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Living Up to Expectations: Public Attitudes Toward Congress

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Americans' feelings about the performance of Congress range across the spectrum from positive to negative, but tend to be negative. What accounts for supportive or unsupportive orientations toward Congress? The effects of personal attributes like socioeconomic status, or beliefs about the efficacy of congressional processes, account for only part of citizens' evaluations of Congress. We argue that discrepancies between what people expect Congress to be like and what they perceive it actually is like independently affect evaluations of Congress. We measure this "expectation-perception discrepancy" and demonstrate in a multivariate explanatory environment that this discrepancy affects the extent of Americans' favorableness toward Congress, drawing upon data gathered in a 1994 post-election survey ($N = 808$) conducted in Ohio by the Polimetrics Laboratory for Social and Political Research at Ohio State University.

Our argument is elementary. Citizens carry with them expectations, however rudimentary, about political institutions, Congress in particular, and about processes taking place within Congress. Such expectations may develop in the form of fuzzy images of the institution as a whole, arise from very partisan or ideological perspectives, biases, and distortions, focus on particular institutional actions or events, or concern the characteristics or attributes of the institution's members. Citizens' expectations about Congress may develop from specific socialization, perhaps in early life experience, about what Congress should be like. Civics textbook expectations about Congress's constitutional function, its members and their conduct, its representativeness, its accessibility, or its reliability in passing legislation may shape citizens' expectations, forming an image or "prototype" of the congressional ideal.

Citizens' perceptions of the congressional reality—what they think Congress is actually like—may emerge from firsthand contact with members, exposure to

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media coverage of congressional activities and events, or in the reinforcement of personal interactions. For some citizens, Congress lives up to expectations, but for many there is a discrepancy, or gap, between what they think Congress ought to be like and what they believe it is like. This relative mismatch of the prototype to perceived reality contributes to citizens' beliefs that Congress is doing a poor job, cannot be trusted, is run by the wrong kinds of people, or passes misguided laws and is responsible for bad public policies.

We seek to draw attention to the importance of expectation-perception differentials in endeavors to explain public satisfaction or, most often, dissatisfaction with Congress. Congress is, after all, a popularly and freely elected, quite representative, and constituency-oriented national legislative institution exercising major lawmaking powers. Americans deeply support its institutional part in the constitutional constellation and believe in the importance of the institution in the abstract. But the everyday, real-world Congress is held to pretty high standards and is often found wanting. Our investigation establishes the unmistakable effect of expectation-perception discrepancies on public support for Congress, even when the familiar and conventional predictors are taken into the explanatory family.

PUBLIC ATTITUDES TOWARD CONGRESS

Various scholarly undertakings have sought to discover why public distrust of political institutions is so pervasive in America. One important grounding for distrust is broadly politico-cultural. It develops from the postulate of a "disharmonic" American polity in which political appraisals historically have shown a gap between the kind of constitutional system Americans believed the Founders had established, on the one hand, and the imperfect working political processes, on the other hand (see Huntington 1981). More specifically, an interpretation of political distrust in America can rest on the widespread view that politicians are, as Mark Twain once said, "the only native American criminal class"—that politicians are scoundrels lacking in honesty, integrity, and civic-mindedness (see Kerbel 1995; Lipset and Schneider 1987). Disparagement of politics and politicians may stem both from politico-cultural values and from populist sentiments, as well as from more concrete reactions to malfeasance in office, conflict of interest, or other criminality or scandal. Whatever its source, public distrust of government reflects dissatisfaction with politicians and the political processes they manipulate (Miller 1974).

A second component of political distrust is largely partisan. Citizens respond much more favorably to politicians of their own partisan persuasion and more positively evaluate governmental bodies when the latter are controlled by those who share the citizens' political party affiliation (Citrin 1974; Patterson, Ripley, and Quinlan 1992). Citizens' partisan attachments deeply influence whether or not they perceive Congress as woefully gridlocked, overly beholden to the president, or overly professional. Our own focus upon both the expectations citizens

have for congressional behavior and their perceptions of actual performance will shed light on both of these components—politico-cultural and partisan—of public support for one major political institution, the United States Congress.

Some inquiries into public attitudes toward the legislature focus upon fundamental public support for the legislative institution, rather than on its workaday job performance. This line of research has demonstrated, among other things, the consistent effects of socioeconomic status on citizens' diffuse support for the legislature, indicating strong institutional support from among those with high status, and relatively low support from among those with low status (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 1995, 119–21; Patterson, Hedlund, and Boynton 1975). One inquiry attributes change over time in public approval or disapproval of congressional performance primarily to fluctuations in presidential popularity, to negative media coverage of the institution, and to news reporting about unethical conduct (Patterson and Caldeira 1990; also see Asher and Barr 1994). An extensive cross-sectional analysis featured the weight of partisan attachment, presidential support, and political efficacy on variations in citizens' evaluations of Congress (Patterson, Ripley, and Quinlan 1992; also see Ripley et al. 1992).

More recent research underscores the importance of the political process in citizens' evaluations of Congress, including process-related concerns about inefficiency, inequities in interest-group influence, and overprofessionalization (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 1995). And, one analysis showed that experts tend to evaluate Congress in a more partisan manner, whereas citizens deficient in information are more likely to link evaluations of the president and Congress; and congressional evaluations are more partisan in nature when elites are involved in highly partisan debate (Kimball 1995). Finally, some scholars attribute the low estate of congressional popularity to negative campaigning and reporting in the media, especially television (see Center for Responsive Politics 1990; Mann and Ornstein 1994; but see Theiss-Morse and Hibbing 1995).

Our theory about the impact of expectation-perception discrepancies leads us to anticipate a strong relationship between the expectation-perception measure and the degree of favorableness toward Congress. Indeed, we demonstrate a very weighty effect, controlling for other well-known predictors of congressional approval. Our findings present important implications for the legitimacy of Congress, and for its capacity for effective performance in a milieu of negativism and distrust.

DISCREPANCY THEORY AND CONGRESSIONAL EVALUATION

We have said that our analysis is an exploration of the effects of the gap between expectations and perceptions of Congress on citizens' favorableness or affect toward the institution (see Klaaren, Hodges, and Wilson 1994). We are not the first to think that evaluations of individual, social, or political objects are partly grounded in disparities between expectations and perceptions. Social

psychologists studying self-esteem have argued that high self-esteem results when individuals believe that their actions or performances equal their ideal level of achievement. According to discrepancy theory, low self-esteem occurs when achievement fails to reach ideal expectations (Higgins 1987; Moretti and Higgins 1990). Inasmuch as citizens appear to evaluate Congress primarily with the members of Congress in mind rather than other characteristics of the institution, it is plausible to argue that individuals are exerting the same cognitive processes to evaluate other people or groups that they invoke to evaluate themselves.

