

LUMPERS AND SPLITTERS

THE PUBLIC OPINION INFORMATION THAT POLITICIANS COLLECT AND USE

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Abstract Are the decisions of American policymakers informed by general trends in the public's ideology or by the public's policy-specific preferences? In this article we discuss two explanations for the types of public opinion information that politicians collect and use. Using a unique data set of private polls from the White House of Richard Nixon, we find that when opinion data on specific policies were available, the president relied on them and not on general ideology data. On less important issues, however, we find that the president often chose not to collect policy-specific data and instead relied on general ideology data. The differential collection and use of information by policymakers reflect varying strategic calculations. They also have profound implications for representative democracy and the demands placed on citizens and governors.

Over the past several years a growing number of social scientists have reported that public opinion exerts a significant, though not unmitigated, impact on government policy and politicians' behavior (e.g., Burstein 2003; Cohen 1997; Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson 2002; Jacobs and Page 2005; Manza, Cook, and Page 2002a, 2002b; McAdam and Su 2002; Page and Shapiro 1983; Soroka and Wlezien 2005; Wlezien 1995, 2004; Wlezien and Soroka 2003; Wood and Hinton Andersson 1998). Although this research program has generated some impressive results, a number of questions remain.

One important question regarding the political impact of public opinion is *how* government officials, usually American presidents, measure public opinion.

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What types of information about public opinion do government officials collect and use? When it comes to presidential monitoring of public opinion, two contrasting accounts have been put forth (e.g., Wlezien 2004, p. 4). One account suggests that politicians track information regarding the public's *preferences on specific policies* (e.g., opinions about crime, the economy, and other particular issues) (Eisinger 2003; Geer 1991, 1996; Heith 1998, 2003; Jacobs and Shapiro 1994; Murray and Howard 2002; Rottinghaus 2003; Towle 2004). This portrayal corresponds with a populist version of democracy where policymakers exhibit respect for citizen competence and an expectation that government ought to be closely connected to preferences regarding specific policies (Dahl 1971, p. 1; Dahl 1989).

The other account argues that presidents and other politicians attend to trends in public support for more or less government (i.e., *general ideological trends*) (Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson 2002; Kingdon 1984, 1989; Wood and Hinton Andersson 1998). In this case, citizens are seen as relatively limited in their capacity to understand particular issues, with policymakers assuming autonomy to exercise discretion in making specific policies (Burke 1949; Sartori 1987; Schumpeter 1950).

In this article we offer a theoretical framework and empirical test that identifies the conditions under which presidents collect and monitor one type of public opinion data or the other. We begin by describing the two perspectives, after which we introduce a novel data set based on the private polling of Richard Nixon's White House. As we will discuss, our analysis not only has important implications for normative debates over democratic representation, but it also offers insights into how campaigns balance appeals to the median voter with efforts to mobilize the ideological supporters who form the party base.

Lumping and Splitting

Although extensive survey research has examined the nature of public opinion, we are interested in a different question: what *types* of information about public opinion do government officials collect and use? In addressing this question, we follow the trend in the literature of shifting the focus from what campaigns do not know about voters (see Calvert 1985; Kollman, Miller, and Page 1992; Lindsay, Sayrs, and Steger 1992; Morton 1993) to exploring the extensive information they do possess (see Eisinger 2003; Geer 1996; Heith 2003; Jacobs and Shapiro 1995). Unlike even this more recent work, however, we investigate what types of information politicians collect and then how they use these different types of data.

Students of American policymakers have long suspected that government officials act like "lumpers" by collecting and using public opinion information

to form summary judgments of the liberal or conservative contours of public opinion. For example, Kingdon (1984, pp. 68–69, 153) argues that government officials rely on “general judgments about the state of public opinion . . . [to] talk of a swing to the right” or an “antigovernment mood in the country.” More recently, Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson (2002, p. 291) compare aggregated global measures of liberalism (or what they call “mood”) regarding both domestic policy and public opinion for every year since the 1950s. For presidents, they report that “a shift in *Mood* yields an almost immediate shift in *Policy Activity* Like antelope in an open field, [presidents] cock their ears and focus their full attention on the slightest sign of danger” (Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson 2002, pp. 319–20, emphasis in original).

According to this portrayal, election-oriented politicians faced with a poorly informed and inattentive public rationally respond to the electorate’s mood—the coherent, homogenous direction that lies under all of its considerations and views toward apparently dissimilar policies. For example, Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson (2002, pp. xxi, 289–91) explain that “political leaders regularly ignore expressed public preferences on [specific policies] . . . knowing that the preferences arise from a weak grasp of the central facts.” Instead, “it is the general public disposition, the mood, which policy makers must monitor” (also see Kingdon 1984, pp. 69, 89–91; Zaller 1992, 1998). Lumping also assumes that politicians and other elites possess, understand, and agree on global trends in public opinion. Kingdon (1984, pp. 153–56) reports the “diffusion of an impression of the national mood” among politicians, journalists, and other participants of American politics: “participants feel that they can accurately sense the national mood at any one point in time” (also see Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson 2002).

Other scholars take a different approach, arguing that policymakers view citizens’ opinions on specific issues as meaningful and important, and collect their own private data to follow these opinions.¹ As a result, officials are “splitters” who invest substantial resources in collecting data on and responding to the public’s preferences toward specific policies (Eisinger 2003; Geer 1991, 1996; Heith 1998, 2003; Manza and Cook 2002a, 2002b; Monroe 1979, 1998; Page 2002; Page and Shapiro 1983; Soroka and Wlezien 2005; Wlezien 2004).²

Which approach presidents take reflects distinct normative models of representation, with lumpers focusing on the broad opinions of a fairly muddled

1. Research on presidential polling finds that presidents invest significant resources in surveys precisely because other politicians will not know the information (Eisinger 2003; Heith 2003). For example, John F. Kennedy stored his polls in his brother’s vault in the attorney general’s office, while Richard Nixon locked up his data in his chief of staff’s safe and protected its confidentiality by blocking access to it by his own staff and party organization (Jacobs and Shapiro 1995).

2. Although the “splitter” scholarly tradition shares a common focus on the specific policy preferences of citizens, there are variations in the data sources and methodological approaches taken (e.g., archival-based research of presidents and quantitative analyses that correlate published polls and government policy decisions). In general, we use the terms “lumpers” and “splitters” to refer both to scholarly accounts and to different political calculations regarding the collection and use of public opinion information. We recognize, of course, that policymakers themselves do not use these terms and that few scholarly accounts represent a “pure” instance of lumping or splitting.

public and splitters emphasizing the acute preferences of a more sophisticated citizenry. The latter approach is in line with theorists who envision a populist democracy where governors routinely respond to citizens' preferences (e.g., Dahl 1989; Gallup and Rae 1940; Verba 1996). By contrast, the lumping focus suggests a model of representation that limits the role and importance of the public's opinions (e.g., Ginsberg 1986; Riker 1982; Schumpeter 1950; for an excellent general discussion see Geer 1996, pp. 175–97; Wlezien 2004).

