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versus Electoral Accountability**



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The Journal of Politics, Vol. 45, No. 1 (Feb., 1983), 183-196.

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*Policy Congruence
and
American State Elites:
Descriptive Representation
versus
Electoral Accountability*

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A concern with the representativeness of political regimes leads us to examine the relative merits of the theses of descriptive representation and accountability. To do so the degree of policy congruence between national samples of the mass public and three elite groups (county political party leaders, state legislators, state bureaucrats) on ten non-fiscal issues is analyzed. The analyses find more support for the latter rather than the former thesis, with legislators being the most representative, followed by county political party leaders for Democrats and bureaucrats for Republicans. These findings have implications for understanding the functions that elites perform, how well they perform them, and to what extent public policy is affected by the learning of accountability by elites rather than increases in descriptive representation.

The representativeness of political regimes often is judged by (1) accountability, the extent to which a government is electorally accountable

* This is a revised version of a paper originally presented at the 1979 Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, Illinois. Institutional support at various times came from the General Research Board, University of Maryland—College Park; and the Division of Research Services, Louisiana State University. Computations for this article were performed at the Computer Science Center, University of Maryland—College Park, and the Systems Network Computer Center, Louisiana State University. We are grateful to Joel D. Aberbach, G. Bingham Powell, R. Robert Huckfeldt, Morris Rosenberg, James H. Kuklinski, Edward G. Carmines, Ronald J. Tercheck, Leroy N. Rieselbach, Nicholas Miller, Clarence N. Stone, Anne H. Hopkins, Mark Tompkins, Russell Hardin, Kathleen Peroff, Charles H. Levine, and several anonymous referees for their helpful comments.

to its citizens, and (2) policy congruence, the extent to which the governors faithfully represent the views of the governed on questions of public policy (see Pitkin, 1967, chs. 3-4; Schumpeter, 1947, ch. 22). The first perspective does not *require* any degree of policy correspondence between a public official and the constituency, for “. . . a representative who acted in a completely selfish and irresponsible manner could not be criticized as long as he let himself be removed from office at the end of his term” (Pitkin, 1967, p. 58). The second view of representation is not tied necessarily to any mechanism such as the ballot box: “. . . representativeness can show up in all sorts of contexts in which there are no voters” (Pitkin, 1967, p. 79; see also Long, 1962 and Kuklinski and Stanga, 1979).

The concepts of “formalistic” and “descriptive” representation, as described by Pitkin, serve as the reference points for our consideration of the most “representative” governing elite in the American states. The accountability or formalistic view stresses the central role of the legislature. The claim that the legislature is the most representative political institution need not rest, however, on the accountability thesis alone. A legislature also can be judged by the closeness of legislators’ opinions to those of their constituents. In this concept of descriptive representation, representative government “means ‘accurate reflection’ of the community [and] representation should secure in the government a ‘reflex’ of the opinion of the entire electorate” (Pitkin, 1967, p. 61). Policy congruence is a function, then, of the extent of demographic similarity between the mass and the elite (which constitutes the basic desideratum of the descriptive representation thesis).

Accountable legislators also may reflect the sentiments of the electorate because of their desire to be reelected (cf. Downs, 1957; Mayhew, 1974, p. 13). This hybrid thesis of legislative supremacy, which combines the “formalistic” and “descriptive” perspectives on representation, is not without its critics. Dahl quite bluntly states that elections “are quite ineffective indicators of majority preference” on most issues because of the overlapping cleavages across policies within the electorate (1956, p. 131). Both the extent to which voters possess opinions on issues and the extent to which they have either the inclination or the information to hold legislators accountable sometimes is overestimated (Converse, 1970).

However, even if elections work to coerce legislators to respond, such “responses” may be ineffective simply because legislators are unable to determine what the public wants (see Uslaner and Weber, 1979). An equally effective means of achieving policy congruence, therefore, may be the sharing of policy views due to a basic similarity in demographic traits. “Representative bureaucracy” theorists, such as Norton E. Long, argue that the process of recruitment from the public makes the “civil service as a body a better sample of the mass of the people” than legislators, so that

the former "are likely to be more responsive to the desires and needs of the broad public than is a highly selected slice whose responsiveness is enforced by a mechanism of elections that frequently places more power in the hands of campaign-backers than voters" (Long, 1962, pp. 70-71).

