

and March 12–15, 2009; NBC News/*Wall Street Journal* poll, February 26–March 1, 2009, and ABC News/*Washington Post* poll, February 19–22, 2009.

31. The CBO estimated that the stimulus bill increased the number of full-time-equivalent jobs by between 1.4 million to 3.0 million compared to what employment would have been without it; see Congressional Budget Office.

32. The partisan breakdown was 53–40 for Democrats, 34–59 for independents, 15–80 for Republicans (Dick 2010).

33. October 20–21 *Newsweek* poll at <http://www.pollingreport.com/budget.htm> (accessed October 28, 2010); the sample is of registered voters.

34. “Boehner: It’s Armageddon; Health Care Bill Will ‘Ruin Our Country,’” The Speaker’s Lobby, Fox News, March 20, 2010, at <http://congress.blogs.foxnews.com/2010/03/20/boehner-its-armageddon-health-care-bill-will-ruin-our-country/comment-page-3/?action=late-new> (accessed April 2, 2010).

35. Speech on the House floor, March 21, 2010, video available at <http://vodpod.com/watch/3280104-devin-nunes-health-care-the-ghost-of-communism-a-socialist-utopia> (accessed April 10, 2010).

36. Data are averages of 38 Gallup, Gallup/*USA Today*, Quinnipiac, CBS News/*New York Times*, Kaiser Family Forum, NBC/*Wall Street Journal*, *Newsweek*, and Ipsos polls taken between during the first 10 months of 2010.

37. See the extensive compilation of survey questions and responses at <http://www.pollingreport.com/health.htm> (accessed April 4, 2010).

38. In the CCEs survey, 52 percent of independents favored Obama, 44 percent, McCain; in the ANES survey, 56 percent of independents favored Obama, 40 percent, McCain; in the national exit poll, it was 52 percent Obama, 42 percent McCain.

39. Note that the categories are not quite identical (the ANES uses “slightly,” the CCEs “somewhat” for categories 3 and 5); there is no evidence that this makes any substantive difference.

40. On average in the four surveys that have asked the question this year, 57 percent blame Bush, 28 percent blame Obama; results from the January Quinnipiac and NPR polls and the March Democracy Corps poll reported at the Roper Center’s Poll facility at <http://webapps.ropercenter.uconn.edu> (accessed April 10, 2010) and the April ABC News/*Washington Post* poll at http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/documents/postpoll_042810.html (accessed April 26, 2010).

41. “Gov’t Economic Policies Seen as Boon for Banks and Big Business, Not Middle Class or Poor,” Pew Survey Report, July 19, 2010, at <http://people-press.org/report/637> (accessed July 26, 2010).

42. For example, in the three ABC News/*Washington Post* polls taken during the first quarter of 2010, 75 percent of respondents who disapproved of Obama’s performance said they disapproved strongly, compared with 59 percent of approvers who said they approved strongly; the comparable figures for disapprovers and approvers of his handling of health care were 84 percent and 60 percent, respectively. In four Gallup polls taken in March, an average of 44 percent of Republicans but only 28 percent of Democrats said they were very enthusiastic about voting for Congress this year; at <http://www.gallup.com/poll/127073/Republicans-Move-Ahead-2010-Vote-Congress.aspx> (accessed April 14, 2010).

43. Based on the McCarty–Poole–Rosenthal DW Nominate scores for the first year of the 111th Congress: the average DW Nominate score for departing members was -.20, for the remaining members, -0.40 on a scale where -1 is most liberal and 1 is most conservative.

44. Noam Levy, “Republicans Spoiling for a Health Care Fight,” *Los Angeles Times*, 15 November 2010, at <http://articles.latimes.com/2010/nov/15/nation/la-na-health-congress-20101115> (accessed November 17, 2010).

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CHAPTER 3

Obama and the Public Mood

Richard W. Boyd

Almost a year to the day after the November 2008 presidential election, a front page story in *The New York Times* reported on the second thoughts of many Iowans about their votes for Obama.¹ My muse is this article, which begins,

Pauline McAreevy voted for President Obama. From the moment she first saw him two years ago, she was smitten by his speeches and sold on his promise of change. She switched parties to support him in the Iowa caucuses, donated money and opened her home to a pair of young campaign workers.

But by the time she received a fund-raising letter last month from the Democratic National Committee, a sense of disappointment had set in. She returned the solicitation with a handwritten note, saying, “Until I see some progress and he lives up to his promises in Iowa, we will not give one penny.”

“I’m afraid I wasn’t realistic,” Ms. McAreevy, 76, a retired school nurse, said on a recent morning on the deck of her home here in east-central Iowa.

“I really thought there would be immediate change,” she said. “Sometimes the Republicans are just as bad as Democrats. But it’s politics as usual, and that’s what I voted against.”

President Obama began his presidency with great expectations and a robust job approval rating of 67 percent in the Gallup poll.² Of the nine newly elected first-term presidents in the post–World War II period, only Eisenhower and Kennedy began their presidencies with a higher favorability rating than Obama. By the end of 2009, however, Obama’s approval rating had fallen to 51 percent. This 16 percentage point decline in his first year exceeded that of all of

the other seven first-term presidents. On the eve of his first midterm election in 2010, Obama's job approval stood at 45 percent. Only Ronald Reagan's approval rating of 42 percent in 1983 was lower at midterm than Obama's. By comparison, Eisenhower's approval rating in October 1954 was 61 percent; Kennedy's in 1962, 61 percent; Nixon's in 1970, 58 percent; Carter's in 1978, 49 percent; George Bush in 1990, 54 percent; Clinton in 1994, 48 percent; and George W. Bush in 2002, 67 percent.

In the 2010 elections, voters swung strongly Republican in congressional and state elections. The November 2010 Political Report of the American Enterprise Institute (AEI 2010) presents a composite measure of seat losses in the Senate, House, gubernatorial races, and state legislative elections for midterm elections since 1914. The 2010 election represents the sixth largest composite defeat for the presidential party during this period. Incumbency offered little protection against this tide in 2010. Strategic votes by moderate Democratic members of Congress against health care reform, the stimulus, or financial regulation may have marginally improved their election prospects (Nyhan 2010), but the scope of the Democratic defeat reflected a national swing against the party. Nate Silver (2010) calls the 2010 election an "aligning election," in that the Democratic congressional candidate's share of the vote in each district in 2010 was highly correlated with Obama's share of the vote in that district in 2008, but with a consistent swing in all districts toward the Republicans. Silver concludes "we have entered a period in which races for Congress have become highly nationalized, and in which few potentially competitive races are conceded by either party and few incumbents are given a free pass. That could mean that we'll continue to see some wild swings over the next several election cycles."

This chapter first analyzes the sources of Obama's victory in 2008. I then interpret the sharp fall in Obama's job approval rating in terms of two related themes. The first theme concerns the multiple meanings of change in election campaigns. What concretely do Obama's victory in 2008 and the Republican resurgence in 2010 imply about American's hopes and fears in domestic and foreign policy and about their judgments on contemporary campaigns and governance? What do Americans really want?

