



## Res Publica - Journal of Undergraduate Research

---

Volume 19 | Issue 1

Article 1

---

May 2015

### Res Publica XIX

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/respublica>



Part of the [Political Science Commons](#)

---

#### **Recommended Citation**

(2014) "Res Publica XIX," *Res Publica - Journal of Undergraduate Research*: Vol. 19  
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/respublica/vol19/iss1/1>

This Prefatory Notes is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been brought to you by Digital Commons @ IWU with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this material in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/ or on the work itself. This material has been accepted for inclusion by editorial board of Res Publica and the Political Science Department at Illinois Wesleyan University. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@iwu.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@iwu.edu).

©Copyright is owned by the author of this document.

---

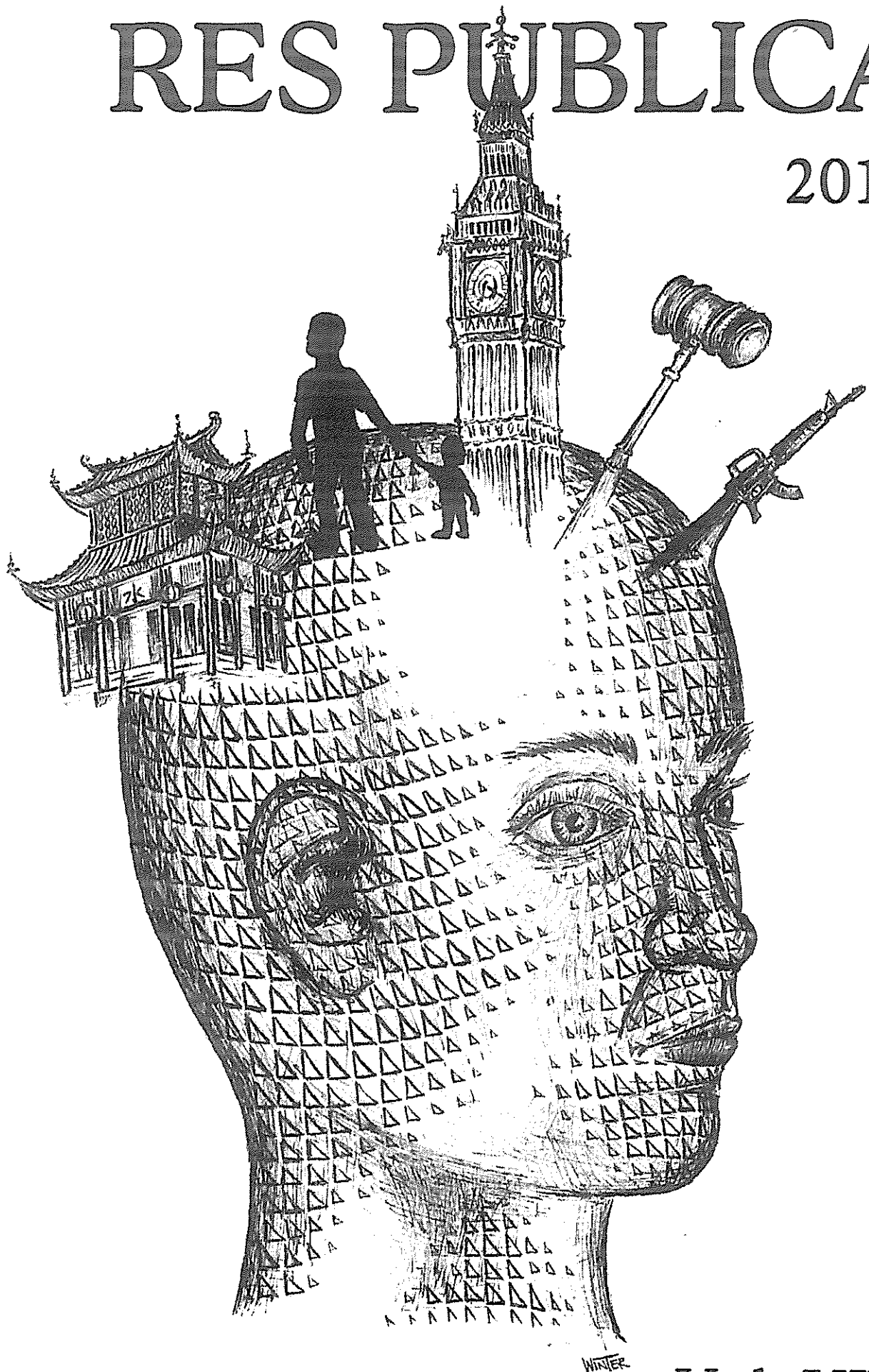
## Res Publica XIX

### Abstract

Complete copy of the 2014 volume of *Res Publica*.

# RES PUBLICA

2014



Vol. XIX

# RES PUBLICA

Volume XIX  
2014

*Res Publica is a publication of Pi Sigma Alpha, the Political Science Honor Society. It is funded by the Illinois Wesleyan University Student Senate.*

Editors:  
Ryan Winter  
Nick Desideri

Associate Editors:  
Patrick Cavanaugh  
Lauren Burke

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Letter from the Department Chair	ii
Editors' Introduction	iii
Authors' Biographies	iv
<i>Radical Right Populist Parties in Britain and the Netherlands: Explaining Electoral Success</i> Casey Plach	1
<i>Vicious Cycle or Business Cycle?: Explaining Political Violence in Northern Ireland After the Troubles</i> Lauren Burke	12
<i>Mass Shootings, Mass Media, and Mass Opinion: An Examination of how the News Media Affects Public Opinion in the Aftermath of Mass Shootings</i> Patrick Cavanaugh	27
<i>The Least Dangerous Branch: The Dark Horse in American Democracy</i> Lexi Baltes	45
<i>The Myth of the Clash of Civilizations: Confucian Values and Democratic Support</i> Xinlin Xu	62
<i>No Smoking: Policy Diffusion and its Prevailing Factors</i> Brad Gresik	76
<i>Curiosity or Manners: The Values That Shape American Political Mindsets</i> Ryan Winter	89

## LETTER FROM THE DEPARTMENT CHAIR

In this, *Res Publica's* nineteenth issue, we encounter a fine collection of some of the best work produced by our students this year. Sponsored by the IWU chapter of Pi Sigma Alpha, the national political science honor society, this *Res Publica* showcases the incisive thinking and very capable writing of students who each, in her or his own way, address various intersections between attitude formation – or in some cases big ideas – and political practice. Topics include the potential tension between the ideas of modern democracy and the ancient ideas of Confucianism, the political salience of second-hand smoke, the impact of economic conditions on violence in Northern Ireland, the dance between right-wing populist parties and European voters, the efficacy of family value frames as ideological metaphors, and U.S. Supreme Court justices' annual parry with one another and public opinion as they selectively assert their institution's role as the dark horse in American politics. These are thoughtful, challenging, and indeed delightful essays to read. This year's issue of *Res Publica* truly deserves a broad audience, so we hope once you have read it you will share it with friends, family members, and colleagues. We are quite proud of our students' accomplishments and are thrilled to share some of those with you here.

Each year the curriculum in the Department of Political Science greets new members of our community with a series of introductory courses as they acclimate to college life. From there students branch out to explore a wide variety of areas running along the major dimensions of our discipline, from institutions and behavior, to American and international topics, employing qualitative and quantitative tools. By their senior years, many of our students have sampled broadly from this rich array of topics and experiences. As they undertake their senior research seminars – the source of most of these essays – they apply what they have learned. At their best, they produce the work you hold in your hands. The maturation of their analytical skills is truly remarkable over four years, and we are excited about the students' prospects as professionals and, importantly, as citizens. There is, of course, a bittersweet quality to the impending graduation of most of these authors, though as we see them go we dwell on the sweet, knowing they will take with them into a complicated, interconnected, competitive, and (as Patrick Cavanaugh reminds us) dangerous world the knowledge, values, and skills they learned during their time at Illinois Wesleyan. The faculty members are grateful for their coming, and their going.

A particular thanks goes to *Res Publica's* lead editors, Nick Desideri and Ryan Winter, ably assisted by associate editors Lauren Burke and Patrick Cavanaugh. From start to finish *Res Publica* is a student production. We are proud of them for what they have done here, producing and sustaining what we believe to be one of the few undergraduate political science journals in the nation for nineteen years running. We also look forward to hearing about their outrageously successful careers and lives in the years to come.

Thank you for reading.

**Greg Shaw**

## EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

Serving as editors for *Res Publica XIX* has been a fantastic experience. We were thrilled not only with the high number of submissions this year but also the quality of them all. While we were unable to accept every submission, each writer impressed us with their breadth of knowledge on their chosen topic. Even more heartening were the submissions by undergraduates. From gateway essays to senior seminar papers, we received a wide array of material for edition of *Res Publica*, and we encourage everyone returning for another year at Illinois Wesleyan University to submit again when the call for papers comes again.

This year's edition is centered on the origin and subsequent spread of ideas. How does newspaper coverage influence American attitudes on gun control? Are Confucianism and democracy more compatible than some scholars have suggested? Why are some right-wing parties more politically powerful than others? In what way is the Supreme Court still the "Dark Horse" of American politics? These are the questions that cut below the surface of our society and illuminate essential truths about how we construct the world around us.

As *Res Publica* approaches its second decade of publication, we look back on the publication's impressive history. One of the few undergraduate political science journals in the nation, *Res Publica* has offered the students of Illinois Wesleyan a place to exhibit their writing and research for nineteen years. Over the years, *Res Publica* has helped students refine their writing and display their abilities to the public, both of which represent invaluable opportunities.

We greatly appreciate the contributions of our associate editors, Lauren Burke and Patrick Cavanaugh, who took time out of their busy senior year schedules to provide assistance and feedback. Without their hard work, this year's edition of *Res Publica* would not be in your hands. We extend a similar sense of gratitude to the Department of Political Science faculty, who have pushed us to improve our analytical, writing, and research skills. It has been a privilege learning from and working with such inspiring individuals. Last, we would like to thank Karl Winter for his outstanding cover artwork, which ties together the themes of this year's articles and the overarching power of ideas.

Thank you for reading; we hope you enjoy this year's edition of *Res Publica*!  
Nick Desideri and Ryan Winter

## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

**Casey Plach** is a junior Political Science and Spanish double major. In her time at IWU, she has worked as a writing center tutor, a research assistant for the Political Science department, and a residential community advisor. Casey has interned at State Farm, Heartland Head Start, and the McLean County Law and Justice Center. This semester she is enjoying time abroad in Granada, Spain and interning at an organization called Tierra de Todos.

**Lauren Burke** is a senior Political Science major at Illinois Wesleyan University. She has been active in IWU's chapters of the Alpha Phi Omega Service Fraternity and the Sigma Alpha Iota International Music Fraternity. She is also a member of The Phi Beta Kappa Society, Pi Sigma Alpha (The National Political Science Honor Society), The Honor Society of Phi Kappa Phi, Phi Beta Delta (The Honor Society for International Scholars), Omicron Delta Epsilon (The Honor Society for Economics), Sigma Alpha Pi (The National Society of Leadership and Success), and Alpha Lambda Delta (The National Honor Society for First-Year Students). Her experiences volunteering with Habitat for Humanity's Alternative Spring Break during her sophomore year and working as an intern in the Irish Parliament during the spring of her junior year contributed greatly to her interest in international politics. Lauren will begin pursuing her M.A. in Democracy and Governance at Georgetown University this fall.

**Patrick Cavanaugh** is a senior with majors in English Writing and Political Science. He has served as an editor for *The Argus*, a Communications Intern at the Chicago Red Cross, and a News/Production Intern at WJBC Radio in Bloomington. Patrick currently works as the Music Director for WESN Radio, an assistant for the Political Science department, and a tutor at the IWU Writing Center. While studying abroad in the Netherlands, he organized a poetry reading to raise money for the Dutch NGO Dokters van de Wereld and got into a couple biking accidents. Patrick hopes to secure an intern position with National Public Radio for the summer before going to graduate school and pursuing a career in journalism and/or communications. He loves his family, his pets, and his friends (not in that order).

**Lexi Baltes** is a senior at Illinois Wesleyan University with majors in Political Science and English Literature. Playing four years on the IWU Women's Basketball Team, Lexi won a National Championship, served as Captain for two years, and earned Elite 89 and Academic All American honors. Lexi is a member of the 2014 All State Good Works Team, a Phi Beta Kappa Fellow, a member of Phi Kappa Phi and the Student Athlete Advisory Committee, and President of Fellowship of Christian Athletes. Lexi interned at the McLean County State's Attorney's office. She will be attending Notre Dame Law School in the fall.



**Xinlin Xu** is a senior Political Science major. She is a member of Pi Sigma Alpha, the Political Science honor society. She has been working with Scholars at Risk on human rights advocacy for threatened intellectuals since her sophomore year. She spent her junior year at Pembroke College in Oxford, studying philosophy, politics and economics. She has interned with Prairie State Legal Services and the Economic Development Office of the City of Bloomington. After graduation, she will be attending New York University School of Law.

**Brad Gresik** is a senior at Illinois Wesleyan University with majors in Political Science and International Studies, Development Concentration. He is the 2013-2014 Co-President of Pi Sigma Alpha and 2014 President of IWU College Democrats. He was selected summer to participate in the Technos International Program in summer 2012 and spent the following semester studying international politics at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland. This year, Brad has interned with Bloomington Mayor Tari Renner, U.S. Senator Dick Durbin, and for Democratic congressional candidate Ann Callis. After graduation, Brad hopes to work for the state or federal government and eventually attend graduate school studying public policy.

**Ryan Winter** is a senior Political Science and History double major. In his time at IWU, Ryan has been a mentor for the Engaging Diversity program, an intern for the Bloomington Mayor's Office, and a political science research assistant. He served as Co-President of Pi Sigma Alpha and Vice President of Phi Alpha Theta honor societies, and was initiated into Phi Beta Kappa. As a recipient of IWU's Ecldey Summer Research Fellowship, Ryan spent last summer studying the role of religion in European populist radical right parties. Ryan competes on the track and field team, and this year he was awarded all-conference honors in the triple jump. Ryan loves working with kids, and along with two other student-athletes he earned a Weir Fellowship for founding an exercise and healthy lifestyles program at the local Boys and Girls Club.

## RADICAL RIGHT POPULIST PARTIES IN BRITAIN AND THE NETHERLANDS: EXPLAINING ELECTORAL SUCCESS

Casey Plach

Radical right-wing populist parties have recently emerged throughout Europe, but the electoral success among these parties is incredibly inconsistent. In the Netherlands, Geert Wilders' Dutch Party for Freedom (PVV) has become established in the country's political system, while the British National Party (BNP) and the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) struggle to gain even a single seat in British parliament. Models outlining a formula for the rise and success of populist parties can help explain why some parties achieve an electoral breakthrough and others do not. Researcher of radical right populism Pippa Norris' model of electoral success is divided into a political demand side that focuses on the public grievances driving these parties, and a political supply side that focuses on internal party activity as well as external factors shaping opportunity structure. This essay compares Britain's two radical right populist parties, the BNP and the UKIP, with the PVV in the Netherlands, and applies Norris' framework to explain the greater electoral success of the PVV. It concludes that while Britain and Netherlands are similar in terms of political demand, populist parties have seen more success in the Netherlands because supply-side factors are more favorable.

### *Populist Parties in the U.K. and the Netherlands*

The British National Party was formed in 1982 by John Tyndall when he split from the National Front, a far-right party for whites only. With its ideological roots in fascism, the BNP has struggled to gain political legitimacy and respect. Current leader Nick Griffin has called for a modernization of the party to change this. He denies the fascist label and instead identifies the party as having "ideological foundations of a twenty-first-century 'popular nationalism.'"<sup>1</sup> Following Griffin's transformation, the BNP's platform defends "democracy, freedom, culture, and identity"<sup>2</sup> Despite this reconstruction, key grievances remained the same, with immigration and European Union membership at the forefront. However, the party's rhetoric has changed in an attempt to appear less radical. For example, the BNP is extremely anti-immigrant, seeing immigrants as a threat to British culture, and it uses nativist rhetoric in an attempt to legitimize these concerns. BNP members defend their stance on the grounds that multiculturalism "wipes out indigenous cultures and identities through homogenization" and so, by opposing it, they "[are] not racists but legitimate defenders of ethnic and cultural diversity."<sup>3</sup> The BNP is also very anti-European Union because it sees the EU as a threat to democracy and national sovereignty. The party's target out-groups include

<sup>1</sup> Copsey 2007, 75

<sup>2</sup> "Democracy" 2010

<sup>3</sup> Copsey 2007, 74

political actors in the EU as well as immigrants within the state, especially Muslims. A vertical structure of antagonisms is observed, as the party attacks both the “corrupt elites” at the top of society and the “dangerous others” at the bottom. With these key issues driving the party, the BNP garners support from “deprived and less well educated members of the working class [who] feel under ‘threat’ from immigration.”<sup>4</sup>

Eleven years after the BNP’s emergence, Alan Sked founded the Anti-Federalist League, which would later evolve into The United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) now led by Nigel Farage. The Anti-Federalist league was a campaign against the Maastricht Treaty, so at its inception the UKIP’s platform solely promoted anti-EU sentiments. Realizing it could not last as a single-issue party, the UKIP broadened its appeals. It currently identifies itself as a “democratic, libertarian party” and focuses on leaving the EU and restoring democracy by empowering the people. Its manifesto explains its anti-EU stance and continues, “But the EU is only the biggest symptom of the real problem – the theft of our democracy by a powerful, remote political ‘elite’ which has forgotten that it’s here to serve the people.”<sup>5</sup> The UKIP’s enemies are the mainstream politicians in both Britain and the EU. Immigration is also a concern, but the UKIP takes an economic perspective focusing on limited jobs and welfare, unlike the BNP’s cultural protectionist stance. The absence of overtly racist rhetoric has helped the UKIP be more successful and appear as a more respectable party than the BNP. The party’s basis of mobilization consists of Eurosceptic voters and ordinary, working-class people, but it also attracts some dissatisfied Conservatives.

In 2002, almost a decade after the UKIP was founded, the Netherlands saw the rise of the Pim Fortuyn List (LPF), a radical right party populist that set the stage for the emergence of Geert Wilder’s Party for Freedom in 2006. Pim Fortuyn founded the LPF in response to the “Purple Coalition” coalition formed by three of the mainstream parties who, he felt, ignored the people. He was killed just before the 2002 election, but the party gained 17 percent of the vote and twenty-six seats in Dutch Parliament.<sup>6</sup> However, the LPF’s success was short-lived. With the death of Fortuyn, the party lost its organizational leadership and experienced internal conflict, ultimately leading to its collapse. Just a few years later, Geert Wilders took over as the country’s new populist leader. He broke from the mainstream right People’s Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) after disagreeing with the parliament leader about Turkey obtaining EU membership and founded Geert Wilders’ Dutch Party for Freedom. His party focuses on the same issues as the BNP and UKIP, with the major concerns being EU membership, immigration, and restoring democracy. Target out-groups are also similar, as the PVV is very hostile to political elites working for the EU and the mainstream

---

<sup>4</sup> Goodwin 2012, 20

<sup>5</sup> “The Only”

<sup>6</sup> Van Kessel 2011, 74

Dutch parties, as well as to Muslim immigrants. For Wilders, “Islam is perceived as a violent ‘ideology’ and Dutch culture should be protected against the process of Islamisation.”<sup>7</sup> Like the BNP, he employs nativist rhetoric in an attempt to restore national sovereignty by means of bringing ownership back to the “true and good people,” also referred to as the heartland. The PVV mainly draws support from Eurosceptic voters and so-called “losers of modernization,” who have lost their jobs to outsourcing, technological development, and other effects of globalization. They are considered the “ordinary hardworking men and women”—a phrase that Wilders is never hesitant to employ.<sup>8</sup>

#### *Demand*

The demand side of Norris’ model focuses on public grievances and how these grievances drive the emergence of new political parties. Touching on the most prominent concerns among countries in Western Europe, Norris explains, “the rising salience of cultural protectionism, in a backlash against globalization and population migration, has altered the public agenda in each country, providing sporadic openings for new parties.”<sup>9</sup> Public grievances increase electoral demand, and the higher the electoral demand for PRR parties, the more likely they are to succeed. Furthermore, if there is dissatisfaction among the public, voters are more likely to be receptive to parties who address issues that mainstream parties have ignored or failed to solve. Dissatisfaction in Britain and the Netherlands has stemmed from structural changes both countries have experienced in recent years. Both countries became member states of the European Union, were affected by the economic crisis of 2008, are subject to negative effects of globalization, and have experienced an increase in immigration. These changes produced electoral demand and led to the emergence of populist parties.

To determine what grievances are present in Britain and the Netherlands, data from the Eurobarometer Public Opinion Survey of 2012 can be examined. One question on the survey asks, “What do you think are the two most important issues facing (OUR COUNTRY) at the moment?” The three highest ranked issues in the United Kingdom were unemployment (40 percent), the economic situation (30 percent), and immigration (24 percent). In the Netherlands, they were the economic situation (55 percent), health and social security (46 percent), and unemployment (32 percent). Unemployment and the economic situation were concerns in both countries, which demonstrates that on the macro level the public has similar grievances.

Populist radical right parties in Western Europe have found success capitalizing on issues of democracy, globalization, and immigration, all of which are public concerns in the Netherlands and

---

<sup>7</sup> Van Kessel 2011, 75

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 84

<sup>9</sup> Norris 2005, 4

the United Kingdom. According to a May 2004 Eurobarometer survey, 27 percent of Dutch respondents and 23 percent of British respondents indicated that they were not very satisfied with the way democracy works in their country. Satisfaction rates were similar on all measures, which indicates that both countries were experiencing similar grievances. Populist parties were gaining ground when this survey was taken, and with about a quarter of the public in each country expressing dissatisfaction with their democratic process, the demand was present for a populist party to respond.

In terms of globalization, results from the May 2012 Eurobarometer survey indicated that 24 percent of Dutch respondents and 37 percent of British respondents believed globalization represents a threat to employment and companies. This is another public concern, common in both the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. One outcome of globalization is an increase in immigration rates, which is an issue that has not escaped notice in Western Europe. Currently, the foreign born population in Netherlands makes up 11.2 percent of the total population, and in Britain 12.9 percent.<sup>10</sup> The public is wary of the immigrant population and high immigration rates, and populist parties are acting on these concerns.

In both the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, public demand is present for a party that offers simple solutions to restore democracy, protect the country from the negative effects of globalization, and limit immigration. The opportunity exists in both countries for radical right populist parties to respond and find success. Overall, the demand actually appears to be slightly stronger in Britain. Immigration, a central focus for all three populist parties, ranks among the U.K.'s top three concerns and 13 percent more of the British public views globalization as a threat. However, demand is not a direct indicator of success. This is especially apparent in the 2010 general election results. In Britain, the UKIP gained 3.2 percent of the vote, and the BNP gained 1.9 percent, but neither won a seat in parliament.<sup>11</sup> In the Netherlands' 2010 general election, the PVV gained 15.5 percent of the vote, which earned it twenty-four seats out of 150 in parliament.<sup>12</sup> While both countries are similar in terms of political demand, the PVV has clearly seen greater electoral success, not only in seats gained but also in overall share of the vote. To explain this difference, political supply-side factors must be considered.

#### *Supply (External)*

Norris explains that demand alone is not enough to guarantee the success of populist parties. She introduces a supply side, which “focus[es] upon patterns of party competition, including where mainstream parties decide to place themselves...as well as the actions taken by the radical right

---

<sup>10</sup> OECD 2013

<sup>11</sup> Denver 2010, 593

<sup>12</sup> Van Kessel 2011, 74

themselves.”<sup>13</sup> External supply-side factors include electoral conditions, ideological space, availability of the electorate, and the media. These factors are outside of party control, but in certain instances they can contribute to the electoral success of populist parties.

A country’s electoral conditions are critical in deciding how many seats a party will gain. Although the BNP and the UKIP do not hold any seats in the British Parliament, they do have a combined fourteen seats in the European Parliament. This difference has only one possible explanation: the electoral system. In the United Kingdom, general elections use a first-past-the-post (FPTP) system where the candidate who earns the most votes wins the seat. As Duverger’s law states, plurality rule voting tends to produce two-party systems, which “makes it rather difficult for new political forces (populist or otherwise) to make an electoral breakthrough.”<sup>14</sup> This type of system can also discourage the electorate from voting for a third party candidate because their vote will most likely not carry any significance. The BNP and UKIP received a combined 5.1 percent of the vote in the last election, but “the FPTP electoral system continues to restrict their ability to impact on national level politics.”<sup>15</sup>

Because the European Parliament uses a proportional representation system (PR), the BNP and UKIP have experienced some electoral success at this level. In this system, candidates gain seats in proportion to the number of votes they receive. The Netherlands also uses a PR system for its general election, which in part explains the electoral success of the PVV. The system has no established threshold, meaning that parties only need .67 percent of the popular vote to gain a seat.<sup>16</sup> The electoral conditions naturally encourage new parties to enter the political arena. In fact, “[b]etween 1946 and 2003, 18 new parties have gained entry into parliament.”<sup>17</sup> The PVV has benefitted from this open and accessible system, while the BNP and UKIP are working under conditions that impede electoral success.

Other actors in the political system also have an effect on a party’s success. Mainstream parties play a role because their position on the political spectrum and whether or not they respond to the concerns of the public determines how much ideological space exists for a populist party to emerge. In the United Kingdom, mainstream parties are much more in tune with public grievances. They will respond to constituent concerns and often “shift policies to mop up temporary forms of discontent.”<sup>18</sup> In fact, the Conservative party has even used populist rhetoric itself, “portray[ing] the

---

<sup>13</sup> Norris 2005, 14

<sup>14</sup> Fella 2008, 182

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 197

<sup>16</sup> Lucardie 2008, 152

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 152

<sup>18</sup> John and Margetts 2009, 497

New Labour as an out-of-touch liberal metropolitan elite selling out the British people.”<sup>19</sup> This does not bode well for populist parties who insist that all parts of the establishment are unresponsive to the people. Rather than gaining the political legitimacy that they aim for, these parties are restricted to the role of a pressure group on established parties. For example, the BNP and the UKIP both concentrate on immigration, but mainstream parties have responded to the issue as well, undermining their efforts. In fact, many might agree with Matthew Goodwin that the “Conservatives have offered a more credible brand to citizens anxious over immigration.”<sup>20</sup> Established parties in the U.K. present themselves as a more legitimate option and since they respond to public concerns, there is very little ideological space for a populist party to succeed.

In contrast, mainstream parties in the Netherlands have converged ideologically and are unresponsive to public concerns, opening political space where populist parties can thrive. With a highly consociational political system in the Netherlands, these parties have not established distinct platforms and have converged in such a way that voters cannot distinguish between them.<sup>21</sup> The Labour Party, for example, attempted to address multiculturalism and the public’s concerns over cultural preservation, but they gave up and “by 2003... little was separating the three mainstream parties on this issue.”<sup>22</sup> This allowed for populist parties, such as the PVV, to step in and be the answer voters were looking for. In addition, mainstream parties in the Netherlands are on the whole less likely to respond to public grievances. Unlike mainstream parties in the U.K. that at least attempt to deal with high immigration rates, “[e]stablished parties [in the Netherlands] failed to recognize that citizens actually were concerned about the perceived problems of immigration.”<sup>23</sup> This provides the perfect opportunity for the PVV to claim that the establishment is ignoring important issues and that the people are not being heard.

Even if political parties are responsive to public grievances, the availability of the electorate is an important factor in determining the support a populist party will obtain. With the UK’s highly structured party system, voters are not very receptive to new parties like the BNP or UKIP. Availability in large part depends on how tied voters are to their respective parties, and in the U.K. mainstream parties have been relatively stable and remain legitimate choices. A State of the Nation Poll measuring views on the BNP indicates that only 9 percent of self-identified Conservatives “might vote for” the BNP in the future.<sup>24</sup> There are some dissatisfied conservatives, but for the most part voters are loyal to their respective parties and would not readily abandon them for a new one.

---

<sup>19</sup> Fella 2008, 197

<sup>20</sup> Goodwin 2012, 17

<sup>21</sup> Van Kessel 2011, 78

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 79

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> John and Margetts 2009, 507

Meanwhile, the electorate in the Netherlands is highly receptive to new parties because of structural changes the country experienced in the twentieth century. Before World War II, Dutch society was organized according to different symbolic pillars, including a Protestant, Catholic, and Socialist pillar. Schools, media, and political parties were divided according to these pillars, but this system broke down and society experienced drastic changes, especially in the political system. Within this pillarized structure “the electorate largely voted along the cleavage lines of religion and social class... By the turn of the twenty-first century, however, the explanatory power of this factor had become very low.”<sup>25</sup> Voters are no longer tied to the pillars that in the past had defined all their choices, and today parties are still developing to respond to the new social structure. This upheaval means that voters are “less loyal to traditional parties and ready to give the benefit of the doubt to new parties.”<sup>26</sup> The PVV is one new party trying to establish itself in this new political structure and with such a highly receptive electorate, it has been able to experience success.

Another factor that can help or hurt a party in its attempts to find electoral success is the media. In Britain, the media is very critical of the UKIP and the BNP. In her study on populist parties and their relation to the popular media, Tjitske Akkerman notes:

One of the reasons that the BNP is less successful is that it faces a less favorable discursive opportunity structure. In contrast to the PVV, a party that is treated by Dutch political parties and the media as a normal party, the BNP has been generally stigmatized by leading politicians and the media as a racist or fascist party.<sup>27</sup>

The BNP’s platform is controversial, and its attempts to legitimize itself are stunted by the media. While less radical than the BNP, the UKIP also faces trouble in establishing legitimacy. It directs its efforts in distancing itself from the BNP, but is still viewed by the media and by many voters as radical.