Elite and public sharing of opinions, then, may not depend on the demands of the accountability thesis. Voters may misperceive what candidates stand for and elites may mistake public opinion, but what matters most is whether policies match opinion (see Monroe, 1979). Sharing of opinions implies a consensus between the mass and the elite on the basis of commonly held values, which, in turn, might be traced to demographic similarities.

We shall analyze the issue positions of national samples of the mass public, county political party leaders, state legislators, and state bureaucrats on ten non-fiscal public policy issues that have confronted political leaders, particularly in the states, in recent years. We first compare the issue positions of each elite to those of the mass public to determine which group is in greatest overall proximity to public opinion. A finding that legislators are *not* more proximal would challenge seriously the role of elections in democratic governance. We then shall consider what would happen if the three elites were "to become" more demographically representative than they are. To accomplish this task we shall weight each elite so that it corresponds, in terms of selected demographic variables, as closely as possible to the mass public, and then reconsider the extent of policy congruence between the party leaders, legislators, and bureaucrats on the one hand and the public on the other. Finally, we shall look at patterns of policy congruence between the elites and the mass within the two political parties to determine the extent to which partisanship facilitates representation.

THE THREE ELITES AS POLICY MAKERS

The policy-making roles of legislators and bureaucrats are obvious. Legislators enact the statutes that have wide-ranging impacts on the daily lives of citizens; bureaucrats implement and interpret these laws, often with considerable latitude. Because bureaucrats may come into more direct contact with clientele groups than do many legislators, some advocates of representative bureaucracy believe that the former elite is more likely to share the views of large segments of the public (Long, 1962, p. 72). But studies of upper-level federal bureaucrats all confirm the unrepresentative character of this elite (see Meier, 1975; Aberbach and Rockman, 1976), as does an analysis of state level administrators in the 1960s and 1970s (Wright, Wagner and McAnaw, 1977). The descriptive representation thesis thus would predict substantial differences between the mass public and both the legislator and bureaucrat samples before

weighting, with the magnitude of the differences depending upon the demographic comparisons.

The policy-making role of party leaders is less obvious. They often are viewed as "proximate policy-makers" and "opinion leaders" for their constituents (see Clark and Wilson, 1961; Key, 1961, ch. 21). Since county party leaders spend a good deal of time recruiting candidates for office and running campaigns, we should expect that they not only would be similar demographically to their constituents but also in concert with public opinion, which after all might determine the election.

Our data come from national samples of each elite group and the mass public.¹ In the analyses to follow, we weighted the responses of the county chairmen by state and party and those of the legislators by state, party, and chamber to provide more representative samples.

The public opinion data are taken from national Gallup polls conducted between 1968 and 1973. The ten issues we examine are: 1) capital punishment, 2) abortion reform; 3) firearms control; 4) teacher unionization; 5) permitting teachers to strike; 6) police and firemen unionization; 7) permitting police and firemen to strike; 8) legalization of marijuana; 9) no-fault automobile insurance; and 10) aid to parochial and private schools.² State elite responses are the most appropriate to use in this context, since the issues we have chosen generally depend upon state rather than federal action.

We examine the responsiveness of each elite to the mass public at the national level, with a focus on "collective" rather than "dyadic," or

¹ The party leader survey was conducted in 1972, with questionnaires mailed to a sample of 2,786 county chairmen in the 50 states. The sample was stratified on the basis of county size, and we obtained 1,606 usable responses, a return rate of 57.6 percent, with approximately equal rates for Democratic and Republican chairmen. The legislator sample consists of 1,256 respondents from the 50 states sampled in the latter half of 1974, an overall response rate of 37.9 percent of the 3,316 selected for the original sample. The design was a random sample, stratified on the basis of state and legislative chamber, and augmented to include legislators with important formal positions in the legislature (Speaker of House, President Pro Tem of Senate, et cetera). The national sample survey of state agency heads was conducted in 1975. Of a total of 2,880 who were sent questionnaires, 1,691 or 58.7 percent returned them.

