

WHAT NATURE AND ORIGINS LEAVES OUT

ABSTRACT: The *Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion* synthesizes leading studies of public opinion from the late 1980s in a top-down model of opinion formation and change. The core feature of this synthesis, the Receive-Accept-Sample (RAS) model, remains sound, but the book overstates the importance of the form of public opinion that it explains—elite-induced survey statements of issue positions—and understates the force of opinions that elites cannot easily shape and that citizens may not be able to articulate in response to survey prompts. Moreover, there are major problems in the book’s *Parable of Purple Land*. What, then, becomes of the top-down view of elite-mass interaction outlined in *Nature and Origins*? To answer this question, I begin by characterizing the kinds of opinions *Nature and Origins* leaves out: Converse’s “group interest” voters, “nature of the times” voters, and issue publics. I then add a model of political parties as policy-motivated organizers of Converse’s voter types. The upshot is an account of elite/mass interactions that is still largely top-down and that has roles for both the elite-led attitudes that the RAS model explains and the less conventional and harder-to-shape attitudes that it overlooks.

John Zaller, zaller@ucla.edu, Department of Political Science, University of California at Los Angeles, 4289 Bunche Hall, Box 951472, Los Angeles, CA 90095. I am grateful to the contributors to this volume—Larry Bartels, Stanley Feldman, Paul Goren, Jennifer Hochschild, Leonie Huddy, Cindy Kam, and George Marcus—for essays that helped me and I am sure helped others to better understand my 1992 book. I am also grateful to Kathy Bawn, Jack Citrin, Hans Noel, Russ Neuman, Markus Prior, Gaurav Sood, and Laura Stoker for comments on drafts of this essay. I am especially grateful to Larry Bartels and Michael Tesler, whose critical comments and suggestions importantly shaped the final product. Finally, I thank Jeffrey Friedman, whose patience with the author from hell has been beyond belief. For the errors of omission and commission that remain, I alone am responsible.

The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion (Cambridge University Press, 1992) is mainly an organizational achievement. Its key ideas—source effects in persuasion, top-of-the-head attitudes, elite creation of ideology, effects of predispositions on opinion, and two-step model of attitude change—came from studies that were a decade or more old: Converse 1962 and 1964, Gamson and Modigliani 1966, McGuire 1968, Mueller 1973, Achen 1975, Taylor and Fiske 1978, and Schuman and Presser 1981. But the ideas resided in different subliterations that often failed to communicate. The book's Receive-Accept-Sample (RAS) model pulled everything into a tidy package. Its Parable of Purple Land described the elite origins of the ideas that diffuse via the RAS model. The result was a start-to-finish, top-down Big Picture of the dynamics of public opinion in the United States.

After 20 years of exposure to new political events and a new generation of scholarship, how does that Big Picture look today?

Mixed. On the one hand, evidence of influence of political leaders on public opinion has never been stronger. The most persuasive evidence comes from Adam Berinsky's *In Time of War* (2009) and Gabriel Lenz's *Follow the Leader?* (2012). But elite influence was never in doubt. The book makes many specific claims about the dynamics of elite influence and about the nature of the attitudes that elites shape. The contributors to this symposium raise problems for some of these claims, as does other published research. Some scholarship outwardly friendly to *Nature and Origins* does it harm. And I have second thoughts about parts of the argument.

The upshot is that the Big Picture of public opinion from *Nature and Origins* is more than a bit frayed around the edges. The nut of my argument in this essay, however, is that the core RAS model, if properly applied, still works well, while much of the material outside the model's technical core needs restatement.

At the top of the list of claims that need restatement is the parable of Purple Land. This is an idea that has not stood the test of time. As Bartels's (2013a) contribution to this symposium makes clear, science-minded elites are not the principal initiators of new partisan policies; interest groups, political intellectuals, and perhaps even ambitious politicians are more important actors (Bawn et al. 2012; Karol 2009; Layman et al. 2010; Noel 2011). The dynamics of public-opinion formation may still be top-down, but science-minded elites are not the top.

The new scholarship that does most to undermine the importance of *Nature and Origins* is, ironically, Lenz's. In support of the RAS model, he

provides what is perhaps the most ironclad evidence to date that presidents and presidential candidates can induce rank-and-file partisans to follow their lead on major issues. But he also finds that partisans give little weight to their leadership-induced opinions when it comes time to make political choices. They parrot the party line, but do not vote it. For *Nature and Origins*, which is all about shaped opinion, this finding raises big questions: Do the opinions shaped by elite leadership have political consequences? Or are they just lip service to party norms?

An especially important problem for *Nature and Origins* on its twentieth anniversary is that, as I now believe, the book ignores and even somewhat obscures a large part of its subject: the part of public opinion that is not anchored in ideology and is little influenced by elites. This is not a small omission in a book called *Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*. The book is lucky to have lived down its title. *Nature and Origins of Ideological Opinion* would have been more apt. Ideology is an important form of public opinion, but scarcely the totality of public opinion.

Despite its near non-status in *Nature and Origins*, public opinion that has not been shaped by elites has played an important role in some of the most significant aspects of American political history: one need only mention as examples racism, fear of communism, and hatred of taxes. Political leaders can sometimes change these attitudes, but often they choose not to try, even when they would like to. The limits of elite capacity to shape mass opinion are not sufficiently acknowledged in *Nature and Origins*.

Some of the opinions that elites cannot easily shape are what V. O. Key, Jr. (1961) called latent opinions. These are opinions that may not be visible in polls, but are likely to emerge and become important at some later point. For example, President John F. Kennedy believed in 1963 that voters would turn him out of office if he permitted South Vietnam to fall to communism; contemporary polls did not disclose so deep a commitment to Vietnam, but Kennedy nonetheless acted as if the opinion were real, and it is quite possible that he was right (Zaller 1998). More often than is allowed in *Nature and Origins*, politicians follow latent opinion rather than lead it. This in turn implies a critical caveat to the book's central argument: The partisan cues that shape opinion reflect judgments about what the public is likely to want and are therefore endogenous. Endogenous cues may still affect public opinion through the Receive-Accept-Sample model, but they are a weaker force than theorized in the book.

Why does it matter that these phenomena—endogenous source effects; opinions that cannot easily be changed; partisan opinions that are repeated in surveys but not acted upon in elections; other opinions that are poorly captured in polls but may be acted upon—have been left out of *Nature and Origins*?

It matters because *Nature and Origins* purports to explain politically important opinion. If there are important opinions that cannot be explained by the RAS model, and if the opinions that are important are often not the opinions that the RAS model does explain, it undermines the importance of the book. The more important the left-out phenomena—and I believe they are quite important—the greater the damage. Because, moreover, the book is mainly a synthesis of the leading work in the public-opinion field, these phenomena tend to undermine other important studies as well.

In this essay I would like to do more than simply catalogue damage. I will offer an updated Big Picture of the dynamics of public opinion, one in which the RAS model plays a role, and in which phenomena neglected in the 1992 book get their due.

Though this may seem an ambitious goal, two big intellectual moves get us most of the way there. The first move is to recognize forms of politically relevant opinion other than the standard opinion statement—“I favor X”—that predominate in the study of public opinion. We can find a typology of such forms in Philip E. Converse’s “Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics” (1964). This study is best known for arguing that most Americans are not ideological, and that many do not have meaningful attitudes on major issues. But Converse also makes strong claims about how Americans *do* conceptualize politics: Many think in terms of groups and group interests; others judge politics in terms of the “nature of the times,” which in modern parlance is called pocketbook evaluation; and some form “issue publics,” whereby mostly non-overlapping groups of Americans develop strong opinions about narrow issues.

Without reifying Converse’s particular categories, I wish to focus on the following big takeaway from his essay: Some citizens relate to politics in terms of the major issues of the day, but many and probably most do not. Narrow issue concerns, group-related evaluations, and pocketbook evaluations are among the means by which the latter relate to politics.

The second move is to broaden the standard conception of parties. In most research, a party is a team of politicians who care above all about winning office. Purple Land brought science-minded elites onto the

party teams to suggest good policy. But we need to go further by bringing in what Kathleen Bawn, Martin Cohen, David Karol, Seth Masket, Hans Noel and Zaller (2012) call policy demanders—interest groups and activists who are devoted to particular issues and form nominating coalitions (parties) in order to get office holders committed to these issues. If there is one thing that my “political education” over the last 20 years has taught me, it is that one cannot tell a sensible story about public opinion and democracy in the United States without ascribing a central role to interest group and activist policy demanders.

From these two anchors, the argument proceeds straightforwardly: Parties offer policies that are acceptable to their policy-demanding activists and calculated to appeal to particular voting blocs. There is no expectation that parties, as creatures of policy-demanding nominating coalitions, will offer policies simply because voters want them. Nor does the median voter’s position on an hypothesized left–right dimension play a significant role. Majorities obtained through any means consistent with the agendas of policy demanders are what parties care about.

Voters, for their part, may join coalitions on the basis of ideology or some broad political disposition, as emphasized in most research. But their motives may also be narrower—a single issue, a group identity, animus toward a group represented by the other party, or a symbolic attitude. Converse’s “ideologues” and “group interest” voters might have a preferred party, leaving “nature of the times” voters as potentially pivotal. There is no expectation that all voters care about and seek to hold politicians accountable on the basis of all issues receiving public discussion.

The role of the RAS model in this system continues as specified in *Nature and Origins*: It describes—still in arguably causal terms—the top-down process by which voters with relatively narrow concerns adapt to the needs of coalitional politics. But more party joiners may be led to give lip service to their party’s agenda than to care about it. The ideologically consistent opinions that result from party leadership are the range of policies partisan voters are willing to accept—and perhaps the range of opposition arguments they are prepared to resist—in exchange for getting allies on the policies they most care about. As such, these opinions may create the appearance of greater ideological motivation than actually exists. Ideologically organized opinions may be more than non-attitudes, but less than real demands.

Let me here enter a caveat that should be obvious: I cannot offer anything like strong evidence for the Big Picture of public opinion and democracy just described. But I am by no means unconcerned about evidence. My motive, after all, is that the Big Picture in *Nature and Origins* is inconsistent with important evidence; my hope is that the replacement view will do better.

I should also say that I have not been able in this essay to respond to all the criticisms that have been made against *Nature and Origins*. Partly this is due to time constraints, and partly due to the wish to organize my discussion on lines other than “Zaller responds to critics.” But I do respond to the criticisms that I am aware of and believe to be most important. For the rest, this essay has an online appendix¹ that responds to several papers that I have not mentioned here. If, upon examining this appendix, you feel something important has been left out, please contact me and I will update it.

This essay has six sections. The first, focusing on the incidence of ideological opinion in the public as a whole, restates the central argument in *Nature and Origins* and defends it against an important criticism. The second section, focusing on changing attitudes toward abortion, shows the inadequacy of the Purple Land account of elite origination of new issues and highlights evidence that some citizens—probably not a large fraction—resist attempts to shape their opinions. The third section, focusing on foreign policy, shows once again the limits of elite influence. The fourth section deals with the challenge of measurement error. The fifth section makes a case for downgrading ideology and upgrading group interests and issue publics in the study of mass politics. The sixth section sums it all up.

I. PARTISAN CUES AND IDEOLOGICAL CONSISTENCY

In her review essay for this volume, Cindy D. Kam gives the RAS model mostly passing marks for its “psychological veracity.” She is, however, guarded in her assessment of whether highly engaged citizens respond passively to political communication, attending to its partisan coloration and nothing else, as specified in the RAS model. Kam (2013, 559) notes the evidence that source effects exist, but also cites evidence that citizens “are not passive receivers but are—or, rather, can be—active processors of the political world.” The Elaboration Likelihood Framework of Petty

and Cacioppo (1986), for example, provides strong evidence that engaged citizens can “counter-argue” persuasive messages that run contrary to their interests or prior views.²

Nature and Origins does acknowledge that citizens can think for themselves; what it questions is how often they actually do so in the domain of politics, and whether independent thought occurs on a sufficient scale to warrant inclusion in a model of opinion formation (Zaller 1992, 47). In this section I will reaffirm the central assumption of the RAS model about passive citizens; later sections will consider cases in which citizens react more critically—or obstinately—to elite cues.

Nature and Origins focuses on the partisan messages that create ideological opinion. The book does not claim that these messages create massive numbers of citizen “ideologues”—people who are devoted to principle, adamant against compromise, and committed to fight for everything on the conservative or liberal agenda. It claims instead that, faced with a confusingly large number of issues, many citizens offer opinions based on the positions of the political figures they most trust. The book assumes that the trusted leaders are, for the most part, party leaders, but they could include recognized spokespeople of the left or right, such as Bono or Rush Limbaugh. In taking cues from such leaders, citizens develop opinions that tend to be ideologically consistent—that is, mostly on the left or mostly on the right or, if they trust neither side very much, mostly in the center. How deeply citizens are committed to the opinions thus formed is a question that *Nature and Origins* did not consider.

Once it is allowed that *Nature and Origins* is about ideologically consistent opinion, the assumption of passive receivers becomes a bit more plausible. Many scholars are comfortable with the idea that political ideologies reflect uncritical mass acceptance of elite-packaged systems of opinion.

One way to assess how much citizens think for themselves in politics is to examine the breadth of ideologically consistent opinion. In his 1964 essay, Converse found that such consistency was minimal. But, as Figure 1 shows, the situation today appears quite different. Across a diverse set of issues, ideological consistency is alive and strong. Several of the issues in Figure 1 were neither on the partisan agenda at the time Converse wrote nor associated with any partisan group, yet they seem all to fit comfortably within an ideological framework.³

Figure 1. Patterns of Partisan Polarization in 2008

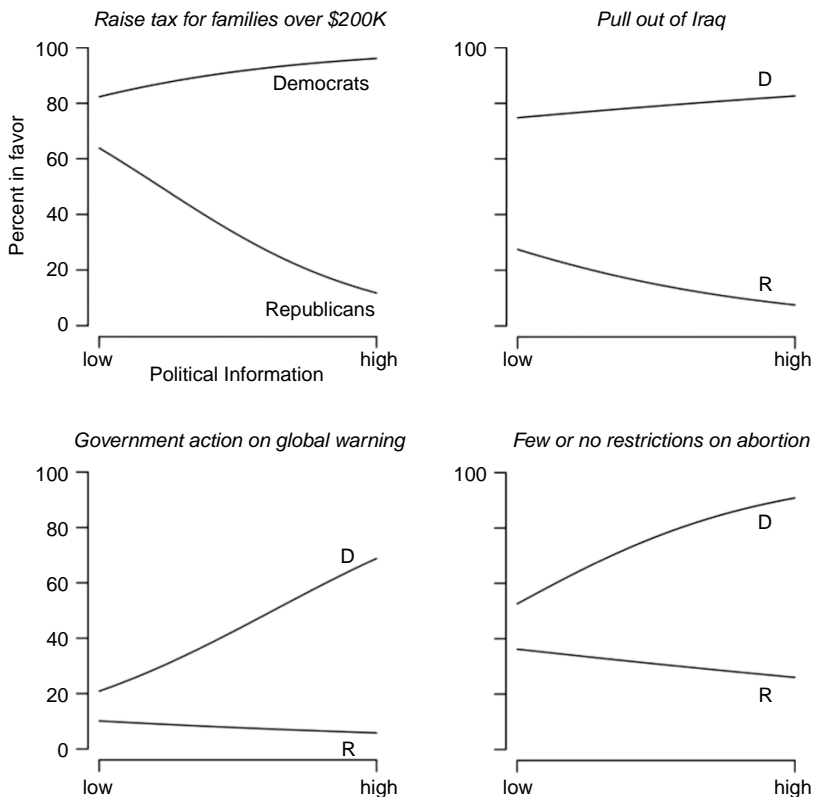
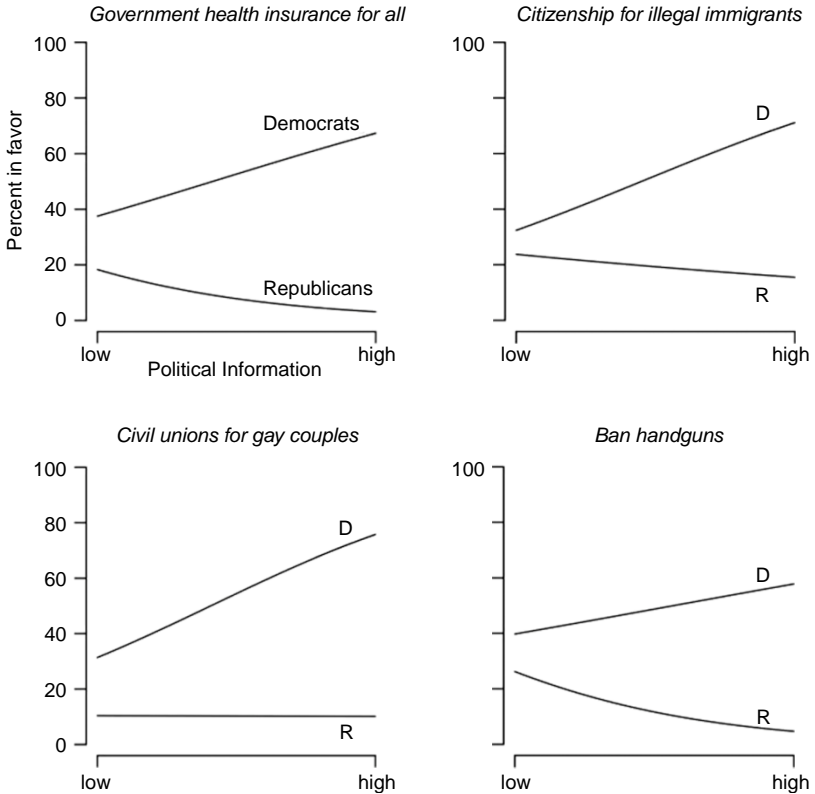


Figure 1 is based on data from the 2008 Cooperative Campaign Analysis Project, an Internet survey of registered voters managed by Simon Jackman and Lynn Vavreck.⁴ The dependent items are dichotomies of multi-option variables that included a “No Opinion” option. The items have been recoded so that one position is support for the liberal position and the other is either support for the conservative position or “no opinion.” No-opinion responses generally run about 5–10 percent, but are higher among the less informed. The independent variables in a logit model are a three-point measure of party identification (with only pure independents in the middle position), a 12-item measure of political information, and their interaction. Further details, including item wordings, are in the online appendix.⁵

Figure 1. (Continued)



Data include registered voters only.

