

FDR to Clinton, Mueller to ??

A “State of the Discipline” Review of Presidential Approval

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As he enters the last year of his presidency, most Americans say Bill Clinton's done a fine job in office — and they'll be glad to see him go. Those contrary views reflect both the personal tumult and policy successes of Clinton's seven years as president ... They find a president whose ratings—despite his impeachment in the Lewinsky scandal—stand up in some respects to those of the last two-term president, Ronald Reagan. 58 percent of Americans approve of his work ... (b)ut even more disapprove of him personally—and 54 percent say that when his second term ends a year from now, they won't be sorry.

ABC News/Nightline Poll Report, January 27, 2000

Bill Clinton has -- like Reagan -- gained in the public's rating of his job performance as his two terms have unfolded, but unlike Reagan, Clinton's job ratings have thus far remained high. Then, in 1998, survey researchers noted one of the more fascinating paradoxes of recent polling history. The Monica Lewinsky crisis unfolded, Clinton's presidency was threatened, and--counter to almost all expectations--Clinton's job approval continued to go up, not down. Clinton's average job approval rating in 1998, the year in which the House of Representatives officially impeached Clinton, was 64%, the highest of his term.

Gallup News Service, August 17, 2000

In December 1998, America watched and waited to see if the U.S. House of Representatives would vote to impeach President William Jefferson Clinton, even though his approval rating was in the sixtieth percentile range. Democrats upbraided Republicans for their vote on impeachment, arguing that the American public had already rendered its judgement on Bill Clinton: personally, a failure, politically, a success. The polls indicated that a majority favored censure but not impeachment. Republicans, meanwhile, pointed to the same polls that showed similarly sized majorities believed that Clinton lied to the public. Republicans disparaged Democrats for an unwillingness to place principles above politics. Following impeachment, Clinton's approval rating soared to 72%. How could the Senate possibly convict a sitting president whose performance was endorsed by nearly three-quarters of the public and who had been reelected?

In the end, Clinton escaped conviction. On Article 1, the charge of perjury, 55 senators, including 10 Republicans and all 45 Democrats, voted not guilty. On Article 3, obstruction of justice, the Senate split evenly, 50 for and 50 against the President. With the necessary two-thirds majority not having been achieved, the President was acquitted on both charges and has

continued to serve out the remainder of his term of office. Public opinion, many claim, triumphed over raw partisan politics.¹

Presidential approval remains a key political resource in an era of the public relations presidency. When approval ratings are higher, members of the president's party in Congress are less likely to be defeated in the midterm and the president's legislative proposals are more successful. The presidential agenda, both on the foreign and domestic side, is "bolder" under conditions of high approval.² Presidents enjoying high levels of approval are more likely to be reelected. The president's performance in this "perpetual election" (Simon and Ostrom, 1989) or "new referendum" (Brace and Hinckley, 1992) is clearly a key to understanding presidential power in the postwar era (Neustadt, 1980).

The nature of presidential evaluations appears to have undergone a marked change over the last quarter century. Ronald Reagan based much of his support on high approval of him as an individual—his personality and leadership qualities. The "teflon President" weathered many political difficulties in this way. Clinton often appears to be nearly the opposite. His support derives more from assessments directly rooted in political judgments, such as economic conditions. His continued high approval ratings came directly in the face of widespread unhappiness with his personal failings (Aldrich, Gronke, and Grynaviski 1999; Moore 1999; Schneider 1998; Berke 1998).

Clinton's and Reagan's dual legacies will undoubtedly shape our understanding of the presidency into the 21st century.³ Our goal in this paper is not to assess these legacies. As we stand at the end of William Jefferson Clinton's two terms as president, indeed at the end of a

¹ Interestingly, public sentiment towards impeachment has continued to change. The last Gallup reading, in December 1999, found that 50% of the public favored impeachment, up from 35% at the time of the hearings. Nearly 80% of Republicans favored impeachment at the end of 1999, compared to 73% in December of 1998, while only 23% of Democrats favored impeachment (up from 12% in 1998). Independents split 50/50 in 1999 and 40/60 in 1998.

² These claims are well established in the literature on elections, presidential approval, and presidential leadership. The citations are too numerous to include here. Four recent volumes are Brody (1991), Brace and Hinckley (1992), Kernell (1997), and King and Ragsdale (1988). For evidence on legislative success, see Rivers and Rose (1985) and for evidence on "boldness" of agenda, defined as breadth of legislative proposals, frequency of vetoes, and use of military force, see Simon and Ostrom (1989).

century of presidents, we take this opportunity to look back over three decades of scholarly attention to presidential approval. A review of recent conferences, planned conferences, and journal articles illustrates an apparent burst of activity by scholars analyzing the presidency, presidential governance, and presidential approval.

What is causing this sudden interest? Is it the puzzle raised by a popular president whose significant domestic achievements seem overshadowed by personal failings, administration scandals, and withering partisan criticism? Have we simply returned to old questions with new tools, be they methodological advancements or archival data collections? Or are we asking new questions, incorporating the influence of other fields and subfields into presidency research?

Not surprisingly, a little bit of each is going on. Clearly, the trajectory of public opinion regarding Bill Clinton's job performance and favorability raises important issues for our understanding of the necessary conditions for electoral success, public acclaim, legislative accomplishments, and, most broadly, an affirmative historical legacy.⁴ In this paper, our goals are more modest. We identify three eras of presidential approval research, marked off by influential works on presidential approval and, interestingly, historically important presidencies. Next, we speculate on what seems to drive this scholarly agenda, highlighting the roles of history (presidents and events), the emergence of new methodological tools and data resources, and the importation of approaches drawn from other subfields and disciplines. Finally, we identify what we believe is an emerging research agenda for the study of presidential approval over the next decade: heterogeneous evaluations across individuals, groups, and institutions.⁵

³ See, for example, Shapiro, Kumar, and Jacobs *The Presidency at Mid-Century and Century's End* (forthcoming, Columbia University Press), and *American Politics After Clinton* (forthcoming, University of Pittsburgh Press).

⁴ For discussions of many of these issues, refer to the Rozell and Wilcox symposium in *PS: Political Science and Politics* (September 1999, Volume XXXII, No. 3). For a discussion of changing standards of candidate evaluation from Reagan to Clinton, see Aldrich, Gronke, and Grynaviski 1999; and for changing foundations of individual level approval, see Gronke 1999.

⁵ This literature review is undoubtedly incomplete and in need of revision. Our own research agendas colors our assessment of future directions. Nonetheless, we hope this serves as a useful device for discussion and comment.

Three Eras in Presidential Approval Research

In some respects, the presidential approval field is remarkably stable, even staid. The conventional method for understanding changes in presidential approval has been to model movements in aggregate mean approval as a function of time in office, economic change, and “rally events.” This agenda was set in place by Mueller’s seminal book, *War, Presidents, and Public Opinion* (1973, see also Mueller 1970). Mueller’s intention in this book was broader than is often remembered. His substantive interest was primarily public opinion *towards war*, not towards presidents. It was not until Chapter 9 that Mueller identifies the now well-known data series---the Gallup survey questions on presidential job performance---and a set of influences on approval ratings that have remained relatively unchallenged.