As Akkerman points out, the PVV is considered normal and established in the Netherlands, even though it employs much of the same rhetoric as the BNP and the UKIP. The party is highly institutionalized and has enough support to be considered a normal part of the political system, which is why the media is less critical. After pillarization, parties were no longer supported by mass media, and for the most part the media has attempted to remain neutral. Therefore, the party’s “core consists of a leader and a parliamentary group that is very effectively fenced off for outsiders in general and journalists in particular.”<sup>28</sup> Geert Wilders is the only formal member of the PVV, so it is not a very open organization. Without the media working against it, the PVV has an easier time developing a positive reputation.

---

<sup>25</sup> Van Kessel 2011, 77

<sup>26</sup> Lucardie 2008, 155

<sup>27</sup> Akkerman 2009, 935

<sup>28</sup> Akkerman 2009, 935



*Supply (Internal)*

Although many factors work outside of party control, there are supply-side factors that allow parties to direct their own success. Further criticizing the one-sided model that only focuses on demand, Norris explains, “demand-side analysis is too simple and instead we need to give far greater emphasis to what parties can do through their own actions as strategic agents.”<sup>29</sup> Here she is referring to the internal supply-side factors, which include leadership and party organization. Parties have control over these factors, so it is their responsibility to craft favorable conditions and create their own political success.

Populist parties regard the public as a homogenous body, so a charismatic leader who embodies the people plays a central role in a party’s development and success. In Britain, the BNP has struggled with leadership and building party reputation. John Tyndall, the original leader of the BNP, embraced the fascist label and took extreme stances on many issues, believing that “all that was required [in the quest for political power] was undiluted racism combined with strong and disciplined central leadership.”<sup>30</sup> Not only did Tyndall fail to deliver electoral success, he tainted the image of the BNP, which made restoring political respectability a central concern for Griffin when he took over. Griffin directed his energy into modernizing the party and continually rejecting the extreme label the BNP gained under Tyndall. However, the public remains skeptical because of the image Tyndall promoted in the past. His leadership harmed the BNP, which is so “delegitimized by association with fascism and violence” that it “has no hope of becoming a serious national force.”<sup>31</sup>

In contrast, strong leadership has been consistent among radical right populist parties in the Netherlands. Before Geert Wilders, the current leader of the PVV, Pim Fortuyn was the country’s central populist leader. He was charismatic and took a less extreme stance on many issues, causing “the stigma of ‘extreme right’... [to be] broken for good.”<sup>32</sup> When Wilders took center stage, the public was responsive because Fortuyn previously established a respectable image. However, in comparison to Fortuyn, Wilders is “more radical in regards to immigration and integration” and “he criticizes the establishment more harshly.”<sup>33</sup> Because Fortuyn did not taint the party’s image like Tyndall did with the BNP, Wilders does not meet resistance for his more extreme positions. Success is, in part, dependent upon the leader and past leaders who worked to shape the party. The PVV has this advantage, which contributes to its electoral success.

Party organization also impacts electoral success, and is critical for a party that wishes to institutionalize and compete with mainstream parties. In the United Kingdom, “[b]oth the BNP and

---

<sup>29</sup> Norris 2005, 14

<sup>30</sup> Copsey 2007, 66

<sup>31</sup> Eatwell 1998, 153

<sup>32</sup> Mudde 2007, 211

<sup>33</sup> Van Kessel 2011, 75

UKIP have experienced infighting and continual organizational problems which jeopardize their electoral chances.”<sup>34</sup> Over time, they have made improvements in basic party operations, such as Internet development and recruitment efforts. However, the biggest challenge that remains is for the radical right to become a united force. After various leadership disputes, both the BNP and UKIP have become more stable and internally united, but they still compete against each other for votes, which takes away from the success the radical right can achieve as a whole.

The PVV, on the other hand, is united and well-organized, which has allowed it to more easily become an established party in the Dutch political system. Party operations are directed by Wilders, who “managed to build up a united party organization under his own firm leadership while sending out an appealing message to a large share of Dutch voters.”<sup>35</sup> The PVV may be running smoothly now, but since Wilders is its only formal member the party’s future may be at risk. The LPF completely fell apart after Fortuyn’s death because, like Wilders, he was the core of his party and made all the decisions. To maintain efficient party operations, Wilders may allocate some of his control or, in his absence, the PVV would likely face the same fate as the LPF.

### *Conclusion*

As Norris explains, “the key to radical right success depends upon the complex interaction of public demand and party supply under conditions of imperfect competition in a regulated electoral marketplace.”<sup>36</sup> Success cannot be explained by supply or demand alone, but in the cases of Britain and the Netherlands where demand is quite similar, differences in supply-side factors can be examined to determine why populist parties are more likely to succeed in the Netherlands. In terms of demand, the PVV, BNP, and UKIP all focus on the same ideals in an attempt to respond to public grievances stemming from immigration, the EU, globalization, and a perceived loss of democracy. These grievances drive the emergence of populist parties, and “will continue to cultivate opportunity for the extreme right.”<sup>37</sup> However, to explain the success of these parties, both internal and external supply side factors need to be examined.

In the Netherlands, supply factors created a favorable opportunity structure for Geert Wilders’ Dutch Party for Freedom to emerge and experience electoral success. With an open electoral system, consensus-oriented politics, and depillarization of Dutch society, the Netherlands was ready and available for a party like the PVV.<sup>38</sup> Internal factors also play a role: the PVV is a well-organized party with strong leadership. Supply-side factors in Britain are quite the opposite, and have greatly harmed populist parties’ chances at success. In Britain, the FPTP system is the root of many

<sup>34</sup> John and Margetts 2009, 501

<sup>35</sup> Van Kessel 2011, 85

<sup>36</sup> Norris 2005, 4

<sup>37</sup> Goodwin 2012, 28

<sup>38</sup> Lucardie 2008, 165

electoral struggles the BNP and the UKIP face. It not only makes winning seats difficult, but also leads to an extremely structured party system, in which outside parties cannot compete. These parties may have answers to electorate concerns, but that does not mean the electorate is available and willing to vote for them. Lack of organization and leadership also hindered the success of the BNP and UKIP. Parties have control over these internal supply-side factors, but even if they can work them in their favor, factors outside of party control will still be present, preventing populist parties in Britain from experiencing electoral success on par with their Dutch counterparts.

## REFERENCES

- Akkerman, Tjitske. 2011. "Friend Or Foe? Right-Wing Populism and the Popular Press in Britain and the Netherlands." *Journalism: Theory, Practice, and Criticism* 12 (8): 931-945.
- Copsey, Nigel. 2007. "Changing Course Or Changing Clothes? Reflections on the Ideological Evolution of the British National Party 1999–2006." *Patterns of Prejudice* 41 (1): 61-82.
- "Democracy, Freedom, Culture and Identity: British National Party General Elections Manifesto 2010." 2010. <http://communications.bnp.org.uk/ge2010manifesto.pdf> (April 20, 2013).
- Denver, David. 2010. "The Results: How Britain Voted." *Parliamentary Affairs* 63 (4): 588-606.
- Eatwell, Roger. 1998. "Britain: The BNP and the Problem of Legitimacy." In *The New Politics of the Right*, eds. Hans-George Betz and Stefan Immerfall. New York: St. Martin's Press, 143-154.
- Eurobarometer. 2004. [ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/eb/eb61/eb61\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb61/eb61_en.pdf) (April 4, 2013).
- Eurobarometer. 2012. [ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/eb/eb78/eb78\\_first\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb78/eb78_first_en.pdf) (April 4, 2013).
- Fella, Stefano. 2008. "Britain: Imperial Legacies, Institutional Constraints and New Political Opportunities." In *Twenty-First Century Populism* eds. Daniele Albertazzi and Duncan McDonnell. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 181-197.
- Goodwin, Matthew J. 2012. "Backlash in the 'Hood' Exploring Support for the British National Party (BNP) at the local level." In *Mapping the Extreme Right in Contemporary Europe* eds. Andrea Mammone, Emmanuel Godin, and Brian Jenkins. New York: Routledge, 17-32.
- John, Peter, and Helen Margetts. 2009. "The Latent Support for the Extreme Right in British Politics." *West European Politics* 32 (3): 496-513.
- Van Kessel, Stijn. 2011. "Explaining the Electoral Performance of Populist Parties: The Netherlands as a Case Study." *Perspectives on European Politics and Society* 12 (1): 68-88.
- Lucardie, Paul. 2008. "The Netherlands: Populism vs. Pillarization." In *Twenty-first Century Populism*, eds. Daniele Albertazzi and Duncan McDonnell. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 151-165.
- Mudde, Cas. 2007. "A Fortuynist Foreign Policy." In *Europe for the Europeans: The Foreign and Security Policy of the Populist Radical Right*, ed. Christina Schori Liang. England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 209-221.
- Norris, Pippa. 2005. *Radical Right: Voters and Parties in the Electoral Market*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- OECD. 2013. "Immigrant and foreign population" in *OECD Factbook 2013: Economic, Environmental and Social Statistics*. OECD Publishing.
- "The Only Party Standing Up for Britain and (All) the British People" <http://www.ukip.org/page/ukip-history> (April 4, 2013).

## VICIOUS CYCLE OR BUSINESS CYCLE?: EXPLAINING POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN NORTHERN IRELAND AFTER THE TROUBLES

Lauren Burke

**Abstract:** *There are currently two schools of thought that seek to explain the persistence of political violence in Northern Ireland, one with a sociopolitical focus and the other with an economic focus. Expanding on past economic theory, this paper utilizes several multiple regression models to test the applicability of the economic school's relative deprivation theory in the fifteen years since the Troubles were formally ended with the signing of the Good Friday Agreement. The basis of this theory is that as economic conditions worsen in a given area, the number of acts of political violence should also increase. This study specifically looked at the effects of a rising unemployment rate and its relationship to political violence. While no such relationship could be observed, there was a statistically significant relationship between Gross Domestic Household Income and the number of acts of political violence, which supports relative deprivation theory. These findings imply that policymakers in Northern Ireland should focus their efforts not on reducing the unemployment rate but rather on increasing the average level of income.*

### INTRODUCTION

From 1969 to 1998, the ethnonationalist conflict in Northern Ireland called the Troubles was “easily the most intense violent conflict in Europe.”<sup>39</sup> More than three thousand people lost their lives and approximately three percent of the population sustained some form of physical injury.<sup>40</sup> Although the level of politically motivated violence has subsided considerably since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, it continues on a smaller scale to this day.

Building on past research on the connection between economic conditions and political violence, the goal of this study was to determine whether or not the unemployment rate had an effect on political violence in Northern Ireland in the fifteen-year period following the Good Friday Agreement. Conventional wisdom seems to be that a reduction in the unemployment rate will lead to a decrease in the level of political violence, and several prominent scholars and policymakers hold this belief. In the wake of the Unionist protests that began last December in Belfast, determining whether or not this perceived connection is supported by statistical evidence would allow the government to pursue policies that hinder the growth of hostile movements.

This study utilized several multiple regression models controlling for various economic and political factors in order to isolate the effects of the unemployment rate on political violence and thereby test the hypothesis that as the unemployment rate increases, the number of politically motivated acts of violence will also increase. None of the various regression models found a significant correlation between the unemployment rate and the number of politically motivated acts of violence in Northern Ireland. However, political violence did show a significant correlation with one control variable: annual Gross Disposable Household Income (GDHI). This finding suggests that although unemployment is not a significant predictor of political violence, other factors

---

<sup>39</sup> Hayes and McAllister 2005, 599

<sup>40</sup> Hayes and McAllister 2005

impacting the economic health of the country do make a difference. The correlation between GDHI and violence also lends support to the relative deprivation theory and suggests that further study of the impact of other economic variables on political violence would be a worthwhile investment, both for policymakers in the U.K. and for economic and political theorists in other post-industrialized conflict areas.

#### ROOTS OF VIOLENCE: LANDLORDS, FENIANISM, AND THE BORDER QUESTION

Today, Northern Ireland is fairly evenly divided between the primarily Catholic Nationalists and the primarily Protestant Loyalists. The term Nationalist has been used interchangeably with the term Republican due to this group's desire to incorporate the six Northern Irish counties into the current Republic of Ireland, thereby uniting the entire island of Ireland to form a thirty-two-county Republic. On the other side of the conflict are the Loyalists, often called Unionists because they wish to remain a part of the United Kingdom and are vehemently against the proposed change. These mutually exclusive goals are deeply rooted in the groups' cultural, religious, and political histories.

The Catholic minority in Northern Ireland, typically of native Irish descent, was for centuries at a relative disadvantage compared to the Protestant majority, who often trace their ancestry back to the British settlers who colonized the island. As the Tudors, and subsequently Oliver Cromwell, attempted to impose the new Anglican Church upon their unwilling Irish subjects, they confiscated land from Irish Catholics and reallocated it to loyal British Protestants.<sup>41</sup> These new landlords established large plantations and enforced discriminatory policies that barred Catholics from participating in Parliament.<sup>42</sup> The Great Potato Famine from 1845 to 1849 exacerbated tensions between Catholic peasants and the mostly Protestant landlords,<sup>43</sup> who developed a reputation for evicting or otherwise mistreating their starving tenants.<sup>44</sup> The famine's legacy along with continued denial of political power to Catholics made many view Great Britain as an unwelcome, imperialist power. It was this perception that gave rise to Fenianism: the revolutionary, nationalist movement aimed at achieving Irish independence.

More moderate, nonviolent political actors attempted to achieve autonomy by pushing for Home Rule, a policy that would have allowed Ireland to have its own Parliament separate from Westminster.<sup>45</sup> The movement met its fiercest opposition in the heavily Protestant Ulster province, which includes the six counties that today constitute Northern Ireland. It was out of this opposition

---

<sup>41</sup> Toomey 2013

<sup>42</sup> Holwell 1997

<sup>43</sup> Feeney, "Parnellism and Home Rule"

<sup>44</sup> Donnelly 2011

<sup>45</sup> Feeney, "Parnellism and Home Rule"

that the Unionist movement was born.<sup>46</sup> At the conclusion of the Anglo-Irish War, the six counties of Northern Ireland were the only ones that established a Home Rule government; the rest of the island was granted Free State status and, ultimately, independence.<sup>47</sup>

By intentionally partitioning Ireland in a manner that guaranteed a Protestant majority, the British created conditions that generated conflict. While the new Irish Free State was overwhelmingly Catholic and therefore protected the Catholics' rights, the Protestant majority in the North ensured that the interests of the Catholic population were never sufficiently addressed and that systematic discrimination against them continued.<sup>48</sup> Unionists not only dominated the police force, the civil service, and local government, but they also enjoyed job and housing options that were denied to Catholics. This imbalance persisted until the 1960s, when Catholics inspired by the American Civil Rights Movement attempted to draw attention to their struggles through participation in peaceful protests. These protests evoked strong Unionist backlash and, to prevent violence, the government banned all political demonstrations in an effort to prevent rioting. On October 5, 1968, Irish Catholics defied one such ban in the city of Derry and were met with a violent response from the Unionist-dominated Royal Ulster Constabulary.<sup>49</sup> This highly publicized incident is considered by many to be the starting date of what have been euphemistically termed the Troubles. For the next thirty years, Loyalist and Republican paramilitaries engaged in a "Dirty War" that claimed the lives of more than three thousand people, most of them civilians.<sup>50</sup> Fighting between the major paramilitary organizations was officially ended by the Good Friday Agreement of 1998, although radical splinter groups continue to commit acts of political violence to this day. The focus of this study will be determining which factors are driving the violent actions of these new organizations.

## EXPLANATIONS FOR THE USE OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE

### *The Sociopolitical Explanation*

Social science explanations for political violence in Northern Ireland fall into two main schools of thought: the sociopolitical explanation and the economic explanation. The sociopolitical explanation contends that political violence in Northern Ireland occurs because the two major ethnonationalist groups in the region continue to view their interests as mutually exclusive. Although they constitute a majority in Northern Ireland, the Unionists are in fact a minority on the island of Ireland as a whole. According to incorporation theory,<sup>51</sup> also known as the "see-saw" theory,<sup>52</sup> each group's minority status makes it feel insecure. As a result, each group tends to view the political

<sup>46</sup> Feeney, "A Deepening Crisis"

<sup>47</sup> Feeney, "Achieving Freedom: Ireland 1921-39"

<sup>48</sup> Feeney, "Northern Ireland, 1920-98"

<sup>49</sup> Melaugh 2013

<sup>50</sup> Melaugh 2013

<sup>51</sup> Thompson 1989

<sup>52</sup> Maney 2005

advancement of the other as a threat to its own security and tries to assert its own power by responding violently to the enemy's political victories. Exposure to political violence leads to an acceptance of violence within these communities, perpetuating a cycle of attacks and retributive action that some expect to continue indefinitely.<sup>53</sup> In essence, proponents of this view believe that the only way to forge a lasting peace is by maintaining that peace for long enough that it becomes the new norm.

### *The Economic Explanation*

The economic explanation seeks to refine this belief in a never-ending cycle of violence and argues that spikes in the level of paramilitary activity are correlated with economic conditions. One of the most studied factors by proponents of this theory has been the unemployment rate. Northern Ireland has suffered from relatively high unemployment compared to the rest of the United Kingdom,<sup>54</sup> and it is widely believed by both scholars and policymakers that unemployment is an underlying cause of political violence.<sup>55</sup> Proponents of this theory argue that the unemployed have a tendency to blame society for their hardships and—more disturbingly—to express greater support for “violent change” to the political system.<sup>56</sup> However, others have found negative correlations between unemployment rate and violence,<sup>57</sup> attributed to the increased political apathy of the unemployed<sup>58</sup> or the increasing scarcity of resources available to terrorist organizations.<sup>59</sup>

The most relevant economic theories to the Northern Irish case are the relative deprivation theory and the power-conflict variant of deprivation theory. Relative deprivation theory states that if there is a “gap between expected and achieved welfare” for a population, they are likely to express their frustration violently.<sup>60</sup> In the context of the Troubles, this theory would imply that the high unemployment rate for all citizens led to an “equality of misery”<sup>61</sup> that exacerbated the underlying sociopolitical conflict and led to the Troubles.

Although results of studies working under this assumption failed to find any positive correlation between the unemployment rate and violence,<sup>62</sup> some scholars have argued that this occurred because economic hardships were not equally distributed.<sup>63</sup> In the 1970s, census data

---

<sup>53</sup> McAloney et al. 2009; Hayes and McAllister 2001

<sup>54</sup> Thompson 1989

<sup>55</sup> Hewitt 1984; Thompson 1989

<sup>56</sup> Breakwell 1986

<sup>57</sup> Berman et al. 2011

<sup>58</sup> Breakwell 1986

<sup>59</sup> Berman et al. 2011

<sup>60</sup> Thompson 1989, 677

<sup>61</sup> Thompson 1989, 681

<sup>62</sup> Thompson 1989; White 1993

<sup>63</sup> Honaker 2004; Maney 2005



showed that the unemployment rate for Catholics was more than twice the rate for Protestants.<sup>64</sup> Because the Catholics were economically worse off than the Protestant majority during the Troubles, their comparative disadvantage may have driven them to participate in violent Republican movements. This hypothesis reflects the “power-conflict” variant of deprivation theory,<sup>65</sup> which states that a group’s absolute economic status is a less significant predictor of its likelihood to respond violently than its economic status relative to other segments of the population. Empirical studies of fluctuations in the unemployment rate during the Troubles found that higher unemployment was positively correlated with acts of Republican paramilitary violence but not with Loyalist violence,<sup>66</sup> and although separate unemployment data for Catholics and Protestants is unavailable, when these values are estimated, high Catholic unemployment was correlated with increased Republican violence.<sup>67</sup>

Since the 1998 Good Friday Agreement, the socioeconomic gap between Catholics and Protestants has narrowed considerably.<sup>68</sup> Data from the 2011 Census show a 3 percent gap in the unemployment rate of Protestants and Catholics,<sup>69</sup> suggesting that the anti-discrimination measures of the Good Friday Agreement have in fact improved the employment prospects of members of the Catholic community. The fact that political violence persists in Northern Ireland despite the decreasing gap in the unemployment rates of these groups suggests that while the power-conflict variant of deprivation theory might have explained political violence during the Troubles, it does not explain the persistence of violence in the post-Good Friday Agreement period. If a correlation between unemployment and violence persists as expected, this would suggest that the relative deprivation theory, with its focus on the overall unemployment rate rather than on the unequal treatment of Catholics and Protestants, would be applicable to this case. More broadly, this would suggest that cohorts with an “equality of misery” are likely to engage in political violence.

#### EXPLAINING VIOLENCE AFTER THE GOOD FRIDAY AGREEMENT

While there is undoubtedly merit to the claim that acts of sectarian violence generate more violence in response, the sociopolitical theory fails to address the immediate conditions that will be most likely to ignite violent action and, consequently, leaves policymakers with few opportunities to respond to the problem. In contrast, relative deprivation theory suggests that sectarian violence occurs not because the groups are too different to peacefully coexist but rather because they are experiencing a common problem. If high unemployment is truly the underlying cause of civil unrest,

---

<sup>64</sup> Blackaby et al. 2007

<sup>65</sup> Maney 2005

<sup>66</sup> Maney 2005; White 1993

<sup>67</sup> Honaker 2004

<sup>68</sup> Blackaby et al. 2007

<sup>69</sup> Beatty 2013

then policymakers have a greater capacity to handle the problem or at the very least to pursue policies that may help them do so.

The United Kingdom has been investing in projects to improve the economy of Northern Ireland for years, believing that a reduction in unemployment would lead to a reduction in political violence throughout the country.<sup>70</sup> The focus of this research will be determining the extent to which the unemployment rate has affected political violence in the fifteen years following the Troubles. If a strong relationship between the variables can be determined, then the continuing support for economic initiatives as political violence deterrents can be more readily justified. Based on the narrowing unemployment gap between the ethnonationalist groups and the assumptions of the relative deprivation theory, the following hypothesis was proposed: As the unemployment rate increases, the number of politically motivated acts of violence will also increase.

### RESEARCH DESIGN

In order to test this hypothesis, the present study utilized multiple regression models to analyze statistics collected by the Northern Irish government. Quarterly unemployment data from the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment of Northern Ireland was used to measure the main independent variable, the unemployment rate. Because it is widely acknowledged that participants in political violence tend to be young and male,<sup>71</sup> separate regression equations were run controlling for age and gender in order to determine whether or not unemployment for those particular groups had an effect on the level of political violence. In order to rule out potential intervening variables, the model also controlled for both Regional GDHI and political attitudes over time. The measurement of political attitudes utilized three categories: Unionist, Nationalist, and Other, Neither, or Don't Know.<sup>72</sup>

The dependent variable, political violence, was measured using data collected by the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI). Specifically, this study utilized statistics taken from the PSNI Security Situation report. I combined the total number of violent incidents per quarter in four different categories of violent action into an aggregate total to get a clearer picture of how the level of political violence varied over the fifteen-year period covered by the study. The categories included in the aggregate measure are as follows: paramilitary style shootings, paramilitary style assaults, bombing incidents related to the Security Situation, and shooting incidents related to the Security Situation. In the time period included in this study, there were a total of 6,328 incidents. The use of this relatively narrow definition of Security Situation-related violence rather than a broader study of sectarian crime

---

<sup>70</sup> Hewitt 1984

<sup>71</sup> Hayes and McAllister 2005

<sup>72</sup> After initially controlling for religious affiliation, I ultimately decided to omit that variable from my model due to a lack of variation over time.

allowed me to ensure that the incidents studied had an underlying political motivation and were not purely acts of ethnic hatred.

### DATA AND ANALYSIS

My results have led me to reject my hypothesis that the unemployment rate has an effect on political violence in Northern Ireland. For every category that I analyzed—regardless of time lag, age group, or gender controls—the unemployment rate did not have a significant relationship with the level of political violence in Northern Ireland in the post-Good Friday Agreement period. The consistency of these findings strongly refutes the possibility of a causal relationship between my independent and dependent variables.

It is worth noting that the unemployment rate might not completely capture the employment situation in Northern Ireland. The unemployment rate is a percentage equal to the number of unemployed individuals divided by the number of workers participating in the labor force. The labor force is the sum of employed and unemployed workers, not the total working-age population. Therefore, the unemployment rate excludes so-called “discouraged workers”—individuals who have been unemployed for so long that they are no longer searching for work and have dropped out of the labor force. It may well be that the long-term unemployed and discouraged workers are more likely to have politically-motivated grievances and to act more violently than those individuals who are included in the total unemployment rate. This is a possibility that should be taken into account in future research on this matter.

Despite the absence of a relationship between political violence and the unemployment rate, the relative deprivation theory still appears to hold true for the period under study. Another economic indicator—Gross Domestic Household Income—showed a significant negative correlation with political violence in each of the six models considered.<sup>73</sup> The U.K. Office for National Statistics defined the GDHI as “the amount of money left available within the household sector for spending or saving, after expenditure associated with income, for example, taxes and social contributions, property ownership and provision for future pension income. It is calculated gross of any deductions for capital consumption.” The regression models used in this study showed that as the total GDHI increases by £1 billion, the total number of Security Situation-related incidents decreased by between twenty-four and twenty-nine incidents, depending on the other variables used in the model. Each of these correlations was statistically significant at the 0.001 level, indicating that there is an extremely small likelihood that the relationship occurred by

---

<sup>73</sup> Significant results are indicated on the tables by underlining. For all results, \* indicates that the result is significant at the 0.10 level, \*\* indicates that the result is significant at the 0.05 level, and \*\*\* indicates that the result is significant at the 0.001 level.

chance. While unemployment itself does not appear to influence the level of violence, income and other economic factors almost certainly make a contribution.

Shifts in political beliefs also appear to be influencing the level of political violence in Northern Ireland. In Model 3, which utilized a one-quarter unemployment rate lag, the results indicated that a one percentage point increase in the number of people reporting a Unionist political affiliation led to roughly nine fewer Security Situation incidents. Model 4 indicates an eight incident increase for every one percentage point increase in the proportion of respondents identifying as Nationalists and a fourteen incident increase for every one percentage point increase in the proportion of those not affiliating with either party. The other models showed similar patterns. These results are inconsistent with the idea that the political divide between Unionists and Republicans is the cause of violence and the data show that an increase in nonaffiliated individuals is a contributing factor.

While the increase in violence corresponding with an increase in the percentage of respondents identifying as Republican—the group that has historically been involved in rebellious activities—seems to make logical sense, the fact that an increase in Unionist affiliation leads to a decrease in paramilitary violence is somewhat puzzling. It might be posited that Unionists are less likely in the post-Good Friday Agreement period to participate in paramilitary acts of violence than are Republicans, but the raw data refute this claim. Since 1998, Loyalists have been responsible for 685 of the 1,181 paramilitary style shootings reported in Northern Ireland through the final quarter of 2012, compared to the 496 such shootings carried out by Republicans. With respect to Paramilitary Style assaults, Loyalists were behind 948 of the 1,412 incidents, whereas Republicans were responsible for 464. The cause of these discrepancies is a subject that deserves further study in the future.

**Regression Model 1: Percent Unionist**

## Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.698	.487	.443	55.82

## Coefficients

	Unstandardized Coefficients		t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error		
(Constant)	808.57	250.04	3.23	.002
Unemployment Rate All Persons	-10.40	8.66	-1.20	.236
Total GDHI (£ Billions)	-25.75***	6.84	-3.76	.000
Political Beliefs Percent Other/ Neither/Don't Know	5.06	5.22	.97	.337
Political Beliefs: Percent Unionist	-8.79**	4.09	-2.15	.037

**Regression Model 2: Percent Nationalist**

## Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
2	.688	.473	.428	56.57

## Coefficients

	Unstandardized Coefficients		t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error		
(Constant)	-43.19	227.18	-.19	.850
Unemployment Rate All Persons	-9.53	8.81	-1.08	.285
Total GDHI (£ Billions)	-24.51***	6.85	-3.58	.001
Political Beliefs Percent Other/ Neither/Don't Know	12.84*	6.71	1.91	.062
Percent Nationalist	7.99*	4.42	1.81	.077

**Regression Model 3: Percent Unionist, Lagged One Quarter Unemployment Rate**

## Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
3	.710	.504	.461	55.45

## Coefficients

	Unstandardized Coefficients		t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error		
(Constant)	836.11	254.24	3.29	.002
Lagged 1Q Unemployment Rate All Persons	-12.27	9.47	-1.30	.202
Total GDHI (£ Billions)	-27.77***	7.13	-3.90	.000
Political Beliefs Percent Other/Neither/Don't Know	5.74	5.19	1.10	.275
Percent Unionist	-8.86**	4.05	-2.19	.034

**Regression Model 4: Percent Nationalist, Lagged One Quarter Unemployment Rate**

## Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
4	.699	.489	.445	56.29

## Coefficients

	Unstandardized Coefficients		t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error		
(Constant)	-21.38	223.83	-.10	.924
Lagged 1Q Unemployment Rate All Persons	-11.56	9.71	-1.19	.240
Total GDHI (£ Billions)	-26.50***	7.17	-3.70	.001
Political Beliefs Percent Other/Neither/Don't Know	13.59**	6.69	2.03	.048
Percent Nationalist	8.02*	4.42	1.81	.076

**Regression Model 5: Percent Unionist, Lagged One Year Unemployment Rate**  
Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
5	.737	.543	.501	54.48

Coefficients

	Unstandardized Coefficients		t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error		
(Constant)	739.58	236.12	3.13	.003
Lagged 1Year Unemployment Rate All Persons	-6.34	10.19	-.62	.536
Total GDHI (£ Billions)	-28.50***	7.09	-4.02	.000
Political Beliefs Percent Other/ Neither/Don't Know	6.04	5.03	1.20	.236
Percent Unionist	-6.98*	3.72	-1.88	.067

**Regression Model 6: Percent Nationalist, Lagged One Year Unemployment Rate**  
Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
6	.725	.526	.481	55.53

Coefficients

	Unstandardized Coefficients		T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error		
(Constant)	111.40	229.98	.48	.631
Lagged 1Year Unemployment Rate All Persons	-6.77	10.40	-.65	.519
Total GDHI (£ Billions)	-27.53***	7.19	-3.83	.000
Political Beliefs Percent Other/ Neither/Don't Know	11.69*	5.82	2.01	.051
Percent Nationalist	5.43	4.06	1.34	.187

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study have important implications for policymakers not only on the island of Ireland but also in other areas of intense ethnic conflict. The statistical insignificance of the unemployment rate on political violence may suggest that if the U.K. and Irish governments' priority is the reduction of violent activity, policies aimed at increasing household income would be more effective than efforts that specifically target lowering the unemployment rate. However, if further research indicates that persistent structural unemployment is related to political violence, this finding would strengthen the argument for government initiatives aimed at educating and training prospective workers. According to T.D. Joe McHugh, Chairman of the Joint Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement, current economic approaches to decreasing violence focus on funding grassroots programs combating youth unemployment. He stated in a press release this past September, "We are acutely aware that education and employment opportunities often elude many young people in Northern Ireland and the border region. As such, a focus on funding to assist in informal and formal education is to be welcomed."<sup>74</sup> While the data fail to show any causal relationship between the unemployment rate and political violence, policymakers continue to act under the assumption that the two are related. Although a reduction in unemployment benefits society as a whole and is a worthwhile policy initiative, if both governments intend to reduce political violence, it would appear that an alternative approach would be more effective.