Despite these implications, virtually no prior work has sought to pit these accounts against one another or to specify the conditions under which politicians will pursue the varying types of data (although see Cohen 1997; Wlezien 2004). Instead, most prior work focuses on the *degree* to which policymakers respond to public opinion (e.g., Hurley and Hill 2003; Kuklinski 1977; Miller and Stokes 1963), rather than the *type* of public opinion information that politicians consider. Past work also has completely ignored the question of which type of information politicians decide to *collect*. Collection decisions are as important as usage decisions, since politicians cannot use data they lack (see Burstein 2003, p. 38).

We expect that presidents engage in both splitting and lumping, under different conditions. Specifically, we predict splitting (i.e., the collection and use of policy-specific data) when it comes to issues that the public ranks as important or salient (e.g., based on a “most important problem” question). This is consistent with research that finds greater responsiveness to public opinion on policies that voters single out as highly important (e.g., Burstein 2002, 2003; Kuklinski and Elling 1977; Kuklinski and McCrone 1980; Manza and Cook 2002b; Page and Shapiro 1983; Wlezien 2004; also see Hill and Hurley 1999), and with research that shows how private presidential polling focuses on nuanced differences in survey results (e.g., Cohen 1997; Eisinger 2003; Geer 1996; Heith 2003). Past work also suggests that politicians are justified in treating public attitudes toward specific and salient issues to be meaningful, as such attitudes tend to be relatively coherent and accessible (e.g., Iyengar 1990; Krosnick 1988, 1989, 1990). By contrast, on low salience issues the public's opinions are typically less reliable (e.g., Druckman and Lupia 2000; Zaller 1992), and as a result, politicians will feel less pressure to collect and respond to issue specific polling data. We thus expect politicians to engage in lumping on less important issues—that is, they will collect and use data on broad ideological trends.

Studying Government Officials and Types of Public Opinion Information

We test our expectations with a novel body of evidence: President Richard Nixon's extensive private data on public opinion during his first term in office, 1969–72. Although focusing on a single president raises questions

about generalizability (that is, from Nixon to politicians more generally), the use of targeted empirical research to generate broader theoretical insights has a distinguished tradition (e.g., Conover and Sigelman 1982; Miller and Stokes 1963; Riker 1996). The main advantage of the Nixon White House's polling data is that they provide unparalleled access to actual political decisions about the collection and use of distinct types of public opinion information. Virtually all prior research on public opinion and political action (e.g., Cohen 1997; Wlezien 2004) relies on publicly available polls from survey organizations or other secondary sources with little or no evidence regarding whether or what kind of public opinion information government officials actually track or use. We show in the next section that the president and his team of advisers—and not third-party polling vendors—made detailed decisions about questionnaire design and dictated the types of public opinion data that were collected and used in order to guide the president's behavior (also see Eisinger 2003, p. 133). In the subsequent section we use Nixon's data to test directly our hypotheses about data collection and usage.

WHITE HOUSE DIRECTION OF POLLING

Archival records from the Nixon presidency, meticulous diary notes of daily meetings with Nixon by his powerful chief of staff, H. R. Haldeman, and interviews document that the president and his senior advisers were intensely involved in designing questionnaires, analyzing their results, and utilizing the findings.³ Beginning in Nixon's first year in office, the president and his senior advisers concluded that his political success depended on "understanding the voters" and using "polling [to] bring out current [public] attitudes on the issues and the candidates." In 1969 the president instructed Haldeman to prepare a "report on what [private] polls the [Republican National Committee], or any other source we have, can undertake on our behalf." Nixon complained that "we get very little information of this type and that we almost exclusively rely on Gallup or Harris."⁴ With Nixon consistently pressuring Haldeman to "set up a procedure whereby telephone polls can be taken [to] . . . get an immediate response [that] . . . will give us some guidance," senior staff "set up a system so that we can get fast checks on specific issues at any time" and established regular polling as a "permanent concern to the White House."⁵ By the middle of 1971, the White House expanded on the already extensive

3. Research on the American presidency over the past four decades demonstrates the "institutionalization" of the office into a functionally specialized and routinized organization (e.g., Ragsdale and Theis 1997). This has greatly enhanced the influence of the president's senior staff and advisers, and accordingly, our analysis focuses on President Nixon *and* his senior advisers.

4. Memo from Nixon to Haldeman, 12/30/69, HRH, Box 403; Haldeman Files (hereafter abbreviated as "HRH").

5. Interview with David Derge, 5/17/93; Memo from Haldeman to Jeb Magruder, 1/21/70, HRH, Box 403; Memo from Nixon to Haldeman, 3/2/70, PPF, Box 2; Memo from Larry Higby to Haldeman, 4/7/70, HRH, Box 403; Memo from Nixon to Haldeman, 5/25/70, Bull, Box 5C.

work of a stable of trustworthy Republican pollsters in preparation for the 1972 elections; they relied on David Derge as a liaison during the first two years in office and then Robert Teeter in 1971 and 1972.⁶ The result was 233 private surveys, which exceeded the number of surveys assembled by Kennedy by a factor of over 10 and Lyndon Johnson by nearly a factor of two.⁷ In short, Nixon placed high priority on conducting private polls rather than relying on outside sources like Gallup's and Harris's polling for the media.

Even as Nixon and his aides substantially expanded private polling, they insisted on a high strategic payoff for what they saw as large investments of White House time and money (often from the Republican Party and private donors; see Jacobs and Shapiro 1995). Given the costs, Nixon and his aides were highly selective in what questions they approved. For instance, a May 1971 entry in Haldeman's diary detailed "a long review [with Nixon] of some of the general results of our new image poll that I just received this morning. [The president] had a lot of questions on the specifics and . . . felt that we need to do some additional polling."⁸ On another occasion, Haldeman recorded that he "spent the whole day . . . working on the analysis of the . . . books [of the latest White House polls] that have been stacked up waiting to get into."⁹ President Nixon dictated the scope of the polls (e.g., surveys of states more than the nation) as well as their content—the selection of subject areas, the wording of questions, and other critical features of surveys.¹⁰ Numerous White House memoranda and entries in Haldeman's diaries record clear instructions about instrument design.¹¹ Early in the president's first term,

6. Nixon's stable of pollsters included the following: Opinion Research Corporation (ORC) and Chilton had conducted most of Nixon's polling through 1971; Teeter primarily shared the work with Market Opinion Research (MOR) and Decision Making Information (DMI). Becker Research also conducted a small number of surveys. Interview with Harry Dent, 5/26/93. Nixon primarily relied on his private surveys because he trusted them and found them more in-depth than the published surveys by Gallup or Harris.

