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Pathologies of Studying Public Opinion, Political Communication, and Democratic Responsiveness

James Druckman
Payson S. Wild Professor of Political Science
Assistant Director, Institute for Policy Research
Northwestern University

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Abstract

The research literature on democratic representation and on public opinion formation have largely ignored one another. Once one considers the reality of the political communication environment, a fundamental tension between these two literatures emerges. In this essay, Druckman reviews work on each, highlighting problems with how "quality opinion" is often defined and with how representation is typically studied, and then offers a way forward.

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"A key characteristic of a democracy is the continuing *responsiveness* of the government to the *preferences* of its citizens…" (Dahl, 1971: 1, italics added). Dahl (1971: 4) goes on to identify two critical dimensions of democracy: public contestation or competition *and* mass participation (4). Dahl's account echoes Schattschneider's (1960: 138) conception of democracy as "a competitive political system in which competing leaders and organizations define the alternatives of public policy in such a way that the public can participate in the decision-making process." Unfortunately, the last half-century of research has seen a disconnect between work on public opinion formation and elite responsiveness. On the one hand, those who work on responsiveness continue to assume preferences are fixed and exogenous to the political process, including communications. On the other hand, the last several decades of scholarship on mass opinion demonstrates that preferences are far from exogenous. This leads to a worst-case scenario in which elites manipulate mass preferences and a still pessimistic best case in which citizens are unlikely to form preferences that meet what many would consider the minimal standards of informed citizenship.

The exogeneity assumption that underlies work on responsiveness poses a serious challenge for the study of representation. However, a close investigation of the invalidity of this assumption also reveals that the definitional criteria underlying mass political preferences are also problematic. Citizens fail to form preferences that many would find normatively appropriate (e.g. Lippmann 1922). Moreover, these failures stem from the effects of political communication. This creates a serious tension for both how we assess opinions *and* how we study responsiveness.

In this essay, I address this tension by discussing responsiveness and opinion

formation, challenging typical conceptions of "quality opinion" and how people typically study responsiveness. I suggest that the way forward is to redefine both how we assess opinion formation and study responsiveness.

The Study of Democratic Responsiveness

Elite responsiveness to mass preferences is foundational to theoretical and empirical work on representation. This principle is implied by the very definition of democracy (i.e. demos = people; kratos = rule), with elected representatives acting as agents of the represented. Elite responsiveness to public opinion is thus used to judge the quality of democratic representation, with attention given to the conditions under which representatives respond to citizens' preferences (e.g., Page and Shapiro 1992, Soroka and Wlezien 2010).[1] Bartels (2003: 50-51) explains the popularity of this normative criterion by noting that, "Most liberal democratic theorists… assume as a matter of course that citizens do, in fact, have definite preferences and that the primary problem of democracy is to assure that a government will respond appropriately to those preferences." More recently, Disch (2011: 100) states "The '*bedrock' norm*, the common-sense notion, that representation in a democratic regime should take citizens preferences as the 'bedrock for social choice… [where] the representation process [is] linear and dyadic'" (italics added). By "bedrock norm", Disch is capturing the idea that preferences are fixed and exogenous to the political process *including mass communications and particularly strategic communications*. Theoretical and empirical treatments of representation thus assume the existence of public preferences, which are typically cast as stable and exogenous to the process and institutions of representative democracy.

[1] Of course an alternative is the trustee model of representation where direct responsiveness is not the key; but empirically this has not been the underling the conceptualization of representation.

The assumption that citizen preferences are exogenous and stable has proven highly problematic in practice. Shapiro's (2011: 1003) sweeping review of the responsiveness literature highlights the problem:

> There are a great many studies of representation and responsiveness that provide evidence for strong effects of public opinion on government policies at different levels…. This essay has *tabled any .... debate about the extent to which public opinion is influenced ... by its political leaders and the information environment that they and the mass media provide, so that public opinion meets some minimum standard of quality or rationality* as important input into the policy-making process. (Also see Druckman and Jacobs 2009.)

While some scholars of responsiveness make at least passing reference to theories of opinion formation (e.g. Erickson et al. 2002, Page and Shapiro 1992), the central question of this literature ultimately comes down to a counter-factual. The question is whether representatives take actions (e.g., roll call votes, policy decisions, rhetorical signals) that cohere with public opinion, where public opinion is taken as a given. *The at least implicit counter-factual is unresponsiveness to opinions, taken as given and as typically measured in surveys.*[2] The central point is that studies of responsiveness ignore how citizens form policy preferences. The reality is that citizens may not have the innate capacity to form preferences on their own, at least not without the messages provided by strategic political communications. Thus, preferences are endogenous and possibly manipulated – where manipulation can be thought of as moving

[2] There are some exceptions comparing responsiveness with specific interests (Jacobs and Page 2005) but writ large, as the quote from Bartels' aptly states, "the primary problem of democracy is to assure that a government will respond appropriately to those preferences."

citizens' preferences in ways counter to their interests (as I will discuss below, defining "interests" is tricky and debated; perhaps the most notable definition is "full information" e.g., Page and Shapiro 1992, Zaller 1992, Bartels 1996).

The responsiveness work to date largely puts aside the question of opinion formation and the reality that citizens do not possess strongly held and stable policy views.[3] Moreover, even when the frailties of mass opinion are acknowledged, scholars go on to argue that any "errors" (e.g. unstable opinions) are random and cancel out in the aggregate thereby making responsiveness important and worth studying (Page and Shapiro 1992). Unfortunately, "the miracle of aggregation" often results in biased, unrepresentative depictions of mass opinion (e.g., Kinder 1998, Bartels 2003). This is a major finding of the vast literature on opinion formation.

Forming Public Opinion

The last quarter-century of research on opinion formation makes crystal clear that citizens do not have the fixed and exogenous preferences assumed by scholars of responsiveness. The media, elites, and political events shape preferences in substantial ways (e.g., Chong and Druckman 2011).[4] Elite influence, especially when exerted by politicians or interest groups, is strategic (Disch 2011: 110) and, perhaps most importantly, takes place in a *competitive* setting over time (given the nature of elections

[3] For example, Soroka and Wlezien (2010: 14) put it succinctly, "The representation function of democratic governance – the production of policy consistent with our preferences – comes with a crucial stipulation: we need to know what we want representatives to do." They go on to discuss elitist views of democracy, low information, low motivation, etc. They also do then explore subgroup responsiveness. However, for the main of their analyses, they follow others, stating, "suffice it to say that we – along with many others, most notably (Bentham 1989; see Cutler 1999), Page and Shapiro 1983), and Converse (1990)—are some of Lippmann's (1925: 39) 'mystical democrats' [i.e., compounding of individual ignorances in masses of people can produce a continuous directing force in public affairs]… [and] examining the degree, extent, and nature of this public responsiveness is a central goal…"

[4] I focus here on media and elites.

and policy debates).[5] Of course while competition could stunt manipulation, the reality is that "bedrock preferences" – those exogenous to communications – do not exist. Exposure to news media coverage and elite rhetoric fundamentally shapes all aspects of preferences. Indeed, the observed instability of citizen preferences raises the obvious questions: are these preferences "reasonable," and is elite responsiveness to public opinion normatively appropriate?