First, Mueller noticed that presidents suffer linear declines in their job approval over time. This is a consequence, he speculated, of a “coalition of minorities” that builds during an administration as the president is forced to act on issues, consequently alienating groups of former supporters.⁶ Second, Mueller found that public support increases during foreign crises and other events that focus on the president as America’s preeminent political leader. Mueller was also the first, but certainly not the last, to realize that measuring rally events is fraught with difficulty. If events are identified post-hoc by notable bumps in approval, then selection on the dependent variable assures a significant statistical relationship. In Mueller’s case (209), he chose as an *a priori* rule “specific, dramatic, and sharply focused” international events directly involving the president. Third, Mueller posited that economic downturns (but not upticks) erode public support.

This first era of approval research is marked off by Mueller’s volume and the reactions to it (e.g. Stimson 1976; Kernell 1978). While there were some disagreements in specifications, the core issues had been identified and have not changed significantly since then:

- Does approval display a linear trend during an administration? Is there any way to capture the linear trend without resorting to a simple time counter?
- Are just “unpopular, indecisive” wars harmful to presidents, as Mueller suggests, or do popular and successful foreign conflicts provide a positive boost to approval (and serve as a dangerous lure for presidents)?

- Can we identify a set of events beyond international crises that help or hinder approval?
- How and why does economic change affect approval?

As an aside, we should also note that, while it is not a focus of this review, scholars early on recognized the possibilities of the approval series as an independent variable, explaining presidential success in Congress (Edwards 1976), election outcomes (Kernell 1977, Tufte 1975), and governmental and institutional trust and prestige (Casey 1975).

Much of Mueller's work, pioneering though it was, was self-consciously a data-fitting exercise. Research since then has proposed more elaborate methodological specification, added new variables, and, most importantly, derived micro-level explanations for the macro-level relationships identified during this first wave.

We mark off the second wave of presidential approval research at the early 1980s (e.g. MacKuen 1983; Hibbs, et al., 1982a, 1982b; Ostrom and Simon 1985). These articles include attempts to determine the appropriate relationship between economic and political trends and disagreements about the appropriate modeling of these relationships. Not surprisingly, the period saw a significant advance in the technical nature of the field. We will not describe the technical developments here. Instead, we highlight two other innovations during this period, a more detailed treatment of events and the first attempts to construct microfoundations of approval.

The second wave of approval research employed a more nuanced treatment of "rally points" and presidentially relevant events (see especially MacKuen 1983 and Ostrom and Simon 1985, 1988, and 1989). Mueller was purposely sparse in his treatment of rallies. Subsequent studies tested the hypothesis that there is a far wider variety of events that implicate presidential activity and leadership in some way and thus could be reasonably be expected to help or hurt the president's standing in the public. Events included election campaigns, speeches and other public appearances, domestic as well as foreign crises, and significant domestic policy accomplishments.

Coding a wider variety of events, however, introduces two problems into the analysis. First, as already noted, the coding scheme needs to be determined in some way independent of

⁶ He operationalized the concept simply as "time," the number of months that a president is in office. See Kernell (1978) for an alternative specification.

the approval series. Otherwise, the analyst is in danger of selecting on the dependent variable and predetermining a statistically significant relationship.⁷

The second problem is one of over fitting the data. After all, a highly detailed event series will fit the approval series perfectly. This would teach us little about differences across administrations or the effects of more global indicators such as unemployment and inflation. There is no easy solution to this problem. Some scholars opt for more detailed coding schemes, other opt for the most sparse set of codes (major wars and Watergate are most popularly used).

The other innovation we choose to highlight is more conceptual. Hibbs, Rivers, and Vasilatos (1982a) were among the first to wrestle with the implications of aggregating individual response into a single aggregate approval score. In the Gallup survey item, respondents are asked:

“Do you approve or disapprove of the way President [name of incumbent] has handled his job as president?”

The dependent variable in most cases is the aggregate percentage of respondents who state that they approve of the president's handling of his job, or some transformation of this variable. Survey respondents are, therefore, forced to answer in one of two response categories (sometimes adding “don’t know”). While we do not have a special insight into the original justification for the item, its use through the years suggests that Gallup saw it as analogous to a “thermostatic” measure of public opinion about the president (see also MacKuen, Erikson, and Stimson, 1995). Some suggest, in fact, that the aggregate measure is all that is of interest, and we should ignore individual ratings of presidential job performance. Thus, the presidential approval data series is treated as what Brace and Hinckley call the “new referendum,” a single, national appraisal of the president’s performance.

What is relevant to our discussion is the possibility that approval may be reconceptualized as an *aggregation of individual preferences* rather than the preference of an aggregate. Approval is theoretically a continuous variable, yet we only observe the dichotomous responses disapprove or approve. Therefore, presidential approval is an aggregation of individual Bernoulli trials, or a binomial. Data limitations often constrained these studies to

⁷ Most often, external event listings such as the *World Almanac*, *Information Please*, the *Gallup Annual*, and the *New York Times Index* are chosen as presumably objective sources. Even so, some events probably made it into an annual listing on the basis of their impact on public discourse, including a president’s standing (the Gallup annual guide explicitly lists events on this basis).

examining only the aggregate data rather than modeling the individual level responses directly, although some scholars during this period built explicitly from micro-level processes (see Ostrom and Simon 1985 for a nice example). Typically, analysts assumed or explicitly argued that the forces that move approval affect all individuals or perhaps group members the same way at all times (Hibbs, Rivers, and Vasilatos, 1982a; Tedin, 1986). Thus, while a few scholars began their thinking in terms of individuals, the models that resulted continued to be aggregate time series models including objective economic indicators and political events.

Still, one could imagine a distribution of approval ratings, ranging from those who have a visceral reaction against everything the President says and does to those who blindly endorse all presidential actions. The bulk of Americans probably fall somewhere in the middle. If one accepts this premise, then one might also ask what is the shape of this theoretical distribution--peaked or flat, unimodal or multimodal—and whether this has any implications for public opinion about the president. We treat this possibility more extensively below.

A third wave of approval studies, beginning in the late 1980s and early 1990s, extended the earlier wave's concern for explicating and developing individual-level models and has been able to employ newly available data to test those individual-level hypotheses. These efforts often employ individual-level data and rely on individual-level perceptions of economic and political conditions rather than objective measures.⁸ The new, rich data sources and advanced analytical technique enabled scholars to construct and test more nuanced models of approval, often specifying heterogeneity in the public's evaluations.

A second notable feature of the third wave is an elevated role for the media, often crediting it with shaping individuals' perceptions of economic and political conditions. Although Brody and Page (1975) cited media coverage as a significant influence on approval, this insight was seldom exploited. More recent work has explicitly emphasized the media's roles in shaping individual reactions to events and thereby aggregate approval. Richard Brody (1991), in *Assessing the President*, provided the clearest statement of media as the central element shaping approval ratings. He constructed a media-based reinterpretation of established empirical regularities like honeymoon periods and rally events (see also Callaghan and Virtanen, 1993). Public reactions, Brody argued, were best understood via a two-step process, as events are first

⁸ MacKuen, Erikson, and Stimson, 1989, 1992 and Peffley, Langley, and Goidel, 1995 employ individual perceptions of economic conditions and opinions about international crises.

interpreted among opinion elites, then transmitted to the public via the mass media. Rather than concentrating on new quantitative specifications, Brody instead collected data on the frequency and direction of mentions (positive/negative) of the president in the press.