7. More nuanced discussions of Nixon's polling can be found in Druckman, Jacobs, and Ostermeier (2004), Eisinger (2003), Heith (1998, 2003), and Jacobs and Shapiro (1995). Additional information is also available from the authors.

8. HRH Diary, 5/31/71.

9. HRH Diary, 1/12/71.

10. The president decided to move from national to state surveys after his first year in office because the states were more in tune with the reality established by the Electoral College. Nixon's team dictated what states to survey and investigated a range of other operational details including the sampling techniques, approaches to weighting, and voter screens that its vendors used. Memo re "Polls," 7/13/70, HRH, Box 403; Memo from Haldeman to Higby, 7/31/70; Memo from Higby to Gordon Strachan, 3/30/71; Memo from Strachan to Haldeman, 7/19/71, HRH, Box 343; Memo from Teeter to Haldeman, 11/24/71, HRH, Box 368; Memo from Teeter to Mitchell, 11/17/71, HRH, Box 368; Memo from Teeter to Haldeman, 11/24/71, HRH, Box 368; "Tentative List of States to be Polled," probably early 1972, HRH, Box 368.

11. The following sources offer a sample of the kind of regular discussion within the White House geared toward dictating and supervising the subject and wording of survey questions. Memo from Higby to Haldeman, 12/28/70, HRH, Box 403; Memo from Higby to Derge, 12/28/70; Memo from Nixon to Haldeman, 1/14/71; Memo from Higby to Derge, 1/21/71, HRH, Box 341; Memo from Strachan to Haldeman, 3/22/71, HRH, Box 342; Memo from Strachan to File, 4/1/71, HRH, Box 334; Memo from Strachan to Higby, 4/19/71, HRH, Box 334; Memo from Haldeman to Strachan, 4/28/71, HRH, Box 343; Memo from Strachan to Haldeman, 6/8/71, HRH,

an aide to Haldeman outlined steps to “comply with the President’s and your request for a change in the format of the quarterly [White House] Polls.”¹² Beginning in 1971, the president and his senior advisers supervised the construction of the “basic design [of the 1972 campaign’s] polling effort” and insisted on “review[ing] all polls before they are done to make sure that they meet . . . parts of the [campaign’s] plan.”¹³

The recurrent refrain to White House staff was to “be sure that [stipulated] questions get put into our future polls.”¹⁴ In a typical exchange, an aide to Haldeman reported that two White House surveys used “questions [that] have been accumulating for several weeks” and, more generally, that the “President, you, . . . and other members of the Staff have suggested many of th[e] issue areas for questions.”¹⁵ Minutes of a 1969 meeting of Haldeman and other senior staff focused on “the next poll to be taken and what should be the content of that next poll”¹⁶; Haldeman commanded his staff in 1971 that “the President wants to get some measure of public attitudes toward the armed forces and toward national defense [and that the staff should] . . . get some questions worked up on this and be sure it’s included in the next poll we take.”¹⁷ Haldeman’s top staffer reported to the White House polling coordinator (David Derge) that the White House had “reviewed the draft questionnaire that you prepared . . . and add[ed] additional items that we would like to have tested.”¹⁸ Haldeman’s aide instructed another White House staffer later in

Box 356; Memo from Strachan to Haldeman, HRH, Box 354; Memo from Strachan to Haldeman, 6/30/71, HRH, Box 354; Memo from Strachan to Haldeman, 8/3/71, HRH, Box 359; Memo from Strachan and Cliff Miller to Haldeman, 8/2/71; Memo from Strachan to Haldeman re ORC Poll, 8/17/71, HRH, Box 359; Memo from Strachan and Miller, 8/27/71, HRH, Box 355; Memo from Higby to Haldeman, 9/2/71, HRH, Box 335; Memo from Teeter to Mitchell, 11/17/71; Handwritten notes of meeting of Mitchell, Garment, Dent, Teeter, and Marik, 11/17/71, HRH, Box 368; Memo from Haldeman to Strachan, 11/22/71, HRH, Box 360; Memo from Strachan to Haldeman re Camp Polling, 12/2/71; Handwritten notes of meeting with Haldeman, Teeter, and Strachan, 12/7/71, HRH, Box 368; Memo from Strachan to Haldeman, 12/7/71, HRH, Box 368; Memo from Haldeman to Mitchell, 12/9/71, HRH, Box 368; Memo from Strachan to Haldeman, 2/8/72, HRH, Box 362; Memo from Ed Harper to Ehrlichman, 4/21/72, HRH, Box 362; Memo from Higby and Strachan to Haldeman, 9/12/72, HRH, Box 364; Memo from Strachan to Haldeman, 4/26/72, HRH, Box 351; Memo from Strachan to Haldeman, 6/23/72, HRH, Box 363.

12. Memo from John Mitchell to Haldeman, re “The Derge Poll,” 1/12/70, HRH, Box 134.

13. Under Nixon’s instructions, the White House and, specifically, Haldeman closely supervised the polling by the Reelection Committee; Nixon also had Haldeman conduct polls that were independent of the Reelection Committee and secret. Memo from Teeter to Magruder, 11/17/71, HRH, Box 368; Memo from Higby to Haldeman, re “Poll Plan,” 12/9/70; Memo (draft), “Polling Memo” (drafted apparently by Haldeman’s staff and eventually addressed to Mitchell, who headed the Reelection Committee), HRH, Box 263; Memo from Magruder and Higby to Mitchell, 6/8/71, HRH, Box 263; Memo from Magruder and Higby to Mitchell and Haldeman, 6/23/71, HRH, Box 341; Memo from Teeter to Mitchell, 4/17/72, HRH, Box 362.

14. Haldeman Diary, 7/23/71; forwarding survey question request from Nixon, 8/12/71, HRH, Box 355; Memo from Nixon to Haldeman, 1/14/71, HRH, Box 341.