As I discuss below, the "quality" of the public's preferences can be challenged on any number of grounds.[6] Despite nearly a century of debate and discussion, a consensus on what constitutes "quality," "rational," or "reasoned" opinions continues to be elusive (Disch 2013: 3, Mansbridge 1983: 225). Even the most exhaustive list of criteria would in all likelihood be seen as incomplete by many. In what follows, I discuss what strikes me as the five most commonly discussed/applied criteria and show that each is influenced by political communication.[7] I reference studies that raise questions about each criterion – at

[5] Disch (2011: 110) states: "Individuals form coherent and relatively stable preferences not in spite of but by means of messages that political elites deploy in pursuit of un-avowed competitive goals. This sets up what I term the 'dilemma of democratic competence': citizen's capacity for form preferences depends on the self-interested communications of elites."

[6] As an aside, I suspect much of the presumption behind the idea of fixed preferences, and its adequacy for normative theory, stemmed from what was the dominant model of public opinion and voting for much of the second half of the 20th century – that is, Campbell et al.'s funnel of causality that focuses on relevance (as opposed to exogenous), personal (as opposed to external), and political (as opposed to non-political) factors. Campbell et al. (1960) point out that considerations become relevant, personal and political, in part, via mass and inter-personal communication but they put the questions of how those communicative processes work aside, choosing to focus on the most proximate of variables (c.f., Berelson et al. 1954). Indeed, while the direct effects of mass communications was firmly established without doubt by Iyengar and Kinder's (1987) book, it was not until 1996, that Mutz et al. set the course for a research program on *political persuasion*. Mutz et al. (1996: 1-2) write "Politics, at its core, is about persuasion…[it] is ubiquitous in the political process… [yet the] cross-sectional general population survey has been far and away the principal vehicle for the study of public opinion and politics [leading to] a focus on the statics, not the dynamics, of political preferences." Consequently, they view their book as a launching pad for the "the field of study" (despite some studies overtime) of political persuasion (1).

[7] Another possible basis for assessing opinion quality is whether they meet the formal requisites of economic rationality such as invariance (no change in opinions due to innocuous changes in wording) and dominance (no change in opinion in distinct states of the world). A generation of work in behavioral decision making has made clear that this standard is neither realistic nor met in the political domain (see Bartels 2003 for a review and application to political science; however, also see Druckman 2004). I thus do not cover this here.

the very least by showing that citizens do not meet the criterion on a regular basis and/or that the criterion does not ensure what studies of responsiveness demand. This sets up a discussion about what this means for a) the role of political communication in opinion formation, b) the difficulty of stipulating criteria, and c) the study of responsiveness.

Information and Opinions

The most often discussed criterion of quality preferences is *informed opinion.* Information is thought to be important because it aids citizens' in the process of connecting their interests and values with available political alternatives. And, indeed, the more and less informed express distinct preferences (e.g., Bartels 1996). There is also no doubt that the bulk of information individuals receive comes from mass or inter-personal communications – this has been clear since at least Berelson et al. (1954) and Downs (1957) with more contemporary examples being Sniderman et al. (1991), Lupia and McCubbins (1998) and Nisbet and Scheufele (2009).

There are four problems with the informed opinion criterion. First, and most obviously, most citizens lack knowledge and thus many fail to meet this criterion outright (Delli-Carpini and Keeter 1996, Somin 2006). By itself this would pose a dramatic challenge to any effort to locate quality preferences in information or knowledge.

Second, even if the mass public did possess knowledge about politics, it is not clear why this would matter. Althaus (2006: 83) explains that a "false start in public-opinion research is the apparent problem for democratic practice revealed by the discovery of an ill-informed public… But what core tenet of democratic theory is being offended by the mass public's apparent lack of civic mindedness?... The institutions of representative as opposed to direct democracy are designed precisely to avoid

encumbering citizens with such an onerous responsibility." Or as Schattschneider (1960: 132) more directly states, "One implication of public opinion studies ought to be resisted by all friends of freedom and democracy; the implication that democracy is a failure because the people are too ignorant to answer intelligently all the questions asked by pollsters. This is a professional invention for imposing professional standards on the political system and deserves to be treated with extreme suspicion… Who, after all, are these self-appointed censors who assume that they are in a position to flunk the whole human race?... It is an outrage to attribute the failures of democracy to the ignorance and stupidity of the masses." In a similar vein, Lupia (2006: 219) refers to the requirement of informed opinion as the "elitist move."

A third issue with informed opinion as a criterion of quality preferences is the argument that high levels of information are not even necessary for the formation of quality preferences in the first place. That is, some argue that citizens find alternative ways to arrive at opinions they would hold if they had more information. They do so by using a variety of shortcuts/cues/advice (see Sniderman et al. 1991, Lupia 1994, Lupia and McCubbins 1998). Yet, shortcuts can often lead people astray; as Kinder (1998: 176) states, "we should keep in mind that when we take shortcuts, sometimes we end up in the right place and sometimes we get lost. The problem here is not just that citizens do not know enough, it is that they know things, or think they know things, that are factually incorrect (e.g. that a huge fraction of the national treasury is being squandered on foreign aid). In the end, shortcuts to knowledge are unlikely to be effective substitutes for the real thing" (also see Somin 2006). This makes shortcuts, at best, unreliable guides to informed

opinion.[8]

Finally, despite years of research devoted to "measuring" knowledge, there is nowhere near a consensus, much less one resting on philosophical underpinnings, on how it should be measured. Lupia (2006: 219) explains, "Most political-knowledge questions are not derived from a replicable or transparent logic about how their answers bear on a voter's ability to make decisions of a particularly quality…." This applies not only to the actual questions but their format as well. Robison (2013) finds massive differences not only in levels of knowledge when open as opposed to multiple-choice knowledge question are used but also that variations in format generate substantial differences in their predictive value of knowledge in determining tolerance and political evaluations.[9]

In sum, perhaps the most commonly employed benchmark of "quality" opinions – being informed – is flawed. If studies of responsiveness require and assume informed opinions, then they are certainly off on one of Althaus' false starts. Ultimately, informed opinion is neither realistic nor independent of strategic elite communication raising serious questions about its suitability as a requirement of democratic functioning and responsiveness.

Attitude Constraint and Opinions

The second criterion is *attitude constraint,* which refers to "the success we would have in predicting any given opinion, given initial knowledge that an individual holds a specific attitude, or supports particular ideas. We depend implicitly upon such notions of

[8] Aside from whether people are sufficiently informed is whether they are actually *misinformed* – that is, they confidently hold false information about political issues. For example, Kuklinski et al. (2000) demonstrate in the realm of opinions on welfare, misinformation appears to be quite common and substantially influences preferences on the topic. Perhaps more worryingly, it appears to be very difficult to change misperceptions (Kulinski, et al. 2000, Nyhan and Reifler 2010, Ecker et al. 2011). However, even if misinformation is corrected this may not lead to changes in attitudes as it is the interpretation of one's beliefs that mediate between information (correct or otherwise) and opinions (Gaines et al. 2007).