Ideological consistency is present to some degree in all segments of the voting public in Figure 1, but is strongest among the best informed, who would be best able to counter-argue elite cues and form their own views. Hence the results in Figure 1 suggest that resistance to ideological cues is not widespread. Table 1 gives us a closer look at “what goes with what,” focusing on the views of the top quartile of scorers on political information. This data likewise shows the breadth and incidence of ideological consistency to be almost embarrassingly great.

Public-opinion scholars have long regarded ideological consistency as an indicator of sophisticated thinking, tied together by the pseudo-logic of what Converse (1964, 212) called a “crowning posture.” At the time Converse wrote, this view was plausible. Attitude consistency could be

Table 1. Ideological Consistency Among Well-Informed People

	<i>Higher taxes on rich</i>	
	No, DK	Yes
Limit abortion	73%	16%
Few/no abortion limits	27%	84%
N	1413	1743
	<i>Iraq policy</i>	
	Stay in	Pull out
No government action on warming	89%	37%
Government action on warming	11%	63%
N	2094	1692
	<i>Government health care</i>	
	No	Yes
Allow handguns	84%	45%
Ban handguns	16%	55%
N	2308	1221

Source: Cooperative Campaign Analysis Project. See online appendix 1 for details (n1 below).

seen as an outgrowth of conflict over the New Deal, as augmented by concern for civil rights, but with foreign-policy attitudes in a mostly separate domain. Alternatively, consistency could be seen as reflecting the longstanding conflict between socialism and capitalism. But where is the logic—or even pseudo-logic—underlying the pattern in Figure 1, with the war in Iraq a central element? What, one may ask, is sophisticated about linking attitudes on abortion with attitudes on taxes, or attitudes on national health insurance with attitudes on handgun control? One is tempted to turn the traditional argument on its head: Ideological thinking in the contemporary United States is conventional and mechanical and not really sophisticated at all—a domain in which many people are manifestly not thinking for themselves.

But that is just an impression. Cross-sectional data like those in Figure 1 are consistent with several causal mechanisms, of which cue taking is only one. How can we be sure that the patterns in Figure 1 are not a natural, value-based response to the issues that politics throws forth? Perhaps the best-informed citizens are reasoning for themselves and coming to similar conclusions, given their own predispositions.

Insofar as *Nature and Origins* makes an original contribution, it is to address precisely this question, claiming to show that attitude consistency forms in response to particular communication flows. The argument begins by adding resistance variables (e.g., ideology) to the Hovland-Converse-McGuire model of attitude change, which the RAS model formalizes. Thus augmented, the model creates the expectation of distinctive patterns of attitude change in response to party-cued messages. The model is applied first to data from a one-sided flow of information—that is, information favoring one side of an issue—and then to two-sided information flows. Full use of the two-message model was made in only a single case: the development of partisan polarization over the Vietnam War from an initial mainstream consensus. But the model was put to work in a wide variety of cases, most frequently in election campaigns, where there were both more data and more measurable variability in information flows.

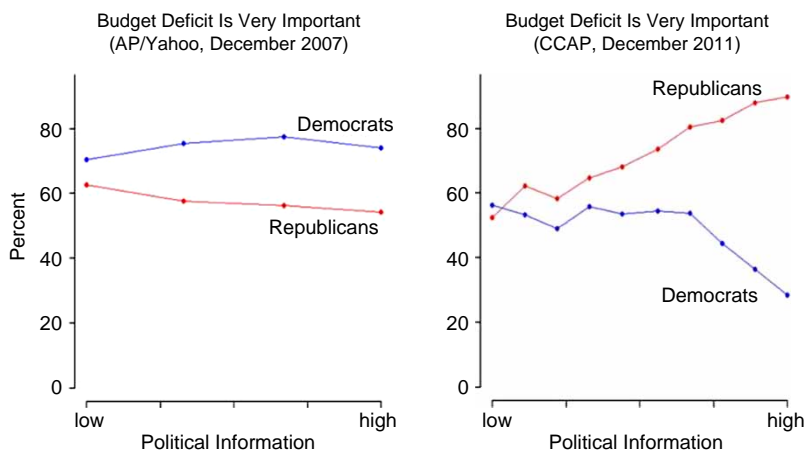
The most important of the applications were those involving the “cross-over pattern of attitude change” (Zaller 1998) in which opposing messages of different intensity cause cross-cutting opinion change. The crossover pattern is not mentioned in the previous essays in this volume, but it shows, more clearly than other evidence, the dependence of mass opinion on competing communication flows. To wit: If, for the Vietnam case, analysts were able to observe only highly informed liberals and conservatives gradually polarizing over time, with no dip or interruption in the trend, the polarization could be explained as the outcome of individuals slowly reasoning their way to opposing positions. But the crossover pattern among liberals from 1964 to 1966—where moderately informed liberals became more pro-war in response to a stronger pro-war message, but highly informed liberals turned antiwar in response to an emerging antiwar cue—ties the outcome to communication flows. (The crossover pattern has been found as well for changing support for Gary Hart and Walter Mondale in the 1984 Democratic primaries, and in vote defection patterns among out-partisans to the incumbent party in congressional elections; see Zaller 1996.)⁶

Thus, the method of *Nature and Origins* was to leverage a well-grounded model of the effects of partisan communication on attitude change and a small number of applications into a big story about the role of partisan elites in shaping mass ideology more generally. The big story itself—the diffusion of elite-created belief systems—comes from Converse’s “Belief Systems” paper.

The statistical modeling necessary to extract evidence of information flow in some of these cases is technical, but sometimes, simple graphs tell a story that is at least as compelling. Figure 2, provided by Michael Tesler, presents such a case. The setup is the same as in Figure 1, except that the dependent variable consists of opinions about whether the federal budget deficit is an important national problem. When George W. Bush was president and running a deficit, Democrats were more likely to believe the deficit was an important problem. When Barack Obama was president and running a deficit, Republicans were more likely to think that the deficit was an important problem. Partisan differences, as well as the switch in direction of partisan differences, are largest among the highly informed, as expected by the RAS model.⁷

The data in Figures 1 and 2 add only modestly to the evidence for the RAS model. They contain no evidence, direct or indirect, of effects of political communication. But they do exhibit a pattern that, owing to the striking diversity of topics covered, is especially hard to explain as the outcome of individual-level reasoning or counter-argued communication. It is true that some partisans appear to resist cue taking. Even on opposition to taxes, a defining issue of conservatism, a small number of highly informed Republicans do not go along; even on government health insurance, a defining issue for liberalism, some highly informed Democrats demur. This may reflect individual-level reasoning or

Figure 2. Polarization on Budget Deficit, 2007 and 2011



Source: Michael Tesler, Brown University

counter-arguing as Kam might point out. But for the main pattern—the more numerous cases in which highly informed partisans do follow the partisan line—acceptance of partisan cues seems the only plausible explanation.

Much of what I say in later sections of this paper will undermine parts of the *Nature and Origins* argument. But none of my comments will cast doubt on the existence of a large amount of elite-shaped opinion in the United States, or the capacity of the RAS model, synthesizing the work of previous scholarship, to explain it.

II. EXPERTS VS. ACTIVISTS AND THE ORIGIN OF NEW ISSUES

With its parable of Purple Land, *Nature and Origins* provides a comprehensive account of how new political issues arise, acquire partisan coloration, and become incorporated into mass ideologies. I have already indicated the inadequacy of the role of experts in this account. Here, for the case of the rise and politicization of the abortion issue, are the details.

I cannot, to begin with, explain any part of the politics of abortion in terms of the science-minded elites that inhabit Purple Land. According to Kristin Luker's *Motherhood and the Politics of Abortion* (1984), some hospital physicians, who are a kind of scientific elite, did play a role in putting abortion on the public agenda by complaining in the 1950s that abortions were often performed for reasons unrelated to the physical health of the mother, and these complaints led to new legislation. The doctors' motivation, however, was religious rather than scientific: They were Catholics seeking to uphold church doctrine. This pattern, moreover, dominated the abortion issue. The elite actors who mattered were agents of value- and interest-based communities: Feminists, religious leaders, professional women, and mothers who do not work outside the home.

On the pro-choice side of the issue, feminists became key players in the Democratic Party (Wolbrecht 2000). Established party members, notably union leaders and some civil-rights leaders, resisted the feminist incursion, but in the end accommodated it. In consequence, feminists were positioned from 1976 onward to ensure the nomination of pro-choice Democrats for president.

The pro-life position on abortion came later to the Republican party. A party dominated by libertarians such as Barry Goldwater in the 1960s

was not initially interested in restricting abortion. The key actors in the transformation were religious conservatives who became active first in presidential nominations in the 1980s (Layman, Carsey, Green, Herrera, and Cooperman 2010; Baylor 2012) and congressional nominations in the 1990s (Cohen 2005). Today, religious traditionalism and libertarianism are in a somewhat uncomfortable but stable alliance in the GOP, with the party nominating candidates who are as reliably pro-life as Democratic party candidates are reliably pro-choice.

The dynamic here could hardly be more different than envisioned in Purple Land. Science was the least part of anyone's motivation. The story is one in which issue activists fought for a place in nominating coalitions that did not initially share their values or key concerns. These nominating coalitions—parties—then began to offer clear choices on the issue pushed by activists, thereby disseminating cues to the entire party membership. In an important series of papers, Thomas M. Carsey, Geoffrey C. Layman, and colleagues refer to this general process as “conflict extension” (Layman et al. 2010).

The public's response to the development of party positions on abortion is examined in Carsey and Layman's “Changing Sides or Changing Minds?” (2006). Using panel data that bridged the emergence of party positions on abortion in the 1990s, they show that highly informed partisans for whom abortion was not salient tended to bring their opinions on abortion into line with their initial partisan predispositions. For highly informed partisans for whom the issue was salient, some changed abortion positions and some changed parties. Among the less informed, no systematic change occurred. This pattern of results can be read as consistent with the RAS model, which stresses the role of political information in mediating partisan cues, and which allows citizens to choose their cue-givers based on their predispositions. But it can also be read as a case of resistance to party cues: Some highly informed partisans changed parties when they didn't like the cues they were getting.

Christopher H. Achen and Larry Bartels produce similar but more textured findings in a paper called “It Feels Like We're Thinking: The Rationalizing Voter and Electoral Democracy” (2006). In some cases, they show, partisans typically adapt opinions to fit their partisanship; but they suggest that the abortion case may be different:

Almost uniquely among issues, abortion attitudes are remarkably stable over time. They easily stand comparison with party identification, the

customary gold standard for attitudinal stability. In [our panel data], for example, party identification correlates .63 between 1982 and 1997, while abortion attitudes correlate at .59 over the same fifteen-year period. Moreover, among 935 respondents, just nine people lacked an abortion opinion in 1982, and only twelve in 1997, remarkably low for political attitudes. The number who lacked an abortion opinion at both time periods was zero. Where abortion is concerned, the overwhelming majority of people know what it means, they know what they think, and drastic change is rare. (Achen and Bartels 2006, 34)

Therefore, they point out, it would be surprising to find that partisan cues changed attitudes about abortion. Initial evidence from the 1982 and 1997 waves of the Youth-Parent Socialization study, however, is tantalizing: The correlation between abortion attitudes and party identification was .07 in 1982, but rose to .22 in 1997. Among the best-informed citizens in the same period, the correlation rose from .04 to .36 (*ibid.*, 33). But which was cause and which was effect? To use the Carsey and Layman question, did people change minds or change sides?

Achen and Bartels begin by bracketing Catholics, for whom a strong cue from religious authority complicates analysis. Before doing so, however, they note that people who were Catholic in 1965 were more likely to have abandoned the church in 1982 if they held pro-choice attitudes at the later period. The relationship between religion and abortion attitudes, as it thus appears, raises the same endogeneity problem as between party and abortion attitudes.

After separating men's views from women's, Achen and Bartels (2006, 39) summarize their empirical results, stated as expectations from their model, as follows:

Women know more about abortion and care more. Hence when the parties diverge, they will disproportionately tend to change their parties rather than their views. Well-informed men will act the same. Men as a whole, however, will have lower levels of information and will be more susceptible to rationalization and thus to influence by their parties. . . . The disproportionate effects are just what one would expect if rationalization plays a large role.

So Achen and Bartels do find party influence even in the case of abortion, just not as much as in other cases.

Other deeply felt issues probably provoke similar responses. Many Southern whites, for example, began suddenly to vote Republican in

1964 in response to the passage of a Democratic-sponsored Civil Rights bill in that year. Many African Americans also began abruptly to vote Democratic in the 1930s when the Democratic party took a more aggressive stance toward the Great Depression. These cases involve historically important party change, but almost any issue on which the parties take strong positions—guns, health insurance, taxes, immigration—might lead some voters to change sides rather than change minds (see, generally, Hillygus and Shields 2008).

Researchers have tried to measure the intensity of voter commitment to particular issues by asking them the strength of their feelings, but the effort has not produced consistent results (Miller and Peterson 2004). One reason, as suggested by Tesler's findings of party flip-flopping on budget deficits, is that people are not good judges of what is most important to them personally and what is important mainly for partisan reasons. Scholars may therefore need to rely, as Achen and Bartels did, on variables they can measure well—demographics such as gender and religion—to locate the pockets of intense issue commitment that Converse called "issue publics." The extent and importance of these issue publics is unclear. They might include all or almost all voters, or they might include relatively few. But from the abortion issue, we can see that some issue publics not only resist elite cues on their issue, but change parties because of the cues.

Another important case that looks different to me now than when I wrote *Nature and Origins* is civil rights. In keeping with the Purple Land story, I stressed the role of biologists in demolishing the scientific underpinnings of racism. I still think that their work was politically important, but it was only one part of a bigger story. One big part was the civil-rights movement, including Martin Luther King and many other activists. This movement received heavy and generally positive coverage in the national media, prominently cueing traditional American values. Most likely this coverage affected public opinion, consistently with the RAS model. Another important part of the civil-rights story, as I relate below, was the effort by leaders of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and of the American labor movement to coordinate a strategy to gain representation in the Democratic party. As in the case of abortion, this effort to get a party to take a new stand on an important national issue reflected tough intraparty struggles much more than it did the diffusion of influence from science-minded elites (Baylor 2013).

The overall story of party change may be sketched as follows: Issue activists work their way into nominating coalitions in order to force parties to offer clear choices on their new issue, and members of their issue publics respond by shifting allegiance to the appropriate party. Opinion leadership then kicks in: Members of issue publics take cues from their new leaders on a range of secondary issues, thereby becoming broadly ideological. It is, however, likely that they remain more attentive to party performance on the issue that brought them to the party—and quicker to punish failure of the party to represent their views on that issue—than on other issues. Meanwhile, long-time partisans, having joined the party on the basis of their own intense concerns, take the party cue on the new issue. The result is a wide-ranging pattern of ideological consistency, as in Figure 1.

To what degree are voters willing to punish poor party performance on issues other than those that they think are the most important? This is unclear. Lenz (2012, Fig. 5.4) finds that voters who are converted to party positions during an election campaign do not vote their new positions in that election. But his results are limited to a few cases and a short period of time. Perhaps, over a longer period of time, partisan voters internalize their party's agenda more deeply. But perhaps not. I return to this question in a later section.

