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CHAPTER 2

The Post–World War II Consensus

Among the social scientists enlisted into the effort to win World War II were survey researchers. Their most notable contributions included classic studies of morale among American soldiers (Stouffer et al. 1949) and the impact of strategic bombing on Germany (U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey 1947).[1] Julian Woodward, who had worked in the Office of War Information, believed that such surveys ultimately would become a routine function of government:

> Sooner or later the government itself will have to go into the polling field and provide both its administrators and its legislators with adequate and sound information on what the public thinks. Eventually this sort of information will become as necessary as census data and will be provided by an agency with a reputation for unbiased research equal to that now enjoyed by the Census Bureau. (1945, 245)

The inception of scientific public opinion polling was not universally applauded, however. Congress, suspicious of the political and social uses to which surveys could be put, dismantled much of the wartime apparatus for such studies. Even George Gallup, whose surveys had underestimated the Democratic vote in 1944—as they had also done in 1936 and 1940—was called before Congress to explain the errors of his ways (J. Converse 1987, 207–10). Survey skeptics also existed outside Congress. One of them, Lester Markel, welcomed the startling failure of the Gallup and other polls to predict Harry Truman's victory over Thomas Dewey in the 1948 presidential election, and Markel ventured the judgment that as a result, the practice of polling would be permanently discredited: "The poll, then, fortunately, has been dethroned from its high place. Government, Congress and the people will be better

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off" (1949, 31). But even Markel conceded that surveys might be useful for gaining some insight into the average citizen's knowledge—or lack of knowledge—about international affairs.

All of the many surveys undertaken during the years immediately following World War II to assess the level of public knowledge about international affairs came to essentially the same two conclusions. First, among the general population there is a wide variation in the level of factual information about world affairs, and the average citizen is remarkably uninformed, even about institutions, events, and personalities that have been the focus of current news and controversies. Soon after the United States joined the United Nations as a charter member, a National Opinion Research Center survey in Cincinnati revealed that few citizens had much interest in or knowledge about that international organization. Even a rather simple six-question test found that 30 percent of the respondents were "uninformed" about the United Nations and another 27 percent were "poorly informed" (National Opinion Research Center 1947).[2] Other evidence indicated that the citizens of Cincinnati were not unusual in this respect (Cottrell and Eberhart 1948).

In the same manner, Thomas Bailey's (1948) pioneering study of public opinion and foreign policy, based on the growing archives of survey evidence at the Gallup Organization and elsewhere, sketched a distinctly unflattering portrait of *The Man in the Street.* Bailey's chapter titles—for example, "The Perils of Apathy," "The Incubus of Ignorance," "The Curse of Caprice," and "The Fruits of Isolation"—provide ample clues to the substance of his main fears and findings. Martin Kriesberg (1949) undertook a similar study of the survey evidence and, in a chapter entitled "Dark Areas of Ignorance," emerged with conclusions that sustained those of the Cincinnati and Bailey studies. Gabriel Almond's *The American People and Foreign Policy* (1950), the most important and systematic analysis of survey data on the topic to that point, reinforced the conclusion that despite the dramatic events of the previous decade—including World War II, the start of the nuclear era, the nation's emergence as a world leader, and the onset of the Cold War—many Americans remained remarkably uninformed about even the most elementary aspects of international affairs.

Research undertaken by educators would be unlikely to applaud widespread ignorance about the world, and indeed, all these studies pointed to the need for better international education. The mere fact of public ignorance, however, was not the sole reason

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for worry. Concerns about the lack of basic information about international affairs were reinforced—perhaps even magnified—by a second finding that emerged consistently from the survey data. One's level of knowledge about the world was typically correlated with attitudes toward many important aspects of international affairs, including global institutions, other nations, and appropriate U.S. foreign policies for coping with postwar issues. For example, the Cincinnati study found that among the better-informed respondents, 76 percent thought that America should take an active part in world affairs, 55 percent mentioned an international problem as among the most important confronting the United States, and 61 percent agreed that they would benefit personally from increased foreign trade. Among the "uninformed," the comparable figures were 41 percent, 29 percent, and 41 percent (National Opinion Research Center 1947).