Theme 1: Four Types of Political Change. One meaning of change is simply the public's sense that "it's time for a change," as expressed in Obama's campaign slogan, "Change We Can Believe In." Even if George Bush was not on the 2008 ballot, his economic and foreign policies were. By the end of his administration, fewer than 30 percent of the public approved of Bush's job performance. In *The American Voter* (Campbell et al. 1960: 240–244) argued that about a quarter of all voters evaluated the parties and candidates in 1956 merely in terms of "the nature of the times." Alan Abramowitz (2008) has developed a simple "time-for-change" model for predicting presidential elections well in advance of an election. Abramowitz's model incorporates only three predictor variables (p. 211): "the growth rate of the economy in the first half of the election year, the incumbent president's approval rating at mid-year, and the length of time the incumbent president's party has controlled the White House." His explanation

includes no information about the policy preferences or qualifications of the contending candidates or the political views of voters, but it is nonetheless useful in anticipating the most likely outcome of an upcoming election. This is a "time for a change" model at its most basic.

Voters who are especially responsive to such a call for change are typically less cognitively sophisticated and knowledgeable than voters who consider the contending policy prescriptions of the candidates. Their resolve to vote against the candidate of the incumbent party is principally a retrospective judgment about the performance of the party in office. Such voters typically do not share any considered views on alternative policies. As V. O. Key, Jr. (1964, 544) described time-for-a-change voters, "The vocabulary of the people consists mainly of the words 'yes' and 'no'; and at times one cannot be certain which word is being uttered." Retrospective performance judgments communicate little useful information to an incoming administration and imply the most limited kind of policy mandate. This description presumably does not characterize Pauline McAtreavy or her disillusionment with Obama. She appears, like many other Obama voters, to have expected more rapid progress in concluding the war in Iraq as well as improvements on other policy fronts.

More interesting for our purposes is a second type of desired political change, when voting decisions reflect policy preferences sharpened by the contested stances of opposing campaigns. Health care reform, financial regulation, energy policy, and the Iraq War in the 2008 campaign are prime examples. Such issues move the votes of more sophisticated citizens and more clearly communicate their policy views to a new administration. The newly elected may heed the calls for more policy purism from their party's base, or they may be attentive to policy moderates and party independents, but voters' messages can be clearly ascertained by the newly elected. If these policy-based opinion shifts are durable and favor one party, then the long-term balance of partisan strength will also change. In this chapter, I present evidence that Obama's victory in 2008 did turn on highly contested domestic and foreign policy issues, but also that independents and policy moderates still hold the balance of electoral power in American politics.

A third desire for change may be an aspiration for less negative campaigns and less polarized and partisan governance (Thurber, Nelson, and Dulio 2000). While the white-hot temperature of contemporary politics pleases the party bases, it may be repellant to independents and to policy moderates in both parties. The public may also view the president or one or both of the congressional parties as corrupt and resolve to "throw the rascals out." In the 2008 Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES), over half of the respondents marked the economy as the most important problem facing the country. But in second place, ahead of all policy issues from abortion to terrorism, was "corruption in government."

A fourth form of change is a shifting balance of demographic groups in the mass party coalitions. When groups such as Hispanics or Evangelicals sense that their growing numbers increase their political leverage with the parties, demographic change affects political consciousness.

Theme 2: Party Polarization, Policy Moods, and Public Trust. A second theme is the tension between the public's expectations about the possibilities of political change and the partisan polarization of policy beliefs in America. On the one hand, Lloyd Free and Hadley Cantril (1967) famously argued that Americans are ideological conservatives, but operational liberals. That is, while Americans identify themselves predominantly as conservatives, they support many liberal social policies. To be sure, Free and Cantril were measuring the political beliefs of Americans during a very liberal policy mood in the mid-1960s (Stimson 1999).³ A nation that had just witnessed the Johnson administration's achievements in securing the Civil Rights Act in 1964, the establishment of Medicare in 1964, and the Voting Rights Act in 1965 had every reason to believe that the federal government could successfully shepherd major policy change. As James Stimson (1999) shows, the US has subsequently moved through cycles of conservative and liberal policy moods.

The 1960s was also the period in which Americans faith in the competence and trustworthiness of its political leaders began its long erosion. (See, for example, the trust in government index from the American National Election Studies.)⁴ Trust in the federal government, which had peaked in 1966, fell sharply in the 1970s, and, except for brief revivals in Reagan's first term, Clinton's second term, and George Bush's first term, Americans have remained largely cynical about the character and competence of national leaders.

Reflecting at the time on this erosion of political trust, William A. Gansson (1968) and Philip E. Converse (1972) noted that what was new about popular attitudes in the 1960s and 1970s was the emergence of many voters who felt politically competent and effective but who also mistrusted public officials. Such voters, Converse suggested (pp. 334–337), created a “prime setting for the mobilization of discontent.” To this epiphany, Arthur Miller (1974) added that the growth of disaffection was centered among voters who were well to the left or well to the right on such major policy issues as Vietnam, the economy, race, and social welfare issues. Miller labeled these voters as “cynics of the right” and “cynics of the left.” The cynics of the left, Miller noted, preferred more social change; the cynics of the right, more social control. Disaffection was thus rooted in the opposition of both the left and the right to centrist government policies (Boyd 1974). Political activism and mistrust were mutually reinforcing. Gerald Pomper (1972) showed convincingly that voters' political beliefs had become increasingly joined to their partisan identification from 1956 to 1968 on a range of domestic policy issues, including medical care, school integration, job guarantees, and federal aid to education.

The themes in these early analyses of the relation of policy dissatisfaction to political disaffection have resurfaced the contemporary debate on whether American voters are increasingly polarized on intractable economic and social policies. Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope's engaging *Culture War?* (2006) argues that the center of political gravity is located in the moderate middle, even on such hot-button issues as abortion and homosexuality. While elites may be polarized on these issues, most Americans have, he argues, views that are contingent, qualified, and largely unconnected to the highly politicized combat among the elite “political class.”

Taking up Fiorina's challenge, Pietro Nivola and David Brady (2006, 2008) have edited two volumes on whether the political beliefs of American voters are increasingly polarized. The contributors present persuasive evidence that even though most Americans are not to be found on the policy extremes, they are nonetheless well sorted out into the two major party camps. Gary Jacobson (2008) and Alan Abramowitz (2010) offer extended evidence that on a range of domestic and foreign policy issues, the political beliefs of self-identified Democrats are now predominantly liberal, just as those of Republicans are conservative.

Are Free and Cantril correct in describing Americans as operational liberals who support many federal policy initiatives? And with what political consequences? Marc Hetherington (2005) contends that declining trust in political leaders and institutions undermines popular support for liberal policy initiatives. Ruy Teixeira (2010) and Karllyn Bowman (2008) have reviewed a large number of recent surveys that expose the contradictory feelings that Americans express about their national government. Teixeira's conclusion is captured in his report's title, “The Public Opinion Paradox: An Anatomy of America's Love-Hate Relationship with Its Government.” As operational liberals (pp. 1–2), “Americans want more government action in key areas such as health, poverty, law enforcement, and improving the environment.” But, “polls reveal the U.S. public lacks trust and confidence in government, and believes it is inefficient, unresponsive to ordinary citizens, and often hurts more than it helps.”

