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OPINION AND ACTION IN THE REALM OF POLITICS

DONALD R. KINDER, *University of Michigan*

Few concepts are more central to the analysis of democratic politics than public opinion. It is, or seems to be, a completely familiar idea, simply part of the landscape of politics we take for granted today. Yet to the specialist, getting a grip on public opinion is not that easy. Public opinion is, as Converse (1975) once put it, "impalpable," "amorphous," and "mercurial" (p. 77). Public opinion is hard to pin down.

Conceding that my subject is complicated and difficult, I nevertheless hope to say something systematic and intelligible about it here. My particular topic is public opinion, but the chapter can be read more broadly as another installment in the continuing conversation between political science and social psychology. This conversation began, one could say, just after the turn of the century with publication of Graham Wallas's *Human Nature in Politics* (1908), and it has been carried on over the decades by Harold Lasswell (1930), Solomon Asch (1987), Carl Hovland (1959), Robert Lane (1959a, 1973), David Sears (1969), Philip Converse (1970), Herbert Simon (1985), and William McGuire (1993), among others. Following in these large footsteps, and now nearing the end of the twentieth century, I take up here a series of political topics—the competence of citizens, the ingredients of opinion, the power of social context and political discussion, the translation of public opinion into political action—from a social psychological perspective.

My ambition is to provide a set of analytic categories helpful in organizing the vast empirical literature on public opinion. In this respect I am trying to follow the admonitions of Max Weber, who argued that the creation of clear and useful concepts was social theory's noblest aspiration. Clear and useful concepts are certainly what we need here; in their absence, making sense of the empirical literature on public opinion is a daunting and perhaps impossible task. It is alarming, actually: thousands of reports have been published; scores more no doubt on their way to completion. In some ways this activity is all to the good; it reflects an unquenchable curiosity for what V. O. Key (1961) once called the "eerie entity" of public opinion (p. 14). But such relentless activity also means that students of public opinion, should they glance up from their own work, risk being buried under an avalanche of contrasting claims and diverse findings. My hope is to provide a set of clear and useful categories so that the empirical literature on public opinion can be understood as something more than "just one damn finding after another," as George Homans once wrote, in a different but related context..

The awesome and unceasing dedication of public opinion researchers means that I could easily squander my allotted space on bibliography alone—an impressive feat, perhaps, but not a very useful one. To make room for text, I have been brutally selective in my choice of examples, and I have paid primary attention to work completed since the last edition of the *Handbook* (Kinder & Sears, 1985). That still leaves me with plenty to do, since the conversation between political science and social psychology has been especially lively recently.

I am grateful to Robert Abelson, Larry Bartels, Philip Converse, Steven Rosenstone, David Sears, Janet Weiss, and John Zaller for the excellence and timeliness of their advice, and to Julie Weatherbee for heroic assistance in preparing the bibliography. Last but not least, I thank the editors—Daniel Gilbert, Susan Fiske, and Gardner Lindzey—for superb editing and remarkable patience.

The field of public opinion today is overrun with theories, concepts, methods, and techniques borrowed directly from social psychology. Books and journals are laced with references to on-line versus memory-based models of information processing (Lodge & McGraw, 1995); to schemas, frames, and expertise (Judd & Downing, 1990; Nelson & Kinder, 1996; Rahn, 1993); to protocol analysis and reaction time (Fazio & Dovidio, 1992; Feldman & Zaller, 1992). Ideas have always been making their way over the border from psychology into political science, but something does seem to be new here. A generation ago Angus Campbell and his associates at the Survey Research Center of the University of Michigan were branded as social psychologists and charged with promoting the psychological approach to voting—and why? Not because they borrowed specific hypotheses from psychology. Apart from a nod to field theory and occasional acknowledgment of the idea of reference group, the Michigan team was largely indifferent to theoretical developments in psychology. Their approach was regarded as psychological primarily in that it vested explanatory power in the concept of attitude. As Campbell et al. put it in *The American Voter* (1960), "The partisan choice the individual voter makes depends in an immediate sense on the strength and direction of the elements comprising a field of psychological forces, where these elements are interpreted as attitudes toward the perceived objects of national politics" (p. 9). Although the Lewinian metaphor is not hard to detect in the Michigan group's approach, social psychological influences are now a good bit more visible and explicit.[1]

Along with this more self-conscious borrowing from psychology have come notable advances in methodological sophistication. When V. O. Key complained more than thirty years ago about social psychologists hijacking the study of public opinion, he nevertheless found it possible to compliment them for their "methodological virtuosity" (Key, 1961, p. vii). If Key was impressed then, he would be astonished today. Looking back over the last decade and a half, he would be bowled over by the improvements in statistical analysis (Bartels & Brady, 1993); the proliferation of experimental studies of public opinion (Kinder & Palfrey, 1993); a growing sensitivity to issues of measurement and error (Achen, 1983; Bartels, 1993; Brehm, 1993; Krosnick & Berent, 1993; Rosenstone, Hansen, & Kinder, 1986); and a deeper curiosity about the psychological processes underlying the construction and expression of opinion itself (Lodge & McGraw, 1995; Schwarz & Sudman, 1996; Tourangeau & Rasinski, 1988; Zaller & Feldman, 1992). I do not mean to suggest that all the problems afflicting research on public opinion have been neatly resolved—the literature is as full of contention and debate as ever, as we will see—but it is hard not to be impressed with how far the field has come in so brief a time.

My review draws heavily on quantitative empirical work and therefore comes, for the most part, from a particular time and place. The lion's share of what I will say about public opinion applies, technically, to *American* public opinion in the post-World War II period. The field shows a growing interest in comparative analysis (e.g., Cain, Ferejohn, & Fiorina, 1987; Inglehart, 1990; Lewis-Beck, 1988; Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995), and I will take advantage of this welcome development when I can. Still, enthusiasm for quantitative social science has been primarily an American phenomenon, and a recent one at that, and my chapter necessarily reflects this fact.

This admission raises the question of historical specificity. Since World War II, stunning changes have come to all aspects of American life, politics included: the rising of social movements pressing for civil and political rights; periods of war and peace; profound adjustments in the national and international economy; seasons of comparative domestic tranquillity and political consolidation then shattered by eruptions of protest and political experimentation; the demise of the Soviet empire; the ascendancy of Japan as an economic superpower; transformations in the landscape of campaigning; dramatic fluctuations in the balance of power between Democrats and Republicans; and more. From the perspective of a science of public opinion, such changes could spell trouble. If everything is changing, erecting a sturdy framework for understanding public opinion, which itself must be responsive to the changes that have marked the last half century, seems all the more difficult. But I prefer to regard these changes as offering an opportunity. Think of American society since World War II as a (gigantic) natural experiment; be grateful for the dynamism of American society and the ample variance it has so generously provided us.

The chapter begins, as chapters of this sort often do, with a definition. The German historian Hermann Oncken once wrote that public opinion is "vague and fluctuating"; that it "embodies a thousand possibilities of variation"; and yet, "when all is said and done, everyone knows, if put to it, what public opinion means" (Lazarsfeld, 1957). Maybe, but on the chance that everyone doesn't know, and acknowledging at the outset that I will likely please no one completely, I will try to say what public opinion is and what it is not, and also to suggest how public opinion should be measured.

That accomplished, the chapter next takes up a sequence of threats to the promise and practice of American democratic life. These are the allegations that, taken all around, Americans are too ignorant, too intolerant, and too unsophisticated to participate wisely or even sensibly in the affairs of politics. These allegations constitute recurrent apprehensions about democracy in general and about the American experiment in self-government in particular, and they provide a useful scheme for organizing large patches of the empirical literature in a coherent way. This part of

the chapter closes on a brighter note, with a rumination on an apparent remedy for the limitations of the average citizen: namely, that thanks to the "miracle of aggregation," American public opinion *taken as a whole* seems well informed and quite sophisticated.

The next part of the chapter sets out a general framework for understanding American public opinion, organized around three broad claims. Public opinion, I argue there, can be understood as an expression of three *primary ingredients*: the material interests that citizens see at stake in issues; the sympathies and resentments that citizens feel toward those social groups implicated in public disputes; and commitment to the political principles that various proposals or candidacies seem to honor or repudiate.

With this framework in place, the chapter then attempts to provide a deeper and more genuinely social psychological analysis of public opinion. First I take up theory and evidence that clarify the psychological processes by which citizens form and change their views. Then I examine environmental influences on opinion: notably, those supplied by social interaction, by political campaigns, and by mass media.

My final topic is the translation of public opinion into political action. I describe the forms of collective action that are readily available to Americans today (their "action repertoire"), set out a general framework for explaining participation in politics, and last, give special attention to voters and elections, on the assumption that voting is the central act of democracy. The chapter ends, mercifully and briefly, with a few remarks on the quality of the contemporary conversation between political science and social psychology and where the conversation might turn next.

I. THE MEANING AND MEASUREMENT OF PUBLIC OPINION

Public opinion is an invention of the modern world, one made possible by the great transformations that visited the West in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: the rise of the middle class, the expansion of literacy, the growth of mass communications, and perhaps most of all, the spread of democratic institutions and ideology (Baker, 1990; Lazarsfeld, 1957; Price, 1992). The precise origins of public opinion are often traced to late-eighteenth-century France and the salons of Paris. There developed for the first time in the modern world what Habermas (1962/1989) calls "the public sphere": a distinct space, separate from the state and the economy, where citizens could deliberate about their common affairs, developing and exchanging ideas critical of government. Ideally, the public sphere was meant to provide a kind of unrestricted rational discussion of public matters. The discussion was to be open and accessible to all, the pursuit of merely private interests was to be set aside or suspended, inequalities of social position and status were to be "bracketed," and participants in such discussions were to deliberate as equals. The result of such discussion would then be public opinion in the strong sense, a consensus about the common good reached as a consequence of free and open debate (Fraser, 1993). If this ideal was never realized in practice, public opinion was still regarded, at the time as dangerous and subversive. Public opinion, one could say, was a revolutionary idea.

Fear of public opinion was certainly prominent among the American founders, who designed political institutions partly to check and tame the views of ordinary citizens. For example, in defending the constitutional provision for the Senate, James Madison wrote that such a "select" and "stable" body would serve as an anchor against the public's impulsive sentiments, providing protection against citizens' "temporary errors and delusions." In a similar vein, Alexander Hamilton worried that an excessively democratic government would be beholden to "every sudden breeze of passion or to every transient impulse which the public may receive from the arts of men who flatter their prejudices to betray their interests" (Hamilton, Madison, & Jay, 1788/1961, pp. 384, 432).

Public Opinion Defined

Madison and Hamilton regarded public opinion as dangerous. Is it dangerous today? Habermas would insist that is not; that in modern postindustrial societies, critical scrutiny of government authority has given way to "public relations, mass-mediated staged displays, and the manufacture and manipulation of public opinion" (Fraser, 1993, p. 5). As an autonomous political force, public opinion, according to Habermas, has been liquidated.

Before we can begin to assess these contrasting claims, we need to agree on what counts as an instance of public opinion. Just what *is* public opinion anyway? An excellent place to begin is with V. O. Key's magisterial *Public Opinion and American Democracy* (1961). According to Key (1961), public opinion refers to

> those opinions held by private citizens which governments find it prudent to heed. Governments may be compelled toward action or inaction by such opinion; in other instances they may ignore it, perhaps at their peril; they may attempt to alter it; or they may divert or pacify it. So defined, opinion may be shared by many or by few people. It may be the veriest whim, or it may be a settled conviction. The opinion may represent a general agreement formed after the widest discussion; it may be far less firmly grounded. (p. 14)

Key is not making the claim that public opinion determines what government does. Under Key's definition, the relationship between public opinion and government action is unspecified, left for empirical analysis to ascertain in

particular cases. Moreover, those opinions held by private citizens that governments find it prudent to heed might be the views of the public today, but they might also be the views of the public at a time still to come—what Key referred to as "latent opinion" (1961, p. 262)—particularly those views that might be called into existence by office-hungry opponents at the time of the next election.[2]

Key's definition also leaves aside the question of the virtue of public opinion. In debates over democracy, public opinion has been characterized as the dangerous and deranged ravings of the mob or, on the other side, as the prudent expression of the people's calm and reasoned reflection. Key's definition allows for both "lightly held views and transient anxieties" and "prejudices" on the one hand, and "preferences, demands, and convictions" on the other.

Key's conception is attractive also in that it specifically and emphatically rejects the common practice of restricting public opinion to opinion on government policy. Public opinion of course includes views on policy, but it is more than that:

> Opinions about candidates, views about political parties, attitudes about the performance of government, basic assumptions about what is right and proper in public affairs, and general beliefs and expectations about the place of government in society are also opinions of political relevance, as would be such opinions or states of mind as are embraced by the term "national morale." (Key, 1961, p. 11)

Key thereby rejects the recommendation offered by Gabriel Tarde, the French social psychologist, who distinguished among tradition, opinion, and fashion. Tarde argued that public opinion should be located in the space "between the rather permanent and subconscious value system of a society and the floating reaction of a people to the passing events of the day" (Lazarsfeld, 1957, p. 45). Key would say, to the contrary, that the proper study of public opinion encompasses all three: tradition and fashion, as well as opinion (*cf.* Lane, 1972).

All in all, Key offers a comparatively evenhanded and broad conception of public opinion. Several questions remain, however. Before leaving definitional matters behind, I need to say a bit more about the meaning of the public, about the meaning of politics, and about the meaning of opinion.

***Public* Opinion** Who is to be included within the public—who counts as a member? Key (1961) himself isn't clear on this point; he says, remember, that public opinion "may be shared by many or by few people" (p. 14). But Key implies elsewhere that the "public" in public opinion refers to citizens in general, notables and influentials as well as the dispossessed and powerless. This is majoritarian or populistic public opinion: opinion without regard to wealth or intelligence or knowledge. Under this scheme, opinions should be tallied following a "one person, one vote" rule. Public opinion refers to those views held or expressed by the public in general.

This conception of public opinion, both democratic and individualistic, is the dominant view today. Its prominence owes much to technical developments of the twentieth century, to the invention and widespread deployment of the public opinion survey in particular (J. M. Converse, 1987). If the public opinion poll is today ubiquitous, so too, and not coincidentally, is the notion that the "public" in public opinion refers to *all* citizens—that the opinions expressed by any one citizen count no more and no less than the opinions expressed by any other (P. E. Converse, 1987).

Familiar as it seems to us today, this conception of public opinion differs notably from an earlier notion developed by Cooley (1909), Park (1904), and especially Blumer (1946, 1954). In this sociological tradition, public opinion was seen as irreducibly collective, not decomposable to the views expressed by individuals. Moreover, the public was transitory, fluid, and loosely structured. It was, according to Blumer (1946), a "spontaneous" collective grouping, one that arose and took shape in response to the emergence of an issue. Public opinion develops through discussion, and this discussion takes place primarily between competing groups that differ vastly in power and influence and that have a vested interested in how things turn out. In this framework, ordinary citizens are relegated to the role of more or less detached and disinterested spectators, providing the audience for interest group debate, eventually pronouncing their approval or censure. Blumer (1954) goes so far as to insist that the term "public opinion" should be reserved for opinion that makes a difference:

> In *any realistic sense,* public opinion consists of the patterns of the diverse views and positions on the issues *that come to the individuals who have to act in response to the public opinion.* (p. 73, italics in original)

This is real public opinion, effective public opinion, as against public opinion that is "mere display" or that is "terminal in its very expression" or that never comes before "those who have to act on public opinion" (p. 73).

There is much to admire and keep alive in this now mainly forgotten tradition. The importance of discussion and social conflict as processes shaping the formation of public opinion, the distinction between expressive and instrumental opinion, the divide between producers and consumers of political discourse, the implication that the quality of public opinion hinges decisively on the effectiveness of public discussion: all these themes are worth underscoring. Indeed, in many ways Blumer and the others anticipated developments that I will have occasion to review in the pages ahead. We should nevertheless be grateful that they lost the argument over the meaning of public opinion.

Insisting that the public consists of only those who directly or vicariously participate in the national debate constricts analysis, ruling out of court a whole set of questions of enduring political significance. And Blumer's more strident contention, that the public opinion survey is incapable of assessing real public opinion, reflects, as we will see, a spectacular failure of imagination on his part.

Public Opinion and *Politics* There are opinions and then there are opinions, Key wrote, and only those that attach to objects of public concern are properly thought of as *public* opinion. Public opinion, one could say, is about politics. Indeed, Key (1961) went so far as to suggest that the study of public opinion should be discontinued "unless the findings about the preferences, aspirations, and prejudices of the public can be connected with the workings of the governmental system" (p. 535). Likewise, Converse (1975) concluded that without assurance that government is at least somewhat responsive to the interests and the aspirations of the wider public, "the study of public opinion and voting behavior would be little more than an esoteric curiosity" (p. 157).[3]

It is useful to insist that public opinion be about politics—but what is politics and where does politics take place? In Key's view, and in the conventional view of his time, politics consisted of deliberate efforts to influence the distribution of resources in society. Such efforts, furthermore, took place in a distinct public realm, one marked by the presence of government.

This conventional view has come under fire recently, most notably from the perspective provided by feminist theory (e.g., Elshtain, 1981; Phillips, 1991, 1993; Randall, 1987). Under this view, politics is indeed about the exercise of power, but power need not be conscious or deliberate. This perspective also challenges the idea that politics belongs to a special public realm. Wherever power is exercised, regardless of the presence of government, becomes the domain of politics. Politics can take place in the home, at work, in the classroom, as well as on the national and international stage.

Whether we want to go as far as equating the personal and the political, we surely need to go farther than Key, to expand politics beyond the formal activities of government. Like Tilly (1986) in his explication of the historical development of forms of popular contention, we should insist on a view of politics

> that looks beyond parties, factions, and national leaders. Politics concerns power in all its guises. We have to examine the everyday use of power, the continuing struggle for power, the changing structure of power as it has involved the fates of local communities and ordinary people. (p. 10)

Public *Opinion* Finally, as emphatically as Key rejects reducing public opinion to preferences on government policy, he displays tunnel vision about what citizens are doing that should command our attention. In this respect, Key is not alone. In the last half century, the proper study of public opinion has been, naturally, *opinion.* And opinions, according to Converse (1975), consist of "affect toward an object of cognition" (p. 78). Or in Zaller's view (1992), opinions are "a marriage of information and predisposition: information to form a mental picture of the given issue, and predisposition to motivate some conclusions about it" (p. 6).

Citizens surely develop opinions, defined in this way, and about a great variety of political topics. They may be angry that inflation has eaten away at their savings; they may think that the president is a fool, that the major political parties are corrupt, that the welfare system must be reformed, that women require protection against discrimination on the job. All these are instances of opinion—they are all affect plus cognition—and we should surely study them.

But if opinion is all that we study, we overlook other tasks of citizens that are implicated in opinion and that may take precedence over the formation of opinion itself. One such fundamental task is *comprehension*: how citizens go about trying to make sense of what Lippmann (1925) called the "swarming confusion of problems" (p. 24) that constitute public life. Another is *assigning priority*: of the events and problems that citizens come to see, how do they decide which are important and which are not?

Research has not ignored these processes altogether (regarding comprehension, see, for example, Graber, 1984; Lippmann, 1922/1960, 1925; Neuman, Just, & Crigler, 1992; Rosenberg, 1988; regarding the assignment of priority, see Erbring, Goldenberg, & Miller, 1980; Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; MacKuen, 1981; McCombs & Shaw, 1972). But the field has been preoccupied with opinion, treating citizens as though their only business were the evaluation of alternatives placed before them. My review inevitably reflects this preoccupation, but I will try, without doing violence to the field's central tendencies, to highlight research that investigates how citizens make sense of and assign priority to the problems and events of their time.

Measuring Public Opinion

Defined in this way, how should public opinion be measured? From the world of practice comes a single and resounding answer: through the sample survey. In her fine history of survey research in the United States, Jean Converse (1987) concludes that the sample survey has become the social scientist's telescope, as indispensable and irreplaceable to the measurement of "flows of information, opinion, and feeling" (p. 1) through society as the telescope has proven to the scientific exploration of space. Converse's analogy may seem extravagant, but it is supported by the meticulous care now given to all aspects of the sample survey method. Voluminous and ever-growing

technical literatures exist on sample design, problems of sample coverage and compliance, the formulation and placement of questions, the training and supervision of interviewers, and more (Schwarz, Groves, & Schuman, 1998, in this *Handbook*).

While the advantages of such concentration and specialization are obvious, the dominance of the sample survey also carries certain methodological liabilities (Kinder & Palfrey, 1993). One could say that an unsettlingly high proportion of what gets counted as dependable knowledge about public opinion comes from just this one way of securing evidence. This state of affairs is unsettling *not* because the survey method is especially prone to error. On the contrary, the sample survey should be regarded as a significant technical achievement, surely the best single way to measure opinion available today. The worry is not with the sample survey as such, but with its unchallenged preeminence. On the assumption that *all* methods are fallible, dependable knowledge has its base in no single method but in triangulation across multiple methods (Campbell & Fiske, 1959; Webb et al., 1966). Thus the empirical regularities that emerge from a science of public opinion dominated by the sample survey should be greeted with the specific suspicion that they are tied up with a particular and in some degree parochial way of examining the political world.

A second and perhaps more insidious shortcoming associated with sample survey dominance has to do with the range of empirical questions that the field pursues. Methodological preoccupations are inevitably accompanied by theoretical ones. What is worth doing is constrained by what one is able to do. In extreme form, this dependence can give rise to the "law of the instrument":

> Give a small boy a hammer, and he will find that everything he encounters needs pounding. It comes as no particular surprise to discover that a scientist formulates problems in a way which requires for their solution just those techniques in which he himself is especially skilled. (Kaplan, 1964, p. 28)

The danger is that one method will come to be thought of as *the* method, while others are pushed aside, "denied the name of science" (p. 29). There are tremendous benefits to specialization, but automatic reliance on one method may undermine the imaginative spirit that is essential to scientific advance.

This line of argument underscores the importance of identifying and nurturing other methods through which research on public opinion can be carried out. One such method is the intensive interview: in-depth, wide-ranging conversations with a handful of citizens. Smith, Bruner, and White's *Opinions and Personality* (1956) and Lane's *Political Ideology* (1962) are the most famous and influential examples, but others have continued in this tradition (e.g., Chong, 1993; Graber, 1984; Hochschild, 1981; Luker, 1984). Public opinion can also be assessed and clarified through ethnographic methods, thereby following (no doubt unintentionally) the advice of James Bryce (1924), who argued that the best way to discover public opinion was "by moving freely about among all sorts and conditions of men and noting how they are affected by the news or the arguments brought from day to day to their knowledge" (Vol. 1, p. 156). An excellent example is provided by Rieder's (1985) detailed and subtle account of the demise of liberalism in middle-class Italian-American and Jewish communities threatened by racial change. Public opinion can also be inferred through the analysis of election returns (Kelley, 1983); through the investigation of social movements and other forms of contentious collective action (McAdam, McCarthy, & Zald, 1996; Tarrow, 1994; Tilly, 1983; Tyler & Smith, 1998, in this *Handbook*); and through the examination of small groups, a reminder of the importance of discussion to democratic public opinion (Gamson, 1992; Levine & Moreland, 1998, in this *Handbook*). Finally, public opinion may be assessed—and probed and prodded—through experimental means (Kinder & Palfrey, 1993). Increasingly, experiments have become valuable tools in the study of public opinion, their versatility on display across a wide range of application—for example, detecting whether alterations in measurement are actually improvements (e.g., Krosnick & Berent, 1993), resolving debates about political change (e.g., Sullivan, Piereson, & Marcus, 1978), testing assertions about political communication (Ansolabehere et al., 1994; Iyengar & Kinder, 1987), probing models of information processing (Lodge & Steenbergen, 1995), or testing claims regarding the conditions under which collective action is more or less likely (e.g., Dawes et al., 1986), to name a few.

Such diversity of method appears to be on the increase. However much there is, and whatever its trajectory, some such methodological diversification is certainly welcome. In the meantime, the empirical literature on public opinion remains beholden, first and foremost, to the sample survey. Whether this is something to celebrate or criticize, whether the sample survey is better thought of as telescope or as a hammer, my essay will reflect this obvious fact.

The rise to prominence of the sample survey sets off political apprehensions as well as methodological ones. Herbst (1993) regards the ascendance of the sample survey as a manifestation of the general triumph of quantification in Western society and the latest installment in the ongoing rationalization of public opinion, and she worries that public opinion polling discourages citizens from active engagement in public affairs: "In a way, polls make many political discussions superfluous, since they give the illusion that the public has already spoken in a definitive manner. When the polls are published and policymakers claim that they will heed these polls, what more is there to say?" (p. 166).

In similar fashion, Ginsberg (1986) argues that polling has diminished and subverted the political significance of

public opinion. First, by subsidizing the expression of public opinion, polling robs opinion of its voluntary quality; those with strong views are submerged in a sea of apathetic and confused citizens. Second, whereas in an earlier era public opinion was expressed in strikes, protests, and demonstrations, in the contemporary period opinion is "mere attitude." As a consequence, public opinion can now, according to Ginsberg, be managed and placated before it erupts into unruly behavior. Third, opinion, thanks to polling, now belongs to individuals, when once it was the property of groups and the product of collective deliberation. This shift from group to individual, Ginsberg contends, diminishes public opinion as a force in political affairs. And finally, where once it was up to citizens to define issues of the day, under the new regime, citizens are relegated to responding to issues defined by others. In this way, opinion has been transformed from assertion to response. Ginsberg (1986) concludes that taken altogether, the public opinion survey has rendered public opinion "less dangerous, less disruptive, more permissive, and, perhaps, more amenable to government control" (p. 63).

These are important and interesting speculations. Are they true? It is hard to say at this stage, though at least some evidence runs squarely against the more sinister versions of Ginsberg's account of how polling has tamed public opinion (Converse, 1996). Still, it would be foolish to insist that public opinion surveys are never deployed as a weapon for the pacification or manipulation of public sentiment. As Beniger (1983) reminds us, survey research developed to meet the needs of business and government—those, one could say, with a strong interest in deciphering and then exploiting the tastes and desires of the mass audience. That is, the elaborate technology of public opinion polling arose not "from a need to speak one's mind . . . but rather from the need to find out what is on people's minds" (Beniger, 1983, p. 482). Conceding this, it seems lunkheaded to deny that the public opinion survey might also have some positive value. In clarifying and communicating what citizens want and need from their government, surveys might actually enhance the likelihood that they get it (Bartels, 1991; J. M. Converse, 1987; P. E. Converse, 1987; Stimson, MacKuen, & Erikson, 1995).

A Working Definition of Public Opinion

The notion of public opinion spans two centuries marked by fundamental transformation: the industrial revolution; the rise of the nation-state; stunning advances in education, wealth, and literacy; the development of new and instantaneous forms of mass communication; and the radical expansion of civil and political rights. No wonder there exist spirited differences over what public opinion is (and how it should be measured).

In this respect I have followed and then gone beyond Key's admirably broad conception. Public opinion is more than the preferences that citizens develop on matters of government policy; rather, it includes anything that government might find prudent to heed. Furthermore, citizens can form their opinions well or badly: opinion might be blind and prejudiced or reasoned and informed. Best to leave this judgment to empirical analysis of particular cases. Our concept of public opinion must be sufficiently capacious to accommodate a broad conception of politics, one that is concerned with the exercise of power inside or outside government. And last, the "opinion" in public opinion should not distract us from studying how citizens construct understandings and assign priorities, processes that in some important respects precede and make possible opinion itself. If public opinion is all this, we should keep in mind that it can be expressed in a variety of ways, not just through what people say when they agree to participate in a survey. We may think of public opinion as that which public opinion surveys measure (P. E. Converse, 1987; Herbst 1993), but as Tilly (1983) reminds us, public opinion existed before the invention of the public opinion survey and even today, when polls and surveys are commonplace, citizens have available to them a variety of ways to express and register their views on politics and society.

II. CHALLENGES TO DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP

These preliminaries now concluded, the chapter next takes up three threats to democratic life: that Americans are too ignorant, too intolerant, and too simpleminded to be safely given much say in the decisions of government. We'll then consider a possible remedy for these alleged ills, the miraculous medicine provided by aggregation.

Knowledge (Awash in Ignorance)

For critics of democracy, the claim that citizens don't know enough to participate sensibly in the decisions of government has been a persistent and powerful weapon. The problem, put starkly, is that:

> Good decision making requires good information. And while the common citizen might be expected to be a fair judge of matters close to his or her ken, such as how a minister's pay was best raised or how much repair must be done on the local bridge, good information about national and international affairs was exactly what most citizens, preoccupied by their daily subsistence rounds, conspicuously lacked. (Converse, 1990, p. 369)

Those opposed to the spread of democratic ideology and practice at the time of the American founding argued that "the common 'subject' or, in the more radical vocabulary, the common 'citizen' simply lacked the information necessary for any sensible contribution to debates over the grand policies of state" (Converse, 1990, p. 369).

Of course, American society today is not remotely what it was 200 years ago. Advances in education and literacy have dramatically lowered the cognitive barriers to political enlightenment. Meanwhile, thanks to the diffusion of electronic media, information about politics has become vastly more accessible. Yet even today, theorists of democracy continue to worry over the problem of ignorance. In *Democracy and Its Critics,* for example, Dahl (1989) proposes that in any democracy worth the name, citizens must have adequate and equal opportunities for discovering and validating their views on matters to be decided. To "know what it wants, or what is best," Dahl argues, "the people must be enlightened, at least to some degree" (p. 111). When it comes to politics, then, do Americans know what they want and what is best?

Politics as a Sideshow Walter Lippmann thought not. In his famous *Public Opinion* (1992/1960), Lippmann advanced the argument that the trials and tribulations of daily life are compelling in a way that politics can rarely be. To expect ordinary people to become absorbed in the affairs of state would be to demand of them an appetite for political knowledge quite peculiar, if not actually pathological. We are "concerned in public affairs," but "immersed in our private ones" (p. 36).

Lippmann presented his argument without benefit of the kinds of systematic evidence we now require, but he was unusually perceptive—and he was right (e.g., Bennett, Fisher, & Resnick, 1994; Campbell, 1981; Campbell, Converse, & Rodgers, 1976; Szali, 1972). Much as Lippmann suspected, Americans are "much more concerned with the business of buying and selling, earning and disposing of things, than they are with the 'idle' talk of politics" (Lane, 1962, p. 25). The vicissitudes of family, work, and health are central preoccupations; the events of political life remain, for nearly all of us nearly all the time, peripheral curiosities. In complex and differentiated societies like the United States, "politics is a sideshow in the great circus of life" (Dahl, 1961, p. 305).

If politics is a sideshow, citizens may well wonder why they should take the trouble to become informed about its details and operations. This claim, first suggested by Lippmann, was developed formally by Anthony Downs in his splendid book, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (1957). Downs pointed out that there are costs attached to the procurement and analysis of political information—measured in time, energy, and opportunity—and that rational voters will pay such costs only insofar as the information promises a real return. But in a large society, one person's vote is "lost in a sea of votes," so the instrumental benefits from an enlightened vote are infinitesimal. The result, according to Downs, is "rational ignorance."

From this perspective, becoming informed about politics, insofar as it happens at all, should be something of an accident, incidental to activities that citizens pursue in the service of much more central and preoccupying interests. "One need not be an economist," Popkin (1993) has written, "to see which way the economy is going. Politically relevant information is acquired while making individual economic decisions: shoppers learn about inflation of retail prices, homebuyers find out about the trends in mortgage loan interest rates, and owners of stocks follow the Dow-Jones averages" (p. 17; see also Downs, 1957, pp. 222–223; for a more general discussion of the meaning of rationality and error, see Gilbert, 1998, in this *Handbook*).

Whether rational or not, the depth of ignorance demonstrated by modern mass publics can be quite breathtaking, inspiring such derogatory terminology as "wretchedly-informed" (Converse, 1975), "know-nothings" (Hyman & Sheatsley, 1947), and in modern parlance, "clueless" (Morin, 1996). In recent surveys, for example, fewer than one American in ten could identify William Rehnquist as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court; less than half could say how Boris Yeltsin made a living; and two-thirds were unable to say who represented them in the U.S. House of Representatives in Washington.

The American system of government, with its separation of powers and federal dispersion of authority, is complicated. Conceding this point, the number of Americans who garble the most elementary of points is still impressive. Thus when offered a choice among the three branches of government, only 58 percent of Americans recognized that it is the Supreme Court that has the final responsibility to decide if a law is constitutional or not. Thus three out of four did not know that U.S. senators are elected to six-year terms. Thus after more than forty years of continuous Democratic control, only 59 percent of Americans knew in the fall of 1992 that the Democratic party held the majority of seats in the House.

The same is true for legislation: proposals that cause commotion in Washington do not always reach the people of Peoria. Despite the extraordinary attention devoted to the Republicans' legislative initiatives following their successful capture of Congress in the 1994 midterm elections, for example, only one-fourth of the American public correctly reported in early 1996 that the House had passed a plan to balance the federal budget. In 1987, after seven years of debate over aid to the Contras, only one-third of the public could place Nicaragua in Central America. In late 1995, more than twice as many Americans believed, stupendously incorrectly, that the federal government spends more money on foreign aid than on Medicare.

Events and personalities do occasionally command the attention of the entire public, and simple facts are some-

times disseminated with remarkable—electronic—speed. President Kennedy's assassination and the *Challenger* disaster are obvious examples. Beyond the biggest and most melodramatic stories, however, public knowledge thins out rapidly (for a more detailed description of the distribution of political information in the American public, see Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996).

If all this seems democratically disheartening, there's more: things are actually worse than they appear. Even the most expensive and methodologically scrupulous surveys—the National Election Study, say, or the General Social Survey—are able to complete interviews with only about 75 percent of the originally targeted sample. Those who refuse to be questioned or who are never contacted, and so play no role in the figures just recited, are unrepresentative of the public as a whole: they are much less likely to take an interest in politics. This means that the American public is even less well informed than my figures suggested (by roughly 25 percent, in corrections suggested by Brehm, 1993). Moreover, Americans are no better informed today than they were a generation or two ago. If anything, they are a bit less well informed—this in spite of dramatic upgradings in education, which should have led, all other things being equal, to noticeable improvements (Bennett, 1989; Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1991). And finally, about the dramatic events and commanding personalities of international politics, Americans know less—considerably less—than do their counterparts in Great Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, and Spain (Dimock & Popkin, 1995).

Shortcuts to Knowledge Such results are not exactly inspiring, but perhaps they are not as unsettling as they first appear. Even without mastering details, citizens might be able to make sensible choices. Granted that encyclopedic knowledge is out of reach (and perhaps even irrational), the public may nevertheless muddle through. How? By relying on a variety of sensible and mostly adaptive shortcuts–or to use the contemporary term, *heuristics* (Popkin, 1991; Sniderman, Brody, & Tetlock, 1991). Heuristics are concessions to uncertainty and complexity—"an inevitable feature of the cognitive apparatus of any organism that must make as many judgments, inferences, and decisions as humans have to do" (Nisbett & Ross, 1980, p. 18).

One such heuristic is to take cues from well-informed or at least better-informed sources. A good case in point is provided by Brody's research on what seems like an anomaly in public opinion toward the president (Brody, 1991). The anomaly is this: in the immediate aftermath of a disastrous fiasco, a president's standing in the general public often goes *up*. Brody shows that such cases can be explained by the interpretations offered by elites at the time, which in turn guide the reactions of the public. When elites swallow their criticism and rally around the president, so, too, do ordinary citizens. As another illustration of the same general point, consider that although voters may be deeply ignorant of the content of referenda that come before them, they may still be able to choose wisely, *if* they happen to know the positions taken by well-informed sources with strong reputations. In an ingenious analysis, Lupia (1994) shows that California voters who knew little about the details of various complicated proposals to reform the automobile insurance industry nevertheless made sensible choices—choices that were indistinguishable from those made by well-informed voters. The key piece of information here was the position taken by various interest groups. When Californians knew that the insurance industry itself or associations representing trial lawyers supported a proposal, they knew enough: they voted against it (see also McKelvey & Ordeshook, 1985).

In short, by taking cues from expert sources—elites (Brody, 1991), television news programs (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987), opinion leaders (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955), interest groups (Lupia, 1994)—citizens may "be knowledgeable in their reasoning about political choices without necessarily possessing a large body of knowledge about politics" (Sniderman, Brody, & Tetlock, 1991, p. 19).

Do heuristics solve the democratic problem of miserably informed citizens? No. First, although citizens may be willing to rely on the views expressed by better-informed elites, we should not presume that elites always get things right, or that it is always easy for citizens to know what elites think. In the case of automobile insurance reform in California, for example (Lupia, 1994), the insurance industry and the trial lawyers understood perfectly well their reputational problem, so in the advertisements they purchased, they disguised and hid their identity as much as law would allow.