[9] Also, as Gibson and Calderia (2009) make clear coding open-ended questions is far from straightforward.

constraint in judging, for example, that, if a person is opposed to the expansion of Social Security, he is probably a conservative and is probably opposed as well to any nationalization of private industries…" (Converse [1964] 2006a: 3). In other words, this criterion demands that people hold consistent attitudes that form coherent ideologies. While heated debate (e.g., measurement issues) continues over the extent of constraint, the general conclusion remains that most citizens hold unconstrained opinions and that people vote on the "basis of their feelings of 'visible social groupings'… or by means of blind partisan loyalty" (Friedman 2006: v). While Converse (2006b: 300) makes clear that the lack of constraint is not synonymous with widespread non-attitudes, the reality is that the more constrained one's ideology, the stronger their opinions (Visser et al. 2006).

It is important to note that while some may see attitude constraint as a long-term attribute that develops via socialization from childhood (Campbell et al. 1960), it is also clear that constraint depends in fundamental ways on mass communications. I will cite just two examples. First, citizens learn their issue positions from mass communications – even if they project their own beliefs onto candidates – as made abundantly clear by Lenz (2012). Second, elite polarization as communicated directly by elite action and indirectly by media coverage of elite action generates constraint; indeed, Levendusky (2009) shows clearly that as polarization increases so too does constraint. Thus, constraint depends on communication (also see Druckman et al. 2013).

As in the case of information, there are problematic aspects to this criterion. First, as intimated, there continues to be an ongoing debate about the level of citizen constraint centering on how one measures issue attitudes (e.g., Achen 1975). For example, Ansolabehere et al. (2008: 299) show that using multiple items on policy

questions and averaging across them produces "much more evidence of constraint and stability" than typically found in studies on constraint. Second, regardless of measurement issues, constraint remains a tricky criterion for informed opinion because one must identify the issues in question and whether they need be explicitly political (e.g., religious values may lead to diverging positions on issues). These first two problems, although significant, are minor in comparison with the next.

The strongest challenge to the argument that constrained opinions are quality opinions is the possibility of motivated reasoning. This is the tendency to seek out information that confirms prior beliefs (i.e., confirmation bias), to view evidence consistent with prior opinions as more relevant and stronger (i.e., a prior attitude effect), and to spend more time resisting arguments inconsistent with prior opinions regardless of their objective merit (i.e., a disconfirmation bias) (Lodge and Taber 2013).[10] Thus, a pro-Bush voter might interpret information suggesting Bush misled voters about the Iraq war as either false or as evidence of Bush's leadership in a time of crisis, rather than an indictment of his competence or honesty. This voter may then become even more supportive of Bush.

Motivated reasoning occurs when people possess sufficiently strong opinions to guide their reasoning processes. It also takes place in the presence of partisan cues that anchor reasoning (see Bartels 2002, Gaines et al. 2007, Gerber and Huber 2009, 2010, Goren et al. 2009, Groenendyk 2010, Rahn 1993). Thus, people may evaluate a policy quite differently depending on whether they believe the policy's sponsor is a Democrat or

[10] Taber and Lodge (2006) refer to motivated reasoning as motivated skepticism while Lavine et al. (2012) call it "partisan perceptional screen." While there are subtle differences, particularly with mechanisms, I treat all as synonymous here. Also note there is a deeper psychological history behind motivated reasoning going back to Festinger (1957) and more recently Lord et al. (1979) and Kunda (1990).

Republican. A Democrat might view a Democratic policy as favoring Democratic principles (e.g., environmental protection), whereas he/she would see the same policy as opposed to such principles if sponsored by Republicans. Similarly, Democrats (Republicans) may view the economy as doing well during a Democratic (Republican) administration even if they would view the exact same conditions negatively if Republicans (Democrats) were in power (e.g., Bartels 2003; Gerber and Huber 2009, 2010, Lavine et al. 2012).

Many believe that motivated reasoning is pervasive to public opinion. Taber and Lodge (2006: 767) state: "despite our best efforts to promote the even-handed treatment of policy arguments in our studies, we find consistent evidence of directional partisan bias—the prior attitude effect [i.e., evaluations of arguments supporting prior opinions as more compelling than opposing arguments], disconfirmation bias [i.e., extra effort devoted to counter-arguing incongruent messages], and confirmation bias [i.e., seeking out consistent information]. . . . Our participants may have tried to be evenhanded, but they found it impossible to be fair-minded."[11] Moreover, motivated reasoning is *particularly* powerful among those with strong opinions, who are the most likely to display constrained opinions (see Fazio 2007, Houston and Fazio 1989: 64, Lavine et al. 2012: 110-116, Redlawsk 2002).

To see just how motivated reasoning can affect opinions, consider a study by Druckman et al. (2012) on support for universal health care reform that took place over a one month time period. At the start of the month, some participants were randomly exposed to one strong pro argument (e.g., universal care will vitiate inequality) or one

[11] Indeed, Lodge and Taber (2008, 35-36) explain that motivated reasoning entails "systematic biasing of judgments in favor of one's immediately accessible beliefs and feelings . . . [It is] built into the basic architecture of information processing mechanisms of the brain."

strong con argument (i.e., universal care will be costly). Then for many participants, nothing of relevance happened in the interim save for the reception of the opposite message at the end of the month. The authors find that participants uniformly forget the first argument and are swayed by the most recent.

A different pattern emerged for participants in two different conditions. Participants in the first condition were exposed to the same message in weeks 2 and 3 as in the first week before receiving the opposite message in week 4. Meanwhile, participants in the second condition were given a choice over what they read in weeks 2 and 3. Consistent with previous work on motivated reasoning, these individuals chose to read messages consistent with the argument they received in week 1. Both these latter groups of participants rejected the message they received in week 4. In other words, choice and repetition facilitate strong attitudes with participants' attitudes toward universal health care ultimately reflecting the content of the first message they received because they counter-argued the later message. Because all participants were randomly assigned, we can confidently say that had they randomly received the other message first, their opinions would be precisely the opposite of what they eventually expressed. In short, when people engage in motivated reasoning they become dogmatic and reject arguments they would otherwise see as compelling. Since opinions change based only on the order in which information is encountered, the implications of motivated reasoning for opinion quality are obvious and not salubrious (also see: Chong and Druckman 2010, Lodge and Taber 2013, Taber and Lodge 2006).[12]

[12] It is important to note that there are conditions that stunt motivated reasoning including weaker prior opinions (Taber and Lodge 2006), ambivalence (Lavine et al. 2012), and accuracy motivation (Druckman et al. n.d.). The question is when and among whom are these conditions applicable (see Druckman et al. 2010).

