ABSTRACT

Title of Document: **READING THE PUBLIC: HOW MEMBERS OF CONGRESS DEVELOP THEIR IMPRESSIONS OF PUBLIC OPINION ON NATIONAL SECURITY**

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To "represent" literally means to present again. For members of Congress, that means presenting again the views their constituents have presented to them. But how do members of Congress determine what those views are? How does a member of Congress read the public, in particular, on questions of national security, where the stakes are particularly high, but where average citizens may be silent, inattentive, or deferential to policy makers?

The current study examines this question – how members of Congress develop their impressions of public opinion on national security issues – through a process of interviews and participant observation with members of Congress and their staff. It examines the information-gathering methods of eight members – six representatives and two senators – as well as their chiefs of staff, focusing in particular on three case

studies: the Iraq war, especially congressional votes during 2005-2007; the sale of six American port operations to the Dubai Ports World company in early 2006; and U.S. relations with China.

The study concludes that members rely on more sources of information about public opinion on national security than the literature has suggested. For example, members do not only look at intentional and issue-linear communications they receive from the public. They tend to be hunter-gatherers for information, and they seek out clues the public did not know it was transmitting. Members also look at public opinion in a highly anticipatory manner – reading the public's preferences not only in the here-and-now, but also as they may evolve. And whereas the literature tends to equate public opinion with public opinion polls, which weight every individual's opinion equally, members appear to view opinion in "lumpy" terms, assigning very different weights to the opinions of different kinds of people. All this helps to explain why there are sometimes divergences between the polls and members' perceptions of public opinion. Ultimately, it also suggests the need for a broader understanding of public opinion, which takes into account not only quantitative polling data, but also the qualitative perceptions of practitioners such as members of Congress, whose job it is to assess the contours of public attitudes.

READING THE PUBLIC: HOW MEMBERS OF CONGRESS DEVELOP THEIR IMPRESSIONS OF PUBLIC OPINION ON NATIONAL SECURITY

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To my mother and father,

Josephine Lori Rosner and

Arnold Stanley Rosner

Introduction and Acknowledgements

This study grew out of a set of questions that took root in my mind during the 1990s, when I was serving on the staff of the Clinton National Security Council, and then as an Special Adviser to the President and Secretary of State. At the NSC, as head of the Legislative Affairs office, I would sometimes get the request from National Security Adviser Anthony Lake or his Deputy, Samuel "Sandy" Berger," to call in some members of Congress for a meeting, in part so that they and the President could get a better fix on what the public was thinking about the national security issues we were addressing. Having worked on the Hill, I was inclined to believe that members of Congress had a pretty good reading on what the public thought on such issues. And yet, the question began to nag at me: how do we know that? Why do we think that members of Congress have a better sense of where the public is on these issues than, say, public opinion polls?

Later in the 1990s, that question took sharper form when two acquaintances – public opinion analyst Steven Kull, and Professor I. M. "Mac" Destler at the University of Maryland, where I had begun my doctoral coursework after leaving the NSC – launched a study to examine whether members of Congress and other national security policy practitioners were "misreading the public" by believing that Americans had become highly resistant to foreign aid, multilateral peacekeeping operations, and other forms of cooperative engagement abroad. Steve and Mac were kind enough to invite me to participate in their roundtable discussions on that question during early

1996, and I laid out some arguments about why I sensed members of Congress were a good reflection of the public on such issues. Yet when I read the book that ultimately resulted from their inquiry, I felt my assertions did not adequately answer their well-argued case.

I had new reason to ponder all this when I returned to the Administration in 1997-98 as Special Adviser, assigned to gain Senate approval of the treaty that would add Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic to NATO. My job was to help the administration make the case to the public and Congress that turning these three former communist states into treaty allies would improve America's security. My team and I pursued all sorts of activities to do that – from mobilizing veterans groups and ethnic communities, to appearing on local cable television shows, to speaking to small groups of students at universities in the states of key senators. The effort was fascinating and ultimately successful. Yet I emerged from it feeling that I really had little sense of what the Senators had heard about the issue, or from whom, by the time 80 of them ultimately decided to vote for the treaty in April 1998.

I started thinking about these questions in new ways when in May of 1998 I myself became a practicing pollster, joining the firm of an old political friend, Stanley Greenberg. Some of the work that I did at our firm focused on attitudes of the American public toward national security issues and, like Kull and Destler, I was often struck by the divergences between what the numbers told me and what I heard from Capitol Hill about these issues. But now I was wearing a different professional

hat, and the kind of confidence I had earlier felt about Congress's perceptions was challenged by the polls I myself was now conducting. So what explained the divergence?

The inquiry that resulted from those experiences is contained in the pages that follow. But it sure took a long time to complete. I began my doctoral studies at Maryland in 1995, during my break between the NSC and the NATO effort, and am only finishing them now, some 12 years later. That means, as Mac Destler has often chided, that my doctoral work did not only last more thin a decade; it actually spanned two millennia. The fact that it took so long to complete this work is my own doing, resulting from the decision to juggle full-time political consulting and part-time doctoral studies. But the fact that I was able to undertake this work at all, and then complete it, owes a profound debt of gratitude to many individuals.

The list starts with Tony Lake, Sandy Berger, Madeleine Albright, Strobe Talbott, and of course President Bill Clinton – the people who gave me the great privilege of serving in their administration, National Security Council staff, and State Department. It was always an honor to work for them, and with them.

I owe an equal debt to the members of my dissertation committee – Mac Destler, William Galston, Ivo Daalder, Ernest Wilson, and James Lindsay. Mac early on was willing to entertain my crazy proposal to pursue this effort on a part-time basis, and he invested a great deal of time and advice, drawing on his deep understanding of

Congress and national security policy, to help guide that crazy idea through to fruition. On top of all that, he was willing to oversee a dissertation that basically engaged in an extended debate with a book he had co-authored. He constantly helped me sharpen the argument, but never counseled against making it. I have had the pleasure of working for and with Bill Galston in various jobs since 1984, when he was Policy Director for Vice President Walter Mondale's presidential campaign and I was a cub speechwriter. I have always admired his mix of intellectual ferocity and personal generosity, qualities that made working with him – through my political philosophy coursework and the arguments in this study – both intimidating and rewarding. I came to know Daalder, Lindsay, and Wilson partly from my work at the NSC, where they all worked at various points, and also from my studies at Maryland, where Daalder was one of my first professors, and Wilson's and Lindsay's writings were among my first readings. I have felt enormously fortunate to have such an outstanding circle of scholar-practitioners to guide and evaluate my work. I thank each of them for the contributions they have made to my understanding of these issues – and for not giving up on me during this over-long process.

My thanks go out, as well, to one person who guided my doctoral aspirations for even longer. Dr. Elliot J. Feldman has been a key part of my scholarly development ever since I strolled into his class on political science field research at Brandeis University in the Fall of 1977. He became my undergraduate thesis adviser, mentor, and close friend, and was the first person to urge me to pursue a doctorate. I resisted his advice for a long time, but he finally won out, as he has in most of our discussions over these

three decades. His standards of scholarship and intellectual integrity have always set the bar for me, and I appreciate his encouragement as well as the insightful comments he provided on various working drafts of this argument.

I wish to thank a number of others who shared so much time and advice in encouraging and reviewing my work as it went along. Richard Fenno reviewed the prospectus and was generous with his time and suggestions; my study owes a great debt to him as well for his pioneering work in studying Congress, including the methodology of "soaking and poking," which I tried to emulate in this study. Rep. Rosa DeLauro, Stan Greenberg, Eric Liu, and Norman Ornstein all reviewed outlines and drafts of my research design and core arguments. Elizabeth Economy and Sarah Miller at the Council on Foreign Relations reviewed the overview of U.S.-China relations in Chapter Two, and John Isaacs at the Council for a Livable World reviewed the chronology of Congress's actions on the Iraq war. A number of people made all the difference in helping me get access to members of Congress, including: Dave Ransom and his boss, Rep. Steny Hoyer, who helped encourage the participation of Democratic members; Neil Newhouse – one of the best Republican pollsters around – and Kevin Sheekey, who both helped open Republican doors; Steven Biegun, Antony Blinken, Mara Rudman, and Randy Scheunemann, who served as a bi-partisan advisory board for this project; and Bruce Jackson. I also want to thank two friends who helped me obtain the participation of the two senators and one of the House members in this study; I cannot name them without giving away those members' identities, but my gratitude to them is substantial.

I owe a very special debt to the members of Congress and their chiefs of staff who took part in this study and became its subjects. I wish I could thank them each by name here, but part of the deal I made with them was that I would not disclose their identities, and so I can only hope that each of you – and you know who you are – understands my gratitude. There is very little incentive for members of Congress or their staffs to take time to cooperate with scholarly studies, and I appreciate that these members and their staffs chose to do so. There is even less incentive for *Republican* members of Congress to provide time and access to a scholar who also happens to be a practicing pollster for a *Democratic* polling firm, and so I particularly appreciate their trust and willingness to speak as candidly as they did. I hope that all of you – the Republicans and Democrats alike – feel that I fulfilled my pledge of protecting your identities; that I accurately captured your words and actions in these pages; and that I extracted some insights about your work which you consider to be valid and interesting.

I also want to thank my friends and colleagues at our wonderful polling firm, Greenberg Quinlan Rosner. To start with, my partners – Stan Greenberg, Al Quinlan, and Anna Greenberg – for deepening my understanding of public opinion over this past decade, and then giving me the flexibility to spend time working on this project. My very talented staff put up with having a distracted and often absent boss, and proved (yet again) that their work is just as terrific when I am not there as when I am. In par-

ticular, my Project Coordinator Jim Secreto graciously and efficiently put up with the scheduling and logistical hassles involved in sandwiching in my research travels and interviews. GQR intern Greg Barr did yeoman work on the side as a personal research assistant to help me dig up congressional votes, polling data, newspaper clippings, and much else. Earlier, intern Ahmed Baset ably assisted in the same way. John Brach, GQR's resident Excel wizard, did some terrific outside work for me helping to manipulate the Federal Election Commission data cited in Chapter Six. Beth Nichols and her team at Wordflow in Connecticut, who have long handled GQR's transcription work, did their usual excellent job transcribing my interviews with members and staff. My thanks to all.

My final acknowledgments are of a more personal nature. I have dedicated this study to my parents, Ms. Josephine Lori Rosner, and the late Professor Arnold Stanley Rosner, for all sorts of reasons, but especially because they planted in me the life-long love of learning that could keep me pursuing this kind of project even as I approached my 50th year. Both of them taught me the joy and value of intellectual curiosity and the virtues of always thinking of yourself as a student. My mother is a remarkable woman – a MENSA member and Scrabble maven – who early on went to the Chicago Art Institute, went back to university after having two kids, got her B.A. and teaching degree at 40, went back to get a law degree at 54, then a masters in psychology at 69; and now has gone through training to become a mediator in the Washington State court system. I can only hope to be as tireless in my own learning. My father was a total intellectual original, a professor of architecture and engineering who was

years ahead of his time in exploring issues of design and prefabricated housing, and a constantly astonishing repository of knowledge about everything from navigation (he was a Navy man, after all), to computers, world history, and how to make home-made gravlax. Arnold would have enjoyed seeing me finish this study – and then arguing with me about its findings. I miss him, and the fact that we won't have that chance.

Last, and above all, I want to thank my remarkable and loving wife, Laurie Duker, and our two wonderful children, Sarah and Jacob. Laurie taught me some of my first and most important lessons about Congress, back when she was a common Cause lobbyist and I had just arrived in Washington as a politically naïve policy wonk. She then provided unstinting support for my long doctoral journey, even though it took yet more time from our family, on top of my intrusive day jobs. She coaxed and coached and humored me past many difficulties and dark moments that otherwise would have been defeating. Moreover, always my very best editor, she generously took the time to read and edit every chapter. And Sarah and Jake: you were little kids when I started this work, and now you are impressive young adults. My thanks to both of you for your patience across all those years, during all my trips away, and all the late nights up writing. The endless joy and energy you have always provided me – along with the new music I downloaded off your iPods – was a big part of what got me through all this. "Doctor" may be a nice title; "Dad" is even better.

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Chapter One: The Puzzle of "Re-presenting" the Public on National Security, and Why It Matters

Members of Congress represent the public. Representation has many dimensions, but a central element derives from the word's components – to "re-present" – that is, to present again, specifically to present the public's views again.[1] Yet before members of Congress can "re-present," they must figure out what views the voters presented to them in the first place. This study asks: how do they do that? How do members of Congress determine what the public believes, as they act on those views in Washington and elsewhere?[2]

At first blush, the answer seems easy. Members of Congress are in constant communication with the public. They get thousands of letters, emails, and phone calls. They talk to people back home. They receive constituents in their Capitol Hill and district offices. They meet with interest groups. They scan national and local media. They read polls. They compare notes with colleagues and follow each other's election re-

[1] According to Pitkin, "In classical Latin, *repraesentare* meant simply to make present or manifest or present again… ." Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, ed., *Representation* (New York: Atherton Press, 1969), 2; the broader array of the meanings of representation are surveyed in: Pitkin, *The Concept of Representation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967); A. H. Birch, *Representation* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971).

[2] For purposes of this study, "the public" includes, at a minimum, all the people who live in a member of Congress's constituency (the district for a representative, or the state for a senator). Beyond their own constituents, members may define "the public" in different ways. Some representatives, for example, may include all residents of their state; or, given that the subject at hand is national security, they may view "the public" as encompassing the entire nation. Even if they do not view "the public" in nationwide terms, members may include certain people outside their own states – for example, current and potential financial contributors. As a result, this study defines "the public" as: all of a member of Congress's constituents, plus other citizens and residents of the United States, in their private (i.e., non-official) capacities, whose opinions the member regards as relevant to their work on national security.

sults. Before elections, they campaign and rally their party faithful. All this reflects the popular image of what members of Congress do. To the extent the literature on Congress has examined the question of how members listen to the public, this is mostly what it says as well. Not surprisingly, there is a good deal of truth to the picture.

But there are puzzles here. On some issues, constituents rarely express direct opinions to their members of Congress. That is especially true on many aspects of national security – the focus of this study – because average citizens may view such issues as so obscure, complex, technical, or dangerous as to warrant deference to military and diplomatic experts.[3] In other cases, constituents may have and express opinions, but lack a sense of the precise policy choices that will come up for a vote in Congress, and so whatever preferences they provide are often more general than specific. Moreover, citizens may muffle or mute their preferences when they communicate with lawmakers if they sense they are expressing a view that is contrary to the member's. Kingdon quotes a member of Congress who puts the resulting problem succinctly: "You're here to represent your people, but you don't know what they want."[4]

[3] This study adopts a broad definition of national security, encompassing policy on diplomacy, geopolitics, military operations, military posture and budget, intelligence, homeland security, and international trade and economics. Although immigration issues now fall under the Department of Homeland Security, this study did not explore immigration policy or include it within the definition of national security, although in some interviews members and staff addressed the issue as an element of national security. The choice of definition ultimately does not appear to significantly affect the study's conclusions.

[4] John Kingdon, *Congressmen's Voting Decisions,* 2nd ed. (New York: Harper and Row, 1981), 32.

There are still other puzzles, even when voters can and do express clear preferences. Consider: even over a period of years, a member of Congress only has personal contact with a fraction of the people he or she represents, and so never comes close to hearing directly from most of them on most issues. Moreover, those people the member does communicate with are nothing close to a random sample. Indeed, many members say they discount the mail and calls they receive, as they assume much of it is prompted by interest groups, and that a good deal of the rest reflects the angriest or most extreme voices, not the most typical. The people who attend events with members of Congress tend to be atypical as well, significantly more politically attentive than the average citizen. As for polls, many members claim to pay limited attention to them; much of the survey data members see is national – not based on polls of *their* constituents; and the polls they may commission of their own districts or states (usually at campaign time) rarely go into much detail on policy issues. As for the insights they get from their colleagues: those typically reflect the opinions of someone else's constituents.[5]

Embedded in many of these puzzles is a question about who "the public" is, when members of Congress try to assess public opinion. That is, which publics should or do matter to members of Congress? Is it everyone in their district or state? Just registered voters? Likely voters? Only people who are well-informed or active on that given issue? In an era of partisan polarization, is it primarily the voters who lean to-

[5] The exceptions here are with same-state senators and representatives.

ward the member's own party?[6] Does the relevant idea of a member's "public" include campaign contributors – even though many of them may live outside the district or state? Should the views of these different members of the public carry equal weight, like voters' ballots, or should some opinions count more than others, and if so, by what kind of formula?

The Special Case – and Special Importance – of National Security

This set of questions, about how members of Congress determine what their publics believe, applies to all areas of policy. But it takes on special significance for issues of national security. At least four reasons justify special scrutiny of the way members of Congress read public opinion on this particular set of issues.[7]

High stakes. The first reason is simply the uniquely high stakes that are involved. As the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan underscore, national security decisions often exact enormous financial and human costs, and can vitally affect America's standing in the world. On a domestic issue, say Social Security reform, the way that members of Congress read public opinion may lead to marginal

[6] The case that polarization has increased – along with arguments about its actual extent and nature – is usefully reviewed in: Pietro S. Nivola and David W. Brady, eds., *Red and Blue Nation? Characteristics and Causes of American's Polarized Politics* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 2006).

[7] Chapter Seven explores in some depth the question of the definition of "public opinion." As that discussion reveals, this study ultimately concurs with those who have concluded that the term has no agreed-upon definition, and that it is necessary to approach the concept through "triangulation" of different methodological approaches. Even so, in the context of this study, V. O. Key's classic definition is a useful starting point: "those opinions held by private persons which governments find it prudent to heed." Vladimir Orlando Key, Jr., *Public Opinion and American Democracy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961) 14. This definition is particularly useful if one views "the government" of the United States to include both the Congress and the executive; in that sense, Key's definition would direct our attention to the process by which members of Congress look for information about the opinions they find it prudent to heed.

shifts in benefits or taxes for this or that group, but on national security issues, decisions can literally mean the difference between life and death, and can affect America's safety for decades to come.

It is precisely because of these high costs and stakes that history reveals a special link between questions of representation and security. It was arguably the high cost of making war that led to the rise of representative governing institutions. Beginning in the Twelfth Century, European kings found they needed to consult with their Lords if they hoped to gain their cooperation in the difficult work of rounding up military conscripts and collecting the tax revenues to support them.[8]

The high stakes involved in national security also raise unique questions about how much members *ought to* listen to public opinion. Edmund Burke and the British Whigs argued that representatives ought to act as "delegates" who vote on the basis of their best judgment, rather than "trustees" who carry out the mandates of their electors. Although the American model was always more firmly rooted in the notion of a strong public influence over its elected officials – and particularly members of Congress – there have long been questions about whether national security should be a partial exception. With the country's safety at stake, some argue the national interest

[8] Birch argues that "the first assembly that can reasonably be described as parliamentary took place in the Spanish kingdom of Leon in 1188, at which the king undertook to 'follow the counsels of his bishops, nobles and wise men in all circumstances in matters of peace and war.'" Similarly, he notes that "it was not until the meetings of 1355 to 1357 that the French 'estates' acquired the characteristics of a parliament. In these years the king badly needed money and troops for his war against England but the estates showed an unprecedented intransigence, refusing to promise either unless they were granted the right to participate in government, the promise of periodic assemblies, and some control over the levying of taxes." *Representation,* 4, 25-26.

rather than public opinion should be the primary point of reference.[9] Since national security raises unique questions about whether members of Congress *should* heed their constituents' preferences, it also raises questions about how much they seek to learn those preferences.

The impact of public opinion on national security policy. Despite the historical linkage between national security, public opinion, and representation, it was not always accepted in modern times that there was a meaningful linkage between the public's views and those of their representatives on national security issues – and if there was no real linkage, then it would not make much sense to study how such information was conveyed from the represented to the representatives. So a second reason to study how members of Congress read their publics on national security is simply that the linkage between Washington and the public on these issues has not always been self-evident or recognized.

Indeed, from the post-World War I period and into the dawn of the Cold War, many theorists and practitioners argued and worried that the public had little understanding of international security affairs, and that their understandings had little influence on policymaking – that American public opinion on foreign policy lacked content, structure, stability, or impact. Beginning in 1922, Lippmann argued that the public, and even the Congress, was an unreliable basis for formulating foreign policy, as their view of the world was based on little more than "pictures in our head," founded on

[9] This is part of the argument behind the "Lippmann-Almond thesis," discussed below.

media-enhanced stereotypes, biases, and rumors.[10] Almond, along with other scholars writing during this period, analyzed the growing body of public opinion polling data and concluded that the public was not only poorly informed, but also dangerously fickle in their views about the world. He argued that the public "tend[s] to react in …undifferentiated ways, with formless and plastic moods which undergo frequent alteration in response to changes in events."[11]

Scholars during this period further concluded that the linkages between the public and policy makers were weak, bordering on non-existent. Cohen concluded this was true regarding executive branch policy makers.[12] Miller and Stokes found more divergence between the roll call votes of members of Congress and the views of their constituents on foreign policy than on domestic issues, and concluded that "the Congressman looks elsewhere than to his district in making up his mind on foreign issues."[13]

This "Lippmann-Almond thesis" reflected a realist outlook, framed by criticism of Wilsonian idealism and the failure of the League of Nations.[14] The proponents of this

[10] Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York: MacMillan, 1922), 3.
[11] Gabriel Almond, *The American People and Foreign Policy* (New York: Fredrick A. Prager, 1960), 53; Lester Markel, "Opinion—A Neglected Instrument." in *Public Opinion and Foreign Policy*, eds. Lester Markel et al. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1949), 3–46; Thomas A. Bailey, *The Man in the Street: The Impact of American Public Opinion on Foreign Policy* (New York: Macmillan, 1948).
[12] Bernard Cohen, *The Public's Impact on Foreign Policy* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1973).
[13] Warren E. Miller and Donald E. Stokes, "Constituency Influence in Congress," *The American Political Science Review* 57, no. 1 (1963): 56.
[14] Ole Holsti, *Public Opinion and American Foreign Policy* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 23*ff*.

thesis also worried that isolationist pressures might prevent the U.S. from taking necessary actions to prosecute the Cold War.

Beginning in the 1960s, however, as public opposition to the war in Vietnam mounted and impressed itself on policymakers, a revisionist and more idealist view emerged in the scholarship, holding that the public's views on foreign affairs are actually rational and influential. Caspary found a "*strong* and *stable* permissive mood" among the public toward national security initiatives.[15] Mueller argued that the public had responded to the wars in Korea and Vietnam in rational, structured ways, with public support dropping in direct proportion to battlefield deaths.[16] Bartels found that House members' votes on the Reagan defense build-up mirrored district preferences.[17] Jentleson, Schwarz, and others argued that reactions specifically to the use of military force are both structured and "pretty prudent."[18] Page and Shapiro, looking comprehensively at a half century of trends in polling data on both foreign and domestic issues, concluded that the public has policy preferences – specifically including on foreign policy – that are "real, knowable, differentiated, and coherent."[19] Achen supplemented these findings by arguing that *individual* views among the pub-

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[15] William R. Caspary, "The 'Mood Theory': A Study of Public Opinion and Foreign Policy," *American Political Science Review* 64 (1970): 536–47 (emphasis in the original).
[16] John E. Mueller, *War, Presidents, and Public Opinion*. (New York: John Wiley, 1973).
[17] Larry M. Bartels, "Constituency Opinion and Congressional Policy Making: The Reagan Defense Buildup," *American Political Science Review* 85, no.2 (1991): 457–74.
[18] Benjamin C. Schwarz, *Casualties, Public Opinion, and U.S. Military Intervention: Implications for U.S. Regional Deterrence Strategies* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1994); Bruce W. Jentleson, "The Pretty Prudent Public: Post Post-Vietnam American Opinion on the Use of Force," in *The Domestic Sources of American Foreign Policy: Insights and Evidence,* 2nd ed., ed. Eugene R. Wittkopf (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994).
[19] Benjamin I. Page and Robert Y. Shapiro, *The Rational Public: Fifty Years of Trends in Americans' Policy Preferences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 383.

lic also show coherence and stability.[20] Wittkopf argued that individuals' views on foreign affairs could be measured and categorized along a limited number of axes – such as whether individuals favored or opposed "militant internationalism" and "cooperative internationalism."[21] The "rational public" school squared the public's low levels of knowledge on foreign policy with the coherence of its views by suggesting that average citizens used "cognitive shortcuts," such as looking to the judgments of trusted friends or public figures.[22] Moreover, some studies argued that the media helped alert the public to important policy arguments by "indexing" its coverage to reflect the degree of official and elite debate about a foreign policy issue.[23]

As a result, by the late 1990s, scholars were concluding that, "few now question that American public opinion has an impact on foreign policymakers."[24] One of the strongest pieces of evidence for that conclusion came from statements of public officials themselves, including many members of Congress. Kull and Destler cited members of both Congress and the executive branch saying that a lack of public support constrained their ability to provide greater support for the UN, foreign aid, U.S. participation in multinational peacekeeping missions, and other cooperative forms of international engagement.[25]

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[20] Christopher H. Achen, "Mass Political Attitudes and the Survey Response," *American Political Science Review* 69 (1975): 1218–31.
[21] Eugene R. Wittkopf, *The Faces of Internationalism: Public Opinion and American Foreign Policy* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990).
[22] Page and Shapiro, *The Rational Public*, 17.
[23] W. Lance Bennett, "The Media and the Foreign Policy Process," in David A. Deese, ed. *The New Politics of American Foreign Policy* (New York: St. Martin's Press) 179.
[24] Philip J. Powlick and Andrew Z. Katz, "Defining the American Public Opinion/Foreign Policy Nexus," *Mershon International Studies Review* 42, no. 1 (1998): 29–61.
[25] Steven Kull and I. M. Destler, *Misreading the Public: The Myth of a New Isolationism* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1999).

Yet, even if the public's opinions about national security questions are coherent, it is not obvious how Congress figures out what they are. Indeed, Congress may find it particularly difficult to take soundings of public opinion on national security, relative to other issues. Many studies suggest the public is less attentive or well-informed on these topics, compared to domestic issues such as education or Social Security.[26] Moreover, when members of Congress talk to the public, national security issues are usually not the dominant topic. That was certainly the case in the period between the Cold War and 9/11; as one study conducted during that period concludes: "Given the low profile that the issue has played in elections, there is no assurance that elected officials necessarily know what the public wants in the realm of foreign policy."[27] But even since 9/11, and even in the middle of two wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, there remains some evidence that voters are less focused on international issues than domestic issues – and that is certainly true if one excludes the very high profile issues of the Iraq war and terrorism.[28] If members of Congress do not talk with the public

[26] For example, Holsti, *Public Opinion*, 215; similarly, even though Page and Shapiro argue that the public's views on foreign policy are rational, they note the low level of awareness on complex security issues such as the MX missile, on which a majority knew "very little" even by 1983, "when the policy debate was fairly far advanced." Page and Shapiro, *Rational Public*, 17; James M. Lindsay, *Congress and the Politics of U.S. Foreign Policy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 45.

[27] Kull and Destler, *Misreading the Public*, 9-10.

[28] For example, an October 29 – November 1, 2006 survey by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research for Democracy Corps, based on a sample of 1200 likely voters in the 50 most competitive Republican-held congressional districts, found that, by a 50-43 percent margin, voters opted for the statement, "for me, what I most want to hear is how the candidates will deal with the financial pressures on people, including gas prices and health care," rather than the alternative statement, "for me, what I most want to hear is how the candidates will deal with our security and terrorism and keeping us safe." In the 2006 exit polling conducted by Edison-Mitovski, the share of voters saying each of the following was "extremely important" in their vote for a representative in the U.S. House was: "corruption and scandals in government," 41 percent; "the economy," 39 percent; "terrorism," 39 percent; "the war in Iraq," 36 percent; "values issues, such as same-sex marriage or abortion," 36 percent; "illegal immigration," 30 percent. There is strong evidence to suggest that in the 2006 election, Iraq was the single most potent voting issue, but it is not clear that national-security issues in the aggregate outweighed economic and domestic issues. For example, a survey conducted by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research for the

much about a large range of national security issues, then how do they know what people think about these matters?

There is a further paradox here: it may be that the public has the most influence on national security precisely at those times when it cares least about these issues. Observers dating back to Tocqueville have noted that the power of America's executive branch in foreign affairs tends to rise when the country is in danger – an observation that was borne out after 9/11.[29] But that means Congress has relatively more influence on these issues during less perilous times – and it is Congress that acts as the chief conduit for public opinion on these issues. As a result, some studies argued that both Congress and public opinion were likely to have a bigger impact on national security after the end of the Cold War – precisely because it was a less dangerous time.[30] While the sense of national danger and executive assertiveness revived after 9/11, the paradox remains: whenever the country is least imperiled, Congress and the public may have the most influence over national security decisions; yet it is exactly

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Campaign for America's Future and Democracy Corps, based on interviews with 1,011 voters, November 7–8, 2006, found the following shares of voters listed each issue as the first or second most important issue "in deciding how to vote for Congress": "the war in Iraq," 41 percent; "jobs and the economy," 26 percent; "moral values," 23 percent; "terrorism and national security," 22 percent; "taxes and spending," 15 percent; "Medicare and Social Security," 13 percent; "health care," 13 percent; "illegal immigration," 13 percent; "energy and gas prices," 7 percent. Thus, about twice as many respondents selected a domestic/economic issue as one of their top two voting issues, relative to national security issues (133 versus 63 percent). Although the comparison is not totally fair, due to the larger number of domestic categories, the difference is large enough to suggest that economic and domestic issues did likely dominate in the aggregate. Democracy Corps polling just after the 2004 election showed the same pattern: the most important voting issue was the war in Iraq, but domestic/economic issues in the aggregate were more important than national security issues.

[29] "It is generally in its relations with foreign powers that the executive power of a nation has the chance to display skill and strength. If the Union's existence were constantly menaced, and if its great interests were continually interwoven with those of other powerful nations, one would see the prestige of the executive growing, because of what was expected from it and of what it did." Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, ed. J. P. Mayer (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1969), 126.

[30] Jeremy D. Rosner, *The New Tug-of-War: Congress, the Executive, and National Security* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1995).

at these moments that the public may be least focused on world affairs, making it harder for Congress to determine what they think about these issues. To be sure, during such periods, the public may pay attention to national security policies and operations when something suddenly goes wrong with them, as with the problems with peacekeeping missions in Somalia and Haiti in 1993. Yet the public's reactions at such moments are likely to be based on quick swings from attention to inattention, and Congress may be faced with trying read opinions that do not reflect long consideration of the problem at hand.

Congress also may find it problematic to gain a clear picture of the public's views on national security because of a Burkean premise that representatives should exercise their best, expert judgment when it comes to the life-and-death questions of national security. We already noted that if members of Congress feel this, it may lead them to spend less time and effort investigating the feelings of their constituents on these issues. At a minimum, it would lead them to have less interest in what their own constituents think, and more what the entire country thinks, since such members would be focused on the national interest, rather than local preferences. But high regard for the national interest may mute what the people say along with how actively their representatives listen. To the extent voters believe that they should leave questions of war and peace to the experts who assess the nation's interests and options, they may be hesitant to suggest to their members of Congress what course of action the country should take. There is some evidence that this is the case.[31]

[31] For example, Susan Herbst asked political activists a survey question: "Are there cases when public officials should *not* be guided by public opinion in their decision making?" Three of the five top open-

The high regard for the national interest might do more than make it hard for members of Congress to read public opinion; it also might systematically bias how they read the content of that opinion. A focus on the national interest may create what might be called an "idealist bias" in what members of Congress perceive in public opinion on national security. It could be that the voters most willing to speak up about national security, and the members of Congress most interested in listening, are those who are more likely to believe that the public *should* matter on questions of national security. Voters with a more realist outlook may be less vocal, and realist members of Congress may be less inquisitive about what their voters think.

Paradoxically, it is also possible that the normative emphasis on the national interest in security affairs could have just the opposite effect, and exert a "realist bias." Politicians who tend toward idealism might worry that they are open to political attack if they are seen to be focusing on public opinion and neglecting the national interest, and therefore might go out of their way to avoid any hint that they are listening to public opinion. Meanwhile, leaders with a reputation for a tough-minded *realpolitik* outlook might feel they run less political risk by soliciting and analyzing public opinion on national security issues, and might therefore do so more extensively and systematically. There is anecdotal evidence to support this scenario as well. During the early years of the first Clinton administration, for example, the president's pollster

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ended answers potentially touch on national security: "when the public is badly informed"; "when issue concerns good for public as a whole"; and "when issue concerns national security." However answers touching on foreign affairs and the military ranked relatively low on this question; *Reading Public Opinion: How Political Actors View the Democratic Process* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998) 145.

asked few questions about national security issues, in part because it was seen as unseemly to inject questions of politics into decisions about the country's safety.[32] A member of the NSC staff during the Clinton administration is quoted in one study as saying that "There's some inhibition in the foreign policy part of the government about studying the domestic opinion…. And the polling that gets done for the president, which is by his political people, is not supposed to inform foreign policy."[33] By contrast, President George W. Bush and his *realpolitik* Vice President Dick Cheney reportedly relied on a leading national security pollster to help formulate their arguments and even their policy regarding the war in Iraq, presumably on the theory that actions taken for reasons of national interest still required public support.[34]

The impact of the Congress on national security policy. The unique dynamics of public opinion about national security – the often low salience and the potentially biasing impact of regard for the national interest – make it worth looking at how members of Congress read such opinions. But there is also a third reason to focus on national security. The United States Congress plays a uniquely influential role on national security, relative to the rest of the world's legislatures. Unlike in most countries, the U.S. Constitution gives Congress the power to declare war, raise and finance the country's armed forces, and regulate foreign trade; and gives the Senate the power to provide its advice and consent to the appointment of ambassadors and the approval of treaties.

[32] Author's interview with Stanley Greenberg, March 28, 2007.
[33] Quoted Kull and Destler, *Misreading the Public*, 211.
[34] Scott Shane, "Bush's Speech on Iraq Echoes Analyst's Voice," *New York Times*, December 4, 2005.

At a minimum, the Constitution's grant of specific national security powers to the Congress creates an "invitation to struggle for the privilege of directing American foreign policy," which offers members of Congress the opportunity to assert a major role in the country's national security decisions.[35] Yet there is a long running debate about the degree to which Congress really flexes those powers. One school, which Lindsay dubs the "Irreconcilables," maintains that Congress does indeed use its powers, and to such an excessive degree that it poaches on the constitutional prerogatives of the executive, such as with earmarks for parochial projects abroad and micromanagement of weapons systems, undermining America's security in the process. A second school, the "Skeptics," believes Congress largely shirks its constitutional responsibilities, taking mostly symbolic actions rather than seizing real control on questions such as war powers and overall defense spending. Lindsay and others represent a third school, the New Institutionalists, who focus more on the subtle ways that Congress shapes national security agendas and outcomes, such as by creating the structure and rules for the national security bureaucracy, influencing media coverage, exerting leverage through procedural motions, and signaling potential future clashes with the executive through hearings, press releases, and other non-legislative actions.[36]

The current study does not attempt to weigh in on the debate among these three schools, since most of that argument derives from differences in constitutional interpretation. But it is notable that at least the first two of these schools of argument presume that members of Congress have some sense of what the public believes about

[35] Edward S. Corwin, *The President: Office and Powers, 1987–1957* (New York: New York University Press, 1957), 171.
[36] Lindsay, *Politics of Foreign Policy,* 2–3.

national security. The Irreconcilables believe Congress compromises national security precisely because it is playing to the public, rather than focusing on the national interest. The Skeptics believe members of Congress avoid taking tough positions because they can score more points with the public, and take fewer political risks, through largely symbolic posturing. All this presumes that members have a sense of what plays well or creates risks relative to public opinion. Even the New Institutionalists often suggest that members of Congress are at least partly reflecting public opinion as they shape the institutions, agendas, and personnel who determine national security outcomes.[37] Since all three schools presume members of Congress start with some reading of the public's views on national security issues, it is well worth investigating how members form those perceptions.

Moreover, cutting across all three schools is a sense that the U.S. Congress exerts a unique kind of "multiplier force" with regard to public opinion on national security. Studies suggest that both the executive branch and the media tend to develop their own impressions of public opinion on national security primarily by looking to Congress.[38] How members of Congress listen to the public on national security therefore shapes the actions of both branches that control these policy decisions – the legislative and executive – as well as the media who report those decisions to American and global audiences.

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[37] Lindsay argues that Congress may shy away from digging for executive branch misdeeds in foreign affairs because "the violation probably would not harm, or interest constituents." James M. Lindsay, "Congress, Foreign Policy, and the New Institutionalism," *International Studies Quarterly* 38, no. 2 (1994): 283.

[38] Bernard C. Cohen, *The Public's Impact on Foreign Policy*, Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1973, 114-115; Bennett, "The Media and the Foreign Policy Process"**;** Kull and Destler quote participants in their study as believing that both journalists and executive branch policy makers view Congress as a good mirror of public opinion, *Misrepresenting the Public*, 194 and 219.

It becomes even more important to pick apart the relationship between public opinion and the Congress and national security policy given recent trends toward partisan polarization across both the American public and the Congress itself. While there is disagreement about the degree and consequences of partisan polarization in America's current politics, there is a fair degree of consensus that Congress itself has become more polarized in recent years. There are fewer competitive districts and less partisan agreement on major votes in Congress. These trends raise the question of whether members of Congress are increasingly taking their cues on issues of war and peace only from their partisans, and ignoring the will of the rest of the political spectrum.[39] One recent study sees peril for America's foreign policy in such polarizing patterns: "stability and perseverance in the pursuit of a foreign policy are as necessary in today's treacherous world as during the showdown with fascism in the 1940s and with communism afterwards. A course of action buffeted by polarized politicians, and tugged in contradictory directions, is no course whatsoever."[40]

The impact of public opinion and congressional input on world peace.

There is also a fourth set of theoretical reasons to dissect the way that Congress listens to the public on national security. Whether one views the international order in realist, neo-realist, or idealist terms, an accurate assessment of domestic opinion is

[39] For example: I. M. Destler, "Congress and Foreign Policy at Century's End: Requiem on Cooperation?" in *Congress Reconsidered*, 7th edition, eds. Lawrence C. Dodd and Bruce I. Oppenheimer (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press, 2001), 315*ff*.
[40] William A. Galston and Pietro S. Nivola, "Delineating the Problem," in *Red and Blue Nation? Characteristics and Causes of America's Polarized Politics* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2006), 37.

arguably a precondition for the maintenance of peace. At the realist end of the spectrum, public opinion is a key component of each country's store of power. Morgenthau lists it – under the rubric of "national morale" – as one of eight core components of national power: "In the form of public opinion, [national morale] provides an intangible factor without whose support no government…is able to pursue its policies with full effectiveness."[41] He concludes countries will be more powerful and successful in the international realm to the extent that they are "truly representative…in the sense of being able to translate the inarticulate convictions and aspirations of the people into international objectives and policies."[42] Thus, realists would hold that the ability of the United States to play a fully vigorous role in the world depends, in part, on the degree to which Congress accurately assesses the public's views.

At the other end of the spectrum, starting with Immanuel Kant's essay on "Perpetual Peace," idealist theories of international relations have asserted that public opinion tends to restrain democratic governments from waging war, at least against other democracies.[43] Yet if members of Congress do not really (or accurately) hear their constituents' views on issues of war and peace, then there is reason to question the idealist thesis and wonder whether the public is really constraining the government's actions abroad.

[41] Hans Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1948) 100.
[42] Ibid., 104.
[43] Pauline Kleingeld, ed., *Toward Perpetual Peace and Other Writings on Politics, Peace, and History: Immanuel Kant* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 67.