Second, an empirical demonstration that poorly informed voters can mimic the decisions made by their better-informed counterparts is not the same as showing that voters always or often do so. Indeed, Bartels (1996) shows, precisely to the contrary, that in recent American presidential elections, poorly informed voters made decisions differently from well-informed voters. Moreover, when Bartels imputed "fully informed" choices to all voters—that is, the choices voters would have made had they been well informed—he discovered a sizable difference between these hypothetical choices and their actual choices. Expressed in probabilities, the differences ranged from about 8 percentage points on average in 1972 to almost 12 percentage points in 1984.

Finally, we should keep in mind that in information processing as in other domains, there is no free lunch. Heuristics are shortcuts, remember, and when we take shortcuts, sometimes we end up in the right place and sometimes we get lost. The problem for democracy is not just that citizens don't know enough; it is that they know things, or they think they know things, that are incorrect: that a huge fraction of the national treasury is being squandered on foreign aid, say, or that the Republicans control Congress (back

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Lodge concludes that voters should be judged *not* by the information they can recall, but by the kinds of information they entertain moment to moment, and how well they integrate such information into their ongoing political evaluations. This is an important argument, as well as a splendid example of psychological theory applied to a consequential political problem. Naturally, it leaves us hungry for more: especially, one would like to know the extent to which the on-line experimental demonstrations can be generalized to more realistic settings.

Ignorance and Inequality "The two simplest truths I know about the distribution of political information in modern electorates are that the mean is low and the variance high (Converse, 1990, p. 373). *Really* high: some Americans know hardly anything; many know a little; and a few, the activists and the elites who live and breathe politics, seem to know everything.

It would be surprising if inequalities of information on this scale were politically innocuous. They are not: the well-informed are more likely to express opinions, to possess stable opinions, to use ideological terminology correctly, to make use of facts in political discussions, to process information sensitively, to retain political news of the day, to participate actively in politics, and to coordinate their views on policy with their attachments to party and with their votes (Bartels, 1988; Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Iyengar, 1990; Junn, 1990; Price & Zaller, 1993; Zaller, 1992). If information inequalities are consequential, as they certainly seem to be, how can they be explained?

Surely some of the extreme variation in information can be traced to equally extreme variation in the "benefits" stemming from possession of such knowledge. At one end of the scale are political elites, "for whom the stakes of political competition are enormously high; the competition affects them day to day and with little respite in the most vital parameters of their lives—their careers, prestige, self-esteem, and most cherished values" (Converse, 1975, p. 95). At the other end are most, or at least many, citizens, for whom the stakes of politics must by comparison seem feeble or even undetectable.

As important as the benefits of information may be the costs. Participation in politics, even in the mild sense of acquiring information, is not free, so we might expect citizens who have more ample resources—more time, money, and skill—to be better informed. And they are. Skill appears to be especially important, in that the well-informed pick up new information easily and retain it readily. To those who already know a lot, the cost of procuring and digesting new information is tiny; to those who know next to nothing, new information may seem completely bewildering, so the cost of making sense of it is high (Graber, 1984; Price & Zaller, 1993).

Is Ignorance Incorrigible? Can the flagrant deficiencies in the American public's knowledge be remedied? Yes. Ignorance is not incorrigible—not entirely. Consider the modern presidential campaign: hugely expensive, lavishly covered, interminably long—and it makes a difference. At the outset of the 1976 campaign, for example, just 20 percent of the American public claimed to know anything about an ex-governor from Georgia named Jimmy Carter. But two months later, after a series of stunning primary victories, Carter's recognition level had nearly quadrupled (Patterson, 1980). The same thing happened to Gary Hart in 1984. Following his upset victory in the New Hampshire Democratic primary, Hart was showered with attention. As a result, in the three weeks following New Hampshire, Hart more than doubled his level of public familiarity, becoming known over this period to roughly 4 million new voters every day (Bartels, 1988).

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and parties. Public confusion on this point is diminished when candidates stake out distinctive positions on central policy questions. In recent history, the "insurgent candidacy" (Page, 1978) of Barry Goldwater in 1964 represents perhaps the purest case. On his promise to offer "a choice, not an echo," Goldwater clearly delivered, especially on matters of race. In the South and elsewhere, Goldwater spoke forcefully on behalf of states' rights, citing his vote against the Civil Rights Act as proof of his conviction. Partly as a consequence, more than three-fourths of the public in the fall of 1964 claimed familiarity with the Civil Rights Act, and of those, almost everyone knew that Goldwater opposed it and that President Johnson favored it (RePass, 1971). These extraordinary figures suggest that when candidates present their differences clearly, a sizable fraction of the electorate is capable of taking notice.

A third and final example concerns the visibility of candidates for the U.S. House. Here the classic analysis is provided by Miller and Stokes (1963), who concluded that the congressional electorate lives preponderantly "in darkness." Miller and Stokes were drawn to this sobering conclusion because voters appear to know so little about the candidates. Nearly half of the voters who had just participated in a contested election confessed that they had been exposed to *no* information about *either* candidate.[4]

These melancholy figures, which have not improved appreciably since 1958 (Bennett, 1989; Pierce & Converse, 1981), no doubt reflect the peripheral place of politics—congressional election politics—in most people's lives, most of the time. No doubt it also reflects the limited opportunities people have to learn about congressional candidates: an analysis of newspaper coverage of House candidates during the 1958 elections was abandoned midstream, since references to the candidates were "presented only sporadically and then usually buried in a remote section of the paper" (Converse, 1962, p. 586). As in presidential contests, too, some portion of public ignorance and confusion on these matters should be ascribed to the candidates themselves, who, according to Fenno's (1978) observations, rarely organize their campaigns around policy proposals.

But every now and then, events conspire to center public attention on congressional contests—and that is the relevant point here. An excellent example is provided by the 1958 campaign in Arkansas's Fifth District. There the incumbent representative had become entangled in the federal government's efforts to resolve the Little Rock school desegregation crisis. The previous fall, Governor Orval Faubus had called out the National Guard to prevent nine black students from entering Little Rock's all-white Central High School. On court order, the guardsmen were withdrawn. But when the black students attempted to enter the school, they were set upon by a howling mob and forced to retreat. Thereupon President Eisenhower dispatched 1,000 paratroopers to Little Rock and placed 10,000 Arkansas National Guardsmen on federal service. The black students returned to school, their safety protected by a contingent of troops that remained on guard the entire school year. Faubus eventually closed down Central High, rather than be implicated in the racial intermingling that might go on there.

The Democrat incumbent representing Little Rock was no integrationist, but that made little difference in this incendiary atmosphere. He was portrayed as soft on civil rights and was defeated in a write-in campaign on behalf of a staunch defender of segregation. In the Fifth District in Arkansas in 1958, *every* voter claimed to have heard something about *both* the incumbent *and* his successful challenger—and no doubt they had (Miller & Stokes, 1963).

Thus the dispiriting indictment of the American public as "wretchedly informed" need not hold always, everywhere. Ignorance is contingent, not inevitable. Whatever hurdles stand in the way of informing the public can be overcome, given the right set of circumstances, as these several examples attest. Of course, the same examples carry another lesson as well: that the right circumstances don't come along very often.

Summary and Implications Romantic renditions of democracy presume what Lippmann (1925) once called the "omnicompetent" and "sovereign" citizen (p. 39), who somehow had the time and resources to devote to careful study of the persons and problems that animated public life, and to think through all the policy proposals and philosophies swirling about the national debate. Lippmann was thoroughly skeptical that such a creature might actually exist, and of course he was right. Americans are indifferent to much that transpires in the political world. "Surely the most familiar fact to arise from sample surveys in all countries is that popular levels of information about public affairs are, from the point of view of the informed observer, astonishingly low" (Converse, 1975, p. 79). So Converse wrote more than two decades ago, and so it is today.

Some of the indifference, ignorance, and confusion is caused by candidates and officials who practice evasion and ambiguity. And there are indications that by following simple heuristics, citizens can sometimes end up choosing as wisely as they would have had they taken the trouble to become fully informed. If citizens "do not patrol government looking for problems," they may at least "pay attention to people who do" (Popkin, 1993, p. 19). But surely some of the public confusion and ignorance must be traced to the subordinate place of politics in the lives of most Americans. I use the word "most" as a reminder of the huge inequalities that characterize the distribution of information: among the American public are some omnicompetent citizens, not a few know-nothings, and everything in between.

Taken all around, the results on information are often read as discouraging if not devastating for democratic sensibilities. While they may not be cause for celebration, the findings seem to provoke more democratic hand-wringing than is appropriate, for they are typically measured against unrealistic standards. Remember Downs (1957) on the rationality of ignorance: rather than admonishing citizens for knowing so little, perhaps we should be impressed that they know so much. Remember also that ignorance is not inevitable. Under certain and imaginable circumstances, Americans seem quite capable of turning their attention to politics and learning reasonably well and quite rapidly about the choices they face. More generally, we should not make the mistake, as we assess the state of contemporary democratic politics, of yearning for a past that never was. The primacy of politics associated with ancient Greek and Roman cities—that exhilarating sense of civic engagement—is gone, lost to us forever. But, as Walzer (1989) argues, "lost" is an odd word to use here, for the primacy of politics, in any stable or sustained way, has never been "found" in a modern setting.

Finally, nothing in the results presented here should discourage thinking about political reform and institutional design that might lead to a better-informed public. But whether such reform and redesign are desirable—or even necessary—turns partly on what could be called the "aggregation of ignorance." Does the confusion of the average citizen cancel out in the public as a whole, or does it turn into an avalanche? We will take up that question later, as part of a broader discussion of public opinion taken in the aggregate. In the meantime, we should be suspicious of any claim that presumes on the citizen's part a constant and voracious appetite for information about politics.

Tolerance (Intolerance Galore)

Free expression is indispensable to successful democracy. So argued John Stuart Mill, who placed debate over the common good at the heart of democratic government. Mill believed that without wide-ranging and frank discussion, citizens would be unable to understand the past and unable to give wise advice about the future. "There must be discussion," Mill (1861/1951) wrote, "to show how experience is to be interpreted. Wrong opinions and practices gradually yield to fact and argument: but facts and arguments, to produce any effect on the mind, must be brought before it. Very few facts are able to tell their own story, without comments to bring out their meaning" (p. 28).

If democracy is not entirely government by discussion, it is certainly government by discussion in part (Barber, 1984; Dahl, 1989; Fishkin, 1991, 1995; Habermas, 1962/1989; Mansbridge, 1980; Sunstein, 1993). This means that regimes with democratic aspirations are tested by their willingness to encourage a full and frank exchange of views. The test is particularly demanding when the views to be exchanged are in some important way unsavory. Then we come up against the problem of tolerance and its limits—of deciding "what forms of opposition to tolerate and how far such tolerance can be safely extended" (Sullivan, Piereson, & Marcus, 1982, p. 1). Put this way, tolerance, according to Marcus et al. (1995), is "the pivotal dilemma of democracy in a pluralist society" (p. 3).

Research on political tolerance takes seriously the notion that agreement on procedural principles is the cement of a democratic political order (Dahl, 1956; Myrdal, 1944; Tocqueville, 1945). Democracy, according to this argument, depends less on constitutional arrangements and more on popular support for democratic procedures and rights. As long as consensus on fundamentals can be maintained, democratic government will remain "a relatively efficient system for reinforcing agreement, encouraging moderation, and maintaining social peace" (Dahl, 1956, p. 151).

All this is threatened when political intolerance erupts, as it often has in history. Tolerance is difficult; it "implies a willingness to 'put up with' those things that one rejects. Politically, it implies a willingness to permit the expression of those ideas or interests that one opposes" (Sullivan, Piereson, & Marcus, 1979, p. 784). Going further, McClosky and Brill (1983) argue that tolerance cuts deeply against the human grain. *In*tolerance, they say, is natural, since people "distrust what they do not understand and cannot control" and need to "feel safe against the terrors of the unknown" (pp. 13–14).

First Results If, as McClosky and Brill suggest, political tolerance is an acquired taste, how many Americans have managed to acquire it? Not too many, according to Samuel Stouffer's *Communism, Conformity, and Civil Liberties* (1955). Carried out as the McCarthy hearings on communist subversion were under way, Stouffer's national survey encountered relatively few Americans prepared to grant constitutional rights to extremists on the left. Two of every three Americans declared that communists should not be permitted to speak publicly; three of four endorsed the idea that communists should have their American citizenship revoked; nine of ten stood against communists teaching in the public schools. Americans were more tolerant toward socialists, suspected communists, and atheists—but not all that tolerant. For example, nearly one-third of Americans said that they would prohibit a socialist from giving a speech in their community. Stouffer's results shattered the notion that Americans would apply democratic procedures and rights to all.

More trouble quickly followed. On the heels of Stouffer's sobering report came Prothro and Griggs' (1960) survey of registered voters in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and Tallahassee, Florida, two university towns running over, one imagines, with highly educated and well-socialized citizens. And indeed, when offered the chance, the voters of

Ann Arbor and Tallahassee declared that democracy was the best form of government, that public officials should be chosen by majority rule, that every citizen should have an equal chance to influence governmental policy, and that those who held unpopular views should be free to criticize majority opinion. When broad principles were translated into specific propositions involving questionable groups, however, consensus broke down. For example, while political equality was fine in principle, a majority of Prothro and Grigg's registered voters endorsed the idea that only the well-informed should be permitted to vote in a city referendum. McClosky (1964) reported similar results, based on a national survey carried out in the late 1950s. Here again Americans nearly unanimously supported general principles, but not the application of those principles to specific, difficult cases. McClosky concluded that "a large proportion of the electorate has failed to grasp certain of the underlying ideas and principles on which the American political system rests" (p. 562).

Are Americans More Tolerant Now Than They Were Fifty Years Ago? The first round of empirical investigation into political tolerance was carried out at the height of the Cold War, with, as Stouffer (1955) put it at the time, the free world living under the "menacing shadow" of communist imperialism (p. 14). A natural, and, as it turns out, provocative question is whether the American public has grown more (or less) tolerant over the succeeding decades.

Looking to the future and imagining improvements in education, Stouffer predicted that the American public would become more tolerant. And for a time it appeared that Stouffer was right. For example, analyzing a national survey that carried some of the same questions that had appeared in Stouffer's original study, Davis (1975) uncovered evidence of massive change: roughly twice as many Americans were prepared to grant communists, socialists, and atheists constitutional rights in the early 1970s as had been true two decades before. The gradual replacement of older, relatively poorly educated cohorts with younger, better-educated cohorts accounted for perhaps a third of this remarkable change. Beyond these replacement effects, Davis found that Americans in general, regardless of education or generation, were becoming more tolerant. Nunn, Crockett, and Williams (1978) reported similar results from their 1973 national survey. The inescapable conclusion from such evidence seemed to be that there had occurred a climatic change: substantial and broadly based increases in political tolerance (Davis, 1975; McClosky & Brill, 1983; Nunn, Crockett, & Williams, 1978). As Nunn, Crockett, & Williams (1978) put it, "The most important finding from our effort to track trends in American tolerance is that citizens who are most supportive of civil liberties have emerged as the majority in our society" (p. 12).

Maybe not. Sullivan, Piereson, and Marcus (1979, 1982) argue that the magnificent rise in tolerance just described is an illusion: "Claims that the public is now more tolerant than in the 1950s," they write, "are either untrue or greatly exaggerated" (Sullivan, Piereson, & Marcus, 1982, p. 250). Behind this contention lies a particular way of measuring tolerance, one based on the premise that political tolerance is tested only under conditions of strong disagreement. Under the Sullivan procedure, Americans are first invited to identify the political group they like least; then they are asked a more or less standard battery of questions dealing with the granting of rights and protections to members of this group. In a national survey carried out in 1978, Sullivan and his colleagues found that only half of those questioned were prepared to grant members of their least-liked group the right to make a public speech; 40 percent endorsed the tapping of their telephones; 70 percent thought that the group should be outlawed altogether. Conceding that Americans were more likely to grant communists rights of expression and assembly than they were in the 1950s, Sullivan, Piereson, and Marcus argued nevertheless that Americans were "now able to point to other political groups toward which they feel more hostility, and which they regard as more threatening" (1982, p. 69). Intolerance, they concluded, has "merely been turned toward new targets" (1979, p. 792).

This doesn't seem quite right, either. Thanks to the heroic archival efforts of Mueller (1988) and Page and Shapiro (1992), we now have a detailed picture of political tolerance over the better part of half a century—not political tolerance in general, but rather the willingness of Americans to extend constitutional protection to communists in their midst in particular. The picture that emerges is neither inexorable progress, nor a turning to other targets, but instead considerable fluctuation. Tolerance for the rights of communists rose during World War II, as the Soviet Union became allied with the United States; fell during the Cold War, as U.S.-Soviet relations cooled and hardened; bottomed out in the 1950s, with the Korean War, the trial and execution of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, and the McCarthy hearings; remained low at least until the end of 1963 (when observations temporarily ceased); rose sharply by the early 1970s; and has drifted slightly upward since then, reaching historic high points in 1990, with the arrival of Mikhail Gorbachev and glasnost. In short, willingness to tolerate communist expression and assembly waxes and wanes with fluctuations in the salience of the threat that communism seems to pose (Mueller, 1988).

Allowing citizens to say for themselves which groups they find dangerous or disagreeable is appealing, but it is not without a shortcoming or two. For one thing, it is impossible, under the Sullivan procedure, to distinguish between people who are generally intolerant—who would be delighted to restrict the rights of all sorts of groups—on the one hand, from those who are generally tolerant but "feel that a *particular* group (say the Symbionese Liberation Army or the Weathermen) is so dangerous that it should not be permitted to engage in such activities as teaching or holding public rallies in the city" on the other (McClosky & Brill, 1983, p. 436). Failing to make this distinction compromises our ability to assess trends in tolerance over time. And if we insist that tolerance only comes up under conditions of strong disagreement, then we may never think to ask questions that seem consequential to free expression. If, to take one example, Americans are less homophobic than they used to be, then they probably are also less likely to agree that gays and lesbians should be denied freedom of speech or assembly. This would be worth knowing, even though, in this hypothetical case, by the Sullivan definition political tolerance would not have budged at all. In short, for a full understanding of tolerance, we need to know what Americans are prepared to do and say about ideas and groups they find disagreeable and why, *and* we need to know which ideas and groups Americans find disagreeable and why (on the latter point, see, for example, Kinder & Sanders, 1996; Schuman, Steeh, & Bobo, 1985; Smith & Sheatsley, 1984; Sniderman et al., 1991).[5]

A final complication for empirical tests of tolerance again takes us back to the root definition of tolerance itself. "A tolerant regime," say Sullivan, Piereson, and Marcus (1979), "is one that allows a wide berth to those ideas that challenge its way of life" (p. 784). As we've just noted, it may or may not be right to emphasize that for tolerance to come up, ideas must be disagreeable. That issue to one side, what about disagreeable *activities*? The waves of protest that engulfed Western societies in the 1950s and 1960s brought to center stage a variety of forms of political action—sit-ins, demonstrations, blockades, and riots—that seemed to exceed what many Americans thought democratically permissible (Barnes & Kaase, 1979; Gibson & Bingham, 1982; Lawrence, 1976). A comprehensive accounting of political tolerance and its evolution over time must consider both disagreeable ideas and objectionable forms of political action. If the evidence is now imperfect and incomplete, in neither respects is the American record altogether inspiring.

Underpinnings of Tolerance Still, some Americans are prepared to defend ideas and activities they find objectionable. Why? "What influences impel some people to honor and protect the liberties of others, even when those liberties are employed for purposes they perceive as hateful?" (McClosky & Brill, 1983, p. 415).

One underappreciated answer is principles. The literature has been perhaps too impressed with the visible gap between the profession of support for civil liberties in the abstract on the one hand, and their application to particular cases on the other. The gap *is* impressive, as we have seen, but it should not distract us from noticing that principles and applications are connected; that is, Americans who are the most enthusiastic about tolerance in the abstract are more likely to express tolerance in the particular (Chong, 1993; Gross & Kinder, in press; Lawrence, 1976; Marcus et al., 1995; Sullivan, Piereson, & Marcus, 1982). Thus Californians who expressed the most support for civil liberties in general were also more likely to say that people with AIDS should be protected against discrimination in employment and that children with AIDS should be allowed to attend school (Sniderman et al., 1991). If Americans were less supportive of rights and liberties in the abstract, they would be less likely to support them in the particular.

Also important are attitudes toward the group in question. Americans are increasingly less willing to support rights of speech and assembly, the more they dislike those who wish to speak and assemble—not a big surprise, perhaps, but worth noting all the same (e.g., Chong, 1993; Kuklinski et al., 1991; Lawrence, 1976; Marcus et al., 1995; Sullivan, Piereson, & Marcus, 1982). In a curious way the most convincing demonstration of this point comes from the research of Sullivan and associates. They find that tolerance is powerfully influenced by attitudes toward the offending group, even though in their analysis, everyone is thinking about a group they find most objectionable. Those who find their disagreeable group really, really disagreeable, are those who are most prepared to waive constitutional rights and privileges (Sullivan, Piereson, & Marcus, 1982).

And people find groups objectionable, according to Sullivan, Piereson, and Marcus, because they are seen as threatening. This equation of attitude and threat, of dislike and danger, is common in the tolerance literature, reaching back all the way to Stouffer. It is a habit, and perhaps not a good one, for it is not obvious that groups must be threatening in some tangible way for them to be regarded as objectionable. For one thing, intolerance appears to be predicted better by sheer dislike of the group than by apprehensions over its power (Marcus et al., 1995; Sullivan, Piereson, & Marcus, 1982). For another, support for the civil rights of gays and lesbians has grown steadily and appreciably in the last twenty-five years, in spite of the AIDS epidemic, a threat to public health of the most diabolical sort (Page & Shapiro, 1992; Sniderman et al., 1991). In short, groups may be found objectionable because they are thought to promote repugnant ideas or display immoral lifestyles, quite apart from their capacity to deliver tangible harms.

Another reliable source of difference between those who express tolerance and those who do not is education. From Stouffer's results on communists to contemporary disputes over gay rights and racist speech, more education is always associated with more tolerance (e.g., Davis, 1975; Gross & Kinder, in press; McClosky, 1964; McClosky & Brill, 1983; Nunn, Crockett, & Williams, 1978; Sniderman et al., 1991; Stouffer, 1955).[6] Prothro and Grigg

(1960) interpret this result to mean that the welleducated are better able to appreciate the logical consequences of democratic principles. Education, in this view, equips people to see the connection between general principles and specific cases. This appears to be part of the story, but only part (Bobo & Licari, 1989). Well-educated Californians are more likely than the poorly educated to say that people with AIDS should not be fired and that children with AIDS should not be prevented from attending school for *many* reasons, not just the one: because the well-educated are more likely to support civil liberties as a matter of principle; because they are less hysterical about how AIDS is transmitted; because they are less homophobic; and finally, because the well-educated are less inclined, as they construct their views on these particular issues, to draw on their personal anxieties about AIDS and their feelings about homosexuality (Sniderman et al., 1991).

In general then, education enhances tolerance. On the (debatable) idea that more tolerance is always desirable, public opinion on matters of free speech and due process provides another case of the beneficence of education—more evidence in support of Hyman and Wright's (1979) general conclusion that education produces "large, lasting and diverse good effects on values" (p. 61; for a good argument in the other direction, see Jackman & Muha, 1984).

Intolerant Attitudes, Intolerant Acts? Taken all around, the American public seems more intolerant in its opinions than in its activities. Americans believe, on balance, that objectionable groups should be silenced, but they don't seem to act on this belief very often. The Jim Crow statutes, the internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II, and the blacklists of the McCarthy period are flagrant examples to the contrary. Still, given what the average American believes, it's a wonder that there aren't more such examples. What should we make of the speculation that Americans are more intolerant in their attitudes than in their conduct?

One response is to acknowledge the uncertain and contingent connection between attitude and behavior in general—an altogether familiar confession for social psychologists (Petty & Wegener, 1998, in this *Handbook*). Stouffer (1955) himself issued an early warning of just this kind. He referred to tolerance as a "latent" tendency, and cautioned against taking "the answers to any specific question as explicit predictions of action" (p. 48). Reviewing their own results with this puzzle in mind, Prothro and Grigg (1960) suggested that the disjuncture between what people say and what they do should in this instance be regarded as a blessing, concluding that democracy may depend more on habits of behavior than agreement on principles.

Mueller (1988) goes further in this direction, doubting whether Americans actually have attitudes on issues of tolerance, one way or the other. The questions used to test tolerance refer to issues so hypothetical, so remote from the pressing concerns of everyday life, that, Mueller (1988) suggests, they elicit mainly "casual caprice and amiable randomness" (p. 21). From Mueller's perspective, the problem is not so much that surveys fail to illuminate behavior as that they fail even to illuminate attitude:

> To put it directly, on questions of tolerance and civil liberties—that is, on some of the basic issues on which the theory of democracy is founded—it may be more useful for some purposes to assume [that] no attitude worthy of the name exists. . . . Rather than concluding that "most people are intolerant," it may be best to conclude that most people have no attitude. (p. 20)

Mueller's skepticism is borne out by some of what Chong (1993) finds in an intriguing analysis of in-depth interviews. On the question of the protection of liberty in a free society. Chong discovers not that people have nothing to say, but that what they say is a mess: people announce their views casually, they abruptly reverse themselves as new thoughts pop into their heads, and then they alter course again before they are through. All this is consistent with Mueller's depiction of public opinion on tolerance as ritualistic, whimsical, and largely off the cuff.

Chong also finds, however, that at least some citizens are capable of providing strong and principled justifications for their opinions. Furthermore, if views on tolerance were as casual as Mueller suggests, then it would be miraculous if they moved sensibly and systematically over time (they do), and equally miraculous if we could predict who is tolerant and who is not (we can). Still, Mueller is right to point out that while applications of democratic principles to hard cases may be riveting to a handful of lawyers and judges and public officials, they very likely appear academic and artificial to most ordinary citizens. From this perspective, it is perhaps impressive that opinions on free expression are as well structured as they seem to be.

The demonstration of widespread intolerance among the American public led some analysts to the conclusion that the fate of democracy in the United States (and no doubt elsewhere) rested in the hands of elites: the lawyers and judges and public officials who presumably *are* in possession of more deeply considered and meaningful views on democratic rights and procedures—views more in tune, furthermore, with democratic principles than are the average citizen's. Stouffer's original investigation included not only a survey of ordinary Americans, but also a sample of community leaders: presidents of PTAs, newspaper publishers, chamber of commerce presidents, county chairmen of party organizations, and the like. Compared to average citizens, local leaders, Stouffer found, were substantially more likely to say that they would permit the expression of disagreeable points of view, and this difference has been replicated time and time again since (see Sullivan et al., 1993, for an excellent guide to this literature). Some of the difference between elites and ordinary citizens can be explained through selective recruitment (e.g., Jackman, 1972; Nunn, Crockett, & Williams, 1978), but some appears to be due to the transformative experiences of leadership itself. By virtue of the lives they lead, political leaders are "exposed to the functional equivalent of a civics and tolerance curriculum . . . their daily experience serves to provide a steady 'prime' for democratic norms, encouraging cogitation which can short-circuit the seemingly automatic connection between perception of threat [that word again] and political tolerance" (Sullivan et al., 1993, p. 72). Thus Stouffer (1955) was at least partly on the mark when he speculated that "community leaders, being especially responsible and thoughtful citizens, are more likely than the rank and file to give a sober second thought to the dangers involved in denying civil liberties to those whose views they dislike" (p. 27).

How reliably do community leaders engage in this "sober second thought"? Perhaps, as Dahl (1961) and Key (1961) say, it is the enlightened views held and acted upon by elites that protect against frequent outbursts of intolerance. Perhaps—but it is clear that the protection that elites afford is far from foolproof (Gibson, 1988). When we hope for democratic control of what Riker (1982) called the "hatreds and oppressions" of divided societies, we would be wise not to pretend that elites will always have democratic values first in mind.

Summary and Implications In *The Revolt of the Masses,* Ortega y Gasset (1932) refers to political tolerance as "the supreme form of generosity" and expresses his astonishment that "the human species should have arrived at so noble an attitude, so paradoxical, so refined, so acrobatic, so anti-natural" (p. 83). Perhaps we should be impressed that the American public expresses as much tolerance for disagreeable political ideas and activities as it does.

All the same, intolerant attitudes are a commonplace. Their prominence is a reflection of the pervasiveness of animosity in pluralist societies and the imperfect counterweight supplied by democratic principles. The implication of intolerant attitudes for action—for the actual suppression of speech or the cancellation of rights—turns substantially on the conduct of elites. These themes are not exactly reassuring, but get used to them; we will meet them again (and soon).

Intelligence (Unsophisticated in the Extreme)

In today's world, almost everyone claims to favor democracy. But this is a modern turn; most political theorists from ancient Greece to the present day have been much more impressed with the imperfections and hazards of democratic practice than with its virtues. In *The Republic,* for example, Plato (1970–1972) argued that democracy was dangerous: citizens possess neither the experience nor the knowledge required for sound judgment; they act on impulse, sentiment, and prejudice; and they are easily manipulated by leaders who "profess themselves the people's friends" (p. 376).

Closer to our own time and place, many perceptive observers have concluded that ordinary citizens are simply not up to shouldering the burdens of democracy. In *The Phantom Public,* Lippmann (1925, p. 39) compared the predicament of the average person who wants to be a virtuous citizen to a fat man who aspires to become a ballet dancer. Likewise Schumpeter (1942) argued against democracy on the grounds that the average citizen "is impatient of long or complicated argument," is in possession of "weak rational processes," is "not 'all there' " (p. 257).

For the most part, such arguments were advanced without benefit of systematic evidence. Schumpeter (1942) was right to say that deciding whether the preconditions for democracy are met requires not "reckless assertion" but rather "laborious appraisal of a maze of conflicting evidence" (p. 254)—but he did not undertake such an analysis himself. To be fair, in Schumpeter's time, there was not all that much evidence to analyze. Which brings us to Philip Converse and his celebrated, or notorious, but certainly influential, analysis of belief systems in mass publics.

Sophistication According to Converse Analyzing national surveys carried out in 1956, 1958, and 1960, Converse (1964) concluded that qualitative, perhaps unbridgeable, differences distinguished the political thinking of elites from the political thinking of ordinary Americans, and that most Americans are ill prepared and perhaps incapable of following—much less participating in—what might be called democratic discussion.

Converse same to his gloomy conclusions in part because of Americans' unfamiliarity with ideological concepts. Citizens who seemed to rely on a relatively abstract and far-reaching conceptual dimension such as liberalism or conservatism when they commented on what they liked and disliked about the major parties and candidates constituted, according to Converse's classification, less than 3 percent of the public. Near-ideologues, citizens who made use of abstract concepts but appeared neither to rely on them heavily nor to understand them very well, made up just another tenth of the sample. Thus the great majority of Americans—close to 90 percent—showed no taste for abstract concepts that seem a standard part of political analysis.

Unfamiliarity with ideological terms could reflect naïveté, or, less significantly, difficulties in the articulation of ideological ideas. Perhaps many people simply cannot

enunciate the principles that inform their beliefs. With this possibility in mind, Converse calculated correlations between opinions on topical issues separately for each of two groups, both interviewed in 1958: a national cross section of the general public, and a smaller group made up of candidates for the U.S. House of Representatives. Both groups were asked their opinions on pressing domestic and foreign policy issues—matters such as aid to education, military support for countries menaced by communist aggression, and the like. Candidates' positions regarding these problems were much more consistent than were the positions expressed by the general public. Indeed, among the public, there was little consistency at all. Candidates tended to be liberal or conservative; citizens were scattered all over the (ideological) place.

Not only did opinions on matters of policy appear unconnected to one another; they also seemed to wobble back and forth randomly over time. Eight of the policy questions that were included in the 1958 national survey had been posed to the same people two years earlier, in the 1956 survey, and were posed to them again two years later, in 1960. Aggregate shifts in opinion were negligible across this period, but at the individual level Converse found a great deal of movement. On average, less than two-thirds of the public came down on the same side of a policy controversy over a two-year period, where one-half would be expected to do so by chance alone. Furthermore, a close inspection of the dynamics of this considerable reshuffling led Converse to suggest that on any particular issue, the public could be separated into one of two groups: the first made up of citizens who possess genuine opinions and hold onto them tenaciously; the second composed of citizens who are quite indifferent to the issue and when pressed, either confess their ignorance outright, or, out of embarrassment or misplaced civic obligation, invent an attitude on the spot—not a real attitude, but a "non-attitude" (Converse, 1970). The democratically disheartening conclusion of this analysis is that those in the first group—known collectively as an "issue public"—are often substantially outnumbered by those in the second. Nonattitudes are encountered more frequently than the real thing.

All in all, not a very pretty picture. In Converse's view, most Americans glance at the political world bewildered by ideological concepts, lacking a consistent outlook on public policy, and in possession of genuine opinions on only a few issues. And of course, Converse carried out his analysis on an American public that in historical and comparative perspective was remarkably affluent, extraordinarily well educated, and virtually bombarded with news.

Reaction It did not take long for Converse's forceful conclusions to provoke a huge commotion. The most powerful line of criticism, or so it seemed, was that Converse had ignored politics, that his analysis had paid too little attention to the nature of campaigns and public debate. Under this view, the sophistication of citizens' understanding of politics mirrors the sophistication of the public debate that they witness. Provide Americans with a more thoughtful and philosophical politics, so ran the argument, and they are perfectly capable of responding in kind.

On this point, the critics certainly have had time on their side. Surely Converse's conclusions reflected in part the comparatively tranquil Eisenhower years, a period of political recovery from the intense ideological debates of the New Deal and from the collective trauma of the Great Depression and war on a world stage. Surely the original claim must be modified, given the events that have shattered national tranquillity since.

Not really. A full account of the evidence relevant to this point would be long and complicated, and I have here neither the space nor the heart to plow through all the details (Kinder & Sears, 1985; Luskin, 1987; Smith, 1989). Suffice it to say that Converse's original claim of ideological naïveté stands up well, both to detailed reanalysis and to political change. In some respects, the claim is strengthened. *Despite* the boisterous events and ideological debates that have sporadically punctuated American politics in the last thirty years, most citizens continue to be mystified by or at least indifferent to ideological terminology. Sophisticated reasoning about politics is only a tiny bit more common now than in the Eisenhower years (Klingemann, 1979; Miller & Miller, 1976; Smith, 1989).

Moreover, such modest improvements appear to have less to do with alterations in political debate and more with gradual upgradings in the public's intellectual capacities. Political sophistication is a reflection, at least in part, of cognitive ability—what Gardner (1983) might call "linguistic intelligence" (see, for example, Graber, 1984; Luskin, 1990; Neuman, 1986; Rosenberg, 1988). Those with more linguistic intelligence have an easier time organizing and retaining information about politics—not surprising, since politics, being remote and abstract, is a "difficult" subject. From this perspective, imaginable improvements in campaigns seem unlikely to make much of a difference.

We should not go too far in this direction, however. For one thing, it is a mistake to think of linguistic intelligence as unchangeable. Gardner (1983) would insist otherwise: that linguistic and other kinds of intelligence are fluid and can be improved through instruction and practice. For another, there exists considerable evidence that complexity of political thought is contingent, not fixed—that, for example, people show more complexity in their political thinking when they are held accountable for their views, when important values collide, when they take an active part in politics, or when they face issues they deem important (Leighley, 1991; Suedfeld, Tetlock, & Streufert, 1992; Tetlock, 1986). Still, on balance the evidence favors skepticism. The American public is not very sophisticated in its reasoning about politics, and is unlikely to become so anytime soon.

Nonattitudes, Issue Publics, and Democratic Debate Sophisticated reasoning about politics may be out of reach, but citizens might still be able to develop well-grounded and sensible views on particular matters of public dispute. This distinction returns us to the nonattitude thesis, the most devastating count in Converse's original indictment. For if Converse is right here, then sizable fractions of the public "do not have meaningful beliefs, even on issues that have formed the basis for intense political controversy among elites for substantial periods of time" (Converse, 1964, p. 245). When it comes to politics, people simply don't know what they want. "Democratic theory," as Achen (1975) put it, "loses its starting point" (p. 1227).

In some ways, empirical support for the idea of nonattitude has mounted in the last three decades. Panel studies have continued to show that wandering from one side of a policy question to the other is utterly common (Converse & Markus, 1979; Markus, 1982)—and not only in the United States: Butler and Stokes (1974) report almost identical results with the British public, while Converse and Pierce (1986) do the same for France. We also know that nonattitudes and their opposite, real opinions, appear to be distributed much as Converse had originally suggested—that is, rather democratically. Issue publics are not the exclusive province of a well-educated elite; membership in a particular issue public has little to do with formal education or general engagement in politics. Instead, citizens seem to be drawn to one domain, but not to others; to be interested in health care, but not international trade (Achen, 1975; Erikson, 1979; Feldman, 1989; Krosnick, 1988, 1990).