A similar argument has been advanced regarding other cognitive evaluation processes (Bem and McConnell 1970; Markus 1986). Other work in social psychology suggests that people use "prototypes," or ideal images of a group, to form expectations about the characteristics of the group and make inferences about its members. It is possible that citizens acquire a prototypical image of Congress (whose members are dedicated, hard-working, honest, respected public servants in touch with the public) as part of their upbringing, or in civics classes in school (see Andrain 1971; Easton and Dennis 1969) and then compare with this prototype the way members of Congress actually behave (Fiske and Taylor 1991, 96–141).

Political scientists have found this concept of discrepancy, differential, or gap useful in various ways. Spatial theories of voting invoke the differential between voter and candidate positions on political issues (see, for example, Enelow and Hinich 1984). One scholar has argued that citizens become cynical about government when political institutions fail to produce policies that match their own policy prescriptions (Miller 1974; also see Citrin 1974).

In a study of citizens' diffuse support for the state legislature, a group of investigators directly assayed discrepancies between public expectations and perceptions concerning influences on and membership in the legislature (Patterson, Boynton, and Hedlund 1969). In 1973, the U. S. Senate Committee on Government Operations contracted with Louis Harris and Associates to conduct a national survey of citizens' perceptions of the responsiveness of government. This survey uncovered a series of discrepancies between public expectations and perceptions, adducing the conclusion that "Americans expect more integrity and energy of the men and women in government than the public thinks elected and career officials are now delivering" (U.S. Senate, Committee on Government Operations 1973, 132). Finally, an analysis of the parliaments of the world generally concluded that "people constantly confront their expectations of the legislature with their perceptions of how the legislature and its members are operating," and that it is the mismatch of the two that leads to diminished support for the legislature as an institution (Mezey 1979, 32; also see Hibbing and Patterson 1994).

We aim to demonstrate the empirical validity of this general line of theorizing. We show that gaps or discrepancies between citizens' expectations about the congressional membership and their perceptions of that membership help

importantly to drive approval of, or favorableness toward, Congress. Our data for this purpose derive from telephone interviews with citizens in a household probability sample of Ohioans ($N = 808$) conducted in late 1994. Split-half interviewing provided congressional expectation and perception data for about half the cases ($N = 403$). In the course of these interviews, respondents were asked to (1) evaluate members of Congress using the feeling thermometer; and (2) declare their expectations of members and their perceptions of them concerning eight discrete attributes—legal training, presidential support, party loyalty, congressional experience, reelection interest, personal gain or profit, community leadership, and attention to the district (see the appendix for specific interview items and sampling details).

CITIZENS' EVALUATIONS OF CONGRESS

We asked Ohioans to evaluate members of Congress in two ways. First, we invoked the feeling thermometer measure, asking respondents to declare their feelings of warmth or favorableness toward the U.S. Congress on a thermometer scale running from 0 to 100 degrees. Respondents were cued to the thermometer by being instructed that ratings between 50 and 100 degrees denoted feeling “favorable and warm,” while ratings between 0 and 50 degrees denoted unfavorable feelings. The distribution of the congressional thermometer ratings for our sample is laid out in Figure 1. On the average, Ohioans leaned to the unfavorable side, accruing a mean thermometer rating of 44.4 degrees. For the sake of comparison, we can report that the average thermometer rating for the Ohio state legislature was higher ($\bar{X} = 52.0$) than for Congress, and even higher for the Ohio State Supreme Court ($\bar{X} = 56.3$). As usual, citizens rated their own incumbent House member much higher ($\bar{X} = 61.1$) than they rated members of Congress generally, although three Ohio House incumbents were, in fact, defeated in 1994.

In addition, we asked our respondents a standard approval-rating question: “Generally speaking, how would you evaluate the job the United States Congress has been doing in the last few months? Has it been doing an excellent job, a good job, a fair job, or a poor job?” Only one person in our sample thought congressional performance was “excellent”; about 12% rated Congress “good”; 57% said Congress was “fair”; and 31% gave Congress a “poor” evaluation. This is roughly equivalent to the results from national surveys and indicates a historic nadir in public satisfaction with Congress (see Patterson and Barr 1995; Patterson and Caldeira 1990; Patterson, Ripley, and Quinlan 1992).

We have chosen the thermometer ratings as our dependent variable. This approach appears to capture citizens' satisfaction with and approval of members of Congress somewhat better than the standard approval-disapproval survey question. The feeling thermometer affords respondents far greater latitude for appraisal—fully 100 options—compared to the limited response categories provided

FIGURE 1

OHIOANS' FEELINGS TOWARD THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS, 1994

by the approval-disapproval item (see Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 1995, 42-46). Clearly, respondents rate Congress, whether on the feeling thermometer or in response to the performance evaluation question, with the members of Congress in mind (see Markus 1986, 39). Our thermometer item refers specifically to the members of Congress, and not broadly or diffusely to Congress as a political institution. It has been demonstrated that, while only a minority of Americans are satisfied with the members of Congress (other than their own representative), respondents are strongly positive about Congress as an institutional part of the constitutional system (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 1995, 45). More pertinently, in our own data, ratings of the congressional membership on the feeling thermometer and evaluations of the performance of Congress run together; the correlation between them is $r = .47$. Fortunately, our multivariate results and substantive conclusions are very similar using either measure of the dependent variable.

CITIZENS' EXPECTATIONS AND PERCEPTIONS

We tapped respondents' expectations and perceptions about Congress by asking them to indicate what characteristics or attributes members ought to have,

and then what attributes they thought members actually have. We offered respondents eight attributes for their appraisal. These are listed in Table 1, along with mean responses (the precise question wording is given in the appendix).¹ For the expectation questions, respondents were asked whether it was “extremely important” (coded as 1), “somewhat important” (coded as 2), or “not at all important” (coded as 3) for members of Congress to possess the relevant characteristic. A lower mean score in Table 1 indicates greater importance attached to that characteristic. For the perception questions, respondents indicated whether each attribute is “extremely accurate” (coded as 1), “somewhat accurate” (coded as 2), or “not at all accurate” (coded as 3) as a description of members of Congress. The lower the mean score for the perception items in Table 1, the more accurately the particular attribute describes members of Congress.