These theoretical questions have a more practical face. Many people – both scholars and average citizens – now wonder whether there is something broken in the politics of American national security policy, with key decisions increasingly becoming disconnected from the public's wishes. The question comes from many directions. Some ask how the U.S. can send so much money abroad in foreign aid when the public opposes such spending, on the grounds that it is wasteful and ineffective.[44] Others ask why members of Congress resist more generous humanitarian efforts abroad, or more robust peacekeeping missions, or more support for the United Nations, when polls suggest most voters support such cooperative endeavors.[45] Still others look at problems with the U.S.-led war in Iraq and ask how and why Congress has not done more to steer policy in ways that more closely reflect the public's concerns (or, from the realist perspective, one could ask whether Congress had misestimated the public's will to sustain a long fight).[46] It may be useful to investigate *how* members of Congress listen to the public on national security in order to help determine *whether* Congress is really hearing what Americans want.

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[44] Mark Thornton, "Corruption and Foreign Aid," Ludwig Von Mises Institute. http://www.mises.org/story/1093 (posted November 14, 2002; accessed May 2, 2007).

[45] Kull and Destler, *Misreading the Public.*

[46] For example, Senator Russ Feingold said: "the President just plain ignored overwhelming public sentiment, the advice of members of both parties, and the views of military and foreign policy experts when he proposed his escalation. The administration turned its back on the American people. We in Congress should not follow suit. We have a responsibility to our constituents, and to our men and women in uniform. If no one will listen to, and act on, the will of the American people, then there is something seriously wrong with our political system." Feingold, "On Opposing the President's Iraq Escalation Policy and Using the Power of the Purse to End Our Military Involvement in Iraq" (February 16, 2007).

Five Assumptions about How Members of Congress Assess Public Opinion

Although there are many reasons to examine how members of Congress go about developing their impressions of what the public thinks regarding national security, few studies have examined the question in detail. Scholars have explored many related issues, including: what the public believes about foreign affairs; what kind of national security issues public opinion influences, and when; how congruent members' votes are with public opinion polls (on national security as well as other issues); how constituent views affect a member's decision to participate on a national security issue; or how local constituent interests affect members' votes on defense issues.[47] These are important questions, which largely extend beyond the scope of this study. To the extent scholars describe how members of Congress assess public opinion, it tends to be in passing, or based on quantitative inference, in the context of these other lines of inquiry. There has been little direct, specific examination of how members of Congress actually go about reading their constituents (and other relevant publics) on national security issues, or indeed on policy issues in general.

[47] For example: Page and Shapiro, *Rational Public*; Holsti, *Public Opinion*; Jentleson, "Prudent Public"; Richard Sobel, *The Impact of Public Opinion on U.S. Foreign Policy Since Vietnam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Lance W. Bennett and David L. Paletz, eds., *Taken by Storm: The Media, Public Opinion, and U.S. Foreign Policy in the Gulf War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Miller and Stokes, "Constituency Influence in Congress"; Larry M. Bartels, "Constituency Opinion and Congressional Policy Making"; Bruce Russett, Thomas Hartley, and Shoon Murray, "The End of the Cold War, Attitude Change, and Defense Spending," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 27 (March 1994), 17–21; Eileen Burgin, "The Influence of Constituents: Congressional Decision Making on Issues of Foreign and Defense Policy," in *Congress Resurgent: Foreign and Defense Policy on Capitol Hill*, eds. Randall B. Ripley and James M. Lindsay (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993); Bernard C. Cohen, *The Public's Impact on Foreign Policy*, (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1973); Mark A. Peffley and Jon Hurwitz, "International Events and Foreign Policy Beliefs: Public Responses to Changing Soviet-U.S. Relations," *American Journal of Political Science* 36 (1992): 431–61.

The lack of attention to this question is notable given the extensive scrutiny scholars have focused on how voters form impressions and preferences about electoral candidates. An entire body of literature has tried to explain how millions of average citizens, pressed by other demands on their time and attention, might develop meaningful opinions about a small number of politicians during campaigns. Yet there has been less attention to what, at least numerically, would appear the harder challenge: how a small number of representatives develop meaningful impressions about the opinions of their hundreds of thousands or millions of constituents. The literature has focused on how voters employ "low information rationality" and use information heuristics to develop their impressions of candidates; yet it has not done much to explore what heuristics members of Congress may use to read the opinions of their constituents.[48] A range of studies have usefully explored how citizens' social contexts and networks affect the flow of political information they receive, and how they process it; but there has been relatively little attention to the way in which representatives' networks might affect what information reaches and moves them regarding the public's views.[49] Moreover, in the few studies that have looked directly at how members assess public opinion, the focus has generally not been on national security – perhaps due to a sense that these issues are less salient to the public, or that the public tends to defer more to its elected representatives on these issues.

[48] Especially: Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1957); Popkin, *Reasoning Voter*.
[49] For example: Robert Huckfeldt and John Sprague, *Citizens, Politics, and Social Communication: Information and Influence in an Election Campaign* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

In 1973, Bernard Cohen complained of a dearth of analysis about the linkages between public views and official actions on national security: "Like an old-time movie that drew the curtains as the couple went into the bedroom, the literature of political science and history has veiled the crucial coupling of public opinion and foreign policy."[50] More than three decades later, it seems the curtain has been pulled back only slightly, and hardly at all on the question of how members of Congress come to understand the foreign policy views of whatever publics they see as relevant to their decisions on such issues.

One of the purposes of this study, then, is simply to fill in a mostly blank space in the literature – to examine in more detail how members of Congress read the views of their publics on national security. But given that some scholars have at least touched on this question, another purpose of the current study is to tease out and question some of the assumptions they brought to bear. To the extent scholarly studies have looked at this linkage, on policy issues generally, but particularly on national security, they have tended toward five major assumptions, either explicitly or implicitly:

- First, they tend to assume that members of Congress look to a *relatively limited set of sources* of information in order to develop their view of public opinion.
- Second, they assume that those sources are mostly *intentional* communications, in which citizens are actively trying to "send a message" to the member of Congress.

[50] Cohen, *Public's Impact on Foreign Policy*, 26.

- Third, they assume that those communications are *issue-linear*, meaning that the member of Congress draws conclusion about public opinion on issue X by looking at what citizens are saying or doing with regard to issue X.
- Fourth, many studies, although not all, assume the proper index of public opinion is the *quantitative* balance of individual views on a given policy, as measured in public opinion polls.
- Fifth, some studies, although again not all, assume that public opinion is something that exists in the *here and now*, a thing that is properly measured at a point in time.

A brief review of the literature clarifies each of these five assumptions.

Relatively limited set of sources. Past studies have cited a range of ways that members of Congress develop their impressions of public opinion generally, and on national security in particular. Yet what is most notable is how limited that range really is. The sources most commonly listed are:[51]

- Letters, email, and telephone calls.
- Meetings and other direct contact with constituents.
- Communications with close supporters and intimates.

[51] These sources are cited in, among others: Charles O. Jones, "Representation in Congress: The Case of the House Agriculture Committee," *American Political Science Review* 55 (June 1961); Raymond A. Bauer, Ithiel de Sola Pool, and Lewis Anthony Dexter, *American Business and Public Policy: The Politics of Foreign Trade* (Chicago: Aldine-Atherton, 1963); Kingdon, *Congressmen's Voting Decisions*; R. Douglas Arnold, *The Logic of Congressional Action* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990); Lewis Anthony Dexter, "What Do Congressmen Hear?" in *New Perspectives on the House of Representatives*, 4th ed., eds. Robert L. Peabody and Nelson W. Polsby (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992); Barbara Hinckley, *Less than Meets the Eye: Foreign Policy Making and the Myth of the Assertive Congress* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Lindsay, *Politics of Foreign Policy*, 28–29; Kull and Destler, *Misreading the Public*; Richard F. Fenno, Jr., *Home Style: House Members in Their Districts* (New York: Longman, 2003).

- Statements or actions by interest groups and their lobbyists.
- Communications from issue experts.
- Campaign contributions, and statements from contributors.
- National and local media.
- Input from their staff.
- Public opinion polls – published, and ones they commission.
- Statements or actions by congressional colleagues and party leaders.
- Statements or actions by the president and other executive officials.
- Election results – their own, and those of other politicians.
- A catch-all category: the member's "intuition," based on experience.

This is varied array of sources, to be sure, and the current study confirms that members do pay attention to all of them, to differing degrees. But we are left wondering: is this all there is, or should the list be longer still? Moreover, there is a hanging question about that catch-all category at the end – "intuition": how do members of Congress develop that, and what other sources of data inform it? And whatever the ultimate list of sources, do members of Congress draw on them in similar ways, or are there important and systematic patterns that differentiate how members collect and assess information on public opinion on these issues?

Intentional. Most notions of how members of Congress develop their impressions of public opinion focus on communications that citizens launch actively and intentionally. At least in the American context, this may trace to the idea of "petitioning

for redress of grievances," an active, intentional concept enshrined in both the Declaration of Independence and the First Amendment to the Constitution. Virtually all of the sources of information about public opinion listed in the preceding section involve intentional actions by the citizen: voting; sending letters and emails; making telephone calls; attending meetings; making verbal comments; supporting an interest group; making campaign contributions; and so on. All can be thought of as the citizen trying to "send a message" about something to his or her representatives.

This sense of intentionality runs throughout the scholarly literature. Bauer, Pool, and Dexter's subtle, landmark study of how public opinion shaped international trade legislation in the 1950s and 1960s discussed how businessmen and other citizens might try to influence Congress. They listed the possibilities of "writing, telephoning, or speaking" to a member; "giv[ing] a public speech"; prompting "his trade association or an organization like the Chamber of Commerce" to take action"; writing a letter to a newspaper; contributing money or providing "verbal support to some organized interest group working on the question"; organizing his employees or groups in the community to communicate with Congress; or talking to his business associates on the issue at hand.[52] While they noted that this list was not exhaustive, they did view the channels of communication as being primarily intentional: "In the American political tradition, the way to get things done is to 'get in touch with your congressman.'"[53]

[52] Bauer, Pool, and Dexter, *American Business and Public Policy*, 196–97.
[53] Ibid., 197.

Miller and Stokes focused more on the correlation between roll call votes and polling data about constituency preferences. Yet when they discussed how members read their constituents' preferences, the focus was on intentional communications: "The Representative knows his constituents mostly from dealing with people who *do* write letters, who *will* attend meetings, who *have* an interest in his legislative stands." [54]

Fenno perceived a far more nuanced system of communication, based on first-hand observation of how members and constituents interacted. He noted that members formed their sense of the public based not only on communications initiated by voters, but also through a more interactive process of two-way talking and listening. He noted that a member "cannot represent any people unless he knows, or makes an effort to know, who they are, what they think, and what they want."[55] Fenno's focus was more on how members build political support and allocate their time and other resources, rather than on how they figure out what their constituents think about specific issues. But to the extent Fenno looked at how members assess their voters' issue positions, the focus was nonetheless mostly (although not exclusively) on intentional communications, such as one-on-one and open meetings with the member, constituent service by the member's staff, letters to the member's office, or questionnaires that the member distributed to voters.

Kingdon, in his study of congressional voting decisions, asked directly how members learn about the views of their constituents. But his answers mostly focused on inten-

[54] Emphasis in the original; Miller and Stokes, "Constituency Influence in Congress," 49.
[55] Fenno, *Home Style*, 233.

tional forms of communication, including constituent mail, constituents' votes and preferences during the candidate recruitment process, constituents' answers to issue questionnaires sent out by the members, and the actions of contributors. Kingdon did identify one less intentional source of information – constituents' responses as a member seeks to explain his or her congressional votes back home – and we return to this source below.[56]

Arnold is one of the few observers of Congress who posited a less intentional model. He noted that, "legislators use a form of political intuition that comes with experience. They talk with and listen to their constituents, they read their mail, they watch how past issues develop over time, they look for clues about salience and intensity, they consider who might have an incentive to arouse public opinion, they learn from one another and from others' mistakes." This is a subtle view, which assumed learning from passive as well as active constituent communications. Yet Arnold was vague about what the "clues" of salience and intensity might be, and he seemed to assume that only intentional constituent communications, such as mail, would transmit citizens' substantive views.[57]

Stimson, MacKuen, and Erikson also go further than most studies in suggesting that members of Congress do not rely only on communications that the public initiates. In a footnote, they comment: "Their careers at stake, politicians energetically consult multiple sources of information about the public's policy judgments – opinion polls,

[56] Kingdon, *Congressmen's Voting Decisions*, 29-68.
[57] Arnold, *Logic of Congressional Action*, 11-12.

constituency newspapers, chats with ordinary voters, monitoring mail, 'lobbying' efforts, and comparisons with other Washington politicians…. Politicians also have conversations with close friends and supporters…. Further, politicians may be influenced, again genuinely, by changes in the 'intellectual' climate that also simultaneously changes public judgments."[58] Yet even this broader view only encompasses one truly non-intentional form of communication – changes in the intellectual climate.

Issue-linear. Most of the literature also assumes that when members of Congress try to read their constituents' views on some aspect of national security (or any other issue), they focus on communications that people launched with a focus on the issue at hand. That is, if a member wants to know what the public thinks about, say, Iraq, he or she will look to the communications – letters, calls, meetings, statements, answers to polling questions, and the rest – that the public relayed regarding Iraq.

Many studies note that average citizens may have little understanding of *policy*, including the policy specifics that may come up for a vote in Congress, and some note that national security issues are particularly arcane and obscure to the average citizen. Bernstein, for example, says that these are issues "that constituents are not likely to know or care a great deal about."[59] Yet they almost all presume that relevant communications to Congress involve efforts by citizens to express their beliefs about

[58] James A. Stimson, Michael B. MacKuen, and Robert S. Ericson, "Dynamic Representation," *American Political Science Review* 89, no. 3 (1995): 562.
[59] Robert A. Bernstein, *Elections, Representation, and Congressional Voting Behavior: The Myth of Constituency Control* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall,1989): 70.

some aspect of society and life, be it the cost of health care, the quality of local schools, or the wisdom of the war in Iraq.

For example, when Bauer, Pool, and Dexter looked at communications to congressmen on foreign trade, they focused on pro/con tallies on that issue; and when they talked about direct requests with constituents, they examined direct requests about trade, although they noted that "petitioners are vague about what they want."[60] When Arnold dissected citizens' current and potential preferences, he focused exclusively on the policy at hand, dissecting voters' perceptions of costs and benefits, and how closely the policy was linked to outcomes.[61]

Quantitative. Most studies that examine members of Congress and the opinions of their constituents focus on polling data as the measure of those opinions. These include, among many others: Miller and Stokes's groundbreaking study in 1963; Stimson, MacKuen, and Erikson's analysis of "dynamic representation"; Kull and Destler's inquiry into whether policy makers were misreading the public; Page, Shapiro, Gronke, and Rosenberg's analysis of congressional representation; and Clinton's study of representation in the 105th Congress.[62] At times, the major studies on Congress and public opinion note in passing that polling data is not the only measure of constituent opinion, but they tend to rely on survey data nonetheless. Clinton, for

[60] Bauer, Pool, and Dexter, *American Business and Public Policy*, 436, 418.
[61] Arnold, *Logic of Congressional Action*, 13*ff*.
[62] Miller and Stokes, "Constituency Influence in Congress"; Stimson, MacKuen, and Erikson, "Dynamic Representation"; Kull and Destler, *Misreading the Public;* Benjamin I. Page, Robert Y. Shapiro, Paul W. Gronke, and Robert M. Rosenberg, "Constituency, Party, and Representation in Congress," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 48 (2001): 741–56; Joshua D. Clinton, "Representation in Congress: Constituents and Roll Calls in the 106th House," *Journal of Politics* 68, no. 2 (2006): 397–409.

example, notes that "survey measures may be imperfect measures of district preferences, but it is unclear that available alternatives are superior."[63]

Kull and Destler, who focus specifically on how members of Congress read (or misread) their constituents on questions of foreign policy, also talk mostly about public opinion "as measured by polls" as the presumptively right measure, and examine why there is such a gap with public opinion "as perceived by practitioners."[64] They take seriously the possible rebuttal that "the aggregate behavior of Congress is a better mirror of the public than polls."[65] But even when they go to test this rebuttal, they do so by relying on public opinion data from individual congressional districts as the best measure of actual opinion in those places.[66]

Here and now. A large number of studies on these issues – although there are some important exceptions here – also view public opinion as something that is time specific, something that relates to events in the current time period. Most of the studies cited above that rely on polling data as the measure of public opinion look to surveys conducted at the same time as the roll call votes studied. Kull and Destler compare the members' perceptions of public opinion on foreign policy issues to contemporaneous polling on those same issues.

[63] Clinton, "Representation in Congress," 399.
[64] Kull and Destler, *Misreading the Public*, 153.
[65] Ibid., 155.
[66] Ibid., 193-204.

The assumption that opinion exists in the here-and-now is not universal. Several studies of Congress and public opinion assume members of Congress anticipate and worry about how public opinion might evolve over time. This notion, which generally traces back to Freidrich's "law of anticipated reactions," plays a significant role in the studies of Fiorina; Arnold; Jacobson; and Stimson, MacKuen, and Erikson. We return to their insights in Chapter Four.

A major purpose of this study is to explore these five assumptions through the eyes of members of Congress themselves, and to see how well they match the process that these members really go through, as they read the public's views on national security issues. This short answer is: the five assumptions only partly reflect reality. The standard list of sources does play an important role. Intentional and issue-linear communications do carry special weight. Polling data do capture a piece of what members try to figure out. Some of what members care about is how people think about national security issues at the present moment. But the process by which members take their readings of the public on national security is much richer, more qualitative, more anticipatory, and more individualized than the literature often suggests. That added complexity is not only interesting; it is also has practical implications related to representation, Congress, national security policy, and public opinion.

Methodology

This study examines these questions by looking at how a small group of members of Congress – six House members and two senators – developed their impressions of

public opinion on national security issues during 2006-2007. The research focuses, in particular, on how they did this within the context of three issues: 1) the war in Iraq; 2) homeland security, particularly the argument in early 2006 over the purchase by Dubai Ports World of six American port operations; and 3) U.S. relations with China.

Most of the focus in this study is on the House of Representatives. The reason for this is that the House is – both by the Founders' design, and in practice, according to many studies – the chamber that is closer to the public and its opinions. As a matter of design, the framers of the Constitution argued for frequent elections to the House of Representatives in part to ensure that its members would have "an habitual recollection to their dependence on the people."[67] As a matter of practice, House members on average spend more time in their districts than their Senate counterparts, represent fewer voters,[68] and pride themselves on being better barometers of local opinion. If reading the public is a bigger part of the job description of House members, then it makes sense to focus there.

The study also focuses on two senators. That is partly because the Senate plays a key role in representing the public on national security, with unique powers regarding treaties and nominations. In addition, the structure of the Senate lends itself to a useful experiment. Each House district only has one representative at a time, which makes it hard to contrast how different members might go about reading the same

[67] James Madison, "Federalist 57: The Same Subject Continued in Relation to the Supposed Tendency of the Plan of the Convention to Elevate the Few above the Many," in *The Federalist Papers*, written by James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and John Jay, edited by Isaac Kramnick (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1987): 343–47.
[68] An exception is the case of House members who have statewide, at-large districts.

public at a given moment. The Senate, however, provides a perfect experimental opportunity, since each state elects two senators to represent the same group of people.[69] Those two senators are presumably even more likely to be trying to read the views of the same people if they are from the same party. That is just what the current study examines: two senators from the same state and same party. The purpose here is to compare and contrast how two elected representatives who represent the same group of people, at the same time, on behalf of the same party, develop their impressions of what their shared public believes about national security.

The study's methodology relies mostly on interviews and observation of members in their districts or states. The model for this methodology is Richard Fenno's participant observation approach of "soaking and poking," deployed in his pioneering study, *Home Style*, and described with care and grace in that book's appendix.

There was a three step research design for each of the House members and senators in this study. First, the plan was to interview the member's chief of staff in their Washington office.[70] The second step was to interview the member directly, also on Capitol Hill. These interviews, which ran 45 minutes on average, were taped and transcribed.[71] The third step in the design was to travel to the member's district (or state, in the case of senators), and to spend one or (usually) two days following the mem-

[69] There are other elective bodies wholly or partly composed of multi-member constituencies that would provide the same research opportunity, including in certain American state legislatures and city councils, as well as foreign parliaments.
[70] The interview with one chief of staff took place in the member's district office.
[71] The quotations in this study from those interviews are therefore verbatim, apart from some editing to eliminate extraneous material; I indicate these edits in the quotations themselves.

bers around, "soaking and poking" as they participated in public events back home. The observational trips provided opportunities for additional and more casual interviews with the members and their staffs – sometimes in their offices, sometimes at events, sometimes while driving through their districts or over meals. I took notes by hand during these events and conversations whenever possible, and later typed them up; in those cases when it was not possible or appropriate to take notes at the time, I reconstructed the conversations as faithfully as possible immediately afterward, and then typed up those notes soon after.[72]

It was ultimately not possible to complete all three steps (chief of staff interview, member interview, member in-district observation) for all eight members. In the end, I interviewed all eight chiefs of staff (although one was a former chief of staff from the member's personal office who now served as staff director for a subcommittee chaired by the member); interviewed seven of the eight members; and went on observational trips to the districts of states of five of the eight members. In addition to the eight members of the House and Senate who were the core focus of the research, I also interviewed one other member. This member was present at an event I attended while tagging along with a colleague from his state's delegation; I conducted a full interview with him, but did not interview his staff or accompany him as he conducted his own district events.

[72] It should be noted that this process of interviews and observation was carried out in compliance with the University of Maryland's regulations regarding research on human subjects, IRB protocol #06-0132.

The basis for all the interviews and observations was that I would not reveal the names of any of the members or staff in the study, or describe them in any way which might provide clues about their identity. While there are costs to that arrangement – it will be somewhat less interesting to many readers not to know which members are linked to which comments – it appeared to be a necessary condition in order to obtain the participation and candor of the members. In order to honor my promise of anonymity, I have in some places in the text altered key facts about the members, especially indications of their gender, but also other information, such as identities of specific ethnic groups, which might point an inquisitive reader to a very small number of districts. In one instance, in Chapter Three, I have also used a fictional name for a town where an event took place, and for a member of the public who attended that event. This seemed useful, since I refer back to that story in later chapters.

The interviews and observational trips spanned from July 2006 to April 2007. In all, I spent about 11 hours interviewing members and staffs. I spent another 28 hours observing the members as they attended 27 different events back home. To give a flavor for the kinds of events, they included, among others: town halls; meetings with veterans; community forums on Internet safety; banquets for local civic and ethnic organizations; political fundraisers; university speeches; get-out-the-vote rallies during the 2006 campaign; a campaign fish fry outside a football game; meetings with high school students; and a ribbon cutting at a veterans housing complex. Attendance at these events ranged from 6 to about 400 people, and in total encompassed about 2,100 members of the public. The members of Congress I was observing delivered

some kind of remarks at 25 of the 27 events, and interacted in various ways with the attendees at all 27. At nearly two thirds of the events, 17 of the 27, there was at least some direct discussion of national security topics, even though only a few of the events had national security as their core focus.

This study suffers from a limitation common to many analyses of Congress – the need to draw conclusions from a small and non-randomly drawn sample of cases. I have attempted to address that constraint by focusing on a set of members who span a number of key variables. The members included both Republicans and Democrats (three of each on the House side; both Senators were Democrats); both men and women (five and three); both white and African American members (although no Hispanics); members who were Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish; members representing urban, suburban, and rural areas; and members who represented the East and West coasts, the upper Midwest, and the Deep South. The group included some members with relatively safe seats, and some with extremely competitive seats; they had won their most recent elections by margins ranging from 51 percent to 64 percent. The group included relative newcomers and long-termers, ranging from 4 years in Congress to 26 years. The members also spanned a range of committee vantage points, including five members who sat on committees linked to national security (including both appropriations and authorizing committees), but three with no committee assignment on a committee that exclusively addresses national security issues. (The group did not, however, include any members of the Armed Services committees.)

While these eight members therefore spanned many relevant variables, there is no pretense here of statistical validity. The sample was far too small to permit that, and there were many potential biases in the sample selection. For example, I cannot rule out the possibility that the kind of members who would agree to participate in this kind of study are systematically different – including in how they read public opinion – than those who would not participate in such a study. As a result of such limitations, this is inherently a qualitative study. I offer my insights more as hypotheses for others to test, rather than as firm conclusions.

The study's conclusions are also necessarily rooted in time. The research focuses on a unique period – the years soon after the 9/11 attacks, when the risk of terrorism remained salient, the United States was fighting wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and national security issues, as a result, played a leading role in a series of national elections. The relatively high public attention to national security issues during this period may have made it easier to investigate the topic, but also may have yielded conclusions that do not generalize well to times when the public and its representatives perceive less of a foreign threat. Moreover, given that the study examines only one period, it cannot hope to offer longitudinal insights, about possible changes over time in how members of Congress develop their impressions of public opinion on national security. Such questions will have to await future studies.

Finally, there are many questions that this study touches on, but does not attempt to address squarely. Two are most notable. First, are the impressions of public opinion on national security that members of Congress develop accurate? Second, do the impressions of public opinion that members develop on these issues – whether accurate or not – play a strong or weak role in shaping their votes in Congress and other official actions, and what is the nature of that shaping role? As noted earlier, these are among the core questions that studies in this field have addressed, and some readers may find it frustrating that this study does not attempt to answer them directly. Its intent, instead, is to illuminate the nature of one of the linkages at work in both questions, and to give future researchers on those issues some guidance about how to refine their analyses. If the current study is successful, it will help future analyses on these and other questions see Congress's process of assessing public opinion somewhat more as members of Congress themselves actually see it – complex, subtle, highly personal, and full of trade-offs that are central to the content and quality of representation.

Structure of the Study

This chapter has explained the question this study seeks to address and why it is important. The structure of the remaining chapters is as follows. Chapter Two provides background on the three national security issues that this study examines in most depth – the Iraq war; homeland security, and particularly the sale of six U.S. port operations to the Dubai Ports World company; and U.S. relations with China.

Chapter Three provides an inventory of the sources of information that members and their staff in this study turned to for developing their assessments of public opinion on national security. It finds that these sources are more extensive than those the literature typically cites, and that they include many kinds of information that do not derive from intentional or issue-linear communications by the public.

Chapter Four examines how members of Congress evaluate public opinion on national security in terms of time frames. It finds that they do not only view public opinion on these issues in the here-and-now; rather they also look at it in a highly anticipatory manner. Moreover, the chapter finds that the ways that members anticipate the possible evolution of public opinion on national security differs in significant ways from the anticipatory models that some studies have suggested for domestic issues.

Chapter Five looks at how members of Congress weight the opinions of different members of the public as they assess the range of opinions they hear. It finds that rather than weighting people's opinions equally, as polling data tends to assume, members construct "perceptual maps" of public opinion on these issues that are highly "lumpy," giving significantly more weight to the opinions of certain kinds of individuals. Moreover, members assign extra weight not just to the opinions of those who have intense or expert opinions, as the literature often suggests, but also to the opinions of those who have certain kinds of relationships to the issue at hand, or to

the member, or to others in the community, or to the potential for changes in the balance of opinion on the issue.

Chapter Six describes how members' approaches to assessing public opinion on national security vary, especially based on their personal backgrounds, their districts, and their committee assignments. It looks in particular at how different members go about balancing two goals as they gather information about public opinion: trying to find evidence that confirms their current sense of public opinion, or looking for information that deliberately tests their existing impressions.

The final chapter sets out some implications from the study's findings. It suggests that there is reason to doubt assertions that Congress is "out of touch" with public opinion on national security issues; when members of Congress talk about public opinion on a national security policy in a way that differs from current polling, for example, it may be that members are anticipating future public reactions to the policy, based on their expectations about its effectiveness, rather than simply reading current opinion. More fundamentally, the study's findings call into question the whole practice among scholars and others of viewing public opinion in strictly quantitative terms, as measured by public opinion polls. It argues for moving away from the (small d) democratic assumption embedded in polls, that all opinions should receive equal weighting, and for moving toward a more (small r) republican view of public opinion, which would combine polling data with the kind of qualitative insights members of Congress can offer in order to form a more complete picture and concept

of public opinion. The chapter concludes by suggesting some steps that might help members of Congress improve the ways in which they assess and reflect public opinion on national security, especially by doing more to test their own sense of prevailing public's attitudes, rather than simply gathering information that affirms their current impressions.

Chapter Two: Three Case Studies – Iraq, Homeland Security, and China

This study focuses on three areas of policy to investigate how members of Congress develop their impressions of public opinion on national security. Other issues came into play during the interviews and observations of members of Congress and their staffs, but the study particularly focused on these three, and each provided distinct insights into the ways in which representatives listen to the public. The first issue is the U.S.-led war in Iraq, especially the Senate and House votes during 2005-2006 that signaled greater congressional skepticism in the lead-up to the 2006 midterm elections. The second case study is the question of homeland security after 9/11, and specifically congressional reaction during February and March 2006 to the proposed sale of operations at six U.S. ports to the Dubai Ports World company. The third is the broad question of U.S. policies toward China, encompassing the full array of strategic, economic, diplomatic, and human rights considerations that play a part in that important and complex relationship.

This chapter provides a brief background sketch of each of these three issues. It does not propose to provide an exhaustive timeline or analysis of each one, but rather to lay out the main developments during the period studied, with a particular focus on the congressional votes and concerns that served as milestones for the members interviewed for this study.

No three case studies can capture all the variables at play in the congressional politics of national security. But these three provide a useful set in many ways. One focuses on a war involving U.S. troops – the instance of national security policy when the broad public is likely to be most engaged and members of Congress are likely to be especially attentive to the public's views – while the other two involve policy decisions that are somewhat less visible to the average voter. One of the cases – relations with China – focuses on a bilateral political relationship. Both the China case study and the Dubai Ports World episode touch on considerations of international economics, which is increasingly a central consideration in America's national security strategies. Iraq and China involve traditional foreign affairs questions of war, peace, and global "high politics"; homeland security touches on the new, transnational threats highlighted by the 9/11 terrorist attacks and other recent events.

The three cases are also particularly instructive in that they cover three different types of public opinion dynamics. Iraq is a highly salient issue to the public, but one on which the public's views were steadily changing during the period under examination. The Dubai Ports World sale was an issue that was wholly unknown to the public until it exploded into controversy in February 2006; although the public had focused a great deal on questions of homeland security between 9/11 and early 2006, there had been little public attention to the question of how foreign ownership of ports and other critical infrastructure in the U.S. might affect homeland security. The third policy area, U.S.-China relations, provides a case of a major national security issue that is, at least temporarily, somewhat calm and quiet and at least partly off the pub-

lic's radar screen. To be sure, China is a familiar and important country in the American public's eyes; yet during the period in question, there was little in the way of U.S.-China conflicts, dramatic events, or high-profile congressional votes to make U.S.-China relations an issue that seized the broad public's concern. In effect, then, these three cases provide instances in which public opinion is alternatively in a state of gradual evolution, sudden learning, or relative quiescence. We return to the questions that each of these dynamics raise throughout the chapter.

Finally, the three cases provide a useful array of congressional roles and actions. On Iraq, both chambers cast roll call votes to authorize the war in 2002, and then cast subsequent votes on funding and policy. On Dubai Ports World, Congress exerted substantial influence over administration policy and the course of events, but less through roll call votes by the full House or Senate, and more through early statements by a few key members, and a vote in the House Appropriations Committee. On China, there were no highly visible congressional roll call votes on major legislation during this period; yet the inherent importance of the U.S.-China relationship – in strategic, economic, political, and human rights terms – created an awareness on Capitol Hill that a range of events could pull Congress back into the issue in the future, as had many events in the past.

Iraq

The war in Iraq is the largest U.S. military operation since the war in Vietnam. Since the initial invasion of the country by American, British, and other coalition forces in

March, 2003, over one million American service personnel have served in Iraq or have been stationed in nearby areas.[1] At this writing, over 3,300 Americans have died in the conflict, and over 24,000 been wounded.[2] As the war has entered its fourth year, it has increasingly become a flashpoint of disagreement in Congress, across American society, and around the world.

Congress has played an important role in authorizing, funding, and helping to lead the national debate over the war effort, including crucial roll call votes in both chambers both before and after the invasion. The war, in turn, has shaped Congress. In particular, the war emerged as a high-profile issue in the 2002, 2004, and 2006 elections, arguably strengthening the Republicans' electoral performances in 2002 and 2004, while helping to bring the Democrats to power in both chambers in 2006.

The war's origins will be broadly familiar to most readers, and are reviewed only briefly here. They partly trace back to the efforts that followed the 1991 war to reverse Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. Throughout the rest of the 1990s, the United States believed Iraq was failing to comply with the terms of the Persian Gulf War ceasefire, including requirements to account for and terminate its weapons of mass destruction (WMD) programs. As a result, the U.S. maintained various sanctions on Iraq, as well as supporting no-fly zones in the country's north and south to protect Kurdish and

[1] Author interview with John Pike, director of GlobalSecurity.org, May 8, 2007.
[2] Casualties, as of May 3, 2007, stood at 3,357; nonmortal casualties, as of February 3, 2007, stood at 24,314. "Iraq Coalition Casualty Count," iCasualties.org, citing U.S. Department of Defense data, http://icasualties.org/oif/ (accessed May 3, 2007). The war in Afghanistan has accounted, in addition, for more than 300 U.S. fatalities and more than 1,000 casualties, according to CNN. http://edition.cnn.com/SPECIALS/2004/oef.casualties/ (accessed May 3, 2007).

Shia populations. Tensions with Iraq increased in the late 1990s. In October 1998, Saddam Hussein suspended cooperation with UN weapons inspectors, which prompted the U.S. and Britain to launch air strikes on suspected Iraqi WMD sites two months later. Late 1998 also saw enactment of the Iraq Liberation Act, which stated that the U.S. was committed to supporting a transition to democracy in Iraq.[3]

The Bush Administration also launched the war in Iraq partly as a reaction to the terror attacks by al Qaeda against the United States on September 11, 2001. Within days of the attack, President George W. Bush and his administration quickly focused on the possibility of taking action, not only against al Qaeda and the Taliban government in Afghanistan, which had provided the group a base of operations (American military operations against the Taliban were launched in October 2001), but also against Saddam Hussein's regime.[4] Vice President Dick Cheney particularly stressed the danger of Iraq's WMD, and repeatedly suggested there had been ties between al Qaeda and Saddam Hussein's regime (a linkage the President later admitted did not exist). The President in his State of the Union address on January 29, 2002 singled out Iraq, along with Iran and North Korea, as part of an "axis of evil," and stated that "the United States will not permit the world's most dangerous regimes to threaten us with the world's most destructive weapons."[5] The administration also made clear, in the President's June 1, 2002 commencement speech at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, and in its September 2002 National Security Strategy, that the U.S. would

[3] PL 105-338, October 31, 1998.
[4] Several sources note the administration's early focus on Iraq, including Richard A. Clarke, *Against All Enemies: Inside America's War on Terror* (New York: Free Press, 2004).
[5] George W. Bush, State of the Union Address (Washington, DC, January 29, 2002) http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/01/20020129-11.html (accessed May 9, 2007).

be willing to use pre-emptive and unilateral military force in order to stop potential attacks on the United States.[6]

During mid-2002, UN weapons inspectors continued to seek full access to Iraq's WMD facilities and records, with mixed results. In mid-September, President Bush called on Congress to provide him with authorization to use force against Iraq, if diplomacy failed to achieve Iraq's compliance with UN resolutions.[7] Some critics chastised the Bush administration for insisting on a congressional vote just before the November 2002 mid-term elections. They drew contrasts to Bush's father, who pointedly waited to ask for congressional authorization for Operation Desert Storm until after the 1990 mid-term elections, partly in order to de-politicize the issue.[8] Whatever the administration's intentions, the House of Representatives provided that authorization by a vote of 296-133 on October 11, and the Senate followed suit the next day by a vote of 77-23. The president signed the authorization on October 16.[9]

Public opinion polls suggested there was broad support for the invasion at the time. National polls by leading media organizations between November 2001 and late September 2002 consistently found majority support for military action against Iraq to

[6] U.S. Office of the White House Press Secretary, " President Bush Delivers Graduation Speech at West Point," The White House, June 1, 2002, http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/06/20020601-3.html, captured May 9, 2007; "The National Security Strategy of the United States of America" (Washington: Executive Office of the President, September 2002).
[7] "President Bush to Send Iraq Resolution to Congress Today—Remarks of the President in Photo Opportunity with Secretary of State Colin Powell," the Oval Office, September 19, 2002.
[8] For example: Dana Milbank, "Democrats Question Iraq Timing: Talk of War Distracts from Election Issues," *Washington Post*, September 16, 2002.
[9] P.L. 107-243.

force Saddam Hussein from power.[10] With the public apparently rallying around the president's response to 9/11, the war in Afghanistan, and the administration's tough line against Iraq, the 2002 mid-term congressional elections bucked historical trends of mid-term losses for the party of a sitting president.[11] Instead, the Republicans regained control of the Senate after picking up two seats, and solidified their House majority by gaining eight seats there.[12]

Just after the mid-term elections, on November 8, the United Nations Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 1441, which found that Iraq stood in "material breach" of the UN resolutions and obligations imposed after the first Gulf War, and warned that if Iraq failed to allow weapons inspectors to resume inspections of its WMD programs it would face "serious consequences."[13] On February 5, 2003, Secretary of State Colin Powell made a dramatic presentation to the UN Security Council

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[10] This was true across polls conducted by ABC News/*Washington Post*; CNN/Gallup/*USA Today*, CBS News/*New York Times*, and PSRA/*Newsweek.* Support during this period ranged from 56 to 78 percent using the relatively neutral wording of ABC News/*Washington Post*: "Would you favor or oppose having U.S. forces take military action against Iraq to force Saddam Hussein from power?" Support ranged somewhat higher, 62 to 81 percent, in response to the PSRA/*Newsweek* question, which linked military action in Iraq to the administration's war on terror: "In the fight against terrorism, the Bush administration has talked about using military force against Saddam Hussein and his military in Iraq; would you support using military force against Iraq, or not?" Support ranged somewhat lower, from 53-74 percent, in response to the question used by CNN/Gallup/*USA Today*, which specified the use of "U.S. ground troops" in such an operation: "Would you favor or oppose invading Iraq with U.S. ground troops in an attempt to remove Saddam Hussein from power?" These and a wide range of other polls regarding Iraq are usefully compiled in: American Enterprise Institute, "Public Opinion on the War with Iraq," March 9, 2007, http://www.aei.org/publications/pubID.14881/pub_detail.asp.

[11] Many commentators singled out national security issues as the prime cause of the Republican victory; for example, Aaron Brown on CNN declared: "This was an election about national security and supporting the president." http://www.cnn.com/interactive/allpolitics/0211/elex.cnn.analysts/frameset.exclude.html (accessed April 17, 2007).

[12] John King, CNN. http://archives.cnn.com/2002/ALLPOLITICS/11/06/elec02.bush/ (accessed April 17, 2007).

[13] UN, "UN Security Council Resolution 1441 (2002) Adopted at its 4644th Meeting, at 8 November 2002," posting on UN Web site, http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N02/682/26/PDF/N0268226.pdf?OpenElement (accessed May 3, 2007).

to make the case that Iraq was harboring WMD and refusing to cooperate with UN weapons inspectors. On March 19, 2003, after failing to achieve full cooperation from Iraq, but also after failing to achieve an additional UN resolution to authorize the use of force, a U.S.-led coalition invaded the country. Baghdad fell on April 9. On May 1, in a dramatic speech on the flight deck of the USS Abraham Lincoln, President Bush declared the end of "major combat operations in Iraq."[14] On December 13, coalition forces captured Saddam Hussein (who was later tried, found guilty of "willful killing" of Shiite civilians in Dujail in 1982, and hanged on December 30, 2006).

Yet along with early military successes, the first signs of an "insurgency" within Iraq had appeared, including the bombing of the UN headquarters in Iraq in August, 2003. Partly as a result, public support for the war diminished somewhat, with various polls showing that confidence in the war effort and support for the President's handling of Iraq were hovering around 50 percent (although support spiked briefly after the capture of Saddam).[15]

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[14] U.S. Office of the White House Press Secretary, "President Bush Announces Major Combat Operations in Iraq Have Ended," May 1, 2003. http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/05/20030501-15.html (accessed April 17, 2007).