² The American Institute of Public Opinion (Gallup Poll) survey numbers and dates are: capital punishment (AIPO 860, 11/72); abortion legalization (861, 12/72); firearms control (852, 5/72); teacher and police/fire unionization and strikes (772, 12/68); marijuana legalization (863, 1/73); no-fault insurance (826, 3/71); and parochial school aid (849, 4/72). The data were obtained from the Roper Public Opinion Research Center, Williamstown, Massachusetts. Identical questions were administered to our elite samples. We wanted measures of mass opinion which precede those of the elites; hence, some of the questions (1973-75) and found general stability of mass opinion. In the discussion below negative replies to the capital punishment question are considered "liberal" responses; positive replies to the parochial school aid question were classified as liberal because those who opposed such aid generally favored other conservative positions.

constituency-based, representation.³ The thesis of descriptive representation should be applicable equally to studies of collective and dyadic representation because its advocates assume that the demographic traits of the respondents, and not specific state political cultures, determine the extent of policy congruence. Inter-state variations solely attributable to such demographic traits, in this view, are posited to vanish after weighting.

Tests of the thesis of descriptive representation thus would lead us to hypothesize, according to this perspective, that: (1) the elite most demographically similar to the mass public also would show the greatest overall policy congruence across the ten issues considered; (2) after weighting, the three elites should be sufficiently similar demographically so that their policy positions display no significant differences from each other; and (3) after weighting, each elite should display more policy congruence with the mass public than before weighting. The hypotheses imply that the overall, or mean, estimates of policy congruence should be greater for the most descriptively representative elite (before weighting) and for all elites after weighting. Furthermore, they also suggest that the variances about the mean should also be reduced in the same manner, with the inter-elite and mass/elite variances after weighting ideally approaching zero. We then shall consider further the nature of policy congruence by examining the linkage of mass and elite opinions through the prism of party.

AN ASSESSMENT OF POLICY CONGRUENCE: UNWEIGHTED SAMPLES

We examine first the extent to which each of the three elites, taken as a national sample, is closest to public opinion on the ten policy areas. The policy position of each sample is operationalized as the percentage of each sample giving a "liberal" response to a question. The data for the unweighted samples are presented in Table 1. The relevant numbers are the signed distance scores (in parentheses), which indicate the percentage of each elite that is more conservative than the mass public.

The most striking results in Table 1 are found by looking down the columns. For seven of the ten issue areas, the party leaders were least likely to favor the "liberal" policy position. In contrast, the bureaucrats were further to the left than either elite on seven of the ten policy areas. The

³ These concepts are developed in Weissberg (1978). Although it clearly would be preferable for us to make mass/elite and inter-elite comparisons at the state level, the data we are examining are not disaggregated easily into the context in which such representation takes place. We have obtained some estimates for the state level which are not as reliable as those for the national samples (particularly when weighted), and they are consistent with the findings we shall discuss below.

TABLE 1

POLICY PREFERENCES OF THE MASS PUBLIC AND
THREE STATE ELITES ON TEN ISSUES OF STATE POLICY, AND
DISTANCE SCORES BETWEEN MASS PUBLIC AND ELITE PREFERENCES*

Policy Question	Percentage Favoring "Liberal" Policy Position			
	Mass Public	Party Chairmen	Legislators	Agency Heads
Capital Punishment Opposition	36.0%	25.9% (10.1)	35.4% (0.6)	38.1 (-2.1%)
Abortion in First Three Months	50.8	58.0 (-7.2)	53.2 (-2.4)	78.5 (-27.7)
Firearms Permits	74.3	49.5 (24.8)	50.7 (23.6)	66.1 (8.2)
Teacher Unionization	67.5	38.3 (29.2)	58.6 (8.9)	56.5 (11.0)
Teacher Strikes	37.2	21.6 (15.6)	25.8 (11.4)	27.0 (10.2)
Police-Firemen Unionization	64.9	42.3 (22.6)	59.7 (5.2)	57.4 (7.5)
Police-Firemen Strikes	30.7	16.0 (14.7)	15.6 (15.1)	16.7 (14.0)
Marijuana Legalization	16.5	15.9 (0.6)	17.4 (-0.9)	33.3 (-16.8)
No-Fault Auto Insurance	75.9	75.6 (0.3)	75.5 (0.4)	88.3 (-12.4)
Parochial School Aid	57.3	45.3 (12.0)	45.1 (12.2)	39.9 (17.4)