We anticipated that citizens’ expectations and perceptions of Congress would cluster around both populist and partisan considerations, so we selected survey questions that would appropriately tap these dimensions. Populist orientations will tend to reflect basic qualities of integrity and responsiveness that should apply to any public officials, regardless of partisanship. For example, are members of Congress honest leaders who keep in contact with the people they represent? Partisan orientations, which tend to reflect overtly political aspects of the representative’s job, are highly sensitive to partisan or ideological disputation. For example, should a member of Congress support the president? Should legislators be loyal partisans? Should representatives have had legislative or legal experience?

The comparisons shown in Table 1 establish that there are, indeed, substantial differences between what citizens expect of members of Congress, and what they perceive to be the reality of the situation. Although Ohioans in the aggregate tend to think members of Congress have legal training in about the right measure, many also think members are deficient in their support for the president, excessively loyal to their political party, long of tooth in office experience, overly interested in getting reelected, and inclined to dishonesty and personal aggrandizement. In addition, representatives are viewed as lacking in community leadership and negligent in keeping in touch with their constituents. Notice that the attributes which rank as the most important in the expectations column tend to rank lowest in terms of how well they describe legislators, further evidence of low public esteem for Congress.

¹We know that expectations and perceptions about political objects could go in a wide variety of directions. We might have included representatives’ gender or race, their socioeconomic status, their ideological leanings, their campaign spending, or their stands on various issues of the day. We might have asked respondents to channel their expectations away from members, toward congressional processes, policy outputs, or agencies influencing the legislative process (see Patterson, Boynton, and Hedlund 1969). Surely, we would have enlarged our roster of attributes and objects of appraisal had we enjoyed the luxury of unlimited interview time, but we had to shape our interview items to fit a limited time budget. Because citizens tend to have members of Congress in mind when they assay the performance of that body, it is desirable from our own analytical perspective to focus especially upon member attributes.

TABLE 1
MEAN CONGRESSIONAL EXPECTATION-PERCEPTION DIFFERENTIALS OF OHIOANS, 1994

Items	Expectations			Perceptions			Mean Differential (E - P)
	Mean	S.D.	Rank	Mean	S.D.	Rank	
Are trained in legal work	1.88	.71	4	1.88	.59	5	.00
Support the president	1.84	.69	3	2.07	.51	6.5	-.23*
Are loyal to party	1.93	.77	5	1.68	.61	2	.25*
Have prior experience in Congress	2.39	.68	6	1.84	.59	4	.55*
Are interested in reelection	2.67	.56	7	1.69	.54	3	.98*
Seek personal gain or profit	2.81	.47	8	1.62	.69	1	1.19*
Are community leaders	1.38	.60	2	2.07	.60	6.5	-.69*
Keep in touch with the district	1.10	.31	1	2.14	.63	8	-1.04*

Source: The Ohio Political Survey (TOPS), conducted by the Polimetrics Laboratory for Social and Political Research, Department of Political Science, Ohio State University, November 1994.

* Means significantly different, $p < .001$.

THE EXPECTATION-PERCEPTION GAP

These comparisons of expectations and perceptions targeted to eight discrete attributes of representatives underscore the gaps, or discrepancies, at play. In Table 2, we show our calculations of the general magnitude of these discrepancies across the eight attributes, indicating the proportion of respondents whose perceptions of Congress surpass, match, or fall short of their expectations. For instance, if a respondent answers that it is extremely important for members of Congress to support the president, and also answers that it is extremely accurate to say that members of Congress support the president, the respondent would be coded as having congruent expectations and perceptions for that characteristic. If an attribute is rated as important but not at all accurate, the respondent is coded as having expectations that exceed perceptions. It is apparent that the expectation-perception discrepancy is considerably wider for some attributes than for others. Notice the greater variation in the direction of the expectation-perception gap on partisan items (especially party loyalty, support for the president, and legal training), reflecting a lack of public consensus on these attributes. The discrepancy is narrowest—congruency is more evident—for legal training and presidential support than for the other attributes. In contrast, there is considerably less variation on the populist items. For about three-fourths of our respondents, members of Congress are thought to be far more preoccupied with their reelection and personal gain than they should be. And, for very large majorities of our respondents, expectations greatly exceed perceptions—representatives are thought to be leaders of their communities far less frequently than they should be, and representatives are deemed out of touch with their constituencies. Members of Congress clearly are not up to snuff measured by these politico-cultural standards.

DIMENSIONS OF EXPECTATION-PERCEPTION DIFFERENTIALS

We might simply have used the absolute gaps between expectations and perceptions as our measure of discrepancy. But our theoretical inclinations, and Tables 1 and 2, suggest that there is a latent structure in two major dimensions embedded in the eight member attributes that warrants investigation. Accordingly, we subjected our expectations and perceptions data to factor analysis (using principal components extraction with varimax rotation).² We show the results of

²Varimax rotation imposes orthogonality between the resulting factors, forcing them to be uncorrelated. We also ran the factor analysis with oblique rotation of the vectors, which of course does not presume orthogonal factors, to ascertain the extent to which the underlying factors were correlated. The oblique rotation produced the same factor structure as the varimax rotation, and the correlation between the two obliquely rotated factors was negligible ($r = .03$). Consequently, we rely on the varimax rotation for this analysis. But, in fact, the results of the multivariate analysis do not change if the oblique rotation is used for the factor analysis.

TABLE 2

CONGRUENT AND DIFFERENTIAL EXPECTATIONS AND PERCEPTIONS OF CONGRESSIONAL MEMBERSHIP (IN PERCENTAGES)

Items	Congruent	Expectations > Perceptions	Perceptions > Expectations	Number of Cases
Are trained in legal work	55.2	23.6	21.2	364
Support the president	49.5	34.4	16.2	390
Are loyal to party	39.2	21.0	39.7	385
Have prior experience in Congress	40.1	9.8	50.1	387
Are interested in reelection	21.7	3.6	74.7	392
Seek personal gain or profit	20.9	2.0	77.0	392
Are community leaders	30.9	62.7	6.4	391
Keep in touch with the district	15.2	82.0	2.8	394

Source: The Ohio Political Survey (TOPS), conducted by the Polimerics Laboratory for Social and Political Research, Department of Political Science, Ohio State University, November 1994.

this step in Table 3. Taken separately, expectations and perceptions indicate somewhat different factorial structures, or dimensionality. On the one hand, the first column in Table 3 suggests that expectations cling to members' characteristics and motives (e.g., legal training, party loyalty, incumbency, reelection motives, personal gain); on the other hand, the second column in the table suggests that expectations cluster around constituency connections (leadership in the community, district responsiveness). For perceptions, there is a clearer discrimination between the experienced politician and the candidate for the legislature.

