[16] Generally, we anticipate stronger relationships between opinions on policy issues and diffuse support for the Court. Table 6 reports the bivariate and multivariate relationships between diffuse support and a variety of independent variables.[17] Following our practice in Table 5, we have included in Table 6 the variables that best account for diffuse support.[18] The variation in diffuse support among opinion leaders is reasonably well predicted: the equation explains more than one-third of the variance. If we adjust for the difference in the numbers of cases, this figure roughly approximates that for the mass public as a whole.

We should first note the variables *not* represented in the table. No measures of information, interest, and attentiveness met the criterion for inclusion in the analysis. This we could have anticipated; the variability of these indicators *among* the opinion leaders is not great and is of relatively trivial consequence. Among the general mass public, diffuse support is in part contingent upon paying attention to the Court and to politics; among opinion leaders, the little variation in attentiveness makes no difference.

The prominent role of policy opinions in the explanation of diffuse support stands as perhaps the most striking substantive difference between Tables 5 and 6.

[16]For any institution, there are a number of relevant elite or informed publics. Scholars have identified these special publics through official position or occupation, level of knowledge and education, intensity of activity, attentiveness to politics, or potential influence (on the Supreme Court, see Adamany and Grossman 1983; Kessel 1966, 188–89; Murphy and Tanenhaus 1968, 1970).

In our analysis, we have blended these approaches. To identify "opinion leaders," we have used an item that asked the respondent if others had asked him or her for opinions about politics: "How often other people ask your opinions about political matters?" For most of the white sample (48%) the answer was "hardly ever." Only slightly less than 10% reported that people "very often" asked their opinions (the remaining 42% responded that they are asked their views "only sometimes").

[17]In light of the small N, we do not present a causal model for the sample of opinion leaders.

[18]For the mass sample, we required that the regression coefficients for the variable be significant at .01 when diffuse support was regressed on the particular class of predictors. Here, we use the criterion of a regression coefficient equal to or in excess of .15 (in absolute value). Since the opinion leaders number fewer than 100, the criterion of statistical significance would be much too restrictive.

Table 6. Bivariate and Multivariate Relationships for Diffuse Support, White Opinion Leaders, 1987

	Diffuse Support	
	r	Beta
Norms of democracy	.32*	.04
Commitment to social order	−.36*	−.31*
Trust in people	−.23*	−.15
Trust in local government	−.25*	−.14
Fairness of others	.03	−.20
Financial satisfaction	.19*	.21*
Residential racial segregation	.17*	−.02
Abortion	−.29*	−.19*
Legalization of marijuana	.05	.24*
Gender	−.12	−.25*
Age	−.09	.11
Education	.33*	.06
Occupational prestige	.26*	.13

*Coefficient significant at .10 or less.

R^2 = .37.

Among opinion leaders, support for the Court depends heavily upon the policy positions of the individual. Those who support the legalization of marijuana and the right to abortion show considerably more commitment to the Supreme Court, even controlling for general orientations toward order. We suspect that for many of the opinion leaders support for the high bench is contingent upon satisfactory judicial policies. That is, for many of these respondents, *diffuse* support behaves as if it were *specific* support. This is decidedly not true of the full sample of the mass public.

The attitudes of the opinion leaders also reflect generalized trust and optimism more than do the views of ordinary citizens. In general, those who express greater trust, satisfaction, and optimism show higher levels of support for the Supreme Court. Just as for ordinary citizens, diffuse support among opinion leaders also reflects basic views on liberty: those who value liberty more highly than order are more likely to support the Court. This relationship stands among the strongest we have observed. In contrast, support for the norms of democracy among opinion leaders exerts little influence on diffuse support. Opinion leaders tend to manifest high levels of support for democratic values (cf. McClosky and Brill 1983), so we would anticipate less variance there than among the mass

public; and, at any rate, the variability among this subsample bears no consequences for attitudes toward the Supreme Court.

Finally, consider the relatively strong influence of gender: male opinion leaders tend to be considerably more supportive of the Court than do female opinion leaders. These differences are slight within the ordinary mass public; they are substantial among the opinion leaders. Men are more supportive of the Court even when we control for policy opinions and basic values.