The irony here is that attitude constraint, which for so long was seen as a proxy for quality opinions, appears instead, at least at times, to stand for dogmatism and potential intolerance, properties not generally seen as strengthening democracy. Regardless of this normative inconsistency, however, constrained opinions are inadequate as a measure of opinion quality because they lock people in to defend opinions that they could just have easily not held. Lavine et al. (2012: 125) summarize the implications for responsiveness: "it raises deeply troubling questions about political representation and accountability that are so central to democratic politics. … How can an electorate possibly reward or punish an incumbent party if it holds grossly distorted views of political conditions? And how can it elect leaders who will pursue desired policy reform in the face of widespread misperception about where leaders stand, what the policy status quo is, and what the central elements and likely consequences of proposed reform are?" (also see Jerit 2009).

Values and Opinions

The next criterion concerns whether citizens connect their political opinions to deeply held *values* (e.g., Chong 2007). While values are supposedly stable and not particularly moveable, one might assume that the exogeneity issue previously discussed is less relevant here. Yet, this is not the case. Indeed, there is just as much concern about the "exogeneity of values" (Feldman 2003: 497). Brewer (2008) demonstrates how public debate about gay rights shapes the values on which people rely, while Chapp (2012) provides a compelling demonstration of how campaign communications alter the impact of religious values on vote choice (also see Sniderman and Hagendoorn 2007: 101). How rhetoric affects the application of values though can perhaps most clearly be seen in the

debates over framing (see section on frames below).

Aside from their endogeneity, a number of other questions remain unresolved about values as a basis for opinion quality. First, there are a host of value systems put forth (c.f. Gastil et al. 2011, Haidt 2012, Rokeach 1973, Schwarz 1994,). While they tend to revolve around a similar two-dimensional structure, they nevertheless differ in their specifics. Compare Kahan's focus on hierarchy-egalitarianism and individualism-communitarianism against Haidt's emphasis on individualizing intuitions and binding intuitions and Schwartz's self-transcendence/self-enhancement and conservation/openness-to-change values. It is unclear which should be more important or more applicable for political attitudes or whether one value system is "better" than the others for different reasons. Thus, measurement and conceptualization issues remain. Indeed, Maio and Olson (2000: 250) summarize the multiplicity of approaches as follows: "values have been defined and operationalized in different ways" (also see Feldman 2003: 498-499).

A second issue confronting the use of values as a criterion of quality opinion is that there continues to be uncertainty about the causal status and stability of values themselves. Feldman (2003: 504) writes, "… We know too little about the stability of values and the extent to which they are exogenous to political attitudes." If attitudes shape values which are not stable, then values themselves have an unclear normative status as a construct. Measurement issues also abound as one of the strongest findings is on many issues people maintain certain values in the "abstract" but abandon them in specific situations. In 1991, Kuklinski et al. (14) pointed out, "If one finding has persisted throughout 30 years of research on political tolerance, it is that many Americans endorse

civil liberties in the abstract but reject them in their concrete applications" (also see Moskowitz 2013 for an application to education policy).

Values clearly play a role in politics but identifying their casual status, which values matter, and then assessing them in a way that can elicit normative consensus is not only a reach but, given the reality of politics, perhaps a non-starter. Sniderman and Highton (2011: 7), aptly explain, "conflicted conservatives wind up holding preferences at odds with one another, not because they are indifferent to consistency, but precisely because they are motivated to achieve it. The difficulty is that they are motivated to achieve consistency with respect to two sets of considerations… [i.e., the values of social welfare and religious convictions]… To put the point summarily, preference consistency in politics needs to be understood against the inescapability of value conflict in politics."[13] In other words, arriving at a clear cut set of *politically ostensibly quality* values is likely not possible and, given that the essence of politics is value conflict between different values, it is unclear how one would even proceed. In terms of responsiveness, it makes little sense to assume or expect an underlying set of values exist and provide a foundation for bedrock preferences.

Frames and Opinion Stability

The next criterion concerns the reality that citizens often base their opinions on subsets of considerations put forth in *frames* (sometimes called primes; however see Druckman et al. 2009 on the near equivalency of these terms in the political science opinion literature). A framing effect occurs when in the course of describing a campaign, issue, problem, or event, a speaker's emphasis on a subset of potentially relevant

[13] An interesting question is how much value conflict stems from institutional variation – such that in multi-party systems, voters have an easier time finding parties that fit their values and thereby avoid internal conflicts of this sort.

considerations causes individuals to focus on those considerations when constructing their opinions (Druckman 2001: 226-231). In other words, a communication induces an individual to alter the weight – in an automatic fashion and/or more deliberately – that he or she attaches to an attribute. This, in turn, may lead to a change in overall attitude (Iyengar 1991, Nelson et al. 1997, Price and Tewksbury 1997, Riker 1986, Wood 2000). For example, if a speaker describes a hate group rally in terms of free speech, then members of the audience will be more likely to base their opinions about the rally on free speech considerations, possibly making them more supportive of the right to rally. In contrast, if the speaker uses a public safety frame, audience members will be more likely to base their opinions on public safety considerations and oppose the rally (Nelson et al. 1997).

Alternatively, an election news story focusing on the economy might induce a voter to focus on John McCain's economic plan instead of his leadership skills, which may make him a less desirable candidate. Such examples of framing effects abound (e.g., Chong and Druckman 2007) and, as I will discuss, much work shows that opinions are highly responsive to short-term shifts in how the media or politicians frame arguments or, when not, leads to dogmatic adherence and inability to follow a compelling argument. Thus, framing is a defining and fundamental part of mass or inter-personal communication (e.g., Druckman and Nelson 2003, Iyengar 1991, Riker 1986). Framing effects clearly violate the assumption of exogenous opinion and lead to further questions over whether frames themselves serve as an appropriate foundation for opinionation.[14]

Early work on framing effects showed powerful impacts using studies that

[14] Moreover, even when from the news media, frames tend to reflect to reflect the efforts of elites to frame events strategically, suggesting that exposure to news may result in elite manipulation of mass opinion (see Iyengar and Kinder 1987).

exposed participants to only a single frame at a time. Recent work has introduced the reality of competition to the study of framing and evidence has accumulated that, regardless of repetition, people base their opinions on frames/considerations that they deem "strong" (e.g., Chong and Druckman 2007, Druckman 2010, Hansen 2007, Sniderman and Theriault 2004). For example, Druckman (2010) shows that when it comes to support for a state owned gambling casino, individuals exposed to even one "strong" frame – the economic benefits of the casino– expressed substantially greater support (41% greater) than those exposed to two "weak" frames (emphasizing the entertainment value of the casino and morality of casinos) (also see Aarøe 2011, Druckman et al. 2012, Druckman et al. 2013, Holm 2012).