One alternative would be shifting the focus to policies promoting the growth of individuals' household incomes. The strong negative correlation between GDHI and political violence provides empirical evidence for the link between economic wellbeing and the level of political violence. This in turn suggests that policies stressing economic development, particularly for communities, have the potential to lower the rates of violence. Policymakers could use this evidence as justification for their economic growth initiatives, which currently receive immense amounts of funding both from the U.K. and the EU.

Notable among these initiatives is the EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland (the PEACE Programme). In the proposed 2020 EU budget, €150 million was set aside to continue the PEACE Programme in addition to the €50 million already earmarked by the U.K.<sup>75</sup> According to EU Commissioner for Regional Policy Johannes Hahn, the success of the PEACE Programme has already drawn the attention of Russia, Palestine, the Balkans, Colombia, and South Korea, countries that are seeking effective

<sup>74</sup> Oireachtas 2013

<sup>75</sup> Oireachtas 2013



reconciliation models.<sup>76</sup> The evidence presented in this study suggests that such emulation has the potential to be highly effective in reducing politically motivated violence. This is a possibility that international economic organizations should consider when determining how to allocate development funds.

As Northern Ireland continues to come to terms with its troubled past, preventing the resurgence of ethnic violence will continue to be of the utmost importance. In light of the empirical evidence of this study, there can be little doubt that the establishment of a solid economic foundation is critical to the maintenance of peace not only in this region but in other conflict areas as well. The need for the government to continue monitoring and promoting this stability should not be underestimated. Though Northern Ireland has undoubtedly made incredible progress in the past fifteen years, the continued presence of paramilitary actors cautions against the possibility of complacency on this matter.

---

<sup>76</sup> “Northern Ireland: The Peace Programme” 2013

## REFERENCES

- Beatty, Robert. 2013. *Statistics Press Notice: Census 2011: Detailed Characteristics for Northern Ireland on Health, Religion and National Identity*. Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency.
- Berman, Eli, Michael Callen, Joseph H. Felter, and Jacob N. Shapiro. 2011. "Do Working Men Rebel? Insurgency and Unemployment in Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Philippines." *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 55 (4): 496-528.
- Blackaby, D. H., P. D. Murphy, and N. C. O'Leary. 2008. "Employment discrimination in Northern Ireland and the Good Friday Agreement." *Economics Letters* 99 (2): 282-285.
- Breakwell, Glynis M. 1986. "Political and Attributional Responses of the Young Short-Term Unemployed." *Political Psychology* 7 (3): 575-586.
- Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment. 2013. *Unemployment Statistics*. [www.detini.gov.uk/deti-stats-index/stats-labour-market/stats-labour-market-unemployment.htm](http://www.detini.gov.uk/deti-stats-index/stats-labour-market/stats-labour-market-unemployment.htm). (November 5, 2013).
- Donnelly, Jim. 2011. "The Irish Famine." [www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/victorians/famine\\_01.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/victorians/famine_01.shtml). (November 5, 2013).
- Feeney, Tom. 2013. "Parnellism and Home Rule." Lecture, Institute of Public Administration. Dublin.
- Feeney, Tom. 2013. "A Deepening Crisis." Lecture, Institute of Public Administration. Dublin.
- Feeney, Tom. 2013. "Achieving Freedom: Ireland 1921-39." Lecture, Institute of Public Administration. Dublin.
- Feeney, Tom. 2013. "Northern Ireland, 1920-98." Lecture, Institute of Public Administration. Dublin.
- Hayes, B. C., and McAllister, I. 2005. "Public Support for Political Violence and Paramilitarism in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland." *Terrorism and Political Violence* 17: 599-617.
- Hayes, B. C., and McAllister, I. 2001. "Sowing Dragon's Teeth: Public Support for Political Violence and Paramilitarism in Northern Ireland." *Political Studies* 49 (5): 901-922.
- Hewitt, Christopher. 1984. *The Effectiveness of Anti-Terrorist Policies*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.
- Holwell, John. 1997. "A Brief History of Ireland." [genealogypro.com/articles/Irish-history.html](http://genealogypro.com/articles/Irish-history.html). (November 5, 2013).
- Honaker, James. 2004. "Unemployment and Violence in Northern Ireland: A Missing Data Model for Ecological Inference." Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago.
- Maney, Gregory M. 2005. "Variations in the Causes of Ethnonationalist Violence: Northern Ireland, 1969-72." *International Journal of Conflict Management* 16 (1): 70-96.

- McAloney, Kareena, Patrick McCrystal, Andrew Percy, and Claire McCartan. 2009. "Damaged Youth: Prevalence of Community Violence Exposure and Implications for Adolescent Well-Being in Post-Conflict Northern Ireland." *Journal of Community Psychology* 37, (5): 635-648.
- Melaugh, Martin. 1968. "Key Events: The Derry March."  
[www.cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/derry/derry.htm](http://www.cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/derry/derry.htm). (November 5, 2013).
- "'New era' as NI police change name." 2001. *BBC News*.  
[news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/northern\\_ireland/1636780.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/northern_ireland/1636780.stm). (November 5, 2013).
- "Northern Ireland: The Peace Programme." 2013. In European Commission Online Database.  
[ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/activity/ireland/index\\_en.cfm](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/activity/ireland/index_en.cfm). (November 5, 2013).
- "Oireachtas Committee Hears Plans for Next Round of EU Funding for Northern Ireland and the Border Region." 2013. Houses of the Oireachtas.  
[www.oireachtas.ie/parliament/mediazone/pressreleases/name-18181-en.html](http://www.oireachtas.ie/parliament/mediazone/pressreleases/name-18181-en.html). (November 5, 2013).
- Security Situation Statistics*. 2013. Police Service of Northern Ireland.  
[www.psnl.police.uk/directory/updates/updates\\_statistics/updates\\_security\\_situation\\_statistics.htm](http://www.psnl.police.uk/directory/updates/updates_statistics/updates_security_situation_statistics.htm). (November 5, 2013).
- "Statistical Bulletin: Regional Gross Disposable Household Income." 2011. United Kingdom Office for National Statistics. [www.ons.gov.uk/ons/index.html](http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/index.html). (November 5, 2013).
- Thompson, J. L. P. 1989. "Deprivation and Political Violence in Northern Ireland, 1922-1985: A Time-Series Analysis." *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 33 (4): 676-699.
- Toomey, Michael. 2013. "The 16th-17th Century Plantation of Ireland."  
[www.ncas.rutgers.edu/center-study-genocide-conflict-resolution-and-human-rights/16th-17th-century-plantation-ireland](http://www.ncas.rutgers.edu/center-study-genocide-conflict-resolution-and-human-rights/16th-17th-century-plantation-ireland). (November 5, 2013).
- White, Robert W. 1993. "On Measuring Political Violence: Northern Ireland, 1969 to 1980." *American Sociological Review* 58 (4): 575-585.

## MASS SHOOTINGS, MASS MEDIA, AND MASS OPINION: AN EXAMINATION OF HOW THE NEWS MEDIA AFFECTS PUBLIC OPINION IN THE AFTERMATH OF MASS SHOOTINGS

Patrick Cavanaugh

**Abstract:** *This research looks at how newspaper mentions of mass shootings correlate with the percentage of people in the U.S. who view gun control as the most important issue facing the country. While the agenda-setting effect of the news media has been theorized and demonstrated for a number of different issues, scholars have yet to consider how the news media may set the agenda for the public's view on the importance of gun control through its coverage of mass shootings. Utilizing designs put forth by Smidt (2011), Tan and Weaver (2007), and Winter and Eyal (1984), this paper seeks to fill that gap by showing the importance of news media discourse surrounding mass shootings on public opinion formation. While the results do not show a definite causal pattern between higher news media mentions of a mass shooting and a higher percentage of people who think gun control is important, this study does demonstrate that there is an important relationship between news media discourse and public opinion.*

### INTRODUCTION

A poll conducted by the Pew Research Center following the Newtown Shootings in December 2012 found that public support for gun control increased in reaction to the tragedy. In the poll, 65 percent of respondents said that allowing citizens to own assault weapons makes the country more dangerous, 56 percent approved of legislation to ban bullets that could explode through bulletproof vests, and 53 percent supported measures to limit high-capacity ammunition clips.<sup>77</sup> However, another article published by Pew Research Center in July of 2013 found that by May 2013 the spike in public support for gun control had receded to pre-Newton levels.<sup>78</sup> This shift raises questions as to how much the mass shooting actually impacted public opinion, and how much outside sources influence that opinion. A possible source of influence is the news media, which has been theorized to have an agenda-setting effect on public opinion ever since Walter Lipmann's influential *Public Opinion* was published in 1922.

In recent years, the gun control debate has often been framed by mass shootings. When a mass shooting gains traction in the media, the gun control debate is reignited, and politicians and special interest groups on both sides voice opinions on the appropriate course of action. Mass shootings appear to be followed by heated discourse on the extent to which gun control laws should be changed in response to the shooting. It would seem that mass shootings, defined by the FBI as public active shooter incidents wherein four or more people are killed within a short time span,<sup>79</sup> could bring gun control to the forefront of the public consciousness.

However, an empirical study on whether coverage of mass shootings has any effect on the public's perception of the issue of gun control has yet to be done. Coverage of mass shootings has

<sup>77</sup> Pew Research Center 2012

<sup>78</sup> Pew Research Center 2013

<sup>79</sup> FBI.gov 2005

been shown to impact perceptions on those with mental illness,<sup>80</sup> and others have found that coverage of the 1999 Columbine shooting led to existing policies being more strictly followed and enforced,<sup>81</sup> but none have performed a newspaper content analysis to determine the impact on public opinion. With easy access to news media outlets and public opinion polls on gun control, an opportunity exists to look at how mass shooting saliency impacts public perceptions. This study seeks to fill the research gap by asking the following: when mass shootings become salient in the news media, does the saliency of the story impact public opinion on the importance of gun control? And if it does, what types of coverage have greater impact?

## ORGANIZING THE PUBLIC CONCIIOUSNESS: THE NEWS MEDIA AS AGENDA SETTER

### *Theorizing the News Media as Public Opinion Director*

Much has been written about the effect of the news media on public perceptions. Scholars have said that discourse in general, of which the news media plays a major part, influences the formation of public opinion.<sup>82</sup> Discourse has long been thought to play an important role in informing the public's view on issues. It binds the social fabric of public opinion<sup>83</sup> and is "indispensable to the organization of the public mind."<sup>84</sup> Public opinion becomes coherent through the give and take of public discourse, in which ideas are debated, lines are drawn, and groups form together around issues that they deem important. Theoretical writings have posited that the news media's function in this discourse could be to influence public opinion by pointing readers' attention to certain stories. This is accomplished by giving more time to certain stories over others, or even, as Lippmann would say, through censorship.<sup>85</sup> Put another way, news media outlets have the power to decide which information on a story is given and which information is withheld.<sup>86</sup> Leading the public's attention to certain stories, according to Lippmann, organizes public opinion along the lines of what the news media views as important: "...the newspapers necessarily and inevitably reflect...organization of public opinion."<sup>87</sup> Though Lippmann failed to reinforce this assertion with empirical data, he provided detailed theoretical and analytical insights into the power of the news media to impact public opinion.

Later theoretical writings on the news media's influence on public opinion focused Lippmann's broad claims in more nuanced ways. Scholars made an important distinction in how exactly the news media's influence functions, characterizing it less as a factor that changes public

---

<sup>80</sup> McGinty, Webster, and Berry 2013

<sup>81</sup> Birkland and Lawrence 2009

<sup>82</sup> Blumer 1946, 48

<sup>83</sup> Park 1939

<sup>84</sup> Cooley 1909, 149

<sup>85</sup> Lippmann 1922, 76

<sup>86</sup> Berelson 1948

<sup>87</sup> Lippmann 1922, 32

opinion and more as an “agenda-setter” for what issues that public should be thinking of and having opinions about. Cohen (1963) said it best: “[The press] may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about.”<sup>88</sup> Kurt and Gladys Engel Lang (1966) echoed Cohen’s assertion, offering that the mass media directs public attention by “suggesting what individuals in the mass should think about, know about, have feelings about.”<sup>89</sup> Though these claims are similar to Lippmann’s characterization of the news media as opinion organizer, Lippmann also asserted that the news media “intensified” public opinion, which these scholars argue against.<sup>90</sup> The news media acts less as an opinion changer and more as an opinion director, pointing its figurative finger toward the issues on which the public should be keeping its collective eye.

To some scholars, the news media’s attention-directing function in tandem with its constant movement between stories creates a perpetual cycle of rising and falling interest. As the news media’s attention to an issue decreases, a new issue takes its place. Anthony Downs has dubbed this phenomenon the “issue attention cycle.”<sup>91</sup> Scholars have shown that the news media not only directs the public’s attention to certain issues, but also contributes to the cycle of increasing and decreasing public valuing of issues.<sup>92</sup> Ultimately, the news media has been characterized not as an opinion changer, but as an agenda-setter, a factor in determining what issues the public thinks and cares about.

*Confirmation of the Agenda-Setting Process and Illumination of how it Functions*

Many scholars have run various types of studies to observe the different ways that news media sets the public opinion agenda, though few have focused specifically on the issue of gun control. McCombs and Shaw (1972), employing survey data, found that “voters tend to share the media’s composite definition of what is important,” which they thought “strongly suggest[ed] an agenda-setting function of the mass media.”<sup>93</sup> This study was subject to some limitations. For one, it focused more on voters and less on the public as a whole, and it may not be possible to generalize from voters, who are more likely to be informed, to the public as a whole. Additionally, McCombs and Shaw acknowledged that it did not necessarily prove the agenda-setting function, as the correlation between the news media’s mention of political players and the measure of voters’ political interest in them could be a result of the news media accurately predicting what the public might want

<sup>88</sup> Cohen 1963, 13

<sup>89</sup> Lang and Lang 1966, 468

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Downs 1972

<sup>92</sup> Protess et. al 1987; Cook and Skogan 1990

<sup>93</sup> McCombs and Shaw 1972, 184

to hear<sup>94</sup>. Despite these drawbacks, the study still provided an early look at how the agenda-setting function might be empirically tested.

Many other studies have since been completed on the agenda-setting function of the news media. Scholars have found that news media agenda-setting can influence the speed at which policymaking takes place, while others have discovered that it can reinforce political interest in the public.<sup>95</sup> Tan and Weaver (2007) used *New York Times* coverage of events from 1946 to 2004 correlated with Gallup's Most Important Problem question to take a long-form perspective on the agenda-setting function of the media. In general, they found a positive correlation between media coverage and public opinion, suggesting that the public viewed salient issues as the more important ones.<sup>96</sup> However, this year-by-year approach takes a broad look at broad issues, whereas a monthly look at the media mentions and the Most Important Problem question applied to a specific issue may be more useful to demonstrating the particulars of agenda-setting.

To engage in this month-by-month analysis of agenda-setting, Winter and Eyal's (1981) findings in their study on agenda-setting in the Civil Rights Issue will be helpful. In that study, mentions from the *New York Times* were correlated with Gallup polls on a monthly basis. In addition to finding a strong correlation between the two, the scholars discovered that a time-lag is necessary when testing for agenda-setting. Analyzing content from one month prior to a poll, they discovered, leads to stronger correlations, suggesting that it takes about four to six weeks for the public to adopt the agenda set by the news media.<sup>97</sup> Consequently, when determining how mass shooting coverage may impact the public's perception of gun control, it would be useful to employ a similar time-lag. Though the agenda-setting effect has been confirmed in many instances, some studies have shown that it is not enough for the news media to mention an issue – how the news media covers the issue can influence agenda-setting. One study found that gun control coverage focusing on citizen activists groups may have greater influence on public opinion than coverage of the efforts of politicians, meaning the angle of coverage can influence agenda-setting effects.<sup>98</sup> Medium matters as well, with internet stories shown as more likely to spur political interest than other forms of news media.<sup>99</sup> The takeaway from these studies is that counting mentions is not enough when analyzing the agenda-setting effect; studies must acknowledge that differing angles can influence how important the public views an issue to be.

---

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Wolfe 2012; Boulianne 2011

<sup>96</sup> Tan and Weaver 2007, 735

<sup>97</sup> Winter and Eyal 1981, 381

<sup>98</sup> Smidt 2011

<sup>99</sup> Boulianne 2011

## HYPOTHESES

A number of testable hypotheses arise from the literature and the study at hand. The primary hypothesis states the following:

**H1:** The more mentions that appear of a mass shooting in the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *USA Today*, and the *Chicago Tribune*, the higher the percentage of people who think gun control is the most important problem facing the United States will be in the month following the coverage.

This hypothesis operates under the theory that news media organize, direct, and have a role in leading public opinion. According to this theory, as news media cover mass shootings, issues of gun control become more salient in the public consciousness. The increased awareness of mass shootings and gun control issues then leads the public to value gun control more, to see it as a more important issue. Though more on this will be covered in the “Design and Methodology” section, it is important to note that the hypothesis specifically mentions the public opinion in the month after the shooting as a result of taking Winter and Eyal’s time-lag into consideration.

In line with Smidt and others, a number of hypotheses about the differing angles of mass shooting coverage follow from the primary hypothesis. Not only will this study test the agenda-setting effect of total mentions in these newspapers, it will also test how differing frames influence agenda-setting. The hypotheses in the table below account for the possibility that different frames on mass shootings will influence how the news media’s agenda-setting works (if it is there to begin with). Each frame is predicted to have a positive correlation with public opinion on the importance of gun control because if it is true that total mentions correlate positively with public opinion (H1), then it would follow that each frame would also correlate positively (H2-H7). It would not make sense if one of the frames had a negative correlation when the frames in total correlate. It would not make sense if one of the frames had a negative correlation when the frames in total correlate positively since the frames are just subsets of total mentions.



Table 1: Hypotheses

**H2:** The more articles that appear in the aforementioned newspapers that take a “gun legislation” frame to mass shootings, the higher the percentage of people who think gun control is the most important problem facing the United States will be in the month following the shooting.

- **H2a:** This frame will show a stronger correlation with public opinion than all other tested frames.

**H3:** The more articles that appear in the aforementioned newspapers that take a “mental illness” frame to mass shootings, the higher the percentage of people who think gun control is the most important problem facing the United States will be in the month following the shooting.

- **H3a:** This frame will show a stronger correlation with public opinion than all other tested frames except for “gun legislation.”

**H4:** The more articles that appear in the aforementioned newspapers that take a “shooter profile” frame to mass shootings, the higher the percentage of people who think gun control is the most important problem facing the United States will be in the month following the shooting.

- **H4a:** This frame will show a stronger correlation with public opinion than all other tested frames except for “gun legislation” and “mental illness.”

**H5:** The more articles that appear in the aforementioned newspapers that take a “victim profile” frame to mass shootings, the higher the percentage of people who think gun control is the most important problem facing the United States will be in the month following the shooting.

- **H5a:** This frame will show a stronger correlation with public opinion than “changing security” and “general mentions,” but a weaker one than all other tested frames.

**H6:** The more articles that appear in the aforementioned newspapers that take a “changing security” frame to mass shootings, the higher the percentage of people who think gun control is the most important problem facing the United States will be in the month following the shooting.

- **H6a:** This frame will show a stronger correlation with public opinion than “general mentions,” but a weaker one than all other tested frames.

**H7:** The more articles with general mentions of mass shootings that appear in the aforementioned newspapers, the higher the percentage of people who think gun control is the most important problem facing the United States will be in the month following the shooting.

- **H7a:** This frame will show a weaker correlation with public opinion than all other frames

However, the frames are predicted to have varying levels of strength of correlation. News articles that frame mass shootings in reference to the issue of gun control, whether directly or indirectly, are predicted to have higher correlations. The “gun legislation” (GL) frame is predicted to

have the strongest correlation because it directly references the issue of gun control. Theoretically, a high volume of articles that frame a mass shooting in relation to gun control will more overtly direct reader attention to the issue of gun control than other frames, fostering public awareness of the problem and leading the public to view it as more important. The “mental illness” (MI) frame is predicted to have the second strongest correlation because it references an important sub-issue of gun control. While they do not reference the issue directly like the GL frame, articles that follow the MI frame will still lead the public to see the gun control issue as more important.

Those frames that look at the human aspect of the mass shootings are predicted to have weaker correlations than those that reference the issue, but stronger correlation than those that examine issues largely unrelated to gun control. The “shooter profile” (SH) frame is predicted to have the third strongest correlation among all of the frames. While it does not directly reference gun control in relation to a mass shooting, it does reference a reason some people may support gun control: limiting access to guns to certain citizens. Consequently, it may bring gun control to the fore of the public consciousness more than other indirectly related frames. The “victim profile” (V) is predicted to have the fourth strongest correlation because articles that take that angle reference a possible consequence of gun control policies without necessarily bringing up the issue of gun control. Articles that use the V frame may lead the public to think about gun control, but they also may elicit emotional responses that do not necessarily raise public cognizance of gun control.

Those frames that either reference different issues or no issues at all are predicted to have the least strong correlations. The “changing security” frame (CS) is predicted to have the fifth strongest correlation because it directs reader attention to a divergent issue: alterations to institutional protections against violence, such as police or warning systems. As a result, it would follow that this frame would theoretically lead the public to become more aware of different issues than gun control and value those problems more. Finally, the “general mentions” frame (G) is predicted to have the weakest correlation because those articles do not reference any issues of gun control or security. The G frame refers to all articles that cursorily mention a mass shooting in the context of the article’s larger focus.

## RESEARCH DESIGN

To test these hypotheses, I ran a series of bivariate correlations between media mentions of a mass shooting in one month and the percentage of people who say gun control is the most important problem facing the country in the following month. Data collection consisted of two main parts: media content analysis (counting and coding of mentions) and public opinion poll collection. My independent variable is then newspaper mentions of mass shootings, and my dependent variable is public opinion on how important of a problem people perceive gun control to be.

The media content analysis focused on six mass shootings, here listed in chronological order: the Red Lake Massacre (2005), the Virginia Tech Massacre (2007), the Binghamton Shootings (2009), the Fort Hood Shootings (2009), the Aurora Colorado Theater Massacre (2012), and the Newtown School Massacre (2012). These shootings were chosen because they were the six most deadly public mass shootings in the past 10 years (excluding the recent Washington Naval Yard Shooting, which was too recent to analyze using this model), meaning they would be more likely to gain media traction.<sup>100</sup>

For each mass shooting, the number of instances the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *USA Today*, and *The Chicago Tribune* ran articles on or mentioned the mass shooting in the month following were counted. Each article was coded as either GL, MI, SH, V, CS, or G. The total mentions from all five of the papers were then grouped by month, as were the coded mentions. In instances where newspaper mentions of the mass shootings overlapped, the mention data were grouped together since the unit of analysis is broadly “mass shooting newspaper mentions per month,” with a total of 57 months.

These newspapers were chosen because they represent a variety of regions in the country, are all national papers, and have large circulation.<sup>101</sup> By covering a wide variety of regions and using widely circulated papers, the hope was the newspaper mention counts could be generalized to represent the country’s public consciousness as a whole and that they would represent readership across the United States. Coding for each of the aforementioned frames utilized the following guidelines:

---

<sup>100</sup> Mother Jones 2013

<sup>101</sup> Alliance for Audited Media 2013

Table 2: Article Coding Guidelines

Frame	Definition	Example
GL	Discusses a mass shooting from the angle of implementing or altering gun control legislation, arguments for or against gun control, etc.	<p>“Gun control groups said that they admired the efforts, but that they would never carry the weight of legislation to expand the number of gun buyers who are subjected to the background check system...”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “White House Makes Moves to Bolster Gun Safety” <i>New York Times</i>, 6/12/13</li> </ul>
MI	Discusses a mass shooting from the angle of mental stability, new approaches to mental health, altering illness in regards to mental illness and guns, etc.	<p>“According to a research review published this year in <i>Annals of General Psychiatry</i>, most people with Asperger's who commit violent crimes have serious, often undiagnosed mental problems...”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “Predicting Who's at Risk for Violence Isn't Easy” <i>USA Today</i>, 12/22/12</li> </ul>
SH	Discusses a mass shooting from the angle of profiling the shooter, explaining his motivations, detailing his personal history or family life, etc.	<p>“She thought Cho Seung Hui exuded loneliness, and she volunteered to teach him by herself, to spare her colleagues...”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “Student Wrote About Death and Spoke in Whispers, But No One Imagined What Cho Seung Hui Would Do” <i>Washington Post</i>, 4/18/07</li> </ul>
V	Discusses a mass shooting from the angle of the victims' backgrounds, providing eulogies, detailing memorial plans, etc.	<p>“Roberta King was...as passionate about helping others as she was about teaching.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “Victim of Binghamton Shootings Is Remembered for Her Compassion” <i>New York Times</i>, 4/5/2009</li> </ul>
CS	Discusses a mass shooting from the angle of changing or enhancing security to prevent future shootings, any security pitfalls in regards to the shooting, etc.	<p>The military remains vulnerable to another Fort Hood-like massacre with religious radicalization on the rise and too little attention being paid to internal threats, Pentagon officials said Friday...”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “Fort Hood Report Critical of Officers” <i>Chicago Tribune</i>, 1/16/2010</li> </ul>
G	Any general mention of a shooting in articles not primarily about the shooting.	<p>“Yes, they have thoughts on Aurora. Yes, gun violence affects these gold medalists. Yes, mass shootings will always impact the sport...”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “Even at the Olympics, Athletes in the Sport of Shooting Face Questions about Gun Violence” <i>Washington Post</i>, 7/31/2012</li> </ul>

Public opinion data were collected from Gallup.com. The monthly question of the most important problem facing the United States was used to gauge how important people found the issue

of gun control to be. The exact wording of the question is “What do you think is the most important problem facing this country today?” It is an open-ended question in which respondents can answer whatever they like. Gallup pollsters then code each response according to a set of categories, one of which gun control. Gallup poll data were collected for the month after the coverage to account for Winter and Eyal’s time lag theory. Since the most important problem question is from a national polling source, it may be used to reflect national perceptions on the importance of gun control.

Once both the newspaper counts were complete for each month in the year, the total mentions of a mass shooting in each month were correlated with public opinion on the importance of gun control in the following month. A one-tailed correlation was used to test for direction and strength of correlation. Direction here is important because the research is trying to determine whether increased mentions of mass shootings influence increased public belief in gun control’s importance. Further, each of the coded mentions, grouped as “mentions per month,” were also correlated with public opinion in order to see which types of mentions had stronger correlations with public opinion. Again, these were one-tailed correlations, testing for the strength and direction of correlation.

Two additional sets of correlations were also run to test for causality. Whereas the initial correlations tested the strength and direction of the relationship between mentions/coded mentions at time zero ( $M_{T0}$ ) and public opinion one month later ( $M_{T0+1}$ ), the next set of correlations tested the relationship between mentions/coded mentions and public opinion in the same month, or both at  $M_{T0}$ . Further, the last set of correlations tested the relationship between mentions/coded mentions at  $M_{T0}$  and public opinion in the previous month ( $M_{T0-1}$ ). If the causal pattern flows from media mentions at  $M_{T0}$  to public opinion at  $M_{T0+1}$ , the relationship between mentions/coded mentions and public opinion both taken at  $M_{T0}$  should be weaker than the one found at  $M_{T0}$  and  $M_{T0+1}$ . If the relationship between mentions/coded mentions and public opinion at  $M_{T0}$  and  $M_{T0-1}$  were found to be more strongly positive than the relationship between mentions/coded mentions and public opinion at  $M_{T0}$  and  $M_{T0+1}$ , this would suggest the inverse of this study’s proposed hypothesis. Ultimately, using this model, it will be possible to test the direction and strength of the relationship between mentions/coded mentions to determine if media mentions of mass shootings influence public opinion on the importance of gun control, and whether this causality flows in the direction this study would expect.