We have seen the direct effects of both gender and attitudes toward abortion: men and those who support the right to abortion show more support for the Court. The issue of abortion affects men and women differently, so the relationship may well take on a multiplicative form. To test this proposition, we have regressed support on gender, attitude on abortion, and an interaction term. Since both gender and views on abortion are dummy variables, we can manipulate the equation to investigate the process through which policy opinions translate into diffuse support among opinion leaders.

The overall R^2 for the equation is a respectable .14. The resulting equation is $Y = -0.63 + 1.10 \times \text{Abortion} + 0.77 \times \text{Gender} - 0.73 \times (\text{Opinion} \times \text{Gender})$. With a few algebraic manipulations, we generate the following predicted scores on diffuse support: female, antiabortion ($-.63$); female, proabortion (.47); male, antiabortion (.14); and male, proabortion (.51). These results are clear-cut: among supporters of the right to abortion, men and women differ little in level of support for the Court. Yet, among those who oppose the right to abortions, men and women differ significantly. For women, opposition to abortion seems to translate into lower esteem for the Court as an institution. For men, we observe a much smaller effect, either because abortion is less salient or support is more resilient among them.

Our analysis has shown quite distinctive differences between the ordinary mass public and opinion leaders. Of these, perhaps the most important is that diffuse support among opinion leaders in part stems from substantive policy opinions. No existing theory of diffuse support predicts this finding. Support among the opinion leaders seems to behave more like specific than diffuse support.

Our items seem to measure diffuse support within the mass public reasonably well. But perhaps elites are sophisticated enough to countenance change in institutions that, although apparently quite threatening, would be compatible with the existing institutional structure. To make the strongest case: What would we find if we were to ask a sample of students of the Courts to agree or disagree with the following proposition: "The right of the Supreme Court to decide certain types of controversial issues should be limited by the Congress"? We use this measure to stand generally for broad and fundamental change in institutions, and the mass public seems to react to it in general terms. Yet we can imagine that

many would agree to limitations, but not to an emasculation of the Supreme Court. Perhaps, then, our measure reflects a specialized sort of measurement error when applied to opinion leaders.[19]

From the larger perspective of research on public opinion, these findings are not surprising. Opinion leaders have more stable and integrated belief systems (cf. Converse 1964). Consequently, their beliefs are more strongly intercorrelated. Thus, our findings point to a major paradox in research on public opinion: systems theory predicts unconnected attitudes among elites on specific and diffuse support in spite of the well-known and strong tendency of elite attitudes to be tightly interconnected.

7. Speculations on the Court and Change

Our results appear to contradict previous research on public evaluations of the Court: the mass public does not seem to condition its basic loyalty toward the Court as an institution upon the satisfaction of demands for particular policies or ideological positions. We have attempted to tease out this relationship between diffuse support and policy opinions from several different angles, and, no matter how we pose the issue, the mass public does not evince this oft-reported connection. Diffuse support for the Supreme Court among the mass public is, rather, associated with basic facets of individuals such as political values. It is not quite so transient a posture to the Supreme Court as a political institution as some have argued. Diffuse support truly does consist of a reservoir of goodwill and commitment among the mass public.

Our research is significant both because of the findings about what *does* correlate with diffuse support and what *does not*. On the positive side, we find that basic political values—especially orientations toward liberty and social order—strongly predict attitudes toward the Supreme Court. It seems quite likely that these values are not ephemeral. In our causal model, we found that commitment to social order quite strongly reflected basic attributes of personality, which, presumably, are acquired relatively early in life and which persist with minimal change. This suggests to us the classical model of socialization to dominant "regime norms" and support for basic political institutions initially suggested by Easton. Indeed, our findings strongly support the Eastonian model, perhaps leavened with a pinch of Lasswellian psychopolitics: basic political attitudes toward the regime and its institutions reflect fundamental political values acquired through socialization during childhood. These values, in turn, reflect core attributes of personality.

Unfortunately, the Eastonian formulation does not account for change, or at least change in the short term. If the mass public does not demand specific

[19]This is a question of validity, not reliability. For this scale among opinion leaders, Cronbach's alpha is .84—a very strong indication of reliability.

policies as a quid pro quo for commitment, then how and why does diffuse support for the Supreme Court change over time? Surely diffuse support for the Court is not a constant, and, however measured, it must ebb and flow even if relatively stable. So, ultimately, we must offer some account of the dynamics of support, even if it requires some speculation about implications of our results for the nature of change.[20]

Perceptions of the institution may provide the missing link in this theoretical framework. Processes of socialization may well create *predispositions* to perceive institutions in a certain way and to support them, but other forces may override these predispositions. In times of "normalcy"—periods in which the institution is not especially salient and in which perceptions of policy outputs, however vague, reinforce general expectations—attitudes toward the institution will tend to reflect basic political values. The system will, of course, fail to socialize some, so we shall observe some variation in support. Nevertheless, core political values will constitute the best explanation of support.