But how should unstable opinions be interpreted? Converse took instability to be diagnostic of the flimsiness of public opinion. Reluctant to own up to their own ignorance, people invented evanescent opinions: liberal on one occasion, conservative on the next. Perhaps—but others have interpreted instability to be a reflection of imperfections in instrumentation. From this perspective, instability reflects vague and confused questions, not vague and confused citizens. This is the position taken by Achen (1975; see also Erikson, 1979), who drew for his analysis on the same national panel study that provided the raw materials for Converse's claim of nonattitudes. Capitalizing on the statistical opportunities provided by opinion measurement at three points in time, Achen corrected the over-time correlations for the attenuation associated with measurement error, on the presumption that all of the error properly belonged to the instrument. Following these corrections, the over-time correlations increased dramatically, soaring toward, and in a few cases past, 1.0. Thus by these calculations, all of the instability in response is due to measurement error; opinion itself is perfectly stable.

Converse (1970) argues to the contrary, that unreliability is a product not only of imperfections in instrumentation but also imperfections in citizens, particularly their low levels of information. If Converse is right, then opinion stability should be predictable from what citizens know—and it is. The best evidence on this point is provided by Feldman's (1989) analysis of policy opinions expressed by a sample of Americans questioned five times during the 1976 presidential campaign. Feldman found that Americans who knew the most about the rival candidates in 1976 were the most likely to remain steadfast throughout the campaign in their views on policy (see also Converse, 1964, pp. 244–245; Schuman & Presser, 1981; Zaller, 1990). Thus instability cannot be written off entirely to instrumentation error; instability reflects ambiguity and confusion in citizens as well.

Achen is on to something, however. Unreliability must reflect imprecision in the design of the questions, mistakes in reading and recording, mismatches between citizens' views and the response categories they are presented, and so forth. If Achen is right, then when questions used to assess opinions on policy are improved, stability should increase—and this turns out to be true, too. When questions are posed in a way that diminishes their ambiguity, and when response alternatives are clearly defined, opinion stability increases (Krosnick & Berent, 1993). Under such circumstances, one could say, citizens appear more capable.

Bravely into this debate on nonattitudes charge Zaller and Feldman (1992), offering yet a third perspective. In their view, instability is common not because citizens have no views, as Converse would suggest, and not because citizens are confused by imprecise questions, as Achen would argue, but because citizens are ambivalent. They do not know what to think exactly, because they cannot adjudicate decisively among various competing considerations.

Zaller and Feldman take as their point of departure the premise that the American political mind is not so much empty as it is teeming with potentially relevant considerations. On this point they cite Hochschild's (1981) results, based on in-depth discussions with ordinary Americans about justice in politics, the workplace, and at home. On the one hand, the people Hochschild questioned displayed the same symptoms that Converse detected: inconsistency, hesitation, confusion, and more. On the other hand, their fundamental problem was not that they had no ideas about taxes or unemployment or income distribution, but that they had too many. They suffered not so much from a shortage of relevant considerations as from an impoverished ability to integrate them. Zaller and Feldman go on to show that many Americans can generate justifications both for favoring and for opposing prominent government policies, and that such ambivalence is associated with instability in opin-

ion: views flip around most from one occasion to the next among those who can most readily see reasons on both sides (Chong's 1993 findings can be read in this way, too).

If Americans have lots of things in mind out of which they might construct real opinions, then whether or not they succeed in doing so might depend on how much help they receive from others as to how issues should be defined and understood—on how issues are *framed.* Framing will become a serious topic later; for the moment, think of frames as "opinion recipes," recommendations about how issues should be understood, and therefore which considerations, in what proportions, should be used to construct an opinion. Insofar as elite debate provides useful frames, citizens should be more likely to develop real opinions. And they do: in a series of experiments across a variety of issues, when provided helpful frames citizens are more likely to express an opinion. Furthermore, such opinions are more stable over time and are better anchored in the interests, group resentments, and political principles that the frames appear to highlight (Kinder & Nelson, 1996; Kinder & Sanders, 1996).

Regardless of what elites say, issues themselves seem to vary in the degree to which they draw large and attentive publics. Particularly when policy proposals become entangled in moral, racial, and religious feelings, the nonattitude problem may diminish dramatically (Carmines & Stimson, 1980; Converse & Markus, 1979; Feldman, 1989). This point is illustrated well in Luker's (1984) brilliant reconstruction of the "worldviews" held by activists on either side of the debate on abortion. According to Luker, the thinking of pro-choice activists on matters of sexuality, morality, gender, religion, and family is fundamentally different from that of pro-life activists, but equally coherent. Do these activists possess real opinions on abortion policy? Absolutely. (If anything, perhaps their views are *too* real: while they are more than prepared to say what they think and why on issues of abortion, it is not so clear that they are capable of hearing points of view that challenge their own.)

Luker's analysis returns us to the allegation of a vast and perhaps unbridgeable chasm between citizens and elites. Converse initiated his inquiry with an interest in democratic conversation: can leaders and publics talk intelligibly to one another? His answer was no, but Converse provided little evidence on elites, and no evidence on the stability of their views. This is important, both for the claim that elites and publics think about politics differently, and, more immediately, for understanding the meaning of nonattitudes. Thankfully, subsequent research has filled this gap. The newer results suggest that by comparison to ordinary citizens, political elites hold onto *their* political beliefs tenaciously. The most pertinent evidence is supplied by Jennings's (1992) systematic comparison of policy views expressed by the American mass public on the one hand, with the views expressed on the same policies with the identical questions by delegates to the Democratic and Republican national conventions on the other. Convention delegates fall below the top stratum of national political elites, but as Jennings (1992) notes, they are "deeply committed, highly motivated, and keenly involved partisans" (p. 422). And their views on policy are *much more stable* than are the views of the public as a whole—roughly two or three times as stable. The same point is made by Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti (1979) in a panel study of Italian regional councilors. Questioned first in 1970 and then again in 1976, these regional elites remained remarkably steadfast in their political opinions. On the question of government workers' right to strike, for example, councilors' opinions were substantially more stable across a six-year period than were the American public's beliefs across any two-year period, on *any* policy question. The same sharp contrasts appear in Converse and Pierce's (1986) analysis of the French electorate and candidates for the National Assembly, in a panel survey that bracketed the spectacular disorders of the spring of 1968. These radical differences, recurring in different settings and at different times, suggest that stability in opinion is not just a matter of getting the questions right, but is a direct reflection, too, of the attention and thought citizens give to politics.

Summary and Implications Precious few Americans make sophisticated use of political abstractions. Most are mystified by or at least indifferent to standard ideological concepts, and not many express consistently liberal, conservative, or centrist positions on government policy. Although elites' views tend to be well ordered, the views of the rank-and-file public are not. Such ideological scatter is no less true during tumultuous and ideologically charged periods than in more serene times. As Lane (1962) once put it, Americans seem to "morselize" their political beliefs:

> This treatment of an instance in isolation happens time and again and on matters close to home: a union demand is a single incident, not part of a more general labor-management conflict; a purchase on the installment plan is a specific debt, not part of a budgetary pattern—either one's own or society's. The items and fragments of life remain itemized and fragmented. (p. 353)

Consistency is not the American public's strong suit, and what modest consistency can be found may have less to do with individual cognitive achievement than with processes of social diffusion. Ideological consistency, it turns out, is predicted rather poorly by education and quite well by engagement in politics (e.g., Converse & Pierce, 1986; Jennings, 1992; Nie & Andersen, 1974). Perhaps the politically engaged manifest more consistency among their policy beliefs not because they invest more mental resources in putting their political ideas together or because they are more acutely sensitive to ideological inconsistency, but because they are more attentive to public life and hence adopt combinations of political ideas that more faithfully reflect positions taken by elites. Ideological structure thus may reflect not only or even mainly the inner workings of psychologic, but rather processes of social diffusion (Abelson, 1975; Zaller, 1992).

So far this summary follows Converse's original conclusions in discouragingly fine detail—discouraging for assessments of democratic competence, that is. The story is both more complicated and somewhat sunnier when we turn to the nonattitude thesis. Converse's contention that large fractions of the American public have no meaningful opinions on matters of high national importance now seems less devastating. For one thing, the recent rise to prominence of such issues as abortion and affirmative action suggest that issue publics need not be confined to small splinters of the general public. Furthermore, unstable opinions are partly a product of the imperfect way in which questions are put to citizens; and partly they are a reflection of the failure of elites to provide frames to help citizens resolve ambivalence among competing considerations. From either perspective, the problem of nonattitudes is at least somewhat remediable. Improve the questions, induce elites to provide a clarifying debate, and real attitudes will increase.

So is instability innocuous? Absolutely not. Unstable opinions are a reflection, too, of the casual and shallow character of much everyday political thinking. This point is supported most directly by the massive differences uncovered in the structure and stability of political views expressed by ordinary citizens and by political elites. It is supported as well by demonstrations that many Americans can be enticed to volunteer opinions on utterly obscure or even wholly fictitious legislative proposals (Bishop et al., 1980; Bishop, Tuchfarber, & Oldendick, 1986; Schuman & Presser, 1980). And finally, there is the well-documented point that public opinion is sensitive to how questions are posed. One unsettling case is supplied by Mueller's (1994) examination of American public opinion about the Persian Gulf War. Mueller was able to demonstrate that on the eve of hostilities, the American public either supported a policy of military intervention wholeheartedly or opposed it overwhelmingly, depending entirely on the wording of survey questions.

Finally, we should perhaps keep in mind that the absence of abstract ideological concepts is not the same as the absence of competence. Converse emphasized the advantages of ideological reasoning and therefore lamented its absence. From Converse's perspective, an ideological framework provides citizens with a deeper, richer understanding of politics than can be realized through other means. But as a mode of thinking, ideology also has its disadvantages (Lane, 1973). Citizens who followed Converse's recommendations could be described not only as informed and intelligent, but as single-minded and doctrinaire.

Miracles of Aggregation

If citizens are, on average, ignorant, intolerant, and unsophisticated, can the public as a whole be informed, tolerant, and sophisticated? Is it possible, as Aristotle (1962) wrote in *The Politics,* "that the many, no one of whom taken singly is a good man, may yet taken all together be better than the few, not individually but collectively, in the same way that a feast to which all contribute is better than one given at one man's expense" (p. 123)?

Aristotle's (1962) answer was yes—that "where there are many people, each has some share of goodness and intelligence, and when these are brought together, they become as it were one multiple man with many pairs of feet and hands and many minds" (p. 123). But things need not work out this way. In *The Phantom Public,* Lippmann (1925) expressed exasperation with those who placed their faith in the "unattainable ideal" of democracy: "there is not the least reason for thinking, as mystical democrats have thought, that the compounding of individual ignorance in masses of people can produce a continuous directing force in public affairs" (p. 39).

Recent analysis of aggregate public opinion—of public opinion writ large—suggests that the inadequacies of individual citizens, when combined, are more likely to cancel than to multiply. In this section of the chapter, I will work through a handful of empirical demonstrations confirming Aristotle's conclusion, suggest how the disjuncture between studies of individual citizens and collective publics can be reconciled, and last, before settling in too comfortably, raise a few questions for the rational public.

Rational Public Opinion A good case in point for the rational public comes from research devoted to explaining fluctuations in support for the president. This is an important topic, not least because popular support is a vital political resource, perhaps the president's single most important base of power (Neustadt, 1960; Ostrom & Simon, 1985; Rivers & Rose, 1985). It is also heavily researched, in part because Gallup and other polling organizations have been faithfully asking samples of Americans for their assessment of the president's performance for the greater part of five decades. From Truman to Clinton, these performance ratings have moved up and down, sometimes dramatically. Such twists and turns may seem mysterious, but they are not; they are, in fact, quite predictable. Unemployment, inflation, economic growth, flagrant violations of public trust, the human toll of war, international crises, dramatic displays of presidential authority: all these systematically affect the president's standing in the public at large (Brody, 1991; Hibbs, 1987; Hibbs, Rivers, & Vasilatos, 1982; Ker-

nell, 1978; MacKuen, 1983; Mueller, 1971, 1973; Ostrom & Simon, 1985; Ostrom & Smith, 1992). Looking over this evidence, one could say that assessments of presidential performance appear to reflect a collective judgment that is both reasonable and well informed.

What about ideological sophistication, where as we have seen, the evidence on the average citizen's innocence is overwhelming? Another miracle: while the typical voter appears bewildered by ideology, the typical *electorate* seems ideologically sophisticated. Feld and Grofman (1988) have demonstrated, for example, that the American electorate can express preferences among candidates exactly congruent with an ideological ordering, even though most voters express preferences that are ideologically incoherent. Converse and Pierce (1986) supply a similar example from their analysis of political representation in France. The French are, on average, nearly as ignorant and confused about ideology as are their American counterparts, but like the American public as a whole, the French public can array its political parties from left to right with deadly accuracy.

Recent research on aggregate party identification, or what MacKuen, Erikson, and Stimson (1989) call "macropartisanship," provides another case. Analyzing the Gallup poll series from the end of World War II to the present, MacKuen and his associates find that movement in macropartisanship is systematic, driven by changes in economic performance and by dramatic political events. They conclude, poetically, that "partisanship's twisting course has been shaped by the winds of political and economic fortune" (p. 1139; see also Abramson & Ostrom, 1991, 1992, 1994; Bishop, Tuchfarber, & Smith, 1994; Haynes & Jacobs, 1994; MacKuen, Erikson, & Stimson, 1992; for a strong view to the contrary, see Green, Palmquist, & Schlicker, 1996).

The argument for a rational public is made most explicitly by Page and Shapiro (1992). They begin by conceding that citizens typically know little about politics, and that individuals' views on policy are often shallow and unstable. But collective public opinion, what the public as a whole thinks about policy, is not like that at all; it is, in fact, rational. To make their case, Page and Shapiro—and a small army of helpers—ransacked the archives of survey organizations, looking for cases in which the same policy was asked about in the same way on more than one occasion. Their diligent search turned up more than a thousand such cases, covering policy proposals of all varieties, spanning more than half a century, from the Great Depression to the near present. Analyzing these remarkable materials, Page and Shapiro make three points. First, the public as a whole is capable of sensible and sometimes fine-grained distinctions in the policies it recommends. Second, collective public opinion on matters of policy is predominantly stable, making the founders' apprehensions about "violent passions" and "temporary errors and delusions" seem misplaced (Hamilton, Madison, & Jay, 1788/1961, p. 432). Third and most important, when public opinion in the aggregate does change, it changes intelligently: *"The public generally reacts to new situations and new information in sensible, reasonable ways"* (Page & Shapiro, 1992, p. 388, italics in original; *cf.* Fan, 1988). The new situations that Page & Shapiro have in mind are big events—war, urban riots, Chernobyl—and the new information they say moves public opinion is supplied notably by presidents, commentators, and experts. Impressed by the intelligence they see in collective public opinion, Page and Shapiro call for reforms that would make institutions more responsive to the public—for more democracy rather than less.

The logical culmination of Page and Shapiro's interest in public opinion on particular issues is realized in Stimson's (1991) analysis of national mood (see also Converse, 1992; Davis, 1992). By the term "mood," Stimson (1991) means to provide "a scientific alias for what Lippmann called, with some skepticism, the 'spirit of the age.' It connotes shared feelings that move over time and circumstance. Policy mood . . . implies that publics see every public issue through general dispositions" (p. 18). Aggregating both across individuals to the public as a whole and across (domestic) policies to policy mood in general, Stimson finds a regular rhythm to American policy mood, a gradual and continuous and mostly cyclical movement of mood from Eisenhower to Bush. Such movements are driven in part by economic expectations: when the American public is optimistic about future economic conditions, the national mood moves to the left, calling for more government; when the public's economic expectations sour, the national mood grows conservative, calling for cuts in government programs (Durr, 1993). Mood also appears to react against ideological excesses. Thus in response to the Great Society initiatives of Lyndon Johnson, the American public said, "Enough!" and moved to the right; a quarter century later, responding to cuts in government programs set in motion by the Reagan election of 1980, the American public again said, "Enough!" this time moving to the left. To Stimson (1991), national mood appears eminently intelligent; its movements are

> what one would expect of an informed and thoughtful public that knew its collective mind. To produce equilibrium requires a collective public opinion that knows what it wants, that observes what it gets, and that reacts appropriately when it gets more of what it wanted (in either direction) than it asked for. This is not an electorate that looks easy to convince, not one that will follow a pied piper president using symbols for a flute. This looks like a tougher bunch altogether. (p. 125)

All these various results are representative of the empirical returns from a wide range of recent inquiry into the dynamics of public opinion taken as a collectivity: on issues of race and inequality (Schuman, Steeh, & Bobo, 1985; Smith & Sheatsley, 1984); war (Mueller, 1971, 1991, 1994; Zaller, 1991); assessments of national economic conditions (MacKuen, Erikson, & Stimson, 1992; Markus & Kinder, 1988); shifts in national priorities (Hibbs, 1979, 1987; Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; McCombs & Zhu, 1995; Neuman, 1990; Smith, 1980); and more. The same holds for the dynamics of electoral change. Swings in election outcomes from one contest to the next—an obviously aggregate phenomenon of the most significant sort—can be dramatic, yet they display the same kind of coherence and predictability familiar to the specialist in collective public opinion (Gelman & King, 1993; Kramer, 1971; Markus, 1988; Rosenstone, 1983). Across these diverse investigations, public opinion in the aggregate emerges time and again as responsive to social, economic, and political change—often exquisitely so. Viewed from this vantage point, collective public opinion looks sensible, well informed, perhaps even, as Page and Shapiro (1992) would have it, rational.

Reconciling Rational Publics with Irrational Citizens If the public is "that miscellaneous collection of a few wise and many foolish individuals," as John Stuart Mill once maintained, how can the public as a whole choose wisely? One powerful answer comes from the sheer mechanical process of statistical aggregation, the law of large numbers applied to public opinion. In aggregating from individuals to the public as a whole, random error cancels out. Given sufficient cases, even faint signals can emerge from a "sea of noise" (Converse, 1990, p. 382; see also Stimson, 1991, p. 125).

A second explanation appeals to Condorcet's (1785/1972) jury theorem: that under certain circumstances, juries as collective bodies are more likely to arrive at correct verdicts than are single jurors deciding alone. Applied to mass publics, the implication is that collective public opinion will be wiser—closer to the position that the public would take under conditions of full information—than are the average opinions that it comprises (Miller, 1986).

Third and last, public opinion may be wise also as a consequence of what Page and Shapiro (1992) call *collective deliberation,* a process whereby information and analysis are generated and then disseminated through a complex social system:

> Experts and researchers and government officials learn new things about the political world. They make new discoveries and analyze and interpret new events. These analysts pass along their ideas and interpretations to commentators and other opinion leaders, who in turn communicate with the general public directly through newspapers, magazines, and television and indirectly through social networks of families, friends, and coworkers. Members of the public think and talk among themselves and often talk back to elites, questioning, criticizing, and selecting ideas that are useful. Most citizens never acquire much detailed information about politics, but they do pay attention to and think about media reports or friends' accounts of what commentators, officials, and trusted experts are saying the government should do. And they tend to form and change their policy preferences accordingly.
>
> As a result, new information and ideas can affect collective public opinion even when most members of the public have no detailed knowledge of them. Even when most individuals are ill informed, collective public opinion can react fully and sensibly to events, ideas, or discoveries. (Page & Shapiro, 1993, p. 42)

Collective deliberation produces something akin to what Dewey (1927) yearned for: real opinion emanating from an "organized, articulate Public."

Questions for the Rational Public The turn in recent scholarship to public opinion in the aggregate is an entirely welcome development, not least for the leverage it provides on enduring questions of democratic responsiveness and representation. For it is public opinion in the aggregate that plays a role in what MacKuen, Erikson, and Stimson call "the larger story of politics—the interaction of citizens and governing apparatus." It is collective public opinion that "builds or undermines electoral coalitions and . . . alters election outcomes" (1989, p. 1129; see also Stimson, MacKuen, & Erikson, 1995).

But there is a price to be paid for analysis carried on at such a high level of aggregation. In the study of macropartisanship, for example, MacKuen, Erikson, and Stimson (1989) are preoccupied entirely with describing and explaining net swings in the national balance of party loyalty. This is a valuable perspective, but it ignores other kinds of change that are clearly visible at just slightly lower levels of aggregation. As things stand, the account that MacKuen and his colleagues present has nothing to say about the realignment in party loyalties in the American South, organized by race, and precipitated by the polarizing presidential campaign of 1964. Black Americans moved into the Democratic party, while southern whites moved out (Black & Black, 1992; Carmines & Stimson, 1989; Kinder & Sanders, 1996). This shift amounted to a political change of historic proportions, a fundamental transformation in the landscape of southern politics, but from the perspective of national macropartisanship, these largely offsetting trends were undetectable. The point here is not that any one level of aggregation is best; it is rather to emphasize that a particular level of aggregation equips us both to see some

things clearly and to see others badly or not at all. If we wish to understand public opinion, we need to understand it in the large and in the small.

What we make of the rational public turns sharply on how we understand rationality to come about. Page and Shapiro offer an inspiring story about the circulation of ideas and the division of political labor—but so far, it is only a story. At the same time, serious obstacles appear to be blocking the application of Condorcet's jury theorem to the general public. The theorem indicates an aggregation gain when (1) all jurors (voters) have at least a reasonable and equal chance of being correct (voting for the alternative that would be preferred under conditions of complete information) and (2) jurors (voters) decide independently. If on average, voters are wandering around in the dark, then aggregation actually makes things worse; and if, as seems certain, voters do not decide independently, then the gains of aggregation diminish and may even collapse altogether (Bartels, 1996).

This leaves us with the statistical account: that publics are more rational than citizens, on average, because the errors and confusions of individuals cancel out in the calculation of the public's opinion. "Aggregation drives out noise, and noise is what most vividly roars to attention with the total disaggregation of the sample survey. The quickest 'fix' for a poor signal-to-noise ratio is to aggregate your data" (Converse, 1990, p. 378). This interpretation of the transformation of uninformed and disinterested citizens into an informed and sensible public has one compelling advantage: it is utterly reliable. The miracle of aggregation does not require special institutional design or particular cultural values; it can always be counted on (Converse, 1990). Rational publics, one could say, are inevitable.

But under this scheme, the error and confusion of ordinary citizens may be thought of as systematic rather than random, structured by deliberate programs of misinformation, cynical television advertisements, appeals to racism, and the like. There's no a priori reason to expect that these various forces will nearly cancel themselves out. Indeed, Page and Shapiro (1992) provide several compelling cases—the fabricated missile gap that helped carry Kennedy into the White House for one—in which the public went off in the wrong direction. Important in this respect is Bartel's (1996) demonstration that poorly informed voters would have chosen differently in recent American presidential contests had they been well informed, and that such differences would *not* have neatly canceled out in the aggregate.

The statistical account for aggregate rationality is also troubling from the perspective of democratic aspirations. For the signal that emerges from the miracle of aggregation may be determined disproportionately by a tiny handful of citizens who are paying close attention. Thus Stimson (1991) suggests that alterations in the American mood are "driven largely by the leadership elements in the public. Where the inattentive and un-informed behave unpredictably, and therefore cancel out one another, the systematic behavior arises from those responding to the events of the real world" (p. 125). Converse (1990) makes the same point, writing that "it is quite possible, thanks to the hidden power of aggregation, to arrive at a highly rational system performance on the backs of voters most of whom are remarkably ill-informed much of the time" (p. 382). It *is* possible, and if it turned out to be true, then it would not be *the public* that deserves the bouquet of rationality.

III. PRIMARY INGREDIENTS

The great debate over ideology, the consuming preoccupation of public opinion studies for more than a generation, has taught us more about how Americans do not think about politics than about how they do. The purpose of this section is to introduce a positive framework for understanding public opinion. It takes for granted that ideological abstractions lie beyond what most Americans can or care to manage. It presumes, instead, that public opinion reflects (1) the material interests that citizens see at stake, (2) the sympathies and resentments that citizens feel toward social groupings, and (3) commitment to the political principles that become entangled in public issues. Interests, group sentiments, and principles are the primary ingredients of public opinion.

The Pursuit of Private Interests

Perhaps citizens are first and foremost single-minded seekers of self-interest. That is, in forming opinions on political matters, citizens fix their attention on what's in it for them. They support parties and policies that seem likely to advance their own material interests, just as they stand against parties and policies that seem to threaten their interests.

This simple claim has a long and distinguished history, extending back at least to Thomas Hobbes and *Leviathan* (1651/1968). But self-interested citizens thrive in contemporary theories of politics as well. This fact is apparent in pluralist accounts of the American system, in which citizens are imagined to organize around their common interests and then to press their claims upon government effectively (e.g., Dahl, 1961; Truman, 1951), and even more conspicuous in the explosion of work that advances the economic approach, in which citizens are portrayed as rational investors, prudently supporting the party they believe will deliver greater benefits (e.g., Downs, 1957). The assumption of self-interest has also occupied a privileged place in empirical analysis. In *The American Voter,* for example, Campbell et al. (1960) concluded that the underpinnings of public support for government policy are to be found in what they called "primitive self-interest." This is self-interest unencumbered by any ideological pretensions, self-interest "simple and naked" (p. 205). Working-class citizens support social welfare policies because the benefits of such policies fall to them, while members of the middle class line up in opposition because they must shoulder the costs.

In short, self-interest has figured heavily—and until quite recently, rather uncritically—in the interpretation of public opinion (Mansbridge, 1990). But to what extent is this justified? Is public opinion reducible to what David Hume (1741/1898) once called the "universal passion" for personal advantage? No, it is not. But before we get to that, we need to understand how self-interest has been defined and measured.

A Minor Role for Self-Interest A useful and influential starting point is provided by Barry's (1965/1990) assertion that "an action or policy is in a man's interests if it increases his opportunities to get what he wants" (p. 183). Such opportunities are best defined in terms of wealth and power, assets that are potential means to any end. Self-interested citizens, moreover, pursue their *own* wealth and power in political life (or their family's wealth and power), and no one else's. Self-interested citizens are indifferent to others; to them, the interests of their community or group or nation are irrelevant. Finally, the literature assumes that citizens motivated by self-interest have mostly the immediate future in mind: self-interest in the short-run. For the self-interested citizen, then, the question is always and relentlessly, What's in it for me and my family—what's in it for me and mine now?

Defined in this way, self-interest is surprisingly unimportant when it comes to predicting American public opinion. We know this thanks in large measure to Sears's pioneering research (Sears, Hensler, & Speer, 1979; Sears et al., 1980), which transformed self-interest from a comfortable assumption into an empirical proposition. Scores of studies followed, generally revealing self-interest to have trifling effects on public opinion. Consider these examples. When faced with affirmative action, white and black Americans come to their views without calculating personal harms or benefits (Kinder & Sanders, 1996; Kluegel & Smith, 1986). The unemployed do not line up behind policies designed to alleviate economic distress (Schlozman & Verba, 1979). The medically indigent are no more likely to favor government health insurance than are the fully insured (Sears et al., 1980). Parents of children enrolled in public schools are generally no more supportive of government aid to education than are other citizens (Jennings, 1979). Americans who are subject to the draft are not especially opposed to military intervention or to the escalation of conflicts already under way (Lau, Brown, & Sears, 1978; Mueller, 1973, 1994). Women employed outside the home do not differ from homemakers in their support for policies intended to benefit women at work (Sears & Huddy, 1990). On such diverse matters as racial busing for the purpose of school desegregation, antidrinking ordinances, mandatory college examinations, housing policy, bilingual education, compliance with laws, satisfaction with the resolution of legal disputes, gun control, and more, self-interest turns out to be quite unimportant (for excellent surveys of the empirical literature, see Citrin & Green, 1990; Sears & Funk, 1991; Tyler, 1990). As a general matter, willingness to pay is much more responsive to variations in price for private goods than it is for public goods (Green, 1992).

Laid end to end, these various and diverse studies have done much to undermine the faith once invested in self-interest. Having reviewed the literature, Citrin and Green (1990) conclude, as I do, that the evidence is "devastating for the claim that self-interest, defined narrowly as the pursuit of immediate material benefits, is the central motive underlying American public opinion" (p. 16).

The Mystery of Small Effects Why the links between self-interest and public opinion are typically so tenuous is unclear: the literature is more persuasive on the empirical demonstration that self-interest matters little than it is in testing among various arguments as to why that might be so. The unexpectedly low profile of self-interest in public opinion has become a playground for (interesting) speculations.

For instance, the disjuncture between interests and opinions might reflect a deeper truth that people don't know what their interests really are. And even if citizens know what they want, they may not see a way to get it: they may lack the information and intellectual skills required for instrumental behavior, perhaps especially in the realm of politics. Or perhaps the limited role of self-interest in public opinion is a reflection of a distinctive culture of politics, which socializes citizens "to behave in the general interest and to justify their choice in ethical terms" (Citrin & Green, 1990, p. 20; see also Banfield & Wilson, 1964, on "public-regardingness" in political life, and Batson, 1998, in this *Handbook,* on the possibility of altruism). Or perhaps interests are disengaged because the political realm is utterly unimportant: citizens believe whatever they want because no discernible consequences follow (Schumpeter, 1942). Or perhaps interests are overwhelmed by emotionally powerful predispositions acquired early in life that are triggered by contemporary conflicts (Sears, 1988). Or, finally, perhaps the faint impression left by self-interest on public opinion is a reflection of the incompatibility between symbol-laden communication from journalists and politicians on the one hand, and the messy, morselized, fragmented world of private experience on the other (Brody & Sniderman, 1977; Kinder & Mebane, 1983).

When Does Self-interest Matter? Self-interest does sometimes make a difference for public opinion. Self-interest matters, or seems to, when the material benefits or harms of a proposed policy are substantial, imminent, and well publicized. All three of these conditions were fulfilled during the battle over Proposition 13 in California in 1978. Thanks to massive publicity, Californians came to understand that if the proposition passed, home owners would receive very substantial reductions in their property tax bills, while an assortment of public services—schools, libraries, police and fire departments—would be drastically cut. In this particular and special case, then, the benefits and harms at stake were unusually large, well advertised, and because they were written into the referendum, almost certain to take effect. Under these conditions, self-interest emerged as a powerful force in public opinion: support for Proposition 13 was disproportionate among home owners, the more so as their anticipated savings grew and as their feeling of tax burden increased; meanwhile, opposition was strongest among public employees, those whose very livelihoods appeared to be on the line (Sears & Citrin, 1982).

More generally, while studies of public opinion set in the context of real campaigns for tax relief—contentious and expensive campaigns like that of Proposition 13 in California in 1978—show sizable effects of self-interest (e.g., Courant, Gramlich, & Rubinfield, 1980; Hawthorne & Jackson, 1987), otherwise comparable studies that inquire about taxes in the abstract or about hypothetical changes in the tax code do not (Lowrey & Sigelman, 1981). This result, along with various experimental findings (e.g., Kinder & Sanders, 1990; Sears & Lau, 1983; Young et al., 1991), points to campaigns and the frames they provide as necessary conditions for self-interest effects. Unless campaigns do for citizens what they seem disinclined to do for themselves—that is, first ascertain and then keep prominently in mind the personal price tags of proposed policies—self-interest may remain politically inert.

Inert, that is, when it comes to the views that Americans express on government policy. But as I argued in the beginning of the chapter, citizens do more than evaluate the proposals put before them. Among other things, they decide what is important and what is not—what is worth the government's attention and what can be safely put aside. And here, on questions of priority, self-interest appears to make a more substantial contribution. During the war in Vietnam, for example, Americans with friends or relatives in active service there paid more attention to news coverage of the conflict (Lau, Brown, & Sears, 1978). During the campaign for tax relief in California that culminated in the passage of Proposition 13, those most affected by the pending proposition were more likely to attach high priority to taxes as a problem and were more likely to take positions on tax-related matters of public policy (Sears & Citrin, 1982). Blacks attach more importance to civil rights than whites do; the unemployed regard unemployment as a more serious problem than do the employed; the elderly see the pending collapse of the Social Security system as looming more dangerously over national life than do the young (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987). In short, the importance people attach to social and political problems is predicted consistently and sometimes quite powerfully by self-interest (Boninger et al., 1995; Thomsen, Borgida, & Lavine, 1995).[7]

Summary and Implications When it comes to public opinion, the assumption of self-interest does not carry us very far. Granted, self-interest can matter: under special circumstances, and for assessments of priority if not for evaluations of policies and authorities. But the main point here must be the general failure of self-interest to motivate public opinion.

The apparent unimportance of self-interest makes trouble for studies of public opinion and elections that emphasize the primacy of social class in organizing political conflict. Lipset (1959/1988) regards competitive elections and public opinion as the political "expression of the democratic class struggle" (p. 230). According to Lipset,

> More than anything else the party struggle is a conflict among classes, and the most impressive single fact about political party support is that in virtually every economically developed country the lower-income groups vote mainly for parties of the left, while the higher-income groups vote mainly for the parties of the right. (p. 234)

And they do so, of course, out of "simple economic self-interest" (p. 239).

But just as we would expect, given the empirical results on self-interest reviewed here, "class struggle" is far too strong a phrase to place on the anemic correlations typically reported between Americans' class position and their views on politics. American society is marked by huge differences in income, education, and wealth (Danziger & Gottschalk, 1995), but such differences generally do not give rise to corresponding differences in opinion. Indeed, among postindustrial societies, the United States tends to finish near the bottom on political measures of class polarization (Alford, 1963, 1967). Moreover, associations between class and opinion are in decline, and not only in the United States (Clark, Lipset, & Rempel, 1993; Lipset, 1959/1988; but see Hout, Brooks, & Manza, 1995, for arguments and evidence to the contrary). Not class, but religion, ethnicity, race, and region provide the dominant lines of political cleavage in postindustrial democratic society (Horowitz, 1985; Huckfeldt & Kohfeld, 1989; Kinder & Sanders, 1996; Lijphart, 1979; Lipset and Rokkan, 1967).

The fact that self-interest matters so little for public opinion, finally, is not necessarily cause for celebration. For one thing, the disconnection between self-interest and opinion expands the opportunity for manipulation, since individual citizens no longer are special authorities on the foundations of their views. Democracy assumes that citizens are qualified to govern themselves, that they know best where their interests lie. But if self-interest matters little, and political views are really the province of group attachments and political principles, then citizens may be more susceptible to the alternative framings and rhetorical flourishes manufactured and disseminated by elites. When the anchor of private experience and personal interest is lost, power passes from citizens to leaders. And for another thing, alternatives to self-interest are not always uplifting or inspiring or noble, nor do they necessarily produce a more just society. Better calculations of interest than, say, ethnic cleansing. Citizens may sink below self-interest as often as they rise above it (Holmes, 1990).

Group-Centrism

In any case, citizens propelled entirely by calculations of self-interest would be, as Sen (1977) once put it, "social morons" (p. 37). This section presumes, to the contrary, that citizens are social creatures through and through; that political opinions are "badges of social membership," declarations, to others and to ourselves, of social identity (Smith, Bruner, & White, 1956, p. 270).

This claim would have baffled John Jay, a prominent participant in the historic debate over ratification of the U.S. Constitution. In *The Federalist Papers,* Jay argued that Americans were a "united people," in all important respects essentially (and thankfully) the same (Hamilton, Madison, & Jay, 1788/1961):

> Providence has been pleased to give this one connected country to one united people—a people descended from the same ancestors, speaking the same language, professing the same religion, attached to the same principles of government, very similar in their manners and customs. (No. 2, p. 1)

If this were ever true—and Jay conveniently overlooked both Native Americans and African-American slaves—it is certainly true no longer. Today, American society is remarkably diverse and increasingly multicultural. Our differences are marked by race and ethnicity; by religion and language; by class, gender, region, and generation; and even by "manners and customs." Furthermore, these differences provide a shorthand and powerful vocabulary for inequality; wealth, power, and status are distributed very unevenly across these social boundaries. The question here is whether (and how) such social differences become political ones.

That they do routinely is suggested by the major positive finding to emerge from the otherwise futile quest for the ideological foundations of American public opinion. The positive finding is this: when Americans are asked to evaluate political parties and presidential candidates, most of all they refer to social groups. Converse (1964) found that 42 percent did so, typically by naming benefits and deprivations that parties and candidates had visited upon social groups in the past or might deliver in the future. Although much has changed in American politics in the past forty years, references to broad social groupings continue to occupy a central place in the citizens' assessments of candidates and parties—in Europe as in the United States (e.g., Klingemann, 1979; Rhodebeck, 1986). In this way, public opinion could be said to be "group-centric."