* Positive values indicate that the mass public is more liberal on the issue than the elite. Negative values mean that the elite is more liberal than the mass public.

bureaucrats are the most liberal elite, and their progressive views stand out most prominently on "new liberalism" issues dealing with public and private morality. The party leaders are not only the most conservative elite, but also to the right of the mass public. The public and especially the legislators are decidedly more centrist.

These findings are reinforced when we consider the summary measures in Table 2, which include both means and standard deviations for the absolute values of the distances between each elite and the mass public across the ten issues, and similar measures for the elite closest to the public on each issue area. The closest elite to the public on each issue has a mean distance score of 6.2, which is considerably closer to that of the

TABLE 2

SUMMARY MEASURES OF ABSOLUTE DISTANCE SCORES ACROSS
TEN POLICY AREAS FOR UNWEIGHTED SAMPLES

	Party Chairmen	Legislators	Bureaucrats	Closest Elite
Mean	13.7	8.1	12.7	6.2
Standard Deviation	9.8	7.6	6.9	5.1

legislators than of the other two elites. The bureaucrats have the smallest standard deviation among the three elites (6.9), compared to 5.1 for the closest elite. The party leaders, with the largest mean, also have the greatest variance about that average.

To what extent can we attribute such stands to the demographic traits of the mass and elites? The data in Table 3 indicate that the elites are more like each other than any is to the public. Particularly on the sex and education variables, the mass/elite distinctions are striking. The three elites are all quite well educated; only 31 percent of the mass public attended college. All three elites are predominantly white, and so is the mass public sample. Each elite is more likely to be middle-aged than is the mass public, for whom age is distributed almost equally among our four-fold categorization. Because of their higher level of education, the bureaucrats appear to be least representative of the mass public. In fact, the portrait of the bureaucrats is most similar to a mid-level business elite, which is most representative of the top 10-20 percent of the population (cf. Aberbach and Rockman, 1976).

TABLE 3

DEMOGRAPHIC AND POLITICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE
MASS PUBLIC AND THREE STATE ELITES*

Demographic Variables	Mass Public	Party Chairmen	Legislators	Agency Heads
Sex				
Male	48.1%	92.4%	93.8%	93.9%
Female	51.9	7.6	6.2	6.1
Race				
White	90.3%	97.0%	94.9%	94.0%
Non-White	9.8	3.0	5.1	6.0
Age				
18-30	27.6%	4.2%	3.2%	4.3%
31-45	26.4	36.5	34.2	36.4
46-60	25.0	43.7	46.3	47.1
Over 60	21.0	15.6	16.3	12.2
Education				
High School or Less	68.7%	20.6%	11.5%	2.9%
Some College	19.2	28.2	20.2	12.4
College Graduate	12.1	51.2	68.3	84.7
Political Party				
Democratic	42.4%	48.0%	60.3%	54.1%
Republican	26.4	52.0	38.6	27.4
Independent	31.2	--	1.0	18.5

* The demographic and political characteristics data for the mass public are averages drawn from the seven AIPO surveys used to provide the policy preference data.

Among the party leaders a slight majority (52 percent) is Republican. This overrepresentation of Republicans in the party leader sample is inevitable since there almost certainly will be both Democratic and Republican leaders in each county in the nation. This imbalance in the party leader sample will affect our comparison of the views of party leaders and the mass public. In contrast, the percentages for Democrats and Republicans among legislators identifying with a party quite accurately reflect the national aggregates in the mass public. The agency heads include more independents than either of the other elites, but the percentage of Democrats *among identifiers* is higher than that for legislators, party leaders, or the mass public. A more Republican and more conservative group might have opted for careers in business or the law. But governmental service also reinforces liberalism and Democratic identification.