The public's ambivalence about its government is evident in its continued skepticism about Obama's most important achievements in domestic policy: health care reform, the economic stimulus package, and the new financial regulation law. A June 2010 survey by the Pew Research Center⁵ shows that Obama's job approval ratings were positive only for energy policy and for foreign policy; the latter typically a strength of Republican presidents. His approval ratings were negative for his handling of the economy, health care, the budget deficit, and immigration policy (p. 6). On issue after vexed issue, the public disapproves of current federal policy but is ambivalent about any alternatives. For example, 81 percent of the respondents agree that “there need to be stricter laws and regulations to protect the environment” and 52 percent oppose “allowing more offshore oil and gas drilling in U.S. waters.” However, only 49 percent agree that “people should be willing to pay higher prices to protect the environment” (p. 2). Moreover, the region most opposed to the Obama administration's moratorium on offshore drilling includes the Gulf states most affected by the BP oil spill.

Similarly, the Pew survey respondents approve by nearly a two-to-one margin Arizona's new immigration law that “requires police to verify the legal status of someone they have already stopped or arrested if they suspect that the person is in the country illegally.” However, these respondents also favor by the same two-to-one margin “providing a way for illegal immigrants in the U.S. to gain citizenship if they pass background checks, pay fines and have jobs.” A majority opposes amending the constitution “so that the parents must be legal residents of the U.S. in order for their newborn child to be a citizen” (p. 2). The Pew survey also shows a growing partisan division on whether “immigrants are a burden on the country” and whether “immigrants threaten U.S. customs

and values" (p. 21). In a climate in which policy views are so conflicted and confidence in the good faith and competence of presidents and members of Congress has so eroded, Americans may no longer support controversial policy initiatives even when the "national mood" may be increasingly supportive of such policy changes.

THE 2008 COOPERATIVE CONGRESSIONAL ELECTION STUDY

I examine Obama's victory through an analysis of the 2008 Cooperative Congressional Election Study.⁶ The Internet-based CCEs survey combines a very large sample of 32,000 respondents with a two-wave, pre- and post-election interview design.⁷

The vote decision model is adapted from the Michigan School's "funnel of causality" (Campbell et al. 1960, 24–32), as subsequently refined by Miller and Shanks (Miller and Shanks 1996, 192). In this model, voters' socioeconomic and demographic characteristics influence their long-term partisan and ideological self-identifications, which in turn influence their policy preferences. Voters' policy views affect their judgments of the performance of the current administration and help determine their final vote decisions. A fuller analysis with supporting statistics is available at the author's web page.⁸ In this chapter, I highlight the findings that bear most directly on the public's reactions to the Obama candidacy and his first two years as president.

SOCIAL, ECONOMIC, AND DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

Sex. Sixty percent of women voted for Obama, compared to only 48 percent of men.⁹ This gender gap first emerged in the Reagan victories, when the Republican Party platform embraced its pro-life position and withdrew support for the Equal Rights Amendment. This gap persists even when the differing incomes and marital states of women are taken into account.

Ethnicity. Ninety-seven percent of non-Hispanic blacks voted for Obama, compared to 64 percent of Hispanics and 45 percent of non-Hispanic whites. When Obama announced his campaign, many black political and civil rights leaders were initially skeptical that white voters would support a black candidate. Before the caucuses concluded in predominantly white Iowa, many of these leaders either withheld their endorsements or publicly endorsed Hillary Rodham Clinton. After Obama's victory over Clinton in Iowa, most shifted to vocal and proud support, and black voters around the nation shifted as well.

Obama's race was a net positive for his candidacy. The white vote remained steadily supportive of Obama throughout the perturbations of the nomination and general election campaigns. According to the national exit polls since 1972, only 40 percent of whites have on average voted for the Democratic candidate in the general election. Overall (i.e., the bivariate relationship of race to the vote),

49 percent of whites voted for Obama, a percentage matched only by President Clinton in his easy re-election victory in 1996 since national exit polls were introduced in 1972. Obama won a greater share of the white vote in 2008 than did Kerry in 2004 or Gore in 2000. As Paul Sniderman and Edward Sgitzler (2008) argue in their post-election analysis, the number of genuinely prejudiced whites is more than matched by whites who hold blacks in esteem. This positive racial view increased support for Obama, particularly among otherwise moderate and conservative Democrats, who often disagree with their national party on policy grounds.

To be sure, Obama did not win a majority of the white vote, but no Democratic candidate has done so since Lyndon Johnson's landslide victory in 1964. My interpretation of Obama's support among white voters is that they viewed Obama's candidacy as a way to express to themselves and others that they considered themselves to be racially tolerant. They were pleased to interpret Obama's victory as evidence that they were ready to put America's strained legacy of race relations to rest. Obama's multi-racial background and his success in positioning himself as a leader of all Americans had the consequence of making racial considerations no more important in 2008 than in any other elections of the post-civil rights era.

The exceptionally large sample size of the CCEs permits good estimates of the votes of smaller ethnic groups. Fifty-four percent of Asian Americans voted for Obama, or about the same rate as Americans overall. Most interestingly, only 32 percent of Native Americans voted for Obama, which is the lowest of any of the ethnic groups in this study. This low vote level is controlled for the Southwestern residence of most Native Americans, which was second only to the Southeast as the most pro-McCain of any of the five regions.

Religion and Religious Observance. Although the Democratic advantage among Catholics that dates to the New Deal coalition continues to erode, Obama still enjoyed a seven percentage point advantage among Catholics, compared to Protestants, with all other social and economic variables controlled. The large sample size of the CCEs permits us to estimate vote probabilities for Jews and Mormons, each of which comprise about two percent of all voters. At 68 percent, the Jewish vote was 31 percentage points more Democratic than Mormons, the most pro-McCain of the religious groups.

More important than denominational differences, however, are voters' habits of religious observance. I created a standardized factor score from two items: "How important is religion in your life?" and "Aside from weddings and funerals, how often do you attend religious services?" I include Religious Observance among the first-stage demographic variables because it is closely joined to the acquisition of religious identity itself. I define a more religiously observant voter as one who is one standard deviation more observant than the mean and a less observant voter as a person who is one standard deviation less observant than the mean. Only 37 percent of the more religiously observant voted for Obama. Seventy percent of the less observant voted for Obama, a 33 percentage point difference. The importance of religious observance in contemporary American

politics is striking, as we shall see in the later discussion of its impact on moral traditionalism and the vote.

Material Interests. The political effects of material interests (family income, employment status, union membership, home ownership, and marital status) are all important, even when each is controlled for the influence of the others. Obama's vote share was 10 percentage points higher among the poorest income quintile than among the richest. The unemployed were nine percentage points more likely to vote for Obama than the employed. A person in a household with at least one member in a union was also about nine percentage points more likely to vote for Obama than someone in a household without a union member. Renters were nine percentage points more likely to vote for Obama than people who owned their homes or apartments. Single (never married) respondents were nine percentage points more likely to vote for Obama than married ones. The cumulative importance of all of these factors that influence material well-being on the vote is quite striking.