In my review of the relevant evidence, I presume the "group" in group-centrism to be a social psychological concept (Campbell, 1958; Levine & Moreland, 1998, in this *Handbook*): a group is, as *The Authoritarian Personality* (Adorno et al., 1950) put it, "any set of people who constitute a psychological entity for any individual" (p. 146). Under this definition, Israel might be a group, so might Japanese-Americans, and so might the neighborhood bridge club. Groups do not require institutional affiliations or formal membership or interpersonal contact among members (though they can have all three). Criminals, intellectuals, eccentrics: all "are groups in so far as they are social categories or regions in an individual's social outlook—objects of opinions, attitudes, affect, and striving" (Adorno et al., 1950, p. 146). But since my topic is public opinion, I will restrict my attention for the most part to broad social groupings, to Japanese-Americans rather than bridge clubs.

Because people belong to many social categories, they have available, in principle, a rich and varied repertoire of potential ingroups and outgroups out of which to fashion a social identity. Such richness and variety give to identity a certain flexibility and to politics a certain power. Which aspect of identity predominates depends, in part, on political circumstances. In foreign affairs, the boundary line demarcating ingroup from outgroup may be drawn around the nation; on issues of immigration, between "authentic" Americans and those who fall short; on policies of affirmative action, drawn again, this time splitting by race and gender. Identity is fluid: defined by situation and reactive to politics (Barth, 1969; Brewer & Campbell, 1976; Hannan, 1979; Nagel, 1986; for more extensive coverage of this topic than I can afford here, see Brewer & Brown, 1998, and Fiske, 1998, both in this *Handbook*).

In *Folkways,* which introduced the idea of ethnocentrism, William Graham Sumner (1906) saw little difficulty in distinguishing between ingroups, drawn together for reasons of kin or commerce or neighborhood, and outgroups, composed of everyone else. Sumner thereby passed over a fair amount of what is interesting and stub-

bornly mysterious in group relations. Conceding that it is certainly artificial and perhaps misleading, I will nevertheless follow Sumner's lead here. My review distinguishes, perhaps too neatly, between ingroups and outgroups, taking up each in turn.

Ingroups: Membership, Identification, Consciousness

The analysis of ingroups and public opinion begins with membership, with place or position in society. Is membership in a particular social grouping associated with a particular view on politics (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967)? We now know quite a bit about political difference organized in this way, including, for example, the emergence and meaning of a "gender gap" in public opinion (Conover, 1988b; Cook & Wilcox, 1991); the occasionally sharp political differences associated with religious affiliation (Leege & Kellstedt, 1993) and ethnicity (Cain, Kiewiet, & Uhlaner, 1991; de la Garza et al., 1992; Uhlaner, Cain, & Kiewiet, 1989); fluctuations in the political impact of social class (Alford, 1967; Clark, Lipset, & Rempel, 1993; Hout, Brooks, & Manza, 1995); the idiosyncrasies that have marked southern politics and opinion (Black & Black, 1987, 1992; Key, 1949); and the evolution of the social group foundations of the American party system (Ladd, 1978; Petrocik, 1981; Stanley, Bianco, & Niemi, 1986). To illustrate this line of work in slightly more detail, I'll concentrate on two cases in particular: *generation* and *race*.

For Mannheim (1928/1952), generations are created out of the conjunction of individual development and political history. The formation of a distinctive generational perspective comes in part out of the openness of late adolescence and early adulthood: "It is only then," Mannheim (1928/1952) wrote, "that life's problems begin to be located in a 'present' and are experienced as such. . . . The 'up-to-dateness' of youth therefore consists in their being closer to the 'present' problems . . . the older generation cling to the re-orientation that had been the drama of *their* youth" (pp. 300–301). Generations also require drama: huge events and dramatic social change taking place as individuals come of age. Under these circumstances, a generation will enter politics with a long-lasting commitment to a particular point of view, in possession of its own "historical-social" consciousness.

As an empirical matter, Mannheim's particular points of view are not that easy to find. There are some confirmations, to be sure: for example, those active in the protest politics of the 1960s were indelibly altered by their experiences (Jennings, 1987; Marwell, Aiken, & Demerath, 1987); women who came of age during or just after passage of the Nineteenth Amendment continued to vote less religiously than comparably aged men (Firebaugh & Chen, 1995); or the finding that Americans know best those events that took place when they were just entering political life (Jennings, 1995; Schuman, Belli, & Bischoping, 1995; Schuman & Rieger, 1992; Schuman & Scott, 1989). Such effects are often quite subtle, however, and in other cases they turn out to be temporary (Campbell et al., 1960, on the "Depression generation"; Weil, 1987), or absent altogether (Barnes, 1972; Holsti & Rosenau, 1980). A generationally distinctive "historical-social consciousness" doesn't come along often—perhaps we shouldn't be surprised.

There is by comparison nothing subtle about differences in American public opinion associated with race. During the past four decades, whenever surveys have been taken, black and white Americans have differed systematically and often enormously. On matters such as the obligation of government to ensure equal opportunity or on affirmative action in employment, differences of forty and fifty percentage points are not unusual. Blacks and whites also disagree sharply over how generous the American welfare state should be and over the integrity of American political institutions. They differ enormously in their partisan loyalties: blacks came late to the Democratic party, but they are now the most loyal members of what remains of the New Deal coalition. And they differ fundamentally in their views on race and American society. Whites tend to think that racial discrimination is no longer a problem; that prejudice is withering away; that the real worry these days is reverse discrimination, penalizing innocent whites for the sins of the distant past. Meanwhile, blacks see racial discrimination as ubiquitous; they think of prejudice as a plague; they say that racial discrimination, not affirmative action, is still the rule in American society (Feagin & Sikes, 1994; Kinder & Sanders, 1996; Kluegel & Smith, 1986; Knoke, 1979; Sigelman & Welch, 1991).

Divisions by race are nothing new to American politics, but if anything, they are more prominent now than they were a generation ago (Kinder & Sanders, 1996). Thus, the racial divide constitutes an unhappy surprise for pluralist conceptions of American society. Under the pluralist view, citizens are pushed and pulled by many social forces all at once, such that no single division has any special or lasting claim (Dahl, 1956, 1961; Polsby, 1980). Blacks and whites are socially diverse; they are subject to various crosscutting pressures—but this is not enough, evidently, to prevent race from emerging as a single and profound line of cleavage in contemporary American society.

Whereas the case of race makes the point that substantial differences in political outlook *can* be associated with mere membership in social groupings, the analysis of ingroups and politics typically goes further. If "objective" membership, by itself, is sometimes sufficient to account for differences in opinion, the political consequences of group membership are typically accentuated among those who belong to the group psychologically, who *identify* with their group for reasons of shared interests or common values (Conover, 1988a; Dawson, 1994; Price, 1989; Tajfel, 1982). Thus although the effects of class on opinion are typically modest, they increase for Americans who think of themselves as middle- or working-class (Campbell et al., 1960; Jackman & Jackman, 1983). Thus racially identified black Americans are more likely to favor government policies designed to encourage integration and narrow racial inequalities than are black Americans who fail to identify with their racial group (Rhodebeck, 1986; Tate, 1993).

Identification is important, but it is but a pale shadow of group consciousness. Karl Marx argued that class struggle requires not just the existence of objective classes in society—in the England of Marx's time, wage laborers, landlords, and capitalists—but the development of consciousness. Marx put this point in epigrammatic and famous form as a distinction between a class "in itself" and a class "for itself." In contemporary analysis, group consciousness requires membership, attachment (or identification), and, with some variation: discontent with the group's current wealth, power, or status; blame for the group's difficulties placed outside the group itself, in patterns of social discrimination or institutional bias, so that inequalities are seen as unjust; and, consistent with Marx's idea that a class in possession of group consciousness is a group in action, commitment to collective political strategies (e.g., Gurin, Miller, & Gurin, 1980; Jackman, 1994; Tyler & Smith, 1998, in this *Handbook*).

Defined in this way, it would be amazing if people in possession of group consciousness did not express distinctive views on politics—and they do, to a degree (Conover & Sapiro, 1993; Gurin, Hatchett, & Jackson, 1989). But more interesting and a good bit more mysterious than the effects of group consciousness are its causes. The obstacles to group consciousness are impressive. Why do "people so often put up with being the victims of their societies?" (Moore, 1978, p. xiii).

OutGroups: Sympathy, Resentment, Ethnocentrism

Membership groups are important, but as reference group theory reminds us, people "frequently orient themselves to groups *other than their own*" (Merton & Rossi, 1968, p. 35), and this may be especially true in politics. Citizens organize their political thinking around visible social groupings, simplifying complex and increasingly technical questions of policy by turning them into judgments on the moral qualifications of the groups involved. Public opinion would then be shaped in powerful ways by the feelings that citizens harbor toward the social groups they see as the principal beneficiaries—or victims—of the policy (Conover, 1988a; Converse, 1964; Kinder, 1983; Nelson & Kinder, 1996; Sniderman, Brody, & Tetlock, 1991).

At a general level, this basic contention is amply supported. Support among whites for affirmative action or school desegregation reflects sympathy for the plight of blacks (Bobo & Kluegel, 1993; Kinder & Sanders, 1996; Kluegel & Smith, 1986; Sears, Hensler, & Speer, 1979). Opposition to social welfare programs derives from hostility toward the poor (Feldman, 1983; Feldman & Zaller, 1992; Gilens, 1995, 1996). Support for a tough-minded foreign policy reflects fear of communists (Hurwitz & Peffley, 1987a; Mueller, 1973). Opposition to government action against AIDS turns on contempt for homosexuals (Price & Hsu, 1992; Sniderman et al., 1991). Acquiescence in political repression hinges on whose phones are to be tapped (Bobo & Licari, 1989; Kuklinski et al., 1991; Sullivan, Piereson, & Marcus, 1982). Opposition to benefits for recent immigrants reflects suspicions that they are lazy or dangerous or somehow un-American (Citrin, Reingold, & Green, 1990; Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995). Group sentiment is not the only thing going on in these various policy disputes, but it is always present, and of all the ingredients that go into opinion, it is often the most powerful.

If the basic contention of group-centrism is well supported in general, it tends to be controversial in the details. The exemplary case is prejudice, where controversy abounds. In light of the sweeping changes that have come over American society since the middle of the twentieth century, does race prejudice still exist (Dovidio & Gaertner, 1986; Kinder & Mendelberg, 1997; Schuman, Steeh, & Bobo, 1985; Sniderman & Piazza, 1993)? Perhaps white opposition to policies that are designed to narrow racial inequalities is really a matter of principled conservatism or economic individualism (Carmines & Stimson, 1989; Sniderman, 1985)? If racism has not disappeared but has mutated to a new form, then how should it be defined and measured (Bobo, 1983, 1988; Devine, 1989; Dovidio & Fazio, 1992; Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986a; Jackman, 1994; Kinder, 1986; Kinder & Sanders, 1996; Kinder & Sears, 1981; McConahay, 1986; Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995; Pratto et al., 1994; Sears, 1988; Sears & Kinder, 1985; Sidanius, 1993; Smith, 1993; Sniderman & Tetlock, 1986a, 1986b; Stephan & Stephan 1993)?

These various debates over the meaning and consequence of race prejudice raise the more general question of how hostility toward outgroups should be explained. One general and powerful answer is supplied by realistic group conflict theory, introduced in rudimentary form at the turn of the twentieth century by William Graham Sumner in *Folkways* (1906) and developed subsequently by Coser (1956), Blumer (1958), Blalock (1967), Bobo (1988), and Olzak (1992), among others. The theory begins with the assertion that antagonism between groups is rooted in actual conflict: groups have incompatible goals, and they compete for scarce resources. In this analysis, groups are neither vestiges of premodern society nor convenient outlets for psychological distress but rather, as Giles and Evans (1986) put it, "vehicles for the pursuit of interest in modern pluralist societies," "participants in ongoing competition for control of economic, political, and social structures" (pp. 470, 471). Conflicts of interest cause intergroup

conflict, and conflict between groups is most intense where the real conflicts of interest are greatest, where the groups have the most at stake.

The relevance of realistic group conflict theory to outgroup hostility is supported by a line of empirical work that extends back to V. O. Key (1949), who demonstrated that politics in the American South through the middle of the twentieth century was most reactionary in the so-called black belt, where the plantation system and slavery had flourished, and where whites possessed "the deepest and most immediate concern with the maintenance of the white supremacy" (p. 5). Inside the black belt, the threat was real and serious; outside it, "Blacks were neither so central to the local economy nor so sizable a bloc of prospective voters in local elections" (p. 10). Accordingly, within the black belt is where support for secession and war was most adamant, where the subsequent drive for black disfranchisement came with greatest force, where the Populist revolt was crushed, and where, in the 1950s and 1960s, defense of segregation was most ferocious (Black & Black, 1987; Kousser, 1974). Key's finding continues to have high relevance today, as blacks in great numbers have migrated out of the rural South into the cities, south and north, creating miniature black belts in every part of the country (Giles & Evans, 1986; Giles & Hertz, 1994; Glaser, 1994; Kinder & Mendelberg, 1995).

This evidence is certainly consistent with realistic group conflict theory, but neither Key nor those following directly in his footsteps attempted to measure the perception of threat, the theory's pivotal concept. This defect has been repaired in a flurry of recent research, which not only measures the perception of threat in a straightforward way, but also extends realistic group conflict theory to a variety of new settings. These applications, which include Europeans' response to immigration (Quillian, 1995), the collective benefits that blacks see in affirmative action programs (Kinder & Sanders, 1996), and the role played by group interest in cementing black Americans to the Democratic party (Dawson, 1994), generally support the group conflict prediction. Taken all around, then, realistic group conflict theory has a strong empirical foundation—with three qualifications.

First, contrary to the main line of theorizing, it is a mistake to presume that group competition is confined to struggles over economic resources. Sumner's original formulation emphasized struggles over land, and contemporary renditions of realistic group conflict theory often stress the primacy of wealth or power (e.g., Blalock, 1967; Olzak, 1992). Better to assume, following Coser (1956), that the stakes are diverse; that they include "status, power, wealth, or allegiance to competing systems of values" (p. 58). This point is suggested by Tajfel's famous—and frequently replicated—minimal group result, where at least a mild version of outgroup hostility emerges in the absence of anything even resembling actual conflict (Tajfel et al., 1971). And it is established by close examination of actual cases, as in Horowitz's (1985) encyclopedic analysis of ethnic group conflict, or in Kagan's (1995) recent assessment of the origins of war in human history. Groups compete over all sorts of things: money, yes—but also power, language, religious doctrine, moral standards, and more.

Second, according to realistic group conflict theory, threat is seen with a clear eye: it is not invented or amplified; it is real and can be traced in a direct line back to actual conflicts of interest. This can't be right. A common feature of group conflict is *unrealistic* threat: a fear of being overwhelmed or annihilated, a fear that is disproportionate to actual conditions. Unrealistic threat can be detected in the anti-Semite's preoccupation with Jewish world domination (Adorno et al., 1950); in the wild claims that white Americans attributed to the Black Power slogan of the 1960s (Aberbach & Walker, 1973; Rieder, 1985); in the fears and apprehensions that race riots set off among suburban whites (Bobo et al., 1994; Sears & McConahay, 1973); in the current popularity of paranoid fears within black communities (Kinder & Sanders, 1996); and, reaching deeper into the American past, in both the panicky fear of black insurrection that haunted the white southern imagination before emancipation (Fredrickson, 1971; Jordan, 1968; van den Berghe, 1967; Wilson, 1973) and the nativist warnings of mongrelization that greeted immigrants to American shores in the early decades of the twentieth century (Higham, 1988).

Third, group conflict theory runs into trouble trying to explain *generalized* hostility, what Adorno et al. (1950) called "ethnocentrism." In *The Authoritarian Personality,* the famous and monumental study of anti-Semitism carried out in the United States in the 1940s, Adorno's team set out to explain the nature and origins of anti-Semitism and to understand its implications for democratic society. They discovered that anti-Semitism was just one aspect of a person's broader outlook on society and politics. Fear and contempt for Jews, it turned out, was often accompanied by fear and contempt directed at blacks, criminals, Japanese-Americans, conscientious objectors, immigrants—even "foreign ideas."

When *The Authoritarian Personality* was published, it was greeted with widespread acclaim and then, in the space of a few years, buried under an avalanche of criticisms. Especially devastating were the essays assembled by Christie and Jahoda (1954). The critics were right to point out the study's defects, and they were persuasive. But of course they established only that *The Authoritarian Personality* failed to prove its conclusions, not that the conclusions themselves were incorrect.

If it was left to others to make the empirical case for ethnocentrism, they have now made it. With improved measures and for diverse samples, ethnocentrism shows up time and again. Americans who regard the Japanese with contempt tend to think the same about Mexicans; Russians who blame Jews for their nation's troubles also blame capitalists, dissidents, and nonethnic Russians; and on it goes. Much as Adorno et al. (1950) suggested, hostility toward one group appears to be part of "a relatively consistent frame of mind concerning 'aliens' generally" (p. 102; for evidence on ethnocentrism, see Kinder & Sanders, 1996; Prothro, 1950; Selznick & Steinberg, 1969; Sniderman & Piazza, 1993).

Because ethnocentrism entails hostility directed not at a single outgroup, but at many, it poses a problem for group conflict theory. From the theory's perspective, such generalized hostility requires the unlikely co-occurrence of multiple and simultaneous intergroup competitions. Of course, Adorno et al. have an answer to generalized hostility: the authoritarian personality provides the adhesion that binds together views toward diverse social groups. But this turns out to be an unsatisfying answer. After reviewing the vast empirical literature on the authoritarian personality, Altemeyer (1981) pronounced it an "enormous wreckage," which sadly it is.

Altemeyer (1981, 1988) sought to do better. Sharing Adorno's intuition that the roots of social and political beliefs are found in personality, he began by reconsidering authoritarianism itself. In Altemeyer's view, authoritarianism should be thought of as a general outlook composed of three essential predispositions: submission to established authorities, aggression directed at targets sanctioned by established authorities, and adherence to traditional social conventions. In a painstakingly careful series of studies, Altemeyer developed a reliable, coherent, and balanced scale of authoritarianism that supported his conceptualization while sidestepping the troubles that plagued the original F-scale. Finally, Altemeyer demonstrated that authoritarianism, so conceived and measured, is systematically associated with a wide range of social and political beliefs, including prejudice and ethnocentrism.

The approach to outgroup hostility through personality is valuable, but also suffers some obvious shortcomings. Although ethnocentrism may play an important role in personality functioning for some individuals, to insist that it does for all misses the point that, as Allport (1979) once put it, "much prejudice is a matter of blind conformity with prevailing folkways" (p. 12). Second, although the questions developed by Adorno and Altemeyer to measure authoritarianism roam across a large territory, it is not obvious that they actually reach their proper destination: the unconscious drives, wish fulfillments, and emotional impulses that, they would say, constitute personality. Finally, to reduce ethnocentrism to personality overlooks other key parts of the story. It ignores the role played by elites and institutions in the creation and promotion of ethnocentric ideologies. It is oblivious to the economic, social, and political conditions that give rise to ethnocentrism.[8] And it is blind to the part that leaders and parties play in turning ethnocentrism to political purposes.

Contingent Group-Centrism Group-centrism provides a powerful and compelling logic for public opinion, but there is nothing inevitable or universal about it. Group-centrism requires that citizens see for themselves a connection between a political dispute on the one hand, and a visible social grouping on the other. That is, to get group-centrism up and running, citizens must "be endowed with some cognitions of the group as an entity and with some interstitial 'linking' information indicating why a given party or policy is relevant to the group. Neither of these forms of information can be taken for granted" (Converse, 1964, pp. 236–237; Nelson & Kinder, 1996; Sears, Huddy, & Schaeffer, 1986). Group-centrism depends on information; it can be short-circuited by the kinds of gaps in information that public opinion specialists run into routinely.

Sometimes issues enter the national debate packaged in such a way as to encourage group-centrism. For example, in 1988, having written off the votes of black Americans, the Bush campaign attempted to assemble a winning coalition by persuading racially conservative Democrats to vote Republican. The means they used were coded racist appeals: an elaborate, well-orchestrated, and artful activation of racial animosity—and its succeeded handsomely (Jamieson, 1992; Kinder & Sanders, 1996). Other cases include Kennedy's Catholicism (Converse, 1966b); Jesse Jackson's bid for the presidency (Gurin, Hatchett, & Jackson, 1989; Tate, 1991); the AIDS epidemic (Sniderman et al., 1991); and the rise of the civil rights movement (McAdam, 1982; Morris, 1984). The general point here is that group-centrism will be a more or less prominent feature of American public opinion depending on the particular constellation of issues temporarily holding center stage. Furthermore, public issues are multifaceted: they are always "many issues at once" (Verba et al., 1987, p. 94). A proposal for national health care might be understood as help for the working poor, or as an unwelcome intrusion of the federal government, or as a solution to one's own health care needs. Group-centrism is prominent in the first interpretation but invisible in the other two. Thus what may seem to be a natural mode of political thinking in fact is not natural: group-centrism depends on how citizens understand issues, which in turn depends on how issues are framed in elite debate.

Summary and Implications American public opinion turns substantially on the beliefs and feelings that Americans invest in social groups—membership groups they belong to and perhaps identify with, as well as reference

groups that elicit their sympathy or resentment. In reviewing this evidence and establishing these points, I have also recovered a role for interests, so poorly treated in the preceding section. Interests, it is now clear, do have a part to play in public opinions—that is, interests that are collective rather than personal, group-centered rather than self-centered. In matters of public opinion, citizens seem to be asking themselves not "What's in it for me?" but rather "What's in it for my group?" (as well as "What's in it for other groups?").

Because group sentiment is important for public opinion, so too is the source of that sentiment. Some theories locate the origins of group sentiment in realistic group conflict, others in the antidemocratic personality. Both share a preoccupation with the negative side of group-centrism. By this I mean that they are oriented to explaining the origins of racism, say, or anti-Semitism. They thereby overlook sources of tolerance and humanitarianism. Perhaps it would be valuable to pay some attention in the future to the dispositions and circumstances that encourage sympathy and compassion for others (Batson, 1998, in this *Handbook*).

The power and persistence of group-centrism in public opinion amounts to a dramatic disconfirmation of the expectation, issued so confidently not so long ago, that categories of race and ethnicity and religion and the like were about to become obsolete (Glazer & Moynihan, 1975). Things haven't turned out that way—not in the United States, and not around the world, where conflict organized around social and cultural difference has become a murderous commonplace.

Matters of Principle

To Alexis de Tocqueville (1848/1945) it was "singular stability of certain principles" that defined the essence of American political life. The American people were in constant motion, but the American political mind, Tocqueville thought, remained fixed, committed to a few key ideas.

Many contemporary observers of American politics agree, placing principles at the center of their analysis. McClosky and Zaller (1984) on the American ethos; Inglehart (1977, 1990) on the politics of postmaterialism; Bellah et al. (1985) on the corruption of American society by individualism; Huntington (1981) on political change driven by the gulf between principles and practice; Pole (1993) on the evolution of the idea of equality in America; and Hochschild (1995) on the meaning of the American Dream: each in a different way suggests that the empirical study of public opinion is finally catching up with Tocqueville's intuition.

But perhaps Tocqueville was wrong all along. In this part of the chapter I sift through the relevant evidence. As we proceed, the terms "principles" and "values" will be used interchangeably, partly for aesthetic relief, but partly in an effort to knit together the political science literature, which prefers the terminology of principles, with the social psychology literature, which tends to favor the language of values. And by principle (or value), I will mean a "conception of the desirable, not something "merely desired" (Kluckhohn, 1951, p. 395). Principles transcend particular objects and specific situations; they are relatively abstract and durable claims about virtue and the good society. Moreover, principles are motivating: they "lead us to take particular positions on social issues"; "predispose us to favor one particular political or religious ideology over another"; help us "to evaluate and judge, to heap praise and fix blame on ourselves and others" (Rokeach, 1973, p. 13; for useful general discussions of principles and public opinion, see Katz, 1960; Lane, 1973; Smith, Bruner, & White, 1956; Tetlock, 1986).

Analyzing public opinion from this perspective takes for granted that people are neither detached nor indifferent to their world, that they

> do not stop with a sheerly factual view of their experience. Explicitly or implicitly, they are continually regarding things as good or bad, pleasant or unpleasant, beautiful or ugly, appropriate or inappropriate, true or false, virtues or vices. (Williams, 1968, p. 16)

Americans, like people everywhere, engage in these kinds of normative assessments, in politics as in other realms of human experience. But Americans may be particularly prone to this inclination, for America, it is sometimes said, originated in the proclamation of certain basic political ideas; and Americans, it is sometimes argued, are unified by commitment to a "creed," a small number of principles that have governed the political development of the nation (e.g., Hartz, 1955; McClosky & Zaller, 1984; Myrdal, 1944).

My review is organized around the contention that American public opinion is shaped by three principles in particular: individualism, equality, and limited government.[9] I focus on these three for several reasons: each has received detailed attention in studies of the American political tradition (e.g., Hofstadter, 1948; Huntington, 1981; Lipset, 1963; Myrdal, 1944; Pole, 1993; Verba & Orren, 1985); each has, from time to time, played a prominent role in national debates; each is neither so general as to be vacuous nor so specific as to be of no use in guiding the variety of views that a political outlook comprises; and finally, each of the three provokes genuine disagreement, so that differences on matters of principle might actually translate into corresponding differences on specific matters of politics. We'll see. After examining individualism, equality, and limited government in turn, I will take up finally and briefly the postmaterialism hypothesis—the possibility that Americans, like citizens of advanced industrial nations everywhere, are undergoing a fundamental shift in their values, moving steadily away from materialistic preoccupations.

Individualism Individualism is a nineteenth-century word, invented in the aftermath of the French Revolution. To conservative writers in Europe and Britain, individualism was a dangerous idea, threatening the stability of government and the harmony of traditional social relations. Possessed by individualism, citizens would become "rapacious wolves" (Arieli, 1964, p. 233); overtaken by the individualistic doctrine, society would disintegrate into "an unsocial, uncivil, unconnected chaos of elementary principles" (Burke, 1790/1910, p. 94).

But not in America. Here, individualism came to stand for the beneficence of capitalism and democracy. In America, Richard Hofstadter (1948) argued, the "economic virtues of capitalist culture" were transformed and celebrated as the "necessary qualities" of mankind. In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1930/1971), Weber traced the origins of American individualism to Puritan doctrines stressing the need for individuals to arrive at their own accounting with God. In such doctrine, work was transformed from a burden into a calling. Work became a vital form of moral activity, idleness a sign of fall from grace.

If the worldly asceticism that Weber identified in Puritan thought is difficult to detect in the American consumer culture of today, most Americans nevertheless continue to subscribe to the intrinsic values of exertion and hard work. Idleness is still a moral defect; hard work, in and of itself, a moral virtue; dependence on others, a disreputable condition (McClosky & Zaller, 1984).

Furthermore, sentiments such as these appear to figure prominently in many Americans' opposition to various government programs. For example, when Americans are asked what runs through their minds as they formulate answers to questions on the responsibilities and obligations of the federal government, they mention individualistic themes often: that people should make it on their own; that people must be responsible for themselves; that welfare induces dependency; that the poor deserve their poverty; that some people are naturally lazy; that work induces pride and self-esteem; that government assistance is unfair to those who do work. Such references seem to carry a moral charge and are expressed more often by opponents of federal programs than by supporters (Feldman & Zaller, 1992). Similarly, Americans who subscribe most enthusiastically to the view that success comes to those who apply themselves are less inclined as a consequence to support an expansion of government services or to see a role for government in providing a decent standard of living (Bobo, 1991; Feldman, 1988; Kinder & Sanders, 1996; Kluegel & Smith, 1986). Americans are inclined to believe that the poor deserve their poverty, that the primary causes of idleness and impoverishment reside not in society but within the poor themselves, and that economic hardships should be overcome not through collective action but through individual diligence and discipline (Feagin, 1975; Feldman, 1983; Gurin et al., 1969; Kluegel & Smith, 1986; Sniderman & Brody, 1977).

These results establish the importance of individualism for redistributive policies of various kinds, but the evidence in the realm of racial policy is less clear. Sniderman (1985) argues the affirmative: that opposition to racial equality, in principle and in practice, is rooted primarily in white Americans' commitment to individualism. Thus whites oppose racial integration as a general matter and resist federal efforts to desegregate public schools in particular because they believe that individuals must take care of themselves. But other investigations find a small or negligible role for individualism in opinion on racial matters (see, for example, Bobo, 1991; Feldman, 1988; Kinder & Sanders, 1996; Kluegel & Smith, 1986; Sears, 1988; Sniderman & Piazza, 1993). Contemporary debates over affirmative action or welfare may tout the virtues of hard work and individual responsibility, but public opinion on such questions appears to be driven by other considerations, not least among them equality, our next topic.

Equality Tocqueville (1848/1945) was struck by the American "passion for equality," which he believed, gave "a peculiar direction" to American public opinion (p. 3). By European standards, American society surely must have seemed egalitarian. Enshrined in the Declaration of Independence, the proclamation that "all men are created equal" was delivered at a time when most European intellectuals regarded equality as a radical and subversive idea. The American revolutionaries renounced the authority of the British king, investing political power instead in republican institutions and democratic sentiments. American customs in social affairs both delighted and shocked European sensibilities, and the upheavals of reform that have punctuated American history—from the Revolution to Reconstruction to the campaign for woman suffrage to the civil rights movement—are often taken as evidence for Americans' special and recurring demand for more and more equality (Pole, 1993; Verba & Orren, 1985).

But while America no doubt seemed egalitarian from European perspectives, inequalities of practice and belief flourished here—and right from the beginning. Men were thought naturally suited to rule over women, at home and in the realm of politics; Protestants were regarded as theologically and morally above Catholics, Jews, and others; Americans of northern European ancestry believed themselves naturally superior to those Americans who were here

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first and to those who were transported here involuntarily for their slave labor (R. Smith, 1993, 1995; Stevens, 1995).

So perhaps it is not surprising that ambivalence and complexity characterize contemporary American attitudes toward equality. Equality may be, as McClosky and Zaller (1984) argue, an essential ingredient in the American democratic tradition, a "presupposition" of democratic fundamentals such as popular sovereignty, the right of the governed to choose and hold accountable those who rule them, and the universal and inalienable nature of human rights. But as they and others recognize, equality is also notoriously complicated. Verba and Orren (1985) distinguish between equality of opportunity and equality of result, between equality for groups and equality for individuals, between economic equality and political equality, and between equality as an aspiration for how the world should be and equality as an assessment of how the world is (for other ways of parsing equality, see Rae et al., 1981, and Walzer, 1983). These distinctions mark real differences: Americans are bothered less by violations of equality in the realm of economics than in the realm of politics, for example; and while most Americans endorse the idea that everyone should have the same chance to get ahead, they reject the idea that everyone should end up with an equal result (McClosky & Zaller, 1984; Verba & Orren, 1985).

Not that all Americans think the same way about equality; if they did, equality as a principle would be no use to us here. In fact, Americans differ sharply over equality as a political ideal and as a practical reality. Moreover, these differences of principle translate into large differences on specific matters of policy (Feldman, 1988; Feldman & Zaller, 1992; Huber & Form, 1973; Hyman, 1953; Katz & Haas, 1988; McClosky & Zaller, 1984; Schlozman & Verba, 1979; Sears, Huddy, & Schaffer, 1986). In a national survey undertaken shortly after the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., for example, Rokeach (1973) found that the importance that whites attached to equality predicted both their reaction to King's murder and their support for racial integration. More recent national survey evidence tells the same story (Kinder & Sanders, 1996). Americans who favor equal opportunity are also distinguished by their support for school integration and fair employment; for sanctions against the apartheid government of South Africa; for more government assistance to the homeless, the elderly, and the poor; for subsidized child care and government health insurance; and for laws to protect gays and lesbians from discrimination at work. Opinions on these very different disputes have a common source: differences over the meaning and importance of equality.

Limited Government Ever since Jefferson's famous announcement at the dawn of the American republic—"That government is best which governs least"—suspicion of government power has been a staple of American political thought. Indeed, Huntington places Jefferson's claim at the exact center of the American political tradition. In no other society, Huntington (1981) asserts, is suspicion of government power such a widespread and deeply ingrained habit: "the distinctive aspect of the American Creed is its antigovernment character. Opposition to power, and suspicion of government as the most dangerous embodiment of power, are the central themes of American political thought" (p. 33).

Huntington may overstate the case, but suspicion of government occupies an important place in contemporary American politics. It is clearly visible in the rise to power of the Republican right, in the views of free-marketeers like Milton Friedman who argue that the effects of government policies are nullified by the workings of the market, in extreme form in the political doctrines enunciated by the American militia movement, in the popular idea that the government in Washington regularly if not inevitably makes a mess of things, and in the continual appeal of what Hirschman (1991) calls the "perversity argument": that government interventions, however well intentioned, always backfire. Moreover, the idea of limited government has a distinguished history in classical liberal thought. Lockean liberalism stresses a view of government as restricted in scope and constrained in practice. Government is, or rather should be, a limited institution, an instrument primarily for the defense of the "life, liberty, and estate" of its citizens, its authority conditional on the consent of the governed (Held, 1987, p. 69).

Philosophy to one side, everyday Americans turn out to be mixed on the subject of limited government. They tend to be liberal programmatically, supporting a wide array of particular policies and regulations that require the interventions of government, but conservative in the abstract, in that they express some apprehensions over the *idea* of big government. Still, many Americans believe that a strong central government is necessary if not entirely desirable; many reject the claim that economic problems would dissolve if the market were left alone to work its magic; many resist the notion that government has intruded upon responsibilities better left to the initiative of private citizens (Feldman & Zaller, 1992; Free & Cantril, 1968; Kinder & Sanders, 1996; Markus, 1989). In short, substantial numbers of Americans seem free of the deep suspicions of government power that Huntington places at the center of our political tradition.

More to the point, what Americans think about government in general does influence their views on policy. Opposition to a powerful national government in the abstract has modest to strong effects on opposition to government policies in the particular. On food stamps and welfare benefits; on school desegregation, open housing, and fair employment; on aid to the homeless and assistance to the poor; on Medicare and Social Security; on federal support for child care and education: on all such matters, Americans who indicate skepticism if not hostility toward government intervention in general are inclined to oppose the policy in particular (see, for example, Feldman & Zaller, 1992; Jackman, 1981; Kessel, 1972; Kinder & Sanders, 1996; Markus, 1989; Nie, Verba, & Petrocik, 1976; Pollock, Lilie, & Vittes, 1993; Schuman & Bobo, 1988). Among the principled foundations of American public opinion are disagreements over the size and scope of government.

Shift in American Values? The Question of Postmaterialism According to Inglehart (1977), the unprecedented prosperity and comparative security characterizing American and western European societies since World War II have set in motion a fundamental shift in political values. Older generations, who experienced crippling depression and devastating war in their formative years, are personally and therefore politically preoccupied by sustenance and safety. They are, in Inglehart's terminology, "materialists." Younger generations, fortunate enough to have avoided the catastrophes of depression and war, are oriented more to higher needs: affection, esteem, self-actualization (Maslow, 1954). They are "postmaterialists."

Inglehart's hypothesis began with the postindustrial West in mind, but it now shows up in all parts of the world (Abramson & Inglehart, 1995; Inglehart, 1990). Almost everywhere, it seems, national samples have been asked to assign priority among various political goals. Maintaining order, fighting inflation, ensuring economic growth, providing a strong defense: all reflect, in Inglehart's scheme, materialistic priorities. By contrast, postmaterialism is in evidence among citizens who emphasize instead a friendlier, less impersonal society, one that honors ideas more than money, that protects freedom of speech, and that encourages widespread participation in decision making, at work and in politics. Evidence on postmaterialism, measured in this fashion, has literally reached global proportions. Perhaps not surprisingly, the literature is full of disagreement, some small, some large.

Inglehart reads the evidence thus: that in the United States as elsewhere, people tend to endorse either materialistic or postmaterialistic goals, but not both; that postmaterialism is more common (though not all that common) among younger generations; that postmaterialism is durable, in that it is undisturbed by fluctuations in economic conditions; and that the distinction between materialism and postmaterialism is politically consequential: postmaterialists are inclined to embrace the left and oppose established institutions and groups, while materialists tend to endorse the right and defend tradition.