More generally, respondents within the least informed strata of the public were also most likely to be isolationist, chauvinist, suspicious of other nations, and generally opposed to policies that involved international cooperation, whether in the United Nations, through the Marshall Plan, or in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Conversely, the most informed strata of the public also tended to provide the strongest support for the wide array of international undertakings that constituted what was often described as the post–World War II "revolution in U.S. foreign policy."

In short, much of the research during the years immediately following the end of the World War II was driven by the same normative concerns that had engaged internationalists during the war—the fear that the public would in fact validate Hadley Cantril's warning to President Roosevelt, cited in chapter 1, by retreating from its temporary and shallow enthusiasm for an active international role once the fighting had ended. Thomas Bailey expressed views that more or less represented a shared outlook among many pioneers in the study of public opinion and foreign policy:

> The statesmen in charge of American foreign policy, as well as the better-informed citizens, know that isolation is not only dead but dangerous; that we must learn to see the other nation's problems as they appear to its eyes; that we must cultivate tolerance and understanding; that we must sublimate suspicion and ill-will; that we must yield pride and

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> prestige; that we must meet the other fellow half way, sometimes more than half way; and that we must invest some of our precious sovereignty in effective world organization—perhaps some kind of world government. But the average citizen—indifferent, ignorant, or misled by ill informed and sometimes unscrupulous editors, columnists, radio commentators, and politicians—does not see all these things. Yet, as we have repeatedly observed throughout this book, American public opinion in the long run determines basic foreign policies. If the American people, through their Congress, insist upon isolation, non-cooperation, ruinous tariff barriers, and other impediments to world recovery, they will have their way—with consequent disaster. (1950, 907)

The availability after World War II of growing archives of polling data and the institution of systematic studies of voting behavior, combined with the U.S. assumption of a leadership role in world affairs, served to stimulate many additional analyses of public opinion. A general consensus about the nature, structure, and impact of public opinion seemed to have emerged from those who focused on international affairs between the end of World War II and the escalation of the American military effort in Vietnam. This consensus centered on three major propositions.

> Public opinion is highly volatile and thus provides very dubious foundations on which to develop and sustain sound foreign policies.
>
> Public attitudes on international affairs are so lacking in structure or coherence that they might best be described as nonopinions.
>
> At the end of the day, however, perhaps the deficiencies of the general public will not be so damaging because public opinion has a very limited impact on the conduct of foreign policy.

Let us examine in more detail each of these propositions and the evidence on which they rest.

Public Opinion Is Volatile

In an early analysis of the sources and nature of public opinion, Gabriel Almond argued that most Americans invest their intel-

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lectual and emotional energies in private pursuits, to the neglect of public policy concerns. Policy issues that impinge directly on daily life may generate some interest and attention among the public, but remote international events rarely do so. Consequently, foreign policy issues give rise to mass indifference, punctuated by occasional apprehension or anger in response to international crises. Almond described these "superficial and fluctuating responses" as "plastic moods which undergo frequent alteration in response to changes in events" (1950, 53). Lacking any firm foundations in knowledge of or interest in international affairs, these moods are highly unstable but are not necessarily random or unpredictable. Owing to some central tendencies in the American national character, Almond suggested that public mood swings would take place along several dimensions of direct relevance to foreign policy:

Withdrawal/ intervention
Unstructured moods/policy simplification
Optimism/pessimism
Tolerance/intolerance
Idealism/cynicism
Superiority/inferiority

Almond proposed the hypothesis that these mood fluctuations are related to the business cycle. Specifically, he suggested that an economic depression would impair national self-confidence, weaken foreign policy resolution, result in feelings of international overextension, and lead ultimately to withdrawal (1950, 54–65).

To substantiate the thesis that public moods are highly volatile, Almond turned to one of the questions that had been posed repeatedly by Gallup surveys between 1935 and 1949: "What is the most important problem facing the United States today?" The evidence revealed striking shifts in the percentage of respondents who identified any foreign policy issue as most important. Between November 1935 and January 1939, that figure ranged between 11 and 26 percent. During the first year after Hitler's invasion of Poland, the figure rose to just under half of the respondents, and by November 1941 (just prior to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor), 81 percent of the public placed a foreign policy issue first on the agenda of the nation's most important problems. A month after the Japanese surrender in 1945, domestic issues again took top priority for an overwhelming proportion