The demographic traits of sex, race, age, and education do not provide a clear-cut distinction among the three elites as to which would be expected to be most representative of the public. Only on education, where the party leaders are somewhat more similar to the public than are the other elites, do we find much variation at all. Yet, the party chairmen are the least representative elite across the ten issues. Thus, the first test for descriptive representation does not support the claims of this concept of representation.

AN ASSESSMENT OF POLICY CONGRUENCE: WEIGHTED SAMPLES

To determine what elite opinion might look like if our party leaders, legislators, and agency heads were made as demographically similar as possible to the mass public, we weighted each elite sample to produce an analogue to Table 1.⁴ When we weight these elites by the four demographic characteristics of the mass public, the bureaucrats become somewhat more conservative on nine of the ten issues. However, the pattern is less clear-cut for either legislators or party leaders. The former become more conservative on five issues, more liberal on two, and change little on the remaining three issues. The party chairmen now tilt more to the left than before on two issues but move to the right on three; the remaining policies show little change. These results are summarized in Table 4.

However, when we examine the specific issues in Tables 1 and 4, we find few major changes in the rank orderings among the elites in terms of representation. The wide disparities on economic issues between the public and the party leaders generally remain and, in the aggregate, there

⁴ A full description of our multiplicative weighting technique is available upon request from either of the authors.

appears to be *less* policy congruence across the elites and the mass public after weighting than there was before.

In Table 5 for the weighted data we see that the party leaders are now

TABLE 4

POLICY PREFERENCES OF THE MASS PUBLIC AND THREE WEIGHTED STATE ELITES
ON TEN ISSUES OF STATE POLICY AND DISTANCE SCORES BETWEEN
MASS PUBLIC AND WEIGHTED ELITE PREFERENCES*

Policy Question	Percentage Favoring "Liberal" Policy Position			
	Mass Public	Party Chairmen	Legislators	Agency Heads
Opposition to Capital Punishment	36.0%	32.0% (4.0)	36.0%(0.0)	19.1% (16.9)
Abortion in First Three Months	50.8	60.6 (-9.8)	47.0 (3.8)	74.9 (-24.1)
Firearm Permits	74.3	50.1 (24.2)	42.3 (32.0)	50.2 (24.1)
Teacher Unionization	67.5	40.4 (27.1)	46.8 (20.7)	42.0 (25.5)
Teacher Strikes	37.2	22.6 (14.6)	24.5 (11.7)	26.7 (10.5)
Police/Firemen Unionization	64.9	50.6 (14.3)	46.4 (18.5)	40.9 (24.0)
Police/Firemen Strikes	30.7	17.4 (13.3)	17.4 (13.3)	12.2 (18.5)
Marijuana Legalization	16.5	12.5 (4.0)	28.1 (-11.6)	20.3 (-3.8)
No Fault Auto Insurance	75.9	69.5 (6.4)	84.6 (-8.7)	79.5 (-3.6)
Parochial School Aid	57.3	41.4 (15.9)	34.7 (22.6)	27.2 (30.1)

* Positive values indicate that the mass public is more liberal on the issue than is the weighted elite. Negative values mean that the weighted elite is more liberal than is the mass public.

slightly closer to public opinion across the ten issues than were the legislators after weighting, with the bureaucrats being least representative. For the party leaders the mean distance score is less after weighting, whereas this measure is largest for the other two elites. When we look at the elite closest to public opinion we see less correspondence after weighting than before; the mean for the closest elite is almost double that of the unweighted analysis.

The evidence on descriptive representation can be described best as mixed. Weighting did reduce the variation among the elites. The ratio of mean distances for the least to most representative elites is less for the weighted sample (13.7/8.1 for the unweighted, or 1.69, compared to 18.1/13.4, or 1.35, for the weighted). However, the variation across the elites is not reduced. Finally, the overall correspondence of elite opinion to public opinion is less. The lowest mean in the weighted analysis (13.4) is greater than that for the unweighted analysis (8.1). Overall, then, we

cannot evaluate the claims of the descriptive representation thesis positively. Not only are the distance scores generally larger than before, but there also is no clear-cut pattern of change across most of the issues.