## DATA

Table 3 provides the correlation between total mentions of mass shootings per month and the percentage of people who answered that gun control was the most important problem facing the country in the Gallup polls. Correlations are shown for  $M_{T0}$ ,  $M_{T0+1}$ , and  $M_{T0-1}$ .

**Table 3: Total Mass Shooting Mentions and Public Opinion on the Importance of Gun Control**

Total Mentions	Gun Control Importance $M_{T0+1}$	Gun Control Importance $M_{T0}$	Gun Control Importance $M_{T0-1}$
Pearson Correlation	.658**	.573**	.339**
Sig. (1-tailed)	.000	.000	.005
N	57	57	57

Note: \*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).

Table 4 presents a correlation matrix of the total coded mentions grouped by month. These coded mentions were correlated with  $M_{T0}$ ,  $M_{T0+1}$ , and  $M_{T0-1}$  in order to test hypotheses two through seven.

**Table 4: Correlations between Coded Mentions of Mass Shootings and the Public's Opinion on the Importance of Gun Control**

	Gun Control Importance $M_{T0+1}$	Gun Control Importance $M_{T0}$	Gun Control Importance $M_{T0-1}$
<b>GL</b> Pearson Correlation	.832**	.704**	.533**
Sig. (1-tailed)	.000	.000	.000
<b>MI</b> Pearson Correlation	.613**	.595**	.451**
Sig. (1-tailed)	.000	.000	.000
<b>SH</b> Pearson Correlation	.188	.133	.042
Sig. (1-tailed)	.081	.162	.379
<b>V</b> Pearson Correlation	.351**	.272*	.107
Sig. (1-tailed)	.004	.020	.215
<b>CS</b> Pearson Correlation	.604**	.500**	.463**
Sig. (1-tailed)	.000	.000	.000
<b>G</b> Pearson Correlation	.633**	.582**	.280*
Sig. (1-tailed)	.000	.000	.017

Note: N=57

\*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).

\*, Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed).

## DISCUSSION

### *Total Mentions Correlated With Public Opinion*

Analyzing the correlations conducted in the study provides more evidence for the influence of newspaper mentions of mass shootings on public perceptions of gun control. The relationship between total mentions of a mass shooting in the five newspapers grouped by mentions per month and the percentage of the public that viewed gun control as the most important problem in the

following month was positive and statistically significant. The Pearson's Correlation Coefficient was .658, which was statistically significant at the .001 level. This strongly suggests that as newspaper mentions of a mass shooting increase, so does the public's view on the importance of a problem gun control is; this result is extremely unlikely to have been found by chance.

The flow of causality is uncertain, though. The subsequent correlations done when public opinion is at  $M_{T0}$  and  $M_{T0-1}$  are weaker than the correlation done at  $M_{T0+1}$ , but they are both still fairly strong and significant at the .01 level. Winter and Eyal's (1981) estimated that it takes 4 to 6 weeks, or about one month, for the news media's influence to take effect on public opinion. However, one would expect the relationship to dissolve when correlating opinion at  $M_{T0-1}$  and newspaper mentions at  $M_{T0}$  because this would assume that public opinion shifts before the mass shooting occurs.

The fact that the relationship is still positive and statistically significant when the time lag is removed might indicate that public opinion may also influence how much the news media covers mass shootings. Influence between public opinion and newspaper coverage could be a two way street. Although, this correlation is weaker than the other two, it is possible that this positive relationship could indicate the presence of an intervening variable influencing both public opinion and the number of newspaper mentions. Therefore, while the initial correlation appeared to confirm the primary hypothesis, the direction of causality is not entirely clear. This study suggests not only that newspaper mentions of mass shootings play a role in setting the agenda for public opinion on the importance of gun control, but that public mood may influence what the news covers.

#### *Coded Mentions Correlated with Public Opinion*

When breaking the total mentions down into coded mentions, there is a noticeable variation in the correlation between newspaper coverage in  $M_{T0}$  and public opinion on the importance of gun control in  $M_{T0+1}$ . As predicted in H2, the "gun legislation" (GL) frame easily had the strongest correlation, with a Pearson's Correlation Coefficient of .832, statistically significant at the .001 level. As hypothesized, articles that focus on gun legislation have a stronger relationship with public opinion in the month following the coverage than all other frames.

Monthly groupings of articles coded for the "mental illness" (MI) frame were not as strongly correlated with public opinion as was predicted in H3, but still had a strong, positive, statistically significant relationship with public opinion on the importance of gun control. The Pearson's Correlation Coefficient of .613, significant at the .001 level, made articles using the MI frame the third most influential frame of the six studied. This means that, contrary to expectations, articles that reference the mental illness subtopic of gun control in regard to mass shootings are not the second most influential at leading public opinion on gun control, though they may still be very influential in framing gun control perceptions.

Contrary to H4's prediction that the "shooter profile" (SH) would be the third strongest, monthly groupings of articles coded for the SH frame turned out to have no statistically significant relationship with attitudes on gun control. In fact, it was the only frame that had no statistically significant relationship with public opinion. As such, the SH frame appears to be unimportant in setting the agenda on public views on gun control.

The monthly groupings of articles coded for the "victim profile" (V) frame also did not fall in their expected correlation strength ranking. Though H5 predicted the frame would be the fourth strongest correlation of all the frames, it instead turned out to be the weakest among those that had a statistically significant correlation. The correlation between groupings of articles employing the V frame had a Pearson's Correlation Coefficient of .351, statistically significant at the .01 level. While the V frame is not as useful for predicting how important gun control is to the public as the other statistically significant frames, it still may have some use in setting the agenda for public opinion on gun control.

Monthly groupings of articles taking the "changing security" (CS) frame correlated more strongly than expected with public opinion in the month following the shooting. H6 predicted that articles employing a CS angle to mass shootings would have a weaker relationship than all frames except the G frame, but the correlations showed that those articles have the fourth strongest correlation of all the frames, with a Pearson's Correlation Coefficient of .604 statistically significant at the .01 level. This correlation coefficient was almost as strong as the MI frame. Consequently, this shows that the CS frame may have a connection with higher percentages of people viewing gun control as a more important issue, regardless of whether CS articles reference gun control directly. It appears that merely reference changing rules of any sort in terms of mass shootings may impact how important people view gun control to be.

The monthly groupings of the "general mention" (G) frame, which were predicted in H7 to have the weakest correlation, are shown in this study to have the second strongest correlation. Groupings of the G frame at  $M_{T0}$  were correlated with the percentage of people who view gun control as important at  $M_{T0+1}$  with a coefficient of .633, statistically significant at the .01 level. This means that, even though general mentions appear in cursorily related articles, just mentioning a mass shooting frequently may raise public awareness enough to lead the public to view gun control as more important. Contrary to the prediction H7, this research shows that the G frame has the second strongest correlation, making it a more useful predictor for public opinion on the importance of gun control. The final strength-ranking for the frames was then:  $GL > G > MI > CS > V > SH$ .

Again, causality is not entirely clear in each of these correlations, as public opinion at  $M_{T0+1}$  also has a strong, positive, statistically significant relationship with GL, MI, CS, and G articles grouped at  $M_{T0}$ . Newspaper coverage may not set the agenda for public opinion completely; it may



be influenced by the public as well. When a higher percentage of the public views gun control as important, the news media may respond by focusing more attention on related stories, like mass shootings. While the majority of these frames, excluding SH, demonstrate that these newspapers may play an agenda-setting role for public opinion, the many positive, statistically significant relationships between mentions at  $M_{T0}$  and public opinion at  $M_{T0+1}$  indicates that the public's valuing of gun control may lead what newspapers cover as well. In fact, it is even possible that the news media and public opinion could be locked in its own cycle. When public opinion views gun control as more important, news sources could be more likely to cover mass shootings, which could then make the public more likely to view gun control as an important issue, etc. However, this question is outside the scope of this study.

### CONCLUSION

There are some obvious drawbacks to this study, primarily that correlations cannot demonstrate true causality. However, the statistically significant correlations suggest there is a powerful relationship between the two, and that the news may have an agenda-setting effect in its coverage of mass shootings, similar to previous studies mentioned in the literature. Additionally, it is possible that the newspapers used for this study are not as generalizable as one would assume, though that seems unlikely since they are all large, national, widely circulated newspapers (both online and in print) that tap into and reflect the public consciousness.

A larger drawback of this analysis is found in the Gallup Poll Most Important Problem Question results. There are many instances where the percentage of people who respond that gun control is the most important problem facing the nation is a tenth of a percent, half of a percent, or some other fraction of a percent. Consequently, those instances where the percentage of people who respond to the question with "gun control" reaches 6 percent seem very large by comparison. While the study showed newspaper mentions in  $M_{T0}$  to have strong, positive, and statistically significant correlations with public opinion at  $M_{T0+1}$ , the substantive significance of the results is lacking. An increase in newspaper mentions of a mass shooting may relate to the public viewing gun control as a more important issue, but whatever influence increased mentions has may only alter public opinion by a few tenths of a percent. Newspaper coverage may have a statistically significant relationship with public opinion in this instance, but it may not impact it all that much.

What this study does show, however, is that discourse surrounding mass shootings has a relationship with the public viewing gun control as more important. Even if more media mentions do not correlate with drastic alterations in public opinion, the statistical significance of the correlations suggests that news media mentions of mass shootings should not be discounted as part of public opinion formation on the importance of gun control. This study also demonstrates that it is not just

general news discourse that matters; the manner in which the news media covers mass shootings changes the relationship.

Further, this study showed that mass shooting mentions in a month have a stronger correlation with opinion in the month following these media mentions. But public opinion may still have some impact on what newspapers decide to cover. Future studies might look more extensively at how public opinion may lead news media mentions, or to see if there is an interacting variable that influences both newspaper mentions of a mass shooting and public opinion on the importance of gun control, such as discourse from interest groups or politicians.

The lack of these considerations in this study should not detract from what was found. This study shows that newspaper discourse on mass shootings has a statistically significant relationship with public opinion on the importance of gun control, meaning it should be an important consideration when thinking of how public opinion on gun control is formed. Moreover, this study showed that how mass shootings are covered is important in determining the strength of that relationship. This study, by demonstrating the importance of the relationship between news discourse on mass shootings and public opinion on the importance of gun control, opens up possibilities for future studies on the formation of public opinion in regards to gun control and mass shootings. The results of this research show that news discourse on mass shootings, as Cooley (1909) said, may be crucial to the organization of the public mind.

## REFERENCES

- After Newtown, Modest Change in Opinion about Gun Control. 2012. *Pew Research Center*.  
Retrieved from <http://www.people-press.org/2012/12/20/after-newtown-modest-change-in-opinion-about-gun-control/>
- Cohen, Bernard C. 1963. *The Press & Foreign Policy*. Newark NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Berelson, Bernard. 1948. "Communications And Public Opinion." In *Reader in Public Opinion and Communication*, eds. Bernard Berelson and Morris Janowitz. New York: Crowell-Collier Publishing Company.
- Birkland, Thomas A. and Regina G Lawrence. 2009. "Media Framing and Policy Change After Columbine." *American Behavioral Scientist* 52: 1405-1425.
- Blumer, Herbert. 1946. "The Mass, The Public, And Public Opinion." In *Reader in Public Opinion and Communication*, eds. Bernard Berelson and Morris Janowitz. New York: Crowell-Collier Publishing Company.
- Boulianne, Shelley. 2011. "Stimulating or Reinforcing Political Interest: using Panel Data to Examine Reciprocal Effects Between News media and Political Interest." *Political Communication*, 28: 147-162.
- Boyle, Katherine. 2012, July 31. "Even at the Olympics, athletes in the sport of shooting face questions about gun violence." *Washington Post*.
- Chicago Tribune* articles on The Red Lake Massacre, Virginia Tech Massacre, Binghamton Shootings, Fort Hood Shootings, Aurora Colorado Shooting, and Newtown Shooting. (2005-2013). Retrieved from [www.chicagotribune.com](http://www.chicagotribune.com) archives.
- Cook, Fay L. and Wesley G Skogan. 1990. "Convergent and Divergent Voice Models of the Rise and Fall of Policy Issues." In *Agenda Setting: Readings on Media, Public Opinion, and Policymaking*, eds. David L. Protess and Maxwell McCombs. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Cooley, Charles H. 1909. "The Significance of Communication." In *Reader in Public Opinion and Communication*, eds. Bernard Berelson and Morris Janowitz. New York: Crowell-Collier Publishing Company.
- Downs, Anthony. 1991. "Up and Down With Ecology: The 'Issue-Attention Cycle.'" In *Agenda Setting: Readings on Media, Public Opinion, and Policymaking*, eds. David L. Protess and Maxwell McCombs. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- FBI Definition of Serial Murder. 2005. *The Federal Bureau of Investigation*. Retrieved from <http://www.fbi.gov/stats-services/publications/serial-murder/serial-murder-1#two>
- Gallup Poll Series: What is the most important problem facing the country today? 2005-2013. *Gallup Brain*. Retrieved from searching <http://institution.gallup.com/home.aspx>

- Gun Control: Key Data Points from Pew Research. 2013. *Pew Research Center*. Retrieved from <http://www.pewresearch.org/key-data-points/gun-control-key-data-points-from-pew-research/>
- Lang, Kurt Gladys E. Lang. 1966. "The Mass Media and Voting." In *Reader in Public Opinion and Communication*, eds. Bernard Berelson and Morris Janowitz. New York: Crowell-Collier Publishing Company.
- Lippmann, Walter. 1922. *Public Opinion*. New York: The MacMillan Company.
- List of Most Widely Circulated Newspapers. 2013. *Alliance for Audited Media*. Retrieved from <http://www.auditedmedia.com/>
- Los Angeles Times* articles on The Red Lake Massacre, Virginia Tech Massacre, Binghamton Shootings, Fort Hood Shootings, Aurora Colorado Shooting, and Newtown Shooting. 2005-2013. Retrieved from [www.latimes.com](http://www.latimes.com) archives.
- McCombs, Maxwell E. Donald L. Shaw. 1972. "The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 36: 176-185.
- McGinty, Emma E., Daniel W. Webster and Colleen L. Barry. 2013. "Effects of News Media Messages about Mass Shootings on Attitudes Toward Persons With Serious Mental Illness and Public Support for Gun Control Policies." *Am J Psychiatry* 170(5): 494-501.
- New York Times* articles on The Red Lake Massacre, Virginia Tech Massacre, Binghamton Shootings, Fort Hood Shootings, Aurora Colorado Shooting, and Newtown Shooting. 2005-2013. Retrieved through [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com) archives.
- Park, Robert E. 1939. "Reflections on Communication and Culture." In *Reader in Public Opinion and Communication*, eds. Bernard Berelson and Morris Janowitz. New York: Crowell-Collier Publishing Company.
- Protess et. al. 1987. "The Impact of Investigative Reporting on Public Opinion and Policymaking: Targeting Toxic Waste." In *Agenda Setting: Readings on Media, Public Opinion, and Policymaking*, eds. David L. Protess and Maxwell McCombs. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Robbins, Liz. 2009, April 4. "Victim of Binghamton Shootings Is Remembered for Her Compassion." *New York Times*.
- Shapira, Ian, and Michael E. Ruane. 2007, April 18. "Student Wrote About Death and Spoke in Whispers, But No One Imagined what Cho Seung Hui Would Do." *Washington Post*.
- Smidt, Corwin d. 2012. "Not All News Is the Same: Protests, Presidents, and the Mass Public Agenda." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 76(1): 72-94.
- Steinhaur, Jennifer. 2013, June 12. "White House Makes Moves to Bolster Gun Safety." *New York Times*.

Tanner, Lindsey. 2012, December 22. "Predicting who's at risk for violence isn't easy." *USA Today*.

Tribune News Services. 2010, January 16. "Fort Hood report critical of officers." *Chicago Tribune*.

US Mass Shootings, 1982-2012: Data From Mother Jones' Investigation. (2013). *Mother Jones*.

Retrieved from <http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2012/12/mass-shootings-mother-jones-full-data>

*USA Today* articles on The Red Lake Massacre, Virginia Tech Massacre, Binghamton Shootings, Fort Hood Shootings, Aurora Colorado Shooting, and Newtown Shooting. 2005-2013. Retrieved from [www.usatoday.com](http://www.usatoday.com) archives.

*Washington Post* articles on The Red Lake Massacre, Virginia Tech Massacre, Binghamton Shootings, Fort Hood Shootings, Aurora Colorado Shooting, and Newtown Shooting. (2005-2013). Retrieved from [www.washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com) archives.

Weaver, David H. and Yue Tan. 2007. "Agenda-Setting Effects Among the Media, the Public, and Congress, 1946-2004." *J&MC Quarterly*, 84(4): 729-744.

Winter, James P. Chaim H. Eyal. 1981. "Agenda Setting for the Civil Rights Issue." *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 45: 376-383.

Wolfe, Michelle. 2012. "Putton on the Brakes or Pressing on the Gas? Media Attention and the Speed of Policymaking." *The Policy Studies Journal*, 40(1): 109-126.

## THE LEAST DANGEROUS BRANCH: THE DARK HORSE IN AMERICAN DEMOCRACY

Lexi Baltes

**Abstract:** *This research examines the extent to which the Supreme Court has the power to influence public opinion. There is a good deal of consensus in the literature regarding the influence of public opinion on the Supreme Court. However, a relatively small pool of contradictory research attempting to turn the casual arrow from the Court to the public underscores the fact that the question of whether or not a dynamic, back-and-forth relationship exists is still open for debate. Using a portion of the work done by Erikson, MacKuen and Stimson in *The Macro Polity* (2002) as a model, and relying heavily on James Stimson's public mood data and salient Supreme Court decisions from 1969-2008, this study asserts that the Supreme Court has the power to influence the public mood on salient issues, especially with regard to highly unanimous decisions. Consequently, this study suggests a dialogue exists between two groups that were never intended to speak.*

### INTRODUCTION

Public opinion carries great weight in the American form of democratic government. A government by the people and for the people implies the certainty of a back-and-forth dialogue between public preferences and institutional accommodations. In order to ensure the government acts faithfully, certain restraints are in place—namely, electoral accountability and legitimacy through acceptance. In this way, the public controls the thermostat, choosing the ideological temperature of the policy produced, enforced, and allowed to stand.<sup>102</sup>

The public has tremendous power and influence over the governing of the nation, yet it is well documented that, at least at the individual level, the public is not well informed about political issues.<sup>103</sup> But how, and how effectively, is the public calling the shots for a global superpower? John Zaller (1992) and James Stimson (1991; 1994) explain that by relying on elite influence (politicians, public officials, etc.) and other heuristics, the public manages to make rational decisions and control the ideological thermostat in a systematic and predictable way. Public opinion is tied to governmental action and positions. However, Jacobs and Shapiro are adamant about the diminishing responsiveness to public opinion. They believe that politicians use the measurement of public opinion “not to move their positions closer to the public’s (as commonly assumed) but just the opposite—to find the most effective means to move public opinion closer to their own desired policies.”<sup>104</sup>

This is a dangerous proposition for any branch of government, but what of the “least dangerous branch,” the branch theoretically isolated from the passions of the public and the passing partisan tides? The interaction between the Supreme Court and public opinion may be both the most interesting and least studied relationship for largely the same reason: it is the forbidden fruit of government and politics, the relationship that was never supposed to be. However, in order to

<sup>102</sup> Erikson, Mac Kuen, Stimson 2002; Deutsch 1963; Easton 1953; Wlezien 1995

<sup>103</sup> e.g. Converse 1962

<sup>104</sup> Jacobs & Shapiro 2002, p. 55

understand politics today, the question must be asked: to what extent do Supreme Court decisions have the power to influence public opinion and mood? There is a significant compilation of scholarship suggesting the presence of the relationship between public opinion and its influence on Supreme Court decisions, but not much more than defensive, nervous rhetoric regarding the reversal of the causal arrow. This research, relying heavily on Stimson's public mood data and salient Supreme Court decisions between 1969 and 2008, seeks to shed light on the extent to which the "least dangerous branch" can influence the public at a level as fundamental as mood and opinion, and investigate the implications the results have on the balance of power.

#### LITERATURE REVIEW

Over 50 years ago, Robert Dahl sparked interest in the Supreme Court's political presence. He wrote, "As a political institution, the Court is highly unusual, not least because Americans are not quite willing to accept the fact that it is a political institution and not quite capable of denying it," and yet, "much of the legitimacy of the Court's decisions rest upon the fiction that it is not a political institution but exclusively a legal one," (1957). The idea that the nation has turned a blind eye to the incongruous attributes it associates with the Court only becomes clearer as partisan divide places increasing credence on ideological position of issues and policy.

There is a good deal of consensus in the literature regarding the influence of public opinion on the Supreme Court.<sup>105</sup> Theory would suggest, in these more polarized times, this influence would weaken or fade completely as Justices become more fixated upon an ideological stance regardless of external influences. Nevertheless, in a relatively recent study of cases from 1953-1996, McGuire and Stimson (2004) found that the Supreme Court continues to weigh their decisions against public mood so as to issue decisions that have a chance of being enforced.

These findings are reminiscent of Dahl's influential propositions and an ample amount of legitimacy hypothesis scholarship since then.<sup>106</sup> Recent scholarship suggests that public mood, even after controlling for the "social forces" that influence both public and judicial mood, influences constitutional interpretations espoused in Supreme Court decisions.<sup>107</sup> At the very least, this points to the weighed and measured constraint placed on the Court based on its own forethought and self-preservation. Like other politicians, Supreme Court Justices seem to have a perception of the most expedient position.<sup>108</sup> There is an established pattern of acknowledgement of, and respect for, public mood in the decisions of the Supreme Court.

---

<sup>105</sup> McGuire & Stimson 2004; Casillas, Enns, Wohlfarth 2010; Erikson, Stimson, MacKeun 2002

<sup>106</sup> Mondak 1992; Baas & Thomas 1984; Jaros & Roper 1980; Murphy & Tanenhous 1968; Marshall 1987; Johnson & Martin 1998

<sup>107</sup> Casillas, Enns, & Wohlfarth 2010

<sup>108</sup> Stimson, MacKuen & Erikson 1995

The presence of a unified voice from scholars regarding the existence of a relationship running from public mood to Supreme Court decisions cannot be overstated when theorizing about reverse causation. If the legitimacy of Supreme Court decisions depend, at least in part, on public acceptance, then it follows that the Court would actively try to pull public opinion toward its preferences. The idea of figuratively purchasing stability public opinion finds wide support among scholars of the Supreme Court.<sup>109</sup> Referenced many ways throughout the literature, the term “judicial capital” will hereby be used to indicate the “funds” used by the Supreme Court. The theory maintains that the Court can use its judicial capital to purchase the legitimacy of a decision, but at some point it will run out of capital and have to start saving again. This research is less interested in determining the way in which the Court gains, spends, and otherwise uses this capital than it is with advancing the notion that when purchasing legitimacy, the Court might also be purchasing public opinion. The idea of judicial capital is a foundational theoretical justification that functions to situate and legitimize this study within the larger body of literature.

Turning to the relatively small pool of research that looks at the influence of Supreme Court decision on public opinion, it becomes clear that the question of whether or not a dynamic, or biconditional, relationship between the Court and the public exists is still open for debate. Much of the current literature concludes evidence is lacking to indicate any such relationship exists.<sup>110</sup> However, there are flaws in both theory and design throughout this camp of research.

In one of the more prominent studies, Marshall (1987) finds that but for a small collection of cases, Supreme Court decisions have virtually no effect on public opinion. He looks at the influence of just eighteen cases using pre- and post-decision opinion poll data. The statistical limitations of such a design go without saying, but what is more, the eighteen Court decisions used were from varying issue domains. It is important to note that when researching the impact of Supreme Court decisions it is difficult to justify looking at individual cases. It is well known that “(policy) is highly cumulative, the result of a stream of decisions over time.”<sup>111</sup> The Court rarely rules singularly or finally on any issue, and even when it does, its decision is still taken in concert with decisions on other issues. Therefore, it is flawed to look at certain isolated hiccups in the Court’s discourse and far better to analyze its influence in light of the fluid voice espoused in a collection of decisions. Other studies stop short of actually investigating the influence of the Supreme Court on public opinion because they conclude that people know too little to be able to systematically respond to

<sup>109</sup> Casillas et. al. 2010; McGuire & Stimson 2004; Hetherington & Smith 2007; Mondak 1992; Caldeira & Gibson 1992

<sup>110</sup> Blake 1977; Marshall 1987; Baas & Thomas 1984; Jaros & Roper 1980; Murphy & Tanenhaus 1968; Hetherington & Smith 2007

<sup>111</sup> Erikson et. al. 2002



Supreme Court decisions.<sup>112</sup> People generally lack political information and the motivation necessary to process and correctly align themselves with ideological positions taken in Court opinions.<sup>113</sup> Therefore, these researchers conclude there is no reason to look further. This study is much less concerned with knowledge and explicit awareness of Court decisions, but instead asserts that awareness is not a requirement for potential influence. To believe otherwise is to discount ample research in the way of heuristics besides knowledge that have been confidently considered to aid the formation of “appropriate” public opinions, and ignore the reality that public mood may be an airborne virus catchable absent direct contact.

Those finding a significant influence of Supreme Court decisions on public opinion<sup>114</sup> are relatively few in number and possess their own theoretical and logistical shortcomings. Mondak (1992) finds that the Court can increase support for rulings, but at a price. This is consistent with the judicial capital theory. However, it would seem that when measuring influence of the Court, analysis ought not be limited to support for the decision, but perhaps better focused on ensuing change of opinion, especially opinion on the issues about which the decision was determined. Furthermore, Mondak’s conclusions are drawn from a controlled experiment that utilizes hypothetical policy and rulings, which exacerbates the limitations of the research.

Taking a unique approach, Franklin and Kosaki (1989) also find that the Supreme Court influences public opinion. However, they do not measure influence in terms of increased support for the Court’s position on an issue. Instead, they measure the structural change of groups supporting certain issue positions, finding that Supreme Court decisions lead to greater homogeneity and clearer preferences between groups (1989). Though Franklin and Kosaki view this structural change as the dichotomous alternative to increased support, in reality, it neither helps nor hinders the theory advanced in this research; rather, it merely answers a complementary question regarding the Court-public relationship. They also find that salient issues blunt the Court’s impact because salient issues are those about which people already have well-ordered beliefs. This is significant because the study at hand looks only at salient issues and cases. Implications of evidence regarding Supreme Court influence on these issues would seem to suggest that the Court has some power to change minds, not to simply help form opinions. This study aims to complement Franklin and Kosaki’s work so as to offer a broader picture of Supreme Court influence on the public and offer clearer implications about any such relationship.

Johnson and Martin (1998) support the conclusions drawn by Franklin and Kosaki, but suggest even further limits on the Court’s influence. They posit that the Court may influence the

---

<sup>112</sup> Murphy & Tanenhous 1968

<sup>113</sup> Hetherington & Smith 2007

<sup>114</sup> Petrick 1968, Franklin & Kosaki 1989, Mondak 1992, Johnson & Martin 1998

public in accord with the structural change hypothesis, but any kind of influence only occurs after the first major ruling on a given issue: subsequent rulings have no effect. Tracking single issues across time, the expectations for this study are fundamentally at odds with the limitations put forth by Johnson et. al. (1998).

In sum, a theoretically sound and scientifically verifiable approach to analyzing Supreme Court influence on public opinion is lacking. The absence of a unified scholarly voice on the topic, and even on the approach to studying the topic, is not altogether surprising, considering the relatively few specific inquiries into the idea of Supreme Court influence on public opinion. Furthermore, there are limitations inherent in the study of an institution with the power to handpick the issues it addresses combined with the study of a free public whose preferences have only recently become well documented. This research attempts to go some way towards filling this gap and standardizing the approach through which future research on the topic might utilize, by implementing a new method that pairs external validity with formulaic consideration for accuracy and error.

After determining that public opinion influences not only Supreme Court decisions but rather the outputs of all three branches of government, Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson (2002, 2008) extend the thermostat analogy and turn the casual arrow around for Congressional policy—looking at public mood<sup>115</sup> as a function of policy and finding a negative relationship. As policy becomes more liberal the public mood becomes more conservative, or in other words, as policy moves in one ideological direction, the public has a logical increased desire for policy in the other direction. *The Macro Polity* model will be employed in this research to extend the analysis of mood as a function of policy into the realm of policy espoused in Supreme Court decisions.

#### RESEARCH DESIGN AND HYPOTHESES

The central predication of this research is that Supreme Court decisions do, in fact, influence public opinion. However, this proposition is not intended to act counter to evidence suggesting that public opinion influences the Court; rather, it is a supplemental study aimed at uncovering a more complete picture of this relationship as a two way street. One side of the street is paved, the other currently in its primitive stages of construction.

In order to test the dynamic part of this relationship, the part that points the casual arrow from Supreme Court decisions back to the public, I will use the portion of testing done in *The Macro Polity* that looks at mood as a function of policy (2002, 2008) as a model. In their study, Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson create an index by awarding a -1 (conservative) or +1 (liberal) to each piece of significant (as defined in David Mayhew's two sweep test) legislation<sup>116</sup>, and then taking the cumulative sum of these scores to create one score for each biennium. Using this score as the key

---

<sup>115</sup> Stimson 2012

<sup>116</sup> Mayhew 1991

independent variable they run an Ordinary Least Squares regression to analyze the influence of policy on public mood (using Stimson's public mood data) controlling for the effects of the economy on mood, specifically inflation and unemployment indicators. As previously mentioned, their testing ultimately concludes there is a negative relationship regarding policy influence on mood; thus, a representation of the thermostat analogy.