Not everyone is persuaded (see, among others, Clarke & Dutt, 1991; Duch & Taylor, 1993; Flanagan, 1979, 1982a, 1982b, 1987; Jackman & Miller, 1996). Inglehart's critics argue that postmaterialism is incoherent; that it is a miscellaneous grab bag of priorities, not a consistent outlook on politics and society. They contend that postmaterialism is predicted less by the affluence and security prevailing at the time a generation made its way into politics and more by current conditions. Postmaterialism, in other words, is not all that durable: when economic conditions deteriorate, erstwhile postmaterialists begin to worry about inflation and economic growth. From this angle, the distinction between materialism and postmaterialism tells us less about enduring shifts in basic values and more about how citizens alter their political priorities in the face of changing economic and political conditions. Such results and interpretations make trouble for Inglehart's (1990) assertion that "people live in the past far more than they realize" (p. 422).

Summary and Implications In scores of commentaries over more than a century, principles have been accorded a prominent place in the analysis of American politics—and none more than those I have examined. Bold claims are not the same as systematic evidence, of course, and it is systematic evidence that I have summarized here. In some respects, my review supports the widespread and apparently growing enthusiasm for principles as a way to understand American public opinion. Principles *do* matter; they are, by various kinds of evidence, an important part of public opinion.

The imprint that principles leave on opinion is not uniformly strong, however; contingent effects are the rule. For example, beliefs about equality of opportunity are very important when it comes to explaining white and black Americans' views on school desegregation and fair employment, two issues that represent the struggle for equal rights and opportunities carried forward by the civil rights movement. But the very same beliefs are utterly unimportant when it comes to explaining opinions toward affirmative action (Kinder & Sanders, 1996). This suggests that both opponents and supporters of affirmative action can enlist equality as justification for their views. Opponents can reject affirmative action in the name of equality, by arguing that affirmative action violates equal treatment; supporters can embrace affirmative action in the name of equality, by arguing that affirmative action brings the formal idea of equal opportunity to life. Equality is complicated and elastic; it can be stretched to more than one use, "furnishing rival interests with equally satisfying terms of moral reference" (Pole, 1993, p. 1).

The malleability of equality in this particular case makes a more general point. Although I take equality, individualism, and limited government to be important, I do not mean to imply that they are fixed or eternal. On the contrary, I presume that political principles are always in (slow) motion—that they are constantly evolving. Princi-

ples should be understood, as Rodgers (1987) wrote, in how they are "put to use, and in this way fashioned and refashioned: not what the American political tradition *means,* but how various aspects of the Creed have been *used*: how they were employed and for what ends, how they rose in power, withered, and collapsed, how they were invented, stolen for other ends, remade, abandoned" (p. 3).

If principles are important—at least some principles, for some issues, on some occasions—where do they come from? How are citizens who are demonstrably unwilling or incapable of developing ideological points of view somehow quite willing and capable of acquiring and deploying principles? We know far too little about this. Equally mysterious is how principles are activated. In the previous edition of this *Handbook,* David Sears and I missed this point entirely. "The psychological machinery here is apparently quite simple," we wrote. "Policies, actions, and candidates are supported to the degree they are understood to further cherished values and to impede pernicious ones" (Kinder & Sears, 1985, p. 674). Citizens may well experience this as an effortless, automatic process, but from the analyst's perspective there is nothing simple about it (see, for example, Nisbett & Cohen, 1996).

Finally, the fact that principles inform and influence public opinion implies a particular conception of politics, one that brings justification and debate centrally into play. Stoker (1992) makes this point nicely:

> Politics is not simply an arena where citizen preferences are articulated and aggregated but one where public goals and policies are debated and political goals must be publicly justified. When citizens assess public policies, events, and leaders or consider their own political choices, they are not merely trying to figure out what or who they like or what it is they want. They are also trying to figure out what or who is *good* and what is *right.* (p. 370)

If, in the end, the modesty and contingency of the effects of principles disappoint those who yearn for a politics of ideas, others may be surprised that ideas count at all.

IV. PSYCHOLOGY, SOCIETY, POLITICS

This part of the chapter follows from the premise that the proper study of public opinion requires both a deeper psychological analysis and a more serious political analysis than has so far been provided.

Processes of Opinion Formation

The great debate over ideological sophistication, which has consumed much of the study of American public opinion in the last forty years, now appears to be over. It has been swept aside by scores of investigations dedicated to the excavation of alternative foundations for public opinion. Not some master ideological idea, but rather interests, group sentiments, and political principles are the primary ingredients of public opinion.

Models of Process Identifying the ingredients that go into public opinion and determining their relative importance is a real accomplishment, but it tells us nothing about how citizens assemble their views, about how they put the various ingredients together. Understanding public opinion requires both: we must specify not only the considerations that citizens care about, but also the "rules" by which such considerations are combined and reconciled (Kelley, 1983).

One prominent rule, supplied by way of economics, is rational choice. In *An Economic Theory of Democracy,* for instance, Downs (1957) imagines that citizens follow the dictates of rationality, approaching "every situation with one eye on the gains to be had, the other eye on costs, a delicate ability to balance them, and a strong desire to follow wherever rationality leads" (pp. 7–8).

Psychologists have generally greeted such proposals with skepticism, finding rationality both unrealistic and preemptive, a distraction from discovering what is really going on (e.g., Abelson, 1976, 1995; Dawes, 1998, in this *Handbook*; Kahneman & Tversky, 1979; Quattrone & Tversky, 1988; Simon, 1955).[10] Unrealistic, even heroic, assumptions need not mean that a theory is useless, of course, and it is easy enough to name serious contributions to the understanding of public opinion drawn from rationalist assumptions (e.g., Achen, 1989, 1992; Brady, 1993; Fiorina, 1981).

The presumption of work reviewed here nevertheless runs in the opposite direction, to psychology rather than economics. There is by now a fair amount of research completed, and more under way, dedicated to an explication of the psychological processes underlying political judgment and choice (e.g., Conover & Feldman, 1984; Holyoak & Thagard, 1995; Kuklinski, Luskin, & Bolland, 1991; Lau & Sears, 1986; Lodge & McGraw, 1995; Petty & Krosnick, 1995; Rosenberg, 1988). The most developed and sustained program of research along these lines belongs to Lodge and his Stony Brook associates. Their purpose is to specify "the main architectural and procedural features of a psychologically realistic model of the candidate-evaluation process" (Lodge, 1995, p. 111). In this pursuit, Lodge takes inspiration from the information-processing approach to human cognition, drawing heavily on the "on-line" model of information processing developed by Hastie in particular (Hastie & Park, 1986; Hastie & Pennington, 1989). Lodge argues that during a campaign, most citizens most of the time develop their impressions of the candidates *on-line*: that is, "each piece of campaign information is immediately evaluated and linked to the candidate node *in working memory at the time of exposure,* when the information is in the senses, so to speak, and not typically computed at a later date from memory traces" (Lodge, 1995, 119, italics in original). Campaigns deliver messages, and citizens sometimes notice them; when they do, they spontaneously detect the implications of the messages for their evaluations of a candidate. Thereupon they immediately integrate these implications into their summary evaluation (or "running tally") of the candidate, transfer their now updated overall evaluation to long-term memory, and quickly forget the details that prompted the updating in the first place. Lodge's model is complicated—I've glossed over several complexities—so parts of it have never been tested, but it is generally well-supported by various experimental results (e.g., Hastie & Park, 1986; Lichtenstein & Srull, 1987; Lodge, McGraw, & Stroh, 1989; Lodge & Steenbergen, 1995; Lodge & Stroh, 1993; Mackie & Anuncion, 1990; Rahn, Aldrich, & Borgida, 1994).

On-line models of information processing are usefully distinguished from memory-based models (Hastie & Park, 1986; Hastie & Pennington, 1989), which specify a direct correspondence between judgment and recall. Under memory-based models, when citizens bump into politically relevant information, they neither elaborate on it nor extract its evaluative implications; instead, they merely file it away. No judgment is made or updated at this time; the information is "merely" transformed from working memory codes into long-term memory traces. Later, when a judgment is called for, citizens initiate a search of long-term memory for relevant information. In the end, judgment reflects the bits and pieces of information that people can successfully recall.

Memory-based models in general, and Tversky and Kahneman's (1973) availability heuristic in particular, have begun to crop up in a variety of public opinion studies (e.g., Aldrich, Sullivan, & Borgida, 1989; Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Jacobs & Shapiro, 1994; Johnston et al., 1992; Krosnick, 1988; Tourangeau, Rasinski, & D'Andrade, 1991; Tourangeau et al., 1989; West, 1993). Zaller and Feldman have taken availability the farthest (Feldman, 1989; Feldman, 1995; Zaller, 1992; Zaller & Feldman, 1992). In contrast to Lodge's preoccupation with candidate evaluation, Zaller and Feldman's intentions are altogether general. "The aim," Zaller (1992) wrote on the first page of his (audaciously titled) *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion,* "is to integrate as much as possible of the dynamics of public opinion within a cohesive theoretical system."

This theoretical system is disarmingly simple; it can be stated in five axioms: (1) Citizens vary in their habitual attention to politics and hence in their exposure to news and debate. (2) "Considerations" are reasons for favoring one side of a dispute over another, and as such, are the essential elements of opinion. (3) Ambivalence is prevalent: most people possess opposing considerations on most issues, that is, considerations that might lead them to decide the issue either way. (4) People answer survey questions by averaging across the considerations that happen to be accessible at the moment. (5) Accessibility depends on a memory search that is probabilistic and incomplete; in particular, considerations that have been "in thought" recently are more likely to be sampled.

Properly organized and formalized (and with the obligatory auxiliary assumptions brought in for particular cases), these axioms do go a fair way toward providing an integrated and cohesive view of the dynamics of public opinion. Nonattitudes (Zaller & Feldman, 1992); the electoral advantages enjoyed by congressional incumbents (Zaller, 1992); alterations in American opinion on the Vietnam War (Zaller, 1991); the repeated demonstration that surveys not only measure public opinion but create and alter it (Schuman & Presser, 1981; Schwarz, Groves, & Schuman, 1998, in this *Handbook*); the power of television news to set agendas and prime opinions (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Krosnick & Kinder, 1990): all these (and more) can be accommodated within a common theoretical vocabulary. Moreover, the core of the theory—that citizens vary in their habitual attention to politics; that judgment reflects considerations that happen to be accessible at the moment; that accessibility depends on a memory search that is probabilistic and incomplete; that considerations that have been "in thought" recently are more likely to be sampled—are well established empirically (Bargh et al., 1986; Bodenhausen & Wyer, 1987; Higgins & King, 1981; Hastie & Park, 1986). Zaller and Feldman's treatment of considerations as the atoms of opinion obliterates distinctions among interests, group sentiments, and political principles that I have taken pains to establish here, but this complaint takes nothing away from Zaller and Feldman's considerable achievement.

Which returns us to Lodge and the on-line model of candidate evaluation, in some ways an equally impressive contribution. We need both theories; how can we reconcile their differences? One possibility is to dissolve or at least soften the differences between the two, by specifying intermediate or hybrid modes of opinion formation and change: partly on-line and partly memory-based (Hastie & Pennington, 1989). Another possibility is to say that the two models cover different domains. Perhaps on-line processing applies only to the evaluation of candidates. Citizens understand that when the campaign comes to a close, they will be asked to make a decision, knowledge that should encourage on-line processing. In contrast, perhaps memory-based models apply when people are surprised by a request for a judgment on matters that they had previously regarded as insignificant (Hastie & Park, 1986). Just such a surprise occurs, Zaller (1992) suggests, when people are accosted by an interviewer wanting to know what they think about health care reform or the crisis in Bosnia. The

presumption that citizens keep a running tally of *all* the various and assorted topics that define the politics of their time seems, well, presumptuous.

Diversity and the Average Citizen The distinction between on-line and memory-based models of opinion formation is a psychologically detailed illustration of a broader question: do people reason about politics in different ways? Analysts of public opinion have usually carried on as if the answer to this question were no, treating all Americans alike. In most studies of public opinion, it is, one could say, the proverbial "average American" who occupies center stage. But average results can be misleading. As Rivers (1988) reminds us, average results can disguise "population heterogeneity in much the same way census averages describing the 'average' family as having 2.5 children do: one has trouble finding an average family" (p. 750).

Conceding that Americans are amazingly diverse, it is not obvious that such diversity cripples the systematic analysis of public opinion. If everyone thought about politics in a unique way, "average" results would not be as intelligible or powerful as they are. Furthermore, studies that have directly taken up the possibility that different kinds of Americans come to their views on politics in fundamentally different ways have often concluded that they do not.

This is not to imply that partitioning the public is pointless or that we should continue on our merry way, pretending that all Americans are interchangeable. Especially important to take into account are differences in information and attention. Such differences are vast and they are consequential, as in Zaller's (1992) theoretical integration of public opinion findings, which turns substantially on the powerful consequences that flow from differences in the fund of information that citizens bring to politics. Consider, as another example, that the structure of American opinion on defense spending in the post-Cold War era depends vitally on information: compared to the well-informed, poorly informed Americans seem stuck in the past, their views on defense still oddly preoccupied with the Soviet empire (Bartels, 1994). Differences in information and attention are thus terribly important, but they are in this respect exceptional. Information and attention to one side, we should probably lower our expectations on the question of whether, when it comes to politics, "people make up their minds in different ways" (Sniderman, Brody, & Tetlock, 1991, p. 8; see also Alvarez & Brehm, 1995; Feldman, 1982; Kinder & Mebane, 1983; Pollock, Lilie, & Vittes, 1993; Sniderman, Brody, & Kuklinski, 1984; Sniderman et al., 1991).

Opinion and Emotion In contemporary studies of public opinion, emotion is conspicuous by its absence. The emphasis, instead, is on the cognitive, as in the debate between advocates of on-line and memory-based models of information processing. The basic task of citizenship is the adequate management of information, or so it would seem. About the emotional requirements of citizenship, or the emotional foundations of political opinion, little is heard.

A generation or two ago, things were quite different. Then, emotion was accorded a prominent place. Inspired by psychodynamic theory and impressed with the possibilities of in-depth interviewing, analysts of public opinion sought to reveal how, in Lasswell's famous formulation, "private affects were displaced onto political objects" (e.g., Adorno et al., 1950; Lane, 1962; Smith, Bruner, & White, 1956). But in short order the scientific reputation of psychodynamic theory came under ferocious attack; intensive interviewing as a mode of inquiry went increasingly out of fashion; and social psychology, which had contributed so much to the study of public opinion, was overtaken by a cognitive revolution (Tomkins, 1981). As a consequence, emotion pretty much vanished from political analysis.

But now things have taken a different turn. Inside psychology, theories of emotion are proliferating and empirical work is booming (Ekman & Davidson, 1994; Zajonc, 1980). Provoked in part by all this commotion, a modest resurgence of interest has taken place in the political analysis of emotion. Anger, fear, pride, and hope: elemental feelings of this sort are clearly implicated in Americans' assessments of personal and national economic conditions (Conover & Feldman, 1986); in appraisals of presidential candidates (e.g., Abelson et al., 1982; Kinder, 1994; Marcus, 1988; Marcus & MacKuen, 1993, Ragsdale, 1991; Sullivan & Masters, 1988); in reactions to what William James (1911) once called the "supremely thrilling excitement" that is warfare on a global stage (Kinder & D'Ambrosio, 1996); and in the assessment of racial and ethnic groups (Esses, Haddock, & Zanna, 1993; Mackie & Hamilton, 1993; Stangor, Sullivan, & Ford, 1991; Stephan & Stephan, 1993). These demonstrations suggest that however inconvenient or awkward it may be to do so, theories of public opinion need to accommodate emotion. If we are to understand public opinion, we must attend to the whole person—to reason and emotion alike.

Onward Nowadays public opinion specialists often conclude that citizens are doing quite well, given what they know and want, and given that politics is for most a sideshow. Exemplary in this respect, Lodge (1995) winds up a presentation of the on-line model of candidate evaluation on a positive note:

> From our perspective, the long-suffering American voter—long thought to be a fool for not being able to recollect many, if any, facts about the campaign—might more rightly be considered an efficient information processor of the "bounded rationalist" school, who in "real time" routinely integrates the raw material of the campaign into an overarching impression and who is content to let the facts that originally contributed to this on-line tally slip from memory. (p. 139)

Lodge might be right, but it is hard, just now, to say. His conclusion is premature partly because we don't know enough about what kinds of information citizens draw on to form their running tallies; partly because we don't know enough about how well citizens analyze and integrate the information they come upon; partly because we don't know enough about how information and emotion might interact; and partly because, as I am about to spell out next, public opinion goes on not only inside citizens' heads, but outside as well, in the world of society and politics.

Bringing Society In

Politics, as Huckfeldt and Sprague (1993) remind us, "involve[s] individuals and groups tied together in complex relations" (p. 281). And yet, "when we address citizen politics in the mass, the temptation appears overwhelming to shift the level of understanding and analysis to that of independent individuals—individuals abstracted from time, place, and setting" (p. 281). This temptation is indeed powerful, and has several sources: the rise of the random sample survey and the individualistic forms of explanation it encouraged; the chilling effect of Robinson's (1950) exposé of the "ecological fallacy," which called into question the capacity of ecological data to support valid inferences regarding the motivations and views of individuals; and the formidable difficulties that continue to stand in the way of accumulating data at multiple levels of abstraction simultaneously.

Despite these obstacles, the inclination to investigate the social context of public opinion has a long and honorable history (e.g., Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955; Key, 1949; Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1948; McClosky & Dahlgren, 1959; Miller, 1956), and now appears to be making something of a comeback, perhaps as design and analysis become more adequate to the task (e.g., Achen & Shively, 1995; Burt, 1987; Erbring & Young, 1979; Hanushek, Jackson, & Kain, 1974; Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1995; Iverson, 1991; King, 1997; Przeworski, 1974). This is welcome news: such studies are indispensable to an adequate understanding of public opinion—or so I will try to suggest here.

Social experience is enormously diverse; Americans live in many social worlds simultaneously:

> At one and the same time, citizens live in households, among immediate neighbors, located in the middle of larger neighborhoods, surrounded by a city, a county, a state, and a region. Coupled with these relatively inescapable geographically based environments are a whole series of less geographically dependent environments: workplaces, churches, taverns, bowling leagues, little leagues, health clubs, and so on. (Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1993, p. 299)

All this together constitutes social experience, partly individually chosen, partly environmentally supplied. The complexity here is daunting. How should analysts slice into social experience? Huckfeldt and Sprague caution against seizing on any single environment as privileged, as somehow superior and more important than the rest. Taking this advice seriously, I will illustrate the power of social context to influence public opinion with examples across the full range, beginning with the most intimate social setting of all, the family.

If the family is no longer regarded as the primeval source of all political orientations, the impact of parents on children is still considerable. The best evidence on this point comes from the landmark study carried out by Jennings and Niemi, based on a national sample of high-school seniors and their parents, interviewed first in 1965, again in 1973, and once more in 1982 (as I write, Jennings and Stoker are designing yet a fourth wave of interviewing). Analysis of these data makes clear that parents play an important role in the development of their children's political identities (Beck, 1974; Beck & Jennings, 1975; Dalton, 1980; Jennings & Niemi, 1968, 1974, 1981; Niemi & Jennings, 1991; Tedin, 1974). Such effects help explain the remarkable continuity of voting patterns and social attitudes uncovered in particular places, often over many decades (e.g., Key & Munger, 1959; more generally, on the family as a crucible for opinion and action, see Sears, 1975; Stoker & Jennings, 1995; Straits, 1991).

Moving from home to work, Finifter (1974) investigated the political influence of friendship patterns within large automobile assembly plants in Detroit. Finifter found that friendships provide protection for politically unpopular views. The broader context of the plant, organized by the United Auto Workers union, was overwhelmingly Democratic. Within this context, Republican workers constructed patterns of association more carefully than did their Democratic coworkers. Because Republican workers' friendships were more cohesive politically, they succeeded in insulating themselves from what John Stuart Mill (1951) once called "democratic coercion."

We are carried next beyond cohesive and intimate social groups to the "weak ties" (Granovetter, 1973) of neighborhoods, and to Huckfeldt and Sprague's (1995) extended analysis of processes of social influence during an election campaign, set very self-consciously in a particular time—the summer and fall of 1984—and in a particular place—South Bend, Indiana. Huckfeldt and Sprague organized their South Bend project around neighborhoods. Why? *Not* on the idea that neighborhoods necessarily take

precedence over other kinds of social contexts, and certainly not because they imagined the neighborhood to be "a hotbed of widespread, interlocking, intense social ties" (p. 36). Rather,

> neighborhoods are important because they determine proximity and exposure—they serve to structure important elements of involuntary social interaction. . . . Where we live determines the churches that are nearby, where we do our shopping, the bumper stickers and yard signs that surround us. Moreover, neighborhoods serve as staging grounds for a variety of voluntary social activities. Everything else being equal, it is easier to pursue a friendship or join a group that is locationally convenient. (p. 36)

Do neighborhoods matter in this way? Huckfeldt and Sprague show first that support for Reagan in 1984 is predicted both by characteristics of individuals and by characteristics of neighborhoods. They then argue that the effect of neighborhood, which strengthens across the stages of the 1984 campaign, is a reflection of cumulative and recurrent processes of social influence. Voters who happen to live in affluent neighborhoods would have been more likely, through the summer and fall of 1984, to bump into Republicans—directly through casual conversation or indirectly by noticing yard signs and bumper stickers—and as a consequence, in the end, would have been more likely to cast their vote for Reagan.

Huckfeldt and Sprague devote much of their analysis to a detailed examination of social influence, by investigating flows of information and preference through social networks. In their South Bend study, survey respondents were asked at the conclusion of the election to name the three people with whom they talked the most about the "events of the past election year"; those so named were then tracked down and questioned independently. About 90 percent of the South Bend voters named at least one such person, and of these, about half named their spouse. Spouses aside, people tended to choose conversational partners who were on average better educated and more engaged in politics, suggesting that "social interaction tends to enhance the civic capacity of the electorate" (Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1995, p. 114). Of course, for this to be true requires that discussion actually matters. In a key analysis, Huckfeldt and Sprague find that support for Reagan in 1984 is predicted not just by individual characteristics (partisanship, union membership, age, income, education, and religion), but by the vote reported by the individual's conversational partner. This is a sizable effect; however, in a further analysis, they find that the effect of discussion holds only when the conversation takes place between wives and husbands; discussions between partners who are neither married nor related by blood evidently carries no influence. This result makes trouble for the hope that influence would be spread through weak ties, and it reinforces a point made earlier: that the family is a potent source of opinion.

Unembarrassed by this result, Huckfeldt and Sprague press on—and it is good that they do. For they do find conditions under which influence *is* carried by weak ties: namely, when citizens perceive the political views of their conversational partners accurately and when partners report being very interested in the campaign while citizens themselves are not. If this result sounds familiar, it should: Huckfeldt and Sprague's finding conforms well to the two-step flow hypothesis put forward years ago by Katz and Lazarsfeld (Katz, 1957; Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955; Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1948; for more on social networks and public opinion, with special attention to the distinction between strong and weak ties, see Huckfeldt et al., 1995; Laumann, 1973; Marsden, 1987; Straits, 1990; and Weatherford, 1982).

From neighborhoods and social networks we move next to broader geographic and political contexts. Perhaps the most dependable contextual effect first came to light in V. O. Key's (1949) classic analysis of southern politics. As noted earlier, Key demonstrated that politics in the American South through the middle of the twentieth century was most reactionary where black populations were sufficiently concentrated to constitute a threat, both to the local economy and, should blacks be permitted the vote, to local political authorities. The doctrine of white supremacy prevailed throughout the South, but whites living in close proximity to large numbers of blacks defended segregation most ferociously.

Key's original observation has been replicated on numerous occasions since (e.g., Black & Black, 1987; Giles & Evans, 1986; Glaser, 1994; Wright, 1976, 1977). A good example is provided by Huckfeldt and Kohfeld's (1989) analysis of the racial unraveling of the Democratic party in the Reagan years. Huckfeldt and Kohfeld argue that the emergence of racial conflict in American politics is functionally tied to the decline of class politics; that "race frequently serves as a wedge that disrupts lower-class coalitions" (p. ix). As the Democratic party has come to depend more on the electoral support of black Americans, working-class whites have peeled off. Consistent with this account (and with Key's original observation), Huckfeldt and Kohfeld show that, controlling on individual partisan and ideological identifications, whites were increasingly less likely to support Democratic presidential candidates as blacks constituted an ever larger share of their state's Democratic coalition. As the Democratic party becomes blacker, whites, especially working-class whites, choose exit. The driving force here, according to Huckfeldt and Kohfeld, is political threat, which derives from the relative size and political cohesion of the black population within individual states.

All these examples can be cited in support of the broad claim that social experience counts, that politics "involve[s] individuals and groups tied together in complex relations" (Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1993, p. 281). Social psychologists, especially, feel this in their bones. Indeed, social psychologists may even be sympathetic to the claim that public opinion *requires* social interaction. As Huckfeldt et al. (1995) put this point:

> Public opinion is communicated through public channels. Indeed, that is arguably what makes opinion public. People hold many opinions regarding many important topics, but opinions that are not publicly communicated might better be understood as private opinions, secluded from the bright light of public scrutiny and socially communicated information. (pp. 1048–1049)

If this goes too far, it would be foolish to deny a role to social interaction in how public opinion is formed, maintained, and occasionally altered. Granted, claims sometimes exceed the evidence, measures are frequently indirect, and explanatory mechanisms are too often left unspecified and untested. Still, the gathering line of research on social context and public opinion constitutes an extremely promising development (additional examples not already cited that make this point in a variety of ways include Brown, 1988; Cox, 1969; Erikson, Wright, & McIver, 1993; Eulau, 1986; Huckfeldt, 1986; Kinder & Mendelberg, 1995; MacKuen, 1990; MacKuen & Brown, 1987; Putnam, 1966; Segal & Meyer, 1974; Wald, Owen, & Hill, 1988, 1990; Weatherford, 1980). Taken together, these various empirical demonstrations effectively place public opinion where it belongs, in society. They remind us that public opinion is not only an achievement of individual psychology, but the product of a complex and muiltilayered social experience as well.

Campaigns Count

If everyday social interaction influences public opinion, then perhaps so do campaigns. By campaigns I mean deliberate, self-conscious efforts on the part of elites to influence citizens. Campaigns deploy various resources—money, organization, technique and expertise, words, symbols, and arguments—in an attempt to influence what citizens think, what they think about, and ultimately, what they do.

This definition is stylized and abstract, and it excludes a fair amount of what is interesting in what might be called "current events." As campaigns unfold, wars erupt around the globe; at home, race riots may break out or the economy might tumble into a recession. Important stuff to be sure, but not necessarily the stuff of the campaign. I concede that the line I'm trying to draw is permeable and inexact. Campaigns "ride stories"—that is, they spin and synchronize their appeals to breaking news—and incumbent presidents may try to manage the business cycle or engineer an "October surprise." For analytic purposes, however, it will prove useful to set campaigns apart from the broader stream of information and commentary that media relentlessly provide.

Campaigns—even when narrowly defined—are enormously variable: in the purposes they hope to achieve, in the resources they command, in the clarity and unanimity of the messages they convey, and more. Ross Perot's 73-million-dollar adventure in 1992 was a campaign, unmistakably, but so were the numerous and largely invisible contests for the local school board and town council that also took place in 1992. Given such diversity, it is perhaps not surprising that we have no single theory of the campaign. In its place, the field offers up a collection of more specific and customized understandings tied to particular types of campaigns and specific forms of communication.

Are Presidential Campaigns Dispensable? The question of whether campaigns matter arises most acutely for the highest-profile campaign: the contest for the American presidency. That the general-election campaign to select the most powerful person on the planet might be dispensable may seem shocking, but it is not an unusual contention among election specialists today, and it has a notable history, extending back at least to the *The People's Choice* (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1948), the landmark study of the 1940 presidential contest between Wendell Willkie and Franklin Roosevelt.

During the 1930s Paul Lazarsfeld and Frank Stanton established the Office of Radio Research at Columbia University. Their purpose was to undertake systematic empirical research on the impact of mass media. They were especially interested in advertising and consumer preferences. Happily for election research, Lazarsfeld was unable to obtain funding to pursue that interest, and so turned instead to politics and to the 1940 presidential campaign in particular, regarding it as "a large-scale experiment in political propaganda and public opinion" (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1948, p. 1). To examine the campaign properly, Lazarsfeld and his colleagues planned and carried out a remarkable study. Citizens of Erie County, Ohio, were carefully selected and then questioned seven times during the 1940 campaign, beginning in May, as Hitler's armies were sweeping through France, and ending just after Election Day. To their surprise, Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet discovered that relatively few voters changed their minds during this period. Indeed, by the time of the summer conventions, before the formal campaign even began, roughly 80 percent of voters had become stably committed to one candidate or the other. The little change that did occur, moreover, had more to do with family and friends than with the campaign. Such evidence led Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet to conclude, contrary to the prevailing apprehensions of the time, that as "a large-scale experiment in political propaganda," the 1940 campaign left much to be desired. Presidential cam-

paigns, they asserted, are generally ineffective as instruments of persuasion; their function is limited to reassuring the early deciders (the "reinforcement effect"), and mobilizing the latent predispositions of the initially uncommitted (the "activation effect").

Despite dramatic changes during the last half century in the technology of campaigning, the rise to prominence of television, and the decline of strong partisans in the electorate, Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet's conclusions have stood up very well (see, for example, Berelson, Lazarsfeld, & McPhee, 1954; Finkel, 1993; Finkel & Schrott, 1995; Markus, 1982; Miller & Shanks, 1982; Patterson, 1980). And from a different angle, their conclusions are corroborated by the recent development of statistical models that are capable of predicting the outcome of American presidential elections quite accurately, on the basis of information that is available *before the campaign gets under way* (see especially Rosenstone, 1983; see also Bartels, 1992; Gelman & King, 1993; Markus, 1988). For example, Rosenstone's forecasts typically fall within a percentage point of the national popular vote and correctly predict the outcome of all but a handful of states. Such accuracy requires information principally of two sorts: about recent changes in economic conditions, and about the relative positions taken by the rival presidential candidates on major and enduring questions of public policy. When economic conditions deteriorate, the incumbent's support declines; when a candidate strays too far to the left or the right on the matters of policy, support likewise diminishes. The crucial point here is that Rosenstone's model is able to generate accurate forecasts of the outcome on Election Day as soon as the nominees are known, and thus well before the formal campaign begins—suggesting, again, the irrelevance of the campaign.

Why are presidential campaigns so ineffective as instruments of persuasion? One answer is that the campaign mounted by one side is offset by the campaign mounted by the other (Bartels, 1992; Gelman & King, 1993). Under current arrangements—electoral competition dominated by two well-established parties and presidential campaigns funded primarily by public sources—both sides assemble roughly equally capable teams, of roughly equal experience and intelligence, who set about spending roughly the same (large) amount of money in roughly the same ways: on polling, organization, travel, canvassing and mobilizing, advertisements, and all the rest.

Presidential campaigns enjoy limited success in converting voters from one side to the other also because they run up against the most basic and durable of the voters' political predispositions: their attachment to party. For many strong partisans, the details brought forward by any particular campaign are beside the point: they made up their minds a long time ago. For them, partisanship is a "standing decision," not subject to revision, whatever horrors the campaign might reveal (Campbell et al., 1960; Converse, 1966a; Green & Palmquist, 1990; Schlicker & Green, 1993–1994).

Even those less frozen in their partisan loyalties do not come to the campaign without prejudice: they tend to come upon information that disproportionately favors their own candidate, and more important, they selectively interpret whatever information they see in a way that supports their political inclinations (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1948; Sears & Whitney, 1973). This point is made well in scores of studies of presidential debates, which show how sharply evaluations of debate performance polarize along partisan lines. Debates typically have minimal effects; mostly they reinforce and strengthen viewers' prior commitments (Katz & Feldman, 1962; Sears & Chaffee, 1979).

Finally, if strong partisans are essentially unmovable because they are so deeply committed, other potential voters are difficult to persuade because they're not paying attention. In the midst of analyzing the flood of political propaganda unleashed by the 1940 presidential campaign, Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet (1948) noticed that far from being drowned in information, most voters "did not even get their feet wet" (p. 121). Perhaps the principal obstacle to persuasion is indifference: "The problem for most political propagandists is not that they fail to reach their enemies but that they fail to reach anyone at all" (Sears & Whitney, 1973, p. 7; see also Hovland, Lumsdaine, & Sheffield, 1949; Hyman & Sheatsley, 1947; Singer, Rogers, & Glassman, 1991; Star & Hughes, 1950).

Having said all that, we should keep in mind that even the most successful forecasting models leave some room for campaign effects. A prime example of such an effect was furnished, inadvertently, by George McGovern and the Democrats in 1972, who offered the country " 'the worst managed campaign in the century,' most notably by selecting and then abandoning a vice-presidential nominee who had been treated for depression with shock therapy" (Bartels, 1992, p. 266; on McGovern's troubles in 1972, see Popkin et al., 1976; another example, according to Kinder & Sanders, 1996, was the Republican initiative that mixed crime and race in 1988).

Granting that little persuasion ordinarily takes place from Labor Day to Election Day, it would be a mistake to conclude that the campaign is thereby dispensable. Activation and reinforcement may not be as glamorous (or as sinister) as persuasion, but they are important processes nonetheless. Campaigns activate voters by arousing their interest and providing them information, thereby allowing them to choose wisely—or in any case, more wisely than they could have in the absence of a campaign. Campaigns reinforce voters by providing good reasons and reminding them why they are Democrats or Republicans, thereby keeping partisans in line and defections to a minimum. Although the terminology is not always preserved these essential lessons of the *The People's Choice* continue to be recognized in more recent theorizing about campaigns. Reassembling old coalitions (Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1995; Johnston et al., 1992); enlightening the electorate (Gelman & King, 1993); priming the voters' choice (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Jacobs & Shapiro, 1994): these constitute the real and important work that presidential campaigns do.

Momentum and the Presidential Nomination Campaign Perhaps it is understandable that research has focused so much on the presidential campaign. But in some ways it is an odd and unfortunate preoccupation, in that the general-election campaign for the presidency is highly unusual as campaigns go, and there are so few of them to examine. Plainly we need to examine other kinds of campaigns as well—which brings us first to the curious ways in which Americans select nominees to lead their party in the fall presidential contest.

The current system constitutes the latest installment of a two-century-long process of democratizing candidate selection procedures. For the Democrats, the immediate stimulus for reform was the spectacularly unsatisfying experience of 1968, which featured the surprise withdrawal of President Johnson, the murder of Robert Kennedy, the "police riot" at the Democratic National Convention, the nomination of Hubert Humphrey, who had entered not a single primary contest, and ultimately the loss of the White House in November. Reform elements within the Democratic party succeeded in changing the rules, and the Republicans quickly followed suit. These changes—which Shafer (1983) has called "the most extensive *planned* changes in the entire history of American parties" (p. 524, italics in original)—ensured that nominees would be selected less by party leaders and more by the party rank and file, in a dispersed sequence of primaries and open caucuses.

This new system is interesting not the least because it invites a large role for the campaign. First, the competition naturally takes place within party. This means that voters' party attachments are largely nullified as a basis for choice, so voters are less anchored in the primary season than they will be later in the fall. Second, primary elections characteristically feature multiple candidates, not just two, so elements of strategic voting may come into play. Voters may throw their support to a candidate other than the one they most prefer in an effort to thwart another candidate they like even less. Third, candidates vary in the recognition and resources they command at the start of the process—though ample resources guarantee nothing, as John Connolly's painful experience in 1980 illustrates. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, the selection process takes place spread out over time, in a tightly bunched sequence of contests, in a way that would seem to invite dynamic forces.

This complex system is analyzed in splendid style by Bartels, in *Presidential Primaries and the Dynamics of Public Choice* (1988). Bartels first develops a theory of choice that draws attention to the interplay among expectations, uncertainty, and political predispositions, and then applies the theory to the primary campaigns of 1976, 1980, and 1984.

By "expectations," Bartels means voters' perceptions of the electoral chances of the various candidates competing in the primary contests. Because news coverage is preoccupied with wins and losses (Patterson, 1980, 1993; Robinson & Sheehan, 1983), even casual observers of the primary campaign absorb information about how the candidates are doing, about who has just won and whose chances are fading away (Brady & Johnston, 1987; Popkin, 1991). And in the aggregate at least, voters do this reasonably well. Bartels shows that alterations in expectations during the campaign are direct reflections of changes in the real world of electoral politics: principally primary results (especially *unanticipated* primary results), and the accumulation of delegates.

By "uncertainty," Bartels means to take into account the ubiquitous problem of informational difference, the notion that "every prospective voter is more or less uncertain about who the candidates are and how they measure up to the voter's own political standards" (p. 65). One function of the campaign should be to reduce the voter's uncertainty, and this does seem to happen, at least for candidates who enjoy early success. Bartels shows that as cumulative coverage of a candidate increases, uncertainty declines, especially among voters who are paying close attention to the campaign.