III. FROM VIETNAM TO IRAQ: LATENT OPINION AS A CHECK ON ELITE CUEING

I said earlier that the case of Vietnam illustrates better than any other the power of partisan messages to shape opinion. At the same time, we shall see in this section that President Kennedy's refusal to follow his own preference to keep the nation out of Vietnam shows the limits of that power. The Iraq War, as we shall also see below, presents similar contrasts. Partisan cues clearly mattered, but there is also evidence that Democratic leaders declined to lead their co-partisans into opposing the Iraq War because they were afraid their followers would not follow. In this hesitancy we get another case of the invisible force of latent opinion. Stanley Feldman, Leonie Huddy, and George E. Marcus (2013) also raise two additional issues: They report evidence that some highly informed partisans resisted the cues sent by party leaders about Iraq—resistance which they see as damaging to the RAS model. They further suggest that

this resistance may be due to the presentation of basic factual information about the impending war in the news media.

I shall do my best to deal with these large issues in the few pages ahead. My argument will be that the core RAS model looks solid for the Iraq War case, but that forces outside the RAS model—strategic behavior of party leaders, the public’s difficult-to-observe latent opinions, and the possibility of news as an independent influence on opinion—are examples of matters to which the larger argument of *Nature and Origins* should have given more attention than it did.

I begin with Adam Berinsky’s *In Time of War* (2009), which I see as the most important study in the last twenty years on the topic of public opinion and war. A principal subject of Berinsky’s investigation is the relative importance of partisan cues and war casualties as determinants of public support for war. The key question, as Berinsky frames it, is whether the public responds to reality—i.e., casualties—or to what their leaders tell them about reality. Berinsky’s results, based on opinion data from World War II to the Iraq War, largely vindicate the importance of cues. This is an extremely important finding for understanding the operation of democracy in the domain of foreign policy. It is also important for *Nature and Origins*: If Berinsky’s results had been otherwise, it would have been a major blow to the validity of the book’s claims.

Yet upon more critical examination, the evidence from public opinion and war reveals sharp limits to the power of elite cues to shape opinion. Indeed, it can be used to support the argument that many citizens have strong views of their own and force politicians to toe their line.

In order to appreciate the power of mass opinion in the domain of foreign policy, one must shift conceptual gears. As Kam notes, the RAS model aims to explain public opinion as measured in polls, but opinion can be conceived and measured differently. Scholars, she observes, should take “an inclusive, broad view of what constitutes public opinion and the multiple methods that should be used to study it” (Kam 2013, 562).

I agree. Toward the end of *Nature and Origins*, I raised V. O. Key’s concept of “latent opinion” and I further developed it in a 1998 paper. One gets a quite different sense of the nature and importance of public opinion if one examines it through this theoretical lens.

Latent opinion, as Key defined it, is the opinion citizens will hold at some point in the future, often the next election, after the dust of current

controversy has settled, policy has been implemented and had its effects for good or ill, and the opposition party has taken its best shots. Key argued that politicians care little about opinion as measured in polls at the time they take action, but care intensely about the latent opinion that may become manifest at the next election. In the 1998 paper, I used the concept of latent opinion to analyze several cases. With respect to Vietnam, I presented evidence that Presidents Kennedy and Johnson both believed that U.S. participation in the war would be unsuccessful, but that they also believed that if they permitted Vietnam to fall to communism, Republicans would attack them and voters would side with the Republicans. As Kennedy remarked in 1963 to a friendly journalist,

We don't have a prayer of staying in Vietnam. Those people hate us. They are going to throw our asses out of there at almost any point. But I can't give up a piece of territory like that to the Communists and then get the American people to re-elect me. (Quoted in Zaller 1998, 484).

If Vietnam did fall to communism, Americans would not be left to figure out for themselves the meaning of the loss; the Republican party, for which opposition to communism had been a major theme since the late 1940s, would make it a campaign issue. The next Democratic president, Lyndon Johnson, worried that he might even be impeached if he “lost Vietnam.” As one of his advisers told him in 1964, “You’re going to be running against a man [Senator Barry Goldwater] who’s a wild man on this subject. Any lack of firmness he’ll make up” (quoted in Beschloss 1997, 495). In this circumstance, Johnson engineered the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution as authorization for the use of military force in Vietnam. The resolution passed the Senate 88-2 and the House 395-0, thereby contributing to a mainstream norm whose effect on opinion is traced by the RAS model.

The source of this mainstream norm on Vietnam, as this sketch implies, was not any sort of scientific-minded elite; it was, on the Democratic side, politicians’ reading of how voters would respond if Republicans attacked them for losing Vietnam, and on the Republican side, a commitment to preventing the spread of communism and a readiness to press the issue in elections.

Kennedy and Johnson were not in a particularly weak political position when they led the country toward a war that, as it appears, they

did not want. Why, then, did neither use his persuasive powers as party and national leader to “cue” voters to accept the triumph of North Vietnam over South Vietnam?

One must assume that they didn’t think it would work. The two presidents had just gone through a period in which Democrats suffered from the perception that they lost China and almost lost South Korea, and they thought they would suffer a similar fate if they tried to lead the country to accept loss of Vietnam. A strong antiwar cue from a Democratic president would presumably have rallied some highly informed liberals against U.S. military involvement—perhaps just enough to create a polarization pattern that would make the RAS model look good—but not enough, as Kennedy believed, to win the next election.

This analysis suggests that observational studies of the effects of cues in *Nature and Origins*, as well as in Berinsky’s more convincing *In Time of War*, might get systematically incorrect estimates of their effect. The reason is endogeneity bias. Observational studies can examine only the effects of cues actually given, but these cues are unlikely to be a random sample of all cues that politicians might like to give. If politicians selectively take positions they believe can win over fairly large numbers of voters, but refrain when they expect to be ineffective, observational studies will systematically overestimate the power of partisan cues to shape opinion.

None of this is a hit to the RAS model. That is, it does nothing to undermine the idea that the cues actually given in the Vietnam case—Johnson’s speeches backed by overwhelming support in Congress—actually mobilized support for war among people who would not otherwise have favored war. What endogeneity bias does undermine is any unqualified claim that elites can mobilize opinion. I was not so rash in *Nature and Origins* as to claim that citizens would follow their leaders no matter what the leaders called for, but I was not sufficiently careful to make clear that such a claim would be unfounded. Nor was I sufficiently sensitive to the importance of Key’s concept of latent opinion, which implies that some significant part of the public has views that are difficult or impossible to shape—in this example, opposition to the spread of communism—and that politicians are therefore prudent to heed.

My argument here does not imply that most citizens actually wanted war in Vietnam, much less the debacle they got. Indeed, survey evidence indicates that they did not want the United States to go to war. But their

past behavior led seasoned Democratic politicians to conclude that voters would, under conditions of electoral competition, punish the “appeasement” of communism, and in this sense public opinion made an essential contribution to U.S. entry into the war.

Many of the same issues arise in the case of the Iraq War, which I shall now examine in some detail. Unlike the Vietnam case, the incumbent administration probably would not have suffered electoral punishment for failure to take military action in Iraq. But as in the Vietnam case, seasoned Democratic politicians were led to take positions that they would not otherwise have taken, except for their reading of latent opinion. Their positions, once taken, then contributed to the formation of public opinion in the manner specified by the RAS model.

On my interpretation, this case raises serious problems not only for *Nature and Origins*, but for the study of public opinion as it is conventionally practiced. The problem is that citizens state opinions in surveys that they may not be prepared to act upon in elections. I start my account with the origins of the Iraq policy itself.

According to James Mann’s book, *The Rise of the Vulcans*, the policy to remove Saddam Hussein from power originated in a group of political intellectuals and out-of-office politicians. The names are familiar: Paul Wolfowitz, Richard Perle, Donald Rumsfeld, and Douglas Feith, with Dick Cheney in the background. These individuals wrote papers, attended conferences, met with political leaders, and actively gathered information on American policy toward Iraq. Their leader, Wolfowitz, held a distinguished academic position as Dean of the School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins University. Mann’s account indicates that the deliberations of the policy initiators were honest and intellectually serious.

When George W. Bush staffed his administration, he turned to these individuals, who were recognized as important thinkers within the more hawkish wing of the Republican Party. In the aftermath of 9/11, these “neo-conservative” individuals found occasion to convince the president, who was no expert on foreign policy, to follow their advice with respect to Iraq. Under President Bush’s leadership, nearly all Republican members of Congress also accepted the policy.

There are several plausible sources from which the policy of regime change in Iraq might have originated—defense specialists struggling to contain Iraq in its no-fly zone, State Department enforcers of sanctions against Iraq, pro-Israel lobbyists, or pro-Israel donors within the

Republican party. The fact that, instead, it originated within a group of defense intellectuals associated with a political party and was sold by them to a leading politician fits the basic Purple Land scenario. One feature of Mann's account of the Vulcans that does not fit the Purple Land model, though, is that policy initiators were not interested in testing their views outside their own group. They excluded members of the other faction of Republican foreign-policy experts—notably, those associated with the former President George H. W. Bush—from their meetings and did not, in Mann's account, engage in debate with liberal defense experts. In the Purple Land account, the policy prescriptions of science-minded elites gain legitimacy from surviving in an open marketplace of ideas. On the other hand, the Vulcans published and openly argued for their ideas to whomever would pay attention.

An important question is how exactly the Vulcan group—with their Iraq policy already under development—became attached to George W. Bush. In Mann's account, former Secretary of State and Hoover Institution Fellow George Schultz brought the candidate together with the experts in 1998, when Bush was assembling his campaign team. With Bush already a leading contender for the Republican nomination, it was presumably a no-brainer for the experts to stay close to the politician. But from Bush's side, it is not so clear. Another cluster of experts was associated with Brent Scowcroft, former President Bush's leading foreign policy advisor. The younger Bush could presumably have tapped into this group, which were reputed to be moderate, but chose instead the more conservative Vulcans. This may have represented simply the younger Bush's preference. But as the nomination contest heated up in a party that was becoming more conservative, campaign operatives touted the campaign's links to neo-conservative foreign policy experts as evidence that the younger Bush would be more conservative than his father (Cohen et al. 2008, 240). His preference for the Vulcans may therefore have been, at least in part, a response to the pressures of nomination politics—a markedly different motive than implied by the Purple Land story, but more in line with the abortion and civil rights cases.

Public discussion of a U.S. invasion of Iraq began shortly after 9/11, but became purposeful in September 2002 when President Bush asked the U.N. Security Council to support the use of military force against Iraq. At the same time, Bush asked Congress to authorize unilateral American action against Iraq. Most congressional Republicans, as well as Democratic House Minority Leader Richard Gephardt and Senator

Hillary Clinton, supported his request, but many leading Democratic senators resisted. Contrary to Bush's request, these Democrats wanted to delay the vote until after the midterm election, and to make authorization contingent on a favorable vote in the U.N. Security Council. "I think unilateral action has very very dire consequences for our country," said Majority Leader Tom Daschle (quoted in Mitchell and Sanger 2002). "You've got to let the U.N. work its will," said Senator John Kerry, a leading presidential contender (quoted in Bumiller 2002). It would be "somewhat foolish for the United States Senate to be up here essentially issuing a declaration of war" before the diplomacy is sorted out, said Joe Biden, chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee (quoted in Mitchell 2002a). There was partisan bickering as Bush and Daschle accused each other of politicizing national security.

Public opinion on Iraq varied greatly, depending on how the question was put. Majorities of about 60 percent favored use of force against Iraq when offered a bare-bones yes/no choice. But when offered multiple options, as in Table 2, about 80 percent of the public supported a U.S. invasion as part of an international coalition. Only about 40 percent supported war if the U.S. lacked international or congressional support.

Poll results like these were reported throughout the month-long congressional deliberation of the use of force resolution. During this time key Democratic skeptics—including the three senators mentioned above—moved to support the president's position. This development was much commented upon by journalists:

Table 2. Range of Support for U.S. Military Action Against Iraq

	pct. who favor	pct. who oppose
If other countries participate in invading Iraq	79	18
If the United Nations supports invading Iraq	79	19
If Congress supports invading Iraq	69	28
If the United States has to invade Iraq alone	38	59
If the United Nations opposes invading Iraq	37	58
If Congress opposes invading Iraq	37	59

Source: Gallup, 20–22 September 2002

Many Democrats are showing clear misgivings about Mr. Bush's policy. But their positions are complicated by the fears of prominent Democrats about how the issue could play in the November elections and even in the 2004 campaign. (Mitchell 2002b)

More than a dozen Democrats, who requested anonymity, have told *The Washington Post* that many members who oppose the president's strategy to confront Iraq are going to nonetheless support it because they fear a backlash from voters. A top party strategist said every House Democrat who faces a tough reelection this fall plans to vote for the Bush resolution. (VandeHei 2002b)

The positions adopted by the prospective Democratic candidates reflect [among other things] . . . the 1991 congressional debate and vote on over whether to go to war with Iraq. That vote left most Democrats . . . on the wrong side of a popular war. (VandeHei and Eilperin 2002)

"Make no mistake: When you combine in our caucus the hawks, the people in close races and all those who one day aspire to be president who are going to vote for this, they've got quite a few Democrats who will vote for this," said Sen. Richard J. Durbin (D-Ill.). (VandeHei 2002a)

The Bush position carried easily when the House and Senate took their votes in early October. Almost all Republicans supported it, but even after electorally induced conversions, Democrats were divided. In the House vote, 61 percent of Democrats opposed the resolution authorizing unilateral use of force. In the Senate, 42 percent of Democrats opposed the resolution.

Opinion leaders outside the halls of Congress were similarly divided. Leading conservative pundits, such as George Will and Charles Krauthammer, favored the Bush position, and some liberal columnists, most notably Richard Cohen, supported the Bush position. But more leading liberal lights—Michael Kinsley, Frank Rich, and the New York Times editorial board—wanted Congress to wait for U.N. weapons inspectors to finish their work before authorizing invasion. Others, such as Paul Krugman and E. J. Dionne, were highly critical of Bush without taking a position on the use of force resolutions. It is also notable that former president Bill Clinton favored the Bush position, but that 2000 Democratic nominee Al Gore opposed it in a widely covered speech.

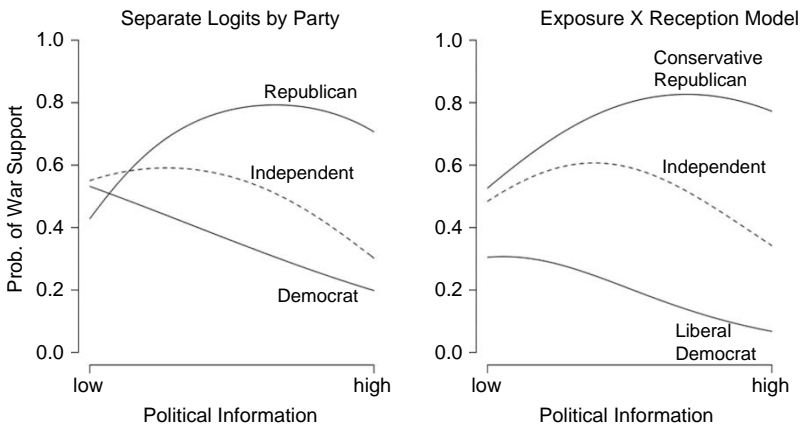
To examine patterns of support for the war, I use the following survey item from the 2002 National Election Study:

As you may know, President Bush and his top advisers are discussing the possibility of taking military action against Iraq to remove Saddam Hussein from power. Do you favor or oppose military action against Iraq—or is this something you haven't thought about?

The item provides a cue that the Republican president supported war, but is otherwise similar to the bare-bones items that were often asked by other organizations. Overall support for the war on this question was 54 percent, including no-opinion responses in the denominator. The question was asked just before, during, and after the congressional vote on a war resolution in early October.

Figure 3 below shows patterns of support for war by information and partisanship. The dependent variable is a 0–1 measure of war support, where the denominator includes “haven't thought about it” and other forms of non-response. The panel on the left is based on separate logit regressions for Democrats, pure Independents, and Republicans in which the independent variables are political information and information-squared. This panel gives a sense of the raw data. The panel on the right is based on a simple Exposure-Acceptance model, Equation 5.7 in *Nature and Origins*. It includes resistance variables for party, ideology, and age. The curves are based on ideology values of “extremely” liberal/conservative and “strong” party identification, using standard NES

Figure 3. Support for the Iraq War in Fall, 2000



For details and replication code, see end note 1.

measures.⁸ Political information is measured from an equally weighted composite of tests of factual information, years of education, and interviewer rating of respondents' level of informedness. Estimation details and some further discussion may be found in the online appendix.⁹

I take the above to be a reasonable description of major features of the run up to the Iraq War. Now, from a theoretical point of view, what do we make of it?

The most notable feature of the case, it seems to me, is the failure of many Democratic politicians to hold their ground in opposition to President Bush's request for a congressional war resolution. This failure is striking because, as it would appear from polls, public opinion was on their side—mostly willing to support an internationally sanctioned war, but mostly opposed to the United States going to war without U.N. support. The positions of presidentially ambitious politicians like Kerry might be explained on grounds that they expected the war to be fought and won by the time their campaigns got underway. But the positions of House Democrats—including, according to the *Washington Post*, every incumbent facing a tough race in an election—are harder to explain. Why, with an election just a month after the congressional vote, would the most electorally vulnerable Democrats fail to follow majority opinion as expressed in polls?

