POLLING AND DEMOCRACY: REPORT OF THE AAPOR TASK FORCE ON PUBLIC OPINION AND LEADERSHIP

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

AAPOR was created by public research pioneers more than 60 years ago to encourage scientific research relating to American public opinion, under the conviction that the results of these scientific efforts should be available to the public itself and to the society's leaders.

This Task Force report has reviewed the current status of these goals. The report devotes major sections and an Appendix to a review of the philosophical and theoretical literature relating to public opinion and democracy, and to reviews of the empirical research on the relationship between public opinion and policymaking. The report also summarizes evidence relating to what leaders and the public think about this relationship and the role of public opinion polling.

The Task Force recognizes that AAPOR has traditionally focused more on the process or methods of public opinion research than it has on the ways in which the resulting research data are used or should be used. At the same time, AAPOR is in a unique position to shift focus somewhat in the years ahead, and to pay more attention to the potential value of the *use* of public opinion data in decision making and policy making, and to the challenges that stand in the way of such use. This follows from the original purpose of the organization and the goals as stated in its recently enacted Strategic Plan.

AAPOR as an organization may not be in a position to advocate either the degree to which public opinion research should be used by policy makers, or exactly how it should be used. AAPOR can, however, certainly be in a position to advocate that public opinion is potentially an important part of the way in which a democratic society functions, and that public opinion data should be made available in ways that it can be used as appropriate.

This Task Force Report thus has recommended that AAPOR should publicly reinforce its position that the use of information about public opinion by leaders can be constructive to decision-making processes and democracy, and that AAPOR should act to provide resources that are available to help facilitate this process when it is appropriate.

The Task Force recommends that AAPOR carefully consider the role it can play in encouraging better measurement, summarization, and evaluation of public opinion, along with making it available to leaders and others who make policy decisions that affect the people. This can improve the workings of American democracy, whether through leaders responding to public opinion that they think reflects capable judgments, or through leaders explaining to the public their positions and actions—and reasons for them when they are at odds with national collective opinion (or state and local level publics for issues at these levels)—in an ongoing process of leadership and responsiveness. Political leaders and policymakers are better off knowing than not knowing where the public stands on the key issues of the day.

This Task Force believes that the types of initiatives outlined in this report further the goals of the Association. There are no doubt additional ways in which AAPOR could become more involved in the process of enhancing the ways in which public opinion is taken into account by leaders and policy makers, and AAPOR will certainly review and discuss all of these. But

whatever the specific ways in which AAPOR decides to further these goals, it is the conclusion of this Task Force that the association and the society in which it operates will be better as a result.

Ideas and action steps relating to the use of public opinion by leaders

AAPOR's core values center on the fundamental ideal of having reliable and valid data measuring public opinion, and having those data accessible for leaders and others to use in the ways they deem most important and appropriate.

These core values lead to practical questions, namely the issue of how public opinion on key issues can best be measured, analyzed and summarized in ways that potentially maximize its usefulness. More specifically, the Task Force has focused on the potential role that AAPOR can or should play in this process, including the possibility that AAPOR itself could provide direction or act as a clearinghouse for those who want and need summaries of where the American public stands on important issues.

The phenomenal changes in technology that have transformed access to information have created opportunities for professional associations and other institutions to help leaders and citizens learn about and understand research and developments that affect their lives and their nation. Citizens need and count on trusted resources to sort out a flood of information, some of it contradictory. In recent years, this process has unfolded in arenas ranging from evaluating colleges to examining local crime rates to finding health and medical information.

This Task Force recognizes that AAPOR's involvement in facilitating the use of public opinion by leaders is potentially a controversial area. The controversy stems in part from the fact that the topics involved in public opinion research are often highly related to partisan, ideological and emotional positions which engender strong reactions. Summarizing evidence or data on any topic is also inherently time-consuming and in many instances can be subjective. Furthermore, the Task Force quickly became cognizant of the fact that there is significant disagreement concerning the degree to which it is appropriate for leaders to take public opinion into account in making decisions. Leaders themselves have historically shied away from public acknowledgment that they are making decisions based on the survey-based attitudes of their constituencies or of the population at large, rather than on the basis of their own thoughts, experience and wisdom.

Still, this report argues that there is an important need for leaders to be able to **find public opinion data**, **judge its quality**, and then **integrate and summarize** it into comprehensible conclusions – whatever their feelings about how much these data should be used as the basis for their decision-making. The ability to summarize and integrate public opinion on given topics is a necessary, but not sufficient, step, if such data are to be potentially used by leaders.

One of the keys to meeting this need is the issue of *who or what entity* is involved in doing the finding, judging and integration. There is a continuum of possibilities in answer to that challenge.

The task of finding, judging and integrating could be left open to whoever wants to engage in it, with a focus instead on providing tools and pathways. This could include a continually updated wiki-type community in which any and all comers make their contribution to a summary document or database. Another possibility is to bring together summaries created by various interested parties into a database of summaries. And, at the far end of the continuum is the possibility of a professional organization such as AAPOR taking on the responsibility of (a) encouraging others to find, judge, summarize and integrate public opinion data on given topics, or (b) taking on these tasks as a part of its central responsibilities.

AAPOR's history of involvement in standards issues and the current Transparency Initiative underscore the organization's partial push for these objectives. These initiatives clearly have positioned AAPOR as an organization dedicated to making sure that the fundamental details of publicly-reported public opinion research are made known to anyone who is interested in assessing or otherwise using this research. The burden of using the information, however, lies on the interested user. This is an example in which the end user is expected to supply expertise rather than relying on the expertise of others.

There is a mid-ground position by which AAPOR could encourage other entities to provide summaries, judgments on quality and integration of research, and leaders could be pointed in those directions.

A more aggressive position would be for AAPOR itself to take over some of these responsibilities, functioning as a clearinghouse for research, making judgments on the quality of research, and promulgating actual summaries and integrations of what the research data suggest about where the public stands on the key issues of the day.

Two considerations are time and resources. AAPOR as an organization has limited resources to use and has to pick strategic objectives carefully. An increased emphasis on this or any other new area could necessitate raising dues or seeking outside funding sources. In general, the Task Force members recognize that establishing new initiatives is not to be taken lightly.

Still, the Task Force recommends that AAPOR seriously consider its role in each of the areas outlined below.

We can look at these in terms of addressing four challenges outlined in this report. The challenges surround the objectives of: (a) advocating the value of public opinion data in a representative democracy, (b) increasing access to public opinion on key topics, (c) allowing interested users to make judgments about the quality of public opinion data, and (d) providing integration and summaries of public opinion on key topics.

The Task Force recommends that AAPOR consider each of the following ideas, some of which overlap:

1. **The idea that AAPOR should adopt an increased public presence arguing for the importance of public opinion in a democracy, the importance of rigorous, unbiased,**

scientific research assessing public opinion, and the importance of leaders having this public opinion data available for use in the process of making policy and other important decisions.

AAPOR's major public stance historically has been its focus on standards and encouragement of transparency in public opinion research. This Task Force recommends that AAPOR go further and actively encourage and help facilitate the availability of unbiased, scientific summaries of public opinion which in turn can be used by leaders in decision-making positions as they deem appropriate. Part of this will be an AAPOR focus on ways in which information about public opinion can be made available, summarized and interpreted for leaders – the subjects of the recommendations which follow.

2. **The idea of a central database or clearinghouse for public opinion data and analysis on specific topics; potentially encouraged by or sponsored by AAPOR**.

This type of clearinghouse would bring together data or links to data, original analyses, papers, on-line publications and articles dealing with public opinion topics, and bring together existing summaries and reviews of public opinion on key policy areas that have been written by others in publications and blogs and elsewhere. The clearinghouse could also commission reviews and summaries of public opinion on key areas, perhaps in conjunction with other publications. The clearinghouse could also provide a virtual warehouse of links to summaries of public opinion data on key topics.

This clearinghouse project would involve two emphases, although it is possible that the decision could be made to focus on just one of these going forward. One emphasis would be to direct users to the actual public opinion data themselves on a given topic. The second would direct users to summaries and integration of the data.

This idea would need to be considered in conjunction with the role of other organizations such as the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, which already exists to perform some of these functions. The Roper Center databases, however, are not routinely grouped or organized by topic, but rather consist of raw data and questions and datasets. The Roper Center additionally does not routinely offer analyzes, summaries and assessments of the state of public opinion on key topics. The idea being discussed in this section would be the creation of a way in which interested leaders could quickly access an understandable and accessible summary of public opinion on specific topics, with the understanding that this summary would be regularly changing. A basic component of this idea is to continue to evolve ways for policy makers/media/others to access all the existing findings on given topics.

It is important that policy makers/journalists/others understand much more than the top line results of any poll. Any of these efforts should reflect that emphasis.

3. **The idea of meta-analyses or meta-reviews of data on public opinion on key policy areas.**

This would be the equivalent of a "state of knowledge" on key topics, involving more than just the basic data or even a summary of the data, and including assessments and interpretation of what the data mean. AAPOR could encourage other organizations and entities to provide should analyses and reviews. AAPOR could sponsor its own analyses and reviews in conjunction with or as an expansion of the already existing AAPOR-sponsored "The Polls-Trends" and "Poll Review" sections of *Public Opinion Quarterly*, or it could be done separately. These could be viewed as the equivalent of the Practice Guidelines published in the medical literature on specific issues.

A challenge here is the fast-moving pace of public opinion research on any given topic. AAPOR-sponsored analyses or reviews of the "state of knowledge" on a topic could take a long time to get through the review process, and by the time they were published could be out of date, given the torrent of new research that pours forth on many topics. This is one issue with the generally excellent "The Polls-Trends" and "Poll Review" sections of *POQ*. These reviews are limited in number, and since they appear one at a time in sequential issues of *POQ*, each can become outdated as the next is published. This suggests that meta-analyses and reviews need to be electronic, and created in a fashion that allows continual updating.

Such reviews would need to take into account consideration of possible inequality in the resources devoted to research on particular sides of an issue, including the possibility that in some areas, there may simply be little public opinion research on one side or the other of a particular issue.

Any such review or summary of the public opinion literature on topics on which there is heated political debate and discourse could be controversial. Some AAPOR members have already expressed concern that efforts by AAPOR to summarize or interpret public opinion data on a topic would go beyond the bounds of a neutral organization focused historically on education and transparency. But all organizations evolve. It is certainly possible for scientific organizations to analyze data from a neutral and bipartisan perspective. The Task Force Committee members believe that AAPOR's expanding its role in this direction is something that deserves full consideration.

The exact way in which these meta-analyses or meta-reviews can be conducted is no doubt going to change as each month and each year progress, particularly given changes in technology and the power of sophisticated computer analysis to replace human analysis.

Any review of data on a public opinion topic will too have to focus on the potential issue of aggregation, either at the marginal or dataset level. If aggregation moves into the realm of combining datasets rather than marginal results, the advantage would be the ability to conduct finer analysis of certain subgroups that are too small for most general-population surveys to look at, like young ethnics or Asian Americans, as well as geographic units. This would require an operation and budget that would combine data sets and then rerun findings.

4. **AAPOR could sponsor forums, either in person or live on the web or interactive on the web, in which public opinion experts can discuss and communicate with the public about public opinion on key topics.**

Included in these types of forums could be an educational component that would speak to the nuances in poll results and to the different ways to understand the findings. This could be called "Beyond the Top Line."

This could also entail an AAPOR-sponsored blog by respected public opinion analysts in which they comment on public opinion data on key topics, providing independent and informed analysis. A more traditional component of this type of approach would be AAPOR sponsored events in which leaders and their staffs are given background, insights and instructions on making judgments about the quality of polls, and what types of things would be important to know regarding the assessment of the value of poll results. The recent successes of AAPOR's webinar format suggest that this communication format could be used to reach leaders with these types of briefings.

5. A variant on the above could be **AAPOR-sponsored sessions or meetings with policy makers and/or journalists on key public opinion topics**. Again, this is not to imply that leaders should be acting based on public opinion, but they should be aware of public opinion and be ready to help the public understand why the leaders' positions and actions better serve the nation and its citizens.

This would be an expansion of AAPOR's historic efforts to educate journalists.

6. **AAPOR could encourage the development of an on-line wiki-type community in which -- in open source fashion – interested or qualified participants would be invited to build an on-going summary of public opinion on key topic areas**.

This idea would most likely involve a "restricted" wiki process, in which only qualified individuals (including as one possibility AAPOR members or perhaps a vetted subset of AAPOR members) would be allowed to contribute. The contributors could add new data, put in their interpretation of the data, and in general comment on, elucidate, expand on, and summarize public opinion data on specific topics. The wiki-community would be made available to the general public.

As is the case with any such wiki-community, the value of the process would depend on its self-policing nature, with participants involved enough to contribute regularly and in general to build collective wisdom based on a large number of inputs. The virtues of this process would be threefold: (1) it would be extremely timely and up-to-date, (2) the result would at least in theory provide insights and summaries which would be more useful than those provided by any one or two individuals or experts alone, and (3) the time and effort involved would be spread out across a wide variety of actors, thus requiring less expenditure of AAPOR Executive Council and administrative staff resources.

It would be possible to appoint "curators" for various sections of this type of wiki-community, whose job it would be to push and prod participants to contribute and to police any attempts to skew the overall tone or results.

The curators and members of the wiki-community might be encouraged to follow up and debate matters. This could, for example, include any big gaps between public opinion and particular policies. Normative and empirical questions could be raised and discussed about potentially problematic characteristics of public opinion, such as: when opinions and different segments of the public are polarized or strongly at odds; when opinions are systematically inconsistent with ostensible facts, whether based on ignorance or possibly influenced by communication processes of manipulation or deception; or when opinions appear very unstable or fickle. These wiki-forums might also be places to raise issues related to standards and ethics in the conducting of opinion polls and how data are used (for example, the targeting of voters, message testing, and the like that raise questions about privacy and manipulation).

7. **AAPOR's Transparency Initiative (TI) could be adapted to more directly fit with the purposes of providing leaders with the ability to use public opinion**.

The TI as currently developed is a mechanism to provide users of public opinion an AAPOR-sponsored way in which they can learn all of the methodological details of a specific public opinion study. The TI could expand its emphasis. As part of the initiative, AAPOR could provide more specific information on how to rate and evaluate the quality of specific polls, poll summaries and poll analyses.

8. **Most generally, AAPOR should appoint a committee whose goal is to focus on the organization's on-going role in facilitating the process by which scientific assessments of public opinion are made available to the public, leaders, and elected representatives in ways in which it can be easily accessed and understood.** This committee should seriously consider the value of new research on these issues, including in particular research on the attitudes of elected representatives and leaders about the degree to which they *should* take public opinion into account in making decisions, and the degree to which they currently *do* take public opinion into account.

THE REPORT

Introduction

The American Association for Public Opinion Research is a professional organization dedicated to giving "...people a voice in the decisions that affect their daily lives." AAPOR's goals include striving to "Educate policy makers and the public at large to help them make better use of surveys and survey findings."

These goals -- using survey research to give people a voice in policy decisions, and educating policy makers so they can make better use of surveys and survey findings as resources to inform what they do – encompass some of the polling industry's longest-standing tenets and rationales for being. These goals are at the same time controversial in some quarters. There is certainly no consensus on how the second of these should be operationalized.

This report of AAPOR's Public Opinion and Leadership Task Force provides a summary of ways in which the role of public opinion in policy decision-making can be approached by public opinion survey practitioners, and how the availability and ease-of-use use of public opinion data can be improved. The report reviews the issues involved, examines historical and current literature, reviews the key elements of debate and discussion, and makes specific recommendations.

The importance of this objective should be self-evident. Understanding the various viewpoints and overall judgments on the role of public opinion in decision making enables researchers to continue to collect and analyze public opinion data with greater clarity about its purpose. Ensuring better use of public opinion data helps fulfill the profession's major objective.

Public opinion, it has been argued over the years, is potentially a very important, vital and rich contribution to decision-making and policy guidance in society. The value of this source of input is part of AAPOR's history and now is in its Strategic Plan. Yet, exactly what this value is and how it can be effectively used is not always well defined or well thought out.

This Task Force Report attempts to remedy that deficiency – not to come to judgment on one single position, but to lay out all of the issues involved along with possible action steps for the future. Specifically, this report highlights the following:

- Empirically and philosophically, the opinions of citizens have and should have visible influence on decision making in society, though this is not ultimate or exclusive power.
- An extensive research literature shows noticeable responsiveness and congruence between public opinion and policy decisions, indicating that basic democratic processes are at work. The relationship is complex, however, and leaders are far from largely influenced by the mass public.
- The American public has expressed low confidence in their leaders and Congress and government in general. The public wants leaders to pay more attention to the public's opinions in making decisions and formulating policy.

- Leaders themselves generally claim that they do pay attention to public opinion, claim that they become aware of public opinion in many ways, but seem to be leery of appearing to rely too closely on "the polls" or other information about public opinion that are available to them.
- The process by which public opinion data can be accessed in a meaningful and expeditious way by leaders and others who would or should use such data is unsystematic, incomplete, and beset by significant shortcomings and difficulties.
- Decision-making and democratic processes will be enhanced if these shortcomings and difficulties are addressed, and if data summarizing public opinion on the key policy issues of the day are made available in ways that improve their accessibility and their usability.

There are many philosophic positions which can be taken in regard to the optimal way to govern in a representative democracy. *This Task Force Report recommends that AAPOR should take the position that leaders' ability to use information about public opinion is constructive to decision-making processes and democracy, and that AAPOR should act to facilitate this process*. This recommendation recognizes significant diversity of opinion—within members of this Task Force, presumably within AAPOR membership, and certainly in the world at large -- concerning the degree to which leaders should follow public opinion in making decisions and enacting policy. But the recommendation focuses on the undeniable positive benefits of improvements in the accessibility, integration, interpretation and usability of public opinion data for any and all who are in a position to use such data.

The views of the citizens of a country or other political entity whose political system involves a representative democratic framework are made available when they vote in local and national elections—to the extent that a subset of the population votes up or down on the performance or projected performance of their representatives. There continues to be controversy about the degree to which these representatives, once in office, should lead based on their own convictions about what is right, or should lead by manifesting the views of their constituents. It is difficult to disagree, however, that elected representatives benefit by availing themselves of knowledge of the attitudes, views on policy, and assessments of problems and priorities of the public. Making the voice of the people more systematically available is particularly important in today's environment when (a) organized groups with money play a major role in efforts to influence elections and policy decisions (b) the governing apparatus is held in such low esteem, and (c) the voice of the people is sometimes assessed through haphazard mechanisms such as social media, and often tendentiously characterized by ideologues on all sides of the political spectrum.

The Task Force recommends that AAPOR carefully consider the role it can play in encouraging better measurement, summarization, and evaluation of public opinion, along with making the results available to leaders and others who make policy decisions that affect the people.

This report focuses heavily on national public opinion and policies, owing to the greater volume and visibility of national public opinion polling in the United States and in other countries. But decisions by leaders and important government policies occur at the state and local levels as well, so that the issues addressed in this report apply to all geographic and institutional levels.

The Task Force recommends that AAPOR consider specific steps to make information about public opinion more accessible to leaders, in the ways outlined in the sections of this report. To the extent AAPOR can help with this it can improve the workings of American democracy, whether through leaders responding to public opinion that they think reflects capable judgments or through leaders explaining to the public their positions and actions—and reasons for them when they are at odds with collective opinion—in an ongoing process of leadership and responsiveness. Without knowing where the public stands, political leaders and policymakers are working in the dark, missing out on the tremendous power of the wisdom inherent in the collected opinions of the citizens of a country, and they increase the chances of an alienated and disenchanted citizenry and thus a poorly functioning political entity. While polling data do not provide a blueprint for action, they can inform leaders as to where the public or electorate to which they are accountable stands at a given point in time, under the assumption that leaders' awareness of this information will result in better outcomes than if these leaders are only able to make haphazard or ill-informed estimates of public opinion.

Part I: Philosophical Background Setting the Scene

Although AAPOR is dedicated to the idea of using research to give ordinary people a voice by collecting and analyzing projections of population sentiments, the exact way in which that "voice" should be used has been the subject of continual debate. In particular, since surveys of public opinion begin to receive widespread distribution nearly 80 years ago in the United States, there has been continual discussion of the degree to which policy makers and leaders should pay attention to public opinion, if at all. Some of this debate has revolved around practical issues. Some has been based on philosophic convictions about the appropriate bases for policy decisions in a representative democracy.

Leaders must use some criteria for decision making. The intent of a democratic form of government is to rely on elected leaders to make decisions, but in turn for those leaders to be responsive to the collective wishes of the people for direction for governance. The evidence from the way in which governing around the world is evolving—the Arab Spring uprisings being the most recent example—in fact points to more and more reliance, forced or not, on the citizens of a country's collective opinions, sentiments, and evaluations in determining the governance of their country.

The increased technological ability of average citizens to communicate and make their voices heard, and the parallel decrease in the ability of leaders to hide what they are doing make the views of all of the people in a society ever more important.