On the positive side, framing effects such as these contradict the claim that citizens "are blown about by whatever current of information manages to develop with the greatest intensity" (Zaller, 1992: 311; also see Cappella and Jamieson 1997: 81-82, Nabi 2003: 225). However, what exactly is a "strong" frame? Druckman, like others, follows the psychological approach of pre-testing various frames/considerations and asking people which they find most "effective" or "compelling." (Note during the pre-test, accuracy motivation is not induced and thus one cannot say that one frame is "normatively" stronger due to accuracy motivation *per se*.) O'Keefe (2002: 147) states that psychology (or, for that matter, political science) "has postponed the question of what specific qualities make arguments persuasive by defining argument quality in an empirical manner." Evidence suggesting that individuals tend to view episodic (Aarøe 2011), emotional, and fearful frames as stronger (Arceneaux 2012) as well as those that invoke loss aversion (Arceneaux 2012) further suggest that framing effects are suggestive

of low rather than high quality opinions.

Even in the unlikely scenario that theorists could agree on normatively desirable "strong" frames and citizens in large part adopted them, extant evidence suggests one of two scenarios follow. First, either the initial impact of the frame fades quickly and people revert to their original opinions (e.g., Chong and Druckman 2007, de Vreese 2004, Gerber et al. 2001, Mutz and Reeves 2005, Tewksbury et al. 2000)*, or,* if reinforced through repetition or a citizen's own information search (see above), people cling to these initial frames in a dogmatic manner and engage in motivated reasoning (see Druckman at al. 2012). Clearly, reliance on opinions based on so-called "strong frames" is too unstable, too unclear or too arbitrary to serve as worthwhile foundation for elite responsiveness.

Political Parties and Opinions

A final criterion I discuss is perhaps the most complex despite its long-standing place in the literature: reliance on *political partisanship which can come from identity and/or endorsements/cues*.[15] While early models of partisan identity presumed that it developed through socialization and not communicative processes, recent work has made

[15] A cue is a piece of information that allows individuals to make inferences without drawing on more detailed knowledge (Eagly and Chaiken 1993, Rucker and Petty 2006). Beyond that defining what "cue" means becomes tricky as they come in a variety of forms, and its usage (as with frames) varies across disciplines (see Druckman and Nelson 2003 for discussion). In political communication, the prime example of a cue is advice from others, or, endorsements. This can come from an expert, interest group, friend, or some other source, but by far the most discussed and studied cue is a party cue (e.g., Berelson et al. 1954, Bullock 2011, Campbell et al. 1960, Downs 1957, Druckman et al. 2013). Sniderman and Stiglitz (2012: 1) explain "Fifty years of research backs up three claims. The majority of voters see themselves as Democrats or Republicans. The majority of them gave their loyalty to one party when they were young… the majority of them, instead of learning from the experiences of their lives, strengthen the bond of loyalty to their party. In short, the most important factor in the most important decision a citizen can make [politically] most often appears to be rooted in … loyalty to political parties." Similarly, Bullock (2011: 496) states, "party identification powerfully shapes people's views and that its effects are strongest among the best informed (Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002, chap. 8, Zaller 1992)…..Collectively, these findings [on party identification] have helped to give rise to a common claim about the way democracy really works: Even when people know about important attributes of policies, they neglect that knowledge and mechanically adopt the positions of party leaders as their own."

clear that mass and inter-personal communications fundamentally alter the nature and strength of partisanship. Indeed, Iyengar et al. (2012) show how negative campaigns can heighten partisan identity and its extremity leading to affective polarization. Overall, the evidence is unequivocal: in terms of affect, Americans are polarized along party lines (Iyengar et al. 2012: 407).

This also can come about from reinforcement via the choice of partisan media outlets (e.g., Levendusky 2013). Iyengar et al. (2012: 427-428) continue that (noting that campaigns are only one factor), "we have suggested, the more plausible explanation of intensified inter-party animus lies in the rhetoric of political campaigns. Virtually every study of campaign advertising documents the steep increase in the frequency of attacks and counterattacks (Benoit 2001; Geer 2010). The tendency of the media to recycle the candidates' negative messages only confirms partisans' suspicions about those on the other side. Exposure to loud negative campaigns is very likely not the strongest factor, much less the only factor, contributing to affective polarization. Technology has facilitated citizens' ability to seek out information sources they find agreeable and tune out others that prove dissonant (see Iyengar and Hahn 2009; Stroud 2008, 2010). As consumers begin to exercise their ability to select "friendly" sources, an increasing number of news providers deliver slanted news (Mullainathan and Shleifer 2005; Gentzkow and Shapiro 2006). As partisan news sources expand their share of the market, the congruence between prior beliefs and incoming information may only increase" (also see Levendusky 2009, Druckman et al. 2013 on partisan polarization and party strength). This could happen even if only a subset of the population turns to partisan sources given downstream inter-personal conversations, as Levendusky (2013) makes clear. Moreover,

perhaps of more importance is that really only a fraction of the population is consistent partisans in the first place (Feldman and Johnston 2013).

Finally, interpersonal conversations also shape partisanship; Sinclair (2012: 139) explains that "individuals are influenced by their social networks to choose party identifications" (Sinclair 2012: 139; also see Klar 2013 who shows how networks shape the strength of partisan identification). And of course more generally even if one does not think of partisanship in terms of identity, the cues used to make choices (e.g., Lupia and McCubbins 1998) typically come via mass communications. Clearly partisanship is not exogenous to political communication.[16]

Reliance on partisan identity or party cues is perhaps the best citizens can do, given the institutions under which we live. Sniderman and Stiglitz (2012: 108) state, "…in the world of American politics as it is, for party supporters to put their money on the policy reputations of the parties is the best rule for them to follow [e.g., because it conveys consistent, constrained, programmatic information]… Programmatic partisans are thus making their best bet, taking into account the information that is available and the institutional realities." Put another way, given people's motivation and the institutional framework of American politics, following their party may be the best people can do and the most straightforward way to assess voter competency. Yet, the reliance on party endorsements also raises significant concerns and questions.

The first concern is captured by Sniderman and Stiglitz (2012: 107) who state "that in era of polarized elite politics this also frees up their elected representatives to take extreme positions," leading to disconnect between what party elites want and what

[16] Gerber et al. (2010) also show that partisanship, at least for independents, is endogenous to electoral institutions.

party voters prefer. If this were the case, while voters may hold more fixed preferences than previously indicated (i.e., they just follow party endorsements; however see Bullock 2011) it would raise serious legitimacy issues in terms of holding elected representatives accountable (see Weingast 1997: 260). Some evidence in this direction comes from Druckman et al. (2013) who find that citizens ignore party endorsements and follow arguments that they otherwise find persuasive (i.e. strong frames; however see above) when the parties are presented as not polarized. Yet, as soon as citizens are primed to think of polarization, they ignore perceived argument quality, engage in motivated reasoning, and follow their party even when the preferred party offers the weaker argument (one that participants readily admit is weak). When parties polarize, argument strength is trumped by the party cue (also see Slothuus and de Vreese 2010).