Brody's work dovetailed with significant developments in the wider field of public opinion. John Zaller, in *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*, while not dealing with presidential approval directly, also gave elite opinions and media interpretations a central place in his theory of opinion change. He noted that media coverage could directly alter the subjective assessments of economic conditions (a suggestion finding much empirical support, e.g., Goidel, Shields, and Peffley, 1997; Hetherington, 1996; MacKuen, Erikson, and Stimson, 1992; Mutz, 1992, 1994; Nadeau, et al., 1999), opinions regarding military uses of force (e.g., Peffley, Langley, and Goidel, 1995), and other issues (e.g., West, 1991). In addition to changing opinions related to presidential evaluations, the media have been shown to influence the ingredients of approval by agenda setting and priming, which we discuss in greater detail below.

A back of the envelope count, shown below, supports our three-wave characterization. Here, we have tried to both report the frequency of articles that discuss presidential approval, but also note articles in which approval is not the primary object of scholarly interest.⁹ As an example of how we have coded these articles, from 1990-2000 all but two of the *APSR* articles which came up in a search of JSTOR were articles or rejoinders to articles authored by Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson (coded EMS in the table). A fifth article (Simon, Ostrom, and Marra 1991) was primarily on elections and the sixth was on presidential manipulation of the economy and one of the other articles was a political economy piece. Thus, by our rough count, *APSR* published only one article in the past decade that dealt directly with presidential approval.¹⁰

⁹ We searched on the phrases "presidential approval" and "presidential popularity" in the abstracts or title on JSTOR and the Political Science and Social Science Abstracts databases. JSTOR returned 189 hits. Political Science Abstracts returned 41 hits and Social Science Abstracts returned 93 hits. Most, obviously, had nothing to do with presidential approval.

¹⁰ The table almost certainly overlooks many articles. The political science abstracts database goes back only to 1975 and the social science abstracts databases to 1983. Secondly, we had to make an eyeball reading of articles based on our own familiarity with them or reading the abstracts. We are probably mostly missing articles in "other" journals during the 1970s. Finally, with the increase in number of publication outlets, the total count of articles on most subjects is likely to increase, particularly a subject where the extant data is so easy to collect.

<i>Frequency Count of Articles Dealing with Presidential Approval: 1970 - 2000</i>				
	<i>American Political Science Review</i>	<i>American Journal of Political Science</i>	<i>Journal of Politics</i>	<i>Other Journals</i>
1990-2000	6 Articles 4 – EMS 1 - Other 1 – PE	10 Articles 2 – PE 1 – EMS 1 – Stat 2 – Other	6 Articles 1 PE 2 Other	16 Articles 2 - Comp 3 – Other
1980-1989	2 Articles 2 - Psych	3 Articles		3 Articles
1970-1979	4 Articles	2 Articles	4 Articles 4 - Other	
Source: JSTOR, Political Science Abstracts (1975-present), Social Science Abstracts (1983-present). Codes: PE = political economy; Stat = statistical essay; Comp = comparative; Psych = political psychology; EMS = various MacKuen, Erikson, Stimson and rejoinders (Macropartisanship, Peasants Bankers, etc.)				

Flawed though it may be, two things stand out in this table, and bear out our own impressions of the literature. First, except for the controversy over macropartisanship, *APSR* has published very few articles on presidential approval¹¹ The vast bulk of empirical work has appeared in *AJPS*, reflective, perhaps, of its position as a primary venue for behavioral work in American politics. Second, there was a slow period in the early 1980s, where the majority of articles that we found were authored by Ostrom and Simon. Finally, there was a resurgence in the early and especially mid 1990s. More articles appeared that dealt with approval as a dependent variable and approval as an independent variable (especially in models of legislative success, led by a series of articles by Bond and Fleisher).

Naturally, breaking the literature into three waves oversimplifies reality and draws sharp boundaries where they may not exist. Many pieces fit imperfectly in this structure, anticipating new trends or hearkening back to earlier questions and methods. Each wave anticipates the next, so characteristics of future waves were sometimes manifest in earlier waves. We offer this view of the literature not so much as a mutually exclusive and exhaustive categorical analysis, but as a bit of intellectual history and an organizing framework. Our main concern here is to outline and highlight the major trends of the most recent wave and to suggest possible future developments.

¹¹ The two 1980s pieces both appeared late in the decade and are political psychology pieces by Kinder and Krosnick.

The Effects of History

Interestingly, the first wave of scholarly interest appeared during and soon after a president was forced to resign from office, while the second wave coincided with the arrival of the Reagan presidency. Now a third wave of articles is appearing, first in tandem with George Bush's rapid rise and severe drop in approval (during and after the Gulf War), and now with Clinton's turbulent term of office.

The daily unfolding of history offers scholars who seek to explain social phenomena joys, challenges, and frustrations. Each day's new information can challenge, complicate, or confirm our conclusions about all that has gone before. Presidential research has both benefited and suffered from history. Each subsequent presidential administration raises interesting new questions about presidential leadership and governance. Yet, this attraction to the idiosyncratic nature of each president can draw us away from generalizable theories, models, and conclusions. The unfolding of history has altered our understanding of the dynamics and bases of presidential approval. For example, prior to Reagan's term, all presidents on record had experienced a downward trend in approval over their tenure, leading students of approval to conclude that presidents face an inexorable decline of their public support (e.g., Lowi, 1985). Reagan challenged the thesis of inexorable decline (Ostrom and Simon, 1989; Ostrom and Smith, 1992). The rapid climb and even steeper descent in public approval during George Bush's administration convinced Brace and Hinckley (1992, Ch. 7) that the public had become more volatile, yet approval during the Clinton administration has been remarkably stable, even in the face of a lengthy scandal (Gronke 1999).

We can only speculate regarding the degree to which presidencies and historical events have driven approval research. The Watergate scandal reverberated throughout our political system, and obviously drew the interest of scholars of public opinion. The Gulf War not only provided an opportunity to study the impact of a war as it unfolded, but was conveniently timed so as to make the 1990 NES study a quasi-experiment (c.f. Krosnick and Brannon 1993).

We suspect that Clinton's presidency, just as it has stimulated a spate of articles by analysts at the Gallup, Roper, and Pew Centers, will attract scholarly interest over the next few years. Clinton's public profile raises many new questions and is likely to spark a flurry of

research. Many have already scrambled to make sense of the Lewinsky affair's effects on Clinton's approval ratings and government generally (Rozell and Wilcox 1999, Miller 1999). Many accounts highlight how initially heavy media coverage amplified the effects of the scandal, but, eventually, long run issues of peace and prosperity moderated the long-term impact (Zaller 1998). Brody and Jackman (1999b) examine individual differences in reactions to the affair among age groups, while others argue that party identification (Miller, 1999), prior evaluations (Fischle 2000), and expectations of the president (Just and Crigler, 2000) colored reactions to the scandal. Each of these pieces fits nicely into what we have described as the third wave of presidential approval research: the focus on the individual level, emphasis on the media, and attention to heterogeneity in reactions.

We will continue to sort out the degree to which Clinton challenges existing theory, both at the empirical level and at a conceptual level. Preliminary data analysis suggests that contrary to popular belief, Clinton's approval ratings seem to fit quite nicely into historical models. When a typical model of approval, including economic indicators and Clinton's approval predicted from the estimates, the predictions come fairly close over most of his tenure. Furthermore, including Clinton directly in the estimation does not significantly alter the model. Even estimating the independent variables separately for Clinton's term via dummy variable interactions reveals no significant differences between Clinton's approval dynamics and those of the previous eight presidents. These results stand up across a variety of estimation techniques (Newman undated).