15. Memo from Strachan to Haldeman, 8/27/71, HRH, Box 359.

16. Memo outlining forthcoming meeting on 9/23/69 with Haldeman, Derge, and Flanigan, HRH, Box 134; HRH, Box 341.

17. Memo from Haldeman to Strachan, 5/4/71, HRH, Box 353.

18. Memo from Higby to Derge, 1/14/71, HRH, Box 341.

1971 to “let [one of the White House’s survey vendors] know that we want to do a poll tonight and tomorrow night” before detailing specific areas and wordings to use, noting that “as soon as we get the draft back, we’ll get it in to Haldeman.”¹⁹

One of the most concrete signs of the White House’s intense monitoring of its surveys were the regular meetings and discussions devoted to updating and organizing the “polling books” that the president and his senior advisers reviewed and used in the Oval Office and Air Force One.²⁰ In addition to carefully mining polls for valuable information about voters, a “question file” cataloged requests from Nixon and his aides, and additional files were created to systematically monitor the “drafts of questions and memoranda related to a particular poll” to confirm that the vendors were responding to White House directions.²¹

An Empirical Analysis of Lumping and Splitting

Is there a consistent relationship between politicians’ (in our case, Nixon’s) private polling data and their (i.e., Nixon’s) public policy statements? Past research, using case studies of various administrations, suggests there is a relationship. This work traces the specific processes by which private polls influence the White House’s formulation and implementation of policies—such as the Reagan administration’s national security policy and the Kennedy and Johnson administration’s passage of Medicare (Jacobs 1993; Sobel 2001). Although this work offers valuable insights about the polling-policy connection, case studies cannot detect general patterns of consistency between a president’s (and his team’s) polling and policy decisions. Our analysis looks for general patterns in the extent and nature of the association between public statements and distinctive types of polling information within one presidency.

In particular, we use quantitative analyses of Nixon’s polls and public statements to investigate our hypotheses that the president and his team attend to the public’s issue-specific policy preferences on important issues (the splitting account) and turn to general ideological trends on other issues. We now discuss the data used for this analysis: Nixon’s privately collected polling data and a systematic content analysis of the president’s public statements on policy issues.

19. Memo from Higby to Strachan, 5/6/71, HRH, Box 353.

20. Memo from Higby to John Brown, re Nixon’s insistence that polls be included in folders for his trips, 10/22/70; Memo from Higby to Strachan, 5/5/71, HRH, Box 353; Memo from Higby to Strachan, 7/20/71, HRH, Box 335; Memo from Strachan to Haldeman, 3/9/72, HRH, Box 362; Memo from Haldeman to Ehrlichman, 9/12/72, HRH, Box 363.

21. Memo from Strachan to Higby, Bruce Kehrli, and secretarial staff, re checklist for “proper processing and control of poll information,” 6/14/71; Handwritten notes between Higby and Tom Benham (executive vice president of ORC), 4/13/71, HRH, Box 334; Memo to File re 4/13/71 meeting of Benham, Higby, and Strachan, 4/19/71, HRH, Box 334.

PUBLIC OPINION DATA

The Nixon White House concentrated on meticulously designing two distinctive sets of polling questions to track the public's opinions. First, the White House relied on an item that asked respondents to rate themselves on a 7-point liberal-conservative continuum. Although the White House occasionally used ideology as a "break" variable to study subgroups, most analyses and discussion of its ideological identification data treated them as important in their own right, as a measure of generalized ideology.²² We label this measure *Ideological Identification*, with higher scores representing the conservative end of the scale. The relevant statistic is the average conservativeness rating.²³ The White House's ideological self-identification data provide an appropriate independent variable for the lumper account. Though this measure differs from other lumping measures—such as Stimson's (1991) "public mood" that aggregates over numerous policy areas—the critical point is that archival records show that Nixon treated the data as measuring the public's ideological orientation.²⁴

The second set of data from White House polling measures public opinion toward specific policies. What we label *Policy Opinion* serves as the relevant independent variable for the splitter account. The Policy Opinion items report the percentage of the public that holds the conservative position on the given policy proposal (running from 0 percent through 100 percent), thereby ensuring congruence with our other measures.

Finally, we expect that the president will engage in splitting particularly on important issues. The White House tracked the importance of policies by measuring how many respondents viewed a particular issue as the single most important one facing the country. (The importance measure was a distinct open-ended item that asked respondents to name which problem they saw as nationally important.²⁵)

22. Some of the largest areas of polling analysis involved the public's ratings of the president's job performance, pairings of potential or real rivals, and policy issues. Ideology was not consistently used as a break in these analyses; income, age, religion, union membership, and party identification were the common breaks.

23. The Ideological Identification measure has an overall mean of 4.10 and variance of .63. This variance is similar to what we find with the public opinion data, described below (which on a transformed comparable scale would have a variance of approximately .84). We also redid all of our analyses using Stimson's (1991) public mood measure instead of our Ideological Identification measure, and the results are virtually identical. Details are available from the authors.

24. The development and use of the White House's ideology data are discussed, in part, in the following documents: Memo from Cole to Magruder, re 8/27/70 Domestic Council meeting, 9/22/70; Memo from Higby to Derge, 1/14/71, HRH, Box 341; Haldeman Diary, 1/12/71, 2/15/71; Memo from Teeter to Mitchell, 11/17/71, HRH, Box 368; Memo from Teeter to Mitchell re "Interim Analysis Report," 4/17/72, HRH, Box 362; Memo from Moore to Haldeman, 1/25/71, HRH, Box 350; Memo from Higby to Derge, 1/21/71, HRH, Box 341; "Ballot Summary," probably summer and fall 1972, HRH, Box 369.

25. The validity of the data is a significant issue. What is important for our analysis is that archival records and other evidence demonstrate that the president and his aides treated private White House polling data as valid and reliable. Although our study focuses on investigating White House behavior rather than on analyzing public opinion per se, the quality of Nixon's polling is striking: each poll was conducted with state-of-the-art procedures, including the use of representative random sampling methods, samples approximating 750 to 1,000 respondents, and well-trained phone interviewers.

POLITICIAN BEHAVIOR DATA

We measure behavior by analyzing Nixon's public statements—what we call *Presidential Policy Positions*.²⁶ Presidents in general carefully calibrate their public statements to signal their policy positions to congressional committees, interest groups, and voters (Cohen 1997; Riker 1996). In addition, Nixon and his senior advisers crafted the president's public statements to “get across” specific messages to the country and to rally public support. White House records indicate that senior staff members were confident that “more public presidential presentations, press conferences, speeches” would “dominate the dialogue” in ways that “bypass the media and get directly to the people,” as well as position him to “comman[d] the news . . . knoc[k] everyone else out of the news” (also see Eisinger 2003, pp. 127–35).²⁷ Polling results on ideology and policy issues were discussed in meetings (according to Haldeman's diary) with “political operatives . . . on speech content [and] campaign strategy” and were used to design the “strategic thrust for the campaign, one that will be embodied in speeches.”²⁸

Our specific measure comes from a rigorous content analysis of Nixon's statements on the full range of domestic policy issues in all of his news conferences and addresses to the nation, as well as a random selection of 50 percent of other oral and written statements.²⁹ The president's statements were retrieved from the *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* and the *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* (for more detail, see Jacobs et al. 2003). Our unit of analysis was each distinct public utterance by the president regarding a specific policy. For each document in the *Public Papers* or the *Weekly Compilation* that we analyzed, we first coded whether Nixon addressed a substantive policy issue (e.g., military spending, Medicare, or other actual or proposed government programs). We categorized each of Nixon's substantive policy statements as referring to one of 231 distinct

26. Although this measure of political activity provides a direct indicator of a critical strategic form of presidential behavior, it differs from those deployed in some past work (e.g., Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson 2002; Page and Shapiro 1983).