Based on this model, I approach Supreme Court decisions in much the same way that Erikson et. al. approach policy. Looking at Court cases from 1969-2008,<sup>117</sup> I consider only salient cases,<sup>118</sup> and of those, only cases involving race, religion, or sex (discrimination, privacy, etc.) issues<sup>119</sup>. There are multiple defenses for this emphasis on salience. First, it is consistent with *The Macro Polity* model, which only looks at salient policy.<sup>120</sup> Second, it is most interesting to understand the public's relationship and interaction with the Court on issues that matter most to both groups. Finally, research has shown that the Court is most likely to defy public opinion on salient cases.<sup>121</sup> Therefore, in an attempt to look at the back and forth between the Court and the public, it is best to look at cases in which there is not complete harmony between the Court decision and public preference. The idea here is that, whether or not the public is aware or has any knowledge of the decisions, salient cases in these issue domains are the ones most likely to matter, which is different than influence; if it were otherwise, this study would be irrelevant.

The restrictions mentioned above leave 146 cases for analysis, with an average of just under four cases per year. In accord with Erikson et. al., each decision was given one of five scores: -1, -0.5, 0, 0.5, 1. Negative values indicate a conservative decision, positive values indicate a liberal decision, and zero indicates a decision that is neither liberal nor conservative.<sup>122</sup> A score of -0.5 or 0.5 was awarded when the decision was obviously narrow in scope or left open the clear possibility of a different decision given slightly different circumstances.<sup>123</sup> The sum of the scores in each year was produced to create a cumulative decision score per year.

---

<sup>117</sup> This is a post-Warren Court case pool. The Warren Court is often said to be the most activist Court of all time—here we look at the influence of supposedly less activist courts. This time period is also convenient, in that public mood data becomes much more reliable around the 1960s.

<sup>118</sup> Epstein and Segal (2000) provide a widely accepted operationalization of salient cases to be those appearing on the front page of the *New York Times* the day after the decision was released.

<sup>119</sup> These three issue domains are broad enough to include a wide range of opinions, but they are also issues about which people are not only likely to have formed opinions but those with which they have personal experience.

<sup>120</sup> Erikson et. al. 2002

<sup>121</sup> Casillas et. al. 2011

<sup>122</sup> Only a handful of zeros were awarded, and all were cases in which the Court unanimously decided not to decide and remand for more information.

<sup>123</sup> In addition to a single primary coder, intercoder reliability was confirmed with three additional coders looking at a random sample of ten decisions from the case pool. There was 100 percent consistency across all four coders in terms of the ideological direction of the 10 cases and 83 percent consistency as to the value itself.

The cumulative decision score per year will be the independent variable of focus, representing the annual nature of Supreme Court outputs. Implementing Ordinary Least Squares regression, the analysis will focus on the relationship between this independent variable and the single dependent variable: change in public mood.<sup>124</sup> Stimson's policy mood indicator is an amalgamated index that produces a single score to represent the aggregate shift along the liberal-conservative continuum of public mood over time by combining policy preferences of survey respondents across many different issues. Stimson's mood data is publicly available<sup>125</sup> and was last updated in 2011.

It is important to note that the data used in this research are not the raw mood scores. Instead, for the purposes of this analysis, the value produced by taking the change in mood from the previous year to the current year is used. Using a change score ensures that the direction of causality suggested is, indeed, the one being tested. In the form of a quasi-experimental design, we have the mood measure before the year of decisions, then the experimental treatment of Supreme Court decisions, and then the mood measure following those decisions. By subtracting the pre-experimental measure from the post-experimental measure, we can determine the effect of the experimental treatment.

Looking at overall mood as a product of time-lagged decision scores would be a useful avenue for future research to pursue; however, the change score lends itself much better to the study at hand for a variety of reasons.<sup>126</sup> Though change scores are limited to short term analysis, they ensure the appropriate direction of causality, as mentioned above. Further, looking at change scores eliminates the chance that any relationship suggested by the data is only a long-term, possibly spurious, relationship. Isolating annual change in mood is therefore the best, though not the only, choice of dependent variables for this study. Thus, the focus of the analysis will ask the question: does the short-term change in tenor of Supreme Court decisions produce short-term change in mood?

Finally, with the annual decision score as the key independent variable influencing the dependent change in mood, I also control for fluctuations in the economy (inflation and unemployment),<sup>127</sup> and the ideal point<sup>128</sup> and ideology of the Court.<sup>129</sup> Both sets of scores are given individually to each Justice. I took the average of these scores for each year to produce one ideal

---

<sup>124</sup> Stimson 2012

<sup>125</sup> These data are available at [www.unc.edu/~jstimson/Data.html](http://www.unc.edu/~jstimson/Data.html).

<sup>126</sup> Overall public mood is a cumulative, or developing, score, so to look at mood, rather than change in mood, the effects would probably not be seen without a large time lag. This type of analysis is beyond the scope of this research given the data collected. The case pool is 146 cases over 40 years, just under an average of four per year. Each annual time lag would eliminate one data point from a relatively small pool. Future research might additionally look at cases 10 to 20 years earlier so a time lag could be conducted with more confidence and thereby add another dimension to the research.

<sup>127</sup> It is well known that the state of the economy affects public mood (Erikson et. al. 2002); however, I anticipate that its influence, and thus its relevance, will be diminished when looking at change in mood rather than overall mood. Nevertheless, inflation and unemployment variables were included just to be certain.

<sup>128</sup> Martin & Quinn 2002

<sup>129</sup> Segal & Cover 1989

point score and one ideology score for the entire Court in each year.<sup>130</sup> The Martin-Quinn ideal point score offers a dynamic indicator of Court preference, with a new score given for every year an individual Justice serves. The Segal-Cover ideology score, which assigns a single value to each Justice for the duration of their time on the Court, offers a more stable and consistent indicator of Court preferences. Thus, we can control for multiple aspects of possible influence of Justices' influence on public mood that might bypass the Supreme Court decisions.

The expectation for this research is that there is an identifiable influence of Supreme Court decisions on public mood, but I propose the nature of this relationship to be opposite that of the one found when at mood as a function of Congressional policy. Whereas there is a negative relationship between Congressional policy and mood, consistent with the thermostat analogy (as policy becomes warmer/more liberal there is an increased desire from the public for cooler/more conservative policy), I predict a positive relationship between Supreme Court decisions and public mood. The Court is neither a representative nor elected institution, and therefore the public may not attempt to control the thermostat in the same way they do a Congressional body. Rather, it is plausible, and here expected, that the public listens to the Court as authoritative and final, recognizing their lack of control over the unelected body. In this way, I propose that Supreme Court decisions act as a recalibration of the thermostat, with the public meeting the Court closer to its espoused temperature, and then taking any qualms to Congress from this new playing field.<sup>131</sup>

Finally, I predict the level of agreement between Justices to make a difference. When looking only at unanimous decisions, I expect the above stated positive relationship will become stronger. A unanimous Court seems to put forth a certainty and finality that will be felt by the public. By the same token, greater dissent within the Court will signal a lack of cohesion, certainty, and therefore finality that will reduce the malleability of public mood. Thus, I predict the relationship between

---

<sup>130</sup> The idea of using the average score of the three most ideologically moderate Justices in each year was considered but ultimately rejected. Though it is true that the more moderate Justices often act as the deciding votes in salient cases, and therefore the ideal points and ideologies of these Justices have a greater influence on the decision that ultimately reaches the public, this aspect is accounted for in the score given to each case. Instead, these variables are meant to control for the influence that the nature of the Court and its members, outside of its decisions, has on the public. While this might be interesting, it is not the focus of the study and could potentially cloud the results. It seems plausible that when people look at the Court they respond more to a Scalia than a Kennedy; therefore, the average of the entire Court is what the public sees and what they would be influenced by (if at all) when considering decisions. In this way, these variables are supplemental and help to control for knowledge of the Court and its decisions—since I do not see either knowledge or awareness as a precondition for possible influence.

<sup>131</sup> How the public responds to Supreme Court decisions is different than how it responds to the Supreme Court. For the sake of theory, I propose that the public may indeed respond in accord with the thermostat analogy regarding the makeup of the Court, while at the same time demonstrating a positive relationship regarding decisions put forth by the same Court. This is why it is important to ensure we are looking at the decision of the Court absent the influence of individual Justices.

Supreme Court decisions with three or four dissents will be weaker, if it even exists, than the influence of all cases.<sup>132</sup>

## FINDINGS

The initial analysis looks at the influence of all the Supreme Court decisions in the case pool, divided into annual units with a single cumulative case score, on the change in public mood. Using annual decision scores, average ideology of the Court, average ideal point of the Court, unemployment rate, and inflation rate as the independent variables, OLS determines that we are explaining 24 percent of the variance, statistically significant at the 0.1 level. In this regression, annual decision score is statistically significant at the 0.1 level and in the expected direction, with a positive B-value of .319. Average ideology of the Court and average ideal point of the Court were also statistically significant at the 0.1 level. It is important to note that inflation rate came nowhere near approaching statistical significance as a predictor of change in mood,<sup>133</sup> thus the model was repeated without inflation as an independent variable.

In the new model, the independent variables still explain 24 percent of all variance; further, this explanatory power is now statistically significant at the 0.05 level. The key independent variable of annual Supreme Court decision score now has a strong positive relationship with change in mood, and is statistically significant at the 0.05 level.<sup>134</sup> For every one unit increase in the liberalism of the annual cumulative decision score, there is a .323 unit increase in the liberalism of overall public mood, holding all other variables fixed. These data are consistent with the hypothesis.

Brand new, issue specific public mood data is currently being produced by Stimson and his team. Though the project is in its primitive stages, mood data for two issues, abortion and race,<sup>135</sup> is now available dating back to the late 1960's and early 1970's.<sup>136</sup> Issue specific data allows the addition of a deeper dimension to this research. It is a dimension ripe for exploration that will offer more reliable results than attempting to track public opinion data using individual questions or cases as has been done in the past. In order to use these data most effectively a race case decision score and an

<sup>132</sup> As a point of clarification, I stand by the fact that knowledge and awareness of the decision are not necessary preconditions for possible influence. The idea here is that the numerical divide representing the degree of the dissent need not be known in order to be felt through alternate channels.

<sup>133</sup> Lack of significance of both inflation and employment was anticipated due to the use of change scores as the dependent variable; however because inflation received a *p* value of .913, its inclusion may be interfering with the results.

<sup>134</sup> Average ideology of the Court also moves to statistical significance at the .05 level, while average ideal point of the Court remains statistically significant at the 0.1 level.

<sup>135</sup> Average ideology and average ideal point were added to the equation with these issue specific tests in mind, otherwise it would seem the two variables were getting at largely the same thing. The more stable measure of ideology was added for the very stagnant issue of abortion, and the more dynamic measure of ideal point was added for the dynamic issue of race. Additionally, it was assumed that ideology would not be a good indicator for race given the changing ideological position on race during this time period.

<sup>136</sup> These data are produced in the same way as overall mood scores as discussed on page eleven, but for issue specific polling data only. The data are available at [www.unc.edu/~jstimson/Data.html](http://www.unc.edu/~jstimson/Data.html).

abortion case decision score was created for each annual term using the same method as was used for the initial analysis of all cases. Thus, we apply a test that looks at change in race mood as a function of cumulative race case decision scores and change in abortion mood as a function of cumulative abortion case decision scores.

The setup for this model is nearly identical. However, when looking at race mood as a function of race case decision scores, the average ideal point of the Court is used as the key indicator to pick up the influence of preferences of the Justices themselves. Race is a dynamic issue that calls for use of a dynamic value; both the issue of race and public opinion towards racial issues have changed considerably over the course of the time period under study. Furthermore, because of the way the issue of race has evolved, ideology would not be an accurate way to get at preferences regarding the issue. By the same token, abortion is a static issue;<sup>137</sup> neither the issue, nor public opinion towards it, has shown much variation over time. When looking at abortion mood as a function of abortion case decision scores, the average ideology of the Court is used as the key indicator to pick up the preference of the Justices themselves.

The race model does not pass the significance test, with a  $p$  value of .103, meaning we cannot reject the null hypothesis and infer a relationship exists. However, all things considered, and given the relatively limited size of the data, a more elaborate, long-term study might not be dissuaded from hypothesizing similarly in expectation of a more fruitful yield.<sup>138</sup>

The abortion model, on the other hand, is statistically significant at the 0.1 level and explains nearly 41 percent of the variance regarding change in abortion mood. The cumulative decision score for abortion cases is a statistically significant indicator for predicting change in abortion mood at the 0.05 level. Interestingly, though not necessarily surprising, the relationship between abortion decision scores and abortion mood is strong and negative; for every one unit change towards more liberal Supreme Court decisions regarding abortion there is a -1.27 unit change in liberalism of public mood on the issue. In other words, more liberal Supreme Court abortion decisions lead to a public desire for more conservative abortion policy.

Because abortion is systematically an outlying issue,<sup>139</sup> and attitudes towards it simply tend not to change much at all, it is actually quite logical that regarding this particular issue there would be a negative relationship between Court decisions and public mood. People will not simply accept variation on this issue as authoritative and final. Furthermore, it is important to note that this

---

<sup>137</sup> This is a trend verified by ample polling data tracking the issue.

<sup>138</sup> Although we cannot infer a relationship exists with a  $p$  value of .103, if we were to entertain the idea that a slightly larger case pool might reduce the  $p$  value the small amount necessary to infer a relationship exists, then it would be worthy to note that, looking past the F test to the T test, the race case decision score is statistically significant at the 0.05 level. Furthermore, the relationship is strong and positive.

<sup>139</sup> e.g. Caldeira & Gibson 1992

negative relationship concerning a generally unique issue does not cause the breakdown of the overall model; rather, it allows us to theorize a better, more concrete model that looks at public mood as a function of all of the Supreme Court decisions in the original case pool minus abortion cases.

Rerunning the OLS regression this way, we are able to explain 31 percent of the variance, statistically significant at the .05 level. Furthermore, the Supreme Court decision score minus abortion decisions variable is positive, strong, and statistically significant at the 0.01 level. For every one unit increase in liberalism in decision score there is a .512 unit increase in the liberalism of public mood. These data go a long way in providing additional evidence in support of the primary hypothesis of this study.

Next, we look to more rigorously examine this story about Supreme Court influence on public mood and opinion by investigating the unanimity aspect of the decisions. There is a predicted interaction here, meaning Supreme Court decisions do different things to public mood depending on a third variable: degree of unanimity.<sup>140</sup> In this portion of the research, Supreme Court decisions are grouped according to their number of dissents: decisions with zero or one dissents are considered highly unanimous, while decisions with three or four dissents are considered to be highly divided.

Running the model exactly the same way for only those decisions put forth with unanimity, we anticipate a stronger, positive relationship to emerge (see Figure 1). In fact, we find the unanimous decision model to explain about 44 percent of the variance, statistically significant at the 0.05 level. The decision score indicator for explaining change in mood is statistically significant at the 0.05 level with a strong, positive *B* value of .93.<sup>141</sup> This is consistent with the hypothesis and is logically pleasing—the more certain the Court is of their decision, demonstrated through unanimity, the more stock the public is willing to give the decision.

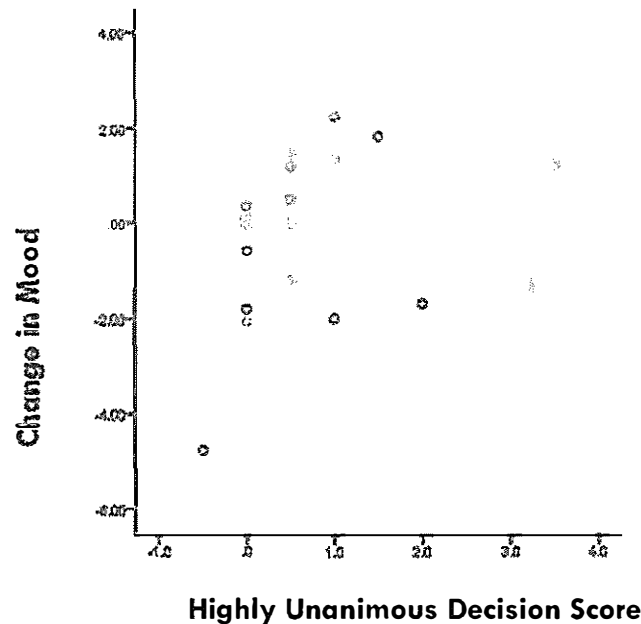
Finally, in order to examine the alternate segment of the hypothesis we conduct one last regression using only highly divided decisions (three or four dissents) to determine the annual decision score, and use this as our key independent variable for predicting change in mood (see Figure 2). As expected, the findings indicate no statistical significance of any kind and do not even lend a hint of directionality of a potential relationship for future study. In other words, Supreme Court decisions completely lacking unanimity offer no explanatory power for determining the short-term change in public mood.

<sup>140</sup> Here, degree of unanimity is taken solely as the number of dissenters. Though the limitation of this operationalization is noted—not all dissents, or dissenters, are created equally.

<sup>141</sup> Only 39 individual case scores qualified for this grouping of cases. This is a clear limitation, but also suggests that the data may actually underestimate the reality of this relationship.



**Figure 1: Mood Change and Highly Unanimous Decision Score (annual)**



**Figure 2: Mood Change and Highly Divided Decision Score (annual)**

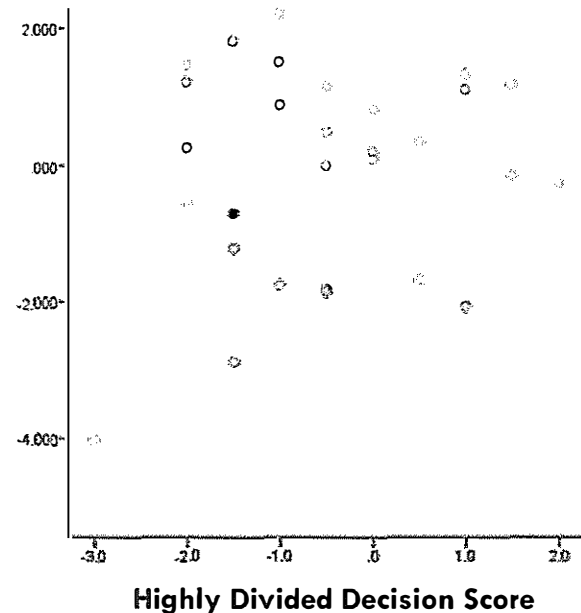


Table 1 presents a summary of all findings. We can conclude that Supreme Court decisions influence public mood and that this relationship is positive. Furthermore, the positive relationship is strengthened by excluding abortion cases and when looking only at highly unanimous decisions (both over all cases, and cases regarding a single issue). Thus, there is an interaction concerning Supreme Court influence on public mood, depending on unanimity of the espoused decision. We cannot conclude a relationship exists between decisions lacking unanimity and public mood

**Table 1:** Change in Mood as a Function of Supreme Court Decisions

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Decision Score	2.028** (.323) .312	2.241** (.514) .400	-2.642** (-1.270) -.648	2.805** (.512) .409	2.592** (.930) .539	1.206 (.257) .218
Unemployment	1.216 (.217) .187	.863 (.150) .156	1.815* (.418) .467	1.193 (.203) .175	.994 (.221) .204	.511 (.100) .093
Ideology	-2.357** (-5.655) -.368		-1.619 (-6.969) -.393	-2.575** (-5.880) -.382	-2.143** (-6.404) -.466	-.152 (-.456) -.027
Ideal Point	-1.785** (-.546) -.282	-1.871* (.496) .340		-1.621 (-.470) -.243	-1.921* (-.562) -.368	-1.598 (-.502) -.296
R Square	.241**	.257	.406*	.309**	.443**	.108

Note:

Each column indicates a separate regression: (1) all cases (2) race cases, (3) abortion cases, (4) abortion cases eliminated, (5) highly unanimous cases, (6) highly divided cases.

\*  $p < 0.1$     \*\*  $p < 0.05$     \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

The t-value is listed first, followed by the B-value in parentheses, and then the Beta Weight.

Average ideology and average ideal point are consistently negative and frequently significant. This can be taken to mean that the public can respond negatively to the Court itself but dissociate that from acceptance and internalization of the decisions.

## CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

This study does not attempt to upend the work suggesting public influence on the Supreme Court. Instead, the research in this study deepens the understanding of the relationship between the Court and the public in a way that begins to remedy the cognitive dilemma that Dahl wrote of so many years ago. The Supreme Court does function as a political player in the American form of government. The positive response hypothesis, originally put forth by Dahl (1957), but more recently rejected by Johnson and Martin (1998) and others, carries weight in American politics beyond an attempt by the Court to ensure legitimacy of decisions. Certainly, this research does not

try to advance the notion of a purely positive response from the public to Court decisions, and even presents abortion as a counter example. The power of the Court to influence the public may be limited (or enhanced) by judicial capital, among a number of other factors; however, multiple forms of testing confirm that the Court can, and does, influence the public on salient issues (i.e. race, abortion) at least some of the time. Thus, taken together with evidence that the public likewise influences Supreme Court decisions, we are left with a picture of a paved and functioning two way street—a dialog between groups that were never intended to speak.

At this point, it is worth reemphasizing the magnitude of the questions asked and answered in this study. The Supreme Court is a small unelected branch of the great American democracy, and yet the evidence holds from multiple angles that the American people are swayed and influenced by it in ways not mirrored by the elected branches. Again, in a study of salient issues and cases about which most people are said to have fixed opinions based on experience or proximity, we find a significant positive relationship between Supreme Court decisions and subsequent public mood in the short-term. The Supreme Court plays a role in changing (not merely forming) the minds and mood of at least some portion of the public.

Judicial activism is a term thrown around by politicians and the public alike. Though no one definition necessarily encompasses the term better than another, it is generally thought to refer to the amount of deference the Court gives to Congressional policy. This study, completely uninterested in supporting or renouncing the accusations of judicial activism that seem wildly popular in current political culture, may function to refine the working definition of judicial activism as it stands. Perhaps activism should not be viewed in terms of deference granted to Congress by the Court, but rather in terms of deference granted to the Court by the public. Indeed, this would make the Court “active” in all senses of the word. Using judicial capital to create an attitude of deference from the American public results in what appears to be popular internalization and acceptance of Supreme Court decisions, for better or worse.<sup>142</sup>

Certainly, the conclusions drawn must be viewed in light of the data used in the study: three salient issue domains and 40 years of Supreme Court decisions for a total of 146 salient decisions delivered to the American people. Future research might look to extend this study by both deepening and broadening the case pool. The time period limitation was discussed in an earlier portion of this paper, but to reiterate, a larger time period would allow for a more confident use of a time lag, which would add a long-term dimension to this short-term study. Furthermore, opening up

---

<sup>142</sup> Whether or not the Supreme Court puts forth apolitical, or anti-agenda decisions is beyond the scope of this paper although in this day of extreme polarization it is hard to imagine this might be so.

the case pool to include additional issue domains would go a long way in solidifying the evidence put forth in this analysis<sup>143</sup>.

Nevertheless, certain limitations will always surround the study of the Supreme Court and public opinion. Most notably, there is no systematic way to control for the social forces that effect both Supreme Court decisions and public mood. This problem is greatly minimized, if not eliminated completely, by the use of change in mood scores rather than raw mood scores, and the use of safety-net economic indicators. However, any attempt to expand this study to a long-term analysis will have to grapple with the social forces that undeniably come with the terrain.

Finally, further investigation into the notion and workings of judicial capital logically follows the study at hand. Theoretically, we can explain the evidence of the Court's influence on the public by way of judicial capital: the Court uses its capital to acquire legitimacy of its decisions from the public, which subsequently turns into internal acceptance by the public. A scientific and psychological understanding of how the transfer from external acceptance (legitimacy) to internal acceptance (opinion) takes place would add a fluid and confident wholesomeness to the study of the Court-public relationship. As it stands, the evidence produced in this research already points to a well-developed, dynamic relationship between the Supreme Court and public opinion. It appears the "least dangerous branch" is something of a dark horse in the conversation that is the American Democracy.

---

<sup>143</sup> Public mood is a cumulative index that considers public opinion on many issues (e.g., gun control, healthcare, education); therefore, a model that included Supreme Court decisions from as many of those issues as possible would be best for this kind of study.

## REFERENCES

- Baas, Larry R. and Dan Thomas. 1984. "The Supreme Court and Policy Legitimation: Experimental Tests." *American Politics Quarterly* 12 (3): 335-360.
- Blake, J. 1977. "The Supreme Court's Abortion Decisions and Public Opinion in the United States." *Population and Development Review* 3 (1): 45-62.
- Caldeira, Gregory A. and James L. Gibson. 1992. "The Etiology of Public Support for the Supreme Court." *American Journal of Political Science*, 36 (3): 635-664.
- Casillas, Christopher J., Peter K. Enns, and Patrick C. Wohlfarth. 2011. How Public Opinion Constrains the U.S. Supreme Court. *American Journal of Political Science*, 55 (1): 74-88.
- Dahl, Robert A. 1957. "Decision-Making in a Democracy: The Supreme Court as a National Policy-Maker." *Public Law* 6: 279-295.
- Deutsch, Karl W. 1963. *The Nerves of Government: Models of Political Communication and Control*. London, UK: Free Press of Glencoe.
- Durr, Robert H., Andrew D. Martin, and Christina Wolbrecht. 2000. "Ideological Divergence and Public Support for the Supreme Court." *American Journal of Political Science* 44 (4): 768-776.
- Easton, David. 1953. *The Political System: An Inquiry into the State of Political Science*. New York, NY: Knopf.
- Epstein, Lee, and Jeffery A. Segal. 2000. "Measuring Issue Salience." *American Journal of Political Science* 44 (1): 66-83.
- Erikson, Robert S., Michael B. Mackuen, and James A. Stimson. 2002. *The Macro Polity*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Franklin, Charles H. and Liane C. Kosaki. 1989. "Republican Schoolmaster: The U.S. Supreme Court, Public Opinion, and Abortion." *American Political Science Review* 83 (3): 751-771.
- Hetherington, Marc J. and Joseph L. Smith. 2007. "Issue Preferences and Evaluations of the U.S. Supreme Court." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 71 (1): 40-66.
- Jacobs, Lawrence R. and Robert Y. Shapiro. 2002. "Politics and Policy Making in the Real World: Crafted Talk and the Loss of Democratic Responsiveness." In *Navigating Public Opinion: Polls, Policy, and the Future of American Democracy*, eds. Jeff Manza, Fay L. Cook, and Benjamin Page. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Jaros, Dean and Robert Roper. 1980. "The U.S. Supreme Court Myth: Diffuse Support, Specific Support, and Legitimacy." *American Politics Quarterly* 8 (1): 85-105.
- Johnson, Timothy R. and Andrew D. Martin. 1998. "The Public's Conditional Response to Supreme Court Decisions." *American Political Science Review*, 92 (2): 299-309.
- Marshall, Thomas R. 1987. "The Supreme Court as an Opinion Leader: Court Decisions and the Mass Public." *American Politics Quarterly*, 15 (1): 147-168.

- Martin, Andrew D. and Kevin M. Quinn. 2002. "Dynamic Ideal Point Estimation via Markov Chain Monte Carlo for the U.S. Supreme Court, 1953-1999." *Political Analysis* 10, 134-153.
- Mayhew, David R. 1991. *Divided We Govern: Party Control, Lawmaking and Investigations*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- McGuire, Kevin T. and James A. Stimson. 2004. "The Least Dangerous Branch Revisited: New Evidence on Supreme Court Responsiveness to Public Preferences." *Journal of Politics* 66 (4): 1018-1035.
- Mishler, William and Reginald S. Sheehan. 1993. "The Supreme Court as a Countermajoritarian Institution?: The Impact of Public Opinion on Supreme Court Decisions." *American Political Science Review* 87 (1): 87-101.
- Mondak, Jeffery J. 1992. "Institutional Legitimacy, Policy Legitimacy, and the Supreme Court." *American Politics Quarterly* 20 (4): 457-477.
- Murphy, Walter F. and Joseph Tannenhaus. 1968. "Public Opinion and Supreme Court: The Goldwater Campaign." *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 32 (1): 31-50.
- Norpoth, Helmut, Jeffery A. Segal, William Mishler, and Reginald S. Sheehan. 1994. "Popular Influence on Supreme Court Decisions." *American Political Science Review* 88 (3): 711-724.
- Petrick, Michael J. 1968. "The Supreme Court and Authority Acceptance." *Political Research Quarterly*, 21 (1): 5-19.
- Segal, Jeffery A. and Alfred D. Cover. 1989. "Ideological Values and the Votes of U.S. Supreme Court Justices." *American Political Science Review* 83(2): 667-565.
- Stimson, James A. 2012. "On the Meaning and Measurement of Mood." *Daedalus* 141 (4): 23-34.
- Srimson, James A., Michael B. Mackuen, and Robert S. Erikson. 1995. "Dynamic representation." *American Political Science Review* 89(3): 534-565.
- Stimson, James A. 2004. *Tides of Consent: How Public Opinion Shapes American Politics*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Stimson, James A. 1991. *Public Opinion in America: Moods, Cycles, and Swings*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Wlezien, Christopher. 1995. "The Public as Thermostat: Dynamics of Preferences for Spending." *American Journal of Political Science* 39 (4): 981-1000.
- Zaller, John. 1992. *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

## THE MYTH OF THE CLASH OF CIVILIZATIONS: CONFUCIAN VALUES AND DEMOCRATIC SUPPORT

Xinlin Xu

**Abstract:** *Literature on political culture claims Confucianism is incompatible with modern liberal democratic values. However, little empirical evidence has been presented to prove the validity of this statement. This paper quantitatively studies the relationship between Confucian values and democratic support in East Asian society and finds no negative correlation between the two.*

### INTRODUCTION

In *Clash of Civilizations*, Samuel Huntington predicts that the post-Cold War world conflict would be a clash between western liberal democratic ideals and the eastern traditions of Confucianism and Islam. It has been taken for granted by many that Confucianism is a hindrance to democratic consolidation, and its emphasis on maintaining a hierarchical society is claimed to promote social inequality. Li (2012) argues that the role-based society that Confucianism endorses discourages individualism and represses individual spontaneity. Confucianism requires that each person behave in accordance with his or her role in society. All these Confucian ideas are found to contradict modern democratic ideologies. This leads to a question: should countries that have Confucian traditions alter their historical roots for the sake of democratization and democratic consolidation? To answer this question, one must first determine the compatibility of Confucianism and modern democratic values. Though scholars have researched this topic extensively through analysis of Confucian texts, the lack of empirical studies makes it difficult to draw definitive conclusions.