Despite the lack of conclusive empirical evidence that Clinton's term is different, it seems that the Clinton experience has driven recent research and will continue to do so. His presidency seems responsible for rethinking what the job approval question captures and what other dimensions of evaluation exist, how they are measured, and what political significance they bear (e.g., Cohen and Hamman, 2000). Future work will continue to grapple with the questions Clinton's term raised, seeking to understand the past eight years systematically in historical context.

Methods and Data Advances

New Measures

Although presidential approval ratings have become an integral part of the daily political landscape of presidential politics and politics more generally and have therefore been the focus of research on presidential evaluation, some work has examined different ways of measuring and conceptualizing public support for the president. For example, Wattenberg (1986) analyzes open-ended questions about individuals' likes and dislikes of presidents and presidential candidates, arguing that underneath Reagan's high approval ratings were skeptical, ambivalent, and sometimes bitterly angry citizens. Deeper, more nuanced measurements and conceptions of popular evaluations are not always possible, but can reveal something about what approval ratings mean and provide a more textured understanding of the public's evaluations.

In a similar vein, Cohen (1999a, 1999b, 2000) and Cohen and Hamman (2000) have argued that job approval is only one dimension of the public's evaluation of presidents. Looking only at job approval for Clinton's presidency misses elements of the public's reaction to the Lewinsky affair only perceptible by examining other measures like presidential favorability, which includes both job performance and character assessments. This perspective makes a close link with the larger literature on candidate evaluations (e.g., Kinder, 1986; Rahn, et al., 1990; and Funk, 1999), which may continue to be fruitful ground for cross-fertilization.

New Designs

Aggregate time series analyses have characterized the bulk of presidential approval studies. By the late 1980s, the penetration of new time series techniques such as vector autoregression, Granger causality tests, and cointegration and fractional integration methods into political science revived this area of research. While the main substantive engine driving these developments was the controversy regarding macropartisanship (MacKuen, Erikson, and Stimson 1989; Box-Steffensmeier and Smith 1998, 1996; DeBoef and Granato 1997), these techniques hold promise for resolving cause and effect relationships between economics and approval.¹²

A few scholars have turned to individual level analyses of presidential approval, but they have been far and few between (Gronke 1999; Mutz 1992, 1994; Gilens 1988, Ostrom and

¹² A special edition of *Electoral Studies* (Lebo 2000) and volume 4 of *Political Analysis* (Freeman 1992) summarize many of these techniques.

Simon 1988). Since the National Election Study did not query about presidential approval until 1980, this is perhaps not surprising (more on data sources below). Now that a twenty year record of approval has been built, and discrete response models (ordered and binomial probit) are available in most statistical packages, we can expect an increase in individual level models in the near future.

Another variety of individual level analyses appeared in the early 1990s, stemming directly from psychological work on candidate assessment and voter learning. Examples include Krosnick and Brannon's (1993) quasi-experimental study of the impact of the Persian Gulf war and explicitly experimental studies by Miller and Krosnick (2000) and Iyengar and Kinder (1987). All were interested in how media coverage may prime the public to evaluate the president in particular ways.

The increased use of experimental designs has been led by scholars interested in examining the psychological foundations of public opinion, candidate evaluation, and candidate choice. There is no reason that these techniques cannot be used more profitably to help us understand public reactions to "rally events" and the relative assignment of reward and blame for economic change. Presidential approval was seldom the direct target of these experimental studies, but they did point to the possibility of employing experimental techniques to help us address some of the same questions that time series scholars are concerned with: economic change, media coverage, and opinion change. However, up to now, however, experimental and quasi-experimental approaches have played a limited role in the subfield.

New Data

- The **National Election Study** began to ask a presidential approval item in 1980. Unlike the Gallup survey, the NES allowed respondents to "strongly" approve and disapprove. While this may not seem like a great deal of change, it does mean that analysts can work with a scale with 2.5 times as many response categories. Besides simply allowing discrimination between strong and weak approval, analysts can also deploy recently developed techniques for modeling heterogeneity in individual level responses (e.g. Alvarez and Brehm 2000; Gronke 1999). The NES has also included the approval item in panel studies (1990-1-2) and in pre- and post-election studies, allowing studies of opinion change across elections and lengthier periods.

- The **NYT/CBS polls**, administered roughly on a monthly basis, have included a presidential approval item since 1976, now comprising more than 25 years of data. Unlike the Gallup data, which is exorbitantly expensive and cannot be distributed, the *individual level* NY Times data are available to anyone with access to the ICPSR website. Wright, Erikson, and McIver's *Statehouse Democracy* uses the NY Times data (both ideology and partisanship by state). Nagler and DeBoef (1999) use it to estimate voting models education and age groups. Box-Steffensmeier, DeBoef, and Lin (1997) use it to look at gender differences in partisanship over time, and DeBoef (1994) employs it to examine individual and aggregate partisanship.
- Other **pooled-cross sectional data series** have recently been assembled by Gronke (1999) from Harris surveys and Brody and Jackman (1999) from Gallup studies.¹³ Individual level pooled cross sectional data sets, cheap computing power, and advanced multivariate modeling techniques hold the potential to unlock many outstanding questions in approval research over the next five years. One such question concerns heterogeneity in evaluations, our final area of review.

Understanding Heterogeneity in Approval

During the third wave, with its emphasis on individual-level theorizing, many efforts focused on various types of heterogeneity. Challenging earlier models' assumptions that all citizens judge leaders by the same criteria and with the same information, these works suggested that different individuals and groups employ different evaluative criteria at different times. In addition, scholars gave greater attention to other conceptions and measures of evaluation, not only of American presidents, but also other leaders and institutions in the United States and elsewhere.

While aggregate models of approval (eg., Ostrom and Simon, 1985; Brace and Hinckley, 1992) suggested that the public consistently held presidents to the same standards, many recent efforts argue that the ingredients of presidential support change over time and vary across individuals at any given time. While over time and cross-sectional heterogeneity are

¹³ The individual level Harris data are available at the University of North Carolina, and George Edwards, director of the Center for Presidential Studies at the Texas A&M University, has been working to make Gallup studies from 1997 onward publicly accessible (<http://www.tamu.edu/cps>)

conceptually distinct, they are clearly related, both conceptually and empirically. We first examine differences in evaluative criteria over time and then turn to cross-sectional differences.

Heterogeneity in Evaluative Standards Over Time

Scholars have offered a variety of reasons why the public might employ different evaluative criteria over time. Many have suggested that the public's unmet expectations drive approval ratings over time and that the nature and scope of those expectations have changed over time. Stimson (1976) built his time-based model of approval on the notion of growing expectations during campaigns and increasing disappointment and disillusionment over the term as presidents fail to meet those unrealistic expectations, resulting in a decline in approval. Many have argued with Seligman and Baer (1969, 18) that "a major political trend of our time is the growth in public expectations of the presidency and the expanding scope of presidential action" (e.g., Genovese, 1995; Edwards and Wayne, 1997; and Waterman, et al., 1999). If expectations of the president have grown over time and unmet expectations lead to disapproval, the public's evaluative criteria have changed over time, generally become more demanding.