Discrepancies between expectations and perceptions (the last two columns in Table 3) provide the clearest expression of this dichotomy between candidacy and experience, linked together by the reelection motive. Two discrepancy factors are sharply defined, a candidacy factor embracing such candidate qualities as personal motivations and constituency connections, and an experience factor including training, experience, political loyalty, and reelection interest. These two factors properly reflect our theoretical expectations. The candidacy factor grows out of items reflecting populist, and largely bipartisan, distrust of politicians; the experience factor develops from items powerfully subject to partisan debate. Moreover, the two factors suggest distinct aspects of the lawmaker's representative role. The candidacy factor reflects universal or diffuse conceptions of proper representation—are members conducting themselves in an honest and upstanding fashion? The experience factor reflects the partisan and political facets of representation—do members have adequate training and experience, and are they in harmony with other political organizations?

We have put these expectation-perception differential factor loadings to work to derive a pair of factor scores for each survey respondent.³ The two resulting scales indicate distinctive dimensions of public attitudes toward members of Congress. Those scoring low on the candidacy factor feel that members are not meeting public standards on the items loading on that factor (e.g., members are not adequately keeping in touch with the district, or members are overly concerned about personal gain or profit). In contrast, respondents scoring high on the candidacy factor do not perceive legislators falling short of these kinds of standards, and a handful actually feel that Congress exceeds expectations on these

³ Investigators face a number of choices in constructing scales based on factor analytic results. Kim and Mueller note that when the factor loadings are not uniform, as in our case, it is not appropriate simply to sum the variables loading on one factor (Kim and Mueller 1978b, 65). Fortunately, factor scales constructed using different methods typically correlate highly with one another (Kim and Mueller 1978a, 51). Alternative methods create factor scales as weighted summations of the items in the factor analysis. We selected the regression method, which minimizes the sum of the squared deviations between the underlying factor and the estimated factor scale (as in least-squares regression). Thus, the weights are equivalent to the coefficients derived from regressing the underlying factor on the set of variables included in the factor analysis. We prefer the regression method because it maximizes the correlation between the factor scales and the underlying factors. Additionally, some argue that it is best to use the regression method to produce scales intended for use as predictors in subsequent analyses (Kim and Mueller 1978b; Tucker 1971).

TABLE 3

FACTOR ANALYSES OF EXPECTATIONS, PERCEPTIONS, AND EXPECTATION-PERCEPTION DIFFERENTIALS FOR CONGRESS

Items	Expectations		Perceptions		Expectation-Perception Differentials	
	Attributes: Factor I	Constituency: Factor II	Candidacy: Factor I	Experience: Factor II	Candidacy: Factor I	Experience: Factor II
Are trained in legal work	.6506	.2931	.0694	.7558	.0634	.7006
Support the president	.5146	.3106	.4462	.2925	.3680	.4565
Are loyal to party	.6809	.1313	.2084	.5891	.0175	.6586
Have congressional experience	.7157	.0025	-.3197	.6943	-.2842	.6530
Are interested in reelection	.6054	-.1218	-.5932	.1663	-.4903	.5010
Seek personal gain or profit	.5944	-.2297	-.7051	.3034	-.6867	.3571
Are community leaders	.3041	.7390	.6669	.2620	.7184	.2377
Keep in touch with the district	-.2752	.7181	.7712	.1642	.7791	-.0159
Percent of variance	32.6	16.0	28.1	21.1	29.0	21.6

Source: The Ohio Political Survey (TOPS), conducted by the Polimetrics Laboratory for Social and Political Research, Department of Political Science, Ohio State University, November 1994.

Note: Items loading on a particular factor are shown in bold.

attributes. By the same token, those scoring low on the experience scale feel that lawmakers fall short of expectations (e.g., they do not have enough prior experience in Congress, they do not support the president sufficiently, they are not very loyal to their political party). Respondents at the high end of the experience scale hold the opposite mix of expectations and perceptions—they feel that members support the president excessively, that they are overly loyal to their party, and that they have spent too much time serving in Congress.

We have investigated the factor scores for our candidacy and experience factors to test the viability of our conceptualization of separable populist (or nonpartisan) and partisan components of citizens' evaluations, and found our predictions well-supported. The experience factor is moderately correlated with citizens' partisan identification ($r = -.23$, $p < .001$), and approval of President Clinton ($r = -.26$, $p < .001$). Neither Clinton approval ($r = .05$, n.s.) nor partisanship ($r = -.07$, n.s.) is significantly related to the candidacy factor.

IMPACT ON EVALUATIONS OF CONGRESS

The two expectation-perception discrepancy factors, *candidacy* and *experience*, have an apparent impact on citizens' favorableness toward, or approval of, Congress. The linear bivariate correlation between the candidacy factor and congressional support is positive ($r = .23$, $p < .001$), while the correlation between the experience factor and congressional support is negative ($r = -.21$, $p < .001$). This cross correlation suggests that members of Congress can alienate the public through perceived sins of omission and commission. Citizens who have a strong sense that Congress falls short on standards of integrity and keeping in touch with the district score low on the candidacy factor and exhibit negative evaluations of Congress, while those who feel that members of Congress meet these standards are at the top of the candidacy factor and generate high congressional ratings.

