THE ROLE OF SELF-INTEREST IN SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ATTITUDES

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John F. Kennedy, in his inaugural address in 1961, said, "And so, my fellow Americans, ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country." Ronald Reagan, as he appealed for last-minute votes in 1980, said, "As you go to the polls next Tuesday and make your choice for President, ask yourself these questions: Are you better off today than you were four years ago? Is it easier for you to go and buy things in the store than it was four years ago?" The contrast raises a fundamental question about the bases of social and political attitudes.

Self-interest is never far from front stage when we consider the ordinary individual's social and political attitudes. Yet there is much dispute about both its pervasiveness and its normative value for society as a whole. In the modern era, this dispute dates from the work of Thomas Hobbes. As Mansbridge (1990a) has noted, he began with the single assumption of self-interest, and from it deduced a world of "all against all." This appalled his contemporaries, who saw self-interest as thereby supplanting such traditional motives linked to civic virtue as honor, honesty, fidelity, and loyalty. But it was reflected in the liberal political and economic theories of the next century, such as John Locke's theories that religious tolerance and majority rule are required out of respect for the diversity of individual interests, or Adam Smith's justification of the free market in the ultimate public good of the exercise of individual self-interest.

The framers of the American constitution were torn between these new liberal ideas stressing individual interests and the older tradition of civic virtue as promoting the public good. Their solution was both to design institutions that would channel unrestrained private interests into the public interest (and guarantee individual liberties, in the Bill of Rights), and to emphasize, in Madison's

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terms, "the importance of virtue among both representatives and people" (Mansbridge, 1990c, p. 13).

Yet, among political theorists, the self-interest thesis has begun to dominate the idea of civic virtue in recent decades. Mainstream pluralists viewed democracy as functioning through bargaining and tradeoffs among competing interest groups, yielding outcomes that gave everyone at least a little. Marxists came to a different view, though from the same assumption: rhetoric about serving the "public interests" only camouflaged the underlying self-interested domination of large private interests over government and other social institutions.

Beginning in the late 1950s, formal economic models have increasingly been applied to democratic theory. The rational choice or "public choice" theorists derived models of all aspects of the democratic process from the assumption of self-interest. Voters vote their self-interests and congressmen simply seek reelection by satisfying their constituents' selfish interests; the notion of the "public interest" is a mere rationalization, as are notions that group solidarity or moral values might motivate social choices. Reliance upon the self-interest assumption in public choice models is justified ostensibly only for parsimony, but with time it has increasingly become an article of faith (see Mansbridge, 1990a).

This has led to a substantial revolt among social theorists. Economists such as Sen (1977), Hirschmann (1985), and Frank (1988), sociologists such as Etzioni (1988), and political scientists such as Reich (1988) and Mansbridge (1990b) have all begun to attack the rational choice formulation, often focusing particularly on the self-interest assumption.

But much of the debate has gone on at a normative rather than at an empirical level. The purpose of this article is to examine the empirical evidence on the role of self-interest in forming and maintaining sociopolitical attitudes.

I. The Idea of Self-Interest

The notion that human behavior is governed at least in part by selfish urges is a part of virtually every psychology and moral philosophy in Western thought. The great thinkers of the Christian era, such as St. Augustine, denounced the various lusts, of which lust for money and possessions (also known as greed or avarice) was one (but only one, and by no means necessarily the worst). Thomas Hobbes regarded the human being as motivated first and foremost by self-interest. Adam Smith also concluded that hedonistic selfishness was in some contexts the ruling motive of the human species: "every man feels his own pleasures and his own

pains more sensibly than those of other people." But he saw self-interest as focused particularly on one motive, "augmentation of fortune." Green (1988, p. 46) aptly quotes Lord Macauley's essay on utilitarianism: "What proposition is there respecting human nature which is absolutely and universally true? We know of only one: and that is not only true, but identical; that men always act from self-interest . . . . when we see the actions of a man, we know with certainty what he thinks his interest to be" (see also Hirschman, 1977; Myers, 1983).

From this mixture of antecedants, neoclassical economics has deduced three basic psychological assumptions: the idea of rationality, that decisions are made on the basis of reasonable calculations limited primarily by the amount of information available; the idea of materialistic hedonism, or a simple pleasure–pain principle of human motivation; and the idea of egoism, that outcomes to the self weigh more heavily than outcomes to others. Today such models dominate economics. For example, Frohlich (1974, p. 57) observes that "economic models using the assumptions of rationality and self-interest have been so successful that economists . . . . have treated rationality and self-interested behavior as if they were the same." It is particularly central to the public choice school of thought: "the basic behavioral postulate of public choice, as for economics, is that man is an egoistic, rational, utility maximizer" (Mueller, 1979, p. 1).

Theories of self-interest have also been influential in the history of psychology. Its formative years were much influenced by Darwin, so accounts of human motivation were dominated by the view that humanity is basically selfish and driven by basic biological needs that ensure species survival. Freud viewed all behavior as motivated by such instinctual survival-oriented drives as hunger and procreation, operating according to the pleasure principle. Mainstream academic psychology developed a not dissimilar view. Hull's and Skinner's ideas of primary drives assumed that deprivation motivates overt activity, and that the organism learns adaptive habits when reinforced with drive reduction.

The idea of self-interest has also been common in the study of interpersonal and intergroup relations. A leading model of interpersonal relationships has been exchange theory, which assumes selfish, economic-like motives and behavior (see Homans, 1961; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). Even research on methods of promoting cooperation in social dilemmas has typically appealed to egoistic, individualistic motives (Lynn & Oldenquist, 1986). "Realistic group conflict theory" assumes that the realistic competition between groups for scarce resources motivates ethnocentrism, hostility toward the outgroup, ingroup solidarity, punishment of deviants in the ingroup, and so forth (LeVine & Campbell, 1972). It is perhaps not unfair to say, with Campbell (1975) and Wallach and Wallach (1983), that the dominant modern psychological theories of motivation have been fundamentally egoistic and hedonistic.

II. The Social Psychology of Self-Interest

The idea of self-interest carries three separable psychological assumptions, then: rationality, materialism, and egoism. What in contemporary social psychology might give us reason to expect these tendencies to dominate the formation of political and social attitudes?

A. RATIONALITY

Psychologists have historically devoted great attention to the question of rationality. A strong and consistent body of work has assumed that human decision making is basically rational, that people make reasonable calculations of the costs and benefits of choice alternatives, and decide accordingly. The most common formal models of such processes in social psychology have centered on an expectancy–value formulation; choice is based on the product of the probabilities of various alternatives times their costs or benefits (e.g., Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Edwards, 1954; Feather, 1982).

Yet much of psychology has emphasized the irrational. Psychoanalytic theory highlighted the persisting effects of early experience and the influence of unconscious motives. Behaviorism focused especially on mindless conditioning and on the resistance to change of ingrained habits even in quite changed circumstances. Conflict theory highlighted the unusual power of fear and such irrationalities as displaced aggression. Gestalt theories emphasized perceptual biases introduced by the human's effort to achieve a coherent perceptual organization of the world.

In recent years, research on cognitive biases has introduced particularly potent challenges to rational choice models. An alternative to economists' traditional assumption of objective (or substantive) rationality is Herbert Simon's (1985) notion of cognitively bounded rationality—rationality bounded by the individual's cognitive limitations. The latter is based quite explicitly on modern cognitive psychology (see Dawes, 1988; Hogarth & Reder, 1987; Kahneman, Slovic, & Tversky, 1982; Lau & Sears, 1986). However, it should be noted that this critique still portrays a wholly cognitive process, merely adding in some shortcuts and guesswork as an acknowledgment that human time and energy are finite. And some cognitive psychologists explicitly challenge the pervasiveness even of irrational cognitive biases (e.g., Cheng & Novick, 1990).

B. MATERIALISM

The idea of self-interest also places materialistic motives in a superordinate role. People are thought to be most strongly motivated by the desire to acquire

material goods, and money, the token for acquiring them. Where psychology has historically departed from economics has been in *not* privileging such materialistic or economic motives, relying instead on a considerably longer list of human motives. Murray (1938), for example, in an early and influential taxonomy of human needs, listed 20 of them, none particularly resembling greed, avarice, or augmentation of future wealth.

Similarly, in psychologists' comprehensive taxonomies of the functions that political and social attitudes serve for the individual, material self-interest is usually not given top billing. To be sure, functional theories always include instrumental or utilitarian functions (i.e., attitudes can be held because they promote the attainment of the individual's goals) but always several others as well, functions that have had more extensive research literatures associated with them, such as object appraisal, value-expressive, ego-defensive, and social adjustment (Katz, 1960; Smith, Bruner, & White, 1956). The same holds today for the resurgent literature on functional approaches to attitudes (see Herek, 1986; Prentice, 1987; Pratkanis, Breckler, & Greenwald, 1989; Shavitt, 1989; Young, Thomsen, Borgida, Sullivan, & Aldrich, in press). Social psychologists' comprehensive taxonomies of attitude functions include but give no special role to material self-interest.

C. EGOISM

Far more pervasive, and indeed nearly universal, is the assumption that costs and benefits affecting the self are weighed especially heavily in any decision-making process. Why should that be the case? Five general answers have been given.

1. Hedonic Needs

For hedonic reasons our attitudes should be most responsive to those pleasures and pains that affect us most strongly. For example, the considerable literature on fear-arousing communications suggests that, under most cirumstances, fear does promote acceptance of fear-reducing communications (Janis, 1967; Leventhal, 1970). Similarly, hedonic needs may produce a variety of cognitive biases: through self-serving attributional biases, people exaggerate their own responsibility for their successes and minimize their responsibility for their failures (Sicoly & Ross, 1977); through egocentric biases, people exaggerate their own contributions to collective products (Ross & Sicoly, 1979); through false consensus biases, they exaggerate the extent to which others share their own preferences (Ross, Greene, & House, 1977); and through the "illusion of control," people exaggerate the extent to which they control their own destinies

(Langer, 1975). Whether these are wholly due to motivational processes is still being debated, but it is likely that they are at least partly influenced by the need to enhance self-esteem (Greenwald, 1980; Markus & Wurf, 1987).

If hedonic needs similarly affect social and political attitudes, we could expect to find people forming policy preferences and candidate evaluations on the basis of how they will personally be affected by the policy or the candidate's actions. Those which benefit the self should be favored and those which hurt the self should be opposed. And those that affect us directly should therefore influence us more than those that affect us indirectly or that affect only others.

2. *Ego Involvement*

Other work has focused on the individual's psychological involvement in his or her attitude, usually with the expectation that attitudes with greater personal involvement will be stronger, more resistant to change, and more influential over other attitudes and judgments. The earliest major conceptualizations of involvement were omnibus in nature. Sherif and Cantril's (1947) notion of *ego involvement* referred to a wide variety of psychological linkages of attitudes to the ego without being particularly specific about the nature of those links. They did suspect that the strongest ego attitudes had anchors in some sense of group identity (see Greenwald, 1982), as did Converse (1964) in forwarding the related notion of the *centrality* of an attitude. A contemporary omnibus concept is attitude *importance*. In several studies, Krosnick has shown that the policy attitudes perceived by the individual as being most important have the strongest impact on candidate preferences (1988a) and are most stable over time (1988b). Not much research has yet been done on the role that self-interest plays in generating attitude importance, although people do sometimes invoke self-interest to explain their most important attitudes (Krosnick, 1990). Another contemporary omnibus concept is a sense of *conviction* about one's attitude, which Abelson (1988) describes as deriving in part from a special emotional preoccupation emerging from the self.

Later work on ego involvement has distinguished several different versions of it. The one that most closely parallels self-interest is *personal involvement* (also known as "issue involvement" or "personal relevance"), which emerges when people expect the issue to have significant consequences for their own lives (Apsler & Sears, 1968; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Several different lines of work have proposed that personal involvement produces more thorough and rational information processing. According to Petty and Cacioppo's (1986) elaboration-likelihood theory, it should produce closer attention to the merits of the arguments, greater persuasiveness of strong relative to weak arguments, and diminished reliance on "peripheral cues." A number of studies have provided supportive evidence (Borgida & Howard-Pitney, 1983; Howard-Pitney, Borgida,

& Omoto, 1986; Omoto & Borgida, 1988; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Wu & Shaffer, 1987).

A related idea is that *outcome dependency* in an interpersonal relationship (i.e., the knowledge that one's future outcomes will be partly determined by another person) will produce more thoughtful processing of information about that person, presumably because such information would be more consequential for one's interaction with him or her. For example, Berscheid, Graziano, Monson, and Dermer (1976) found that people paid closer attention to potential date partners than to nonpartners, and Erber and Fiske (1984) found that outcome dependency led people to pay closer attention to information about their partner that was inconsistent with their initial expectations (also see Harkness, DeBono, & Borgida, 1985; Neuberg & Fiske, 1987).

Personal involvement and outcome dependency have also been thought to reduce attributional and other cognitive biases that result from "top of the head" processing. Omoto and Borgida (1988) have suggested that personal involvement reduces categorization and stereotyping effects; Borgida and Howard-Pitney (1983), that personal involvement reduces the impact of more visually salient cues in favor of more systematic processing of message arguments; and Taylor (1975), that outcome dependency reduces misattribution biases.

On the other hand, personal involvement may not always contribute to rationality, since it may actually stimulate self-serving biases. Kunda (1987) found that self-serving evaluations of research evidence increased when the personal consequences of the research were more serious. Kunda presented subjects with information on the consequences of caffeine consumption for disease. Those who were most likely to be affected by such a linkage, the heavy caffeine consumers, were less likely to believe the research evidence when the disease was said to be painful, progressive, and possibly linked to cancer. When it was said to be so common that it was not even a disease, self-interested subjects showed no such special rejection of the evidence.

3. Accessibility

A concept that integrates such notions into social cognition is that of *accessibility*. A social construct such as an attitude can be more or less accessible on a chronic basis, and/or can be activated (made accessible) by exposure to the appropriate attitude object (Higgins & King, 1981). Chronically accessible social constructs are spontaneously activated in the presence of the attitude object, supposedly automatically and without conscious goals or attention or awareness, placing minimal demands on processing capacity (Bargh, 1988, 1989).

In general, a social construct should have more impact to the extent that it is cognitively accessible. In this form accessibility resembles other indicators of attitude strength, such as ego involvement, centrality, importance, and conviction.

Accessibility can have this effect in two ways. Some social constructs are strong and chronically accessible, and are likely to have strong effects on judgment and behavior whatever the context. Less strong constructs must be explicitly primed to have an effect.

Priming an accessible construct has been demonstrated in several ways to give it more impact over other attitudes, judgments, and behavior. First of all, priming a strong construct has been shown to evoke automatically the evaluation associated with it; that is, "the mere presentation of an attitude object toward which the individual possesses a strong evaluative association would automatically activate the evaluation" (Fazio, 1989, p. 157). Second, priming a particular trait construct has been shown to give it more weight in impression formation (Bargh, Lombardi, & Higgins, 1988). Similarly, Iyengar and Kinder (1985) have shown that emphasizing a particular issue in a news broadcast had an "agenda-setting" effect, in that that issue took on greater weight in determining viewers' evaluations of presidential performance. Presumably watching network coverage of that issue primed the individual's evaluations of the president's performance on it. And third, framing variations have been shown to prime different underlying constructs. For example, Kahneman and Tversky (1984; also see Quattrone & Tversky, 1988) suggest that framing choices in terms of relative gains produces risk aversion, whereas framing them in terms of relative losses produces risk seeking. Fourth, presenting issues in different terms often yields quite different attitudes. Presenting the Korean War as intended "to stop the Communist invasion of South Korea" yielded more public support than when it was simply described as "the war in Korea" (Mueller, 1973); presenting domestic spending in terms of specific program areas such as "education" or "health" produced more public support than describing it as "larger government" (Sears & Citrin, 1985); and presenting public assistance to the disadvantaged as "helping the poor" produced more support than describing it as "welfare" (see Sears & Citrin, 1985; Smith, 1987). And Beer, Healy, Sinclair, and Bourne (1987) found that presenting international relations in terms of Allied weakness prior to World War II produced recommendations for more aggressive policies toward a hypothetical international dispute than did introducing it in terms of the slaughter caused by World War I.

The link to the self-interest assumption is the hypothesis that self-constructs are generally more chronically accessible than are other social constructs (Higgins & Bargh, 1987, p. 395). There are two plausible reasons why they might be. More information may be available about outcomes and experiences that affect the self. Alternatively, the self is highly salient and may, therefore, be used as a reference point against which to judge social and political attitude objects. Either way, individual self-constructs may have particularly high levels of chronic accessibility. The consequence would be that constructs relating to the self, such as self-interest, should be weighed especially heavily in attitude formation sim-

ply because, relative to other kinds of social constructs, they are particularly likely to be evoked in everyday life.

However, Sherman, Judd, and Park (1989) point out that not all aspects of the self are equally accessible at all times, though they should have special impact when they are made accessible. For example, self-consistent behaviors are more likely when self-awareness is high (e.g., when manipulated through mirrors and other techniques). In this view, priming of self-constructs may be important, but start with no particular advantage relative to any other social construct. And, as Iyengar (1989) has suggested, in political life information about the self may generally not be very accessible, because the mass media are our primary sources of information, and their focus is on national and collective affairs rather than on matters directly relevant to our own lives.

4. Perceptual Egocentrism

That the self may have unique properties as a cognitive structure is a notion that has drawn great attention in recent years. As Higgins and Bargh (1987, p. 389) put it, the "self" may be an unusually rich and highly organized cognitive structure that can introduce egocentric influences into information processing (for other capable reviews, see Greenwald, 1980; Kihlstrom *et al.*, 1988; and Markus & Wurf, 1987).

For one thing, the self is said to be overused as a perceptual point of reference; i.e., "the self acts as a background or setting against which incoming data are interpreted or coded" (Rogers, Kuiper, & Kirker, 1977, p. 678). The most widely researched example is the so-called *self-reference effect* by which information is especially likely to be remembered if the individual considers its relation to the self at the time of initial consideration. A large number of studies have found that such self-reference tasks do contribute to enhanced memory (e.g., Rogers *et al.*, 1977), although its interpretation is still open to dispute, particularly concerning any special role of the self (see Higgins & Bargh, 1987; Kihlstrom *et al.*, 1988; Klein & Loftus, 1988).

Egocentrism may also lead to overweighting the self as "the axis of cause and effect," producing various attributional biases (Greenwald, 1980, p. 604). Biases such as "the illusion of control," egocentric biases in causal attribution, and false consensus effects were cited earlier as possibly originating in hedonic needs, but they can also be interpreted as purely cognitive biases. Very similar phenomena have been reported in Jervis's (1976) accounts of misperceptions in international politics.

People may have heightened sensitivity to self-relevant stimuli, such as self-relevant adjectives (Bargh, 1982) or even the letters in their own name (Nuttin, 1985). Memory for one's own behavior is greater than it is for others' behavior or for nonsocial information (Markus & Wurf, 1987). As Higgins and Bargh

(1987, p. 395) suggest, "self-knowledge is associated with quick decisions, easily retrievable evidence, confident self-prediction, and resistance to contrary evidence" (see also Markus & Wurf, 1987, p. 317). However, as they point out, this does not necessarily privilege the self; it could be true of any belief the individual is committed to.

Finally, there is much evidence that our memory overestimates the consistency of our own past history, a phenomenon Greenwald (1980) called "ego as self-justifying historian" (also see Ross, 1989). For example, after being given the correct answers to a series of problems, people claim that they knew it all along (Fischhoff, 1975); in experiments, people "remember" their preexperimental attitudes as being more similar to their postexperiment attitudes than they were in fact (Bem & McConnell, 1970; Goethals & Reckman, 1973); and in surveys, people seriously underestimate how much their own political attitudes have changed over time (Markus, 1986; Niemi, Katz, & Newman, 1980; Reiter, 1980). For all these reasons, then, the self may have an especially prominent role in organizing our perceptual experience and therefore our thinking and judgment.

5. *Direct Personal Experience*

A number of quite disparate literatures have asserted that direct personal experience with an attitude object has unusually powerful effects on attitudes and judgments toward it. McGuire, in two extensive reviews (1969, 1985) of the attitude literature, suggested direct experience does have strong intensifying and strengthening effects on attitudes, citing both single imprinting-like formative experiences (such as in "born-again" religious experiences or combat experiences) and long-term direct intergroup contact. However, the former have not been rigorously researched, and the latter does not have simple effects (Hewstone & Brown, 1986; Miller & Brewer, 1984). Moreover, with rare exceptions such research has not compared direct experience with indirect experiences such as interpersonal or mass media communication.