Age and Education. When their socioeconomic and demographic attributes are statistically controlled for each other, voters' material interests, identities, and affiliations mattered much more than their age and education. The difference in support for Obama between voters with a grade school education and those with some college was only two percentage points. Obama support was distinctively higher only for those with a four-year college or a post-graduate degree.

The effects of age matters least of all. Voters under 30 scarcely differed in their votes from those over 60, once the other social and economic variables are taken into account. Much has been made of the potential significance of the mobilization of young voters in the 2008 election.¹⁰ Similarly, older voters are currently seen as the recruiting pool for the Tea Partiers united in opposition to Obama. To be sure, 67 percent of the respondents under 30 did vote for Obama, while 53 percent of voters in their 60s and 61 percent of voters over 70 voted for McCain. But age differences mattered little in the full vote model. Age is politically relevant only to the extent that it is associated with the politically more important elements of one's economic and social life circumstances, such as income, employment, marital status, and religious observance.

PARTISAN AND IDEOLOGICAL IDENTIFICATIONS

Voters' long-term partisan and ideological identifications are always strongly related to their vote decisions, even controlled for their socioeconomic and demographic attributes.

First, we present the 2008 vote probabilities for each category of party identifiers (controlled for all other socioeconomic variables and ideological identification) and their share of the 2008 electorate:

<i>Percent 2008 Obama Vote</i>	
93%	Strong Democrats (30% of the 2008 voters)
82%	Weak Democrats (20%)
51%	Pure Independents (8%)
17%	Weak Republicans (18%)
3%	Strong Republicans (22%)

And the same breakdown for ideological identification:

<i>Percent 2008 Obama Vote</i>	
83%	Very Liberal (9% of the 2008 voters)
79%	Liberal (18%)
60%	Moderate (30%)
32%	Conservative (21%)
19%	Very Conservative (14%)

Two elements of the 2008 vote bear emphasis: First, Obama won a surprising percentage of the center-right in 2008. Majorities of pure independents and ideological moderates voted for Obama. Even those who viewed themselves as conservative or very conservative gave healthy shares of their votes to Obama. Conservatives were more likely to vote for Obama than liberals to vote for McCain. As we shall shortly see, these independents and moderates switched strongly to the Republicans in 2010, creating the national GOP surge in Congressional and state races.

Second, a corollary to Cantlil and Free's dictum that many Americans are ideological conservatives but hold liberal policy views is that many more Americans identify themselves as Democrats than think of themselves as liberals. In 2008, 50 percent of the voters identified themselves as Strong or Weak Democrats, but only 27 percent identified as liberals. Ideological moderates outnumber partisan independents by more than 4 to 1, which explains much of this disparity. Little wonder that Democratic candidates proudly declare their partisan affiliation, but typically describe themselves as "progressives" rather than "liberals." Who doesn't believe in progress, after all?

POLITICAL AND MORAL POLICY PREFERENCES IN 2008

The 2008 CCEES survey includes many questions measuring people's policy preferences. I have reduced these items to a set of four underlying policy dimensions: views on the proper federal role in social welfare, moral traditionalism, preferences on means of reducing budget deficits, and conditions justifying the deployment of US troops abroad.

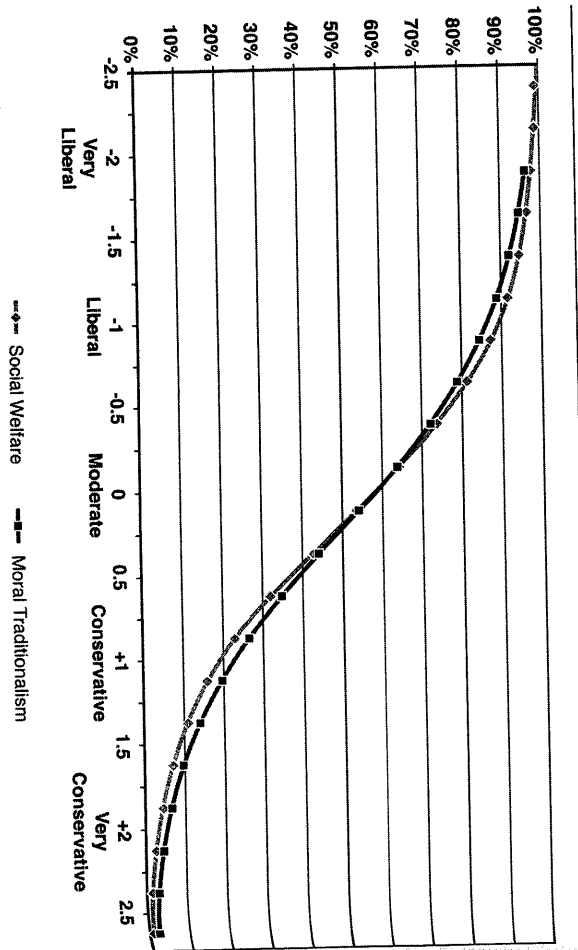
Social Welfare and Moral Traditionalism. The social welfare and moral traditionalism dimensions are standardized factor scores, with means of 0 and

standard deviations of 1. Respondents' social welfare factor scores derive primarily from questions on affirmative action, increasing the minimum wage, health insurance for children, federal assistance in housing, guaranteed health care, and withdrawing troops from Iraq (the last being viewed by most respondents preferentially as a desire to focus economic resources on domestic social welfare needs rather than on military deployments abroad). Scores on the moral traditionalism factor derive primarily from survey items on abortion, stem cell research, and support for a proposed amendment to ban gay marriage.

Figure 3-1 displays the exceptionally strong relationships of social welfare and moral traditionalism to the 2008 vote. For example, even controlled for voters' socioeconomic position and their partisan and ideological identification, moderate social welfare liberals (defined as voters one standard deviation more liberal than the mean) voted 88 percent for Obama. Comparably moderate social welfare conservatives voted only 16 percent for him. Moral traditionalism was as strongly related to voters' support for Obama as their views on social welfare policy, as Figure 3-1 clearly shows.

Budget Policy. The CSES survey gauged people's views on balancing the federal budget by asking them to choose their most preferred and least preferred of three options: cutting defense, cutting domestic spending, and raising taxes. Conservative budget policy preferences are defined as support for cutting domestic spending and as opposition either to raising taxes or to cutting defense. Liberal budget preferences are defined as opposition to cuts in domestic spending and as support for either cutting defense or raising taxes. Only 38 percent of fiscal policy conservatives voted for Obama, compared to 77 percent of fiscal policy

Figure 3-1: Social Welfare, Moral Traditionalism, and the Obama Vote



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liberals, a difference of almost 40 percentage points. It is worth noting that 52 percent of the CSES respondents were fiscal conservatives by this measure, and only 24 percent were fiscal liberals, a conservative advantage on budget and fiscal issues of more than two to one.