Finally, by incorporating political predispositions into his framework, Bartels takes exception to the popular notion that politics is not very important in primary contests. Bartels (1988) defines political predispositions broadly to include "the whole range of social characteristics, group loyalties, and basic issue stands that shape public attitudes about politics" (p. 84). Such predispositions, Bartels argues, provide the durable "landscape against which the highly dynamic events of a particular nominating campaign are played out" (p. 84; see also Popkin, 1991, on this point). And indeed they do, in just the way Bartels would expect. Thus predispositions are more important for well-informed voters, those who are less uncertain about who the candidates are and how they are related to their own political standards; and more important for the entire electorate as the campaign proceeds, as more and more voters become more and more certain. Thus, early in the 1984 contest for the Democratic nomination, whether voters were rich or poor, young or old, black or white, opposed to or in favor of more government programs made little or no difference for the views of the principal contenders, Gary Hart and Walter Mondale. Later, however, these characteristics became substantial predictors of Hart's and Mondale's support. This is another and vivid case of what we

should call, remembering Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet (1948), "activation."

Having established the relevance of expectations, uncertainty, and political predispositions, Bartels moves on to an analysis of primary voting itself. He argues that variation in the outcome of primary elections can be explained by the interplay among differences in voters' predispositions, state to state; by differences in voters' expectations, which are shaped by fluctuations in electoral fortunes; and by differences in voters' uncertainty, which generally diminish during the campaign (see also Brady & Johnston, 1987, for a nice analysis of the crystallization of candidate impressions over the campaign). The role played by uncertainty is to regulate the relative importance of expectations and predispositions in choice. Under high uncertainty, predispositions are relatively unimportant and voters are swayed mostly by signs of a candidate's success and electoral viability. As uncertainty diminishes, political predispositions come more and more into play.

Bartel's analysis suggests that the primary campaign can matter, and in a big way. To estimate the impact of the campaign, Bartels simulated the results of a one-day national primary, assuming that uncertainty about the candidates and expectations regarding their chances would take the values prevailing on the eve of the first primary. This analysis yields stunning results. For example, in 1976, in the absence of a campaign, Jimmy Carter would have been a far weaker candidate, George Wallace would have been the likely beneficiary of Carter's decline, and the Democratic convention of that year probably would have had real work to do. In 1984, Gary Hart won fifteen primaries and nearly 50 percent of the Democratic vote; according to Bartels's calculations, in a one-day primary held before New Hampshire, before his emergence into the national limelight, Hart would have taken about 25 percent of the vote and would have had to settle for just a single state.

From this perspective, then, the sequence of contests that constitutes the primary campaign is of obvious and real importance. Especially consequential are early and unanticipated outcomes—surprising victories or shocking defeats. Such events influence voters' expectations, which in turn influence their choices, particularly early in the sequence. The dynamism of the nomination campaign is particularly significant because once the nominees are known, remember, we understand quite well and can predict quite successfully the outcome in November.

Lesser Races, Larger Effects? Campaign effects are likely to be larger in lesser races—for primarily two reasons. First, candidates entering such races are typically dimly understood, so the campaign has more chance to influence what voters know and how they think. Second, such campaigns are more likely to be lopsided, so voters are more apt to be treated to a recitation of the virtues and accomplishments of just a single candidate.

As a practical matter, the systematic study of lesser races has meant the examination of House and Senate campaigns. One principal result that emerges repeatedly from this literature is the importance of money. This point owes much to Jacobson (1978), who was the first to exploit data on campaign finance compiled by the Federal Election Commission. House and Senate incumbents raise more money—often vastly more money—than do challengers, but spending by challengers appears to be more consequential. The more money challengers raise, the better the campaign they can mount. And the better the campaign, the more prospective voters they can reach and the better impression they can establish (Abramowitz, 1989; Ansolabehere & Gerber, 1994; Green & Krasno, 1988; Jacobson, 1978, 1980; R. A. Smith, 1995; Squire, 1989). Candidates who challenge House and Senate incumbents generally have a difficult time, but without adequate financing, *without a real campaign,* they have no chance.

If the challenger's campaign makes a clear difference, less obvious is the importance of the incumbent's campaign. Jacobson originally found incumbent spending to be negatively related to vote: the more incumbents spent, the worse they did at the polls. This seems, at first glance, an odd result. Jacobson (1980) explains it ingeniously, by arguing that incumbent spending should be thought of as reactive to the seriousness of the threat posed by the challenger: when incumbents find themselves in trouble, they respond by raising money to underwrite a more forceful campaign in order to fend off the challenge.

This explanation deserves to be true, but alas it seems not to be. Jacobson's finding—a negative relationship between incumbent spending and vote—has been contested, most vigorously by Green and Krasno (1988). Agreeing with Jacobson that challenger spending is more important than incumbent spending, Green and Krasno take exception to the claim that the more incumbents spend, the worse they do. This disagreement has turned out to be very difficult to sort out empirically. The complexity of the strategic interplay among incumbents, potential challengers, actual challengers, and potential donors, makes a mess of estimating the effects of campaign spending. Not surprisingly, under these circumstances, estimates are sensitive to alternative assumptions. Without pretending that we have heard the last word on this subject, the evidence suggests, on balance, a reversal of the original result: that is, incumbents who spend more do better (Goidel & Gross, 1994; Green & Krasno, 1988, 1990; Jacobson, 1990; Kenny & McBurnett, 1994; Thomas, 1989).

The general conclusion that better-financed campaigns in House and Senate elections yield more votes leaves unspecified *how* campaigns affect the views and decisions of prospective voters. More focused studies have begun to fill in some of the details For example, Franklin (1991) has shown that campaigns clarify citizens' views of their incumbent senator's positions on pressing matters of policy.

Campaigns also alter the standards that voters apply: intensive campaigns provide individuating information about the candidates, inducing voters to rely less on their standing commitments or simple rules of thumb (Abramowitz & Segal, 1992). As a final illustration, campaigns are implicated in a complicated and interesting way in the much-noted electoral advantage enjoyed by House incumbents since the 1950s. The increase in pro-incumbent voting in the last forty years has been concentrated primarily among moderately informed voters—just those who are most likely to be swayed by the incumbent's "continuous campaign" for reelection (Zaller, 1992).

Negative Campaigning? Some observers see a new and troubling development in American politics, apparent at all levels: campaigns have turned negative. Not only has television taken the place of party organizations (Ansolabehere & Gerber, 1994; West, 1993) and rewarded candidates whose skills are largely rhetorical (Jamieson, 1992). To these sins must be added another: that with the advent of television, campaigns have become "increasingly hostile and ugly. More often than not, candidates criticize, discredit, or belittle their opponents rather than promoting their own ideas and programs" (Ansolabehere et al., 1994, p. 829).

Is negative campaigning as corrosive as editorial writers have been suggesting? The best answer so far comes from the research of Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1995; Ansolabehere et al., 1994), based primarily on a series of well-crafted and ambitious field experiments in which negative advertisements are embedded, more or less seamlessly, within actual ongoing campaigns. Their principal result is that negative campaigning is *demobilizing.* Negative advertisements strengthen citizens' impressions that government is unresponsive. Treated to campaigns that are little more than angry exchanges of accusations, citizens withdraw. This important result shows up across a series of experiments, and is corroborated in an aggregate analysis of turnout in the 1992 Senate elections.

Thus negative campaigns are bad—or at least some kinds of negative campaigns are bad. Insinuating (falsely) that your opponent is a child molester, is one thing; attacking (accurately) your opponent's disreputable voting record is another. Negative campaigns need not be empty, inflammatory, and diversionary; indeed, West (1993) finds that negative advertisements in presidential campaigns are often quite informative. Nor is it obvious that current campaigns are especially corroded. West (1993) discovers a sharp increase in negative advertising from the Eisenhower and Kennedy elections to the present, but Jamieson (1992) reports a much less impressive rise across the same period. Comparable evidence extending deeper into the past is unfortunately unavailable, but it seems clear that negative campaigning is not a product of the television age. To Herbert Hoover, for example, the New Deal was "Fascism," "despotism," and "the poisoning of Americanism" (Sundquist, 1983, p. 301). Reaching back still further, Riker (1991) discovered negative campaigning to be a prominent feature of the storied and often romanticized campaign for the ratification of the U.S. Constitution. Perhaps negative campaigning is on the rise just now, but it is clear that as a nation, we've been there and done that.

Media Matter

So much for campaigns. Next and more broadly we consider the avalanche of information and analysis that rumbles down on Americans every day. Such information becomes available to ordinary citizens in a multitude of ways: by the reporting of daily events in television news programs, newspapers, and radio; by editorials, syndicated columns, political talk shows, cartoons, newsletters, and the like; and most directly by press conferences, debates, advertisements, speeches, and so forth. Through all these channels, individual citizens are bombarded with suggestions about how issues should be understood, which problems are important, what solutions should be applied—with what effect?

Framing How citizens understand an issue—which features of it are central and which are peripheral—is reflected in how the issue is *framed.* Social psychologists will recognize frame as a pivotal idea in Tversky and Kahneman's (1981) influential analysis of decision making, but the analysis of frames and public opinion is indebted more to the work of Gamson (1992; Gamson & Lasch, 1983; Gamson & Modigliani, 1987, 1989). Gamson presumes that politics is in part a competition of ideas, and that advocates of one persuasion or another are always attempting to define the issue their way. At the heart of each issue definition is a frame:

> a central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events, weaving a connection among them. The frame suggests what the controversy is about, the essence of the issue. (Gamson & Modigliani, 1987, p. 143)

Thus the Arab-Israeli conflict might be framed as a matter of U.S. strategic interests, as a fight between a tiny embattled nation surrounded by hostile forces, or as a struggle between two liberation movements. The debate over abortion policy might be couched in terms of a woman's right to choose or as the baby's right to life. AIDS might be portrayed as a lethal disease that poses a dire public health threat or as divine retribution for sinful habits. As these examples are meant to suggest, frames are rarely even-handed: they define what the essential problem is and how to think about it; often they suggest what, if anything, should be done to repair it.

Defined in this way, frames are a central part of the

news and information in continual circulation through American society discourse. Frames are rhetorical weapons created and sharpened by political elites to advance their interests and ideas. More often, perhaps, they are journalistic conventions, a way to impose simplification and order on a complex and disorderly world (Gitlin, 1980). Frames also live inside the mind; they are cognitive structures that help individual citizens make sense of the issues that animate political life. They provide order and meaning; they make the world beyond direct experience seem natural. Without frames, citizens are likely to be bewildered by all the political talk among elites; it will appear to them, in William James's (1890) famous formulation, as "one great, blooming, buzzing confusion" (p. 488).

The central contention in this literature—that public opinion depends in a systematic and intelligible way on how issues are framed in elite discourse—has stood up well to a variety of empirical tests (Bobo & Kluegel, 1993; Iyengar, 1991; Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Kinder & Sanders, 1990, 1996; Mendelberg, 1994; Nelson & Kinder, 1996; Sniderman & Piazza, 1993; and Popkin, 1991, who applies framing in a provocative way to presidential primary campaigns). An excellent case in point is provided by Stoker's (in press-b) recent experiment on public opinion toward affirmative action. Stoker finds that support for government's requiring large companies to give a certain number of jobs to blacks increases when the question is framed to include the information that such companies have been found to discriminate against blacks. Under this frame, support increases among white and black Americans, by roughly 15 percentage points in each case. This result is important because it shows that alternative frames can tip the balance of public opinion, but also because Stoker designed the experimental frames to mimic the contingent thinking evident in recent Supreme Court decisions. Increasingly the Court has ruled that preferential treatment is appropriate only as a narrowly tailored remedy for discriminatory practice. In effect, the Court has decided, as Stoker (in press-b) puts it, "Because this institution has been discriminating against blacks, it is this institution whose procedures must change, and those subject to this discrimination that deserve restitution." Stoker's result implies that affirmative action programs that follow the Court's rulings are more likely to be favorably received by the American public, white and black alike.

A second example exploits the fact that over the years, both the National Election Study (NES) and the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) have asked comparable samples of Americans for their views on residential integration, using similar but not identical questions. While the NORC version mentions only a reason to oppose racial integration of neighborhoods (white people have a right to keep blacks out of their neighborhoods), the NES version of the question refers both to the rights of whites to determine the racial composition of their neighborhoods and to the rights of blacks to live wherever they can afford. Thus the NORC version mimics the case in political debate where a single frame dominates, where the opposition is silent; the NES version represents the classic case where two opposing frames collide. By encouraging whites to consider reasons to support *and* oppose neighborhood integration, the NES version of the question should evoke more support for the policy. And it does: white support for neighborhood integration is about 25 percentage points stronger under the NES frame (Schuman, Steeh, & Bobo, 1985, p. 60), a result that suggests the political importance of an effective opposition.

Framing effects have also been demonstrated in a series of experimental investigations of television news. Assessments of the president's performance are influenced not just by which national problems the networks pay attention to and which they ignore, but also whether the problems that are covered are framed in such a way as to implicate the president. When coverage implies that the president is responsible either for causing a problem or for failing to solve it, the political consequences for the president's reputation are visibly enhanced (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987).

These examples suggest that framing is an essential feature of democratic politics. On the one hand, public issues are always complex and multifaceted; they can always be understood in more than one way. On the other hand, political thinking is fluid; citizens are in simultaneous possession of interests and group sentiments and principles, all of which might be relevant. Which ones influence opinion depends on which come to mind. And this is what frames do: they spotlight some considerations and neglect others, thereby altering the mix of ingredients that citizens consider as they form their opinions on politics.

Agenda Setting Agenda setting is an old idea, recently enlivened. In *Public Opinion,* Lippmann (1922/1960) drew attention to the heavy responsibility shouldered by the press in a free society, since the press alone describes and interprets the events of public life that few citizens experience directly. But according to Lippmann, the press discharges this responsibility poorly, for it is capricious in what it chooses to disclose: "like the beam of a searchlight that moves restlessly about, bringing one episode and then another out of the darkness into vision" (p. 229).

Lippmann's warning that news organizations possess the power to determine what the public takes to be important had little immediate impact on empirical research. Forty years later, Klapper's (1960) fine and encyclopedic review of findings on the effects of mass communication devoted but two pages to agenda setting, and even that brief discussion was punctuated with such disheartening phrases as "it is a matter of common observation" or "some writers believe" (pp. 104–105).

Recently, however, research on agenda setting has proliferated. Perhaps this can be traced in part to the advent of television, which reawakened interest in the political consequences of media. Perhaps it had more to do with Cohen's (1963) forceful restatement of the thesis. Cohen had newspapers in mind, but his argument applies generally:

> The press is significantly more than a purveyor of information and opinion. It may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think *about*. . . . The editor may believe he is only printing the things that people want to read, but he is thereby putting a claim on their attention, powerfully determining what they will be thinking about, and talking about, until the next wave laps their shore. (p. 13, italics in original)

More than thirty years later it now seems that Cohen was right: that news media are "stunningly successful" in determining what Americans think about (see, for example, Erbring, Goldenberg, & Miller, 1980; Funkhouser, 1973; Iyenger & Kinder, 1987; MacKuen, 1981; McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Neuman, 1990; Protess et al., 1987). Rising prices, unemployment, energy shortages, arms control: all these (and more) become high-priority issues for the public after they first become high priority for newspapers and networks. These results both vindicate Lippmann's general observations of more than half a century ago and begin to specify in much greater detail the particular ways that news influences the citizen's conception of what he called the "mystery off there" (Lippmann, 1925, p. 13).

Priming A close companion to agenda setting is what Iyengar and Kinder (1987) call "priming." We presumed that, when evaluating complex political objects such as the performance of a president, citizens do not as a rule take into account all that they have stored away in long-term memory. What they do instead is consider what comes to mind, those bits and pieces of political memory that are accessible. And television news, we argued, might be a powerful force in determining what springs to mind and what does not. Thus we proposed that by paying attention to some problems while ignoring others, network news programs set the terms by which political judgments are rendered and political choices made. And indeed, when primed by television news stories that focus on national defense, citizens judged the president largely by how well he had provided, as they saw it, for the nation's defense; when primed by stories about inflation, citizens evaluated the president by how well he had managed, in their view, to keep prices down. Or, in a pair of election studies, the priorities that were uppermost in voters' minds as they went to the polls were influenced by the last-minute preoccupations of television news (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987).

All this evidence appears to support priming, but it comes entirely from experiments—realistic and reasonably crafted experiments perhaps, but experiments all the same. Fortunately for the hypothesis, priming has since been demonstrated by other methods and in quite different settings. For example, following revelations in November 1986 that funds from secret arms sales to Iran were being illegally channeled to the Nicaraguan Contras, the public's evaluations of President Reagan suddenly became preoccupied with matters of foreign policy, as priming would predict (Krosnick & Kinder, 1990). Likewise, immediately after public disclosure of Gary Hart's sexual escapades in the spring of 1987, moral conservatism, which had been utterly unconnected to the public's evaluations of Hart before the revelations, suddenly became relevant and important (Stoker, 1993; for other examples, see Jacobs & Shapiro, 1994; Krosnick & Brannon, 1993; Pollock, 1994).

V. OPINION AND ACTION

"In a political system where nearly every adult may vote but where knowledge, wealth, social position, access to officials, and other resources are unequally distributed, who actually governs?" So Dahl (1961, p. 1) began his famous meditation on politics and power in New Haven. Here I take up a prior question: in a political system where knowledge, wealth, social position, access to officials, and other resources are unequally distributed, who actually *participates*?

The empirical literature relevant to this question is vast, and it sprawls across disciplinary lines. I organize the evidence, or try to, by taking up a series of general propositions that together constitute a conceptual framework on participation. First I argue that participation in politics should be understood as an enactment of forms of contention that are part of a standard repertoire. Then, whether or not people "choose" to take part in politics at a particular time and place depends, as social psychologists insist it must, on the capacities and motivations of individuals on the one hand, and features of the environment they face on the other. After doing my best to cram all manner of evidence and ideas into this framework, I turn in the final part of this section to voters and elections.

Forms of Contention

Without participation in public life, democracy would be unimaginable. How *much* participation, of *what* sort, and by *whom* are vigorously debated. But on the question of the necessity of participation to democracy—of the democratic imperative, one might say, of translating opinion into action—there is no discussion (Barber, 1984; Dahl, 1956, 1989; Pateman, 1970; Shklar, 1991). And so the study of

public opinion and the study of political participation go naturally hand in hand.

What is political participation? Rosenstone and Hansen (1993) provide a good answer: "Political participation," they say, "is action directed explicitly toward influencing the distribution of social goods and values" (p. 4). Under this definition, political participation is action directed at the achievement of social ends. It includes pressure applied to private as well as to public authorities; pressure that is direct as well as indirect. Rosenstone and Hansen's answer is good in part because it makes no mention of government. Participation certainly includes action directed at the selection of government authorities and the influence of government policies, but more besides.

Participation, moreover, usually takes well-defined and established forms. In Tilly's analysis, such forms constitute a *repertoire* (Tilly, 1978, 1986, 1993; see also Sewell, 1990; Tarrow, 1994):

> Any population has a limited repertoire of collective action: alternative means of acting together on shared interests. In our time, for example, most people know how to participate in an electoral campaign, join or form a special-interest association, organize a letter-writing drive, demonstrate, strike, hold a meeting, and build an influence network. These varieties of action constitute a repertoire in something like the theatrical or musical sense of the word; but the repertoire in question resembles that of the *commedia dell'arte* or jazz more than that of a strictly classical ensemble: people know the general rules of performance more or less well and vary the performance to meet the purpose at hand. (Tilly, 1986, p. 390)

An action repertoire is partly a claim about present capacity, about what people can or are prepared by their culture to do. Simultaneously, it is a claim about limits, about the channeling of political action into predictable and known forms. The repertoire familiar to us today differs notable from its nineteenth-century predecessor, which was parochial in scope and heavily dependent on patrons. Seizures of grain, collective invasions of forbidden fields and forests, attacks on machines, sacking of private houses, and turnouts were once the established forms of contention. With the development of capitalism and the rise of the nation-state, however, "the interests and organizations of ordinary people shifted away from local affairs and powerful patrons to national affairs and major concentrations of power and capital" (Tilly, 1986, p. 395). A new repertoire began to take shape. No longer so parochial in scope, forms of contention were now often addressed to national authorities. No longer so dependent on patrons, collective action was now autonomous and versatile. In place of the grain seizure and the turnout came the demonstration, the strike, the social movement, and the election campaign.

The Contemporary American Repertoire The idea of repertoire, if interpreted too flatly, is insensitive to the huge variation of skills and knowledge that characterizes any large and diverse society. It ignores the obstacles and barriers that are often put in the way of learning how to take part in politics. And it fails to appreciate innovation: that, for example, in the twentieth century, lynching dropped out of the American repertoire and the sit-in was added. It is nevertheless a useful point to make that when citizens contemplate participating in politics, they are for the most part choosing among a small set of prepared and familiar options. For Americans about to enter the twenty-first century, such options include participating in elections, petitioning government, going out on strike, joining a voluntary association, enlisting in a social movement, or taking to the streets in protest.

That these various forms of contention are all included in the same repertoire does not mean that they are all drawn upon equally. On the contrary: some forms of political action—notably voting for president—are common, while others—for example, boycotting a local business—are rare. Rosenstone and Hansen (1993) supply the best evidence on this point, drawing simultaneously on several good sources: surveys undertaken for the National Election Study between 1952 and 1990; official turnout estimates for presidential and midterm voting during the same period; and scores of national surveys carried out by the Roper organization between 1973 and 1990. By a wide margin, turning out to vote emerges as the citizen's favorite political activity. On average, 57 percent of Americans manage to make their way to the polls to vote for president; about 42 percent vote at the midterm. Beyond the vote, activity falls off steeply: just under one-third report that they had attempted to persuade someone during the just completed (presidential) campaign; one in ten say that they had given money to a party or a candidate; 8 percent report that they had attended a rally or political meeting; and just 4 percent claim that they had worked on a campaign. Voting is the ordinary citizen's principal political act. Indeed, setting voting to one side, two-thirds of the American public steer completely clear of presidential elections; that is, they refrain from trying to persuade anyone during the campaign, they donate no money, they attend no public meetings, and they give none of their time to anyone's campaign. And so it goes for most other activities: attending a public meeting in the last year on town or school affairs (18 percent); writing Congress in the past year (15 percent); taking part in a protest, march, or demonstration sometime in the previous two years (6 percent; the last figure comes from Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995; see also Verba & Nie, 1972).

Providing good estimates of these various activities is difficult, and not only for the obvious reason that citizens are inclined to exaggerate their level of participation (see, for example, Abelson, Loftus, & Greenwald, 1992; Abramson & Claggett, 1991, 1992; Anderson & Silver, 1986; Silver, Anderson, & Abramson, 1986). Consider, as one example, trying to ascertain how many Americans participate in politics by taking part in associational life. What counts as participation here? Is formal membership required? Or do financial contributions suffice? In light of new technologies for reaching citizens—direct mail, telephone banks—if we insist on the former we may be missing a large part of what passes for participation today. And which groups count? Are charitable organizations eligible? What about church-affiliated organizations? Do we allow citizens to say what is political and what is not, or does that prerogative belong to the analyst? Finally, how intensively should citizens be probed: on the one hand, citizens may need help in recollecting their group commitments; on the other, too much probing may artificially inflate estimates of group life. All these differences matter: depending on our assumptions and measures, we can end up describing Americans as engaged in a rich associational life, or as socially isolated, cut off from others (e.g., Baumgartner & Walker, 1988, 1990; Smith, 1990).

Participation and Inequality Under democratic regimes, participation is supposed to come from one and all. Political institutions bent on enhancing democracy are supposed to encourage what Dahl (1989) called "effective participation":

> Throughout the process of making binding decisions, citizens ought to have an adequate opportunity, and an equal opportunity, for expressing their preferences as to the final outcome. They must have adequate and equal opportunities for placing questions on the agenda and for expressing reasons for endorsing one outcome rather than another. (p. 109)

The mere availability of equal opportunities for effective participation of course does not mean that all citizens are able or willing to take part.

A case in point, perhaps, is provided by the contemporary United States, where participation is characterized by huge and persistent inequalities, most notably by class. Americans with a college education are about 30 percentage points more likely to turn out to vote for president than are those with an eighth-grade education; they are twice as likely to try to persuade others during a campaign; they are four times as likely to attend a rally; and more than five times as likely to be a member of an interest group. Though differences in participation are apparent on all measures of class—income, occupation, wealth, in addition to education—the educational differences tend to be the most impressive (Leighley & Nagler, 1992; Nie & Verba, 1975; Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993; Schlozman & Tierney, 1986; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995; Wolfinger & Rosenstone, 1980). The same kind of class bias appears in less conventional activities. Within several industrialized Western nations, including the United States, it is the better-educated who are more likely to approve boycotts, demonstrations, strikes, and the like, and here again, among various indicators of class, education is the most discriminating (Barnes & Kaase, 1979; Jennings et al., 1989). Likewise, participation by black Americans in the urban uprisings of the 1960s came disproportionately from the better-educated (e.g., Caplan & Paige, 1968; Sears & McConahay, 1973). In short, class inequalities in participation are cumulative, not dispersed: they show up in all forms of contention.

Inequalities of participation by race are more complicated. Thirty years after the Voting Rights Act, blacks are still less likely than whites to turn out to vote; they are also less likely to contribute money to a party or a candidate, to sign a petition, or to write a letter to their representative in Washington (Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993; see also Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995, who generally report smaller racial differences). Such differences are hardly surprising, given the large inequalities in resources that remain between black and white Americans. Income, wealth, education, and employment are all positively associated with participation, and on all four, whites enjoy substantial advantages (Farley, 1996; Farley & Allen, 1987; Jaynes & Williams, 1989). What is surprising, rather, is the modesty of racial differences in participation. For some activities, moreover, the familiar relationship actually reverses: black Americans are a bit more likely to attend meetings about an issue or a problem in their community, to take part in a rally or a protest, to complain to a business or a corporation, and to take part in a boycott of a local business (Rosenstone, 1989; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995).

Evidence on political participation among Hispanic-Americans is fragmentary, but striking inequalities seem apparent here as well. One complication is that the Hispanic category obscures enormous social and political diversity. Taken as a whole (something to avoid if sample size and quality permit), Hispanic-Americans take a less active part in politics than do black and (non-Hispanic) white Americans (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). Among Hispanics, Cubans participate substantially more than Mexican-Americans and Puerto Ricans (de la Garza et al., 1992; Uhlaner, Cain, & Kiewiet, 1989), a difference that may reflect group differences in economic and social standing (Borjas & Tienda, 1985; Portes & Truelove, 1987).

After class, race, and ethnicity comes gender. In a study of turnout in Chicago for the 1920 presidential contest, the first in which women were permitted to vote throughout the nation, Merriam and Gosnell (1924) found huge differ-

ences between men and women in turnout: 75 percent of the men, but only 46 percent of the women, made it to the polls in 1920. By the 1972 presidential election, the gender gap in turnout had closed to just 2 percent (Wolfinger & Rosenstone, 1980). And by 1988, women went to the polls in slightly higher numbers than men did (Schlozman, Burns, & Verba, 1995). More generally, differences in participation between men and women in the United States, once very great, are now trifling. On such matters as working on a campaign, serving on a local governing board, willingness to take part in protests and demonstrations, or attending a public meeting, women take part nearly as often, and sometimes more often, than men do (Barnes & Kaase, 1979; Firebaugh & Chen, 1995; McAdam, 1992; Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993; Schlozman, Burns, & Verba, 1994, 1995; Verba, Burns, & Schlozman, in press). An exception shows up in what McAdam (1986) calls "high-risk" activism: looting, arson, rock throwing, and the other illegal and often violent activities that were part of the great urban eruptions of the 1960s were undertaken much more often by men than by women (Fogelson, 1968; Sears & McConahay, 1973); likewise, women were less apt to find their way to Freedom Summer, the dangerous voter registration project carried out in the summer of 1964 in Mississippi (McAdam, 1986).

Gender to one side, participation in American politics is characterized by gross inequalities. The differences noted here—associated with class, race, and ethnicity—violate the democratic principle of effective participation. As a more practical matter, inequalities in participation very likely contribute to corresponding inequalities in government programs and policies. Because citizens express their aspirations and defend their interests through participation, failing to take part diminishes the chances that they will get what they need. As V. O. Key (1961) once put it, "in the operations of government those who make themselves heard, those who argue their case, and those who take a hand enjoy an advantage" (p. 428).

Summary: Pale Democracy Tocqueville (1848/1945) found Americans to be amazingly preoccupied with politics:

> No sooner do you set foot on American soil than you find yourself in a sort of tumult. . . . A thousand voices are heard at once. . . . One group of citizens assembles for the sole object of announcing that they disapprove of the government's course, while others unite to proclaim that the men in office are fathers of their country. . . .
>
> It is difficult to say what place is taken up in the life of an inhabitant of the United States by his concern for politics. To take a hand in the regulation of society and to discuss it is his biggest concern and, so to speak, the only pleasure an American knows. If an American were condemned to confine his activity to his own affairs, he would be robbed of one half of his existence; he would feel an immense void in the life which he is accustomed to lead, and his wretchedness would be unbearable. (pp. 259–260)

Tocqueville's observations raise in dramatic fashion the question of American exceptionalism. We will probably never know if Tocqueville was right in his time, but we can say that it is very hard to make his case today. Tocqueville's sketch seems quite jarring, laid against what we know about contemporary Americans' modest interest in public life. Nor does it stand up well to cross-national comparisons. For example, on turnout, Americans lag far behind their counterparts in Europe—about 20 to 30 percentage points behind. This gap no doubt reflects in some part the relatively onerous voter registration requirements imposed in the United States, and perhaps as well the relative weakness of American parties as instruments for mobilizing potential voters (Glass, Squire, & Wolfinger, 1984; Jackman, 1987; Powell, 1986; Wolfinger, Glass, & Squire, 1990). Tocqueville was especially impressed with Americans as joiners. "In no country in the world," he wrote, "has the principle of association been more successfully used or applied to a greater multitude of objects than in America" (p. 198). Americans *are* more likely to join voluntary associations than are Europeans, though the American comparative advantage in this respect has much to do with religious organizations. Setting churches, synagogues, and temples to one side, America no longer appears to be the nation of joiners that Tocqueville claimed to discover (Curtis, Grabb, & Baer, 1992). Americans are also much more likely than Europeans to contact public officials (Barnes & Kaase, 1979; Dahl, 1971; Verba, Nie, & Kim, 1978), but this difference probably reflects the institutional fact that the American political system is comparatively decentralized and pervaded by influential and resource-rich interest groups (Walker, 1991). Finally, Americans display no unusual or special interest in unconventional forms of political activity, such as joining a boycott or occupying a building (Barnes & Kaase, 1979; Jennings et al., 1989).

Conceding that the evidence (outside of turnout) is fragmentary and incomplete, there is little here to support the claim that Americans take participation in politics more seriously than do citizens in other modern societies. Furthermore, what differences do emerge should probably be understood not as a revelation about the American character but rather a reflection of the opportunities, burdens, and provocations that the American political system lays out before the citizenry.

Taking into account all the evidence, the average American, one might say, is a citizen without politics. As was true for interest and information, we now find to be true for action as well: that in the great circus of life, politics is but a sideshow. Averages of course can conceal enormous variation, and that would seem to be the case here. Small numbers of Americans do a lot; much larger numbers do nothing; the rest do one thing or another, depending on timing and circumstance. Parts of the American participatory repertoire are exercised vigorously; others scarcely at all. There is, in short, enormous variation in American participation—and the question, taken up next, is why?

Explaining Participation in Politics

Whether or not people *choose* to take part in politics depends on the capacities and motivations of individuals on the one hand, and features of the environment they face on the other. As to individuals, participation hinges on two things in particular. One is the *resources* that citizens command. The assumption here is that participation is costly—it demands time, money, skill, conviction, perhaps more—and that potential participants count costs. Second, participation depends on the diverse *motives* that public life may engage. Citizens can "do politics" for a variety of reasons: to protect their own interests or the interests of their groups, out of sympathy or resentment for others, or for reasons of principle and duty (*cf.* Sen, 1990; Wilson, 1973). Political action also depends on the environment: the *opportunities* that citizens are presented for effective action, the prevailing *social norms* that support action and penalize passivity, the *mobilizing structures* that stimulate citizens' attention and subsidize their action, and *action frames* that attempt to convert personal troubles into collective grievances. I'll take up each of these claims in turn, hoping to illustrate that, in conjunction, they illuminate why certain people, under certain circumstances, take part in politics while others stay home.

Resources and the Price of Participation Participation in politics is costly: it eats up time and sometimes money; it requires a variety of skills; it is encouraged by the conviction that taking part will be worthwhile. So if the question is, Who participates in politics?, a good (if partial) answer seems to be: those who can pay the costs. And indeed, political action comes most from those citizens who command ample resources: plenty of time, lots of money, good training in the skills required for political action, complete conviction that their efforts will pay off (Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993; Tilly, 1978; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995; Wolfinger & Rosenstone, 1980).

Some resources matter more than others: roughly speaking, skills matter the most, and conviction and time matter the least. This is *very* roughly speaking; sweeping generalizations are impossible to sustain, since different resources come into play for different elements of the participation repertoire. Thus family income has a huge effect on the likelihood that citizens will donate money to a political cause, but it figures much less importantly in other kinds of political activities (Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993; Schlozman, Burns, & Verba, 1994; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995).[11] Thus mastery of English discriminates sharply between citizens who do and don't send letters to Congress, but it is irrelevant for predicting who shows up at community meetings (Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993). Thus free time seems to influence not *whether* citizens take part in politics, but rather the hours citizens are prepared to contribute should they decide to take part in labor-intensive activities such as working on a campaign or serving on a local community board (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995).

The idea that political action may flow, at least in part, from the conviction that action will make a difference may seem self-evident, but the story is actually rather complicated. Of course, Americans vary in the degree to which they regard political activity as effective. The standard concept intended to capture and represent such variation is "political efficacy," defined by Campbell, Gurin, and Miller (1954) as "the feeling that individual political action does have, or can have, an impact upon the political process" (p. 187). Campbell and his associates found that Americans who believed that public officials are responsive, that government listens to the ordinary person, that voting is not the only way the public can influence government, and that politics can be understood were much more likely to vote and otherwise to take part in the 1952 campaign than were those who expressed the reverse. Since this initial demonstration, the connection between efficacy and participation has emerged repeatedly—and not only in the United States (e.g., Abramson & Aldrich, 1982; Almond & Verba, 1963; Barnes & Kaase, 1979; Campbell et al., 1960; Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993).

Over the years, political efficacy has in fact made *two* names for itself. As Lane (1959b) pointed out, a sense of political effectiveness combines "the image of the self and the image of democratic government—and contains the tacit implication that an image of the self as effective is intimately related to the image of government as responsive to the people" (p. 149). As a raw empirical matter, internal political efficacy (the image of the self as politically effective) and external political efficacy (the image of government as responsive to popular will) are quite separate. People often reach different conclusions about their own political effectiveness on the one hand, and the openness of the political system to their efforts on the other (Acock, Clarke, & Stewart, 1985; Craig & Maggiotto, 1982). Moreover, the two aspects of efficacy have followed sharply different trends in the United States in the past forty years. Americans are nearly as confident about their own ability to understand and influence government now as they were four decades ago, but they are much less convinced that government will be responsive to their wishes (Converse, 1972; Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993). The distinction be-

tween the two kinds of efficacy continue when we take up the tricky issue of causality. Even repetitious demonstrations that efficacy and participation are correlated of course do not prove that the former causes the latter. The reverse seems quite plausible: citizens who participate in politics may rationalize their action by thinking it effective, while those who find other things to do with their time may explain (away) that choice with the belief that political activity is pointless. From investigations that take simultaneity seriously, that does seem to be the case for one form of efficacy but not the other. While external efficacy appears to be more an *effect* of political activity than its cause, internal efficacy—the sense of self as politically effective—does contribute independently, if modestly, to participation (Finkel, 1985, 1987; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995).

A more potent resource for participation than conviction appears to be what Verba and his associates call "civic skills": communication and organizational abilities that render politics more interesting and political action less costly. Citizens who speak and write well, who command the skills required for organizing others, and who possess the requisite cognitive abilities for reasoning effectively about the complex and abstract world of politics are more likely, as a consequence, to take an active part in politics (Leighley, 1991; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995).

Given that civic skills matter so much, how do they arise? The standard story is (perhaps discouragingly) general and familiar: civic skills have their origins in the family and the school but continue to develop throughout adulthood, tested and refined by involvements at work, or in neighborhood associations, or in religious organizations.