Additionally, public opinion research findings offer an antidote to the efforts by special interests with deep pockets to attempt to wield influence over policymakers – using tools ranging from the new super PACs that finance campaign ads to lobbying behind closed doors. To be sure, caution is in order if public opinion itself has been influenced—manipulated—through the communication efforts of moneyed interests. Still, relying on summaries of public opinion as one input in decision making in theory could allow all Americans to have their say on major issues of the day, above and beyond the periodic vote, regardless of whether those citizens contribute to campaigns or have the ear of policymakers,

It is possible that some of Americans' current historically low regard for and confidence in their government is based the perceptions that the government is not doing what they want—including perceptions that elected officials are most responsive to the rich and well-connected, and that elected officials are held captive to rigid partisan ideologies. An increased recognition of the relevance of public opinion by elected officials could be one step in countering this low esteem in which the government is held and in helping maintain the legitimacy of the country's form of government.

Collective wisdom is of course at the heart of representative democracies, built as they are on the basis of representative elements which function as a mechanism for overcoming the practical problems of assessing all citizens' input at all times on all issues. The tension which developed almost from the beginning of the concept of representative democracies, and a tension that persists to this day, is the relationship between the views of the people who elect legislators and

executives, and the views and actions of those leaders themselves. That tension is a core consideration throughout this report, particularly in an era in which survey research—and increasingly other technological innovations—allow in theory for a continued monitoring of the opinions of average citizens between elections.

Competing with the public are other factors and pressures that may influence legislators to hold certain views and (probably more crucially) that contribute to the election and reelection of representatives with particular views in the first place. Electoral outcomes in the United States are almost certainly affected unequally by the views and actions of campaign contributors and party activists—compared to those of ordinary citizens. Thus, the real tension is not only the one highlighted by political philosopher Edward Burke, of trustee versus delegate (regarding how autonomous legislators exercise their decision making powers), but also a tension between equally weighted citizens and the disproportionate power of organized interest groups, wealthy individuals, and intense ideological activists. This tension points toward the argument that more equal representation might be achieved through increased attention to opinion polls.

The normative claim for the value of what AAPOR members do in seeking indicators of public opinion is strengthened by the properties of random (or quasi-random) sampling. If political equality is the central feature of democracy, equal probability of inclusion in a poll nicely implements the idea of equal voice (Verba 1996).

There are of course limitations to the use of public opinion in shaping the actions of elected officials. Some argue that at times the responsibility of a democracy's leaders is not to follow public opinion but to try to change it. To many, President Franklin Roosevelt's efforts to educate an isolationist public about the threat from Nazi Germany stands as one of those times, although it was clear even in this situation that Roosevelt paid attention to and reacted to public opinion as measured by polls (Cantril 1965, Casey 2001). President George W. Bush and his Vice President, Dick Cheney, made clear that their conception of their role was to make decisions on their own without consulting "polls." More recently New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg has made clear his conviction, perhaps forged by his years as majority owner of a large business in which he did not need to report to any higher level of management, that leaders should make decisions based on their own convictions and then later convince the public to come around to their view point.

There is also debate about the nature and *quality* of public opinion that bears on the extent of the public's collective wisdom. Not all public opinion is made equally. Clearly there are topics on which leaders are far better informed than the public and have better frameworks and expertise for understanding and taking action. There are issues on which the public reveals a lack of information or knowledge, and cases in which public opinion appears to be unstable and fluctuating (although evidence indicates that the latter is less common than is often supposed; see Page and Shapiro 1992.) Poll-measured public opinion can vary markedly, depending on how issues are framed and described to respondents in question wordings (e.g., Bishop 2005), on context, sampling considerations, and numerous other factors.

Thus the measurement of public opinion is often exceedingly difficult, as is the effort to summarize and synthesize that opinion. Any use of data and other evidence concerning public opinion needs to take into account a wide variety of these types of considerations.

Many AAPOR members devote their professional efforts and energies to the rigorous assessment of public opinion on the key policy issues of the day. Some, if not many, of these members no doubt hold out the conviction that this information should be used by policy makers as a significant input in the decision making process. Others may hold opposite views and contend that public opinion is of interest, but should be of little use by leaders and elected representatives who owe the electorate their judgment—a judgment not to be sacrificed to public opinion. There may also be views in-between that emphasize different conditions and circumstance that need to be considered, including the strength and intensity of opinion, its knowledge base, and even its very existence, especially on new issues that are not (yet) very salient (e.g., see Converse 1964, Bishop 2005; the review in Gilens 2012, 17-37; the essays in Saris and Sniderman 2004). Such considerations can strongly affect conclusions about of what influence—if any—public opinion should have on legislation and policy making.

The United States is a democratic republic in which the people retain the ultimate power through the mechanism of the periodic vote, but in which elected representatives carry out most of the actual decision making that results in government policies. These leaders do not get much if any specific guidance from the votes that put them in office. Voting is in effect a low-information-providing action that decides on who should be the people's representative, but does not "speak" or express much else. The information content of elections needs to be inferred from other sources of information about public opinion from polls and additional sources that are described later in this report. A central aspect of debate on the optimal impact of public opinion on decision making over the years has concerned the proper balance between the views of the people and the views of their elected representatives. And, as noted above, it has also concerned questions about the nature and quality of public opinion itself.

These challenges and difficulties make it all the more important for AAPOR to champion the best possible ways of summarizing and interpreting public opinion on key issues of the day. The fundamental assumption is that—in almost all cases—it is worthwhile and valuable for leaders to be aware of the state of public opinion and of changes occurring in it, regardless of whether they agree with or "follow" that opinion. On almost all important policy issues, it is important that elected representatives be aware of where the public stands, and why—along with the degree to which the public cares about, has knowledge of, understands, and prioritizes those issues.

Outline of the Report Which Follows

The sections of the body of this report that follow begin with a review of evidence, mainly based on the history of survey research, bearing on the correspondence between public opinion and public policy. The report then reviews what the public, and what leaders themselves, think about leaders relying on public opinion in decision making. Finally, the report turns to obstacles that

stand in the way of better uses of public opinion, possible steps that could be taken to deal with those obstacles, and specific recommendations for AAPOR to consider.

It should be noted at this point that the conceptualization and normative standing of "*public opinion*" has been the topic of extensive theorization, philosophical debate, and research over the years. Members of this Task Force have spent a considerable amount of time reviewing this valuable and important literature. Task Force members made the decision to include their important summarization in the ***Appendix*** to this report rather than in its body. Readers are urged to consider this material in the Appendix carefully. It contains a review of this theoretical literature, including discussion of the place of public opinion in democratic theory, the normative ideals which in theory govern the role of public opinion in society, and the potential challenges which could erode these ideals—along with references to the relevant works.

PART II: The Situation Today: Public Opinion, Leaders' Decisions and Government Policies

This section of the report reviews in some detail the evidence-based research literature on the relationship between public opinion and policy decisions in the United States.

As has been made clear in the previous sections of this report, this Task Force report holds that public opinion can and should be a part of the policy making process and to the decisions made in a representative democracy. One major consideration in examining this fundamental tenet is the degree to which public opinion has actually affected policymaking in recent American history; that is, the extent to which leaders already respond to the public's wishes, especially as manifested in opinion surveys, and the extent to which government policies have followed suit.

Assessing the Degree to Which Leaders Follow Public Opinion and to Which Public Opinion is Reflected in Policy Decisions

Substantial research has examined the possible effect of public opinion on government policymaking. Within this body of research, we have more systematic evidence concerning the *relationship* between public opinion and policies themselves than on the extent to which political leaders are *directly* influenced—that is, how regularly and widely—in their decision-making by public opinion.

This is an important issue, given George Gallup's and others' views that the public opinion polling would enable the nation's leaders to find out these mass preferences and respond to them (see Gallup 1938; and [with Rae] in *The Pulse of Democracy*, 1940). The jury is still out on the extent to which a wide range of political leaders *specifically* make use of information about public opinion and respond in accord with it (evidence regarding this is considered later). The body of evidence which is available on this direct connection consists of studies of presidential administrations, survey and interview studies of various other leaders, case studies of policy decisions, and observations reported by political insiders and the press.

In contrast, the number of studies connecting public opinion to ongoing and subsequent government policies themselves (without directly tracing closely the intermediate step of leaders' responsive behavior along the way) is enormous.

These studies do not in and of themselves answer the question of whether political leaders became more directly responsive with greater exposure to public opinion polling. Moreover, there is the political as well as conceptual question about how to define "the public" during past times in which women, 18-21 year olds, and blacks did not have full voting rights. What polling did provide—as the 19th century's Lord Bryce (1897) had sought and Harry Field, echoing Gallup, intended in establishing the National Opinion Research Center in 1941 (National Opinion Research Center 1992)—was the means for regularly measuring *en masse* individuals' personal opinions that leaders might act on, as opposed to just the desires of those who attempted to influence leaders through political activities (see Key 1961, p.14; Dahl 1956, Verba 1996). This goal aside, political scientists and other researchers have used these available research *data* to study more fully than before the impact of the mass public on government policies, as well as

to examine aspects of the normative ideals and challenges to them described above that could be evaluated empirically.

What did these studies find? Drawing on and updating past summaries and evaluations of this work, one of the members of this Task Force – in a recent review of this research in the 75th anniversary issue of *Public Opinion Quarterly* – concludes that *there has been, overall, a substantial connection between public opinion and government policies in the United States* (see Shapiro, 2011, which was written with this task force report in mind and is drawn on heavily here.)

This review echoed the conclusions of others, for example, Paul Burstein (2010, p.72): "Overall the finding that opinion influences policy is amazingly robust—most studies show opinion affecting policy regardless of how opinion, policy, and the relationship between them is measured. It's not possible to say how strong the relationship is, or how the strength depends on circumstances." (There is evidence for this conclusion from other liberal democratic countries as well, but there are far fewer studies to date outside the United States.)

We would emphasize again that we do not fully understand the extent to which the mechanism for the observed relationship between public opinion and enacted policy decisions has involved political leaders consciously using information about public opinion in their decision making. What is clear is that – however it happens – there is a clear relationship between public opinion and policy decisions.

While different causal processes or "linkages" between opinion and ultimately policy might be at work, the most compelling theory and persuasive driving force is *electoral accountability*, which predicts that elected leaders in democratic nations do not usually diverge far from voters' opinions--at least by the time of the next election (see Downs 1957, Mayhew 1974, on other linkages see Monroe and Gardner 1987, Erikson and Tedin 2011, and its earlier editions; Glynn et al. 2004, Chapter 9; Pzreworski 2010). The fact that elected leaders make sure they have not deviated far from public opinion does not require that leaders monitor public opinion constantly and use it to inform each of their decisions. Nor does it require a reliance on opinion polls to gauge public opinion, though polling arguably provides the best measures of the public's attitudes and preferences. It does presume that the public ultimately wants its leaders to be responsive—at least to some extent—and that this responsiveness does occur.

Causal claims that the opinions of ordinary citizens actually influence policy requires dealing fully with the issue of *spuriousness*. The most recent research that we will review below has begun to suggest that the statistical relationships found in many relevant studies could be partly or largely spurious, in the sense that affluent individuals and organized groups do the actual influencing, and that correlations between public opinion and policy are artifacts of the relationship between elite preferences and those of the general public. While opinion polls and leaders and policymakers' attentiveness to them could in principle have counteracted the influences of the affluent and of interest groups and other non-governmental elites, there are indications that this has not happened, or does not occur as much as it once might have.

Research Beginning in the Early 1960s

The first directly relevant publications in this area began in 1963 with Warren Miller and Donald Stokes' groundbreaking study of "Constituency Influence in Congress" (Miller and Stokes 1963). This study, using very small and far from representative samples in congressional districts based on National Election Study (NES) data from the 1950s (and also surveying the opinions of members of Congress and their perceptions of constituency opinion), found a modest relationship between constituency opinions and congressmen's roll call voting overall. The study also found that this relationship differed noticeably across policy areas. The weakest relationship occurred for much less visible foreign policy issues. There was a solid correlation for the more salient civil rights legislation votes, along with statistical evidence of representatives acting in accord with their perceptions of their constituents; and the relationship was noteworthy for economic welfare issues. The Miller and Stokes study was heralded, for good reason, as the first to bring survey measures of public opinion into the study of representation. The study suffered from serious measurement problems, however, most notably in the case of foreign policy; and they were very likely offset on civil rights owing to the geographical (North/South) polarization among whites on this issue, so that the minimal district samples captured more real variance on this than other issues.

This groundbreaking work was followed by studies that similarly compared constituency versus legislator measures of public opinion and policy action in both houses of Congress, in state legislatures, and similar European bodies (e.g., Converse and Pierce 1986, Barnes 1977, Farah 1984). These researchers sought better aggregate measures of public opinion as they extended this early research.

- The 1978 NES survey's more representative sampling design revealed stronger results for Miller and Stokes' domestic issues (racial integration, aid to minorities, health care, providing jobs), as well as new ones such as women's rights (and to a much lesser extent law and order issues and abortion; see Erikson 1981, Powell 1982, and Page, Shapiro, Gronke, and Rosenberg 1984).
- An examination of the NES data over time (Stone 1982) found some increase from 1956 to 1972 in the relationship between district opinion and roll call voting.
- A study using the 1980 NES to measure district level opinions toward defense spending (Bartels 1991) revealed that these opinions were strongly related to House member voting on the major Ronald Reagan-era defense build-up.

Overall, this constituency representation literature provided evidence for district level responsiveness to public opinion, controlling for other variables, among which issue salience remained important. Despite this evidence, however, it has not been clear whether responsive legislators were attentive to all their constituents or mainly to their fellow partisans or particular core constituencies (see Mayhew 1974, Bishin 2009, Clinton 2006, and Jewell and Loewenberg, 1979).

Studies of representation in the U.S. Senate that followed pooled multiple NES and NORC General Social Surveys (NORC-GSS) to obtain large samples. A major 1988-1992 Senate

National Election Study (SNES) provided more representative state samples as well (Norrander 2001, Brace et al. 2002, Matsusaka 2010). Measures of the state level- liberalism/conservatism developed to study state policy making by combining the 1976-1988 CBS News/*New York Times* surveys were used to study voting by senators (see below and Erikson, Wright, and McIver 1993). The National Annenberg Elections Study (NAES) and other large surveys were used for this purpose, as well as exit poll data in election years that have large samples (see Frankovic, Panagopoulos, and Shapiro 2010; Medoff, Dennis, and Bishin 1995b; Uslaner 1999).

These studies found that the estimates of statistical effects of public opinion on Senate roll call voting have varied by issue, with some evidence for greater responsiveness in homogeneous rather than in heterogeneous states (e.g., greater on gun control, trade, and general ideological policy direction, than on abortion issues; Medoff, Dennis, and Bishin 1995a, 1995b; Bailey and Brady 1998.) Using a new and more refined method of estimating state opinion (see further description below), a recent study found that state level public opinion was strongly related to senators' votes to ratify the nominations of justices to the Supreme Court (Kastellec, Lax, and Phillips 2010).

Research focusing on legislators and the opinions of those whom they represent has profound normative and empirical importance to political scientists and philosophers who have wrestled directly with whether elected legislators should behave as "delegates," directly channeling the expressed wished of their constituents, or as "trustees" who fit the Edmund Burke model of a leaders chosen to exercise their own best judgment in serving the interests of their constituents (see Wahlke, Eulau, Buchanan, and Ferguson 1962).

But as Robert Weissberg (1978) noted, this is different from analyzing the extent to which representatives collectively voice the preferences of the nation's citizenry as a whole – regardless of how the process works. His own analysis of the Miller and Stokes data showed that members of Congress taken all together generally "represented" the opinions of congressional districts (see also Hurley 1982, 1989). Another contemporaneous study compared national public opinion on 6 issues with survey responses on these issues from House and Senate members in 1970—the Vietnam war, the antiballistic missile program, control of inflation, a family income maintenance program, social and economic assistance to blacks, and the Supreme Court on the rights of the accused (Backstrom 1977). The results showed that the majorities of House members and the public agreed on four of the six issues, with a three-three split for senators.

The logical extension of this—and so obvious that we might ask, "What took so long?"—was the comparison of public opinion *majorities* and the actual *enactment of policies*—not legislative votes or position-taking along the way—which is presumably what Gallup and others had in mind. Research designs were needed to compare measures of national public opinion with government policies at particular points in time and over long time periods, so that short-term and long-term effects of opinion on policy could be ascertained.

Congruence Between National Public Opinion and Government Policies

National opinion surveys provided abundant data to compare over time the degree of consistency or *congruence* between national public opinion and government policies. Policies have been measured in different ways depending on the issues described in the survey questions: the enactment (or not) of legislation corresponding to the actions proposed in the questions; relevant presidential, bureaucratic, or judicial (especially Supreme Court) decisions; inflation-adjusted government expenditures for spending issues; and any relevant quantitative indicators called for by particular question wordings, such as troop levels, immigration levels, and the like (e.g., Page and Shapiro 1982; Shapiro 1982, Appendix A). Interpretive analyses of individual issues can be found in a number of histories and case studies (e.g., works cited in Shapiro and Jacobs 1989, 152-153; Weaver 2002, Burstein1998b, Burstein and Freudenberg 1978, Hinckley 1992, Sobel 2001, and Jacobs 1993). The first important analytic works were Weissberg's *Public Opinion and Popular Government* (1976) and Donald Devine's *The Attentive Public: Polyarchical Democracy* (1970).

Weissberg made the important distinction between "majoritarian congruence" or agreement between opinion majorities and government policies, and "covariational congruence" between *opinion changes* and *policy changes*. This led to the two major strands of research that subsequently provided the most widely cited evidence for strong effects of public opinion on policy. Looking at a relatively small number of issues, however, Weissberg in 1976 found limited evidence for both forms of congruence. Devine (1970) earlier had found greater opinion-policy congruence for the preferences of the more politically "attentive" segment of the public, though his data showed congruence for public opinion writ large as well.

But to reach any conclusions regarding persistent or predictable effects of opinion on policy required examining a large number of issues over time. Alan Monroe (1979) and Benjamin Page and Robert Shapiro (1983) offered this kind of evidence. In comparing public policy changes (or lack thereof) for more than 200 issues for which he could compare majority opinion supporting or opposing such *proposed changes* (as framed in the available survey questions and albeit sensitive to question wordings), Monroe (1979) found majoritarian congruence in 64 percent of these cases. Page and Shapiro's (1983, Shapiro 1982) findings were quite similar (66 percent) when comparing changes in policy within a year after changes in public opinion for well over 200 of cases ("instances") of opinion change. The relationship was stronger for larger opinion changes and more highly salient issues.

Both Monroe and Page and Shapiro noted that finding over 50 percent of cases congruent—more than would result from random coin tosses—indicated that something systematic was at work. But these percentage determinations are not definitive. A 50 percent or even lesser result would not preclude the possibility that public opinion mattered in policymaking in many important cases (cf. Brooks 1985, 1987, 1990), though not in the preponderance of them. By the same token, 60 percent or greater congruence may not include many important cause-and-effect connections. Based on closer analysis, however, the time sequences in the relationships that Page and Shapiro (1983) found suggested that any effect of opinion on policy was more prevalent than the reverse effect. In addition, the congruence that Monroe (1979) and Page and Shapiro (1983)

found occurred more frequently for larger opinion majorities, larger opinion changes, and for more salient issues, as expected if policymakers were attuned and responsive to public opinion (see also Graham 1994, Murray 2006).

Monroe (1983) further connected his cases of congruence to processes of party representation, which are also consistent with presidents fulfilling a large number of their campaign promises and party platforms driven by concerns for public opinion (Pomper with Lederman 1980, Fishel 1985, and Patterson 1996). There have not been a great many similar studies of country-level responsiveness across a wide range of issues, but Monroe's (1998, 2001) updated research found a drop to 55 percent in the early 1990s and 53 percent by the end of the decade. Outside the United States, other researchers found low levels of opinion-policy congruence in comparisons for the Anglo-American countries, France, and West Germany (Brooks 1985, 1987, 1990). In contrast, later studies of German and Canadian public opinion found congruencies at the 60 percent level (Brettschneider 1996, Petry 1999; see also Petry and Mendelsohn 2004). There has been, however, far less research done in Europe or elsewhere compared to the United States (see Dalton 2006).

Presidential Responsiveness to Public Opinion

More targeted study has been devoted to presidential responsiveness to public opinion. This has included research on the congruence of presidential policymaking with public opinion, along with archival work, uncovering presidents' private polling and analyses in order to examine the causal processes at work (Jacobs 1993; Jacobs and Shapiro 1994a, 1995a, 1995b, 1995-96, 1999, 2000; Druckman and Jacobs 2006, 2011; Eisinger 2003, Foyle 1999, Murray 2006, Murray and Howard 2002, Heith 2004, Rottinghaus 2007, 2010; Knecht 2010, Stevens 2002, Towle 2004, Tenpas and McCann 2007).

These studies of the "public presidency" have reported noticeable congruence between public opinion and presidential position taking and actions:

- One analysis found that presidents' positions were congruent with prior majority opinion in 70 percent of the issues examined (Rottinghaus 2010).
- Another found less congruence overall (just over 50 percent) for public opinion and presidents' proposed budgetary changes, but over 70 percent in the cases of more ideologically charged social welfare issues (Canes-Wrone 2006). Congruence also increased as an election neared; it was contingent also on the president's popularity and declined for second term presidents.
- A study of the Reagan administration found congruence at 54 percent among the policies examined; it was greater for domestic issues and issues with greater salience and opinion majorities much greater than 50 percent, reaching nearly 75 percent for highly salient and supported domestic policies (Murray 2006).
- Another analysis of the Reagan administration also revealed significant effects of public opinion on administration's domestic policy positions, but this masked greater

responsiveness to religious conservatives and independents in order to strengthen administration's party's coalition (Druckman and Jacobs 2011).