Still, the notion that direct personal experience has unusually strong effects is a pervasive and compelling one to many researchers. Two main explanations have been offered. The most thoroughly developed theory comes from Fazio and Zanna (1981): direct experience provides more information about the attitude object, makes the attitude more salient and therefore more accessible, and is more likely to elicit behavioral responses, which (through self-perception processes) should lead to more confident inferences about one's own attitudes. In laboratory research, they found that direct experience with the attitude object produced more confident attitudes, attitudes that were more persistent and resistant to change, as well as more attitude–behavior consistency. Further experi-

mental evidence of the attitude–strengthening effects of direct experience has been presented by Wu and Shaffer (1987).

A second explanation invokes vividness. Nisbett and Ross (1980, p. 45) define a stimulus as vivid to the extent that it is "(a) emotionally interesting, (b) concrete and imagery-provoking, and (c) proximate in a sensory, temporal, or spatial way." Directly experienced stimuli are presumably inherently more vivid than those only indirectly experienced, and have been hypothesized to have a greater influence on evaluations for that reason. However, research on vividness comparing the persuasiveness of communications presented directly (live and in person) as opposed to presented indirectly (video, audio, or written) has generally not found much difference (see Taylor & Thompson, 1982, for a review). Indeed in one study (Collins, Taylor, Wood, & Thompson, 1988), recipients believed more vivid messages were more persuasive but did not evidence more attitude change. So the belief in the greater persuasiveness of vivid messages may mainly be an illusion.

And in naturalistic settings, the special effects of personal experience are not so pervasive as originally hypothesized. For example, Tyler (1980) compared the effects of personal crime victimization and mediated, indirect experience with crime on judgments of risk. Tyler found that personal experience affected people's estimates of their own personal vulnerability, but not their baserate estimates of the overall crime rate. Similarly, media reports about such risks as firearms, drunk driving, and floods influenced judgments of risk at the societal level, but not at the personal level (Tyler & Cook, 1984). Both findings suggest direct experience may have more impact on attitudes about one's personal situation than about broad social and political issues. And Weinstein's (1989) general review of research on direct personal experience with hazards (auto accidents, crime victimization, natural disasters, and myocardial infarctions) found that in most cases, direct personal experience did not have any special effect on judgments of risk, policy attitudes, or self-protective behavior.

In short, the hypothesis that direct personal experience has especially strong effects on individuals' attitudes has been widely propagated and tested. However, it is not clear that personal experience does usually have stronger effects than indirect experience on judgments and attitudes. Nor is it clear that the proposed mediators of such hypothesized effects do: vividness seems not to have uniformly strong effects, and there are other ways to become well informed. It should be noted, however, that the vividness literature has largely focused on passive audience experiences. The notion of self-interest would seem generally to imply a more interactive type of direct experience, such as in Tyler's (1980) comparison of recent crime victims with those who have only indirect experience with crime through media reports. So these failures may not be as damaging to the self-interest hypothesis as might appear at first glance.

D. SUMMARY

Self-interest has had quite a specific meaning, then, focusing on the conjunction of egoism, materialism, and rationality. The heritage of neoclassical economics, in stressing self-interest as the dominant human motive, remains a potent intellectual force. However, the picture is more mixed in psychology. For example, social psychologists' few attempts at comprehensive taxonomies of the bases of attitudes do not put self-interest in any especially prominent position. The assumption of rationality has a strong tradition in psychology, but it cannot be said to be unchallenged or even dominant. The assumption of materialism so fondly held by neoclassical economics is not common among psychologists. The assumption of egoism, on the other hand, is quite widely shared by social psychologists, many of whom believe that attitudes or other social constructs connected directly with the self are conferred some special power; that personal consequences of an attitude object produce more rational information processing about it; that egocentric biases in information processing are manifold, pervasive, and powerful; and that direct personal experience with an attitude object confers special powers to it. The general thrust of sociopsychological research, then, would certainly seem to leave the door open for a major role for self-interest, although it does not compel it.

Having said that, two caveats are in order. First, the internal validity of much of the experimental evidence supporting the egoism assumption is more open to dispute than might be thought from the strongly phrased theories generating it. And second, there are external validity problems: most of the sociopsychological research on the self has been conducted on college students, and such late adolescents are perhaps unusually egocentric relative to individuals in other life stages (Sears, 1986). So contemporary sociopsychological research on these matters is perhaps more useful as a series of theoretical benchmarks than as a fully trustworthy guide to what we are likely to find in adults in their natural habitats. While it is plausible that self-interest might play an important, or even central, role in attitude formation, then, it is far from self-evident.

III. Alternatives to Self-Interest

Moreover, there are clear alternatives to self-interest in understanding the ordinary person's response to social and political objects. In our own work we have used a "symbolic politics" approach. This is not the place to develop the approach in detail, but some of its more central features can be outlined.

A. SYMBOLIC POLITICS

The symbolic politics approach has appeared in a variety of guises, mostly sharing several basic assumptions. People are said to acquire learned affective responses to particular symbols relatively early in life (variously placed anywhere from childhood to early adulthood). These learned responses from those formative early experiences (which we here generically call predispositions) persist to some degree into and through adult life. And they strongly influence the adult's attitudes toward current political stimuli. The strongest of these learned responses, which we have called "symbolic predispositions," are distinguished by their special persistence over time and influence over other attitudes.[1] Attitudes then reflect the affects previously conditioned to the specific symbols included in the attitude object. For example, attitudes toward "forced busing" to integrate whites and blacks would depend on affects toward such symbols as "force," "busing," "integration," and "blacks." We have assumed that the processing of such political symbols is well described by the simple cognitive consistency theories (which perhaps would be more aptly described as affective consistency theories, or transfer-of-affect theories). That is, people simply transfer affects from one symbol to another (Lorge, 1936; Osgood & Tannenbaum, 1955).

These basic ideas have undergirded research on a wide variety of problems. Research on political socialization has investigated children's and adolescents' early learning of attitudes toward such symbols as the flag, the President, stigmatized racial groups, and the political parties. Such early learning presumably yields such standing predispositions as party identification, racial prejudices, ethnic identities, basic values, nationalism, and attachment to various symbols of the nation and regime (e.g., Campbell, Converse, Miller, & Stokes, 1960; Easton & Dennis, 1969; Jennings & Niemi, 1981). The persistence of these predispositions has been investigated as a variable in its own right (see Alwin & Krosnick, 1988; Converse, 1975; Sears, 1983).

The activation of these predispositions by political symbols in the adult's environment, and their influence over attitudes toward such symbols, have received even more research attention. Longstanding partisan predispositions or basic values are activated by policy and candidate alternatives, thereby influencing the individual's preferences (Campbell *et al.*, 1960; Feldman, 1988; Sears, Lau, Tyler, & Allen, 1980). Racial predispositions are activated by black candidates and racial issues, and influence attitudes toward them (Kinder & Sears,

[1]It should be emphasized that both the timing of initial acquisition of these predispositions and the degree of their persistence over the life span are usually now treated as variables dependent on other factors, in contrast to the simple primacy-and-persistence assumptions made by early investigators (see Alwin & Krosnick, 1988; Sears, 1975, 1983).

1981; Sears, Hensler, & Speer, 1979). Other basic values can be activated by symbols of injustice, inequity, or immorality, and thus produce mass protest (Gusfield, 1963; Sears & Citrin, 1985; Sears & McConahay, 1973). Longstanding antagonisms toward such groups as the Communists, Nazi party, and Ku Klux Klan are evoked by debates about their rights, and influence support for extending civil liberties to them (Sullivan, Piereson, & Marcus, 1982).

There are some good reasons for expecting that symbolic predispositions might have stronger effects on sociopolitical attitudes than self-interest does. The notion of symbolic politics is that political symbols activate underlying predispositions reflexively. Put another way, such symbols automatically activate relevant and accessible social constructs (Bargh, 1989). Why might such social constructs, as opposed to self-constructs such as self-interest, be especially likely to be activated by information about societal and public affairs?

The informational environment in the public arena is dominated by communicators, principally journalists, who constantly condense its complexities into simplified symbolic terms. Put in Tulving's (1983) terms, they engage in semantic coding that consolidates the bits and pieces of real life into more abstract categories. Politicians go still further. Their principal goal is to code political symbols in terms that will evoke widespread and supportive predispositions in the citizenry. To do this they use abstract symbols ("welfare," "crime in the streets," "patriotic," "busing," "Watergate," or "Vietnam"). Such processes result in an informational environment that itself is coded in terms of abstractions corresponding to the social constructs most common among attentive ordinary citizens. This simplification has great advantages for these citizens, since it provides symbols that readily prime their most accessible attitudes and thus render meaningful the booming and buzzing confusion of public life.

In contrast, such communicators rarely help to code the rich complexity of private experience into simple symbolic terms. Individuals' personal experiences are often too proximal, complex, and individuated to lend themselves to easy generalization. As a result, personal experience becomes, as Lane says, "morselized": "[the] treatment of an instance in isolation happens time and time again and on matters close to home: a union demand is a single incident, not part of a more general labor–management conflict; a purchase on the installment plan is a specific debt, not part of a budgetary pattern—either one's own or society's. The items and fragments of life remain itemized and fragmented . . ." (1962, p. 353). People see the trees, not the forest.

In short, political dialogue is by its nature coded into abstract semantic terms. But personal experience may be morselized because it is difficult to code the rich complexity of direct personal experience into the simple symbolic terms that can readily be triggered by political symbols. As a result, the two should tend to be cognitively compartmentalized. Perceptions and evaluations of events in the public arena should tend simply to be perceived as in a different cognitive realm,

separate from personal experience. Political events would have implications for one's political attitudes, and personal experiences would have implications for private behavior; but there would be relatively little cross-over.

The core of the symbolic politics process, then, is that standing learned predispositions are evoked by political symbols in the current informational environment. The dominance of symbolic predispositions may come about because of a general tendency toward reflexive affective responses to political symbols. Political symbols may come semantically coded in ways that make them easy to link to symbolic predispositions, but difficult to connect to the confusing idiosyncracies that are our daily personal experience.

B. THE PUBLIC INTEREST AND SOCIOTROPIC POLITICS

Another tradition, alluded to earlier, is that people are motivated by their sense of the "public interest" (see Reich, 1988), or, alternatively, that some people are especially "public-regarding" (see Banfield & Wilson, 1964). The most extensive empirical work on this approach has been described as "sociotropic politics": people evaluate social and political objects in terms of the general societal, rather than personal, costs and benefits they provide. For example, a voter evaluates the president in terms of whether or not he has presided over a healthy economy and a nation at peace rather than whether or not the voter has prospered and been unharmed by war (Kinder & Kiewiet, 1979). We will discuss this below since it is particularly relevant to some cases we will discuss.

IV. Self-Interest in Everyday Life

The central purpose of the remainder of this article is to assess the empirical evidence on the power of self-interest as a motive in the ordinary citizen's political and social attitudes.

A. DEFINING SELF-INTEREST

Our intention has been to define self-interest in terms that match as closely as possible both its conventional usage in intellectual history and the common-sense, person-in-the-street understanding of it. We also wanted the definition to be sufficiently restrictive that the self-interest hypothesis would be both verifiable and falsifiable. As a result, we define an individual's self-interest in a

particular attitudinal position in terms of (1) its short to medium-term impact on the (2) material well-being of the (3) individual's own personal life (or that of his or her immediate family). For example, a worker with no health insurance might have self-interested reasons for supporting a legislative proposal that would mandate all firms to provide health coverage (material well-being) to their employees (own personal life) within the next 6 months (short-term impact). [For a similar definitional analysis, see Barry (1965, Ch. 10).]

We have excluded several other possibilities that we feel both fall outside the normal connotations of the term and would make its effects much more difficult to assess (and indeed in some cases nonfalsifiable). For example, we excluded "interests" that involve nonmaterial aspects of well-being, such as spiritual contentment, self-esteem, social adjustment, social prestige, or feelings of moral righteousness. The ordinary person rarely equates conformity with high spiritual or moral codes as expressions of "selfishness"; in ordinary language, selfishness refers to egoistic materialism. And while neoclassical economics may include such matters as legitimate bases for the individual's utilities, such inclusion makes the hypothesis impossible to falsify, since any goal that people strive for would be in their "self-interest." Essentially the term would be redundant with "motive" or "goal-directed behavior."

We also excluded long-term or "enlightened" self-interest, such as a young worker's support for increased social security benefits on the basis of a perception that it will secure his or her own old age. While this falls at least close to both intellectual and person-in-the-street definitions, it makes the hypothesis excessively difficult to falsify; any attitude position could be justified in such terms, and the very lengthy time perspective involved makes any real impact on the individual difficult to assess. In any case, an attitude object's immediate personal impact should have stronger effects than its long-term prospects would, so this restriction should limit us only to a focus on the most potent kinds of self-interest.

Finally, we rule out "group interests"; i.e., interests that affect the well-being of the individual's group but not necessarily that of the specific individual. For example, we would not describe as "self-interested" the support given by wealthy Jews to Jewish welfare agencies. It is not part of everyday understanding, we believe, to identify such generous aid to others as "selfishness." However, we will return in more detail to enlightened self-interest and group interest below.

B. BOUNDARIES

Before proceeding, we should specify the boundaries of our endeavor. Three other possible effects of self-interest fall outside the scope of this article.

One is the role of self-interest in private life; e.g., individuals' preferences about how family chores should be divided, or about boundary disputes with neighbors, or the role of economic incentives in consumer or job choices. Plainly self-interest plays a large (if hardly omnipotent) role in such choices. Second, we are not concerned with the operation of political interest groups or other political elites or their influences on government decisions. There is a substantial literature on the origins of interest groups and their means of functioning (e.g., Caldeira & Wright, 1988; Schlozman & Tierney, 1986; Walker, 1983). We would not dispute a role of self-interest there, although again it may often be overestimated and other kinds of symbolic incentives discounted (see Bauer, de Sola Pool, & Dexter, 1963). Nor would we dispute the observation that political officeholders often operate their daily lives in a self-interested manner, husbanding their energies behind activities that ensure their continuation in office and ignoring those that will not help much (Aberbach, 1990).

And third, we do not focus on self-interest as a motivator of the political *behavior* of the ordinary citizen. Here the evidence is mixed to date, with some positive evidence (as on compliance with or protest against school desegregation or programs of energy reduction; see Giles & Gatlin, 1980; Green & Cowden, 1990; Sears, Tyler, Citrin, & Kinder, 1978) and some negative (as on popular protest; see Barnes, Farah, & Heunks, 1979). For a general review, see Green (1988, Ch. 7). In practice, the ordinary citizen's participation in political life is considerably more likely to be attitudinal (or quasiattitudinal, as in casting a vote or expressing opinions to a pollster or to a friend) than it is to be behavioral (as in marching in a protest demonstration), so this restriction does not much limit the social and political importance of the phenomena under scrutiny here.

C. AGGREGATE-LEVEL DATA

There have been three general approaches to testing the effects of self-interest on political attitudes. One has used aggregate-level data to predict from broad conditions (such as national economic conditions) to mass outcomes (such as aggregate presidential vote). Numerous studies have tested the hypothesis that fluctuations in the strength of the economy are correlated with support for an incumbent government, as reflected in presidential approval, presidential vote, and support for the president's party in congressional, senatorial, or parliamentary elections (Abramowitz & Segal, 1986; Kramer, 1971; Monroe, 1979; Tufte, 1978). These aggregate-level studies have not yielded uniformly strong correlations, but they do appear to be fairly consistent for at least one economic indicator (per capita real disposable income) and one dependent variable (presidential vote; see Erikson, 1990; Owens, 1984). The typical interpretation has been that individuals were voting their own pocketbooks.

Other kinds of aggregate-level correlations have led to similar conclusions. The most racist white candidates in the old segregated South generally drew most votes from whites in areas with the heaviest concentrations of blacks (Key, 1949; Pettigrew & Campbell, 1960). The usual interpretation again focused on individual self-interest: where blacks were most numerous, they produced the most personal racial threat to individual whites, and therefore the strongest electoral support for segregation. Similarly, in a referendum on a rapid transit system in Atlanta, each precinct's votes correlated with the percentage in that precinct using the bus to commute to work, and with that precinct's proximity to the nearest proposed rapid transit station. Again the interpretation was that individuals were voting their own interests, in terms of their potential personal benefits from the system (Schroeder & Sjoquist, 1983).

In all such cases, though, the inference of individually self-interested behavior from aggregate-level data risks the ecological fallacy, and so is largely speculative in the absence of individual-level evidence. Nothing in the aggregate-level data specifies that the specific individuals most affected by the independent variable (economic conditions, large numbers of blacks, rapid transit availability) show the most appropriate attitudinal response. Unfortunately, efforts in such studies to use more proximal, but still aggregate, independent variables sometimes yield weaker findings, rather than strengthening the correlation as the self-interest hypothesis would predict. Aggregate voting in congressional contests did correlate with changes in national economic conditions over the 1970s and early 1980s. But it did not correlate with changes measured at the more proximal congressional district level, which should index more closely the individual voter's self-interest (Owens, 1984; Owens & Olson, 1980). The same is true for gubernatorial vote: over the period 1940 to 1982, it correlated with the state of the national economy more strongly than with the state of the more proximal state economy (Chubb, 1988). The national-level data may indicate, then, that individual voters are responding to well-publicized national economic indicators rather than to their own personal economic situations. A satisfactory test of the self-interest theory about individuals' attitudes, then, requires individual-level evidence.

D. DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES

A second approach has been based on individual-level data, using individuals' demographic variables to predict their sociopolitical attitudes. The classic example is socioeconomic class. It has long been assumed, by Marx and many others, that social class differences produce political cleavages due to self-interest; e.g., "the less privileged have supported parties that have stood for greater equality and protection against the strains of a free enterprise economy through govern-

ment intervention" (Lipset, 1981, p. 469; also see Alford, 1963; Hamilton, 1972; Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1948).

The relevant empirical research uses surveys on public opinion and voting behavior. And the classic early studies did indeed find that socioeconomic status correlated with vote preferences, therefore concluding that self-interest was an important motive. *The People's Choice* (Lazarsfeld *et al.*, 1948) reported strong correlations between social class and the vote, and in *Voting: A Study of Opinion Formation in a Presidential Campaign,* Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee (1954) explained them in terms of "position issues" whose motivational appeal was presumed to be "self-interest of a relatively direct kind" (p. 184). Similarly, in *The American Voter,* Campbell *et al.* (1960) concluded that Americans commonly responded to domestic issues in terms of "primitive self-interest" (p. 205) and in terms of "fairly concrete and short-term group interest" (p. 223), rather than ideologically.[2]

However, most demographic variables are not adequate indicators of individual self-interest, for two reasons. One is that, like aggregate-level data, they are too distal from the individual's behavior. For example, income level is negatively correlated with support for medical aid earmarked for the poor (Lupsha, 1975). But we have no assurance that individuals' relative actual potential use is responsible. This correlation could emerge if stably employed, unionized workers, with adequate health insurance, were the most politically aware and therefore most ideologically supportive of egalitarian policies, even though requiring little special government funding themselves. More proximal measures of the direct personal impact of such political issues are required if a causal role for self-interest is to be safely inferred.

A second reason is that demographic variables index not only the individual's material interests but also the residues of much earlier socialization, and therefore can reflect the symbolic politics process as well as self-interest. For example, young working women who are college graduates are unusually favorable to women's rights, such as legalized abortion and antidiscrimination laws (Sears & Huddy, 1990a). But is that because they have a special self-interest in such positions? Possibly. On the other hand, they have been exposed to more intensive socialization than other women in support of the women's movement in college, at work, and among peers. Similarly, on occasion *upper* status

[2]The early voting studies did have some evidentiary base other than demographics on which to assert the operation of self-interest. For example, Campbell *et al.* (1960) did infer it from the pattern of voters' attitudes and their links to the vote; e.g., party differences in domestic policy preferences, especially among those most attentive to politics, who should be most attuned to their own interests (pp. 205–208). Many people also identified the good and bad points of the parties and presidential candidates in terms of benefits to one group or another (Campbell *et al.*, 1960, Chapter 10). However, both sets of data are vulnerable to other explanations that have little to do with the self, as will be seen below.

individuals paradoxically demonstrate the greatest support for helping the disadvantaged, presumably because of more sympathetic symbolic predispositions (Shingles, 1989).