[15] The ABC News/*Washington Post* showed 48 percent approval for the president's handling of Iraq in its November 12–16, 2003, poll ("Do you approve or disapprove of the way Bush is handling the situation in Iraq?"), although it spiked to 60 percent in mid-December following Saddam's capture. CNN/Gallup/*USA Today* showed 50 percent approval December 5–7 ("Do you approve or disapprove of the way George W. Bush is handling the situation in Iraq?"), spiking to 51 percent January 2–5, 2004. The December 10–13 CBS/*New York Times* poll found 47 percent of the public feeling that the U.S. campaign was going very or somewhat well. ("How would you say things are going for the U.S. in its efforts to bring stability and order to Iraq: would you say things are going very well, somewhat well, somewhat badly, or very badly?") However, some polls found higher or lower support during this period. The PSRA/Pew Research Center poll conducted October 15–19 found 60 percent of the public feeling the U.S. military effort in Iraq was going well ("How well is the U.S. military effort in Iraq going: very well, fairly well, not too well, or not well at all?"). Conversely, the CNN/Gallup/*USA Today* poll found that by November 3–5, only 38 percent of the public felt things were going very or

By early 2004, the Iraq war effort was beginning to encounter even more serious problems, which served to erode public support further. Looting had broken out soon after the invasion, including from the national antiquities museum, and reports began to surface of the looting of major Iraqi weapons caches as well. Guerrilla attacks against American and coalition troops, along with American private contractors, escalated. With the Iraqi military largely disbanded, and with a relatively modest American force on the ground, civil order eroded. Intense battles broke out in key cities such as Fallujah inside "the Sunni triangle," with American forces killing hundreds of insurgents, but only at the cost of high American casualties. During April, the media began to expose reports and lurid pictures of prisoner abuse in the American-run Abu Ghraib prison.[16] Thus, although there had been some signs of progress, such as the signing of an interim constitution in March 2004, by the time of the American elections later that year, the war had become more controversial, and support in most polls slid further below the 50 percent mark.[17]

In the 2004 presidential campaign, Democratic nominee Sen. John Kerry (D-MA), who had voted in favor of the war in 2002, argued that President Bush had made a

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moderately well for the U.S. in Iraq ("In general, how would you say things are going for the U.S. in Iraq: very well, moderately well, moderately badly, or very badly?") American Enterprise Institute, "Public Opinion on the War."

[16] These included: Seymour Hersh, "Torture at Abu Ghraib: American Soldiers Brutalized Iraqis. How Far Up Does the Responsibility Go?" *New Yorker,* May 10, 2004; and on the CBS show *60 Minutes* on April 28, 2004.

[17] The CNN/Gallup/*USA Today* poll conducted December 17–19, 2004, found 39 percent approval for the conduct of the war. ("Do you approve or disapprove of the way the U.S. has handled the situation in Iraq in the past few months?") The CBS/*New York Times* poll of October 29–November 1 found 45 percent support for Bush's handling of the Iraq war and 46 percent believing things were going well for the U.S. in Iraq (wording of both questions cited earlier).

"colossal error of judgment" in prosecuting the war, principally by not pursuing Osama bin Laden in the mountainous Afghan region of Tora Bora, when coalition forces reportedly had the al Qaeda leader pinned down there in 2003. But President Bush largely neutralized the issue by arguing that Kerry had flipped-flopped on the war, and famously derided Kerry's statement, regarding an appropriations bill for the war effort, that he had "voted for it before voting against it." In the November elections, Kerry narrowly lost, while the Republicans picked up four seats in the Senate and two in the House.

During 2005, the Iraqi people took a series of steps toward the creation of a new political order, including elections for an interim National Assembly in January, approval of a new constitution in October, and elections for a permanent Assembly in December. Despite these steps, however, a series of events during 2005-2006 gave fodder to the critics of the war effort and steadily drove down polling measures of U.S. public support. One of them took place not in Iraq but in the United States: the destruction visited on New Orleans and the Gulf Coast by Hurricane Katrina in August 2005. The mismanaged emergency response to the disaster raised questions about government effectiveness at all levels, but particular undermined the Bush administration's sense of executive competence, while also raising questions about the on-going costs of the Iraq war relative to the costs of reconstruction at home. Then on February 22, 2006, powerful bombs destroyed the golden dome of the Al Askari Shiite mosque in Samarra, triggering waves of sectarian violence between Iraqi Shia and Sunnis, often launched or abetted by militia groups embedded in the country's

police and military. During this period, the use of road-side bombs – or "IEDs," improvised explosive devices, in the military's parlance – continued to take a toll on American troops; by June 2006, as the mid-term congressional elections approached, the American death toll in Iraq was nearing 3,000. By this point, support for the war and the President's handling of the conflict was down to the mid-30 percent range.

During this period, as support for the war had begun to drop further, some notable voices in Congress began to criticize the President's policy in Iraq. In June, 2005, Rep. Walter Jones (R-NC), a conservative Republican whose district includes the Camp Lejeune Marine base, and who had voted to authorize the war in 2002, began to criticize the administration's handling of the conflict.[18] In November 2005, Rep. John Murtha (D-PA), a former Marine war hero and long-time conservative defense appropriator, surprised many observers by coming out strongly against the war, calling it "a flawed policy wrapped in illusion," and noting that "the American public is way ahead of us" on this policy."[19] That same month, Sen. Carl Levin (D-MI), the ranking Democrat on the Senate Armed Services Committee, introduced a "sense of the Senate" amendment, along with Senate Democratic Leader Harry Reid (D-NV), which expressed congressional concern over the course of the war and called on the administration to report to Congress periodically about its progress. Sen. John Warner (D-VA) signaled a key Republican break with the administration in the Senate when he quickly introduced a substantially similar amendment, which then passed the Senate by a lopsided 79-19, on November 15. Commenting on his amendment, War-

[18] Susan Milligan, "More in Congress Want Iraq Exit Strategy: Unease Grows as War Backing Falls," *Boston Globe*, June 11, 2005.
[19] Congressman John Murtha, "War in Iraq," news release, November 17, 2005.

ner said: "I'm not one that follows the polls, but I'm not unmindful of the polls, and the polls are showing a great deal of concern by the American people."[20] A leading political reporter from *Newsweek* said the vote "illuminated growing Republican nervousness" about the war.[21]

As the congressional election year of 2006 arrived, the White House and many of its Republican supporters in Congress sought to bolster the President's Iraq policy and demonstrate that it had political support. In June, the House voted 256-153 in favor of a resolution by House International Relations Committee Chair Rep. Henry Hyde (R-IL) rejecting the idea of a withdrawal date from Iraq and declaring that the U.S. "will prevail in the global war on terror."[22] As the Fall election approached, there were also reports that the White House would push for votes endorsing its controversial policies on domestic telephone surveillance by the National Security Agency and interrogation procedures of detainees from Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere. Yet a series of events complicated that effort. Sen. John McCain (R-AZ) and other key Republicans objected to the initial White House proposal on interrogation. A leak of the latest National Intelligence Estimate on Iraq suggested skepticism in the intelligence community about the effectiveness of the administration's war policy.[23] The Iraq-related indictment of Vice President Cheney's Chief of Staff, I. Lewis Libby, deepened doubts about the administration's candor regarding pre-war intelligence, while a

[20] Quoted in Hotline, *National Journal*, November 16, 2005.
[21] Howard Fineman, interview by Chris Matthews, *Hardball with Chris Matthews*, MSNBC, November 15, 2005.
[22] HR 861, 109th Cong., 2nd sess. (June 12, 2006).
[23] Karen DeYoung, "Spy Agencies Say Iraq War Hurting U.S. Terror Fight," *Washington Post*, September 24, 2006.

sex scandal involving Rep. Mark Foley (R-FL) distracted congressional Republicans from their efforts to build support for the administration's Iraq policy.

Against this backdrop, Iraq proved a liability for the Republicans in the 2006 elections, whereas it had arguably fueled their gains in the two previous cycles. Democrats campaigned heavily on the need for a "change of course" in Iraq. On Election Day, the Republicans lost both control of both chambers. Polling by Democracy Corps and others found that Iraq was the top concern as voters went to the polls, and it cut heavily in favor of Democrats.[24]

As Democrats assumed control of Congress in 2007, they quickly initiated hearings and resolutions designed to put pressure on the Bush administration to bring the war to an end. In February, the House by a vote of 246-182 adopted a non-binding resolution by Rep. Tom Lantos (D-CA) and Rep. Ike Skelton (D-MO), the new chairs of the House International Relations and Armed Services Committees, opposing the President's call for a "surge" of more than 20,000 additional combat troops to Iraq. Congress then moved to exercise stronger leverage through its power of the purse, as Democrats in both chambers sought to attach language to a supplemental funding bill for the Iraq war that set a schedule of phased redeployment of troops out of Iraq. The House adopted the bill on a close vote in late March, and by April the Senate followed suit on a close vote of its own. On May 1 – the fourth anniversary of the

[24] A November 7-8, 2006 survey of 1,011 voters by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner, conducted for Democracy Corps and Campaign for America's Future, found that 28 percent cited Iraq as the most important issue in deciding how to vote for Congress, twice as much as for the two next most important items, "jobs and the economy," and "moral values," each at 14 percent. Full survey at www.democracycorps.com.

President's declaration of the end of major combat operations – the House and Senate sent the measure to the White House, and the President vetoed the bill the same day.

Thus, during the period of this study, Iraq stood as the dominant national security issue on the minds of most voters and members of Congress alike, but it was also an issue on which the content of opinion was steadily evolving in a more negative and critical direction, as a result of changing events. It moved from a policy that generated broad support to one that raised broad public concern, and from being an issue that arguably helped the Republicans gain seats in Congress in 2002 and 2004, to an issue that contributed to their loss of both chambers in 2006. This evolution raises a series of questions for this study. Most important, how did members of Congress pick up signs of these changes in public opinion regarding the war? Which indicators were most important for shaping members' impressions of public opinion: polls, direct communications from constituents, or other kinds of information? How did members go about revising their understandings and estimates of public opinion as conditions in Iraq changed? Moreover, what explained why different members reached differing conclusions at different points along the way about these changes in the public's opinions toward the war?

Homeland Security and the Dubai Ports World Sale

Another impact of the 9/11 terrorist attacks was an intense new focus on homeland security. The phrase itself was barely in the American lexicon before that date. Its components – things like urban emergency preparedness planning, screening of air-

line passengers, and inspection of cargo containers at U.S. ports – had lain at the fringes of the country's national security debates, and authority for these issues was spread across more than two dozen major and minor agencies, such as the Coast Guard, the Immigration and Naturalization Service, and the Federal Aviation Administration. The heightened awareness of the terrorist threat, made vivid by the death of nearly 3,000 American civilians in a single day's attacks, spurred intense public and congressional debates over how to re-organize the U.S. government so that it could better protect America's territory and people.

Among the many changes that resulted from this shift was the creation of the Department of Homeland Security. By consolidating a sprawling array of agencies and bureaus, the Homeland Security Act of 2002 stood as the biggest reorganization of America's national security capabilities since the National Security Act of 1947, which had created the National Security Council, the Central Intelligence Agency, and what became the Department of Defense. The idea for the new department had originated in Congress, most notably from a proposal by Senator Joseph Lieberman (D-CT). It was initially resisted by President Bush, who maintained that his creation of a White House Office of Homeland Security was a sufficient response. But the President ultimately embraced the idea of a new cabinet department, and pushed for its creation. An acrimonious, partisan debate over the collective bargaining rights of the new department's employees stalled legislative progress for weeks, and became a major issue in the 2002 congressional campaign. But in mid-November, 2002, the House and Senate voted final versions of the bill creating the new department, and on

November 23 President Bush signed the Department of Homeland Security into existence.[25]

Throughout the process of creating DHS, and across the wide-ranging post-9/11 debates, one of the major concerns was over the vulnerability of America's ports to terrorist attacks, infiltration, or transshipments. The 9/11 Commission's final report concluded, for example, that "opportunities to do harm are as great, or greater, in maritime or surface transportation [than in aviation]."[26]

Such concerns provided the fuel for a brief and heated debate that exploded in early 2006, when Dubai Ports World, a company owned by the government of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), acquired the British-headquartered Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company (P&O). The $6.8 billion transaction, part of a trend toward consolidation in the port operations industry, was global in nature, affecting facilities at about 100 ports in 18 countries. But among its many components, P&O owned the leases or concessions for terminals and operations at six American ports, in Baltimore, Miami, Newark, New Orleans, New York, and Philadelphia. The sale to Dubai Ports World, therefore, would transfer these operations to a company owned by the government of the UAE. The UAE had an extensive record of military cooperation with the United States and was seen by many as a modern and relatively progressive Arab state. But it was also a country that some American observers felt had a

[25] For a history of the department's creation, see: Harold C. Relyea, "Homeland Security: Department Organization and Management," *Congressional Research Service Report for Congress* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, updated November 19, 2002).
[26] *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2004) 391.

mixed record in the war on terrorism; some noted, for example, that the UAE was one of only three countries to recognize the Taliban as the legitimate government of Afghanistan.[27] Moreover, after four years of official and media expressions of concern about the terrorist threats emanating from the "Broader Middle East," many among the public were disturbed by the notion of placing important U.S. port operations under the control of a country located in the heart of that region.

Although reports of the acquisition first surfaced in the business press in 2005, the U.S. debate over the sale did not erupt until early February the next year. The trigger for the debate was a statutorily-required review of the sale by an obscure inter-agency panel called the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States (CFIUS). CFIUS was created by executive order by President Ford in 1975, charged with "monitoring the impact of foreign investment in the United States and coordinating the implementation of United States policy on such investment." The Omnibus Trade and Competitiveness Act of 1988 amended the Defense Production Act of 1950 to give CFIUS statutory authority, and to give the president the power to suspend or prohibit any foreign acquisition, merger, or takeover of a U.S. company (or foreign company with U.S. subsidiaries), if the president determined that it could impair the national security of the U.S. CFIUS carries out the review of such proposed transactions, with the Treasury Department coordinating individual reviews by a dozen agencies, including the Departments of State, Defense, Justice, Commerce, and (after 2003) Homeland Security; the Office of Management and Budget; the Council of

[27] Kenneth Katzman, "The United Arab Emirates (UAE): Issues for U.S. Policy," *Congressional Research Service Report for Congress* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service (updated March 9, 2006), 4.

Economic Advisers; the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative; the Office of Science and Technology Policy; the National Security Council; the National Economic Council; as well as other agencies on an ad hoc basis.

Prior to the Dubai Ports World case, these reviews had been relatively routine and uncontroversial. Between 1988 and 2006, CFIUS reviewed over 1,500 foreign acquisitions. It disposed of the vast majority of them within its standard 30-day review process. In just 25 cases, CFIUS triggered an additional 45-day review as permitted under the statute; only 12 of those went to the president for a decision; and in only one of those cases – involving the sale of an aircraft parts firm to China in 1990 – did the president take action, ordering the foreign acquirer to divest all its interest in the U.S. company.[28] The Dubai Ports World acquisition initially proceeded through the CFIUS process as smoothly as most of these other cases. Dubai Ports World began discussions with CFIUS in October 2005, filed its formal notification with CFIUS on December 15, and on January 17, 2006 CFIUS issued a letter of "no objection" to the transaction.[29]

On February 11, however, opposition to the sale began to stir. Prompted in part by a lobbyist hired by a firm with joint ventures with P&O, an Associated Press story that day expressed concerns about the transaction. In its leading paragraph, the story said

[28] James K. Jackson, "The Exon-Florio National Security Test for Foreign Investment," *Congressional Research Service Report for Congress* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, April 3, 2006), 4.

[29] The finding of "no objection" was premised in part on a Letter of Assurance provided by Dubai Ports World that made seven commitments to the U.S. government. Most of these related to security issues, such as an agreement "to designate a responsible corporate officer to serve as point of contact with the Department of Homeland Security on security matters," as well as a requirement "to operate all U.S. facilities to the extent possible with current U.S. management."

the sale would leave "a country with ties to the Sept. 11 hijackers with influence over a maritime industry considered vulnerable to terrorism."[30] Two days later, Senator Charles Schumer (D-NY) began voicing pointed criticisms of the deal. On February 13, he issued his first press release attacking the sale. Within a few days, other members were joining his criticism, and on February 19, he expanded the attack by convening a press conference to air criticisms from families of 9/11 victims.[31] Soon, many Democrats were alleging that the deal would "outsource" America's port security, and even many leading Republicans, including Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist (R-TN), began to question the transaction.

The intense criticism seemed to take the White House by surprise. No polling had been published on the issue up to this point; when the first polls did emerge – starting with a Rasmussen survey on February 24 – they bolstered Congress's message of strong public opposition.[32] Even before that, the administration tried to mount a counter-offensive, including a threat by President Bush to veto any legislation that would block the sale, along with numerous statements by the White House press secretary, fact sheets defending the deal, and press appearances on the top news shows

[30] Ted Bridis, "UAE Company Poised to Oversee Six US Ports: Administration Not Blocking the Deal," Associated Press, February 11, 2006 (accessed May 12, 2007); Peter Overby, "Lobbyist's Last-Minute Bid Set Off Ports Controversy," National Public Radio, http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5252263 (accessed May 3, 2007).

[31] Senator Charles Schumer, "Lawmakers Begin Push for New Thorough Federal Review of United Arab Emirates-Owned Company Taking Control of Major U.S. Ports in NY, NJ and East Coast," news release, February 16, 2006; Schumer, "Joined by Outraged 9-11 Families, Schumer Calls on President to Personally Intervene to Override Secret Committee's Deal to Give United Arab Emirates Control of our Ports," news release, February 19, 2006.

[32] Rasmussen Reports, "Just 17% Favor Dubai Ports Deal," February 24, 2006, http://www.rasmussenreports.com/public_content/current_events/just_17_favor_dubai_ports_deal (accessed May 3, 2007); a CBS News Poll conducted February 22–26 found a 21 to 70 percent margin opposing the sale; a March 8–12 survey by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press found that 58 percent of the public said Congress had acted appropriately in opposing the Dubai Ports World sale.

by senior administration officials, such as Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff and White House Homeland Security Adviser Frances Townsend. Moreover, as the congressional opposition mounted, Dubai Ports World initiated a series of steps to try to stem the damage. Most important, in late February, Dubai Ports World and P&O announced they would suspend transfer of P&O's North American operations until at least May 1, and they jointly requested that CFIUS undertake a more in-depth 45 day review of the sale.

None of this proved sufficient, however, to stem the tide of public and congressional discontent. On March 8, the Republican-controlled House Appropriations Committee voted by an overwhelming and bi-partisan 62-2 margin to block the sale. With such ominous writing on the wall, Senator John Warner took to the Senate floor the following day to read a letter from Dubai Ports World, announcing that the company would resell the newly-acquired U.S. port operations to an American-owned entity. The sale of the six U.S. port operations to the UAE-controlled company was dead.

The Dubai Ports World saga raises a series of questions for the purposes of this study, mostly about how members of Congress take readings on the public's attitudes toward a national security issue when it has just emerged, and when the public is rapidly learning and forming its opinions. For example, how could members of Congress determine what public opinion on the Dubai Ports World sale was, given that – at least until early February – the public had never heard about the issue? In their floor statements and press releases throughout February, many members stressed the

public's opposition to the proposed sale; but how did they know this, given that the issue had just broken into the public arena days earlier? Was this all about calls and emails to their offices, or were there other sources of insight about the public's views? For the members who initiated criticism of the proposed sale, did they have some reading of public opinion on the issue, even before the calls and emails began to arrive? If so, what informed that reading?

U.S.-China Relations

Unlike the Iraq war and the Dubai Ports World sale, U.S. relations with China were not a subject of intense debate for the public or Congress during the period under study. As one expert noted in 2007, "U.S.-China relations have remained remarkably smooth since late 2001."[33] As a result, there had been few roll call votes on major legislation regarding China in either chamber since 2001. Moreover, there were indications that American public attitudes toward China during this period had begun to improve in some ways. For example, while the American public voices strong concerns about China on many dimensions, such as on trade, an NBC News/*Wall Street Journal* poll found that the share of Americans viewing China as an "adversary" had dropped from 67 percent in June 1999 to 49 percent in July 2005. Thus, whereas Iraq presents a case of evolving public opinion, and the Dubai Ports World sale presents a case of a national security issue on which there is sudden public learning, China presents a case in which public opinion was relatively calm and quiet.

[33] Kerry Dumbaugh, *China-U.S. Relations: Current Issues and Implications for U.S. Policy*, (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, February 14, 2007), i.

The decade did not start so quietly for U.S. relations with China. It had been preceded by a period marked by perennial debates in Congress and among experts over how to balance America's strategic, economic, political, and human rights interests regarding China, particularly in the wake of the deadly Tiananmen Square crackdown on political protesters in 1989, and in the face of rising Chinese economic and military power throughout the 1990s. Beginning in the early 1990s, the statutorily-required congressional vote over whether to extend "Most Favored Nation" trading status had become an annual showdown between free-traders and foreign policy realists on one side, who pushed for greater engagement with China, and human rights and democracy activists on the other side, who argued that China would only change in the face of greater U.S. pressure. That annual fight began to become less heated as the decade wore on, however. In 1998, Congress renamed "Most Favored Nation" to "Normal Trade Relations" to help defuse the issue, and in 2000 enacted legislation to dispense with these annual approvals once China joined the World Trade Organization, which it did in late 2001.[34]

The decade also began with a tense climate between mainland Beijing and Taipei. The election in March 2000 of pro-independence politician Chen Shui-bian to Taiwan's presidency heightened tensions with mainland China, which threatened to attack if Taiwan attempted to secede.[35] Partly in response to such threats, Congress in April 2000 approved an expanded package of arms sales to Taiwan, although the

[34] Public Law 106-286; Kerry Dumbaugh, *Voting on NTR Again in 2001, and Past Congressional Decisions*, (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, July 17, 2001), 1.
[35] Asia Society, *Special Report: China Threatens Taiwan,* February 29, 2000, http://www.asiasource.org/news/at_mp_02.cfm?newsid=13423 (accessed May 9, 2007).

Clinton administration deferred a decision on some of the most controversial weapons under consideration, including submarines and new Aegis-class destroyers. When President George W. Bush took office, he further heightened tensions by saying that he did not regard China as a "strategic partner," and by dropping support for the Clinton administration's "three no's" policy toward Taiwan – no support for Taiwan independence; no recognition of a separate Taiwanese government; and no backing for Taiwan membership in international organizations.

These tensions were suddenly aggravated even further on April 1, 2001, when an American EP-3 spy plane collided mid-air with a Chinese fighter jet. The fighter crashed, killing its pilot. The American spy plane was forced to make an emergency landing on the Chinese island of Hainan. China accused the U.S. of ramming the fighter jet, and only agreed to release the 24 American crew members after President Bush said he was "very sorry" for the death of the Chinese pilot. Friction increased further the following month, as President Bush allowed the new Taiwanese president to visit the United States.

Yet the U.S.-China relationship soon took a sudden and dramatic turn toward greater harmony, or at least less visible acrimony. Many factors contributed to the change. As noted, China's accession to the WTO eliminated the need for annual congressional action on China's trade status. The 9/11 terrorist attacks also contributed to a more positive tone, partly because they directed U.S. attention to a new set of strategic concerns and de-emphasized the importance of U.S.-Sino relations. At the October 2001

Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in Shanghai, President Bush met for the first time with Chinese President Jiang Zemin, who backed the U.S. war on terrorism (in part, some assert, because it gave China cover to crack down on Muslim separatists in its Xinjiang-Uighur Western Autonomous Region), and expressed his willingness to develop a "constructive relationship" with the U.S. Developments on the other side of the Pacific also contributed to the improvement. During the early years of the decade, China became internally preoccupied with the transition to a new generation of leaders, including the new President Hu Jintao, and the new Premier Wen Jiabao.

Yet even with the improved and quieter tone in U.S.-Chinese ties, a series of strategic, economic, political, and human rights considerations ensured that the relationship would remain as complex and difficult as it is important for both countries. Each of these areas raises on-going concerns for U.S. policy and the possibility of future clashes over policy with Beijing. As a result, these issues gave members of Congress during this period good reason to think about where the public stood regarding China, even though the U.S.-Chinese relationship had moved off center stage.

In strategic terms, there are concerns about China's expanding military profile and its relations with some of its neighbors. The U.S. government estimates that China's military expenditures have expanded even faster than its rapid rate of GDP growth, with a projected growth of defense spending in 2006 of just under 15 percent.[36]

[36] U.S. Department of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military Power of the People's Republic of China* (Washington: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2006), 7.

China's nuclear arsenal, inter-continental missiles, and an expanding naval fleet give it both regional and global military reach. There are also concerns that its global sales of weapons and advanced technology, which in the past have gone to states such as Pakistan, Iran, and North Korea, could aid or arm states or terrorist groups hostile to the U.S. On January 11, 2007, China's military capabilities created new concerns for the U.S. when Beijing carried out its first successful anti-satellite test by destroying one of its own weather satellites; previously only the U.S. and Russia had demonstrated anti-satellite capabilities. The greatest point of concern regarding China's military, however, involves its relations with Taiwan. Beijing continues to view Taiwan as a "renegade province," and insists it has the option to use force should Taiwan declare independence. It maintains more than 700 ballistic missiles deployed opposite Taiwan and regularly engages in military exercises that mirror preparations for an invasion across the Taiwan Straight.

The economic relationship with China has become an even greater source of friction for the U.S. in many ways. China is now the third-largest U.S. trading partner, with total U.S.-China bilateral commerce estimated at $285 billion.[37] Its economy has maintained a heated pace of growth, with about 10 percent real GDP growth rate over the past three years.[38] On one hand, China's economic expansion has stimulated world markets and provided a supply of inexpensive imports for the U.S., thus reducing inflationary pressures. On the other hand, the rise of China's manufacturing and service sectors has increased competition with American companies at the perceived

[37] Dumbaugh, *China-U.S.-Relations*, 4.
[38] International Monetary Fund, *World Economic Outlook: Spillovers and Cycles in the Global Economy* (Washington: International Monetary Fund, 2007), 60.

cost of American jobs, created a yawning trade imbalance that surpassed $200 billion in 2005, and bid up prices for oil and key building materials, such as steel, on which many U.S. businesses rely.[39] The booming Chinese economy has also become a major source of environmental concern, as the country expands reliance on coal-fired electricity plants to meet its expanding energy needs, thus increasing its output of greenhouse gases. There are also worries that China does not act with fairness and transparency in the international economic arena. There is rising concern, for example, that China has maintained an undervalued currency, relative to the dollar and other international currencies, by refusing to allow its remnimbi to float freely. There is continuing anger from the American business community over lax Chinese enforcement of WTO-sanctioned intellectual property protections. And there are new concerns about the stability of China's financial markets: a nine percent plunge on the Shanghai stock market on February 27, 2007 triggered a world-wide sell-off, including a 461 point plunge that day in the Dow Jones Industrial Average. [40]

China also remains a source of concern for American policy makers in the political and diplomatic arena. The biggest point of concern involves China's influence over North Korea and its nuclear program. After more than a decade of indications that it was pursuing the production of weapons-grade nuclear materials, North Korea tested a nuclear weapon for the first time on October 9, 2006. The test helped spur the resumption of so-called Six Party Talks among North Korea, the U.S., China, Japan,

[39] Dumbaugh, *China-U.S. Relations*, 4.
[40] Madlen Read, "Stocks Have Worst Day Since 9/11 Attacks: Dow Down 416, Nasdaq Drop 97 on Global Market Plunge," Associated Press, http://biz.yahoo.com/ap/070227/wall_street.html (accessed May 9, 2007).

South Korea, and Russia; and on February 13, 2007, the U.S. announced a tentative agreement under which North Korea would permit the resumption of international nuclear inspections, although not necessarily the dismantling of its existing nuclear weapons stockpile, in exchange for various forms of energy and food aid. While China has apparently shared American concern over North Korea's recent nuclear test and played a constructive role in the recent talks, there likely will be continuing U.S. focus on how seriously China applies its unique influence over Pyongyang as further negotiations proceed. There is also new concern over the increased influence that China's booming economy gives it across many parts of the world, including Africa, where it has recently launched aid, investment, and trade initiatives, aimed in part improving relations with countries able to supply the energy and raw materials necessary for its continued economic expansion. China's goals in Africa have begun to clash with those of the U.S. in some cases. In particular, China has come under criticism for doing too little to pressure the government of Sudan – a key source of oil for China – to prevent genocide in the country's Darfur region.

Finally, American policy makers continue to express concern over China's domestic human rights practices. On top of the restrictions on speech and association that have continued since the Tiananmen Square crackdown, the government in Beijing has taken steps in recent years that critics argue further abridge the human rights of the Chinese people. In September 2005, for example, the government introduced new restrictions on the availability of news over the Internet.[41] The government has tightened restrictions in recent years on some religious groups. China also continues to

[41] Dumbaugh, *China-U.S. Relations*, 20.

employ repressive actions against Tibetans and Muslims Uighurs, whom it accuses of separatist aims and, in the case of the Uighurs, terrorist acts.

Since 2001, Congress has remained active in a variety of ways on this broad set of concerns involving China, including informal "caucuses" and key hearings. There have been scores of bills introduced in Congress regarding China in recent years, and dozens that came to a floor vote of some kind. Yet these have mostly been non-binding "sense of the chamber" bills, condemnations of China's human rights practices, or relatively minor trade provisions. There have been no major votes on China in the past several years of the kind that sharply divided Congress in the 1990s and became top-tier legislative battles. Yet there have been threats of major votes, such as on the alleged overvaluation of China's currency. And it is not difficult to imagine new developments in U.S. relations with China – sudden hostilities between the PRC and Taiwan, a severe human rights crackdown by Beijing, new revelations of unfair trade practices by China – that could suddenly renew public and congressional concern over the relationship.

That prospect raises the question: how does Congress assess public opinion on a national security issue that is vitally important, but – at least for now – relatively quiet? When a major national security issue like China largely disappears from the front pages, it also tends to disappear from published polling; in the absence of such data, are there other ways that members of Congress update their sense of the public's attitudes toward the U.S.-China relationship? And on a bilateral relationship that is so

multi-faceted, how do members of Congress determine what “China” means to the public – whether it is more about security, economics, geopolitics, or human rights?

Chapter Three: The Broad Array of Sources that Members of Congress Look to for Clues about Public Opinion on National Security

This chapter seeks to provide a more complete picture of the sources that members and staff rely on for assessing public opinion on national security issues, like the three just reviewed, based on the interviews and observations conducted for this study. It concludes that the list of sources members of Congress turn to is far more extensive than the literature has often suggested. Letters, emails, calls, direct comments during meetings, urgings through interest groups – these and other intentional, issue-linear inputs all play an important role. But the list also includes a wide array of sources that are not intentional or issue-linear, and instead derive from events, facts, actions, and statements that on their face are not directed toward national security policy. The list of sources also includes a range of clues related to *how* citizens and members of Congress talk to each other about these issues.

Members of Congress as Hunter-Gatherers of Public Opinion

There is a good reason that members look beyond direct comments and other intentional and issue-linear inputs. Members of Congress tend to be politically omnivorous. They are constantly hungry for political intelligence that might help their careers. They become resourceful hunter-gatherers for clues that might feed this appetite. On national security, and undoubtedly on other issues as well, members of Congress do not just wait for their constituents to express their beliefs and preferences

directly. They also actively work to develop insights based on a host of other indicators. Whether their careers rise or fall depends in part on how early and how well they pick up subtle signals where others might not. One result is that members become expert in developing impressions about their publics' views on national security based on very small scraps of information, and often scraps that do not seem on their face to look like the "preferences" or "opinions" that the literature usually describes. It may be that in an era of increased polarization many members mostly look for these clues and scraps of information about voters on their own side of the partisan divide; yet the search process within that sphere is nonetheless active and resourceful.

The fact that members of Congress hunt and gather many unintentional, non-issue-linear clues about public opinion also stems from the nature of their communications challenges. Their daily conversations and interactions with people correspond to a wide array of political needs. At times their goal in talking with constituents may be to figure out what voters currently think about an issue, to help inform an upcoming floor vote. At other times, they may be trying to shape and lead people's opinions. In some conversations, they may be trying to solve a particular political problem with some constituent, interest group, or other politician. In others, they may be trying to rally support or turnout for an upcoming election. Stretching across a very large number of such of interactions will be the member's overriding interest in getting re-elected. These different kinds of motivations and purposes will tend toward different kinds of conversations and exchanges – some more one-directional, some more interactive. It makes sense that many will not take the form of a substantive discussion

about a policy issue – yet may still reveal information that provides insights about public opinion on that topic.

The way that members of Congress appear to use their time back home also reinforces the view that they rely on a broad array of information sources – including unintentional and non-issue-linear communications – to assess the public's views on national security. David Mayhew famously argued that members of Congress have one over-riding objective – to get re-elected – and that they do three principal things to advance that goal: advertising, credit claiming, and position taking.[1] Fenno framed the actions of members of Congress in their districts as being part of a broader objective oriented around (drawing on Erving Goffman) "the presentation of self."[2] The present study did not attempt to conduct a thorough study of members' time allocation back home. But during the periods that these members were under observation, they spent even more time doing something back home than presenting themselves, defining their positions, claiming credit, or advertising: they listened and watched. Across 27 events lasting a total of nearly 28 hours, the members in this study were listening and watching for approximately 63 percent of the time, and only talking for 37 percent of the time. Moreover, that tally excludes additional hours spent with these members when they were driving around their districts between events – times they spent partly talking on their cell phone, but also partly observing things about their districts – new businesses, new housing, new roads, crop conditions, and the

[1] David Mayhew, *Congress: The Electoral Connection* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1974).
[2] Fenno, *Home Style*, 54*ff*.

like.[3] The extent of time that members of Congress spend in this way recalls Yogi Berra's line – "you can observe a lot by just watching" – and it bolsters the sense that members invest a good deal of effort taking in clues about public attitudes, including clues that citizens did not know they were sending.

Moreover, members of Congress appear to develop broad and consequential conclusions from these narrow pieces of evidence. As noted in Chapter One, political scientists have long observed that voters often develop preferences among political candidates based on "low information rationality" – making judgments about candidates' positions and leadership styles based on a limited number of telling indicators.[4] The current study suggests that members of Congress also exercise a kind of low information rationality – or what social psychologists sometimes call "thin slicing" – about their constituents' views. And even though members may at times be basing their conclusions on small scraps of information, the social psychology literature suggests it would be a mistake to discount the value of the kind of heuristics members of Congress appear to be using. In some cases, thin-slicing heuristics have been shown to lead to conclusions that are by some measures "better" – equally accurate, yet more "fast and frugal" at processing complex information – than more comprehensive methods of data collection and analysis (e.g., in this context, opinion polls).[5] We re-

[3] The percentages of time at events cited here are approximate; I clocked the division of time between talking and listening roughly by my watch, but not by a stopwatch. With regard to the time spent driving, it is likely these members would have spent more time working or talking on their cell phones had I not been riding with them. Yet their observations about new visual cues in the district were often made to staff or spouses, so they did not seem to be an unusual act, or made just for my benefit.
[4] Popkin, *The Reasoning Voter*.
[5] One way to view this kind of process, of drawing conclusions from small scraps of information, would be as a second-best solution – a kind of information "satisficing," when a member confronts a national security issue on which he or she is receiving little direct information from the public. Yet

turn in Chapter Seven to the question of how reliable and useful members' assessments of public opinion on national security really are.

A Senator Listens to Veterans in Fairview

An episode in the Fall of 2006 provides an example of the unintentional and non-issue-linear form that members' communications with the public often take. A third-term senator has convened a meeting with local veterans at American Legion post 21 in Fairview, a rural town of just over 8,000 people. A sign board outside the unassuming, rust-colored, one-story, building reads: "Support the Troops." The 40-or-so attendees are mostly older, several relying on canes or crutches to navigate the steps leading into the hall; about a quarter are wearing their legionnaires caps. Most turn out to be veterans of Vietnam and Korea, but there are a couple of World War II vets, including one survivor of the Battle of the Bulge, who says he still has dreams about it – "you can't get rid of 'em." The only two Iraq War veterans stand out due to their relative youth.

The senator recites his long history of attention to veterans' issues, and how he asked to be put on the Veterans Affairs Committee as soon as he was elected to the Senate

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there is a growing body of literature that information-gathering heuristics of this kind can actually produce *superior* results, relative to gathering all possible data about a phenomenon. Surveying a range of examples across different fields, from biology to artificial intelligence, Gigerenzer and Todd conclude: "fast and frugal decision making can be as accurate as strategies that use all available information and expensive computation…. Bounded rationality is neither limited optimality nor irrationality." Gerd Gigerenzer, Peter M. Todd, and the ABC Research Group, *Simple Heuristics that Make Us Smart* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 5, 27. Malcolm Gladwell has explored illustrative applications of the superiority of thin-slicing in *Blink* (New York: Little Brown and Company, 2005). As Chapter Seven suggests, it is ultimately impossible to prove whether members of Congress or public opinion polls offer the most accurate measure of public opinion; it argues they are different and complementary measures of the same phenomenon.

in the early 1990s. He stresses the need for more funding and better veterans' services, and says he has come to listen to their needs and observations about the Veterans Administration.

This is not a meeting about the Iraq war or other questions of national security policy. Its focus, and the totality of the discussion, centers on these veterans' health needs and the other problems they are having in their post-military lives. They talk about their frustrations with too-short VA hospital hours; the need for simpler VA forms and better record-keeping; a perceived pattern of the military trying to shirk its health care obligations to vets by "losing" their records of service-related injuries; the inadequacy of VA services for dental care and hearing aids; and the problems of dealing with post traumatic stress disorder – PTSD – both for Vietnam veterans and those starting to return from Iraq.

Nobody says anything about the wisdom of the current wars. The words "Iraq" and "Afghanistan" are only mentioned a few times, and even then, only in terms of the needs of vets starting to return from those conflicts. In an echo of a much earlier war, most of the attendees talking about Iraq and Afghanistan speak of the service personnel who have served "over there" – a nephew was recently killed "over there"; the government is letting servicemen down who were defending our freedoms "over there"; the guard and reserve are doing a fantastic job for us "over there."

One of the two Iraq vets in the room is a muscular man of about 40, named Bill Barnstad. There is a purple heart pinned to the lapel of his blue blazer. Barnstad talks in a quiet voice about how he got back from Iraq about a year and a half ago, and is struggling with PTSD. He has used up his sick time and annual leave from his job to go to his VA medical appointments, and stresses how helpful it would be to have a VA facility that was closer and less time consuming to reach.

The senator listens to all these comments and stories – listening more than he speaks – and motions the couple of staff he has brought along over to various vets who are describing problems with the VA, so the staff can get them entered into the senator's casework system. After about 90 minutes, the discussion is over, and people start to file out. The senator, as well as several of the older vets, comes up to Barnstad to thank him for his comments and his service.

As the event ends, I introduce myself to the senator's young staffer for veterans' issues. Just as we are starting to talk, an older woman, the wife of one of the vets, says to him: "we were very pleased with the turnout here today. I'm especially glad we had two Iraq vets here. My grandson served in Iraq. He has post-traumatic stress disorder, and he was going to come today, but he just wasn't comfortable yet doing that."

I tell the staffer that I was struck by the lack of discussion about any national security issues, including the Iraq war. He says he was struck by just the opposite: "I counted

eight times that people mentioned kids coming back from Iraq. A year ago, they would have only talked about their own problems, not the problems of the kids coming back from there." He notes the conversation with the older woman we just spoke with: "A year ago, that wouldn't have happened. You have 20-year active duty retirees who a couple of years ago were denying that PTSD is a real condition. Now they're coming to these events complaining there's not enough funding for treating it."