More recently, despite claims that George W. Bush was unresponsive to public opinion during the polarizing conflicts on several issues that characterized his administration, more than half of the key votes in Congress that Bush supported were congruent with majority opinion during the first six years of his presidency. At the same time, his administration was able to pursue policies that were not widely visible, allowing it to pursue conservative policy goals, responding to Republican partisans, with diminished risk of electoral punishment (Jacobs and Shapiro 2008, Wood 2009).

Time Series Data

Substantial evidence bearing on the causal interplay in which policy responds to public opinion has come from *time series studies* that were finally possible as more trend data (i.e., responses to identically worded survey questions) for a large number of issues became available. Robert Erikson, Michael MacKuen, and James Stimson's (2002), *The Macro Polity*; Clem Brooks and Jeff Manza's (2007), *Why Welfare State's Persist;* and Stuart Soroka and Christopher Wlezien's (2010) *Degrees of Democracy* stand out as book-length works based on time series data and multivariate analysis.

- *The Macro Polity* starts from the premise that aside from the most salient issues, political leaders do not respond issue by issue but rather react to changes in the overall liberal to conservative "public mood," which Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson measure as a composite of opinion trends across a range of big government/domestic economic welfare issues. The public in the aggregate may express preferences on individual issues moving over time in an overall liberal-conservative direction, or they might use ideology as a shortcut in making judgments about the direction of government policy. The authors compared trends in liberal-conservative mood from the early 1950s forward and found that it tracked closely with multiple measures of policymaking activities for the House of Representatives, the Senate, the president, and the Supreme Court. The time lags found for the relationships were consistent with effects of opinion on policy corresponding to the timing of elections for the different institutions, with the trends tracking least closely, as expected, for the non-elected members of the Supreme Court (more on the courts below).

- *Why Welfare States Persist* examines patterns of government responsiveness to public preferences for social welfare benefits and related policies by comparing how these policies differ across sixteen Western European and other developed democratic countries and over time. In a pooled time series analysis Brooks and Manza show that the strength of the persistence over time of welfare state policies has varied consistently with the level of public support for such policies, with the U.S. historically at the low end

compared to other countries—defined further as liberal democracies, Christian democracies, and social democracies.

- *Degrees of Democracy* synthesized and expanded its authors' earlier work, which focused on opinion time series analyses for a range of policy areas in the U.S., Britain, and Canada (e.g., Wlezien 1995, 2004; Soroka and Wlezien 2005, 2011, extending the research to additional countries). It examined government spending on national defense, welfare, health care, education, the environment, the problems of cities, the space program, crime, and foreign aid for the United States; national defense, health care, education, and transportation for the United Kingdom; and national defense, health care, welfare, and transportation in Canada. Overall, the evidence revealed substantial but varying degrees of responsiveness to the countries' publics wanting more or less spending (taking into account appropriations decisions versus outlays), with greater responsiveness in the cases of more salient issues, and the most glaring cases of non-responsiveness occurring for spending on foreign aid and dealing with crime in the United States. The American system, however, tended to be the most responsive overall in the other policy areas.

Other time series research has reported similar cases of policy following the lead of public opinion. Hobolt and Klemmensen's (2005, 2008) longitudinal studies of policy priorities showed how public opinion led policymakers' attention and government expenditures in major policy areas in Britain, Denmark, and the United States. Soroka and Wlezien's (2010) findings for defense spending comport with other analyses of defense spending in the United States over the last 40 years and with analyses of changes in support for the Vietnam war from the 1960s to the early 1970s (including responses to questions about troop levels, not just general support; see Shapiro and Page 1994, Hartley and Russett 1992; also Bartels 1991, Page and Shapiro 1992.) A recent and highly compelling study showed how the decline in national public support for the death penalty for murder that occurred after DNA and other new evidence revealed numerous cases of innocent people on dealth row, led to an overall decline in death sentences and executions in the United States (Baumgartner, De Boef, and Boydstun 2008; on past sentencing in the federal judiciary see Cook 1977, 1979; Kritzer 1979, and Kuklinski and Stanga, 1979).

Public Opinion and the Judiciary

That the judiciary might be influenced by public opinion runs against the argument that (with the possible exception of states that elect judges) this branch of government is insulated from politics. There has been a significant literature on the effect of public opinion on Supreme Court decision-making. Research has progressed substantially from the early use of congressional majorities that upheld or by-passed Court decisions as proxies for public opinion to determine the responsiveness of the Court (cf. Dahl 1957, Casper 1976). Based on comparisons of public opinion data with Court rulings and on other observations, there is a consensus "that public preferences and court policies continue to be largely in agreement with one another" (Marshall 1989, 2008; Gibson 2008, p.828-829; and especially the treatise offered by Friedman 2009.) The

debate, however, is whether this reflects responsiveness to public opinion or political leadership by the Court (see Shapiro and Jacobs 1989, p.156-158). There is evidence that at least some decisions clearly followed significant changes in national public opinion, such as those toward civil rights and abortion (Page and Shapiro 1983, 1992; Shapiro 1982). To untangle the direction of influence further, a series of studies has examined the effect of changes in liberal-conservative public mood on judicial decisions. The latest have focused on the proportions of liberal Supreme Court decisions each term that reversed rulings in a lower court, which researchers argued provided a theoretically and empirically compelling assessment of the effect of the public's ideological mood. These effects have been found to be pronounced, but less so for more salient cases (see Casillas, Enns, and Wohlforth 2011; McGuire and Stimson 2004, Mishler and Sheehan 1993, 1994, 1996; but see Norpoth and Segal 1994, and on causation, Epstein and Martin, 2010). That so much attention has been devoted to policymaking by the branch of government that is *least* expected to yield to pressures from public opinion, says much about the importance of public opinion in the policymaking process.

State and Local Policy and Public Opinion

The effects of public opinion appear to be relevant not only to national-level policymaking but to government actions at all levels and in all decision-making institutions. On the political agenda at large, however, state and local issues and the actions and politics of state and local governments are normally less visible in the national media, which might be thought to decrease pressure from the public on these governments. In contrast, it might be the case that responsiveness is greater at levels "closer to the people," including administrators and bureaucrats at all levels charged with implementing policies and solving problems that arise in doing so. A long strand of research in public administration looks at the role of citizens' input and participation, including survey studies of citizen satisfactions and inquiries about problems that need to be addressed (e.g. Truman 1945, Aberbach and Rockman, 1978, and the reviews in Shapiro and Jacobs 1989, Barrett 1995, Frankovic, Panagopoulos, and Shapiro 2010, and Miller 2012). The U.S. government itself has a long history of survey research, not the least of which is the decennial census, related to fact-finding for purposes of identifying problems and collecting data useful in policymaking and implementation (see Converse 1987, Frankovic, Panagopoulos, and Shapiro 2010). These are not political but can facilitate responsiveness to the public's wants and needs. The Canadian government, for example, has historically been more visibly active and transparent in this regard in issuing an annual report on Public Opinion Research of the Government of Canada (Public Works and Government Services Canada, 2012).

Early research on state and local policymaking attempted to study responsiveness by using aggregate demographic characteristics as proxies for the public's interests and preferences. These studies suggested varying degrees of government responsiveness, but there was a clear need for more direct estimates or measures of public opinion. The first efforts involved "simulations" of state level opinion using census data in tandem with information from individual-level surveys to estimate how demographic attributes translated into opinions and policy preferences (Seidman 1975, but cf. Kuklinski 1977a). More compelling evidence for substantial state-level government responsiveness to public opinion came from studies that

measured directly the opinions of state residents (particularly their degree of liberalism-conservatism), or that have drawn on further advances in estimating state public opinion based on demographic data and national surveys. More generally, however, opinion data for many states have not been easy to come by due to small (or non-existent) state samples within national surveys and state-by-state polling that has been done on an ad hoc basis without coordination for comparisons across states. With the NAES and other large surveys such as the national and state election-year exit polls, some state-level comparisons can be made for recent years. Referenda and ballot initiative results can also be used in the states in which they are available, which is preferable to using presidential vote or ideologically scaled congressional votes as proxies for public opinion on specific issues. Robert Erikson (1976) used large Gallup Poll samples in 1936 and 1937 to find a substantial relationship of state level public opinion with whether state governments had the death penalty for murder, allowed women to serve on juries, and ratified the proposed Child Labor Amendment (that Congress had passed). James Gibson (1988) made intriguing use of the large survey that Samuel Stouffer (1955) conducted to study political tolerance to show that there was some correlation between public opinion and the repressiveness of the anticommunist legislation that states adopted. In this case, however, the crucial influence at work came from elites (based on Stouffer's parallel surveying of community leaders) in the states, very likely influencing public opinion but largely spurring the severity of the states' responses (Gibson 1988). This case of *spuriousness* was found through the use of survey measures of the opinions of elites, which emphasizes the need to bring in measures of such competing influences whenever possible.

In addition to the large and still growing research literature on state public opinion and policymaking based on different survey-based measures of public opinion, there has been increased use of state ballot initiatives and referenda, an approach used to study public opinion before national polling began. These methods of direct democracy have been routinely used as a measure of democratic norms and values, or as an institutional context that emphasizes responsiveness to or direct pressure from the public (through the implicit threat to resort to the ballot if it does not get the policy it wants). Overall, based on studies using different measures of opinion, there is general agreement that public opinion matters in state policymaking: A number of studies have disaggregated state samples from individual or pooled NORC-GSS or NES surveys; used the 1988-1992 SNES; or have pieced together opinion measures from state or national polls by different organizations. These studies have found significant effects of public opinion on policies, including capital punishment, restriction of abortions, gay rights issues, school prayer, and certain taxes and spending policies (Norrander and Wilcox 1999, Norrander 2000, Arceneaux 2002, Burden 2005, Lupia, et al. 2010, Brace, et al. 2002, Matsusaka 2010, and Lewis 2011). Pre-dating Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson's (2002) work, Robert Erikson, Gerald Wright, and John McGiver's *Statehouse Democracy* (1993) showed how variations in different state policies (and a combined policy measure) can be explained by the different ideological leanings of state publics. This study pooled a large number of 1976-1988 CBS News/NYT polls that asked respondents to self-identify as liberal, conservative, or moderate, and was premised on a similar causal process in which leaders sense changes in the ideological direction of the public's policy preferences. The ideology measure has become widely used in studies of state politics and policymaking, showing effect of states' opinion ideologies on a wide range of policies, including education spending, the scope of Medicaid and Aid for Family with

Dependent Children, the legalization of gambling, passage or the Equal Rights Amendment, capital punishment, and those related to state spending and tax effort and progressivity (e.g., Lascher, Hagen, and Rochlin 1996; Camobreco 1998, Mooney and Lee 2000).

The latest advanced technique that has been used to estimate state-level public opinion as well as public opinion at other levels of aggregation (especially legislative districts), builds on simulation methods using national-level survey data in conjunction with state-level census data. This multilevel regression and post-stratification method (see Park, Gelman, and Bafumi 2006) has been used on large scale by Jeffrey Lax and Justin Phillips (2009a, 2009b), who showed how state policies toward gay rights were responsive to public opinion on this issue—more so than any effect of liberal-conservative ideology. Extending this to fully 39 policies covering 8 issue areas—abortion, education, electoral reform, gambling, gay rights, health care, immigration, and law enforcement—they found that state policies have been highly responsive to state publics' issue specific preferences after statistically controlling for other variables. They confirm that issue salience affects this relationship, as does legislative professionalism that apparently sensitizes state legislatures to public opinion, along with electoral motivations (Lax and Phillips 2012; see also Pacheco, 2011, 2012; on state judges, Canes-Wrone, Clark, and Kelly, 2013). This method of opinion measurement was also used at the local level to study how political and institutional factors bear on how public opinion affects education spending by school districts (Berkman and Plutzer 2005), and at the congressional district level to study constituency representation (Krimmel, Lax, and Phillips 2012; Warshaw and Rodden 2012, Tausanovitch and Warshaw 2011, 2012).

Limitations and Qualifications Regarding Democratic Responsiveness

This review clearly shows a basic positive correlation between public opinion and policy decisions in the United States. There are a number of ways in which this connection can operate. The connection could be explained by processes of representation that occur due to electoral accountability. It could be driven by responsiveness to some segment or segments of the public more than others, such as those who are most affluence, engaged, and politically active. It could also include the possibility that elites generally feel it necessary or desirable to prepare, persuade, or manipulate opinion before changing policy. There are scenarios in which these latter two processes could promote democracy or alternatively undermine it.

That policies or changes in policies tend to be visibly related to levels or changes in public support for them, does not necessarily mean that information about public opinion has been used directly as the basis for decision-making in the past—or today. Any fully and indisputably *causal* effect of public opinion is still subject to debate (Page 2002). Plus, the evidence for responsiveness only goes so far. While it may be easy to accept substantively that the effect of public opinion should apply to issues above a certain level of visibility in political debates—on the public's collective radar screen and salient enough to be asked about in national opinion polls—there have been some important issues for which there are no public opinion data, so that there is no basis for judging responsiveness (see Burstein 2006, Barabas 2007; cf. Mackenzie and

Warren 2012). Further, there have been many cases of non-responsiveness on salient issues, too numerous to describe here (e.g., Shapiro, 2011, p.1000-1001).

The extent of leaders' democratic responsiveness also appears to be limited and incomplete in other compelling respects. There is evidence that it falls short of giving the public the policies it wants, going only so far in the *direction* the public desires. Leaders may not be fully predisposed to provide full compliance with the public's wishes, or their well-intentioned responses may be imperfect. Government and policymakers may *satisfice* -- so that in the end, there is still a *democratic deficit* (see Lax and Phillips 2012; Weissberg, 1976, 1978, 1979; Page 2002, Burstein 2010, Achen 1977, 1978). Policymakers may be responding to public opinion but they often keep falling short or overshooting the mark. This is one theme in the time series studies that found responsiveness over time but also tracked a "thermostat" effect (Wlezien 1995) in which policies respond to public opinion by over-responding and provoking, in effect, a backlash in the hope of pulling policy back to what it prefers; or changes in policy can fall short of what the public wants (cf. Sharpe 1999, Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson 2002a, Soroka and Wlezien 2010, Bafumi and Herron 2010, Bartels 2008b; for a further discussion of this and its possible causes, see Shapiro, 2011, 1001-1003)..

It is important to monitor the extent to which policymaking responds not to mass public opinion, but rather to particular subgroups whose fundamental interests may differ from those of the public at large. Government policies may be responding unequally to public opinion – for example, to the opinions of the rich more than to the poor, or to those with the highest levels of political engagement and participation, or others. Or they may respond more readily to intensely-held opinions regardless of who holds them, so that a passionate and vocal minority may dominate a less passionate and more apathetic majority. Current state policies on illegal immigration would appear to provide an example here, where majority opinion suggests a far more tolerant approach than the policies adopted in a number of southern and Mexican-border states (though at this writing in August 2013, the nation has moved closer toward enacting moderate immigration reform).

The question of how economic inequality may have translated into political inequality – unequal influence on government leaders and policies—has received increasing attention, given rising economic disparities in the United States. Interestingly, studies examining changes over time in public opinion and policy have generally either found no difference in responsiveness to different groups or have found parallel changes in opinion among all subgroups (Soroka and Wlezien 2008, Wlezien and Soroka 2011b; but cf. Jacobs and Page 2005 on largely foreign policy issues). In contrast, based on *cross-sectional data*, Bartels' (2008a, Chapter 9) analysis of Senate voting using the 1988-1992 SNES revealed greater responsiveness among senators to those in the top-third income group versus the poor and those with middle income—both for overall liberal-conservative voting and for specific roll call votes (minimum wage, civil rights, important budget-related votes, and four abortion restriction votes; see also Griffin and Newman 2005, 2007, 2008; Rigby and Wright 2011). This kind of analysis of political inequality is very important and it requires replications with other data—on other policy issues and during different time periods (cf. Bhatti and Erikson 2011).

In that spirit and on a much larger scale—looking at national policies in the aggregate—Martin Gilens' (2005, 2012) found that policies were more likely to be enacted when supported by larger percentages of the affluent as opposed to larger percentages of those in middle and lower income groups. His recent book, *Affluence and Influence: Economic Inequality and Political Power in America* (2012) has provided a fuller picture of the extent of this statistical relationship and the extent to which it holds up after other variables are taken into account. He finds possible spuriousness involving the association between the preferences of the middle class and the poor with government policies, in that this association "is accounted for by shared preferences with the affluent." And "When the less-well-off Americans hold preferences that diverge from those of the affluent, policy responsiveness to the well-off remains strong but responsiveness to lower-income groups all but disappears" (Gilens 2012, p.5). These results are robust to other competing explanations, though representational inequality is lower in presidential election years. There are a few important issue-area exceptions, especially concerning social welfare policies, including Social Security, Medicare, public-works spending and others in this area; in this case policies are more responsive to the preferences of the poor and the middle class, which can be attributed to the strong interest-group allies such as labor unions and the American Association for Retired People, that are also supportive and work for these policies. With regard to how interest groups might limit responsiveness to ordinary citizens—or might increase it as in the case just cited—Gilens' work stands out in having data on interest group positions that he could take into account in multivariate analyses to show their significant independent effects and to guard against spuriousness. Gilens' research underscores the degree that—within any broad overall congruence between public opinion and policies—political responsiveness to ordinary citizens is limited in some, if not a great many, situations.

But why has this greater influence of the affluent has not been supported by evidence that *changes* in the opinions of higher-income Americans are more closely related to *changes* over time in government policies, such as spending, in different policy areas? Such different results for studies of responsiveness over time are not necessarily at odds: Government policies can move in the same direction over time as the opinions of all subgroups, but the substance or levels of the policies themselves may remain closer, maybe increasingly so, to the preferred policies of some groups more than others—most notably to those more well off and active in politics, with resources and opportunities that enhance their influence (Stimson 2011). If this is so, the end result would be the overall *democratic deficit* mentioned previously. This would not be surprising to those who have studied political inequality in the United States and the influences of money on who participates in politics and who is most likely to receive the attention of political leaders and policymakers (Schlozman, Verba, and Brady 2012, Gilens 2012, Bartels 2008a; for research on the opinions of the wealthiest Americans, see Page, Bartels, and Seawright 2013.)

This apparent policy deficit, along with cases of nonresponsiveness and various qualifications, contingencies, and the need to track causal mechanisms and processes at work, raise important questions about the extent and quality of American democracy.

Beyond the consequences of issue salience, other conditions affecting the attentiveness of policymakers to the general public can include: the size of opinion majorities, the magnitudes of

opinion changes, the time in an election cycle (policy changes responding to the public before an election—or after the election with changes in governing elites; Kuklinski 1978, and Shapiro 1982), the degree of electoral competition, and the politics associated with different types of issues which lead to predictions that responsiveness will be greater for domestic than foreign policies, which tend to be more complex, often less salient, and subject to presidential dominance (cf. Monroe 1979, Page and Shapiro 1983, Shapiro 1982, Shapiro and Jacobs 2000, 2002; Murray 2006, Baum and Potter 2008, Foyle, 2011). It matters which institutional actors are taking action: the president, a house of Congress, the Supreme Court or other courts, or state and local governments through their various institutions. Comparisons with and beyond the United States require taking into account differences between the American presidential system and parliamentary forms of government (see also Risse-Kappen 1991, 1994).

Are Surveys Necessary for Leaders to Be Responsive to Public Opinion?

In this context, we must also consider how useful and important survey data are for leaders as measures of public opinion. (A subsequent section of this report looks more directly at the degree to which leaders self-report that they do or do not use public opinion polling data.) There is evidence from the past of leaders' responsiveness to public opinion prior to the advent of scientific polling, certainly suggesting that such responsiveness is not necessarily dependent on polling. Moreover, the existence of opinion surveys does not mean legislators or any policymakers have access to measures of opinions on *all* issues on the policy agenda. Leaders historically have used a variety of sources for insight about public opinion. These have included information or impressions they might get from the mass media, organized groups and lobbies, social movements, mail from and contacts with constituents, staff members, various informants, and leaders own intuitive judgments (even simply their own opinions as a member of the public.) Leaders can choose what indicators of public opinion to attend to (see Zukin 1992, Powlick 1995, Herbst 1998, 2002; Brown 2011, Shaw 2000, Lee 2002a, 2002b; Rottinghaus 2007, Scott 2005).

Any evidence of responsiveness to public opinion prior to the availability of opinion polls would obviously have to be attributed to non-survey sources of information about the state of the relevant public opinion. Some studies, especially those concerned with representation over time, have used district-level partisan presidential votes as proxies for voter ideology and found early evidence for responsiveness (see Ansolabehere, Snyder, and Stewart 2001). Studies using ballot initiatives and referenda votes to estimate of policy preferences have also found indications of responsiveness (see the review by McDonaugh 1992, 1993; e.g., Overby 1991, on the nuclear freeze issue). A study using the available referenda results by county (covering the years 1913-1921) to measure district-level opinion toward women's suffrage, Prohibition, and the pro-labor Clayton Act found district opinion to have a substantial impact on House roll call votes (McDonaugh 1989, 1992, 1993). Preceding this national level research by several decades were three early studies of referenda and state level representation, all sharing the title "Do Representatives Represent?", that showed increased responsiveness in one state from the 1912-1926 period compared to a decade later (Arneson 1927, White 1938) and responsiveness on one major issue in Wisconsin in 1957 (Crane 1960).