TABLE 5

SUMMARY MEASURES OF ABSOLUTE DISTANCE SCORES ACROSS
TEN POLICY AREAS FOR UNWEIGHTED AND
WEIGHTED SAMPLES

	Party Chairmen	Legislators	Bureaucrats	Closest Elite
Unweighted Sample:				
Mean	13.7	8.1	12.7	6.2
Standard Deviation	9.8	7.6	6.9	5.1
Weighted Sample:				
Mean	13.7	14.3	18.1	11.0
Standard Deviation	7.8	9.4	9.3	8.1

The failure of the weighting scheme to reduce the variance across the elites suggests that Suleiman's argument on the recruitment of political leaders needs revision. He argues that the recruitment process will produce a homogenized set of elites in terms of policy views through common experiences in higher education (1974, pp. 72-99). Yet, large differences among the elites remain (indeed, are enhanced) in our samples after weighting. Furthermore, the increase in both mean distance scores and standard deviations between the mass public and the elites after weighting suggests that race, sex, and age differences may not account for differences in policy attitudes.

THE PARTISAN LINKAGE

We next examine the impact of political party identification upon policy congruence. As noted above, party is not a similar demographic trait to sex, age, education, or race. Several studies have shown that such demographic variables are not good predictors of policy stands (cf. Edinger and Searing, 1967). In contrast, while the mirroring of the partisan preferences of the public does not seem to be critically important to descriptive representation, partisan preferences generally do color issue positions. The classic role of parties is contesting elections, and this suggests that partisan differences *may* suggest a greater role for the accountability perspective on representation.

We compare policy congruence for the unweighted and weighted samples of elites by party with the full electorate as the basis for comparison. To make comparisons across the elites we need a basis for making inferences about overall (i.e., "collective") policy congruence. If the

descriptive thesis is correct, we should not find any major differences between the pattern of congruence for Democrats and that for Republicans. On the other hand, large differences would suggest that we may have judged the accountability thesis too harshly and that a reconsideration might be in order.

We make the following comparisons: (1) between the full elite sample and the partisan elites for each party before and after weighting; (2) between the unweighted and weighted elite responses for each party; and (3) between Democratic and Republican elites. The general summary measures are presented in Table 6. What we clearly see from the data is: (1) without exception, the Democratic elites are either similar to the full samples in their policy positions or, as is most often the case, more liberal; (2) the reverse pattern holds for the Republican elites, although GOP agency heads are slightly more liberal on abortion than all bureaucrats; (3) the weighting does not have much of an impact on the comparisons of the full elite samples with the partisan ones, except that Democratic bureaucrats are somewhat to the right and GOP administrators slightly further to the left on the public employee unionization and strike questions.

TABLE 6

SUMMARY MEASURES OF ABSOLUTE DISTANCE SCORES ACROSS
TEN POLICY AREAS BY POLITICAL PARTY FOR
UNWEIGHTED AND WEIGHTED SAMPLES*

	Party		Legislators	Bureaucrats	Closest Elite			
	Chairmen							
Unweighted Sample:								
Democratic Mean	5.9	(4.9)	5.3	(4.6)	10.9	(7.8)	2.4	(2.3)
Republican Mean	25.3	(13.6)	17.3	(11.3)	16.9	(7.9)	13.4	(8.2)
Total Mean	13.7	(9.8)	8.1	(7.6)	12.7	(6.9)	6.2	(5.1)
Weighted Sample:								
Democratic Mean	6.4	(6.9)	7.2	(6.5)	20.9	(9.5)	3.6	(2.7)
Republican Mean	24.2	(13.1)	28.8	(17.2)	18.4	(11.7)	13.4	(9.9)
Total Mean	13.4	(7.8)	14.3	(9.4)	18.1	(9.3)	11.0	(8.1)

* Figures in parentheses are standard deviations.