Changes in issue salience over time have also been offered as an explanation for differences in the public's reaction to events and conditions. Although Ostrom and Simon (1985, 336) explicitly argue that the public makes consistent demands of all presidents, namely that they provide "peace, prosperity, domestic tranquility and both the authority and integrity of office itself," they specify a model of individual citizen evaluators in which the influence of economic and political conditions depends on individuals' attention to and concern about those conditions. For example, they found that economic problems in the 1950s did not hurt Eisenhower's approval as much as similar economic conditions hurt Nixon's in the 1970s. Similarly, they found that Eisenhower, Johnson, and Nixon were punished differently for their sustained involvement in war, "with the difference being attributable to both a reduction in the proportion of the public who noticed the war" (351-2). Edwards, Mitchell, and Welch (1995) also highlight the importance of salient issues for overall evaluations, arguing that because issue salience changes over time, the bases of evaluations also vary over time.

Models of media priming elaborate on these claims, suggesting that media coverage may be responsible for changes in issue salience and can make some criteria more important to overall evaluations, altering the ingredients of support over time (Iyengar, et al., 1984; Iyengar

and Kinder, 1987). According to Miller and Krosnick, “priming occurs when media attention to an issue causes people to place special weight on it when constructing evaluations of overall presidential job performance (301). Typically researchers uncover these effects in experimental or quasi-experimental settings. In the typical quasi-experimental design, scholars examine changes in the ingredients of support in response to “rally events.” These designs take advantage of fortuitous timing when surveys exist before and after a major rally event, enabling analysts to examine the influence of particular considerations on overall evaluations under different conditions. For example, Krosnick and Kinder (1990) found that opinions about foreign affairs had greater influence on presidential approval in the wake of Iran-Contra revelations, while Krosnick and Brannon (1993) found that evaluations of Bush’s handling of foreign affairs had a greater influence on overall evaluations after the Gulf War than they had previously. Similarly, Peffley, Langley, and Goidel (1995) found that opinions about the United States’ bombing in Libya in 1986 strongly influence approval of Reagan just after the bombing. Similar effects can be uncovered in survey data over a period of time during which media content are relatively known, as when Goidel, Shields, and Peffley (1997) find that greater media coverage of the economy in 1992 made economic evaluations more influential on overall approval of George Bush.

While many of these efforts employ the quasi-experimental design, some construct purely experimental settings to test hypotheses with more precision and control (Miller and Krosnick, 2000; Iyengar and Kinder, 1987). Although not all of these studies examine temporal heterogeneity explicitly, their results hold implications for temporal heterogeneity. If media coverage can change the ingredients of presidential support by making some issues more salient than others and salient issues are more related to approval than other issues (Edwards, Mitchell, and Welch, 1995), then changes in media coverage over time will alter the bases of support over time.

Some have suggested that presidents have some ability to control the criteria by which the public evaluates them by influencing media coverage. Although political and institutional factors constrain the president’s ability to influence the media’s agenda, Edwards and Wood (1999) find that sometimes, presidents do exert some influence over the media’s agenda, especially on domestic politics. Holian (1999a, 1999b) suggests that presidents will try to lead media coverage on issues he “owns,” issues the public generally sees as the president’s strengths.

This is only one example of the endogenous nature of studying presidential approval in a greater political context, which can make analysis complex, but also more connected to political dynamics and competition among various players in the political game.

Heterogeneity in Standards Across Groups

Many of the studies that find changing bases of evaluation over time also find that different groups of the public employ different criteria at any given time. While empirical analysis of differences between groups are not new (e.g., Hibbs, Rivers, and Vasilatos, 1982; and Monroe and Laughlin, 1983), more attention and effort have been given to these types of approaches in recent years. Recent work has examined differences between the sexes, among age groups, information levels, partisan groups, and at the level of individual attitudes, often corroborating Neustadt's (1980, 64) claim that "the presidential public is actually an aggregate of publics."

As an opening example, we have included two plots of presidential approval, broken down by partisan and racial groupings. We won't spend a great deal of time interpreting these graphics here, more extended treatment can be found in previous work (Gronke 1999, 1997, 1996). We present these simply to illustrate two interesting patterns of heterogeneity in approval. The patterns, shown in Figures One and Two are not unexpected. The starkest differences in approval are evident during the Reagan years, where the average level of approval among Democrats was approximately 40% versus nearly 90% among Republicans. Carter's and Bush's partisan pattern of approval (distinct from their overall levels of approval, reported in the first figure), are somewhat similar. Both experienced the expected pattern, with in-partisans approving at higher levels than out partisans, yet the gap was seldom more than 30%. Similarly, Black/Non-Black differences were muted during the Nixon, Carter and Bush years. Blacks and non-blacks gave substantially different ratings, on average, to Reagan, varying by as much as 50 points during the height of the 1981 recession.