27. Memo from Teeter to Mitchell, 11/17/71, HRH, Box 368; Memo from Flanigan to Mitchell, 9/30/71, HRH, Box 368; Haldeman Diary, 4/24/70, 10/8/70, 1/15/71, 4/3/71, 8/16/71, 9/17/71; Memo from Higby to Strachan, 3/29/71, Chapin Files, Box 22; Memo from Teeter to Haldeman, 8/8/72, HRH, Box 363.

28. Memo from Teeter to Mitchell, 4/12/72; “Position Paper: The 1972 Campaign, 4/18/72,” HRH, Box 358; Memo from Teeter to Mitchell, 5/11/72, HRH, Box 362; Memo from Teeter through Strachan to Chapin, 7/25/72, HRH, Box 398; Memo from Teeter to Miller, 9/22/72, HRH, Box 364; Memo from Teeter to Mitchell, 3/3/72, HRH, Box 362; Memo from Teeter to Chapin, 7/25/72 (marked “Confidential”), HRH, Box 363. Nixon believed that improved public relations could increase media coverage of conservative perspectives. Haldeman Diary, 9/8/70, 5/10/69.

29. Oral statements include bill signings; addresses to the nation; press conferences; and speeches to interest groups, administration officials, state and local government officials, Republican Party leaders, and foreign nations. Written statements include messages to Congress, administration officials, and foreign nations; interviews with domestic and foreign news media; proclamations, bill signings and vetoes; and press secretary releases.

issues, from government waste to taxes, foreign policy toward Russia and China, and other policies. (This constituted the universe of distinctive issues that Nixon addressed.)

In addition to coding the policy issue that Nixon addressed, we coded the date of his comment and the number of lines of text devoted to it. We also coded the ideological direction of each of Nixon's policy statements on a 1 to 5 scale: higher scores indicate increasing conservativeness (i.e., policy statements favoring less government responsibility and activity), and lower scores represent liberalism (statements indicating greater government involvement). When necessary, to determine the conservative direction of a proposal, we consulted contemporary accounts in the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, as well as memoirs and other historical analyses. Coding Nixon's statements on all policy issues avoids the selection bias of previous research on political representation, which limits its data on political behavior to issues for which public opinion data existed (Burstein 2003). By including every issue on which Nixon spoke, regardless of whether he possessed analogous public opinion data at the time, we can explore how he used the public opinion data *and* the conditions under which he chose to collect it. We carefully assessed the content analysis and found it reliable (nearly 75 percent agreement between independent coders).³⁰

We collapsed Nixon's statement data in two ways. First, we merged the 231 issues into 27 clear-cut policy areas, where each area included issues that were clearly substantively related to one another; for instance, one code was created for the dozen or so individual codes for U.S. military intervention in Vietnam and Southeast Asia. For one part of our analysis, we further collapsed these 27 into seven clusters of policies: social welfare, economy and labor, crime, energy and environment, civil rights, political reform (which includes reforming federalism or revenue-sharing), and a miscellaneous category.³¹ Second, we combined our coding of Nixon's policy statements into monthly measures to produce time-series data.

ANALYSIS OF PUBLIC OPINION AND POLITICIAN BEHAVIOR

Our core research question is: does the White House primarily collect and use information on Policy Opinion or Ideological Identification in fashioning the president's public statements? We use cross-tabulations and regression

30. One coder conducted nearly all of the content analysis (98 percent). Accordingly, our reliability analysis focused on external comparisons of lines of text that were coded in common; there was no pressing need to examine intercoder reliability. A second coder who had not been involved in this project analyzed a sample of documents examined by the first coder. A third coder compared the analysis by the first two coders. Comparisons between the first coder and the second showed levels of agreement above 74 percent for identification of the specific policy issue addressed by Nixon (74 percent for the full list of 231 issues, which rose well above 80 percent when we condensed the list to 27 issues) and the directionality of Nixon's messages (87 percent for whether a policy statement was pro, neutral, and con).

31. Details on which specific issues fell into each cluster are available from the authors.

analyses to identify the statistical associations between the White House's polling measures and presidential statements and to pinpoint the relative effects of the polling measures under different conditions.

In our analyses of the relationship between White House polling data and Nixon's statements, we created monthly aggregated measures of each of the variables. For each month where data were available, we created measures of Presidential Policy Positions, Ideological Identification, Policy Opinions, and issue importance for each of the 27 issues.³² As mentioned, we coded all variables so that higher values indicated congruent movements in a conservative direction. The splitting and lumping accounts each predict a significant and positive relationship between Nixon's statements and his Policy Opinion and Ideological Identification data, respectively.³³

We potentially have data on 27 issues over 47 months (from January 1969 to November 1972), which comes out to 1,269 potential observations (i.e., if Nixon had made a statement on every issue in each month, he would have made $27 \times 47 = 1,269$ statements). In practice, however, Nixon did not make a statement on every issue in every month. Rather, he made a total of 731 statements on different policies in the given months; each of these 731 statements (observations) represents the aggregated measures for each policy that the president addressed in a given month (e.g., the overall conservative direction of all his statements on controlling inflation in January 1972 or on fighting crime in February 1972).

As we will later discuss, Nixon also did not collect public opinion data on every issue over time, and thus, when he made each of the 731 statements, he did not always possess comparable public opinion data. The data sets we analyze will depend on the availability of relevant public opinion data prior to the president's statement (i.e., we can only analyze the relationship between statements and public opinion data when the public opinion data exist).³⁴ In terms of the public opinion information available to the White House before presidential statements, the polling data were generally quite timely.

32. We created monthly aggregated scores by averaging White House polling items on similar issues across geographic areas (state and national) within the same month. Our decision to produce monthly aggregated averages was based on White House memoranda and other evidence in which Nixon and his aides concentrated on trends and patterns across a number of states and within the nation as a whole. We also took average monthly scores for our Presidential Policy Positions measure; results were generally robust if we instead used weighted averages (i.e., weighted by the space of the statement).

33. Interestingly, we do not find evidence that Ideological Identification and Policy Opinions always move in concurrent directions over time; this is consistent with Page's (2002, pp. 329–31) statement that broad ideology measures ignore "movements . . . that cut across, contradict, shrink, or magnify general liberal-conservative trends."

34. We do not impute missing values in any of our analyses. Our decision was based on an examination of archival and other evidence from the Nixon White House that suggests that Nixon and his aides did not try to impute missing data, and thus any such imputed data cannot be expected to impact Nixon's behavior.