Occasionally, an institution acts in an aberrant fashion and upsets popular expectations. Its actions create controversy. As an institution becomes controversial, it creates dissonance between basic expectations and perceptions. This dissonance provides no guidelines for the formation of attitudes, so policy preferences will dominate views of the institution. During these periods of upheaval, the institution becomes more salient, and some will perceive a difference between expectation and performance. At this point, the views of some toward the institution might come to reflect policy opinions more directly, and basic predispositions may exert less influence in the shaping of current attitudes.

The source of dissonance we have in mind here is a wholesale shift in style—not short-term disagreements with the Court's policy. If the justices anchor their decisions in legal, not political, values and symbols, citizens' attitudes toward the Court will come from basic political values. If the Supreme Court makes no bones about its pursuit of policy objectives, members of the public may come to see the Court in a different light. Sharp departures in style might constitute a trigger for those who would ordinarily see the Court in a noncontroversial light. For example, the Warren Court was less likely than its predecessors to couch its decisions in the miranda and credenda of the judiciary. To the extent that the Court becomes politicized or perceived as such, it risks cutting itself off from its natural reservoir of goodwill and may become reliant for basic institutional support on those who profit from its policies. This is a risky position for

[20]We are aware of the limitations of previous research—in particular the failure to separate diffuse from specific support for the Court. These difficulties in the measurement of support make comparisons of our work with earlier research problematic. Nevertheless, at this stage, we think it profitable to engage in informed and self-conscious speculation. In the future, scholars might well consider the relationship between our items and other scales of diffuse support. We simply did not have the resources to do so in our survey.

any institution to adopt. And the inclination of most judges—even on the Supreme Court—to pursue change incrementally rather than synoptically may stem from an intuition of precisely this danger.

These speculations are, of course, difficult to test, given the lack of comparable and well-validated measures over a long period of time. But we can point to one bit of probative evidence from a study of a related indicator of popular evaluations of the Court. Caldeira (1986, 1222) reports a strong and negative relationship between judicial activism, as measured by the number of statutes invalidated, and confidence in the Supreme Court: the bolder the Court is in confronting the policies of Congress, the less confidence citizens bestow it as an institution (but see Mondak 1991).

The results for elites are another matter. Opinion leaders today look something like ordinary citizens of the 1960s and 1970s. For opinion leaders, the Court has *not* become less salient and has *not* become less politicized. Accordingly, the commitments to the Court among the opinion leaders go together with their views of proper policy. This segment of the citizenry evaluates its commitment to the Court as an institution in a much colder-eyed calculus than does the mass public. Thus, opinion leaders play an important role as agents of change in diffuse support for the Supreme Court. Shifts of opinion leaders in response to changes in judicial policy may account for changes in support over time.

We have no way of knowing whether the relationship between support and policy opinions among opinion leaders poses a threat to the Supreme Court as an institution. Yet the history of controversies over the Supreme Court holds many ominous signs. In response to dissatisfaction with judicial policies, both Congress and the president have repeatedly attempted to alter the basic outlines of the Court as an institution (Murphy 1962). The results we have reported for opinion leaders, which exhibit a strong connection between specific and diffuse support, also cast doubt on the idea of elites as single-minded pillars of commitment to the Court.

Ironically, however, the ideological diversity of opinion leaders and political elites may well help the justices to fend off the more radical political attacks (Adamany and Grossman 1983; Murphy, Tanenhaus, and Kastner 1973, 55–58). The location of diverse political elites and opinion leaders at crucial "veto points" in the political process no doubt provides a measure of protection for the Supreme Court from various threats. Thus, for example, sympathetic elites can muster a number of checks, including the filibuster, committee control of the congressional agenda, and the presidential veto, to guard the Court from attempts to curb it and its powers. Moreover, the mass public may wield a check on the Court-curbing activities of issue-oriented activists and other opinion leaders. For, if the public at large accords the Court a high level of diffuse support, not conditioned on the specific decisions of the justices, then these issue-oriented

elites might run some political risks if they press vigorously for Court-curbing measures.[21]

Whether or not we are correct about these processes we cannot say. We are certain, however, of the centrality of public attitudes toward the Supreme Court as an institution in any theory of institutional stability and change.