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of the public, as only 7 percent identified a foreign policy issue as the most important problem. During the next four years, the comparable figures ranged from a low of 11 percent in June 1946 (ten months after the Japanese surrender but before the Cold War) to a high of 73 percent less than two years later, when the Soviets had just instituted the Berlin blockade.[3]

Interpreting these data, however, is not unlike deciding whether a glass is half full or half empty. From Almond's perspective, the surveys revealed a fickle public whose limited attention span precluded a steady focus on important international problems. But the same figures do not automatically exclude an alternative and somewhat more flattering interpretation of shifts in public identification of the most serious problems: the public reasonably focuses its attention on external problems when wars, crises, and confrontations pose a major threat to the United States. When these international threats appear to have faded or disappeared (for example, with the Japanese surrender that ended World War II) public attention turns to more proximate problems and threats that originate in the domestic arena (for example, unemployment, inflation, race relations, or crime). Some economists feared that postwar cuts in military spending and demobilization of millions from the armed forces would throw the United States into a recession or even a depression. Thus, concerns about the state of economy following the end of hostilities do not necessarily serve as powerful evidence of public ignorance or fickleness.

The explanation for these mood swings resembled those proposed by Tocqueville in the nineteenth century and Lippmann during the 1920s. It could be found, according to Almond, in general American value orientations:

> The average American is so deeply and tensely involved with immediate, private concerns that any diversion of attention meets with powerful resistance. When political issues impinge, or threaten to impinge, upon these concerns, public attention broadens to include them. But the moment the pressure is reduced there is a swift withdrawal, like the snapping back of a strained elastic. (1950, 76)

Although the half decade prior to Almond's study had witnessed a number of major international commitments by the United States, including membership in the United Nations, the

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World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the Truman Doctrine, and the Marshall Plan, Almond drew some sober policy conclusions from his analysis. The possibility of a relapse into mindless isolationism could not be ruled out because only a thin veneer of postwar internationalism covered a thick bedrock of indifference to the world. Most leaders might understand that isolationism was no longer a viable option for the United States, but public opinion could serve as a volatile and mood-driven constraint on foreign policy: "The undertow of withdrawal is still very powerful. Deeply ingrained habits do not die easy deaths. The world outside is still very remote for most Americans; and the tragic lessons of the past decade have not been fully digested" (Almond 1950, 85). Consequently, "Perhaps the gravest general problem confronting policymakers is that of the instability of mass moods, and cyclical fluctuations which stand in the way of policy stability" (239).

Six years later, Almond restated his thesis, citing not only the instability of public moods but also other deficiencies of public opinion. He told an audience at the National War College, "For persons responsible for the making of security policy these *mood* impacts of the mass public have a highly irrational effect. Often public opinion is apathetic when it should be concerned, and panicky when it should be calm" (1956, 59).[4]

Expressions of concern about the instability of public opinion were not limited to such academic analysts as historian Bailey and political scientist Almond. George F. Kennan, a diplomat whose "long telegram" from Moscow in 1946 and subsequent "X" article in 1947 often have been depicted as the intellectual foundations of the American policy of containment, delivered a series of 1950 lectures that examined the bases, assumptions, and practices of American diplomacy. Kennan's diagnosis, like those of Tocqueville and Almond, focused broadly on American society rather than solely on public opinion. From a realist perspective on world affairs, Kennan raised some questions about the ability of a democratic society imbued with moralistic and legalistic values to conduct its external relations effectively. Using the metaphor of a dinosaur, Kennan vividly depicted his views on the inept ways in which democracies attempt to cope with their international environments:

> But I sometimes wonder whether in this respect a democracy is not uncomfortably similar to one of those prehistoric

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> monsters with a body as long as this room and a brain the size of a pin: he lies there in his comfortable primeval mud and pays little attention to his environment; he is slow to wrath—in fact, you practically have to whack his tail off to make him aware that his interests are being disturbed; but, once he grasps this, he lays about him with such blind determination that he not only destroys his adversary but largely wrecks his native habitat. (1951, 59)

Kennan recognized that it would be impossible to eliminate altogether the impact of public opinion, but his prescription, like those of Bailey and Almond, strongly emphasized giving foreign policy experts and the executive a greater degree of latitude in the conduct of policy:

> Before this government can function effectively in foreign affairs, there will have to be a greater spirit of organization and discipline throughout it, a greater readiness to recognize and submit to constituted authority, a more courageous acceptance of the fact that power must be delegated and delegated power must be respected. I believe that there can be far greater concentration of authority within the operating branches of our Government without detriment to the essentials of democracy. (lecture on June 18, 1947, in Harlow and Maerz 1991, 214–15)[5]

Walter Lippmann, who by the 1950s had become America's most influential political columnist, delivered still another attack on public opinion, charging that democracy run amok had come to threaten the possibility of formulating and implementing effective foreign policies. During the interwar period, Lippmann had described the average citizen as indifferent and ill informed about the world and thus unable to play the role required by classical democratic theory. Moreover, Lippmann had repeatedly expressed doubts that the mass media could or would bridge the chasm between the public's stereotypes and international reality.

Three decades later, at the height of the Cold War, Lippmann had become even more alarmed about the prospects for democratic government because the "spirit of Jacobinism" had destroyed the proper balance between rulers and the ruled, resulting in "excesses of democracy" and "misrule by the people." While public opinion remained ignorant, in his view it had been trans-

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formed from a largely indifferent and inert body into an almost uncontrollable monster. "Where mass opinion dominates the government, there is a morbid derangement of the true functions of power. The derangement brings about the enfeeblement, verging on paralysis, of the capacity to govern." The consequences are no less than "the precipitate and catastrophic decline of Western society" (1955, 15). Tracing the roots of the problem to the need of democratic governments to pander to the public during World War I, Lippmann asserted that legislatures, representing the will of the public, had infringed seriously on the proper prerogatives of the executive, with disastrous consequences for the quality of foreign policy. Whereas his earlier analyses had emphasized the public's indifference and ignorance, by 1955 Lippmann had come to see public opinion as a virtually irresistible, highly irresponsible, and potentially catastrophic element in the conduct of foreign affairs:

> The unhappy truth is that the prevailing public opinion has been destructively wrong at the critical junctures. The people have impressed a critical veto upon the judgments of informed and responsible officials. They have compelled the government, which usually knew what would have been wiser, or was necessary, or what was more expedient, to be too late with too little, or too long with too much, too pacifist in peace and too bellicose in war, too neutralist or appeasing in negotiations or too intransigent. Mass opinion has acquired mounting power in this country. It has shown itself to be a dangerous master of decision when the stakes are life and death. (1955, 20)

Although Lippmann's book was intended to be a broad-ranging treatise on the philosophical foundations of all democratic governments rather than a commentary on the making of contemporary American foreign policy, it is somewhat ironic that his volume was published during the first Eisenhower administration, a period when executive dominance of foreign policy had perhaps reached its peak. A combination of personal popularity and impressive experience in international affairs provided Eisenhower with a good deal of latitude in the conduct of foreign and defense policy. Congressional challenges to the executive role in the conduct of foreign relations, in the form of the Bricker Amendment on treaty powers and Senator Joseph McCarthy's shotgun attacks

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on the State Department, the Foreign Service, the U.S. Army, General George Marshall, and Presidents Truman and Eisenhower, to name just a few of the more prominent targets, had recently been beaten back. Indeed, formal censure by his colleagues in 1954 effectively removed the power of the senator from Wisconsin to wreak havoc on American diplomacy. More generally, although Democrats regained control of Congress after the 1954 elections, the most vitriolic congressional attack on Eisenhower's foreign policies often came from right-wing Republicans. Although partisan differences certainly existed in congressional policy debates and votes, many disagreements of the period revolved around means, strategies, and tactics for achieving ends shared by most members on both sides of the aisle. (On this point, compare Wittkopf 1990 and Holsti and Rosenau 1984.) Moreover, it would be hard to find serious evidence that, during the Eisenhower years, public opinion was so significantly at variance with the main features of American external policies that it seriously hampered the White House's ability to conduct foreign relations. Few foreign policy issues of the Eisenhower era divided the public along primarily partisan lines (Campbell et al. 1964, 113–14; see also chap. 5). If the term *internationalist foreign policy consensus* was ever a valid description of the domestic bases of American foreign policy, it would appear to have been most applicable to the period between the traumas of the Korean and Vietnam Wars.