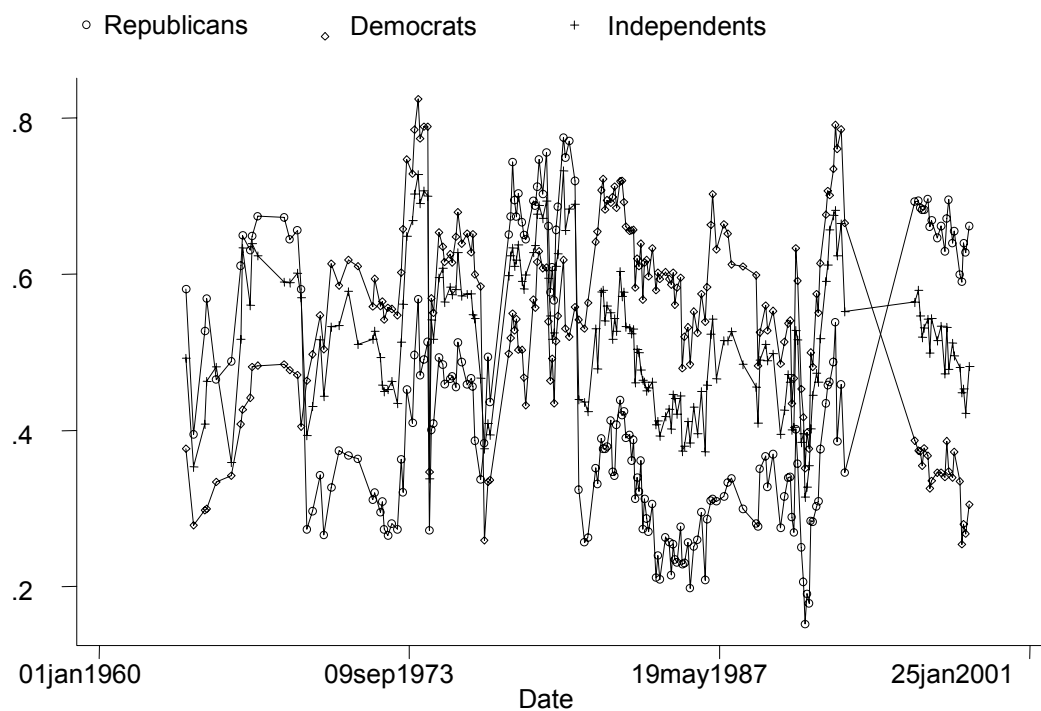


Figure One: Presidential Approval by Partisan Grouping

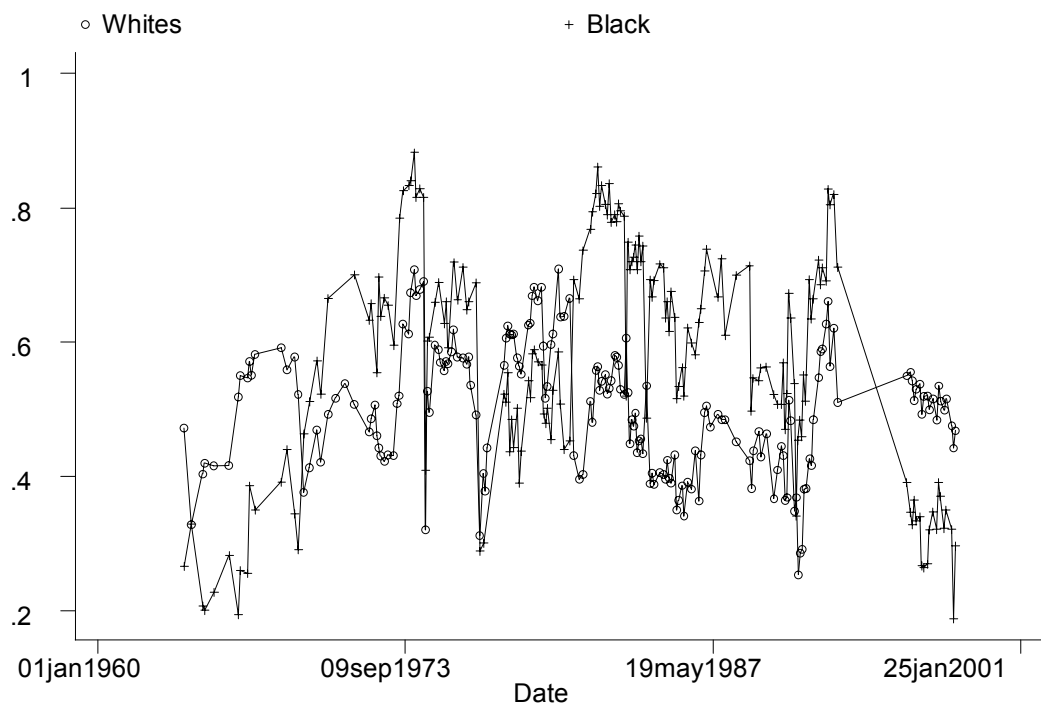


Figure Two: Presidential Approval by Race (Harris data)

What causes these differences? One possibility is that different individuals or groups have somewhat stable or default criteria of evaluation. These get perturbed temporarily by events and media coverage. While media coverage and national events (indeed, media coverage

of national events) can make some criterion more or less significant in overall evaluations, they do so differently over these groups.

Given the importance of the gender gap in voting behavior in the United States, coming to grips with the sources of different opinions and behavior is necessary (Anderson, 1997; Conover, 1988; Winder, 1992). Clarke, et al. (2000) attempt to do just that, examining gender gaps in approval, differences in economic perceptions, and differences in their weights on overall approval. Disaggregating the approval series by gender shows that the average gender gap in approval has grown, reaching an average of 8.5 percentage points during the Reagan years. Since 1981, the mean approval gender gap is about 5.7 percentage points. They find that women have judged economic conditions more harshly than men since the Carter administration and tend to rely most heavily on national prospective assessments, while men tend to rely mostly on personal prospective assessments when judging the president. They conclude that varying economic assessments and their differential magnitudes account for about 40% of the gender gap in approval.

While a robust gender gap in approval calls for explanation, Brody and Jackman (1999) find much to explain in the lack of a gap in approval between the post-Reagan cohort of voters and the rest of the voting population. Despite significant generational differences in overall levels of attention to, knowledge about, and apathy toward politics, levels of attachment to the party system, and overall confidence in government, there were only slight differences between the groups' ultimate evaluations of Bill Clinton during 1998. Although the ultimate evaluations were similar, Brody and Jackman argue that the younger cohort arrived at their assessments differently. These individuals were more likely to think that the affair is relevant to public affairs, but because they were also more likely to think Clinton shares their values, they did not punish Clinton for the affair.

Reflecting developments in other substantive areas in the discipline, some studies of approval have focused on differences of information levels and political expertise, trying to determine whether the most (Krosnick and Brannon, 1993; Miller and Krosnick, 2000) or the least sophisticated individuals (Krosnick and Kinder, 1990; Tedin, 1986) move aggregate approval. Various research efforts have suggested that many effects of concern to students of political behavior vary by individuals' level of information and attentiveness to elite and media discourse (e.g., Zaller, 1992; Krause, 1997; Althaus, 1998). Indeed, the processes that alter the

bases of support over time appear to have differential influences across the population. Various studies have attempted to discover whether political knowledge moderates agenda setting and priming effects, with mixed results. Some earlier studies found that the least knowledgeable were most susceptible to priming (Iyengar, et al., 1984; Krosnick and Kinder, 1990), while other studies found no knowledge-based differences in the effects of priming (Iyengar and Kinder, 1987). Most recently, Krosnick and Brannon (1993) and Miller and Krosnick (2000) found that priming is most likely among those with greater stores of political knowledge. While previous work suggested that political novices were helpless against the tide of media coverage, more recent work argues that considerable sophistication is required to “interpret, store, and later retrieve and make inferences from news stories” (Miller and Krosnick, 2000, 312). Furthermore, Miller and Krosnick find that priming effects are strongest among those individuals with high political knowledge who also trust the media. They argue that these individuals infer from media coverage that a particular issue is important and should therefore be weighted more heavily in evaluating the president. If an individual does not have the sophistication necessary to make these judgements or finds media untrustworthy, he or she will not make those inferences and will judge the president according to the same criteria they had previously employed.

Differences among partisan groups have also proved important, as was recognized early in approval research (Mueller, 1973, ch. 10). Empirical analysis has found partisan differences both in a priori probability of approving of the president (Ostrom and Simon, 1988) and in reactions to changes in the major variables aggregate studies highlight as influences on approval, namely decline over time, rally events, and economic conditions. In an early examination of the secular decline in approval during each administration, Presser and Converse (1976-77) found important differences in rates of approval decay across partisan groups. Tatalovich and Gitelson’s (1990) more rigorous test of this claim supports it, finding that while each president faces a party gap at inauguration, the gap grows substantially over the term, generating the most significant gap in approval. They attribute this increasing gap to the large number of out-partisans who initially support the president who eventually fall away and remain in disapproval until the surge period, which they find induces greater approval across all subgroups. Tedin’s (1986) analysis of a three wave panel study in 1982 found that out-partisans were the most unstable in their opinions, a finding corroborated in Ostrom and Simon’s (1988) analysis of a 1980 panel study.

Dramatic events sometimes interrupt these secular trends, often generating increases in approval across partisan groups. However, the magnitude and duration of these increases vary across groups. Hibbs, Rivers and Vasilatos (1982a) found partisan differences in reactions to negative events like Watergate and Vietnam, while Edwards (1983) found that increased approval among out-partisans drives the rally phenomenon, a finding Callghan and Virtanen (1993) largely supported ten years later in their analysis of reactions to the Iran Hostage Crisis (but see James and Rioux, 1998). They found that Republican support was the most difficult to induce in response to the rally event and that what little positive change occurred was short-lived. Democrats also changed relatively little, but mostly because most Democrats already approved of Carter prior to the rally event. The bulk of the change came from independents, who were free to be rallied to Carter's approval in response to the event and were also free to remain approving, exhibiting much slower decay than Republicans.

