

Erikson/Tedin: Ch. 4 – *Macrolevel Opinion: The Flow of Political Sentiment*

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- I. Trends in policy opinions – no general pattern of change common to all issue areas; each issue area has somewhat unique patterns of change
- A. Social welfare issues [Table 4.1, p. 96] public often ahead of congressional action & generally operationally liberal although subjective self-identification is more conservative
    - 1. Health care [Figure 4.1, p. 98] conflict over public vs. private insurance options
    - 2. Taxes: generally anti-tax in the abstract, but typically recognize that we cannot have it both ways – more spending & lower taxes
  - B. Civil rights [Figure 4.2, p. 101] generally more supportive of abstract goals than specific government policies to guarantee equality
    - 1. Causes:
      - a. Overt racism: plain, unvarnished, direct, conscious, & blatant racism
      - b. Symbolic racism: a concealed but intentional racism evidenced by loud denials of discriminatory intentions combined with a disingenuous fixation on the perceived inadequacies of other races while ignoring or denying the existence of improper behavior by members of one's own race
      - c. Systemic racism: indirect & unintentional discrimination due to otherwise legitimate decision criteria and institutional arrangements (e.g., neighborhood schools & seniority systems in employment)
    - 2. Remedies:
      - a. Voluntary action
      - b. Government policies
        - (1) Anti-discrimination (outlawing direct & intentional forms of discrimination) generally higher support
        - (2) Affirmative action (countering indirect & unintentional forms of discrimination) widespread opposition among whites
  - C. Foreign policy: greater public-opinion instability than on domestic issue opinions because less knowledge & more sudden & dramatic events
    - 1. Internationalism v. isolationism [Figure 4.3, p. 105] major change with: 1) WWII & Cold War and 2) Vietnam War
    - 2. Defense spending [Figure 4.4, p. 106] large changes in support with changing perceptions of foreign threats
    - 3. Russia and China mass attitudes generally follow the lead of U.S. foreign policy
  - D. Social issues [Table 4.2, p. 108] conservative consensus on a few issues, but generally liberal on many others
    - 1. Marijuana: conservative consensus
    - 2. Law and order [Figure 4.5, p. 109] mass conservative attitudes strongly influenced by distorted media coverage
    - 3. Gay rights: increasing support on some issues
    - 4. Pornography: access to adults vs. minors
    - 5. Government-sponsored school religious devotionals: moment of silence vs. active devotionals
    - 6. Sex education in public schools: strong support
    - 7. Women's role in society & politics: major changes in mass attitudes & behaviors [Figure 4.6, p. 111]
    - 8. Abortion: consensus on "traumatic" and conflict on "elective" abortions; pro-life activists are more politically vocal
- II. General ideological movement
- A. Self-identification
    - 1. Trends
      - a. 1930s - 1960s: even division between liberals & conservatives
      - b. 1960s: conservative shift in self-labeling, but not in policy preferences
      - c. 1970s to present: [Figure 4.7, p. 111] moderate > conservative > liberal
    - 2. Explanations
      - a. Shifts in issue salience
        - (1) Rise of new social issues (public order, morality, and race relations)
        - (2) Decline of New Deal issues
      - b. Success of liberal legislative agenda (New Deal, Fair Deal, New Frontier, Great Society)
  - B. Issue position
    - 1. Tom Smith conclusion: gradual shift to liberal by mid-1970s
    - 2. James Stimson conclusion: [Figure 4.8, p. 106 and update at <http://www.unc.edu/~jstimson/>] oscillations in "moods"
      - a. 1950s to early 1960s: more liberal
      - b. Mid-1960s thru 1970s: less liberal
      - c. 1980s: more liberal
      - d. 1990s to present: less liberal
- III. General partisan movement
- A. Partisan realignments
    - 1. Types
      - a. Critical (sudden)
      - b. Secular (gradual)
    - 2. Examples: 1788, 1824, 1860, 1896, 1932, 1968 (dealignment), 2004?
  - B. Partisan dealignment [Figure 4.9, p. 117 & update at: <http://www.gallup.com/poll/151943/Record-High-Americans-Identify-Independents.aspx>]
    - 1. Causes
    - 2. Consequences

3. Examples: 1968 to present
- C. Relationship between change in party identification and change in ideological identification weak – stronger relationship to consumer expectations about national economy

#### IV. Presidential approval

- A. Standard measure: Gallup question – approve/disapprove/no opinion on President’s performance
- B. Trends Figures 4.10 & 4.11, p. 119
  1. Overall: decline (usually from 70% to 40%)
  2. Variations in regression lines
    - a. Upward slopes:
      - (1) Roosevelt (50-75%; 1937-43 only)
      - (2) Reagan (50-55%, before Iran-Contra criminal indictments in 1988)
      - (3) Clinton (45-65%; before Lewinski scandal and impeachment)
      - (4) GW Bush: post-9/11/01
    - b. Shallow declines: less than 10%
      - (1) Eisenhower (70-60%)
      - (2) Kennedy (80-70; 1961-63 only)
      - (3) Ford (50-45%; 1974-76 only)
    - c. Moderate declines: 20-30%
      - (1) Carter (60-30%)
      - (2) Obama (65-44%) [update at: <http://www.gallup.com/poll/113980/Gallup-Daily-Obama-Job-Approval.aspx> ]
    - d. Steepest declines: 30-40%
      - (1) Truman (60-20%)
      - (2) Johnson (80-35%)
      - (3) Nixon (70-30%; 1969-74 only)
      - (4) Bush (86-34%) Figure 4.11, p. 119
  3. Variations in approval lines
    - a. All rated above 50% at some time (usually early)
    - b. All but Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Clinton fell below 50% at some time
    - c. Only three fell below 30% for more than one poll
      - (1) Truman
      - (2) Nixon
      - (3) Carter
- C. Significance
  1. Measure of political support
  2. Component of presidential power
  3. Measure of reelection prospects
- D. Causes
  1. The honeymoon – initial aura of goodwill that fades
    - a. Upset expectations (Mueller) defection of disillusioned supporters
    - b. Natural equilibrium at about 50% (Kernell & Brody) arrived at by 2<sup>nd</sup> year after unnatural hiatus from criticism passes
  2. Rally-'round-the-flag
    - a. Causes: salient foreign policy events that give an initial positive boost
      - (1) Hopes: summits/treaties/peace efforts
      - (2) Fears: unexpected foreign crises and wars
    - b. Consequences: frequently a negative slide afterward
      - (1) Unfulfilled hopes
      - (2) Blame for costs of military operations
      - (3) Blame for “losing the peace”
  3. The economy
    - a. Measures
      - (1) Recession
      - (2) Inflation
      - (3) Mal-distribution of economic rewards
    - b. Linkages
      - (1) Personal pocketbook -- psychotropic responses – less important
      - (2) General economy -- sociotropic responses (Kinder & Kiewiet) – more important because motive is still largely personal
  4. Presidential approval and presidential success

#### V. Conclusion: what moves public opinion?

- A. Responses to events
- B. Generational change (almost 50% of electorate every 20 years) – includes changes in education, urbanization, mass media