In contrast, as respondents' scores on the experience attributes climb, congressional approval diminishes, reflecting citizens' rejection of politics as usual in 1994. To harbor a belief that perceptions exceed expectations about experience attributes—legal training, presidential support, party loyalty, congressional experience, and reelection interest—fosters declining favorableness toward Congress. Indeed, a fair number of our respondents feel that Congress needs more partisan, legally trained legislators who support the president (as indicated in the second column of Table 2). The negative sign for the experience factor suggests that these respondents generated some of the most positive ratings Congress received. In Table 4, we show mean congressional support levels by the direction of expectation-perception differentials for each attribute that loads highly on the experience factor (using the same coding of congruence and noncongruence as in Table 2). These comparisons indicate that, for the most part, those producing the highest mean evaluations of Congress are the ones who feel that members

TABLE 4

MEAN CONGRESSIONAL THERMOMETER RATINGS BY EXPERIENCE FACTOR
DISCREPANCIES BETWEEN EXPECTATIONS AND PERCEPTIONS

Experience Factor Items	Congruent	Expectations > Perceptions	Perceptions > Expectations
Are trained in legal work	47.5 (n = 196)	45.4 (n = 81)	40.6 (n = 77)
Support the president	44.5 (n = 183)	47.2 (n = 130)	41.5 (n = 63)
Are loyal to party	45.0 (n = 147)	51.5 (n = 77)	40.9 (n = 149)
Have prior experience in Congress	48.4 (n = 148)	48.7 (n = 36)	41.4 (n = 191)
Are interested in reelection	47.1 (n = 82)	65.0 (n = 14)	42.9 (n = 284)

Source: The Ohio Political Survey (TOPS), conducted by the Polimetrics Laboratory for Social and Political Research, Department of Political Science, Ohio State University, November 1994.

of Congress fall short of expectations on each trait. This monotonic relationship does not hold for the candidacy factor, where citizens with congruent expectations and perceptions, and those who think members exceed their standards, were equally supportive of Congress.

THE MODEL

How does this nexus between expectation-perception discrepancies and congressional approval fare in the bosom of a multivariate model in which standard predictors are included? We estimate the effects of the independent variables in our analysis on the dependent variable, congressional approval (using the thermometer measure). Except for the expectation-perception factors, this panoply of independent variables has appeared in all recent modeling efforts and needs little adumbration here (see Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 1995; Patterson, Ripley and Quinlan 1992). The independent variables in the congressional approval model include, in addition to the two expectation-perception scales, standard measures of socioeconomic status, race and gender, partisanship, ideology, media exposure, political knowledge and participation, incumbent evaluations, and presidential support. The general model is that:

$$C_{app} = f \{EPD, SES, PA, PID, IDEO, PI, INCUMB, PRES\},$$

where

- C_{app} = congressional approval;
- EPD = expectation-perception discrepancies;

SES	=	socioeconomic status variables;
PA	=	personal attributes of race and gender;
PID	=	direction and strength of party identification;
IDEO	=	ideological self-placement and strength;
PI	=	political involvement measures;
INCUMB	=	evaluations of incumbent members of Congress; and
PRES	=	evaluation of the performance of the president.

The variables included in the model are characterized, and their particular measurement described, in the appendix. But a brief elaboration is in order. The model includes eight sets of explanatory variables, the independent variable of major interest being expectation-perception discrepancies. Because we suspected that the relationship between the discrepancy factors and congressional approval would be nonmonotonic, we tested several alternatives to the monotonic assumption. A simple linear relationship between these measures may be distorting, in the sense that the direction of the discrepancy between expectations and perceptions may influence the relationship between these differential variables and congressional approval. For instance, it may be that citizens who feel that lawyer-legislators are in excess in Congress harbor greater negativity toward the institution than those who feel an insufficient number of representatives have legal training. Alternatively, those who think legislators need more legal training may, hypothetically, generate the same evaluations of Congress as people who believe representatives have about the right level of legal skills.

In order to accommodate these concerns, we anticipate a quadratic relationship between the discrepancy factors and congressional approval. Because the discrepancy factor scales conveniently have means of zero, a quadratic equation means that the effect of the factor scales is conditioned by whether respondents are above or below the mean on these scales. Accordingly, a quadratic form suggests a diminishing return in congressional disapproval from widening gaps between expectations and perceptions, and vice versa.⁴

The other explanatory variables (except for presidential support) are measured in more than one mode. We measure three socioeconomic indicators—age, income level, and educational attainment—to control for the possibility that high-status individuals systematically support political institutions more than low-status persons. Two personal attributes, race and gender, both genetic and not subject to short-run change by individuals, are included in the model to control for the possibility that blacks and women, who may feel discriminated against, are less supportive of political institutions.

⁴We tried recoding or transforming the discrepancy variables so as to test other nonmonotonic relationships. For instance, we tested whether the absolute value of the discrepancy was a better predictor of congressional approval than the alternatives. The quadratic form survived the competition with the alternatives because it best fit the data.

Because the rose-colored glasses of partisan identification may bias citizens' favorableness or unfavorableness toward Congress—with Democrats more favorable toward a Democratic Congress and Republicans more favorable to a Republican Congress—we naturally include the conventional seven-point party identification measure in our model, allowing us to incorporate the dual indicators of party affiliation and strength of party loyalty into the model. Although party and ideology are correlated so that Democrats tend to be liberal and Republicans tend to be conservative, the two indicators are not the same; we include measures of ideological orientation to recognize the possibility that congressional support might have an ideological basis independent of other, even related, effects. The model includes three indicators of citizens' political involvement—media exposure, participation, and knowledge—in order to assay the distinct possibility that those who are familiar with political affairs, and more directly exposed to political figures and events, are more prone to strong feelings one way or another about the congressional institution. Finally, our model embraces two categories of evaluations of incumbent politicians: appraisal of incumbent members of the House of Representatives and Senate; and, evaluation of the president. There is good reason to believe that positive or negative feelings about individual representatives and the chief executive affect the public's assessment of Congress as a whole (see Patterson, Ripley, and Quinlan 1992, 329–31).

THE FINDINGS

The results of the multivariate estimation presented in Table 5 show that the two expectation-perception factors, along with party identification and appraisals of President Clinton and the respondent's own member of Congress directly influence evaluations of Congress.

First and foremost, the analysis indicates the powerful effect of expectation-perception discrepancies on attitudes toward members of Congress. Both candidacy and experience factors are significantly related to congressional approval, and the signs are correct, even when all the other variables in the model are controlled. More specifically, the positive coefficient for the candidacy factor means that an increase in the candidacy factor scale improves the warmth of congressional approval. Similarly, the negative sign for the experience factor means that an increase along the experience factor scale should reduce congressional approval.

Additionally, the quadratic term is negative and significant for the candidacy factor. This suggests that, as the candidacy factor grows more positive, the translation into more positive ratings of Congress becomes weaker. It is also the case that the quadratic term for the experience factor is not statistically significant. This underscores the simple linear relationship between the experience factor and congressional approval, supporting the bivariate results we reported in Table 4.