We deal with the over-time nature of our data in several ways. First, in all of our analyses we include a lagged value of our dependent variable, Presidential Policy Positions. We expect a strong positive relationship between prior and present Presidential Policy Positions given the incremental nature of policy movement (Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson 2002, p. 285; Wildavsky 1964). This provides a tough test of our models: including the lagged dependent variable serves as a control for various other influences that may have impacted Nixon's prior position (e.g., interest group activities). Second, we use lagged versions of both Ideological Identification and Policy Opinion data (and issue importance) so as to reflect the White House's operations and decision-making process. This lag captures the time it took for the survey organizations to enter and analyze their results and for the Nixon team to weigh the results and incorporate them into Nixon's activities. White House records and the extensive diaries of Nixon's chief of staff suggest that Nixon used the previous set of results—even if this meant going back in time. Accordingly, our lagged variables used the most recent data completed at least one month earlier (most of the data were quite timely).³⁵ For instance, we related Nixon's policy statements (i.e., our variable Presidential Policy Positions) in April 1972 to his polling data in March 1972 or, if data were not available in March 1972, in the previous month for which data were available.

Empirical Analysis

Our quantitative analysis proceeds in three steps. First, we begin by examining what types of public opinion data Nixon collected. Second, we test whether the White House engages in splitting or lumping, all else constant. Third, we explore how issue importance affected Nixon's data collection and, to a lesser extent, his decision to use these data in fashioning his public statements.

STRATEGIC INVESTMENTS IN INFORMATION

The White House recognized that space on survey instruments was limited and that collecting and processing data imposed substantial financial and organizational costs in terms of staff time and attention. These costs, in

35. The interval between Nixon's statement and his prior polling data was generally brief. We dated the White House's polling data with the last day on which interviewing was conducted. For 45 percent of Nixon's statements, the interval between the last day of White House survey data and Nixon's statement on a related policy was six months or less; three-quarters of polling results were dated within one year prior to his statements. These intervals of time reflect the reality of how long it took the vendors to tabulate survey responses, analyze the results, write them up in reports for the White House, and deliver them; it also took the White House time to distribute, discuss, and use the polling results. As the archival evidence discussed earlier demonstrates, the White House kept large polling books that allowed them to readily access previous polling results as it reached decisions about the policy positions the president would adopt.

We do not include policy dummy variables because our Policy Opinion data change over time very slowly or not at all. In this situation, it is preferable not to use policy dummies so as to ensure analysis of between unit effects (see Beck 2001, p. 285).

Table 1. Availability of Policy Opinion and Ideological Identification Data When Nixon Made a Statement

	Policy Opinion Data Not Available	Policy Opinion Data Available	Total
Ideological Identification Data Not Available	Independent 19% (142)	Pure Splitter 5% (35)	24% (177)
Ideological Identification Data Available	Pure Lumper 41% (298)	Strategic Balancing 35% (256)	76% (554)
Total	60% (440)	40% (291)	100% (731)

NOTE.—Each cell reports the percentage (and absolute number) of statements for which Nixon had a given type of data at least one month earlier.

conjunction with strategic concerns, motivated the White House to calibrate its collection of data on Policy Opinion and/or Ideological Identification. In table 1 we show which types of public opinion data the Nixon team collected preceding (by at least a month) each of his 731 public statements. Each cell reports the percentage (and absolute number) of statements for which Nixon and his advisers had a given type of data.

Table 1 reveals that the White House took four distinct approaches to data collection. First, Nixon made 19 percent, or 142 (of 731), of his statements without public opinion data on either the public's general ideology (Ideological Identification) or policy-specific preferences (Policy Opinions). In a sense, Nixon and his staff were "independent," but not surprisingly, this scenario occurred during their first year in office—far from the 1972 election, and before they engaged in substantial data collection efforts (see Kuklinski 1978). It also occurred on issues such as parochial school aid that the general public did not identify as salient national problems. Second, the White House often acted as a "pure lumper." The White House possessed *only* data on Ideological Identification for 41 percent of the president's public positions (298). Table 1 shows that Nixon possessed data on Ideological Identification for 76 percent, or 554, of the statements. The low cost and simplicity of tracking the public's ideology made it a more readily available source of information.

Third, the White House behaved on relatively rare occasions as a "pure splitter." Specifically, 5 percent of the time Nixon relied *only* on Policy Opinion data (35 of his statements); as we will discuss, he tended to do so on issues that were especially salient in the eyes of Americans. Overall, Nixon collected Policy Opinion data preceding 40 percent, or 291, of his statements. This is substantially less than the 76 percent of the time that he had data on Ideological Identification: the White House assembled nearly twice as much data on ideology as opposed to policy-specific polling results (554 versus 291).

The fourth and perhaps most interesting scenario occurred when the White House engaged in “strategic balancing,” having data on both Ideological Identification and Policy Opinion. On these occasions—which occurred for 35 percent, or 256, of Nixon’s statements—the White House invested heavily in collecting the maximum amount of information.³⁶

THE RELATIVE IMPACT OF WHITE HOUSE INFORMATION

The White House’s selective investment in different types of public opinion does not explain the relative impact of distinctive types of polling information. In particular, we examine the three scenarios presented in table 1:

1. the “pure lumper” scenario: before Nixon makes a policy statement, the White House *only* possesses polling data on Ideological Identification (with higher scores representing the conservative end of the scale);
2. the “pure splitter” scenario: prior to a presidential statement, the White House *only* possesses specific Policy Opinion data (operationalized with the conservative response category); and
3. “strategic balancing” scenarios: Nixon makes a policy statement with *both* Policy Opinion and Ideological Identification data on hand.

For each of the three scenarios, we regress our Presidential Policy Positions variable (Nixon’s statements) on the public opinion data that the White House possessed (in the given scenario). (Of course, we do not have data to test the independent scenario.³⁷) As mentioned, all of the regressions include Presidential Policy Positions lagged to capture the incremental nature of policy movement. (The number of cases in table 2 is slightly lower than in table 1 due to missing lag values for the dependent variable.)

We present the results from the pure lumper, pure splitter, and strategic balancing regression models in table 2.³⁸ In the first regression (the regression of the pure lumper scenario), the results show that where Nixon only possessed data on Ideological Identification, the effects of ideology on his statements were in the expected direction ($p \leq .10$). As the public moved in a more conservative direction, so did Nixon. We also find, not surprisingly, that his current policy pronouncements were strongly related to his statements from previous time periods.

Substantively, each 1-point increase in the public’s average conservative leaning (on the 1–7 scale) coincided with Nixon’s becoming 3 percent more conservative in his statements on that issue. At first glance, this may not appear

36. It is noteworthy that Nixon often decided not to make a statement after receiving information on public opinion. For example, the White House possessed information on the public’s Ideological Identification in 73 percent of the cases on which Nixon failed to make a statement; 46 percent of the time he had Policy Opinion data available and yet decided not to address these issues.