US Troops Abroad. The CSES survey included several questions on conditions justifying the use of US troops abroad. I formed a standardized factor score from responses to four such conditions: "to destroy terrorist camps," "to intervene in a region where there is genocide or a civil war," "to protect American allies under attack by foreign nations," and "to help the United Nations uphold international law." As before, moderate supporters and moderate opponents are defined as voters whose policy views are one standard deviation above or below the mean. Moderate opponents of committing US troops under the listed conditions voted 62 percent for Obama, compared to only 45 percent among those who were moderate supporters of committing US troops in these circumstances. Although the relationship of opinion on committing US troops abroad was not as strongly related to the Obama vote as opinions on social welfare, moral traditionalism, and fiscal issues, people's policy views on the deployment of US troops in foreign conflicts influenced the 2008 vote substantially.

**PERFORMANCE JUDGMENTS AND ECONOMIC EXPECTATIONS:
THE ECONOMY, THE IRAQ WAR, AND THE BANK BAILOUT**

This set of policy issues includes voters' judgments about the performance of the Bush administration in the context of their expectations about an Obama or a McCain presidency. These retrospective and prospective judgments are activated as the general election campaigns move into full swing. Our model includes four performance judgments from the 2008 CSES: consumer confidence in the current economy, consumer confidence in the economy's near future, opinion on US commitment to the Iraq War, and opinion on the 2008 bank bailout.

The Economy. Confidence in the current economy was measured by three items: the performance of the national economy "over the past year," people's ratings of "the present general business conditions" in their area, and their perceptions of the number of "available jobs" in their area.

Confidence in the economy's future prospects was measured by people's expectations about business conditions "six months from now." These expectations focused on "general business conditions," "jobs," and "total family income."

People's confidence in the current economy was neither substantively important nor statistically significant in explaining their vote decisions. Instead, it was their degree of optimism about the state of the economy six months into the future that moved vote decisions. Voters who lacked confidence that the economy would improve (i.e., those one standard deviation or more below the mean) voted 59 percent for Obama. Voters with higher confidence in the future economy voted only 48 percent for Obama. This 11 percentage point difference

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is important, especially when we remember that an absolute majority of all voters in the CCEs survey rated the economy as the most important problem facing the country.

The Bank Bailout. From September 7 to 19, 2008, the public was shocked by the gravity of the crises in the housing and financial markets (Campbell 2008). The Bush administration determined to seize ownership of the government sponsored mortgage institutions, Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac. Lehman Brothers, the large bond firm, declared bankruptcy. At the federal government's urging, Bank of America absorbed Merrill Lynch as major banks came under great financial pressure. A reluctant President Bush proposed a \$700 billion financial bailout program, which Congress convened to consider.

During this crisis, Senator McCain suspended his presidential campaign in order to participate in his party's consideration of President Bush's bailout initiative. He unsuccessfully proposed postponing the first presidential debate to free time for his involvement. However, he offered no alternative to Bush's proposal and played no leadership role in his colleague's deliberations.

Fifty-three percent of voters in the CCEs survey opposed the bank bailout legislation compared to only 21 percent who supported it. One would have expected that many of the voters who opposed the president's bailout proposal would have shifted to Obama. However, people's views on the bank bailout at the time were not statistically related to their votes. Both opponents and supporters of the bailout voted for Obama at about the same rate. Thus, we are left with the puzzle that people's retrospective judgments on the bank bailout did not contribute more importantly to Obama's victory in 2008, given the fact that in the 2010 campaign the Tea Party activists made Bush's bank bailout and Obama's stimulus package primary examples of federal overreaching.

The Iraq War. In contrast, the Iraq War was much more influential for the 2008 vote than the bank bailout. The CCEs survey tried to capture people's contingent and ambivalent feelings. Many people wished to support the troops and to justify their sacrifices, even while doubting the official justifications for the war. Others believed that the decision to go to war was right, even if the decision had been informed by faulty intelligence about Iraq's capacity to produce weapons of mass destruction or about the presence of al-Qaeda in Iraq. The survey asked respondents to choose between five competing statements on positions on the war.

The plurality of CCEs voters (43 percent) agreed with the unqualified statement, "The Iraq War was a mistake from the beginning; it never should have been started, and the U.S. should withdraw now." These voters supported Obama at a rate of 77 percent. Only among this group did Obama win a majority of the vote.

Two other statements were endorsed by more ambivalent voters. Eleven percent agreed "The Iraq War was a mistake, but since the U.S. did invade Iraq, it has been worth the cost in American lives and money to avoid a failure that would be even worse for the U.S." Another 15 percent believed that "The U.S.

was right in going to war in Iraq, but mistakes made following the invasion made the results too costly in American lives and money to be worth it." These two groups voted 44 percent and 48 percent for Obama, respectively.

Thirty percent of the voters gave more unqualified endorsement of America's war aims. Of these, 23 percent agreed "The U.S. was right in going to war in Iraq, and despite mistakes following the invasion, the results have been worth the cost in American lives and money." Seven percent more agreed that the US was right in going to war and "made no serious mistakes following the invasion." These two groups of war supporters voted only 25 percent and 26 percent for Obama, respectively. In sum, people's retrospective judgments on the merits of President Bush's commitment to the Iraq War had a striking impact on their final votes, even controlled for all other variables influencing the vote.

PARTISAN POLARIZATION, POLITICAL CHANGE, AND TRUST IN GOVERNMENT

Almost certainly, the shift in voter sentiment in 2008 that led to Obama's victory depended importantly on the high disapproval ratings of the Bush administration. In this sense, 2008 was similar to Reagan's first election victory over President Jimmy Carter in 1980. By the end of President Carter's first term in 1980, voter anger was at a boiling point over the combination of high unemployment and high inflation. His Republican challenger, Ronald Reagan, needed only to persuade an uncertain public that he was a competent alternative to Carter. This Reagan accomplished in the presidential debates. Similarly, voters saw Obama as winning all three of the 2008 presidential debates (Pomper 2010). Reagan's 1980 victory reflected in part the voters' conclusion that Carter's economic policies had failed and that a qualified challenger from the opposition party could be trusted to govern. In this interpretation, Reagan's victory did not necessarily imply that most voters endorsed his conservative policy principles.

Initial examinations of the 2008 exit surveys led some analysts to conclude that Obama's victory mirrored Reagan's win in 1980. That is, Obama owed his victory primarily to voter dissatisfaction with the economy and with Bush's performance as president, not to Obama's proposals on health care and other policies. For example, Gerald Pomper (2010, 68) argues,

The fundamental causes were set months before the party conventions, the debates, and the campaign maneuvers. The voters' verdict was a retrospective negative judgment of the Republican administration. It resembled similar past elections, grounded in the public's economic discontents (as in 1932), its wish for a change in political parties (as in 1952), and the unpopularity of the president (as in 1980).