TABLE 5
A MODEL OF PUBLIC APPROVAL OF CONGRESS

Independent Variables	Coefficient	t-ratio	p-value ^a
<i>Intercept</i>	21.971	2.50	.02
<i>Expectation-Perception Differential</i>			
Candidacy factor	4.838	3.92	.0001
Candidacy factor squared	-1.658	-1.96	.05
Experience factor	-2.801	-2.24	.03
Experience factor squared	-.172	-.21	.83
<i>Socioeconomic Status</i>			
Age ^c	-.072	-.99	.32
Income level	-.114	-.20	.84
Educational attainment	-.088	-.07	.94
<i>Personal Attributes</i>			
Race	2.499	.63	.53
Gender	3.385	1.42	.16
<i>Partisanship</i>			
Party identification	-1.306	-1.70	.09
Strength of party loyalty	.658	.51	.61
<i>Ideological Orientation</i>			
Ideological self-placement	-.202	-.25	.80
Strength of ideological attachment	1.794	1.29	.20
<i>Political Involvement</i>			
Media exposure	-.109	-.63	.53
Political participation	-1.000	-.60	.55
Political knowledge	.533	.79	.43
<i>Evaluation of Incumbents</i>			
Incumbent representative	.111	2.17	.03
Sen. John Glenn	.171	2.46	.01
Sen. Howard Metzenbaum	.062	1.00	.32
<i>Presidential Support</i>			
Presidential approval	1.399	2.21	.03
AdjR ² = .20; N _{max} = 807, N _{min} = 261 ^b			

Source: The Ohio Political Survey (TOPS), conducted by the Polimetrics Laboratory for Social and Political Research, Department of Political Science, Ohio State University, November 1994.

^a Two-tailed test.

^b Numbers of cases vary by variable; pairwise deletion was used.

In Figure 2, we show the curvilinear effects of both discrepancy factors on congressional approval. The figure presents the expected contribution to congressional approval or disapproval for different values of each factor scale, based on the multiple regression results in Table 5. There is, indeed, some symmetry here. Scoring above zero on the candidacy factor or below zero on the experience factor generates for respondents a small positive contribution to their overall evaluation of Congress. On the whole, however, the candidacy factor produces a substantial contribution to negative evaluations of Congress. The more citizens

FIGURE 2

EXPECTATION-PERCEPTION FACTORS AND SUPPORT FOR CONGRESS

score below zero on the candidacy factor (which a majority of our respondents did), the more support for Congress drops, and this decline grows larger and larger for those falling farther and farther below zero on the candidacy scale. In our analysis, populist sentiments that are embedded in American political culture mightily contribute to disapproval of Congress.

Important support for our argument requires comparing the explanatory power of the discrepancy indicators against the expectation and perception measures standing by themselves. Our claim for the importance of a gap between expectations and perceptions is less compelling if this gap predicts congressional approval or disapproval no more reliably than expectations or perceptions alone. In fact, the expectation-perception differential items do perform better than either the expectation or the perception measures by themselves, a result consistent with other research using the discrepancy concept (Moretti and Higgins 1990). To verify this, we created factor scales from the factor analyses of the expectation and perception items individually (we refer to the items reported in the first four columns of Table 3).

Although the scales representing the first factor in each case correlate significantly with congressional approval ($r = -.27, p < .001$, for the first perception scale; $r = -.28, p < .001$, for the first expectation scale), the second factor scales are not significantly correlated with approval of Congress ($r = -.03$ for the second perception scale; $r = .03$ for the second expectation scale). When substituted in the multivariate model, these raw scales produce a poorer fit than do the discrepancy scales ($R^2 = .18$ when the perception scales are included, $R^2 = .17$ when the expectation scales are used). And, only the first of the factors

emerges as a significant predictor of congressional approval, as opposed to the two significant factors when using the differentials.

In addition, our estimates verify the substantial influence of appraisals of respondents' own members of Congress upon their favorableness or unfavorableness toward members of Congress as a group (with one exception). As previous research has shown, Ohioans' approval of the performance of their two U.S. senators—John Glenn and Howard Metzenbaum—and the respondents' own U.S. representative powerfully influence respondents' approval of Congress (Patterson, Ripley and Quinlan 1992, 324). Of course, the payoff in congressional approval for favorableness toward respondents' own incumbent members of Congress cannot be expected to be one-for-one. But we did anticipate some return in approval of Congress for favorableness toward citizens' own representatives, and indeed there is some such payoff.

Research on congressional approval drawing upon national sample survey data underscores this twist on the “incumbency effect” on a broader canvas (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 1995, 118).⁵ Our one exception is Senator Metzenbaum, who was an ex-senator by the time our 1994 interviews were conducted; he did not run for reelection, so by the time of the postelection interviewing he was no longer an incumbent senator. Consequently, Ohioans did not much take their evaluation of his performance into account in appraising Congress.

Again, whether measured over the long haul in aggregate presidential popularity levels, or cross-sectionally in presidential approval ratings, citizens' esteem for the president profoundly and independently influences their attitudes toward Congress (Patterson and Caldeira 1990; Patterson, Ripley and Quinlan 1992). In our data, approval of President Bill Clinton's performance is powerfully linked to favorableness toward Congress. A one-unit jump in presidential approval (on a scale ranging from 1 to 10) generates a 1.4-unit increase in the congressional thermometer rating. This developed despite the president's low national performance ratings at the time and the fact that voters had, only a few days before our interviewing, endured months of “Congress bashing” culminating in a remarkable feeding frenzy against incumbents and the election of a Republican congressional majority in 1994 (a result also shown in Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 1995, 118).

Political party identification also plays an important role in our model. Partisanship has been a significant predictor in some other work on congressional approval, where Democrats are found to approve, and Republicans to disapprove, of Congress when it houses a Democratic party majority. Our data were collected

⁵One might wonder why incumbency has a positive effect on congressional approval while our experience factor has a negative effect. A partial explanation is that incumbency reflects an evaluation of just one member of Congress (one's own representative), while the factor scores are based on impressions of all members. Furthermore, incumbents go to great lengths to ensure that citizen evaluations reflect personal characteristics (which coincide more with our candidacy factor) rather than partisan considerations (which are reflected in our experience factor).

just after the election of the first Republican Congress in four decades, during what must have been a transition period for our respondents. Accordingly, our party identification variable carries the appropriate negative sign. Although positively correlated with congressional approval in other studies when the Democratic party occupied the majority in Congress, in our analysis Democratic party identifiers rated the new Republican Congress lower, and Republicans rated the new Congress higher. This citizen sensitivity to partisan change in Congress is quite remarkable.