For the years 1917-1937, just leading into the expansion of Gallup's polling, one intriguing study showed that the Literary Digest Polls, which had now-known biases in their population coverage and responses, could be used to uncover a significant impact of state-level public opinion on Senate voting on Prohibition, the Soldier's Bonus, and the Mellon Plan tax cuts (see Karol 2007). We have no idea—and we have reason to doubt—whether leaders were paying particularly close attention to these early non-scientific polls.

Still, despite these limitations, the totality of the available evidence provides an empirical picture of a visible connection between public opinion and government policies in the United States, even as (a) the exact nature of how this works is not totally clear, and (b) the strength of this connection has varied widely across time, issues, and the policymaking entity.

Conclusions and Implications for the Objectives of the Task Force

As noted, this brief review confirms that public opinion appears to matter in the policymaking process. This may be taken as heartening, given that AAPOR was founded based on the ideal of the importance of public opinion in nations, communities, and social, economic and political life more generally (Sheatsley and Mitofsky 1992). AAPOR's flagship journal, *Public Opinion Quarterly* at its outset focused heavily on the influences on public opinion, predicated on the assumption of the public's important impact on politics and policymaking. This assumption has clearly been borne out, as the review above shows, by evidence of "a substantial connection, overall, between public opinion and policymaking in the United States" (Shapiro 2011, p.982). That is, policymaking in the United States has in fact tended to be in line with or in sync with public opinion on many issues, at many levels, across many decades.

These findings are consistent with the incentives that elections provide for leaders running for office—and for political parties that recruit candidates attuned to what voters want— to seek out and use information about public opinion on issues that are (or might be) electorally important.

The Need for Improvement

Most broadly, these findings raise the question for this Task Force: "Why is a focus on change or improvement in the process by which public opinion is measured and made known to leaders necessary if the system of democratic representation appears to be working?"
There are several responses to that question.

First, it should be noted that patterns of leader responsiveness may be subject to change. One current debate, for example, focuses on the hypothesis that policy responsiveness to the public at large has decreased. The argument is that partisan conflict has become more polarized and presidents and other political leaders have used polling to determine how best to lead, persuade, and manipulate public opinion, not respond to it. The opinions that they may be most likely to respond to are those of their partisan bases whose support they must keep to avoid intra party

challenges (see Jacobs and Shapiro 2000, Layman, Carsey, and Horowitz 2006; Layman et al. 2010; Abramowitz 2010, Jacobson 2011, Fiorina with Abrams 2009, Wood 2009, Shapiro and Bloch-Elkon 2008, Shapiro and Jacobs 2010, 2011b; Quirk 2009, 2011; cf. McClosky, Hoffman, and O'Hara 1960). This might help explain why presidents have—perhaps increasingly—engaged in valiant but unsuccessful efforts to turn public opinion around on policy changes that they have proposed but that the citizenry at large has not supported (see Edwards 2003, Jacobs and Shapiro 2000).

Second, it is clear that the pattern of responsiveness is by no means universal, and there are many examples where leadership is out of sync with public opinion. This may be acceptable or even desirable in the eyes of those who advocate for a strong leadership role of elected representatives, but it is clear that increases in this "out of syncness" can lead to increased instability and an increasing loss of faith by the people in their government system.

Third, and along these same lines, there is the evidence that Americans are in fact increasingly dissatisfied with their government and the way it operates, particularly the legislative branch. This evidence includes extremely low Congressional job approval ratings, low confidence in Congress as an institution, low ratings of the honesty and ethics of elected representatives, and low levels of trust in government to do what is right. One recent study found that "...only about a quarter (26%) [of Americans] saying they can trust the government always or most of the time, while nearly three-quarters (73%) say that they can trust government only some of the time, or volunteer than they can never trust the government". http://www.people-press.org/2013/01/31/majority-says-the-federal-government-threatens-their-personal-rights/

While this state of affairs is not necessarily or totally a direct result of a lack of responsiveness of elected representatives to public opinion, it is a reasonable assumption that this is part of the reason.

Fourth, regardless of the evidence concerning the historical relationship between public opinion and policy decisions, the Task Force believes that a persistent effort to make public opinion data more accessible and easier to understand and use has been and should continue to be an important part of AAPOR's overall mission.

The proliferation in recent decades of polling results that are available to leaders should, in theory, strengthen the process of responsiveness and leadership described above, by providing better information about public opinion than has been available in the past (cf. Geer 1991, 1996; Jacobs and Shapiro 2000).

However, while there is no doubt that leaders and political parties have paid increasing attention to public opinion (e.g., Jacobs and Shapiro 1995a, 2000; Murray 2002, 2006; Tenpas and McCann 2007), there is no direct evidence that polling per se has strengthened responsiveness. Opinion surveys have provided data to study the opinion-policy connection. There is some interesting recent experimental evidence that learning about constituency opinion can affect how legislators vote (Butler and Nickerson 2011), and there is reason to believe that representatives' constituents evaluate them based on the priority that they give to the interests of their districts or states (Doherty 2013). To the extent they provide the best available measures of public opinion,

the widespread availability of poll results should sharpen findings for this relationship, and the relationships should be stronger if the results of polls actually enter the policymaking process. There is, however, no clear evidence for a stronger relationship than in the past, when electoral accountability was probably no less a motivating force. This underscores the value of a renewed effort to make public opinion data available and easy to use.[1]

Further, as we will consider below, political elites have not always believed, trusted, understood, or known how to interpret opinion polling--and many still do not. Thus any findings of responsiveness may reflect a sense of public opinion that political leaders may garner from the overall environmental "ether," so to speak, not what has come out of opinion polls alone (see also Jacobs and Shapiro 2000, Jacobs et al. 1998, Kull and Destler 1999, Kull and Ramsey 2002, Hawver 1954). Additionally, the denigration of polls by pundits and politicians—possibly designed to defang public influence on policy and to facilitate unequal influence by affluent citizens or unrepresentative interest groups that the pundits and politicians represent—could have an effect on leaders' willingness to use polling results.

None of this implies, as this report has made clear in previous sections, that democracy requires (or that it is optimal) that leaders *always* seek out and respond directly to what they learn about public opinion. But we believe that leaders should at least be attentive to the public, evaluate the quality of its opinions, and carefully consider bringing the wishes of the public into a process in which they attempt to persuade and guide the nation as part of the process of *leadership*. This could include explaining why their decisions and actions might deviate from what the public wants at the moment—but would be what the public would want in the longer term.

Conclusion

All in all, it is the assumption of this Task Force that finding ways to *improve* the ability of political leaders to directly learn about public opinion will accrue to the benefit of leaders' decision making, their efforts to gain support for their policies that serve the public interest, and *democracy* overall, and is thus a desirable objective. Since most assessments of public opinion today involve survey research, it is the assumption of the Task Force that finding ways to improve the ability of political leaders to understand and use polling results fits well within this goal.

[1] It should be noted that there is no reason to think—with respect to most prevalent theories of electoral democracy—that electoral institutions provide strong incentives to respond to "the public" in the aggregate. Rather, elected representatives piece together majority coalitions, and if there is responsiveness, it may well be to these. Often, producing coalitions may be quite different from responding to the public—for example, there may be incentives to support distinctions through wedge issues. It may also be worth noting that the high level of party polarization in Congress may have something to do with state-level redistricting for party advantage—not enabled directly by public opinion research, of course, but by new data capabilities.

This report turns next to evidence relating to leaders'—and the public's—views about the use of public opinion data.

PART III: The Public's and Leaders' Views on the Use of Public Opinion and Polling for Decision Making

This report has highlighted the contention that the society is better off when leaders and elected representatives are aware of public opinion and take public opinion into account in making leadership and policy decisions. At the same time, as has been discussed, the need for automatic or widespread congruence in the short-term between the policy decisions made by elected leaders and public opinion is debatable. At least some correspondence or consistency should probably result as a fulfillment of the philosophic underpinnings of a democratic society. However, democracy, as considered further in this report's Appendix, does not require and this report does not advocate that policymakers substitute the will of the people for their own judgment.

In addition to philosophic positions, or the arguments or theories of social scientists, there are, of course, the critically important views of the actual entities involved in this process—the citizens of a democracy and the leaders these citizens elect to represent them. How do the public and leaders see this process? To answer these questions, we turn next to an assessment of the research literatures that focus on the public's views of the optimal way in which their views are represented in policy decisions in a democracy, and then on the perceptions, views, and behavior of leaders themselves.

1. The Public's Views

In the broadest sense, Americans believe that public opinion is valuable and should be used by decision makers in making policy decisions.

It should be pointed out, to begin, that any review of polling data which deals with the subject matter of polls should be looked at with some caution. Results relating to polls and public opinion based on data from individuals who responded to questions in an opinion poll may involve a bias owing to the obvious fact that respondents have shown some favorable predispositions to polls by virtue of their decision to participate in the poll. Plus, there are environmental or contextual factors that may encourage positive responses about polling within the context of a poll.

Still, the finding that the public generally subscribes to the democratic ideal that leaders should respond in one way or the other to the wishes of their people appears to be a robust one. In recent years, the public's positive views of the value of public opinion may have been affected by the public's exceedingly negative views of elected representatives and the job they are doing, particularly in the legislative branch. In other words, to some extent Americans may be telling us that anything would be better than relying solely on the ability of elected leaders to use their own flawed or inept judgments – or to follow the influence of corporate or special interests -- in arriving at decisions.

At the same time, the public, as is the case with philosophers, is not fully of a single mind regarding the abstract question of the basis on which elected representatives should act. Research shows that when given choices, the public has indicated a desire for representatives who both respond and lead, with the mix of leadership and responsiveness determined by considerations of what would produce the most effective policies.

David Barker and Christopher Carman (2012, p.21-27) reviewed the very limited historical data and research that has examined citizens' general expressed attitudes toward the leadership versus responsive roles of representatives ("trustee" versus "instructed delegate"). Overall there was no consensus across these studies on which role the public preferred, and these opinions could vary depending on the context (data reported in Cantril and Struck 1951, McMurray and Parsons 1965, Davidson 1969, 1970; Patterson, Hedlund, and Boynton 1975; Parker 1974, Sigelman, Sigelman, and Walkosz 1992; Grill 2007, Fox and Shotts 2009). Citizens prefer to have leaders and bureaucrats with more knowledge and expertise than the public make political decisions and enact policies, but are less confident with regard to them "doing what's right" (cf. Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2002, Bowler, Donovan, and Karp 2007).

At the same time, examining congressional and presidential decision- making in general and in cases of different domestic and foreign policies, Barker's and Carman's analysis of 2006-2009 data reported that most of the survey respondents preferred that these leaders give the people what they want, though a sizeable minority wanted them to stay true to their values and principles (Barker and Carman 2012, p.28-37). This echoed the findings of a major Kaiser Family Foundation study in 2001 that found a comparable division of public opinion, with the public allowing for officials to rely on their own knowledge and judgment when they thought that majority opinion was in the wrong. Still, perhaps the study's most striking finding was that in moving away from the abstract to specific policy areas, large majorities—of two thirds or more—thought "that the public can make sound judgments about the general direction officials should take regarding..." economic, health care, and education issues; and fully half felt the same way on "foreign policy issues, such as whether to send our troops to another country or expanding our military" (Kaiser Family Foundation 2001).

Most broadly, survey researchers have been asking Americans about their views of survey research for decades. A recent review in *Public Opinion Quarterly* by Jibub Kim, Carl Gershenson, Patrick Glaser, and Tom Smith (2011) highlights Hadley Cantril's poll of November 1944 as the nation's first "poll on polls." The author of the 1944 *Public Opinion Quarterly* review of that poll, Eric Goldman, concluded that "a majority of the American public know about the polls, believe them generally a good thing, and trust their reports." The record of evidence on Americans' views on polls has been only sporadically updated since the 1940s. The Kim et al. review of polling trends did, however, conclude that there had been a "markedly negative shift in attitudes towards public opinion researchers and polls across several dimensions between the mid-1990s and the first decade of the 2000s" (2011, p.165).

Despite this more negative conclusion about pollsters/polls, the 2001 Kaiser study, as noted above, found more positive views when Americans were asked about how much attention officials in Washington should "pay to what public opinion polls say the public thinks" in

making decisions about (asking separately about) economic, health care, education social, and foreign policy issues. Clear majorities or pluralities responded "a great deal"—and well over 80% "a great deal" or "a fair amount"—for all these issue except for foreign policy (this echoed their responses that the majority of American should have a great deal or fair amount of influence "on the decisions of elected and government officials in Washington"; Kaiser 2001). These specific questions, however, have to date not been tracked in subsequent surveys.

More recent data suggest that there has remained strong majoritarian support for the idea that public opinion should be taken into account by leaders. Again, this may in part be due to the decline in the trust that Americans have in their system of government and in particular in their elected representatives and the way Congress works in conjunction (or not) with the White House. This lack of faith in representatives logically ties in with an increase in faith in the bottom rung of the pyramid of power—which is the citizens themselves. The system of representative government involves a balance between the people's wishes and the ways in which their elected representatives carry out those wishes. When the pendulum swings such that the people are not satisfied with the ways in which representatives are carrying out the people's wishes, then the people may increase their faith in their own views.

In September 2011, Gallup updated two trend questions that asked Americans about the impact of (a) the views of the public, and (b) the views of public opinion polls. The framework of the questions was as follows: "If the leaders of our nation followed [the views of the public/the views of public opinion polls] more closely, do you think the nation would be better off, or worse off than it is today?" Each version of the question was asked of a random split half sample of about 500 respondents each.

The results showed that the significant majority of Americans—77% in the version "views of the public" and 68% in the version "views of public opinion polls"—said that the nation would be better off if these two "entities" were followed more closely by leaders of the nation.

The first version asking about "the views of the public" had been asked four times previously by Gallup, in 1975, 1996, 2001 (September 7-10), and 2005. The low point was in 1975, when 67% responded "better off", and the highpoint was 80% in 1996. But from a broad perspective, the range over the four measurement periods from 1996 to 2011 has only been from 73% to 80%, suggesting both a stability of these attitudes, and a strong affirmation of the value of public opinion being taken into account by leaders.

The inclusion of the word "polls" in the question generally has the effect of lowering positive responses. The range of affirmative "better off" responses with the expression "views of public opinion polls" has been 61% to 73%, including the 2011 measurement of 68%, essentially in the middle of the range. The decrement in "better off" responses caused by the word poll ranges from 7% to 12%, and averages 10% points. More stark are Harris poll results for separate questions asked in April 2011: 83% of respondents felt that "public opinion" had too little influence in Washington, whereas the use of the word "polls" in the question lowered the "too little" percentage to 53%.

This finding underscores the fact that Americans have been somewhat more positive about the more abstract concept of "public opinion" being taking into account than they are the more specific "public opinion polls." This suggests that the words "poll(s)" or "pollster(s)" have had negative connotations over the years (see Rogers 1949). Indeed, Kim, et al.'s (2011) review of "surveys on surveys" found that "pollsters" as people had a negative image, and one that had become more negative over the years. This could be a consequence of the proliferation of polls, bitter debates over conflicting poll results, the use of "push polls," and the excessive attention to polls and these conflicts in the media. It could also could be a result of leaders' attempts to denigrate surveys and survey results showing low levels of support for their positions (or for them personally), so that they can be more responsive to subconstituencies with compelling interests or with money and power, as addressed further below.

Still, even at its low point in 2005, more than six in ten Americans indicated in response to the Gallup survey question that the nation would be better off if leaders followed the views of public opinion polls more closely. Six years later, in 2011, more than two-thirds of Americans said that the nation would be better off if leaders followed poll results or public opinion results more closely. These are strong results, though not as strong as a Gallup finding in 1996 that 87% of the public agreed that "public opinion polls" are a good thing for the country.

More recent Gallup organization polling has found an increased positive reaction to the "the American people as a whole when it comes to making judgments under our democratic system..." in contrast to decreased confidence in the official, representative bodies of government. Gallup has asked Americans each September since 2001 (and in some instances in years prior to that) to rate their level of confidence in the following:

1. The Executive Branch of Government
2. The Legislative Branch of Government
3. The Judicial Branch of Government
4. Government in your state
5. Local government in your area
6. Mass media - such as newspapers, TV. and radio -- when it comes to reporting the news fully, accurately, and fairly
7. Men and women in political life in this country who either hold or are running for public office
8. The American people as a whole when it comes to making judgments under our democratic system about the issues facing our country

Although the percentage of Americans who have a great deal or fair amount of confidence in each of these has varied over the last decade, one thing stands out. Americans have generally and consistently reported a high level of confidence in #8—the "American people as a whole". In September 2011, the results showed that 68% had a great deal or a fair amount of confidence in local governments, while 67% had a great deal of fair amount of confidence in the American people as a whole. Faith in the judicial branch of government came in at 63%. Tellingly, confidence in the legislative branch of government was down at 31%, the executive branch down at 47%, and confidence in the men and women holding political office was 45%.

In short, Americans have more faith in themselves to "make judgments under our democratic system about the issues facing our country" than they did in the men and women who hold national legislative office or in the legislative or Executive branches themselves.

One last piece of evidence for the American public having more influence on government policy, and possibly increasingly so, are changes in responses to the following question from 2004 to 2010 in the Chicago Council on Global Affairs' surveys: "How much influence do you think the following SHOULD have on U. S. foreign policy? 0 means they should not be at all influential and 10 means they should be extremely influential… The American Public?" The results: 70% of respondents in 2004 answered "6" or higher, and this rose to 85% in 2010. In contrast, in both years only 41% thought the American public currently had that amount of influence.

This last set of questions, however, did not ask explicitly about "public opinion" or "polls." It is possible that Americans may have been thinking primarily about the expression of the judgments of average Americans as expressed through voting and the ballot box and thus through their elected representatives. Still, this underlying expression of faith in the average citizens of the country would seem to imply that there would be faith in efforts to measure what these citizens are thinking and feeling about policy issues, measurements which of course could include polls.

The bottom line conclusion: A significant majority of the American public favors the idea that public opinion should be taken into account when leaders and elected representatives make policy decisions that affect the nation; the people's faith in their own wisdom is greater than their faith in the wisdom of the elected representatives they presumably elect to represent their views. In short, the evidence supports the assertion that Americans are desirous of, certainly not unequivocally opposed to, their elected representatives using polls and taking public opinion into account when making decisions that affect the nation.

One caveat to this is the argument that the public or voters want trustworthy leaders and could be disconcerted by politicians who appear to do nothing but follow public opinion (see Mansbridge 2003). While, as noted, the data fairly strongly support the idea that the public wants its leaders to pay attention to them (the public), there is also evidence that the public wants leaders who have character and internal convictions at the same time. This highlights the distinction between a direct democracy and a representative democracy. There is little doubt that the public neither wants a direct democracy with no representatives, nor wants representatives who pay no attention to the public between elections. Finally, it should be kept in mind that Americans' faith in their federal government and elected representatives has reached all-time lows in recent years, meaning—as noted—that faith in almost any alternative source of input and wisdom may be more welcomed now than it would be if people had great trust in their government. It is possible that if positive evaluations of government systems increase in years ahead, the desire to see public opinion and polls be a major part of the policy-making process could decrease concomitantly.

2. The Views and Behavior of Political Leaders

Unlike the case with the public's views of the appropriate role of public opinion in decision making by leaders in a democracy, we do not have ongoing, large scale opinion surveys that measure leaders' views on how they see the role of public opinion and polling in decision making. The evidence we do have comes from some survey and interview studies, various case studies, a variety of observations by political insiders and journalists, and anecdotal evidence (such as presidential candidate George W. Bush saying while campaigning in 2000 that "I don't need polls to tell me how to think. If elected President, I will not use my office to reflect public opinion;" but cf. Tenpas 2003.)

To understand the attitudes and behavior of political leaders regarding their reliance on polling and other information on public opinion requires that we understand their motivations. Given no other considerations, elected leaders presumably have their own preferred policy goals. Driven by political ideologies, principles, party platforms, egos, or other factors, they have ideas about what actions they think are best for government and the nation, as Burkean "trustees," or perhaps, for catering narrowly to particular supporters. They are not necessarily inclined to be fully attentive to public opinion writ large *or* their constituencies.

On the other hand, political leaders are also generally motivated by the desire to remain in office (Downs 1957, Mayhew 1974) or seek higher office. This may require that they act as "delegates" and not deviate too far from the opinions of the voters who (re)elect them. At the same time, leaders could in theory see the delegate style of representation as an obligation of office—and many state legislators and members of local council members may see themselves as delegates for constituents with whom they and their staff regularly interact. Leaders may also believe that the collective views of large groups of citizens provide an excellent source of wisdom that can effectively guide society forward in the most efficient way. But having to answer to voters at election time arguably best explains the overall extent of policy responsiveness that has been found in the United States. It is important to remember the review earlier in this report showing that—for whatever reasons—there does in fact tend to be substantial and agreement between the policy decision made by elected representatives and the attitudes and desires of their constituents.

The perspective that elected leaders have their own preferred policy goals or pursue those of their ideologically driven parties—rather than just the goal of representing what their constituents may want them to do—should take into account recent trends in electoral politics and the impact of campaign finance laws, including the recent Supreme Court rulings allowing unlimited campaign contributions as well as spending by organizations in support of political candidates. The power of money to influence the political and policymaking process may be greater now than in the past. Policymakers thus have to deal not only with the tension between what they believe is right versus what they think voters want, but also with what deep-pocket contributors think. Of course, the influence of entities with money on politics is by no means a new phenomenon. But it remains true that in order to be elected and re-elected, politicians now have to be highly attentive to their need to raise money from corporate and other well-off donors and "bundlers" for their campaigns, and to motivate "independent" supportive organizations or

committees. All of this is necessary to pay for effective advertising and workers to mobilize supportive voters and persuade inattentive and undecided voters. (The rise in the influence of outside money may also increase the public's disdain for the political process, and could enhance the incentives for politicians explicitly to say that they follow the wishes of their constituents rather than the interests of those with the most money.)