It is worth noting another irony here concerning Druckman et al.'s (2013) results. Levendusky (2009) carries out a similar study, albeit without arguments attached, and shows that polarization generates more constrained preferences. This accentuates the confused state of our understanding of quality opinion: polarization may lead to constraint (associated with high quality) but causes people to ignore arguments perceived to be strong (associated with low quality).[17]

A final issue with using party cues as a criterion of quality opinions is that, even after more than a half-century of study, scholars continue to not fully understand the basis of partisanship. One school of thought views partisan identity as an emotional attachment (Campbell et al. 1960, Green et al. 2002) where "a party is only minimally, and then

[17] Another issue that remains unclear is the reputations of parties: are they accurate, i.e. do people base or change their affiliations on accurate assessments? (see Nicholson and Segura 2012). Along similar lines, one could argue that parties are just one identity among many and in many instances other identities such as gender, ethnicity, or socio-economic status should trump partisan identity.

often coincidentally, related to identifying with policies that the party stands for" (Sniderman and Stiglitz 2012: 23-24). This so-called emotional school also acknowledges how partisanship can serve as a perceptual screen similar to partisan motivated reasoning (Lavine et al. 2012: 7). Contemporary treatments of this school of thought often base themselves in the psychological theory of social identity where identity is derived by an in-group attachment (and associated out-group animus).

The major alternative to the emotional attachment theory is the view that citizens affiliate with parties in a more programmatic fashion whereby voters "share the political preferences and political outlook of the party that they identify with" (Sniderman and Stiglitz 2012: 24; also see Downs 1957, Fiorina 1981). In this case, identification is more of a utility calculation than a group attachment. Perhaps as Lavine et al. (2012: 10) argue the dichotomy is false, but clearly, if party-line opinions are to serve as useful basis for responsiveness, one needs to identify the conditions and meaning of voters' reliance on partisanship.[18]

In short, to define opinions based on partisanship as quality opinions is a double-edged sword that at times can provide parties with substantial leeway, short-circuiting responsiveness and accountability.[19] Of even greater importance, we continue to lack of a full understanding of how partisanship works under varying institutional, social, and

[18] Overall, there is much still be done on understanding partisanship. For example, only recently Bullock (2011) offers an initial study exploring whether people do turn to substantive information when offered a partisan endorsement. He finds that party cues have an effect, but do not overwhelm content. He concludes that "party cues are influential, but partisans… are generally affected at least as much – and sometimes much more – by exposure to substantial amounts of policy information" (2011: 512; also see Druckman et al. 2013).

[19] Another question is whether or to what extent do citizens treat parties like candidates. This is relevant because Tomz and Van Houweling (2012) show voters prefer ambiguous candidates and more importantly hold political actors to pledges even under shifting conditions, stating, "pledges can be powerful even when candidates sign them to please narrow constituencies, such as pressure groups… By deterring politicians from responding to changing circumstances, including shifts in the preferences of the electorate, pledges can contribute to non-representative outcomes" (35).

individual conditions and thus reliance on partisanship seems insufficient as a bedrock norm. Indeed, at its worst, it is a complete false start since elected party elites may instill the very opinions to which they then respond. Lavine et al. (2012: 200) conclude that "The evidence amassed in this book indicates that partisan loyalty per se is not a sufficient condition for responsible democratic citizenship." This goes back to a theme running through this essay: political realities make studies of responsiveness highly problematic as elites end up responding to their own preferences.

In sum, I have reviewed five prominent criteria often used to assess citizen competence and the mechanisms by which citizens may form "bedrock" preferences: information, constraint, values, exposure to frames, and partisan cues. In each case, I argue that the criterion is questionable and that opinions meeting the criterion are not necessarily any more deserving of representational responsiveness (e.g., information is poorly defined and may be seen as elitist, strong frames are merely perceptual, constraint can generate biased reasoning, values are too poorly defined and variable, parties can generate legitimacy issues). I recognize this is not an exhaustive (or exclusive) list of possible criteria, but suffice it to say, I am confident that regardless of other criteria explored, the results would be the same: assessment of what constitutes "quality opinion" in terms of its substance is a false start as consensus will not be attainable. This, in turn, raises two questions to which I now turn.

Implications for Opinion Quality

My review begs the question of what we might gain from conceptualizations of an "ideal" or "reasoned" decision. My answer is threefold. First, one needs realistic criteria if the goal is to identify quality opinions. In so doing, if one takes an approach grounded

in psychology (which has been the *modus operandi* for the past decade; see Druckman and Miller 2004), then it is essential to accurately represent that work to avoid the development of inaccurate path dependencies.[20] Ultimately, realistic criteria *must* account for realities of political communication and its pathologies (e.g. the ability of elites to shape the news and the ability of the news and elites themselves to shape opinions). Realistic criteria need to account for the actuality of what a democratic system motivates citizens to do, or not do, when it comes to politics. Any account that ignores these realities and their implications is bound to be inaccurate.

As intimated, empirical and normative theorists, must also avoid Lupia's (2006) elitist turn and Althaus' (2006) similar concerns about the mismatch between normative theory and what may actually be reasonable opinions That is, if one draws on normative theory, it must be carefully done: it is simply not clear. My point is to not only encourage the valuable goal of increased dialogue, but to persuade theorist and empirical scholars of the *need to be realistic* about what to expect of citizens and avoid setting impossible bars such as "full information."

Second, when one specifies a standard, it is critical that the counter-factual be stated explicitly – that is, what does it mean exactly to meet the standard and with what consequence.[21] This is an issue that has not been made explicit in a number of cases (see Mansbridge 1983: 25). Lupia (2006: 232) explains that "Until critics can offer a transparent, credible, and replicable explanation of why a particular set of facts [although

[20] Indeed, on a conceptual level, Druckman et al. (2009) detail how the terms "heuristics," "priming,", and "on-line processing/motivated reasoning" have been incorrectly imported into political psychology given the vast knowledge accumulated in psychology (and despite initially accurate introductions of the concepts by scholars such as Iyengar, Sniderman, Krosnick, Kuklinski, and Lodge). In the end, misuse generates inappropriate applications and misunderstandings

[21] Of course the ideal, unrealistic counter-factual is "would citizens make the same decision once they view the consequences of their opinion relative to what it would have been had they otherwise chosen." This is time-wise and meta-physically impossible, however.

one may extend this to any criteria] is necessary for a particular set of socially valuable outcomes, they should remain humble in assessing the competence of others." In other words, is not answering a particular knowledge question correctly the "right" counter-factual for information as a measure of competence or is the right counter-factual, for example, how one would answer under other conditions such as when paid for correct answers or provided with visuals (e.g., Prior and Lupia 2008)? In many, if not all cases, this counter-factual will involve a type of communicative process.