37. We find that Nixon was marginally more conservative in the independent scenario.

38. Because the hypotheses posit directional predictions, we use one-tailed tests (see Blalock 1979, p. 163).

Table 2. Impact of Public Opinion Data on Presidential Policy Positions (dependent variable)

	Nixon's Use of His Public Opinion Information (Data Set)				
	Pure Lumper	Pure Splitter	Strategic Balancing		
			(1)	(2)	(3)
Ideological Identification	.12* (.09)	—	-.06 (.11)	—	-.04 (.11)
Policy Opinions	—	.04** (.01)	—	.02** (.004)	.02** (.004)
Presidential Policy Positions, $t-1$.82** (.03)	.45** (.17)	.78** (.04)	.60** (.05)	.60** (.05)
Constant	-.10 (.36)	-.15 (.34)	.99** (.50)	.14 (.18)	.30 (.49)
R^2	.68	.83	.61	.65	.65
N	296	32	255	255	255

NOTE.—The table reports ordinary least squares (OLS) coefficients, with standard errors in parentheses.

* $p \leq .10$.

** $p \leq .05$.

overwhelming; however, it is critical to recognize that Nixon is becoming 3 percent more conservative (.12 on a 1–5 scale), *controlling* for his prior position and all the factors that went into determining his prior position (due to our inclusion of the lagged dependent variable). From this perspective, we find it impressive that movement in public opinion polls is associated with a statistically significant and substantively meaningful move in Nixon's own position—Nixon revises his position above and beyond what might be expected based on other forces.

In the second regression (the pure splitter scenario), the results show that when Nixon and his advisers only had polling information on specific policies, effects of the public's Policy Opinions on presidential statements were in the expected direction ($p \leq .05$). As more of the public became conservative on specific policies, so did Nixon. Past presidential statements (Presidential Policy Positions) again have a positive and significant effect, although their impact is smaller than in the pure lumper scenario.

The evidence suggests, then, that Nixon and his staff used the data they had, whether it was Ideological Identification or Policy Opinions. The more interesting scenario concerns Nixon's activity when he possessed both types of data. We examine this scenario with the three regressions for the strategic balancing scenario shown in table 2: the first regresses Presidential Policy Positions on Ideological Identification and excludes Policy Opinion, allowing us to focus

on the effect of ideology data when the White House possessed fuller information; the second regression includes Policy Opinion while excluding Ideological Identification; and the third examines the relative effects on Nixon's statements of having the full information of both Ideological and Policy data.

Not surprisingly, prior presidential policy statements (Presidential Policy Positions) maintain a significant and positive effect on present statements in all three regressions. More important, we find no support for lumping in either the bivariate or multivariate regression. Ideological Identification is incorrectly signed in a negative direction and not significant statistically. In situations where the White House possessed fuller information, its data on Ideological Identification had no meaningful effect on Nixon's statements.

By contrast, the bivariate and multivariate regressions offer evidence that is consistent with splitting. When the White House possessed information on general ideology and the public's specific preferences across policies, Nixon's statements coincided with Policy Opinion data, while data on Ideological Identification did not have a statistically significant effect ($p \leq .05$). If, for example, 10 percent of the public increased their support for a particular conservative position (recall Policy Opinions runs from 0 percent to 100 percent), Nixon's position became 5 percent more conservative.

In sum, when only a measure of Ideological Identification was available, these data had statistically significant effects on the president's statements. Similarly, White House data on Policy Opinions coincided with congruent presidential statements. When both types of data were available; however, only polling information on specific policies produced statistically significant effects.

EXPLAINING THE ROLE OF POLICY OPINION DATA

Table 1 shows that the White House collected data on the public's general ideology for 76 percent of Nixon's statements, compared with only 40 percent of the time for the Policy Opinion data. Yet our regression analyses suggest that Policy Opinions have a stronger connection to presidential statements than Ideological Identification. We hypothesized earlier that issue importance would condition White House decisions about collecting and using distinctive types of polling information.

We find that among the separate policies for which the White House collected Policy Opinion data, 19.2 percent of respondents named the policy, on average, as important (standard deviation = 13.2 percent, $N = 141$).³⁹ In contrast, only 9.2 percent of respondents named a policy, on average, as important among those issues for which Nixon did not collect Policy Opinion

39. We focus on the cases where Nixon had data on Ideological Identification; however, the findings are similar if we include all cases. As table 1 reveals, he had the data on Ideological Identification for 76 percent, or 554, of his statements. Of these cases, he also had Policy Opinion data for 46 percent, or 256, of his statements, and did not for 54 percent, or 298, of his statements. Also, he had importance data for 285 of the 554 statements.

data (standard deviation = 6.0 percent, $N = 144$). This difference is highly significant ($t_{283} = 8.22, p \leq .05$) and confirms that the White House was more prone to collect Policy Opinion data on issues seen as important by the public.

We find a similar pattern in the collection of polling information on specific issue areas. The White House collected a large amount of Policy Opinion data on economic and labor issues and a noticeably smaller amount on social welfare; indeed, 44 percent of the policy-specific data collected were on economic and labor issues as compared with 12 percent for social welfare. This is consistent with the White House's information on the public's ranking of issue importance: polling information indicated that Americans ranked economic and labor, on average, as substantially more important than social welfare (18.2 percent versus 5.6 percent, respectively).

We also expected issue importance to condition Nixon's responsiveness on specific policies, and we find some evidence on this.⁴⁰ For example, if we look only at economic and labor issues, the results are consistent with the splitter hypothesis and with the findings reported in table 2. When we further disaggregate economic and labor policy into the components that the public ranked as especially important (inflation) as opposed to less important (unemployment and taxes), we find that Policy Opinions have a substantial effect on inflation but not on unemployment and taxes. In short, the White House appears to have invested resources to collect Policy Opinion data on policies the public ranked as important and, once having the data in hand, seemed more likely to attach particular significance to them in plotting policy activities. By contrast, on policies that the public ranked as less important, Nixon collected and used Ideological Identification data.