Many others contributed to the view that public opinion on foreign policy issues is highly volatile. By the mid-1960s, if not before, that conclusion had become a standard part of virtually all treatises and textbooks on the domestic sources of American foreign policy. Guided by Almond's hypothesis that superficial attitudes are "bound to be unstable since they are not anchored in a set of explicit values and means calculations or traditional compulsions" (1950, 69), studies directed at locating the sources of public volatility seemed to find the answer in the structure—or more precisely, in the lack of structure—of mass political beliefs.

Public Opinion Lacks Structure and Coherence

The growing volume of data on public opinion and voting behavior, as well as increasingly sophisticated surveys, statistical methodologies, and the advent of computers in social science research, enabled analysts not only to describe aggregate results and trends but also to delve into the structure of political beliefs.

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Owing to immediate policy concerns about the U.S. role in the postwar era, many of the early studies were largely descriptive, focusing on attitudes toward such issues as participation in international organizations and alliances, the deployment of troops abroad, security commitments, foreign aid, and protectionism. Would the United States accept internationalist and cooperative policies to deal with these and other issues, or would it retreat into a more isolationist stance? The underlying premise was that a single internationalist-to-isolationist dimension would serve to structure foreign policy beliefs, much in the same way that a liberal-to-conservative dimension was assumed to underlie preferences on domestic issues.

Challenges to the notion that the public's political thinking had ideological underpinnings that gave rise to coherent and consistent issue voting emerged most prominently from studies of American voters and the bases of their electoral decisions (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet 1944; Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954; Campbell et al. 1964). In a classic study based on evidence from the late 1950s and early 1960s, Philip Converse (1964) analyzed the correlations across responses to questions on domestic and foreign policy issues as well as between these two policy areas. Finding only very low correlations, he concluded that the political beliefs of the mass public lacked any "constraint" or underlying ideological consistency that might provide genuine structure or coherence to political thinking and to the act of voting. Converse's findings yielded little support for those who had argued that foreign policy attitudes constituted a special case because this issue area was remote from the daily concerns of the average citizen. In contrast to these findings about the general public, his analyses of elites—congressional candidates—revealed substantially higher correlations across responses to various domestic and foreign policy issues. Moreover, Converse found that both mass and elite attitudes on a given issue had short half-lives. Responses to a question in 1956 only modestly predicted answers to the same question two years later, much less in 1960. These findings led him to conclude that mass political beliefs are best described as "nonattitudes" (Converse 1970).

Although Converse's findings later became the center of an active debate, his was not a lone voice in the wilderness. His results contributed additional evidence in support of hypotheses developed by Almond and others about the absence of intellectual foundations for public moods and provided a plausible

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explanation for the putative volatility of public attitudes. Moreover, Converse's findings were only one of the most widely quoted results emerging from the voting studies. Other students of electoral behavior came to essentially the same conclusions about the absence of structure, coherence, or persistence in the political beliefs of the mass public, especially in the area of foreign affairs (W. Miller 1967). For most Americans, these scholars asserted, the bases of voting decisions did not lie in structured or ideological assessments and responses to policy issues. Campbell and his coauthors have offered a concise summary of the primary findings that emerged from the voting studies: "What psychological dimensions of voting are of greatest importance to the political system? Our discussion will focus on the low emotional involvement of the electorate in politics; its slight awareness of public affairs; its failure to think in structured, ideological terms; and its pervasive sense of attachment to one or the other of the two major parties" (1964, 280–81). Thus, whether analyzed as a respondent to Gallup or other surveys or as a voter, the average American citizen portrayed in study after study was a rather pale imitation of the informed and engaged citizen celebrated in classical democratic theory and countless civic textbooks. Indeed, the average citizen was sometimes depicted as ignorant of, indifferent about, and perhaps even a threat to the most fundamental tenets of democratic society (Prothro and Grigg 1960).

Thus, unlike the earlier analysts, who had focused on foreign policy attitudes as a special case, at least some of these studies of public opinion and voting behavior tended to regard the lack of information and structure on foreign policy issues as part of a broader problem—the gap between the ideal and actual American citizen.