All elected leaders face the same democratic dilemma concerning the extent to which they should lead or follow public opinion. Faced with the choice, it is common for leaders to emphasize that they are chosen for the capabilities to do what is in the best interest of their constituents/electorates. This does not preclude representative from using information, including polls, to gauge and take into account their constituents' wishes, but they rarely, if ever—and this applies to presidents as well—publicly say they are simply doing what their constituents tell them to do, let alone report they are acting based on what the latest opinion poll is telling them about their constituents' opinions (e.g., Jacobs, Lawrence, Shapiro, and Smith 1998). Elected representatives may believe that it is politically incorrect for them to say they are going to follow the winds and whims—and passions—of public opinion, as the Founders of the American republic and U.S. Constitution would have put it. As the previous section of this report outlines, this belief may be incorrect. The public may in theory appreciate their representatives making it clear that they are following the opinions of their constituents. The political value of a representative saying out loud that he or she explicitly and primarily attempts to follow the wishes of constituents in making decisions and votes has not been fully tested.

But when probed further it is clear that leaders at all levels look for information about voters' sentiments, presumably because most do in the end face re-election and perhaps because they have a genuine desire to understand the views of those they represent to help guide their own decisions.

Continuing from the time before opinion polling, leaders have cited a number of sources of information about the most relevant opinions to which they need to attend. The consensus that emerges from extant research and from insider accounts and accounts from journalists is that to the extent that relevant polls are available, they are at treated as one source of information among many about public opinion.

While it not possible to say for certain, public opinion data might be much more important if they were readily available—that is, cheaply and easily accessible—to utilize for purposes of responding or leading public opinion. This report will turn to those considerations in Part V.

Presidential Administrations

Among all political leaders in the United States, we know the most about American presidents. There has been a long history of research on the "public presidency," examining the relationship between presidents and public opinion (e.g., see Edwards 2003, 2006; Tulis 1997, Kernell 1997, Neustadt 1980, Jacobs and Shapiro 1994 1995a, 1995b, 2000; Eisinger 2003, and Heith 2004). American presidents have been able to draw on national polling data since Franklin Roosevelt

first had ongoing access to polls on policy issues conducted by Hadley Cantril's Office of Public Opinion Research (OPOR; Cantril 1965, Casey 2001; see also Eisinger 2003, Holli 2002, on FDR's election pollster/consultant Emil Hurja). This use of available polling data became more institutionalized beginning with the Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon administrations. Pollsters or polling-savvy advisors like Patrick Cadell in the Carter administration, Richard Wirthlin in the Reagan years, Dick Morris in the Clinton administration, and Karl Rove in the George W. Bush White House all exemplify the power that polling can have in a presidential administration.

Today the White House is able to monitor public opinion through polls provided by the two national political parties and by presidents' election campaigns, as well as the great many--and increasing– number of media and other polls that are publicly available or available for a subscriber fee, including some accessible online. By most accounts, presidential administrations now monitor all these sources of polling data continually. While the U.S. government provides support for surveys on politics and policy issues by researchers outside of government, it does not use public funds for political and policy polling in the U.S. (though it does so abroad) of the sort most relevant to this report. This reflects the need to avoid violations of laws regarding the political behavior of public officials (in contrast to administrative and government agency surveying noted above).[2]

Presidents and their parties conduct more polling during election campaign periods than during the years between elections (see Jacobs and Shapiro 1995a**,** Murray and Howard 2002, Tenpas and McCann 2007), and there is more publicly-available polling in election years. This underscores the likelihood that a central motivation for polling is maintaining and increasing voter support in the next election. Indeed, in election years, a good deal of the polling which presidential administrations and their surrogates pay attention to is directly campaign- related, dealing with candidate images, horse race assessments, and message testing. Having polling available which assesses the public's attitudes about key policy issues has helped maximize what presidents and their staffs know about public opinion and voters, allowing them to compare their own positions and policy objectives with those of the public and subgroups within the electorate. But, as noted in Part II, there is no clear evidence that the expansion of polling through the present has led to a consistent increase in policy responsiveness over time. Rather, in contrast to George Gallup's and others' early expectations, polling and poll results have been used not only to respond to public opinion, but also to design and assess efforts to lead (or manipulate) public opinion in the direction of the White House's policy objectives.

[2] It is striking that when Congress very belatedly learned that the State Department was conducting "secret" foreign policy surveys (administered by NORC) in the 1940s and 1950s, it held hearings and rebuked the State Department, ending these surveys. Congress saw this as a usurpation of power by the executive branch, arguing that it represented public opinion and such polls were unnecessary. See Eisinger 2003, p.48-51; Foster 1983, and Page and Shapiro 1992).

Most important, polling is often used to devise the best ways – through political rhetorical and activities—to move public opinion in a desired direction and to attempt (though with great difficulty and rare success on policy issues) to increase voter support for the president and his policies (on "crafted talk," see Jacobs and Shapiro 2000; in the case of foreign policy, see Cohen 1973; cf. Polick, 1995a, 1995b). This has applied on a larger and larger scale to politicians, politics, and policymaking at all levels. Where presidents can have success, as James Druckman and Lawrence Jacobs (2009) observed in their review of this work, is in having substantial influence on what issues rise to the fore on the policy agenda so that they can target their responsive behavior to them and to the preferences of certain segments of the country. Presidents can also shift the standards by which the public evaluates their performance in office – moving them away from policy concerns and toward symbolic activities, image, and personality, as they find it exceedingly difficult to persuade the public to support their policy efforts (see Cohen 1997, Jacobs and Shapiro 1994a, Druckman and Jacobs 2006, 2009, 2011).

Presidents, however, are in a unique position. They are leaders of their parties and have a national constituency. They have financial and other resources and expertise available to them that other elected officials and political leaders do not always have, especially those at the state and local level, for whom polling has not expanded as it has nationally and whose circumstances this task force is less well positioned to address (this is an important question for future research). Moreover, polling is only one of many sources of information that presidents, like other political leaders can draw on. In addition, there are limitations to polling results that make them less useful to leaders (a topic to be addressed later in this report), and they have and other sources of information on public opinion that they find more accessible and hence useful.

Other Leaders

There is less information available about public opinion and members of Congress and leaders at other governmental levels. While U.S. Senators and the few at large U.S. Representatives may have access to media and other polls at the state level, the degree to which most U.S. representatives have regular access to polls specifically in their districts has not been determined. As noted in the older Miller and Stokes study (1963) cited earlier, members of Congress' perceptions of their constituencies' opinions almost certainly did not come from opinion polls, as they were unlikely to have conducted them. Where it has been possible to compare legislators or other leaders' relevant perceptions of public opinion with measures of public opinion, some early studies suggested their perceptions were fairly good, particularly on salient issues but less so on others such as foreign policy; more recent research has found significant *misreading* of public opinion (see Miller and Stokes 1963, Hedlund and Friesema1972, Kull and Destler 1999, Kull and Ramsey 2002, Kull 2004, and Kull et al., 2011).

As noted, there is little research or evidence about the degree to which members of the House or Senate have easy access to regular polling in their districts or states, or the degree to which they use national polling data to estimate of the opinions of their constituents. By virtue of the wide reporting of public opinion poll results and polling done by the Republican and Democratic national parties, Senators and members of Congress' and their staffs can follow and pay attention

to these results more than their counterparts in the past. But there is no systematic evidence measuring the degree to which these policymakers use this information in their legislative decisions, and it is reasonable to hypothesize that such data is not consistently available. Representatives are, as might be expected, more likely to seek out or do their own polls of their constituents as part of their reelection campaigns than for policy making purposes between elections. But there is little available data on the numbers of these proprietary congressional district and statewide polls--especially ones focusing on policymaking apart from campaign and election polling (see Herbst 1998, Alpert et al. 1954).

Are political leaders a priori dismissive of public opinion on grounds that they think the public is not sufficiently competent and should defer to their judgment? There is little evidence to support that hypothesis. Though not repeated subsequently, the 2001 Kaiser survey included a sample of policy leaders, including congressional and executive branch officials. In responses to some of the same questions cited above, these leaders acknowledged, though less so than the public itself, that the public could make sound judgments about the general direction officials should take on particular issues. They also acknowledged, again less so than the public at large, that the majority should have a fair amount or great deal of influence over government officials in Washington. What they had reservations about concerned the use of polls to measure opinions of interest to them, compared to other indicators of opinion (Kaiser Family Foundation 2001)

Although all adult citizens in a politician's area of representation in theory have an equal weight at the ballot box, for a variety of reasons, elected leaders in reality may not regularly pay equal attention to all segments of their constituency or electorate. Political scientists have identified "subconstituencies" that for Senators and members of Congress can attain significantly disproportionate importance. These can vary by policy issue. These subconstituencies might be defined in term of core electoral supporters, increasingly including campaign donors, and those with whom members of Congress have regular contact as related specific ways that they serve individual or groups of constituents, or related to services from the federal government that they bring back to the district (see Mayhew 1974, Fenno 1978, Fiorina 1989, Bishin, 2000, 2009).

A recent study of congressional representation by Kristina Miler (2010), based on a number of interviews with staff members in a sample of congressional offices, is striking in that most of the long list of subconstituency opinions of concern to the legislators on the policy issues the study examined were not of the sort that can be readily found and extracted from sample surveys. These subconstituencies instead consisted of entities such as business leaders, physicians, patients, organized labor, farmers, senior citizens, insurance companies, attorneys, environmentalists, consumers, utilities, veterans, oil and gas, mining, Native Americans, oil and gas companies, sportsmen, farmers, and state government. The study found that members of Congress were involved in representing these subconstituencies' interests through a process that did not reflect corruption but rather a more natural consequence of the psychological effect of the access of these groups. Legislators too apparently make use of information shortcuts (heuristics) in ascertaining and representing the preferences of their constituents.

This search for information has always occurred. As noted in Part II, in the days before polling and continuing today, leaders found and used many sources of information about public attitudes

and preferences of interest to them and their offices. In a sense what leaders have done to gauge public opinion mirrors what historians and others interested in public opinion have done during times before polling began, and also subsequently when no relevant public opinion data have been available. These sources are emphasized in research and writing on the *social construction* of public opinion as well (see Herbst 1998). To different degrees leaders can and have drawn on each of the following as reflecting or leading indicators of public opinion: mass media reports and commentary (newspapers, radio, television), and talk shows and call-in broadcasts; election results and interpretations of them; the positions and lobbying and other activities of the representatives and members of interest groups; statements and activities of party activists; the sizes and actions of social movements; e-mails, Tweets, social media posts, letters and other written communication from individuals, direct contacts and conversations with individual or groups of constituents; town hall meetings and other public gatherings; the observations of staff members and other informants; and, like any ordinary individuals themselves, leaders' own observations and reactions to events and changing conditions, and their mingling with the community. In short, leaders can pick and choose among these sources of information about public opinion and use them as multiple indicators of public opinion, as well as any public or proprietary opinion survey data that are available (see Zukin 1992, Powlick 1995a, Herbst 1998, 2002; Brown 2011; Shaw 1997, 2000; Kaiser Family Foundation 2001, Lee 2002a, 2002b; Rottinghaus 2007. and Scott 2005).

In conclusion, evidence suggests that elected representatives are most likely aware of the broad sentiments of those in their districts, but there is less evidence which quantifies precisely the degree to which leaders either have access to polling data, or pay close attention to such data when they are available. This has not prevented them from arguing that they have public support for their positions. Members of Congress, for example, have not hesitated to invoke "public opinion" or "the American people" in floor debates, but they rarely mention polls and often get the facts wrong (e.g., Cook, Barabas, and Page 2002a, 2002b; Page and Paden 2003).

Reasons Why Leaders May Be Hesitant to be Attentive to Polls

The available evidence, much of it anecdotal, suggests that leaders have approached polling results with some caution and skepticism. This may be less true of politicians and policymakers in recent years as they, their staffs, and experts whom they can draw have become more skillful and sophisticated in understanding survey data.

Some of the skepticism that all manner of elites have about polls may reflect their possible perception of the public as not well informed or capable. Leaders may devalue poll results that appear contradictory or show inconsistencies, as in instances in which the different wordings of survey questions on ostensibly the same issue appear to affect results. They may claim that the polls do not accurately reflect what the public thinks; that polls do not ask for the public's opinions on the right issues; and that the results of polls can be interpreted to support different positions (see Kaiser Family Foundation 2001, Kull and Destler 1999; cf. from past times Kriesberg 1945, Yarmolinksy 1963; and cf. Page and Shapiro 1992, and the related literature cited earlier). Other elites may not view the public as universally ignorant, but as far better

informed on some issues than others (such as technical economic issues or foreign policy considerations), and may consequently pay more attention to public opinion on issues—especially highly visible and electorally important ones—for which they deem the public to be better informed and more likely to react to policy decisions. Some leaders may be less concerned about public opinion on an issue if they think opinion is not intensely held and therefore not likely to become politically significant.

Some leaders may claim that the public is fickle, so that poll results are volatile, or that they cannot rely on a drive-by snapshot of public opinion at one passing point in time. This may happen particularly when survey results are at odds with the leaders' own opinions that they want to adhere to and lead from (e.g., Jacobs and Shapiro 2000, Jacobs et al. 1998, Kull and Destler 1999, Kull 2004).

As noted earlier, even if leaders pay attention to polls and may be inclined to respond in certain instances, they may be reluctant to say so, because to do so undermines what the leaders perceive as their own value as well-informed and trusted leaders. Some officials say they do not pay attention to polls out of the conviction they want to lead and not follow the masses. This conviction that leaders know better than their constituents what is right and good to do no doubt also reflects the ego strength that compels leaders to seek office to begin with. Many support the legitimacy and value of leaders defending goals and the specific policies that they wish to pursue. New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg, a former business CEO, encapsulates this approach, saying "Leadership is about doing what you think is right and then building a constituency behind it. It is not doing a poll and following from the back. If you want to criticize the political process—and it's probably true throughout history, and certainly not just in the United States—I think it's fair to say, in business or in government, an awful lot of leaders follow the polls. And that's not the way to win. I happen to think it's not ethical, or right, and not your obligation. But I don't even think it's good business or politics, because people aren't good at describing what is in their own interest."
http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2012/11/the-bloomberg-way/309136/

In contrast, other leaders might take largely same view but might be interested in learning at the outset whether their assumptions about the public are correct regarding particular interests and issues. And leaders can draw on polling results to see how they might engage in "building a constituency" for their policies (e.g., see Jacobs and Shapiro 2000).

In examining poll results, even leaders who are not cynical about the capabilities of the public may find difficulty or fault with confusion they see in survey results, or perceive what they think are biases and distortion due to the motivations of the pollsters who frame the questions that are asked, those who commission the polls, and the media or others who report the results (for a review of examples of biases or incompetent poll questions and the reporting of them, see Bishop 2005). Another possibility is that leaders and those around them may feel they do not have the technical know-how to assess the accuracy and reliability of the data, to make sense of the results, or to tease out the more relevant parts of the data that they might find most useful (e.g. Alpert et al., 1954). Leaders may not be easily able to make sense of data of interest that are available from multiple surveys, conducted by organizations that may vary in the quality of their

polling. Although there is no empirical research which measures elected representatives' knowledge of the scientific basis of polls, it is certainly possible that among other reasons for skepticism of polls, there still remains for some elites lingering ignorance of the power of small random samples. One such example of an apparent lack of understanding of the nature of polling was provided by Florida representative Daniel Webster who in 2012 wanted to get rid of the Census Bureau's American Community Study because he thought it was worthless since it was "...not a scientific survey. It's a random survey." http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/20/sunday-review/the-debate-over-the-american-community-survey.html?_r=0

Further, political leaders can maintain that national poll results are not useful for learning about the relevant opinions of their constituents at some other geographic level. The freely available polling data in the media or on websites or otherwise publically available may not have the information about public opinion they most need. This is particularly true for state and local leaders interested most in state and local issues whereas the available data cover only national issues and the opinions of national samples. Still, politicians' insistence that "my district is different" on national issues is contradicted by research that has shown that on many major issues the geographic variation is small if not trivial (see Kull 2004).[3]

The vast majority of leaders do not have the resources to do extensive polling, especially between election campaigns. National leaders—members of the House and Senate or candidates for these offices—are better positioned to draw on the private polls that the two major parties regularly conduct, and they might raise funds that they can devote to their own polls, especially during their (re)election campaigns.[4]

Still, because of the lack or relevant available survey data, many elected leaders are left to use other sources for information described above bearing on the opinions from the constituencies they most need to know about. Many legislators may also simply feel that that "their 'years of experience' place their finger on the 'pulse of the district'" (Scott 2005, p.5; see also Fenno 1978), though this may mean focusing on some subconstituencies more than others as noted above.

Even when polling data are available these other sources provide information on other aspects of public opinion beyond the top-line and demographic and other subgroup results. Leaders can obtain insight into intensity of opinion by monitoring those who are engaged in more visible

[3] This research even included a special poll in congressional representative Helen Chenowith's Idaho district to show that the good people of Boise did not fear United Nations' black helicopters (Kull and Destler 1999).

[4] Where state or legislative district polling may not be available, legislators offices or campaigns might draw on by sound scientific methods that could be better publicized that use demographics-based simulations to estimate opinion in specific states, districts, or localities. See Lax and Phillips (2009a), Warshaw and Rodden (2012), and other related works cited earlier.

activity motivated by their opinions. The opinions of individuals in constituency groups who cannot readily be identified in the available survey data are made known through a variety of non-survey means. These kinds of additional information may be leading indicators not available in polls that may anticipate changes in mass opinions that are underway.

Conclusions

Overall, the available evidence suggests that elected representatives generally feel they are in touch with the views of the people they represent, and that there is certainly no strong, publicly-expressed sentiment on the part of these leaders that they normatively should continually pay attention to public opinion polls. This puts leaders to some degree at odds with the wishes of the people they represent, who appear to want them (that is, the leaders) to pay more attention to polls representing their (that is, the public's) views and sentiments.

This section has reviewed a number of philosophic and personal explanations for why elected leaders both privately do not seek out or use polling information, and publicly shy away from giving evidence that they pay close attention to polls,

This review has also discussed practical reasons why leaders may find it difficult to assess public opinion polling data. These are important. If public opinion data are not easily available, if public opinion is difficult to integrate and interpret, and if public opinion data appears on the surface to be contradictory or labile, then leaders may not be able to, or inclined not to, take such data into account in their decision making—no matter how motivated to do so they are. In short, a necessary (but certainly not sufficient) requirement for any systematic use of public opinion data by leaders is that such data be accessible and approachable.

It is to these types of practical considerations relating to the use of public opinion data by leaders that this report turns next.

PART IV: Practical Obstacles to Leaders' Use of Public Opinion Data

This section of the Task Force report takes up practical issues involved in the use of public opinion data by policy makers. While the previous sections of this report provide no explicit consensus or prescription on the exact role public opinion should play in policy decisions in democratic societies, it is clear that public opinion is by definition an extremely important component of the functioning of any society, even in non-democratic countries, and that its role will almost certainly become more rather than less important in the years ahead. The recognition of this fact fits with the overarching goal of AAPOR of fostering the understanding of public opinion and what influences it, and improving its measurement so that it can be used as appropriate to the betterment of humanity and society (for an early related debate about the power of polls, see Bernays 1945 and Field, Lazarsfeld, Robinson, and Bernays 1945-46).

As this report has pointed out, there are a number of ways in which public opinion in a society can become known—up to and including uprisings, riots and revolutions. The primary focus of AAPOR in today's U.S. environment is the measurement of public opinion through *research*—as is explicit in the organization's name. Public opinion research today focuses primarily on public opinion surveys, or polls, although it is possible that new modes of measuring public opinion, including those centering around the analysis of available social media data, will increasingly be used in the years ahead.

Thus the Task Force recommends that there should be ongoing efforts to continue to improve the quality of data collected in public opinion surveys and polls, and to improve the ability of leaders to access, understand, and use these data. These goals are consistent with the many different ways in which public opinion data can be useful to leaders. In addition to simply measuring opinions, polls can disclose the intensity of opinions and issue salience; and they can reveal information gaps and illuminate needs for education and persuasion for the pursuit of the public good, among other things.

Most generally, this section of the report assumes that a significant component of a well-functioning democratic society is the measurement of public opinion on a regular basis, and a process by which the results of that measurement procedure are known and accessible not only to the public from whence the data come, but to leaders who are charged with making decisions and policy that affect the society.

This process is not an easy one. There are obstacles and challenges. The chief challenges are twofold. First is the challenge of assessing and improving the quality and therefore the usefulness of public opinion data. The second has to do with the science and art of analyzing, integrating, and making accessible polling data.