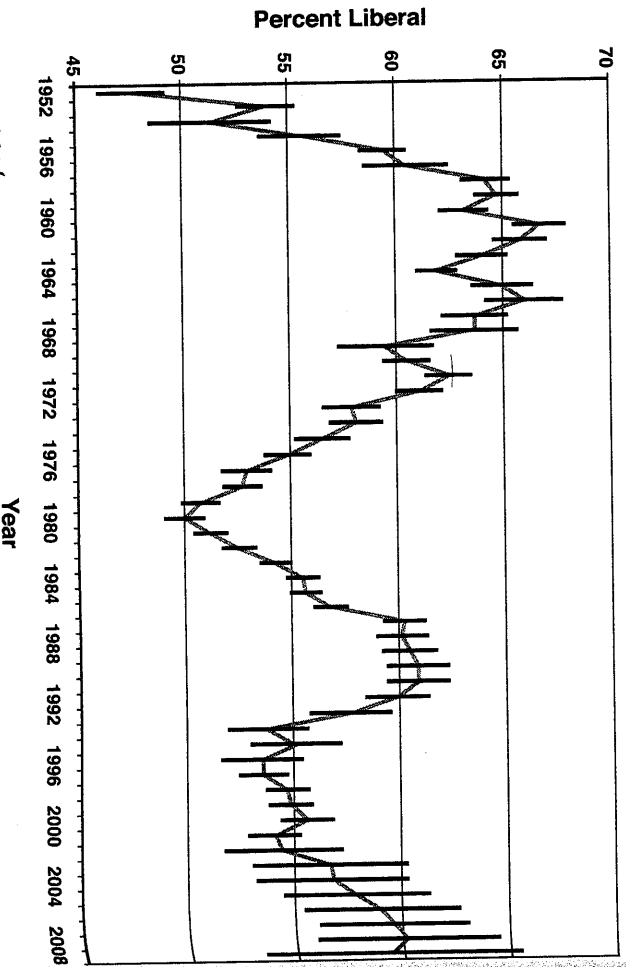
Yet, the 1980 and 2008 elections were not simply retrospective judgments about the failures of the Carter and Bush presidencies. James Stimson (1999) has established that voters' views on domestic issues track a long cycle of conservative

and liberal "policy moods." As we see in Stimson's graph (Figure 3-2), Reagan's victory in 1980 came at the conclusion of a shift from 1968 onward toward more conservative policy views.¹¹ Similarly, the public's growing policy liberalism since 2000 contributed to Obama's election in 2008. Obama's victory reflected voters' policy hopes, and not just their negative appraisals of the Bush presidency.

Stimson's chart is suggestive of a broad pattern in postwar American elections. Voters do not typically elect the party out of power to the presidency until the policy mood that supports this change has almost run its course. Although Stimson's time series does not extend back into the 1940s, one imagines that a comparable graph for the policy mood then would show a growing conservative policy trend all during the 1940s, after a liberal trend in the 1930s. Eisenhower's victory in 1952 likely came just as the conservative policy mood of the 1940s had reached its maximum and shifted in a liberal direction. Kennedy in 1960 was elected only at the conclusion of the 1950s liberal trend, which remained predominantly liberal until Nixon's election in 1968. Reagan in 1980 began his administration just as the 1968–1980 conservative policy trend shifted back in a liberal direction. Clinton's victory over George H. W. Bush in 1992 came just as the 1980–1992 liberal trend reached its peak and a shift toward conservatism ensued. George W. Bush's victory in 2000 coincided with a shift toward policy liberalism. An immediate shift to conservatism in 2009 followed Obama's election in 2008. It is as though Captain Obama, like his predecessors, called for the spinnaker just as the favoring wind stalled.

The recurrent pattern is so regular that it invites competing explanations of cause and effect. Are elections a "lagging indicator," with a change in the

Figure 3-2: James Stimson's Cycle of Policy Moods, 1952–2009



presidential party coming only when the supporting shift in policy mood has fully matured? Or, do incoming administrations wrongly interpret their policy mandates and, by the unpopular policies they initiate, actually cause the policy mood to shift against them? Secondly, what set of voters initiate the shift in mood? Are they those on the policy extremes, such as the liberal Vietnam dissidents in the late 1960s and the current conservative Tea Party activists? Or, do partisan independents and policy moderates shift the balance of liberal and conservative policy sentiment?

To the second question, Stimson argues that policy moderates are the key to shifts in the policy mood cycle (p. 123).

The moderate electorate alternately experiences "too left" policies from one party and "too right" policies from the other. . . . As the parties constantly miss the center in their policies, the electorate constantly pulls back in that direction. The moderate electorate as a result produces a negative feedback, always moving left when the government moves right and moving right when the government moves left. . . . In the long run the counter-movement of public opinion enhances the likelihood of cyclical change of government, with parties alternating in power, neither ever able to hold on to it for lengthy periods.

If Stimson is correct on the second question, then he has presumably answered the first question as well. Presidents cause the policy mood to shift against them by governing against the grain of the moderate policy center.

Years wrote, "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold." Yet, in US electoral politics, the left and right prevail only temporarily. Newly elected administrations champion the policy preferences of the coalition that supported them, which are typically more extreme than the policy views of independents and policy moderates.

Consider, for example, the social welfare policy views of Republicans and Democrats in Figures 3-3 through 3-6. As Figure 3-3 shows, the great majority of Democrats are social welfare liberals, just as the large majority of Republicans are social welfare conservatives. On social welfare provision, the modal Democrat and the modal Republican stand more than two standard deviations apart. When the party bases differ so markedly, each is prepared to hold their party's presidential and congressional candidates accountable for any deviation away from their liberal or conservative policy preferences on the federal role in social welfare provision.

Although abortion, stem cell research, and gay rights have not been politically contested for as long as social welfare policy, partisan division on these religious and cultural issues has been a feature of presidential contests since 1980. On the moral traditionalism dimension in Figure 3-4, the modal Democrat and the modal Republican are again more than two standard deviations apart in their policy views.

Compare the political views of independents in Figures 3-5 and 3-6 to those of Democrats and Republicans in Figures 3-3 and 3-4.

The social welfare policy preferences of independents are substantially more centrist than those of Democrats or Republicans. Though independents appear

Figure 3-3: Federal Role in Social Welfare Policy by Party Identification

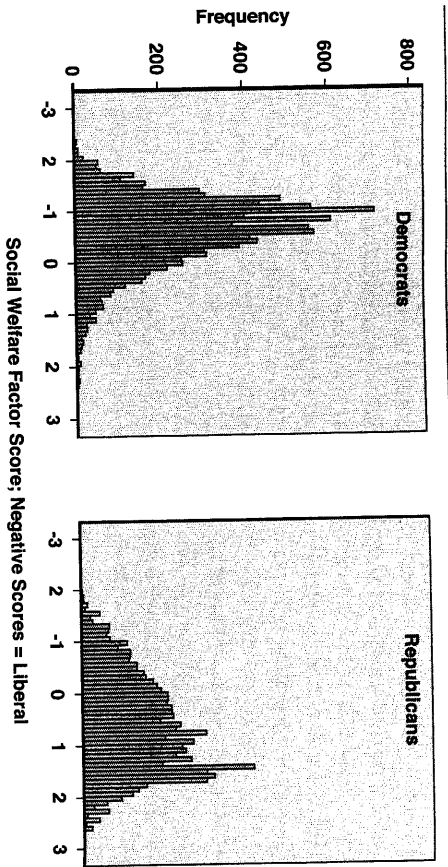
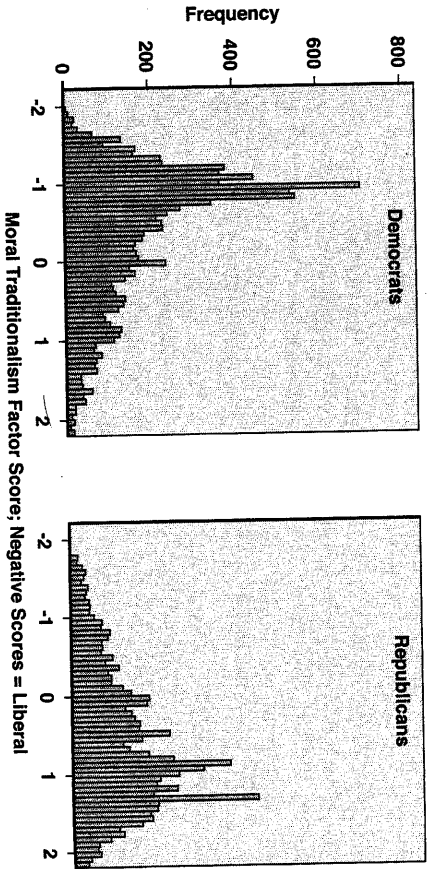