The self-interest hypothesis has fit so comfortably with the conventional wisdom about human nature that for many years it has been widely accepted throughout the social sciences. However, we would suggest that it has generally been accepted on the basis of only indirect evidence. Aggregate-level data are subject to the ecological fallacy, and demographic variables are excessively crude implicators of self-interest.

E. PERSONAL IMPACT

More appropriate, then, would be yet a third paradigm, using individual-level data that link individuals' attitudes directly to the circumstances of their private lives and perceptions of their own interests. It would use the direct personal impact of the attitude object to predict the individual's attitude toward it. Much research has been done in recent years using this third paradigm. The primary goal of this article is to canvass that literature. It centers on the research done by ourselves and our colleagues, although it is intended as a reasonably comprehensive review of the literature as a whole.

Let us begin by describing our own general research strategy. To assess the effects of self-interest upon an individual's sociopolitical attitudes, we have measured both variables in large-scale cross-sectional survey studies. A positive effect of self-interest would be reflected by a positive correlation with the presumably associated attitude. For example, we would interpret a correlation of personal unemployment with support for government-guaranteed jobs as reflecting self-interest: being unemployed motivates support for remedial government action.

1. Samples and Measures

To obtain reliable estimates of self-interest effects, we have generally used large-scale public opinion surveys with representative samples. Almost all of them have involved national samples, statewide California samples, or samples of large local jurisdictions, such as residents of Los Angeles County or the City of Los Angeles on such local matters as school busing or mayoralty elections. In one case we utilized a college student sample; this was a relatively unusual case, in which students' self-interests were much involved (a threat to reinstitute the military draft) and we were able to secure a representative sample of undergraduates at a large public university (Sears, Steck, Lau, & Gahart, 1983).

Our dependent variables have generally been of three kinds: policy preferences

(such as support for national health insurance or increased spending on the public schools), evaluations of political leaders (such as level of approval of an incumbent president), or electoral preference (such as preferring an incumbent congressman to his or her opponent, or support for a tax cut initiative).

Our independent variables, measures of self-interest, have varied along two dimensions: (1) *objective*, the researcher's assessment of the individual's self-interest (e.g., parents with children in the public schools have an interest in increased school funding) vs *subjective*, the individual's perceptions of his or her well-being (e.g., people who perceive that their own finances have been deteriorating have an interest in dismissing political incumbents), and (2) *retrospective* (e.g., having recently lost one's job provides an interest in current government employment policy) vs *prospective* (e.g., expecting that an oncoming recessionary will soon cause one to be laid off provides an interest in government employment policy).

Most of our research has contrasted the effects of self-interest with those of symbolic predispositions. We have generally used only a rather small and conservatively selected set of the latter, primarily party identification, ideological self-placement, and racial tolerance. These can be shown to have been quite stable through most individuals' adult life spans, and so are unlikely to be substantially influenced by the individual's short-term material self-interest in adulthood (for the reasoning, see especially Sears, 1975, 1983, 1989).

2. *Statistical Criteria*

We have used several statistical criteria for assessing the effects of self-interest. A convenient starting point is the simple bivariate correlation of the self-interest index with the attitude in question, in terms of (1) its statistical significance (using the usual threshold of $p < .05$ with a two-tailed test). However, a relatively weak correlation can meet the minimal criterion of statistical significance in large survey samples, and, according to the usual rule of thumb, account for only a trivial amount of the variance in the dependent variable. So we also refer to (2) the absolute size of the correlation.

We usually have then moved to simple least squares regressions that regress the dependent variable not only on self-interest indicators but on symbolic predispositions, and often demographic controls, as well. These yield three further measures of effect: (3) statistical significance of the regression coefficient for a particular self-interest index, (4) the total variance in the dependent variable accounted for by all relevant self-interest indicators, and (5) a comparison of the amount of variance accounted for by all self-interest indicators pooled with that accounted for by all available symbolic predispositions.

We report correlation and standardized regression coefficients primarily because they are most intuitively interpretable. Some researchers would contend that relying on either is inappropriate because they confuse the strength of the

effect with the amount of error, and so would prefer unstandardized regression coefficients. However, we feel that strength can be assessed only in light of error. Over a large number of cases, such coefficients should yield a fairly accurate approximation of the strength of self-interest effects.

V. The Minimal Effects of Self-Interest

The results of all our studies are tabulated in Table I. Moving from left to right, the table shows, for each study, (1) the type of self-interest (e.g., "vulnerability to busing") and the number of self-interest measures used, (2) the political attitude that serves as the dependent variable (e.g., "opposition to busing") and the number of items used, (3) the sample area and date of survey, (4) the mean bivariate correlation between self-interest and dependent variables and type of correlation used, (5) variables used in the regression equation, (6) the percentage of self-interest measures that yielded statistically significant regression coefficients, (7) the mean standardized regression coefficient for the self-interest terms, and (8) the number of coefficients on which that mean is based. These analyses were taken from previous research reports, so the procedures vary somewhat from study to study.

A. RACIAL ISSUES

Our work began as an outgrowth of analyses of whites' responses to the racial crisis in America in the late 1960s. As the Southern system of racial segregation broke down and as the Northern black population grew, whites throughout the country were increasingly faced with demands for greater racial equality in education, jobs, housing, politics, and other areas. These demands produced increasingly direct personal racial threats to a white population that had been relatively insulated from them. The self-interest hypothesis was that those direct racial threats to whites' personal well-being should turn whites against pro-black policies and candidates.

1. Black Candidates

This hypothesis was first tested with a pair of surveys done in 1969 and 1973 in an almost all-white suburban section of Los Angeles, when the incumbent white mayor, Sam Yorty, was challenged by a moderately liberal black city councilman, Tom Bradley (Sears & Kinder, 1971; Kinder & Sears, 1981). The measures of personal racial threat (i.e., self-interest) focused on (1) the danger of

TABLE I

EFFECTS OF SELF-INTEREST ON PUBLIC OPINION[a]

Self-interest		Dependent variable		Survey			Regression				
Type	No. of items	Type	No. of items	Sample	Year	Correlation (Mean)	Type	β (net percentage significant)	β (mean)	No. of tests	Source
Racial Issues											
1. Racial threat	20	Oppose black mayoral candidate	1	Los Angeles suburbs[b]	1969, 1973	+.21[c]	1	11.1	+.04	(18)	Kinder and Sears (1981)
Neighborhood integration	5					+.41[c]	1	0.0	+.06	(5)	
Economic competition	6					+.21[c]	1	25.0	+.02	(4)	
Racial busing	5					+.05[c]	1	0.0	−.01	(5)	
Black violence	4					+.26[c]	1	25.0	+.09	(4)	
2. Vulnerability to busing	5	Opposition to busing	2	National[b]	1972	+.01	4	16.7	+.02	(6)	Sears, Hensler, and Speer (1979)
3. Vulnerability to busing	5	Opposition to busing	1	National[b]	1976	NA[d]	4	0.0	−.02	(4)	Sears, Lau, Tyler, and Allen (1980)
4. Vulnerability to busing	24	Opposition to busing	14	National, California, Los Angeles[b]	1964–1979	NA	4	21.1	+.03	(52)	Sears and Allen (1984)

(*continued*)

TABLE I (*Continued*)

Self-interest		Dependent variable		Survey			Regression				
Type	No. of items	Type	No. of items	Sample	Year	Correlation (Mean)	Type	β (net percentage significant)	β (mean)	No. of tests	Source
5. Vulnerability to bilingual education; bilingualism	9	Opposition to bilingual education	7	National[e]	1983	+.02	1	0.0	+.01	(8)	Huddy and Sears (1989)
General economic issues											
6. Declining personal finances	2	Presidential performance	3	National	1983	+.04	NA	NA	NA	(6)	Sears and Lau (1983)
7. Declining personal finances and vulnerabilty to inflation	2	Opposition to taxes and spending	18	California	1979	NA	1	0.0	.00	(10)	Sears and Citrin (1985)
8. Vulnerability to inflation	2	Presidential performance	4	National	1983	−.03	4	NA	NA	(4)	Sears and Lau (1983)
Employment											
9. Employment problems	6	Government-guaranteed employment	2	National	1976	NA	1	33.3	+.02	(3)	Sears *et al.* (1980)

10. Employment problems	4	Guaranteed jobs, presidential performance	5	National	1983	+.04	NA	NA	NA	(8)	Sears and Lau (1983)
11. Women's role in the workplace	3	Gender equality and feminism	5	National	1984	NA	3	16.7	NA	(6)	Sears and Huddy (1990a)
Energy											
12. Personal impact of energy crisis	4	Proadministration policy support	8	Los Angeles County	1974	NA	3	0.0	.00	(2)	Sears, Tyler, Citrin, and Kinder (1978)
Service recipients											
13. Poor health insurance	3	Support for national health insurance	1	National	1976	NA	1	66.7	+.08	(3)	Sears *et al.* (1980)
14. Service recipience	13	Support for taxes and spending	18	California	1979	NA	1	25.0	+.03	(20)	Sears and Citrin (1985)
15. Service recipience	4	Opposition to Prop. $2\frac{1}{2}$	2	Massachusetts	1980, 1981	NA	4	25.0	+.03	(4)	Lau, Coulam, and Sears (1983)
16. Women's economic disadvantage	5	Support for women's issues	3	National	1984	NA	3	20.0	NA	(10)	Sears and Huddy (1989)

(*continued*)

TABLE I (*Continued*)

Self-interest		Dependent variable		Survey			Regression				
	Type	No. of items	Type	No. of items	Sample	Year	Correlation (Mean)	Type	β (net percentage significant)	β (mean)	No. of tests	Source
Taxes												
17.	Federal tax burden	5	Support for tax cuts	4	National	1983	+.10	NA	NA	NA	(16)	Sears and Lau (1983)
18.	State and local tax burden	2	Opposition to taxes and spending	18	California	1979	NA	1	90.0	+.15	(10)	Sears and Citrin (1985)
19.	State and local tax burden	4	Support for Prop. 2½	2	Massachusetts	1980, 1981	NA	4	50.0	+.12	(4)	Lau *et al.* (1983)
Public employment												
20.	Public employees	1	Support for taxes and spending	18	California	1979	NA	1	60.0	+.09	(5)	Sears and Citrin (1985)
21.	Public employees	2	Opposition to Prop. 2½	2	Massachusetts	1980, 1981	NA	4	100.0	+.14	(2)	Lau *et al.* (1983)
Crime												
22.	Vulnerability to crime	6	Support for law and order policies	5	National	1976	NA	4	33.3	+.03	(3)	Sears *et al.* (1980)

War												
23.	Relatives and friends in Vietnam service	6	Opposition to Vietnam War	3	National	1968	+.04[f]	3	16.7	+.04	(6)	Lau, Brown, and Sears (1978)
24.	Vulnerability to military draft	7	Opposition to draft; support detente	11	UCLA students	1980	−.08	2	−20.0	−.05	(10)	Sears, Steck, Lau, and Gahart (1983)
25.	Concern about likely war	3	Opposition to draft; support detente	11	UCLA students	1980	.20	2	50.0	+.19	(2)	Sears *et al.* (1983)
	Total:	147		168			+.07		22.8	+.04	(188)	

[a]The number of items shown is prior to the development of composite scales. Correlation is Pearson *r* unless otherwise specified. Regression type included only self-interest terms, where possible (type 1); otherwise they included self-interest and some demographics (type 2); self-interest and symbolic predispositions, typically ideology, party identification, and racial attitudes (type 3); or all three (type 4). The standardized regression coefficient (β) is shown. Net percentage significant is percentage at least $p < .05$, two-tailed, in predicted direction minus percentage significant in opposite direction. (*Source*: Sears and Funk, 1990a.)

[b]Whites only.

[c]γ.

[d]NA, not applicable.

[e]Non-Hispanics only.

[f]τ_c.

neighborhood desegregation (opposition to it, perceived likelihood of it), (2) economic threat from blacks (dissatisfaction with own economic gains compared to those of blacks, likelihood of having a black supervisor at work, likelihood of losing jobs or promotions due to preferential treatment for minorities), (3) racial busing (having children in the public schools; likelihood of minority children being bused into, or white children out of, neighborhood schools), and (4) fear of black crime (likelihood of black violence in own neighborhood; distance from a small black ghetto in the area). The symbolic predisposition used was "symbolic racism," an index of racial intolerance.[3] The dependent variable was the difference in evaluation of the two candidates.

Electoral choice was closely related to symbolic racism but not to racial threat. As Table II shows, only 2 of the 18 regression coefficients for racial threat were significant, and their average was a nonsignificant +.04 (also see Table 1, Study 1). In contrast, symbolic racism had highly significant effects, accounting for 22.3 and 15.3% of the variance in candidate preference in the 2 years. Symbolic racism contributed 15.7 and 8.9% of the unique variance explained in candidate preference, whereas racial threat contributed only 3.0 and 0.0%. Racial threat failed in three other respects not shown in Table II, as well. It had only trivial effects on symbolic racism; the votes of those most vulnerable to threat were not more influenced than others by their affects toward that threat (e.g., distaste for neighborhood desegregation had no greater effect on the vote among people living close to a black ghetto or feeling their own neighborhood was likely to be desegregated than it did among those not so vulnerable); and vulnerability to these threats did not increase the impact of symbolic racism on the vote. This first study, then, gave little support to the racial threat version of the self-interest hypothesis.

2. *Busing*

We then focused specifically on whites' opposition to busing. The self-interest hypothesis was that being personally affected by busing (in terms of having children in the public schools, living in districts with busing happening or threatened, and/or living in all-white neighborhoods) should produce the greatest

[3]Symbolic racism is typically indexed with items focusing on (1) antagonism toward blacks' demands (e.g., "blacks are getting too demanding in their push for equal rights"), (2) resentment about special favors for blacks (e.g., "over the past few years, blacks have gotten more economically than they deserve"), and sometimes (3) denial of continuing discrimination (e.g., "blacks have it better than they ever had it before"; see Sears, 1988). Research on symbolic racism has been criticized on several grounds, the most common of which have been disputes about its exact content (Bobo, 1983, 1988; McLendon, 1985; Pettigrew, 1985; Schuman, Steeh, & Bobo, 1985; Sniderman & Tetlock, 1986a; Weigel & Howes, 1985). That dispute is irrelevant to the present point, which is simply that measures of racism (however they are characterized) have more political impact than do those of realistic racial threat, and are themselves not influenced by threat.

TABLE II

EFFECTS OF SYMBOLIC RACISM AND RACIAL THREATS ON PREFERENCES FOR WHITE LOS ANGELES MAYORALTY CANDIDATE[a]

	1969 (n = 178)	1973 (n = 220)
Symbolic racism		
Expressive racism	.31**	.30**
Opposition to busing	.26**	.11
Racial threats		
Neighborhood desegregation and interracial social contact		
Oppose neighborhood desegration	−.07	.08
Dislike social contact with blacks	.06	−.04
Likelihood of neighborhood desegregation	NA[b]	−.03
Economic competition		
Economic resentment of blacks	−.02	.11
Likelihood of black supervisor	NA	−.06
Likelihood of being affected by affirmative action	NA	−.11
Racial busing		
Children not in parochial school	.14*	NA
Children in public elementary school	NA	−.08
Children in public high school	NA	−.05
Likelihood of busing blacks in	NA	.01
Likelihood of busing whites out	NA	−.02
Black violence		
Closeness to Pacoima	.08	−.04
Fear of black violence	.16*	.11
Variance contributed by		
Symbolic racism	.223	.153
Racial threat	.096	.055
Both	.253	.144
Unique variance contributed by		
Symbolic racism	.157	.089
Racial threat	.030	−.009

[a]Entry is the standardized regression coefficient (β) for each predictor variable. Variables are coded so that a positive β reflects a positive effect of either racism or threat. R^2 is adjusted for number of variables in the analysis. (*Source*: Adapted from Kinder and Sears, 1981, p. 422.)

[b]NA, Not available.

*$p < .05$.

**$p < .01$.

opposition to it. The first study, using the 1972 National Election Studies (NES) sample, revealed no support for this hypothesis. The regression coefficients averaged .01, and only one was significant, as shown in Table III (Sears *et al.*, 1979). Nor did the self-interest variables show any additive or interactive effects; in combination (e.g., having children in districts with busing) they proved just as impotent as they did in isolation, as shown in the right-hand columns of Table III. Rather, racial intolerance dominated in all cases, yielding highly significant regression coefficients ranging from +.49 to +.36. A later replication using the 1976 NES survey obtained almost identical results (Sears *et al.*, 1980; see Studies 2 and 3 in Table I).

At about that time, the Los Angeles Unified School District introduced a plan with some mandatory busing. A local survey conducted in 1976 found some evidence that self-interest increased white opposition to the plan; parents of

TABLE III
DETERMINANTS OF THE OPPOSITION OF WHITES TO BUSING[a,b]

	All respondents (1)	Classified by busing in area		
		Happening (2)	Heard of (3)	Neither (4)
Symbolic attitudes				
Racial intolerance (cubed)	.39**	.36**	.49**	.36**
Conservatism	.19**	.03	.16	.26**
Conservatism squared	.10*	.01	.00	.13**
Self-interest				
Busing happening/heard of	−.01	—	—	—
Child in public school	.05	.08	−.06	.04
White neighborhood schools	−.02	−.07	.15	−.02
Demographic factors				
Education	−.05	−.01	−.33**	−.04
Age	.06*	.16*	−.14	.04
Southern residence	.05	.09	−.14	.04
Multiple *r*	.540	.480	.699	.574
R^2	29.1%	23.1%	48.8%	33.0%
N	853	153	82	537

[a]Computed from data collected in the 1972 National Election Studies survey (Sears, Hensler, and Speer, 1979).

[b]Entries are standardized regression coefficients, where each column is a separate regression equation.

*$p < .05$.

**$p < .001$.

children in the district were among the most opposed (Allen & Sears, 1979). To follow up this possible exception, we reviewed the results of eight surveys conducted at different stages of busing controversies (Sears & Allen, 1984). This (study 4 in Table I) permitted 52 separate tests of the self-interest hypothesis. Again, on average the effects were weak, with a mean regression coefficient of +.03; in contrast, a single-item index of symbolic racism yielded an average coefficient of +.26, again highly significant. This study did yield one apparently reliable self-interest effect, however; self-interest did prove to be a significant determinant of opposition to busing in the stage between announcement of a court order mandating some desegregation, and announcement of a specific plan implementing that order. We will return to this exception later on.

Others who have tested the self-interest hypothesis concerning busing have obtained much the same result. Numerous other cross-sectional studies have been done, typically using such measures of racial threat as having children in the public schools, having children being bused, and the distance of the bus ride. They have usually found no greater opposition to busing or integration among whites personally affected by it (e.g., Bobo, 1983, using national data; Gatlin, Giles, & Cataldo, 1978, in Florida; and McConahay, 1982, in Louisville, Kentucky). In a particularly interesting study, Jacobson (1978) compared surveys done before and after a desegregation ruling in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Before the ruling, people with children in the public schools were trivially less opposed than others to integration and busing (by an average of 3% over four items). After the ruling, those with children in the public schools actually became somewhat more *pro*-busing than others (by an average of 5%).

The only apparent exception is that McClendon (1985) and McClendon and Pestello (1983), using Akron, Ohio data, found that having a child in the public schools (or perceiving busing as especially costly) did increase opposition to it. However, the two variables did not interact as they should according to the self-interest hypothesis: perceived costs were no more influential among parents than among nonparents. Moreover, those perceptions of the costs of busing themselves proved to be based in anti-black attitudes, and so the effects of being a parent washed out with perceived costs controlled (consistent with the notion that antibusing attitudes are most strongly rooted in racial prejudices). In short, the opposition of whites to busing has rarely been shown to have a self-interested basis.

3. Affirmative Action

Whites' opposition to affirmative action has also often been thought to be rooted in self-interest, such as in perceived personal competition with blacks for jobs. The landmark Bakke decision, after all, was stimulated by a white applicant who alleged that affirmative action quotas had deprived him of a position in

medical school. However, a number of studies have found whites' attitudes toward affirmative action to be unaffected by self-interest. For example, Jessor (1988, p. 111) reports that a measure of racial self-interest (termed "outgroup interdependence"), based on whites' fears that they or a family member might not get a job, promotion, or admission to school because of preferential treatment for blacks, correlated with opposition to pro-black racial policies (in terms of federal spending, jobs, schools, etc.), but had no remaining significant effect once symbolic predispositions were controlled. "Ingroup interdependence" (the feeling that one's own opportunities would improve if those of whites did) had no effect at all. Similarly, Kluegel and Smith (1983) tested the effects of 4 dimensions of whites' self-interest on their attitudes toward affirmative action for blacks, and found 2 of the 16 coefficients were significant in the predicted direction, and 1 in the opposite direction. Jacobson's (1985) report of a small, statistically significant effect is compromised by use of measures of self-interest irrelevant to affirmative action (e.g., perceived probability of neighborhood and local school integration). And in all three cases, racial intolerance explained opposition to affirmative action far better than any measure of self-interest. Interestingly, Jacobson (1983) also found no evidence that self-interest influenced support for affirmative action among blacks.