Discussion

One possible reason why Nixon responded to ideology on less important issues is that it provided him an opportunity to lock in the support of his political base among conservatives while simultaneously appealing to swing voters. On the one hand, Nixon and his senior advisers appear to have used the president's position on salient and popular issues to win over the general public and, specifically, the centrist "split-ticket" voter that they counted on to "give us our margin of victory." On the other hand, they seemed to use issues that were not especially salient to most voters but resonated with their "natural base" among conservatives to dampen "right wing Republican unhappiness

40. One challenge in analyzing this dynamic is that the White House often did not collect data on less important issues.

because we're not adequately cutting spending, welfare, etc and they feel we're softening in Vietnam."⁴¹

Indeed, in terms of his political base, Nixon was alarmed by criticism from prominent conservatives like Kevin Phillips and Pat Buchanan (who served in the White House) that "we basically had sold out all of our Republican conservative policies in our 'move to the left.'" Haldeman's diary records numerous meetings in which Nixon insisted that "we need the group enthusiasm of the right wing" and had to "maintain the conservative support." The administration, Nixon demanded, had to "quit zigzagging and establish a cutting edge" in a "clear-cut," "tougher," "very hard direction" that "establish[es] an awareness of our philosophy to get the government cut down": he insisted that "there's no mileage politically for a conservative Administration in pushing how much we're spending, because the opposition will always spend more . . . [and we] can't gain on the liberals, but we can sure cool off the conservatives."⁴²

Archival records suggest that Nixon and his advisers collected and used their private polls on ideological identification to pinpoint where the public shared the conservatism of Nixon's political base. Nixon became convinced that "based on polls, there are twice as many conservatives as Republicans."⁴³ Haldeman's staff and other advisers believed that "the American people tend to categorize themselves more as conservative than as liberal."⁴⁴ A study of Virginia in January 1972 paralleled the findings of a number of other state surveys: "voters' ratings of the candidates and themselves on the liberal-conservative continuum" showed that "Nixon is closest to the voters in terms of political ideology" among the total electorate and, especially, Republicans and the politically important group of "ticket splitters" who "rate his political position identical to their own."⁴⁵ On less salient issues Nixon and his aides may have believed that conservative policy positions were critical to holding their political base and also fit with the general inclination of many Americans.

White House records also suggest, however, that Nixon and his aides tempered their conservatism based on their "polls on issues" and continual concern with "whether our position [on specific issues] has gone up or down

41. Haldeman Diary, 7/7/69; Memo from Teeter to Mitchell, 3/3/72, HRH, Box 362; "Position Paper: The 1972 Campaign, 4/18/72," HRH, Box 358; Memo from Teeter to Chapin, 7/25/72 (marked "*Confidential*"), HRH, Box 363; Memo from Teeter to Mitchell, 5/11/72, HRH, Box 362. Additional analysis of ticket-splitters was the central focal point of White House polling. Numerous archival records on this subject can be found in the HRH in the Nixon records, Boxes 372, 380, and 381.

42. Haldeman Diary, 5/7/69, 4/2/70, 1/17/71, 1/20/71, 5/24/71, 5/28/71, 6/2/71, 6/10/71, 6/27/71, 7/17/71, 8/1/71, 8/24/71, 8/31/71.

43. Haldeman Diary, 7/11/70.

44. "The Public Appraises the Nixon Administration and Key Issues," Confidential Survey, ORC, 12/69, HRH, Box 406.

45. "Virginia Statewide Study (Volume I—Analysis)," 2/72, Market Opinion Research, HRH, Box 380; Memo from Teeter to Mitchell, 3/2/72, HRH, Box 380; Memo from Higby to Strachan and Bruce Kehrl, 9/6/71, HRH, Box 335; Memo, "Polls," 7/13/70, HRH, Box 403 (appears to be Higby's notes of a conversation with Haldeman following a conversation with the president).

in the eyes of the public.”⁴⁶ Nixon and his senior advisers paid particular attention to polling information on specific issues that are of “*particular importance to independent and swing voters*.”⁴⁷ Teeter reported that multivariate models found that for the general electorate overall “ideology exerted little influence [on its vote choice].”⁴⁸ Even as he was pressured by his base, Nixon and his advisers accepted that reelection depended on “monopolizing the center” and not “go[ing] all conservative.”⁴⁹ John Ehrlichman, the senior White House official in charge of domestic policy, counseled Nixon against “the pure conservative line which Phillips peddles” in favor of a “domestic course that is down the center” on policy issues.⁵⁰

Conclusion

Nixon and his aides appeared to make the calculated choice to invest limited resources in collecting and responding to the public’s policy preferences on issues that voters ranked as important. On less important issues, however, the White House appeared to collect a measure of general ideological identification and use it in tailoring the president’s statements. We arrived at these findings by complementing quantitative analyses of Nixon’s private polls and his public statements with archival research. Multiple methods provide distinctive analytic advantages in addressing complex causal processes: quantitative analyses identify general patterns, while archival research offers insights into the calculations and motivations of politicians that may underlie broader central tendencies.

Future theoretical and empirical research on democratic representation and citizen competence should investigate not only the *degree* of government responsiveness to citizens’ attitudes but also the *type* of information that policymakers collect and use (American Political Science Association Task Force on Inequality and American Democracy 2004, pp. 40–42; Jacobs and Skocpol 2005). The parameters of research on political representation should also be widened to include different policymakers (in addition to presidents) as well as to study over-time dynamics (Jacobs and Shapiro 2000).

The tendency of policymakers to rely on general ideology or policy-specific preferences raises significant issues regarding the nature and quality of representative democracy and, specifically, the roles of citizens and governors (Burstein 1998; Manza and Cook 2002a, 2002b; Manza, Cook, and Page 2002a). The responsiveness of policymakers to policy-specific information on

46. Memo from Higby to Derge, 1/14/71, HRH, Box 341; Memo from Nixon to Haldeman, 12/30/69, HRH, Box 403; Memo from Higby to Haldeman, 12/9/70; Memo from Teeter to Mitchell, 4/17/72, HRH, Box 362.

47. Memo from Teeter to Haldeman, 2/3/72, HRH, Box 362 (emphasis added).

48. Memo from Teeter to Mitchell, “Final First Wave Analysis,” 5/11/72, HRH, Box 362.

49. Haldeman Diary, 10/21/70, 1/17/71; Memo from Teeter to Haldeman, 8/8/72, HRH, Box 363.

50. Memo from Ehrlichman to Nixon, 10/21/70; Haldeman Diary, 7/23/71.

public opinion increases the demands on citizens to meet a relatively stringent information requirement and diminishes the discretion of governors who are expected to closely follow public preferences. In this model, citizens' opinions are critical, and enhancing civic competence is of paramount importance (Fishkin 1991). By contrast, the decision of policymakers to respond to a global measure of public opinion diminishes the demands on citizens while increasing the demands on governors to exercise substantial discretion in order to design the specific means to achieve broad public preferences. These distinctive possibilities may suggest a workable division of labor, with policymakers following the broad contours of public thinking about the role of government on relatively settled issues while listening more intently to the public's distinct policy preferences on salient issues on which it is more likely to be attentive and deliberative (Warren 1996).

Supplementary Data

Supplementary data are available online at <http://pubopq.oxfordjournals.org/>.

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