One possible explanation is that electorally marginal Democrats were just playing it safe. But why, given what opinion polls were showing, was it safe to support war? Why, instead, weren't Republican politicians constrained to play it safe by opposing war? The most likely explanation for the Democrats' lack of resolve is that they were not persuaded that public opinion as measured in polls would carry over to the ballot box. Under conditions of political competition—a condition that must always be taken into account when evaluating poll results—a vote against war would be attacked as weakness toward Saddam Hussein and his WMDs, and a majority of voters, polls notwithstanding, might agree.

If politicians do not feel comfortable relying on polls when their careers are on the line, academic analysts should not be comfortable with the polls either. But what exactly is the problem with the polls?

One possibility is that, as the experiments of Petty and Cacioppo have demonstrated, people respond differently to questions when they are engaged than when they are not—and most citizens are simply not very

engaged when they respond to survey questions. As pundit Michael Kinsley (2002) complained:

Citizens ought to be more serious. . . . They tell pollsters they favor the Bush policy, then they say they favor conditions like U.N. approval that are not part of the Bush policy. Many, in polls, seem to make a distinction between war, which they favor, and casualties, which they don't.

But I suspect that the problem is deeper. Consider a survey question that asked in 1988 whether the United States should send troops to Saudi Arabia if necessary to protect from attack by Iran. In the tranquil conditions of 1988, only 18 percent said yes (Mueller 1994, 49). But when, fewer than two years later, Iraq threatened Saudi Arabia, upwards of 75 percent favored sending American troops. The difference, of course, was that Iraq had just invaded Kuwait, which borders Saudi Arabia. This created a huge stir in the news media, and in these circumstances U.S. defense of Saudi Arabia seemed warranted.

It seems highly unrealistic to expect citizens in a standard survey to anticipate the conditions that would exist if Saudi Arabia were actually threatened and how they would respond. People simply don't know, and can't figure out, what they would think. If, then, the question is whether the public will support sending troops to Saudi Arabia in a crisis, the savvy politician and the wise survey analyst will have the same resort—to historical rather than poll-based assessments of how the public will respond. My explanation for the collapse of opposition to the Iraq War by Democratic politicians follows the same logic: Democrats believed that, despite what most Americans were saying in polls, the public's response to opposition to Bush's war resolutions would be, under conditions of Republican attack, to punish it.

Business people, trying to figure out what products will sell, face essentially the same problem that politicians do. One of the world's most successful businessmen, Steve Jobs of Apple, famously responded by turning his back on market researchers, which asked consumers what they would like, and followed instead his own sense of what consumers would like if he offered it to them. Political leaders do not, like Jobs, entirely spurn polls, but they view them with reservations, deciding where to lead on the basis of where they think the public will want to go when it eventually engages the options that the politicians (and nature) put on offer.

Latent opinion may be understood in precisely these terms. But how to study it?

One possibility, as I have argued elsewhere, is to find generalizations that seem to work across multiple cases. A statement that may capture public opinion in national security threats is: Voters are easily excited by media reports of threat, will probably want aggressive responses to these threats, and will punish politicians who respond weakly (Zaller 1998). This disposition may be rooted in an authoritarian or ethnocentric view of foreign nations that intensifies in times of crisis (Stenner 2005; Kam and Kinder 2007).

If this characterization of public opinion seems unacceptably vague, poll results from the Iraq War are not obviously more precise. We deceive ourselves if we believe otherwise. Commenting on prospective public support for the Persian Gulf War, John Mueller (1994, 30) wrote that “one might conclude [that] 28 percent of the population was willing to initiate war, 38 percent was willing to go to war, 46 percent was willing to engage in combat, and 65 percent was willing to use military force—that is, one could as easily argue that doves outnumbered hawks by two to one as the reverse.” Mueller went on to argue from these and other data that public opinion toward the war with Iraq was poorly crystallized and permissive. This view seems to me more defensible than a claim from polls alone that the public wanted any particular policy. But Mueller may have been wrong. Despite the confusion of the polls, the public may have “wanted” the use of military force to roll back the Kuwait invasion—“wanted” in the sense that, under conditions of partisan competition, it would punish a party that did not pursue military action. Someone looking at polls alone could miss this attitude; someone attending to historical evidence would be less likely to miss it.

To be sure, the historical evidence might also fail to give an accurate reading of public opinion. There are no guarantees for any method. So my claim is not that “latent opinion” as determined from some sort of qualitative analysis is generally more accurate than public opinion as measured by polls. It is that polls often and unavoidably do a poor job of capturing politically relevant public opinion, and that an analysis that tries to read public opinion from polls alone—as did *Nature and Origins*, and as most other analysis does—makes a mistake. Consideration of the latent opinions that polls often measure poorly is essential to any full assessment of public opinion. Thus, an adequate account of public support for the Vietnam War in 1964 should take into account not only

the influence of a mainstream norm in support of the war, but also the existence of a large reservoir of anti-communist feeling in the country and the readiness of one party to play to that feeling. In the case of the Iraq War, a consideration of latent opinion offers a plausible account of the otherwise puzzling unwillingness of Democratic politicians to stand their political ground.

I turn now to the performance of the RAS model in the run-up to the Iraq War. Feldman, Huddy, and Marcus (2013) argue that support for the invasion of Iraq was a mainstream norm—that is, a policy endorsed by most opinion leaders across the political spectrum. Given this view, they expect that increases in political information will be monotonically associated with increases in support for invasion.

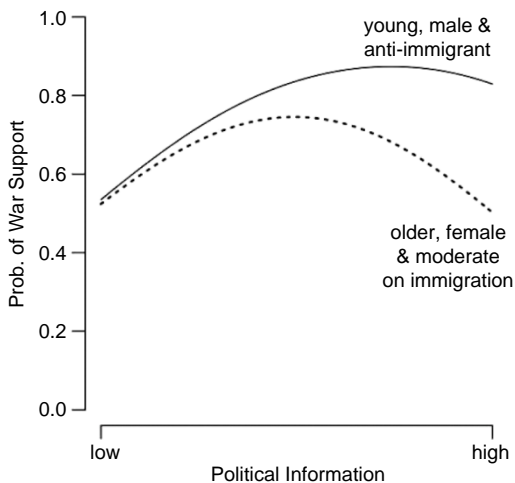
The data, as shown in Figure 3, obviously do not conform to the mainstream pattern. But should that pattern be expected? From my sketch of the political discourse that presumably shaped opinion, I would say no. Democratic and liberal elites were split, and better-informed Democrats in the general public would surely have known that many in their party opposed war without U.N. sanction. In these circumstances, resistance to the Bush policy by the Democratic rank-and-file should be expected.

Whether resistance should be expected to take exactly the form it does in Figure 3 is another matter. Feldman et al. report, and my analysis in Figure 3 agrees, that even some highly informed Republicans resisted Bush's Iraq policy. Can the RAS model explain the resistance of Republican partisans to a policy supported by a Republican president and nearly all Republican members of Congress?

Yes it can, rather easily. It is both a strength and a weakness of the model that, in simple cross-sectional data like these, the RAS model can capture the patterns in Figure 3 and many generally similar patterns as well. To see the variety of patterns of opinion change that a single persuasive message may produce, depending on the intensity of the message and the strength of prior opinion it must overcome, see Figure 8.2 of *Nature and Origins*.¹⁰

Although applications of the RAS model in *Nature and Origins* generally highlight only one or two resistance variables—in the right panel of Figure 3 they are party and ideology—nothing prevents inclusion of multiple resistance variables. Figure 4 shows the patterns of war support when measures of age, gender, and anti-immigrant attitudes are added to the model. As can be seen, resistance to the Bush

Figure 4. Profiles of Two Conservatives



Ideology variables are set to “strong Republicanism” and “extremely conservative” in both profiles

policy is less among conservatives predisposed toward hawkish policies by age, gender, and attitudes toward immigrants, and greater among other conservatives. I do not see a violation of any argument in *Nature and Origins* in this pattern.¹¹

Of course, a model that can explain many patterns may actually explain very little of substance. But my qualifying phrase—in simple cross-sectional data—is important. With more complex data—where different citizens are exposed to different messages, or where messages vary across time, or where opinions are measured at two points in time—the RAS model gives rise to expectations that are not so trivial, and some data do confirm them.¹² Hence I do not see a problem in saying, for cases in which more demanding tests are not possible, that the model is doing fine. It isn’t doing any real explanation, but it isn’t suffering damage either.

This said, the responses of highly informed Republicans to the Bush Iraq policy are eye-catching. Why, from any viewpoint at all, were they resisting?

One possibility is that the Republican party has a core of members who simply, strongly, and flatly oppose overseas wars unless the country has been directly attacked. The party has a long association with isolationism, and this has come to the fore again in the libertarian

movement of the 2000s. I am not suggesting that cues from a libertarian elite explain the resistance to the Bush policy; I am saying that isolationism may be a core belief of some significant number of sophisticated Republicans. Similarly, in 1964, support for the Vietnam War among Republicans seems to have topped out at about 80 percent (see Figure 6.1 of *Nature and Origins*). On this account, what is notable about the patterns in Figures 3 and 4 is the greater support for war among middle-information Republicans than existed in 1964. Perhaps in the new media age, Bush's pro-war message on Iraq was "louder" than Johnson's on Vietnam.

Another possible explanation for the resistance to the Bush policy of highly informed Republicans is their exposure to a stream of news and media commentary pointing up the inability of the Bush administration to provide clear evidence that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction and was therefore a threat to the United States. This point received substantial news coverage in the run-up to the congressional vote in October, and while the bulk of it (from my casual inspection) was favorable to the Bush position, contrary views were reported, along with a persistent tone of skepticism. For example, an NBC correspondent concluded a mostly pro-administration segment with the comment, "All these estimates are based on some facts, mixed with a lot of assumptions and guesses. The question is: is that enough to go to war?"¹³

Feldman et al. (2013, 502) believe that this sort of news coverage may explain resistance to the war. As they comment:

Some members of the press did their part, investigated the story, revealing dissenting views within the intelligence community, providing information that was at odds with the administration's account, and this information was absorbed by many Democrats and some Republicans in an unusual example of democracy unmediated by partisan elites.

This argument is certainly plausible. In my way of thinking, media news and commentary might constitute a third message stream, competing with the left and right party messages. If I were asked, as a matter of personal opinion, whether news affects public opinion in this manner, I would say yes.¹⁴ If I were asked if news, independent of the partisan cues it often carries, has a substantial impact—enough impact, say, to affect the country's decision to go to war in Iraq—I would be doubtful. "The fog of war" is well-known; the fog of political debate of war is surely at least as thick. I think I have seen partisanship cut through it; it would be

very good news if someone could show that reason and evidence can also do so, but I haven't yet seen the evidence. The continued support of most Republicans for the Iraq War in 2003 and 2004, after it became clear that justification for it by the Bush administration had been factually incorrect, further suggests the limited importance of neutral information in shaping political attitudes on partisan issues.¹⁵ At present, therefore, I see no strong reason to discount the performance of the parsimonious two-message version of the RAS model.

IV. THE CHALLENGE OF MEASUREMENT ERROR

Measurement error in a survey is like a bathroom scale that randomly registers weights that are 20 to 30 pounds higher or lower than people actually weigh. Error of this size makes it difficult to determine whether a diet—or an elite message—is having effect. Stephen Ansolabehere, Jonathan Rodden, and James Snyder (2008) rightly comment that it is a mystery why most survey analysis ignores the problem.

Measurement error is an issue in the evaluation of *Nature and Origins* because some scholars have argued that the effects of political information on attitudes, as featured in the book, may be artifacts of measurement error. Paul Goren (2004) finds that, after correcting for measurement error, poorly informed citizens can usually link their values to relevant policies just as well as can the most informed. Ansolabehere, Rodden, and Snyder (2008) find that, after correcting for measurement error, information-related differences in opinion are much reduced. As they phrase the conclusion most pertinent to *Nature and Origins*: “Heterogeneity of sophistication among the public is not as important a phenomenon as the line of research from Converse through Zaller would suggest” (ibid., 229).

I argue in this section that the findings of these scholars do little to undermine the argument presented in *Nature and Origins*. I begin with background on the nature of measurement error, the view of it developed in *Nature and Origins*, and how the findings of Goren and Ansolabehere et al. relate to that view. Measurement error involves some technical matters, but I will keep the discussion accessible to non-specialists.

Measurement error cannot be directly observed. What can be observed is a great deal of random variability in responses to survey questions. This could be because, as in the bathroom-scale analogy, the

measurement instrument—that is, the survey question—is wildly error prone. Sometimes the error is blamed on vague and poorly worded questions. Another view is that the error is not due to the questions themselves, but to an unavoidable mismatch between the feelings people store in their heads and the questions that attempt to elicit them. Trying to figure out how to map the ideas in their heads with the particular text they have been asked to respond to, survey respondents exhibit a certain amount of randomness. A quite different explanation for survey randomness is that people don't have well-developed attitudes. Hence, even when the questions are perfectly clear, some people don't think any particular thing and hence respond to the question in a partially random manner. Deciding what combination of these explanations to accept is a difficult problem.

Table 3 provides an example of the random variability that is pervasive in survey research. The example is the National Election Studies question on whether government services “in areas such as health and education” should be increased or decreased. A set of some 900 randomly selected citizens was asked the question twice, in 1990 and 1992.¹⁶ The precise form of the question, which involves self-placement on a 7-point scale, is shown in Figure 5. The interviews were conducted in the respondents' homes, so that respondents could be given a “show card,” like the one pictured in Figure 5, as an aid to answering the question.

Table 3 shows how people who gave a particular response in 1990 answered the same question in 1992. Thus, looking at the first column of the table, one can see that, of the people who said “no opinion” in 1990, some 47 percent said no opinion again in 1992; the rest gave opinions that ranged across the seven substantive options. The second column shows that, of the people who took the most extreme “Fewer Services” position in 1990, only 19 percent gave the same response in 1992. However, a total of 50 percent ($19 + 20 + 11 = 50$) gave an opinion on the same side of the issue; meanwhile, 13 percent said no opinion in 1992, 17 percent took a middle position, and 20 percent ($13 + 7$) were now on the “Increase Services” side of the scale.

One can easily imagine that people are uncertain how to express their feelings in numerical quantities—who, after all, carries around a stored attitude that “I am a 6 on the 1-to-7 Government Services scale”? In light of this kind of problem, some random fluctuation in responses can reasonably be attributed to measurement error. But there is a lot of variability in Table 3, and some of it is quite large. To get a clearer fix on

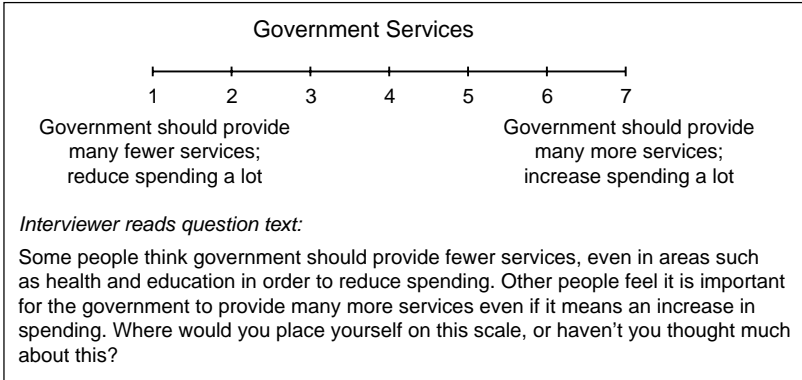
Table 3. Responses to Government Services Question in 1990 and 1992

	<i>No opinion (1990)</i>	<i>Fewer government services (1990)</i>		<i>Middle (1990)</i>			<i>More government services (1990)</i>			
		(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)		
<i>No opinion (1992)</i>	47	13	10	8	18	13	13	29	<i>274</i>	
<i>Fewer government services (1992)</i>	(1) 4	19	12	7	2	2	3	5	<i>65</i>	
	(2) 5	20	24	18	4	4	4	1	<i>104</i>	
	(3) 5	11	22	25	14	13	10	5	<i>172</i>	
<i>Middle (1992)</i>	(4) 17	17	11	27	36	27	25	14	<i>331</i>	
	(5) 7	13	9	9	16	26	23	10	<i>201</i>	
	(6) 7	0	9	3	5	10	14	13	<i>107</i>	
<i>More government services (1992)</i>	(7) 8	7	5	3	4	4	7	23	<i>98</i>	
	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100		
	<i>202</i>	<i>54</i>	<i>93</i>	<i>165</i>	<i>338</i>	<i>206</i>	<i>147</i>	<i>147</i>	<i>N = 1,352</i>	

Note: Cell entries are column percentages. Row and column n's are shown in italic font on the margins.