This paper examines how Confucianism directly and indirectly influences support for democracy at the individual level and finds no negative correlation between the two, as Huntington had predicted. Confucianism is deconstructed into Elitism, Familism, Preference for Harmony, and Respect for Authority. Their corresponding effects on individuals' support for democracy are explored. This research does not merely examine the Confucian texts alone, but rather focuses on the Confucian principles that are practiced by the society. It tries to provide a new interpretation of the role Confucianism plays in the development of political culture in modern and post-modern East Asian society.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The prevailing assumption, articulated by Huntington in his *Clash of the Civilizations*, is that Confucian thought is inherently anti-democratic. He believes that maintaining order and respecting hierarchy constitute the central tenets of Confucianism, and that these ideas repress the development of individualism. Other researchers, including Chenyang Li, question the compatibility of democracy and Confucianism as well. Li argues that Confucianism embraces both numerical and proportional

equality. Numerical equality indicates that all human beings are endowed with the same capacity for moral cultivation.<sup>144</sup> Moral equality does not imply that all people have the same status; rather, it dictates that people with the same roles, such as fathers and husbands, are given the same kind of responsibilities and entitlements. Li calls such equality “role based numerical equality.”<sup>145</sup>

Proportional equality, or “equality relative to people’s due,” is another fundamental principle in Confucianism. According to this notion, some form of division of labor based on social stratification is necessary. Confucianism promotes the concept of *xian*, which means virtuous and talented. A person with such qualities must be well educated and equipped with superb moral achievement, consequently deserving high status in society.<sup>146</sup> Though advocating that everyone should have equal opportunities to be educated, Confucianism recognizes that only *xian* people could bear the responsibility of managing a state. Li also argues that with Confucian proportional equality comes political inequalities that contradict the fundamental values underlying modern democracy.<sup>147</sup> Based on this analysis, political Confucianism is theoretically incompatible with modern notions of political equality.

Other scholars have a more positive attitude towards the compatibility between Confucianism and democratic ideals. Fukuyama argues that Confucianism is relatively tolerant and has potential egalitarian implications, in that everyone is entitled to receive equal opportunity to cultivate himself or herself into a virtuous being.<sup>148</sup> Chen also argues that Confucian values are compatible with modern liberal democracy. She claims the Confucian practices of “personal cultivation...and the moral responsibility of the holders of power” can prevent the tendency of over-materialization of modern society.<sup>149</sup> In addition, He summarizes four ideal-type models of the relationship between Confucianism and democracy: conflict, compatible, hybrid, and critical.<sup>150</sup> He notes in the conflict model that Confucianism lacks the concept of negative liberty, which is the freedom to act free of exterior interferences. But he also argues that the conflict model overstates the negative role of Confucianism and overlooks the possibility of compatibility, consequently downplaying the likelihood of a Confucian contribution to democratization. However, he admits that empirically, the conflict model was much more accurate than the compatibility model in the early stages of democratization in East Asia.<sup>151</sup>

---

<sup>144</sup> Li 2012, 297

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 299

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 306

<sup>147</sup> Li 2012, 308

<sup>148</sup> Fukuyama 1995, 25

<sup>149</sup> Chen 2007, 211

<sup>150</sup> He 2010, 19

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 30



Some scholars have conducted empirical research on Confucianism as well as on political culture in East Asian countries. In *Democratization in Confucian East Asia*, Zhengxu Wang (2007) argues that citizens with stronger self-expression values are more likely to be critical citizens. He shows that economic development and social modernization in Confucian Asia results in stronger self-expression values which in turn give rise to democratic citizenship in these societies. Wang does not examine how self-expression tendencies are correlated with Confucianism, but he does raise the important concept of self-expression values, which have played a non-negligible role in shaping civic culture in Confucian societies. Another empirical study done by Qi (2008) finds that Confucian values are negatively correlated with democratic support. However, this study did not unravel the mechanism through which such negative effects took place. Moreover, this study did not deconstruct Confucianism and investigate which doctrine or concept specifically undermined democratic support.

At this point, no research has been done to depict the exact mechanism through which Confucian thought affects support for democracy at the individual level. This study aims to empirically test this correlation as well as the mechanism through which Confucianism can indirectly affect individuals' support for democracy.

#### RESEARCH DESIGN

This research employs a large-N statistical model using data from the Asian Barometer (AB) Wave 2 conducted between 2004 and 2008. The analysis presented in this paper is from a set of structural equation models (SEM) employing Maximum Likelihood. Variables are first set up in an assumed causal sequence, with each variable being regressed on all variables that precede it in the chain. A path model enables the test of direct correlations between a particular Confucian value and individuals' support for democracy. It examines correlations suggested by existing political culture theories--such as the social capital theory--that can indirectly affect democratic support. This model requires the deconstruction of Confucianism into measurable variables. Confucianism covers a broad range of topics, such as humanity, morality, governance, and etiquette. This study is based on the theoretical framework raised by Weiming Tu, which divides the ideology into two categories: political Confucianism and Confucian personal ethics.

In order to measure Confucianism, one needs first to define every variable in the model. Elitism is one of the most prominent doctrines in Confucianism. Bell describes elitism as the "rule of the wise;" it exemplifies the ideal that "the best and the brightest" should exert more influence in order to build a good society.<sup>152</sup> Confucius claims: "In government, the secret is Integrity. Use it, and you'll be like the polestar: always dwelling in its proper place the other stars turning reverently about

---

<sup>152</sup> Bell 2006, 157

it.”<sup>153</sup> This statement shows that political Confucianism values the virtues of a ruler. The ruler shall establish himself as a moral exemplar and shall be well educated. Moreover, by likening an ideal ruler to a “polestar,” Confucius affirms his belief in the centrality of the role rulers perform in state management.

Confucianism is also governed by a fundamental principle of harmony. In the political realm, Confucianism means a well-rounded sociopolitical order governed by *li*, which involves “the behavior of persons related to each other in terms of role, status, rank, and position within a structured society.”<sup>154</sup> Such a strong tendency towards conformity is characterized as one form of Preference for Harmony. Another aspect that exemplifies this characteristic is Confucian personal ethics, which advocates litigation avoidance in solving private disputes. As recorded in *The Analects*: “I can hear a court case as well as anyone. But we need to make a world where there’s no reason for a court case.”<sup>155</sup> Confucianism claims that if everyone in society has courtesy and treats others in a benevolent and altruistic manner, then harmony can be maintained and no dispute will take place.

The Confucian personal ethic states that it is necessary to obey family elders, whose decisions should be followed and respected. It also stresses that one’s personal behavior must honor the ancestors. These claims are conceptualized as *Familism* in this study. Confucian personal ethic encourages a harmonious and cooperative society by stipulating strict moral codes regarding respect that must be performed among people with different hierarchical status. Moreover, two notions of self are clearly differentiated in the Confucian tradition: the small self and the great self. The small self is the limited self. It operates as a force of inertia that resists further development. The great self, on the other hand, goes beyond self-centeredness. It not only relates to the family, the society, the state, and beyond to the world at large, but also establishes these relationships as “part of its own sensitivity and concern.”<sup>156</sup> In other words, familism embodies a certain degree of self-sacrifice when conflicts rise between personal and family interests.

The Confucian ideology also promotes a role-based society, where everyone has his or her own entitlements and responsibilities, according to which each individual acquires his or her due equality. Confucius specifies five relationships: rulers and subjects, fathers and sons, husbands and wives, elder and younger brothers, and finally friends and friends. He maintains that if individuals observe these relationships properly, the society will stabilize itself. This observation of social hierarchy is conceptualized as Respect for Authority.

When studying the correlation between political culture and democracy, it is worth examining the social capital theory, which integrates sociology and economics to study civic tradition as well as

---

<sup>153</sup> Confucius 1998, 11

<sup>154</sup> Schwartz 1985, 67

<sup>155</sup> Confucius and Hinton 1998, 132

<sup>156</sup> Tu

political dynamics. In other words, besides direct correlations, Confucian values may affect democratic support at the individual level through other mechanisms suggested by literature on political culture. Social capital theorists have shown that social trust and democratic consolidation are positively correlated.<sup>157</sup> Inglehart argues that social trust is essential for people to view political opponents as a loyal opposition and is strongly correlated with stable democracy.<sup>158</sup> Coleman (1988) contends that a system of mutual trust is an important form of social capital through which future obligations and expectations may be based. Regarding social trust, Putnam draws a distinction between “thick trust,” which is “embedded in personal relations,” and “thin trust,” which extends to other people within the community. Though this dichotomy has been criticized for failing to characterize the complexity of social trust in the real world, it is especially appropriate for studies East Asian countries. Qi argues that Confucian personal ethics encourage people to “pursue interests and seek social exchanges” within “in-groups”<sup>159</sup> where the “thick trust” applies. She also finds that, in countries influenced by Confucianism, such particular trust is negatively correlated with general interpersonal trust in society.<sup>160</sup> Therefore, this study will also incorporate General Trust as an intervening variable to test whether Confucian values indirectly influence democratic support by altering social capital.

Another concept raised by Inglehart is the postmaterialist value, which embodies tolerance, quality of life, self-expression, intellectual and aesthetic needs, etc.<sup>161</sup> He finds that postmaterialist values contribute to people’s declining confidence in hierarchical institutions, which in turn strengthen their support for democracy.<sup>162</sup> This theory has been confirmed in Wang’s study on democratization in Confucian East Asian countries. Based on this study, I incorporated Self-Expression values as another intervening variable. By influencing this variable, Confucian values could possibly have an indirect impact on individuals’ support for democracy. In measuring self-expression values, I extracted the elements comparatively relevant to democratic support. Individuals’ interest in and willingness to participate in politics is used as an indicator of the level of self-expression values; individuals’ potential for civil disobedience is another. John Rawls defines civil disobedience as “politically-motivated, public, non-violent and conscientious breach of law undertaken with the aim of bringing about a change in laws or government policies.”<sup>163</sup> Civil disobedience is a call to conscience when no other means of self-expression is found adequate or

---

<sup>157</sup> Inglehart 1997; Putnam 1993 and 2000; Fukuyama 1995; Newton 2001

<sup>158</sup> Inglehart 1997, 172-173

<sup>159</sup> Qi 2008, 9

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 17-19

<sup>161</sup> Inglehart 1997, 109-130

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 299

<sup>163</sup> Rawls, 1971

satisfactory. Therefore, the level of one's potential for civil disobedience reflects one's aspiration for liberty and inclination to act in self-defense through public expression.

Democracy is a concept that resists attempts to objectively define. Schmitter and Karl recapitulate nine "procedural minimum" conditions for democracy,<sup>164</sup> while Whitehead argues that all definitions of democracy are contextually based.<sup>165</sup> However, regardless of the definitions of democracy, there is a consensus on the liberal political ideal that laid the foundation of democracy. The ideal of liberty claims that all men are born equal, and as a result, they all have natural rights to life, to property, and to civil freedoms of association. All individuals are equally entitled to exercise the rights listed above, irrespective of their sex, race, religion, or political views. As implied by liberal democratic ideals, political equality is a prerequisite for modern democracy. Though unequal distribution of political resources poses the question of whether political equality can be realized or not, the goal of political equality still has its intrinsic merits.<sup>166</sup> On the surface, the Confucian idea of proportional equality, which implies that virtuous people should run the government, conflicts with the modern ideal of political equality. Proportional equality resembles Dahl's concept of guardianship, which states that only qualified elites can govern for the common good.<sup>167</sup> Dahl argues that guardians who make moral judgments based on the "science of ruling" and the knowledge of the general good misunderstand the relationship between private and collective interests. Individuals who give consent to guardianship based on economic performance are regarded as having lower levels of democratic support.

I synthesized the literature on Confucianism and incorporated social capital and post-materialist theory to hypothesize a path model that depicts the mechanism by which Confucianism generates impact on democratic support at the individual level. The final model of the correlation between Confucian values and support for democracy in East Asia will be obtained by dropping all the paths that show insignificant correlations. The selection of countries covers China, South Korea, Japan, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. The reason I chose these cases is because my study is confined to East Asian countries. All these countries or regions either have had Confucianism as their official religion, such as South Korea and Japan, or are occupied by population that is culturally rooted in Confucianism, such as Hong Kong and Taiwan.<sup>168</sup>

The hypotheses I proposed are outlined in Table 1 below. Elitism, Respect for Authority, Familism, and Preference for Harmony are exogenous variables, and the covariances between the variables are represented by two-ended arrows. Causal relations between variables are represented by

<sup>164</sup> Schmitter and Karl, 1991, 81-82

<sup>165</sup> Whitehead 2002, 26

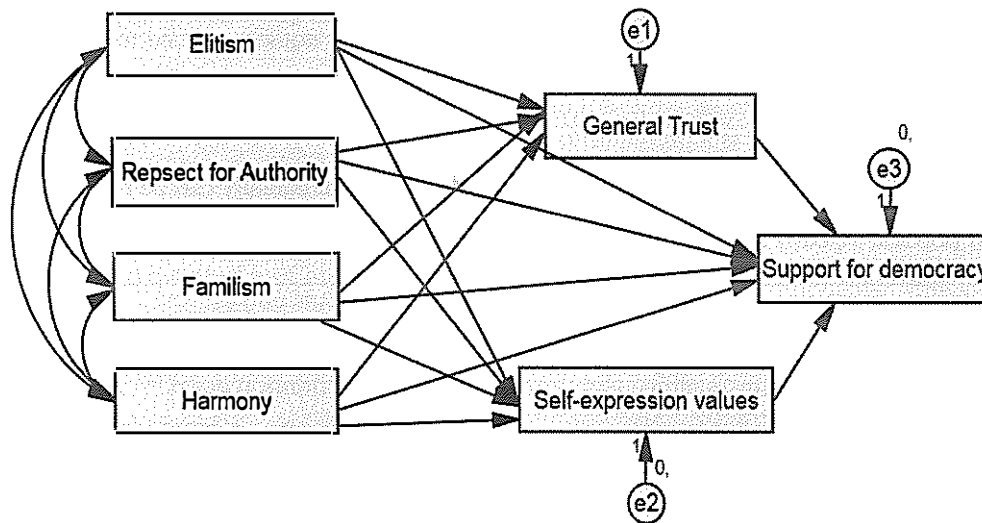
<sup>166</sup> Dahl 2006, 36 and 84

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 53

<sup>168</sup> Lew, Wang and Choi, 2001; Nosco, 1997

unidirectional arrows. The unexplained effects are represented by error 1, 2 and 3. In this model, direct correlations between every single Confucian value and support for democracy are assumed. Further, direct correlations between Confucian values and General Trust as well as Self-Expression Values are also represented. The total effect that Confucianism has on democratic support is thus calculated by adding up the direct and indirect effects.

**Figure 1:** Hypotheses



#### MEASUREMENT AND OPERATIONALIZATION

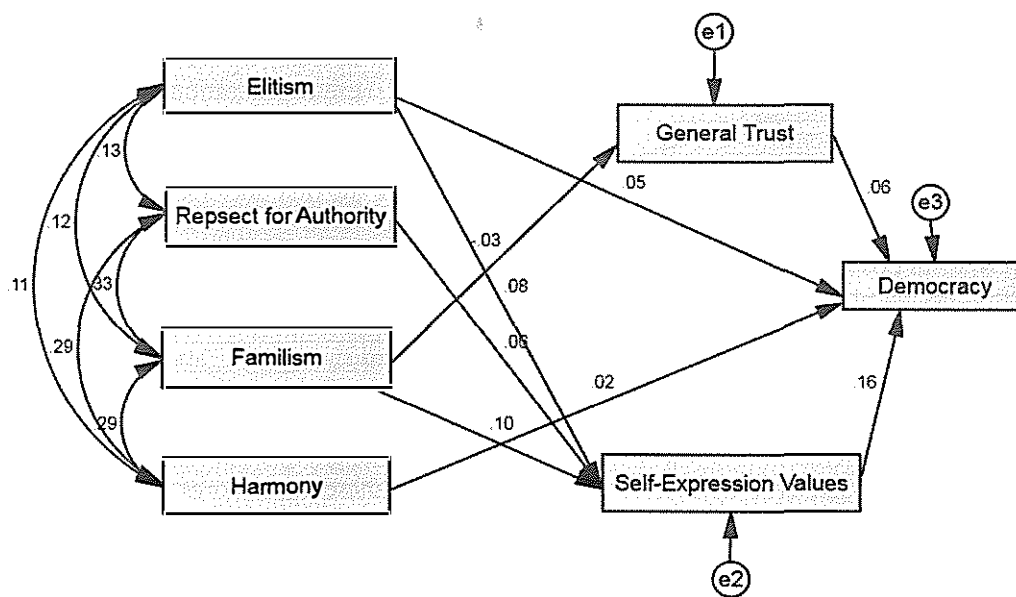
**Table 1:** Measurement of Variables

Variable	Measurement	Description
Elitism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“We should get rid of parliament and elections and have a strong leader decide things.”</li> <li>“People with little or no education should have as much say in politics as highly-educated people.”</li> </ul>	For both statements, respondents choosing “strongly disagree/disapprove” were coded as 1, “disagree/disapprove” as 2, “agree/approve” as 3, and “strongly agree/approve” as 4. The sum score stands for the level of elitism. The higher the score, the higher the level of elitism.
Respect for Authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“Being a student, one should not question the authority of their teacher.”</li> <li>“Government leaders are like the head of a family; we should all follow their decisions.”</li> </ul>	Same as above. The higher the score, the higher the level of respect for authority.
Familism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“For the sake of the family, the individual should put his personal interests second.”</li> <li>“Even if parents' demands are unreasonable, children still should do what they ask.”</li> </ul>	Same as above.

Preference for Harmony	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “When one has a conflict with a neighbor, the best way to deal with it is to accommodate the other person.”</li> <li>• “If people have too many different ways of thinking, society will be chaotic.”</li> </ul>	Same as above.
Out-group trust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Generally speaking, would you say most people can be trusted or that you must be very careful in dealing with people?”</li> <li>• “How much trust do you have in other people you interact with?”</li> </ul>	For the first question, “you must be very careful in dealing with people” was coded as 1, “most people can be trusted” as 2. For the second question, “none at all” was coded as 1, “not very much trust” as 2, “quite a lot trust” as 3, and “a great deal of trust” as 4. The sum score of these two questions indicates the level of out-group trust.
Self-Expression Values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “How interested would you say you are in politics?”</li> <li>• “If possible, I don't want to get involved in political matters.”</li> <li>• “Citizens should always obey laws and regulations, even if they disagree with them.”</li> </ul>	For the first question, “not at all interested” was coded as 1, “not very interested” as 2, “somewhat interested” as 3, and “very interested” as 4. For the second and third statements, “strongly agree” was coded as 1, “somewhat agree” as 2, “somewhat disagree” as 3, and “strongly disagree” as 4. The sum of these three scores stands for the level of self-expression values.
Support for democracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “If you had to choose between democracy and economic development, which would you say is more important?”</li> <li>• “Which of the following statements comes closest to your own opinion?”</li> </ul>	For the first question, “economic development is definitely more important” was coded as 1, “somewhat more important” as 2, “equally important” as 3, “democracy is somewhat more important” as 4, and “democracy is definitely more important” as 5. For the second question, “it does not matter whether we have a democracy or not” was coded as 1, “under some circumstances, an authoritarian government can be preferable” as 2, and “democracy is always preferable” as 3. The sum score of these two questions indicates level of support for democracy.

A reduced model, which shows the correlations between variables, was produced by dropping all the insignificant paths in the original one. The path coefficients are shown above each arrow. The RMSEA is .017, which is smaller than the .05 required for a good model. Therefore, the goodness of fit measure supports the adequacy of this model. The Chi-square is not used here to test the adequacy of this model. First, the finding of significance in the likelihood ratio test of a path model can occur even with very small differences of the model-implied and observed covariance metrics, especially given the large-N of the samples in this study, which is 9,813. Moreover, since Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) tends to inflate Chi-square, RMSEA, an indicator less influenced by sample size is used to measure the goodness of fit of this model.

**Figure 2: Reduced Model**



Note: Comparative fit index = 0.986; root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.017; 99 percent confidence interval for RMSEA = 0.011-0.024; N=9813, Chi-square=28,  $p < 0.0001$ .

**Table 2: Total Effects of Confucian Values on Democratic Attitudes**

	Elitism	Authority	Familism	Self-Expression	Harmony	Trust
Self-Expression	.079	.056	.095	.000	.000	.000
Trust	.000	.000	-.029	.000	.000	.000
Democracy	.065	.009	.014	.162	.020	.061

In the model, no direct correlation is found between Respect for Authority, Familism and Support for Democracy. Familism is found to be negatively correlated with General Trust, which confirms Qi's finding that interpersonal trust in East Asian countries tends to undermine general social trust. This model also confirms the social capital theory, which states that social trust promotes

democratic governance. The model does not find any direct negative correlation between the four sets of Confucian values and Self-Expression Values. On the contrary, Elitism, Familism and Respect for Authority are found to contribute to Self-Expression Values. In this model, Preference for Harmony neither contributes to nor undermines General Trust or Self-Expression Values, but exhibits a positive correlation with Support for Democracy. The total effects are calculated by adding the direct effects, association of one variable with another free from other intervening paths, and indirect effects, association of one variable with another mediated through other variables in the model. As shown in Table 2, the net effects the four values have on democratic support are all positive according to this model, with Self-Expression Values affecting Support for Democracy most significantly.

Familism undermines Support for Democracy by reducing out-group trust, but the net effect of Familism on Support for Democracy is nonetheless positive. Furthermore, none of the four sets of Confucian values are found, directly or indirectly, to undermine democratic support at the individual level.

### CONCLUSIONS

No negative correlation between Confucian values and democratic support is found in this study. On the contrary, a positive correlation, negligible as it is, is presented in the model. Therefore, this study does not support the claim made in the *Clash of Civilizations* stating that a major conflict exists between Confucian values and democracy. With the small path coefficients, this study neither supports the claim that Confucian values could positively contribute to individuals' democratic support. However, this study refutes cultural arguments against Confucianism regarding democratization or democratic consolidation.

The constitutional liberties in modern democratic countries, such as freedom of speech and religion, belong to negative liberty, which designates rights that can be exercised free from interference. However, the correlativity of rights and duties dictates that rights and duties are just two sides of a same concept. Confucianism rarely stipulates positive duties people have towards one another; rather, it mostly enumerates negative duties, which are actions people shall refrain from doing for the benefit of others. To say A has a duty not to act in a certain way towards B is the same as saying that B has a right over A's not acting in that way. *The Analects* says, "Never impose on others what you would not choose for yourself."<sup>169</sup> If each individual in the society attaches significant importance to self-autonomy, then everyone else has a duty not to interfere with this preference as long as it does not do harm to others. Culture is not stagnant, but rather constantly

---

<sup>169</sup> Confucius 1998, 176



evolving and opening to new interpretation. Confucianism, it appears, is flexible enough to accommodate new perspectives.

One cannot simply conclude a particular culture is pro-authoritarian or will foster the growth of democratic ideas. Empirically, no evidence is found that Confucianism is incompatible with democratic support. Future research should focus on whether institutions established based on Confucian values or practices inherited from Confucian traditions have played a role in hindering democratization or democratic consolidation.

## REFERENCES

- Bell, Daniel A. 2006. *Beyond Liberal Democracy: Political Thinking for an East Asian Context*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Chen, Albert H. Y. 2007. "Is Confucianism Compatible with Liberal Constitutional Democracy?" *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 32 (June): 195-216.
- Coleman, James A. 1988. "Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital." *The American Journal of Sociology* 94 (January): S95-S120.
- Confucius. 1998. *The Analects/Confucius; translated by David Hinton*. Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint.
- Dahl, Robert A. 2006. *On Political Equality*. New Haven : Yale University Press.
- Fukuyama, Francis. 1995. "Confucianism and Democracy." *Journal of Democracy* 6 (April): 20-33.
- Fukuyama, Francis. 1995. *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity*. New York, NY: The Free Press.
- He, Baogang. 2010. "Four Models of the Relationship between Confucianism and Democracy." *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 37 (February): 18-33.
- Huntington, Samuel P. 1991. "Democracy's Third Wave." *Journal of Democracy* 2 (Spring): 12-34.
- Inglehart, Ronald. 1997. *Modernization and Postmodernization: Cultural, Economic, and Political Change in 43 Societies*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Jiang, Tao. 2006. "Intimate Authority: The Rule of Ritual in Classical Confucian Political Discourse." In *Confucian Culture of Authority*. eds. Peter D. Hershock and Roger T. Ames. New York: State University of New York Press, 21-48.
- Lew, Seok-Choon., Woo-Young Choi, and Hye Suk Wang. (2011). "Confucian Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism in Korea: The Significance of Filial Piety." *Journal of East Asian Studies* 11 (May): 171-196.
- Li, Chenyang. 2012. "Equality and Inequality in Confucianism." *Dao* 11 (July): 295-313.
- Nosco, Peter. 1997. "Confucianism and nativism in Tokugawa Japan." In *Meeting of minds*, eds. Irene Bloom and Joshua A. Fogel. New York: Columbia University Press, 278-296.
- Putnam, Robert D. 1993. *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Putnam, Robert D. 2000. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.
- Qi, Lingling. 2008. "A Tale of Two Trusts: Confucianism, Social Trust and Democratic Support in East Asian Countries." Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago.
- Schmitter, Phillippe C. and Terry L. Karl. 1991. "Why Democracy is ...and is Not." *Journal of Democracy* 3 (Summer): 75-88.

Schwartz, Benjamin. 1985. *The World of Thought in Ancient China*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Tu, Wei-ming. "Core Values in Confucian Thought."

[http://www.trinity.edu/rnadeau/Asian%20Religions/Lecture%20Notes%201330-](http://www.trinity.edu/rnadeau/Asian%20Religions/Lecture%20Notes%201330-3/Chinese%20Religions/Tu%20Wei-ming%20(Core%20Values).htm)

[3/Chinese%20Religions/Tu%20Wei-ming%20\(Core%20Values\).htm](http://www.trinity.edu/rnadeau/Asian%20Religions/Lecture%20Notes%201330-3/Chinese%20Religions/Tu%20Wei-ming%20(Core%20Values).htm) (October 22, 2013).

Wang, Zhengxu. 2007. *Democratization in Confucian East Asia: Citizen Politics in China, Japan, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, and Vietnam*. New York: Cambria Press.

Whitehead, Laurence. 2002. *Democratization: Theory and Experience*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

## APPENDICES

## Regression Weights

		Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
Trust	<--- Familism	-.011	.004	-2.584	.010
Self-Expression	<--- Familism	.093	.012	7.481	***
Self-Expression	<--- Authority	.073	.017	4.287	***
Self-Expression	<--- Elitism	.229	.038	6.018	***
Democracy	<--- Trust	.113	.023	4.950	***
Democracy	<--- Self-Expression	.117	.010	12.223	***
Democracy	<--- Harmony	.022	.013	1.669	.095
Democracy	<--- Elitism	.109	.025	4.323	***

\*\*\*p&lt;0.0001

## Standardized Regression Weights

	Estimate
Trust <--- Familism	-.029
Self-Expression <--- Familism	.095
Self-Expression <--- Authority	.056
Self-Expression <--- Elitism	.079
Democracy <--- Trust	.061
Democracy <--- Self-Expression	.162
Democracy <--- Harmony	.020
Democracy <--- Elitism	.052

## Covariances

	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
Authority <--> Elitism	.179	.017	10.671	***
Familism <--> Authority	1.319	.048	27.563	***
Familism <--> Elitism	.210	.021	10.166	***
Harmony <--> Authority	.746	.031	24.172	***
Harmony <--> Familism	.984	.038	26.016	***
Harmony <--> Elitism	.126	.013	9.497	***

## Squared Multiple Correlations

	Estimate
Self-Expression	.025
Trust	.001
Democracy	.035

## NO SMOKING: POLICY DIFFUSION AND ITS PREVAILING FACTORS

Brad Gresik

***Abstract:** Over the past few years, many states have taken steps to ban smoking in public areas. The process of specific policies spreading across state lines is called policy diffusion. Statewide anti-indoor smoking bans are utilized to demonstrate what the most prevailing factors in policy diffusion are. A two-step approach to analysis is implemented, first looking only at simple policy adoption among the 50 states, and secondly the rate at which the policy expands across the country. A strong presence of local ordinances, nearby neighbors with statewide bans in effect, and a history of smoking preemption laws are found to be the most statistically significant of a list of variables. Because diffusion of this policy is entering its final stages, this research can be used as a reference for designing and implementing policy diffusion studies in the future.*

### INTRODUCTION

Good ideas simply do not materialize as law in every state. Instead, these ideas slowly spread from state to state based on a variety of internal and external factors, a process called policy diffusion.<sup>170</sup> The phenomenon of progressive ideas spreading due to specific circumstances has long been debated by scholars, generally requiring a two-fold examination to understand a policy's diffusion. First, one must compare the circumstances of states that have adopted or not adopted the policy in question. Once that is established, it becomes necessary to examine why a policy diffused so rapidly in some states and lagged in others. The aim of this research is to determine both of these components in regard to Anti-Indoor Smoking Bans (AISBs).