Figure 3-4: Moral Traditionalism by Party Identification



in Figure 3-5 to be more liberal than conservative, the median independent is located at $-.03$ on the social welfare factor score, or very close to the overall mean social welfare policy view.

On the moral traditionalism dimension in Figure 3-6, the policy preferences of independents are closer to those of Democrats than to Republicans, but independents are again more centrist on abortion, gay rights, and stem cell research than Democrats or Republicans.

Similarly, independents stand midway between Democrats and Republicans on approaches to a balanced federal budget. Nearly nine of 10 Republicans have a conservative fiscal view. That is, if balancing the federal budget is a priority,

Figure 3-5: Independents' Views on Social Welfare

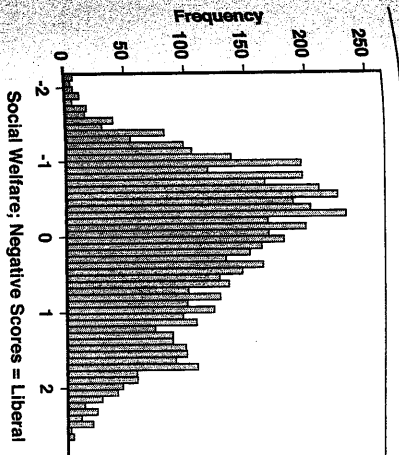
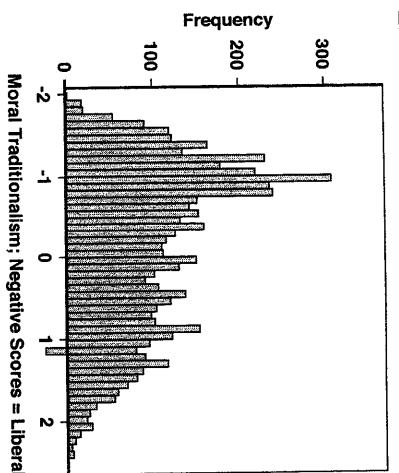


Figure 3-6: Independents' Views on Moral Traditionalism



Republicans would rather do so by cutting domestic expenditures than by raising taxes or cutting the defense budget. Only a quarter of Democrats hold this view. Independents are again more centrist. Half of independents share the conservative budget preferences of Republicans. Half have liberal or mixed policy preferences.

The partisan polarization of both voters and their elected representatives in Congress creates a dynamic in which there is little electoral incentive for either party to cooperate with the other on legislation. In the House of Representatives and the Senate, members vote the policy views of their electoral bases, rather than court more centrist independents and policy moderates. Policy moderates in the electorate grow increasingly dissatisfied, and their confidence in both the president and the parties in Congress erodes. The policy mood reverses course against newly elected presidents, and mistrust of the institutions of governance hardens.

The journalists John F. Harris and Jim VandeHei describe this dynamic in these terms:¹²

The Flight of the Independents

Obama sees himself as a different kind of Democrat: one who transcends ideology but is basically a centrist. By some measures, his self-image fits. His war and anti-terrorism policies are remarkably similar to those advocated by the man he blames for most of the country's problems: George W. Bush. He's butting heads with the teachers unions by enticing states to quit rewarding teachers on tenure instead of merit. On immigration, he stresses border security instead of amnesty for illegal immigrants.

But on the issues voters care most about—the economy, jobs and spending—Obama has shown himself to be a big-government liberal. This reality is killing him with independent-minded voters—a trend that started one year ago and has gotten much worse of late. On the eve of his inaugural address, nearly six in 10 independents approved of his job performance. By late July of 2009—right

around the time Obama was talking up health care and pressuring Democrats on cap-and-trade legislation—Independents started to take flight.

Many never returned. For the first time in his presidency, Obama's approval among Independents dropped below 40 percent in the past two weeks, according to the widely respected Gallup surveys.

This "flight of the independents" accounts for both the Democratic wave in the 2006 congressional elections and the Republican wave in 2010, according to the national exit polls (Pew 2010). The proportions of Democrats and Republicans voting in the two congressional elections held steady from 2006 to 2010. Republican voters supported Republican House candidates at rates of 91 percent in 2006 and 95 percent in 2010. Similarly, 93 percent of Democratic voters in 2006 and 92 percent in 2010 supported Democratic candidates. But in 2006, independents preferred Democratic House candidates 57 percent to 39 percent. In 2010 independents reversed this division almost exactly: 55 percent voted for Republican House candidates; only 39 percent for Democratic candidates.¹³

REVOLT OF THE MODERATES OR OF THE POLICY EXTREMISTS?

This emphasis on the pivotal role of independents and policy moderates is not in tension with the earlier argument that political disaffection is particularly characteristic of voters on the policy extremes—i.e., very liberal Democrats and very conservative Republicans. If Stimson is correct, independents and policy moderates tend to react negatively to the policy agenda advanced by newly elected presidents, causing a shift in the aggregate policy mood, the alternation of party control of the presidency, and electoral losses for the president's party in Congress in midterm elections. The movement of independents and policy moderates affects the balance of party control of the presidency and the Congress.

In contrast, the policy disaffection of very liberal Democratic voters and very conservative Republican voters manifests itself in ideological fights in the primaries, rather than in the general elections. The Tea Party insurgency is a prime example. The Gallup poll (2010) headlined its July 2, 2010, report on Tea Party adherents thus: "Tea Party Supporters Overlap Republican Base: Eight of 10 Tea Party Supporters are Republicans." Based on a September 2010 YouGov poll, the *Economist* reported (2010) that "the [Tea Party] movement's supporters are older, whiter, richer and far more likely to be Republican than Democrat." The Tea Party is the conservative wing of the Republican Party rebranded for enhanced market appeal. National Tea Party leaders such as 2008 Republican Vice Presidential candidate Sarah Palin and Republican Senator Jim DeMint (SC), among other movement leaders, endorsed conservative challengers to incumbent Republican Senators Lisa Murkowski of Alaska and Bob Bennett of Utah. Murkowski lost in the Republican primary (though she prevailed in the general election as a write-in candidate) and Bennett lost in a pre-primary Republican state convention vote. With Tea Party backing, Sharon Angle in Nevada, Ken Buck in Colorado, and Christine O'Donnell in Delaware won

Republican Senate primaries, but all three lost in the general elections, running behind other state-wide Republican candidates and perhaps costing Republicans the opportunity in 2010 to control the Senate. The influence of the Tea Party thus far has been to pressure more mainstream Republican office holders to move to the right to protect themselves from future primary challenges by more conservative Republicans. The Tea Party, like the liberal Democratic dissidents of the Vietnam era, will push the policy centers of gravity of the congressional parties further apart, but it is not clear that the movement will affect the electoral balance between the parties or the overall public policy mood as much as independents and policy moderates do.