4. Bilingual Education

Opposition to bilingual education among non-Hispanics might also be thought to be motivated by self-interest. Anglo parents might oppose it as a means of protecting their own children from what is perceived as inferior education, especially if their children are in public schools with many Hispanic children. Anglos with no language proficiency aside from English might be especially threatened by a bilingual society, and Anglos living in areas with many Hispanics might also be especially threatened by it. Yet a 1983 national survey revealed that opposition again proved to be governed more by racial attitudes than by self-interest or direct personal experience with it (Study 5 in Table I). The data are shown in detail in Table IV. There was no effect of threats to Anglo parents or of personal language proficiency. Indeed those with children in such programs were the most supportive of it (Huddy & Sears, 1989).

These studies, then, have uniformly yielded strong effects of racial intolerance on these attitudes toward racial policies or minority candidates. They have almost equally uniformly yielded no support for the self-interest hypothesis that racial or ethnic threats to the private lives of whites affect such attitudes.

B. ECONOMIC POLICIES

It might be argued that racial conflicts have a complex, profoundly emotional quality that masks or at least complicates the effects of self-interest. Economic

TABLE IV
THE OPPOSITION OF NON-HISPANICS TO BILINGUAL EDUCATION: BIVARIATE CORRELATIONS AND REGRESSION ANALYSES[a,b]

	Full sample		Parents only	
	r (1)	β (2)	r (3)	β (4)
Racial attitudes				
Symbolic racism	.39	.30**	.36	.29**
Nationalism	.22	.08*	.15	.02
Anti-Hispanic affect	.18	.08*	.15	.00
Self-interest and personal experience				
Parental role				
Children				
Under 18 years	−.03	.01	.01	—
In public school	—	—	.06	.06
Hispanics in school	—	—	.04	.00
Learning Spanish	—	—	.03	.05
In bilingual program	—	—	−.08	−.12*
Bilingual experience				
Family bilingual	.04	.02	.06	.04
Current proficiency	−.01	.00	−.04	−.06
Hispanic context				
Objective	.14	—	.16	—
Subjective	.13	—	.07	—
Composite	.15	.15**	.14	.16*
Group conflict				
Educational conflict	.24	.12**	.25	.13
Economic threat	.14	.05*	.04	−.01
Pro-majority evaluations	−.06	.01	−.11	−.09
Social class				
Education	−.01	−.05	.05	−.01
Household income	.07	.03	.12	.04
Variance explained				
Self-interest and personal experience		2.4%		4.6%
Racial attitudes		16.8		13.3
Group conflict		7.3		6.8
Social class		0.7		1.5
All predictors		21.2		19.8

[a]The 1983 National Bilingual Education Survey (Huddy & Sears, 1989).

[b]The entries in columns (1) and (3) are Pearson correlations of predictors with opposition to bilingual education; in columns (2) and (4), standardized regression coefficients from equations including all predictors listed. The estimates of variance explained are based on regression equations including only the variables specified.

*$p < .05$.

**$p < .0001$.

issues, the presumptive "home turf" for theories of self-interest, might therefore be regarded as more appropriate venues for its impact on attitudes. If so, support for particular economic policies should be strongest among those most likely to benefit from them personally.

1. Employment

Our research on economic self-interest began with attitudes toward government-guaranteed full employment and national health insurance. The self-interest hypotheses were that support for the former would be greatest among the unemployed, laid off, or those hurt by a recent recession, and for the latter, would be greatest among those with inadequate or excessively costly personal health insurance (Sears *et al.*, 1980). Half of these self-interest indicators did yield significant regression coefficients in the 1976 NES survey, but at a rather low level: they averaged +.05. Another national study (Sears & Lau, 1983), focusing on unemployment, inflation, and presidential economic performance, yielded an average correlation of +.02 with self-interest (over 18 tests; see Studies 6, 8, and 10 in Table I).

Others have obtained similarly weak findings. Green (1988) also reports weak self-interest effects on guaranteed employment and national health insurance from NES surveys. In an excellent in-depth national study of the effects of unemployment in the mid-1970s, Schlozman and Verba (1979) failed to find the unemployed to be unusually sympathetic to such radical proposals as assigning jobs, ending capitalism, taxing the rich to redistribute the wealth, or capping personal income. Nor did the length of unemployment or the jobless workers' appraisals of their chances of finding work have any effect on these attitudes. The few exceptions were some modest self-interest effects upon attitudes toward such moderate government policies as ending unemployment, being the employer of last resort, and providing for those in need. And job insecurity (e.g., perceptions of likelihood of job loss in the near future, short time on current job, and a history of unemployment) did prove to have significant effects on policy preferences, particularly on radical solutions.

2. Taxes and Spending

Our most comprehensive study (Sears & Citrin, 1985) took advantage of three California ballot propositions that proposed, respectively, a massive property tax reduction (Proposition 13 in 1978), a cap on state spending (Proposition 4 in 1979), and a 50% reduction in state income taxes (Proposition 9 in 1980). This represented a unique opportunity to study self-interest since two of the propositions promised large and concrete economic benefits to individual taxpayers, and all three threatened public services and public employment. It should have

provided an optimal situation for the exercise of self-interest since these large potential consequences for personal well-being were placed before the voters with the intense and focused attention of hotly contested campaigns.

The dependent variables included support for the three ballot measures, attitudes toward smaller government and reduced spending on public services, and perceptions of waste and excessive wages for public employees. Four groups of self-interested respondents were identified. The "taxpayers" (those who were homeowners, felt burdened by heavy property and/or income taxes, expected large tax reductions from the propositions, and/or had high income) stood to profit handsomely from tax reductions. The generally economically discontented (those with declining family finances and/or feeling most hurt by inflation) presumably also should have had a stake in the personal economic benefits provided by reduced taxes. On the other hand, public employees and the recipients of various government services (public assistance, public schools, public health services, unemployment compensation, and so on) should have favored maintaining current levels of taxation, spending, and public employment. These four groups of self-interested respondents were partially overlapping, of course, so most of the analyses simply incorporated self-interest as variables in regression equations.

The "taxpayers" held quite self-interested political preferences. Both homeownership and feeling subjectively burdened by taxes were related to support for the ballot propositions (as summarized in a "tax rebel" index) and for smaller government and reduced spending on specific public services (such as schools and public health), as well as to perceptions of waste in government and beliefs that government workers were overpaid, as shown in Table V (see also Study 18 in Table I). Similar effects of homeownership on support for Proposition 13 were reported by Neiman and Riposa (1987). We will return to these findings.

General economic discontent, however, yielded only trivial regression coefficients, averaging +.02, as shown in Table V (see also Study 7 in Table I). Nor was there any evidence of interactions between the two types of economic discontent that might reflect the effects of "stagflation": those whose personal financial situation was slipping *and* who felt especially badly hurt by inflation showed no special support for the tax revolt (Sears & Citrin, 1985, pp. 137–139).

On the anti-tax-revolt side, the public employees did show some self-interest: relative to others, they were significantly more opposed to the tax revolt propositions ($\beta = .18$) and more likely to reject the claim that government workers were overpaid ($\beta = .20$; see Table I, Study 20). However, the recipients of government services did not show the expected defense of the public sector. The regression coefficients for service recipients averaged +.03, and none exceeded .06 (see Table V and Study 14 in Table I). To be sure, in some areas (public schools, welfare, and public health), service recipients did show significantly

TABLE V

EFFECTS OF SELF-INTEREST ON ATTITUDES TOWARD TAXING AND SPENDING[a,b]

	Tax revolt schema					Attention	
	Tax rebel index	Size of government	Service spending	Waste	Overpaid government workers	Issue salience	Opinion-ation
Pro-revolt interests							
Taxpayers							
Homeownership	.17**	.15**	.17**	.06*	.03	.07	.07*
Subjective tax burden	.20**	.15**	.18**	.21**	.14**	.18**	.06*
Economic discontent							
Declining finances	.02	.03	.04	.03	.01	−.03	.02
Inflation impact	.03	−.01	.03	.01	.01	.01	.02
Anti-revolt interests							
Public employees	.18**	.02	.01	.06*	.20**	.02	.03
Service recipients							
Government assistance	.01	.04	.07*	.04	.02	.04	−.01
Employment status	.05*	.04	.02	.04	.01	.02	−.07
Work problems	.06*	.06*	.06*	.02	.05	−.06*	.06*
Child in public school	.02	.01	.01	.04	.04	−.01	−.02
R^2	.113	.067	.079	.068	.065	.045	.020

[a]The 1979 California Tax Revolt Survey (Sears & Citrin, 1985, p. 114).

[b]Entries are standardized regression coefficients from equations including all interest variables. A positive entry indicates position is associated with the specified self-interest in the hypothesized direction.

*$p < .01$.

**$p < .001$.

greater support for increased spending on the services from which they specifically benefited than did other respondents, but the effects were quite weak ($\beta <$ .10, as shown in Table V). In toto, then, this study presented an interesting blend of success and failure for the self-interest hypothesis to which we will return.

A similar study was done in Massachusetts before and after the vote on its major property tax-cutting measure, Proposition $2\frac{1}{2}$, with quite similar results in virtually all these respects (Lau, Coulam, & Sears, 1983). The taxpayers showed some significant special support for tax cuts (Study 19 in Table I), and public employees showed significant opposition (Study 21), but service recipients again showed no special opposition (Study 15). Other studies of voting on ballot measures on taxes or attitudes toward tax legislation report similar results, if not always as dramatic. One dealing with two Michigan tax-cutting propositions found consistent (though modest) effects of property tax burden (Courant *et al.*, 1980). A local rapid transit referendum in Atlanta, Georgia, was opposed most by those who both thought it would cause property tax increases and who did not expect to use it (Schroeder & Sjoquist, 1983). Income level and tax bracket significantly predicted support for the tax cuts, and use of capital gains and home mortgage deductions predicted support for those deductions, in the 1978 federal Tax Revenue Act (Hawthorne & Jackson, 1987). And respondents' own perceived federal tax burdens predicted their support for the Kemp–Roth tax cuts proposed in 1979, later implemented as part of President Reagan's budget plan in 1981 (Sears & Lau, 1983). In almost all these cases, then, taxpayers' self-interest in real ballot or legislative propositions have significantly influenced their support for them.

A number of other studies have focused on tax attitudes in the abstract or in hypothetical situations, and they have less consistently yielded self-interest effects. To be sure, Coughlin (1989) reports that higher income individuals in a General Social Survey (GSS) opposed income redistribution substantially more than did lower income individuals, at least among whites. But other studies are not always so confirmatory. In Norway, acceptance of tax cheating was found to be only slightly greater ($\beta = .10$) among higher income individuals and among those personally dissatisfied with their own financial situation, although it was not significantly related to homeownership or personal financial expectations (see Listhaug & Miller, 1985). Studies with Florida and national samples obtained almost no evidence for self-interested attitudes on the part of taxpayers (Beck & Dye, 1982; Lowery & Sigelman, 1981). A similar portrait emerges from a major study of taxes and spending in Sweden in 1981 (Hadenius, 1986). The principal dependent variables were again discontent about taxes and preferences about public spending. There were only scattered effects of vulnerability to taxes; e.g., higher income individuals were not more discontented with taxes, although they were more opposed to welfare spending. Those feeling especially economically pinched were especially discontented with taxes, as were em-

ployers (especially about corporate taxes; pp. 31–35). But little else mattered. And Rasinski and Rosenbaum (1987) found no effects of homeownership on opposition to local property tax increases for the schools.

These null findings are joined with a few studies suggesting that the economically disadvantaged, rather than the advantaged, most oppose new taxes. For example, Banfield and Wilson (1964) found that lower income individuals most opposed higher taxes to pay for local services. Beck, Rainey, and Traut (1990) found that economic disadvantage (slipping past or future personal finances, low income, and those perceiving taxes and utility charges as increasing) generated more complaints about taxes being too high. Nevertheless, the most common finding in these studies is that taxpayer self-interest does have a consistently significant effect.

Fairly sharp and distinctive opposition among public employees to other tax revolts has also turned up in studies of Proposition 2½ (Ladd & Wilson, 1982) and of two tax-cutting propositions in Michigan (Courant, Gramlich, & Rubinfeld, 1980). However, there are exceptions: surveys in Florida, Sweden, and Norway, with no tax cut measure on the ballot, found few differences between public employees and others (Beck & Dye, 1982; Hadenius, 1986; Listhaug & Miller, 1985).

The lack of effects of being a service recipient on support for the public sector in general, with weak but significant effects on support for the particular service in question, obtained in our two tax-revolt studies have generally been duplicated in other studies as well. A few stronger effects have been reported: the low income and unemployed supported welfare spending more than did others in a national sample (Coughlin, 1989), and parents with children in the public schools supported increased school taxation in a local survey (though other factors proved considerably stronger among registered voters; see Rasinski & Rosenbaum, 1987). Similarly, Cleveland, Ohio, parents of children in the public schools voted more strongly than others for school bonds (Cataldo & Holm, 1983), but this special support eroded to nonsignificance when other variables were considered. Other studies of service recipients have generally found that they do not support service spending at unusual levels. In Hadenius' intensive study (1986) in Sweden, actual or potential service recipients did not have distinctive attitudes (see pp. 35, 37, and 100). Those whose economic situations were most fragile or deteriorated showed only slightly greater support for welfare spending than others did (R^2 = 1.4%; see p. 99), and those on pensions were more favorable than others to spending on welfare, but his more detailed pursuit of special demand for public expenditures among specific client groups (such as parents of children at home, or those receiving sickness or unemployment benefits) proved fruitless (p. 104). Hadenius concludes that "political symbolic beliefs" (especially left–right placement and discontent with the distribution of power), not interests, best explain the views of citizens about taxation and public

welfare (p. 121). And, finally, in two studies in Florida, self-interest did not influence service recipients' attitudes at all in one case (Beck & Dye, 1982), while economic disadvantage contributed to more dissatisfaction with local services in the other, but only indirectly, as mediated through more general disaffection from the community (Beck *et al.*, 1990).

In short, we find moderately consistent evidence in these studies for self-interest effects among taxpayers and public employees, to which we will return. But we find very little for service recipients or the generally economically discontented.

3. Women's Issues

The women's movement has raised numerous issues involving women's self-interest, such as job discrimination, pay equity, sexual harrassment, abortion, and child care. One hypothesis is that self-interest would generate special support among women in general for policies that benefit women more than men. However, few gender differences have been identified on these issues (Franklin & Kosaki, 1989; Mansbridge, 1985; Shapiro & Mahajan, 1986). A second set of hypotheses is that policies benefiting women should be most strongly supported among subsets of women who benefit most from them; working women and/or single mothers might be especially likely to support government-supported child care. However, our study using the 1984 NES national sample showed that for the most part symbolic predispositions rather than self-interest explained women's attitudes on these issues. The same held for their attitudes toward gender equality and feminism, and toward candidates favorable to women (such as Mondale and Ferraro in 1984). Feminism and abortion policy in particular proved to be almost purely symbolic issues, with attitudes toward the latter strongly influenced by political ideology and religiosity. The only real exceptions were that single mothers were especially supportive of government aid to women, and working women, of gender equality (Studies 11 and 16 in Table I; Sears & Huddy, 1990a). These findings parallel those obtained by Coughlin (1989) from GSS data; income had a weak but positive relationship to support for funding abortions for the poor, contrary to a self-interest hypothesis, and in any case its effects were overwhelmed by those of religious affiliation and attendance.

A particularly careful study of women's self-interest in the equal rights amendment (ERA), the women's liberation movement, and the human life amendment (HLA, an antiabortion measure) sprang from two local surveys by Del Boca (1982). In both cases, women's objective self-interest (working, desiring further education, and/or being divorced or separated) did not influence attitudes toward the human life amendment. In one case it did significantly increase support for the ERA and for women's liberation in general, but only at a modest level (R^2 =

4%). In contrast, such symbolic predispositions as prejudice against women and traditional American values had much stronger effects. The effects of subjective self-interest (concerning the potential impact of ERA on opposite-sex relationships and personal life goals, and perceived discrimination against the self and friends) on support for the ERA were also tested, as were perceived effects of the HLA on the self. In most cases the associations were positive and significant. However, as the author indicates, the causal inference in this case is suspect; the perceived effects of the policy measure on the self may be better interpreted as a cognitive component of that policy attitude than as an antecedent motive for adopting a particular preference.

It might be noted in passing that the effects of objective self-interest in the Del Boca study disappear with socioeconomic status and age controlled. In general, the young and the better-educated support abortion much more than do older or less-educated individuals (Sears & Huddy, 1990a), as they do spending on the environment (Coughlin, 1989). Trying to interpret these findings illustrates the dangers of interpreting demographic variables solely as indicators of self-interest. Younger individuals both are generally more personally affected by abortion policy than older people and have more of a stake in the future of the environment. Yet both abortion and environmental policy are emerging issues, the kind usually embraced by such vanguard segments of the population as the young and better educated, compromising a simple self-interest interpretation (Coughlin, 1989).

4. Social Security and Medicare

Two studies have examined political self-interest among the elderly. The self-interest hypotheses were that older people should support Social Security and Medicare more than young people do, especially lower income older people (because they are more dependent on such benefits), and be more opposed than the young to greater spending on education (since that typically benefits younger people and their children most). Huddy's (1989) literature review found no greater support for Social Security or Medicare spending among the elderly than among younger people, and Ponza, Duncan, Corcoran, and Groskind (1988) actually found less support among them (along with less support for spending on education). The latter also find no greater age differences in support for transfer payments either to low-income older people or to (presumably younger) low-income families with children. On the other hand, in both studies, support for greater benefits to the elderly was linked more closely to economic self-interest among older than younger people. In Huddy's (1989) study, low income and personal finances were associated considerably more strongly with support for Social Security and Medicare among the elderly (explaining 12.6% of the variance) than among younger age groups (4.7%).

5. Energy

A survey of Los Angeles County residents found that the personal impact of the 1973–1974 energy crisis in terms of perceived increase in difficulty of daily life, effects on employment, and residence in areas with restrictions on electricity use had no effect whatever on relevant policy attitudes, such as support for reduced consumption or increased resource development (Sears *et al.*, 1978).

Economic policy preferences have not been shown to be closely tied to the individual's self-interest, then. Attitudes toward unemployment policy, national health insurance, women's issues, Social Security and Medicare, and energy consumption all have proved only weakly related to self-interest. Recipients of government services do not evidence any very general support for the public sector. The exceptions are scattered, but seem to cluster around discontent with taxes, public employees, and some tendency for service recipients to support the specific services from which they benefit.

C. POCKETBOOK VOTING

A related literature tests the "pocketbook voting" hypothesis that voters' own financial situations are major influences over their voting preferences in presidential and congressional elections. In this case economic self-interest is thought to dictate candidate choice through its impact on evaluations of the incumbent's performance rather than on policy preferences. As indicated above, Kramer (1971) showed that the electoral fortunes of congressmen of the incumbent president's party were influenced by the strength of the economy prior to the election. This was generally interpreted as reflecting self-interest; presumably voters whose own personal finances were improving had responded by rewarding the incumbent's party, while those whose finances had deteriorated had responded by punishing it.

This interpretation was challenged by Kinder and Kiewiet (1979, 1981), based on individual-level correlations between self-interest and voting preferences in the NES surveys. They used two measures of self-interest, both of which have become conventional indicators in this literature: perceived personal finances (e.g., "would you say you and your family living here are better off or worse off financially than you were a year ago?") and recent household unemployment experiences. They found that self-interest had little effect on voting behavior, while "sociotropic" judgments about the collective economic well-being of the nation had strong effects. They concluded that the fluctuations in aggregate vote observed by Kramer (1971) were due to sociotropic rather than to pocketbook (or self-interest) motives among individual voters.