The weighting of the elite samples does not reveal many changes, particularly in comparison to the break by party. The weighted Democratic samples of party leaders and legislators are somewhat more liberal, whereas the agency heads are slightly more conservative. Policy congruence is slightly lower for the party chairmen, unchanged for the legislators, and quite a bit lower for the bureaucrats. Overall, the closest Democratic elite to public opinion is slightly less representative.

The GOP party leader sample is slightly more liberal whereas the

legislators are somewhat more conservative. The agency head change depends on the issue. The bureaucrats, whose views are most similar to their Democratic colleagues, are the most representative GOP elite. The party leaders and legislators are far less representative of the mass public with the GOP legislators being far more conservative than is mass opinion.

On no issue, either before or after weighting, do the GOP elites consistently demonstrate greater policy congruence than do their Democratic counterparts. Republican *distance scores* are almost uniformly above 20 percent and on the strike issues, which more clearly differentiate the parties than do most social questions, in the weighted samples range between 50 and 60 percent! The Democrats are much closer to public opinion on every issue and often the extent of policy congruence across elites is very high. The Democratic elites closest to public opinion overall are the ones closest to the electoral arena: legislators and party leaders. These findings are consistent with research which shows not only that upper-level bureaucrats at the national level are a highly atypical and very liberal elite, but also that the Democratic Party's most prominent national elite, the members of the House of Representatives, have been much more supportive of their party's constituency policy bases than have the Republicans (cf. Aberbach and Rockman, 1976; Mayhew, 1966, pp. 146-160). The Democratic Party has been dominant, in this view, precisely because it has been so responsive to the policy views of its supporters, whereas the Republicans have been more concerned with ideological purity than with attracting electoral support (cf. McCloskey, Hoffman and O'Hara, 1960; Kirkpatrick, 1975).

CONCLUSION

Our analysis casts considerable doubt on the utility of the thesis of descriptive representation. Certainly, there was not much support for the idea of representative bureaucracy in this analysis. Our agency heads, even recognizing that they are atypical of most bureaucrats, were demographically least like the mass public. No less than legislators, these agency heads are a "highly selected slice" of the public (cf. Long, 1962, pp. 64-76). The entire weighting scheme did little to make any elite more representative of the mass public. The greatest differences occur not among elites but, rather, between the elites in each party. At the collective level we have found little support for descriptive representation and at least some indications that legislators are the most representative elite, if not by a very wide margin. The elite which, for the Democrats at least, consistently ranks a close second is the county party leadership. In contrast, the GOP elite closest to mass opinions on eight of the ten issues is the bureaucratic sample, whose members are much closer to their

Democratic colleagues in attitudes than are other Republicans we have examined. This pattern of results suggests that electoral accountability *may* be the reason why legislators are closest to public opinion for the full sample and Democratic subsamples — and why the Democrats have been the majority party for so long. The theoretical leverage accountability offers, which the descriptive notion does not, is a concern for the different functions multiple elites perform. Party leaders not only are proximate policy makers, but they spend much of their time recruiting candidates and running campaigns. By the nature of their positions, they will be demographically unrepresentative of the mass public with respect to partisan affiliation. Similarly, we might believe that the bureaucracy should be more representative demographically, and perhaps ideologically as well, but would a less educated bureaucracy be as capable of running the government? Given that demographic traits do not seem to predict elite policy preferences across a variety of issues, we may be placing too much emphasis on the composition of our policy-making elites. We caution against the view that all one needs to do is to select more women, blacks, young, or old people, or ordinary people with “typical” levels of education (non-professional legislators, etc.) to obtain major changes in public policy. Indeed, our analysis of the partisan linkage, as well as our reconsideration of the functions of each branch of government, suggest that there may be more leverage in accountability, particularly through political parties, than we might have assumed. Selective recruitment by existing elites along with subsequent socialization of those recruits may be at work minimizing the extent of descriptive representation, while at the same time reinforcing a view that elites need to be accountable constantly to the constituency that selected them.

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