Leaders, as noted above, can point to conflicting and contradictory research data on public opinion on key issues. It is difficult to use public opinion as a basis for decision making when it is unclear exactly what public opinion is. A number of different survey organizations typically assess public opinion on key issues, often in different ways and at different times, and this can leave the policy maker adrift in an effort to make sense of it all. Along these same lines, it is

often difficult for policy makers and elected representatives to find or locate available data. While there are depositories for raw data such as the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, and an increasing number of online poll data "*aggregators"* (some examples of which are: huffingtonpost.com/news/pollster/; realclearpolitics.com; fivethirtyeight.com; pollingreport.com), these efforts are often fragmentary, difficult to use, and focused on providing only raw data rather than summarizing what it means. Aggregation also raises the issue of equal treatment of survey results which in fact have unequal quality, and in particular difficulties in integrating survey data on key issues based on different samples and using different question wordings.

Overall, there appear to be three broad types of practical obstacles to the use of public opinion data. These are:

(1) The ability of leaders to find relevant public opinion data in a straightforward, systematic and efficient way, rather than stumbling across it sporadically;

(2) The ability of leaders to shift through public opinion data and assess its quality, making decisions on which surveys are most likely to be representative and which are not;

(3) The ability of leaders to make sense out of the body of public opinion on a given topic, particularly when assessments are based on different questions, different time periods, and different sampled populations, and to make decisions on how the public opinion data should or could be used to affect policy decisions.

The sections which follow address each of these obstacles and discuss possible ways in which each can be addressed. These sections include considerable input from AAPOR members in response to a request sent to all members, and from those members attending a session on this topic held at the AAPOR 2011 Annual Conference in Phoenix, Arizona. Some of these issues overlap concerns addressed by AAPOR's Transparency Initiative and standards efforts, committed to ensuring data quality. It should also be noted that AAPOR members who contributed in these forums had widely differing views on what the appropriate role of AAPOR as an organization should be in terms of fostering better understanding and use of public opinion data.

1. Finding and Aggregating Public Opinion Data

In order for leaders to use public opinion data as an input into their decision making, they need to be able to find it. This problem is not unique to the field of public opinion. Research is a continuing process in most fields, and the results of that research appear in many different places in many different forms across time. The challenge for those who are intent on understanding and using the resulting knowledge is to know that it exists and to collect it together in one place.

This is less of a problem for academics or other specialists in a field, because these specialists spend their professional lives constantly maintaining vigilance on the status of knowledge in

their given area of expertise. Academics and specialists subscribe to journals, visit websites, engage in discourse with colleagues, and in general monitor their field on a daily basis. From time to time, these experts write review articles, react to current research online, and with somewhat longer lead times, write books that summarize the state of knowledge. Historians know the literature in their field of specialty, cardiologists try hard to be up to date on research in their area, and computer scientists are constantly aware of the changing state of knowledge in their field.

A problem arises when non-specialists attempt to understand or summarize the literature in a field in which they are not involved on a daily basis. One excellent example is the field of medical and health research, given that so many non-specialists are interested in the results and their applicability to their own personal health situations. A number of ways to access medical research on a given topic have arisen as a result of this need. Consumer-oriented websites and other publications, some sponsored by medical institutions such as the Mayo Clinic and others by for-profit groups and entities, now take it upon themselves to summarize the data and literature on specific medical topics. They do this with varying degrees of expertise. The content on the Mayo Clinic website, for example, is controlled by medical specialists at that institution. Other publications may have lay journalists do the summarizing.

Medical specialty societies invest resources in developing practice guidelines for their doctor members, most of which are accessible by the general public. These societies bring together a number of their member-experts who systematically assess the state of knowledge in a given area and publish resulting guidelines for practice in those areas. These guidelines, although perhaps relatively impenetrable to many laypeople, are publicly available and provide access to the relevant literature and sources for given health issues or diseases.

The field of public opinion research has seen some efforts resembling these over the years, but none have been highly systematic. As is the case in these other fields, there is a continually aggregating body of knowledge in most areas of public opinion research, with many survey and other measures of public opinion on most topics of possible interest continuing to pour forth on an on-going basis. Some of the resulting data are widely visible and available, and other data are more obscure. Some results are brought to leaders' attentions directly, while others are published or otherwise made available in more isolated locations where leaders are highly unlikely to run across them.

Leaders who would like to find research assessing public opinion on specific topics thus face a real challenge. Most leaders are not public opinion specialists, are not acquainted with the extant "literature" in a given field, and certainly do not have at their fingertips a command of the different ways and places in which they can find public opinion. Where to look for public opinion and how to know if all relevant public opinion data has been pulled together?

Some leaders, of course, have experts whom they can call on to find and analyze relevant studies on a topic of interest. Elected representatives at the national level, and high-level business executives in major companies, often have staff members who can go forth and look for public opinion data, and/or seek out experts. An additional approach often used by elected

representatives is to hold a formal hearing in which experts are invited in to review relevant material. Still, even national representatives and Senators do not have the time, inclination, or resources to engage in this process on every topic of interest that comes up. More generally, many leaders do not have the resources available to them to seek out and bring together public opinion research data, and thus are basically left to what is easily available or given to them on an ad hoc basis.

The public opinion industry itself has tools used by its practitioners which in theory could be made more available to leaders seeking to understand public opinion on given topics. These include databases that collect and make available data on specific topics. The oldest and best known of these is the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, which was developed just to serve this purpose – that is, to collect and make available public opinion data from many disparate sources. Other websites with online databases, such as *pollingreport.com*, pull together published or reported data on given topics; in the areas of foreign policy and related opinions in the United States and worldwide, there is *http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/about.php* and *http://www.americans-world.org* of the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA). Specific research organizations, such as Gallup and the Pew Research Center, have comprehensive websites which allow visitors to search for data on given topics. Other sites associated with companies that conduct polls include data from their recent polls.

AAPOR's major journal, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, publishes articles on "The Polls—Trends" and "Poll Reviews" and sections on particular topics, although it seems likely that few leaders are aware of POQ's existence and know how to find it and reference it. Furthermore, these review sections, excellently compiled by public opinion specialists at the time they are submitted for publication, can become dated within weeks or months after their publication.

Of course, the most efficient way in which relevant public opinion data are collected and assessed no doubt is to have an expert – a public opinion librarian, as it were – do the searching until a comprehensive list of poll data on a given topic is assembled. This, as noted previously, is not a mechanism which is readily available to the average leader.

Most of the ways of finding public opinion data outlined here are not known to the general population of leaders. Thus, overarching all of this discussion is the need to make all possible sources of public opinion data known to leaders so that they have the opportunity to take advantage of them. Failing this, leaders are confronted with the possibility that they will be cognizant only of certain bits and pieces of public opinion research on a given topic, often based on which lobbyists bring the research to their attention, or based on what they happen to read or hear about from miscellaneous sources. Additionally, as already noted, leaders often want localized data. Even when know there are no regional differences in national data, leaders may want to know what opinion is like in their districts or states -- which to them may seem "unique."

Of course, instances may also arise at the level of national, state, or local issues when leaders may be interested in public opinion data when there are in fact no data yet available. Some of these may be cases of important issues and pressing problems for which the challenge becomes one of the process by which such data can be collected.

2. **Making Judgments of the Quality of Survey Results**

Once leaders and/or their staff have access to, or have compiled or brought together, public opinion data on a given topic, they are faced with the challenge of assessing its quality. Not all surveys or other measures of public opinion are created equally. Those on the "inside" of the public opinion industry are well aware of the differential quality of various surveys purporting to measure public opinion, although even within the industry there are often disagreements on the value of a given public opinion assessment. The issue today is often not one of an "either/or" decision on whether to accept or totally reject a study of public opinion. Rather, the issue is one of judging the relative merits of a study, and making a decision on how much weight it should be given, what parts of it should be paid attention to, or how the results could inform or relate to other studies.

This differential nature or quality of survey research results is sometimes based on different methodologies. This is an increasingly important concern. Various entities today claim to assess public opinion, with data collection mechanisms that range from rigorous attempts to use the latest scientific sampling techniques, to non-representative collections of Internet survey postings, to compilations of haphazard postings from visitors to social media sites. Populations under study vary widely, from the general adult population, to likely voters, to those communicating through Twitter and Facebook. Indeed, a major trend going forward is likely to be increased attempts to "data mine" the millions of postings on these and other social media sites.

It can be tempting for an interested leader to take all of these types of studies into account and to give them all equal weighting, but of course this would not be a prudent course of action. Medical researchers certainly would not give all medical studies equal weight without some effort to assess their relevant quality and adherence to usually accepted scientific procedures. Likewise, those interested in analyzing public opinion on a given topic need some procedure for assessing the quality of the studies that measure public opinion.

AAPOR's Code of Standards and its recently launched Transparency Initiative are aimed at making sure that published public opinion studies reveal and make public all of the details of how the study was done – including sampling method, dates of data collection, screening procedures, question wording, context, respondent selection, and so forth. This is an admirable and worthwhile goal that stretches back to AAPOR's beginnings, based on the premise that it is impossible to assess the quality of a research study if one does not have the details on how the study was done.

The disclosure of methods goes only so far, however. Having at one's fingertips all of the relevant information about how a study was conducted is useful only to the degree to which the interested observer is able to use that information.

Since most leaders are not public opinion experts, the challenge becomes one of finding ways of providing expert guidance on the relative quality and value of specific public opinion studies – even assuming that the progenitors of those studies make available all relevant methodological details about how the study has been conducted. As was the case for the challenge of assembling public opinion data, the best way to handle this situation is either to have experts readily available, or to have access to assessments done by experts. Well-placed leaders with staffs may find it easy to ask experts for their help; many leaders are not so lucky.

3. **Integrating Studies of Public Opinion on Specific Topics and Making Judgments about the Implications of the Survey Research for Actual Policy Decisions.**

Once a leader has located the relevant body of studies of public opinion on a given topic of interest, and has made judgments on the quality of each of these studies, he or she is faced with the challenge of making sense of it all.

This is a very difficult challenge. In any field of endeavor in which there is a great deal of research literature, it is a challenge to figure out what it all means when it is all taken into account. The legal profession is perhaps most practiced at dealing with this situation, since lawyers and judges operate within an environment in which precedents based on existing legal decisions often provide the most important contextual variable used as the basis for making new legal rulings. Lawyers make it their business stay current on the case background of a legal issue, and there are a wide-ranging number of print and electronic tools at their disposal to facilitate this process.

But other fields face the same challenges, without the same types of well-developed tools as the legal profession. The Civil War historian must integrate and make sense out of a great deal of information relating to a specific battle, often using historical records, memoirs, and archives in addition to published articles and books. The CIA or FBI analyst much attempt to integrate and make sense out of vast quantities of information from many different sources in order to spot patterns that might suggest criminal activity. The practicing doctor today must integrate and make sense out of the mass of data on a number of different screening tests. The climate scientist must attempt to make sense out of, and integrate, a wide ranging literature on the causes and implications of the warming of the earth.

In all of these areas there are disputes, controversies, arguments, and disagreements over just what the literature is saying – even among learned experts. Imagine the despair that might beset a lay leader who is attempting to understand where public opinion is on a particular topic, in the face of numerous studies that may seem to imply quite different conclusions.

Some public opinion topics may permit more straightforward interpretation than others. For example, even given declining support in recent years owing to the discovery of innocent convicted felons on death row, almost all public opinion studies have shown that a majority of Americans favor the death penalty in cases of murder. But a closer look at the data reveals that significantly fewer Americans favor the death penalty when it is made clear in the question

wording that there is an explicit alternative of life imprisonment with no chance for parole. And when questions have been asked about the death penalty for perpetrators of particularly heinous crimes – such as the Oklahoma City bomber or terrorists responsible for hundreds of deaths - support for the death penalty can be even higher. Thus, even in this situation, the integration of existing data can be a real challenge.

Most areas of public opinion are more complex and provide even the expert with substantial challenges. This occurs because measurement on a given topic involves different question wording, different contexts, and sometimes different study populations. In the most general sense, there is often no single, easily summarized "truth" in terms of public opinion on a given topic, but rather complicated patterns of opinion that can vary depending on specific aspects of the topic under consideration.

There is also the issue of assessing the potential value of techniques which involve more active measurement procedures, such as "deliberative polling" or conventional focus groups.
In particular, deliberative polls—a methodology initiated by James Fishkin around which there has been substantial, fruitful debate—have brought together a representative samples (not self-selected groups) of citizens, and then, by providing information, advocacy, and opportunities for deliberation, have simulated what public opinion would look like, if it were both representative and deliberative (Fishkin 2009, Fishkin and Luskin 2005). The methodological emphasis here is on the attempt to combine scientific sampling with transparent and balanced deliberation by the public. To the extent that biases in the provision of information and other possible confounding influences are ruled out, deliberative polling can make credible claims to representing autonomous and authentic public opinion (though the mechanism affecting opinion formation and change may not be fully clear; see Sanders 2012).[5]

[5] As Fishkin (2009) and others have put forth, the results can then be used (a) to highlight the differences between actual ongoing public opinion and deliberatively formed opinion (in this context the opinions of citizens who do not deliberate have great informative value about public opinion; the literature has not fully grappled with the frequency and conditions under which the results from deliberating ultimately are not that much difference from the opinions of those who do not participate in deliberation); (b) to stimulate broader public conversations aimed at deliberative public opinion formation; (c) to represent deliberative public opinion to bodies, such as legislatures, that hold (or should hold) deliberative norms; and (d) to provide democratic legitimacy for political leaders and entrepreneurs who propose policies that reflect opinions formed through such deliberative processes. In some cases of live, real-time policy issues on which deliberative polls have been done, the aspirations of such polls seem to have been achieved, in that the resulting public opinion has had substantial policy effects (e.g., the case of expanding wind power in Texas; an impact on local budgetary decisions in China [Fishkin et al. 2010]); deciding on the future use of nuclear power in Japan after the Fukushima disaster; and leading to a statewide initiative proposition in California [see http://cdd.stanford.edu/polls/japan/; http://cdd.stanford.edu/polls/california/]).

All in all, leaders interested in public opinion are faced with the challenge of integrating many often disparate results to figure out what they indicate about the true state of public opinion. This is not an easy task, and not one with a lay person (or lay leader) can easily approach. The challenge is figuring out ways in which this integration can be provided to leaders. Either leaders adopt the responsibility for doing this on their own, which mainly would mean hiring or contracting with experts, or the public opinion industry must do it for leaders. Since many areas of public opinion are controversial and tinged with ideological and partisan conflicts, this is indeed a significant challenge. Indeed, members of AAPOR involved with this Task Force process have pointed out how much of a potential challenge this could be for a neutral professional organization like AAPOR.

Still, there are significant consequences of these obstacles to understanding public opinion. When political leaders cannot readily find relevant public opinion data or when they have trouble assessing their quality, they are less likely to engage in a further search for relevant findings or to give the survey findings much weight. The profusion of polls in the public arena – sponsored by news organizations, advocacy groups and others – can be sufficiently contradictory and overwhelming that some officials either ignore all of it or simply cherry-pick results that fit their policy inclinations. That undercuts public opinion research as a trusted resource that measures the views of the public in a democracy. For some, it has become just one more tool in the partisan wars.

The bottom line: Trying to address these obstacles to the better use of public opinion data will carry some cost and undoubtedly create some controversy. But failing to address them also carries costs, to the field of public opinion research and to the quality of our democratic system.

With that in mind, the next section of this report reviews a set of specific steps which would address these obstacles and which could be considered by AAPOR and others in the public opinion field. Certainly AAPOR's membership and others reading this report will not be in agreement on either the appropriateness or the practical utility of all of these steps, as has been the case among members of this Task Force. We, however, recommend that each them be seriously considered by AAPOR as ways to help make it easier for public opinion data to be accessed and used by leaders as appropriate in the years ahead.

PART V: Specific Action Steps Which Can be Taken to Facilitate the Use of Public Opinion Data by Leaders

To recap, this Task Force Report has addressed the issue of the role of public opinion in relationship to policy in a society.

The report reviewed the large literature dealing with the empirical relationship between public opinion and public policy and laws; it examined data on the views of the public and of leaders concerning this topic; and it covered other significant issues revolving the appropriate role of public opinion in governing society and in making policy. The report has also addressed problems and potential obstacles standing in the way of the use of information about public opinion by those who so desire.

But at the base of it, there is little question that AAPOR's core concerns center on the fundamental value of having public opinion data available in a form that leaders and others can use in the ways they deem most important and appropriate.

These core values lead to practical questions, namely the issue of how public opinion on key issues can best be measured, analyzed and summarized in ways that potentially maximize its usefulness. More specifically, the Task Force has focused on the potential role that AAPOR can or should play in this process, including the possibility that AAPOR itself could provide direction or act as a clearinghouse for those who want and need summaries of where the American public stands on important issues.

The phenomenal changes in technology that have transformed access to information have created new opportunities for professional associations and other institutions to help leaders and citizens learn about and understand research and developments that affect their lives and their nation.

This Task Force recognizes that AAPOR's involvement in facilitating the use of public opinion by leaders is potentially a controversial area. The controversy stems in part from the fact that the topics involved in public opinion research are often highly related to partisan, ideological and emotional positions which engender strong reactions. Summarizing evidence or data on any topic is also inherently time-consuming and in many instances can be subjective. Furthermore, the Task Force quickly became cognizant of the fact that there is significant disagreement concerning the degree to which it is appropriate for leaders to take public opinion into account in making decisions. Leaders themselves have historically shied away from public acknowledgment that they are making decisions based on the survey-based attitudes of their constituencies or of the population at large, rather than on the basis of their own thoughts, experience and wisdom.

Still, the previous sections of this report have argued that there is an important need for leaders to be able to *find public opinion data, judge its quality,* and then *integrate and summarize* it into comprehensible conclusions—whatever their feelings about how much these data should be used as the basis for their decision making. As has also been noted, the ability to summarize and

integrate public opinion on given topics is a necessary, but not sufficient, step, if such data are to be potentially used by leaders.

One of the keys to meeting this need is the issue of *who or what entity* is involved in doing the finding, judging and integration. There is a continuum of possibilities in answer to that challenge.

The task of finding, judging and integrating could be left open to whoever wants to engage in it, with a focus instead on providing tools and pathways. This could include a continually updated wiki-type community in which any and all comers make their contribution to a summary document or database. Another possibility is to bring together summaries created by various interested parties into a database of summaries. And, at the far end of the continuum is the possibility of a professional organization such as AAPOR taking on the responsibility of a) encouraging others to find, judge, summarize and integrate public opinion data on given topics, or b) taking on these tasks as a part of its central responsibilities.

AAPOR's history of involvement in standards issues and the current Transparency Initiative underscore the organization's partial push for these objectives. These initiatives clearly have positioned AAPOR as an organization dedicated to making sure that the fundamental details of publicly-reported public opinion research are made known to anyone who is interested in assessing or otherwise using this research. The burden of using the information, however, lies on the interested user. This is an example in which the end user is expected to supply expertise rather than relying on the expertise of others.

There is a mid-ground position by which AAPOR could encourage other entities to provide summaries, judgments on quality and integration of research, and leaders could be pointed in those directions.

A more aggressive position would be for AAPOR itself to take over these responsibilities, functioning as a clearinghouse for research, making judgments on the quality of research, and promulgating actual summaries and integrations of what the research data suggest about where the public stands on the key issues of the day.

Two considerations are time and resources. AAPOR as an organization has limited resources and has to pick strategic objectives carefully. An increased emphasis on this or any other new area of focus for the organization could necessitate raising dues or seeking outside funding sources. In general, the Task Force members recognize that establishing new initiatives is not to be taken lightly.

The experience with the Transparency Initiative so far indicates that simple is better. The more involved the initiative and the higher the degree of difficulty in its aspects, the lower the probability that it will be successful. Creating elaborate new systems and complex processes is not generally good. As an example, one of the great values of a wiki-type initiative is that the responsibility lies with hundreds of individual actors to keep it running, not for the most part with a centralized individual or committee. In general, the Task Force members recognize that establishing new initiatives is not to be taken lightly.

Four challenges have been outlined in this report. The challenges surround the objectives of: a) advocating the value of public opinion data in a representative democracy, b) increasing access to public opinion on key topics, c) allowing interested users to make judgments about the quality of public opinion data, and d) providing integration and summaries of public opinion on key topics.

The Task Force recommends that AAPOR consider each of the following ideas, some of which overlap:

1. The idea that AAPOR should adopt an increased public presence arguing for the importance of public opinion in a democracy, the importance of rigorous, nonpartisan, unbiased, scientific research assessing public opinion, and the importance of leaders having this public opinion data available for use in the process of making policy and other important decisions.

AAPOR's major public stance historically has been its focus on standards and encouragement of transparency in public opinion research. This Task Force recommends that AAPOR go further and actively encourage and help facilitate the availability of unbiased, scientific summaries of public opinion which in turn can be used by leaders in decision-making positions as they deem appropriate. Part of this will be an AAPOR focus on ways in which information about public opinion can be made available, summarized and interpreted for leaders – the subjects of the recommendations which follow.

2. The idea of a central database or clearinghouse for public opinion data and analysis on specific topics, potentially encouraged by or sponsored by AAPOR.

This clearinghouse would bring together data or links to data, original analyses, papers, on-line publications and articles dealing with public opinion topics, and bring together existing summaries and reviews of public opinion on key policy areas that have been written by others in publications and blogs and elsewhere. The clearinghouse could also commission reviews and summaries of public opinion on key areas, perhaps in conjunction with other publications. The clearinghouse could also provide a virtual warehouse of links to summaries of public opinion data on key topics.