Manuscript submitted 13 February 1991
Final manuscript received 18 October 1991

APPENDIX
Scales and Indices

Dogmatism

Dogmatism, or "closedmindedness," was first proposed by Rokeach (1960) as an important attribute of personality. Perhaps the most relevant attribute of dogmatism is the tendency to dichotomize beliefs into strict categories of acceptance and rejection. More dogmatic people are hostile to beliefs that differ from their own, in part because contrary beliefs are seen as quite threatening. Dogmatism was measured in this research through six items. The items, with their direction of scoring (A for agree, D for disagree) for dogmatism, collapsed frequencies and item-to-scale correlations, are:

Q8. Of all the different philosophies that exist in the world, there is probably only one that is correct. (A) 14.3%, $r = .62$.
Q15. In the long run, the best way to live is to pick friends and associates whose tastes and beliefs are the same as one's own. (A) 45.1%, $r = .45$.
Q31. There are two kinds of people in this world: those who are for the truth and those who are against it. (A) 49.4%, $r = .78$.
Q32. Most of the ideas that get printed nowadays aren't worth the paper they are printed on. (A) 37.7%, $r = .69$.
Q34. To compromise with our political opponents is dangerous because it usually leads to the betrayal of our own side. (A) 40.5%, $r = .68$.
Q35. A group which tolerates too many differences of opinion among its own members cannot exist for long. (A) 55.5%, $r = .67$.

The reliability coefficient for the dogmatism items is a quite reasonable .74. Except for the second item, all of the item-to-scale correlations exceed .6.

Commitment to Political Order

This scale was developed specifically for the Tolerance and Freedom Survey. The concept commitment to political order is conceptualized as a unidimensional continuum, ranging from a strong commitment to order to a strong commitment to individual liberty. Those scoring high on this index are more likely to value sociopolitical order than individual freedom. The scale was extensively pretested using undergraduate students at the University of Houston prior to administration to the national sample.

[21]For some of the ideas expressed in this paragraph, we thank one of the referees.

The scale is composed of six items:

Q45. It is better to live in an orderly society than to allow people so much freedom that they can become disruptive. (A) 51.3%, $r = .62$.
Q47. Free speech is just not worth it if it means that we have to put up with the danger to society of radical and extremist political views. (A) 28.9%, $r = .82$.
Q49. Society shouldn't have to put up with those who have political ideas that are extremely different than the majority. (A) 20.5%, $r = .76$.
Q51. Do you agree strongly, agree, disagree, or disagree strongly with this: Free speech ought to be allowed for all political groups even if some of the things they say are highly insulting and threatening to some segments of society. (D) 25.8%, $r = .58$.
Q53. Because demonstrations frequently become disorderly and disruptive, radical and extremist political groups shouldn't be allowed to demonstrate. (A) 47.0%, $r = .75$.
Q55. It is refreshing to hear someone stand up for an unpopular political view, even if most people find the view offensive. (D) 19.7%, $r = .33$.

The reliability coefficient for this scale is a quite reasonable .75. Except for the last item, all of the item-to-scale correlations exceed .5.

Norms of Democracy

Commitment to the norms of democracy is a concept that plays a central role in the model of the origins of tolerance developed by Sullivan, Piereson, and Marcus (1982). It includes a fairly heterogeneous set of items:

Q46. If someone is suspected of treason or other serious crimes, he should not be entitled to be released on bail. (D) 20.9%, $r = .43$.
Q48. When the country is in great danger, we may have to force people to testify against themselves in court even if it violates their rights. (D) 50.5%, $r = .69$.
Q50. No matter what a person's political beliefs are, he is entitled to the same legal rights and protections as anyone else. (A) 92.8%, $r = .51$.
Q52. Any person who hides behind the laws when he is questioned about his activities doesn't deserve much consideration. (D) 31.3%, $r = .66$.
Q54. I believe in free speech for all, no matter what their views might be. (A) 70.7%, $r = .62$.

The reliability coefficient for this scale is .52. Deletion of none of the items would significantly affect alpha.

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