In their important early examination of disaggregated approval time series, Hibbs, Rivers, and Vasilatos (1982) found several important differences in the influences of particular economic variables across partisan groups. They found that Democrats typically relied more heavily on unemployment and real-income growth, while inflation drove Republicans' approval, a finding in line with Hibbs' other work that finds Republicans generally more concerned with inflation and Democrats with unemployment (Hibbs 1986, 1987). Similarly, Ostrom and Simon (1988) found that, at least over three panel waves in 1980, the balance of news coverage of the Iran Hostage Crisis drove Democrats' approval, inflation was the strongest influence on Republicans' assessments, and unemployment influenced independents.

Individual Level Models of Presidential Approval

The vagaries of public approval of the president are well documented -- presidents profit from economic growth, are penalized for downturns, and benefit differentially from war and peace, depending on how the country's role is perceived. We also know, from aggregate results, that the approval series and the macropartisanship series are cointegrated (MacKuen, et al., 1989, but see Greene, et al. 1996). Previous work, using aggregate data, documents that presidential approval has become more volatile in the postwar era, and that the increased variability is related to changes in partisan attachments (Brehm and Gronke 1999). At least at the aggregate level, partisanship, economic performance, and presidential approval are closely linked.

It is surprising, then, that so little is known about the individual level determinants of presidential approval. One might assume that aggregate level findings reflect the dynamics of individual opinion formation and change, but there is good reason to be doubtful. First, there is the well-known paradox in congressional voting: at the aggregate level, midterm seat gains and losses are strongly correlated with macroeconomic indicators (Kramer 1973), yet voters seldom cite economic concerns when explaining why they voted (or failed to vote) for a particular candidate. This seeming paradox resulted in Jacobson and Kernell's seminal theory of "strategy and choice in congressional elections" (Jacobson and Kernell 1983). The same sort of paradox is likely to emerge when comparing individual level and aggregate level presidential approval. Second, the "miracle of aggregation" may be a way produce "rational" aggregate public opinion from unstable individual level responses (Page and Shapiro 1992) or help us build "a summary model of American politics (Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson 2000). Still, aggregating individual survey responses can obscure more than it reveals. Berinsky demonstrates that aggregation can result in bias, overrepresenting those individuals with more stable opinions (Berinsky 1997). Aggregate level approval results thus provide an obvious starting point for an individual level model of presidential approval, but only a starting point. And we must be sensitive to ways that the individual level opinion process may induce important departures from the aggregate level model.

Gronke has considered two departures in his own work. First, drawing on the rich literature on presidential voting, he adapted the traditional three-pronged approach to presidential candidate assessment, most commonly referred to as the "Michigan" approach, to presidential approval. This individual level model of approval incorporates aspects of policy performance, both retrospective and prospective; candidate characteristics, in this context personality and trait assessments of the president; and, not surprisingly, individual level partisanship, along with other demographic and attitudinal controls. He labels these three components to the individual's assessments of the president's job performance policy, performance, and prototype. Two of the dimensions of evaluation--policy and performance--are policy oriented. The third is personality oriented. One dimension of evaluation, policy, is based on prospective forecasts of what the president might do in the future. The second--performance--draws upon retrospective evaluations of the administration's performance over the past two (or more) years. The third--prototype--compares actual character and trait impressions of a president to an ideal standard.

The second consequence of the focus on aggregate level approval is that we have little insight into potential heterogeneity in approval. When we are examining individual attitudes, however, we have to be concerned with attitude stability as well as attitude level. We cannot assume, as in the aggregate, that idiosyncrasies, accidents, and measurement error cancel each other out (see Berinsky 1997 for a nice discussion of the aggregate-individual link). It is unrealistic to assume that our survey measures reflect precisely the underlying attitude held by an individual. That has long been recognized. More recent developments in survey theory, however, go further. In the survey interview, as conceptualized by Feldman and Zaller (1992), a respondent draws upon a pool of considerations that are evoked by the stimulus (the question). Respondents select among these considerations according to a particular rule to generate a response. The mix of considerations will vary based on predispositions of the individual, individual exposure to political information, and the nature of the survey.

This description of the survey interview has intuitive appeal. Yet the model has something of a mindless quality about it. Respondents are trapped by their own predispositions and the mix of elite debate. A more recent alternative proposed by Alvarez and Brehm (2000, and multiple previous papers) adds a more dynamic element to opinion formation and puts predispositions in a more central role in the process of opinion giving (not just information receiving). In their formulation, a respondent weighs various arguments, pro and anti, balances considerations, and explicitly wrestles with situations of uncertainty, ambivalence, and equivocation.¹⁴

In the realm of presidential approval, Gronke tested whether the centrality of partisanship and party images is the key predisposition that lead to greater or lower levels of certainty in the approval response. Partisanship provides an inertial base to political attitudes, helping individuals organize, understand, and react to political information. Weak partisans, then, will be less likely to receive information about presidential leadership, will be less likely to encode that information in a consistent basis, and will have a more difficult time constructing a consistent image of presidential performance.

Results from both the model of the mean and the model for the variance have been reported previously (Gronke 1999) and are only briefly summarize here. The performance

¹⁴ For differing conceptualizations of this process, compare Zaller 1992 and Alvarez and Brehm 2000, especially Ch. 1 of Alvarez and Brehm. Multiple applications of these models can be found in both volumes.

measure, national economic assessments, is unsurprisingly strong and positive. The addition of an item that asks specifically about the president's performance in managing the economy is even more strongly related to approval. Policy distance measures all have the correct sign, but fail to consistently pass conventional statistical significance levels. Finally, personality assessments show a strong, positive relationship with presidential approval.

These results for the variance portion of the analysis, both at the aggregate (Brehm and Gronke 2000) and individual level (Gronke 1999), have also been uniformly encouraging. In every year but one, Gronke found that the stronger your partisan attachment, the more precise our statistical estimate of approval. The opposite is also true--the weaker your affiliation, the less confident we are in any forecast. Replicated over time, this implies that presidents have a reduced ability to predict approval for any particular subgroup. The president's ability to build a lasting support coalition in the public has been hindered as the population has become less partisan.

Party and Uncertainty in Presidential Approval

	Pooled Heteroskedastic Ordered Probit, 1980- 1998		Pooled Heteroskedastic Ordered Probit, Election Years	
Party ID	0.619	0.038	0.431	0.043
Economic Assessments	1.105	0.087	0.382	0.096
Presidential Mgmt of Economy			2.057	0.129
Distance: Defense Policy	-0.005	0.009	-0.02	0.012
Distance: Ideology			-0.077	0.019
Trait Assessments	3.842	0.187	3.132	0.215
Affect Assessment	1.914	0.101	1.327	0.11
Black	0.361	0.048	0.278	0.058
Education	-0.041	0.016	-0.093	0.021
Female	0.020	0.029	0.042	0.037
South	0.090	0.032	0.137	0.04
Mu(1)	0.867	0.017	0.901	0.093
Mu(2)	2.314	0.024	-1.393	0.151
Variance Equation				
Chronic Political Information	-0.046	0.020	-0.015	0.015
Out Partisan	-0.030	0.018	-0.041	0.014
In Partisan	-0.020	0.018	-0.019	0.016
Intensity of Economic Assessments	0.227	0.022	0.086	0.067

If these findings hold up in other analyses, one might speculate that the relationship between attitudes and stability help politicians choose a course of action during periods of rapid

partisan change, periods that Aldrich and Niemi (199x) describe as periods of “disequilibrium.” However, our results indicate ways that politicians may also benefit during periods of partisan flux. If the proportion of strong identifiers increases rather than decreases, politicians not only can predict changes in the level of support, but can be more confident in their predictions, both for supporters and the opposition.