This type of clearinghouse project would involve two emphases, although it is possible that the decision could be made to focus on just one of these going forward. One emphasis would direct users to the actual public opinion data themselves on a given topic. The second would direct users to summaries and integration of the data.

This idea would need to be considered in conjunction with the role of other organizations such as the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, which already exists to perform some of these functions. The Roper Center databases, however, are not routinely grouped or organized by topic, but rather consist of raw data and questions and datasets. The Roper Center additionally does not routinely offer analyses, summaries, and assessments of the state of public opinion on

every key topic. The idea being discussed in this section would be the creation of a way in which interested leaders could quickly access an understandable and accessible summary of public opinion on specific topics, with the understanding that this summary would be regularly changing. A basic component of this idea is to continue to evolve ways for policy makers/media/others to access all the existing findings on given topics.

It is important that policy makers/journalists/others understand much more than the top line results of any poll. Any of these efforts should reflect that emphasis.

3. AAPOR-sponsored meta-analyses or meta-reviews of data on public opinion on key policy areas.

This would be the equivalent of a "state of knowledge" on key topics, involving more than just the basic data or even a summary of the data, and including assessments and interpretation of what the data mean. AAPOR could encourage other organizations and entities to provide such analyses and reviews. AAPOR could sponsor its own analyses and reviews in conjunction with, or as an expansion of the already existing AAPOR-sponsored "The Polls—Trends" and "Poll Review" sections of *Public Opinion Quarterly*, or they could be done separately. These could be viewed as the equivalent of the Practice Guidelines published in the medical literature on specific issues.

A challenge here is the fast-moving pace of public opinion research on any given topic. AAPOR-sponsored analyses or reviews of the "state of knowledge" on a topic could take a long time to get through the review process, and by the time they were published could be out of date, given the torrent of new research that pours forth on many topics. This is one issue with the generally excellent AAPOR-sponsored "The Polls—Trends" and "Poll Review" sections of *POQ*. These reviews are limited in number, and since they appear one at a time in sequential issues of *POQ*, each can become outdated as the next is published. This suggests that meta-analyses and reviews need to be electronic, and created in a fashion that allows continual updating.

Such reviews would need to take into account consideration of possible inequality in the resources devoted to research on particular sides of an issue, including the possibility that in some areas, there may simply be little public opinion research on one side or the other of a particular issue.

Any such review or summary of the public opinion literature on topics on which there is heated political debate and discourse could be controversial. Some AAPOR members have already expressed concern that efforts by AAPOR to summarize or interpret public opinion data on a topic would go beyond the bounds of a neutral organization focused historically on education and transparency. But all organizations evolve. It is certainly possible for scientific organizations to analyze data from a neutral and bipartisan perspective. The Task Force Committee members believe that AAPOR's expanding its role in this direction is something that deserves full consideration.

The exact way in which these meta-analyses or meta-reviews can be conducted is no doubt going to change as each month and each year progress, particularly given changes in technology and the power of sophisticated computer analysis to replace human analysis.

Any review of data on a public opinion topic will too have to focus on the potential issue of aggregation, either at the marginal or dataset level. If aggregation moves into the realm of combining datasets rather than marginal results, the advantage would be the ability to conduct finer analysis of certain subgroups that are too small for most general-population surveys to look at, like young ethnics or Asian Americans, as well as geographic units. This would require an operation and budget that would combine data sets and then rerun findings.

4. AAPOR could sponsor forums, either in person or live on the web or interactive on the web, in which public opinion experts can discuss and communicate with the public about public opinion on key topics.

Included in these types of forums could be an educational component that would speak to the nuances in poll results and to the different ways to understand the findings. This could be called, for example, "Beyond the Top Line."

This could also entail an AAPOR-sponsored blog by respected public opinion analysts in which they comment on public opinion data on key topics, providing independent and informed analysis. A more traditional component of this type of approach would be AAPOR sponsored events in which leaders and their staffs are given background, insights and instructions on making judgments about the quality of polls, and what types of things would be important to know regarding the assessment of the value of poll results. The recent success of AAPOR's webinar format suggests that this communication format could be used to reach leaders with these types of briefings.

5. A variant on the above could be **AAPOR-sponsored sessions or meetings with policy makers and/or journalists on key public opinion topics**. Again, this is not to imply that leaders should be acting based on public opinion, but that they should be aware of public opinion and be ready to help the public understand why the leaders' positions and actions better serve the nation and its citizens.

This would be an expansion of AAPOR's historic efforts to educate journalists.

6. AAPOR could encourage the development of an on-line wiki-type community in which in open source fashion, interested participants would be invited to build an on-going summary of public opinion on key topic areas.

This idea would most likely involve a "restricted" wiki process, in which only qualified individuals (including as one possibility AAPOR members or perhaps a vetted subset of AAPOR

members) would be allowed to contribute. The contributors could add new data, put in their interpretation of the data, and in general comment on, elucidate, expand on, and summarize public opinion data on specific topics. The wiki-community would be made available to the general public.

As is the case with any such wiki-community, the value of the process would depend on its self-policing nature, with participants involved enough to contribute regularly and in general to build collective wisdom based on a large number of inputs. The virtues of this process would be threefold: (1) it would be extremely timely and up-to-date, and (2) the result would at least in theory provide insights and summaries which would be more useful than those provided by any one or two individuals or experts alone, and (3) the time and effort involved would be spread out across a wide variety of actors, thus requiring less expenditure of AAPOR Executive Council and administrative staff resources. It would be possible to appoint "curators" for various sections of this type of wiki-community, whose job it would be to push and prod participants to contribute and to police any outlandish attempts to skew the overall tone or results.

The curators and members of the wiki-community might be encouraged to follow up and debate matters that all under the other recommendations listed above. This could, for example, include any big gaps between public opinion and particular policies. Normative and empirical questions (see Appendix) can be raised and discussed about potentially problematic characteristics of public opinion, such as: when opinions and different segments of the public are polarized or strongly at odds; when opinions are systematically inconsistent with ostensible facts, whether based on ignorance or possibly influenced by communication processes of manipulation or deception; or when opinions appear very unstable or fickle. These wiki-forums might also be places to raise issues related to standards and ethics in the conducting of opinion polls and how data are used (for example, the targeting of voters, message testing, and the like that raise questions about privacy and manipulation).

7. AAPOR's Transparency Initiative (TI) could be adapted to more directly fit with the purposes of providing leaders with the ability to use public opinion.

The TI as currently developed is a mechanism to provide users of public opinion an AAPOR-sponsored way in which they can learn all of the methodological details of a specific public opinion study. The TI could expand its emphasis. As part of the initiative, AAPOR could provide more specific information on how to rate and evaluate the quality of specific polls, poll summaries and poll analyses.

8. Most generally, AAPOR should appoint a committee whose goal is to focus on the organization's on-going role in facilitating the process by which scientific assessments of public opinion are made available to the public, leaders, and elected representatives in ways in which it can be easily accessed and understood. This committee should seriously consider the value of new research on these issues, including in particular research on the attitudes of elected representatives and leaders about the degree to which they *should* take public

opinion into account in making decisions, and the degree to which they currently *do* take public opinion into account.

PART VI: Concluding Remarks

AAPOR was created by public research pioneers more than 60 years ago to encourage the process of the scientific research of American public opinion, under the conviction that the results of these scientific efforts should be available to the public itself and to society's leaders.

The Task Force recognizes that the Association has traditionally focused more on the process or methods of public opinion research than it has on the ways in which the resulting research data are used or should be used. At the same time, AAPOR is in a unique position to shift focus somewhat in the years ahead, and to pay more attention to the potential value of the use of public opinion data in decision making and policymaking, and to the challenges that stand in the way of such use. This follows from the original purpose of the organization and the goals as stated in its recently enacted Strategic Plan.

AAPOR as an organization may not be in a position to advocate either the degree to which public opinion research should be used by policy makers, or exactly how it should be used. AAPOR can, however, certainly be in a position to advocate that public opinion research is potentially an important part of the way in which a democratic society functions, and that public opinion data should be made easily available in ways such that it can be used as appropriate.

This Task Force Report thus has recommended that AAPOR should publicly reinforce its position that the use of information about public opinion by leaders can be constructive to decision-making processes and democracy, and that AAPOR should act to provide resources that are available to help facilitate this process when it is appropriate.

This Task Force recommends that AAPOR carefully consider the role it can play in encouraging better measurement, summarization and evaluation of public opinion, along with making it available to leaders and others who make policy decisions that affect the people. This can improve the workings of American democracy, whether through leaders responding to public opinion that they think reflect capable judgments or through leaders explaining to the public their positions and actions—and reasons for them when they are at odds with the national collective (or state and local level publics for issues at these levels)—in an ongoing process of leadership and responsiveness. Political leaders and policymakers are better off knowing than not knowing where the public stands on the key issues of the day.

This Task Force believes that the types of initiatives outlined in this report further the goals of the Association. There are no doubt additional ways in which AAPOR could become more involved in the process of enhancing the ways in which public opinion is taken into account by leaders and policy makers, and AAPOR will certainly review and discuss all of these. But whatever the specific ways in which AAPOR decides to further these goals, it is the conclusion of this Task Force that the association and the society in which it operates will be better as a result.

Appendix (Theoretical Background)

The Role of Public Opinion in Democratic Societies

I. The Place of Public Opinion in Democratic Theory

What do political theorists and philosophers have to say about the extent to which leaders should follow or lead public opinion? While their views differ, it is increasingly common to argue that leaders should respond to public values, concerns, priorities and experiences, while also recognizing their essential roles in shaping and leading public opinion in such a way that representative democracy can take its lead from democratically-formed public opinion.

The reasons for these views are in part empirical. There is no public opinion apart from the events that call it forth and from public communication, leadership, and political strategies that shape that opinion (Dewey 1927, Arendt 1989, Habermas 1991; see Key 1961 on leadership). Publics are not blank slates; we know from public opinion research that most people have relatively stable underlying values and interests, and that there are common discourses that comprise political cultures. The formative role of opinion leadership resides in linking these values, interests, and discourses to preferences and policies, a process that works through the marketplace of ideas, and would not exist except for the noisy business of public advocacy and electioneering that is part of a democracy.

But political theorists suggest normative reasons to focus on public opinion leadership as well. Ideally, the process of shaping and leading public opinion might function as public deliberation. Out of deliberation arises considered opinion that relates individual values and interests to possible public choices, information and trade-offs, relative costs and benefits, as well as to political landscapes that may require bargaining, negotiation, and compromise (Manin 1997, Urbinati 2006). Stated in other terms, political representation—whether by elected representatives or opinion leaders—is an active process (Pitkin 1967, Mansbridge 2003, Urbinati and Warren 2008, Saward 2010, Disch 2011). Public opinion leadership, in this view, involves enabling public discourse in two ways. First, leaders function to organize voice, bringing people into political processes. Second, to the extent that leaders enable public discourse, they are also contributing to better collective decisions—better in the sense that they benefit from more thoroughly considered information, and also in the sense that they enable people to connect their values and interests to collective decisions.

This increasingly held view of public opinion leadership, however, risks slippage into anti-democratic forms of paternalism at best, or manipulation and demagoguery at the worst. So it is

important to consider this active role within the context of democratic institutions, which counter these dangers with a two-track response. On the one hand, they enable public opinion leadership—by providing protected spaces for public discourse and election campaigning. On the other hand they empower people to say "yes" or "no" through votes or followings. So leaders may shape public opinion, but they must continually persuade people that the versions they propose are acceptable—on pain of losing elections, followings, or media market shares.

It also follows from this view that leaders have role responsibilities with respect to public opinion: they have duties to articulate and frame public opinion, in a way that is responsive to the wide varieties of constituencies affected by collective decisions.

Role responsibilities differ, however, according to the kinds of leaders: particularly, whether they are non-elected opinion leaders or elected representatives. With respect to the first, opinion leaders in the media and advocacy organizations play an important role in constituting public opinion—they respond to a variety of constituencies mostly by framing their values and interests, and pushing them into the public domain. From the normative perspective of democratic theory, we might say that non-elected public opinion leaders have a dual responsibility. They should be responsive and responsible to the constituencies they claim to represent. But we might also say that, in a democracy, opinion leaders should be responsive not just to those they claim to represent, but also to the medium in which they operate: advocacy, persuasion, and deliberation. Thus, they should contribute to the framing of opinion in ways that enable public opinion to function as a persuasive force that can contribute to collective decision-making. This ideal is expressed in the "public journalism" movement (Glasser 1999), and—importantly though less grandly—by such things as Anderson Cooper's "Keeping the Honest" segment on CNN and similar media genres. At its best, the journalism profession, with self-understanding as the "fourth estate" that expresses public opinion and holds power-holders to account, is iconic of public opinion leadership outside of electoral processes: it underwrites public opinion formation through the give and take of reasons, arguments, and information. This is also why not all talk counts as contributing to democratic public opinion formation. Hate speech and race priming, for example, degrades opponents in such a way that public opinion cannot serve as a medium of persuasion (Warren 2006).

Elected representatives have additional duties, defined by their roles in making collective decisions. Whereas journalists or advocates have a responsibility to form and express the opinions of their constituents and followers, elected representatives also have duties to the institutions that ultimately make collective decisions. They do so democratically when they are able to summarize public opinion into collective wills sufficient to collective decision-making. But neither "raw" public opinion (as measured by opinion polls) nor opinion formed by advocates and journalists is typically sufficient to the kinds of trade-offs and compromises that enable collective decisions. Owing to their role in making collective decisions, elected representatives have the responsibility to explain the constraints of policy, the realities of diverse positions that require compromises or creative solutions, while also connecting proposals to their constituents' values and interests. This is, perhaps, the most difficult and creative kind of public opinion leadership because it is subject to the hazards of strategic electioneering (Gutmann and

Thompson 2012). But without this kind of leadership, it is unlikely that democratic polities can function.

These ideals are, of course, subject to many challenges, hazards, and caveats, as detailed in other parts of this report. From a democratic perspective, the most important are those that make it difficult for people to assent to, dissent from, or otherwise participate in the forming of public opinion by leaders. Advocacy and electoral politics are essential to democracy, but they only indirectly and ideally function to enable good public opinion leadership. The direct incentives, however, are typically strategic, and may often favor manipulative priming and framing, crowding out alternative messages through media saturation, repetition of misinformation, and segmentation of messaging, all of which favor groups with money and organization. So, on the one hand, we need to know more about the conditions and mechanisms that check these incentives, so that discursive competition underwrites the deliberative processes that are essential to public opinion leadership. On the other hand, we should want and need leaders who understand and embrace their duties with respect to public opinion.

Democracy means the rule of the people, in contrast to the rule of elites, aristocrats, monarchs, or any subset of an organized collectivity. The philosophical assumptions that underwrite democracy are disarmingly simple and compelling. The central moral assumption is that all individuals have equal moral worth and are equally entitled to the lives through which their worth is expressed and realized. The additional prudential assumption is that all are better placed to judge what is good for them than any feasible alternative judge—an aristocracy, a group of experts, or any others who would decide (Dahl 2000, Chapter 4). Moreover, a strong theoretical case, supported by substantial evidence, can be made that *large* and *diverse* collectives of citizens can do well in knowing what is good for them and responding in explicable and sensible ways to events and changing circumstances and conditions. Both the size and the diversity of the collective matters (see Landemore 2013, Surowiecki, 2004).

Beyond these basic assumptions, however, the simplicity disappears in a myriad of questions as how to best organize the people, so they can direct and control government to make government responsive to the preferences, needs, and interests of the people (e.g., see Held 2006, Pzreworski 2010). There are many conditions that must be in place for the people to rule in any meaningful way: They must be empowered to express and convey their preferences into the decision-making process, and the decision-making process itself must have institutions that enable and respond to these empowerments. This assumes that people know what they want collectively, and in a form to which government can respond to this public agenda and opinion.

The term *"public opinion"* is most commonly used to refer to peoples' collective judgments, which are normatively and empirically central to democratic government. It assumes that a single collective judgment can be defined concerning specific matters.[6]

[6] This can in theory be problematic under certain circumstances. In particular, it assumes that the "Arrow problem," identified by economic theorist Kenneth Arrow (1951), can be avoided: Specifically, procedures for rational collective-choices have to have certain properties. The most important one is transitivity, meaning that if an individual prefers choice *x* to *y* and choice *y* to *z*,

The term implies (1) that people have identifiable preferences about what they want or need, and they can express them; and (2) that they have them as a public: that is, they must aggregate into collective preferences that are publicly available in such a way that governments can respond to them. Public opinion, then, is the form in which the people convey substantive direction to governments, and it is thereby a centrally important feature of all democratic government. Without the institutions that help form, protect, and enable public opinion, there can be no democracy (Habermas 1989). Likewise, institutions of government must be structured such that governments have the incentives, not just the capacities, to be responsive to the public. Elections, for example, are typically thought to provide such incentives for government officials, while processes of deliberation, negotiation, and bargaining, and within parties and legislative bodies can convey an reflect actionable versions of public opinion within government (Urbinati 2006, Manin 1997, and Habermas 1996, Chapters 7-8). And importantly for the present context, surveys provide and assess estimates of the opinions of the entire public based on responses to specific questions about the issues of the day that are posed in them.

II. Normative Ideals

Although the basic role of public opinion in a democracy is clear enough in the abstract, political philosophers and theorists have put forth normative ideals bearing on this role, and they raise questions about how these ideals compare with evidence regarding the nature and dynamics of

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then she must prefer choice *x* to *z*. In this case an individual's preferences are consistently ordered. However, the problem that Arrow found is that collective choice by majority rule cannot be guaranteed to have the same transitivity? Based on some simple but important assumptions, Arrowed showed that when there are more than two choices, a collective ordering of preferences may not be found among all the possible individual preferences. Problems can occur whenever there are at least three choices and three choosers. For example, with three choosers A, B, and C, A prefers x to y and y to z and hence, by transitivity, x to z; if B prefers y to z and z to x and hence y to x; and if C prefers z to x and x to y and hence z to y. The paradox or problem here is that in these specific pair-wise collective comparisons, a majority prefers *x* to *y*, a majority prefers *y* to *z*, and a majority prefers *z* to *x*. In this case, while the individual choices are transitive, the collective decision following majority rule yields an intransitive result, and hence no collective majority choice. Why, however, does this not appear to occur much – let alone all -- of the time? The reason has to do at least in part with institutional rules and procedures in governing, including the role played by political parties, which result in choices being structured in ways which avoid the kinds of multiple independent choices that lead to this problem. In general Arrow's theorem is a theoretical puzzle but rarely appears to pose an empirical problem. For one, the U.S. two-party system tends to produce unidimensional politics (e.g., defined along an ideological continuum or line defined by two extreme points, such as maximally liberal and maximally conservative), which Duncan Black (1968) showed does not suffer from the Arrow problem. Moreover, any context or process that enables some deliberation tends to sort out preferences in such a way that the cycling emphasized by Arrow does not occur (see specially Dryzek and List 2003).

public opinion that has emerged from public opinion research These ideals go beyond what can reasonably be expected of the public writ large, though they provide an important set of benchmarks for the public and its leaders to strive for.

A. *Authenticity and autonomy*: If public opinion is to help guide government, it should genuinely – authentically – represent what people want. While there is no way of knowing what individuals "really" want—in the end, people's preferences are in some way revealed—there are conditions that are likely to compromise the authenticity of public opinion. At a high level of generality, opinions should not be distorted or biased by identifiable powers that can impinge on what people think, believe, and say. Specifically, public opinion should be autonomous from the powers of money, coercion, and manipulation or deception; rather it should be formed through *collective reasoning and reflection*, such that any individuals who hold opinions could, in principle, give justifications—reasons—to explain their opinions. Leaders and other elites, to be sure, can contribute positively to this, as long as they do not buy people off, or coerce, manipulate, or deceive the public (e.g., Key 1961).

B. Deliberative opinion formation: The public reasoning and reflection just emphasized has been addressed by much political theory from Aristotle to James Madison, to Burke to Jürgen Habermas. This political philosophy holds that public opinion that is the result of deliberative consideration is likely to be better public opinion, in the sense that it is less prone to manipulation, more likely to include information, and is more likely to be rational in that there are reasons and justifications for the positions that the public takes. When opinions are the consequence of deliberation, they are more likely to be robust in the sense that they have normative and factual merit (Estlund 2008). Moreover, most democratic theorists maintain that public opinion that issues forth from deliberation is more likely to be politically legitimate: If a fair process of explanation precedes (and, as needed, follows) a decision expressed by the public, the decision should be more acceptable.

C. *Inclusion and representation*: From a normative perspective, public opinion should include the interests of those who are affected by particular issues (Young 2000). Inclusion can be direct, in the sense that individuals affected by a policy should have some influence through their opinion of it. In recent years there has been more inventiveness than in the past in participatory governance, especially at the local level, about which we cannot go into any detail here (Fung 2004, 2006; Gastil 2008, Smith 2009, and Warren 2009). More often, however, inclusion works not through participatory governance but, rather, linkages of political representation: through legislators or other formal political leaders within government who are either elected or appointed, and whose decision-making should be responsive to public opinion (Manin 1997). But in addition, there can be representation within the domain of public opinion itself. Our political world today is populated with representative claim-makers: advocacy and interest groups, and sometimes notable individuals, might be viewed as "voice representatives," who inject and interject a variety of perspectives, interests, and values into processes of public opinion formation (Saward 2010, Urbinati and Warren 2008). Such representatives are particularly important because they can, potentially, compensate for the incapacities that most citizens face in the formation and expression of public opinion. Through political entrepreneurship, these representatives within the public can assume the costs of collective

action and can give voice to latent or not visibly expressed interests (which would otherwise not be expressed as the result of the "free rider" problem; see Olson 1965); they can develop and aggregate public opinion across jurisdiction and borders; they can give voice to those who would otherwise have little or none.