1. Declining Personal Finances

These findings have led to considerable subsequent research. The most common hypothesis has been that perceptions of declining personal finances generates votes against the incumbent president's party in presidential, congressional, senatorial, and gubernatorial elections. The most supportive evidence comes from the presidential vote. Kiewiet (1983, Table 4.1) conducted probit analyses of seven NES surveys from 1956 to 1980. All personal finances terms were in the predicted direction (although it would appear that only 29% of the terms are statistically significant if the customary two-tailed, $p < .05$, criterion is used). According to our own calculations, the mean associations of perceived personal finances with presidential vote over that 1956–1980 period were of modest absolute magnitude, although statistically significant (raw correlations averaging slightly over .10, and regression coefficients, slightly under it; Lau, Sears, & Jessor, 1990). The data are shown in Table VI.

Most tests of the role of personal finances in other kinds of electoral contests yield null results. Kiewiet (1983) repeated the same analysis on congressional vote, and found that only 7% of the terms were significant, close to the chance level. In our analyses of the same data, shown in Table VI, the mean correlation over the full NES series has been .07, and the mean regression coefficient, .02. Lewis-Beck's (1988) thorough analysis of economic voting in Western Europe (Britain, France, West Germany, Italy, and Spain), using Euro-Barometer Surveys from 1983 and 1984, found that perceived personal finances had only small effects on the vote, on approval or disapproval of government economic policy, or, by and large, on expectations that government policies would improve the economy. In these studies, perceptions of collective economic well-being and symbolic predispositions again had much stronger effects than did self-interest. For example, Kiewiet (1983) found that the effects of party identification exceeded statistical significance in every single case, unlike self-interest, which did so less than a quarter of the time.

Scattered studies of senatorial and gubernatorial voting in the United States yield similar conclusions (Kiewiet & Rivers, 1984; although see Kuklinski & West, 1981, for an exception). An extensive study of gubernatorial and senatorial exit polls in 16 states in the recession year of 1982 reports strong effects of holding the President responsible for the state's economic problems on voting against Republican candidates as well as significant effects of declining personal finances, interpreted as pocketbook voting against Ronald Reagan, the Republican incumbent president (Stein, 1990). It can be argued, however, that brief exit polls taken immediately after voters leave the voting booth place unusual pressure upon them to rationalize their votes in terms of the explanatory items provided on the survey, and thus artifactually exaggerate such correlations (Sears & Lau, 1983).

TABLE VI
ASSOCIATION OF PERCEIVED PERSONAL FINANCES WITH VOTES AGAINST INCUMBENT PRESIDENT'S PARTY[a,b]

	Presidential vote				Reported congressional vote	
	Vote intention		Reported vote		Reported vote	
Year	*r*	β	*r*	β	*r*	β
1956	.23	.15	.19	.11	.17	.07
1958					.16	.08
1960	.14	.05	.13	.05	.14	.07
1962					.03	.05
1964	.02	.07	.01	.06	−.03	.01
1966					−.02	−.04
1968	.11	.10	.11	.13	.07	.06
1970					.06	−.01
1972	.13	.09	.12	.07	.07	.00
1974					.00	.00
1976	.16	.06	.13	.06	.15	.08
1978					.00	.00
1980	.08	.08	.05	.07	.03	.00
1982					.12	.03
1984	.36	.18	.33	.18	.22	.11
1986					.08	.01
1988	.19	.07	.20	.10	.10	−.01
Mean, excluding 1984	.12	.08	.12	.08	.07	.02

[a]The 1956–1986 National Election Studies (Lau, Sears, & Jessor, 1990).

[b]The entries are associations between perceptions of improved personal finances over the past year and support for candidates of the incumbent president's party. In columns 1, 3, and 5 they are Pearson *r* values; in columns 2, 4, and 6, standardized regression coefficients from equations including income, education, political interest, and party identification.

Be that as it may, the major question seems to us to focus on the strength of the link of perceived personal finances to American presidential vote: Kiewiet and Rivers (1984, p. 377) feel it is a consistent association, while Feldman (1984, p. 248) concludes that "the accumulated evidence very strongly suggests that vote choice and presidential evaluations are at best modestly influenced by *personal* economic considerations." Our own perspective is that personal finances have consistently affected the presidential vote in the expected direction

considering the full series of elections with available data, but the individual effects are small and usually unreliable.

2. *Other Economic Indicators*

Another version of the pocketbook voting hypothesis is that personal or family unemployment should be associated with voting for the party of the Left. The best study on this point is Kiewiet's (1983), using the same probit analyses cited above. Kiewiet finds that in most (30 of 36) presidential and congressional elections, unemployment has been associated with greater support for Democratic candidates, although only 20% of the comparisons were statistically significant. In a separate analysis, individuals who said that unemployment is their most serious personal problem voted more Democratic than did other respondents, but not significantly so. Schlozman and Verba's (1979) in-depth examination of the effects of unemployment in the mid-1970s also found only a slight tilt (of 4%) to the Democrats among the unemployed. Some other studies have failed to find significant effects of unemployment (or the personal impact of recessions) on voting or presidential job approval (Feldman, 1984; Kinder & Mebane, 1983). These findings are consistent with Kiewiet's view that personal unemployment usually yields a slight but usually statistically unreliable shove toward the Democratic side.

Most macroeconomic theories suggest that inflation most hurts the middle class, just as unemployment most hurts the working class. Historically parties of the middle class (e.g., the Republicans in the United States) have fought inflation more vigorously than they have unemployment. So perceptions of being especially hurt by inflation should be correlated with increased Republican voting. However, the personal impact of inflation quite consistently has had no influence on voters' political choices. Kiewiet (1983, Ch. 5) examined those who said inflation was their most serious personal problem, and found them to vote significantly more Republican in but one of five surveys. In other studies, feeling hurt by inflation had no significant effect on presidential job approval or on retrospective or prospective judgments of the severity of inflation in the nation as a whole (Conover, Feldman, & Knight, 1986, 1987), and very weak effects on presidential vote (Lewis-Beck, 1988, p. 122).

Finally, one might think that those most affected by such Reagan Administration policies as cutting direct economic benefits and federal taxes would have manifested self-interested attitudes toward Reagan and the Democratic Congress. However, Feldman's (1984) analysis of the 1982 NES survey showed that personal tax cuts affected neither approval of Reagan nor of Congress, and that feeling one's own benefits had been cut contributed only to disapproval of Reagan.

D. VIOLENCE

We have also considered the effects of violence. "Law and order" issues, such as the death penalty, gun control, permissive judges, and rights of the accused, have been major political issues since the 1960s. Attitudes on them might well have a self-interested basis: those who have been victimized by crime in the past or who feel vulnerable to future crime victimization might have self-interested reasons for supporting law and order policies. However, our analysis of the 1976 NES survey found that such self-interest variables explained only 0.4% of the variance, compared to 17.1% for the usual three symbolic predispositions (see Study 22 in Table I; Sears *et al.*, 1980). Other studies of support for law and order have generally also shown only weak self-interest effects. Past victimization by crime or fear of crime has not significantly affected support for the death penalty or opposition to gun control (Tyler & Weber, 1982; Tyler & Lavrakis, 1983). However, there was greater support for gun control in the 1984 GSS survey among those who had been threatened by a gun (Lotwis, 1989). A further exception would seem to be the special opposition to gun control displayed by gun owners and hunters in most surveys (e.g., *Gallup Report,* 1985; Lotwis, 1989). But in all these cases symbolic predispositions have had considerably stronger effects than has self-interest. Crime would seem to be more a symbolic than a personal issue in politics.

One might think war and other issues of national defense would also be compelling matters of self-interest, since they too can involve life and death. A major source of self-interest in war is vulnerability to combat. However, people with friends and relatives serving in Vietnam were not unusually opposed to the war there (Lau, Brown, & Sears, 1978; Mueller, 1973).

But what about the fear of war? Among a representative sample of UCLA undergraduates, in a study conducted during the 1979 confrontations with the Soviet Union over Afghanistan, personal vulnerability to the draft did not produce increased opposition to registration, draft, or military action toward the Soviet Union (Sears *et al.*, 1983). While one possible measure of self-interest, the perceived likelihood of war, was associated with antiwar and antidraft preferences, controls for symbolic predispositions completely eliminated any trace of a self-interest effect. Apparently in that context partisan cleavages arose between those opposed to confrontation and afraid of an outbreak of war, on the one hand, and those feeling confrontations did not risk war, on the other.

Studies of citizens' fears of nuclear war yield yet another puzzling failure of self-interest to generate seemingly appropriate policy preferences. Although throughout the postwar period many Americans perceived nuclear war as rather likely (e.g., in 1983, 40% as either "very" or "fairly" likely, and 28% as only "fairly unlikely"), and as horrific in consequences (about 70% feeling that

chances of personal survival of it were poor), most people did not think about it much, worry about it much, or act politically in any way to try to minimize the risk of one (see Fiske, 1987; Kramer, Kalick, & Milburn, 1983). In short, even as personally devastating as war is, it apparently does not usually elicit passionately self-interested policy preferences (which may partly explain why there are so many wars).

E. ISSUE PUBLICS

Self-interest might be thought to attract attention to an issue or to political events even if it does not often affect preferences. In Converse's (1975) language, self-interest might breed "issue publics" for "doorstep issues" that affect the individual personally (also, see Krosnick, 1990). In three studies we have indeed found that self-interest in a political issue significantly (if not always enormously by absolute standards) increased public attention to it. The personal impact of the 1973–1974 energy crisis was strongly related to paying more attention to the crisis (Sears *et al.*, 1978). Having family members, relatives, or close friends serving in the military in Vietnam generated more attention to the Vietnam issue (Lau *et al.*, 1978). And in the California tax revolt, taxpayers were more likely than others to think that taxes and spending were one of California's most important problems, and to have opinions on all features of the tax revolt (see the right-hand columns of Table V; Sears & Citrin, 1985).

As usual, there are some contrary examples. In the tax revolt study, service recipients and the economically disadvantaged did not see taxation and spending as unusually important problems, nor were they any more likely to hold opinions about the tax revolt than other Californians. More surprisingly, the same held true for public employees (see Table V). But there does seem to be something of a tendency for self-interest to generate greater public attention, concern, and knowledge, and thus to be one factor in helping to create "issue publics" for a particular policy area.

F. SUMMARY

Clearly, averaging the effects of these quite heterogeneous studies cannot be meaningful in any rigorous sense, but a summary statement can perhaps convey a crude approximation of the overall pattern. We have found in our own work that self-interest correlates only weakly with policy or candidate preferences (an average bivariate correlation of +.07, and regression coefficient of +.04, as shown in Table I). These reflect only a minor explanatory contribution in terms

of variance accounted for. Moreover, only about 20 to 25% of the self-interest terms meet the conventional standard of statistical significance at the .05 level, which is a minimal standard indeed, given the rather large samples used in this research.

Similarly, in most cases, simple measures of pocketbook motivation do not relate significantly to pro- or anti-incumbent voting. It should be said that the general style of the work on pocketbook voting following Kinder and Kiewiet (1979) has been rather inductive, often presenting a large number of regression equations and interpreting the occasional statistically significant self-interest term as a reliable effect. This runs some risk of using chance differences to reject the null hypothesis. Nonetheless, self-interest has generally had quite modest effects.

Moreover, in most of this research symbolic predispositions have had considerably greater power over policy and candidate preferences than has self-interest. In our initial studies of mayoral voting, racial attitudes explained 15.7 and 8.9% of the variance, while racial threat explained only 3.0% and 0.1% (see Table II); in the 1976 NES study the standard three symbolic predispositions explained an average of 14.0% in policy preferences regarding jobs, health insurance, busing, and crime, as against 1.7% for self-interest (Sears *et al.*, 1980); and even in the California tax revolt, with unusually strong self-interest effects, symbolic predispositions explained more variance (12.6 to 11.3%; see Table V).

In short, this research has investigated self-interest as a determinant of a wide variety of policy and candidate preferences. It has usually been of only minor importance in explaining the attitudes of ordinary citizens, usually far outstripped by symbolic predispositions. These conclusions parallel those arrived at in other major reviews of this literature (Citrin & Green, 1990; Feldman, 1984; Kiewiet & Rivers, 1984). They also parallel the conclusions obtained in the most extensive monograph-length studies of self-interest and political attitudes (Green, 1988), of pocketbook voting (by Kiewiet, 1983), and of unemployment (Schlozman & Verba, 1979). As Lewis-Beck (1988, p. 155) says on the basis of a careful study of pocketbook voting in five Western European countries, "Does economics operate on these citizens through the pocketbook? Only a little." We would conclude, therefore, that personal self-interest generally has not been of major importance in explaining the general public's social and political attitudes.

G. FACT AND ARTIFACT

Moreover, it is possible that even this dismal portrait may exaggerate the role of self-interest somewhat. Some of the significant findings, especially in the pocketbook voting literature, may have resulted from two kinds of item–order

artifacts. Placing a battery of items about the respondent's own economic situation immediately before the relevant attitude items might tend to *personalize* the latter, and induce artificially high levels of consistency between the two. A person whose finances have declined and who then is given a chance to blame the president may take that opportunity. Alternatively, respondents may be asked to estimate their economic well-being immediately after being asked for whom they had voted (as in exit polls on Election Day), which might provide an inducement to bias descriptions of their personal finances to rationalize their vote choice, thereby *politicizing* personal well-being.

We have tested for the potential impact of such artifacts in three ways. First, we conducted an experiment within a national survey that varied how closely personal items preceded the political attitude dependent variables in four economic areas (general personal finances, taxes, inflation, and unemployment). In the first three areas, self-interest and political attitudes were significantly correlated among the experimentally proximate respondents, but not among those in the so-called neutral condition (Sears & Lau, 1983).

This raised the possibility that item–order artifacts were responsible for the occasional reports of significant correlations between declining personal finances and presidential vote (or presidential approval) cited above. To test this, we reviewed the entire series of the National Election Studies to determine whether the strongest self-interest effects appeared when item proximity might have produced personalizing or politicizing biases. Ten of 11 cases yielding significant self-interest effects came from such interview schedules, while only 4 of the 13 cases with nonsignificant self-interest effects did so (Sears & Lau, 1983). Lewis-Beck (1985) reanalyzed these data, however, and concluded that item proximity had not been associated with stronger effects of personal finances on vote intention and actual vote. In a subsequent paper, Lau *et al.* (1990) criticized some of the procedures Lewis-Beck had used, especially the assessment of potentially contaminating item orders. They report that the effects of personal finances on a wider variety of political attitudes were almost twice as great in contaminated contexts as in neutral contexts, and were not statistically significant in the latter contexts. It is not possible to ascertain in any rigorous manner the exact magnitude of item–order contamination in such surveys, but some of the stronger reported effects of personal finances in the NES series do appear to be suspect.

Finally, we compared the association of personal finances with the vote in brief exit polls (which are framed explicitly to ask respondents to explain their votes) with longer and more complex surveys. Pocketbook voting was much stronger in the exit polls (Sears & Lau, 1983). As indicated earlier, Stein (1990) similarly reports fairly consistent pocketbook voting in exit polls concerning gubernatorial and senatorial elections, which, as indicated above, do not always yield such strong effects in other surveys.

VI. In Further Pursuit of the Effects of Self-Interest

Although the overall picture indicates a relatively small role for self-interest, it is clear that there are exceptions. These can point us to the more circumscribed conditions under which self-interest can be effective, and thereby to a more refined theoretical understanding of its role in attitude formation and change.

A. SOME EXCEPTIONS

We can identify five cases in which virtually every indicator of self-interest had a statistically significant effect on virtually every relevant dependent variable.

1. Taxpayers and Tax Cuts

The strongest and most consistent self-interest effects have been associated with paying taxes. In the California tax revolt, homeownership (which indexes property tax burden) and subjective perceptions of being especially personally burdened by state and local taxes affected both the vote personally and a variety of attitudes toward government services and public employees. These self-interest effects were consistent, statistically significant, and of substantial magnitude, as both Tables I and V show. In other analyses, the exact dollar return of proposed property or income tax reductions to the individual also proved to have very substantial effects. For example, Proposition 13 received 84% of the vote from homeowners who expected their property taxes would otherwise have increased greatly (over $1000/year), 67% of the vote from those who had expected modest increases (up to $200), and 52% from those who expected no increase (Sears & Citrin, 1985). Other studies conducted during referendum campaigns have also found significant effects of taxpayers' self-interest. Subjective tax burden and homeownership were both related to support for Proposition $2\frac{1}{2}$ in Massachusetts (although the latter only marginally so; see Lau *et al.*, 1983).

As already noted, taxpayer self-interest is not always so powerful when assessed in the absence of active political campaigns that focus attention on taxes. Still, a number of studies have found fairly robust and consistent effects of taxpayer self-interest on political preferences, especially those done in the midst of tax-cut campaigns.

2. The Reagan Revolution: Politicizing Self-Interest

A second case also suggests that political events can sometimes politicize personal financial incentives, and thus induce strong self-interest effects. Ronald

Reagan appears to have succeeded in politicizing economic self-interest over the course of his presidency. As already indicated, perceived personal finances rarely has had much impact on voting behavior in the postwar period in the National Election Studies series, yielding mean correlations of +.12 and mean regression coefficients of +.08 with presidential vote intention and actual vote, as shown in Table VI (Lau *et al.*, 1990). Even when candidate Reagan quite explicitly asked Americans to vote in 1980 on the basis of self-interest ("ask yourself . . . , are you better off today than you were four years ago?"), perceived personal finances were only weakly associated with presidential vote (β = .07), and the new support he attracted toward the end of the campaign did not come disproportionately from those whose personal finances had been declining (Sears & Lau, 1983). Apparently this explicit appeal to self-interest became salient too late in the campaign to evoke widespread self-interested voting.

By 1984, the same plea for a self-interested vote was the centerpiece of his presidency and campaign for reelection. The association of personal finances with presidential preference showed a startling increase: the raw correlations jumped to +.36 and +.33, respectively, and the regression coefficients, to +.18 each, as shown in Table VI (with no case to be made for any item–order artifact in this survey). This reflects an increase in the strength of self-interest over his first 4-year term of some considerable magnitude. (And there is Stein's, 1990, evidence, reviewed earlier, that the 1982 senatorial and gubernatorial elections yielded unusually strong pocketbook voting effects, although these findings were based on exit polls which may exaggerate such effects.) Nevertheless, the fact that self-interest so rarely has a strong and systematic effect suggests that events and political campaigns are not often successful in mobilizing it, even when they try.

3. Public Employees Defending Their Jobs

Public employees were particularly opposed to the tax revolts in both California and Massachusetts, as indicated above. For example, averaging across 11 different comparisons, they opposed the California referenda by an impressive 24% more than other respondents (Sears & Citrin, 1985). In both states the effects held up with all other variables controlled (Lau *et al.*, 1983). Studies of the tax revolt in Michigan found similar results.

In the tax revolt cases, public employees' opposition seems to have been based on their desire to prevent job and pay cuts; their opposition to the California spending cap referendum was correlated with their perceptions that it would cut the number of public employees or their wages (r = .24), which was not the case for other citizens (r = .02; see Sears & Citrin, 1985). Similarly, Green (1988, p. 237) reports that public employees' particular opposition to the income tax-cutting proposition was greater among those who believed layoffs were "likely" than among those who believed they were "not likely."

This fear of lost jobs may have some more general effect on political attitudes. Schlozman and Verba (1979, p. 213), surveying the general population, found that fear of losing one's job had considerably more impact on attitudes about government aid to the needy or income redistribution than did even current or prior long-term unemployment. But it does not seem to be driven solely by a fear of economic losses in the future. Lewis-Beck (1988) systematically compared prospective and retrospective estimates of personal financial situation and found that prospective fears of declining personal finances did not have much effect in either the United States or in Western Europe (pp. 14 and 82). The fear of future personal economic disaster may have induced self-interest in the case of public employees, then, but it seems not to do so consistently in the general public as a whole.

4. Busing: On the Eve of the Unknown

Self-interest has not generally been very powerful in busing controversies, as indicated earlier. But it does seem to have been stimulated in one particular phase of them. Surveys in Los Angeles, California, done after a general court order had mandated school desegregation, but before announcement of any concrete plan for implementing it, found a substantial self-interest basis for whites' opposition to busing (all 10 regression coefficients were significant, averaging +.13). In contrast, surveys done prior to any court order or indeed much publicity about busing in the community, or done after implementation of the court order, yielded the usual crop of generally nonsignificant self-interest effects (only 17% of the regression coefficients were significant, averaging +.03: see Sears & Allen, 1984; other smaller sample studies done prior to the court order also obtained nonsignificant results: see Caditz, 1976, and Kinder & Sears, 1981). In short, whites' opposition to busing was motivated by self-interest only when busing seemed certain to occur in their own child's school district, yet the nature of the busing plan was as yet unknown.