This standard story raises a big question: namely, the extent to which participation in ostensibly nonpolitical organizations spills over into political life. Systematic inquiry into this question began in *The Civic Culture,* Almond and Verba's (1963) famous exploration of the cultural and political underpinnings of democracy. They discovered that members of voluntary organizations—especially active members—felt more confident in their ability to influence political decisions, knew and cared more about politics, and, most relevant for present purposes, participated more than did nonmembers in the United States, Great Britain, Germany, Italy, and Mexico alike. In a more detailed analysis of the same evidence, Nie, Powell, and Prewitt (1969a, 1969b) confirmed the importance of organizational involvement, but found that its influence on political participation did not flow through augmented knowledge and interest, or through enhanced feelings of efficacy, involvement, civic obligation, or the like. This has become the standard result: taking an active part in associational life enhances political participation, but without necessarily instilling any special knowledge of or reverence for the process (e.g., Schlozman & Verba, 1979; Tate, 1991; Verba & Nie, 1972; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995; for an illuminating exception, see Denney, 1979).

How then does participation in ordinary voluntary organizations enhance participation in politics? Verba, Schlozman, and Brady's answer is that an active organizational life provides opportunities to develop the civic skills that make political participation both more interesting and less burdensome. Civic skills partly reflect pre-adult experience at home and school, their evidence shows, but more, such skills flow from adult involvement in the various institutions that constitute civil society: work, religion, and voluntary organizations (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995; Wald, 1992).

This conclusion is supported as well by a line of work set in motion by Pateman's *Participation and Democratic Theory* (1970). Inspired by Jean-Jacques Rousseau's vision of a participatory society, Pateman turned specifically to the political potential of organizational arrangements at work, arguing that hierarchical authority patterns on the job might well instill apathy and passivity, while democratic patterns might promote feelings of efficacy and (therefore) greater participation in politics. For evidence one way or the other, Pateman at the time could find only Almond and Verba's (1963) stray result that workers who reported that they were consulted about decisions affecting their jobs or who claimed to feel free to protest such decisions also expressed a stronger sense of competence regarding their dealings with the political system. Now, twenty-five years later, we have more and better evidence, and it is not very friendly to Pateman's thesis. Participation in decision making at work seems to have little effect on participation in politics (Elden, 1981; Freedman & Rosenstone, 1995; Greenberg, 1981, 1986; Sobel, 1993; Verba & Shabad, 1978).

The workplace *does* seem to be important in another way, however: by providing (or denying) citizens the opportunity to develop and exercise an ensemble of skills, some of which are readily transferable to politics. Jobs that routinely demand writing letters, making presentations, telephoning strangers, contacting public officials, or organizing coworkers create more active citizens. The relationship is unsurprisingly clearest for political activities that draw the most heavily on the specific skills developed at work: for example, taking part in public meetings or expressing views to local businesses (Freedman & Rosenstone, 1995).

These results tie in strongly to the more general claim of Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995). For citizens contemplating participating in politics, civic skills are an essential resources, and such resources have their foundation in associational life. Verba and his associates conclude that "the institutions of civil society operate as the school of democracy" (Brady, Verba, & Schlozman, 1995, p. 285).[12]

The fact that organizational involvement makes a difference to political participation lends importance to Putnam's (1995a) recent and instantly famous claim, introduced by the wonderfully titled essay "Bowling Alone," that civic engagement in the United States is on the skids. Taking a page

from Tocqueville, Putnam (1993) argues that associations "instill in their members habits of cooperation, solidarity, and public-spiritedness" (p. 90) and, at the same time, serve the political purpose of aggregating and articulating the interests of their members. In both these ways, associations contribute to effective social collaboration. Democracy, Putnam proposes, depends on civic engagement.

Having established, at least to his own satisfaction, that civic engagement explains regional differences in the performance of government in modern Italy (Putnam, 1993; for a critique, see Jackman & Miller, 1996), Putnam trained his attention on America, where he found civic engagement to be in perilous decline. Membership in the PTA and the Elks Club and bowling leagues, informal socializing and visiting, church attendance and more have all decreased, and sharply, in the last three decades (evidence summarized in Putnam, 1995b). In one respect these declines are even more impressive than they first seem, since they occur simultaneously with dramatic increases in levels of education, which, all other things equal, should have pushed the trends in just the opposite direction. Why are Americans bowling alone?

After sifting through the evidence and ruling out a variety of possible explanations, Putnam settles on the introduction of television in the middle of the century as primarily responsible. One important clue leading Putnam in this direction is that, upon close inspection, the decline of civic engagement appears to be tied to generations. Putnam discovers a substantial divide in civic engagement between those Americans born before and those born after 1930. Starting with the 1930s cohort, who came of age as television was about to, each succeeding generation has participated less and less in collective life of their community. The reason, Putnam suggests, has to do with the profound transformation of American social life induced by television. In 1950, barely 10 percent of American homes had television sets; by the close of the decade, 90 percent did—an astonishing change. Americans now watch an average of three to four hours of television each day, and the more they watch, they less they participate in civic associations (Brehm & Rahn, 1997; Putnam, 1995b). Putnam (1995b) concludes that if the evidence is not quite sufficient to convict television for the crime of declining civic engagement in America, "the defense has a lot of explaining to do" (p. 680).

Putnam's thesis has created a huge stir, and naturally not everyone is convinced that he is right. Critics challenge whether civic engagement has actually declined. They point out that the kind of overnight slide in civic engagement that Putnam claims to find in America is inconceivable from the perspective he set out in *Making Democracy Work* (1993), where variations in present-day Italian civic society are so stable that, according to Putnam, they can be traced back in a straight line to the early Middle Ages. The critics suggest that not all civic associations enhance democracy: the Ku Klux Klan and the Michigan Militia are civic associations, too, but not the sort Putnam has in mind. Putnam's critics argue, finally, that his theory of participation leaves out politics—in particular, it neglects the extent to which political organizations are responsible for mobilizing citizens into political life (see, among others, Schudson, 1996, and Vallely, 1996). If, as seems certain, Putnam has not delivered the final word on civic engagement and political participation, he has at the very least succeeded in reinvigorating inquiry on an ancient and important question of democratic politics.

Motives and Goals: The Rewards of Participation Participation also has its rewards. Chief among them is the pleasure that comes from taking part in any valued discretionary activity—be it skydiving, bridge, bowling, barhopping, or (perhaps less plausibly) going door-to-door with a petition in hand. The claim that participation in politics is partly a matter of personal taste probably seems blindingly obvious, but it is worth keeping in mind, particularly as research on participation turns more and more to matters of resources (as we have seen) and to considerations of political mobilization (as we will see shortly). Some Americans find fascination in politics; others could scarcely care less. Those who are interested in politics—who follow public affairs carefully and closely, who know a lot about what is happening, who worry about how things are going to turn out and which party is likely to win in November—are much more likely, as a consequence, to take an active part in political life (Bennett, 1986; Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993; Verba, Burns, & Schlozman, in press; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995).

Another and quite different reward of participation is the securing of benefits for one's self and family—what Wilson (1973) once called, in his analysis of participation in political organizations, "material incentives." Wilson argued that citizens are drawn to political parties and interest groups in part for the tangible rewards they promise: tax relief, changes in tariff levels, improvements in property values, and so forth. More generally, political action is often assumed to spring from calculations of tangible benefits. This popular assumption is commonly enlisted to explain why most citizens take part in politics so infrequently. Participation, so goes the argument, becomes worthwhile only on the rare occasions when potential rewards (or harms) become appreciable—when government policies become "doorstep issues" (Converse, 1975; Downs, 1957).

Running against the material-incentives hypothesis is the general finding, reviewed earlier, that self-interest plays a small and often negligible part in public opinion. But opinion is one thing and action another, or so it seems. In predicting who takes part in politics and who does not, it is useful to know whose interests are directly and immediately at stake. Thus parents of school-age children are more

likely to take an active part in the affairs of the local school board (Jennings, 1979), just as white parents of school-age children are more likely to participate in antibusing organizations (Green & Cowden, 1992). These cases are interesting not least because in each instance, self-interest and opinion are utterly unconnected. Self-interest predicts not where people stand on school board policy or school busing, but rather whether they act on their convictions—whatever their convictions might be.

Why the disjuncture between opinion and action? Citrin and Green (1990) emphasize the special costs of action, which "cause people to become more attentive to the potential benefits of their decisions" (p. 21). Forming an opinion is not entirely cost-free: it requires information, the marshaling of mental resources, time that could have been spent on other activities. But these costs pale against the resources required by active participation in public life. Think of the whirlwind democratic citizen who takes time out from a busy and demanding personal life to go door-to-door, organizing her neighborhood on behalf of a community cause, who fires off a barrage of letters to her elected representatives, who shows up regularly at city council meetings, and so on. Such activities have serious costs, and if the object is predicting who takes part, then knowing whose interests are directly affected appears to be of considerable value (for theorizing and research on attitudes in social psychology sympathetic to this conclusion, see Crano, 1995; Fazio & Zanna, 1981).

As we saw earlier, feelings of group solidarity are often an important ingredient in public opinion. When citizens identify with their group or, going further, when they develop group consciousness, their views on politics and society are altered as a consequence; then their opinions on specific matters become aligned with their conception of their group. The question here is whether group solidarity has anything to do with participation.

The answer is clearly yes. In particular, participation in politics increases among subordinate group members who express group solidarity. For example, Tate (1991) finds that black Americans who are racially identified—who think about the meaning of being black in America and who believe that their own prospects are tied up with the fate of blacks in general—were more likely to turn out to vote in the 1984 and 1988 presidential elections than were those not so identified. This result appears to be quite general: it shows up for various subordinate groups (poor, blacks, women, young), in different political periods, for different kinds of participation, and regardless of particular measures (e.g., Aberbach, 1977; Miller et al., 1981; Rinehart, 1992; Schlozman & Verba, 1979; Shingles, 1981; Verba & Nie, 1972; a puzzling exception is provided by Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). Solidarity, one could say, is a weapon of the disadvantaged.

Group solidarity shows up in another way relevant to participation. Much of this work builds on the concept of relative deprivation, brought to life by Samuel Stouffer et al. in their landmark study, *The American Soldier* (1949). In an effort to understand why soldiers who experienced the best conditions expressed the lowest morale, Stouffer argued that feelings of deprivation were relative, based less in objective condition and more in social comparison.

In the wake of *The American Soldier,* the concept of relative deprivation developed into a theory—in fact, into a family of theories (Crosby, 1976; Davis, 1959; Gurr, 1970; Runciman, 1966; for a review, see Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998, in this *Handbook*). The theories differ in many small ways, but they agree that among the consequences of relative deprivation are protest and political violence. According to Gurr (1969), relative deprivation "is as fundamental to understanding civil strife as the law of gravity is to atmospheric physics: relative deprivation . . . is a necessary precondition for civil strife of any kind" (p. 596).

Perhaps, but direct tests of the connection between relative deprivation on the one hand, and protest and violence on the other, are largely disappointing. In a study of collective violence in France between 1830 and 1960, for example, Snyder and Tilly (1972) found that relative deprivation, measured by increases in food prices and decreases in industrial activity, was unrelated to the incidence of industrial violence. Likewise, short-run economic contractions generally have little to do with strikes (Hibbs, 1976; Shorter & Tilly, 1974). Or consider the lynching of black Americans in the South in the latter stages of the nineteenth century and first few decades of the twentieth, once taken as an exemplary case of relative deprivation, of economic frustration triggering political violence (Hovland & Sears, 1940). More sophisticated analysis suggests that as the price of cotton fell, lynching actually declined. Evidently, lynching had less to do with the personal frustrations of poor white southerners and more to do with the political and economic struggles of the times (Beck & Tolnay, 1990; Hepworth & West, 1988; Olzak, 1992). High prices made control over cheap labor more important, and lynching (and its threat) was a powerful instrument for this purpose. Lynching also increased in response to the Populist challenge to one-party rule in the South. The Populists were crushed partly through a campaign of terror, with lynching playing a leading and horrific role (Kousser, 1974; Woodward, 1938). Relative deprivation theory also runs into trouble trying to account for the epidemic of violence that raced through American cities in the 1960s (Olzak, Shanahan, & McEneaney, 1996; Spilerman, 1970, 1971, 1976). Furthermore and finally, once a protest or riot began, relative deprivation distinguished weakly between those who took part and those who remained home (Abeles, 1976; Barnes, Farah, & Heunks, 1979; Caplan & Paige, 1968; Sears & McConahay, 1973; Useem, 1980).

All this evidence suggests that the causes of civil strife and violence are located other than in feelings of relative deprivation—in organizational, structural, and political considerations (Gurr & Duvall, 1973; Hibbs, 1973; Skocpol, 1978; Tilly, 1978, 1984). Surely the analysis of political violence requires this broader framework, as I will try to illustrate a little later. But the empirical record for relative deprivation theory is not quite so bleak, once we take into account Runciman's (1966) distinction between egotistical and fraternal deprivation: the first, which has informed most empirical tests of relative deprivation theory, refers to a sense of *personal* relative disadvantage; the second refers to a sense of *group* relative disadvantage. Political action appears to be motivated more by feelings of fraternal deprivation than by feelings of egoistical deprivation. Thus participation of black college students in the civil rights movement in the American South in the 1960s was predicted better by their anger over society's treatment of black Americans in general than by any discontent they felt about their own lives (Geschwender & Geschwender, 1973; Orbell, 1976). Thus white working-class participants in the Boston antibusing movement were motivated especially by their resentments about the gains of blacks and professionals, and less by their own personal troubles (Useem, 1980). Other examples make the same point (Abeles, 1976; Crosby, 1982; Guimond & Duke-Simard, 1983; Muller & Opp, 1986; Pierce & Converse, 1990; Vannemann & Pettigrew, 1972). The political power of deprivation appears to be located in a sense of collective disadvantage.[13]

The general drift of the literature on relative deprivation and protest may be mistaken also in its preoccupation with material disadvantage. Economic deprivation is important, especially when cast in fraternal terms, but protest can be motivated by other things entirely. Gusfield's (1963) famous study of the American temperance movement makes this point splendidly. It is an entirely general point, however, as Rule (1988) reminds us:

> Various political activities having to do with drugs, abortion, the teaching of evolution in public schools, prayer in the classroom, and religious observance as sanctioned by the government are fundamentally symbolic. That is, they are struggles over what activities—and hence what kinds of people—will be publicly defined as righteous, respectable, and worthy, and which will be bracketed in the opposite ways. . . . Political participation tells who we are and what we stand for—to the world at large and to ourselves. Thus the stakes are very high, even when they have nothing to do with the kinds of interests allocated by lobbies and other "economic" action. (p. 40)

Rule's reminder suggests that principles might be a potent source of political action. In Wilson's (1973) terminology, principles are *purposive* incentives. Their lure is the sense of satisfaction that comes from having contributed to a noble goal.

One particular instance of this general claim is the proposition that political action stems from a critique of existing political authorities and policies. Those who are disaffected from the current regime might withdraw from conventional political life, or they might engage in active protest; either way, the disaffected would be acting on their political principles.

There is more than a little interest in this proposition, since Americans are markedly more disaffected from government now than they were three or four decades ago (Miller, 1974; Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993). In 1958, more than three-fourths of Americans ascribed to the proposition that the government in Washington could be trusted to do what is right; in 1990, after Vietnam, race riots, and Watergate, fewer than one in three did. Equally precipitous declines appear on questions of the efficiency of government, the honesty of public officials, the influence of special interests, the responsiveness of government to public opinion, and the role of elections in influencing public policy.

This trend seems ominous—and it still might be—but the connection between conventional forms of participation and distrust has proven elusive, to put it mildly. The disaffected do not vote less; they do not participate less in campaigns; they do not give less of their time and money to mainstream political organizations (not in the United States, nor in western Europe: Aberbach, 1969; Aberbach & Walker, 1973; Bennett & Resnick, 1990; Citrin, 1974, 1977; Farah, Barnes, & Heunks, 1979; Miller, 1980; Wolfinger, Glass, & Squire, 1990). Nor can recent declines in turnout be attributed to corresponding declines in trust (Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993). In short, "despite the surface appeal of the idea that Americans have turned off and tuned out of politics, there is in fact no evidence that popular participation in elections constitutes a display of public confidence (or lack of it) in the political system" (Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993, p. 150).

The story is different when it comes to more demanding forms of political activity, however. On protest and violence, disaffection appears to be a potent motive. For example, in a survey of the San Francisco Bay area carried out in the summer of 1972, Citrin (1977) found that participation in sit-ins, boycotts, and even violent protests was predicted well by criticism of American political institutions. Muller (1979) reported similar results from surveys conducted in the early 1970s in the United States and West Germany. Enthusiasm for confrontational forms of political contention—rent strikes, factory takeovers, brawling with police—derived from the strong sense that political institutions and authorities were illegitimate: that the legal system was unfair, that basic rights were violated as a matter of routine, that public officials were liars and scoundrels (see also Farah, Barnes, & Heunks, 1979).

McAdam's (1986) analysis of college students' participation in the movement to register blacks to vote in Mississippi in the summer of 1964 provides another case. McAdam argues and shows that strong agreement with movement goals is a necessary (but not sufficient) condition for such "high-risk" activism. A final example is supplied by Sears and McConahay (1973), who found that participation in the Watts riot in Los Angeles in the summer of 1965 was motivated by disaffection from institutions and authorities. The most potent mobilizing elements of disaffection were specific and local: mistreatment by merchants, police, and local government agencies (see also Aberbach & Walker, 1973; and for comparable results regarding the strikes and demonstrations that overtook France in the spring of 1968, see Converse & Pierce, 1986; Pierce & Converse, 1990).

In short, disaffection appears to be a powerful motive underlying confrontational politics. If there is an ideology of protest—a configuration of ideas and feelings that sustains activism—then disaffection would seem to be at its center.

A final reward of participation has to do with duty and guilt. What do citizens of democracy feel obliged to do? In *The Voter Decides,* Campbell, Gurin, and Miller (1954) began to wrestle with this question by introducing the concept of civic duty: "the feeling that oneself and others ought to participate in the political process, regardless of whether such political activity is seen as worth while or efficacious" (p. 194). To measure this sense of civic obligation, Campbell and his colleagues developed four questions, each probing the importance of voting *in principle*: whatever the office, regardless of the insignificance of a single vote, in the face of overwhelming odds, even if the outcome is inconsequential.

Results of Campbell et al.'s studies showed that most Americans do subscribe to the principle that citizens are obliged to vote, regardless of circumstance. Moreover, those who subscribe most completely are those who are most likely to vote themselves (Ashenfelter & Kelley, 1976; Campbell, Gurin, & Miller, 1954; Campbell et al., 1960). The most persuasive evidence on this point comes from analysis that takes alternative interpretations of turnout into account simultaneously. Controlling statistically on the effects due to resources, registration requirements, mobilization efforts, involvement in social organizations, and more, citizen duty remains an independent predictor of turnout (Knack, 1992a, 1994; Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993). Its effect is not enormous, but it is unmistakable: citizens with a strong sense of civic duty are about 6 percentage points more likely to turn out to vote in recent presidential elections than are their otherwise comparable counterparts who do not recognize voting as an obligation of citizenship.

The importance of citizen duty is further corroborated by Knack's (1994) winning analysis of turnout in the rain. Weather figures prominently in popular writing on turnout, but is surprisingly invisible in the scholarly literature—or as Knack puts it, "everyone talks about the weather, but no one ever does anything about it" (p. 188). Knack did: merging data from the National Climatic Data Center with the 1984, 1986, and 1988 National Election Studies, Knack found that rainfall on Election Day depresses turnout among eligible citizens. In some ways this finding is merely another reminder that participation in politics costs something and that potential participants count costs. But there's a neat twist: when it rains, turnout diminishes *only among those deficient in citizen duty.* Prospective voters with a well-developed sense of obligation march to the polls, rain or shine; only the less duty-bound stay home when it's wet.

If turning out to vote is in part a matter of conscience, then it should be associated with other forms of social altruism—and it is. Voters give more time and more money to charities compared with those who abstain on Election Day; they are also happier to serve on jury duty, and they are more likely to complete and return census forms (Knack, 1992a). Indeed, turning out to vote may have more in common with other forms of social altruism than it does with other kinds of electoral activity. Knack (1992b) concludes that turnout in national elections should be thought of as a selfless act, "primarily civic-minded rather than politically-directed" (p. 7; Meehl, 1977, ends up in the same place).

Although citizen duty has important implications for turning out to vote, its effects on other forms of political activity diminish sharply, often all the way to zero (Nie, Powell, & Prewitt, 1969a, 1969b; Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993). This fact may reflect the obvious: that the questions drawn up to assess citizen duty tap into only the obligation to vote, not the obligation to participate in politics in a fuller, richer sense. More interesting is the possibility that this result reflects a distinctively American conception of citizenship. In fact, Americans are unusually inclined to stress the vote as a fundamental obligation of citizenship. Participation in politics beyond voting is virtuous, most Americans say, but quite voluntary (Almond & Verba, 1960; Conover, Crewe, & Searing, 1991; Conover, Leonard, & Searing, 1963).

Participation and Political Opportunity Ample resources, keen interest, high stakes, strong convictions, felt obligations: all these are important but, in the end, insufficient to comprehend participation in politics. Understanding participation also requires an analysis of the environment that citizens face, and I begin with the proposition that participation depends on opportunity. McAdam (1982) and Tilly (1978) were among the first to argue that the emergence and success of social movements depend intimately on the structure of political opportunity they face. Here political opportunity means, according to McAdam (1996), (1) the relative openness of political institutions, (2) the stability of elite alignments, (3) the presence of allies among elites, and (4) state capacity and propensity for repression.

Defined in this way, political opportunity has become in little more than a decade a central organizing idea across a dazzling spectrum of inquiry (McAdam, McCarthy, & Zald, 1996; Tarrow, 1994). Its versatility is displayed by the range of cases that it has helped to illuminate: why violence erupted during the 1960s in some American cities but not in others (Eisinger, 1973); why the civil rights movement—or the antinuclear movement or the feminist movement—arose when they did (Button, 1989; Costain, 1992; McAdam, 1982; Meyer, 1993); why ostensibly identical movements take such different forms from one country to another (Ferree, 1987; Kitschelt, 1986).

Still another example of the importance of opportunity, one closer to the individual-centered preoccupation of this essay, is provided by registration requirements and turnout. Law and practice governing registration may seem a bit pedestrian compared, say, to the rise of the feminist movement or the collapse of the Soviet empire. Nevertheless, in democratic societies, registration laws and restrictions are an important indication of the openness or accessibility of the political system—and, as we are about to see, a highly consequential one.

In order to vote, Americans first must register. And registration, as Wolfinger and Rosenstone (1980) once put it, "is usually more difficult than voting, often involving more obscure information and a longer journey at a less convenient time, to complete a more complicated procedure" (p. 61). Within the United States, registration procedures vary widely (though less now than they did before the Voting Rights acts of 1965 and 1970), and such variation accounts for a substantial share of city-by-city and state-by-state differences in turnout (Kelley, Ayres, & Bowen, 1967; Nagler, 1991; Rosenstone & Wolfinger, 1978; Wolfinger & Rosenstone, 1980). The registration provision with the greatest impact is the closing date: the last day that citizens can register before the election. In 1972, the closing data varied from zero days—as in North Dakota—to fifty days in Georgia and Arizona. According to Wolfinger and Rosenstone's (1980) calculation, if all states had adopted North Dakota's lenient standard in 1972, turnout would have increased nationwide by about 6.1 percentage points—an addition of 8 million voters. From a comparative perspective, furthermore, voter registration is unusually demanding and cumbersome in the United States. This is the principal reason why voting rates in America trail so far behind turnout in Europe, where the burdens of registration are typically assumed by parties and governments (Jackman, 1987; Powell, 1986; Wolfinger, Glass, & Squire, 1990).

Finally, if the consequences of contemporary registration law and practice seem substantial, as I think they do, consider for a moment the historical record. The Fifteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, ratified in 1870, was designed to ensure that former black (male) slaves, freed by the Thirteenth Amendment and made citizens by the Fourteenth, would not be denied the right to vote "on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude." Apart from the most backward counties of Alabama and Mississippi, during Reconstruction this promise was made real. In the South as a whole, as many as two-thirds of the eligible blacks voted in national and state elections, and scores of blacks were elected to state houses and to Congress (Kousser, 1974, 1992). As Reconstruction came to an end, however, blacks quickly disappeared from political life. Across the South, white-dominated legislatures implemented an assortment of ingenious contrivances to banish blacks from politics. These included literacy requirements, property tests, grandfather clauses, the poll tax, the understanding clause, and, later, the white primary: all in all, as V. O. Key (1949) once put it, "the most impressive systems of obstacles between the voter and the ballot box known to the democratic world" (p. 555; on the effects of such obstacles, see Alt, 1994; Kousser, 1974; Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993; Rusk, 1974; Rusk & Stucker, 1978). Key wasn't exaggerating: as late as 1940, only about 3 percent of southern blacks were registered to vote. Thankfully, these barriers to participation are gone now, swept away by Supreme Court decisions, by the Voting Rights Act of 1965, by the threat of federal enforcement, and by scores of local struggles. Gone—but I hope not forgotten, for they remind us of the symbolic and material power that can reside in the denial of political opportunity through law and administrative practice.

Participation and Social Influence The idea that social influence would loom prominently in accounts of participation would hardly come as a surprise to social psychologists. "If there is one message above all others that social psychology carries, it is that *individuals are very much more susceptible to the social influence of peers or authority figures than they are ordinarily aware*" (Abelson, 1976, p. 60, italics in original; see also Cialdini & Trost, 1998, in this *Handbook*). Abelson was thinking especially of Stanley Milgram's famous experimental demonstrations of obedience to authority and Irving Janis's analysis of groupthink in elite decision making, but the point has been made time and time again. From a social psychological perspective, then, it is disappointing how small a part social influence has played in guiding research on participation. About the best the literature can offer at the moment are a few empirical hints and reasoned speculations.

For example, in *The American Voter,* Campbell et al. (1960) found that many people voted who seemed to have

no psychological tie to the campaign. Even those who were quite indifferent to the candidates, who expressed no interest in the campaign, who didn't care who won, who regarded themselves as politically impotent, and who expressed no signs of civic obligation, nevertheless voted—in 1956, some 20 percent did so. Such creatures turn out in roughly the same numbers in more recent elections as well (Miller, 1980). Why do they bother? Campbell and associates speculated that "motiveless voting" reflects processes of social influence: unengaged voters are driven to the polls, figuratively and sometimes literally, by their more involved friends and neighbors.

Social influence might also account for the well-established result that Americans who are better integrated into their communities are more likely to turn out on Election Day. Citizens who attend church regularly, who own their homes, who are married, and who are longtime residents of their neighborhoods also are more likely to vote (Miller, 1992; Teixeira, 1987, 1992). Perhaps they do so in order to earn social approval (or to avoid social sanctions), though there are other plausible ways to interpret these empirical relationships (for example, such people are more likely to be canvassed by the parties, according to Rosenstone & Hansen 1993). More convincing is Knack's (1992a) demonstration that turnout increases among Americans who interact frequently with their neighbors. In Knack's analysis, neighbors serve as the "enforcers" of social norms, rewarding those who make it to the polls and penalizing those who stay home.

Participation and Mobilization Mobilization is "the process by which candidates, parties, activists, and groups induce other people to participate" (Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993, pp. 25–26). From the perspective of elites, participation is a resource. Officials and organizations attempt to use participation for political advantage, targeting and timing their efforts for maximum effect. To enhance their chances of winning an election, or passing a bill, or modifying a ruling, or influencing a policy, officials and organizations mobilize the public. They sponsor meetings and rallies, circulate petitions, request contributions, instruct citizens about the issues at stake and how and when to act, drive voters to the polls, supply citizens with arguments (and text) with which to bombard their representatives, and more (for overlapping but distinct conceptions of mobilization, see Gamson, 1975; McCarthy & Zald, 1973; Tilly, 1978).

One well-documented example of successful mobilization is the party canvass. During a typical national campaign, representatives of the Democratic and Republican parties contact roughly one of every four potential voters, talking to them about the candidates and the coming election (Rosenstone & Hensen, 1993). The evidence suggests that they are wise to do so. The verdict is in fact unanimous: field experiments show that party contact enhances turnout (Eldersveld, 1956; Gosnell, 1927); reports based on aggregate statistical analysis find that districts with relatively elaborate, well-financed, and active party organizations also have high turnout rates (Crotty, 1971; Cutright & Rossi, 1958; Katz & Eldersveld, 1961); surveys show that people who report that they have been contacted during the campaign by a party representative are much more likely to vote—and more likely as well to try to persuade others, to work for a campaign, and to donate money to a candidate or cause (Kramer, 1970; Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993). Huckfeldt and Sprague (1995) speculate that these effects are a consequence of "cascading mobilization": by providing the initial provocation, the party canvass sets in motion processes of social diffusion and informal persuasion through the neighborhood, leading ultimately to visibly enhanced participation.

This conjecture suggests a larger point: that the mobilization of political participation often takes advantage of the social organization of everyday life (Gould, 1993; Marwell & Oliver, 1988; McAdam, McCarthy, & Zald, 1996; Tilly, 1978). Mobilizing through "preexisting social networks lowers the social transaction costs of mounting demonstrations, and holds participants together even after the enthusiasm of the peak of confrontation is over. In human terms, this is what makes possible the transformation of episodic collective action into social movements" (Tarrow, 1994, pp. 22). This is a strong claim, but it is substantiated by close and careful examination of important and various cases, ranging from the Paris commune of 1871 to the contemporary women's movement (Evans, 1979; Gould, 1991; McAdam, 1982, 1986; McAdam & Paulsen, 1993; McCarthy, 1987; Morris, 1984).

Finally, mobilization may provide the most satisfying solution to the riddle of declining turnout. Between 1960 and 1988, turnout in American presidential elections steadily declined: 62.8 percent of the voting-age population made it to the polls in 1960; by 1988, that figure had decreased to 50.1 percent. This decline is curious because it coincides with alterations in social structure and registration procedure that together should have substantially increased participation. During this period, the proportion of Americans having successfully completed a high-school diploma almost doubled. In the meantime, barriers to registration were lowered. The Twenty-Fourth Amendment eliminated the poll tax, while the Voting Rights Act of 1965 suspended literacy tests. All other things equal, turnout should have increased by 4 to 5 percentage points. Clearly, all other things have not been equal.

The major source of decline in presidential voting since 1960 appears to be a reduction in mobilization efforts. Parties contacted fewer voters, preferring to spend their resources on advertising; elections tended to be more lopsided and so were less powerful venues for mobilization; and in the meantime, civil rights protests and voter registration drives tapered off. Pushed less often and less effectively, more and more prospective voters remained home

(so say Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993; for other interpretations, see Abramsom & Aldrich, 1982; Burnham, 1982; Shaffer, 1981).

Participation and Action Frames This brings us to frames, or I should say, *back* to frames. We've made use of frames before, as a way to describe how elites formulate issues, thereby influencing how citizens come to their opinions. In parallel fashion, frames may influence how—and especially whether—citizens choose to take part in politics. The basic argument here is that collective action draws "on the trust and cooperation that are generated among participants by shared understandings; or, to use a broader category, on the collective action frames that justify, dignify, and animate collective action" (Tarrow, 1994, p. 22; see also Snow & Benford, 1992).

The importance of frames in this sense is illustrated perhaps best in Gamson's recent work. In *Talking Politics,* Gamson (1992) reports the results of a set of focused discussions with ordinary Americans on a series of pressing public problems. Gamson is interested in a certain kind of political potential: the development of consciousness that would support participation in social movements. And for the source of such consciousness, Gamson looks to social movements themselves, which are always in the business of promoting frames that inspire and legitimate their activities. Gamson distinguishes among three aspects of frames. First is the injustice component: collective-action frames express moral indignation at some harm. Second, collective-action frames attempt to induce a sense of agency: change is possible; harm can be rectified. Collective-action frames seek, as Gamson (1992) put it, to "empower people by defining them as potential agents of their own history" (p. 7). Third and finally is a sense of identity. Frames define both a "we" and a "they": the we who together can accomplish something noble; the they who stand in the way. Gamson says that of the three aspects of frames, injustice is the most central. Given injustice, citizens are inclined to define the issue in adversarial terms and to believe that working together they can prevail.

Do frames really do this work? It is hard to say. So far the literature has been "long on ringing, programmatic statements, and short on the kinds of detailed empirical applications that would allow for a real assessment of the worth of the concept" (McAdam, 1996, p. 354)—and this from a frame enthusiast! Enough already about injustice and agency; on with the messy and hard business of empirical application (as in, for example, Ellingson, 1995).

Elections as an Expression of Public Opinion

To bring my discussion of political action to completion, I turn finally to a consideration of how and why people vote as they do. The relevant literature on this point is daunting, and there is good reason for it. Elections are widely regarded as *the* democratic moment, the "critical technique," as Dahl (1956, p. 125) once put it, for making leaders responsive to the aspirations and needs of voters. And participating in elections, as we've learned, is the ordinary American's primary (and often only) form of political activity. Without making the mistake of assuming that democracy is nothing more than elections, and while acknowledging that citizens have available in principle a broad repertoire of political activities, it is nevertheless worthwhile to devote special attention to this particular activity. When all is said and done, voting remains, in William Riker's (1982) words, "the central act of democracy" (p. 5).

The discussion here will focus primarily on how and why people vote as they do in *presidential* elections. Until quite recently, research on voting has been preoccupied with presidential contests; for better or worse, my review reflects this practice. And I give more space to individual choice—the American *voter*—than to collective choice—the American *electorate.* Understanding voters and understanding elections are related projects, of course, but they are not identical, and the former is the more obviously psychological of the two.

Voting as an Affirmation of Party Loyalty For more than a generation, the dominant account of voting came from Angus Campbell et al., spelled out in grand style in *The American Voter* (1960). The hallmark of this account was the voter's abiding attachment to party. Party identification was a standing commitment, a "persistent adherence" (Campbell et al., 1960, p. 146), one of great use to citizens as they tried to make sense of the swirling confusions of politics:

> To the average person the affairs of government are remote and complex, and yet the average citizen is asked periodically to formulate opinions about these affairs. At the very least he has to decide how he will vote, what choice he will make between candidates offering different programs and very different versions of contemporary political events. In this dilemma, having the party symbol stamped on certain candidates, certain issue positions, certain interpretations of political reality is of great psychological convenience. (Stokes, 1966a, pp. 126–127)

The privileged position of party identification was consolidated in Converse's (1966a) development of the normal vote. Converse partitioned the vote into two components: the "normal vote," reflecting voters' durable commitments to party, on the one hand; and short-term deviations from the normal vote, reflecting response to transient election circumstances, on the other. The value of this distinction was illustrated in a series of brilliant reports on the presidential elections of 1960, 1964, and 1968 (Converse, Clausen, & Miller, 1965; Converse et al., 1961,

1969). While insisting on the preeminence of party identification, each analysis also identified short-term forces that tipped the balance to one side or the other and gave to each election its unique character. The 1960 contest was notable in this respect for the mobilization of religious conflict. In 1964 the most significant short-term force was widespread concern that Goldwater might plunge the country into war. And in 1968, Richard Nixon's victory was traced to the electorate's deep displeasure with the Democratic administration: exasperation over the bleeding war in Vietnam, apprehensions provoked by violent confrontations between blacks and whites, and escalating fears about crime in the streets. In each case, a unique configuration of short-term forces played against a background of stable partisan divisions.

This account of voting, which places party identification at the center of the voters' calculus, has been challenged from two directions. The central theme of the first is party decline. In the past thirty years, the identifications that bind voters to parties have eroded. In a period of advanced party decline, a theory whose foundation is the voter's commitment to party will require drastic rehabilitation—perhaps it should be discarded altogether.

Measured every two years at election time, party identification remained virtually constant between 1952 and 1964. In mid-1965, however, it began to shift. More Americans began to call themselves Independents, fewer claimed to be strong partisans of either party. This decline of party identification continued through 1974, and seems now to have plateaued. In relative terms, neither party has been greatly disadvantaged: the balance of partisanship in the past thirty years has remained roughly stationary, with the Republicans gaining some ground, but not much. The change is nevertheless one of massive proportions. Once a distinct minority, Independents in 1990 outnumbered Republicans and drew equal to Democrats (Clarke & Suzuki, 1994; Converse, 1976; Keith et al., 1992; Klingemann & Wattenberg, 1992).

The trend away from the parties seems an obvious menace to the doctrine set out in *The American Voter*: citizens who make no explicit claim on party can hardly be counted as party voters. The surge of Independents also raises questions about the quality of electoral choice, for compared to partisans, Independents "have somewhat poorer knowledge of the issues, their image of the candidates is fainter, their interest in the campaign is less, their concern over the outcome is relatively light, and their choice between competing candidates, although it is indeed made later in the campaign, seems much less to spring from discoverable evaluations of the elements of national politics" (Campbell et al., 1960, p. 143). An electorate swimming with Independents would not only threaten a theory of voting but would also imply a public less capable of making intelligent political choices.

