PSCI4120 Public Opinion and Participation
Elected Leaders

Tetsuya Matsubayashi

University of North Texas

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Representational Linkages

Impact of Public Opinion

Various Factors → Public Opinion → Elected Leaders → Policy Outcomes
Five Models of Representation

- **The rational-activist model**: voters use elections as a policy expression: retrospective voting and issue voting.

- **The sharing model**: representation is achieved because politicians are drawn from the same culture as their constituents.

- **The parties model**: Republican and Democratic politicians diverge ideologically to provide the convenient cue of party affiliation, allowing voters to vote rationally using their habit of party identification.

- **The delegate model**: politicians are sufficiently fearful of public opinion that they follow public opinion in their policies in advance of the next election.

- **The interest group model**: politicians respond to public opinion when they respond to articulated interest group opinion.
How different are political leaders from the general public?
The simplest form of linkage is the simple sharing of common opinions by followers and leaders.
Members in legislatures are less representative than a random sample.
Growing up in a politically active family is a major cause of interest in a career in politics.
There is an upper-status bias to the political leadership opportunity.
The occupations of the members of Congress are predominantly professional or managerial.
### The status bias in the Senate and the House (1993)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>U.S. Senate</th>
<th>U.S. House</th>
<th>U.S. Labor Force</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager (business)</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lawyer</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalist</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>&lt;0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All others</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Do political leaders and the general public share opinions?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Public</th>
<th>U.S. House Members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Defense: In favor of decreasing money for national defense</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SALT: In favor of SALT II</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health insurance: In favor of “national health insurance fully paid by the government”</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tax cut: Opposed to a “large federal income tax cut”</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abortion: In favor of “government paying for abortions for the poor”</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Electoral politics works to weed out political candidates whose views are incongruent with public opinion.
The political parties model suggests that party labels clarify the political choices available to voters.

Democratic politicians earn reputations as liberals and Republicans earn reputations as conservatives.

These stereotypes then provide useful cues regarding what Democrats and Republicans will do once in office.

Instead of monitoring candidates’ behavior, the voter need only learn the differences between the parties and use party labels as a cue to rational voting.
Partisanship and Ideology of State Electorates, 2000
Ideology and Party Leaders

- Among political activists and politicians, ideology is an even stronger motivation force.
- When a strong ideology motivation spurts an individual to political activism, the individual usually develops an affinity for the ideologically appropriate party.
- As the leadership structures of the political parties have become more internally democratic, the potential for greater policy choice between the parties is created.
We limit our attentions to survey respondents who recognize that the Democrats are to the left of the Republicans.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R left of both parties</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R in between both parties</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R right of both parties</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Three-quarters of those who correctly order the parties ideologically see themselves as between the Democrats on their left and the Republicans on their right.
Two Ideological Distributions

In the general election

(A) Both parties near the center

(B) The Republicans veer to the right

In the primary:

(A) Democratic Primaries

(B) Republican Primaries
Ideally, from the standpoint of the political parties model, the electorally dominant party not only would articulate a program that achieves voter approval but would also be in a position to enact that program once in power.

Do Democratic legislators vote for liberal policies, while Republicans vote for conservative policies?

Party affiliation is the single best predictor of roll-call voting in Congress.

Let’s look at the party differences in the roll-call liberalism in the U.S. House and the Senate in 2002.

The roll-call liberalism is based on the ADA (Americans for Democratic Action) index.
Party Voting in Legislatures

![Bar charts showing voting patterns of different groups in legislatures.](image-url)
A congressional voter has an easy decision rule for casting a partisan ballot: To help elect the most conservative candidate, vote Republican; to help elect the most liberal candidate, vote Democratic.

When the public desires a more conservative or liberal Congress, it can simply elect more Republicans or Democrats accordingly.

The over-time variation in the numbers of Republicans and Democrats in Congress is partially due to ideological shifts by the public.

The mechanism of choice is available for the public to create a policy shift in Congress, in state legislatures and other political areas.

The moderate voter can achieve ideological satisfaction by ticket-splitting.
Leadership Responsiveness to Public Opinion

- When politicians respond to public opinion, rather than personal taste, they play the role of the people’s delegate or agent.
- Officeholders are driven by two conflicting motivations: to win elections and to make a good policy (as they see it).
- Re-election chances depend on how well officeholders represent constituency opinion.
- Citizen attention is highly variable. Thus, politicians try to follow public opinion but are also guided by their personal policy preferences.
Leadership Responsiveness to Public Opinion

- Most politicians try to continue in office as long as possible.
- Staying elected is the dominant congressional motivation.
- Political leaders with the strongest policy motivations tend to feel the most electoral pressure to satisfy public opinion.
- The classic question is whether the legislator should serve constituency interests as the legislator thinks best or should the legislator heed public opinion and follow the wishes of the constituency.
Leadership Responsiveness to Public Opinion

- Politicians follow district preferences, at least in terms of broad ideological outline.
- Each party’s most ideologically extreme members represent districts that voted one-sidedly for their party’s candidate for president.
Leadership Responsiveness to Public Opinion

![Graph showing leadership responsiveness to public opinion]

Solid Dots = Democrats
Hollow Dots = Republicans

% Liberal Roll Call Voting (ADA Index)

District Pres. Vote (% Gore)
Electoral Timing: the Delegate Model

- Elite responsiveness to the mass preference is conditional on electoral timing.

- Democratic senators, whose personal beliefs are generally more liberal than those of their statewide constituencies, would act less liberal as their term progresses, but then return to more liberal positions once reelected.

- For presidents in their first term, the closer to the election, the more their stands are consistent with public opinion. If they succeed to a second term and thus become ineligible for reelection, the election cycle no longer governs a president’s behavior.

- In sum, politicians move in the direction of their constituents when election day approaches. But if they plan to retire or become ineligible for reelection, they can be away from their constituency.
Do Elected Leaders Need to Follow Public Opinion?

- Incumbent officeholders do not lose reelection bids at a rate that stimulates electoral anxiety.
- Low political knowledge indicates that people do not monitor legislator’s behavior.
- The impacts of term limits?
Interest Groups and Democratic Representation

- Politicians pay extra attention to group activity due to the power of numbers and resources.
- Many people believe that the group process results in some opinion carrying more weight than others, but evidence is inconclusive.
How influential is public opinion in the United States?

Count the number of major liberal laws minus the number of major conservative laws for each Congress.

When public opinion turns more liberal or conservative (and these movements of mood are small in magnitude), the index of national policy appears to follow.

The most liberal states enact the most liberal policies, and the most conservative states enact the most conservative policies.
Public Opinion and Policy Liberalism over Time
Whose voices are more likely to be heard?

Informed opinions are likely to have disproportionate influence, which of course means that many are underrepresented.

Politicians can educate the public rather than the public influencing the politicians.