Third, alas, I will not conclude without offering an alternative route to exploring competence that I believe is a way forward. Specifically, I advocate *less* focus on the *content/substance* of opinions (e.g., are they informed, constrained, based on strong frames, etc.?) and *more* on the *process* and specifically the *motivation* that underlies the formation of that opinion. In this case the ideal standard is that citizens approach opinion formation in what is known as "accuracy" processing whereby they carefully assess the arguments put forth in a fairly objective fashion. (One may turn to deliberative polling as an ideal, a topic I have not touched on yet, but will below.) This has been shown to overcome motivated reasoning, allows for assessment of issue positions, vitiates reliance on cues, and does not demand constraint (see Druckman et al. n.d). In psychology, this is commonly induced by asking one to justify/provide reasons for their opinions. Druckman et al. (n.d.) implemented such a procedure, showing that it stunted motivated reasoning and dramatically altered the way in which people formed opinions. Importantly, it is not even the justification itself that seems to matter but only the *expectation* of having to justify opinions that motivates citizens (Eveland 2004).

Of course, expecting citizens to suddenly become hyper-motivated may be not be

realistic but it is an area in need of much more study – as almost no work has explored the sources of and/or types of motivation.[22] A focus on motivation follows psychological work on competence; for example, White (2011: 52) states, "I consider it necessary to treat competence as having a motivated aspect" (also see Murayama et al. 2012). It is also a position endorsed by Lavine et al. (2012: 215) who state "What is at issue is *motivation*" (italics in original).

When might a citizen be motivated to be accurate? One obvious reason why one may be so motivated is when it comes to issues or candidates in which they will be directly affected such as those on Social Security and Medicare whose economic livelihoods are intimately connected to these policies and are consequently motivated to seek out more information about potential changes to the system and participate accordingly (for instance: Campbell 2002). But more importantly, and along these lines, Krosnick (1988) shows that issues people consider more important drive presidential evaluations to a much greater extent than those considered less important, with perceived self-interest a crucial driver of importance beliefs (Boninger et al. 1995). This feeds into the literature on attitude importance and issue publics (see Miller and Peterson 2004; Visser et al. 2006) and is an area in need of greater study (e.g., Iyengar et al. 2008), especially concerning how it relates to the previously discussed criteria.

Motivation to form accurate opinions also can come from social pressure/groups

[22] I follow much of the psychological literature on motivation by equating "motivation" with "goals." With regard to motivation, the common focus, an implicitly my focus in the motivated reasoning discussion, is on two major categories: accuracy motivation (i.e., arrive at the "best" opinion given substantive information) and directional/defensive motivation (i.e., defend prior opinion regardless of information). Yet, the latter category encompasses a range of distinct motivations including defending prior opinions, various identities, impression motivation or behavioral motivation (see Kunda 2001). Moreover, it is likely that motivations interact so people may be partially aimed at accuracy and directional goals (e.g., Lodge and Taber 2000; also see McGraw 2003: 396). I do not delve into these mixes because for my purposes, a focus on movement towards forming an "accurate" preference is sufficient.

(and thus communication matters but in this case it less mass and more inter-personal).[23] Gerber et al. (2008) demonstrate that the social pressure stemming from the expected public exposure of not voting increases turnout by 8%. More importantly, when individuals anticipate conversations that may involve political issues, they often prepare so as to be able to discuss in a sophisticated manner. On the one hand, this may seem like a non-starter given that social groups are sometimes presumed homogenous and reinforcing. But the reality is social groups vary widely – and people bring up politics in many distinct groups. Sinclair (2012: 6) makes the critical but often overlooked point that "individuals primarily form social relationships based on shared *non*political characteristics." She goes on to cite Weatherford (1982: 129) who finds that variables that affect the degree of social interactions between local residents "do not contribute to network politicization." Even groups in which political issues are regularly discussed are not formed based on shared political preferences (Walsh 2004). In short, politics is not driving social relationships and the possible relative homogeneity of political network may appear only because socio-demographics often correlate with political leanings. This is a crucial point because it means that networks likely come in many guises (even among different people) and one thing that has been understudied is how different types of networks may influence political preferences.

To be clear, I am not advocating deliberative democracy as a route to quality opinions (see note),[24] rather, I suggest that the anticipation of having to justify one's

[23] Of course, this should be read as a route for further investigation – to focus on motivation – and unravel if accuracy does in fact more deliberative thought or people aim to be accurate just to conform.

[24] Indeed, one criterion sometimes proposed to assess quality opinions (that I did not mention above) is whether individuals engage in specific types of deliberation (e.g., Habermas 1990, Plotke 1997). I put this aside for three reasons. First, much of this work ignores the reality that politics is strategic and this makes it at best an empirical non-starter. Disch (2011: 104-106) notes this in stating "Even those deliberative

opinions can prompt motivation and that can generate what I would consider higher quality opinions (i.e., opinions based on greater consideration and thought). Baumeister and Leary (2011: 11, 14) explain that "social contact could overcome established intergroup prejudices and stereotype… group memberships also appear to exert important influence on cognitive patterns." Overall, motivation can stem from anticipation via social groups, issue importance, or some other mechanism. This may or may not depend on the make-up of the group but, regardless, evidence from Mutz (2006) suggests groups can be heterogeneous if this is a necessary condition.

One could then map back to how those more motivated meet the aforementioned criteria, despite their previously discussed problems. For example, motivated individuals have been shown to engage in substantially less motivated reasoning (Druckman et al. n.d), are less likely to fall victim to biased reasoning (Druckman 2003), and are more likely to connect issues to preferences (Plaks 2011). Moreover, engagement with heterogonous groups can prompt such motivation (Klar 2013).[25]

Before turning back to a discussion of responsiveness, let me make two last points on opinion quality. First, my point is not to hold citizens to some fairly arbitrary level of motivation but rather to alter the way we assess opinion formation and move away from looking at the substance of opinion to the formation of that opinion. We would then want

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democrats who have criticized Habermasian model…. [they view preferences as] endogenous to politics in idealized way: they are formed by practices of public reason to secure the independence and autonomy of citizens' judgment" (Disch 2011: 104-105). She (2011: 106) continues that even the exceptions to this such as Mansbridge (2003) who acknowledge strategic possibilities end up retaining "a vestige of his [i.e., Habermas'] urge to separate 'communicative' from 'strategic action'." Second, Lupia (2002: 135) states that while "many people claim that deliberation can enhance civic competence," the conditions to actually induce better opinions (e.g., being attentive, being persuaded by better arguments, etc.) are not met. Third, I opted to not risk confusing readers by discussing group discussion as a possible route to motivation and having that conflated with some formal requirement of deliberation as often posited by theorists.