The staffer says he does not pay much attention to the letters and calls the office receives on Iraq. "We tally all that, and the tallies go to the senator, but he hardly looks at them." The staffer says that he himself relies instead on other indicators – who talks in meetings like this one, and what they talk about, and he often discusses these perceptions with the senator, who does about 15-20 meetings like this each year across the state.

Thus, the veterans in Fairview communicated a great deal to the senator and his staff about public opinion on the war in Iraq, even though they were not trying to do so. Their comments became data points for the senator and his staff that opposition to the war was growing – or at least that the war was producing consequences that would likely cause opposition to grow in the future. The veterans did not communicate this intentionally or in an issue-linear way. But this is how members form much of their sense of public opinion on these issues.

An Inventory of Sources for Assessing Public Opinion on National Security

Building on the basic insight offered by the Fairview story, the rest of this chapter inventories the sources that members of Congress appear to examine for developing their impressions of public opinion on national security issues, based on interviews and observations with members and staff, as well as sources cited in the literature. The current study used three approaches to determine the sources on which members rely. First, in the interviews conducted with members and staff in Washington, I asked participants in an early, open-ended question how they develop their sense of public opinion on these issues. Second, later in the same interviews, I asked about their reliance on a set list of particular sources often cited in the literature: letters, emails, telephone calls, office visits, public opinion polls, and the media. Third, I developed additional lists of sources based on things the members and their staffs said or did during my time spent with them in their states and districts, as in the preceding story about the senator's meeting with the veterans in Fairview.

In the sections that follow, I start with sources that are often cited in the literature – typically intentional and/or issue-linear forms of communication – and try to provide deeper insights about how members make use of these sources. I then turn to additional sources that the interviews and observations of members and their staffs revealed – often not intentional or issue-linear – and try to paint a picture of how members go about decoding and "thin slicing" this kind of information as well.

Sources typically cited in the literature

Letters, emails, and telephone calls to the member's office. It is useful to start with the letters, emails, faxes, and telephone calls that come to a member's office, since this is the set of sources most discussed in the literature. Every one of the members interviewed talked about this source of information, and all but two of the chiefs of staff said that their office compiled tallies of these communications on a regular basis (usually weekly).

Yet despite the frequent mentions of such communications, they appear to play less of a role than they may have played in the past. In 1963, Bauer, Pool, and Dexter reported that "mail is the congressman's main source of information" on constituents' views, at least on foreign trade, the issue they analyzed. By the time of this study, however, mail and calls appeared to play a less important role, and paper letters – what some now call "snail mail" – had diminished to a very minor part of the information flow.

Letters have become a less important source in recent years, for two reasons.[6] The first directly relates to matters of national security. On October 15, 2001, a letter containing anthrax spores was opened in the office of Senate Democratic Leader Tom Daschle of South Dakota, scattering a potent form of the pathogen. Twenty-eight Capitol workers tested positive for anthrax, and two postal workers from the distribution center that processes the Capitol's mail ultimately died from anthrax infection.

[6] I assume there has also been a sharp fall-off in telegrams and even faxes. Both are cited in the literature as forms of correspondence to Congress, but only one staff in this study mentioned faxes, and none mentioned telegrams. It is possible that the staff lump both of these together in their minds with other forms of mail, but it is even more likely that their use has become relatively insignificant.

As a result of that attack (which remains unsolved at this writing), Congress immediately started sending all incoming mail to Congress to facilities in Ohio and New Jersey to irradiate it in order to kill any such pathogens.[7] This process slows the delivery of letters by several weeks. As a result, paper letters no longer represent a very timely source of public opinion for members.[8]

The second reason for the decline in paper letters has been the advent of the Internet and email, which have proved to be an easier and faster form of communication for constituents. A study by the Congressional Management Foundation found that the total number of postal and email communications Congress jumped from about 50 million in 1995 to around 200 million in 2004. *All* of the increase was due to increased use of email to communicate with Congress – indeed, more than all of the increase, since the number of postal communications actually fell substantially over this same period. Just from 2000 to 2004, the number of emails to Congress more than doubled, jumping from just under 48 million to 99 million in the House, and from 26 million to 83 million in the Senate.[9] This shift was top of mind for the chiefs of staff interviewed; one, in the Senate, said: "When I started here in '98, we got 125,000 pieces of correspondence a year, primarily paper letters. We now get north of 350,000 pieces of correspondence a year, primarily electronic."

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[7] John Hollenhorst, "Security Causing Major Postal Delays to Congress," KSL-TV website, posted April 24, 2007, http://www.ksl.com/?nid=148&sid=1143878; U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, "Irradiated Mail," http://www.epa.gov/radiation/sources/mail_irrad.htm (accessed May 12, 2007).

[8] The impact of the anthrax attack on postal communications was something I discovered inadvertently, while trying to recruit members and staff to participate in this study. During my first call to a chief of staff, I asked if he had received the letter I had sent describing the project. He asked how long ago I had sent it; I told him that it had been about a week earlier. He politely informed me that he probably would not receive that letter for about another month, and then explained why.

[9] Brad Fitch and Kathy Goldschmidt, *Communicating with Congress: How Capitol Hill is Coping with the Surge in Citizen Advocacy*, (Washington: Congressional Management Foundation, 2005).

Some of the ways members of Congress have coped with the wholesale shift from "snail mail" to email have substantive implications for what members hear about the public's opinions. For example, to deal with the flood of emails, some members' home pages direct people who want to email a comment to choose which of a series of categories their comment addresses. Of the eight members in this study, five channeled their email in this way.[10] One of the members in this study, for example, required correspondents to pick one of 40 topics, six of which related to national security ("defense and military," "foreign relations," "Iraq," "security," "terrorism," and "trade").[11] Pre-defining all of national security into these few areas potentially leads to more constituent impact on specific issues in which a member has a particular interest; for example, one of the members – but none of the others – listed "Armenian issues" as one of the topics about which someone could send an email. Conversely, this system potentially mutes the impact of emails that do not fit neatly into one of the listed categories. For example, which topic would a citizen select if they wanted to weigh in on U.S. policy toward poppy eradication in Afghanistan and its impact on the war effort there – and how would their comment get tallied? We return to this question of pre-coding of email categories in Chapter Six.

[10] As it happened, all five were Democrats, while the three who did not have such a process were all Republicans; however, examination of other members' email systems reveals that this practice does not split strictly on partisan lines.

[11] Among the five members who channeled emails in this way, the number of topic categories they offered ranged from 22 to 42, and the number of topics related to national security ranged from three to six.

Telephone calls also remain an important source of insight on public opinion. Every member or their staff cited them, and all of the offices that compiled tallies included telephone calls along with mail and email as part of the count. Conversations with the members suggested that at least some pay more attention to telephone calls than mail. The chief of staff for one of the senators noted that his boss "pays attention to the phones; he'll want to know if people are calling about an issue, and, if so, if it's a script or if people are really agitated." The senator later confirmed his focus on the phones: "I'm just curious that the phones are lighting up. I'm the kind of person who, if I'm sitting at home and something makes me mad, I know a lot of people would go, 'gosh that makes me mad'; but you step over a line when you say, 'I'm going to make a call about this.' You pick up the phone and you take the time and you register a complaint…. It just seems to me that when our phones light up…, it says to me that this has touched a chord that I at least need to be aware of."

Although letters, email, faxes, and calls were an important source of information for every office interviewed, most members and many staff discounted these sources in certain ways. As other studies have noted, members and their staffs closely examine the nature of the calls and letters for signs that they have been prompted by interest groups. One of the members said: "If you get 500 copies of the same letter, you know it's an organized action. But if I get 50 letters on a subject, individually written, that has significant value." Similarly, one staffer said, "there is nothing scientific about the letters that we get…. These are either generated, or [from] people with too much time and too little to do." Several members and staff said they generally ignore

calls and letters from out of state, and some specifically omit them from the weekly tallies that go to the member. One member's website promises a written response to emailed questions, but only for in-state residents, and another member's site only allows emails to be sent from people who live in-state. Other members channel their email through a central House website, which forces emailers to answer a simple math question in order to screen out interest groups' automated email programs. Most members and staff also considered calls and letters to be a fairly general input. As Bauer, Pool, and Dexter noted, letters are often vague or even contradictory in terms of giving the member guidance; their study found that many letters included positive words for both protectionism and liberalized trade policy.[12]

Some members go even further in discounting their mail and calls. One member's chief of staff said that their office looks over the calls and mail to pick out ones that are particularly important or heartfelt. But his office does not keep a tally of these communications, because both he and the member have become so skeptical about the content of what comes in. "He thinks they're crap," said this staffer. "They're not from the heart anymore…. And for that reason, we don't keep tallies. Could care less."

Despite the wariness of generated mail and the feeling that some mail lacks clear or representative content, members and staff view mail and especially calls as an important warning sign of a sudden build-up of opinion on a national security issue. In this respect, calls and letters can serve a "fire alarm" function, much as McCubbins and

[12] Bauer, Pool, and Dexter, *American Business and Public Policy,* 417.

Schwartz talk about ways that Congress builds fire alarms into the design of the bureaucracy in order to assist its oversight of the executive.[13] This is particularly true if members and staff feel the input is spontaneous. Several suggested they measured spontaneity by two indicators: how suddenly the calls and letters start showing up, and how much the calls and letters appear to be coming from individuals rather than generated by groups.

One chief of staff described this kind of dynamic – calls and letters setting off a fire alarm – in response to his member's efforts to help several thousand refugees from a former war zone to resettle in his district.

> It was interesting. Blue collar folks, who were, like, "what the hell are you bringing more people here to our district who are going to, you know, don't speak the language and take our jobs and take our social services?"… We heard from them… The grandma who writes the letter. The elderly person who calls into the office. The talk radio. [How many?] Dozens; fifty; a hundred.

This fire alarm model was particular evident – and potentially decisive – in the case of the sale of US port operations to Dubai Ports World. Several of the members cited the sudden rush of calls and letters against the proposed sale as an early and important sign of public opinion and concern. One House member, who represented a district

[13] Mathew D. McCubbins and Thomas Schwartz, "Congressional Oversight Overlooked: Police Patrols versus Fire Alarms," *American Journal of Political Science*, 28 (1984):165–79.

with a medium sized port and was generally sympathetic to the perspective of port operators, who supported the sale, recalled how telephone calls affected his thinking: "I didn't see the point of beating up on [Dubai Ports World] just because it is Arab-owned. But about on the second day after it broke, there was a major public uproar. I first noticed it through phone calls and emails to my offices, both in Washington and in [the district]. People were saying, 'we're going to let *Arabs* operate these ports?!' And I thought, 'oh my.'" This member maintained contact with port operators abroad, including at one of the Canadian ports that were to be part of the P&O sale to Dubai Ports World. He was struck by the fact that, from what he heard from his Canadian contacts, there was no comparable uproar north of the border: "the only sound you'd hear there was crickets chirping."

Interest groups and civic organizations. The current study also affirms the important role, stressed in the literature, which interest groups play in shaping members' perceptions of public opinion on national security and other issues. Every member or chief of staff cited this as an important influence. Among the kinds of interest groups they cited were: businesses and industry groups; unions; ethnic organizations; veterans groups; human rights organizations; and other NGOs.

This is a case in which the typical model in the literature – of intentional, issue-linear communications shaping members' impressions of public opinion – seems apt. For example, one chief of staff says that when the Dubai Ports World case erupted, "we heard from those port directors on the coast," who were concerned about "knee-jerk reactions" from people opposed to foreign ownership of port operations – given that a

large number are, in fact, foreign owned. Another chief of staff talked about how many industry groups – from fertilizer makers to the association of shopping malls – suddenly have a keen interest in homeland security issues, partly because they are worried about security, and partly because there is new federal money flowing to this set of issues. Members also talked about how significant populations of Hispanics, Armenians, Chinese, Vietnamese, or other ethnic populations correlated to opinions on various foreign policy issues.

All the members and chief of staff also noted the role that civic organizations play in shaping their impressions of public opinion on national security issues. The groups they mentioned included: churches and other religious communities; groups linked to universities; and rotary-type clubs. Churches, synagogues, and corresponding religious groups played an especially important role for many of these members – not so much as a pressure group, but as a network of like-minded people who shared information, including about many national security issues. This was particularly true for the African American House member in the study. Two of the seven events that this study observed him attending over a two-day, pre-election period were at district churches, and both he and his chief of staff stressed the role of the local churches in opposing the Iraq war and sharing information about church members killed or wounded in action. Religious communities were important outside the African American community as well: a white urban House member equally stressed the role local churches and synagogues had recently played on Darfur and opposition to Bush administration policies regarding detention and interrogation of terror suspects.

On some issues, the relevant interest groups and civic organizations were the only source of information that members appeared to heed in assessing opinion. For example, members of smaller ethnic communities (e.g., Armenian, Laotian, etc.) were the only source of information that members cited in discussing issues that pertained narrowly to those communities (e.g., Turkey-Armenia genocide resolutions, Laos's trading status). In most other cases, however, such ethnic groups were not the only voice in play, or members discounted their input, or both. Two chiefs of staff, for example, talked about how they actively questioned guidance from major Jewish organizations by seeking out other voices or sources of data in order to gain a broader sense of public opinion. Thus, except for relatively obscure issues, there were few signs that members construct their sense of public opinion just by listening to the interest groups with the strongest and best-organized stake in the issue at hand.

Non-family political intimates and activists. Some members and staff cited the role of political intimates – what Fenno calls the "personal constituency" – in developing their sense of public opinion on national security issues. For some, political intimates emerged as people who conveyed to members what the public was thinking on these issues; we return to some examples of this in Chapter Five. For other members, political intimates were more important in shaping political and substantive decisions than in assessing the public's views on national security. As one House member says: "I've got my political folk. But I don't necessarily need them on national secu-

rity issues. Believe it or not, I'd rather deal with them on something like gay marriage, those kinds of issues."

There was a somewhat broader circle for most of these members that they often referred to as "political activists" or, more simply, "the base" of the party. These may not have been people who were personally close to the member, but they nonetheless represented an important block of votes and opinion. They were part of Fenno's "reelection constituency," but only a subset, since they were usually among the most active and ideological of the party's faithful. Several of the members and staff in this study made references to the national security views of "activists" or "the base," reflecting a combination of meetings, letters, interest group activity, and interactions at political events. For example, one chief of staff talked about the pressure from party activists for his member – a vocal opponent of the war in Iraq – to take an even stronger position against the war: "We have this caucus system for endorsing, precinct caucuses, house district, on and on, until the congressional district. And he has been out there on everything regarding Iraq, he has been way out there from the get-go. Well, the first question at his endorsing convention, 'what can we do to get you to be more outspoken?' He was a little dumbfounded."

While the trends toward polarization in Congress may make party activists and "the base" increasingly important in electoral considerations, none of these members of Congress raised them as their most important source of information about public opinion. Indeed, some of them discounted the views of activists – from both parties –

on the grounds that their views and voting tendencies were fairly predictable. As one Republican member said: "Hard-core Republicans who vote are going to vote for me no matter what, so I take them for granted; and hard-core liberals are going to vote against me, so I write them off."

Talking with people in the district (or state). Much of the literature notes that members learn a great deal about public opinion from being back at home in their districts (or states, in the case of senators). This study bears out the importance of back-home conversations: every one of the members and their staff cited the importance of discussions in-district or in-state, even on questions of national security, on which the public may be less informed and more deferential to those they consider to be experts.

Equally notable was the diverse array of kind of interactions back home that members and their staff noted as being influential. Just a few examples included: meetings with individuals in the district office; statements and questions from individuals at substantive events, political events, or fundraisers; insights from local businesspeople; conversations with voters while going door-to-door; interactions at a stand one member had set up at a farmers' market; things shouted to another member as he rode in a parade; information traded at the local barber shop, coffee shop, garage, or grocery store; things learned from fellow spectators at a high school football game; planning sessions with in-district mayors or other elected officials; remarks from neighbors, met walking down the member's street; and whispered conversations with political acquaintances during the pre-dawn hours in a back-country duck blind.

At one level, this is an unsurprising list: this is what politicians do. It is at least somewhat surprising, however, that these emerged as sources that members of Congress relied on to develop their views of public opinion *on national security policy,* since the list of people they were interacting with included many who were neither experts nor elites. We return to this list in Chapter Five and explore the qualities that tended to define types of people who proved particularly influential to members on these issues. In general, however, the diverse array of settings underscores the point made earlier in the chapter: members of Congress have many reasons and modes for communicating with people, and it makes sense that they will cull insights on the full range of policy issues, including national security, from moments of interaction that were not originally designed to elicit opinion on those particular issues. They seek out moments of interaction; they take what they can find on policy insights.

It is also interesting to see the wide variation in ways that members and their staff approached the challenge of takings soundings of public opinion. For some, the emphasis was more on reading the people who brought themselves to the attention of the member and his or her staff. For others, there was more of a direct effort to sample opinion in various ways. Some of that sampling was limited in scope, such as setting up a booth at a farmers market. But some offices went to greater lengths to construct networks of inquiries. For example, the chief of staff of one member said, in cases where they have an interest in public opinion in a given issue: "Well, I call our district director, and I say, Mrs. Smith, have our staff, our case workers, and they have

about 10 case workers who are responsible for our 16 counties, and a case worker may have one, two, or three counties in their coverage area; and say, call our top folk in that county and just sort of quiz them on this issue, here are the two or three questions to ask them."

Campaigning and fundraising. There is a subset of interaction with people in the state or district that is particularly notable: campaigning. It was hard to determine in this study how much more time members spent with their constituents during campaign season compared to other times. I traveled with three Democratic House members and interviewed one other during the months preceding the 2006 election, but none of these members faced a close election. All three with whom I traveled did some things that were linked to their campaigns – two held fundraisers, and one spoke at a series of get-out-the-vote events – but the degree and nature of the input regarding national security at these events were not markedly different from other, more substantive events that these members conducted, or from events that other members conducted just after the 2006 election. Moreover, it seems increasingly hard to draw a line between campaign and non-campaign periods. For example, during the 2007 Super Bowl – just 89 days after the 2006 election, and nearly two full years before the next voting, an anti-war group, the Vote Vets Action Fund, ran television ads aimed to put pressure on swing Republican senators to vote in favor of a resolution condemning President Bush's plan to increase troop levels in Iraq.[14] Campaigning for many members, if not most, is non-stop.

[14] Sheilagh Murray and Jonathan Weisman, "Iraq Vote Could Resonate in 2008," *Washington Post*, February 5, 2007.

Despite the difficulty in determining what exactly constitutes a campaign event, there were some cues particular to the dynamics of electoral campaigns. One was an awareness of what issues electoral opponents were using against the members. One of the three members I accompanied during campaign season noted that he was one of several Democratic House members in his state who had faced primary challenges from candidates campaigning on the basis that the incumbents were not sufficiently critical of the Iraq war. In addition, the pre-election period highlighted the choices members face regarding what issues to stress as part of their re-election efforts. During this period, all three House Democrats spoke about Iraq and other national security issues at their campaign-related events.

One of the members later noted that, prior to 9/11, it would have been unlikely for him to focus on national security issues as a way to stir up partisan passions at such an event. Yet, for this member, at a series of African American churches in this rural district in the Deep South, Iraq and national security were centerpieces of a stem-winder speech punctuated by murmurs of "uh-hmm" and "yes!" from the nearly all-black audiences:

> You remember how it was under Clinton. Full employment. Things were more affordable. It seems like there wasn't any problem we couldn't solve. Six years later, we're back up fighting a war we never should have been in the first place. And for the first time, we're fighting people who don't mind dying. In every other war, the people we were fighting wanted to survive and

> live. But these people fight by committing suicide. How can we fight people like that? Under Clinton, we were respected and admired all over the world. But now we're hated around the world. Part of it is that we are going in to the oldest civilization in the world and telling them they need to do things different. And they say, 'no, we're going to be just like we are.' And so now we are spending $2 billion a week in Iraq. Let me tell you what $2 billion in a week would mean if we could spend that here. It would mean that every child in America who needed a decent education would get it for free. It would mean that every person in America who needed health care would get if for free. That's what $2 billion a week would mean.

This litany produced a crescendo of applause and shouts of support. The fact that this member felt he could fuel a campaign speech with a partisan attack on President Bush's Iraq policy was itself a form of reading public opinion on these issues.

One component of campaigning – fundraising – provides a particularly measurable channel of information about public opinion. As noted, two of the campaign events for members in this study were fundraisers, and at both, the members spent substantial time stressing national security issues, signaling that they viewed these as effective issues for generating or sustaining contributions. Sometimes, however, the linkage is even more direct, with members or their staff talking about how money flows in response to specific national security positions. For example, one member in the study came into public conflict with the America-Israel Public Affairs Committee, or

AIPAC, widely thought to be one of the country's most influential advocacy groups for the interests of American Jews. His chief of staff said that one way they knew they had support for taking a position opposed to AIPAC's was that, once the conflict received press attention, contributions began flowing in, "from Jews and non-Jews alike; we got, like, $5,000 sent into the office from groups all over."

Other members of Congress, congressional party leaders, and other politicians. Kingdon and others note that one of the major influences on the voting behavior and issue orientation of members of Congress is their colleagues. This study finds that congressional colleagues are also a major influence as members develop their sense of public opinion on national security. This influence starts with the leaders of a member's party. Both the literature and the members in this study stress that some votes in Congress are heavily influenced by the party's position. In these cases, the party position becomes not only an influence on the member's vote, but also an indicator of how colleagues are reading public opinion. The Dubai Ports World case was a good example. Several of the members in the study said the proposed sale became a "political issue," with party leaders helping to foment a negative congressional reaction. Some of the members in the study thought the leaders had read opinion well, and that the issue was useful in scoring political points against the Bush administration. Interestingly, some Democrats thought, to the contrary, that the issue helped provide congressional Republicans with a way to distance themselves from an increasingly unpopular president; as one House member said: "it allowed some Republicans to show themselves taking the president on in a strong fashion, which did noth-

ing to improve our security here in the United States." In either case, however, members looked to the positions of the parties' leadership as an indicator of how their senior colleagues were reading the public.

Members looked to their non-leadership colleagues, as well, as a window on public opinion; indeed, for many members, this was a vantage point they used on an almost daily basis. As one House member said: "I'll send emails to a couple of my colleagues say, 'what are you hearing your constituents say on gas prices, war, how are you discussing this issue?' And they'll send me their thoughts, or sometimes they'll send me a clip of how they handled this. Or I'll say, 'I just did a letter to people on this issue, do you want to see a copy, because this came up in my district?' So we do that a lot. And you choose people when you sound them out that way who represent districts that are similar to yours, that are suburban districts, or moderately middle income districts."

Members particularly appeared to look to colleagues – as well as challengers who have not yet been elected to Congress – during election season. They watch each other's campaigns closely and take note of how issues – including national security issues – are playing. They have a double interest in doing so: issues and lines that work for one member may work well for them. But also, in an era of close partisan division in both chambers, the success of their fellow candidates may determine whether they end up in the minority or majority – as a ranking member of a panel, or as the panel's chair. One Democratic House member talked of a Democratic chal-

lenger in a neighboring district who was thinking of airing a hard-hitting new campaign spot focusing on Iraq; the challenger asked this member to review the ad to see if it seemed effective or went too far. By seeing the spot (which ultimately aired, and received a good deal of national attention), the House member got an early sense of where opinion was headed on Iraq in the vicinity of his own district. Similarly, another member held a fundraiser for a political action committee he had recently created solely to help other same-party congressional candidates, with a heavy focus on challengers; at this event, he ran through the status of some three dozen races across the country, stressing the issues and dynamics in each race, including several in which national security was playing a prominent role.

One of the striking findings in this study, however, is the extent to which members of Congress look to the opinions and experiences of other politicians at *all* levels – not just congressional colleagues and would-be colleagues, but also state legislators, county executives, mayors, and candidates running for every kind of office, even those that on their face bear no relation to national security. Several of the members studied here emphasized how they look to these other politicians within their own jurisdictions to gain insights about constituents' views on these issues. One House member, according to his chief of staff, regularly "pulsed" the mayors and county commissioners in his own district in order to get their views on a range of issues, including national security topics. He partly looked to this source because he himself held various local offices prior to running for Congress. Another member stressed how she had asked a candidate for a local post what he had been hearing as he cam-

paigned, in part because, “he can get in to some people I can’t, because he’s running for water and soil commissioner.” Despite the fact that the position this other candidate was seeking focused solely on the most inherently local of issues – water and soil – this member of Congress said that what the local candidate had been hearing focused significantly on “Iraq and health care; they’re not so much angry on Iraq as disappointed, saying we need to bring them home.” Thus, it is not just congressional colleagues who emerge as influential, as some of the existing literature has stressed, but also the much broader class of local politicians.

National security experts. For all eight of the members, either they or their staff said they sometimes turn to various kinds of experts as part of their process for developing their thinking on national security issues. Usually this was more in the context of developing their substantive understanding of the issue, with members and staff citing national-level scholars, think tankers, and former high-level national security officials as experts they may sometimes consult. But as Chapter Four argues, members of Congress read public opinion in an anticipatory fashion – developing impressions of where opinion will be tomorrow, not only where it is today – and a major factor in their anticipatory expectations is the likely effectiveness of a national security policy on the ground. Thus, the substantive input members received from national security experts became a major factor in their estimate of what opinion would likely be on these issues in the coming months, and particularly as they approached their next election.

In other cases, the lines between expertise and public opinion blurred. For example, one member had a former senator and presidential candidate living in his district, and sometimes consulted him when national security issues arose. The advice was substantive, but this was also a figure who used to represent the member's state, and whose views still shaped opinion there. Similarly, three of the eight members sometimes consulted with retired senior military officers in their districts – people who were both substantive experts and influential in local public opinion.

There was one particularly decisive case of how a local "expert" shaped a member's thinking on national security policy. One chief of staff says his boss was approaching the Fall 2002 vote, as part of the bill creating the Department of Homeland Security, on whether commercial airline pilots should be permitted to carry guns. The member's chief of staff recalls: "Much consternation over that. Eventually voted to arm the pilots, but he didn't make the decision until about five minutes before the vote. Because up to that point, we were against it. But he said, 'well, let me call the only pilot I know and see what he thinks'; and he called him, and the pilot, who was a retired Delta pilot, he said, 'if the terrorist gets in the cockpit it's over anyway, so it might help if I had a gun.' [Was this somebody from the district?] Yeah. Somebody from the district who had a relevant experience, he was a pilot, a relevant profession, I should say." At one level this was input from a person with personal expertise; on the other hand, the fact that the congressman consulted a *local* pilot – rather than, say, the national pilots' association – indicated that the congressman put special weight on the fact that the man was not only a pilot, but also a constituent.

Public opinion polls. Many past studies have found that members of Congress take note of public opinion polls, but place only limited reliance on them as a measure of public opinion on national security and other issues.[15] The statement from Sen. John Warner regarding Iraq quoted in Chapter Two – "I'm not one that follows the polls, but I'm not unmindful of the polls" – captures this ambivalence well.

This study reinforces that finding. For most of the members and staff interviewed, polls emerged as only a modestly important source of information about public opinion on national security issues. Only one member and his chief of staff said that they frequently looked at polls as a source of opinion on national security. This chief of staff would often send his boss press stories about such polls, or the actual polls themselves. The member had a strong interest in polls on these issues, in part because he felt they provided an indication of broad movements of national opinion; as a result, he sometimes helped convene sessions to have polling experts brief him and other congressional colleagues on this information. He and his chief of staff noted that he followed both national and state-level published polls, and the member spoke of how he would calibrate national poll findings to draw conclusions about his own

[15] Destler and Kull, *Misreading the Public*, 208; Catherine Paden and Benjamin I. Page found that members of Congress rarely cited public opinion polls during debates on welfare reform in 1995, "Congress Invokes Public Opinion on Welfare Reform," *American Politics Research* 31, no. 6 (November 2003); Fay Lomax Cook, Jason Barabas, and Benjamin I. Page found the same pattern during congressional debates over Social Security, "Invoking Public Opinion: Policy Elites and Social Security," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 66 (2002) 235-264; Susan Herbst found that staff in the Illinois state legislature placed little reliance on public opinion polls, *Reading Public Opinion*; a 1997-1998 study by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press found that public opinion polls were only the fourth most important source of information for members of Congress "about the way the public feels about issues," cited by 24 percent, after personal contacts (59 percent), telephone or mail from citizens (36 percent), and the media (31 percent).

district: “Some things in my district, a now blue state, kind of an anti-Bush district, are going to be to the left of the national poll, but not that much to the left.”

Another member placed some faith in polls, but used them more to help frame national security issues he already supported, rather than helping him determine his public’s positions on them. He described their value to him in helping him “tailor the way I’m going to express my position.” At least this one member’s use of polls bolsters the argument of Jacobs and Shapiro, who contend that politicians use polls less to decide their positions, and more to pursue a strategy of “crafted talk,” in which they try to sell their positions with popular words and phrases.[16]

Most of the others members, however, were relatively skeptical of polling on these issues and said they rarely consulted it. A few of the members said they had included a question or two on Iraq in their latest campaign polling, but even some of these placed little stock in such survey results, for reasons that other studies have noted as well. Some were skeptical of modern survey methodology; as one said: “I think people put too much weight on polls; we’re seeing an age where most people are screening their calls and everything else, you’re more apt to get the Chatty Cathy’s on the phone, or people that are just dying to give you their opinion.” Others believed that polls on national security issues often asked questions that went beyond the knowledge base of the respondents; as one House member said: “how can you poll on these issues when most of the public can’t find most of the places we’re talking about on a

[16] Lawrence R. Jacobs and Robert Y. Shapiro, *Politicians Don’t Pander: Political Manipulation and the Loss of Democratic Responsiveness* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

map?" Others felt that the national polls did not necessarily reflect their particular state or district, since the polls sampled broader geographic areas; as one House member asked, "Who would ever poll my district?"

There was a particular skepticism from several members about looking to public opinion polls on *national security*, where realist considerations of threat and national interest seemed more important. As one senator said: "On national security issues, I don't ever remember looking at a poll. You know, they are interesting, trends are interesting from the perspective of, are people's opinions changing on this, or how is the world viewing this. But on national security issues, I think it's most important to understand what the conflict is about, what our role should be, what policy should be, and then being able to go back and tell your voters why you voted the way you did." In all, four of the eight members expressed this sort of Burkean reservation. Interestingly, however, they spanned the partisan spectrum, as this group included two Democrats as well as two Republicans.

Media. The media emerged as a very important way that members gauge public opinion on national security, although not wholly in the way the literature has often suggested. Members and staff in this study mentioned or exhibited attention to over a half dozen different types of media that gave them insights on public opinion on national security, including: national broadcast and cable television stories or shows; local television stories; national print coverage; state and local print coverage; foreign language papers read by local ethnic communities; national radio stories, such as Na-

tional Public Radio; local talk radio; Internet bloggers; and letters to the editor. During trips to observe these members, such media often permeated their days. During an hours-long drive with one member around his large rural district, for example, NPR news and talk radio shows played nearly non-stop. As I sat with another member in her district office, CNN played on a small set next to her desk, including a press conference on Iraq with President Bush. Both members later talked about what they had just heard, on the radio and TV, in the context of the way that they read the public on national security issues.

Some of the information about public opinion on national security that members pick up from the media is intentional and issue-linear, in the way the literature usually describes it. This includes letters to the editor in newspapers, or comments on television or talk radio by average citizens about the war in Iraq or other national security topics.

Yet there are other ways that members read the media for clues about public opinion on national security that are not intentional or issue-linear. Sometimes, members talk about viewing the media partly as an indicator of what interests the public – on the theory that the media are skilled at figuring this out. Or they view the media as a shaper of public values; for example, one member slammed the TV drama "24" because young viewers might feel it legitimizes torture. Above all, they saw the media a stimulus that was likely to inform and drive public opinion in the coming days; in this sense, the media stands as a leading indicator of public opinion. For example, a

House chief of staff said: "We have a very literate, very engaged community. And therefore, I mean, if it's in the *New York Times,* if it's on the news, if it's on NPR, they hear it, they read the books, they're reading journals, they're giving us feedback."

This sense of the media as a leading indicator of future public opinion was especially clear on Iraq. A chief of staff for a House member, discussing how they figured out what national security issues are important to their public, said: "People are talking about Iraq, and there's a steady flow, because about, almost every – we've lost a soldier about once a month. You know, we've lost, I believe it was 39 soldiers we've lost, and we've been in Iraq about 38, 39 months. So that's every 30 days or so you get a not-so-subtle reminder that there is a war going on." In this case, he saw media coverage of war deaths as both a driver and a proxy of public opinion, but it was not a kind of public opinion that came from the public directing their voices or requests to the member.[17]

The media especially seemed to become a proxy for public opinion when there was no time to canvass the public's attitudes directly. One chief of staff suggests that they immediately concluded the public was leaning strongly against the Dubai Ports World

[17] Although not directly raised by the members and staff interviewed for this study, at least one other aspect of the media should be noted as a barometer of public opinion: satire, and the extent to which various issues become a target for political humorists. It is notable, for example, that the *Hotline,* a daily summary of the nation's political and polling news, devotes its final pages each day to a compilation of the political jokes from the previous day's late night television shows. Similarly, in the context of the case studies covered in this study, the author found it notable (and funny) that the Capitol Steps, a musical satire group in Washington, had written a send-up of the Dubai Ports World sale; set to the tune of Frank Sinatra's "Strangers in the Night," their song was entitled "Strangers in our Ports," and included the crooning refrain, "Dubai-Dubai-doo…."

sale – or at least that they ultimately would – because the media was so instantly critical of the deal: "It was so quick. There was no time to figure out how it was going to play. It played out so fast. The administration handled it so poorly, so quickly. The press got on it fast. And when I say the press, I don't mean the *Washington Post*; I mean the bloggers and the talk radio and that sort of stuff. There was almost no recovering."

Sources not typically cited in the literature

Beyond the sources listed above, which earlier studies have pointed to as sources of information for members of Congress on public opinion, the current study finds an additional range of sources. Most of these are non-intentional, or non-issue-linear, or both. In the traditional model of how members read the public, as usually depicted in the literature, members mostly rely on intentional, issue-linear communications that come in from the public, including interest groups and activists, and supplemented by insights shared with colleagues. Members also seek out information from the media and polls, which provide insights into the public's views.

The additional sources described in the rest of this section suggest the need for an updated model. In the updated model, members place a good deal of focus on information about events, facts, and trends that they believe tend to shape public opinion – even before those opinions take form, and even though these events, facts, and trends do not constitute intentional, issue-linear communications. In this updated view, the search for such information tends to be less passive and one-way, and more pro-active

and interactive, often based on insights gleaned from observations in society and conversations with constituents, interest groups, and activists. These events, facts, and trends – everything from changes in district demography to the pace of battlefield casualties – thus become a kind of leading indicator of public opinion, since members know such information will have an impact on both the media and the public. This updated model reflects the professional incentives members have to search actively for subtle and early clues about opinion wherever they may be able to find them.

Demography – and the importance of ethnic restaurants and food stores. One of the most important non-intentional sources of information about public opinion on national security comes from perceptions of demographic change. Fenno, in *Home Style*, notes that many (although not all) members of Congress are avid amateur demographers, when it comes to describing and assessing political support in their districts.[18] That was certainly true with the some of the members in the current study, particularly those from more urban districts.

For example, the member most attuned to demographic change represented a center-city district, the place where he had grown up, as a member of one of the district's many ethnic groups, the Irish Catholic. This member was able to describe the evolution of the district almost block by block – which ethnic groups lived on which street, what ethnic-owned businesses had newly opened or recently closed, and what this meant about each ethnic group's fortunes. As we drove around the district, he told its story through a century-long narrative of waves of immigrants – Norwegians,

[18] Fenno, *Home Style*, 3.

Swedes, Irish, Italians, Poles, Serbs, Croats, Jews, Hispanics, Vietnamese, Somali – and how one could chart their economic progress, as they moved from the low-rent real-estate down on the flood plain along the river, up the hill toward the city's drier and more desirable high ground.

But whereas Fenno saw members' attention to demography as a way of reading the district's politics, the current study finds it is also a way that members read public opinion, including on national security issues. Some of this can be general. One staffer said that the presence of a large ethnic population meant that people in their district "understand that the U.S. is not, we're not an island anymore." Some is issue-linear. For one member, the growing size and strength of his Armenian-American population signaled a new balance of active opinion on matters related to Armenia and Turkey. The growth of an ethnic bloc can also mean divided opinion on an issue that touches the home-country, such as one member whose large Central American population was bitterly divided over free trade agreements with those countries. Similarly, in another district, the member's chief of staff described the community as having a large Chinese population that is "split 50/50 between pro-Taipei and pro-Beijing." Still other demographic impacts on opinion are far less issue-linear: the same member's chief of staff said that one ethnic group in their district was relatively supportive of Iraq, because many of their children had volunteered for service in the U.S. military, partly to prove the bona fides of first-generation American citizenship.

There are many indicators that members cited as ways of tracking demographic change, but one of the most interesting – cited by two different members – was the presence of ethnic restaurants and food stores. Members of Congress – like armies – cover a lot of ground and tend to travel on their stomachs, and many of them were highly attuned to the openings and closings of new restaurants and what it said about the ethnic composition of their constituencies. One congressman in the rural Deep South noted the presence of a new Mexican restaurant, and linked it to the increasing flow of Mexican immigrants, and the importance of relations with Mexico. An urban House member took me to lunch on successive days at Puerto Rican and Vietnamese restaurants in different neighborhoods in her district. She told the story of how the owner of the latter establishment had recently expanded to a much larger space, and saw it as a sign of how the Vietnamese community in the district was becoming more prosperous and influential, while also somewhat less focused on the old arguments linked to the Vietnam War. As a signal of the mainstreaming of this community, she noted that you could now buy lemon grass in the major nearby supermarkets.

Partisan change. An additional source of information for members of Congress, related to shifting demographic patterns, is the pattern of change in a district's party affiliation. One chief of staff for a Republican member started his interview by noting that his district had been changing, with rising levels of Democratic registration. He saw this, in part, as an indication that opinion in the district against the war in Iraq was gradually intensifying. Changes in party registration presumably provide a clue to opinion on national security issues only when those issues break along party lines.

But given the increasing trend toward partisan polarization noted earlier, it may well be that an increasing share of national security issues fall into that category.

Family. The literature sometimes mentions members' spouses and wider families as part of their "personal constituency" or inner-circle of advisers and confidants. When it comes to assessing the public's views on national security, family members appear to play a different and even more prominent role.

The chief role here is not as political confidant, but rather as a proxy for the average member of the public. Several members said their spouses and other family members played this role – at least until their familiarity with Washington policy debates made their views less like those of the average citizen. One House member said: "I still have family members and others that are in their normal lives pretty apolitical, that are kind of a good window. But they've become over time less of a good window as they got, just through me, got more immersed. My wife used to be a very good window into the outside world, and she still is, but obviously not as much as she used to. For example, she will say things like, 'well, if I have to give up some of my privacy to protect myself when I get on a plane or whatever, I don't care; I don't care whose calls the NSA is listening to.' I'm [active on that issue, opposing the administration's initiatives on anti-terrorism wire-tapping], so it's not like she's echoing my view on the subject. She is like many people, maybe most people. So she's the proverbial 'security mom.'"

Similarly, one of the two senators in this study looked to his extended family members as key indicators of public opinion on these issues: "I have two brothers and two sisters who I think are good gut checks because they are – I didn't grow up in a political family. They are politically astute now because they pay attention to what I do, but they include a school teacher, a sister who is a stay-at-home mom, [and] a brother who is a police officer. These are people who are out in the world everyday talking to people and they are a really good gut check for me. And we get together all the time. It's pretty easy just having them over to my house, getting a good sense of where the world is."