Public Opinion Has a Limited Impact on Foreign Policy

The most important reason for interest in public opinion on foreign affairs arises from the assumption that in some ways and at least some of the time, public attitudes have an impact, for better or worse, on the conduct of the nation's external policy.

For students of foreign policy and international relations, the central questions were not merely whether one party or the other controlled the White House or Congress. The United States was armed with atomic weapons, as was its primary adversary after 1949, and was the political leader of a Western coalition attempt-

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ing to contain the Soviet Union. The U.S. economy produced half of the world's goods and services soon after World War II, and, as the core country in a network of international institutions that was intended to prevent a replay of the beggar-thy-neighbor economics of the decade prior to World War II, the American impact on trade and financial issues was enormous. Even if Almond, Bailey, Kennan, Lippmann, and other critics did not always agree on specific U.S. policies and undertakings, these observers were united by the fear that the public would render ineffective foreign policy elites' efforts to provide enlightened global leadership in the quest for a more stable world order. These fears even appear to have provoked some prescriptive overreactions. For example, Bailey, a fervent "small d" democrat whose frequent jibes at "low blow Joe" McCarthy and other demagogues enlivened Bailey's enormously popular history classes at Stanford, nevertheless felt sufficiently alarmed about the public's potential impact to justify distinctly undemocratic leadership behavior: "Franklin Roosevelt repeatedly deceived the American people during the period before Pearl Harbor. . . . He was like the physician who must tell the patient lies for the patient's own good. . . . Because the masses are notoriously shortsighted and generally cannot see danger until it is at their throats, our statesmen are forced to deceive them into an awareness of their own long-run interests" (quoted in Shogan 1995, 278).

It is certainly not hard to find policymakers' statements avowing the importance of public opinion. In his August 21, 1858, debate with Stephen Douglas, Abraham Lincoln asserted, "Public sentiment is everything. With public sentiment nothing can fail; without it nothing can succeed" (Angle 1991, 128). In 1936, Secretary of State Cordell Hull stated, "Since the time when Thomas Jefferson insisted upon a 'decent respect to the opinions of mankind,' public opinion has controlled foreign policy in all democracies" (1936, 47). Almost all presidents and secretaries of state have made similar assertions at one time or another.

Such hyperbolic statements, depicting an unalloyed direct democracy or "bottom-up" model of government, are unlikely to withstand serious empirical scrutiny. Not the least limitation of assertions such as those by Lincoln and Hull is that they neglect the role of institutions that may shape, mobilize, transmit—and perhaps distort—public preferences. These institutions include the media, opinion leaders, interest groups, parties, and legislators. Furthermore, presidents and others in the executive branch are

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not merely passive receptors of public sentiments. Moreover, the impact of public opinion cannot be assessed merely by describing its content, and we should not assume that its impact is constant across administrations, circumstances, and issues. Policymakers may vary widely in their answers to some important questions: What is the appropriate role of public opinion in the formulation of foreign policy? Under what circumstances and for what issues should it play a greater or lesser role? What are the most appropriate indicators of public sentiments? The media? Interest groups? Prominent opinion leaders? Congress? Opinion surveys? What strategies should policymakers use to gain public support for policies? I shall return to these questions in chapter 7.

As we have seen, the driving force behind many of the analyses of public opinion during and after World War II was the fear that an ill-informed and emotional mass public would powerfully constrain the conduct of American diplomacy, establishing unwise limits on policymakers, creating unrealistic expectations about what is feasible in foreign affairs, and otherwise doing serious mischief to American diplomacy and, given the American role in the world after 1945, perhaps even to international stability (compare Lowi 1967 and Waltz 1967 on this point). In contrast to these fears, some analysts concluded that policymakers could not take very seriously an ill-informed and largely indifferent public, limiting its impact on policy. As a leading social psychologist stated, "A public opinion so impoverished can hardly have a major impact on foreign policy decisions" (H. Kelman 1965, 580). In line with this reasoning, a consensus in fact seemed to emerge by the mid-1960s on a third point: public opinion has little if any impact on foreign policy. The weight of the research evidence cast doubt on the potency of public opinion as the driving force behind or even a significant constraint on the making of foreign policy.