[25] The implications of motivation for value reliance remains unclear: "Although empirical research linking values and motivation is limited, many theorists [Rokeach, Schwartz] have proposed that this link should exist…. needs more work" (Parks and Guay 2009: 680).

to explore conditions that generate distinct types of opinions and the consequences of those attitudes. Scholars should reframe from quickly drawing normative conclusions, particularly in light of the below discussion of responsiveness, and be careful, as mentioned, of maintaining a realistic counter-factual in the political world of social networks, institutional design, and new media. This last point is critical because new media communication technologies are constantly changing and scholars need to be attuned to how this influences opinion formation and quality. Second, practically speaking, there are ways to prompt accuracy motivation such as increasing competition which comes through communication (Bowler and Donovan2011, Kam and Utych 2011) and stimulating participation more generally (e.g., Borah 2011, Druckman et al. 2013, Krosnick and Smith 1994: 287, Visser et al. 2006) which is plausible with some simple electoral reforms such as same day registration, voting on holidays/weekends, etc. Ultimately, these changes will enhance external efficacy and generate interest in politics simply by making elites more competitive and enhancing access and thereby critically needed arguments, information, cues, etc.

Implications for Responsiveness

I began with the notion of democratic responsiveness. Exploring how responsiveness works or should work, however, requires careful consideration of the basic underlying premise that citizens' hold "bedrock preferences." My review shows that this is a false start, and in fact, even attempting to specify what a "quality bedrock preference" entails is far from clear (aside perhaps from my plea for more focus on motivation). What does all this mean for the study of responsiveness? I conclude with four points.

First, to ignore the realities and frailties of political communication as the basis on which citizens form preferences is simply a non-starter and studies of responsiveness that ignore these processes are bound to lead to dead ends.

Second, empirical work on responsiveness has been exceedingly narrow. Althaus (200: 102) states, "the venerable literature on opinion/policy congruence… has been a centerpiece of public opinion research since the early 1960s (following Miller and Stokes 1963). This literature addresses basic questions of political representation, but the philosophical context for understanding representation has been largely neglected in this line of work (for exceptions, see Jacobs and Shaprio 1994 and 2000). As a consequence, the empirical literature has developed a conception of congruence or responsiveness defined narrowly in terms of mass policy preferences." Thus, there has been scant work on alternative forms of responsiveness such as descriptive responsiveness, symbolic responsiveness, or anticipatory responsiveness, etc. (Mansbridge 2003, Rehfled 2006, Mansbridge 2011). Similarly, studies focused specifically on policy responsiveness typically fail to account for responsiveness to "what type of opinion" (e.g., aggregated or disaggregated; also see Druckman and Jacobs 2009; Grimmer 2013). That is, do politicians respond to dynamics like policy mood (the liberal or conservative "mood" of the country) or more strict issue positions?

Third, issue based empirical studies of responsiveness give little consideration to the counter-factual. Specifically, the at least implicit counter-factual is whether a legislator or policy matches citizens' or a subset of citizens' preferences. Yet, is this that the right counter-factual? For example, an alternative would be to compare the extent to which citizens' preference influence governmental actions relative to other actors such as

interest groups (see Jacobs and Page 2005), foreign entities, other elites, the media, etc. Moreover, nearly all of these studies rely on publicly available surveys with virtually no consideration of what questions are included or excluded on those surveys. The reality is that public surveys (e.g., Gallup, Harris) focus on issues of current importance and thus citizens and officials may have more incentive to form stable preferences in the former case and respond in the latter (see Druckman and Jacobs 2006, Druckman and Leeper 2012).

This leads to my final (fourth) point. Disch (2011, 2012) offers an alternative route to assessing democratic representation that falls in line closely with the findings discussed in this paper (also see Garsten 2009: 91).[26] Specifically, she coins the term "reflexivity." The idea here is that one should not explore responsiveness in a uni-directional fashion of whether elites respond to citizens' preferences.[27] Rather the more nuanced idea is that the quality of democratic representation cannot be judged along the axis of representative-represented alone because elites are always shaping the preferences to which they purport simply to "respond" and we do not even know if those preferences are of "quality."

The important question is to what extent political communication – broadly defined to include information provided by the mass media, interest and advocacy groups, and political elites – helps individuals affected by a policy to recognize that they are affected, and how they are affected, and then to what extent it affords them the

[26] I thank Lisa Disch for the insights of this paragraph, much of which she deserves credit for writing and editing.

[27] One small aside, a recent cottage industry has developed to explore unequal responsiveness (e.g., Bartels 2008, Enns and Wlezien 2011). This shift in a conceptualization of responsiveness does not overcome but merely changes the nature of these inequalities. Instead of looking directly at to whom governors respond, the questions become inequality in access to information, mobilization (collective action), and so on (see Strolavich 2008).

opportunity to take appropriate action in response. Reflexivity only works if political communication informs those affected to act and then they must actually be sufficiently motivated to do so (which again, as discussed can be trigged by communications). It is "the measure according to which a representation process can be judged as more or less democratic insofar as it does more or less to mobilize both express and implicit objects from the represented… it would have to encourage contestation… formal and informal means of communication and action to contest governmental and party initiatives… and political communications of advocacy groups, mass media, and opinion shapers would be in competition with one another so as to mitigate passive absorption of elite communications" (2011: 111).

The key as far as I understand it is that those affected need to be informed and respond; all need not respond *per se*. The challenge of course is informing the public of these policies and giving them mechanisms for expression (as Dewey (2008: 365) long ago recognized when he argued that "the essential need…is the improvement of the methods and conditions of debate, discussion, and persuasion," i.e. of mass communication, in facilitating public action). This is quite challenging for a number of reasons. First, the question "who is affected" will always be contested and the answer will come out differently depending on how one frames an issue and how it is communicated, as mentioned. Thus, one needs to rephrase the question by asking "who is truly affected?"

Second, there will be collective action problems among those affected that need more exploration. There are intriguing possibilities of how novel media technologies can be utilized by governments to communicate with citizens and citizens with governments.

These are all questions in need for future work. The point is that a theory of democratic responsiveness need not rely on universal bedrock preferences, but instead should focus largely on those who may be motivated to act, and may be a more realistic reality given our institutional, social, and media environment. I will not go further other than to say this is a tempting and more realistic means by which to explore democratic functioning and one that perhaps should set the ground work for future studies of responsiveness, given what we know about preference formation.

Disch (2012: 610) further argues that she aims to "shift the normative assessment of democratic representation from the preferences to which the system responds to its constituent effects. This means paying attention to the question of whether affected parties recognize themselves as such and, so, mobilizes to demand a response in the first place." This conceptualization fits nicely with my emphasis on motivation since those affected are exactly those that will be motivated to explore policies and take action: issue publics (and those motivated to think/act).

This conception of representation raises a host of questions including how will individuals be informed, how do they overcome collective action problems (and concomitant inequalities; see Strolovitch 2007), will they feel sufficient external efficacy to take action, and so on. These are questions in need of inquiry and my point here is not to develop a new theory of responsiveness. _ftn1 Rather, the last fifty years of study of public opinion and responsiveness (assuming bedrock preferences) has been in many ways either unrealistic or simply futile. I advocate a stronger focus on motivation and a more compelling exploration of responsiveness given the institutional, social, and media environment in which we live. At the very least, the realities of the ever-changing

communication environment must be taken into account. This calls for a reorientation of empirical study and of normative-empirical dialogue but one that is sorely in need if we are to make progress on these critical questions concerning democratic functioning.

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