PSCI4120 Public Opinion and Participation
Macro-level Opinion

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Try to understand a general picture of people’s preferences on politics

How has public opinion changed over years?

Look at the frequencies of opinion for the sample over time

Temporal changes

- Economic and welfare issues
- Social issues
- International issues
- Ideology
- Party identification
- President’s approval rating
The domestic services provided by the government to its citizens are popular.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spending Should</th>
<th>Increase</th>
<th>Stay the Same</th>
<th>Decrease</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Security</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving and protecting health</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public schools</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welfare programs</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor people</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protecting the environment</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>War on terrorism</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign aid</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child care</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stop illegal immigration</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Opinions on Federal Social Welfare Programs, 2004

- Ideologically conservative, but operationally liberal.
- Most people generally are supportive of liberal spending for specific social welfare programs
- A lack of support for increased spending on general welfare programs is explained by two concepts: the “deserving poor” and the “shiftless poor.”
People feel that the government should help those who cannot help themselves – the deserving poor.

Many Americans see people on welfare as able but unwilling to work and thus meriting little sympathy – the shiftless poor.

Race, regretfully, is an important part of the explanation for low support for general welfare programs.

Those whites who believe (mistakenly) that most welfare recipients are black are also those who are most opposed to welfare.

This mechanism is called racialization of welfare issues.
Private versus Government Health Insurance

![Graph showing the percent of public with government and private health insurance over time from 1972 to 2004. The graph indicates that government health insurance has generally been more prevalent than private health insurance, with a significant peak in government coverage around 1992.](image-url)
In the past, many whites showed racial stereotypes.
By 1994, according to a Harris survey, only 12 percent of whites agreed with the stereotype that blacks have less native intelligence than other races.
Whites have become much more liberal on questions concerning the ideals of the civil rights movement.
Mixed attitudes on the role of government for racial equality.
White Support of Integrated Schools

- Black and white children should attend the same school (% agree)
- White people have a right to keep blacks out of their neighborhood (% disagree)
- Government should see to it that schools are integrated (% agree)
- Favor busing for integration (% favor)

Year:
- 1955
- 1960
- 1965
- 1970
- 1975
- 1980
- 1985
- 1990
- 1995
- 2000

Percentage:
- 0
- 10
- 20
- 30
- 40
- 50
- 60
- 70
- 80
- 90
- 100
“Some people say that because of past discrimination, blacks should be given preference in hiring and promotion. Others say that such preference in hiring and promotion is wrong because it discriminates against whites. What about your opinion – are you for or against preferential hiring for blacks?” (2004)

For 12%, Against 82%, Unsure 4%

Why is the level of support so low?

“New racism” explanation: racial hostility toward African Americans is expressed by a glorification of traditional values such as the work ethics and individualism, in which blacks and some other minorities are believed to be deficient.

Internationalism and Isolationalism

- Take an active part in world affairs
- Stay out of world affairs

Year:
- 1945
- 1950
- 1960
- 1970
- 1980
- 1990
- 2000
- 2005

Percentage:
- 0
- 10
- 20
- 30
- 40
- 50
- 60
- 70
- 80
- 90
Defense Spending

Say United States spends “too little” on defense
On social issues, the public is generally thought to be rather conservative

- Increase in support for gay rights and equality for women
- Mixed support for abortion
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opinión Distribution on Social Issues, 2004</th>
<th>Liberal</th>
<th>Conservative</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Marijuana</strong></td>
<td>Do you think marijuana should be made legal or not?</td>
<td>36 (yes)</td>
<td>64 (no)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gay rights</strong></td>
<td>Should there be laws to protect homosexuals against job discrimination?</td>
<td>75 (yes)</td>
<td>25 (no)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pornography</strong></td>
<td>Should there be laws against the distribution of pornography?</td>
<td>38 (no)</td>
<td>64 (yes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex education</strong></td>
<td>Do you favor sex education in the public schools?</td>
<td>90 (yes)</td>
<td>10 (no)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Prayer in schools</strong></td>
<td>Should prayer be permitted in public schools?</td>
<td>29 (no)</td>
<td>69 (yes)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Law and Order

Percentage

Violent Crime Rate

Say courts not harsh enough on criminals

Support death penalty

Rate of violent crimes

Year


0 10 25 50 75 100

0 250 500 750 1000
Equality for Women

Percentage Who Would Vote for a Qualified Woman for President

Year
Percent Support
0 20 40 60 80 100
Circumstances are crucial for the public’s willingness to support abortion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Traumatic Abortion</th>
<th>Elective Abortion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Defective fetus</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>Married, does not want children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Danger</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>Cannot afford children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rape/incest</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>Does not want to marry</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When the public was asked in 2005 if the Roe decision should be overturned, 65 percent said “no” compared with 29 percent who wanted the ruling overturned.
General Ideological Movement

- Does the public regularly undergo changes in its “ideological mood”
- Monitor changes in the degree to which people call themselves liberals or conservatives → no significant change
- Monitor changes by carefully estimating movement by combining responses to multiple survey items containing left-right political content → significant changes!
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Percent Liberal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I ideological lentification of the U.S. Public, 1976–2004

![Chart showing ideological identification of the U.S. Public, 1976–2004](chart.png)
The Public Policy Mood, 1952–2004

Year
Liberals
45 50 55 60 65 70 75
Individual-level party identification is quite stable over time.

As parties’ policy images change in fundamental ways, the electorate responds with surprisingly large shifts in party identification.

Aggregate-level partisanship moves in one-sided fashion in response to events.

“Macropartisanship”

Movement of party identification bears no resemblance to the movement of ideological mood.
Macropartisanship
Presidential Approval

![Graph showing approval ratings for various presidents from 1945 to 2001. The x-axis represents years from 1945 to 2001, and the y-axis represents the percentage of approval. The presidents listed include Truman, Eisenhower, JFK, Johnson, Nixon, Ford, Carter, Reagan, Bush, and Clinton.]
What Moves Presidential Approval?

- The honeymoon
- Rally-round-the-flag effect: major foreign policy events dramatically increase support for the presidents in the short term.
- Economy: The presidents’ approval rating rises and falls with the state of the economy.