Moreover, the multivariate model is interesting for what is not statistically significant in its midst. Our results confirm the findings of other recent multivariate analyses that socioeconomic variables like income and education, or race and gender, are not major influences on congressional approval. As related modeling has demonstrated, ideological orientation is not significant in our model, nor does it bear a significant bivariate correlation with congressional approval, despite the theoretical possibility that approval or disapproval of the congressional membership might carry ideological overtones. Finally, the political involvement measures in our model do not bear fruit. Measures of media exposure, political interest, and political knowledge are not significant correlates of congressional approval.

In order to double-check our results against an alternative, and perhaps more conventional, dependent variable, we estimated our regression model with the familiar congressional approval question (“Generally speaking, how would you evaluate the job the U. S. Congress has been doing in the last few months? Has it been doing an excellent job, a good job, a fair job, or a poor job?”) as the dependent variable. The exercise produced results very similar to those generated for the congressional thermometer ratings. Importantly, both discrepancy factors and the quadratic term for candidacy were significant predictors, carrying the same signs on their coefficients. Generally, the variables statistically significant in the initial multivariate analysis proved significant utilizing the alternative dependent variable. Accordingly, our modeling results are not reflecting some unforeseen peculiarity of congressional appraisal as it is measured by the congressional thermometer.

Because a number of the variables in our explanatory model, depicted in Table 5, are not significant direct predictors of congressional approval, we naturally suspected the presence of indirect effects—that these predictors were, in fact, influencing congressional approval through their relationship with the two expectation-perception measures. Such indirect effects are, indeed, plausible.

It is reasonable to think, for instance, that higher levels of education, media exposure, political knowledge, or income may provide sustenance for awareness of congressional shortcomings. Educated citizens may be more inclined than the less educated to see wide discrepancies between what they expect members of Congress to be like and their perceptions of the real-world membership, and

thereby to be more strongly disapproving of Congress. Or, citizens exposed to the admittedly negative political news emanating from the media, and particularly those exposed to the drumbeat of "Congress-bashing," may thereby experience larger expectation-perception discrepancies and, accordingly, be less supportive of Congress than the media-underexposed. The same might be argued for the politically knowledgeable and aware, and for those enjoying the resources of high economic status. We might expect that these variables will be negatively associated with the candidacy factor, and that they will indirectly fuel lower evaluations of Congress.

At the same time, age, strength of partisanship, and participation may have a positive influence on the candidacy factor. The political experience of those who have strong ties to the political system through firm partisan attachments or regular political participation, or who have the longevity that allows for perspective and balance, leads them to take a less jaundiced view of politicians. For these kinds of citizens, there may, indeed, be greater congruence between expectations and perceptions about the responsiveness of members of Congress. In contrast, we envision the experience factor in congressional affect as one much influenced by partisan predispositions, inclinations that include presidential support as well as party and ideological orientations. For example, we expect that Democrats, liberals, and people who support President Clinton will tend toward lower scores on the experience factor, indirectly producing more congenial evaluations of Congress.

A path analysis uncovered several variables with measurable indirect effects on ratings of Congress (results are portrayed in Figure 3). Six of the ten indirect effects assayed here are statistically significant and in the predicted direction. On the one hand, strength of partisanship and age have notable positive indirect effects on congressional approval through their positive relationship with the candidacy factor. On the other hand, educated respondents and those substantially exposed to the media exhibit lower ratings of Congress as their appraisals flow through candidate discrepancies. Finally, participation, income, and political knowledge do not significantly affect the candidacy factor scores. Both partisanship and Clinton support bear positive indirect effects on congressional approval because of the significant negative relationship between these variables and the experience dimension (the experience factor scale is negatively associated with congressional approval). The relationship between ideology and the experience factor is statistically insignificant and carries the wrong sign.

While these indirect effects upon which we have been commenting are statistically significant, their substantive impact is, regrettably, rather weak. This disturbing fact of life is underscored by noting, for instance, that a standard deviation increase in education (roughly 1.4 units on the five-point education scale) should reduce congressional approval approximately 0.8 units on the feeling thermometer on account of education's indirect influence on the candidacy factor.

FIGURE 3
PATH ANALYSIS OF CONGRESSIONAL APPROVAL

Note: Entries are path coefficients
*Statistically significant, $p < .10$

CONCLUSION

Citizens appear to make comparisons between what they expect their elected representatives in Congress to be like, and what they perceive these representatives actually are like. If there is a discrepancy, citizens are likely to take a dim view of Congress. We have been able to demonstrate the effects of this mismatch on congressional approval in a striking and unequivocal way. Public attitudes toward Congress hinge very much upon public expectations, citizens' perceptions of congressional performance, and, presumably, the actual performance of the institution. In fact, our discrepancy variables suggest two distinctive forces driving public sentiments toward Congress. For the candidacy factor, citizens disapprove of Congress because they are not getting the Congress they want (with honest, community-minded members); for the experience factor, many citizens disapprove Congress because they feel they are getting a Congress they do not want (inhabited by partisan, career-oriented, lawyer legislators).

The analysis has sharpened our understanding of the interplay of expectation-perception discrepancies and evaluations of Congress by suggesting that the absolute discrepancy between expectations and perceptions is not sufficient to explain support for Congress. The direction of the gap matters, particularly for attributes associated with congressional experience and behavior in office. A sizable minority of our survey respondents feels that members of Congress do not have sufficient legal training and should exhibit stronger loyalty to their party and their president. As it turns out, these members of the body politic are more approving of Congress than others, and often more approving than citizens whose perceptions match their expectations. Perhaps these folks sense that they are rooting against the tide of majority public opinion.

Of course, Americans may misperceive what Congress and its members are really like. Surely there is room for better public understanding. But the problem of congressional support lies heavily in the domain of member behavior and performance. Public attitudes are greatly infected by a sense that Congress is scandal ridden, that it is inefficient and laggard, and that it is unresponsive and has lost touch with the public (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 1995, 96–100; Patterson and Barr 1995).

It is not merely public reaction to the legislative process at work, but how well citizens believe the members of the institution are living up to expectations. Americans' expectations about political institutions may be too high, or may be idealistic; and their perceptions may be too negative and unyielding. Perhaps Congress can perform so as to make expectations more realistic and perceptions more in accord with actual performance. And, perhaps other amelioration, such as civic education programs, can help to close the expectancy gap that so profoundly drives congressional approval. Undeniably it is on the right track to exclaim that "it's the process, stupid" souring public attitudes toward Congress, but we suggest that this is not enough, that to explain how process and performance affect public attitudes we must focus analysis directly upon public expectations and perceptions, and the discrepancy between them.