A large body of scholarship now addresses the causes and consequences of increasing issue polarization among voters and members of Congress on major policy issues (Abramowitz 2010; Hetherington 2009; Hetherington and Weiler 2009; Jacobson 2008; Kamarck 2009; Nivola and Brady 2006, 2008; Pildes forthcoming).

We should expect partisan issue polarization to continue to typify campaigning and governing. The United States is a mature party system. The policy views of members of Congress are closely aligned with those of the party bases in the electorate. This feature of our party system is not new. It is the contemporary form of a politics that took root in the late 1960s and continued to develop over the ensuing half century.

EFFECTS ON TRUST IN GOVERNMENT

When ideologies, partisanship, and policy views are so tightly linked and consequential, polarization and mistrust in elected leaders are mutually reinforcing. Galston (2010) has recently asked, "Can a Polarized American Party System Be 'Healthy'?" It is a question worth pondering. A virtue of this party system is that it can deliver policy change, particularly when a party has united control of Congress and the presidency. During Obama's first regular congressional session, with minimal support from congressional Republicans, the Obama administration succeeded in passing his major legislative priorities, including health care, the stimulus package, and financial regulation. In the lame Duck session following the 2010, Obama added even more legislative successes: a compromise package extending the Bush tax cuts and unemployment insurance, the repeal of the Defense Department's "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy; a food safety bill, the 9/11 First Responders bill providing free medical treatment and compensation; and the Senate ratification of the New START nuclear arms reduction treaty.

Yet, legislative victories have not sustained the public's confidence in Obama, in Congress, or in the congressional parties. So it has been since the late 1960s, long before today's talk radio and politicized television. Through shifts in partisan control of national institutions and through liberal and conservative policy moods alike, voters have remained mistrustful and disaffected. Political discourse takes on a hard, mean-spirited edge. Suspicion is not reserved only for the political opposition. The party bases are also quick to turn on their own

parties' representatives in Congress if they appear to stray from the party line or to cooperate legislatively with the opposition party. Obama hoped he could raise the quality of political discourse and increase trust in leaders and institutions. This aspiration will likely prove elusive, both for his administration and for his successors.

NOTES

1. *The New York Times*, November 3, 2009, p. 1.
2. Weekly Gallup ratings. <http://www.gallup.com/poll/124922/Presidential-Approval-Center.aspx>. The presidential job approval ratings quoted here are measured at three points: the first poll after inauguration, the last poll in December of the first year in office, and the last poll in October before the November midterm election.
3. See Figure 3-2 later in this chapter, with Stimson's updates to his trends on the cycles of liberal and conservative domestic policy moods through 2009. In spite of the fact that the policy mood cycles into conservative as well as liberal periods, Stimson still thinks it is sensible to describe Americans as operational policy liberals. Even during increasingly conservative policy moods, the trend line typically stays above the 50 percent liberal level. This was true in the 1960s. The trend in policy mood was conservative beginning in 1968, but the overall policy mood was on balance still liberal. In contrast to the cyclical character of policy mood, the proportion of people who identify themselves as conservatives or liberals is remarkably constant over time and therefore does not vary in concert with the policy mood cycle. See, for example, Michael J. Robinson, "Static America: Myths about Political Change in the U.S.," Pew Research Center, September 27, 2010. The fact that self-identified conservatives have consistently outnumbered self-identified liberals since at least 1972 is the basis for the claim that Americans are ideological conservatives and that the US is a "center-right" nation.
4. http://www.electionstudies.org/nesguide/graphics/g5a_5_1.htm.
5. "Growing Opposition to Increased Offshore Drilling: Obama's Rating Little Affected by Recent Turmoil," Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, June 24, 2010. <http://people-press.org/report/?pageid=1744>.
6. I am indebted to Professors James Thurber of the Center for Congressional and Presidential Studies at American University and Brian Schaffner of the University of Massachusetts for providing access to the common content of the 2008 election study and to Stephen Ansolabehere of Harvard University for assistance with the final codebook.
7. A full description of the project is available at <http://web.mit.edu/polisci/portl/cces/index.html>. Ansolabehere, Stephen, Cooperative Congressional Election Study, 2008: Common Content [Computer File] Release 1: February 2, 2009. Cambridge, MA: M.I.T. [producer].
8. <http://boyd.web.wesleyan.edu/profile/boyd.htm>.
9. This is verbal shorthand. What this really means is the probability of women voting for Obama is .60, controlled for all of the other socioeconomic variables introduced previously or at the same stage in this multistage vote model. This formulation should not be confused with the actual bivariate vote of men and women for Obama. In the simple bivariate cross-tabulation of gender and vote, 58% of women in the 2008 CCEs survey voted for Obama, compared to 50% of men. I will use this verbal shorthand throughout this discussion. When I specify a vote division for Obama, I always mean the probability of an Obama vote controlled for all other variables in the model introduced by that point.
10. In "Save Us Millennials," Op-Ed column, *The New York Times*, June 3, 2010, Timothy Egan thapsodizes, "The young were Barack Obama's strongest supporters, and still are...."

They were wise beyond their years and ahead of every other generation on the major issues—from offshore oil drilling (not so fast), to gays in the military (duh), to tolerance of the new ethnic stew (you mean that's still a problem)... You would never know, with the nightly images of jowly Tea Partiers and their inchoate discontents, that people ages 18 to 29 years old made up a larger percentage of the 2008 electorate than those over 65." Similarly, Andrew Kohut of the Pew Research Center writes, "The third important element of this election was the age gap—the divergence between the candidate preferences of the youngest and oldest voters was the widest in decades, perhaps ever. More young voters, those 18–29, have now moved into the Democratic column in three consecutive national elections—2004, 2006, and 2008—than in the three previous comparable elections." See Pew Research Center Publications, "Post-Election Perspectives," November 13, 2008.

11. See Stimson's updated chart from 1952 to 2009 in Figure 3-2 at <http://www.unc.edu/~jstimson/>. I gratefully acknowledge his permission to reprint this chart. The vertical bars in the chart are standard errors. Stimson regards 1964, 1980, and 1994 as three mandate elections. "The 1964 and 1980 cases represent the high points, liberal and conservative, respectively of policy mood (p. 114)."

12. In Politico.com, July 15, 2010. <http://dyn.politico.com/printstory.cfm?uuid=D58D428A-18FE-70B2-A80D4E80D221BD8A>.

13. The summary of the 2010 national exit poll is from an early November 3, 2010 release. The final poll figures may differ marginally.