Comparative Approval Research

While our focus is the American presidency, this research speaks to larger issues of public evaluations of democratic leaders and institutions, with implications for discussions on the bases of regime legitimacy and democratic accountability. Indeed, some of the questions, models, and methods developed in the study of presidential approval have encouraged analyses of the public’s evaluations of other political figures and institutions. For example, many have examined congressional approval ratings (e.g., Durr, Gilmour, and Wolbrecht, 1997; Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, 1995; Parker, 1977; Patterson, Ripley and Quinlan, 1992; Patterson and Magleby, 1992; and Patterson and Caldeira, 1990), approval of the Supreme Court (e.g., Caldeira, 1986; Caldeira and Gibson, 1992; Tannenhau and Murphy, 1981) evaluations of state legislatures (Patterson, Ripley and Quinlan, 1992), and governors.

Furthermore, many scholars have examined the dynamics of approval of executives outside the United States. For example, Lewis-Beck (1980) examined France, Weyland (1998) examined Venezuela, Cuzan and Bundrick (1997) looked at Central America, Buendia (1996) and Davis and Langley (1995) looked at Mexico, and Norpoth (1985) examined executive support in Western Europe. In some cases, comparative work can illuminate important features of American political dynamics. Hibbs’ work on group differences in approval in the United States, Great Britain, and Germany, which produced multiple journal articles, stands as an example (Hibbs and Vasilatos, 1982; Hibbs, Rivers, and Vasilatos, 1982a; Hibbs, Rivers, and Vasilatos, 1982b).

Final Thoughts

Thus far, we have reviewed many recent trends and developments, many of which we consider positive and encouraging for the study of presidential evaluations. However, much remains to be done. First, while this year marks the thirtieth anniversary of Mueller’s path breaking article, Neustadt’s (1960, 95) forty year old claim that the approval question is

“unfocused” and elicits equally unfocused answers continues to plague this literature. Although approval ratings have become a part of political life in the United States, we still do not understand exactly what people mean when they say they approve or disapprove of the way the president is handling his job. Indeed, much of the president’s political strategy may involve trying to interpret the meaning of his approval ratings and to craft interpretations and explanations of recent trends to their benefit in political affairs. If so, it is incumbent on scholars to continue to think conceptually about exactly what people mean when they approve of the president and whether those meanings remain constant or change over time and across the population and to specify the processes governing such variation.

Rather than close with a flourish, we close with a summary of what we believe are the most troubling outstanding questions in presidential approval research. Perhaps these can serve as something of an agenda for scholars over the next few years.

1. *Simultaneity bias* likely creeps into most studies of presidential approval and presidential governance. We have already noted that presidents are more likely to successfully shepherd through legislation when their approval ratings are high, and then these same accomplishments enhance their approval ratings.

From a very different direction, Jacobs and Shapiro (2000) argue that the popular view of the presidency and the polls is backwards. Superficially, it seems like presidents are a slave to public opinion. But Jacobs and Shapiro demonstrate that, in fact, presidents have a specific political agenda, and use the polls as a guide to positioning that policy, much the way that interest groups use polls to construct “policy narratives” as a way to influence Congress (Loomis and West 199x).

Often thought to be a data issue, these two examples show that simultaneity is more broadly an issue of research design and causal interpretations. The qualitative analyst is just as subject to simultaneity bias as is the survey analyst. As scholars of an institution that has such a large impact on the domestic policy agenda, congressional agenda, and public opinion, we must be careful about cause and effect.

2. *A unified data series.* We have reviewed a large number of articles. Very few of these studies, however, draw upon the same set of survey data or event series. Each new scholar seemingly builds the dataset anew. A unified dataset, containing Gallup, Harris, and New York Times polls, would be a boon to the field. A unified event

series would save significant labor and avoid endless battles over the proper coding of rally points.

3. *Individual Level Analysis.* The variety of individual- and group-level findings, which are interesting not least because they are sometimes contradictory, need to be assessed in a systematic way, with an eye toward constructing a unified theoretical understanding. This understanding should seek to explain the dynamics of approval at various levels of analysis, moving back and forth across different levels of aggregation. Such an understanding should continue to uncover the implications of individual- and group-level findings for aggregate approval ratings and ultimately macro-level political and policy outcomes.
4. *Elite use of public opinion.* A fourth question asks what are the political implications of the first two questions. How do presidents interpret approval ratings and other evaluations? How does this understanding shape their activities in office? Do they think of approval in aggregate or group terms and how does this matter politically? The earlier literature on the president's ability to manipulate approval ratings (e.g., Ostrom and Simon, 1985) may be extended by examining whether or not presidents seek to increase their popularity by targeting particular groups in particular ways given their understandings of what the group will respond to. Encouraging work has already started in this area (Jacobs and Shapiro 2000; Herbst 1998, Geer 1996).
5. *A Changing Media Universe.* The mass media are an important part of the third wave of approval studies. However, mass media are undergoing a tremendous change, as newspapers merge and disappear, cable television stations proliferate, and, of course, the Internet have already revolutionized how information is stored and retrieved. Ostrom and Simon, while arguing for individual level analyses of approval, wrote: "any analysis of the president's ability to influence citizen opinions is fundamentally tied to question about the attentiveness of the public, the stability of individual opinions, how citizens acquire and process information, and the impact of information on opinion change..." (1988).

In order to learn, however, citizens must first be exposed to information. Past assumptions about presidential dominance of events are increasingly unsustainable. A president's ability to dominate the news has been called into question in light of the

growth of cable television (Baum and Kernell 1999a). Metzger (1999) argues that approval of the “incredible shrinking president” is increasingly detached from actual performance in office. How this may effect the president’s ability to marshal public opinion is unclear. The rapid diffusion of the *Starr Report* provided us just a glimpse of this future.

6. *Short Term and Long Term History.* Finally, we must extend our historical reach in two ways. First, we need to wrestle with the Clinton experience, seeking to make sense of it in a systematic way. Work must continue to question whether and how the last eight years challenges what has gone before and attempt to make sense of the Lewinsky affair. Impeachments are relatively rare in American history and we obviously must make the most of the chance to study the end of Clinton’s term with the mountain of survey and other data currently at our disposal.

Second, we must continue to subject our models to the testing, refining, and expanding the experience that a longer historical overview may bring. The theory underlying presidential approval ought to be portable across different historical eras.

In this spirit, we close by highlighting two recent research efforts. Baum and Kernell (1999b), drawing on newly discovered Gallup polls from the 1930s, have examined FDR’s approval rating during the Depression and World War II. A second endeavor takes the theory of approval and attempts to apply it to the XYZ Affair during the presidency of John Adams. While this is admittedly a long way from the daily monitoring of the public’s “temperature” which we have become accustomed to, it is nonetheless a fascinating effort to broaden and enrich our understanding of presidential activities, elite opinions, and public approval.

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