Figure 5. National Election Studies Question on Government Services

Interviewer hands the following "show card" to respondent as an aid in answering question:



Note: Show card is not an exact replica.

Table 4. Response Patterns to Government Services Question, 1990 to 1992

Same scale position in both interviews (but not DK)	22 (303)
Some position change, but directionally stable*	32 (438)
Opinions in both interviews, but directionally unstable**	17 (229)
No opinion in one interview, opinion in other interview	21 (288)
No opinion offered in either interview	7 (94)

* Any combination of 1,2,3 both times is counted as directionally stable; likewise for 5,6,7; likewise for 3,4,5.

** Minimal change that counts as change is 3 units on 7-point scale.

Cell entries are percentages; Ns shown in parentheses. Calculations are from data in Table 3.

the main patterns, Table 4 reduces the clutter to five large categories: Perfectly stable across two interviews; some change, but respondent stays either on the same side of the issue or consistently near the middle (3, 4, or 5); directionally unstable; unstable between opinion and no opinion; and consistent no opinion. As can be seen, about 54 (22 + 32) percent of

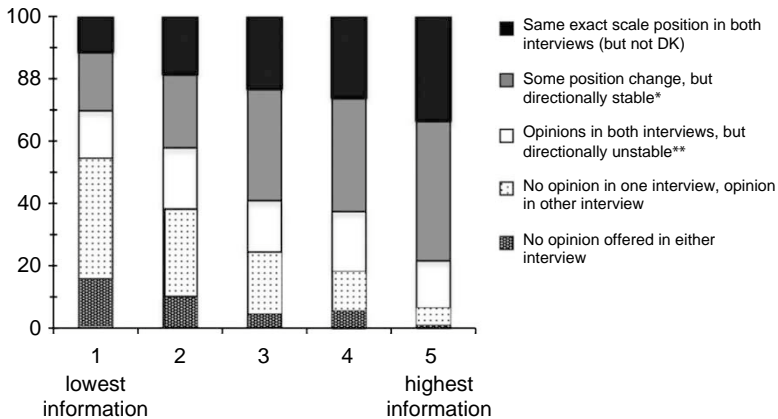
respondents give the same or similar responses, while the rest either have no opinion or no firm opinion.

If responses to this question were studied over three or more time periods instead of just two, the picture of random variation in the data would not be much affected (Feldman 1989). The amount of random variation would also vary across different types of issues: Opinions are generally more stable on cultural issues such as abortion, race, and gay rights. People are also more likely to give “no opinion” responses when, as in this question, the wording includes that option. But the random variability in response to the Government Services item is nonetheless fairly typical of what occurs in survey data.

In his 1964 paper, Converse argued that most survey change of this kind reflected weakly developed attitudes or, in many cases, no attitudes at all. But beginning with a paper by Achen (1975), analysts have tried to distinguish between randomness in survey responses due to the problem of mapping ideas in one’s head onto particular survey questions, and randomness due to weakly developed attitudes. In a suggestion that has been followed by many researchers, Achen proposed that insofar as response randomness occurred in all types of respondents—from the most politically sophisticated people to the least sophisticated—it should be regarded as due to measurement error, i.e., the inherent difficulty of mapping opinions onto the particular text of the survey question. But insofar as randomness is higher among the less politically engaged and informed, it could be regarded as due to some sort of confusion. The nature of this confusion, if any, can still not be directly observed. Achen attributed such confusion to failure to understand the question among the less sophisticated; others, most notably Converse, have attributed it to weakly developed attitudes.

In the tests Achen conducted, political sophistication had almost no effect on survey randomness. His conclusion was therefore that randomness was mostly caused by measurement error. Using richer data, however, subsequent researchers have usually found that differences in respondents’ level of political information explain some but not all survey randomness (see especially Feldman 1989). They have, in other words, found evidence of both weakly developed attitudes and inherently hard-to-answer questions. Figure 6 shows how response instability on the Government Services item varies by political information. As can be seen, the ratio of stable to unstable opinion is much higher among the highly informed than among the least informed.¹⁷

Figure 6. Response Stability on Government Services Question, 1990 to 1992



Source: National Election Studies

*Any combination of 1, 2, 3 both times is counted directionally stable, likewise for 5, 6, 7; likewise for 3, 4, 5.

**Minimal change that counts as change is 3 units on 7-point scale.

I mention in passing that a part of my education that was missed in Bartels's account has some relevance here: I was a student of Achen at U.C. Berkeley in the late 1970s, which was just after the publication of his paper on measurement error. Hence survey randomness, and the alternative explanations proposed for it, were foundational in my development as a student of public opinion. An APSA convention paper called "Toward a Theory of the Survey Response" integrated an attitude-change model with a survey-response model (Zaller 1984). The survey-response model was further developed in an NES Pilot Study with Stanley Feldman and a paper done jointly with Feldman (Zaller and Feldman 1992).

A key contribution of the survey-response model, which then appeared in chapters 3 and 4 of *Nature and Origins*, is to specify and test a particular model of what it might mean for survey respondents to have weakly developed attitudes. The model holds that individuals do not in general possess fixed opinions on political issues. Rather, they have in their minds a mix of positive and negative considerations. When queried, they respond on the basis of whichever considerations happen to be most accessible in memory. For example, someone asked the Government Services question in Table 4 might want the services that

government provides but hate the taxes he must pay to get those services. If he is asked the question around April 15—the deadline to pay federal income tax—his hatred of taxes may be at the top of his head and he will then opine that government services should be cut. But if he is asked the same question a few months later, and just after seeing a news report on teacher layoffs in the schools, he might take the opposite position.

Nature and Origins argues that, because politically engaged respondents are more ideologically consistent in accepting or rejecting the elite-cued communications they receive, they fill their heads with mainly consistent considerations and therefore produce more stable responses to survey questions. The operation of this process also causes greater consistency between predispositions and opinions among the highly engaged. And insofar as ideologically consistent party cues drive the acceptance or rejection of the messages that become considerations, the process tends to produce ideological consistency across multiple diverse issues. *Nature and Origins* reviews a variety of evidence, most but not all of which is consistent with this theoretical view.

The pertinent point here is that *Nature and Origins* provides both theoretical and empirical reason to believe that the greater randomness in survey responses of less-informed citizens is due, in large part, to a particular notion of weak attitudes—unresolved ambivalence. What, then, have Goren and Ansolabehere et al. found that undermines any of the above?

I begin with Goren. To *Nature and Origin's* central tenet about the importance of political information, he maintains the counter-thesis that “even relatively uninformed citizens perform quite well at grounding policy opinions in abstract views about the good and just society” (Goren 2013, 520). In his most sophisticated treatment of this topic, Goren uses a statistical procedure to demonstrate that, after measurement error is controlled, the general political values of highly engaged respondents are no more tightly linked to their policy opinions than are the political values of the least engaged (Goren 2004). But in my view Goren’s test is incorrectly done for the point he wishes to make. The reason is that, in correcting for measurement error, he fails to distinguish the random variability that is likely due to measurement error, from the variability that is more appropriately explained as due to weakly developed (ambivalent) attitudes.¹⁸ He simply corrects for all of it, regardless of cause. This seems to me an unfair test of an argument that claims that the survey responses of the less informed are less strongly

related because their opinions they are more likely to reflect ambivalent minds.

Goren might contend that the survey items he uses to measure general political values are not subject to the RAS model of the survey response, which seeks to explain particular policy stances, and that he may therefore correct for all forms of response randomness, whatever the cause. I disagree. Consider the initial items in his measures of the political values “Equal Opportunity” and “Limited Government:”

Our society should do whatever is necessary to make sure that everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed.

[Which is closer to your view?] ONE, we need a strong government to handle today’s complex economic problems; or TWO, the free market can handle these problems without government being involved?

These questions, although intended as measures of political values rather than policy preferences, raise the usual concerns about question vagueness and conflicted minds. Citizens trying to answer these questions must figure out the meaning of imprecise language, and also canvass their memories for considerations relevant to answering them. What, for example, is meant by “strong government” and “today’s complex economic problems”? On a day when the government exposes insider trading on the stock market, he may have one idea of strong government at the top of his mind. But on a day when a big federal budget deficit is announced, a different idea of government may come to mind. A politically sophisticated respondent might have a sufficiently large and consistent set of considerations relating to strong government to give the same survey response on both days; a less-sophisticated respondent might not. And this might be so even if both respondents had the same underlying disposition toward big government. In assuming away these issues in his error-correction procedure—issues that are at the heart of the claim that values and policy opinions are likely to be more tightly linked for more politically informed respondents—Goren fails, in my opinion, to fairly test the RAS model.

How much difference does it make that Goren corrects for information-related differences in measurement error? Summarizing tests in a 2008 paper that do not correct for measurement error, Goren (2008, 159) writes that “there is a moderate tendency for political expertise to strengthen the relationship between core beliefs and policy preferences.”

This summary is consistent with my re-analysis of two tests in Goren's 2004 paper under conditions of equal measurement error correction in all information groups. For the cases I examined, the unstandardized coefficients linking values to attitudes were about 60 percent larger among citizens in the top third of political information, compared to those in the bottom third.¹⁹

These differences, if they generalize to other cases, are large enough to be consistent with the RAS model's emphasis on the importance of political information. But information matters for more than its effect on measurement error. An effect that Goren's assessment overlooks is the impact of information on offering opinion statements at all. For the Iraq war question analyzed earlier in this paper, rates of no opinion are much higher—30 percent among the poorly informed versus 11 percent among the well-informed. For a question about President Bush's 2002 tax cuts, the no opinion rates are even higher—53 percent among the less informed, 24 percent among the highly informed. For the policy questions Goren examines, the opinion rates are much lower,²⁰ but this is likely due to an artifact of question-wording: The NES gave featured treatment to the Iraq War and Tax Cut questions and this treatment included an option for "haven't thought about it," whereas the questions Goren examined did not. But like many artifacts, this one reveals an important phenomenon—that many people, especially among the less informed, offer opinion statements that, in their own assessment, reflect no real thought. That these assessments correlate to some degree with other opinion statements is, as Goren's analysis stresses, a fact worth noting. But so is the admitted lack of thought, because people who say, even on the most momentous and heavily debated issues of the day, that they have given no thought to them are unlikely to make much effort to hold politicians accountable on those issues.

Having made clear some disagreements with Goren's counter-thesis, let me indicate areas of common ground. In stressing the importance of information for opinion formation, *Nature and Origins* fails to distinguish its impact in two related but actually quite different areas: Its impact on the development of ideological consistency across multiple attitude domains, or what is often called ideology, and its impact on consistency between preferences and values within a narrow domain. Example: Information does more to increase attitude consistency among such unrelated policies as abortion, Iraq, and global warming, than to increase consistency among such related notions as individualism and opposition

to food stamps. Goren does not dispute that the first kind of information impact is large; he challenges only the second, and in so doing underscores a difference *Nature and Origins* failed to recognize. I think Goren overstates the difference, but I accept the point as a useful correction to the book's argument.

In addition, I agree with what I take to be the major point of Goren's contribution to this volume: that ideological self-identification and "feeling thermometer" evaluations of liberals and conservatives are unacceptable proxy measures for the political values of the poorly informed. I did use them for this purpose in one of the major analyses in *Nature and Origins*—the analysis of mainstream and partisan norms in Figure 6.5—and in retrospect I should not (and need not) have done so. So I stand corrected on this point. But while accepting Goren's substantive point, I do not agree that it has importance for the assessment of the RAS model, since my use of the questions with liberal-conservative language is quite limited.²¹

I turn now to the study of measurement error by Ansolabhere, Rodden, and Snyder (2010). In contrast to Goren's procedure, their correction procedure—averaging over large numbers of survey items—does not automatically eliminate information-related differences in survey randomness. It may or may not, depending on the form of randomness present. Hence I accept their main conclusion: Correcting for measurement error substantially increases the apparent stability and coherence of citizens' attitudes. However, I cannot tell what exactly they mean in saying that information effects are "not as important a phenomenon as the line of research from Converse through Zaller would suggest" (*ibid.*, 229). The reason for my uncertainty is that most of the firepower in their paper is directed at a claim Converse is taken to have made—that, as the paper's abstract puts it, the "vast majority of voters have incoherent and unstable preferences about political issues" (*ibid.*, 215). This is, I believe, an overstatement of Converse's position, and it fails to engage the argument that *Nature and Origins* makes. But testing the claim is at the center of the paper by Ansolabhere, Rodden, and Snyder. Much of the paper's analysis does not control for political information, and when it does, it uses a dichotomous measure that compares "very high" and "fairly high" information respondents with the majority of less-informed respondents. This classification is consistent with the purpose of testing whether the less-informed majority has coherent preferences, but is poorly suited to evaluating the arguments of

Nature and Origins, which involve the effects of political information across a wider spectrum of difference.

The authors believe that one of their findings is particularly damaging to the Converse-to-Zaller research tradition. The finding is from a model with presidential vote as the dependent variable and measures of “traditional morality” and “economic attitudes,” their interactions with a dichotomous information variable, party attachment, and ideology as the independent variables. The putatively damaging finding is that the two interactions are small and non-statistically significant. But I don’t see the relevance to *Nature and Origins*. The finding does bear on some of Converse’s arguments about the general unimportance of issues compared to party attachment in voting behavior, but not to claims in *Nature and Origins*. My voting models all involve the vote-changing effect of exposure to communication from the opposite party, and most attention is on non-linear effects (see Zaller 1992, Fig. 10.6, and Zaller 1996). Outside the domain of voting, the strongest tests in *Nature and Origins* likewise involve the non-linear, opinion-changing effect of exposure to communication. Ansolabehere et al. do not examine this phenomenon.

Another matter not examined in the Ansolabehere et al. paper is how measurement error affects the relationship between substantively distinct but ideologically related issues. Examples are “moral traditionalism” and “market capitalism.” There is no logical reason that attitudes toward these domains ought to co-vary; but the Converse-to-Zaller tradition expects that they will—but mainly for highly informed persons exposed to ideological cues. Table 5 below shows that the Converse expectation holds. The independent variable is a 27-item economic attitudes scale built in the 1990 NES survey along lines similar to the measures in Ansolabehere et al. 2008. The dependent variable is a ten-item traditional morality scale. Respondents levels of political information are measured by ten information tests. All variables are scored in a 0–1 range. The strength of the relationship is roughly an order of magnitude stronger at the top of the information scale than at the bottom.

In the end, the results reported by Ansolabehere, Rodden, and Snyder do so little to engage *Nature and Origins* that I was unsure whether to discuss the paper as part of this essay. Their beef, it seems to me, is with Converse, and especially his black-and-white (intertemporally stable attitudes versus nonattitudes) model. But since the paper puts my book in its line of fire, I felt I should give my view.

Table 5. Effects of Political Information on Constraint Across Issue Domains

	unstandardized slope	SE of slope	standardized beta
Economic conservatism (range 0 to 1)	0.06	0.06	0.06
Political Information (range 0 to 1)	-0.40	0.06	-0.53
Information x Econ	0.61	0.14	0.42
Constant	0.61		
Adjusted R-square	0.13		
RMSE	0.16		
N	960		

Note: Dependent variable is a 10-item measure of moral traditionalism. The economic conservatism measure has 27 items. Both were constructed by standardizing the items, summing them, and converting them to a 0-1 range. The information scale is based on 10 items measuring political knowledge. The items necessary for the 27-item economic conservatism variable are available only on Form A. For additional details, see online appendix (see note 1).

Source: 1990 National Election Study

All this said, I must acknowledge that, with one exception, the main attitude formation and change models in *Nature and Origins* do not correct for measurement error. The reason is that I was not clear at the time, and still am not entirely clear, how to do these corrections in non-linear models with dichotomous dependent variables. But why, then, should the attitude-change results be believed? One reason is that the single case in which I did attempt error correction was Vietnam, which on other grounds is also my most important case.²² A more general reason can be seen in Figure 1 by comparing the pattern of opinion on the Iraq War with the pattern for the other cases. Party polarization for the Iraq War is much greater than for the other cases in the Figure—a reflection, I can plausibly claim, of the greater intensity of political communication on Iraq. For this issue, even poorly informed partisans got the partisan message. Measurement error is present and uncorrected on all variables in Figure 1, but it cannot explain why low-information partisans were more polarized about Iraq than about less politically salient issues. The results in Figure 2 are even more difficult to explain in terms of measurement error. The more complicated set of information effects

in *Nature and Origins*—not only stronger, but intelligibly different in different cases—are by similar logic hard to explain as a consequence of measurement error.

Survey randomness is a much more important problem in the study of public opinion than is commonly acknowledged. I do not believe that I got to the bottom of it in the simple survey response model in *Nature and Origins*, and I do not believe that Goren and Ansolabehre et al. have the last word either. The key problem in this area—what exactly people mean by their survey responses—is simply a long way from being resolved.