Family also play a role by providing an important part of the frame of reference through which members make sense of available information about public opinion on national security. Several members had fathers who were veterans, and these members noted how this led them to focus more on veterans' concerns. The spouse of one of the women House members was a Vietnam veteran, and she noted how this had made her more attentive to body language from veterans at public events – for example, noting how some Vietnam veterans shifted uncomfortably when another audience member appeared to criticize the troops currently serving in Iraq: "their whole body language went rigid… And I thought, uh-huh, they're Vietnam veterans. Interesting. And I stepped out and said, 'wait a minute, we're not going to have a disrespectful debate that starts using our soldiers as weapons and the language that they're using if you're mad at the Bush administration.'"

Students. Another source of information about public opinion on national security that emerged from the research is grade school and high school students – a group that is notable, in part, because they are not eligible to vote and are not surveyed by public opinion polls. For one of the senators in the study, students were an especially top-of-mind group, providing the one case he could recall when specific public comments shaped his thinking about public opinion on national security:

> I think the thing that startled me the most was when I was talking to a group of high school students…and we were not talking about foreign policy. We were talking about their future, and kids were complaining about teachers, not enough money for college, to talking about some of their struggles. You know, I talk to high school students a lot. And mostly they're very curious about the world around them and want to know how I see things. And this was sort of semi-hostile, and I was trying to get at their hostility, and this one student, an African-American student, I think he was a junior or something, stood up, and he very eloquently told me about how his parents had abandoned him, his grandmother was raising him. He really wanted to do well, he wanted to go to college, and he said, "all you guys want to do is send me to your war in Iraq." And it took me aback, because it's not *my* war in Iraq. But he sees the adult world as not being there for him to pursue his dreams, but looking at him as sort of who we send to Iraq…. He was just looking at it from a very personal perspective of, I'm just your pawn in a war.

There are reasons to discount members' claims that they pay attention to what young students say on such issues. Members may be playing to an idea that it is socially and

politically attractive to say they are focused on young people – an older version of kissing babies. Yet several of the members in this study showed signs that interaction with non-voting-age students made a real impression in their perceptions of public opinion on national security. Another member, for example, conducted meetings in his district with two groups of outstanding Hispanic and African American high school students; a major topic in the discussion with the Hispanic students was the fact that one of them planned to volunteer for the Marines, and how some of the Hispanic teachers attending the event had served in the military when they were younger. Yet another member cited the exposure of high school and college students to the world through their foreign travel as a leading indicator of future changes in local attitudes toward world affairs.

Partisan cues. In highly partisan environments, members sometimes read public opinion on national security issues just by looking at the partisan cues attached to the issue. As political polarization in Congress increases, this might become an increasingly important clue for members about public opinion. For example, the chief of staff in an overwhelmingly Democratic district said that he and his boss were able to predict strong opposition in the district to the Dubai Ports World sale the minute the initiative became linked to President Bush: "Well, if the President did it, then it's going to be a problem. I mean, it has rung true every time. I mean, he has made some crucial mistakes. And Dubai Ports is just one of them…. A lot of it is the messenger. So if Dubai Ports World has entered into an agreement or a contract to operate terminals at some of the largest ports in the country, then the first question is, well,

how did it happen? Who approved it? Who's responsible? And then, when all roads lead to the President, [people say] 'I knew it; it makes all the sense in the world now.' But if it had been, if the roads had led to the Congress or somebody that's a little more objective, say, some bureaucrat, or a group of bureaucrats, then the response would have been different, I assure you it would have been different."

The president and the executive branch. Although some studies have concluded that the executive branch develops its impressions of public opinion on national security by looking to Congress for cues, this process also works the other way around. In a few cases, members in this study described instances in which they took readings of public opinion based on the perceived reactions to national security actions by the president or others in the executive branch. At the most general level, they talked about positive reactions to President Bush's leadership just after 9/11, or negative reactions to his policy on Iraq. But in some cases the method for reading the executive branch was more nuanced. For example, one member said that he worried about the strength of public support for the U.S. air strikes against Serbia, which this member had supported, when President Clinton went on television to present the public case for the war, but afterward Clinton's job approval ratings did not rise.

Occupations and networks. Another way that members read public opinion is through the short cut of looking at who is showing up for various events. Occupation, cues about class, information about what networks different people are connected to –

at various times, members in this study focused on all of these as ways of reading public opinion on national security issues.

A good example came from a fundraiser in a community just outside a House member's district. The fundraiser was for a political action committee the member himself had created in order to assist other congressional candidates in his party. The event took place at the modest suburban home of a professional couple in their 40s. After making a presentation about the prospects for Democrats to take control of the House in November, the member took some questions – six in all. Five of the six questions were on national security – mostly Iraq – but they all were genuinely questions: none of the questioners voiced an opinion directly. Even so, talking after the event is over, the member had no trouble giving his reading on what the attendees mostly thought about national security generally, and Iraq in particular: "They mostly felt that we never should have been there [in Iraq]. Although they were slightly more moderate than some in the [Democratic] base, because they were not full-time grass-roots activists, they were more attorneys and friends of the hosts." My conversations after the event with some of the attendees who had asked questions confirmed that the member's reading of his audience was mostly right.

Facts and actions, including casualties and requests for federal resources. There is another class of inputs, which might simply be called facts and actions, which members use to develop their impressions of public opinion on national security issues. The most obvious of these are war casualties, of the kind the senator and his

staff heard described by veterans and their families in Fairview, as related at the start of this chapter. The tallies of killed and injured in war are facts that reflect an independent reality, and which exert an influence on public opinion, through networks of family and friends, even apart from the media's reporting of those facts.

Beyond war casualties, there is a whole range of government actions that can produce direct impacts on public perceptions of national security – from deployments of military units, to changes in security screening procedures at airports, to changes in trade rules. Members of Congress are often aware of such government actions before they are launched, and read public opinion in part by anticipating the reactions these actions spur.

In other cases, the actions that help shape their impressions of public opinion are the requests for government assistance that follow some initiative by the government. In the case of the senator whose meeting with the veterans was retold above, it was the increased request for resources to address PTSD that caught his staffer's attention. In another case, a member on the Homeland Security Committee described how he met with local officials to tell them about resources available through a new program at the Department of Homeland Security; he says he knew he had struck a chord on the issue at hand when he started seeing a flow of funding applications from the same local communities for federal assistance under the program.

The presence of military facilities and personnel. Another kind of "fact," cited by several members in the study as an indicator of public opinion on national security, is the local presence of military facilities and personnel. Some studies have used the presence of military contractor facilities as a proxy for constituent interest in defense spending, [19] but none has looked at military-related facilities as a way that members of Congress themselves read public opinion in their own districts. It is a source of information about public opinion on national security that is issue-linear, but not intentional: the military facilities and personnel send a signal simply by their presence. Members in this study often viewed local military facilities as economic links to defense spending and deployment decisions, and the lack of such a facility as a sign that opinion in their district would be less moved by such decisions. The African American House member in this study said: "I don't have a military base in my district. I've got a lot of Guard folk, but those are weekend warriors, stuff like that, but they're doing something else, pretty much, full time, so I don't have a direct economic link to a military facility. So I don't really get that position. You know, I have good votes on defense, and I can still raise the issue…, I can talk about promotional opportunities for minorities and women in all the branches and still be viewed as supportive of it. I just want it to be done a certain way."

International exposure among constituents. Some of the members also took note of the extent to which constituents were traveling abroad and gaining more exposure

[19] For example: Robert Bernstein and William Anthony, "The ABM Issue in the Senate, 1968-1970: The Importance of Ideology," *American Political Science Review* 68 (1974) 1198-1206; and Richard Fleisher, "Economic Benefit, Ideology, and Senate Voting on the B-1 Bomber," *American Politics Quarterly* 13 (1985) 57-61.

to foreign countries and cultures, and viewed this as an input or even a proxy for views about the world. One House member said: "I have a lot of businesses, a lot of people who travel internationally, a lot of immigrants, and they're just sort of throwing up their hands and saying, 'Why? What's happened here? We used to be, kind of, the human rights, the people that people went to look for ideas on fair and balanced trade; and now I tell people I'm from America, I'm an American business person, the first thing I feel I need to do is apologize.' So I'm hearing a lot more of that."

Polling data reinforces the sense that international travel may shape citizens' views about international affairs. A 2004 survey conducted for the Open Society Institute by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research found that the extent of international travel correlated strongly with support for certain statements about international engagement. For example, among the 41 percent of the national sample of adults who reported taking no trips abroad during the previous 10 years, a 60-28 percent majority agreed with the statement, "we should focus more on problems in our own country, like health care and education, rather than devoting so many resources to foreign aid to help other countries" (and rejecting the alternative statement, "we can't solve all the world's problems, but we should do at least as much as other major countries to do our part to relieve global hunger, disease, and repression"). But among the 13 percent of adults who had taken 7 or more trips during the previous 10 years, the prefer-

ence was nearly flipped, with a 28-60 percent majority favoring international engagement.[20]

Staff. As the story about the senator and the veterans at the start of this chapter illustrates, staff play an important role in helping to collect, filter, and interpret information about public opinion on national security. They are the ones who compile the tallies of letters and calls for members, choose which individual messages to single out for attention, report out on meetings with interest groups and constituents that the member cannot attend, call attention to press clippings and polling results, and provide interpretations of trends in discussions back home.

In many cases, the role of staff on these issues is even greater. One member's chief of staff was a former Peace Corps volunteer; partly as a result, the member placed a good deal of stock in this staffer's opinions about world events, and had taken to meeting regularly with other returned Peace Corps volunteers in the area. Another chief of staff had founded an issue organization that focused specifically on national security. The chief of staff for one of the senators had earlier worked for a House member who was seen as a leader on national security issues, and this gave the chief of staff a particularly important role in helping to read opinion in the state. Indeed, most of the chiefs of staff in this study acted as the de facto chief legislative aide on

[20] Jeremy Rosner and Michelle Nowroozi, "Openings for Framing a Progressive Foreign Policy: Key Results from New Open Society Institute Research," January 20, 2004. The data cited was based on interviews with a nationwide sample of 851 likely voters, conducted December 15-20, 2003. The stronger support for international engagement among the frequent fliers may partly have been a function of higher income; but the correlation to travel was even stronger than the correlation to self-reported income or other proxies for class, such as education.

national security issues, and were heavily involved in decisions on key national security votes, particular Iraq.

Lower level staff often play an important role as well. In the urban districts, members tended to have one or more staff of the same ethnicity as one of the key ethnic blocs in the district. Conversations with the members and their chiefs of staff made it clear that these ethnic staff often played the role of not only liaison, but also guide to public opinion, reading and interpreting the local foreign-language press for the member, and helping the member to understand divisions within that ethnic community about a range of issues, including such international topics as trade or bilateral political relations with the home country.

Congressional delegations abroad. There is another way that the members in this study assessed public opinion on national security that is rarely if ever mentioned in the literature: congressional delegations traveling to foreign countries. The members' foreign travels helped them assess public opinion in at least two ways. One was the degree of constituent criticism that they got for taking what the public and media often deride as "junkets," or what voters may at least view as a distraction from more immediate, local concerns. One chief of staff said of his boss: "He went to Malawi last year, when they were having the food security crisis and this whole intersect of AIDS with security, poverty. Big press on that. The challenge is, because they're willing to cover him on the foreign policy issues, and it's more challenging getting covered on the domestic issues, that people don't think, and we hear it occasionally,

you're taking care of us here at home, you're only worried about those people, other people." But another member said that foreign travel and attention to foreign issues generally had generated less criticism since 9/11. Thus, the public reaction to foreign travel emerged as a barometer of public views on the necessity of a congressional focus on international affairs.

There was another, even more important role, however, that foreign travel played. Many of these trips played a significant role in informing and shaping members' impressions of the rest of the world. For at least some members, the information they gathered on these trips then influenced their assessment of how public opinion back home was likely to evolve, relying on the kind of anticipatory dynamics about effectiveness that will be discussed more in Chapter Four. Thus travel in foreign countries became a significant influence in how members took their readings of public opinion back home.

Foreign media and polls. In at least one case, a member's staff tried to deepen his boss's understanding of American public opinion on national security issues by looking to foreign polls and foreign press. This staff worried that his member was sometimes too willing to take at face value arguments from the local Jewish community and national Jewish activists about what policies would be good for Israel. He reported that he sometimes sent his boss translations of Israeli media reports, including reports on Israeli polls, as a way to suggest that the opinions of American Jewish activists were out of line, and might change as they bumped into the reality of Israeli

public opinion. The chief of staff said: "Frankly there are a lot of American Jews willing to fight to the last Israeli. If you look at Israeli public opinion, it's far more left than sort of the organized American Jewish public opinion. And also, frankly, sometimes some of the things we do here hamstringing the Israelis. A lot of the Syria Accountability Act stuff, the sanctions on Syria …. All through the Lebanon thing, I was sending him opinion pieces from Israel about what the Israelis were saying about what was going on. And it was very different from what you were hearing here."

Reading How People Communicate about National Security

The preceding list of sources – the indicators that members of Congress draw on to form their impressions of public opinion on national security issues – is extensive, and covers a broader array of indicators than those cited in most of the literature on this issue. It includes many intentional, issue-linear sources that other observers have noted in the past, such as letters, calls, and pressure from interest groups on the particular issue at hand. But it also includes many kinds of information that the public unintentionally communicates (such as patterns of where ethnic groups live or eat), or in which intentional communications about other topics also send signals about the public's views on national security (such as veterans talking about their health needs, or business people talking about the extent of their travels abroad).

Even beyond this long list, however, there is another set of factors that members assess in order to determine what the public believes about national security – inferences that members make about what members of the public *mean* based on *how* they

speak about these issues. Such inferences obviously apply to conversations about other issues as well. But they appear to play a particular role in members' discussions back home about national security, in part because citizens may be uniquely deferential on these issues, sometimes believing that they lack the expertise to voice an opinion in the same way that they might do so on a more familiar topic, such as health care. As a result, it may be that – relative to other, domestic issues – citizens more often express their views on national security by asking questions rather than making statements; that was certainly a pattern in several of the events observed. Or they may refrain from saying anything at all. In such settings there is an added premium on the member's ability to discern a person's intent or sentiment, behind the questions, between the few words, or within the silences. Some of this is just a matter of reading intensity, which the literature has long noted as an important facet of public opinion; for example, as noted earlier, one of the senators in the study often asks his staff about whether callers are "really agitated" – a measure of intensity. But other aspects of how people express themselves can also tell members a great deal about the *content* of their views.

The remainder of this chapter attempts to categorize some of the ways that members in this study went about reading the intent and meaning behind what citizens told them about national security. It is, then, an extension of the inventory in the first part of the chapter. That list described the "where" that members turn to in order to develop their sense of public opinion on national security policy; this second list describes the "how."

Reading body language, applause, and other non-verbal cues. Politicians spend a great of effort trying to read the people with whom they are speaking, whether it is one person or an audience of hundreds. Kingdon long ago noted that members often test their policy positions by seeing how well they can explain them to people back home.[21] This study abundantly confirmed his insight. For example, earlier, we noted the campaign speech of the African American House member, which included a litany on what domestic improvements could flow from the $2 billion a week being spent on the Iraq war. Over the course of two days, he used this litany several times, each time tweaking it slightly, listening for which $2 billion domestic examples – such as education, or housing, or other domestic programs – generated the strongest reaction. He later told me he started using this litany about three weeks earlier, and had been refining it ever since. His method was something like echolocation – repeatedly sending out a signal, and gleaning information from the way in which it bounced back. One of the chiefs of staff described in similar terms his boss's method for gauging public opinion by testing phrases and arguments: "A lot of it is, you try something, she tries a line, and you get a certain response…. That gave you an indication that you could push back regarding your vote on Iraq, and that it would, and that people were responding, apart from the polling." Another chief of staff put it in similar terms: "If he's got an idea in his head…, say if it's on Dubai Ports; and he's at a ribbon-cutting for some new manufacturing facility, he'll try his new message out and see what they think about foreigners in the U.S. ports."

[21] Kingdon, *Congressmen's Voting Decisions*,47-54.

Much of the reaction depends on non-verbal cues. We already noted how one member sensed how Vietnam veterans in the audience seemed to tense up physically when a critic of the Iraq war sounded like he was blaming the troops. Members talked about the lines they had used that generated the most applause. They also looked for cues about what holds people's attention. One chief of staff said his boss could sense the increasing public interest in Iraq during 2006 because, "he says people, when the word 'Iraq' comes out of his mouth, people stop clinking their knives and forks and start paying attention – that's what people are really interested in – I've heard him articulate that on more than one occasion recently."

Reading what people mean. Bauer, Pool, and Dexter noted that much of the mail that comes into congressional offices is unclear about the position the writer is advocating. That proves to be true with people's direct remarks to members as well. It was often the case, in watching members interact with citizens back in their states or districts, that people would ask questions about national security issues rather than state their own beliefs, leaving the members to infer the speaker's perspective. We noted above that one of the House members, at a fundraiser, was accurately able to surmise that an attendee who asked a neutral-sounding question was in fact an opponent of the war – partly because of who the people at this event were, but also partly because of how the question was asked.

Reading who is speaking. Sometimes the important information for a member comes from *who* is speaking, as much as what they are saying. That was true, in part,

for the senator and his staff described at the start of this chapter, who were struck that a group of veterans and their families would be talking so openly about PTSD. Similarly, one of the women members in the study reported a recent visit to an elderly housing project, and was struck that the older women were speaking out to her about Iraq: "People have been bringing up Iraq more. People who you wouldn't expect to, like older women. Older men often speak up on things like this, but older women are less likely to. In fact, many older women won't even take literature from me because they don't approve of the idea of women running for Congress."

Reading who is *not* speaking – the dogs that don't bark. Members also take careful note of cases in which people fail to speak up when they might have been expected to do so – the dogs that are not barking. One example came from a Republican House member in a highly competitive district during the Spring of 2007, as Congress was considering language for an Iraq war spending bill that would call for the start of troop withdrawals. He had voted against the bill when it first passed the House, but now, a couple of weeks later, he had two meetings back in the district that offered opportunities to look for any signs of mounting pressure against the war.

The first meeting was with his "Veterans Advisory Committee" – a group of about a dozen veterans who periodically met to advise him on military and veterans' issues, from nominations to the military academies to V.A. issues, but also on national security topics. He led the meeting by talking about the Iraq funding bill, but none of the meeting's participants offered any comments, even after he asked for reactions. Later

in the meeting, he raised Iraq again, but once again there was little reaction. In a conversation after the meeting, he acknowledged to me that he was intentionally raising the issue to see what sort of response he would get, and was somewhat surprised by the relative silence the issue engendered. He took it as a sign that opinion among these kinds of core Republican supporters had not turned anti-war. Later in the day, he attended a town hall meeting that a city council member in one of the towns in his district had convened, which drew a less partisan, more average-citizen crowd. The meeting was advertised as focusing on crime and policing, but the House member stressed in his remarks that would be glad to answer questions on other issues as well – he told the audience they were free to "stray into some other issues which we can discuss as well" – which provided an opening for questions about Iraq. Nobody raised the issue, however, and so he finished the day twice hearing a dog that did not bark – two pieces of evidence that opposition to Iraq so far might not be getting more intense among relevant voters in his district.

Reading the impact on trust, not just agreement. Ultimately, when members of Congress talk to voters, the members are often looking for more than signs of agreement or clues about the audience's substantive views; they are looking for signs of trust. Fenno noted how much members – and particularly House members – seek to build up a sense of trust, or "at homeness," with their constituents over time.[22] The importance to members of building such a sense of trust speaks to the multi-dimensional nature of representation: representatives partly seek to know and reflect

[22] Fenno, *Home Style*, 21 and 55*ff.*

their voters' substantive views, in their role as "trustees"; but also to gauge how much voters trust them to exercise their own best judgment, in their role as "delegates." Indeed, Fenno noted that communications about issue positions are often merely "vehicles that some House members choose to convey their qualifications, their sense of identification, and their sense of empathy. It is not the statement of an issue position that wins elections, but the presentation of self by the candidate as he states his issue position."[23]

This two track assessment – looking for agreement on substance, and for signs of trust – appears to be particularly important on an issue like national security, where the public tends to be more deferential to experts and elected representatives. In discussing how they read public opinion on national security, every member or their staff in this study wound up also talking about how they assessed the degree of trust they have built up with their voters.

What makes things even more complicated is that substantive agreement and political trust do not always move in tandem. Indeed, some of the members stressed how they were often able to build up trust by telling their constituents how they *disagreed* with them. One House member recounted the story of the first time he ran for the state senate, and spoke to a group at a senior citizens' facility. The question of immigration came up; he sensed they wanted a tougher line on immigration than he advocated, and the event went sour once he apologetically described his position. After losing that race, he ran for state senate again, and found himself speaking at the same

[23] Ibid., 134.

senior center, and once again getting a hostile question about immigration, focusing on a state proposition that would restrict public services to illegal immigrants. "I thought, oh God, here we go again. But I decided to handle it very differently. I said, 'Look, I'm against this proposition. I know this is not a popular view in your group, but you are entitled to know exactly what your representative thinks, or anyone who would represent you. If you want someone just to come in here and tell you what you want to hear, then you don't want me. Go ahead and vote for the other guy.' And, you know, they gave me a rousing applause. They were delighted that I was not only disagreeing with them, but challenging them."

A senate chief of staff made the same point, and stressed that this dynamic applies with special force to national security: "It's my experience that the public doesn't have to completely agree with you all of the time, but if they think you've made a decision based on principle and you can articulate those principles, and that's rooted in values that are related to the American experience, they may disagree with your policy decision, but respect you for rooting that decision in principle… I find on national security issues, it's really a situation where the American public still really defers to their government for leadership, unlike a lot of other issues where they think their opinion is as good or better than everyone else's. On national security, they really want to be led. And so I think when they see people leading in a direction that seems thought out and principled, that makes sense, that passes the smell test, that's a journey they'll take with that person."

Another member explained that this dynamic had helped him retain a bond of trust with his electorate even though most of them now opposed his position in support of the war: "They definitely feel I'm fighting for them on homeland security, that I'm standing up to overseas terrorists. Even people who may not support the war in Iraq see me as fighting Islamic terrorists in Iraq, keeping their country safe." Thus, he had been able to create a sense of trust, based on an image of advocacy, which offset substantive disagreements.

It may even be that a feeling of trust can lead citizens to believe their member agrees with their own position, even when this is not the case. In the meeting described earlier in this chapter between a Republican House member and his Veterans Advisory Committee, one participant blasted House Speaker Nancy Pelosi for traveling to Syria, echoing criticism from the White House and some outside commentators. The member gave a nod to some of the sentiments that motivated the participant's comment, saying he did not believe Congress should micromanage the President's conduct of the war and related diplomacy. But he ultimately discounted such objections to Pelosi's trip, noting that some Republican members had also recently visited Syria: "Actually I believe it's much ado about nothing, to tell you the truth." After the meeting, I talked with the veteran who raised the objection to Pelosi's trip. He praised his local member, partly for being "a good listener," and for soliciting his participation in this group; but also partly because "he shared my concern about Syria." The trust the House member had built up led this voter to hear more agreement than really existed.

Thus, as members of Congress try to read the public on national security – including points about who is and is not talking, how they are talking, what their non-verbal signals are saying, trying to intuit what point they are really making – members are also trying to read yet another dimension about the degree of trust that exists within the representative transaction. As the members in this study describe it, their ability to take clear readings on these multiple levels gets to the heart of one aspect of the job of being a member of Congress, or perhaps a politician at any level. As one House member said: "In an audience, you never have any question when you leave the podium how it went. Or when you leave the room, about how it went. If you do have any question, then you are in the wrong business."

Chapter Four: Members' Anticipatory Assessments of Public Opinion on National Security

When the Bush administration's approval of the Dubai Ports World purchase of six U.S. port operations became news during the opening weeks of 2006, it is safe to assume that virtually none of the public had any awareness of the issue. The story had received press coverage before that only in some specialty business publications. The first published polling on the subject did not appear until February 24.[1] Yet nearly two weeks before that, starting on February 13, members of Congress began condemning the sale, due in part to their perceptions that public opinion ran strongly against it. But if members of Congress view public opinion as something that exists in the "here and now," as Chapter One says many scholars have assumed, how could members assess public opinion on an issue about which the public was almost entirely unaware, and on which no polling existed? That case, along with others, points to one of the main findings of this study: that members of Congress read public opinion on national security in a highly anticipatory manner, developing refined assessments of potential, as well as existing, voter preferences.

This study therefore supports the findings from others in recent decades that have refuted the "here and now" view of congressional assessments of public opinion, and argued instead that members think about public opinion not only as it exists, but also

[1] Rasmussen Reports, "Just 17% Favor Dubai Ports Deal," February 24, 2006, http://www.rasmussenreports.com/public_content/current_events/just_17_favor_dubai_ports_deal (accessed May 3, 2007 (accessed May 7, 2007).

as it is likely to evolve. That is, while members clearly worry about how their constituents might react to a floor vote or statement today, they also focus on how the public might feel about their actions and words during the run-up to the next election. Other scholars have argued that this dynamic helps to explain many aspects of congressional behavior, including why congressional coalitions and majorities sometimes do or do not form on certain issues.[2] Some argue that anticipation of opinion does not just exist; it is a dominant force in congressional politics; as Stimson, MacKuen, and Erikson contend: "*all is anticipation.*"[3]

The literature on Congress's reading of potential public opinion mostly suggests a straightforward model for how members go about anticipating the ways in which the public's views might evolve, especially on domestic policy issues – which is almost entirely what these studies have examined.[4] In addition to their impressions of current opinion on an issue, members think about whether the position they might take on an issue (e.g., a floor vote) could become fodder for a negative ad or some other kind of attack during the next election. They think about the potential line of criticism the vote could stimulate from would-be supporters. They assess whether there are interest groups or issue leaders who would be likely catalysts for that line of criticism. Based on these factors, they evaluate the likelihood that the argument against their position may arise in the next campaign, and then they assess the likely electoral toll that criticism would exact. As part of all this, members of Congress may also an-

[2] See, for example: Arnold, *Logic of Congressional Action*: Kingdon, *Congressmen's Voting Decisions*; Stimson, MacKuen, and Erikson, "Dynamic Representation."
[3] Emphasis in the original; Stimson, MacKuen, and Erikson, "Dynamic Representation," 545.
[4] Arnold, for example, applies his analysis of potential opinion primarily economic, tax, and energy policy.

ticipate the likely intensity of future public reactions, and anticipate how long it would likely take for an intense reaction to die down.[5]

The interviews and observations of members of Congress and their staffs suggested that some of their anticipation of potential opinion on national security followed just this kind of logic. For the most part, the Dubai Ports World sale fit that model well. Members considered how it would look to their constituents, in the post-9/11 environment, to turn over U.S. port operations to a company owned by an Arab country with a less than perfect record on terrorism; most of them quickly anticipated the public would line up strongly against the idea once they heard about it.

Sometimes such anticipatory evaluations were more subtle – for example, serving to reinforce a position the member already planned to take. For example, one member decided to vote against a resolution supported by the powerful American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC); the resolution sought to ban meetings between members of Congress and Palestinian parliamentarians who are members of Hamas. The member said that in opposing the resolution, he had little concern about a backlash from Jewish voters in the next election, because his dealings with that community over the years left him with expectations that they would understand his position and push back against the position AIPAC had declared in Washington: "I know people who are members of AIPAC back home, who if I said, 'Harry, I just couldn't vote for this because of, you know I do all of this international parliamentarian traveling, and we need to keep a dialog open'; and I could see them saying, 'Oh yeah, you know, I

[5] Kingdon, *Congressmen's Voting Decisions,* 40.

can see your point.' I could hear those voices [even at the point] I realized it was a big deal for AIPAC."

It is tempting to think that it is easy for members to take such anticipatory readings. For example, on the Dubai Ports World sale, what could be more obvious than the idea that selling port operations to an Arab-owned company after 9/11 would generate opposition? Yet, as Chapter Two notes, there had been over 1,500 sales of U.S. companies for foreign owners, and only one had ever led to presidential action; there were reasons to think this was a fairly pro forma process. Moreover, not all the members in this study concluded that the Dubai Ports World sale would generate public opposition, as we see below. What looks obvious in retrospect, therefore, may not have looked so obvious at the time, and it is worth dissecting the analytical steps that are part of the anticipatory process, including on the Dubai Ports World deal.

In addition, this study finds that members' anticipatory reading of public opinion may work *differently* when it comes to national security issues. Some of the differences stem from the fact that national security is (largely) a public good. On domestic policy issues, a member of Congress can assess potential opinion by thinking about who the financial winners and losers from a given tax or spending or regulatory policy will likely be. But there are fewer distributional differences on a public good such as "increased security from terrorism."[6] Other unique aspects of national security policy

[6] Of course, that is not true for all national security issues, particularly given how the term is defined in this study. Trade policy, for example, has very specific financial winners and losers. Even on a military operation, there will be specific individuals who bear more of the cost, such as military service personnel and their families, and specific individuals who reap disproportionate gains, such as stockholders

relate to issues of secrecy, low salience, the decision making process on national security, and deference to experts on these issues on grounds of national interest.

In all, the interviews and observations in this study illuminated seven specific dynamics of anticipating opinion. None of them can be said to be wholly exclusive to national security issues; there are elements of each that might apply to domestic topics as well. But the first five come into play relatively more on national security issues, while the last two also have broad applicability to domestic policy matters as well. These seven dynamics of potential opinion involve anticipation based on:

- The likely *effectiveness* of national security operations.
- What "*face"* a national security issue will wear
- The *reputations of specific countries* and other players on the global stage.
- Aspects of *the inter-agency policy making process*.
- Expectations about the issue's *salience*.
- The *political context* of an issue.
- The room to *move or educate public opinion*.

We now address each of these in turn.

Anticipation based on Expected Effectiveness of National Security Policies

Descriptions in the literature of how members of Congress assess potential preferences tend to assume that the policy in question will have a predictable, determinate

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and employees of defense contractors. Moreover, many domestic policy areas, such as education, entail also some degree of public good (an educated citizenry). Yet national security policies generally aim at producing public goods more than other areas of policy.

impact. A congressional pay raise will increase congressional salaries at taxpayers' expense; a cut in Social Security benefits will reduce retirees' monthly checks; and so on. In such cases, it is relatively straightforward for members of Congress to anticipate what impact a policy change will have, and how different kinds of voters might react to the initiative, if an interest group or opponent makes an issue of it during a future campaign.

With national security policies, by contrast, effectiveness is both more important and less determinate. It is more important because national security is more of a public good, and so a major question becomes simply whether or not the policy will work and produce broadly-shared benefits. The answer is less determinate, particularly from the perspective of average citizens, because national security policy entails highly complex and attenuated linkages of action and consequence. To start, the connection between a given national security decision and the intended impact on the voter and the country as a whole is often obscure to voters. A bill that expands development aid for an African state may yield discernable changes in that country's well-being, or in its attitude toward the United States, only many years down after the policy's implementation.

In other cases, lawmakers may keep key elements of a national security initiative hidden from the public in order to protect classified or otherwise sensitive information. The annual appropriations levels for the nation's intelligence agencies, for example, are classified (although published reports typically provide well-informed estimates).

The findings of CFIUS reviews, such as the one carried out on the Dubai Ports World sale, are kept confidential from the public. It may be hard for voters to know if national security policies are effective if they are denied information about the rationales and resources that feed into those policies.

Even on the most visible and consequential kinds of national security decisions, such as approval of American military operations, the impact of Congress's decision may be unclear. In Iraq, for example, the war effort initially met with success, as American forces invaded Baghdad, and toppled and then captured Saddam Hussein. Only some time after the fall of Baghdad did the reconstruction effort falter and a widespread and deadly series of insurgent attacks begin.

National security is not the only area in which the relationship between government policy and end result may be attenuated. Arnold differentiates between "single-stage" and "multi-stage" policies in a range of fields, and notes that voters may have more difficulty evaluating the impact of those that are multi-stage.[7] But the sense of attenuation in national security is often particularly acute. There may be many steps between passage of a new federal law on education and subsequent changes in the quality of local schools, or between enactment of a tax cut and an up-tick in the economy. But most voters will at least feel competent to judge whether schools are getting better or incomes are rising. By contrast, voters may feel much less competent to judge whether the United States is more or less secure at any point in time, or to assess what contribution a particular treaty, foreign aid program, or weapons system is

[7] Arnold, *Logic of Congressional Action*,19.

making to the goal of national security. Arnold does note that new, exogenous events may change voters' evaluations of policies – for example, the discovery of the endangered snail darter in Tennessee leading Tennesseans to start opposing the Endangered Species Act. But this kind of scenario simply involves changes in a set of voters' perceived self-interests. It does not involve uncertainty about how effective the policy would be.

Effectiveness certainly loomed as a major consideration for members of Congress as they anticipated how public attitudes toward the Iraq war were likely to evolve. Consider the way one of the House members described how he assessed public opinion toward the war at the time of the initial authorizing vote in 2002:

> Well, I think that with a decision like that there's always a large question mark that hangs over it because there are so many factors, there are so many beyond your control. There was at the time a pretty strong consensus, both internationally and domestically, that Iraq had WMD. Less of a consensus about whether the possession of WMD was sufficient cause to use force. I felt pretty comfortable with the decision that we had to at least threaten Saddam with the use of troops if we were going to get the inspectors back in. In terms of whether the President would make use of that authorization to use force and go to war, have a war, prosecute it, I think most of us felt that there were some big unknowns that concerned us, like the use of chemical weapons against our troops, and the prospect of kind of block-by-block urban warfare in Baghdad. We all had great confidence in America's military might, that we could beat

> Saddam's army. But I think the big concern was what happened when we got to Baghdad, which was what kept Bush-the-father out. But when you are voting on authorization to use force if diplomacy fails, and you can't tell what the course of the war will be if even there will be a war, it's hard to predict. But I think certainly none of us anticipated we'd be where we are right now five years, three and a half, four years hence. Though we had to know that there were worst case scenarios as well as best case scenarios.

Similarly, a Republican member suggested that he would start to worry about his political base turning against the war in Iraq if they started to tell him that they had lost faith in the policy's effectiveness: "[If base supporters said] 'geez, we just can't do it anymore, this is too much, then…I would be able to read them as saying, these people want the policy to work, these people want to support the policy, but they just think it's not working any more."

Such statements suggest that before members of Congress can assess potential opinion on national security issues, they must first decide whether they think the national security initiative in question is likely to be effective. This helps explain why members of Congress, as they talk about how they anticipate public opinion on these issues, place heavy emphasis on two sources of information: expert briefings and trips to foreign countries. Several of the members stressed the extent to which they attended and analyzed briefings by experts in the run-up to the 2002 Iraq war vote. Beyond expert briefings, congressional delegations also emerged as a particularly im-

portant source of information, as noted in Chapter Three. For example, one Democratic House member who voted against the Iraq war says he nonetheless felt an obligation to travel to Iraq to see conditions on the ground, in an effort to make the mission work as effectively as possible. On two trips to Iraq, however, he saw early signs that led him to believe the war effort was going astray. "I talked with General Patraeus [then commander of the Army's 101st Airborne Division], who said there was no plan and no budget for reconstruction or post-invasion." This member said that on a second trip he spoke with Sunni leaders who were talking about some Shiite elements starting to turn to sectarian violence. The member said these events provided early forewarnings of deteriorating support for the war back home.

Similarly, for a Republican member's chief of staff, a series of trips to Baghdad gave him an early sense that the war strategy was proving ineffective: "I was there in the red zone [that is, outside the safe "green zone" around the U.S. embassy and military compound] for a long time right after Saddam Hussein had left. And the last time I was there was last November, after the election. There was clearly a change. The things I did two years previous – walk around, buy food, go to restaurants, live, meet with these people, having seminars and all the rest – you just can't do them now."

Thus, members of Congress and their staffs appear to make assessments about whether a national security policy will prove effective, and they use that assessment to inform their sense of how public opinion will evolve. To the extent this dynamic is true, it plays into a debate about the relationship between public support for military

operations and the number of battlefield casualties. Gelpi, Feaver, and Riefler argue that public support for military operations does not plummet in the face of battlefield casualties as long as the public expects the operation will succeed.[8] Others have highlighted important methodological shortcomings with their analysis.[9] But whether or not Gelpi, Feaver, and Riefler are correct, the current study would at least suggest that members of Congress *believe* that the public engages in roughly this kind of calculus. We return to some implications of that belief in Chapter Seven.

Anticipation Based on the "Face" the Issue will Wear

Assessing potential opinion is also uniquely difficult on national security issues because many of these areas of policy wear multiple "faces." That is, a single foreign policy issue may have implications for very different aspects of the country's security. In order to assess what future opinion is likely to be regarding a particular issue that the member of Congress is voting on, he or she must first decide which face the issue is likely to wear if and when it becomes an issue in their state or district.

The case of U.S. relations with China provides a particularly clear example. Nearly all of the members and staff interviewed for this study suggested that the issue currently has relatively low-visibility among most of their constituents. Yet as they described how people in their district or state thought about relations with China, and

[8] Christopher Gelpi, Peter Feaver, and Jason Reifler, "Casualty Sensitivity and the War in Iraq," *International Security* 30, no. 3 (2006): 7–26.
[9] Louis Klarevas, "Correspondence: Casualties, Polls, and the Iraq War," *International Security* 31, no. 2 (2006): 186–94.

particularly how they might think about U.S.-China relations in the future, they focused on strikingly different aspects of that relationship.

One member, who represented a liberal Democratic district, said that future challenges in U.S.-China relations could revolve around human rights issues, or possibly tensions over mainland-Taiwan relations: "I think if there was a [development like] Tiananmen Square, people would be upset, and I would be upset… The tensions between Taiwan and China, though, here's where the business community might try to weigh in with editorial boards or whatever back home, about letting cooler heads prevail."

Another member, from a trade-dependent state in the West, said that her voters mostly focused on trade and cultural ties: "I think our state is very interested in China and the Pacific Rim because we are much closer to it. We have a lot of immigrants from the Pacific Rim countries. They have integrated well into many of our communities. And we have a real interest in selling our products there, and it's agricultural products and everything else. So we sort of see them as a marketplace and a cultural exchange."

Yet another member, from a relatively poor, southern district, focused most on the threat that many of his voters perceive China poses to their jobs and economic well-being: "My district would love to have an alternative to China, simply because they see China as the sleeping giant out there, that unless we do something about it, it's

going to get larger and more and more challenging to our economy, and it's this whole global trade issue."

Members in some cases may feel they can influence which face an issue will wear, and so steer opinion in a direction that works to their advantage, and the case of China shows this dynamic as well. One chief of staff, asked what his district would think if new developments surfaced in China, described how his boss would try steer the public to focus on the human rights face of the issue: "You're making an assumption that a lot of constituents care about China at home, and I don't think that's true. I think they see, as a kind of reference, it's like [how his boss weighed in on] the Irish thing. They basically write it off and say, 'Oh, that's [our congressman] being the human rights guy again. He's fighting for the oppressed in China, just like he fights for the oppressed in Ireland, just like he fights for the oppressed in [our district].'" Thus, members of Congress may exert leadership on a national security issue not only by trying to persuade constituents on the substance of the issue, but also by trying to influence the face the issue wears, in order to change the dynamics of support.

Other national security issues also wear many potential faces. The debate over the war in Iraq raised issues about how to combat terrorism, how to encourage democracy in the broader Middle East, and how to contain the spread of weapons of mass destruction. The initial enlargement of NATO was debated in terms of human rights and democracy in Central Europe, potential military conflict with Russia, and budgetary implications for the U.S. The debate over trade relations with Vietnam variously

focused on American economic competitiveness and prosperity, strategies to encourage political liberalization in Vietnam, and the fate of American soldiers missing in action in the Vietnam War.