AISBs are important to the study of policy diffusion because they can be broadly applied as a model for the study as a whole. This is due to the pressure to pass an AISB coming from different levels of federalism. In the past, the push has primarily been from local and state pressure, but as of September 2013, federal funding is now being put towards anti-smoking policies. AISBs also represent a policy which is still diffusing. For example, Indiana passed a comprehensive AISB in July of 2012, a full 17 years after Utah pioneered the policy in 1995.<sup>171</sup> AISBs also are important to examine because they are “fact-based” rather than a “moral-based” policies.<sup>172</sup> For instance, a state policymaker can look at same-sex marriage and be morally opposed to it, and in their mindset, have a reasonable rationale for excluding that policy. Smoking leading to cancer, heart failure, and stroke is something that is an accepted fact in the majority of U.S., which therefore represents an interesting take on how a baseline policy can be diffused. Due to these factors, this research can be used as a jumping off point for other studies in the future and as a point of comparison.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

A compelling diffusion analogy once observed that “a sense of political ‘Stockholm Syndrome’ exists, where a piece of radical legislation gets passed by the Swedes, then it’s flown directly to the U.S. and is passed into law in California. Then it’s flown to Wisconsin. Then to New

---

<sup>170</sup> Shipan and Volden 2006

<sup>171</sup> Americans For Non-Smokers’ Rights 2013

<sup>172</sup> Shipan and Volden 2006

York. By the time it gets to Mississippi, which is about four years later, it's a national birthright."<sup>173</sup> This idea of policy diffusion was first widely made popular with Jack L. Walker Jr.'s 1969 groundbreaking work "The Diffusion of Innovations among the American States," which still stands as a cornerstone of diffusion research.<sup>174</sup> Walker proposed the idea that the country has several competitive regional leaders that emulate each other so as not to appear left behind. Using dozens of different cases, Walker classified states as leaders, pioneers, and followers, defining their role in the diffusion process while leaving many questions to future scholars. Some of these pivotal questions include what actually makes a state more or less prone to new ideas, and what is the biggest determinant of adoption probability.

Virginia Gray began to tackle this problem in the years following Walker's work and began to better frame the question researchers need to examine. By looking at several different policies across what V.O. Key called the "have-not spectrum" including education, welfare, and civil rights, Gray determined that it is almost impossible to find a catch-all diffusion model that will inherently help define all future studies.<sup>175</sup> Most importantly, she found that all examinations of policy passage need to be observed as time-specific, noting that states can change dramatically in as little as a decade. Also emphasized was the importance of differing levels of federalism, as policy diffusion trends looked completely different in cases where, for example, federal influence was exerted rather than just state and local influence. Finally noted was the importance of current political and economic conditions of the state during the time of passage. For example, a unified legislature combined with a strong current economy might provide incentive to pass a politically turbulent policy where before it might have been overlooked.

In a direct response to Gray three years later, Robert Eyestone claimed that it would be irrational to dismiss policy diffusion as a case-specific phenomenon and identified key trends that drive policy diffusion. Most importantly, it was found that even when a multitude of different policies were controlled for, several states were always leaders in early adoption. However, as Eyestone notes, "Diffusion patterns may record the spread by necessity rather than the emulation of virtue: leaders may lead because they are also the first to suffer industrial growth which creates demands for state policy responses."<sup>176</sup> Eyestone summarizes that for policy diffusion to be truly understood, it must be battered with a multitude of independent variables, as the interactions between many allow the true result to reveal themselves. The main message is that for diffusion to be understood, many different models with the same policy must be run. A method which can be

---

<sup>173</sup> Shaw and Renner 2002

<sup>174</sup> Jack L. Walker 1973

<sup>175</sup> Grey 1973

<sup>176</sup> Eyestone 1977

inferred from these authors suggests examining both simple adoption of a policy and then going back and surveying the rate at which that policy was adopted. Without both parts of the puzzle, the full story remains obfuscated.

The next major contribution in policy diffusion theory came with Berry and Berry's 1990 diffusion analysis. By using the policy of state lottery adoptions, they determined that many previous studies had completely ignored the impact of internal factors, such as state legislature and local municipality makeup, and external factors, such as the number of nearby state powers with similar policies. The usage of a less controversial topic like lotteries as opposed to something more heated like gun control also provided future scholars the ability to look at these two different categories as separate beasts. In a nutshell, Berry and Berry proved to be groundbreaking due to the fact that they had concrete proof of three principles: "the probability of state innovation is directly related to the motivation to innovate, inversely related to the strength of obstacles, and directly related to the availability of resources for overcoming these obstacles."<sup>177</sup> This not only confirms that both Virginia and Gray were correct in their papers, but also gave more context to Walker's first proposal. Due to the establishment of definite diffusion facts, Berry and Berry's article is easily one of the most cited research endeavors in the field of policy diffusion.

While the evaluation of macro-influences were being gauged and discussed, several scholars such as John Kingdon and Michael Mintrom took a micro-approach to policy diffusion via the importance of policy entrepreneurs. Policy entrepreneurs can be defined as "people who seek to initiate dynamic policy change."<sup>178</sup> In layman's terms, this comes down to individual politicians, grassroots organizations, and lobbying institutions. Both Kingdon and Mintrom arrive at the conclusion that policy diffusion absolutely hinges on the success or failure of these groups in making their case to legislatures and the public.<sup>179</sup> Even when controlled across several policies and time, it was found that effectiveness of policy innovators is statistically significant. Ignoring them would deprive a study of getting the full scope of what is occurring during the moment of policy diffusion.<sup>180</sup>

One interesting method that had not been considered was the notion of examining policies that do not get adopted and comparing them to those which do. Craig Volden took this approach, and his findings were quite strong in reaffirming many central tenets of policy diffusion. Firstly, he noted that policies that do gain national and regional momentum usually have a watershed moment, during which they gain traction and are adopted by many states in a very short period of time. Those

---

<sup>177</sup> Berry and Berry 1990

<sup>178</sup> Kingdon 1984

<sup>179</sup> Mintrom 1997

<sup>180</sup> Mintrom et al. 1997

that do not typically have a very slow start and tend to lead nowhere. When looking at children's health insurance programs, Volden also found that while diffusion does typically occur regionally with leaders taking the initiatives first, diffusion occurs most rapidly between states that are located geographically close while simultaneously having a similar economic and political makeup.<sup>181</sup>

The most relevant literature in regard to this research paper comes from Shipan and Volden in 2006.<sup>182</sup> They were the first to attempt to solely look at AISBs and attempt to explain their diffusion across state lines. This work is significant as it identifies what makes up an AISB and labels smoking as a fact-based policy. They also utilized the idea of the watershed moment and were able to successfully create a working model of policy diffusion incorporating many of the lessons learned by earlier diffusion scholars. These lessons include incorporating regional importance, policy entrepreneurs, and several unique models. However, their models missed several key variables, such as constituent makeup, and they examined the policy when it was still very young. To put in perspective, over 20 states have adopted AISBs since 2006, which indicates that the study completely missed the rapid watershed phase; in fact, it had only just begun.<sup>183</sup>

### HYPOTHESES

My hypotheses for this project reflect the two-stage design explained in the literature review. My first hypothesis examines strictly policy adoption. The second looks at those states that as of October 2013 already have policies in place, and assesses the rate in which the policies were passed.

**H1:** Having a significant percentage of the population already covered by AISB local ordinances will lead to a state adopting a comprehensive AISB.

**H2a:** Geographical closeness to leader states will be the leading cause the rate of AISB to increase.

**H2b:** Internal state features will be the leading cause of AISB adoptions.

### METHODOLOGY

This research is based on a combination and adaption of the tests administered by Shipan and Volden (2006) as well as Berry and Berry (1990). I will examine all 50 states and their adoption of AISBs between 1995- September 2013. The first module will be a simple Pearson's  $r$  to determine if there is any connection at all between the two dependent variables that will be tested, policy adoption and rate of adoption. Next a binary logistic regression will be implemented with policy adoption as the dependent variable. These results will then be compared with the final module, which is an ordinary least squares regression with the rate. I observe rate of adoption in terms of simple years and do not utilize months, so a policy passed in November 2008 and December of that same year will receive the same score of 13 years.

---

<sup>181</sup> Volden 2006

<sup>182</sup> Shipan and Volden 2006

<sup>183</sup> Ibid.



## RESEARCH DESIGN

As stated earlier, this research relies on two different dependent variables and the evaluation of both of them to get the full picture of policy diffusion. My first of these variables, Policy Adoption, is simply a dummy variable which assigns a 1 to states which have a statewide comprehensive AISB. Given consideration to the literature and how similar policies can carry the same theme, a state will be evaluated to have an AISB if they have 2/3 of the parts necessary to have what is considered a comprehensive smoke-free state: 100 percent smoke-free non-hospitality workplaces, 100 percent smoke-free restaurants, and/or 100 percent smoke-free bars<sup>184</sup>. My second dependent variable is named Rate of Adoption. The rate of adoption is the number of years that have passed since the first statewide AISB took place in 1995.<sup>185</sup> I am counting the years since the first case, not months. Due to the serious chance of data overlap and inconsistency with several other independent variables that rely on the date being accurate, I believe simpler is better in this case and paints a more accurate picture.

One of the most critical intervening variables being analyzed is one which captures the pressure of local laws and ordinances. Retrieving these data was an arduous task, and was drawn by adding up the overall percentage of a state's population already covered by local AISBs in place the day that the statewide comprehensive AISB took effect. A chronological table of state and local AISB laws<sup>186</sup> along with a percentage chart of U.S. population covered by 100 percent Smoke-Free laws were examined, which allowed a Proportion of State Population with Local Restrictions variable to be generated.<sup>187</sup> By using multiple data sources, I was able to avoid double counting data for cases that might have overlapped (like Sacramento versus Sacramento County laws). If a state does not have an AISB in place, I used the percentage as of October 2013.

The proximity variables were measured by breaking the concept into two parts to capture the idea of geographical pressure influencing policy diffusion. First, I looked at regional adoption. I did this by dividing the country into 4 semi-homogeneous partitions based off the Census Bureau's regional map. The regions used are West (including Hawaii and Alaska), Midwest, South, and Northeast. I then counted the number of states in that given region that had an AISB in place when the state being examined passed theirs and divide by the total of regional states minus one to account for the state itself. This culminates to the production of a Regional Adoption variable. For example, Florida would receive a .083 because 1/12 of the other southern states already had a comprehensive AISB in place. I implement a similar scheme for the Bordering State Adoption variable as similarly

---

<sup>184</sup> Americans For Non-Smokers' Rights 2013

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> Americans For Non-Smokers' Rights 2013

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

implemented by Shipan and Volden (2006).<sup>188</sup> A state receives this score based on the percentage of states that share any direct border with the state being examined. This information was collected from the Americans for Non-Smokers' Rights interest group.

To capture internal state governance similarities, I use a variety of variables. First, I implement the Legislative Professionalism variable, and use the Squire scale and directly place every state's 2003 legislative professionalism score into SPSS. Legislative professionalism scores are based on a variety of things, such as how many days the general assembly is in session. The result of this process is states like California, whose state legislature essentially prepares policymakers for the national political scene, receive a higher score than places like Idaho, where the legislature is very speed orientated and lawmakers are more lax. Next I use the Congressional Quarterly Political Encyclopedia of U.S. States and Regions to look at my Democrat and Republican Unity dummy variable. For a state to score a 1, the year their AISB was passed both upper and lower house along with the governor must be from the same party.<sup>189</sup> If the state has not passed an AISB, I use October 2013 as the date to record. I also use a dummy variable I call Historical Preemption, again drawing from the Americans for Non-Smokers' Rights database and give a state a 1 if they have had any kind of AISB preemption law since 1995, when the first statewide ban took effect until October 2013, the cutoff date for my model. Finally, I used the variable Government Ideology to capture government preferences, as opposed to constituent ones, because "all else equal, a more liberal government prefers a higher level of government activism."<sup>190</sup> I use the historical state score from Berry et al. (2010) to determine the figure and use the date of when a state passed an AISB. For those states that passed statewide AISBs after 2010, I referred to Richard C. Fording's database, which has the updated figures until October 2013. For those states who do not have a statewide AISB, I used the October 2013 score.<sup>191</sup>

I then turn my attention to the people that comprise the state, and insert several variables based on their traits. I use Berry et al.'s citizen ideology score to represent the constituents in a state.<sup>192</sup> I directly place this score (from the year the AISB was placed or October 2013 if none) into SPSS and named it Citizen Ideology. I also examine historical median income from the US Census Bureau and use a similar measure of entry into SPPS, again using the dates an AISB was in place (or October 2013 if none) I call this variable Median Income.<sup>193</sup>

---

<sup>188</sup> Shipan and Volden 2006

<sup>189</sup> Winkler 2008

<sup>190</sup> Volden 2006

<sup>191</sup> Fording 2013

<sup>192</sup> Berry and Berry 1990

<sup>193</sup> US Census Bureau 2013

Tobacco usage and production must also be considered when looking at anything related to anti-smoking. I used historical smoking rates from when a state passed an AISB or 2013 if AISBs were not present. I obtained this information from the American Lung Association. I named the created variable Smoker Percentage. To capture the idea of a tobacco producing state and the ramifications, I use a dummy variable called Tobacco Producing State, and give a 1 to those states which grow or produce tobacco products and 0 to those who do not.

Finally I construct two opposite variables which examine lobbyist influence in a state and name them *Tobacco Lobby Percentage* and *Health Lobby Percentage*. The figures are taken from a 1996 snapshot study conducted by Goldstein and Bearman. The measure is “a ratio of the number of health (or tobacco) lobbyists in the state to the total number of registered lobbyists present.”<sup>194</sup> Together I believe these variables accurately reflect the many scholars who wrote diffusion literature recommend as a “comprehensive analysis of policy diffusion,” and truly capture the whole picture of what is happening in statewide comprehensive anti-indoor smoking bans.

## RESULTS

**Table 1:** Pearson’s r correlation

Policy	Years
Policy & Median income (-.369**)	Years & Percent Region (.689**)
Policy & South (-.646**)	Years & Percent Touch (.439**)
Policy & Citizen ID (.564**)	Years & Uni. Republicans (-.351*)
Policy & T. Producing State (-.305*)	Years & Percent Smokers (.632**)
Policy & Percent Smokers (-.444*)	**=.05 *=.01

Table 1 is the statistically significant Pearson’s r correlations between the two dependent variables in the equation. Between both simple policy adoption and adoption rate, the only common correlation between the two was Percent Smokers. It has a negative correlation at -.444 and was statistically significant at the .05 level for policy adoption, meaning more smokers will lead to less of a chance for an AISB to be in place in that state. For adoption rate, Percent Smokers had a positive correlation of .632 and was actually significant at the .01 level. Other statistically significant adoption rate correlations included median income, south, citizen ideology, and if the state is a tobacco-producing one. Adoption rate correlations appeared to be based along geographical lines, with both my proximity variables of regional adoption and direct border state adoption variables were statistically significant at the .01 level. To no one’s surprise, there was a negative correlation between unified republicans and the adoption rate of AISBs. Most notably absent from both policy and years were the variables Unified Democrats and Government Ideology, which in this early test might signal that in this particular policy, constituent makeup matters more than governmental.

<sup>194</sup> Goldstein and Bearman 1996

**Table 2:** Binary logistic regression of simple policy adoption

Model	Exp(B)	Sig.
Constant	.009	.25
Municipality	.928	.049*
Professionalism	1.03	.679
Unified Republicans	.102	.234
Unified Democrats	6.85	.293
Citizen Ideology	1.215	.015*
Government Ideology	.938	.110
Tobacco Producer	.90	.066
Preemption History	1.470	.836
Median Income	1.056	.593

$R^2 = .735$

Table 2 represents my first stage of policy diffusion. The dependent variable in this binary logistic regression was whether or not a state simply had a comprehensive AISB or not. The  $R^2$  was .735, which allows us to say that the model explains 73.5 percent of the variance in the dependent variable. Of the variables listed above, only the percentage of state covered by local ordinances and citizen ideology were statistically significant at the .05 level (.049 and .015 respectively).

Professionalism, unified democrats and republicans, government ideology, if the state was a tobacco producer, preemption of AISBs, and median income were all statistically insignificant. These initial findings appear to be in line with what other researchers have found to be primary determinants of policy diffusion but with several key exceptions. All of the factors which represent state-level influences, such as government ideology and unified legislatures played zero role in determining the passage of a statewide AISB. The influence of municipality passage also appears to have diminished since Shipan and Volden's similar endeavor in 2006, which across the board found .01 significance level, most notably with local ordinances.

**Table 3:** OLS regression of policy adoption rates.

Model	T-Score	Sig.
Constant	.992	.333
Municipality	1.072	.296
Percent Region	2.372	.028*
Percent Touching	.377	.71
Professionalism	-1.904	.071
Median Income	-.344	.735
Unified Republican	-.643	.527
Unified Democrat	1.016	.322
South	1.687	.107
Preemption	-2.12	.047*
Citizen Ideology	-.207	.838
Government Ideology	-.274	.787
Tobacco Producer	.864	.398
Percentage Smokers	.869	.395
Tobacco Lobby	-.51	.615
Health Lobby	1.711	.100

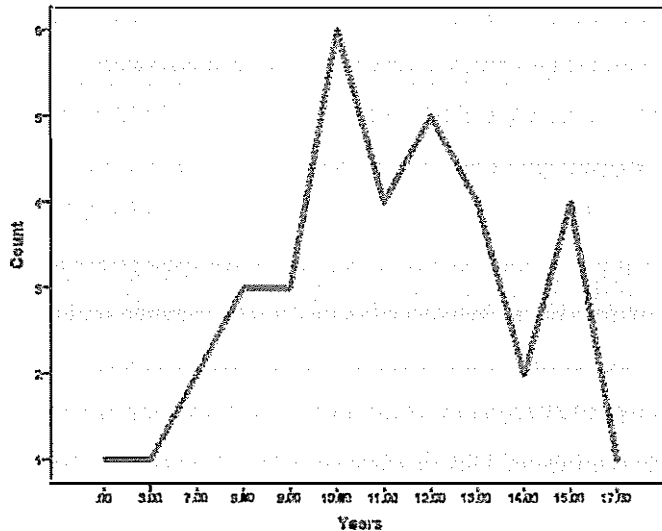
R<sup>2</sup> = .765

Std. Error of the Estimate = 2.165

Table 3 is the second step in analyzing policy diffusion, this time using rate of adoption with those states which have an AISB in place as the dependent variable. To calculate this, a filter was implemented to only look at states that registered policy = 1 on SPSS, resulting in an N of 36. Again, a high R<sup>2</sup> was observed, specifically .765, which gives a high amount of confidence. Surprisingly, this time the percentage of citizens with a local ordinance and citizen ideology were not statistically significant. This time municipality had a causal effect of .296 and citizen ideology was observed at .838. What was statistically significant, however, was the percentage of states already with an AISB in place when the case state adopted, along with a negative correlation with states that have had a history of AISB preemption laws in place. Again, unified Democrats and Republicans did not come up as statistically significant and were observed at .322 and .527 respectively. Surprisingly, the variables for Tobacco and Health Lobby both were not statistically significant, with the former coming in at .615 and the latter at .102. Percentage smokers and tobacco being produced in a state both were also statistically insignificant despite the percentage of state smokers being so strongly

related in the last model that it had to be removed. The percentage of smokers in a state was only .395 and production was .615. During this step of the evaluation of AISBs, regionalism percentage and history of preemption laws were statistically significant at the .05 level, with regionalism at .028 and preemption .047. Although the regionalism score was significant, the bordering score was not. This is noteworthy because it implies that the definition of state neighbors must be expanded to include more than those states which share a direct border.

**Figure 1:** A frequency table of state adoption rates



I included this figure to again reaffirm Volden's hypothesis that a watershed moment exists where a policy will rapidly diffuse and gain national momentum causing late adopters, or "followers" such as Wisconsin, to adopt a specific policy.<sup>195</sup> 2005-2009 appears to be that time period, as there was an explosion of diffusion that as of 2013 has appeared to have completely dissipated. Finally, it can be inferred through this observation that the states that have not yet adopted (the majority of them being in the south) will never do so given the current influencers both inside and around their state.

### CONCLUSION

My initial hypotheses for my two-step approach to policy diffusion were only partially confirmed. For simple policy adoption, having a larger percentage of people already covered by local ordinances was statistically significant, but that was only when coupled with several other distinct variables. As mentioned above, placing the variable of historical smoker population percentages completely skewed the results. On top of that, the significance level was only .049. If any other southern state were to adopt a comprehensive AISB, I imagine that local pressure would no longer become statistically significant. I was also incorrect about having a multitude of underlying state

<sup>195</sup> Volden 2006

features affecting adoption. All of my other variables attempting to control for government preference and capacity fell flat. I do know however (due to my Pearson's  $r$  correlation) that there is a lot more going on with adoption of AISBs, as median income, being a southern state, and citizen ideology all were significant at the .01 level. Perhaps future researchers can construct more focused regressions to figure out what I am missing and account for the lost variables.

My evaluation of statewide AISB adoption rates yielded similar contradictions with my hypotheses and data. I was correct in my estimate that geographical proximity would play a key part in determining policy diffusion, but I expected a state sharing a direct border with an AISB state would be more significant than regionalism percentage. The opposite actually occurred, with regionalism having a significance rate of .028 and sharing a direct border only being .71. Again it appeared that state legislature makeup had no effect on policy diffusion at the state level. The only other factor that was actually significant at the .05 level was having a history of AISB preemption, which therefore likely threw off the municipality numbers because it was illegal for local governments to have them. Based on my Pearson's  $r$  correlation between adoption rates and percentage of a state's smoking population being .632, I strongly expected that result to shine through in my OLS regression. Seeing another lost variable, I ran another regression with just variables significant at the .1 level and nothing came back as statistically significant. This therefore reaffirmed Berry and Berry's 1990 conclusion that for policy diffusion to be analyzed, there needs to be a multitude of independent variables. Comparing the two independent variables' results show that many different forces are at play when policies diffuse, and ignoring a two-step procedure leaves out much of the story.

According to my frequency chart, policy diffusion for statewide comprehensive anti-indoor smoking bans appears to be at its end. Unfortunately for this study, federal influence on this policy did not begin until September 2013, with a national ad campaign from the Center for Disease Control (CDC) aimed at curbing tobacco usage called "Tips from Former Smokers."<sup>196</sup> The full impact of this new federal initiative has not been recorded on states that do not have a comprehensive AISB and it is likely that it might tip the scale toward adopting legislation. This research can therefore be interpreted as the result of state and local government, as the diffusion is appears to be largely completed. In the coming months when such federal spending can be coded, future researchers can use this document to provide insight on how to explain policy diffusion.

---

<sup>196</sup> Center for Disease Control and Prevention 2013

## REFERENCES

- Americans For Non-Smokers' Rights. "Smokefree Lists, Maps and Data." 2013. <http://www.no-smoke.org/goingsmokefree.php?id=519> on: [December 2, 2013]
- Americans For Non-Smokers' Rights. "Chronological list." 2013, <http://www.no-smoke.org/pdf/EffectivePopulationList.pdf> on: [December 2, 2013]
- Americans For Non-Smokers' Rights "WRB Laws map." 2013 <http://www.no-smoke.org/pdf/WRBLawsMap.pdf> on: [December 2, 2013]
- Berry, Frances and William D. Stokes Berry. 1990. "State Lottery Adoptions as Policy Innovations: An Event History Analysis." *American Political Science Review* 84 (June) (2): 395-415.
- Boehmke, Fredrick. 2005. *The Indirect Effect of Direct Legislation: How Institutions Shape Interest Group Systems*. Columbus: The Ohio State University Press.
- Eyestone, Robert. 1977. "Confusion, Diffusion, and Innovation." *American Political Science Review*, 104 (1) (Jun.): 443.
- Fording, Richard C. 2013. "State Ideology Data." <http://rcfording.wordpress.com/state-ideology-data/> on: [December 2, 2013]
- Goldstein, Adam O. and Nathan S Bearman. 1996. "State Tobacco Lobbyists and Organizations in the United States: Crossed Lines." *American Journal of Public Health* 86 (8): 1137-42.
- Gray, Virginia 1973. "Innovation in the States: A Diffusion Study." *American Political Science Review*, 67 (Dec.) (4): 1173-1187
- Kingdon, John W. 1984. *Agendas Alternatives, and Public Policies*. Boston: Little Brown and Company.
- Markel, Donald P Haider. 2008. *Political Encyclopedia of U.S. States and Regions Library Journal* Washington: CQ Press.
- Mintrom, Michael. 1997 "Policy Entrepreneurs and the Diffusion of Innovation." *American Journal of Political Science* 41 (Jan.) (3) :738-770.
- Mintrom, Michael et al. 1997. "The State-Local Nexus in Policy Innovation Diffusion: The Case of School Choice." *Publius: The Journal of Federalism* 27 (Sept.) (3) :41-59.
- Shaw, Greg and Tari Renner. "Patterns of State Policy Diffusion: Convoys, Packs and Clusters." MWPSA 4/2002.
- Shipan, Charles R and Craig Volden. 2006. "Bottom-Up Federalism: The Diffusion of Anti-Smoking Policies from U.S. Cities to States." *American Journal of Political Science* 55 (Oct.) (4): 825-842.
- Tips from Former Smokers. Center for Disease Control. 2013  
<http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/campaign/tips/resources/videos/> on: [December 2, 2013]
- US Census Bureau 2013. "Historical Income Tables."  
[www.census.gov/hhes/www/income/data/historical/household](http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/income/data/historical/household). on: [December 2, 2013]



- Volden, Craig. "States as Policy Laboratories: Emulating Success in the Children's Health Insurance Program." *American Journal of Political Science* 50 (Apr.) (2) (2006): 294–312.
- Walker, Jack L. "Problems in Research on Diffusion of Policy Innovations." *American Political Science Review*, 67 (Dec.) (4): 1186–91.

## CURIOSITY OR MANNERS: THE VALUES THAT SHAPE AMERICAN POLITICAL MINDSETS

Ryan Winter

**Abstract:** *In the late 1990s, political analyst and linguist George Lakoff proposed an intriguing new way to understand what separates liberals from conservatives in American politics. His theory was based on the premise that there are two opposing frames through which Americans view politics, and that parenting values determine which frame one chooses. Those who adhere to the strict father model hold conservative beliefs on a wide range of issues, while nurturant parents are more liberal. Lakoff's writings have since become widespread and his parenting theory has convinced many political strategists and activists, despite the fact that his hypotheses lacked empirical evidence. This study used survey data to test the impact of parenting values on a wide range of controversial policies. It finds strong support for the hypotheses that strict fathers tend to prefer stronger security measures and support traditional social norms, while nurturant parents are more liberal on these issues. However, parenting style proved to be a poor indicator of political attitudes on the government's role in the economy.*

### INTRODUCTION

On September 20th of 2004, millions of Americans turned on their televisions to watch the first presidential debate between George W. Bush and John Kerry. On issues ranging from foreign policy to social problems to financial matters, the candidates clashed at every turn. Then, during one of Kerry's responses, Bush made a very strange comment. It was such a small, unremarkable moment that most people have now forgotten it. However, if one were to believe the writings of cognitive scientist George Lakoff, Bush's remark and Kerry's response perfectly explains the vast differences between two men representing political polar opposites.

John Kerry was in the middle of complimenting the president and his family on how well they handled the considerable pressure of living in the White House. Kerry began to joke about the Bush daughters, "I've chuckled a few times at some of their comments," but Bush interrupted. "I'm trying to put a leash on them," he said, to which Kerry immediately replied, "Well I don't know, I've learned not to do that." The audience laughed appreciatively for both candidates, and the debate continued. While this brief interchange might appear no more than a slight disagreement in parenting techniques, Lakoff believes it is the ultimate key to understanding why some people are liberals and others are conservatives.

### LAKOFF'S THEORY

It was during the 1990s that Lakoff began to wonder where people got their political attitudes from. Specifically, he was interested in why the two dominant political ideologies in America stood opposed on so many seemingly unrelated issues. "The question I asked myself," he recalls, "was this: What do the conservatives' positions on issues have to do with each other?"<sup>197</sup> What does being against gun control have to do with opposing gay marriage? Why should a person's opinions on foreign policy correspond to a particular stance on the environment, and what does abortion have

---

<sup>197</sup> Lakoff 2004

to do with welfare spending? Is there some natural connection that explains the organization of these beliefs, or are they just historical remnants of coalition building?<sup>198</sup> These questions had been asked before, but Lakoff's answer was a completely new one that captured the imagination of his readers. In his earlier work, Lakoff argued that people construct political opinions on the basis of their moral identity.<sup>199</sup> For example, if one were to ask the average American to explain why abortion should be legal or illegal, they might give facts and figures to back up their position, but in the end it comes down to what feels right, a fundamental and unchangeable belief that abortion is either morally acceptable or unacceptable. There are two opposing frames through which Americans view the world of politics, Lakoff says. One frame is associated with liberal beliefs and the other with conservative. One missing piece remained in his theory: Lakoff had not yet explained the logic holding these frames together.