V. IDEOLOGY, ISSUE PUBLICS, AND DEMOCRACY

In a famous section of *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*, Joseph Schumpeter (1942, 269) attacks the reigning conception of democracy as romantic and incoherent. It is, he says, nonsense to believe that “‘the people’ hold a definite and rational opinion about every individual question and that they give effect to this opinion—in a democracy by choosing ‘representatives’ to see that this opinion is carried out” The only “democratic method” that is normatively and empirically viable, Schumpeter argues, is selection of leaders by a “competitive struggle for the people’s vote.”

Schumpeter makes no reference to the policy preferences of voters in his statement of the democratic method, but he comments almost in passing that the competition for popular support leads politicians to offer “exactly or almost exactly the same program” as their opponents. In this way, Schumpeter slips the preferences of the voters into his argument. But his view of them remains thoroughly downbeat; at earlier points in the book, he calls them bigoted, intolerant, ignorant, and prey to manipulation by politicians.

In *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (1957), economist Anthony Downs brings the preferences of voters into the heart of democratic politics. His party politicians do not simply compete for votes; in a two-party system like that of the United States, they compete for vote of the median voter in an ideologically organized policy space, such that the party that gets closer to the median voter wins. Downs argued that it was rational for voters to remain ignorant of politics, but he endowed them with sufficient sophistication to vote like ideologues.

The context in which these books were written is worth noting. Schumpeter wrote just after the 1940 Republican presidential nominee, Wendell Wilkie, came strikingly close to matching the Democratic party on major issues of both foreign and domestic policy. Downs wrote 15 years later, shortly after Republicans broke the Democratic hold on the presidency by convincing Dwight Eisenhower to run on their ticket rather than the Democrats'. In the 15 years after Downs wrote, each party ran a decidedly non-centrist candidate—Goldwater in 1964 and McGovern in 1972—and was soundly thrashed. By this point if not sooner, many political scientists had become comfortable with Downs's famous median-voter argument.

One political scientist who was not comfortable with ideological interpretations of elections was Converse (1964). Only a small proportion of voters were in any meaningful sense ideological, he said. Many didn't have attitudes even on the major issues of the day. Groups—business, labor, and above all political parties—dominated the public's thinking about politics. When voters were deflected from their group attachments, it was mainly because of "the nature of the times," which in today's parlance would be the performance of the national economy or the progress of a war. Some voters did have commitments to particular issues, but, as Converse continued, these "issue publics" tended to be small and narrowly focused.

The dominant response to Converse's "Belief System" paper—a response that runs through *Nature and Origins* and beyond—has been to argue that most voters do have real policy views, and that many voters are also ideological. An especially important strand of this research, launched by Achen, focuses on correction for measurement error. Better surveys, with more and better-crafted questions, have also made contributions to the evidence that voters are more ideological than Converse thought, as demonstrated by Ansolabehere et al. (2008). Self-administered surveys elicit more ideological responses (Vavreck 2012). In addition, voters have become, to some genuine but probably modest degree, more consistent in their support for party programs, possibly due to greater clarity in the ideological cues emanating from the parties (Abramowitz 2012; Baldassarri and Gelman 2008; Levendusky 2009; Hetherington 2001).²³

The net effect of these developments—better analysis, better data, better sorting of voters into parties—is that voters appear to be strikingly, perhaps even somewhat credulously, ideological in their political preferences, as I suggested in connection with Figure 1 above. But

there are anomalies in the current view of a more ideological public. And, as in a Ptolemaic star chart, the anomalies may ultimately be more telling than the dominant pattern.

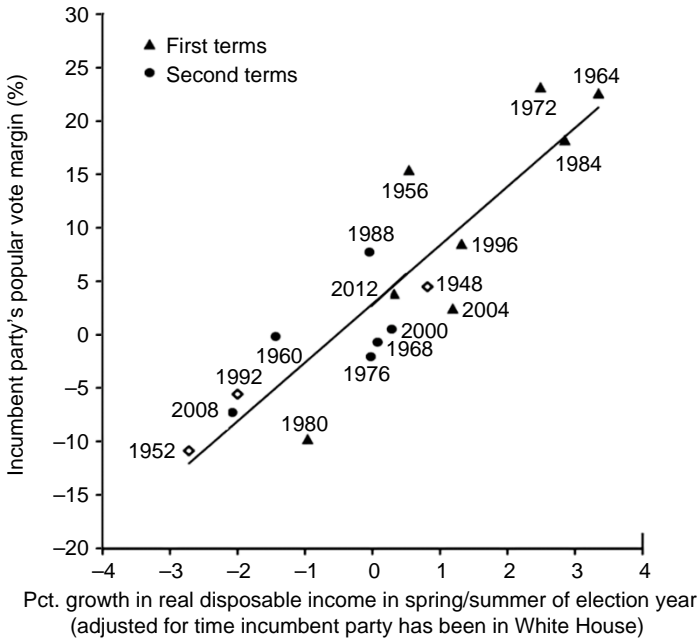
The most important anomaly is the marked polarization of the party system. When Downs wrote, it appeared that parties were under intense pressure to converge to the position of the median voter, but there is little evidence of such pressure today. Consider congressional elections. Extreme incumbents are at somewhat greater risk of defeat (Canes-Wrone, Brady, and Cogan 2002). But extremist incumbents are typically replaced by a candidate from the other party who is equally extreme, a pattern that Bafumi and Herron (2010) call “leap frog representation.” The result is that Congress is sharply polarized, with most members far to the left or far to the right and relatively few in the middle. This pattern goes back to the 1980s if not further (Ansolabehere, Stewart, and Snyder 2001) and, contrary to popular speculation, cannot be explained by gerrymandering (McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2010).

The failure of Downs’s median-voter theory in congressional elections has plausible explanations. One is that parties rather than voters are falling down on the job. Downs assumed that parties will strategically converge to the ideological median, but if for some reason both refuse to do so, what can voters do about it? Another possibility is that voters typically get too little information about congressional candidates to recognize and reward the candidate who takes positions closer to the median (Cohen, Noel, and Zaller 2011).

Neither of these explanations, however, works well in presidential elections, where candidates who are perceived by voters to be non-centrist suffer little or no penalty. When, for example, voters in the National Election Studies were asked to rate the ideological location of George W. Bush in 2004, they placed him in the same far-right location that Barry Goldwater had occupied in 1964.²⁴ When asked to rate Barack Obama in 2008, voters rated him almost as extreme as they had rated George McGovern in 1972. And yet both Bush and Obama won handily over candidates (Kerry and McCain) who were rated as more moderate (Cohen and Zaller 2012). Sides (2013) and Vavreck (2012) find that Obama was rated farther from the median voter than his opponent again in 2012, but he won anyway, even with a weak economy.

To get a clearer sense of the forces at work in presidential elections, consider Figure 7, which is adapted from Bartels 2013b. It shows that two variables—the state of the economy during the presidential

Figure 7. Evidence of a Non-Effect



Vote margin is incumbent party percent of popular vote minus challenger percent. Horizontal axis shows percent change in RDI per capita in spring and summer quarters of the election year, minus 1.29 points for each year the incumbent party has been in the White House. The adjustment reflects the fact that it becomes harder, all else equal, for incumbent parties to win re-election. *Source:* Bartels 2013b

campaign, and the time the incumbent party has been in the White House—explain most of the variation in presidential election outcomes.

Technical explanation of Figure 7: The x-axis shows Income Growth and the incumbent party's time in the White House on the same scale. Consider the point for 1952 at the lower left, which has a score of -2.76 on the x-axis. The economy grew about 2.4 percent in the fourteenth and fifteenth quarters, but the Democratic Party had been in the White House for five straight terms. According to Bartels's analysis, each term in office (after the first) offsets 1.29 percentage points of Q_{14}/Q_{15} growth. For 1952, this works out as 2.4 percent minus $1.29 \times 4 = -2.76$. The y-axis shows the vote margin of the incumbent party in each election year.

The effect of ideological extremism—or rather, evidence that there might be little effect at all—can be gleaned from the examination of particular cases in the scatterplot. Note, for example, that the point for 1964 is Lyndon Johnson’s landslide win over extremist Goldwater, and that the point for 1972 is Richard Nixon’s landslide over extremist McGovern. Both points are close to the trend line. What this shows is that the state of the economy (very good in both years) and incumbent party time in the White House (at its minimum value in both years) is mainly responsible for the landslide outcomes. Meanwhile, at the bottom left of the graph, the data point for 1952 shows that there is no need to invoke the moderation of Dwight D. Eisenhower to explain his landslide victory over Adlai E. Stevenson in that year.

Careful examination of this graph, as well as statistical analysis, provide hints that ideological extremism matters. The challenger party’s poor showing in 1980 may, for example, be due to moderate incumbent Jimmy Carter’s advantage over Ronald Reagan. But statistical analysis of these data indicates that the penalty for extremism, if real, is not large (Cohen and Zaller 2012).

I noted earlier that the moderate Republican candidacies of the 1940s and 50s may have been taken as evidence for the median-voter theory. But we must now consider a simpler explanation: That Republicans were under pressure not to moderate, but to accept the New Deal, which was by no means moderate when it was enacted. Similarly, the slightly subpar performances of McGovern and Reagan in 1980 might have been due to specific policies they favored, or groups they offended, rather than to ideological extremism. Reagan, for example, had a history of opposing Social Security, which might have cost him votes even if his ideology did not.²⁵ Thus what at one point looked like compelling evidence for the median-voter theory now looks from Figure 7 like it might be better explained as historical accident.

The jury is still out on whether parties face a penalty of extremism.²⁶ But it is striking that, neither in congressional nor in presidential elections, is there evidence that the penalty, if it exists, is large. Putatively ideological voters are simply not voting their median preferences (Adams, Merrill, and Grofman 2005).²⁷

In this situation, it is more than a curiosity that Lenz has found that voters who have been induced by campaign discourse to adopt orthodox party positions do not then vote on the basis of those positions (Lenz 2012, Fig. 5.4). Lenz’s finding is the individual-level affirmation of the

aggregate-level pattern: Partisan voters take the positions they are expected as partisans to take, but do not seem to care about them. Their ideological consistency—however stable and reliable—seems to be, at least some of the time, a verbal more than a behavioral commitment.

Two recent experimental studies provide indirect evidence for this possibility. In both, respondents were asked simple factual questions about the performance of the economy, trends in the federal budget deficit, and other matters that typically yield large partisan differences in assessment—i.e., each side saying conditions are better when its party is in power and worse when the opposition is in charge (Shani 2006). In the two recent studies, some respondents were queried in the usual manner and some were offered financial inducements for accurate answers. The result was not only greater accuracy, but a large reduction in the usual partisan differences in assessment. For Prior, Sood, and Khanna (2013), this result raised the title question—“You Cannot be Serious: Do Partisans Believe What They Say?”—and the conclusion that they often do not. As Bullock, Gerber, Hill, and Huber (2013, 2) conclude in a similar study, “the apparent gulf in factual beliefs between members of different parties may be more illusory than real.”

No one has demonstrated that incentives for thoughtful responses can reduce partisan differences in questions about policy preferences. Numerous experimental studies have, however, demonstrated the effect of what may be an incentive to *not* respond thoughtfully: The inclusion of partisan cues in policy questions, i.e., labeling response options by their partisan sponsors. The effect of this manipulation is large and reliable: It substantially increases the frequency of partisan responses (Milburn 1987; Cohen 2003; Tomz and Sniderman 2005). The usual interpretation of the result is that it shows the importance of elite cues on mass opinion, but a plausible alternative is that it shows how readily citizens default to thoughtless partisan opinions that are quite possibly different from what their considered opinions would be. The same kind of behavior surely occurs on conventional surveys: Forced to answer multiple questions in rapid succession, people default to partisan answers they may or may not really mean.²⁸ To borrow the language of Petty and Cacioppo, they engage in peripheral rather than central processing of the questions put to them.

If aggregate data corroborated the survey view that voters are highly ideological, we might dismiss the suggestion—from Lenz, the two experiments on factual matters, and the strikingly broad pattern of

consistency in Figure 1 above—that ideologically consistent responses in surveys are not always indications of real commitment. But since this is not the case, the possibility of partisan lip service must be taken seriously.

If we cannot rely upon the existence of an ideologically attuned electorate, we also cannot rely on the median-voter model to study political accountability. I would like, therefore, to sketch an alternative model of accountability on a foundation of mostly non-ideological voters. This foundation may be found in Converse’s “Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics” (1964): While few citizens, as Converse said, respond to politics in terms of issues and ideologies, many respond in terms of either “group interest” or the “nature of the times.” Some citizens can also be characterized as members of “issue publics,” that is, people who care about only one or two of the many major issues that constitute the agenda of national politics.²⁹

Converse’s ideologues, group-interest voters, and issue-publics voters may be expected to attach themselves to parties on the basis of their various concerns. Although I am not aware of evidence on this point, voters may also attach themselves to parties on the basis of social identities and symbolic concerns.³⁰ Nature-of-the-times voters, by contrast, may be expected to vacillate between parties depending on the performance of the economy.

Once voters come, for whatever particular reason, to identify with a party, they must decide what they think of the rest of its agenda. A study by Sniderman and Stiglitz (2012) suggests how they may do so. From survey experiments, these scholars show that, given a choice between two candidates with locations on a spatial dimension, well-informed voters will sometimes support candidates who are farther from them on a given issue because they want to support the party they associate with the candidate position. If well-informed voters will do this, they may also support candidates of their party who are distant from them on one issue for the sake of the party’s reputation for being closer to them on another they care about more.

But we should not expect narrowly motivated partisans to maintain disagreement with their chosen party on the bulk of its agenda. Once they identify with a party, the RAS model expects that they will accept cues favoring the party’s broad agenda.

To complement Converse’s non-Downsian view of voters, it is useful to have a non-Downsian view of parties. In the Downsian view, parties are teams of politicians who care only about election to office. In an

alternative view, colleagues and I propose that parties in the United States are best understood as coalitions of interest groups and activists seeking to capture and use government for their particular goals, which range from material self-interest to high-minded idealism. The coalition of policy-demanding groups develops an agenda of mutually acceptable policies, insists on the nomination of candidates with a demonstrated commitment to its program, and works to elect these candidates to office (Bawn et al. 2012).

The “agenda of mutually agreeable policies” is readily observable in party agendas, the structure of voting in Congress, the views of party activists, and the views of party nominees. When interest groups enter or leave party coalitions, these observables change as well.

Everyone understands that the contemporary Democratic and Republican parties disagree with one another on almost everything; but the group-centric theory of parties implies that intra-party disagreement is also very great. Wall Street interests, for example, want the Republican party to stand for weak bank regulation much more than an end to abortion; church leaders who are their co-partisans may be indifferent to the first and ardent for the second. On the Democratic side, unions are more concerned about policies that promote well-paying jobs than policies that reduce global warming, whereas the Sierra Club has the opposite priorities. Party coalitions strive mightily to achieve a unified public front, but they are disparate groups in which unity of outlook is often superficial.

The same, I suggest, is likely to be true of the partisan rank and file. Thus, the bulk of ideologically consistently Republican voters may not want an end to abortion any more than the Chamber of Commerce does. But they may want something from politics—something most other voters don’t want nearly as much as they do—and be willing to sign on to the larger agenda of the party that promises to get it for them.

This is not to say that truly committed ideologues—people who adopt partisan agendas with a fervent consistency—are non-existent in American politics. Converse estimated the percent of ideologues in the general public at 3.5 percent. It would probably be higher now, but I doubt that the correct figure is as high as measurement-error corrected estimates make it out to be. Nor, I suspect, is the breadth of genuine commitment as great as my Figure 1 indicates. What Figure 1 does, in my opinion, accurately convey is the large number of partisans who are

willing to sign on, perhaps only very casually, to their party's agenda. That they care about the bulk of that agenda should not be assumed.

The reader may at this point feel that I am using the terms party and ideology interchangeably. I do not believe that I am. Though party and ideology operate side-by-side, they are different forms of political organization. My understanding of them, which is essentially that of Hans Noel (forthcoming), is as follows.

An ideology is a set policy positions recommended by informal coalitions of political pundits, intellectuals, and interest-group representatives. Although ideologies generally appeal to principles and values, they are not defined by them, but by what members of the informal coalition can agree on. The purpose of ideology is to persuade citizens at large, and especially the more politically active segment of the populace, of what ought to be done in politics. Citizens sign on to ideologies for the same sorts of reasons that citizens identify with parties—single issues, identities, general political values. As careful studies show, different people are attracted to liberalism and conservatism for different reasons (Conover and Feldman 1981; Feldman and Johnston forthcoming). Thus, for example, what Conover and Feldman call symbolic attachments—e.g., disliking “Big Business,” liking “Women’s Liberation”—are more closely associated with evaluations of liberalism and conservatism than are policy preferences.