Bernard Cohen's (1973) research most directly attacked the proposition that the public significantly affected foreign policy or that it even established limits beyond which policymakers would not dare to venture. In a critical review of the literature, he argued that assertions about the constraining role of public opinion far outnumbered any empirical demonstration of that relationship. Indeed, he argued that the often-cited "limits" proposition was rarely if ever even put to a serious test. His interview study of the foreign policy bureaucracy indicated that State Department officials had a rather modest interest in public opinion, and to the extent that they even thought about the public, it was as an

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entity to be "educated" rather than as a lodestar by which to be guided in formulating and implementing foreign policy. As one State Department official told Cohen, "To hell with public opinion. . . . We should lead, and not follow" (62).

Elections are intended to provide an opportunity for the public to have an impact on policy. According to the "electoral retribution" model, officeholders will be sensitive to public opinion for fear of alienating voters to the point of losing office at the next election; vigilant voters will "throw the rascals out" if they fail to respond to public preferences. Virtually all the election studies found that there was so little issue-based voting as to raise serious questions about the classic views of accountability to the public on policy issues. As the authors of one of these studies noted, "The quality of the public's review of policy formation is that the electoral decision gives great freedom to those who must frame the policies of government" (Campbell et al. 1964, 282). Moreover, the evidence indicated that while public officials might find it prudent to respect their constituents' preferences on domestic issues, these officials felt largely free of such constraints on votes pertaining to foreign affairs. A classic study of the public-legislator relationship revealed that constituents' attitudes on foreign policy issues had less impact on members of the House of Representatives than did views on domestic issues (W. Miller and Stokes 1963). Research that focused on the presidency came to similar conclusions. The proposition that the president has "almost a free hand" in the conduct of foreign affairs received support from diverse studies (Lipset 1966; Caspary 1970; LaFeber 1977; Paterson 1979; Graebner 1983).

This period also witnessed a proliferation of case studies of key foreign policy decisions.[6] With some exceptions, however, these studies tended to make few references to the impact of public opinion.[7] But it is not always clear whether that is because public opinion was irrelevant as even a partial explanation for the decisions under analysis. Some alternative reasons for the omission might include the following: decision makers quietly anticipated public opinion without consciously considering it or might have been reluctant to state that they were acting in response to public pressures, preferring instead to ascribe their actions to broader values such as the "national interest"; public opinion was excluded from the research design and thus no effort was made to assess its impact; or disproportionate research attention to international crises—events that are usually characterized by short decision

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time—tended to exclude episodes in which decisions represent the culmination of a long and complex political process that may also play out in the domestic arena. All other things being equal, the more protracted the decision process, the more likely policymakers are to be subjected to the impact of public opinion through the activities of Congress, interest groups, the media, and opinion leaders. Finally, analyses of recent events must necessarily rely more on interviews of foreign policy officials than on archival research. To the extent that policymakers are biased toward attributing their decisions to "doing what is right" rather than to pressures or constraints from the public, such research might underemphasize the actual impact of public opinion. Presidents as diverse as Franklin Roosevelt and George W. Bush have shared a deep interest in polling data—and a determination to keep that interest secret.

These studies did not answer all of the questions about the public's impact on foreign policy processes and outcomes. For example, the realities of research access required Cohen to exclude White House personnel from his study and to focus on precisely those officials—State Department bureaucrats—who are most sheltered from the effects of elections and who thus might be somewhat freer to express and act on cavalier attitudes toward the average person. Nevertheless, the weight of the evidence cast significant doubt on the public's impact on policy. These findings should have assuaged those who shared Lippmann's fears that mass public opinion "has shown itself to be a dangerous master of decision when the stakes are life and death" (1955, 20).

Such results might also explain why interest in the topic, which had been so evident in the years immediately following the two world wars, had waned considerably. If the impact of public opinion on foreign policy ranges from little to none and from rarely to never, it robs the topic of significance and urgency. Students of voting behavior might continue to pursue research agendas directed at illuminating the sources, nature, representation, and impact of public opinion; these are, after all, some of the classic and enduring issues of democratic theory and governance. But there would be fewer compelling reasons for foreign policy analysts to invest much of their attention in these topics. It took another war—the longest, least successful, and ultimately least popular in American history—to rekindle interest in public opinion and foreign policy while stimulating a reexamination of the consensus about the volatility, lack of structure, and impotence of public opinion regarding foreign policy.