5. Restrictions on Smokers

Another case of a strong and consistent self-interest effect is that smokers are considerably more unfavorable than nonsmokers to almost any anti-smoking policies, such as restrictions on smoking in public places, increases in cigarette taxes, or bans on cigarette advertising. In one survey, heavy smokers opposed banning smoking in public places more than did moderate smokers, who in turn were more opposed than light smokers, and they in turn more than nonsmokers. Sensitivity to smoke similarly was closely related to support for the ban. In a second survey, smokers were more opposed than nonsmokers to an increase in the cigarette tax. Moreover, as would be expected, there were both price and

income effects only among smokers: larger proposed taxes and/or lower income produced more opposition to the tax among smokers but not among nonsmokers (Green & Gerken, 1989). These findings, based on two surveys, a variety of dependent variables, and conceptual replications of the self-interest finding, make a persuasive case that antismoking policies do evoke strongly self-interested preferences.

We would suggest, then, that self-interest has had a consistent and significant effect in five well-documented cases: when tax referenda or the Reagan presidency politicized positive financial incentives, and when public employees, white parents, and cigarette smokers were presented with severe and rather ambiguous personal threats. However, these represent exceptions to the general rule.

B. THE COGNITIVE NARROWNESS OF THE EFFECTS OF SELF-INTEREST

Self-interest only occasionally is an important determinant of policy and candidate preferences, then. But does it help to organize more general and abstract belief systems, as Marx and other economic determinists have contended? There is considerable debate in the public opinion literature about the prevalence of coherent, consistent, and far-ranging belief systems in the general public. Some feel that ordinary citizens have, at best, rather narrow and inconsistent belief systems (Converse, 1964), while others find broader belief systems organized by ideological preferences or basic values (e.g., Feldman, 1988; Sears *et al.*, 1980; for the general debate, see Kinder & Sears, 1985). Nevertheless, it turns out that the effects of self-interest are cognitively quite narrow. Even when it has significant effects, it usually influences only those attitudes that are specific to the narrow interests in question. And it does not play a major role in determining more basic and general predispositions, such as individuals' general political ideologies.

1. When Effective, Self-Interest Is Specific to Narrow Interests

We have identified five cases in which self-interest has had significant and consistent effects. But these effects prove to be quite narrow cognitively. Three cases should illustrate this point. First, public employees did manifest self-interested opposition to the tax revolt propositions in both California and Massachusetts, as indicated above. But beyond this, public employees' self-interest extended no further than a narrow defense of their own jobs and salaries. We looked at whether it also strengthened support for the public sector and for the moderate political Left. These were indexed with 11 questions ranging from the

quite general (political ideology and party identification) to more concrete policies (desired size of government, levels of spending on public services, or imposition of tuition at public universities). As shown in Table VII, public employees did deny more than others that government workers were overpaid. They also expressed greater opposition than other respondents to the three ballot propositions, phrased in terms of their actual and probable effects. But otherwise they demonstrated no more support for the public sector than did other respondents, in terms of support for spending on government services, for liberals or the Democratic party, or in denying waste in the public sector. Their opposition to the tax revolt did not extend to any special support for the public sector or the political Left.

Second, in several studies service recipients have displayed some self-interested defense of the specific programs from which they personally benefited. For example, in the California tax revolt, people with children in the public schools showed some modest special support for spending on the schools, those on public assistance supported welfare spending more, and those on Medicare or Medicaid supported public health spending most, all shown in Table VIII. To be sure, these effects were not very strong in absolute terms, ranging only from $+.06$ to $+.09$ (β) and in any case being far outstripped by the effects of symbolic predispositions. And we have given a number of other examples in which service recipients have not had distinctive attitudes.

But again, even when service recipients have displayed significant self-interest effects, they prove to be cognitively quite specific to the individual's own narrow interest. In California, they did not show any special support for government spending other than on the domestic programs they directly benefited from, as shown in Table VIII. Parents were no more supportive than others of welfare or public health, and those on public assistance or Medicaid were no more supportive of the schools. Similarly, in Sweden, receiving sickness or unemployment benefits did not relate to support for welfare spending, nor did having a child at home relate to support for spending on education (Hadenius, 1986, p. 100). Finally, service recipients did not show any special opposition to more general policies affecting the public sector, such as general tax and spending cuts, or the drive for "smaller government" (see Tables V and VIII).

Third, as indicated earlier, our study of college students' attitudes toward resumption of military registration and the draft showed little evidence of self-interested attitudes (Sears *et al.*, 1983). However, more fine-grained analyses did turn up two rather narrow and limited self-interest effects. One proposal had been that the draft would apply only to just one age cohort (e.g., 19 year olds), as it had in the waning days of the Vietnam war. In our study, students 21 and older self-interestedly favored restricting the draft to 18 to 20 year olds (30% supported the restriction) more than did those under 21 (16% supported it). Similarly, student deferments were supported more broadly by freshmen males, who pre-

TABLE VII
THE NARROWNESS OF PUBLIC EMPLOYEES' SELF-INTEREST IN THE CALIFORNIA TAX REVOLT[a,b]

	Public employee in family			
	Self (%)	Family member (%)	None (%)	Difference (%)
Support own pocketbook				
Government workers are not overpaid	85	66	58	+27*
Oppose Proposition 13 (property tax cut)				
Government spending cut too much since Proposition 13	32	21	22	+10
Proposition 13 had bad effect on education	50	51	34	+16*
Gann Amendment (spending cap)				
Would Gann cut public employment?	65	64	61	+4
Would Gann limit public-sector pay?	70	64	62	+8
Oppose Proposition 8 (state income tax cut)				
Would produce very serious service cuts	50	41	60	+20*
State surplus would cover little of revenue shortfall	51	50	36	+15*
Very likely to cut public employment	44	36	29	+15*
This is a very serious effect	51	38	24	+27*
Not likely to improve economy	50	50	40	+10
Not likely to slow inflation	68	62	61	+7
Very likely to hurt school quality	52	43	32	+20*
This is a very serious effect	56	63	53	+3
Will restrict access of poor to college	45	33	24	+21*
General support of public sector				
Democratic	45	46	48	−3
Liberal	40	40	37	+3
Government can cut at most 10%	24	27	25	−1
Want larger government in general	32	28	30	+2
Want increase in service spending (1978)	37	31	37	0
Want increase in service spending (1979)	77	70	72	+5
Support state bailout	80	71	71	+9
Losing local control over schools to the state is very bad	31	37	31	0
School can cut no more than 10%	50	49	42	+8
Should not impose tuition at public universities	68	75	61	+7

[a]California Poll 7807, Tax Revolt Survey, California Poll 8001, California Poll 8002.
[b]Adapted from Sears and Citrin (1985, p. 156).
*$p < .05$.

TABLE VIII

JOINT EFFECTS OF SYMBOLIC PREDISPOSITIONS AND SELF-INTEREST ON SERVICE SPENDING PREFERENCES AND PREFERRED SIZE OF GOVERNMENT IN CALIFORNIA TAX REVOLT[a,b]

	Spending				
	Public schools	Welfare	Public health	All services	Size of government
Symbolic predispositions					
Ideology	.16**	.11**	.15**	.19**	.07*
Party identification	.09**	.09**	.15**	.13**	.16**
Symbolic racism	.16**	.26**	.14**	.22**	.19**
Self-interest					
Parent of school child	.09*	−.02	−.04	−.02	−.04
Service recipience					
On public assistance	.02	.07*	.04	.05	.08*
On medicare/medicaid	.01	.12*	.06*	.09**	.02
On unemployment compensation	.00	.01	.00	−.01	.01
Employment problems					
Work worry	.03	.08*	.05*	.04	.08**
Work problems	.06*	.00	.03	.05	.01
Variance accounted for (R^2)					
Symbolic predispositions only	9.6%	12.9%	0.9%	16.2%	9.9%
Self-interest only	2.5	5.4	2.6	3.6	3.6
Both combined	11.1	16.5	13.3	18.1	12.0

[a]Tax Revolt Survey. From Sears and Citrin (1985, p. 173).

[b]Each column is a separate regression equation. Entries are β values.

*$p < .05$.

**$p < .001$.

sumably could benefit from them, than by senior males (79 to 53%). Both self-interest effects are strongly statistically significant.

But once we moved to policy questions that were not explicitly age related, these age differences disappeared. The younger and older students did not differ significantly on either of the questions having to do with reinstituting registration and draft. Nor did they differ on questions concerning military responses to Soviet aggression. Their age-based self-interested attitudes did not generalize beyond issues specific to their age.

The taxpayers in the tax revolt study again provide one partial exception to this cognitive narrowness of self-interest. They displayed evidence of quite specific self-interested attitudes, as indicated earlier, but of some generality of them, as well. As well as opposing the tax revolt propositions, the heavily tax burdened were markedly more anti-public sector than were the less burdened in a wide

variety of other respects, such as opposing service spending, favoring small government, and perceiving large amounts of waste in government, as shown in Table V. Also, being burdened by one kind of tax did transfer to support for cuts in other kinds of taxes; e.g., homeowners, especially those whose property taxes had been significantly cut by Proposition 13, continued to give more support than renters to the income tax cuts proposed by Proposition 9 (even with income controlled; see Sears & Citrin, 1985, pp. 125 and 131).

But aside from the taxpayers, the rather small self-interest effects uncovered in other areas turn out not only to be rather weak in absolute terms, or unreliable, but when present, to be quite specific to a particular narrow interest. They extend neither to issues affecting other groups with similar interests who normally are in political alliance with them, nor to more broadly applicable formulations of the policy in question.

2. Little Influence on Symbolic Predispositions

The cognitive generality or narrowness of self-interest can be tested in another way. Materialist theorists often propose that ideology, party preferences, and racial prejudice are themselves mere creatures of real economic interests (e.g., Bobo, 1988; LeVine & Campbell, 1972; Lipset, 1981). Even before consulting the data, though, it does not seem very likely that self-interest would strongly shape such symbolic predispositions. The affective preferences we have described as symbolic predispositions tend to crystallize and stabilize by the end of early adulthood (although they are not wholly invariant), and so should not be strongly responsive to the vagaries of adult material interests (Converse & Markus, 1979; Sears, 1989). Nevertheless, it is worth considering the possibility, given the popularity of the theory.

In fact, self-interest proves to be almost wholly uncorrelated with these symbolic predispositions. Three examples will perhaps make the general point. Our study of the origins of policy attitudes toward unemployment, health insurance, busing, and crime (Sears *et al.*, 1980) generated 29 correlations between self-interest indices and these 3 symbolic predispositions. The largest was +.11, and the median, a nonsignificant +.05. In our study of the California tax revolt (which had yielded several significant self-interest effects) we regressed the same three symbolic predispositions on our seven basic self-interest indicators. Only 4 of the 21 self-interest terms were statistically significant (Sears & Citrin, 1985, pp. 169–170). Finally, our study of women's self-interest (Sears & Huddy, 1990a) generated 20 such correlations, but only 4 exceeded +.10, and the median was a nonsignificant +.05.

Moreover, if self-interest controlled symbolic predispositions, placing both in the same regression equation should reduce or even remove the effects of the latter on policy and candidate preferences. In our own research, this has virtually never occurred. Rather, the effects of symbolic predispositions remain un-

diminished in virtually all cases (e.g., Kinder & Sears, 1981; Sears & Citrin, 1985; Sears *et al.*, 1980). The same holds in Hadenius's (1986) extensive research on the determinants of attitudes toward taxation and spending (see summary regressions on pp. 58, 82, 118, and 125; also see Green, 1988; Sudit, 1988; Tyler & Lavrakis, 1983). These findings seem to reflect a pattern of chance relationships. They are typical of the results we have obtained in other studies, and indeed in studies done by others.

3. Can Cognitively Broad Self-Interest Effects Be Induced?

If self-interest effects can be created by politicizing personal experience (as in the Reagan presidency) or by personalizing political issues (as in our item-order experiment), can they also be made cognitively more encompassing? The limited evidence available to date would suggest that it is difficult to do so.

Our item-proximity experiment did induce several apparent self-interest effects, but they too prove to be cognitively quite specific (Sears & Lau, 1983). Placing questions about personal financial situations immediately before questions on presidential performance induced stronger correlations between them, but only when the time frame (past vs future) and arena (economic vs overall) exactly matched. For example, item proximity did induce consistency between perceptions of one's *past finances* and evaluations of *past* presidential *economic* performance. But it did not induce greater consistency between *past* personal finances and projections of the nation's *future* economic health, or (to a lesser extent) between past personal *finances* and *general* national performance ("how things are going in the country" with no reference to the economy). Similarly, item proximity increased the correlation of attitudes toward *federal* tax policy with perceived *federal* tax burden but not with perceived *state or local* tax burden.

These self-interest effects induced by item proximity are cognitively narrow in another way. They tend to occur only when the items are presented immediately after one another; even highly relevant items are unaffected if more distant. An experimental prime affected, at most, the first subsequent item in two experiments by Green (1988, pp. 189–193). And item proximity in the NES series of election surveys seems to have affected the correlation of perceived personal finances with political attitudes only when the items were in very close proximity (Lau *et al.*, 1990). This rapid dissipation parallels that occurring in laboratory priming studies (Bargh *et al.*, 1988).

In short, it would appear that not only are self-interest effects rare, but when they do appear, they are cognitively quite specific to narrow interests. Nor does self-interest influence more general symbolic predispositions. And attempts to induce self-interest effects may be successful only within a cognitively quite

narrow and specific arena, and may quickly dissipate over time. So self-interest appears not to form a foundation for broader thinking about politics, or broader ideologizing.

VII. Possible Facilitating Conditions

Most of the time, then, self-interest has relatively little effect on social and political attitudes. But we have identified a few exceptions. What general principles can we extract from these successes, and the far more numerous failures, about the necessary conditions for self-interest effects?

A. LARGE STAKES

Most economic or cost–benefit models would assume that larger stakes would engage stronger self-interest motives. Perhaps in most of these studies the stakes have simply been too small. Indeed the strongest self-interest effects do seem to have emerged when unusually high stakes were offered. In the California tax revolt, the dollar benefits to the individual were substantial in absolute terms (e.g., the average southern California homeowner was likely to receive an annual savings of almost $2000 from the successful Proposition 13; Sears & Citrin, 1985). And support for that tax cut was quite specifically linked to indicators of such benefits. Similarly, support for the later proposed income tax cuts was closely related to the expected dollar return from them, rising to a considerable height (65%) among those expecting to save over $1000.

Another test of the role of large stakes is to experimentally vary them, as done in several studies by Green (1988). Greater proposed personal tax increases described as the likely cost of a particular policy proposal ($5 vs $50 annually) significantly diminished Californians' support for providing shelter for the homeless (from 86 to 75%) and for building a subway in Los Angeles (from 51 to 29%). Similarly positive findings emerged from experiments on cleaning up California's waterways and on a proposed increase in cigarette taxes (although not in experiments on support for bilingual education or an environmental bond issue; Green, 1988, p. 176).

Similarly, self-interest should have more powerful effects on policy preferences on issues that the individual regards as most important. Young, Borgida, Sullivan, & Aldrich (1987) found that respondents who said economic issues were highly important for both the country and themselves showed strong correlations of self-interest (personal and friends' employment problems, and government benefits received) with Reagan–Mondale voting in 1984 ($r = .36$, vs $+.11$ for the respondents to whom such issues had low importance).

So it appears that variations in the size of the stakes often tend to have a significant effect, at least when personal tax increases or reductions are direct, clear, and highly salient. And self-interest may emerge as a significant force only when the stakes are unusually high in an absolute sense.

B. INFORMATION ABOUT COSTS AND BENEFITS

Most rational choice theories assume that rationality depends on having adequate information. People with more information about the potential costs and benefits of a policy presumably can calculate and act on their interests better than the poorly informed. But three versions of this hypothesis should be distinguished (see Green & Gerken, 1989).

The *clarity* of costs and benefits may be a crucial factor. Green (1988) investigated attitudes toward a ballot proposition in California limiting rent control that was written in such confusing (and perhaps even deceptive) fashion that many mistakenly cast votes contrary to their real preferences. In this case, renters (the interested parties) were more likely to vote their own interests if correctly informed.

The *certainty* of costs and benefits may also be an important variable. In the California tax revolt case, the political remedy was certain. The dollar return to the individual was in effect written into the legislation, a constitutional amendment that would lock in a reduction in property assessments and a cap on tax rates. However, the personal costs and benefits of many other governmental policies are inherently ambiguous and uncertain; e.g., the likelihood of any affirmative action programs actually affecting one's own life, or that of a family member, is often quite uncertain.

Even if the stakes are objectively clear and certain, their *salience* may vary. The real stakes may not be salient because the individual may not be thinking about them when asked about his or her political preference. As a result, self-interest, like other personal constructs, should have more substantial effects on one's attitudes when it is chronically accessible and/or primed. In a study done by Young *et al.* (in press), self-interest was primed through hearing two men discussing money taken out of their paycheck for taxes. This produced a closer correlation between the listener's economic self-interest and policy preferences on another issue.

Political campaigns can, of course, make the personal stakes clearer, more certain, and more salient. Some of our cases of significant self-interest effects fit this pattern. In the California tax revolt, local newspapers ran preelection tables displaying the exact (and large) property or income tax reductions individual voters would be guaranteed to get. And, as already indicated, support for the propositions was directly related to the size of the anticipated reduction (Sears &

Citrin, 1985). Similarly, President Reagan's 1984 campaign to focus attention on the question of "are you better off today than you were four years ago" may have been partially responsible for the surge of self-interested voting for him.

Information about the stakes may often be greater in narrow interest groups. Businessmen's attitudes toward trade policy were influenced by self-interest in the study by Bauer *et al.* (1964). Similarly, Sudit (1988) found significant effects of all four of her measures of objective self-interest on medical students' attitudes toward national health insurance.

While all of this might seem to be consistent with rational choice theory, one should be somewhat cautious. In several cases self-interest had significant effects despite great uncertainty. The strongest self-interest effect on the busing issue occurred in Los Angeles when no specific busing plan had been agreed upon. Public employees opposed the tax revolt despite widely varying predictions about post-Proposition 13 layoffs. And no unreformed smoker really knows what total smoking deprivation is like. These issues allowed for the most threatening sorts of fantasies about one's own possible fate, helped along by the far-ranging rumors that gain circulation in a time of uncertainty and ignorance. In the busing case, for example, there was little real contact with and reality testing among most whites about blacks, and many lurid fantasies lurking just below the surface. The uncertainties and terrors of cigarette deprivation may seem less cosmic to readers who have never smoked, but perhaps not to those who are now or have in the past been heavy smokers. So we suspect respondents' estimates of the probability of very bad outcomes were exaggerated in these cases. Perhaps the devil we know does not motivate self-interest as much as the devil we imagine.

C. GENERAL POLITICAL INFORMATION

General political information is likely to contribute to developing more rational beliefs, and so another possible implication of rational choice models is that better informed individuals should be more influenced by self-interest. However, this hypothesis has failed in three studies. Sears *et al.* (1980) found that those above the median in general political information actually had *less* self-interested policy preferences in three of four issue areas, but, on average, the differences were trivial. Similarly, in our study of college students' attitudes about the novel, complex, and fast-changing set of government proposals about the draft, greater personal vulnerability to the draft actually was slightly more closely associated with *support* for the draft among the better informed (the variance accounted for was 11%, compared to 8% for the less informed; see Sears *et al.*, 1983). In our study of busing (Sears *et al.*, 1979), self-interest had no greater effect among the well educated than among the poorly educated.

It should also be noted that the contrary hypothesis has its supporters: one

could argue that the poorly informed should be the more self-interested because they cannot look beyond the narrow confines of the family (Conover *et al.*, 1986, 1987; Weatherford, 1983). But these studies have found no more central a role for information. Personal finances, personal employment, and income change had only slightly (but nonsignificantly) greater impact on evaluations of government performance among the less informed in one case (Weatherford, 1983). Conover *et al.* (1986, 1987) found but one of eight such comparisons to be significant with respect to retrospective and prospective evaluations of national economic conditions.

D. FEAR VERSUS GREED

In several of the positive effects of self-interest cited earlier, feared negative outcomes appeared to be more salient than desired positive outcomes. Public employees fearing the loss of their jobs particularly opposed the tax revolts; self-interest sparked opposition to busing particularly when future busing plans were unclear but possibly massive; and threats of anti-smoking legislation were particularly likely to motivate opposition. To those might be added Bauer, Pool, and Dexter's (1964) findings that firms' interests in trade policy were more powerfully associated with their executives' policy attitudes and attempts to influence Congress when the firm's interest lay in protectionism and high tariffs (fear of foreign competition) than when it lay in free trade and low tariffs (desire for foreign exports).