Ideological activists—that is, people with intense commitment to a pundit-created ideology—seek to implement their agendas through political parties, where parties are defined as above. These activists work with other policy-demanding groups in a party (e.g., union members, gun-rights advocates, businesses, church leaders) to nominate candidates committed to a mutually acceptable agenda. Party nominees then become the most visible and important source of cues—which are at once partisan and ideological, depending on the balance of forces in the party—for the broader public.³¹

The science-minded elites of Purple Land have a limited role in this theory of party. If they have close connections to party activists—as, for example, climate scientists appear to work closely with liberal activists—experts may still influence or perhaps determine party positions. But if party activists represent their own interests and pet attitudes, policy expertise may have little importance for party position taking. In the Democratic Party, for example, industrial unions seek protectionist policies at variance with conventional economics, and this carries over

into the attitudes of the politicians they help to nominate. Similarly in the Republican Party, the strong views of Tea Party activists on economic issues, some of which run contrary to economic research, nonetheless determine party position taking on issues these activists care deeply about. The Republican party's position on global warming may, I speculate, reflect the influence of energy interests in Republican nominations. Party nominations have long been under the radar both for voters and for political scientists, but this signifies nothing about their actual importance. As E. E. Schattschneider (1942, 100) commented, "He who has the power to make nominations owns the party."

What might political accountability look like with the kinds of parties and voters just described? Consider this model: *Parties are primarily responsive to their own activist and group-defined agendas, but they will be responsive to any identifiable group that has a clear policy demand and appears pivotal for winning control of government.*

A virtue of this model is that it makes realistic demands of voters, who are assumed to care about only a small number of personally important issues. But it does make some demand on them: Issue publics are expected to notice what government does and to reward and punish accordingly. They must be prepared, in other words, to change sides rather than change minds. They cannot maintain this disposition toward all issues, but they can maintain it toward some. The model is realistic about parties as well: They mainly serve interest groups and activists, but will depart from that focus as necessary to woo groups they see as crucial to electoral prospects.

One weakness of the model is that it is underdetermined. In an electorate in which voting is organized by ideology, a well-defined median voter is pivotal. In an electorate lacking ideological organization, any voter can be pivotal, depending on how other voters are voting. If, as may be roughly expected from Converse's scheme, most ideological and group-interest voters are firmly tied to one of the party coalitions, the large bloc of nature-of-the-times voters may be pivotal. Such voters would enforce little if any pressure toward moderation, leaving the parties to be as extreme as they liked.

But in order to win elections when the "nature of the times" favors them, or when it favors neither side, parties need to maintain rough parity in the size of their party followings, and this will sometimes entail concessions to groups that are not pivotal in a left-right sense, but can nonetheless throw the election one way or the other. One recent case is

the decision of Republican leaders, stung by their lack of success with Hispanic voters to make a try for immigration reform in the current session of Congress. As Senator John McCain explained: “Look at the last election. We are losing dramatically the Hispanic vote, which we think should be ours” (quoted in Helderman and Sullivan 2013). An especially surprising example of apparent party responsiveness to a pivotal group came in the 2000 election, when candidate George W. Bush promised—and then delivered—a substantial drug benefit to senior citizens, who were alert to the issue and formed a major voting bloc in the pivotal state of Florida. Democrats had promised an even larger benefit, but without Bush’s counter—which brought a significant expansion of the social safety net that Republicans generally oppose—he might well have failed to become president.³²

Voting blocs that induce the parties to offer targeted concessions do not create pressure toward ideological moderation in any general sense. In this they are similar to nature-of-the-times voters.

This theoretical scheme—a Converse-style mix of voter types and strongly policy-motivated parties—implies a two-tier process of political representation. Policy-demanding groups (e.g., business, labor, civil rights, religion) organize parties to nominate candidates committed to their issue concerns. Voters who commit to parties on these issues get a high level of representation—but only when their party is in office and only on their key issues. What happens at other times and on other issues is a different and presumably less satisfying result. Voters who are not committed to a party, except by transient pocketbook concerns or a possibly equally transient electoral promise, get a lower level of representation. Elderly voters in the early 2000s make a good example. As noted earlier, they got a real prize from the Republican party for being perceived as pivotal in the 2000 election, but their organizational arm, the American Association of Retired Persons, is not a player in the nomination of Republican candidates for Congress.³³ But anti-big government groups like Club for Growth, Americans for Tax Reform, and KochPAC, along with Tea Party activists, are important groups in congressional nominations. In consequence, congressional Republicans have not spared the elderly in their proposals to downsize the federal government. The elderly may re-emerge as pivotal in a future election, in which case they may collect another prize, but they do not fare so well when their votes are not immediately needed.

Thus the overall picture of political accountability is as follows: The vast amount of government policy-making—from budgeting to regulation to welfare and rights administration to Supreme Court decision-making and much more—that is beneath the radar for most voters is ceded to the demands of the interest groups and activists that are most active in party nominations. But the parties' agendas are moderated to some degree by the need for electoral concessions to voting blocs not already represented by core party groups in the nominating process.

The economic theory of democracy has great curb appeal: The rationally ignorant median voter gets what he wants without much effort. Democracy is as wonderful as capitalism. What might be called the group-politics view of democracy is not so optimistic: Organized policy demanders routinely get what they want at the expense of the unorganized; but groups of ordinary voters—if sufficiently numerous, cohesive, attentive, and pivotal—also get some of what they want.

I note again that what I have offered in this section is a sketch, not a validated theory of political representation. But it is a sketch that seems to me to link the nature of public opinion to the nature of political parties in a potentially fruitful account of elite-mass interaction.

Where does the sending of cues by partisan leaders fit into this model of representation? It doesn't have a primary role. Its secondary role is to increase political harmony within coalitions by gaining the assent of members for the common agenda. Most of the business of representation, however, runs through organized groups and issue publics, which are assumed to have views that are autonomously their own. By that, however, I do not mean that each individual in a group or issue public comes to her own conclusion. They may or may not. Many kinds of groups have leaders who disseminate cued messages to their followers. If, as seems likely, these messages have impact, the RAS model, with its general account of the diffusion of political communication, ought in principle to capture the process.³⁴ African Americans, Latinos, Catholics, Jews, gays and lesbians, gun enthusiasts, farmers, union members, feminists, and environmentalists may all pay more attention to their group leaders than to their party, perhaps exclusively so on group-relevant matters.

Such attention casts cue giving in a different light than in my Purple Land account. Influence may still run top-down, but the top is more pluralistic, rooted in values and institutions closer to citizens' lives, and amenable to citizen choice. The opinions thus formed might not be any more permanent or deeply held than those formed by the influence of

party elites; but an opinion formed in response to group leadership might function to check the action of party elites and in this sense represent autonomous opinion.

The normative status of cues emanating from social groups would, however, raise the same dilemmas examined by Jennifer L. Hochschild (2013) in her contribution to this volume. The cues might embody corrupt or simply incorrect recommendations, and group members might take the recommendations or not. Some gain in the normative status of the cues might, however, arise from the fact that group members—e.g., workers deciding whether to follow organizers in a strike, worshippers deciding whether to follow their pastor’s advice about abortion—might have personal experience with the issue, or at least with the leader advising on it.

VI. PUBLIC OPINION AND DEMOCRACY

In 1971, President Richard Nixon went on national TV to announce that he was imposing emergency wage and price controls to halt the country’s galloping inflation. By good fortune, a survey of Republican activists was in the field at the time and contained a question on price controls. Support for price controls was 37 percent before the speech but 82 percent afterwards. No doubt this number fell back as, among other things, the price controls failed to work very well, but even as an initial level of support, 82 percent is high for a policy so deeply at odds with standard Republican party principles.

I cited this case in *Nature and Origins* as an example of the power of elite-opinion leadership. But in this essay, I am looking at such findings from another angle—taking big leadership effects as more a sign of the lability of the attitudes being shaped than of the strength of the leadership. The large source effects that often appear in experimental studies may likewise be taken more as an indication of the weakness of the attitudes affected than of the power of cues (e.g., Bullock 2011; Cohen 2003; Milburn 1987; Tomz and Sniderman 2005). I have maintained that citizens have some attitudes that are beyond the power of party leaders to shape, but this example suggests that the frequency of such attitudes—attitudes that are a cause rather than an effect of partisanship—may be surprisingly limited, even among party activists.

The bedrock attitude in this case appears to be an attitude toward a group leader rather than a particular policy.

In a similar vein, consider an experiment by James H. Kuklinski and Norman L. Hurley (1994) in which the names of well-known leaders are inserted into the following survey question:

We would like to get your reaction to a statement that [NAME] recently made. He was quoted in the *New York Times* as saying that African-Americans must stop making excuses and rely much more on themselves to get ahead in society.

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with [NAME]'s statement.

In the baseline condition, in which the statement was attributed to an anonymous source, the mean level of agreement among black subjects was 2.57 on a scale that runs from 1 to 5. When the name was George H. W. Bush, the rated agreement by black subjects was somewhat higher, 2.97. When the name was Clarence Thomas, the rating rose to 3.87, and when it was Jesse Jackson, the rating rose to 4.11.

These are impressively large effects for a matter of this kind. Again, many people seem to have stronger loyalties to a group leader than to a particular opinion. But there are also studies offering clear evidence of opinion that has not been shaped by the efforts of partisan elites. Perhaps the best known is by Taeku Lee (2002, 92), whose examination of letters to the president about civil rights by ordinary Americans finds evidence of attitudes that are “reasoned and deliberated expressions of one’s personal beliefs and sentiments.” Because, however, the vast majority of Americans did not write letters to the President, Lee does not demonstrate the existence of a large amount of autonomous opinion on the race issue, and a large fraction of the letters that he uses as evidence of autonomous opinion have been, by his data, stimulated by organized effort.

Which is not to say that I doubt the existence of a large amount of non-elite shaped opinion on race—or, for that matter, on other matters on which culturally defined groups clash. I am with Converse on the importance of group-focused opinion—and with Donald M. Kinder and Kam (2010) on the importance of ethnocentrism; Karen Stenner (2005) on the deep psychological impulses that structure some people’s response to group conflict; and Jim Sidanius and Felicia Pratto (2001) on the

inclination of some members of groups to dominate others groups. These attitudes are at the top of my list of forces that political leaders are often unable to lead—except, of course, in directions in which the group wants to go. But as Stenner emphasizes, these attitudes are often flexible in their targets and highly situational in their expression. They are not, in other words, the kind of specific policy preferences examined in *Nature and Origins* and in most other analyses of public opinion. One reason the anti-communism that Kennedy and Johnson feared, and the anti-Saddam feeling that Democratic politicians may have feared in 2002, were not sharply visible in polls is that the triggering conditions were not present.

Public opinion is obviously much more difficult to study if many survey respondents do not stand by what they say in surveys, either because they may be quick to change when leadership changes or do not know what they think until a triggering context occurs. But that may be the nature of the public opinion, and if it is, analysts of public opinion need to accommodate it. Let me offer a final example in which identifying the politically important signal is by no means straightforward—the case of opinion toward President Obama’s health-care reforms. Douglas L. Kriner and Andrew Reeves (2012, 5) find that “the single strongest predictor of perceptions of health care reform is partisanship” and that variables measuring individual circumstances have slight or no impact. They comment, wisely in my view, that:

the stark partisan polarization in attitudes toward reform suggests that efforts to sell reform proposals, such as targeted appeals to specific groups or efforts to convince Americans that reform will benefit them personally, are unlikely to bear much fruit.

In other words, even when the basis for an autonomous attitude seems to be present, it cannot easily be activated. Thus, “support for reform efforts, assessments of reform’s personal consequences, and support for the law’s repeal are almost exclusively a function of partisanship” (Kriner and Reeves 2012, 1). Dan Hopkins (2012) similarly finds that several measures of personal circumstance fail to have important effects. Of the one that would be expected to have the largest impact, he comments that

those without health insurance were somewhat more likely than others to think health-care reform was a good idea. But that sentiment did not seem to last, and it was never sizeable. Here on stark display is the central political challenge of the 2009–2010 health-care reform: the core

constituency to be helped by the reform was not especially supportive of it.

Michael Henderson and D. Sunshine Hillygus (2011) examine attitude toward health-care reform in a panel survey that permits control for initial opinions. They find that Republicans became more opposed to reform, but that Democrats became slightly more opposed as well. Racially resentful respondents also became more opposed to the Obama proposal (see also Tesler 2012), while respondents who were worried about paying their medical bills became less opposed. The pro-reform effect of worrying about one's medical bills was greatest among strong Republicans (a swing of about .4 units on a 0-1 scale among those most worried). Henderson and Hillygus (2011, 946) view these findings as damaging to the "polarization model" and conclude that "while not resistant to elite influence, partisan identifiers do not blindly follow the rhetoric of party leaders."

Taking these findings together, one would say that most opinion on health care reform was structured by partisanship, and that a small amount was due to non-elite-shaped assessments of one's personal situation. Strikingly, however, the aspect of public opinion that was most important to the health-care debate—indeed, determinative of the outcome—is overlooked in these analyses: Assessments that the economy at the time of the 2008 election was poor, which led to the election of a Democratic president with sizeable majorities in Congress. Passage of health reform because the economy in the preceding election was bad is not the kind of democratic-politics story that political scientists like to tell, but it seems to shed more light on the outcome than do analyses focusing on attitudes toward health care. Nor, I believe, is this an isolated case. Achen and Bartels (2004) go so far as to argue that the American electorate's "ratification" of the New Deal in 1936 may have been mainly a response to the improved state of the economy. The theme of their paper, "Musical Chairs: Pocketbook Voting and the Limits of Democratic Accountability," is that the rotation of parties with markedly different agendas into and out of office depends heavily on essentially chance variation in the peaks and valleys of the economy.

If, then, there is a key idea in this review it is that the kind of attitude centrally studied in *Nature and Origins*—statements of policy preference—may matter less for the operation of the political system than the kinds of attitude left out. Few today would accept Converse's

numerical assessments in “Belief Systems” about the proportions of the public that are oriented toward group interests or the nature of the times, but the main points of his argument still seem plausible: policy preferences, whether organized into ideologically consistent patterns or not, may matter less for politics than these non-policy based attitudes. When firm policy preferences exist, they are typically narrowly focused and held by non-overlapping groups of “issue publics.”

One good way to judge an argument is by its implications for phenomena in data different in nature than the data that generated it. The obvious out-of-sandbox implication of Converse’s scheme is that efforts to explain political outcomes by means of political attitudes—whether organized into ideology or not—will have only limited success.

From this motivation, I have examined Downs’s median-voter theory, which assumes, contrary to Converse, the existence and importance of ideologically organized policy preferences. The evidence in Figure 7 alone seems to me a near knock-out blow to that theory. If we add the information that Franklin Roosevelt, the most successful politician in American history, was more of an extremist than a moderate—and seemed to emphasize his extremism in his acceptance of the Democratic nomination in 1936—the model looks weaker still. Lenz’s finding—that at least some of the partisan consistency that correlates with vote choice is not, upon close inspection, truly causal—further undermines the notion of broad-based policy voting. As discussed earlier, one can find hints that parties are punished for electoral extremism, but no more than that.

By contrast, the Converse system of categories makes easy sense of the dominant features of the current political system: Motivated by some combination of ideology, group interest, and narrowly defined issue-public concerns, voters organize into competing blocs. But the electoral pivot is a nature-of-the-times or a group-interest voter who exerts little pressure on the parties to moderate their agendas, not an ideological voter who pushes parties toward the median.

My analysis of the Vietnam and Iraq wars similarly aimed to test the nature of opinion by the effects it produced. I began by noting that attitudes expressed in polls, which tended dovish in the runups to the two wars, did not explain the behavior of politicians who were also somewhat dovish but nonetheless took pro-war actions in the face of exposure to voter judgment.³⁵ My inference was that these politicians—Kennedy and Johnson with regard to Vietnam, Democratic Members of Congress with regard to Iraq—read public opinion as more hawkish than

polls made it out to be, and that their reading might have been correct. A notable piece of evidence from the Iraq case was that Republicans, whose position seemed most out of line with public opinion as expressed in polls, were most confident in asserting their position. A second inference was that the basis for the public's politically consequential attitudes is, in Stenner's phrase, "groupiness"—a tendency in situations of threat to suspend deliberative judgment and to assert the bald power of one's own group against the out-group.

I have also proposed a model of political parties that has implications for the kinds of opinions that are most likely to be consequential. The key theoretical proposition is that parties are loyal above all to the agendas of their coalition sponsors, but respond to the preferences of ordinary voters whom they believe are potentially pivotal and are prepared to "change sides." Consistent with the Converse scheme, the potentially pivotal voters are not assumed to be ideological medians, but members of groups or issue publics.