Repairing Congress's public image, restoring public trust in Congress, will require serious attention to both sides of the expectation-perception coin. Improving public perceptions of congressional integrity will depend upon changes in both Congress and the mass media so that citizens receive more positive information about members of Congress. An adversarial press no doubt focuses public attention on congressional scandal, and on politicians' motivations for pursuing power, status, and wealth (Kerbel 1995; Patterson 1993). But the chances for improvement do not seem very good; if anything, press coverage of Congress has tended to be more, not less, negative in recent years (Mann and Ornstein 1994).

Moreover, changing citizens' expectations of congressional experience and partisanship may be quite difficult without a change in administration. It is

conceivable that the public could be educated to the benefits of electing representatives who have considerable professional experience, ultimately enhancing congressional support. But the results of this analysis suggest that public expectations and perceptions about experience attributes are driven largely by partisan attachments and citizens' affinity for the president. A regular alternation in the political party in power might help cement citizens' attachment to the political system, insofar as partisans could thereby enjoy a real-world experience with their own political party in control of government.

APPENDIX

The following is an accounting of the variables used in the foregoing analysis, indicating the measurement of each.

Congressional Approval: The dependent variable is measured by respondents ratings of Congress on a feeling thermometer. Scores range from 0 (lowest) to 100 (highest).

Expectations and Perceptions of Members of Congress: Respondents' expectations of Congress on eight attributes were measured with the following question: "People often talk about what members of Congress ought to be like—what kind of people they should be. I'm going to read you a series of characteristics members of Congress might have. Please tell me how important it is for a representative to have each of these characteristics: (1) They should only be interested in reelection. Is this extremely important, somewhat important, or not at all important?" Responses were coded 1 for extremely important, 2 for somewhat important, and 3 for not at all important.

Respondents' perceptions of Congress on the same eight attributes were measured with the following question: "Now we would like to know what you think members of Congress are actually like. For each of the characteristics I will mention, please tell me how well you think they describe members of Congress: (1) They are only interested in reelection. In describing members of Congress is this extremely accurate, somewhat accurate, or not at all accurate?" Responses were coded 1 for extremely accurate, 2 for somewhat accurate, and 3 for not at all accurate.

The eight attributes were worded as follows: (1) only be interested in reelection; (2) support the president; (3) keep in close touch with the people in the district; (4) act as important community leaders; (5) be trained in legal work; (6) be loyal to their political party; (7) seek personal gain or profit; (8) have prior experience in Congress.

The differences, or gaps, between respondents' expectations and perceptions were calculated by subtracting their perception scores from the expectation scores on each of the eight items. A factor analysis of the eight differential scores produced two factors (one included items dealing with personal candidate qualities, and the second included items dealing with legislative experience and par-

tisan activity in Congress). Two separate variables were created from rotated factor scores using the regression method to capture these two factors. The two sets of factors scales were then used as independent variables in the multivariate analysis.

Feeling Thermometers: Respondents' ratings of their U.S. representative and Senators John Glenn and Howard Metzenbaum were measured on feeling thermometers. Scores range from 0 (lowest) to 100 (highest).

Presidential Popularity: Approval or disapproval of President Clinton's performance was measured on a scale from 1 (worst) to 10 (best).

Party Identification: Respondents' self-reported party affiliation was measured on the standard seven-point scale. Scores range from 1 (strong Republicans) to 7 (strong Democrats).

Strength of Party Identification: Measured by folding the seven-point party identification scale. Scores range from 1 (weakest) to 4 (strongest).

Political Ideology: Respondents' self-reported placement on a liberal-conservative spectrum was measured by a branching question (similar to the party identification question). Respondents were first asked about the general direction of their political views. Then they were asked about the strength of their ideological identification. Scores range from 1 (strong conservative) to 7 (strong liberal).

Strength of Ideology: Measured by folding the seven-point ideological identification scale. Scores range from 1 (weakest) to 4 (strongest).

Media Exposure: Respondents' level of media exposure was measured as a summary of their responses to eight questions on the amount of attention they devote to television news, newspaper stories, and radio news about national politics, the election campaign, and local politics (reliability $\alpha = .84$). Scores range from 8 (lowest) to 40 (highest).

Political Participation: Respondents' voting participation was measured on a scale indicating whether (1) they were registered to vote, and (2) whether they voted in the 1994 general election. Scores range from 0 (not registered to vote) to 2 (registered and voted in the general election).

Political Knowledge: A knowledge scale was created based on respondents' ability to accurately name their congressional district and the party of the candidates for the Ohio Supreme Court, as well as their ability to recognize the names of the candidates for the congressional, senatorial, and gubernatorial races on feeling thermometer questions. Verification of their congressional district was obtained from the telephone numbers along with the sample specifications. Scores for the knowledge variable range from 0 (respondent could not provide any correct information) to 12 (all responses correct). The scale has a reliability coefficient (α) of .67.

Age: Respondents' age in years.

Race: Respondents' race, coded 0 for white, 1 for nonwhite.

Gender: Respondents' gender, coded 0 for men, 1 for women.

Income: Total family income before taxes, coded as follows: 1 = less than \$10,000; 2 = \$10,001 to \$20,000; 3 = \$20,001 to \$30,000; 4 = \$30,001 to \$40,000; 5 = \$40,001 to \$50,000; 6 = \$50,001 to \$60,000; 7 = \$60,001 to \$70,000; 8 = \$70,001 to \$80,000; 9 = \$80,001 and above.

Education: Highest level of education completed, recoded as follows: 1 = some high school or less; 2 = high school graduate; 3 = some college or trade school; 4 = college graduate; 5 = advanced degree.

The sampling and interviewing were conducted as part of The Ohio Political Survey (TOPS) by the Polimetrics Laboratory for Political and Social Research, Department of Political Science, Ohio State University. A random digit dial sample of telephone numbers in the State of Ohio was purchased by the Polimetrics Laboratory from Genesis. Using the telephone number exchange, Genesis also identified the congressional district for each respondent. The resulting sample provided roughly equal coverage across all 19 congressional districts in Ohio with approximately 35 to 45 respondents from each district in the sample.

Interviews were conducted during November and December 1994 over the telephone by trained and professionally supervised interviewers, with 808 completed interviews. To accommodate several research programs, the sample was randomly split in half. Questions that were of interest only to individual research teams were restricted to one half of the sample. Hence, the number of respondents for this analysis was 403, before accounting for missing data (due to refusals, don't knows, etc.).

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