These asymmetrical effects may reflect similar dynamics. In each case, high-stakes threats to personal well-being were present, combined with sufficient uncertainty about the exact nature of the threat to allow them to become exaggerated and distorted. While some readers might not feel that smoking deprivation is a major threat compared to public employees' possible loss of jobs, or white parents' fantasies about the fate of their children to be bused, they would perhaps be well advised not to make that observation to smokers (or even ex-smokers).

This parallels the now substantial laboratory evidence for asymmetrical responses to positive and negative events. Negative events seem to elicit stronger physiological responses, more strongly influence mood, focus attention more, influence judgment more powerfully, elicit more attributional activity, and lead to more social mobilization than do positive events (Taylor, 1991). So, too, the effort to avoid costs may motivate sociopolitical preferences more strongly than does the effort to accumulate gain. Of course in these cases there was no direct test of this contrast. And thorough testing of it in the case of taxpayer response to the tax revolt came to the opposite conclusion: those who stood to profit most (e.g., high-income homeowners) supported it more than those most vulnerable to loss (e.g., elderly low-income homeowners; see Sears & Citrin, 1985). So this hypothesis must remain speculative at this juncture.

E. ATTRIBUTIONS OF RESPONSIBILITY

The pocketbook voting hypothesis proposes that voters' support for incumbent candidates is based on how well they have fared during the period of that incumbency. But it requires another crucial assumption, that the incumbent be perceived as somehow responsible for those outcomes. A voter who has just been fired for drunkenness on the job cannot claim that as a rational basis for a vote against the incumbent president. So a common assumption is that self-interest will affect political preferences primarily when individuals attribute responsibility for their well-being to the government or to society at large, rather than to themselves.

At the aggregate level, congressional election outcomes are more closely correlated with changed economic conditions when one candidate is an incumbent (especially a long-term incumbent), as would be expected if voters were only punishing or rewarding those possibly responsible for the economic situation (Fiorina, 1983; Hibbing & Alford, 1981). On the other hand, Stein (1990) finds that pocketbook voting supported the incumbent-to-blame thesis for neither senators nor governors in 1982. Political issues also vary in whether or not their personal costs and benefits can unequivocally be attributed to government. Some can: successful tax-cutting propositions ensure that the government will cut taxes, and governments are clearly the cause of busing children to racially mixed schools. However, while tax cuts often do evoke strong self-interest effects, busing usually does not, as indicated earlier. And various other events usually attributed to government have not produced positive self-interest effects, such as inflation, the Reagan budget and tax cuts, or the 1982 recession (Conover *et al.*, 1986, 1987; Feldman, 1984; Kiewiet, 1983; Sears & Citrin, 1985; Sears & Lau, 1983).

But more appropriate tests of the attributional hypothesis again rely on individual-level data. Presidential approval has been shown to correlate with perceptions of presidential responsibility for economic conditions; e.g., President Reagan's performance ratings did not suffer particularly from the 1982 recession among those who blamed it on the predecessor Carter administration (Peffley & Williams, 1985).

Does self-interest indeed primarily affect political preferences in that subset of individuals who perceive government or society at large as responsible for their personal problems? Feldman (1982) found that perceived family finances affected political attitudes only among those who attributed trends in their own finances to societal, as opposed to personal, causes. Stein (1990) found that gubernatorial voting was influenced by perceived presidential responsibility for the state economy, while perceived gubernatorial responsibility for state economic problems had relatively little power over gubernatorial votes, consistent with his finding that governors are not generally held responsible for the state of the local economy. Other studies have variously supported the hypothesis

(Abramowitz, Lanoue, & Ramesh, 1988) or found nonsignificant differences in the predicted direction (Kinder & Mebane, 1983; Lau & Sears, 1981) or null findings (Sears *et al.*, 1980). The evidence seems mixed but mildly supportive on this point, then.

F. OTHER PERCEPTIONS AND VALUES

We might briefly mention four other plausible moderating variables that have so far turned out to be dry holes. Presumably, self-interest should influence those sociopolitical attitudes that are perceived as instrumental to the individual's own outcomes. Thus, its effects should be greatest when people believe their attitudes will influence government actions and thereby their own outcomes. However, we found that those above the medians on perceived government responsiveness and/or personal political efficacy did not exhibit stronger self-interest effects than did those below the medians (Sears *et al.*, 1980).

Some people value personal material gain more than others do, and so perhaps should exhibit stronger self-interest effects than others. Over several tests, materialistic values have sometimes generated more self-interested attitudes, but, just as often, less (see Green, 1988; Sears *et al.*, 1980). On the other hand, holding public-regarding values (valuing the outcomes of the collectivity more than the outcomes of the self) should generate less self-interested political preferences (Wilson & Banfield, 1964). One direct test of this hypothesis (Sears *et al.*, 1980) yielded no such differences, but should not be regarded as definitive. Other tests have been indirect, indexing public-regarding values with demographic variables such as social class and ethnicity; e.g., upper middle class Anglo-Saxon Protestants are assumed to be more public regarding, and working class ethnic Catholics, more private regarding (Wilson & Banfield, 1964; see also Bowman, Ippolito, & Levin, 1972; Lupsha, 1975). This seems to us an excessively crude test, since values, like self-interest, are quite imprecisely indexed by demographic variables.

G. SUMMARY

This brief excursion has dealt with several situational and dispositional conditions that have been thought to facilitate the self-interest motive. Self-interest is most potent when the issue provides large, clear, certain, and salient costs or benefits. At one point we semifacetiously pegged the price of a Californian's vote at around the value of a color television set, since support for state income tax cuts tipped over the 50% mark among those who would save $500 annually or more (Sears & Citrin, 1985). On the other hand, individual differences in

general political information seem to have little effect one way or the other. That information about the specific interests at stake can help, while more general political information does not, is consistent with our general view that the occasional effects of self-interest occur under unusually facilitating conditions that are quite narrowly specific to the issue at hand.

There is some dispute about the role of attributions of responsibility for personal outcomes. The attributional hypothesis has taken on the status of an "almost ubiquitous" assumption in the literature on self-interest (Kiewiet & Rivers, 1984, p. 381). Yet the attribution of government responsibility sometimes fosters self-interest effects, and sometimes does not. In any case, these variables would seem at best necessary, but insufficient, conditions for the operation of self-interest.

Other values and dispositions have largely proved unsuccessful as moderators of self-interest effects. Perceived government responsiveness, political efficacy, materialistic values, and private-regarding values all have generally failed, even though they surface from quite plausible hypotheses. The very difficulties that self-interest faces in motivating important social and political attitudes, then, are indicated by the general failure to uncover powerful moderating variables specifying conditions for its emergence. Even the most plausibly facilitating conditions usually are inadequate to give it a major role.

VIII. Critiques of the Research

Challenging a hypothesis that is so often taken for granted inevitably generates some criticism. The most common critiques have concerned our conceptual definition of self-interest, especially regarding the role of group (as opposed to self-) interest, and our operationalization of it (see especially Bobo, 1983; Pettigrew, 1985; Sniderman & Tetlock, 1986a, 1986b).

A. CONCEPTUAL DEFINITION OF SELF-INTEREST

Perhaps the most common critique is that our definition of self-interest is too narrow, in three ways. First, it excludes nonmaterial interests. As indicated above, our definition was deliberately selected to align it with common usage. Excluding nonmaterial values does so, we believe. Ordinary people do not call each other "selfish" when they defend their own moral principles; e.g., a Shiite fundamentalist is not called "selfish" for opposing Western secular dress for women in his country.

Second, we exclude long-term self-interest. The view of such nineteenth cen-

tury theorists as de Tocqueville was that political preferences are influenced by the individual's longer term sense of self-interest rather than merely by short-term self-interest. For example, a young woman's attitude toward social security taxes may be dictated by her anticipated needs for social security benefits in retirement as well as by concern about her current tax burden. Even symbolic predispositions could conceivably reflect long-term self-interest. A young business student may conclude that in the long run his interests will best be served by the Republican party, even though no partisan issues now affect his own well-being directly. Similarly, apparently disinterested sociotropic judgments could be based in long-term self-interest. People who perceive the Republicans as having presided over a period of great national prosperity may support Republican candidates because they think that a party that is good for the national economy will ultimately benefit them as well, whether or not they themselves have especially benefited from that prosperity.

We have excluded long-term self-interest for two reasons. In defining self-interest, we desired to generate a testable, falsifiable hypothesis. From a purely technical point of view, it is not obvious how one could obtain rigorous empirical tests of long-term self-interest, since it is extremely difficult to assess uncontaminated by other variables, given the rather projective quality of predicting into the distant mists of the future. But even if such methodological problems could be surmounted, we would still expect short-term self-interest to have a stronger political impact, since it is more proximal, emotionally evocative, and easier for the individual to calculate. In the one effort that we are aware of to make a direct empirical comparison between short-term and long-term self-interest, Lewis-Beck (1988, p. 121) found that voters' expectations about their financial prospects in the next year had a marginally significant effect on their 1984 presidential vote, whereas their expectations for 5 years hence had literally no effect. So there is currently no hard evidence that voters are more influenced by their long-term self-interest than by their short-term self-interest.

B. GROUP INTEREST

A third critique is that by focusing on egoistic concerns, and ignoring outcomes that affect the individual's group, we exclude the most potent forms of interest-maximizing behavior in public life. Politics is thought by many to revolve around group interests (see Conover, 1985; 1987). And even self-interest may be more potent if linked to one's group's interests. For example, individual whites' opposition to busing or affirmative action may be based more in their fears about threats to their group's racial hegemony than in racial threats to their personal well-being (Bobo, 1983, 1988; Pettigrew, 1985; Schuman, Steeh, & Bobo, 1985; Sniderman & Tetlock, 1986a).

1. Three Distinctions

To us, the issue is somewhat more complicated than that. Three key distinctions must be made to understand the relationship of group interest to self-interest (also see Sears & Kinder, 1985). One is whether or not the relevant political costs and benefits to the group also affect the self; that is, whether the self is interdependent with the group. Voters may support the political positions of their groups because they perceive their personal interests will be met if the group's interests are (Campbell *et al.*, 1960). We might describe this as "self-oriented group interest," because it intermixes group and self-interest. On the other hand, an individual may support a policy because it benefits the group as a whole irrespective of its impact on his or her own well-being. A successful black doctor might support job training for unskilled workers because it would benefit blacks as a whole, even though it would not affect her own well-being. Such "pure group interest" is involved when individuals are motivated by the policy's impact on the group as a whole irrespective of its impact on their own well-being; i.e., when self and group are not interdependent. This distinction, incidentally, parallels that made by Sen (1977) about actions on behalf of others: they may be motivated by egoistic costs and benefits, which he describes as "sympathy," or by nonegoistic concerns, which he describes as "commitment," often motivated by a sense of morality.

Second, group interest can be subdivided between "realistic group interest," involving real short-term material costs and benefits to the group, and "symbolic group interest," which does not. The black doctor's support for job training may be based in her expectation that it would provide material gains to young blacks. On the other hand, postrevolutionary changes in national flags, such as in Eastern Europe in 1989 and 1990, tend to be more symbolic, and to draw support because of affective responses to the relevant groups rather than from expectations of tangible, material gains for those groups.

Third, the interests of a particular group may or may not be in conflict with those of another group. Most work on group interest has grown out of the realistic group conflict hypothesis that people's own interests are mobilized when their group is in competition with another group for scarce resources. A good example is Bobo's (1983, 1988) theory that whites' opposition to racial policies is based in their feeling that white hegemony (including their own personally privileged position) is threatened by blacks' gains. In our terms, this adds the further element of "perceived group conflict"; i.e., perceptions that the realistic interests of blacks and whites are negatively interdependent, perhaps being in a zero-sum game.

"Group interest," then, can take several forms which differ in consequential ways: it may or may not involve outcomes to the self as well as to the group; it may or may not involve realistic, material gains to the group; and it may or may not involve competition with the interests of another group.

2. Self-Oriented Group Interest

Of these, self-oriented group interest is the most relevant to the self-interest hypothesis, since it involves outcomes to the self as well as to the group. The hypothesis would be that there is some added political clout to self-interest if it is mixed with group interest. But two still further variants of self-oriented group interest might be distinguished.

The self may be perceived as positively interdependent with the ingroup. For example, a racial majority's opposition to policies favoring minorities might be influenced by perceptions of material interdependence between the self and the majority ingroup. In one study, whites' perceived material interdependence with the ingroup (other whites) did contribute to their opposition to bilingual education (Huddy & Sears, 1989). However, in a second it proved irrelevant to their attitudes toward racial policies and Jesse Jackson (Jessor, 1988).

Second, the self may be perceived as negatively interdependent with a competitive outgroup. This was also tested in Jessor's (1988) two surveys of whites' attitudes. In this case, outgroup interdependence (the perception that one's own outcomes might be harmed by blacks' successes as a group in areas such as affirmative action) did correlate with opposition to racial policies and to Jesse Jackson. But when included in regressions with symbolic racism and affect toward blacks, it was uniformly nonsignificant. This suggests that perceived interdependence was symbolic rather than based in self-interest. These tests of self-oriented group interest have therefore yielded only limited support for it. However, in both cases there was strong evidence for the role of antiminority attitudes and other symbolic predispositions, consistent with the symbolic politics view.

There have also been some studies of what might appear to be "realistic group interest." The pocketbook politics hypothesis, testing whether voters reward and punish incumbents according to their own personal finances, has a group-level analog, in which their votes are influenced by perceptions of their own group's economic progress or decline. The findings have not been encouraging. Kinder, Adams, and Gronke (1989) found that such perceptions (by a number of groups) had no effects on the 1984 presidential vote, and Sears and Huddy (1990a) found that women's political attitudes were no more influenced than men's by perceptions that women's finances were declining. On the other hand, in Jessor's (1988) surveys, perceived intergroup conflict between whites and blacks did significantly increase whites' opposition to racial policies. However, none of these effects are relevant to "self-oriented group interest," and so do not really bear on the question of self-interest.

3. Fraternal Deprivation

A parallel contrast between self- and group-based motivations has been made with respect to relative deprivation (Runciman, 1966). Egoistic deprivation, the

analog to self-interest, involves comparisons between one's own well-being and that of others. Fraternal deprivation, the analog to group interest, involves comparisons between the well-being of one's ingroup and that of other groups in society.

A considerable number of studies have found that fraternal deprivation has considerably more impact on sociopolitical attitudes than does egoistic deprivation. Pettigrew (1972; Vanneman & Pettigrew, 1972) found that fraternal deprivation (defined in either class or racial terms) had a considerable effect on anti-black racial attitudes, and on voting for the "white backlash" candidacies of George Wallace and white mayoral candidates. However, egoistic deprivation had little effect. Similarly, Guimond and Dubé-Simard (1983) found that fraternal, but not egoistic, deprivation contributed to Quebec nationalism. Crosby (1982, 1984) found that working women felt fraternal deprivation more acutely than they did egoistic deprivation: they felt that women in general were unfairly paid relative to men, but were just as satisfied with their own jobs as men (also see Taylor & Dubé, 1986). Gays' perceptions of discrimination against gays in general motivated militancy more than did their perceptions of being personally discriminated against (Birt & Dion, 1987). And fraternal deprivation significantly predicted protest orientation among unemployed workers in Australia, whereas egoistic deprivation did not (Walker & Mann, 1987).

The available research, then, suggests that "self-oriented" group interest is not especially more potent that ordinary self-interest. Perceived interdependence of the self with either the ingroup or the outgroup in racial conflicts does not generally influence racial attitudes. The evidence is more mixed on the role of pure group interest, dissociated from considerations of the self. The group analog of pocketbook politics has not so far been shown to have strong effects, but perceptions of intergroup conflict may. A number of studies have found that egoistic deprivation, like self-interest, has relatively little political clout. But concerns about the group's well-being—fraternal deprivation—may have a stronger influence on sociopolitical attitudes. Self-oriented or egoistic motives seem to be relatively weak, then, while group-oriented motives do have some greater strength. But it is not obvious that their strength depends on a linkage to the self.

C. OPERATIONALIZING SELF-INTEREST

There have also been three general critiques of our operational definitions of self-interest. One is that they are in some cases too broad, diluting self-interest by combining people with little interest along with the few genuinely interested parties. Clearly *not* having children in public schools would seem to exclude that source of self-interest in the busing issue, but merely having a child in public school would not by itself insure self-interest. The truly self-interested parents

would need to have children directly vulnerable to the impact of busing. We have protected ourselves in most of these studies by examining both refining combinations of self-interest variables and interaction effects; e.g., whites who *both* have children in the public schools *and* live in a district with busing also fail to show unusually high levels of opposition to it (Sears *et al.*, 1979). Such refinements have rarely improved the case for self-interest.

A second critique is that our work has relied too heavily on objective measures of self-interest, and that subjectively perceived interests would give more predictive power (e.g., Bobo, 1983; Pettigrew, 1985). For example, subjective feelings of being threatened by the desegregation of one's neighborhood school may be more important than its objective desegregation. This is a quite reasonable point: subjective perceptions of objective conditions are indeed more proximal to the dependent variables in our causal models, and so should have more effect.

To be sure, over our entire research program, about two-thirds of the self-interest measures have been objective. But this reflects a deliberate methodological choice. Our concern has been about the reactivity of subjective self-interest measures, and the resulting threat to unequivocal causal interpretations. One danger comes from reverse-causality effects in which the dependent variable affects the index of self-interest. A concrete example comes from a study of medical students' self-interest in the national health insurance issue (Sudit, 1988). Opposition to national health insurance could easily influence such subjective self-interest measures as perceptions of whether it would affect the earnings of doctors. The dependent variable would seem less likely to influence such objective indicators of self-interest as the medical student's actual indebtedness at graduation. And indeed, subjective self-interest was correlated with opposition to national health insurance, while objective self-interest was not. A second danger is that subjective indicators of self-interest may be influenced by symbolic predispositions. For example, subjective perceptions of self-interest in the busing issue may be influenced by racial prejudice (McClendon, 1985).

However, in our research we have usually taken the precaution of using both objective and subjective measures of self-interest. And in fact the two have had very similar effects whenever parallel measures have been available. The objective fact of having children in the public schools in districts with busing did not increase whites' opposition to busing, but neither did the subjective probability of busing children in or out of the respondent's neighborhood schools (see Tables II and III). The objective proportion of Hispanics in one's county increased non-Hispanics' opposition to bilingual education as much as did subjective estimates of the proportion of Hispanics in the neighborhood (see Table IV). Objective personal tax obligations (homeownership) had about the same effect on support for the California tax revolt as did subjective feelings of tax burden (see Table V). Kiewiet (1983) actually found stronger effects of objective than of subjective measures of unemployment, contrary to expectation.

Part of the reason that their effects have been so similar in our research is that we have tried to make the subjective measures as unreactive as possible. Most important, we have tried to ensure that the subjective measures of self-interest have not simply been slightly altered versions of the dependent variable (e.g., not using items such as "do you think Proposition 13 will help or hurt your personal financial situation?"). We would suggest, then, that objective measures of self-interest are the more trustworthy, but that when nonreactive subjective measures are used, they prove to have about the same impact as do objective measures.[4]

A third criticism concerns our eschewing demographic variables, especially social class, as indicators of self-interest. Our view, to reiterate, is that they are generally too distal to measure self-interest precisely, being even more distal than the objective measures of personal impact just discussed. Beyond that, it might be noted, social class simply does not consistently have the effects predicted by a self-interest theory. Presumably high-income people should strongly support tax cuts. Yet in Sweden, income explained just over 1% of the variance in discontent with corporate and income taxes and none in general discontent with taxes. And social class had no residual effect with symbolic predispositions considered (Hadenius, 1986, pp. 31 and 118). Among American whites, social status has no overall relationship with support for government services and aid to the disadvantaged (jobs, health, and educational services). Nor does social class usually relate closely to attitudes on issues such as abortion, aid to minorities, or defense spending (Himmelstein & McRae, 1988). Indeed, the most marked aspect of upper stratum white Americans is not their self-serving economic conservatism but their partisan polarization (Shingles, 1989). In short, our abstention from the use of demographic variables as indicators of self-interest seems unlikely to have resulted in our ignoring strong self-interest effects.