It is obvious that liberals and conservatives view the world differently; the real question is why. The incessant use of the phrase “family values” by conservative politicians first gave Lakoff the idea that perhaps the two opposing political frames in this country result from two opposing conceptions of the family. Because families occupy such a core part of life, it seems reasonable to infer that parenting values could function as a heuristic for more complex issues, including politics. His hypothesis, as another team of researchers succinctly summarized, was that “As people normatively understand proper relations between parents and children, so will they envision proper relations between government and its citizens.”<sup>200</sup> Consequently, the two frames underlying political identity correspond to two different styles of parenting: on the one hand the nurturant parent, and on the other the strict father.<sup>201</sup>

### *The Strict Father*

The strict father mentality is one that most people will recognize immediately. It starts with the assumption that humans are naturally flawed and want to do what feels good, not what is right. Children must to be taught right from wrong by a loving but stern authority figure—the father. The world is competitive, but those who work hard and stand by their morals will rise to the top.<sup>202</sup> Children must be corrected if they disobey their parents or resist learning discipline. Often, they must be spanked for their own good, because punishment will keep them from making mistakes again. For strict fathers, all kinds of social ills and perversions can be attributed to permissive parenting practices. They believe that those who deviate from traditional lifestyles, commit violent crime, or

---

<sup>198</sup> Barker and Tinnik 2006, 249

<sup>199</sup> Lakoff 1996

<sup>200</sup> Barker and Tinnik 2006, 259

<sup>201</sup> Both men and women can technically be “strict father” types, as long as they agree with its overall outlook. In fact, this study finds that women are actually slightly more likely than men to identify with the strict father model.

<sup>202</sup> Lakoff 2004

rely on government assistance were never disciplined as children and never learned to be responsible adults.<sup>203</sup>

The political implications of such a mindset follow logically. Strict parents oppose taxing big business and wealthy business owners because they are doing their part and contributing to the economy. Government “handouts” and other programs that promote equality only encourage laziness and do not teach people responsibility. Lakoff argues that the strict parent’s focus on punishment as a correctional measure, along with the belief in absolute good and evil, explains why conservatives insist on a tough stance on crime and a strong military.<sup>204</sup>

### *The Nurturant Parent*

Nurturant parents take a more interdependent view of the world, valuing egalitarianism and tolerance of other moral standards. While the strict father model presupposes a traditional family, the nurturant parent is gender-neutral and can be found in a traditional family, a single-parent family, or even same-sex relationships.<sup>205</sup> If there are two parents, they share the responsibility of raising and disciplining the child, which they believe is born good and can be made better through nurturance. The utmost goal is for the child to live a happy, fulfilled life so that it can grow up to nurture others and make the world a better place. Lakoff thinks that parents who fall closer to the nurturant end of the spectrum are more likely to have the values of tolerance and empathy accessible when they think about politics.<sup>206</sup> If he is right in guessing that nurturance underlies American liberalism, it would certainly explain much of the Democratic Party’s current platform, including universal healthcare, raising the minimum wage, workers’ rights, and more. On issues from gay marriage to social policy to foreign policy, the nurturant parent outlook leads logically to the opposite conclusions of the strict father.

### *Implications*

If Lakoff’s theory is correct, it could have enormously significant consequences for politicians, campaigns, and researchers. Lakoff suggests that partisans can use parenting metaphors to harness the potential of undecided and independent voters, by far the most vital slice of the electorate. Since nonpartisans do not use one of the two parenting models but rather a mix depending on the situation, Lakoff argues that candidates of either party can activate the middle through careful word choice and by framing the political debate in ways that remind voters of their parenting values.<sup>207</sup> Apart from influencing elections and public opinion, Lakoff’s model could be a

---

<sup>203</sup> Lakoff 1996, 197

<sup>204</sup> Lakoff 2004

<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

<sup>207</sup> Lakoff 2004

very useful tool for political scientists. If he is right, it would be possible to predict people's feelings on a wide range of political issues simply by asking them a few questions about parenting.

While his insights certainly contributed a creative new take on the origins of ideological constraint, Lakoff's model lacked systematic data to back it up. He relied primarily on the face-value plausibility of his parenting theory, without offering scientific evidence. Therefore, a study testing the reliability of the parenting theory provides much-needed quantitative research on a topic that could have major repercussions for the ways political scientists think about ideological constraint.

#### LITERATURE REVIEW

Other researchers have designed experiments to test the parenting proposal, but for the most part these have been contradictory or inconclusive. Analyses of survey data from 2000 revealed that "the stronger one's views regarding childrearing—either in terms of nurturance or discipline—the more consistently liberal or conservative one's political attitudes tend to be,"<sup>208</sup> a finding that offers robust support to Lakoff's claims. Archival research, too, has revealed a correlation between statewide attitudes towards punishing children and presidential vote. As a general rule, red states approve of corporal punishment while blue states do not. In their book *Authoritarianism and Polarization in American Politics*, Heatherington and Weiler describe a positive relationship between the percentage of a state's population that voted for Bush in 2004 and the share of parents who approved of using physical punishment to discipline children. At the top were Idaho, Wyoming, and Oklahoma, all of which voted nearly seventy percent for Bush, and where about sixty percent of parents approved of using physical punishment. At the other end were Massachusetts, Vermont, Rhode Island, and New York, with the lowest rates of Bush voters and corporal punishment.<sup>209</sup> While useful for highlighting trends, this type of data can only show correlations, not underlying causes. Heatherington and Weiler cannot conclude from these data that parenting attitudes *cause* worldviews. It might be that some other variable causes both strict parenting and Republican voting. The correlation between the two could well be spurious. Nonetheless, these statewide trends certainly bolster the authority of Lakoff's model.

Other researchers are more hesitant to accept the parenting hypothesis. In one creative experiment, linguist Alan Cienki studied presidential candidates' use of strict or nurturant expressions in presidential debates. He concluded that Al Gore was more likely to use nurturant language or gestures than George W. Bush, but the overall occurrence of such metaphors was extremely low. If parenting indeed represents the underlying frame through which all of politics is understood, it should have shown up more frequently in these important political talks. Another researcher testing

---

<sup>208</sup> Barker and Tinnick 2006

<sup>209</sup> Heatherington and Weiler 2009, 2

Lakoff's conclusions stopped short of ever testing for ideological constraint.<sup>210</sup> Postlewait interpreted Lakoff's writing to mean that there should be two distinct camps of parents, with few people remaining in the middle. When she discovered that in reality parenting styles more closely resembled a normal distribution, she concluded that the results did not fit with Lakoff's depiction of two "radically opposed" styles.<sup>211</sup> However, Lakoff does not claim that all people are either one type of parent or the other. In fact, he says there is a range of parenting styles and that the majority of people alternate between strict and nurturant styles depending on the situation. For these reasons, Postlewait's conclusion was shortsighted. Liberals and conservatives make up only a small portion of the population, so why should parenting purists be the majority? In fact, the finding that most parents fall in between strictness and nurturance only increases the importance for politicians to understand these frames. A liberal candidate running for office will have already locked down the vote of nurturant parents, but needs to figure out how to speak to and convince the swing voters in the middle, who use both frames and respond to both. This is where the political battle takes place, so understanding how to connect with these voters is essential.

#### HYPOTHESES

For the purpose of testing, Lakoff's theory has been broken into two smaller hypotheses. To pass the initial test of validity, the independent variable of parenting style must accurately predict broad political attitudes, such as party identification, ideology, and presidential vote. If it cannot, then Lakoff will have a hard time convincing others of his theory's reliability.

**H1:** Strict fathers will be more likely than nurturant parents to identify as

Republicans, to identify as conservatives, and to vote for Romney in 2012.

Later on, more focused hypotheses will test parenting style's relationship towards specific policies, but the foundation of Lakoff's theory rests on the assumption that people instinctively access their parenting values to interpret the political world. If nurturant parents are no more likely than strict fathers to call themselves Democrats or Republicans, conservatives or liberals, then Lakoff's theory will have been dealt a fatal blow and it will hardly be worthwhile to continue the study.

After testing for broad political identities, I proceed to test Lakoff's assertion that parenting styles tie together the diverse coalition of ideas that comprise liberal and conservative worldviews. Again, my independent variable was parenting style and I tested for sixteen different dependent variables on as many controversial political topics as possible. Studying these attitudes separately will enable comparison of which types of political views, if any, parenting can predict. For ease of interpretation these sixteen issues have been categorized into three groups: security, traditional values, and desire for equality.

---

<sup>210</sup> Postlewait 2006

<sup>211</sup> Lakoff 1996, 35

**H2a:** Strict fathers will show more support than nurturant parents for defense and security issues.

Because strict fathers view the world as a dark and dangerous place, they are expected to favor vigorous law enforcement and a strong military. It also seems logical to expect that strict father types would be less trusting of others in general. Nurturant parents decidedly disagree. Five political attitudes dealing with security were measured, including federal defense spending, crime spending, the death penalty, gun control, and social trust.

**H2b:** Strict fathers will be more likely to approve of traditional family roles and socially conservative values than nurturant parents.

Recall that nurturant parents teach their children to be more tolerant and accepting of diversity, whereas strict fathers are likely to think that others should live by traditional roles and the customs of their own parents. Again, five attitudes—feelings about abortion, gay marriage, traditional gender roles, environmental protection, and white privilege—were tested to determine the influence of parenting. Lakoff's theory will only be strengthened if nurturant parents choose the more tolerant or liberal option.

The last group of issues dealt with the role and scope of the government and the extent to which it should be involved in promoting equality. Naturally, strict parents are expected to prefer a small government, allowing those who have learned discipline to flourish without interference. Nurturant parents, however, see the welfare state as essential to helping people back on their feet so they can become self-sufficient and give back to a society that cares for its citizens.

**H1c:** Nurturant parents will be more likely than strict fathers to endorse government intervention to promote equality.

Altogether, six attitudes were measured that correspond to views on equality, including feelings about government involvement in the economy, universal healthcare, welfare spending, size of government, affirmative action, and a general measure of the importance of having an equal society.

If parenting philosophy fails to consistently predict views on all of these topics, or if it only predicts views on one or two out of the three categories, then I have failed to find support for Lakoff's theory. If, after controlling for extraneous variables, parenting remains a strong predictor of all these political views, then substantial support will be given to the parenting theory put forward by Lakoff, lending a more systematic form of credibility to his anecdotal evidence

## DESIGN AND MEASUREMENT

### *Operationalization of Variables*

For all the necessary variables and controls in this study, data was drawn from the most recent American National Election Study (ANES), conducted at the time of the 2012 election. To operationalize the chief independent variable, parenting style, four questions were chosen from the

dataset that directly measured the nurturant/strict cleavage. For each question, respondents were offered two possible traits, one nurturant and one strict, and were asked to choose which they considered preferable for children have. The choices included “independence or respect for elders”; “curiosity or good manners”; “obedience or self-reliance”; and “considerate or well-behaved.” Nurturant responses received zeroes and strict responses ones. The resulting scale, which is labeled in the data as “parent score,” ran from zero to four, with higher scores indicating a stricter parenting style. Unfortunately, the ANES 2012 did not ask for respondents’ opinions on the use of corporal punishment to discipline children, one of Lakoff’s major distinctions between the two styles. Despite this omission, the parent score should provide a very good measure of the two frames Lakoff described. As Table 1 illustrates, the questions did not intercorrelate as highly as might be expected. However, Lakoff predicted most people to fall somewhere in the middle of the scale because most people are not strong liberals or conservatives and would therefore employ both models in everyday life. Each individual question correlated highly with the scale as a whole, and the removal of any single question did not significantly alter the findings of this research. The most common score was a three out of four, meaning the average American is more strict than nurturant, a result consistent with other studies of authoritarianism among the American population.<sup>212</sup>

**Table 1:** Correlation Matrix of Parenting Index and Individual Parenting Questions

	Independence/ Respect Elders	Curiosity/ Manners	Obedience/ Self-Reliance	Considerate/ Well-Behaved
Independence/ Respect Elders	1			
Curiosity/ Manners	.331**	1		
Obedience/ Self-Reliance	.326**	.350**	1	
Considerate/ Well-Behaved	.133**	.282**	.264**	1
Parent Score	.624**	.716**	.729**	.641**

Note: One asterisk denotes significance at the .05 level, two asterisks at the .001 level

ANES data were also used to measure the dependent variables. The survey included questions that dealt with all sixteen issues mentioned in the hypotheses, as well as sociodemographics and other extraneous variables for which social scientists routinely control.<sup>213</sup> Because race has well-known effects on American political identity, and because some of the dependent variables such as

<sup>212</sup> Heatherington and Weiler 2009

<sup>213</sup> These included age (measured by group), gender (men were coded as zeroes, women as ones; therefore a positive relationship with “gender” actually indicates that females were likely to hold that particular attitude), education level (five categories were included, and a higher score indicated more years of education), and annual income (measured in 28 categories ranging from under \$5000 to over \$250,000, a higher score indicates a higher annual income).



affirmative action and white privilege dealt directly with racial issues, two dummy variables, white and black, controlled for race. Religion has also been shown to correlate with political beliefs, notably abortion and gay marriage, so a scale that combined two dimensions of religious behavior was created. Frequency of attendance at religious services and frequency of private religious practice were combined into an overall religiosity score. Last, party identification was measured in the form of a seven-point scale from strong Democrat to strong Republican, and another seven-point scale measured ideological self-placement from strong liberal to strong conservative. On both of these two indicators, the more right-wing answers were coded as higher. It should be noted that party ID and ideology were almost always controls and were therefore categorized as independent variables. However, hypothesis one required testing of these as dependent variables. When party ID was a dependent variable, ideology was still controlled for and vice versa.

#### *Testing the Relationships*

Each dependent variable was tested separately. For most of these, ordinary least squares regression was employed to determine the relative strength of parenting and all of the other sociodemographic and control variables. However, three of the dependent variables only had two possible outcomes. For vote for president, size of government, and role of government in the economy, binary logistic regression was used instead of OLS.<sup>214</sup> The results of the regression models allow us to see which factors are significant predictors for each of the nineteen separate dependent variables. When the parenting index receives a high T-score that means it is a good independent predictor of people's views towards that issue.

---

<sup>214</sup> For size of government, respondents were asked to choose from “the less government, the better,” or “there are more things that government should be doing.” For government's role in the economy, respondents were read: “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.”

## RESULTS

**Table 2: Political Identities**

	Party ID		Ideology		Presidential Vote (binary)
	Beta	T	Beta	T	Exp (B)
<b>Parenting Score</b>	<b>.002</b>	<b>.164</b>	<b>.120</b>	<b>9.734**</b>	<b>1.159*</b>
Age	-.050	-4.563**	.061	5.370**	1.037
Gender	-.041	-3.697**	-.030	-2.614*	1.138
Education	.044	3.563**	-.044	-3.463**	.912
Income	.052	4.326**	.004	.314	1.015
Party ID	--	--	.606	48.958**	2.563**
Ideology	.574	48.958**	--	--	2.339**
Religiosity	.048	4.024**	.137	11.301**	1.083*
White	.103	5.950**	.002	.094	1.664
Black	-.183	-10.588**	.019	1.054	.055**
Constant	--	-.955	--	10.717	.000
R Square	.477		.448		.799 (Nagelkerke R Square)

Note: One asterisk denotes significance at the .05 level, two asterisks at the .001 level

The higher the T-score, the stronger the predictive power of that variable. A negative T-score indicates a negative causal influence of that variable on the political attitude.

An Exp (B) that exceeds one denotes a positive relationship, while less than one denotes a negative relationship.

As Lakoff predicted, nurturant parents were much more likely to self-identify as liberal, even after controlling for party ID and other variables, while strict fathers were more often conservative. This relationship is statistically significant at the .001 level, and in fact proved to be one of the best predictors of how people defined their ideology, surpassing education, income, gender, and age. In fact, only party ID and religiosity showed stronger predictive power. However, looking as an independent predictor of party ID, parenting performed much worse than it did for ideology. This finding should not be mistaken as an assertion that nurturant parents are unlikely to be Democrats, because bivariate correlations show that they are. Instead, the regression model reveals that nurturant attitudes do not cause people to become Democrats. The variance in partisanship is instead explained by other factors, notably ideology and race.

Finally, the parenting effect was tested for presidential vote. Here, the relationship is small but significant at the .05 level. Even after holding party ID, ideology, and all other contaminating variables constant, nurturant parents were significantly more likely to cast a ballot for Obama than strict parents, who favored Romney. Despite the immense amount of attention focused on the notorious gender gap and the media's coverage of Romney's personal wealth, gender and income

were still eclipsed by the predictive power of parenting. At the theoretical level it appears that Lakoff was on to something, but examining the issues in closer detail will reveal the true influence of parenting on today's most controversial political debates.

*Hypothesis 2a: Security*

**Table 3:** Security

	Defense Spending		Crime Spending		Death Penalty		Gun Control		Social Trust	
	Beta	T	Beta	T	Beta	T	Beta	T	Beta	T
<b>Parentin g Score</b>	<b>.104</b>	<b>6.479**</b>	<b>.156</b>	<b>9.595**</b>	<b>.177</b>	<b>11.336**</b>	<b>.001</b>	<b>.041</b>	<b>-.139</b>	<b>-8.993**</b>
Age	.070	4.834**	.046	3.107*	.014	1.002	.061	4.346**	.083	5.914**
Gender	.019	1.329	.047	3.150*	-.031	-2.158*	.149	10.665**	-.007	-.494
Educatio n	-.101	-6.233**	-.066	-3.979**	-.062	-3.915**	.043	2.751*	.144	9.122**
Income	.003	.219	-.029	-1.829	.040	2.570*	.028	1.821	.119	7.798**
Party ID	.167	8.356**	-.078	-3.887**	.155	8.052**	-.248	-13.125**	.060	3.150*
Ideology	.212	10.864**	-.013	-.671	.138	7.403**	-.138	-7.500**	-.025	-1.376
Religiosity	.016	.995	.039	2.433*	-.159	-10.348**	.012	.786	.056	3.667**
White	-.022	-.987	-.043	-1.858	.057	2.549*	-.064	-2.896*	.098	4.446**
Black	.019	.851	.022	.927	-.039	-1.737	-.018	-.834	-.074	-3.294**
Constant	--	10.402	--	35.748	--	9.286	--	25.406	--	23.913
R Square	.169		.069		.144		.163		.150	

Note: One asterisk denotes significance at the .05 level, two asterisks at the .001 level

The higher the T-score, the stronger the predictive power of that variable. A negative T-score indicates a negative causal influence of that variable on the political attitude.

The regression results for predicting distrust of others and the related desire for increased security were astounding. As indicated in Table 3, parenting emerged as one of the strongest, if not the best, predictor of attitudes on nearly every issue. Often, parenting's independent effect even surpassed the giants of party ID and ideology. Strict parents heavily favored increasing the defense budget; in fact, only party ID and ideology better predicted views towards defense spending. Parenting index actually proved to be the strongest predictor of views on the death penalty and crime spending, an extremely promising result for Lakoff, and after education, parenting proved to be the best predictor for social trust. The one exception was gun control, where parenting had almost no effect at all. One possible response to this anomaly is that for gun control, either side could technically be viewed as a security issue. For some people, gun access is vital to protecting their family from a hostile world. For others, there are many evil people in this hostile world who should not be able to get their hands on a gun. And yet most Americans recognize that there is a clear conservative and liberal side to the issue of gun control. Either Lakoff's model must be elaborated to

explain this discrepancy, or it must acknowledge that it simply cannot predict attitudes towards gun restrictions.<sup>215</sup> Overall, these results substantially strengthen Lakoff's hypothesis; strict parents trusted others less and were willing to spend more to ensure their security.

*Hypothesis 2b: Traditional Social Values*

**Table 4:** Traditional Social Issues

	Gay Marriage		Abortion		Gender Roles		Environment		White Privilege	
	Beta	T	Beta	T	Beta	T	Beta	T	Beta	T
<b>Parenting Score</b>	<b>-.158</b>	<b>- 11.476**</b>	<b>-.111</b>	<b>-8.074**</b>	<b>.112</b>	<b>7.115**</b>	<b>-.042</b>	<b>-2.852*</b>	<b>.199</b>	<b>13.550**</b>
Age	-.091	-7.246**	.039	3.130*	.121	8.411**	-.052	-3.933**	-.054	-4.013**
Gender	.073	5.850**	.055	4.359**	-.062	-4.323**	.026	1.932	-.043	-3.190**
Education	.078	5.597**	.066	4.696**	-.079	-4.938**	-.007	-.464	-.169	- 11.366**
Income	.000	-.010	.049	3.627**	.023	1.466	-.045	-3.156*	-.023	-1.558
Party ID	-.148	-8.760**	-.122	-7.234**	.046	2.381*	-.256	- 14.281**	.151	8.363**
Ideology	-.215	- 13.024**	-.227	- 13.791**	.137	7.215**	-.257	- 14.784**	.165	9.401**
Religiosity	-.277	- 20.414**	-.348	- 25.625**	.119	7.603**	.014	.979	-.039	-2.717*
White	.060	3.064*	.000	.023	-.018	-.792	-.044	-2.124*	.000	-.021
Black	-.018	-.895	.088	4.453**	-.043	-1.874	.006	.279	-.194	-9.180**
Constant	--	39.928	--	26.643	--	9.631	--	51.265	--	14.895
R Square	.330		.333		.117		.250		.238	

Lakoff's model was again strongly supported on attitudes ranging from abortion to white privilege. Table 4 exhibits the absolutely immense influence of parenting style on acceptance of gays and lesbians. For homosexual marriage, parenting style surpassed age and even party ID; only religiosity and ideology performed better on this issue. On abortion, the T-score of over eight shows a high association between nurturance and pro-choice attitudes, and once again the only better predictors were religiosity and ideology. When asked whether it would harm the family for a woman to work outside of the home, strict fathers showed startlingly high preferences for traditional gender roles. While environmental issues may not have revealed the same level of predictive power as other issues, here too Lakoff's hypothesis was supported. It appears that nurturant attitudes towards children translate into environmental protection, a finding statistically significant at the .05 level.

Where parenting style really stood out was on measures of white privilege, or the ability of members of the majority race to ignore historical and institutional prejudices that maintain racial

<sup>215</sup> Interestingly, gun control was the only security issue where gender played such a major role. Women were much more likely to think it should be more difficult to buy a gun.

inequality. This variable was measured by asking respondents how strongly they agreed or disagreed with the statement, “It’s really a matter of some people not trying hard enough; if blacks would only try harder they could be just as well off as whites.” After controlling for a multitude of intervening variables, parenting stood out as the most significant variable measured, with a T-score of over thirteen. For white privilege, parenting is more important than whether one is black or white. Education represents the second strongest individual predictor, with increases in education resulting in drastically reduced white privilege. Returning to Lakoff’s theory, we can observe that it is clearly borne out on all social issues measured.

#### *Hypothesis 2c: Equality*

**Table 5:** Independence versus Interdependence (OLS Regression)

	Equality		Healthcare		Welfare		Affirmative Action	
	Beta	T	Beta	T	Beta	T	Beta	T
<b>Parenting Score</b>	<b>-.084</b>	<b>-5.667**</b>	<b>-.042</b>	<b>-3.392**</b>	<b>-.067</b>	<b>-4.573**</b>	<b>-.096</b>	<b>-6.250**</b>
Age	-.009	-.683	.001	.107	-.002	-.140	.003	.211
Gender	.001	.063	.020	1.755	.023	1.692	-.016	-1.179
Education	.045	3.023*	.035	2.787*	-.053	-3.538**	.064	4.093**
Income	-.003	-.179	.023	1.914	-.161	-11.118**	-.044	-2.885*
Party ID	-.180	-9.919**	-.446	-29.462**	-.203	-11.310**	-.240	-12.755**
Ideology	-.265	-15.002**	-.253	-17.182**	-.231	-13.192**	-.151	-8.233**
Religiosity	.009	.635	.020	1.637	.041	2.864*	.070	4.632**
White	-.033	-1.569	-.042	-2.376*	-.036	-1.740	-.012	-.554
Black	.104	4.880**	.080	4.511**	.073	3.481**	.241	10.829**
Constant	--	32.112	--	33.540	--	47.052	--	21.979
R Square	.226		.467		.244		.262	

Note: One asterisk denotes significance at the .05 level, two asterisks at the .001 level.

The higher the T-score, the stronger the predictive power of that variable. A negative T-score indicates a negative causal influence of that variable on the political attitude.

**Table 6:** Independence versus Interdependence (Binary Logistic Regression)

	Big Government	Free Market
	Exp (B)	Exp (B)
<b>Parenting Score</b>	<b>1.097*</b>	<b>.952</b>
Age	.959**	1.000
Gender	1.316**	.711**
Education	.913*	1.056
Income	.983**	.993
Party ID	.696**	1.453**
Ideology	.704**	1.505**
Religiosity	1.035*	.960*
White	.675*	1.362*
Black	1.524*	.612
Constant	12.115	.054
Nagelkerke R Square	.366	.371

Note: One asterisk denotes significance at the .05 level, two asterisks at the .001 level

An Exp (B) that exceeds one denotes a positive relationship, while less than one denotes a negative relationship.

On the third set of issues, which can be seen on Tables 5 and 6, parenting style showed mixed results, and in general the impact of parenting on policy preference was weaker than for hypotheses 2a and 2b. Still, it remained a statistically significant predictor for some independent/interdependent issues. For the variable classified “equality,” respondents were asked whether the country would be better off if we worried less about how equal people are. As predicted by Lakoff’s model, nurturant parents turned out to be more concerned about fairness. This relationship proved to be statistically significant at the .001 level, and only party ID and ideology proved to be stronger predictors. Nurturant parents were also significantly more likely than strict fathers to support the Affordable Care Act, affirmative action, and welfare spending, findings consistent with Lakoff’s predictions. While most of Hypothesis 2c’s dependent variables had lower T-scores than security and traditional social issues, many remained statistically significant at the .001 level, so while the relationship is perhaps weaker than Lakoff predicted it is certainly present.

However, parenting theory fails to explain attitudes on government involvement in the economy and views on the proper size of government.<sup>216</sup> Lakoff would have predicted nurturant parents to advocate more government involvement to help solve society’s inequalities, while strict fathers are supposed to distrust government and want it to do less. However, Table 6 shows that

<sup>216</sup> These two issues required binary logistic regression because respondents were only offered two choices. They were entered into a different table for this reason, and their Wald scores should not be compared to T-scores in OLS. It was a mere coincidence that the two measures that did not support Lakoff’s hypothesis were the two that required binary logistic regression.

while conservatives, Republicans, and men were more likely to endorse laissez-faire government, parenting had no significant effect. For size of government, there is a significant parenting effect, but it goes in the opposite way Lakoff's theory predicted it would. Strict parents were actually more likely to agree that there are more things that government should be doing. With only four out of six attitudes significantly predicted by parenting and one attitude directly contradicting his theory, it is difficult to say that Hypothesis 2c lends much support to Lakoff.

### CONCLUSION

It appears that parenting might not be the single dominant political heuristic, as Lakoff predicted, but it certainly cannot be discounted. Few variables tested in political science have shown such a significant and consistent effect. The very fact that parenting's impact remains significant after controlling for party ID and ideology proves that Lakoff was on to something. The parenting index is off the charts for security and tradition, and even for many issues dealing with equality. However, it seems that parenting might be a poor predictor about people's views towards government. This is problematic, because Lakoff's central point was that the way people envision parent-child relations is the way they envision government-citizen relations. Parenting seems to be very important for politics—probably far more important than anyone suspected—but it is not always important in the exact ways Lakoff predicted. Nonetheless, he made a bold and original claim that largely passed the test of empirical scrutiny.

## REFERENCES

- American National Election Studies. "2012 Time Series Study."  
[http://electionstudies.org/studypages/anes\\_timeseries\\_2012/anes\\_timeseries\\_2012.htm](http://electionstudies.org/studypages/anes_timeseries_2012/anes_timeseries_2012.htm)  
 (November 15, 2013).
- Barker, David C. and James D. Tinnick III. 2006. "Competing Visions of Parental Roles and Ideological Constraint." *American Political Science Review* 100 (2): 249-263.
- Cienki, Alan. 2005. "Metaphor in the 'Strict Father' and 'Nurturant Parent' Cognitive Models: Theoretical Issues Raised in an Empirical Study." *Cognitive Linguistics* 16 (2): 279-312.
- Heatherington, Marc J., and Jonathan D. Weiler. 2009. *Authoritarianism and Polarization in American Politics*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Lakoff, George. 2004. *Don't Think of an Elephant!: Know Your Values and Frame the Debate*. White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing.
- Lakoff, George. 1996. *Moral Politics: How Liberals and Conservatives Think*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- Postlewait, Katie. 2006. "Parenting and Politics: Testing Lakoff's Theory of Worldview and Policy Preference." Master's Thesis. University of Washington.



**RES PUBLICA XIX**  
**ILLINOIS WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY**  
**2014**