To be sure, national security is not the only area in which policy decisions can present multiple faces. Debates over Social Security reform can focus on the well-being of senior citizens, inter-generational equity, or long-term projections for budget deficits. Fights over education policy can be about helping the country's most disadvantaged children, the ability of U.S. workers to compete internationally, or the strength of America's moral values. The many-faced nature of national security issues may be more a difference of degree than of kind. Yet, as the China example suggests, national security issues may war fundamentally different faces in different kinds of districts, and members of Congress may confront unique challenges in deciding which face will dominate – or which face they can help put forward – as they try to assess the nature of potential opinion on these issues.

Anticipation Based on the Reputations of Global Players

One thing that is relatively unique about public opinion on a given national security issue is that it develops, in part, in response to attitudes toward individual counties, and those attitudes may shift over time. American opinion toward Russia was very different during World War II than during the Cold War, and has now changed once again. In most domestic issues, attitudes toward the groups that shape perceptions of the issue – the NRA, environmentalists – tend to be more or less stable. In foreign

affairs, a member of Congress seeking to evaluate how public opinion will evolve must take account of how attitudes toward specific countries and foreign organizations are changing.

The Dubai Ports World sale provided a good example. What convinced many members of Congress that the sale was politically toxic was not simply that the port operations were being sold to a foreign country, but that they were being sold to an *Arab* country at a time when the Bush administration had created an impression that much of the Arab world represented a new threat to America. One Republican chief of staff described plainly how this calculus shaped his anticipation of public opinion on the sale of the port operations: "I used the old, 'what would your wife say' [test]. You know, if you had gone home to your wife the night before this story broke and said, 'honey, the government's going to – and this isn't necessarily, I'm simplifying – but the government's going to sell all our ports to the United Arab Emirates – you know, the guys in turbans, the Arabs.' Wouldn't she have said, 'that doesn't sound right; because those are who the 19 people [who attacked on 9/11] weren't they?.... This is basically what the Bush administration had jammed down our throats since 9/11 was that, you know, they're the bad guys; there's good and there's bad; there's us and there's them. And right now, the 'them' is the Arabs, because they're the ones who did this 9/11 thing….. And then we were going to very quietly and nonchalantly just let business go forward and let them run our ports?"

Thus, members and their staffs anticipated an adverse public reaction to the Dubai Ports World sale in part because events since 9/11 had created a specific set of attitudes toward Arabs and Arab countries. It was not simply a matter of selling these port operations to foreigners, since the ports in question were already owned by a British company. The anticipated reaction stemmed from the events of 9/11 and specifically the way the Bush administration since then had seemed to characterize the Arab countries of the broader Middle East.

Anticipation Based on Dynamics of the National Security Inter-agency Process

The interviews for this study highlight a fourth unique element about the dynamics of potential opinion in the area of national security, and that is the role of the inter-agency process. More than in other areas of policy development and implementation, national security policies reflect an intense, formalized, multi-directional tug-of-war among executive branch agencies, especially the State Department, the Pentagon, the National Security Council, and the intelligence community.[10] While other areas of policy often span different cabinet departments and lead to inter-agency quarrels – health care would be one example – national security policy is virtually *always* an interagency process. Moreover, the departments that are involved in this process tend to be highly skilled at subtly mobilizing political supporters and media voices to support their positions at crucial times. As a result, members of Congress often look to the nature of the inter-agency process as an early indicator of where public opinion is

[10] The NSC was designed to act as a mediator and coordinator among the others, not as a bureaucracy with its own interests, yet that is what it has often become. See, for example: David J. Rothkopf, *Running the World: The Inside Story of the National Security Council and the Architects of American Power* (New York: Public Affairs, 2005).

likely to go. If they see an inter-agency process full of discord, they may reasonably expect that the discord will soon spill over into the press and the public arena, and fuel doubts about the policy at hand.

That dynamic was very much in play in the case of the Dubai Ports World sale. One member of Congress in this study reported talking with a high level White House national security official during early February 2006 about the proposed sale – asking whether the official backed the CFIUS review process and approval, and being struck when the official told him that he personally thought the deal was "crazy." When this member then heard other senior administration officials defending the sale publicly, including Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff on the Sunday political talk shows on February 19, he concluded that divided opinion within the administration might engender divided public opinion.

Anticipation Based on an Issue's Salience

A fifth set of dynamics that shapes members' anticipation about public opinion revolves around their expectations of how salient a national security issue will be. This is often one of the biggest considerations in anticipating public opinion on these issues. If an issue gains little public attention, the member may feel relatively free to ignore the issue, or to engage on it with a high degree of substantive latitude. The judgment about salience applies to domestic as well as national security issues, of course; but national security issues are often less immediate to voters. Of the three major issues examined in this study – Iraq, Dubai Ports World, and China – members

suggested there was only universally strong salience on the first of them. Even on Iraq, as noted in Chapter Three, some members found in the period under study that they would go home for town hall meetings and face not a single question regarding the war.

Members and staff identified a wide set of issues that made it more likely a national security issue would have high salience. The most important, not surprisingly, was the sense of real physical threat to the nation and local communities; 9/11 gave terrorism instant salience. But there were other factors as well: whether there was a direct connection to the district (such as an ethnic or religious community related to the country in question); whether there was a direct economic or employment interest (such as a company with trade ties to the country or district); whether there were local military personnel linked to the issue (as in Iraq and Afghanistan); or whether the issue resonated with the dominant concerns of an ethnic or religious group or NGO (such as potential sympathy for the Jewish community toward a new case of genocide). If members saw these kinds of factors at play in an issue, they were more likely to expect that there would be local concern about the issue.

There were also factors that led members to expect the public would pay *less* attention to a given national security issue. In addition to the simple absence of the factors just listed, they tended to expect an issue would get less attention if it were highly technical or complex. For example, one House member initially decided not to make a strong case against the Dubai Ports World sale because he doubted that his district's

voters would care much about the issue. In part, he anticipated that the issue's complexity would limit voter attention and concern: "I never had the sense that this was a compelling issue in our district…. I guess intuitively I felt that this issue would not have the resonance that so many other national security issues do have. And maybe that was in part because it was a complicated issue in terms of leasing arrangements, port management companies. I think people have the general impression that the administration was the gang that couldn't shoot straight, and this was sort of embarrassing to them; but whether people really felt jeopardy from this, I didn't have that impression."

Anticipation Based on Political Context

The interviews in this study point to a sixth element of how members of Congress anticipate future public opinion, involving expectations about an issue's political context and overtones. This dynamic is not at all unique to national security issues, but it is worth noting, as it has not been well addressed in the literature.

As noted at the outset of the chapter, there was little public awareness or "here and now" public opinion about the Dubai Ports World sale before members of Congress began criticizing it. Some members criticized the sale because they anticipated the public might blame Congress for turning a blind eye to a security threat, if Congress failed to oppose the sale. Others initially declined to raise objections to the sale, in part because they believed the complexity of the issue would preclude much public concern over the sale's security implications.

Yet much of the congressional criticism of the sale was simply partisan in nature. Many Democrats saw opposition to the sale as a way to undermine the Bush administration's claims of a strong posture on national security, especially during the run-up to a congressional campaign, after two previous elections dominated by security issues. One House member said: "We got calls from Democrats who thought, 'isn't this great? We'll stick it to Bush; don't do Dubai Ports.' Didn't care anything else other than it was making the Bush administration squirm." Similarly, a Democratic chief of staff said: "There are things that all of these guys do, it's kind of a caucus thing; these are targets of opportunity…. The Republicans play these kinds of shenanigans all the time, but there's no substance to anything. And if [Republicans] are going to hand us targets of opportunity, we [Democrats] have to take advantage of them as well."

At the same time, some Republicans saw opposition to the deal as a way to distance themselves from an administration whose policies on Iraq (along with other issues) were increasingly becoming a political liability in the upcoming elections. One chief of staff for a Republican member said of his boss's early opposition to the Dubai Ports World sale: "He needed an issue to break with the Bush administration, and this was a big, fat softball right down the middle of the plate, as they say. I mean, it was a gift…. There were a few politicians who, at the time, were looking for a way to break with the Bush administration, and [my boss] in particular, probably needed something, because he was so tightly tied to Bush on 9/11 and the war, that he needed

something before the election to say, 'here's an example of where I broke with the President.'"

One of the elements of anticipation that goes into assessing public opinion, then, is an evaluation of how an issue may play into larger and longer-term partisan arguments, such as how one party characterizes the governing philosophy of the other, or how members of a party try to portray the president and administration in power. The way an issue plays into such assessments is by no means a forgone conclusion. Even on the Dubai Ports World sale, the members in this study differed considerably as to their predictions of how the issue could or would play out politically. One member, in an overwhelmingly Democratic district, felt it was an effective way to stir up opposition to President Bush, yet his chief of staff worried that the backlash against the Dubai purchase was dangerous because it was nearly racist in character. Yet another Democrat, also in a relatively safe seat, believed her party was making a mistake to stir up opposition to the vote, because it gave politically vulnerable Republicans an easy way to distance themselves from the President at a time when his Iraq policy was becoming unpopular: "it allowed some Republicans to show themselves taking the president on in a strong fashion, which did nothing to improve our security here in the United States.... It gave [Republicans] an opportunity to say, 'oh, yes, we are doing oversight [on national security].' Well, no, they're not. So I just think it was, if we had any kind of victory out of it at all, it was a pretty hollow and shallow one."

There is no reason to believe that the challenge of anticipating the partisan potential and consequences of such issues is unique to national security. But this aspect of the anticipatory process reminds us that assessing "potential opinion" is no simple task. The challenge is not only, as Arnold describes, assessing whether there is an opponent, interest group, or other catalyst who might use the issue against the member in a future campaign. It is also a matter of estimating how the issue might interact with the broader political environment. For example, members could place the Dubai Ports World sale in a very different political context in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and a worsening situation on the ground in Iraq – at which point, as one member noted, the Bush administration looked like "the gang that couldn't shoot straight." Similarly, a member trying to determine how opinion on China might evolve in the future might have to assess whether the "face" of the issue in his or her district will be more about geopolitics, human rights, or economics, but also whether the administration in power is likely, at that point, to be seen as politically stronger or more vulnerable on each of those areas.

Anticipation Regarding the Room to Educate and Lead the Public

There is a seventh and final aspect to anticipating future public opinion that played a role for members in this study, but which also has received little attention in the literature on "potential opinion." This was the member's estimation of how much room there was to educate and even change public opinion among his or her constituents. Just as members do not view the political context surrounding an issue as static, they also tend not to treat the public's views as a fixed variable in all cases. That is, they

anticipate where opinion may evolve on its own, but – on national security issues as well as other topics – they also assess their ability to lead and shape the kind of opinion they feel they need. This involves more than just explaining their past votes, an element that many studies address. Rather, it is about determining where opinion is likely to go, determining whether that poses substantive or political risks, and, if so, gauging their own ability to lead opinion in a more favorable direction. They make judgments on whether "I can sell this."

One Democratic member's thinking about the closely linked debates over the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan provided an example. This member had voted against Iraq war in 2002, but supported the war in Afghanistan, and believed that, as a political matter, it was essential for Democrats to accentuate their support for the war in Afghanistan in order to avoid being tarred as weak on national security issues. He believed this would be particularly important if Democrats won the 2006 elections, which at that point were just weeks away: "If Democrats get the majority, we'll have to figure out how to have a new direction for fighting terror, not just being negative on Iraq. We may take some hits from the left. But the Republican National Committee from the first day will be looking at how they get back in, and they will go after this large freshman class, which will have some very vulnerable members."

As he looked ahead to anticipate the future opinion dynamics on Iraq, this member worried that his relatively liberal district, and particularly his liberal core supporters, would lose sight of the substantive and political importance of a strong and successful

military effort in Afghanistan. As a result, on several occasions he went out of his way to talk to core, liberal Democratic supporters about the war in Afghanistan, even though he knew this argument likely ran contrary to their preferences. At a speech to law school students, who mostly appeared to be liberal in their outlook, he spent time stressing the importance of the American effort in Afghanistan. Later that same day, at a fundraiser with a liberal circle of academics and professionals, he stressed the issue again, even though he knew support for the war effort in Afghanistan ran against the grain of opinion in the room: "Afghanistan was an horrific vote for me. It was the right thing to do, but it was hard, given that women and children would be caught up in this… At the time of the vote on Iraq, I thought, they're doing the wrong thing and Afghanistan will suffer as a result."[11]

Another member talked about being active earlier in her career on the conflict in Northern Ireland, but felt her district might react coolly toward her involvement, since it had little to do with the district's needs or interests. She found that by reframing the conflict as a human rights struggle for the side she favored, she could persuade key audiences within the district – especially the Jewish community – that it was the type of issue they should support. Indeed, later in the interview, this member was blunt about the tight link between anticipating opinion and moving attitudes in her district: "The only time I pay attention to the district on these issues is [on] how I have to sell it to the district. I mean…, on Iraq, I try to find a way to couch my con-

[11] The story illustrates another interesting point: members may anticipate potential opinion not just in the *next* election, but also in future elections after that. This member was stressing support for the war in Afghanistan to bolster support for Democrats on national security, not just in the next election (2006), but also in the one that would follow.

tinued support in a way that is going to keep them off my back, tying it to the war on terrorism, by supporting the troops, by telling Jewish voters what it would mean to Israel if Iran became the dominant power in the Mideast, which is what would happen, that type of thing."

* * *

This chapter has argued that there is a great deal of evidence members of Congress read public opinion on national security issues in an anticipatory manner. In part, this appears to be one sub-set of how members assess "potential opinion" across virtually all issues. But there also appear to be particular dynamics involved in national security policy that lead members to take their anticipatory soundings on these issues in unique ways. Chapter Seven returns to this set of conclusions to explore their implications. In part, it argues that the unique anticipatory dynamics of public opinion on national security issues may help to explain why members at time have been resistant to some kinds of policies, even though public opinion polls show strong current support for such actions at the time.

Chapter Five: The "Lumpiness" of Public Opinion

Scholars often express surprise that members of Congress appear to pay limited attention to public opinion polls. One study notes that members of Congress rarely invoke polls in floor speeches as they make the case for their legislative positions.[1] Another puzzles over why members of Congress feel that public opinion constrains them from supporting initiatives such as foreign aid and peacekeeping, when polling shows support for those policies, even in the members' own districts.[2] These and other studies offer many reasons why members may doubt polls. They speculate that members may feel that polling depends too much on the wording of the question; or that the wide variation across polling results renders polling suspect; or that polls fail to account for the intensity of respondent's opinions.

There is some truth to this; members do sometimes cite these reasons for discounting polling. But there is something deeper going on: members of Congress cast a wary eye on polls in part because they hold a different and in some ways richer conception of what public opinion means. Kingdon talks of members of Congress having "conceptual maps" of their electorates. The current study suggests their conceptual maps of public opinion are topographical, with the peaks indicating not just intensity of opinion, but also more complex ideas, such as people's inter-relationships and which kinds of people represent "leading indicators" of changes in opinion.

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[1] Catherine Paden and Benjamin I. Page, "Congress Invokes Public Opinion on Welfare Reform," *American Politics Research* 31, no. 6 (November 2003).
[2] Kull and Destler, *Misreading the Public.*

The Congressman and his Coffee Clubs

Consider the case of one congressman in this study, a liberal African American from a district in the Deep South, talking in his Washington office about how he sensed a hardening of opinion in his district against the Iraq war during 2005-2006. If he had been focusing on what the majority of his voters believed, he would have been talking about the views of African Americans, who make up most of his district. Instead, he was focusing on things he has heard from moderate or conservative white voters:

> **Congressman:** In my district, I'm very comfortable raising the question of our participation [in Iraq] and even to the most loyal, patriotic person, they will now accept the questioning of, did we do the right thing by going, and not view the question as being unpatriotic.
>
> **Question:** Did you get a lot of flak on your original vote [opposing the war]?
>
> **Congressman:** Yeah, yeah. From the usual suspects.
>
> **Question:** Like who?
>
> **Congressman:** A lot of fundamentalist Christian groups, a few veterans groups. You know, a lot of letters to the editor and stuff like that. But some of the things that amaze me in that is some of the people who I expected more criticism from, I actually got support.
>
> **Question:** Like who?
>
> **Congressman:** You know, little coffee clubs. You know, the guys who kind of sit around the coffee shops. I think a lot of them had been through anything from Vietnam to Korea, and some of them all the way back to World War II.

> And they've seen conflict. They've seen it, and they kind of saw through it. Good soldiers. They could do it again – the man said we're going to war, they'd go again. But… I think what I've seen is people saying, 'well, is this the only way to solve disputes?'…. And so, you know, a lot of these guys, as I said, were vets, conservative, you know, got as many flags around their house as you could ever hope to see. Every holiday that comes around, doesn't matter what it is, they put a flag out. So those kind of folk. And that was quite revealing to me. And so now you have people trying to, who will still defend the president, but they really don't defend him on the war. They'll try to defend him on other issues. But I think the war in the minds of the public has lasted too long, cost too much. And so now you're asking, why are we there? And, you know, you used to get a reference to Vietnam at one point, but now people see this decision as even worse than the Vietnam decision.

These conversations did not lead to any change in this congressman's position on Iraq; he had opposed the war from the start and what he heard at these coffee clubs only reinforced his own feelings about the war. But the conversations did change his assessment of where public opinion on the war stood, and that had a rippling impact. The congressman was is in line to become chair of an important security-related subcommittee if the Democrats were to take back control of Congress. His perception of the popularity of the war was shaping his assessment of what might be possible in the new chairmanship that he did, in fact, assume the following year.

The Inherent Inequality of Public Opinion

Public opinion polls typically weight the opinions of each respondent equally.[3] But in the eyes of members of Congress, public opinion is inherently unequal. Not a single member in this study gave any sign of placing equal weight on the opinions of each of his or her constituents. The rule may be "one person, one vote" on election day; but members of Congress do not appear to evaluate public attitudes through a lens of "one person, one opinion." Instead, interviews and observations with members of Congress and their key staff suggest that they see public opinion as "lumpy," and that they use refined weighting schemes to evaluate and combine the opinions they hear.

The members and staff in this study repeatedly talked about listening to particular kinds of people to develop their sense of public opinion on particular issues. They talked about listening to the Chinese immigrant community, or business people, or human rights activists, on China. They talked about looking for signs that veterans, or Reagan Democrats, or ethnic blocks, or the members of the congressman's "coffee club" were turning against the Iraq war. They talked about how family members, or cameramen at the local TV studio reacted to the Dubai Ports World deal. They placed tremendous weight on the opinions of these and other very particular groups.

[3] It is true that pollsters often marginally weight certain demographic and political factors in order to correct for apparent imbalances in their samples. But that does not contradict the basic assumption in virtually all polls that each person's opinion deserves equal consideration. Some polls do look only at the opinions of various types of activists or elites – such as likely voters, or people with college education, or those with high interest in public affairs, etc., and this reflects an implicit weighting; it assumes: these people matter in a special way. Yet even with that kind of approach, all the activist/elite respondents are typically weighted equally to each other. It is extraordinarily rare for polls to assign any kind of variable weighting across a sample on the basis of respondents' levels of knowledge, activism, influence, etc.

While they were mindful of more general measures of attitudes on these issues, such as opinion polls, such indicators seemed to be less influential in shaping their perceptions of what they considered to be public opinion.

It should not be surprising that members of Congress would rely more on some specific kinds of individuals to inform their sense of the broader population's attitudes. This is partly a function of what is necessary for a member in order to build political support. In *Home Style*, Fenno described a series of concentric circles of constituencies that House members court as they seek to win and retain their offices, with the greatest attention going to the inner circles of a member's "primary" and "personal" constituencies. He concluded that, "members feel more accountable, and doubtless are more accountable, to some of their constituents than others…. They feel more accountable to some constituents than others because the support of some constituents is more important to them than the support of others. As persons whose very right to represent depends on getting and holding electoral support, they would be crazy not to think this way, and not take action on this basis"[4]

There are also reasons to expect that members would *listen* to some people more than others as the develop impressions of public opinion, rooted in questions of information gathering efficiency. In *An Economic Theory of Democracy*, Anthony Downs noted that it made sense for voters to rely on the impressions of like-minded acquaintances in order to develop their own impressions of political candidates or issues; this heuristic technique would save voters the time and expense of gathering

[4] Fenno, *Home Style*, 234.

that information on their own.[5] A series of important studies since then have refined that dynamic, detailing the kinds of friends and relatives whose opinions are most likely to be sought out and heeded. For example, Sprague and Huckfeldt's study of political influence networks in South Bend, Indiana during the 1984 presidential election found that voters tended to listen most to friends and family who are more knowledgeable about politics than they themselves are – a sensible approach.[6]

But what kind of heuristics would members of Congress rely on to read a district of over half a million individuals – or a state of several million? To whose opinions would they listen most, as a measure of the broader district or state? Much of the literature focuses on the importance of opinion "intensity" as a key factor for politicians.[7] Yet the perceptual maps in members' minds go well beyond that factor. Intensity of opinion only captures how strongly a person feels, and perhaps whether they are willing or likely to take action based on that feeling. The current study suggests that members of Congress care more about who that person is, how they are connected to other people, and whether that person's opinion is notable relative to expectations about his or her political leanings, ethnic identity, or a host of other factors that members look to as predictors of opinion.

Indeed, in this study, intensity sometimes emerged as a gully rather than a peak when it came to members' topographical maps of public opinion on national security.

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[5] Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1957), 229.
[6] Robert Huckfeldt and John Sprague, *Citizens, Politics, and Social Communication,* 116.
[7] See, for example, Kingdon, *Congressmen's Voting Decisions*, 35; Arnold, *Logic of Congressional Action,*32.

Many of the members and staff in this study reported that they regularly discounted the most passionate advocates on these issues. For example, one House member's chief of staff derided many of the kinds of people who attend town hall meetings: "Four of five people who shout at you.... These are the activists, these people that are part of national organizations that get their information, and they come out, and they want to make their single point." Another chief of staff talked about how his boss had actively avoided town hall meetings for similar reasons: "He's not the kind of guy who does town hall meetings. He may not admit it, but he's done one in 12 years – I think he's done one, maybe two. But not a big fan of the town hall meeting, which is an opening for people to come and gripe and bitch and tell him all your problems about government and what you don't want to hear." For these members, then, intensity alone was not necessarily influential as they read public opinion.

Six Categories of People Whose Opinions Hold Extra Weight

Members' perceptual maps of public opinion emerged in this study as highly personalized, as the next chapter discusses. But there were also some common characteristics about the kinds of people in their own states and districts that members of Congress looked to most as they developed their sense of public opinion on national security. They tended to fall into six categories, which might be labeled:

- Squeaky Wheels.
- Experiencers.
- Advisers.
- Randoms.

- Collectors.
- Bellweathers.

These categories are imprecise and overlap to some degree, but the concepts they embody recurred frequently in the interviews and observations, and they therefore provide useful insights into how members make sense of the opinions they hear. The next sections explain and explore the role that each of these six groups play. The final part of the chapter focuses on the people in any district from whom members hear very little – and who therefore receive *less* weighting in a member's evaluation of public opinion. In particular, members appear to hear little from those who are not politically active, and – at least in some districts – those who are on the opposite side of the partisan divide.

Squeaky Wheels

The common perception of Congress is that it responds to squeaky wheels – pressure groups, lobbyists, party activists, party leaders, callers to talk radio, and other vocal constituents, as they call, write, or visit their congressperson. As discussed in Chapter One, these are the kinds of intentional, issue-linear communications that most of the literature has assumed do the most to shape members' impressions of public opinion on national security issues.

The interviews and observations in this study confirmed that such Squeaky Wheels are an important source of information, and they were typically more prominent in

members' perceptual maps than the invisible average citizen whose opinion is measured in a poll. Chapter Three noted that members cited all these kinds of groups as important sources of information about public opinion on national security. This is why every member but two in this study received a weekly tally of calls and letters; why all said they paid attention to input from interest groups, such as Jewish-American or human rights organizations; and why several talked about the views of activists in their party's base.

Yet there was a notable tendency of members of Congress to discount the views of Squeaky Wheels. For each of the members interviewed for this study, either the member or their chief of staff or both expressed reservations about calls and letters, either because they tended to be generated by organized interests, or because they represented extreme and not average opinion. As noted earlier, one chief of staff said: "there is nothing scientific about the letters that we get… These are either generated, or people with too much time and too little to do." This is part of the reason why, as noted in Chapter Three, members and their staffs tended to place great stock in calls and letters only when they seemed to be spontaneous. Several discounted the views of party activists on the grounds that their views were predictable – for example, either against or supportive of the Iraq war, depending on which party the members and their activists were from. And several members and staff discounted the views of organized interest groups, which they viewed as reflecting organizational agendas more than rank-and-file opinions. In each of these cases, members appeared to feel that the Squeaky Wheels were conveying information about the agendas of

organized groups (who may be generating the letters and calls), or the opinions of those with extreme views, but might be less useful in figuring out what the bulk or swing portion of the electorate felt, which is what concerned them more.

Experiencers

Members and staff talked about a second group, who might be called Experiencers, who were people with some direct contact with the issue or concern at hand. Experiencers cited by members and staff in this study included: the kind of veterans with whom the senator met with at the opening of Chapter Three; the Delta pilot mentioned in that same chapter, who provided one member with a decisive perspective about whether airline pilots should be allowed to carry guns in the cockpit; businesspeople who had traveled abroad recently and told their member about changes in foreign attitudes toward the U.S.; returned Peace Corps volunteers, who emerged as an important source to another member; and individual members of various ethnic diasporas, who were cited by nearly every member in the study.

The line between Squeaky Wheels and Experiencers is not absolute. A VFW member could both have experienced combat and be writing to his member of Congress at the urging of the national VFW organization. What sets Experiencers apart as a class is that their communications are not only a function of being prompted by an organization; rather they convey a more spontaneous motivation and a more intense connection to the issue. In some cases, as in the case of the Delta pilot, their views are solicited by the members or their staffs. Since the Experiencers were directly linked to the

issue in question – making them more of a cog wheel than a squeaky wheel – members view their opinions as carrying a unique kind of insight that is both substantively valuable and potentially influential.

Advisers

Far more important to most of the members interviews in this study than either the Squeaky Wheels or Experiencers were their Advisers – the small number of individuals (well under a dozen, it seemed from these interviews) to whom the members turned for political advice or substantive soundings. For all eight members in this study, either the members themselves or their staff stressed the role that such Advisers played as they developed their sense of public opinion on national security issues.

In several cases the key advisers were family members. One chief of staff said that his boss's closest advisers were, "core family – his wife and his kids; all well educated, well read on the issues. They all have an interest in public service and government. They sit around the dinner table every night and talk politics and talk positions and talk what's going on in the Middle East, and what's going on in Africa. I don't think it's incredibly common around the country, but that's what some families do, and this is definitely one of those families – who's up, who's down, politically. They love it. They love the game of politics, especially in [our state]. Local politicians, absolutely. On local issues, on national security issues, to some degree."

In other cases the key advisers were long-time friends who had played key roles over the years in providing political and substantive advice and support to the member. They were close to what Fenno calls the "personal constituency" – often "his closest political advisers and confidants."[8] But in this case, they were serving not as a political constituency, but rather as a source of information about public opinion.

The Advisers were generally valued by members, not so much for substantive expertise on national security issues, but rather for their proven insight over the years into how issues of this type would likely play in the media and resonate with the public. Across the eight members in the study, their Advisers included (in addition to family members) college professors, lawyers, small businessmen, former journalists, and local politicians. A keen understanding of the media was particularly important in several of these cases. For example, the closest adviser for one House member was a former newspaper reporter – as his chief of staff described him, "a former press guy… gifted with an instinct of what people are thinking, how is this going to sell in the newspapers…. He won't read the Internet…. He still likes getting his hands dirty every day, he wants to read the paper. And now they only communicate in times of crisis and times when things are tough. When there's some poll not looking good or some issue not looking good or some issue with the newspapers, [this fellow] is the go-to guy."

[8] Fenno, *Home Style*, 24.

Randoms

As members talked about assessing public opinion on national security issues, one of the most striking things was their emphasis on reaching out beyond the Squeaky Wheels and intentional communicators to solicit the opinions of more-or-less random people who had no clear interest or stake in the issue. Every member in the study or their chief of staff emphasized the importance of such Randoms in some form, and their search mechanisms for finding Randoms were varied and creative. One House member shunned automatic teller machines and computer-screen kiosks in airports, according to his chief of staff, so that he could instead wait in line at the bank or ticket counter and get a chance to talk to whoever happened to be standing next to him. His comments, as well as his actions, showed the importance he placed on the views of Randoms; he said his sense of public opposition to the Dubai Ports World sale was bolstered when he found that, "even like the television technicians [at the studios where he was conducting interviews on the issue] were telling me, 'this is crazy; what are these guys, nuts?'"

Another member said he sought out Randoms by setting up booths at local farmers markets in his suburban district to hear what was on the minds of the weekend shoppers who happen by; he said, "we kind of are constantly looking for new ways to reach people, because otherwise you are talking to the same hundred people all the time." Two members stressed the value they placed on the chance encounters with constituents at their local Target or grocery stores – and they stressed that they shopped at those stores, in part, precisely so they could have such "chance" conversations.

Another member talked about a deliberate effort he had made to move his information flow away from Squeaky Wheels and more toward Randoms. He had recently replaced traditional town hall meetings with "tele-town halls," in which his office initiated mass automated telephone calls, inviting any interested constituent to join a conversation with the member simply by punching a key on their dial pad. These mass conference calls were set up so that a series of more-or-less randomly selected participants could directly pose their questions to their congressman. The member's chief of staff did not feel that the people who called in were a genuinely random sample, but he did suggest that this technique produced a more random spread of voices than the traditional town hall: "You don't have the problem with people being organized ahead of time to push their particular agenda, which might or might not be representative of the whole constituency. I mean, when he does [actual] town hall meetings, there will always be someone who gets up and starts shouting at something and someone else stands up and says, 'shut up already, we get it, that's not why we are here; we don't care about cutting down the redwood trees, but thank you for flying in from Oakland to tell us not to do that."

In each case, the conversations with Randoms were important because these were *not* Squeaky Wheels – they were not people speaking with intensity, speaking out of expertise, pursuing an agenda, or initiating their communications in a pre-meditated way. Rather they were more or less average constituents, intercepted at places that gave the member confidence that the person was in some way politically relevant,

such as the type of person who would likely be a swing voter in that district. For example, one member said that he based his views on Iraq, "by the people that come to me at the town halls, at the office hours, through the emails and through the phone calls. But in larger part, I base it on the people that *I* go to. Because those that come to me are the most active on the issue; those that I go to are maybe more reflective of the less active majority of the district."

In many ways, this reliance on Randoms is akin to reliance on public opinion polls, or to the search for the "median voter." It is an effort to find an "average viewpoint." The fact that members seek out these Randoms shows that the "average viewpoint" is part of what they want to know about public opinion; but the fact that this is one of six categories shows it is not the only thing they want to know. Moreover, it is also striking that members seemed more interested in this kind of *qualitative* interaction with Randoms than in quantitative measurements of such people's views – suggesting that they were looking for a deeper sense of opinions and opinion-holders than numerical measures would tend to capture.

Collectors

A fifth category of influencers among the public were Collectors of opinion – people who for various reasons talked to a large number of other people, and so had a good sense of what their particular networks were thinking. The members of the informal

"coffee clubs" noted at the top of this chapter fit this category, and many other examples emerged.[9]

One member, who had lived in his district all his life, said he had "three or four places" he tended to hang out, where there was a good deal of through-traffic, and where reliable Collectors were easy to find. For him, these included the local barber shop, the local garage, and the local church he had attended his whole life.

Three members stressed that they relied on local elected officials as their Collectors – mayors, county executives, state representatives, and the like – because those politicians were regularly canvassing their own constituents, who in some cases (but not all) were congressional constituents of these members as well. The chief of staff for one of them said that when major issues broke – including national security issues – they solicited opinion from "our top folk" in each county: "these are folk, elected officials, who really have their ear on the ground – whether they be mayors, city counselors, they may be supervisors, sheriffs, police…, but they'll be somebody who's elected, somebody who's responsive." As noted in Chapter Three, another member questioned candidates for local office – including a candidate for soil and water commissioner – to find out what they were hearing from people on various issues, including national security topics such as Iraq.

[9] Collectors thus play a role that is somewhat comparable to the "Connectors" that Malcolm Gladwell describes in trying to explain why some ideas suddenly catch on, in almost epidemic fashion – they are individuals who are not necessarily experts about the idea themselves, but rather simply know a lot of other people; *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 2000), 30*ff*.

The academic model of opinion formation, especially on relatively specialized issues such as national security, stresses the role of opinion elites, who are highly knowledgeable about the issue, and whose opinions exercise a *top-down* influence on others who are less well informed. The important role of Collectors for the members in this study shows that there is another type of opinion elite who shape opinions in a *bottom-up* fashion. These are people who may not have any particular expertise about the national security issue at hand, but rather have a great deal of expertise about, and contact with average people and what they are or might be saying about that issue. This is the same logic that leads many people who are involved in electoral politics to query taxi drivers in strange cities about how a campaign is going – not because the taxi drivers are experts, but because their reports are informed by conversations with so many other people.

Bellweathers

The last and in many ways the most important of the six categories for the members in this study were the Bellweathers – people who members of Congress looked for and listened to because their opinions could literally sound the arrival of a change in the climate of opinion. Every member in the study cited some form of Bellweather as they tried to assess public opinion on national security, although the kinds of people who fit that category differed in each case.

For some, it was a particular person. One House member, who had been a prosecutor, spoke of a fellow former prosecutor, from the other party: "I did have a friend

who was a fellow prosecutor of mine that was my bellweather of sort of the national mood. And he was sort of a, he was basically a moderate Republican. He would vote for the best person or whatever. I think he voted for Clinton over George Herbert Walker Bush, but then he voted for George W. over Gore."

As we saw in Chapter Four, the Bellweather was sometimes a family member – or the anticipated reaction of a family member, as in the case of the chief of staff who talked about using the "what-would-your-wife-say?" test. The same staffer said he and his boss often used a similar test, speculating about what the chief of staff's mother would say about a particular issue: "We have some tests that we joke about. One of them is my mother. What would Mrs. McLaughlin – we joke about it, but he asks, 'what would Mrs. McLaughlin say on this issue?'" For one member, an actual conversation among his wife and her Bellweather friends about the Dubai Ports World sale was key: "I also knew [it would be unpopular] because I had actually discussed it with my wife and actually some friends of mine, saying, 'how do you react?' [And their response was] 'What, are they crazy letting the Arabs run the ports?' And this was from my wife, who I think is intelligent, because she married me, but even friends of mine politically, who can be somewhat cynical, they said, 'this is crazy.'"

For others, the Bellweather was not a specific person but rather a type of voter. A Republican House member, who represented an East Coast blue collar suburban district, had a highly refined definition of the type of voter whose views could signal a change in the opinion environment. This member noted that his district probably ran

two-to-one in opposition to the Bush administration's Iraq policy, yet he did not feel that his own staunch support for that policy put him in much political peril, because he was not hearing strong opposition from these Bellweathers. He said he would only start to worry about the political impact of eroding support for the war, "when people who I would consider to be either Reagan Democrats or – I've got to put it in ethnic terms – Irish and Italian Republicans, or conservative Jews, start coming up to me and say, 'this war is killing us....' It would be people who wouldn't have almost like a hate-America tone, but saying, 'geez, we just can't do it anymore, this is too much.'"

Whether the Bellweather was a person or category of voter, they exercised their impact on a member of Congress when their opinion became surprising in some way. The congressman cited at the start of this chapter was surprised that the conservative, battle-hardened vets in his local coffee club had started to question the Iraq war. His House colleague would be surprised if the ethnic Reagan Democrats in his suburban district started to question the war in the same way. The negative reaction of the Republican chief of staff's wife to the Dubai Ports World sale was important because she presumably did not often react critically to Bush administration actions on national security. As one member said: "If I go to a Knights of Columbus hall and I get criticized for what I'm doing on the military, then I know it's real, because they are the people who like to identify themselves to me as very patriotic… I don't look for comfort zones. I try to find people who should feel one way on an issue [but] are opposing it. Then I realize that I'm having trouble."

That is, members were often less interested in determining where opinion stood, and more interested in having warning signs that opinion was changing in ways that could be politically dangerous. Or to put it in terms of physics: they were less interested in the position of opinion than in its change of position, or even its rate of acceleration. That is why Bellweathers emerged as so important for these members: they signaled changes in opinion, which were often more politically consequential than the balance of opinion itself – which is what polls generally measure. This search for clues about the direction of future opinion also bolsters the findings from Chapter Four about the anticipatory nature of public opinion for members of Congress.

There is also an important theoretical implication here. Rational choice theory would suggest that members of Congress are trying to determine the opinions of median voters in their districts – or at least the median voters within their partisan blocks. Most of the Randoms and a few Bellweathers described above fit that mold. But most of the Bellweathers did not. Often, members intentionally picked as Bellweathers voters who were safely to one side of the median, because they signaled real change and cause for surprise if their opinions seemed to be crossing the center line. The ethnic Republicans and conservative Jews that one member cited above are a good example. For this member of Congress, these were not his swing or median voters; they were usually reliable loyalists, and that is precisely why it would have been so notable to this member if they started turning against the Iraq war.

The fact that members appeared to assign disproportionate weight to the opinions of these six categories of people carries a range of implications. Most important, it raises questions about widespread reliance on polls as the most authoritative measure of public opinion. If members of Congress do not assign equal weight to people's opinions, then why should the rest of us – the public, the media, scholars – rely almost exclusively on a measure based on equal weighting of all respondents' opinions? We return to this question in Chapter Seven.

The Voices Not Heard: People Whose Opinions Get Less Weight

There is another aspect to the "lumpiness" of public opinion on national security issues. Not only do some voices carry more weight than others, but some voices appear not to get heard much at all. One thing that stood out in the interviews and observations was that members did not listen to a comprehensive or fully random set of voices as they developed their impressions of public opinion. There were two kinds of people in particular who appeared not to get heard much.

The politically inactive

The first kind of people who did not get heard much – at least directly – were the politically inactive. Across the 27 events that I watched members attend across the course of this study, only two provided real access to people who were not active in political or civic affairs. Those both involved the same member, when he swung by football games in his district, and stopped to talk with the local community members who had come out to cheer for their local teams. A large number of his conversa-

tions there were with people who made the effort to come over to talk to their local congressman, but at least some of were initiated by the congressman, and so were with people whose only activism consisted in coming out to watch some football.

The rest of the 27 events, however, were comprised of people who were active in some way; these included: contributors at political or hospital fundraisers; union members at an event for their local; party activists at get-out-the-vote rallies; attendees to ethnic community banquets; students at meet-the-candidates forums; concerned citizens at meetings with elected leaders on various public issues; city and port authority officials attending an event on port security; or community leaders attending the ribbon-cutting at a new veterans housing complex. For the most part, these are the sort of people members of Congress see back home from day to day. Similarly, the people who are in contact a member's office – phone callers, emailers, lobbyists, reporters, issue experts – represent unusually active or informed elements of the public.

Some of the politically inactive may hold clear opinions about national security issues, but many of them do not. Such members of the public – both inactive and inattentive to national security issues – are for the most part the equivalent of broad expanses of lowlands in the topographical maps of public opinion that members construct in their minds. Members look for peaks, in the form of Collectors and Advisers and Squeaky Wheels. They look for changes in topography that the Bellweathers may signal, or that a conversation with a Random may reveal. But on many national

security issues, particularly those of low salience, there is little sense that members pay much direct attention to the lowlands – the portions of their public who are silent and inattentive. Thus, there may well be a range of national security issues on which members perceive public opinion as existing only among a small share of the public, for all practical purposes. These might include such issues as trade preferences that matter only to a narrow business segment, or diplomatic positions that are only of concern to a small ethnic group. The fact that different amounts of the full public are relevant on different national security issues – and that on some issues, very little of the public really has opinions – is yet another sign that there is a problem with equally weighting the views of the entire public, as opinion polls do.