D. GOVERNMENTALLY INDUCED VARIANCE

Finally, in critiquing the negative findings of pocketbook voting research, Kramer (1983) has contended that self-interest effects are relatively rare in cross-sectional survey studies precisely because government is in fact responsible for relatively little of the variance in individuals' material well-being, and such

[4]Where should the more proximal, reactive perceptions of subjective self-interest fit into our model, then? Del Boca (1982) suggests that quite reactive forms of subjective self-interest in the ERA, such as the perceived personal effects of a policy, could be treated as a cognitive component of the policy attitude itself rather than as self-interest. This resolution is methodologically conservative, but it may underestimate self-interest effects since it does not allow for the possibility that such perceived effects of a policy on the self do genuinely motivate preferences about it. However, we know of no sound way to extract a causal inference from such correlations.

studies are poorly equipped to distinguish governmentally induced changes from all others. The relatively small boost (or dampening) that government-induced macroeconomic changes give to individuals' personal finances may be swamped, in a cross-sectional study, by all the other sources of variance in them, and therefore not be revealed for the small but electorally decisive influence they truly represent.

Our response might be anticipated. First, some personal economic changes are unequivocally induced by government, such as the tax cuts in California's Proposition 13 or in Reagan tax and spending cuts; sometimes the political response is self-interested, but more often it is not. Second, we earlier reviewed research on attributions of responsibility for changes in personal well-being to government; they sometimes contribute to self-interest effects, but often do not help much. Third, people's perceptions of government-induced changes in their well-being have themselves been used as self-interest indicators. To test their effects, Lewis-Beck (1988, pp. 56 and 90) used a modification of the basic personal finances item that read, have "the government's policies" had a good or bad effect "with regard to the financial situation of your household?" This item turned out to have a slightly greater impact than did the apolitical version of personal finances, but was still generally nonsignificant. This critique, therefore, seems less to challenge the research than help to explain its outcomes: the assertion that individuals' well-being is not much influenced by government (and not all economists would agree) might help to explain why their attitudes are so rarely motivated very much by self-interest.

IX. Why Doesn't Self-Interest Usually Work?

If we accept the general finding that self-interest usually does not have a significant effect on Americans' social and political attitudes, why doesn't it? We offer four main explanations.

A. THE STAKES: USUALLY NOT LARGE, CLEAR, OR CERTAIN

One is that the personal stakes in most social and political issues are not usually large, clear, or certain to very many people. Ordinary people do not very often perceive government policy issues or candidate choices as having important personal costs and benefits. For example, the personal costs of unemployment may be intense, but they are concentrated in relatively small groups of people; only 3 or 4% cite unemployment as their most serious personal problem,

according to Kiewiet (1983). Similarly, in the midst of a hotly contested campaign over the equal rights amendment, few women felt that it would much affect their own lives, and few (6 and 11% in two samples) explained their attitudes toward it in terms of those possible effects (Del Boca, 1982). At a time when affirmative action programs provoked great controversy, only 1% reported that they or someone in their family had been aided, and 7% had lost out in jobs or school admissions, because of affirmative action (CBS News/*New York Times,* 1977). In 1985, despite a much-publicized war on drugs, they were described as having created trouble in one's own family by only 9% (ABC News/*Washington Post,* 1985).

Frequently people do not perceive as serious problems issues that objectively should stimulate widespread self-interested revolt. An example is the curious phenomenon of public apathy about nuclear weapons. One might think humans would be united in vehement opposition to weapons that could eradicate all human civilization and indeed life on this planet. Yet researchers have consistently found very little public concern about them. For example, Schuman, Ludwig, and Krosnick (1986) found that in the early 1980s an average of only 6% cited nuclear war, or war in general, as the most important problem facing the nation (also see Fiske, 1987; Kramer *et al.*, 1983). The reason apparently was that most people saw it as impossible, or too far in the future to worry about.

The personal consequences of apparently horrendous macroeconomic changes are often unpredictable and even mixed. The personal costs of inflation, which officeholders treat as if it were the bubonic plague, are particularly difficult to establish. Prices go up, but for many, wages and/or the value of their real property go up much more, so short-term losses may be overshadowed by longer term gains.

The California tax revolt was a clear exception. As indicated earlier, the stakes were generally quite large; the property tax savings were likely to average almost $2000/year to southern California homeowners and about two-thirds of the adult population in California owned their own homes (Sears & Citrin, 1985, p. 118). Media coverage of these personal gains was extensive and concrete, making these gains quite salient. Implementation was assured if the voters supported Proposition 13 because it was a constitutional amendment with quite specific language about tax rate caps and assessment rollbacks. But these large, clear, and certain stakes were the exceptional case.

B. THE BIAS TOWARD INTERNAL ATTRIBUTIONS

External attributions (to government or society at large) for one's personal well-being seem on occasion to be crucial preconditions for self-interest effects. That represents yet another difficult hurdle for self-interest. Several researchers

have observed a general genuine bias toward making internal attributions for one's own outcomes, whether described as "the illusion of control" (Langer, 1975), "the ethic of self-reliance" (Sniderman & Brody, 1977), or a "belief in a just world" in which people get the outcomes they deserve (Lerner, 1965). Moreover, Americans value this sense of internal control. Experimental subjects like people who believe human behavior is caused by internal causes better than those who believe it is caused by external causes; they themselves claim to believe in internal control more than the "average person" does; and when trying to ingratiate themselves with others, they bias their own self-presentation in the direction of claiming a belief in internal control (Jellison & Green, 1981).

This pervasive bias toward internal control should work against attributing one's own outcomes to broader collectivities. Indeed, empirically, people do seem only rarely to see society or government as responsible for either their present personal financial well-being or its future prospects (Feldman, 1982; Kinder & Mebane, 1983). The unemployed tend to perceive their unemployment as caused by individual, proximal circumstances, rather than seeing government or the society at large as responsible (Schlozman & Verba, 1979). This bias toward internality is, not surprisingly, stronger for positive than for negative outcomes; for example, in a national survey, only 1% of those whose economic situation had improved gave a societal attribution, whereas almost half did of those whose situation had worsened (Feldman, 1982; also see Ross & Sicoly, 1979). But even among those in worse positions, a majority did not blame society or government. Nor do people often feel that government should help them solve their personal economic problems (Brody & Sniderman, 1977).

This bias toward a sense of internal control might well be highly adaptive in some areas of life, especially in coping with illness, accidents, and traumas such as rape, as Taylor and Brown (1988) have argued. For example, it is probably useful for personal mental health that people display unrealistic optimism and exaggerated perceptions of mastery with respect to crime, accidents, and illness (Perloff & Fetzer, 1986; Weinstein, 1989). It may even have some societal advantage by lessening individuals' absorption with their own particularistic needs at the expense of the community. On the other hand, obstacles to the operation of self-interest in the political thinking of the general public can lead to problems of pluralistic ignorance and false consciousness, and therefore exploitation.

C. REFLEXIVE AFFECTIVE RESPONSES TO POLITICAL SYMBOLS

At a number of points we have indicated that symbolic predispositions usually have considerably greater strength than does self-interest in determining policy

and candidate preferences. This has held despite the use of rather conservative tests of their effects, generally using only party identification, political ideology, and/or racial intolerance as symbolic predispositions, often measured with but a single item. In one case, we did make a strenuous effort to milk these symbolic predispositions for every last jot of predictability, and we believe it represents a good example of what could be done more generally with more thorough measurement: Sears *et al.* (1979) report that an equation combining two symbolic predispositions (racial intolerance and ideology, both strongly significant) with self-interest and demographics (all with weak effects) accounted for a healthy 29.1% of the variance in whites' opposition to busing. Moreover, individuals with more information, who should therefore have more "rational" preferences, are even more influenced by symbolic predispositions than by self-interest. In most studies, symbolic predispositions have had far stronger effects among the well informed and/or well educated than among the poorly informed and/or poorly educated, while the effects of self-interest have not been enhanced by greater information (e.g., Sears *et al.*, 1979, 1980, 1983).

Why do symbolic predispositions have such strong effects? According to a symbolic politics theory, political attitudes reflect the affects previously conditioned to the specific symbols included in the attitude object. In its simplest form, it suggests that affects are tied quite closely to the manifest symbolic content of a particular attitude object, without detailed consideration of underlying or latent meanings (see Sears & Huddy, 1990b; Sears, Huddy, & Schaffer, 1986).

This then places a premium on cognitively simple symbols that are affectively evocative. And the external informational environment promotes this process of simplification, as indicated earlier. Politicians and journalists constantly condense the complexity of the political world into simplified symbolic terms. In contrast, individuals' personal experiences are perhaps too close at hand, complex, and individuated, to lend themselves to easy generalization; they are "morselized" and difficult to trigger by political symbols. In other words, the world of public affairs is coded to trigger symbolic predispositions, while the world of private life is not.

If political dialogue is coded into abstract, symbolic terms, while personal experience is morselized, attitudes toward the two should tend to be cognitively compartmentalized. And there is substantial evidence that judgments about one's personal well-being usually are quite independent of those made about group or national well-being even when they concern the same general domain of life. For example, perceived personal finances correlate only weakly with perceived trends in national business conditions (Kinder & Kiewiet, 1979), and studies of the unemployed (Schlozman & Verba, 1979) and of working women (Crosby, 1984) show that they compartmentalize personal and group well-being. This even held for men's attitudes about working women: "men . . . kept their so-

ciopolitical attitudes separate from their personal lives. . . . dissociation of personal and public lives was not limited only to people who are, themselves, victims" (Crosby & Herek, 1986, p. 64).

Attitudes about these two cognitive domains, personal experience and the public arena, can be accessed separately by appropriate framing of political issues, as Iyengar (1987, 1990) has shown in several experiments. Framing an issue in terms of societal conditions or national problems tends to produce attributions that place responsibility (for either problem or solution) on government or society at large, while framing it in terms of individual cases yields internal attributions. The same point is made by correlational data: personal experience with crime influenced judgments of personal vulnerability to it but not base-rate judgments of the general crime rate, which tend to be influenced more by mass media information on crime (Tyler, 1980). Similarly, Tyler and Cook (1984) found that exposure to base-rate information on risk of death due to firearms or drunk driving influenced perceptions of these problems' societal seriousness but did not change judgments of personal risk.

These findings lend support to the notion that people are slow to draw societal-level implications from personal-level information, and vice versa; the two seem to be cognitively compartmentalized. Our considerable discussion of the narrowness of even significant self-interest effects, other than those of taxpayers, makes the same point. Insofar as people do connect private interests to public life, it is done in a highly specific, morselized way; no general belief systems connect the two, and personal experience rarely gets related to more general societal or political symbols.

In short, the dominance of symbolic predispositions may come about because of a general tendency toward reflexive affective responses to political symbols. Political symbols may come semantically coded in ways that make them easy to link to symbolic predispositions, but difficult to connect to the blooming and buzzing confusion that is our daily personal experience. The two realms tend to be cognitively compartmentalized.

D. PUBLIC REGARDINGNESS

One possible reason for this compartmentalization is that most people may be politically socialized to respond to public issues in a principled and public-regarding manner. Even proponents of the rational choice perspective acknowledge this possibility: "In reality, men are not always selfish, even in politics. They frequently do what appears to be individually irrational because they believe it is socially rational—i.e., it benefits others even though it harms them personally" (Downs, 1957, p. 27). People may have been taught to weigh most heavily the collective good when they don their "political hats," and to weigh

their private good most heavily only when dealing with their personal affairs (Sears *et al.*, 1980). Indeed, some have taken public regardingness as the major alternative to self-interest. If "a vote . . . [that is] . . . incompatible with a certain voter's self-interest narrowly conceived . . . was not in some sense irrational or accidental, then it must be presumed that his action was based on some conception of 'the public interest'" (Wilson & Banfield, 1964, p. 876). If so, symbolic or sociotropic attitudes might express the adult's sense of the public good, and would be quite deliberately and self-consciously given more weight than private considerations in judgments about public policy.

This does not necessarily imply that the public-regarding view in question is a particularly noble one. One may support genocide in order to prevent the "mongrelization of the race," or oppose welfare because it simply rewards sloth. Nor would it necessarily rule out all forms of self-interest; e.g., de Tocqueville felt that personal and national interests converged in "enlightened self-interest." In any event, too little is known at the present time about the ordinary individuals' values in this respect; e.g., the extent to which they feel that self-interest is a legitimate basis for forming attitudes about social and political issues, and if so, under what conditions.[5]

X. Conclusions

To summarize, we have reviewed a large number of studies examining the effects of ordinary citizens' short-term material self-interest on their sociopolitical attitudes. We have examined attitudes toward racial policies and black candidates, economic policy issues, pocketbook voting, and attitudes toward political violence. The conclusion is quite clear: self-interest ordinarily does not have much effect upon the ordinary citizen's sociopolitical attitudes. There are only occasional exceptions, as when there are quite substantial and clear stakes (especially regarding personal tax burdens) or ambiguous and dangerous threats. Moreover, self-interest effects generally turn out not only to be rather small in absolute terms, or unreliable, but also, when present, to be quite specific to the policies most narrowly linked to the self-interest dimension in question. The effects of self-interest usually extend neither to other related policy issues nor to more general policy or ideological questions. The general public seems to think about most political issues, most of the time, in a disinterested frame of mind.

[5]One positive finding has been reported by Del Boca (1982, p. 63) concerning women and the ERA. Del Boca asked them if they regarded personal self-interest as a legitimate political motive. Among those who did, objective self-interest had a strong effect ($r = .38$), but it did not among those who did not ($r = .17$).

We have offered four main explanations for these weak effects: the individual's personal stakes in matters of public policy are rarely large, clear, and certain; they usually make internal attributions for their own personal outcomes; the world of personal experience is not cognitively coded in terms that relate easily to the abstractions and generalities of public life; and citizens may be socialized to a norm of public regardingness about policy issues affecting the broader community.

These conclusions complement other recent challenges to the assumptions of neoclassical economics about human nature (e.g., Etzioni, 1988; Hogarth & Reder, 1987; Lynn & Oldenquist, 1986; Mansbridge, 1990; Simon, 1985). The present article extends the challenge to a central element in society's mechanisms for resolving conflicts of interest, the ordinary individual's preferences about societal allocation of resources. Its primary focus, then, is on some of the phenomena about which that assumptive framework has some of its most provocative and consequential things to say.

If the data are as conclusive as we have suggested, why is the belief in the central political role of self-interest so pervasive? Our primary answer is that it persists because it is congruent with the dominant theories of human behavior, values, and social and economic structures of Western society. The focus upon the individual as self-oriented maximizer begun by Thomas Hobbes, and promoted further by Adam Smith and the utilitarians, continues to be a central theory in Western intellectual history. And it is consistent with reinforcement theory, perhaps the dominant psychological theory of this century; people are thought to pursue goals that they have basic and material incentives for pursuing.

The self-interest hypothesis is also congruent with the most fundamental of American values—individualism. Americans' belief that a political and economic system in which each individual pursues his own interests assures both freedom and equal opportunity. Privileging the collective interest of the community, rather than the individual's interest, is an ideal common in conservative political movements in Europe and in the cultural teaching of the Catholic Church. But that is not the dominant value in America, a fact much lamented in the wake of the "Reagan Revolution," decried as selfishly oriented (see Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985; Etzioni, 1988; Mansbridge, 1990; Reich, 1988; Sandel, 1982).

Self-interest is central to the structure of the American economic and political systems as well. The economic system is founded on an Adam Smith version of the self-interest hypothesis: that the individual and the collectivity both prosper most if each individual pursues his or her own interest. And the Federalists argued that the fundamental basis for the American constitutional system—the "checks and balances" of tripartite government—were required to prevent any one of the many competing interests from prevailing. Indeed, it is likely that the political thinking of the ordinary person is not very salient in intellectuals'

assessment of political motivation. More visible, doubtless, are the self-interested attempts of interest groups such as labor unions or manufacturers' associations to influence public policy.

Finally, perhaps, a belief in the ubiquity of the self-interest motive is especially appealing to certain kinds of people. Some people pride themselves on a cynical, selfish account of human behavior, whereas others are drawn to a generous, altruistic portrait. The hard-bitten, tough-minded, individual does not want to be taken advantage of, believes that everyone is trying to, and that it is a jungle out there. Aficionados of the political scene, such as journalists and political scientists, may often be drawn to such professions because of the allure of this cynical realism. At the other extreme, people drawn to the clergy or to clinical psychology may be more likely to believe in the inherent goodness and generosity of others, and may manifest a tender-minded and naive idealism. But accounts of political behavior tend to be written by journalists and political scientists, not the clergy or clinical psychologists.

If the public is in reality not driven strongly by self-interest, why are politicians apparently so afraid of it? We do not doubt for a minute that they are. A good example is their timidity today about the "T word." We have two general observations here. One is that interest groups no doubt do respond quite intensely to the interests of their organizations. Threatened cuts in social security cost of living adjustment (COLA) payments arouse the wrath of the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), and threats of gun control measures arouse the ire of the National Rifle Association (NRA). They may also arouse the passions of the ordinary citizens who are members of these groups, such as retirees who depend on social security or gun owners. But much more obscure policies may stimulate intense interest from such groups as medical associations or tobacco growers or shoe manufacturers without making much of a splash in the ordinary public.

Even if the citizenry is largely oblivious to these debates, their potential political costs and benefits to officeholders can be considerable. Interest groups control most campaign contributions. And their reactions to candidates' policy positions may have important indirect impacts on the ordinary voter's opinions. Perhaps incumbents prefer not to offend interest groups not so much for fear of antagonizing a self-interested general public as simply to let sleeping dogs lie. Opposing an interest group may make it squeal bloody murder, and that protest may in turn reach the voters in a more diffuse but quite damaging form, as some nasty mess associated with the incumbent. That can swing votes even without touching on the voters' sense of their own self-interests.

In closing, we should not be taken to claim that self-interest is never important in politics and society. We have five particular cautions in this regard. First, the personal stakes for the ordinary citizen are not always as minor, unclear, and uncertain as they are in most national and even statewide controversies. For example, as Converse (1975) and Green (1988) have suggested, self-interest may

well operate more strongly on local "doorstep" issues, such as the "NIMBY" (not in my back yard) resistance to threatening local projects, such as prison "live-out" programs or public housing projects (Rothbart, 1973). Unfortunately, exploration of such issues is not as glamorous as matters of war and peace, presidential elections, or the control of Congress, and so research on them, to the extent that it is done at all, tends to be relegated to the less prestigeful academic venues and outlets.

Elites' interests may motivate their attitudes more than do the ordinary person's. Our focus has been on mass sociopolitical attitudes, but elites' goals may be more affected by social and political policy. For example, Bauer, Pool, and Dexter (1964) found businessmen's attitudes toward trade policy significantly influenced by their firms' "objective" (according to a panel of economists' ratings) interests (though not very much by their own subjective perceptions of their firms' interests).

Egoistically-based group interest (interdependence between self and group outcomes, in Jessor's 1988, terms, or "sympathy," in Sen's, 1977) may be more potent than pure self-interest. This is not the place to add to the earlier discussion of this point. But the caution offered by Bauer *et al.* (1964) regarding businessmen's alleged hard-headed self-interestedness is useful: is it really *self*-interest to advocate a trade policy favorable to one's firm? Whose interests are really at stake: the individual executive himself? Probably not very greatly. Management as a team? The firm's bottom line? The stockholder? The entire entity? It would seem most likely that the executive's primary goal is the well-being of the firm, with a secondary spillover onto his own financial well-being (though perhaps much more on his reputation and self-esteem). This would cast it more as a problem of group interest and of nonmaterial interests than of pure material self-interest.

Attention and *behavior* may conceivably be more readily influenced by self-interest than are attitudes themselves. We have discussed the formation of issue-publics around self-interest. And there is evidence of greater influence over political behavior; e.g., Green and Cowden (1990) find strong self-interest effects on Bostonians' participation in antibusing organizations, and Bauer *et al.* (1964), in businessmen's communicating with Congress about trade policy, both contrasting with relatively weak effects of self-interest on attitudes toward those same issues.

But a final caution is in order here. The idea of self-interest as a central motivator of human behavior has been at the core of Western thought for over three centuries (Hirschmann, 1977; Mansbridge, 1990a). It is an idea taken so for granted by so many that data seem almost irrelevant, or, if nonconfirmatory, wrong. The empirical evidence is now extensive on its quite modest role in forming sociopolitical attitudes in mass publics, but only fragmentary on these latter claims of more extensive effect. One should perhaps be cautious in too quickly accepting its "obvious" importance in these other contacts.

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