The case of African Americans—a group prepared to change sides in response to what the parties put on offer—nicely illustrates the two forms in which political responsiveness may be expected. The policies of the New Deal brought a substantial number of Northern black voters into the Democratic party in the 1930s and 1940s, thereby transforming the previously Republican Midwest and East into a political battleground with black voters perceived to be pivotal (Weiss 1983). But African Americans were not yet core members of the Democratic Party nominating coalition (Karol 2009). In these conditions, both parties appealed to Northern black voters, but were constrained by core interest groups in what they could offer. President Truman initially promised a meaningful package of reforms, but was forced by Southern elements in his party to back down. Northern liberals forced the adoption of a relatively strong civil-rights plank at the 1948 Democratic convention, but it did not result in new laws. Republican congressional leaders offered support for civil rights, which did not offend the business interests that dominated their coalition, but not for social welfare, which did offend core party interests (Karol 2009; Baylor 2012). Nevertheless, much active courting of black voters occurred. The most interesting case involved the Civil Rights Act of 1957. Vice-president Richard Nixon, laying the groundwork for a presidential run in 1960, sought to engineer a Republican bill offering some benefits to Southern blacks, for which he expected electoral credit from Northern blacks. But he was

out-maneuvered by Senate Majority Leader Lyndon Johnson, whose own bill was limited by the Southern wing of his party. The result was that Democrats were able to claim credit for a bill of modest importance (Evans and Novak 1966; Caro 2003).

Meanwhile, however, three groups of elite-level policy-demanders—the Congress of Industrial Organizations, the NAACP, and liberal activists—were seeking to wrest control of the national Democratic party from representatives of the white South. Their path to power ran, as documented by Chris Baylor (2013), through control of the party’s national nominating conventions and, as documented by Brian Feinstein and Eric Schickler (2008), through state party conventions. By the 1950s, these groups were nominating reliably liberal politicians throughout the North, and when these politicians gained majority status in Congress after the 1958 and especially 1964 elections, they offered African Americans a truly significant prize: a federal guarantee of the right to vote. Importantly, the dominant wing of the Democratic party offered this prize despite recognition that it would cost the party substantially among white Southern voters, as in fact it did. Also very important, the two elections that gave the Democratic contingent in Washington the boost necessary to pass civil-rights legislation were driven more by economic retrospection and tenure in office than by ideology—an outstanding example of what Achen and Bartels (2004) might describe as a musical-chairs effect.³⁶

These developments left Southern whites, another large issue public with respect to civil rights, without representation in national politics. But not for long. Barry Goldwater announced that he intended to “go hunting where the ducks are,” by which he meant the white South, in his 1964 presidential run. And Nixon, no longer courting blacks as pivotal, reached an understanding with Southern Republican leaders that he would go slow on civil rights in exchange for their support at the party’s 1968 nominating convention, which was his so-called “Southern strategy.” The upshot, as David Karol (2009) has put it, is that the party of Lincoln became the party of the Confederate flag. So, again, an interaction between a pivotal issue public and party nominations seems to explain a lot.

I emphasize that I take this set of developments as illustration rather than systematic evidence of the relationship between parties and opinion—akin to the citation of the Goldwater and McGovern elections as evidence of the importance of ideological moderation. The real work

of theory development and testing remains to be done. Included in work to be done is validation of the Bawn et al. (2012) claim that the influence of interest groups and activists operates through party nominations.

The RAS model, as I have noted, plays an important but not primary role in this theoretical scheme. The sampling model, with its stress on ambivalence, spells out what it might mean to have poorly crystallized but still meaningful attitudes. The attitude formation model specifies a clear and nuanced relationship between what society's organized policy demanders want and the range of policies their party adherents will accept. A named idea like the Hovland-Converse-McGuire-Zaller model of attitude change might be warranted to describe this model.

But even at the heart of the RAS model, much remains unclear. It is, for example, uncertain how firmly, and over what length of time, individuals internalize the messages they accept through the RAS model (see Lo, Hill, Vavreck, and Zaller forthcoming). It is also unclear when elite messages will be influential and when they will not—and hence how much political elites can lead and how much they are constrained to follow. Even for the case of attitudes on civil rights—attitudes on which I believe party leaders had an important liberalizing effect in the mid-century period—one must wonder how much liberal politicians could have accomplished without the help they received from the protests led by Martin Luther King, the favorable coverage of those protests in the national media, and the long-term liberalizing efforts of education on new generations of Americans.

What of ideology? Does it play no role in democratic politics? There surely are, as Converse maintained, a small number of citizens who are truly committed to an ideological program and who are quite important (some think too important) to politics (e.g., Fiorina et al. 2011). Noel (forthcoming) has strongly argued that liberal pundits created the liberal activists who, in the mid-century period, were visibly important in re-making the Democratic party. Yet even here, one may wonder: Is ideology the real motive behind political activism, or do narrower motives—to ban abortion, stop war, legalize same-sex marriage, end Southern apartheid, cut taxes, save the planet—matter more? Even in elite politics, ideology may be, as Bawn (1999) argues, better understood as coalitions of separate groups and concerns than as unified forces.

The political organization that exists at the mass level is, one must assume, even more likely to be coalitional in nature: Different individuals

with different concerns and ways of thinking about those concerns attaching themselves to the better of two choices. The operation of the RAS model makes many citizens seem alike in their concerns, but the challenge of understanding what is really going on is to recover the differences—the attitudes and more general dispositions that, at least under conditions of political competition, cannot be easily shaped—and use them to explain political outcomes. The theoretical scheme I propose—politics as the interaction between policy-motivated nominating coalitions and Converse-style voter types—is, of course, merely an hypothesis, but it seems more probable than the principal alternative, which is that the partisan consistency, as exemplified in Figure 1 above, reflects real commitment.

Pursuit of my suggested agenda will require stepping back from a powerful ideal: the democratic notion that citizens are and should be omniscient (Lippmann 1922), and should care much more about the whole nation than their small part of it. Public-opinion surveys, with their barrages of policy questions and their representative samples, embody the democratic ideal. So do political-science models of voting behavior that include large numbers of issue questions, either individually or in ideology scales. Downs's median-voter theory is an unusually elegant embodiment of the common democratic ideal. Purple Land is an attempt to square the RAS model with the ideal.

Converse did not concede much to the democratic ideal in his "Nature of Belief Systems." Perhaps the rest of us can learn from this empiricist attitude. But it will not be easy for scholars to overcome their democratic predilections. One of the more touching stories in the annals of science is how a certain normative ideal motivated—but at the same time blocked—Kepler's understanding of the orbits of the planets.³⁷ He was certain that the orbits were circular because the circle was the perfect form and God would only have constructed a perfect universe. But the more carefully he examined his data, the clearer it became that the orbits were not actually circular. So Kepler worked and worked and worked, trying to find deeper patterns that would reveal the ultimate circularity of the orbits. Along the way, he discovered three major laws, none of which he named or even cared about. They were simply building blocks for the larger argument he was never able to complete. Political science can learn a lesson here: Beware how culture shapes your deepest intuitions.

NOTES

1. For online appendix see <http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/polisci/faculty/zaller/>.
2. See also Taber and Lodge 2006.
3. Attitudes on racial issues show polarization effects similar to those in Figure 1. They have been excluded only for space reasons.
4. Opt-in Internet surveys, as used in Figure 1, tend to produce higher levels of partisan constraint than do face-to-face surveys, especially among the less informed. Two comments on this: Higher constraint among the less informed undermines my emphasis, which is that constraint is lower among the less informed. Also, recent experimental evidence indicates that the higher constraint among the less informed is a mode rather than a sample effect, with the self-administered results more likely to be valid (Vavreck 2012; Chang and Krosnick 2009).
5. For online appendix see <http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/polisci/faculty/zaller/>.
6. Bartels (2013a) comments in his review that the modeling of the Vietnam and congressional elections cases, which include crossover effects, is based on variables that are not quite the right variables. I agree with this comment. I should have either looked harder for the right variables or been more clear that I was using proxies. But the proxy variables do work in statistical models of competing information flows to explain the crossover effects that occur. It is also the case that my three crossover patterns do not emerge mysteriously from heavily modeled data; all are clearly visible in the raw data, which are shown, and can be explained by qualitative arguments alone (e.g., incumbents generally outspend challengers in congressional elections). So there is coherent evidence in support of the crossover pattern even if the statistical models are not credited at all.

It would be very valuable to directly measure the cues that are presumed to have driven attitude change on Vietnam. Berinsky (2009) has used the case of World War II to show how this might be done.

7. Michael Tesler (2013) of Brown University, who created the graphs, comments, "It is important to note that the 2007 and 2011 percentages are not directly comparable because the issue importance response options and political awareness items were different in the two surveys. Yet the shift is unmistakable nonetheless." Objective conditions were, of course, different: Republicans would note that the budget deficit was much larger under Obama, but Democrats would note that Bush, after inheriting a surplus, created a deficit without a recession as excuse. My impression is that Republican leaders discussed the budget deficit when Obama was president more than did Democratic leaders when Bush was president. If so, this might explain the greater polarization in the former case. But if one side were actually more deeply committed to balanced budgets, I don't see why the difference in conditions would lead to a change in relative concern.
8. If I run the Exposure-Acceptance model without ideology, and set the values of party identification to reflect the breaks used in the creation of the raw data plot, the plotted results from the Exposure-Acceptance model are very similar to

- those in the raw data plot in Figure 3. See online appendix at <http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/polisci/faculty/zaller/>.
9. For online appendix see <http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/polisci/faculty/zaller/>.
 10. Communication may promote change on novel or familiar issues. For familiar (versus novel) issues, more relatively well-informed individuals will be more resistant to opinion change, because they have stronger opinions (or more previously held considerations) that must be overcome.
 11. The RAS model does say that there should be no resistance among conservatives to messages carrying a pro-conservative cue, as Bush's Iraq policy did. But the new pro-war considerations would, at least in the early phase of the public discussion of war, mix with previously formed considerations, which would not have included ideas about preventive war against Iraq. For a discussion of how highly informed partisans might fail to immediately embrace even policies of their own leaders, see pp. 157 and 172–80 of *Nature and Origins*. It should also be noted that, while highly informed conservatives did not immediately embrace Bush's policies, most came to do so over time, as indicated in Figure 1. See online appendix for further discussion at <http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/polisci/faculty/zaller/>.
 12. For a case in which citizens are exposed to different messages, see the analysis of congressional elections in Zaller 1996; for a case in which messages vary across time, see the analysis of Vietnam in *Nature and Origins* and the analysis of the 1984 Democratic primary in Zaller 1996; for cases of attitude change, see Zaller 1992, Chapter 8.
 13. NBC Nightly News, August 27, 2002.
 14. Feldman et al. (2013) note that support for the Iraq War declined somewhat in September as the war debate heated up. I included a measure of newspaper readership in the model used to create Figure 4. It has no effect on exposure to pro-war messages in the exposure function, but a slight pro-war effect in the acceptance function. That is, all else equal, heavy newspaper readers were slightly but statistically significantly more likely to accept the pro-war messages to which they were exposed. See online appendix (<http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/polisci/faculty/zaller/>) for details.
 15. Support for war among Republicans rose slightly from fall 2002 to spring 2003, maxing out at 85 to 90 percent and thereafter declining slightly over the next two years. Personal communication from Michael Tesler, 28 April 2013.
 16. I am using the 1990 and 1992 NES studies because they are the one set of data that overlap the results in Goren (2004) and Ansolabehere et al. (2008), whose results I have wanted to familiarize myself with.
 17. The ratios—wholly and mostly stable to unstable—are about 5:1 and 2:1 for well- and poorly informed people. It is notable that the modal response category among the least informed is to state no opinion in one interview and a substantive opinion in the other; people exhibiting this pattern are sometimes omitted from or given imputed scores in calculations involving measurement error.
 18. More specifically, he corrects for measurement error within three groups of respondents as partitioned by their levels of political information. By this

- method, he removes the effects of randomness due both to vague questions and to vague-mindedness. A fair test of the RAS model would remove only the effects of vague questions. See the online appendix for further discussion, at <http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/polisci/faculty/zaller/>.
19. My tests involved the mediating effect of information on the relationship between values of “Equal Opportunity” and “Limited Government” (on one side) and federal spending on the needy and on social security (on the other), as reported in Goren’s (2004) Table 6. My tests are not, however, a simple replication. Goren drops about 20 percent of his cases as a result of missingness (mostly from no opinion responses) whereas, after data imputation, I drop about 3 percent. Respondents who offer no opinion responses tend to be poorly informed, so it is important to keep them in an analysis focusing on the performance of the poorly informed. (On the perils of non-random missing data, see King, Honaker, Joseph, and Scheve 2001).
 20. These data are from my calculations.
 21. In his contribution in this volume, Goren (2013, 510) writes: “Zaller does not establish that political sophistication determines the extent to which someone will rely on value predispositions; data limitations force him to deploy liberal/conservative self-placement scales and feeling thermometers in lieu of direct measures of values.” This statement may suggest that *Nature and Origins* makes frequent use of measures that require respondents to understand the terms liberal and conservative. But this is not so. The book makes significant use of such measures in only two places: in Figure 6.5 (and its associated table), as discussed in the text, and in Figure 6.1, which is a warm-up for the main analysis of Vietnam in a later chapter, which does not use this type of item. See pp. 344–45 for a list of the items used to measure political predispositions. In two places, I make what I would call non-significant use of liberal-conservative based items by including them in scales that mostly include other kinds of items. See online appendix (<http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/polisci/faculty/zaller/>) for further discussion.
 22. The Hawk-Dove scale in the Vietnam case is an instrument for the Hefley-Hurwitz measure of this value and, as such, purged of random response error. I have done Monte Carlo simulations indicating that using an instrument to correct for measurement error in models like mine substantially reduces bias. However, I am not a methodologist and I am not confident in my measurements. See the online appendix (<http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/polisci/faculty/zaller/>) for the simulations.
 23. Baldassarri and Gelman (2008) find temporally increasing correlations between party attachment and issue positions and, among activists, increasing correlations between issues, but unlike other scholars, they stress that overall levels of correlation are low. The low correlations should, however, be interpreted in light of their method. They use all items reflecting potential liberal-conservative difference whether or not parties take different positions, and they use different items in different years, depending on what items are in their surveys.
 24. The NES did not obtain a voter rating of Goldwater’s location in 1964. This statement is based on a re-scaling of the ideological rating of Goldwater (and

- other candidates from the period 1948 to 1968) from Rosenstone's *Forecasting Presidential Elections* (1983) onto the metric of the NES scale.
25. Tea Party-backed Republican candidates lost several Senate seats in 2010 and 2012 that their party had been expected to win, a result that has been attributed to their extremism. But campaign ineptness by novice politicians is often a strong rival argument. In Missouri, for example, conservative Todd Akin lost a lead after justifying his opposition to abortion in cases of rape on the ground that a woman's body would not allow her to become pregnant from a "legitimate rape."
 26. I am reluctant to dismiss the median-voter theorem as it applies to presidential elections. Robert Erikson, Robert, Michael MacKuen, and James Stimson claim in *Macro Polity* (2002) that the party whose platform is closer to the "policy mood" of the electorate—where policy mood is scored in left-right terms—enjoys a large advantage in presidential elections. Cohen and Zaller 2012 examines this claim and finds that, while it replicates, it holds up poorly when recent cases and relevant control variables (economic performance and incumbent party tenure) are added to the analysis. But the Cohen and Zaller analysis has not yet been vetted in the review process. Hence, for purposes of the present paper, I rely most heavily on eyeball analysis of Figure 7, which seems to me to provide strong but not definitive evidence for the weakness of the median-voter theory.
 27. Cross-national analysis similarly indicates that parties are more polarized than the median voter theory can accommodate.
 28. Jon Krosnick (2003, 4) uses the term *satisficing* in surveys to mean doing "just enough to satisfy the survey request, but no more." Higher levels of ideological attitude consistency are often taken as evidence of *low* satisficing. Compared to acquiescent or "don't know" responses, they are. But compared to thinking seriously about the issue, it may indicate high satisficing.
 29. See also Campbell, Converse, Miller and Stokes 1960 (ch. 10).
 30. By symbolic attitude, I mean an affective response toward a political object (e.g., guns, farmers, homosexuality, banks, protestors) that has no particular policy content.
 31. Party and ideological agendas can sometimes be at odds. In the 1940s, for example, the Democratic Party was dominated by representatives of the white South, which made it conservative on race, but liberal ideology stood for civil rights. By the 1970s, however, liberal activists and interest groups had largely taken over the Democratic Party, so that partisan and ideological cues were largely the same. The liberal coalition favoring civil rights developed outside the Democratic Party and fought its way in via the nomination process. Both political intellectuals and interest group leaders participated in the process of party transformation. See also Baylor 2012.
 32. See Hussey and Zaller (2011) for a general analysis of the nature of party responsiveness.
 33. The AARP does not have a political action committee. Nor do other groups associated with the elderly appear to make significant contributions in Republican nomination contests. The source on this point is Mark West,

- “Money and Power in Congressional Nominations,” dissertation in progress, University of California, Los Angeles.
34. See Kuklinski and Hurley 1994. For an account of the influence of cues of African American leaders on black opinion toward the Vietnam War, see Zaller 1992 (206–207).
 35. Dovish public opinion in the runs up to the Persian Gulf War and World War II also failed to explain the behaviors of politicians who were inclined toward dovishness. See Zaller 1994 and Martin 1960 (ch. 6).
 36. See Tuftes 1978, for an examination of the 1958 congressional elections.
 37. This account is based on Dolnick 2011.

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