Partisans from the opposite party

The other set of voices that members of Congress appeared not to hear much, not surprisingly, were those of partisans from the opposing party. Of the 27 events observed for this study, nearly half, 11 of the total, were comprised mostly or completely with partisan supporters. The rest of the events were policy discussions or gatherings of an ethnic or community group, in which there were no clear clues about the partisan leanings of the participants. Across the 27 meetings, with over 2000 participants, there was only one participant who expressed what seemed to be a critical question that represented an opposing partisan viewpoint (the member of Congress learned from a separate conversation that this participant did indeed lean toward the opposing party).

Members may well hear more dissenting viewpoints from their mail, phone calls, and other conversations in the district. They also are exposed to many other sources of information – such as the statements of colleagues from the other party – which give them important insights into what opposing partisans in their districts likely think. Yet there is in all this an element of an echo chamber, with members largely hearing from people who at least share the same partisan outlook, if not the same views on every policy issue.

The fact that members rarely come in contact with the politically inactive or with members of the opposing party help explain why they are particularly eager to find ways of reaching and hearing "Randoms," as well as why they may often look to "Bellweathers" who are not fellow-partisans. It also helps explain why they may look to non-intentional sources of information, which often seem to provide clues about those who might not express their opinions directly.

Yet the asymmetries of the information sources that members of Congress generally examine mean that they almost certainly form impressions of the opinions of only parts of the public. It may well be that they get a relatively clear sense of the opinions of the portion of the public that is most important for their re-election. As congressional districts become less competitive and more politically polarized, it would seem likely that members would increasingly hear directly from a narrower band of voices, more aligned with the member's own partisan leanings. This study did not produce the kind of longitudinal data to determine whether such a trend is in fact oc-

curring over time. Even so, we return to the possible implications of this issue in Chapter Seven.

Chapter Six: The Individualized Nature of Assessments of Public Opinion on National Security

The preceding chapters argue that members of Congress develop their impressions of public opinion on national security issues in some ways that diverge from assumptions in much of the literature. Members appear to rely on a much wider range of sources of information; many of those sources are not intentional or issue-linear communications from the public; members look at what public opinion on these issues is likely to be in the future, not just what it is in there here and now; and they do not view public opinion primarily in quantitative, equally-weighted terms, but instead see opinion as lumpy, and place different amounts of weight on the opinions of different kinds of people. All this suggests the members develop their impressions of public opinion in rich, multi-dimensional ways. This refined picture, however, raises some additional questions. Are there notable differences in how individual members go about the process of assessing the public's opinions on national security issues? If so, what factors might explain those differences?

This study suggests that members' processes for assessing the public's views are, in fact, highly individualized. The ways that they mix and weight different sources of information, strike balances between current and anticipated opinion, and test and update their perceptions of opinion are as varied as the members themselves and the districts they represent. This chapter examines the nature of those differences, and suggests some major factors that appear to explain the variations.

Members' Assessment Styles as a Reflection of Their Life Experiences

Few things are more individualized than the ways in which people acquire and process information; it is an essential part of what we think of as an individual's personality. It therefore should not be surprising that the ways members of Congress go about assessing public opinion significantly reflect the same factors that shape other parts of their personality, especially their pivotal personal and professional experiences.

For some of these members, their methods of assessing public opinion on national security reveal parental influences. For example, two members – including the senator whose meeting with local veterans was described at the start of Chapter Three – placed significant stress on the fact that their fathers were World War II veterans. That fact contributed to both members giving heavy weight to veterans' voices, particularly in assessing the wisdom and effectiveness of the Iraq war. It also shaped how they balanced current and anticipated opinion. In the case of the senator, the backdrop of his father's experience helped focus him on the number and type of war casualties as an important early indicator of how opinion on the Iraq war was likely to evolve.

For another member, the fact that his father was a policeman not only drew him to issues of homeland security, but also led him to place much more weight on the views of law enforcement officials, firemen, and other first responders, relative to the vari-

ety of business interests who sought to influence legislation on these issues. His chief of staff said, "This man is not comfortable carrying business's water; he'll carry water for the [local police department] on crime and terror, he'll carry water for the Department of Homeland Security on terror. But he is not comfortable carrying water for business. This distinguishes him from a lot of Republicans."

Members' career tracks also play a role in shaping the ways they seek out and evaluate information on public opinion regarding national security. As noted earlier, one member who had earlier been a prosecutor saw another former prosecutor as his Bellweather. Another who had held a variety of local elected offices viewed his district's mayors and county officials as his key "Collectors" of district opinion. One of the senators had launched his political career in the state legislature, and looked to certain state legislators and their districts as his Bellweathers; this member's chief of staff said that one of their early indications of shifts in opinion on Iraq was the increasing strength of liberal candidates in a fairly conservative swing state legislative district. For yet another member, his experience as an activist on local education issues helped explain his focus on the schools as a key source of opinion; he twice cited conversations with high school students as key influences in his thinking about national security issues.

Beyond parental and professional influences, there are also aspects of a member of Congress's personality that shape how he or she goes about assessing public opinion. One member in this study was outgoing, jovial, and casual, and felt comfortable

hanging out at a fish fry, listening to whatever people from his district happened to tell him; over two days of observation, half of the events he attended had this "just hanging out and listening" quality. Another member was more serious, intellectual, and reserved, and preferred more structured conversations, such as at a fundraiser or town hall meeting. Over two days of observation, none of his events involved simply hanging out and talking with constituents; rather, all revolved around relatively structured speeches, presentations, and interviews. Of course, these generalizations are based on very few observations. Yet just as Fenno concluded that a member's "presentation of self" partly reflects his or her personality and what kind of activities "come naturally" (e.g., an issue-focused candidate in Fenno's study who was "an exceptionally verbal person"[1]), so too a member's personality appears to shape how he or she investigates the public's views on substantive questions.

All this suggests something important about the representative process. When we consider a candidate's life history and personal qualities during a campaign, they are not only possible sources of insights about his or her accomplishments, character, issue positions, and leadership style. They also can tell us something about how that member may go about the business of taking readings of public opinion. To the extent we vote for a biography or a style of leadership, we also vote for a set of heuristics that we may expect the member will bring to the task of assessing and processing what we ourselves believe about national security and other issues – that is, how they read us. To some extent, we vote not only for the person who represents us, but also for the *way* they "re-present" us.

[1] Fenno, *Home Style*, 127, 94.

Members' Assessment Styles as a Reflection of Their Districts

As we might expect, members' approaches to assessing public opinion also reflect unique characteristics about their districts. This goes beyond content. It is not just that one district may harbor more or less support for the Iraq war, or defense spending, or human rights, or trade protection. The point is that a range of qualities about any given district will tend to lead the member who represents that place to rely on certain kinds of sources and strategies for collecting insights about public opinion on national security.

We have noted some of these already – for example, that members from more urban districts may put more emphasis on recognizing shifts in the ethnic composition of specific neighborhoods in their district as an indicator of changes in opinion on national security. More generally, it may be that members from urban areas, where there tends to be a faster pace of demographic change, may place relatively more reliance on "Bellweathers," to help them spot changes in opinion. Conversely, rural districts may lead members to rely more on "Collectors," who can help them gather opinion from a more far-flung territory more efficiently. That seemed to be the case, at least, with the congressman with the largest and most rural district of all the members in this study. He seemed to have the largest array of "Collectors," from local officials, to the proprietors of the local garage and barber shop, to the members of the "coffee clubs" noted at the start of Chapter Five.

Sources of information that might be available in one type of district might be rare or non-existent in another. One chief of staff said that some members of Congress might get information about opinion on national security from street protests – against the Iraq war, for example – but then quickly noted how unlikely that would be in the kind of suburban district his House member represented.

A crucial characteristic of a district, which showed signs of affecting members' information gathering styles, was its political composition. Generally speaking, districts that are more one-sided in partisan terms may lead the people who represent those places to focus more on voices in the heart of the majority party, since those are the voters who will decide the dominant party's nominee. By contrast, more balanced districts may tend to lead members to seek out opinions closer to the center of the political spectrum. There was a good deal of evidence for this pattern among the members and districts in this study. As a Democratic House member from a relatively marginal district said: "My district used to be a Republican district. It's evolving. I continue to view it as a swing district. The Republicans don't, and I'm not going to persuade them otherwise. I had enough years of having to persuade the moderate Republicans, and [having to] keep the moderate Democrats, to know how they look at the world. And I have to continually remind myself of how they look at the world because over time you forget. So when I'll read those national polls, I'll often look at them and say, you know, that sounds about right for what, of how I would view those people in the middle of the district and where they would be coming from on it."

Another factor related to a district's size is the nature of its media markets. It is well established that different kinds of media markets lead members to *send out* information to their constituents in different ways.[2] But the current study shows it also affects how they read the district's opinions. For example, one of the members who represented a suburban district near a major East Coast city said it was hard for him to get much coverage from major newspapers or broadcast television stations; he noted that he shared that media market with over a dozen other House members, and as a result, reporters "are not going to be following me every day." That fact pointed him toward more reliance on more localized cable television news programs – not just as an outlet for reaching his voters, but also as a source of information about what people in his district were thinking.

Similarly, another member who represented the suburbs of a major West Coast city was especially attentive to talk radio as a source of insight about public opinion. He said there were about a half dozen different radio stations with talk radio shows during drive time that attracted major audiences. He had noted a pattern of one talk radio host stressing a given issue, only to have the others soon pick it up as well. In a smaller city, with only one or two stations with talk radio shows, this might not have been as important a source of early warning about emerging issues.

[2] For example, Fenno talks about the difficulties of reaching constituents in a spread-out suburban district. *Home Style*, 89 *ff.*

Members' Assessment Styles as a Reflection of Committee Assignments and Tenure

The committee assignments, tenure, and other aspects of a member's institutional role in Congress appear to provide a third set of forces that shape how he or she goes about assessing public opinion on national security issues. The current study covered too few members, spanning too few different kinds of committees and lengths of tenure, to permit definite conclusions on this point. But it was notable how often the members and staff in the study described their methods for determining public opinion in terms of their respective committee responsibilities, or their seniority in Congress.

In part, the fact that a member served on *any* committee that focused on national security often meant that he or she was more likely to talk about these issues in public events, which in turn would elicit more public comment on those issues. As one member said: "Issues of national security come up quite often [in my public events]. Now, part of that is due to the fact that when I go to give a talk, I often talk about national security, because through my committee and other work, I've focused a lot on those issues." Bolstering this member's observation: when he spoke at a campaign fundraiser, the material his staff passed out led with information about his role on national security issues, even though this was a political event of a very general nature.

Moreover, members' personal backgrounds often steered them to certain *types* of national security committees, and then those committee assignments would in turn reinforce that aspect of their personal background and the way in which it steered them to

certain telltales of public opinion. Take, for example, the senator whose meeting with veterans was described at the start of Chapter Three. As noted, his personal background – the fact his father had been a war vet – partly explained why he looked to veterans and the nature of their health problems as a key source of information about the Iraq war. But that focus also led him to seek a position on the Veterans Affairs Committee, which then gave him an additional reason to hold regular meetings around the state with veterans and to hear their input.

This kind of interplay between personal background, committee assignment, and inputs about public opinion was common. Another member's liberal outlook and district gave him a particular interest in human rights issues, which led him to a seat on the subcommittee of the House International Relations Committee that focuses on human rights. That seat, in turn, led him to pursue congressional delegations abroad that focused on human rights, and to focus on NGOs in his district that worked on human rights issues. Yet another member's background as a lawyer and prosecutor led him toward the Judiciary Committee, which then led him into the debates over the legal issues surrounding the war on terrorism, such as the Patriot Act and the National Security Agency's authority to conduct wiretaps; the member then stressed such issues in public events, which led him to hear more public input about those issues, located at the intersection of law enforcement and national security, where he had the greatest interest and comfort.

The same was true with two members who sat on the Homeland Security Committee. They put more emphasis than other members on information sources who would tend to have business with that committee, including police officers, firefighters, and other first responders, and corporate executives and industry groups with some business link to homeland security threats, services, or products. For example, the chief of staff for one of these members noted that many trade associations had come to speak with him about homeland security, including some he had not realized were affected by these issues: "We can talk to the fertilizer industry… For years, while we were in Congress, they talked to us about the Farm Bill… Well, now they want to talk to us about…how we can control the ammonium nitrate, so that it doesn't get in the bad guys' hands. Or when we talk to the International Council of Shopping Centers, which I didn't even know existed until this year…., they come in and instead of just talking about the estate tax and minimum wage, they want to talk about security. They want to talk about surveillance cameras. So we end up getting information from everybody we talk to."

With a member of the appropriations committee, not surprisingly there was a particular focus on demands for funding. At an event focused on port security, this member urged the audience to put more pressure on Congress to provide more resources for new port security upgrades that had been authorized but not full funded. The flow of public calls for such funding – or in this case, the relative lack of such demands – was thus a piece of data about public opinion, and the member's focus on this source was partly a function of his seat on the Appropriations Committee.

In addition to committee assignments, there were other aspects of a member's institutional position within Congress that helped to shape the way he or she sought out information on public opinion. The most important of these appeared to be tenure. Fenno and others have noted that freshman members devote more time, attention, and staff resources to matters back home in the district.[3] The current study reinforces that finding, and suggests it has clear implications for information gathering about public opinion on national security. The newer members appeared to be somewhat more focused on mail, calls, and investigating constituent opinion, while longer-term members seemed more likely to trust anticipatory readings of opinion. It was a relatively new, two-term member – described in Chapter Three – who checked his perceptions about Iraq twice in one day, first with a veterans advisory group and then with a town hall audience, to make sure opinion at home on the war was not turning more negative than he had believed. Conversely, it was a seven-term member who viewed most of his mail and calls as "crap," according to his chief of staff. As one chief of staff said: "When [my boss] first came to the Hill, he looked at every letter that came in and reviewed every letter that went out; he can't do that any more." Another chief of staff said: "Every member of Congress has an evolutionary process to begin with. I think when you are a freshman, all roads lead to constituent services, all roads lead to making sure that people believe that you are listening, and that you are taking what they believe and translating it into legislation."

[3] Fenno, *Home Style*, especially 171*ff*.

Striking the Balance Between Affirmation and Testing: "Make Me Know You"

The ways that members gather information about public opinion on national security therefore appear to be highly individualized, reflecting their personal backgrounds, districts, committee assignments, and congressional tenure. But there is another important individualized aspect to the way they gather such information, and this has to do with the kind of balance they strike between looking for information that affirms their preconceptions about public opinion, and looking for information that tests or challenges those impressions.

As a starting point for exploring this balancing dynamic, this study strongly supports a key finding, dating back to at least the 1950s and the work of Bauer, Pool, and Dexter, who found that members of Congress often help generate, and then listen to, opinions that support their own positions. In a trenchant observation, their study concluded: "A congressman largely determines for himself what he hears from the public… [He] very largely gets back what he puts out. In his limited time, he associates more with some kinds of people than with others, listens to some kinds of messages more than to others, and as a result hears from some kinds of people more than from others. He controls what he hears both by his attention and by his attitudes. *He makes the world to which he thinks he is responding.* Congressmen, indeed, do respond to pressures, but they generate the pressures they feel."[4]

[4] Emphasis added. Bauer, Pool, and Dexter, *American Business and Public Policy*, 415–20.

In some cases, members in this study literally talked about helping to create the kind of public opinion they felt they politically wanted or needed – both generally and on national security issues. One Democratic chief of staff talked about how he and his office might prime local opinion to oppose an idea that they knew was about to be put forward by the Republican administration: "People are against [Bush] because he's not competent in their eyes. And so if we can see something happening and it's two months before it really goes out, or two weeks before it really goes public, and intelligently play the issue up with certain people, and just hip certain people to the idea that, well, here's something that you might want to pay attention to, and then when it finally makes the five o'clock news, it triggers something in their head to say, 'I heard about this.' And then they come back and say, 'Congressman, you said it was going to happen, and it happened, too.' And then we play dumb, like, 'oh, is that right?' …We've got a staff that is just proactive. They go out and seek stuff. Almost looking for problems, which is what you have to do when you're the opposition party."

Not only did members show signs of taking steps to help generate the public opinion they might want or need to hear; some of them felt their efforts along these lines could make a substantial impact on local opinion, particularly on some issues of low public salience. One member, who helped lead the charge against the Dubai Ports World sale, acknowledged that he had helped stimulate the opposition that flowed into his office during late February and early March 2006. But he also said he might well have been able to generate a more balanced public response had he come out

publicly on the other side of the issue: "Now, I'm being arrogant here. But I think I could have kept it – if I had thought it was the right thing to do – I think I could have kept it a 50/50 issue, I think, as opposed to a 90/10 or whatever it was. I think."

In many other cases, members tended to hear affirming information, not because of the response they generated, but more because of the company they kept. A large number of the events that the members attended or described were populated largely with their own supporters or at least supporters of their party's positions – not necessarily hard-core activists, but at least people who were politically-engaged and sympathetic to the member's views. For example, a Republican House member who had avidly defended the Iraq war talked about the support he had heard for his position at an event of 300 people in a small town in his district; the event was organized, in part, to help send off a young Marine who was returning to his second tour of duty in Iraq, and the crowd was mostly composed of politically-engaged Republican voters and the local Republican officials they had helped to elect. This kind of reinforcing selection of audiences is particularly strong during campaign season. Unsurprisingly, a Democratic member got only roars of approval at a pre-election get-out-the-vote rally as he tore into President Bush and his administration's Iraq war policy. Similarly, people who attend political fundraisers are mostly there on a self-selected basis, because they support the member; as a result, the questions that were asked at the two fundraisers attended as part of this study were largely supportive.

But the tendency of members to seek out affirming information about public opinion can be more subtle. In some cases, it is a matter of the members hearing what they want to hear. Chapter Three talked about members listening to what people do *not* say – the dogs that do not bark – and the Republican House member who gave his Veterans Advisory Committee a chance to object to President Bush's "surge" policy in Iraq, but heard no objections back from them. When later asked what he made of that silence, the member responded that he interpreted it as an affirmation of his own position: "I think they're just taking a wait and see attitude, just like we all are."

Beyond interpreting the public's silence as affirmation of one's own position, members of Congress actively filter the information they see and hear. They often seize on the signs of public opinion that bolster their own position, while ignoring other signals that would seem to undermine their existing view. For example, one member in this study repeatedly said that one sign of shifting opinion against the Iraq war was the number of people who were talking to him about the hardships imposed on families of constituents in the National Guard and Reserve. At the end of one campaign event, held at a church in the district, the minister who had given the concluding benediction came over to the member and noted he was getting out of the military after 20 years in the Guard: "After 20 years, it was time to come in out of the rain." He worried that if he stayed in the Guard, he would be sent back to Iraq. "I had to get out so I could be sure I'd have a chance to spend some of these dollars." After the minister walked away, the member turned and said: "You see? That's what I was talking about."

Yet the next day, this same member came across a piece of information that pointed in a different direction. He was just about to walk into a rural home for a small campaign event, when a young woman came walking up the street. The member's local campaign coordinator called out to her, waved her over, and pointing to the congressman, said to her: "Hey, do you know who this is? It's your congressman!" The young woman, not missing a beat, walked straight up to the congressman and said: "Well, do you know who *I* am?" Impressed by her gumption, the Congressman grinned at her and said: "Make me know you." As she shook his hand and told him her name, she informed him that she was also a member of the local Guard, assigned to a transportation unit. He said, "That's one of the functions most likely to be deployed" – meaning, to Iraq. She responded: "That's OK. I wouldn't mind being deployed. It's money. I'll come back richer." Then, looking up at the sky, she added: "And I'd bring the guy up there with me, so I'd be OK." Despite the memorable exchange, the member never mentioned it again during this trip, suggesting that it had not made as much of an impression as the minister-Guard-member whose complaint had bolstered the member's own preconceptions of public opinion.

This challenge of "make me know you" is therefore very real and often quite difficult. That is, members of the public with views that diverge from the member's own views almost do have to *make* the member know them. Unless the person fits one of the groups singled out in Chapter Five – a Squeaky Wheel, Collector, Advisor, Random, or Bellweather – the member may find a way to shrug off the conflicting information

the person provides as an aberration, as this member seemed to do with the young woman from the local National Guard.

Yet members do not only look for and listen to information that confirms their existing sense of public opinion. As the observations in the preceding chapters about the war in Iraq and other issues demonstrate, a shifting public mood eventually makes itself felt on members of Congress. They pick up signs of change – perhaps not all of them, and not all at once, but some members, in different ways, over time. The process of opinion change reflects the fact that, along with a search for confirming information, at least some members also devote some of their information collection efforts to seeking out opinion that could challenge or test their existing impressions of public opinion. For example, one member said he often used his hunting trips to get to know people from outside his usual political circles, including people who might have divergent views from his own. The chief of staff for a Republican member in a competitive district said that the member had met with the parents of service personnel from the district, even though he knew their opinions about the Iraq war might be critical.

One of the most interesting stories about such "testing" strategies came from a Democratic member who opposed the Iraq war, but had gone on a congressional delegation to Iraq to test his own views on the war. He stressed that his goal was to "look with his eyes and listen with his ears," and stressed the importance of testing one's own assumptions with first-hand observation. As he went to depart on the trip, he

was struck that a group of Republican members who would be going on the same trip, including one conservative Republican from his own state, were standing outside the bus that would take them to the airport, singing, "Onward Christian Soldiers." This member said that the Republican from his own state seemed to carry this tone of righteous certainty along with him on the trip, repeatedly explaining out how well things were going, rather than really looking for new information about conditions on the ground. This Republican member returned from the trip with his views on the war essentially unchanged. The Democratic member contrasted that story with the experience of another Republican member from their state who traveled to Iraq a bit later. This second Republican had supported the war as well, but approached the trip with a much more inquisitive attitude. He returned highly troubled about what he had seen in-country, and began to voice a more skeptical tone toward the war.

Similarly, a chief of staff relates the story of his Republican boss, who was the longest serving member among the group in this study, and someone generally seen as an astute and talented politician. He notes that early in 2005, the member started to pick up signals that there was a tide of dissatisfaction with his party:

> After '04…he sensed that it was going to be a bad, bad year. And this was before Schiavo[5] and a few other members sensed it, but very few. I remember talking to … other chiefs of staffs, and none of them saw it. Later on, of course, they all got it, but it was too late. And I think one of the reasons [my

[5] The reference is to the controversial case of Terri Schiavo, a Florida woman with massive brain damage who became the focal point of a "right to die" case that involved the Florida state legislature, various courts, and ultimately the U.S. Congress.

> boss] detected it earlier is that he was spending a lot more time listening to the non-traditional Republican line and just talking with folks back home. And he could tell that those folks were getting mad about Bush, about corruption, about various things that were just not believable. He'd go to these people he'd known for 20 years and they'd say, you know, I'm really pissed off. He'd say, okay, why? And it was never personal to him, but it was like, 'I'm mad at Congress, I'm mad at the arrogance, I'm mad at Bush; I don't think he knows what he is doing in the war.' And that didn't really reflect itself in '04, but it certainly reflected itself in '06.… I think [my boss] was, I don't know if the word is fortunate, but smart enough to be able to sense just by the contacts with the folks back home that – they weren't holding protests on the streets – it was just individual conversations. There was a sense that there was an anger and a distrust with Republicans and that type of thing.

The members in this study, and other congressional colleagues they talked about, seemed to strike very different balances between the impulse to find information that would affirm their impressions of public opinion, and their need to be on the lookout for contrary evidence. It would have been conceptually satisfying if these differences had neatly tracked differences in the competitiveness of the districts represented, but the evidence was more mixed. For example, the member from the most competitive district in the study did show signs of searching for signs of change in opinion; he was the one who twice in a day created opportunities for his veterans advisory committee and his town hall audience to provide signs of unhappiness over his support for

the Iraq war. Yet this member showed fewer signs than many of the others in the study of being an aggressive "hunter-gatherer" for subtle clues about public opinion on national security. He appeared to have a relatively limited strategy for looking to Advisers, Collectors, Bellweathers, or others who could tip him off to early signs of a changing public mood.

The members from safer seats provided a mixed picture as well. Some seemed relatively content to base their assessment of opinion on largely supportive voices and evidence. It was a safe-seat member who challenged the young guard member to "make me know you," but then appeared not to revise his existing impressions about Iraq much when she showed enthusiasm for deploying there. Yet it appeared that many of those with relatively safe seats had created their strong political positions in part by being unusually creative at searching out information that challenged their existing impressions, and by being unusually quick to update their impressions when they found such contrary data. For example, it was a very long-serving member from a generally safe seat whose chief of staff was just quoted, describing his boss's early sense of shifting opinion after the 2004 elections. Similarly, one of the members who showed the most varied and creative styles of searching for clues about public opinion – the member who stressed the importance of keeping one's eyes and ears open – had served several terms and never won by less than a dozen points.

Of course, virtually no member of Congress believes that they represent a safe seat, and even the members with the safest seats are often driven by memories of some

long-past cliffhanger race that nearly ended their political career. Yet it does not appear possible, at least from this very limited sample, to draw a simple, linear conclusion that members with safer seats uniformly are less creative or energetic in looking for conflicting as well as affirming information about public opinion on national security issues.

Nor was the evidence clear that this kind of self-questioning curiosity about public opinion uniformly made the difference between winning and losing for these politicians. If members who only seek "affirming" information are more likely to miss shifts in public opinion and therefore lose their seats, then we could argue that the electoral process behaves in an almost Darwinian fashion, selecting for members who spend more time "testing" their perceptions. The resulting change in the membership of Congress would then help to explain how attitudes change within Congress a whole. Yet the evidence here was ambiguous. Take, for example, the two Republicans described above who both went on congressional delegations to Iraq, but came back with different impressions: as it happened, both lost their races in 2006. It would require a different kind of study to determine how different listening styles – the degree of mixing "affirming" and "testing" strategies – affected electoral outcomes. At a minimum, such a study would need to interview both candidates who won their races and those who lost; this study, by contrast, only interviewed winners. Even so, a willingness to seek out contrary information about public opinion did seem to be a mark of the more politically adept members in the study, and it does stand out as a trait that may be particularly important to Congress's role as an aggregator and

mirror of public opinion on national security. We return to this point in the final chapter.

Measuring the Individualized Nature of Opinion Assessment: A Test in the Senate

The preceding sections of this chapter argue that while the size and nature of a district (or state) can shape the way a member assesses public opinion on national security, it matters a great deal who the member is. Their individual characteristics – their life experiences, interests, committee assignments, tenure, and methods of balancing the search for affirming or testing information – will tend to produce highly individualized patterns of assessing public opinion on these issues, even apart from what the nature of the district is. This is an important point in terms of the theory of representation. It suggests that the identity and judgment of the representative matter. Their personal qualities shape how they listen to, and therefore represent, the views of the people who live in that place.

If this thesis is true, then we would expect that two representatives who represent the same people at the same point in time might reveal notably different methods of assessing public opinion on national security issues. Do they?

The current study provided a partial test. It examined the ways in which two senators from the same state and the same party went about the task of assessing public opinion on national security. It found that while the two turned to some similar sources of

information, as one might expect, there also appeared to be some striking divergences in both their sources of information and their search methods.

To assess this question thoroughly, it would be useful to look at all the inputs two such senators considered on some set national security issues over a given period. That set of inputs might include all of the mail, calls, meetings, briefings, travel, and media that each of them conducted or observed, and other inputs as well. It was not possible in this case to obtain or review such a broad set of inputs, although a future study might profitably undertake that kind of examination.

This study was able, however, to look at one set of inputs – campaign contributions. As noted in Chapter Three, campaign contributions can be an important source of information for members of Congress about the public's national security views. In addition, we can think of their list of contributors as one of their networks of politically-relevant contacts. If there is significant overlap between two senators' lists of contributors, that might be an indication that their broader networks of information providers substantially overlap as well, and that two members will tend to assess public opinion in largely similar ways.

To investigate this question, the current study examined four years of data from the Federal Election Commission about all the money received by the two senators in this study from individual contributors. (More precisely: the data reveal all contributors who gave over $200 to a candidate; contributions below that threshold are not re-

quired to be reported to the FEC.) The four-year period examined included an election cycle for each of the two senators.

As Table One shows, the degree of overlap between the two senators' contributors was surprisingly low. Only about 15 percent of the individuals who contributed to either of the two senators' campaigns contributed to both of them. Even when we restrict the analysis to in-state contributors, the figure only moves up to about 17 percent. At least with regard to their contributors, the two senators' networks were more divergent than shared.

Table One: Degree of Overlap in Contributors to Two Same-State Senators

Universe of contributors:	% of contributors who gave only to Senator A	% of contributors who gave only to Senator B	% of contributors who gave to both senators
All contributors	54.7%	29.9%	**15.4%**
Only contributors who list in-state addresses	51.9%	30.9%	**17.2%**
Only contributors who indicate they work for one of the state's two biggest companies	44.5%	32.7%	**22.8%**

Source: Federal Election Commission campaign contribution reports.[6]

[6] The data are based on Federal Election Commission reports of individual contributors who contributed more than $200 to either of the state's two senators in an election cycle, covering the years 2002–2006. Contributions from non-individuals, such as native American tribes, were removed from the list. The percentages are based on the number of different individual *contributors,* not the number of *contributions.* The lists were "cleaned" to remove duplicate entries for what were likely to be the same individual For example, if the lists included a "John Smith" at a certain address and also a "Mr. John Smith" at the same address, these were assumed to be the same individual. Cleaning the lists in this way significantly raised the percentages listed, and thus provided a more aggressive test of the conclusion that emerges from these data. That is, the degree of overlap between the two senators' contributors remains low *even after* taking steps to ensure that the total number of contributors was not artificially inflated due to this kind of duplication. The risk in cleaning the data in this way is that it may have wrongly removed real individual contributors from the pool. For example, "John Smith" and "Mr. John Smith" might really be different people even though they live at the same address; the former might be

One might expect that there would be more overlap if one restricts the analysis to just a couple of large businesses – say the two largest companies in the state. In that case, one might think that the two senators from the same state and the same party might cultivate a very similar list of supporters and contributors. Yet even when we restrict the analysis to the state's two largest private employers, the incidence of shared contributors increases to only about 23 percent – still less than a quarter of the total pool of the two senators' contributors.

There are many limitations to this analysis. It only looks at campaign contributors, who are at best a very loose proxy for the kind of information networks that members rely on to assess public opinion on national security. As noted, contributions of less than $200 are exempt from disclosure, and so were not captured in this analysis. Moreover, this analysis was only able to check the degree of contributor overlap for the senators from one state; their case may be an aberration. All these limitations underscore the need to view the findings here as more suggestive than definitive, and to conduct similar analyses – such as of *all* the pairs of same-state, same-party senators.

Moreover, it would be a mistake to conclude from this data that these two senators went about the task of assessing public opinion on national security issues in completely different ways. The study's interviews suggested that, to the contrary, they

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the latter's son, for example. To the extent the cleaning process incorrectly removed real contributors from the pool, the conclusions reported here would be even *stronger*; that is, the degree of overlap between the two senators' pools of contributors would be even lower (because the denominator, the total number of individual contributors, would be higher).

shared some common approaches to assessing public opinion on these issues. Coming from a state heavily linked to foreign commerce, they both reported listening a great deal to the state's business leaders about trade issues, and – not surprisingly – both stressed the state's strong support for generally open trade policies. Coming from the same party, both stressed to some degree the influence of the partisan activists as an important source of insight into public opinion. Both senators were focused on their state's ethnic diversity as an indication of its ties to many countries and its generally internationalist outlook. Both senators placed great stock in the views of their own family members as a way of gauging the views of their state's broader public. And both senators (or their staffs) noted that each looks to the other as a key indicator of public opinion on these and other issues.

Yet the study's interviews provided a good deal of support for the picture painted by the FEC data, and suggested there were real and systematic differences in how these two senators went about assessing public opinion on national security issues. As noted, one senator looked to veterans and their war injuries as a way of anticipating increasing opposition to the war; the other senator also looked to veterans, but more as a conservative voting block in swing areas of the state that had major military facilities. One senator had spent years in the business community, and his chief of staff put more emphasis on the influence of business voices than did the other senator or his chief of staff. One senator, who had served as a state legislator, also saw state legislative districts as a key telltale of how opinion on national security issues such as the Iraq war might be shifting. The other senator, who had a background in education

issues, placed particular emphasis on the views of high school students. In these and others ways, the two senators appeared to turn to distinctly different sources of information about public opinion on national security issues.

The two senators also took actions that served to channel the input of the state's residents on national security in different ways. For example, Chapter Three noted that many members require people submitting emails to their offices to choose from a list of topics to indicate the subject matter of their email. For one of the two senators studied, the list of potential topics included "human rights"; for the other senator, "human rights" was not on the list of available categories. Therefore, one of the senators was arguably more likely to hear from staff that their office was getting a certain amount of mail on human rights, whereas it was possible that human rights might not show up as often as a category of incoming mail for the other senator. Similarly, one senator's topic list included "Iraq" as a separate category, while the other senator's list did not.

Indeed, the war in Iraq provided a broader example of how such differences came into play. The two senators were on opposite sides of the issue when it came to a vote on the Senate floor in 2002. It was one of the most significant and visible policy differences between the two. It would go much too far to say that the two came down on opposite sides of the Iraq vote because they came to opposite conclusions about what opinion in the state was at the time. To the contrary, both senators or their staffs stressed that, on that vote, they had done what they thought was best for the country's

security, apart from what they sensed opinion was at the time. Yet they did appear to be listening to somewhat different voices. One was more focused on the voices of the young people whose lives might be on the line in the conflict; the other appeared to have been more focused on the voices of the state's military leaders and veterans, as well as policy experts. While one must view recollections four years after the fact with some caution, these differences appeared real and significant.

An even more subtle difference appeared in how they dealt with one source of information about Iraq and other national security issues – the state's veterans. The start of Chapter Three told the story of the visit by one of the senators to the veterans' hall in Fairview. But it turns out both senators had been to that same hall in recent years, and both had met Bill Barnstad, the Iraq vet who wore a purple heart on his lapel. The senator in the story in Chapter Three was hearing Barnstad and other vets talk about post-traumatic stress disorder. The other senator had been to the same hall the previous year to award Barnstad his purple heart. For the first senator, who had voted against the war in 2002, Barnstad was a sign of the conflict's human toll, and part of the evidence that opinion would likely keep turning against the war. For the second senator, Barnstad partly represented a way to maintain contact with the veterans and military community which he and his staff viewed as an important source of substantive and political advice.

The two senators' different meetings in the Fairview veterans hall had also helped them address different political challenges. For the senator who had voted against the

war, this was a way to show concern for veterans, despite an anti-war voting record that was more liberal than many in the veterans' community. For the senator who had voted for the war, traveling to Fairview to award Barnstad his purple heart was a way to push back against a public image of being a bit cool; as his chief of staff said of this event: "[the Senator] is a very real human being. He just has problems letting himself be seen that way or being put in positions where that comes out. So part of our job was to make sure that we were putting him in those positions where that would naturally happen."

* * *

The picture of how members of Congress assess public opinion on national security is thus both more complex and more individualized than many previous studies have suggested. The earlier chapters suggest that members act as hunter-gatherers for clues about public opinion on these issues, rather than just relying on the intentional and issue-linear communications constituents send their way. They anticipate potential opinion in addition to gauging current opinion, and the ways they assess future opinion in some ways reflect the unique characteristics of national security issues and the interagency processes by which they are decided. Rather than giving the opinions of all members of the public equal weight, as public opinion polls do, members of Congress tend to view opinion on these issues in "lumpy" terms. The current chapter finds that all of this – the styles of hunting out information, anticipating opinion, weighting different people's views – gets played out in highly individualized ways that reflect each member's own personality, background, district, and styles of balancing "affirming" and "testing" types of information searches. The final chapter

looks at these findings to explore their implications for scholars, journalists, public opinion researchers, national security policy makers, and members of Congress themselves as they consider the relationship between the public's views and national security policy.

Chapter Seven: Implications

The preceding chapters make the case that members of Congress tend to be creative hunter-gatherers of information about the public's views on national security issues. They do not wait for messages about these issues to arrive; rather they go out and actively seek clues about the public mood, and rely on a richer array of sources of information than many previous studies have assumed. This study suggests that members of Congress take note not only of messages that the public intentionally sends to them about these issues, but also information that the public does not send knowingly, at least not about the issue at hand – things like the number of injured soldiers returning home from a war, or the kinds of local ethnic restaurants opening in local communities. In the eyes of members of Congress, public opinion embraces not only how people view these issues today, but also how their views are likely to evolve in the coming months. Moreover, members' understanding of public opinion is not only or even primarily quantitative; it is not defined by the bulk percentage of people who favor or oppose a policy, but rather by a variably weighted, "lumpy" calculus that recognizes which people among their public talk to each other, whose voices are genuinely random, and which people are bellweathers of changes in the public climate.

These findings have important implications. They make it hard to support the view, expressed in some scholarly and popular writing that Congress as a whole is often out of touch with the American people and their opinions on national security. The find-

ings raise even more serious challenges to current notions of what public opinion is, and how we should assess it. The study ultimately finds that members of Congress provide an important set of insights into a more complete picture of public opinion on national security than public opinion polls alone can provide. But that is not to say that their reading of public opinion is always well-informed or accurate; and so the study also leads to some insights about how Congress might become an even better gauge of public opinion on national security issues. This chapter addresses each of these implications in turn.

Are Members of Congress Out of Touch with Public Opinion on National Security?

The most immediate implication of this study's findings is to call into question the assertion that members of Congress are out of touch with public opinion on national security. To the contrary, they emerge instead as having richly textured impressions of what their publics believe about these issues, based on their hunting and gathering of myriad clues. There should be some comfort in this for all of us who are citizens and taxpayers, for this study suggests that the members we elect generally appear to put a good deal of creative effort into listening to our opinions and trying to gauge our likely reactions to existing and potential policies toward the broader world.

The idea that Congress is out of touch with the public – particularly on national security – is a recurring refrain in both the scholarly and popular literature.[1] To a large

[1] A Google search for the words "Congress out of touch" produces over three million matches; narrowing the search by adding the words *national security* to the instructions reduces the number—but the remaining entries still total over one million.

extent, it tends to emerge as the battle cry of those at any point in time whose preferred national security strategy is running into political opposition, particularly on Capitol Hill. In 1942, George Gallup, seeking to make the case for the American war effort, argued that Congress had lagged behind the wisdom of the public in recognizing the need for war preparations: "The people were in favor of military conscription before their political leaders or Congressional representatives had advocated the plan."[2] During the late 1960s, Richard Nixon implied that congressional antipathy toward the war reflected only a "vocal minority" and was out of step with "the silent majority."

Similarly, in the mid-1990s, some observers concluded the Republican-led Congress was misreading or ignoring public opinion when it pursued restrictions on U.S. foreign aid and participation in multilateral peacekeeping operations. Kull and Destler, for example, interviewed various experts and participants in the national security policy making process and concluded: "members of the policy-making community do little to seek out information about public attitudes on foreign policy. This was true in virtually every category of interviewees, though it was most marked among those in Congress and the media."[3] They attributed this congressional misreading of the public on national security issues to the small role these issues played in elections during the 1990s; the ineffectiveness of Democrats in making the case for cooperative engagement abroad; and the self-interest of members of Congress in preserving their

[2] George Gallup, "Democracy—And the Common Man: The Quality of Common Sense" (address on July 24, 1942). *Vital Speeches of the Day* 8, no. 22 (September 1, 1942), 688.
[3] Kull and Destler, *Misreading the Public,* 208.

control over American forces (as opposed to putting them under UN command) and budgetary resources (wanting to spend them at home rather than abroad).