Neither implication stands up well to inspection. Those most impressed with the decline of partisanship have usually made use of just the first round of the standard series of party identification questions, typically ignoring replies to a follow-up question, asking those who claimed to be Independents on the first round whether they lean toward the Republican or toward the Democratic party (Nie, Verba, & Petrocik, 1979; such refinements are ignored by necessity by those working with Gallup materials, like Ladd, 1976, since the Gallup party attachment question seldom included the follow-up question). With the benefit of informed hindsight, this neglect of detail turns out to be a mistake. As Keith et al. (1992) convincingly demonstrate, "Independent Partisans"—those who first say they are Independents and then claim a party preference—differ substantially from "Pure Independents"—those who claim no party preference whatsoever. Independent Partisans express a keener interest in politics and public affairs, know more about politics, vote more frequently, and participate more avidly in campaigns than do Pure Independents. Moreover, they vote consistently for the nominee of their party. Independent Partisans, one might say, are covert Democrats and Republicans. And although the numbers of Pure Independents have increased somewhat in the last forty years—constituting roughly 6 percent of the electorate in 1952 and about 11 percent in 1990—most of the increase in Independents is concentrated among Partisan Independents.

In light of this more finely drawn portrait of the Independent voter (or voters), the erosion of partisanship now seems less cataclysmic, both for theory and for the capacity of the electorate to make intelligent choices. Fewer Americans now than in the 1950s define themselves in party terms, but many remain covert party supporters, and those who do define themselves as party loyalists support their party's nominee just as consistently now as before (Miller, 1991). Ticket splitting has increased (Fiorina, 1992), but this increase may reflect at least as much the occasional appearance of unattractive presidential candidates as it does any irreversible decline of party. In short, reports of the demise of party identification (and the party system) have been exaggerated. Keith et al. (1992) conclude their thorough examination of the evidence on the decline of party

> reassured to learn that party identification should remain a central concept in the study of individual political behavior and that the traditional method of measuring it has not been seriously threatened. As citizens, we take heart from our findings that the surface-level increase in Independents does not portend a decline in political stability, the decay of the political system, nor any of the other unwelcome developments heralded by some scholars. In fact, we might go so far as to say that it portends very little at all. (p. 203)

If I'm not prepared to go quite this far, there is surely nothing in the evidence to suggest that the theory of voting should abandon party identification.

Not abandon, but perhaps modify. In *The American Voter*, party identification was defined as a "durable attachment, not readily disturbed by passing events and personalities." Indeed, "only an event of extraordinary intensity can arouse any significant part of the electorate to the point that its established party loyalties are shaken" (Campbell et al., 1960, p. 151). It is this interpretation that has in recent years been vigorously challenged. The central contention here is that party identification should be regarded not as a standing decision, a residue of childhood learning, but, as Fiorina (1977, p. 618) put it, a "running balance sheet on the two parties."

Fiorina's strong claim is now backed up by an impressive array of evidence. Party identification does seem responsive to what the parties *do*. The parties nominate popular or hideous candidates (Jennings & Markus, 1984); promote attractive or repellent policies (Gerber & Jackson, 1993); deliver or fail to deliver peace, prosperity, and domestic tranquillity (Fiorina, 1981)—and all the while, voters are adjusting their loyalties.

But (there are always buts), these results are fragile. Whether or not party identification is seen to be responsive to changes in contemporary politics turns delicately on the details of analysis. When measurement error is taken into account, or when different and arguably more plausible assumptions are made, the apparent responsiveness of party identification evaporates (Green & Palmquist, 1990; Schlicker & Green, 1993–1994). Moreover, even if party identification does respond to the grand events of the day, we should not exaggerate how rapidly and completely it does so. Change in party identification is typically slow and sluggish. In this respect, the metaphor of the running balance sheet seems quite misleading.

Public Policy and the Responsive Voter Citizens who weigh public policy in their electoral decisions are often commended for their civic virtue. By supporting candidates whose views on policy resemble their own, they are said to shape the direction of policy itself. Responsive, democratic governments are often imagined to work this way.

But the typical voter seems ill prepared to make such a contribution—at least according to *The American Voter* (Campbell et al., 1960). We've already encountered part of this argument: that many citizens confess to having no opinion on policy questions and that some substantial fraction of those who express a view do so capriciously (Converse, 1964). *The American Voter* goes further in the same direction, adding that few citizens know current government policy and that not many think the parties differ appreciably on important matters. In light of these results, Campbell et al. (1960) concluded that opinions on specific policies ordinarily play a modest role in presidential elections.

This conclusion provoked a strong reaction. Beginning with V. O. Key's posthumously published volume, *The Responsible Electorate* (1966), a major preoccupation of research on voting has been to rehabilitate the ordinary citizen by demonstrating that policy voting is more widespread than Campbell and his associates had alleged. Squarely in this tradition, Pomper (1972) argued that *The American Voter* uncovered so little policy voting not because of any failure of voters to fulfill their civic obligations, but because of the failure of the parties in the 1950s to offer distinct programs. Pomper showed that between 1956 and 1968 the proportion of the public who thought that the two parties differed on specific policy questions edged upward, from about one-half to about two-thirds, and that greater consensus developed regarding the positions taken by the parties. Particularly striking was change in public perceptions on racial policy between 1960 and 1964. This evidence establishes Pomper's general point: clarity in the voter's mind depends on the clarity of the choices available. Not everyone's mind cleared, however. At the close of the 1964 campaign, only 43 percent expressed an opinion on school desegregation and placed the Democrats as supporting it more than the Republicans. This finding represents a material increase in clearheadedness from the previous two elections to be sure, but it still leaves considerable confusion.

A separate question is whether voters capitalize on the opportunities provided them when parties stake out alternative programs. They do. When confronted with real differences on issues, voters take them into account (e.g., Aldrich, Sullivan, & Borgida, 1989; Nie, Verba, & Petrocik, 1976; Rabinowitz & MacDonald, 1989).[14] This point is worth underscoring: that policy voting waxes and wanes according to the clarity and aggressiveness with which rival candidates push alternative programs. Thus in 1964, when Goldwater and Johnson offered the country very different views on the role of the federal government in ensuring civil rights, voters, especially in the South, reached decisions with racial issues prominently in mind (Rosenstone, 1983).

Consider, as a clinching demonstration of this point, the clever analysis provided by Page and Brody (1972) of the 1968 presidential contest. They discovered that late in the campaign, voters' opinions on Vietnam policy appeared to be irrelevant to their votes. Page and Brody attributed this result not to voter dimness but rather to Hubert Humphrey's and Richard Nixon's failure to articulate alternative policies between which voters could choose. In sharp contrast, Page and Brody found that in a hypothetical election pitting Eugene McCarthy against George Wallace, voters' "choices" reflected their opinions on Vietnam policy much more faithfully (see also Converse et al., 1969).

Page and Brody's result thereby demonstrates the importance to policy voting of the alternatives that voters are offered. At the same time, their demonstration suggests rather discouraging limits on how much of a difference candidates can make. Despite the clarity and extremity of the positions on Vietnam staked out by McCarthy and Wallace, confusion on these matters in the general public was widespread. In mid-August, only about two-thirds of the public was able to assign positions on Vietnam to both McCarthy and Wallace, and of those who were able to do so, less than half placed McCarthy to Wallace's left. Thus rival candidates who differ on important issues and who say so clearly and repeatedly will certainly encourage policy voting, but even then, not everyone will get the message.

What exactly are voters doing when they engage in policy voting? The most common assumption, spelled out in the "spatial theory," supposes that voters have genuine opinions on issues and clear and accurate perceptions of the positions taken by the contending candidates. Voters then compute the distance between their own position and those of the candidates, preferring the candidate whose position is closer to their own (Davis, Hinich, & Ordeshook, 1970; Enelow, Endersby, & Munger, 1993). Rabinowitz & MacDonald (1989) suggest an alternative account. Under the "directional theory," voters' reactions to issues are assumed to be diffuse and emotion-laden. Voters choose sides—they are for or against affirmative action or abortion, say—and they do so with varying intensity. Voters then prefer candidates who they see as being on their side, especially on issues they care deeply about. Insofar as the spatial and directional theories of issue voting can be distinguished empirically, the evidence tends to favor the latter (MacDonald, Listhaug, & Rabinowitz, 1991; MacDonald, Rabinowitz, & Listhaug, 1995; Rabinowitz & MacDonald, 1989).

Government Performance and the Retrospective Voter That the directional theory seems to provide a more faithful account of policy voting than the spatial theory makes good sense, on the idea that voters follow heuristic simplifications when they can. But even under the directional assumption, policy voting imposes serious burdens. By comparison, the informational demands of what I will call retrospective voting are quite modest. Are economic conditions improving? Is the government corrupt? Is the nation's defense sound? In answering such questions, voters are required not to master the policies that rival candidates promote, but only to take stock of how things are going and then credit or blame the incumbent party accordingly. The intricacies of policy debates may often surpass ordinary citizens' expertise and exhaust their curiosity, but evidence on government performance is readily available, in newspapers, television programs, and the mundane experiences of everyday life. And while presidential hopefuls often cultivate ambiguity in their policy proposals, they seem eager to talk about performance: their own many accomplishments along with their opponent's many failures (Page, 1978). Perhaps, then, as Butler and Stokes (1974) put it, "the preeminent means by which the public simplifies the complexity of government action is by shifting its attention from policies to performance, from government action to the values that government may achieve" (p. 285).

Is retrospective voting as irresistible as Butler and Stokes make it out to be? Yes. Ransacking the entire National Election Study series, Fiorina (1981) discovered strong support for retrospective voting: assessments of government performance—notably, on peace, prosperity, and civil rights—influence evaluations of the incumbent president, which in turn strongly influence the vote. From Fiorina's presentation, and from evidence reported by others (Kinder & Kiewiet, 1981; Mattei & Weisberg, 1994; Page, 1978; Popkin et al., 1976), it seems safe if not glamorous to conclude that presidential elections are, in part, referenda on the incumbent's performance.

The pervasiveness of this simple reward-punish calculus leaves open the questions of how voters decide whether a government's record has been glorious, abysmal, or merely ordinary. One possible answer is supplied by the self-interest hypothesis: perhaps voters examine their own circumstances first, throwing their support to candidates and parties that have advanced and defended their interests. A political calculus based entirely on such close-to-home calculations would substantially reduce the costs that are normally incurred by becoming informed about the world of politics—costs that Lippmann, Downs, Converse, and many others insist voters are reluctant to pay.

But as self-interest has little to do with public opinion, so it seems to have little to do with voting. Empirical efforts to test the self-interest proposal have been confined primarily to economic performance. There, pocketbook voters, as we might call them, have proven hard to find. Economic interests occasionally influence political choice, but the effects are never very strong and often they are trivial. Declining financial condition, job loss, preoccupation with personal economic problems: none of these seems to drive presidential voting (Feldman, 1982; Fiorina, 1981; Kiewiet, 1983; Kinder & Kiewiet, 1981; Lau, Sears, & Jessor, 1990; Lewis-Beck, 1988; Markus, 1988; Sears & Lau, 1983; Sears et al., 1980; improvements in the measurements of economic self-interest don't appear to help: Kinder, Adams, & Gronke, 1989).

A second possibility is that voters pay attention not so much to their own problems and achievements as they reach their political decisions, but rather to the problems and achievements of the country—the "sociotropic hypothesis" (Kinder & Kiewiet, 1981). Whereas self-interested voters ask the incumbent, "What have you done for *me* lately?," sociotropic voters ask, "What have you done for the *nation* lately?" Real voters appear to resemble this sociotropic ideal rather closely, responding to changes in general economic conditions much more than to changes in the circumstances of personal economic life, in the United States and in western Europe alike (see, for example, Feldman, 1982; Fiorina, 1981; Kiewiet, 1983; Kinder, Adams, & Gronke, 1989; Kinder & Kiewiet, 1981; Lewis-Beck, 1988; Schlozman & Verba, 1979; Sniderman & Brody, 1977).

Just as these results were settling down into a neat and intelligible pattern, along came Kramer (1983), who argued forcefully that cross-sectional surveys were precisely the wrong basis for reaching conclusions about retrospective economic voting. Cross-sectional estimates of the impact of economic self-interest were hopelessly biased, according to Kramer. Why? Because the sources of change in personal economic welfare other than government—promotions, changes in family composition, health problems, and the like—contaminate the relationship between the vote and government-induced change in economic well-being. The latter, in Kramer's view, is the economic variable of interest: it is change in economic well-being stripped of all "extraneous and idiosyncratic" factors, and cross-sectional surveys don't begin to measure it.

Kramer also distrusts the estimates for sociotropic voting based on cross-sectional surveys. Why, Kramer asks, do voters living at the same time in the same society come to such different judgments about national economic conditions? Such differences might reflect confusion and error, or they might reflect processes of political rationalization; under either interpretation, the sociotropic effect is rendered suspect.

Kramer's argument stirred up a lot of commentary—on whether government-induced change in economic well-being really is the variable of interest; on whether rank-and-file citizens are prepared and willing, as they contemplate their vote, to figure out what portion of change in their economic welfare is government-induced; on how Kramer's argument can be reconciled with the extant evidence, which seems systematic and coherent; on whether improvements in the measurement of personal economic well-being and national economic conditions cannot solve some of what has become known informally as "the Kramer problem" (among others, see Alesina, Londregan, & Rosenthal, 1993; Bartels & Brady, 1993; Cowden & Hartley, 1992; Feldman, 1985; Kinder, Adams, & Gronke, 1989; Markus, 1988).

One indisputable contribution of Kramer's argument, or so it seems to me, is to clarify the shortcomings inherent in the two dominant approaches to the study of economic retrospective voting. On the one hand, while results based on aggregate time series models are well suited to establishing that economic conditions affect election outcomes (e.g., Kramer, 1971), they have trouble distinguishing between pocketbook and sociotropic voting (though see Cowden & Hartley, 1992, for a heroic effort). On the other hand, results based on cross-sectional surveys cannot, by their nature, provide estimates of the impact on the vote due to over-time change in national economic conditions.

Combine and conquer was Markus's (1988) solution to these shortcomings. By pooling the National Election Study presidential surveys from 1956 to 1984, Markus was able to disentangle pocketbook and sociotropic motivations (with the latter estimated by the effect on voting due to changes in national economic conditions from one election period to the next). Under this specification, Markus found evidence of both: voters whose own economic situation had recently improved were more likely as a consequence to vote for the incumbent; simultaneously, voters in periods of national economic expansion tended to vote for the incumbent, regardless of their own situation.

The sociotropic result could be read as implying that a significant portion of the electorate is sensible. That is, in making political decisions, citizens tend to rely on information about the economy as a whole, instead of depending entirely on information about their own, perhaps idiosyncratic, experiences. But on the other side, perhaps voters can be bamboozled about the real state of the country. They may know very well what has happened to themselves and their families, but judgments of the nation's well-being have nothing like the same grounding in everyday experience. Assessing government performance, Edelman (1988) suggests,

> is not at all like evaluating the plumber by checking whether the faucet still drips. Officials construct tests that show success, just as their opponents construct other tests that show failure. The higher the office the more certain that judgments of performance depend upon efforts to influence interpretations by suggesting which observations are pertinent, which irrelevant, and what both mean. (p. 41)

While Edelman's warning is altogether proper, and while we should not take for granted a close correspondence between the public's diagnosis and the actual health and vitality of the nation, the relevant evidence available now is, on balance, rather reassuring. That is, the American public's assessment of the national economic tracks changes in real economic conditions reasonably faithfully (Haller & Norpoth, 1994; MacKuen, Erikson, & Stimson, 1992; Markus & Kinder, 1988).

Group-Centrism and the Vote Research on economic retrospective voting has assumed overwhelmingly that voters are motivated either by personal or by national con-

cerns, ignoring other possibilities. But perhaps voters are actually preoccupied with the economic fortunes and misfortunes of their *group*—with how the poor are faring, or the elderly, or college professors, or whatever. As we've seen repeatedly, social groups often constitute a powerful political frame of reference. Failing to consider the group level may be a serious mistake in studies of retrospective voting in particular, since, as Conover (1985) argued, voters may find group economic well-being to be more personally relevant than national economic conditions and more politically relevant than their own economic condition. We know (too) little about this, but there are suggestions that citizens do vote against the incumbent when things have gone badly for their group (Conover, 1985; Kinder, Adams, & Gronke, 1989).

The possibility that group interest might provide a foundation for retrospective voting would have come as no surprise to the authors of *The People's Choice* (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1948). They placed membership in social groupings at the center of their attempt to explain the vote. In their analysis, voting was a social act, a product of common interests and mutual influence among those sharing the same social location. In epigrammatic form, Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet put it this way: "a person thinks, politically, as he is, socially. Social characteristics determine political preferences" (p. 27).

The People's Choice was a fine book, but research on voting and elections soon took a different turn, to the more immediate causes of the vote: party identification, policy opinions, retrospective assessments, and the rest. Nevertheless, a scattering of evidence and analysis can now be assembled that confirms Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet's insistence that the foundations of the vote are social.

One example is Axelrod's (1972, 1986) analysis of the evolution of presidential election coalitions. Axelrod estimated the contribution of various social groups—the poor, Catholics, blacks, union members, southerners, Protestants, and so on—to each party's presidential vote, from 1952 through 1984. Contribution, in turn, Axelrod decomposed into size, turnout, and loyalty. This exercise would be pointless if social location were independent of vote—but it is not: party strength is distributed very unequally across social groups, in a manner that Lazarsfeld and his colleagues would readily recognize. And Axelrod's exercise would be boring if the coalitions were completely frozen in time—but that's not true either. For example, black Americans contributed much more sizably to the Democratic coalition at the end of the series than at the beginning, not so much because blacks became more loyal to the Democratic party (though they did, a bit), but because they turned out in sharply increasing numbers (see also Ladd, 1978; Petrocik, 1981, 1987; Stanley, Bianco, & Niemi, 1986).

Axelrod's analysis demonstrates that it is possible and even useful to predict the vote from mere membership in social groups. Not surprisingly, such predictions are sharpened for members who also identify with their group; this holds at least for class (Campbell et al., 1960; Converse, 1958), race (Dawson, 1994; Gurin, Hatchett, & Jackson, 1989; Rhodebeck, 1986), and religion (Converse, 1966b).

Group identifications take time and effort to build, but their *relevance* to the world of politics can change rapidly, practically overnight. A fine and well-analyzed case in point is provided by the 1960 presidential campaign. At least since the Great Depression and the New Deal, American Catholics have tended to favor the Democratic party. John Kennedy's Catholicism converted this advantage into a landslide: Kennedy did much better among Catholic voters in 1960 than his Democratic predecessors had, and he did especially well among devout Catholics, those strongly identified with their religious group. This is a vivid illustration of group identification at work, one made instantaneously (but temporarily) relevant by the nomination of Kennedy. And there's more: at the same time Kennedy was winning votes from Catholics, he was losing support among Protestants. Kennedy's losses were particularly steep among Protestants who closely identified with their faith, who were "remarkably preoccupied by the fact that Kennedy was a Catholic," and, in the main, who were quite upset at the prospect that a Catholic might become president (Converse, 1966b, p. 112). Thus the 1960 contest illustrates the two sides of group-centrism: both ingroup pride and outgroup hostility (see also Conover & Feldman, 1981; Miller, Wlezien, & Hildreth, 1991; Stokes 1966b).

The Question of Character Citizens vote in overwhelming numbers for the presidential candidate they like better (e.g., Brody & Page, 1968; Kelley & Mirer, 1974; Stokes, 1966b). This unremarkable observation—one hesitates to call it a "finding"—has led in time to a line of inquiry on candidate-centered voting. The central contention here is that presidential candidates (like the less-celebrated) are judged partly by the sort of person they seem to be.

Indeed, when asked to describe what they like and dislike about a particular president, or an ideal president, or a particular presidential contender, Americans mention aspects of character frequently (Miller & Miller, 1976; Miller, Wattenberg, & Malanchuk, 1986). Such judgments seem to reflect two central traits: *competence* and *integrity*. Presidents are judged by their intelligence, knowledge, and experience on the one hand, and by their honesty, decency, and their ability to set a good moral example on the other (Funk, 1996; Kinder, 1986; Markus, 1982; Miller, 1990; Miller, Wattenberg, & Malanchuk, 1986; Rahn et al., 1990). Defined in these terms, Americans' judgments of the character of particular presidents and presidential candidates form recognizable patterns (Kinder, 1986). Character, finally, appears to be consequential: voters' assessments of competence and integrity substantially affect the choices they make (Markus, 1982; Markus & Converse, 1979; McCurley & Mondak, 1995; Miller, 1990; Miller & Shanks, 1996; Miller, Wattenberg, & Malanchuk, 1986; Mondak, 1995; Rahn et al., 1990) and, in the case of the incumbent president's qualities, the trust that citizens invest in the national government (Citrin & Green, 1986). Established first in the United States, the electoral importance of character has traveled far and wide: migrating into Canadian election studies (Johnston et al., 1992); taking a prominent place in accounts of recent elections in Australia, New Zealand, and Great Britain (Bean, 1993; Bean & Mughan, 1989; Stewart & Clarke, 1992); and perhaps most impressive, cropping up in spatial models of voters and elections (e.g., Enelow, Endersby, & Munger, 1993).

If character is as important as these results suggest, then it becomes valuable to learn how judgments of character are formed and how they might change. One useful approach to this question, pitched at the level of psychological mechanism, is provided by Lodge's development and application of the on-line model of information processing, discussed earlier (Lodge, 1995; for a detailed discussion of processes implicated in judgments of character without regard to politics, see Gilbert, 1998, in this *Handbook*). At a more general level, character assessments are predictable, related in systematic and sensible ways to voters' partisan attachments, opinions on issues, and assessments of government performance (Kinder, 1986b; Miller & Shanks, 1996). This predictability makes the point that when it comes to presidents and those who compete for the office, Americans' judgments of character are permeated by political considerations, and it suggests that such assessments will be slow to change (Brady & Johnston, 1987). A spectacular example to the contrary is provided by Gary Hart's precipitous demise, splendidly analyzed by Stoker (1993). Taking advantage of a national panel survey serendipitously timed to bracket the revelations about Hart's sexual peccadillos, Stoker was able to illuminate the details of Hart's abrupt collapse. Among other things, Stoker shows that evaluations of Hart plummeted more among Republicans than among Democrats; that moral conservatism, which was unimportant in evaluations of Hart before the revelations, became very important afterward (noted earlier, as a case of priming); and that Democrats who were committed to Hart on programmatic grounds were basically unaffected by the scandal. Such dramatic episodes may not come along very often, but when they do, they constitute important opportunities for citizens to rethink their assessments of character.

Explaining Elections Last, we turn from voters to elections, from the mysteries of the individual voter to the mysteries of the electorate. The study of voters and the study of elections are of course related (Campbell et al., 1966). Prominent features of the individual voter set out in the preceding pages are indispensable in understanding elections, and the finest and most influential work on electoral change is rooted in empirically defensible assumptions about individuals (e.g., Kramer, 1971; Rosenstone, 1983). Still, the two projects are not identical and should not be confused. Compared to the examination of voters, the study of elections, one could say, both giveth and taketh away. On the one hand, examining elections imposes an additional burden: to identify variables that not only strongly and recurrently affect vote choice, but also themselves change in notable ways from one election to the next. Party identification may be the most potent predictor of the individual vote, but if it does not vary over time, then it cannot tell us much about electoral change. But the study of electoral change also yields a bonus: aggregation—which, as we saw earlier, turns confusion and random scatter in public opinion at the individual level into informed and systematic opinion when the public as a whole is considered—also works its miracle here.

One approach to the explanation of elections takes as its point of departure the observation that dramatic instances of electoral change need not be accompanied by shifts in the underlying distribution of voters' party attachments. Democrats temporarily abandoned their party to vote for Dwight Eisenhower in 1952, just as Republicans temporarily abandoned their party to register displeasure with Barry Goldwater in 1964. These were *defections*, not *conversions*, important to the outcome in each case, certainly, but falling short of permanent alterations in the balance of party strength (Converse et al., 1961; Converse, Clausen, & Miller, 1965).

From this perspective then, the key to understanding short-term change requires identifying forces that deflect the electorate from its normal, or standing, decision (Campbell, 1966; Shively, 1992). One such force appears to be the emergence of particularly irresistible or repellent candidates. Eisenhower's personal magnetism was decisive in 1952 and 1956; Goldwater's image in 1964 and McGovern's in 1972 were just as decisive, but in the opposite direction. Evidently the dynamics of presidential elections are, as Stokes (1966b) put it, "particularly tied to the emergence of new candidates" (p. 28; see also Popkin et al., 1976).

Electoral outcomes are responsive as well to changes in national conditions—particularly to changes in national economic conditions. Prosperity advantages the incumbent president's party, while economic decline enhances the chances of the opposition (Alesina, Londregan, & Rosenthal, 1993; Erikson, 1989; Markus, 1988; Rosenstone, 1983). A slightly more robust economy in 1960 would have made Richard Nixon president; likewise, a stagnating economy had much to do with Jimmy Carter's troubles in 1980 (Rosenstone, 1983).

Third and last, electoral change can also be attributed to

the introduction of new (or newly framed) disputes over policy. When presidential candidates stray too far from the views of the public on important matters, they are punished at the polls (Rosenstone, 1983). The skirmishing over which issues, framed in what ways, will prevail in a presidential campaign can be seen as one important part of a larger process that Riker (1982) calls the "political mobilization of tastes." In Riker's scheme, new issues arise because leaders are constantly preoccupied with assembling a winning coalition and see in a new issue, or in a new way of framing an issue, a way to achieve it.

In short, deviations from the electorate's normal vote seem motivated primarily by three forces, each completely familiar from research on the individual voter: the emergence of new candidates, changes in national circumstances, and the introduction of new issue divisions. Commanding personalities, national crises, and deeply felt issues may tilt the electorate's preferences in one direction, for a time. But when the candidates pass from the scene, when the national crisis eases, when the issue agenda goes on to something new, the electorate tends to return to a division of the vote that more closely reflects the abiding strength of the rival parties.

Usually. But electoral change is not always a short-lived deviation from a stationary equilibrium point. At special junctures, the equilibrium point itself shifts. The hallmark of such turning points is the critical election, characterized by a "sharp and durable electoral realignment between parties" (Key, 1955, p. 16). Critical elections and the national realignments of party strength that accompany them have come three times since the origins of the modern party system, at intervals of about a generation: first in the 1850s, second near the turn of the twentieth century, and third and most recently during the 1930s, in the depths of the Great Depression. Theorizing about realignments with just three cases in hand might seem hazardous; nevertheless, it has often been attempted.

According to the standard account, realignments are instigated by the emergence of a grave national crisis. In response, the rival political parties travel in opposite directions, offering radically different remedies. These political differences harden; the parties trade accusations and ridicule. Voters, for their part, march to the polls in record numbers, throwing their support to a new party. Whether this moment reflects a temporary alteration or a durable change in the underpinnings of support for the parties depends on the success enjoyed by the governing party in appearing to resolve the crisis (Brady, 1988; Burnham, 1970; Campbell, 1966; Clubb, Flanigan, & Zingale, 1980; Key, 1955; Sundquist, 1983; an excellent guide to the imposing literature on realignment is provided by Shafer, 1991).

If, as Burnham and others argue, there is a generational rhythm to realignments, then the fourth case is long overdue. The tardiness of the next realignment, the formidable complexity of realigning periods when examined closely, and the assertion that partisan attachments are *always* in motion have combined to produce a crisis of confidence in the theory. Some argue that the term should be abandoned altogether (e.g., Carmines & Stimson, 1989; MacKuen, Erikson, & Stimson, 1989; Silbey, 1991).

The critics will probably prevail in this debate, and perhaps they should (though see Nardulli, 1995, for a spirited defense of a reconceived concept of realignment). But in these various discussions about the strengths and shortcomings of the idea of realignment and critical elections, one point has been overlooked. A case of realignment—in all respects exemplary—has recently taken place in the United States: centered in the American South, precipitated by the racial crisis of the late 1950s and early 1960s, which was every bit as gripping as the economic dislocation of the 1930s, and set in motion by the Johnson-Goldwater presidential contest of 1964. As black Americans moved nearly unanimously *into* the Democratic party, southern whites began to move *out*. The political reverberations of this rearrangement of party loyalties are still being registered. The South, solidly Democratic for most of the twentieth century, is now solidly Republican (Black & Black, 1992; Kinder & Sanders, 1996).

A final puzzle for the study of electoral change in America is to understand the emergence and (modest) success of third-party candidates. Such candidates are a regular feature of American presidential elections, though only occasionally do they make a real splash: George Wallace in 1968, John Anderson in 1980, and most notably, Ross Perot in 1992, are recent cases in point. What prompts Americans to abandon their normal attachments and give their support to a third party?

The enormous political variety represented by third parties would seem to frustrate a general answer. After all, can Theodore Roosevelt, Strom Thurmond, and Norman Thomas really be shoehorned into the same theory? According to Rosenstone, Behr, and Lazarus (1984), they can. In their analysis, third-party candidates of whatever political persuasion draw for their support on those Americans who have grown disenchanted with the major parties. George Wallace and John Anderson could scarcely be more different. Yet their supporters shared motivations in common: they were unhappy with the major parties and distressed at their nominees. "Major party failure is the primary force motivating third party voting in America" (Rosenstone, Behr, & Lazarus, 1984, p. 181).

But what about Perot in 1992? Just like Wallace and Anderson before him, Perot was the beneficiary of a particular kind of political disenchantment, one rooted in the sense that the Democratic and Republican parties had failed, that the major parties were part of the problem (Rosenstone, Behr, & Lazarus, 1996). Thus Perot seems to be merely the latest installment of the standard story—

except, Perot did so much better. Perot won nearly 20 percent of the vote in 1992, nearly tripling John Anderson's showing in 1980. In fact, Perot did better than any third-party candidate since 1912, when Teddy Roosevelt ran on the Bull Moose ticket.

Why did Perot do so well? Why, as Rosenstone, Behr, and Lazarus (1996) put the question, did Perot do so much better than Anderson? Not because allegiance to the major parties was plummeting—it wasn't. Not because Americans were more disgruntled with the major party candidates—they weren't. Not out of a sense of alienation from politics and institutions, for alienation is generally unrelated to third-party support and in any case was falling in 1992 compared to 1980 (Alvarez & Nagler, 1995; Rosenstone, Behr, & Lazarus, 1996; Zaller & Hunt, 1994, 1995). Not because Perot dazzled Americans with his personal appeal and charm—John Anderson was evaluated more favorably in 1980 than Perot was in 1992. And not because the Perot organization successfully mobilized new voters into the electoral system—for it seemed not to (Alvarez & Nagler, 1995; Rosenstone, Hansen, Freedman, & Grabarek, 1993). Instead, the key to Perot's success was (not to put too fine a point on it) cash. Wads and wads of cash. Perot outspent both Clinton and Bush in 1992, shelling out some 73 million dollars, nearly all of it drawn against his own personal fortune. And he spent it well: building and maintaining a national and professional campaign organization; ensuring that he would be on the ballot on all fifty states (and the District of Columbia); and mounting a memorable advertising campaign, spending 45 million dollars on television alone (Zaller & Hunt, 1994, 1995). Perot succeeded so well because his pockets were so deep—another and final reminder that campaigns (and money) matter.

VI. CONCLUSION

As always, the last word belongs to the faithful reader—should there be any, this deep into a long chapter. But *my* last word is this: the ongoing conversation between social psychology and political science is very much alive and well. Critiques of mainstream social psychology, delivered most forcefully by Europeans like Tajfel, and the crisis of confidence that such critiques both reflected and exacerbated, are for the most part conspicuous by their absence here. The study of public opinion is far from perfect, but there is a way in which it can be read as a success story for social psychology, a place where social psychology remained true to its original commitment to take seriously both the individual *and* society. Asch (1987) expressed this original commitment well:

> Social psychology needs an understanding of the surroundings in which people act if it is to study adequately how they act in surroundings. From the standpoint of psychology the regularities of society are a map or skeleton of the social environment necessary as a starting point of investigation of the individuals who are the actual centers and the points at which social forces intersect. (p. 37)

Without pretending that contemporary students of public opinion have spent a lot of time poring over Asch's textbook, there is nevertheless a lot of Asch in public opinion studies these days—and we should be grateful for it. An adequate comprehension of public opinion requires a big-minded social psychology, of the sort that Converse (1986) had in mind when he wrote of social psychology's obligations that it "must cope with social structure, with political and economic institutions, with cultural values, and with historical sequencing" (p. 58; see also Taylor, 1998, in this *Handbook*).

Chapters of this sort often close with projections for the future, brave predictions about the next big turn in scholarship. Perhaps the resurgence of interest in emotion will continue to gather strength? Perhaps more will be heard about rational choice? Perhaps work will take off on the reconciliation of individual and aggregate understandings of public opinion? I confess to having no idea where the conversation is likely to turn, and maybe that's just fine. Unpredictability has its charms. McGuire (1993) has aptly characterized the relationship between psychology and political science as "lively and long-lasting as interdisciplinary affairs go, its longevity fostered by the protean nature of the collaboration, with frequent shiftings of its popular topics, methods, and theories" (p. 32). Yes indeed, and long may it continue.

NOTES

1. Over the last two decades, the study of public opinion has been marked by contributions from psychology *and* from economics. On the understanding that the audience for this essay is made up primarily of those whose sympathies run to psychology rather than economics, and in light of restrictions of space, I must, for the most part, set these important contributions from economics aside (see, for example, Chong, 1991; Downs, 1957; Hardin, 1995; Olson, 1965).
2. I am grateful to John Zaller for concentrating my attention on this point.
3. The study of representation—the connection between public aspirations and interests on the one hand, and the actions of government on the other—is just as important as Key and Converse say for political science, but it is far less central here, where public opinion is treated as a subject for social psychological analysis. For an introduction to the empirical literature on representation, see Bartels,

1991; Converse and Pierce, 1986; Jackson and King, 1989; Miller and Stokes, 1963; Stimson, MacKuen, and Erikson, 1995; Verba and Nie, 1972; and Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, 1995.

4. Indeed, voters are so ignorant of House elections that sizable numbers are unable to recollect their own votes (Wright, 1993).
5. I am grateful again to John Zaller for this point (acknowledging that I may have mangled it in the writing).
6. *Almost* always, that is: Sullivan, Piereson, and Marcus (1982) find that political tolerance has little to do with education. This is an important result—demoralizing, in fact, for liberal theorists like Mill, who argue that education produces a more competent and responsible public. But the failure of Sullivan, Piereson, and Marcus to find a positive association between education and tolerance may be due to their procedure, which requires citizens to contemplate not just disagreeable groups but *very* disagreeable groups. The well-educated may be more prepared than the less well-educated to grant protection to run-of-the-mill objectionable speech and assembly, but not to extremists who practice intolerance themselves (Bobo & Licari, 1989).
7. This exception—that self-interest *is* implicated in priority if not in preference—may be related to a second, taken up later in the chapter: namely, that self-interest also appears to play a visible role in political action.
8. Generalized hostility toward all manner of outgroups could also be a manifestation of what Dawkins called the "selfish gene" (1976). For an analysis of the implications of evolutionary theory for the rise and management of ethnocentric conflict, see Ross, 1991.
9. In selecting these three, I obviously ignore other possibilities: most notably, militarism, which addresses the extent to which the United States should be prepared to use force in pursuit of its national interests (Bartels, 1994; Hurwitz & Peffley, 1987a, 1987b; Hurwitz, Peffley, & Seligson, 1993; Peffley & Hurwitz, 1992), and moral traditionalism, which seems centrally implicated in a variety of cultural conflicts (Stoker, in press-a). I also pass over deep cultural beliefs or "dominant ideologies," where there is no real disagreement and no public discussion (Abercrombie, Hill, & Turner, 1980).
10. An entirely separate matter concerns the methodological purity and empirical success of rational choice applications. For a blistering assessment, see Green and Shapiro's *Pathologies of Rational Choice Theory* (1994). Among those firing back are Fiorina (1995) and Lohmann (1995).
11. That money matters at all is important, given that inequalities of income and wealth in the United States are high and growing (Danziger & Gottschalk, 1995).
12. The various findings on organizational involvement and participation can be interpreted from an entirely different angle. Perhaps organizations enhance participation not because they give citizens opportunities to develop their skills, but because they serve as convenient sites for political mobilization (see, for example, Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993). We will run into this idea again, a bit later.
13. For an interesting theoretical treatment, from the rational-choice perspective, of the incendiary merging of self- and group interest, see Hardin, 1995.
14. Public officials may be evaluated not only on the positions they take on public policy but on how they *explain* their positions (McGraw, Best, & Timpone, 1995).

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