One important note of caution again here (and returned to below) is that it is possible and in certain instances highly likely, that those with great resources may be able to "crowd out" the voices of those with fewer resources, either in voicing their opinions directly, inserting them through interest or advocacy groups or particular individuals, or finding ways to have their positions drown out those of the public at large more directly in the government policy making process. But there are, however, forces that work against this: the public's resistance to persuasive efforts, especially when there are any credible countervailing voices and messages that offer alternative "framings" of issues (further discussion below; see Chong and Druckman, 2007a, 2007b, 2010; Druckman 2004).

D. *Responsiveness*. One democratic ideal to be aspired to is that laws, public policies, and other decisions of leaders respond to public opinion. This does not mean that leaders should be completely responsive at all times on every issue, but this should be a visible if not predominant characteristic of governance. The empirical evidence regarding the reality of this in the United States is reviewed at length in main body of this report.

E. *Economy of citizen resources and responsibility*: Beyond responsiveness, policy making and other public institutions, as well as political leaders, also have a responsibility regarding public opinion itself. In a modern and complex society, it is impossible for citizens to be fully informed on every policy and political question. On the one hand, citizens themselves have the responsibility to be sufficiently informed to exercise their rights to self-rule constructively, at minimum voting. On the other, public institutions and political practices ought to be designed to make it possible for citizens to fulfill this responsibility. This includes not just measures that might lead to the condition of "enlightened understanding" (Dahl 1989) -- accessible information and arguments — but also by providing for high quality heuristics, cues, and other cognitive short cuts (see Lupia and McCubbins 1998, Mackenzie and Warren 2012).

III. Challenges to these Normative Ideals

It is important to identify these ideals and their institutional requirements in order to emphasize those areas of public opinion research that are normatively valuable for the functioning of democratic government and society. These normative ideals highlight a number of challenges that have been examined and should be studied further in public opinion research, which involve both the capabilities and characteristics of elites, the mass media and other aspects of the information environment, and public opinion.

A. *Vulnerability*: Most basically, social or political vulnerabilities can shape public opinion in ways that affect its authenticity, autonomy, deliberativeness, and inclusiveness. Political vulnerabilities are commonplace in countries that lack basic freedoms related to public opinion formation, including freedoms of speech, the press, and association. In countries where public expressions of opinions are constrained, opinion research can sometimes identify the distance between latent public opinion and officially sanctioned opinion. For example, looking at public opinion in Mexico during the 1950-1990s, Dominguez and McCann (1996) found that Mexican voters were more ready for democracy than their leaders. Ideally, research could take account of the regime conditions under which opinion is formed in assessing the extent to which preferences are expressed and revealed and —even more difficult—in taking into account the extent to which public opinion fails to form at all in the absence of social infrastructures for opinion formation. These considerations point to the importance of comparing political regimes that have constrained or have no free forums for public discussion and debate.

Less obvious, perhaps, are the impact of individual-level vulnerabilities. Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann (1974) refers to the "spiral of silence," through which individuals' places in a society affects their free expression of opinion due to fears, including those resulting from the real or simply perceived threat of punishment or sanction. What people believe and say, or fail to say, however, should not be the consequences of personal or collective vulnerabilities. A woman should not, for example, be constrained by her husband or father to reflect their opinions as the result of the threat of expulsion from a family relationship (Fraser 1990). Town residents should not remain silent about the carcinogenic effects of pollution by its dominant industry for fear of losing their jobs. The extent to which these kinds of vulnerabilities shape public opinion is an important question.

The shape of public opinion can be affected in the above manner through direct experiences of social isolation and in other ways through the publicly available mass media: television, print journalism, radio, and politically relevant websites. Indeed, the media still provide people with the bulk of their access to political issues. For this reason the economic forces that impinge on political journalism matter. While the media are more diverse and competitive than a few decades ago -- as the result of new media, including online outlets -- local business monopolies, chain ownership of media outlets, or dominant economic forces in local markets can all shape the way the media cover the news, prioritize issues, and make other decisions that can affect public opinion (e.g., Hamilton 2004, and essays on the media in Shapiro and Jacobs 2011a). These constitute economic vulnerabilities that can mix with other kinds of factors that are inherent in making a business out of political issues: news cycles, the emphasis on events that draw audiences, limits of audience attention, and market pressures to expand audiences. These forces interact with virtually all the effects discussed below. But since there will always be an economics of communication, it is important to ask empirical questions as to how market and related forces might be structured or harnessed to serve the normative function of shaping of public opinion in a democracy.

B. Crowding out and resource bias: Public opinion is formed, in part, through the aggregation of many individual and group voices and perspectives. Even if opinion formation is not directly subject to vulnerabilities, there may be biases, as already noted at the outset, that result from

differential amplification of voices, a point made by E.E. Schattschneider long ago when he famously pointed out that the "flaw in the pluralist heaven is that the heavenly chorus sings with a strong upper-class accent" (Schattschneider 1960, p.35). Recent literature on the United States shows increasing economic and/or political inequality among citizens (Hacker and Pierson 2010a, 2010b) as well as increased polarization between elites and those in lower economic brackets (McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2006). Because those who have more resources, especially education and media access, are better able to project their voices, they will tend to crowd out voices and perspectives backed by fewer resources. If so, public opinion can be highly skewed against those who should have a place at the "table" of public opinion, so to speak. Unequal education, resource distribution, and access to the mass media, as well as deficits in political entrepreneurship, collective action problems, and social vulnerabilities may all add together, in varying degrees and mixes, to produce domains of public opinion that fail basic tests of democratic inclusion and representation..

One of the most important normative contributions of public opinion research has been to identify and document these biases (see Schlozman, Verba, and Brady 2012). As summarized further below, there are data that suggest, among other issues, that business leaders and experts have the greatest ability to influence foreign policy while the public has little to no influence (Jacobs and Page 2005). Recent work in political science shows that elites are increasingly responsive to the views of those with higher income levels in the United States (Bartels 2008a, Gilens 2005, 2012; regarding race, ethnicity, and political participation, see also Griffin and Newman, 2005, 2007, 2008). The 2010 *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* Supreme Court ruling, which struck down provisions of the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act (McCain-Feingold Act) that prohibited election-related communications by corporations and unions, appears to have unleashed a flood of corporate money into elections campaigns, and even more so for money spent by very wealthy individuals, furthering worries about resource-induced bias in public opinion formation. Public opinion, then, is also affected by those who have the financial resources to push out their point of view, and by the issues and causes taken up by powerful and influential media outlets.

C. *Latency and collective action*: Public opinion is often most affected by those who are able to collectively organize their voices. Interests that are latent or held by individuals with less intensity, such as concerns about global climate change, are less likely to find expression in public opinion owing to collective action problems. In contrast, interests that are focused and where there are payoffs that can be captured by discrete groups are more likely to organize and shape public opinion (Olson 1965). As with other biases, public opinion research has and should continue to document these biases as well.

D. *Framing and priming*: Public opinion may often reflect framing effects — that is, images, claims, or standards of evaluation or judgment that produce opinions by priming or linking citizens' values and/or prejudices to specific political positions. (Chong and Druckman 2007a, 2011; Zaller 1992). While framing is intrinsic to political debate and the public may show some significant resistance to domination by any one frame on an issue, as noted above (see Chong and Druckman, 2007b, 2010; Druckman, 2004), the normative concern is that frames deny people the opportunity to think about what they want and to link those wants to public policy

choices in ways that reflect their preferences. Walter Lippman was concerned that the public opinion might simply be distorted by the images (and their attendant frames) that the media put into people's heads, which meant that the media had great responsibility in providing such information—finding and relying on capable elite and expert knowledge where it can be found. In contrast, John Dewey thought that in tandem with whatever information the media provided, the public was capable of forming sensible opinions through a process of education through active experience after issues were discussed and debated in the public forum (see Lippmann 1922, 1925, 1955; Dewey 1916, 1939). These concerns are deepened by the fact that capacities to use framing effects may be especially found among well-resourced and well-organized groups with access to the mass media. Research will continue to have a key role to play in identifying and measuring the impact of framing and priming on public opinion (Chong and Druckman, 2007a, 2011).

E. *Information deficits and misinformation*: Closely related to these influences on public opinion, opinion formation is highly vulnerable to information deficits and misinformation (e.g., see Kuklinski and Quirk 2000, Shapiro and Bloch-Elkon 2008, and Shapiro and Jacobs 2011b). In part, the problem is one of public attentiveness: most citizens are neither very attentive to, nor very knowledgeable about many of the issues that affect them. Another critique questions the rationality of citizens who may hold inconsistent beliefs and have unstable attitudes and opinions, due to incomplete or uncertain information (Converse 1964). But certainly a large part of the problem is that the information requirements for many policy areas are so high that only small numbers of experts can knowledgably participate in deliberation and decision-making. It is not entirely clear how much individual deficits matter for aggregate public opinion: it may be that ignorance is rational, in the sense that the costs of information far outweigh the chance that the information could influence collective decisions (Downs 1957). It may also be that citizens are able to compensate for ignorance and inconsistency by using cues and heuristics that enable better decisions than their knowledge would predict (Lupia and McCubbins 1998). And as noted above, the public as a diverse collective can make up for the deficiencies of its individual members (Landemore, 2013). An important normative and empirical agenda for public opinion research will continue to be to understand how the state of public opinion might be enhanced in ways that are not unrealistically demanding of individual information resources, rationality, and attentiveness. In this respect, there are access biases: It is often common for policies, particularly in the area of foreign affairs and national security, to be remote, secretive, or to require timely strategic action in ways that sideline public opinion (Nelkin 1979, Hall 1992, Jacobs and Page 2005). These problems have figured prominently in public opinion research, and should continue to do so.

Information deficits may not always be important to democratic responsiveness, however. Many people form their opinions about new or other issues based on core values in ways that compensate for low information (the public opinion literature also demonstrates this, especially, but not exclusively, in the case of social and economic issues; see Hartz 1955, Hochschild 1981, McClosky and Zaller 1984, Feldman 1988, and Page and Shapiro 1992). For example, one pollster who is a member of this Task Force found on the tax debate issue that voters were unaware of the Bush tax cuts, but that they felt strongly that they could not afford to pay more taxes and that the wealthy were not paying their fair share. They used these core beliefs to sort

out policy choices. This kind of opinion formation process can lead to authentic preferences which (according to most democratic theories) should be represented by policy makers.

At one extreme, there is the question of how to deal with issues in which the public has little knowledge or in which the public has the facts wrong, like the amount the U.S. pays in foreign aid. Are these opinions to be discounted? And with exposure to new information and engagement in processes of deliberation, there is the empirical question (which we return to below) of the extent to which this changes the basic opinions groups of citizens have before they receive new information and begin deliberating.

F. *Deliberation deficits*: Information deficits may not be highly problematic if those who are attentive have a good chance of gaining sufficient and good information (Popkin 1991), in the sense that public information is subject to the testing that a competitive marketplace of ideas and claims should provide. That is, in principle these deficits could be mitigated by a public forum that is made up of the available mass media, political leaders and others widely discussing and debating issues, and members of the public doing the same in their daily conversations and interactions. These processes constitute a deliberative forum, in the minimal sense that opinions are sufficiently diverse that citizens could reflect on these opinions if they have cause to do so (see Page 1996). But there are structural challenges here as well. Today's media landscape is increasingly segmented by audience, and there is evidence that individuals tend to expose themselves to those sources of information that confirm their opinions (e.g., Sunstein 2007; elites are vulnerable to this as well; see Shapiro and Jacobs 2011b). These effects may be exacerbated by self-selection into social contexts and inter-personal interactions in ways that reinforce beliefs (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995; Mutz 2006: Bishop 2009). Under these circumstances, public opinion may simply be an aggregation of unchallenged information and ideologies. In addition, those who are most politically interested and active within the public pose a further challenge (Fiorina with Abrams 2009; Abramowitz 2010; Shapiro and Bloch-Elkon 2008): They are more likely to hold more extreme views, and these are the views that are more likely to make it into the policy making arena and feed back into the existing level of polarization (Shapiro and Jacobs 2011b; Quirk 2011)

IV. Responses to Challenges: Democratic Theory and Public Opinion Research:

Public opinion research cannot address and remedy all these challenges directly. What it can do—and has sometimes done—is to assess how serious a challenge they pose, to the extent that public opinion has a major impact on policymaking and to the degree that leaders pay substantial attention to the public in their decisions and actions. Public opinion research itself cannot resolve issues of social structure, resource distribution, patterns of organization, and institutional design. Research is, primarily, about knowledge—not political change or action. That said, because public opinion research is itself a legitimate way of representing and giving voice to public opinion, many specific aspects of opinion research and the ongoing dissemination of its results already provide the means of promoting democratic norms. How to promote democratic norms in this way is addressed in this report. What follows here are responses to particular

normative ideals and a summary of what the extant evidence suggests regarding how well American public opinion measures up to these ideals.

In short, the challenges that political philosophers and theorists have posed appear not to have had dire consequences or completely undermined the role of public opinion in democratic politics in the United States. Political leaders and policymakers battle over public support to gain leverage and power from it in pursuing their policy objectives (e.g., Neustadt 1980. Kernell 1997). The narrative about this in the media and public discourse more widely is one of a public as a collective that has opinions that are authentic, that are based on sufficient information and engagement to warrant attention of political leaders and other decision makers. Whether these opinions have become wise through processes of leadership and education, versus manipulation and deception, should still be of concern for any specific issues and decisions, since the quality of these opinions may be only as good as those of the political leaders on whom the public relies for information and guidance. Also of concern, and increasingly so, is the extent to which the political process responds inclusively on specific issues to the collective opinions of all, or whether it selectively represents some segments of the public more than others:

As to the specific challenges:

A. Authenticity and autonomy: Public opinion research has found Americans' underlying values and belief structures to be relatively stable, and to have implications for their preferences. It has probed the underlying structure of beliefs and compared these to the preferences people actually have (see Hurwitz and Peffley 1987; Feldman 1988; Page and Shapiro 1992; Page with Bouton 2006; Dryzek and Niemeyer 2008). In this way public opinion research has formulated approximations of authenticity and autonomy. It has also probed the effects of *framing* on opinion formation through experimental methods as well as survey research. The critical challenges posed by framing to authenticity and autonomy are that the effects of framing show that the public has no real attitudes and opinions or that these attitudes and opinions are manipulable in ways about which Lippmann and others have warned. Overall, the best available research shows that while these effects do occur, they are not substantial and widely pervasive, and they are mitigated if not eliminated by elite debates and competition. Despite all the possible confusion and biases – collective policy preferences (e.g., as expressed in poll results) do surprisingly well at resisting manipulation and attaining authenticity. People can resist framing—including deceptive rhetoric—if there is at least some alternative rhetoric available (see Gilens 2012, p.35; Chong and Druckman 2007a, 2007b, 2010, 2011; Druckman 2004).[7]

[7] On the critical side, public opinion professionals should – but do not always -- resist polling that uses framing effects to evoke opinions and then to represent these opinions as authentic and autonomous. This is a reason to refrain especially from "push polling" (see American Association for Public Opinion Research 2007). While all public opinion research involves framing in some fashion, the kind of research that intentionally seeks to *evoke* and *report* opinions for a cause is unethical, in the sense that it violates the autonomy of survey respondents and amounts to false claims to authenticity.

B. *Vulnerability, information deficits, deliberation, and misinformation*: While more research should be done, these concerns have been addressed substantially in recent years in ways that can only briefly be summarized here. There have been two camps in this debate which have drawn on a great deal of empirical research. They have, in short, reached different conclusions regarding the incompetence and emptiness versus competence and the wisdom of public opinion, defining these characterizations in different ways (see Glynn et al. 2004, Chapter 8). The debate often comes down to reaching a conclusion about whether the glass is half empty or half full (see Landermore 2013).

This report takes the positive view: The dominant narrative about public opinion, for good and visible reasons, depicts a public whose opinions vary and change in intelligible and explicable ways as it receives new information about events at home and abroad, changes in social economic conditions, and changes in politics and political debates, which are largely conveyed through the mass media. Anyone who follows reports of opinion polls will find this quite evident -- that there are clear "signals" as opposed to "noise" in the public's collective opinions concerning the issues of the day. The public opinion that emerges does not show the kind of expanding majorities that would be expected from "spirals of silence." In addition, the range of issues covered by these expressed opinions challenges claims about the widespread existence of latent or unexpressed interests, though these may be important concerns and public opinion polling can uncover them, as suggested further below (see Page and Shapiro 1992, Shapiro 2011).

On the opposite side, echoing some of the academic critique of the public's competence, there are occasional reports of how the public often falls short in knowledge of political facts, or how inattentive it is to new issues or even political candidates early in election campaigns. But this noise does not interfere with the overall signal from the public, especially for issues that have made it to the political agenda. Persuasive studies have shown that knowledge and the acquisition of information matter for public opinion, as does issue salience that leads to learning, where information may be acquired not through intensive study but rather through the use of information shortcuts or "heuristics" (Popkin 1991; Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock 1996; Gilens 2012, p.30-32). As issues become more visible and elections near, the public *collectively* becomes more attentive and learns, perhaps more superficially than most elites and political junkies but enough to form and adjust its opinions and preferences (Page and Shapiro1992, Chapter 1). Studies have shown that the amount of factual knowledge and information people have leads to differences in issue opinions and vote choices *in the aggregate*, on the order of 2-7 percentage points in the case of opinions, and 3 points in terms of election outcomes in the United States. While small figures like this can matter immensely in the case of close elections, these are not overwhelming or compelling differences in the context of effects they might have on leaders' actions and government policies (Althaus 2003, Bartels 1996, Berinsky 2004, Gilens 2012, p. 30-32).

How new information, and cue-taking and heuristics can play out has been illustrated if not definitively shown in research from "deliberative polling," that is cited in the main body of this report. Initiated by James Fishkin, deliberative polls have brought together representative samples of citizens, and then, by providing information and opportunities for debate and

deliberation, have examined what public opinion would look like, if it were both deliberative and representative (Fishkin 2009, Fishkin and Luskin 2005). In this way, deliberative polling attempts to make the credible claim that it produces autonomous and authentic public opinion. The results can highlight the differences between public opinion measured in conventional polls and deliberatively formed opinion (here the standard poll results can be highly informative, as it is possible that the results from deliberating in the end may not be that much difference from the opinions of those who do not deliberate). The results can also be used to initiate larger public conversations aimed at furthering the deliberative process to improve the quality of public opinion writ large on the issues in question, or to represent deliberative public opinion to governing bodies that might take public opinion into account in their policy deliberations. Deliberative opinions in this process can provide democratic legitimacy to political leaders who propose policies that reflect these opinions. While deliberative polling has itself evoked some debate, what has engendered less controversy are the observed effects of new information and cue-taking and information shortcuts that these experiments have revealed, and what they suggest about public opinion. For one, over many deliberative polls that have been done, the cases in which participants opinions do not change or do not change more than that of a comparison or control group on particular issues, suggests that many individuals have in fact reached opinions based on relevant information available to them in their day to day lives. In those cases in which participants' opinions have changed due to the new information received, along with opportunities for discussion and deliberation, the opinion changes have not been enormous and they parallel over a very short period of time what has been observable over longer periods in aggregate public opinion. (see Fishkin 2009; Fishkin and Luskin 2005; Gilens 2012, p.30-31; Page and Shapiro 1992). To the extent that there are not many big differences, this would indicate that a lot of useful deliberation occurs in natural settings and is reflected in conventional opinion polls fairly quickly after an issue comes up.

However, any cases in which exposure to new issues and information could lead to misinformation are highly problematic. The *quality* of public opinion hinges on individuals having accurate information for opinion holding that is in their interest and that of the nation as a whole. Clear-cut and important cases of misinformation leading to manipulation and deception have occurred in the United States and continue to occur. They can have major consequences. It is important for the public to resist such political efforts. Being able to track and study the behavior of public opinion though polls can play a role in learning about them—and from them. (see Page and Shapiro 1992, Chapters 5, 6, 9; Nacos, Bloch-Elkon, and Shapiro 2011; Shapiro and Bloch-Elkon 2008).

C. *Inclusion, representation,* and latent or unorganized opinion: Again, public opinion research is a form of representation of public opinion. For this reason, opinion researchers have been and will continue to be conscious of this. The representativeness of a survey sample is a basic research goal— to this point in time almost always considered a required condition of the enterprise of public opinion research. Insofar as survey researchers strive for representativeness, they address democratic norms of inclusion and provide a way to identify the differences between public opinion as measured and estimated in credible samples and what many political agents might assert claiming to speak for the public.

In particular, researchers can identify latent or unorganized opinions, opinions that are crowded out, opinions that are "voiceless" owing to resource biases, and opinions that are formed through deliberative processes (in the case of deliberative polling). Such research can be used to highlight inclusion and representation deficits in public discourse by providing the opinions and perspectives that may be left out of that discourse. In this way, it makes available for public discourse and for decision makers the voices and perspectives that might otherwise have little influence on political leaders and government actions and policies. To the extent that the gap between this public opinion and public policy is one benchmark against which to assess the quality of our democracy, it provides an important normative instrument.

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