More recently, there have been arguments that Congress has been misreading the public when it comes to the war in Iraq. During the run-up to the 2006 elections, leading Democrats and like-minded bloggers and other commentators charged that the Republican majority in Congress was out of touch with the public's opposition to the Bush administration's Iraq policies. For example, in the Democratic party's last weekly radio address prior to those elections, Pennsylvania congressional candidate Lois Murphy accused the congressional Republicans of being "out-of-touch and out-of-synch" with the American public on Iraq and other issues.[4]

This argument of congressional ignorance or misreading of public opinion is not limited to national security issues. For example, Cook, Barabas, and Page argued that members of Congress rarely invoked public opinion when making their arguments about Social Security reform, and that when they did cite public opinion, their references were often either incorrect or misleading.[5] Similarly, Paden and Page in 2003 found, in the context of the 1995 welfare reform debate, that "political elites [including members of Congress] just do not seem to have paid much attention to public opinion in their utterances." They suggested that this might be "discouraging to many proponents of democratic theory who believe that elected representatives should pay

[4] Democratic National Committee, "Lois Murphy Delivers Democratic Radio Address," DNC Services Corp., http://www.democrats.org/a/2006/11/lois_murphy_del.php (accessed April 28, 2007).
[5] Fay Lomax Cook, Jason Barabas, and Benjamin I. Page, "Invoking Public Opinion: Policy Elites and Social Security," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 66, no. 2 (2002): 235–64.

close attention to the best available evidence about what policies the citizens want them to enact."[6]

Yet the current study suggests members of Congress are anything but inattentive to the public's views, even on the national security issues that may be of relatively low salience. Members might pay little attention to public opinion polls, and they might discount the attitudes of the politically inactive, or of those on the other side of the political divide; but they hardly ignored the task of collecting information about public opinion. Indeed, members in this study provided well-developed impressions of what their publics felt about U.S. relations with China – an issue that had not been very visible in Congress or in the media – and how their publics might react to various developments in that relationship. Members also had highly textured impressions of the public's views about the Dubai Ports World sale, even before any polling was published on the topic, and even though the issue was utterly new to the public in early February 2006. And the members interviewed had highly informed views about how public opinion about the Iraq war was likely changing during 2005-2007, with subtle, district-specific insights that went far beyond the aggregate measures provided in national or state-level opinion polls.

How can we square these divergent views? One answer lies in the insights from Chapter Four, about the anticipatory way in which members of Congress read public opinion on national security. Consider one of the issues that Kull and Destler analyze: congressional resistance to U.S. support for multilateral peacekeeping operation

[6] Catherine Paden and Benjamin I. Page, "Congress Invokes Public Opinion," 677.

in the mid-1990s. Kull and Destler found that four fifths of all the members of Congress they interviewed, and two thirds of all the congressional staff, felt that "Americans have negative attitudes about UN peacekeeping"; yet they found that 84 percent of the public in 1994, and 67 percent of the public in 1995, favored the idea of UN peacekeeping. [7]

One reason for this dramatic disparity may have been the anticipatory way in which members of Congress were likely evaluating public opinion at the time. Chapter Four suggested that members of Congress, in assessing how the public will feel in the future, pay particular attention to whether a national security operation will be effective. It speculated that in the case of national security – a public good on which there tend to be fewer financial winners and losers within the electorate, compared to domestic initiatives – a dominant consideration for evaluating "potential opinion" will be whether a policy is likely to work, more than looking at who stands to gain or lose financially, which arguably is a more important factor in determining potential opinion on domestic issues.

In the mid-1990s, members of Congress had real reasons to question whether multilateral peacekeeping operations were likely to be effective. The American-led operation in Somalia was fatally marred by the October 3, 1993 firefight in Mogadishu that left 18 American troops dead and 84 wounded. Later that same month, a UN peacekeeping deployment to Haiti was aborted when gangs appeared at the docks in Port au Prince where the *USS Harlan County* was planning to land a group of American and

[7] Kull and Destler, *Misreading the Public*, 82.

Canadian forces. UN peacekeeping forces in the early 1990s failed to stem ethnic cleansing instigated by Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic and other former Yugoslav leaders, and in July 1995, Dutch peacekeepers, operating under UN flag, failed to prevent a massacre by Bosnian Serb forces of some 8,000 Bosnian civilians, including women and children, in the UN-declared "safe area" of Srebrenica, Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Congress's sense that UN peacekeeping tended to be ineffective was not simply a product of problems in specific missions. It was also rooted in a sense that multilateral peacekeeping operations had *systemic* weaknesses that tended to undermine effectiveness. For example, a bipartisan Senate analysis concluded that one reason for the 1993 Somalia debacle was that the UN was embracing contradictory missions: "U.S. commanders were coping with a dual policy which required that U.S. forces be kept small while at the same time conducting military operations to ensure that the U.N. would not appear to fail…. The United Nations was not and is not now the best organization to direct the conduct of large-scale Chapter VII peace enforcement operations that may involve the substantial risk of combat."[8] This was a broad conclusion, based as it was on only this one operation; but as the same Senate report noted, "UNOSOM II [the peacekeeping phase of the Somalia operation] was the first UN conducted peace enforcement operation, i.e., an operation that is authorized under Chapter VII of the UN Charter to use all necessary means to accomplish its mandate,

[8] U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Armed Services, "Review of the Circumstances Surrounding the Ranger Raid on October 3–4, 1993, in Mogadishu, Somalia" (September 29, 1995), 37, 43.

that was launched with high potential for combat."[9] Similarly, a UN-commissioned study of lessons learned from the Somalia mission concluded that the operation's mandates were frequently "vague" and "contradictory," partly as a result of disagreements among troop-contributing countries, and that the mission suffered from "unity of command problems."[10] Other analyses at the time also cited problems of logistics, procurement, financing, and oversight for such operations.

The analysis in this study suggests that members of Congress would have looked not only at then-current levels of public support for peacekeeping, as measured in opinion polls, but also at anticipated levels of future support, based in part on the likely effectiveness of such operations. In the mid-1990s, members of Congress might well have looked at the effectiveness of peacekeeping operations up to that point and concluded that future support – once these operations ran into trouble – would be low.

Indeed, Kull and Destler revealed some support for that thesis. They found that: "There are indications that support for UN peacekeeping has softened in response to frustration about the performance of UN peacekeeping operations.[11] They noted that in 1995, at the same moment that they found 67 percent support for the idea of UN peacekeeping (down from 84 percent a year earlier), an even higher 75 percent "agreed that 'UN peacekeeping operations are often ineffective and even dangerous

[9] Ibid., 45.
[10] Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (Germany), Life and Peace Institute (Sweden), and Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, in cooperation with the lessons-learned unit of the Department of Peace Keeping Operations (UN), *The Comprehensive Report on Lessons Learned from United Nations Operations in Somalia (UNOSOM)* (New York: United Nations, 1995), 6.
[11] Kull and Destler, *Misreading the Public*, 96.

because they send troops into civil wars without the means to defend themselves or the ability to deter attacks…. UN troops end up being sitting ducks.'"[12]

Based on a review of polling at the time, Kull and Destler concluded that what the public really wanted was not a retreat from UN peacekeeping operations; instead, the public actually wanted these operations to be "more muscular."[13] Yet it is plausible that members of Congress would conclude that the problems that had afflicted UN peacekeeping operations to date – lack of clear mandates, conflict among troop-contributing nations, absence of unity of command – would not be any less problematic with a larger force as opposed to a smaller force, and might well be more problematic.

All this is somewhat speculative. The current study did not probe members' attitudes toward the peacekeeping operations of the 1990s. But the current study does provide an explanatory hypothesis that Kull and Destler did not explore: that members of Congress may have been drawing conclusions about public support based on anticipatory assessments of the likely effectiveness of UN peacekeeping operations, and that they might trust their own evaluations of the effectiveness of these operations more than the prospective evaluations of the public. This kind of anticipatory approach would not be based on ignoring or misreading of the public. Rather, it would be based on a presumption by members of Congress that they had a better sense of how a "more muscular" UN peacekeeping operation would work in the field than did most

[12] Ibid., 96. Ellipsis in the original.
[13] Ibid, *Misreading the Public*, 96.

of the public, and that they were reading the public's likely reactions to the outcomes they anticipated.

The point here is not to wade into the argument about whether UN peacekeeping operations can be made to be more muscular and more effective. The point here is that members of Congress might well have been *accurately* reading the public when they told Kull and Destler that the public did not support UN peacekeeping operations. One reason for the apparent discrepancy with the polling data may have been that members of Congress were evaluating the question in an anticipatory manner, looking at expected public reactions to the likely effectiveness of such operations, while Kull and Destler were looking only at polling about attitudes in the here and now.

The same dynamic that constrained congressional support for the Clinton administration's involvement in UN peacekeeping in the 1990s may have constrained congressional support for the Bush administration's Iraq war effort during 2003-2007. The administration, reportedly following guidance from academic polling expert Peter Feaver, felt it could sustain public support for the war as long as the public felt the war effort was likely to be "successful" – that is, effective. But the current study suggests that many members of Congress were not reading public opinion in the kind of static terms Feaver described. Instead of looking at polling results on whether the war effort was succeeding in the here and now (which were divided during much of this period), members in this study were looking more to indicators such as casualty rates, the incidence of post traumatic stress disorder, and the rising doubts of conser-

vative "Bellweather" voters in rural "coffee clubs" – signs that public assessments of the operation's effectiveness were likely to decline *in the future*.

There is a Burkean elegance to all this. Burke is often misunderstood. He did not suggest that representatives should take little heed of public opinion; rather, in his "Speech to the Electors of Bristol," he said that representatives should give their constituents' views their "unremitted attention" and "high respect," but then ultimately take action based on their own best judgment.[14] An element of a representative's informed judgment, one might argue, involves how events are likely to unfold, which itself will affect the future course of public opinion. Just so, the current study suggests that members of Congress combine the duties of "delegate" and "trustee" in subtle ways. They do not ignore the public's views – just as Burke would have counseled them not to do. But they do factor in their knowledge of the operational details on national security to assess how the public might react in the future, in addition to noting how the public feels today.

Of course, members of Congress can get this wrong. They often do. Some predicted the Iraq war would be a great and quick success – echoing the Bush administration's predictions that the American forces would be gratefully welcomed in as liberators by the Iraqi people. But this is a different kind of "misreading" than the type suggested by Kull and Destler. This model says that members of Congress take note of current public opinion; use expert information to evaluate likely future effectiveness in the field; and then also evaluate how public opinion is likely to evolve in response. To

[14] As reprinted in Pitkin, *Representation*,174–75.

the extent congressional assessments of public opinion diverge from reality in that case, the fault lies less with the Congress for misreading the public, and more for misreading the likely effectiveness of the Iraq war effort and other specific operations.

There is another, more practical implication here, for those who would seek to influence Congress on national security issues. This study suggests: if you want to persuade a member of Congress regarding some national security proposal, put less effort into stressing the current polling, or generating letters and calls; instead, spend more effort making the case for the likely *effectiveness* of the operation or policy, since that will be a major factor in how the member will tend to evaluate future public opinion. When the member of Congress tells you that he or she is only focused on how well the policy will work, not what the public opinion data days, it likely means: "I am highly focused on the likely effectiveness of the operation, in part because I care about positive outcomes, and in part because that will shape future public opinion, which is as important, or more important to me than current opinion."

Toward a More (little "r") Republican Conception of Public Opinion

There is a second problem with many of the arguments that Congress is "misreading" the public on national security issues, and it leads into a much deeper set of questions about the nature of public opinion. This study noted at the outset that one of the assumptions in much of the literature is that the relevant measure of public opinion on national security issues is quantitative – data from public opinion surveys about how the public feels about these issues. Kull and Destler, for example, compare the im-

pressions of policy makers about public opinion to what the authors consider to be the reality of public opinion, "as measured by polls."[15] (Kull and Destler do ask a key question at the outset of their study: whether members of Congress and other policy practitioners "intuitively sense something about the public that has not yet been revealed in the polls?"[16] They conclude the answer is no – but this answer is based on their finding that the intuition of the policy practitioners is not borne out by polling data, even when the polling questions are developed based on the practitioners' hypotheses. Thus, they still assume that polling data provide the ultimate test for hypotheses about public opinion.) Similarly, as noted earlier, a host of studies have examined relationships between congressional voting behavior and public opinion on national security issues by using polling data as the relevant measure of public opinion.

At a minimum, the current study suggests that, as a descriptive matter, this is simply not how members of Congress tend to think of public opinion. As Chapter Five demonstrates, they do not weight each person's opinion equally. Rather, they tend to give added weight to certain types of people whose views serve various key functions in their process of understanding public opinion, such as looking to "Bellweathers" to anticipate changes in the public mood. This logic suggests a member of Congress might be well aware that the equally-weighted views of his or her constituents stack up on one side of a national security issue, while believing that "public opinion," as they understand the term, lands on the other side – because he or she unequally

[15] Kull and Destler, *Misreading the Public*, 153.
[16] Ibid, 25.

weights various people's views in arriving at that aggregate concept. Exactly in this manner, one of the Republican members in this study stated that, "my district goes about two-to-one against the president's policy in Iraq," but still stated that opposition to the war "had not broken into the mainstream yet." This formulation would be puzzling to those who only think of public opinion only in equally weighted terms: how can two thirds of his constituency not be part of "the mainstream"? Yet he went on to describe his district's "mainstream" as being defined by the Bellweathers of his Republican constituency – "Irish and Italian Republicans and Reagan Democrats, [and] Conservative Jews."

But it is not enough to say, descriptively, that members of Congress think of public opinion in non-equally-weighted terms. That finding begs the normative question of whether members of Congress *should* think of public opinion, instead, in equally-weighted terms. And that question, in turn, raises the conceptual challenge of what we mean by public opinion, and why we should care about it. While it is not this study's purpose to settle those sprawling questions, it can hardly avoid them. Ultimately this study's findings suggest the need for some deep changes in the way many people understand the nature of public opinion.

It is widely acknowledged there is no single definition of "public opinion." Price, in a broad examination of the question, concludes that, "any search for a single, clear definition of the concept will … prove fruitless."[17] Childs famously catalogued

[17] Vincent Price, *Public Opinion* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1992), 4.

nearly 50 different ways in which the term has been defined and understood.[18] The *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* finds that the term has "no generally accepted definition." [19] Herbst concludes public opinion is "a contested and malleable concept."[20]

One of the central impediments to arriving at a single definition of public opinion is that the phrase itself is rooted in a contradiction, and that contradiction goes precisely to the issue of aggregation that is part of the challenge for members of Congress. The contradiction is this: "opinion" is individual, while "the public" is plural. To define public opinion, one must specify how to combine individual opinions into a public aggregate – and to specify what purpose we are trying to achieve in doing so.[21]

Different answers to those questions suggest different methodologies. If one wants to know how an electorate is likely to translate their preferences among candidates into ballot choices in an approaching election, then the best methodology is to weight likely voters' opinions equally. The purpose of "public opinion," in this instance, is predictive – to anticipate the election's outcome, and so the best method of aggregating individual opinions is in a manner that mirrors the behavior we are trying to pre-

[18] Harwood L. Childs, *Public Opinion: Nature, Formation, and Role* (Princeton: Van Nostrand, 1965) 14.
[19] W. Phillips Davison, "Public Opinion: Introduction," in David L. Sills, ed., *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (New York: The MacMillan Company and The Free Press, 1968; this fact is noted in Price, *Public Opinion,*, 4.
[20] Herbst, *Reading Public Opinion*, 2.
[21] Price expands on this tension at length, in *Public Opinion.*

dict. Since each voter can only cast one equally-weighted vote, we use a methodology that assigns the same weight to each voter's preferences.[22]

If, however, the focus is on "public opinion on national security," then we are instantly dealing with a broad and divergent set of purposes and behaviors. The term is partly important for the sake of prediction. On a given national security decision, how is Congress likely to vote? What is the President likely to decide? How long will the public likely support a given course of action, particularly in face of new costs and difficulties? The term also partly touches on normative questions of legitimacy: what policy has the broadest support? What policy has the strongest backing from experts and other elites? Alternatively, public opinion on these questions can be thought of as a political instrument that provides a countervailing force to the power of elites, such as military leaders and politicians – a concept that might enable "the people" to push back against decisions taken in the White House, State Department, and Pentagon. Public opinion on national security can also have implications for international relations theory; it may partly define the country's national interest and national will, or its perceptions of other countries' national interests.

Each of these meanings requires different methodologies for assessing public opinion. If the goal is to predict how Congress will act on a national security issue, it is hard to

[22] Of course, even this familiar exercise is not so simple. Any election poll must decide whether to base its estimate on the views of all adults, all registered voters, or all likely voters. Sampling likely voters generally tends to be the better approach, for purposes of prediction, and that omits some eligible voters. These choices are all inherently questions of weighting. Moreover, even as a simple predictive exercise, it is possible to imagine more elaborate weighting schemes that would take into account how different people are likely to influence each other's preferences, particularly if the poll were to be taken well in advance of the voting.

argue that an equally-weighted survey of all adults is the best measure. Indeed, studies like those done by Miller and Stokes, Kull and Destler, and many others repeatedly demonstrate that opinion polls often *do not* predict congressional behavior on national security.

The reality, however, is that many scholarly, media, and lay discussions of public opinion on national security (as well as other policy issues) do not have this broad range of purposes in mind. Rather, they are focused more narrowly on the normative question: what policy has public legitimacy? This is exactly the sense when one political party charges another of being "out of touch" with the public, because it supports policies which polls show a majority of the public opposes. It is also the sense behind Paden and Page's lament, noted earlier, that Congress seems to take little note of polling data, which represents "the best available evidence about what policies the citizens want them to enact."

The heart of the matter, then, is this: is there a normative basis for arguing that equally-weighted surveys are the presumptively correct measure of public opinion on national security, for purposes of evaluating the political legitimacy of a given policy? The question here is not whether national security policies should be guided *only* by public opinion. Even those who criticize Congress for misreading the public on these issues typically are not making that claim, and note that policy makers must balance the demands of public policy with the imperatives of the national interest. Kull and Destler, for example, note that national security officials "have far more in-

formation than can ever be squeezed into a poll question," and so therefore "must come to their own judgment about how to apply those values and priorities [measured in polling data] … while taking into account the welter of information and competing claims they face."[23] At the same time, as noted earlier, even realists and neo-realists acknowledge that public opinion is important for determining a nation's will and therefore its ability to carry out a given policy.

The question, rather, is: putting aside how much weight public opinion should carry relative to matters of national interest and the representative's judgment, which measure of public opinion on national security is most appropriate? Is it the equally weighted measure implicit in public opinion polls, or some other measure or measures?

The current study calls into question the idea that public opinion polls are the proper measure of public opinion on national security, for purposes of evaluating political legitimacy. The presumption toward using polls for this purpose seems to derive from two premises. The first has to do with methodological convenience. Some studies rely on polling data because that is the most abundant, replicable, and quantitative measure of public opinion. A great deal of polling data is available, and researchers can easily manipulate it in useful ways, such as using it for regression analyses with congressional voting behavior. These studies may note that polling data is not the only conceivable measure of public opinion, but then they tend to proceed to rely on it anyway. For example, Clinton's regression analysis of district pref-

[23] Kull and Destler, *Misreading the Public*, 263.

erences and congressional voting behavior notes that: "Survey measures may be imperfect measures of district preferences, but it is unclear that available alternatives are superior."[24] The fact that polling data has often correctly predicted election outcomes often seems to make this measure not only convenient but reliable – even though election polling is directed to the narrow task of prediction, on an activity in which each person's view counts equally.

The other reason that people tend toward polling data as the presumptively correct measure of public opinion is that it reflects a (small "d") democratic notion that each person's opinion *should* be counted, and counted equally. This was the sense with which George Gallup helped launch the polling enterprise in the 1930s. At that time, he argued that public opinion polls would further democratic values by strengthening the voice of average citizens. Animated by the verbal as well as physical attacks that Hitler, Stalin, Mussolini and other dictators had launched on the world's democracies during that era, he sought not only to devise a measure of public opinion, but to move American governance itself closer to something resembling direct democracy. This is why he initially referred to his survey technique as "the sampling referendum." At the same time, he castigated those who seemed to resist direct democracy – including James Madison – as fundamentally mistrusting the common man, and charged that their view "differs only in degree, and not in essence, from the view urged by Mussolini and Hitler that the people are mere 'ballot cattle.'" He claimed that resistance to opinion polling as the right measure of public opinion was "antidemocratic": "If it is argued that legislators understand better than the people what the people want, it is

[24] Clinton, "Representation in Congress," 399.

but a short step to give legislators the power to decree what the people *ought* to want. Few tendencies could be more dangerous."[25]

Yet neither the methodological convenience of public opinion polls nor their resemblance to direct democracy is a persuasive reason to accept them as the singular measure of public opinion. The convenience of polling data is only defensible if such data can be shown to be a good approximation of reality. Yet this study shows that, in fact, at least in the context of national security policy, they are not. Members simply do not weight people's opinions equally, nor do they only look to existing attitudes as the relevant measure of opinion, as do polls. And the small-d democratic values embedded in polling data may represent the normative preferences of some analysts, but they do not reflect the normative preferences or decision making structure of the American Constitution, which is small-r republican. For both predictive and normative purposes, a representative form of government requires a conception of public opinion that incorporates dynamics inherent in the representative process.[26]

These arguments are not new. In 1948, University of Chicago sociologist Herbert Blumer made essentially these same points in his critique of public opinion polling. He argued that public opinion could only be understood in the context of a society's structures for decision making and collective action; that individuals brought unequal

[25] George H. Gallup and Saul F. Rae, *The Pulse of Democracy: The Public Opinion Poll and How it Works*, Westport: Greenwood Press, 1940, 261-262.
[26] The distinction I am drawing here between (small d) democratic and (small r) republican conceptions of public opinion is different than the distinction I stress earlier between anticipatory and here-and-now measures of public opinion. One could, for example, use polling (which tends toward the small-d democratic model) to asses either anticipatory or here-and-now opinion.

influence to bear on a society's decisions and actions as a result of unequal resources, differing connections to groups and institutions, and the channels of decision making that society embraces at any point in time; and that public opinion polls failed to capture any of this. He was especially fierce in rebutting the normative argument that individuals' views in a democratic society ought to be given equal consideration in assessing public opinion: "if one seeks to justify polling as a method of studying public opinion on the ground that the composition of public opinion *ought to be* different than what it is, he is not establishing the validity of the method for the study of the empirical world as it is. Instead, he is hanging on the coat-tails of a dubious proposal for social reform."[27]

But if public opinion polls lack justification as the presumptively singular and correct measure of public opinion, in the context of political legitimacy of national security policies, what other measure or measures *are* correct? Blumer got stuck there. He called this the "interesting and seemingly baffling question of how one should or can sample an object matter which is a complicated system of interacting parts, having differential influence in the total operation." He concluded that perhaps it might be possible to build some kind of organic "model" to capture this, and he speculated on how to go about doing so: "My own hunch is that such a model should be constructed, if it can be at all, by working backwards, instead of by working forward. That is, we ought to begin with those who have to act on public opinion and move

[27] Herbert Blumer, "Public Opinion and Public Opinion Polling, *American Sociological Review* 13 (1948): 548. For similar reasons, Herbst argues: "To offer a definition about public opinion is to offer a fragment of one's own version (or critique) of democratic theory as well"; *Reading Public Opinion*, 62.

backwards along the lines of various expressions of public opinion that come to their attention, tracing these expressions backwards through their own various channels and in doing so, noting the chief channels, the key points of importance, and the way in which any given expression has come to develop and pick up an organized backing out of what initially must have been a relatively amorphous condition."[28]

In essence, that is just what the current study has done – by "tracing backwards" and examining where members of Congress obtain their impressions of public opinion on national security. Rather than building a model, however, it implicitly argues that members of Congress – their perceptions, and their actions – are themselves a measure of public opinion. To be sure, this is not a measure that submits readily to quantification. Some aspects, such as roll-call votes, may be quantifiable; but other aspects, such as which sources of information members rely on to assess public opinion, can only be captured in qualitative terms. But if the goal is to describe public opinion in a complete and accurate way, then an effort should be made to factor in such measures, even if they do not submit as readily to regression analyses and other quantitative techniques as polling data.

All this is not to say that the perceptions of members of Congress necessarily constitute a *better* measure of opinion than those produced by polls. They do not. This study shows that members' perceptions of national security have real, systematic limitations. They often under-recognize the opinions of the politically inactive, of

[28] Blumer, "Public Opinion and Public Opinion Polling," 549.

opposing partisans, and even of organized activists. Members often pay disproportionate attention to opinions that bolster their own substantive predispositions.

Nor is the conclusion here that polling data should be discarded in assessing public opinion on national security and other issues. Indeed, equally weighted polls undoubtedly offer a good rough approximation of many aspects of public opinion in many settings, even outside of electoral predictions.[29]

The argument is, rather, that there is no reason to believe polls capture the totality of what we should think of as public opinion in a wide array of contexts. Herbst talks about the need for "a triangulation of methods" for measuring public opinion, and the need for broader concept of what public opinion means.[30] That is the conclusion here as well. If we are dealing with a phenomenon that cannot be reduced to one metric, then we should use multiple forms of assessment and multiple metrics; to do otherwise is to throw out useful data.

The present study provides strong evidence for the need to move from a small-d democratic model of public opinion, based overwhelmingly on equally-weighted public

[29] If this were not true, polling firms like the one I work at would likely not be in business for long. Even in the context of issue debates (as opposed to predicting election outcomes), polls may be useful in providing valid ordinal rankings of various public concerns, or for testing the impact of potential arguments. In addition, polls may provide rough guidance to legislative outcomes when an issue has broad public salience, and when the balance of opinion is very lopsided. The point here is that there is no reason to view polling data as *the* correct measure, or to presume that such data are have more legitimacy when they clash with other valid, qualitative measures of public opinion.

[30] To be fair, Herbst actually says mere triangulation is not enough, and argues instead for a "broader and richer conceptualization of public opinion itself." *Reading Public Opinion*, 186. I agree with the point, but feel that even triangulation of diverse sources of quantitative and qualitative measures of public opinion would be a big improvement over relying on polling m measures alone.

opinion polls, to a more small-r republican model of public opinion, which also gives weight to the perceptual maps of the public's attitudes that elected representatives employ. Such a change is particularly important on matters of national security, where the public gives particular deference to its elected representatives. No collector of data is better situated to estimate the degree and subtle meanings of that deference, voter by voter, than the members themselves.

Moreover, there are likely to be specific kinds of national security issues on which public opinion, as measured in polls, is likely to fall particularly short in capturing the full sense of what we should think of as public opinion. These likely include: issues on which opinion is thinly held, with only small pockets of informed and concerned observers; issues, such as the Dubai Ports World sale, that are suddenly thrust on the public; and issues that turn on questions of military effectiveness, where members of Congress may have a deeper base of knowledge.[31]

Moreover, there is an important theoretical justification for thinking of public opinion on national security in republican terms. It is usually overlooked that Kant, in his famous design for "Perpetual Peace," suggested that countries might avoid war, not if they were all democracies, as his argument is typically recalled, but rather if they were all *republics*. Indeed, he went out of his way to note that direct democracies would *not* provide a restraint on war-making, since such polities do not separate the

[31] Although, as the wars in Vietnam and Iraq demonstrate, the access of members of Congress to expert briefings, military plans, and classified information does not necessarily ensure they will make accurate assessments of effectiveness and outcomes in the field. They may instead become captured by the biases of an administration's national security bureaucracies and briefers.

legislative and executive functions. If classical idealism is properly understood as involving the check that public opinion places on national security policy, through the mediating function of the people's representatives, then there is ample reason to measure that opinion as it is understood and perceived by those representatives.

What would this mean in practice? At a minimum, it would mean that when we find qualitative evidence that the views of elected representatives differ from those measured in opinion polls, we should view these as data about the same phenomenon; rather than trying to figure out which one is "correct," it may be more useful to consider them in the aggregate in order to arrive at a complete picture. As we do so, we need to take into account the different aspects of public opinion that each data source measures. The polls will tell us what equally weighted "democratic" opinion looks like in the here and now. Statements and votes by members of Congress can offer a window into what differentially weighted, "republican" opinion looks like, and how it might well evolve in the future.

The finding also means that pollsters, journalists, scholars, and policy practitioners might do well to pursue a more complete picture of public opinion as they conduct their analyses. Interestingly, journalists in many cases naturally seem to do this. The media give some attention to polling results, but they often supplement them with stories about congressional votes and statements as indications of prevailing opinion. The current study suggests that is more that color commentary. It is methodologically sound. For the same reasons, professional pollsters might do well to regularly sup-

plement their polling studies with qualitative interviews with members of Congress, to provide a more multi-faceted picture of how public opinion may be developing. Debates over public issues, unlike elections, are not horse races; it is not enough to provide quantitative measures of which side of an issue is gaining or fading. Rather, a truly complete picture of public opinion would include qualitative measures of how the public's richly textured conversation is being perceived by those the public has elected to represent that conversation.

It is possible to imagine various challenges to this finding. First, one might argue that supplementing polling results with a few congressional quotations and roll call votes lacks methodological rigor. For purposes of measuring public opinion in this new, broad sense, who is to decide which roll call votes matter most? Who is to decide which members should be interviewed? These are legitimate questions, but they hardly justify throwing out the wealth of useful qualitative insights that Congress offers. The correct answer is to examine critically the choice of votes and members that an analyst or journalist has made, and to insist that, to the extent possible, those choices represent defensible criteria.

This study points to one criterion, in particular, that such observers might want to adopt: do not only look at the views of relevant committee chairmen; also pay particular attention the views of newly-elected members of Congress. While they may not wield the same power of these issues, this study (and others, such as Fenno's)

suggests that the newcomers often spend more time and effort listening to the views of their publics than the long-timers.[32]

Second, one might argue that there is a circular logic in assuming that members of Congress are themselves measures of public opinion, just because they have been elected. Surely some members do a better job than others at canvassing opinion back home and looking for clues about public attitudes; surely some are surely more resourceful hunter-gatherers than others. This is also a reasonable point. But at any moment in time, the 535 members of the United States Congress are the legislative opinion aggregators we have elected. Their perceptual maps have a presumptive political legitimacy that is surely as great, if not greater, than the legitimacy we might accord to an unelected pollster's equally-weighted measure of the public's attitudes. Moreover, as Blumer noted, these are the people "who must act on public opinion," and so there is particular value in looking at how they understand it. In the same way, we should be interested in how other players in the national security policy making process view public opinion – senior officials in the executive branch and the military, for example – and a more complete, "triangulated," small-r republican picture of public opinion would factor in qualitative assessments of their perceptions as well.

[32] To give the recommendation an even more practical edge: When I served as Senior Director for Legislative Affairs in the National Security Council, I would usually round up the chairs and ranking minority members of a relevant committee when we wanted to take a sounding of congressional opinion; the findings from this study would lead me to counsel people in such positions to round out such a gathering of members with some freshmen as well.

Encouraging Members to Strike a Better Balance Between Affirming and Testing

The preceding sections of this chapter essentially provide advice to scholars, pollsters, journalists, and executive branch officials, as they seek to assess the real nature of public opinion on national security issues. This final section suggests some implications for Congress itself.

The principal implication has to do with the way members of Congress balance the imperatives of looking for clues about public opinion that *affirm* their existing perceptions, and seeking out clues that *test* those perceptions. The use of the word "imperatives" is intentional, and it reflects my understanding of members' own motivations. On one hand, public office – and particularly high public office, such as being a member of Congress – requires a good deal self-confidence. Members of Congress are wonderfully varied, but few of them seem to be big self-doubters. It may well be that the psychological requirements of the job – taking high-stakes positions, justifying them before the public, asking people for their votes and financial contributions – lead members to need a good deal of affirmation that the perceptions and methods of gathering information that helped get them to their current position have some validity. That would explain why the study by Bauer, Pool, and Dexter, and other studies, including this one, find that members tend to help generate the public opinion they want to hear.

At the same time, virtually all members know they must test their perceptions of prevailing attitudes in order to guard against the possibility that public opinion is chang-

ing in ways that put them at political risk. This, after all, is why members typically go back home more frequently and commission more district-level polls just prior to an election.

While there is reason to accord a degree of presumptive legitimacy to the perceptions of public opinion that all members of Congress have – since the voters elected those members and their perceptual maps to office – it is not true that all of them are equally talented at reading public opinion. And one of the key factors that seemed to differentiate the most and least talented readers of the public in this study was the degree to which they actively sought out information that tested their existing perceptions of public opinion.

Chapters Five and Six suggested the variety of ways that some of the members in this study went about testing their own perceptions. They sought out Randoms who could give them fresh information, apart from the more familiar views of long-time Advisers. They kept a careful watch on the Bellweathers who might signal a change in the public mood. They paid attention to information that they saw as reflecting gradual shifts in opinion, such as changes in party registration, or sudden shifts, such as when the phones "lit up" after the news of the Dubai Ports World sale went public. Some intentionally sought time with figures who they knew held outlooks at variance with their own – like the member who sometimes invited new political acquaintances, who he knew differed with him on some points, to join him on hunting and fishing trips.

But there were also instances in which members appeared to ignore or discount potentially useful information when it differed with their existing sense of public opinion. There was the member who urged the young National Guardswoman to "make me know you," but then seemed to discard her evident interest in deploying to Iraq. There was the story of the member (related by a House colleague) who traveled on a delegation to Iraq, but seemed more interested in convincing himself that everything there was going well than in gaining a fresh assessment of the facts on the ground. And while every member in this study showed some signs of testing their perceptions of public opinion, three of the members and their staffs seemed notably incurious, and seemed to put less effort into finding evidence that might challenge their impressions.

It seems self-evident that the public has an interest in having members of Congress who are more rather than less active and talented in testing their sense of public opinion and seeking out signs that attitudes might be changing. This was certainly the Founders' design in making House members run for office every two years. As noted earlier, this is just what Madison, in Federalist 57, argued: "the House of Representatives is constituted to support in the members an habitual recollection to their dependence on the people. Before the sentiments imposed on their minds by the mode of their elevation can be effaced by the exercise of their power, they will be compelled to anticipate the moment when their power is to cease, when the exercise of it is to be reviewed, and when they must descend to the local level from which they were raised; there forever to remain unless a faithful discharge of their trust shall have es-

tablished their title to the renewal of it."[33] When President Johnson proposed abolishing mid-term elections in 1966, one member of the House argued against the idea in terms that validated Madison's scheme: "It is useful to have to run every two years, because this compels me to go home, to do what I do, which is to bend my ear as much as I can and to ring door bells, to find out what people are thinking about Vietnam, about the war against poverty…. I doubt very much that I would be quite as assiduous in going back to make those rounds if I had to run only once every four years."[34]

The constitutional design thus creates an imperative – perhaps more for representatives than senators – to seek out information that tests their perceptions of public opinion on national security and other issues, and not just information that affirms those perceptions. The question is: are there any other steps that might lead members to strike the balance more toward testing and less toward affirmation?

The first inclination is to make the case for more competitive congressional districts, which might then encourage members to seek out more information that is contrary to their understanding of opinion. It is often noted that districts have become less competitive over past decades, and that over 90 percent of incumbent House members running for re-election in recent years have typically been returned to office (although the percentage dipped lower in some years, such as 1994). There have been many

[33] James Madison, "Federalist 57: The Same Subject Continued in Relation to the Supposed Tendency of the Plan of the Convention to Elevate the Few above the Many," *The Federalist Papers* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1987), 344–45

[34] Charles O. Jones, *Every Second Year: Congressional Behavior and the Two-Year Term* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1961), 36.

recent proposals for changing the state-level redistricting process in order to push back against the recent trend of creating safe districts for incumbents of both parties. The current study provides modest support for such steps. Two of the three members who demonstrated the least inclination toward "testing" were both long-term members who represented relatively safe seats. Yet one of the three was fairly new to Congress and represented one of the most competitive seats in the House. Conversely, one of the long-serving members in the study, who represented a relatively safe seat, showed one of the most varied repertoires for continually testing his perceptions of opinion, including refusing to use automatic teller machines, so that he would have to wait in bank lines, where he was likely to engage in more conversations with random members of the public. Creating more competitive districts may thus be part of the answer, but it does not seem to be a sufficient answer. Just as studies have found that the loss of competitive districts only explains a small part of growing polarization in Congress, a move to more competitive districts would likely only go part way in encouraging members to look for signs of public opinion that clash with their own impressions.[35]

An even more powerful factor appears to involve questions of ideology and party discipline. One of the big questions lurking behind this study is: how could so many congressional Republicans apparently have been caught so unaware by the country's shifts in opinion against the war in Iraq, which played such a dominant role in change in Congress's partisan control in 2006? One might respond that they were not caught

[35] See, for example: Thomas Mann, "Polarizing the House of Representatives: How Much Does Gerrymandering Matter?" in Nivola and Brady, *Red and Blue Nation?* 263-283.

unaware – that they recognized the deterioration in public support, but kept supporting the Bush administration's policies out of a belief that those policies represented the best course for America's security interests. This was undoubtedly true for many members, including some in this study. But there are signs that at least some failed to test their perceptions out of a combination of party loyalty to the Republican president and congressional leadership, and an ideological belief in the policy. The story of the House Republican who reportedly went off on a delegation to Iraq singing "Onward Christian Soldiers," and then made little effort to look for signs of trouble on the ground, provides one such case. Similarly, one of the Democratic members in this study speculated that the Republican House leadership's demand for strict party discipline limited the inclination of some members of that caucus to look for problems and new information about public opinion on Iraq and other national security issues. He noted that the Republican rank-and-file in the House "weren't allowed to voice any dissent or show any independence."

Any majority party in either chamber of Congress must find ways to keep its members in line in order to get legislation passed and its agenda accomplished. Yet these findings suggest that lock-step discipline carries a price, in the form of limiting the tendency of the majority party's members to seek information that tests, rather than just affirms, their impressions about public opinion. It may be that the rise of ideological polarization plays an independent role here, beyond the decline in competitive districts, in deterring members from testing their impressions. A wise leadership

team – for either party – will find ways to recognize the consequences of polarization and build in space for dissent and public opinion "testing" by its members.

One way the leadership can do that, within the realm of national security policy, is by encouraging members and staff to take part in more fact-finding trips abroad. The interviews in this study repeatedly revealed the importance of such trips as a source of fresh information, which gave members and staff insights about the likely evolution of public opinion on these issues. The trips themselves are not enough, as demonstrated by the case of the one member who traveled to Iraq but apparently saw and learned little; as a result, the leadership needs to encourage members to take these trips with a genuine sense of curiosity and skepticism.

Members often find it hard to take such trips; they worry the trips will be a political liability with the voters, who may think of these excursions as "junkets." Some trips are just that, after all, especially those that are privately financed – like the infamous golfing trip former Majority Leader Tom DeLay and some of his colleagues took to Scotland. But the ones sanctioned by the leadership and committees tend to be of great value in helping to educate members and give them the basis for anticipating the evolution of public opinion back home. There are a number of ways that the leadership of each party can give members cover for such trips, such as by announcing that members are traveling at their request. And the media could do a much better job focusing on the positive value of responsible congressional delegations, rather than simply drawing attention to trips that are truly scandalous.

Ultimately, one of the things that might contribute to members of Congress drawing a better balance between "affirming" and "testing" is simply the kind of re-conceptualization of public opinion that this study recommends. It was striking, during the interviews, that many members and staff seemed apologetic as they described their methods for assessing public opinion on national security issues. One staffer, for example, demurred that his methods "aren't very scientific." Another said that his impressions could not hold much weight compared to the data that comes out of opinion polls. A third, however, seemed to grasp that the people who work in Congress are themselves an essential metering device for public opinion in ways that do not always reduce to simple percentages; he said: "Everything's not a metric. Everything doesn't need to be quantified. And you're a pollster, so you probably don't like to hear that, but everything isn't quantifiable. Some of this is just gut, and 'I'll know it when I see it,' and [my boss] says that to people, and they get frustrated with him." If scholars, pollsters, and the media were to give due weight to the impressions that Congress has about the public's attitudes, regarding them as an important and legitimate element of a more complete and "republican" picture of public opinion, it might lead members themselves to invest even more thought into how they go about developing and testing their own impressions. That, in turn, might help make Congress an even more responsive barometer of public attitudes toward national security – and other issues – than it already is.

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